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ERCCT Online Paper Series:

**The Three Phases of China's Response to Koizumi and
the Yasukuni Shrine Issue: Structuration in Sino-
Japanese Relations**

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August 2012

EOPS No. 0007

–Young Scholar Workshop 2012 selected collections –

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**The Three Phases of China's Response to Koizumi and the Yasukuni Shrine Issue:
Structuration in Sino-Japanese Relations**

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Abstract

This paper examines the reaction of China to the repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine, a controversial Shinto site in Tokyo, by Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro from 2001 to 2006. The period was arguably the worst in political relations since the countries normalized their diplomatic relations in 1972. The paper analyses the responses from a constructivist view of International Relations (IR), positing a potential foundation for an IR-grounded theory of the relationship. By breaking the response into three distinct phases it demonstrates that China learned and strategized throughout this time to both work within, and to re-shape, the structural determinants of the bilateral relationship. This process, which is termed *structuration*, involves actors from across the political and social spectrum both domestically and bilaterally, affording greater levels of agency than is sometimes suggested in structural analyses of international relations. China's strategizing was ultimately successful in preventing the challenge to its preferred set of norms in the bilateral relationship that was posed by Koizumi's repeated visits to the shrine, though in doing so the cost of any future recurrence of this problem was raised.

¹ The author is a PhD candidate at the University of Leeds in the UK. This is a revised version of a paper that was presented at the ERCCT Young Scholars' Workshop at Tuebingen University in June 2012. The author wishes to thank the participants of the workshop for their constructive feedback. This paper draws on a series of lengthy interviews conducted as part of the author's PhD research across China and Japan over a six month period with a diverse array of observers and advisers. These included policy analysts, government advisers, foreign ministry bureaucrats, journalists, diplomats, senior academics and Communist party officials. Though not all participants requested anonymity, in order to ensure that it is maintained for the majority who did, nobody will be identified in this paper either by name or position.

1. Introduction

Though China and Japan have long had a difficult and complicated relationship, the period of Koizumi Junichiro's tenure as prime minister of Japan from 2001 to 2006 marked arguably the most fractious period since they normalized diplomatic ties in 1972. Koizumi's insistence on paying tribute at Yasukuni Shrine each year was a source of consternation for both the government and public in China. This article explores the reaction of the Chinese government to each visit in order to deconstruct the bilateral relationship and lay the foundations of a theory that will contribute to better understandings of China, the Sino-Japanese relationship, and constructivist International Relations (IR) theory in general. This project takes the Sino-Japanese relationship, analyzed through the prism of China's response to Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine throughout his tenure, as its focus. It seeks to deconstruct China's reaction in order to better understand the workings of this complex but important bilateral relationship. By breaking the reaction down into its constituent parts and assessing the roles of various actors and sectors of society in producing that reaction, it aims to provide the foundation for a constructivist theory of Sino-Japanese relations. Through a combination of analyses from a variety of methodological bases it traces the structural format of the Chinese response to what are ostensibly-perceived as historical sleights, and seek to shed light on how this also shapes, and is itself shaped by, the external structures of the bilateral relationship.

This article begins with a brief outline of the controversy over Yasukuni Shrine. It then introduces the theoretical framework that underpins this project and describes a proposed constructivist IR theory of Sino-Japanese relations. The third section goes into the detail of China's reaction to each of Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, explaining how the three distinct phases of that response support a constructivist explanation of the relationship by describing the causal factors and strategic motivations behind the Chinese actions. Finally, the conclusion offers some thoughts on the implications of this study for our understanding of China and the Sino-Japanese relationship more broadly.

1.1 The Yasukuni Shrine Controversy

Yasukuni Shrine, or *Yasukuni Jinja*, literally means "shrine of the peaceful country" and has been a significant Shinto site of commemoration of Japan's war dead since the 1860s. Under

Shinto beliefs it is considered to house the *kami*² of every person who has died in the course of fighting for Japan since then. Included in the more than two million *kami* are a number of convicted Class A war criminals, among them the wartime prime minister Tojo Hideki, who were enshrined secretly in 1978. It is the presence of these individuals' name plates and the shrine's adjoining museum, the Yushukan, which is viewed by many as presenting a distorted history of Japan's actions during the Second World War in East Asia, that are usually invoked as the reason for its controversial nature. This is particularly true in the eyes of Japan's East Asian neighbors and visits to the shrine by prominent Japanese are a cause of frequent objection by political leaders in the region, most notably from China and South Korea. Prior to the enshrinement of the war criminals visits by those in positions of power or responsibility were not particularly controversial but Emperor Hirohito ceased visiting as a result³ (Japan Times, 2006) and his successor, Emperor Akihito, has never been. Prime ministers continued to visit relatively frequently until Nakasone Yasuhiro's visit on August 15th 1985, the fortieth anniversary of Japan's surrender, when the visits ceased at the direct or through private or request of the then-General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Hu Yaobang. It was believed that no prime minister visited the shrine for the next eleven years until Hashimoto Ryutaro visited in July 1996. However, it was reported in 1996 that Miyazawa Kiichi secretly visited when he was prime minister in 1992 (Su, 2007). In April 2001, during the election campaign for the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP), Koizumi Junichiro pledged that he would resume the visits if he were elected, and that he would do so on August 15th. Koizumi won the election and went on to become one of Japan's longest serving prime ministers. His six visits during his five-year tenure were considered especially antagonistic and each visit was accompanied by both an internal, as well as an external, outpouring of rhetoric from the official organs of the Chinese state. By the time of his final visit to Yasukuni Shrine on August 15th 2006, just one month before he left office, the political relationship at the highest level appeared to have completely broken down and popular Chinese perceptions of Japan had reached their lowest point for generations⁴.

2. Theory

² The Japanese word *kami* is often translated into English as 'gods', 'deities', or 'spirits', none of which are adequate. The Chinese is *shen* (神).

³ This information was revealed in the diaries of former Grand Steward of the Imperial Household Tomita Tomohiko.

⁴ This information comes from opinion polls conducted by the Cabinet Office of Japan.

This study intends to contribute to the school of constructivism, in the ongoing quest for greater coherence as an approach to the study of IR and of foreign policy, by developing a constructivist-inspired framework of analysis for Sino-Japanese relations. It is unashamedly region-specific in this aim in drawing on the epistemological foundations of constructivist thought in combination with the peculiarities of China and the Sino-Japanese relationship. It is neither an entirely narrow attempt to discuss the Sino-Japanese relationship, nor a meta-theoretical project of grandeur. It uses constructivist ideas and methodological aids in order to posit a hypothesis of the Sino-Japanese relationship which, both within this study and over a longer period of time, can be tested and adjusted to bring about a more coherent theory of the relationship. It does so from the perspective of China's reaction to Japan and therefore might be considered to be more a study of China's Japan policy rather than Sino-Japanese relations *per se*. However, the role of Japan's actions within the processes outlined here mean that it contributes to the study of the relationship as a whole by analyzing a particular aspect of it.

2.1 Constructivism in IR

Since its inception as a formal academic discipline in 1918, IR has been dominated by two schools of thought: realism and liberalism. Liberals viewed international relations from a state-centric perspective, but allowed for these states to find common ground that would enable them to cooperate for mutual gain (Angell, 1910). Focusing on the ability of states to accept the possibility of mutual interests, Liberals hoped to demonstrate that the seemingly perpetual state of conflict in the international system was neither natural nor inescapable (Zimmern, 1945). In contrast to liberal theory, realists opined that power in international relations was a zero-sum game and that cooperation among states was only possible along the lines of alliances, which themselves were specifically aimed at balancing against other threats. The analysis of the behavior of states was based on the principle of human nature being selfish and egotistical and that they operated in a Hobbesian "state of nature" (Hobbes, 1998). Thus, states were considered to be belligerent and the system within which they operated a given that could not be altered. The development of neo-liberalism and neo-realism in the 1970s and 1980s marked a notable shift in the focus of that debate that rendered the two theories closer to each other than had ever been previously accepted (Cox, 1981). Keohane and Nye's model of "complex interdependence" (1977), the basis of what has come to be termed "neo-liberalism" argued that the number of actors involved in international relations had been seriously underestimated by IR theory. While states remained the primary focus of their work, they emphasized the interconnected nature of the modern international system and

considered other transnational actors to also have relevance and agency within a cobweb of interrelation. The model did not go unchallenged. Kenneth Waltz outlined what has come to be known as "structural realism" or "neo-realism" (Waltz, 1979). For Waltz, and for all those who have followed in his intellectual footsteps, the key determining factor in the course of international relations was the absence of an overarching authority that could regulate state-to-state interaction. This absence leaves all states in the position of having to assume the worst of all of one's rivals and prepare accordingly, for failure to do so may result in their own destruction. While the end result of this model – inevitable conflict – was not markedly different from classical realism, it did mark a fundamental shift in the explanatory aspect of the theory. Human nature was no longer the root of conflict in the international system; instead it was the rationality of the state in seeking its own survival within a system of other states all seeking to do the same thing.

Frustration with the sterility of the debate between these dominant traditional theories led to ontological challenges within IR in the form of critical theory and postmodernism which called for a greater exploration of the concepts within the discipline that had long been taken for granted (Devetak, 1995; 2005). From this seemingly irreconcilable debate emerged a new basket of theories that came to be known as constructivism, which identified the need to acknowledge the social production of knowledge and to deconstruct it. This allowed for the development of IR theories that no longer relied upon on basic state interests that were assumed; instead they were socially produced and, crucially, fluid. Given that interests are to be socially constructed – that is, expectations of what is both possible and desirable determined by social interaction – the interests of states across the international system may differ, and may alter across time.

Constructivism could be argued to be an approach rather than a theory and this is clear when considering the differences between the constructivism espoused by Wendt (1992; 1995; 1999; 2004), which takes the international system as its level of analysis, and by Katzenstein (1996), which looks within the state itself. Wendt, drawing inspiration both from the "English School" of IR (Bull, 1977; Wight, 1977), as well as Waltzian structural realism, outlined his vision of a state-centric theory of IR that concentrated on the social interaction within the international system. That is to say that the identity of any given state was produced by its social interaction with other states in the international system. He articulated this vision by drawing comparison with Waltz's structural conception of the international system, but characterized the structures as those that had been established by the previously described

processes of interaction. Katzenstein, on the other hand, sought to explore the construction of a particular individual state from within, rather than taking it as a given entity existing in a system that determines its behavior⁵ (Katzenstein, 1996). By breaking the state down into its component parts, thus allowing both conscious and unconscious agency for a multitude of actors and groups not considered in other areas of IR theory, constructivism at the level of the state seeks to reveal the roots of a state's identity in ways that were not previously discussed in earlier incarnations of IR theory. If the identity of a state is central to its interests and, therefore, to its motivations for action at the international level then the role of this branch of constructivism is to uncover the domestic forces behind this identity.

Not all constructivist approaches differ so starkly and the most convincing constructivist theories value both Wendtian systemic analysis in combination with 'unit-level' constructivism (Kratochwil, 1993; Ruggie, 1993). The deconstruction of the state into its domestic components and processes allows us to consider the production of interests from within; placing these interests into the context of international interaction between states, conceptualized as entities, or between those who act as representatives of what we conceptualize as states, completes the picture of international relations in a way that is not achieved in any other approach. One of the biggest contradictions in common understandings of international relations is that of the state as both a distinct entity in the international arena and, simultaneously, a domestic system created from, and ruling over, a given society. By considering the domestic production of the state concurrently with its international environment, we can address this quandary. This blend allows us to deconstruct the state, identifying actors and groups within a state and measuring – or, at least, describing – their interaction. In this way, a state's domestic identity and interest-formation that is projected onto the international stage can become clearer. Similarly, allowing our focus to move between the domestic and the international means that the relationships between states can also become a part of the bigger picture of complex interaction. What this means for this study in particular is that China can now be deconstructed into groupings of actors and parties that all play some role in what is frequently abbreviated to 'China's reaction'. Having examined these processes, consideration can also be made of the relationship between China and Japan as states. Once the ontological decision is made that states can be conceptualized as entities, even with the caveat that they are neither fixed nor uniform and that they are not the exclusive drivers of international relations, then it is reasonable to hypothesize that

⁵ Katzenstein's later work has taken a wider focus (Katzenstein, 2005).

structural relationships are formed between any two given states. A structurally defined relationship is one where norms, expectations, and rules (both explicit and implicit) guide the actions of either party when engaging in interaction. These structures might be quite subtle in that they are frequently unspoken and unwritten, but they provide the framework for expectation of policy-makers on either side. Thus, where these structures are not challenged, the relationship between any two given states will run smoothly but where either party seeks to operate outside of the understood format the relationship will become much more fractious.

If the above description of structural relationships is correct, then it follows that the patterns of interaction among states will, at least in part, shape their future interaction through experience-led expectation-production. Sprout & Sprout's highly influential conceptualization of the way in which foreign policy is formulated and conducted outlined two "environments" which are crucial to the process: the "psychological environment"; and the "operational environment" (Sprout & Sprout, 1965). The former of these refers to how the policy-maker perceives the world and the various contributory factors of that perception. It includes values and interests but also lessons that have been learned from previous actions and reactions. The latter refers to the world as it actually is and, thus, determines the outcome of the decision that has been made within the psychological environment. It follows that a successful foreign policy is one that is made in a psychological environment that is as close as possible to the operational environment. Indeed, it has been argued that policy-makers' inability to escape from the psychological environment has resulted in some catastrophic decisions (Vogler, 1989). Holistic constructivism adds a nuance to this interpretation by incorporating the psychological environments of the policy-makers on either side within the operational environment of the relationship itself. In other words, if the perceptions of an actor determine its policy towards another actor, and the reaction of the other actor is, at least, part of the outcome, then it follows that the perceptions of that actor are integral to the outcome of the original policy. Thus, the psychological environments of either side are not only crucial in determining the initial policy, but also the outcomes that follow.

2.2 Towards a Constructivist Theory of Sino-Japanese Relations

This project is intended to test a holistic constructivist hypothesis of an aspect of Sino-Japanese relations in order to help build the foundations of an IR-grounded theory of the relationship. The aim is not to produce a meta-theoretical explanation of international relations as a whole, but to provide one aspect of the foundation, grounded in a more-widely

applicable IR framework, of a theorization of the Sino-Japanese relationship itself. By examining a state's identity-driven interest formation at both domestic and international levels it ought to be possible to understand the motivations behind actions that are not comprehensible under the previously described methods of interpreting international relations; certainly neither realism nor liberalism can explain the response from China over the Yasukuni Shrine issue. A caveat is necessary here. This study takes as its focus China's reaction rather than Japan's behavior. For that reason, the hypothesis and concomitant methodology deployed have a bias within them that may appear to render this an attempt at formulating a theory of Chinese foreign policy, rather than a theory of Sino-Japanese relations. However, the analysis is of an important aspect in the chain of Sino-Japanese interaction and while it cannot and does not claim to be a holistic and comprehensive study of all aspects of the Sino-Japanese relationship, it deconstructs aspects of the cycle of interaction in order to theorize more widely about the relationship.

The government of China is bound by the structures that have been determined in no small part by itself, as well as by the interests and desires of the other parties within this process. The government-determined censorship, and government-inspired self censorship, has shaped the debate in academia as well as the media and, therefore, in society at large. If one is limited in what one can say, it follows that any debate conducted under these conditions is limited in terms of its scope (Bourdieu, 1991). The discussions over Japan generally, and the Yasukuni Shrine issue specifically, were determined by what had gone before, in terms of the prior bilateral interaction over the so-called 'history issue' which had previously been identified as something of a litmus test of Japan's propensity to remilitarize and its general attitude towards China. The issue of the agency of those involved cannot be ignored. Neither academics nor journalists are passive, robot-like contributors and helped to shape the discussion too. It is this process that is termed *structuration*. This concept is most closely associated with Anthony Giddens who advocated the approach in the discipline of sociology (Giddens, 1984) and it is in that discipline in which the idea has received most attention (Cohen, 1989; Parker, 2000; Stones, 2005). Though it is not ordinarily linked with IR theory, Reus-Smit's use of the term 'structurationists' to describe those theorists who consider structures to be formed, re-formed and altered in this way demonstrates that it is not entirely alien within holistic constructivist IR theory (Reus-Smit, 2005). The creation and reinforcement of structures within the identity of China as a state is the product of interaction between government, society, academia, and media operating within the already defined structures. It follows that any of these groups of actors

may have agency to alter the future shape of the structures of the relationship, but that they can only do this by operating within the system. This may appear to be a kind of organic process in which the structures of China's identity and interest-formation evolve but is actually the product of action taken by those operating within the system, either consciously or subconsciously. *Structuration* is, therefore, the process by which structures are created, reinforced, and altered by the agency of those that operate within them.

A similar, though distinct, process of *structuration* has occurred at the state-to-state level. This has been particularly pronounced since normalization of diplomatic relations between the two states in 1972. Superficial reconciliation and the concomitant cooperation and deepening of cross-national ties have been followed by periods of tension and mistrust, usually centering on the unresolved issue of the two nations' modern bilateral history. This pattern has been observed throughout the 1980s, when the issue of history first really emerged as an overt source of bilateral tension, through and beyond the 1990s (He, 2006). While each cycle of tension and superficial reconciliation follows a relatively similar pattern, each has its own characteristics, making the study of such periods more complicated than describing a simply structural nature to the relationship. Each period of tension tends to occur following an act by, or from within, Japan that is apparently perceived by, or within, China as provocative. A prime example of this is the recurring issue of Japan's history textbooks, that first became a bilateral problem largely through a misunderstanding in 1982 but which are a continuing source of tension (Rose, 1998). The pattern of interaction, as described by Ijiri (1990) tends to follow the well-trodden path of Chinese outrage (whether faux or genuine) expressed in both internal media as well as international diplomatic forums, with the response from Japan being one of a 'low posture' in response to China's 'high posture', a system under which both China and Japan appear to understand their respective roles and required actions. Such a response usually comes from a representative of Japan as a state, as opposed to any non-state actor from within Japan that may have been responsible for the initial offence⁶. Thus, though the relationship appears at first sight to be one fraught with stress and a hostage to frequent outbreaks of tension and dispute, it actually maintains a high level of equilibrium through this process of outrage and repentance. This stable instability forms the pattern of Sino-Japanese interaction that has been documented over recent decades and, therefore, has become an influential aspect of expectation production for individual policy-

⁶ A good example of such an actor would be the *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai* (Society for History Textbook Reform).

makers on both sides. In other words, the pattern of Sino-Japanese interaction is an important part of the psychological environment for these policy-makers who have learned from previous experience that certain actions provoke relatively predictable reactions. This also works in reverse; those same policy-makers also understand what reaction is expected of them when the other party implements a particular action. What this means in practice is that when Japan is perceived to have committed some act of insensitivity, particularly with regard to the issue of history, the response of outrage (faux or genuine) from China is expected *on both sides*. Furthermore, it is understood by both parties that protestations from China will result in Japanese repentance of some kind, though the exact nature of both the protestations and the subsequent atonement are not as predictable and are subject to the agency of both sides, taking into account the impact of domestic considerations of the particular time.

While this perspective clearly implies an acceptance of the existence of states as actors ó that there is a discernible entity we call "China" which can be observed and analyzed ó it also acknowledges the plurality of other actors involved in both the international realm and the production of what we discern to be "China's reaction." Thus, the central hypothesis of this study is that prior interaction both between China and Japan as states and also between the various actors within China set in place a psychological structure of the relationship that determined the expectations of all parties. This structure, while neither physical nor fixed, guided the reactions of these parties during the period of Koizumi's tenure to help shape their individual and collective reactions. The interplay between all of these differing reactions not only produced the wider effect that we commonly think of as "China's reaction" but also helped to reshape the psychological structures of the relationship in a way that may impact future interaction in this area. Japan's *perceived* attitude to China, in particular with regard to the powerful image of its aggressive history, maintains its centrality in the discourse of Sino-Japanese relations by which societal and elite interaction occurs within China. The centrality of this issue to Chinese notions of identity combined with the actions of Koizumi during his tenure as Japan's prime minister to give Yasukuni Shrine a potent position within this interaction; the repeated discussions of it in China both prompted, and were incited by, the state-level protestations against the paucity of Japanese repentance on the "history issue" Both Yasukuni Shrine specifically, and the "history issue" more generally, have a position in China's relationship with Japan at the political level, and both can obviously be influenced and affected by the behavior of Japan, whether at a societal or elite level. However, due to the previously mentioned nature of the production of China's response, it is wrong to think that

Japan's behavior alone can alter the position of these issues in the bilateral relationship, contrary to the rhetoric that emerges from China which consistently refers to the need for Japan to treat the issue correctly. China's reaction to Japan is a product of competing and complementary domestic forces operating within a structurationist pattern of bilateral relations formed, and reformed, over decades of Sino-Japanese interaction around the issue of history. No single actor within this complex process can claim ownership of it, but each has agency within it to either reinforce the existing pattern of the relationship, or to alter it.

3. The Three Phases of China's Response

The response from China to Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine is divided here into three very distinct phases, each accounting for two of the six visits made during Koizumi's premiership. The alteration in China's reaction demonstrated an evolution which was achieved through learning from failures and previously incorrect assumptions. The first stage incorporates the first two visits, when the reaction was strong on rhetoric but relatively low on actions that significantly affected the mechanics of the relationship. This period represents a time when China sought to influence Koizumi's future behavior, believing that it was engaging with Japan under the accepted "rules" and that Japan would respond accordingly. The second stage includes the third and fourth visits in the Januaries of 2003 and 2004 respectively, when the reaction was relatively low key in terms of rhetoric but when the high level relationship had already become strained. Thus, under the new leadership of Hu Jintao, China sought to minimize the disruption to the bilateral relationship at various levels, recognizing the importance of the economic relationship and the risks to social stability within China that were all too apparent. It did, however, hold out some hope that sufficient pressure could be brought to bear on Koizumi to alter his course of action. Finally, the third stage refers to the final two visits marking a complete breakdown at the highest level, when it was known that Koizumi was to retire in September 2006. During this stage the rhetoric was increased in a clear attempt not to influence Koizumi, on whom the Chinese had already given up hope, but on any and all of his potential successors. There was also a desire to indicate to the domestic audience that it would not tolerate continued insults from Japan on behalf of the Chinese nation.

3.1 Phase I

The first phase of China's response began not when Koizumi made his first visit to Yasukuni Shrine, but several months earlier, from the very moment that he was elected president of the

LDP in Japan. Though no visit had yet occurred, Koizumi's electoral pledge to pay tribute at Yasukuni Shrine once he became Prime Minister and to do so on the August 15th anniversary of Japan's surrender in 1945 was a cause of great consternation among the Chinese leadership and efforts to ensure that this would not occur began immediately.

The government rhetoric at this time focused entirely on Chinese opposition to any Japanese leader visiting the shrine while in office, with barely disguised warnings of the consequences for Japan's relationship with China. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) called it "difficult to understand" and insisted that any visit would demonstrate a contradiction in Japan's apparent desire to "develop friendly relations" (MFA, 2001a). This rhetoric, if taken at face value, seemed to suggest that there could be no level of comprehension from China of any decision by Koizumi to follow through on his pledge. However, the private actions of the Chinese bureaucracy demonstrate a much greater level of pragmatism. Following Koizumi's election in April 2001, secret negotiations with the Japanese bureaucracy were conducted over the possible management of this issue, with both sides apparently keen that an accommodation be reached. The very fact that such negotiations could take place at all indicates that China's position was somewhat more flexible than the public rhetoric suggested. Furthermore, an agreement was apparently reached between the two sides that Koizumi would visit Yasukuni Shrine, but that he would not do so on August 15th as he had promised and would wait until a few days after this highly sensitive anniversary (Interview, Beijing, 2012). Such an agreement represented, to the Chinese, a demonstration that they held some sway within Japan over this issue, though the failure to reach an agreement for Koizumi to abandon the plan completely was certainly a disappointment. However, Koizumi was not personally involved in these secret negotiations; the only Japanese involved were civil servants. Koizumi's decision to visit Yasukuni Shrine on August 13th, while still representing a minor success for Chinese pressure in that he did not follow through with the pledge to go on the sensitive date of August 15th, was seen as a double-insult by those in the Chinese bureaucracy who had engaged with their Japanese counterparts over the issue. It is not clear what prompted Koizumi to ignore this agreement, though it is widely believed that his decision to visit on August 13th rather than August 15th was a direct result of external pressure from China and South Korea combined with internal pressure from Japanese who opposed the action (Wan, 2006).

The response from China to this first visit was predictably vitriolic at the rhetorical level. Commentaries in *Renmin Ribao* claimed Koizumi's actions had "damaged the political

foundations of Sino-Japanese relations and were bound to affect [their] healthy development (*Renmin Ribao*, 2001). There was no official word from the highest level of the Chinese leadership on the issue, though this would be truly exceptional and it was to be expected that the response was left to the Foreign Ministry. Spokesman Zhang Qiyue described Koizumi's actions as wrongful and expressed indignation (MFA, 2001b). However, despite the strength of the rhetoric, the reaction to this visit was limited in its scope and the same statement from the ministry also made a point of noting the change of date from Koizumi's original pledge. It was a very deliberate policy that was aimed at keeping up an appearance of shock and outrage at Koizumi's actions, despite the fact that governmental and academic analyses had assumed that the visit would take place, albeit on a different date⁷, while leaving room for compromise and reconciliation later. However, the expectation of the Chinese was that, as with previous prime ministerial visits to the shrine, a suitable level of pressure would extract a concession in the form of a commitment that such visits would not continue. The Chinese view, despite the publicly declared outrage, was that this visit could be dealt with swiftly and sensibly by both sides and it need not cause lasting or serious damage to the bilateral relationship. Indeed, the *expectation* was that an isolated visit, followed by an appropriate symbolic concession, would ensure that this was the case, following the pattern of the previous instances as perceived by the Chinese. When China had pressured Nakasone in the 1980s, his reversal of the policy was interpreted this way and a similar conclusion had been drawn over Hashimoto's single visit in 1996.

Koizumi certainly seems to have understood that a concession was necessary. In October 2001, just two months after his first visit to Yasukuni Shrine, he arrived in Beijing to meet with Jiang Zemin. On the same visit, Koizumi made a highly symbolic trip to the Museum of the War of Chinese Resistance against Japanese Aggression and also to nearby *Lugou Qiao* (Marco Polo Bridge), the scene of the July 7th Incident that marked the beginning of full-scale war between Japan and China in 1937. In a carefully choreographed move, Koizumi designed this visit to pacify the Chinese over the issue of history, using Murayama's 1995 speech⁸ as a template. In doing so, Koizumi became only the second serving Japanese prime

⁷ One should not confuse accepting the inevitability of an action with condoning it in any way. Among the minority of those interviewed who demonstrated a willingness to analyse this issue from a strategic point of view rather than as a question of morality, without exception a caveat was added to make clear that Koizumi's actions were considered to be wrong and unnecessarily provocative.

⁸ On August 15th 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's surrender, then-Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi made a speech describing Japan's "aggression" as "irrefutable facts of history" and expressing his "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" (Murayama, 1995).

minister ō and the first from the LDP ō to visit the bridge⁹. In choosing that location to issue his own acceptance of Japan's responsibility for its wartime conduct, he appeared to be offering the large symbolic concession that the Chinese had expected. In fact, during the bilateral discussions that were conducted in order to arrange this visit, it was the Chinese side that had suggested this action. Furthermore, not only was the visit made conditional on Koizumi following through with this gesture, but also on it taking place prior to him being granted an audience with Jiang. In other words, Koizumi had to be seen to be contritely making amends for his previous wrongdoing before he could be accepted by the Chinese leadership. This was, in the eyes of both the Japanese and the Chinese, the concession required to restore stability to the political relationship.

However, despite the apparent shared understanding of the meaning behind this gesture, there was a fundamental disconnect between the interpretations. Both implicitly understood that there were 'rules' to the interaction, hence Koizumi's willingness to appear on *Lugou Qiao* and Jiang's desire for him to do so. With this gesture complete, the Chinese leadership's interpretation (and that of those who advised them) was that Koizumi, having fulfilled the requirements of the rules of interaction, would not return to Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister. This was not simply wishful thinking on the part of the Chinese; it was rooted in decades of experience of the bilateral relationship. Viewed from Beijing, on previous occasions this was precisely the outcome; pressure brought to bear on Nakasone in 1985 and Hashimoto in 1996 resulted in neither returning to the shrine during their respective tenures¹⁰. However, it seems that the Japanese ō or, more specifically, Koizumi's ō interpretation of this series of events, was slightly different. Koizumi seemed to believe that a repetitive cycle of provocation and repentance was a feasible and workable strategy. In other words, provided he continued to offer occasional symbolic gestures of this kind, then his subsequent visits to Yasukuni Shrine would not cause any greater disturbance to the political relationship with China. Both sides understood that there was a pattern to be followed on this issue and that they had to abide by the 'rules' of interaction, but there was a disconnect over what the 'rules' were. It is not uncommon to see such misunderstandings in international relations but this did represent a failure for both China and Japan in terms of their own respective foreign policy analyses.

⁹ Murayama had been the first prime minister in May 1995.

¹⁰ Nakasone specifically cited Chinese concerns as the reason for his decision but Hashimoto might not accept this interpretation. However, this does not negate the importance of the Chinese assessment of it as so.

This became evident in April 2002, when Koizumi paid tribute at Yasukuni Shrine for the second time. The rhetorical response from China was very similar to that of the previous year, but, in private, both academics and policy advisers were taken aback (Interview, Beijing, 2012). Whereas the first visit had been anticipated, the second came as a shock and brought into question the analysis of the relationship that had previously been made in China. This was hinted at in *Renmin Ribao*'s verdict which declared that with Koizumi's vow of self-reflection still echoing in our ears he had taken a wrong action again which is not acceptable in both Oriental ethics and international morality (*Renmin Ribao*, 2002). Though the response was similar at a superficial level, this visit was much more serious in terms of the effect on the political relationship between the two governments. Jiang believed that there was a *junzi xieding*, or a gentlemen's agreement, between the two leaders that the shrine visit would not be repeated. However, this *junzi xieding* was never articulated, and is probably better understood in the Chinese concept of a *moqi*, a word that does not have a satisfactory English translation but which refers to an agreement or understanding that is neither spoken nor written. It is a fairly common phenomenon in China and in East Asia more generally, but has obvious potential for misunderstanding and communication failures. It seems that this is what happened between Jiang and Koizumi after the *Lugou Qiao* speech, with both believing that the other understood their position. Certainly Jiang did not expect a second visit and nor did those that advised on the Japan policy making. The response to this visit was almost entirely rhetorical, and was of a reactive nature in that the visit itself was unexpected. At this stage, it was still believed that sufficient pressure could convince Koizumi to put an end to the visits and the rhetoric that emanated from China's media and governmental statements was aimed precisely at this. There was, therefore, no alteration in strategy during this first phase.

3.2 Phase II

The second phase of responses from China to this issue shows a subtle, but discernible, shift in strategy and aim. This shift was driven both by the change in leadership that occurred in China during this period and also by a process of learning regarding the Japan with which it now dealt, a Japan that differed fundamentally from the one that had been imagined at the beginning of the first phase.

The replacement of Jiang Zemin with Hu Jintao offered an opportunity for the Chinese to alter its Japan policy, though this alteration had, by necessity, to be subtle; it is not feasible

for an incoming leadership with a relatively unsecure powerbase both within and outside the party to initiate sweeping changes to either foreign or domestic policies (Dittmer, 2003). Hu's history of positive interaction with the Japanese – he was instrumental in establishing the youth exchanges between China and Japan in the 1980s – left him with a warmer feeling for Japan than his predecessor but a more important factor was the recognition within the leadership that a vitally important relationship was deteriorating quickly. During the handover process it is believed that Jiang explicitly acknowledged that this matter needed addressing and that a fresh perspective from his successor would be beneficial (Interview, Tokyo, 2012). Jiang was noted in Japan for his repeated references to the 'history issue', particularly after his notoriously unsuccessful attempt to draw a formal written apology from Prime Minister Obuchi in 1998 during a visit to Tokyo¹¹.

The second factor affecting the subtle change in China's reaction was the process of learning that had occurred during the previous two years. Whereas after the first and even second visits, Chinese expectations were that sufficient rhetorical pressure would result in a cessation of Japanese provocation on this matter, by 2003 there was increasing understanding that this was not the case. Similarly, early Chinese analyses of Koizumi's potential longevity as prime minister were flawed in that they considered him unlikely to be in power for more than around twelve to eighteen months¹² (Interview, Shanghai, 2012). By 2003, it was becoming clear that Koizumi's term may be exceptional in its length as well as in its far-reaching domestic reforms and more assertive foreign policy. While the Chinese side still hoped to affect some alteration in Koizumi's actions with regard to Yasukuni Shrine, there was a growing realization that this might not happen and that an alternative strategy was needed, particularly in light of Koizumi's now repeated assertions that he would visit the shrine once a year while in office.

Koizumi's third visit to Yasukuni Shrine, in January 2003, came as something of a surprise in that it had not been trailed in the media in the days or weeks preceding. China's response was almost identical to the previous two visits in rhetorical strength – Koizumi was accused of 'rubbing salt into the wounds of those suffered during the war' (*Renmin Ribao*, 2003) – but

¹¹ Though a joint statement was released at the conclusion of this visit, neither leader signed it and the visit was widely considered a diplomatic failure on both sides. Jiang believed that a written apology could be achieved because the Japanese had afforded one to South Korea earlier that year.

¹² This is, perhaps, an understandable underestimation since Japanese prime ministers frequently serve such short terms; within five years of Koizumi leaving office in September 2006, Japan had six different prime ministers.

not in depth; coverage in *Renmin Ribao* was limited to just 8 articles in the two weeks following this visit. This contrasted starkly with the 52 articles that followed the first occasion. It is important to note that this visit was made before Hu formally assumed the Chinese presidency in April; indeed it has been suggested that Koizumi timed this visit to avoid clashing with the early months of Hu's period in office (Wan, 2006).

Though Koizumi did not visit the shrine again in 2003, the issue did not simply disappear. However, in line with the recognition of the importance of the relationship, both from a strategic perspective as well as in terms of the economic ties that continued to strengthen, high level meetings continued. Though neither side sought or suggested any state visit, meetings at the highest level of government were not infrequent; Cabinet Secretary Fukuda and Foreign Minister Kawaguchi both visited Beijing in August of that year to meet Premier Wen Jiabao and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing respectively. Indeed, even Hu and Koizumi met twice during 2003, though neither meeting occurred on either Chinese or Japanese soil¹³.

Koizumi's fourth visit to Yasukuni Shrine came on January 1st 2004. To some extent this visit was the final straw in that it confirmed in Chinese minds that Koizumi's actions on this issue could not be affected by their rhetoric or pressure, and that accommodating him was beginning to make them look weak in the eyes of their own public. Though it is possible that Koizumi calculated again that a January visit would leave the rest of the year free from speculation and friction over this issue, his visit came shortly after a series of incidents that had contributed to a serious deterioration of popular Chinese views of Japan. Notable among these was the 'Qiqihar incident' when abandoned Japanese chemical weapons were discovered in the ground, serving as a potent reminder of the most unpleasant aspects of Japan's occupation. There were also the so-called 'Zhuhai sex scandal' in which more than 400 Japanese businessmen were found to have hired hundreds of local prostitutes in a party that coincided with the anniversary of the beginning of Japan's occupation of China in 1931, and a bizarre skit performed by Japanese students in Xi'an that caused widespread offence and sparked angry demonstrations on and around campus. To some degree these incidents or the response of the Chinese public to them were symptomatic of the deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations, but they also reinforced mutually negative images. In this atmosphere, Koizumi's fourth visit to Yasukuni Shrine drew the strongest reaction to date from the Chinese public, with public demonstrations breaking out in Beijing and Shanghai. It

¹³ They met once in St Petersburg on May 31st and once in Bangkok on October 21st.

was common at the time for these demonstrations to be characterized as being government-led (Gabusi, 2005), but there is little evidence of this and the protests appear to have been unauthorized, though tolerated (Interview, Beijing, 2012).

The official reaction was again strong in rhetoric and symbolism, including the summoning of Japan's ambassador and the cancellation of planned mutual naval exchanges. However, as with the 2003 visit, the official media's response was limited in scope despite continuing to maintain the tone: Koizumi's "stupid move" had "violated his own commitment to reflect on Japan's aggressive history" (*Renmin Ribao*, 2004a; 2004b). In terms of high-level meetings, Premier Wen Jiabao had met with Koizumi on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in October 2003, but Koizumi had followed that meeting by confirming just twenty four hours later that he would continue to visit the shrine. In direct response to this Wen refused to meet him at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Hanoi in October 2004, despite Japanese requests (Wan, 2006). However, despite this refusal, Hu and Koizumi did meet at the APEC summit in Santiago, Chile in November 2004, though this meeting was dominated by the shrine issue and Hu repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Japanese side addressing the history problem in an appropriate manner (Taipei Times, 2004).

This second phase was marked by the Chinese public's reaction to Japan in ways that had not been previously seen. 2003 was what James Reilly called "China's year of internet nationalism", noting various campaigns directed predominantly against Japan (Reilly, 2010). The summer of 2004 offered a glimpse of the increased antagonism felt among the Chinese public towards Japan when China hosted the quadrennial Asian Football Confederation Cup. The final, in which Japan defeated the host nation, was marred by booing of the Japanese national anthem and violence outside the stadium directed towards Japanese supporters. Though an intense rivalry is only to be expected – the Chinese had more than 5000 police in attendance and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a warning to its citizens not to display overt symbols of national pride including Japanese football shirts – the ferocity of the reaction surprised and concerned both governments.

Throughout this phase what is notable about the Chinese strategy is that maintenance of the relationship with Japan was a priority, despite the official rhetoric and the increasing resentment among the Chinese public. However, the ability to maintain the relationship was constrained by the domestic feelings towards Japan and Koizumi. The atmosphere at the highest level grew gradually frostier but contact between the two sides continued in an effort

to limit the damage. Furthermore, both Hu and Wen insisted that so-called “grassroots” exchanges should not suffer, as they saw these as key to ensuring a long term positive relationship with Japan that was very much in the Chinese national interest (Interview, Beijing, 2012).

3.3 Phase III

The third phase of the Chinese response refers to Koizumi’s final eighteen months in power, incorporating his fifth and sixth visits to Yasukuni Shrine in 2005 and 2006 respectively. This period of time was marked by the Chinese increasing pressure, particularly at a rhetorical and symbolic level, ostensibly aimed at Koizumi but in fact intended for the attention of his successors and the wider audiences in both Japan and China. By this time Koizumi had already let it be known that he would serve until September 2006, when his term as president of the LDP came to an end, and would not seek to stay in power beyond this date. In other words, Koizumi’s tenure as prime minister had a definitive end-date that the Chinese could factor into their strategizing. The aim for the Chinese was not only restoring the previously understood rule-system but actually strengthening it. In other words, the pressure brought by the Chinese on the final two visits was a deliberate tactic to ensure that Koizumi’s successors were under no illusion as to the cost of continuing the practice of visiting Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister.

2005 had the potential to be a particularly sensitive year for Japan’s relations with its neighboring countries as it marked sixty years since the end of World War II and its occupations of much of East and Southeast Asia. Coincidentally, Japan was also hosting the World Expo in the city of Aichi from March to September and did not want this to be marred by a series of boycotts. Perhaps with this in mind Koizumi elected not to visit Yasukuni Shrine until October, taking opportunities along the way to confirm that he would not go at certain times while maintaining the stance that he would visit each year he was in office.

The early part of the year was dominated by two issues that had a profound effect on the relationship as well as on Chinese domestic concerns. Firstly, in response to Japan’s campaign for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Chinese internet activism reached a previously unimagined level with a petition reportedly gathering

in excess of 10 million electronic signatures in a matter of weeks¹⁴ (Reilly, 2010). The Chinese government was taken slightly by surprise over the strength of feeling on this issue and was forced to take a position that it had previously sought to avoid, namely one of overt opposition to Japan's bid. In fact, despite previously not declaring a firm position on this issue, Wen Jiabao used a visit to India¹⁵ in April 2005 to proclaim China's opposition, citing Japan's failure to treat history correctly (Beehner, 2005). The timing and previous ambiguity of China's position suggest that this was a direct response to domestic pressure. Secondly, Japan's Ministry of Education approved a series of history textbooks including one that appeared to downplay some of Japan's actions in China and the wider Asia-Pacific during the occupation¹⁶. In conjunction with the strong feelings that had already emerged over the UNSC bid, the approval of these textbooks proved something of a tipping point for Chinese popular sentiment and large scale protests occurred across China. The largest of these demonstrations were in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, but many other cities also witnessed anti-Japanese rallies. Many of these turned violent, in particular a protest at the Japanese Embassy that ended with eggs and stones being hurled, breaking windows in the compound. Elsewhere, Japanese business interests and even Japanese citizens were physically attacked by protesters. Although some early analysis of these protests suggested that there was government incitement behind them (Khan, 2005), this appears to have been incorrect. While there was certainly some level of accommodation – for example, buses were provided to allow students from Peking University to participate and return to campus – this was an action that the government felt compelled to take in order that it not be seen to be on the wrong side of the argument (Interview, Beijing, 2012).

Wen Jiabao was invited to attend the World Expo but, with the loss of face he felt that he had suffered from the 2003 meeting with Koizumi still relatively fresh in his mind, and with anti-Japanese sentiment growing in strength and vociferousness among the Chinese population, he felt that this would not be possible. Instead Vice-Premier Wu Yi arranged a week-long trip to Japan for May 2005 that would culminate in a meeting with Koizumi in Tokyo. That she would be the highest level Chinese leader to meet Koizumi on Japanese soil since he took

¹⁴ The petition was actually started by a US-based group, the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia. It should also be noted that this figure was skewed by people signing multiple times and there is no way of verifying how many individuals actually did sign it.

¹⁵ Along with Germany and Brazil, India was also bidding for a permanent seat and the four nations lobbied jointly.

¹⁶ As with earlier incarnations of this issue, the textbook in question was adopted by a tiny number of schools in Japan.

office more than four years previous is testament to just how much the Yasukuni Shrine issue had affected the political relationship at the very highest level.

However, Wu's visit to Japan was marred when the issue of Yasukuni Shrine was repeatedly raised, most notably in the Diet in questions from opposition parties. The day before her arrival, Koizumi, in response to questioning by a budget committee, stated that he did not understand "why I should stop going to Yasukuni Shrine" (China Daily, 2005). This was compounded on the fourth day of her visit when Koizumi responded to a question from a New Komeito¹⁷ lawmaker by insisting that his repeated shrine visits were a private and personal matter and that "Koizumi Junichiro, who is prime minister, is paying a visit as an individual" (Japan Times, 2005). This stance had become Koizumi's position in response to claims from within Japan that his visits were unconstitutional and inappropriate for a serving prime minister, but they are inexplicable to the Chinese and were never accepted as a serious explanation¹⁸. Concomitantly, the General Secretary of the LDP, Takebe Tsutomu, paid a visit to Beijing and met with Hu Jintao. On the face of it, these developments could have been a step forward for the political relationship but Takebe reportedly told a senior Chinese official that objections to Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine constituted interference in Japanese affairs, with the implication being that Beijing was violating its own frequently cited cardinal principle of international relations: that of non-interference. Hu then took the opportunity to publicly chastise Japan over the three important issues that affected the relationship – Yasukuni Shrine, Japanese history textbooks, and Taiwan – hinting strongly that the relationship could be undermined by the incorrect attitude to any one of these "in an instant" (Curtin, 2005). The following day, one day before Wu Yi was due to meet Koizumi in Tokyo, her trip was abruptly cut short and she returned to Beijing. She cited "domestic business" as the reason for her sudden departure but Kong Quan a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explicitly linked the cancellation of the meeting with the repeated references to Yasukuni Shrine (MFA, 2005). This was clearly intended to be a very public metaphorical slap in the face for Koizumi. It does not appear that this move was premeditated and seems to have been a direct response to the comments made by Koizumi

¹⁷ New Komeito is one of the smaller political parties in Japan with Buddhist roots, and was the LDP's coalition partner at the time.

¹⁸ The Chinese were never expected to accept this explanation as it was intended to appease those within Japan who objected to Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine on constitutional grounds.

and Takebe¹⁹ but it was, nonetheless, intended as a message to both Koizumi and the Chinese public.

To some analysts in China this proved to be the breaking point. Despite all of the evidence to the contrary, it had still been believed that Koizumi could be accommodated in some way up until this point. Koizumi's decision to visit Yasukuni Shrine for a fifth time in October 2005 left the Chinese with little room to maneuver, particularly in light of the very serious pressure the leadership found itself under from popular sentiment at home following the UNSC bid and the textbook issue. On this occasion the full force of the Chinese official media was brought to bear on Koizumi, with a series of articles and commentaries thoroughly condemning him and his actions and warning of the serious political consequences his wrong actions have caused (*Renmin Ribao*, 2005). After two years of relatively low level media responses, the 2005 visit saw a return to the ferocity of the early condemnation.

The response went beyond symbolism and rhetoric on this occasion. Shortly after Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine the annual APEC summit was held in Pusan, South Korea. The pattern that had developed over the previous four years suggested that Koizumi and Hu would meet at this summit, but the shift in Chinese strategy meant that no such accommodation was made on this occasion and even the two foreign ministers, Li Zhaoxing and Aso Taro, did not speak directly. This was a significant movement away from the tactics of previous years during which Koizumi appears to have correctly calculated that the issue of his shrine visits would not completely disrupt the bilateral relationship. A system of meeting on the sidelines of the increasingly common international forums of which both countries were part had replaced formal bilateral summits and appeared to be workable. However this was not the Chinese view and it was deemed necessary to ensure that any successor to Koizumi fully understood that this pattern could not continue. Thus, a calculated hard line was taken against Koizumi's fifth visit in a way that had not been seen on any of the previous four occasions, despite there being perhaps for the first time a clear understanding that his behavior could not be altered by Chinese pressure.

In March 2006, Hu Jintao welcomed a delegation from Japan to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. This delegation had particular symbolic significance because it was led by

¹⁹ One academic conceded that premeditation was a possibility (Interview, Beijing, 2012) but could not confirm that it was the case. In all other interviews and private conversations on the matter Chinese sources have consistently expressed the view that there was genuine anger at the comments and the cancellation was not premeditated.

Hashimoto Ryutaro, a former prime minister and the last to visit Yasukuni Shrine during his tenure prior to Koizumi. Hu made a speech, apparently intended for both Chinese and Japanese audiences in which he explicitly declared that a resumption of bilateral summits rested on the condition that no future prime minister visited the shrine (Xinhua, 2006). Though this may have been displeasing to his Japanese visitors who had hoped that the issue could have been avoided, it left no ambiguity over the line that China was now drawing.

Koizumi's final visit to Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister came just over a month before he left office. Apparently aware that he would no longer have to deal with the consequences of his actions he elected to make this sixth and final visit on the highly sensitive date of August 15th, the anniversary of Japan's surrender in 1945, finally fulfilling his original election pledge of five years previous. China could not cancel meetings or visits that it had not yet arranged and it was left with just rhetoric as its only option to respond. However the strength of this rhetoric was beyond anything that had previously been seen during Koizumi's period in office, with a series of more than 20 articles and commentaries in *Renmin Ribao* containing strong condemnation of Koizumi for "trampling over human conscience" and "casting a shadow over a potential thaw in Sino-Japanese relations" (*Renmin Ribao*, 2006a; 2006b). This sharper reaction can be understood in two ways. Firstly, Koizumi's visit was made on the sensitive date of August 15th, the first time he had done so and the first time a serving Japanese prime minister had done so since Nakasone in 1985²⁰. Secondly, and more significantly, it was fully understood that this would be Koizumi's final visit as prime minister and the last chance to make an impression on his yet-to-be-determined successor.

While maintaining as many channels of communication as possible during this final phase, China sought to marginalize Koizumi within the bilateral relationship and to demonstrate that, despite the management of the friction in which both sides had engaged during the first two phases, it would not be feasible for future prime ministers to continue in this vein. There was a clear understanding that the norms and accepted patterns of the relationship were in flux during this time and a failure to mould them into a form acceptable to the Chinese, at both governmental and societal levels, would have serious consequences domestically as well as for the Sino-Japanese relationship itself.

²⁰ A Chinese academic noted that the date itself carries a great deal more significance in Japan than it does in China. Had Koizumi selected any of the dates that are marked as sensitive anniversaries in China, such as September 18th or July 7th, then the response would have been much more far-reaching (Interview, Beijing, 2012).

4. Conclusion

This project aimed to set out a foundation for an IR-grounded theory of Sino-Japanese relations. By considering the different aspects of China's overall reaction to Koizumi's repeated Yasukuni Shrine visits it is possible to discern the understanding of the relationship from the Chinese perspective, the causal factors of the differing response over the period of time in question, and the priorities for the decision-makers on the Chinese side. From this analysis, a picture of the Chinese view of the Sino-Japanese relationship emerges that shows it to be perceived to be governed by norms and accepted practices that can, and are, shaped by continued operation within the structures that they define. This process of *structuration* affords greater agency than is sometimes believed and this is demonstrated by the strategizing that is seen across the three phases of China's response.

Each of the three phases of China's reaction had its own characteristics and was significant for different reasons. The first stage, which encompasses the first two visits and coincides with the final two years of Jiang's presidency, is crucially important. During this period of time Koizumi's initial actions were no surprise to the Chinese; indeed the Chinese were fully prepared and expecting the first visit. That they brought to bear enough pressure to ensure that he did not visit on August 15th as originally planned was considered something of a success, and perhaps as much as could have been hoped for. Nevertheless, the pattern of Sino-Japanese relations in this field suggested that a vociferous response from China would ensue. Furthermore, if the previously understood pattern were to be reinforced and continued then such a response would be necessary. Therefore the aim of China's reaction to Koizumi's first visit to Yasukuni Shrine as PM was to ensure that this pattern played out as it had done in previous versions of this dispute. That is to say that Koizumi would offer a concession to China that would reassure both the political and societal levels of Japan's commitment to the understanding of their shared history. Viewed from the Chinese perspective, Koizumi's rapid arrangement to visit China just two months later was ample evidence that this pattern was to continue and that Koizumi understood his role in the process. It is demonstrative of the continued commitment to maintaining the balance of the Sino-Japanese relationship. The symbolic gesture of going to *Lugou Qiao* was considered to be a gesture of atonement. While Koizumi's behavior might be understood to be a normal part of his particularly theatrical brand of politics, to the watching Chinese it constituted an appropriate level of symbolism that paved the way for the relationship to return to its even footing.

The second phase saw a careful management of the relationship at the highest political level that was increasingly influenced by the Chinese public's animosity towards Japan. There was, and continues to be, a tendency among Chinese academics to characterize this period of time as *“zhengleng jingre”* (cold politics, hot economics), to indicate the apparent breakdown in the political relationship that contrasted so starkly with the rapidly developing economic relationship (for example Jin, 2004; Liu, 2005; Zhang, 2005). It is easy to understand why such a phrase would gain traction; there is no question that political relations soured over the Yasukuni Shrine issue among others, or that bilateral trade increased quickly. However, closer analysis of China's actions during this second phase demonstrates why it is inadequate²¹. Even those exchanges described as “grassroots” are political to some extent and, in combination with the continued willingness of Li Zhaoxing and Wen Jiabao to greet their counterparts from Japan, make it more difficult to defend the description of the political relationship as “cold”. In fact, the explanation of the relationship in these terms suited the Chinese government's domestic priorities during this time. The need to maintain the important economic relationship with Japan whilst simultaneously conveying the appropriate level of outrage to a public that had grown increasingly vociferous in its own condemnations of Japan generally, and Koizumi in particular, meant that such a description of the bilateral relationship was politically convenient.

The tactics employed by the Chinese government in the third phase of the response were high risk but ultimately successful. Had they failed, and subsequent prime ministers continued the practice of paying tribute at the shrine, then the consequences for both the CCP and the bilateral relationship would have been severe. The success of the strategy has reintroduced the previously understood norm of the relationship that prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine are unacceptable to China, and the decision of all subsequent holders of office not to challenge that norm has reinforced it further. Indeed, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the current ruling party, has been quite explicit about avoiding a recurrence of this issue²². This is not quite a return to or a re-creation of the pre-Koizumi pattern and norm-creation of the relationship. As was seen in the first phase of the response outlined in this article the Chinese would previously have tolerated a single visit or perhaps even two or provided the

²¹ The concept was never accepted in Japan. Both academics and policy advisors are keen to point out that they do not recognise this characterisation of a completely broken political relationship (Various interviews, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, 2012).

²² Until August 15th 2012 no serving member of the cabinet had visited Yasukuni Shrine since the DPJ came to power in 2009. However on that date two recently appointed and relatively junior ministers paid tribute, both stressing that they were doing so in a private capacity.

necessary and expected level of symbolic prostration ensued. This is no longer the case. The Chinese strategy was successful in preventing the norms of the relationship being defined on Koizumi's terms and ensuring that the reformed relationship was based on a principle that was domestically acceptable to China. However, it has also raised the stakes domestically in China: the Chinese public is more aware of Yasukuni Shrine and its symbolism than they were previously and it is clear that a return to the practice of the Japanese prime minister visiting it would necessitate an equally strong reaction from the Chinese leadership. The price that any future Japanese prime minister would pay for returning to the shrine would have to be to become *persona non grata* in China, a heavy price for any internationally minded politician but equally damaging to both countries if the bilateral relationship suffered resultantly, as it surely would. Any semblance of failure to respond in an appropriately severe fashion would render the government weakened in the eyes of nationalistic Chinese and leave it open to challenges to its very legitimacy. From a Chinese perspective this was a success, demonstrated by the fact that, to date, no subsequent prime minister has visited Yasukuni Shrine. Koizumi's immediate successor, Abe Shinzo, was widely considered to be even more hawkish than Koizumi (Yoshihara, 2008) and was an ardent supporter of his visits to Yasukuni Shrine, even suggesting that he would continue them if he were elected as leader of the LDP (Taipei Times, 2006). However, on taking office Abe adopted a position of strategic ambiguity, neither declaring that he would go nor that he would stay away. This was understood by the Chinese to be a commitment that he would put an end to the practice and this allowed the repairing of the political relationship to occur quite rapidly. In the end Abe did not visit Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister, though his term in office lasted just one year, and none of his successors have done so either. This is interpreted in China, both among policy advisers and academics, as evidence of the success of China's strategy in this third phase.

Taken as a whole, these three distinct phases demonstrate not only that a constructivist interpretation of international relations is revealing when applied to the Sino-Japanese relationship, but also that the level of agency involved in these processes is greater than is sometimes assumed. The clear strategizing on the part of the Chinese aimed at returning the relationship to one governed by mutually acceptable norms and practices demonstrates that the Chinese side already understood the importance of this, even if it is rarely articulated in these terms. The increased role of the public in China's foreign policy priority assessments may have further implications, not only for China's relationship with Japan but in many areas

of its foreign policy and a better understanding of the *structuration* processes will provide a clearer picture of China's Japan policy.

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