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

Bahir, C.

Conclusion

This study has looked at the context, life, career, ideology and influence of Wuguang, while demonstrating his erudition and mastery of multiple thought-traditions. Our goal was to reveal the overlooked reenchanted side of Buddhist modernism and illuminate how some magically-inclined, modernist East Asian Buddhist clerics have navigated the tension between their religions' enchanted past and rationalized present by reincorporating magical elements from which their faiths were earlier purged in a previous generation. We also sought to uncover how the reincorporation of magic was translated into religious practice, and why living religionists find this reenchantment appealing. To this end, I began by analyzing the ideological contours of nineteenth-twentieth century Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhist discursive engagements with modernity, as well as the historical factors surrounding those engagements. From there, I proceeded to locate Wuguang within these contexts and demonstrate how they shaped the trajectory of his life and the contents of his teachings. This was followed by an in-depth analysis of his writings that illuminated his ideological typology, epistemology, ontology and metaphysics. The final chapters detailed the living incarnation of Wuguang's teachings, the MSBL, as well as its related movements. Data that I presented were gained from textual and historical research as well as long-term, onsite fieldwork at relevant locations throughout Taiwan. Based upon these data, I argued that Wuguang's career and doctrines represent a polemical response to the disenchanting hermeneutic of Buddhist modernism and that this response constitutes a form of 'reenchanted Buddhist modernism.'

In this conclusion, I begin by revisiting the research questions I posed in the introduction, along with my findings, while outlining the ways in which I have argued for my thesis. I then

highlight a number of this study's most provocative peculiarities and present an integrative analysis thereof. From there, I explore this project's broader implications, after which I suggest its contributions. I conclude by discussing the limitations of this study and areas for future scholarly inquiry.

Section I: Findings

In order to understand East Asian clerical attempts to reconcile magic and modernity, I sought to answer several questions that relate to Wuguang's eclecticism and motivations. I strove to discern the identity and provenance of each ideological thread from which he wove his doctrines, and to understand the ways in which this ideological weave resembles, and differs from, those of his predecessors. I also sought to understand Wuguang's means and motivations for sophisticating magic and resurrecting Zhenyan, as well as how these two endeavors are related to one another. Additionally, I set out to account for the allure of the MSBL, analyze its orthopraxis, and contextualize it within its local and global settings.

Wuguang's Eclecticism

I identified the particular threads from which the fabric of Wuguang's doctrines are comprised of, Daoism, Chinese folk religion, Chan/Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, Zhenyan/Shingon, thermodynamics, biology, modern philosophy and Western occultism. I also located the points that Wuguang encountered each of these. Moreover, I traced the paths that these thought-traditions took in order for these encounters to take place.

Wuguang was exposed to Daoism and Chinese folk religion within his childhood home. He deeply probed each in his search for the 'elixir,' and throughout his career as an exorcist, faith healer and related magical and religious leadership roles. He studied Chan/Zen whilst a

monk at Zhuxi Temple. As the education he received there was under the tutelage of the modernist monk Yanjing, this is also the spatiotemporal point that he encountered modern philosophy, and most logically where he was exposed to Western occultism and energeticism as these were popular concepts within nineteenth-twentieth century East Asian Buddhist engagements with modernity. These penetrated Buddhist discourse in Taiwan via Japanese colonialism and exchanges between Taixu's Nanputuo Academy and Taiwanese monks before they came to shape Wuguang's own typology. Wuguang encountered Tibetan Buddhism whilst a student of Elder Gongga and during an encounter with Nan Huai-Chin. Wuguang's interest in biology can easily be explained by his lifelong practices related to Daoist alchemy. His knowledge of Zhenyan/Shingon was born out of his self-study of the Chinese *Tripiṭaka* and his time in Kōyasan, Japan.

Semblance and Divergence

The most prominent similitudes shared by Wuguang's writings and those of his modernist predecessors are the secular-religious-superstitious trinary, the self/other-power binary, material/mental dualism and energeticism. Additionally, the writings of both pay special attention to spirit-communication and funerary rites, as well as to astrology. Like his modernist predecessors, Wuguang adopted the typological trinary and self/other-power binary in order to distinguish science, religion and superstition from one another. He used material/mental dualism to construct an ontological dual-aspect monism based on energeticism that reconciled Buddhism with modern philosophy and science. Wuguang diverged from his predecessors when he explained the aforementioned practices. Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhist modernists had concluded that the *Ullambana* had been contaminated by Chinese ancestor veneration and ghost propitiation practices. In opposition to this, Wuguang labeled the native Chinese customs

as a cherished facet of 'Chinese Buddhism' and explained spirit-communication and astrology in terms of thermodynamic principles.[619] Thus, Wuguang appropriated the same typological categories, as well as philosophical and scientific concepts that his modernist predecessors had used to purge these practices from Buddhism, in order to reintegrate them into the tradition in a way that was intended to be intellectually sound. Additional support is found in the fact that all three were pillars of Wuguang's personal religiosity and the first two—as manifest in the multiple *Ullambanas* and astrological rituals—are central facets of the MSBL's orthopraxis.

Wuguang's Motivations

Desire to Sophisticate 'Superstition'

Wuguang's motivation to sophisticate the aforementioned practices was rooted in his personal religiosity, and in historical factors particular to Taiwan. Personally, his childhood experience of the Divine Husbandman's wrath that constituted daemonic dread was so painfully soul-shaking that it endowed him with an unwavering belief in the existence of magic.[620] It also inspired him to embark upon a religious quest that entailed experimenting with different magical technologies in order to evaluate their potency. Thus, once he encountered the disenchanting hermeneutic of Buddhist modernism whilst a monk at Zhuxi Temple, he experienced a crisis of faith. This crisis cut so deeply that he wished to leave the *saṃgha*, but he stayed because he had burned his familial bridges. Seeking answers, he went into two retreats, began practicing Tibetan Buddhism, and finally decided to go to Japan to become a Shingon *ācārya*. His exploration of esoteric Buddhism represents his attempt to harmonize his personal belief in magic with the modernized form of Buddhism that he had studied at Zhuxi Temple. Having found common

[619] See Chapter 4, Section II, "The Metaphysics of Magic."
[620] See Chapter 2.

ground between the religion of his birth and the faith of his adulthood within Buddhism's esoteric sides, he appropriated the same concepts that had been used to disenchant Buddhism in order to sophisticate magic, and thereby reenchant Buddhism. Thus, his doctrines and the orthopraxis of the MSBL are outcrops of Wuguang's personal religious struggle. This is further attested to by the particular scientific concepts that Wuguang drew upon. His lifelong interest in telecommunications technology as well as "unseen forces, invisible to the eye"—which is a clear example of the "mysterious incalculable forces" that Weber asserted required an "intellectual sacrifice" to believe in—rendered thermodynamics and energeticism the perfect playground for his imagination, which is why the scientific principles related to energy-waves dominate his explanations of magical forces.

Desire to Resurrect Zhenyan

Wuguang's desire to redeem magic, in turn, is what motivated him to resurrect Zhenyan. I base this assertion on similarities between Daoist and Shingon ontology and praxis. The ontological roles and energetic makeup of Daoism's Dao and Shingon's Mahāvairocana that lay at the heart of Wuguang's theory of everything, as well as similarities between extant Daoist and Shingon practices, made bridging these two particular traditions relatively unchallenging.[621] Moreover, as the former is described in terms of *qi* and the latter in terms of *guang*, both traditions are intrinsically amenable to theories concerning energy.[622] Thus, Mahāvairocana's ontological role and energetic makeup rendered Shingon doctrine the perfect medium for Wuguang to clothe Chinese forms of magic within in order to explain that they are not 'superstitions.' Moreover, Jason Josephson has highlighted that Shingon was one school of

[621] See Chapter 4, Section I, "Energetic Ontology."

[622] Shingon's amenability to scientific theories concerning energy is attested to by the writings of the Shingon *ācārya*, Oda Ryūkō, analyzed by Katja Triplett and Pamela Winfield. See note 26.

Buddhism whose adherents in fact pushed back against the Meiji-era Buddhist modernists by attempting to show that their magical practices were in fact not undermined by science.[623] Additionally, as Michael Pye has pointed out, Shingon "allow[s] plenty of space for an 'enchanted' view of the world" where divination and divine intercession are not discouraged, even in the modern era.[624] As Shingon represents an enchanted form of 'religion' rather than 'superstition,' Wuguang was able to use its doctrines to ideologically uplift spirit-communication, Daoist bodily transformation and astrology by explaining them in terms of Mahāvairocana's bodily composition, karma and thermodynamics, and thus present them as facets of 'religion' that are compatible with modernity. Thus, for Wuguang, Shingon functioned as an agent of reenchantment. This is further attested to by Shinzen Young, who stated that Wuguang was "interested in establishing credibility for Vajrayāna by linking it to texts that already existed in the Chinese canon, the Tang dynasty Zhenyan works…"[625] As we know that Tibetan Vajrayāna was a vehicle for Wuguang to harmonize his core religiosity with Buddhism rather than his core religiosity itself, Young's statement attests that Wuguang saw Zhenyan/Shingon as a tool for justifying his personal belief in, and practice of, magic.

All of this elucidates Wuguang's motivations to study and appropriate Shingon. However, it does not fully explain why he resurrected Zhenyan. These are two different matters, for he could have simply used Shingon to sophisticate 'superstition' without founding a new revival lineage, which reveals that there were additional factors at play. These factors were born out of the Meiji-era 'Exiting Asia Ideology' 脱亜論 that framed non-Japanese Asian culture,

[623] Josephson, "An Empowered World," 135-139.
[624] Pye, "Rationality, Ritual and Life-shaping Decisions in Modern Japan," 15.
[625] See note 321.

traditions and people as inferior to those of Japan.[626] This sentiment was made manifest in the Japanese colonial efforts to redefine Zhaijiao along Japanese sectarian lines, to eradicate the practice of chanting Amitābha's name from Taiwanese Chan, and to convince the Taiwanese to burn their Chinese gods and enshrine Shintō *kami* in their stead.[627] As the particular disenchanting hermeneutic of Buddhist modernism that Wuguang was rebelling against was one tinged with pro-Japanese, anti-Chinese sentiment, appropriating particular facets of Shingon—a Japanese form of Buddhism—was not enough to sophisticate Chinese forms of magic. He had to reclaim the entire tradition's Chinese forerunner, which was accomplished—in his mind—by resurrecting Zhenyan and founding the MSBL. The fact that Wuguang was consciously responding to Japanese anti-Chinese sentiment is evidenced by the pro-Chinese—and somewhat anti-Japanese—sentiment embedded within Mt. Five Wisdoms discussed in Chapter 5. As Wuguang's redemption of 'magic' was aimed at redeeming 'Chinese' forms of magic from within a Japanese-based typology, his line of reasoning is perspicuous.

The MSBL and Related Movements

By employing the Religious Economy Model (REM), I determined that people attracted to the teachings of Wuguang and his students represent a niche corner in the Chinese-speaking religious marketplace. This market is largely comprised of affluent and highly-educated people from Buddho-Daoist-folk religious backgrounds who are looking for a way to harmonize the religion of their ancestors with the modern world. Wuguang marketed his religious product by Sinifying Japanese and Tibetan religious practices, while leaving enough just enough foreign elements to ensure that his product retained an exotic flavor. Wuguang's main selling point—

[626] See Introduction, Section III, "Inoue Enryō and the Meiji Buddhist Revival."
[627] See Chapter 1.

charisma—is what fueled MSBL recruitment while he was alive, and its routinized and textualized forms continue to sustain the movement since his death.

Due to the success of Wuguang's product—and the growth of his target market—a number of his formal disciples and associates attempt to establish themselves as the rightful heirs of Wuguang's charisma. They have also emulated the ways in which he packaged and promoted his product. As this market is only growing, since the need of Chinese-speaking religious consumers to harmonize their enchanted past with their disenchanted preset shows no signs of satiation, it is probable that this corner of the religious market will continue to become increasingly saturated.

Section II: Provocative Particularities and Integrative Analysis

There are several facets of Wuguang's life, personality and doctrines that render him a particularly captivating figure. Wuguang's personal saga is intriguing on multiple levels. Mundanely, his travels throughout Taiwan, trips to Japan and voyages as a merchant sailor are not only entertaining, but also offer a first-hand account of several pivotal moments in Taiwan's history, beginning during the height of Japanese colonialism, and spanning the period of Republican martial law and the birth of Taiwanese democracy. Wuguang—who was fluent in Japanese and Taiwanese but never mastered Mandarin—tells us how the Shōwa Financial Crisis and Second Sino-Japanese War impacted the lives of the Taiwanese people: the former caused him to venture overseas and the latter to return home, where he was then suspected of espionage. Later, when seeking to study Shingon at Kōyasan, he faced difficulties acquiring the necessary permits to go abroad due to governmental restrictions, a difficulty his disciples no longer face. Religiously, Wuguang's experimentation of multiple religious traditions throughout Taiwan paints for us a vivid picture of the state of Taiwanese religion during the middle and latter half of

the twentieth century. Thus, Wuguang's personal story is a narrative microcosm for the totality of the nineteenth-twentieth century Han Taiwanese religious experience. His story is one that could happen nowhere but Taiwan.

This charismatic person, whose followers attribute magical abilities to and report that he appeared to them in visions after his death, openly smoked cigarettes and chewed betel nut. He was also very forthcoming about his own struggles with monastic life and admitted to breaking his wife's heart when he became a monk. This larger-than-life figure was thus one who stressed his own humanity and admitted his personal shortcomings. Wuguang's down-to-earth character also flavored his writings with a bit of humor. In a passage on how to reply to those who criticize Buddhist deity devotion as 'superstitious,' Wuguang let his mind dwell in the gutter:

> Some religionists claim that Buddhism is superstitious saying: "You pray to wooden Buddhist statues, but if the wood was fashioned in a different form you wouldn't pray to it.…In fact, the same wood can be made into a toilet, would you pray to a toilet?"…We can retort: "Your wife and Buddha are equally composed of the elements of earth, fire, water, air, space and consciousness. Yes, they are the same, however, they are also different…You would kiss your wife's face, but you would not kiss her ass; is she not the same person?"[628]

Perhaps it was this otherworldly monk's down-to-earth persona that made him particularly appealing to his disciples.

Doctrinally, the most perplexing of Wuguang's teachings are undoubtedly his predictions regarding the future of Buddhist religiosity. In addition to believing that Zhenyan/Shingon would become a major religion in not only East Asia, but Europe and the Americas as well, he predicted that 'Buddhism' as we know it will be rendered obsolete by the actualization of the

[628] Wuguang, *Amituo*. Original text: "有些宗教說佛教迷信，說木頭像尊佛你就去拜，若是創造別樣的你就不去拜…其實相同的木材有些被砍下來做廁所板，廁所板你又不去拜？…我們可以反駁：你太太也是人都是地水火風空識，佛祖也是地水火風空識，當然平等之中有差別…你太太的面你就去親，她的屁股你卻不親，不是同一個人嗎？"

Transporter from *Star Trek*.[629] As outlandish as this claim may seem, it was built directly upon Wuguang's understanding of Shingon doctrine. Based upon his energetic interpretation of Mahāvairocana and all phenomena, Wuguang reasoned that Buddhist practice—as it has been practiced for millennia—is nothing more than energy-manipulation. This deduction led him to conclude that machinery capable of manipulating energy at its most primordial level would thus be no different than reciting Buddhist *sūtras*, invoking deities or even engaging in Daoist bodily practices. Albeit wholly untraditional, this prediction reveals that Shingon was not merely a tool for Wuguang to use in order to sophisticate 'superstition,' as it came to shape his Theory of Everything (TOE).

In fact, Wuguang's understanding of Shingon doctrine was what led him to many of his conclusions. This can be seen in an admonishment of dualism where he states that all forms of dualistic thinking are symptomatic of rejecting a monism that is embedded within Shingon iconography:

> The space of the universe has the perfect characteristic of principle and wisdom. 'Principle' refers to natural phenomena while 'wisdom' refers to the cause of consciousness. Within principle there is wisdom and within wisdom there is principle: principle and wisdom are one, not two. People who do not understand that principle and wisdom are one give rise to two different calamities. The first is materialism, the second is idealism…[630]

This passage reveals that Wuguang's rejection of dualism and consequential energy-based dual-aspect monism was directly based upon his understanding of Shingon doctrine. He asserts that a materialist or idealist outlook is merely an outcrop of perceiving 'principle' 理 and 'wisdom' 智 as a binary rather than a singularity. According to Shingon doctrine, principle and wisdom

[629] See Chapter 4, Section IV, "Future Soteriological Ramifications."

[630] Wuguang, *Chan de jianghua*, 16-17. Original text: "何宇宙間有理與智的全德，理是自然理現象，智是精神之因，理中有智，智中有理，理智合一不二，未悟此者，能生出二種病態，第一是唯物主義，第二是唯心主義…"

constitute a non-dual binary, are respectively embodied by the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* and *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala*, and respectively represent the body and mind of Mahāvairocana.[631] As noted, these two maṇḍalas are seen as different sides of the singular 'Twin Maṇḍala' and thus are non-dual, which is also the case for Mahāvairocana's body and mind. As noted by Ryujun Tajima, this multi-layered non-duality is often articulated in terms of principle and wisdom, via the phrase 'principle and wisdom are not two' 理智不二 that Wuguang evokes in the above passage.[632]

These two cases make it clear that Wuguang's understanding of Shingon non-dualism as related to Mahāvairocana and the Twin Maṇḍalas informed both his predictions and ontology. Although I dissected Wuguang's ideologies in order to identify the particular threads from which he wove them, he did combine them into a singular seamless tapestry. My deconstruction of Wuguang's TOE mirrors the way in which he constructed it. First, he deconstructed all of the traditions that he had studied, locating their points of contention and commonalities, and then struggled to make sense of each. Wuguang lays bare this personal struggle when he relates his spiritual crisis at Zhuxi Temple that inspired him to go into two retreats. After having practiced various forms of experientially rich Daoist techniques for years, he found Chan meditation unfulfilling and desired to leave the *saṃgha*. Wuguang put this struggle's ensuing internal dialogue into words when, after acquiring magical healing powers, he noted contradictions between the teachings of Elder Gongga concerning visionary experiences and the disenchanted form of Buddhism that he had studied under Yanjing. In the midst of this personal spiritual crisis born out of contradictory Dao-Buddhist doctrines and enchanted-disenchanted religiosity, he

[631] See A. Snodgrass, *Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas*, 124.
[632] Alex Wayman and Ryujun Tajima, *The Enlightenment of Vairocana*, Buddhist Traditions, 18 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992), 227.

turned to Kōyasan for answers. Whilst there, he emerged from this crisis, as Shingon doctrine enabled him to harmonize the conflicting ideologies and modes of religiosity that had been troubling him. This was accomplished by deconstructing the seemingly contradictory traditions and utilizing Shingon as a harmonizing agent to bring them together by locating what he believed to be their undiluted essence. From there, he then constructed an entirely new religious outlook by using those commonalities as building blocks. With a renewed religious zeal and appeased soul, he then set himself to the task of disseminating his comprehensive ideology that harmonized science with Taiwan's dominant religious traditions of Daoism, folk religion, Yongquan-based Chan and Japanese forms of Buddhism as well as the increasingly influential Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, Shingon served as a source of inspiration, solace and harmonizing agent for Wuguang whose doctrines came to shape his notion of 'religion.'

Section III: The Bigger Picture

Esoteric Buddhism and Modernist Reenchantment

To explore the overlooked phenomenon of 'reenchanted Buddhist modernism,' I have built directly upon David McMahan's definition of 'Buddhist modernism.' I argued that the widespread usage of this term ignores magical forms of Buddhist modernism as it is limited to its disenchanted forms. In so doing, I have primarily based my analysis on 'demythologization,' which is but one of three characteristics common to Buddhist modernism that McMahan lists, the other two being 'psychologization' and 'detraditionalization.' I justified this by equating demythologization with disenchantment, and asserting that detraditionalization and

psychologization are secondary aspects thereof.[633] I now return to this argument and, based upon the data I have presented, explore its wider implications.

McMahan confirms the interconnectedness between these three aspects by stating that "demythologization and detraditionalization are often continuous with psychologization,"[634] and that "the interaction of Buddhism with psychology exhibits aspects of both detraditionalization and demythologization."[635] However, he does not hierarchize them as I have. Nevertheless, his key illustration of demythologization—which is a modernist reinterpretation of Buddhist afterlife practices and associated belief in noncoporeal entities—constitutes nothing more than a psychologized interpretation,[636] demonstrating that psychologization is merely a disenchanting hermeneutical trope, and not an independent trend. McMahan's definitive illustration of detraditionalization, which references what Robert Sharf refers to as Buddhist modernism's "Hermeneutic of Meditative Experience,"[637] explores the emphasis on personal meditative practice amongst Western Buddhist communities. McMahan states that detraditionalization represents "a shift of authority from without to within,"[638] which he equates with "the modernist tendency to evaluate reason, experience, and intuition over tradition and to assert the freedom to reject, adopt or reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices on the basis of individual evaluation."[639] I argue that this shift of authority and freedom to reject tradition is related to disenchantment, a claim I base on deductive reasoning and on the basis of living examples, as I will now explain.

---

[633] See page 15, particularly note 36.
[634] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 52.
[635] Ibid, 57.
[636] Ibid, 45-48.
[637] See Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42 (1995): 228-283.
[638] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 212.
[639] Ibid, 43.

In addition to transmission-chain provenance and continuity, the display of magical powers was a common way of legitimizing religious authority in premodern Buddhism, something that even Śākyamuni is canonically depicted as doing.[640] This is not the case within disenchanted modernist Buddhist circles. Jack Meng-Tat Chia, building upon the work of Stuart Chandler, has discussed this difference in his analysis of autohagiographical accounts of the Buddhist modernist Hsing Yun. Chia proposes drawing a distinction between "traditional" and "modern" Chinese Buddhist hagiographies, stating that the former often depict religious authorities as "transcendental being[s] with superhuman powers and spiritual attainments,"[641] which is in contrast to the latter that do not make "overt claims of possessing paranormal powers."[642] Moreover, modernist hagiographies downplay the importance of such powers by emphasizing "that life itself is miraculous…such that even the most mundane acts, such as people's ability to walk and swim, can be regarded as 'magical,'" and highlighting the distinction between magical prowess and liberation from *saṃsāra*.[643] In substitution of magic, authors of modernist hagiographies promote their subjects' authority by depicting them as 'worldling Bodhisattvas'凡夫菩薩 in possession of "bodhisattva qualities such as compassion and wisdom in the this-worldly realm."[644] The displacement of magic within modernist Buddhist hagiographical accounts is a clear expression of disenchantment that evinces how detraditionalization, as related to religious authority, leads to the "shift of authority from without to within" and the "the freedom to reject, adopt or reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices on

[640] See David V. Fiordalis, "The Wondrous Display of Superhuman Power in the Vimala- kīrtinirdeśa: Miracle or Marvel?" In *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained through Meditation and Concentration*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Brill's Indological Library, 37 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 97-125.

[641] Jack Meng-Tat Chia, "Toward a Modern Buddhist Hagiography: Telling the Life of Hsing Yun in Popular Media," *Asian Ethnology* 74, no. 1 (2015): 144.

[642] Ibid, 148.

[643] Ibid.

[644] Ibid, 144.

the basis of individual evaluation" that McMahan speaks of. Once the sources of transmission-chains and the magical abilities assigned to the propagators thereof have been disenchanted, the authoritative nature of the contents of these transmissions is open to question. Thus, detraditionalization is a symptom of demythologization/disenchantment. Beliefs and practices whose authenticity and veracity were once considered to be unquestionable, due to their provenance and the authority held by their proponents, are now more open to individual rejection and unbridled reinterpretation. This chain of causation is not particular to disenchanted Buddhist modernism, but is clearly showcased cross-culturally, across faiths. The interplay between questioning traditional modes of religious authority and the quest for 'religious experiences' has been explained by Ann Taves:

> Around 1900, that is, at the height of the modern era, Western intellectuals in a range of disciplines were preoccupied with the idea of experience…thinkers with a liberal or modernist bent…turned to the concept of religious experience as a source of theological authority at a time when claims based on other sources of authority—ecclesiastical, doctrinal, and biblical—were increasingly subject to historical critique.[645]

Since the authorship of scriptural passages attributed to Śākyamuni and other religious figures—as well as their magical powers and those of their perceived heirs—are "shorn of literal truth-value,"[646] they are "transposed into the realm of the symbolic, and thereby effectively neutralized."[647]

Detraditionalization and early forms of Buddhist modernism evolve out of disenchantment, and are intertwined with one another. We see examples of detraditionalization and the emphasis on personal experience in various disenchanted manifestations of East Asian

[645] Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and other Special Things* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4.
[646] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 13.
[647] Ibid, 106.

Buddhist modernism,[648] and even Wuguang's mystical empiricism. Although the "freedom to reject" traditional beliefs and practices is more prevalent in the Western Buddhist communities that McMahan primarily worked with and is not particularly relevant to this study, there is another trend that McMahan correlates with detraditionalization that—I believe—lies at the heart of this study's broader implications: laicization.[649] Nineteenth century Asian laicization emerged from a sentiment of 'anticlericalism'—defined by Vincent Gossaert as "the rejection of the institutionalization of religion, especially monasteries and professional clerics living off liturgical services"—that was rooted in both Confucianism and the Protestant Reformation.[650] This anticlerical trend expressed itself as the forced laicization of Buddhist monks and redefinition of monastic life in Japan during the early Meiji period.[651] This trend also manifested itself within Chinese Buddhist discourse during the Chinese Buddhist Revival, so much so that Holmes Welch predicted that if the trend were to continue, Chinese Buddhist monasticism would eventually disappear.[652] Eyal Aviv has analyzed later effects of laicization on twentieth century Chinese Buddhism, demonstrating that lay leaders have assumed leadership roles that were previously reserved for monastics.[653]

Laicization and anticlericalism represent a trend that directly relates to the larger issue of disenchantment-reenchantment and, I contend, is intertwined with the growing popularity of esoteric Buddhism in East Asia. As just detailed, demythologization fuels detraditionalization and laicization in part due to the demythologization of transmission provenance and the

[648] See Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience."
[649] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 187.
[650] Goossaert, "1898: The Beginning of the End," 308.
[651] See note 155.
[652] Welch, *Buddhist Revival in China*, 267.
[653] 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.

disenchantment of magical powers. Once becoming a monastic is no longer equated with becoming a medium between realms, a living reservoir of ancient wisdom, and a possessor of magical powers, monasticism falls from its pedestal—to a certain extant—which in turn elevates the notion of lay Buddhist life. One form of Buddhism where laymen can function as religious authorities and links within Dharma-transmissions is esoteric Buddhism. While monastic life is an important facet of Tibetan and Japanese forms of esoteric Buddhism, lay practitioners thereof can become *ācāryas* and even give certain forms of *abhiṣeka*. This fact greatly irritated Taixu and other Chinese Buddhists, who believed that laity were inferior to monastics.[654] As esoteric Buddhist clericalism is paradoxically compatible with anticlericalism and allows the ordained to lead a secular life; it has an appeal that orthodox Chinese Buddhism—within a modernist mindset—does not. Moreover, as detraditionalization leads to a surge in lay desire for personal religious experience, esoteric Buddhist rituals that consist of highly experiential visualizations and deity invocations render esoteric Buddhism well-equipped to meet the needs of experientially driven seekers. All of this helps to explain the ever growing popularity of esoteric Buddhism that began during late Republican China and continues today. This is not to discount the impact of urbanization, changes in familial structure or other important components that have led to the rise of the laity. Nor do I suggest that monastic roles were historically limited to the soteriological and supernatural. Nevertheless, in the case of esoteric Buddhism within the context of the Chinese-speaking world, I suggest that anticlericalism and laicization are directly related to disenchantment in a significant way that has largely been overlooked.

[654] Luo Tongbing, "The Reformist Monk Taixu and the Controversy about Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism in Republican China," in *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Monica Esposito (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2008), 437-438. Also see Aviv, "Ambitions and Negotiations."

As esoteric Buddhism is a form of Buddhism that largely retains its enchantment, detraditionalization—in this study's context—renders reenchantment a probable consequence of disenchantment, since people, out of modernist tendencies, are drawn to an enchanted form of Buddhism. We can see exactly this process in the life of Wuguang—and even his followers and emulators. Having found his religious practice as a Buddhist monastic unfulfilling, he was drawn to esoteric forms of Buddhism. This is a narrative echoed by MSBL members who I interviewed. Thus, as with the case of Wuguang's reenchanted Buddhist modernism, the seeds of reenchantment were planted within disenchantment. This cycle is further demonstrated by two offshoots of the MSBL discussed in Chapter 6.

My stratification of McMahan's three characteristics of Buddhist modernism does not contradict his framework, but adds nuance to it, as he himself relates all of these to Weberian disenchantment.[655] This harmony is further demonstrated by the fact that Wuguang's reenchanted Buddhist modernism, and its living embodiment, the MSBL, fit neatly within McMahan's own predictive characterization of a retraditionalized 'Buddhist postmodernism.'[656]

Global Esoteric Reenchanting Trends

To ensure that it rings clear, I have isolated Wuguang's singular voice among the throng of contributors to the discursive chorus regarding the relationship between science, religion, superstition and magic. As socio-anthropological studies focused on popular religion have long dominated scholarly discussions regarding magic in contemporary East Asia, until further original work has been done, we must broaden our gaze to explore this study's wider

[655] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 12.

[656] Regarding Buddhist postmodernists McMahan states that "they do not necessarily attempt [to] abandon modernity in toto—they often use modern technologies and may draw upon the language of Buddhist modernism—but they have rejected some of its innovations in favor of attempting to reconstruct more orthodox aspects of Buddhism." See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 246.

implications. While Wuguang's treatment of magic bears striking similarities to interpretive strategies utilized by Western occult figures as already noted,[657] he differed from such figures in the fact that he sought to remain within the confines of an established religious tradition. One clear example that prominently embodies this difference is Aleister Crowley (b. Edward Alexander Crowley; 1875-1947), author of the most well-known emic definition of 'magic' in the world[658] who "represents and encapsulates, almost paradigmatically, the attempts made by occultism as a whole to come to terms with traditional esoteric concepts in a world deeply transformed culturally and socially by the impact of secularization and modernity."[659] Crowley's reconciliation of magic with modernity entailed founding a new religion that he named Thelema.[660] This is in stark contrast to Wuguang, who went to great lengths in order to firmly establish the MSBL as an orthodox lineage within mainstream Buddhism. Because of this, to explore the widest possible implications of this study, it would be prudent—and fruitful—to look at the global discourse itself while briefly referencing a number of its key figures and facets, rather than comparing Wuguang's doctrines with any particular Western thinker.

East Asia was dragged into the modernist discourse concerning 'religion' during the 1890s, a decade that "saw the triumph of the monists."[661] It is no coincidence that monism—

---

[657] See page 186.

[658] Henrik Bogdan, "Introduction: Modern Western Magic," *Aries Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 12 (2012): 11. Crowley wrote the term 'magic' as 'magick' with an additional 'k' in order to distinguish it from 'superstition' and defined it as, "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will." See Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (York Beach: Maine: Samuel Wieser, 1994), xii-xiii. Also see Egil Asprem, *Arguing with Angels and Demons: Enochian Magic & Modern Occulture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 89.

[659] Marco Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views on Occult Practice," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 6, no.2 (2011): 123.

[660] This religion, which is still practiced today, boasts its own sacred canon, Aiwaz (Aleister Crowley), *The Holy Books of Thelema* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1983).

[661] Dominic Green, "Soul Survivor: Metaphysics as Intraphysics in the Age of Re-enchantment," *The Hedgehog Review* 17, no. 3 (2015). Online: http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2015_Fall_Green.php (accessed Mar. 28, 2016).

which Kokcu von Stuckrad states is the "conception of the cosmos" from which Western esoteric discourses usually emerge[662]—permeates Wuguang's own TOE. In fact, Western magical discourse was being directly influenced by Asian forms of monism at the same time that esoterically-minded occultists—such as Henry Steel Olcott, the 'White Buddhist'—were influencing the South and East Asian pioneers of Buddhist modernism.[663] While Olcott and his like were looking to Asia's traditional religious traditions in order to reenchant their own worlds, their Asian counterparts were looking to the West in order to disenchant the exact sources that were being used to reenchant the West. Thus, the time that this cross-pollination was taking place was one when the actors were moving in opposite dialectical directions.

The particular form of monism that Wuguang—and Inoue Enryō—opined, dual-aspect monism, resembles the thought of Cartesian dualism's most successful critic, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), the Jewish heretic who "opted for secularism at a time when the concept had not yet been formulated."[664] Rather than seeing the material and mental as two distinct substances, he asserted that they were merely different observable aspects of the same underlying substratum that he referred to in his *Ethics* as "*Deus sive Natura*" ('God or nature').[665] For both Wuguang and Inoue,[666] *Deus sive Natura* was the energetic *dharmakāya*. Although Spinoza spoke in terms of the material/mental binary, it has been argued that he believed that these are merely two of many possible 'attributes' that the beholder assigns to phenomenal manifestations of the

---

[662] Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 11.

[663] See note 10.

[664] Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity*, Jewish Encounters (New York: Nextbook; Shocken, 2006), 5.

[665] A full-length dissertation on this facet of Spinoza's thought, as well as the validity of the double-aspect interpretation thereof, is Sam-Yel Park, "A Study of the Mind-Body Theory in Spinoza" (PhD diss, University of Glasgow, 1999).

[666] This similarity between the monisms of Inoue and Spinoza have already been pointed out in Godart, "'Philosophy' or 'Religion,'" 80. Also see Kosaka Kunitsugu, "Metaphysics in the Meiji Period," *Journal of International Philosophy* 3 (2014): 297.

substratum, rendering his position a monistic-pluralism with countless aspects.[667] Interestingly, based on his understanding of Shingon phenomenology, ontology and iconography, Wuguang stated the same thing:

> The universe is not dualistic, it is a monistic pluralism, an infinitely pluralistic monism. Modern science says that the universe is pluralistic, they say this now, but the Buddhas and patriarchs had already said that it is a pluralistic monism. Why is it called pluralistic? It is similar to a flower. Just as the multiple petals of a single flower have many different seeds, the universe contains countless physical potentialities.[668] If we were to label and list them, [that list] would be the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala*. However, all of the phenomena that are enumerated within the *Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala* represent but a small portion [of the universe's plurality], there are many others that not enumerated there, and they are innumerable…[669]

According to both Wuguang and the pluralist interpretation of Spinoza, the plurality that mundane phenomena display belies a universal divine unity. For Spinoza, it was 'God or nature', for Wuguang, Inoue and a number of Chinese Buddhist modernists as well as Western occultists, this underlying divinity was understood as a form of energy.

Magically and mechanically speaking, the energetic substratum concretely identified the *spiritus mundi* ('world spirit') of which all is composed, and by which all is connected, that serves as the medium for the practitioner of magic to manipulate reality.[670] Energeticism has been particularly alluring to Western occultists. Again, to quote von Stuckrad, "Wilhelm Ostwald is a prime example of the entanglement of scientific and religious discourses…his work explicitly contributes to the discourses of science, religion, vitalism, alchemy, philosophy,

---

[667] See R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 105; Amihud Gilead, "Substance, Attributes, and Spinoza's Monistic Pluralism," *The European Legacy* 3, no. 6 (1998): 1-14.

[668] I am translating the term 'virtuous principle' 理德 as 'physical potentiality' for that is how Wuguang defines it later on in the same text. See Wuguang, *Zhaolun*, 2.13.

[669] Wuguang, *Zhaolun*, 2.4 Original text: "宇宙不只是二元， 是多元的一元，無限多元的一元。現在的科學家說社會是多元化的，他們現在才這樣說，但佛祖早就說過了，是多元的一元，一元中的多元。為什麼說多元？好比一朵花，花是一，但花苞含無限多的種子，宇宙一的裡面也有無限多的理德，我們若用一個名詞來總括時，就是胎藏界曼荼羅。而胎藏界曼荼羅所列舉出來的只是一小部份而已，其他沒有列出的項目還有無限的多…"

[670] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," *Religion* 33, no. 4 (2003): 363.

psychology and art."[671] This popularity is because energeticism "emphasized invisible or hidden phenomena, eliminated ontological dualism" and was seen as "merely a new form of the alchemical idea of transmutation."[672] Hanegraaff explains 'transmutation' within the context of Western esotericism as "a process by means of which man or nature may be changed into a higher spiritual state or even attain a divine condition,"[673] which conspicuously mirrors the notion of 'refining the elixir' at the heart of the Daoist alchemical techniques practiced by Wuguang. Thus, quite remarkably, Wuguang found monism and theories regarding energy to be titillating for the exact same reason. Moreover, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4, Wuguang utilized his interpretation of energeticism to explain possession, mediumship and astrology. His TOE, however, was pointedly Buddhist as he correlated this energetic magical medium with karma.

This universal energy is closely related to another philosophical and scientific theory that, like energeticism, has been misunderstood by both scientific historians and scholars of Buddhist Studies alike: the 'luminiferous æther' or simply 'ether.' The modern notion of the ether can be traced to Descartes,[674] who looked to the celestial bodies and asserted that there had to be a physical mechanism that caused their motion. As explained by Edmund Whittaker:

> Descartes regarded the world as an immense machine, operating by the motion and pressure of matter. 'Give me matter and motion,' he cried, 'and I will construct the universe.' A peculiarity which distinguished his system…was the rejection of all forms of action at a distance; he assumed that force cannot be communicated except by actual pressure or impact.[675]

---

[671] Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion* (Boston and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Inc, 2014), 80.

[672] Mikhail Agursky, "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism," 249.

[673] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 5.

[674] This is despite the fact that Hammerstrom claims that it originated "in the 1850s and 1860s." See Hammerstrom, *Science of Chinese Buddhism*, 256, n. 37.

[675] Edmund T. Whittaker, *A History of the Theories of Aether and Electricity from the Age of Descartes to the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1910), 3.

The concept of 'action at a distance' Descartes is shown to have rejected here is the belief that material phenomena can affect one another without coming into physical contact. Descartes's rejection was based on his rigid ontological dualism that asserted that material and mental phenomena can only interact with phenomena of the same type. However, he observed that light from the celestial bodies shine down upon the Earth. This presented a quandary, since light does not seem to constitute a material substance. This led him to further speculate about the nature of matter itself and trifurcate it into luminous, transparent and dense forms. The first constituted what we think of today as 'light' while the last, dense matter, was the material on earth which we are all familiar with. Since luminous matter must be transmitted to dense matter via another material substance, he proposed that there exists a medium that is composed of an invisible material that connects the source of light to its destination. This medium was his luminiferous æther. This idea was later taken up by scientists, and although scholars of the humanities and sciences popularly claim that Einstein disproved the existence of the ether, he himself rejected action at a distance, and combined earlier etheric theories with his own. In an address at Leiden University in 1920, Einstein proclaimed, "Recapitulating: we may say that according to the general theory of relativity…there exists an ether."[676]

As noted, the belief in the ether was used by Chinese Buddhist modernists to harmonize Buddhism and science. It continues in widespread use amongst magically inclined Western thinkers.[677] Its religious appeal in the East and West of both past and present can be attributed to the fact that it "held a central position in nineteenth-century physical science whilst remaining

[676] As translated from the German in Galina Granek, "Einstein's Ether: Why did Einstein Come back to the Ether?" *Apeiron* 8, no. 3 (2001): 25.

[677] Mark Morrison, *Modern Alchemy*, passim. Its current popularity is evident in the work of a contemporary occultist already mentioned, Peter J. Caroll. See his *Liber Kaos* (Boston and York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1992), passim.

sufficiently mysterious to allow all kinds of metaphysical speculation regarding its relationship with the psyche and the soul."[678] For Wuguang, this ether was alive, as in reference to astrology we saw him state that "the universe is the living body of the *dharmakāya*…that encompasses all of the heavenly bodies…[which] are cells of the *tathāgata*.[679] Thus, just as his energeticism was particularly Buddhist, his ether was particularly Shingon, for he saw it as synonymous with Mahāvairocana. As an heir to Buddhist modernism, thermodynamics, Daoism and esoteric Buddhism, Wuguang asserted that the ether is the universal substratum that constitutes, connects, and permeates all phenomena. Energeticism was particulalry attractive to Wuguang since it enabled him to harmonize science, philosophy, Buddhism and Daoism.

These multiple similarities are easily attributable to the cross-continental flow of ideas characteristic of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, I would like to heuristically suggest that there is something deeper at work here related to the ideological contents of this discourse, rather than simply the contexts of its contributors: magic and reenchantment. The reason that magical thinkers gravitate towards energeticism in particular and monism in general is that they are aptly suited to a magical worldview in which invisible forces—mutable through ritualized formulae—fill the world. Rather than requiring an intellectual sacrifice, believing in them can be justified by science, the most powerful disenchanting force of all. Perceiving the universe as being singularly composed of an invisible, divine, magical force that science has labeled as 'energy' not only *re*-enchants the world, but in a sense enchants it anew by flipping science on its head and turning it into an enchanting, rather than disenchanting, force.

[678] David Wright, *Translating Science: The Transmission of Western Chemistry into Late Imperial China, 1840-1900* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 2000), xxv.

[679] See note 456.

Section IV: Contributions

First and foremost, this study both deepens our understanding and broadens our knowledge of twentieth-twenty first East Asian religiosity. This was accomplished by bringing to light the life, exploits and doctrines of a pivotal twentieth-century Buddhist figure. As noted, Wuguang's importance is not limited to Taiwan, as he impacted modern Buddhism throughout the Chinese-speaking world (see Chapter 6), and even influenced the ideology of Shinzen Young in North America. This study makes additional contributions to multiple areas in the fields of Buddhist and East Asian Studies, the study of Taiwanese religion and showcases a the unexplored, reenchanted side of Buddhist modernism. Broadly speaking, this study also contributes to scholarly discourse concerning the disenchantment, and eventual reenchantment, of the world.

Buddhist, East Asian and Taiwanese Studies

Discovering how Wuguang acquired his eclecticism brought to light overlooked aspects of modern pan-Asian intellectual exchange. One example is the fact that energeticism was a key facet of Buddhist engagements with science not only in Japan, but also China and even possibly Tibet, where scholars have consistently misidentified this theory as Einstein's Special Relativity. The same is true for the self/other-power dichotomy. Although Michael Pye had previously noticed that it became a talking-point within modern Japanese Zen circles, its use as a way to distinguish 'religion' from 'superstition' had gone unnoticed.[680] Moreover, my isolation of 'magic' as a non-category within the East Asian secular-religious-superstitious trinary deepens our understanding of magically inclined Buddhist modernists have sought to reconcile magic

[680] See pages 70-73.

with modernity. I have thus nuanced our understanding of nineteenth-early twentieth century Buddhist engagements with Western typologies.

My examination of the MSBL and its related movements as competing religious suppliers vying over the same niche market of affluent, educated, magically-inclined Chinese-speaking religionists adds both breadth and depth to our understanding of contemporary East Asian religiosity. This is in addition to highlighting the hitherto unnoticed phenomenon of Zhenyan revivalism that continues to sweep across this corner of the world.

Taiwanese Religion

In addition to deepening our understanding of Sino-Japanese Buddhist modernism, this study has also brought to light the First Taiwanese Buddhist Revival as well as the historico-ideological factors that gave birth to it. This revealed the anti-superstitious nature of the Kōminka campaign and the career of Wuguang's master-father, Yanjing. Additionally, the early transmission of Tibetan Buddhism to Taiwan is still an under-explored area in which this study has helped advance our knowledge, due to Wuguang's involvement with Elder Gongga and her disciples. As scholarly discourse on contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism has been dominated by discussions on Humanistic Buddhism, it is my hope that this study will serve as a reminder that Humanistic Buddhism is just one of drop within the ocean of Taiwanese Buddhism, and that this is an area whose past and present both warrant future investigation.

Reenchanted Buddhist Modernism

My findings led me to conclude that Wuguang's doctrines represent a form of reenchanted Buddhist modernism. The relevance of this conclusion is not limited to the singular figure of Wuguang, but has wider repercussions. While previous studies focused on the survival and persistence of magic in modern popular religious communities, I additionally analyzed how

a cleric of 'high church' Buddhism intentionally reincorporated magic. Thus, I was able to discover how Buddhist ontology, epistemology and soteriology—whose comprehension thereof is beyond the scope or concern of the average religionist—continue to be reinterpreted to reconcile modernity, magic and high/popular forms of Buddhism. Even though I have largely focused my examination of reenchanted Buddhist modernism to Wuguang, this taxonomy has global applicability as it represents the most visibly vital state of contemporary Buddhism. This study thus breaks new ground and opens up an entirely unexplored area of contemporary East Asian religiosity by revealing the overlooked magical side of Buddhist modernism. There are undoubtedly many like-minded modernist Buddhists who have undertaken interpretive endeavors similar to that of Wuguang. Understanding these endeavors as reenchanted forms of Buddhist modernism—rather than fundamentalism[681]—by applying the framework I have applied to Wuguang will certainly deepen our understanding of contemporary East Asian religiosity and the ever-evolving relationship between Buddhism and modernity.

Reenchantment

This study additionally contributes to the broader issues regarding the disenchantment and reenchantment of religion. Disenchanted and reenchanted Buddhist modernism respectively represent but one religion's nexus of traditions that have been intentionally purged of magic in order to be harmonized with modernity, and later reenchanted in order to reclaim what had been lost. As explained, Wuguang's reviving Zhenyan in order to reenchant Buddhism strikingly resembles a number of Western, esoterically inclined reenchanters who challenged the disenchantment of the world by reviving dormant magical traditions during the 'Occult Revival,' which represents the surge of interest in occult traditions, first throughout Europe and then in the

[681] See pages 9-10.

New World, that began in the nineteenth century that saw renewed passion for the study of heterodox and arcane disciplines such as alchemy, astrology and various other forms of magic. It was during this time that various occult orders and organizations such as the Theosophical Society were formed.[682]

The relationship between the Occult Revival and disenchantment/reenchantment has been discussed by Wouter Hanegraaff. He explains that the birth of 'the occult' or 'Western esotericism' as a typological category "can be seen as a direct outcome of the disenchantment process as formulated by Weber"[683] and that it served as a "waste-basket category of 'rejected knowledge'"[684] and "superstitious arts"[685] such as divination, spirit communication and preternatural powers that "came to be reified as a positive counter-tradition of enchantment (or, eventually, re-enchantment)."[686] Thus, this "waste-basket category" served as a 'typological identity' for magic, and contained the means of reenchantment due to what had been deposited into it. This is in contrast to Wuguang's discursive context, where magic lacked a typological identity within the secular-religion-superstition trinary. As there was no 'typological other' for Wuguang to draw from, he sought out esoteric forms of Buddhism such as Karma Kagyu and Shingon, for they were examples of 'religion' whose enchanted magical contents remained intact. However, like his Western reenchanting counterparts, Wuguang sought out religious

[682] See James Santucci, "Theosophical Society," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism,* ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1114-1123.
[683] Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 254.
[684] Ibid, 230.
[685] Ibid, 232.
[686] Ibid, 254.

technologies considered to be extinct. A number of Western occultists looked to Europe's pagan past, ancient Egypt[687] and the 'Mystic East,'[688] while Wuguang turned his gaze to Tang China.

These similarities and differences demonstrate that this study's relevance is not confined to Wuguang's East Asian context, as it contributes to our understanding of the ever-evolving relationship between modernity and magic across religious traditions. Although separated by geography, culture and language, the particular discourses that Wuguang and other magically inclined, science-embracing reenchanting figures lend their voices to are threads within a much larger, worldwide conversation.

Section V: Limitations and Questions for the Future

As this is the first nuanced investigation of Wuguang, it is anything but exhaustive. There are no doubt details related to his life, career and influence that I have yet to uncover. One example is his encounter with the Buddhist reformer Nan Huai-Chin, the nature, extant and time of which all remain a mystery.[689] Similarly, although I have identified six religious movements that owe their existence to Wuguang (five of which are detailed in Chapter 6), there very well may be additional important religious figures whom he greatly influenced. Moreover, the breadth of Wuguang's influence has precluded the possibility of thoroughly exploring the exact ways in which he impacted each figure who he influenced.

Given this study's limited focus, it did not touch upon other contemporary magically inclined modernist East Asian clerics or their followers. This prevented me from comparing

[687] See Christopher I. Lehrich, *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 1-17.

[688] See Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 7-35 and passim.

[689] See page 117.

Wuguang's approach with like-minded figures. As it is obvious that magic has not disappeared from East Asian religiosity, searching for other religious figures who have attempted to reclaim magic in a sophisticated way should prove to be a worthwhile endeavor. Moreover, although I successfully identified specific aspects of disenchanted modernist Buddhist discourse that shaped Wuguang's doctrines, the presence of energeticism therein and other figures of the First Taiwanese Buddhist Revival certainly warrant further investigation. Lastly, this study was able to only touch upon a single voice within the global, modern discourse of reenchantment. I suggest that future inquiries into these areas should attempt to identify a number of phenomena highlighted throughout the course of this study. The role that self/other-power played in Japanese Buddhist engagements with modernity is most likely a subject worthy of its own study. The same is true for energeticism and etheric theories.

Wuguang's dizzying eclecticism rendered this study a microcosmic crossroads of the ever-unfolding, universal conversation concerning traditional beliefs and scientific advancement. Although undoubtedly unique in a number of ways, Wuguang and his beliefs were products of their time and location, and were directly informed by ideas that originated on the opposite side of the globe. It is my hope that this study will inspire scholars outside the areas of popular religion, anthropology and folk-lore to turn their attention to the more sophisticated, 'High-Church' side of magic in the modern world, and explore the magical side of religious modernism in general, and reenchanted Buddhist modernism in particular.