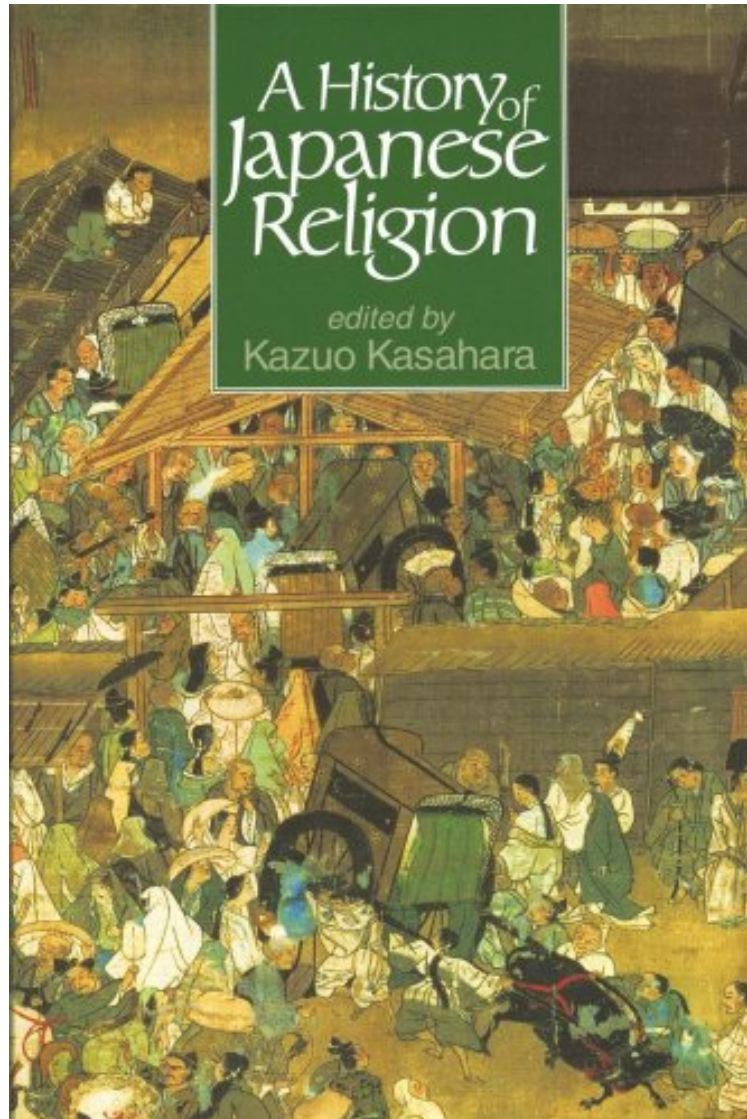


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A History of Japanese Religion

Kazuo Kasahara

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Kazuo Kasahara : A History of Japanese Religion before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A History of Japanese Religion:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Vctor Manuel HernndezThis is a MUST if you need to study Japanese History.10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Clear, concise and readable history of religionBy Neutiquam ErroIf you are seeking to understand the complex history of Eastern religion this book is a godsend. In clear, concise and readable prose, it lays out the development of religion in Japan from its prehistory to the present. It includes detailed descriptions of the major Buddhist and Shinto sects including biographies of their

founders and major figures, as well as the history of Christianity in Japan and the development of various other "new religions" in more recent times. The book begins with a preface and introduction which paint the history of Japanese religion in broad strokes. A chapter devoted to the development of religion to the Nara period (began c. 500 AD) is followed by a discussion of the early development of Mahayana Buddhism. The Tendai and Shingon sects receive special attention as does the development of Pure Land Buddhism. The Kannon, Miroku and Jizo Buddhist cults are discussed as is early Shinto and its relationship to Buddhism. Buddhist development in the Kamakura period, especially the Pure Land sects of Jodo, Jodo Shin and Ji are covered next, along with the Rinzaï and Soto schools of Zen and the Nichiren Lotus Sutra Buddhists. Developments in Shinto and Shugendō (a mountain-based ascetic movement) are discussed as are changes in the major sects under the Shogunate. The early history of Christianity in Japan is well treated and, from a Western perspective, is fascinating. The process whereby Buddhism became the dominant religion under the Shoguns only to be superseded by Nationalistic Shintoism in the Meiji period is likewise interesting. Finally, the development of myriad cults and the splintering of older established religions following the world war and the changes in religious thought up to the present make for interesting comparisons with the changes in religious thought in the West. The book, by a panel of Japanese scholars, was part of a series written originally in Japanese, on the religions of the world. The translation is very readable and the text hangs together remarkably well for something written by a panel of experts. There is occasional redundancy between sections and even through the translation one can hear different voices speaking at different times. The level of detail will satisfy most in the West, although scholars of particular eras or faiths may find it too general. The book is a history of religion and as such is not really a history of religious ideas. I occasionally wished for more discussion of the philosophical and theological notions underlying the historical actions and developments. The book is supplied with an excellent set of maps but would be improved in my opinion, by the addition of some illustrations. That said this is possibly one of the best books on Eastern Religion I have read in some time.²¹ of 22 people found the following review helpful. Well written and comprehensive. By Robert Self A surprisingly well-written and comprehensive look at religion in Japan, suitable for both specialists and non-specialists. The narrative is extremely well-organized and easy to follow. Some reviewers have mentioned that the book has far more pages on Buddhism than Shinto. However, that does NOT mean that Shinto is given short-shrift or that readers will not receive here an excellent history of that faith- it is just that the Buddhist sections are truly comprehensive. Chapters on Japan's much overlooked "third faith"- Shugendō- are also thorough and intriguing. Possibly the main strength of this book is its compassion and balance. It treats Buddhism, Shinto, Shugendō, and Christianity in a way that could offend none of them. More pages on Buddhism do not entail a pro-Buddhist slant to this book. In fact, some of the comments about the corruption of Buddhism during the Edo period are extremely biting. By the end of *A History of Japanese Religion*, one cannot but dwell upon the unstated and obvious fact that after 60 years of proselytizing, tens of thousands of missionary visits, millions of dollars of donations, and official government support after World War II, Christianity has made little or no impact on the country, with less than one half of one percent of the country, for example, describing themselves as "protestant". Astounding. There are far more members in obscure Shinto cults, such as Tenrikyō. There's a thesis in there somewhere...

Seventeen distinguished experts on Japanese religion provide a fascinating overview of its history and development. Beginning with the origins of religion in primitive Japanese society, they chart the growth of each of Japan's major religious organizations and doctrinal systems. They follow Buddhism, Shintoism, Christianity, and popular religious belief through major periods of change to show how history and religion affected each-and discuss the interactions between the different religious traditions.