

Graduate School of International
Culture and Communication Studies
Examination Report on the Doctoral Dissertation

Applicant	
Name	GUIMARAES DE OLIVEIRA, Diego
	(Last Name / (Middle Name) / First Name)

Dissertation Title · Subtitle : (English)	Preparing for the End of Life:
	A Genre Analysis of Ending Notes in Japan
Dissertation Title · Subtitle : (Japanese)	人生の終焉の準備
	—日本におけるエンディングノートのジャンル分析—

*Even if the dissertation is written in English, a Japanese language translation of the title and subtitle must also be submitted.

YYYY/MM/DD

To Dean of Graduate School of International
Culture and Communication Studies,

Examination Committee

Chief Examiner SADOSHIMA, Saori 印 Signature

(Affiliation・Title: FIRE/Professor)

Sub-Examiner LAW, Graham 印 Signature

(Affiliation・Title: FIRE/Professor)

Sub-Examiner IINO, Masakazu 印 Signature

(Affiliation・Title: FIRE/Professor)

Sub-Examiner 印 Signature

(Affiliation・Title:)

The Examination Committee members report the results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense below.

1. Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (in International Culture and Communication Studies)

2. Dissertation Doctorate (*Ronbun Hakase*)

*Please delete either one.

3. Examination period

Dissertation examination: From 2022/11/11 To 2022/12/17
YYYY/MM/DD YYYY/MM/DD

Oral defense: 2022/12/17
YYYY/MM/DD

4. The results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense

*Please write down Pass or Fail in both categories.

Dissertation examination: **Pass**

Oral defense: **Pass**

5. Summary of the Dissertation

As per attached sheet

6. Table of Contents

As per attached sheet

7. The results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense

(About 3,000 characters in Japanese or 1,000 words in English)

(1) Evaluation and summary of the dissertation examination

(Including Summary of the Dissertation)

The examination committee was united in evaluating the dissertation as excellent. The topic and its focus both reflect social issues in contemporary Japan, and represent a significant contribution in the field of writing studies.

The examinee's doctoral dissertation is about Ending Notes, that is, notebooks that are sold in bookstores or online, in which personal information about end-of-life matters can be filled in. They contain blank spaces for the writers' life history, finances, contact information, funeral and grave wishes, medical wishes, etc. Although there are many aging countries in the world, ending notes emerged in Japan, and are apparently published only in Japan. The examinee paid attention to this phenomenon and conducted a study on ending notes as a specific genre. The research questions were: 1) What are the basic characteristics of an ending note? 2) What actions does an ending note do and how does it perform them? and 3) What are the social and cultural aspects that influence the production and use of ending notes in Japan?

The background theory focused on was genre theories which arose in the 1970s and developed by offering various approaches to define and categorize the function of texts. It

developed in three separate approaches, Sydney School, English for Specific Purposes, and Rhetorical Genre Studies, all sharing the same assumption that writing is a social act and texts are socially constructed. Focusing particularly on one of these approaches, English as a Specific Purpose, the examinee analyzed the ending notes along with their usage in the real world to see their basic characteristics, functions, and social and cultural aspects that influence the production/use.

The literature review was thorough, detailed and well organized. He reviewed the literature in three categories: Aging, Dying and Death in Japan; *Shūkatsu* (終活) and Ending Notes; and Genre Theories.

The method used was qualitative including text analysis, observation, and interviews. The candidate conducted a careful text analysis on fifteen ending notes, observed twenty-two *shūkatsu* seminars and events, and interviewed twelve people including the notebook makers, *shūkatsu* advisors, seminar lecturers, as well as the writers. Texts were analyzed by using J. Swales' Move-step framework, while the fieldnotes from seminars and events were analyzed according to four phases: close reading, indexing, coding for themes, and focused coding. All interview data was analyzed by utilizing four steps of coding including pre-coding, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Based on these analyses, the candidate arrived at the following results for each research question. Regarding the basic characteristics of an ending note (RQ 1), these were the main findings: there were twenty-seven sections in ending notes in total; there was a prototypical order to these sections; the titles represented different understandings and interpretations of the genre; there were two writers (makers and writers) and two readers (the writers and its readers); and finally, a pattern of hierarchical relationships between the ending note and the reader was found.

As for the actions of ending notes (RQ 2), the following were the findings. There were three functions in ending notes: persuading the writers using business strategies and language use; providing writing prompts about the end-of-life topics and possible actions to be taken; and educating writers on *shūkatsu*.

Regarding the social and cultural aspects that influence the production and use of ending notes in Japan (RQ3), two aspects were revealed: Avoiding being a burden to others (迷惑をかけない), and living true to one's self (最後まで自分らしく生きる).

All the findings were based on detailed analyses, which lead to an original contribution to the field. Another aspect that the sub-examiners highly evaluated was the fact that all data collection was done competently in the candidate's third language, Japanese.

(2) Summary of the oral defense (including Comments and Questions)

The examinee gave a 45-minute presentation about his research project followed by comments and questions from the two sub-examiners, then comments and questions from the student observers. Below are the comments and questions:

Sub-examiner 1 suggested that the candidate supply the interview data in the original language (Japanese) in an appendix, since the content of the participants' conversation is highly personal and involves emotional aspects. The examinee gratefully acceded to this suggestion. Sub-examiner 1 also asked if it was possible to add readers' (family members') reactions to the ending notes. The examinee answered that this was possible but only when one of the writer participants passes away. It was also suggested to include reference to the Japanese cultural practice of "*ubasute yama* (姥捨て山)" which reflects the issue of agency of *shūkatsu*. That is, it concerns who decides when to die, which used to represent social pressure on elderly people in pre-modern times in Japan. The examinee agreed to add this content.

Sub-examiner 2 suggested that the implication should be spread in and beyond Japan and academia. To do so, he urged the candidate not only to publish this dissertation as a book in English, but also to broadcast the main findings in Japanese. The examinee immediately acceded. Sub-examiner 2 also pointed out that the privacy of the participants should be preserved and that the current initials should be changed to 'ABC' or '123'. The examinee immediately acceded to this suggestion as well. Sub-examiner 2 also pointed out that the business aspect should be mentioned in the analysis of the function of the genre since genre theory in the broader sense can also concern marketing purpose. The examinee agreed to include brief descriptions about the *shūkatsu* business behind the ending note seminars and events.

In the final part of the defense, some questions were raised by the student observers. One concerned the process of coming up with the chosen topic. The examinee answered that his initial target was a different genre in teaching writing, *seikatsu tsuzurikata* (生活綴り方), but that he changed to the current genre, ending notes, since it is still evolving and there is a gap in the literature. He also joked that he was naturally morbid! A further question was

about his maintaining mental health through working on a thesis that relates to death and the end of life. The examinee answered that working full time all through the dissertation process might have provided the opportunity to refresh himself. He also mentioned that by attending an international conference in Europe about ‘aging,” he found an academic grounding and the importance of maintaining mental health through research on such topics. Another technical question was about the unit of coding, where the examinee responded that his coding units were ‘quite big chunks’.

The three committee members discussed the overall quality of the thesis and the oral defense and decided unanimously to award him a passing mark.