

“The Industrial Property Rights System in Japan”

Chapter 2. The Patent System and Utility Model System

Prior art Searches

A comparison of the invention with “prior art” is essential for patent examinations.

To avoid the “unwanted results” of free text searches, patent classification search is possible using the “International Patent Classification” (IPC), or Japan’s unique “FI” (File Index) or “F-term”. This makes it possible to systematically search features of technologies that are difficult to express in words, such as shapes and structures.

Text searches using keywords enable searches with fewer failures.

Since the examination of “prior art” requires efficient searches with fewer “unwanted results” and less search failure, it is carried out by combining a patent classification search and a text search.

Regarding the search for Japanese patent documents, use of the FI or F-term searches is more efficient than using an IPC search.

Here we can see the relationship between IPC, FI and F-term.

The Official Gazette of the Japan Patent Office containing information on patents, utility models, designs and trademarks has been issued since the Meiji era which started in 1868. In addition, there is the Industrial Property Digital Library, or IPDL, which offers the public Internet access to information such as the progress of examinations included in the IP Gazettes of the Japan Patent Office.

PAJ (Patent Abstracts of Japan) and FI or F-term searches are possible in English, so overseas examiners can use these for reference regarding patent applications and registrations from Japan.

Let’s take the example of “an umbrella with LED lights installed at the end of the ribs to improve safety at night”. Now we’ll try an FI search.

The FI for this invention is somewhere in the Main Group of “A45B Umbrellas”. Using the Patent Map Guidance System, or PMGS, we make an inquiry in the Main Group of target A45B.

Searching for related FI from the viewpoints of “lighting device” and “the end of umbrella ribs”, we find A45B3/04@C and A45B25/10.

Using FI search, we now search for the theme of 3B104 with A45B3/04@C and A45B25/10 (A45B3/04@C*A45B25/10).

A similar official report can be found in the Gazette.

Advanced Industrial Property Network (AIPN)

The Advanced Industrial Property Network, or AIPN, is the system whereby examiners in IP Offices overseas can obtain patent examination information from the JPO.

The purpose of the AIPN is to reduce the workload in IP offices overseas, thereby enabling Japanese applicants to obtain patents in other countries more quickly.

Via the Internet, it's possible to obtain patent applications, their legal status, cited documents, examination information for granted claims, and the patent family of a patent application filed with the JPO.

The JPO registers the global IP addresses of the computers used in each IP office overseas, which makes it possible to use the AIPN without having to input an ID or a password.