

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

# DIJ Social Science Study Group



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## **The Absence of Armed Conflict in the East China Sea**

Since the 1970s, the situation in the East China Sea has been marked by recurring crises between Japan and the People's Republic of China in regard to the sovereignty issue over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and discord over the delimitation of maritime boundaries. On top of territorial disputes and geographic contiguity, the robust US-Japan security alliance that is seen by many as containing Beijing, historic rivalry dating back to the Chinese-Japanese war of 1894/95, and an arms race in the making between the two East Asian giants add up to all elements that John Vasquez includes in his famous 'steps-to-war' formula. Therefore, it amounts to an empirical puzzle why the East China Sea has been a sphere of relative stability where both parties refrained from the threat and use of force to solve their conflicts of interest for several decades.

In this presentation, I will analyze empirical evidence on the Sino-Japanese interaction in the East China Sea, drawn from the academic literature on Sino-Japanese relations as well as foreign and defense ministry documents from both countries. I endeavor to account for the absence of armed conflict through testing the empirical evidence against the predictions of two major International Relations theories, structural constructivism and defensive realism.

While I find that structural constructivist explanations that focus on mutually perceived identities fail to capture the ongoing dynamics comprehensively, I will argue that defensive realist logic with its emphasis on material capabilities and information variables accounts reasonably well for the absence of armed conflict in the East China Sea to the present day.

**Roland Löchli** graduated from the Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU) of Munich with an M. A. in Japanese Studies, Chinese Studies and Political Science. Currently, he is enrolled as a PhD student at LMU and carries out research for his PhD thesis on Sino-Japanese security relations as a scholarship fellow at the German Institute for Japanese Studies.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by P. Holdgrün, B. Holthus, C. Hommerich.

All are welcome to attend, but registration ([holdgruen@dijtokyo.org](mailto:holdgruen@dijtokyo.org)) is appreciated.

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