

## Introduction

This course reader explores issues of memory-making and memory-shaping in modern Japan. The debates over historical memory in recent decades in Japan have major contemporary significance, as do the problems emerging from “memory wars” in modern societies more generally. We also explore the larger question of the uses and abuses of history and its implications for contemporary and future political developments both in Japan and in international relations. This includes a discussion of issues such as war responsibility, reparations for war and war crimes, apologies for war, and reconciliation.

After a general introduction to the problem of historical and social memory related to the Asia-Pacific War and Japanese imperialism, we identify important sites of memory in Japan and their functions and historical development. Additionally, we investigate representations of memory in Japanese society, and controversies surrounding memorialization projects and history textbooks. Japan is divided, still today, about the ways the past is presented in the public sphere. While a number of controversial memorials seek to justify Japan’s wars and war crimes and some even beautify the Asia-Pacific War as a war of Asian liberation, in recent years, criticism has emerged within Japan that challenges these kinds of unreflective narratives. In addition, the war is being memorialized in other parts of Asia, often in ways that emphasize the ways that Japanese imperialism brought disaster its former colonies or for neighboring countries.

Questions that will be explored in detail include: What are the political, ideological and aesthetic presuppositions of memory-making and of representations of history? Who are the major actors in memory-making in modern Japan? What can we say about the relations of the individual and the state through the analysis of the politics of memory?