

Living National Treasure (Japan)

Living National Treasure (人間国宝 *Ningen Kokuhō*) is a Japanese popular term for those individuals certified as **Preservers of Important Intangible Cultural Properties** (重要無形文化財保持者 *Jūyō Mukei Bunkazai Hojisha*) by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as based on Japan's Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (文化財保護法 *Bunkazai Hogohō*). The term "Living National Treasure" is not formally mentioned in the law, but is an informal term referencing the cultural properties designated as the National Treasures.

Contents

- History**
- Types of Certification**
- Support System**
- Categories**
- List of Living National Treasures**
- See also**
- References**

History

Before 1947, a system for Imperial Household Artists (帝室技芸員 ; Teishitsu Gigei-in) was in place.

Under the 1950 Law for Protection of Cultural Properties, intangible cultural properties are defined as dramatic, musical, artistic, and other intangible cultural artifacts of high value in terms of Japanese history or art (Article 2, Section 1, Part 2). Those intangible cultural properties of especial importance can be designated as "Important Intangible Cultural Properties" by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Article 71, Section 1).

In other words, intangible cultural properties are certain artistic skills. Those individuals or groups who have attained high levels of mastery in those certain skills can be designated as preservers of them by the Japanese government for the purpose of ensuring their continuation. Living National Treasure is a term for those designated as keepers of important intangible cultural properties.

Types of Certification

There are three types of certification:

- **Individual Certification** (各個認定 *Kakko Ninte*): this designation is for individuals who "have attained high mastery" of an art or craft.
- **Collective Certification** (総合認定 *Sōgō Ninte*): this designation is for groups of 2 or more who as a group working in common have attained high mastery of an art or craft.
- **Preservation Group Certification** (保持団体認定 *Hoji Dantai Ninte*): this designation is for large groups who have mastered an art or craft in which individual character is not emphasized.

Of the three types, generally only those to have received "Individual Certification" are referred to as Living National Treasures. Those working in artistic fields such as drama and music receive Individual and Collective Certifications, while those working in the crafts receive Individual or Preservation Group Certifications.

Support System

The Japanese government, with the goal of preserving important intangible cultural assets, provides a special annual grant of 2 million yen to Living National Treasures. In the case of groups, the government helps defray the costs of public exhibitions and activities necessary to continue the group. The National Theater of Japan provides training programs to help train successors in such arts as Noh, Bunraku, and Kabuki.

Many of the craft artisans are also members of the Japan Kōgei Association.

Categories

To date Living National Treasures have been certified for 16 categories of Intangible Cultural Properties:

- Performing Arts: Gagaku, Noh, Bunraku, Kabuki, Kumi Odori, Music, Dance, and Drama
- Japanese crafts: Ceramics, Textiles, Lacquerware, Metalworking, Dollmaking, Woodworking, Papermaking, and Miscellaneous Crafts

List of Living National Treasures

- List of Living National Treasures of Japan (performing arts)

- [List of Living National Treasures of Japan \(crafts\)](#)

See also

- [Living National Treasure \(South Korea\)](#)
- [National Living Treasures of the Philippines \(Gawad Manlilikha ng Bayan\)](#)

References

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