



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

Bahir, C.

### **Citation**

Bahir, C. (2017, June 1). *Reenchanting Buddhism via modernizing magic: Guru Wuguang of Taiwan's philosophy and science of 'superstition'*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/49753>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/49753>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/49753> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

**Author:** Bahir, C.

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

**Issue Date:** 2017-06-01



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

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,  
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties  
te verdedigen op donderdag 1 juni 2016  
klokke 13.45 uur

door

Cody Roger Bahir  
geboren te Kentucky, Verenigde Staten van Amerika  
in 1979

**PROMOTIECOMMISSIE**

Promotor: Prof. dr. J.A. Silk (Universiteit Leiden)

Overige leden: Dr. C.B. Jones (Catholic University of America)  
Prof. dr. H. van der Veere (Universiteit Leiden)

## **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.



# Contents

<b>Notes on Romanization.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Section I: Research Questions and Motivation.....	8
Section II: Data Collection.....	12
Section III: Background and Terminology.....	14
Section IV: Dissertation Structur.....	37
<b>Chapter 1: Wuguang’s Taiwan.....</b>	<b>41</b>
Section I: The First Taiwanese Buddhist Revival.....	43
Section II: The Revival’s Context, Japanese Colonialism (1895-1945).....	55
Section III: Republican Period (1945-present).....	78
Conclusion.....	83
<b>Chapter 2: Wuguang’s Quest.....</b>	<b>85</b>
Section I: Childhood.....	89
Section II: Early Adulthood.....	94
Section III: Adulthood.....	100
Section IV: Middle Age.....	109
Section V: Maturity.....	123
Conclusion.....	134

<b>Chapter 3: Wuguang’s Magical <i>Prajñā</i>.....</b>	<b>140</b>
Section I: Wuguang’s Magical Taxonomy.....	143
Section II: Mystical Empiricism.....	155
Section III: Soteriological Phenomenology.....	162
Conclusion.....	169
<b>Chapter 4: Wuguang’s Electric Universe.....</b>	<b>171</b>
Section I: Energetic Ontology.....	172
Section II: The Metaphysics of Magic.....	186
Section III: Future Soteriological Ramifications.....	199
Conclusion.....	202
<b>Chapter 5: Wuguang’s Lineage.....</b>	<b>204</b>
Section I: Birth.....	205
Section II: Headquarters.....	212
Section III: Current Status.....	227
Section IV: Sociological Significance.....	250
Conclusion.....	270
<b>Chapter 6: Wuguang’s Larger Legacy.....</b>	<b>272</b>
Section I: The Samantabhadra Lineage.....	273
Section II: Modern Chan Society.....	297
Section III: The Xiu Ming Society.....	302
Section IV: Mahā Prañidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna.....	305
Section V: Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple.....	308
Section VI: Analysis.....	309

Conclusion.....	311
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>312</b>
Section I: Findings.....	313
Section II: Provocative Particularities and Integrative Analysis.....	319
Section III: The Bigger Picture.....	323
Section IV: Contributions.....	336
Section V: Limitations and Questions for the Future.....	340
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>342</b>
Samenvatting	
Stellingen	
Curriculum Vitae	

## 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	Kuomintang	國民黨
MCS	Modern Chan Society	現代禪
MPPM	Mahā Praṇidhāna 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

## List of Figures: in order of appearance

Unless otherwise noted, all images were created by the author. Photographs that have been reproduced have been done so with the copyright holders' permission.

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Magical Terms Used by Wuguang	28
2	Mantra School Bright Lineage's lineage chart	35
3	Taiwan's Five Great Buddhist Lineages, their sanctuaries and locations	59
4	Cover of 1972 copy of <i>The Art of Yogic Nourishment and the Esoteric Path</i>	108
5	Modern façade of Zhuxi Temple	108
6	Modern façade of Zhuxi Temple	109
7	Ming Dynasty gate of Zhuxi Temple	109
8	Wuguang, circa 1971	127
9	Wuguang wearing the purple robes	133
10	Wuguang's understanding of the Shingon cognitive map	165
11	Superpositioning	190
12	Mantra School Bright Lineage's lineage poem	207
13	Alley of Temple of Universal Brightness 1	209
14	Front of Temple of Universal Brightness 1	209
15	Lecture Hall of Temple of Universal Brightness 1	209
16	Incense altar at Temple of Universal Brightness 1	209
17	Street entrance to Mt. Five Wisdoms	212
18	Resident monastic riding a scooter along the entry road	212
19	Mountain gate	214
20	Commemorative house overlooking Qinglong Pond	214



21	Ossuary stūpa	214
22	Temple of Universal Brightness	215
23	Front of Temple of Universal Brightness	215
24	Lion flanked staircase	215
25	Stone lanterns	215
26	<i>Mitsudomoe</i> on steps at Temple of Universal Brightness	215
27	Basement shrine to Wuguang	217
28	First floor altar to Wuguang	217
29	Illuminating Lecture Hall	217
30	Images of the Zhenyan/Shingon patriarchs	218
31	Image of Wuguang bathing the Buddha	218
32	Europeanesque columns	218
33	Hanging roofs	218
34	Mahāvairocana Hall	219
35	Aerial view of the Temple of Universal Brightness	224
36	Aerial view of the Iron Stūpa atop the Temple of Universal Brightness	224
37	1994 <i>abhiṣeka</i> workshop class	229
38	Huiding leading Mantra School Bright Lineage members in Kōyasan	230
39	Huiding and Wuguang at a Buddha-bathing ceremony	230
40	Layout of Mahāvairocana Hall	233
41	The raised platform in the Mahāvairocana Hall	234
42	Floorplan of Temple of Universal Brightness's first floor	235
43	Taiwanese Zhenyan hand-held censer	237
44	Front entrance to the Illuminating Lecture Hall	242

45	Ritual setup for the esoteric preparatory part of the <i>Ullambana</i> ceremony	246
46	Candy Toss	247
47	The central seat and altar used by the ritual officiator	247
48	Stark and Bainbridge's quantification of tension	253
49	Interviewee Demographics	257
50	The Great King of Tantra Maṇḍala and its components	275
51	Samantabhadra Lineage's lineage poem	277
52	Medicine Buddha Hall	280
53	Medicine Buddha Hall's inner courtyard	280
54	Organizational wings of the Samantabhadra Lineage	280
55	Medicine Buddha Hall entrance	280
56	Meeting room	280
57	<i>Homa</i> altar with Acala	281
58	Ākāśagarbha altar	281
59	Main Zhenyan/Shingon altar overlooked by Śākyamuni	281
60	Maitreya	281
61	2015 Buddha-bathing ceremony	283
62	2015 Buddha-bathing ceremony	283
63	Samantabhadra Lineage member wearing the green half- <i>kāṣāya</i>	285
64	Chesheng awarding disciple with a red <i>kāṣāya</i>	285
65	Samantabhadra Lineage member performing a <i>homa</i>	287
66	Chesheng wearing the triangle hat	288
67	Samantabhadra Lineage priest wearing the triangle hat	288
68	Comparison of the Trisyllabic Mantra and Chesheng's hybrid mantra	291

69	Comparison of Sino-Japanese transliterations	294
70	The three sections of the <i>Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala</i>	296
71	The Buddha, Lotus and <i>Vajra</i> mudrās	296
72	Modern Chan Society lineage poem	301
73	Front of Mt. Dharma-propagation	302
74	Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Rajya Samghārāma	306
75	Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna administrative office	307
76	Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna symbol	307
77	Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna youth event	307