

On the Religious and Cultural Aspects of Divination in Japanese Society

Zīlēšanas reliģiskie un kultūras aspekti Japānas sabiedrībā

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This article presents an overview of the multifaceted history of divination and astrology in Japan. The questions addressed in this paper are the following: What was the place of divination in the traditional Japanese society and within ancient bodies of knowledge? What part of traditional science and cosmology does it form? What are the main methods of divination used in Japan? How was divination related to the Shinto and Buddhist worldview and religious practices? What elements of Indian astrology and divination have been introduced by the Buddhist monks to Japan? And which forms of divination are of Chinese origins? Finally, which of the mantic practices are likely to persist even nowadays and why? These and similar questions are discussed, emphasizing some resumptive cross-cultural and hermeneutic methodological considerations. The hermeneutical examinations of those practices are significant for the comparative history of ideas and also for understanding of contemporary religious practices and beliefs. Such approach can also assist in revealing the local modes of cultural transmission of knowledge in Asia, methods of social control, and the nature of the cultural norms, that shaped the traditional epistemic field. The author considers divination to be a unifying factor in Japanese religious life, and fortune-telling practices played an important role in mediating social tensions. The analysis of the history and transformations of divination in Japanese society helps to solve some theoretical and methodological issues and to state that the dominant function of divination needs to be understood in its motivational context.¹

Keywords: divination, astrology, cosmology, Japanese religion, Shintoism, Buddhism.

Introduction: What is divination?

Besides, the world view or views implicit in the divination system itself may reflect the historical rather than the current context of use. To appreciate the

¹ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to *Japan Foundation* for supporting my research in Nagoya. I would also like to thank the *Nanzan Institute of Religion and Culture* at Nanzan University (Nagoya) for providing me with excellent research facilities and for very useful and inspiring discussion on the present topic with the faculty of the Institute – Hayashi Makoto, James W. Heizig, Paul L. Swanson, Ben Dorman, and others. For the advices regarding Japanese terminology, my deep appreciation goes to my colleague at the Center of Oriental Studies, Vilnius University, Dr. Dalia Švambarytė.

significance of the diviner's art in any culture or era, one must know the culture or era's fundamental belief about the man and the world. The cosmological and psychological conditioning that affects divinatory practices within a cultural tradition will influence all of its religious practices. Consequently, the question of what did the traditional and modern Japanese think of divination could be reasonably and accurately answered only by examining the divination in its fullest social and intellectual contexts, as far as possible. Namely, how the grounds for belief in prediction and divination in the ancient world differed from our own, and the way in which their different ordering of knowledge might be related to a different social, cultural, and even political context.

While living in various Asian countries, I became fascinated with the anthropological and psychological significance of divination in the traditional society. It became evident to me, that astrology is pertinent to understanding the intellectual ethos of a given area. Surprisingly, very little scholarly attention has been devoted to this important subject. One reason is undoubtedly the attitude of intellectuals, who have long regarded most forms of divination as nothing more than popular superstition, unworthy of serious studies. Another factor: the widespread belief that traditional practices such as fortune-telling are incompatible with the principles of modern science, and therefore should be actively discouraged. The third problem – professional astrologers, amateur practitioners, and their clients tend to be either unwilling or unable to bring sufficient detachment to the subject of divination. For some, it is a game and for others, important, perhaps even vital means of gaining psychological insights.

So, what is divination? By divination we mean the attempt to elicit from some higher power or supernatural being the answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding. Questions about future events, about past disasters, whose causes cannot be explained, about the correct conduct in a critical situation, about the time and mode of religious worship and the choice of persons for a particular task – all these have from the ancient times and in all parts of the world been the subject of divinatory enquiry. According to Evan M. Zuesse,

Divination, as an art or practice of discovering the personal, human significance of future, or more commonly, present or past events, is a preoccupation with the import of events and specific methods to discover it, and is found in almost all cultures.²

² Zuesse, Evan M. Divination. In: *Encyclopedia of Religions*. Eliade, Mircea (ed.). Macmillan Press, Vol. 4, 1987, pp. 375–382. A long time, until the Middle Ages, the two words, *astronomia* and *astrologia* were used in European culture as synonymous, and one of the first writers to distinguish them was Isidore of Seville in the 7th century A.D. See his *Etymologiae*, III. 27. For some methodological considerations regarding the history of astrology, refer to *Astrology, Science, Society. Historical Essays*. Curry, Patrick (ed.). Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1987; *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*. Oestmann, Günther; Rutkin, H. Darrel; Stuckrad, Kocku von (eds.). Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005; *Seeing with Different Eyes: Essays in Astrology and Divination*. Curry, Patrick; Voss, Angela (eds.). Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2007; Campion, Nicholas. *A History of Western Astrology, Vol. 1: The Ancient World*. London: Continuum, 2009; Campion,

It means that astrology seeks information, which is not available through empirical observation or deduction thereof. And it is based on the use of symbolical connections: the external signs used in divination have only a symbolic connection with the matters about which information is sought.

In their massive work *La Divination*, André Caquot and Marcel Leibovici identify about 160 forms of fortune-telling.³ Evan Zuesse reduces these to three main types: intuition, possession, and decoding. The first entails a spontaneous ‘seeing’ or ‘knowing’ of the future, from hunches and premonitions to the insights of spiritual masters. The second involves messages communicated by spiritual beings through intermediaries – either human (in the form of dreams, body sensations, trances, spirit possessions, etc.) or non-human (stars, planets, fire, water, objects, animals and lots). The third implies a logical analysis of ‘impersonal patterns of reality’, including divination based on celestial movements, earthly patterns, body forms and mathematical correspondences.⁴ All three types of divination existed and still exist in Japan, although most would fall under the third category. Decoding, based on “a unified field of impersonal and universal processes that can be studied, harmonized with, and above all internalized by non-ecstatic sages” is most often found in “complex civilizations that have been defeated by equally powerful cultures and therefore must integrate their own indigenous views with other perspectives”.⁵

Even a superficial observer of the part played by divinatory predictions through the complex web of relations in Japanese society: politics, medical profession, commercial and family relations, sexuality, war, games, etc., cannot fail to notice the eminent, indeed, at times the leading role played by oracles in determining policies and more, social attitudes in private and in public of traditional society. In nearly all traditional cultures, specially gifted people, seers, fortune-tellers or mediums (Japanese *miko*), are recognised as affording the necessary link with the supernatural world.⁶ The Japanese have a long tradition of belief in another world, peopled by superior and usually benevolent divinities, which is accessible to men if they know the proper manner of communicating with it. The word for divination in Japanese is *ura* or *uranai*, a term, which appears to indicate primarily ‘that, which is behind’, ‘invisible’, ‘the reverse’, ‘soothsaying’, ‘augury’.⁷ In other words, the etymology of this term shows us that for the Japanese the idea of divination does not necessarily involve a prediction, but only the discovery of something hidden – present, past, or future.

Nicholas. *A History of Western Astrology, Vol. 2: The Medieval and Modern Worlds*. London: Continuum, 2009; Campion, Nicholas. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012.

³ *La Divination: études recueillies*. Caquot, André; Leibovici, Marcel. (eds.). Paris, 1968, 2: 557–559.

⁴ Zuesse, Evan M. Divination. In: *Encyclopedia of Religions*. Eliade, Mircea (ed.). Macmillian Press, 1987, 4: 376.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4: 378.

⁶ Not all the pre-modern societies embraced the mantic arts with equal enthusiasm. In fact, two of the cultures of the world least interested in divination appear to be the traditional Australian Aborigenes and the American Plains Indians.

⁷ Tsuyuki, Masahiro. *Uranaiishi*. Tokyo: Shakai shisōsha, 1993.

Divinatory practices in the early history of Japan

The Chinese history *Wei chih*, which describes the manners and customs of the Japanese people in the 2nd century A.D., states that they practiced divination by roasting bones.⁸ The earliest Japanese chronicles, *Kojiki* “Record of ancient matters”, compiled in A.D. 712, and *Nihon Shoki* “Chronicles of Japan”, known also as the *Nihongi*, compiled in A.D. 740, but incorporating an orally transmitted material of an older date, frequently mention divination. According to *Kojiki*, the two creator deities Izanagi and Izanami are said to have resorted to divination to discover why they had given birth to malformed children.⁹ An ancient method was performed, called grand-divination *futomani*, in which the shoulder blade of a deer was heated using bark from *papaka* tree, and the cracks observed. The early Emperor Suinin, likewise, resorted to divination to learn the reason why his child was dumb. He discovered that he only had to build a shrine to a certain divinity for the curse to be removed. *Nihongi* shows that divination was employed to foretell the results of military expedition (I:121; 227; 237); to reveal the cause of plague, rebellion, and other public calamities (I:152), or private misfortunes (II:102); to discover what person is to be entrusted with the cult or God (I:153; 177); what offerings must be made for a God (I:178); whether the Emperor should make sacrifices in person or send a representative (I:189; 190); why Emperor’s soup almost froze into ice one day (this was due to a case of incest in the court, I:324); which place should be selected for building a tomb or a palace (I:355); what was signified by a mysterious omen (II:59; 306).¹⁰

Divination was a regular process in certain essential points of Shinto worship, for instance, by divination, the priestess of the Sun temple was chosen at Ise (I:176). At court, a special divination took place annually, on the 10th day of the 12th month, to find out what misfortunes were to be feared with regard to the Emperor in the coming months and to provide propitiatory measures accordingly.¹¹

From these early times until the present day, the divinatory methods practised in Japan have been plentiful. For example, Michel Revon mentions and describes some of them: *futomani*, or divination by the shoulder blade of a deer, *thsuji-ura*, or crossroads divination, *hashi-ura*, or bridge divination, *ahsi-ura*, or foot divination, *ishi-ura*, or stone divination, *koto-ura*, or harp divination, *mi-kayu-ura*, divination by gruel, etc.¹² Carmen Blacker provides more detailed discussion of the three other forms of divination: *kiboku*, divination by turtle shell, *reimu*, the oracular dream,

⁸ Tsunoda, Ryusaku; Carrington, Goodrich L. *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*. South Pasadena, 1951, p. 12.

⁹ Philippi, D. (transl.). *Kojiki*. Tokyo: University Press and Princeton University Press, 1968, 5: 2.

¹⁰ Aston, W. G. (transl.). *Nihongi. Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*. Translated from original Chinese and Japanese. London: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972.

¹¹ See, for instance: Holtom, D. C. *The Japanese Enthronement Ceremony with an Account of the Imperial Regalia*. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972.

¹² Revon, M. Japanese Divination. In: *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Hastings, James (ed.). Edinburgh, 1908, Vol. 4, pp. 801–806.

takusen, utterances of an inspired medium (*matsuri*).¹³ Some of these methods are clearly derived from China, some are unseparable from the traditional Shinto cults or Japanese Buddhist practices. These various forms of divination were employed to determine the kami's will regarding their lives and the success of their undertakings. Divination for the matters of state and regarding the important ceremonies of the early Shinto cult was carried out by a ministry of religious affairs known as the *Jingikan*. Believed to have been imported from China, from the mid 7th century until 1868, *kiboku* was the official method of interpretation used in the *Jingikan* to determine matters like the choice of princesses to serve as shrine virgins (*saigū*) at the Ise and Kamo shrines, and the places where they should dwell.

As for the ancient knowledge of Japanese of the planets, which are of a great significance for astrological divination, it is well known that in the ancient mythology almost nothing is told about stars, except the Sun-Goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami (“the heaven-shining deity”) who plays the most important role. However, her brother, Tsuki-yomi, the Moon-God (“the ruler of the moonlight night”) occupies an insignificant place. (I:28) The Sun-Goddess was considered to be the supreme ruler of the heaven and earth, also the progenitrix of the ruling family. The relation between the Sun and the Moon is based upon a natural phenomenon that the two are visible alternately by day and by night. A Star-God is mentioned in the ancient myth, but his role is quite ambiguous, while a festival in honour of certain stellar constellations (the Hersmann and the Weave-maid), according to M. Anesaki, was derived from China.¹⁴ All the other planetary stories and worship of stars appeared much later and were introduced mainly through Buddhism in the 6th century, although some of them may have been derived from Hindu, Persian or Chinese sources.

The most striking analogy between the indigenous deities and the Buddhist pantheon was an identification of the Japanese Sun-Goddess Amaterasu with Buddha Vairocana. In Shingon Buddhism, the so-called *Taizōkai mandara* (Skr. *Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala*), which means “Womb world mandala” represents Dainichi the Sun Buddha (Skr. *Mahavairocana*) as the body of Principle as it is or as it exist in the totality of phenomenal existence. It symbolises the unfolding compassion, growth and potentiality of the world of Enlightenment.¹⁵ And this conception exercised an extensive influence on doctrine and worship during the sway of the syncretic Shinto from the 8th century until the middle of the 19th century.¹⁶

¹³ Blacker, Carmen. Japan. In: *Divination and Oracles*. Loewe, Michael; Blacker, Carmen (eds.). London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981, pp. 63–86.

¹⁴ Masaharu, Anesaki. Japanese Sun, Moon, and Star. In: *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Hastings, James (ed.). Edinburgh, Vol. 12, 1911, pp. 88.

¹⁵ More on the structure and symbolical meaning of the *Taizokai mandara*, see: Ten Grotenhuis, Elizabeth. *Japanese Mandalas. Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999, pp. 58–77.

¹⁶ Among the theorizers of the syncretism, see Kanera (1402–1481), who explained Sun, Moon and Stars as corresponding to the three insignia of the throne, i.e. the sun to the mirror, the moon to the jewel, and the stars to the sword.

An impact of Chinese astrology and divination

However, perhaps the most influential stream of divinatory practices reached Japan from China. It is well known that in China divination gave rise to the earliest written records of a great civilization, its principles found a place in both the Taoist and the Confucian ways of life, and in the sophisticated philosophies of the Sung period. Of the many methods, which have been used in China since Shang dynasty (1500–1100 B.C.) to practice divination or to consult oracles, three stand out conspicuously with particular significance. These are the roasting of animal bones or turtle shells and causing the cracks upon their surfaces; the cast of the stalks of the yarrow plant as a means of forming linear patterns or hexagrams; and the recognition of inherent properties in the land with a view to determining its propensities for good or evil.¹⁷ All early East Asian astronomy was done for calendrical purposes; there was no observational astronomy independent of the astrological and calendrical arts. During the millennium from Shang to Han times, Chinese astrology and calendrical astronomy achieved early maturity and was assured public status in government agencies.¹⁸

The Chinese belief that the emperor conducted the affairs of state under the mandate of the heaven was a doctrine rooted in the Chou period and firmly established by Han times. Regularity in solar, lunar, and planetary movements was regarded as one manifestation of the natural order, or what might be called the “law of heaven”, and the task of studying this aspect was institutionalized in China in the Institute of Astrology, the *T'ai-shih chu*. In the *Hou Han shu* (History of the Later Han Dynasty), compiled in A.D. 450, there is a clear description of the duties of the Grand Astrologer, or *t'ai-shih ling*. Production and promulgation of the calendar were among the principal tasks of the Emperor, whose title *T'ien-tzu* meant literally “Heaven's son”. Observing and reporting such apparent anomalies as lunar and solar eclipses, comets, meteors, and the conjunction or occultation of certain planets, or meteorological peculiarities like odd-shaped cloud formations, or even terrestrial abnormalities like earthquakes and floods, were also the responsibility of the Institute. The Institute also had the job of divining the importance of these occurrences according to the *Yin-Yang* art, as the “will” or “warning” of heaven, although this function was supplemented by a separate Bureau of Divination, the *T'ai-pu shu*. The Han dynasty (around 90 B.C.) treatise *Shih chi* (Records of the Grand Astrologer-Historian) established an explicit analogy between the realms of Heaven and the realm of man: Asterisms and stars had their counterparts in government bureaus and official positions, just as divisions of the heavens had their analogues on earth.

¹⁷ See: Keightley, David. *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle – Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1978.

¹⁸ More on the history of Chinese divination and its different branches, see Field, Stephen L. *Ancient Chinese Divination* (Dimensions of Asian Spirituality). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008; *Divination at Rationalité en Chine Ancienne* (Vol. 21 of *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident: Cahiers de Recherches Comparatives*). Chemla, Karine; Harper, Donald; Kalinowski, Marc (eds.). Saint-Denis, France: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1999; Ho Peng Yoke. *Chinese Mathematical Astrology: Reaching Out to the Stars*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

According to this correspondence theory, which displayed a remarkable tenacity in China, “proper behaviour, proper government and proper rituals contributed to cosmic harmony, while immoral actions and improper relationships disrupted the balance of *Yin* and *Yang* and *wuxig* (the five primary elements) forces in the universe, striking a discordant and therefore disruptive note in the cosmic symphony”.¹⁹ One of the most widespread results of the theory of interaction between Heaven and man was the popular belief in geomancy (Ch. *feng shui*, Jap. *fū sui*).²⁰

Insofar he was responsible for keeping records, the Grand Astrologer also performed some of the functions of an official historian in the early period. From the Later Han dynasty on, astrological knowledge was considered esoteric and was restricted to a small circle within the court. It was feared that if astrological knowledge and unauthorized private calendars were diffused among the common people, political unity and authority of the imperial court might be jeopardized. According to S. Nakayama, Chinese astrology shares three essential features with that of ancient Babylon: empirical collection of data; official character of its usage; and secrecy as directly relevant to national security.²¹ Indeed, advanced knowledge of astrology (*t'ien-wen*) and calendrical astronomy was a state prerogative in China, as it was in Babylonia and its monopoly of these sciences was at times quite thorough, preventing private citizens from the access to the latest knowledge.²² Even when private citizens were permitted to work on astronomy, it was usual for someone who submitted an important calendrical reform or who made a spectacularly confirmed astrological prediction to be immediately appointed to the Institute of Astrology.

As there was virtually no concourse with other cultural realms during this millennium, the Chinese versions evolved and maintained some distinct characteristics in internal methods and public role. In the half-millennium from Han – T'ang times some Indian and Western ideas, including some Babylonian and Hellenistic, entered to give them a certain cosmopolitan colour, notably in astrological practice, but the major technical advances were purely Chinese. Indian astrology began to make its way into China in the wake of Buddhist influence, in the third century A.D., particularly in the A.D. 230 translation of an Indian astrological work, the *Mo-teng-ch'ieh ching* (Canon of Astrology based on Lunar Mansions). Chu-t'an Hsi-ta, an Indian who served as court astrologer in the T'ang dynasty, in 718 translated into Chinese and Indian the astrological book, the *Chiu-chih li*. The title means “Calendrical System of the Nine Upholders”, referring to the sun and moon, the five planets, and two

¹⁹ Smith, Richard J. *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society*. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, p. 25. See also: Loewe, Michael. *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 160–191.

²⁰ See: Bruun, Ole. *Fengshui in China: Geomantic Divination Between State Orthodoxy and Popular Religion*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003; also Walters, Derek. *Chinese Geomancy*. Longmead: Element Books Ltd., 1989.

²¹ Nakayama, Shigeru. Characteristics of Chinese Astrology. *Isis*, 57. 4. 1966, pp. 443–444.

²² See: Thompson, Reginald. *Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon*. 2 Vols. London: Luzac and Co., 1900; and Koch-Westenthalz, Ulla. *Mesopotamian Astrology. An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination*. University of Copenhagen, 1995.

‘invisible’ planets, Rahu and Ketu. Only one text in a secret 120-volume set devoted almost entirely to astrology and divination, the *Chiu-chih li* belonged to the class of texts omitting theoretical sections. The Chinese seem to have been more interested in the results than in the methods of Indian astrology and astronomy. In the middle of the eighth century A.D., a Chinese translation of an Indian astrological treatise, *Hsiu-yao ching* (Canon of Lunar Mansions and Planets) began to exercise an influence on Chinese astrology. The Indian method was horoscopic and described solar, lunar, and planetary positions according to the twenty-eight lunar mansions and the week, rather than the twelve-sector zodiac, thus indicating largely Indian, not Greek, influence.²³

As it was told before, there was no systematic knowledge of heavenly phenomena in ancient Japan. Initial Japanese knowledge of astrology and calendrical astronomy was gained from Korea late in the pre-Chinese cultural wave. There are only occasional, scanty records of the importation of continental sciences. According to the *Nihon shoki* (720), it was in 513 that Korean scholars introduced the “five texts” – a group of classic Chinese works, including the *I ching* – to the court of the (semihistorical) Emperor Keitai. The earliest bears the date A.D. 533, when the Japanese Emperor requested Paekche, a Korean state, to send scholars (*hakase*) of medicine, divination (*eki*), and calendar-making to Japan. The next year a Korean professor of calendrical science, Ko-tōk Wang Po-son and others arrived at the imperial court in response to this request.²⁴ They were employed as temporary visiting scholars, supplying technical advice to the court. In A.D. 602, the *Nihon shoki* states:

A priest [of Korean kingdom] Paekche named Kwal-lūk arrived and presented as tribute books on calendar-making, astrology (*tenmon*), and geography, and also books on the arts of prognostication (*tonkō*) and magic (*hōjutsu*). At this time three or four pupils were selected and put to study under him. Yako no Fumito no Oya Tamafuru studied calendar making. Ōtomo no Suguri Takatoshi studied astrology, and Yamashiro no Omi Hinamitate studied the arts of prognostication and magic. Each of them mastered his subject of study and made it his profession. (*Nihongi*, 2:126)

This statement is the first record of a serious attempt by Japanese to study the continental divinatory arts. In 554, Korean *I ching* professors (*Eki hakase*) and calendar masters who had been serving at the court of Emperor Kinmei were replaced by new ones. In 602, the Korean Buddhist monk Kanroku presented himself to the court of Empress Suiko, along with up-to-date almanacs and books of astrology, geography and magic. Prince Shotoku (574–622), Suiko’s nephew and regent, is said to have chosen the colors of the caps used in his civil rank system on the basis of onmyōdo symbolism. The “Seventeen Article Constitution” attributed to him has also

²³ Nakayama, Shigeru. *A History of Japanese Astronomy. Chinese Background and Western Impact*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 62.

²⁴ Aston, W. G. *Nihongi. Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*. Tr. from original Chinese and Japanese. London: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972, p. 72.

been said to reflect *onmyōdō* concepts of social order. When the scholars Mi-nabuchi Shogen and Takamuko Genri in 640 returned from a long period of study in China, they introduced the latest in Chinese divining texts and practices. But even at this early stage, Japanese *onmyōdō* was distinguished from its Chinese models by the extent to which it incorporated other arts of divination, natural science, and what were probably native forms of magic.²⁵ Nor was *onmyōdō* thought of as a discipline entirely separate from Buddhism or the other religions, philosophies, and forms of learning imported at the same time; the *onmyōdō* teacher Kanroku, for example, was also a high-ranking Buddhist monk.

The first Chinese cultural wave began with the Taika reforms of A.D. 646 and continued through the Nara and early Heian eras (seventh-ninth centuries inclusive) when Japan sought to adapt the Chinese model of T'ang society. That was a period of effort consciously based on systematic, large-scale importation of high culture and science directly from China. Under the *ritsuryō seido* system – the administrative system as an integrated political and social unit under the central control largely shaped after the Sui and T'ang bureaucracies – different kinds of institutes were founded to propagate and utilize Chinese learning and sciences. Beside the University (*Daigakuryō*) and Institute of Medicine (*Ten'yakuryō*) an Institute of Divination (*Onmyōryō*) was also established in the capital Heiankyo. Despite the great diversity in technical aspects of medical and astrological theory, the traditional Japanese doctors and diviners shared many of the same cosmological assumptions about systematic correspondence, as well as demonology.

The Institute of Divination (*Onmyōryō* literally, the Institute of *Yin-Yang* arts) trained specialists and performed official tasks for the state in astrology, calendrical astronomy, and divination. In appropriating astrology and calendrics as state functions, Japan kept the same formal bureaucratic controls as China. The Institute was under the central administrative ministry (*Nakatsukasashō*) and intellectual efforts in astrology were largely oriented to social, i.e., state purposes. This single *ritsuryō* institute combined the functions of two separate Chinese T'ang institutes: the institute of Astrology (*T'ai-shih chu*, sometimes rendered Office of the Grand Astrologer), which handled both services and education in astrology, calendrical astronomy, and reporting time; and the Bureau of Divination (*T'ai-pu shu*), and organ for divination. The curriculum of the Institute consisted of *Yin-yang* divination (*onmyōdō*), calendrical astronomy (*rekidō*), astrology (*tenmondō*), and timekeeping (*rōkoku*).²⁶ The name chosen by the Japanese institution suggests a preference for divination over astrology, calendrical astronomy, and timekeeping. In China, astrology had the highest official status, calendar-making the next, and timekeeping and divination the lowest, whereas in Japan astrology and divination enjoyed the highest status, followed by calendar-making and timekeeping. As in China, the Director of the Japanese Institute of Divination (*onmyō no kami*) was obliged to submit to the emperor a sealed

²⁵ Kamens, Edward. Onmyodo. In: *Encyclopedia of Religions*. Eliade, Mircea (ed.). Macmillan Press, 1987, Vol. 11, p. 77.

²⁶ See: Masayoshi, Sugimoto; Swain, L. David. *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan A.D. 600–1854*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1978, p. 35.

report of astronomical or geophysical abnormalities. The institute employed six divination masters (*onmyōji*), who performed the real work of observing and forecasting, and one professor of divination (*onmyō hakase*), who supervised ten students (*onmyōsho*). In 628, the Chinese system of time-keeping was adopted, and a water clock was constructed.²⁷ According to *Nihongi*, in 675 an astrologic observatory began to function: “A platform was for the first time erected from which to divine by means of the stars” (2:326).

Emperor Temmu (reigned 672–686) is said to have been adept at the *onmyōdō* arts. As in China, Japanese capitals, including the permanent capitals Heijo (Nara) and Heian (Kyoto), were all constructed on carefully surveyed north-south axes, and official buildings and residences were placed where they might best receive favourable influences or be protected from evil ones, according to *onmyōdō* geomancy. Japanese specialists were less interested in cosmology than Chinese. The first reference to Chinese cosmology by Japanese author did not come until A.D. 1414.²⁸ Japanese students in the Institute of Divination were required to read the *Chou-pi suan-ching* (Treatise on mythology and cosmology) and *T'ien-wen chih* (Astrological records of the Chin dynastic history, *Chin shu*), as the most substantial discussion of early Chinese cosmology.

Two kinds of astrology entered Japan from China during the first Chinese cultural wave: portent astrology for political purposes and individual fate calculation. The former sought to correlate celestial, meteorological, and seismological portents with the social phenomena related to imperial rule or major political events. The astrological records (*T'ien-wen chih*) of the dynastic histories contain voluminous details of portents in chronological order, ways, in which they were interpreted according to *Yin-Yang* and *wuxing* (Jap. *gogyō*), Five Phases (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water) principles, and measures were taken to avoid the direst consequences. Portent astrology was derived from empirical observations, interpretations were for public, not private affairs, and all data kept strictly within government control. Planetary motions acquired astrological significance at an early stage, the 4th century B.C. The Japanese were exposed to Chinese views on portent astrology through the Institute of Divination's use of such texts as the *T'ian-kuan shu* (Records of Heavenly Offices, i.e., constellations) of *Su-ma Ch'ien's* (135–93 B.C.), *Shih chi* (Records of the Grand Historian), and of the astrological treatises of the former Han and Chin dynasties (*Han shu* and *Chin shu*, respectively).

In portent astrology, there was no strict determinism, such as existed in the medieval horoscopic art of the West. There was always the possibility of averting an impending disaster. On the whole, neither emperors nor the nobility in Japan took such portents as guides to state affairs very seriously. Nonetheless, considerable observational data is found in the official Japanese documents compiled at the time. The Emperor Tenchi (reigned 661–671) and the Empress Genshō (reigned 715–724) could be singled out as examples of Japanese rulers who manifested some hypersensitivity

²⁷ Nakayama, Shigeru. *A History of Japanese Astronomy. Chinese Background and Western Impact*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

to heavenly portents. In A.D. 721, the Empress Genshō was impressed with a halo of the sun and said:

The appearance of the wind and clouds is unusual. I have become most anxious, and cannot be tranquil day or night. Consulting the old classics, I find that when the governance of a ruler is inadequate, heaven and earth rebuke him by displaying signs of reprimand.²⁹

The competition in eclipse prediction was patronized by court circles as only one of the many forms of fate calculation favored. The chronicles, diaries, and literary works of the Heian period (794–1185) mentioned about fifty different *onmyōdō* rites as having been observed at court.

Japanese students in the divination course of the Institute of Divination were required to study such Chinese texts as: the *Chou-i* (or as it is more commonly known in Japan and the West, *I-Ching*), *T'ien-wen chih* of the Former Han History), *San-se pu-tsan* (Commentary on Three Star Classics), *Han-yang t'ien-wen yao-chi* (Collected Essentials of Han-yan's Astrology), and other classical texts of Chinese divination. According to S. Masayoshi and L. D. Swain, "these highly metaphysical treatises do not appear to have been widely read or well understood by the Japanese in the first Chinese cultural wave. It was much later, from fourteenth century, that divination based on the *I-ching* was once again taken seriously, this time by Zen priests".³⁰ It was a divination based on the calendar, and other cruder everyday practices, that during the Chinese wave penetrated deeply into Japanese society and remained widely accepted up to and including the modern times. Japanese military strategists in warlike ages frequently used the *I-ching* in making crucial decisions, and, in fact, it is still the principal tool of Japanese street-corner soothsayers.

Calendrical divination took the form of an almanac (in Japanese, *gachūreki*, literally, "annotated calendar"), produced by the Institute of Divination, following T'ang practice, by the first day of the eleventh month for the coming year.³¹ It was written in Chinese characters, copied by hand, and distributed to the court nobility and government officials. It included extracalendrical matter: predicted fortunes for each day of the year; lucky and unlucky directions with regard to each day; the direction assumed by the God of the Year's Virtue (*Saitokujin*); and various taboos for each day. This extracalendrical content derived from Taoism, Buddhism (especially *Sukyōdō*), and, particularly, the *Yin-Yang* and Five Phases tradition. The Five Phases – Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water – were thought to characterize everything in heaven and earth, and was a means of analyzing complex entities in space and time. The five planets, for example, were originally regarded as

²⁹ Shoku Nihongi (*Official History of Japan Continued*), Ch. 8, cited from: Nakayama, Shigeru. *A History of Japanese Astronomy. Chinese Background and Western Impact*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 49.

³⁰ Masayoshi, Sugimoto; Swain, L. David. *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan A.D. 600–1854*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1978, p. 37.

³¹ More on calendrics in Japan see: Yabuuchi, Kiyoshi. *Chūgoku no kagaku bunmei* (Astrology and Calendrics in China). Tokyo: Heibonsa, 1969.

embodying the essence of the energy (*ch'i*) of the Five Phases. By observing the movements of the planets, one could know the changes in the energetic cycles that govern all natural phenomena. Many other sets of five were also correlated with the Five Phases.

Phases	Planets	Directions	Seasons	Colors	Organs	Orificies	Emotions
Wood	Jupiter	east	spring	green	liver	eyes	anger
Fire	Mars	south	summer	red	heart	ears	pleasure
Earth	Saturn	center	end of summer	yellow	spleen	mouth	cogitation
Metal	Venus	west	autumn	white	lungs	nose	sorrow
Water	Mercury	north	winter	black	kidneys	anus, urethra	fear

These concepts also provided the theoretical framework for Chinese and Japanese medicine: physiology, pathology, as well as the guidelines for prescribing particular drugs.³²

The purely Indian form of horoscope astrology that came to China first was the translation *Mo-teng-ch'ieh ching* (A.D. 230), which used the twenty-eight lunar mansions or *nakṣatras*. Twenty-eight lunar mansions were associated with twelve ancient feudal states of China, and the movable celestial bodies that appeared in a mansion were thought to exert an influence upon the corresponding state. It was not until the fifth or sixth century that the Indians were able to calculate planetary positions by Greek methods. In 759 Amoghavajra (Pu-k'ung) translated the *Hsiu-yao ching* (Canon of Lunar Mansions and Planets), in which horoscopic practice was explicitly, although sketchily explained. This canon was supplemented by the more detailed *Ch'i-yao jang-tsai chueh* ("Formulas for Avoiding Calamities According to the Seven Luminaries"), an early ninth century work by the Buddhist Chin Chü-ch'a. It contained planetary tables, ephemerides since A.D. 794 that could actually be used for casting horoscopes. This Chinese manual was brought to Japan in 864 and used as a planetary ephemeris.³³ The Japanese practice of Indian astrology, based on the *Hsiu-yao ching* (in Japanese, *Sukuyōkyō*) was called *Sukuyōdō* ("the art of the lunar mansions and planets"), and began late in the first Chinese wave under Buddhist promotion and aristocratic patronage, but flourished only after the end of the period.

³² See more: Needham, Joseph. *Science and Civilisation in China*. Vols. 1–5. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–1974, 2: 262–263.

³³ See Michio, Yano. The Ch'i-yao jang-tsai-chueh and its Ephemerides. *Centaurus*, 1986 (29), pp. 28–35; and Michio, Yano. A Planetary Ephemeris in Japanese Buddhist Astrology: A Case of Transmission. In: Keizo, Hashimoto, et al. (eds.). *East Asian Science: Tradition and Beyond*. Osaka: Kansai University Press, 1995, pp. 73–81.

Development of divinational practices in the medieval period

During the following five centuries of the semiseclusion (894–1401), the impetus for social and cultural change shifted from imitation of a foreign model to pursuit of domestic priorities. Japanese Buddhist priests visiting China in these times acquired some competence in both traditional methods and in matters related to *sukuyōkyō*, enabling them to compete with official specialists. The Buddhists were concerned with astrology only as one of the peripheral features of the Indian cultural tradition that had been transmitted as an incidental part of their theology. The pursuit of astrology and calendar-making by Japanese Buddhists stemmed not from original Buddhist practice, but from forms in which later Indian ideas were intermixed.

It should not be forgotten that in the early Buddhist texts (*Digha Nikaya*, I.10) divination is stigmatized as a base science and false means of livelihood. In the Pali *Sutta Nipata* (927), the monk is forbidden to devote himself to magic (*athabbana*), to the interpretation of the dreams, the signs and the stars. That such a science is possible is generally taken for granted, but in the *Jatakas* there is a tendency to ridicule the belief in lucky stars, omens, names and sneezing Buddha himself, when he became a teacher is invariably represented in the scriptures as discouraging and condemning divination and all the allied arts. The *Jatakas* frequently refer to the Brahmins taking to the profession of foretelling the future by observing the movements of the limbs (*anga vijja pathakas*) and auspicious marks on the body (*lakkhana pathakas*) and reading dreams (*supina pathakas*), the diviners (*nemittikas*), and the astrologers (*nakkhatta jananakas*) and accuse them of resorting to fraudulent practices.

Nevertheless, divination was obviously too deeply rooted in the popular life of India to be eradicated. It is found at the present day flourishing among professing Buddhists of all schools, among the monks, as well as the laity. Not merely foreign aboriginal methods of divination have been absorbed by Buddhists in its extension as a popular religion outside India, the elements of Indian astrology and divination have been introduced by the Buddhist monks, who are now the chief astrologers not only in Tibet and Mongolia, but also in China, Japan, Korea, Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The most prominent institutions of learning founded by New Kamakura Buddhism, mainly the Rinzai sect, were the temple complexes called *gozan* (lit. “five mountains”), a group of five (and later, more) temples built at first in Kamakura and afterwards in Kyoto. Kamo no Yasunori, who held appointments as a professor of astrology and as the head of the Institute of Divination, died in 987, after entrusting the work of astrology to his ablest disciple, Abe no Seimei (921–1005). Subsequently, astrology became the House Learning (*Kagaku*) of the Abe family and later, its descendants. Calendrical astronomy was considered a less honorable and exacting task, and the Abe family enjoyed a privileged status at the court. The Institute of Divination, along with the Institute of Medicine, continued to exist up to the Meiji Restoration (1868). Abe family was knowledgeable in the *Yin-Yang* studies, and particularly the modes of calendar-related divination. The authorship of the *Hoki naiden*

(Ritual implement tradition), an *onmyōdō* text that drew on Buddhist, Shinto, and possibly Taoist sources is traditionally attributed to Abe no Semei.

The most famous *onmyōdō* priests' families – Abe and Kamo – also grew in prosperity from the ninth to eleventh centuries. Practitioners of *onmyōdō* trained in the Institute of Divination were called *onmyōji* or *on'yōshi*. The priests offered many kind many kinds of food at crossroads or entrances to villages or cities in order to soothe the evil spirits or demons of plague, or requested the villagers to purify themselves by bathing in the streams or sea or by abstaining from certain kinds of foods and remaining at home on unlucky days. Sometimes, too, they employed wandering shamanesses as assistants. According to Ichiro Hori, Japanese shamanesses could be divided into two groups. The first group included *miko* or *jinja-miko*, who belonged to the imperial court and Shinto shrines, and the second group *kuchiyose* (or *sato-miko*, *ichiko*, *o-kami-sama*, *aruki-miko*, *azusa-miko*, *shinano-miko*, *nonō*), included shamanesses who settle down in their own villages or migrate from village to village in compliance with the request of the residents.³⁴ They utilize techniques of trance and engage in telepathy, mediumship, divination, and fortunetelling. The main functions of those wandering shamanesses included communication with the spirits of the dead or hearing the will of angry deities, prayers of possession (*yorigotō*), deities, wraths, and the dead; divination and fortune-telling through trance; prayers for recovery of the sick; purification of new buildings, wells, stoves, and hearths.³⁵

Descendants of the *onmyōdō* priests also traveled from village to village to propagate their beliefs and to bring relief to villagers. Some, who belonged to large Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, periodically visited the villages or cities within their jurisdiction to distribute their shrine's or temple's charms, talismans, amulets, phylacteries, and professional agricultural calendars. Some of them settled in villages and survived as members of outcast minority groups. Remnants of this sect may be found today in the *Onmyōji-mura* (villages of *onmyōdō* priest), or *Shomonji-mura*, *Innai-mura*, and *Sanjo-mura* (villages of the lower-class *onmyōdō* priests). The inhabitants of these communities still preserve some of their original social and religious functions. They, for example, “make seasonal visits to purify each house and oven by reciting magical words and songs, and to dance for a happy New Year, a good future harvest, and good luck at the beginning of the year”.³⁶

³⁴ Hori, Ichiro. *Folk Religion in Japan. Continuity and Change*. Kitagawa, J. M.; Miller, A. L. (eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 79. I. Hori, who did much to introduce M. Eliade's works in Japan, accepted possession as a genuine form of shamanism if it happens as a sign of election from the part of a spirit and is not achieved willingly as a result of ascetic training.

³⁵ See: Blacker, Carmen. *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1975, pp. 252–297. In her fascinating study of the modern Japanese shamanism, C. Blacker points out that the subject of her anthropological study “makes nonsense of that conventional distinction hitherto observed by most Western writers on Japanese religion, the separation of Shinto from Buddhism” (p. 33). According to Peter Knecht, to understand Japanese religions a knowledge of shamanism is essential. See: Chilson, C.; Knecht, P. (eds.). *Shamans in Asia*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

³⁶ Hori, Ichiro. *Folk Religion in Japan. Continuity and Change*. Kitagawa, J. M.; Miller, A. L. (eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 80. A new class of professional

During the Semiseclusion Era, the *onmyōji* increasingly served the personal interests of the court nobility, and on the more popular level, many of them assigned to the provinces eventually settled down and spread *onmyōdō* ideas and practices among the general population in a much degenerated form. Their services performed for individual client became increasingly mixed with Buddhist *sukuyōdō* elements and various indigenous taboos and exorcistic rites. They also practiced magical invocation for good harvests, good weather, purification and good fortune. *Onmyōdō* became intermingled with Shinto, and thus merged imperceptibly into the popular beliefs which spread over all of Japan via mountain ascetics *shugen-ja* (“exorciser”), *yamabushi* (“priest, who lies down on the mountain”), or *hōin* (“Buddhist exorciser”).

Even in China, the *Yin-Yang* divination, through replete with cosmological theory, was never brought into a functional relation with calendrical astronomy, the *onmyōdō* practices in Japan veered even further away from exact scientific work. In practice, Japanese court nobility, like the commoners, made little distinction between the intellectually dissimilar notions of ethnic Shinto, Chinese-style divination (*onmyōdō*), and Buddhist fate calculations (*sukuyōkyō*). Esoteric forms of Shingon practices were itself allied to *onmyōdō* and various folk religious practices and “included incantation, rain-making, averting misfortune, bringing good fortune, healing, and prolonging life”.³⁷ The elements of Esoteric Buddhism *Mik-kyō* were an integral part of Japanese Buddhism, which the court and noble clans sponsored in expectation of the same benefits offered by *onmyōdō* practices, such as avoidance of illness, immunity to disaster by fire and water, safety from bandits, healing, prosperity, and victory over foes. Very often *onmyōdō* practices were mingled with various practices of the Nembutsu – the Buddhist Pure Land school (*Jōdo-kyō*) mixed with animistic and shamanistic elements, – and Shugendō – the Buddhist Tantric Mantrayana school (*Shingon*) also mixed with popular Shinto animism and shamanism.³⁸

While Japanese Shinto was influenced by Shugendō, Shugendō itself borrowed many elements from ancient shamanism, *onmyōdō* practices, Taoist magic, Confucian ethics. The role undertaken by *shugen-ja* or *yamabushi* was to respond to the various mundane needs of the common people regarding disease and problems of daily life, offering religious services, such as fortune-telling and divination

conjurers, the *shomōnji*, appeared that had appropriated many *onmyōdō* functions, which they combined with sutra chanting, dancing and theatricals. Although licensed to perform such entertainments, the *shomōnji* were a despised class. The word *onmyōji*, which previously had denoted a learned master, came to refer to itinerant magicians who roamed the country selling charms, almanacs and advice. Eventually, in the Edo period (1603–1867), both *shomōnji* and *onmyōji* were labeled outcasts and were forced to reside in ghettos. Sometimes these people became actors. In the medieval period, actors in the Nō theater and puppet plays usually belonged to this group.

³⁷ Yamasaki, Taishō. *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*. Boston and London, Shambhala, 1988, p. 23. For a comprehensive study of Shingon doctrines and practical disciplines, see: Kiyota, Minoru. *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*. Los Angeles – Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 1978.

³⁸ Abundant data on Buddhist Tantric astrology are collected by Ryūsen, Morita. *Mikkyō senseihō (Astrology in Tantric Buddhism)*. 2 Vols. Kōyasan, 1941.

(*bokusen*), obtaining oracles through mediums (*fujustu*), prayers or ritual incantations (*kitō*), and exorcism (*chōbuku*). According to Miyake Hitoshi, *shugen-ja* were and still are involved in many types of fortune-telling and divination, from the analysis of good and bad days of the calendar, *yin-yang* divination, the determination of lucky and unlucky directions, divination of a person's fate through astrological signs or guardian deities on the basis of a person's birth date, and so forth.

Fortune-telling methods such as *kikkyō* and *unsei* use the motif of analyzing the smaller realm of human beings within the larger universe through the structure of the five forces of *yin-yang*, and through the ten calendar signs and twelve signs of the zodiac. In this case the religious worldview involved is one in which daily fortunes depend on the power of various deities or vengeful spirits, or the fates of human beings depend on the astrological influences of the stars.³⁹

There are also Shugendō rituals for determining the cause of disease, and so forth, through *bokusen*, *kikkyō*, or *unsei*. These rituals are based on assumption that disease is caused by angry spirits or spirits of the living or dead that hamper the proper and normal course of the universe. The practice of obtaining oracles through mediums (*fujustu*) involves rituals, by which a *shugen-ja* makes his guardian spirit, *kamis* or buddhas possess the medium in order to obtain an oracle. In the case of *kuchiyose* oracles by *itako*-type mediums, the mediums achieve identification with their own guardian spirits and use the power they acquired to call forth the requested spirit (of the living or the dead), which then takes possession of the medium. Fire ceremonies for averting misfortune (*sokusai goma*) are rituals wherein a *shugen-ja* achieves identification with the central deity Fudō Myōō (*Acala*, destroyer of evil) in order to manipulate the deity of fire (*katen*) and the stars governing fates (*yōshuku*) for the purpose of removing evil influences. This activity is based on the religious worldview that it is possible to obtain good fortune by determining the cause of misfortune through divination, and that one can then “burn away” misfortune.

Divination-exorcism (*chōbuku*) is a uniquely Shugendō ritual process. Initially, the *shugen-ja* ascertains the cause of his believer's misfortunes through divination. Two forms of divination are used for this purpose. One form is an objective divination technique, such as *onmyōdō* and *eki*. He determines the cause of his believer's misfortune by examining the signs that show a deviation in the normal cycle of the cosmos. Another form is the subjective or inspirational divination, which is practiced by shamans – *shugen-ja* becomes possessed by his guardian spirit and makes the spirit tell the cause of his believer's misfortune. And then, having found the source of the misfortune, *shugen-ja* performs the necessary acts to remove it.⁴⁰

³⁹ Hitoshi, Miyake. *Shugendō. Essays on the Structure of Japanese Folk Religion*. Earhart, H. B. (ed.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001, p. 72.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–107.

From *onmyōdō* to *sukuyōdō*

After the twelfth century, as political power passed from the Heian court to a series of military dictators, the heyday of official *onmyōdō* came to an end. The upper hand in fortune-telling during the Semiseclusion Era was held by the Buddhist practitioners of *sukuyōdō*, who were called *sukuyōji*. As in Western horoscopic astrology, the point of departure for *sukuyōdō* was the moment of birth of the individual. Each part of the human body was said to be influenced by a particular constellation. Indian version of zodiacal man (*nakūatra puruūa*), as an symbolical expression of macrocosm-microcosm sympathy, was depicted in Chinese text *Ch'i-yao jang-tsai chueh*. The earliest known horoscope in Japan is the one cast for a young boy in 1112; the document that records it, the *Sukyō unmei kanroku* ("A Record of Fate Prognostication According to the Mansions and Planets") is based on Hellenistic zodiac astrology, without references to Indian sources. This horoscope and the second oldest known, for the year 1269, were both cast by consulting the *Fu-t'ien li*, an unofficial Chinese calendar compiled by Ts'ao Shihwei between 780 and 783, and brought to Japan in by a Buddhist monk in 957. According to Shigeru Nakayama, the horoscopic art of Indo-Hellenistic background could, in principle, have been a stimulus to astronomical observation and study in Japan, but the opposite seems have been closer to the truth.

Although practitioners quoted these works, there is virtually no record that they also observed the courses of heavenly bodies for the purpose of casting horoscopes. This art, therefore, did not help in stimulating astronomical activities but was merely absorbed into the underworld of Chinese divination practices.⁴¹

The pre-Tokugawa Japanese were interested in utilitarian and anthropocentric aspects of Chinese astrology; the application of fate calculation was the main attraction to people, not the theory itself.

The Buddhist *sukuyōji* early in the eleventh century began to predict solar and lunar eclipses on their own. The lunar eclipses were considered far less serious than the solar eclipses. The emperor was painfully embarrassed by an unforeseen eclipse, for he was not prepared to ward off the disaster it foretold. Non-occurrence of a predicted eclipse was regarded by the emperor as the result of exorcism and those responsible were rewarded. While the specialists of the Institute of Divination no longer had a direct contact with China, many Buddhist priests did. The *sukuyōji* lost their patronage after the first phase of Semiseclusion Era, largely because the samurai class had different tastes from those of the declining nobility, but also because they patronized the priests of New Buddhism instead. Many *sukuyōdō* practices survived by being absorbed into *onmyōdō*, along with indigenous elements, and thus were diffused throughout society. A new sort of activity in fate prediction arose

⁴¹ Nakayama, Shigeru. *A History of Japanese Astronomy. Chinese Background and Western Impact*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 62.

among the priests of New Buddhism in the second phase of the Era. It came from *gozan* monasteries, where the Book of Changes (Japanese, *Ekikyō*) was studied as one of the “outer canons” of Chinese classics, as distinguished from the “inner canons” of Buddhism. *Eki* divination, as it was called in Japan, reached its peak in the post-Semiseclosure Era time of civil wars, when Zen priests used it in their role as advisors to military leaders. The Ashigaka School gained a special status as a kind of professional training center for *eki* practitioners. Zen priests did not, however, confine themselves solely to *eki* methods but also used portent astrology to interpret unusual celestial and terrestrial phenomena.

During Chinese cultural Wave II (1401–1854), no significant influx of Chinese astrology occurred in Japan. There is no known instance of any Japanese specialists going to China to acquire knowledge of astrology. It rather was a time of spreading traditional divinatory practices and calendrical techniques into some localities outside Kyoto, continued interest in prognostications based on the calendar-almanac. That the interest in Chinese thought in these fields was not entirely lacking, is suggested by the appearance of the *Rekirin mondōshū* (Collection of Dialogues on the Calendar), by the court astrologer Kamo no Arikata in 1414. Devoted largely to prognostication in the *onmyōdō* tradition, the opening section, which makes brief references to Chinese cosmology, exhibits a strong Neo-Confucian flavour, transmitted presumably through the learning of Buddhist priests. A treatise titled *Hoki naiden* (“Ritual Implement Tradition”), which dealt with popular fortune-telling, was printed around 1612, and reprinted many times prior to isolation. This is regarded as the first printed book on astrology in Japan. It treats mainly calendrical annotations and prognostications, and is traditionally attributed to Abe no Seimei, the tenth-century court astrologer. The court astrologers were beginning to lose their traditional monopoly over the “sacred learning” of astrology. With the emergence of specialists outside Kyoto, the decline of competence and prestige of the calendrical office in Kyoto Institute of Divination was evident.

With the rise of competence in calendrical astronomy under Western Wave I (1543–1639) from the seventeenth century onward, its specialists were less and less interested in astrology and those concerned with various forms of divination were increasingly distancing themselves from astronomy. The eighteenth century gave impulses that eventually led to a shift away from traditional sciences toward Western science and technology, and many Japanese scholars grew dissatisfied with the traditional learning and divination, and outspoken criticism of astrology appeared. While Western scientific scholarship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought a new epistemology to Japan, and with it, a fundamental pattern of intellectual change, it certainly did not have the same effects on divination and magic. The notions of astrology, however, were still popularly accepted. In particular, ancient classics on portent astrology were highly esteemed as textbooks for military strategists. Even notable astronomer Nishimura Tōsato in the 18th century admitted the political utility of astrology, despite his general disbelief in it, on the grounds that “the ruler’s behavior is adjusted to what portent astrology tells him, and a faithful retainer remonstrates

with his lord under the pretext of signs in the heaven. Therefore astrology should not be entirely abandoned”.⁴²

Divination in the contemporary Japanese society

Not suprisingly, divination, oracles and astrological ideas of lucky and unlucky days continue to be an active element of Japanese folk religion (*minkan shinkō* or *minzoku shūkyō*) today. The popular folk religion in general was unstructured, with no set doctrines or organisation. One of the basic elements of folk religion is that it is concerned with life in the present, especially dealing with practical issues in people’s lives, and seeking to bring them good fortune and to deal directly with misfortunes. According to Ian Reader,

Divination practices [...] reflect an interest in speculating about what the future might hold rather than a belief in the overriding power of fate. Many people simply consider it best to play safe and take precautions against the possibility of bad luck, especially by confirming to customs and cultural traditions they will please those around them such as their parents, grandparents and ancestors.⁴³

The fortune telling and divination plays a major part in contemporary Japanese life, with oracles consulted before undertaking new projects, and with diviners conferred with about the correct day to start an enterprise or the best possible position for constructing a house. Certain directions (in particular, the north-east, known as the *kimon* or “devil’s gate”) are especially unlucky and to be avoided for the proposed orientation of the house, or when constructing a grave. This direction traditionally was believed to be favoured by a deity called *Daishogun*, an active manifestation of the deity *Taihakujin*, identified, in turn, with the planet Venus. A large number of Japanese also consult an almanac or a diviner for the most auspicious day for a wedding, also taking into account the zodiacal signs and the horoscopes for getting married. Many Japanese state that they take notice of lucky and unlucky days, that is called *rokuyō* system. Although the Japanese adhere to the seven-day week, many people still remain aware of the traditional six-day cycle, in which each day is classified in varying degrees of good and bad luck.⁴⁴ The luckiest day in this cycle is known as the *taian* (“great peace”) and is the best day for marriage and starting projects, while the unluckiest days, such as the *butsumetsu*

⁴² Inakayama, Shigeru. *A History of Japanese Astronomy. Chinese Background and Western Impact*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 54.

⁴³ Reader, Ian; Andreassen, Esben; Stefansson, Finn. *Japanese Religions. Past and Present*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993, p. 51. In his other works, Ian Reader clearly shows that many seemingly “folk” oriented beliefs, practices, and ritual processes are “intrinsic elements in the structure of Japanese Buddhism, rather than as anomalous external accretions”.

⁴⁴ Japan used a lunar calendar with six days from the 14th to 19th centuries, and although it changed to the solar (Gregorian) calendar system in 1873, the memories remained.

(“death of the Buddha”) clearly are not. People take a particular note of the unlucky years, the most notable of which are the age of 42 for men and 33 for women. Slips of paper called *omikuji* (divination slips or oracle lots) that predict one’s fortune can be acquired at shrines and temples alike on payment of a small fee, and are very popular at the beginning of New Year. Referring to Kōgan-ji temple in Tokyo, where Toge Nuki Jizō (Splinter-pulling Buddha), noted for its various healing abilities, is enshrined, E. Swanger describes the great demand for *omamori*, *ema*, and *fuda* (amulets, votive tablets and talismans). Being regarded as fortune-beckoning objects (*engimono*) or manifestations (*bushin*, *kesshin*) of the sacred entity enshrined at the temple or shrine, *omamori*, *ema*, and *fuda* are also related to the divinatory practices.⁴⁵

The fear of death and the dangers that may come from the spirits of the dead are expressed strongly in Shinto myths. They exist, too, in the folk religious world with the idea that the spirits of those who die sudden, premature or violent deaths and of those for whom no memorial services and rituals have been performed after death, will continue to exist in relationship with this world, but in an unhappy and angry way. There are many stories in Japanese folklore and from the past of malevolent spirits causing distress to the living by possessing them and causing illnesses, or by creating havoc in the environment. To counteract the threats posed by malevolent spirits, there were large numbers of diviners, who were believed to be able to contact the spirits of the dead, ascertain why they were angry and causing problems and, if necessary, to exorcise spirits from those whom they possessed. There are still large number of diviners and spirit mediums who ply their trade in Japan today, the best known of whom are called *itako*, the blind oracles at Mount Osore, or Mahikari, new religious movement that has become especially popular in the last years because of its spiritual healing practices.⁴⁶ Not by chance Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe in their anthropological study *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*, come to a penetrating conclusion that the magical, worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*) is a normative and central theme in the structure and framework of the traditional and new religious movements in Japan.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Swanger, Eugene R. A Preliminary Examination of the *omamori* Phenomenon. *Asian Folklore Studies*, (1981), 40(2): 237–53.

⁴⁶ Mahikari believes that many problems – diseases, misfortunes, spiritual problems – are caused by evil or unhappy spirits that possess and afflict the living. The central practice of Mahikari is known as *Maikari no waza* or *tekazashi*, the technique of purification, an exorcism, in which the members of this religion are believed to radiate, through their hands, a beam of pure light that comes from Su-God, the great deity of Mahikari, and is transmitted to them through a holy amulet that their receive upon joining Mahikari. In Mahikari, omens play an important role in the guidance of everyday life and often omens are regarded as a warning from an ancestor. See: Davis, Winston. *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980.

⁴⁷ Reader, Ian; Tanabe, George J. (eds.). *Practically Religious. Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, p. 14. Similar ideas were expressed by E. O. Reischauer and Marius E. Jansen, who state, that 70 or 80 percent of Japanese do not profess to believe in any religion, and most of the elements of religion are seen to be missing: there is no faithful affirmation of teachings that provide guidance of life. Japanese religio is less a matter of belief than it is of activity, ritual, and custom. (Reischauer,

Analysing the different types of divination existing in the contemporary Japan, Kentaro Suzuki distinguishes three types of modern diviners: the street fortune-tellers, the home fortune-tellers, and the touring fortune-teller, who appears for limited periods of time at special events.⁴⁸ What are the types of divination techniques utilized by the various contemporary fortune-tellers? Although objective statistical data is lacking, personal observation and a perusal of magazine articles suggest that palmistry (*tesō*) and physiognomy (*ninsō*) are overwhelmingly predominant in street fortune-telling. Next in popularity would be either Chinese augury or Eastern astrology. Eastern astrology (*shichū suimei* or *kyūsei jutsu*), which is based on a nine-star system, matches the client's date of birth (and occasionally the exact time of birth) against a special calendar to yield predictions concerning the client's fate and compatibility with others. Home fortune-telling, too, relies heavily on palmistry and Eastern astrology techniques. However, in this form of divination one also sees techniques of Western origin, such as tarot-card reading (*toranpu uranai*) and Western astrology. Another frequently observed technique is *seimei handan*, a form of fortune-telling based on the number of strokes in the Chinese characters of the client's name; practitioners often advise people on how to change their names in order to better their fortunes. *Kasō*, another method, predicts a family's fortunes based on the shape and arrangement of the family's house; this can influence construction or renovation.⁴⁹

Many weekly and monthly journals include columns by famous fortunetellers; columns that are based on Western astrology, and allow the reader to determine her fortune by simply referring to the zodiac sign under which she was born (young people in Japan today, almost without exception, know their birth signs). Every year appears the almanac that uses the *kyūsei jutsu* type of Eastern astrology to provide short fortunes for every day of the year according to each of the nine stars in the *kyūsei* system. Computer divination is a newer form of the art, and computer divination machines are found in game centers and shopping malls, and can read palms or compute fortunes on the basis of date and place of birth.

E. O.; Jansen, Marius O. *The Japanese Today: Changes and Continuity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 215) According to Toshimaro Ama, the Japanese generally lack an understanding of or desire to commit to a particular organized religion, oftentimes fusing Shinto, Christianity, and Buddhism into a hybrid form of spirituality. "Thus the majority of Japanese dislike revealed religion, not because they are uncomfortable with the teachings themselves, but because they lack the courage to find true meaning in life through such religions. [...] In this sense, being non-religious is an expression of self-protection against dealing with one's true self. [...] Many people are non-religious not because they have faith in the development of technology and a booming economy, nor because they believe in rationalization and materialism, but rather in the tradition of ancestral worship, which incorporated Buddhist rituals in order to supplement natural religion." (Toshimaro, Ama. *Why are the Japanese Non-religious? Japanese Spirituality: Being Non-Religious in a Religious Culture*. Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2005, pp. 9; 24)

⁴⁸ Suzuki, Kentaro. Divination in Contemporary Japan. A General Overview and an Analysis of Survey Results. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1995, 22/3–4, pp. 250–251.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 252–253.

In place of a conclusion: how to understand divination?

Accepting and conflating the dichotomies of science/religion and modernity/tradition, scholars of religion have rarely interrogated divination as a distinct feature of traditional religious activity. Tradition is never produced *ex nihilo*, but emerges precisely out of a conjunction of what is received from the past, and present aspirations of community. I consider tradition to be a primary form of culture, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others, society and history. That is, traditions themselves structure consciousness, history, and memories, they provide the representations through which actors came to understand their worlds. Being themselves constructed and modeled, traditions are models or “cultural patterns” (C. Geertz) for shaping the the life and also the forms of cultural memory.

The function of divination needs to be understood in its motivational context. Divination is motivated to the extent that information, whether spurious or true, will please a client. Early students of divinatory practices concluded that clients must be gullible, superstitious, illogical, or even “prelogical”, i.e., culturally immature. However, ethnographic studies do not confirm this, rather suggesting that a client seeks from the diviner the information upon which he can confidently act. He is seeking, in so doing, public credibility for his own course of action. Consistently with this motive, he should set aside any finding that he thinks would lead him into doubtful action and continue his consultations until they suggest a course that he can take with confidence. In this sense, the ultimate function of divination is the legitimation of the problematic decisions. The diviner’s findings are judged pragmatically and divination is universally concerned with practical problems, private or public. Divination is employed to discover the source of trouble in order to remove it, whether by sacrifice, countersorcery, or accusation and ordeal. The mind is turned to past events or hidden motives of the present time, however, and to the future – not to borrow trouble.

Such divination and fortune-telling assumes that there are set of laws governing the universe that human beings are subject to those laws, and that by knowing these laws one can predict one’s future or fate. Thus, the rational operations of the intellect were not sharply disconnected from what Westerners would call intuition, imagination, illumination, aesthetic perception, ethical commitment, or sensuous experience. Generally speaking, rather than taking divination’s irrationality as given, it is more fruitful to consider how the grounds for belief in prediction and divination in the ancient world differ from our own and the way in which their dissimilar ordering of knowledge might be related to another social, cultural, and even political context.

Evidently, besides its application to all aspects of secular life, divination also played its part in religious activities. Like the practice of medicine, it is both diagnostic and prescriptive, relating the personal and social past to the present and future. Like a drama and ritual, with which it shows remarkable affinities, divination can often be “read” as a social performance, as well as evaluated on the basis of its own written materials, whether esoteric manuals or simply worded oracles. The author also presumes that divinatory practices in traditional cultures offer a contrasting case to our positivistic organization of knowledge, illustrating the artificial, historically

specific nature of boundaries between knowledge and pseudo-knowledge, intellectual discipline and technical craft, science, and mysticism.

The author considers divination to be a unifying factor in Japanese religious life, and fortune-telling practices played an important role in mediating social tensions. Comparing several different traditional societies, George Park asserts that divination “has as its regular consequence the elimination of an important source of disorder in social relationships”.⁵⁰ The author’s assumption is that an analysis of divination will shed light not only on conceptions of cosmology and causality but also on values, logic, symbols, structures, and styles of discourse. It also illuminates questions of personal and political power, class and gender, social order and social conflict, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. When traditional fortune-tellers assert that their divine originators formulated a system of divination that imparted the knowledge of the past and the future, they never do so solely because they believe it, but also because such assertions confer value to their practice. The formulations of the origin, history, and nature of traditional divinatory practices and knowledge are meant to bestow self-confidence and self-respect and are the acts of self-creation.

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⁵⁰ Park, George. Divination and its Social Contexts. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1963, 93.2., p. 195.

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Typology and Origins of Divinatory Methods Practiced in Japan

I. Traditional Shinto methods

- futomani* – divination by the shoulder blade of a deer;
tsuji-ura – crossroads divination;
hashi-ura – bridge divination;
ashi-ura – foot divination;
ishi-ura – stone divination;
koto-ura – harp divination;
mi-kayu-ura – divination by gruel;
reimu – oracular dream;
takusen – utterances of an inspired medium (*miko*);
omikuji, ema – divination by slips or oracle lots in the temples and shrines;
toshi-ura – a form of New Year's divination used to foretell the fortunes of the coming year.

II. Methods derived from China

- kiboku* – divination by turtle shell;
onmyōdō, eki – *ying-yan* divination, based on the Book of Changes (*Yijing*, Jap. *Ekikyō*);
feng shui (Jap. *fūsui*) – geomancy, emphasizing good or bad directions (e.g. *kimon*);
tenmondō – Chinese astrology, based on *wu xing* (five elements, Jap. *gogyō*).

III. Methods derived from Indian Buddhism

- sukuyōdō* – horoscopic astrology that matches the client's date of birth.

IV. Contemporary methods

- toranpu uranai* – Western tarot-card reading;
omikuji, ema – divination by slips or oracle lots in the temples and shrines;
ninsō – physiognomy;
tesō – palmistry;

seimei handan – form of fortune-telling based on the number of strokes in the Chinese characters of the client's name;

shichū suimei or *kyūsei jutsu* – Eastern astrology, based on a nine-star system, matches the client's date of birth against a special calendar to yield predictions concerning the client's fate and compatibility with others;

kasō – prediction, based on the shape and arrangement of the family's house;

takusen – shamanistic and spiritualistic technics of blind or inspired oracles (*miko*);

rokuyō – “six days” calendar of lucky or unlucky days (e.g. *Butsumetsu, taian*).

Kopsavilkums

Šis raksts ir pārskats par zīlēšanas un astroloģijas neviennozīmīgo vēsturi Japānā. Rakstā mēģināts atbildēt uz vairākiem jautājumiem: kāda loma ir zīlēšanai tradicionālajā Japānas sabiedrībā kā vienai no seno zinību sistēmām? Kāda ir tās vieta tradicionālajā zinātnē un kosmoloģijā? Kādas bija tradicionālās zīlēšanas metodes Japānā? Kā zīlēšanas prakse bija saistīta ar Šinto un budistu pasaules uzskatu un reliģisko praksi? Kādus Indijas astroloģijas un zīlēšanas paņēmienus budistu mūki ieviesa Japānā? Kura no zīlēšanas formām ir nākusi no Ķīnas? Kura no mantiskajām sistēmām ir pārdzīvojuši laiku un pastāv vēl tagad un kāpēc? Raksta nolūks ir analizēt šo un citu tipoloģiski līdzīgo starpkultūru parādību hermeneitiskos aspektus no pētniecības metodoloģijas viedokļa. Šī pieeja var palīdzēt, analizējot lokālo zināšanu un kultūras transmisijas pētījumus Āzijā, sociālo kontroles sistēmu, kultūras normas, tradicionālās epistemoloģijas veidošanos. Pēc autora domām, nākotnes pareģošana ir bijusi svarīga sociālās spriedzes mazinātāja. Zīlēšanas vēsturisko izmaiņu analīze palīdz risināt dažus teorētiskus un metodoloģiskus Japānas sabiedrības jautājumus un ļauj secināt, ka zīlēšanas dominējošā funkcija ir jāsaprot tās motivācijas kontekstā.