

The National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) have coordinated with Japanese and overseas universities, research institutes and communities to manage Transdisciplinary Projects to contribute to resolving the contemporary challenges for six years from the fiscal year 2016. Minpaku is in charge of the following projects:

Multidisciplinary Collaborative Projects: Change of Local Communities and Reconstruction of Community Cultures after Disasters in Japanese Archipelago

Minpaku Unit “Rediscovering Local Cultures and Constructing a System of Representation
in the Japanese Archipelago”

Representative: HIDAKA Shingo

The Japanese Archipelago is long from North to South, with residential areas spread over seashore areas, plains, and mountainous areas. This topology has nurtured diverse local cultures, each adapted to its own natural environment. These local cultures have lost some of their unique characteristics in social transformations due to globalization. This has given rise to an impression cultural standardization across all of Japanese society, at least on the surface. In addition, rebuilding after many recent large-scale natural disasters forced communities to relocate, merge, or otherwise reorganize themselves, reconstructing their local cultures that had been passed down across generations.

In this research, we focus on local cultures and identify what cultures are passed down and new cultures being constructed. We discuss how studies of human cultures can contribute contribution to the society now and into the future.

More specifically, we are pursuing three research themes namely, “Rediscovery of Local Cultures,” “Conservation of Local Cultures,” and “Utilization of Local Cultures.” Our aim is to rediscover local cultures that are buried under the surface at ordinary times, and to build a system that represents local cultures in a way that is meaningful for community residents and the external society.

Multidisciplinary Collaborative Projects, New Developments in Ecohealth Research in Asia,

Minpaku Unit “The Constellation of Food and Foodways in Human and Natural History”

Representative: NOBAYASHI Atsushi

The purposes of our project are to research the social function and the history of food and foodways of humans, and to study the principles of coexistence and conflict concerning food among them. We recognize the concept of food and foodways as being a cultural system in human and natural history.

Food is indispensable to the maintenance of life, and foodways is embedded deeply in culture and economy. Knowing the mass production and disposal of food, world population growth and the increasing numbers of those existing at starvation levels, we can see that food and foodways in modern society is far from being ecologically adaptive.

Food issues will be connected in a multidisciplinary human ecological perspective that examines the function of food, and natural history, which examines the role of food in human societies. It will develop a model of food and foodways in the human future.

This work is a part of the “New Developments in Ecohealth Research in Asia” project, promoted and led by the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature. “Ecohealth” is a new approach to the concept of “health”, which has been analyzed previously from a medical perspective. We shed a new light on the relationships among livelihood, living environment, and occupations, dietary habits in the modern era of rapid social transformation, and environmental change.

Network-based Projects: Northeast Asia Regional Structure and Its Change in Northeast Asia: in Search of the Way to Coexist from the Point of View of Transborderism

Central hub for the study project covering
“The Structure of Natural Environment and Cultures / Civilizations”

Representative: IKEYA Kazunobu

The Center for Northeast Asian Area Studies at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) consists mainly of the researchers working in cultural anthropology, ethnology and adjacent domains within Minpaku, and archaeological researchers of its partner institution, National Museum of Japanese History. The Project focuses on the movement of people and exchange of materials, introduce and influence of the political and economic systems in Northeast Asia, and to clarify the structures and transformations of the natural environment, cultures, and civilizations from prehistory to the present.

Northeast Asia for the purpose of the Project refers to the vast area covering Siberia and Far East Region of Russia, Mongolia, Korean Peninsula, China, and Japan. Up until now, researches have been done within the framework of each nations, but this project is a novel attempt to comprehend the region as a whole.

As central hub, the Center promotes the Project in partnership with other organizations, namely, Slavic-Eurasian Research Center/ Hokkaido University, Center for Northeast Asian Studies/ Tohoku University, Center for Far Eastern Studies / University of Toyama, Institute for North East Asian Research/ The University of Shimane, and Waseda Institute of Contemporary Chinese Studies/ Comprehensive Research Organization of Waseda University.

Network-based Projects: Modern Middle East Towards a Pluralistic and Multi-Valued Society: People and Cultures of the Middle East in the Age of Global Change

Central hub for the study project covering
“The Transformation of Cultural Resources and the Reconfiguration of the Personal Sphere
in the Modern Middle East”

Representative: NISHIO Tetsuo

The Area Studies Project for the Modern Middle East aims to develop new methodologies for Middle East Studies that would allow us to conceptualize the ways in which individuals related to the world. In the age of the global transformation of nature, society, and media, how do the individuals of the Middle East obtain information, accumulate knowledge as well as utilizing them as resources? We strive to examine the resocialization of individuals in relation to the ways in which they create their social spaces through inclusion and exclusion of multiple values.

Our center was established in April 2016 as a central hub to coordinate the project and investigates on the topic of “The Transformation of Cultural Resources and the Reconfiguration of the Personal Sphere in the Modern Middle East.” Personal encounters with unknown people, places, and information play an important role in shaping the life-worlds of those who live in the Middle East. We try to clarify the attributes of this personal sphere: 1) where does the boundary between the personal and the public lie? 2) how do personal spheres connect to form communities or world views? 3) in what ways do cultural resources reflect the reconfiguration of the personal sphere? In the course of this 6-year project, we will send research missions, host foreign researchers, conduct international symposia, develop learning kits, plan exhibitions, and publish our results in collaboration with our partner institutions.

Network-based Projects: South Asia Structural Transformation in Globalizing South Asia – Integrated Area Studies for Sustainable, Inclusive and Peaceful Development

Secondary hub: Research Topic “South Asian Cultures and Societies”

Director : MIO Minoru

The South Asian region is currently undergoing significant transformation due to rapid economic development, which aggravates a range of existing socio-cultural, economic, and political problems while also giving rise to new ones. International tensions within the region and beyond are also increasing. In the context of accelerated globalization, Japan cannot ignore such tensions. This project aims to encourage solution-oriented approaches to the real world problems through the network of research centers at Kyoto University, National Museum of Ethnology, University of Tokyo, Hiroshima University, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and Ryukoku University.

The center at the National Museum of Ethnology functions as the secondary hub, especially advancing the international activities of this project. We are also attempting to delineate characteristically South Asian forms of social resilience by understanding the dynamics of the global circulation of people, cultures, and values, as well as by analyzing the particular characteristics of South Asian social relationships that have been maintained amidst rapid social change. Through this research, we intend to contribute to the academic and social discourse on the social risks resulting from meteoric globalization.