

REFERENCE LIST - Dr. John Freedman

Silver Moon Japan-Korea Lecture Series Sept 19 - Oct 3, 2026

JAPAN

BOOKS:

The Kojiki, translated by Basil Hall Chamberlain. Big news in early 8th century Japan: The Emperor is descended from the Sun God (if he must say so himself). Read all about it.

Japan, An Illustrated History by Shelton Woods. A good introduction to the fascinating history of this extraordinary land and people.

A Traveller's History of Japan by Richard Tames- Excellent and well-written "short course" in Japanese history with a scholarly approach despite its title.

A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower by Kenneth Henshall – Very thematically oriented approach rather than a lot of dry facts. The author points out the recurring motifs in thousands of years of Japanese history, and they resonate well.

The Tale of Genji by Lady Murasaki Shikibu, c. 1000AD – Very probably the world's first novel, offering a colorful glimpse into the intrigues and amours of handsome Prince Genji and the Heian (classical Kyoto) imperial court.

The Life and Times of Tokugawa Iyeasu by A.I. Sadler

The Travel Writings of Matsuo Basho, edited by Steven D. Carter

Silence by Shusaku Endo. A prize-winning 1966 novel set in 17th century Japan which recounts the lives of Jesuit missionaries during the years of the "*Kakure Kirishitans*" or Hidden Christians. This was the basis for Martin Scorsese's powerful 2017 movie of the same name (see below).

The Temple of the Golden Pavillion by Yukio Mishima. Japan's revered avant-garde novelist tackles the true story of why a young Buddhist monk burned down the ethereal Golden Pavillion in 1950. A novel about beauty, obsession and evil – Mishima himself committed *seppuku* in 1970 at age 45.

Shogun by James Clavell. The highly acclaimed novel based on the life of Englishman William Adams who was shipwrecked off the coast of Japan in 1600 and became an advisor to the Shogun Tokugawa Iyeasu. A fascinating and colorful look at the history and culture of feudal Japan.

Samurai: An Illustrated History by Mitsuo Kure

Samurai: A Concise History by Michael Wert

Bushido: The Soul of Japan by Inazo Nitobe

The Sengoku Period: War in Japan 1467-1615 by Stephen Turnbull

At the Dragon's Gate-With the OSS in The Far East by Charles Fenn- A superb first-hand account of Japanese-occupied Vietnam and China in the 1940s by an OSS (CIA precursor) operative.

The Imperial Cruise: A Secret History of Empire and War by James Bradley, who makes the case that Teddy Roosevelt's support of Japanese imperialism helped light the long fuse to Pearl Harbor.

Bridge Over The River Kwai by Pierre Boulle. Original novel on which the movie (see below) is based.

The Pacific War Trilogy by Ian Toll. One of the most recent and most definitive treatments, with an emphasis on naval warfare aspects. Volume 1 covers 1941-2, volume 2 1943-44, and volume 3 1944-45.

The Pacific War by John Costello - An excellent 1-volume (albeit 720 pages) account of a vast subject

Retribution by Max Hastings. An unhedged and exhaustingly referenced historical review of the latter years of World War II and Japan's inevitable destruction.

Hirohito and The Making of Modern Japan by Herbert Bix

Flyboys by James Bradley. A book chronicling the sordid events on the island of ChiChi Jima, neighbor to Iwo Jima, in 1945. Bradley (the author of *Flags of Our Fathers*) puts it all into rich context with an excellent historical overview of the war and the insanely evil "Spirit Warrior" regime that ruled Japan.

Memoirs: 1945-Year of Decisions by Harry S. Truman. Plain speaking from the man who made the biggest and most controversial military decision in human history.

Hiroshima by John Hersey. The classic tome about the bombing of Hiroshima.

Okinawa: The Ultimate Battle by Bill Sloan. An excellent book about this epic battle.

Typhoon of Steel: The Battle For Okinawa by James Belote. A well-researched tome for those interested in detailed military history and an understanding of this fiercest of battles.

Memoirs of a Kamikaze by Kazuo Odachi - An amazing first-hand account of a 94yo surviving kamikaze pilot - clearly unmasking the shameful realities behind this suicidal fanaticism.

Downfall by Richard B. Frank - Outstanding analysis of the end of the Pacific War, assessing the necessity and consequences of the atomic bombings vs. alternative strategies of blockade and invasion.

The Most Controversial Decision by Wilson Miscamble. A measured analysis by an ordained priest and historian looking at the question of whether the use of the terrible weapon was truly necessary to save lives, or primarily a potent and expedient political tool to thwart Soviet ambitions.

Robert J. Oppenheimer: American Prometheus by Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin

Downfall: The End of the Japanese Imperial Empire by Richard Frank

On Apology by Dr. Aaron Lazare

The Art and Culture of Japan by Nelly Delay. A nice compendium of a vast subject.

The Book of Yokai (Japanese ghosts) by Michael Dylan Foster

Travelers' Tales: Japan, edited by Donald George and Amy Carlson. A sampling of literary excerpts from classic travel pieces on Japan. Captivating and an easy read.

The Inland Sea by Donald Richie. Travelogue and paean with almost poetic descriptions of the Seto Sea's charm and beauty by inveterate Japanophile Donald Richie ("the Lefcadio Hearn of our time").

A Beginner's Guide to Japan by Pico Iyer

Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan by Lefcadio Hearn. Classic (1891) writings by Japan's most famous expatriate resident and the West's first great observer of Japan. Read carefully and you will note that much of the "beauty" of the Japanese psyche that Hearn praises will later be twisted by the militarist regime into an ugly and destructive jingoism.

Memoirs of a Geisha, by Arthur Golden. Read the book, skip the movie (which missed the essence). An amazing "walk in the shoes" of a geisha.

The Films of Akira Kurosawa by Donald Richie. Prolific Japanese observer and aesthete turns his eye and keen insight toward Japan's greatest cineaste.

Dave Barry Does Japan On a (much) lighter note, the inimitable Dave Barry offers very funny and razor-sharp insights into Japanese culture and psyche.

The Secrets of Mariko: A Year in the Life of a Japanese Woman, by Elizabeth Bumiller. An intimate glimpse into the private world of a Japanese housewife and her family in a changing (1990s) Japan.

The Art of the Japanese Garden by David and Machiko Young. Excellent and richly illustrated. (They are lovely people to boot- I worked with them on a Smithsonian program.)

Zen and The Fine Arts by Shiniochi Hisamatsu

A Taste of Japan also by Donald Richie. A classic tome on Japanese cuisine and its unique aesthetic by Japan's greatest Western observer of our time.

The Complete Book of Japanese Cooking by Emi Kazuko. This is a combined food encyclopedia and cookbook, well-illustrated and well-priced. You can also download my own ***Japanese Culinary Lexicon*** from my [Scholar At Sea](#) website.

FILM and TELEVISION:

Samurai Trilogy Collection- The 'classic triad': three of film legend Akira Kurosawa's "samurai cinema" masterpieces in one DVD set: ***The Seven Samurai*** 1954 (which inspired *The Magnificent Seven*), ***Yojimbo*** 1961 (inspiration for *A Fistful of Dollars*), and its sequel ***Sanjuro*** (1962). All starring samurai superstar Toshiro Mifune.

Other very notable Kurosawa films include the iconic ***Rashomon*** 1950 which exposes the nature of truth and perspective by non-linear storytelling of the murder of a samurai in feudal Japan through the eyes of several characters, ***The Hidden Fortress*** (1958), ***Throne of Blood*** 1957 (based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), ***Kagemusha***, ***The Shadow Warrior*** (1980), and the legendary filmmaker's final epic, ***Ran*** (which means chaos - an apt description of the Sengoku Period) 1983, based on *King Lear*.

Shogun 1980 TV series based on James Clavell's novel which itself is based on the story of William Adams in Tokugawa Iyeyasu's Japan. Starring Richard Chamberlain and the famed Toshiro Mifune.

The Last Samurai – 2004 – Well-done if romanticized historical fiction (it conflates several real-life events including the life of William Adams, the life of Saigo Takamori, the Boshin War and the War of the Northern Coalition) that nevertheless provides real and entertaining insight into the mid-1800s Meiji “Restoration” period. Starring Tom Cruise but the excellent Ken Watanabe steals the show.

Yasuke, The Black Samurai, 2021 Netflix animated special based on a (probably) real historical figure.

The 47 Ronin, 2013 - Not Keanu's best, but nicely recounts the timeless story of honor and sacrifice

The Last Emperor – 1987 epic directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. A masterpiece on the life of Pu Yi, China's last Emperor. A great work of cinematic art as well as an excellent historical drama on the rise of Japan and fall of the Qing Dynasty. Begins in 1912 and ends in the 1950s People's Republic of China.

Empire of the Sun- directed by Steven Spielberg 1987 – A beautiful epic tale of the Japanese invasion of Shanghai seen from the perspective of a British boy (played by young Christian Bale).

John Rabe 2009, directed by Florian Gallenberger. A truly superb and under-appreciated film based on the life of German industrialist John Rabe and his efforts to save the Chinese from Japanese atrocities in Nanking during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Every bit as compelling as ***Schindler's List***.

The Pacific 2010 mini-series produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks (companion piece to their *Band of Brothers*) - the human side of the Pacific War. The powerful first episode ends with the Battle of the Tenaru on Guadalcanal and depicts the Japanese ferocity and suicidal drive along with the end of their 'victory disease' (Guadalcanal was the first major Allied offensive victory).

The Bridge On The River Kwai – 1957, directed by David Lean. The classic and still great Hollywood version (highly fictionalized) of the real events in Japanese-controlled Thailand in WWII on the Mae Klong River (not the Kwai).

The True Story of the Bridge On the River Kwai – The History Channel. The real scoop. Makes the Hollywood film and the whole subject even more interesting. And vindicates the Alec Guinness character who was written as a less than admirable British officer by the author Pierre Boulle, a Frenchman,

King Rat 1965, directed by Bryan Forbes, starring young George Segal, based on the James Clavell novel. A beautifully filmed allegorical tale of life in Singapore's infamous Changi Prison during the Japanese occupation. Clavell was a real-life prisoner in Changi during the war.

Day of the Kamikaze- Excellent Smithsonian program available on DVD about the world's first mass suicide bomber operation – unfathomable but true.

Okinawa: The Last Battle - History Channel DVD on the “Typhoon of Steel”.

Letters From Iwo Jima and ***Flags of Our Fathers*** (2006) directed by Clint Eastwood. These two companion pieces tell the tragic tale of Iwo Jima from the Japanese and American sides, respectively. By far the best and most intelligent work Eastwood has ever done, and among the best WWII films.

The Railway Man 2013, directed by Jon Teplitzky and starring Colin Firth and Nicole Kidman. A moving story about the lasting personal trauma of war – and forgiveness.

The Sands of Iwo Jima 1949. The Duke at his best as the haunted Sgt. Stryker.

Tora! Tora! Tora! 1970. An intelligent historical drama looking at the events that led up to the day of infamy in Oahu on December 7, 1941.

Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo 1944. A classic film nicely re-telling the story of the amazing and heroic Doolittle Raid of 1942. Van Johnson and Spencer Tracy star.

Silence 2017, directed by Martin Scorsese. Finally made after a 20-year gestation period, this tale of the ‘Hidden Christians’ starring Liam Neeson & Andrew Garfield is beautiful, brutal (be aware) and powerful.

Oppenheimer 2023, directed by Chris Nolan - star-studded cast and mega-hype but IMHO a missed opportunity that failed to mine the profundity of the real story. See ***The Day After Trinity*** below.

The Day After Trinity, 1981- superb documentary directed by Jon Else - available on Amazon Prime Video. Far better treatment of the subject than the Hollywood blockbuster.

The Inland Sea 1991 - a beautiful film based on Donald Richie's classic travelogue/philosophical treatise

Spirited Away 2001 - A highly acclaimed Japanese *anime* fantasy film by the renowned Hayao Miyazaki that will transport you deep into the world of 'yokai' - ghostly spirits of Japanese folklore.

Tampopo 1987 - A whimsical modern 'ramen Western' wryly satirizing American 'spaghetti westerns'.

Shogun - 2024 - Brilliant re-imagining of the 1980 mini-series based on James Clavell's novel. Darker, more textured, with a spellbindingly cunning Toranaga (Tokugawa) played by the great Hiroyuki Sanada.

Hikikomori, The Lost Generation 2018 documentary on the Japan's *hikikomori* ('pulling inward') young shut-ins who self-isolate and drop out of society.

[Note: For more films related to the *hikikomori* phenomenon, send me an email: ScholarAtSea@gmail.com]

A Man Vanishes - 1967 classic of Japanese cinema by director Shohei Imamura - a semi-documentary telling the story of a *johatsu* ('evaporated' person) - and there is more than meets the eye

Johatsu: Into Thin Air- A moving documentary on Japan's 'evaporated' people who choose to escape shame and desperation by vanishing without a trace (currently available on AppleTV+)

ON THE WEB:

20,000-Year History of Japan in 10 mins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Echp1N4o0Y&feature=youtu.be>

Japanese Cosmology: The Age of Gods

<https://japanthis.com/2020/06/12/japanese-cosmology-japanese-mythology/>

Shinto – An overview <https://www.ancient.eu/Shinto/>

History of Japan Podcasts - <https://historyofjapan.wordpress.com/>

BUYUUDEN: Japanese History - a truly excellent compilation of videos on Japanese history. *Buyuuden* means 'epic story'. <https://www.youtube.com/@BuyuudenJapaneseHistory/videos>

The Tale of Genji and The Art it Inspired

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/23/arts/design/genji-met-musum-review>

The Samurai Archives –The very interesting musings of graduate students and other Japanese history buffs, examining both history and contemporary society. Most of the material is about feudal Japan.

<http://www.samuraipodcast.com/>

The Tale of Genji: Sex and Intrigue in Medieval Japan

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/10/writers-way-kyoto-lady-murasaki-travel/683723/>

Tokugawa: The Cunning Shogun Who Outlasted His Rivals

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/premium/article/tokugawa-ieyasu-japan-shogun-shogunate>

The Samurai Code for Kamikaze Pilots and Businessmen

<https://bigthink.com/thinking/bushido-japanese-samurai-code-kamikaze-pilots-businessmen/>

The True Story of Jules Brunet and The Last Samurai

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/last-samurai-true-story-jules-brunet>

How A Lady Invented The Novel

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/articles/the-tale-of-genji-the-worlds-first-novel/>

Glossary of Japanese Buddhism https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_Japanese_Buddhism

Japonisme: How Japanese Art Influenced and Inspired the Impressionists

<https://mymodernmet.com/japanese-art-impressionism-japonisme/>

What Did Van Gogh Learn From Japanese Artists? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boxylJrNxRg>

How Japan Influenced the Impressionists <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1tt3Xpf8Lo>

China, Japan and The 21 Demands

<http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/china-japan-and-the-21-demands/>

The Washington Naval Conference of 1922

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/naval-conference>

This Day in History: December 7, 1941

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/pearl-harbor-bombed>

Major Battles in the Pacific from PBS special "The American Experience".

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/pacific-major-battles/>

Battle of the Coral Sea: The First Aircraft Carrier Battle in History

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB5hH3ksvKE>

Japanese History Thru Film- article available on the IMDB

<http://www.imdb.com/list/ls074864845/>

Pacific Overtures – Brilliant comedic 1976 Stephen Sondheim musical about the forced opening of Japan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQ546PASgHI>

History of Japan in 9 Minutes by Bill Wurtz on You Tube – spot on and witty!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh5LY4Mz15o&list=PLo7FOXNe7Yt9nQlysoQ9MJIGGV2ZIs26X&index=1>

Why Humans Are Cruel from Vox online

<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/12/14/16687388/violence-psychology-human-nature-cruelty>

How Evil Happens <https://medium.com/aeon-magazine/how-evil-happens-a7e023f905a9>

Diplomacy That Will Live in Infamy: How Teddy Roosevelt Lit the Fuse That Led to Pearl Harbor

https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/opinion/06bradley.html?_r=2&hp

Why is the Plight of Comfort Women Still So Controversial? NY Times August 2017

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/opinion/comfort-women-japan-south-korea.html?_r=0

An Important Statue – on the ‘Comfort Women’ memorial in San Francisco- The New Yorker, Oct 2017

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/an-important-statue-for-comfort-women-in-san-francisco>

Invasion of Malaya: First Shot in the Pacific War

<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/people/2016/12/08/invasion-of-malaya-the-japanese-arrive/>

A Kamikaze Pilot Who Escaped Death Tells His Story

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/03/world/asia/japan-kamikaze.html>

Tianan and Hiroshima: 75 Years Later

<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/atomic-bomb-hiroshima-75th-anniversary-intl-hnk/index.html>

The Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – actual 1945 post-bomb footage

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn8hcq8bPqs&feature=youtu.be>

The Enola Gay and the Hiroshima Bombing, 75th Anniversary

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/history/hiroshima-anniversary-enola-gay-mission/>

What It Was Like Aboard The Enola Gay

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/08/06/hiroshima-oral-history/>

This Day in History: The Pacific Theatre (nice compilation of key events in succinct monographs)

<https://www.history.com/tag/pacific-theater>

Hiroshima: The Price of Peace? Prager University (5-minute video)

<https://www.prageru.com/videos/hiroshima-the-price-of-peace?37709013241>

Why The Second A-Bomb?

<https://www.history.com/articles/hiroshima-nagasaki-second-atomic-bomb-japan-surrender-wwii>

Victory in the Pacific

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1945-10-01/america-war-victory-pacific>

The Highest Democracy: Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn's Eulogy to the Fallen at Iwo Jima

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gittelsohn-iwo-jima-eulogy>

Japan's Nuremberg: The Tokyo Trials <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/japans-nuremberg>

Deaths by Country in WWII (Source: National Museum of WWII, New Orleans)

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students/research-worldwide-deaths-world-war>

U.S. National Park Service - Monuments to Japanese Confinement

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/japaneseamericanconfinement/visit.htm>

Farming Behind Barbed Wire- Japanese Americans remember Incarceration

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/farming-behind-barbed>

Final Stragglers: The Last Japanese Soldiers to Surrender

<https://mikedashhistory.com/2015/09/15/final-straggler-the-japanese-soldier-who-outlasted-hiroo-onoda/>

How To Apologize

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/08/apology-contrition-responsibility-benefits/675025/>

The Seven Decade Fight For Okinawa

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/16/asia/japan-okinawa-bases-new-battle-intl/index.html>

The World Is Running Out of Japanese People

<https://qz.com/1295721/the-japanese-population-is-shrinking-faster-than-every-other-big-country/>

The Age of Depopulation

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/age-depopulation-surviving-world-gone-gray-nicholas-eberstadt>

Abdication, Succession, and Japan's Imperial Future <https://apjjf.org/2019/09/Breen.html>

Japan's Day Care Crisis: Forcing Mom's to Stay At Home

https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/04/07/japan-economy-daycare_n_9583014.html

Japan's Successful Economic Model

<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/japan-successful-economic-model>

Shinzo Abe Transformed Japan's Relationship With Taiwan

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/shinzo-abe-transformed-japans-relationship-taiwan-counter-threats-china>

Shinzo Abe - A Tough Act to Follow

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2020-09-22/shinzo-abe-will-be-tough-act-follow>

Showdown: American Forces in Japan in *The Economist*- Feb 14, 2015. A good compendium of the history leading to the dynamic situation with Okinawans and Tokyo in firm opposition.

<http://www.economist.com-long-running-struggle-over-new-military-base-coming-head-showdown>

Japan Wrestles With Its Views on 'Outside People' Amid Population Crisis

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/04/japan-wrestles-with-its-population-crisis?>

Pew Foundation: "Hostile Neighbors: Japan vs. China" – recent data on inter-country attitudes

<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/09/13/hostile-neighbors-china-vs-japan/>

US-Japan to Co-develop Hypersonic Missile Defense System

<https://www.eurasiantimes.com/of-talks-to-develop-hypersonic-intercepto/>

Kintsugi: The Art of Precious Scars <https://www.lifegate.com/kintsugi>

Why Do Cats Hold Such Mythic Power in Japan?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/10/t-magazine/japan-cats-travel.html>

Fusui - Japanese Feng Shui <https://www.customcanvascollective.com/blogs/blog/fusui-in-modern-interiors>

Japan's Obsession With Bizarre Mascots

<https://www.sbnation.com/2020/3/18/21174767/japanese-mascots-yuru-chara>

Japanology.org – A web magazine on Japanese Culture <https://japanology.org/>

New Words From The Land of the Rising Sun Make It Into the OED

<https://www.oed.com/discover/words-from-the-land-of-the-rising-sun/>

The Japanglish' Song- fun! - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K12l63BcMRc>

Japan Guide: Food & Drink <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e620.html>

How To Eat Sushi Like A Tokyo Local

<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/how-to-eat-sushi-tokyo-local-cmd/index.html>

Top 50 Japanese Foods (4-minute video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sfkK0XIORE&feature=youtu.be>

Toshikoshi Soba- A New Year's Tradition

<https://medium.com/why-japanese-people-eat-a-bowl-of-soba-noodles-on-new-years-eve-11d7f118b9a0>

Sampuru - The Japanese Art of Fake Food <https://arigatojapan.co.jp/plastic-food-japan/>

Faux Feast- A Guide to Japanese Fake Food (Plastic Replicas)

<https://www.today.com/food/trends/sampuru-japanese-art-fake-food-rcna26990>

Shogun Is Challenging Hollywood's Stereotypes

<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2024/03/shogun-fx-tv-show/677685/>

Ishiba's Asian NATO

<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/ishibas-asian-nato-a-pot-of-gold-at-the-end-of-the-rainbow/>

The Case For A Pacific Defense Pact - Foreign Affairs July 2025

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/case-pacific-defense-pact-ely-ratner>

Meet Japan's First Female Prime Minister <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crkj5e73xkmo>

Johatsu- Japan's 'Evaporated' People

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toireporter/author-toi-lifestyle-desk-479263437.cms>

Hikikomori- Understanding People Who Live in Extreme isolation

<https://theconversation.com/hikikomori-understanding-the-people-who-choose-to-live-in-extreme-isolation-148482>

Japan's Quest for Sleep

<https://www.washingtonpost/inside-japans-billion-dollar-quest-help-sleep-starved-nation-rest/>

Note: My ***TIMELINE of JAPANESE HISTORY, TIMELINE OF THE PACIFIC WAR, BUDDHISM PRIMER, NOTES on SHINTO, SAKE PRIMER, JAPANESE CULINARY LEXICON*** and numerous other handouts related to my **JAPAN LECTURE SERIES** can be downloaded from my document **Scholar At Sea®** website (<https://www.scholaratsea.com>)

THE TWO KOREAS

BOOKS:

A Brief History of Korea by Michael J. Seth - excellent compendium

History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present also by Professor Seth

The Koreans by Michael Breen. Excellent overview of the history and cultural history of the Korean Peninsula, and what it means for the future.

The Korean War: A History by Bruce Cummings

The Three Kingdoms of Korea by Richard McBride

The General vs. The President by H.W. Brands

The Two Koreas by Don Oberdorfer. Another good overview of the history of this divided land.

South Korea: The Impossible Country by Daniel Tudor (*The Economist's* Korea correspondent).

Impossible in a good way. Excellent review of the two "miracles": economic ascent and democratization.

The Impossible State: North Korea by Victor Cha. Impossible in a bad way. A well-titled exposition looking at the question of how a hereditary dynastic cult ruling over a communist dictatorship warlord prison state can defy all odds and survive for 74 years (and counting...).

North Korea Through the Looking Glass by Kongdan Oh & Ralph Hassig. A disturbing look at life in the "glorious nation" of the DPRK.

A Corpse in the Koryo by James Church. A murder mystery set in North Korea. And it works.

The Orphan Master's Son by Adam Johnson. Like me, Johnson went to North Korea and was never quite the same after. He turned his musings into a fascinating psychological novel about what it must be like to be North Korean and live the lie every day. 2013 Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

The Great Successor: Divinely Perfect Destiny of Brilliant Comrade Kim Jong Un by Anna Fifield

FILM/TV:

Korea: The Forgotten War – The History Channel – Excellent documentary. Should be "required" viewing for us all, in honor of the 2.5 million soldiers and civilians killed, including over 33,000 US troops.

Under The Sun – 2016 documentary – a chillingly accurate depiction of life in North Korea

Inside North Korea – National Geo Special. A hidden camera exposé showing the theocratic dynastic society as it truly is. Accurate (as I can attest, based on my visits) and chilling.

Brotherhood [Tae Guk Gi] directed by Kang Jy-geu, one of South Korea's leading filmmakers, 2005. A sweeping Korean War epic. The #1 grossing film ever in South Korea.

Silmido 2003. South Korean. Very disturbing but powerful story about the South Korean black ops raid (in response the North's murderous 1968 Blue House raid) that went bizarrely and violently awry.

Crash Landing On You 2020 - Award-winning South Korean TV mini-series about a hang-gliding female executive who is accidentally (due to a storm) blown into in North Korea! (available on Netflix).

K-Pop Demon Hunters - 2025 - Hugely popular American-made (by Netflix) animated film

ON THE WEB:

The Korea Society (<http://www.koreasociety.org>). Outstanding website of the Manhattan-based Korea-watching organization, with a wealth of resources to deepen understanding of life on the peninsula.

The Korean War: Fire and Ice <https://watch.historyvault.com/shows/the-korean-war-fire-ice>

The Korean War - National Army Museum website <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/korean-war>

Samsung and the South Korean Miracle <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/samsung-and-the-south-kor...e=mini-moth®ion=top-stories-below&WT.nav=top-stories-below&r=0>

VICE HBO- Basketball Diplomacy in the Hermit Kingdom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrCQh1usdzE>

"The King's Letters" – the story of King Sejong and birth of the Hangul Korean alphabet

<https://www.damninteresting.com/the-kings-letters/>

"Who Is Kim Jung Un?" – by Andrew Nathan in the *New York Review of Books*, August 2016

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/08/18/who-is-kim-jong-un/>

38 North (U.S. Korea Institute North Korea information/analysis website): <http://38north.org/>

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Progress in Pyongyang Must Go Through Beijing, in *Foreign Affairs*, Nov 2016

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2016-11-01/china-option>

A Murderous History of Korea in *London Review of Books* May 2017

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n10/bruce-cummings/a-murderous-history-of-korea>

The Kim Family Missiles- a good infographic, correctly titled

<https://public.tableau.com/en-us/s/gallery/north-korean-missile-tests>

Misunderstanding History Between Beijing and Pyongyang in *The Diplomat*

<http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/on-north-korea-us-policymakers-misunderstand-the-history/>

Undercover in North Korea – Uncommonly - and chillingly - accurate.

<https://theintercept.com/2017/09/04/undercover-in-north-korea-all-paths-lead-to-catastrophe/>

Perception and Misperception on the Korean Peninsula – in *Foreign Affairs* - May 2018

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-04-05/perception-and-misperception>

The Right Way To Coerce North Korea by Victor Cha, in *Foreign Affairs*, May 2018

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-04-01/right-way-coerce-north-korea>

[Note: I put this article in as a *negative example* - one of hundreds written by so-called experts that I believe show a failure to understand North Korea - leading to 75 yrs of failed diplomacy.]

North Korea - Will This Time Be Different? – 2018 editorial in *The Washington Post* (My answer, regretfully: No. North Korea violated every denuclearization agreement it has signed since 1985).

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/talk-of-peace-

Don't Let The Korea Summit Hype Fool You- We've Been Here Before – by Max Boot

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/dont-let-the-korea-summit-hype-fool-you->

Trump's Meeting With Kim Will Lead To An Awful Hangover, CNN editorial – more realistic than most

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/22/opinions/trump-kim-meeting-doomed-opinion-metzl/index.html>

Chronology of US-North Korea Missile Diplomacy <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

From North Korea With Dread – Nick Kristof's video log of his 2017 visit. Accurate depiction.

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/columnists/.html>

Pictures of North Korea – some photos I have taken, on my website:

<http://travelenrichmentservices.com/moretravelphotosforenthusiasts.html>

The Mind-Blowing 'Mass Games' (Arirang) of Pyongyang <https://vimeo.com/296373541>

Inside North Korea - Feeling the Drums of War by Nick Kristof, in *The NY Times*, October 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/opinion/sunday/nuclear-north-korea.html>

North Korea: The Modern Slave State in *The Washington Post*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/19/north-korea->

How The Kim Cult Came to Dominate North Korean Life

<https://www.nknews.org/2018/12/how-the-kim-cult-of-personality-came-to-dominate-north-korean-life/>

Pyongyang- A Video <https://vimeo.com/300271709>

Why the US-North Korea Hanoi Summit Was Doomed to Fail

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2019-03-05/hanoi-summit-was-doomed-start>

While the World Is Looking Elsewhere, North Korea Becomes A Bigger Threat

<https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/north-korea-kim-jong-un-military-nuclear-f33ede51>

Kim Jung Un Abandons Goal of Unification - What Do North Koreans Think?

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/kim-jong-un-abandoned-unification-what-do-north-koreans-think/>

The Roots of South Korea's Political Crisis

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/south-korea/roots-south-koreas-political-crisis?s=EDZZZ005ZX>

South Korea's Martial Law

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/03/10/world/asia/south-korea-martial-law-president-yoon.html>

South Korea's New President Could Transform the Korean Peninsula

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/south-korea/lee-jae-myung-new-president-could-transform>

South Korea Stock Euphoria to Panic

<https://economictimes.from-stock-euphoria-to-panic-south-korea-investors-face-painful-market-fallout>

Some of my pictures of North Korea can be viewed [here](#)

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

BOOKS:

What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Rahula. If I had to recommend one simple and classic book on Buddhism, this tome by Sri Lankan Theravada Monk Walpola Rahula would be it.

Buddhism- A Very Short Introduction by Damien Keown. A succinct but scholarly short course. Also check out Dr. Keown's quite comprehensive Buddhism Dictionary app for iPhone.

Buddhism- A Way of Life and Thought by Nancy Wilson Ross. A good basic introduction.

Buddhism Explained by Laurence Khantipalo Mills. A very compact and readable introduction to Buddhism with an emphasis of Theravada Buddhism.

Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse. The classic. The Siddhartha of this famous novel is not Siddhartha Gautama himself, but like the Buddha he embarks upon a search for meaning in ancient India which yields new ways of thought which can help one to prevail over suffering.

Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn. A seminal work bringing Buddhist mindfulness concepts and practice to Western minds.

Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life and **The Heart of Buddha's Teachings** and **The Art of Mindful Living** (Audio CD's) by Thich Nhat Hanh. The exiled Vietnamese Buddhist monk offers his keen insights in a way that is very accessible to Westerners.

The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle. Oprah's favorite guru, Tolle combines various spiritual traditions and a dose of pop psychology. Tolle is not a Buddhist himself but his life experience overcoming suffering and his focus on living in the moment are very much aligned with the dharma.

Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy From a Buddhist Perspective by Dr. Mark Epstein - Foreword by the Dalai Lama. A good book on the nexus between the dharma & modern psychotherapy.

The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan by Kaiten Nukariya. A classic, available for free as a Kindle book.

The Way of Zen by Alan Watts. British-born philosopher and writer wrote this in the 1960s and it is still considered the finest concise exposition for Western audiences on the history and philosophy of Zen.

Why Buddhism Is True- The Science & Philosophy by Robert Wright

The Jew in the Lotus by Roger Kamenetz (a dialogue between rabbis and the Dalai Lama)

Zen Judaism by David Bader

Sapiens by Noah Yuval Harari

For the extensive writings of **Joseph Goldstein** and **David Kornfield** on Zen, search them on [Amazon](#)

FILM:

Little Buddha directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (a lifelong Asia-phile who also directed the magnificent Academy Award-winning epic *The Last Emperor*) – Interesting 1994 film based on the life of Buddha starring Keanu Reeves. Keanu is not at his best but the film overall succeeds in telling the story of the Buddha's life in an interesting way, with ties into modern Tibetan Lamaism.

Life of Buddha directed by Martin Meissoniere. A recounting of the Buddha's life and how it relates to his teachings, interspersed with interviews with key thinkers and interpreters such as Thich Nhat Hanh.

The Lady directed by Luc Besson. An inspirational if hagiographic look at the life of Burmese freedom fighter Ang San Suu Kyy. Her life exemplifying the Buddha's teaching of fearlessness and compassion led some to see her as a modern-day *bodhisatva* - but her recent failings are painfully disappointing.

ON THE WEB:

GRATITUDE, or HAPPINESS REVEALED – <https://www.youtube.com/embed/gXDMoiEkyuQ> A particularly moving TED talk which beautifully captures the concept and practice of mindfulness in a way that is very accessible to the Western mind.

Buddhanet: Worldwide Buddhist Information and Education Network

<http://www.buddhanet.net/>

Introduction to Buddhism in 8 Quotes

<https://bigthink.com/thinking/essential-introduction-buddhism-8-profound-quotes/>

The Mudras of The Buddha <https://web.stanford.edu/class/history11sc/pdfs/mudras.pdf>

Neuroscience Has A Lot to Learn From Buddhism in *The Atlantic* - Dec 17, 2017

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/buddhism-and-neuroscience/548120/>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Timeline of Art History - Life of Buddha

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/buda/hd_buda.htm (Click on **Works of Art** on upper right after reading text)

A 6-Step Guide to Zen

<https://twitter.com/bigthink/status/1740810918144209246>

The Swastika: Its Ancient Origins and Modern Misuse

<http://norse-mythology.org/symbols/swastika-ancient-origins-modern-misuse/>

Glossary of Japanese Buddhism https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_Japanese_Buddhism

Note: My **Buddhism Primer** and **Buddhist Iconography** monograph can be downloaded from my website: ScholarAtSea.com

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness.”

- Mark Twain in The Innocents Abroad

And my own personal motto:

“TRAVEL IS THE PASSPORT TO PEACE”

Thank you for your interest in my lecture material and your wonderful companionship onboard the beautiful *Silver Moon* in Japan and Korea.

Please feel free to share any thoughts, feedback, critiques, suggestions, and any tips on interesting books, films, online references, apps or podcasts with me by emailing me at:

ScholarAtSea@gmail.com