

Holy Sites within New Religions in the Chinese Diaspora: Influencing the Practices and Development of Weixin Shengjiao

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Introduction

- 1) Weixin Shengjiao in the Chinese religious diaspora
 - Connection with and influence of the Chinese diaspora's historical background on holy sites within Taiwanese religions
- 2) Factors for holy lands (Eliade)
 - Similarities and differences between Weixin Shengjiao with other religions
 - Logic and usage of *fengshui* in Weixin Shengjiao
- 3) Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao
 - Concrete examples around Hsien Fo Temple
- 4) Conclusion

Weixin Shengjiao in the Chinese religious diaspora

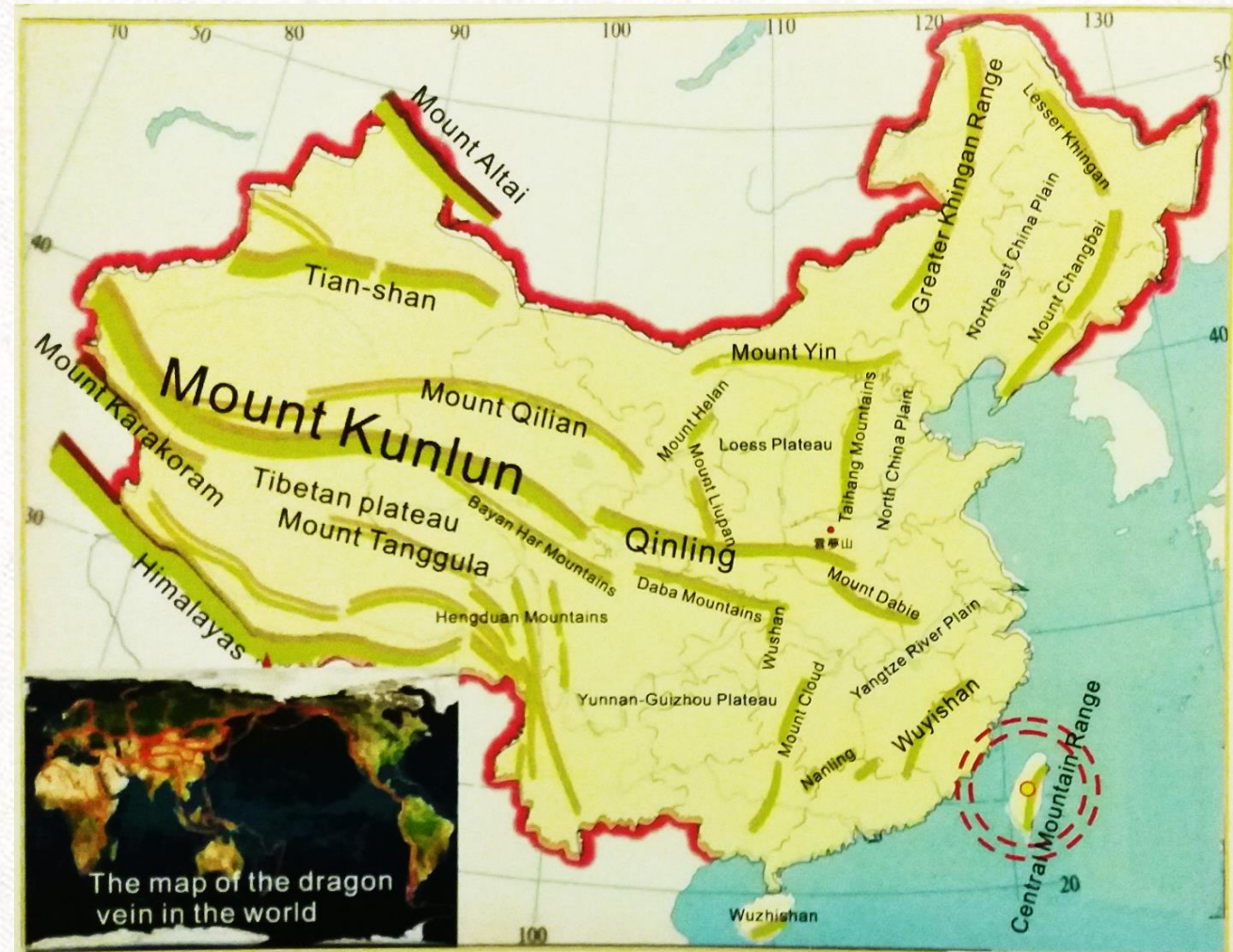
The majority of literature on the Chinese diaspora

- focus on migration movements up from the 19th century
→ Migration between Taiwan and China started centuries before.
- lack of the religious sides of Chinese diaspora
→ Statues of Chinese deities found in the far corners of the world.
- the place of Taiwan as part of the Chinese homeland
→ Taiwanese is both culturally and historically related to China, but there are also important differences.

Weixin Shengjiao in the Chinese religious diaspora

Weixin Shengjiao is distinctly Made in Taiwan but through its heritages and sages also intrinsically linked with China.

- Founded in 1982 (at the end of martial law)
- In 1989 established Hsien Fo Temple as the religious headquarters
- Promotion of ancient Chinese teachings of *fengshui* rules
- Pilgrimages to China to worship the ancestors and sage Wang Chan Lao Zu



Factors for holy lands

Mircea Eliade *The Sacred and the Profane*

(Eliade, 1987: 11, 20-1)

- Hierophany: the manifestation of a divine wholly other into the profane world, thereby transforming the profane space into a sacred space.
- Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc.: each of the holy sites is formed through the divine manifestation of a god, deities, or another form of a wholly Other
- Weixin Shengjiao:
 - Hsien Fo Temple: historical significance at the start of the religion
 - City of Eight Trigrams: mythical origin of the teachings

Factors for holy lands

- Ontophany: nature directly reveals its divinity.

(Eliade, 1987: 116-7, 155)

- Natural worship:

- Nature is the dwelling place of the gods
- Nature is a window to the gods -> the gods at work, contact with the gods
- **God and nature are one and the same thing**

(Park, 1994: 246)

- Weixin Shengjiao:

- Fengshui: all living things in the natural world are divinely spirited
- Differences:

1. Not pray in front of nature
2. Symbolic meaning:

Eliade's Western/Christian interpretation vs.

Weixin Shengjiao's Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian influences on interpretation.

Factors for holy lands

Fengshui rules

- Systemization of the symbolisms with regard to nature
 - Interpret the principles of all movements in the natural world
 - Design and construct religious sites and buildings
- Result: strengthen the site's sacredness.
- Next, concrete examples with explanations by Grand Master Hun Yuan to his followers.

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

Treasured 'spots' or 'pits' (xue):

- Originate from the time that the Chinese prehistoric creator Pangu first separated heaven and earth, then himself transformed into the *original natural geography*.
- These prototype mountains, rivers and rocks are all naturally formed in this prehistoric time and were preserved until now, until the virtuous person was brought by faith, who could use the appropriate *fengshui* rules to conserve them well.

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

Amitabha Lecture Hall:



- A 'spot' was discovered
- The nest of a tortoise that concealed itself.
- Inside, more than a hundred round stones, as small eggs that are held in a tortoise shell.
- According to a Chinese saying, the tortoise represents longevity
- To preserve the 'spot,' a Buddha statue was erected above it.

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

"Fengshui"

- "feng" -> qi (air), like the human breath
- "shui" -> like the human fluids and blood
- > crucial elements for both mankind and the natural world to survive

30% of the land is naturally developed, while 70% of it is created by humans

1. observe and analyze the geographical environment of a place
2. develop the area conform the original landforms

→Emphasize: 1) symbolism of form 2) circulation of air (qi)

Form of nature -> spirit -> *qi* (invisible and all-permeating)

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

Weixin Main Hall

- Dragon *qi* = magnificent natural power
- Position: follows a winding mountain range likened to a dragon
- Design: shaped after a dragon head



Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

Other *fengshui* knowledge includes

- yin and yang (陰陽)
- the five elements (五行): metal, wood, water, fire, earth
- the Eight Trigrams from the I Ching (易經八卦)

Location of Hsien Fo Temple:

Based on the 'geomancy hymn' by the Ming dynasty political advisor Liu Guoxuan (劉國軒), when he came down from China to the current location of Hsien Fo Temple.

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

Geomancy hymn:

*I look up and see the majestic Mount Hua,
What happened that separated Mount Hua by deep gorges?
The mountain ranges on the left and right protect the land in the middle,
In front, the Nanxi creek and Beigang creek converge,
The lake and sea shine as the light of the stars and sun,
Eight hundred beautiful scenes line up on both sides,
This is the land of the emperor and his generals,
I see the endless panorama along the one vein,
The tortoise and snake tightly guard the passage,
The mystery of the winding and turning of the river,
What a pity that the land is occupied by savages,
The land waits for the virtuous person appearing on the right and virtuous time.*

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

I look up and see the majestic Mount Hua,

What happened that separated Mount Hua by deep gorges?

Hsien Fo temple



Mount Hua

Yang yao

Yin yao

Yin yao

Wuxi creek



Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

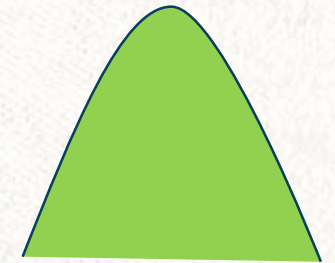
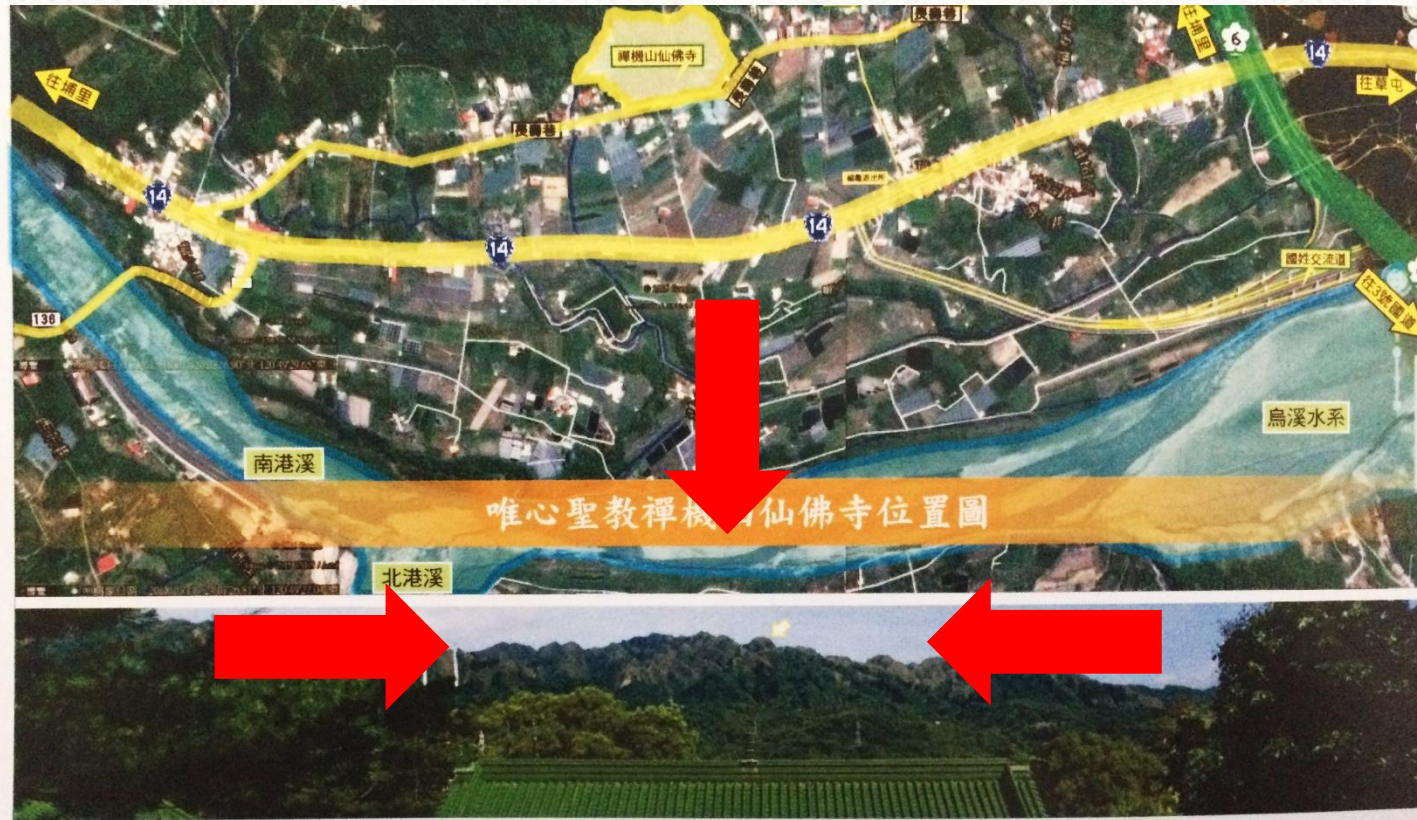
The mountain ranges on the left and right protect the land in the middle,

尚書大傳
(Shangshu dazhuan)
'Great tradition of
the Book of the
Documents'

military help



Fire mountains



Metal mountain

civil help



Earth mountains

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

*In front, the Nanxi creek and Beigang creek converge,
The lake and sea shine as the light of the stars and sun,*

Nanxi creek

Hsien Fo temple



Beigang creek

Wuxi
creek

Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

*Eight hundred beautiful scenes line up on both sides,
This is the land of the emperor and his generals,*

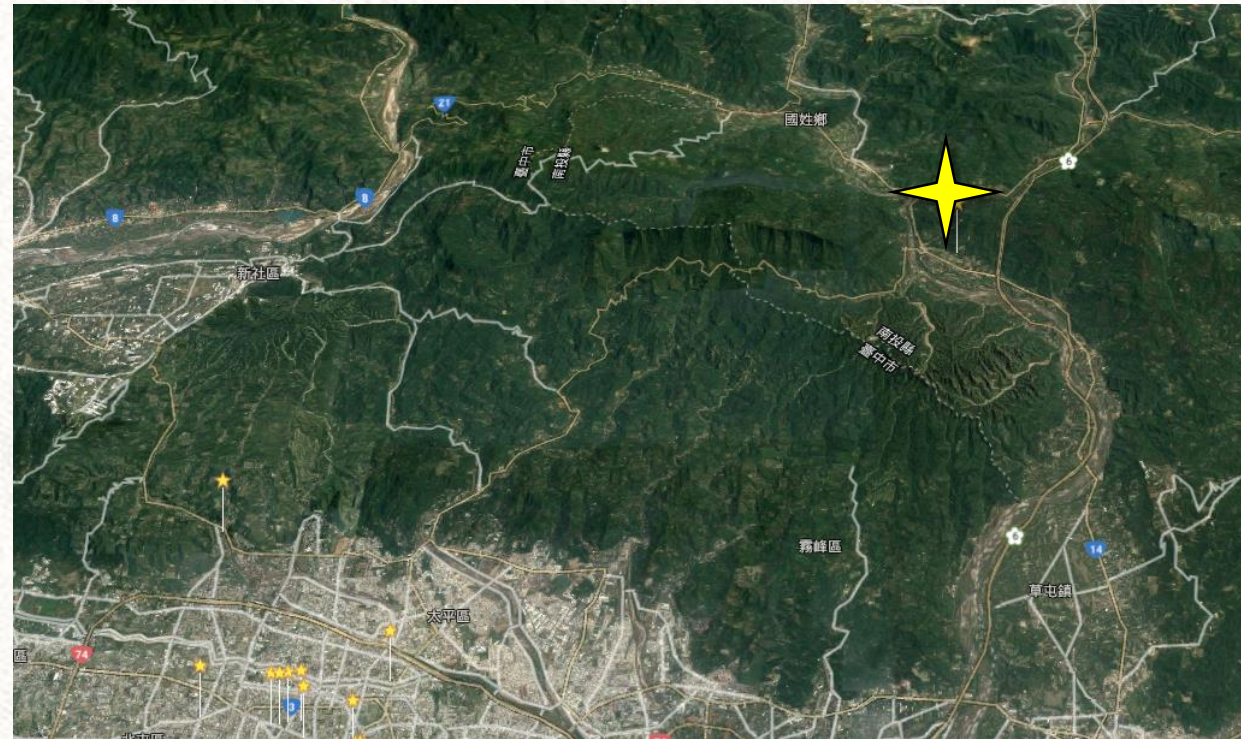
- eight age: helping body on the right
 - ninth age: helping body on the left
- people praying to the emperor

I see the endless panorama along the one vein,

'one vein' (一脈, yi mai):

homonym for

I Ching teachings (易脈, yi mai).



Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

*The tortoise and snake tightly guard the passage,
The mystery of the winding and turning of the river,*

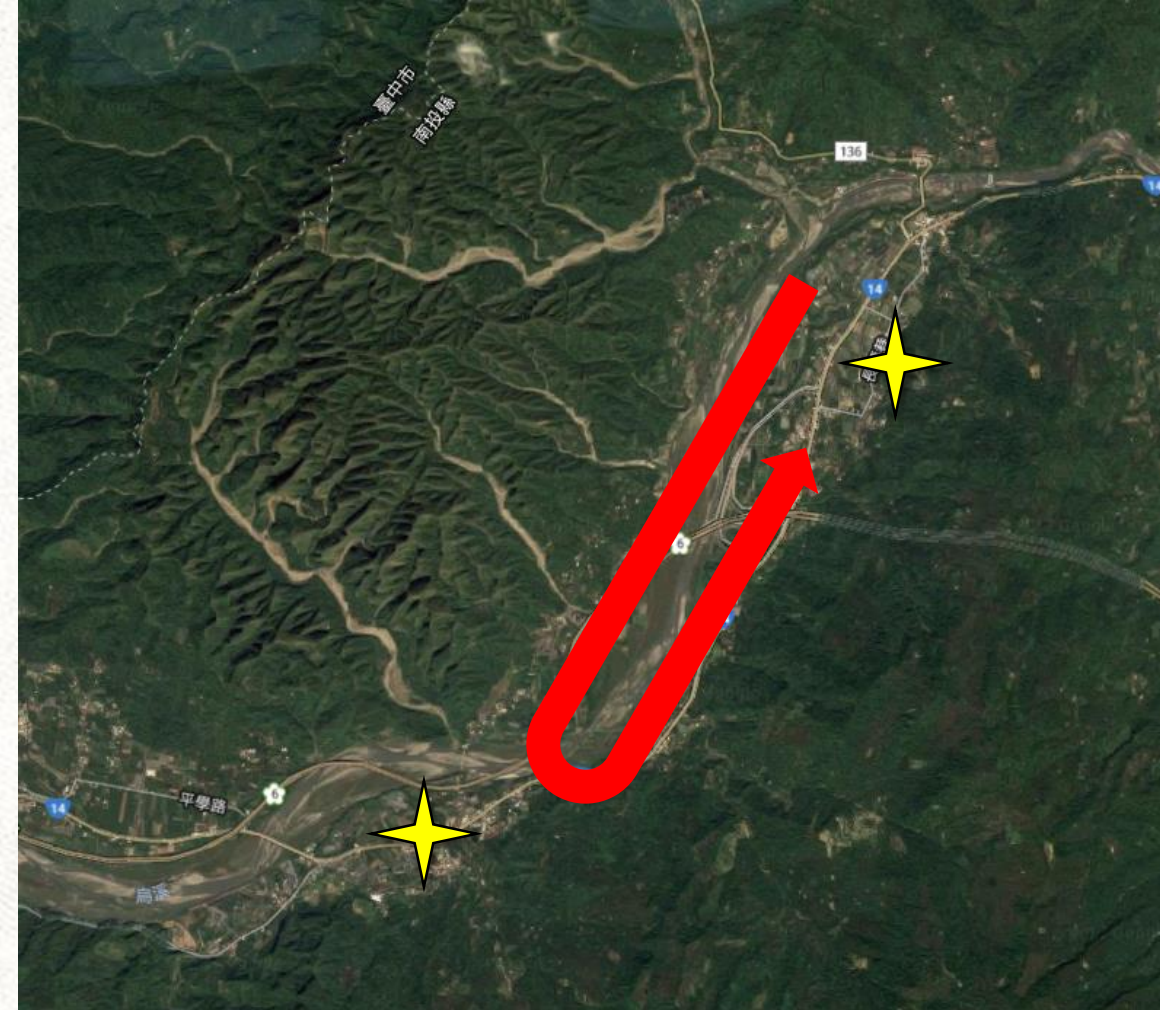
Tortoise and snake:

- Mountain shapes
 - Lock the water stream
- Guardians to limit the flow away of water and qi

The myth of Great Yu Controls the Waters:
Transform into tortoise and snake to stop the water.

Water symbolizes wealth

Tortoise and snake hold and turn around the flow
→ Competency to Hsien Fo Temple



Sacred space principles in Weixin Shengjiao-Hsien Fo temple complex

*What a pity that the land is occupied by savages,
The land waits for the virtuous person appearing on the right and virtuous time.*

This hymn shows:

- Proclamation of the position of Weixin Shengjiao in the Ming dynasty
- Suitability of this area for religious purposes
- Through all kinds of *fengshui* principles

Conclusion

There are two factors form a holy sites in Weixing Shengjiao:

1. Hierophanies or historical factors -> just like most religions
2. Fengshui principles

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Thank you !

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