



Message from the Director-General

The Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) was established in April 2001 to conduct integrated research in the field of global environmental studies. In 2004, RIHN became one of the original members of the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU), as an Inter-University Research Institute Corporation.

Environmental degradation can be understood as an imbalance in interactions between human beings and natural systems. Our mission is, therefore, to conduct solution-oriented research aimed at exploring how these interactions between humanity and nature ought to be. To achieve this mission, RIHN has been conducting interdisciplinary research spanning the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and in recent years, has enhanced transdisciplinary research that involves collaboration with various stakeholders in society.

Since its establishment, RIHN researchers have formulated creative projects to address social needs in diverse fields of environmental interaction. Following an external review of research activities and organizational structures, in fiscal year 2015 we reformed the ways

in which we conduct and promote research projects, in order to enhance coordination and integration of the projects for achieving the goals of RIHN missions. As part of this reformation, since April of 2016 (beginning of fiscal year 2016), we have launched a new set of Research Programs, a Core Program, and the RIHN Center in order to organically integrate and support the overall research activities of RIHN. With a new structure in place, we determined to pursue our mission even more vigorously through enhanced collaboration within our institute, across our diverse research community, and with society in general.

To enhance international activities of RIHN, we have been collaborating in the international research platform Future Earth, which aims to integrate global environmental change research for achieving global sustainability. As part of this international collaboration, RIHN has established the Asian Regional Center for Future Earth as one of the four formally-appointed regional centers in the world.

In fiscal year 2017 we are fully implementing these new research initiatives.

安成 哲三
YASUNARI Tetsuzo

Director-General
Research Institute for Humanity and Nature





Above: OSHIUMI Keichi, Tranquility, Wat Phou, Laos

Below: ISHIKAWA Satoshi, A women diver's house, Toba, Mie, Japan

RIHN's Mission

For several decades, researchers from many academic disciplines have attempted to find solutions to the environmental problems that now confront human communities at all scales. Despite extensive research in individual disciplines, however, many environmental problems have remained unresolved. There is therefore need not for additional partial descriptions of discrete environmental problems, but for holistic understandings of the underlying causes of these problems, and integrated approaches to their solutions.

RIHN research is characterized by the belief that environmental problems stem from problems in human culture. RIHN research projects therefore are designed to examine not only the diverse range of cultures that currently inhabit the Earth, but also past patterns of cultural and environmental change. In addition to conducting high quality basic research, our aim is to enable discussion of diverse perspectives of nature and their potential relevance to the future.

Since the establishment of RIHN, researchers of the institute have discussed the concept of *futurability* (or sustainable future), a Japanese word that combines the ideographs “future” and “potential”. This concept invites us to consider the kinds of interactions between human beings and nature—some age-old and some entirely new—that various societies and communities might seek. We hope it will continue to stimulate discussion of what should be done to address environmental problems

at their roots, so that future generations will not inherit the same patterns of use and degradation that now characterize our global society.

The idea that environmental problems stem from problems in human culture inevitably leads to the conclusion that environmental research needs to consider the concept of values in various human societies and cultures. Anthropogenic environmental impact is now predominant on a global scale, and the current era of Earth history is being called the “Anthropocene”. Humankind is becoming increasingly conscious of its dependence on finite and limited resources, and of the many negative consequences of continued degradation of our biosphere. Humans have also progressively come to understand that a number of critical environmental problems cannot be separated from social inequity, especially in terms of access to natural resources and their benefits. RIHN is now conducting solution-oriented environmental research projects based on new forms of transdisciplinary knowledge production.

Exposing different value systems in such contexts can lead to social conflicts, but true resolution of socio-environmental issues is a challenge shared by humanity in general. It requires forthright dialogue and exchange between peoples of the world. A sustainable future, or “*futurability*”, thus also indicates our sincere aspiration to establish integrated global environmental studies as a new holistic approach to a sustainable future for human beings at local, regional to global scales of our planet Earth.