

KIERKEGAARD AND MEIJI ERA

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With regard to the relationship between Kierkegaard and Japanese thinking, we may generally distinguish three standpoints. The first is to consider what influence Kierkegaard may have had upon the development of Japanese thinking or Japanese philosophy. This is to critically investigate Japanese thinking from the standpoint of Kierkegaard. The second is the reverse, which considers how Japanese ideas can contribute to an understanding of Kierkegaard, or to study and criticize Kierkegaard from a Japanese perspective. Finally, to synthesize these two methods, we may consider both sides impartially, not using one to judge the other, but dealing with both on equal terms. This approach does not stop at interpretation, but deals with living issues in philosophy, ethics, and religion, bringing questions to us in a direct way, so that we become involved in the existential dilemma.

In this article, we are to deal with Kierkegaard's relation to Japan. However, we will not explain why Japanese people study Kierkegaard.¹ Rather, we will discuss how Kierkegaard's thought came to be known in Japan during the Meiji Period (1868-1912), that is to say, we will do a little bit of Japanese intellectual history.

1

Kierkegaard's name was already known in Japan by the late 1880's. This was mainly through three routes: first, the introduction of the Danish philosopher, Harald Høffding; second, the introduction of Georg Brandes' aesthetic studies of Ibsen; third, the religious thought of Uchimura Kanzo. First, let's trace the route of Høffding.

¹ My reasons for not discussing why are not unrelated to Uchimura's reasons for not discussing why he became a Christian. Cf. *The Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo*, with notes and comments by Taijiro Yamamoto, Yoichi Muto, vol. 1, p. 15, Tokyo Kyobunkan 1971.

In 1889, Inoue Tetsujiro, Japan's very first philosophy professor, posted at Tokyo Imperial University, was invited to give a lecture at the International Eastern Conference in Sweden. On his way to Sweden, Inoue visited Høffding at his home in Copenhagen. By this time, Høffding's reputation as an astute philosopher was already established: the German translation of his *Psychology* was published in 1887, and the translation of his *Ethics* was published the following year. It was this reputation which brought Inoue to visit Høffding.

By the 1880's, as a result of the effects of the so-called Meirokusha circle of thinkers, the introduction of Occidental philosophy had finally been assimilated to Japanese thought and Japanese philosophers started to develop their own style of philosophizing. Logic, psychology and ethics were especially popular, and interest in the history of philosophy also arose. Høffding's works, in particular, gained wide readership. This naturally awoke an interest in Danish philosophy. Indeed, on the basis of Høffding's article "Die Philosophie in Dänemark im 19. Jahrhundert," published in 1889, KOBAYASHI Ichiro wrote in 1911 the article "Denmaku no Kinseitetsugaku (Modern Philosophy of Denmark)."

Another philosopher, through whom Høffding's works came to be known in Japan was Ohnishi Hajime (1864-1900), the founder of Kyoto Imperial University's Philosophy Department. While still a graduate student studying under Inoue at Tokyo Imperial University, Ohnishi lectured on ethics, psychology and logic at Tokyo Senmon Gakko (later to become Waseda University). For his classes, he used Høffding's psychology text, and in 1891, Ohnishi finalized Høffding's introduction to Japanese thinkers with his translation of Knud Ibsen's article "Die dänische Philosophie des letzten Jahrzehnts" (*Philosophische Monatshefte*, Bd. XXVII, 1891.) into Japanese for Tetsugakukaizasshi (*the Journal of the Philosophical Society*), Vol.5, Nos. 54, 55.

Roughly five years later, the German translation of Kierkegaard's *Øjeblik* and Høffding's *Soren Kierkegaard som Filosof* were published 1896, with reviews of these books appearing in several philosophical journals. It's clearly possible that Japanese philosophers learned of Kierkegaard's name through such German philosophical journals; as some Japanese philosophers themselves had contributed articles to these journals, clearly they would have been acquainted with their contents. In fact, it was in this period that Ohnishi took notes of Høffding's book *Soren Kierkegaard als Philosoph*². What's more, in 1895 the first five chapters of Høffding's *Psychology* were translated into Japanese by Ishida Shintaro(1870-1927), and a revised edition, which

² cf. *Meiji Bunkashi*, Vol. 4 and Kohsaka Masaaki, Kohsaka Masaaki Chosakushu (*Kosaka Masaaki's Writings*), Vol.

included Chapter 6, was published in 1897. This was the first time that Kierkegaard's name appeared in print in Japan, albeit in a translation into Japanese of a foreign work.

2

The other route through which Kierkegaard's thought came to Japan was Brandes' introduction of Ibsen. Ibsen's name, of course, was already known to the Japanese in the late 1880's. One of the leaders of the literary movements in the Meiji Era, Tsubouchi Shoyo (1859-1935), who employed Ohnishi at Tokyo Senmon Gakko, introduced Ibsen twice in 1892 in the *Waseda Bungaku* (The *Waseda Literary Magazine*)(No. 27, 28)³. From Brandes' works, Tsubouchi concluded that Ibsen was an indignant pessimist and that individualism was the best protection against diseases of society. In 1893 *An Enemy of the People* (Japanese title is *Shakai no Teki*(=*An Enemy of Society*)) and *A Doll's House* (*Ningyo no Ie*) were translated by Takayasu Gekko, and in 1894 in the *Waseda Bungaku* No. 71 a disciple of Ohnishi, Kaneko Chikusui, gave a detailed introduction to Ibsen in his article "Shinbungo (New Great Man of Literature)". In the last part of this article Kaneko wrote that Ibsen denounced Christianity as lifeless, criticized traditional Christianity and rejected old corrupt thought.

From the middle of the 1890's Ibsen became quite a literary fashion. This trend became clearer around 1900, as it kept abreast of the general interests in such notions as self and individualism, against the background of an emerging resulting, in part, from the Japanese victory of the Sino-Japanese War.

At about this time Takayama Chogyu, famous as an ultranationalist, wrote an article entitled "Bunmeihyoka toshitenō Bungakusha (The Writer as Critic of Civilization)" in the *Taiyo* (the *Sun*)⁴, the source of which was *Die geistigen und sozialen Stromungen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin Georg Bondi 1899) by Theobald Ziegler⁵. In this article Takayama regarded Ibsen (as well as Nietzsche) as a propagator of individualism. He characterized Ibsen's poems as "poems of will", "idealistic poems", and construed Ibsen's hero, Brand, as an incarnation of the individualistic will. He claimed that should Japanese novelists ever read Brand and understand him, they would not be able to write in the same way as before.

7, p. 419, Risosha 1969.

³ cf. on the reception of Ibsen in Japan, especially Matsumoto Nobuko, *Meiji Engekiron Shi (The History of Theory of Drama in Meiji Era)*, pp. 293, Engekishuppansha 1980.

⁴ Vol. 7, No. 1, January 1901.

⁵ cf. Sugita Hiroko, "Takayama Chogyu to Niche (Takayama Chogyu and Nietzsche)", *Hikaku Bungaku Kenkyu*, No. 11, 1966.

Takayama showed great sympathy for Brand's watchword: 'All or Nothing', and this watchword had great influence on many Japanese intellectuals of the time. Some months later, Takayama published a paper entitled "Biteki Seikatsu wo Ronzu (Treating Aesthetic Life)", in which he defined the aesthetic life as one satisfying instinct⁶. Given his popularity as an ultranationalist and outspoken critic of the day, the radical individualism he espoused in this article drew a lot of public attention. Takayama's theory of aesthetic life was thought to be based on Nietzsche's ideas. As a result, Nietzsche's thought itself rapidly drew public notice.

Against this growing popularization of Nietzsche, Tsubouchi Shoyo criticized both Takayama and Nietzsche. Tsubouchi was conscious of the necessity of introducing a correct Ibsen to Japanese readers, so dedicated the second volume of his series of *Waseda Bungaku* (not the *Waseda Literary Magazine*) to *Ibsen Saku Shakaijeki* (*Ibsen's Social Drama*), as translated by Takayasu Gekko (October 1901). Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and *A Doll's House* were included in this translation, as were a general introduction to Scandinavian literature and translation of selected passages from *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. Tsubouchi wanted to introduce Ibsen to Japanese readers without tying Ibsen's works to Nietzsche's thought. Be that as it may, in general, Ibsen, as well as his 'Brand', was considered a Nietzschean individualist.

In response to this Takayama-Tsubouchi debate over the aesthetic life, the first Japanese professor of aesthetics, Ohtsuka Yasuji, in 1902 published an article entitled "Romanchikku wo Ronjite Wagakuni Bungei no Genkyo ni Oyobu (A Look at Our Current Literature through the Romantic Movement)."⁷ In this article he criticized followers of "the new romanticism," as the trend of the 1900s in Japan was called. In particular, Ohtsuka attacked those who recommended Nietzscheism and advocated a new romanticism. According to Ohtsuka, these followers neglected to develop the proper literary spirit of romanticism. He summarized the origin, nature and meaning of romanticism in the history of literature, and in the course of this summary made reference to Kierkegaard.

Ohtsuka summarized the new Romanticism as follows:

...a romantic trend has been popular for ten or fifteen years. The principle of almighty science, (...) which flourished in the early 19th century has gradually been declining. The study of psychology has become much more popular than physics, and philosophy

⁶ The *Taiyo*, Vol. 7, No. 9, August 1901.

which was previously out of fashion, has now come to raise its head. Moreover, the spirit of reaction is reflected even in the sphere of religion; in particular, in the Catholic reaction against Protestantism, and in the increasing number of Catholics themselves. In addition to these trends in the field of thought concerning world and life, first Schopenhauer's pessimism, Nietzsche's extreme individualism, third the thought of Kierkegaard, who believed in a principle similar to Nietzsche's, not to mention the thought of Tolstoy, a great man in Russia, who eagerly advocated philanthropism in contrast to Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, these thoughts or principles have become increasingly popular and enthusiastically accepted by some people, and have become central to and have developed new trends in literature."(p.13)

So far as I am able to establish, this is the first time ever that a Japanese thinker, in the context of his own work, made reference to Kierkegaard.

In contrast to the 1890's, the character of this new romanticism was divisive and destructive both socio-politically and philosophically; and the mainstream of intellectual thought at this time was individualism, with Kierkegaard coming to be considered as one of its main proponents.

What's more, in 1905, a Kierkegaard entry appeared in *Tetsugaku Jiten (Dictionary of Philosophy)*(Hobunkan, January) edited by Tomonaga Sanjuro (1871-1951), philosophy professor at Kyoto Imperial University. This entry was a translation by Tomonaga from *The Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* <vol. 1, 1901> edited by J. M. Baldwin. Moreover, Tomonaga claimed that the entries he wrote for ethics and psychology were based on Høffding's works, the first German edition of whose *Søren Kierkegaard als Philosoph*, of which there were only few copies available, was found in Tomonaga's personal library.

3

If we refer to the period discussed above as the dawn of Kierkegaard's reception in Japan, then, properly speaking, the following period should be called its introduction.

We can gather a clear picture of this period with quotes from Watsuji Tetsuro (1889-1960), Japan's sole systematic ethical philosopher and author of the first exhaustive text on Kierkegaard:

⁷ The *Taiyo*, Vol. 8, No. 4, April 1902.

It was as a model of Ibsen's Brand that I first heard Kierkegaard's name. When Ibsen's works appeared in our country, I was a high school student. I found Brandes' Ibsen and Bjørnson in English and read the part on Ibsen. It was after the Russo-Japanese War, from 1906 to 1909. There was a fairly discernible religious strain among the youth, so I was keenly conscious of and intensely fascinated with Kierkegaard's name as the model of Brand's 'Either-or' dilemma.⁸

---, When I read Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, as mentioned above, the world of Christianity was more discernible than now, and because of this the thought of the Anti-Christ or of an attack upon Christendom gave us young people a considerable shock.⁹

Ibsen died on the 23rd of May, 1906, and when news of his death reached Japan, there was an explosion in Ibsen's popularity. In July of the same year, the literary world witnessed the publication of various articles on the works of Ibsen, and in these articles we find references to Kierkegaard's thought.

Among these articles, only one article by Ueda Bin entitled "Ibsen (Ibsen)" has been taken notice of. This appeared the 1st of July¹⁰. However, my own research has discovered two previously unknown references to Kierkegaard's thought. One reference occurs in the article entitled "Henrikku Ibsen (Henrik Ibsen)" by Iwaya Sazanami¹¹. Another reference occurs in the article entitled "Ibsen towa Ikanaru Hito zo—19 Seiki no Bunmei to Ibsen (Who is Ibsen?—Ibsen and Civilization in 19th Century)" by Saito Shinsaku¹². Both articles were published the 1st of July, 1906, the year of Ibsen's death. In short, it would not be inaccurate to claim that Ibsen's work was of considerable importance in introducing Kierkegaard to Japanese thinkers.

Now, one of the main sources at this time of Ibsen's works was the English translation of Georg Brandes' anthology: *Henrik Ibsen. Bjørnsterne Bjørnson. Critical Studies*¹³. In his article "First Impression of Ibsen," (1867) Brandes advanced the view that Kierkegaard was the model for Ibsen's Brand. Accordingly, the two articles mentioned above argued that Kierkegaard's thought was the background of Ibsen's work, and that Kierkegaard himself was a champion of individualism. Finally, in the

⁸ *The Complete Works of Watsuji Tetsuro*, Vol. 1, p. 395, Iwanami Shoten 1961.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 404.

¹⁰ *The Waseda Bungaku*, the third series, No. 7, 1906.

¹¹ *The Shin Shosetsu (The New Novel)*, vol. 11, no. 7, 1906.

¹² *The Toa no Hikari (The Light of Eastern Asia)* vol. 1, no. 3, 1906.

¹³ trans. by Jessie Muir, intro. by William Archer. Heinemann, 1899.

September issue of the *Waseda Bungaku*¹⁴ Kierkegaard's name appeared for the first time in the title itself of a published article.

The article, entitled "Kiyakegorudo no Jinseikan (Kierkegaard's View of Life)," written by Kaneko Chikusui afforded a detailed treatment of Kierkegaard's thought. It closes with the following passage:

There is much that could be criticized here: not a few weak points are contained in epistemological relativism or subjectivism, or ethical individualism or subjectivism. However, his thought has some merit in advocating a kind of pessimistic religion against modern civilization.¹⁴

Following this article, in the November issue of the *Waseda Bungaku*¹⁵ Kaneko published an article entitled "Shukyoteki Shinri (Religious Truth)" in which he criticized Høffding and W. James for apparently following Kierkegaard in founding the certainty of religious truth on the actual experiences of the subject.

In short, it must be said that the proposals of Høffding and James have not yet freed themselves from the religious subjectivism of Feuerbach and Kierkegaard: the proposals are a kind of version of pure subjectivism.¹⁵

Of course, Kaneko's view did not go unnoticed: his first article was reviewed in a Christian newspaper of the times, *Hukuin Shinpo* (the *Evangelist*)¹⁶: and his November article was criticized by the Japanese philosopher Tsunajima¹⁷, a disciple of Ohnishi.

In November 1906, Japan's most famous philosopher, Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), referred to Kierkegaard along with Ibsen in a remarkable, short essay entitled "Jikaku Shugi (The Principle of Self-awareness)."¹⁸ And in this essay, Nishida argued that the Schopenhauerian thought prevalent in Europe at that time reflected, his, Nishida's, principle concerning self-awareness. Nishida thought that the truth of this principle of self-awareness went deeper than epistemology and regarded this truth as the kind for which Buddha and Socrates searched. He said that "Kierkegaard in the vanguard of this principle regards only knowledge about personal existence as true." In addition, Nishida regarded Ibsen's Brand as a proper example of one who followed this principle. He

¹⁴ The *Waseda Bungaku*, the third series, No. 9, 1906.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, No. 11, 1906.

¹⁶ No. 585, September 1906.

¹⁷ Tsunajima Ryosen, "Kaneko Chikusui Kun no Shukyoteki Shinri wo Yomu (I read Kaneko Chikusui's Religious Truth)", The *Waseda Bungaku*, the third series, No. 12, 1906. This debate is famous as 'the debate over religious truth.'

¹⁸ in *Hokusinkai Zasshi* (*Hokushinkai Magazine*), No. 45, 1906.

commented that if there were no clear ideal to take the place of old morals, pessimism would result. Nishida's principle of self-awareness, however, was neither mere egoism nor sentimentalism nor pessimism, but was based on pure and direct religious experience. For Nishida the principle of self-awareness was always a pivotal point and was directly connected with his maiden work *An Inquiry into the Good* in 1911.

Despite Nishida's reference to Kierkegaard, however, it seemed at this time that Nishida was not genuinely interested in Kierkegaard's thought.

4

The third route by which Kierkegaard was introduced to Japan was the religious thought of Uchimura Kanzo (1861-1930), the founder of the non-church (Mukyokai) movement¹⁹ in Japan. Uchimura's article, entitled "Dai Yashin (The Great Ambition),"²⁰ appeared one month before Ueda's article on Ibsen.

One of the most famous passages of Uchimura's article concerns Kierkegaard's critique of so-called followers of the Christian faith:

The Danish thinker Kierkegaard says: 'Christianity is the most difficult religion to understand. I have never seen a true and genuine Christian in this world. But the difficulty in understanding Christianity does not mean that Christianity is mistaken. The fact that there are no true Christians should not prevent us from believing in Christianity. Though there is no Christian anywhere in the world, I merely want to attain certainty in the Christian belief.' This is indeed true. I also, a native of the Far Eastern country of Japan, have never seen a believer worthy of the name. Following Kierkegaard, I also fervently desire to be even one such true Christian in Japan.

In short, according to Uchimura, the disparity Kierkegaard noted between, on the one hand, the doctrine of Christianity and, on the other, the so-called believers of Christianity, was a disparity that existed also in Japan.

Now, I would like to dwell for a while on the character of Uchimura. It should become obvious from this that Uchimura's thought and life bear a strikingly resemblance to the thought and life of Kierkegaard himself.

Uchimura saw Kierkegaard only as an opponent of the church and regarded him as

¹⁹ The movement which Uchimura began in order to criticize the established church and to found 'ecclesia' in the biblical sense appropriate to Japan.

the forerunner of his own non-church movement. Although Uchimura referred to Kierkegaard's name more than ten times, there is no actual historical evidence that he ever really studied Kierkegaard's texts. For example, in the above quote it is not yet known from which of Kierkegaard's texts Uchimura took the quote. My own suspicion is that Uchimura learned Kierkegaard from his German friend, the missionary Wilhelm Gundert. The problem is still being researched. But throughout his life, he never lost interest in Kierkegaard, and it could be said that he reduplicated Kierkegaard's principle.²¹

In 1884, Uchimura went to America in search of the solution to his religious problem. He entered Amherst College and was 'converted' by President Julius Hawley Seelye (1824-1895) in 1886. As Uchimura himself tells us: 'I believe I was really converted, that is turned back, there [Amherst], some ten years after I was baptized in my homeland. The Lord revealed Himself to me there, especially through that one man [Seelye].'²² After graduating, he entered Hartford Seminary in 1887, but only after four months he left because of the personal habits of his classmates and the general attitudes expressed towards theological study: in Uchimura's own words:

Spiritless Theology is the driest and most worthless of all studies. To see students laughing and jesting while discussing serious subjects is almost shocking. No wonder they cannot get at the bottom of the Truth. It requires the utmost zeal and earnestness to draw life from the Rock of Ages.²³

And the fear that I had entertained about the bestowal of this new privilege upon me grew more as I observed its benefits talked about within the walls of my seminary. "One thousand dollars with parsonage," "twenty dollars" sermon upon Chicago anarchy," and similar combinations of such words and phrases sounded very discordant to my ears. That sermons have market-values, as pork and tomatoes and pumpkins have, is not an Oriental idea at least. . . With us, religion, is not usually

²⁰ in *Seisho no Kenkyu* (The Biblical Study), No. 76.

²¹ He wanted to let W. Gundert introduce Kierkegaard's life and thought (but it was not actualized) (cf. "Mukyokai Shugi no Zenshin (The Progress of the Principle of Non-church)", in *Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 85, 1907) and made one of his disciples, Ishikawa Tetsuo, to translate selected passages of Kierkegaard's *Attack upon Christendom* (The Moment) into Japanese ("Kirisutokyou to Kyokai (Christianity and Church)", translated by Ishikawa Tetsuo, in *Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 164-70, 1914) and his Two Ethical-Religious Essays ("Tensai to Kurisuchan (Genius and Christian)", translated by Ishikawa Tetsuo, in *Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 174, 1915). Uchimura called Kierkegaard as his forerunner (*Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 85, 1907), his kindred spirit (*Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 96, 1908), a founder (*Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 113, 1909), an advocate (*Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 125, 1910) and a prophet (*Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 164, 1914) of non-church movement.

²² *The Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo*, with notes and comments by Taijiro Yamamoto, Yoichi Muto, vol. 1, p. 166, Tokyo Kyobunkan 1971.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 175, Tokyo Kyobunkan 1971.

convertible into cash. Indeed, more religion, less cash.²⁴

Two years after he returned to Japan, in 1890, the year of the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education, Uchimura got a job at Dai Ichi Koto Chugaku Ko (later Dai Ichi High School) but was fired the following year because of his demonstrative disrespect for the Emperor: a lese majestic. This loss caused him tremendous financial and spiritual hardship. Shortly after this his wife died. Under these poignant conditions, in 1893, he completed, in English, his book *How I became a Christian*.

In 1895, this book was published in America under the title *The Diary of A Japanese Convert*, but it was not popular. In 1904, It was issued in Germany from the publishing house, which Gundert's father managed, and was widely acclaimed. Indeed, the royalties from the book were sufficient to relieve Uchimura from his poverty. In the following year, 1905, the book was published in Finland and Sweden, and finally in 1906, it was published in Denmark.

The popularity of Uchimura's book seemed closely connected to the influence of Kierkegaard at that time²⁵. Maria Wolff, the Danish translator of the German edition, wrote in her preface, "It has been said that his [Uchimura's] thought is very similar to Søren Kierkegaard's whose books he is finally about to read. —Therefore, it would be a great pleasure for him that his little book will be read in Thorvaldsen's, H. C. Andersen's and Henrik Ibsen's language."²⁶

In 1912, W. Rudin, author of the book *Søren Kierkegaards person och forfatterskap*, compared Uchimura to Kierkegaard in a letter to Uchimura²⁷, and Carl Skovgaard=Petersen, a minister visiting Japan at the time, having met Uchimura described him as a Japanese Kierkegaard²⁸, and some German publisher wrote to

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 180.[The issue of money and its relation to the church was also one of the main points on which Kierkegaard criticized the church.]

²⁵ As mentioned above, the main spiritual trend of the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century was pessimistic and individualistic. Ibsen gained much popularity and Kierkegaard was regarded the model of Ibsen's Brand. Nietzsche was also popular. G. Brandes contributed a lot this popularity. Besides Brandes and Hoffding, Rudolf Kassner wrote an article about Kierkegaard ("Søren Kierkegaard/ Aphorismen von Rudolf Kassner, in *Neue Rundschau*, 1906). This spiritual situation seems to have corresponded to the reception of Uchimura's book in Protestant countries.

²⁶ Uchimura Kanzo, *HVORLEDES JEG BLEV EN KRISTEN*, autoriseret oversættelse ved M. Wolff, Oversætterens Forord, Koebenhavn 1906.

²⁷ cf. Japanese translator's comments of Uchimura's *How I became a Christian*. Uchimura Kanzo, *Yo wa Ikanishite Kirisuto Shinto to Narishika*, translated and with comments by Suzuki Toshiro, pp.282-3, Iwanami Shoten 1967. According to the comments, Rudin wrote to Uchimura that he had become very popular through his book. Cf. these Japanese comments about the situation of translations of this book in Scandinavian countries. And Uchimura himself wrote in "The Late Professor Eucken", "When his book "*How I became a Christian*" appeared in German translation eighteen years ago, the greatest Jena professor was among the first who read it with appreciation." (Uchimura Kanzo, *Uchimura Kanzo Zenshu (The Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo)*, Vol. 30, p. 79, Iwanami Shoten 1982.

²⁸ C. Skovgaard=Petersen, *Aus Japan, wie es heute ist, Persönliche Eindrücke von C. Skovgaard=Petersen*, übersetzt von H. Gottsched, S. 121, Basel 1912. cf. Japanese translation by Nakazawa Gohju, "Denmaku no Hito no Mita

Uchimura that Kierkegaard's Christianity was the same as that of Uchimura²⁹.

The title of Uchimura's *How I became a Christian* often reminded its readers of Kierkegaard; indeed, Kierkegaard's religious task was 'How to become a Christian.' The fact that there was someone who pursued this task in a small distant country moved people very much.

Uchimura himself explained not why he became, but how he became a Christian. His explanation suggests a view concerning the content of the Christian doctrine, and this view is strikingly similar to Kierkegaard's. It might be best to quote.

What is Christianity? Certainly it is not the Bible itself, though much of it, and perhaps the essence of it, is contained in it. ---

We say Christianity is Truth. But that is defining an undefinable by another undefinable. --- The true knowledge of Life comes only by living it. --- We come to know it only by keeping it.

--- The very fact that it grows more to me the more I confirm myself to its teachings, shows its close relationship with the Infinite Truth itself.³⁰

In this context, it is significant that Uchimura, like Kierkegaard, published his book under the pseudonym, Jonathan X. Uchimura wrote to the publisher in America, the following: "I like to send it out anonymously, without any introduction by a favored author or dedication to any of my friends, but solely upon its own merits." (Jan. 3. 1894)³¹

We can see in this book the struggle of the soul of a man from a small heathen country; he met Christianity and tried to appropriate it with the very earnestness of a true Kierkegaardian.³²

Uchimura's Christian spirit was grafted on to a person of Samurai Character: Uchimura himself was of samurai descent, his father (later his father become a Christian through him) being samurai. In general, his samurai character was very pietistic. Indeed, the standard Japanese translation of the word 'piety' ('keiken') was introduced by Uchimura himself. Parenthetically, Seelye, through whom Uchimura experienced

Shuhitsu Kanzo Uchimura," in the *Seisho no Kotoba*, No. 245, May 1956.

²⁹ *Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 314, 1926. cf. Japanese translator's comments of Uchimura's *How I became a Christian*. p. 283.

³⁰ *The Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo*, with notes and comments by Taijiro Yamamoto, Yoichi Muto, vol. 1, pp. 188-89.

³¹ Uchimura Kanzo, *Uchimura Kanzo Zenshu (The Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo)*, Vol. 36, p. 390, Iwanami Shoten 1983. Cf. Japanese translator's comments of Uchimura's *How I became a Christian*, p. 275.

³² I highly recommend this book for anyone with interest in Japan or a serious interest in the question of what it means to be a Christian.

“conversion,” studied at Halle University, which was founded by Phillip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Franke (1663-1723), the founders of Europe’s pietistic movement. What’s more, Uchimura’s conversion found a natural context in New England of the time: Uchimura often memorized Emerson’s poems and often quoted the works of Carlyle as personal mottoes. for example:

ENCOURAGEMENT: Veracity, true simplicity of heart, how valuable are these always! He that speaks what is really in him, will find men to listen, though under never such impediments.” (in the front cover of *How I Became A Christian*)

Uchimura wanted to appropriate Christianity in ways fitting the Japanese; as he tells us:

The best of Christian converts has never given up the essence of Buddhism or Confucianism. We welcome Christianity, because it helps us to become more like our own ideals. --- “I came to fulfill, and not to destroy,” said the Founder of Christianity.”³³

Uchimura’s aspiration to appropriate Christianity for the Japanese, caused him to radically criticize the established Christianity of Japan and America, leading him to a Christianity more primitive than that proposed by Luther. As he himself wrote:

In forming any right estimate of Christendom, it is essential for us first of all to make a rigid distinction between Christianity, pure and simple, and Christianity garnished and dogmatized by its professors.³⁴

Uchimura was not only interested in Kierkegaard, but also in the small country Denmark and made Denmark an example to Japan. After the Russo-Japanese War, Japan seemed to him to be a country ‘which gained victory, but at the expense of its own property.’ This arouse his own patriotic sentiments and compelled him to write in 1911 the comically titled article, “Denmarukukoku no Hanashi—sinko to jumoku towo motte Kuni wo Sukui shi Hanashi (A Story of Denmark or A Story of How Faith and Forestry Saved a Country).” This article presents a theory of the ideal state for a small country and argues that Japan must develop itself accordingly rather than expanding abroad.

³³ *The Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo*, with notes and comments by Taijiro Yamamoto, Yoichi Muto, vol. 1, pp. 190.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 187.

Following Uchimura's references to Kierkegaard, several articles were written about Kierkegaard, but all of them were based on the work of either Høffding or Brandes. In accordance with the prevailing intellectual atmosphere of the time, Kierkegaard was regarded as an extreme individualist. For example, in 1910 BESSHO Umenosuke (1871-1945), a famous translator of hymns, relying on Martensen's *Christian Ethics* (English translation of vol.1 in 1891), wrote "Kutsu no Hukuin, Vine to Kiyarukegorudo (The Gospel of Suffering · Vigny and Kierkegaard)" in Uchimura's journal *Seisho no Kenkyu* (the *Biblical Study*). Though BESSHO read Kierkegaard through Martensen's book, BESSHO showed great sympathy for Kierkegaard's thinking. He summarized Kierkegaard's sincere attitude as follows: "Kierkegaard was not, as Høffding said, a person who solved problems and helped others, and he did not empirically expand the world of thought; rather, Kierkegaard sincerely examined the essence of matters and awakened the self-deceived minds of the world."³⁵

The late stages of the Meiji Era (around 1910) saw the profusion of Neo-Kantians in the sphere of philosophy; both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard were virtually forgotten. It was at this time that Nishida published his book *An Inquiry into the Good*. In this book, he argued against the subject-object dualism which was widely accepted in Western philosophy; and this argument he based on his notion of pure experience. The book was widely read and proved extremely influential. However, at no place in the book was Kierkegaard's name mentioned.

As for philosophers whose starting point is Kierkegaard's thought, we had to await the publication in 1915 of Watsuji's book *Søren Kierkegaard*, and while intellectuals of the Meiji Era often referred to Kierkegaard's name, their understanding, naturally had its limits: pivoting as it did primarily on the view of Kierkegaard as an individualist. Be that as it may, the personal commitment to Kierkegaard's view of life expressed by such thinkers as Uchimura certainly deserves admiration.

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³⁵ *Seisho no Kenkyu*, No. 125, 1910.