

Message

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The National Institutes for Cultural Heritage include the following: four national museums, two national research institutes for cultural properties, and the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI), which was established in 2011. This brochure presents an overview of the activities being undertaken by these seven institutions.

These institutions are located in different parts of Japan; each has its own unique characteristics, and the activities undertaken by each institution reflect the region in which it is situated. The Tokyo National Museum is a broadly focused museum located in the Tokyo metropolitan area. It takes a leading role in promoting Japanese culture worldwide. The Kyoto National Museum showcases the unique culture that developed in Kyoto over the course of its nearly 1,200 years as an Imperial capital from the eighth century to the nineteenth century. The Nara National Museum plays an indispensable role in the preservation and interpretation of Buddhist culture, while the Kyushu National Museum embodies a unique perspective that emphasizes Kyushu's status as a region that historically has had extensive cultural exchanges with other parts of Asia. The National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo, disseminates to the world knowledge that is the fruit of both fundamental research and cutting-edge, high-tech scientific research relating to cultural properties. The Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties is an important center for wide-ranging research on society in ancient Japan. The International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region is engaged in research on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the said region through international collaboration.

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 researching 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 have the important task of supporting the foundations of the administration of cultural property preservation in Japan.

For the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, 2013 was a year that saw a defining debate that will have a major impact on how the institutes develop in the future. It had been proposed, based on a Cabinet decision made in January 2012, that the institutes should be merged with the National Museum of Art and the Japan Arts Council. However, with a new administration coming into office in December 2012, this merger was suspended. Throughout 2013, the Japanese government reviewed the proposals regarding the organizational restructuring of the Independent Administrative Institutions (IAIs).

The three IAIs – the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, the National Museum of Art, and the Japan Arts Council – are all organizations that underpin the framework for cultural administration in Japan. However, there are major differences among them in terms of the focus of their activities and operational approaches; as such, it is highly unlikely that a merger of these three organizations would produce any significant benefits. The point that we sought to emphasize was that rather than thinking of a merger, the “Act on General Rules for Incorporated Administrative Agency” and its operation should be reviewed, which would without question allow these three existing organizations to operate more effectively. Voices were also raised suggesting that it was not desirable to have a merger among organizations with different missions and different roles, and that, instead, it would be preferable to expand these organizations so that they can properly fulfill their originally-conceived role as the “core” of Japan’s cultural administration. Because it was believed that the merger would not improve efficiency, it was put on hold by the cabinet late in December of 2013.

The main points that we wanted to get across during the recent round of discussions were as follows: While seeing government subsidies cut every year, our revenue target has been raised, making it extremely difficult to carry on operating. In addition, even when we have gained more than the revenue target, we have not been allowed to use the surplus revenue ourselves. These are areas where we felt that improvement was needed. The new government policy will ease financial pressure as our target revenue for the fiscal year of 2014 will remain the same as for the previous year. Regarding the distribution of revenue, up until now the efforts made by the institutes to strengthen their operations have generally not been recognized, and any surplus revenue earned in excess of the target for internally-generated revenue was paid to the National Treasury. Now, following a number of improvements to the recognition criteria guidelines, a new approach is being demonstrated whereby revenue in excess of the target set is recognized as “new revenue.”

As has been reiterated in the “Basic Strategy Regarding Reform of the Independent Administrative Agencies” that was approved by the Cabinet on December 24, 2013, regardless of the circumstances, given that government funding support derives ultimately from the taxes paid by the nation’s citizens, we should be constantly striving to ensure that this funding leads to improvements in the quality of services provided that are visible to the public.

While recognizing the reality of government finances, we have a responsibility to make people aware that preserving cultural heritage and enabling more people to view and learn about it is very important, and is intimately connected with the invigoration of contemporary Japanese culture.

Looking ahead, we at the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage will continue to carry out our work in full awareness of the important role that has been entrusted to us. We look forward to your continuous support in the future.