

The Ryukoku University Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures
presents a public seminar on

Religion and Social Ethics in Japan

Characteristics of Japanese Engaged Buddhism in Post-war Japanese Society

with

Prof. Susumu Shimazono (Sophia University) as Keynote

Panelists

Rev. Hidehito Okochi (Jodo Shu priest)

Prof. Katsuhiro Kohara (Doshisha University)

Dr. Shuntaro Kondo (Honganji Historical Research Institute)

Prof. Mami Iwata (Ryukoku University, Gender and Religion Research Center)

Prof. Mitsuya Dake (Ryukoku University) as Moderator

September 30, 2022

5:30-8:00 PM

Seiwakan 3F Hall

Ryukoku University Omiya Campus, Kyoto

This seminar will examine the problem of the role of religion and social ethics in Japan since the end of the war. With the bankruptcy of Japan's religious traditions in support for violent imperialism, the Japanese lost faith in religion, and Japanese society became deeply secular. Despite this secularism, public morality still seems to be a recycling of pre-war and medieval themes of veneration of authority and diligent self-sacrifice. Further, the militarization of society during the war continues to leave its imprint on society with the prevalent practice of relational bullying (*ijime*) and an authoritarian hierarchy. These trends appear to be reaching their limit with high levels of mental illness, high levels of employee burnout, and the creation of an "alienated society" (*mu-en shakai*). Due to Buddhism's marginalization since the advent of modernization in the 19th century, its role in forming post-war social ethics has been largely muted. In the first two decades of the 21st century, however, a new movement of engaged Buddhism is encouraging priests to become more socially active and public-minded; for example, in these fields of end-of-life care, suicide prevention, disaster trauma, poverty alleviation, anti-nuclear and environmental activism, and even political issues concerning peace and social justice. In many of these activities, we are witnessing Buddhists promoting a new kind of social ethics based on bodhisattvic compassion to meet the "alienated society". They are encouraging people to extend beyond their own circles of interest to become concerned with and care for those who have fallen outside of social support systems. They are articulating and practicing a new sort of social ethics for modern Japan based on universal compassion and non-violence that differs greatly from the often violent and inward group-oriented one of the modern industrial era. The panelists of this seminar will discuss these themes and the potential for Socially Engaged Buddhist ethics with its balance between individual and collective awakening to contribute to social justice and democracy in Japan.

This seminar is part of JNEB's ongoing series of the Engaged Buddhist Study Group and features themes and activities found in IBEC's forthcoming volume An Engaged Buddhist History of Japan: Historical Perspectives & Contemporary Exemplars.