

**Establishment of the Contemporary Nordic Image in Japan:  
A Comparison between Uchimura Kanzō's *A Story  
of Denmark* and Henry Leach's *Reclaiming the Heath***

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**Abstract:**

This paper discusses the role of Uchimura Kanzō's *A Story of Denmark* in establishing the contemporary Nordic image in Japan. In 1911, Uchimura Kanzō presented *A Story of Denmark: Faith and Trees Help the Land*, which was later published many times and continues to remain an influential work even today. In this presentation, Uchimura discussed afforestation of the Jutland after the Second Schleswig War. He explained that Denmark chose to engage in afforestation to become one of the richest countries in the world rather than participating in the third war. Drawing on Christian elements, his presentation emphasized the contributions of Enrico Dalgas and his son in transforming Jutland. Japanese Christians acquainted with Uchimura were so impressed with this story that they considered Denmark an ideal agricultural country (Koyama, 2000). From the 1920s–1930s, Japanese folk high schools were established as institutions for adult peasants' education, based on the concept of *Folkehøjskole* (Danish folk high school) introduced by the Danish pastor N. F. S. Grundtvig. Some of those who established the schools were Uchimura's acquaintances and followers. Afterwards, these schools became training centers for Japanese colonists of Manchuria. Today, this story is considered as an example of Uchimura's pacifistic ideas and proof that Northern Europe is ideal and happy. However, in my paper, I hypothesize that this story is compatible with the ideas of Japanese colonialism in the first half of the 20th century, and that the ideal image of Northern Europe in fact strengthened colonialism. To substantiate this hypothesis, I compare Uchimura's *A Story of Denmark* with Henry Leach's *Reclaiming the Heath: How Denmark Converted a Desert into a Farming Country*, a text that N. Suzuki (2012) claimed was the original material that influenced *A Story of Denmark*. I discuss how Uchimura's work changed the theme of "reclaiming the heath" to "afforestation of the land" to high-

light its link to Japanese colonialism, focusing its relationship to the idealization of Northern Europe.

**Keywords:** Uchimura Kanzō, *A Story of Denmark*, Nordic Image, Afforestation, Colonialism

## Introduction

This paper discusses the role of *A Story of Denmark* by Uchimura Kanzō in establishing the contemporary Nordic image in Japan. First, I outline my research framework on the changing Nordic image in Japan. My research primarily focuses on the Nordic literature and the image of Northern Europe in Japan, especially through the works of Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf. She is most well known for her book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1906, 1907). In 1909, she became the first woman and the first Swede to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. My previous works have focused on the translations of Lagerlöf's writings during the Pacific War. While she was largely accepted as a pacifist writer in those days, during the same period in Germany, she was considered a Nazi writer. My interest in the Nordic image began with the question of Nordic writers' opposing images: both pacifist and fascist. Because pacifists and fascists praised Lagerlöf in the same reason, I hypothesize that pacifism and fascism have one root, although the two images contradict each other. Lagerlöf's perceived image as a writer shows one facet of the Nordic image.

In Japan today, Northern Europe often have a positive image, and are considered happy, idyllic, peaceful, or idealistic. However, these images are also linked to fascism and nationalism. Apart from Lagerlöf and her translators, the Nordic image in Japan was created through the works of many other writers and translators. One of the most significant of these is Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930)<sup>1</sup>, who once gave a presentation titled *A Story*

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<sup>1</sup> The surname of this Japanese name is Uchimura. In my paper, Japanese names are stated according to the Japanese order.

*of Denmark: Faith and Trees Help the Land [Denmarukukoku no hanashi. Shinkō to jumoku to wo motte kuni wo sukuishi hanashi].*

In this study, I assess Uchimura's *A Story of Denmark* from the perspective of the Nordic reception in Japan. Today, this story is considered an expression of his pacifist ideas and proof that Northern Europe is ideal and happy. In contrast, I hypothesize that this story was compatible with the ideas of Japanese colonialism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that the ideal image of Northern Europe strengthened such colonialism. Previously, Uchimura has been studied mainly from the perspective of modern Japanese history of ideas, religion, and sociological history (Suzuki, 2012; Akae, 2013). In addition, Koyama Tetsushi, a pastor of Non-Church Groupe, researches the relationship between *A Story of Denmark* and Danish folk high schools (Koyama, 2000). Murai Makoto, a researcher of Danish history, focuses on the aspect of *A Story of Denmark* and Nordic image. He has criticized the discrepancy between *A Story of Denmark* and the historical facts (Murai, 2010; Murai, 2017). My research is not to criticize the discrepancy but rather to analyze what it means and which role *A Story of Denmark* played in establishing the contemporary image of Northern Europe in Japan.

My paper comprises three parts: First, I introduce Uchimura Kanzō and *A Story of Denmark* and its impact on Japanese ideas and society. Thereafter, I introduce Henry Leach's essay titled *Reclaiming the Heath: How Denmark Converted a Desert into a Farming Country*, the original work that inspired *A Story of Denmark*. Through a comparative analysis, I show how Uchimura's portrayal of Denmark differed from that of Leach. Finally, I consider the meaning behind his changes to the original text in relation to Japanese colonialism.

**Uchimura Kanzō and his presentation, *A Story of Denmark: Faith and Trees Helps the Land* and its reception in Japan**

Uchimura was one of the most influenced Christian leaders in modern Japan. He is currently envisaged as a pacifist against militarism. In 1981, when he was teaching at the Imperial High School, he bowed to the portrait of Tenno, the Japanese Emperor, and the paper for the Imperial Rescript on Education. However, the bowing was considered "insufficiently deep," hence, he became notorious for committing lese-majesty, a violation of the dig-

nity of the sovereign power. He also worked as an English columnist for the Japanese Newspaper Yorozu Chōhō. When his boss Kuroiwa Ruikō (1862–1920) started advocating Japan's war against Russia, Uchimura resigned from the newspaper, proclaiming a "No war" stance. Later, Uchimura dedicated himself to let many people know his Christian ideas. He published his research in the magazine *The Bible Study* [*Seisho no kenkyū*], which he founded in 1900. In parallel with publishing, he held regular study meetings (Akae, 2013, pp. 67-73).

In 1911, Uchimura Kanzō presented *A Story of Denmark: Faith and Trees Help the Land* in his study meeting. He published it in the same year in his magazine *The Bible Studies*, and in 1913 as a book.<sup>1</sup> Uchimura discussed the afforestation in the Jutland, initiated after the Second Schleswig War in 1864. He explained that Denmark chose afforestation in the third war and became one of the richest countries in the world. Captain Enrico Dalgas and his "first son Frederik Dalgas"<sup>2</sup> were instrumental in the country's afforestation efforts.

This story impressed both Japanese Christians and the other Japanese, such that they considered Denmark an ideal agricultural country. (Koyama, 2000). This perception is exemplified by the fact that Anjō in Aichi, the prefecture known for its high agricultural output, has been called the "Japanese Denmark" since the 1920s. In addition, in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dairy farming in Hokkaidō was started based on the Danish dairy farming model. One of its pioneers, Kurosawa Torizō (1885-1982), was influenced by Uchimura's thought and activity. Thus, Denmark is strongly associated with an image of an ideal primary industry.

In 1913, two years after *A Story of Denmark* was published, Nasu Shiroshi (1888-1984) translated A. H. Hollmann's German book titled *The Danish Folk High School and its Significance for the Development of a Folk Culture in Denmark* [*Die dänische Volkshochschule und ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklung einer völkischen Kultur in Dänemark*] and published it as

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I cite excerpts from the book, *A Story of Denmark*, published in 1913.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, the name of the eldest son is not Fredrik, but Christian. I will analyse Uchimura's change later. According to Murai (2010, p. 97), three of Enrico Dalgas' sons were grown up. Christian Dalgas (1862–1939) helped his father Enrico in afforestation and became the second minister for the Danish Heath Society. The third son Frederik Dalgas (1866–1934) became a head of Royal Copenhagen. The fifth son Ernesto Dalgas (1871-1899) became a writer.

*The National High Schools and the Agricultural Civilization [Kokumin-kōtōgakkō to nōminbunmei]*. Here, the national high schools imply the Danish folk high schools, known as the *folkehøjskole* in Danish. Originally conceptualized by the Danish pastor Nikolaj Grundtvig (1783-1872), Danish folk high schools were institutions for adult peasant education. Between the late 1920s and the 1930s, Japanese folk high schools were established and modelled after the Danish folk high schools. Among those interested in establishing such schools were some of Uchimura's friends or followers, such as Watase Torajirō (1859-1926), Uchimura's senior at the Sapporo Agricultural University [Sapporo Nōgakkō]. After Watase's untimely death, Uchimura and Watase's bereaved family and friends continued Watase's legacy. In 1929, the Promote Agriculture School [Kōnō Gakuen] was founded (later known as the Kuzura Folk High School). In 1927, Uchimura visited Katō Kanji (1884-1967), to get the advice. Among those who assisted in running the school was Kagawa Toyohiko (1888-1960) (Koyama, 2000).

Nowadays, Danish folk high schools have a fairly positive image; they are described as “The Schools for Life” that encourage freedom and democracy rather than merely reading and memorizing textbooks. This emphasis is reinforced through Denmark's happy, idyllic image. However, I argue that the Japanese reception of these schools is related to Japanese colonialism. In the second half of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, Katō and Kagawa used these schools as training centers for Japanese colonists of Manchuria: Katō, the headmaster of the Japanese Folk High School [Nihon kokuminkōtōgakkō], promoted and organized the colonization of Manchuria. Kagawa, a famous Christian, built the “Christian Frontier Village in Manchuria” [Manshyū kirisutokyō kaitaku mura] to send his followers as colonialists (Nakamaru, 2021).

Notably, Uchimura and his story have no direct links to the Japanese colonization of Manchuria; he died in 1930, before Japan began colonizing China in 1931. However, Uchimura helped establish and run the Promote Agriculture School with the assistance of Katō and Kagawa, and some of Uchimura's students were directly involved in Katō's Folk High School Movement. Therefore, my research examines the connection between *A Story of Denmark* and Japanese colonization of Manchuria to understand how the Nordic image in Japan fueled colonial ideas of Japan.

## **A Comparison between Henry Leach's *Reclaiming the Heath* and Uchimuri's *A Story of Denmark***

For a long time, no one knew how Uchimura gained information about afforestation in the Jutland. Finally, in 2012, Suzuki Norihisa found the original material, *Reclaiming the Heath: How Denmark Converted a Desert into a Farming Country* by Henry Leach, who was an instructor of Scandinavian at the Harvard University, and formerly served as a secretary to the American Minister to Denmark. Leach's essay was based on the story told by Frederik Dalgas, the third son of Enrico Dalgas, who was invited by President Roosevelt to visit the USA.

In this section, I compare Uchimura's *A Story of Denmark* with Henry Leach's *Reclaiming the Heath*. The first major change evident in Uchimura's work is the addition of Christian elements. *A Story of Denmark* begins by citing the Book of Isaiah.

The wilderness and the parched land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God (Uchimura, 1913, p. 3; Book of Isaiah 53:1-2).

Uchimura compared Dalgas to Isaiah and emphasized that Dalgas is a Huguenot descendant. This contrasted with Leach's description of Frederik Dalgas as a descendant of the Vikings. Leach added:

In 1864 the combined forces of Prussia and Austria wrested from Denmark the rich duchies of Holstein and Slesvig and the southern part of the peninsula of Jutland. The vast inheritance of Danish kings like Cnut the Great, who ruled over England, Norway, and Prussia, had gradually dwindled into a few islands and the desolate moors of North Jutland. The nation felt that this war was the last straw, and the disbanded army returned to their homes listless and hopeless (Leach, 1911, p. 274).

Second, I discuss how Uchimura changed the description of those who Dalgas worked with. According to Leach, Dalgas founded the Danish Heath Society with a few friends in 1866. Leach wrote much about the expansion of society's activities. They gained the support of rich landowners, then farmers and peasants, and finally the government. To spread their teachings about the value of the woods, the Heath Society published journals or pamphlets and visited Danish folk high schools. They also established a system to stop forest fires. However, Uchimura mentioned nothing about the Danish Heath Society and instead focused on Dalgas's son as his only helper. This son was also mentioned by Leach; however, interestingly, Uchimura changed the description of the son in two ways.

First, Uchimura changed his name. In Leach's essay, which was based on his interaction with Frederik Dalgas himself. Frederik is Enrico's third son. Christian Dalgas, who became the second president of the Heath Society, was Enrico's eldest son. During the planting process, Enrico discovered that spruce grew well with fir because the roots of the fir induced root growth in spruce as well. Thus, he called fir the "spruce's nurse." However, the growth always stops halfway through, so "the farmers of Jutland said derisively to Dalgas: 'See, your nurse never lets her child get out of the cradle!'" (Leach, 1911, p. 281). Subsequently, Christian Dalgas made the following discovery:

It was Captain Dalgas's son, Christian Dalgas, who made the discovery that if the fir trees were cut down when still young, the spruce that they had fostered would shoot up, as out of a rich forest floor, to their full height. (Leach, 1911, p. 282)

However, Uchimura incorrectly attributes this discovery to Frederik Dalgas, and also misrepresents him as Enrico's eldest son:

The apocalypse descended not on him, but on his son. His eldest son's name is Frederik Dalgas. (...) This botanical fact was discovered by the father and the son. Moreover, this discovery was immense for Denmark, because it solved the problems of reclaiming the heath in Jutland (Uchimura, 1913, pp. 23-25).

Uchimura made another key change. For Leach, the son symbolized the younger generation that could continue the efforts of the old genera-

tion. His existence meant that he could continue his father's activities after his death. For Uchimura, fathers should always be stronger and wiser than sons. Uchimura did not explain the death of Enrico Dalgas in 1894. He changed the eldest son's name from the name that means "Christian man" (Christian) to a mediocre name (Frederik). I think that Uchimura made this change to avoid the son's reputation surpassing that of his great father. Uchimura did not write that Dalgas called the firs the "nurse" for the spurce to indicate that Dalgas did not need anyone else to support his activities. Thus, *A Story of Denmark* can be interpreted a story of the great father who helps all people, just like God does.

Third, I point out what Uchimura had deleted. The word heath can refer to both the plant "heath" and a "useless land covered with heather." *Reclaiming the Heath* devotes a lot of space to the Dalgas' process exterminating the heath. There is even a chapter titled, "Running Water is the Heather's Death". In contrast, Uchimura wrote only two sentences on this topic: "First, man makes a ditch and pours water in it, then gets rid of heath. This was not much of a problem" (Uchimura, 1913, p. 19).

Uchimura's text continues as follows:

The most difficult thing was to plant trees in the wasteland. After that, man can see the deep forest of spruce all over. In the year 1860, the forests of Jutland were only 157,000 acres. But forty-seven years later, in the year 1907, they reached a multitude of 476,000 acres (Uchimura, 1913, pp. 24–25).

Uchimura's sentences rely on Leach's table with the same numbers, which is followed by a text about thereclamation of the land:

	1860	1907
Acres of forest in Jutland . . .	157,000	476,000
Percentage of Jutland covered by forest . . . . .	2.4	7.2

That is to say, the forests of Jutland have more than tripled in extent since the Heath Society was organized. It must be remembered, at the same time, that the planting of trees is only one of the several ways in which the heath has been reclaimed. In 1,860 the unproductive area of Jutland was 2,860 square miles. In 1907 it was



only 1,428 square miles, showing that in the first forty years of the Heath Society's work, more than one half the waste soil of Jutland has been reduced to cultivation (Leach, 1911, p. 286).

By making the three changes outlined above, Uchimura transformed the story of the Society's extermination of the heath into a story of planting trees by a father and son, to recount what Isaiah did.

### **The meaning behind Uchimura's changes in relation to Japanese colonialism**

*Reclaiming the Heath* originally had aspects that idealized Denmark. This work describes Danish people as the descends of the Vikings. Dalgas's son suggests independence from the "Nurse," who "never lets her child get out of the cradle" (Leach, 1913, p. 274). Subsequently, the number of Dalgas's collaborators increased from a few friends to landowners, farmers, peasants, and the government. Including his son, the book emphasized male-allied connections in the image of the Vikings. By contrast, Uchimura turned the story into a story of a reconstruction by a great father and son in the image of God and man, respectively. Uchimura focuses on land restoration through afforestation. In the original work, reclamation of the heath is highly emphasized by describing how Dalgas killed the plants heather. However, this emphasis is missing in Uchimura's text, which reminds me of Kagawa's discourse surrounding his establishment of the Christian Frontier Village in Manchuria.

Kagawa suggested that Christian colonists are "Abraham's heirs." They must build an exemplary village in Manchuria where no one lives or cultivates. For Kagawa, colonization is the "Practice of the Gospel" (Kagawa, 1940, p. 3). After their arrival, the members of the Christian Frontier Village found that the Manchuria was not an "uninhabited land." They usurped the land settled by local people. I cite the example of Sakai Yoshiyuki, a member of the Christian Frontier Village. He trusted Kagawa because of his struggle with the peasant's dispute. In an interview in 2005, Sakai's bereaved nephew responded, "It shocked me, that Yoshiyuki said, 'it was different from what he had heard in Japan.'" However, Yoshiyuki had no other way to continue to live in Manchuria, because only the eldest son had farmland in Japan and he was not. The nephew added, "He had to live in a house

whose owners had been evicted, and that farmland became the basis of his life. This reality reflects the social structure that he wanted to escape from” (Interview with H. Sakai by M. Ishihama. Kagawa Museum, 2007, p. 24).

Moreover, I point out that the motif of planting trees evokes the cultivation of the soil, which is in affinity with Blood and Soil, a slogan for Nazi Germany (“blood” meant a racially defined national body and “soil” meant a settlement). Hence, I argue that Uchimura supports the ideas of colonialism and fascism in his emphasis on the plantation, even though Uchimura himself was consciously critical of militarism.

Today, few people read *A Story of Denmark* as a story of the Christian faith. The story was accepted as a story of reconstruction and peace after the Pacific War when it was published as *the Iwanami Bunko*, a famous and popular paperback, and as a textbook for primary school. This publication helped shape Japanese people's perception of the Nordic countries as happy, idyllic, and idealistic. In some textbooks, Takahashi Kenji (1902-1998), a German literature scholar and translator, retold excerpts from *A story of Denmark* (Kubota & Kimura, 2014). He changed Uchimura's “Denmark is one of the richest countries in the world” to “one of the happiest countries in the world.” Takahashi is currently known for his translations of the works of the anti-war writer Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) and the resistance writer Erich Kästner (1899-1974). However, during the Pacific War, he introduced Nazi literature (Takahashi, 1940; Takahashi, 1943) and was the propaganda director of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association.

Overall, I argue that *A Story of Denmark* was one text that helped construct Japanese people's positive image of the Northern Europe. Uchimura made the killing of the heath as a process behind the Jutland's afforestation invisible. Takahashi further modified Uchimura's writing without taking any responsibility for propagating fascist ideas and literature. *A Story of Denmark* is still read nowadays as a pacific story due to a lack of awareness of the killing of the heath and a lack of reflection on the affinity between the motif of planting trees and colonialism. The fact that the image of a happy Denmark remains today connects to this lack of awareness or reflection.

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