YCAPS Recommended Reading and Viewing List

Late Update: 22 June 2020

This list catalogs YCAPS members’ recommendations regarding books to read in English to gain better understanding of the Indo-Pacific and Japan. Given the nature of our organization maritime and security topics are featured heavily. It also looks beyond books to include articles, films and TV series that inform the consumer. Inputs are encouraged. Please submit to info@ycaps.org!

Asia-Pacific

-Michael Auslin, *Asia’s New Geopolitics: Essays on Reshaping the Indo-Pacific*

Should we be wholly focused on China with regards to the overlying geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific region? Auslin asks and answers this question. [Mike Perrin]


This is a great background read for how the Central Pacific Ocean is affected by geopolitics, mainly focusing on the fisheries industry. Bay-Hansen came out of the fisheries industry and knows what he’s writing about. Micronesia, while a small nation in population, is significant in its location and actual seascape. Available on Kindle in Japan. [Mike Perrin]

-Jeff Smith, *Asia's Quest for Balance: China's Rise and Balancing in the Indo-Pacific*

Smith deals with the fundamentals of the security landscape with regards to China in the Asia-Pacific region and applies them to the realms of compromise and diplomatic balancing. [Mike Perrin]

Japan

-Jake Adelstein, *Tokyo Vice*

Adelstein takes a rare glimpse inside Japan’s police force in this character-filled narrative. He pulls no punches in the most literal sense of the word, as his tales of fights and underworld interaction make for a riveting story. [Keiko Mitchell]

-Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*

It was written at the invitation of the U.S. Office of War Information, in order to understand and predict the behavior of the Japanese in World War II by reference to a series of contradictions in traditional culture. The book was influential in shaping American ideas about Japanese culture during the occupation of Japan, and popularized the distinction between guilt cultures and shame cultures. [Keiko Mitchell]

-Roger Davies and Osamu Ikeno, *The Japanese Mind*

An all-encompassing work that covers everything from the *bigaku* sense of beauty concept to the *maza-kon* Oedipal complex. Davies and Ikeno also discuss the Japanese sense of ambiguity and using silence in communication. Wider social issues such as the seniority system that starts in primary education, the ‘inside’ circles vs the ‘outside’ circles in societal commitment, and the adopting of foreign elements of culture are all covered alongside more obscure characteristics. [Mike Perrin]
Takeo Doi, The Anatomy of Dependance

The Anatomy of Dependence (Amae no Kōzō) is a 1971 book by Japanese psychoanalyst Takeo Doi, discussing at length Doi's concept of amae, which he describes as a uniquely Japanese need to be in good favor with, and be able to depend on, the people around oneself. He likens this to behaving childishly in the assumption that parents will indulge you, and claims that the ideal relationship is that of the parent–child, and all other relationships should strive for this degree of closeness. [Keiko Mitchell]

John Dower, Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WWII

This history of post-WWII Japan shows the complexity of the Japanese psyche revealing much about the status of its current Alliance with the U.S. [Yoichiro Sato]

Sheldon Harris, Factories of Death

This controversial book sheds light on Japanese biological warfare predating and during World War II, and America's assistance in covering it up. Harris investigates the activities of the Japanese scientists involved in the experiments, the upper echelon of the US Army’s knowledge of the torture, and the claims of the experimentation of POWs during wartime. This is a sensitive and relevant topic for many countries, including China, the Koreas, Mongolia, Russia, Japan, and the U.S. [Nicholas Millward]

History Channel, Defending Japan

A new series by the History Channel from an American point of view on the defense of Japan and the challenges that are faced. Events are changing fast, though, so what was on the plate two months back may be old school this month. Nevertheless, a must-see with great footage, despite my adversity to the History Channel in the past decade. [Mike Perrin]

Alex Kerr, Lost Japan

Written by a Japanese speaking, Oxford educated, American, Lost Japan is a narrative work that allows the new arrival to Japan to dive into the Japan of the first half of the post-war years, while at the same time allowing the Japan veteran to feel the same nostalgia Kerr writes about. While many of the books on this list are informative, Lost Japan is emotional and a good read to balance out the raw information in other media on Japan. [Keiko Mitchell]

Alex Kerr, Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Japan

Alex Kerr is a former Rhodes Scholar (Yale <> Oxford), who is an expert on Japanese art and aesthetics, based on his experience of teaching traditional arts at the Omoto-Kyo Shinto sect in Kamioka (near Kyoto). This work is essentially part II, a mirror image, of his book “Lost Japan.” Lost Japan is a love letter to Japan, Dogs and Demons, the lover scorned. [Kyle Cleveland]

Akira Kurosawa, Kagemusha (The Shadow Warrior)

The undisputed master of the mountains during Japan's feudal period (Sengoku period), Takeda Shingen, has died, but to maintain morale and stymie the Takeda clan's enemies, his twenty-four generals recruit an imposter. The story unfolds in an eerie and beautiful way that only Kurosawa was able to capture on film. Nominated for two Oscars and winner of Cannes, Cesar and Golden Globe awards, Kagemusha was eventually taken under George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola's wings for international distribution. [Mike Perrin]
- Akira Kurosawa, [Rashomon](#)

One of Kurosawa’s most acclaimed films, Rashomon is almost Shakespearean (as many of Kurosawa’s films are) in its approach to what is said to be the symbolism behind America’s relations to Japan in the early post-war era. Four people give different accounts of a man’s murder and the rape of his wife, which director Akira Kurosawa presents with striking imagery and an ingenious use of flashbacks. Symbolically, the rough protector (played by Toshiro Mifune) is America, while the refined lord and his wife are the Japanese government and culture. A controversial film in that respect as well as a classic. [Mike Perrin]

- John Lie, [Multi-Ethnic Japan](#)

A historical analysis of the social construction of Japanese ethnic identity, with discussion of contemporary racism and discrimination in Japan and in its popular culture. [Kyle Cleveland]

- Thomas Lockley and Geoffrey Girard, [African Samurai: The True Story of Yasuke, a Legendary Black Warrior in Feudal Japan](#)

Lockley and Girard tell the amazing story of the first ever foreign-born samurai, Yasuke, a man from Africa who served and fought beside Japan’s infamous warlord Oda Nobunaga in the 1580s. Yasuke, a mercenary in the service of Jesuit missionaries, met Nobunaga when his employer Alessandro Valignano was granted an audience. Nobunaga was more interested in Yasuke than the Italian priest, and immediately took the African warrior into his service and became a close personal confidant. The dream ended abruptly in June 1582 when Nobunaga was assassinated. Yasuke stayed by his lord until the end, and is traditionally held to have rescued the severed head from capture. This book is an easy access point into Japanese history, told in a vivid and speedy narrative manner. [Thomas Lockley]

- James May, [James May: Our Man in Japan](#)

Top Gear and the Grand Tour have nothing on this inside tour of Japan from top to bottom. James May of Top Gear fame takes us around Japan to see not the tourist spots, but places that really tell the story of what makes the nation tick. He approaches the psyche of Japan with a sense of humor reminiscent of Top Gear. [Mike Perrin]

- Gavan McCormack, [The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence](#)

A political science professor (formerly at ICU and then at Australia National University), discussing the rise of the "Doken Kokka" (the Japanese Construction State). [Kyle Cleveland]

- Boyé De Mente, [The Japanese Have a Word for It](#)

Set up in an encyclopaedic format, each entry has a whole page dedicated to explaining and fleshing out the phrase examined. It elucidates the socio-cultural underpinnings of the phrases in question, making this a really comprehensive and enlightening work. [Keiko Mitchell]

- Jennifer Miller, [Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan](#)

Includes sober and serious content about Japan’s Post-WW2 security matters [Ooishi Naoaki]

- Inazo Nitobe, [Bushido](#)

BUSHIDO’s literal translation is “Military-Knight-Ways”. It is an unwritten code of moral principles which the knights (Samurai) were required or instructed to observe. This book is a classic to which generations of scholars and laymen alike have long referred for insights into the character of the Japanese people. [Keiko Mitchell]
- Alexis O'Shay, *Moving to Japan*

Moving to Japan with kids can be a daunting and uncertain process that will mold their future personalities. This early reader story helps children to not only adjust to Japan life, but to really enjoy it. [Mike Perrin]

- Richard Lloyd Parry, *Ghosts of the Tsunami*

A moving account of the emotional impact of the great Japan Tohoku tsunami, using the tragedy of an elementary school in Tohoku, where poor decision making among school administrators led to the largest loss of life among children in the 3.11 Tohoku tsunami, as a case study of Japanese relation to authority. Parry is the senior editor of The Times (of London), and also author of *People Who Eat Darkness*. [Kyle Cleveland]

- Andrew Oros, *Japan's Security Renaissance*

Oros expertly unpacks how, in the last decade, Japan has shifted its security policy from one almost exclusively focused on building a strong economy while relying on its alliance with the United States, to develop a wider range of military capabilities backed by a new national comfort with the possession of a wider range of strategic options.

- Alessio Patalano, *Post-war Japan as a Sea Power*

Patalano is the premier historian writing on the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force in English. His expertise is such that the JMSDF invites him to come from London to give JMSDF admirals lecture on their heritage. [John Bradford]

- Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese*

*The Japanese* is a definitive work on understanding the Japanese people. Reischauer’s viewpoint is Western, but he is also a man who was raised in Japan from the Meiji period right through until the end of the Showa post-war era. This is a fascinating insight into the changing socio-economic landscape of Japan as well as the historical benchmarks that made the Japanese who they are today. [Mike Perrin]


These are Richie’s Diaries; he is the author of over 40 books on Japan. Richie arrived in Japan on a Liberty Ship (as a medical officer) in 1947, and was a long time correspondent for The Japan Times. He is considered the leading authority on Japanese films, but his work spans a much larger range of cultural analysis, attuned especially to mass/popular culture. A genuine insider, Richie is a historical figure in post-war Japan studies, and is widely known as being the most accessible and insightful writer on Japan for almost 5 decades. [John Bradford]

- Richard Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children*

Richard Samuels is a political science professor at M.I.T. This book compares Italian and Japanese politics. [Kyle Cleveland]

- Sir George Sansom, *A History of Japan (vol 1-3)*

While being one of the first works on Japanese history in English, it is arguably one of the most detailed, yet colourful, and those who want a more substantial bite of Japanese history will get a feast from Sansom’s volumes. [Mike Perrin]
- **Sheila A. Smith, Japan Rearmed: The Politics of Military Power**
  Despite the simple title, this is an intricate account of the evolution of the Japan Self Defense Forces from the Cold War through to the constitutional changes that have brought the SDF to its present condition. The implications these changes render are addressed in the conclusion. [Mike Perrin]

- **Gregory Smits, When the Earth Roars**
  The March 11, 2011 Tohoku earthquake in context, with a deeply informed understanding of seismology. [Kyle Cleveland]

- **Peter Woolley, Geography & Japan’s Strategic Choices: From Seclusion to Internationalization**
  A convincing history that shows the influence of geography on Japan’s strategic choices from the 16th century to the present. A great walk through the history of Japan’s international relations. [John Bradford]

### Korean War

- **David Halberstam, The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War**
  Halberstam is Pulitzer Prize winning author of "The Fifties," "The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era," and many books on the popular history of government and war in the modern era of American politics. His book on the Korean War is among the most accessible - even cinematic - renderings of the Korean War, depicting in intimate detail the travails suffered by the U.S. Army in Korea. With vivid portraits of the architects of the war, his chapter on the relationship between General MacArthur and President Truman, and explanation for why MacArthur was removed from command, is worth the price of admission. [Kyle Cleveland]

### North Korea

- **Van Jackson, On the Brink**
  A solid academic who served as the Secretary of Defence’s Country Director for North Korea during the Obama Administration. He admonished then for being too hawkish, his analysis is none to kind to that leadership, but he explains why he believes the Trump administration’s approach is even more dangerous. [John Bradford]

- **Adam Johnson, The Orphan Masters’ Son**
  Winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, this novel deals with intertwined themes of propaganda, identity and state power in North Korea. The scenes involving the protagonist work on “spy ships” is particularly poignant for YCAPS members. [John Bradford]

- **Bradley K. Martin, Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty**
  A history of the Kim Dynasty by a former president of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan. [Kyle Cleveland]

### Russo-Japanese War

- **Shiba Ryotaro, Clouds Above the Hill (vol 1-4)**
  Ryotaro’s most famous and influential work, he captures an encompassing and in-depth analysis of the Russo-Japanese War, from the front-lines to the Emperor. These novels depict the lives of two brothers who significantly impacted the war efforts. A fairly long read, the series really picks up starting in the 2nd of 4 novels. [Nicholas Millward]
-Reginald Hargreaves, *Red Sun Rising: The Siege of Port Arthur*
  One of Lippincott Company’s “Great Battles of History” series, this book provides an excellent account of the siege of Port Arthur. Hargreaves depicts strategic considerations and tactical methods of both armies, while capturing numerous dramatic battle narratives. This extremely costly battle serves as a prelude to the deadly trench warfare of World War 1 and shows the dramatic difference between siege and field armies. [Nicholas Millward]

-Noel F. Busch, *The Emperor’s Sword*
  Many historians claim the Battle of Tsushima was the most crucial naval engagement in history, displaying Japan’s advanced gunnery skills, preparation, and leadership. This novel delves into the main characters, the preparation, encounter, and repercussions of this monumental battle. [Nicholas Millward]

**South China Sea**

-Bill Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*
  Top-notch book on the South China Sea. Hayton’s record of journalism enables the writing to be accessible and relatable while the depth of his knowledge reflects his Cambridge PhD. [John Bradford]

-Ian Storey and Clive Schofield, *The South China Sea Dispute: Increasing Stakes and Rising Tensions*
  Leading scholars dive in the political and legal aspects of the South China Sea dispute. [John Bradford]

**Yokosuka**

-James Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*
  Pulitzer Prize–winning author and former Navy officer, James A. Michener wrote much of this novel about naval aviators fighting in Korea and recharging during port visits to Yokosuka while serving as a reporter about the carrier Essex and Valley Forge during the Korean War. Veterans have described is a stunningly accurate depiction of their lives. The film adaptation was shot with cooperation of the Navy onboard Essex-class carriers and on location in and around Yokosuka. The film is worth a watch just to see 1950s Yokosuka, Tokyo and the Fujiya Hotel in Hakone. [John Bradford]

-Giles Milton, *Samurai William*
  Milton paints a stunningly vivid picture of the Englishman who sailed to Japan before the East India Companies were even formed. William Adams’ journey from Europe to Japan is never boring, and Milton reminds us of that fact in his excellent narrative style. While researchers may find the lack of in-text referencing, it is pure gold for the reader seeking adventure in a book. This work does not fail to provide that. [Mike Perrin]

**World War II**

-James Clavell, *King Rat*
  Clavell wrote this novel about life as in Singapore’s Changi Prison based on his own experience as a POW there being held by the Japanese. Whereas the other historical fiction in Clavell’s “Asia Saga” (i.e. Shogun, Taipan, Noble House) is overly romanticized, *King Rat* is gritty, realistic, and literary. The 1965 film adaptation is also worth the watch. [John Bradford]
- John Dower, *War Without Mercy*
  The definitive work on the racial aspects of the Pacific War. A companion piece to Dower's Pulitzer Prize winning book *Embracing Defeat.* [Kyle Cleveland]

**Other Reading Lists**

- CNO’s Professional Reading Program
- Marine Corps Commandant’s Professional Reading List
- Australian Navy Chief’s Professional Resource List