NIPPON FOUNDATION FELLOWS PROGRAM
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As a second year graduate student in the History Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, my research interests include everyday cultural practices within the Ainu community during the early-twentieth century. I am currently writing an MA thesis that explores this theme at the intersection of environmental, performance, and diaspora studies. The paper specifically looks at how Ainu women claimed cultural autonomy within the contested and uneven landscape of Hokkaido by deploying folktales as a mode of storytelling in which to interrogate Japanese colonial-capitalism and Ainu patriarchy. Through it, I argue that the practice of reciting folktales, as a distillation of deep knowledge which pre-existed colonial intervention, provided Ainu women and their children with an alternative ecological worldview in which to organize their relations with one another and with the external environment. By revealing the historical specificity of Hokkaido’s transformation, though, oral literature also grounded such phenomenon within capitalist-modernity, creating the potential to generate new political forms and critiques that could resist the increasing rationalization of society and reclaim the natural landscape from the commodity form. Through such an inventive manipulation of folktales, Ainu women created an alternative archive in which to register everyday experiences of displacement that were concealed by dominant narratives of state development. Consequently, I argue that it is from this archive that they were ultimately able to conceptualize the possibility of a utopian spatio-temporal domain - an Ainu homeland with an emancipatory future – as a means to articulate their demands and
enact their contestations. This eventually provided future generations with the grounds for indigenous social action by outlining a new way of belonging within modern Japan.

By examining the history of the Ainu people at the margins of Japanese historiography, I ultimately hope to not only highlight the multifaceted nature of modern Japanese society as it incorporated the Ainu people into it, but also make the Ainu voice legible so as to reveal the diverse array of meanings and transformative possibilities produced and embedded within their lived experience. Currently, though, much of my work is based on secondary sources because very few primary sources on the Ainu have been translated into English. Those that exist largely consist of anthropological and literary works focusing on traditional culture. While I have integrated these sources into my own research, I would especially like to analyze documents on the Ainu intellectual and working class, two very mobile social groups who traversed many different boundaries, so as to better understand and theorize the position of the Ainu people within modern history. My long-term goal with this project is ultimately to scrutinize how the category of indigeneity has been conceptualized and mobilized throughout the twentieth century at the global scale, creating an arena in which to resist or facilitate imperialism and capitalism. Consequently, as a historian of Ainu-Japanese transculturation, it is my greatest desire to overcome this language barrier and begin navigating the archive and process primary sources so as to expand the scope of my research.

With this in mind, I believe that the language training program at IUC will best help me to realize my academic aim of developing the skills necessary to pursue specialized research and collaboration within my field. In particular, I look forward to the immersion setting of the Center as I strive to acquire a professional level of Japanese
proficiency with the help of my language teachers and classmates. A linguistic foundation that enables me to communicate and exchange my ideas to a Japanese-speaking audience will help me obtain a teaching position at a university or work in the Foreign Service. Furthermore, I believe that the 2015-16 year is the most appropriate time for me to apply to IUC because it coincides with what would otherwise be my last year of coursework here at UW-Madison. Strong Japanese language skills are vital not only to successfully complete my preliminary examinations, but also to prepare for my dissertation fieldwork in Japan. At the same time, however, I also realize that I need a comprehensive grasp of my research interest before I can tackle either of these two goals. Therefore, I would like to have a year after I return from IUC to work closely with my advisor in familiarizing myself with the Japanese foundational works on Ainu studies, especially considering that the secondary literature on it is very limited in the English language. It is with these concerns in mind that I strongly hope to be able to attend the program this year.

In applying to IUC, though, I also strongly view the Nippon Foundation Fellows Program as an exciting opportunity to meet my peers within the Center, as well as to develop both my language and research skills alongside them. In our discussion about IUC, my advisor shared with me her experience there, noting how useful it was in cultivating social networks with various Japan scholars and professionals. Since it is my desire to reproduce a similar experience while I am in Japan, I believe that acceptance into the Fellows Program is an enormous privilege and responsibility. Consequently, I hope to bring an intellectual- and cultural-historical perspective that synthesizes the works of my mentors at UW-Madison and UCLA to the group. As I have taken courses
in multiple departments at both universities, much of my graduate training has also been interdisciplinary and transnational. It is this academic experience, as well as the observations I have made from the various workshops and reading groups I have attended, which has convinced me that an interdisciplinary model of collaborative studies is most productive and enjoyable in generating new ideas and critiques. Therefore, the regular meetings, public lectures, and conferences organized by the IUC Resident Director and other Fellows are particularly appealing to me, as I recognize that the community environment created by such activities will live up to the Program’s mission of “fostering strong collegial bonds and intellectual exchange” between its members.