

# 100 Books for Understanding Contemporary Japan

The Nippon Foundation

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## Foreword

The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century sparked a social revolution by making information available on a previously unimaginable scale. The advent of the computer chip in the mid 20th century and the rapid expansion of Internet technology in the 21st century have further revolutionized access to information. It is now possible to exchange vast volumes of information through cyberspace in real time. This unprecedented access to information has made the realities of foreign countries feel much closer to us. However, we do not always receive a complete picture of life overseas. The sheer volume of information available makes choosing reliable sources a challenge, and we are often left with oversimplified views of what are in fact complex realities.

Trying to gain a more comprehensive understanding of another country or culture requires considerable effort, yet through this effort we can expand our horizons and gain insight into ourselves, which in turn impacts positively on our relationships with others. An understanding of other people is essential if we are to collaborate and coexist with people of different cultures and customs. The ability to understand each other creates infinite new possibilities for improving the world.

There is no question that the best way to deepen our understanding of a country is to visit in person, to see the country with our own eyes, and to talk and work with the people who live there.

I travel frequently in the course of my work, and I have often found that I am only able to fully comprehend an issue by talking to local people and complementing these first-hand encounters with well-written, informative books. Books can be an inspiration when it comes to enhancing our understanding of other cultures, and for making our own culture more easily understood by others.

Recently, more people are visiting Japan, learning Japanese as a second language, and consuming Japanese popular culture than ever before. But with so many sources of information at their disposal in today's interconnected world, where should they turn for reliable and authoritative insights?

With this in mind, we assembled a committee of ten individuals with an extensive knowledge of Japan to undertake the difficult task of selecting one hundred books to be included in this catalogue, which we hope will serve as a useful guide to those interested in deepening their understanding of present day Japan. The catalogue will also be utilized in a series of new initiatives aimed at facilitating access to information on contemporary Japan, including a program to donate books to selected individuals and institutions abroad.

We are deeply indebted to the committee members and the many other individuals who contributed their time and expertise to this project. In particular we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Shotaro Yachi, former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, who inspired us to undertake this initiative, and to Prof. Takashi Shiraishi, Vice President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, who so ably headed the committee that selected the hundred books.

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*Yohei Sasakawa*  
Chairman of The Nippon Foundation

## On the Selection Process

Our committee was given the responsibility of selecting one hundred books to help non-Japanese readers better understand contemporary Japan. The committee was made up of ten people with different backgrounds, including business, academia, media, government and NGOs, and who are widely read in things Japanese and beyond. Though we were assisted by many who kindly suggested titles and shared their resources, the final responsibility for selection rested with us, the ten committee members.

Most of the books chosen were published recently, not surprising given our focus on contemporary Japan. Some older books were however selected; books that we believe should be read for a better appreciation of the historical background of contemporary Japan.

We are confident that the books we selected are of outstanding quality and merit. But we should also note that many of the best Japanese books on contemporary Japan are not available in English translation, and that not a few excellent English books have been long out of print. As part of the second round of the selection process, we hope to select the best of these books for translation or reprinting.

We hope that you enjoy the books we have chosen and that they will help you gain a better understanding of contemporary Japan.

*Takashi Shiraishi*

Chair, Program Committee

100 Books for Understanding Contemporary Japan

## Program Committee

Keiko Chino	Chief Editorial Writer, The Sankei Shimbun
Richard Dyck	President, TCS Japan K.K.
Sir Graham Holbrook Fry	British Ambassador to Japan
Glen S. Fukushima	President & CEO, Airbus Japan K.K.
Takenori Inoki	Director-General, International Research Center for Japanese Studies
Shinichi Kitaoka	Professor, The University of Tokyo Graduate Schools for Law and Politics
Izumi Koide	Director, Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship, Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation
Donald Richie	Author/Critic
Takashi Shiraishi	Vice President & Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies
Masayuki Yamauchi	Professor, The University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences