

Why We Have Translation Style Guides for Asian Language Content No Client Asked For

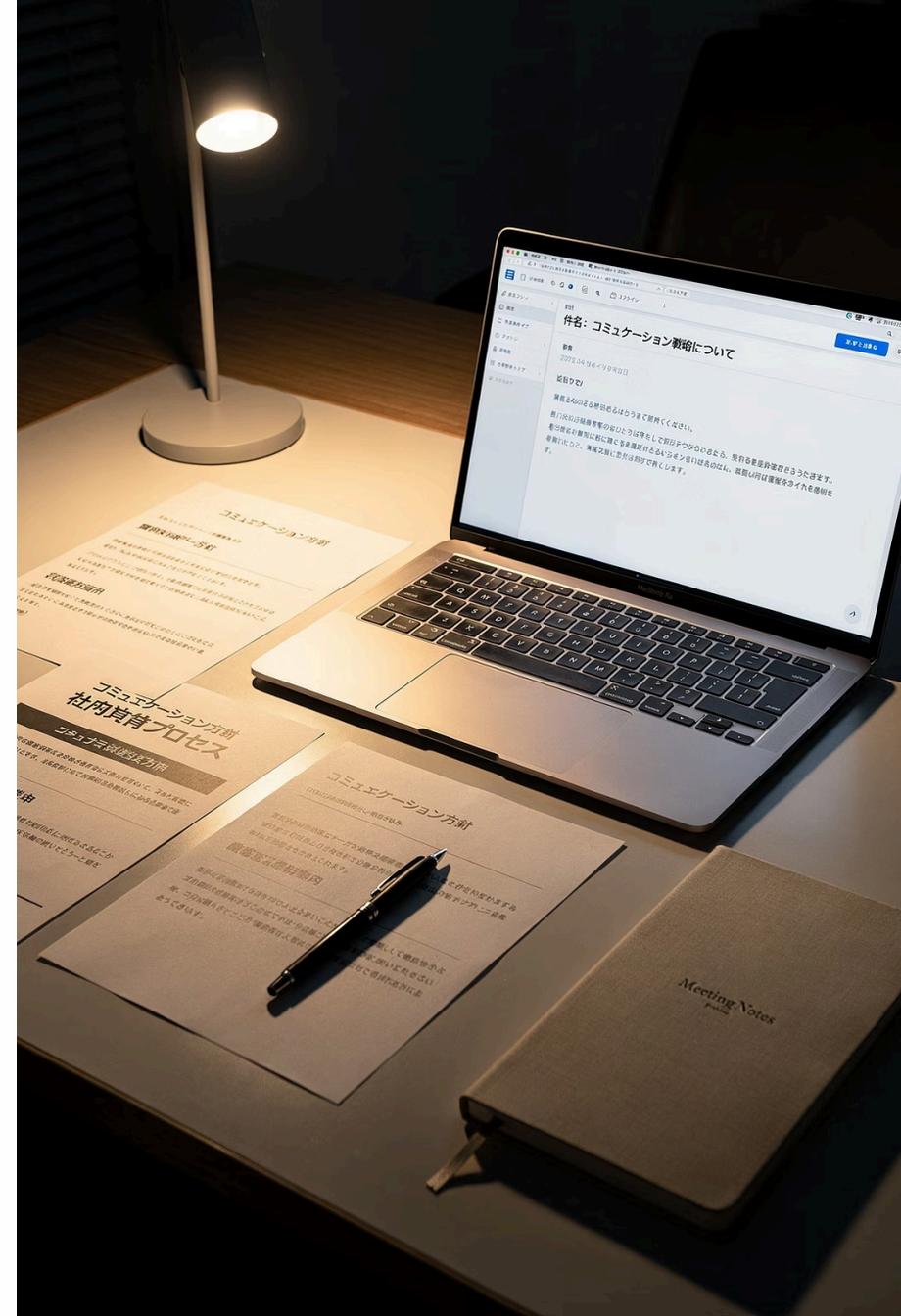
AUTHOR: GERGANA TOLEVA

What's inside the Orange Book and why it exists.

The File Arrived at Eleven at Night

Japanese. Corporate communications. The client's global style guide was thorough - tone, voice, brand positioning, all clearly defined for English. It said nothing about formality register in Japanese. *Desu/masu* form? Plain form? Something hybrid for a digital interface?

The guide wasn't silent because the client was careless. It was written by people who had never needed to make that decision because in English, they hadn't. That moment, when the brief goes quiet at exactly the point where the work needs an answer, is a regular occurrence in Asian language production. It is the daily starting condition.



The Question Is Never Whether Gaps Exist

Silence is not an edge case. It's the starting condition. Every brief has gaps.

Most clients know this. What they don't always see is how **structural** those gaps become when the content is in an Asian language. A Western-origin style guide is built from a Western-language baseline. It defines voice and tone in terms that translate cleanly across European languages.

It does not typically address formality register in Japanese, script selection in Chinese, or how politeness functions differently in Korean B2B versus consumer content. Rather than a client oversight, these gaps exist simply because those decisions fall outside the original guide's frame of reference.

The Gaps Are Predictable and Structural

Chinese

A project labelled "China market" with a tight deadline. Simplified or Traditional? The brief doesn't say. The distinction determines character set, terminology, audience alignment, and tone and needs an answer now.

Thai

Punctuation conventions with no English equivalent. Spacing, sentence segmentation, line flow - structural differences, not stylistic preferences. Almost never documented in a brief written outside the market.

Vietnamese

No guidance on formality of address across a mixed B2B audience. The decision affects tone and credibility. It isn't covered because the person who wrote the brief works in English and the distinction isn't visible from there.

These are the predictable gaps in any brief written from one linguistic frame of reference and executed in another.

What Runs When Nothing Is Specified?

The Problem

In years of watching Asian language content move through production, we have never seen a brief that covered everything. The question is not whether gaps exist. They always do.

Our Answer: The Orange Book

The Orange Book is our internal operational documentation made public for the first time. It is not a style guide. It is not a client deliverable. It defines what happens when the brief runs out. It is the operational layer underneath a brief where most of the actual production decisions are made.

Four Decisions That Already Had Answers Before Your File Arrived

The Orange Book defines, in specific and operational terms, what happens across four categories of decision that briefs routinely leave open.



1. Default Register Positions



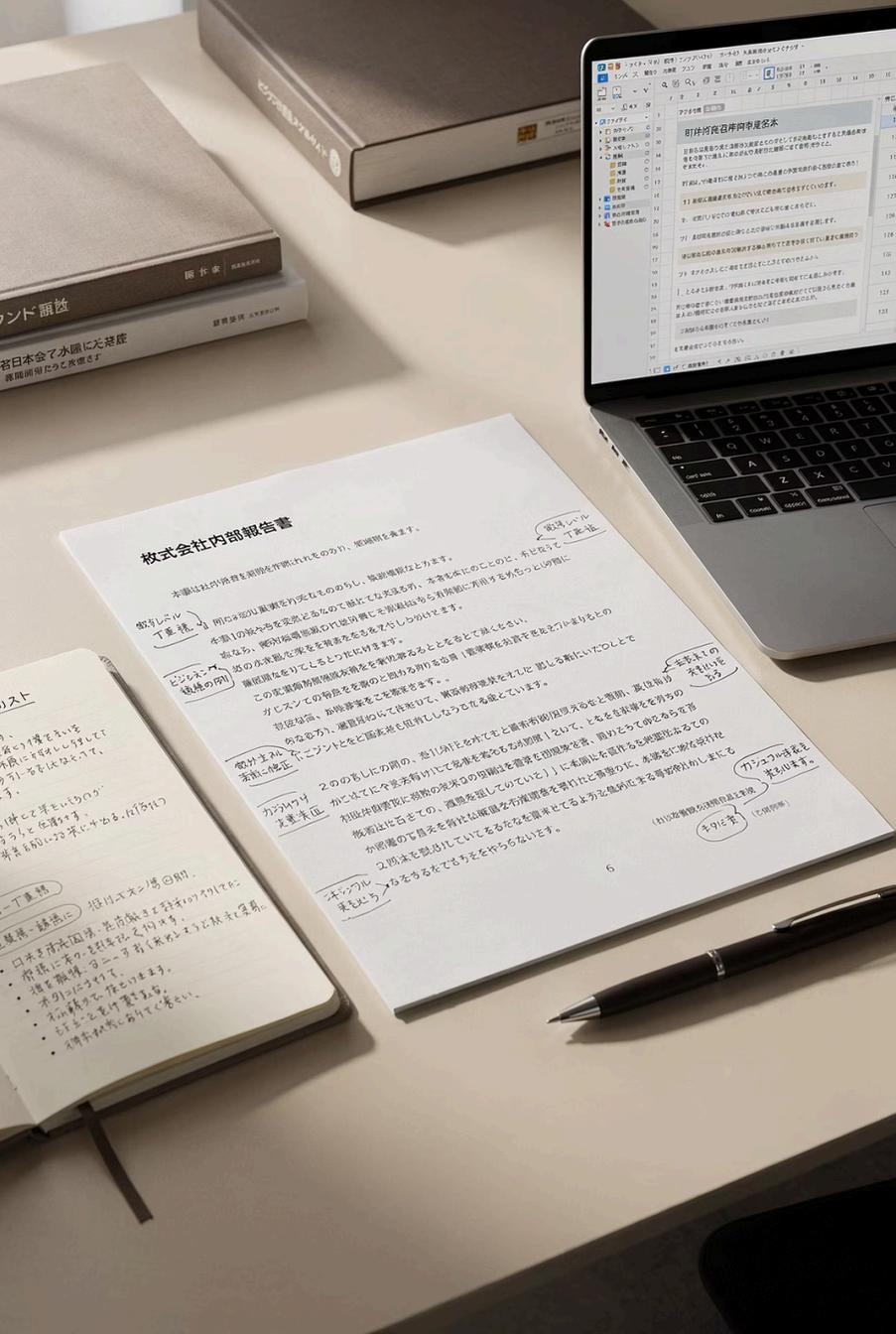
2. Script & Variant Protocols



3. Punctuation & Spacing Conventions



4. Terminology Without a Glossary



DECISION 1

Default Register Positions

For each language and content type, there is a defined default register because it is **consistently defensible** in the absence of explicit instruction.

→ Japanese

Specifies when *desu/masu* is the baseline for corporate communication, when a hybrid tone suits digital UX, and when deviation requires escalation.

→ Korean

Documents polite form expectations across B2B versus consumer-facing content - two registers that are genuinely different and immediately audible.

→ Thai & Vietnamese

Thai formality doesn't map onto English concepts. Vietnamese pronoun selection carries social meaning with no English equivalent. A default is not optional.

DECISION 2

Script & Variant Protocols

Chinese is the clearest example. When the brief says "Chinese" and nothing more, there is a decision to make. Making it arbitrarily or differently each time is not a neutral outcome.

The guidelines define which contextual signals determine script selection when explicit instruction is absent: **audience, platform, domain, regional indicators**. They define when to proceed and when to escalate.

The goal is to protect client intent ensuring that in the absence of stated intent, the output still reflects a consistent, defensible standard, not the judgment of whichever project manager happened to be closest to the file.

Simplified or Traditional?

This single question determines character set, terminology, audience alignment, and tone. It needs an answer immediately, not after a 24-hour clarification cycle the client doesn't have.

DECISION 3

Punctuation & Spacing Conventions

English-based style guides assume punctuation rules that do not transfer into Asian languages. These are structural differences almost never specified in a brief written outside the market.

Japanese

Full-width versus half-width punctuation.
Readability in dense technical content is directly affected by punctuation consistency.

Chinese

Spacing around numbers. Handled inconsistently, this creates visible quality issues for any native reader.

Thai

Line-break behavior that, handled incorrectly, can **change meaning**. Invisible to anyone who reviewed the work in English first.

We specified these rules internally because they are almost never specified externally.



DECISION 4

Terminology Behavior Without a Glossary

Glossaries are ideal. They are also frequently incomplete, outdated, or unavailable when the file arrives. The guidelines define what happens in their absence.

1

Default to industry terminology

When to use commonly accepted terms rather than waiting for client confirmation.

2

Define the query threshold

Querying everything is a delay transferred to the client. The guidelines codify exactly when to escalate versus when the linguist decides.

3

Prioritize internal consistency

When consistency within the document takes precedence over external alignment. The threshold is documented, not improvised each time.

Accumulated Decision-Making

The Orange Book is the record of what actually happened when the brief was silent across thousands of files, across five Asian languages.

Every rule exists because, at some point, the absence of that rule created a problem. A decision was made under pressure. It was reviewed. Sometimes it was wrong, and it was corrected. Over time, patterns became clear: where do briefs tend to go quiet? Which decisions recur? Which choices, when left undefined, create the most downstream impact?

Those patterns were documented, then tested against the next round of projects. What held consistently became a standard. What didn't was adjusted or removed. **A client's style guide is built from their brand. The Orange Book is built from operational depth across markets no brand document controls.**



What This Means for the LSP Sending Us Work

When a project enters our production environment, it does not enter a blank space. Register defaults are set. Script handling is defined. Punctuation behavior is documented. Terminology thresholds are in place and applied consistently regardless of which linguist opens the document or what time zone they're working in.

Your brief still owns the standard.

If you specify the register, we follow it. If you provide a glossary, it supersedes the defaults. Your style guide always takes precedence.

We fill silence with structure.

The space between your specifications is not empty on our side. It has consistency. It has an answer.

One Question Worth Asking Your Production Partner

What happens when my brief goes quiet?

The answer or the absence of one tells you more about their operation than any capability statement.

The Orange Book editions for each language and domain are published in our quality standards series. What you've read here is the explanation of why they exist. The editions themselves are the system.