

Document 17.6: Excerpt from “PM’s War Shrine Visits the Issue That Matters, Beijing Tells Tokyo,” in *The Australian*, November 25, 2005

[Japan’s Prime Minister] Junichiro Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni shrine war memorial are the most urgent political issue between China and Japan and the matter needs to be fixed quickly, Beijing’s top envoy to Japan has warned.

Ambassador Wang Yi made it clear yesterday that of all the recent frictions between Japan and China, the “historical problem” symbolized by the Yasukuni visits had done the most to poison the bilateral relationship.

“We need to resolve the situation as soon as possible,” said Mr. Wang. “This is not a situation we can simply avoid.” Though he insisted that anti-Japanese riots that swept China in April were not sanctioned by the Beijing government, Mr. Wang pointedly declined to rule out further trouble. “No one can predict what might happen, but if this situation continues, it will not work for the mutual interest of China and Japan.”...

When last at Yasukuni on October 17 [2005], Mr. Koizumi tried to mollify neighbouring countries by insisting he attended not as Japan’s leader but as a private citizen praying for peace and the souls of the 2.4 million war-dead enshrined there.

But Mr. Wang, one of China’s most senior diplomats, dismissed Mr. Koizumi’s contention that he and China’s top leaders should hold a summit to deal with other differences, while leaving the Yasukuni issue in abeyance. Those problems include a territorial dispute in the East China Sea covering potentially large gas fields, China’s objection to Japan gaining a permanent UN Security Council seat, and the two countries’ intense competition for influence in the rest of Asia.

“We would like to make it very clear that we don’t want a meeting simply to have a meeting; we want a meeting that would make normal the not-normal relations between our countries,” Mr. Wang said.

Mr. Koizumi has been trying vainly for four years to arrange a summit with Chinese leaders. Though they have met occasionally on the sidelines of international conferences, even that seems to have become impossible since the Prime Minister's most recent visit to Yasukuni, which enshrines 14 Class-A war criminals, many of whom were involved in the occupation of Manchuria and China....

Though the Japanese believe Beijing's leaders use anti-Japanese antagonism to divert mass discontent away from domestic problems, Mr. Wang insisted his government tried to turn popular attention towards the future of the relationship, not its past.

He said the Chinese would accept—albeit unhappily—if ordinary Japanese and lower-ranking politicians continued to visit Yasukuni as long as their leaders stayed away. “When it comes to Japan's top leader paying respects at a place where A-Class war criminals are enshrined, this revives the bitter memories of those who suffered during the war,” Mr. Wang said. “It is like pouring salt into an open wound.”

Source: Peter Alford, “PM's War Shrine Visits the Issue That Matters, Beijing Tells Tokyo.” *The Australian*. 25 Nov. 2005.