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## **Reenchanting Buddhism via modernizing magic: Guru Wuguang of Taiwan's philosophy and science of 'superstition'**

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**Reenchanting Buddhism via Modernizing Magic**  
Guru Wuguang of Taiwan's Philosophy and Science of 'Superstition'

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the life, exploits and ideology of Guru Wuguang (1818-2000), a dizzyingly eclectic and extremely influential Taiwanese Buddhist figure who studied Daoist alchemy, multiple forms of Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan Buddhism, as well as biology, thermodynamics, philosophy, theology, and occulture. This is done in order to understand what happens when a tradition ‘purified’ from its ‘mythical’ elements reincorporates itself in the tension between its ‘enchanted’ past and ‘scientific’ present. Wuguang is famous throughout the Chinese-speaking Buddhist world for resurrecting Zhenyan, a school of esoteric Buddhism said to have flourished in China during the Tang Dynasty. The academic community has largely ignored Wuguang, making this the first in-depth exploration of this figure, whose influence is truly global. Building upon David McMahan’s work on Buddhist modernism, Jason Josephson’s secular-religious-superstitious trinary, scholarly discourse concerning Weberian disenchantment, and employing the Religious Economy Model, I argue that Wuguang’s teachings represent an intentionally reenchanting form of Buddhist modernism aimed at harmonizing magic with modern science and philosophy. While scholarly discourse on Asian magic in the modern world has been confined to popular religion, this study additionally focuses on ‘High-Church Buddhism’ by analyzing Wuguang’s magico-scientific interpretation of complex Buddhist doctrine. This was accomplished by identifying each facet of Wuguang’s eclecticism, tracing its provenance, and illuminating Wuguang’s innovative use thereof while exploring his influence. Primary data were collected through textual and historical research, as well as onsite fieldwork conducted from 2011 to 2016.



## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother of blessed memory, and my father, may he live till the age of 120.





## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my many informants, both anonymous and named, who welcomed me into their communities and allowed me to try and see the world through their eyes. I also wish to express my gratitude to my dear friends and colleagues, Jeffrey Kotyk and Joseph P. Elacqua, who were always there to read my drafts and offer invaluable emotional support.



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## Notes on Romanization

Excluding a number of special cases, all Chinese words have been transcribed into Mandarin Pinyin. The exceptions to this are Taiwanese place names and personal names which have been rendered in accordance with their standardized form. Japanese words and names have been romanized in the modified Hepburn system with identical exceptions.

Due to the Sino-Japanese character of this dissertation, when broadly speaking of doctrines and practices of Buddhist sects that cross the Chinese/Japanese linguistic divide, both the Mandarin and Japanese pronunciations have been transliterated. Thus, the characters 真言 and 禪 are respectively transcribed as Zhenyan/Shingon and Chan/Zen. However, when referring to a particularly Han or Japanese group within these larger categories, only the pronunciation used in that particular group's context is given.

## List of Abbreviations: in alphabetical order

Abbreviation	Full Form	Characters
GKTM	Great King of Tantra Maṇḍala	大教王曼荼羅
KMT	Kuomingtang	國民黨
MCS	Modern Chan Society	現代禪
MPPM	Mahā Prañidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna	马来西亚佛教真言宗大願山
MSBL	Mantra School Bright Lineage	真言宗普賢流
PRC	People's Republic of China	中華人民共和國
ROC	Republic of China	中華民國
SSBA	South Seas Buddhist Association	南瀛佛教會
SSBJ	South Seas Buddhist Journal	南瀛佛教會報
TOE	Theory of Everything	
TOUB	Temple of Universal Brightness	光明王寺

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