# The origins of the Jingzong Xuehui 淨 宗 學 會, or the Pure Land Learning Center

May Ying Mary Ngai

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# The Origins of the *Jingzong xuehui* 淨宗學會, or the Pure Land Learning Center

**May Ying Mary Ngai**

**Abstract**

*It is because of the popularity of Lianshe, the Lotus Society, that Pure Land Buddhism became the most prevalent and influential Buddhist school among ordinary Chinese people. However, since the downfall of the Qing Empire in 1911, Chinese society has experienced drastic social and cultural changes, particularly after 1949, when two governments, one Mainland Chinese and the other Taiwanese, came to confront one another from across the Taiwan Strait. Nevertheless, a modernized Lotus Society, the Pure Land Learning Center, has emerged as the times require. These new, individually established Centers carry on the tradition into the age of globalization and computerization by developing an internationally based network that is well–equipped with updated information technology. In order to better understand the underlying reasons behind the success of these transformations, this pilot study intends to focus on the traces of the historical link and Dharma lineage of the Learning Center and its leader, Jingkong (1927–), a Buddhist master. Those who have influenced Jingkong include another Buddhist master, Yinguang (1860–1940), and two lay Buddhists, Li Bingnan (1888–1986), and Xia Lianju (1882–1965).*

## Introduction

Thanks to the popularity of *Bailianhua she*, 白蓮華社, the White Lotus Society, commonly known as *Lianshe* 蓮社, the Lotus Society, Pure Land Buddhism, or the Pure Land School, became the most prevalent and influential Buddhist school among ordinary Chinese people.[1] Founded in 402 CE by the Buddhist master Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416 CE) on Mount Lu 廬山 in the province of Jiangxi 江西, for the purpose of obtaining salvation to the Western Pure Land by faith in its presiding Buddha, Amitābha,[2] the gathering of the Lotus

[1] The names *Lianshe* and *Bailian she* 白蓮社 (the White Lotus Society) are the shortened forms of the *Bailianhua she*, which was named after: (1) the white lotus pond in the Donglin Monastery 東林寺 on Mount Lu, where lived the first Patriarch of the Pure Land School, Huiyuan 慧遠; and, (2) according to the Pure Land scriptures, the lotus flowers into which the Pure Land practitioners are said to be reborn. As for Pure Land Buddhism, or the Pure Land School, it is one of the Buddhist schools in China based on the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Great Vehicle of Buddhism, "whose followers vow to attain enlightenment for the sake of delivering all other sentient beings from suffering. The spiritual hero of the Mahāyāna is the Bodhisattva, in whom the virtues of wisdom and compassion are stressed and balanced." Garma C.C. Chang (Chang, Chen-chi), ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūta Sūtra* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1983), p. 478.

[2] According to the major scriptures of the Pure Land School, Amitābha, the Buddha of infinite meritorious qualities, was a monk named Dharmākara (Fazang 法藏). After learning the teachings from Lokeśvararāja Buddha (Shijianzizaiwangfo 世間自在王佛), Dharmākara, who at the time was still a king, decided to become a monk and carry out practices of *bodhisattva* as well as resolved to attain Buddhahood for the salvation of all sentient beings. In front of Lokeśvararāja Buddha, he made the solemn vow to create a wonderful world, where reincarnate, sentient beings could enjoy happiness and attain Buddhahood effortlessly. In order to fulfill Dharmākara's vow, Lokeśvararāja Buddha taught and manifested the magnificence and meritorious virtues of all Buddhas' worlds for him so that he could model his world on the very best he had seen in the manifestation of other Buddhas' worlds. After making the decision on the design of his world, Dharmākara then characterized the features of his world by generalizing them in the form of forty–eight specific vows. After thousands of years of self–cultivation and bringing salvation

Society has long been recognized as a model for the Pure Land practitioners of later generations. Even now, the organization, principles and ritual traditions of the Lotus Society can still be found in some modern Asian countries like Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, where the large majority of inhabitants are of Chinese descent. However, the Lotus Society and its traditions were established at the time of an agrarian society, fitting in with the needs of that way of life.[3] After being influenced by the process of industrialization, and recently by digitalization and globalization, this agrarian culture has been experiencing a series of social changes. In the face of these changes, the questions arise: could the customs of the Lotus Society remain unchanged? Could there be alternative Buddhist groups for the new generation?

After the Nationalist government of the Republic of China was driven from Mainland China to Taiwan in 1949,[4] the traditions of

to others, Dharmākara was completely enlightened and became Buddha Amitābha; the Pure Land resulting from his accumulated meritorious virtues was established as a world free of every cause of suffering and prepared with surroundings necessary for the salvation of its residents. Amitābha still presides over it, assisted by Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, the two *bodhisattvas* representing the natures of compassion and wisdom respectively. For details, see the three major Pure Land scriptures: the four translations of the *Infinite Life Sūtra* (the Wuliangshou jing 無量壽經; the Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra) in the *Dazang jing* (the Buddhist Canon), vol. 12, no. 360: 265c–279a; no. 361: 279b–299c; no. 362: 300a–317c; and no. 363: 318a–326c; the *Amitābha Sūtra* (the Foshuo Amituo jing 佛說阿彌陀經; the Smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra) in the *Dazangjing,* vol. 12, no. 366: 346b–348b; and the *Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life Sūtra* (the Foshuo guan Wuliangshoufo jing 佛說觀無量壽佛經; the Amitayur-dhyana-sūtra) in the *Dazangjing,* vol. 12, no. 365: 340c-346b.

[3] Erik Zurcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), p. 219.

[4] After 1949, many Buddhist groups transferred their lineage to Taiwan from Mainland China. Since then, the development of Chinese Buddhism has taken place mainly in Taiwan. This is an important historical phenomenon and needs a brief explanation here [the following history is an abstract of information found in the following two books: Chen Lingrong, *Rijushiqi shendaotongzhixia de taiwan zongjiao zhengce* (Taipei: Zili wanbao, 1992), pp. 71-100, 117–31; and Lan Jifu, *Ershishiji de zhongrifojiao* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1991), pp. 59–63].

Before Japanese occupation (1895–1945), the result of the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki at the end of the 1894 Sino–Japanese War, Buddhist ritual traditions in Taiwan were mainly inherited from the lineage of Yongquan Monastery 湧泉寺 on Mount Gu 鼓山 of Fujian 福建, which has the geographical advantage of being the Mainland Chinese province closest to Taiwan. As for the theory of practice, the Caodong 曹洞 and Linji 臨濟 Sects of the meditational Chan School and the Pure Land School were the mainstreams; in other words, most Buddhist groups emphasized the dual practice of Chan and Pure Land. However, the reality is that fewer than ten monks out of several thousand comprehended the meaning of the Buddhist scriptures that they recited daily; the rest of them joined the *sangha* (monastic fellowship) simply for living and sheltering. During the early period of Japanese occupation, Japanese Buddhism had almost no influence on Chinese Buddhism; it served mainly for Japanese who lived in Taiwan. As time went on, Japanese authorities gradually announced a series of decrees to either restrict or prohibit many indigenous religious activities. In order to survive, many religious organizations, including those of Chinese Buddhism, asked for protection from or simply joined Japanese Buddhist groups. After 1926, Shintō 神道 (the Way of the Gods), the native religion of Japan known for its worship of agrarian and ancestral gods, was promoted alongside military expansion by Japanese imperialists. In 1934, the Japanese announced that each community should establish at least one Shintō temple as an educational center for its community. For this political reason, the influence of Shintō on Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan was greater than the influence of Japanese Buddhism since then.

Chinese Buddhist traditions finally regained their influence on Buddhist groups in Taiwan around 1949 after the Chinese Communist Party defeated the National People's Party in the civil war fighting for the dominion over Mainland China. Thus, following 1949, many practitioners of different Buddhist schools went to Taiwan along with the retreat of the Nationalist government, the Republic of China. Almost all these Buddhist groups took

Chinese Buddhism did not entirely die out but were forced to migrate to another geographical area across the straits – Taiwan, where for decades, the Pure Land School has managed to carry out self–reforms to cope with the change. Growing out from the base of the long standing Lotus Society, the resulting 'new' organization is called *Jingzong xuehui* 淨 宗 學 會, or the Pure Land Learning Center. It was founded by the Buddhist master Jingkong 淨 空 (1927– ; Ching-k'ung), who has been teaching Pure Land doctrines and scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism for more than forty years. His years of ceaseless effort in publicizing the teachings of the Pure Land as well as his establishment of the Learning Center have drawn attention from Chinese Buddhists all over the world. Through their efforts, an increasing number of Learning Centers have been established. In addition, Jingkong is noted for his pioneering employment of multi–media and cyber technology containing Buddhist teachings as well as his leading role in the worldwide, free distribution of over three million texts and tapes about Pure Land Buddhism. Recently, Jingkong has focused on the training of Buddhist lecturers, most of his students coming from China, Taiwan, Singapore, and the United States. The primary goal of this pilot study is to act as a starting point for exploration into the underlying reasons for the success of the transformation from the locally–based national Lotus Society to the internationalized Learning Center, with emphasis on the historical and *dharma*[5] lineage backgrounds.

**The Historical Origins of the Pure Land Learning Center – the Lotus Society**

The term *Lianshe*, or the Lotus Society, has long been recognized by Chinese Buddhists as an alternative name for Pure Land Buddhism, or the Pure Land School. Originally, this term referred to a group of one hundred and twenty–three *nianfo*[6] 念 佛 practitioners, both monks and lay Buddhists, led by Huiyuan on Mount Lu. The group is known for its gathering in 402 in the Donglin Monastery 東 林 寺, where its members practised and observed teachings of Pure Land Buddhism and made a vow in front of an image of Buddha Amitabha in the hopes of being reborn in the Western Pure Land.

over existing Buddhist monasteries in Taiwan, and reestablished and reformed their systems of administration and ritual ceremony. When this occurred, the influences of Japanese Buddhism and Shintō were easily uprooted and replaced.

[5] The term *dharma* here refers to the teachings of the Truth.

[6] *Nianfo* 念 佛, literally meaning 'to recite the name [of Amitābha]', is in fact a general term that can be used to refer to a wide range of Buddhist practices. For the Pure Land School, the term is a complex expression of four different kinds of Pure Land practices. As Yü Chün-fang states:

> [t]he four kinds of *nien-fo* [*nianfo*] are enumerated in the following order: (1) *ch'eng-ming nien-fo* [*chengming nianfo* 稱 名 念 佛, or *chiming nianfo* 持 名 念 佛], or calling upon the Amitābha's name in the manner prescribed in the *A-mi-t'o ching* [*Foshuo Amituo jing*; the Amitābha Sūtra] ; (2) *kuan-hsiang nien-fo* [*guan xiang nianfo* 觀 像 念 佛], or concentrating one's attention on a statue of Amitābha made of earth, wood, bronze, or gold; (3) *kuan-hsiang nien-fo* [*guanxiang nianfo* 觀 想 念 佛], or contemplating the miraculous features of Amitābha with one's mind's eye in the manner described in the *Kuan-ching* [*Foshuo guan Wuliangshoufo jing*; the Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life Sūtra]; (4) *shih-hsiang nien-fo* [*shixiang nianfo* 實 相 念 佛], or contemplating Amitābha as no different from one's own self–nature, since both Amitābha and self–nature transcend birth and extinction (*sheng-mieh* [*shengmie* 生 滅]), existence and emptiness (*y*[*o*]*u-k'ung* [*you kong* 有 空, or *kongyou* 空 有]), subject and object (*neng-so* [*neng suo* 能 所]).
>
> See Yü Chün-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981), p. 45. Since the recitation of Amitābha's name became the most common Pure Land practice among ordinary people by the effort of the Lotus Society, the term *nianfo* was mistakenly simplified to refer specifically to the recitation method. Thus, in order to avoid any inappropriate generalization or misinterpretation of the term, this paper all along uses the *pinyin*, a system of romanizing Chinese ideograms.

Above all, members of this fellowship were all believed to have successfully attained the rebirth, which has become the ideal or symbolic achievement for successors of later generations who resolve to organize activities and associations of this kind. Hundred of years later, the leader of the gathering regained attention from Buddhist groups but this time with a new status in a patriarchal tradition. By the effort of Zongxiao 宗曉 (1151–1214) of the Song Dynasty (960–1280), Huiyuan became the first patriarch of a new born Pure Land School at the beginning of the thirteenth century.[7] In his compiled collection, *Lebang wenlei* 樂邦文類 (Various Writings on the Land of Bliss), Zongxiao indicated that Huiyuan was the first patriarch for his role in organizing the Lotus Society as well as specifying the *nianfo* practice. However, neither Huiyuan's writings nor those of his contemporaries made reference to the name of the Lotus Society.[8] The earliest record of an

[7] It is said that, before the publication of Zongxiao's (1151–1214) *Lebang wenlei* (Various Writings on the Land of Bliss) in 1200, there was no record of a patriarchal tradition for the Pure Land School. See Yü Chun-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis,* p. 36.

[8] Regarding the earliest record of the founding of a school for Pure Land Buddhism, there are two views. One claims that a Pure Land School did exist during the early period of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), as supported by a source written by a Korean named Wonhyo (617–686), while the other deems that a Pure Land school was not formed until the Song dynasty. The former view is still used by David W. Chappell in his article, 'The Formation of the Pure Land Movement in China: Tao-Ch'o and Shan-Tao', pp. 139–71 in James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, eds., *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1996), pp. 140, 167. The proof he used to support his claim is a Chinese phrase, *yizong* 一宗 (a school).

However, Tang Yongtong quotes a good deal of evidence from historical documents to expound on the changing of the meaning of this phrase corresponding to the historical changes and development of Buddhist activities at the time. According to his penetrating analysis on the issue, Tang points out that, before the Song, the Chinese character *zong* 宗 had at least two meanings in terms of Buddhist terminology, namely, 'discourse' and 'school'. He explains that, before the sixth century, a person's argument on a theory or exegesis on a Buddhist scripture can also be called *zong*. Thus, at the time when Wonhyo used the phrase *yizong*, he could have meant either 'a discourse', or 'a school'. To further verify Wonhyo's meaning, Tang turns to the history of the forming of Chinese Buddhist schools. On his view, only after the early Sui Dynasty (581–617) did the character *zong* include the meaning of a school or sect. Before the Sui, Buddhist teachers were called *jingshi* 經師 (the teacher of Buddhist scriptures) or *lunshi* 論師 (the teacher of Buddhist treatises). They usually interpreted Buddhist scriptures according to their own understandings. Those who wanted to learn the theories or teachings developed by these teachers could have traveled from place to place to freely attend their lectures; there was no record of any existence of a teacher–student organization (that is, a school) yet.

Until the beginning of the Sui, an official position called *zhongzhu* 眾主 (the leader of the mass), deemed as the precursor of the forming of a school, was founded by the Emperor Wendi with the purpose of operating a better–organized system for the teaching of Buddhism. Later, organizations named *jiao* 教 and sects like Sanjiejiao 三階教 (the Three Stages Sect) arose, each of them advocating its own theories or exegeses on Buddhist scriptures, so that, before long, the word *zong* probably started to be equated with the meaning of *jiao*. Accordingly, the phrase used by Wonhyo most likely just referred to the meaning of 'discourse'; that is, the discourse or teachings on the Pure Land(s). This conclusion can also be supported by the fact that teachings on different Pure Lands aside from that of Amitābha were very popular at Wonhyo's time in China. Hence, the argument about the meaning of the phrase as 'a school' seems to be too weak to predate the existence of the Pure Land School. Therefore, this paper adopts Tang's view on the founding period of the Pure Land School, not only for its higher degree of reliability but also for its being widely accepted by scholars of the field. For details, see Tang Yongtong, 'Lun zhongguo fojiao wu shizong [On the Issue that There Is No So–called Ten Schools in Chinese Buddhism]', pp. 221–26 in Zhang Mantao, ed. *Zhongguo fojiao de tezhi yu zongpai* (Taipei: Dacheng wenhua chubanshe, 1978).

associated theme, *shiba gaoxian* 十八高賢 (the Eighteen Sages),[9] only appeared at the time of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), as seen in the poems by the well–known Buddhist poet Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846).[10] Nevertheless, some documents suggest that the association of organizations of *she* 社 and *hui* 會[11] with Buddhist activities was already formed in the sixth century, long before Tang. This argument is supported by a quotation from the *Jieshe faji wen* 結社法集文 (Essay on Forming a Society to Gather *Dharma* [or Buddhist teachings]) by the Song monk Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001). According to this essay, during the reign of Emperor Wenxuan 文宣王 (r. 550–559) of the Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577), the Emperor had called at least once for a gathering of both monks and laymen to carry out Buddhist practices together; yet this event appears to be merely an occasional incident at the time.[12] In fact, based on existing primary sources and recent researches, it is only in the Song Dynasty that, by the effort of Shengchang 省常 (959–1020), the organization of *she* or *hui* came into vogue and the activity of *jieshe nianfo* 結社念佛 (forming a society to practice [methods of] *nianfo*) became popular outside monasteries, that is, among lay Buddhists.[13] Therefore, the tradition of patriarchal transmission for the Pure Land Buddhism created by Zongxiao in 1200 can be deemed as a production that reflects the popularization of the establishment of religious organizations based on the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism after the promotion of Shengchang.

As noted in the *Jingtu shengxian lu* 淨土聖賢錄 (Record of Sages and Worthies of the Pure Land), under the guidance of Shengchang, the seventh patriarch of the Pure Land School, a *Jingxingshe* 淨行社 (the Pure

[9] The Eighteen Sages refers to the eighteen most prominent members out of the total of one hundred and twenty–three gathered on Mount Lu.

[10] See Tang Yongtong, *Han wei liangjin nanbeichao fojiao shi* (Taipei: Luotuo chubanshe, 1987), pp. 366–7; and Tsai Hsing-li, *Chen Hung-shou's Elegant Gathering: A Late–Ming Pictorial Manifesto of Pure Land Buddhism,* Ph.D. diss. (Lawrence, Kans.: Univ. of Kansas, 1997), pp. 109–10. On Huiyuan, see Chen Shunyu, *Lushan ji, Dazangjing,* vol. 51: 1025–1051; and Zurcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China.*

[11] Both characters bear the meanings of 'meeting', 'gathering', 'association', 'society', and 'union'.

[12] For details, see the *Dazangjing,* vol. 47, no. 1969A: 177b.

[13] Li Xiaoben, 'Zhongguo jingtuzong shi [History of the Pure Land School in China]', p. 108 in Zhang Mantao, ed., *Jingtuzong shilun* (Taipei: Dacheng wenhua chubanshe, 1979). However, back in the Tang Dynasty, most of the organizations that concentrated on the practice of *nianfo* and advocated the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism were either monasteries or monastically operated; they were more frequently called *Daochang* 道場, Arenas of the Way. This is reflected in the *Jingtu shengxian lu* 淨土聖賢錄 (Record of Sages and Worthies of the Pure Land), a huge, detailed chronicle of the biographies of those who were believed to be successfully reborn into the Pure Land of Amitābha. According to this source, most titles of those monasteries associated with Pure Land Buddhism or *nianfo* practice are called *Daochang* 道場. For examples, see the *Nianfodaochang* 念佛道場 (the Nianfo Arena of the Way) under the entry of Qihan 齊翰 (p. 97); the *Wuhuinianfodaochang* 五會念佛道場 (the Five Assemblies of Nianfo Arena of the Way) under the entry of Fazhao 法照 (p. 100); and the *Xifangdaochang* 西方道場 (the Western Direction Arena of the Way) under the entry of Wei Wenjin 韋文晉 (p. 261). Regarding the title of *she,* a *Xifangshe* 西方社 (the Western Direction Society) can be found under the entry of Shenhao 神皓 (p.71). See Peng Jiqing (1740–1796), ed., *Jingtu shengxian lu* (Tai-chung, Taiwan: Taizhong lianshe, reprint 1992), pp. 71, 97, 100, and 261. And according to Daniel B. Stevenson, *daochang* "is a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word *bodhimanda*, which specifically means the 'site where the Buddha attained enlightenment.' By extension, it has also come to refer to any site where the Buddha (or the enlightenment that is the Buddha's essence) is ritually invoked, sought, or found." See Daniel Stevenson, 'Pure Land Buddhist Worship and Meditation in China', pp. 359–79 in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 363–4.

Practice Society), modeled after the Lotus Society,[14] was founded in the province of Zhejiang 浙 江 during the Chunhua 淳 化 era (990–994).[15] In order to honor Huiyuan and his fellowship as well as to indicate their goal of attaining rebirth together, a total of one hundred and twenty–three aristocrats and prominent government officials vowed to concentrate on the Pure Land practice.[16] This event was so successful that a thousand monks also joined the society. Undoubtedly, it was such a grand–scale congregation that people took delight in talking about it. The immediate result was the widespread of the movement of *jieshe nianfo* among society (*shenjin minjian* 深 浸 民 間),[17] which was particularly welcomed by the elite and largely popularized in the Jiangsu 江 蘇 and Zhejiang provinces as well as the surrounding areas in southern China.[18]

Like most advocates of Pure Land Buddhism, Shengchang's motivation behind the forming of the Society was mainly out of "the admiration of the custom of Mount Lu (*mu Lushan zhi feng* 慕 廬 山 之 風)."[19] This fact indicates that the advocacy of the *nianfo* practice and the assembly on Mount Lu were significant enough to uphold the traditions of the society and pass them down to the later generations. Huiyan and the customs of Mount Lu have undoubtedly become symbolic elements of the leadership of the School. Hence, all succeeding patriarchs and advocates never hesitated about carrying on such advocacy and traditions, and regarded the society as an effective tool in promoting Buddhist teachings among people. This remained unchanged and lasted until the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). For instance, the tenth Pure Land patriarch Xingce 行 策 (1628–1682) and the eleventh patriarch Shixian 實 賢 (1686–1734), in 1670 and 1729 respectively, began the advocacy of the Lotus Society among people after years of war and disorders between the downfall of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and the establishment of the Qing.[20] Besides, since 1800, under the influence of the twelfth patriarch Jixing 際 醒 (1741–1810), the Zifu Monastery 資 福 寺 on

[14] Originally, the term Lotus Society specifically meant the organization founded in 402 on Mount Lu; however, as the teachings and practices of the Pure Land became widely spread, the term was conceptualized to refer to the activities of forming a society to practice the method of *nianfo* as a means to obtain salvation. Thus, societies that bear different titles but carry out the activities discussed herein can generally be called the Lotus Societies.

[15] Peng Jiqing, *Jingtu shengxian lu,* p. 115. Other examples of similar activities in the Song dynasty can be found in the same book. The issue of *jieshe nianfo* is briefly discussed in Li Xiaoben's article, in which Li mentions that: in 996, a society of monks and lay Buddhists was organized by Zunshi 遵 式 (963–1032); in 1015, a *Nianfoshijiehui* 念 佛 施 戒 會 (the Nianfo and Precept Giving Society) was started by Zhili 知 禮 (960–1028); in 1017, a *Bailianshe* 白 蓮 社 (the White Lotus Society) on Mount Dongye 東 掖 山 was founded by Benru 本 如 (981–1050), the prime minister, and other Buddhists; after the Yuanfeng 元 豐 era (1078–1088), a *Jingyeshe* 淨 業 社 (the Pure *Karma* society) was established by Lingzhao 靈 照, who led the seven–day *nianfo* practice of twenty thousands practitioners every spring; a *Jingtuhui* 淨 土 會 (the Pure Land Society) of hundred thousands monks and lay Buddhists was set up by Jingyan 淨 嚴 and the prime minister Wen Yanbo 文 彥 博 (1006–1097); and in 1089, a *Lianhuashenghui* 蓮 花 勝 會 (the Lotus Magnificent Society) by Zongze 宗 賾 (fl. 1086). All of these activities took place in the vicinity of Jiangzhe area and some of such gatherings even involved tens of thousand people. See Li Xiaoben, 'Zhongguo jingtuzong shi', pp. 108–9.

[16] Since the unprecedented success achieved by the fellowship of Huiyuan has become a symbol of being successfully reborn into the Pure Land under the leadership of the Lotus Society, the number of the group has become a symbol as well. Likewise, Jingkong of the Pure Land Learning Center has adapted the same idea to the practice of *nianfo*, such that the number of people allowed to join the practice was limited to one hundred and twenty–three.

[17] Ibid., p. 108.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Peng Jiqing, *Jingtu shengxian lu,* p. 93.

[20] Shoucheng, ed., *Lidai jingtu gaoseng xuanji* (Taipei: Fotuo jiaoyu jijinhui, 1992), pp. 24, 26.

Mount Hongluo 紅 螺 山 in Beijing 北 京 became the biggest *daochang* specializing in Pure Land practice in China.[21] This was where Shengliang 聖 量 (1860–1940; Yinguang 印 光), the later thirteenth patriarch, had spent five years practicing austerities and *nianfo*.[22] Likewise, under the guidance of Yinguang, the Lingyanshan Monastery 靈 岩 山 寺 of Suzhou 蘇 州 in the province of Jiangsu became another famous *daochang* specializing in *nianfo* practice after 1937; because of his great influence, the Lotus Society soon prospered throughout China.[23]

Fig. 1: Yinguang

Yinguang's advocacy and teachings were observed and developed by his disciples. Among them, the most influential one for the contemporary development of Pure Land Buddhism is Li Bingnan 李 炳 南 (1888–1986), who fled to Taiwan in 1949 with the army and officials of the Nationalist government of the Republic of China. It was there that he established the first Lotus Society in the Tai–chung 台 中 (Taizhong) area in 1951.[24] His effort and ability in preaching and organizing allowed him to carry on Yinguang's tradition. It is on this foundation that the advocating of the modernized Pure Land Learning Center was fostered.

## The *Dharma* Lineage of Jingkong – the Leader of the Pure Land Learning Center

Li Bingnan was an important lay figure for his succession to the Pure Land teachings popularized by Yinguang in China as well as for his diligent promotion of Pure Land Buddhism in Taiwan,[25] where he was notable

[21] Yanxing 演 性 and Xinzhong 新 鐘, eds., *Lianzong shisanzu zhuanlue* (Taiwan: Sanbao dizi, 1997), p. 93.

[22] Ibid., p. 98.

[23] Yuanche 圓 徹, 'Lianzong shisanzu zhuan zhongyin liutong xu 蓮 宗 十 三 祖 傳 重 印 流 通 序 (Preface on the Reprint and Spread of the Biographies of the Thirteen Patriarchs of the Pure Land School)', pp. 1–4 in ibid., p. 3. Aside from these activities, many Pure Land advocates also made contributions to modifying rituals and *nianfo* practices as well as clarifying the principles and philosophical system of Pure Land Buddhism. A notable example is the revival movement of the release of living creatures by Zhuhong 袾 宏 (1535–1615), the ninth patriarch of the Pure Land School, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shoucheng, *Lidai jingtu gaoseng xuanji,* p. 20.

[24] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* ed. Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji bianji weiyuanhui (Taichung, Taiwan: Taizhongshi fojiao lianshe, 1996), pp. 17 and 411.

[25] Most information concerning Li Bingnan is based on the Chinese source *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji* 雪 廬 老 人 淨 土 選 集 [Selected Works of the Old Xuelu on the Pure Land] and Charles Brewer Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1999). However, some of their records are not consistent. Because *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji* was written two months within the death of Li, I choose to follow it wherever a contradiction occurs. Examples of differences can be seen in Jones's book: on p. 122, he writes that before Li undertook a strict vegetarian diet, he "had been a revolutionary famous for his seemingly endless capacity for alcohol and meat"; however, no such description of "seemingly endless capacity for alcohol and meat" can be found in his Chinese biography and autobiographical articles. In addition, Jones mentions that Li "began corresponding with the master, and within a year he journeyed to Shanghai to take the Three Refuges under him." Here, according to the Chinese source, Li took the Three Refuges under Yinguang through correspondence by the recommendation of a disciple of Yinguang; Li began corresponding with Yinguang only after, not before, the Three Refuges rite. Also on the same page, Jones writes that: "[h]is reputation spread, and in 1931 he received an invitation to go to Nanjing to assume the directorship of the 'Agency for Making Offering to the Past Masters Who Achieved Sagehood of the Republic of China'…". However, according to the Chinese source, Li received the invitation not simply because of his reputation but because of his previous performance in the editorial task as well as the recommendation by the editor–in–chief. Besides, Li was not the director of the Office. On p. 123, Jones includes

in spreading the Pure Land doctrines and ways of practice. Even after his death in 1986, his thirty–eight years of ceaseless teaching and writing still have a considerable influence on the contemporary elite and people of different social classes.[26] Above all, in terms of Buddhist practice, his efforts sustained the tradition of *jieshe nianfo*, through which the tradition of the Lotus Society was popularized to the rest of the island from the Tai-chung area. The practice of *nianfo* has become the major form of practice in Taiwan to this day.[27] Under the guidance of Li, Jingkong successfully built up the solid foundation and capabilities for his future achievements in both teaching and leadership.

In order to thoroughly understand Jingkong as a successor to the *dharma* lineage from Yinguang through Li, and as a reformer who emphasizes the modernization of the ancient form of Lotus Society, a study of Li's philosophy and accomplishments is of the utmost importance.

Fig. 2: Li Bingnan

Li Bingnan was a native of Jinan 濟南 in Shandong 山東, the home province of Confucius. His parents named him Li Yen 李豔, but he is best known as Li Bingnan. Like many children of educated families, he studied Confucian classics in a traditional Chinese educational system. At the young age of twenty–three (1912), he was elected as the first president of an educational institution organized by various academic groups in Jinan; his diligence in popularizing education was soon recognized and publicly praised by the Shandong provincial government. Beginning in 1920, he worked for the Judiciary. From 1934 to 1937, his literary competence earned him a respectful government position as one of the editors engaged in recomposing and reediting the county annuals of Jinan. Upon finishing the editorial work, he was immediately appointed, by the recommendation of the Editor in Chief, to work for the *Dacheng zhisheng xianshi fengji guanfu* 大成至聖先師奉祀官府 (The Office of Sacrifices to the Greatly Accomplished Supreme Prior Teacher) as a government officer in charge of offerings to Confucius and other related matters. He was soon promoted to the position of Secretary in Chief of the Office. In 1949, while in his 60's, he left Mainland China (along with the Office and the government) for Taiwan, where he continued to hold the same post until his resignation.[28]

Li married twice, wedding Zhao Defang 趙德芳 after the death of his first wife, Zhang Defu 張德馥. However, his wife, his son Junlong 俊龍, and two granddaughters were not able to leave for Taiwan in time and remained in Mainland China for good. He remained single in Taiwan, living in a small house alone and in an austere way. He retained his health and vigor well into old age and refused being taken care of by his students until he was ninety–five.[29]

Li has been recognized as an energetic man of versatile talents. Other than his knowledge of Confucianism and poem writing, he also mastered Chinese medicine and sword playing. When he was in Tai-chung, people noticed that he worked in The Office of Sacrifices by day and taught Confucianism and Buddhism in various *daochang* at night. Other than these tasks, he also lectured on the *Analects* and Buddhist

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the "Lingshan Temple" as one of the Buddhist "enterprises" founded by Li, but, according to a Chinese source [Xingfan, *Wangsheng jingtu zhuan jiyou* (Gaoxiong: Gaoxiong wenshu jiangtang, 1997), pp. 280–1], it was established in 1938 by a local Buddhist nun, Deqin 德欽 (1888–1971), eleven years before Li's arrival in Tai-chung, Taiwan.

[26] Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990,* p. 124.

[27] Ibid., p. 115.

[28] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* pp. 14–16.

[29] Ibid., p. 20.

scriptures in the Medicine College of China 中國醫藥學院, as well as on Chinese poetry, the *Record of Rites* 禮記, and Buddhism in Chung Hsing 中興 and Tung Hai 東海 Universities in Tai-chung.[30]

This characteristic of versatility is reflected in Li's study of Buddhism, as well. From around 1920 to 1928, he studied Buddhist teachings of the Weishi 唯識 School (the Consciousness–only School)[31] from Mei Guangxi 梅光羲 (b.1879) in a *Foxueshe* 佛學社 (the Buddhism Learning Society) near Lake Daming 大明湖 in Jinan. Then, from about 1928 to 1936, for another eight years, he studied Buddhist teachings of the Chan School[32] under the guidance of Keguan 客觀 of the Jingju Monastery淨居寺, Jinan, and Zhenkong 真空, who was invited from Beijing by the Jingju Monastery. From 1937 to 1945, he studied Tantric teachings[33] for, once again, eight years, from Gongge Hutuktu of the White Sect 白教貢葛呼圖克圖and Nuona Hutuktu of the Red Sect 紅教諾那呼圖克圖.[34] All of Li's teachers were famous for their expertise in their own fields of Buddhist study and were respected by their contemporaries. Li's versatile talents broadened and deepened different aspects of his understanding of Buddhism, which served to enrich his religious experience and prepare him for his future career in teaching. Surprisingly, after his diligent studies of Weishi, Chan, and Tantric teachings, Li did not encourage his students to follow in his steps. Nonetheless, he concluded that, because of its flexibility in meeting people's needs and living conditions, Pure Land Buddhism was the school of doctrine and practice best suited to Buddhists of his time.[35]

According to his own account, Li became a Pure Land practitioner in about 1930, shortly after he came across several freely distributed booklets concerning the teachings of the Pure Land School.[36] These booklets were printed, distributed freely and mailed on request by the *Honghuashe* 弘化社 (Grand Influence Society), a society organized by Yinguang in Suzhou to print and distribute Buddhist scriptures and related materials. After some time, working by correspondence, Li took the rite of Three Refuges[37] under, and received his Buddhist name Deming 德明 from Yinguang. From this point forward, Li kept in touch with Yinguang: he continued his study by reading Buddhist scriptures, and published letters and writings by Yinguang; and, at the same time, he frequently inquired and learned from his teacher through correspondence until Yinguang's death in 1940. In about 1934, a business trip finally gave him the chance to visit Yinguang, who was at that time in sealed confinement[38] in the Baoguo Monastery 報國

[30] Ibid., p. 19.

[31] The ideology of the Weishi School is based on the idea of *weishi* 唯識 (vijñāna-mātra; Consciousness–only), which is a form of Buddhist doctrine holding that nothing exists aside from consciousness.

[32] Generally speaking, the Chan (or Zen in Japanese) School is a meditational school founded in China by the Indian monk Bodhidharma. It is known nationwide for the dramatic story of the succession of its sixth patriarch, Huineng (638–713).

[33] The Tantric teachings here refers to Tibetan Buddhism, which is greatly different from Chinese Buddhism in terms of the ways of practice that involve visualization on the complicated pictures of *mandala,* or rostrum ground, and the use of hand gestures (mudrā, mystic positions of the hand).

[34] Hutuktu, or Grand Lama of Urga, is the modern term 'Ulan Bator' in Mongol. See John Snelling, *The Buddhist Handbook: A Complete Guide to Buddhist Teaching, Practice, History and Schools* (London: Century, 1987), p. 214.

[35] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* pp. 20, 416–18.

[36] Li Bingnan, 'Yinguang dashi yuanji shizhounian jinian huiyilu' pp. 412–15 in ibid., p. 412.

[37] This is a Buddhist rite taken by Buddhists who resolve to observe Buddhism according to the three qualities of their own Buddha–nature or True Mind.

[38] The term *biguan* 閉關, translated as sealed confinement, literally means closed barrier. This kind of practice was initiated by Chan practitioners who isolated themselves for Buddhist practices. The place for a *biguan* practitioner to carry out the practice is called *guanfang* 關房 (the confined

寺 of Suzhou. Li spent a day talking with Yinguang, which was deemed a rare occasion since Yinguang seldom chatted with visitors for more than twenty minutes. By Li's own account, although this was the only time he could learn from Yinguang in person, the experience was splendid and invaluable.[39]

In his article in memory of Yinguang, Li summarizes the content of the first letter he received from his teacher, in which Yinguang answered Li's seeking of the Three Refuges by giving him the Buddhist name, setting forth the principles of Pure Land Buddhism, and pointing out some key points for the *nianfo* practice. This summary gives a glimpse of the practicality of Yinguang's thought:[40]

> The gist of the teachings that was bestowed on me by the Old Man is:
>
> One who studies to be a Buddha should: set forward harmonious human relations and fulfill one's duty; avoid evil thoughts and preserve sincerity; not to do any misdeeds, but pursue all good deeds; carry [these] out by oneself and transform others so as to practice Pure Karma[41] together. For the method of *nianfo*, [one] should insist on sustaining [the recitation of] the name [of Amitabha Buddha]; [if one's] mouth recites clearly and ears listen to [the recitation] clearly, for a long, long time, [the stage] of one–mindedness will be attained naturally. There is no need to practice visualization concurrently for [if one] does not comprehend the teachings and theories [for visualization], [when] the phenomena [to be visualized] are subtle but the mind is inattentive, contrary [to one's intentions] disadvantages will arise.
>
> For [the issues of] sustaining a vegetarian diet and of prohibiting killing, [he] was only too pleased to exhort repeatedly…
>
> …老人賜給之開示，其中大要：
> 學佛之人必須敦倫盡分閑邪存誠諸惡莫作眾善奉行
> 自行化他同修淨業念佛之法宜執持名號口念清楚
> 耳聽清楚久久自得一心不必兼修觀想因倘不明教相
> 境細心粗反而生弊
> 對於持齋戒殺更是諄諄告誡[42]

As stated in his biography, Li placed this letter in front of an image of Buddha and kowtowed one hundred times to show his reverence for the teachings. Li clearly had observed them seriously throughout the rest of his life, in particular the exhortation to "carry [these] out by oneself and transform others so as to practice Pure Karma together." This is exemplified by his devotion to teaching and the establishment of the multi–functional Tai-chung Buddhist Lotus Society.

Li's teaching career started around 1931, when he started to teach Buddhism locally in Jinan soon after learning about the profound ideology of the Pure Land School by reading the booklets he had obtained. In 1937, Mei Guangxi recommended to Buddhist master Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947) that Li serve as a lecturer on Buddhism to prisoners in jails. The outcome was so remarkable that he was complimented in an inscription by Taixu. Later, he set up a *Lianshe* in Mount Gele 歌樂山 of Yu City 渝市 where he taught Buddhist scriptures and practiced *nianfo* for a long time. After that, because of the chaotic political situation as a result of the Sino–

room). Those who are in sealed confinement can either read and study Buddhist scriptures from the *Buddhist Canon* or concentrate on 'one' type of Buddhist practice such as *nianfo* and meditation. The time limit and goal for *biguan* vary with one's own needs. When one is in sealed confinement, one is not allowed to leave the confined room; therefore, it is necessary to have someone else to take care of the food, medications, and miscellaneous matters for the practitioner. This butler–like individual is called the *huguan* 護關 (the barrier protector).

[39] Li Bingnan, 'Yinguang dashi yuanji shizhounian jinian huiyilu', pp. 412–15.

[40] Ibid., p. 412.

[41] The term 'Pure Karma' here refers to the Pure Land practice.

[42] Ibid.

Japanese War (1931–1945) and the following Chinese Civil War (1945–1949) between the Chinese Communist Party and the National People's Party, Li, as an officer of The Office of Sacrifices, had to frequently move along with the government he served. Despite the difficulties he faced, he managed to teach Buddhism wherever he relocated.[43] Shortly after he arrived in Tai-chung, he was invited by a Buddhist nun, Deqin 德欽 (1888–1971) of the Lingshan Monastery 靈山寺, to give lectures on the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism.[44] Since Li's in–depth interpretation of Buddhist scriptures was rarely seen in Taiwan at that time,[45] his reputation soon spread and the number of his followers increased. In just two years, he founded the Taizhong fojiao lianshe 台中佛教蓮社 (the Tai-chung Buddhist Lotus Society, commonly known as the Taizong lianshe 台中蓮社, or the Tai-chung Lotus Society), from which the doctrines of Pure Land Buddhism and the practice of *nianfo* have spread throughout the whole island.

In addition to Pure Land Buddhism, Li also gave lectures on other Mahāyāna scriptures and Confucian classics like the *Analects, Book of Rites,* and so forth.[46] At the peak of Li's teaching career, in Tai-chung alone, approximately two hundred thousand Pure Land practitioners were following his teachings. His career continued until the last days of his life when he passed away at ninety–seven.

Symbolically, the establishment of the Tai-chung Buddhist Lotus Society can be viewed as a substantiation of Yinguang's teachings. Like the preceding Lotus Societies in imperial China before 1911, this Society gives first priority to propagating the teachings of the Pure Land School. However, aside from transmitting Pure Land Buddhism to Taiwan from China, the immediate influence of this Society over Taiwan's Buddhist development is that it introduces the seven–day collective practice of *Foqi fahui* 佛七法會 (the Seven [Days] *Nianfo Dharma* Gathering)[47] and the rite of Receiving the Precepts.[48] Both rites are modelled on those that had been observed in China long before 1949. In the case of the *Foqi* ceremony, the liturgy observed by the Society is recorded in *Fomen bibei kesongben* 佛門必備課誦本 (the Buddhist Essential Recitation Manual), in which a statement mentions that the rules and the schedule of the *Foqi* ceremony are copied from the one used in the Lingyanshan Monastery 靈巖山寺 of Suzhou.[49] Fortunately, this liturgy survives and is titled *Lingyanshansi zhuanxiu jingtudaochang niansongyigui* 靈巖山寺專修淨土道場念誦儀規 (the Chanting and Reciting Liturgy of the Specialized Pure Land Arena of the Lingyanshan Monastery). The postscript of this Lingyanshansi liturgy reveals that it

[43] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* pp. 16–17, 418.

[44] Xingfan, *Wangsheng jingtu zhuan jiyou* (Gaoxiong: Gaoxiong wenshu jiangtang, 1997), p. 280.

[45] As is explained in footnote 4, before the arrival of the Nationalists from the Mainland China, most monks in Taiwan joined the *sangha* simply for living; they were trained not to teach but to perform ceremonies that were irrelevant to their studies and practices. Therefore, after the arrival of the Nationalists, partly because of the influence of this new government and partly because of the efforts of a number of elite Buddhists from China, both monks and laymen, most monasteries in Taiwan were taken over and reformed by the newcomers. However, among these elite Buddhists, Li Bingnan was the only one who mastered both the self–practice for salvation, and the teaching of Pure Land Buddhism and a wide variety of scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

[46] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* p. 20.

[47] The purpose for this kind of gathering is to attain the rebirth in the Pure Land within the period of seven days by practicing *nianfo*, which, during the present day, is usually referred to the recitation of the name of Amitabha. This collective practice was established according to two of the School's major Buddhist scriptures, the *Amitābha Sūtra* (the Smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra) and the *Infinite Life Sūtra* (the Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra).

[48] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* p. 418.

[49] *Fomen bibei kesongben* (Tai-chung, Taiwan: Ruicheng shuju, reprint 1982), p. 104. According to the date specified on the title page of this manual, this is a re–edition of the 1954 version.

was established by a Buddhist master Miaozhen 妙 真 of the Lingyanshan Monastery in 1938 under the guidance of Yinguang.[50] This confirms that the Pure Land teachings promoted by the Tai-chung Lotus Society are a direct heritage from the orthodox Pure Land School in China.[51]

Nevertheless, the Tai-chung Lotus Society was not organized merely for the collective practice of *nianfo* and daily or weekly gatherings; structurally speaking, it is a more complicated organization. Many affiliates have been set up one by one for various purposes; for instance, the Compassion Light Library (Ciguang tushuguan 慈 光 圖 書 館) was established in 1958 to meet readers' needs.[52] Within decades, a succession of further institutions was founded, namely, the Compassion Light Childcare Association (Ciguang yuyouyuan 慈 光 育 幼 院) in 1959, the Bodhi Salvation Association (Puti jiuji hui 菩 提 救 濟 會) in 1963,[53] the Bodhi Hospital (Puti yiyuan 菩 提 醫 院) in 1963, the Ethics Demonstration Society (Minglun she 明 倫 社, a publishing house) in 1970, and many Doctrine Promotion Places (Bujiao suo 佈 教 所) from 1957 to 1984.[54] Each of these affiliated organizations, including the Tai-chung Lotus Society itself, is further subdivided into groups for specific purposes. For example, the subgroups of the Tai-chung Lotus Society include: the Salvation Society (Jiuji hui 救 濟 會), the Society for Releasing Living Beings (Fangsheng hui 放 生 會), the Chinese Tutorial Classes (Guowen buxiban 國 文 補 習 班), the Society for Printing Buddhist Scripture (Shoutuo yinjing hui 受 託 印 經 會), the Grand Influence Group (Honghua tuan 弘 化 團), the Heavenly Music Class (Tianyue ban 天 樂 班), the Prosperous *Nianfo* Assisting Group (Rongfu chunian tuan 榮 富 助 念 團), the Society for the Annotation and Translation of Buddhist Scripture (Fojing zhushu yuji hui 佛 經 注 疏 語 譯 會), the Class on the Study of Inner Classics (Neidian yanjiu ban 內 典 研 究 班), the Class on How to Instruct the *Analects* (Lunyu jiangxi ban 論 語 講 習 班), the Initiation Class on National Literature (Guoxue qimeng ban 國 學 啟 蒙 班), and the Class on the Study of Social Education (Shejiao yanxi ban 社 教 研 習 班).[55] The unusual, highly diversified functions of these subgroups reflect that efforts had been made to carry out Yinguang's exhortation: "set forward harmonious human relations and fulfill one's duty; avoid evil thoughts and preserve sincerity; not to do any misdeed but pursue all good deeds."[56] Influenced by Li Bingnan, it is apparent that Pure Land practitioners in Taiwan had tried their best attempting to integrate Yinguang's teachings with the daily needs of the public. As many of these affiliates are still working properly to this day, the success of their endeavor is undeniable; as a result, the Tai-chung Lotus Society has successfully transformed the *Lianshe* into a huge social, cultural, and educational network.

**Conclusion – the Mission of Renewal**

After the death of Li Bingnan, the mission of "carrying on the traditions to cope with the change of the society" passed on to Jingkong 淨 空, one of Li's students who had been training for ten years to teach Buddhism. This

Fig. 3: Jingkong

[50] Miaozhen, ed., *Lingyanshansi zhuanxiu jingtudaochang niansongyigui* (Taipei: Shipusi dabeifahui, reprint 1957), p. 200.

[51] A brief discussion on the adoption of Lingyanshansi liturgies can be found in Charles Brewer Jones's *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990,* pp. 119–22.

[52] Li Bingnan, *Xuelulaoren jingtu xuanji,* p. 18.

[53] It was later renamed as Home of Benevolence and Love (Renai zhi jia 仁 愛 之 家).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Li Bingnan, 'Yinguang dashi yuanji shizhounian jinian huiyilu', p. 412.

transmission was carried out by a symbolic act of passing a copy of the newly compiled *Infinite Life Sutra* on to the new master by Li.[57]

The compilation of this scripture was done by a lay Buddhist, Xia Lianju 夏蓮居 (1882–1965), who was also the one who first proposed to establish the Pure Land Learning Center after the Second World War.[58] From 1932 to 1935, Xia spent three years compiling this *Foshuo dacheng wuliangshou zhuangyan qingjing pingdeng jue jing* 佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴清淨平等覺經 (The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sūtra of Majesty, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahāyāna School),[59] which is a compiled version of five different translations of *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (the Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra; the *Infinite Life Sutra*).[60] According to the prefaces written by Mei Guangxi and Huang Chaozi 黃超子 as well as the postscript by Xia's student, Huang Nianzu 黃念祖, the release of the draft of this compiled scripture quickly attracted the attention of various Buddhist groups; it was sent to the press immediately by a Buddhist General Zhang Xianchen 張憲臣 and was reprinted several times.[61] Above all, it was soon reputed as the best–compiled version of the *Infinite Life Sutra.*[62]

Fig. 4: Xia Lianju

However, since this scripture is a relatively new version, it was not heard of in Taiwan before 1949; the one who brought the first and the only copy to Taiwan was Huang Luchu 黃臚初 (1886–1960),[63] a Lieutenant General.[64] He gave this copy to Li Bingnan, who later bestowed it on Jingkong and urged him to propagate it to the whole world. The uniqueness of this copy is even enhanced by

[57] Jingkong, 'Xueluenshi wangsheng shizhoulian jinian', brochure (1996), p. 6.

[58] Jingkong, *Renshi fojiao: xinfu meiman de jiaoyu* (Taipei: Huazang fojiao tushuguan, 1997), p. 211.

[59] Xia Lianju, ed, *Foshuo dacheng wuliangshou zhuangyan qingjing pingdeng jue jing* (Taipei: Huazang jingzongxuehui, 1935, reprint 1992), p. 6.

[60] See ibid., p. 1. The five different translations are:

1). *Wuliang qingjing pingdeng jue jing* 無量清淨平等覺經 of the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220 CE);

2). *Foshuo zhufo amituo sanyesanfosailoufotanguodurendao jing* 佛說諸佛阿彌陀三耶三佛薩樓佛檀過度人道經 of the Wu Dynasty (222–280 CE);

3). *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 of the Wei Dynasty (222–265 CE);

4). *Wuliangshourulai hui* 無量壽如來會 of the Tang Dynasty; and

5). *Foshuo dacheng wuliangshou zhuangyan jing* 佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴經 of the Song Dynasty.

[61] For details see ibid., pp. 1–8, 133–5.

[62] Ibid., pp. 1, 4–5.

This is the fourth compiled *Infinite Life Sutra.* The first attempt was the *Da Amituo jing* 大阿彌陀經 (the Large Infinite Life Sutra) by a Song *jinshi* 進士 Wang Rixiu 王日休 (d. 1173); the second one is the *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 (the Infinite Life Sutra) by Peng Jiqing (1740–1796); and the third one is the *Mohe Amituo jing* 摩訶阿彌陀經 (the Great Infinite Life Sutra) by Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857). A brief comparison of these four compiled versions can be found in Huang Nianzu, *Foshuo dacheng wuliangshou zhuangyan qingjing pingdeng jue jing jie* (Tai-chung, Taiwan: Wufeng sanbao huchihui, 1993), pp. 70–5.

[63] Huang took the Three Refuges in 1937 and decided to specialize in the practice of Pure Land. He fled to Taiwan in 1948 and became a monk the next year. He was given a Buddhist name, Zongjing 宗淨 (better known as Lühang 律航). In order to concentrate on the *nianfo* practice, he took the 100–day sealed confinement twice. In 1956, he became the abbot of Cishan 慈善寺 Monastery in Tai-chung, Taiwan. For details, see Xingfan, *Wangsheng jingtu zhuan jiyou,* pp. 263–4.

[64] Jingkong, 'Zaocan kaishi 早餐開示 (The Teaching at Breakfast)', http://www.amtb-dba.org/Audio/Live/live. html (6 Mar. 2000).

Li's personal marks, specifically, his manuscript of exegesis. Moreover, as the compiled scripture has since been used as the guide for the Learning Center in preaching and practice, it could be viewed as the tangible heritage left to the Learning Center by Xia.

In conclusion, it is quite clear that the roles played by Li Bingnan and the Tai-chung Lotus Society were a link between Yinguang and Jingkong as well as between the traditional Lotus Society and the contemporary Pure Land Learning Center. This transitional stage has allowed the Lotus Society to gradually adjust to social changes in a relatively stable environment in Taiwan after 1949 so that the Learning Center can be well–prepared for the process of internationalization and digitalization. The passing on of the compiled scripture demonstrates that, through Li, Jingkong was given a mission to complete Xia's plan in reviving the *Infinite Life Sūtra* and renewing the Lotus Society. Jingkong succeeded in this mission by promoting the compiled scripture and establishing the Learning Center.[65] In other words, Li Bingnan and Xia Lianju are important in the establishment of the Learning Center because they provided Jingkong's reforms with a solid foundation and explicit directions.

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[65] As has been discussed herein, Li had learned Weishi Buddhism from Mei Guangxi, who was the best friend of Xia Lianju. Hence, from Mei's close relations with Xia and from Li's keeping and transferring of the compiled scripture, Li's attitude towards Xia can be revealed even though there is no textual evidence from which one can determine if Li was an acquaintance of Xia.