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

Bahir, C.

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Chapter 5

Wuguang's Lineage



This final chapter discusses Wuguang's influence on modern religiosity in Taiwan as embodied in the MSBL, which has over 6000 converts,⁴⁶⁵ international branches and offshoots in Hong Kong and Malaysia.⁴⁶⁶ The data presented here were primarily collected through onsite fieldwork and analyzed in an attempt to answer a number of questions. First, given the importance of Dharma-transmission continuity, how did Wuguang attempt to present the MSBL—a new form of Buddhism—as an orthodox Buddhist lineage? Second, how have Wuguang's peculiar energetic-magical-necromantic doctrines and eclectic religiosity been praxiologically translated to serve as a framework for the MSBL's orthopraxis? Third, how has the MSBL fared since Wuguang passed away in 2000? In order to appreciate the MSBL within the East Asian and global religious landscape, after seeking answers to the above questions, we analyze the MSBL from a sociological perspective, approaching it as a 'New Religious Movement' (NRM).

⁴⁶⁵ On a refuge certificate from Apr. 27, 2014, it states that Huiding has officiated over 835 MSBL ceremonies, a number that does not include refuge ceremonies conducted by other MSBL members in Hong Kong and Malaysia. Wuguang himself performed over 5000.

⁴⁶⁶ The known MSBL offshoots in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia are discussed in Chapter 6.

Section I: Birth

Like Wuguang’s universe and monastic style, the name of the Mantra School Bright Lineage 真言宗光明流 is constructed around the character *guang* 光. The luminous quality of the MSBL’s name illuminates the fact that Wuguang designed the MSBL to be a living embodiment of his teachings. This underlying agenda is visually manifested in the ‘school emblem’ 宗徽 that Wuguang created to signify the MSBL presented above. This image permeates the MSBL’s material culture including: T-shirts, bumper stickers, window stickers, mailings, websites, keychains and publications.

This emblem is a combination of disparate elements drawn from South and East Asian as well as Western traditions. It incorporates the Japanese *mitsudomoe* 三つ巴, the Indian *vajra* and the caduceus—a symbol commonplace in Western Occultism and used by the medical profession.⁴⁶⁷ Underlying these three prominent elements are subtle references to specific Zhenyan/Shingon concepts that furnish this symbol with a multilayered signification. Wuguang explained the specific layers of signification:

1. A pair of wings whose thirty-seven feathers represent the thirty-seven deities of the Perfected Body Assembly 成身會 at the center of the *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala*. These wings are topped by eight red lotus petals representing the eight petaled lotus at the center of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*.
2. A sword whose three-pronged *vajra* pommel represents the Buddha, Lotus and *Vajra* sections of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*. The two ribbons coming from the sword symbolize merit and knowledge. Its body represents the ability of *prajñā* to end *kleśas*.
3. The circle of the three mysteries [*mitsudomoe*] signifies the use of body, speech and mind.
4. Twin snakes whose six semi circles denote the karmic power of the six elements.
5. The three pronged [*vajra*] sword’s penetrating the double wings, circle of the three mysteries and twin snakes embodies the vital *prajñā* of the activities of the deities in the *Vajra-Garbha* Twin Maṇḍalas.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ For more information on the caduceus see Walter J. Friedlander, *The Golden Wand of Medicine: A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992).

⁴⁶⁸ Wuguang, “*Zonghui de xianghui yiyi* 宗徽的像徽意義 [Meaning of the School’s Emblem],” in *Fojiao zhenyanzong wuzhishan guangmingwangsi* 佛教真言宗五智山光明王寺 [Buddhist Zhenyan Temple of Universal

Despite the fact that this symbol hardly looks Buddhist and was obviously inspired by the caduceus, Wuguang wove Zhenyan/Shingon doctrine into the different elements that he used to create it. From his description we can see that this emblem was intended to encapsulate the symbolism of the Twin Maṇḍalas 兩界曼荼羅 that are central to Zhenyan/Shingon⁴⁶⁹ and embody esoteric Buddhist practice built around the three mysteries.⁴⁷⁰ Notable here is Wuguang's use of the Japanese *mitsudomoe* to represent the three mysteries despite the fact that it usually refers to the triad of heaven, earth and humanity 天地人.⁴⁷¹ To justify his interpretation, Wuguang changed the actual name of the symbol to the 'circle of the three mysteries' 三密環流. The *mitsudomoe* is used in Shingon material culture, which is obviously the reason why it made its way into Wuguang's emblem. However, I am unaware of any pre-Wuguang figure—Japanese or otherwise—who correlates the three blades of the *mitsudomoe* with the three mysteries of esoteric Buddhist practice. Thus, Wuguang changed the meaning of

Brightness at Mt. Five Wisdoms], NA (Kaohsiung: Yimin chubanshe, 2002), 5. Original text: “1. 雙翼：共三十七羽，代表金剛界成身會三十七尊；羽翼上緣有八瓣蓮葉，代表胎藏界中台八葉九尊。2. 三鈷劍：劍柄三鈷，表示佛部、蓮花部、金剛部三部；劍柄端有二穗帶，代表福慧之鬘；劍身代表能斷煩惱之智慧。3. 三密環流：代表身口意三密妙用 4. 雙蛇：代表六大能生的羯摩力。5. 三鈷劍貫穿雙翼、三密環、雙蛇，代表貫穿金胎兩部諸尊的精神智慧活動。”

⁴⁶⁹ The most comprehensive exploration of these *maṇḍalas* in English is A. Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Maṇḍalas*. For the Perfected Body Assembly and Eight pedaled lotus Wuguang mentions here, respectively refer to A. Snodgrass, 630-636 and 207-214. For the Buddha, *Vajra* and Lotus sections of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* see *ibid*, 252, Elizabeth T. Grotenhuis, *Japanese Maṇḍalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 61 and Nicoloff, *Sacred Kōyasan*, 141. In addition to the maṇḍalic specific elements, Wuguang is referring to Shingon ontological doctrines that teach that the basic material underlying all phenomena are the Six Great Elements 六大. The belief in the Six Great Elements is built upon an earlier Indian model that posits there are four great elements (Skt. *catvāri mahā-bhūtāni*), earth, water, fire and air. This early quadric-elemental schema is found throughout Buddhist literature. In select early Buddhist texts there are two additional elements sometimes mentioned—space and consciousness—which gives us the six that we see Wuguang referencing. For more information see Minoru Kiyota, “Shingon Mikkyō Maṇḍala,” *History of Religions* 8, no. 1 (1968): 31-59 and *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles and Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 1978), 66-68.

⁴⁷⁰ For more information regarding the three mysteries refer to the Introduction, Section III, “Buddhist ‘Schools’ and ‘Lineages.’”

⁴⁷¹ E. Leslie Williams, *Spirit Tree: Origins of Cosmology in Shintō Ritual at Hakozaki* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 164.

the Japanese *mitsudomoe*—and even the Western caduceus—in order to imbue them with Zhenyan/Shingon symbolism.

As I have argued elsewhere, Wuguang’s creating this emblem was inspired by the Japanese use of ‘crests’ 紋 to signify different Buddhist lineages.⁴⁷² The fact that the *mitsudomoe*—notwithstanding Wuguang’s reinterpretation—is used as such a crest in Japanese Shingon strengthens this argument. It also shows us that when Wuguang formed the MSBL he attempted to make it seem as ‘official’ as possible by mimicking established Buddhist sectarian tactics. This is further attested to by other well established sectarian tactics that he employed. In addition to signifying his sect with a new banner, Wuguang wrote a new lineage poem for the MSBL’s members’ Dharma-names to be chosen from (see figure 12).

English	Pinyin	Chinese
Thoroughly awakened and perceiving the mysterious, the mind’s powers are true and constant.	<i>Wu che xuan jue, Xin di zhenchang.</i>	悟徹玄覺, 心諦真常。
Luminosity shines universally, the transcendent attestation of Mahāvairocana’s Pure Land (Skt. <i>Ghana-vyūha</i>).	<i>Guangming puzhao, Chao zheng miyan.</i>	光明普照, 超證密嚴。
Completely revealing the nature and characteristics of things, [like] Huiguo and Kūkai.	<i>Quan xian xingxiang, Huiguo Hongfa.</i>	全顯性相, 惠果弘法。
Wondrous virtue expansively transforms, forever bringing esteem to the this school.	<i>Miaode guanghua, Yongxiang benzong.</i>	妙德廣化, 永尚本宗。

Figure 12: MSBL Lineage Poem.

I have highlighted the initial character of each stanza to reveal another code written by Wuguang that involves his monastic names. When these characters are put together they form Wuguang’s full monastic name that includes both his Dharma-name and monk’s style, Wuguang

⁴⁷² Bahir, “Buddhist Master Wuguang’s Taiwanese Web,” 88.

Quanmiao 悟光全妙.⁴⁷³ There is another message embedded in this poem, particularly in its second stanza where Wuguang references the Zhenyan/Shingon patriarchs Huiguo and Kūkai—the latter through his posthumous title Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師 (Chn. *hongfa dashi*). This reference and encoded message demonstrate that Wuguang was trying to root his new lineage—and himself—in the past and present both as traditionally Buddhist.

In the next chapter we will see that these two tactics—creating a new religious crest and lineage poem—were copied by Wuguang’s students who went on to form their own movements. Now, we will turn our attention to the history of the sect that Wuguang’s banner and poem were meant to legitimize.

History

As we saw in Chapter 2, when Wuguang returned from Japan he began propagating his version of esoteric Buddhism at Zhuxi Temple in an isolated corner near its ossuary stūpa before relocating to a small folk religion shrine named Longshan Hall. Two years later, in 1974, the section of this space utilized by Wuguang and his followers was given the name Temple of Universal Brightness (TOUB1) 光明王寺 (literally ‘Temple of the Luminous Wisdom King’), a name which evokes the class of deities in the Zhenyan/Shingon pantheon referred to as the Wisdom Kings 明王 (Skt. *vidyā-rāja*)⁴⁷⁴—to which he attached the character *guang*.⁴⁷⁵ Although the sanctuary is small and currently rarely used, it still shows evidence of the practices performed

⁴⁷³ For more information on Dharma-names and lineage poems refer to note 421.

⁴⁷⁴ See Patricia J. Graham, “Naritasan Shinshōji and Commoner Patronage During the Edo Period,” *Early Modern Japan* 12, no. 2 (2004): 11, n. 1.

⁴⁷⁵ The title, ‘Luminous Wisdom King’ 光明王 is also a translation for the Sanskrit name of the bodhisattva Jvalanādhīpati in the retinue of Amitābha. See William E. Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (Digital version: Digital Archives Section, Library and Information Center of Dharma Drum Buddhist College). Online: <http://buddhistinformatics.ddbc.edu.tw/glossaries/glossaries.php#soothill-hodous> (accessed Feb. 2, 2016). However, I do not believe Wuguang is referencing this deity, but the Wisdom Kings and his energetic ontology.

there and its presence is indicated by a sign at the intersection of the main street and small alley where at whose back it can be found (see figures 13-16).



Figure 13: Alley to TOUB1.



Figure 14: Front of TOUB1.



Figure 15: TOUB1 Lecture Hall.



Figure 16: TOUB1 incense altar.

From this modest space Wuguang's flock steadily grew. In 1980 another, equally humble branch was established in Kaohsiung's Zuoying district. In 1983, the MSBL joined the Kaohsiung chapter of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) 中國佛教協

會, the Kaohsiung Buddhist Association 大高雄佛教會.⁴⁷⁶ That same year, a large plot of land in Wuguang's rural hometown of Neimen was purchased with the intention to construct a large central monastery. It took sixteen years for the temple to finally be completed in 1999, during which time the MSBL Hong Kong branch was opened in 1990, and another has since been opened in Taipei. After completion, the new monastery took on the name of the original Tainan shrine, The Temple of Universal Brightness (TOUB).

What truly made Wuguang's new MSBL an independent Buddhist lineage from its inception is the fact that it has always been self-perpetuating. In lieu of sending students to Japan to receive *abhiṣeka* as is done at Shingon centers in Taiwan—even those who are run by Taiwanese devotees—Wuguang ordained his own *ācāryas* on Taiwanese soil.⁴⁷⁷ In Japan, to become a Shingon priest (Skt. *ācārya*) one must go into retreat that lasts roughly 100 days and perform multiple rituals around the clock.⁴⁷⁸ Since the MSBL's humble beginnings made hosting such a retreat impossible, Wuguang allowed his students to perform the rituals at home after he had instructed them in the ritual procedures and meanings thereof. After they had performed each of the four elements in the Quadrilateral Cultivation 108 times each, Wuguang would ordain them as priests of his new lineage.

The MSBL's informal *abhiṣeka* process eventually changed. After the land for a central temple was purchased, Wuguang attempted to recreate the 100-day retreat experience that he had

⁴⁷⁶ Personal correspondence with an MSBL monastic on behalf of Huiding, Jun 22, 2016. For the BAROC, refer to Chapter 1, Section III.

⁴⁷⁷ Two examples of Taiwanese-run Shingon centers who send their disciples to Japan to receive Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* are Kōyasan Jūkon-in 高野山住巖院 in Taichung and Kōyasan Juntei-in 高野山準提院 in Kaohsiung.

⁴⁷⁸ See Nicoloff, *Sacred Kōyasan*, 193-196.

undergone at Kōyasan.⁴⁷⁹ This began in October of 1991 when a number of portable trailers were brought to the future site of the monastery to house disciples attending the first ‘*ācārya* workshop’ 阿闍梨講習班. On January 1, 1992 the first batch of MSBL priests to have undergone the retreat received *abhiṣeka*. Once construction for the TOUB was complete, it became the center of all MSBL activity and enabled the *abhiṣeka* retreat to take place inside permanent monastic walls.

After being granted Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka*, a devotee becomes an MSBL ‘priest.’ The MSBL’s clerical divisions include: monastics, lay members, priests, and refuged-only members. Monastics are Buddhist monks and nuns, while lay members are not. Priests are members who have obtained *abhiṣeka*, while refuged-only members have not. The ‘priesthood’ is open to both monastics and lay members. Being a priest within the MSBL is not a function, but a title that a devotee is bestowed after completing the retreat just discussed. While social bonds are fermented by becoming a priest, assisting the residents of the TOUB in performing rituals is the only privilege reserved exclusively for priests that I have observed.

Now that we have discussed the early history of this young Buddhist lineage and the contours of its priesthood, let us take a look at its home. Our exploration of this monastic complex begins by detailing its central features and concludes by analyzing their symbolic significance.

⁴⁷⁹ This retreat—which is now performed in an actual monastery on the same grounds where the trailers once stood—replicated the ritual procedures and schedule of the retreat in Japan. One major difference however is that unlike Japanese Shingon priestly students, MSBL retreatants do not make any homages or offerings to *kami* as these are considered ‘non-Buddhist’ and ‘foreign’ due to their being Shintō. In place of this, local mountain deities are prayed to. Thus, the Japanese Shingon retreat has been appropriated and Sinicized by replacing specifically Japanese elements with their Chinese equivalents.

Section II: Headquarters

The TOUB houses around fifteen resident monastics. It is nestled inside a small mountain cove within a large mountain-top, flat-floor valley. This complex is invisible from the public highway and is therefore easy to pass without ever realizing it. Only during special occasions is the entrance decorated to allow newcomers to find the small winding road that leads up over the mountains and then down into the belly of the cove (see figures 17-18). This cove is surrounded by four mountains at whose center is a humanly enhanced hill. This topography gives this place its name, Mt. Five Wisdoms 五智山, which is an obvious reference to the phenomenological transformation discussed in Chapter 3.



Figure 17: Street Entrance to Mt. Five Wisdoms.



Figure 18: Resident monastic on a scooter along the entry road.

In accordance with traditional Chinese Buddhist custom, the front gate referred to as the ‘Mountain gate’ 山門 faces south (see figure 19).⁴⁸⁰ To the west of the monastery are two lakes, one much larger than the other. The larger one is named Qinglong Pond 青龍池 and the smaller one is known as Yongquan Pond 湧泉池. These lakes are surrounded by a footpath which is often used by visitors for walking meditation or leisurely strolling. On the west bank of Qinglong Pond is a house built as a memorial to Wuguang that is occupied by a number of Wuguang’s relatives who are also MSBL members (see figure 20). There are a number of other minor features of the grounds, such as a carpentry workshop, a number of steles and gardens as well as an old study center that is rarely used. To the TOUB’s east is a large parking lot and an ossuary stūpa (see figure 21).

Resting atop the central ‘mountain’ of Mt. Five Wisdoms is the TOUB. Including the basement, the TOUB’s main structure is a five-leveled cube that is topped by five stūpas (see figures 22-23). The TOUB is accessed through the mountain gate from where one ascends this ‘mountain’ by way of a flight of steps whose railing is topped with roaring lions on both sides (see figure 24). Coming to the top of the first flight of stairs, one encounters stone lanterns 石灯籠 and *mitsudomoe* (see figures 25-26). At this point one is level with the monastery’s first level, the basement.

⁴⁸⁰ See Louise Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects: Buddhism, Imperialism and Display*, Museums and Collections, 3 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 39.



Figure 19: Mountain gate.



Figure 20: Commemorative house overlooking Qinglong Pond.



Figure 21: Ossuary stūpa.



Figure 22: TOUB.



Figure 23: Front of TOUB.



Figure 24: Lion flanked staircase.



Figure 25: Stone lanterns.



Figure 26: Mitsudomoe on steps at TOUB.

In the basement one finds the dining hall 五觀堂 which is separated into two areas, one for visitors and one for residents. The only demarcation marking this boundary is the difference in furniture, with long wooden tables designated for the former and small, round tables for the

latter. At the northernmost wall—on the residents’ side—there is an unassuming shrine dedicated to Wuguang’s dharma protector who accompanied him on retreat near the waterfall and one dedicated to Wuguang (see figure 27). On the basement’s eastern side one finds the kitchen.

In the center of the first floor is the Illuminating Lecture Hall 遍照講堂—whose name is a reference to Mahāvairocana. It is here that the major public events, lectures and rituals take place. The northern wall boasts a stage that is usually adorned with either a painting of Wuguang holding the mūdra of Mahāvairocana, a statue of him sitting in a lotus posture or both (see figure 28). The support columns in the lecture hall are decorated in a style reminiscent of European architecture with acanthus leaves adorning their crowns (see figure 29). This lecture hall’s height extends until the top of the second floor and is thus a two storied room. Flanking the lecture hall on its east and west sides are administrative offices, a public lounge, small book store and library. The corridors separating the lecture hall from the other rooms are used for circumambulation during specific rituals and decorated with pictures of past events, Wuguang and the Zhenyan/Shingon patriarchs (see figures 30-31).

The entire first floor is surrounded by a covered veranda that functions as an extension of the inner corridors during circumambulation. Here one finds two *homa* altars, one on the veranda’s northeastern and northwestern corner.⁴⁸¹ The external architecture of the TOUB, like that of the lecture hall, is a mix of East and West as seen from the hanging roofs and veranda’s columns and archways (see figures 32-33). This is intentional as the TOUB is meant to look

⁴⁸¹ The *Homa* is found in both Tibetan and Japanese forms of esoteric Buddhism. For more information see Yael Bentor, “Interiorized Fire Rituals in India and in Tibet,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, no. 4 (2000): 594-613 and Richard K. Payne, “The Shingon Subordinating Fire Offering for Amitābha, ‘Amida Kei Ai Goma,’” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, third series, no. 8 (2006): 191-236.

‘European’ 歐洲建築系列.⁴⁸² This design reflects Wuguang’s belief that the future of Zhenyan/Shingon lies outside of Asia.



Figure 27: Basement shrine to Wuguang.



Figure 28: First floor altar to Wuguang. Image by Xiongyu.



Figure 29: Illuminating Lecture Hall, first-second floors.

⁴⁸² Chezhen 徹貞, “Miren xianyu—Taiwan wuzhishan guangmingwang si dadian kaiguang dadian 密人顯語—台灣五智山光明王寺大殿開光大典 [Exoteric Words of an Esoteric Buddhist—Dedication Ceremony of the Great Hall at Taiwan’s Temple of Universal Brightness at Mt. Five Wisdoms],” ed. Chewei 徹威, *Fengshui Magazine* 30 (1999). Online: <http://www.fengshui-magazine.com.hk/No.30-Dec/A6.htm> (accessed Feb. 1, 2016).



Figure 30: Images of the Zhenyan/Shingon patriarchs adorning a corridor on the first floor.



Figure 31: An image of Wuguang bathing the Buddha hanging in a corridor on the first floor.



Figure 32: Europeanesque columns.



Figure 33: Hanging roofs on TOUB's roof.

On the second floor, the lecture hall is flanked on both sides by living quarters. Most of these are unoccupied and occasionally used by lay devotees and guests. This floor is gender-segregated, with the men's quarters on the east and the women's on the west. Each room has a window which either faces outside, or into the lecture hall.

The spatial layouts of the third and fourth floors are identical to that of the first and second. This is where the majority of residents live in cells flanking the main sanctuary, the Mahāvairocana Sanctuary 大日寶殿 (see figure 34). Just like the lecture hall, the main

sanctuary's height extends two-stories tall. It is in the very center of the building right atop the lecture hall. The altar on the north side of the wall is flanked by the Twin Maṇḍalas and boasts a large Mahāvairocana behind which is a Buddha relic (Skt. *śarīra*) in the form of a skull fragment from Wuguang's corpse that has been encased within the wall. The rest of his body rests in the form of cremated remains within the ossuary stūpa.



Figure 34: Mahāvairocana Hall, third-fourth floors. Image provided by MSBL member and reproduced with full permission.

Above the fourth floor is a roof from which one can take in entire grounds in a 360° panoramic view. The four corners of the roof are crowned with two-storied square stūpas in the center of which is a single two-storied stūpa whose first floor is square while the second is circular. It is within this the round walls of the central stūpa's second floor where Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* takes place. Thus, it is within this circular space, at the very center and highest point of Mt. Five Wisdoms that Wuguang's transmission chain is perpetuated.

Having explored the core features of Mt. Five Wisdoms we are now ready to look at their significance.

Physical Features: Symbolic Significance

Just like Wuguang’s monastic designations, the MSBL’s religious emblem and lineage poem, Wuguang intentionally designed Mt. Five Wisdoms to function as a multilayered representation of his beliefs and intentions. As he worked in construction for many years and oversaw the remodeling project at Zhuxi Temple, doing so was well within his skillset. Since this skillset related to architecture, the most architecturally rich element at Mt. Five Wisdoms—the TOUB—is embedded with the greatest profusion of symbolism.

Mt. Five Wisdoms is a massive topographic representation of the Twin Maṇḍalas. This is readily apparent in the location’s name—Mt. Five Wisdoms—and its five-peaked topography. The Five Wisdoms discussed in Chapter 3 are iconographically enshrined within both the *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala* and *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* in the form of the Five Wisdom Buddhas 五智如來 (Skt. *pañca-buddha*),⁴⁸³ which is one of the reasons why the number five is a salient theme in Zhenyan/Shingon sacred space.⁴⁸⁴ Thus, the entire mountain cove is a physical representation of the Twin Maṇḍalas. As Mahāvairocana is the most esteemed of the Five Wisdom Buddhas, the TOUB—the heart of Mt. Five Wisdoms resting atop the central ‘mountain’—architecturally embodies Mahāvairocana. Thus, it is the most significant part of the MSBL’s physical maṇḍala. However, this is only part of the story.

⁴⁸³ In Zhenyan/Shingon iconography, there are two different sets of Five Wisdom Buddhas, one found in the *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala* and the other in the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*. See Louis Frédéric, *Japan Encyclopedia*, tr. Käthe Roth (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 251.

⁴⁸⁴ See Nicoloff, *Sacred Kōyasan*, 21 and 124-167.

The TOUB is not only a piece of the maṇḍala that comprises the entire monastic grounds. It is a smaller, independent structural maṇḍala within the larger, topographic one and a multi-functional stūpa. This dual maṇḍalic identity and stūpa function can be seen in the adamantine throne (Skt. *vajra-sana*) stūpa 金剛座塔 by which it is crowned. Adamantine throne stūpas—also referred to as five buddha stūpas 五佛塔—are distinguished by constituting a central stūpa that is surrounded by four smaller ones.⁴⁸⁵ The most well known adamantine throne stūpa is the Mahābodhi Temple in Bodhgayā, India located next to the Bodhi Tree. Adamantine throne stūpas are architectural representations of the *bodhimaṇḍa*, the ground from which the Bodhi Tree grew and upon which Śākyamuni sat when he attained enlightenment—an inference reflected in the fact that the term ‘adamantine throne’ is another word for *bodhimaṇḍa*.⁴⁸⁶ As the TOUB is an adamantine throne stūpa whose five points represent the Five Wisdom Buddhas, it is simultaneously an independent maṇḍala and a stūpa. As stūpas were originally constructed to house Buddha-relics, the fact that the TOUB houses a piece of Wuguang’s skull cements this function.

The name of the adamantine throne stūpa atop the TOUB—as well as its function—represents the key to unlocking the symbolism that Wuguang embedded in the TOUB and even Mt. Five Wisdoms as a whole. Wuguang named this five-towered stūpa the Iron Stūpa of south India 南天竺鐵塔.⁴⁸⁷ This name is a clear reference to Zhenyan/Shingon’s origin myth discussed in this dissertation’s introduction. As noted, this myth depicts Nāgārjuna entering an iron stūpa

⁴⁸⁵ See Clarence Eng, *Colours and Contrast: Ceramic Traditions in Chinese Architecture* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 93-94.

⁴⁸⁶ The significance of the adamantine throne/*bodhimaṇḍa* is not limited to the spatiotemporal location upon which Śākyamuni sat. It also functions as an omnidirectional soteriological *axis mundi*. See A. Snodgrass, *Symbolism of the Stupa*, 157.

⁴⁸⁷ NA, *Fojiao zhenyanzong wuzhishan guangmingwangsi* 佛教真言宗五智山光明王寺 [Buddhist Zhenyan Temple of Universal Brightness at Mt. Five Wisdoms], NA (Kaohsiung: Yimin chubanshe, 2002), 17.

in southern India and becoming the first human link in the esoteric Dharma-transmission chain. Thus, it should be no surprise that since the TOUB's construction was completed, the central tower of this Taiwanese iron stūpa—which the MSBL calls the Stūpa of Ten Thousand Buddhas 萬佛寶塔—is where Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* takes place. Thus, the original iron stūpa in South India is where the Zhenyan/Shingon chain of transmission began and the Taiwanese iron stūpa is where new links are added to this chain. This reveals that when Wuguang designed the TOUB he desired to replicate—in form, function and name—the original stūpa within whose walls Zhenyan/Shingon was brought into the human realm. There is yet one more layer of symbolism that I will now detail.

The TOUB's iron stūpa is not just a simple reference to Zhenyan/Shingon mythology as it is also a polemically motivated sectarian proclamation. I base this argument on a number of the stūpa's architectural peculiarities and specific topographic features in the surrounding area. First, the fact that this iron stūpa is not only a reference to the Zhenyan/Shingon origin myth but also to the birth of Buddhism—as depicted in Śākyamuni's enlightenment upon the *bodhimaṇḍa* and referenced in the adamant form of the TOUB—shows that Wuguang wished to present the MSBL as an all-inclusive Buddhist lineage whose doctrines and practices encapsulate the totality of the Buddha-Dharma. A single reference to one of these origin myths could be interpreted as simply a reference devoid of polemical intentions. Two references to two entirely independent origination myths indicate that this was a calculated move. The multilayered quality of this calculation implies that Wuguang felt that he had something to prove that may otherwise be called into question. The exact claim that Wuguang was making is that the MSBL is a form of orthodox—and esoteric—Buddhism that is firmly rooted in ancient transmission chains. From Wuguang's emblem and lineage poem—as well as reliance on Buddhist doctrine to articulate his

energetic ontology—it is unquestionable that Wuguang was attempting to establish a new lineage within Buddhism that would be perceived as an orthodox form of Buddhism as opposed to a new religion. The most convincing way for him to validate this claim was to reference the provenance of his different Dharma-transmissions—Chan/Zen and Zhenyan/Shingon—which we see him doing when he designed the TOUB. However, the second transmission, Zhenyan/Shingon, is in fact questionable due to the fact that Wuguang severed his connection to his Japanese Dharma-kin and ordained his own *ācāryas* without their permission. Because of this, Japanese Shingon authorities generally do not recognize MSBL priests as their Dharma-kin since Wuguang rerouted his disciples’ transmission by establishing himself as the sole fount thereof.⁴⁸⁸ This consequently calls the MSBL’s orthodoxy into question.

My interpretation of the TOUB’s symbolism as a polemic proclamation is further attested to by the iron stūpa’s architecture. The central tower—where Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* takes place—is a many-jeweled stūpa 多寶塔 (Skt. *prabhūtaratna-stūpa*) as it has a square base and circular second floor (see figures 35-36). This design differs from the more common East Asian design whose different levels are all square. This sort of structure began appearing in Japan during the Heian period 平安時代 (794-1185) and has always been associated with esoteric Buddhism.⁴⁸⁹ Like the TOUB’s deific identification as Mahāvairocana within the topographic maṇḍala of Mt. Five Wisdoms, many-jeweled stūpas are representations of

⁴⁸⁸ This is not to say that Japanese Shingon priests generally express disrespect to or refuse to interact with the devotees of the MSBL and its offshoots. In fact, there have been multiple Japanese delegations to Taiwan who have visited the TOUB and centers used by its offshoots. MSBL members and those of its offshoots have also visited Kōyasan—which I have detailed in Bahir, “Buddhist Master Wuguang’s Taiwanese Web” and “Relinking the Chain.” However, MSBL *ācāryas* are not recognized as ‘Shingon’ priests, but as priests of a derivative movement.

⁴⁸⁹ Hugo Munsterberg, *The Arts of Japan: An Illustrated History* (Rutland, VT and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1957; Seventeenth printing, 1988), 144.

Mahāvairocana’s body.⁴⁹⁰ As the many-jeweled stūpa design is a Japanese phenomenon,⁴⁹¹ the presence of one in Taiwan is truly remarkable.⁴⁹² This would seem to indicate that the many-jeweled design of the central stūpa atop the TOUB is intended to evoke the Japanese provenance of the MSBL’s Dharma-transmission. This is true, however; it is a fact a polemical reference.



Figure 35: Aerial view of the TOUB. Image from video taken by Chun Hrong Lin 林俊宏 and reproduced with full permission.



Figure 36: Aerial view of the Iron Stūpa atop the TOUB. Image from video taken by Chun Hrong Lin and reproduced with full permission.

Notwithstanding that many-jeweled stūpas were confined to Japan for over a thousand years, this Taiwanese stūpa was designed to replicate the Tang Dynasty models that Wuguang believed the Japanese Buddhists of the Heian period had mimicked.⁴⁹³ Wuguang was not referencing the Japanese provenance of his esoteric Dharma-transmission by constructing a

⁴⁹⁰ This is a multilayered association, as many-jeweled stūpas are also representative of the first of the Five Great Elements which are Mahāvairocana’s body while the sixth element, consciousness, is his mind. See Hillary E. Pedersen, “The Five Great Space Repository Bodhisattvas: Lineage, Protection and Celestial Authority in Ninth-century Japan” (PhD diss, University of Kansas, 2010), 148; Patricia J. Graham, *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art, 1600-2005* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 29.

⁴⁹¹ Although there are textual references to many-jeweled stūpas that predate this design’s Japanese debut, there are no existent examples. See Paul Groner, “Kōen and the ‘Consecrated Ordination’ within Japanese Tendai,” in *Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia: Places of Practice*, eds. James A. Benn et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 197.

⁴⁹² The only other one I am aware of in Taiwan was constructed by a Taiwanese Chan monk, Weili 惟勵 (1931-2016) who, like Wuguang, received Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* in Japan. This stūpa was built under Japanese supervision and is located in a monastic complex named Mt. Qinglong 青龍山 that houses the monastery, Acala Temple 不動寺 in Gaoshu Township 高樹鄉, Pingtung County.

⁴⁹³ Huiding, personal conversation with author, Aug. 2013.

Japanese-styled stūpa on Taiwanese soil. Instead, he was declaring that—despite popular opinion—many-jeweled stūpas are not Japanese at all as their Chinese existence predated their Japanese construction. Hence, rather than evoking the MSBL’s Japanese ancestry Wuguang’s many-jeweled stūpa is meant to recall the Chinese origins of Japanese Shingon.

This innuendo has ramifications that reverberate throughout Wuguang’s resurrecting Tang Dynasty Zhenyan by giving birth to the MSBL. The history of many-jeweled stūpa design is an architectural metaphor for Zhenyan/Shingon. Despite the fact that Wuguang received both from Japan, he is declaring that he was not the original appropriator; Kūkai and his subsequent followers were. Consequently, the MSBL is not a derivative of Japanese Shingon, but a revival of Tang Dynasty Zhenyan of which Japanese Shingon is itself a derivative. The message embedded within the architecture of the TOUB is thus a preemptive response to potential challenges to his religious authority—and the religious beliefs and practices of MSBL devotees—that could arise. Since the MSBL was founded by Wuguang severing the Japanese links in his chain of Dharma-transmission their legitimacy is inherently vulnerable to attacks from more established Buddhist lineages. If such criticism was hurled, MSBL devotees could equally call the legitimacy of Shingon authority into question by asserting that their lineage is no less an expropriation than the Japanese ones are. They could also say that Wuguang was merely emulating Kūkai, who established his own form of Buddhism after studying in China.

The TOUB is not Mt. Five Wisdom’s only integrant to make this statement. The two bodies of water due west of the TOUB, Qinglong Pond and Yongquan Pond, are named for two Buddhist temples in China directly related to Shingon’s Chinese past. The first one, Qinglong Temple 青龍寺 in the old Tang capital of Chang’an 長安 (present day Xi’an 西安), is where the Zhenyan/Shingon patriarch Amoghavajra (705-774) is said to have taught the esoteric Dharma to

Huiguo and where he in turn transmitted it to Kūkai. Yongquan Pond bears the name of Yongquan Temple in Fuzhou, which we noted in Chapter 1, was the fount of Taiwanese monastic Buddhism.⁴⁹⁴ This renders Yongquan Pond a reference to Wuguang’s Chan lineage. Nevertheless, this is not this pond’s central allusion. When Kūkai set out for Chang’an in 804, his ship was blown off course and landed near Fuzhou where the local authorities initially halted the delegation’s expedition for one month.⁴⁹⁵ As inscribed upon a stele at Yongquan Temple,⁴⁹⁶ there is a tradition—taught by Wuguang’s disciples⁴⁹⁷—that Kūkai studied at Yongquan Temple during this time.⁴⁹⁸ As Qinglong Pond is obviously a reference to Kūkai’s time in China, in light of this tradition it is logical to conclude that Yongquan Pond is as well. Thus, although these lakes are references to Kūkai, they evoke his reliance upon China for transmission of the esoteric Dharma.

The fact that Mt. Five Wisdoms is a massive maṇḍala is a further articulation of Wuguang’s sectarian polemic. Kongōbu-ji 金剛峰寺, the core temple at Kōyasan, was designed by Kūkai to be a physical maṇḍala that encompasses the Twin Maṇḍalas.⁴⁹⁹ As this was also the guiding template for the design of Mt. Five Wisdoms—in light of all of the above—it is clear that Wuguang intended for Mt. Five Wisdoms to serve as ground zero for Zhenyan/Shingon’s

⁴⁹⁴ See page 48.

⁴⁹⁵ Abé, *Weaving of Mantra*, 114-115.

⁴⁹⁶ Hayashi Hiroshige 林廣茂, “*Kūkai to Nagayasu: Kūkai no ashiato o junkō suru* 空海と長安: 空海の足跡を巡行する [Kūkai and Chang’an: In the Footsteps of Kūkai’s Voyage],” Unpublished paper, (2008): 2. Online: <http://www.hayashihiroshige.jp/travel.html> (accessed Feb. 3, 2015).

⁴⁹⁷ Edward Li 李居明, *Mizongde miyi yu xingfa* 密宗的秘儀與行法 [The Secret Meaning of Esoteric Buddhism and Cultivation], 2008. Online: <http://lifedevotee.likuiming.com/PrearticleDetail.aspx?id=41> (accessed Jun. 16, 2015). Mr. Li was a disciple of Wuguang and is discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁹⁸ See Wu Qingyuan 吳清源, *Zhongde jingshen: weiqi zhi shen wuqingyuan zizhuan* 中的精神: 圍棋之神 吳清源自傳 [Moral Spirit: Wu Qingyuan, the God of Go’s Autobiography] (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2010), 44.

⁴⁹⁹ See David. L. Gardiner, “Maṇḍala, Maṇḍala on the Wall: Variations of Usage in the Shingon School,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 19, no. 2 (1996): 245-279.

future in lieu of Kongōbu-ji, a future that he we know he believed lay in the West and is expressed in the TOUB's European architecture.

Interlude

During Wuguang's life, embarking upon the road to priestly ordination merely required asking for permission. This is no longer the case as one must first perform a preliminary esoteric practice⁵⁰⁰ in conjunction with reciting specific mantras tens of thousands of times.⁵⁰¹ This transition exemplifies a change in leadership and community-building methodology. As we are already intimately familiar with Wuguang, the MSBL's history and symbolic significance of its spiritual home, let us now discuss how it has fared since its founder passed away.

Section III: Current Status

Since Wuguang's passing in 2000, Huiding 徽定 (b. 1956; secular name Jiang Huixiong 蔣徽雄, Dharma-name Chezhen 徹真, a.k.a. Cheding 徹定) has been the sect's spiritual leader (see figures 37-39). Huiding was born in the Kaohsiung suburb of Yong'an Township 永安鄉 to mainlander parents. He became interested in Buddhism while in high school and took refuge under Wuguang at Zhuxi Temple in 1986 at the age of 19.⁵⁰² After graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Taichung's Feng Chia University 逢甲大學 and finishing his mandatory military service, he began studying at the Hua Yen Institute of Buddhist Studies 華嚴專宗學院佛學研究所 in Taipei in 1983. He reports that the curriculum at the Hua

⁵⁰⁰ The preliminary practice that one must perform is a rite dedicated to Cintāmaṇi-cakra-avalokiteśvara. This rite's core visualization can be found in Robert H. Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003): 66-67.

⁵⁰¹ The mantras that one must recite include the Mantra of Light 光明真言, *Sitātapatroṣṇīṣa-dhāraṇī* 佛頂真言 (T 2131.54.1071c6) and others.

⁵⁰² Huiding, semi-structured interview, Apr. 2014.

Yen Institute of Buddhist Studies included *āgama* studies, modern research methodologies, Western and Chinese philosophy, *Yijing* 易經 studies, Japanese, Sanskrit and Tibetan, comparative Chinese-Indian Buddhology, Buddhist sectarianism, *vinaya*, Tiantai and Huayan Studies.⁵⁰³ After graduating in 1986, he became a tonsured monk under Wuguang and revived full monastic ordination at Kaohsiung's Yuan Heng Temple 元亨寺 later that year. In 1999, Wuguang appointed him abbot of the TOUB. In addition, he currently serves on the board of directors of the Kaohsiung Buddhist Association, the Kaohsiung branch of the BAROC mentioned above.

Huiding's presentation of Buddhism and his vision for the community differ from Wuguang's in many respects. While Wuguang was a betel nut-chewing, cigarette-smoking charismatic leader who often spoke of magical powers and preternatural occurrences, Huiding's persona fits the image of what one would expect of a modern Buddhist abbot. While friendly, he projects an air of authority. One can already see the roots of such a difference in their dissimilar educational backgrounds. Wuguang spent most of his life exorcising ghosts, creating alchemical concoctions and only later studied Buddhist modernism after becoming a monk at Zhuxi Temple. Huiding was introduced to more modern and 'rational' forms of Buddhism immediately after graduating from college. Huiding's teachings are much more exoteric. In fact, in his lectures I have heard him commonly reference Taixu and even Yinshun, despite the fact that the latter was an open critic of esoteric Buddhism and Huiding is the abbot of an esoteric Buddhist monastery. The majority of Huiding's lectures are on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, Kūkai's Ten Stages of the

⁵⁰³ Huiding, "Xian daoshi zhuisi zansong wen 先導師追思讚頌文 [Memorial Article for Master Xian]," *ALL Ways Monthly* 275 (2011): 60. Online: <http://www.huayen.org.tw/allWays/275.pdf> (accessed Oct. 18, 2015).

Mind⁵⁰⁴ and the *Discourse on Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* 大乘起信論. He runs an ongoing course that meets every four to six weeks at the TOUB. Devotees who were disciples of Wuguang while he was still alive generally do not attend this course. The same is true for the Mantra of Light workshops that he occasionally teaches.



Figure 37: 1994 *abhiṣeka* workshop class. In the center sits Wuguang to whose left sits the taller and younger Huiding. Monastics are dressed in blue robes while lay *ācāryas* are wearing black robes. Image provided by MSBL member and reproduced with full permission.

⁵⁰⁴ Refer to note 387.



Figure 38: Huiding leading MSBL members in Kōyasan. Image provided by MSBL member and reproduced with full permission.



Figure 39: Huiding and Wuguang at a Buddha-bathing ceremony at the TOUB. Image provided by MSBL member and reproduced with full permission.

During my fieldwork, Huiding instructed me not to pay attention to the miraculous stories surrounding Wuguang. He never denies the validity of such things, but prefers not to speak openly about them. It is not that his religious beliefs necessarily differ from Wuguang's, rather, he approaches the role of a religious leader differently from how his predecessor did. Whereas Wuguang openly taught the esoteric, Huiding adopts a much more secretive and selective way to disseminate the MSBL's doctrines. This can be seen in Huiding's adding ritual prerequisites to the *abhiṣeka* process. His role as the gate-keeper to the MSBL's spiritual technology is not limited to deciding who becomes a priest. When one wishes to become a member of the MSBL, the first step is to acquire a mantra from Huiding. The devotee is instructed to recite this mantra often, whenever he has the chance and then to report to Huiding on how it has impacted his life and if he has had any insights into the mantra's meaning. Reflecting his role as the lineage-head—despite the fact that there are other MSBL members who studied with Wuguang longer than Huiding did—only Huiding is allowed to instruct students in mantra recitation and ritual

performance in Taiwan.⁵⁰⁵ These instructions occur during specific retreats, when taking refuge or by appointment.

Now that we are familiar with the MSBL's home, leader and trajectory, let us look at its religious practices and activities.

Praxis and Activities

The events that take place at the TOUB can roughly be grouped into three categories: cultivational, communal and commemorative. These are separated by their foci and participants. Cultivational activities include the daily rituals performed by the monastics and rituals performed by lay devotees. Communal events are services with greater attendance that are open to the public that are still of a purely religious nature. Commemorative events—which are those with the greatest attendance in terms of both numbers and diversity—mark the life and death of Wuguang as well as key moments in the MSBL's short history.

As we will see, the orthopraxis of the MSBL represents a fusion of Zhenyan/Shingon, traditional Taiwanese monastic Buddhism, Daoism and Tibetan Buddhism. In this next section we will pay special attention to this weave while exploring how Wuguang's esoteric-necromantic-energetic doctrines translated into the MSBL's orthopraxis.

Cultivational

The daily ritual life of the TOUB's residents is centered in the Mahāvairocana Hall on the third-fourth floors. I have created a blueprint detailing the specific features of this hall including the deities, symbolism and layout. The darker area represents a raised platform upon which the

⁵⁰⁵ The only other member of the MSBL I am aware of who is allowed to give such instructions is the head of the MSBL's Hong Kong Branch, Chehong 徹鴻 who, although not the MSBL's lineage head, has a role in Hong Kong similar to that of Huiding's in Taiwan.

deities and three Zhenyan/Shingon styled altars are found (see figures 40-41). The central deity is Mahāvairocana, in front of whom are Amitābha (to the west), Śākyamuni (center), and Akṣobhya (east). Each is flanked by their usual accompanying deities whose names are detailed below the diagram. There are two daily rituals that take place in this space, one in the morning and one in the evening.

The morning ritual 早課 begins at 5:00 a.m. Devotees enter the Mahāvairocana Hall in accordance with Zhenyan/Shingon custom with their hands loosely clenched in a fist and held at the waist, giving the appearance that their hands are resting on their hips. Upon choosing a seat that consists of a square meditation cushion in front of a desk containing the liturgical texts, one clasps their hands in respect (Skt: *añjali*) while prostrating three times. Although clasping one's hands and bowing in this manner is largely a universal Buddhist custom, there are nuances to how this is performed. In Japanese Shingon—and the MSBL—one's hands are held in the adamantine clasp 金剛合掌 (*vajra-añjali*) where the fingers and thumbs of the hands are slightly intertwined with one another. This differs from the majority of other traditional Buddhist communities where the fingers are pressed against one another.

On every occasion that I have stayed the night, the majority of the residents who live in the TOUB attend this morning ritual while most of Wuguang's relatives who live in the house built in his memory do not. The key feature of this ritual is the recitation of the *Adhyarthaśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* 大樂金剛不空真實三摩耶經. This text is one of the core texts of Zhenyan/Shingon and also recited daily in Shingon temples in Japan. Rather than reciting the sūtra in accordance with Japanese or even Mandarin pronunciation, the TOUB devotees chant it in Taiwanese—as is the case with all sūtra chanting at the TOUB. The recitation is led by a resident monk on a microphone who also hammers the large woodenfish.

NORTH

<i>Vajra- maṇḍala</i>	<i>Sukhāvātī</i>		Mahāvairocana			<i>Abhirati</i>		<i>Garbha- maṇḍala</i>	
	1	Amitābha	2	3	Śākyamuni	4	5	Akṣobhya	6
	Cintāmaṇi-cakra- avalokiteśvara		Āryavalokiteśvara						
Patriarchs	Esoteric Altar		Esoteric Altar			Esoteric Altar		Patriarchs	
	Woodenfish					Bell			
Windows	Female Seating		Walkway			Male Seating		Windows	
Female Entrance							Male Entrance		
			Door to veranda						

Names of the deities in the retinues of Amitābha, Śākyamuni and Akṣobhya	
1. Mahā-sthāma-prāpta 2. Avalokiteśvara 3. Samantabhadra	4. Mañjuśrī 5. Candraprabha 6. Sūryaprabha

Figure 40: Layout of Mahāvairocana Hall, third-fourth floors.



Figure 41: The raised platform in the Mahāvairocana Hall on the third-fourth floors. Image provided by MSBL member and reproduced with full permission.

Once the sūtra recitation is well underway three elder members of the MSBL, one by one, make a late appearance. The first two are elderly monks who were among Wuguang’s first *ācāryas*. Huiding is the third. As the congregation is in the midst of chanting, no attention is paid to these three when they enter. They make their way from the men’s entrance, through the walkway and then up the stairs to the raised platform where they sit at one of the three esoteric altars that has already been prepared. Huiding always sits in the middle one. These altars are both arranged and equipped in accordance with Zhenyan/Shingon liturgical prescriptions that are consistent with those found in Japan.⁴⁹⁹ The ritual procedures that these three senior monks perform upon these altars mirror that as found in the Eighteen Postures Ritual 十八道 of the Quadrilateral Cultivation.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ This arrangement is detailed in Richard K. Payne, *Feeding the Gods: The Shingon Fire Ritual* (Phd diss, University of California, Berkeley, 1985), 110-116.

⁵⁰⁰ See Miyata Taisen, *Handbook on the Four Stages of Prayoga Chūin Branch of Shingon Tradition*, 5 vols. (Kōyasan: Department of Koyasan Shingon Foreign Mission, 1988).

While the three senior members are still performing the esoteric rites, after the congregation finishes chanting the *Adhyarthaśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* they then recite five mantras that are associated with the Five Wisdom Buddhas of the *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala* that are followed by numerous mantras to other deities, the Zhenyan/Shingon patriarchs, Wuguang, the Mantra of Light and finally the dispersal of merit. The three senior members then finish their practices and make their way out of the sanctuary. Once the congregation finishes chanting, they all rise and face the inner walkway with hands in the adamantine clasp. Once these three have made their way out, the congregation—in two, gender-segregated single-filed lines—makes their way down to the first floor. From there, they walk through the corridors adjacent to the lecture hall, exit the building and go to the *homa* altars (see figure 42). The men go to the altar on the east while the women go to the altar on the west. There, they bow to one of the three senior members (on the men’s, eastern side it has always been Huiding during my visits) who sits in front of the *homa* altar. Except for those who assist the *homa* ritualist, everyone then goes back to their rooms to change clothing before heading to the basement for breakfast.

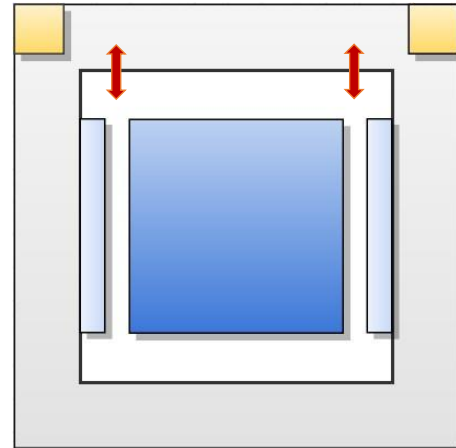


Figure 42: Floorplan of TOUB’s first floor. The gray area represents the veranda, at whose northeastern and northwestern corners the *homa* sanctuaries are depicted in yellow. Inside, the Illuminating Lecture Hall is indicated in dark blue and flanked by the administrative offices and library on the west and a room used for classes and meetings on the right. The corridors—indicated by white space—lead out to the north side of the veranda via exits marked in red.

Immediately after breakfast, residents and retreatants dedicate themselves to the upkeep of the monastery. This includes: sweeping, mopping, gardening, window washing, meal preparation (as three meals are served a day) and more overtly religious concerns such as

cleaning up the *homa* altars and changing the offerings in the Mahāvairocana Hall on the third-fourth floors. There are offerings of fruit on each of the three esoteric altars in the Mahāvairocana hall discussed above. These offerings are donated by lay devotees. After breakfast—since the fruits have already been offered—they are taken away to be eaten by the residents or donated to charity. There is an abundance of such fruit at Mt. Five Wisdoms as the surrounding mountains boast a variety of fruit bearing trees cultivated by the monastics. These include kumquats, lychees, oranges, plums and limes. The fruits grown on the monastic grounds are not used as offerings; only those donated by lay devotees are offered. I was told this is in order to ‘share the merit’ generated by these rituals with members who do not reside at the TOUB and can therefore not partake in the performance of the rituals on a daily basis.

The evening ritual 晚課 is much shorter than the one performed in the morning. It is also more exoteric. No esoteric sūtras are recited, there are no esoteric rituals performed on stage and there is no *homa* at the end. The scriptural recitation is the twenty-fifth chapter of Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*. After this is finished, five mantras associated with the Five Wisdom Buddhas of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* are recited. The rest of the service is the same as the morning, save for there being no *homa*.

Analysis

The morning and evening rituals showcase the mixture of Chinese Chan Buddhism and Japanese esoteric Buddhism in the MSBL’s orthopraxis. It also shows how they have Sinicized these practices. In addition to reciting the *Adhyarthaśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in Taiwanese—rather than Japanese—pronunciation, the way lay members wear their ritual garb is done in accordance with the normal Taiwanese fashion. At Japanese Shingon centers in Taiwan, not only is Japanese pronunciation adopted but also attire as devotees wear Japanese styled black robes

over white kimonos. At the TOUB, lay devotees wear a robe that they refer to as a ‘black ocean’ 黑海 (elsewhere widely referred to as a *haiqing* 海青), which is commonly worn by lay Buddhists—and even Daoists—throughout Taiwan. Underneath the black robe devotees simply wear their regular clothes. Thus, although they are performing rituals that Wuguang learned in Japan, they are doing so in Taiwanese Buddhist clothing and pronunciation.

Another small difference is the hand-held incense censer 手爐 used by the MSBL. In Japan, this censer holds powdered incense. At the TOUB, the incense censer holds stick incense (see figure 43). This detail may seem miniscule, but it is yet another example of the ways in which the MSBL has Sinicized their Dharma-



Figure 43: Taiwanese Zhenyan hand-held censer.

transmission. Stick-holding censers are commonplace in Taiwan, particularly in Daoist temples. They range in size, shape and color. Some are very simple, unadorned and thus outwardly resemble those used in Japan. Others are more elaborate and are fashioned in the image of a dragon. Those used by the MSBL are the less conspicuous kind. This is undoubtedly done to distance their rituals from non-Buddhist Taiwanese practices while simultaneously Sinicizing them.

These ritual, linguistic and material nuances are the inner, ritual manifestations of Wuguang’s wish to fashion the MSBL as a ‘Chinese’ form of esoteric Buddhism that we saw outwardly expressed in the TOUB’s architecture and the surrounding features of Mt. Five Wisdoms.

In addition to these Japanese-derived ritual nuances, the MSBL's orthopraxis contains one Tibetan element that is firmly rooted in Wuguang's private religiosity—the Tibetan *phowa*. Although members of the MSBL do not openly speak of their *phowa* practices, they do in fact perform them. Due to the secrecy surrounding the MSBL's *phowa*, I have not been given details concerning its nuances. Nevertheless, it represents another aspect of Wuguang's personal spiritual life that made its way into MSBL orthopraxis. The *phowa* was the rite Elder Gongga taught at Zhuxi Temple during the retreat that Wuguang organized, and thus represents his first-known exposure to esoteric Buddhism. Moreover, Shinzen Young reports that Wuguang displayed magical abilities that he explained were outcomes of his *phowa* practice. The MSBL's *phowa* practices are based on a text that Wuguang wrote entitled *The Sūtra of Eternal Life* 臨終不斷經.⁵⁰¹ This work goes into detail about the spirit's postmortem journey and makes allusions as how to navigate the different paths of rebirth. Wuguang's composing a scripture in Chinese in order to make these practices accessible can be considered an additional example of his appropriation and Sinification strategy.

Communal Rituals

The TOUB hosts a bi-monthly *homa* on the first and fifteenth of every Chinese lunar month, which are traditional days of worship in Daoism and Chinese folk religion. These are performed either by monastics, or lay MSBL priests who travel to the TOUB. As these are not well attended, the following section focuses on the MSBL's five major public religious events: Refuge, Śākyamuni's birthday celebration, the Spring Astrological Blessing ritual, Fall Astrological Blessing ritual and the *Ullambana*. We will now look at these individually.

⁵⁰¹ Wuguang, *Linzhong buduan jing* 臨終不斷經 [The Sūtra of Eternal Life] (Kaohsiung: Guangmingwang si, 1993).

Refuge

The Buddhist refuge ceremony is the Buddhist conversion ceremony. In most forms of Buddhism this entails taking refuge in the Three Precious Gems (Skt. *tri-ratna*) of Buddha, Dharma and *saṃgha*. In certain forms of esoteric Buddhism such as the MSBL, one takes refuge in the Four Precious Gems (*catū-ratna*), which include the additional gem of root teacher or guru. The guru of the MSBL is of course Wuguang. Not everyone who attends classes at the MSBL is in fact a refuged member. One couple whom I frequently spoke with did not take refuge during the first year and a half of their attending Huiding’s regularly scheduled classes. This was not due to MSBL regulations, but their own choice. The reason they gave was that since MSBL refuge includes binding karmic affinity *abhiṣeka* that creates a bond between the refuge-taker and the guru, they wanted to be entirely sure that they wished to forge this eternal link.

This karmic bond is cemented by anointing the heads of refuge-takers with a mixture of consecrated oils. This is done with a sacred vase 壺 (also 瓶; Skt. *kalaśa*) that sports a long curved spout. During the ritual—which takes place in the Mahāvairocana Hall—Huiding anoints the head of the each devotee one by one while aided by a senior MSBL member. While being anointed the refuge-taker recites the following:

Homage to the Guru!
Homage to the Buddha!
Homage to the Dharma!
Homage to the *Samgha*!⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² Original text: “南無古魯毘耶! 南無佛陀耶! 南無達摩耶! 南無僧伽耶!”

After this part of the ritual has been performed the attendees are then instructed in the performance of *Cintāmaṇi-cakra-avalokiteśvara* ritual mentioned above and how to pronounce the Sanskrit text of the Mantra of Light.

The instructions of the *Cintāmaṇi-cakra-avalokiteśvara* ritual are done orally. The only text provided is a small, thin volume with the ritual procedures in which the mantras are written in Siddham,⁵⁰³ Chinese and Katakana. During this instruction the students are taught how to pronounce the mantras in accordance with MSBL tradition and the exact way to perform the mudras and the specifics regarding the maṇḍalic visualizations. There are some differences between how the MSBL performs these and how they are practiced in Japan that are discussed in the Chapter 6. They are also given a lesson on the importance of secrecy and instructed never to speak of the nuances of these rituals to the uninitiated.

After becoming a member of the MSBL, the devotees are encouraged to perform the rituals and recite the mantras at home.

Śākyamuni's Birthday Celebration

In Chinese forms of Buddhism, Śākyamuni's birthday is said to be on the eighth day of the fourth Chinese lunar month. During the weeks before and after these dates, Taiwanese Buddhist temples commonly celebrate this occasion through performing the Buddha-bathing ritual 浴佛法會 while some additionally perform a Medicine Buddha ritual 藥師佛法會. At the TOUB, these are celebrated on the same weekend, with the Buddha-bathing preceding the Medicine Buddha ritual. During the former, devotees 'bathe' a small image of the baby

⁵⁰³ Siddham is a mono-syllabic Sanskrit script sacred to Zhenyan/Shingon. See Richard K. Payne "Ajikan: Ritual and Meditation in the Shingon Tradition," in *Re-visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 223.

Śākyamuni with his right hand pointing towards the sky and his left to the ground in reference to his miraculous nativity story.⁵⁰⁴ This is an extremely common ritual in Taiwan celebrated in a variety of Buddhist communities. The Medicine Buddha ritual is less common.

The Medicine Buddha ritual takes place on the first floor of the TOUB in the Illuminating Lecture Hall that has already been segregated into an inner and outer sanctuary by means of a portable wall. The ritual begins by circumambulating the hall in a counter-clockwise direction thrice while reciting the mantra of Acala, “*namaḥ samanta vajrānāṃ caṇḍa-mahāroṣaṇa-
sphotaya hūṃ traḥ hāṃ māṃ.*” This circumambulation is gender-segregated, with the men leading the women.

After completing the three circumambulations, everyone finds their seats in either the inner or outer sanctuary after which two different rituals—one inner and one outer—commence. Behind the wall and inside the makeshift inner sanctuary, roughly ten MSBL monastics perform a *homa* while roughly two hundred devotees—who cannot see the *homa* due to the wall—recite the *Medicine Buddha Sūtra*, the Medicine Buddha Mantra, various mantras associated with a plethora of deities, the Mantra of Light and a mantra composed by Wuguang.

The fact that the *homa* is hidden from public eye reveals the secrecy within which the MSBL cloaks its rituals. Although notable, it is in fact quite mild compared to the secrecy surrounding another one of the MSBL’s communal rites.

⁵⁰⁴ For this story and its relationship to the Buddha-bathing ritual, see Miriam Levering, “The Precocious Child in Chinese Buddhism,” in *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions*, ed. Vanessa R. Sasson, Religion, culture, and history series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 132-138.

Astrological Ritual

The astrological rituals 攘星法會 performed at the TOUB are based on Wuguang's views of the celestial bodies as the agents of karma we saw in the previous chapter. It is executed with the expressed intent to counteract the damaging effects on one's lifespan and health caused by past life karma that are made manifest through astrological forces. The ritual is performed in the lecture hall on the first-second floors under strict secrecy. The doors to the ritual space are locked and the windows—which are always unobstructed at other times—are veiled by curtains (see figure 44). Public participation occurs on the first and final days of this ritual when devotees write their wishes alongside their names and those of their loved ones on sticks of wood that will be consumed during the Big Dipper *homa* 北斗七星護摩法 that marks both the beginning and end of this week-long ritual.



Figure 44: Front entrance to the Illuminating Lecture Hall whose doors and windows have been locked and covered with curtains to ensure secrecy and prevent disturbances.

This ritual last for seven days, during which time MSBL priests—both lay and monastic, male and female—share the responsibility of this ritual’s performance by taking two hour shifts, twenty-four hours a day throughout the entire week. This happens twice a year, beginning on Chinese New Year’s Eve and the first week of the seventh month of the Chinese Lunar Calendar popularly referred to as Ghost Month. Although shrouded in secrecy, the ritual contains elements from Tang Dynasty Zhenyan and Daoism that are discernible in the iconography and liturgy employed as well as the times when the ritual is performed.

I have been told that this ritual centers on the bodhisattva Sudṛṣṭi 妙見菩薩 and involves his maṇḍala. During the Tang Dynasty Sudṛṣṭi came to be seen as the deified form of the Big Dipper constellation, believed to be in charge of one’s lifespan. This occurred during a time when the exact school of esoteric Buddhism that Wuguang was attempting to resurrect—Tang Zhenyan—was creating a fusion between esoteric Buddhist and Daoist astrological beliefs and rituals. The stated purpose of this ritual to counteract the negative effects of one’s lifespan and health and the centrality of this deity reveals that Wuguang based this ritual in part on these Tang Dynasty texts.⁵⁰⁵

The Daoist elements contained in this ritual are revealed in the exact times it is performed. A similar, week-long ritual dedicated to the Big Dipper Constellation is commonly conducted at Daoist temples throughout Taiwan at the same times as the MSBL’s. This timing is based on traditional Chinese religious beliefs regarding the forces of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 rather than Buddhist doctrine. There is a belief that the changing of the seasons are a result of shifts in

⁵⁰⁵ See Henrik H. Sørensen, “Astrology and the Worship of the Planets in Esoteric Buddhism of the Tang,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, eds. Charles D. Orzech et al. *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 230-244.

the forces of *yin* and *yang*. The first fifteen days of the Chinese first month is believed to be a time when the forces of *yang* are on the ascent and the forces of *yin* are on the decline. The exact opposite relationship is believed to occur during the midpoint of the year—the beginning of the seventh month—when *yin* is on the ascent and *yang* in decline. Due to these beliefs, these two weeks are some of the most heavily ritualized times in the Chinese calendar.⁵⁰⁶ The fact that the MSBL performs these rituals at these specific times is no coincidence and Huiding himself has pointed out the similarities between the ritual as performed at the TOUB and in Daoist settings.⁵⁰⁷ From these details it is clear that the MSBL’s secretive stellar ritual is the product of Wuguang’s integrating Daoist elements into the Tang Dynasty astrological rituals—the latter which already contained Daoist elements. Given Wuguang’s lifelong practice of Daoist bodily cultivation, this is unsurprising.

As noted in Chapter 4, *yin* is associated with the netherworld. *Yin*’s ascent during the seventh month played a major role in East Asian Buddhists’ choosing the fifteenth day of the seventh month to perform the *Ullambana* festival.⁵⁰⁸ At the MSBL, the mid-year astrological ritual concludes the day before the *Ullambana* is performed. As these two rites are inextricable from one another in the context of the MSBL’s orthopraxis, let us now explore this connections as well as the rite’s nuances. Although it begins in astrological secrecy, it concludes in a very public display of filial piety. As we will see, just as Wuguang’s beliefs concerning astrology

⁵⁰⁶ Michael Como, *Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 262, n. 30.

⁵⁰⁷ Huiding, “*Xu* 序 [Procedure],” in *Xuantian shangdi zhi fazhan* 玄天上帝信仰之發展 [The Development of the Supreme Emperor of the Mysterious Heaven],” ed. Huang Fabao 黃發保 (Taiwan: Daojiao Xueshu, 2010), 22-23.

⁵⁰⁸ Como, *Weaving and Binding*, 100.

manifested in the astrological rituals performed at the TOUB, his necromantic fascination can be seen in the MSBL's *Ullambana*.

Ullambana

The other major ritual at the TOUB is the ritual aimed at ferrying the spirits of the dead from a ghostly existence to a more positive one. As noted, this ritual—known to Buddhists as the *Ullambana* 盂蘭盆 and Daoists as the Midsummer Spirit Festival 中元節—came under attack throughout Asia during the rise of Buddhist modernism due to its ‘superstitious’ nature and the non-Buddhist elements contained therein,⁵⁰⁹ so much so that Taiwanese Buddhists themselves, influenced by Japanese Zen, attempted to abolish it.⁵¹⁰ Within the orthopraxis of the MSBL—due to Wuguang's necromantic fascinations—it has been recentralized. This ritual is usually performed on the fifteenth day of Ghost Month 鬼月, the seventh Chinese lunar month.

The ritual as practiced at the TOUB represents a mix of Chinese Buddhio-Daoist customs and Zhenyan/Shingon ritual techniques. The ritual elements common in Taiwanese settings such as scripture recitation, familial offerings, candy toss⁵¹¹ and wearing the crown of Kṣitigarbha⁵¹² are interwoven with mantras associated with the Zhenyan/Shingon pantheon, the Mantra of Light and procedures drawn from the Quadrilateral Cultivation. Unlike the rituals detailed above, this

⁵⁰⁹ For more information on the history of the *Ullambana* see Charles D. Orzech, “Saving the Burning-Mouth Hungry Ghost,” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr., Princeton Readings in Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 278-283 and Guang Xing, “Yulanpen Festival and Chinese Ancestor Worship,” *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka* 9 (2011): 123-143.

⁵¹⁰ See Chapter 1.

⁵¹¹ At the conclusion of the liturgical part of the ceremony, the officiating clerics take handfuls of food—most commonly treats such as candy and cakes—and throw them in front of the altar. Children and sweet-toothed adults then descend upon the goodies in a chaotic yet peaceful effort to collect as many of their favorite snacks. Although playful, this is done for the benefit of the spirits of the dead.

⁵¹² Also referred to as a Five-Buddha Crown 五佛冠, this religious headpiece is more commonly found in Tibetan Buddhism but has been increasingly used in Chinese circles since the late Ming Dynasty 明朝 (1368-1644). See Kevin R. E. Greenwood, “Yonghegong: Imperial Universalism and the Art and Architecture of Beijing's ‘Lama Temple’” (PhD diss, University of Kansas, 2013), 260 and Ng, *Making of a Savior Bodhisattva*, 98-125.

one is performed facing south rather than north. It is also held in the basement cafeteria rather than the Illuminating Lecture or Mahāvairocana Hall. The esoteric part of this rite—which is not attended by the public—begins during the astrological ritual. In the basement a table is arranged with Zhenyan/Shingon ritual implements in front of scriptures, talismans and images related to the Pure Land where MSBL priests perform rites dedicated to the dead (see figure 45). After the preliminary private rite has concluded on the last day of the astrological ceremony, the basement is rearranged in preparation for the public *Ullambana*.

The *Ullambana* is led by a number of monastics who sit at a long table that has been placed in the middle of the basement cafeteria. This table faces south, overlooking offerings of food that devotees have placed on tables before the ritual's commencement. The prime officiator—indicated by his wearing the crown of Kṣitigarbha, sits at the long table's center. While leading the congregational chant, he performs ritual elements drawn from the Quadrilateral Cultivation on a makeshift altar arranged in accordance with Zhenyan/Shingon formula (see figures 46-47).



Figure 45: Ritual setup for the early, esoteric preparatory part of the *Ullambana* ceremony.



Figure 46: Candy Toss. As the resident monastics perform the concluding elements of the ceremony, devotees scramble to collect treats that have been thrown.



Figure 47: The central seat and altar used by the ritual officiator. Notice the presence of the Zhenyan/Shingon elements such as the *vajra* bell, singing bowl, flower petals and various kinds of incense.

The inclusion of Zhenyan/Shingon elements and relationship to the astrological ritual are not the only characteristics of the MSBL's *Ullambana* that distinguish it from those practiced at other Taiwanese temples. Unlike other religious centers that perform the *Ullambana* once a year during Ghost Month, as is typical, the MSBL performs it an additional two times, coinciding

with the celebration of Wuguang's birthday—which is when the TOUB's completion is also celebrated—and the day of Wuguang's death. When I asked why, I was told that it was in order to share the merit generated by the MSBL with all sentient beings, in all realms, as often as possible.

Public Events

There are four public, commemorative events held annually at the TOUB. The first two are respectively Kūkai's birthday and his date of death. These events are generally not very well attended. Each time I have gone only a handful of followers have come. Kūkai's birth and death are marked by a rite held in the Mahāvairocana Hall centered on reciting the Mantra of Light. The third event is a combined celebration of Wuguang's birthday and the opening of the TOUB. It is held on Wuguang's Chinese calendrical birthday, on the third day of the eleventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar. Wuguang's death is commemorated on twenty-first day of the sixth Chinese lunar month.

In contrast to Kūkai's commemorations, these latter two events are the most widely attended of all MSBL activities. During these days Wuguang's eldest disciples—who rarely come to the TOUB—make it a priority to come and pay their respects. A great many MSBL members who live in Hong Kong also make their way to these events. It is also the only time I have ever seen any of Wuguang's children who did not become priests come to the TOUB.

In contrast to the secretive and somber atmosphere cultivated during the communal religious rituals, these two occasions are celebrated with drum performances, skits and dances put on by children of MSBL members. The events are also catered, with free gourmet coffee stands, snack stands and even cartoon artists present. As mentioned, at the end of each of these another *Ullambana* is performed. These additional *Ullambanas* are not central features of these

events and many MSBL members leave before they begin as they are performed after the main festivities have already concluded.

Analysis

The data just presented reveals the activities of the MSBL, levels of participation, and the various threads from which her orthopraxis is woven. As seen from the mixture of Shingon, Daoist, and common Chinese elements, there has been an intentional effort to Sinify the Japanese components. However, I conclude that there is also a discernible intention to substitute common Chinese religious practices in order to appeal to the common Taiwanese religious palate. This can be seen from the *homas* that are performed on the first and fifteenth of each Chinese-lunar month—which are usual days for ancestor veneration—as well as the astrological rituals that are performed at the same times as their Daoist counterparts. Were these practices not instituted, MSBL devotees—who come from predominantly Buddho-Daoist-folk religious backgrounds—would have to seek elsewhere to have their religious needs met.

This sort of targeted catering speaks to the MSBL's recruitment strategies, why devotees are attracted to it, and adds another layer to our understanding the MSBL's orthopraxis—since it was intentionally constructed by a single person, rather than developing over time. These insights can be gained by sociologically analyzing the MSBL's demographics, history, activities and evolution via the Religious Economy Model (REM) mentioned in the introduction. Now that we have analyzed the MSBL from a ritualistic and ideological perspective, we turn our attention to her place within the Taiwanese religious market.

Section IV: The Sociological Significance of the MSBL

Thus far, this chapter has looked at the history, headquarters, status and activities of the MSBL while explaining their architect's intentions. From the ritual nuances detailed—particularly concerning the astrological rite, multiple *Ullambanas* and *phowa* practices—it is obvious that the magical practices we saw Wuguang explain in the previous chapter in order to rescue them from the category of 'superstition' manifested as the most important public religious events held at the TOUB. Thus, there is an undeniable connection between Wuguang's personal beliefs and the MSBL's orthopraxis. However, the MSBL's significance lies not only in its dead founder, but in its living propagators and its position within the Taiwanese—and increasingly international—context. In order to appreciate this significance, the rest of this chapter offers a sociological analysis of the MSBL.

This analysis is accomplished by approaching the MSBL as a New Religious Movement (NRM), while employing the Religious Economy Model (REM) as utilized by Rodney Stark and like-minded sociologists of religion. To do so, I employ a distinction between magic and religion that is parallel to the binary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy laid out by Wuguang.⁵¹³ As cited in this dissertation's introduction, according to Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, "magic does not concern itself with the meaning of the universe, but only with the manipulation of the universe for specific goals...magic deals in relatively specific compensators, and religion always includes the most general compensators."⁵¹⁴ In simple terms, magic has definitive and worldly goals that can be empirically disproven. Religion does not offer these. Instead, it offers answers about the ultimate meaning of the universe.

⁵¹³ See Chapter 3.

⁵¹⁴ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 30. Also see this dissertation's Introduction, "Magic."

The Religious Marketplace

As noted, REM frames both religion and magic as ‘products,’ while treating religious organizations as ‘suppliers,’ and religious individuals as ‘consumers.’ As a deductive model for the global religious market, it is used to understand why new religions are born, and predict whether a religion will flourish or flounder. REM applies Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to understand why religious consumers make the choices they do, which is the true driving force behind the contours the religious marketplace since religious suppliers “try to address the needs of their intended constituencies, adapting their services as conditions change or as competition with other suppliers increases.”⁵¹⁵ Humans are shown to make predictable decisions based upon ‘background factors’ that predispose them to joining a religion, and ‘situational contingencies’ that create the right set of circumstances for them to join.⁵¹⁶ REM explains religious pluralism and the reason NRMs form, since “no single supplier can satisfy the full array of niches in the religious market...other things being equal, there will always be a variety of suppliers, each competing to attract a particular niche or set of niches.”⁵¹⁷ Since consumer needs drive the religious marketplace, if a need is not being met by the dominant religious organization or organizations, religious suppliers will form NRMs tailored to meet the unmet market needs.

Within a pluralistic marketplace, consumers will make rational choices largely based on ‘getting the most for their capital.’ Similar to a consumer who is in need of a specific product will ‘shop around,’ looking for the product that offers the greatest benefit for the lowest price,

⁵¹⁵ Graeme Lang, Selina Chan, and Lars Ragvald, “Temples and the Religious Economy,” in *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*, eds. Fenggang Yang and Joseph B. Tamney (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 149.

⁵¹⁶ John Lofland and Rodney Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 30, no. 6 (1965): 864.

⁵¹⁷ Rodney Stark, *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief* (NP: Harper Collins e-books, 2008), 115.

religious consumers attempt to maximize both their ‘cultural capital’ and ‘religious capital’—which respectively represent the “the investments or sunk costs that culture represents to each person” and “the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture”⁵¹⁸—and are thus attracted to religions whose orthopraxis and doctrines are familiar to them, since they require minimal effort to acquire new capital.⁵¹⁹ The ‘need’ that the product fills is referred to as ‘deprivation-ideological appeal,’ which is a “long-established point of view on why people join cults and sects combines assessment of the particular appeals offered by a group’s ideology with an analysis of the kinds of deprivations for which this ideology offers relief” by seeing “whom its ideology offers the most.”⁵²⁰ In simple terms, what attracts individuals to specific religious suppliers is their belief that it can supply what they are seeking for the least amount of capital. Within a pluralistic religious marketplace, religions will compete with one another, intentionally tailoring their product to meet the needs of specific audiences.

Wuguang and the MSBL as Religious Suppliers

My analysis of the MSBL as a supplier within the Taiwanese religious market frames the organization as a ‘cult.’ This is based upon typologies put forth by Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and William S. Bainbridge. Stark and Finke distinguish NRMs according to the amount of tension they have with their sociocultural environment, defining ‘tension’ as “the degree that a religious organization sustains norms and values different from those of the surrounding

⁵¹⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 65.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid. Also see Rodney Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1996): 135-136.

⁵²⁰ Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, “Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 85, no. 6 (1980): 1377.

culture.”⁵²¹ Equating tension with “subcultural deviance,” it is quantified according to three factors (see figure 48).⁵²²

Defining and Quantifying Tension		
Factor	Definition	Measurement
Difference	Disagreement over beliefs, norms, and behavior	Differences between acceptable and unacceptable opinions and actions
Antagonism	Mutual harsh judgment and assertions of superiority over the other	Particularism, missionizing to, defending from, and exclusion of outsiders
Separation	Social manifestation of difference and antagonism, resulting in levels isolation	Reluctance to form social bonds with non-members

Figure 48: Stark and Bainbridge’s quantification of tension.

Within this framework, ‘cults’ are low-tension religious organizations, while ‘sects’ are high-tension ones.⁵²³ Based upon the data I gathered, the MSBL is in a state of low-tension with its surrounding culture. The only tension that I did observe is shared with other religious organizations that cater to the same niche market. In other words, the MSBL is in low-tension with the dominant religio-cultural organizations in Taiwan, but in high-tension with its direct competitors, primarily its offshoots.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000), 144.

⁵²² William S. Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, “Sectarian Tension,” *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1980): 108.

⁵²³ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 144. It must be noted that Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, “Of Churches, Sects, and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1979): 125, distinguish cults from sects entirely differently. They state that “sects are schismatic groups, they present themselves to the world as something old. They left the parent body not to form a new faith but to *reestablish the old one*.” This is in contrast to a ‘cult,’ which “represent an *independent religious tradition* in a society.” According to this earlier distinction put forth by Stark and Bainbridge, the MSBL is not a ‘cult,’ but a ‘sect.’

⁵²⁴ The behavioral and ideological norms of the MSBL are not in conflict with their surrounding environment, therefore there is little quantifiable ‘difference.’ Except for the offshoots discussed in the next chapter—and certain criticisms of Tibetan Buddhist groups as well as Japanese Shingon—I have only heard positive opinions concerning other Buddhist or Daoist groups. The MSBL does not actively missionize, nor pressure people

Stark and Bainbridge utilize a tri-category classification system to explain how cults function within the religious market: ‘audience cults,’ ‘magical cults,’ and ‘cult movements.’ Audience cults are the least socially connected and administratively organized. They offer displays of magical powers, but do not offer magical services.⁵²⁵ Client cults, which often have higher levels of social connection and administrative organization, “deal in serious magic” for a price, but do not offer answers to life’s bigger questions.⁵²⁶ Cult movements have the highest level of social interconnectedness and administrative organization. They can be magical, but their leadership must supply ‘religion’ by “explain[ing] the meaning of the universe.”⁵²⁷

Just like cults, cult leaders are categorized according to whether they supply magic, religion, or both. Leaders of audience cults and client cults are categorized as ‘magicians,’ and leaders of cult movements as ‘priests.’⁵²⁸ None of these categories are static. Although the MSBL—when it was born—can be understood as a cult movement since it has always supplied both magic and religion, Wuguang’s role represents a transformation from a magician to a priest. As a magician, he sold herbal concoctions, ghost-busted, and performed faith-healing without supplying answers to universal questions. After becoming a monk at Zhuxi Temple, although we know he continued to supply magic from Shinzen Young’s accounts, he also taught courses on

who come to the TOUB to take refuge. Outsiders are also welcome, leading me to conclude that there is low ‘antagonism.’ Many MSBL members attend religious services at non-MSBL temples, and maintain close familial ties with non-MSBL members. Thus, I have not observed any ‘separation.’ My assessment of the MSBL as low-tension is also based on its membership in the Kaohsiung branch of the BAROC, as well as Huiding’s involvement with other Buddhist and Daoist organizations.

⁵²⁵ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 33-34. It must be noted that this classification scheme is based on the earlier cult/sect distinction (see previous note). As the entire point of these classifications and distinctions is explanation—rather than definition—this contradiction is unimportant.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 34.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail,” 134-135.

Buddhism, offered counseling—all the while publishing books and articles whose contents represent a mix of both magic *and* religion.⁵²⁹

Although Wuguang returned from Japan in 1972, it was not until 1983 that the MSBL joined the Kaohsiung branch of the BAROC and purchased land for the TOUB. Thus, in its infancy, the MSBL was not an officially recognized Buddhist organization nor did it have a centralized headquarters. As noted, during this time Wuguang still lived at Zhuxi Temple, his students performed the Quadrilateral Cultivations at home, and communal rituals and lectures were held in a small back-alley folk religion shrine. Now, the MSBL has a central monastery, a highly structured path to the priesthood, and multiple branches.

This transformation from a loosely-knit adherents tied to a charismatic figure to an international religious organization can be explained by the changes that occurred within the Taiwanese religious marketplace. REM predicts that tightly regulated religious markets weaken more organized religious groups while strengthening less-organized traditions. Adversely, lax regulation—which increases competition by creating an open religious market—strengthens more organized religious communities while weakening less-organized ones. At an organizational level, one can predict that “when confronted with competitive forces, loosely organized religions tend to fail or to be transformed into congregational religions.”⁵³⁰ As convincingly argued by Yunfeng Lu, Byron Johnson and Rodney Stark, this helps to explain the changes that occurred in the Taiwanese religious landscape during the 20th century. In the early Republican period, the KMT closely regulated religion.⁵³¹ During that time, folk religion swelled

⁵²⁹ See Chapter 2.

⁵³⁰ Yunfeng Lu, Byron Johnson and Rodney Stark, “*Deregulation and the Religious Market in Taiwan: A Research Note*,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 49 (2008): 140.

⁵³¹ See Chapter 1.

while more organized Buddhist and Daoist organizations suffered. Once religious freedom was granted, the opposite occurred. To remain competitive in the new religious marketplace, folk religious leaders, shamans, and mediums began to found highly organized institutions.⁵³²

Contextualizing the lifespan of the MSBL within the flows of the Taiwanese religious marketplace helps account for its early popularity, as well as the changes it has gone through. It was founded in the early 1970s, when religion was highly regulated. At that time, the MSBL was anything but organized, as it was headquartered in a back-alley folk religion shrine. Later—when the market changed—and religious figures such as the heads of Humanistic Buddhist organizations started to setup centralized religious establishments, Wuguang seems to have predicted the future of the market and followed suit. When the market favored magicians who oversaw unorganized clientele, Wuguang met those needs. When the market changed and favored more organized suppliers of religion, Wuguang adapted.

The MSBL's Niche Market

In addition to offering insight into Wuguang's marketing strategy, REM enables us to understand the reasons that the MSBL arose, what niche market its adherents represent, and why they are attracted to this movement. The answers to these questions lie in the fieldwork data already presented, as well as those gained during targeted data collection yet to be discussed. To answer these questions, I composed a questionnaire that I intended to distribute. I submitted my questions to the MSBL's leadership, who approved them. However, I was instructed that they would assist me in this aspect of my targeted data collection by selecting members for me to interview, rather than allowing me to disseminate the questionnaires. In the end, I conducted

⁵³² Yunfeng Lu, *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan: Adapting to a Changing Religious Economy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 118-119.

semi-structured interviews with nine MSBL members. Four of these members (Group A) had become disciples of Wuguang within ten years of his returning from Japan. Three of them (Group B) had become disciples while the TOUB was under construction and two members (Group C) were recent converts, who started coming to the TOUB over a decade after Wuguang’s death. Six of these nine subjects were priests. Two of these priests were also monastics. Two interviewees were from Hong Kong, while the rest were from Taiwan. Three were women, six were men (see figure 49). To safeguard their anonymity, I will refer to each by male pronouns, irrespective of gender. Despite the small sample size, these subjects represent a wide qualitative spread. Additionally, while accompanied by my designated guide, I was allowed to informally ask individuals whom I encountered at public rituals and functions why they had been attracted to the MSBL.⁵³³

Interviewee Demographics							
	Male	Female	Lay	Monastic	Taiwanese	Hong Kongese	Priest
Group A (x4)	4	0	3	1	4	0	3
Group B (x3)	1	2	2	1	1	2	3
Group C (x2)	1	1	2	0	2	0	0
Total (x9)	6	3	7	2	7	2	6/9

Figure 49: Gender, clerical and national demographics of interviewees.

Although I was not given permission to ask about the socioeconomic demographics of MSBL members, the majority that I did encounter—including those not interviewed—are

⁵³³ These interviews took place at the TOUB during the first two weeks of Aug. 2014.

obviously quite affluent. This is evidenced by the clothes they wear, the cars they drive and details about their lives that came up in conversation. Two members have served as faculty at national Taiwanese universities in scientific fields. I also met a medical doctor and a lady whose family owns an international jade business. A number of devotees who live in Hong Kong frequently travel to the TOUB for special events. Quite a few MSBL members, even those born in Taiwan, are fluent in English—fluency they gained while living in either Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the USA or UK. These details indicate that the MSBL is largely composed of relatively wealthy people.

Without exception, everyone that I asked either in passing or during semi-structured interviews stated that they had already been religious before becoming members of the MSBL. Each one had also been raised in a Buddho-Daoist-folk faith. One of my interviewees had additionally experimented with Tibetan Buddhism before joining the MSBL. Due to this consistency, as well as the religious demographics of Taiwan and Hong Kong, it is safe to conclude that this is representative of the majority of the MSBL's membership base, which also includes one ex-Fo Guang Shan monastic whom I met.

When asked “How did you first hear of Wuguang/the MSBL?,” each stated that either a friend or a family member had been the original source. This was true for interviewees and those I asked in passing. When interviewees were asked “What first attracted you to Wuguang/the MSBL?” three narratives arose, largely dispersed along the three different periods of recruitment detailed above.

The first two narratives recalled the teller's initial encounter with Wuguang. Group A made ambiguous references to his presence, saying that there was something special and unique about him that made it obvious to them that he was an enlightened being. This was also the case

for one subject from Group B. The other two subjects from Group B explicitly referenced what they considered demonstrations of magical powers. One of these individuals stated that, after hearing of Wuguang from a friend, he went to Mt. Five Wisdoms to meet Wuguang and had a long conversation about Buddhism. The interviewee in question recalled that Wuguang read his mind during this initial encounter, which convinced him—then and there—to become one of Wuguang’s disciples. The other interviewee from Group B stated that when he met Wuguang, he told him that he had been his disciple in a previous life, something that he immediately felt to be true.

The two members who joined the MSBL after Wuguang’s death told a very different story. They said they were first attracted to the MSBL due to the lovely scenery of Mt. Five Wisdoms, which is a welcome getaway from the urban jungle in which they live. One of these subjects stated that after coming to Huiding’s regularly scheduled classes, reading Wuguang’s texts, and participating in rituals, he found Wuguang’s and Huiding’s attempt to harmonize the magical and scientific appealing—even if not entirely convincing—as it brought together the rational and religious sides of his life that had previously been sequestered from one another. Interestingly, the harmony between magic and science as taught by Wuguang was also mentioned by one subject from Group A. This seemed unimportant to the other subject from Group C, as the main allures of the MSBL that he mentioned in addition to the scenery of Mt. Five Wisdoms were the sense of community and structure that the MSBL provides. On a later date—during a casual conversation—he informed me that the teachings of the MSBL and Huiding’s lectures did not resonate deeply with him, and that he preferred the lectures of a Chan

monk at a different temple. However, that temple is located far away, making it impossible for him to go there regularly.⁵³⁴

Analysis

The socioeconomic, cultural, and religious demographics of the MSBL help us understand the sect's target audience, recruitment strategies, and the reasons this audience finds the MSBL appealing. From the consistency among those I was allowed to interview, as well as those I spoke to in passing, it is clear that the MSBL's core recruitment happens via word of mouth that travels through ties of kinship and friendship. As demonstrated by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, interpersonal bonds are a key factor that predispose an individual to joining an NRM in addition to in addition to deprecation-ideological appeal.⁵³⁵ Thus, if an individual has a friend or family member who belongs to a specific NRM, he is much more likely to join himself. Although it is highly probable that there are MSBL members whose first exposure to the sect occurred via Wuguang's writings, it is unsurprising that each individual to whom I spoke to stated that his social network was the medium by which he was recruited.

Given the socioeconomic affluence and level of education displayed by MSBL members, it is logical to conclude that the majority of their interpersonal bonds run through the same higher echelon of society. Thus, Wuguang and the MSBL's target audience consists of the wealthy and educated who come from Buddho-Daoist-folk religious backgrounds.

Deprecation-ideological appeal enables us to further zone in on Wuguang and the MSBL's targeted audience. The socioeconomic and religio-cultural makeup of MSBL members are not the only pre-existing commonalities that unites them. As demonstrated by the conversion

⁵³⁴ Personal correspondence, Dec. 25, 2015.

⁵³⁵ Stark Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith," 1376-1395.

stories and recruitment anecdotes that I collected, they are also yearning for something that they felt the MSBL offered. Groups A and B referenced Wuguang's otherworldly presence or magical capabilities. This makes it is safe to assume that they had preexisting beliefs in magic. Thus, Wuguang's target audience—and those who are attracted to join the MSBL—are socioeconomically affluent and highly educated people from Buddho-Daoist-folk religious backgrounds in search of magic.

Viewing Wuguang as a producer/supplier of a particular religious commodity—and MSBL members as consumers within the religious marketplace—demonstrates that Wuguang intended to corner a niche market. To do so, he tapped into a nexus of newly emerging markets with a unique brand. Those emerging markets constituted three different groups of people. These include: Buddhists who found Humanistic Buddhism and other disenchanting forms of Buddhist modernism unfulfilling, people attracted to Tibetan Buddhism—such as one of my interviewees and Chesheng, the founder of an MSBL offshoot who also studied Tibetan Buddhism before becoming Wuguang's disciple⁵³⁶—and individuals looking for a way to bridge the modern and the magical. Evidently, Wuguang read the market well, as his magico-scientific, Japanese-appropriated, Tibetan-sprinkled, Chinese revived esoteric Buddhist movement is composed of such individuals.

To distinguish his brand from other producers of religion, Wuguang labeled it 'Zhenyan' and invoked his Japanese initiations in order to testify to both the uniqueness and quality of his product. He was able to do so because—as far as I am aware—he was the only living Taiwanese to be ordained as a Shingon priest when he began his career as a religious leader. Moreover, by

⁵³⁶ See Chapter 6.

cutting his ties to Japanese Shingon he was able to offer what no one else—except for his disciples—has yet to offer to this day, Zhenyan/Shingon priestly ordination outside of Japan. The allure of this unique product within the context of Taiwan—and later Hong Kong and Malaysia as well—is understandable from the viewpoint of conservation of cultural and religious capital discussed above, which predicts that people are “more willing to join a religious group to the degree that doing so minimizes their expenditure of cultural capital.”⁵³⁷ Due to their familiarity with Chinese culture and its related religious traditions, their preexisting cultural and religious capital minimize the effort needed to become familiar with MSBL orthopraxis and doctrine, which for the most part, closely resemble the dominant forms of traditional religions in the Chinese-speaking world. The importance that cultural and religious capital makes in people’s decision to convert to more familiar religions in East Asia has already been noted by Ng Ka Shing in reference to I-Kuan Tao,⁵³⁸ and Winston Davis in the case of Sūkyō Mahikari.⁵³⁹ In terms of the MSBL, devotees are offered substantial gains—joining an exotic form of Japanese/Tang Dynasty esoteric Buddhism—at minimal expense. While they could join another religious group with similar expense, the gains would not be as high. Similarly, they could travel to Japan—or even a local Taiwanese-run Shingon center—to study Shingon, but the former requires large monetary capital and both require a lot of cultural capital. These latter options additionally lack the appeal to devotees’ Chinese identity that permeates the MSBL.

We can see conservation of cultural and religious capital at play in the MSBL’s refuge ceremony. Although it differs from others I have attended in Taiwan—such as at a rival

⁵³⁷ Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, 114.

⁵³⁸ Ng Ka Shing, “Yiguan Dao in Hong Kong : A Case Study of its Organizational Characteristics and Conversion Experiences of Adherents,” *Journal of the Graduate School of Letters*, vol. 9 (2014): 47.

⁵³⁹ W. Davis, *Dojo*, 101-102.

Shingon/Chan group in Pingtung County 屏東縣⁵⁴⁰ and the MSBL's offshoot, the Samantabhadra Lineage—in the fact that the audience is communally instructed in esoteric rituals and individually anointed, the emphasis on “initiation, ordination, and lineage affiliation” is in no way out of place within the Taiwanese Buddho-Daoist-folk religious landscape.⁵⁴¹ Moreover, although the majority of converts will find the refuge ceremony's procedural particularities as well as the mantras and mudrās unfamiliar, they will not find them entirely alien, as these consumers come with a lifetime's exposure to similar ritual praxes. Additionally, the liturgical texts used are written in Chinese, the mantras are transliterated into Chinese and a central point of the ritual, the *Heart Sūtra*—“arguably the fundamental text of East Asian Buddhism”⁵⁴² and “perhaps the most famous Buddhist scripture”⁵⁴³— is something all those in attendance will be familiar with. These recognizable features are sprinkled throughout with understandable, yet unfamiliar features, adding the ‘appeal of the exotic,’ which is a driving force in the Taiwanese religious market, igniting enthusiasm for esoteric Buddhism.⁵⁴⁴

Thus, Wuguang was able to offer a unique product, with a unique pedigree that required relatively little capital at a time when the market was beginning to take off. In fact, the market niche that caters to people especially attracted to esoteric Buddhism in general, and Zhenyan/Shingon in particular is still growing. In Taiwan, it began with the importation of

⁵⁴⁰ See note 492.

⁵⁴¹ Louis Komjathy, “Adherence and Conversion to Daoism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, eds. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 528. The MSBL is a form of esoteric Buddhism. Despite the vast literature on priestly ordination in various forms of esoteric Buddhism, there is scant material on ‘conversion’ in esoteric Buddhist circles that takes into account the importance of initiation, ordination and lineage affiliation. Komjathy's piece on conversion in Daoism highlights these aspects.

⁵⁴² Stephen Addiss et al, *Zen Sourcebook: Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2008), 3.

⁵⁴³ Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Heart Sutra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 3.

⁵⁴⁴ Rubinstein, *Taiwan: A New History*, 356-357.

Tibetan Buddhism—which Wuguang himself had a hand in promoting.⁵⁴⁵ The emerging Shingon groups in Taiwan, and MSBL offshoots further demonstrate the continuing growth of this niche market. Notably, Chen Kuan 成觀, a Taiwanese Chan monk who traveled to Japan to become a Shingon priest—much later than Wuguang—and went on to found the Maha-Vairocana Temple 大毘盧寺 in Taipei and American Buddhist Temple 遍照寺 in Howell, Michigan, states in his autohagiography that his interest in esoteric Buddhism was initiated by the growing popularity of esoteric Buddhism in Taiwan.⁵⁴⁶ He believed that this trend was motivated by an unwholesome interest in magic and decided to study esoteric Buddhism in order to offer a more wholesome, less worldly-oriented form.⁵⁴⁷

Viewing Wuguang as a religious entrepreneur, it becomes clear that he read the market well. He tapped into the emerging popularity in esoteric Buddhism and the need felt by affluent people from Buddho-Daoist-folk religious backgrounds to harmonize their ‘superstitious’ beliefs with the modern world. Wuguang seems to have also been able to predict market trends and foresee that these niche markets were only going to grow, as “a widespread faith in miracle-working gods and in the magical efficacy of statues, stones, and incense smoke is as much a part of Asia’s future as electric cars, stock exchanges, sea level rise, and Prada handbags.”⁵⁴⁸ He created a competitive product with a uniquely unrivaled brand that met these market needs, and required minimal financial and cultural capital.

⁵⁴⁵ See Chapter 2.

⁵⁴⁶ The temples’ website can be found here: <http://www.abtemple.org/> (accessed Jun. 29, 2016).

⁵⁴⁷ Chen Kuan 成觀, *Wode xuemi licheng* 我的學密歷程 [The Course of my Esoteric Studies] (Taipei: Xinxiaoyuan yi jingyuan, 2013), 10-13.

⁵⁴⁸ Denise Byrne, *Counterheritage: Critical Perspectives on Heritage Conservation in Asia* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 6.

Selling Point

While REM explains why the MSBL arose, appeals to its target audience, and the reasons Wuguang packaged his teachings and formulated the MSBL's orthopraxis as he did, there is an additional selling point that appears to have to be the driving force that fueled recruitment. This selling point relates to Wuguang's 'charisma,' which Weber defined as:

...a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader'... It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This recognition is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader.⁵⁴⁹

Here, Weber states that displays of magical powers or unique characteristics inaccessible to ordinary people can legitimate one's role as a religious leader, if those abilities are recognized. These displays etch within the mind of the devotee that the charismatic figure is suited for leadership. Weber presents two vital components of charismatic leadership. The first constitutes a display of "specifically exceptional powers or qualities" on the part of the leader, and the second is "freely given" recognition that is "guaranteed by what is held to be a proof" as perceived by the devotee. In simple terms, a leader's 'charisma' is an individual's *belief* that a religious figure is in possession of supernatural qualities or powers that qualify him to be a leader. This belief derives from the believer having witnessed qualities or powers that he regards are "of divine origin or as exemplary."⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Ckus Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 241-242.

⁵⁵⁰ This is despite the fact that Rodney Stark states that "Because Weber's discussions of charisma did not move beyond definitional and descriptive statements, and said nothing about the cause of charisma, the concept is merely a name attached to a definition." While I agree with Stark that charisma is often used tautologically, from the above passage we can see that Weber did in fact speak of the "cause of charisma," and defined it from the perspective of the religious consumer. See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 24.

Such ‘proofs’ that elicit charismatic recognition are found in the initial encounter stories of MSBL members from Groups A and B that I interviewed. These stories told of Wuguang’s otherworldly presence or referenced what the devotees considered to be magical powers—clear examples of what Weber referred to as “specifically exceptional powers or qualities...not accessible to the ordinary person.” Notably, even those who made ambiguous references to his charismatic presence also recalled miracles he had performed after they became disciples. These miracles included: healing, affecting the weather, mind-reading, the ability to predict the future, and being followed by butterflies. Wuguang’s charisma is so well established among those he met that it even extends beyond the grave, manifesting as a type of ‘post-life charisma.’⁵⁵¹ One subject from Group A said that after Wuguang passed away, he began to experience serious knee problems. Although he visited a number of specialists and even went through a surgical procedure, the pain did not go away. One night while sleeping, he dreamt that Wuguang visited him, knelt in front of him and placed his hands on his knees. When he awoke, the pain was gone and even now, years later, it has never come back. Similarly, Li Yuansong, who formed his own NRM after converting to Buddhism under Wuguang,⁵⁵² stated that Wuguang visited him—during waking hours—the year after his death.⁵⁵³

While these stories represent the ‘proofs’ that MSBL members base their charismatic perception of Wuguang upon, they do not explain *why* such incidents are interpreted as doxastic

⁵⁵¹ Catherine Wessinger, “Charismatic Leaders in New Religions,” in *Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 86-87.

⁵⁵² See Chapter 6.

⁵⁵³ Hua Minhui 華敏慧, “*Wei chang duojie yuan, haodang fu qiancheng* 為償多劫願, 浩蕩赴前程 [To Fulfill the Wishes through Countless Eons, Irresolutely Proceeding into the Future],” in *Jingtuzong xiangshan mituo gongxiu huibian* 淨土宗象山彌陀共修會編, *Li yuansong laoshi jinian wenji* 李元松老師紀念文集 [Collected Memorials for the teacher Li Yuansong (Taipei: Jingtuzong wenjiaoji jinhui chuban; Jingtuzong xiangshan mituo gongxiu hui faxing, 2004), 201. Online: <http://www.modernpureland.org/webc/html/buddhist/show.php?num=101&page=2&kind=33> (accessed Mar. 24, 2016).

justification for that perception. However, we have determined that these individuals had a pre-existing belief in magic, and that they were looking for a religious entity that would cater to this belief by providing a sense of enchantment, but one that specifically spoke to their high levels of education, affluence and sophistication. Evidently, Wuguang was skilled at providing this.

Routinization of Charisma

Charisma explains not only the driving force behind the MSBL's recruitment while he was alive, but also how the MSBL has transformed since his death. While longtime MSBL members referenced Wuguang's charisma to explain their conversion to the MSBL, those who joined after his death—and stated that they were initially lured by the beautiful scenery surrounding the TOUB—did not. In fact, when overhearing the stories regarding the miracles that Wuguang during the interview sessions, they said that it was their first time hearing them. Moreover, although I have witnessed Huiding performing religious healing, I have not heard of any miracles ascribed to him. When people speak highly of him, it is his learning and wisdom that they praise. Furthermore, when I asked Huiding about the miracles attributed to Wuguang, although he did not discount them, he asserted that they were unimportant and should not be the focus of my research.

These differences in recruitment, allure, and leadership represent an example of what Weber referred to as the 'routinization of charisma.' Weber stated that, "in its pure form, charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but either becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both."⁵⁵⁴ Thus, while charismatic leadership can give birth to religious movements, it cannot sustain them.

⁵⁵⁴ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 364.

According to Weber, for an NRM to be anything but an ephemeral phenomenon, its leadership model must transform to gain legitimization and meet its administrative and economic needs.⁵⁵⁵

This need for leadership transformation is often realized after the death of the charismatic founder, when the movement faces the problem of succession. This transformation can be actualized via ‘hereditary charisma,’ where the original charisma is transferred to another individual, possibly through designation or rituals,⁵⁵⁶ as was the case with Huiding. Once this occurs, “recognition is no longer paid to the charismatic qualities of the individual, but to the legitimacy of the position he has acquired by hereditary succession...Personal charisma may be totally absent.”⁵⁵⁷ Thus, although Huiding may not fit the definition of a charismatic leader in his own right, he has inherited the well-established charisma that Wuguang—even after his death—continues to enjoy. This helps us understand why, unlike Wuguang, he does not feel the need to create charismatic moments to recruit new members.

The general rule put forth by Weber that “routinization is not free of conflict”⁵⁵⁸ sheds light on the existence of two readily observable MSBL cliques that are distinguishable by levels of reverence to Huiding. Although Huiding is the spiritual leader of the MSBL, he has taken care to keep Wuguang the central guru of the MSBL. This is demonstrated by his not assuming the title ‘guru’ 上師 nor writing himself into the MSBL’s liturgy as Wuguang did. Additionally, despite his position, he shares power with Wuguang’s relatives, who arguably also have claims to hereditary charisma due to their blood relations. This became known to me when I discovered two small pamphlets consisting of Huiding’s speeches.⁵⁵⁹ When I asked about them, I was

⁵⁵⁵ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 252.

⁵⁵⁶ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 246-248.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 248.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 252.

⁵⁵⁹ Huiding, *Liaowu: zhaohui zixinde gandong* 了悟: 找回自心的感動 [Complete Enlightenment: Rediscovering what Touches your Heart] (Kaohsiung: Fojiao zhenyanzong guangmingwangsi, 2012); *Xing gu:*

informed that their contents had originally been uploaded to the MSBL's website, but were taken down due to high-level members' complaints. As the contents of the pamphlets are anything but provocative, I am forced to conclude that the complaints were due to the pamphlets' author being Huiding, rather than Wuguang. This episode is but the most obvious example of this murmuring power struggle. I have also heard complaints about the requirements for priestly ordination that Huiding instituted, and witnessed Huiding's displeasure when such things are mentioned.

It further helps us to contextualize the reasons why Group C said that they were first attracted to the beautiful scenery of Mt. Five Wisdoms without making mention of Wuguang's post-life or Huiding's hereditary charisma. When routinized, charisma can be transferred and instilled within multiple mediums, not just humans. These mediums include apotropaic devices, texts, and even buildings.⁵⁶⁰ We can see multiple layers of this 'textualization of charisma' at Mt. Five Wisdoms. As a topographic mandala, it embodies Wuguang's doctrines. It also represents his achievement of bringing orthodox esoteric Buddhism back to the Chinese-speaking world. The structure at its center, the TOUB—where Huiding lives—is a representation of Wuguang himself as it houses a fragment of his skull within the walls of the main sanctuary. The entire complex's only other main structure—occupied by relatives of Wuguang—is a memorial to him that bears his name. Additionally—from a practical and economic perspective—the grounds testify to his charismatic right to rule due to its size, scale and ornamentation. One glimpse of the TOUB and its surrounding grounds demonstrates that Wuguang was an important figure whose

huanxing benyoude rulai tixing 心鼓: 喚醒本有的如來體性 [Drum of the Heart: Arousing Original Buddha-nature] (Kaohsiung: Fojiao zhenyanzong guangmingwangsi, 2012).

⁵⁶⁰ John S. Strong, "Buddhist Relics in Comparative Perspective: Beyond the Parallels," in *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, eds. David Germano and Kevin Traino (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 38-39. Also see Mikael Rothstein, "Emblematic Architecture and the Routinization of Charisma in Scientology," *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2014): 51-75. In this article, Rothstein demonstrates how the charisma of Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard was transferred to the religion's sacred structures.

importance stretches beyond his grave. Thus, there is no need to familiarize members with the ‘proofs’ that Wuguang’s pure charisma was based upon. Rather than mythological, the proof is physical. Wuguang’s charismatic right to lead is self-evident. Thus, it is unsurprising that when identifying their religious affiliation, MSBL devotees commonly state that they are members of “Mt. Five Wisdoms, Mantra School Bright Lineage 五智山光明流,” which is also how the MSBL identifies itself on its fliers and in its publications. Mt. Five Wisdoms has thus absorbed Wuguang’s charisma through the process of routinization. In doing so, it has in fact replaced him as the central object of veneration for new members.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to contextualize the MSBL within the Taiwanese religious landscape while presenting a robust and nuanced understanding of this movement from the perspective of its founder as well as his living heirs. In closing, I wish to highlight a number of connections that exist between these two perspectives and their surrounding context.

As demonstrated, practices common in traditional Chinese religiosity that disenchanting modernist reformers deemed ‘superstitious’ were the exact practices that formed the core of Wuguang’s personal religiosity, and became the elemental components of the orthopraxis of his followers. Despite the fact that Wuguang was the MSBL’s architect, his followers are anything but passive recipients of his teachings. The MSBL is a small organization that shows no signs of wishing to become a dominant religious entity. Recruitment largely happens via word of mouth, and curious religious seekers are welcome to regularly attend MSBL events without being coerced to take refuge, such as the couple mentioned above. Moreover, Huiding has planted obstacles along the group’s path to the priesthood. While these details can be interpreted as

strategies to weed out as ‘free-riders,’ “the Achilles’ heel of collective activities...[since] people will not contribute to a collective enterprise, when they can fully share in the benefits without contributing.”⁵⁶¹ I contend that there is something much more organic that enables the MSBL to grow and survive without the need for organized recruiting efforts or an open door policy to the priesthood.

Although the practices that Wuguang attempted to rescue from the category of ‘superstition’ can be classified as forms of magic, they are vital components of Chinese religious life. Their importance is not peculiar to Wuguang, as they are also important to the average Taiwanese individual. Wuguang’s sophistication of ‘superstition’ is something that readily appeals to modernized, smartphone-using, educated, affluent people who grew up going to incense-filled, idol-populated temples believed to be inhabited by spirits. All of this speaks to the fact that Wuguang’s sophistication of ‘superstition’ meets a need commonly felt by East Asian religionists to distance themselves from ‘superstition’ while not relinquishing core aspects of their culture’s dominant religious practices. Wuguang is not the only figure to try and meet this need, as even Taiwanese spirit-mediums have attempted to explain their practices in scientific terms in order to safeguard themselves from accusations of superstition.⁵⁶² As we will see in the next chapter, this market need extends far beyond Mt Five Wisdoms, throughout Taiwan, Hong Kong and even Malaysia, and is being met by Wuguang’s emulators.

⁵⁶¹ Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail,” 137.

⁵⁶² The most in-depth work that I am aware of on this phenomenon is Yi-Jia Tsai, “The Reformative Visions of Mediumship in Contemporary Taiwan” (PhD diss: Rice University, 2002).