

Center for Japanese Studies Seminar Series

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Zenchō Everywhere: A Brief History of Earthquake Prediction in Japan, 1855-2012

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The notion that earthquakes are preceded by electromagnetic disturbances or that certain species of fish are sensitive to changes deep in the earth prior to earthquakes originated in unverified tales from the 1855 Ansei Edo Earthquake. Despite stacks of books claiming to identify thousands of different kinds of alleged precursors, the success rate for useful earthquake prediction in Japan has been zero—approximately the same as the rest of the world. The complete inability of the seismological community to predict events such as the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji (Kōbe) earthquake or the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 have led some Japanese to turn to alternative approaches. This talk examines the major turning points and events in the history of earthquake prediction in Japan and argues that resources would be better spent in emergency preparedness and anti-seismic engineering than in a futile attempt to predict events as chaotic and poorly understood as earthquakes.



Tokioka Room (Moore Hall 319)

Tuesday, February 12 (3:00–4:30 pm)

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