



Three Danish Japanophiles on a cultural exchange trip to Tokyo

On February 10, I watched the latest news from Japan on NHK and finalized my packing before heading off to Copenhagen Airport to meet Laerke Steinmann and Lars Stroebaek from Copenhagen University. The scholarship had brought us together and I looked forward to getting to know them better during our trip to Japan. As we boarded the plane destined for Tokyo, we were excited about the programme which had been planned for us, including speaking at the annual meeting of the Japan-Denmark Association in the presence of Prince and Princess Hitachi, participation in a TV programme and a wide range of activities reflecting traditional, modern and corporate Japan. We ordered red wine to our flight dinner and said cheers to the great experiences ahead of us! While we have been studying Japan for several years, we are passionate about different aspects of Japan. Thanks to our view on Japan from different angles we were able to learn from each other's knowledge and experience. In this way, traveling the three of us together was highly advantageous. In Narita Airport, we were met by Mrs. Kusunose and her assistant Yuuki from Kuniburi International who spent the whole week with us making sure that we had an unforgettable time in Japan. In the following I will elaborate on my observations and how I see the potential for strengthening the ties between Denmark and Japan.

Tohoku Earthquake 2011

When I talk about this trip I foremost mention our visit to the coast town Higashi Matsushima, one of the most hardly hit areas during the Tohoku earthquake in March 2011. Being in Denmark at the time, it was difficult to fully comprehend the damage, fear and chaos when I saw the destructive waves literally wipe out parts of North-Eastern Japan on Danish TV. Therefore, it made a big impression to see one of the damaged areas with my own eyes. The left picture below shows our guide, Mr. Sato Shinji from the city council, displaying a Youtube video taken on the very spot where we are standing. As the waves hit the shore, he had clung to one of the pillars of the house on our left side. The area behind us used to be a residential neighbourhood. The waves took even the modern houses, similar to the one in the right picture below, built using the latest and supposedly most resistant technology.



As we drove past the devastated hotel building shown in the left picture below, Mr. Sato explained that more than a hundred guests had held a Coming-of-Age party at the hotel when the tsunami struck. The guests were evacuated to the top floor and they all survived. I tried to imagine the terrible feeling the guests must have felt while looking down on the chaos brought about by the waves and not knowing whether the building would prove to be tsunami resistant. The right picture below shows some of the garbage equivalent to 153 years' waste left by the tsunami.



Given the severe destruction and losses following the triple disaster, it was highly encouraging to experience the strong will to overcome the crisis among the people we met and see several 'we can do it' slogans in the public space such as the ones below.



It was nice to hear from Mr. Sato that aid from Denmark has been helpful in the recovery process along with aid from many other countries. One example is the pump in the pictures below provided by Danish Grundfos. Japan received quite some attention in Danish media following the Tohoku Earthquake and Danish companies are actively involved in the reconstruction work including the promotion of renewable energies. I firmly believe that this interaction is helpful in breaking down the psychic distance between Danes and Japanese by fostering emotional ties and mutual understanding. In this way, the March 11 disaster is an example of the popular saying 'nothing is so

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bad as not to be good for something'. In addition to the disaster-oriented publicity, I find it important to provide positive news on the fighting spirit residing in the Japanese people and the reconstruction of the Tohoku region. Two friends of mine cancelled a visit to Japan last year that they had been planning for months. When I returned from Japan, I was happy to be able to tell them that it is safe for them to go now.

PhD research

One of my goals for this trip was to gather inspiration for a PhD project. Prior to our departure I considered researching whether the recent nuclear resistance may lead to the formation of a stimulating framework towards the promotion of renewable energies similar to the development in Denmark amid the oil crises of the 1970s. Therefore, I took a special interest in our visit to Higashi Matsushima and the following seminar held by Mr. Hideaki Oda on earthquakes and water sanitation in Japan. Three American Rotary Peace Fellowship students joined the seminar and we had lively conversations over dinner. One of the students cooperates with Fujifilm on taking new family portraits of victims of the Tohoku Earthquake having lost family members to illustrate a new beginning. The picture below shows the presenter (furthest to the left) and the audience.



Our discussion during and after the presentation led me to think of the climate obligations committed to by Japan under the Kyoto Protocol and how the Japanese government will manage to reduce CO₂ emissions while pursuing nuclear power reducing policies. Although the plans of implementing renewable energies may materialize and have an impact in the future, increased import of gas and oil may be necessary to compensate for the lack of nuclear power in the short term. When I returned from Japan, I looked into the carbon market and discovered that Japan and the EU are the largest buyers of Kyoto offsets through emissions trading, CDM projects and JI projects. On this background, I have initiated a PhD study of Danish and Japanese strategies for obtaining emission reduction units through JI projects in Russia and Ukraine. My research includes examining the potential for undertaking JI projects with a market seeking motive to promote the export of low-carbon products and technologies from Japan/Denmark to Russia/Ukraine. This is a field of competence of both Japanese and Danish companies. For instance, J-Power in Japan invests in the development of low-carbon technologies, while the Japanese company Shimizu consults on carbon management e.g. zero-carbon construction.

Traces of Denmark in Japan

We witnessed how the Japanese and Danish societies are similar in some ways. For instance, jogging and cycling seems almost as common in Tokyo as in Copenhagen despite relatively few cycle lanes in Tokyo. We found a few traces of Denmark e.g. a poster of a wooden house with PH lamps and Arne Jacobsen furniture at a shop selling wall painting. Furthermore, while visiting a shop selling kaleidoscopes and speaking in Danish among ourselves, the shop owner asked if we were from Denmark. In the picture below to the left, the shop owner explains us that she has bought a number of Danish coins and plans to produce kaleidoscopes using these coins because she thinks they are kawaii (cute). Another example is the availability of Danish pastry e.g. at the 'danish bar' in Tokyo subway seen in the right picture.



More imports from Japan

We were expected to make a speech at the annual meeting of the Japan-Denmark Association. Mine was about the increasing fascination of Japan and Japanese culture among Danes (see appendix 1). In my view, many more Japanese products and concepts may be well received among Danish consumers if they are introduced on the Danish market. Both Danes and Japanese appreciate good quality, health benefits and sustainability. The fact that healthy food to-go is sold at practically every train station, convenience store and supermarket in Japan helps eating a balanced diet despite a busy schedule with little time left for cooking. The Japanese food to-go concept is slowly being introduced in Denmark e.g. the fast food store 'Onigiri' operating in Copenhagen. Hopefully it will become as commonly available as in Japan and eventually outcompete greasy fast food like pizza and hotdogs to benefit the public health. The left picture below shows a few examples of the delicious lunch packages offered. To the right is a picture of a souvenir to one of my Danish friends who uses Shiseido facial cleansing products every day. With this body towel I wanted to show her that Shiseido offers more products. To my knowledge it is not possible to buy body towels in Denmark. Considering that it is really comfortable to scrub the skin and possible to reach the back with a body towel, it could be worthwhile launching the product on the Danish market.



Danish consumers are also likely to appreciate the no-label and no-waste philosophy of MUJI, the Japanese supplier of high quality, natural and simple consumer goods at reasonable prices. While MUJI may compare with IKEA at a first glance, MUJI products are based on design-consciousness and environmental friendliness that make them appeal to conscientious consumers. MUJI's 'this will suffice'-statement might succeed in Denmark especially during times of economic slowdown where people tend to prefer a few, good things over unnecessary luxury. Below is a MUJI poster showing some of the products offered.

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I remember visiting Japan for the first time in 1998 and realizing that not only Japanese children but also adults fancy cartoon characters. I was surprised because I had never seen adults being obsessed with cartoon characters before. At that time I could not imagine that Danish adults would eventually join in on this trend. Nevertheless, several of my female friends in their 30s now fancy Hello Kitty accessories e.g. wallet, towel, cosmetic bag etc. Thus, Japanese 'cute culture' has made inroads into the Danish society. The left picture below shows a sign in Tokyo subway telling to keep a distance to the door, while the picture to the right shows boxes of cute cakes; an example of how Japanese food is a joy for the eyes as well as it tastes good.



Seeing the various smoking cabins in the streets of Tokyo, made me think of the recent ban on smoking in Denmark aimed to protect non-smokers from passive smoking. Since the risk of passive smoking outdoors is significantly less than indoors, there are no restrictions on smoking outside. Consequently, there are many cigarette butts in the streets unlike in Japanese streets where there are none. Implementing outdoors smoking cabins similar to the ones in Japan might help overcome this problem. The left picture below shows a smoking cabin at Narita Airport whereas the smoking cabin in the right picture is placed near Yasukuni Shrine.



Following a tour of the Suntory factory we had a glass of freshly brewed Suntory beer. I do not fancy beer in general but this one was very nice indeed. We were informed that Suntory is not exported to Denmark due to competition from Carlsberg and Tuborg. However, according to Statistics Denmark, Danish import of foreign beer is on the rise as Danes increasingly favour uncommon beer brands to accompany their meal instead of wine. I hope that Suntory will consider entering the Danish market in the near future.



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Japan is second only to the US in terms of most patent registering and is known for advanced technology including robotics and automation. Vending machines are seen almost everywhere in Japan. Although increasing in numbers, vending machines are still not as common in Denmark. Moreover, Danish vending machines offer mostly beverages and snacks whereas a wide selection of goods are vended in Japan including flowers, neckties and even fish feed like the vending machine in the left picture below situated next to a pond. The picture to the right shows a vending machine at a restaurant where the guests select and pay for their menu at the machine as they enter the restaurant and pass the ticket to the staff. Increasing efficiency and saving costs in this way may also be relevant for a number of Danish restaurants.



The Japanese people celebrate many festivals and national holidays which we do not know about in Denmark. We saw many decorations for the doll festival celebrated on March 3rd e.g. the decoration at a luxury hotel in Tokyo shown in the left picture below. Although most of these festivals relate to Shintoism some of them may be adopted by people in foreign countries in the same way as many Japanese celebrate Christmas despite not being Christians. The celebration of Valentines Day and Halloween is becoming widespread in Denmark and demonstrates that Danes are willing to adopt foreign traditions. Considering that Mother's Day and Father's Day are practiced in Denmark, it may be worthwhile introducing the Japanese Children's Day celebrated on May 5th. The right picture below shows the tradition of decorating with koi fish on Children's Day symbolizing the family.



Source: wikimedia commons 2012

Stunning ancient culture

We experienced a wide range of traditional art and I saw parts of the Japanese culture that I had not

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seen before. First of all, while visiting the Edo-Tokyo museum we listened to a performance of rakugo (storytelling) shown in the left picture below. Furthermore, as we attended a workshop for traditional dying technique I came to understand why exclusive kimonos may cost as much as a car. In the right picture below I attempt to dye a piece of kimono material under the factory owner's guidance.



I gained a deeper understanding of the connection between Japanese culture and religion. During a Shinto ceremony where the priests prayed for our journey home, I came to think of the importance of rituals and traditions in culture and how culture often emanates from religion. As Denmark develops into a secular society, we are turning our back on a significant part of Danish culture. The pictures below were taken during our visit to the Court Music Section of the Imperial Household Agency. We learned how the instruments are related to Shinto gods and saw the impressive costumes and the stage of the court musicians and dancers.



During our visit to the Association of Shrines in Japan we heard about the coexistence of Shintoism and Buddhism in Japan. I have always found it quite interesting how the Japanese people manages to worship two religions at the same time even though some of their principles conflict. One example is bonsai emanating from Buddhism where man carefully designs the tree as opposed to the belief that man is part of nature and must never try to dominate it, according to Shintoism. Whereas Shintoism provides many rituals for celebrating various circumstances during a person's life and does not operate with hell and heaven, Buddhism concerns mostly life after death. I find it inspiring that Shintoism focuses on the actual life and helps people to make the best out of their lives while respecting the nature and people around them. The ad below which we noticed on our way back to the airport illustrates the point of enjoying the present and living in the moment.



The most fascinating aspect of the Japanese society is probably the coexistence of modern and traditional life. Entering the quiet, nicely smelling and neatly decorated home of a Japanese woman teaching calligraphy and tea ceremony seen in the right picture below, literally feels like entering another world compared to the busy streets of Tokyo seen in the left picture below.



Trains on time

Many things work flawlessly in Japan and public transportation is one of them. Japanese trains are known for their punctuality with an average delay of just a few seconds. It also impressed me to see signs painted onto the ground on the platforms. The signs below relate to the Shinkansen (they turn upside down). The right picture below shows a person (the face is removed to preserve anonymity) reading a book in Tokyo subway covered in brown paper so that other passengers cannot see which book it is. This degree of discretion is uncommon in Denmark. In fact, some Danes speak on their cell phones in public even about personal and sensitive matters.



In the left picture below we are about to enter the Shinkansen. In the right picture we enjoy the comfort on board.



Beyond stereotypes

My first experience with Japan was a home stay in the village Maruoka where daily life was based on traditional values and the patriarchal society was evident. It contrasted to the way that I had been brought up and the Danish society where men and women have become almost equal following the women's revolution during the 1970s. The stereotype about the Japanese family pattern was confirmed. For instance, my female school mates at Maruoka High dreamt of marrying early and starting a family, and my host sister was thrilled when her in laws offered to pay her for giving up her work. As an adult trying to organize my own life I have started to think that the family structure where both parents have demanding full time jobs fails to acknowledge the challenge of fostering a harmonious home. Now more than ever I can understand why my host sister felt privileged when she could become a house wife. I am glad that I learned the background for the traditional Japanese family pattern instead of merely perceiving it as male dominance. I have later experienced several ways of family life in Japan and during this trip it was interesting to talk with Mrs. Kusunose about how the Japanese society is developing.

I believe that the translation of the novels by Haruki Murakami into Danish helps creating a nuanced picture of the Japanese society among Danes. Several characters in his novels are men who have been left by their wife and a female character is the breadwinner in 'The Wind-up Bird Chronicle'. Furthermore, the Japanese setting of the novels is likely to spur interest and may impact positively on tourism to Japan and Japanese exports in the same way as England, France and Scotland have capitalized on the success of the author Dan Brown's 'Da Vinci Code', while the popularity of Danish TV thrillers in other countries seems to positively impact on Danish exports. Murakami's novels demonstrate that the Japanese mentality may compare with the Danish Law of Jante which does not allow showing off and prescribes humbleness. For instance, one of the characters in his novel 'Dance, dance, dance' is an author named Hiraku Makimura whose first couple of books were successful but his following writings disappointed the readers. Since the character's name contains the same letters as Haruki Murakami, I interpret it as his way of showing humility while implicitly telling the readers that he is aware of the fact that his success as a writer may come to an end at some point. In this way, Japanese literature can help strengthen the mutual understanding between Danes and Japanese.

Another stereotype about the Japanese people involves unwritten rules that make it difficult for foreigners to navigate the Japanese society. On the plane heading back to Denmark I read a book on Japanese customs and realized that I had behaved inappropriately when giving souvenirs since I had explained what it is instead of merely saying 'it's nothing'. However, I like to think that Japanese people acknowledge the fact that foreigners do their best even though they fail on some of the social

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conventions from time to time. In the picture below, I am offering Danish candy to Kikkoman employees following a tour of the factory.



When I talk with Danes about going to Japan they often mention the high living costs as a hindrance. However, it is probably cheaper going to Japan as a tourist than being a tourist in Denmark. For instance, the delicious gyū-don meal that Laerke is about to consume in the right picture above costs less than DKK 50 and green tea is served for free, whereas lunch at a Danish restaurant tends to cost at least DKK 100.

Spreading the word

The interaction of ordinary Danish and Japanese people is a powerful tool to strengthen the relations between Denmark and Japan. Interaction can invalidate unfavourable stereotypes and create human bonding between Danes and Japanese based on affection and trust. It fosters bottom up integration of Denmark and Japan in addition to various integrative processes at the institutional level. Therefore, I am glad that this trip offered several opportunities to talk about Danish-Japanese relations. Besides speaking at the annual meeting of the Japan-Denmark Association, Tokyo MX TV invited us to participate in a TV show where we engaged in a dialogue with the panel. Moreover, Tokyo Fuchu Rotary Club invited us for lunch where Mrs. Kusunose spoke about the Japan-Denmark People to People Interchange Programme (left picture below). As a former Rotary exchange student I have agreed with the Danish Rotary Club who sent me to Japan to participate at their meeting on August 1 to talk about the study tour and give them the banner of Tokyo Fuchu Rotary Club seen in the right picture below.



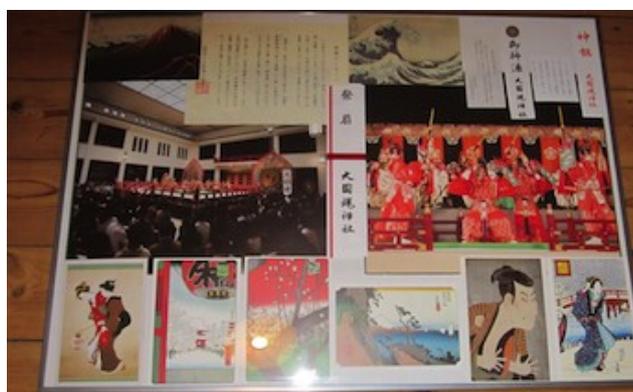
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On June 13 I spoke about the study tour at an NGO named Inner Wheel (picture below). The organization has made a donation to the March 11 victims and the members were particularly interested in hearing about the reconstruction of the region.



The Japan-Denmark People to People Interchange Programme has encouraged me to initiate various activities to support the good relations between Denmark and Japan. Some time ago I wrote a children's book. Inspired by the many bilingual (Japanese/English) books available in Japan I have decided to make it bilingual (Danish/Japanese). As a child I was intrigued by the mysterious Japanese characters and I hope that this book can expose a couple of Danish children to Japanese characters and spur interest in learning the language. Furthermore, I have taken contact to Assistant Professor Gunhild Borggren from Copenhagen University and we have agreed to cooperate on writing an article about Japanese robotics to Danish media. The picture below is a collage that I made from some of the written materials that we received during the study tour and Japanese art on postcards. It now hangs on my wall to remind me of the good memories and to entertain my guests.



Strategic approach

My last recommendation for strengthening the ties between Denmark and Japan is the development of a strategy to increase Danes' awareness about Japan. In order to form a strategy based on facts, it will be useful to conduct perception study among a representative sample of the Danish population, to uncover knowledge gaps and prevailing stereotypes in relation to Japan. Once the results have been analysed it will be possible to develop a communication strategy targeting the identified problem areas. To support my point I conducted the small scale survey outlined below. Among other things, the survey indicates that most respondents are aware that Japanese people wear face mask outside but some believe that is due to pollution. Furthermore, one respondent associates 'Japan' with producing cheap goods for export, suggesting that it can be difficult for some Danes to distinguish between Japan and China. It also reveals that many respondents are unable to name specific Japanese products despite the fact that Japanese brands are part of most Danish households.

Results of a survey on Japan conducted June 2012

Respondents

9 females between 50 and 90 years old living south of Copenhagen participated in the survey.

Associations

The respondents were asked to note down their thoughts associated with 'Japan'.

Karate, monks, hot springs, exotic, a country with many skilled, hard working and friendly people, impressive culture, produces 'cheap' products for export, progress, interesting, exciting, different, lotus flower, sushi, cars, volcanic eruption, various products, photo equipment, samurai, leakage from power plant, a big country, many young people travel to Denmark as tourists in Copenhagen, archipelago.

Travel activity

The respondents were asked to answer yes or no to the questions below.

Do you know someone who has been to Japan?	9 x Yes	0 x No
Have you been to Japan?	3 x Yes	6 x No
Do you plan on going to Japan?	2 x Yes	7 x No

Opinions

The respondents were asked to finish the sentences in the left column using their own words. Those who did not know enough about the subject to have an opinion put a question mark instead.

I think Japanese culture is	exciting, different, interesting, beautiful, something special, unique	2 x ?
I think Japanese products are	good, high quality, beautiful design, advanced, innovative, exotic	3 x ?
I think Japanese art is	different, colourful, very special, beautiful, interesting, controlled perfectionism and symmetry e.g. bonsai	4 x ?
I think Japanese food is	delicious, lovely, exciting, delicate, super - I love it, low-fat	3 x ?
I think the Japanese language is	special, screaming, difficult, completely impossible to understand, possible to learn	2 x ?
Japan is mostly known for	rice, cars, nature, power plant, progress, advanced technology, catastrophes (earthquake), high standards, currency, Hiroshima, sumo wrestlers	3 x ?
I admire Japan and/or the Japanese people for	being hard working, their skills, their beautiful gardens, their buildings, their ancient culture, being eager to learn	4 x ?

Awareness

The respondents were asked to explain the phenomena or answer with a question mark.

What is <i>sushi</i> ?	Delicious food, raw fish with rice and vegetables, a dish	1 x ?
Who is <i>Haruki Murakami</i> ?	A poet	8 x ?
What is <i>Manga</i> ?		9 x ?

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Who is <i>Hayao Miyazaki</i> ?		9 x ?
What is a <i>geisha</i> ?	A lady of the night, a lady who entertains at parties, a lady who entertains men, a Japanese lady wearing beautiful clothes	5 x ?
What is an <i>onsen</i> ?	Mountain and volcano	8 x ?
What is <i>Zen</i> ?	God, a religious ritual, money	6 x ?
Which Japanese products do you know?	Rice, high quality cars, photo equipment, videoplayer, cell phones, technical equipment, many, Daihatsu, none	3 x ?
What is <i>MUJI</i> ?		9 x ?
What is <i>Shinto</i> ?	A bicycle brand, a shrine	7 x ?
Why do Japanese people wear face masks outdoors?	To protect against pollution, the sun, bacteria, to avoid passing on bacteria to others	2 x ?
What is a <i>kimono</i> ?	Housecoat, dress (for women), national dress	0 x ?
What is <i>ikebana</i> ?	Flower arrangement	8 x ?
What is <i>Fuji</i> ?	An island, a volcano, martial art, a camera, the highest mountain, a computer brand	3 x ?
What is <i>kanji</i> , <i>hiragana</i> and <i>katakana</i> ?		9 x ?
What is <i>karate</i> , <i>kendo</i> , <i>judo</i> and <i>aikido</i> ?	Sports, Japanese martial arts	1 x ?
What is a <i>katana</i> ?		9 x ?
What is <i>sashimi</i> ?	It is part of sushi	8 x ?
What is <i>Copenhagen Sakura Festival</i> ?	A festival to celebrate the blooming of cherry blossoms, export promotion	7 x ?

Stereotypes

The respondents were asked to indicate whether the following statements are true or false.

The living costs are higher in Japan than in Denmark.	2 x agree	0 x disagree	7 x neither agree nor disagree
Japanese products are generally exclusive and high quality.	5 x 'agree'	0 x disagree	4 x neither agree nor disagree
Japanese culture is very different from Danish culture with unwritten rules that are difficult to navigate as a foreigner.	4 x 'agree'	0 x disagree	5 x neither agree nor disagree

Japan has sub tropical climate.	6 x true	2 x false	1 x ?
There is a beach in Tokyo.	4 x true	4 x false	1 x ?
There is an imitation of Tivoli in Japan.	6 x true	1 x false	2 x ?
There is an imitation of Legoland in Japan.	6 x true	1 x false	2 x ?
It is necessary to know 10,000 characters to be able to read a Japanese	6 x true	1 x false	2 x ?

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newspaper.			
The largest religion in Japan is hinduism.	7 x true	1 x false	1 x ?
Japan is a monarchy.	7 x true	1 x false	1 x ?
Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905.	7 x true	0 x false	2 x ?

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Appendix 1

デンマークと日本協会へのスピーチ

皆様 こんにちは。

私はカミラと申します。これから、自己紹介と日本の体験についてスピーチをしたいと思います。よろしくお願いを致します。

子供の時、日本の映画を見た切っ掛けで、『はい』と言う日本語の単語を分かるようになりました。それから、日本語または日本の生活を面白く思って、日本に行きたかったので。1998年に口タリ交換留学生として初めて日本へ来ることができました。日本で留学するのが珍しかったから、行く前に、どうして日本を選んだのかをよくデンマーク人に聞かれました。

しかし、日本から戻った時、デンマーク人は日本の生活をとても素敵に思っていると分か

りました。寿司のレストランチェーンが成功したことや、人気のある洋服のブランドが漢字で書いた『美人』とか『神風』のTシャツを売ったことはその例です。

今も、日本は魅力があって、映画館でデンマーク語に訳したアニメを見ることができし、村上春樹を読んだデンマーク人がたくさんいます。私はできるだけこのようないい発展に貢献したいと考えます。そのため、日本専門の研究者になれるように頑張っています。特に日本における高齢化社会を研究したいと思います。デンマークでも若い人より、老人が増えて行くのです。今回一週間日本に来させていただいて、印象やキーパーソンと会ったことが研究に役に立つと思います。感謝しています。

以上です。