

The History Issue in East Asia

14 April 2025
What is the "History Issue"?

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Our Course Aim

- Read the text of the Statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe from 14 August 2015. It is in both English and Japanese (see links on the class website).
- **By the end of the course I want you to be able to make an informed, critical assessment of this statement and its implications.**

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Key Terminology

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Key Terminology

- History 歴史

A narrative account of the past based on evidence such as documents, eye witness accounts and contemporary media sources.

- Memory 記憶

The ways in which the past is viewed from the standpoint of the present. May say more about contemporary society than the past.

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Key Terminology

- Personal memories 個人的記憶

Memories of the past inside an individual's head.

- Collective memories 集団的記憶、集合的記憶

Experiences/stories of the past shared among members of a group.

- Narratives 物語

Stories of experiences made public and retold.

- Official narrative 公的物語 (政府の立場)

The version of the past promoted by national/local government.

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Key Terminology

- Remember 記憶する、思い出す

To preserve the memory of a person, experience or event.

- Forget ("amnesia") 忘れる、忘却

The intentional or unintentional process of not remembering.

- Commemorate 記念する、祈念する

A political/personal act of keeping memory alive.

- Mourn 追悼する、嘆く

The psychological process of coming to terms with loss.

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Key Terminology

- Dominant memories 優勢な集団的記憶

The most common forms of memory in a society.

- Subaltern 下位のもの、サバルタン

The oppressed or minorities.

"We are the majority"



My views are important too.



Key Terminology

- Historical consciousness 歴史認識

A broad moral/political understanding of the past. Close in meaning to ideology.

- War responsibility 戦争責任

The moral, political and legal consequences of war actions. Must be faced in the postwar through apology, compensation, reparations and justice (謝罪、賠償、補償、処罰).

Key Terminology

- Aggressor/Perpetrator 侵略者、加害者
- Victim 被害者
- Bystander 傍観者

These categories are not necessarily as easy to define as you think!



Chinese prisoners about to be buried alive by Japanese soldiers.

Key Terminology



"I used the work of medieval philosophers on war and developed it within the context of the Vietnam War. Read my book *Just and Unjust Wars*." Michael Walzer.

- Just war theory 「正義の戦争」説
- *Jus in bello* (Justice in War) 戦争における正義

What are the actions that are permissible in war?

- *Jus ad bellum* (Justice of War) 戦争に行く正義

What are justifiable reasons for going to war?

Key Terminology



"Few of us are completely immune to either of these types of moral intuition, though in some people, either naturally or for doctrinal reasons, one type will be dominant and the other suppressed or weak." Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter, 1972).

- Absolutism 絶対主義

"Absolutism gives primacy to a concern with what one is *doing*."

- Utilitarianism 功利主義

"Utilitarianism gives primacy to a concern with what will *happen*."



Historical Consciousness in Japan

Judgments on the War in Japan

	Aggressive War 侵略戦争	Not Aggressive War 侵略戦争ではない
Aggressive Acts 侵略的行為	Progressive 進歩派	Conservative 保守派
Not Aggressive Acts 侵略的行為ではない	Anomalous 無意味	Nationalist ナショナリスト

Judgments on the War in Japan



War with China, 1931-45

War with the Soviet Union, 1938-9 and August 1945

Colonization of the Korean Peninsula, 1910-45

Each conflict generates differing interpretations of Japanese war responsibility.

Occupation of nations in Southeast Asia, 1941-45

War with the USA and other colonial powers, 1941-45

Reconciling Aggression and Victimhood

- “Victim mentality”被害者意識:
 - a tendency to see the Japanese as victims. Justifiable (e.g. Hiroshima) or “forgetting Japanese aggression”?
- Prideプライド (自尊心) :
 - how can war history generate pride and national identity ?



The Politics of History

Domestic Debate

- Japanese people cannot agree on how to interpret the war.
- There are domestic media and academic debates regarding Japanese war history and responsibility.
- 歴史認識論争、「歴史戦」



Legacies

- The war's legacy continues to play a huge role in Japan.
- Key symbols of the Japanese state - the flag, anthem, Imperial household & constitution - plus Japan's international role continue to be influenced by the legacy of the war.



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International Controversy

- Japan's neighbours in particular are very sensitive of how the war is remembered and commemorated in Japan.
- Diplomatic protests over Yasukuni Shrine worship, textbook content, politicians' statements etc.



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History and Territory

- Is the history issue now being superseded by territory as the number one issue?
- Senkaku/Daiyou, Takeshima/Dokdo, Northern Territories/Kuriles.
- The role of American bases on Japanese territory.



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This Course

- Six Topics (two weeks each):
 1. Japan's wars: aggression or inevitable?
 2. Compensation: sufficient or not?
 3. Yasukuni Shrine: to worship or not to worship?
 4. Active Learning: Fieldwork at a war-related site.
 5. The A-bombs: decisive or simply destructive?
 6. Disputed Territories: Japanese or not?
 - Exam: Is overcoming the past possible?

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Debating Skills

- We will also ...
 1. ... practice making effective academic arguments.
 2. ... learn how to have passionate debate on these issues without falling out with your classmates!
 3. ... learn how to think from multiple perspectives on the same issue.

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