

Institute for Japanese Studies Lecture Series

China's Hot-Button Maritime and Territorial Claims: A Role for Japan

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EAST ASIAN
STUDIES
CENTER

Thursday, February 27, 3:30-5:00 pm
Orton Hall 110, 155 S. Oval Mall



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In Asia-Pacific (or, increasingly commonly, “Indo-Pacific”) security discourse, a dominant narrative has developed in recent years—namely, that China has become a revisionist, expansionist aggressor. The primary drivers of this narrative have been China’s behaviour with respect to maritime and territorial claims and its rapid military modernization and expansion. For the most part, however, perceptions of the “Chinese threat” are misperceptions founded upon misunderstandings of China’s internal decision-making processes and a lack of empathy with Chinese leaders. The international community, in short, has largely overestimated the Chinese threat. On at least one important issue, however, the international community has underestimated the Chinese threat—again, largely owing to a lack of empathy. This pattern of threat misperception can readily be understood with reference to bureaucratic politics and cognitive psychology. Perhaps no country has misperceived the Chinese threat as dramatically as has Japan; and yet, ironically, Japan is particularly well-positioned to take a leadership role in making appropriate policy adjustments and in promoting an approach to regional security governance that is better suited to dealing with China’s hot-button maritime and territorial claims.

David Welch is University Research Chair and Professor of Political Science at the University of Waterloo, and teaches at the Balsillie School of International Affairs. His 2005 book *Painful Choices: A Theory of Foreign Policy Change* (Princeton University Press) is the inaugural winner of the International Studies Association ISSS Book Award for the best book published in 2005 or 2006, and his 1993 book *Justice and the Genesis of War* (Cambridge University Press) is the winner of the 1994 Edgar S. Furniss Award for an Outstanding Contribution to National Security Studies.



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