

## The concept behind the symphony "Kūkai":

During a phone call between President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on October 8, 2021, President Xi emphasized that the current China-Japan relations present both opportunities and challenges. China appreciates Japan's new government's emphasis on maintaining high-level communication between the two countries and is willing to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with Japan. Following the spirit of drawing lessons from history and creating a future, China aims to promote the development of China-Japan relations in line with the requirements of the new era. It is understood that drawing lessons from history not only requires Japan to face up to its history of aggression against China and learn from its experiences and lessons, but also to deeply explore, inherit, and promote the rich resources and valuable traditions contained in the long history of friendly exchanges between China and Japan. This aims to evoke shared beautiful memories among the people of both countries, promote mutual understanding, and continuously strengthen the psychological and cultural foundation of China-Japan friendship, providing support and impetus for opening up new prospects for bilateral relations.

The history of friendly exchanges between China and Japan is long-standing. Numerous predecessors and virtuous individuals have made great contributions to promoting cultural exchanges between China and Japan and forging traditional friendship between the two peoples, leaving an indelible monument. Kūkai, a prominent figure from Japan's Heian period, is one such outstanding representative.

Kūkai (774-835 AD, posthumously known as "Kōbō-Daishi") was the eighth patriarch of the Shingon school (Tangmi) and the founder of the Japanese Shingon school. Under the careful guidance of the seventh patriarch of the Tangmi school, Huiguo, Kūkai introduced the complete system of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism to Japan, promoting the growth of the Shingon school in Japan from its inception to its peak, leading the creation of a new face of Heian Buddhism, and exerting a lasting and profound influence on Japanese Buddhism in later generations.

Kūkai serves as an important bridge connecting the hearts and minds of the Chinese and Japanese people. The encounter between Huiguo and Kūkai stands as a significant event in the history of Sino-Japanese cultural exchange. Huiguo, without any national bias, imparted the highest Buddhist teachings to Kūkai without reservation. He personally organized large-scale transcription of scriptures, painting of Buddha images, and casting of ritual implements, presenting these invaluable treasures representing the height and level of Tang culture to Kūkai. Huiguo earnestly advised him to "return to his homeland early, serve the country, spread teachings far and wide, and increase the happiness of all beings." As Huiguo's most promising disciple, Kūkai never forgot the meticulous guidance of his mentor. He steadfastly adhered to Huiguo's teachings, dedicating his life to serving the country and benefiting the people, living up to the high expectations and trust placed upon him by his mentor. The spirit and contributions of Kūkai are inseparable from the careful nurturing and selfless teachings of Huiguo. The source of Kūkai's contributions and great achievements to Japanese culture lies in the brilliance of Chinese culture. His lifelong endeavor was to inherit and promote the essence of Tang culture in Japan, using Chinese culture to comprehensively reshape Japanese culture. The exemplary relationship between Huiguo and Kūkai, characterized by their shared ideals, actions, and monumental achievements, represents a precious spiritual heritage shared and passed down by the Chinese and Japanese people. It serves as an important spiritual bond today for enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between the two nations.

Kūkai's compassionate spirit and significant contributions are deeply rooted in the hearts of the Japanese people. After Kūkai entered into long-term meditation on Mount Kōya, the Japanese people's faith in the Great Master Kūkai spread widely throughout the country, becoming an important cultural element passed down through generations. "The Master's Faith" (the belief in the Great Master Kūkai) thus became a distinctive term in Japanese culture, ingrained in the spiritual life of the Japanese people.

After more than 1200 years of historical changes, Kūkai's influence on the spiritual

life of the Japanese people continues uninterrupted. However, the understanding and memory of Kūkai's true image, spiritual realm, historical contributions, and spiritual origins among the Japanese people have become increasingly obscure. To evoke the shared historical memories of the people of China and Japan and fully utilize Kūkai's role as a cultural bridge promoting mutual understanding between China and Japan, at the historic moment of the 1250th anniversary of Kūkai's birth, we have composed the symphony "Kūkai." Through music, "Kūkai" artistically reproduces Kūkai's magnificent journey of rigorous cultivation, seeking enlightenment in Tang China, inheriting the lineage of the Dharma, propagating the teachings for the benefit of all beings, and safeguarding the country and its people. It showcases the mentor-disciple relationship between Huiguo and Kūkai, characterized by shared ideals, joint efforts, and continuous succession, demonstrating Kūkai's boundless compassion and dedication to benefiting all beings. "Kūkai" expresses the reverence and remembrance of later generations towards Kūkai, highlighting the profound influence, radiance, and vitality of Chinese culture, revealing the deep and longstanding relationship and history of interaction between the Chinese and Japanese peoples and cultures. It inspires contemporary Japanese people's nostalgia, longing, and reverence for Kūkai, as well as their appreciation and friendly sentiments towards Chinese culture and the Chinese people, playing a subtle yet significant role in promoting contemporary Sino-Japanese friendship.

## Kūkai

Kūkai (774-835 AD), posthumously known as "Kōbō Daishi," was the eighth patriarch of the Tangmi (Shingon) lineage and the founder of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. Under the careful guidance of his master, the seventh patriarch of Tangmi, Huiguo, Kūkai brought the complete system of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, including

its sutras, rituals, sacred instruments, and spiritual essence, to Japan. He established two major centers of practice, the To-ji Temple in Kyoto and the Kongōbu-ji Temple on Mount Kōya, creating a comprehensive religious system for the Shingon sect and nurturing many talented disciples. Kūkai's efforts propelled the Shingon sect to its zenith and ushered in a new era of Buddhist practice in Japan, exerting a profound and enduring influence on Japanese Buddhism. Today, the Shingon sect is one of the five major Buddhist sects in Japan, with over 12,000 temples and more than 15 million followers, possessing significant social influence.

Kūkai is revered as a key figure in ancient Sino-Japanese cultural exchange and a foundational figure in Japanese culture. Not only did he introduce Shingon Esoteric Buddhism to Japan, but he also brought advanced Tang Dynasty culture to the country. Kūkai's works and achievements in language, literature, calligraphy, architecture, sculpture, and technology facilitated the integration and flourishing of Chinese culture in Japan during the Heian period, laying the groundwork for cultural development and prosperity.

In the field of education, Kūkai emulated the educational institutions of the Tang Dynasty by founding the Zōga Shōrai-in academy. He pioneered public education in Japan, focusing on the cultivation of moral character and advocating for comprehensive education and equal educational opportunities. Kūkai implemented a fully subsidized education system, demonstrating forward-thinking ideas in national education. It wasn't until the Meiji Restoration that Japan underwent educational reforms, and compulsory education for all citizens was fully implemented. The advanced nature of Kūkai's national education philosophy is evident. The 1947 Education Fundamental Law of Japan explicitly states that "education should aim at the cultivation of a well-rounded personality." The 2006 revision of the law reiterated that "education must aim at perfecting the individual's character," while consistently upholding the fundamental principle of equal educational opportunities. These fundamental ideas and principles, which have guided contemporary education development in Japan, reflect the profound influence of Kūkai's national education philosophy and represent the application of his ideas in modern Japan.

In terms of social welfare, Kūkai's water management projects garnered nationwide attention. Responding to the requests of officials and residents in his hometown of Zanki-no-kuni Tado-gun (modern-day Zentsūji City, Kagawa Prefecture), Kūkai was tasked with organizing the construction of Japan's largest ancient reservoir, the Mannōike (located in Mannō Town, Nakatado District, Kagawa Prefecture). The Mannōike reservoir was excavated during the Taihō era (701–703) to prevent water shortages and disasters and to irrigate farmland, but it suffered multiple breaches over time. Particularly devastating was the major breach in the ninth year of the Kōnin era (818), which turned the surrounding area into a muddy sea beyond repair. In the eleventh year of the Kōnin era (820), the imperial court dispatched engineers to oversee the construction, but due to a shortage of manpower and outdated techniques, the project remained unfinished after three years. Consequently, local authorities petitioned the court to appoint Kūkai as the project director. Kūkai's arrival inspired a large number of farmers to join the construction effort, providing ample manpower. During the construction process, Kūkai fully utilized the water engineering techniques he had learned in the Tang Dynasty and constructed a Mokujiki Ganesha altar by the reservoir to perform esoteric rituals, facilitating the smooth progress of the project. In just three months, Kūkai completed the construction of the Mannōike reservoir. For over 1200 years since Kūkai's time, the vast reservoir has nourished the extensive fields nearby, with an irrigation area still reaching 4600 square kilometers to this day.

In the realm of culture and arts, Kūkai's contributions were manifold. He drew inspiration from Chinese cursive script to create the hiragana syllabary, laying the foundation for the formation of Japanese script with his work "Iroha Uta," which captures the phonetics of the Japanese language. Kūkai's writing of "Bunjō Hifuron" systematically summarized theories of medieval Chinese literature, providing a comprehensive and clear textbook for Japanese scholars studying the Chinese language and literature. This work preserved valuable historical materials for the inheritance and study of medieval Chinese language and literature. Even today, "Bunjō Hifuron" remains an indispensable classic for the study of ancient Chinese

literary history and Sino-Japanese cultural exchange.

Kūkai's establishment of Shingon Buddhist temples, adorned with exquisitely carved Buddha statues and grand temple architecture, are considered global treasures. For instance, the three-dimensional mandala Buddha statues at Tō-ji Temple, personally designed and supervised by Kūkai, are designated as national treasures of Japan. Kūkai also made remarkable achievements in Japanese calligraphy history, being recognized as one of the "Three Brushes of Japan" and revered as the founder of the "Daishi-ryū" calligraphy school by later generations.

Kūkai's influence extended across multiple domains including Buddhism, education, painting, architecture, literature, and calligraphy, shaping Japanese culture and elevating the cultural development and productivity levels of the Heian period to new heights. He is rightfully regarded as a preeminent spiritual leader in Japan's intellectual, artistic, political, economic realms, and even in everyday life. Nobel laureate in physics, Hideki Yukawa, once remarked, "In Japan's long history, there is no one comparable to Kūkai," acknowledging Kūkai as a polymath beyond compare, surpassing figures like Aristotle and da Vinci in breadth. He transcended his era in realms of thought, art, scholarship, and craftsmanship.

Kūkai's compassionate spirit and immense contributions have deeply ingrained themselves in the hearts of the Japanese people. Following his extended meditation retreat on Mount Kōya, reverence for the Grand Master Kūkai spread widely among the populace, becoming an essential aspect of Japan's spiritual life. The "master worship" (or reverence for the Grand Master Kūkai) became an exclusive term in Japanese culture. In his youth, Kūkai undertook ascetic practices in the mountains and along the coast of Shikoku Island in Japan. Today, the pilgrimage route known as the "Shikoku Pilgrimage" encompasses 88 temples associated with Kūkai, spanning approximately 1,200 kilometers. This pilgrimage is a rare large-scale temple pilgrimage worldwide. Each year, over 150,000 pilgrims follow in Kūkai's footsteps, embarking on the Shikoku Pilgrimage. The pilgrims wear conical straw hats inscribed

with the characters "companion of two," symbolizing Kūkai's perpetual companionship with them, guiding and protecting them on their spiritual journey. This enduring influence highlights Kūkai's profound impact on contemporary Japanese spiritual life.

Kūkai served as a bridge connecting the hearts of the people of China and Japan. While Huiguo resided in the Tang capital of Chang'an, Kūkai was born in distant Japan. Yet, neither the vast mountains nor the raging storms could deter the firm vow of these two eminent monks to propagate the Dharma. When Kūkai finally met Huiguo after enduring countless trials, Huiguo, who would pass away just seven months later, joyfully exclaimed, "I have long awaited your arrival. Today, to meet is truly auspicious. My mission is nearing its end, and no one else can carry on the teachings. My path lies to the east. You must quickly prepare incense and flowers and enter the initiation platform." Huiguo imparted the highest teachings of the Shingon school to Kūkai, instructing him, "Return to your homeland soon, serve your country, spread the teachings far and wide, and bring blessings to all beings. In doing so, you will bring peace and joy to all under heaven, fulfilling your duty to the country and showing filial piety to your family." In his heartfelt inscription "The Stele of Master Huiguo," Kūkai expressed his deep gratitude for Huiguo's nurturing guidance: "Disciple Kūkai, looking back to the east of the East Sea for my homeland, facing countless hardships. Waves upon waves, mountains of clouds. My coming was not by my own strength, my return was not my own will. He called me with a hook, he guided me with a rope. At dawn on the sail, he showed me many signs; at dusk on the return voyage, he explained the connections of past lives." The shared aspirations and deeds of the wise figures of both countries serve as a precious spiritual legacy cherished and passed down by the people of China and Japan, fostering mutual understanding and friendship. In 1984, with the support and assistance of various levels of government in China and the Chinese Buddhist Association, the "Association of Main Shingon Temples" and the "Japan-China Friendship Shingon Association" funded the construction of the Huiguo Kūkai Memorial Hall at the Qinglong Temple in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. This memorial hall

commemorates the kindness of Huiguo, nurturing the Dharma, and honors the bond between Huiguo and Kūkai, inspiring future generations to contribute to the promotion of friendship between the two countries, fully reflecting Kūkai's role as a link in contemporary Sino-Japanese exchanges at the grassroots level.

In summary, Kūkai made remarkable contributions to the transmission and development of the Shingon school and Japanese Buddhism, the overseas dissemination of Chinese culture, the progress and prosperity of Japanese culture, the exchange and mutual learning between China and Japan, and even the cultural exchanges across East Asia. Over the course of more than 1200 years of history, Kūkai has become an important symbol of Sino-Japanese friendly exchanges and a significant bridge connecting the hearts of the people of both countries.