



From Isolation Emerges a Mathematics Genius



Stories from Japan in a new seminar in the SISSA series on History and Science

6 December 2016, 4:00pm
SISSA, Room 005
Via Bonomea 265, Trieste

It is well known that Japan was forcibly isolated from the rest of the world from the beginning of the 17th century to the mid-19th century. What few people know, however, is that during that period of time, in spite of, or perhaps because of this, the country of the Rising Sun developed its own form of mathematics with particular features as well as striking similarities to what was happening in the rest of the world. Don Zagier, a professor at the Max Planck Institute in Bonn and the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, will give the second lecture



in the series of seminars on the History of Science organized by The Interdisciplinary Laboratory (ILAS) at SISSA on 6 December 2016 at 4:00pm. The lecture: *The Emergence of an Independent Japanese Mathematics* is Free and open to the public. It will be held in English.

Nearly two and a half centuries of isolation can produce extraordinary results. This was the case in Japan when, from the beginning of the 1600's, it was closed off from the world, letting in only a few rare Dutch ships (one per year) and preventing its citizens from leaving the country under threat of capital punishment, until 1854 when it was forced to open its borders. One would assume that cultural and scientific life could not thrive in such isolation, yet, during this very period Japan developed its own "indigenous" form of mathematics, known as *Wasan*. In particular, two major Japanese mathematicians, Seki and his student Takebe, made many of the same discoveries as Bernoulli, Leibniz, Euler and others in the West, but in a nearly unrecognizable form.

Don Zagier will speak about this fascinating phenomenon in a free public seminar to be held at SISSA on December 6. Zagier is an American mathematician (born in Germany) who works in the field of number theory and is a Director at the Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in Bonn, as well as a Distinguished Staff Associate at ICTP. Zagier was a precocious talent, studying at MIT in Boston when he was only 14 years old and becoming a Professor at age 24. Among other positions, he has also held a professorship at the Collège de France in Paris.

All events in the History of Science series organized by the Interdisciplinary Laboratory of SISSA are free and open to the public and do not require reservations. The series will continue until May 2017, with one seminar per month featuring Italian and international experts.

For more information: <https://www.sissa.it/news/seminars-history-science-sissa> or email ilas@sisssa.it Phone: 0403787549, 401.

USEFUL LINKS:

- Programme and other information: <https://www.sissa.it/news/seminars-history-science-sissa>
- Don Zagier's talk abstract: <https://goo.gl/dN8gKB>

IMAGE:

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