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Emerging Scholars

Buddhist Master Wuguang's (1918–2000) Taiwanese web of the colonial, exilic and Han

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Introduction

THE Mantra School Bright Lineage¹ 真言宗光明流 is a modern Buddhist movement that encapsulates Taiwan's richly tumultuous history. The diverse historico-cultural and sectarian threads from which it is woven were imported from Mainland China, Japan and Tibet. The precise point at which these strands intersected can be located within a single monk's crisis of faith that led him on a quest for religious fulfillment.

Master Wuguang² 悟光上師 (a.k.a. Chen-Miao 全妙, secular name Chang Jinbao 鄭進寶 1918–2000) established the Bright Lineage in 1972 in Tainan 台南 upon his return from Kōyasan 高野山, Japan, where he received empowerment 灌頂 and became a Shingon 真言 priest 阿闍梨. This new religious movement was largely modelled after the Ono branch 小野流 of Japanese Shingon into which Wuguang was initiated.³ It also incorporates elements from Zen 禪, Tibetan Buddhism and Western Occultism.

The only academic treatises on the sect are two recent MA theses in Chinese.⁴ In order to lay the groundwork for a robust understanding of the sect, this article begins by fo-

1. Official English name.

2. Transliterations of Chinese words are in accordance with their established usage even when not in Pinyin. If no such usage is existent, then Mandarin Pinyin has been used.

3. As corroborated by the sect's lineage chart 血脈 and the Zuishin'in Religious Research Institute's, *Zuishin'in shōgyō tojiin nettowāku* (Tokyo: Zuishin'in Shōgyō Chōsa Kenkyūkai, 2004), section 1, 30–31.

4. Li Yongbin, "Master Wu Light Esoteric Ideological Research," (MA thesis, Xibe University: 2011) and Gu Zhengli, "Study on Shingon Buddhism of Guangmingwang Temple at Wuzhishan, Kaohsiung" (MA thesis, Huafan University, 2012).



Figure 1: Temple of Universal Brightness. Photo by the author; March 2013.

cusing on the context from which it arose as primarily told through the monastic career of its founder; the framework for which is based on Wuguang's autohagiography entitled *A Memoir of Trials and Tribulations* 滄桑回憶錄.⁵ This narrative has been corroborated with secondary sources on tangentially related subjects. This is followed by examples of Wuguang's unique teachings, his influence on other Buddhist movements and concludes with an analysis. Data has been ascertained through long-term, on-site fieldwork at relevant communities throughout Taiwan which I have been conducting since August, 2011. This has been coupled with information collected from historical documents, religious texts and secondary sources.

Origins

The historico-cultural factors that lead to Wuguang's founding the Bright Lineage, can be traced to Late Ming and early Qing Dynasty Fujian 福建, the Japanese colonial period 日治時期 (1895–1945) and the importation of Tibetan Buddhism.

Sino-Japanese Origins

During Japan's rule of Taiwan, there were five dominant Buddhist Temple networks which had earlier been associated with Yongquan Temple 湧泉寺, a Chan 禪 temple with both Linji 臨濟 and Caodong 曹洞 elements, located in Gushan 鼓山, Fujian Province. Under Japanese rule these networks formed ties with either Zen's Sōtō 曹洞 or Rinzai 臨濟 sects⁶

5. Mantra School Bright Lineage, "Cangsang Huiyilu", accessed 2013-07-31.

6. Kan Zhengzong, *Taiwan Fojiao Yibainian* (Taipei: Dongda, 1999), 246.

and became associated with their respective head temples in Japan.⁷ One such temple network, Kaiyuan 開元, became associated with Japan's Rinzai Myōshinji sect 妙心寺派.⁸

In 1955, Wuguang left his wife and children to live at a Kaiyuan network temple in Tainan, Zhuxi Temple 竹溪寺, where he became a novice monk in 1957. Zhuxi Temple's abbot at that time, Monk Yanjing 眼淨和尚 (secular name Linkan 林看 1898–1971) was a high-ranking member of the Kaiyuan network. He was also one of Taiwan's "Buddhist Elites" 佛教菁英, a class of Taiwanese monks who received training in Japan during the colonial period.⁹ He studied at Hanazono University 花園大学 in Kyoto, the main university of the Myōshinji sect. He also studied Shingon in Gifu 岐阜, Japan.¹⁰ It was in this Sino-Japanese Buddhist environment that Wuguang converted to Buddhism and became a Chan monk.

Sino-Tibetan Origins

In the wake of WWII and the Chinese Civil War, Taiwan's sovereignty changed hands from Japan to the Kuomintang (KMT) 國民黨. Seeking to eventually retake the Chinese mainland, the KMT involved itself in the affairs of the ethnic minorities on the PRC's outskirts, which led to a tense relationship with the exilic Tibetan government in Dharamsala. However, mainland Chinese lamas not politically affiliated with Dharamsala began to establish religious centers in Taiwan. Thus began the "Mainlander Transmission" of Tibetan Buddhism.¹¹ Simultaneous to this importation, Wuguang had become dissatisfied with his Chan practice. He considered resuming a secular lifestyle, but remained a monk due to the vows he had taken and the inevitable loss of face after having left his family for the monastery. While on a three-month retreat, he heard of a female teacher of Tibetan Buddhism's Kagyu Sect, Elder Gongga 貢噶老人 (secular name Jia Shuwen 申書文, 1903–1997). For some time, Gongga had been contacting temples throughout Tainan in search of a setting to come and preach but was turned down by each one. Though today she is most famous for being posthumously mummified into a golden Flesh Body Bodhisattva relic 肉身菩薩, she was instrumental in the success of Tibet's Kagyu sect in Taiwan. Originally from Beijing 北京, she spent years on various retreats throughout Tibet and China

7. Mao Shao-Chou, "A Study on the Connection of History and Spatial Meaning in the Great Matzu Temple of Tainan" (MA thesis, Nanhua University, 2005), 45.

8. Chang Jinbao, "Yanjing heshang shiji," in *Yanjing heshang yuanji ershiwu zhounian jinianji*, ed. Shi Jingming (Kaohsiung: Yuanheng simiao lin, 1985), 69.

9. For information on Taiwan's Buddhist elites, see Ohno Ikuko, "The Appearance of the Buddhism [sic] Elites in the Japanese Taiwan Rule Times by Overseas Taiwanese Students of Soto Zen Buddhism Komazawa University" (MA thesis, Tamkang University, 2009).

10. Yang Kung-mei, "The modern transition of Taiwanese Buddhist Monastery: A Comparison Between the Kai-yuan and the Miao-shin Temples in Tainan" (MA thesis, Nanhua University, 2005), 60.

11. Abraham Zablocki, "The Taiwanese Connection: Politics, Piety, and Patronage in Transnational Tibetan Buddhism," in *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 386.

before coming to Taiwan. Despite her influence, she did not receive full monastic ordination until the age of 77 in 1980.¹²

At that time, Tibetan Buddhism was considered heterodox 外道 amongst the Buddhist establishment in Tainan. This, coupled with her gender, is why Gongga was refused by the temples she approached. Having heard of her difficulties, Wuguang used his position at Zhuxi Temple to organize a ten-day event there featuring Gongga in 1960. This event, which had over one-hundred attendees, was one of the first times Tibetan Buddhism had been publicly taught in southern Taiwan and was a key event in its early propagation.¹³ During this event Wuguang, along with the majority of attendees, received preliminary esoteric empowerment 灌頂.

Shortly thereafter, Wuguang allocated a newly constructed dormitory at Zhuxi Temple for a number of Gongga's followers to reside in Tainan. He also became an active member in the new community by attending classes and being the primary officiator of the community's routine rituals. This was all while simultaneously fulfilling his regular responsibilities at Zhuxi Temple. Wuguang, however, became disillusioned with Gongga after she allocated his position in the community to a recent initiate who Wuguang believed had relatively little training.

Interim Period

In 1967, Wuguang received full monastic ordination 受具足戒. Despite this, Wuguang continued to be filled with doubts. In an effort to ease his suffering, he sought to attend Hanazono University as his abbot Yanjing and a number of other Kaiyuan network monks had done. However, due to immigration issues during Taiwanese martial law (from 1949 to 1987) and a lack of funding, this turned out to be an impossibility. Despondent, in 1969 Wuguang retreated into the mountains in rural Kaohsiung county where he resolved to live out his remaining days in a small hut next to a waterfall. After reportedly curing a man from syphilis through sympathetic magic 加持,¹⁴ Wuguang became a very sought-after religious healer.

Although he cherished this new ability, rather than strengthening his faith it only exacerbated his confusion as he did not understand its mechanics. He was dissatisfied with the explanations he had received from Gongga and unable to locate the answers within the Chinese Buddhist Canon. However, this search did lead him to discover another form

12. See Douglas Gildow and Marcus Bingenheimer, "Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan: Two Case Studies," *Asia Major* (3rd Series), 15, no. 2 (2002): 95, 123.

13. Luo Weishu, "A study of the development of Chongqing Temple in Tainan and its relationship to the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Southern Taiwan," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, 20 (2007), 316–317.

14. Translation taken from Robert Sharf, "Visualization and Maṇḍala in Shingon Buddhism", in *Living images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert Sharf and Elizabeth Sharf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 196. Also see Pamela D. Winfield, "Curing with *kaji*: healing and esoteric empowerment", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32, no. 1 (2005): 107–130.



Figure 2: Long San Villa and Temple of Universal Brightness. The large red sign reads “Temple of Universal Brightness”, while the yellow letters above state “Long San Villa”. Photograph by the author; Tainan, 3 May 2013.

of esoteric Buddhism which he had previously overlooked; Shingon’s Chinese Tang Dynasty forerunner Zhenyan.¹⁵ Due to Zhenyan’s esoteric nature and Chinese—rather than Japanese or Tibetan—setting, Wuguang felt an immediate affinity towards it.

Kōyasan

In the hopes of finding solace, Wuguang set his sights once again on Japan, this time to Kōyasan; one of the main centres of Japanese Shingon. According to Shingon’s lineage scheme, its teachings were transmitted from India to Japan via Tang dynasty China, where it existed as Zhenyan. Shortly after its transportation to Japan by Kūkai 空海 (774–835),

15. The nature of Tang dynasty Esoteric Buddhism is a point of contention amongst scholars, one which is outside the scope of this project. What is relevant, however, is Wuguang’s belief therein. For information see, Charles D. Orzech, Richard K. Payne and Henrik H. Sørensen (eds.), *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 3–18.

who studied in China, orthodox Chinese Zhenyan lineages faded into obscurity and its spiritual technologies were subsumed within other Buddhist schools, Daoism and folk religion.¹⁶ Thus, in Wuguang's eyes Shingon initiation offered him his only legitimate entrance into Zhenyan.

Through contacts forged under colonialism, he was put in touch with Meguro Ryūko 目黒隆幸, the then and current head priest of Kōyasan's Henjōson-in 遍照尊院. Meguro warned Wuguang of the difficulty studying at Kōyasan posed to foreigners. Nevertheless, Meguro advised Wuguang to apply for a student visa and make the necessary final arrangements after arriving in Japan. Once in Japan in 1971, Meguro introduced him to Hotta Shinkai 堀田真快 (1890–1984), the chief abbot 座主 of Kongōbu-ji 金剛峰寺. Wuguang requested to study at his training hall 専修学院. Hotta refused this request because the training hall was not open to foreigners at that time. In response to this refusal, Wuguang likened his situation to that of Shingon's founder Kūkai. He told those that barred his entrance that if Kūkai's Tang Dynasty Chinese teachers had been similarly exclusive then today there would be no such thing as Shingon.¹⁷

Despite this difficulty, he remained in Japan and began auditing classes. This dedication, coupled with his remarks about Kūkai, helped Meguro persuade Kamei Senyū 亀位宣雄, the abbot of Hōju-in 宝寿院, to allow Wuguang to officially enrol as a student and undergo the initiatory empowerment process to become a Shingon priest.

The Mantra School Bright Lineage

After receiving esoteric empowerment, Wuguang returned to Tainan the following year and established the Mantra School Bright Lineage. He began teaching his followers his own form of Esoteric Buddhism at the Miaoming Monastic Quarters 妙明精舍 which he had built in 1967 next to Zhuxi Temple. In 1973 Wuguang's fledgling community relocated its ritual space to a small folk religion sanctuary, Long San Villa 龍山内院 to whose name was added Temple of Universal Brightness 光明王寺. Both religions still currently coexist within the same space, as shown in fig. 2.

Almost immediately, Wuguang began to initiate his own disciples on Taiwanese soil rather than sending them to Japan. Though much of what he taught in terms of doctrine and practice was similar to the Shingon he had studied in Japan, Wuguang altered the tradition, predominantly drawing inspiration from Chinese Chan, Rinzai Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism. Wuguang also drew inspiration from Western occultism which he had studied independently.

16. Charles Orzech "Seeing Chen-yen Buddhism: traditional scholarship and the Vajrayāna in China", *History of Religions* 29, no. 2 (1989): 95–96.

17. As reported in the personal blog of Dr. Huang Ying-Chieh (a.k.a. Tulku Palme Khyentse Rinpoche), associate professor at Huafan University. Huang Ying-Chieh, "Yimingfufashi: xiao moheside zailairen", *Pusa qingliang yue youyubijingkong zhongsheng xinshuijing puti yingxian zhong* (6 June 2009, 2:16 am).



Figure 3: Wuguang's Religious Banner 宗徽. Image courtesy of a Bright Lineage member.

Around 1980, these initiations as well as innovations were brought to the attention of Wuguang's Japanese teachers in Japan. Displeased, they had Meguro write a letter to Wuguang revoking his permission to teach. Wuguang responded with his own letter, stating that in order for the tradition to take root in Taiwan it must be adapted to its new context. He also wrote that he needed to compose a more comprehensive curriculum aimed at Taiwanese lay devotees. He received no official response.

However, it seems that Wuguang was vindicated from his promotions within the Japanese ecclesiastical hierarchy 僧階.¹⁸ In 1983 he was given the title of lesser archbishop 少僧正 and was allowed to wear purple robes, the colour associated with the Japanese imperial household, as a sign of his authority.¹⁹ In the same year, Wuguang purchased a large plot of land in Kaohsiung's Neimen District 高雄市内門區, where construction began the following year on a large complex named Mount Five Wisdom 五智山, centered around the Temple of Universal Brightness²⁰ 光明王寺 whose architecture is meant to mimic that of Tang Dynasty China (see fig. 1). Although this temple has been the sect's headquarters since its construction, the sect has various branches throughout Taiwan and one in Hong Kong. Since Wuguang's passing in 2000, Huiding 徽定 (a.k.a. Cheding

18. Wuguang's certificates can be found in his book, *Fojiao zhenyanzong jishenchengfo guan* (Kaohsiung: Paise wenhua, 1991), front endpapers.

19. Though primarily focused on Zen, for a thorough treatment of purple robes see, Duncan Williams, "The purple robe incident and the formation of the early modern Sōtō Zen institution," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 27–43.

20. Official English name.

徹定, secular name Jiang Huixiong 蔣徽雄) has been the sect's spiritual leader. Huiding began studying with Wuguang at the age of 19 and was named abbot of the Temple of Universal Brightness in 1999.

Consolidation

Having traced Wuguang's monastic career and pinpointed some of his major sources of inspiration, what follows are a few poignant examples of how he interwove these disparate elements into a comprehensive religious system.

Inspired by the crests 紋 used in Japan to signify Buddhist sects, Wuguang composed a unique symbol to encapsulate the doctrines of his own. Fig. 3 depicts Wuguang's religious banner. It incorporates the Japanese mitsudomoe 三つ巴, the Indian vajra sword and the caduceus, an emblem commonplace in Western Occultism and used by the medical profession.²¹

One of the titles used by Wuguang, *shangshi* 上師, which I have hitherto translated as “master” in accordance with English speaking members of the sect, is quite telling. It is actually an abridged version of the title “Lofty Vajra Teacher” 金剛上師 (see fig. 4). It is used neither for Shingon priests in Japan nor for Chinese Buddhist monks in Taiwan. Rather, it is used by Tibetan Tantric teachers and is more correctly rendered as “guru” or “lama”.²² It is also how Gongga's followers refer to her. Thus it is clear that Wuguang was attempting to consolidate what he considered to be the kernels of truth he had encountered throughout his multifaceted studies.

Influence

Wuguang's influence has not been confined to the Bright Lineage. In fact, a number of his former students have gone on to form their own Buddhist movements. Additionally, Japanese sponsored Shingon centres in Taiwan, although not affiliated with the Bright Lineage also display Wuguang's influence; either by incorporating elements from his consolidation or legitimizing their authenticity by distancing themselves from it.

One example of Wuguang's impact was the formation of the Modern Chan Society (MCS) 現代禪,²³ a lay Taiwanese Buddhist order created in the 1980s which has been described as “one of the most remarkable phenomena in the modern history of Chinese

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

22. Foguang Shan Committee of Religious Affairs, *Foguang dacidian* (Kaohsiung: Foguang chubanshe, 1988), s.v. 上師.

23. For more information, see Ji Zhe, “Expectation, affection and responsibility: the charismatic journey of a new Buddhist group in Taiwan,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 12, no. 2 (2008): 48–68.



Figure 4: Temple Entrance on Wuguang's Memorial Day. The horizontal text displays Wuguang's full Tibetan-inspired title and reads "Memorial Ritual for Lofty Vajra Teacher Wuguang's Anniversary of Achieving Nirvana". As can be seen, at the far end of the sanctuary is a picture of Wuguang. Photo by the author; Temple of Universal Brightness, 28 July 2013.

Buddhism".²⁴ The most radical aspect of the MCS was its rejection of the traditional Chinese Buddhist communal model that separated adherents into lay and monastic followers. The founder of MCS, Li Yuansong 李元松 (1957–2003), converted to Buddhism under Wuguang in 1980 and stated that Wuguang was his greatest influence.²⁵

Wuguang's teaching that had the most profound impact on Li was "Externally Chan, Internally Esoteric" 外禪內密. This teaching is not prevalent in his writings as it was primarily transmitted orally.²⁶ This is a multi-layered doctrine that captures the essence of both the man and the religious movement he founded. In an almost apologetic sense, it reveals Wuguang's self-perception as a practitioner of Esoteric Buddhism essentially trapped within the confines of Chan.

This teaching also influenced another one of Wuguang's students, who unlike Li was

24. Ji Zhe, "The establishment of a lay clergy by the Modern Chan Society: The practice of modern Chinese Buddhism," *China perspectives* 59 (2005): 56.

25. Yang Huinan, "Inquiry concerning the development of 'New Rain' and 'Zen Now': from Yin-shun's 'Buddhism for this World'," *Foxue yanjiu zhongxin xuebao* 5 (2000): 275–312.

26. I heard this teaching on 12 August 2011 from Chen Shenghua (see next paragraph), who attributed it to Wuguang.

actually empowered as a Shingon priest by Wuguang: Chen Shenghua 陳聖華 (a.k.a. Master Chesheng 徹聖上師 1938–). After Wuguang's passing Chen broke away from the Bright Lineage and founded his own, the Zhenyanzong Samantabhadra Lineage 真言宗普賢流.

As mentioned, Wuguang's influence can even be seen in Taiwanese Shingon communities under Japanese direction. Chou Wen-Kuei 周文魁 (a.k.a. Master Rongyong 融永上師), head of the Kōyasan Muryōkō-in Branch Temple 高野山無量光院別院 in Taipei 台北, studied under Chen Shenghua before obtaining empowerment in Japan. His use of the term *shangshi* 上師 in his title was clearly inspired by Chesheng's, who in turn appropriated this title from Wuguang, who modelled it after Gongga.

The writings of Huaihai Yuanzhi 懷海圓智, the abbot of another Shingon temple in Taiwan under Japanese direction, Kōyasan Jūkon-in 高野山住嚴院 in Taichung 台中, contain polemics aimed at contemporary Zhenyan groups in Taiwan.²⁷ His main reproach is their inclusion of non-traditional Japanese elements, which he sees as an adulteration of Shingon.

Conclusion

Wuguang's monastic career was rife with both tension and friction; tension caused by disparate elements competing for centrality and the friction born out of the centralization of these elements. These exact elements to which I refer are the cultural, social, ethnic and religious binaries. At the centre of these was Wuguang, who was pulled in incongruent directions, both internally and externally. Externally were the tensions between Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese identities as well as their subsequent sectarian exclusivities. Internally, Wuguang was torn between his pursuit of a fulfilling religious life and the monastic vows he had taken.

It was from within Wuguang's attempt to harmonize these binaries, all of which were present during his religious crisis at Zhuxi Temple, that his unique religious movement was born. It is also the source of the aforementioned characteristics found in the modern Buddhist movements and Taiwanese Shingon centres under Japanese direction.

The evidence for the above can be discerned from the path Wuguang took in pursuit of a meaningful religious life. Despite the intolerance shown towards Gongga, Wuguang helped her establish a community in Tainan which he became a part of. Later, only after discovering its Chinese past, did he study Shingon in Japan where he became the victim of intolerance. This shows that Shingon, in his mind, offered the framework within which to harmonize the internal as well as external incongruent directions in which he felt pulled. This was accomplished via the creation of the Bright Lineage.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this topic, comprehension thereof is relevant to the study of Japanese, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism as well as their relationships to modern geopolitics. It is also crucial for a comprehensive understanding of Taiwanese

27. Huaihai Yuanzhi, *Fojiao mimi: mimi fojiaode xin shiye* (NP: Yiqie zhizhi guocha wenchuang, 2013), 48–51.

religion. Recent Western scholarship on Taiwanese Buddhism has been largely monopolized by Humanistic Buddhist organizations 人間佛教. Consequently, colonial Japanese Buddhism, the early influx of Tibetan Buddhism and smaller movements such as the Bright Lineage have received relatively little attention. To address these voids, Wuguang, his sect and their place within the Taiwanese religious landscape are the focus of my PhD thesis at Leiden University, tentatively entitled, “The Flag of Zhenyan Flies Again: The Taiwanese Resurrection of Esoteric Buddhism through Wuguang’s Appropriation of Imperially Imported Shingon”, and expected to be completed in May, 2016.

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