

## What Is a Holder of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage?

Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage—informally known as “Living National Treasures”—are individuals or groups recognized by the government as being masters of a craft or performing art that has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage. They receive an annual stipend and other support from the government to help them preserve and promote their knowledge and skills.

The designation was established in 1954 under a revision to the 1950 Law for Protection of Cultural Properties. The revision tasked the agency now called the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports, and Technology with the preservation not only of tangible cultural artifacts like historical buildings, but also the intangible bodies of knowledge that underpin traditional crafts and performing arts.

Only a few hundred people have been named Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage, a title they hold until death. Currently, the number of possible concurrent Holders is capped at 116, although the actual number is usually lower.

There are nine categories for Important Intangible Cultural Heritage under the heading of “Crafts”: ceramics, textiles, lacquerware, metalwork, woodwork and bamboowork, doll making, paper making, *bachiru* (stained ivory engraving), and *kirikane* (applying thin pieces of metal foil to create designs). Specific techniques are recognized under these broad categories, such as *saiyū* glazing within the ceramics category or *maki-e* ornamentation under lacquerware.

Ishikawa Prefecture has a proud history in many of these categories, particularly woodwork, lacquerware, metalwork, textiles, and ceramics. In fact, as of 2022, the prefecture had nine individuals and one group designated Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in crafts—more per capita than any other prefecture.