

**Statue of Kūkai**

Kūkai (774–835), also known as Kōbō Daishi or the Great Teacher of Buddhist Doctrine, was a Japanese monk who traveled to China in the early ninth century to learn the secret teachings of esoteric Buddhism. When he returned to Japan, nobles and commoners alike were drawn to his teachings, which would be eventually formalized into the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism.

Kūkai became abbot of Tōji in 824 and he made the temple the headquarters for his new Shingon school. Kūkai was a Renaissance man: besides traveling and teaching, he built temples, directed public works projects, and created some of Japan's most celebrated calligraphy.

This statue was carved in 1233 by Kōshō (dates unknown), the son of the famed sculptor Unkei (1150–1223) and a master sculptor of Buddhist iconography whose works can be found in a number of Kyoto temples. It is the oldest surviving statue of Kūkai and was designated a National Treasure in 2000.