

*Transcending Time and Space: The Social Practice of Weixin Shengjiao in Facing Global Ethical Responsibility*

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of Weixin Shengjiao in Taiwan toward the issue of global ethical responsibility for social suffering, how Weixin Shengjiao learns the root causes of the current social suffering issues, and how Weixin Shengjiao undertakes the social practice of global ethical responsibility. The findings of the study indicate that Weixin Shengjiao's attitude toward the issue of social suffering stems not only from the imbalance between people and other people, people and objects, and people and nature caused by human factors in the phenomenal world but also from the suffering caused by the influence of the consciousness realm beyond time and space on the phenomenal realm. Weixin Shengjiao is dedicated to the advancement of Chinese cultural orthodoxy, I Ching Feng Shui, and the heart method. "Use I" to identify the cause of present social suffering issues, to further solve current social suffering issues through religious practices and religious education, and to fulfill Weixin Shengjiao's social practice of global ethical responsibilities. The contribution of this study includes Weixin Shengjiao's worldwide social anguish issues, which have covered Knitter's four faces of global suffering. Weixin Shengjiao's social practice encompasses a wide range of global care and has its origins in the resolution of disputes and sufferings dating back thousands of years. Its social practice of global ethical duty transcends various combinations of time and space.

Keywords: Global Ethical Responsibility, Social Suffering, Social Practice

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## Introduction

Taiwan is the most religious area in the Chinese world. It pursues the beliefs of Chinese culture. About 49.3% of the traditional folk beliefs are a combination of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. More than 80% of the people have religious beliefs, and 14% are atheists. The main religious categories reach There are more than 22 kinds, and there is one temple or church per square kilometer on average, and the density of religious buildings is very high. Taiwan is a region with a relatively high degree of religious freedom under the Constitution's guarantee of people's freedom of religion. It has diverse religious beliefs and enjoys a good international reputation. In the past, Taiwan experienced changes in political structure, social changes, and the decline of traditional religions, which in turn created opportunities for the development of new religions in Taiwan. This environment of religious freedom has also promoted the development and exchanges of various religious groups, contributing to Taiwan's multiculturalism and social stability.

The term "new religion" first appeared in Japan after World War II. In Western society, it is often referred to as cult, with negative references in the context; but for academic circles, it is more often referred to as new religion or new religious. The name of the movement marks the development of various emerging sects that are different from mainstream religions. With the development of the research field, the new religion is gradually accepted by all parts of the world, but it also creates tension with traditional religions or mainstream society. It is worth knowing about Taiwan's new religion's development in an environment of religious freedom.

The religious beliefs in Taiwan before 1945 appeared to be very stable. The vast majority of Han people believed in traditional Chinese folk beliefs, while the aborigines believed in their traditional religions. When the Kuomintang came to Taiwan in 1949, it moderately retained the autonomy of local religious activities and recognized those who helped to maintain the legitimacy of the regime. This move allowed traditional Chinese religious culture to continue to maintain a vibrant local environment. After the 1970s, the ruling structure of the Kuomintang began to loosen. The religious groups that were originally under surveillance gradually grew substantially, and new religious groups also emerged one after another. Traditional folk beliefs also developed from local to national. In the early 1980s, new religion or folk beliefs flourished. Martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987, religious policies were liberalized, and people's organizations were established freely one after another. The new religion openly developed religious activities, which appeared to be more active and capable of mobilization, resulting in the emergence of a large number of various new religious groups in Taiwan. Around the 1990s, in the process of modernization and globalization in Taiwan, the weakening of Western hegemony and the rise of local powers in various regions interacted with each other, which promoted the vigorous development of the new religion in contemporary Taiwan (Ting, 2014). With the rise of some new religions, it has also brought some controversies and problems. For example, some religions have been accused of fraud, abuse, and forced persuasion. These controversies have also attracted the attention of Taiwanese society and the government, making the supervision and management of emerging religions gradually stricter. In 1996, the Taiwan government adopted a religious anti-crime campaign, coupled with the media's negative coverage of the new religion, many religious groups were deeply affected, affecting the subsequent development of new religious groups.

However, religion is the best way to help people out of suffering. According to the global disaster-related database, the Spanish flu disaster caused the largest number of human deaths in the 20th century. The global death toll is estimated to be between 50 million and 100 million;

the second largest disaster was the Chinese mainland between 1959 and 1961. Famine, with a death toll of between 30 million and 45 million; the third place was the Great Soviet Famine in the 1930s, with a death toll of about 5 million to 8 million. The characteristic of disaster statistics since the 21st century is that plague and natural disasters once again dominate the ranking of large-scale accidental human deaths. As of now, the global death toll from COVID-19 has reached more than 6.86 million. In December 2022, World Health Organization, WHO published the number of excess deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing that the number of excess deaths in 2020 and 2021 was 2.7 times higher than the official number of deaths, between 13.2 million and 16.6 million, the global impact of COVID-19 may far exceed the officially reported death toll (Msemburi, W. et al., 2022). As for the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the South Asian tsunami in 2004, the Myanmar typhoon in 2008, the Wenchuan earthquake in China, the Japanese tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, etc., there are frequent natural disasters. Faced with the above social suffering issues, what is the attitude of Taiwan's new religion? How does Taiwan's new religion perceive the root of the current social suffering issues? How does it undertake the social practice of global responsibility? These are issues worthy of research and attention.

### **Global Ethics Declaration and Social Suffering**

The "Parliament of the World's Religions" (PoWR) inaugurated in 1893 devotes itself to cross-religion dialogues of the world. PoWR announced in 1993 meeting the "Global Ethics Declaration". This is due to the famous German Catholic theologian Hans Küng and the American Professor Leonard Swidler, Temple University. There were 6,500 people participating in the Parliament of World's Religions, who came from different religious belief groups in the world. Although these participants all held their own religious doctrines and beliefs, there were intractable differences of thought on many issues. But they do see that there can be no new global order without a new global ethic. The Global Ethic is a landmark declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions stating the universal values and principles shared by the world's religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions. It awakens a sense of responsibility. "Global ethics" can only be a minimum "golden rule", which is the sense of responsibility that all people should have.

Paul F. Knitter is the most influential Catholic and famous religious scholar in the United States. Knitter agrees with Hans Küng's initiative. Knitter once mentioned that "suffering Other" and "religious Other" have deeply influenced his life and theological thought in the past few decades. Therefore, he believes that religious people must empathize with common suffering and global threats. For Knitter, "suffering" is not only the suffering of human beings, but also the suffering of the earth and ecology. Therefore, Knitter divides suffering into four aspects: (1) Suffering of the Body—Due to Poverty, (2) Suffering of the Earth—Due to Abuse, (3) Suffering of the Spirit-Victimization, (4) Suffering Due to Violence.

The issue of global social suffering raised by Knitter has existed since ancient times. For example, the 3,762 wars brought about by the Chinese nation in the past five thousand years have caused all kinds of suffering, casualties, lack of food, and homesickness. Plague events that have been recorded in Chinese history. The historical site of the destruction of the Shakyamuni Buddha family of Shakyamuni Buddha. These historical social misery events are still repeated today. The sense of responsibility awakened by the Declaration of Global Ethics initiated by the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993, for the emerging religions in the context of democratized religious freedom, how should they assume social responsibility for religious practice?

## **Global Ethical Responsibility: The Founding and Doctrine of the New Religion of the World “Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao”**

According to Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior, all religious categories are either traditional religions or new religions that have existed for over fifty years. Notably, Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao was established only 41 years ago. How can the teachings, tenets, and practices of Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao achieve a symbiotic and harmonious relationship with contemporary reality in the face of rapid environmental changes, modern society, and the spread of higher education? The majority of Taiwanese studies on emerging religions are concerned with the description of religious doctrines, religious beliefs, religious organizations, religious rituals, the development experiences of religious groups, or the explanation of phenomena such as religious origins, the interaction between religion and society, and religious mobilization. Rarely are studies conducted on social suffering or social practices. The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of Weixin Shengjiao in Taiwan toward the issue of global ethical responsibility for social suffering, how Weixin Shengjiao learns the root causes of the current social suffering issues, and how Weixin Shengjiao undertakes the social practice of global ethical responsibility.

The Weixin Shengjiao was founded by Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi in 1982 and is headed by Immortal Master Guigu, Wangchan Laozu. Master Hunyuan Chanshi explains in the "Cultivation and Enlightenment Scripture of Hunyuan" that he wrote the sutras to preserve the history of his practice for future generations to realize the compassionate wishes of the first Taiwanese ancestor, Taiwan Zushi, and the blessings of the Buddhas. Furthermore, the Scripture advises future generations of Dharma-based practices for achieving enlightenment based on destiny and the power of aspirations, with the safety of all sentient beings as the guiding principle and world peace as the primary wish.

As a result, Weixin Shengjiao's doctrine is to "practice for the country; praying for the people." It promotes Chinese cultural orthodoxy, the I Ching Feng Shui, integrates Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist concepts, and utilizes the I Ching Feng Shui and religious activities to develop Weixin Shengjiao 48 Great Wishes and The Great Dharma Wheel of World Peace. Master Hunyuan Chanshi uses the divination culture of the I Ching to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings, guiding the devotees by the light of benefit and praying for the blessings of the people through religious activities to accomplish the primary goal of global peace.

### **The Religious Practice of Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao in Social Suffering**

Weixin Shengjiao establishes a religion and administers an education for the promotion of Chinese culture orthodox I Ching Feng Shui, which encompasses altruistic causes such as religion, education and culture, propagation, publishing, and social services. Weixin Shengjiao has received the Religious Public Welfare Award from the Taiwan Ministry of the Interior on numerous occasions for outstanding religious groups. "To practice for the nation; to pray for the people" is the Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao doctrine. Its goal is to help people develop their talents and virtues, raise their aspirations, and bring peace to the world. The mission of Weixin Shengjiao is to ensure the safety and security of all living things. In response to the problem of social suffering, Weixin Shengjiao uses religious practices and rituals to settle disputes, end fights, and stop disasters and catastrophes. But, Each religion has its own system for describing and explaining suffering. What is the underlying cause of today's social suffering? I Ching Feng Shui and religion, according to Master Hunyuan Chanshi, the founding master of Weixin Shengjiao, are the paths to peace and the paths for present and future humans. The I Ching

comprehends cause and effect and can predict events 500 years in advance and 500 years in the future; feng shui is the home of the present that transforms danger into peace; and religious practice is spiritual advancement. Weixin Shengjiao employs the three treasures of the I Ching, Feng Shui, and religious practice in order to comprehend the root causes of social suffering and alleviate the suffering of all beings.

Weixin Shengjiao employs religious events, pujas, and chanting of scriptures to resolve the "Suffering of the Body" caused by poverty, such as hunger and disease.

In 1994, I Ching University was founded to encourage people to learn I Ching. By studying the I Ching, believers can understand the cause and effect of everything, and avoid "Suffering of the Body" caused by wrong decisions.

In 2003, a puja was held for the relief of dengue fever.

In 2003, a puja called "Eternal Rest and Catastrophe Relief Ritual for Plague" was held to resolve the SARS pandemic.

In 2005, the "Resolution of the Avian Influenza Pandemic Puja" was held, with 360,000 recitations of the Guigu Xian Shi Tiande Sutra.

In 2014, the "Relieving the Ebola Virus Puja" was held. In 2020, a puja was held to resolve COVID-19 pneumonia, with a total of 4,800,000 recitations of the Heavenly Virtue Sutra of Immortal Master Guigu.

Weixin Shengjiao has resolved the "Suffering of the Earth—Due to Abuse" caused by the mismanagement of earth's resources and the destruction of the ecological environment through social service activities, pujas, and religious practice of chanting scriptures.

In 1987, in Daxinganling, China, a puja was held to quell the Great Fire.

In 1999, after the 921 earthquake, the I Ching Feng Shui Service Love Group was established to serve 123 elementary and middle schools.

In 1999, it provided religious space for teachers and students to study near the epicenter of the 921 earthquake.

In 1999, it commemorated the 921 earthquake with the "Seven Eternal Days Nembutsu Ceremony."

In 2007, it held the "Ozone Layer Hole Patching Ceremony," during which 640,000 volumes of the Ghost Goddess Heavenly Virtue Sutra were recited.

In 2010, in response to the worldwide sinkhole catastrophe, it held the "Ozone Layer Hole Patching Ceremony."

In 2012, it hosted the "Disaster Relief Puja for Mount Fuji, Japan" and "Disaster Relief Puja for Yellowstone Park."

Weixin Seijiao uses religious practices such as pujas and scripture recitation to alleviate "Suffering of the Spirit-Victimization" caused by wrongs and unjust harms.

In 2016, it held a puja to help resolve the riots in Vietnam and to support the Vietnamese people.

In 2017, it organized a puja to alleviate the Sakyas' grievances in the altar city.

In 2022, it set up overtaking tablets for the souls of those who died in the war between Russia and Ukraine.

In 2022, it set up overtaking tablets for the spirits in the Monalu Road Anti-Japanese Uprising Monument in Wushe Mountain, Taiwan.

Weixin Shengjiao uses the religious practice of pujas and scripture reading to end "Suffering Due to Violence" caused by weapons and military conflicts.

In 1986, a puja was performed to end the Sino-Russian arms race.

In 2010, a puja was held to resolve the potential Yellow Sea military conflicts between Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China.

In 2021, a puja was held for the protection of the nation, Taiwan's peace, and peace across the Taiwan Strait.

In 2023, a puja was held to welcome all the immortals and Buddhas to Taiwan for peace.

"To practice for the nation; to pray for the people" is the Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao doctrine. In order to achieve world peace, Weixin Shengjiao is making unremitting efforts with incredible power of religious practice.

## **Conclusion**

Weixin Shengjiao is a religious movement that emerged in Taiwan in the mid-20th century, and its doctrine emphasizes the importance of religious practice and prayer for the benefit of society. The phrase "To practice for the nation; to pray for the people" encapsulates this idea, suggesting that by dedicating oneself to spiritual practice and offering prayers for the well-being of others, one can contribute to the greater good and help bring about peace in the world.

The findings of the study indicate that Weixin Shengjiao's attitude toward the issue of social suffering stems not only from the imbalance between people and other people, people and objects, and people and nature caused by human factors in the phenomenal world but also from the suffering caused by the influence of the consciousness realm beyond time and space on the phenomenal realm. Weixin Shengjiao is dedicated to the advancement of Chinese cultural orthodoxy, I Ching Feng Shui, and the heart method. "Use I" to identify the cause of present social suffering issues, to further solve current social suffering issues through religious practices and religious education, and to fulfill Weixin Shengjiao's social practice of global

ethical responsibilities. Weixin Shengjiao's doctrine reflects a deep commitment to spiritual values and a vision of using those values to serve others and promote peace in the world.

The contribution of this study includes Weixin Shengjiao's worldwide social anguish issues, which have covered Knitter's four faces of global suffering. Weixin Shengjiao's social practice encompasses a wide range of global care and has its origins in the resolution of disputes and sufferings dating back thousands of years. Its social practice of global ethical duty transcends various combinations of time and space.

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