

*The Separation of Indigenous Rights and Ainu Culture in Contemporary Japan:
museums, art, and the place of politics*
by Sabra Harris (2024)

This project continues my dissertation fieldwork investigating the separation of Ainu culture from Indigenous rights within Japan. One of three goals include finishing my field observations of museums and memorial sites at nine locations within Hokkaido as well as the Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. Secondly, I will work closely with Naraki Kimiko, a Karafuto (Sakhalin) Ainu artist and educator. Under her supervision, we will create an online gallery of her artwork, containing photographs and interviews, which will be in Japanese and English, transcribed and translated by myself. The final product will also include business cards featuring the website which Naraki will be able to hand out to her class, the Karafuto Ainu Embroidery Club, and to the students of the Ecological Tours she conducts multiple times a year on the Hokkaido University campus in collaboration with the Hokkaido University Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies. The website will also be of use during her educational presentations for domestic and international touring groups, during the events she hosts at Pirka Ainu Kotan, the Ainu museum in Sapporo, and during events sponsored by the Karafuto Ainu Association. This website aims to support these organizations in their commitment towards Ainu cultural revitalization, a form of outreach that links Ainu ecology, culture, and history with contemporary art, thereby prioritizing Ainu voices today. Thirdly, this summer, I will continue my outreach work with Ainu Jikara, a grassroots Ainu organization headed by another Ainu elder, educator, and artist, Ukaji Shizue. Ainu Jikara seeks to foster Ainu communities outside of the authority of museums and universities. At their meeting space, Shimafukuro no Ie, they host monthly events such as Ainu culture classes for cooking, embroidery, and language, lectures based on Ainu Indigenous rights and ways of life, and yearly ritual events. I create the monthly flyers for their events, and during my time in Hokkaido this summer, I will assist in the set up and recording of the July event. I aim to additionally offer any support as needed for the creation of an Ainu Art Museum, the first of its kind. The Mendell Graduate Fellowship allows me to support these communities that have generously and warmly welcomed me, to sustain these indispensable communal connects while also working towards the completion of my PhD dissertation.