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

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Citation

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

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Issue Date: 2017-06-01

Chapter 6

Wuguang's Larger Legacy

This chapter takes a broader look at Wuguang's wider influence on the Chinese-speaking world's contemporary religious landscape. In addition to the MSBL, there are five Buddhist communities which prominently bear Wuguang's influence: the Zhenyan Samantabhadra Lineage 真言宗普賢流, Modern Chan Society 現代禪 (now Modern Pure Land Society 現代淨土), the Xiu Ming Society 修明堂 (a.k.a. Hong Kong Esoteric Group 港密), the Malaysian Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna 马来西亚佛教真言乘密宗大願山 and the Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple 高野山無量光院別院. Each of these movements—to differing degrees and in different ways—owes its existence to Wuguang. They also represent the MSBL's main competitors, with whom the MSBL has the greatest tension, as they are vying over the same niche market that Wuguang attempted to corner.

As each of these sects are in different locations, use different means of propagation—and responded differently to my research—the data presented below have been gathered through different means.⁵⁶³ For these reasons, and the impossibility of presenting an in-depth exploration

⁵⁶³ The Samantabhadra Lineage is the first of these communities I ever encountered. Due to my living in Taiwan and their receptivity to my research, I was able to conduct long-term onsite fieldwork at its various branches. This included participatory observation, attending their *ācārya* class and performing the first two preliminary ritual prerequisites for entering into the *abhiṣeka* retreat. As the Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple is also located in Taiwan, I was able to visit and interview the head of the center. However, since they were not supportive of my research, the data I was able to gain during my single visit was minimal. The Modern Chan Society, since the latter years of its founder, has taken on a new direction. Therefore, I have gathered data regarding this group primarily through secondary sources and the writings of its founder. Since the Xiu Ming Society is located in Hong Kong, I have relied on the writings of its founder. Similarly, the Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna's Malaysian location has prevented me from conducting fieldwork at their centers. However, they have a very strong online presence and I have been able to acquire an informant—one of the main priests of the center—who is very sympathetic to my research.

of all five of these movements within a single dissertation—let alone a single chapter—I discuss only one of these movements in great detail while briefly exploring the ways in which the other four are connected to Wuguang.

My analysis of these data demonstrates that elements of Wuguang’s personal religiosity and sectarian concerns that permeate the MSBL can also be found in these movements. This is strengthened by the ways in which the founders of the movements mimicked the tactics that Wuguang employed when attempting to establish the MSBL as a new orthodox Buddhist lineage. We begin this chapter by exploring the leadership, history, current status, material culture, doctrines and orthopraxis of the Samantabhadra Lineage. After this we will take a brief look at the ways in which the founders of the others above were influenced by or emulated Wuguang.

Section I: The Samantabhadra Lineage

The Zhenyan Samantabhadra Lineage 真言宗普賢流 is an esoteric Buddhist movement with branches throughout Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands and Hong Kong as well as loose followings in China and New Zealand.⁵⁶⁴ It was founded in the late 1990s by one of Wuguang’s former disciples, Guru Chesheng 徹聖上師 (secular name Chen Shenghua 陳聖華 1938-). Chesheng received Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* from Wuguang in 1983. However, Chesheng is not a member of the MSBL, he is the Samantabhadra Lineage’s ‘guru’ 上師. Although the Samantabhadra Lineage was officially founded after Wuguang’s death, even during Wuguang’s life there was tension between Chesheng, Wuguang, and the MSBL. Chesheng has never been to Mt. Five Wisdoms. He was ordained by Wuguang before the MSBL began running the *abhiṣeka*

⁵⁶⁴ Parts of this section can be found in Bahir, “Transforming the Appropriated.”

retreat during the time when Wuguang's students performed all of the rituals at home. There is little love between the MSBL and the Samantabhadra Lineage. Nevertheless, Chesheng—occasionally—quotes Wuguang during his lectures. He also proudly displays his *abhiṣeka* certificates signed by Wuguang in the main sanctuary of his lineage's headquarters. Unlike Wuguang, Chesheng is not a monk, but a layman. His lineage is similarly dominated by lay, rather than monastic, leadership. This is just but one difference between the MSBL and the Samantabhadra lineage. There are many, however, there are also many similarities that we will now discuss.

Although Chesheng broke away from Wuguang and created his own lineage, he employed similar tactics to found the Samantabhadra Lineage that Wuguang had used to found the MSBL. This can be seen in what Chesheng considers the magnum opus of his religious practice, the Great King of Tantra Maṇḍala 大教王曼荼羅 (GKTM; see figure 50). Just as Wuguang created a new religious banner that encapsulated the Twin Maṇḍalas to designate his lineage, Chesheng uses this maṇḍala to designate his own. Chesheng states this this maṇḍala is so all-encompassing that it combines the contents of all Tibetan, Japanese and Tang Dynasty esoteric Buddhism as well other forms of Buddhism and the wisdom, accomplishments, virtue and characteristics of all Buddhas.⁵⁶⁵ So efficacious is this maṇḍala that Chesheng states that its greatness may in fact surpass the *Lotus Sutra*. This maṇḍala is so central to the Samantabhadra Lineage that it is the object of veneration placed upon meditation desks in their affiliated temples while performing the Quadrilateral Cultivation.

⁵⁶⁵ Chesheng, *Dajiaowang mantuluo* 大教王曼荼羅 [Great King of Tantra Maṇḍala] (Taichung: Zhenyan Samantabhadra Buddhist Learning center, 2001), 34-35.



| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 五鉇 Five-pronged <i>vajra</i> | 降三世明王 Trailokya- vijaya-rāja | 金剛羯摩 Double <i>vajra</i> |
| 中台院 Central Dias (G) | 大日如來 Mahāvairocana (V) | 成身會 Attainment Assembly (V) |
| 微細會 Sublime Assembly (V) | 佛眼佛母 Buddha-locanī (G) | 理趣會 Transcendent Assembly (G) |
| 供養會 Offering Assembly (V) | 文殊師利院 Mañjuśrī Hall (G) | 釋迦摩尼院 Śākyamuni Hall (G) |
| 三鉇 Tri-pronged <i>vajra</i> | 不動明王 Acala- vidyā-rāja | 獨鉇 Single- pronged <i>vajra</i> |

Figure 50: The Great King of Tantra Maṇḍala and its components. Elements taken from the *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala* and *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* are respectively indicated by a ‘(V)’ and ‘(G)’ while those not found in either have not been labeled. Layout according to Chesheng, *Dajiaowang mantuluo*, 27. As a received work (see below), Chesheng forfeits all copyright claims to this image.

Although the GKTM first materialized through Chesheng’s hand, he asserts that this maṇḍala is a received work. Rather than claiming credit for its begetting, he asserts that he was merely the medium which the buddhas and bodhisattvas chose to disseminate this gift.⁵⁶⁶ In explaining why this happened, Chesheng juxtaposes his Buddhist movement with the larger, Humanistic Buddhist movements that dominate the Taiwanese Buddhist sphere. He compares the materialization of the GKTM to Buddhist relief efforts in the wake of the 921 Earthquake that

⁵⁶⁶ Chesheng, personal conversation, May. 2, 2015.

ravaged central Taiwan on September 21, 1999. This disaster elicited an immediate response from three of the four large Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, namely Tzu Chi, Fo Guang Shan and Dharma Drum Mountain. The forms of aid they provided were material goods and psychological counseling.⁵⁶⁷ Chesheng reports that he observed these organizations instructing survivors to “recite Buddha’s name, sit in meditation or pray to Buddhas” 念佛, 要打坐, 要拜佛,⁵⁶⁸ but he noticed many survivors had lost faith. This led him to believe that the material, psychological and spiritual help these movements were offering was inadequate. This inadequacy is contrasted with the creation of his maṇḍala. Thus, like Wuguang, Chesheng’s teachings represent a reenchanting form of Buddhist modernism that has been designed to the needs of religionists who are dissatisfied with disenchanting forms of Buddhist modernism.

Another way in which Chesheng emulated Wuguang’s strategy for lineage establishment was to create his own lineage poem (see figure 51). This poem’s first character, *che* 徹 is the generational-character of its author’s Dharma-name, Chesheng 徹聖. It is also the second character in Wuguang’s lineage poem that we saw in Chapter 5. This attests to the fact that the Samantabhadra Lineage is an offshoot of the MSBL and that Chesheng is one of Wuguang’s Dharma-heirs.

⁵⁶⁷ Jou-Jou Chu, “Patterns of Public-Private Partnership in Community Reconstruction: The Case of Taiwan after the Chi-Chi Earthquake,” in *Community Disaster Recovery and Resiliency: Exploring Global Opportunities*, eds. DeMond S. Miller and Jason D. Rivera, (Boca Raton FL: CRC Press, 2011), 454.

⁵⁶⁸ Chesheng, *Dajiaowang mantuluo*, 34-35.

| English | Pinyin | Chinese |
|---|---|----------------|
| Deeply [penetrate] the mysteries of the mind school, Mahāvairocana enlightens the spirit. | <i>Che mi xin zong, dari ling guang.</i> | 微密心宗, 大日靈光. |
| The essential truth turns the world, wisdom and joy fulfill [our] aspirations. | <i>Zhendi lunyuan, hui xi manyuan.</i> | 真諦輪圓, 慧喜滿願. |
| Bodhi purifies nature, Dharma constantly illuminates you. | <i>Puti jingxing, fa'er changing.</i> | 菩提淨性, 法爾常明. |
| The wonderful virtue omnidirectionally shines, together with the attestation of Samantabhadra. | <i>Miaode bianzhao, tongzheng puxian.</i> | 妙德遍照, 同證普賢. |

Figure 51: Samantabhadra Lineage's lineage poem.

Chesheng's Great King of Tantra Maṇḍala and lineage poem constitute two clear examples of Chesheng's emulating Wuguang to firmly root the Samantabhadra Lineage within orthodox Buddhism. Despite his reliance on Wuguang for his Dharma-transmission and strategy at creating a new Buddhist movement, Chesheng did in fact break away from Wuguang. After Chesheng broke away from the MSBL, he did not attempt to present himself as Wuguang's true and rightful successor in opposition to the MSBL's current leadership. Instead, he wished to sever all ties with the MSBL and present the Samantabhadra Lineage as his own creation. This is why I refer to the estrangement between the MSBL and the Samantabhadra Lineage as a break, rather than a schism. A schism would entail a split due to succession controversy, which did not occur. Chesheng states that the reason he broke away from Wuguang was due to his teacher's emphasis on *guang*. In his own words:

Wuguang went to Kōyasan, Japan, to study the Dharma. After he came back he established the Mantra School Bright Lineage. After I studied with them it occurred to me that I should spread the word that everyone has Buddha nature, everyone has the merit of the Buddhas. Guru Wuguang just propagated that everything has a form of *guang*, the universe has *guang*...everything has *guang* and how to manipulate *guang* to help our lives, [teaching] all of the different ways to manipulate it. I think this approach is a bit dangerous. Everyone [in the MSBL] likes to talk about *guang* and

how to use it for magical purposes. [This emphasis] makes it easy to neglect cultivating a peaceful life, which is dangerous. Therefore I decided to create the Samantabhadra Lineage to as a corrective. Our message is the doctrine of independence, equality and freedom.⁵⁶⁹

From this, it would appear that Chesheng's break with Wuguang and his MSBL was over Wuguang's emphasis on magic. However, Chesheng himself also believes in—and even performs—magic. During the very earliest stages of my fieldwork Chesheng's chief disciple instructed me to return to the temple with a bottle of alcohol (as this is predominantly a lay Buddhist movement, they are not bound by prohibitions regarding alcohol or even sex). I was not told why. The following day I, along with my alcohol (a bottle of red wine) were taken to a private room where Chesheng handed me a sealed plastic bottle of water and instructed me to drink its contents and then hand the bottle back to him. After I followed his instructions he opened the bottle of wine I had brought and then poured some of its contents into the empty water bottle. Then, he produced a single-pronged *vajra* which he used to perform *adhiṣṭhāna* on the water by carving symbols into the air in front of it while reciting mantras. I was then given two plastic cups into which I was told to pour the contents of the wine—both from the water bottle and the original glass bottle which I had brought. I was then told to perform a taste test to see if there was a noticeable difference between the two.⁵⁷⁰ This was intended to demonstrate the fact that he is in possession of otherworldly powers.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Chesheng, *Shengyi xinyao azi yi*, 12. Original text: “悟光 (上師的上師), 他到日本高野山大學求學修法, 回來之後, 自創光明流。我(上師) 在那邊學習之後, 發覺到應該提倡所有生命應該都有佛性, 都有佛的功德。悟光上師的提倡就是生命都是一種光, 宇宙有光....什麼都有光, 運用光來幫助我們在生活中, 各方面上來運作。但這樣的方式, 我(上師)覺得有一點危險, 大家喜歡說光, 能夠怎麼樣運作, 談靈異的事情, 寧靜的生命容易被忽略, 這有一個危險在, 所以我(上師)認為要以一個(「普賢流」來說明比較好, 我們的提倡是屬於平等自由的學說。”

⁵⁷⁰ There was in fact a noticeable difference, as the wine that had undergone Chesheng's enchantment was much sweeter than the unenchanted wine. This was confirmed by an acquaintance whom I asked, “Which of these do you think tastes better?” The acquaintance, preferring sweet wine and not being fond of the taste of alcohol, favored the enchanted wine.

⁵⁷¹ This occurred in Aug. 2011.

Demographics, Organization and Headquarters

The Samantabhadra Lineage is based in Taiwan's third largest city, Taichung. Its headquarters, the Medicine Buddha Hall 藥師院 (see figures 52-53) is located in the first floor of an apartment building adjacent Chesheng's house. Currently, the Samantabhadra Lineage claims to boast an estimated 150 ordained priests and 1000 converts. Like the MSBL, the Samantabhadra Lineage is largely composed of well-educated, financially affluent devotees with enough disposable income to travel abroad and own expensive cars. The sect's operations are overseen and executed by three different committees (see figure 54) and it is funded by donations from its membership.

When entering the Medicine Buddha hall one meets two wrathful door deities. Between these deities is a Siddham *a*-seed syllable resting upon a lotus flower etched in white upon glass (see figures 55). This letter is central to Zhenyan/Shingon orthopraxis.⁵⁷² The first floor is dominated by a large room that functions as the main sanctuary while doubling as a classroom, meeting hall and gift shop. There are two smaller rooms, one that functions as both a changing room and large storage closet and one whose walls are lined with couches and a single chair reserved for Chesheng. Above Chesheng's chair hangs a suspended parasol indicative of his religious authority (see figure 56).⁵⁷³ This is the room where Chesheng and I shared a glass of wine that was meant to be magical.

⁵⁷² The *a*-seed syllable is discussed below.

⁵⁷³ The parasol is a universal symbol of power and elite social status that made its way into Buddhist symbology to represent religious authority. See A. Snodgrass, *Symbolism of the Stupa*, 326 and Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 2-5.



Figure 52: Medicine Buddha Hall.



Figure 53: The Medicine Buddha Hall's inner courtyard.

| Committee Name | Primary Activities |
|---|---|
| Seven Rays of Light Mindfulness Association 七色光關懷生命協會 | Offers counseling and mindfulness retreats |
| Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist Learning Association 中華大乘佛學會 | Education, religious event organization, outreach and <i>abhiṣeka</i> |
| Chesheng Cultural Foundation 徹聖文化基金會 | Publish books and multimedia related to Chesheng and his teachings |

Figure 54: Organizational wings of the Samantabhadra Lineage.



Figure 55: Medicine Buddha Hall entrance.



Figure 56: Meeting room.



Figure 57: *Homa* altar with Acala.



Figure 58: Ākāśagarbha altar.



Figure 59: Main Zhenyan/Shingon altar overlooked by Śākyamuni.



Figure 60: Maitreya.

The main sanctuary's iconography is a mixture of exoteric and esoteric Buddhist imagery. There are three main altars along the back wall and a less conspicuous one in a corner. The central one supports a large image of Śākyamuni in the middle who sits in front of the Twin Maṇḍalas and behind a much smaller Avalokiteśvara. To the right is a *homa* altar dedicated to Acala and to the left is an altar with Ākāśagarbha. At the center of the room is a large altar setup in accordance with Zhenyan/Shingon tradition. The smaller, corner altar is dedicated to Maitreya (see figures 57-60).

On most days, the Medicine Buddha Hall is a quiet place. There are no daily public rituals and the sole monthly event is a *homa* that is usually only attended by a handful of members. Oftentimes, however, there are priests-in-training practicing the requisite rituals from the Quadrilateral Cultivation in preparation for the *abhiṣeka* retreat. The ritual manuals used by the Samantabhadra Lineage for the *homa* and the other Quadrilateral Cultivation are those that Chesheng received from Wuguang.

Additional to the ordination retreats and ceremonies, there are four major events held at the Medicine Buddha Hall. The first two are retreats specifically held for visiting members from the Hong Kong branch.⁵⁷³ These retreats occur during Christmas and Easter since they are public holidays in Hong Kong. While in Taiwan, devotees receive instruction in Samantabhadra Lineage orthopraxis and doctrine. Although run for the sake of the members who live in Hong Kong, attendance is open to all Samantabhadra Lineage members.

The two other major annual events are the Buddha Bathing Ceremony and a calligraphy and art exhibition. The former is held near the Buddha's birthday on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month in the Chinese calendar and the latter during Chinese New Year. The Buddha Bathing Ceremony takes place either in the Medicine Buddha Hall or in a nearby warehouse owned by one of the sect's members (see figures 61-62). The art and calligraphy exhibition takes place at the headquarters and displays Chesheng's work and those of his followers who meet weekly at the center for a calligraphy class. This exhibition also displays Chesheng's books and CD's and operates as a fundraiser.

⁵⁷³ The center in Hong Kong is named the Zhenyan Samantabhadra Lineage Life Education Center (*Zhenyanzong puxianliu shengming jiaoyu xuehui* 真言宗普賢流生命教育學會). Their website as of Nov. 16, 2014 can be found at: <http://www.ple.org.hk/>



Figures 61-62: 2015 Buddha-bathing ceremony.

Of equal importance to the rituals held at Samantabhadra Lineage centers is one rite that is entirely ignored, the *Ullambana*. Although this festival is a common practice the second most important in Chinese Buddhism,⁵⁷⁴ and as we saw, a core element of the MSBL's orthopraxis, it is entirely ignored at Samantabhadra Lineage centers. The reason for this is that Chesheng believes the practices surrounding this holiday to be non-Buddhist, having originated in Chinese folk religion and are nothing more than superstition.⁵⁷⁵ This exemplifies two tensions that run throughout the orthopraxis and doctrines of the Samantabhadra Lineage. The first, between magic and modernity, was already noted above. The second is related to Chesheng's reliance on Wuguang. Despite the fact that the ritual manuals used and legitimization tactics employed by Chesheng were appropriated from Wuguang, Chesheng has designed his lineage to be different from the MSBL. This was done by mixing elements particular to Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan Buddhism. Although these ingredients are also found in the MSBL, the particular elements of

⁵⁷⁴ Orzech, "Saving the Burning-Mouth Hungry Ghost," 278.

⁵⁷⁵ Semi-structured interview, Apr. 2012.

these ingredients that Chesheng chose to incorporate into the Samantabhadra Lineage are different.

Chesheng's Mix

The tension between Chesheng's reliance on and rejection of Wuguang is further pronounced in the Samantabhadra Lineage's *abhiṣeka* process. Like Wuguang, Chesheng has altered the path to ordination to fit the needs of his disciples. But unlike Wuguang—who began his guru career in a back-alley shrine and eventually built a massive monastery—Chesheng has multiple small yet fully functional sanctuaries under his direction. In order to become a Samantabhadra Lineage *ācārya*, one must be instructed in the Quadrilateral Cultivation and perform each ritual 108 times—as Wuguang himself had prescribed. This must be done at a Samantabhadra Lineage branch temple before entering into the *abhiṣeka* retreat—of which there are two kinds. The first, the 100-day retreat 百日關 requires devotees to live in the apartments above the Medicine Buddha Hall during this time while they perform rituals. The other retreat, called the convenient retreat 方便關 is tailored to people who cannot leave their familial or professional obligations for such a lengthy amount of time and is only six weeks long. The daily schedule during both of these retreats are meant to mirror the grueling ordeal of Kōyasan.⁵⁷⁶ After completing either retreat—if deemed worthy—the devotee receives Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* and thus becomes a Samantabhadra Lineage priest. Worthiness of this title is determined by performing a *homa* in front of Chesheng. If the smoke given off by the burning wood is 'too black' it is taken as a sign that the student has not adequately purified himself of defilements and is therefore not ready to become an *ācārya*. I have been told that around one

⁵⁷⁶ See page 210.

fourth of students, due to the color of the smoke, are not allowed to receive Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* after completing the retreat.



Figure 63: Samantabhadra Lineage member wearing the green half-*kāṣāya* indicating his low rank.



Figure 64: Chesheng awarding disciple with a red *kāṣāya* indicating his hierarchical progress.

Chesheng has instituted another lay hierarchy in addition to the priestly/non-ordained distinction. As this is a largely lay movement, this is not at all based on monastic ordination but on Chesheng's perception of the devotee's level of spiritual maturation. To advance within this system, one must meet with Chesheng privately, who asks the student various questions and then determines the latter's spiritual level. One's rank within this structure is then displayed on one's religious garb in the form of a half-*kāṣāya* 半袈裟 (see figures 63-64). This garment is predominantly worn by Japanese Buddhists but not commonly found in Chinese Buddhist circles. Half-*kāṣāyas* are often adorned with religious or imperial insignia and can designate the sect and sectarian rank of a Japanese Buddhist. Chesheng has reinvented this garment and created a tri-tiered, color-coded hierarchy wherein a disciple's rank is ascendingly discernible by the green, red or gold of his half-*kāṣāya*. The insignia which adorn Japanese half-*kāṣāyas* have

been replaced by Siddham letters. Only distinguished members of the sect—such as those who run their own branch temples—wear the traditional Japanese half-*kāṣāya* while all others wear the one created by Chesheng. It is not uncommon for followers to be turned down, multiple times, for advancement.

Chesheng's attitude towards the *Ullambana*, adaptation of the *abhiṣeka* retreat and color-coded lay hierarchy are examples of his altering the Zhenyan/Shingon teachings that he received from Wuguang. Another difference—that simultaneously demonstrates Chesheng's indebtedness to Wuguang—is found in the Tibetan elements of Samantabhadra Lineage orthopraxis. These elements represent a mix of those that Chesheng received from Wuguang—unknowingly as we will shortly see—and those that he directly received from the same person who Wuguang learned Tibetan Buddhism from: Elder Gongga. Before ever studying with Wuguang Chesheng spent years practicing Karma Kagyu rituals under the supervision of Elder Gongga in the early 1980s in Taipei. Although he never received Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* from Gongga in real-time, Chesheng does claim to be her Dharma-heir due to in a series of dreams.⁵⁷⁷ Thus, Chesheng claims a dual-esoteric Dharma-transmission, one Japanese from Wuguang and the other Tibetan from Elder Gongga.

This dual transmission is visible in the orthopraxis of the Samantabhadra Lineage. The most prominent example is in Samantabhadra Lineage religious headgear, which is clearly based on Tibetan garb. Tibetan Buddhist sectarian affiliation and ecclesiastical hierarchy are often designated by different forms of headgear. One such distinction, 'red hat' versus 'yellow hat' sects is based directly upon this fact. The Karma Kagyu lineage is known as a 'red hat sect.' One

⁵⁷⁷ Chesheng, *Bairi guanxinjing jiangyi* 百日關心經講義椎擊三要訣勝法解合輯本 [Collection of Explanatory Lectures on the Three Essentials from the Hundred Day Heart Sutra Retreat] (Taichung: Zhenyanzong puxianliu foxuehui, 2003), 88-107.

such red hat, the long-eared *paṇḍita* hat is worn by high-ranking priests of Karma Kagyu affiliation. It was also worn by Elder Gongga.⁵⁷⁸ In the Kagyu sect the *paṇḍita* or “scholar’s hat” is often worn by a master during lectures or religious ceremonies.⁵⁷⁹ The Samantabhadra Lineage has a similar—yet distinctly different—red hat created by Chesheng. Commonly referred to as the triangle-hat 三角帽 (see figures 65-67), it is awarded to devotees who complete the initiation retreat during their ordination ceremony. It is worn by Chesheng at special events and rituals such as a Buddha-bathing, conversion or ordination. His followers wear it when performing the *homa* fire ceremony or performing other priestly duties.



Figure 65: Samantabhadra Lineage member performing a *homa*.

⁵⁷⁸ An image of Gangkar Rinpoche, Elder Gongga’s teacher, wearing a red *paṇḍita* hat is displayed on the front endpaper of Elder Gongga’s book entitled *Bai yuanmen de zhuaji: Gongga laoren shan xiuxing ji* (Taipei: Zhengfa yan, 1993). Additionally, as of 5/6/2015, an image of Elder Gongga wearing this hat could be viewed at http://album.udn.com/joffy1961/photo/3854907?f_number=5

⁵⁷⁹ Giuseppe Tucci, *Religions of Tibet* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 125.



Figure 66: Chesheng wearing the triangle hat.



Figure 67: Samantabhadra Lineage priest wearing the triangle hat while bestowing a blessing.

Despite the fact that Chesheng modeled the hat's shape after the *paṇḍita* hat and chose its color based on Elder Gongga's Tibetan Buddhist lineage affiliation, it is intended to represent a pivotal segment of a maṇḍala central to Zhenyan/Shingon—rather than Tibetan—esoteric Buddhism, the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*. The *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* is broken up into two major parts, the outer rim which is populated by deities who are mostly of non-Buddhist origin, and the central layer, which is largely populated by Buddhist deities. This central layer is further subdivided in various ways. The most common subdivision scheme breaks it up into three sections. The first is the Buddha-section, which extends across the top, middle and bottom of the central unit in the shape of a capital 'I.' This is the chief section of the maṇḍala. The central column of the Buddha-section is flanked on the left by the Lotus-section and on the right by the

Vajra-section. Directly above the central lotus is a triangle called the Seal of Universal Knowledge. This seal, which is a flaming triangle resting on a lotus, represents the generative powers of wisdom which burns away the three sources of negative karma—anger, greed and attachment. It is also believed to encapsulate the contents of the three inner sections of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*.⁵⁸⁰ Chesheng’s triangle-hat is a vestural representation of this seal. Thus, Chesheng’s hat—whose shape was inspired by a Karma Kagyu hat worn by Elder Gongga—is meant to symbolize a maṇḍala that is of prime importance in Zhenyan/Shingon that Chesheng studied under Wuguang.

The *paṇḍita* hat was not the only muse for Chesheng’s triangle hat. In addition to modeling its shape after a hat entirely absent from Chinese Buddhism, he also incorporated elements from a headpiece—which although more commonly Tibetan—has been increasingly used in Chinese circles that we discussed in Chapter 5, the *Kṣitigarbha* Crown.⁵⁸¹ Similar to the *paṇḍita* hat, this crown is flanked by two lappets. However, these are unlike the ears of the *paṇḍita* hat in that they are detachable and not always present. Additionally, the crown’s lappets are frequently adorned with mantras, which is also the case with Chesheng’s hat. This is despite the fact that an actual Karma Kagyu *paṇḍita* hat’s ears are exteriorly bare. Thus, the ears of Chesheng’s hat are structurally similar to the *paṇḍita* hat while they ornamentally resemble the Buddha crown.

The writing on Chesheng’s hat infuses this vestment even further, multilayered significance and shows his reliance upon Wuguang. On each ear are three Sanskrit seed-syllables (Skt. *bīja*). Seed-syllables are Sanskrit ideographs of particular semiotic significance often

⁵⁸⁰ A. Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*, 252.

⁵⁸¹ See page 245.

inscribed on trinkets for protection, good fortune, longevity or health. Due to their function as symbolic representations of Buddhist deities and soteriological concepts, they are often chanted and traced in the air when performing *adhiṣṭhāna*. Iconographically, pictorial representations of Buddhist deities are sometimes substituted by images of their corresponding seed-syllables in both Tibetan⁵⁸² and Japanese⁵⁸³ maṇḍalas. Liturgically, seed-syllables can be chanted or visualized alone as monosyllabic mantras or linked together to form longer ones.

One such mantra, “*oṃ āḥ hūm*” is known as the Trisyllabic Mantra 三字明 is central to many forms of Tibetan Buddhism and a key element in specific *guru-yogic* rituals where the three seed-syllables of *oṃ*, *āḥ* and *hūm* respectively represent the three mysteries (in Tibetan forms of Buddhism these are referred to as the ‘three *vajras*’) of body, speech and mind. In numerous Tibetan Buddhist practices, the recitation of the Trisyllabic Mantra is accompanied by a visualization where the devotee pictures a white, red and blue light at the head, throat and heart chakra when respectively intoning *oṃ*, *āḥ* and *hūm*. This is meant to purify the individual’s physical, oral and mental karma. If performed within the context of *guru-yoga*, the practitioner visualizes the same points of light radiating from the body and corresponding chakra of a root teacher or Tibetan Buddhist patriarch. Since its nascence, the Karma Kagyu lineage has perceived the Trisyllabic Mantra as “the fundamental guide for mystical realizations and experience.”⁵⁸⁴ Elder Gongga taught that this mantra should be recited daily.⁵⁸⁵ Although these three seed-syllables—*oṃ*, *āḥ* and *hūm*—are key components in many Shingon mantras, chanting

⁵⁸² Susan M. Walcott, “Mapping from a Different Direction: Mandala as Sacred Spatial Visualization,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 23, no. 2 (2006): 82-83.

⁵⁸³ In Shingon Buddhism, a maṇḍala entirely of seed-syllables is referred to as a Dharma-maṇḍala, which is one of four kinds of maṇḍalas used. For more information see Gardiner, “Mandala, Mandala on the Wall,” 265-268.

⁵⁸⁴ Pema Dorjee, *Stūpa and Its Technology: A Tibeto-Buddhist Perspective* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 32, n. 22.

⁵⁸⁵ Gongga, *Zixing guangming: Jingang shangshi gonggelaoren kaishi lu* 自性光明: 金剛上師貢噶老人開示錄 [The Luminous Self: Records of Vajra Master Elder Gongga’s Elucidations] (Taipei: Zhengfayan, 1993), 2.

them as a standalone mantra is not.⁵⁸⁶ This is in contrast to Tibetan Buddhism where the recitation of the Trisyllabic Mantra is central.

In Tibetan Buddhist iconography and ritual implements, mantras are most often written in Tibetan or the Sanskrit Laṅṭsa script while in Chinese circles they are usually written in Chinese or Laṅṭsa. In contrast, the letters on Chesheng's hat are written in Siddham, the mono-syllabic Sanskrit alphabet sacred to Shingon and primarily used in Japan. Although Siddham used to be the primary script that Chinese Buddhists chose for Sanskrit mantra transcription, since the late imperial period it has been gradually replaced by Laṅṭsa due to the influence of Tibetan Buddhism.⁵⁸⁷

In addition to differing in form, the syllables on Chesheng's hat are also linguistically and semiotically different. The exact syllables on Chesheng's hat—although remarkably similar—do not form the Trisyllabic Mantra commonplace in Tibetan Buddhist practices. While the first and final seed-syllables—*oṃ* and *hūm*—are identical, the middle one is slightly different (see figure 68).

| | Script | Transcription | Romanization | Middle Letter | Middle Letter Aspiration |
|---------------------------|---------|---------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Trisyllabic Mantra | Tibetan | ཨྐ ཨྐ ཨྐ | <i>oṃ āḥ hūṅ</i> | ཨྐ <i>āḥ</i> | Yes |
| | Laṅṭsa | 𑖦 𑖦 𑖦 | <i>oṃ āḥ hūm</i> | 𑖦 <i>āḥ</i> | Yes |
| | Siddham | 𑖦 𑖦 𑖦 | <i>oṃ āḥ hūm</i> | 𑖦 <i>āḥ</i> | Yes |
| Hybrid Mantra | Siddham | 𑖦 𑖦 𑖦 | <i>oṃ a hūm</i> | 𑖦 <i>a</i> | No |

Figure 68: Comparison of the Trisyllabic Mantra and Chesheng's hybrid mantra.

⁵⁸⁶ Despite its not being a common element of Shingon practice, the Trisyllabic *Mantra* is in fact found in the *Betsu Gyō* 別行 (T2476_78.0165c22-24) written by the Shingon figure Kanjo 寛助 (1057-1125).

⁵⁸⁷ Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 148.

In the Tibetan, Lañtsa and initial Siddham scripts above, all three syllables refer to the same Sanskrit syllable. The middle seed in Chesheng's hat, however, differs from them all in pronunciation, form and refers to a different Sanskrit seed. Although subtle, this difference has monumental repercussions. As the three seeds of the Trisyllabic Mantra respectively refer to the three mysteries of body, speech and mind and ritually function to cleanse three types of karma. Altering any one of the letters, even slightly, alters the meaning, semiotic correspondence and liturgical function of the entire mantra. The key to extrapolating these repercussions lies in the fact that Chesheng chose to depict this letter in Siddham. This script—not widely used in Tibetan Buddhism—dominates Shingon liturgy and ritual. In Shingon esoteric ritual manuals, Siddham is used to transcribe esoteric mantras and as a focus of visualizations. Siddham's special status as the sacred language of Shingon is demonstrated by beliefs and practices surrounding its first letter, *a*. Based on the Indian tantric idea of 'phonetic emanation,'⁵⁸⁸ this letter is believed to be the source of all other sounds. It is also the seed-syllable of the chief deity in the Shingon pantheon, Mahāvairocana who is seen as the first Shingon patriarch, the omnipresent *Dharma-kaya* and the embodiment of the entire universe itself. Mahāvairocana is also a symbol of enlightenment. A common Shingon practice, the *a*-syllable Visualization 阿字觀, is centered on the visualization of this single seed-syllable. It is this letter that occupies the central position in Chesheng's mantra. Thus, rather than referring to the mystery of speech—a particular soteriological concept—this middle letter refers to the very principle of awakening in its totality.

The consequence of this interweaving makes Chesheng's hat an embodied synthesis of Tibetan liturgy and Shingon doctrine. The mixture of Tibetan and Japanese esoteric Buddhist

⁵⁸⁸ 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.

elements found on this hat are not limited to aesthetics. In the key text given to new members of the Samantabhadra Lineage, Chesheng's states that this hybrid mantra encapsulates all others and the purpose of its recitation is to "give rise to the spiritual accomplishments of the *a*-seed."⁵⁸⁹ Thus, Chesheng's hat is a polysemic symbol for the integration of Tibetan and Japanese seed-syllables, Tibetan and Japanese interpretations of the three mysteries, the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* and Shingon theology as well as notions of phonetic emanation.

Provenance of Chesheng's Mix

Notwithstanding the prominent position that this hybrid mantra occupies in Chesheng's movement, he is not its creator. In Wuguang's very first book, he prescribed chanting this hybrid mantra while detailing the performance of a Tibetan-inspired guru-yogic ritual.⁵⁹⁰ It is also found within the orthopraxis of the MSBL, though not as prominently. Wuguang's reasons for creating this mantra are likely not limited to Shingon doctrine, but rooted in something much more mundane.

In Elder Gongga's writings, mantras are transliterated into Chinese. In Shingon ritual manuals, they are printed in Siddham and are often accompanied by pronunciation keys. These pronunciations are written in *Hiragana*, *Katakana* or logographic Chinese characters referred to as *kanji* 漢字 (Chn. *hanzi*) that have multiple, contextually specific pronunciations. In the manuals used by the Samantabhadra Lineage and MSBL, they are transliterated into both *Katakana* and *kanji*.

In Elder Gongga's writings, the Trisyllabic Mantra's aspirated second letter is rendered as 'a' 阿 (see figure 69). This Chinese transliteration is devoid of doctrinal significance and is in

⁵⁸⁹ Chesheng, *Shengyi xinyao azi yi*, 65.

⁵⁹⁰ Wuguang, *Yujia yangsheng*, 241.

fact a common rendering. However, in the Shingon ritual manuals Wuguang acquired in Japan it is rendered into both *kanji* and *Katakana* as *aku* (Kanji: 惡, Ktk: アク),⁵⁹¹ while the *a*-seed of the Shingon *a*-seed visualization—the unaspirated syllable at the center of the hybrid *mantra*—is rendered as ‘a’ (Kanji: 阿, Ktk: ア)⁵⁹²—which is how Gongga transcribed the aspirated syllable. These renderings are not peculiar to Wuguang and Chesheng’s ritual manuals, but are consistent with pronunciation keys found in other Shingon manuals in Japan.⁵⁹³ It is this tradition of pronunciation—in addition to the significance of the *a*-seed—plus Elder Gongga’s transliteration thereof that form the basis for Wuguang’s substitution of the middle letter.

| Middle Letter | Siddham | Character | Mandarin | Taiwanese | Japanese |
|-----------------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Elder Gongga | X | 阿 | <i>a</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>a</i> |
| Shingon Manuals | 𑖀 | 惡 | <i>e</i> | <i>ok</i> | <i>aku</i> |
| Hybrid | 𑖀 | 阿 | <i>a</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>a</i> |

Figure 69: Comparison of Sino-Japanese transliterations.

Thus, this hybrid mantra seems to have originated with Wuguang and to be rooted in his studies of Tibetan Buddhism. However, it was not only his Buddhist education that led to his substituting the unaspirated syllable for the aspirated one. As we saw in Chapter 2, Wuguang had a very limited formal education, one that did not include Chinese, let alone Tibetan or Sanskrit. As he grew up during Japan’s rule of Taiwan, the only formal language instruction he received was Japanese. As we already know, this resulted in him being not very proficient in Mandarin but only fluent in Taiwanese and Japanese. In addition to the *Katakana* transcription of the aspirated *āḥ* as ‘aku’ in the Japanese ritual manuals, the *Kanji* transcription—pronounced as a

⁵⁹¹ NA, *Sidu jiaxing: Taizangjie xiuchi yigui* 四度加行: 胎藏界修持儀軌 [Quadrilateral Cultivation: The Garbhadhātu Ritual] (No publication information), 30.

⁵⁹² Ibid, 11-12.

⁵⁹³ Robert H. Sharf, “Thinking through Shingon Ritual,” 66.

short ‘e’ in Mandarin 惡—is pronounced ‘ok’ (similar to ‘oak’) in Taiwanese.⁵⁹⁴ This is not the case for the *Kanji* of the unaspirated syllable, which is pronounced ‘a’ in Japanese, Mandarin and even Taiwanese. Thus, in decoding how to pronounce Siddham characters and transcribe mantras that he learned from Elder Gongga, Wuguang seemed to have relied on Japanese transliterations. His understanding of these transliterations was further directed by Taiwanese pronunciations of Chinese characters. It was this reliance that precluded Wuguang from correctly rendering the Trisyllabic Mantra he learned from Elder Gongga—which he would have seen in either Tibetan or Chinese—into Siddham. As the texts he viewed and the Shingon priests he knew rendered the middle letter of the Tibetan mantra as ‘aku’ rather than ‘a’—his mistake is understandable. This mistake was subsequently transmitted to Wuguang’s student, Chesheng, who also studied Karma Kagyu rituals with Elder Gongga. Given the fact that Chesheng’s Shingon education is limited to self-study and tutelage under Wuguang, the significance of the unaspirated *a*-seed in Shingon and Elder Gongga’s Chinese transliteration thereof as well as the Japanese pronunciation keys, it is logical that he would accept the mantra’s transcription as taught by Wuguang. This is attested to by the fact that Wuguang and Chesheng’s pronunciations and transcriptions of the aspirated and unaspirated letters are all in conformity with the Japanese *Kanji* and *Katakana* transliterations.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁴ In addition to my own multiple observations, this is corroborated by transcriptions found throughout Jhen-Fu Lin 林振福, “The Phonetic Research of Reciting Sutra and Dharani from Universal Door in Taiwanese by three Buddhist Temples in Taiwan 台灣三處道場以臺語唱誦普門品經咒之語音研究” (MA thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, 2011).

⁵⁹⁵ This character is in fact *Romanized* by Chesheng as ‘aku’ in *Banruo liqujing jiangyi* 般若理趣經講義 [Commentary on the *Adhyarthaśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*], 2 vols. (Kaohsiung: Zhenyanzong puxianliun foxuehui, 2011), 2.89. Wuguang’s transliteration can be found in *Banruo liqu jing jiangji*, 2.499.

Visualization

The fact that Wuguang is this hybrid mantra's author explains a specific ritual consistency between the MSBL and the Samantabhadra Lineage that is not found in Japanese Shingon. This hybrid mantra and its visualization are further integrated into the MSBL's and Samantabhadra Lineage's liturgy. The exact liturgical texts, however, are of Japanese origin rather than Tibetan. The opening of numerous Shingon rituals contain a karmic cleansing, the most common being centered on the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*. During this purification, the devotee performs three mudrās that are each accompanied by a mantra and visualization. These mudrās represent the face of a Buddha, a lotus flower and a *vajra* (see figures 70-71) and are respectively accompanied by a visualization of a specific deity or retinue of deities within the Buddha, Lotus and Vajra sections of the Matrix Realm Maṇḍala. These deities are pictured performing *adhiṣṭhāna* on the devotee to respectively purify the karma of his body, speech and mind.

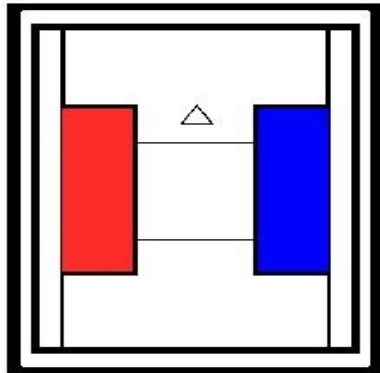


Figure 70: The three sections of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*.



Figure 71: The Buddha (right), Lotus (middle) and Vajra (left) mudrās. Open source image.

Although the visualization instructions in the ritual manuals used by the MSBL and Samantabhadra Lineage are written in accordance with Zhenyan/Shingon and consistent with those in Japan, in practice, they have been replaced. Instead of visualizing deities from these respective sections of the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*, sect members visualize a white *om*, red *a*

(unaspirated) and blue *hūm* as rays of light respectively emanating from the Buddha, Lotus and Vajra sections of the maṇḍala and entering into their head, throat and heart chakras. During training, students are told not to perform the visualization as written in the manual—which is how it is performed in Japan—but to execute this Tibetan-Japanese hybrid visualization. This visualization—despite being appropriated from Tibet—is presented as a form of oral tradition that is only accessible via master-disciple transmission and therefore, not found written in the manual. This oral tradition, as taught by Chesheng and practiced by his disciples, originated with Wuguang, as it also practiced at the TOUB where it is taught as an oral transmission.

Section II: Modern Chan Society

Throughout this entire dissertation we have discussed the castigation and marginalization of ‘magic’ by attacking ‘superstition’ and how Wuguang’s teachings were a polemical reaction to this. There is another aspect of the attacks on Buddhism during the Meiji and late Qing-early Republican China to which I have yet to give robust attention as it was not central to Wuguang’s reenchanting response to disenchanted Buddhist modernism: anticlericalism. As noted, this sentiment expressed itself in the forced defrocking of Buddhist monastics in Japan and was a major trend during the Chinese Buddhist Revival.⁵⁹⁶ Nowhere can this anticlerical attitude be seen more clearly than in the establishment of the Modern Chan Society (MCS) 現代禪. Unlike the other movements studied in this dissertation, the MCS has already received scholarly attention, albeit very little. The MCS was a lay Taiwanese Buddhist order created in the 1980s which has been described by Ji Zhe as “one of the most remarkable phenomena in the modern history of Chinese Buddhism.”⁵⁹⁷ The most radical aspect of the MCS was its rejection of the

⁵⁹⁶ See the Introduction, Section II, “Buddhist Modernism: From Disenchantment to Reenchantment.”

⁵⁹⁷ Ji Zhe, “The Establishment of a Lay Clergy by the Modern Chan Society: The Practice of Modern Chinese Buddhism,” *China perspectives* 59 (2005): 56.

traditional Chinese Buddhist communal model that separated adherents into lay and monastic followers. Thus, the MCS was a fully Buddhist, yet simultaneously wholly anticlerical movement.⁵⁹⁸

The founder of MCS, Li Yuansong 李元松 (1957-2003) was a devotee of a new Chinese religious movement popular in Taiwan, Yiguandao 一貫道 when he converted to Buddhism.⁵⁹⁹

The monk who oversaw his conversion was none other than Wuguang. In regards to Wuguang's influence Li said:

Guru Wuguang does not criticize other people. The custom of the Modern Chan Society is also not to criticize or compete with others. Guru [Wuguang] said before, "The true essence of Buddhism can be propagated amongst the masses. If this name 'Buddhism' were to disappear there would be no problem." Just like the ideology of Modern Chan Society is propagated by people, if the Modern Chan Society were to disappear there would be no problem. This is the influence of Guru Wuguang on the Modern Chan Society. Even though Guru Wuguang established Mt. Five Wisdoms, he did it all by himself. Without criticizing others. He worried not about other people or even himself. He allowed other people [to do as they pleased] and allowed himself [to do as he pleased]. He did not interfere with other people and did not interfere with his own self.⁶⁰⁰

Here, Li tells us that the independent spirit of his movement—which is in fact what anticlericalism entails—came from none other than Wuguang. Despite the fact that Wuguang was a monk and a leader of his own Buddhist lineage, the fact that he did so in a non-competitive

⁵⁹⁸ Although there is no mention of the MCS, an overview of the ever-increasing growth of lay Buddhist leadership is discussed in Eyal Aviv, "Ambitions and Negotiations: The Growing Role of Laity in 20th Century Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* 1 (2011): 31-54.

⁵⁹⁹ For a full length work on Yiguandao, a new religious movement popular in Taiwan that was imported from China see Lu Yunfeng, *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan: Adapting to a Changing Religious Economy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Book, 2008).

⁶⁰⁰ Jin Ke'an 金柯案, "Xinforen liyuansong laoshi bingzhong suibi 信佛人李元松老師病中隨筆 [Essay on Buddhist Teacher Li Yuansong while Ill]," (2003). Online: http://www.unjinkr.url.tw/m_33.htm (accessed Feb. 5, 2016). Original text: "悟光上師與人無諍，現代禪的家風也是與人無諍訟。以前上師曾說，當佛教的真理能普傳，佛教這個名詞消失也無妨，當現代禪的思想有人宏傳，現代禪消失也無妨。現代禪這個風格多少受到悟光上師的影響，雖然悟光上師創立五智山，但是他都做自己的事。與人無諍訟，與己無諍訟；放過別人，也放過自己；允許別人，也允許自己；放任別人，也放任自己。"

way and essentially ‘danced to the beat of his own drum’ became a great inspiration for Li to do the same and create his own Buddhist lineage: a lay lineage that was devoid of monasticism.

It was not only Wuguang’s free and uncompetitive spirit that inspired Li. In fact, Li states that Wuguang formed Li’s standard of truth:

In my informal writings as well as public publications and recordings, many times I have expressed my gratitude to Guru Wuguang. In my mind, my Guru is an extremely admirable elder monk, as advanced of a practitioner as Kalu Rinpoche. The look in his eyes, his facial expression, the corners of his mouth, his actions and even his idle chatter forever arouse my *prajñā* and have led me to seek out the sources and criteria of verification.⁶⁰¹

Here we see Li idolizing Wuguang, stating that his mundane bodily motions and even idle chatter were a source of deep spiritual inspiration. We also see him refer to Wuguang as “my Guru” 我的上師 and even put Wuguang on the same level as Kalu Rinpoche (1905-1989), one of the most famous teachers of Tibetan Buddhism whose influence was truly global. We also see Li making a direct references to Wuguang’s mystical empiricism that we explored in Chapter 3 in the final sentence where Li says that Wuguang led him “to seek out the sources and criteria of verification.” The way Wuguang prescribed to seek verification of the truth was through experiencing mystical visions.

Wuguang’s emphasis on direct mystical experiences deeply influenced Li’s interpretation of Buddhism. In Li’s book entitled, *The Experiential Ideology of the Modern Chan Society* 經驗主義的現代禪 Li opens with a dedication to Wuguang that reads:

⁶⁰¹ These words were recorded during an interview with Li Yuansong conducted by Yang Huinan 楊惠南 in 1998. See Yang Huinan, “*Li Yuansong Shangshi fangwen ji zhi yi* 李元松上師訪問記之一 [First Visit with Li Yuansong],” (1998). Online: <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/museum/TAIWAN/md/md07-06-01.htm> (accessed Feb. 5, 2016). Original text: “我曾在拙著和公開發行的錄音帶裏，多次感念地提起我的上師，在我心目中上師是和廣欽老和尚、卡盧仁波切同等一流的大修行者，他的眼神、表情、嘴角、動作以及隻言片語的閒常話，永遠是啟發我智慧，讓我尋求印證的泉源與圭臬。”

I sincerely offer this book to my master, Guru Wuguang, in appreciation to this elderly man, may he have many more years. He always goes to the highest places. Like a lighthouse on mundane ground, leading ships of disciples across the shore.⁶⁰²

Despite this influence, the one scholar to write in English about the MCS, Ji Zhe, entirely overlooked the impact Wuguang had on its founder and his teachings. He only mentions Wuguang in passing as the monk to officiate Li's conversion to Buddhism. However, one Taiwanese scholar, Yang Huinan 楊惠南 did recognize this and even quotes Li stating that Wuguang was his greatest influence.⁶⁰³ He also linked one of Li's main teachings, "Externally Chan, Internally Esoteric" 外禪內密 to Wuguang. This is a multilayered doctrine that Li used as a pedagogical methodology, doctrinal classification system and religious imperative.⁶⁰⁴ Even though Yang had the insight to link this statement to Wuguang, I have not found it in any of Wuguang's writings. However, the very first time I ever heard the name 'Wuguang' it was in attribution of this exact doctrine. I received this teaching on August 12, 2011 in the Medicine Buddha Hall from Chesheng. As this was the first time I ever heard of Wuguang—and I had yet to even hear of Li Yuansong and the MCS at this time—it was only after reading Yang that I became aware of the fact that this teaching of Wuguang's that Chesheng quoted was the same one that Li adopted. The fact that two different, disconnected former students of Wuguang uttered the exact same phrase—a phrase I have yet to encounter in Wuguang's writings—means that this was something that Wuguang transmitted orally.

⁶⁰² Li Yuansong, *Jingyan Zhuyi de Xiandaichan* 經驗主義的現代禪 [The Experiential Ideology of the Modern Chan Society] (Taipei: Xiandaichan chubanshe, 1970; second printing, 1981), front endpaper.

⁶⁰³ Yang Huinan, "Inquiry Concerning the Development of 'New Rain' and 'Zen Now': From Yin-shun's Buddhism for this World' 從印順的人間佛教探討新雨社與現代禪的宗教發展," *Foxue yanjiu zhongxin xuebao* 5 (2000): 275-312.

⁶⁰⁴ See Bahir, "Buddhist Master Wuguang's Taiwanese Web," 89-90.

| English | Pinyin | Chinese |
|--|------------------------|---------|
| The luminous mind of the Chan/Zen patriarchs, | <i>Zuchan ming xin</i> | 祖禪明心 |
| [Enables] one to thoroughly see [his] Dharma-nature. | <i>Chejian faxing</i> | 徹見法性 |
| The Great Compassionate vow is like an ocean, | <i>Beiyuan ruhai</i> | 悲願如海 |
| Whose dimensions encompass all sentient beings. | <i>Guangdu youqing</i> | 廣度有情 |

Figure 72: MCS lineage poem.

There is another facet of Wuguang’s influence readily apparent in the MCS. Just like Chesheng, Li also emulated Wuguang’s lineage establishment strategy by writing his own lineage poem (see figure 72). The generational-character chosen from this poem forms the first character in the Dharma-names of Li’s followers. As the first member of this lineage, the generational-character in Li’s name is the first character of this poem *zu* 祖, meaning ‘patriarch.’ The second, personal character that he chose for his new, self-given Dharma-name was *guang* 光. According to Li’s Dharma-heirs, this was to commemorate Wuguang,⁶⁰⁵ who Li reports posthumously visited him in a vision.⁶⁰⁶

From all of this we see that Wuguang’s memory and mystical empiricism live on in the Dharma-heirs of Li Yuansong.

⁶⁰⁵ Jin Ke’an 金柯按, “*Xinforen liyuansong laoshi nianpu chuguo* 信佛人李元松老師年譜初稿 [Early Chronicle of the Buddhist teacher, Li Yuansong],” (2007). Online: <http://www.modernpureland.org/webc/html/buddhist/show.php?num=27&page=1&kind=4> (accessed Dec. 25, 2015).

⁶⁰⁶ Hua Minhui, “*Wei chang duojie yuan*,” 201.

Section III: The Xiu Ming Society

The Xiu Ming Society was founded in Hong Kong in 1996. It is headquartered in a large complex called Mt. Dharma-propagation 弘法山. The main temple there is called the Grandmaster Temple 大師堂. This is a clear reference to Kūkai, who was posthumously called the Grandmaster of Dharma-propagation, Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師. Its English name is the ‘Daishi Place’ reflects this. The training center here is named the Chinese Hong Kong Esoteric Buddhist Enlightenment Training Hall 中華港密修明佛院 (see figure 73).



Figure 73: Front of Mt. Dharma-propagation. GoogleMaps, “57 Cumberland Rd, Hong Kong, Kowloon,” Feb. 2009, (screenshot taken Feb. 5, 2016).

The founder and spiritual head of this group is Guru Ming 明上師 (secular name Li Kuiming⁶⁰⁷ 李居明, English name Edward Li, Dharma-name Chehao 徹豪) from Hong Kong.

⁶⁰⁷ Due to Kuiming’s Hong Kong setting, it should be noted that the character 居 is transcribed according to the Cantonese pronunciation as Kuiming himself uses, however, in Jyutping it is actually *geoi*.

Ming received Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* from Wuguang in 1982.⁶⁰⁸ This is reflected in his Dharma-name, who like Chesheng's, has the generational-character *che* 徹. He later traveled to Japan and received Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* at Kōyasan in 1997. Through the use of multimedia and social media, Ming has made himself extremely famous throughout the Chinese-speaking world. He frequently appears on television, produces many books, DVD's and even has his own radio show. He also has a fan club named 'Li Kuiming's Fan Club' 李居明大師超級 FANS 會.⁶⁰⁹

Although Ming writes prolifically about esoteric Buddhism, the majority of his books, DVDs and CDs have almost nothing to do with Buddhism of any form whatsoever. The topics which he most commonly teaches are Fengshui 風水, magical practices to accumulate wealth and good fortune, dream interpretation, divination and even romantic love.

Despite the fact that his approach radically differs from Wuguang's, Ming states that all of this was inspired by the responsibility that Wuguang gave to him:

I made a great resolution after my master Wuguang passed away. I was initially very low-key in my propagation of [the esoteric Dharma], but I made up my mind to raise my voice after ten years. Why? To provide the masses with the opportunity to join in the assembly of *ācāryas*, to raise the esteem of the Buddha and ensure the future propagation of Zhenyan in China. Right now, Eastern Esotericism [Zhenyan/Shingon] is a Japanese national treasure that they do not propagate to outsiders. My master [Wuguang] was able to obtain [*abhiṣeka* from] Chūin-ryū, this was truly his karmic reward. While bringing the esoteric Dharma back to China, Master Wuguang would say that it was his responsibility to establish an eastern esoteric root temple in Kaohsiung. Twice he referred to me as the "Vanguard of Luminosity" (*guangming*) and gave me permission to wear the purple robes.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁸ Edward Li, *Mizong xinyang yu xiuchi*, 密宗信仰与修持 [The Practice of Esoteric Buddhism] (Beijing: Hualing chubanshe, 2010), foreword.

⁶⁰⁹ The url, www.likuimingfansclub.com now redirects to a more professional looking website found at <http://www.likuiming.com/index.html> (accessed on Dec. 25, 2015).

⁶¹⁰ Edward Li, *Mizong qi meng* 密宗启蒙 [Elementary Esoteric Instructions] (Beijing: Hualing chubanshe, 2010), foreword. Original text: “我於悟光師父圓寂後發此大願。本來一向低調傳道，但決意高調十年。為何？是為了提供機會給眾生，以列席一百零八位阿闍梨之位，共襄佛舉，為真言宗將來在中國延燈也。現

Despite the fact that Ming went to Kōyasan to supplement the esoteric credentials he received from Wuguang, here we see him saying that his mission is the same as Wuguang's, namely, to create a Chinese Zhenyan/Shingon lineage. He also attributes his more commercial approach to Wuguang's having referred to him as the "Vanguard of Luminosity" 光明先鋒. Whether or not this is true, Ming demonstrates a misunderstanding of the meaning of the purple robe that he claims Wuguang allowed him to wear. This robe is meaningless outside of the Japanese ecclesiastical system and being granted permission to wear it—as we saw Wuguang was in Chapter 2—does not make one a successor. However, Ming—and the majority of Han religionists who were the intended audience of this claim—would likely associate this with the 'granting of the bowl and robe' in Chan/Zen succession stories. According to these stories, Chan/Zen masters designate their successor by handing over their begging bowl and monastic robe. Of these, the robe is the most important.⁶¹¹ However, the Japanese ecclesiastical ranks denoted by the different color of one's robe is a different system that has nothing whatsoever to do with transmission. If Wuguang did in fact give Ming permission to wear the purple robes, it would have been an entirely symbolic gesture devoid of any actual ecclesiastical or successive implications. The majority of Han Buddhists, being unfamiliar with the Japanese system, would not be aware of this and would naturally assume this is a succession story.

Despite these inconsistencies, it is critical to note that Ming draws upon Wuguang—not the Japanese priests from whom he received Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka*—as the source of his priestly authority. Nevertheless, Ming has entirely broken away from the MSBL.

在，東密是日本國寶，從不外傳。吾師能獲中院流法脈，正因機緣。密法歸還中華之時，悟光師父曾言道，他的責任是在高雄市建立東密本山，併兩次以“光明先鋒”四字贈我，又賜其所穿之紫衣給我。”

⁶¹¹ See John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 110.

Section IV: Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna

The Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna is based in Bukit Mertajam, Penang in northern Malaysia. Unlike all of the other groups discussed in this chapter, the Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Mantrayāna (MPPM) does not see itself as an offshoot nor different lineage than the MSBL, but as an extension thereof. This is despite the fact that the MSBL in Taiwan does not recognize it as such. It currently is run out of two spaces, an administrative office and an independent temple (see figures 74-75). The temple's name is the Mahā Praṇidhāna Parvata Sahasra Rajya Samghārāma 大願山千光王寺 ('The Great Vow Mountain Temple of a Thousand Rays of *Guang*'). The crest of the MPPM (see figure 76) is meant to be "the flower of one's life rising and returning" and is a clear reference to the lotus rising from the mud as a symbol of enlightenment. The public face of the MPPM is Xiongyu 雄宇 (secular name Tan Yinghao 譚英豪, Dharma-name Xuanyu 玄宇). Xiongyu was not a student of Wuguang, but traveled to the TOUB in 2007 and studied the MSBL's Dharma there. He refers to himself as an MSBL *ācārya*, but those in the MSBL whom I have spoken with say that he only received Karmic affinity-binding *abhiṣeka*.

Xiongyu's teacher and the head of the MPPM, Guru Xiongyao 雄曜上師 claims *abhiṣeka* from the MSBL as well. Xiongyu told me that his teacher Xiangyao is who got him interested in esoteric Buddhism in general and Wuguang in particular. He said it was through the books that Xiongyao had brought back with him from Taiwan that got him interested.⁶¹²

⁶¹² The contents of this section are based on data gathered through correspondence with Xiong on Dec. 24-25, 2016.

The liturgy of the MPPM is the same as that of the MSBL. They celebrate the same holidays and use the liturgical texts that I have seen at both the Samantabhadra Lineage's Medicine Buddha Hall as well as at the TOUB. Similar to both of these movements, the MPPM also runs more festive, family oriented activities (see figure 77).

According to Xiongyu, the MPPM does not 'currently' 目前 provide Dharma-transmission *abhiṣeka* in Malaysia without the oversight of the MSBL. His characterizing this situation as 'currently' leads me to believe that this will happen in the future. If it does, this could mark a new chapter in the history of Wuguang's influence—and contemporary esoteric Buddhism in the larger Sinosphere—by creating a new independent offshoot.



Figure 74: Mahā Prañidhāna Parvata Sahasra Rajya Samghārāma. Image provided by Xiongyu and reproduced with full permission.



Figure 75: MPPM's administrative office. Image provided by Xiongyu and reproduced with full permission.



Figure 76: MPPM symbol. Image provided by Xiongyu and reproduced with full permission.



Figure 77: MPPM youth event. In the middle sit Xiongyu (left) and his teacher Xiongyao (right). Image provided by Xiongyu and reproduced with full permission.

Section V: Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple

Of the five communities discussed in this chapter, the Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple is the one that is most loosely connected to the MSBL. It is headquartered in Taipei in the apartment of its founder, Guru Rongyong 融永上師 (secular name, Chou Wen-Kuei 周文魁; dates unknown). Rongyong also oversees another branch in nearby Taoyuan 桃園 and two in Malaysia, one in Kuala Lumpur and another in Puchong.⁶¹³ Rongyong received Dharma-transmission from Habukawa Shōdō 土生川正道, abbot of Muryōkō-in 無量光院 at Kōyasan. Thus, Rongyong is in fact a Shingon—not Zhenyan—priest. However, that is only part of the story. One can see that there is more to Rongyong’s educational background than what is popularly known simply by his assuming the title ‘guru’ 上師. As this title is not one used in Japanese Shingon—or other Taiwanese-run Shingon centers—it is clear that he chose it himself. This is not surprising as, before studying in Japan under Habukawa, Rongyong was a member of the Samantabhadra Lineage. In fact, it is reported that he entered the one hundred day retreat but then—for reasons I do not know—left in the middle thereof.⁶¹⁴ After this, Rongyong broke away from the Samantabhadra Lineage and severed his connection with them entirely. Nevertheless, his choice of title displays the fact that he was first introduced to the practice of East Asian esoteric Buddhism via Wuguang’s former disciple, Chesheng. As Chesheng relied so heavily on Wuguang for his own study of Zhenyan/Shingon, Rongyong is also indebted to Wuguang.

There is yet an additional connection between Rongyong and Wuguang, an ideological connection. Rongyong has a Master’s Degree from Huafan University’s 華梵大學 Department of Asian Humanities. His MA thesis entitled “An Investigation of the Shingon Heritage and the

⁶¹³ Muryōkō-in Taiwan Beitsuin, Online: <http://koyasan.org.tw/index.php> (accessed Feb. 5, 2016).

⁶¹⁴ I was told this by a high-ranking member of the Samantabhadra Lineage in Jan. 2014.

Revival of Tang-Esoteric Buddhism during the Early Years of the Republic” is on the Shingon-oriented figures of the Tantric Revival.⁶¹⁵ This shows Rongyong’s concern with the Sinic reclamation of the Dharma-transmission chain of Tang Dynasty Zhenyan—something only Wuguang is known to have actually accomplished. Even though Rongyong—as far as I know—has not broken away from Japan as Wuguang did in an attempt to thoroughly Sinicize this chain, he is not against the idea of eventually ordaining his own priests without Japanese oversight.⁶¹⁶ Thus, not only is he linked to Wuguang via Chesheng’s Samantabhadra Lineage, but also his own vision of a Chinese form of Zhenyan.

Section VI: Analysis

The existence of the communities discussed in this chapter attests to the widespread influence Wuguang has had on the religious landscape of the Chinese-speaking world. As discussed in Chapter 5, these organizations represent the MSBL’s primary competitors, and there is therefore quite a bit of tension between them. This tension manifests as both antagonism and separation. I have observed that these levels of tension correspond with how closely related these communities are with one another. Thus, there is a great amount of tension between the MSBL on the one side, and the Samantabhadra Lineage, Xiu Ming Society, and MPPM on the other. As these movements splintered off from the MSBL, they are her direct descendants. However, the mutual tension between these three sects themselves is less than each’s individual tension with the MSBL. Furthermore, while the tension between the Samantabhadra Lineage and Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple is observably high, I have yet to observe any tension between the

⁶¹⁵ Chou Wen-Kuei, “An Investigation of the Shingon Heritage and the Revival of Tang-Esoteric Buddhism during the Early Years of the Republic 民初自日本回傳真言宗阿闍黎復興唐密之考察” (Ma thesis, Huaan University, 2012).

⁶¹⁶ Interview, Dec. 2013.

latter and the MSBL. In fact, Rongyong expressed respect for Wuguang when I met him, but showed clear disdain for the Samantabhadra Lineage.

The Modern Chan Society, having never been an overtly esoteric Buddhist movement—and therefore not a direct MSBL competitor—has all but been forgotten by the MSBL. This is in contrast to the Samantabhadra Lineage, Xiu Ming Society and MPPM, all of which the majority of MSBL members I spoke to were aware of. In fact, Huiding downplays the relationship between Wuguang and Li Yuansong, stating that the two only met once.⁶¹⁷ If this is in fact the case, it would seem that Li exaggerated his ties to Wuguang. If it is not true and there was a close relationship between them, then Huiding is either attempting to protect the MSBL, or he simply does not know. If Li's claims are true—which I believe to be the case—Wuguang's teachings had a deep impact on the founder of a revolutionary Buddhist movement. If he chose to exaggerate his relationship with Wuguang, it demonstrates that Li believed associating himself with Wuguang would bolster his religious credentials. Whichever the case may be, Li's evoking Wuguang is another demonstration of Wuguang's importance.

The founders of the Samantabhadra Lineage, Xiu Ming Society and MPPM represent obvious cases of individuals copying Wuguang, as well as attempting to ride his coattails. Chesheng—who criticizes Wuguang—still displays his ordination certificates that Wuguang signed. His relationship to Wuguang is also referenced on the Samantabhadra Lineage's websites.⁶¹⁸ He also emulated Wuguang by composing a new lineage poem and creating a maṇḍala that he claims encapsulates the Twin Maṇḍalas. Although Li Kuiming of the Xiu Ming Society does not seem to have emulated Wuguang to the extent Chesheng has, he references his

⁶¹⁷ Personal correspondence, Dec. 26, 2016.

⁶¹⁸ These sites can be found at: <http://www.cmha.org.tw/lineage.html> and <http://www.pu-hsien.org/intro/> (accessed July 6, 2016).

relationship to Wuguang much more frequently, claims to be Wuguang's self-appointed successor, and quotes Wuguang's teachings quite frequently. Similarly, the leadership of the MPPM, claiming to be an extension of the MSBL despite not having Huiding's recognition as such, proliferate their online presence and publications with images of and references to Wuguang.

From this we see that the founders of the Samantabhadra Lineage, Xiu Ming Society and MPPM are attempting to present themselves as the heirs of Wuguang and inheritors of his charisma. This was also the case for Li Yuansong, who claimed that he was visited by Wuguang's spirit. This demonstrates that, within the niche markets of esoteric Buddhism and modernized magic of the Chinese-speaking religious marketplace, associating one's self with Wuguang is perceived to be profitable. Chesheng's wine and maṇḍala, as well as Li Kuiming's many publications on magical subjects attests to the fact that they are competing over the same corner of the market as the MSBL.

Conclusion

As we have seen, there are five known Buddhist lineages in addition to the MSBL whose existence is indebted to Wuguang. This is not the full extent of Wuguang's impact on global religiosity, as the meditation teacher and author Shinzen Young referenced throughout this dissertation was also greatly influenced by Wuguang. Additionally, even the followers of Elder Gongga owe part of their success to Wuguang's inviting Gongga to preach at Zhuxi Temple, his allocating space for them to stay there and his assistance in establishing a community in Tainan. This all shows us that, despite being overlooked by the scholarly community Wuguang set multiple chains of events in motion that are still unfolding before our very eyes. As this is a living, breathing topic, only time will tell what the future holds for Wuguang's legacy.