RIIS Research Institute for Islands and Sustainability
University of the Ryukyus

*Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*
5 (March 2024): 1-16

*Paper*

# The Mermaid, the Wheat Ear & Idealised Otherness: The Transformation of an Aquapelagic Symbol into a Japanese Bakery Logo

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**Abstract:** Over the last century, the mermaid—a figure that represents aspects of what has been termed the 'aquapelagic imaginary' of maritime and waterside societies—has become increasingly widespread in international popular culture. Along with its appearance in cinema and television, it has been used to promote various products, including, most notably, Starbucks coffee. This has also been the case in Japan, where Hans Christian Andersen's short story "The Little Mermaid" is well known and where the mermaid has been significantly localised through being featured in manga and anime productions. This article profiles one of the most persistent uses of the mermaid in Japanese popular culture to date: the logo used to symbolise and promote the Little Mermaid bakery chain. The logo is discussed with reference to the Danish association of the chain's bakery products and its use is contrasted to aspects of the Starbucks coffeehouse symbol. The particular socio-cultural and industrial nexus that the logo emerged from is explored through discussion of the history of the Andersen group of companies. This aspect, in turn, has deeper roots in the particular attention paid to Denmark as a model for Japanese modernisation in two periods (the 1910s-20s and the late 1940s-50s), and this aspect serves to contextualise the nature and life of the logo. The recontextualisation of the Little Mermaid in Japan is also notable for minimising its aquapelagic aspect and, instead, packaging it in very precise manners for domestic consumption. In this context, the mermaid is effectively the "tip of the iceberg" of a greater, more far-reaching, imaginative, and transformative engagement with a European exotic "other." The article contributes to an expansion of Island Studies by documenting the manner in which the symbol of one archipelagic/aquapelagic culture is transformed into a more *terrestrialised* commercial brand in a different island nation.

**Keywords:** Little Mermaid bakery, Andersen group, Japan, Denmark, the aquapelagic imaginary

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.24564/0002020195

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## Introduction

Over the last decade, the term *aquapelago* has gained currency to refer to the integrated marine and terrestrial spaces created by human livelihood activities around islands and coastal locales. In recent years, the concept has also been extended to riverine and lacustrine-lagoon contexts in recognition of the relationship between inland waterways and the larger bodies of water they feed into and the potential for continuities of perception and imagination between them.[1] Reflecting on the cultural implications of aquapelagic societies, the first named author of this article has also posited the existence of an "aquapelagic imaginary" that is constituted by reflections on and imaginations of human presence in and experience of aquapelagic spaces (Hayward 2017, 6-7). Recent theme issues of the journal *Shima* (12.2 and 15.2) have explored this with regard to the mermaid as a paradigmatic figure of the aquapelagic imaginary inscribed within social consciousness, memory, and culture and have argued that these aspects underlie the mermaid's use in broader popular cultural contexts. One notable deployment has been in corporate branding. Reflecting on this, Graham (2021) has characterised that:

> The sultry siren that marks the millions of Starbucks coffee cups worldwide each day is just one example of a brand logo that employs imagery related to mermaids as part of its identity. Organisations invest significant resources, both time and money, in establishing and building their brand with the goals of creating a unique and recognisable identity for themselves, of connecting with and generating meaning for their target markets, and of distinguishing their brand from others in the marketplace. Thus, the choice to incorporate mermaids into their brand logos is a strategic decision. (2021, 125)

As she has also contended, "the symbolism of the mermaid in corporate branding is under-investigated"[2] (2021, 125). While her article substantially redresses this situation with regard to Western marketing, the use of such imagery in Asian locations is yet to be explored. One of the most obvious aspects of mermaid symbolism is its ability to signify different things in different contexts. Reflecting on the mermaid and her multiple incarnations, Hayward has attributed a "polyvalence" to the folkloric figure regarding "the potential for multiple associations and combinations of elements and/or motifs to accrue and/or be ascribed" to her (2017, 188). This article contributes to discussion of both aspects by considering the most notable use of a mermaid logo in Japanese culture to date: that associated with the Little Mermaid bakery chain. It also furthers the project of the *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*, identified by Ginoza (2020) in the inaugural issue in terms of expanding the scope and inclusiveness of Island Studies by attempting

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[1] See, for instance, *Shima 15*(1), a theme issue on Venice and its lagoon.
[2] Also see Mesker (2019) for the use of mer*men* in beer branding.

a multi-perspectival approach to a variety of socio-cultural-political phenomena. The following account illustrates the manner in which figures originated in specific island/aquapelagic contexts can be deployed in distinctly different social, cultural, and economic ones in ways that both draw on and transform the associations that previously adhered to them.

Japan is home to multiple *yōkai:* odd, somewhat grotesque, folkloric beasts that have increasingly been rendered *kawaii* (cute) in modern contexts. Many of these have appeared as *yuru-chara* (mascots, promoting a place or product) or as logos for various products and companies.[3] This corpus of folkloric characters has also been supplemented in recent years by imported creatures such as the Western mermaid (phonetically rendered as マーメイド, *māmeido*, in Japanese). One of the first, and certainly the most persistent, of these has appeared as the logo of the Little Mermaid (*Ritoru māmeido*) bakery chain. The chain's logo is also notable for its parallels to the Starbucks coffeehouse corporate logo. Originally designed in 1971, and serially modified until its current form was fixed in 2011 (Upsiide 2019), the current Starbucks logo comprises a medium close-up of the upper half of a mermaid's body, with her smiling face topped by a crown and with her arms holding the ends of a split mermaid tail by her sides. The logo has been present in Japan since 1996, when the first Starbucks outlet opened in Tokyo, and there are now over 1,600 outlets across the country (DMFA 2022). In contrast to Starbucks—whose name has no prior association with mermaids—the association is central to the Little Mermaid bakery brand, which is now retailed through 260 Japanese outlets (and also in franchises in Hong Kong and Taiwan).

As Fraser (2017) has detailed, the Western form of the mermaid has been present in Japanese culture since the beginning of the Meiji period (in the late 1800s), with the first Japanese language translation of Hans Christian Andersen's short story "Den lille havfrue" (1837) (better known in English language translation as "The Little Mermaid") appearing in 1904 (Fraser 2017, 31). Despite the diffusion of Andersen's mermaid narrative into Japanese culture and the related phenomenon of what Hayward (2018) has termed a creeping "mermaidisation" of representations of the Japanese traditional humanoid-fish known as the *ningyo*, mermaid symbolism was little developed in Japanese public signage and commodity logos prior to the late 20th Century. In 1972, this situation changed with the establishment of what began as a single bakery store in Hiroshima.

As a rice-based culture, bread (which is traditionally made from wheat or rye dough) is not native to Japan, and domestic production appears to have commenced during the Meiji period (1868-1912), initially in port cities where Western produce was introduced to a public that was, to some degree, curious about exotic cuisine. The Kimuraya Bakery in Tokyo has been generally identified as Japan's first commercial bakery (Ako 2019). The bakery was located in Ginza, an inner-city suburb devastated by fire in 1872 and then redeveloped as a deliberately "modern"—

[3] See Shaw (2019) for discussion of some of the issues involved in such appropriations.

i.e., Western-style—neighbourhood (Matsuyama 2022).[4] Initially, Western style breads proved unpopular with local customers, and it was not until sweet breads such as *anpan*[5] were introduced that the Kimuraya bakery became profitable (Ako 2019). Western style breads only began to gain traction after the US occupation in 1945, and it was not until the late 1960s that (non-sweet) bread achieved significant popularity with Japanese consumers. Even then, it was not retailed as a dietary staple (as in the West) but rather as a somewhat exotic, premium product that signified Western-ness (Sheng 2017). Like the Kimuraya Bakery, the Little Mermaid bakery chain also owes its origin to the disruption of a specific urban environment—and of Japanese life more generally—that occurred 73 years after the Ginza fire. The disruption in question resulted from the US nuclear attack on Hiroshima on October 15, 1945. The city was devastated, with over 100,000 people dying as a result of the explosion and subsequent radiation poisoning. As the city's infrastructure and economy were slowly restored, a number of new businesses were established, including a bakery founded by Takaki Shunsuke in 1948.

The following section of the article profiles the work of late nineteenth/early twentieth century pacifist advocate Kanzō Uchimura and the broader "Scandinavianist" movement in Japan and their influence on Takaki Shunsuke's corporate and social visions. Within this focus, it identifies the geopolitical context of Hans Christian Andersen's work and the manner in which his mermaid character can be regarded as indicative and reflective of the maritime/aquatic orientation of Denmark in the early-mid nineteenth century.

**A Story of Denmark**

Takaki's decision to open a bakery was informed by both commercial and philosophical-ideological impulses. As the website of the Andersen Group (the current corporate incarnation of his original business) summarises:

> An influential book served to link the Andersen Group with Denmark. The book, written by Kanzō Uchimura (1861-1930), a well-known pre-war pacifist, was entitled *A Story of Denmark*. . . . The story resonated with our founder and gave him the courage to live through the turmoil in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Consequently, he became deeply interested in the country of Denmark. (Andersen Group, n.d.)

Uchimura is a striking figure in Japanese modern history. His worldview developed during the Meiji era, a period of significant upheaval for a nation whose deliberate isolation had been breached by the arrival of a US fleet under Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 and 1854 and by

[4] The Ginza Kimuraya was preceded by two earlier bakeries that burned down, in 1870 and 1872, respectively.
[5] A soft milk bread with sweet bean paste filling.

subsequent interventions by Western powers. Among the many responses of the emperor was an emulation of the assertive nationalism and aggressive colonialism of powers such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Ravina 2017). This was manifest in two related doctrines adopted in the late 1800s, the *Nanshin-ron* (southern expansion), which saw Japan secure control over Taiwan, Pengu, and the Bonin/Ogasawara Islands and, later, parts of Micronesia; and the *Hokushin-ron* (northern expansion), primarily focussed on Jeju, the Korean peninsula, and Manchuria. The former doctrine led Japan to engage in a brief and successful war with China in 1895, and the latter led Japan to defeat Russia in a series of battles in 1904-5. The growing imperial ambition and militarism of Japan in this period was opposed by several factions, including members of the samurai class, who felt disenfranchised by the new regime (resulting in the abortive Satsuma rebellion in 1877). Opposition also arose amongst a cadre of intellectuals who embraced modernisation along Western lines but took their inspiration from their perception of Scandinavian socio-cultural values as represented in a limited number of texts translated into English, German, or Japanese (Steffensen 2019). For these intellectuals, Scandinavia appeared to offer a version of modernism based on elements of regional traditions without the underpinnings of aggressive nationalist expansionism.[6]

Uchimura was one of the key members of the "Scandinavianist" camp. He converted to Protestantism while studying at Sapporo Agricultural College in 1877 and became interested in Quaker pacificism during a visit to the United States in 1884-8. He developed his convictions through journalism upon his return to Japan, opposing Japanese militarism and expansionism and exposing industrial pollution. He also founded and led the *Mukyōkaishugi* movement, which espoused Christian values but rejected the formal trappings and institutions of organised religion (Howes 2006). Along with books about his faith, Uchimura also wrote a notable—if somewhat fanciful and factually inaccurate—paean to Danish enterprise, resilience, and self-sufficiency entitled *Denmaruku-koku no hanashi* ("Denmark: The Story of a Country"), which was presented in a public lecture in Tokyo in 1911 and then as a pamphlet in 1913. Uchimura had not visited Denmark, and the book was entirely based on secondary sources, including a meeting he had with the Danish pastor Carl Skovgaard-Petersen in Tokyo in 1911 (Steffensen 2019). The principal theme of Uchimura's tract was explained in its subtitle, "A Story of How Faith and Forestry Saved a Nation," and it served to promote Denmark as an exemplarily peaceful and faith-based society at a time of assertive nationalism and expansionist ambition in Japan.

Uchimura's vision of Denmark was principally an agrarian/terrestrial one, focusing on the inland resources and products of a country that comprised a peninsular area (Jutland) together with close to 1,500 islands and a capital—Copenhagen—that straddled the islands of Zealand and

[6] In fact, Denmark, was an active colonial power between the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, maintaining a North Atlantic empire that comprised Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroes. It also established small coastal colonies in various parts of Asia, the Caribbean, and South America, retaining several of these through until the early twentieth century. (See Ramerini (n.d.) for details of Danish colonial settlements.)

Amager. Located in the Baltic Sea a short distance from the south coast of Sweden across the Øresund Strait and close to the Kattegat (the Baltic's point of entry into the North Atlantic), Copenhagen developed as centre for fishing and maritime trade from the twelfth century onwards. In terms of recent developments in island studies theory, Denmark became an aquapelagic nation in which terrestrial and maritime spaces were integrated as a central aspect of national livelihood (Suwa 2012). Indeed, this aspect of the capital's and country's history is arguably as significant as the agrarian aspect emphasised by Uchimura, whose pamphlet is imbued by a nostalgia for a pre-industrial past that directly links Danish culture to its agrarian roots:

> The wealth of Denmark is mostly in the country itself, in its pastures and livestock, in its fir and white birch forests, and its coastal fisheries. . . . Denmark, which has revealed a new world to us through Thorvaldsen's sculptural technique[7] has given birth to Andersen's pioneering modern [fairy tales] and to Kierkegaard as an advocate of no-church Christianity to the world, is truly a peaceful little country built on the dairy industry. (Uchimura 1913, 4)

While it is unclear when Takaki first became attracted to Uchimura's works, the trauma of Japanese militarism and the devastation of Hiroshima and other areas of Japan during the war years led him to embrace Uchimura's vision of Danish society as an ideal to be aspired to. Bread and pastries, in this context, provided an entree into a more complex cultural realm. Takaki's company operated on a fairly low-key basis between 1948 and 1959 until he visited Denmark and the United States and became acquainted with *wienerbrød*, a sweet, multi-layered baked product often referred to in anglophone markets as "Danish pastries." Perceiving the product's potential appeal to Japanese consumers who had already embraced sweet baked products such as *anpan*, he returned to Japan and launched a range of pastries referred to as *Denisshu* (デニッシュ) in 1962.

Takaki was particularly inspired by Uchimura's championing of Hans Christian Andersen's writing, and the style of fairy stories associated with him, to the extent that when he established a self-service bread and pastry store in Hiroshima in 1967, he named it "Andersen," with that title later being adopted for the corporation that developed from his earlier ventures. As the Andersen Group identify on their corporate website: "The name of the store, 'Andersen,' conveys a desire to deliver joy and happiness through bread, just as the prolific Danish author Hans Christian Andersen awakened the dreams and hopes of people all over the world through his [fairy tales]" (Andersen Group n.d.).

The Hiroshima store was decorated in red and white colours (as per the Danish national flag) and—in recognition of Andersen's best-known short story—featured a modestly sized

[7] Bertel Thorvaldsen was a Danish neo-classical sculptor who trained and developed his skills while living in Italy and was lionised in Denmark upon his return in 1838.

mermaid logo, which also appeared on publicity materials.[8] The mermaid merits comment here regarding Uchimura's vision and the aquapelagic aspect of Denmark discussed above. Andersen was born in 1805 in Odense, a riverside town on the island of Fyn (Funen) that was transformed into a major port from 1796-1806 by a canal that linked its eponymous river to Odense Fjord and on to the wider Baltic.[9] Prior to the construction of bridges from Jutland to Odense (in 1935 and 1970) and from Odense to Zealand (in 1998), Odense and Zealand were entirely dependent on ferries for access to other Danish locations and, arguably, had more developed island identities than they have at present, when there is a direct road route between Jutland and Copenhagen that crosses the island.[10]

Easterlin (2001, 262) has contended that folkloric traditions remained strong in Fyn in the early 1800s, and Hauberg Mortensen (2008) has emphasised the significance of the Odense River for Andersen's imaginative development and his choice of themes:

> On its way to the sea, the Odense River still runs sluggishly through the city. Here in the cold water, Andersen's mother stood and washed clothes for the well-to-do. In 1855, he depicted this scene in "Hun duede ikke" ["She was good for nothing"], which tells of a mother with a heart of gold who dies from the cold and toil. Twenty years earlier, he placed the setting of another of his fairy tales, "Little Claus and Big Claus," by the same river. Little Claus—the sharp and cunning proletarian—settles accounts with the powers that be and finally fools Big Claus such that he is drowned, in having been tempted by the fine sea cattle at the bottom of the river. Sea cattle belong in later Nordic folklore to the merpeople and were therefore associated with mermen and sea giants, who were believed to be the cause of accidents at sea. (Habuberg Mortensen 208, 439)

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[8] The materials included posters advertising a Danish product fair at the store in 1968 that featured a smiling, young, Caucasian woman dressed in traditional-style Danish clothing and a mermaid logo in the bottom right of the poster.

[9] As Reigstad (2012, 137), has characterised, "Until 1700, the harbour was only accessible by small ships—bigger ships had to anchor at the mouth of the stream, sending in goods to the city on small carts and horse wagons. In 1803, the stream was converted into a canal, and from then on, trade in Odense increased and the harbour grew in size and activity level. Industrialization was a turning point for the use of the harbour. Big industry was located at the harbour front, with easy access to shipping and close connections to the railway that had been laid out between the harbour and the city."

[10] It is notable, though, that Visit Denmark's Fyn page is headlined "Live the island life," and its opening line states, "We Danes are not the only ones that love to escape it all on this pretty, green island." An insert box next to a map states, "The island of Fyn and the many laid-back islands of its archipelago are nestled right at the heart of Denmark. Head an hour west of Copenhagen over the dramatic Great Belt Bridge or east from the fjord-dotted coast of Jutland to start your island adventure!" The page also has a subsection headed "Fyn has its own archipelago!" This suggest that island and archipelagic identities are still available for the area despite the recent bridging that has linked it to adjacent areas.

In this context, Andersen's choice of a mermaid as the subject of his best-known short story and as a motif used in other works (see Hayward 2017, 24-25) was far from incidental. Indeed, as Gunnell has characterised, with regard to legends and landscape in Nordic countries:

> Folk legends have always lived in and grown out of living context. Before the advent of the modern media, at least, one might say that they "were" the landscape that people lived in, both geographically and mentally. As the French philosopher Michel de Certeau has underlined, the stories we tell "have the function of founding and articulating spaces" . . . in the minds of those who lived among them, "places" were all, essentially, composed of memories and stories [and] for the people of the past, the landscape that they inhabited was "clothed" in a vast repertoire of legends based on both experience and tradition. (2015, 307-8)

In this regard, Andersen's mermaid fiction and poetry can be interpreted as an expression of a regional aquapelagic imaginary through which social concepts of the world could be articulated.[11] Indeed, Odense, with its river heritage and its modern canalisation giving it access to wider archipelagic areas, is a paradigmatic example of the expanded concept of aquapelagic assemblages discussed in the introduction to this article. As will be apparent, the mermaid can be regarded as emblematic of such perceptions, and it is also unsurprising, within perceptions of Denmark as an aquapelagic state, that Edvard Eriksen's statue of the Little Mermaid, erected in Copenhagen Harbour on the eastern coast of Zealand in 1913, went on to become a symbol for the city, and of the nation more generally, around the time that Uchimura was actively promoting Danish values in Japan.

Before going on to discuss the mermaid logo itself, it is worth emphasising that there is no obvious association between baked food items and mermaids outside of the store's linkage of them in the context of Andersen's famous short story. Similarly, it merits comment that Andersen's original pathos-laden tale of thwarted love, physical pain, and the ultimate death of its protagonist is hardly a warm, "upbeat" narrative to associate with commercially retailed baked goods. It is fitting, in the latter regard, that the version of the mermaid presented in the store was a cheerful, welcoming figure. Her hair is presented in a 1960s' style beehive, and she is shown smiling. Her face and upper torso are presented directly to the viewer, and her hips and finned tail presented sideways on. Her upper arms extend downwards from her shoulders at 45$^{o}$ and then bend to rest on her midriff. Her fishy lower part is signalled by three horizontally scalloped rows across her mid-section (suggesting waves on water as much as fish-scales) (fig. 1).

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[11] Indeed, Olwig (2008, 12-13) has contended that Andersen had a sophisticated understanding of the relationships between Denmark's peninsular and island areas with regard to Jutland's position between two seas and with regard to the eastern islands.

FIGURE 1. Original Little Mermaid store mermaid logo (1972-8).

In 1978, as part of a renewal of store design, the mermaid logo was simplified. Her face was rendered more simply, with dots for eyes and a straight-line mouth. Her hair falls to her shoulders, and although there is an ambiguous area that seems to indicate the top portion of a human trunk beneath her neck, she is not shown as having arms (fig. 2). The re-design rendered her in a less obviously appealing manner than the first and emphasised the separation of her human face and hair from the central column of her trunk and horizontally distended tail. The reasons for such modifications are unclear, but the end result was to produce a more abstracted logo in which the scale/wave pattern of her fin (suggesting her maritime context) was more emphasised, despite a lack of reason for such an association in order to promote a bakery.

FIGURE 2. Revised logo c. 1978.

**The Modern Corporate Mermaid Motif**

The current logo (fig. 3) was adopted in 2012, on the fortieth anniversary of the original Little Mermaid store opening and at a time when the national chain was being expanded. The logo is simple and appealing. Smooth curves delineate the mermaid's form, and her face is presented directly to the viewer, turned at a 90° angle, and her lips curve up at the edges in a friendly smile. Her long hair frames her face and falls over the upper half of her torso. Similar to the original, her fishy lower part is signalled by three horizontally scalloped rows across her mid-section. Unlike a number of representations of mermaids in nineteenth and twentieth century Western culture, in

which they appear slender and/or pre-pubescent,[12] the mermaid's face and mid-trunk are more fully rounded and suggest her as well-fed and/or fertile.[13] One of the logo's most distinct elements is the wheat stalk that she holds in her single visible hand. While the stalk clearly symbolises the grain essential for traditional Western bread baking, it makes for a surprising accessory for a creature more commonly associated with the sea and seashore. In this regard, the logo design essentially sutures the mermaid and her aquapelagic symbolism to the evocation of agriculture represented by the wheat stalk. But the logo can also be read as performing another symbolic operation. The three thin spikes the emerge from the topmost wheat kernels (fig. 3) evoke the pointed tridents commonly brandished by Neptune, Poseidon, and tritons as symbols of their power (Dundes and Dundes 2002) and thereby suggest the mermaid's agency. But the agency she manifests is markedly less combative than that of her male mythological counterparts. The logo features in shop branding (fig. 4 and Woohoo 2020) and has also been reproduced on other products, such as soups packaged for and retailed through the bakery chain.

FIGURE 3. Little Mermaid bakery logo (2022).[14]

[12] Such as in British artists Charles Napier's *The Mermaid* (1888) or John Waterhouse's painting *The Mermaid* (1901) or a series of illustrations of Andersen's story published in Europe and North America by artists such as John Rackham.

[13] As the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (2010) has identified: "This symbolic association dates to the earliest days of Western civilization, when the cultivation of wheat and other grains facilitated the eventual development of cities and towns. Women were closely associated with wheat, due to a shared ability to perpetuate society: wheat nourished women, who reproduced and then used wheat (in the form of bread) to feed their families."

[14] The company's fiftieth anniversary logo isolates the mermaid's face—framed by its "number 7" hair contour shape from the original design—within the oval zero of the "50," illustrating the company's confidence in its symbol's brand recognition in modified format (specifically without a visible fishtail).

FIGURE 4. Little Mermaid bakery shop, Jimbocho (Tripadvisor, 2018).

The mermaid's appearance in the logo, and in her more general promotional function for the brand, has "not simply made a one-way trip from the West into Japan, its path has branched out, doubled back, twisted and turned as the story transmutes. In Japan, the confluence of Western, local and other traditions continues to provide fertile ground for popular culture in particular" (Fraser 2017, 184).

While unintended by Fraser, the reference to "fertile ground" serves to emphasise the manner in which the Little Mermaid bakery chain literally "grounded" their mermaid, distancing her from her aquapelagic association and the aquatic maritime folklore that influenced Andersen's original imagination of her. The "transmutation" involved her being sheared from the Danish aquapelagic context that was embellished in Andersen's original short story while maintaining an isolation from any Japanese aquapelagic association that—presumably—might detract from the imagined Danishness of the brand. The bakery chain's version of the Little Mermaid also differs from many of the more radical Japanese revisions of the tale detailed by Fraser (2017, 95-157), instead serving as a cheerful symbol of bountiful agricultural cultivation. It is notable, in this context, that the image of the maiden with a wheat sheaf is an enduring image of fertility (and of fertile femininity) in Western fine art[15] and popular culture.[16] While such imagery has also been

[15] Such as in Samuel White's *Seated Woman with Sheaf of Wheat* (c. 1865), Frederick Underhill's *Girl with Wheat-Sheaf* (c. 1880), or George van Houten's *Portrait of a Woman Holding a Sheaf of Wheat* (1953).
[16] See, for example, the number of such images identified by a Google Images search for "woman and wheat sheaf"—some of which, such as George Peter's mezzotint *Young Woman and Wheat heaf* (n.d.), are overtly sexualised.

deployed to support nationalist causes,[17] the company's logo operates on a more modest (and deliberately wholesome) level of signification that, nevertheless, is premised on the complex and contrasting imaginations of Danishness that inspired Andersen's work, on the one hand, and Takaki's engagement with Uchimura's vision on the other.

Along with these uses of a standard company logo, other designs for particular products have referred more directly to Andersen's original story and/or Disney's 1989 animated adaptation. Figure 5 for instance, shows a blonde-haired mermaid accompanied by a heart (symbolising love) staring at a prince who seems unaware of her presence. While the mermaid is suspended in a starry void, rather than the ocean, the implication seems to be that she wants to be "part of his world" (to paraphrase Ariel, the mermaid in Disney's feature film, in her signature song "Part of your world"). Together with a castle—which might be taken to represent Disney's fairy castle logo[18] as much as it does the prince's home—the image contains a humorous innovation in that the prince is represented as balancing a rolling pin in one hand (suggesting him as a baker and, by extension, perhaps alluding to Takaki's own love for the Little Mermaid story and all things Danish). A box of confections sold at stores in 2020 also alluded to Andersen's story and the Disney film. Sold as 'The Little Mermaid's first love,' the boxtop features a heart symbol that the mermaid is reaching for. Above this, and above the surface of the water, lies the castle in which her prince resides.[19]

FIGURE 5. Promotional image for mermaid themed confections (2020).[20]

The extent of the parent company's commitment to Andersen's heritage (above and beyond its use of the Little Mermaid logo for its retail outlets) is illustrated by its engagement with literary fiction. In 1983, on the thirty-fifth anniversary of Takaki's first bakery opening (and one year after

[17] For example, Ukraine's status as the (currently beleaguered) "wheatbowl" of Europe has been symbolised by Maxsim Prochain's sensuous images of a young female model in wheat fields in a series of prints, part of whose purchase fees go to NGOs supporting Ukrainian causes. See https://www.dreamstime.com/.

[18] See Gass (2022) for discussion.

[19] In actuality, the box's contents do not contain sweets that allude to her romance but rather to what might be considered as her first loves: the fish, starfish, and seaweed that inhabit the underwater world of her youth.

[20] In translation, the caption simply states, "Mermaid sweets, I am happy, someone is happy, everyone is happy."

the company adopted the name Andersen), it introduced an annual Andersen fairy tale award competition (*Andersen Merhen Taisho*[21]). According to promotional materials for the contest, it was introduced during a period when the national economy was booming but when the company's management perceived that excessive materialism was causing spiritual poverty. The competition involves writers submitting short stories on fairy tale themes, with five being chosen for annual publication together with illustrations by established artists. While modest in circulation (with about 2000 copies of each annual anthology being printed), the production of the books emphasises the company's continued commitment to Takaki's original vision and, beyond that, the idealised version of Denmark conceived by Uchimura in the 1910s, a very different era from that of the present.

## Conclusion

While the Little Mermaid bakery brand and its logo only represent a minor filament in the weave of Japanese popular culture, the longevity of the symbolism of the Little Mermaid (pre-dating the success of Disney's 1989 film) marks a notable "bedding-down" of the *māmeido* in Japanese vernacular imagery and, thereby, the broader Japanisation of the mermaid. As it tends to do, Japanese culture has incorporated, adopted, and re-signified a foreign element for domestic purposes; in this case one that projects an exotic Euro/Danishness and, simultaneously, is familiar for Japanese consumers. The bakery company's use of the image has also required a disassociation of Andersen's mermaid from her aquapelagic heritage in the peninsular and island nation of Denmark and her insertion into Japan in a manner that eschews the aquatic in favour of the rural/pastoral. This is further evidence of the mermaid's versatility as an international symbol that can sell comfort foods in one context and can evoke passion, mystery, and the lure of aquatic depths in others. The interconnection of this logo and the greater engagement of the Andersen group with Demark and Danish culture is also notable. It represents a distinct and idiosyncratic combination of commodity branding and affective engagement with an external cultural context that goes beyond superficial exoticism (and/or any Postmodern play of signs). Instead, it derives from the apparently sincere vision of the company's founder and has been perpetuated by those who have maintained and pursued his original vision in the Andersen Group. Despite the decline in belief in Denmark as an idealised model for contemporary Japan, the Little Mermaid continues to represent this vision and remains tightly woven into the Japanese cultural context that generated its use as a logo. For island studies, the case study presented above illustrates the complexity of island, archipelagic, and/or aquapelagic motifs both in themselves and as commodified entities that can be transplanted from one socio-political context to another. While seeming superficial, commercial brands and logos such as those of Little Mermaid Bakery chain can reflect complex

[21] The middle term is a variation of *märchen* (German for fairy tale) and is often used in Japanese to refer to Grimm's fairy tales and, thereby, fairy tales more generally.

ideological entanglements that reveal illuminating aspects of national cultures and cultural appropriations that mould these in new forms.

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Husna Zainal Abidin for her assistance with initial background research for this article; to the International Institute of Asian Studies in Leiden (Netherlands) for hosting the first named author in November-December 2022 and providing him with the time to complete the writing-up of research for this piece; and to Lucy Fraser for her comments on an initial draft of the article.

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