Upekṣā as a Potential Basis for Kyosei in Buddhism

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Foreword

The following story appears in the *Plutarch’s Lives* and is pertinent to the ostracism practiced in Ancient Greece.

When the Athenians sought to banish Aristides and wrote his name on potsherds, an illiterate from the country, thinking Aristides was just another passerby, handed him a potsherd and asked, ‘Would you please write the name of Aristides on here?’ Surprised, Aristides asked, ‘What wrong has Aristides done to you?’ ‘Nothing,’ the man replied, ‘I have just had enough of hearing everywhere that he is “a just man.”’ Hearing this, Aristides wrote his name on the potsherd without another word and gave it back to the man. (*Tale of Plutarch* I, Kentarō Murakawa ed., Chikuma Bunko, 1987, pp. 214-215)

This account demonstrates the bottomless jealousy of humanity.

The term “kyosei” (symbiosis / harmonious coexistence) has been a topic of several discussions over the past few decades in Japan, just as the name Aristides was at the time in Greece. The concept of kyosei would most likely not instill jealousy, but the more it is repeated, the more psychological reaction there has been to it, as we shall discuss later. For kyosei to become a truly effective slogan, it is necessary to elucidate the concept of kyosei and examine its ideological basis.

This paper gives a broad outline of the history of kyosei and the research into it. The paper examines the concept of kyosei (tomo-iki) according to Benkyō Shiio and Kishō Kurokawa, thereafter attempting to point out the possibility that upekṣā, as preached in Buddhism, could form an ideological basis for kyosei in that sense.

1.1 The History of the Term “Kyosei”

What is kyosei? First, we define and scrutinize the term.

At present, we could say that kyosei is used to mean striving for “a society in which everyone can achieve perfect self-actualization collectively and independently” (Takemura, Makio, et al. eds. *Kyōsei no Katachi* [*The Form of Kyosei*], Seishin Shobo, 2006, p. 7). However, this meaning is extremely vague.

There are two theories on the origin of the term in Japanese: one is that it is a translation of a biological term; the other is that it comes from the similarly written term tomo-iki [living together], advocated by Benkyō Shiio (1876-1971), a statesman and Jōdo priest. However, if we limit the origin of the term to where it first appeared, it appears to have first come from the biological term rather than Shiio’s Buddhist term.

We trace back the history of the term, inadequate as that may be.

Wikipedia (Japanese: http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/共生) provides the following entry on “symbiosis.”

Symbiosis (or commensal) is the phenomenon of several varieties of living creatures living in the same place in a mutual relationship (Living together).

A theory exists that the original term was written using the Japanese characters meaning “paragenesis”; however, the
latest research confirms that the term was used in its present form in an essay by Manabu Miyoshi in 1888, even earlier than the “paragenesis” example. According to the information that has been confirmed, Manabu Miyoshi was the first researcher to introduce the concept of symbiosis to Japan; therefore, it is also likely that he translated this term.

The latest research referred to here is Kubo, Teruyuki: “Lichen wa Ika ni shite Chii to Honyaku sareta ka? [How was lichen translated as chii?],” *Journal of History of Science*, II, 48 (249), 1-10, 2009. According to this research, A. de Bary published a new term, “symbiose” (symbiosis), meaning “biological coexistence,” in 1879, with the discovery of mutualism in modern biology. Further, the term used in Miyoshi, Manabu: “Raiken Tsūsetsu [An Outline on lichen],” *The Journal of Japanese Botany*, Vol. 2, No. 21, 1888, is almost definitely a translation of symbiose (symbiosis). Kubo states that “Miyoshi can be considered to be the first to have used the term symbiosis in the sense of living together.”

As Shōgo Watanabe (2006) discusses, the only active writer on kyōsei / tomo-iki in the prewar days before 1946, in terms of published books, was Shiio. Scholarly articles, on the other hand, provide the following information.

Searching on CiNii brings up Ōshima, Hiroshi: “Yorii Kani to Kyōsei suru Nishu no ‘Hidorakuchinia’ [Two varieties of *Hydractinia* that coexist with hermit crabs],” *Zoological Magazine* 23 (268), 91-95, 1911) in the field of biology in 1911; in the next decade we also have Miyashita, Yoshinobu: “Hidora to Ryokusō to no Kyōsei no Shinrei [New Cases of Symbiosis between Hydra and Algae],” *Zoological Magazine* 34 (404), 685-686, 1922.

From then on, articles on “symbiosis” among minerals and microbes appear one after another.

However, needless to say, symbiosis in this sense differs from our provisional definition given above. A fundamental statement of moral philosophy says we cannot derive the Sollen from the Sein. Symbiosis as it appears in the above articles is used in the sense of the natural world. This differs from symbiosis used in contexts such as modern “multicultural symbiosis,” which carries the sense we are looking for.

Other than a very early case of usage by Shiio in 1922, the use of the term symbiosis to refer to humanity, rather than a biological or mineral concept, appears to have begun in 1961.


The term symbiosis given here in relation to cattle or machines is a new usage of the biological term; it is being used figuratively. We see that Arishima (1963) alludes to Takeo Arishima’s symbiotic farms. Yamazaki (1969) uses expressions such as “the symbiotic spaces of ‘tenement housing’ in villages or urban alleys”; no special meaning is given to symbiosis here. For instance, the close communities such as tenement housing that once existed in Japan were symbiotic spaces.
A noteworthy usage of the term symbiosis is given in detail in Onai (1999). Here we simply mention that Park discussed the concept of symbiosis in 1936, and Illich advocated “conviviality” in 1973.

It is not mentioned by Onai, but interestingly, E. Fromm’s (1942) idea of symbiosis cited by Suzuki (1967) indicates the diversity of the concept of kyosei.

Symbiosis, in this psychological sense, means the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside of the own self) in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of its own self and make them completely dependent on each other.

From the initial description—“symbiosis, in this psychological sense”—we can see that the term originates from outside of psychology, perhaps biology, and that Fromm is giving it a new psychological meaning. However, symbiosis is used in a negative sense here. He analyzed the psychology of Nazism through its known state, and treated sadism and masochism the same way. That is, as mentioned immediately before the passage cited above, he states that symbiosis is at the basis of sadism and masochism, and that it is one basic need springing from the inability to bear the isolation and weakness of one’s own self. As symbiosis is also understood this way, it is necessary to define the concept when discussing symbiosis.

A more detailed investigation is required into Japan’s interest in symbiosis. For example, Hanazaki (‘Kyōsei’ e no Shokahatsu [Inspirations for ‘Symbiosis’], 2002, Misuzu Shobo) states, “I remember that starting around the mid-80s there was a ‘symbiosis’ boom in the press and advertising; there was a flood of catchphrases with the word ‘symbiosis’ that continues today” (p. 132). Kishō Kurokawa’s Kyōsei no Shisō [The Concept of Symbiosis], first published in 1987, with a revised edition published in 1991, probably contributed to the growing interest. However, he also stated in 1987 that, “I began to use the term ‘concept of symbiosis’ in 1979…but I used the term ‘concept of kyozon (coexistence / being together)’ beginning in the mid-80s.” Judging from this sore-loser type of talk, we can probably say that certain people already recognized the word symbiosis in 1979.

On the basis of the jumble of studies above, the author imagines the following provisional history of the concept of kyosei / symbiosis.

The Japanese term originally appeared in 1888 as a translation of the biological term “symbiosis” that had been created in 1879. Later, the term was used in research papers on mineral or biological symbiosis and gradually came to be used as a term relating to humanity, in the figurative or loose sense of “symbiosis” between humans and cattle or machines. The term became more defined in the field of sociology because of Park, Illich, and Fromm, who used it in a negative sense and from a psychological perspective.

Meanwhile, although the similarly styled term tomo-iki was advocated by Shiio as early as 1922, unfortunately there is nothing to suggest that the influence of “symbiosis” had spread as far as non-Buddhists. However, if Kurokawa (1987) was the instigator behind the symbiosis boom, as has often been said, then this phenomenon can be viewed as the result of the evangelism and education of Shiio, because, despite admitting that he borrowed the term from biology, Kurokawa also acknowledges the influence of having studied under Shiio at Tokai Gakuen.

Given the above history of the term kyosei, we must ask what type of reactions there have been to it in recent years. Let us now outline some of these within a carefully considered scope.

1.2 Reactions to Kyosei

Onai (1999), mentioned above, states that “the concept of symbiosis is often used as a slogan or modifier with a pleasing ring to it; a situation has been created in which it is no exaggeration to say that the concept of symbiosis is being abused.” He expresses the concern that “symbiosis is sometimes seen as having a one-word problem-solving capability, without strictly portraying that our relationships with our peers, which are by nature fraught with largely unavoidable contradiction, confrontation, and tension, are the path to victory over contradiction, confrontation, and tension.”

Terumasa Nakanishi (Nihonjin toshite Kore Dake wa Shitte Okitai Koto [This is All I Want You to Know as a Japanese]
PHP Shinsho, 2006, 52) criticizes a concept of oversimplified internationalization by saying

“If we stick to being typically Japanese, we will again find ourselves in a disastrous war. Therefore, ‘internationalization’ means putting off as much of ‘Japan’ as possible, leading to the ‘symbiosis with Asia and the rest of the world.’ Therefore, we can slightly exaggerate and say that ‘everything traditional about Japan should gradually die out.’” Such is the thinking of the shallow minds of those who advocate internationalization.

In relation to Buddhism, Keiichi Miyamoto (Bukkyō no Rinri Shisō [Buddhist Ethical Thought], Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 2006, 34-35) states the following.

These days, we incessantly hear about symbiosis. This is a wonderful term; we cannot be assured of our own existence if we deny and ignore others and the natural environment. However, as can be expected, it becomes a problem if symbiosis is thought to consist of an interdependent relationship. Although it does consist of connections between oneself and others and the natural environment, it is important to be very aware that the connections are made on an equal footing.

Kōji Tamaki’s “Tomo ni Ikiru [Living Together]” (Ryūkoku Bukksu, 123, 2011) concludes that abiding with Amitābha is the Jodo equivalent of symbiosis, referring to many interesting materials in relation to symbiosis. One of these citations is Takeshi Hasegawa (“Tomo-iki to Kyōsei to Gūshō,” Ryūkoku Bukksu, 120, 2010) to which we refer here:

While it may be true that ‘being together in the world forms relationships,’ they add some value to it. In other words, there are a lot of expressions which forces us to feel something that is unconditionally good and unobjectionable by the phrase ‘we are being supported in life’.

There is a tendency for the idea that ‘we support each other in life; nobody can live by themselves’ to be interpreted as pratītyasamutpāda (origination by dependence). Although this is one interpretation of the concept of pratītyasamutpāda and they could call it ‘innovation,’ it is often written about with the fixed idea that this is what Buddhist pratītyasamutpāda should be, and thus the responsibility is forced onto Buddhism.

2.1 Kyosei / Tomo-iki according to Shiio and Kurokawa

While we approach kyosei from a Buddhist standpoint, we must mention Benkyō Shiio’s tomo-iki.

Although Shiio was subjected to criticism in the unique post-war language vacuum because he had a strong love for Japan and was passionate about honoring Imperial traditions, he was a very interesting character and a man of overwhelming erudition, as seen in the ten volumes of his collected works, such as his Outline of Buddhist Scriptures.

His concept of kyosei / tomo-iki is often spoken of based on Lectures on Tomo-iki / Kyosei in Volume 9 of his collected works; however, this does not imply that the concept did not change throughout the 95 years of his life, particularly in the periods before and after the war. In this regard, of major significance is Kana Hayashi3, who discusses the pre- and post-war changes and inconsistencies in his ideology, covering a wide range of materials and issues.

Shiio’s tomo-iki is known to have originated in the wording found in the works of Vasubandhu, Shan-tao, and Genshin, of passing [ōjō – second character: ıklı] into the Pure Land together [tomo] with all living beings.

However, this passing into the Pure Land is not really at the forefront of his concept of tomo-iki or symbiosis; it more strongly advocates “true” living in this world. Put simply, he views a rebirth in paradise as an extension of living a full life in this world. Makio Takemura states that the meaning of kyosei is probably living life vivaciously, rather than simply living life together. This is probably the essence of Shiio’s concept of tomo-iki in a nutshell.

However, his concept of kyosei / tomo-iki does not seem that important to the author in terms of Buddhism, due to the following two reasons. First, it seems to lack a denial of the kleśas that cause suffering. Second, as already pointed out, although his ideas of tomo-iki and pratītyasamutpāda are based on selflessness, he tends to treat that selflessness as a kind of selfless devotion.

We look at quotes from the 77th Birthday Commemoration: Dr. Shiio and Kyosei / Tomo-iki and the Textbook of Kyosei / Tomo-iki.
Because *kyosei* is based on the force of nature, which does not wait for the suggestions of philosophers, it is formed through the landscape and reproduction; it was not a new teaching founded by Shakya, Kongzi, Laozi” (*Commemoration*, 13).

Believe that there is true life where life coexists in sincerity in place of the infinite light and life of the *Tathāgata*. To never stop studying, improving, and advancing is the perfection of the cooperative life. Faith is progressive” (*Textbook of Kyosei/ Tomo-iki*, 20).

In short, *tomo-iki* is not enduring hardships and hoping for special practice, but rather embodying that great, true, eternal life in our strained everyday life” (*Textbook of Kyosei/ Tomo-iki*, 23).

Kurokawa’s *The Concept of Symbiosis* (1987, 1991) is a major work on multicultural symbiosis. We examine his work here because he states that Buddhism, particularly the idea of *vijnapti-matrata* (consciousness only) could also be the origin of the twenty-first-century philosophy. His key ideas of symbiosis are the “middle ground theory” and “sacred ground theory,” discussed in detail in the expanded edition.

The first edition (1987) stated that the “middle ground,” which supersedes the dichotomic Western way of thinking, is the “central concept in the idea of symbiosis,” but does not go into any detailed explanation. By contrast, the 1991 expanded edition stated that “the most important characteristics of the idea of symbiosis are the ‘middle ground’ and the ‘sacred ground’” (94). Such symbiosis differs from mere compromise or harmony. The sacred ground theory is “the active recognition of sacred ground (or an area that cannot be understood) within a dichotomy or between heterogeneous cultures and the mutual respect for that sacred ground.” The middle ground theory is the establishment of common ground within a dichotomy or between heterogeneous cultures or elements (103). In other words, “it is the idea of giving middle ground to each other where there are ‘appearances’ of opposition or heterogeneity to create a third area of common ground, even if it is only ten percent” (95). Thereby, “there can be symbiosis in the world, with respect for each culture and individual identity” (105).

### 2.2 Basis for *Kyosei* in Buddhism

What is the basis for *kyosei* in Buddhism? First of all, Shiio himself says that it is (1) *pratītyasamutpāda*. Takemura also mentions *pratītyasamutpāda*, particularly the concept of peaceful coexistence of the six aspects advocated by *Avatamsaka* school. Further, (2) nonviolence, (3) compassion, and (4) indiscriminate gnosis (Atsushi Ibuki, 1999) have also been referred to as the basis. Takemura (2006), a foundational work on the construction of studies on *kyosei*, also mentions the six *pāramitās*, or perfections, the four integrative methods of Bodhisattvas, and the four immeasurables.

However, despite Shiio himself asserting that *pratītyasamutpāda* is the basis for *kyosei*, the author has doubts as to whether this could actually be the basis for *kyosei*.

What would *kyosei* based on *pratītyasamutpāda* be like? Where *pratītyasamutpāda* is perceived as temporal, it is generally taken as 12 processes, starting with *avidya* and ending in death and old age, with its stages divided between two or three worlds (the past, present, and future life). In such a case, the practical challenge of being led by *pratītyasamutpāda* is the end of *avidya*, the cause for the transmigration. Thus, there would then be no such thing as *kyosei*. Conversely, if *pratītyasamutpāda* is understood relationally rather than temporally, the practical challenge is the attainment of wisdom to gain awakening on *pratītyasamutpāda*, because one should stop the view of entity and strive to understand relationships. Here too, there would be no such thing as *kyosei*. As we have previously cited, if, as Shiio says, *kyosei / tomi-iki* is “based on the force of nature, which does not wait for the suggestions of philosophers,” then it is simply just the way of nature, like mineral or biological symbiosis; we cannot say that *kyosei* is something that we ought to do. In other words, we can conclude that *kyosei* occurs because of *pratītyasamutpāda*. However, in that case, what we have concluded is that “we have *kyosei* because of *pratītyasamutpāda*” (Sein) and not that “we ought to have *kyosei* because of *pratītyasamutpāda*” (Sollen).

Further, the view that “indiscriminate gnosis (insight free from *vikalpa* [the main cause of the inability to attain
awakening])” underlies kyosei is acceptable. In other words, from the perspective of vijñapti-mātratā, the entire world that we see is, in fact, an erroneous concept of the world because of vikalpa (imagination, discriminative thought). However, if we attain indiscriminate cognition, then we will see the Tathata, or the ultimate nature of all things, ineffability of everything, the impartiality, and the uniqueness of everything. There are no words in the indiscriminate world; we see the discrimination of all things through the pṛṣṭhalabdhajñāna or gnosis that is attained afterwards. The world viewed thus already differs from before the attainment of indiscriminate cognition. This is called samsara is the same as nirvana, or kleśa (pollution) is the same as bodhi (awakening).

Only saints at the first stage of bodhisattva development and above can attain this indiscriminate cognition. However, even in the history of Indian Buddhism, only two or three attained indiscriminate cognition. Even Vasubandhu, who perfected the theory of vijñapti-mātratā, is said to have not reached the first stage of bodhisattva development. Because indiscriminate cognition is so difficult to achieve, it cannot really form the practical basis for the modernistic issue of kyosei, even if it could be the theoretical basis for it. It is also doubtful whether the unique impartiality of the world of awakening has any appeal to the un-awakened person. For instance, even if one knows that salvation is awakening, it does not soften the hardships of reality.

In this case, what could be proposed as the basis for kyosei from a Buddhist perspective?

First, we outline the differences in viewpoint between ethics and religion. Since modern times, there has been a definite awareness in Japan of the difference between ethics and religion. These exist within a similar framework in Buddhism as well: laukika (worldly) and lokottara (otherworldly). In broad terms, these concepts could be expressed here as the common people (the laity) and the priesthood. This is seen very tangibly in places like Sri Lanka, where those in the priesthood participate in strict ascetic practices to attain nirvana. In contrast, the members of the laity, unable to reach nirvana, seek blessedness in the present world, and in the world to come, by giving alms to those devoted to priesthood. However, those in the priesthood show no gratitude to the almsgiving laity, because it is considered a means for the laity to accumulate merits. Mayeda (1999) outlines this as the so-called division of labor between the laity and the priesthood.

In summary, a Buddhist basis for kyosei as an attainable ideal has to be from the standpoint of worldly ethics—the ethics of the laity. One possible view of kyosei from the perspective of the laity is that “Everyone (tomo/kyō) is subject to kleśas.” While we cannot aim to destroy these kleśas as tries to do those in the priesthood, we can try to live a life (iki/sei) of restraint, based on the understanding that kleśas are the cause of suffering.

At this point, the six pāramitās, or perfections, the four attractions of Bodhisattvas, and the four immeasurables become very important. Below, we examine the four immeasurables of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity, particularly the concept of upekṣa or equanimity.

3. **Upekṣā as a Basis for Kyosei**

Upekṣā is one of the four immeasurables, or brahmavihāras (supreme state), of maitrī (friendship), karuṇā (compassion), muditā (empathetic joy), and upekṣā (equanimity). By mastering these sublime attitudes, one can be reborn into the heavenly world and live together (sahavyatā) with Brahman.

As an overview, we summarize the brahmavihāras with the interpretation given in the Abhidharma-kośa (AKBh, Chap. VIII, 452 ff.).

They are called “immeasurables” because they are recognized by immeasurable (innumerable) sentient beings (people and animals), they bring immeasurable good fortunes, and have immeasurable effects.

The number of them is limited to four because people who succumb to (1) anger, (2) malice, (3) discontent, and (4) anger and avarice need to turn to these four (loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity).

With regards to upekṣā in particular:

*Upekṣā* is a remedy for avarice toward mothers, fathers, children, and relatives.

*Upekṣā* is a heart that simply says, “I am a sentient being”; it is a tranquil heart separated from affection or hatred.
Next, we examine the distinguishing characteristics of *upekṣā* according to Gethin (2001) and Dayal (1932 [1970]). Despite *upekṣā* being in the last position among the four *brahmavihāras*, Gethin draws from Aronson by saying that the four are essentially complementary, rather than *upekṣā* being more dominant than the other three (157).

Aronson further criticizes certain scholars’ interpretation of *upekṣā* as “indifference or lack of concern that purifies all emotional responses or feelings.” According to Gethin, *upekṣā* is the balance of an adept mind and the power to maintain that balance.

Dayal states the following.

*Upekṣā* thus seems to denote the mental state of equanimity under all favorable and unfavorable circumstances, and also the practice of impartiality in one’s conduct toward others.

*Upekṣā* has something in common with the “Apathy” of the Stoics of Greece and Rome.

A bodhisattva, who cultivates *upekṣā*, does not hurt or injure any living being; he does not love or hate anything or anyone; gold and stone are the same to him; he develops a feeling of aversion to mundane existence (or to the idea of personal existence); he acquires the certitude of knowledge; he is free from sorrow, as he has transcended the feelings of love and hate (154).

*Upekṣā* is occasionally translated as “indifference”; however, it expressed objectively, and on the basis of the above, it could be translated as “neutrality” (or Dayal’s “impartiality”), taking a broad perspective or farsightedness. Subjectively, it could be translated as “tranquility of heart” or a “still mind.” The English term would be “equanimity.”

The above characteristics of *upekṣā* are indeed a good match for the mental state of *kyosei*, as discussed in Section 2.1.

### 4. Conclusion

It is necessary to further clarify what Buddhism and *kyosei* / symbiosis is and examine the characteristics of *upekṣā* on the basis of original texts. However, this paper raises the concept of *upekṣā* only in terms of its relevance to *kyosei*, on the basis of existing research. The following points can be identified as a result.

- It blends with Buddhist ideology in terms of a remedy for *kleśas* — the cause of suffering.
- Since *upekṣā* is one of the four immeasurables, that is, one of the *brahmavihāras*, the mastery of which enables one to be reborn into the heavenly world after death and live together with Brahman, it has its roots in the time-honored Buddhist concept of rebirth. Furthermore, if the original concept of *kyosei* lies in the pass over [*ōjō – second character: iki / sei*] to the Pure Land together [*tomo / kyō*] with all living things, as stated by Shiio, then *upekṣā* could indeed form the basis of *kyosei* in that sense.
- Due to overuse of the term, there have been a number of comments that symbiosis is the mere compromise or harmony. However, *upekṣā*, in terms of not overcommitting to another’s standpoint (yet having some commitment. Remember, for example, the ‘emptiness of the three wheels’ preached in Mahayana Buddhism), is neither simple harmony nor simple indifference, but rather a mutual respect that acknowledges the opposition. (Note that in the four immeasurables, *upekṣā* is complementary to *maitrī* and *karuṇā*. Conversely, *maitrī* and *karuṇā* are supported by *upekṣā*.) This lines up with Kurokawa’s symbiosis.
- In addition, in terms of being viewed as a concept similar to the apathy (*apatheia*) of the Stoics (Dayal, 154), *upekṣā* is also linked with Western ideology, meaning it is a concept with much wider possibilities than Buddhism. (Undoubtedly, there are differences between the two. *Apatheia* was the ideal mental state of Stoicism. By contrast, because *kleśas* cannot be destroyed through *upekṣā*, *upekṣā* cannot be the ideal mental state of Buddhism, as is *nirvana*.)

From the above points, we can propose that *upekṣā* could be a basis for *kyosei* in Buddhism (*kyosei* in the Buddhist sense or from a Buddhist perspective).

**Abbreviations and Reference List**


Kurokawa, Kishō [1987, 1991] *Kyōsei no Shisō* [The Concept of Symbiosis], Tokuma Shoten


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1 Although the similarly titled work by Murai (2005) also cites Onai (1999) in its list of references, it appears to be more than a reference work. The flow of the discussion as well as the meticulous expressions are extremely similar, both of which can be downloaded online.
