

Literature In Japan: Groups And Conferences

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In this brief article I will provide information to LiLT Journal readers about literary groups and conferences in Japan. The information below will unfortunately not comprise a complete list due to space limitations. However if there is a group or conference you'd like to me to write about next time, please contact me at janenakagawa@yahoo.com and I will make an effort to include the information in a future LiLT Journal or newsletter.

Website URLs and/or contact person email addresses for the groups mentioned appear throughout the article, as well as in an alphabetical list for easy reference at the end.

Academic groups and conferences in Japan

There are many literary groups in Japan, some of which operate a little bit like secret societies where the groups are not openly advertised and new members are referred to the group by existing members only (those won't be mentioned here). However, there are also some large organizations open to anybody in Japan. Most of the Japanese organizations provide journals, newsletters and conferences entirely or primarily in the Japanese language but some are bilingual or host some English language presentations at their conferences or publish at least a limited number of English language papers.

ELSJ – The English Literary Society of Japan (日本英文学会):

ELSJ hosts an annual conference as well as regional chapter conferences and annual publications which include some presentations and articles in

English as well as Japanese. I've attended Chubu area ELSJ conferences and found the presentations (in Japanese) were a good way to learn what Japanese educators think about English literature. I also presented a paper about the poetry of Sylvia Plath for this organization (the paper and various offshoots of it are still in progress!). <www.elsj.org/>

ALSJ - The American Literature Society of Japan (日本アメリカ文学会):

Like ELSJ, this society hosts an annual conference as well as regional meetings. While I am currently only a paper member of the group, the conference presentations announced in schedules appear quite interesting. As with ELSJ however, most presentations are in Japanese. Unlike ELSJ however, this group has an exclusive focus on American literature. <alsj.org/>

ASLE Japan - The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (文学—環境学会):

This is the Japan branch of a group founded to promote discussion of literature and the environment. ASLE-Japan holds an annual conference, publishes an annual journal, and will host the 2014 East Asian Symposium on Literature and Environment: <www.asle-japan.org/english/>

JCLA – the Japan Comparative Literature Association (日本比較文学会):

This group hosts Japanese language conferences and promotes research in comparative literature. As a panelist at a JCLA conference held in Nagoya, I focused on poetry and feminism; some information about that presentation appears in the inaugural LiLT Journal. <www.nihon-hikaku.org/index-e.html>

**IASIL Japan - the Japan branch of the
International Association for the Study of Irish
Literatures:**

I've just given a paper on feminism in contemporary avant-garde poetry by women for the October IASIL Japan conference, which had the overall theme "Connections: Ireland in the World." Unlike most Japanese academic groups, IASIL Japan's conference is English language presentations only. This year's conference featured Irish poet Gerard Fanning as well as many papers and symposia by various literary scholars. <iasil.jp/>.

The Liberlit conference:

This is an annual conference devoted to presentations on teaching literature in Japan. While Liberlit may be familiar to some LiLT members, I only learned about it last year and attended and presented at it (on poetry with global issues content for language learners) for the first time in February 2013. The next conference will be in Tokyo in February 2014. <www.liberlit.com>

**Groups and conferences for writers in
Japan**

There are numerous writers organizations in Japan. If you don't write in Japanese the Japanese groups will perhaps be of limited use, but one example is the Japan Poets Association (日本現代詩人) <www.japan-poets-association.com/>

However, expat writers have started many groups throughout Japan, some of which still continue today and which focus entirely or mostly/significantly on English language writing and/or Japanese writing in translation.

**The East Japan Poetry Association (東日本国際
詩学会)**

This is a new group. An event being planned now is poetry readings followed by discussion at Toyo University's Hakusan campus in central Tokyo on the afternoon of Saturday March 15, 2014. To learn more about this group you can contact me: <janenakagawa@yahoo.com>.

The Japan Writers Conference:

With the help of Diane Nagatomo, Colleen Sheils and Noemi Hiraishi, I founded this group and helped organize the inaugural conference in 2007 in Tokyo at Ochanomizu University which included presentations on cross-genre writing, travel writing, writing and publishing poetry and fiction, and using poetry in the ELT classroom. Now in its seventh year, this year's conference was held in Okinawa. This conference is now under different leadership and includes writing workshops, lectures on getting published, as well as presentations by LiLT members and others.

**JIPS - The Japan International Poetry Society
(JIPS / 日本国際詩歌研究会):**

JIPS, a group I'm honored to have help co-found, was launched in 2009 and has held many poetry readings and discussions in the past several years featuring well known poets from abroad such as Jerome Rothenberg and Bill Berkson, bilingual and Japanese language only events, and readings by many local and visiting poets. Its main event for 2013 was a bilingual reading and discussion on September 28th in conjunction with '100,000 Poets for Change', a worldwide event launched by American poet Michael Rothenberg. The event featured five Japanese and five non-Japanese poets (including myself) reading their work in Kyoto followed by a bilingual discussion with the audience. For JIPS meetings, which thus far have always been held in Kansai, readers have been asked to provide the audience with their work in paper handout form whether in English or Japanese or both; this helps to make it easier for the audience to follow the readings no matter their native language background or degree of familiarity with poetry. Contact: janenakagawa@yahoo.com for more information. (For those in the Tokyo area, see the East Japan Poetry Association, above.)

Four Stories:

A popular prose reading series founded by Kansai and U.S. resident Tracy Slater. Tracy divides her time between the U.S. and Japan, and her Four Stories events are held in Boston as well as Osaka and Tokyo. <www.fourstories.org/>

SWET - The Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators:

This society has Kansai and Kanto chapters, formerly published newsletters and now communicates mostly via online publications, and holds meetings in Tokyo and Kansai. I highly recommend this excellent group. <www.swet.jp/>

SCBWI Japan - The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators:

This society has a Japan chapter which hosts meetings in Tokyo. <www.scbwi.jp>

For LiLT members who write fiction and poetry in addition to teaching it, and who would like feedback on their work in progress, there are numerous feedback groups such as the **Toyohashi Writers Group**, **Nagoya Writes**, **Tokyo Writers Workshop**, and **Tokyo Writers Salon**, to name a few. Please see the list of contacts/URLs at the end of this short article if you'd like to get in touch with any of these groups.

I have been running an online support group for foreign female writers in Japan for approximately eight years; if you are a **foreign female writer in Japan** and would like information about the group, please contact me via janenakagawa@yahoo.com.

Other literature-friendly groups and conferences

The groups I will mention below are not literary groups or conferences per se, but are very literature-friendly.

PGL - Peace as a Global Language:

This is a conference I co-founded many years ago which continues under different rotating leadership. PGL began as a consortium between various special interest groups of JALT (before there was ever a PAN-SIG conference), non-JALT teacher organizations and other kinds of NGOs/NPOs, and had its first conference soon after 9-11. Although not a literary or writers conference, PGL has always featured presentations which highlight literature and other art so long as it displays a connection to peace and global issues. <pgljapan.org/>

WELL - Women Educators and Language Learners:

This is a bilingual group with a bilingual annual retreat open only to women. As with PGL, the group is very literature-friendly. In addition to often featuring presentations related to literature, WELL hosts an annual talent show that includes literary readings by women as part of its annual retreat. <welljapan.org/>

AFWJ - Association of Foreign Wives of Japanese:

The female-only AFWJ is also not a literary group, but women married to Japanese men who are eligible to join the group will find that its quarterly journals and annual conventions frequently feature literature (I write myself a column for its journal called "Inside Poetry"). <www.afwj.org/>

Upcoming events

LiLT's 2014 conference on literature in language teaching:

LiLT will be holding a conference on the teaching of literature in September, 2014 at Aichi University's Toyohashi campus. For more information, contact program chair John Roberts: roberts5413@msn.com or visit the LiLT website at <liltsig.org>.

Website URLs and/or email addresses for quick reference

AFWJ – Association of Foreign Wives of Japanese: <www.afwj.org/>

ALSJ – American Literature Society of Japan (日本アメリカ文学会): <als-j.org/>

ASLE – The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (文学・環境学会): <www.asle-japan.org/>

East Japan Poetry Association (東日本国際詩学会): Contact <janenakagawa@yahoo.com>

ELSJ -- The English Literary Society of Japan (日本英文学会): <www.elsj.org/> LiLT's homepage: <liltsig.org>

Four Stories (Japan and U.S.A.): <www.fourstories.org/> Nagoya Writes: <nagoyawrites.wordpress.com/>

IASIL (International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures) Japan: <iasil.jp/> PGL -- Peace as a Global Language: <pgljapan.org/>

JCLA – Japan Comparative Literature Association (日本比較文学会): <www.nihon-hikaku.org/index-e.html> SCBWI – Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators: <www.scbwi.org>

JFWW – Japan Foreign Women Writers: Contact janenakagawa@yahoo.com SWET -- The Society of Writers, Editors and Translators: <www.swet.jp/>

JIPS -- Japan International Poetry Society: Contact <janenakagawa@yahoo.com> Tokyo Writers Salon: <www.meetup.com/writers-648/>

JWC -- Japan Writers Conference: <www.japanwritersconference.org/> Tokyo Writers Workshop: <www.meetup.com/Tokyo-Writers-Workshop/>

Liberlit: <www.liberlit.com/> Toyohashi Writers Group: Contact John Roberts <roberts5413@msn.com>

Women Educators and Language Learners: <welljapan.org/>