

KÜRZERE BEITRÄGE

Finding Japanese Law on the Internet: A Sample Odyssey

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As yet, there are few resources in Western languages on Japanese law which are freely available over the Internet (the "World Wide Web"). However, this is sure to improve along with the exponential growth of interest in the Internet worldwide, Japan included. Already, some useful information is available at various Internet sites ("URLs" or "webpages"). This section will attempt to introduce some of the most important of those sites, but also to demonstrate how one might set off to find such sites on one's own.

A search of the entire Internet can be carried out by keywords using various functions or programmes incorporated in the major "browsers", software allowing ready access to the Internet. A search under "Japan" and "Law" carried out in December 1996 using the Yahoo function in the Netscape browser, for instance, identified 38 possible sites or "hits". One difficulty with such searches is that sites cannot always be opened: they may be obsolete, or the connection may be poor. Another difficulty with such searches is that the sites identified are not always particularly relevant. For instance, a number of hits were for law firms advertising their expertise in Japan-related services, which usually did not contain much useful information. It is important to locate more compendious sites, with cross-links to other useful sources. One such site revealed by this search was the *US House of Representatives - Internet Library - Japan*.¹ This contained various legal documents (translations of the Japanese constitution, some treaties and laws, and so on) as well as some abstracts and reviews related to Japanese law. However, neither the entries cross-referenced in this site nor the sites of the Yahoo search gave much indication of their contents or whether they are still up to date. Some sites do, which can save much time.

One such site, well known to those seeking information on Japan generally, was therefore accessed: *Japan Related URLs*.²

This site recommended another with one of the most comprehensive information and links relating to Japan in English, now known as the *X-Guide*.³ The *X-Guide* now includes a key site for Japanese law resources, the Japanese Law and Regulation Information Guide.⁴ This contains cross-references to a list of webpages on Japanese law in general, several of which are particularly helpful.

First worth exploring, as a brief introduction to parts of the Japanese legal system, is *A Guide to Japanese Law*.⁵ This site was created by a group of Japanese practising attorneys. Some of them have written a series on Frequently Asked Questions regarding Conflict of Laws, Copyright Law, and Contract Law. These traverse a number of practical issues as well as giving some indication of the contours of these areas of Japanese law. Although brief, it seems likely they will gradually be added to. The *Guide* also contains cross-links to an English translation of the Japanese Constitution, and the webpage for the Tokyo *Daini* Bar Association. The latter gives a brief overview of the legal profession, and includes a section on Activities of the Association which gives some idea of what aspects of Japanese law are currently being debated.

Secondly, the webpage of *Kitahama Law Office* in Osaka has a section on Selected Writings on Japanese Law.⁶ At present, this contains a more extensive overview of the legal profession in Japan (undated, but clearly quite recent), and a very informative conference paper on International Commercial Litigation in Japan (March 1996).

Thirdly, the Japan-related webpage of the *Washburn University School of Law*⁷ has a section on Legal Documents, including cross-links to a translation of the Product Liability Law (in force since July 1995) and to recent Japanese Patent Law Amendments (prepared by a US law firm). It also has a section on Government Information including cross-links to government departments, such as the Office of the Trade and Investment Ombudsman (complete with Complaint Form!) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (which in turn has a very handy Guide to the Product Liability Law⁸). The webpage also has a section on Law Firms. At present, this only has a cross-link to Solberg International Law Office, in Osaka. However, the latter contains an extensive list of Japan related webpages, including government departments, which does have a time-saving summary of what can be found at each.⁹ This webpage seems likely to be updated quite regularly.

Fourthly, the *X-Guide* refers to a number of law-related articles included in issues of *Social Science Japan*. This turns out to be the newsletter of Tokyo University's Institute of Social Sciences.¹⁰ This appears quarterly in both electronic and hard copy form.

The Institute's cross-link to the University of Tokyo reveals that its International Center for Comparative Law and Politics has not yet uploaded its webpage. No doubt, in due course that will contain some information on Japanese law and cross-links to other resources, as will that of the Kyoto Comparative Law Center. Any such developments, updating the above summary of Internet sources on Japanese law, will be reported on the webpage of the New Zealand Monbusho Scholarship Alumni Association Inc.¹¹

Notes

- 1 <http://law.house.gov/70.html> .
- 2 <http://www.mnet.or.jp/~erikkass/MoreJapan.html> . Interestingly, this site was compiled by an American anthropologist who worked for CCH, particularly in its tax law publications, then went on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program to a remote village in the middle of Kyushu, Japan's main southern island. He left in August 1996, and some of the webpages listed are now "dead ends" but others are still very useful. Moreover, several give information on how to view webpages in Japanese, which obviously enables much more information relating to Japanese law to be accessed through the Internet (see also *Japanese WWW Support*: http://epd_hp9k.caenn.wisc.edu/~tomo/japan/japan1.html).
- 3 <http://fuji.stanford.edu:80/XGUIDE/>. This is created and updated by Stanford University's US-Japan Technology Management Center (<http://fuji.stanford.edu:80/SERVICES/overview.html>). Stanford University has a further close relationship with Japan through the Stanford Japan Centre in Kyoto (<http://www.stanford-jc.or.jp/intro.html>).
- 4 http://fuji.stanford.edu:80/XGUIDE/japan_legal_info_text.html .
- 5 <http://home.highway.or.jp/JAPANLAW/> .
- 6 <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Kitahama/Selwrij.htm> .
- 7 <http://lawlib.wuacc.edu/forint/asia/japan.html> .
- 8 <http://www.jef.or.jp:80/news/guidepl1.html> .
- 9 <http://www.iac.co.jp/~solbergn/websites.html> .
- 10 <http://www.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/center/SSJ/aboutSSJ.html> .
- 11 <http://www.wcc.govt.nz/~nzmsaa/> .