Sites of Japanese Memory: Museums, Memorials, Commemoration
Yasukuni Shrine, its War Museum, and other World War II Museums

"The National Politics of the Yasukuni Shrine"
Takahashi Tetsuya
N.D.
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Takahashi-Tetsuya/2272

"Yasukuni Shrine: Ritual and Memory"
John Breen
June 3, 2005
http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-Breen/2060

"Japan, the United States and Yasukuni Nationalism: War, Historical Memory and the Future of the Asia Pacific"
Mark Selden
September 10, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mark-Selden/2892

"Yomiuri and Asahi Editors Call for a National Memorial to Replace Yasukuni"
Wakamiya Yoshibumi and Watanabe Tsuneo
February 14, 2006
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Watanabe-Tsuneo/2124

"Revising the Past, Complicating the Future: The Yushukan War Museum in Modern Japanese History"
Takashi YOSHIDA
December 2, 2007
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Takashi-YOSHIDA/2594

"Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity: Negotiating the Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums"
Kirk A. Denton
October 17, 2007
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Kirk_A_-Denton/2547

"Nanjing's Massacre Memorial: Renovating War Memory in Nanjing and Tokyo"
Jeff Kingston
August 22, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Jeff-Kingston/2859

In the absence of a "national war memorial" designated by the Japanese state, the Yasukuni Shrine, an institution founded to commemorate the fallen of Japan's civil wars from 1853 to 1877 and Japan's wars abroad in later years, is receiving growing attention as a site of memory and commemoration. Since it was once a pillar of prewar militarism, the shrine was legally detached from the state and re-established as an "independent religious

body" immediately after World War II. Nevertheless, politicians continue to blur the line between religion and state and convey support for the idea that the war had divine qualities by paying official visits to the shrine. The essays in this section detail further just how controversial the Yasukuni Shrine remains.

Takahashi Tetsuya, author of a best-selling book on the role of the shrine, for example, notes that active politicians "worshipping" the "Gods of Yasukuni" at the shrine violates articles 20 and 89 of the Constitution, which stipulate a separation of state and religion. Moreover, he argues that worship at the shrine, where not only soldiers, but also Class-A war criminals are venerated as Gods, contradicts the government's official acknowledgement of the war as one of aggression. The shrine's wartime role, Takahashi stresses, stands in stark contrast to postwar Japan's ideology of pacifism. The basic problem with the Shrine, Takahashi argues, is that it is not a place of mourning, but a place to honor the military war dead—an act that contradicts a critical and reflective approach to Japan's wartime past.

John Breen disagrees with Takahashi. He introduces the various sites within the Shrine and interprets it as a place of "intimate personal memory." Breen also emphasizes that "praying for peace" by remembering the war dead is an integral part of the activities of this institution.

Mark Selden's article adds another dimension to the arguments by putting the "Yasukuni Problem" in an international perspective, including Japan's relations with the United States and "competing nationalisms" in the Asia-Pacific. Urging readers to set aside images of a monolithic Japan when talking about war-related issues, Selden emphasizes deep fissures in "Japanese" attitudes towards the Yasukuni Shrine. In order to underline this claim, he introduces memorials with different approaches, such as the "Cornerstone of Peace" in Okinawa. The next text features the chief editors and the publishers of Japan's two largest newspapers, who strongly criticized Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō's controversial visits to the Shrine, and is an example of how discussions around the shrine escalated in the early 2000s. The fact that they both did so was striking: the *Yomiuri*, which is usually considered rather conservative, had supported politicians' visits to the Shrine in the past, while the *Asahi* had considered them a violation of the constitutional provision of separation of state and religion. But, in the early twenty-first century, a consensus emerged that visits to the controversial Shrine harmed Japan's reputation abroad, especially its relations with China and Korea, and so should stop.

Takashi Yoshida's article then takes us inside the grounds of Yasukuni by analyzing the Yûshûkan war museum. Yoshida concludes that the museum clearly advocates conservative, revisionist ideas that beautify the war. In contrast to the Yûshûkan, the next two essays show that the war is portrayed very differently in memorials and museums in two of the countries that were victims of Japanese military aggression: Korea (South) and China. Kirk Denton explores representations of Japanese imperialism and war in museums of the People's Republic of China (PRC), including the Northeast Martyrs Memorial Hall (celebrating the sacrifices of those who lost their lives in the northeastern region of China, also known as Manchuria), the Memorial Hall of the People's War of Resistance Against the Japanese in Beijing (commemorating the 1937 incident that formally began full-scale war between China and Japan), the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, the Unit 731 Museum, and the September 18 History Museum (commemorating the outbreak of the Manchurian

Incident 1931). Last, Jeff Kingston provides a more detailed look at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial in Nanjing, China, including the reactions of visitors to the memorial.