

## Abstract

This qualitative research showcased a range of worldviews through in-depth interviews with contemporary Chinese astrologers in Hong Kong. Through the practitioners' practices and lived experience, the study shows the approach to astrology is marked as much by diversity as they are by individual worldviews.

In the regards to their work approach, the differences were shown due to their personal experience and understanding of the Chinese intellectual foundations such as *I Ching* 易經, that also extends into the understanding of the Chinese characters themselves. Various ways of understanding constitute a range of attitudes on fate. While most participants are of advocacy in human responsibility for free will, there was also one determinist. This result was seen to be due to the influences of the diverse culture or a mix of views in *tian ming* 天命. All these factors of different worldviews contribute to the distinct approach of Chinese astrologers' attitudes on fate, as well as the Chinese notion of fate, *ming yun* 命運.

Practitioners' approach varied with their worldviews that is a combination of both of their inner and outer experiences with the world. In the study, some of the societal worldviews were seen to be impacted not only by diverse culture, but also the disruption of astrology in the recent century. Chinese astrology is regarded as superstitious influenced by the colonialism and the contemporary intellectual history of modern China. The ambiguity of knowledge and history allows misinterpretations, misuse, and misunderstandings in some of the literature. Throughout the exploration, the research offers insights by placing contemporary practices and the voice of practitioners in the evolution in its wider cultural environment, contributing to a more holistic history.

The study completed 5 in-depth semi-structured interviews in Cantonese, Chinese, translated and transcribed in parallel with two approaches. Including simultaneous translations to English and verbatim transcriptions from Chinese to English. In this relatively small sample of my study, the attempt is to stay close in capturing deeper into the insider perspectives, understand the practice by examining the development of Chinese astrology through the practitioners' experiences. With thematic analysis, the research reconnected Chinese astrology as an expression of nature, revisited the concept of change and free will from *I Ching*, rediscovering the practices as a way of life that is continuing to evolve in modern times.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge my ancestors, my family lineage of astrology, and my people in recognition of their effort to conserve and research Chinese culture and astrology before me for thousands of years. Special thanks to the participants' trust in me. I could not have taken this journey without the collective, especially my grandfather Lee Fatman 李發文 and my father Lee Joi Tong 李再唐.

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In honor of the Lee's of Wong Jim lineage 鳳漸李氏 with grandpa's poem in the 1920s.

龍山騰紫氣

溪水映長庚

Ridge of the Dragon radiating purple Qi,

Gentle stream reflects Venus's grace in the twilight sky.

# An Examination of the Worldviews and Practices of Contemporary Chinese Astrologers

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## Part 1. Introduction

This study examines how the worldviews of contemporary Chinese astrologers impact on their practices through an investigation into their lived experiences and work approaches. Following Nicholas Campion, who investigates the astrology and popular religion of contemporary astrologers in the West, I decided to investigate the worldviews and practices of contemporary Chinese astrologers in the East, in particular in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> Thus this study explores the nature, meaning and use of Chinese astrology today, focussing on the extent to which that practitioner's lived experiences and personal beliefs impact their attitudes on the Chinese notion of fate, *ming* 命 or *ming yun* 命運.

As my main purpose is to promote understanding between Eastern and Western worldviews, this research is qualitative with a phenomenological perspective, focusing on giving a voice to Chinese astrologers' evolving human experiences and interpretations of the world. The intent is to provide access to how the culture of Chinese astronomy and astrology is developing by integrating the worldviews of practitioners with those of their Western contemporaries, thus expanding the discipline of cultural astronomy and astrology by revealing the Chinese way of knowing and understanding the cosmos. By valuing Chinese cosmological and intellectual foundations as equal to those of the West, I hope to rebalance the approaches as equal and create respect for the beauty of each other's knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

With consideration to the underlying theme of the concept of fate among the astrology community in Hong Kong, the research may also be indicative of practices in wider international Chinese astrology communities. This will illuminate the development of their worldviews in contemporary times, both personally and as a part of a collective.

### Chinese Astrology in Chinese Culture

In China, patterns in the sky were seen to reflect all forms on earth, including human affairs and fate, as early as the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>3</sup> The *I Ching* describes the relationship between these patterns (*xiang* 象) in the sky and interactions with the earth and humans in the first verse of the commentary: 'Xiang forming in the sky, and shapes 形 forming

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement* (Routledge, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Linda, Tuihai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Third (Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 182–83.

<sup>3</sup> Shuren 薄樹人 Bo, *Zhongguo Guxingtu* 中國古星圖, "Zhongguo Guxingtu Gaiyao" 中國古星圖概要, Chen Meidong 陳美東 (Shenyang: Liaoning Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1996), p. 1–27.

on earth, change [transformation] can be seen'.<sup>4</sup> These interactions of *xiang* and shapes suggested a natural order contributing to the Chinese cosmological view that points to a cultural continuity in present day Chinese astrology.

From an archaeological find dated 4510 BCE, astral symbols were found in a Neolithic tomb mirroring the furnishings in the space and the position of the deceased.<sup>5</sup> Star maps were used to set up a temporal-spatial coordinate to guide the person to their desired path in the cosmos.<sup>6</sup> This cosmological view reflects the conception of the Chinese notion of fate, *ming* 命, commonly understood as the 'cycle (yun 運) of fate (ming 命)', *ming yun* 命運.<sup>7</sup> In *ming yun*, *ming* represents the innate qualities of humans in the heavenly realm; *yun* indicates the interactions between the earthly realm and human realm that cycle within the natural order.

The natural order between Heaven and the Earth identifies the interrelationship of humans and the surrounding natural world through the model of the three realms of the universe: Heaven, *Tian* 天; Earth, *Di* 地; and Humans, *Ren* 人.<sup>8</sup> These three realms are regarded as an organic whole that is interconnected and self-generating.<sup>9</sup> The process is explained in the beginning of the *I Ching*, or *the Book of Changes* 易經, written in the Zhou Dynasty 周 (1046–256 BCE) by *Zhouyi* 周易.<sup>10</sup> The vision was later theorized in the *Tao Te Ching* 道德經, written by Lao Tzu 老子 in the Warring States Period 戰國 (475–221 BCE). Lao Tzu said, 'human rounding the way of earth, earth rounding the way of heaven, heaven rounding the way of life (*tao* 道), till the circle is full (*ziran* 自然)'. In this process, humans are seen to be responsible for

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<sup>4</sup> 周易 Zhouyi Confucius Commentary, '周易象傳繫辭上 Zhouyi Xiang Zhuan Xieci (Part 1)', 中國哲學書電子化計劃/Chinese Classics Text Digital Platform, v. 1 <<https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/xi-ci-shang/zhs>>. Original text '在天成象，在地成形，變化見矣'.

<sup>5</sup> David W. Pankenier, 'The Cosmic Center in Early China and Its Archaic Resonances', *Proceedings of the International Astronomical Union*, 7.S278 (2011), 298–307 (p. 305–6) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743921311012737>>.

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Wang, 'Patterns Above and Within: The Picture of the Turning Sphere and Medieval Chinese Astral Imagination', *Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, Books in Numbers: Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Harvard-Yenching Library*, 2007, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Ann Raphals, 'Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck in Chinese and Greek: A Comparative Semantic History', *Philosophy East and West*, 53.4 (2003), 537–74 (p. 552) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2003.0045>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Marie Chen, 'The Meaning of Te in the Tao Te Ching: An Examination of the Concept of Nature in Chinese Taoism', *Philosophy East and West*, 23.4 (1973), 457 (p. 463) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1397717>>.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), ii.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), p. 102.

rounding the way of the earth to correspond to the sky, seeking the path by unveiling the natural order of a full circle.<sup>11</sup> Within this cosmological view, individuals can achieve their fullest expression of natural authenticity, *ziran*, by taking the initiative to self-actualize through aligning with the natural order of the *tao*.<sup>12</sup> Astrology is a way to navigate this natural order by reading the patterns of *xiang* in the respective *ming yun*.

In Chinese astrology, the order of expression is built on an immense system of correlation-building and a level of resonance.<sup>13</sup> The system includes the use of principles such as *yin yang*, *wuxing* (five phases), and the eight trigrams.<sup>14</sup> These principles form the intellectual foundations of Chinese astrology, forming the basic terms, *ganzhi* 干支, for astrological calculations.<sup>15</sup> This system of correlation and *ganzhi* is used across a range of astrological practices such as *fengshui* and all kinds of fate calculations; they are also commonly used across occult traditions such as medicine and alchemy.<sup>16</sup>

The general practice of astrology involves a combination of astronomical observations and astrological calculations.<sup>17</sup> The interaction of the celestial and terrestrial were observed and calculated with the system of *ganzhi*, providing meanings to explain various phenomena and affairs.<sup>18</sup> As astronomical research was restricted to court astrologers, many schools of astrology in early China developed to rely heavily on computation rather than celestial observations, as with Ptolemaic astrology. In these astrological calculations, precise *ganzhi* terms are formed indicating positions within space and time in which people and events are located. *Ganzhi*, the ‘heavenly-stems and earthly-branch’ system, produced the lunar calendar with the sexagenary system, indicating seasonal changes, regulating rituals and agricultural traditions, and selecting auspicious directions and dates. *Ganzhi* has also become a language used not only for calculation, but also to interpret issues that concern a particular

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<sup>11</sup> 老子 Tzu Lao, *The Way of Life According to Laotzu Translated by Witter Bynner* (London: Lyrebird Press Ltd., 1972), v. 25. original text: 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然

<sup>12</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, p. 51–52.

<sup>13</sup> Louise Sandararajan, ‘Understanding Emotion in Chinese Culture: Thinking Through Psychology’, *Cham, Switzerland: Springer*, 2015, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 2–4.

<sup>15</sup> Nakayama, ‘Characteristics of Chinese Astrology’, *Isis*, 57.4 (1966), 442–54 (p. 447–48).

<sup>16</sup> Leslie de Vries, ‘The Authentic Person as Ideal for the Late Ming Dynasty Physician: Daoist Inner Alchemy in Zhang Jiebin’s Commentary on the Huangdi Neijing’, *Synthesis Philosophica*, 2014, 63–82 (p. 63–80).

<sup>17</sup> Nakayama, ‘Characteristics of Chinese Astrology’, p. 446–47.

<sup>18</sup> Nakayama, ‘Characteristics of Chinese Astrology’, p. 447.

time, place, and person. The computation has become essential in the development of Chinese astrology, carrying a significant role in understanding *ming yun*.<sup>19</sup>

The character *ming* was seen earliest in the term *shou ming yu tian* 受命於天.<sup>20</sup> Translated as ‘fate (*ming*) bestows from Heaven (*tian* 天)’, it first appeared on oracle bone inscriptions in the Shang Dynasty 商 (1675–1029 BCE).<sup>21</sup> The term indicated the worthiness of Chinese kingship or the Mandate of Heaven, *tian ming* 天命.<sup>22</sup> This universal sovereignty, bestowed from Heaven, empowered the king to understand celestial rhythms in managing human affairs. From the cosmological view of *ming* to its application in *tian ming*, astrology was heavily involved in bureaucratic activity, so the meaning of fate was also impacted by political rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> The order of the cosmos was used by the ancient empires as an instrument to elevate and legitimise the ruling system and its worldviews – cosmological views were leveraged to sustain the interests of the powerful.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout China’s history, the nature and the use of astrology was justified by the power relations of the society.<sup>25</sup> This formed a dynamic process of collective production and transformation of astrological practices.<sup>26</sup> Power relations can also be seen impacting attitudes towards astrology in the West although in different circumstances, as per Champion’s research.<sup>27</sup> The power of scientific sceptics and evangelical Christians disempowered astrology as a matter of superstition. The influences of these ideologies impacted the worldviews of astrologers and their attitudes towards astrology.<sup>28</sup> Ideologies and religion also play a major role in Chinese culture. The three major religious systems in China are Confucianism, Taoism

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<sup>19</sup> Nakayama, ‘Characteristics of Chinese Astrology’, pp. 448–49.

<sup>20</sup> Shuxian Ye, *A Mythological Approach to Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization* (Trans. Jing Hua), Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China’s Development Path (Singapore: Springer, 2022), p. 464.

<sup>21</sup> Ye, *A Mythological Approach to Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization* (Trans. Jing Hua), p. 464.

<sup>22</sup> David W. Pankenier, ‘The Cosmo-Political Background of Heaven’s Mandate’, *Early China*, 20 (1995), 121–76 (p. 121–23).

<sup>23</sup> David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139017466>>.

<sup>24</sup> Yuan Chen, ‘Legitimation Discourse and the Theory of the Five Elements in Imperial China’, *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 44.1 (2014), 325–64 (p. 325–29) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/sys.2014.0000>>.

<sup>25</sup> Pankenier, ‘The Cosmic Center in Early China and Its Archaic Resonances’, p. 298–304.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Needham, ‘Astronomy in Ancient and Medieval China’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series A, Mathematical and Physical Sciences*, 276 (1974), pp. 67–69.

<sup>27</sup> Champion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*.

<sup>28</sup> Champion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions*, p. 11.

and Buddhism.<sup>29</sup> They all share the same cosmological view that focuses on the present instead of future salvation, and astrology is included in a diversity of religious expression.

The range of worldviews expand along with human understandings of the universe and the world, contributing to evolving attitudes on astrology and fate. As Karl Jaspers explained in the book *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, a worldview is ‘something total and universal at the same time. [...] They [The worldviews] are... the point of view of the subject, as experiences, forces, feelings and from the point of view of the object, as worlds which have been moulded in an objective and concrete way’.<sup>30</sup> This study aims to explore attitudes on fate from the evolving worldviews and astrological practices of our present times.

### Chinese Astrology in Recent History

In contemporary times, Chinese astrology is widely practiced in Chinese communities although there is still hostility against the practice as superstitious. Its development was disrupted, mainly due to internalized colonialism in the institutions and the abolishment of the practice in mainland China in the mid-1940s.<sup>31</sup> Even so, the practice of cosmic correspondences is still crucial in contemporary Chinese lives and it continues to develop as a practice in periphery cities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and other international Chinese communities.

Due to the abolishment of most ancient traditions, insufficient preservation and conservation has resulted in fragmentation in the understanding of the traditions of astrology in mainland China. The idea of astrology has been heavily misused and commercialised in recent times,<sup>32</sup> leading to multiple crackdowns in the PRC that hinder the cultural development of the tradition in the mainland.<sup>33</sup> Under the law of ‘feudal superstition’ in the PRC, astrology is

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<sup>29</sup> Donald S. Lopez, *Religions of China in Practice*, Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Gesamtausgabe 1/6: Psychologie Der Weltanschauungen (Karl Jaspers Gesamtausgabe)*, Oliver Immel (United Kingdom: Schwabe Velagsgruppe AG Schwabe Verlag, 2019), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> ‘1949-1999: Fifty Years of Progress in China’s Human Rights’ <[http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/zt/rqwt/200607/t20060726\\_2413631.htm](http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/zt/rqwt/200607/t20060726_2413631.htm)> [accessed 18 October 2023].

<sup>32</sup> Xinrou Shu, “‘Psychics Slut-Shamed Me’: The Rise of Astrology Apps in China”, *South China Morning Post*, 2023 <<https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3236118/he-just-not-me-ill-ask-psychic-young-people-china-turn-astrology-apps-amid-uncertainty>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

<sup>33</sup> Weilun Soon, ‘China Is Cracking down on Celeb Gossip and “feudal Superstitions” to Keep Citizens from Misbehaving during Chinese New Year and the Olympics’, *Business Insider*



still condemned even though some cultural aspects are accepted for inclusion in the latest intangible cultural heritage list.<sup>34</sup> Cosmological myths such as the legend of Nuwa 女媧, along with over 180 traditions, are considered a form of intangible cultural assets.<sup>35</sup> Classics such as the *I Ching* and *Tao Te Ching* are recognized under Confucius, while some festivities, such as the moon festival, are considered to be a form of ethnic culture. In spite of the selected preservation, the traditions have been preserved, practiced, and developed more holistically in periphery cities such as Hong Kong and the international Chinese communities till the present time.

During the civil wars in mainland China in the 1940s, astrologers fled to periphery cities like Hong Kong to seek a new life.<sup>36</sup> In colonial Hong Kong, ruled by the British empire, the people and their traditions were considered to be 'native' or 'oriental' in the eyes of the West.<sup>37</sup> During this time, society changed structurally under scrutiny of western ideologies, from the use of the land to the roads, from the naming of places to the celebration of festivities. Even though colonialism resulted in a certain degree of cultural fragmentation, traditions were still practiced rigorously among the locals.<sup>38</sup> Despite colonial suppression, astrologers continued to work, research, and write, making a living and trying to support the community in their own ways. One example is the revision of the traditional yearly lunar calendars, the 'book of winning for all or *Tung Sing* 通勝', with an additional section translating simple English words with Chinese pronunciations.<sup>39</sup> Like all other professions, astrology strived to survive through the times. In present times, it has become not only a traditional heritage but has also rejuvenated among the younger generation. Astrology is seen in the sectors of finance to the arts, from pop culture to fashion, as people look for personal meaning and expression

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<<https://www.businessinsider.com/china-cracks-down-celeb-gossip-feudal-superstitions-new-year-olympics-2022-1>>.

<sup>34</sup> Ziying You, 'Conflicts over Local Beliefs: "Feudal Superstitions" as Intangible Cultural Heritage in Contemporary China', *Asian Ethnology*, The College of Wooster Open Works, 79 (2020), 137–59 (p. 138).

<sup>35</sup> '中華人民共和國非物質文化遺產法--知識產權--人民網'

<<http://ip.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2019/0704/c136672-31214011.html>>.

<sup>36</sup> 'Chinese Civil War | Summary, Causes, & Results | Britannica'

<<https://www.britannica.com/event/Chinese-Civil-War>>.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia Lim, *Forgotten Souls: A Social History of the Hong Kong Cemetery* (Hong Kong University Press, 2011), chap. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Elaine Yu, 'A New Feng Shui Cycle Starts Soon and Distressed Financial Traders Are All In', *Wall Street Journal*, 3 February 2023, Page One <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/feng-shui-finance-markets-hong-kong-11675441220>>.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Palmer, *T'ung Shu: The Ancient Chinese Almanac* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986).

through astrology.<sup>40</sup> A range of new Chinese astrologers have emerged as individual practitioners. My study is a curiosity in how it explores the impact of the practitioners' backgrounds and worldviews on their work approaches and attitudes to fate. It explores both collective and individual experience, investigating the way culture and beliefs get into the equation of initiating change in their own lives.

## Part 2: Methodology

### Decolonizing Methodologies

Colonization in 'decolonization' usually means Eurocentric. It involves one dominant group regarding the other as less worthy, in addition to the suppression imposed by dominant ideologies such as imperialism.<sup>41</sup> The dominant group takes control of land, languages, resources, cultures and so on from the other, resulting in fragmentation of Indigenous histories and cultures.<sup>42</sup>

Even today, mainstream academic knowledge and methodologies in Hong Kong are based on disciplines primarily rooted in the Eurocentric understanding of the world. Edward Said regarded this process of disregarding the worldviews of the 'Other' as one that is endorsed by institutions. He described the Western worldview as 'make[ing] statements about it [the Orient], authorising views of it, describing it...' These perspectives 'share genealogical foundations in various classical and Enlightenment philosophies' which are indifferent to other beliefs or knowledge systems.<sup>43</sup>

Richard Evans mentioned a methodology that is useful in decolonizing information, it is to identify evidence and fact, and they should not be confused.<sup>44</sup> He remarked that, 'history is not just about events; it is about many aspects of the past...'.<sup>45</sup> The way the historians use documents as facts or as evidence to establish a larger pattern is therefore crucial to be identified. Although there are still 'traditional' scholars who dismiss the lived experience of the Chinese people in retelling their history, there are also contemporary scholars

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<sup>40</sup> Kriti Nayyar, 'Checkout All the Sneakers Celebrating the Year of the Dragon 2024', *Lifestyle Asia Hong Kong*, 2023 <<https://www.lifestyleasia.com/hk/style/fashion/all-the-sneakers-celebrating-the-year-of-the-dragon-2024/>>.

<sup>41</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p. 23–28.

<sup>42</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p. 28–31.

<sup>43</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p. 74–77.

<sup>44</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), chap. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Evans, *In Defense of History*, p. 68–69.

who are reflexive in their positionality writing on culturally sensitive topics, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, David Pankenier, and Nicholas Campion.

To decolonize methodologies is to restore indigenous ways of knowing that are connected with broader concepts of inclusion and equity.<sup>46</sup> The study aims to use the approach of the insider as researcher to take up the role of a bridge between cultures – to use the ‘insider-outsider position’ suggested by Jo Pearson to engage in the process of ‘going native in reverse’, to be in relation with the community in an attempt to explore, restore, and create the known and unknown together.<sup>47</sup>

### Reflexivity

The research idea came from my personal experience as a Chinese grew up in a family with generations of Chinese astrologers. My insider background allows me to ponder on how astrologers’ perspectives impact the practice, in particular the concepts of individual fate, *Ming*.

I recognize myself as belonging partly to the world of Chinese astrology, partly a Chinese woman who was born and raised in a British colony, and partly a person who currently resides in the Hong Kong SAR. As Pearson remarks, ‘objectivity as an absolute cannot exist... especially research that involves people, will always have some effect on the researcher and will always be filtered by researchers’ own subjective views.’ In maintaining the insider-outsider perspective, I choose to be self-reflexive, negotiating between the two roles in providing an in-depth understanding that is ethical and informative.<sup>48</sup>

As an insider and a researcher, it is important to avoid generalisation of the culture in the process. The study aims to avoid the pitfalls of reducing theories of the Chinese notion of fate, or projecting one tradition on another, or generalising the development through different times, place, and contexts. Due to the vast amount of knowledge and experiences involved in Chinese culture and history, the paper focuses on the concept of fate before the systemized philosophical and religious discussion in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). With this particular discussion being a separate discourse, this study focuses on the naturalistic view of fate in Chinese astrology that demonstrates the flow of changes in the realm of *ming yun*.

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<sup>46</sup> Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’, 1 (2012), 1–40.

<sup>47</sup> Jo Pearson, “Going Native in Reverse”: The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca’, *Nova Religio*, 5.1 (2001), 52–63 (p. 61) <<https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2001.5.1.52>>.

<sup>48</sup> Pearson, “Going Native in Reverse”: The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca’, p. 58–61.

## Interview Methodology

A qualitative research method is used, including 5 semi-structured interviews.<sup>49</sup> I looked for practitioners with over 20 years of experience in Chinese astrology, while not requiring that they be professional astrologers. In my study, 3 are currently professional astrologers and 2 are not. All of the participants are Chinese in ethnicity, 3 are male and 2 are female. I decided to follow the recommendation of Hesse-Biber and Leavy, to engage in a 'meaning-making partnership' with the interviewees, in an attempt to co-create a 'knowledge producing conversation'.<sup>50</sup> The interview questions are open-ended, and participants spoke in the language they were most comfortable with. The setup of the interviews was a personal choice of in person or on Zoom, allowing ease and sharing of their natural settings.<sup>51</sup> Each interview was approximately an hour and a half in the language of Cantonese Chinese. All data was collected in the form of voice and video recordings for transcription, and all translations were done by me personally.

I combined two approaches to translating the transcriptions of the interviews.<sup>52</sup> The first approach was a translation and transcription produced simultaneously in English; the second was a verbatim transcription in Chinese that was translated into English for textual analysis in support of the first approach.<sup>53</sup> Both approaches were applied in parallel to form a more holistic data collection.

With the relatively small sample of participants representing a broader population, the data is analysed with an interpretive phenomenological approach. To follow Edmond Husserl, I decided to use phenomenology as an approach to 'go back to the things themselves', to understand from the participants' perspective.<sup>54</sup> By understanding the interviewees' personal experiences and work, the study analyses narratives and themes to find out the factors that are involved in or influence their worldviews and practices.<sup>55</sup> This approach allowed me to be in relation with interviewees, allowing the data to develop and speak for itself.

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<sup>49</sup> Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods* (SAGE, 2020), p. 166–67.

<sup>50</sup> S Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), p. 128.

<sup>51</sup> Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, p. 294–95.

<sup>53</sup> Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, p. 291–92.

<sup>54</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2001), ii, p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, p. 288.

## Methodology of Chinese Characters

The study attempts to innovate a qualitative methodology, inspired by art-based engagement ethnography, in the use of Chinese characters as a non-traditional data source, allowing the analysis to be closer to the insider perspective visually and culturally.<sup>56</sup> Reclaiming the visual, historical, and cultural aspects of the characters enabled me to explore the way the choice of character can be used as a form of data for research. It also facilitated a different epistemological vantage point in the culturally sensitive research of the Chinese notion of fate.

In early China, cosmic parallelism applied in astrology was also applied to character formation.<sup>57</sup> Shapes of the characters also evolved from *xiang*, and they are called the xiang-shaped characters 象形文字. Chinese characters were systematically developed in oracle bone inscriptions during the Shang Dynasty, and transformed into modern fonts over time.<sup>58</sup> While most of the origins of the characters can still be found in the ancient Chinese lexicon *Shuo wen jie zi* 说文解字 (100–121 BCE), there are an additional 60,000-plus new characters included in contemporary Chinese dictionaries.<sup>59</sup>

Chinese characters are not alphabetic and so they often carry multiple and subtle meanings that correlate with nature, culture, and sound; sometimes they are related to the shapes or textures of objects.<sup>60</sup> The characters evolved from pictographic symbols to modern characters that are indicative or sometimes semantic compounds.<sup>61</sup> Mark Federman said, '...the medium of language extends our thoughts from within our mind out to others... since our thoughts are the results of our individual sensory experience...'.<sup>62</sup> Chinese characters and language also play a role in the extension of the ways of knowing in Chinese culture. The collection of characters accumulated along with human experiences in historical processes; as a result, each character carries a piece of history that is told or untold.

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<sup>56</sup> Suzanne Goopy and Anusha Kassan, 'Arts-Based Engagement Ethnography: An Approach for Making Research Engaging and Knowledge Transferable When Working With Harder-to-Reach Communities', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18 (2019), 160940691882042.

<sup>57</sup> 老子 Lao Tzu, 'Tao Te Ching - Translated by J. Legge', v. 1 <<https://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/taote.htm>> .

<sup>58</sup> Hye K. Pae, 'Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Writing Systems: All East-Asian but Different Scripts', in *Script Effects as the Hidden Drive of the Mind, Cognition, and Culture*, by Hye K. Pae, Literacy Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), xxi, 71–105 (p. 74) <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55152-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55152-0_5)>.

<sup>59</sup> Wendan Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy* (University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*, p. 73–83.

<sup>61</sup> Geng Li, *Fate Calculation Experts: Diviners Seeking Legitimation in Contemporary China* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), Asian Anthropologies Book 9, p. 77.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Federman, 'What Is the Meaning of The Medium Is the Message?', *Citeseer*, 2004.

The understanding of the characters can be imaginative, personal, or even abstract, on top of the standard definition. One example is the character of fate, *ming* 命 (Fig. 1). Visually it is a picture composed of a person kneeling under a triangular mouth in the sky. Since the understanding of this mouth can vary according to each person's differing worldview, it provides a structure that allows space for imagination. In my study, Chinese characters are used as a form of cultural probe for the research. Like art, characters can lead to a deeper understanding of the psyche of the interviewee, and can also lead to non-verbal realms. The use of Chinese characters also involves an insider-outsider position in co-creating knowledge, as Pearson suggested in *Going Native in Reverse*. This positionality can lead to known or unknown territory, both of the researcher and the researched community.<sup>63</sup>

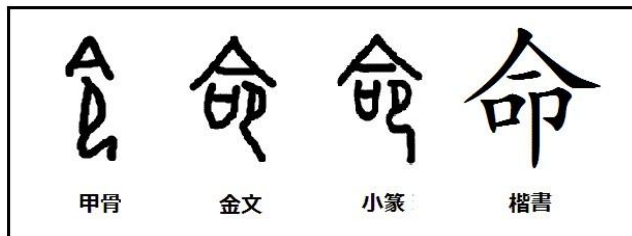


Fig.1 the evolution of the character 'ming' in the order from Oracle Bone Characters in Shang Dynasty to modern times (left to right).<sup>64</sup>

### Part 3: Literature

#### What is Culture?

The idea of culture evolves with time along with the human understanding of the world. Raymond Williams suggested that culture separates humans from nature with civilisation and the arts. He points out that culture exists in every society and every mind, not exclusively within an elite minority.<sup>65</sup> Eagleton further transformed the idea of culture into a holistic one, bringing it back to an expression of nature, a way of life, a civilisation and the arts.

<sup>63</sup> Pearson, "Going Native in Reverse": The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca', p. 59.

<sup>64</sup> 白扇 Hakusen, *Evolution of Chinese Character 'Ming'*, 2016, photograph, <<https://asia-allinone.blogspot.com/2016/12/p650.html>>.

<sup>65</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings (Edited by Jim Mcguigan)', 1958, p. 1–3.

This post-modern approach describes culture as what ‘we do to the world and what it does to us’.<sup>66</sup> It is considered to be distinct and possibly even opposed to the idea of ‘civility’. Eagleton commented that culture cannot be generalised as a grand narrative of human self-development or to define what normative is.<sup>67</sup> With its nature of plurality, distinct cultures develop subcultures that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Raymond Williams commented, cultures of any growing society are ‘made and remade in every individual mind’, and they evolve with the worldviews of the collective.<sup>68</sup>

The relationship between nature and culture in the context of the Ontological Turn in anthropology can be understood as an expression of nature.<sup>69</sup> In this approach, nature is a constant, and culture is regarded as the viewpoint that takes various positions in experiencing it. In the context of astrology, the observation of the celestial phenomenon is a constant. Astrology is nature, experienced and interpreted from various positions. These positions form different traditions of astrology across the world. Each of these traditions branches out into different viewpoints due to differences in ideologies, forming various schools of astrological cultures. Culture therefore serves as a framework of reference for our understanding of a particular nation; as Eagleton commented, it ‘is the unconscious verso of the recto of civilized life, the taken-for-granted beliefs and predilections which must be dimly present for us to be able to act at all. It is what comes naturally, bred in the bone rather than conceived by the brain’.<sup>70</sup>

### What is Astrology?

There are many approaches to astrology. Margaret Hone noted, ‘it is not easy to formulate a definition to suit all...’, and it is ‘a unique system of interpretation of the correlation of planetary action in human experience’.<sup>71</sup> Many definitions in the West attempt to categorize it as one of the sciences. Astrology is like *xiang* in the *I Ching* or the Buddhist parable of the blind man and the elephant in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra 大般涅槃經, it is so big that it takes a

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<sup>66</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, ‘Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings (Edited by Jim McGuigan)’, p. 93.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Hobraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Margaret Hone, *The Modern Text Book of Astrology* (Romford Essex: L.N. Fowler, 1951), p. 16.

lot of information and imagination to comprehend.<sup>72</sup> Dennis Elwell commented that, ‘it is big enough to accommodate many complementary and even contradictory opinions’, and ‘it can mean different things to different people’.<sup>73</sup>

With the universal theme of nature as a constant, astrology can be defined as an expression of nature. Dane Rudhyar said it ‘has no more meaning than algebra. It measures relationships between symbols whose correctness is entirely a matter of convention and does not enter into the problems involved... moving celestial bodies are like the realm of logical propositions... both are purely formal, symbolical, and conventional’.<sup>74</sup> As cultures formed traditions according to their own local theories, cosmologies and philosophies, astrology expressed nature in different languages. Patrick Curry defined astrology inclusively as ‘the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth’.<sup>75</sup> Various traditions developed, different not only epistemologically but also ontologically.<sup>76</sup> They also influence the experience phenomenologically and in turn impact the way practitioners imagine and interpret the phenomena.

The term ‘astrology’ was defined by Ptolemy in *Tetrabiblos* as a ‘means of prediction through astronomy... whereby we apprehend the aspects of the movements of sun, moon and stars in relation to each other as they occur from time to time; the second is that in which by means of the natural character of these aspects themselves we investigate the changes that they bring about in that which they surround’.<sup>77</sup> Astrology has thrived since the times of Plato in the West until it was discouraged by sceptics of science and religion in the Enlightenment period. Despite being viewed as form of superstition, astrology remains to be familiar part of popular culture in the contemporary times.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> ‘盲人摸象 Idiom Blind Man and the Elephant’, *National Academy for Educational Research 國家教育研究院教育部成語典* <<https://dict.idioms.moe.edu.tw/idiomView.jsp?ID=320&webMd=2&la=0>>.

<sup>73</sup> Dennis Elwell, ‘Astrology: An Alternative Reality’, *The Astrological Journal*, XXVIII.4 (1986), 143–51 (p. 143).

<sup>74</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Personality* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 48.

<sup>75</sup> Patrick Curry, *The Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, ‘Astrology’ in Boyd, Kelly (ed.) (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), II, p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Hobraad and Pederson, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*.

<sup>77</sup> *Tetrabiblos*, trans. E.E. Robbins (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1930), I.1, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 1–2.



Meanwhile, astrology in China was based on nature, but heavily influenced by politics and religion.<sup>79</sup> It is important to note that Chinese astrology involves not only celestial motions, but also the observation and participation of the terrestrial phenomena as a whole. As Levy Bruhl described in the law of participation, human beings are a part of this cosmic drama, and participation is an event that is 'localized in space and time, or better said which has its own space and time'.<sup>80</sup> This concept of the here and now was also suggested by Clive Ruggles as one of the characteristics of astrology among indigenous communities, who believed in the direct interconnectedness of the universe.<sup>81</sup> Given Levy-Bruhl lived at a time when decolonization was not common, I choose to look beyond the derogatory term of 'primitive' in his book title, citing him based on his well-articulated on participation. Levy Bruhl described it precisely as something felt in the body before it becomes a thought, and with participation, 'one lives in two world... the natural world is imposed on them...the supernatural world, is revealed to them'.<sup>82</sup>

### Fate in the West

In Greek classical times, theories of fate were written by Homer, Plato (424–348 BCE), Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and the Stoics, influencing debates on fate and astrology ever since.<sup>83</sup> The Greek term for fate was *Moirai*. Mircea Eliade called it 'a symbol of the thread of life... fate, temporality, and death... the ideas of cycle...'.<sup>84</sup> Richard Onians regarded fate as a 'binding process on the part of the powers determining man's fate'.<sup>85</sup> While Eliade would agree that fate was the work of gods, 'every world... was either created directly by the gods or was consecrated, hence cosmicized...'.<sup>86</sup> Given that fate was understood as god's plan, destiny was referred to as the 'return to origins' by Eliade.<sup>87</sup> The idea of *Moirai* also involved another term – *Ananke* – meaning constraint, necessity; the meaning was expanded by Plato and Aristotle as

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<sup>79</sup> Pankenier, 'The Cosmo-Political Background of Heaven's Mandate'.

<sup>80</sup> Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality Trans. Peter Rivere* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), p. 59.

<sup>81</sup> Clive Ruggles, *An Encyclopaedia of Cosmologies and Myth* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2005), p. 27.

<sup>82</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality Trans. Peter Rivere*, p. 139.

<sup>83</sup> Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), p. 2–3.

<sup>84</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (A Harvest Book Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. New York, 1987), p. 156.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 349.

<sup>86</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, p. 64.

<sup>87</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (Harper and Row, 1968), p. 34–36.

the logical and necessary results of earlier actions, indicating the force of cause and effect in the way the world was constructed, as explained by J.O. Urmson.<sup>88</sup>

In contemporary times, the term fate has often been mixed up with the terms fatalism and determinism. Fate as a belief system was expressed as fatalism in Stoicism, a fatalism that indicates a future that is fixed and not necessarily due to causality.<sup>89</sup> Determinism indicates a determined future that is entirely causal or governed by the laws of nature.<sup>90</sup> Regarding the Stoic theory, Michael Frede pointed out that free will was implied and the concept was phrased as 'what is up to us'.<sup>91</sup> Frede argued that fate includes personal belief about the source, while also considering its limitations upon the individual, the nature of these limitations, and the amount of freedom the person has in dealing with these limitations. On this note, the views on fate in western astrology is also seen to be evolving with the worldviews of the contemporary practitioners. Bernadette Brady found out that the present day astrologers believes an extent of free will while the 'outsider' literature are mostly featured as more deterministi.<sup>92</sup>

One example of determinism is Isaac Newton's law of motion and law of physics.<sup>93</sup> These laws set mathematical equations that use the past to calculate the future. This statistical determinism views the universe as a clockwork mechanism that is predictable and inevitable.<sup>94</sup> Free will, on the other hand, is a concept of autonomous human agency. According to William James, individuals form new thoughts and actions ranging from 'accidental and spontaneous variations' to a tendency of 'deliberately willed' ones.<sup>95</sup> The introduction of free will allowed a range of theories to develop, from deterministic to indeterministic, to different extents of free will. James explained the concept with the Two-Stage model suggested by John

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<sup>88</sup> J.O. Urmson, *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> Sophie Botros, 'Freedom, Causality, Fatalism and Early Stoic Philosophy', *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy*, 30.3 (1985), p. 280.

<sup>90</sup> Bob Doyle, 'Jamesian Free Will, The Two-Stage Model of William James', *William James Studies*, 5 (2010), 29 (p. 4).

<sup>91</sup> Michael Frede, *A Free Will - Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> Bernadette Brady, 'Theories of Fate Among Present Day Astrologers', *Trinity Saint David University of Wales*, 9 (2012), 55 (pp. 298–99).

<sup>93</sup> George Smith, 'Newton's Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica (Edward N. Zalta Ed.)', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2008) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/newton-principia/>>.

<sup>94</sup> Doyle, 'Jamesian Free Will, The Two-Stage Model of William James', p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Doyle, 'Jamesian Free Will, The Two-Stage Model of William James', p. 9.

Locke.<sup>96</sup> The model explained free will referring to the elements of chance and choice. The two were believed to be crucial in breaking the causal loop of a deterministic future.<sup>97</sup> In understanding the element of chance, the movements of atoms in modern Quantum mechanics come into play. Quantum mechanics shows that things do not necessarily happen following their expected path.<sup>98</sup> The view of indeterminism formed with the presence of chance, the element of quantum uncertainty. While indeterminism is also based on classic natural laws, chance can occur without a cause, something that classical mathematics cannot comprehend.

Within the elements of chance and choice, Locke remarked that ‘it is not the question whether the will be free, but the man be free’. He believed that the word ‘free’ applied to the individual and not to the ‘will’. Chance is not necessarily causally determined, and ‘will’ is a choice the individual makes. In a decision-making moment, the quantum uncertainty of chance provides the creative part to break the predictable causal loop. This randomness creates alternate possibilities, yet the determinist argues that it would threaten moral responsibilities. James argued that moral responsibilities are still confined in the element of choice, because choice was considered to be statistically determined by one’s experiences and worldviews. As Bob Dyle explained regarding James’ remark, ‘chance is not the direct cause of action, choice is what grants consent to one of them’.<sup>99</sup>

### Fate in Early China

The *I Ching* is one of the earliest classical texts in China that contains the concept of fate. It is a book of oracles from Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) that became source material for Taoism, Confucianism, and other systems.<sup>100</sup> Yiting Zou said it ‘discusses states of change and other correlations, evolutions and predictions’.<sup>101</sup> Composed of a set of binary symbol combinations of *yin* (--) and *yang* (-), it connects to chance operations. In Hellmut Wilhelm’s translation, the book is accompanied by explanatory poems.<sup>102</sup> The meanings of the character of ‘I’ in the title of *I Ching* gave a cryptic opening that greatly contributed to the Chinese

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<sup>96</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe* (1956: Dover Publications), p. 145.

<sup>97</sup> Doyle, ‘Jamesian Free Will, The Two-Stage Model of William James’, p. 6–8.

<sup>98</sup> Popper Karl and John C Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (Routledge, 1984), p. 540.

<sup>99</sup> Doyle, ‘Jamesian Free Will, The Two-Stage Model of William James’, p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> Yiting Zou, ‘The Image of the Change: From the I Ching to the Evolution of Chaos’, *Leonardo*, 48 (2015), 257–63 (p. 257).

<sup>101</sup> Zou, ‘The Image of the Change: From the I Ching to the Evolution of Chaos’, p. 257.

<sup>102</sup> Hellmut Wilhelm, *Change: 8 Lectures on the I Ching, Translated by Cary F. Baynes* (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1960), p. 3.

concept of fate. 'I' has two main meanings, the first being a lizard, a changeable chameleon that represents change, while the structure of the word represents celestial motions. 'I' is composed of a sun above and a moon below, meaning yang and yin and natural cyclicity.<sup>103</sup> The theory of change itself consists of 3 characteristics: the easy, the changing and the constant, as translated by Wilhelm.<sup>104</sup> The first, 'easy', describes the effortlessness of the celestial motions of the heavenly realm; the second, 'the changing', indicates there is power in change; thirdly, 'the constant', indicates change as a state is constant, implying the consistency and all-inclusiveness in 'Tao'. In the context of astrology, the three characters of the *I Ching* delineate the concept of change within fate. The heavenly realm is easy and innate; changes happen in the interactions of earthly and humanly realm. And humans are at the centre of events.<sup>105</sup>

The cosmos is participatory in the *Tao Te Ching*, with humans in the centre of events; in the *I Ching*, human participation becomes crucial in forming the changing patterns of fate, *ming yun*.<sup>106</sup> Levy-Bruhl described participation in the *participation mystique*: that if life is a dramatic stage, human beings are the actors creating characters in this cosmic drama.<sup>107</sup> Similarly in the *I Ching*, the individual's participation in the cosmic forces is akin to being an actor, while in the Chinese universe, they can also influence the direction of change.<sup>108</sup> This process is metaphorically described as 'riding the dragon' in the *I Ching* as translated by David Pankenier.<sup>109</sup> In 'riding the dragon', fate is not dictated by a higher power. It depends on the interactions of the three realms of the universe, while placing humans in a position of responsibility to make choices through engaging with cosmic forces. *Ming* carries the *I Ching* character of easy, and *yun* carries the character of changes. These changes contribute to a chance operation that is similar to the quantum chances mentioned by Karl and Eccles. This shows that the earliest Chinese concept of fate entails a spectrum of free will, while also indicating a fundamental indeterministic view of *ming yun*.

In early China, astrology was a guideline one can read off events from. In the pre-imperial era, the Chinese sky was oriented to the Celestial Pole, centred on the Northern Dipper.<sup>110</sup> The sky was divided into 28 lunar mansions, each region corresponding to an Earthly

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<sup>103</sup> Wilhelm, *Change: 8 Lectures on the I Ching*, p. 13–14.

<sup>104</sup> Wilhelm, *Change: 8 Lectures on the I Ching*, p. 15.

<sup>105</sup> Wilhelm, *Change: 8 Lectures on the I Ching*, p. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Wilhelm, *Change: 8 Lectures on the I Ching*, p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>108</sup> Wilhelm, *Change: 8 Lectures on the I Ching*, p. 23.

<sup>109</sup> Pankenier, 'The Cosmic Center in Early China and Its Archaic Resonances', p. 306.

<sup>110</sup> Pankenier, 'The Cosmic Center in Early China and Its Archaic Resonances', p. 305.

region.<sup>111</sup> The legitimacy of kingship, *tian ming*, was indicated by astronomical changes in relation to each other.<sup>112</sup> The earliest recorded war that reflected this concept was the succession of the Shang-Zhou Dynasty.<sup>113</sup> According to the *Hanshu*, '...when the prince of men is not virtuous, a reproach appears in Heaven or Earth... to inform him that he is not governing rightly...'.<sup>114</sup> Personal virtues were of importance in aligning oneself with the Heaven, *tien*. This understanding of *tien ming* in the pre-imperial times was a notion of *ming* that implied great political consequences representing Heaven's will; it also legitimised wars. Besides astronomical observations, astrological calculations were also used. Philosopher Zou Yan (305–240 BCE) developed the theory of dynastic transition using the cyclical progression of the Five elements.<sup>115</sup> Each element possesses a colour and virtue that indicated the particular dynasty's *ming yun*.<sup>116</sup> The revolving cycles of the elements coincide with the dynastic model of revolution, invoking elemental force to rightfully succeed in power.<sup>117</sup> This model of pre-imperial *tian ming* contributes to a deterministic view of *ming*.

The nature of change posed threats to the stability of power, and the notion of *tian ming* started to shift with the rise of the imperial period. In the beginning of the imperial times, the first emperor of Qin Shihuang leveraged cosmic parallelism to reinterpret the cosmos.<sup>118</sup> The orientation of the emperor was re-established to be the constant Pole; this arranged the cosmic order, placing him at the centre.<sup>119</sup> The intention to have unmovable power contributed to an imperial *tien ming* that was authoritarian and fatalistic. Qin enforced the emperor-centred universe, shifted the pre-imperial view of elemental force to absolute power.<sup>120</sup> The concepts of *tian ming* shift back and forth between deterministic and fatalistic as the dynastic successions continued in the imperial times.<sup>121</sup> These shifts gave rise to a range of

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<sup>111</sup> Christopher Cullen, 'Understanding the Planets in Ancient China: Prediction and Divination in the Wu Xing Zhan', *Early Science and Medicine*, 16.3 (2011), 218–51 (p. 223).

<sup>112</sup> Pankenier, 'The Cosmo-Political Background of Heaven's Mandate', p. 122–23.

<sup>113</sup> Pankenier, 'Astronomical Dates in Shang and Western Zhou', *Early China*, 7 (1981), 2–37 (p. 7–9).

<sup>114</sup> 司馬遷 Sima Qian, *History of the Former Han Dynasty (Trans. Homer H. Dubs)* (Baltimore: Waverly, 1938), p. 382.

<sup>115</sup> Sima, *History of the Former Han Dynasty*.

<sup>116</sup> 呂不韋 Lv Buwei, *春秋 Spring and Autumn Annals by Lord Lv* (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1985), p. 126–27.

<sup>117</sup> Yuan Chen, 'Legitimation Discourse and the Theory of the Five Elements in Imperial China', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 44.1 (2014), 325–64 (pp. 328–29) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/sys.2014.0000>>.

<sup>118</sup> Pankenier, 'The Cosmic Center in Early China and Its Archaic Resonances', p. 298–300.

<sup>119</sup> Pankenier, 'The Cosmic Center in Early China and Its Archaic Resonances', p. 298.

<sup>120</sup> Lanny B. Fields, 'THE CH'IN DYNASTY: LEGALISM AND CONFUCIANISM', *Journal of Asian History*, 1989, 26 (p. 1).

<sup>121</sup> Chen, 'Legitimation Discourse and the Theory of the Five Elements in Imperial China', p. 329.

philosophies associated with *ming*.<sup>122</sup> Various schools of thought such as Confucianism were established, justifying social hierarchies and codes of conduct.<sup>123</sup> Interpretation of the cosmic order became more than a symbol, it defended the State's duty instead of God's figure in the West. As a result, the authoritarian system influenced by the imperial *tian ming* restricted the free will of the individual to a certain extent, something that has continued to the present time.

## Part 4: Research

### Structure of the Research

The data of the research are outlined in four sections. The first section focuses on the worldviews surrounding the astrologers' grounding values, culture, and beliefs. In the second section, the research investigates the astrologer's practice and approach to discover their attitudes on fate. The third section explores religious and spiritual influences. Finally, the last section interprets the single character that participants chose to represent the essence of their attitudes on fate. The sections are categorised by referencing the four characteristics of a worldview identified by Karl Jaspers in his book, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*.<sup>124</sup> Since a worldview involves many implications, these characteristics are used as a conceptual map for the data analysis. The first is 'matter of life', concerning the grounding values of an individual; the second, 'the complex mix', referring to the lived experience that gets into the mix; the third, the 'individual and its world', referring to how worldviews impact the involvement of the individual lives; and the fourth, the 'claim and paradoxes', refers to possible conflicted worldviews, those Pearson referred to as 'hidden'.<sup>125</sup> For the purpose of the study, the characteristics are not ends in themselves but processes to be used to investigate into the worldviews, looking to analyse the vast range of factors and experiences in a more comprehensive way.

### Grounding Values, Cultures, and Beliefs

Referencing Nicholas Campion's research question on the reasons for belief among contemporary astrologers in the West, I began my interviews with the similar question

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<sup>122</sup> Raphals, 'Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck in Chinese and Greek: A Comparative Semantic History', p. 538.

<sup>123</sup> Elena Ziliotti, 'Questions for Hierarchical Confucianism', *Cambridge University Press, The Review of Politics: A Journal of Political Theory*, 2022, 329–49 (p. 329).

<sup>124</sup> Elena Paola and Carola Alessiato, 'What Is a Worldview?', *Danish Institute for International Studies*, 2022, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> Paola and Alessiato, 'What Is a Worldview?', p. 5–7.

of how they developed an interest in astrology, so as to investigate participants' grounding values and beliefs through their journey of becoming practitioners.<sup>126</sup> The three of the practitioners – Jay, Goldie and Si – were born and raised in Hong Kong; all grew up in families with astrologers. The remaining two, Tess and Stan, studied abroad in the UK and the US. Both grew up in families who were regular visitors of astrologers. Tess was born and raised in Malaysia and Stan was born in Hong Kong but was educated in the UK. Among all the participants, early exposure to astrology created a level of acceptance except for Stan. While family influence was evident among the interviewees, early exposure to diverse religions and spiritualities was revealed to have a significant impact on their worldviews. All participants were inclusive in their attitudes to world religions and spiritualities, although most of their personal beliefs are rooted in Eastern religions and spirituality, in particular Buddhism and Taoism.

Three interviewees, Jay, Si and Goldie, are from families of astrologers. Both Jay and Si are established practitioners in Hong Kong, while Goldie only works in private for friends and family. When I asked Jay how he started his astrology journey, he told me:

'My family lineage is from royal lines of the Tang Dynasty... our family has access to materials that have been passed on from the court along with the teachings of court astrologer Yang Junsong 楊筠松'. With the influences of ancient court astrologers on Jay's family, Jay started his interest and learning journey as a child. The experience was described as immersive, a family heritage that he was born into. He said, 'since I was little, my father would take me on hikes to teach me how to look at the landscapes. He would talk about astrology, history, and culture all the time, at home, with his friends, with his clients...'

Jay became a professional astrologer upon retirement with a sense of meaning and duty for his family heritage. Although he has always practiced astrology, he chose to build a career in the radio and television industry and established himself as a respectable practitioner in Buddhism and Taoism among Chinese communities. Astrology and spirituality are a big part of Jay's life, something that started with deep family influence.

Si, on the other hand, had a different journey Si was born from generations of astrologers, like Jay. When asked about how his interest started, Si said,

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<sup>126</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 188.

‘... From I was 4 or 5 years old, I started to observe my father's teachings when he talked with clients. Then when I reached 14 or 15 years of age, I became his apprentice. I was 19 years old when I established my own company to be a professional astrologer. It has now been 30 years’.

Starting as a professional astrologer in his late teens, Si quickly came to stardom, boosted by the Hong Kong entertainment industry in the 1990s. Si said, ‘I was the youngest *sifu* 師父 in Hong Kong, in China, and possibly internationally at the time’. Even though astrology is well accepted among Chinese communities, most *sifu* are older and male. *Sifu*, meaning ‘master or teacher’, is a common term for professional astrologers. It was rare for a younger person to be addressed as *sifu* in the 1990s. Si said he experienced prejudice in the public eye, that it took more than 10 years to break the mindset that only older people deserve to be addressed as a *sifu*. Si engaged in making astrology youthful and reachable by establishing a Chinese astrology magazine, going on TV, radio shows, and participating as an actor in movies in Hong Kong. This contributed to popularising Chinese astrology and also made him a local celebrity.

Goldie, on the other hand, did not consider herself a *sifu* even though the term has normalized in the past decades. Her interest started when she was small but she remains a very private practitioner. When I asked Goldie how she started, she said, ‘I was only 2 or 3 years old. My father would ask me to bring a little stool sitting next to him, watched as he worked with clients. As a child I rarely spoke, the only time I spoke was translating for him. He had an accent that not everyone understood, so I would listen and repeat to the clients. I was 9 years old when my father asked me to become an astrologer [chuckles]. My mother was there too. He saw [in the chart] that it would be an easier path for me... I said would let him know in a few years. I was 11 when he asked me the second time.’

Goldie’s interest started in childhood especially with her curiosity in the ideas of fate, she said, ‘I was born very rebellious and debated with my father a lot about traditions and matters of fate. I said to him, humans will win over heaven’. Goldie expressed that she believes in free will, and humans have the responsibility to live the best potential in their individual charts. To Goldie, astrology is a practice that comes with a lot of responsibility, culturally and spiritually. She said,

‘The year when I reached 11, I developed terrible headaches... No doctors knew what happened, so my father sent me to a shaman. Something supernatural happened that I



am forbidden to say. All I can say is that I have a different 'frequency' than others. My senses are more acute, like the 6th sense as people say? That was when he asked me the second time. This time, I told him I only wanted astrology for personal use... deep down, I felt it was not my duty as a girl. Being 'naive' is a blessing... you know, not having to know so much'.

Even though her father read the possibility in her chart, she chose not to engage with the idea mainly because she felt that the role of an astrologer was traditionally reserved for men. Goldie expressed that there has always been a metaphysical context underlying in her practice. She mentioned that compassion and spirituality is important for her to ground herself in her practices.

Interviewees Tess and Stan discovered astrology from their families, who were not astrologers but rather clients of astrologers. Tess is a professional astrologer in Hong Kong who has risen to fame in recent years. She is known for her passion across traditions and cultures in astrology, tarot and magic, with Chinese astrology as her core practice. Stan, although not a professional astrologer, has been practicing for almost 30 years. Both encountered astrology through family influences, yet they started to practice under different circumstances. When I asked Tess about how she started, she recalled,

'My parents used to bring me along in visiting Buddhist monasteries. One time, a chief monk approached us and told my parents that I was born extraordinary. He said, 'she is a reincarnated deity'. Then he urged my parents to nurture my spiritual side, and to teach me Buddhist prayers... as I became a teenager, he offered to teach me secret methodologies, including qigong, kungfu, meditation, prayers, and Chinese astrology'.

Tess's interest started young, her adventurous personality brought her to experiment cross-culturally. While her core practice is Chinese astrology, her current work consists of a range of different traditions including Malaysian magic. When asked about her learning journey, she said, 'My parents considered me too wild... they sent me to study abroad... I went to both the US and the UK... while studying, I was also exploring other trades in my free time; I learned tarot, western magic, energy work, divination, seance, western astrology... anything energy-related that you can think of, I have learned them all. Upon graduation, I found a job as a TV presenter in Taiwan while continuing to practise my skills as my side gig'.

For Tess, astrology started as one of her interests in the supernatural, which developed into her own blend of practices along with her multi-cultural background.

Stan grew up with the influence of a traditional Chinese family, but his interest did not start until he was an adult, when he was working as an architect in Hong Kong during the 1990s. When asked if he had thought about becoming a *sifu* in the supplementary question, he said, 'Some friends said I have done an excellent job reading their charts. However, astrology entails a lot of Chinese knowledge. And so, I never thought about that, I am a learner and only doing it for private purposes'. As he recalled his journey,

'Being in a traditional Chinese family, we had a lot of religious influences from Taoism and Buddhism, you know burn incense to deities and all. My family would seek guidance from divinations, rituals, prayers to deities and (Chinese) astrology. We do the usual animal zodiac and the yearly forecast chart readings. My mom would pray to the deities for superior results for my exams'.

Despite this, he said, 'it never occurred to me that astrology or fate was something I was remotely interested in growing up... I mean when I was studying in the UK, I did read Western astrology columns in the newspapers... about what a Cancer is like... the horoscope, it was curiosity. I started learning astrology with fengshui when I was working in Hong Kong'.

One account written of the streets of Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s is by John Carroll: 'Small Chinese shops sit comfortably on streets named after British royalty... Christianity and modern Western medicine coexist happily with traditional Chinese medicine, several hundred Chinese temples, a plethora of religious festivals and ceremonies, and a fervent belief in feng shui applied in even the most modern Western-style buildings...'.<sup>127</sup> Carroll's account reflects a perspective of the two forces underlying the culture of colonial Hong Kong, the first being, like young Stan, the phenomenon that some Chinese people value western cultures over the traditional Chinese. Westernized Chinese people and lifestyles were seen as more 'civilised' or royal, or as Raymond Williams remarked, as the elite minority.<sup>128</sup> The second one is the energy of 'Bruce Lee as method' as described by Daryl Maeda regarding

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<sup>127</sup> John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p. 6.

<sup>128</sup> Williams, 'Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings (Edited by Jim McGuigan)', p. 247.

those who stand up for Chinese cultural identity.<sup>129</sup> These two opposing forces created the unique sense of cultural identity in colonial Hong Kong. From a sceptic to a practitioner, Stan's journey shows the changing of the worldviews influenced by this unique blend of identity. He recalled the time when he first started as an architect,

'I was shocked to see so many feng shui objects in the individual cubicles at the office... a *qilun* here, a mirror there...[laugh]. I often joked around with this other younger colleague, laughed at how old-fashioned these 'uncles' were. Turned out, I accidentally saw a big piece of brass fengshui ornament underneath my friend's desk when we moved office. Not only that. I was surprised to see that I was actually the only one who did not have any fengshui arrangement around my desk'.

After nearly 30 years of practice, Stan admits that it is still hard for him to comprehend the practices. He said it takes a lot of experience and knowledge to understand the poetic element in astrology. Through the years, he has taken numerous courses, yet he thinks many are 'lying to make ends meet' and that the courses available are often without proper structure, knowledge, or experience. He says he currently relies on self-practice. However, the courses available are often without proper structure, knowledge, or experience. When I asked Stan about the level of interest in astrology in the context of his work in Hong Kong, he said,

'Many people on various levels in my line of work are believers. From architects, clients, construction contractors to the regular construction workers. There is a metaphysical context in our field. Regardless if they are Chinese or Westerners, most would participate in rituals, and that traditions are considered to be important... you can say that it is superstitious or a form of culture, but they are very specific when it comes to the auspicious dates, alignments and the way they engage into a project... But there are certainly a lot of supernatural stories in our field'.

From Stan's work experience, the impact of diverse cultures introduced by colonialism seems to be not linear. Diverse culture can be disruptive to the traditions, but the gap also allows other perspectives to arise. In an addition, it is also important to note that some worldviews of the practitioners have been subtly impacted by the traditions of ancient Chinese

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<sup>129</sup> Daryl Joji Maeda, 'Nomad of the Transpacific: Bruce Lee as Method', *American Quarterly*, 69.3 (2017), 741–61 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2017.0059>>.

imperialism. Si for example, in being suppressed by collective hierarchical thought when he first started because of his youthful age. Goldie internalised the role of a woman as submissive and believed being 'naive' was a blessing. These thoughts, such as the societal hierarchy and virtues of Confucius developed from imperial times, are still seen impacting some of the choices the practitioners make. With worldviews composed of a combination of both the old and the new, as well as the East and the West, each participant has their own unique blend that can take them in multiple directions.

This section started with curiosity similar to that in Campion's research as to whether western astrology is considered to be a belief.<sup>130</sup> In my study with Chinese astrologers, participants showed that their interest in astrology is also hard to classify as a belief or a single entity. It is an ingrained part of the Chinese way of life that is not a religion or an organized system, it is a mindset that integrated with their individual worldviews that is woven into the fabric of the society and their daily lives.

### **Astrology Practices and Work Approach**

A worldview has the power to shape the world of the practitioner while justifying its involvement in their lives and work. This second section analyses data referencing Jaspers' characteristics of the 'individual and its world'. Through an investigation into the participants' practices and approaches, I attempt to use the data as a justification of an attunement between correspondences of the individual's exterior and interior worlds. The question in this section started from enquiring into the way practitioners perceive their own practices, to the different approaches toward readings that are rooted in their views and attitudes on fate.

As each participant experiences Chinese astrology differently, they also described their own practice differently. This allows them to speak for themselves about their views, as with any other sub-culture, tribe, or society. Among the participants, the views ranged from astrology as a form of art to science, from mechanical to an order. Just as Dennis Elwell described astrology with the ancient parable of the blind man and the elephant, 'astrology can mean different things to different people'.

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<sup>130</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, chap. 8.

When I asked Jay how he describes his practice, he said, 'Astrology is *Xiang*, it is a holographic way of viewing the world, it's inclusive, creative and expansive... not just about reading books, calculating or memorizing'. He views astrology as a way to perceive and create, Jay said,

'It is a method that considers a combination of various areas. To read is to understand how they interact and relate with each other. *Xiang* of the sky of course is one of them. As well as the relationship between the heavenly qualities and the earthly qualities. The relationships of the directions and orientations. The particular timing and so on, everything is relevant. To read and to understand it is like art appreciation. It is more than just statistics, it requires experience, knowledge, abstract thinking and *chu ji* 觸機 [spark of resonance through senses]'.

To Jay, astrology is like art appreciation, it is trained yet it is also an innate way of appreciating the patterns of *xiang*. Much as how Eagleton described culture, it is an expression of nature that is 'bred in the bone'.<sup>131</sup> He added, 'An example being the ancient prophecy of the dragon in the ground and metal flying bird. At that time nobody would have guessed there are trains and planes now, but they described it as close as they could'. To Jay it is a matter of both having the skills and openness to see alternate possibilities beyond the patterns. He views predictions as communications, and a way to be in relation with people and things. Prescribing or balancing according with the situations read in the patterns. When I asked about his thoughts on predictions, he said,

'it is like different shades of black in ink wash painting. Some view it as it is, some might get a deeper sense of it. Some look at it with different perspectives and come to the same point. Just like the prophecy, layers of meanings require a keen eye and experience to see and put together a model. Or like Chinese medicine, you do not necessarily focus on healing the head when you have a headache. The natural order and the interactions do not spread out as paint by numbers, like counting, 1,2,3,4... It is an art of reading'.

This creative way of thinking is also shared by Stan's general view on astrology, although Stan's personal practice is more straightforward with his reading and prescriptions. Stan said, 'it is unlike Physics or Chemistry. The formulas in astrology cannot derive a straightforward answer. You can easily generate a chart with an app now, however, if you wish

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<sup>131</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 28.

to dissect and to understand it, it is a different story'. As Stan is currently learning Chinese medicine, he gave me an example to illustrate the point. He said,

'When a patient walks in, the diagnose has already begun. The way they walk, the energy on their face, all give a basic impression of the patient's condition. But of course, we also need the pulse diagnose 把脈 and other methods to be certain... astrology is even more abstract than feeling the quality of the pulse'. Stan said it is not easy to master because information is not always solid, that it could be beyond physical sensations.

He further described his own process as being similar to his work as an architect. He said, 'there is a lot of trial and error involved. We review and test new things constantly... that way, my experience sharpens, and they become one of the guidelines to solving problems in a practical way'.

In regard to prediction, Si described it from another angle. He said,

'Chinese astrology is a statistic in a big statistic, like a supercomputer using different data to see if the results are alike. I have done a lot of predictions before. I predicted the earthquake in Japan 2013, 911... Bin Laden's death, the crashes of the stock market, even beauty pageants... because history, people, the earth keeps changing, experiences are changing. Predictions won't be so 100% but it would be very very close'.

Si described astrology from the angle of the Western concept of statistics. It is less abstract but more focused on the materialised data. For Si, abstract thinking is seen to be involved in the way he reads the patterns. Throughout the conversation, he stressed the difference between *ming* and *yun*, as he said it is something people usually misunderstood. He explained that the changing of conditions and the people in *yun* can alter the results in many ways – predictions are seen to be made with a combination of statistical information and the various methods selected at the particular moment. Jay and Si use various methods depending on the moment with *chu ji* 觸機. *Chu ji*, as explained by Jay, is the 'on the moment blend of method' that is based on the participation of the astrologer. As Levy-Bruhl described participation as an event happens in the here and now that is 'localized in space and time', *chu ji* is one of the ways astrologers participate.<sup>132</sup> While there are also astrologers who use a single

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<sup>132</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality Trans. Peter Rivere*, p. 59.

method like Stan, astrological readings – especially *chu ji* – require in-the-moment participation of the astrologer. Jay said,

‘This tradition is used across the Chinese occult traditions of medicine, divination, astrology, and physiognomy 醫卜星相. It depends on the information and the way they stimulate and interact with the practitioner. Every reading is different. Forming a holographic like model in receiving and perceiving the information... *Chu ji* is like the concept of the Buddhist phenomenology, Yogacara Buddhism 轉識論, transforming knowledge into wisdom. To be relational to the client's experience and at the same time having the holographic model of the information formed. Patterns are not flat, not two-dimensional’.

In my study, practitioners’ various forms of participations shape their unique style in approaching their work. From information formation to the reading, analysis and prescription, participation is used on different levels in the process of reading. While not all astrologers in the study use *chu ji*, practitioners engage in participating in their own ways that is also localized in the here and now.

Goldie mentioned she uses her ‘6th sense’ most of the time before she actually reads into a chart. She feels the ebbs and flow in her ‘heart’ as a feeling or a sensation, as an impression formed, and she then decides whether or not she wants to engage into it. She mentioned her approach is to have the clarity of the ‘human heart’ 人心. Similarly, Tess also mentioned clarity. Her understanding of this clarity was described as the ‘clarity of the soul’. Her practice involving many traditions. However, she mentioned that her blueprint relies on the Chinese astrological chart even she would use various traditions and magic to support her sessions. When asked about her method, Tess said,

‘There is an order in everything... like reincarnation described in Buddhism. Engaging in seance is to use this method of cause and effect to get information in what happened in the past lives. Astrology is also a calculation of an order of cause and effect. Magic. I possess a quality in my chart with the ‘command from the heaven’. The heaven bestows me power to help humanity. I have a mission here on earth... I possess a stronger resonance than others. I meditate and do my spiritual work... these are important practices to be able to have clarity in the soul. With clarity one can become more sensitive to all that is happening around’.

Just as Levy-Bruhl suggested that the supernatural revealed itself as one participates, the metaphysical concept of the material world is evident among the participants

in different ways; however, each participant experiences differently. Each participant provided a unique angle. Their own metaphysical worldviews of the material world impact on their views on astrology as well. In the study, Tess's metaphysical view of astrology is on the spectrum at the more supernatural end, while Goldie, Jay and Stan are around the middle, and Si is on the more physical end. Si's more physical view is seen to be influenced by mainly Western ideas of understanding. When I asked Si on his views on astrology and his practice, he said,

'*I Ching* is like a supercomputer; it is a way of analysing. Chinese astrology holds the big data of thousands of years of human knowledge and experience, just as the way the West will use behavioural science, Chinese astrology is a big data within a big data'. Si views astrology as a field that is capable of evolving into a form of science. He said,

'In the latest Nobel peace prize, people were discussing questions on matter, the vibrations of matter. The vibrations of the magnetic field, atoms, materials, colours that could affect the health, emotions and other areas of human beings... If only we can dissect fengshui with science... even though not necessarily all can be proven. They are all interrelated. I believe it as a new form of science'.

Si believes science is the way to take Chinese astrology to a higher level in the scholarly sense. As much as science and the scholarly fields are traditionally western ways of knowing, the impact of diverse cultures is seen to be part of the worldviews of the participants. These Western ideas are revealed mostly in the way they describe astrology. In Si's description it is obvious that he leans on categorizing astrology in a scientific framework. Others such as Goldie and Tess also described astrology partly with the western idea of statistics. Goldie described astrology as 'mechanical', and Tess understands it is an 'order' derived by behavioural science. They both see astrology as a statistical 'cause and effect'. However, describing astrology puts the practice into the same class as other ways in analysing the world, as their personal understandings of astrology shows to be not necessarily westernized. When asked Goldie about how she defines astrology with the way she practices, she said,

'Astrology is to flow within the natural cycle of *tian ming*, we cannot go against the flow. *Ming* is like X-rays. I can see everything. It is no fun as it is like mechanics. It is statistics. But life is full of changes, and change is constant. The sky changes, faces changes, health conditions changes. I did not become a professional astrologer because it takes too much of my spiritual strength to manage the changes for the clients. Not everyone worth the energy'.



Goldie described astrology borrowing a partial western angle of statistics and mechanics; however, as with the other participants, her understanding of fate is still based on the traditions of Chinese cosmology. *Ming* to Goldie is the qualities that a person is born with; she referred it as the mechanical in the chart, while *yun* was not included as mechanical. She referred *yun* as 'life' – including all the correlations formed between the characters involved in the earthly and humanly interactions. Goldie described astrology with the help of western ideas and the physical, and her understanding of the participation of the astrologer and the individual as metaphysical. In her views on her own practice, she thinks there is an extent of free will due to the nature of change, but the chance of change in the human order can be limited by their own habitual patterns.

Tess's understanding of cause and effect is different from Goldie's – there is no human responsibility within choice. For Tess, collective human behaviour contributes to this collective order. This order already dictates choice, leaving no choice or chance that changes can bring. While this idea do not align with the concept of change in the I Ching, she still adopts the cosmological view of the three realms of the universe in her understanding of astrology. She explained,

'Astrology is the statistic of the accumulation of human knowledge, history, and experience. There is an order in everything and everyone. Nobody can break this order. Whether it is the economic trend, finance, or human destiny. Or even reincarnation. They are all cause and effect'.

Tess thinks that human habitual patterns influence the order, and patterns are not merely stuck but fixed. She gave me an example, saying,

'Here is a person whose chart says they will never be able to get married. Now, they can use magic to get themselves a date or even a proposal if they wish, yet it will only work temporarily. Since it is not in her destiny, things ultimately will not change. These changes done by magic are short lived'.

Even though Tess's description and understanding of astrology and fate are on the spectrum of the physical end, her own experience mentioned earlier was on the metaphysical end. With her personal experience as supernatural, she also gave an exception example for someone to break this rigid order. She said,

‘To possibly break this order the person is either a really compassionate guru, like someone religious or who has done a great number of good deeds. Or the opposite kind, the kind of people who have done extreme terrible deeds. The two extremes might take them out of the chart, out of the order’.

Tess believes these extreme good or bad deeds can take one out of the order. Yet, in her view, future is fixed and fate is deterministic. Magic is centred as a force that allows a form of choice. However, this choice does not represent a force that can alter fate. Since the order she describes is formed on the basis of collective human behaviour as a phenomenon – and the existence of God, or an emperor-centred system, or an absolute power is not evident – her view does not fit entirely into a fatalistic one. It is worth nothing that, even though Tess uses Chinese astrological chart in her work, the principles she is using are not fully aligned with Chinese cosmology. Tess’s particular approach is possibly influenced by other cultures, traditions, beliefs, or possibly by the concept of the imperial *tian ming*. What is clear about her view is that Tess’s diverse background has impacted her worldviews and this has also influenced her practices and approach. These subtle influences of alternate traditions and cultures interlace with Chinese traditions, contributing to various concepts of fate held by contemporary practitioners.

Stan sees the practice in an artistic way for chart readings, although in his actual practice he finds it hard to comprehend in a metaphysical way. As a result, he chooses to practise reading in the straightforward sense. He understands the patterns with relativity, and his readings are understood in relation to current societal standards. In this approach, he thinks patterns can be read differently in different worlds. It is similar to the understanding of culture in the context of the Ontological Turn in anthropology.<sup>133</sup> To Stan, astrology is a form of culture that is not a matter of the possibility of living out of the pattern, but a different way of perceiving the world. Stan believes in free will even though he is on a spectrum closer to being deterministic. On matters of *ming yun*, Stan said,

‘To me, things are relative. For example, the birth *bazi* of the biggest tycoon Lee Kashing could have the exact same *bazi* as someone else born at that moment in other corners of the world. Why are they not Lee Kashing? It is because of the consideration of other conditions that contributes to the differences. So, for me, to be able to read relatively is

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<sup>133</sup> Hobraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*.

important. Because it is still a complicated process of correlations to read beyond, the deeper you analyse the harder you can see. It takes a lot of experience and knowledge... but I generally think it is hard to get out of *ming yun*'.

In general, even though the participation of the astrologer has an important role in performing a reading, the extent of free will is made possible by the individual's participation with their will power to change. In the study, Jay, Si, Goldie and Stan all believe in an extent of free will except Tess. Just as Si mentioned earlier, people understand *ming* and *yun* differently and therefore it also causes a range of attitudes on fate among contemporary Chinese astrologers.

On the extent of free will, the participants each has their own different view. Goldie said, 'there is extraordinarily little room for people to grow out of their 'frames' (charts), the main reason being the habitual patterns are dominating what people do most of the time'. Goldie believes in free choice, but the possibility that people can grasp the moment to 'ride the dragon' is rare. And it takes the clarity of the human heart to exercise free will. Goldie explained,

'The power of the heart can change fate, for example, the feeling of accomplishment can give a person the vibrations to ride onto the life affirming direction. If a person does not want to initiate change, or to let go of something, the heart hinders change. *Tian* [heavenly realm] cannot be altered by matters or desires, only the heart [human intention] can. But then again, having such heart clarity through the currents of life can be rare'.

To Goldie, the 'clarity in the heart' is rare, but human participation with intention is seen as essential in altering fate. Si also has a similar view free will that is closer to a deterministic sense as Goldie, while he also gave me another idea. Si said,

'This is a pessimistic example. If you ask me in a scholarly sense, do I think there is free will? Yes. But in what extent? Let's say, a chart indicates that this person has a life that is at least 80 years of age. Now at an incredibly young age, she decides to commit suicide. This is a free choice. She is exercising her free will and possibly live out of her chart. So, logically if free will can be exercised in a pessimistic way, it can also be exercised in a positive way...'

To Si, free will can go positively or negatively. However, clarity of the mind is important in steering the will towards the positive waves of *yun*. Therefore, the extent of free will lies in the clarity of the mind. He continued,

‘I have a client who experienced just that. She came thank me... 16 years ago, her husband left her and she contemplated on suicide. During the consultation, I read her chart and suggested she seek counsel in Buddhism. She did shortly after for 15 years and also met her current husband in the community. So, people have free choice. But to what extent? That is the question’.

Si views this quality of clarity of the heart and mind is key to making choices that are conscious – it is a quality that was also stressed among all participants except for Stan. While not all participants in the study mention the importance of clarity or self-awareness in free will, most suggested doing good deeds and spirituality helps in attaining a more positive flow of *ming yun*.

On this note, among the participants who believe in free will, the extent of free will depends not only on the will to change, but also the level of self-awareness. Jay also mentioned that self-awareness applies to the client as much as the participation of the astrologer. He said, ‘Astrology is *xiang*, it is not a way to solve problems. When *xiang* is clear. Some might need rituals or religion to help them access their own clearer choice. So, I think increase in self-awareness, doing good deeds are the general way to deal with problems encountered’. In regard to this self-awareness in a practitioner, Jay and Si both mentioned that the way the practitioner presents to the client also impacts the way they make their choices. Therefore, during a consultation it is not merely a reading to balance the elements in the chart, but also a form of intervention in providing clients’ with ways for self-development and spiritual transformation. Jay said that he has to be self-aware in how he relates to the client as well, to not generalise the possibilities by only looking at the chart. In a similar manner, as suggested by Champion, that astrologers do not work to a single code in astrology, Jay demonstrated his way of working in Chinese astrology. He said,

‘All patterns of *ming yun* has to be treated individually. That is why it is not an effective way to study sample charts because every situation is unique. Same chart can be read differently in different eras, cities...’.

Chinese astrology is a way to read one's highest potential in the patterns of *ming yun*. In the context of the two-stage model of free will, choice in Chinese astrology is a human responsibility to initiate change,<sup>134</sup> and chance is the quantum uncertainty that is not a direct cause of action.<sup>135</sup> In the study, all participants would agree with William James that choice is statistically determined by one's experiences, this point of granting consent to chance in the conscious direction. Even though not all participants think choice is free, astrology is still seen as a guide to navigate through changes in the patterns of *ming yun*. Moral responsibility in making choices points to the direction of chance.

As discussed in Campion's research into the New Age movement, I found that the importance of self-awareness and free will in Chinese astrology has a similar emphasis to that of psychological astrology in the West. Campion explained the Western practice include, 'a source of individual free will which cannot be described, influenced or pressured by the planets'.<sup>136</sup> However, from my study, it is not evident that Chinese astrologers are gathered for a New Age historical transformation. Even though some of the emphasis overlaps in the practices or with New Age, just as Campion's findings regarding western astrology, neither can be classified as a part of the New Age. In Chinese astrology traditionally in focussing on personal virtues and spiritual evolution to align with the Heaven as early as the Han Dynasty.<sup>137</sup> That said, from my study, contemporary Chinese astrologers also include personal development and spiritual evolution in their prescriptions, it is seen as one of the guidelines in reaching the highest potential of *ming yun*. With the common theme of participants mentioning spirituality, religion and 'good deeds', the following section looks into the influences of these grounding basis of moral responsibilities, and explores other factors that contribute to this basis of contemporary Chinese astrologers.

### Religious and Other Influences

The acceptance of fate can be seen in the individual's personal beliefs. The expression of fate, however, can be seen through the practitioner's approach at work and in life. Within the grounding values that the participants formed growing up, religious beliefs and spirituality were evident in playing a role in their worldviews – especially on the views on fate. In my study, all of the participants defined themselves as spiritual, their main religious

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<sup>134</sup> Doyle, 'Jamesian Free Will, The Two-Stage Model of William James', p.6.

<sup>135</sup> Popper Karl and John C Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism*, p. 540.

<sup>136</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 65.

<sup>137</sup> Sima, *History of the Former Han Dynasty (Trans. Homer H. Dubs)*, p. 382.

influences being multiple Eastern religions, in particular Buddhism and Taoism, with some Christianity and other forms of spirituality as well. This finding resonates with Campion's research with astrologers in the West, and my study shows that there is also a high acceptance of theosophy with a small 't' among Chinese astrologers. All participants accept world religions as sharing universal truths.<sup>138</sup> In the study, astrologers use spirituality and religion as a way to circle back to the state of *Ziran* or the highest potential of *ming yun*.

In the study, personal beliefs are not directly used in the reading necessarily, they appear as part of the prescriptions from time to time, and are considered to be an important influence related to their attitudes in fate and their practice approach. Each participant had their own blend of beliefs and views developed over the years.

Jay's personal belief is Buddhism and Taoism; he mentioned that, unless the client's chart indicates religious influences, religion is not used in the context of consultation. He would instead use universal truths such as compassion and basic goodness. The approach is similar to a combination of the two types of astrology identified by Campion, regarding the practices under possible influence of the 'New Age' in the West.<sup>139</sup> Jay's approach is a combination of spiritual evolution and personal development in guiding the individual to the path of *Ziran*. Si and Tess take a similar approach; however, they also recommend clients to practice a particular religion or spiritual practices as part of the advice they prescribe. Tess said,

'Not one singular religion or practice can be flawless, that is why I use a combination of a lot of different traditions and practices. Prescribing people what they need. People of diverse backgrounds would come to me, and so, I have to speak in the 'language' that they could understand and comprehend'.

Although both Tess and Si have their own personal beliefs in Eastern religions, they also embrace alternative views and beliefs within the prescription. When I asked Si for his views on matters of belief, he said religion and spirituality is an important quality in order to achieve the highest *ming yun* or *Ziran*. He said, in traditional folklore there are '10 guidelines in achieving the highest *ming*', they are *ming*, *yun*, *fengshui*, self-enrichment and good deeds,

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<sup>138</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 201.

<sup>139</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 65.

knowledge, reputation and music, physical appearances, religion and spirituality, social skills and the last one wellness and health'. Si said,

'Religious and spirituality is one of the ten qualities. Historically, it is important for practitioners to meditate and practice in a way to gain a sense of clarity. That enhances and sharpens their basic instincts, *chu jui* [觸覺 inspirations through senses for *chu ji*] when they engage in readings. While this category of practitioners usually has more time to contemplate, that enables them to give unique perspectives... However, it is not a requirement to have a religious belief in order to work with astrology'.

While religion and spirituality are traditionally important for all the practitioners, participants did not immerse themselves in only one particular belief or spiritual practice. In my study, religious and spiritual practices are ways for individuals to gain clarity and a way to *Ziran*. They are also shown to be an important compass in life and a source for emotional relief for individuals, while also the way to the highest potential of *ming yun*. Goldie believes that 'intentions of all religions are intrinsically the same basic goodness. They are all from compassion, it is only the people that are making the differentiation'. She thinks that all beliefs can essentially fulfil spiritual needs. This general view of a universal truths was also shared by Jay, Si, Tess and Stan.

Contemporary Chinese astrology is seen to have evolved from the imperial *tian ming*, and centred on the moral basis in spirituality instead of the throne as it was in the imperial times. Charts are being read with the individual as the centre instead of the emperor as a centre. With the influence of religion and spirituality, the idea of societal standards is seen to be playing a role in the readings among the participants. As the positionality of the astrologer impacts the way they practice, they therefore constitute each astrologer's own unique style. Jay's position is to be self-aware that every chart and every individual is unique, allowing alternate possibilities to develop in the readings. Si described himself with a neutral position, maintaining a non-judgemental approach towards the idea of good and bad towards the societal 'norm'. Stan aims to strikes a balance between the patterns and the understanding of the different worlds, relating the reading to people with their own worldly experiences. On this point, Tess very much shared Stan's view in engaging with diverse cultures, while her presentation and prescriptions have a keen sense of her own blend of identity and values. Lastly, Goldie's position is focussed mainly on spirituality, while she also based her values on some of the ideologies in Confucianism according to the example regarding gender roles.

## Essence of Individual Attitudes

In the last part of the study, each participant gave me a single Chinese character as an essence to reflect on their views and attitudes on fate. They are as below,

Stan's character was *ming* 命. While it is an often mentioned character throughout the study, Stan simply commented, 'it is your life.' He said everyone has a different pattern, but it is up to the individual to live responsibly.

Jay's character was *yuen* 玄. *Yuen*, meaning 'mystery', is found in the first verse of the *Tao Te Ching*.<sup>140</sup> From *Shuowen Jiezi*, it represents deep and profound mystery, that is of the colour of the darkest black with a hint of red 黑而有赤色者為玄.<sup>141</sup> It is described as the colour of the sky 天玄地黃 in the *I Ching*.<sup>142</sup> Jay said, 'the formation of the character is a bow above, extending strings down below in spirals. It is mysterious and there is a lot of changes, and so people need orientations from the stars. The more you turn the more mystery unveils, layers and layers like a theatrical stage'.

Si's character was *tao* 道. *Tao*, as explained in verse 42 in the *Tao Te Ching*, is the mother of all things.<sup>143</sup> Si explained the character *tao* as the meaning, the way, or the path. He said, '*ming* is from the beginning to the end. It is the process of passing through, a cycle of order 規律, and the 'way of the *Tao* 道理' seems to add up to be *ming*'.

Goldie's character was *gai* 計, meaning a plan or calculation.<sup>144</sup> While the *Classic of Supreme Mystery* explains *gai* as 'Yin and yang that derives all the calculations in the world, it is the essence of the knowledge of *Yuen* 玄',<sup>145</sup> Goldie said, 'I think free will is the key for living beyond the frame, it depends if you wholeheartedly work hard to calculate in creating the chance for yourself'.

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<sup>140</sup> Lao, 'Tao Te Ching - Translated by J. Legge', chap. 1.

<sup>141</sup> 許慎 Shen Xu, '說文解字 - Shuowen Jiezi', 中國哲學書電子化計劃 *Chinese Classics Text Digital Platform*, p. Book 5 Yuan 卷五-玄部 <<https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&char=%E7%8E%84>>.

<sup>142</sup> '康熙字典 Kangxi Zidian' (Beijing: Zhonghua Bookstore 中華書局, 1989), p. 725.

<sup>143</sup> Lao, 'Tao Te Ching - Translated by J. Legge', chap. 42.

<sup>144</sup> 許慎 Xu, '說文解字 - Shuowen Jiezi', chap. 4 言部.

<sup>145</sup> 楊雄 Yang Xiong, '太玄經 The Classic of Supreme Mystery', 中國哲學書電子化計劃 *Chinese Classics Text Digital Platform*, chap. 2 <<https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=284784>>.



Tess's character was *sum* 心, the human heart.<sup>146</sup> The *Tao Te Ching* describes the function of the heart as similar to the mind.<sup>147</sup> Tess explains 'heart' with the phrase, 'Everything is created from the heart 萬法唯心造', from the Buddhist classics in *Huayan Jing* 華嚴經.<sup>148</sup> She explained in her view that whether *ming* is considered to be good or bad, it depends on the individual perspective, and it is an individual's lesson to learn to accept their individual *ming*.

Among the participants most characters' foundational meanings align with their views and attitudes towards *ming*. However, Tess's character of the 'heart' shows a character that can be understood differently in the different layers of worldviews. Tess's attitude towards the 'heart' is to accept a fixed future. This understanding of the character is seen to be different from Goldie's understanding of the 'human heart' referred to earlier in the interview. Tess's description of the 'heart' was a deterministic view, and Goldie's 'human heart' was a description of free will. From the data provided from the characters, contradictory concepts arise due to the differences in the individual's worldviews. Worldviews are shown to impact attitudes on fate, that in turn impact how the practitioners read the same character that also possibly influence the way they read the character-based charts.

In the study, not one single character can represent the range of distinct attitudes towards *ming*. The understanding of *ming* depends on the individual worldviews and their lived experience. As Campion stated in his research, we cannot assume astrologers, 'to think the same and work according to a single code'.<sup>149</sup> This is also seen to be applicable to the participants' approaches and their attitudes of fate.

## Part 5: Conclusion

Hong Kong is a city of diverse culture, it has developed its own personality, identity, and history, this is reflected in the diversity of approaches of Chinese astrology. The interviewees' worldviews have been influenced by many factors, included but not limited to social, cultural, historical, and metaphysical conceptions of the material world. These worldviews impacted how the astrologers engage in the world; in particular their understandings of and approaches towards astrology revealed a range of attitudes on fate.

<sup>146</sup> 許慎 Xu, '說文解字 - Shuowen Jiezi', chap. 11 心部.

<sup>147</sup> Lao Tzu, 'Tao Te Ching - Translated by J. Legge', chap. 3.

<sup>148</sup> 星雲大師 Venerable Xing Yun, '星雲說偈 -- 一切唯心造 | 星雲說偈 Everything is Created from the Heart', 人間福報 Merit Times <<https://www.merit-times.com/NewsPage.aspx?unid=268121>>.

<sup>149</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 203.

In the study, Chinese astrology is seen to be integrated as a Chinese way of life, and was described in many ways and forms. However, just as Champion's research in the context of western astrology, it is hard to categorise Chinese astrology in any 'pure' terms or discipline as it is distinctive on its own.<sup>150</sup> Chinese astrology is not consciously seen as a belief, nor classified as a religion. Chinese astrology is a discipline that is older than all the main religions in China, with its impact commonly seen across different aspects in the Chinese way of life. The study shows it to be true from the environment the participants were born into, elements of astrology integrate in their daily lives as an 'unconscious verso of the recto of civilized life... bred in the bone rather than conceived by the brain'.<sup>151</sup>

In the technical sense, astrology is used by the participants as ways to read *xiang* in all 'shapes' in the sky, on earth and in calculations. In other words, attitudes of fate can also be found not only through the way the practitioner reads the patterns, but also through exploration into their own lived experiences as 'shapes'. Chinese astrology evolved from an expression of nature based on the Chinese cosmology as described in the *Tao Te Ching* and *I Ching*, to a system leveraged by imperialism for more than two thousand years, to become a way of life in the contemporary Chinese culture. Through the historical processes, various 'shapes' in forms of social and ideological influences continue to impact worldviews and practice. Even though Chinese astrology is not included in the Chinese and Hong Kong institutional systems, the knowledge is commonly practice among Chinese communities in Hong Kong and around the world as a form of tradition and culture that is also becoming a form of self-enrichment. The study shows that it is hard to categorize astrology as a single entity as much as it is hard to categorize the cultural identity of Hong Kong. Just like any disciplines, the nature, understanding and the use of Chinese astrology evolves with the times, and it can be as distinct as the individuals' worldviews are.

Among the participants, fatalistic imperial *tian ming* was seen to be no longer a centre of the attitudes of fate in contemporary practices. Similar to Brady's findings among the western astrologers, most Chinese practitioners' insider views are also based on its advocacy of personal responsibility. A diverse spectrum of an extent of free will was found among the Chinese astrologers even though there was one determinist in the group who does not believe in choice of the human will. In this relatively small sample of my study, the differences among

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<sup>150</sup> Champion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 203.

<sup>151</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 28.

the participants were seen to be due to the influences of the diverse culture or a mix of the shifting views between the deterministic pre-imperial *tian ming* and other influences. Despite the range of views, contemporary Chinese astrology focusses on the individual *ming*, nurturing personal virtues and spiritual evolution to align with the Heaven, rather than centring the development of an empire or emperor.

Even though imperial *tian ming* is no longer a focus, the range of philosophical thought extended from the ancient imperialism, in particular concepts associated with *ming* and what personal virtues are, are seen impacting some of the practitioners' worldviews. In the study, these worldviews were recognized as prejudices against age and gender roles, specifically with Si's experience as a young practitioner when he began his professional journey, and the views on gender roles for a woman to be submissive for Goldie. These imperialism-related worldviews are deep-rooted, yet they are also being recognized more and occasionally decolonized within the participants' own experiences. As Raymond Williams would agree, these ancient imperialism worldviews created a culture that separates humans from nature with 'civilisation' for the elite minority.<sup>152</sup> In the study, these attempts to limit the power of certain groups of people in society is still active in some experiences of the participants: they imposed limitations on personal choices for Goldie, and were also seen as collective behaviour in the society through Si's experience.

Personal virtue and spirituality are seen to be crucial in astrology as well as their attitudes on fate among the participants. Astrologers not only prescribe ways for self-development in forms of balancing the elements in the chart, but also prescribe religious or spiritual practices or recommendations as part of the readings. Self-awareness is seen to be important to access clarity in the heart/ mind for making conscious decisions, guiding individuals towards a positive direction in chance. While self-awareness is seen to be cultivated in spiritual practices, spirituality and religions also seen to be helpful in being a ground for moral responsibility in choice making. In the study, all participants considered themselves as more spiritual than religious; they are inclusive to world religions and spiritualities, while having personal beliefs in multiple eastern religions and spiritualities. Just as Campion's research on astrologers' beliefs under the influence of New Age in the west, reveals a plurality of views and positions, the Chinese astrologers in the study are inclusive of all religions and believe they

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<sup>152</sup> Williams, 'Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings (Edited by Jim Mcguigan)', p. 1-3.

shared universal truths. The study shows that spiritual realities are crucial in astrology in order to live to the fullest potential of *Ziran*.

While self-awareness and individual spiritual transformation overlap with some of the emphasis of the New Age movement, it is not evident that the phenomenon is seen as a preparation for a historical transformation as with the New Age. Chinese astrological practices might fall into the broader sense of the movement; however, it is not considered to be part of this movement in the West as it would mean taking the practices out of their historical and cultural context. Similar to the situation of western astrology as argued by James Holden, that although ‘devotees of a particular philosophy or religion, and some who practiced magic have also been interested in astrology’, however, ‘that does not mean astrology itself has anything to do with religion or magic...for that matter, with ‘New Age’ thought’.<sup>153</sup> As with astrology traditions, Chinese astrology equally possess its own culture, history, development and contemporary practitioners who are developing the lineages in the modern world. It is a discipline of its own with diverse wit diverse approaches. Campion would agree that labelling the disciplines of astrologies under an emblem of a religion, a cult, or a movement would be dismissing an integral part of modernity itself.<sup>154</sup> Each of the disciplines are important in the understanding of the development of the particular culture, the people and their societies and they should not be excluded from the flow of history.

Even though Chinese astrology has a cultural continuity in contemporary times among Chinese communities, it is still interpreted as ‘feudal superstition’ in mainland China.<sup>155</sup> The interpretation of astrology in the narrative of modern Chinese history could be due to the selective preservation and the impact of its partially imperial past. The intellectual historians in China were foremost in setting the tone of history writings after the 1920s.<sup>156</sup> As Richard J. Evans remarked, the characteristics of historians in Communism are in, ‘... advocacy of the interest of the masses... enthronement of ideology and belief as the centre of historical process and historical interpretation...’.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, many of the intellectual thinkers’ ideas are wide

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<sup>153</sup> James Herschel Hoden, *History of Horoscopic Astrology* (Tempe, AZ: American Federation of Astrologers, Inc., 1996), p. 261.

<sup>154</sup> Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, p. 216–17.

<sup>155</sup> Soon, ‘China Is Cracking down on Celeb Gossip and “feudal Superstitions” to Keep Citizens from Misbehaving during Chinese New Year and the Olympics’ [accessed 6 January 2024].

<sup>156</sup> Eddy U, *Creating the Intellectual: Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 1–20.

<sup>157</sup> Evans, *In Defense of History*, p. 30.

ranging, yet as history becomes a means of service of the state, just as astrology was being leveraged in the imperial times, the intellectual historians reconstruct selected sources to construct the meaning according to the political rhetoric.<sup>158</sup> This ambiguity of understandings allows history and knowledge to be misused, misinterpreted, and manipulated by some. As this impacts the general public, who catch astrology as a 'new' trend, this results in the deeper misunderstandings in the contemporary times.<sup>159</sup> As historian's concerns are always led by their present day concerns, as Evans put it, 'the truth does not simply emerge from an unprejudiced or neutral reading of the sources'.<sup>160</sup> However, with globalization of communication and modern organization of historical scholarship, they provide greater opportunities in balancing out the fragmentation of history, encouraging exchange of ideas, and contribute to constructing a more holistic perspective for history.<sup>161</sup>

Hong Kong, with its history of navigating differences between cultures, has established a cultural identity that is inclusive of the diverse and the traditional. Even though the city has never been granted much political freedom since colonial times, it has developed into one of the important financial centres in the world that thrives on economic freedom.<sup>162</sup> From my study, Chinese astrology in Hong Kong has transformed into a specific profession, or even a form of business that is no longer bureaucratic. Deep-rooted cosmic parallelism still plays a significant role in contemporary lives as a form of tradition, culture, entertainment, and knowledge that influence not only the civilisation, but also the arts, the architecture, and the way of life. Culture, as Eagleton puts it, 'shifts us... we are clay in our own hands... priest and sinner in the same body'.<sup>163</sup> Just as the *I Ching* places the responsibility on the individual to 'ride the dragon', free will, as Frede commented, 'it's up to us', as the Chinese people ride through the *ming yun* of Chinese culture.<sup>164</sup>

As an insider-outsider researcher, my study makes space for the astrologers to speak for themselves, and to understand the development of Chinese astrology in contemporary times. My challenge in the research was to be able to shift positions rigorously, as well as deal with the translations from Chinese to English. I used two approaches of

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<sup>158</sup> Evans, *In Defense of History*, p. 74.

<sup>159</sup> Shu, "'Psychics Slut-Shamed Me": The Rise of Astrology Apps in China', *South China Morning Post*.

<sup>160</sup> Evans, *In Defense of History*, p. 75.

<sup>161</sup> Evans, *In Defense of History*, p. 156.

<sup>162</sup> 'Hong Kong Maintains Fourth Place in Global Financial Centres Index' <<https://www.info.gov.hk/gja/general/202309/28/P2023092800657.htm>> [accessed 21 December 2023].

<sup>163</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 6.

<sup>164</sup> Frede, *A Free Will - Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*, p. 45.

translation and transcription in parallel for the interviews.<sup>165</sup> I found this methodology useful in allowing me to stay close to capturing the insider perspectives of Chinese astrologers. Throughout the times, traditions have survived and revived, and contemporary astrologers continue to reorient and redefine their worldviews in the midst of everchanging cultural and historical processes. By demystifying the ancient emperor-centred universe and exploring contemporary attitudes on fate, we can rediscover Chinese ways of knowing in astrology and its continuous relevance to the Chinese people today. The research of the development and applications of astrology to the Chinese notion of fate, *ming yun*, offer new insights to the attitudes on fate as well as the evolution of Chinese astrology in the recent century.

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<sup>165</sup> Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, pp. 294–95.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview Release Form

Ying Ching Lee (Berna)  
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This form has been drawn up to ensure that the material in your interview with Ying Ching Lee (Berna) is used only in accordance with the Research Ethics and Integrity code of practice at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

The research project *An Examination of the Worldviews and Practices of the Present Times Chinese Astrologers* aims to gain insight into the worldview and evolution of contemporary Chinese cultural astronomy and astrology through the understanding of Hong Kong Chinese astrologers' practices and beliefs. In today's world, it is often assumed that astrology is about one's entire life and life decisions being dictated by the "stars", yet there is a range of worldviews in this context regarding the ideas of fate, destiny, and freewill among the contemporary Chinese astrologers. This project is to investigate how ancient Chinese cosmology, your work approach, and your lived experience reflect in your worldview, and if your expectations and experience, in turn, alter your cosmology.

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this project. Your answers will be stored in a database and analyzed, to help create this overall picture with the research. The results will then form a part of my research. Thus, your answers will provide ideas and perspectives on the subject and are important in building toward a concept of fate (or determinism) and free will among the community of contemporary Chinese astrologers. During the interview, we will dive deeper into your personal lived experience and work approach that is related to your Chinese astrological practices. Please be informed that you have the right to opt out of the interview at any time without any negative consequences. In case of any emotional discomfort arises, upon request, I will also be providing a list of local helplines to further assist your emotional needs. The interview should take about 60 to 90 minutes.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. May I use your

name Yes/No

If so, then may I use the material from your interview:

- a) for public reference. Yes/ No
- b) for research purposes. Yes/No
- c) for presentations such as seminars and lectures. Yes/No
- d) in research material which may be published at a future date. Yes/No

Signature of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

訪問同意書

Ying Ching Lee 李映晴 (Berna)

天文及星象文化研究碩士

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威爾斯大學聖三一學院

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英國

為確保參與者了解本次學術研究訪的目的與權利，Ying Ching Lee 李映晴 (Berna) 希望通過此同意 書說明採訪性質，我們僅按照大學道德與誠信章程使用所有研究資料。

本次研究題目“審視當今中國占星家的世界觀和實踐”，旨在透過香港中國占星家的工作實踐與個人經歷，深入了解當代中國占星家對命理及世界觀的演變。在當今世界，可能一般人會認為占星 是一種透過星象瞭解命運，又或是一種根據星象決定人生方向的方式。實際上，占星學對於中國 占星學家來說，可能包含了更深層對於命運、天命或自由意志的看法和個人觀點。這個項目是針對研究中國宇宙觀的演變，透過占星學家的自己的工作方向和個人生活經歷，反映中國現代占星 家群體的不同世界觀甚至宇宙觀。

感謝您對本研究的支持！這個訪問的參與純屬自願性質，過程將會以錄影或錄音形式用於後期 記錄文字使用，所有受訪者提供的答案及個人私隱將會以加密形式保存在本人個人電腦用於研究分析。電子文檔保存將不會存在任何能識別受訪者身份的資料，所有資料包括錄影/錄音/任何 有關文件檔案等將會在研究完成及提交后刪除。訪問過程中，受訪者可以選擇隨時終止參與是次 訪問，如感到任何不安情緒浮現，有需要我們也能提供情緒支援熱綫或轉介。所有隨時終止參與 的原因及有關決定不會引致任何不良後果。本次訪問將會歷時 60-90 分鐘。

姓名：

電郵：

我 \*同意/不同意在研究中使用本人真實姓名。

我 \*同意/不同意本研究使用本人所提供的材料：

- a) 公開研究報告中使用 \*同意/不同意
- b) 研究用途 \*同意/不同意
- c) 研究發佈使用例如教學用途、發佈會等 \*同意/不同意
- d) 用於將來其他發佈形式使用 \*同意/不同意

(\*請刪去不適用者)

簽署

受訪者： \_\_\_\_\_ 日期： \_\_\_\_\_ 訪問人員： \_\_\_\_\_ 日期： \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2

### Dissertation Interview Questions

1) How do you see your role as an astrologer?

2) How would you define Chinese astrology and the scope of your own practice?

optional: How did you establish the scope of your practice?

3) How did you become an astrologer? How does your practice impact the way you make decisions in your personal life and work approach?

optional: Was there a particular moment/ person/ incident/ things that shifted your worldview and how?

4) During a consultation, how do you position yourself when interacting with clients at the crossroads of their important life decisions?

5) Given the changes that happened in recent years such as the pandemic and the world in general, have the general uncertainties of the world shifted your outlook on life? If so, does it impact your work approach or worldview? Can you share an experience?

6) What does Tian Ming means and what does it mean to you?

- Can you give me a Chinese character/ emblem or artifact/ item/ doodle to illustrate your understanding or your personal view?