

# Comments and Responses

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## Comment from Michael Pye

The term *seken* comes up in several papers, but I wonder how far we can internationalize that term. It's rather a mysterious word in Japanese. If you ask a Japanese person to explain *seken*, well, it could take some time. And if we try to bring it into English or German, we have to start all over again. So I think it has a very strong power of suggestion for those who are familiar with the scene in Japan, and it's instructive for us to hear about it from Japanese colleagues. But I'm not sure if we can internationalize it. I'd like to know your reaction. Maybe you wish to do so, and then we will all go back to the drawing board.

I think you said that Japanese people are largely unaware of this stratum of *seken*, because they're used to thinking about the things that you refer to as customs. Custom is a very difficult word. Just by the way, I once bought a little book called Introduction to Japanese Customs. I thought it would be good to read on the train, you know, to keep up my knowledge. And when I opened it, there were lots of pictures of buildings in Osaka and Kobe and other ports—the customs offices. All of that was “Japanese customs.” After that, I decided not to use the word customs in my discussion of Japanese religions anymore. I've been waiting for many years for the opportunity to tell that story.

Anyway, it is an important distinction, but I think my conclusion is that we have to be careful not to go along with the distinction between religion and custom, because custom or customs can easily become an alibi. For example, that happens when Japanese people are saying, “No, I'm not religious.” Then you say, “Well, did you go anywhere at New Year?” “Well, I just went to the shrine, you know.” “Oh yes, you're not religious, No. You went to the shrine. What did you do? Did you pray?” “Well, not really.” “Did you clap your hands?” “Yes, I did that.” “And what did you think about?” “Well, I just wished for the welfare of my family.” So in fact, they were doing it, but they would say that is a custom. Now, that's not a sufficient answer for those of us who study religions. And it can easily be politicized to normalize the attitudes which people have towards Shinto shrines, etc. So I'm a bit concerned about that term, customs. But *seken* is extremely instructive.

### **Response from Miyamoto**

Because of the time limit, I will take just brief responses from the presenters before opening the discussion. I'd like to add just one comment about the meaning of *seken*. I mentioned that the term *seken* often means the opinions, evaluations, and awareness of others in one's community or the broader social sphere. I'd also like to add that *seken* involves not only human beings but also ancestors, kami, buddhas, and so on. So while the concept of religion is based on individual human beings, on the individual existence of human beings, *seken* is based on the division or mutual existence of human beings in Japanese history. That's the point I'd like to make.

### **Comment from Michael Pye**

The second talk was by FURUSO Sensei, and this was about multiple belongings. I think this multiple belonging is very interesting in the case that you adduce, FURUSO Sensei, because the person you described was mobilizing the concept of belonging as an opportunity for people to belong to more than one thing.

This reminded me of my youth in England, when I met somebody who said they went to a church, and I said, "What kind of church is it?" And they said, "It's a non-denominational church". But I thought, how can you have a non-denominational church. If it's a church with an organization and so on, well, it's some kind of a denomination. So to say it's non-denominational is a sort of trick, really, it can be a trick to say you can have this and you can have that. You can't have it both ways.

So it is in the case, for example, of somebody who is a member of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan, while other family members are members of Tenrikyō. They might say, well, she goes to the Kirisuto Kyōdan sometimes, but actually, she belongs to Tenrikyō. In that case, what is her concept of God? Is your concept of God male only, or is it like God the Parent, as in Tenrikyō, which is a very nice concept.

I'm therefore always a little bit suspicious about these cases, but I don't want to be negative. So, what I want to do is to pick up the beauty of multiple belonging, and, in fact, it's quite common in Japan, I think.

There are many people where there are mixed families, and it's often the case that the problem really arises when it comes to burials. Where is somebody going to be buried? That's the problem that arises if you have a Christian wife and a Buddhist husband, or he may not be religious. He might say, "No, I'm not religious. I just go to the shrine sometimes". But then, his family is a Zen Buddhist traditional family, so they want to have the remains of the wife in the Zen Buddhist cemetery. But she doesn't want that, because she wants to have a Christian burial. Up till then it's not a problem. In life, she goes to church. Sometimes she doesn't, sometimes she does, but when it comes to the burial, then the family has a crisis about their multiple belonging. Anyway, it's all a very interesting area, and I thank you for bringing a particular case, in which you told us about the Jiyū Shūkyō of Imaoka.

### **Response from Furuso**

Free Religion is a religion for the "elite", or for religious people who belong to other religious groups, so Free religionists do the ritual of their own religion. But Free Religion itself has a kind of ritual. For example, in a meeting of Free Religion, Free Religionists recite Imaoka's words. But Free Religion is for the people who have own religion as well, and seek to deepen their own religion.

Thank you for your comment.

### **Comment from Michael Pye**

Time is short and I must hurry on. The next talk was by Suemura-sensei from Nagoya about Suzuki Daisetsu. Thank you very much. I'm sure everybody here has read something by Suzuki, and it would be very interesting to go all around the room and see which books you've actually read and in which languages, and then do a statistical study. But I can see there's a huge variety of awareness here.

Now, something I missed in your talk, in your discussion about his Japanese works and his English works, was the point that Suzuki Daisetsu was always very, very much relating to his audience. He was a publicist. He didn't just write books. He knew how to address this audience or that audience.

And that's why some of his books in English are about subjects which are quite different from the subjects in Japanese, because he thought people in the international readership would not be interested in Shin Buddhism. Well, I'm not sure that that's quite true. I think at that time it might have been true, in that we had the beginnings of the Zen boom, which he was helping to create. And Shin Buddhism was not really part of his message. And I think there was not a market for "Shin" Buddhism.

Actually, Shin Buddhist thought is extremely profound. It's just different from Zen Buddhist thought. And so I think we have to be careful about that. It's another problem that we have with that term, if we want to introduce it more widely. I think we have to have further considerations about the different uses of "*seken*."

### **Response from Suemura**

Thank you for your comments. I agree with your opinion that Suzuki was a good speaker. He talked about Zen to Westerners, and he talked Shin Buddhism to Japanese. But I think he recognized clear differences Zen and Shin Buddhism. I think he thought that Zen is beyond to the framework of religion. So Zen can be shared with all peoples, not only Japanese. On the other hand, as to religion, Shin Buddhism fits in with Japanese people.

Zen is beyond religion, and Shin Buddhism is religion, I think. Further examination of this is needed.

### **Comment from Michael Pye**

I'll move on to the fourth contribution now, which I was also very interested in for particular reasons. I think it's wonderful that you produce the connection between the beginnings of *yoriai* in Jōdo Shinshū, in the teaching of Rennyo. After Shinran, Rennyo was very geared to looking after the people. He really looked after the people in great ways through all his activities. That was the starting point for this idea of *yoriai*.

And then you have these lovely new terms, which are such fun. We have Monku, Cafe de Monk, that's very good pun because *monku* means complaints. And of course, in Japanese life it's very bad to complain. *Monku wo iimashite, yoku nai desu ne*. Very bad. It's bad manners. And so it's quite interesting that they brought this up in a café, where you can actually speak up if you've got anything to complain about. Then we can look into it and think about it.

I also thank you for making the link to the Risshō Kōsei-kai, and to the Sōka Gakkai, I believe. Actually, I wanted to make further links. As to this idea of mutual caring about problems, I think you find it also in Konkōkyō, the *toritsugi*, and possibly in Tenrikyō, where there is a similar activity. So it's not really restricted to any one religion, even though there's a strength there in Jōdo Shinshū.

We also see here the interaction between a religious orientation and the non-religious. You emphasize the lay quality of the people involved. I think that's very interesting. This brings us back again to the *seken* level a little bit. I think (this is what I'm learning from you) we shouldn't consider the primal religion, or the *seken*, as being only transactional, only getting benefits, this-worldly benefits and so on. We should also recognize that there is a culture of personal interactions involved in it, which can possibly be helpful mutually. So that's a very good lesson, I think, to learn from your paper, if I may say so.

### **Response from Inoue**

Thank you for your comment.

Concerning activities such as pastoral care, Japanese temples have long been deeply involved in the family situations of followers and have been involved in activities like pastoral care. However, this was in the context of the relationship between each temple and its members, not in a systematic and specialized way as seen in Christianity. By focusing on the aspects of each religion that transcend secular values, cooperation among different religions becomes possible, I think. Thank you.