For many years following Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces, Japanese people were forced to reckon with the physical, psychological, and political consequences of war and defeat in their daily lives. Faced with a landscape of physical ruin, foreign military occupation, and their own government’s feeble attempts at explaining the situation, they sought to articulate for themselves what had gone wrong and who had done wrong in the past. Many were stunned, if not outraged, when on 28 August 1945 Prince Higashikuni Naruhiko, the first postwar prime minister, called on “one hundred million to repent together” (ichiboku sōzange). Higashikuni in effect declared “the people” responsible for military defeat, exempting no one but the emperor, in whose name the war had been fought. Indeed, the concept of collective repentance was typical of Japan’s wartime rhetoric, and its continued use could be—and was—interpreted as an implicit justification of the war. In sharp contrast to this attempt by the Japanese authorities to dilute responsibility among the populace, Allied occupation officials insisted on assigning individual responsibility to particular Japanese leaders, arresting and trying war criminals and purging those suspected of having supported the war.

The people responded more enthusiastically to the punishment of wartime leaders than to national repentance. The assertion of collective responsibility ran counter to their overwhelming sense of their own victimization, especially in the wake of the Tokyo air raids and the atomic bombings. But no matter how the problem was framed—as individual
or collective accountability, responsibility for starting the war or for losing it—posing war responsibility immediately became a strategic instrument in the politics of reinventing Japan as a peaceful and democratic society. People from all walks of life looked back at the war years through the lens of defeat and foreign occupation in efforts to identify which aspects of Japanese society needed to be changed most urgently in order to reconstruct the social system as a whole. Many attended mass rallies and listened to academics from various disciplines, to writers and critics, to Marxists, non-Marxist progressives, and even conservatives, to war cooperators and war resisters who had been imprisoned. Depending on their field of specialization, political convictions, and war experiences, they addressed the problem of responsibility in different ways and different contexts as part of a broad public discourse.

A photograph of one of these rallies (Fig. 0.1) gives a sense of the dynamism that propelled this public debate. It was taken at a “public mass meeting to discuss war responsibility” (senso sekinin taikai) in Tokyo in December 1946. Facing a crowded auditorium, a panel of speakers sat against a backdrop of huge hand-painted banners, which spelled out the issues and demands put forth for discussion. Some called militarists, bureaucrats, and capitalists the plunderers and torturers of ordinary people. Others called for the punishment of war criminals and the dissolution of reactionary organizations. The banner on the left demanded the establishment of a republican government and a democratic, peaceful state. Most interestingly, the banner in the middle of the photo and to the right of the speaker read, “Pursue the war responsibility of the emperor, who deprived us of our livelihoods.” They all spoke to an explicit rejection of the recent Japanese past, a sense of acute post-surrender “moral deterioration” or psychosocial dislocation, and fervent support for democratic reform, individual autonomy, and political activism. Maruyama Masao called the intellectuals who met and discussed these issues in the early years after the war a “community of contrition.” The common bond, he argued, was remorse for having failed to resist fascism, accompanied by a need to make sense of the war and defeat.2

The second photograph (Fig. 0.2) fast-forwards the discussion to December 2000. It shows a group of Filipina survivors of Japan’s
Fig. 0.1 A public mass meeting on responsibility for the war, December 1946. The banner to the right of the speaker reads: “Pursue the war responsibility of the emperor.” By permission of Kyōdō News Agency.

Fig. 0.2 Filipina victims of Japan’s wartime “comfort women” system testify at the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo, December 2000. Courtesy of Violence against Women in War–Network Japan (VAWW–NET Japan).
wartime sexual slavery system, called upon as historical witnesses by an international tribunal pursuing the emperor’s war responsibility. Their aged, dignified faces bespeak less the horrors of the war than the long decades since then—a time during which most of them were silent about their war experiences. The three-day event was staged in Tokyo by women’s groups from all over Asia under the organizational leadership of Violence against Women in War–Network Japan (VAWW–NET Japan). An international team of prominent judges heard testimonial and historical evidence about the wartime “comfort women” system from legal teams representing the countries that once suffered under Japan’s empire. Specifically, it set out to examine Emperor Hirohito’s historical responsibility for such war conduct (Hirohito had passed away in 1989) as the most important omission of the Tokyo war crimes trials of the 1940s. The tribunal recommended that the state of Japan (1) fully recognize its legal, political, and moral responsibility for these wartime crimes and issue an unambiguous apology to the victims, (2) consider the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and make available to the public all historical documents pertaining to wartime sexual slavery, (3) pay adequate compensation to survivors and establish appropriate educational tools and commemorative sites to honor them. The Japanese government, not legally bound by this unofficial tribunal, paid scant attention to the event.

Japan’s History of War Memory: A Framework

The two events (and their associated images) frame Japan’s history of war memory. First, they suggest, correctly, that questions of war memory and postwar responsibility have been a part of public life in Japan from the end of the war into the twenty-first century. It is certainly not true that Japanese have no sense of guilt, that theirs is a culture of amnesia, or that they are politically immature. Rather, war memory developed together with—and as a part of—particular and divergent approaches to postwar democracy in the aftermath of war. Since then, the demands placed upon postwar democracy have shifted considerably, and the place of war memory in public life has shifted with them. War memory remained fragmented and contested on the political map of democracy for decades, yet it was closely woven into the political structure. At
certain historical junctures—for example, Japan’s independence in 1952, the normalization of relations with China in 1972, or the end of the Cold War in 1989—war memory emerged prominently as a tool of political conflict in Japan. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the legacies of the war threatened to jeopardize international relations as Japan clashed with its Asian neighbors over territorial issues and its bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Second, even if war memory implicitly shaped the way internal political battles were contested, it rarely guided postwar politics explicitly on the state level. The events captured in the photos involved citizens who organized to debate and act upon issues of war responsibility in the face of government inertia. (In this case, both the rally in 1946 and the tribunal in 2000 took issue with the American and Japanese authorities’ failure to hold the emperor responsible.) The Japanese government rarely exhibited leadership in interpreting the lessons of the war or in bringing about reconciliation with those who suffered under Japanese imperialism. Instead, successive administrations left war memory to participants in domestic political contests—to representatives of special interests, to citizens’ movements, to self-proclaimed opponents of the state, all of whom used war memory to further their own aims and interests. Although there is no question that the government played a significant role in the contention over memory issues, it acted more as a foil against which particular views of the past were articulated than as a national consensus builder or ideological leader.

At the same time, the Japanese people became gradually accustomed to seeing war memory argued in terms of special interests through representative politics rather than as an issue that concerned either the individual as an individual or the public as a national public. The making and negotiating of public memory took place largely on the middle level of the political process, between the individual as a political participant and the government as the articulator of public policies. This was indeed a “public sphere” occupied by groups of organized citizens communicating their interpretations of the war and the postwar to their own constituents, to the state, and to the larger public as well.

Third, even while the two events depicted here addressed Japanese domestic audiences, they were informed by global circumstances in crucial ways. In 1946 Japan was occupied by American military forces, and the
power to make changes lay primarily not with the Japanese people but with the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur. Under the occupation’s demilitarization and democratization policies, SCAP imposed the war interpretation and political agenda of the victor and foreign occupier on the Japanese. That interpretation declared Japan the sole aggressor in the war. Almost immediately, SCAP set out to cleanse Japan of militarism, dismantling its war machine and eradicating the social structures of ultranationalism. The “military purge” of more than 200,000 public workers (mainly business executives, journalists, teachers, right-wing leaders, and former military personnel) in 1945–46 and SCAP’s strict censorship of the public media had a profound impact on public and private lives, in some respects liberating, in others devastating.

Unwittingly but with almost uncanny accuracy, the organizers of the December 1946 rally had put their finger on the most far-reaching SCAP decision: granting the emperor immunity from legal prosecution at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), which took place in Tokyo from May 1946 to November 1948. The tribunal sought to establish personal responsibility for starting and conducting an unjust war, and yet it excluded the emperor, who had been supreme commander of the military under the Meiji constitution. Instead, the emperor was installed as the symbolic center of the new constitution (promulgated in 1946 and inaugurated the following year), the cornerstone of a peaceful and democratic Japan. This effectively ended public calls for his investigation or abdication. The Tokyo trial in turn prosecuted 28 military and civilian wartime leaders and pronounced 25 sentences of death or imprisonment for crimes against peace and crimes against humanity (so-called Class A war crimes). The trials were riddled with legal, political, and procedural problems from the beginning, and many contemporary observers both among the Allies and the Japanese public understood it as an extraordinary show of power and politics that smacked of “victor’s justice.” In addition, thousands were tried for conventional war crimes at Class B and C war crimes trials conducted all over Asia, resulting in 920 executions. Nonetheless, the Allied trials passed over some major Japanese war crimes, such as the production and use of biological weapons in Manchuria, and the government-operated “comfort women system,” to which an estimated 100,000 Asian women fell victim.
By investigating wartime sexual slavery and Emperor Hirohito’s war responsibility, the Women’s International Tribunal in 2000 self-consciously picked up where the Tokyo trial had left off. This was not the first time that the 1946–48 trial was publicly revisited; a major symposium in 1982 had brought together scholars and participants in that trial for a critical reevaluation. The organization, style, and specific themes of the Women’s Tribunal in 2000, however, bore the direct imprint of changed global circumstances. Rather than a Western-dominated military court wielding “victor’s justice,” this civilian tribunal drew upon the regional connections among citizens’ groups across Asia, in particular women’s groups, in a quest for belated justice and closure for war victims and victimizers alike. It built upon global experiences with different strategies for addressing historical injustices, such as South Africa’s truth commissions. The aim was not only to expose Japan’s responsibility but to appeal to a global public who recognized the political value of such memory work—for example, taking the issue of violence against women in war to the international human rights court in The Hague. Most important, the tribunal focused public attention not only on the war crimes themselves but on the incomplete history of their memory over more than half a century. It highlighted the gendered nature of war crimes and of war memory that had been all but invisible until the 1990s. Indeed, war memory turned out to be driven by a host of historical factors: international circumstances, domestic politics, and a shifting public culture, as well as changing divisions along generational, gender, social, and ethnic lines.

This book traces the social politics of war memory in Japan from defeat in 1945 to the beginning of the new millennium. The term “social politics” refers here to the continuing yet shifting contest over war memory among organized social groups. It draws upon the histories of five prominent civic organizations from across the political spectrum that found themselves at the forefront of this struggle: the Association of Shinto Shrines, the Association of War-bereaved Families, the Teachers’ Union, the Japan-China Friendship Association, and the Memorial Society for the Student-Soldiers Killed in the War, better known as Wadatsumikai. These five organizations were established between 1946 and 1950, riding the “wave of interest group growth” that marked the immediate postwar period, and they were still active political players in
With the exception of Wadatsumikai, they participated in politics as recognized “pressure groups” (atsuryoku dantai), on the local as well as national levels, negotiating their respective social meanings of the past vis-à-vis the state and the public at large. The social politics of war memory thus operated in the interstices between “the state” and “civil society,” linking the two in multiple and changing ways. T. J. Pempel’s observation several decades ago also applies to war memory as special interest:

Virtually any social interest that one could imagine is organized in Japan. Although many, particularly the major agricultural, business, and professional associations, retain close ties to government, most are also fiercely independent in the pursuit of their particular vision of the national interest. They organize widely, lobby lustily, endorse or oppose political candidates, and play a major role in the politics of the nation. The specific lessons and legacies ascribed to the experience of war and defeat became deeply embedded in the postwar political structure, and they were used as tools for advancing particular interests in changing contexts. All viable participants in the process of defining and redefining the postwar order accepted participatory democracy as essential, but their visions for a democratic Japan at times clashed openly.

From the 1950s to the early 1980s, this battle took place primarily between organized political interests with varying proximity to the state, even while they were gradually joined by other forms of political participation. Together, these interest groups focused war memory around a set of political issues that rarely spilled over into the international arena and only at certain moments reached beyond the framework of domestic politics to engage the public as a national public. This began to change over the course of the 1980s, when issues of Japanese war memory and postwar responsibility became part of a broader global culture of memory characterized by a more robust recognition of Japan as a brutal colonizer in Asia.

The first of the five organizations is the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja honchō), an umbrella organization that worked with representatives of the right in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Imperial Household Agency to strengthen the ties between Shrine Shinto, the Imperial House, and the state through the use of Shinto rituals in public ceremonies. This institutional relationship had reached
a peak during wartime and had therefore been dismantled by occupation policies. The Association of Shinto Shrines was crucial to keeping in public view the problem of the “emperor system,” which it worked to redefine (after the end of the occupation) to better represent the essential continuity of Japanese history. Though critical of the wartime bureaucratic abuse of Shrine Shinto, the Association insisted on a hegemonic and binding definition of national identity based on the historical continuity of the emperor as the spiritual essence of all Japanese. This could be seen as an attempt to resurrect wartime ideology.

Another conservative interest group is the Japan Association of War-bereaved Families (Nihon izokukai), which lobbied LDP representatives in the Diet and in the Health and Welfare Ministry for state recognition of the military war bereaved as the nation’s foremost victims of war. This prominent organization demanded that the government revive pensions for war-bereaved families and official ceremonies for the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine, both of which had been discontinued under the occupation. The Izokukai remained a major conservative pressure group in Diet politics throughout the postwar decades and fanned the enduring controversy over the appropriate commemoration of millions of military dead at Yasukuni Shrine. At the same time, precisely because of its political clout, the Izokukai elicited much public protest, which in fact revealed different war memories and postwar identities among groups of war victims and war bereaved.

On the political left, the Japan Teachers’ Union (JTU) sought to diminish the power of the bureaucracy, which it saw as a continuation of wartime militarism, and opposed the Ministry of Education over its system of textbook approval, curricula decisions, and teacher employment. Indeed, school curricula and history textbooks provided material for ongoing battles over public information, interpretation, and representation of the national past in service of contemporary definitions of citizenship. The JTU’s opposition to the public use of Japan’s national flag and anthem, the revival of prewar national holidays, and Yasukuni Shrine as a site of national mourning for Japan’s war dead made it the archenemy of right-wing organizations such as the Association of Shinto Shrines and the Japan Association of War-bereaved Families.

A progressive interest group with ties across the political divide is the Japan-China Friendship Association (Nitchū yūkō kyōkai), which
worked with academic, political, trade, and peace groups to improve Japanese relations with the People’s Republic of China. It continually insisted on an official acknowledgment of Japanese war atrocities against China as the necessary basis for a rapprochement. Although the U.S.-Japan alliance tended to eclipse “Asia” from public view at the height of the Cold War, unresolved legacies of the war periodically revealed contrasting memories of a shared past, within Japan as well as between Japan and its neighbors. The Japan-China Friendship Association helped in 1953–56 to administer the repatriation of thousands of Japanese left in China after the war’s end, expanded trade relations with China on an informal basis, and contributed to the eventual normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972 (ratified in 1978). Throughout the postwar decades the Friendship Association publicly commemorated anniversaries of Japanese wartime aggression against China, and, especially since the 1980s, supported research into Japan’s biological warfare and the comfort women system.

A small but influential peace group is the Japan Memorial Society for the Students Killed in the War, better known as Wadatsumikai. This group of intellectuals, students, and relatives of students killed during the war organized high school and university students and teachers around a pacifist critique of contemporary politics. It compiled and edited many editions of the book *Listen to the Voices from the Deep (Kike wadatsumi no koe)*, a bestselling collection of letters, poems, and other writings by students who died in the war. Its members also produced important scholarship on the history and the memory of the war. Wadatsumikai evoked the tragic experiences of student-soldiers in the last years of the war and interpreted them through the lens of resistance against the state. War victimization, both physical and spiritual, translated into a popular pacifism symbolized by the atomic bombs and the ethical conflict of students experiencing the horror of war.

By the mid-1950s, the five organizations had established themselves as special interest groups dominating the political contest over the memory of war and its aftermath. They were not internally homogeneous; instead, each was continuously engaged in creating and recreating a measure of coherence and consistency in its positions over time. Yet each represented a distinctive strand of war memory along an established left-right divide in Japan’s public life. The Association of
Shinto Shrines and the Association of War-bereaved Families centered their tactics on resurrecting aspects of the wartime system that occupation policies had dismantled. The Teachers’ Union, Japan-China Friendship Association, and Wadatsumikai, in contrast, opposed what they regarded as the continuation of political structures that had supported militarism during the war and were incompatible with postwar democracy.

But the lines could also be drawn differently. Civic groups on the nationalist right as well as on the liberal left raised fundamentally similar concerns about the postwar democratic system, although they used different historical memories and pursued divergent contemporary goals. For example, both the Association of Shinto Shrines and Wadatsumikai targeted public structures of thought or ideology. Shrine Shintoists validated a unified, unchanging system of public values that was expressed during the war through the ritualistic reproduction of the nation centered on the emperor. Wadatsumikai activists, in contrast, insisted on a universal humanist pacifism, which was clearly incompatible with wartime nationalism and the ideology of the emperor system. Likewise, both the Association of War-bereaved Families and the Teachers’ Union, two important political pressure groups directly opposed to each other, focused on the government bureaucracy as a powerful link between the war and the postwar. Representatives of the war bereaved forged close ties especially with the Health and Welfare Ministry in pursuit of their goal of restoring to military families the privileged position they had enjoyed during the war. Unionized teachers, in contrast, opposed the Ministry of Education precisely because of its pivotal role in promoting militarism during the war. Instead, it demanded the right for teachers themselves to guide educational policies. The Friendship Association, in a category of its own, made international relations its central concern. It criticized the postwar conservative government’s resistance to formal relations with the People’s Republic of China as a sign of lack of remorse for—and even a continuation by other means of—Japanese war atrocities against Chinese and other Asian people.

Other, not explicitly political lines of division also emerged at different moments during the postwar decades, and with varying degrees of intensity. Finely divided generational cohorts established important
commonalities among people who had experienced the war at particular life stages. This was especially meaningful in early postwar Japan among those who were rebuilding the country. But the real generational conflict erupted later: between those who had experienced war as adults and the first “postwar generation,” who were students in the late 1950s and 1960s. In contrast to West Germany in the latter 1960s, however, no significant change in the content and organization of war memory occurred at that time. Instead, the ideological leaders of the war generation were able to assert their perspectives on war memory within the interest groups analyzed here.

Class divisions also came into play in the social politics of memory. In the early postwar years, labor unions such as the Teachers’ Union clearly looked back at the past through the lens of class struggle. Nonetheless, the emphasis on the teacher as laborer (who had not been recognized as such before and during the war) soon gave way to the more important role of the teacher as citizen. More controversial was the inherent elitism that characterized Wadatsumikai’s collecting the testaments of students from Japan’s top universities to the exclusion of writings by young soldiers from the working class. In the early 1960s, a debate unfolded in the intellectual journals *Shisō no kagaku* (The Science of Ideas) and *Wadatumi no koe* (Listen to the Voices from the Deep) over the publication of a collection of testaments by farm-soldiers (in contrast to student-soldiers), which challenged the elitist grounds on which Wadatsumikai conducted its pacifist campaign.

The gender divide entered the realm of war memory briefly in the immediate postwar years but began to be addressed in earnest only in the 1990s, propelled by the comfort women protest. In the latter 1940s, however, a “gendered memory” appeared in the conflict between war widows, who formed self-help groups early on, and war-bereaved organizations under male leadership. In the context of utter poverty on one hand and the introduction of women’s rights under the new constitution on the other, some war widows joined women’s political groups in an effort to define their own interests as separate from that of the state. Male-led war-bereaved groups, in contrast, were comparatively well connected in political circles and insisted on recreating the state-centered position of war widows as the honorable wives of the “departed heroes” (*eiri*). By the early 1950s, the war-bereaved had won
Introduction

out by successfully appropriating the plight of women in the aftermath of war. An independent, critical perspective among war widows as liberated postwar women retreated into the background. Japan’s women’s movement did not take up the question of war responsibility until the late 1990s, when feminist scholars began to examine the issue of war memory in light of that lacuna.

The structure of this book reflects the main phases in Japan’s history of war memory. Part I describes how five of the most prominent political interest groups formed within the context of the occupation, and how they articulated their visions for postwar Japan on the basis of selective memories of the war. They represented different strands of memory within postwar politics and demonstrate how the political contention over memory worked in concrete cases. These organizations ranged from the far right to the radical left, and all were well-known in political and intellectual circles, although their respective political clout changed, in some cases considerably, across the decades. The end of the occupation in the early 1950s was the defining historical moment for all of these organizations, when their activities matured into interest politics.

Part II analyzes different aspects of public memory as they emerged in changing contexts and connected to specific political controversies. The social politics of war memory remained tied to issues of bureaucratic control of school curricula and textbook approval, attempts to revive official celebrations of the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine, the public use of the national flag and anthem, and the restoration of wartime public holidays. Yet these controversies also revealed the shifting parameters of the memory debate in public life, influenced by generational changes in the second postwar decade, by the volatile international context of the 1960s, and by struggles over the official custodianship of memory since the 1970s. Although the strands of memory represented by special interest groups of the kind surveyed here remained dominant throughout the postwar era, the landscape of contentious political activism changed significantly. Whereas public memory in the 1950s was closely tied to representative politics, a decade later other forms of civic activism proliferated and selectively adopted the issue of war memory as part of their respective agendas. Special interest groups were joined in the late 1960s by spontaneously organizing “citizens’ movements” motivated less by a defined political ideology than
by the perceived need to make underrepresented political voices heard. Anti–Vietnam War protest and environmental movements stood out among this new form of civic involvement in politics. In the 1970s, the proliferation of religious groups further qualified the place of special interest organizations as leaders in the political contention over war memory. Such groups provided the ruling conservative party with critical support seemingly “from below,” and made memory issues a concern of the popular right.

Part III documents the most significant shift in Japan’s history of memory. From the 1980s on, the interest-based, primarily domestic politics of negotiating the meanings of the wartime past began to engage a global, rights-based approach to memory and restitution. The mushrooming of cross-national organizations representing the interests of long-neglected war victims compromised the once-dominant position of special interest groups in the politics of memory by introducing an international dimension that could no longer be ignored in the post–Cold War era.

**The First Postwar Decade, 1945–1955**

It is worth pointing out that Japanese people were well acquainted with the political potential of public memory by the time the war ended. The project of modernization and empire building in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as efforts to make sense of the conditions of modernity thereafter, readily employed strategies of defining the past. Modern wars constituted a privileged terrain. The Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), in which Japan defeated a European power for the first time, acquired an iconic place in official as well as popular discourse in the 1920s and 1930s. Not only had Japan’s victory produced additional territory, but it was also evidence of Japan’s international power and equality and an example of national unity.11 It was also in the context of the Russo-Japanese War that the public commemoration of the military dead at Yasukuni Shrine and the maintenance of a network of nation-protecting shrines all over the country became both popular practice and official policy. At later stages of World War II, this cult of the war dead came to provide a prominent avenue for ultranationalist indoctrination, with profound repercussions for postwar
struggles over memory. Furthermore, many Japanese found it necessary to bear witness to the political and military events they were experiencing. These testaments from the home front as well as from combat zones across Japan’s empire came to constitute a valuable and prominent source of memories imbued with conflicting meanings.

August 1945, the foundational moment of the postwar era, towered over the history of Japanese memory much as the “zero hour” cliché did in postwar Germany. Defeat meant different things to different people, making it perhaps the most overdetermined point in time in Japan. In the lived reality of many, the hardships of the war, defeat, and life under foreign occupation tended to merge into each other and became almost inseparable in their personal memory. Citizens organizing around a specific political interest, however, almost by definition had to explain how the three related to each other in order to overcome this threefold trauma. It was important for this early postwar organizing that the new “peace” constitution set a legal framework for the political negotiation of war memories. It established Japan as a structural democracy that had chosen the renunciation of the right to wage war (Article 9) as its cornerstone, thereby becoming the foremost tool of the left-liberal opposition to check the powers of the state against undue encroachment on civic society. The constitution, however, guaranteed democratic civil and human rights to all Japanese people as a “gift” of the American occupiers rather than the fruit of a Japanese democratic revolution. At the time of its promulgation under occupation censorship, the foreign origins of this document did not become a subject of public debate, cloaked, as it was, in a Japanese mantle. Yet the circumstances of its origins came to figure prominently and controversially in the subsequent discourse about war memory as either the stifling of a popular democratic impulse or the loss of a putative Japanese national identity.

All five groups surveyed here have continued actively to participate in public life up to the present. Throughout this time, each group was nationally organized, with regional and local chapters, and each published one or more periodicals through which it distributed information to its members and represented its constituencies and work to the public. Each organization maintained a political agenda of its own for which it was publicly known despite shifts in focus and in method
of activism. Although each operated in a distinct—though not separate—public space, addressing itself to a certain set of people, all spoke to issues of national and international concern. The public culture of memory emerged from the historical circumstances of the early postwar years, when these organizations established themselves first as popular movements and then (with the exception of Wadatsumikai) as political interest groups. In organizing, each group employed strategies to which war memory was central.

First, a new organization defined its own community. Being a Shinto priest or an elementary school teacher did not necessarily mean that one shared the same war experience or even postwar situation as other Shinto priests and elementary school teachers. The establishment of a Shinto organization or teachers’ labor union involved ideological considerations and required an (often selective) articulation of past and present realities with which potential members could identify. Because most people lived in straitened circumstances in the immediate postwar years, much of the early organizing process was driven by a group’s promise to alleviate its members’ economic hardship. Economic considerations, however, could hardly be separated from political interests. Civic organizations began to develop their political visions by articulating, even inventing, collective wartime experiences for their communities. Explaining to themselves and the wider public the cause of the current state of ruin from their particular vantage points (for example, from the point of view of Shinto priests or elementary school teachers) not only made the current situation comprehensible, but also increased the willingness of (potential) members to engage in political activism.

Second, organizations competed for a share of public attention during the occupation years by positioning themselves as leaders of democratic change. Their initial target audience was “the people” rather than the state. But in claiming popular leadership in their country’s quest for change, civic organizations automatically accepted a certain responsibility for the war. J. Victor Koschmann and others have described this trope in detail with respect to left-liberal intellectuals during the immediate postwar years. But intellectuals hardly stood separate from the many other social groups that formed during those years—indeed, they often helped establish them. Nor was democratic leadership an exclusive
privilege of those with left-wing political views. Conservative groups, too, articulated their activities in terms of a commitment to democracy. They even shouldered a share of responsibility for the war disaster, or, more precisely, for defeat, in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of their participation in the postwar democratic process.

Third, organizations located themselves on the emerging political map of postwar Japan vis-à-vis the occupation authorities, the government, and one another. Occupation-inspired reforms, the public purge, and Allied censorship created a political and practical context within which each organization, whether left or right of center, had to adjust its activities. This was urgently true in the five organizations considered here, for all were formed in a time not propitious for their politics. The two right-wing organizations, the Japan Association of War-bereaved Families and the Association of Shinto Shrines, established themselves in the early postwar years, when the purge of military elements was at its height. The two groups with communist sympathies, the Japan-China Friendship Association and Wadatsumikai, were formed in 1950 at the beginning of the Red Purge of leftists. The teachers’ union movement coalesced into one large union in 1947, just as SCAP began to crack down on Japan’s militant labor unions. All of them remained legal, however, by negotiating shifts in their organizational practices and by adjusting their language to fit political circumstances under the occupation. By the early 1950s, this self-censorship stopped, and each organization’s political agenda hardened considerably. But the experience of negotiating their views to accommodate the political climate continued to serve these organizations well. Indeed, those on the extreme right even opted to keep some of the self-censoring mechanisms in place for the sake of preserving their places in public politics.

Fourth, each civic group formed networks with political parties and other organizations to establish its interests in the political arena. Each benefited from the political power of larger organizations and increased its own power base by supporting a host of smaller groups. As the political system coalesced into two dominant parties in the first half of the 1950s, organizations became identified, in part through their networks, with particular stances on contemporary issues, including views of the war. Some of the more critical examinations of the wartime past—for example, the public acknowledgment of Japanese atrocities
on the Asian mainland—were presented to the public as part of a communist political agenda, which rapidly lost credibility as the Cold War intensified and Stalin’s crimes were internationally exposed. In other words, a group’s contemporaneous political positioning largely determined the reception of, or the public willingness to confront, certain interpretations of the past. War memory, which had been so raw and omnipresent during the immediate postwar years, was largely reduced to a by-product of interest politics by the early 1950s.

The end of the occupation in 1952 constituted a particularly important moment in the history of memory, in that Japan’s political options for international rehabilitation became narrowly circumscribed by its alliance with the United States in the deepening Cold War. At the same time, a whole new range of discursive possibilities concerning Japanese war memories opened up. The return of convicted war criminals to public life (and even national politics), the belated disclosure of the real horrors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, the stories of repatriates from Japan’s former empire, and bestselling collections of war testaments brought a flood of memories to public prominence and provided fertile ground for liberal democrats, pacifists, and nationalists of different vintages to formulate their respective political agendas with great urgency. Three pivotal political developments in the early 1950s set the discursive framework for public memory at the end of the occupation: the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, and the Korean War.

In September 1951 Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty with the United States and 47 other countries, formally ending Japan’s empire and guaranteeing its national sovereignty. Although regarded as nonpunitive and nonrestrictive, the peace treaty, like the resulting liberation from foreign occupation, turned out to be at best partial: excluded from the signatories were the entire Communist bloc and most countries of Japan’s former empire, in particular China and Korea. Okinawa and the Ogasawara Islands, moreover, remained American-occupied twenty years longer than the main islands—until 1972. Concurrently, Japan signed a separate alliance with the United States, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which guaranteed the United States the right to station troops in Japan to protect Japan’s internal and external security as part of the U.S. containment strategy in East Asia.
The two treaties combined brought Japan firmly into the deepening Cold War confrontation, leaving no option for the political neutrality demanded by the left-liberal opposition on the basis of Japan’s constitutional renunciation of war. As feared by those who vehemently opposed the conservative and anti-Communist trend at the time, the “San Francisco system” established an international framework in which the official pursuit of Japanese culpability and atonement for the war was quarantined by the so-called bamboo curtain, a metaphor for the Cold War division of Northeast Asia. Unlike West German leaders, who found official apologies for Nazi crimes politically necessary in order to integrate Germany into the European Community, the Japanese government saw no political reason to make amends for its colonial past. Reconciliation with Communist China and war-shattered Korea was not called for under alliance agreements with the United States, which allowed Japanese leaders instead to focus single-mindedly on economic growth.

The peace and security treaties were negotiated against the backdrop of war in Korea, which broke out a scant five years after Japan’s defeat in World War II and affected the Japanese public deeply. When hostilities commenced on the Korean peninsula, ongoing conservative efforts to curb communist influence turned into an outright purge of more than twenty thousand private and public workers following the dissolution of the Japan Communist Party (JCP) central committee. MacArthur’s denunciation of the JCP on 3 May gave the so-called Red Purge legitimacy and convinced the left that the doors were closing on the possibility of a genuine democratic revolution. The proximity of war, not only in time (World War II) but now also in space (Korea), spurred an immensely visible peace movement, which proclaimed the connection between these two wars in humanitarian and political terms. The peace movement’s emotional appeal rested on memories of war victimization, both as Japanese experience and as international reality. Its dynamism helped the left-liberal opposition build its political platform around protesting the conservative government’s abject support of the U.S.-Japan alliance, which it saw as perpetuating, instead of renouncing, imperialist and militarist policies. Progressive scholars of Japan’s history of memory have long pointed out that the manner in which the Japanese government concluded international treaties (geared
Introduction

primarily toward furthering U.S. military interests in the Cold War) in effect sanctioned the shelving of Japan's war responsibility issues.12

The Cold War politics of an increasingly conservative government at the end of the occupation period contributed to sharply defined relations between civic organizations and the state. A group’s institutionalized proximity to the state—not claims of popular leadership—came to determine its political influence (although not its public visibility, as the prominence of protest politics in the later 1950s and 1960s would indicate). As organizations such as the ultraconservative Association of Shinto Shrines and the Association of War-bereaved Families successfully lobbied state institutions on behalf of their causes, left-liberal groups (in this case, the Teachers’ Union, Japan-China Friendship Association, and Wadatsumikai) claimed to represent “the voice of the people” and positioned themselves in opposition to the state. War memory, insofar as it was attached to special interests, became organized along a left-right divide, which also separated the allegedly conservative state from the allegedly liberal people. Public controversies about interpretations of the war and its legacies—most notably over textbooks and national symbols—therefore tended to focus on the state as a target (of either lobbying activities or protests) and thus obscured critical issues such as the overlapping identities of victim and victimizer, as well as war responsibility toward Asia in general.

Interest-based Struggles over Memory, 1950s–1970s

It is important to recognize that the subject of the past—of both the war and the postwar—was defined eclectically and changed significantly over the decades since the end of the war. Indeed, one could speak of a “doubling” of temporalities as the historicity of the present changed over time. The wartime past, which tended to include prewar experiences and foreign occupation, doubled up with the postwar years, which in fact encompassed all three temporalities of past, present, and future as it was construed after 1945. Memories of war were the means by which visions for a democratic Japan were formulated in the immediate postwar years. But by the mid-1950s, both the war memories and the democratic visions had to contend with the realities of the preceding decade, which did not always meet the goals set in the early postwar years. At this
point, memories of war (and of prewar experiences) were joined by the need to reckon with the immediate postwar past if the democratic visions were to become realities. As the postwar period continued, war memories became more and more explicitly negotiated on the terrain of the postwar past through which special interest groups legitimized their ongoing political involvement, on the right as on the left.

In 1956 the economic white papers declared Japan’s “postwar” to be over as the annual GNP reached and soon surpassed prewar levels. Socially and politically, however, many legacies of war, defeat, and foreign occupation remained unresolved, from war widows’ pensions and medical aid for atomic bomb victims to Japan’s continued subordination to the Cold War objectives of the United States. The government lay firmly in conservative hands under the leadership of the newly consolidated Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), whose ranks included prewar and wartime politicians like Hatoyama Ichirō, Ishibashi Tanzan, and the depurged Class A war criminal Kishi Nobusuke. Moreover, the ruling LDP pushed revisions of many occupation reforms, foremost the American-imposed constitution. While attempts to revise the constitution failed, efforts to once again grant the bureaucracy power to influence the appointment of teachers and police officers met with increasing success. Predictably, the intellectual and political left were alarmed by what they saw as a swing back to the bureaucratic centralism and state coercion of the 1930s.

This social and political climate spurred the revival in 1956 of the discourse on war responsibility among progressive intellectuals, many of whom had been part of the earlier debate shortly after defeat. They took issue with the apparent lack of resolution in the matter of war responsibility in contemporary political and social consciousness and ascribed this to a failure of the earlier discourse, both public and intellectual. In particular, they conceived of war responsibility as an academic pursuit. They searched for theoretical categories to approach it in a more differentiated way than had been done in the immediate postwar years and conducted historical investigations into the roots of the wartime behavior of various social groups. The debate established the term “war responsibility” (sensō sekinin) as the functional equivalent of what the West Germans called “overcoming the past” (Vergangenheitsbewältigung). This combined research into wartime conduct with a
critique of postwar trends without explicitly making a distinction between the two. As such, “war responsibility” became firmly established as an issue of the left-liberal opposition, characterized by anticonservatism (based on what the left perceived as an insufficient break with the past in postwar politics), anti-Americanism (attacking the American interpretation of the war and the conduct of the Tokyo war crimes trial), and self-critique (scrutinizing intellectuals’ role in society).¹⁴

A similar set of concerns animated the mass protest movement against the renewal of the revised U.S.-Japan Security Treaty a few years later in the spring of 1960. A broad protest coalition of the political left had formed the year before, including the Socialist and Communist parties, labor federations, women’s groups, student councils, and prominent intellectuals engaged in the war responsibility debate. They came together in opposition to Prime Minister Kishi, who had staked his political career on the revised treaty. In their eyes, the treaty renewal took on an iconic meaning: it demonstrated the fragility of postwar democracy (which denied ordinary citizens an adequate political voice), the possible return to militarization and state coercion embodied by the former wartime leader and now prime minister Kishi, and the self-interest of the United States in the Cold War. Amid the escalating mass protests in front of the Diet in May and June 1960, Kishi proved the protesters’ impression correct when he forced the treaty’s ratification by having opposition Diet members physically removed from their seats. It cost Kishi his job, but the treaty remained in place. Postwar Japan’s worst political crisis thus effectively mobilized popular war memory by invoking the continued victimization of the people by the state. But the experience also transformed it by focusing attention on the need to overcome the ghosts of the past by generating more social equity and a stronger national identity. The conservative, nationalist aspect of this message bore fruit as Japan entered its phase of high economic growth, which muted some of the political discontent and even brought to the fore positive evaluations of the war as a time of righteous national unity.¹⁵

The early 1970s constitute a widely acknowledged break in the history of postwar Japan, marked by the end of high economic growth, the normalization of relations with Communist China, and the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, albeit with the American military bases intact. This conjunction of foreign-induced changes reverberated deeply
Introduction

in domestic politics. First, it proved Japan’s viability in the world economy and as an international presence, demonstrated by the overwhelming successes of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and Osaka Expo ’70, but also its international vulnerability in the aftermath of the 1973 oil shock. Second, restoring relations with South Korea in 1965 and China in 1972 began a process of renegotiating Japan’s place in Asia that conjured up various and conflicting national memories of Japanese colonialism and war. Third, the broad-based reversion movement, which linked Okinawans with mainland Japanese for the first time since 1945, complicated the putative identity of a unified people, raising the issue of their very different wartime and postwar experiences and revealing war memory also as a local issue of social and political justice. Occupied Okinawa territorially embodied defeat, and as such the nexus between the legacies of Japan’s prewar involvement in Asia and its postwar orientation toward the United States. The overwhelming national consensus on the desirability of ending the U.S. occupation there kept this issue firmly in the public eye. Moreover, the conflicting demands levied on the Japanese government, the Americans, and the Okinawans revealed ongoing political and ideological struggles over the meaning of the war in relation to the postwar.

The Vietnam War and massive antiwar protests in Japan constituted a critical context for these developments. The daily news of American military conduct against Vietnamese civilians substantiated both left-wing and right-wing critiques of American hypocrisy as self-proclaimed champions of “peace and democracy.” But it also confronted many Japanese with memories of their own wartime behavior. It marked the culmination of lively citizen activism on a variety of political issues and resulted in a more critical consideration of war victimization, including questions of the Japanese people’s complicity in and perpetration of war crimes. Writer and critic Oda Makoto consciously built his antiwar citizens’ movement Beheiren (Citizens’ Federation for Peace in Vietnam) around the notion of individual political (but nonideological) commitment and responsibility to recognize and resist state management of public life. The Asahi shinbun journalist Honda Katsuichi came to research the history of Japanese atrocities in China after covering the war in Vietnam, and his writings remained on the bestseller lists for years, even decades. Kinoshita Junji published a satirical and deeply
Introduction

(self-)critical play on the Allied war crimes trials, *Between God and Man* (*Kami to hito no aida*, 1970), set both in Tokyo and in the South Pacific, where some of the smaller Class B and C war crimes trials had been held. The first accounts of Asian military comfort women’s experiences of sexual slavery appeared in the early 1970s, the emperor’s war responsibility began to be systematically explored, and an outright “China boom” in the mass media explored the historical and contemporary importance of continental Asia for the Japanese.

Nonetheless, the dominant pattern of contention over both the wartime and the postwar past remained locked in a dynamic that pitted (liberal) citizens against the (conservative) state. One landmark was the beginning of the textbook trials in 1965, when Ienaga Saburō sued the Ministry of Education over the legality of textbook censorship, especially concerning historical accounts of Japanese colonial and war crimes. The outburst of students’, citizens’, and environmental movements against the politically constraining, socially discriminating, and physically harmful consequences of government policies also fed upon new nationalist strategies led or sanctioned by the ruling LDP in the late 1960s. The official revival in 1967 of the wartime national holiday *kigen* (the birthday of the legendary first emperor, Jimmu) as *kenkoku* *kinen* *no* *hi* (National Foundation Day, 11 February) was followed the next year by elaborate government-sponsored events marking the centennial of the Meiji Restoration. This was postwar Japan’s first large-scale public commemoration event, celebrating a century of “Japan in the world” by lightly skipping over the imperial and colonial quality of much of that history. Concurrently, the LDP supported a bill, long in preparation, to bring Yasukuni Shrine back under state management and conduct official ceremonies for the Japanese war dead there. As an important conjuncture in the history of memory, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw intensified public uses of war memory across the political spectrum and tied to various international and domestic issues.

In all these ways, the five organizations surveyed here competed with one another for public space in which to present what they considered to be essential legacies of the war. Political controversies did not engage all groups equally at all times, and such controversies are discussed in detail only to the extent that they serve to illuminate the public negotiation of memories. Overall, this study does not aim at a “complete”
picture of memory in Japan, which would have to account for all that is not said or publicly visible, or even at a full chronology of Japan’s history of memory. Arguably the most blatant omission here concerns the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which have produced a memory culture unparalleled in its richness and have therefore attracted far more attention from scholars. 16 Organizations of atomic bomb victims (hibakusha) were deeply involved in citizen political activism from the mid-1950s on. Until the 1970s and 1980s, however, the literature of hibakusha groups suggested an enormous disconnect between the memory of 6 and 9 August and that of the preceding war. Since then, this strand of “victimization” memory has become subject to public criticism, so much so that in the 1980s the Hiroshima Peace Museum added a new wing dedicated to Japan’s war in Asia. The important contribution of the atomic bomb experiences to the larger public culture of war memory notwithstanding, it does not add a critically new perspective to the present focus on the mechanisms by which certain interpretations were publicly formed, articulated, and negotiated as part of the political process over the five postwar decades.

Global Memory Cultures since the 1980s

The loosening of institutionalized political alliances at the end of the long conservative hegemony, and the growing interaction of local and national publics with an emerging global public culture (in part through cross-national civic organizations), focused wide attention on “memory” as both a political issue and a framework for historical analysis. Progressive intellectuals had begun writing about war responsibility as a problem of postwar history in the mid-1970s,17 coining the term “postwar responsibility” (sengo sekinin), but not until the second half of the 1980s did this new discourse reach a critical volume and public audience. This discourse reflected an overwhelming concern with the people’s responsibility for the unresolved legacies of Japan’s colonial and war conduct in Asia and the historical and conceptual treatment of these legacies among intellectuals and in public education.18

Meanwhile, the Chinese and South Korean governments discovered political capital in war memory issues, which they had formerly chosen to treat lightly, and began to monitor Japanese official gestures toward
endorsing an unapologetically nationalist view of the war. From 1982 on, public protests against Japanese textbooks and visits by Japanese prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine were ignited primarily by the complaints from the Chinese and Korean governments and official media and only secondarily by domestic political contestants. In the broader context of relocating international relations in a still-undefined post–Cold War world, unresolved historical injustices became imbued with political meaning and practical utility in many parts of the world, and especially in East Asia, where regional and national divisions had for decades eclipsed the need for reconciliation, apology, and honest attention to lingering humanitarian and political legacies of the war. Memory issues became part and parcel of exploring new possibilities for a politically and economically more integrated Asian region, the new realities of economic recession in Japan in the 1990s, and the challenges of facing the United States and Asia at the same time.

Emperor Hirohito’s death in 1989, which ended the Shōwa period (1926–89), the fall of the Berlin Wall in the same year, and the collapse of the long hegemony of the conservative LDP in 1993 marked a pivotal point in the history of memory in Japan, when issues of war and postwar responsibility for Japan’s war conduct in Asia became tied to the politics of redefining its position in the world. This era of endings and putative new beginnings seemingly catapulted Japan’s unresolved war responsibilities into the political limelight and made it an issue of broad public debate rather than a tool exclusively of political protest. The massive production of Shōwa retrospectives in the aftermath of the emperor’s demise focused overwhelmingly on the war itself and was connected with a suddenly prominent investigation of the emperor’s war responsibility. The feminist movements in various Asian countries began to network and succeeded in bringing the long-neglected history of Asian women’s sexual slavery at the hands of the wartime Japanese government not only to national but to global public attention. In the following decade, a host of still uncompensated and often ignored victims of war, including former Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, and Southeast Asian colonial subjects as well as atomic bomb victims, joined in a rapidly intensifying movement to press the Japanese government for individual compensation payments.
The turning point in Japan’s imperial calendar found a critical political corollary with the onset of the Persian Gulf War in August 1991, the first military conflict led by the United States and its allies after the end of the Cold War. U.S. demands for Japan’s active participation in the Gulf conflict confronted the Japanese government for the first time with the new challenges of the post–Cold War world as fundamentally political—rather than economic—issues. At the center stood interpretations of Japan’s constitution and the legal position of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) as participants in United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (PKO). The problem of constitutional revision itself dated back to the early 1950s and was inseparable from the particular political dynamic between the conservative LDP in power and the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) in permanent opposition in which set positions, often tied to war memory, had been articulated for decades. The Gulf War brought this formerly domestic issue into the international arena, where it assumed an entirely new relevance as the only available tool with which to negotiate an unprecedented diplomatic situation. Prime Minister Kaifu’s indecisive handling of the crisis, followed by furious debates in the Diet about a new “PKO bill” allowing overseas deployment of the SDF (passed in 1992), revealed two things: the inadequacy of the postwar (Cold War) political framework in the new decade and the need for a realignment of political positions and forces. These events clearly shaped the context in which the debate about war memory and postwar responsibility became a genuinely public discourse—broadly reflective of the postwar system’s shortcomings and championed by new forms of political activism.

The year 1995 carried particular significance in the Japanese context, marked by the Hanshin earthquake in January, the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in March, and the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II in August. It revealed a society in flux, struggling with the demands of political reorganization, economic recession, and Asian regional integration, which had combined to engulf Japan in a genuinely public and highly contentious debate about its wartime and postwar past (in striking contrast to the seeming inability to produce viable visions for the future). Japan’s response to the events of 1995 was symptomatic of significant shifts in international relations, domestic politics, and an increasingly global public culture that began
in the late 1980s and continued into the twenty-first century, however differently nuanced by the demands of the Bush administration’s declared global war on terrorism. While the dominant culture flows no longer bound Japan first and foremost to the United States, as had been the case in earlier postwar decades, the U.S.-Japan alliance remained central to Japan’s international relations and even played into domestic conservative agendas in ways that both invoked and transcended Cold War structures.

As Laura Hein argued in a thoughtful commentary on current affairs at the end of 2003, Prime Minister Koizumi’s unqualified support for the Bush administration’s unilateral foreign policy decisions in the aftermath of 9/11 suggested few new or independent goals, whereas his push for the Antiterrorism Measures Special Law of 2001 fed directly into newly fervent plans to amend the constitution and allow Japan’s active participation in full-scale war. The U.S.-Japan security relationship and constitutional revision certainly represent two of the longest-standing issues with which war memory has been bound up since the end of the occupation in 1952. The end of the Cold War transposed these issues from the domestic terrain of political contest to the arena of international relations. In the 1990s, international relations were being reshaped by the need of nation-states to respond collectively to violent ethnic (rather than ideological) conflicts in Asia, Europe, and Africa, and at the same time by the proliferation of transnational and nongovernmental organizations performing tasks formerly reserved for national governments. It was in this changed international context that the particularity of the U.S.-Japan relationship and Japan’s constitutional disavowal of engaging in military action abroad assumed unprecedented urgency, with respect not only to shaping the future, but also to reevaluating the past.

Not only Japan but much of the world faced new political challenges after the Cold War at precisely the time that the political, legal, and intellectual concern with restitution and the negotiation of historical injustices emerged as a global phenomenon. This was an unprecedented development that nevertheless presented itself with specific national inflections. Whereas in Japan the political organization of memory was once intricately linked to the representation of powerful special interests, war memory and postwar responsibility emerged in the 1990s as an issue
of broad public appeal no longer predictably aligned with established strategies to preserve or undermine the postwar status quo represented by the U.S.-Japan security system and the constitution. The JSP, for example, along with the biggest labor federation, simply ended its decades-long opposition to the U.S.-Japan Security system in 1994 and even considered constitutional revision while pressing for an official apology to China and Korea for Japan’s war conduct. The nationalist right emerged better organized than ever to protest against such apologies, to rewrite the constitution, and to liberate Japan from its long subjugation to American hegemony. The government, itself experimenting with various coalition arrangements, had to address questions of war memory as a matter of foreign policy but without deemphasizing its close relations with the United States. Meanwhile, a host of local and cross-national rights-based organizations have inserted themselves as viable political players in restitution cases as much as in the Iraq conflict.

The Japan-China Friendship Association, for example, once considered a radical opposition group because of its insistence on atoning for Japanese wartime aggression against Chinese victims, now appeared more in the public mainstream amid a host of civic groups demanding compensation for Asian war victims. The Teachers’ Union, which had all but abandoned its antagonistic stance against the Ministry of Education by the mid-1990s, was a far less significant actor in the contention over memory than in earlier decades. Battles over the contents of textbooks were now carried out by a number of smaller, issue-oriented groups both on the left and on the right, for example, the neo-nationalist Liberal View of History Study Group (Jiyūshugi shikan kenkyūkai) led by Fujioka Nobukatsu. The Association of War-bereaved Families, for its part, celebrated a major victory in the late 1990s when its public project, Japan’s first national museum of the war dedicated to the war bereaved, the Shōwa-kan (National Shōwa Memorial Museum), prevailed over much public protest and finally opened after twenty years of lobbying and preparation. Yet this project appeared driven by a fear of displacement, given the many new or newly prominent organizations of war-bereaved persons that had formed in clear opposition to the long-established Association.

Sixty years after the end of World War II in Asia, Japanese and foreign observers of Japan’s “memoryscape” sensed that things had changed
since 1995, though exactly how or to what effect was less clear. In April 2005 a wave of anti-Japanese mass protests across China, unprecedented in scale, brought Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations to a low point and demonstrated once again that a genuine reconciliation between Japan and its Asian neighbors remained elusive from a mainland Asian perspective. Again, Japanese nationalist textbooks and Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine had served as triggers for the protests. Many political commentators, however, saw larger conflicts of interest hovering in the background. Japan’s active campaign to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and China’s determination to block this quest, formed one specific issue of conflict. More generally, however, Japan’s new muscularity in international relations—combined with Koizumi’s unequivocal support for Bush’s war in Iraq—pointed to a decisive rightward shift among the Japanese leadership that did not bode well for reconciliation. For the first time since the 1950s, a conservative-initiated revision of Japan’s constitution, and Article 9 in particular, appeared to have become a real possibility, which could open the door to Japan’s rise as a military power in East Asia.

To be sure, the LDP’s proposals for constitutional revision drew sharp and extensive criticism from the Japanese public. But it is also true that for the first time, a majority of Japanese agreed that it was time to rewrite the constitution to reflect current national and global realities rather than those of the early postwar years under foreign occupation. Civic groups of all political persuasions in fact responded by drafting their own versions of revision proposals, and bookstores in Tokyo were flooded in the summer of 2005 with publications, from a variety of angles, on the issues at stake. Insofar as this newly pertinent debate focused on the conflicting and changing interpretations of war legacies over the course of the postwar period, it reflected both the concerns of and the recent patterns of conflict in the civic struggle over war memory. This time, of course, the government itself had initiated the debate, in contrast to the public furor over war memory a decade earlier, into which the government had to be dragged belatedly. It is too early to say exactly how the two debates are related. Certainly, there is much overlap among active contributors to these discussions, even if it cannot be assumed that they line up neatly along the familiar right-left divide. Like war memory in earlier decades, constitutional revision
may appear to be primarily a matter of domestic politics, as J. Patrick Boyd and Richard J. Samuels have argued. The debate’s global dimensions, however, weigh heavily. Not unlike the political struggle over war memory in the 1990s, the debate over constitutional revision is not Japan’s alone. On the one hand, changing Article 9 is sure to affect the dynamics of Asian regionalism and therefore draw other countries into the debate; on the other, writing and amending constitutions to reflect the realities of the post–Cold War world is going on elsewhere in the world as well, most dramatically in Europe. Perhaps the most salient issue of constitutional revision in Japan in the first decade of the twenty-first century is to make the constitution amendable as a matter of regular political procedure—to make it a living and changing part of Japan’s political life. Seen from this angle, the debate about constitutional revision may not so much eclipse the political contention over the meaning of the war as draw upon its long history.