

Kūkai and Books of the Shingon Esoteric Buddhism

Keio University will hold an exhibition called the “Esoteric Classics and Kūkai” from Monday November 15 until Friday December 15. The core of the exhibit will be items preserved at the Institute of Oriental Classics (Shido Bunko) on behalf of the Century Cultural Foundation.

[Purpose of exhibition]

Kūkai (774-835) introduced systemic esoteric Buddhism to Japan from Tang dynasty China. His extensive activities include bringing Buddhist sutras and ritual implements back to Japan and composing many original books. Later generations portrayed his legendary achievements using the posthumous name of Kōbō Daishi (Great Teacher Who Spread the Dharma), while other works would also be written in his name. The esoteric teachings of Shingon Buddhism were inherited by numerous branch schools, and diverse esoteric rituals developed according to the demands of the aristocratic and military societies of medieval Japan. Many books were also composed on these esoteric rituals (ascetic practices).

In this exhibition, we will introduce the achievements of and traditions regarding Kūkai through his works and their commentaries. Furthermore, we shall shed light on the work of esoteric monks in medieval Japan using classical books and Buddhist paintings created along with esoteric rituals. Additionally, we will explore the spread of the culture of esoteric Buddhism by examining how esoteric practices and faith in Kūkai influenced other spheres such as the arts and literature.

[Event information]

○ Venues and opening hours

Venue 1: Mita Media Center (Keio University Library) Exhibition Room

Period: November 13–December 15

Open: Weekdays 09:00–18:20, Saturdays 09:00–16:50

Closed on Sundays, public holidays, and from November 23 to 26

Venue 2: Keio University Art Space

Period: November 13–December 8

Open: Weekdays 10:00–17:00

Closed on weekends, public holidays, and from November 23 to 26

*The opening hours and exhibition period is different to Venue 1.

- Admission: free

- Gallery talks (free admission; no reservations required. Both talks to be held in Venue 1)

Talk 1: November 16 (Thurs.) 14:40–

Talk 2: December 1 (Fri.) 14:40–

- Hosts

Keio University Institute of Oriental Classics (Shido Bunko), Keio University Art Center (KUAC),
Mita Media Center (Keio University Library)

- Inquiries

Keio University Institute of Oriental Classics (Shido Bunko)

03-5427-1582

<http://www.sido.keio.ac.jp/>

[Main Exhibits]

- “Portrait of Kobo Daishi”

One scroll, color on silk

Muromachi period (14th–16th century)

This work belongs to a lineage of Daishi portraits passed down as drawings by the Cloistered Imperial Prince Shinnyo (third prince of Emperor Heizei, Imperial Prince Takaoka). It was painted upon the death of Kōbō Daishi Kūkai and enshrined in Mieidō at Mt. Kōya.

- “Seed Mandala of the Two Realms”

Two scrolls, color on paper

Kamakura period (12th–14th century)

A mandala symbolically depicting various deities such as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, using Sanskrit “seed-syllables.” Gold painted on dark blue paper

- “Memorial Presenting a List of Newly Imported Sūtras and Other Items by Kōbō Daishi”

Compiled by Kūkai, one book

4th year of Tenbun (1535), reproduction

A catalog of approximately 250 articles brought to Japan by Kūkai upon his return from Tang dynasty China in the first year of Daidō (806), including new translations of sutras, Buddhist statues, and tools, that was presented to the Imperial court. This is a copy that was received by a Buddhist monk from Aki Province (the western region of what is today Hiroshima Prefecture) in the fourth year of Tenbun at Ōjyōin Nikaidō in Mount Kōya

○ “Treatise on the Secret Mandala of the Ten States of Mind”

Compiled by Kūkai, 10 volumes (one volume missing)

9 books

6th year of Kenchō (1254) – 3rd year of Shoka (1259)

A major work of Kūkai that compiled and edited the doctrines of Shingon Buddhism in accordance with the Imperial command of the Emperor Junna in the seventh year of Tenchō (830). This is a book from a relatively early stage of the temple press at Mount Koya referred to as “Koya-ban,” which began publishing works by Kūkai and others in the Kenchō period.

○ “Kūkai’s Treatise on Poetry and Prose”

Edited by Shinzei, 10 volumes (volumes 1, 2, and 5 missing)

7 books, published in the 7th year of Keichō (1602) (Kōya-ban)

Poetry and prose by Kūkai edited by his pupil Shinzei. This rare book was published in the 12th year of Keichō (1607) by the Buddhist monk Seiyo, who had been entrusted with the governance of Mount Kōya by Tokugawa Ieyasu. No other copies from this year have been confirmed.

Portrait of Kōbō Daishi



Kūkai’s Treatise on Poetry and Prose
(Kōya-ban)

