

Message

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The National Institutes for Cultural Heritage (NICH) comprises the following institutions: four National Museums (Tokyo National Museum, Kyoto National Museum, Nara National Museum, Kyushu National Museum); two National Research Institutes for Cultural Properties (National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo, Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties); and the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI). This booklet presents an overview of the activities being undertaken by these seven institutions.

While each of these institutions has its own important role to play, they also have a shared goal—to contribute to a better understanding of Japanese traditional culture by preserving and conducting research on cultural properties and by enabling as many people as possible to view these cultural assets under the best possible conditions and in the best possible environments. The National Institutes for Cultural Heritage thus has the important task of supporting the foundations of the administration of cultural property preservation in Japan.

The Fourth Medium-term Plan of the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage (NICH) was launched in April this year, which marks the fifteenth anniversary of NICH's establishment as the Independent Administrative Institution (IAI) National Museum and the ninth anniversary of its transformation into the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage. While the creation of NICH, which was part of a wider program of administrative reform in Japan, was followed by a period in which it struggled to find its way, the implementation since then of three medium-term plans has seen the National Museums, National Research Institutes for Cultural Properties, and International Research Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region that make up NICH put their operations on firm footing, with each institution successfully developing its own unique character. During this period, NICH has also been working steadily to improve its facilities, with the renovation of the Nara Buddhist Sculpture Hall & Ritual Bronzes Gallery at the Nara National Museum in 2010 when the Second Medium-term Plan was being implemented, the renovation of the Toyokan at the Tokyo National Museum in 2013, and the opening of the Heisei Chishinkan Wing at the Kyoto National Museum in 2014 during the Third Medium-term Plan. During the implementation period of the Fourth Medium-term Plan, the construction of the new head office building for the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties will be completed (scheduled for completion in 2019), and upcoming projects include the renovation of the Honkan (Japanese Gallery) of the Tokyo National Museum and the seismic reinforcement of the Special Exhibition Hall at the Kyoto National Museum.

Regarding projects relating to NICH as a whole, major upcoming events include the ICOM KYOTO 2019, and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. The hosting of these major events by Japan represents a marvelous opportunity to promote wider understanding of Japan's rich, diverse culture, and to utilize Japan's cultural heritage in dynamic ways. It will be possible to use culture to promote exchange among people from all over the world throughout Japan, and NICH will be implementing a variety of initiatives aimed at realizing the vision of "putting culture and the arts at the heart of Japan's national regeneration."

The first year of implementation of NICH's Third Medium-term Plan (2011) was the year in which the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, and 2016—the year in which the Fourth Medium-term Plan is being implemented—has seen major earthquakes in Kumamoto. Both disasters resulted in severe damage and loss of life. NICH is striving to learn from the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake by reviewing the relevant coordination and collaboration mechanisms for protecting and rescuing cultural heritage from natural disasters, with the aim of ensuring that, in the event of large-scale disasters such as major earthquakes, suitable measures can be taken to rescue and restore cultural heritage.

While acknowledging that we operate within the constraints of government finance, we must endeavor, as those engaged in traditional Japanese culture, to communicate the importance of protecting cultural properties, exhibiting them to the public, and informing the public about them. This is our responsibility.