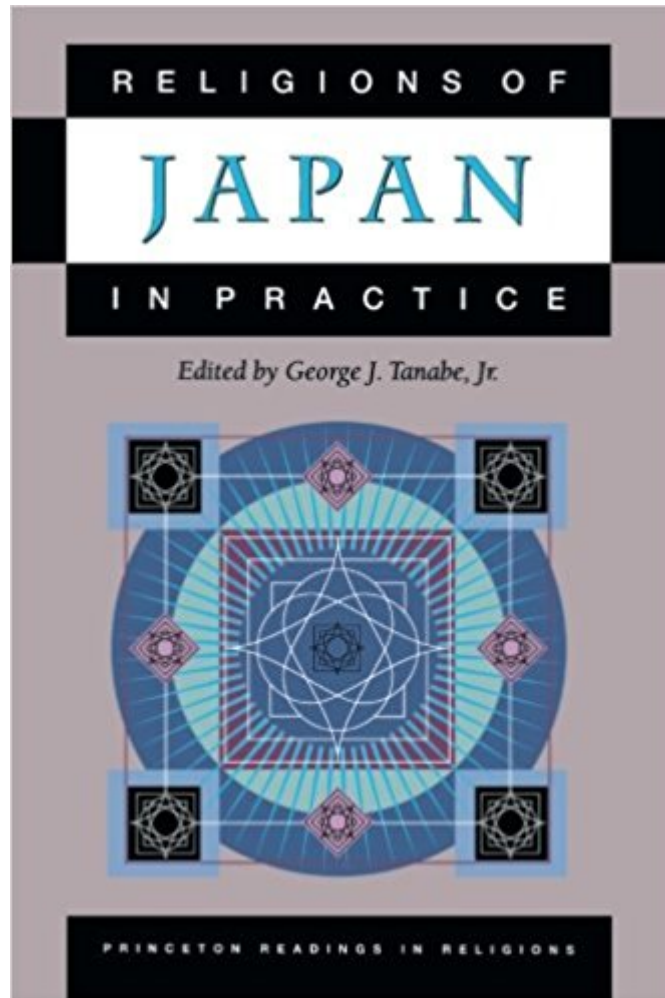




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# Religions Of Japan In Practice



## Synopsis

This anthology reflects a range of Japanese religions in their complex, sometimes conflicting, diversity. In the tradition of the Princeton Readings in Religions series, the collection presents documents (legends and miracle tales, hagiographies, ritual prayers and ceremonies, sermons, reform treatises, doctrinal tracts, historical and ethnographic writings), most of which have been translated for the first time here, that serve to illuminate the mosaic of Japanese religions in practice. George Tanabe provides a lucid introduction to the "patterned confusion" of Japan's religious practices. He has ordered the anthology's forty-five readings under the categories of "Ethical Practices," "Ritual Practices," and "Institutional Practices," moving beyond the traditional classifications of chronology, religious traditions (Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism, etc.), and sects, and illuminating the actual orientation of people who engage in religious practices. Within the anthology's three broad categories, subdivisions address the topics of social values, clerical and lay precepts, gods, spirits, rituals of realization, faith, court and emperor, sectarian founders, wizards, and heroes, orthopraxis and orthodoxy, and special places. Dating from the eighth through the twentieth centuries, the documents are revealed to be open to various and evolving interpretations, their meanings dependent not only on how they are placed in context but also on how individual researchers read them. Each text is preceded by an introductory explanation of the text's essence, written by its translator. Instructors and students will find these explications useful starting points for their encounters with the varied worlds of practice within which the texts interact with readers and changing contexts. *Religions of Japan in Practice* is a compendium of relationships between great minds and ordinary people, abstruse theories and mundane acts, natural and supernatural powers, altruism and self-interest, disappointment and hope, quiescence and war. It is an indispensable sourcebook for scholars, students, and general readers seeking engagement with the fertile "ordered disorder" of religious practice in Japan.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The latest offering in the Princeton Readings in Religions series rises to the same high standards as previous volumes on India and China. Editor Tanabe (*Practically Religious*) has gathered 45 documents ranging from legends and prayer rituals to sermons and theological treatises to illustrate the dynamic, living character of Japanese religion. Rather than classifying the documents according to religious traditions (Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism), Tanabe has divided them into sections that reflect the ways that people use certain texts in religious practices. In the first section, "Ethical Practices," Mary Evelyn Tucker provides a translation of Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekken's (1630-1714) "Precepts on Family," in which the teacher offers advice on raising children, serving parents and things to do in the morning ("Every day we should get up early, wash our hands and face, and first inquire about the health of our parents."). Other writings in the section deal with such matters as syncretism, monastic discipline, celibacy and nationalism. A second section, "Ritual Practices," contains documents related to the gods and spirits and to faith. For instance, William E. Deal offers a translation of "Tales of Birth in the Pure Land," legends that accompany birth rituals in Amida, or Pure Land, Buddhism. A final section collects documents concerned with "Institutional Practices," including excerpts from imperial histories and tales of great heroes. Perhaps the most fascinating offering in this section is H. Byron Earhart and Etsuko Mita's translation from *Our Master Teshima Ikuro*, a record of Ikuro's (1910-1973) call to the Christian ministry and the subsequent development of his preaching style combining the elements of his Japanese heritage with his Christian religion. Tanabe's collection is one of the finest anthologies available of primary documents illustrating the diversity and liveliness of Japanese religions. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The fifth in a distinguished series of anthologies on world religion from Princeton, this volume brings together a variety of documents representing the diverse and complex religious traditions of Japan. Each of the 45 chapters is introduced by a scholar in the field. The book as a whole is arranged

thematically (e.g. "Social Values," "Faith," and "Spirits"), with each section containing articles that illuminate the theme as it manifests itself in different areas of Japanese religious thought and practice. Rather than canonical literature, the volume presents more obscure texts, including pamphlets, folktales, and ritual manuals in an attempt to depict the influence of religion in the daily life and culture of Japan over the centuries. An enormous undertaking, this is a book to be admired rather than enjoyed, and its value to those in the field of comparative religions is undeniable. Neither an introductory text nor for the casual reader, it is indispensable for academic collections supporting religious studies programs. A Mark Woodhouse, Elmira Coll. Lib., NY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Very good on the part concerning the practice of suchness!

I basically bought this book for a class and did not take the class after all. I didn't get to read the book, but it comes highly recommended from a professor if you like this kind of culture.

It seems to be almost a required rhetorical given nowadays for books published by academic presses to claim usefulness to students, specialists, and general readers alike. Few live up to this admittedly implausible promise, but "Religions of Japan in Practice" comes pretty darn close. Clearly it's principally intended as a source book of primary readings for college students, and in that capacity provides an extremely good grasp of the incredibly rich array and variety of Japanese religiosity. Each of the forty-five selections is carefully translated and accessibly introduced by an expert in the field specializing in that subject, so that overall the work makes for a trustworthy and reliable textbook. Speaking as someone who has avidly studied Japanese religions for many years now, though, I can vouch that specialists and other old hands at this topic will or at least should themselves find the selections herein immensely interesting and, yes, even informative as well. Though surely there must have been heartbreaking omissions the editors had to insist upon so that the book didn't grow to unwieldy proportions (it's a hefty volume as it is), the range of selections is pretty comprehensive, with at least something representing most Japanese religious traditions and subdivisions thereof present and accounted for from the earliest records to contemporary articles--with the sole exception of 20th-century "New Religions" which seem conspicuously absent. More to the point of this book, each selection is in its own way uncommonly vital, a living breathing sample of vibrant religiosity actually known and practiced by real people--no dusty doctrinal tracts long forgotten in monastic libraries here (though I sometimes enjoy these, too). Indeed, this is a

refreshingly down-to-earth anthology. A majority of the translations appear only here, while some have been adapted from relatively obscure sources available only in major university libraries; only a small handful can be found in other readily available publications, and their absence in this source book would've been regrettable in any case. Obviously with such an embarrassment of riches, different folks will find different aspects of the book appealing for different reasons. Personally I found the texts included from Japan's Zen (Rinzai and Soto) traditions here especially intriguing and noteworthy for the manner in which they--by the way, as it were--happen to deconstruct and undercut certain all-too-common idealized and essentialized stereotypes, and the quantity of Pure Land tracts does justice to the pervasive nature of this form of Buddhism in Japan while not submerging the equally important (and, to me I must say, more engaging) types of Buddhism such as Shingon and Tendai. The example of an actual Shugendo apocryphal sutra is a particular standout for me since translations of these are so unimaginably rare despite their ubiquity in certain regions of Japan such as (for example) the one where I lived for several years, while the child's guide to Yasukuni Jinja offers an unsettling but preciously unprecedented glimpse into the self-presentation of this controversial shrine that still tends to make the news from time to time. In general too the many hagiographies and miracle tales, in addition to their value as religious documents and the way in which they tend to muddle our cut & dry sectarian categories, give a certain level of homely literary enjoyment or else movingly testify to deeply human concerns entrusted to the divine. Well, I could go on and on, but in short, there's a lot going on in this book, and, for once, pretty much something for everyone.

Anyone seeking greater insight into the many and varied religions of Japan, and how they are practiced in actual daily life could not do better than "Religions of Japan in Practice." This book differs from most other texts on the subject by presenting translations of various religious documents, pamphlets, advertisements and religious stories rather than interpretations. While the religious stories translated can be found in many sources, specifically the many Buddhist doctrines and such, nowhere else have I discovered a translation of the tourist's pamphlet of Yasukuni Shrine, the controversial Shinto shrine celebrating the honored "war heroes" of World War II, or the children's pamphlet describing the "Miraculous Tales of the Hasedera Kannon." It is these small touches that make this book so incredible. The organization of "Religions in Japan in Practice" is also wonderful, focusing on the various aspects of religion in daily life rather than the differences between shinto and Buddhism's various sects. However, there are cross indexes of organization by chronology and religious tradition if needed. The book is scholarly in nature, and would not be a

valuable book for anyone seeking insights into their spirituality or to open their third eye. However, anyone with an interest in or making a serious study of the religions of Japan needs "Religions of Japan in Practice."

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