

**The Parliamentary Library Supports a Different
Democracy in the Digital Age: a Country Report**

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Theme:

**The Role of Parliamentary Libraries in
Enhancing Democracy in
the Digital Age**

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I. Foreword

The Legislative Yuan was originally founded in 1928. According to the Constitution, the Legislative Yuan shall be the supreme legislative organization of the state, to be constituted of members elected by the people, and exercise legislative power on behalf of the people. In terms of its competence, power and function, the Legislative Yuan is equivalent to a congress in other democracies.

The Fifth Legislative Yuan, which consists of 225 members, was elected on December 1, 2001. The members' tenure will start from February 1, 2002 to January 31, 2005.

Nowadays, every member of the Legislative Yuan has his/her own office in the Legislative Yuan. Each member is entitled to recruit six to ten assistants, who work at the office in the Legislative Yuan or in the electoral district.

In accordance with the official functions of the Legislative Yuan, the Department of Compilation with a library was founded in the Nan-jing period of government during the 1940's. In order to simplify the organizational structure, the staff of Department of Compilation was reduced and task-work teams were formed after the government moved to Taiwan, China in 1949. The Library & Information Service (LIS) was the resulting institute.

During the period of 1950's to the early of 1980's, the LIS had offered reading and library services for the parliamentarians only. In the mid-1980's, the LIS had launched its development project named officially as "Program for Development of Information and Research Services of the Legislative Yuan 1985-1989". Mr. Karl Min Ku had served as the program leader in which the new legislative reference services and computerized Chinese information systems were created, operated and managed. Therefore, the LIS had enlarged three functional units, i.e., the Law Information Center, the Computer Center and the Newspaper Clipping Center, to support the research and lawmaking functions of legislators, and to provide current information to conform to the modern trends of society. In addition to strengthening the original functions of library as "disseminating information and extending knowledge", the objectives of LIS included developing the legislative information service and the network system in the Legislative Yuan, as well as improving the efficiency of information freedom & access.

In January 12, 1999, the organic law of Legislative Yuan had been amended for

congressional reform. Article 15 and Article 27 of the organic law of Legislative Yuan stipulated the foundation of Parliamentary Library. So, the library was officially launched in February 1999. And Mr. Karl Min Ku was appointed as the first parliamentary librarian.

Parliamentary Library of Legislative Yuan shoulders both the responsibilities of supplying information services to legislators and bridging the gateway between citizens and legislature for the public policy making in our current society.

II. Computer Application in Parliamentary Library, 1985-2000

The library planned and launched its legislative reference & information service in September 1985. In the first decade of modernized library service, “centralized processing, centralized service” was the computer-based development policy that some basic reference resources and sources were evaluated as the fundamental knowledge base of service system and it had gained high reputation for its stable growth.

Afterwards, the wide area network among legislators’ offices and the remote access system had increased the use of legislative information system (LEGISIS) profoundly, which consisted of “Legislative Electronic Bulletin Board System”, “Legislator’s Interpellation Information System”, “Chinese Code Information System”, “Chinese Code Amendment Information System”, “Legislative Literature Information System”, “Legislative News Information System”, “Legislative Records Information System” and “The Legislative OPAC (On-line Public Access Catalog) System”. The service strategy had changed to “centralized processing, distributed service” for expanding its service range as the computer-supporting system from points to larger areas including a few dozens of government branches. In recent years, the rapid development of World Wide Web has changed the structure of legislative network. Presently, with the new strategy that featured of networked internet/intranet, media/knowledge content, computer system/various service platforms for “distributed processing, centralized management and personalized service”, an on-site and prompt delivery service is provided to each user that either inside or outside of the parliament.

The weblibrary of Parliamentary Library was integrated in 1999. The development of web-site resources is based on the booming World Wide Web application and the modern trend of digital collections. The self-developed web of Parliamentary Library has been built up and opened to the public since September 1999. And then the second stage of website development is advanced to a bilingual version of interactive

multi-media digital library. Parliamentary Library is dedicated to improving the legislative information system (LEGISIS) to provide a better quality service, as well as a more efficient service results.

III. Broadband Network in the Legislative Yuan

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Information Technology Department of Legislative Yuan was officially set up and in charge of the new information technology application and management for the parliament.

Within the past three years, the Parliament Broadband Network System was built and operated. The PBNS, adopted the gigabit broadband, is sufficient for the requirement of transmitting audio and video data. It connects one T3 and four T1 lines for the external network connection. The PBNS has a series of programs as follows,

(1) Multimedia Agenda System

The electronic voting system displays the voting results that show the Bulletin Board or TV wall accurately and instantly. It provides printing, save and searching functions. The system enhanced the quality of members' performance and the efficiency of law-making process.

(2) VOD (Video On Demand) Proceeding System

The situation of each conference can be broadcasted on spot directly, scheduled for replay or for instant replay, or the file of the program can be saved. The proceeding of each conference at the same venue can be broadcasted at the same time, so the committee members can follow the discussion of each conference.

(3) Internet Information Service System

Public information network service which connected within the parliament to the global Internet communication system is available. It lets the committee member's service station in different areas be connected to Internet in order to obtain the information service of the Legislative Yuan.

(4) Virtual A-V Material Reading Room

Parliamentary Library also adopts the broadband network system to provide the A-V material & multimedia program to each member's office for introducing the government branch's business, cultural, educational and knowledgeable programs.

IV. The Weblibrary of Parliamentary Library

Digital media have grown rapidly since the digital revolution started in the early 1990's, so the weblibrary is not a sudden invention. The objective of this task is to create a virtual library service network able to meet the massive information demands of legislators. Till now, we have developed four modules for the provision of library service via the Internet. These were a reference question and answer service (QA), a selective dissemination of information service (SDI), a multimedia information storage and retrieval service (ISAR), and a general Internet access through the library's portal.

The weblibrary contents can be divided into five domains or zones, each with its own type of service suited to the different character of the information it supplies. These distinct domains of service and content could be called the browsing zone, the searching zone, the dissemination zone, the reference zone and the leisure zone. Their characteristics are presented in Table 1. In this table we have analyzed the nature of the information stores and data linkages within our weblibrary under six separate characteristics: (a) the type of resources available; (b) the function served; (c) the type or degree of interaction via the user interface; (d) the scope of the intended audience; (e) whether or not service requires subscription; (f) the availability of participation by a postings capability for network users.

Domain Characteristic	Browsing Zone	Searching Zone	Dissemination Zone	Reference Zone	Leisure Zone
Resources	Static Materials	Cumulative Materials	Current Materials	Indicative Materials	Materials for Pleasure
Function	Browsing	Searching	On-demand	Guide	Browsing
Interactivity	Low	High	Both Interactive & Automatic	Crossing through only	Yes
Audience	Entire Network	Partial Net / IP	IP Address only	Entire Network	Entire Network
Subscription	No	Partial	Yes	No	Sometimes
Participation By Postings	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

Table 1: Content Domains and their Characteristics in the Weblibrary

The advantages of building a weblibrary according to fixed content domains are: (a) more efficient electronic access for library users, and (b) being able to offer user

support services, value-added services and reference services via diverse e-collections.

V. Services from the Parliamentary Weblibrary

The digital revolution has influenced libraries to varying degrees. One phase has been the development of a digital library collection from electronic resources, parallel to the main collection; but another stage could see the digital collection becoming the core of the library and providing the personal information service path. The weblibrary can provide the following services:

(1) A Chinese E-paper for Library Clients

Our current information delivery service is a daily (in weekdays) electronic newspaper published by the Parliamentary Library and distributed to the public as well as library clients. Beginning on July 1, 2000, it had published five hundred twenty issues by August 8, 2002. Items in our e-paper include: (a) daily legislative news; (b) the latest laws; (c) legislative summaries; (d) a record of general policy questions (interpellations) to the government in the Legislative Yuan; (e) a parliamentary forum; (f) committee reports; and (g) a report from our international legislative awareness service.

(2) Multilingual Legislative Awareness

Our multilingual, international legislative awareness service, or *Dispatch of Current Legislative Information*, is a daily report service providing major international news and updates on the status of legislation around the world. Translated from reliable sources in eleven countries, this report provides a Chinese edition of news and other materials which originally appeared in the Chinese, English, Japanese, German, Spanish and Russian languages. It is one of our most rewarding and popular services.

(3) Library E-mail Distribution Service for Press Clippings

News and commentary about the parliament & legislators from sixteen local Chinese or English newspapers will be selected and filed electronically each day through an extension of the Legislative Yuan News System. These electronic press clippings on parliamentarians are automatically send out to each legislator's individual e-mail box within the day.

(4) Information and Knowledge on Demand

The new system of our library automation project (or LA II) at the Parliamentary

Library of the Legislative Yuan features an on-demand Internet information dissemination service on topics chosen by our clients. Users may easily select topics of interest and construct a research profile from our subject thesaurus. Then the LA II system will compile all the current website resources related to the chosen subjects and e-mail site references to users promptly. This subject access to websites is an individual subscription feature of our weblibrary

(5) Subject-oriented Information Packages

The subject-oriented information package service of our weblibrary draws on a well-organized and comprehensive online collection of web resources arranged by subject headings.¹ The service collates and stores links to previously prepared research materials under an online menu, and thus makes them available for use by everyone, whether as a direct reference or as background for further research.

VI. Conclusion

Democracy is a faceted human system to each people in each way. In a democratic country, its situation, social, economic, educational, and cultural background that due to a society synthesized into a whole political performance as a feedback to the society itself.

Democracy is also based on various communication activities through different massive and private channels to get information and knowledge for the best decision-making management of a society. Therefore, parliamentary library is very important within a democratic society for collecting, preserving, processing and sharing those information and knowledge via the knowledge contents and context management.

In the digital age, the information and knowledge flow become even faster, and the popular value of knowledge necessities as well as the need of parliamentary library of any parliament member will require more quantity and higher quality. The digital approach such as building up a weblibrary is an inevitable change to any parliamentary library. And we need to keep the pace with digital development and digital applications in the future.

Parliamentary Library shoulders three responsibilities for parliamentarians and the general publics as well in the new century, as follows,

- Democratic memory
- Information freedom and access

- Knowledge management for the parliament

We believe that more human beings, more mature politics, and more developing of a parliamentary library; or from another angle, to develop a qualified parliamentary library is an important social infrastructure for enhancing the democracy in human life.

¹ Association for Computing Machinery, "Digital library off to a fast start", *Communications of the ACM*, Vol.41, No.3 (1998) pp.3.