Hows and Whys: Guidelines for the Japanese Literature Ph.D.

PhD students in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature must adhere to (1) the University of Washington's Graduate School regulations, (2) the Department of Asian Languages and Literature policies and procedures, and (3) all program specific regulations.

The information below is meant only as a reference. Final authority in all cases remains with the official regulations.

General Aims

The goal of graduate study is to train students to make original contributions to scholarship in a given field and to present them in a coherent form with the appropriate scholarly apparatus. For this purpose, the graduate student needs to build a solid awareness of the publications in the field of specialization, the major questions that are being (and could be) researched, as well as the methodology for answering such questions. In addition, the student should have a solid grasp of the broader academic context in which the field of specialization is situated (i.e. "the big picture").

How to Proceed

The following explains the rationale behind each of the general requirements for Ph.D. students in the department, and outlines the procedure students should follow to satisfy them. It also contains, in bold, the specific rules of the Japanese literature program over and above those of the department. Finally, notes in boxes are explanations, examples, and additional commentary.

1. Meeting with the Advisor

Each new student is assigned an interim advisor, that is, a graduate faculty member with whom the student can discuss the course of his/her study in the initial stages. Upon arrival, the student should meet as soon as possible with the assigned interim advisor to chart a plan of course work and the student should meet quarterly with the advisor to keep him/her apprised of his/her progress. It is the student's task to take the initiative for these meetings, and the advisor's to file a formal progress report once a year. Once the student has determined the area of specialization and the faculty member he/she would like to work with, he/she should discuss this with the interim advisor and appoint a permanent advisor. Students are required to appoint a faculty advisor by the end of their second quarter of graduate study.

2. Filing a Program of Study

The graduate student should start by carefully planning a program of study that will contribute to achieving the skills mentioned above. Each of the department's programs has its own required graduate courses. The student should carefully plan when to take which courses, keeping in mind that many courses are not offered every year, and that some courses will not be offered when faculty are on leave. Ideally, students should take at least one course with every faculty member in their program, so as to familiarize themselves with the full range of scholarship and expertise available to them.
The student should submit a feasible proposal of study to the advisor, which, after approval, will be filed by the department secretary no later than the third quarter of graduate study. The plan of study should be viewed as a guideline rather than a straitjacket; specifics of the plan are likely to change as the student proceeds, but the general course of study should be clear.

There is a minimum course requirement of 90 credits (45 of which must be taken before pre-candidacy), and the student must take classes and examinations relating to both the linguistic and literature aspects of the language of specialization. Classes in other disciplines might also be advisable (e.g., religion or anthropology), depending on the student's chosen field of specialization.

The student's file will contain a checklist of the required courses in his/her program and the student will be responsible for checking off each requirement as the courses are completed. When all courses are taken, the student will present the completed list to the Program Coordinator and ask him/her or his/her designated representative to sign off the box "course work completed" on the checklist. If there are any irregularities (such as course substitutions), an explanation will be placed in the file along with the signature.

Please note that a graduate student is required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA.

No student enters the department in the Ph.D. program. Please note that fulfillment of the credit requirements does not automatically ensure admission to the Ph.D. program. All students must be formally admitted to pre-candidacy by the faculty in their program.

3.a. Students with an MA from this Department

Students with an MA from this Department cannot automatically assume successful admission into the PhD program. (See "Petition to Proceed" below).

3.b. Students with an MA from another University or in another area

Students with an MA from another University or in another area than the one to be pursued will first need to fulfill the following requirements before petitioning to proceed.

1. The student must complete at least 45 credits of relevant graduate credits at the UW.

2. The student must prepare for and pass the additional language requirement. In consultation with the advisor, the student selects a language relevant to his/her program of study and files a plan for achieving the necessary level of competence in this language. In the language plan, the student should outline the reasons for choosing this second language and a time schedule detailing how the student intends to prepare to fulfill this requirement. The requirement may be satisfied by taking a reading exam in the Department or by taking classes up to a certain level of proficiency. The language plan is to be approved by the advisor and added to the student's file no later than the third quarter of graduate study.

3. Except when the student has undergone a comparable MA examination in a comparable program, the student needs to pass also the departmental MA General Examination, which is a written test, consisting of two two-hour parts to be taken in the same week. The point is to establish the student's general competence in the field, that is, the aforementioned "big picture". The advisor will suggest which steps should be taken by the student to prepare for the exam. In some cases, a student may be advised to take the Department's General Examination even when he/she has passed a comparable exam elsewhere, in order to strengthen the student's petition to proceed.

4. Petitioning to Proceed
All PhD students must file a Petition to Proceed. The petition will demonstrate to the program faculty the student's ability to pursue the PhD, i.e. to make a meaningful contribution of original research to the field. This document should highlight the student's accomplishments (MA thesis or papers, exam papers, transcript of graduate courses, other preparation for research, honors) as well as indicate future direction (study and language plan, proposed four fields and dissertation topic and scope). It should also include a time schedule. If the petition is successful, the student becomes a Pre-candidate.

5. From Pre-candidate to Candidate: Three Fields and the General Exam

In addition to the minimum of 45 credits or its equivalent required for the master’s program, the student must take at least 50 credits of course work at the graduate level, 20 of which must be at the 500 level. The following courses and dissertation credits are required:

- Modern Japanese: JAPAN 431, JAPAN 432, JAPAN 433 (may be bypassed with previous training, if approved)
- Classical Japanese and kambun: JAPAN 471, JAPAN 472, JAPAN 505 (may be bypassed with previous training, if approved)
- 10 credits in classical Japanese literature and culture (JAPAN 571, JAPAN 572, or JAPAN 573)
- 10 credits in modern Japanese literature and culture (JAPAN 531, JAPAN 532, JAAPN 533)
- ASIAN 800 Doctoral Dissertation (27 credits)

Seminars on modern literature should address Meiji (typically JAPAN 531), prewar (typically JAPAN 532), and postwar (typically JAPAN 533) periods. Classical literature seminars (JAPAN 571, 572, and 573) are not period specific; content will vary. JAPAN 590 is a special topics seminar and may focus on modern literature, classical literature, or a combination thereof. Graduate courses outside of the department may be taken with the prior approval of the student’s advisor. Students may repeat courses if content has changed.

For example: A classical literature specialist might take classical seminars in three different years (all JAPAN 571), three special topics seminars on classical literature (JAPAN 590), the modern literature seminar series (JAPAN 531-532-533), and 27 credits of ASIAN 800 to fulfill this requirement.

In addition, he/she will work towards fulfilling a second additional language requirement, as established in the language plan. The student should select his course work such that he/she acquires a solid foundation in the field and builds expertise in an area of specialization, as well as prepares for the field exams. The three fields represent areas of specialization but also span the broader range of the program area.

A “field” may consist of a period (e.g., Heian literature, Muromachi literature, Meiji literature), genre or sub-genre (poetry, drama, fiction; tanka, haiku, shintaishi), a specific author and his work (Komachi, Zeami, Sōseki), a style or a school (Shinkokinshû symbolism, the naturalists, the White Birch school), a broadly conceived topic (Shinto elements in Japanese literature, literary censorship, women in the modern novel), a language topic (historical phonology, historical grammar, comparative grammar), or any other appropriate topic of interest to the student. The four fields must be sufficiently diverse, and at least one of them must focus on some aspect of language.

The purpose is to assure that the student develops into a broadly versatile scholar. Each field is supervised by a faculty member; one of the fields can be taken outside the department. Fields must be approved by the student’s academic advisor.

When the supervisor for each field is satisfied that the student has attained sufficient mastery of the subject, the student will take an examination whose format is determined by the supervisor.

Early on, the nature and scope of the field exams should be discussed and arranged with the main advisor and the individual field advisors, who together constitute the student’s supervisory committee. This committee will also oversee the General Examination, which again is intended to demonstrate the student’s general knowledge of his/her program area.
Successful examinees will be expected to demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of Japanese literature from earliest times to the contemporary era, in addition to mastery of the subjects studied for the field examinations.

By the quarter prior to the exam date, the student should meet with the advisor to discuss exam preparation. In preparation for this meeting, the student should compile a list of classes taken and readings completed, so as to give the advisor a good idea of what the student already knows and what needs more work. On the basis of this information, an effective strategy for exam preparation can be devised. Once the student passes the general examination, he/she becomes a Candidate.

6. From PhC to PhD: Writing the Dissertation

Officially, the student begins work on the dissertation only after passing the General Examination. It is advisable, however, to start thinking about a topic of specialization and discussing it with the advisor before this time, and to start working on it as soon as feasible.

The PhD dissertation should make an original contribution to existing research in a given field and present it in a coherent form with the conventional scholarly apparatus. In this department, demonstrating the ability to work with primary sources in the language of specialization is a requirement of the dissertation.

In practical terms this means that the graduate student will go through a study process to familiarize him- or herself with the publications in the field of specialization, the major questions that are being (and could be) researched, and the methodological approaches to answering such questions. The end product of this process, the dissertation itself, demonstrates the mastery of these materials and approaches. The PhD dissertation differs from the MA thesis in that it is broader in scope. It is similar to a book in length and scope, while the MA thesis is comparable to a lengthy scholarly article.

Before beginning to write the dissertation, the Candidate should select an informal reading committee and provide the members with a prospectus of the dissertation (topic, state of the field, student's contribution, resources to be used) and a time schedule. The student is to send yearly progress reports to the members and should meet regularly with the advisor, submitting drafts for comments. It is advisable to consult early on the graduate school guidelines for formatting and to make sure the dissertation is in compliance with these rigid stipulations. Once the dissertation is nearing the stage of completion, the committee is formalized (usually the quarter before the final examination). The committee consists of three members, two of whom should be in this department; in addition, the graduate school appoints a GSR, who will oversee the procedure, and needs to be consulted about the scheduling of the examination. Usually this committee is the same as the supervisory committee. Each member should receive an abstract of the dissertation. The complete draft should be given to the committee six (or eight, if the committee members so require) weeks before the final examination. The Final Examination is an oral defense of the dissertation before the committee and the general public. The final version of the dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate School by the last day of the quarter of graduation.

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