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人為經典與天啟經典：詮釋羅清的《五部六冊》

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Canon Made and Canon Revealed: An Interpretation of Luo Qing's 羅清 *Wubu liuce* 五部六冊*

Yen-zen Tsai**

Abstract

Baojuan 寶卷 produced by religious sects in Ming-Qing China stand prominently in the history of Chinese religion, but how to evaluate them still remains a moot point among scholars of Chinese scriptural studies. Deriving insights from recent discussions of scripture and syncretism and taking Luo Qing 羅清, the founder of *Luojiao* 羅教, and his *Wubu liuce* 五部六冊 as an example, this paper argues that the sect founder's creative agency is key and cannot be ignored while dealing with *baojuan*. His personal encounters, including his painstaking search for the truth and mystical experience, usually constitute an inalienable part of the canon. Further, the cultural context of Ming-Qing China, characterized by the amalgamation of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, provides rich sources from which to make a syncretic canon. The paper points out that *baojuan* are not merely a hodgepodge of confusing texts. Rather, they represent a meaningful symbolic order and serve the sect followers as spiritual guidelines. In this light, the sect leader's intention to select different scriptural passages, his interpretation of them, and how he reconciles them into a coherent whole are crucial to our understanding of the sectarian syncretic scriptures.

Keywords: Chinese religion, canon, *baojuan*, Luo Qing, *Wubu liuce*

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I. Locating the Issues

Huang Yupian 黃育楩, magistrate of Julu 鉅鹿 and Cangzhou 滄州 counties in the reign of the Qing Emperor Daoguang (r. 1822-1850), observed that depraved religious sects abounded in his jurisdictional domain. In spite of the severe punishment that Qing law codes promised to inflict on those who dared to form religious groups, clandestine religious sects and their activities continued to flourish. Huang maintained that these sects were composed of ignorant people susceptible to the propagation of religious demagogues. He feared that sectarian groups of such a nature would “grow into multitudes, perpetuate their own traditions, and scheme against [the empire].”¹ In a locale such as Zhili 直隸, where he held his office, it was undoubtedly necessary for him to remain alert because the area was closely adjacent to the imperial capital.²

Out of his loyalty to the imperial house and zeal to guard the established order, Huang Yupian assiduously investigated religious sects hoping to stamp them out completely. He knew that the task was by no means easy, but was determined to do a thorough job. Crucial to his campaign against the sectarian groups was his painstaking search for their *xiejing* 邪經 or “heretical scriptures.” During his tenure

¹ Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, *Kōchū haja shōben* 校注破邪詳辯, p. 90. This primary source is hereafter abbreviated as *KHS*. See also Che Xilun 車錫倫 “Poxie xiangbian” suozai mingqing minjian zongjiao baojuan de cunyi,”《破邪詳辯》所載明清民間宗教寶卷的存佚, pp. 130-137.

² It is well known that religious sects often got involved in political and military revolts and that they became an easy catalyst to cause the overturn of the dynasty in Chinese history. The Qing rulers were much aware of that and tried to exterminate them by all means. This is most obviously seen in the imperial law “Against Sectarian Leaders, Shamans, and Their Evil Crafts”(jinzhi shiwu xieshu 禁止師巫邪術); see its English translation in J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*, vol. 1, pp. 137-148. For political and military repressions against the religious sects, see Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, “Qinggaozong chajin luojiao de jingguo,” 清高宗查禁羅教的經過, pp. 35-43; Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: the Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813*; Dai Xuanzhi 戴玄之, *Zhongguo mimi zongjiao yu mimi huishe*, 2 vols. 中國秘密宗教與秘密會社(上、下冊); Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, esp. chs. 7-10, 14, 16-17, 21. Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, “Kōyōkyō shitan(zoku)” 弘陽教試探(續), pp. 37-51.

in office, he collected sixty-eight examples of sectarian scriptures and wrote a scathing commentary for each. He edited and compiled his critiques in a book entitled *Poxie xiangbian* 破邪詳辯 (*Debunking Heresies in Detailed Refutation*).³ He circulated thousands of copies of the book, with the intention to dismantle the “depraved bandits” (*xiefei* 邪匪), make known their confusions, and eventually liquidate their organizations.⁴

Huang’s remarks about the sectarian scriptures are multifarious. He notes in his *Poxie xiangbian* that the *baojuan* volumes were printed in large-sized characters, covered with leather, and embroidered with silk, in a striking resemblance to Buddhist canons.⁵ They were often used on ritual occasions and treated with reverence by their worshippers. Upon reading the texts, however, he found that their general contents were strange and fictitious, their expressions crude and repetitious, and their doctrinal expositions always contradicted the true teachings of orthodox Buddhism.⁶ He judges that they were composed by the unlearned to seduce the ignorant for material gain.⁷ He also surmises that these heretical writings might have originated in the Ming Dynasty, most likely during the reign of Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620), transcribed by *yaoren* 妖人 or “perverted” in theatrical troupes. Indeed, by comparing the scriptural titles and literary format, particularly the arrangement of rhymes and refrains for oral purposes, with those of the theatrical scripts, one is justified in reaching this conclusion concerning their original mutual connection.⁸

Among Huang’s refutations against the heretical writings are his remarks on the *Wubu liuce* 五部六冊 (Five Books in Six Volumes), a scripture created by Luo Qing 羅清 (1442-1527), founder of the Luo sect or *Luojiao* 羅教. This sectarian scripture, the central interest of the present thesis, consists of five books and is printed in six volumes, hence its title. Huang Yupian describes these five books and

³ Huang Yupian actually published his collections consecutively in 1834, 1839, and 1841 as series; see *KHS*, pp. 6-7, 89-90, 119-120, 157.

⁴ *KHS*, p. 120.

⁵ *KHS*, p. 6, 150.

⁶ *KHS*, p. 150.

⁷ *KHS*, p. 150, 153.

⁸ *KHS*, pp. 78-79.

criticizes each of them as he sees fit. Regarding the first book, *Kugong wudao baojuan* 苦功悟道寶卷 (*The Precious Volume on Awakening to the Way through Bitter Toil*),⁹ he writes that it highlights the names of Amitāhba Buddha and *Wusheng laomu* 無生老母 (Eternal Venerable Mother) as two magical formulae and recommends the believers to constantly evoke them. He seriously doubts the efficacy of the evocations. He also ridicules the elaboration in repeated phrases of *Zhenkong jiaxiang* 真空家鄉 (“Native Home in True Emptiness”) as “deviant, exaggerating, [and] superfluous.”¹⁰ He further criticizes the second book, *Tanshi wuwei juan* 嘆世無爲卷 (*Book of Nonactivism in Lamentation for the World*), as a promulgation of its own tenets, which bless those who observe them and condemn those who defy them. The confusion of merit and demerit and their inverted consequences appears preposterous according to him, and so does the repetition of gibberish refrains.¹¹ Huang sees the teaching of the third book, *Poxie xianzheng yaoshi juan* 破邪顯證鑰匙卷 (*The Key to Refuting Heresy and Showing Evidence [for Correct Teaching]*), as a collection of self-contradictions. While the sect deprecates the Confucian classics and advocates the supremacy of wordless scriptures, it nevertheless composes its own canon by piling up countless words.¹² The fourth book, *Zhengxin chui wuxiuzheng zizai baojuan* 正信除疑無修證自在寶卷 (*The Precious Volume of Self-Determination, Needing Neither Cultivation Nor Verification, which Rectifies Belief and Dispels Doubt*), is unacceptable to him for it emphasizes offering and scriptural recitation as ways to escape from *samsāra* or the cycle of rebirth. If this were to work, he demurs, the effect would be similar to the case when a convicted criminal bribes the judge for acquittal.¹³ Concerning the fifth book, *Weiwei budong taishanshengen jieguo baojuan* 巍巍不動太山深根結果寶卷 (*The Precious Volume of Deeply Rooted Karmic Fruits, Majestic and Unmoved like*

⁹ I am indebted to Daniel L. Overmyer for his translation of the titles of the five books here and what follows, as well as for the important work he has done in the field of Chinese sectarian scriptures; see his introduction to these texts in his *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 92-135.

¹⁰ *KHS*, p. 52.

¹¹ *KHS*, p. 55.

¹² *KHS*, pp. 55-56.

¹³ *KHS*, p. 53.

Mount Tai), he cites a sentence from the text, which assures the sectarian members of an everlasting home and eternal life, and points out the groundlessness of such an assertion. In his opinion, the *Luojiào* sectarians of past generations would be reborn into the present age if they were fortunate to have escaped the government's search. And, if they were found to have joined the sect today, they would surely be captured and executed. He remarks that any association with the *Luojiào* only leads to destruction, and the promise of an eternal life would prove to be a deception. The fifth book, he concludes, was full of repetitious nonsense.¹⁴

The critical attitude Huang Yupian expressed toward religious sects in general and the *Luojiào* in particular is by no means unique. Three hundred years earlier in the Ming Dynasty, Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535-1615), an eminent Buddhist monk, already noticed that the *Wubu liuce* was widely venerated by the uneducated populace. Seeing passages drawn from different Buddhist sūtras, many regarded the work as an orthodox canon, although it distorted the true meanings of *wuwei* 無為 (non-action), *youwei* 有為 (action), and *kong* 空 (emptiness). Yunqi Zhuhong lamented that its author developed heresy by disguising it as the right faith and, in conclusion, issued a battle cry to defend against the sectarian scripture.¹⁵ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), also a renowned Buddhist monk, indicated in his autobiography that in the area of his residence near Luo Qing's birth place, *Luojiào* followers were numerous. As a result, the *sanbao* 三寶 or Three Treasures did not see much light of day; it was through his strenuous effort in evangelism that the orthodox dharma began to take root.¹⁶ Dharma Master Mizang 密藏法師, in his *Canyi jingshu biaomu* 藏逸經書標目 (*Index to the Collections of Dispersed Sūtras*) that was published in 1597, inveighed against the *Wubu liuce*, saying that it quoted Buddhist sūtras randomly. The heretic teaching based upon this scripture corrupted ignorant men and women, to the extent that its harmful effect was more serious than that brought about by the infamous White Lotus sect.¹⁷ Cases against Luo Qing and his *Wubu liuce* in the Ming and Qing periods were many, and they all vented similar

¹⁴ *KHS*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵ See the section of *Wuwei juan* 無為卷 of his *Zhengeji* 正訛集, collected in *Yunqi lianchi dashi igao* 雲棲蓮池大師遺稿, expounded by Araki Kengo 荒木見悟。

¹⁶ Shi, Fu Zheng 釋福徵, *Hanshan dashi nianpu shu* 憨山大師年譜疏 vol. 1, pp. 52-53.

¹⁷ See this book in *Dazangjing bubian* 大藏經補編, vol. 14, p. 444.

indictments, either condemning the sectarian scripture as “vulgar and uncanonical”¹⁸ and its phrases crude and teachings eccentric,¹⁹ or that it derived quotes at will from Buddhist or even Taoist canonical works to formulate its own contents.²⁰

It is thus evident that government officials and mainstream Buddhists in the Ming and Qing periods held a similar, negative sentiment against the religious sects. According to them, the sectarian members were of low social backgrounds, ignorant, and deceived. These religious followers cherished their own scriptures with reverence and used them on many important ritual occasions. In the eyes of the critical observers, however, these sectarian writings were amalgamations of different orthodox canonical pieces, especially Buddhist works. What appeared to be precious teachings to the sect members were for objective observers hodgepodge and plagiarism. Closer examination by the critics showed that these religious texts conveyed superficial and self-contradictory teachings, a far cry from the orthodox understanding. With regard to literary expression, they were arid, crude, and redundant. On account of these scriptural traits, they were fit to be censured and excluded from the Confucian and Buddhist canonical categories.²¹

A reevaluation of Luo Qing and his *Wubu liuce* from the perspective of the canon and its transmission, however, challenges the preceding views. We may ask, if the Confucian, Buddhist, or Taoist orthodoxy was satisfying enough, why would flocks of commoners risk their lives to form sectarian groups in Ming-Qing China?

¹⁸ Daniel L. Overmyer, “Boatmen and Buddhas: The Lo Chiao in Ming Dynasty China,” p. 291.

¹⁹ Ye Wenxin (Yeh Wen-hsin) 葉文心, “Ren-‘shen’ zhijian: qianlun shiba shiji de luojiao” 人「神」之間—淺論十八世紀的羅教, pp. 70-71.

²⁰ Song Guangyu 宋光宇, *Shilun ‘wusheng laomu’ zongjiao xinyang de ixie tezhi* 試論「無生老母」宗教信仰的一些特質, p. 565.

²¹ It is significant to note that some modern scholars of history of Chinese religions still echoed similar critique against sectarian scriptures in Ming-Qing China. It indicates that the negative sentiment outlined here has represented a pervasive voice among the educated Chinese elite in the past five hundred years or so; see Ye Wenxin (Wen-hsin Yeh), “Ren-‘shen’ zhijian: qianlun shiba shiji de luojiao,” p. 56; Dai Xuanzhi 戴玄之, *Zhongguo mimi zongjiao yu mimi huishe* 中國秘密宗教與秘密會社, vol. 1, p. 53; Li Shiyu 李世瑜, *Xianzai huabei mimizong jiao* 現在華北秘密宗教, pp. 1-9; Lu Yao 路遙, *Shandong minjian mimijiaomen* 山東民間秘密教門, pp. 1-4; Sakai tadao 酒井忠夫, *Zōho chūgoku zensho no kenkyū* (*Jyō*) 增補中國善書の研究 (上冊)。

What kind of vacancy did the established religions leave to the sectarian leaders who thereupon created alternative beliefs for their followers? For our particular concern in this paper, we may continue to raise questions in relation to the *Wubu liuce*: Are the teachings in this scripture really superficial and self-contradictory? If so, why did the *Luo jiao* members accept them as true and binding? If this sectarian scripture appeared to outside observers as discordant, was it viewed in the same way by its worshippers? What kind of function did the “vulgar and repetitious” words, a conspicuous target for unsympathetic critics to find fault with, serve in the life of the sectarian community? How do we explain the fact that the *Wubu liuce* was held in high esteem, indeed a real “precious volume,” in *Luo jiao*? How did it gain its sacred and authoritative status and become a sectarian canon? What follows is my attempt to answer these questions by interpreting the *Wubu liuce* on the basis of general theories about scripture and syncretism.

II. Luo Qing’s Experience of Enlightenment

Many scholars have carefully studied the life of Luo Qing and portrayed him as a man of immense religious inclination.²² Our knowledge about him is fundamentally derived from the autobiographical accounts he himself provides in the *Wubu liuce*.²³ What should interest us most for the goals of this paper is the

²² Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan: mingdai luozu wubu liuce zong jiao baojuan sixiang yanjiu* 無生老母信仰溯源—明代羅祖五部六冊宗教寶卷思想研究, pp. 16-25; Randall L. Nadeau, “Popular Sectarianism in the Ming: Lo Ch’ing and His ‘Religion of Non-Action’,” pp. 13-59; Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, pp. 166-173; Xu Xiaoyao 徐小躍, *Luo jiao fo jiao chanxue: luojiao yu wubu liuce jiemi* 羅教·佛教·禪學：羅教與《五部六冊》揭秘, pp. 13-33; Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, “Raso no muikyō (Ge),” 〈羅祖の無為教(下)〉, pp. 44-58; Asai Motoi 淺井紀, “Rakyō no keishō to henyō : Mukyokuseiha.” 羅教の繼承と変容—無極正派, pp. 611-631; Han Bingfang 韓秉方, “Luo jiao jiqi shehui yingxiang,” 羅教及其社會影響, pp. 38-47.

²³ There are different versions and editions of *Wubu liuce*; see discussions by the following scholars: Wang Jianchuan & Lin Wanchuan 王見川、林萬傳, *Ming-Qing minjian zong jiao jingjuan wenxian* 明清民間宗教經卷文獻, vol. 1, pp. 14-16; Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, pp. 177-187; Xu Xiaoyao 徐小躍, *Luo jiao fo jiao chanxue: luojiao yu wubu liuce jiemi* 羅教·佛教·禪學：羅教與《五

strenuous process he has undergone in seeking spiritual liberation. He tells us at the beginning of the *Kugong wudao baojuan*, the first book of the *Wubu liuce*, that he was initially frightened by the impermanence of life and death. All forms of worldly existence, including wealth and glory, appeared to him vain and transient. This sense of dream-like uncertainty caused him to reflect upon the Buddhist teaching of *samsāra*, which drove him into even deeper despair. His mind was tormented and, thinking of his experience of being orphaned in early childhood, generated in him a feeling of abandonment; he was parentless and also felt homeless. His reflexive sensitivity, reinforced by his personal unhappy experiences, led him to *zai canyibu* 再參一步, or further look into the truth.²⁴

He next pondered how to settle his soul and lamented the impermanent elements constituting a physical being. This inspired him to think of the origin of every human person and the true home of the real self. If all beings originated from somewhere, he believed that his soul must be generated in a certain place. This triggered the concern about his native home, which, in combination with the previous subject of parents, served as two of the most important themes in the *Wubu liuce*. Here Luo Qing expressed a strong nostalgic longing for his soul to return to its original home.²⁵

Luo Qing was motivated as well to begin a quest, the description of which forms the rest of *Kugong wudao baojuan*. He went forth to learn with a religious master named Sun Fu 孫甫 who instructed him to recite the names of Amitāhba Buddha and *Wusheng fumu* 無生父母 (Eternal Parent). He followed this advice closely and for eight years ceaselessly evoked these names, day and night in a loud voice. The result, however, proved to be of no avail; his mind was still beclouded, and he felt uneasy with himself.²⁶ He left his master with a troubled mind and continued to search for enlightenment. Thereafter, he came across a funeral rite

部六冊》揭秘, pp. 43-51. I adopt the *kaixin fayao* edition 開心法要版 for my present paper; see *Wubu liuce jingjuan* 五部六冊經卷, ed. Lin Liren 林立仁編, Taipei: Zhengyi shanshu chubanshe 臺北: 正一善書出版社, 1999. This important book is hereafter abbreviated as *KFWL*.

²⁴ *KFWL*, 1: 1, p. 15.

²⁵ *KFWL*, 1: 2, pp. 18-20.

²⁶ *KFWL*, 1: 3, pp. 20-24.

where Buddhist monks were chanting the *Jingang keyi* 金剛科儀 (*Ritual Amplification of the Diamond Sūtra*), a ritual sūtra affiliated with Pure Land Buddhism.²⁷ He found it illuminating, as the text advocated no distinctions among all forms of existence and promulgated popular reverence toward gods and immortals. He observed the scriptural instructions and occupied himself with studying the text during the day and practicing meditation at night. In this way, he persisted for three years, yet he was still far from satisfied; fear of the cycle of rebirth and the sense of unsettledness still haunted him.²⁸

It is important to note that during the long and painstaking process of his spiritual quest, Luo Qing probed every way available to him for achieving his goal. To his regret, all means were ineffective in his eyes. As he testifies, he tried Chan meditation, recited the name of Amitāhba Buddha, practiced Taoist quiet sitting, and engaged in esoteric spiritual cultivations. All these methods, which he termed *zafa* 雜法 (miscellaneous ways) afterwards, were useless to him when dealing with his psychological crisis.²⁹ They might have been helpful at some points, but proved to be only a temporary solution to his concerns; a long-term solution, a more reliable way, was needed. Hence, he undertook further investigations.³⁰

It was through negation of the *zafa* that Luo Qing arrived at his own discoveries. From then on, he turned to concentrate upon his inner self. He gradually realized that before the universe came to existence, the state of void, coverless and bottomless, had been a true emptiness. This Great Emptiness (*taixukong* 太虛空), as he called it, was unmoved and enduring. Upon further thinking, he found that the so-called Buddha was no more than this Great Emptiness that enshrouds all and generates all. If one cleaved to nothing, one would become enlightened, that is, a Buddha. The Great Emptiness, in this sense, should exist in “me;” indeed, he remarks “I am the Great Emptiness.”³¹

This understanding dawned upon Luo Qing and pushed him toward the verge

²⁷ See introduction to this Buddhist text by Daniel. L. Overmyer in his *Precious Volumes*, pp. 34-38.

²⁸ *KFWL*, 1: 5, pp. 28-32.

²⁹ *KFWL*, 1: 6, pp. 36-37.

³⁰ *KFWL*, 1: 6, pp. 37-38.

³¹ *KFWL*, 1: 7-11, pp. 38-52, esp. p. 51.

of spiritual emancipation. However, mere noetic knowledge at this juncture did not entirely satisfy him. As a man who had been struggling in bitter toil and shedding profuse tears to find an eternal rest for his soul, additional aid was needed to assuage his religious sentiment. He frankly confesses:

Up to this moment, I have undertaken steps to investigate [the truth] and realized that I am the Great Emptiness with dharma nature. [However,] I still don't know how to get free and be myself (*zongheng zizai* 縱橫自在), nor do I know how to get settled in face of crisis. I cannot give up, considering this serious business of life and death; indeed, in face of the impermanent life and death, the intervals of breathing (painful state of living?), and the agony of [human] fall, how do I avoid them?³²

This final step was crucial, because it determined whether he would succeed or fail. Luo Qing was sinking into his spiritual struggle, being tormented day and night again. Thereupon, a miraculous event happened that marked the total transformation of his whole being:

I was bitterly weeping in my dream, which alarmingly roused the Venerable True Emptiness (*laozhenkong* 老真空) [living] in the Void (*xukong* 虛空) to great compassion. She issued a white beam of light from southwest to fall upon my body. I woke up from my dream and was greatly troubled. Strolling southwestward, I sat down soberly. All of a sudden, my mind became illumined and began to light up; it penetrated into what a natural state really was (*bendi fengguang* 本地風光). Henceforth, I felt genuinely liberated and found peace with my self.³³

There is no way to empirically verify this mystical experience or, if one likes, “conversion story,” nor can we pinpoint the exact identity of the Venerable True Emptiness. What was significant to Luo Qing, however, was that from that moment onward, his doubts were dispelled, agony removed, and true home found. His long

³² *KFWL*, 1: 12, pp. 52-53.

³³ *KFWL*, 1: 12, pp. 53-54.

process of spiritual quest culminated in a total enlightenment, a new vision or realization that lifted him out of the entanglement of the cycle of rebirth, as he clearly expresses. The remaining part of his autobiographical accounts bears witness to his light-heartedness. His repeated praises, in rhymed verses, of such entities as the true self (*zhenshen* 眞身), True Emptiness, native home, and divine sparks (*lingkuang* 靈光) complete the remaining pages of the *Kugong wudao baojuan*.³⁴

Luo Qing took his experience of the thirteen-year quest for spiritual liberation seriously. In his third book, *Poxie xianzheng yaoshi juan*, he consciously refers to this soul-searching process in which occurred numerous “small enlightenments” (*xiaowu* 小悟) and no less than seventeen or eighteen “great enlightenments” (*dawu* 大悟).³⁵ “Bitter investigation for thirteen years” (*kucan shisannian* 苦參十三年), as a matter of fact, has become a catchword in the *Wubu liuce*. It appears time and again, for example, in the *Zhengxin chui wuxiuzheng zizai baojuan* and *Weiwei budong taishanshengen jieguo baojuan*,³⁶ a trend that functions to remind the reader of its importance. To be more specific, the mystical encounter in which Luo Qing received the celestial light crowned his long search. Because of it, his leap of faith toward total emancipation reached final completion. It is thus justifiable to say that his thirteen-year spiritual quest in general and the revelatory experience in particular constitute the core of the *Wubu liuce*. Both of them comprise the foundational myth of the Luo sect, the understanding of which is a *sine qua non* when one approaches this group.³⁷

³⁴ *KFWL*, 1: 13-18, pp. 57-84.

³⁵ *KFWL*, 3: 3, p. 270.

³⁶ *KFWL*, 4: 21, pp. 184, 188-189; 5: 9, p. 322.

³⁷ Some scholars have highlighted Luo Qing’s spiritual quest and mystical experience, but it seems that they did not emphasize them heavily enough from the religious perspective as I do here and will do in the following pages. See Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan* 無生老母信仰溯源, pp. 77-81; Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, pp. 199-200; Randall L. Nadeau, *Popular Sectarianism in the Ming*, pp. 37-39.

III. Luo Qing's Creation of the *Wubu liuce*

Luo Qing's personal religious experience is special and fundamental as far as the study of *Luojiao* is concerned, but it does not mean that the concepts and images he used are unique. Daniel L. Overmyer has traced the antecedents that may have influenced Luo's religious knowledge.³⁸ He points out that sectarian scriptures such as the *Foshuo huangji jieguo baojuan* 佛說皇極結果寶卷 (*The Precious Volume, Expounded by the Buddha, on the [Karmic] Results of [the Teaching of] the Imperial Ultimate [Period]*), dated 1430 CE, contain elements that resemble those found in the *Wubu liuce*. For example, the phrase *laomu* 老母 or Venerable Mother appears many times in this earlier precious volume. It may have played an important role in shaping Luo Qing's idea of *wusheng fumu*.³⁹ Likewise, the concept of returning to one's origin or to a heavenly paradise holds a prominent place in this sectarian scripture. Luo Qing's *jiexiang* motif only amplified this antecedent.⁴⁰ *Baojuan* as a sectarian scriptural genre, furthermore, had evolved through centuries before the Ming. By virtue of their popular textual format and oral expression, they were widely used in Buddhist evangelism and theatrical performance. Luo Qing inherited the general cultural tradition and adopted this genre to create his *Wubu liuce*.⁴¹ More impressive is the fact that Luo Qing draws a great many quotations from various sources.⁴² The majority of them come from Buddhist scriptures and a small portion originate in Taoist and Confucian works. The *Niepan jing* 涅槃經 (Nirvāna Sūtra), *Jingang jing* 金剛經 (Diamond Sūtra), *Jingang keyi* 金剛科儀, and *Xinjing* 心經 (Heart Sūtra) are among those most frequently cited.⁴³

There is no denying that Luo Qing appropriated cultural elements for his own

³⁸ See Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp.51-91.

³⁹ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 56, pp. 71-77.

⁴¹ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 9-32.

⁴² According to Randall L. Nadeau's statistics, there are 275 attributed quotations from fifty-nine works in the *Wubu liuce*; see his *Popular Sectarianism in the Ming*, pp. 239-248. See also Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan* 無生老母信仰溯源, pp. 221-253 for similar discussion.

⁴³ Daniel, L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 103-105; Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan* 無生老母信仰溯源, pp. 231-234.

scriptural creation; the mass of quotations alone suffices to prove this practice. The key to understanding his adoption of outside sources still lies in his personal religious experience outlined in the preceding section.

In the thirteen-year-long spiritual quest, Luo Qing sought all kinds of means to fulfill his goal of enlightenment. This indicates he was a ready recipient as long as the adoption of certain religious elements fitted his purposes. As he acknowledges in his first book, *Kugong wudao baojuan*, some of these means may have brought “small enlightenments,” but the majority proved to be ineffective or useless. Therefore, in his next books, most obvious in *Poxie xianzheng yaoshi juan* and *Zhengxin chui wuxiuzheng zizai baojuan*, he candidly specifies those ineffective means for his reader. With regard to the Buddhist practice of leaving home for ascetic cultivation, he criticizes it as “lonely...vain labor,” a kind of activism that is diametrically opposed to his advocacy of non-activism.⁴⁴ According to Luo, even such acts as observing vegetarian precepts, practicing charity, chanting scriptures, undertaking Chan meditation, and prostrating before Buddha images did not bring positive results; people who do them still remain in the cycle of rebirth.⁴⁵ If non-action is superior to action and all forms of existence are unreal, then Taoist cultivation in search of immortality is no more than a fruitless pursuit as well.⁴⁶ In the realm of folk religions or popular beliefs, Luo Qing singles out idolatry as a great error because the worshippers are deceived by the illusory appearance of images.⁴⁷

That Luo Qing disparaged diverse religious practices in his generation does not mean that he negated them in total. He still needed the religious matrix from which he could draw nourishments for spiritual growth. His experience of a painful religious search dictated his principles of selection, and his eventual enlightenment reinforced his sense of judgment. If an Upāsaka or home-dweller Buddhist like him could attain enlightenment, what would the use be of leaving home for an ascetic life? Besides, numerous celebrities of past generations were neither monks nor nuns

⁴⁴ *KFWL*, 2: 8, pp. 162-172; 3: 2, p. 268.

⁴⁵ *KFWL*, 3: 12-14, pp. 376-406.

⁴⁶ *KFWL*, 3: 7, pp. 326-331.

⁴⁷ *KFWL*, 4: 9, pp. 105-112.

and yet were able to penetrate into the Buddhist truth.⁴⁸ In this sense Luo found good reasons to defend his ideal type of Buddhism; nevertheless, he was working within a Buddhist context. This principle of selection likewise guided his other choices, those which he believed comprised the *zhengfa* 正法 or right dharma.⁴⁹ The positive evaluation of sudden enlightenment and the emphasis on one's true nature (*benlai mianmu* 本來面目 [literally "original face"]) were essential parts of the teaching of Chan Buddhism.⁵⁰ The repeated theme of returning home was reminiscent of the form of Pure Land Buddhism that projects a vision of Western Paradise.⁵¹ The affirmation of the all-encompassing Great Emptiness, juxtaposed with *wuji* 無極 (Ultimate of Non-being) and *taiji* 太極 (Great Ultimate), echoed core concepts of Taoism.⁵² All these are examples of Luo Qing's conscious selection, which was meant to corroborate his new religious understanding.

The process of Luo Qing's scriptural creation in a significant sense paralleled that of his spiritual quest. During this process, one witnesses him select, exclude, and incorporate differing elements to make a syncretic whole. Once he attained his final enlightenment, he seemed to know what a perfect religious canon should be:

Examining the Tripitaka, [one finds that] the five thousand and forty-eight volumes therein came to existence from the One (that is, the true origin of all forms). [All] scriptures of the Three Teachings originated in the One. All the Buddhas' names were derived from the One. All the Bodhisattvas' names came from the One. Wonderful dharma or awful dharma, good laws or bad laws, all of them issued from this One. This word, [One], is the scripture, and the scripture is this word. This scripture is the true nature (*benlai mianmu*), and the true nature is this scripture. This scripture is the pagoda, and the pagoda is this scripture. This scripture is the native home (*jiaxiang*), and the native home is this scripture. This scripture is the Western [paradise], and the Western [paradise] is this scripture. This scripture is the Buddha

⁴⁸ *KFWL*, 5: 21, pp. 405-409.

⁴⁹ *KFWL*, 2: 10, pp. 179-181.

⁵⁰ *KFWL*, 3: 1, pp. 243-244; 3: 4, pp. 277-292; 5: 5, p. 281; 5: 11, pp. 332-333.

⁵¹ *KFWL*, 4: 13, p. 143; 4: 14, pp. 144-152; 5: 12-13, pp. 341-356; 5: 19-20, pp. 397-405.

⁵² *KFWL*, 5: 17, pp. 370-394.

country (*foguo* 佛國), and the Buddha country is this scripture.⁵³

The expression here is wordy and repetitious, yet its meaning is very clear: the ultimate truth lies in the realization of this One which comprehends all, and the true Buddhist canon is no more than its reflection. Luo Qing assumed that he already grasped this truth; his revelatory experience confirmed his belief. Little wonder that immediately after his great enlightenment, he quoted more than fifteen passages in succession from diverse sūtras to verify his experience as though they all spoke the same thing.⁵⁴ For him, it was not his task to systematically analyze each Buddhist scripture as a supporting proof. On the contrary, all the scriptures converged in him and were harmonized because of him. As he himself proclaimed, “I intuited the Way (*wudao* 悟道) and now all the scriptures bear witness to me.”⁵⁵ If this were Luo Qing’s conviction, it seems irrelevant therefore to question how and why he drew quotations from different sources and then interpreted them.

It was Luo Qing’s ideal to create a scripture without sound, word, and title, because that would simply tally with his understanding that the ultimate truth was the Great Emptiness.⁵⁶ In the real world and for a would-be sect leader like him, this would seem unpractical. Creating a canon with concrete contents and title was necessary, and he began this task after his spiritual quest, an undertaking that took him twenty-seven years to finish.⁵⁷ Now it remained for Luo Qing to convey the importance of his new scripture in order to secure its status.

There were three ways that Luo Qing took to underscore the unique status of his *Wubu liuce*. First, in an apologetic tone, he criticized the scriptures of other religious faiths, debasing their value in light of his right dharma. His own scripture, the embodiment of the original One, served as the canonical standard. People who “mistakenly recite it should go to hell” (*miusong cijing yingxia diyu* 謬誦此經，應下地獄), he severely warned.⁵⁸ Such erroneous beliefs as those advocated by the

⁵³ *KFWL*, 4: 8, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁴ *KFWL*, 1: 18, pp. 81-99.

⁵⁵ *KFWL*, 3: 3, p. 273.

⁵⁶ *KFWL*, 2: 15, p. 410; 2: 19, p. 460.

⁵⁷ Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan* 無生老母信仰溯源, p. 21.

⁵⁸ *KFWL*, 4: 17, p. 166.

White Lotus and Maitreya sects thus fell under his condemnation.⁵⁹ In a four-lines of seven-character verse, he thus affirms:

The dharma gate of non-action lies in the midst of mystery;
It clears away ten-thousand scriptures and penetrates into the eternal life;
[This] one dharma subsumes countless other ways;
[Through this] gate [one] breaks into all other gates.⁶⁰

His defensive attitude was more than apparent. If the true canon (*zhenjing* 真經) was equated with the right dharma, refusal to subscribe oneself to the former meant to violate the latter.

In another milder but equally aggressive manner, Luo Qing attempted to harmonize scriptures of the Three Teachings by resorting to their common origin. As all laws issued from the One, Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian teachings shared the same root. They were initially no different from one another; it was the ignorant who vainly distinguished them into three branches of learning.⁶¹ It was only wise to avoid making distinctions and prudent to return to the original One.⁶² Implicit in these statements, however, was the conviction that through Luo Qing's vision this truth became clear. His *Wubu liuce* as a manifestation of this truth therefore stood superior to other scriptures.

Most emphatic was Luo Qing's direct assertion that highlights the uniqueness of his canon. At the end of the *Kugong wudao baojuan*, he thus assures his reader:

[The purpose of my] composing these Five Books is meant to deliver you out of the bitter sea of life and death and to uplift you out of the mundane world without ever returning back.”⁶³

Here he revealed the motivation behind his scriptural creation, as well as

⁵⁹ *KFWL*, 4: 18-19, pp. 170-175.

⁶⁰ *KFWL*, 2: 10, pp. 190-191.

⁶¹ *KFWL*, 3: 1, p. 233, pp. 240-241.

⁶² *KFWL*, 3: 15, p. 412; 3: 23, p. 483; 4: 21, p. 181.

⁶³ *KFWL*, 1: 18, p. 98.

imparted the salvific function to the new canon. He repeatedly mentioned the Five Books as a whole, prompting his readers to take heed to the scripture which contains *wanju miaofa* 萬句妙法 (wonderful dharma in ten-thousand sentences). In the *Weiwei budong taishanshengen jieguo baojuan*, his tone is even more urgent. The promise of salvation was there, and it was to be showered upon those who did not have any doubts about its efficacy and longed to transcend the cycle of rebirth.⁶⁴

It would seem farfetched to conclude that Luo Qing promoted his *Wubu liuce* schematically or programmatically. It is unmistakable, however, that after the completion of his spiritual quest, he regarded his scriptures as concrete fruit of his revelatory experience. These special books accordingly contained a sacred quality. Based upon this understanding and because of it, he could either use his canon to judge scriptures belonging to other religious faiths or subordinate all other scriptures to his own. By affirming the salvific function of his *Wubu liuce*, he further attributed to it an incomparable religious authority. Both of these two elements, sacredness and authority, would prove to be essential for gathering sectarian followers and forming their scriptural tradition.

IV. Formation of a Scriptural Tradition

Luo Qing published his *Wubu liuce* in 1509 at the age of sixty-seven. This new sectarian scripture was immediately met with great success. It not only became the canon among Luo Qing's close followers but also attracted devout readers or listeners far and wide. It was reprinted several times afterwards and reached its heyday of popularity in the period of Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620).⁶⁵ Even after Luo Qing's death, its canonical influence continued to increase. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to the wide spread of *Luojiao* and its offshoots, the sacred status of this canon was firmly established and, along with its author, became the foundation of many religious sects.⁶⁶ According to one statistic, it was reprinted

⁶⁴ *KFWL*, 5: 1, p. 232, pp. 236-237; 5: 24, p. 433.

⁶⁵ Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, pp. 77-183; Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 300-307.

⁶⁶ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk-Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Imperial China*, pp. 113-129.

twenty-nine times up until 1869 and in differing textual versions.⁶⁷

Interesting to us is that commentaries on the *Wubu liuce* quickly emerged after its author had passed away, and they all tried to interpret what Luo Qing actually meant or to elaborate on what he left unsaid. The *Kaixin fayao* 開心法要 edition was one among them. It includes commentary on the *Wubu liuce*, dated 1581, by a monk called Lan Feng 蘭風. Lan Feng's disciple, Wang Yuanjing 王源靜, later added his own supplementary commentary and had the entire text published in 1596. Two sect members in the early Qing, named Pu Qing 普卿 and Pu Shen 普伸, collated the text and wrote a preface and a postscript for it in 1652. The *Kaixin fayao* edition of the *Wubu liuce* henceforth became very popular; it was reissued at least four times after its first publication and continues to be used by the descendants of *Luojiào* in Taiwan today.⁶⁸

The spread and textual ramifications of the *Wubu liuce* in the history of *Luojiào* are complex, but the fact that this scripture has been reprinted from time to time and exerted its influence on many men and women for close to five hundred years bespeaks its religious value. Simply examining the *Kaixin fayao* edition alone, one finds that a scriptural tradition was already in the process of formation, a significant indicator that manifests the *Wubu liuce* as a canon.

Luo Qing gathered a group of followers soon after he had obtained enlightenment. As founder of the *Luo* sect, he was highly respected and venerated. After his death, pious reverence toward him steadily grew and transformed him from a historical personage to a legendary figure, and then to an immortal. Commentators and sect members, as indicated in the *Kaixin* edition, commonly called him *zujia* 祖家 or *zushi* 祖師 (patriarch, progenitor of the sect). They attributed this title to him primarily on account of his heart-inspiring thirteen-year quest for spiritual emancipation. According to Lan Feng, the *Kugong wudao baojuan* can be summarized in a phrase, *shisan nian xingjiao* 十三年行腳 (travels [in search of

⁶⁷ Han Bingfang 韓秉方, "Luojiào jiqi shehui yingxiang," 羅教及其社會影響, in *Zhongguo mimi shehui gaikuang* 中國祕密社會概況, ed. Cai Shaoqing 蔡少卿, pp. 176-179.

⁶⁸ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volume*, 300-301; Xu Xiaoyao 徐小躍, *Luojiào fojiao chanxue: luojiào yu wubu liuce jiemi* 羅教·佛教·禪學：羅教與《五部六冊》揭祕, p. 47; Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "Lüelun kaixin fayao ban wubu liuce de xueshu jiazhi," 略論《開心法要》版五部六冊的學術價值, in *KFWL*, preface, pp. 3-6.

enlightenment] for thirteen years), a fact that shows its foundational character.⁶⁹ The Patriarch's story of quest became the stepping stone upon which the sectarians could "recognize the origin of the Buddha, know the foundation of all things, and see through their own native place; hearing it [read or sung] one time is superior to self-cultivation for millions of years."⁷⁰ It is therefore important to realize that Luo Qing's first religious experience contained a sacral, potent quality, leading to the recognition of his special identity. In the story, the miraculous revelation at the end played a particular function. Lan Feng's commentary underlines it and reminds the reader that it crowned the patriarch's final enlightenment that "penetrated into the world of ten directions."⁷¹

More than that, in his *Zushi xingjiao shizi miaosong* 祖師行腳十字妙頌 (*The Marvelous Gāthā in Ten-character Verse of Master Luo's Travels [in Search of Enlightenment]*), Lan Feng begins his praise of Luo Qing by identifying him with the Buddha incarnate. He remarks that the Ancient Buddha (*gufó* 古佛), showing pity upon humanity, was born into the Luo family in order to redeem all sentient beings. The Buddha-Patriarch lived for eighty-five years, attained nirvāna, created the five books, and pointed out the way of salvation for later generations.⁷² He was the Ancient Buddha for certain, but he was also called *wukong laozu* 悟空老祖 (Venerable Patriarch Who Intuits Emptiness)⁷³ or *wuji shengzu* 無極聖祖 (Holy Patriarch of the Limitless).⁷⁴ The concept or understanding of Luo Qing as a celestial redeemer thus appears time and again throughout the commentaries of the *Kaixin fayao* edition. Later hagiographical narratives such as *Sanzu xingjiao yinyou baojuan* 三祖行腳因由寶卷 (*Precious Volumes of Causal Origins Based on Traces of the Three Patriarchs*) continues this pietistic tradition, recognizing him as Maitreya incarnate, portraying him in cosmic terms and with supernatural power, and creating fantastic legends about him.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ KFWL, 1-2, 5-6.

⁷⁰ KFWL, 10.

⁷¹ KFWL, 11-12.

⁷² KFWL, 12-13; 4: 2, p. 34.

⁷³ KFWL, 4, 7.

⁷⁴ KFWL, 4: 5, pp. 76, 78-82; 4: 6, pp. 84-90.

⁷⁵ For the text of *Sanzu xingjiao yinyou baojuan* 三祖行腳因由寶卷, especially the narrative

As a concrete witness to and embodiment of Patriarch Luo's enlightenment, the *Wubu liuce* also underwent transformation, as far as its scriptural status is concerned. Pu Shen in his preface explains that Luo Qing's canon was intended to synthesize differing opinions by referring to various sorts of scriptures. It actually contained "words that see through the truth and illuminate the mind." (*yanyan jiandi juju mingxin* 言言見諦 句句明心) People who comprehend it were able to search for the origin of the universe and verify the life and death of human reality. Previous sect leaders like Lan Feng and Wang Yuanjing used it as yardstick to judge other religions. In this sense it was the canon which encompassed all the religious truths of other scriptures and in which all religions converged (*zongjiao huiyuan* 宗教會元).⁷⁶ In order to emphasize its unique status and highlight its incomparable role, Pu Shen thus remarks in his postscript:

This canon had already existed before the Buddha was born and did not yet come [to the human world] from the West. It does not dwell in any place, nor is it restricted by any space. Rather, it fills the Great Emptiness and surrounds the whole world.⁷⁷

Pu Shen's commentary is representative of the common understanding of the *Luo* sect. In a way he repeated what Luo Qing had expressed about his own scripture; that is, it was the manifestation of the truth and that it was the converging point of all other scriptures. Furthermore, he elevated the canon to such a high level that he accorded it a cosmic preexistence. The *Wubu liuce* in this context was not seen merely as an ordinary scripture but had a life of its own. Its sacred character therefore increased, a process that paralleled Patriarch Luo's deification.

One must realize that the *Wubu liuce* was not a philosophical writing meant for private reflection. Rather, it was a religious text intended for public use in a

account about Patriarch Luo, see Wang Jianchuan & Lin Wanchuan 王見川、林萬傳, *Ming-Qing minjian zong jiao jingjuan wenxian* 明清民間宗教經卷文獻, vol. 1, pp. 242-255. For a discussion of Luo's other hagiographical materials, see Randall L. Nadeau, *Popular Sectarianism in the Ming*, pp. 39-43.

⁷⁶ *KFWL*, preface, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁷ *KFWL*, postscript, p. 441.

communal context. The *Kugong wudao baojuan* opens with an instruction that manifests a ritual setting. It commands the attendants to set up a table upon which to lay the scripture and then finish reciting the Heart Sūtra to calm down the mind. By raising high the burning incense, they participate in a meeting of the Buddhas of all directions. In such a solemn atmosphere, the participants are instructed to call the name of Sākyamuni Buddha, the original master, three times, vow to take refuge in the Dharma, Buddha, and Sangha, and ask for a blessing so that the wheel of Dharma continuously revolves to save all sentient beings.⁷⁸ Only after this preparatory ritual procedure is the *Wubu liuce* to be read or sung. It is therefore crucial to mark the performative dimension of this canon.

In a similar vein, Patriarch Luo instructed his followers “to urgently listen to the messages of [his] five books” so that they could be saved from the “bitter sea.”⁷⁹ On this point Wang Yuanjing comments that if one does not believe in the Patriarch’s *koujue* 口訣 (oral formulae), one will fall into a state beyond redemption.⁸⁰ The commentator implies that the *Wubu liuce* was meant to be read, listened to, sung, and memorized. It was a copy of an oral scripture rather than a written one and was aimed at a large illiterate audience, rather than a few educated elite. Indeed, as Wang Yuanjing makes clear in his Guideline for the Supplementary Commentary (*Buzhu fanli* 補注凡例):

The Patriarch repeats his words like a garrulous old mother with a good heart. A canon (*jing* 經) is what is repeatedly emphasized, and so the reader should not be bored with his incessant reiteration.⁸¹

This explains why the *Wubu liuce* appeared wordy in format and superfluous in expression to the outside observers. It also demonstrates why the commentators used countless verses or *gāthās* to elaborate the original text, with the result being extensive repetition. For the sectarians, these scriptural traits were exactly what they were familiar with. They were the same elements that provided them with easy

⁷⁸ *KFWL*, 1, pp. 2-4.

⁷⁹ *KFWL*, 5: 1, p. 232, 237.

⁸⁰ *KFWL*, 5: 1, p. 232.

⁸¹ *KFWL*, 7.

access to the teaching of the Buddha-Patriarch. It was also because of them that a special scriptural tradition was formed, guarded, and transmitted.

V. Discussion of Syncretic Scripture

Some scholars of religious studies have proposed a reevaluation of scripture and their effort merits our attention. Their insights can serve as a starting point for our discussion of the *Wubu liuce*. According to them, as a sacred text or holy book, scripture denotes a special class of words, either written or oral, that has a special meaning for a community of faith.⁸² It usually contains teachings to which the believers submit their devotion and from which they find guidance for their lives. As such, it is neither an ordinary text or a neutral object, nor is it a type of literary genre. Rather, it represents a form of human religious activities, an expression of human religiosity.⁸³ Different scriptures, such as the *Vedas*, *Lotus Sūtra*, *Platform Sūtra*, *Torah*, the *Bible*, *Qur'an*, etc., enjoy an incomparable status in their respective traditions. The sacred aura and incontestable authority they manifest, however, are not innate components. On the contrary, they are qualities imparted by those who revere the scriptures with utmost sincerity. The fact that different sacred books in their respective traditions claim veneration from their worshippers and tower above all other books in value and meaning bespeaks a complicated phenomenon. It is in this sense that scripture is not merely an isolated text but a relational concept.⁸⁴ It designates a religio-historical genre and an intricate set of relationships. To understand a particular scripture, one should probe into the interactions, in evolving historical contexts, between this special book and the community that uses it. Human agents, it should be emphasized, are the subject that brings about a scripture or scriptures. And it is the religious feelings of those agents that make the scriptural

⁸² Miriam Levering, "Introduction: Rethinking Scripture," in *Rethinking Scripture*, ed. Miriam Levering, pp. 1-2.

⁸³ Wilfred C. Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, p. 18.

⁸⁴ William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspect of Scripture in the History of Religion*, pp. 5-6; "Scripture," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 13, p. 134.

phenomenon possible.⁸⁵

Different scriptures exhibit different features, and yet they share some common characteristics; interconnected elements, sacredness, power, and authority are among the most obvious. A scripture is often thought to have originated with a God, celestial beings, or other supernatural causes. This divine and revelatory attribute endows the book with a sacred quality. The words contained in it, therefore, brim with power. The believers regard them to be operative and salvific, and to recite them is to evoke this sacred power. Because the scripture has power, it is also held to be authoritative. Religious tenets, moral injunctions, and legal prescriptions concerning a scripture become standard on the basis of which the believers define their identity, defend their faith, and conduct their daily life. In connection to this, since the believers treat their scripture as the ultimate reference and consider it to be sacred and authoritative, they firmly regard the text as a unified whole, no matter how the diverse parts are constituted.⁸⁶

The function of scripture varies, depending upon the nature of a sacred text and how a religious tradition or community uses it. Generally speaking, one can discern two aspects of function, informative and performative. The former emphasizes the ethical and legal instructions, which are to be recognized and observed by the believers. The latter lays its focus on ritual actions, hence scripture-related recitation and liturgical celebration are important parts of it. While the educated elite may be inclined to regard more highly the informative dimensions and the less educated or illiterate populace the performative aspects, one often sees a combination of these two in a religious tradition.⁸⁷

Recent reflections on the meaning of syncretism among some scholars of religion and anthropology are also helpful at this juncture. In the Western intellectual tradition, syncretism has been held in a negative sense. The educated or orthodox elite equated this term or concept with hodgepodge, adulteration, perfidy, corruption, untruth, etc., terms that connote moral and theological judgment.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Miriam Levering, "Introduction: Rethinking Scripture," p. 11; Kendall W. Folkert, "The 'Canons' of 'Scripture'," pp. 172-174; Wilfred C. Smith, "The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible," pp. 31-140.

⁸⁶ William A. Graham, "Scripture," pp. 140-142.

⁸⁷ Sam D. Gill, "Nonliterate Traditions and Holy Books: Toward a New Model," pp. 235-238.

⁸⁸ Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, pp. 1-5; Charles Stewart and

Phenomenologists of religion first challenged this view and pointed out that from the cross-cultural and comparative perspective, syncretism is normal in the history of religions. More than that, syncretism has been an indispensable dynamic force without which no single culture or religion could possibly develop.⁸⁹ If one examines the origins, themes, and structures of all the existing religions, one might discover that syncretism has been functioning universally.⁹⁰ If that is indeed the case, one should constructively face this religious phenomenon and treat syncretism as a “category of historico-genetic explanation.”⁹¹

Syncretism presupposes a multi-cultural environment in which different cultures or religions interact with one another. It is often the case that as a result of encounters, some religious groups feel alienated from their native traditions, thereby giving rise to a sense of crisis and predicament. Syncretic engagement is intended to unravel this psychological or cultural entanglement.⁹² It aims at creating a new symbolic order in which the estranged group can resettle itself and find meaningful principles for further actions. In a true sense, syncretism functions as a survival tactic applied to maintain the integrity of a religious group in face of external challenge.⁹³

It is important to note that syncretic engagement is not always passive; the religious group in a predicament is not necessarily pressured to choose a new life at random. On the contrary, one often sees an ingenious human agent or agents involving themselves in creative activities with confidence. They participate in the process of selection, choosing elements out of the diverse resources available. They exclude those unfit and incorporate those desirable to form a syncretic whole.

Rosalind Shaw, “Introduction: problematizing syncretism,” pp. 3-4.

⁸⁹ Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, vol. 2, pp. 671-695; Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, pp. 220-250.

⁹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 vols., esp. vol. 1, pp. 183-186, 334-336; vol. 2, pp. 277-281, 290-294; vol. 3, pp. 251-261, 267-274.

⁹¹ Carsten Colpe, “Syncretism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14, p. 219.

⁹² Helmer Ringgren, “The Problem of Syncretism,” in *Syncretism: Based on Papers read at the Symposium on Cultural Contact, Meeting of Religions, Syncretism Held at Åbo on the 8th-10th of September*, pp. 7-14.

⁹³ Thomas L. Bryson, (The Hermeneutics of Religious Syncretism: Swami Vivekananda’s Practical Vedanta), pp. 22-23.

Through their reinterpretation of received elements, they impart new meanings to the old symbols and come up with a belief system of their own creation. This new belief system then serves as a guideline for the faith community to venture into the challenging environment, and as such, it is often seen as valid and internally coherent.⁹⁴ In this explanation, syncretism appears in the history of religions more as a process than as a state. For the understanding of it, one has to heed the dynamic history in which a syncretic phenomenon burgeons, develops, and completes.⁹⁵

In light of the preceding theoretical exposition, Luo Qing and his *Wubu liuce*, a syncretic scripture, are good examples worth our reevaluation indeed. While many of his contemporaries and later critics accused him of being perverted and depraved, and his scripture, heretic and vulgar, I believe otherwise. I argue that it is only fair to understand the man and his scriptural creation in the proper historical context. By referring to the recent theories about “scripture” and “syncretism,” in particular the emphases on the intimate relationship between the sacred text and the faith community, as well as on the selection, reinterpretation, and integration process of the creative agent or agents in a multi-cultural environment, one can more positively appreciate the activities of such an important religious sect as *Luojiao*.

The paper thus begins its examination by concentrating upon Luo Qing’s search for enlightenment and finds Luo was a man of tremendous religious sentiment. In order to accomplish his spiritual emancipation, the final release from the cycle of rebirth, he undertook a series of austerities. After a thirteen-year long search, he went through a revelatory, mystical experience that eventually liberated him from doubts and anxieties. He then realized that the Great Emptiness was the true reality, and he himself was none other than this Great Emptiness. From his initial psychological crisis to his final accomplishment, he benefited from the syncretic environment that was characteristic of Ming China, drawing sources from Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and popular religious practices. One clearly sees him choosing and adopting useful cultural or religious components for his ultimate goal.

“Bitter investigation for thirteen years” became the foundation upon and with which Luo Qing started his scriptural creation. The finished product, the *Wubu liuce*,

⁹⁴ Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, p. 6; Thomas L. Bryson, *The Hermeneutics of Religious Syncretism: Swami Vivekananda’s Practical Vedanta*, pp. 16-17.

⁹⁵ Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, “Introduction: problematizing syncretism,” pp. 6-7.

was an embodiment of his life-and-death experience. If he were the Great Emptiness, so was the canon he created. It was the yardstick by which all other religions or means of salvation were to be judged. Although he drew countless quotations from diverse scriptures, primarily Buddhist ones, his purpose was not to expound them in their own right but to use them as supporting proofs to verify his *Wubu liuce*. In his eyes, his canon subsumed the Buddhist Tripitaka and should therefore enjoy an incontestable, supreme status. It undoubtedly embodied sacrality and authority.

Sacredness and authority are religious qualities by recognition. They are usually found in the relationship between a religious figure or a scripture and those who venerate these objects. This paper does not detail the mutual interactions between Luo Qing and his followers. However, the fact that his “travels in search of enlightenment for thirteen years” became a model for the *Luo jiao* sectarians to emulate and that the *Wubu liuce* as canon was subsequently reprinted numerous times testifies to the prominent existence of these two religious qualities in the faith community. Judging from the *Kaixin fayao* edition, an important textual version that includes the *Wubu liuce* and its commentaries, it is clear that the status of Luo Qing continued to ascend after his death. He became Patriarch Luo or, at his pinnacle, the Ancient Buddha incarnate, around whom spread legendary stories of many kinds. So, too, the *Wubu liuce* was elevated to an incomparable position. It was thought to encompass all other scriptures in relation to the ultimate truth and to possess a cosmic preexistence. The sect members therefore worshiped it with extreme reverence. They held a solemn rite whenever they recited it. Indeed, they chanted it, sang it, and listened to it in a communal setting rather than silently read it in private. To them, the Buddha-Patriarch’s words were always sacred, authoritative, and powerful. These words conveyed messages that were inspiring and meaningful to every individual in the community; as such, their verbal repetitions, mostly in rhymed verses, never appeared superfluous but on the contrary intimately relevant and welcome.

If my interpretation is plausible, then we ought reconsider the prejudice against religious sects and their sacred texts. It is a recurrent historical fact in China that religious sects were severely suppressed, not only by the ruling authority but also by mainstream religious bodies.⁹⁶ Those sects that were designated as syncretic more

⁹⁶ Richard Shek, “Religion in Chinese Society: Orthodoxy versus Heterodoxy,” in *Proceedings*

easily incurred criticism and accusation because their all-including inclination posed a threat to many established religions.⁹⁷ “Purist” sentiment in this context triggered counterattacks in order to maintain orthodox legitimacy. From the perspective of the history of religions, however, orthodoxy and heterodoxy are never a fixed relationship. Rather, they are terms that describe a relative religious condition in certain segment of the long historical process. As I stated, cultural or religious syncretism has been a norm over thousands of years. All the “orthodox religions” or “great religions” today either emerged from a syncretic status or syncretized other religious components in their respective history of development. Christianity is a good case in point.⁹⁸ “Pure religion” exists only in idea and imagination. In this sense, castigating the “heretic” sects reflects more one’s biased value judgment than objective description of historical fact.

Upon further consideration, we might credit the *Wubu liuce* for spreading many religious teachings that originally “belonged to” mainstream Buddhism. The case resembles Chinese Buddhist apocrypha that were composed by Chinese authors and promulgated important Buddhist messages in vernacular language, but were deprecated as “spurious.”⁹⁹ Popular Buddhist scriptures found at Dunhuang might also serve as a comparison.¹⁰⁰ Regardless, Luo Qing appropriated different elements from diverse Buddhist sūtras, incorporated them into his religious framework, and formed a new canon. The *Luo jiao* sectarians believed that this canon was the embodiment of the ultimate truth; they accepted it and used it as such. If the “orthodox” Buddhist scriptures were too dignified and profound for the commoners, this new one, with its simple content and familiar oral expression, provided them with easy access to final salvation. For them, grasping it was paramount to

of the First International Symposium on Church and State in China: Past and Present, pp. 37-42; Prasenjit Duara, “Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China,” pp. 167-183.

⁹⁷ Robert P. Weller, “Sectarian Religion and Political Action in China,” pp. 463-483.

⁹⁸ Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 2, p. 277; vol. 3, pp. 251-255.

⁹⁹ Robert E. Bushwell, Jr., “Introduction: Prolegomenon to the Study of Buddhist Apocryphal Scriptures,” pp. 1-30; Yu Chunfang 于君方, “‘weijing’ yu guanyin xinyang” 「偽經」與觀音信仰 pp. 98-128.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel L. Overmyer, “Buddhism in the Trenches: Attitudes toward Popular Religion in Chinese Scriptures Found at Tun-huang,” pp. 197-222.

comprehending all Buddhist canons.¹⁰¹ Luo Qing's discovery of the One was openly received at its formation and many worshippers in different parts of China over the last five hundred years have continued to embrace it.

VI. Concluding Remarks

The significance of Luo Qing and his *Wubu liuce* in the history of Chinese popular religion is tremendous. Patriarch Luo was not merely the legendary founder of *Luojiao*, he was also an ideal model whom succeeding sect leaders and even leaders of different religious groups consciously imitated.¹⁰² In a similar development, the *Wubu liuce* became the “progenitor-scripture” (*zongjing* 宗經), the title and content of which were appropriated by later sectarians for their own scriptural creations.¹⁰³ The man and his scripture generated an important tradition of discourse in which commentaries and reinterpretations of the *Wubu liuce* kept flourishing. To call him a “founder of discursivity,” to adopt Michel Foucault's term, is apt and accurate.¹⁰⁴ He and his canon manifested the idea and ideal that “man can create scriptures [and] man can become a Buddha” (*jing you ren zao, fo you ren cheng* 經由人造，佛由人成), a popular concept that inspired numerous religious aspirants in Ming-Qing China.¹⁰⁵

More noteworthy is the significance the *Wubu liuce* manifested in the area of Chinese sectarian literature. Overmyer classifies the vast amount of Chinese

¹⁰¹ This case of simplification and popularization parallels the relationship between the *Wujing* 五經 (Five Classics) on the one hand and the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects of Confucius*) and *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Book on Filial Piety*) on the other. See my exposition of this Han scriptural phenomenon in my “Scriptures and Their Popularization: The Case of the *Lunyu* and *Hsiao-ching* in the Han Dynasty,” pp. 137-165.

¹⁰² Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi*, pp. 221-241; Yu Songqing 喻松青, “Ming-Qing shiqi de minjian mimi zong jiao (daixu),” 明清時期的民間秘密宗教(代序), pp. 1-33.

¹⁰³ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 124-135

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” pp. 101-120; Daniel L. Overmyer, “Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch'ing Pao-chüan,” pp. 226-227.

¹⁰⁵ Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 馬西沙、韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zong jiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, p. 193.

religious texts into five categories: Confucian writings, Taoist scriptures, Buddhist sūtras, spirit-writings, and *baojuan*.¹⁰⁶ While the first three, representing the “orthodox” religions in traditional China, have garnered attention from scholars in the past, the fifth type still awaits to be explored. The *Wubu liuce*, which occupied a pivotal position in the formation of *baojuan* genre and even sectarian literature in general, deserves our special evaluation.¹⁰⁷ It may, in my opinion, provide us with an important avenue through which to look into a religious world that has long been ignored. Further investigation of it, I believe, will offer a promising result that will help us understand Chinese religious writings and, more generally, Chinese popular culture.¹⁰⁸

It is still a thorny issue for some modern scholars to deal with sectarian religion in its own right. Traditional biases of the educated elite linger in the public and scholarly consciousness, and are often aggravated by political intolerance. To associate popular religion with “primitive witchcraft” or “low class culture” indiscriminately distorts its real face; simple generalization does not help clarification.¹⁰⁹ To judge that religious sects were “superstitious,...[and their] beliefs and rituals were confusing, ...disreputable,...and difficult to understand” reflects the psychological and cultural distance that still exists between the scholar-observer and religious believers,¹¹⁰ as well as the need to shorten it. Luo Qing and his *Wubu liuce*, in this connection, appear to be a touchstone that testifies to how we scholars perceive religious sects, their writings, and popular culture as a whole. The general theories about scripture and syncretism discussed in this paper may not always be suitable in interpreting the Chinese case in every detail. They at least serve as expedient means by which we can readjust our past perception and understand from a new perspective such an important cultural phenomenon as

¹⁰⁶ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel L. Overmyer, “Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch’ing Pao-chüan,” pp. 219-221.

¹⁰⁸ Concerning the fourth type, the spirit-writings, the reader may refer to Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*; Song Guangyu 宋光宇, “Guanyu shanshu de yanjiu jiqi zhanwang” 關於善書的研究及其展望, pp.163-191.

¹⁰⁹ Pu Wenqi 濮文起, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao suyuan* 中國民間宗教溯源, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Lu Yao 路遙, *Shandong minjian mimijiaomen* 山東民間秘密教門, pp. 3-4.

popular religious sectarianism. Chinese sectarian scriptures are a broad area yet to be interpreted, and the present thesis is a humble attempt at that task.

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人為經典與天啓經典： 詮釋羅清的《五部六冊》

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摘要

明、清時代，民間教派所著作的寶卷在中國宗教史上佔有重要的地位，但是如何評價這些宗教典籍，在研究中國經典學者中仍舊莫衷一是。本文即是要針對此一議題，汲取學界討論宗教經典與宗教融合的多種洞見，並以羅教創教者羅清及其著作《五部六冊》為具體實例，進行研討。本文主張，羅清當作創作主體是我們討論寶卷文類不可忽略的關鍵。有關他的個人遭遇，包括苦心覓道與神秘經驗，都是構成羅教聖典的不可分割成分。再者，明、清中國社會融合儒、釋、道三教的文化特性，也是產生混融經典的母體來源。本文強調，寶卷不是毫無章法的雜繪，而是有意義且含象徵秩序、功能在導引教派信眾的宗教作品。基於此認知，教主如何選擇不同經典篇章、如何詮釋、如何將其調和成一貫整體，皆是我們理解民間教派經典的重要面向。

關鍵字：中國宗教、宗教經典、寶卷、羅清、《五部六冊》

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