

An overview of the court-appointed defense counsel system in Japan

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Abstract. In 2004, Japan enacted the Comprehensive Legal Aid Act. In the same year, its criminal legal aid system underwent a major reform: for the first time, the court-appointed defense counsel system for criminal suspects was incorporated into the Code of Criminal Procedure. Subsequent amendments have gradually expanded the scope of suspects eligible for court-appointed defense, marking a significant breakthrough in the development of Japan's court-appointed defense counsel system. This reform further affirmed the state's primary responsibility in providing criminal legal aid. Alongside the enactment of the Comprehensive Legal Aid Act, the Japan Legal Support Center was established as an operational and administrative body for various legal aid services. It is responsible for specific tasks such as the appointment of court-appointed attorneys and the payment of their remuneration, thereby ensuring the independence and professionalism of the court-appointed defense system. This institutional arrangement has led to a comprehensive enhancement of Japan's legal aid mechanism and has created broader room for the application of court-appointed defense. According to the White Paper on Attorneys in Japan published by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations in 2021, the proportion of criminal cases in district courts where suspects applied for court-appointed counsel at the pre-indictment stage has been increasing year by year. This trend vividly illustrates the profound impact of Japan's court-appointed defense reform on judicial practice. The concept of the court-appointed defense system may be understood in both a narrow and a broad sense. In the narrow sense, it generally refers only to the systems of court-appointed counsel for defendants and suspects. In the broader sense, however, Japan's court-appointed defense system is a composite of multiple specific legal aid systems and should also include the system of court-appointed victim participation attorneys and court-appointed assistants. In practice, the Japanese legal community tends to operate based on this broader conception. A comprehensive understanding of the components of Japan's court-appointed defense system, as well as a brief examination of its coordination with other criminal legal aid systems—such as the duty attorney system and the private defense counsel system—can offer valuable insights into the development and characteristics of Japan's criminal legal aid framework.

Keywords: court-appointed defense system, court-appointed counsel, criminal legal aid in Japan

1. Introduction

The court-appointed defense counsel system occupies a central position within Japan's criminal legal aid framework. In its narrow sense, the court-appointed defense system refers solely to the systems of court-appointed counsel for defendants and suspects. However, in a broader sense, it comprises a collection of several specific legal aid systems in Japan and should also include the system of court-appointed attorneys for victim participation and the system of court-appointed assistants. This broader interpretation is supported by the fact that both the court-appointed victim participation attorney system and the court-appointed assistant system (also referred to in this article as the court-appointed guardian system) can be understood as contextual extensions or adaptations of the narrowly defined court-appointed defense system. The legal platform of the Japan Legal Support Center categorizes the court-appointed assistant system under services related to court-appointed defense [1]. While the court-appointed victim participation attorney system is a form of legal aid conducted from the standpoint of the victim, it similarly involves state-appointed attorneys participating in litigation procedures and includes components such as legal consultation and defense-related support. These features overlap with those of the narrow court-appointed defense system and can therefore, at least in part, be incorporated into discussions of the broader court-appointed defense framework. Accordingly, any overview of Japan's court-appointed defense system should encompass the systems of court-appointed victim participation attorneys and court-appointed assistants. Only by including these elements can one gain a more systematic and comprehensive understanding of the overall structure and specific functions of Japan's court-appointed defense system.

2. Overview of Japan's court-appointed defense counsel system

2.1. Court-appointed counsel system for suspects

The court-appointed counsel system for suspects—officially referred to as the “Court-Appointed Defense System for Suspects” (higisha kokusen bengoshisei)—refers to a system in which a suspect who is under detention and unable to appoint defense counsel due to poverty or other reasons is provided with a court-appointed attorney at the state's expense, either upon the suspect's request or in accordance with statutory provision [2].

2.1.1. Development of the court-appointed counsel system for suspects

The court-appointed counsel system for suspects has undergone several stages of expansion in terms of its scope of application. Prior to 2006, the Code of Criminal Procedure did not extend the court-appointed defense system to suspects who had not yet been indicted. However, the 2004 amendment expanded the scope of legal aid to include suspects charged with offenses punishable by death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment (or detention) with a statutory minimum term of one year or more. Starting from May 2009, the system was further extended to include suspects facing charges punishable by death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment (or detention) with a statutory maximum term of more than three years. Finally, the 2016 amendment broadened the coverage to include all suspects for whom a detention warrant had been issued—that is, suspects who were formally placed under detention [3].

Despite the ongoing improvement of Japan's criminal legal aid system following the 2004 judicial reforms, suspects who have not been issued a detention warrant still remain ineligible for court-appointed counsel. This reveals a gap in Japan's protection of the right to defense for non-detained suspects, and is directly related to the provisions of the Constitution of Japan regarding the right to appoint defense counsel. Article 37(3) of the Constitution explicitly states that a defendant shall have the right to retain counsel at all times, and when the defendant is unable to appoint counsel on their own, the state shall provide one [4]. In addition, Article 34 stipulates that any person who is detained or held in custody shall have the right to appoint counsel. From the literal interpretation of these constitutional provisions, it is evident that the Constitution does not grant suspects the right to court-appointed counsel. Accordingly, prior to the 2004 amendment, the Code of Criminal Procedure contained no system of court-appointed counsel for suspects. Within this framework, while the Code guarantees the right of suspects to retain private counsel, it continues to impose the condition of “being detained” for eligibility under the court-appointed counsel system for suspects.

2.1.2. Applicable circumstances

Poverty constitutes the primary criterion for suspects applying for court-appointed counsel. Article 37-2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that a suspect for whom a detention warrant has been issued may, if unable to retain defense counsel due to poverty or other reasons, request the appointment of a defense attorney, in which case the judge may appoint counsel accordingly. In addition, Article 37-4 provides that, if a suspect under detention has a mental disorder or other condition that makes it difficult for them to determine whether they require legal representation, a defense attorney shall be appointed for them regardless of a request [5].

2.2. Court-appointed counsel system for defendants

The court-appointed counsel system for defendants—officially referred to as the “Court-Appointed Defense System for Defendants” (hikokunin kokusen bengoshisei)—refers to a system in which a defendant who has entered the prosecution stage and is unable to retain defense counsel due to poverty or other reasons may request the appointment of counsel, and the court shall appoint a defense attorney accordingly.

2.2.1. Origin of the court-appointed counsel system for defendants

The court-appointed counsel system for defendants is a fundamental right granted to criminal defendants under the Constitution of Japan. Article 37(3) of the Constitution provides that when a defendant is unable to appoint defense counsel, the state shall appoint one on their behalf. The Code of Criminal Procedure gives concrete expression to this constitutional right. Specifically, Article 36 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that if a defendant is unable to retain a lawyer due to poverty or other reasons, the court shall appoint one upon the defendant's request. Therefore, unlike the court-appointed counsel system for suspects, which evolved later through legislative development, the system for defendants originates directly from constitutional

guarantees. Through the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, this fundamental right is implemented and transformed into a procedural right within the criminal justice system.

2.2.2. Applicable circumstances

As with the court-appointed counsel system for suspects, poverty is also a condition under which a defendant may apply for court-appointed counsel; this point will not be discussed in detail again here. In addition, Article 37 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that the court may, *ex officio*, appoint counsel for a defendant who meets any of the following four specific conditions, or in other necessary circumstances: first, the defendant is a minor; second, the defendant is seventy years of age or older; third, the defendant is deaf or mute; fourth, the defendant lacks mental capacity or suffers from diminished mental capacity.

2.3. Court-appointed victim participation attorney system and court-appointed guardian system

2.3.1. Court-appointed victim participation attorney system

The court-appointed victim participation attorney system—officially referred to as the Kokusen Higai-sha Sanka Bengoshi Seido (国選被害者参加弁護士制度)—is provided for in Article 10 of the Act on Measures Incidental to Criminal Procedures for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Crime Victims, etc. (hereinafter referred to as the Act on the Protection of Crime Victims) [6]. This system applies to victim participants, as defined in Articles 316-34 through 316-38 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, who delegate their participation to attorneys. If, after deducting expenses necessary for treating injuries or illnesses caused by the criminal act in question—or resulting from such act—within six months of applying for court-appointed victim participation, the applicant's assets remain below a specified threshold, they may apply to the court handling the relevant criminal case to have a court-appointed victim participation attorney designated.

According to Article 316-33 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the court-appointed victim participation attorney system generally applies to the following types of cases: first, cases involving intentional crimes that result in death or injury; second, cases involving crimes defined under Articles 176, 177, 179, 211, 220, or 224 through 227 of the Penal Code; third, cases involving criminal conduct that includes any of the offenses mentioned above; fourth, cases involving crimes specified in Articles 4, 5, 6(3), or 6(4) of the Act on Punishment of Acts Inflicting Death or Injury by Driving a Motor Vehicle; fifth, cases involving attempted offenses corresponding to any of the crimes listed in the preceding categories [7].

2.3.2. Court-appointed guardian system

The court-appointed guardian system, also known as the court-appointed assistant system (Kokusen Tsuejin Seido, 国選付添人制度), is a component of the court-appointed defense system within the juvenile justice framework. It refers to the system under which, pursuant to Article 22 of the Juvenile Act, the family court appoints a lawyer to provide accompaniment and support in cases where legally prescribed conditions are met [8]. Unlike the court-appointed defense system, the appointed lawyer in this system not only provides criminal defense assistance to the juvenile offender but also offers guidance and correction, hence the designation as a court-appointed guardian.

The initiation of the court-appointed guardian system is relatively complex and can be categorized into three circumstances:

First, pursuant to Article 3(1)(i), Article 22-2, and Article 22-3 of the Juvenile Act, when the family court is handling cases involving the situation described in Article 3(1)(i) or cases punishable by death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment exceeding three years, and decides that the prosecutor should participate in the trial and allows the prosecutor to attend, if the juvenile has no lawyer accompanying them, the court may appoint a lawyer as guardian.

Second, pursuant to Articles 3, 17, and 22 of the Juvenile Act, in cases related to intentional crimes causing death or other serious injuries to victims, punishable by death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment of two years or more, and where the juvenile is placed under protective custody by transfer to a juvenile classification home without lawyer accompaniment, the family court, considering the case details and whether a guardian exists, may appoint a lawyer to accompany and participate in the trial.

Third, concerning the requirement to hear the opinion of the lawyer guardian: pursuant to Article 22-5 of the Juvenile Act, when the family court permits victim or other party attendance at the trial, for juvenile offenders aged twelve or above charged with intentional crimes causing serious injury or death, or business negligence causing serious injury or death under Article 211 of the Penal Code (Law No. 45 of 1907), if the juvenile is not accompanied by a lawyer, the court may appoint a lawyer guardian [9].

2.4. Characteristics of the court-appointed defense system

2.4.1. Existence of asset eligibility criteria

In both the court-appointed counsel systems for suspects and defendants, applicants are required to submit a financial report when applying for court-appointed counsel. Assistance from a court-appointed defense attorney is granted only if the applicant's personal assets are below 500,000 Japanese yen. The assets considered here refer to liquid assets such as cash and bank deposits. In the court-appointed victim participation attorney system, the asset eligibility criterion is set at less than 2,000,000 Japanese yen after deducting expenses necessary for the treatment of injuries or illnesses caused by the criminal act (or resulting from such act) within six months from the application for court-appointed victim participation. However, there are exceptional mandatory defense provisions in the Code of Criminal Procedure where these asset thresholds do not apply. Article 289 stipulates that cases punishable by death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment exceeding three years may not proceed without defense counsel. If a defense attorney fails to appear, cannot appear, or if the defendant has no attorney, the court or judge shall appoint counsel *ex officio*. This provision ensures that suspects in such cases are not subject to personal asset restrictions when applying for court-appointed counsel. Additionally, Article 38-2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure sets forth legal consequences for fraudulent applications for legal aid. Applicants who provide false information regarding their personal assets that misleads the court or judge may be fined up to 100,000 Japanese yen.

2.4.2. Social welfare nature

The court-appointed defense system ensures that attorney fees are paid by the government, relieving defendants or suspects from the financial burden. Although defendants may still be liable for possible compensation and other litigation costs after the judgment, the overall expenses are thus controlled to a certain extent. Moreover, since court-appointed defense attorneys are designated by the court, there are established procedural norms and assessment criteria for their appointment. Defendants or suspects do not need to worry about the defense quality or professional competence of the counsel, nor do they have to bear the time cost of privately selecting an attorney [9].

2.4.3. Certain lag in assistance

For suspects, applications for court-appointed counsel are made only after a detention decision has been issued. Before that, during the voluntary interrogation phase prior to arrest and the compulsory phase before detention, suspects cannot receive assistance from court-appointed defense attorneys. In practice, the period between arrest and pre-detention is critical, as legal support is necessary for appropriately responding to interrogations during this stage. Choosing court-appointed counsel may result in missing certain protections of litigation rights [10].

2.4.4. Irrevocability and non-changeability

Due to the welfare nature of the court-appointed defense system, and to balance defendants' litigation rights with effective government fiscal control, the system lacks the flexibility of private counsel selection and dismissal. In principle, once court-appointed counsel has been accepted, defendants or suspects cannot dismiss or replace the court-appointed attorney at will. Except in cases of significant misconduct or other special circumstances by the appointed counsel, refusal to accept court-appointed defense on grounds such as unmet expectations or lack of trust is not permitted. To grant defendants or suspects who meet the eligibility criteria a form of "right to reconsider," the court allows them to waive continued court-appointed defense assistance after acceptance. This waiver occurs when the defendant or suspect selects a private defense attorney who files a request for appointment, leading the court to dismiss the originally appointed counsel, thus automatically relinquishing the original court-appointed defense opportunity.

3. Operation of the court-appointed defense system

3.1. The Comprehensive Legal Aid Act and the establishment of the Japan legal support center

The Comprehensive Legal Aid Act serves as the fundamental institutional framework for the establishment of the Japan Legal Support Center. It provides detailed regulations regarding the organizational structure, scope of services, and operational methods of the Center. As an independent administrative institution, the Japan Legal Support Center undertakes legal aid services based on court-appointed defense and has become a crucial vehicle for the welfare-oriented transformation of Japan's legal aid

system. Leveraging the framework of the Legal Support Center, Japan has implemented comprehensive regulations to protect and assist the rights and interests of crime victims.

Article 5 of the Comprehensive Legal Aid Act ensures the prompt and effective appointment of court-appointed defense attorneys and court-appointed victim participation attorneys. The appointment of court-appointed counsel requires the court, presiding judge, or judge to designate defense attorneys for defendants or suspects in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure. This process relies heavily on the cooperation between the Legal Support Center and local law offices. The establishment of the Legal Support Center facilitates the extensive collection and utilization of various information resources and materials to more effectively assist in resolving trials and other legal disputes. It also promotes communication and collaboration among lawyers, law firms, bar associations, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, and other legal professional groups, thereby strengthening professional exchanges [11].

The Comprehensive Legal Aid Act also advances comprehensive assistance for victims. The Act on the Protection of Crime Victims provides guidance and regulations for assisting victims in criminal damage compensation claims, payment of economic relief, provision of social welfare services such as medical care, ensuring victims' personal and residential safety, securing stable employment, enhancing victim participation in criminal proceedings, offering support throughout case handling, improving societal understanding of crime victims, promoting relevant research and investigations, supporting assistance activities by civil organizations, and increasing transparency in victim feedback. These measures fully ensure that victims can recover from the trauma of crime as quickly as possible and return to normal life at an early stage. Furthermore, the Act on the Protection of Crime Victims exempts crime victims from travel expenses incurred during participation in criminal proceedings and trial preparation.

3.2. Operation of the court-appointed defense system

3.2.1. Procedure for appointing court-appointed defense counsel

Court-appointed defense counsel for suspects or defendants are typically designated by the trial judge. First, the judge determines, in accordance with relevant provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, that the suspect or defendant in the case is entitled to court-appointed defense assistance. Subsequently, the judge requests the Japan Legal Support Center (Legal Platform) to nominate and notify candidates for court-appointed defense counsel [12].

The Japan Legal Support Center then selects specific lawyers from among those who have entered into contracts as court-appointed defense attorneys and notifies the judge of these candidates. Finally, the judge makes the formal appointment of the court-appointed defense counsel. The selection of court-appointed victim participation attorneys follows a process of delegated reassignment. If a victim has already retained a lawyer who has been assisting them prior to the appointment of a court-appointed victim participation attorney, and that victim or others participate in the criminal trial, the previously retained lawyer may continue to assist as the court-appointed victim participation attorney. The retained lawyer can transfer the case to a local law office, submit an application, and provide relevant documentation to be designated as the court-appointed victim participation attorney.

3.2.2. Operation of court-appointed counsel services

Court-appointed defense attorneys, court-appointed guardians, and court-appointed victim participation attorneys all operate under a contractual system. According to the Operational Regulations for Court-Appointed Defense, Court-Appointed Guardians, and Court-Appointed Victim Participation Legal Services established by the Japan Legal Support Center, lawyers wishing to engage in these court-appointed defense services must enter into corresponding contracts on the Legal Platform managed by the Legal Support Center. Acceptance of such contracts requires approval from the director of the local Legal Support Office where the applicant is based. The Japan Legal Support Center also provides standardized contract templates.

Upon acceptance of a court-appointed defense designation, the Legal Support Center is required to notify the relevant courts and bar associations of the names of lawyers who have signed contracts as court-appointed defense attorneys or court-appointed victim participation attorneys, along with the names and locations of their affiliated law offices, as well as other matters prescribed by Ministry of Justice ordinances in accordance with Article 30, Paragraph 1, Item 6 of the Comprehensive Legal Aid Act. Any changes to such information must be communicated following the same procedure.

3.3. Coordination with other criminal legal aid systems

3.3.1. Coordination with the duty lawyer system

The duty lawyer system applies after a suspect's arrest, allowing the suspect, their family members, or other related persons such as friends or social welfare workers to request the bar association to arrange a duty lawyer for a single meeting and a free consultation. Upon such a request, the duty lawyer promptly visits the police station or other location to meet with the arrested person, conduct a consultation, and provide explanations about forthcoming procedures and legal advice. This meeting with the duty lawyer occurs only once and does not involve actual defense representation. In other words, a lawyer acting as a duty lawyer has only one opportunity to meet a suspect or defendant in a case in that capacity. Meanwhile, court-appointed defense counsel are selected from lawyers at the detention facility. Therefore, if the suspect or defendant qualifies for court-appointed defense, it is possible that the lawyer who previously served as the duty lawyer may be appointed as the court-appointed defense attorney to meet the suspect or defendant again and provide defense representation. Thus, under certain circumstances, the duty lawyer system can transition into the court-appointed defense counsel system.

3.3.2. Coordination with the private defense attorney system

First, coordination after receiving court-appointed defense assistance: As mentioned earlier, to provide defendants or suspects who meet the eligibility criteria for court-appointed defense with a second opportunity to exercise their litigation rights, the court allows them to waive continued court-appointed defense assistance after accepting it. This occurs when the defendant, suspect, or their family members—if qualified to appoint a private defense attorney—select a private defense attorney, who then submits an application for appointment. The court subsequently dismisses the originally appointed counsel, thereby automatically relinquishing the original court-appointed defense opportunity.

Second, coordination before the initiation of court-appointed defense assistance: This coordination can be seen as a pre-emptive waiver by the suspect or defendant of the opportunity for court-appointed defense. Articles 36 and 37-2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure specify exceptions to the application of the court-appointed defense system: For defendants in prosecution who meet the eligibility criteria for court-appointed defense, if a person other than the defendant appoints a private defense attorney on their behalf, the original court-appointed defense assistance will no longer apply; For suspects who have been detained and meet the eligibility criteria for court-appointed defense, if a person other than the suspect appoints a private defense attorney, or if the suspect has already been released, the original court-appointed defense will no longer apply. Extracting the common feature from these two exceptions, if a person other than the defendant or suspect appoints a private defense attorney, the court-appointed defense system ceases to apply from the outset. Thus, suspects or defendants eligible for court-appointed defense who have had private counsel appointed in advance effectively waive their right to court-appointed defense. This completes the direct transition from the potential application of the court-appointed defense system to the duty lawyer system without the court-appointed defense actually taking effect.

4. Remuneration and other expenses for court-appointed defense services

4.1. Remuneration and other expenses for court-appointed defense counsel and court-appointed guardians

4.1.1. Method of receiving remuneration

The remuneration for court-appointed defense counsel and court-appointed guardians is granted on a report-based payment system. After completing their work, the court-appointed defense counsel and guardians must submit a report within 14 working days. This report should detail the process expenditures and fees, provide an account of the case handling results, and include a request for payment of remuneration. If the report is not submitted within the prescribed deadline, payment of remuneration may be withheld. Regarding the determination of the completion date of the legal services: For court-appointed defense counsel, the completion date of the services is defined as the day the suspect is indicted, transferred, or released; the day the defendant is pronounced judgment or the indictment is dismissed; or the day the court-appointed defense counsel is dismissed. For court-appointed guardians, the completion date of the services is defined as the day the family court hearing concludes, the appeal or retrial hearing concludes, or the day the court-appointed guardian is dismissed.

4.1.2. Establishment of criteria for calculating remuneration and other expenses

Since court-appointed defense services are funded by public taxes, it is essential to minimize discretionary judgments by the Legal Platform. At the same time, appropriate consideration must be given to reflecting evaluations of defense activities in the

remuneration. Ultimately, an objective evaluation criterion is established, and standardized, categorized calculations are conducted based on this objective indicator. However, since these criteria are somewhat fixed, actual defense activities may involve elements that do not fit the criteria or cannot be adequately reflected in remuneration. Therefore, the calculation standards require flexible interpretation or substantive evaluation of the defense activities without departing from the objective criteria.

4.1.3. Composition of remuneration and expenses

According to the March 2025 edition of the Basic Explanation on Court-Appointed Defense Remuneration and Expenses, remuneration can generally be divided into ordinary remuneration and additional expenses. Applications for ordinary remuneration should include the following items in the report: meeting time with the suspect, evidence of the meeting, the date the public trial is confirmed, whether substantive hearings were held on the trial date, transportation fees, and long-distance meeting expenses. Additional expenses include costs for transcript copying, transportation and accommodation fees for long-distance meetings, local transportation and communication fees, translation fees, litigation preparation costs, and expenses for assisting clients with expert evaluations.

4.2. Remuneration and other expenses for court-appointed victim participation attorneys

4.2.1. Basic remuneration calculation standard

According to the March 2024 edition of the Interpretation of Victim Court-Appointed Defense Related Services issued by the Japan Legal Support Center, the basic remuneration for first-instance cases is set at 103,000 yen for non-jury trials and 230,000 yen for jury trials. Under special circumstances, this may be reduced to 50% to 80% of the basic remuneration. For appellate cases, the basic remuneration starts at 10,000 yen and decreases by 2,500 yen for each additional prior trial participant.

4.2.2. Main additional fee calculation standards

The additional fee for pre-trial procedural arrangements is 4,000 yen. If multiple days of participation in procedural arrangements or negotiations occur before the first trial date, no further additional fees are charged; however, from the second trial date onward, additional fees are accumulated daily. The remuneration for the actual duration of each trial day is calculated as follows: For less than 45 minutes: no fee for the first trial, and 5,000 yen for subsequent trials; For 45 minutes to less than 2 hours 30 minutes: 5,000 yen for the first trial, 8,000 yen for subsequent trials; For 2 hours 30 minutes to less than 4 hours 30 minutes: 11,600 yen for the first trial, 16,600 yen for subsequent trials; For 4 hours 30 minutes or more: 18,300 yen for the first trial, 25,300 yen for subsequent trials. An additional 3,000 yen is granted for attendance on the judgment announcement day, regardless of multiple attendances on the same day, which are considered as one. During the trial, if the defense's discussion with the prosecutor exceeds 1 hour 30 minutes, an additional fee of 3,000 yen must be paid. Additional fees related to trial proceedings vary based on the number of defendants and case nature, generally ranging from 5,000 to 40,000 yen. A notable feature is that costs increase with the number of defendants in jury trials, whereas for other cases, costs decrease as the number of defendants decreases. Additional fees for copying case records, settlement fees, travel expenses, and pre-trial preparation fees are also specified in the Interpretation of Victim Court-Appointed Defense Related Services.

5. Conclusion

As a cornerstone of Japan's legal aid system, the court-appointed defense system has played a significant role in safeguarding the litigation rights of criminal defendants in Japan. Since the judicial reforms of 2004, the court-appointed defense system has undergone multiple enhancements and supplements, gradually developing into a socially welfare-oriented mechanism characterized by centralized and unified management and applicability across diverse situations. This system has resolved many inconveniences that previously relied heavily on the duty lawyer system and has further expanded the connotation of legal aid's "welfareization." By providing an overview of the broadly defined various court-appointed defense systems as delineated in this article, and by presenting their specific contents and main features, it facilitates a more comprehensive understanding and mastery of the fundamental components, overall connotation, and operational rules of Japan's court-appointed defense framework. Additionally, through introducing its coordination with other criminal legal aid systems such as the duty lawyer system and the private defense attorney system, readers can better appreciate the distinctive application characteristics of different legal aid mechanisms and, in conjunction with the entire article, gain certain insights.

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