Preparing for the End of Life:
A Genre Analysis of Ending Notes in Japan
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Abstract

The objective of this doctoral thesis was to investigate the genre of ending notes in Japan. Ending notes are small notebook-like writing pads that are published, sold, and sometimes given free of charge by a variety of businesses, NPOs, and government branches in the country. Inside these notebooks, there are sections for readers to write and fill in their choices and arrangements concerning a variety of topics related to aging and death in Japan. Some of the topics included in the ending notes are end-of-life care, nursing in old age, funeral and grave arrangements, inheritance, self-history, and messages to loved ones. Ending notes also have short texts giving general explanations about topics such as life-prolonging treatment, new types of burial, finance, inheritance, and others. The notebooks have different titles, sizes, lengths, and colors according to each publisher.

Ending notes are also part of a larger phenomenon in Japan called *Shūkatsu*. *Shūkatsu* is a movement that promotes end-of-life planning and preparation starting from retirement all the way through aging, dying, and death. The movement includes NPOs, businesses, local governments, scholars, and professionals from the fields of health, aging, and death, among others. *Shūkatsu's* professionals and businesses promote ending notes as the introduction and guide for end-of-life preparation in Japan, particularly through *shūkatsu* seminars where they teach how to use the ending note.

This thesis investigated the genre of ending notes utilizing the textography approach. Textography is a qualitative method designed to research genres textually and in context (Paltridge, 2008; Swales, 1998). This means the researcher conducts a textual analysis of the genre in combination with small-size ethnographies of spaces, situations, and people related to the genre. Applying the textography approach, this thesis conducted genre analysis in 15 ending notes, 12 interviews with ending note makers, writers, and lecturers as well as fieldwork in *shūkatsu* seminars throughout the country.

The findings of this research revealed the main characteristics of an ending note, the actions the genre performs, and the social and cultural aspects that influence the creation and uses of such a genre. The ending note's main characteristics are its fill-in writing style format and its most common sections. The most common sections in ending notes are the introduction

section, the about myself section, the finance section, the contacts section, the medical and nursing section, and the funeral and grave section. These sections seem to be organized in an order that makes writers reflect on the course of their lives, starting with personal history in the about myself section, followed by the medical and nursing section, and ending with the funeral and grave section. Moreover, the linguistic choices utilized in the ending note suggest a relationship of expertise/advisor and novice/beginner between the maker of the ending note and the reader. In addition, this thesis also found that ending notes perform three main actions. First, they persuade readers into becoming writers by using several persuasion strategies, especially in the introduction section. Second, they prompt writers into expressing their requests and wishes regarding aging and death. At the same time, ending notes also prompt writers into reflecting on and considering a series of future scenarios regarding aging, dying, and death. Third, ending notes are educational. They teach writers about the topics of *shūkatsu*, advise on actions writers should take in preparation for the end of life, and warn of the dangers of not doing certain preparations for aging and death. The last finding of the thesis concerns the context of culture in ending notes, or the social and cultural influences that are a constitutive part of the genre. The context of culture was divided into two parts in this thesis, writers' purposes for their ending notes and the broader social and cultural context of Japanese society. This thesis suggests that for writers ending notes have two main purposes. One is to confront and resist the cultural and social order concerning aging and dying customs in the country, the other is to maintain and follow cultural and social expectations about the end of life in Japan. In terms of the broader cultural context of ending notes, this thesis explored the influences of the ideals of *meiwaku* and *jibunrashii* in the creation, use, and promotion of ending notes.

The implications and contribution of this study are threefold. For academia, this thesis's results and methodology contribute to the fields of aging studies, death studies, writing studies, and research on *shūkatsu* and ending notes. For *shūkatsu* stakeholders, the findings of this study can be used for practical applications of teaching and creating better ending notes that are more tailored to the expectations and concerns of older people in Japan. Lastly, the social implication of this thesis is its contribution to the conversation on the discord between social expectations and personal needs regarding aging and dying in the country.