

## Weixin Shengjiao: An Introduction

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**ABSTRACT:** Weixin Shengjiao, founded in the early 1980s by Chang Yi-Jui, later known as Grand Master Hun Yuan, is one of the largest Taiwanese new religions, with some 300,000 members in Taiwan and abroad. This introduction places Weixin Shengjiao within the context of the religious effervescence that followed the end of the Martial Law period in 1987 in Taiwan. It shows how the movement's success is due to its institutionalization of very popular forms of folk religion, and its emergence as an authoritative source of teachings about I Ching and Feng Shui, both techniques that interest a large number of Chinese in Mainland China, Taiwan, and the diaspora. Its doctrines are rooted in a sacred history of China and the world. The main challenge of Weixin Shengjiao is now how to expand internationally a movement so much rooted in Chinese mythology and practices.

**KEYWORDS:** Weixin Shengjiao, Weixinism, New Religions in Taiwan, Hun Yuan, Taiwanese New Religious Movements.

### *Introduction*

When I last visited Taiwan, in January 2017, I was told that the island is home to the largest number of new religions headquartered in a single country or territory in the whole world. I am not aware of statistics, and surely there are also hundreds of new religious movements in Korea, and even in two countries less studied by the specialists of the matter, Vietnam (Hoang 2017) and Indonesia (Makin 2016). At any rate, there is little doubt that Eastern Asia offers persuasive evidence that new religious movements continue to be born and prosper, and that hundreds of them are understudied or not studied at all by scholars.

One such case is Weixin Shengjiao, a large new religious movement born in Taiwan in 1984 and now becoming international. CESNUR discovered it

through papers given at its conferences by Taiwanese scholars. Because of friendships born during CESNUR conferences, as Bernadette Rigal-Cellard explains in her article, some Western scholars were invited to The International New Religion Interaction Forum of Weixin Shengjiao in Taichung, which followed the impressive Unified Ancestor Worship Ceremony for Chinese in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, held on January 1, 2017 in Taipei's Linkou Stadium.

Apart from two entries I wrote for an online encyclopedia (Introvigne 2016; 2017), the articles published in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR* are the first to appear in a Western scholarly publication on this movement. Bernadette Rigal-Cellard offers some elements of context, and a comparison between Weixin Shengjiao and another growing Eastern Asian new religion, Korea's Daesoon Jinrihoe, is proposed by both Fiona Hsin-Fan Chang, from a Taiwanese perspective, and Taesoo Kim, from a Korean perspective.

Some overlapping between the articles is unavoidable, and general information about what Weixin Shengjiao is all about are also scattered in the articles of the issue. However, since the movement is virtually unknown to Western scholars, some basic information are also offered in this introduction.

### *The Taiwanese Context*

The context for the rise of Weixin Shengjiao, one of Taiwan's largest indigenous new religions, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century included three main elements. The first was the religious effervescence in Taiwan after World War II, which grew out of a pre-existing disparate mosaic of religious organizations and beliefs, including the traditional Three Teachings (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) and a variety of folk religions. New religions normally did not deny the Three Teachings, but integrated all of them with folk beliefs into syncretistic projects guided by their founders' religious creativity. The second was the Martial Law, which was in force in Taiwan between 1949 and 1987 and, among other effects, severely limited religious liberty. The end of the long Martial Law period in 1987 allowed several new religions to be legally recognized and registered (see Chang 2016).

The third element was the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–1976), which led to the destruction of thousands of libraries, temples, and other cultural and

religious memories, in the name of a strict interpretation of Marxism and Maoism. As a result, Taiwanese authorities felt that the island should act as the guardian of the endangered Chinese cultural heritage, preserving it for future generations. Although the policy called “Revitalizing Chinese culture” was part of a political strategy through which the last Martial Law governments in Taiwan tried to legitimize themselves, it was also genuinely popular. Taiwanese started to look for groups preserving “Chinese orthodoxy,” i.e. the authentic teachings of ancient Chinese religion and culture. Several new religions seized the opportunity and claimed they could offer precisely such orthodox teachings, first to Taiwanese and later, after the effects of the Cultural Revolution subsided and Cross-Strait relationships between Mainland China and Taiwan improved, to Chinese living in the People’s Republic of China, and to the large international Chinese diaspora.

*Enter Weixin Shengjiao*

One such new religion was Weixin Shengjiao. Although founded at a comparatively recent date, it developed very fast. The information on its history and doctrine derive from primary sources (Huang 2016, Hun Yuan 2016a, Hun Yuan 2016b), and in a large part from interviews I conducted with the founder, Grand Master Hun Yuan, and with members (called in the movement “virtuous fellows”) in New York, Taiwan, Mainland China, and Europe in 2016 and 2017 (hence the limited number of references).

Its founder, Chang Yi-Jui, later known as Grand Master Hun Yuan, was born in Zhongliao Township, Nantou County, Taiwan, in 1944. Until he was 39, his main interests were not in the field of religion, although he was a lifelong reader of the Chinese Classics, particularly of the *I Ching* (Classic of Changes), whose origins date back to the Western Zhou period (1000–750 BCE) and which is both a philosophical and cosmological treatise and a manual for divination. The expression “I Ching” refers both to the book and to the doctrine it presents. The book includes 64 hexagrams, each of which combines, in a different way, the basic eight trigrams, also called “Bagua” (the eight symbols), i.e. vertical sequences of three lines, either broken or unbroken. Broken lines represent Yin (the female, passive, and shadowy side of the universe) and unbroken lines represent Yang (the male, active, and luminous principle).

Chang graduated at the Land Survey Department of Kuang-Hwa Senior Industrial Vocational High School in Taichung City, Taiwan. He went on to teach Engineering Measurement at the same school and established Zhong Xin Measuring Ltd., the oldest company of land surveying and measurement in Taiwan. These successful mundane activities were not completely far away from spirituality, as Chang was also interested in Feng Shui, one of the classical Five Arts of Chinese Metaphysics, whose aim is to harmonize human beings with their environment, including the land, and which is widely used to orient buildings in an auspicious way. Although suppressed by the Cultural Revolution in China, and regarded with some suspicion by the official cultural policies prevailing under Martial Law in Taiwan, Feng Shui remained immensely popular among all Chinese.

In 1982, Chang fell seriously ill, and attributed his recovery to divine intervention and to his vow that, should he recover, he would abandon secular activities and devote his life to spirituality. After his recovery, Chang received several revelations from high spiritual beings and felt he was now united with the deified Chinese sage Guiguzi. He then went to a pilgrimage to Mount Dawu, in Taitung County, with a few friends. There, he reported that the Jade Emperor, the supreme ruler of the universe in Chinese mythology, gave him a message, advising him “never to be selfish” and to “encourage people for self-cultivation” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 59).

In 1983, in the day of the Lantern Festival, Chang opened a family hall called Yi Yao She in Taichung City for worshiping Buddha and solving his followers’ problems through divination. In 1984, Yi Yao She was expanded and renamed Shennong Temple. On October 12, 1984, Chang was given the Buddhist name Hun Yuan by divine revelation. He started teaching I Ching, Feng Shui, and Buddhism to an increasing number of disciples.

In 1987, Martial Law was finally lifted in Taiwan, which enabled Grand Master Hun Yuan to spread to larger audiences the teachings of “Weixin Shengjiao” (“Sacred Teachings of Mind Only”). The name refers to the doctrine that “the mind is the Buddha” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 47), or “mind is the only method” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 42). “The rising and falling of everything, the movement teaches, depend on the mind” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 43). Accordingly, “the method of this religion is to cultivate the mind” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 43). The notion of “mind,”

on the other hand, is not constructed according to Western or rationalist models and includes what is commonly called the heart.

By the time of the group's legal recognition, the Shennong Temple had become too small to accommodate all the Master's followers, and land was purchased in Nantou County. In 1989, the Hsien-Fo Temple, which continues serving as headquarters of Weixin Shengjiao to this very day, was inaugurated on Chan-Chi Mountain. Both the land and the architecture of the impressive buildings were chosen according to Feng Shui principles. The area includes I Ching University, founded in 1996, temples, and cultural facilities.

In fact, in addition to some forty branch temples in Taiwan, Weixin Shengjiao has built, starting in 2002, a temple complex honoring the three ancestors of the Chinese people on Ciao Mountain, Hebei Province, China. From 1998, Grand Master Hun Yuan led his followers in pilgrimages to Yunmeng Mountain, in the Chinese province of Henan, where the historical Guiguzi is said to have established the oldest military academy in China, in a place where a shrine to him was erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 2001, a contract was signed for constructing near that shrine the City of Eight Trigrams, or Town of Chinese Culture. Construction is ongoing and, when completed, will include temples, a cultural research center, and a campus of I Ching University. The size of the buildings already completed, which I visited in June 2017, is at any rate impressive. According to Grand Master Hun Yuan, the City of Eight Trigrams "is the debut of lasting Cross-Strait peace as well as the start of the great Chinese reunion of all people propagating Chinese culture together" (Huang 2016, 85). From 2001, several academic initiatives including scholars from both Taiwan and Mainland China were also organized in different locations.

In addition to China, Weixin Shengjiao established overseas branches in Japan, Vietnam, United States (Los Angeles and New York), Australia (with events held also in New Zealand), Canada (Vancouver and Toronto), and Spain. The global core membership of the movement grew to about 300,000, with a larger audience estimated by Taiwan's Ministry of Internal Affairs at one million. This rapid success was achieved through three principal strategies. First, Weixin Shengjiao became the leading agency, at least in Taiwan, offering information and teaching on I Ching and Feng Shui, both in their philosophical dimensions and practical applications, including divination. Polls show that this remains a matter of great interest for most of the Chinese population, even among those who

regard themselves as not religious. Through I Ching University and Weixin Shengjiao College (which has been accredited in 2013 by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education), the movement offers courses like those of traditional universities, but it also promotes “lifelong learning” for adults and teaches I Ching to children. The latter program has involved more than two million children in Taiwan only. A study by Taiwanese scholars Chen, Li, Song Lin and P.-C. Lin, who are themselves members of the movement, concluded that these I Ching courses improved the temperament of children and their attitudes towards learning, respecting schoolmates, and avoid bullying (Chen, Li, Lin and Lin 2015).

In addition to courses and seminars, Grand Master Hun Yuan became a familiar presence on Taiwanese national television, through the daily programs *View All Perspectives of I Ching – Feng Shui* (1998), *Everybody Comes to Learn I Ching* (1998), and *Feng Shui of My Home* (digital, 2004). In 2009, the movement launched its own TV channel, Wei Xin TV. From 1995, conventions about I Ching and Feng Shui are organized in stadiums normally used for sport events, with tens of thousands of participants. Several books published by the movement became best sellers in Taiwan, including the early *Feng Shui World View* (1995).

The second reason of Weixin Shengjiao rapid growth relates to the popularity of the idea of “Chinese Orthodoxy” in Taiwan and, increasingly, in Mainland China and among the global Chinese diaspora. Grand Master Hun Yuan claimed that he was able to rectify century-old mistakes in the interpretation of I Ching, including the attempt by academics to marginalize its practical application to divination by emphasizing its philosophical content only. This does not mean that Weixin Shengjiao despises academic studies, both on I Ching and China’s early past. On the contrary, while the movement is aware that its traditional narrative of early Chinese history and the origins of I Ching is regarded as largely mythological in the academia, it actively promotes interaction with academics and a continuous dialogue between mythical and scholarly reconstructions of the Chinese past. The participation of leading academics to Weixin Shengjiao’s conferences reinforces the public image of the movement as an organization seriously committed to study and protect “Chinese Orthodoxy.”

The third factor in the movement’s success is the longing for peace in the global Chinese community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after a 20<sup>th</sup> century marked by so many bloody wars. Grand Master Hun Yuan believes that there will be no world

peace without Cross-Strait peace. His strategy for promoting peace between Taiwan and Mainland China is to emphasize that they both share the same cultural and spiritual roots, and all Chinese descend from the Three Great Ancestors. Weixin Shengjiao also insists that the historical Guiguzi's teachings were ultimately about peace through diplomacy. The movement has promoted both spiritual dialogue between Taiwan and Mainland China, by organizing pilgrimages of Taiwanese to spiritually significant locations in China and by building temples and religious centers there, and, as mentioned earlier, cultural exchanges between scholars.

Grand Master Hun Yuan insists that, in its historical roots, the Chinese culture is a culture of peace and harmony. He believes that both Cross-Strait reconciliation and the globalization of Chinese spirituality, of which Weixin Shengjiao is an important part, would eventually become key factors in the promotion of world peace. In 2009, he founded the Taiwan Wei Xin Association for World Peace. On October 26, 2010, in the City of Eight Trigrams in China both Taiwanese and Chinese organizations signed a "Letter of Intent" for promoting the ancient culture of China, reconciliation among the Chinese, and, through it, world peace.

Weixin Shengjiao also maintains that it is not enough to talk about peace in academic conferences. It is also necessary to show solidarity in time of need. On September 21, 1999, the 921 (also known as Jiji) earthquake hit Taiwan, leaving 2,415 dead and 11,305 injured. Grand Master Hun Yuan launched the I Ching and Feng Shui Interest Circle, whose members were recruited among students of Weixin Shengjiao with an advanced knowledge of Feng Shui. The movement believed that Feng Shui would be useful in guiding the reconstruction after the earthquake, but also offered relief and assistance to the homeless. The organization evolved into the Feng Shui Interest Circle Service Team, which helps needy families in both Taiwan and Mainland China, again by offering both material help and suggestions based on the principles of Feng Shui. Advice is also offered to the business community, based on the idea that I Ching and Feng Shui may benefit "sustainable development" of large and small corporations. Grand Master Hun Yuan teaches that "each factory is like a temple" and has set the goal to bring his programs about Feng Shui and I Ching to 10,000 Taiwanese factories. In turn, these activities have enhanced the credibility of the movement's commitment to world peace and development.

Grand Master Hun Yuan is the charismatic leader of Weixin Shengjiao. His charisma derives from having founded the movement and having received divine revelations and holy scriptures from supernatural beings. He is also regarded as mysteriously united with the deified Guiguzi. As Taiwanese scholar Su-Wei Hsieh noticed, the revelations of Guiguzi legitimize the Master, but symmetrically “in order to make acceptable the revelation of Wanchan [i.e. Guiguzi], Hun Yuan himself must be legitimized as a matchless individual. A substantial number of hagiographic books, pamphlets, and audiovisual resources elevate Hun Yuan from the class of ordinary human beings to that of a sage or a saint” (Hsieh 2015, 30–31). Weixin Shengjiao also operates an historical museum at its headquarters, which includes a presentation of the Master’s life through a typically hagiographic narrative, and a selection of his works of art.

Below the Master, who remains personally responsible for all the main decisions, the movement has what Fiona Chang has described as a “clergy” structure, with the four classes of masters, lecturers, chanters, and preachers (Chang 2016, 5). There is, however, also a parallel leadership structure within the many societies and associations established by Grand Master Hun Yuan for specialized purposes, according to a pattern common to other East Asians new religions.

### *A Doctrine Rooted in the Sacred History of China*

Weixin Shengjiao’s doctrine is set in the context of a mythological history of China, although, as mentioned earlier, the movement continuously compares this sacred history with the findings of academics, and keeps promoting conferences aimed at fostering this dialogue. The origins of Chinese culture are seen in a civilization called Kunlun, which flourished along the long chain of Kunlun Mountains in prehistorical times. The movement believes that the range of the Kunlun Mountains extends to Taiwan and forms what in Feng Shui is called a “dragon node.”

Kunlun’s heritage was transmitted to Fuxi, believed to have been a king in the third millennium BCE and the main originator of I Ching and its central component, the Eight Trigrams (Bagua). Fuxi’s knowledge was transmitted to Jiutian Xuannu, the “mysterious woman” described in the Chinese classics as the goddess of longevity, sexuality, and war. She appeared on Earth, also in the third

millennium BCE, to become the teacher of the Yellow Emperor, a mythical early Chinese sovereign who was one of the Three Great Chinese Ancestors. The others were the Yan Emperor (identified with the sage-ruler Shennong) and Chiyou. In Chinese mythology, Chiyou is a villain, a tyrant who defeated the Yan emperor but was in turn defeated by the Yellow Emperor at the epic battle of Zhuolu, traditionally placed in the 26<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Chiyou, however, is worshipped by Weixin Shengjiao together with the other two Great Ancestors. This seeming anomaly has been explained by Fiona Chang with the fact that Chiyou is believed to be the ancestor of Chinese ethnic minorities and, through his worship, they are also incorporated in the movement's grand project of reconciliation (Chang 2016, 8; see also Chang's article in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*).

The legitimate successor of the Three Ancestor in this lineage of Chinese sages was Guiguzi, a central figure for Weixin Shengjiao. Guiguzi, "the Sage of Ghost Valley," is the name given both to a treatise about politics, peace, and diplomacy that appeared towards the end of the Warring States period in Chinese history (4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) and to his author, of whom little is known. Reportedly, he was the teacher of several key political and military figures of his period, and the founder of a military academy.

Again, the movement is aware that many facts about Guiguzi are disputed by historians and is willing to interact with them. In 2003, it founded the Taiwan Gui Gu Zi Academy to build a space of dialogue with academics on Guiguzi's life and teachings. One can distinguish, from the historical Guiguzi, the deified Guiguzi, identified with the Bodhisattva Wang Chan Lao Zu. The transformation of Guiguzi into a god has a century-old history in China. He was regarded as a god of trade, divination, and Feng Shui. However, in Weixin Shengjiao, as Fiona Chang has noticed, "Guiguzi far exceeds the confines of a trade deity, and descends into the world as an enlightened cultivator, integrating Chinese culture" (Chang 2016, 9). In the movement's sacred history and iconography, the deified Guiguzi is surrounded by "guardians," consisting of 33 celestial kings and 72 celestial masters, a notion peculiar to Weixin Shengjiao and connected to the I Ching's trigrams.

It is a central tenet of Weixin Shengjiao that Guiguzi appeared to Grand Master Hun Yuan, mysteriously united with him, and gave to him several books of revelations. They are collected in the sixteen *Apocalypse Sutra* that, together with

six classics from Buddhism, two Confucian classics, and seven from Chinese folk religion (through which a form of popular Taoism is also transmitted), form the canon of the 30 Weixin Sacred Scriptures. In addition, there is the *Weixin Dao Zang*, an impressive set of more than 18,000 volumes collecting all the speeches and lessons of Grand Master Hun Yuan. The movement went to extraordinary lengths to preserve these volumes for the posterity, depositing them in safes that will survive even a nuclear holocaust. The books also became sacred objects in themselves, as they were “presented to Heaven” and consecrated during the movement’s ceremonies.

The long chain of succession from Fuxi to Grand Master Hun Yuan guarantees the authenticity of the teachings and the transmission throughout history of orthodox I Ching and Feng Shui. Weixin Shengjiao believes that the main truth about the universe is summarized in four lines, which are repeated in several texts revealed by Guiguzi to the movement’s founder: “Yin and Yang, Sun and Moon of longevity. Unfortunately, the heavenly truth is hard to comprehend. If the world has Guiguzi, the world will certainly be at peace” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 44).

Both academic scholars and Weixin Shengjiao agree that the I Ching system is strictly connected to the doctrine of Yin and Yang. These produce four phenomena, including the Sun and the Moon, which in turn generate the eight trigrams. Weixin Shengjiao teaches that in the traditional Yin-Yang symbol, the Tai Chi, Buddhism is on the Yang side, Confucianism is on the Yin side, and Taoism represents the method (Tao), or the middle path between Yin and Yang. Through this interpretation of the Tai Chi, the movement claims to assume the heritage of all the Three Teachings (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism), while walking along the Tao. Thus, it adopts a “neutral” stance towards the Three Teachings, aimed at changing the world through I Ching and Feng Shui and at reaching a state of Yang with no possible return to Yin, known as the Eternal Bright Heaven. The I Ching, according to the movement, “contains all dharma” (Chang 2016, 10) and is the ultimate truth of each of the Three Teachings, the very center of a “Way of Change” leading the world towards a millennial era of peace.

Weixin Shengjiao distinguishes between the “theory” and the “use” of I Ching, epitomized respectively by Confucius (551–479 BCE) and Guiguzi. The movement teaches that theory and use (the latter including divination) cannot be separated, and lead to cultivation of the mind, longevity, happiness, and peace.

However, the theoretical truth has an esoteric dimension and is not easy to master, which explains the lengthy courses offered by the movement. Students attending the “lifelong learning” courses at I Ching University appear to be interested in the theory of I Ching and not only in its practical applications. Answering a 2015 survey of their motivations for enrolling in the University by Chen, Li, and Lin, students indicated “to expand my mind” and “to acquire general knowledge” as the main reasons for going through the courses, although meeting new likeminded friends also scored high (Chen, Li and Lin 2015a). A parallel study by the same three scholars used the psychological concepts of “life satisfaction” and “family satisfaction” and found that both were improved by the experience of attending an adult education course at I Ching University. However, the improvement was more significant when the adults had enrolled in the University motivated by a desire for expanding their knowledge (Chen, Li and Lin 2015b).

Feng Shui is regarded as part of I Ching or, stated in different terms, I Ching and Feng Shui are two sides of the same coin. In the West, where it is also becoming popular, Feng Shui is often understood simply as the art of orienting buildings, and furniture inside the buildings, in an auspicious manner based on geomagnetical, astrological, and spiritual principles. While Feng Shui surely incorporates these techniques, Weixin Shengjiao insists it is much more. In 1995, Guiguzi revealed the *Feng Shui Sutra* to Grand Master Hun Yuan. This is but one of several texts revealing that “Feng Shui is the only way to reach the Buddhist idea of Kong Si (emptiness)” (Hun Yuan 2016a, 49). *Kong Si* is the harmony of human beings and nature, Earth and Heaven, the visible and the invisible. Through the practice of Feng Shui in its orthodox form, individual karmic problems are solved, longevity is achieved, disasters are avoided, and social and cultural work towards world peace becomes effective. Accordingly, promoting the correct practice of Feng Shui and rectifying common mistakes about it is of paramount importance for the movement.

Weixin Shengjiao does not neglect the philosophical and cosmological dimensions of I Ching and Feng Shui, yet its historical starting point was the “use” of these old Chinese systems for practical purposes, including divination and the solution of daily problems. This “use” was rooted in century-old popular Chinese folk religion, and Fiona Chang regards Weixin Shengjiao as a form of “institutionalization of (...) diffused folk beliefs” (Chang 2016, 4).

### *Chanting for World Peace*

Hsieh insisted on the centrality of ritual in Weixin Shengjiao as a “blending of new and old” (Hsieh 2015, 33). The basis is found on (mostly Buddhist) traditional Chinese rituals, but they are creatively reinterpreted by Grand Master Hun Yuan. At the center of the ritual are chanting and ancestor worship. Chanting mantras is aimed at self-improvement, but also has an altruistic dimension, since it is believed that through chanting we may benefit others and the world at large. In December 1997, Grand Master Hun Yuan started the “One Day Zen Event with a Thousand Buddha” at Hsien Fo Temple, since then held on the fourth Sunday of every month. In this event, chanting is practiced to achieve both individual harmony and a larger harmony extending from the families to the whole world.

Chanting may also be directed to avoid disasters and solve international problems. Weixin Shengjiao has a special ritual for “ridding the world of calamities and eliminating disasters,” based on I Ching, Feng Shui (which in this case teaches where and how to arrange an appropriate worship space), and the chanting of sutras. Such chanting is indeed extensive, and proportional to the threat to be averted. The movement reports that in 2014 sutras were chanted 11,2 million times to stop the virus Ebola. The *Sutra of Gui Gu’s Immortal Master’s Heaven Virtues* was chanted 360,000 times in 2005 to eliminate avian flu, 640,000 times in 2007 to close (at least partially) the ozone hole, and 480,000 times in 2007 (together with another sutra) to prevent a threatened eruption of the Mount Fuji volcano in Japan. The sutra was also mobilized in favor of the Western world and, chanted another 360,000 times in 2012, prevented a volcano disaster in the American National Park of Yellowstone (Hun Yuan 2016a, 151–152).

In 2006, Grand Master Hun Yuan founded the Wei Xin College of Buddhist Chants to train ritualistic specialists capable of leading dharma services. He stated that one of his main motivations for establishing this institution was “looking after the realms of both life and death” (Huang 2016, 46). The movement’s rituals honor the ancestors, starting with the Three Great Ancestors and Guiguzi, who are also enshrined in beautiful temples built both in Taiwan and Mainland China. Ancestor worship, Hsieh states, is offered as evidence of the “group’s

authentic participation in time-honored traditions” (Hsieh 2015, 33). However, it goes further than that.

Millions perished in wars, other episodes of violence, and miscellaneous disasters. Their souls are not at peace. Until they are released from their anguish and attain rebirth in Buddha’s Pure Land, their grievances influence negatively events on Earth. The movement teaches that “in order to bring about world peace, we must care for both the realms of life and death” (Huang 2016, 47). Invisibly, but effectively, Weixin Shengjiao’s services bring safety and security to our present world. One example is the dharma service held in April 2004, where millions of victims of the two World Wars and those who perished in the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks were “given peace and settled” in the movement’s main shrine (Huang 2016, 47). Weixin Shengjiao believes that the ritual had a profound impact on the perspectives of Cross-Strait reconciliation and world peace.

Since January 2004, honoring the Great Ancestors and bringing peace to the victims of violence come together in the Unified Ancestor Worship Ceremony for Chinese in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is held each year on January 1 in Taipei’s Linkou Stadium and attracts great crowds. Taiwanese political dignitaries, including presidents of the Republic, have also participated in the event. Before the first ceremony took place in 2004, Grand Master Hun Yuan wrote the *Doctrines for Unified Ancestor Ceremony for Chinese in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, detailing the ritual procedure and the meaning of the event. The manual explained that the ceremony honors all the great ancestors, from Fuxi to Guiguzi, as well as the 917 emperors of the history of China and the forefathers of all Chinese family clans, whose traditional number is 15,615. The Master also claimed that Chinese history had, after an initial golden age, 5,000 years of darkness with bloody wars marked by 3,762 battles, where more than ten million died. By pacifying the souls of all the victims and honoring the ancestors, Weixin Shengjiao hopes to revive and spread filial feelings among contemporary Chinese and prepare 5,000 years of peace and harmonious development.

Although the Ancestor Worship Ceremony is held in Taiwan, Chinese from Mainland China and the overseas diaspora are also invited. Increasingly, there is a larger Eastern Asian outlook, as the movement teaches that Koreans descend from one of the three Great Chinese Ancestors, Chiyou, and that the first Japanese emperor, Jimmu, who according to traditional chronology reigned in

the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, was a blood relative of a Chinese imperial court sorcerer, Xu Fu (regarded as a prophet by Weixin Shengjiao), who, according to certain traditions or legends, went to Japan and became a king there. Some scholars argue that Xu Fu and Jimmu were one and the same; others believe that neither existed. According to Weixin Shengjiao, Xu Fu was in fact a reincarnation of Guiguzi. The first king of Vietnam, Kinh Duong Vuong (Lôc Tuc), who is said to have reigned between 2879 and 2794 BCE, is also regarded as a descendant of the Yan Emperor, one of the Three Great Chinese Ancestors.

Western scholars are also invited to the conferences and events held in connection with the Ancestor Worship Ceremony. Whether, as the movement becomes global, the ceremony would evolve into an event including a global commemoration of non-Chinese ancestors remains to be seen. Non-Chinese victims of war and other calamities have already been included in Weixin Shengjiao rituals.

### *Looking Towards the Future*

So far, Weixin Shengjiao has proven comparatively uncontroversial. In the United States and the other Western countries where it operates, despite its unconventional beliefs, it has escaped the radars of the anti-cultists, as its activity has been mostly (although not exclusively) confined within the boundaries of the Chinese diaspora.

In Taiwan, the movement's approach to I Ching runs counter a certain academic attitude, which argues that the I Ching's valuable contribution to Chinese culture lies in its philosophical content, while its use as a divination device promotes superstition. Feng Shui's practical applications are also occasionally dismissed as superstitious. During and after the Cultural Revolution, similar objections were also heard in Mainland China, backed by Marxist orthodoxy and enforced through the repressive apparatus of the State. Weixin Shengjiao is aware of these problems and, as mentioned earlier, strives to maintain a dialogue with the academics. In recent years, it has increased its contacts with academics through seminars, conferences, and lectures. On the other hand, it regards the practical applications of I Ching and Feng Shui as crucial not only for their understanding, but also for the promotion of human development and world peace.

Ironically, the Westerners fascinated by I Ching and Feng Shui, not only in the occult-New Age community but also among architects (some of whom claim to derive practical benefits from studying Feng Shui), artists, and writers, are often very much interested in the practical aspects, including divination. To mention just one example, this was certainly the case for celebrated Argentinian novelist Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) and his friend and leading Argentinian painter, Xul Solar (1887–1963), who pondered for many years the theoretical and practical implications of the I Ching both in his paintings and theoretical writings (Nelson and Artundo 2012). Ernst Bernhard (1896–1965), a German disciple of Carl Gustav Jung (1896–1965) who moved to Rome and became one of Italy’s leading psychoanalysts, also regarded divination a constitutive part of I Ching, which played a crucial role in his writings and therapy. One of his patients, Federico Fellini (1920–1993), consulted often I Ching in order to make crucial decision about his movies (Marinangeli 2015, 42–45).

This offers to Weixin Shengjiao both an opportunity and a challenge. After thirty years of growth and expansion among Chinese communities throughout the world, the movement now states that it would like to present its message to a global international audience, beyond the Chinese diaspora, as everybody should be interested in self-cultivation, harmony, and world peace. Grand Master Hun Yuan asked all the branch temples of the movement throughout the world to disseminate the teachings in their respective areas. This would involve the task of translating the main texts of Weixin Shengjiao into other languages, a monumental endeavor given both the magnitude of the movement’s corpus of scriptures and the difficulty of rendering Chinese philosophical and spiritual concepts in other tongues. The sacred history and mythology around Guiguzi and other characters also appears as quintessentially Chinese, and not easy to explain to other cultures. Yet, other East Asian movement rooted in local traditions and folk beliefs have successfully started a process of globalization.

Weixin Shengjiao might perhaps also be able to take advantage of a growing international interest in I Ching and Feng Shui. Already, Western architects have approached the movement to learn “orthodox” Feng Shui, and during my observation of the movement I met at least one in New York who ended up joining Weixin Shengjiao and accepting its theological premises in full. Just as several Westerners in the 1960s and 1970s came to accept Indian and Japanese religious systems, from ISKCON to Soka Gakkai, a new generation of spiritual

seekers may well turn to Chinese spirituality and folk beliefs, giving to movements such as Weixin Shengjiao a chance for expanding in the West.

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