

# Introducing Weixin Shengjiao to Those Who Do Not Know It

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# A New Statue of Guiguzi



- On June 18, 2018, we and many others gathered in Nantou County, Taiwan, to witness the unveiling of a 25-meters-high golden statue of Guiguzi (the largest statue of Guiguzi in the world) by the Taiwanese new religion Weixin Shengjiao

## Megastatues in Contemporary China

- ▶ Megastatues are a common and impressive phenomenon in contemporary China. A megastatue of Yang'asha, the goddess of beauty of the Miao ethnic group, was completed months ago in Jianhe County, Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, in Guizhou province. At 88 meters tall, the statue is the tallest of its kind in China



# Guan Yu Statues



- ▶ Particularly popular are megastatues of Guan Yu, a divinized general of the late Eastern Han dynasty. The one in Jingzhou, unveiled in 2016, is 36 meters tall. Understanding “our” megastatue, however, requires understanding what Weixin Shengjiao is all about



## The Context:

# 1. Religious Effervescence

- First, we should understand the context in which Weixin Shengjiao was born. Its first feature was religious effervescence in post-World-War-II Taiwan, with a flourishing of both traditional temples and new religious movements (although the latter's activities were limited by the government). They integrated the traditional Three Teachings (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) and folk religion, and offered hope to the Taiwanese in a difficult political situation

## 2. The End of Martial Law

- ▶ In 1987, the end of the long Martial Law period (which had started in 1949) allowed several new religions to be legally recognized and registered

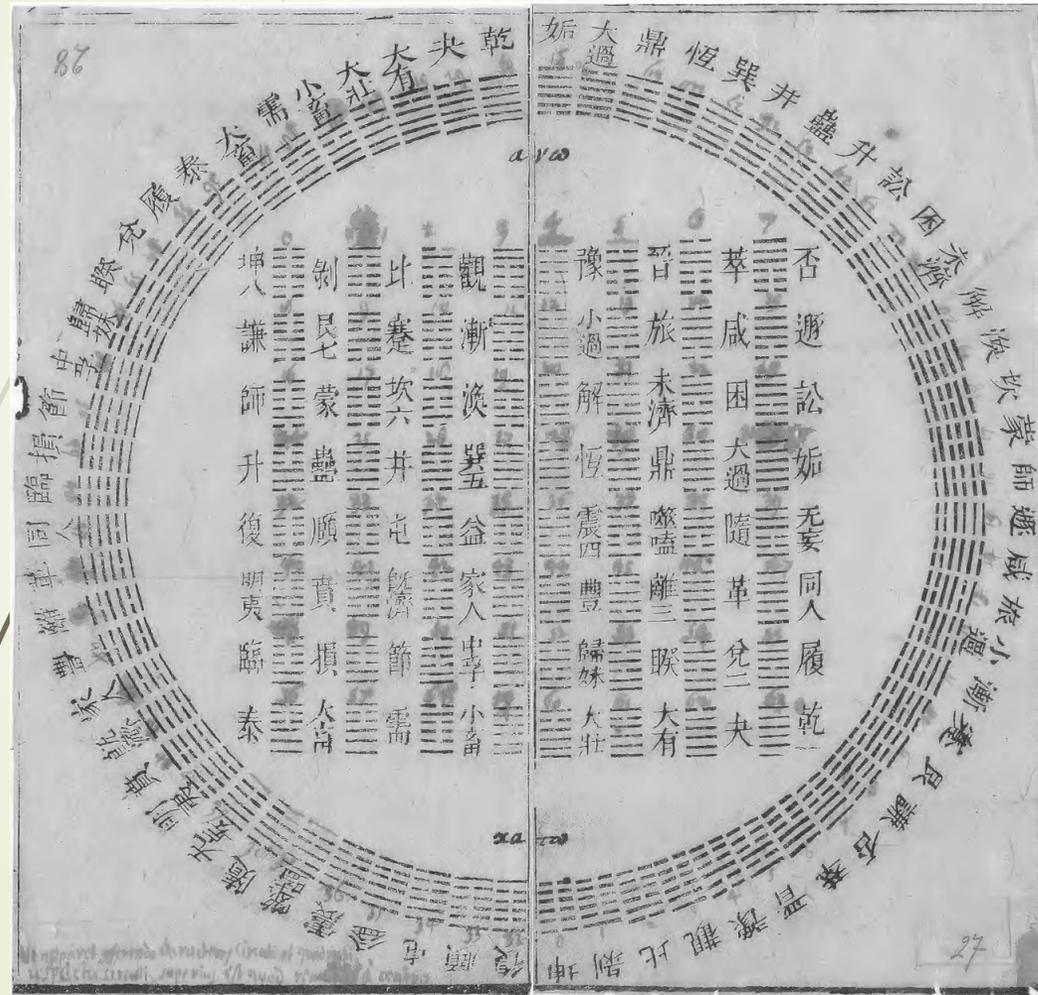


### 3. The Cultural Revolution in Mainland China

- ▶ The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) led to the destruction of thousands of libraries, temples, and other cultural and religious memories. Taiwanese authorities felt that the island should act as the guardian of the endangered Chinese cultural heritage, preserving it for future generations. The Taiwanese started looking with favor at religions offering “Chinese orthodoxy,” i.e. authentic Chinese religion and culture



# 4. I Ching and Feng Shui



- Surveys in Taiwan confirm that the majority of the population is interested in the *I Ching* and Feng Shui
- I Ching* is the venerable “Classic of Changes” whose origins date back to the Western Zhou period (1000-750 BCE). It is both a philosophical and cosmological treatise and a manual for divination
- Feng Shui is one of the classical Five Arts of Chinese Metaphysics, whose aim is to harmonize human beings with their environment, including the land. It is widely used to orient buildings and furniture in an auspicious way



## What is Weixin Shengjiao?

- ▶ Weixin Shengjiao is one of Taiwan's newest new religions, as it was founded in 1984 by Chang Yi-Jui, later known as Grand Master Hun Yuan. He was born in Zhongliao Township, Nantou County, Taiwan, in 1944. Until he was 39, he operated a land survey company and his main interests were not in the field of religion, although he had studied the *I Ching* and Feng Shui. In 1982, Chang fell seriously ill, attributed his recovery to divine intervention, and decided to devote his life to spirituality

# A Religion is Born

- ▶ In 1983, Chang opened a family hall in Taichung for worshiping Buddha and solving his followers' problems through the *I Ching*. In 1984, it 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



# Weixin Shengjiao



- With the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, Grand Master Hun Yuan was able to incorporate “Weixin Shengjiao” (“Sacred Teachings of Mind Only,” although the notion of “mind” is not the same as in the West and in fact includes what is commonly called the heart). The Shennong Temple had become too small to accommodate the growing number of followers and the Hsien-Fo Temple in Nantou County was inaugurated, to serve as the new headquarters

# A Growing Religion

- ▶ With some 300,000 disciples (“virtuous fellows”), Weixin Shengjiao has emerged as one of the largest and fastest-growing new religions of Taiwan, with 40 branch temples, two “Cities of the Eight Trigrams” in Taiwan and Henan, a temple complex in Hebei, an accredited university, charitable activities, popular courses and TV programs on I Ching and Feng Shui, and branches in several foreign countries



# The Unified Ancestor Worship Ceremony



- Since January 2004, Weixin Shengjiao has organized the “Unified Ancestor Worship Ceremony for Chinese in the twenty-first century,” attracting great crowds and top Taiwanese political leaders to Taipei’s Linkou Stadium. The ceremony is aimed at bringing peace to the victims of war and violence and to the world, and to honor the Great Ancestors of the Chinese people



# Dialogue with Eastern Asia

- Although the Ancestor Worship Ceremony is held in Taiwan, Chinese from Mainland China and the overseas diaspora are also invited
- The movement also teaches that Koreans descend from one of the Three Great Chinese Ancestors, Chi You, and that the first Japanese emperor, Jimmu, was a blood relative of a Chinese imperial court sorcerer, Xu Fu (left, regarded as a reincarnation of Guiguizi by Weixin Shengjiao), who, according to certain traditions or legends, went to Japan and became a king there
- The first king of Vietnam, Kinh Duong Vuong (Lôc Tuc), is also regarded as a descendant of the Yan Emperor, one of the Three Ancestors

# Chanting Mantras

- ▶ In Weixin Shengjiao, 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
- ▶ Chanting may also be directed to avoid disasters and solve international problems





# Educational Activities

- Through I Ching University and Weixin Shengjiao College (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
- Daily TV programs on *I Ching* and Feng Shui made Grand Master Hun Yuan a familiar face for many Taiwanese

# A Mythical History



- ▶ Weixin Shengjiao sees the origins of Chinese culture in a civilization called Kunlun, whose heritage in the third millennium BCE was transmitted to King Fuxi and later to the goddess Jiutian Xuannu, who appeared on Earth and became the teacher of the Yellow Emperor, one of the Three Great Chinese Ancestors, together with the Yan Emperor and Chiyou.

In Chinese mythology, Chiyou is a villain, but he has been rehabilitated and is worshipped by Weixin Shengjiao together with the other two Great Ancestors, and honored as the progenitor of China's ethnic minorities

# The Key Role of Guiguzi

- It is a central tenet of Weixin Shengjiao that the legitimate successor of the Three Ancestors was Guiguzi, identified with the Bodhisattva Wang Chan Lao Zu, and that he appeared to Grand Master Hun Yuan, mysteriously united with him, and gave to him several books of revelations





# Who Was Guiguzi?

- Guiguzi, “the Sage of Ghost Valley,” is the name given to a treatise about politics, peace, and diplomacy that appeared towards the end of the Warring States period (453–221 BCE).
- The traditional narrative is that the book was authored by a sage whose name was indeed Guiguzi, who operated the first school of diplomacy in human history. A shrine in the Shui Lian Cave in Yunmeng Mountain, Qi County, Henan, the place where the school is said to have been located was erected in the nineteenth century, and is still visited by pilgrims

# Contesting Guiguzi

- ▶ Twentieth century scholars contested the traditional narrative. As Michael Broschat stated in his 1985 PhD dissertation on Guiguzi, they noted that the earlier available information about the sage “is based on statements made first, as far as we know, about one thousand years after his supposed lifetime,” and claimed that a person called Guiguzi might never have existed. The book of course existed, but it might well have been a compilation of writings by different authors



# New Perspectives



- Recently, however, scholars came to adopt different views. For instance, University of Oklahoma historian Garret Olberding maintains that “in itself this lack of information [about Guiguzi] is insufficient ground to dismiss him as fiction”



# Divinizing Guiguzi

- ▶ Guiguzi was deified after his death as a god of commerce. Weixin Shengjiao, however, promoted him to a main deity of its pantheon. It recognized in him the incarnation of Bodhisattva Wang Chan Lao Zu, and claimed that Guiguzi was a crucial figure in the development of I Ching and is now mystically united with Grand Master Hun Yuan

# Worshipping Guiguzi in Weixin Shengjiao

- ▶ On the 26th day of the 3rd month of the lunar calendar every year, devotees come to Shui Lian Cave, in the Yun Meng Mountain in Henan, to worship Guiguzi. Since 1997, Grand Master Hun Yuan came to the Cave to worship Guiguzi every year. By 2003, the Eight Trigrams City was built by Weixin Shengjiao in the plain of Yun Meng Mountain



# Taichung Branch Temple

- In 2004, Weixin Shengjiao inaugurated the Taichung Branch Temple, which now includes a 5-meter tall statue of Guiguzi



# The Megastatue in Nantou City



- ▶ The statue inaugurated yesterday has great spiritual significance. Through Grand Master Hun Yuan, Guiguzi himself instructed that there should be no steel frame in the inner space of the megastatue. This created a number of construction problems, solved by using traditional Chinese techniques but also, according to the movement, with the help of the Immortal Lu Ban, the god of engineering in China, whom Grand Master Hun Yuan invited to be present at the site

# The Giant Compass

- ▶ A giant compass was placed in Guiguzi's palm on the day of Mid-Autumn Festival in 2017. According to the devotees, the ceremony helped reduce the effects of a typhoon that hit the area
- ▶ However, due to construction problems, the engineering team removed the giant compass and placed it on the ground. An earthquake happened in Hualien. Weixin Shengjiao believes that Guiguzi's giant compass is the "Compass of Heaven and Earth", which stabilizes the society and eliminates disasters. It should not be removed





# Applying Feng Shui

- All temples and statues in Weixin Shengjiao are built according to Feng Shui rules in appropriate locations, believed to protect the important “Dragon Landscape” of Nature from being damaged and the energy and ecology of the entire Earth. The movement also believes that the spirit of Guiguzi descends in his statues, profoundly influencing Nature, humankind, and the spirit world

# Peace and Cross-Strait Dialogue



- ▶ Weixin Shengjiao insists that the historical Guiguzi's teachings were ultimately about peace through diplomacy. Grand Master Hun Yuan believes that there will be no world peace without Cross-Strait peace between Taiwan and Mainland China. He emphasizes that they both share the same cultural and spiritual roots, and all Chinese descend from the Three Great Ancestors
- ▶ The movement has promoted both spiritual and scholarly dialogue between Taiwan and Mainland China

# Social Welfare Work



- ▶ Weixin Shengjiao also maintains that it is not enough to talk about peace in academic conferences. It is also necessary to show solidarity in the time of need. When the 921 earthquake hit Taiwan in 1999, Grand Master Hun Yuan launched the I Ching and Feng Shui Interest Circle. Its members taught Feng Shui as a useful tool 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

# Advising the Business Community



- ▶ Advise is also offered to the business community, based on the idea that the *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

# Visual Arts

- ▶ Within Weixin Shengjiao, a significant artistic production has flourished. In addition to the construction of temples and statues, Grand Master Hun Yuan's paintings, produced with a single stroke of the brush, are increasingly appreciated by critics as a modern revisitation of classical Chinese calligraphy—although, for the devotees, they are sacred objects that offer guidance and protection



# Towards Globalization



The opening seminar of the new campus of Yi-ching University in New York.

- ▶ After thirty years of growth and expansion among Chinese communities throughout the world, the movement has now started to present its message to a global international audience, beyond the Chinese diaspora
- ▶ Weixin Shengjiao might 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
- ▶ 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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