

## **Enhancing our Role as the “Brains of the Legislature”: Comprehensive and Interdisciplinary Research at the National Diet Library, Japan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Research and Legislative Reference Bureau (the Research Bureau) of the National Diet (Parliamentary) Library, Japan, is a legislative support organization serving the National Diet of Japan and providing comprehensive research and library services for Diet Members.

The Research Bureau strives to enhance its capability to serve as the “brains of the legislature” by providing professional research and analysis on national policy issues based on timely and highly-reliable information. Over the next three years, we will expand our research capabilities to include professional analysis, mid- to long-term policy research, cross-sectional research, and comparative policy analysis between major countries. We are also planning to enhance our expertise in researching parliamentary systems, foreign constitutions, and science and technology issues.

The Research Bureau undertakes on its own initiative a variety of research projects in collaboration with independent scholars and experts. These include Research Cooperation Projects, which are carried out by researchers from one or more research divisions at the Research Bureau in cooperation with independent scholars; Interdisciplinary Research Projects, which are conducted on wide-ranging issues in collaboration with guest scholars, who contribute different perspectives and research methods; Foreign Constitution Research Projects, which focus on comparative analysis of constitutions from various countries; and Science and Technology Research Projects, which are comprehensive policy study projects performed in collaboration with independent think tanks and experts. These Projects enable us to collect a wide range of information and to enhance the quality of our research and analysis.

Diet Members turn to us for comprehensive, cross-sectional, non-partisan, professional research and analysis on a wide range of policy issues as well as information on various policy options. The Research Bureau responds to these needs by enhancing both our research capabilities and the quality of our research through collaboration with independent experts and scholars.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Research and Legislative Reference Bureau (the Research Bureau) of the National Diet (Parliamentary) Library, Japan, is a legislative support organization serving the National Diet of Japan. The Research Bureau performs research either at the request of individual Diet Members, committees from either House of the Diet, and political parties or on our own initiative in anticipation of major legislative issues and future research requests from Diet Members. This kind of anticipatory research is a major portion of our activities.

Requested research and anticipatory research are complementary and function in tandem, much like the front and back wheels of a bicycle. The purpose of anticipatory research includes the development of resources for future research, the improvement of our research capabilities, and the expansion of our research capacity. The results of anticipatory research form a major resource for answering research requests promptly. While some anticipatory research is performed by individual researchers, much is performed in cooperation with outside scholars and experts. Most of the latter type involve major research projects, through which we are able to expand the scope and quality of our research.

It is extremely difficult to enhance the quality of legislative research, and this is a challenge faced by all parliamentary research institutions. The development of specialized expertise by researchers requires long periods of training. Cooperation with and utilization of outside resources is one way to make improvements even under severe budget restraints.

## **2 OBJECTIVES 2012-2016 AND STRATEGIC GOALS**

In July 2012, the National Diet Library (NDL) published its Mission and Objectives 2012-2016, which replaced the earlier Vision for the NDL's 60th Anniversary. The mission to be accomplished by the NDL during the five years from 2012 to 2016 include the six objectives. In addition, there are strategic goals that were listed under each of the six objectives in May 2013 to serve as milestone goals for the Mission and Objectives 2012-2016.

Over the next three years, the Research Bureau will expand its research capabilities to include professional analysis, mid- to long-term policy research, cross-sectional research, and comparative policy analysis between major countries. We are also planning to enhance our expertise in researching parliamentary systems, foreign constitutions, and science and technology issues. The objectives and strategic goals of our research services for the Diet are as follows.

### **Objectives 2012-2016**

## **Objective 1: In Support of the Diet**

To enhance reliable research and analysis with advanced expertise in public policy issues and to emphasize prompt and precise information services in providing the Diet with full assistance.

### **Strategic Goals**

#### 1-1 Develop services for the Diet

- ① To enhance our roles as brains of the legislature and an information center for Diet Members in assisting the Diet, the highest organ of state power.
- ② To respond promptly, precisely, and expertly to research requests and, in doing so, to produce publications and others materials systematically and in consideration of their extensive use in the formation of public policy.  
To make the most of our collections and information resources, including digital information on the Internet, and respond accordingly in a manner optimized for each research request and the issues it addresses.
- ③ To conduct research projects on basic national policy issues as well as to publish and utilize these results for further research inquiries.
- ④ To enhance research in areas such as trend reports and analysis of the systems, policies, and legislation of foreign countries as well as situation or policy analysis utilizing advanced statistics and data processing.

#### 1-2 Facilitate the public's access to information published by the Diet

- ⑤ To acquire a wide range of materials and information generated during the daily activities of the Diet, including the Minutes of the Diet, and in cooperation with relevant institutions, to provide the public with easy access to these materials, both past and present. This is our role in terms of materials and information for connecting the Diet with the public.

#### 1-3 Enhance external cooperation

- ⑥ To exchange information with parliamentary libraries and other institutions worldwide on topics related to the development of services for the parliaments, through which we can improve our research abilities and contribute internationally to the development of parliamentary libraries.
- ⑦ To cooperate with research institutions, researchers, and others, both in Japan and abroad, and to utilize their expertise in our research. To acquire a broad range of materials and information from a variety of sources, and to utilize them for in our research for the Diet.

## **3 MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECTS**

To achieve these objectives and goals, the Research Bureau conducts several research projects on our own initiative with outside scholars and experts.

### **(1) Research Cooperation Projects**

In FY 2011, the Research Bureau implemented a new research initiative named Research Cooperation Projects, and the Research Cooperation Office of the Research

Planning Division was newly established to manage and administer these projects. Research Cooperation Projects are research and study projects on topical subjects conducted by researchers from one or more research divisions of the Research Bureau and in cooperation with outside experts and scholars. These Projects are performed in any of several research formats, such as interviews with experts, roundtable discussions, and field studies. (See fig. 1) The length and extent of cooperation is very flexible and determined individually for each project. The results of the projects are published in multiple formats and made available to both Diet Members and the public.

For example, the Politics and Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Research Bureau conducted research during both FY 2011 and FY 2012 on “the British Political System and Its Transformation” in cooperation with a professor of comparative political science. The Westminster model is one of the most influential systems of parliamentary government. In Japan, political and governmental reform has been a hotly debated issue for the past decade. The Division invited a professor of comparative politics who specializes in British politics for a series of roundtable discussions with our researchers in conducting comprehensive research and analysis on the British political system. We performed theoretical analysis on institutions, their function, history, and impact on other systems of world government. We also analyzed recent constitutional reforms, such as 1997 reforms under the Labor Party Government to those under the current coalition government. Subjects included reform of the House of Lords, legislative processes and procedure reform, political party reform, the cabinet system under a coalition government, and political finance reforms.

The results of the project were published in nine separate articles in a special December 2011 issue of *Reference*. In FY 2012, the Division researched the British cabinet system with the same professor. Later, in 2013, an annotated translation of *British Cabinet Manual: A guide to laws, conventions and rules on the operation of government* was published under the supervision of the professor, who also contributed commentary. A policy seminar with the professor was held for Diet Members and their staff on the comparative power of the prime ministers of Britain and Japan.

We are currently planning to invite a German law professor to participate in research cooperation projects on German parliamentary power and the German Constitution starting in 2015. He will make a presentation at an international policy seminar and at a series of interviews together with Japanese constitution scholars.

## **(2) Interdisciplinary Research Projects**

Another major undertaking of the Research Bureau is Interdisciplinary Research Projects, which are conducted on wide-ranging cross-disciplinary issues. We began the project in 2001. Each year the Research Bureau is to set one subject. The project team, which is composed of researchers from several research divisions, visiting scholars, and part-time researchers, coordinates research on this one issue but from a variety of

perspectives using different research methods. This is a long-term project that takes from one to two years to complete.

The topic of the 2013 project was Decentralization in the 21st Century: Implications for the *Doshusei* Regional System Plan. 26 researchers of the Research Bureau and one visiting scholar did the research together from February 2013 to March 2014. They reviewed existing studies, performed field studies in Japan, France, Germany, the U.K. and Spain, held a series of interviews with six experts, and held roundtable discussions with project members. The Research Bureau invited foreign and Japanese scholars to participate in an international policy seminar on Regionalism in Europe from a Comparative Perspective: Implications for Japanese Regionalism. The results of this research were published as *Research Material* in March 2014, and included a transcript of the international policy seminar. The Research Bureau also held a policy seminar for Diet Members. The visiting scholar leads these projects, planning, advising, and discussing them with our staff members.

The past topics of interdisciplinary research projects are shown in the Table.

### **(3) Foreign Constitution Research Projects**

The Japanese Constitution was enacted in 1946 and has never been amended. In August 2007, both Houses of the Diet inaugurated a Commission on the Constitution. The Commission started work in October 2011 and has been conducting broad and comprehensive research both on the Constitution of Japan and on fundamental legislation closely related to the Constitution of Japan. Since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took office in December 2012, constitutional amendment has become one of the most topical of political issues.

The Constitution Division was established in the Research Bureau in April 2012. The Constitution Division is responsible for researching both Japanese and foreign constitutions, and one of its main research projects is the Foreign Constitution Research Project. This project focuses on foreign constitutions that have yet to be translated into Japanese. Outside scholars cooperate with our researchers in translating these documents into Japanese. The Japanese translation together with commentary is published in *Research Material*. Until now, the Division has published translations of the constitutions of Sweden, Ireland, Austria, Canada, Greece, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Portugal. In FY 2014, the Constitution Division is translating the Constitution of Finland. The project also focuses on procedures for constitutional amendment and systems of referendum used worldwide.

Foreign legislation research requires advanced expertise, including fluency in a foreign language, legal knowledge, and significant experience. The Research Bureau develops such expertise through on-the-job training and foreign legislation study groups. But it is not possible for us to research the laws of smaller countries with just our staff. Outside resources are essential to expand our research capabilities on these areas.

#### **(4) Science and Technology Research Projects**

Science and technology are basic elements of our modern civilization. The promotion and development of science and technology are major goals of the Japanese government. Demand for research in this area is increasing because Members of the Diet believe science and technology to be essential for Japan's future prosperity. The House of Representatives of the Diet established a Special Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation Promotion in January 2011. Given our severe budget restraints, however, we are unable to increase our research staff with expertise in science and technology. Outsourcing enables us to widen the range of our research without increasing the size of our staff.

The Research Bureau launched a new science and technology research project in 2010. It is a comprehensive study project and not a technology assessment project, and is characterized by outsourcing a part of the research work. Each year, the Research Bureau chooses one subject. The Science and Technology Research Office was newly established in the Education, Culture, Science and Technology Division in 2010. The responsibility of the Office is to do research on these issues and to manage the projects.

Having obtained a budget allocation to outsource a part of the science and technology research work, the Research Bureau contracted with one of the leading private think-tanks in Japan to research during FY2010 the science and technology policies of major countries. The project included research performed both by the Research Bureau staff and by outside scholars. The Research Bureau organized a project team comprising both staff members and visiting scholars, while the think-tank organized a research committee consisting of scholars. The project team was in charge of planning, administering, and scheduling the whole project. It also oversaw the overall quality of the research. Members of the team conducted researches by themselves. The research committee and the think-tank implemented researches in accordance with the plan set forth by the project team. The results of the project were published in *Research Material* in March 2011. The report covers 12 countries and it contains comparative analysis of their science and technology policies.

The subject of the FY2011 project was State Promotion of Research and Development: Support for Higher Education Institutions and Public Research institutions. After 2 years of basic comparative policy research, the projects moved to a new stage of specific issue research. The scheme of the project is the same as the first two years.

The subject of the FY2013 project was Science and Technology Policies on Renewable Energy. Researchers of the Research Bureau and the visiting scholars analyzed renewable energy from various perspectives, including the history of Japanese policy, trends and issues. Researchers performed field studies in Japan and Denmark. The Research Bureau held a series of interviews with outside experts. The visiting scholars advised and instructed the planning and implementation of the whole project. One of the leading think-tanks contracted the project and did comparative research and

analysis on science and technology policies on renewable energy of Japan, the EU, Germany, Spain, the UK, the USA, Indonesia, and China. It also researched technology trends. The research was published in March 2014 in *Research Material*. The scheme of the FY2013 project is shown in Fig. 2.

One of the challenges of the project is quality control. Private think tanks take different approaches and used methods of research that differ from ours. To get research products of the expected quality, we must carefully draft the conditions of the contract and manage its schedule.

In 2013, the Research Bureau held a total of 43 interviews on a wide range of issues from professors and think tank experts. Transcripts of four of these interviews are published in *National Policy Issues* for Diet Members.

## **CONCLUSION**

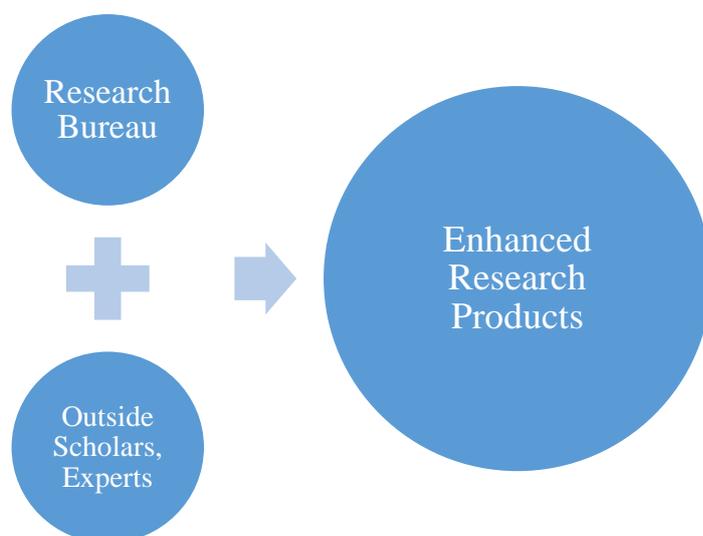
To improve our services, the Research Bureau conducted survey research for Diet Members in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2011. This year we are using interviews and questionnaires to survey satisfaction with our research services. The interviews target Diet Members and their staff, newly elected during the 2012 Lower House elections and the 2013 Upper House elections. The majority party of both houses changed as a result of these two elections, and about a third of Diet Members are newly elected. Some of them are very familiar with our services and quite often use our both library and research services, but others are not familiar with our services, especially our research services. The interviews in 2014 are a very good opportunity to improve Members' understanding of our brains of the legislature services.

Diet Members are in need of comprehensive, cross-disciplinary, non-partisan, professional research and analysis on a wide range of policy issues as well as information on various policy options. The Research Bureau is responding to these needs by enhancing both our research capabilities and the quality of our research through collaboration with independent experts and scholars. The major research projects enable us to collect a wider range of information and to improve our analysis and quality of research.

## Subjects of Past Interdisciplinary Research Projects

| Year      | Subject  |
|-----------|--|
| 2001-2002 | Emergency Measures Taken by Local Communities and Residents against Large-Scale Natural Disasters: Focusing on the Disaster Caused by the Oyama Volcano on Miyakejima Island from 2000 |
| 2002      | Emergency Management in Major Countries  |
| 2002-2003 | U.S. Reform from the 1980s: Implications for Structural Reform in Japan  |
| 2003-2004 | Aging Society with Fewer Children  |
| 2004-2005 | Regional Revitalization: Creation of Communities with their own Characteristics by Decentralization and Autonomy   |
| 2006      | Agenda for Peace-Building Support Activities   |
| 2005-2006 | EU Enlargement: Organizations, Policies and Issues   |
| 2006-2007 | Problems of Immigration Policy and Foreign Workers Policy in a Depopulating Society  |
| 2007-2008 | Attempt at a Solution for Juvenile Problems  |
| 2008      | First Year of the Rudd Government of Australia   |
| 2008-2009 | Policy Issues of Japan in International Comparison   |
| 2009      | Toward Establishing a Sustainable Society  |
| 2010      | China in Global System   |
| 2011-2012 | Regeneration of Japan through Technology and Culture   |
| 2012-2013 | Japan-U.S. Relations Reconsidered  |
| 2013      | Decentralization in the 21st Century: Implication for the <i>Doshusei</i> Regional System Plan   |

**Figure 1 Research Cooperation Projects**



**Figure 2 Scheme of Science and Technology Project of FY 2013**

