

READER, I. (2024) RELIGION AND TOURISM IN JAPAN: INTERSECTIONS, IMAGES, POLICIES AND PROBLEMS. BLOOMSBURY. 257 + XI PP. HBK £85. ISBN: 978-1-3504-1883-7.

Ian Reader has produced a well documented and tightly argued book that shows, as the author sets out to do, that, within the broad remit of secularism's grasp, tourism has meant that religious sites, especially pilgrimage trails, have become dominated by leisure and heritage discourses that crowds out their "religious" significance within Japan. If critical readers worry that these terms do not "properly" apply to Japan, Reader fully justifies his utilisation of them in his first chapter giving a local and indigenous context, relating his work to critical studies on the concept of "religion" in Japan.

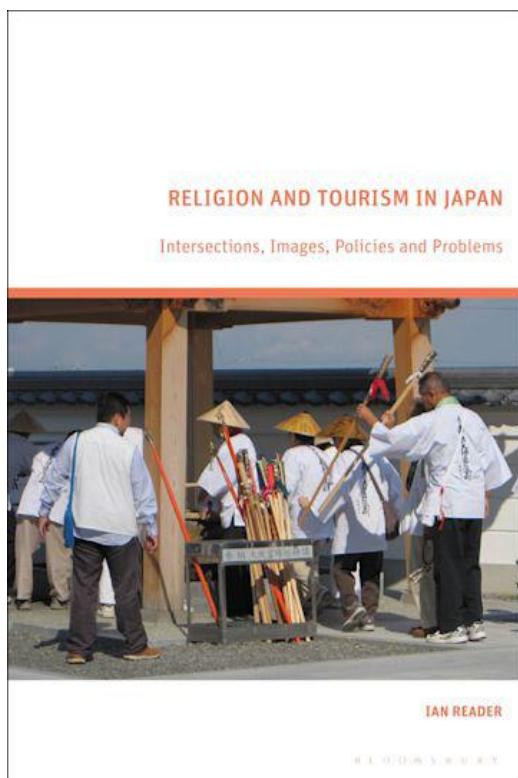
The book consists of six main chapters as well as a substantial introduction and conclusion (or chapter 7). The introduction starts with a vivid description of how a "religious" site is contrasted with a "tourist" site by a bus driver taking visitors to what he seemed to regard as something which should be the former but has become regarded as the latter. It also opens up many of the terms and issues that arise in later chapters, with particular chapters, while focused on differing case studies, also taking on specific issues. Chapter one takes on definitions of the two key terms "religion" and "tourism", which includes both a critical discussion of the wider disciplinary fields, as well as the local context regarding what they mean in Japan. Reader makes a key point which is that often scholars of tourism operate with uncritical definitions of "religion", but equally religious studies scholars are naïve in how they conceptualise "tourism". He also, rightly, takes issue with any conception

that these two are opposites and must be envisaged within a zero sum game mentality. He demonstrates that aspects of what we may term "tourism" has roots within Japanese history both as a term and a concept, with a long association with many pilgrimage trails and sites. One note that may be raised here for readers of the book, is that there is a lot of repetition of themes, issues, and arguments between the chapters. This, for myself, was somewhat tedious, and went beyond simple reminders. Nevertheless,

I do not raise it as a critique because Reader may well be alert to the fact that some readers will only read one or two chapters; many chapters would be ideal class readings. His approach helps include in each chapter critical issues on terminology, the political context, and the Japanese historical context around these issues.

Chapter two then addresses the development of transport networks – often at first bus tours, later railways, but also considering the rise of car ownership – alongside state policies on tourism. Chapter three then specifically takes on the status of secularism within Japan's

constitution, and so how "religious" sites (often officially registered as such) can be promoted and supported by the state by framing them as part of "culture" or "heritage". Chapters four to six take on particular locations as case studies, but also set them in the context of specific issues, though these often overlap and intersect. Chapter four on the Shikoku pilgrimage looks at how representations in popular television and media affect the image and popularity of sites. The next chapter takes another pilgrimage trail, Saikoku, and shows how railway companies helped popularise it and how, in particular, the question of food, especially sweets, became associated with the temples and shrines. The sixth chapter then takes on the tradition of Shugendo and its association with particular mountain re-



gions, showing how practitioners both resist and encourage the more touristic elements, and what this means for tradition. As mentioned above, many issues recur across these chapters as issues typically affect the sites in general, which has the benefit of allowing chapters to be employed as class readings in that most of the core issues will be included in any chapter, but does add to a sense of *déjà vu* for a reader of the whole book. Notably, the focus in the case studies is not so much the sites themselves, though their history and development is well described, but the wider issues that concern the book's argument.

Chapter 7, or the “Concluding comments” which are a full chapter length, bring together the arguments and issues in the book. Key in this is that religious institutions have often acted from a position of weakness in the modern period, needing both visitors and money, and so they actively cooperate in what we may term the commoditisation of their temples, shrines, and pilgrimage sites. Unease with this is balanced against pragmatism. As noted above, Reader resists the religion-versus-tourism binary, rightly noting how what we may term leisure and commercialism was in place in pre-modern Japan. But he also shows why, especially over the last few decades, we see something quite radically new in how this is managed. The author also shows how the heritage and culture discourse, including sites becoming UNESCO world heritage sites or recognised as significant in Japan, feeds into a change in how these sites are understood and need to operate. The way that government is integrated into this, with tourism being a key government policy for many rural areas, where these sites are often located, must frame the “heritage” angle above “religion” as the state cannot be involved with the latter. There is a Japanese dynamic, but one which is not unique to that context. Some other arguments also arise within his discussion and conclusion, but I raise these as some of my major takeaways in a rich discussion.

In conclusion, Reader offers an important contribution not simply to the study of religion in Japan, but also to studies on religion and tourism, and wider arguments around how religion is com-

modified and repackaged in the contemporary secular, social media saturated, and capitalist landscape. Insights beyond the Japanese context, though these are not Reader’s concern, certainly will strike thoughtful interlocutors grappling with this book. It is another sign also that Bloomsbury is a place where a lot of the most interesting scholarship in religious studies is emerging. Every serious library in the study of religion, and especially in religion and tourism (and popular culture) should include this book.

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TAIRA, T. (ED). (2022) ATHEISM IN FIVE MINUTES. EQUINOX PUBLISHING. 280 PP. HBK £70. ISBN: 9781800502369.

Atheism in Five Minutes is a collection of short essays edited by Teemu Taira. It is a concise yet comprehensive exploration of atheism. The book provides readers with an understanding of what atheism is and is not and its implications for society and individuals. It is a thought-provoking and accessible introduction to atheism, making it ideal for newcomers and those seeking to deepen their understanding.

The book is structured straightforwardly, each chapter focusing on a specific aspect of atheism. A leading scholar writes each of the sixty-four chapters, drawing on the latest research. They offer concise and thoughtful answers along with suggestions for further reading. The book is ideal for classroom use and personal study. Some of the questions the book asks include: Are children born atheists? (pp.185-188). Do atheists have rituals? (pp.224-226). Are atheists immoral? (pp.231-234). How has atheism related to politics? (pp.117-120). Why do some atheists remain members of religious groups? (pp.156-159). Is it challenging to be an atheist in Muslim countries? (pp.67-70). Do atheist parents have atheist children? (pp.189-192). Why are there so few black atheists? (pp.109-112). Has the Internet made atheism

more popular? (pp.92-95). The authors skilfully navigate through various philosophical arguments for and against the existence of God, shedding light on the complexities of theological discourse while maintaining a straightforward approach. The book addresses common misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding atheism, debunking myths and clarifying its moral and ethical implications. It emphasises the compatibility of atheism with values such as compassion, empathy, and social justice, challenging the notion that atheism necessarily leads to nihilism or moral relativism.

One of the book's strengths lies in its examination of the diversity within atheism itself. The book delves into different forms of atheism, from secular humanism to existential atheism, highlighting the nuanced differences in their approaches to life's existential questions. Through this exploration, readers gain a deeper appreciation for the richness and complexity of atheist thought. Another strength of the book is its discussion of atheism's relationship to religion. Paul-Francois Tremlett acknowledges the complex interplay between atheism and religious belief, noting that atheism can exist alongside various religious traditions and that not all atheists are hostile to religion (pp.79-82). The book examines the role of atheism in secularism and the separation of church and state, arguing that atheism can provide a valuable perspective in promoting religious freedom and equality. Throughout the book, contributors engage with critical philosophical and ethical questions that atheism raises. They address the challenge of morality without religion, arguing that moral principles can be grounded in human reason and empathy rather than divine command. The book also explores the implications of atheism for concepts such as meaning and pur-

pose in life, suggesting that atheism can offer a sense of freedom and responsibility to create meaning for oneself.

In addition to its intellectual exploration of atheism, the book also touches on its practical implications for individuals and society. Ryan Cragun and Peter Klug discuss the stigma often faced by atheists, particularly in religiously conservative societies, and the importance of promoting tolerance and understanding (pp.148-155). They also consider the role of atheism in contemporary debates on science, education, and public policy, highlighting the need for evidence-based decision-making and critical thinking.



Despite its brevity, *Atheism in Five Minutes* is a rich and thought-provoking read that covers several topics with clarity and insight. Contributors do not shy away from addressing challenging philosophical issues, including topics such as the problem of evil, the nature of consciousness, and the meaning of life with intellectual rigour, encouraging readers to reflect critically on their beliefs and assumptions. The book is accessible and engaging,

making complex ideas accessible to readers of all backgrounds.

While the contributors acknowledge the global diversity of religious belief, the book focuses primarily on atheism in Western societies. A more extensive exploration of atheism in other cultural and religious contexts would have enriched the book's analysis and provided a more comprehensive understanding of atheism as a global phenomenon.

In conclusion, *Atheism in Five Minutes* is highly recommended for anyone interested in exploring

the concepts of atheism and secularism. The contributors' clear and concise writing styles and insightful analysis make this book an invaluable resource for understanding the complexities of atheism and its implications for individuals and society. Whether one is a sceptic, a believer, or somewhere in between, *Atheism in Five*

Minutes offers a compelling insight into a topic that continues to spark debate and inquiry in the modern world.

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