

# ONLINE ESOTERISM 在线神秘性

By Juaniko Moreno and Chen TianQi (陈天琪), 2021

We might say that spirituality, esoterism, and religiosity, are to be found across all latitudes, and manifests themselves in different typologies according to the local culture(s). When trying to build a bridge between the Chinese and Colombian noospheres<sup>1</sup>, is impossible to ignore the starring role that superstition has in both. From small daily rituals to avoid certain actions or objects that symbolize bad omens, to the spatial orientation of buildings, or the correct time to go on a journey; superstitious practices are to be found in the everyday life and customs of both cultures, even though they might be relegated to the private or hidden realm due to fears of social mockery. The lines between superstition, religion, cosmological view, and everyday life are very thin, and are out of the scope of the present text to exhaustively identify the borders between each of them. However, we will try to shed some light on some precise characteristics of each region, as they expose aspects about how each of these localities interprets the world, and consequently builds it around said cosmovision.

It is probably through esoterism that we might be able to access a more direct and straightforward view of the cosmology of a society. Beliefs about destiny, the supernatural, and the future mirror the model of the world we have, what events are possible inside said model, and which of them are inconceivable. From praying and asking for saints' protection, reading your natal chart, or on the contrary, believing in the most pragmatic version of scientism, each belief outlines the limits of the feasible and implausible in our

---

<sup>1</sup> The noosphere (singular) is a concept proposed by Vladimir Vernadsky, and refers to a planetary layer, similar to the biosphere or geosphere, but which is composed of thought. Here is proposed as plural, given that considering "thought" as a unified element proves to be globalist and positivist, yet bringing this concept allows to better define the set of ideas and thoughts that float around a geographical territory, without necessarily recurring to categories that necessarily denote nationality, such as "Colombian thought" would be.

cosmovision. It is precisely within those limits that any technology of a given society emerges, and determines the way in which said technology is used or transformed.

We might think that the relationship between technology and religious belief is absurd, and it is precisely because of the former that the latter has suffered in recent years. After all, who needs to believe in God when it is through science (and its devices) that we have been able to identify the physical phenomena that cause rains or earthquakes, and on top of that, it delivers text messages to my pocket every day. But philosopher Gilbert Simondon thinks differently<sup>2</sup>. He considers that technology and the sacred have the same origin, and that they are mutually intertwined. Originally, the human experience of time and space was connected with its planetary surroundings due to annual cycles of animal reproduction, harvesting times, climatic events, equinoxes, and solstices. Sacred rituals were developed around these temporary singularities, and technological developments were made in response to them: hunting tools, temples, calendars, clocks, or stellar maps, so as to identify their location and regularity. According to Simondon, to the extent that the concrete, operational and local were correlated with technology; and the universal, transcendent, and immaterial was restricted to the religious field, both disciplines pulled away from each other as well as from the planetary frame that originated them. It is in this primeval union that we can track practices such as the natal chart to foretell the future, or the reading of good and bad omens in the Chinese lunisolar<sup>3</sup> calendar; it is through the development of technological devices framed within a cosmological model that techniques concerning the sacred and absolute can develop. Simondon argues that despite the fact that technical objects ceased to be attached to the worldly cycles and connections, these objects have ended up organizing themselves like systems. It is in this way that spatial (such as Cape Canaveral or Silicon Valley) and temporal (Greenwich) singularities replace

---

<sup>2</sup> Chabot, Pascal. *The Philosophy of Simondon: Between Technology and Individuation*, Bloomsbury, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese traditional calendar is lunisolar, which means it takes both the movement of the sun (divided in 24 periods or JieQi 节气) and the cycles of the moon (around 28 days per month) to measure time. The gap between lunar and solar cycles is compensated with intercalary months (7 added months throughout 19 years). Historically, it was the emperor's astronomers' role to decide when such months were to be added, effectively exerting government upon (and through) time. R. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society*, Westview Press, 1991.

the sacred place of temples and ritual practices, and emerge within distributed systems – such as the internet – in a fashion resembling the shape and relationship with the sacred and planetary. The technosphere – the technological layer of the planet – as a second and “artificial” nature, configures and distributes itself in an isomorphic way, which means that it reflects the shapes and relationships of the “first” nature; perhaps revealing that they might not be so different after all, that nature and artificiality may ultimately be the same thing.

World thinking materializes in the technical object: emerges from, and articulates through it. Living in an arbitrary and unknown world that, nevertheless, expresses certain cycles and patterns, allows to deduce phenomena, calculate fates, and allows for the realization that our inner characteristics are connected with external elements that can be found in that world. If on the contrary, the development of technologies such as fertilizers (which allow for faster harvesting periods and planting crops in terrains unsuited for them), electric light, or thermostats (heating or cooling our environments, making us less reliant on atmospheric changes); places us in a world where our decisions shape everything to our will, an environment that changes at our command, and a fate that is reliant on our personal effort, intelligence, and wit to reach success. Despite the ruling narrative of the second model in our contemporary world, plenty of us still rely upon and trust the first one, maybe under the suspicion that human determinism applied to the general cosmic framework may still leave plenty of answers to be resolved.

Consequently, this topic attempts to track the connections between technology and sacrality in Chinese and Colombian cultures, how one expresses through the other. It also seeks to explore how fortune-telling may allow us to find the ideological scaffolding behind our everyday behavior, and how our congregation around faith may explain the reality we live in.

### **Natal Chart, Tarot and religious syncretism in the land of the “Holy Child”<sup>4</sup>**

---

<sup>4</sup> The “Holy Child” is the most popular patron saint in Colombia, and depicts Jesus Christ as a child.

It is likely that is within the spiritual realm that is more evident the cultural syncretism that underlies Colombian idiosyncrasy. The powerful catholic conversion that has been undertaken in the territory since the 16th century is still ongoing, and it has clearly defined the belief of the catholic church as “religion”, and the rest of spiritual practices as “sacrilege” or “paganism”. However, there are strong arguments to say that looking for advice in the bible or a priest is not very different from searching for the same advice in the tarot or *I Ching*. It might precisely be that because of the prohibitive and forbidding attitude of this creed, that the expansion and popularization of esoteric practices has been enabled. In a country that has yet to internalize the separation between church and state, and one in which religious creed is identified at so many levels in everyday life, the world finds itself mediated by divine intervention and will. Is in this manner that tarot and astrological readings, despite their European origin, were imported alongside the catholic religion, and have a fervent following.

Natal chart astrology is a descendent of the Greek astrological map, which was originally used to divide the year into 12 symmetrical periods of a solar cycle in the sky, characterized by the arcane constellation at its zenith, as well as for the emotional and subjective character of their pantheon of gods. In this fashion, a Spatio-temporal referencing device between people and cosmos is modeled so as to respond to personal faith and will. The natal chart requires geographic location (birthplace) and birthdate (up to the minute) to measure the heavenly bodies positioning at the particular time and space of birth, and how these define personal attributes of the charted person, as well as how these bodies affect their mood. This action is possible as long as we assume the premise of the individuality of being, of a notion of fate, a cosmical determinism to which our personality is attached.

The premise of having an individualized soul in catholic belief – after all, we are individually judged in front of Saint Peter<sup>5</sup> – and the divine agency upon the earth and its people – as it is enough to pray and be a good Christian to receive God’s help – creates an anthropocentric cosmological framework, centered around the individual subject. Our life, action, and eternal salvation are directly dependent upon the soul that resides within us,

---

<sup>5</sup> In Catholic belief, when you die, you go to heaven’s door to be judged by your deeds in front of Saint Peter, the founder of the church. If he deems you did not follow the commandments, he sends you to purgatory, or even worse, hell.

that arrives at our bodies at the time of conception, and leaves it at the time of death. In catholic faith, each human has a privileged position, as it is Adan (and not God) who names all animals and plants, and the garden of Eden was made for his satisfaction<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, in all Abrahamic religions, eternal life is achieved as an individual reward for abiding according to the holy rules: judgment and eternity are circumscribed to our soul, which is, in turn, a moral extension of the individual. This sets some defined cosmological setting with clear categories between the living beings that inhabit it, a path of righteousness to be followed throughout life, heaven's salvation as a north, and hell's evil to be avoided. Furthermore, Christianity is among the few religions to believe in a linear and finite universe: there was creation, and the apocalypse sets an invisible clock to all things. This linearity and exceptionalism underlie the identification of a predetermined fate that is bestowed upon us, a path we are set to traverse. Is worth mentioning that Abrahamic religions are among the few cosmological systems that propose an apocalypse, a beginning, and end of times, and thus a fate to fulfill.

This individuality and its associated fate are, in part, what gives tarot its popularity as a divination practice. This card game originated in medieval Europe, and has been associated with fortune-telling since its inception. Borrowing its legitimacy from Egyptian hieroglyphs, or from the Jewish kabbalah<sup>7</sup>, its 22 major arcana have historically symbolized the world and the society to be read and interpreted as signs of personal future. A good amount of contemporary tarot readers identify such figures as *archetypes*<sup>8</sup>, or images that materialize a series of figures located in the collective unconscious, behavioral patterns

---

<sup>6</sup> "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. (...) Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. Genesis 2: 7, 9, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Some associate the number of cards (78) with the Egyptian hieroglyphs plates of the Book of Toth, which have the same number. It has also been related to kabbalah's numerology, which identifies the totality of the cosmos to be contained in the 4 letters in the name of God (Yod, He, Vau, He = Yahve). P. Ouspensky, *The Symbolism of the Tarot: Philosophy of Occultism in Pictures and Numbers*, Dover Publications, 1976.

<sup>8</sup> "As *a priori* conditioning factors, they represent a special psychological instance of the biological 'pattern of behavior', which gives all things their specific qualities. J. Jacobi, J. Uytman, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung*, Routledge, 1999.

present in all humanity and throughout history, which can be interpreted in fate-reading as much as they point towards people we'll encounter, or future events in our lives. Although there are cards such as the sun, the star, or the world; the majority of arcane concern worldly and social affairs, the identified roles point towards and reflect upon concerns of life in community. Even though plenty of tarot readers say to merely “interpret symbols”, the things that are being symbolized encompass a reality with human characteristics, and are circumscribed to our ideas of individual life in the constant act of social interaction<sup>9</sup>.

In Colombia, the esoteric pantheon cannot be considered complete without mentioning the shamans or “Amazonian Indians”<sup>10</sup>. Whether it be because of urban curiosity towards indigenous cultures, a mere strategy to legitimize the perceived powers of this group’s knowledge, or an authentic ethnic bloodline, several esoteric practitioners claim ancestral knowledge that allows them to perform prayers, healings, “tyings”<sup>11</sup>, getting rid of hexes, dark magic, Satan-craft, and all other disciplines encompassed by the “obscure arts”. Even though their connection to authentic indigenous cultures is debatable, especially regarding their cosmovision<sup>12</sup>, their practice has a devoted and satisfied clientele<sup>13</sup>. It is through tarot, natal chart, voodoo, *tabaquism*<sup>14</sup>, herbal and animal potions; shamans funnel the energy of saints and consecrated spirits to perform favorable work in the field of love, health, luck, and money. Through their knowledge and channeling devices<sup>15</sup>, they invoke the energy of spirit saints<sup>16</sup> that continue to roam the world to solve problems for their clients. The

---

<sup>9</sup> “The separative bubble created by the animal-based brains ( in a strict sense, by the social interaction of animal-based brains) conforms that peculiar internal articulation that we call ‘I’”. E. Carutti, *Inteligencia Planetaria*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2014, p.74.

<sup>10</sup> All quotes and information provided here were extracted from an [interview](#) with the “Great Shaman Florentino”, made on December 22th, 2020, at the Calle 42 Sur, #78h-16, Bogotá.

<sup>11</sup> Tying is when someone asks for someone else to fall in love with them, even if they have to remove an existing relationship.

<sup>12</sup> In *systems representing themselves*, several aspects of Amazonian indigenous cultures are explored which have several cosmological differences with those expressed by the Shamans interviewed here. For the referred interview, Florentino says to come from the Tolima original tribes, who could have had a different cosmovision than those explored in our text.

<sup>13</sup> According to the Great Shaman Florentino, he Works under the model “pay after seeing results”, and his office has already been working continuously for over 20 years.

<sup>14</sup> The shaman smokes a cigar and through the smoke channels his powers.

<sup>15</sup> Tobacco, natural essences, personal objects, or bodily extracts from the person desired to heal/curse.

<sup>16</sup> “Saint Gregorio, Saint Martha, Saint George, Felipe the black, Buddha, Guaisipuro, the Holy Child, Maria Lionza, Jesuschrist”, or any of the “one thousand virgins”. In [an interview with Shaman Florentino](#)

shamans say that they do not clash with any religious belief, and reject being called “pagans”, as they claim to have “fear of God”. Their practice is also based on parapsychology and the reading of bodily signs from the consultant, as well as their personal and spiritual motivation to achieve the desired result. These types of techniques, of not only fortune-telling but active intervention upon that fate, are strongly linked in the individual energy and aura, as well as the personal will and capacity to positively act upon that which is being asked for. There is no petition that fulfills without imprinting certain agency on behalf of the requester. This syncretism of beliefs is woven around the idea of spirit that primarily corresponds with a metaphysical extension of “self”, and also around the understanding of otherworldly agents that have intentional agency upon the cosmos, modifying things in our favor.

Despite offering sessions at a distance, shamans prefer bodily present work. In social media, we can find a rich community of online tarot readers, as well as classes for reading and self-knowledge therapy using this deck of cards. It is clear that virtuality does not hinder these types of practices, and as a matter of fact, it may facilitate the consolidation of wider and active groups devoted to studying it.

### **China: Correlational cosmology**

Throughout its history, China has had an incredibly rich repertoire of divination practices. From the analysis of physical appearances such as palm or face reading, to dream reading, to those using technical devices such as the Luopan (罗盘)<sup>17</sup> from FengShui (风水)<sup>18</sup>, to those making use of calendars and astrology such as BaZi 八字<sup>19</sup> or the Zi wei dou shu (紫

---

<sup>17</sup> Is a type of compass that is used to determine the orientation of objects or structures according to FengShui principles. It differs from a western compass in that it points to the south, has 24 directions (corresponding to 24 solar terms in the calendar), and having 40 marks related to FengShui principles.

<sup>18</sup> Literally meaning “wind and water”, is a spatial orientation practice that seeks the rightful direction of architectural structures, objects, or shapes; so as to allow a continuous flow of Chi (气) or energy. Its origins are rooted in traditional Chinese astrology, which seeks harmonious action according to the 4 divisions of the heavenly vault: The Azure Dragon (east), Fire Phoenix (south), White Tiger (west), and black turtle (north).

<sup>19</sup> The *eight* pillars is a fortune-telling method that uses the correlations between the ancient characters used to designate time in ancient China. It uses the hour, day, month, and year of birth, which correspond to 4 pillars in the 12 earthly branches,

薇斗数)<sup>20</sup>, to geomancy based on the *Book of Changes* (I Ching 易经), and a long etcetera. The Depth of Chinese “superstition” in imperial China might be exemplified with this quote from W.A.P. Martin, the head of the Astronomic Interpreter’s College of the Qing Dynasty<sup>21</sup>, in charge of publishing the official astronomic calendar (which included readings for auspicious days): “No man [in China] thinks of beginning a journey, laying a corner-stone, planting a tree, marrying a wife, burying a parent, or any of the thousand functions in public or private life, without consulting this convenient oracle”<sup>22</sup>.

This pervasive superstition, from the emperor<sup>23</sup> to the populace, is the main reason for Jesuit missionaries and western officials to qualify the Chinese people as “backward”. Nevertheless, this attitude, as well as the rich repertoire of fortune-telling techniques, can be perfectly understood within their correlational cosmology.

Chinese traditional thought conceives a holistic, coherent, compatible, and interconnected cosmos that share a series of principles and patterns that replicate at several scales. Firstly, you have Dao (道), or *the way*, the supreme order of things, that from where existence (有) and nonexistence (无) distills, the original harmony and productive force of cosmos, the coherence between the moral and natural order of things. Dao represents a cosmos without beginning or end, without creator nor destructor; a fabric without a weaver. Dao is

---

which are then crossed with their presence in the sexagenary cycle (traditional time measurement consisted in a cycle of 60 years that would repeat after completion) forming 4 pillars that would then alienate with the 10 heavenly branches. More than a divination method, it was a reading of the cosmos that allowed to find the area of optimal occupation at a given time during one’s life. For example, “During the two years from age forty-nine to fifty, don’t act as a guarantee for anyone or lend them money, otherwise you will suffer financial loss” R. Smith, 1991, p.3

<sup>20</sup> Fortune Telling method takes the constellation of Ursa Major (Zi wei), Polaris (Dou), the 12 palaces of heaven, and the 14 major stars.

<sup>21</sup> Between the XVII and XIX centuries, several European Jesuit missionaries worked as directors for the Astronomer’s Interpreters College, given they possessed tools and astral maps that could measure with greater precision important celestial events, such as eclipses.

<sup>22</sup> Martin (1897), p.310; cf Grey (1878), 2: 13-15, in R. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society*, Westview Press, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> The relationship between oracles and emperors is long and diverse. In broad strokes, it could be said that most dynasties had an astrology department or with official oracles; and the emission of the yearly calendar was a crucial governing tool. Even though the emperor might be skeptical of the oracle’s words – as Qing emperors, who were from Manchuria and did not share the same belief system as Han Chinese – it was crucial for them to abide by the rules of traditional cosmology in the realization of official rituals, as not doing it would undoubtedly represent the loss of legitimacy in front of the people.



present in every sensible thing in the shape of Chi (气 or energy), yet escapes all objectification<sup>24</sup>. Dao is in constant Flow and transformation, and it always tends to equilibrium. This last characteristic makes it compatible with another principle – probably the most widely known in the west – Yin and Yang.

Yin and Yang are the two polarities between which the world cycles: heaven and earth, attraction and repulsion, light and dark, waning and waxing, etc. These two polarities are not mutually exclusive, as one cannot exist without the other (阴中有阳, 阳中有阴<sup>25</sup>). Without its opposing polarity, there is no meaning nor principle, as the reference and orientation towards transformation tends is lost. This principle of complementary duality is what allows for contradictory ideas and entities to coexist, for things that are simultaneously one thing *and* the other; *radically* different from scientific deductive thought that identifies things as *either one or* the other. Likewise, the catholic moral imperative of always having right actions and refraining from evil is inconceivable, as there are no mandates written on stone<sup>26</sup>, or a heaven that is just immutable purity and goodness.

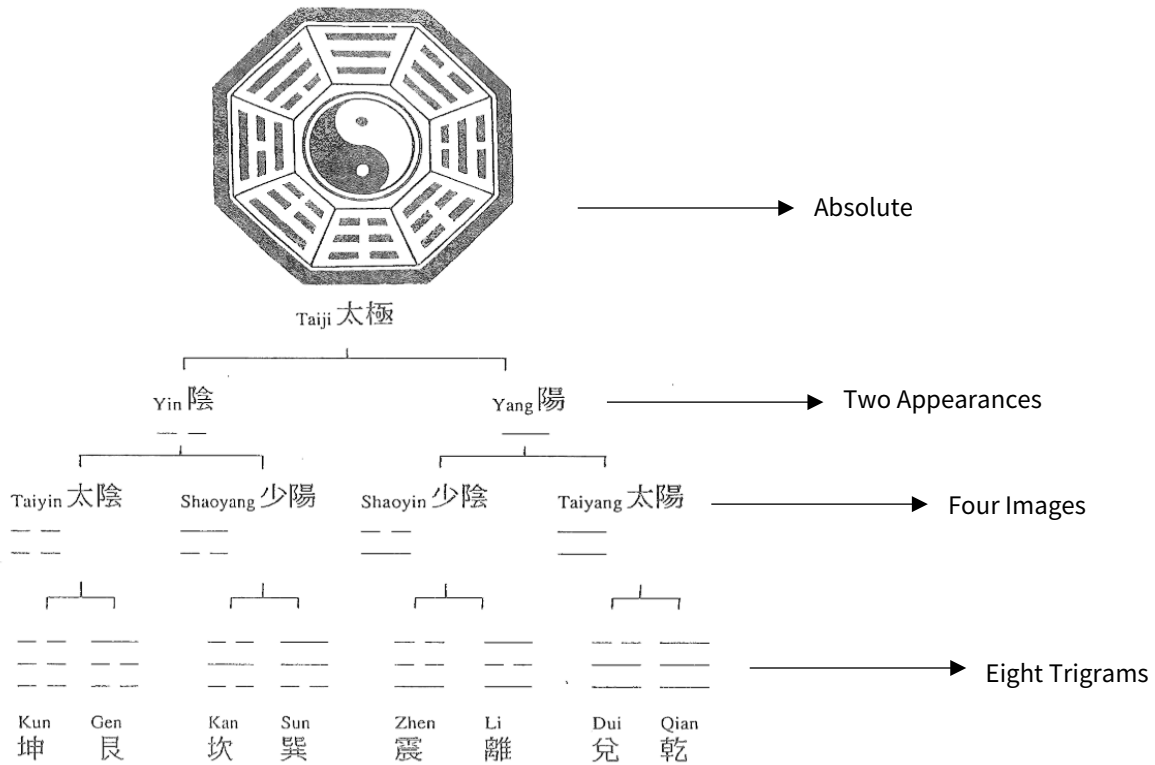
The I Ching (易经), or the book of changes, provides another foundational and complementary idea to this cosmology:

---

<sup>24</sup> Y. Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, p.66-69. Urbanomic, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> “In the middle of yin, there’s yang, in the middle of yang there’s yin”

<sup>26</sup> Although there are not commandments directly received from God as in Abrahamic religions (Christianism, Islam, and Judaism), thought schools such as Confucianism and Legalism did propose a series of principles for morality and righteousness by following certain rites. These come from oral tradition and are a product of historically added commentaries upon classical texts.



无极生太极，太极生两仪，两仪生四象，四象生八卦，八卦化万物<sup>27</sup>

“The non-manifest engenders the manifest (absolute), the manifest engenders the two appearances, the two appearances engender the four images, the four images engender the eight trigrams, the eight trigrams transform into the ten thousand things”

In this sentence, we identify the manifest and non-manifest as emerging from the absolute (or Dao), and the two appearances referring to Yin and Yang. The four images are binary combinations between Yin and Yang, identified in the four cardinal directions. The eight trigrams refer to combinations of three Yin-Yang that materialize in the natural elements of heaven, lake/marsh, fire, thunder, air, water, mountain, and soil. The ten thousand things

<sup>27</sup> 易传·系辞上传 (First part of XiCi's commentary on the Book of Changes), 1976, Taipei (Reprint).

are a metaphor for everything that exists. In this model, we can see that everything sensible and apprehensible is just a temporary combination of Yin and Yang in different levels of concentration and organization. These two forces/principles subdivide until everything is produced by their permutations, and the cyclical transformation<sup>28</sup> between waning and waxing is the only constant. Both the composition of the cosmos, as well as the processes<sup>29</sup> by which it is transformed, rule both on a macrocosmic level – the stars, mountains, and rivers – as well as on a microcosmic level – the human body, its organs, birds, cicadas, etc. –.

It is under this compatibility between all cosmic components that predictions about the future become possible. More than predictions, is about tracking the flow of the universe so as not to clash with it. As long as the universe is cyclical, and its eternal flow of homeostasis is marked by patterns that can be tracked and interpreted; is just a matter of having the right information or reading the right signals to know the auspicious and unlucky times to perform any action. Since *Chi* flows from mountains and rivers, and is also compatible with the one inside oneself, to orientate my living environment according to Feng Shui helps in not clashing with it. The world becomes a vast book, that despite allowing interpretation, contains a gargantuan amount of agents and variables that alter it at every moment, and make it exponentially complex (if not impossible) to accurately read it.

The People's Republic of China is nowadays a mostly secular society. During the cultural revolution<sup>30</sup>, these beliefs were punished and mostly eradicated for being one of the “four

---

<sup>28</sup> “Between heaven and earth there is only *xing*[form] or *chi*[energy] [ ...] *energy* transforms in *form*, and *form* returns to *energy*, although, we are not aware of it [ ...] when *shen* [spirit] transforms into *form* from *energy*, we see it; when it returns to *energy* from *form*, we don't see it”. Pang Jixing (潘吉星) Critical Biography of Sung Yingxing (宋應星評傳) Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1990, 338. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Another ruling principle of Chinese cosmology is the five processes/five elements: metal, Wood, water, fire, and earth; each of them with a particular Chi composition. They are known as “processes” because, unlike presocratic thought, they do not behave as substances, but rather they describe relational movements in the transformation of *forms*, namely: Promote-generate (生) – i.e. wood feeds fire –, Weaken (泄) – i.e. wood exhausts water –, Control-regulate (克) – i.e. earth contains or steers the river –, Overwhelm-dominate (乘) – i.e. water extinguishes fire –, and Counteract (侮、耗) – e.g. Wood dulls metal- .

<sup>30</sup> Political movement proposed by Mao ZeDong between 1966 and 1976 to purge old institutions and ideologies that hindered the country from adopting Maoist doctrine, and thus fully achieve development.

olds” (old costumes, culture, habits, and ideas). The current national constitution grants “freedom of religious belief” and the protection for “normal” religious activities<sup>31</sup>. Under these parameters, divinatory techniques are considered “superstitious” (MiXin 迷信), as well as exploitative – when undertaken by private practitioners in exchange for money – and thus, illegal. Nevertheless, these continue well and alive in places such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and places with Chinese diaspora.

The FuLu (符籙) or enchanted talisman text is a Daoist practice that continues to our days. It consists of a series of inscriptions during the repetition of a spell or chant, and this combination is meant to scare away evil spirits, bring good fortune in love or business ventures, or balancing the energy in a given space. The project by [Biin Shen and Kwan Chak Lee](#) explores the way in which this practice can be reinscribed in the contemporary context, bringing good fortune for bitcoin mining, browser surfing, or decreasing internet lag.

### **Comparison: the cosmos and the individual**

We could think that since both cultures have esoteric practices, both are based on more or less compatible notions of energy and spiritual agency, then both are homologous in their discourse and pseudo-scientific attitude. But we would like to propose a more careful view. Methods such as tarot, natal chart, tabaquism or witchcraft, place a strong emphasis on the individual, his aura, and energetic load. The individual is the measuring unit, the target of the spiritual work, and the source from where energy is channeled. This is the reason why readings are considered more genuine if they are conducted in person, or prayers more powerful if personal belongings are available. Moreover, the astral chart is centered around the position and path a particular individual traverses in relationship to astral bodies, and how these were aligned at the time of birth, and consequently how they influence on a personal level. Lastly, catholic faith has the core belief of God’s direct interference upon the world to personally favor us in case we abide by the holy law, and despite the fact that

---

<sup>31</sup> Article 36 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. In R. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society*, Westview Press, 1991. Preface, XII.

heavenly actions may not neatly fit our expectations (God works in mysterious ways), it is clear that he intercedes for our benefit.

Despite the plethora of Chinese fortune telling techniques also have personal destiny (命运) as a measuring unit, all techniques are designed to prevent, measure, and adapt personal behavior in the cosmic framework, which itself has a series of fluxes and forces that are outside our agency, and upon which we have no capacity for change. In Confucian tradition, *knowing faith* (ZhiMing 知命) “meant simply making the best of a situation by devising the appropriate moral strategy for dealing with it”<sup>32</sup>. For example, the *eight pillars* (八字) method uses similar data to the western natal chart to perform its calculations, but its focus is in identifying the area of occupation that allows living without conflict, the one that helps to leave behind impositions of personal will upon the world, and that guides the way to settle into the flow of change that is inevitably confronted. After all, this “self” is physically and metaphysically composed with the same elements as its exterior, and thus is an indissociable part of that *whole*. Except from local iterations of Taoism that include spirits (神) that can actively intercede in the natural flow of things to grant favors<sup>33 34</sup>, most fortune readings identify appropriate times to take action (or do nothing), convenient places to perform an action, auspicious paths that can allow living accordingly to WuWei (无为)<sup>35</sup>, or the Taoist principle of *effortless action*, to act without facing resistance to the natural flow of cosmos; to live in synchrony with the ulterior.

We are able then to deduct that a cosmology centered around the individual on a spiritual level is the prevailing model in contemporary societies, given it is the one that mostly fits the measurement unit established by market capitalism. The neoliberal doctrine is rooted

---

<sup>32</sup> R. Smith, p.36. The minister Yi Zhi was supposed to say to Tai Wu, the emperor of Shang, that “omens cannot triumph over virtue” (爻不胜德). Shiji, Fengshan Shu, 6, 1b.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ancient.eu/article/894/most-popular-gods--goddesses-of-ancient-china/>

<sup>34</sup> Could also consider divine interference upon the individual the Mahayana version of Buddhism, where bodhisattvas help all people to escape the cycle of samsara, and by lighting up incense one can receive their help. Nevertheless, the ulterior goal of this act is the liberation of all beings from the cycle of ego. There is no individual salvation without collective salvation. Thus, we may discard it as an individualistic practice.

<sup>35</sup> Translated as “non-action”, “effortless action”, “acting without imposition”, “non-doing”, or “living without intervention”, is the fundamental principle of Taoism to live a plentiful life through “leaving space for things to grow by themselves”. Hui, p.95.

in personal benefit that trickles down to society. Thus, A cosmology of personal fate and control of upcoming events echoes beyond the esoterism a common person may believe in, and is rather materialized in market measurement tools, the establishment of insurance companies, futures markets<sup>36</sup>, retirement plans, financial investments, hedging, bonds and stocks<sup>37</sup>, or, as argued in *digital societies*, users that can only access to online services through personal accounts. On the other hand, tools such as the astrolabe, the compass, dams, or calendars; were all developed in traditional china as technologies directed towards helping in *flowing with the world*, to mutually adapt instead of fully controlling it. Despite the fact that nowadays plenty of esoteric beliefs may be identified as superstitious or primitive, they continue to point our view towards the latent world beneath our culture; social and language structures that end up guiding the “invisible hand” of technologic progress.

With this exploration we do not imply that the individual model is inherently bad, but we do want to stress that it is crucial to identify it as just one among the ideological frameworks that underlie our material practices. We point out that esoterism reveals the architecture that structures our world, and that beyond modeling our view regarding the metaphysical and paranormal, it also explains the tools we develop to live inside it, as well as the intention with which we use said tools.

### **Study Case: esoterism and digital fandom: “BJYX”, rumors and unidirectional communities.**

In the summer of 2019, 7 letters went viral in Chinese fandom social media, getting to even influence the real world. The letters were “BJYXSZD”, which were the acronym for *Bo Jun Yi Xiao Is Real* (博君一肖是真的). This fever that took by surprise thousands of fans, refers to the actors Xiao Zhan and Wang Yi Bo, who after a starring role in *The Untamed* (陈情令)

---

<sup>36</sup> Are financial tools that allow setting the Price for a commodity to be sold in the future. Even though futures markets are material only in the contracts being signed, they order production and material organization in time, and thus may be considered as a technology.

<sup>37</sup> Examples of technologies of futurity proposed by R. Tiffany. “Future, is by definition, an unknown entity. Nevertheless, several Americans involved with practices of speculation, investment protection, or future planning in several ways”. Romain, Tiffany (2010) ‘Extreme Life Extension: Investing in Cryonics for the Long, Long Term’, *Medical Anthropology*, 29: 2, 194 – 215

were rumored to sustain a homosexual relationship in real life. Nevertheless, given the conservative atmosphere in China, they are forced to keep their relationship hidden from sight. This does nothing but ratify the belief of its most ardent believers.

In the previously mentioned web series, the couple sustains a very close friendship and camaraderie. It is rumored that some fans, disappointed in the mere fictional condition of this relationship, decided to find proof of its existence in real life. Their garments, matching necklaces, or even social media posts from 10 months prior, all were used as proof of their romantic connection.

Surprisingly, the collective hysteria of this community can be traced back to a publication posted on a forum called *the rabbit* (兔区). The anonymous user claims to be a fortune teller specialized in reading Yin Yuan 姻缘, or the faith of lovers using just their birth dates. In said post, the user identified the compatibility between Xiao Zhan and Yi Bo on 95 points over 100, making them earn the title of “the chosen ones”.

In this case, we see that the community gets convinced, and sees itself validated as the numerological knowledge mediates their belief. Given that all types of fortune telling, whether it be the Zi Dou Wen Shu (紫薇斗数) native to China, or the western horoscope, are based on the logical rigor of consistency, integrity, and the so-called self-representation. On the other hand, although stars and other natural objects do not speak in human ways, they fill in the void left by instrumental rationality in the era of digital explanation. For this reason, in front of the eyes of BJYX fans, the interpretation of their birth date fates can be used to measure that which escapes scientific tools: human sensitivity, affection, love, and desire. Given that it cannot be disproven as a fallacy, the belief suggests itself as authentic. The fact that said post was made by an anonymous user, and thus someone that was not looking for economic benefit out of it, makes it all the more legitimate. In their logic, the advantages that money can offer can lie, but supernatural truth does not. Because of this, this individual esoterism may seem anti-spectacular, and justifies itself as legitimate in the sense proposed by Guy Debord.

Nevertheless, what fans ignore is that all the information that is hosted online is already filtered in one way or another, and does not even require an elaborate algorithm. In Weibo (a site similar to Twitter) for example, the user with the most amount of likes or upvotes is the one that appears first in any blog. This means that, when a group of like-minded people gets behind a message that is large enough, this point of view becomes their only truth. It is in this fashion that BJYX grew explosively, given the retroactive feedback of popular content.

What does this have to do with the fans that only want to know the fate of their idols? The issue is that this instrumental use of numerology and esoterism is not only undertaken by fans in their small informational cocoon, but rather it can be the source of rumors that influence numerous groups like hypnosis, and be weaponized by commercial groups as a marketing tool.