

Hut Existence or Urban Dwelling? Deprovincializing Heidegger from the East

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Abstract

Heidegger's "Creative Landscapes: Why do we remain in the provinces?" and "Dialogue on Language" reveal the importance of rootedness for his existentialism. The article engages with the provinciality of Heidegger's thought by juxtaposing his solitary "hut existence" to Buddhist compassion and the urban aesthetics of Kuki Shūzō. Turning to the East allows for a deprovincialization of Heideggerian themes. The rich philosophical legacy of reflecting on intercultural modernization and urbanization processes in East Asian philosophical traditions presents a genuine opportunity to rethink what it means to dwell today.

Keywords: Heidegger, Kuki, Buddhism, provincialism, urbanism

Obstoj kočé ali bivanje v mestu? Deprovincializacija Heideggerja z Vzhoda

Izvleček

Heideggerjeve »Ustvarjalne pokrajine: Zakaj ostajamo v provinci?« in »Dialog o jeziku« razkrivajo pomen ukoreninjenosti za njegov eksistencializem. Članek se ukvarja s provincialnostjo Heideggerjeve misli tako, da njegov samotarski »obstoj kočé« primerja z budističnim sočutjem in urbano estetiko Kukija Shūzōja. Obračanje na Vzhod omogoča deprovincializacijo Heideggerjevih tem. Bogata filozofska zapuščina razmišljanja o medkulturni modernizaciji in urbanizacijskih procesih v vzhodnoazijskih filozofskih tradicijah predstavlja pravo priložnost za ponoven razmislek o tem, kaj pomeni bivati danes.

Ključne besede: Heidegger, Kuki, budizem, provincializem, urbanizem

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*Small time hermits hide in the mountains,
real ones preserve their world downtown.*

Chinese Idiom

Introduction: Heidegger's Hut Existence

It is well known that Heidegger was drawn to East Asia, even if he ultimately dismissed the possibility of an intercultural dialogue with non-European philosophical traditions.¹ His close friend Heinrich Wiegand Petzet recounts Heidegger's visit to the collection of East Asian art in the apartment of the collector Preetorius in Munich: "Most of these pieces came from China and Japan; there were some riches from Korea as well. Heidegger was profoundly impressed by what he saw and asked many questions" (Petzet 1993, 170). In particular, Heidegger seems to have felt an aesthetic and existential resonance with the depiction of Laozi as a solitary recluse. He was particularly fond of Bertolt Brecht's poem "Legend of the origin of the book Tao Te Ching on Lao-Tzu's road into exile" (1938). Petzet recounts that when Heidegger was sitting in front of his hut he was "like one of those sages painted on one of the Chinese folding screens in the Museum of Ethnology in Bremen, which had inspired Heidegger's great admiration. Each of the sages is sitting in front of his hut, meditating and writing" (ibid., 216–17). In a study of the architecture of Heidegger's hut and its relationship to his thinking, Adam Sharr remarks "Many bourgeois Germans then and now have kept country retreats of some kind", while adding that

a canonical "tradition" of huts as situations for poetic or philosophical reflection can also be traced back over three thousand years to the Far East. In later life, Heidegger was aware of the work of 17th-century Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho who worked in a hut like the ones Petzet described. (Sharr 2006, 76)

Heidegger's hut has become a symbol for his philosophy. It stands for, depending on one's interpretive perspective, the profound rootedness of Heideggerian existentialism or the philosopher's provincialism. This article will closely interpret and

1 The literature on Heidegger's relationship to East Asia is extensive. It includes, among others, Buchner (1989), Davis (2013), May (1996), Parkes (1987), Ma (2008), and Heubel (2020).

reveal the limitations of Heidegger's idealization of hut existence and hut philosophy from an intercultural perspective. It argues that the rich tradition of philosophically reflecting on urban culture in East Asia provides interpretive potentials for the task of urbanizing the Heideggerian province. Such a re-orientation *via* an urbanization will include a reflection on the place of thinking and the place of dwelling in modern societies.²

In his brief radio talk “Schöpferische Landschaft: Warum Bleiben wir in der Provinz?”, Martin Heidegger explains, as the title suggests, why he remains in the province (Heidegger 1983a, 1994). This short essay from 1933 paints a pastoral image of the philosopher's Black Forest hut located on the steep hill of a wide valley. The reader is informed that the hut has three rooms dedicated to living, sleeping and studying. Heidegger emphasizes the proximity between his work world (*Arbeitswelt*) and that of the peasants dwelling and working nearby. He stages his hut existence (*Hüttendasein*) in contrast to that of the visitors from the city. Whereas the city dweller merely observes the province in “forced moments of ‘aesthetic’ immersion or artificial empathy”, by “being stimulated” (*angeregt*) or searching release from urban stress, Heidegger proclaims to not even perceive the landscape while being fully immersed in his work, just as the peasant is immersed in his labour. Philosophical creation is integrated into the mountainous landscape. It serves as an act of philosophical resistance against urban uprootedness (*Entwurzellung*): “working through each thought can only be hard and sharp. The effort of linguistic impregnation is like the resistance of the pines standing against the storm” (Heidegger 1983a, 10). While the pines resist the storm, Heidegger presents his solitary hut existence as an act of resistance against the superficial temptations of urban life. Instead of engaging in groundless idle talk and publicity that was analysed in paragraph 35 of *Being and Time* as characteristic of the “uprooted understanding of *Dasein*” (*entwurzelten Daseinsverständnisses*) (Heidegger 1967, 170), Heidegger is also careful to distinguish himself from “the aloof studies of some eccentric”. The peasant philosopher depicts his philosophical hut existence as an act of being *bodenständig*, grounded. He remains loyal to his provincial roots: “The inner relationship of my own work to the Black Forest and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rootedness in the Alemannian-Swabian soil” (Heidegger 1983a).³ The atmosphere of this short but

2 Watsuji Tetsurō has pointed to the lack of taking climate and place seriously (1988). For a related attempt at a spatial turn in post-Heideggerian philosophy see Casey (2009).

3 In this talk as well as at other occasions, including his talk on “*Gelassenheit*”, equanimity or releasement, Heidegger interprets his rootedness in an unbroken earth-bound tradition as a form of resistance against modern uprootedness. See also Robert Metcalf (2012). During his later years, Heidegger was far less rooted in the provinces than his self-description suggests. While he lived in his suburban Freiburg home that is rarely mentioned in his work, he was also engaged in extensive

dense text from the period of Heidegger's *Keibre* is that of a pastoral idyll. Heidegger presents himself in a romantic tone of voice as a solitary peasant philosopher who remains remote from the superficial and hectic existential stress of modern cities and engages in a solitary, profound and labour-intensive conversation with perennial Being.



Figure 1. Heidegger's Hut. (Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heidegger-rundweg0009.JPG>)

Buddhist Compassion and Being-With

Heidegger's celebration of rural life does have a transcultural appeal. Everyone comes from some province, after all. To take one example, the depiction of rural life resonates with the Korean scholar Choong-su Han (2004). In his inquiry into "Heideggers Denken und sein Ort", Han perceives a resonance between

travelling. In addition to brief trips to Greece, Italy and France, he also frequently travelled in Germany, as documented in the correspondence with his wife (Heidegger 2009).

Heidegger's evocation of his grounded Black Forest and Han's own memories of the communal spirit in the Korean village of his childhood. Han's grandparents lived in this village in a way similar to that of the peasants portrayed in Heidegger's essay. Han also illustrates the basic mood of Heidegger's nostalgic image of living in the countryside by turning to an example of Buddhist religious architecture in the city of Gyeongju, the former capital of the Silla Kingdom, which existed in the South-East of the Korean peninsula until the 10th century. The Silla culture is, among other achievements, known for the flourishing of Buddhist religious art. More specifically, Han discusses two Buddhist temples by the name of Bulguk and Seokbul, which are located in the ancient Silla capital Gyeongju.⁴ He writes:

even though they belong together, they also stand in contrast to each other. The temple Bulguk stands at the foot of a mountain while the temple Seokbul stands on the peak of the same mountain. The temple Bulguk has a very wide courtyard with many staircases, doors, bridges, halls, towers, walls, art works and Buddha statues. The temple Seokbul, in contrast, only has one hall, which was originally open. In it there is also just one statue of Buddha who looks tenderly with a look of compassion to the other temple and also to the people in the city. (Han 2004, 14)

According to Han's interpretation, the Buddha in the temple on top of the mountain expresses nostalgia in a double sense: he has left the earthly life of the city but, as Boddhisattva, has also returned from his celestial existence out of compassion for other living and suffering beings. If I understand Han's interpretation correctly, the Buddha represented in the statue in the mountain temple looks to the twin temple below and to the city with a sense of compassion while also recalling celestial Enlightenment. His existence on the mountain Tohamsan can thus be considered as a suspension: the Boddhisattva remains bound to both the often painful and complex life on earth and the blissful release from suffering. He has remained calm and withstood the tests of time, even if his perseverance and solitude have been severely challenged by the rise of mass tourism after the monument was included in the list of documents recognized by UNESCO as part of world cultural heritage. In contrast to Heidegger's cold resistance against the temptations of the city in his lonely hut, the Buddha's stone existence expresses compassion, serenity and calmness.

4 Based on Han's description, the reference is likely to the Seokguram grotto in Gyeongju and not to the Seokbul temple, which is located in Busan.



Figure 2. Buddha at Seokguram in South Korea, World Heritage Organization. (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seokguram_Buddha2.jpg)

While feeling a sense of resonance with Han's depiction of this remarkable work of Buddhist spiritual culture, there also seems to be a dissonance between this sympathetic image of the Buddha's compassionate look towards the complex life in the city and Heidegger's self-depiction as a solitary thinker sitting in his hut while brooding over Western metaphysics and rejecting the uprootedness of modern urban existence. Heidegger, in a deeply condescending tone of voice, criticizes visitors from the city for their "forced moments of 'aesthetic' immersion or artificial empathy", while refusing to reveal what an unforced form of aesthetic experience or authentic empathy among people might be. Whereas the Heidegger of *Being and Time* still gestured towards the possibility of authentic social existence when analysing being-with (*Mitsein*) and hinted at the possibility of empathy in

the Zolikon seminars, solitude is identified as the philosophically privileged form of relationship with the world in his later works.⁵ Such solitude can only be discovered in remote huts and the lives of peasants, and remains an enigma to those who live in cities and towns:

City people are often surprised about the long, monotonous being alone among the peasants between the mountains. But it is not loneliness, but solitude. In the big cities humans can easily be as alone as almost nowhere else. But he can never be solitary there. (Heidegger 1983a, 11)

While one does not need to agree with Theodor W. Adorno's polemical critique of Heidegger's text as "German petit-bourgeois kitsch" (Adorno 1973, 55), its appeal does stem from the effective combination of cultural critique and a romanticized idealization of being rooted and cultivating the solitary existence of a profound thinker. While Heidegger's creative solitude may have put him in touch with "the vast nearness of the essence of all things", it put him out of touch with the social world and that of the city. In contrast to Heidegger's self-image as a contemplative recluse, the Buddha in the hermitage Seokbul expresses compassion with the life in the city. At the same time, he—or she—is reminiscent of the celestial existence beyond the mountain grotto and thus inhabits a mediating position between the troubled existence of humans and celestial peace.

Heidegger on the Radio

Before returning to the image of the compassionate Buddha, let us dwell on Heidegger's brief, but also dense radio address. In particular, an interpretation of the text from a media-philosophical perspective exposes a contradiction of Heidegger's self-proclaimed solitude and anti-urbanism. The text was written and delivered in the form of a radio broadcast to address citizens in Berlin and inform them of Heidegger's reasons for turning down an invitation to take up a professorship at Berlin University. Heidegger engages in the paradoxical task of using the urban stage and one of its guiding media, the radio, to declare that he is existentially opposed to city life and the tendency of modern technology to de-distance and accelerate human existence.⁶ Notably, in spite of Heidegger's critique of modern

5 A noteworthy attempt to enrich Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein*, or being-with, by turning to the Buddhist ethos of compassion has been presented by Ryosuke Ohashi (2018).

6 In section 23 ("The Spatiality of Being-in-the-World") of *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes "An essential tendency toward nearness lies in *Dasein*. All kinds of increasing speed which we are compelled to go along with today push for overcoming distance. With the 'radio', for example, *Da-sein*

life and technology, a radio was one of the communication devices he kept in his mountain hut.

According to Heidegger's self-description, he belongs far away from any urban setting in his remote mountain retreat, his hut existence, with life here transformed by the peasant-philosopher from something lacking into a deliberate choice. By making effective use as a broadcaster on and listener of the radio, Heidegger rejects modernity by modern means. While proclaiming that "we do not yet hear, we whose hearing and seeing are perishing through radio and film under the rule of technology" (Heidegger 1977, 48), Heidegger not only highlights that he has been offered a prestigious academic position in the capital, but also announces and justifies his decision to remain in the familiar province. In addition to the use of the radio, the form of his transmission is also modern, since it expresses a conscious choice, one of the pillars of what it means to be an autonomous modern subject. The radio broadcast celebrates the right to exercise this choice to listeners in the capital who are nevertheless, according to Heidegger, unable to truly listen and see. The radio talk closes with a depiction of Heidegger's 75-year-old peasant friend who "read about the call from Berlin in the newspapers" and responded with "a sure gaze of his clear eyes (...) keeping his mouth tightly shut". The friend's shaking of his head is translated by Heidegger into an "absolutely no" (Heidegger 1983a, 13). The tone characteristic of resolute decisions does not allow for further deliberation and second thoughts. Rather than being a form of effective resistance, the text "Creative Landscape: Why do we remain in the Provinces?" thus reveals a stubbornness and an unwillingness to even consider leaving the provincial comfort zone behind to expose himself to the challenges of alterity that are common to urban life under the conditions of modernity. Instead of engaging with the difficult complexities of living in a city, Heidegger preferred to dig himself into a cloistered hut existence. Rather than entering into dialogue with the people below, he broadcasts his indictment and resolute rejection from up high in a solitary mountain hut.

As it becomes clear in the text "... Poetically Man Dwells ...", for Heidegger modern ways of living do not allow for authentic dwelling but "merely the occupying of a lodging" (Heidegger 2001, 213). In "Building Dwelling Thinking", Heidegger refines this claim and argues that that the "reference to the Black Forest farm in no way means that we should or could go back to building such houses" and acknowledges the very real existence of a "housing shortage" (ibid., 158). However, he relativizes this calamity: "the state of dwelling in our precarious age" (ibid., 159) is marked by the fact that "the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of

is bringing about today de-distancing of the 'world' which is unforeseeable in its meaning for *Dasein*, by way of expanding and destroying the everyday surrounding world." (Heidegger 1996, 98)

houses”, but in the fact “that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell” and that “as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer” but “the sole summons that calls mortals into their dwelling” (ibid.). This shifting of registers from a merely ontic level (how to get by in light of the severe housing shortage) to an ontological one (the dwelling of mortals) is characteristic of fundamental ontology. Reminding a homeless person who is struggling with skyrocketing real estate prices in urban areas about the existential task of the dwelling of mortals reveals Heidegger’s lack of empathy. It documents a flight from confronting concrete socio-economic and ultimately existential problems to seemingly more profound philosophical concerns. Heidegger’s publicly broadcasted choice to remain outside of the world of public discourse and the city carries more weight than a merely contingent biographical fact. This choice for the province and against the city reflects a radical rejection of urban forms of existence by modern means.

Re-orienting Heidegger: Urban Dwelling

It is no surprise then that the Heideggerian tropes of affirmed provincialism and rejected urbanism have become prominent reference points in the reception of the philosopher himself, as the following three paradigmatic examples serve to illustrate. Jürgen Habermas famously praised Heidegger’s student Gadamer because his hermeneutic philosophy achieved what his teacher was incapable or unwilling of doing, an “urbanization of the Heideggerian provinces” (Habermas 1981). By exploring the dialogical dimension of hermeneutics, Gadamer has overcome the reduction of dialogical deliberation to idle chatter and elaborated a dialogical conception of *Mitsein*. Secondly, Habermas’ successor at the University of Frankfurt, Axel Honneth, praised the “superb formulation” of the “urbanizing the Heideggerian province”, but suggests that one should not think of hermeneutics as an urbanization, but as an “*Urbarmachung*”, a cultivation or reclamation, when he writes:

“urbanization” is understood sociologically as the emergence of civilized forms of life, “reclamation” since ancient times designates that arduous and time-consuming process through which economically useless land is changed into fruitful “firm” ground, be it field, meadow, or forest. Applied to the situation here, we would have in the first case a civilizing of the motives of Heidegger’s philosophy, transforming them into a cosmopolitan openness to the world; in the second case, by contrast, Gadamer would be making them fruitful on their own terrain, i.e., would be unfolding the productivity of what was originally meant. (Honneth 2003, 5–6)

Like Habermas and Honneth, Peter Sloterdijk draws on the juxtaposition of urbanism and provincialism in his philosophical character sketch of the Black Forest hut philosopher:

in Heidegger there is something that did not relocate, that runed away from the world, that harbored a rage for remaining where it was. One can enumerate what his old *Da* (here/there) consists in: the silhouettes of the village and the alleys of the small town, meadows, forests, hills and chapels, classrooms, school hallways, book spines, the banners of the *Kirchweih*, and bells tolling in the evening. (Sloterdijk 2016, 27)

The critical interpretations presented by Habermas, Honneth and Sloterdijk attempt to reinterpret Heideggerian insights by way of an urbanization, a reclamation and a mobilization. This raises the question of whether and how the intercultural dialogue with Heidegger could contribute to this critical engagement. In the context of exploring East Asian “oriental” perspectives on Heidegger’s work, one may speak of the task of a “re-orientation” of Heideggerian themes. If one considers Heidegger’s interlocutors in the East not only as recipients and interpreters of the master’s work, the question arises as to what contribution can be made to a de-provincialization by way of a re-orientation. Heidegger’s receptive history in East Asia, most notably by the Kyoto School, could play an important role in this task, especially if the critique from the East manages to not enter the trap of repeating the call for cultural rootedness, solitude and a narrow sense of communal living that has been the touchstone of the mentioned Western critiques of Heidegger.

In an essay on Franco-German “Ways towards an Open Dialogue” (1937), Heidegger sees the task of intercultural exchange as providing a “justification of one’s own and one’s own future history” for the sake of a “recognition of one’s own” and a “true pride of peoples” (Heidegger 1983a, 16). This understanding hardly does justice to a true “reciprocal calling-oneself-into-question” (ibid., 17). Ultimately, for Heidegger, mutual “engagement situates everybody in what they truly are (...) if it endures while confronting the threat of the uprootedness of the occident” (ibid., 20). The classical Greeks whose “uniqueness and greatness” Heidegger emphasizes “did not become what they are perennially by way of an encapsulation (*Verkapselung*) within their ‘space’”, but by virtue of the “sharpest yet creative engagement with what is the most foreign and difficult for them: the Asiatic” (ibid., 21).

To advance a radical critique of Heidegger’s self-assertive provincialism that reduces intercultural engagement to self-aggrandizement it is first necessary to come to terms with Heidegger’s provincialism. This is revealed in what is his most explicit attempt at an intercultural dialogue, only to reaffirm the greatness of his

own cultural identity. In “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache: Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden” (Heidegger 1985), the European interlocutor, a staged version of Heidegger, is unwilling to engage with the Japanese visitor on equal terms. The conversation, the text states, “emerged as if a free play in our house” (*ein freies Spiel in unserem Hause*) (Heidegger 1985, 84). But isn’t this retreat to one’s house as the privileged site of intercultural conversation precisely the encapsulation Heidegger is critical of? The sense of the ultimate futility of intercultural dialogue is further refined by characterizing the conversations in terms of the danger (*Gefahr*) characteristic of translation. Heidegger both upgrades and downplays the status of the conversation. It is free, but also merely a play that shies away from a genuine dialogue on substantive issues. It is a play in a distinctive and confined setting, this time not Heidegger’s hut, but his house, in which he receives without, however, crossing his threshold to engage with what is being received. He refuses to leave his familiar comfort zone and presents himself as the generous host who receives solicitors from afar.

Just as the communication with the peasant cited in the previously mentioned radio broadcast was reduced to the man shaking his head when being prompted, the Japanese visitor is reduced to silence when it comes to the moment of engaging in intercultural exchange. The dialogue instrumentalizes the visitor to reveal the impossibility of genuine intercultural—and, by extension interlinguistic—communication beyond the confines of the narrow orbit of testing the limits of European metaphysics from within. A true conversation between cultural others who are nevertheless connected in dialogue remains blocked due to the alleged gap between key terms and the irreconcilable and unbridgeable differences between the linguistic spirits of European and East Asian languages. According to Heidegger, the conceptual richness that allegedly only characterizes the European linguistic spirit necessarily creates a temptation to downgrade what is talked about to something indeterminate and fluid. The Heideggerian interlocutor increasingly reveals himself as an inquisitor who insists on and celebrates untranslatability, while the nameless Japanese visitor remains silent or is put into the role of being a messenger who gives reports to Europeans about Japanese aesthetic traditions. As previous interpreters have pointed out, in Heidegger’s dialogue there is a sense of it not being a real open encounter, but a staged interplay on unequal terms where the host sets the rules unilaterally (Gumbrecht 2000, May 1996). Heidegger’s knowledge of the aesthetics of “*iki*” that represents Asian aesthetics and ontology in his staged dialogue, as well as his conception of Japanese culture, is based on Oscar Benl’s work “Seami Motokiyo und der Geist des Nō Schauspiels” (1952). Heidegger’s relying exclusively on a German reconstruction of Asian themes underscores his unwillingness to engage with Asian sources directly. The visitor from Japan

is depicted by Heidegger as someone from East Asia who combines a sense of submissive politeness and the frenzy of a modern urban tourist, as opposed to the grounded interlocutor. The interlocutor reminds his Japanese visitor that the time for their conversation is limited, by pointing out that the guest wishes to continue his brief trip through Europe by visiting the city of Florence the next day. When the Japanese man responds that he is determined to stay one more day “if you permit me to visit your house one more time” (Heidegger 1985, 126), he granted the honour by the generous host representing Heidegger without, however, pursuing the possibility of an in-depth intellectual exchange any further. Moreover, Heidegger incorrectly remembers their mutual acquaintance Shūzō Kuki as a visiting student. In fact, Kuki visited Europe as an advanced lecturer in the years 1922 to 1929, as was well versed in Japanese, French and German literature.

If Heidegger had studied Kuki’s *Reflections on Japanese Taste: The Structure of Iki (Iki no kozō)*, he could not only have learned about the simultaneous revealing as well as concealing aesthetics of urban geishas, but, more importantly, witnessed a genuinely transcultural attempt to modernize a tradition without thereby abandoning its cultural roots (Kuki 2011). Kuki rescues the conception of *iki* from the Edo era both by way of carefully positioning it with regard to the French and the German linguistic and cultural registers and practices, but also by marking out a space between traditional rural and modern urban Japan. Kuki’s concept of *iki* can be traced back to Matsuo Bashō’s concept of “*karumi*”, which means “lightness”. This existential aesthetics of an urban vagabonding lightness is at odds with the search for existential rootedness we find in Heidegger. While the former historically emerged as a creative and subversive form of resistance by common town folks against the overly ritualized aristocratic ruling class of the rural Samurai, Heidegger’s insistence on rootedness does not have any emancipatory or subversive dimensions (Pincus 1996, 132).

As Ryosuke Ohashi states, Kuki, who grew up in modern Tokyo, was rather amused about Heidegger’s “astonishment” when he first visited Berlin as a young man (Ohashi 1989, 99). Rather than seeing Kuki as a student whose thought developed under Heidegger’s influence, it may thus serve him better to uncouple or delink the two and underscore Kuki’s original contributions and philosophically productive differences to Heidegger (Mikkelsen 2004). Kuki’s reconstruction of *iki* undermines the very juxtaposition between urbanism and provincialism and the corresponding valorizations of being either overly refined in order to display one’s status and wealth, or being vulgar and provincial. *Iki* is presented as an intermediary between these binaries. The feeling of *iki* is characterized as an awareness of differentiation by an elegant connoisseur who remains detached from the world, especially the world of confining conventions and provincial mindsets. In

order to illustrate the structure of *iki*, Kuki emphasizes the modern and distinctively urban literary tradition of the “*ninjō*”, a genre of licentious fiction, since it emphasizes the interplay of seduction and renunciation that is characteristic of the distinctively modern structure of *iki*. The peasant (*yabu*) is juxtaposed with the connoisseur. Kuki reveals the interplay of the sophisticated but unassuming man of taste and judgement and the pride of being authentic that is being proclaimed by aristocrats as well as “vulgar” people who identify with their seemingly superior provinces. The specifically urban dialectics of attraction and detachment as expressed in *iki* are reflected in its combination of a suspension of judgment and playfulness: “*Iki* rejects a cheap thesis about reality and puts into parenthesis real life and breathes a neutral air and puts into play an autonomy without intention and without interest.” (Kuki 2011, 73) Kuki has anticipated the concept of a suspension of judgment in practical terms. He presents *iki* as an essentially modern notion with practical consequences not only in the realm of aesthetics, but also in ethics. As a spiritual form of detachment *iki* allows for a playful and often subversive engagement with established conventions.

Kuki’s aesthetics can be situated within Japanese modernization processes that attempt to free urban life from a one-dimensional focus on utility and to rediscover the existential as well as aesthetic potentials of emancipated citizens. It is mirrored in the construction of interior spaces in the Taishō writing of Satō and Uno (Gerbert 1998). They draw on the representation of cultural otherness in the midst of urban spaces that have become characteristic of Japanese modernity and its capacity for blending Eastern and Western, rural and urban influences. They represent an attempt to cultivate a distinctively modern sense of dwelling that engages with tradition and cultural alterity in creative ways. Kuki’s aesthetic modernism is thus at odds with Japanese agrarian utopian movements that rejected the “city fever” and invented Japanese tradition as a site of longing before the ambivalences of modernity. They conceived of farming as the authentic expression of the Japanese national spirit, and identified the city with a force of evil. Yamakawa Tokio, for example, refers to the city as “a monstrous three-legged idol, stained crimson with the blood of farmers” (Vlastos 1998, 89).

When arguing that a deprovincialization of Heideggerian themes can be achieved by drawing on the cosmopolitan, urban aspects of Kuki’s aesthetic intervention, it is important to also remain aware that Kuki’s cosmopolitanism is connected to a nationalist project of advancing “Japanism” (*nihonshugi*). For Kuki, as well as for other members of the Kyoto School, the search for “ethnic authenticity” (Nara 2004, 115) was not opposed to but included the capacity of intercultural learning processes. Among many Japanese intellectuals, there was a sense of pride in the rapid urbanization that resulted from the Meiji reforms, and Kuki was no exception. Japan had

engaged in modern urbanization processes since the Meiji Reforms. For Kuki, the category of a normatively superior Japanese culture and ethnic group, *minzoku*, remained immune to critical questioning. His phenomenological attempt at rescuing a specifically modern Japanese aesthetics does reveal its own blindspots, but these are, as I attempted to demonstrate in this paper, different ones from those revealed by Heidegger's provincialism. While Kuki presents a vision of a modern cosmopolitan Japan, Heidegger dreamed the anti-modern dream of remaining faithful to his Alemanian Black Forest hut. If one wanted to compare Heidegger's normative appreciation of rootedness and traditional peasant-life, it would make more sense to look elsewhere. Indeed, there are surprising parallels between Heidegger's philosophy of rootedness in the provinces and Mao Zedong, who legitimated his authority by way of intimate knowledge of Chinese village life. The leader of the Cultural Revolution, Mao forcefully relocated the urban elite to the countryside in an attempt to overcome perceived urban pathologies and learn from the peasants.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has departed from Heidegger's attempt to claim the derogatory term "province" as enabling and intimately linked with his work and thought. This has contributed to his critics attempts at urbanization, reclamation and relocation. Heidegger's emphasis on provincial solitude abandons his earlier search for being-with and compassion. Moreover, it is contradictory since it relies on modern technology and experiences to criticize modernity. It's somewhat ironic that the traditional small-scale farming and craftsmanship that is typical of the Black Forest region, and that Heidegger seems to have favoured, is now sustained by a complex system of subsidies as well as ecotourism by environmentally conscious tourists from the cities.

There is a danger of idealizing either pastoral nostalgia or an uncritical urbanism rather than to confront the task of conceptualizing the complex and interrelated entanglement of rural and urban modes of life within modernity, including their distinctive existential pathologies and potentials. This task cannot be performed by painting an idyllic image of the solitary existence in a mountain hut or a free play within one's house, as Heidegger envisioned. Rather, it would require a complex interdisciplinary as well as intercultural research project that would benefit from involving different disciplines and cultural traditions and experiences of what it means to be modern.

From an East Asian perspective, this task of a re-orientation of an existential analytic that is sensitive to the dimensions and existential, aesthetic economic and social

challenges and potentials of urban life can be performed in a rich and rewarding manner for at least two reasons. First, the radical urbanization processes that are characteristic of Chinese, Japanese or Korean modernization provide ample examples of processes of intercultural exchange. Modern cities in Asia serve as laboratories of the imagination. While influenced during the 19th century by European ideals of urban spaces, Asian cities have unique developmental trajectories that often surpass processes of urban modernization in the “West” (Stapleton 2022). Compared to many cities in Asia, cities like Berlin or Madrid seem like remote villages. Max Weber was still able, without having set foot outside of Europe, to develop a sophisticated theory demonstrating why Asian cities lacked the rational organization and progressive dynamism considered unique to Western cities (Sunar 2019). Today, any visitor from the old “West” to the new “East” feels that Asian cities anticipate the challenges of global urban futures. Moreover, some of the experiences in East Asian societies’ rapid processes of modernization *via* urbanization have left traces in philosophical conceptions such as that of *iki* that, as I have argued, outplay the very dichotomy of urban and provincial, traditional and modern, dichotomies that are essential for Heidegger’s philosophy and its tendency to reproduce conceptual and existential binaries while claiming to overcome them.

Heidegger was not completely unaware of the potentials and significance of Asian cities. In his copy of Ernst Jünger’s “The Worker: Dominion and Form”, he highlighted the following passage:

Many experiences, which we still need to confront, have already been made in China—for example the harmonious planning of cities with millions of people and entire landscapes, the highest use of agriculture and gardening, the typical and high-quality manufacturing, the intensity and completion of small-scale economy. (Heidegger 2004, 406–07)

Heidegger underlined the specification “which still await us” (*die uns noch bevorstehen*) and thereby—at least implicitly—acknowledged that China and, by extension, other Asian nations with megacities, had already anticipated modernization processes that Europe still needed to deal with in the future. No doubt the expression “*uns bevorstehen*” has a fatalist, even apocalyptic, tone to it, at least when interpreted from a Heideggerian anti-modern perspective.⁷

7 Jünger’s reference to Chinese cities is more optimistic in context. He identifies the aesthetic practice of longing for China as the refined cultural other known as “Chinoiserie” during the 18th century European style of Rococo as a sign of “developed and completed formation processes, which entail the possibility of a long duration” (Jünger 1981, 299). Following the earlier examples of Sinophile authors such as Leibniz and Wolff, Jünger also articulates the need to increase the presence of a professional academic focus on China in German academia.

Rather than using Heidegger in order to construct new forms of existential provincialism that are presented as a longing for rootedness in a harmonious small-scale community where being-in-the-world is still authentic, there is a need to rethink modernization from an intercultural perspective in order to address some of the most pressing tasks today: the integration of increasingly diverse urban populations within economically, environmentally, culturally and politically sustainable cities. These cities need to provide the conditions of possibility for human flourishing. Some city dwellers will no doubt seek to escape the buzz of urban spaces. They may hike to Heidegger's Black Forest hut or the Korean temple of the solitary Buddha statue. And while one can imagine Heidegger turning in his grave at the sight of uprooted tourists, the Buddha welcomes such visitors with compassionate delight.

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