

**CLOSED PANEL:**  
**Rethinking the Concept of “Religion”: From the Perspective of  
“*seken*” (“the World”) and “Freedom” in Modern Japan**

Many Japanese people regard themselves as “non-religious” today. In reality, however, most Japanese people unconsciously participate in some kinds of religious events, such as *hatsumoude* (the practice of visiting a Shinto shrine or a Buddhist temple on new year’s day) and Bon Festival; they do not have any religious consciousness that they perform religious activities. What these facts suggest is that in most cases when they call themselves “non-religious,” the term “religion” refers exclusively to religious faith and belief of a certain religious community which individuals choose, while such popular religious activities as *hatsumoude* and Bon festivals are not considered as “religious” at all, but rather merely as lifestyle customs. Religion as a lifestyle custom has been (and is) supported and observed by “*seken*” (“the World”), the human relationships that are characteristic of Japanese culture. At the same time, however, *seken* has generated social pressure to conform for the Japanese people and has often suppressed “freedom of faith” to them.

In this panel, from the perspectives of religious studies, we would like to reconsider the concept of “religion” (*shukyo*) by analyzing the various aspects of “freedom” in religion in modern Japanese society in order to examine the above-mentioned state of “religion” in modern Japan.

**パネル報告:**

**「宗教」概念の再考——近代日本における「世間」と「自由」の視点から**

現代の日本人の多くは自らを「無宗教」とみなしている。しかし実際には、多くの日本人が初詣（新年に神社や仏閣を参拝する慣習）やお盆といった宗教的行事に無意識のうちに参加しており、そうした活動を自ら宗教的行為としては認識していない。この事実が示すのは、日本人が「無宗教」と自称する際、その「宗教」という言葉は、個人が選択する特定の宗教共同体における信仰や教義のみを指すということである。これに対し、初詣やお盆のような大衆的宗教行事は「宗教」ではなく、単なる生活習慣と見なされている。こうした生活習慣としての宗教は、日本文化特有の人間関係である「世間」によって支えられ、維持されてきた。同時に「世間」は、日本人に同調圧力を生み、「信教の自由」を抑制してきた側面もある。本パネルでは、宗教学の視点から、現代日本社会における「宗教」の「自由」の諸側面を分析し、上記のような日本の「宗教」の現状を検討するために、「宗教」概念の再考を試みる。