



Message from the Director-General

The Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) was established in April 2001 as an inter-university research institute corporation to conduct integrated research in global environmental studies. Our mission is to conduct integrated research that will resolve global environmental problems, guided by our awareness that the global environmental problems find their roots in human culture. Environmental degradation can be understood as an imbalance in the interaction between human beings and natural systems, and our goal is to decide what must be done to establish a dynamic interplay that will be sustainable in the future. We will conduct solution-oriented research in search of the ideal interaction of humanity and nature, in addition to academic research spanning the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, while also considering regional characteristics and historical contexts.

RIHN has been part of the inter-university research institute corporation, the National Institutes for the Humanities since its incorporation in fiscal year 2004. Since fiscal 2010, under Phase II medium-term plans and targets, the future design initiatives were proposed, and we incorporated a system of conducting research by adopting the methods of design science. In October of 2010, we published the Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Studies, portions of which have now been translated into English in order to make RIHN's completed research more accessible to an international audience. To reinforce our role and function as an inter-university research institute corporation, in fiscal year 2012

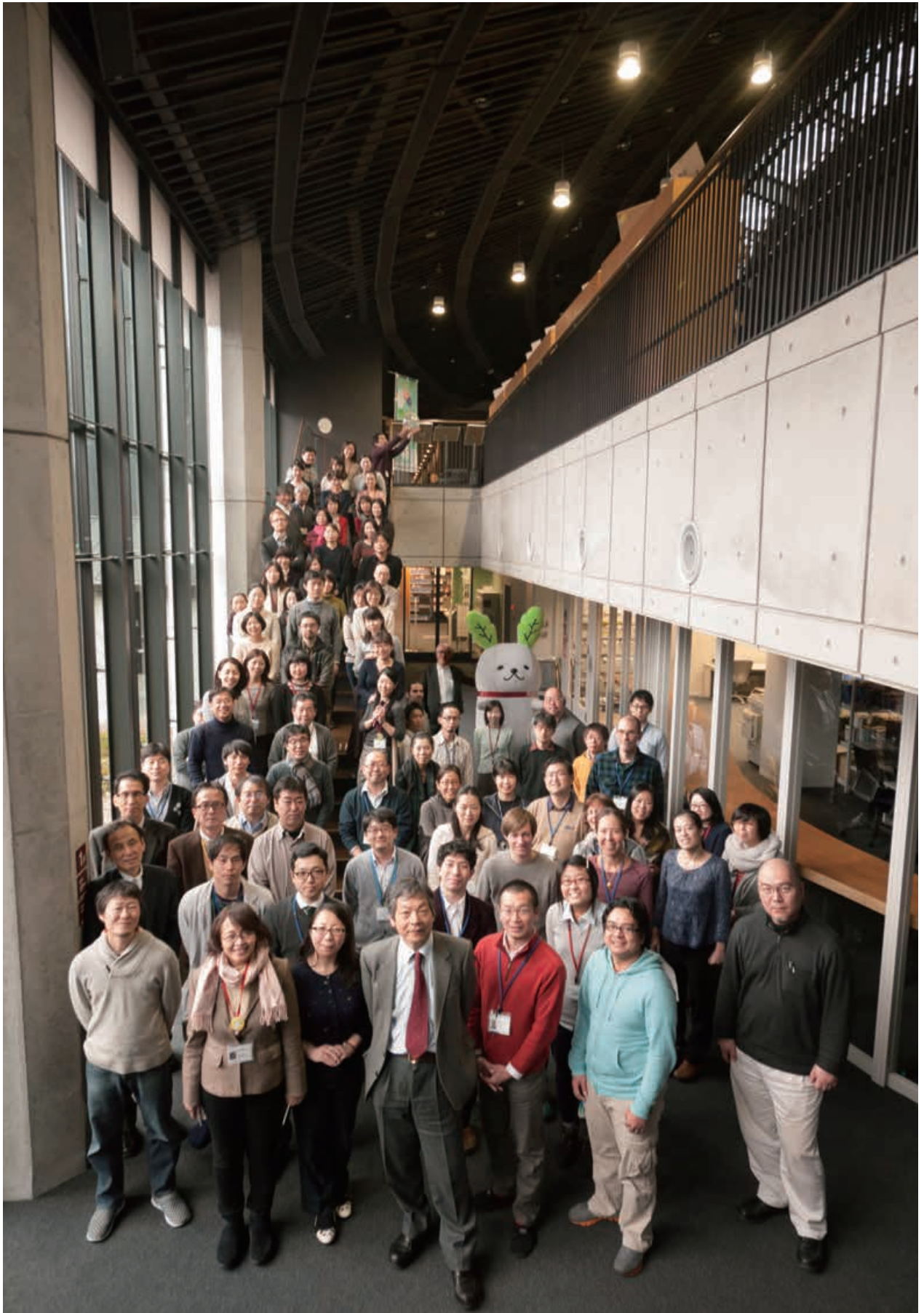
the network-based Global Environment Repository Project was established to resolve global environmental problems, and we have been constructing the infrastructure that will allow it to be used by universities and research institutes throughout Japan. Beginning in fiscal 2014, we introduced an institutional collaboration project to conduct joint research based on agreements with universities and other organizations.

In addition, we are now collaborating in a large-scale international project, Future Earth, aiming for a sustainable global society through integrated global environmental studies. These initiatives have earned the RIHN respect for its research activities that have, until now, focused on Asia, and in September 2014, it was designated as the Asian hub for Future Earth.

This fiscal year is the final year of our Phase II medium-term plan, and we are now summarizing our Phase II research achievements while aiming for new achievements in global environment studies as we enter Phase III.

安成 哲三
YASUNARI Tetsuzo

Director-General
Research Institute for Humanity and Nature



RIHN's Mission

Researchers across academic disciplines have attempted to find solutions to environmental problems since they have become a topic of wide popular concern. Despite extensive research in individual disciplines, however, the essential character of environmental problems remains unknown. There is need not for more partial descriptions of environmental problems, but for integrated knowledge of their causes and integrated approaches to their solutions. At RIHN our goal is therefore to develop 'design science': solution-oriented research based on genuine integration of the arts and sciences.

Such integrated environmental study is characterized by the belief that the essence of global environmental problems can be traced to the relationship of people with nature, that is, to human culture. RIHN projects therefore study not only the diverse cultures that now exist on Earth, with special emphasis in Asia, but also past patterns of cultural and environmental change. In addition to conducting high quality primary research, RIHN's goal is to enable discussion of the interactions between humanity and nature that different societies may or should establish in the future. RIHN has proposed the concept of "futurability", a translation of a Japanese term that combines the meanings of 'future' and 'potential', that is intended to stimulate discussion of what should be done to address environmental problems at their roots so that future generations do not inherit the same patterns of use and degradation.

The RIHN approach therefore suggests that environmental research must engage the social and cultural values related to nature. Humankind's environmental impact is now measurable throughout the world. We are increasingly aware of our dependence on finite resources and of the many negative consequences of a polluted biosphere. We also increasingly understand that many critical environmental problems cannot be separated from social inequity, especially in access to and benefits of natural resources. While exposing different value systems in such contexts can lead to social conflict, real resolution of social-environmental problems is a challenge shared by humanity in general and which requires genuine dialogue and exchange between the diverse peoples of the world.

As an institute, RIHN supports collaborative research projects that are defined and promoted through dialogue between researchers of many different disciplines. Since the research problems require experience in many fields of social thought and practice, RIHN projects must also engage people with other forms of non-academic experience and expertise. At their conclusion, RIHN projects should propose new knowledge and concepts to all members of society. In this sense, we hope that RIHN's achievements will become a common asset. Our mission is to reassert the significance of the human relation to nature, and through constructive dialogue and collaboration, to assist in the exploration of these relationships in different societies around the world.



Top: Parvis KOOHAFKAN, Village life in Puno, Peru
Middle: TANAKA Ueru, Investigation of traditional farm tools, Sudan
Bottom: ABE Ken-ichi, (untitled), Peru