

City and Country in England and Japan: *Rus in urbe* versus *Kyō ni inaka ari*

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1. TWO PROVERBS

Here we have two proverbs, "*Rus in urbe*" and "*Kyō ni inaka ari*," one Latin and one Japanese, seemingly the same in meaning: "the country in the city." In fact, however, the inner meanings of the two are profoundly different, and provide useful leverage on a broad historical comparison of the city in England and Japan.

The basic argument of this essay is as follows. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both England and Japan went through a period of revolutionary social and economic change which thoroughly transformed both the scale and function of cities in each nation. These far-reaching material changes, however, occurred within the context of the existing cultural traditions of the city, traditions which I will refer to as "classical." This interaction of classical ideology and material change produced a new complex of urban conceptualization that took deep root in the ensuing eighteenth century in each nation.

Then in the course of the industrial revolution, the societal scale and the material conditions of urban life were once again utterly transformed, giving rise to still another complex of urban conceptualization, one which continues to change before our very eyes. This very rapidity of change in the last century and a half has ironically made the persisting eighteenth century complex of urban ideology particularly persuasive. The material city has continued to change with such accelerating speed in our own time that we cling with special tenacity to the urban ideas of the early modern era.

2. THE "LONG SIXTEENTH CENTURY"

European scholarship offers the useful concept of the "long sixteenth century"

as a coherent and pivotal historical epoch. It is "long" because it encompasses more than the literal sixteenth century of 1500–1600, which is expanded in the "long" version to the period 1470–1650. As a pan-European phenomenon, it was primarily an economic transformation, characterized by the interrelated factors of rising population, prices, and productivity, and by worldwide economic and territorial expansion. This epoch came to an end in the first half of the seventeenth century in what has been proposed as the "general crisis of the seventeenth century" [DE VRIES 1984: 255; WALLERSTEIN 1980: 6–8].

As it happened, Japan went through a similar era of transformation, extending from the Onin War of 1467–77 until the final consolidation of Tokugawa rule in the mid-seventeenth century. As in the case of Europe, this was an era of quickened population growth, of rapid economic transformation in both the commercial and agricultural spheres, and of unprecedented overseas expansion. The parallel is far from exact, of course, since Japan experienced no dramatic "crisis" in the seventeenth century: nevertheless, the cessation of overseas expansion in the middle of the century and the end of rapid population growth by the century's end clearly mark the termination of an era which was broadly comparable to that in Europe. Perhaps this similarity between Japan and Europe was, as in the classic Umesao scheme, a case of "parallel phenomena" in two mutually isolated worlds which shared the institutions of feudalism [UMESAO 1957: 95–96], although the actual intersection of Japanese and European destinies in the Pacific cannot be wholly overlooked.

Within Europe, the specific case of England in the "long sixteenth century" offers an especially persuasive comparison with Japan. Both are island nations on the continental fringe, relatively late developers in medieval times and notably early developers in modern times. Both nations also underwent revolutionary political transformations in the "long sixteenth century."

How were these parallel transformations reflected in city-country relations? The critical change in each case lay in the patterns of landholding. In England, the feudal aristocracy suffered some loss of land, while the emergent gentry class made large gains, within the context of a dramatic overall increase in the concentrated private holding of land—at the expense of common land (through enclosures), of church land (through the dissolution of the monasteries), and of crown land (through sales to finance continental wars). The political revolution under Cromwell resulted in a sharp decrease in royal prerogative, and a corresponding consolidation of the landed classes as the entrenched political elite [YAMAMURA 1979: 302–315].

In Japan, the consequences of the "long sixteenth century" were strikingly different. Far from expanding and consolidating a landed political elite, the process of political unification resulted in the actual removal of the samurai elite from the land, and their concentration in newly constructed castle cities.

3. LONDON VERSUS THE SANTO

In terms of the national configuration of cities as well, the "long sixteenth

century” had contrasting consequences in England and Japan. In the former case, geographic centrality and the concentrating effect of foreign trade worked to make London the Metropolis (Greek, “mother city”), larger by far than any other English city and indeed the largest city in Europe by the end of the “long sixteenth century.” This remarkable “primacy” of London is the central and unique feature of the English city system.

In Japan, the starting point was similar to England: in the fifteenth century London and Kyoto were the only cities worthy of the name in either country, and neither was impressive on a contemporary global scale. But whereas England’s urban energies were funneled into a single Mother City, the peculiar logic of Japan’s political unification in the same era resulted in the phenomenon that would come to be known as the “Santo,” literally the “three capitals” (of Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo) but perhaps better translated as the “Tripartite Metropolis.” In Japan, the two wholly new cities of Osaka and Edo were created in succession in the last two decades of the sixteenth century, and both came to assume roles of economic, political, and cultural function which as much complemented as challenged the traditional city of Kyoto.

The contrast between the Metropolis and the Santo, the unitary capital versus the tripartite, is of central importance in comparing urbanism in England and Japan. Urban definition in England had only a single point of internal reference: London. In the pre-industrial era, lesser cities (really towns) were in fact and conception a part of the non-city, the “country.” To find a city which was comparable with London in the seventeenth century, one would have had to look outside England, to the European continent.

The Santo, by comparison, offered an elaborate system of *internal* differentiation, a system which has come to structure much of the internal cultural dynamics of Japan ever since. Moriya Takeshi in his book *Santo* offers a detailed documentation of the subtle differences which Japanese literati perceived among the Santo in the latter half of the Edo period [MORIYA 1981: 9–60]. Suffice it here to list some of the basic structural oppositions:

	KYOTO	OSAKA	EDO
AGE	old	newer	newest
REGION	west	west	east
POLITY	court	commoner	bakufu
CLASS	artisan	merchant	samurai
FUNCTION	production	exchange	consumption
FIXATION	dress	food	drink

Whole books can be, indeed have been, written along these lines. But the broader point is this. In England, urban definition was along two lines, one internal and one external: London versus the rest of England, and London versus continental

cities. In Japan, by contrast, urban definition tended to be internalized among the Santo.

4. THE CLASSICAL LEGACY: ENGLAND

The revolutionary changes in national urban configuration which occurred in England and Japan in the "long sixteenth century" worked within the context of existing conceptions of the city. To call these models "classical" for both England and Japan, however, should not be allowed to obscure certain fundamental contrasts between the two.

In Renaissance England of the sixteenth century, "classical" meant the world of ancient Greece and Rome. Umesao Tadao argued in his 1957 essay that early modern Europe should not be construed as the historical successor to the Ancient Mediterranean [UMESAO 1957: 101]. In terms of economic and social structure, he may be correct; but the ideological succession which we now call the "Renaissance" cannot be so easily dismissed. Indeed, it was precisely the ideological support offered by classical ideas that is necessary to explain much of the course of early modern European history. Two ideas are of particular relevance to the city. One is the ancient Greek conception of the autonomous city-state and its "citizen" population. The other, and the one which concerns us here, is the "pastoral" idea, the concept of an idyllic and innocent countryside, contrasted with the corruption and politics of the city.

This brings us to the expression "*rus in urbe*," which may be seen as a manifestation of the classical pastoral tradition. This particular proverb has a classical source in the *Epigrams* of Martial, a Roman poet of the 3rd century A.D. The poem begins as a complaint about the city, above all its noise, but also its confusion and chicanery [MARTIAL, *Epigrams*, XII, 57; my translation]:

In this city a poor man finds no place
For thought, nor for quiet. In the morning
The schoolmasters won't let you be; before dawn
It's the bakers, and all day the pounding of the coppersmiths;
Here the money-changer clinks coins on a dirty table,
There the goldbeater hammers out Spanish gold dust
On his worn stone anvil with polished mallet . . .

After more in this vein, the poet expresses envy of his patron Sparsus, to whom the poem is addressed:

You, Sparsus, know nothing of this, nor can you,
Luxuriating in your pedigreed estate,
Looking down over hilltops from the ground floor:
You've a veritable "country in the city" (*rus in urbe*), complete with a vineyard

As fruitful as any in the hills of Falernus,
 And broad roads for carriage-riding right on your own land,
 Plus plenty of room for sleep, with a stillness unbroken
 By chattering tongues, and daylight only if *you* let it in.

As for himself, the poet concludes, living in narrow quarters and unable to get away from the noise of the city, the only recourse is to flee to his tiny villa in the countryside.

This, then, is the original “*rus in urbe*”: a large urban estate cut off from the bustle of the city. The logic of “*rus in urbe*” is thus that city and country are in a basic way opposed, and the two can coexist only in an ironic sense, whereby the country “in” the city is in fact apart from the real life of the city.

It was this logic of city-country opposition, which was rooted in the classical tradition of pastoral literature, that found fertile ground for revival and refinement in early modern England. In what has been called “neo-pastoralism,” an extensive literary and artistic corpus emerged in this era, glorifying the life and landscape of rural England. Critical to this movement was the patronage of the emerging gentry class, which had the economic and political power to make this rural aesthetic pervade the value system of the culture as a whole [WILLIAMS 1973: 13–34].

But what of the country *in* the city? The English landed elite tended to circulate between London and their country estates, so had little need to re-create rurality in the city. But the logic of *rus in urbe* was reflected in other ways, most dramatically in the great royal parks of London [RASMUSSEN 1937: 76–98, 142–164]. The greatest of these was Hyde Park, created of land wrested from the monasteries in the sixteenth century and for many years a wooded wilderness. By the eighteenth century, however, it had been converted to the pastoral mode, an urban version of the landscaped garden “parks” of the great rural estates.

5. THE CLASSICAL LEGACY: JAPAN

The dynamics of “classical” influence in Japan were different from England. The term “renaissance” has been suggested for the great revival of aristocratic culture which began in sixteenth century Japan. This was indeed a revival, but it was a revival that grew out of the direct and unbroken tradition of the Japanese court, in contrast with Europe, where much of the tradition of classical antiquity had been lost in the medieval period.

Nevertheless, Kyoto served as the sole, unchallenged point of reference for the “classical” conception of city versus country in sixteenth century Japan: one must always bear in mind that in spite of various ups and downs, Kyoto had been the only real city in Japan for fully seven centuries. Kyoto’s role as a basis for city-country conceptions was much enhanced by the great political power and prosperity which the city enjoyed in the course of the “long sixteenth century.”

At any rate, this ancient capital—the capital—had survived and was now changing rapidly. These changes would set the tone for this great urban epoch in

general. But Kyoto was also Kyoto. As Yanagita Kunio put it, "*Miyako wa miyako, toshi wa toshi.*" For Yanagita, the *miyako* was not simply a large city, it was the "emotional home of much of rural Japan" (*ōku no inakabito no kokoro no kokyō*) [YANAGITA 1929:243]. Yanagita of course was not free of twentieth-century biases (particularly those of the Meiji emperor system), but there remains a fundamental truth in what he was saying, and one which helps to get us to the heart of rural-urban ideology in the "long sixteenth century".

The logical evolution of the Japanese idea of the *miyako* against its "country" has been explored in a revealing essay by Takahashi Tomio [TAKAHASHI 1977]. Examining early uses of the two key words, *miyako* and *hina*, he sees first an underlying political layer, whereby the *miyako* is the core, the very center of the Japanese nation, and the remaining *hina* is a downward graded hierarchy of submission as one moves away from the core.

This logic took on different coloring in the Heian period, as the element of urban *style* entered, and the adjectival mode (*miyabita*) replaced the nominal (*miyako*). The ideal was that of *miyabi*, a polished and "urbane" quality; the opposite was *hinabita*, that which is rural, unsophisticated. *Miyabi*, in short, was civilization in its literal sense, suggesting a process of citifying, and, by association, of pacifying, of instructing, of humanizing. This all corresponds well with the picture conveyed in Heian literature, of the capital as a bastion of peace and culture, an island in a sea of provincial danger and unrefined behavior. The *hina* was not domesticated like the English "country," but rather an untamed and almost inhuman landscape.

With the political emergence of the samurai class, whose roots lay precisely in the provinces, the relative valuation of *miyako* and *hina* showed signs of change. The "polish" of the capital was now countered with a new respect for the practical and plain-spoken eastern warrior. This is suggested in the passage from *Tsurezuregusa* (no. 141) in which it is proposed that "you can trust a man from the East. People from the capital are good at making promises, but they're not to be trusted" [KEENE 1967: 127]. Urbanity is equated with an *excess* of sophistication, to the point of dishonesty.

This criticism is immediately answered, however, by the holy man Gyōren, himself from the East:

I can see why you might think so, but having lived in the capital for a long time and become thoroughly acquainted with the people, I don't think they are any worse by nature. They are so gentle and warm-hearted that they cannot bear to refuse outright whatever anyone may ask of them. Because they are incapable of speaking out their thoughts, they consent helplessly to every request. . . . People from the east, though I am one of them myself, lack such gentleness in their hearts or sympathy for others."

As this astute defense of capital-dwellers suggests, the favorable valuation of provincial-rural qualities never took root in Japan as it did in Europe. The reason is

simple: the samurai class had no “classical” basis for exalting rural values, aspiring rather to the wholly urban biases of the Kyoto nobility.

This is not to say that there was no cult of rusticity in Japan. Far from it: in the ideology of the tea ceremony, which emerged precisely in the “long sixteenth century,” the Japanese elite classes sponsored ideals which seem perfectly captured by the phrase “*rus in urbe*.” The tea house as it evolved in the *suki* tea ceremony was, just like the “country in the city” of Martial’s patron, an escape from the noise and bustle of the urban environment. The tea house in the *sukiya* style even affected a specifically rural flavor, self-consciously adopting various details of rustic peasant dwellings.

Closer inspection, however, reveals a fundamental contrast between the tea house and the European *rus in urbe*. The basic model for the teahouse was not the aristocratic rural estate, but rather the hermit’s retreat, the “grass hut” (*sōan*) which had emerged from medieval Buddhism as a powerful literary image [LAFLEUR 1983: 60–79]. The environment which was sought in the city was not the settled and productive “country,” but rather a wild and uninhabited mountain wilderness, or at best an impoverished farmer’s abode (*hina no rōoku*). Nowhere is this conception made more clear than in the provocative first-hand description of the *suki* tea ceremony by João Rodrigues, written in the middle of the “long sixteenth century.” It is perhaps the most revealing evidence available concerning the Japanese sense of city and country in that era [COOPER 1973: 275–276]:

... certain Sakai men built the *cha* house in another way. It was smaller . . . , and it represented, as far as the small site allowed, the style of lonely houses which are found in the countryside, or like the cells of solitaires who dwell in hermitages far removed from people. . . . In the same way we see that Europeans enjoy the sight of cattle, and the pastoral and rustic life of the countryside on account of its peace and calm. . . .

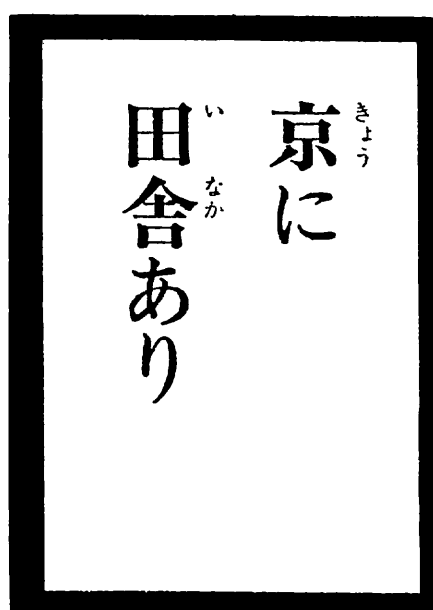
So they entertained each other with *cha* in these small huts within the city itself and in this way they made up for the lack of refreshing and lonely places around the city; indeed, to a certain extent this way was better than real solitude because they obtained and enjoyed it in the middle of the city itself. They called this in their language “*shichū no sankyo*,” meaning a lonely hermitage found in the middle of a public square.

As this passage makes clear, the tea house was not in basic opposition to the city itself. On the contrary, as Rodrigues notes, the urban location of the Sakai tea house made it even *better* than an actual mountain retreat. This contrasts with England, where rurality in the city was seen as an inferior substitute for the true countryside where the elite maintained their estates. This reminds us that the tea ceremony was preeminently a city phenomenon, supported by an urban elite of courtiers, priests, merchants, and daimyo. And so the ideals of the tea house environment—the small size, the affectation of poverty, the symbolic references to

rural dwelling—all these are signs of a mentality which takes the city rather than the country as the point of departure.

This brings us, finally, to the proverb “*kyō ni inaka ari*.” In contrast with *rus in urbe*, it is not an ancient classical reference; the earliest documented uses of the term are in two *haikai* collections of the seventeenth century, the *Kebukigusa* of 1638 (Kan’ei 15) and *Komachi odor*i of 1647 (Shōhō 4) [MORIYA 1981: 35]. I would hypothesize that this saying was a product of the “long sixteenth century” itself, and that it reflected the economic prosperity and political prestige of Kyoto in that era. Hence the basic sense of the proverb is that “even in such a flourishing place as Kyoto, there remain rustic and uncivilized places” [NIHON DAJITEN KANKŌKAI 1973–76, VI: 132].

This contrasts fundamentally with *rus in urbe*. In the Western case, the “country” was seen as preferable to the city, but in the Japanese case, the “country” is of clearly lesser status, reflecting a continuation in the term “*inaka*” of the older sense of *hina*, as an “uncivilized” place. But a new element is to be detected in *kyō ni inaka ari*, a sense that it is appropriate (and even desirable) that the city include country-like places. The conventional illustration of the proverb on the Kamigata syllabary cards (*iroha karuta*) shows an Ohara-me bringing firewood into the city (see below), an appropriate symbol of the interaction between the capital and its surrounding countryside. The logic, in other words, is not that the country replaces the city, as in the West, but rather that country and city co-exist. The relationship in the Western case is one of opposition (“either/or”), while in the Japanese case it is one of complementarity (“both/and”).



“*Kyō ni inaka ari*,” from *Kamigata iroha karuta*, illus.
Takahira Jirō (Shinsensha, ca. 1970)

This logic of inter-penetration is given no better expression than in the great screen paintings of Kyoto known as “*Rakuchū rakugai zu*,” a genre which quite exactly spans the “long sixteenth century.” The very term *rakuchū rakugai* (“inside the capital and outside the capital”) implies the city and the country *together*. This logic is affirmed by the pictorial structure itself, which shows *machi* and paddy interwoven with no clear boundaries. The key mode of differentiation in the paintings is rather by season of the year, confirming their evolution from the genre known as *shiki-e* (“pictures of the four seasons”).

The sense of city-country complementarity which is capsulized by “*kyō ni inaka ari*” was not, to be sure, the sole mode for understanding city versus country in seventeenth-century Japan. It was precisely at this time that a very different set of attitudes was taking root, in the form of Confucian agrarianism. Here for the first time one may find in Japan a strongly pro-rural ideology, comparable to that in England. But a fundamental difference remains. Whereas the “neo-pastoral” ideology in seventeenth-century England was supported by an elite class which actually resided in the country, the agrarianism of Tokugawa Japan was sponsored by an elite class which resided in cities [SMITH 1979: 58].

For this reason, Japanese agrarianism never developed the deep emotional and aesthetic roots which are to be found in English neo-pastoral thought, and remained an anomalous strain within the broader tradition which derived its primary cultural ideals from the urban aristocratic elite. The Japanese elite, both the court aristocracy and the Tokugawa samurai class, sought not to escape from the city, but rather to draw the non-city into the city, primarily in the form of mountain rather than pastoral environments, as revealed in garden design, in landscape painting in the *sansui* style, and in teahouses in the “grass hut” mode.

6. THE COUNTRY AS A KEY TO COMPARING CITIES

Yanagita Kunio argued in *Toshi to nōson* [1929] that Japan was distinguished by an absence of the sort of rural-urban opposition that characterized both China, with its conspicuously walled cities, and Europe, with its conspicuously autonomous cities [YANAGITA 1929: 241]. This argument does not help us with the case of England, however, where cities were almost never walled or autonomous. I wish to suggest in conclusion that a more basic explanation of contrasting rural-urban differentiation in England and Japan must be sought not in the nature of *cities*, as Yanagita and many others have implied, but rather in the “country,” in contrasting modes of agrarian production.

Quite simply, the contrast is between the urban implications of an economy dominated by irrigated rice culture and those of an economy characterized by a mix of pastoral animal husbandry and rainfall agriculture. In Japan the customary bond between individual cultivator and soil was far stronger than in Europe, and a system of justiciable and absolute property rights was slower to develop. Even in Europe, the idea of absolute property rights owed much, again, to classical tradition, in this

case to Roman law [ANDERSON 1974: 424–426]. These circumstances help explain the relatively easy conversion of the Japanese samurai class from a landed gentry into a service gentry. As I have already suggested, this development was central to the course of urbanism in Japan, by which dominant cultural values were sustained in the large cities rather than in the countryside.

A further relevance of this agrarian contrast is the way in which wet rice culture may have impressed its basic rhythms on city life to an extent that the more pastoral economies of Europe could not. Edward Seidensticker has recently proposed, for example, that “Tokyo has remained nearer its natural origins, and nearer agrarian rhythms, than the great cities of the Kansai” [SEIDENSTICKER 1983: 127]. The specific contrast with Kansai probably has less to do with agrarian rhythms than with the existence in Edo of over one thousand daimyo mansions, lending the city a notably green and rural (but not necessarily agrarian) aspect. But Seidensticker’s observation may apply to Japanese cities in general in comparison to the West. Is it possibly true that the great cities of Japan have been closer to agrarian rhythms than, say, the city of London? Not in any immediately obvious way, to be sure: both London and the Santo were embedded in complex and developing hinterlands which assured constant intercourse simply to supply the huge cities with both people and food. But were the Santo in some more special ways uniquely integrated with the “*inaka*”?

William Skinner has proposed that in Chinese cities, both the systematic re-circulation of urban nightsoil to peri-urban agriculture and the periodic reduction of wooden cities to ash worked to fertilize regional cores at the expense of the deforested and eroding peripheries [SKINNER 1977: 287–288]. This model, if it does apply to Japan, suggests that the meaningful distinction was less between city and country than between mixed rural-urban core and a more distant periphery, a true “*hina*.”

Or perhaps Japan’s distinction lies in primitive religious beliefs. In contrast to the strongly urban, abstract, and historical logic of Christianity, perhaps the peculiar Japanese amalgam of *kami* and *hotoke* worked to keep the great Japanese cities more immersed in ancient agrarian seasonality than elsewhere. Perhaps, indeed, as Umesao Tadao has suggested, “The cities of Japan have become a playground for the gods to romp about in” [UMESAO 1973: 8].

Whatever answers ethnologists may bring to such intriguing questions, I would like to insist that any such differences in culture and spirit must be seen in the light of the specific historical experiences of the “long sixteenth century” in both England and Japan. Only when we begin to explore the rapidly changing meanings of the “country in the city” in that critical era can we begin to make sense of our own attitudes to the “city” and the “country” today.

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