

## Kuki Shūzō's Critical Reception of Heidegger: From the Horizontal Plane of Time to the Vertical Plane, and to Returning Time

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on Kuki Shūzō's "metaphysical time" and attempts to depict the intersection of Kuki's and Heidegger's thoughts. The aim is to clarify the significance of "metaphysical time" as "returning." The significance of "returning time" seems not to be sufficiently explained without considering the question of "the Other" based on Kuki's critique of Heidegger. In my opinion, "returning time" is a kind of *conceptual apparatus* for depicting the process of accepting the contingent reality at the very moment by imagining the infinite repetition of the same. Through this process, reality and the Other emerge as irreplaceable and profound.

**Keywords:** Heidegger, Kuki Shūzō, metaphysical time, returning time

Kuki Shūzō is one of the Japanese philosophers greatly influenced by Heidegger's philosophy for during his stay in Europe, he met the philosopher and attended his lectures. This paper attempts to trace the intersection between Heidegger's and Kuki's thoughts, focusing on the issue of temporality.

When describing the intersection between them, the issue of the Other is vital. As pointed out by other thinkers, such as Emmanuel Levinas and Watsuji Tetsurō, Heidegger's discussion of the Other in *Being and Time* is inadequate. This paper interprets Kuki's theory of returning metaphysical time as a response to the inadequate discussion of the Other in *Being and Time*, which allows us to elucidate one aspect of Kuki's critical reception of

Heidegger while also examining why metaphysical time must be “returning.”<sup>1</sup>

### Kuki's Metaphysical Time

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempted to clarify temporality as the horizon of “the sense of Being” through an analysis of the understanding of Being of Dasein. He reduces the structure of Dasein's understanding of Being to the structure of “care” (*Sorge*)<sup>2</sup> and presents this structure as the unity of three “ecstasies” (*Ekstasen*): “present” (*Gegenwart*), “having-been” (*Gewesenheit*), and “future” (*Zukunft*).<sup>3</sup>

The unity of the three ecstasies, which is clarified from the structure of care as Being of Dasein, was named by Kuki as an “ontological-phenomenological ecstasy” and was considered as the horizontal plane of temporality.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the horizontal ecstasy, which prioritizes the future, Kuki identifies the vertical plane of temporality that emerges in the understanding of time in samsara as the “metaphysical-mystic ecstasy.”<sup>5</sup> In this vertical plane, the temporality of the present is emphasized as an “infinitely profound moment.”<sup>6</sup> At this moment, we are not concerned with the reality of our finite temporal horizon, but rather with the infinite that transcends phenomena imaginarily, which is why it is called “ecstasy” in the original sense of the word, i.e., in the religious and mystic sense. Therefore, Kuki positions each of these as the real and imaginary planes of time.

In addition, Kuki distinguishes between two forms of ecstasy as follows. The ontological-phenomenological ecstasy is continuous in that the constituent moments of temporality—past, present, and future—are arranged linearly, and each constituent moment is absolutely heterogeneous from the others, thus presupposing the irreversibility of time. In contrast, in the metaphysical-mystic ecstasy, whether it be the past or the future, everything is composed of an infinite number of “moments.” Therefore, the temporal components are discontinuous, yet since all these moments constitute the same moment, they are homogeneous and replaceable. In other words, in the latter case, the reversibility of time is presupposed.

However, these two planes of ecstasy are not simply opposed to each other, nor does Kuki argue, as Obama Yoshinobu points out, that returning

<sup>1</sup> The following discussion in this paper is a reconstruction from the perspective of the reception of Heidegger of my forthcoming article “Temporality, Contingency, and the Other: The Intersection of Kūki Shūzō and Heidegger,” planned for publication in *Kyūshin*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 19. Aufl. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006), §41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>4</sup> Kuki Shūzō, *Collected Works of Kuki Shūzō*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1980-82), 404.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

time is the genuine form of time in contrast to linear time.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the core of Kuki's theory of time lies in the assertion that the intersection of the horizontal and vertical plane, the real and the imaginary plane, between the ontological-phenomenological ecstasy and the metaphysical-mystic ecstasy constitutes the unique structure of time.<sup>8</sup>

### Kuki's Critical Reception of Heidegger

Kuki does not so much present a vertical ecstasy as an alternative to Heidegger's horizontal understanding of time, but rather seems to attempt to consider a vertical plane of time, building and expanding upon Heidegger's understanding of time. What did Kuki recognise as the inadequacy of Heidegger's theory of time, then?

The main points of Kuki's critique of Heidegger can be summarized as follows. First, in *Being and Time*, space is reduced to temporality.<sup>9</sup> According to Kuki, in order for us to encounter beings in the world, a spatial moment is necessary. In Kuki's opinion, however, because space does not occupy as important a position as time in *Being and Time*, the Other could not play a positive role in Heidegger's theory of time.<sup>10</sup> Another important point in Kuki's critique of Heidegger is that Heidegger treats the temporality of the present lightly. Heidegger had identified the temporality of relating to other beings as the present linked to "falling" (*Verfallen*), which leads Dasein to be inauthentic,<sup>11</sup> and thus did not play a positive role. For Kuki, Heidegger's thought underestimates the significance of the contingency of encountering the Other by failing to thematize the moment sufficiently.<sup>12</sup>

While Kuki's critique of Heidegger is certainly based on his concern with contingency, it touches on the fundamental problems inherent in the theory of time in *Being and Time*. This is because the focus of Heidegger's discussion of the temporality of Dasein in *Being and Time* is primarily on the problem of the self rather than the Other, which leads to distortions in his argument. In *Being and Time*, the status of the Other and the present is problematic. This is because, while the future and the past are ecstasies toward self, the present is an ecstasy toward the Other.<sup>13</sup> This is also clear from the three constitutive moments of the disclosure of Dasein: "understanding" (*Verstehen*), "affective self-finding" (*Befindlichkeit*), and

<sup>7</sup> Yoshinobu Obama, *Kuki Shūzō no Tetsugaku: Hyohaku no Tamashii* (Tokyo: Showado, 2006), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Kuki Shūzō, *Collected Works*, 1:405.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:330.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 346.

<sup>12</sup> Kuki Shūzō, *Collected Works*, 2:210.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 326.

“discourse” (*Rede*).<sup>14</sup> Each of these constitutive elements corresponds to each ecstasy: “future,” “having-been,” and “present.” According to Heidegger, “discourse” includes the moment of other Daseins.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, since discourse leads to falling, it is inevitably linked to the inauthentic mode of being of Dasein, which understands its own Being within the world.

Corresponding to the authentic and inauthentic modes of Dasein, Heidegger suggests the authentic and inauthentic modes of “future,” “having-been,” and “present.” Concerning the temporality of the present, its authentic mode is “moment” (*Augenblick*) and its inauthentic mode is “making present” (*Gegenwärtigen*).<sup>16</sup> However, as Heidegger states, “Formally understood, every present is making present, but not every present is ‘momentary’[.]”<sup>17</sup> This shows that the present is always accompanied by an inauthentic mode, namely making present, and always prevents an authentic understanding of Dasein. In other words, the temporality of the present is mainly related to inauthenticity, and conversely, the content of its authentic mode is not entirely explicit. As a result, Heidegger’s determination of “moment” can only be described as “empty.”<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, Kuki’s critique of Heidegger accurately identifies the fundamental problem concerning the theory of temporality in *Being and Time*. Based on this critique, Kuki attempts to enrich the concept of “moment,” which remains an empty definition in Heidegger, by reinterpreting it as the temporality of contingent encounters with the Other. Kuki’s conception of vertical ecstasy, which intersects horizontal ecstasy, can be understood as an attempt to achieve this.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Otto Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers*, 3., erw. Aufl. (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1990), 210.

<sup>19</sup> Here, it must be noted that the meaning of “the Other” differs in scope between Heidegger and Kuki. This is because, for Heidegger, the beings encountered in the temporality of the present are “beings in general,” including not only people but also instrumental beings, whereas Kuki particularly thematises encounters with “other people.” Consequently, what is actually signified by the term “the Other” is, strictly speaking, different between them. Nevertheless, it is certain that Kuki was dissatisfied with Heidegger’s argument precisely because it did not thematise “the Other” (in the sense of “other people”). In the following discussion, I will fundamentally follow Kuki in employing “the Other” to signify “other people.” However, this term ought to possess a scope extending beyond encounters with other humans to encompass encounters with other beings in general.

## Why Returning?

The main point of Kuki's critique of Heidegger is that Heidegger failed to adequately address the moment as the authentic mode of the present and therefore failed to thematize "encounters with the Other" sufficiently. In light of this, we can say that the motivation behind Kuki's concept of the metaphysical-mystic ecstasy as the vertical plane of temporality is to thematize the contingent encounter with the Other by pursuing the temporality of the moment. However, it remains unclear why this vertical plane of temporality must be suggested as "returning time." In the case of Heidegger, after the publication of *Being and Time*, he continued his attempt to elucidate the "sense of Being in general," which remained an unresolved issue in the published part of *Being and Time*, from the perspective of "Temporality" (*Temporalität*), and reached to the conception of "enowning" (*Ereignis*) as being itself that appears to us. However, Heidegger does not describe this enowning as returning, as Kuki does. Why, then, does Kuki insist on the idea of "returning"?

In my opinion, Kuki does not provide clear grounds for considering vertical planes as returning time. The rest of this paper, based on the previous discussion, attempts to consider the significance of Kuki's concept of returning time.

A possible interpretation is that Kuki thematizes "self-identity" through returning time.<sup>20</sup> However, the motivation of ensuring self-identity alone does not sufficiently explain the necessity of the vertical plane of temporality being "returning." In other words, assuming the eternal return of the same thing in order to ensure self-identity pays too high a speculative cost. Instead, this paper attempts to explain Kuki's motivation by focusing on the issues of contingency and the Other, which he did not address in his theory of time.

When linking returning time to the issues of contingency and the Other, the following two problems arise. According to Kuki, returning time is the infinite repetition of the same thing, so it is related to necessity and therefore opposed to contingency, which is the possibility that things could have been something else. Furthermore, by assuming the infinite repetition of returning time, the irreplaceability of the moment of encounter with the Other becomes diminished.

Regarding the relationship between necessity and contingency in returning time, it is significant that returning time is imaginary. What is important here is the definition that "contingency is the negation of

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<sup>20</sup> See, as an example, Tanaka Kyubun, *Kuki Shūzō* (Tokyo: Kodansya Gakujutsu Bunko, 2022), 121.

necessity."<sup>21</sup> This "negation" does not imply an exclusive opposition but rather a relationship of mutual belonging, like the two sides of a coin, as Obama points out.<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, I consider the relationship between returning time and contingency as follows. The reality we are living in or the facts we are facing are always contingent events that could have been something else. However, we must accept this contingent reality as something actually happening. To do so, we must deliberately imagine the necessity, or destiny, that lies behind the contingent that could have been something else. Returning time, as the infinite repetition of the same, is involved in this process of imagining the necessity that lies behind the contingent. In other words, returning time is a kind of *conceptual apparatus* for depicting the process of accepting contingent reality as something contingent and still significant for our existence by thoroughly imagining the necessary as "the same thing in infinite repetition."

In this process, we confront the contingent reality that could have been something else – that is often the harsh reality, such as a disaster or a disease – by ruminating to ourselves that "it could not have been anything else." However, this concept is not a quick solution for dealing with reality, nor is it a moral imperative. If it were, it would diminish the urgency of the reality we are facing. Returning time is not future-oriented but is concerned with the very moment. In other words, the essence of returning time lies in the distress of being unable to accept the contingent reality that we actually face at this moment without imagining necessity, rather than moving forward toward the future. Then, contingency is not easily reduced to necessity but appears as profound contingency.

Given this concept of returning time, how can we describe the irreplaceable encounter with the Other in a moment? In other words, how is the profound reality that we have encountered this Other, and not any other being else, revealed? Merely conceiving encounters with the Other as something that could have been someone else would reduce contingent encounters to merely one of possibilities and would not be profound as such. However, by deliberately imagining the inevitability that it could not have been anyone else behind the contingency of it could have been anyone else, contingent encounters become profound. In particular, when this imagination is carried out thoroughly, as if the same thing has been repeated

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<sup>21</sup> Kuki Shūzō, *Collected Works*, 2:9.

<sup>22</sup> Obama Yoshinobu, *Hyohaku no Tamashii Kuki Shūzō no Tetsugaku* (Showado, 2006), 4–5. In fact, the relationship between contingency and necessity in Kuki's discussion, according to *The Problem of Contingency*, would be more complicated than I describe here because he discusses contingency in three levels: "Categorical Contingency," "Hypothetical Contingency," "Disjunctive Contingency." This paper, however, does not delve into this topic in detail. In this paper, in order to make the existential significance of the concept of the "metaphysical returning time," I focus on the more empirical (i.e., hypothetical) dimension of contingency than the others.

infinitely in the returning time, contingent encounters with the Other come to seem fateful. Through the extreme imagination of the necessity of returning time, the profoundness of the already occurred contingent encounter is revealed as the irreplaceability of destiny.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> My conclusion appears to understand "contingency" psychologically, seemingly at odds with Kuki's intention to grasp it metaphysically and logically. Yet in my view, this conclusion remains compatible with the "metaphysics" Kuki conceives. Kuki appears to maintain a preoccupation with "metaphysics" throughout his work, from his early theory of time, through *The Problem of Contingency*, to his later literary theory. Yet this "metaphysics" is not simply metaphysics in the traditional sense – that is, metaphysics concerning matters transcending our experience. As in his theory of time, where he problematized the intersection of the ontological-phenomenological ecstasy and the metaphysical-mystic ecstasy, and as in "The Problem of Contingency," where transcending beyond Being into nothingness was posited as metaphysics, Kuki's metaphysics is grounded in the real or phenomenal plane while being imaginarily or hypothetically enacted upon that foundation. Mine also focuses on the hypotheticality of Kuki's metaphysics (See Hideki Mine, "Kuki and The Problem of Metaphysics," in *Risō*, 698 (2017), 40–41.). Furthermore, Ebersolt noted that while "phenomenological ecstasy" and "metaphysical ecstasy" appear at first glance to be incompatible, he argued that Kuki's "metaphysical ecstasy" possesses an experiential aspect akin to the religious experience of mystics, thereby enabling the two to "intersect." (See Simon Ebersolt, "The Problem of Intersection between Phenomenology and Metaphysics in Kuki Shūzō," in *Studies in Japanese Philosophy*, 10 (2013), 110–131.).