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Re-Imagining ‘A Story of Denmark’: A Comparison between Uchimura Kanzō’s ‘A Story of Denmark’ and Henry Leach’s ‘Reclaiming the Heath’ from the Perspective of the Nordic Reception

In 1911, Uchimura Kanzō made a presentation titled ‘A Story of Denmark: Faith and Trees Helps the Land’ and published it in the same year. In this presentation Uchimura talked about the afforestation in Jutland after the Second Schleswig War. He explained that Denmark chose afforestation to the third war, to become one of the richest counties in the world. Enrico Dalgas and his son made efforts towards the afforestation.

According to one account, this story impressed so much the Japanese Christians around Uchimura, that they considered Denmark as an ideal agricultural country. Some of them introduced Danish Folk High Schools (Folkehøjskole) — institutions for adult peasants’ education, originally conceptualized by the Danish pastor N. F. S. Grundtvig, subsequently establishing Japanese Folk High Schools modelled after Danish Folk High School between late 1920s and 1930s. Later, these schools were used as training centres for Japanese colonists of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.

In this proposal, I argue Uchimura’s ‘A Story of Denmark’ from the perspective of the Nordic reception. Today, the story is considered as an expression of his pacifist ideas and as a proof that Nordic countries are ideal and happy. Contrastingly, I hypothesize that the story was compatible with Japanese colonialism of the first half of 20th century and that the ideal image of Nordic countries strengthened the colonialism. To this end, I compare Uchimura’s ‘A Story of Denmark’ with Henry Leach’s ‘Reclaiming the Heath: How Denmark Converted a Desert into a Farming Country’, which N. Suzuki claimed as the original material of ‘A Story of Denmark’ (‘Uchimura Kanzō’s life and thought’ (Iwanami, 2012)). I argue why Uchimura changed the theme from ‘reclaiming the heath’ to ‘afforestation of the land’, to draw attention to its link to Japanese colonialism, focusing its relationship to idealization of Nordic images.