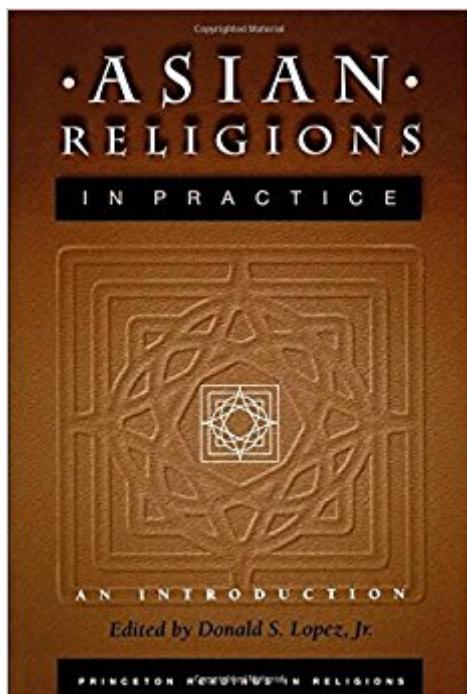


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Asian Religions In Practice: An Introduction (Princeton Readings In Religions)



Synopsis

Princeton Readings in Religions is a new series of anthologies on the religions of the world, representing the significant advances that have been made in the study of religions in the last thirty years. This volume brings together the introductions to the first five volumes of this acclaimed series: Religions of India in Practice (1995), Buddhism in Practice (1995), Religions of China in Practice (1996), Religions of Tibet in Practice (1997), and Religions of Japan in Practice (1999). The introductions to these volumes have been widely praised for their accessible, clear and concise overviews of the religions of Asia, providing both historical context and insightful analysis of Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and Bon, as well as many local traditions. The authors of the chapters are leading scholars of Asian religions: Richard Davis (India), Stephen Teiser (China), George Tanabe (Japan), and Donald Lopez (Buddhism and Tibet). They bring together the best and most current research on their topics, while series editor Donald Lopez provides an introduction to the volume as a whole. In addition to providing a wealth of detail on the history, doctrine, and practice of the religions of Asia, the five chapters offer an opportunity for sustained discussions of the category of "religion."

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Customer Reviews

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., is Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan. He is the editor of Princeton Readings in Religions, which includes Religions of China in Practice, Buddhism in Practice, Religions of India in

Practice, Religions of Tibet in Practice, and the forthcoming book, Religions of Japan in Practice.

His most recent publication is Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West.

This text is a good overview of the belief systems covered, but, it lends, at times, to information that appears deceiving to the unexperienced reader. In other words, to gain a greater understanding of what these various belief systems are, I would suggest trying other texts at first and then maybe think about getting this one. One great book on this subject would be "The Sacred East" by Littleton. Take Care, Aireon

fast shipping and book is great condition-packed well. Thanks!

The following was written as a sort of "after the discussion of the book response" to the professor. Through seeing what responses I had, and the issues I picked up on especially you can gain a better understanding of the book. In general, its good point is that it covers a lot of ground, and it covers "practice" not "philosophy" or "history". Its low points... the Japan chapter was particularly poorly synthesized, the two chapters by Lopez ignored Korea (and its major contribution to Buddhism), the typographical errors, and the short length for such a major topic. Its about "Asian" religions, but entirely focused on Indian religions, almost entirely Mahayana Buddhism, no mention of SE Asian religiosity or changes to practices there, no mention of newer religions in for example Vietnam or the interesting interpretation of Islam in Indonesia. To improve, rewrite the Japan chapter, fix the typos, add a chapter on Korea and a chapter on Vietnam, and SE Asian Buddhism and SE Asian Islam. On the other hand, this book is a collection of the introductory essays for five other books, and you can just buy the five and get lots more details, I'm sure. In fact, I felt disappointed by this book. Throughout the book, Lopez, the primary author, neglects the impact of Korea on Buddhism, and the book seems to imply that in Korean religions; in shamanism, Buddhism and Korea's interpretation of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism there is nothing new to say, or original or different. The message of the book is that yet again, if you know China and Japan, you've got Korea covered. Perhaps just on an emotional level is makes me angry to no end when Korea is unreasonably ignored, and I felt like a scholar of Lopez's repute should never have done so. Furthermore, as I own his "Buddhism in Practice" and am waiting for the delivery of "Tibetan Religions", I sure hope that his other books exhibit more attention to typographical errors than this one. I find it extremely unprofessional and generally disappointing to find words where letters have been reversed or a letter is missing from the beginning of the word and so on. I found issue with the

repeated use of the term "syncretic". Even now, as I check the dictionary definition of the word to see if I am understanding it correctly (Syncretic: Reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion, especially when success is partial or the result is heterogeneous.) I don't like what it says, I don't like the idea of "success is partial or the result is heterogeneous". This means that by calling a religion syncretic you are calling it something less than whole, complete, perfected. Whether you call Sikkhism or Sufism which I have no real emotional attachment to, or Tibetan Buddhism, which I do, syncretic I can't help but find this word coming from a western scholar to be at least slightly derogatory. Though I can certainly see the point in talking about syncretism in the period of foundation of a religion, once that religion can stand on its own, this term should be used only to refer to history. Interestingly on one internet website discussing "Religious Syncretism" they listed Caodai, Rastafari and Konkokyo as syncretic religions but the only mention of the ones given that appellation in the book was as religions that were syncretized into religions like Caodai (in the case of Buddhism, certainly). Perhaps I am mincing words here and should abandon this entire argument before I offend the entire history of scholarship in religious studies with my strange semantic bullheadedness. (Last gasp, my MS Word spell check thinks syncretic is a misspelling, but Sufism is not.) One of the things that I was interested in was the idea of the incarnate lamas of Tibet. To be straight here, of course I believe in incarnate lamas. I believe that the Dalai Lama has been around fourteen times. I believe in souls that have more knowledge of how to live than I myself do. I truly do believe that the entire concept of incarnate lamas is a natural outgrowth of the belief in reincarnation, that they must be the physical representation of the bodhisattvas that stay to help the rest of us attain a higher level of understanding and that it's stranger to wonder why other Buddhist traditions did not develop a concept of a succession of lamas in the way the Tibetans did. A non-believer may find the idea of incarnate lamas unbelievable, and pass it off with musings such as it being a form of succession or that Tibetan Buddhism is corrupt 'lamaism' but I don't feel that way myself. To me, it just seems natural. I have a particular interest in nationalism and national identity, perhaps because in Korean studies it has been such a widely discussed topic. Naturally I've looked at the issue from many different sides, and overall the aspect of national identity that is most interesting to me is the ways in which people actively seek to form national identity around specific images and stories. We've seen that in Korea with Dangun, and in the book they related a story about a specific politician creating a patriotic feeling around Ganesh. This may say much more about politicians and the pragmatic value in uniting people under one banner than it does the truth in the myths surrounding either Dangun or Ganesh (in this sense I am also taking Dangun as a religious leader, as he has been even

sometimes is perceived in this way, but was resurrected from relative obscurity to show national origins independent of China (Ganesh showing Indianness separated from Britain). I suppose it's not worth going into much detail here, but I wished that the book has actually explored the theme of how religions in Asia are often used for political purposes, and as a political platform almost. Despite being in general unimpressed with this book, I enjoyed the section of this book that gave an overview of the religions of India. India-understanding the historical time period that gave birth to Buddhism-is important for any student of Buddhism. However, I still feel that my knowledge in this respect is somewhat spotty. This chapter of the book did a really great job explaining the intertwined religions of the Indian subcontinent so that at least their relationships to each other and their similarities became rather clearer than before I read the book. Though I could continue on and on, the last salient point I would like to make is that reading the book I was struck, yet again, with what an enlightening effect Buddhism had on East Asia. Buddhism spurred literacy, printing and amazing artistic and architectural endeavors. No matter the religion of the people in the region today, they must acknowledge the tremendous debt that their ancestors have to the intellectual awakening which Buddhism brought.

This book surpasses all others currently available in terms of accuracy, subtlety, and complexity-a remarkable achievement, given the vastness of the task. An excellent introduction to Asian religions for college-level students, superbly supplemented by essays in the volumes from which these essays were excerpted.

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