

The Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators (SWET) : Fostering Professionalism in English Writing in Japan

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The Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators (SWET): Fostering Professionalism in English Writing in Japan

Compiled by

Lynne Riggs (Translator and Editor, Tokyo)

Keith Wilkinson (Copywriter, Translator and Engineer, Tokyo)

SWET：日本における英文執筆の専門技術育成

Abstract

This article introduces the goals, activities and origins of SWET (the Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators). SWET has about 200 members—150 of these in greater Tokyo, and most of the remainder in Kansai or overseas—including not only writers, editors, and translators, but also people involved in teaching, research, rewriting, copywriting, design and production, and other areas related to improving the quality and presentation of written English in Japan. SWET has regular meetings in Tokyo and occasional meetings in Kansai, and publishes a newsletter and directory for members. Please visit the SWET web site (www.swet.jp) and join the SWET-L mailing list (open to non-members) for more details.

本稿は、SWET(著述家・編集者・翻訳家協会)の目標、活動および起源を紹介している。SWETは、著述家、編集者、翻訳者だけでなく、教育、研究、英文添削、広告文案作成、デザインと制作、およびそれ以外の日本における英文執筆の品質と表現の向上に関係する分野を含め、200名程の会員を擁している(150名は東京とその周辺地域、それ以外はおもに関西または海外)。SWETは、東京で定例会議を、大阪で不定期の会議を開いており、会員向けに会報と会員名簿を刊行している。詳細については、SWETのウェブサイト (www.swet.jp) を閲覧し、SWET-Lのメーリングリスト(非会員にも解放している)に参加されたい。

Introduction

SWET (the Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators) has about 200 members—150 of these in greater Tokyo, and most of the remainder in Kansai or overseas. SWET members include not only writers, editors, and translators, but also people involved in teaching, research, rewriting, copywriting, book and magazine design and production, and other areas related to improving the quality and presentation of written English in Japan.

SWET's aims are to facilitate the flow of information among members—to encourage the sharing of know-how and experience—and to facilitate networking among people working in related fields and so improve working conditions. These aims are promoted by regular meetings held throughout the year, the annual book

fair, and (mainly for SWET members and associates) occasional workshops, social events (year end/new year party, summer beer-fest, Kobe pool-side party in Kansai), and (for members) the *SWET Newsletter* and *Directory* of members. SWET seminars and workshops have ranged from newsletter editing, design and production, to getting yourself published, getting online, starting your own company, and marketing. These SWET activities are informally run by a dozen or so volunteers.

The *SWET Newsletter* announces upcoming activities, reports on past activities—including reports on meetings, workshops and socials—and provides information of interest and assistance to members, including reviews of books, style guides, dictionaries and other tools and resources, columns on English usage and publishing practice, articles on and examples of translations, and tips on dealing with clients. SWET and the newsletter have continued to reinvent themselves and reach out to involve new people, as evidenced by the columns ‘Over Their Shoulders’ (comparisons of the same item translated by different people), ‘A Day in the Life’, and ‘Ask Aunt Eva’ (tongue-in-cheek advice). Other SWET publications include *Wordcraft*, which is an anthology of articles from the newsletter, and the *Japan Style Sheet*. The *Directory* is a listing of members, for private use only; it is published annually, but an update supplement is published in the second half of the year.

Membership, in Japan or overseas, is currently 5,000 yen or \$50 per year. Please visit the SWET web site www.swet.jp and join the SWET mailing list (open to non-members) for more details.

SWET’s formation began with an informal gathering held in Tokyo in November 1980. More than one hundred people attended, and their enthusiasm for forming a continuing association prompted further meetings and the first issue of the *SWET Newsletter* in February 1981. Since those early days, SWET has been a facilitator, mentor—and community of friends—to many people. A more detailed history of SWET follows below.

A History of SWET: The First Decade

The late 1970s were years of growth and ferment in English-language book and periodical publishing in Japan. Book publishers Charles E. Tuttle, Inc., John Weatherhill, Kodansha International, and the University of Tokyo Press released dozens of new volumes in English annually. *The Japan Quarterly*, *Japan Echo*, and *The Japan Interpreter* published high-quality Japanese journalism and writing in English translation. Four daily English-language newspapers and several weeklies joined book and magazine publishers in providing jobs and outlets for editors, translators, and writers working in English. Corporations hired writers and editors to tell their stories to the world as they set their sights on expansion overseas. High ideals, personal quests, and just plain curiosity brought many talented people to

Japan to begin or continue careers in editing, publishing, and translation. A critical mass formed, and in 1979 a group of translators, editors, and writers in Tokyo began to talk to one another. Aware that they and many other English wordsmiths were working in relative isolation, their conversations began to turn to the idea of an organization.

An exploratory gathering on November 15, 1980, of “professional editors, writers, and translators working (for the most part) with English” was announced in the Tokyo English-language newspapers. When more than 100 people interested in meeting “birds of their own feather” descended on the Aoyama apartment of Barbara Adachi, to the mixed dismay and delight of the organizers, SWET was born. The tally of attendees that day listed 20 writers, 58 editors, 33 translators, 23 journalists, 20 technical and scientific writers/rewriters, 23 scholars, 10 rewriters, 19 publishing-related workers, 25 freelancers, and 40 organization employees (each person could list more than one category).

A core group of volunteers met to discuss ways of turning the energy of that first meeting into an organization: Barbara Adachi, Amadio Arboleda, Susan Barberi (Murata), David Edison, Teresa Gautry, Barbara Levene, Jared Lubarsky, Pamela Pasti, Lynne Riggs, Kim Schuefftan, Ruth Stevens, Michael A. Uehara, Fred Uleman, and Peter Ward. This first steering committee decided to begin by planning programs and activities for the three constituent groups (writers, editors, and translators) in rotation, and to publish a directory of members. Activities got off to a vigorous start on February 27, 1981, with a panel discussion about editing, featuring Meredith Weatherby (editor-in-chief of *John Weatherhill*), Suzanne Trumbull (assistant managing editor at *Japan Echo*), and Luther Link (professor at Aoyama Gakuin). This meeting, too, was attended by 100 people.

In April 1981, more than 70 translators turned out to hear Frank Baldwin (Asia Foundation Translation Service Center), Frank Hudachek (technical translator), Deborah Kinzer (*Japan Echo*), Kano Tsutomu (*The Japan Interpreter*), Fred Uleman (freelance translator), and Yamamoto Takamichi (Simul International) talk about their work. The desire for sharing information and resources inspired the SWET Glossary Bank, instigated by Jared Lubarsky and maintained initially by Ruth Stevens and later by Bill Lise. In those pre-computer, pre-database days, it consisted of typed vocabulary lists on more than 15 different subjects.

In June, Donald Richie spoke about “Writing In and On Japan” to a large crowd, sharing insights from his long career and making suggestions to both experienced and beginning writers. Founding member Ruth Stevens brought further insights from experienced writers on Japan to the pages of the first issues of the bimonthly *Newsletter*.

The August 1981 issue of the *Newsletter* contained a survey questionnaire. The responses to questions about careers, income, professional interests, and

expectations of SWET were summarized in the March 1982 issue. The average age of members was then 39. That fall, Peter Ward had organized the printing and sale of the first SWET T-shirts and sweatshirts emblazoned with the SWET logo.

During the early 1980s, SWET offered a number of workshops focusing on publications-related skills: typography, proofreading, paste-up for editors, indexing, and newsletter editing and production. In September and November 1981, Becky Davis led the first of her series of three workshops on typography for editors and others involved with the written word, followed in 1982 by “layout for editors” in May and “photo editing and layout” in December. These workshops helped develop design and production awareness and skills among people who worked mainly with words.

In January 1982, the SWET Book Exchange opened for the first time in editor Pamela Pasti’s spacious apartment in a corner of Shibuya. Book-loving SWETers, often with small children in tow, gathered once a month to exchange books from the shelves in the corridor and converse in the living room. The Book Exchange, which ended in 1984 when Pamela moved to California, would later be replaced by the annual Book Fair.

The introduction of word processors revved up the pace of everyone’s lives. By 1983, editors and translators were embarking eagerly, if anxiously, on the computer age. SWET surveyed its members to find out how to help and advise them. The *Newsletter* printed the names and phone numbers of members willing to help out others with word processing problems and questions; articles offered advice on choosing hardware and software.

In 1983, membership dues were raised from 1,000 to 3,000 yen a year. The May 1983 issue of the *Newsletter* carried the first of a long series of columns by the Book Mavin, who reviewed “periodicals and books of special interest to writers, editors, and translators”—dictionaries, style guides, books on design and typography, dictionaries for translators, books on writing, editing, and copyediting. Another columnist, the Publishing Hexpert, appeared in occasional issues with advice on typography-related editorial problems.

In January 1982 the first SWET-wide social gathering was held at the Amaltheia restaurant in Takadanobaba. SWET’s semiannual parties attracted large crowds of members and friends for networking, noshing, and schmoozing throughout the decade.

SWET’s first book-length publication, *The Japan Style Sheet*, was another product of the collective process that has fueled most of SWET’s activities. Drafted mainly by Susie Schmidt, Lynne Riggs, Ruth Stevens, and Jared Lubarsky, with input from dozens of other writers, translators, and editors, the first edition (1983) was typed on an IBM Selectric; the pages were laid out by Becky Davis. The first edition was reprinted twice, and more than 2,000 copies were sold. (A second

edition has been published commercially by Stone Bridge Press, the Berkeley, CA-based publishing company founded and run by SWETer Peter Goodman after his move to the United States in the mid-1980s.)

Founding member Barbara Adachi ushered in the trend of the times in the January 1984 issue of the Newsletter with an ode to the charms of word processors, and SWET members never looked back. The Book Mavin specialized in word processors that year; a WordStar user's group, SWETStars, was formed for networking and information sharing; and a major autumn event was a panel discussion, "The W/P and Me."

A "Writer's Market: Japan" panel session in June 1984 drew more than 100 people to learn how experienced freelancers market their work. The year marked the publication of the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, now an indispensable tool of J-E translators, scholars, and students of Japan. Other 1984 events included a session on computer-assisted J-E translation systems and a two-day hands-on workshop (attended by 40 members) on "Proofreading from A to Z," led by Susie Schmidt, Suzy Trumbull, and Becky Davis. The 13-page kit prepared for this workshop was later offered for sale as a SWET fundraising activity. The workshop was repeated in May 1988, when 32 more members benefited from six decades' combined experience of the three instructors.

A perennial problem for SWETers in the days before Amazon.com was obtaining English-language reading (both professional and personal) at reasonable prices. Core volunteers Becky Davis and Yobuko Yuriko inaugurated the SWET Book Service in August 1983 to enable SWET members to order professional reading and reference books at U.S. list prices and pay for their purchases in yen. Despite numerous problems, the service continued for three years, helping many SWET members obtain important reference tools they still rely on and treasure. To link the book-thirsty membership to booksellers' marketing efforts, SWET volunteers also organized special sales: a 20-percent discount sale of the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, a group special order of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and year-end "Super SWET Special" book sales from 1984 to 1987 with the cooperation of major Japan-based publishers and booksellers who offered 20 or 30 percent discounts.

In 1988, the annual Book Fairs began, held in the early years (through the good offices of Jiho Sargent) at Taisoji temple in Komagome. Books donated by members were sold at bargain-basement prices. Partial revenues from the sale were donated to charities, and remaining volumes were handed over to Stella Maris, a mission to seamen in Yokohama that provides books in Western languages to merchant ship crews. (The Book Fair tradition continues today, with a change of venue to Temple University, under the capable organization of Cynthia Yenches and others.)

At the beginning of its fifth year, in 1985, SWET had over 300 members. A

group called PrintStars was formed to address problems of communication between publishers' and typesetters' computers. Desktop publishing know-how became increasingly important to writers, editors, and translators, and SWET responded with *Newsletter* articles and a workshop conducted by Becky Davis.

The translators' contingent of SWET decided to organize, first as a subgroup of SWET and then, in 1985, as the independent Japan Association of Translators (first anchor, Clive Crews). JAT now has about 415 members. Its newsletter, begun as a monthly printed publication, went online in 1997. It holds monthly meetings and since 1990 an annual international conference of J-E translators.

In late 1986, the Newsletter column "Rough Words" was inaugurated; the column, which ran for more than four years, shared Jiho Sargent's collection of "words to be viewed with deep suspicion" when they crop up in translations from Japanese to English. The first "Over Their Shoulders" project, compiling renderings of a single Japanese text by three or more experienced translators, began in July 1987. (Both "Rough Words" and "Over Their Shoulders" columns that appeared through 1990 are collected in *Wordcraft*.)

SWET activities toward the end of the 1980s included lectures by invited speakers from outside SWET: Charlotte Kennedy Takahashi of Oak Associates on "Professional Communication," James Fallows of *The Atlantic Monthly* on journalism between the United States and Asia, and a panel of journalists including David Benjamin, Christine Chapman, and Damon Darlin discussing "The Art of the Interview."

In late 1989, Kansai SWET members held the first of a series of regional workshops and talks that would continue until the Kobe earthquake shook lives and professions in the region in January 1995.

The 1990 Directory reported that SWET had 430 members.

The people mentioned in this article, along with many others, contributed their time, energy, and talent to making SWET a viable organization that continued to meet, publish, and organize throughout the 1980s—and continues to do so. (The highlights of the 1990s will be covered in a future article.) The guiding principles of professionalism, collectivity, and sharing were a continuous thread in the early years, inspiring and energizing a steering committee whose membership is open to any SWETer; a cadre of volunteers who wrote, produced, and mailed the *Newsletter*; members who shared their professional skills at workshops and on panel discussions; dedicated members who produced an annual Directory, hosted meetings, and husbanded SWET funds; and many others who contributed in countless ways to this network of people who work with the English word in Japan.

(By Lynne E. Riggs, Nina Raj, and Susie Schmidt; originally published in the *SWET Newsletter*, No. 89, June 2000; reprinted by permission of the authors.)

A History of SWET: The Second Decade

The energy of writers, editors, translators, and other professionals working with English in Japan carried SWET into its second decade in the 1990s. In addition to the by-now-traditional summer and New Year parties, the early years of the decade featured events at which members shared their experience and knowledge with others. A sampling: the 1990 two-day “Proofreading from A to Z” workshop (led by Becky Davis, Susan Schmidt, and Suzanne Trumbull), a desktop publishing workshop (Hunter Brumfield and Ted Mills) in 1991, a six-member panel on “Making It as a Freelance Writer” in 1992, a two-day intensive “Typographic Literacy” workshop (Becky Davis) in 1993, an introduction to electronic communications, “The World from Your Desktop” (Eric Bossieux), in 1994, and “Using the Internet” (Stephen Anderson) in early 1995.

SWET’s membership peaked in 1994 at nearly 500, when the organization was at its most diverse and perhaps most prosperous; but, perhaps reflecting trends as the aftereffects of the burst “bubble” caught up with English wordsmithing in Japan, membership fell through 1996 and 1997 to about 250, and it now stands at 265.

In February 1990 work on publication of SWET’s second book was launched mainly through the efforts of Becky Davis and Yobuko Yuriko. By the end of that year *Wordcraft* was on sale. An anthology of selections from the first decade of the *SWET Newsletter*, *Wordcraft* reprints articles on professionalism by a number of SWET’s founding members; three continuing columns, “The Logomagus,” “Rough Words,” and “The Publishing Hexpert”; and eight “Over Their Shoulders” comparative translation projects in the fields of social commentary, electronics, short fiction, religion and politics, finance, marketing, urban architecture, and humor. Its “Resources” section reprints “Book Mavin” reviews of major dictionaries, speller-dividers, and translation references; books on style, usage, and grammar and design, typography, and production; and a series on major libraries in Tokyo with accessible English-language collections. Despite the advent of the Internet age, the insights, lore, and advice collected in *Wordcraft* continue to address the special needs and concerns of wordsmiths in Japan.

Many editors, translators, and writers who had made the initially traumatic, but ultimately delighted, transition from the typewriter to the computer were just beginning to gain a sense of confidence in word processors and PCs when the new world of electronic communications via the Internet appeared on the horizon. SWET’s computer-savvy contingent, including Maynard Hogg, Phil Ono, Jiho Sargent, and Keith Wilkinson, among others, offered their experience and knowledge to members, and a series of articles on modems and electronic networking in the 1991-93 issues of the *Newsletter* signaled members’ avid interest in the uses and potential of the new technology. The buzz about Internet service providers was audible, too, with the more intrepid members encouraging the rest to

investigate such services as TWICS, one of Japan's earliest Internet service providers. By mid-1993, TWICS had set up a special topic for SWET, launching SWET online for the first time. Discussion of an independent online network for SWET began; it continued until 1996, when Paul Findon volunteered to launch SWET's own Internet mailing list and to serve as its list owner, a task he continues to perform. The mailing list, SWET-L, opened for discussion in May 1996. By October, Paul had also set up SWET's web site [current address: www.swet.jp].

Unlike some organizations, SWET has never had elected or appointed officers but has moved along in fits and starts punctuated by irregular brainstorming gatherings of the Steering Committee. The organization has maintained no permanent office headquarters, and SWET's mailing address and contact point have been provided by volunteers: from 1981 to 1985 by Lynne Riggs in Komae, Tokyo; from 1985 to 1993 by Fred Uleman in Shibuya, Tokyo; from 1993 to 1997 by Susan Murata in Asaka, Saitama; and from 1997 to [2003] by Nina Raj in Kokubunji, Tokyo [current address: 1-16 Kita Iwaoka, Tokorozawa-shi, Saitama 359-0007].

A SWET-wide survey was conducted in 1992 to get feedback and input on the six-times-yearly *Newsletter* and suggestions for new activities, as well as obtain a consensus on raising annual membership dues, which had been 3,000 yen a year since 1985, to 5,000 yen. By 1994, a slowdown in volunteer energies was evident: only one special event other than the regular social gatherings and the annual book sale was scheduled in Tokyo; SWET Kansai was the more active chapter that year.

In January 1995, the strong tremors that hit Awaji and Kobe firmly shook up the lives and employment of the vigorous SWET contingent active in the area since 1989. Many former SWET members left the area or the country, and others concentrated on putting their lives back together. The year in general was one of transition and adjustment, and even Tokyo activities were limited in scope.

The Steering Committee in Tokyo nevertheless rallied to generate new energy for SWET beyond its fifteenth year, and a round of "town meetings" was scheduled in 1995 to encourage members to contribute ideas and help facilitate activities. New ideas for the *Newsletter* led to the launching of a series on "frequently asked questions." The FAQs mined the accumulated experience and practical advice of members on such topics as handling translation clients, charging for freelance work, and assembling reference works. Begun in response to questions from aspiring translators and rewriters, the "A Day in the Life" and "How We Got Here" columns showed the variety of ways members have carved out their professional lives. In 1996, "Aunt Eva" began a regular column that offered wise counsel and practical tips to the worklorn.

As desktop publishing software became more sophisticated, wordsmiths without formal training in layout, design, and production found themselves increasingly faced with the need to make typographical and design decisions. "True

to Type,” a series of *Newsletter* articles by Becky Davis answering questions on type, typography, and production, continued from November 1992 (No. 50) to 1995 (No. 67) in 11 installments. Davis designed and produced the *SWET Newsletter* from May 1983 to 1996. Adding to opportunities for members to boost their design-related knowledge and acumen were a pair of hands-on workshops in 1996 covering the basics of QuarkXPress and PageMaker, and lectures by veteran book designer Arnie Olds in 1996 and 1997.

In 1994, when stocks ran low of the second printing of the *Japan Style Sheet*, of which SWET had sold nearly 2,500 copies, the Steering Committee decided to prepare a revised edition and publish it commercially. The process of revising and updating the text began, and a contract was signed with Stone Bridge Press in Berkeley, California. After several stages of rewriting and revision, SWET received its first shipment of the new 80-page book in May 1998.

In 1996, Susie Schmidt, long-time editor at the University of Tokyo Press, moved to the United States. SWET’s core had long relied on her knowledgeable and steadfast work in compiling and editing the *Newsletter*. Lynne Riggs undertook coordination of the *Newsletter* editorial work, and Ruth McCreery took over layout and production beginning with issue No. 71. Internet mailing lists for the Steering Committee (SWET-SC) and a new Newsletter Committee (SWET-NC) were set up, and most SWET business began to be conducted via the two lists.

SWET workshops and lectures in the 1980s and early 1990s had drawn relatively large numbers, but lower attendance at scheduled events from 1995 onward signaled an increasing diversification and geographical spread of the membership. In place of skills-related workshops and talks drawn from SWET’s own resources, the events of 1997 and 1998 featured lectures by outside people, including Andrew Horvat lecturing on “Revisionism and Beyond” (August 1996), Glen Fukushima on “Challenges of Communication” lecture (August 1997), Frederik L. Schodt with “On Translating and Being Translated” (January 1998), Judith Clancy on “An Author’s View of Publishing and Self-publishing” (Kansai, June 1998), and Frank Baldwin (Jr.) with “A Published Novelist Tells (Almost) All” (November 1998).

One dimension of the lull in SWET activities in the late 1990s was the advent of new networking options that the Internet provided for professionals working in isolation. E-mail and the growing body of online information accessible from one’s desktop offered new responses and options. Discussions on SWET-L addressed a wide variety of ongoing concerns of SWET members, and some of the discussion threads were recapitulated in the *Newsletter*.

The *Newsletter* also featured articles introducing the special language of the Internet in “Cyberjargon,” authored by Michael McDonald and Paul Findon, as well as articles on such topics as the identifying trails left by users of the

Internet, Adobe's Acrobat software, and graphics file formats for publishing.

In April 1999, SWET Kansai was relaunched with a talk by translator Juliet Carpenter, and under the leadership of Richard Sadowsky, Darlene Davidovic, Kay Vreeland, and Gretchen Mittwer, has continued a relaxed but steady succession of workshops, panel discussions, and lectures. A locally maintained list of members was created and intra-regional communication helped rouse interest and networking among Kansai members. Social events have provided opportunities for isolated members to meet face-to-face. Reports of SWET Kansai activities reach all members of SWET through the *Newsletter*.

In the autumn of 1998, Ruth McCreery redesigned the *SWET Newsletter* in its present A5 size and format. With nearly one-third of SWET's membership based outside the Tokyo area, the Newsletter is an important vehicle for sharing experience and information in the far-flung community that is SWET and for setting down a printed record of their specialized professional lore.

In January 1999, the Steering Committee decided to institute regular meetings at a permanent Tokyo site, to be held the fourth Thursday of each month and to feature speakers from both within and outside SWET. The monthly meetings began in March that year, have continued almost without pause, and have succeeded in drawing new members and new topics into the networking circle.

Today the dues of 240-some members in Japan (as well as a small number overseas) support publication of the annual directory of members and of four issues of the *SWET Newsletter* annually, maintenance of the SWET-L mailing list, and the holding of monthly meetings in Tokyo and occasional events in Kansai. Treasured by its members for professional links, close personal friendships, and far-reaching resources, SWET now is poised on the threshold of its third decade.

(By Lynne E. Riggs, Nina Raj, and Susie Schmidt; originally published in the *SWET Newsletter*, No. 91, December 2000; reprinted by permission of the authors.)

The Spirit of SWET

From the beginning, the Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators has eschewed exclusivism and cultivated a good-humored friendliness and openness, striving to provide a framework for communication among people in many and varied fields of work associated with the English written word in Japan. The founders could not resist the acronym SWET because of its tongue-in-cheek quality—it seems to communicate just the right sense that we are a group of hard-working people who have not lost their sense of humor. It also hints—in only thin disguise—at the “blood, sweat, and tears” that it took to build and establish careers in these professions over the years.

Among the founding members and the core members who make up the steering committee, however, the underlying and most important purpose of SWET has been

so self-evident and tacitly shared as not to have required discussion: to cultivate and support professionals and professionalism in writing, editing, translating, and related fields in Japan. Of late, however, we sense that perhaps “professionalism” is a subject that ought to be discussed among us: What is professionalism? What is a professional? What kind of mentality—approach to work—does a professional have? How does he/she acquire it and cultivate it?

We know that people who make their careers in writing, editing, translating, copyediting, book designing, rewriting, and so forth, are not the kinds of professionals who get their credentials through academic or vocational training alone. Most of those who are successful started a long way back and way, way down the totem pole. They apprenticed as typists, secretaries, proofreaders, spending long years as assistants to senior professionals, learning by watching, helping. Some began translating or editing alone, totally in the dark, equipped only with the desire to learn and the tenacity to tolerate uninteresting work, their own ignorance, and the demands of the job. They swallowed the embarrassment of being told a job was shoddy; they stayed up nights searching through dictionaries and encyclopedias for words they did not know; they typed frantically—fingers endowed with miraculous speed—to meet a fast-approaching deadline; they shed bitter tears when a client failed to appreciate the toil that went into a job; but they were fascinated, wholly absorbed by the challenges of their work for years, usually to the exclusion of all other things.

Such people, whose professionalism wells from the same mentality and dedication as does the craftsmanship of an artisan or a performing artist, are found the world over. But let us look at the peculiar cluster of professional writers, editors, translators, rewriters, copywriters who work with the English written word in Japan, many of whom are members of SWET.

Whether of Japanese or other nationalities, these people live and work in a cross-cultural realm, which adds to the skills they must acquire. Translators, in particular, must be able to speak both languages with facility and learn the etiquette and manners that will pave the way for smooth relations on both sides. No one working in this environment can afford to be zealously “American” or “French” or “Japanese.” They must know and care about the society they are working in—how to exploit its best aspects and not be confounded by those that seem irrational.

Japan is a nation of professionals, of people who approach their work as a craft, an endeavor that begins with elementals and is constant apprenticeship and an all-absorbing challenge. No one working with or for Japanese in particular can afford to ignore this—to treat a job as a mechanical operation that exacts no emotional toll and no sincere commitment. Here, at least as much as if not more than anywhere else, the professional is prized and cultivated; dedication and sincerity are rewarded. An editor or translator who approaches each task, no matter

how minor or dry or inept the material may be, with the intent and skill to produce a good product, and who knows what a good product is, is highly respected and in great demand. Experienced professionals who have proved themselves, in fact, are constantly swamped with work, prompting them to plead: Isn't there anyone else you can ask?

That plea, in fact, was one of the reasons SWET came into being; there seemed to be too few reliable, experienced people to fill the demand. More needed to be encouraged to acquire better skills, to invest more years and more "sweat" in the important task of raising the quality of English writing, translating, editing, and related work in this country. Years after SWET's founding, however, the situation is little changed. The assumption that if you have studied Japanese for a while you can be a translator is still widespread, and the belief, on the part of both Japanese clients and newcomers from other countries, that they are qualified to edit or "proofread" or copywrite simply because they are native speakers of English is still rampant. It takes years—at least eight or ten—of unremitting effort to build a profession in one of these fields in Japan, so we cannot afford to be impatient. But perhaps it is time to discuss among ourselves the values we would seek and the ways we can promote professionalism, both among ourselves and as a standard to be sought among our clients.

Editing, translating, freelance writing, and rewriting are often jobs done in relative obscurity, sometimes exploited, rarely given due recognition, often underpaid; but if we are to expect society to accord us greater status and remuneration—to treat us as professionals whose qualifications are significant and valuable—we ourselves must have pride in our work and be committed to the highest standards. The spirit of professionalism lies at the very heart of SWET as an organization and is, and should be, the force that propels and inspires it.

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