In one paragraph, describe how the language training you receive during the period of your FLAS fellowship will help prepare you to achieve your academic and career goals.*

My immediate academic goal is to continue to research feminist periodicals written during the 1920s and 1930s in Japan and Korea. Because these periodicals are dealing with complex issues like female agency, political rights, Marxist ideology, nationalism, and gender roles, reading these articles requires an advanced vocabulary and firm understanding of grammar that I hope to gain throughout the summer/school year. Furthermore, I aspire to be active in the greater historiographical discussion of this issue in both Korea and Japan, so a firm understanding of academic spoken Korean, and command of academic writing would be useful in this regard.

Describe your training to date, your academic plans for this coming year, and the themes in your coursework and/or thesis or dissertation project. [500-1200 words] The evaluation committee understands that beginning or early graduate students may have rudimentary thesis or dissertation plans, while more advanced students will be able to lay out plans for major research projects in some detail. Likewise, the committee understands that essays from applicants in professional schools or other non-thesis degree programs will be quite different from essays written by students planning theses or dissertations. So, view this essay as a chance to inform the committee of your current thoughts on how you hope to advance knowledge in your field or use your training to prepare for valuable work in a profession.*

My research is centered around two major themes: transnational Korean-Japanese history and the history of the feminist movement. My goal for my dissertation is to write a transnational history of the Korean feminist movement under Japanese colonial rule that includes Korean-Japanese feminist intellectual exchange. The vast majority of historiography, coming out of Korea and the West, typically describes the feminist movement within a nationalist framework; the Korean feminist movement is thus characterized as a movement for national independence, with female participants. At prima facie such a conclusion seems warranted, as much of the widely available public discourse written by feminist authors, especially in newspapers like the Tong’a ilbo (East Asia Daily), shows a clear devotion to Korean independence, placing these authors squarely within the “patriotic” category of the nationalist history framework.

This vein of nationalist feminism is a way to write Korean women into history, to write this history within the Confucian framework of celebrating good while criticizing evil, and to memorialize an image of cooperation – crucial for the nascent nationalism of Korea. It is an image of how, in the words of feminist historian Chŏng Yo-Sŏp, “Korean women... contrast to...
western women. The latter stand against men but the former, due to the special situation in Korea, cooperate with men in patriotic movement.” However, this type of historiography limits the feminist movement to a narrow range of agency – only agency on behalf of the male dominated nation-state. While it grants the illusion of agency, this narrow range of action perpetuates patriarchy instead of complicating it. Finally, the nationalist framework also ignores the wide range of scholarship and ideas, written by early Korean feminists, that extended far beyond the nation.

Thus my research is aimed at three goals: the first is to plot how the feminist movement was included with the Korean independence movement. To trace this movement, I am looking at Ewha Womans [sic] University’s anthology of feminist periodicals from 1905-1930, which includes Nyŏja jinam (Women’s Education), Chasŏn buinhoe jahji (Philanthropic Women’s Society Magazine), and Shinyŏsŏng (New Women). Additionally, I was able to do archival research at Ewha Womans University’s library and the Korean Magazine Museum (Hanguk chabji bangmulkwan), and am using primary source materials that I collected, including the periodical Kŭnu (Friends of the Rose of Sharon).

My second research goal is to examine intellectual exchange between Korean and Japanese feminists. Many of the early Korean feminist studied overseas, and one of the most popular destinations was Tokyo. Nationalist Korean historiography leaves no space to chronicle this exchange, because this would be “collaboration,” one of the more controversial acts during Korea’s colonial period. However, by separating the Korean feminist movement from nationalism, I hope to elaborate on the shared traditions of these two East Asian feminist movements. In pursuit of this goal, I am looking at Japanese feminist periodicals like Hiratsuka Raichō’s Seito (Bluestockings).

Finally, I have a personal and abashedly selfish aspect to this project; my mother, my maternal aunt, my aunt-in-law, and my maternal grandmother are all graduates of Ewha Woman’s University, the birthplace of the Korean feminist movement. Additionally, my maternal great-grandmother herself was part of the first wave of Korean feminists and was among the first students to enroll at Seoul National University. I believe that this research will bring several contributions to the fields of feminism, postcolonial Korea history, Japanese history, and the feminist movements of Korea and Japan.
Naturally, the greatest challenge towards this goal is language. This is a trilingual enterprise, as the analytical framework is drawn from English sources, while the primary sources are written in Korean and Japanese. Additionally, because of the period, the Korean uses some obsolete spellings and letters (like a’rae a), mixed Sino-Korean script (kukhan honyong) and often includes hanmun (Chinese based Korean). Much of the Japanese is written in kyūkanazukai (the premodern writing system) and kyūjitai (traditional Chinese characters), with occasional classical Japanese (bungo). While the language of this period poses a formidable challenge, I believe that through relevant training and hard work, I will be able to access these texts.

As for my language training to date, my Japanese language classes have been sufficient to read the vast majority primary source materials in Japanese, whether written in a classical style (bungo, sorobun) or modern Japanese. Although much of my ability was gained through classes, I also gained much experience through research. As an undergraduate student I worked extensively with microfilm of wartime Kokumin shinbun (Citizen’s News), obtained from the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago and Kobe Christian University’s Digital Newspaper Archive.

For Korean, my language ability is the result of growing up in a Korean household. However, my vocabulary was limited to words concerning household tasks, therefore I have been studying on my own to learn more relevant vocabulary, and hands-on research has again played an important role. Last summer, I spent three weeks in Seoul doing archival research at Ewha Womans University’s main library and the Korean Magazine Museum, where I was able to find one of the few extant copies of Kūme, the periodical for colonial Korea’s largest feminist organization. I have also been delving into microfilm of the Tong’a ilbo (East Asia Daily) from the late 1920s and early 1930s, on loan from the University of Chicago.

Thus my plan for this summer is to enroll in an intensive Korean program at Yonsei University. During the following academic year, I also plan on enrolling in Fourth Year Korean for heritage speakers with Professor Lim while preparing for preliminary exams, and possibly enrolling in or auditing First Year Classical Chinese with Professor Huntington to learn kanbun (classical Sino-Japanese) and hanmun (classical Sino-Korean).