

Saigyō: Poet and Sorcerer

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IJS
LECTURE
SERIES

Wednesday, April 14

2:20-3:50 pm

Online



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Over more than eight centuries of reception, the occult side of the genial wandering monk and poet Saigyō (1118-1190) has been largely ignored, even though he uttered mysterious incantations, ensorcelled with mudras, and employed the power of numinous words to achieve magical ends. This wonderworking aspect of Saigyō is very important to understanding how he was viewed in the pre-modern era as a religious figure, even a thaumaturge and necromancer. It is also very important to understanding his spellbinding poetics. I will analyze a variety of sources, including poems, setsuwa (Buddhist anecdotes), and karon (poetic treatises), to better understand Saigyō the poet-sorcerer. By uncovering this long-obscured aspect of his poetry and legend, we will be better able to comprehend both the unique position Saigyō held in the pre-modern Japanese imagination and the enduring effects of his poesy.

Jack Stoneman received his PhD from Columbia University, where he studied under Haruo Shirane, Tomi Suzuki, Ryūichi Abe, and Melissa McCormick. He specializes in the poetry and legends of the late-Heian-period monk-poet Saigyō as well as the culture of recluses and literati.

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