

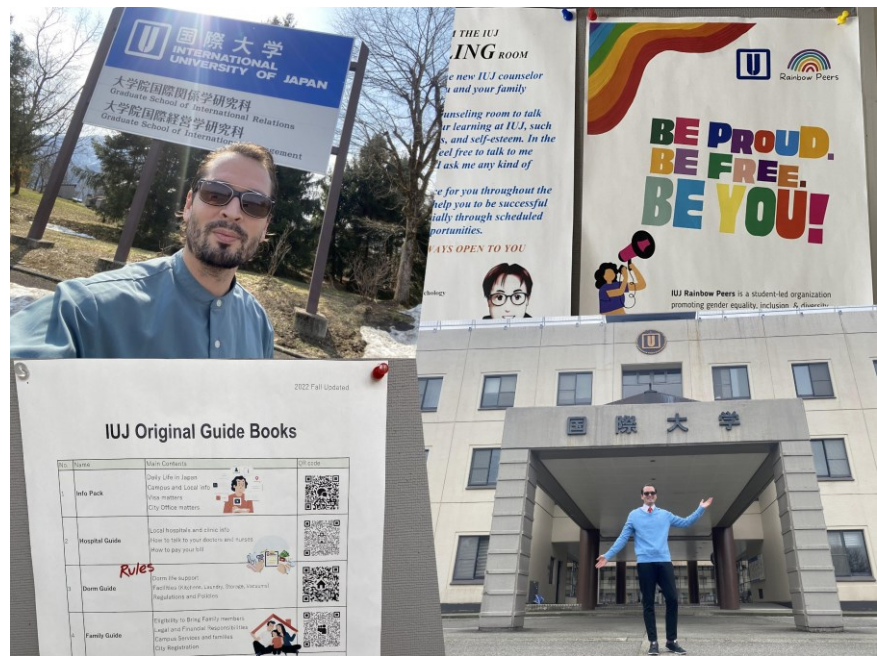


In 2022 I received approval for a grant of support from Ivalo & Minik Fonden, ensuring my reverie of studying at the Graduate School of International Relations of the International University of Japan, IUJ, would realize, where I had found a university that offered a curriculum perfectly suited for the subjects of my master's thesis. My thesis is a socio-politic analysis of Greenland's independence discourse, which maps and charts the discourse of independence in Greenland historically from the 1940s until today, and towards the future. The discourse of independence in Greenland is quite complex, influenced by the intricate international relations between Denmark and Greenland, and Greenland with the rest of the world. Furthermore, human rights issues following the second world war, have come to surface throughout the years since Greenland first gained autonomy, from Denmark. Many of these issues, of which some are criminal and others negligence, fuels the debate and skews the discourse towards immediate necessity of political secession. The historic social and societal imbalance sets a fertile ground for populist ideologies that narrows and shades the issues of the independence goal, to an extend that the normative and positive socioeconomic reality takes only a peripheral role, against ideological aims.

As it where, I was extremely lucky to find that IUJ at the Graduate School of International Relations offered just the classes I needed including: A class called *Comparative Government and Politics*, in which we learned about analysis of political governance and their normative role regarding socio-politics and subsequent economic strategies. Another class I took was called *Foreign Policy Analysis*, that gives an in dept overview of the interplay between nations and states and international organization. Also, I took the class called *Human Rights & Global Justice: Culture, Gender and Equality*, which aptly facilitated great discussions on human rights cases from all over the world, giving me an amazing chance to reflect upon our own situation across the Kingdom of Denmark and beyond.

The university is situated in the mountainous southern region of Niigata prefecture in central Japan. It looks and feels similar to the alps in Europe. The University was surprisingly small and remote which surprised me when I first arrived there. There is about one hour's walk to the nearest restaurants and one and half hour to the train station. It gets really warm in summer and very cold in winter. All in all, an incredibly beautiful and different place from Nuuk, and yet strangely familiar. One thing I realized very fast, is that there is a huge elder population in Japan, especially on the country side. The economy of Japan although very competitive and healthy, has virtually come to a halt since the turn of the millennia, mainly due to the steadily growing share of the elder population. In Greenland we are going to experience a similar trend now.

In the beginning of my stay at the university, I found that there were people from all over the world and surprisingly many from Africa and India, seemingly among other things drawn by the human rights courses and inclusive atmosphere. I was the only person from Greenland and Denmark, but there was a few from Europe and the US. The size of the school is similar to Ililmarfik, with about 310 graduate and PhD students.



Even though the COVID-19 pandemic had already subsided in Greenland and Denmark, and most regulations had ended at home, it wasn't so in Japan.

When I first arrived in September 2022 it was still closed for tourists and people who didn't have student or special business visa. Even through March 2023, when the official national requirements for wearing masks in public areas and transport finally had become optional and no longer mandatory, we were still required to wear masks in class. Regrettably thus, all my photos from my travels to Tokyo, Kyoto, and other places were during the strict masking laws, so all my touristy photos are with masks on.



Another reason besides the curriculum, for which I chose the Graduate School of International Relations, is because I have a lot of interest in international relations. In 2020 I was a stagiaire at the Greenland Representation in Reykjavík. It was a very exciting place to work, and I learned a lot about how Greenland navigates international relations, trade, and corporations with other nations, in unison and with autonomy within the adhering of the framework of the laws and regulations of the international scene within and without the Kingdom.

In March 2023, I was honoured to be a speaker at a plenary session at the [Arctic Circle Japan Forum \(program\)](#), on behalf of the [Greenland Foreign Policy Society](#). At the session which was called [The Future Vision of Greenlanders: Cohesion and Contrasts](#), I presented how the Inuit navigates the international laws with regards to the waters between Greenland and Canada, especially with regards to drawing the maritime boarder by peaceful negotiations in agreement with the United Nations Law of the Sea and Inuit Circumpolar Councils protocols on engagement with Inuit, as well as the Ilulissat Declaration. Engaging the fact that neither Greenland nor Canadian Inuit have independent representation within

UN, due to lack of statehood, yet we do participate. As it happened with the Tartupaluk agreement of June 2022, it was proven that strong engagement with local Inuit, proved vital to the common understanding and subsequent resolution. Greenland and Canada had the largest maritime boarder in the world already prior to the 2022 agreement, and after that it grew by 25% settling disputes south and north of Greenland, as well as the famous whiskey war over Tartupaluk (Hans Island). Another point I brought up at the presentation was the fact that the Inuit do engage with international organizations directly through for example the observer and consultative status in the IMO, where it helps in setting the requirements of the Polar Code.



Overall, the experience I gained from my stay has been absolutely invaluable. I never fully understood how different and yet similar the Asiatic societies were to ours, and how much we have to learn from and teach each other. Japan has been battling the rising elder demographics, and high suicide rates the past 30 years with success, as Greenland is still to meet these challenges. Building a strong national economy based on industry such as technology and manufacturing, even as a somewhat isolationist nation is another thing Greenland may be able to learn from.

It is also awesome to see how Japan is a great sports nation, and experience it from within. Especially when they played at world cup in football, and when they won the world cup in baseball.

The times I had the opportunity to leave Niigata for Tokyo, Kyoto or Osaka, I loved searching for trading card stores, where I could and exercise the Japanese I had learned, and look for Pokémon cards.

While staying in Niigata was absolutely amazing, one can not help but feel a bit of FOMO, so close, yet far away from all the famous sights in Japan. Though a lot of things are substantially cheaper in Japan, tickets between cities across the country are expensive.



Being able to represent a little piece of Greenland in Japan has been a privilege and a great honour, and my most amazing journey in life so far. This has been possible thanks to the support from Ivalo & Minik Fonden and the Government of Greenland. Although our two nations are 12 hours' time zones away from each other, we face some similar challenges, and in a world where international politics that respects democracy and the rule of law and order have become challenged, we may find that Japan and Greenland are closer than we appear on a flat map.

There were a few things that I wished I had been aware of a little earlier in the process of preparation for my stay. These include, the TOEFL-test that I had to take during my application process, it takes time to get a date for the test, and it takes time again to get the answer, luckily this was possible online. I might however not have been able to make it if I hadn't passed the test on my first try. For applicants to similar international universities, I hope they are aware that this test must be taken as soon as possible, and also include the cost into their budget. I also became aware a bit late in my preparation process, of the additional vaccines including for Japanese Encephalitis and Hepatitis A, B, and tetanus vaccine, which I

had to get, and only that because my brother who studies to be a doctor reminded me. Such vaccines can be a bit expensive as well, so it is a good idea to include them in one's budget. Further costs including the visa processing, and transport within Japan can amount to a lot, so it is important to save up prior to going abroad.



Thank you,
Malik Peter Koch Hansen