STÉPHANIE HOMOLA. *THE ART OF FATE CALCULATION: PRACTICING DIVINATION IN TAIPEI, BEIJING, AND KAIFENG.* NEW YORK: BERGHAHN BOOKS 2023. 374 P. ISBN: 9781800738126

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Studies of traditional Chinese divination offer significant contributions to the study of divinatory arts in contemporary societies. Stéphanie Homola adds to this body of work with the publication of *The art of fate calculation.* This book was developed over a long period, starting from Homola's PhD studies to her ongoing anthropological studies on divinatory practices in Mainland China and Taiwan. It provides multifaced insight into the conceptions of fate calculation, and the transformations of divinatory arts within present-day Chinese societies.

The introductory chapter to this book outlines the world of Chinese divinatory practices, from the experiences of modern-day practitioners to the fictional adventures of Judge Dee (also known as Di Renjie). Homola follows a chronological sequence of field investigations (i.e., among two mainland and one Taiwanese fieldsite between 2007 and 2011: Beijing, Kaifeng, and Taipei (18)), gradually constructing detailed portraits of practitioners. This allows her to develop a nuanced understanding of the legitimisation processes and cognitive mechanisms at work in divinatory practices (18). Homola carefully provides a unique perspective on Chinese culture and history and raises questions about the role of divination in modern societies.

Following the introduction, the book is organised into five chapters and a conclusion. Homola's anthropological research began in Taiwan, focusing on the clients of divinatory services rather than the diviners. In Chapter One, Homola explores the sociocultural issues and consultation experiences among people living in Taipei. Based on the ethnographic research in Taipei (i.e., seven case studies, the sample group included one French diaspora in Taiwan and six Taiwanese), she demonstrates that the 'belief' of divination is used as a systematic framework to answer various questions in people's everyday life related to education, career, marriage, or political fate. However, clients primarily consult divinatory specialists depending on '*zhun bu zhun*' (were the predictions from divination accurate?) of the fate calculation techniques rather than '*xin bu xin*' (believe or not) in contemporary Taiwanese societies. Thus, it is not the main question of 'believe or not' that should count for Homola's ethnographic studies on divinatory practices, but what makes the consultation journeys meet the expectations of the clients and whether the clients follow their diviners' advice.

This book's second and third chapters focus more specifically on the dynamic of knowledge transmission and the development of divinatory arts in Taiwan, eight signs (*baizi*)

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and *ziwei doushu*. As a doctoral student of divinatory and religious studies in anthropology, I found much to appreciate, especially as it provides a combination of descriptive historical depth and traditional knowledge in the field of Chinese divination. Not only does Homola present a complex view of the world of divination that proves the legitimacy and rationality (science) of fate calculation through institutionalisation processes of academic disciplines, the descriptions of two primary traditional Chinese divinatory techniques (i.e., eight characters and *ziwei doushu*) also make it an invaluable guide for scholars of anthropology, religion, politics, sociology, and non-native Chinese speakers.

Having explored the role of divination in Taiwanese society, the last two chapters offer a compelling ethnographic exploration of the grassroots knowledge (*minjian*) of divinatory arts in contemporary mainland China's cities – ranging from professional to amateur practices in Beijing and Kaifeng. Here, Homola demonstrates that another aspect of the legal status of divinatory knowledge is a positive categorization in Chinese society through folk activities (204), e.g., 'luck tourism' in and around tourist sites of worship, rather than through the ideological challenges of science and superstition (*mixin*) (173). Throughout Homola's research, she highlights two contrasting ideal-types of Chinese divinatory knowledge transmission among communities in Taipei, Beijing, and Kaifeng (237), i.e., master-disciple and a dynamic of trust in friendship (*guanxi*). The processes of knowledge transmission among Chinese cities reveals the way thoughts are interpreted differently in different social contexts. Ethnographic research helps to understand a study of common human practices about divination across different sociocultural background (e.g., politics, education, and social relation).

Overall, this book explores how conceptions of fate, and the studies of fate calculation techniques are circulated to help people make better decisions in daily life in Chinese societies. However, it should not be defined as standardised divinatory knowledge as it depends on the various sociocultural realm of local customs, including legal status, conceptualization, and transmission processes. The book provides an excellent overview of Chinese divination and generates further research into the next generation (transmission of traditional divination, online divination, AI predictions). This book not only gives anthropologists a perspective on different ways to think about uncertain futures and decision-making in different human societies, but it is also suitable for anyone interested in gaining knowledge of Chinese divination or the ethnography of Chinese relationships.