INTRODUCTION

Divination, according to the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, comprises 'culturally sanctioned methods of arriving at a judgement of the unknown through a consideration of incomplete evidence' (Willis 2012: 201). In Chinese, it is often referred to as 'calculating fate' (*suanming* 算命). In this ethnography, divination mainly refers to the multiple forms of Chinese divination using traditional techniques without involving communication with gods and other beings. Its text-based knowledge with a coherent system of symbols and a naturalist ontology are a result of centuries of development.

Two reactions were common during my fieldwork on divination. Often, people would laugh when they heard the topic of my research; several people would gather around, and the whole circle would burst into laughter. However, when it was a private chat with two or three people, their response was, 'Ha-ha! You study fate calculation?!' But they usually showed great interest after their initial chuckle and would ask me, 'Do you think it is accurate?'

Another commonplace event was that whenever I met a diviner for the first time, he or she always talked eloquently for hours to convey the positive meaning of their vocation, such as the grand role divination has played in Chinese culture, and the accuracy of their predictions. Anthropologists studying Chinese popular religion often have to deal with 'people's insouciant attitude toward explicit interpretation' (Weller 1994: 7); my informants, on the contrary, had a strong motivation to offer me the meaning of their practice and did it eloquently with an 'interpretative noise' through their constant bragging and legitimation efforts.

The frequency of these two events made me wonder: Why did people laugh? Which features of this topic made it amusing to a Chinese audience? Why were diviners so eager to defend themselves? Is there any connection between the

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audience's laughing and the diviners' eloquent self-bolstering? It is important to note here that misunderstandings also probably affected these reactions. Many people in China know little about anthropology and its research objectives, so when I said, 'I research divination', they often thought I was learning fortune telling techniques and seeking a doctorate in divination itself. My status as a doctoral student might have made diviners feel they needed to emphasize the academic significance of divination. Anyhow, the laughing and later inquiries also reflect divination's contradictory position: it is often not taken seriously, but many people get interested and involved with it. Correspondingly, the diviners' bragging also exposed their coexisting stigma and privilege: they had to defend themselves to avoid being looked down on as 'superstition experts', but at the same time, they were proud to be regarded as experts of 'traditional culture' whose skills were in great demand in most people's everyday lives.

My research interprets these facts mainly from the perspective of professional diviners, who answer the great demands of a transitional society where the dialectic of agency and determinism is being restructured, and develop multiple strategies to reshape the business of 'fate'. Their efforts to seek social and political legitimacy give us an opportunity to observe how meaning and justice is negotiated in contemporary Chinese society.

Ambiguous Divination in Contemporary China

Xi Jinping, the current political leader of China, officially promotes the ideal of the 'Chinese Dream', an equivalent to the 'American Dream'. Although the Chinese Dream places more emphasis on the revival of collective national prosperity, in which subjects can be viewed as an extension of the socialist project, it still exposes and responds to an atmosphere of aspiration or ambition around the country. Not long after my fieldwork, Evan Osnos, the *New Yorker* journalist, published his portrait of China with the title *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China*. The period Osnos spent in China between 2005 and 2013 reminded him of the Gilded Age in the United States. He felt that Mark Twain, Charles Warner and himself had witnessed similar historical moments 'when the individual became a gale force in political, economic, and private life, so central to the self-image of a rising generation' (Osnos 2014: 5).

The period when Osnos found the Chinese embracing the idea that individuals can be the agent of their own fate was also the time when divination in China was revived. The flourishing of divination was exemplified by the numerous divination shops and booths on streets across the country, thousands of fortune telling requests posted each day on Internet forums, and the enormous wealth accumulated by divination masters, who are active in teaching divination knowledge, writing self-help divination manuals and giving advice on real estate developments. The

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paradoxical relationship between consulting one's fate and the strong aspiration to succeed is one context for the book.

If we look closer at people's attitude towards divination, a contradiction caused by the inconsistency between words and deeds also exists. In 2002, the largest national organization of scientific and technological workers in China, The China Association of Science and Technology, conducted a nationwide survey that showed that 40 per cent of 5,000 respondents had consulted with diviners. More than 60 per cent of respondents admitted that their behaviour was influenced by the results of divination. But only 26.5 per cent claimed they regarded divination as reasonable in some degree. While more than 60 per cent recognized the social harm of divination, less than 30 per cent of them supported repressing divination (China Association of Science and Technology 2002).

These statistics reveal that the popularity of divination practice and the negative attitudes towards it are related to divination's illegal status and stigmatized status in ideology and popular culture. Ever since China began modernizing at the end of the nineteenth century, divination has been tagged as a superstition and has been attacked during anti-superstition movements. Diviners have been labelled as frauds and morally corrupt criminals. Divination is not recognized as a legal job in China. The laws and regulations at all levels prohibit the practice of divination, punishing divination in public areas and divination that causes losses of property and life.[1] The punishment of public divination is also highly variable across regions and times. When local policy is tighter, diviners on the street are confronted with the danger of arrest; when regional government does not take them seriously, they can conduct their business in multiple ways, including running a studio or office, or just selling their services on the street. Despite its stigmatized and illegal status, divination persists. As a traditional custom, it has never stopped. Even during periods of radical repression by the Communist regime, it took place underground or was just suspended. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, divination and many forms of religiosity have revived and enjoy a degree of freedom. Probably everyone growing up in China knows or has heard something about it. Even if they themselves have not experienced it directly, they would have relatives or friends who have used divination. Some people regard most divination practice as totally fraudulent but may also assume that divination itself is a field of extraordinary knowledge, which outsiders cannot fully comprehend. Many officials in the current Chinese regime have invested considerable sums of money in divination, and many Chinese intellectuals both practise divination and talk about fate. Likewise, some diviners are well respected by their customers, including by members of the political and economic elite. Several of my informants have accumulated considerable wealth and also achieved great fame. Some divination masters even have disciples with postgraduate degrees from famous universities. Given the problematic social and

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political legitimacy of divination in China, a country that is obsessed with science and progress and influenced by its Communist legacy, the ongoing popularity of this 'superstition' deserves more explanation and interpretation, even though divination is already a classic topic in anthropology.

Divination as Social Critique

Compared to the extensive anthropological interest in the cognition, function and symbols of divination, little attention has been given to the problem of divination's social and political legitimacy, or the politics of meaning production around divination.[2] Instead of scanning the enormous anthropological literature on divination, here I focus on the most relevant works to my study: those concerned with divination's social conditions.

In some cultures, such as African tribal or lineage societies, for example, most members of society see divination as legitimate, whereas in most of the Anglo-Saxon world, divination is marginalized but has not been outlawed by the courts. Divination in Asian nation states has a more ambiguous status. Modernists suppress and stigmatize divination on the grounds of rationalization and the social engineering potential of scientific thinking. But divination is also a flexible institution with popularity. In terms of the attack on 'superstition' in the modernization project, divination's potential for strengthening national identity, and its status as a cultural industry supported by the development of media and technological development, the following cases have much in common with Chinese divination.

Nerida Cook points out that Thai astrology in the late 1980s received criticisms ranging from 'religious questions of orthodoxy and compatibility with Buddhism, through rationalist queries regarding the credibility of the system in scientific terms, to the questioning of the role of such a belief system in the socio-political order of contemporary Thailand' (Cook 1989: 90). The defence of Thai astrology 'reflect[s] the views of the military, bureaucratic, aristocratic and latterly business groups who form the main opposition to the progressives' (Cook 1989: 91).

According to Stephanie Homola, the social stigma of divination in Taiwan as 'superstition' originated in the Chinese Modernist revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. 'The decay of Modernist discourse in connection with the democratization process and the development of the Taiwanization movement in the 1990s explain why divination practices were popularized in the 1990s' (Homola 2013: 144). Mass media, a cultural industry, and communication technologies created the impression of a boom, which attracted scholarly attention. Moreover, divination is widely regarded by Chinese-speaking groups as better preserved in Taiwan than in mainland China and has become 'a symbol of national, social and psychological uniqueness' of Taiwan (ibid.).

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While Cook and Homola explain the social conditions of divination and only briefly mention the criticism of divination in society and the efforts made to seek legitimation in their studies, I will focus on these questions with detailed delineation of the actions of diviners.

From a Marxist point of view, David Kim (2009) asked what it was about Korean shamanism and other forms of divination that conjured up 'the real' within the larger context of market capitalism. He defined divination as a mirror of the everyday and a medium that channels 'desire' itself as a pleasurable form of expenditure. Kim argued that social hegemony, hiding under the mask of fate, was the real power behind the superficial pursuit of happiness in the form of monetary success. Kim drew our attention to a neoliberalist 'magic' behind divination; magic promises individuals monetary rewards under the disguise of freedom of choice.

Seremetakis (2009), who based on her research on exorcism and divination in Greek urban society, argues that divination and related involuntary gestures of the body show the impact of the social nervous system in Taussig's sense (Taussig 1993). Here divination is seen not only as redressing the social order in traditional structural-functionalist terms but also as redressing the body that is fragmented by the shocking structures of modernity. As a healing practice, divination counters the distracting and distancing effect of the media and creates touch-ability in social life.

The last two examples of divination studies in urban and industrializing societies have been influenced heavily by the social critique of the Frankfurt School of writers. Divination in this theoretical context points to the incomplete articulation of everyday life by neoliberal, globalizing processes driven by capitalism and consumerism. Theodor Adorno points out that it is the susceptibility to astrology more than astrology as such that deserves attention (Adorno 1994: 114). Similarly, I analyse divination in order to find out what it indicates as a 'symptom' of Chinese society. The ironies of divination relate to tensions in cosmology, morality, politics and economy as well as the political-social context of Chinese religiosity. Even if divination reknits the social fabric (Winkelman and Peek 2004b: 7), divination itself is also a part of the same social fabric that needs to be reknitted from time to time.

I contend that observers of divination in complex modern societies should go beyond the particular setting of divination practice, to look at changes before and after divination, and also take sceptics and critics of divination into consideration. The limited recognition and acceptance of the legitimation efforts of diviners by various social agents are consciously expressed or are implied. Among them, lawyers, ancient philosophy experts, psychological counsellors, divination amateurs and typical customers are the most relevant. Taking various social groups into consideration also allows me to look at divination as a refractor of the impact of

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large-scale transformations. Complex material and social processes are especially distilled in divination's scenarios and in diviners', customers' and non-customers' narratives, which weave together their emotions, motives, involuntary actions and messages. Divination has the dual potential to enable a social critique and to reveal the implicit tensions in society.

Anthropological studies have shown that by making particular moral judgments, diviners not only reveal the unknown but also combine known facts into a coherent picture, in other words, they make sense of the local world and restore social reciprocity (Fernandez 1991). As ethnographies of divination in Africa and Asia illustrate (Peek 1991; DeBernardi 2006), instructive and admonitory propositions are often sequentially applied by diviners to resolve troubled behaviours. Diviners not only inform clients about the future, they also judge and persuade clients within the morality of a social network. Diviners reshape the ethical dispositions of individuals to help them out, as in daily life, 'relations of power and dominance driven by greed and lust, envy, anger and aggression are often at the core of the conflict' (Steffen 2013: 200).

Victor Turner's classic argument about Ndembu divinatory symbolism is applicable here. Turner revealed that a diviner acts to enable social adjustments among local descent groups. The diviner accuses or exonerates individuals in a system of moral norms. Thus diviners play an important role as upholders of tribal morality and rectifiers of disturbed social relationships, especially in a society without centralized political institutions (Turner 1975). However, unlike Ndembu society, the divination discussed in this book is based on a tradition distinguished by its strong reliance on texts (Zeitlyn 2001). More importantly, by contrast with Ndembu society, divination in China is stigmatized and requires political and moral justification. Contemporary Chinese diviners have to assert divination's moral usefulness, and often present themselves as conservative guardians of morality to do so. Within an unfriendly social and political environment, they even adjust their discourse to slogans of the party-state that emphasize social harmony. Self-representation absorbing state discourses and self-institutionalization that aims at transforming their occupation into a profession both point to the creation of new self-definition. Apart from a disposition to instruct customers through relationally oriented conduct codes, explicit rhetoric about filial piety, karma and kindness helps diviners to enhance their public image and the reputation of divination as such.

Previous anthropological research has noticed that diviners often have an anomalous status in their societies. A diviner is typically someone who, by reason of ethnic origin, occupation, physical condition or sexual orientation is considered marginal to ordinary society. Social marginality could help the diviner to 'see' the situation of the client with the requisite degree of detachment and overall perspective (Willis 2012: 202).

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Among Chinese diviners, except for blind practitioners, the text-based knowledge of divination is highly rationalized and can be learned through training rather than spiritual insight. The symbolic calculating and reasoning techniques of divination rationalize divination and elevate it from 'magic', which has a lower status in all forms of 'superstition'. Its inherent cosmology endows Chinese divination with a more rational status and more ordinary disposition.

Some Chinese diviners are empowered by their 'occult capital' and are often referred to by their clients using the honorifics 'superior man' (*gaoren* 高人) or 'master' (*dashi* 大师). Their charisma is further enhanced by incorporating the occult or spiritual into the politic and economic arena of contemporary China, which is a skill that requires skilfully manoeuvring cultural capital among social networks. At the same time, despite their celebrated cosmology and knowledge and the great demand for their services, diviners are still socially deviant and problematic. Their legitimation efforts, which will be introduced in the book, aim to shake off accusations such as 'frauds on the street' to 'pretenders colluding with the elite'.

I would rather call the whole group 'daily metaphysicians' who supply a folk service – granting insight into the mundane world. As an ordinary occupational group, diviners earn a living through providing folk consulting services. They can comment on fundamental issues of time, space and fate in a historical moment when their clients feel trapped in a gale of political, economic and private upheavals.

Optimistic Fatalism in Chinese Society

A belief in fate is the precondition of divination. The salience of fate (*ming* 命) in Chinese culture has been widely noticed by a number of Western observers. *Ming* often occurs in works of film and literature but also in everyday language. For example, it is common to hear people saying 'his fate is good' or 'my fate is not good'; people often attribute a success or failure to fate. By saying 'it is not my fate to have money', the speaker means she is doomed to be poor no matter how much efforts she makes, and she has to accept her poor financial situation for what it is. Fate or *ming* has been such a common concern in Chinese psychic and narrative trajectories that we can say it is life-limiting, but also life-giving.

In his edited volume on the idea of fate in China, Lupke (2005) reminds us that diviners, the professional group dealing with fate, should also be analysed. In my research, I found that many diviners detached fortune (*yun* 运) from destiny (*ming* 命). Jean DeBenardi translated the pair of concepts respectively as 'cycles of luck' and 'constitutive fate' in her study on popular religion in Penang Chinese communities (DeBernardi 2006: 15, 63). Diviners explain that one can change one's fortune in a particular period through one's own efforts, but that one's general

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destiny is preordained and is very difficult to change. *Ming* locks an individual into a predetermined hierarchical position, whereas *yun* inspires actors to capture opportunities and to work hard. The combination of an overarching frame of fate with the flexibility of fortune is the whole picture of one's destiny, called *mingyun* (命运) in modern Chinese. Generally speaking, most diviners acknowledge the extraordinary and decisive power of fate, but at the same time they encourage customers to change their behaviour, to advance their self-cultivation and to improve their social relations and ethics. Many of them, partially to seek profit, are apt to offer methods for enhancing fortune or remedies for bad luck.

Occupying a central position in Chinese philosophical and everyday discourse, *ming*, however, is more complex than 'fate' or 'destiny' in English. The Chinese character *ming* (命) also means command (e.g. *mingling* 命令), implying fate is an order to obey given by a supreme authority. Stafford (2012) outlines three ideal-type accounts of fate in Taiwan and China: cosmological (fate is determined in the mechanisms of the universe); spirit-oriented (fate is determined or shaped by the intervention of gods, ancestors or other spirits); social (fate is something we create for ourselves, especially through interactions with other people). The spiritual and social faces of fate are often recognized by both diviners and customers.[3] However, the rationale of Chinese divination mainly involves the first account of fate. In this line of thought fate can be presented as a kind of logical-mathematical problem.

There is a spectrum of popular ideas about agency and determinism related to fate, including passive fatalism, moral determinism (such as karma – a result of Buddhist influence) and anti-fatalism (Chan 1963: 78–79). The whole picture is also more than being passive and fatalistic. Raphals (2005) finds that, for Chinese, *ming* does not necessarily mean the demise of free will; there is room for manoeuvre. Ethnographies have also confirmed that in spite of a keen and strong interest in fate and fortune, in practice Chinese people are not very fatalistic; rather, they believe that fortune is heavily shaped by hard work and the manipulation of human relationships (Oxfeld 1993; DeBernardi 2006). The mainstream doctrine of Confucianism stereotypically requests people to behave in accord with *ming* but also to exert their utmost in moral endeavours and leave whatever is beyond our control to fate, even though it is so random and mystical that it goes beyond the ethical reasoning and rational understanding of human beings.

Researchers have confirmed that ideas of strong agency are maintained in conditions of an underlying determinism. Freedman (1979: 208–11) discloses the social competitiveness and assertion of individual rights in fengshui, while Potter (1970: 147) reminds us that the impersonal explanations of success and failure in fengshui soften the defects of social differentiation. Wang Mingming's research on Chinese notions of happiness and self-fulfilment reveals that people in villages in Southeast China rationalize achievement and failure with two factors: capability

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and fate. Wang Mingming summarises the double explanations, together with other local social, economic and ritual behaviours and concepts related to happiness, as a 'social ontology' (M. Wang 1997). DeBernardi (2006) and Stafford (2012) add the manipulation of social networks and human intersubjectivity to social ontology in their studies about popular beliefs concerning fate and fortune.

This ethno-philosophy and worldview bring about a contradictory phenomenon for observers: Chinese frequently refer to fate as though one's destiny was beyond one's control. On the other hand, Chinese also stereotypically appear as hardworking, energetic people, obsessed with success from effort and believing in the possibility of discerning and controlling fate (Potter 2003). An extreme case is that even in religious rituals Chinese worshippers often bribe or negotiate with gods instead of offering total devotion. In post-Mao China, the globalized market economy has produced millions of self-managing, competing individuals as well as books about how to succeed, which always occupy the top places in bestseller lists. In general, the diligent work ethic of the Chinese has impressed observers for generations.

Anthropologists further explore the contradiction between fatalism and agency with reference to social connection, self-representation and deep structure. Harrell (1987) attributes this contradiction to a practical treatment of fate. Moreover, he explains hard work in an economically rational way, as being determined by a family-centred economic goal (Harrell 1985). Hatfield (2002) explores the importance of 'fate' as a grounding notion of self-representation and as a recognition of efficacious agency in a social field. The Chinese fascination with fate and divination, in Sangren's view, raises human existential issues such as the desires that structure the productive and reproductive process of family and community life (Sangren 2012).

After the review of the conceptional foundation of divination, one might want to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese social structure's role in providing a combined sense of constriction and determinism but still elevate individual agency and a belief in randomness. This leads us to the next section.

Worldly Success, State and Religiosity

Larger social forces and cultural norms influence the practice of seeking divination or supernatural help out of self-interest. Obeyesekere's study on the god Skanda and Xin Liu's research on fengshui belief are germane to my thinking. Obeyesekere related the rise of the god Skanda to socio-economic frustrations faced by Sri Lankans in the late 1970s. Worldly success, such as a job in the bureaucracy or in a profession, became desirable goals as a result of mass education, political democratization and urbanization. While the aspiration levels were high, the possibility of achieving these goals was limited. Very often feudalistic

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elements, such as patronage systems, or the huge lag in development between the metropolis and the rural area, limited the mobility and prosperity of ordinary people. 'When the goals are well-defined and highly desired, but the means are ill-defined and problematical, the actor would experience considerable anxiety and frustration' (Obeyesekere 1977: 388). Obeyesekere presumed that in a psychologically frustrating situation, a person tends to place himself in a dependent position where a strong authoritarian figure can act on his behalf. The deity Skanda became especially welcomed because he was not constrained by socially sanctioned or moral codes. Skanda would achieve the desired goals by any means, as an authoritarian figure, acting on the worshipper's behalf in a situation of general uncertainty. Obeyesekere's deduction can be applied in many developing societies in transition, including contemporary Chinese society, where modernization or the introduction of capitalism provokes people to resort to supernaturalism to achieve their desired goals and where the likelihood of their achievement is unpredictable.

Xin Liu noticed that people in Beihai city in the 1990s attributed their business success to luck and supernatural powers such as fengshui. This is because local businesses were routinely exposed to unpredictable influences such as discontinuity in policies and excessive state intervention. This business environment, which Xin Liu referred to as a 'structure of rupture', was common in most areas of China. To regain a sense of order, it was necessary to believe in something beyond one's own control such as luck and to resort to support from supernatural powers.

I contend that the irregularity of state intervention alone cannot explain the importance of supernatural beliefs in attributing success. Why did people adopt a belief in the idea of fate and luck instead of a resentful attitude towards authority, even when they clearly knew that the intervention from the authorities was excessive? Why did public servants in Beihai also explain other phenomena such as the sudden death of government officials in terms of fengshui? Furthermore, irregularity and uncertainty often promote a belief in luck but not necessarily in fate. The determinism inherent in the idea of fate is at odds with uncertainty and irregularity.

The ethnographic depictions presented in this book show that individual success in China is largely influenced by external factors beyond one's control. Multiple social agencies are at work: *guanxi* networks, patriarchal family structures, social control through timing and state intervention are just a few examples. Businesswomen can achieve 'good fortune' through monetary success but they are still deeply bound by social forces, such as the heavy reliance on the social network of officials who control resources, and responding to the demand to reach life's 'milestones' at the expected time. Public servants cannot predict their promotions. Social relations can destroy or assist people but they are difficult to manipulate, as they involve too many people and are too susceptible to

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unpredictable events. This unpredictability is made even worse when the rules of the game founded on formal institutions such as a legal system do not work.

Xin Liu's study reminds us that in the field of anthropological studies of religiosity of China the relationship between the state and popular practice has always been a heated topic against the backdrop of modernization and state socialism. The history of the problematic status of Chinese religion dates back to the late nineteenth century, when the building of a modern nation state was launched. A modernist understanding of religion condemned most forms of traditional Chinese religious practice as 'superstition' and, later, 'feudal superstition'. Since then, superstitious Chinese beliefs and practices have been constantly described as what prevents China from developing and enriching itself with the Maoist party-state, who employ the most radical anti-religion policies of all regimes. In post-Mao China, apart from the revival of religion itself, the collective effervescence in spirituality and traditional practical techniques is also remarkable (Chen 2003; Palmer 2007; Boretz 2011; Farquhar and Zhang 2012). Adopting a more tolerant attitude, the state has become regulatory and managerial rather than suppressive (Chau 2011: 8). There are five religions recognized by the state, namely Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholic Christianity and Protestant Christianity. Theoretically, only religions registered by the government and under the leadership of the Bureau of Religious Affairs are recognized and legal. No explicit policy has been unveiled towards popular practices that are not included in the five officially registered religions. In general, reform-era religious policy still prohibits activities once those activities are deemed superstitious and harmful.

Writing on the topic of legitimation seeking, I argue that resistance and hegemony coexist in the negotiation process. Moreover, legitimation seeking by diviners is not merely a 'politics of articulation' that incorporates popular religious ideas and practices into the main body politic of the nation state (ibid.: 8). The legitimation relationship is not limited to the party-state and a particular occult practice but extends to the other social members, the larger society and culture.

Divination in many post-socialist societies brings a sense of the past or an alternative way of seeing the world within a nativist framework into people's mind. Though the past is deified and mystified, the popular imaginings of an 'old civilization' and the 'wisdom of ancestors' are in line with nationalist conceptions that are manipulated by the statism of the party-state. The 'superstition' and the mainstream could easily meet at a point to form a strong cultural nationalism supported by the leadership.

Methodology

Starting from a fresh standpoint, my study de-psychologizes the notion of comprehension and communication, I pay attention to divination as an occupation in

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modern societies that suspect and practise divination at the same time. Thus, divination's effect in legitimating results or facilitating decision-making is contested, and its social function in eliminating disorder is problematic. In such a setting, the traditional explanation of divination in terms of its social functions and psychosocial effects does not suffice. Moreover, diviners nowadays are increasingly exposed to the public, the media and the state. Their performances, such as running a company, organizing and attending divination-related conferences and giving lectures to club members, attract judgement.

Observers may interpret diviners' legitimation efforts as information control in stigma management (Goffman 1986). In their attempt to gain acceptance for divination and their profession, diviners highlight the positive signs of their practice. In particular, legitimation efforts are pervasive in diviners' dramaturgy: self-presentation in the public sphere, their encounter with the state and their communication with divination customers. As critics point out, 'the dramaturgical perspective over-extends the notion of acting or performing' (Manning 1992). I combine social constructionism with the subjectivity and reflexivity of diviners and argue that the psychic deposition and desire inherent in their beliefs and worldview also shape diviners' legitimation discourses. I also highlight actors' critical and creative agency.

Here my analytical approach to legitimation is in line with the pragmatic sociology of critique. In their book *On Justification*, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) delineate the interweaving of multiple 'orders of worth' in social life. Civic, market, inspired,[4] fame, industrial and domestic orders coexist as principles of evaluation. People constantly justify themselves, reach agreement or disagree with someone else with reference to these six domains of value. Here I do not directly apply their broadly feasible logics of justification to diviners;[5] rather, I embrace the approach of new pragmatic sociology that 'fully acknowledges actors' critical capacities and the creativity with which they engage in interpretation and action *en situation*' (Boltanski 2011: 43). Critical competence not only requires a reverse in power relations but also implies a rearrangement on the ontological level. Therefore, actors can be called 'daily metaphysicians'. Diviners are typical 'daily metaphysicians', as they have to give an alternative interpretation of life, having to be critical when confronted with challenges in their daily life in legitimating their practice, which is deprived of institutional and legal support but enjoys a certain degree of social acceptance. They borrow symbols, rhetoric and logics from nationalism, moral doctrines and modern professionalism to weave a structure for a chaotic world. Their legitimation-seeking behaviour is not merely about 'articulation' but also involves a politics of action and identification in the larger context of society and culture. Their sincere pursuit of meaning and cultural identity through divination knowledge also echoes the mainstream society's own consciousness of reapproaching Chineseness.

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Fieldwork

My personal attitude towards divination went through a series of changes during my fieldwork. At the beginning of the research, like many educated people who regard themselves as 'enlightened', I was aloof and even contemptuous toward divination. The first change originated with my own family's experience with divination.

Several of my aunts were ardent consumers of divination and spirit medium healing. I did not directly oppose their activities – how can a student of anthropology present a narrow-minded attitude towards custom! But, I still thought the amount of money my aunts spent on divination and healing was huge. They also consulted with diviners for many members of our extended family, including me. One day my aunt Xia came to me and took out a piece of crumpled paper. On the paper were her notes recording a diviner's declarations after calculating my birth information. She smiled with a little embarrassment and pointed out that much of the diviner's description about me was accurate, including my appearance, face shape, character, etc. When I looked through the notes, I was impressed by their accuracy. I was also astonished to see how seriously Aunt Xia as an educated woman took divination. She even wrote notes carefully while listening to the diviner's judgements and kept those notes for a long time. Later I found out that numerous people with various levels of income, education and status, not just my aunts, were attracted by divination. These experiences convinced me of the importance of this project.

During fieldwork, the rich knowledge, the time-honoured cosmology and the logically self-consistent system of divination gradually began to fascinate me. I bought textbooks to learn divination myself and also consulted diviners who I got to know through fieldwork. These studies led me to a new understanding of traditional Chinese practical knowledge. However, once I had returned to Australia after fieldwork, some of my middle-class educated friends often doubted the credibility of divinatory knowledge. I tried to defend divination at first, but later I began to suspect my own gullibility. My intellectual connection with divination was further challenged when I realized the basic premises of divination such as categorizing the world according to yinyang and the Five Phases were not necessarily true.

My position changed again when I started presenting my work to intellectuals in Chinese universities, including some anthropologists. Some of them admired the mystic knowledge of ancient divination but did not see any great knowledge or wisdom in contemporary divination practitioners; rather, they simply looked down upon diviners as frauds. Their judgements went against my findings, so I felt again the necessity to write a neutral description of divination and diviners.

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I conducted my fieldwork in my hometown, which I will call L City in northern China. This choice was based on several considerations. Divination is found in Chinese-speaking communities throughout the world. As it is not an exclusively local phenomenon, my choice of fieldwork site was mainly based on accessibility. Divination is generally a stigmatized occupation in Communist society, and practitioners have a bad reputation for fraud. As a result, diviners are often suspicious and sensitive towards investigators. In order to connect more easily with professional diviners, I chose my hometown to base my fieldwork in as I had a strong social network. Besides, L City was typical in terms of divination; during the main period of my fieldwork in 2011–2013, there were many divination shops on the city streets of L City. A diviner who often travelled to other cities to work told me that the visibility of divination in other cities was much more restricted than L City. In order to have a comparative view, I went to Beijing, Hebei, Fujian and Malaysia for short visits to gather preliminary data from different regions.

L City used to be a poverty-stricken area, lacking an industrial foundation until the 1990s, when commercial industry grew vigorously. A prominent feature of L City is that the private sector contributes most of the local income. A high percentage of formerly rural people in the population gives the city a rustic atmosphere, while fast urbanization is apparent as well. According to the local government's official website, during 2011–2015 urbanization will be comprehensively promoted. At the time of my research, L City was a prefectural level city with approximately one million people living in its urban districts.

L City was one of the main 'old revolutionary areas' of China – i.e. scattered locations where the Communist Party successfully built bases during the anti-Japanese war (1937–1945) and the civil war (1945–1949). China has a tradition of 'revolutionary pilgrimage'. Every year public servants and students are encouraged to visit a 'sacred revolutionary place' such as L City. The Party attempts to strengthen its legitimacy by revitalizing 'red' memory with the help of the tourism industry and intensive ideological propaganda.

L City people enjoy countrywide fame as residents of an old revolutionary area, and they utilize it to request financial support from the state and to sell commodities. However, they are also annoyed by the stereotype of being an impoverished area because it is widely known that the Communist Party always built their bases in hard-to-reach poor areas. When people from L City introduce their hometown to strangers they often add that the local economy has much improved since the 1990s. L City people want to shrug off the stereotype of ethical but backward peasants. Like many other Chinese cities, L City is eager to display its economic achievement and the superiority or grandness of its development based on wealth accumulation.

During my research in L City, I gradually became familiar with eight local professional diviners of different income levels and genders. In general, my

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research focused on full-time professional diviners who lived in the urban districts and who used text-based knowledge of traditional Chinese divination. Spirit mediums, monks, Daoists and blind diviners also play the roles of diviners, but I did not focus on them. I mainly looked at divination in urban settings to challenge the stereotype that divination is most popular in rural areas. Researchers in the 1990s declared that 'urban Chinese [are] strongly unfavourable to traditional folk wisdom' (Bruun 1996: 52); however, my fieldwork shows that now urban residents are also interested in traditional divination, with a heavier investment in divination-related consumption.

I constantly paid diviners visits and observed their business. Some divination consultations were conducted in public with many other customers present. Some customers rarely wished to tell a stranger about what he or she had consulted the diviner for. For them, privacy was a problem. I collected some customers' data initially from relatives and acquaintances and from anonymous posts on the Internet. These people were more likely to reveal their own or somebody else's private concerns and issues. In the case of my friends and relatives I already knew about their backgrounds without requiring them to confess. In general, I targeted clients I thought were representative. The opinions of governmental administrators, psychological counsellors and writers in new media and literature rounded out my sources. As for general attitudes to divination, and statistics about divination activity, I consult a series of nationwide surveys conducted by the China Association of Science and Technology. The project with the title of 'Public Attitude towards Unknown Phenomena'[6] was conducted successively in 1996, 1998 and 2002 among 100 counties (or equivalent administrative districts) of the whole country. Investigators were staff of a local branch of China Association of Science and Technology whose semi-governmental status might have influenced interviewees' choice of answers. Sample methods include stratified cluster sampling, multistage sampling and population proportionate sampling. All surveys were undertaken in the way of questionnaires combined with structural interviews. The surveys conducted in 1996 and 2002 involved 5,000 questionnaires; the one in 1998 involved 5,500 questionnaires. The retrieval rate in 1996 was 51.9 per cent, 72.2 per cent in 1998 and 88.5 per cent in 2002 (China Association of Science and Technology 1997, 1999, 2005). These three surveys had larger sampling sizes than other surveys on a similar topic. They also had questions related to divination practice and related attitude.

In his fieldwork on *qigong* healing in China, Ots (1994) found that in the primary interviews his respondents evoked stereotyped descriptions of *qi* and of yin and yang. It was only after he had interviewed his subjects repeatedly that their descriptions revealed a complex inner world. Diviners who bragged about themselves using mainstream discourses likewise constituted an obstacle in the early stages of my research. However, then I gained more in-depth knowledge;

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instead of regarding the initial 'bragging' as having limited value, I realized the self-promotion of diviners was important. Their performances were a window through which I could observe how meaning was established, making use of and showing commitment to mainstream discourses. By attending to this 'bragging', I was also able to observe the inverse in the diviners' own marginality and discomfort.

Book Structure

Chapter One introduces the historical background to divination's social and political status to help explain the ambiguous position of divination in China. This chapter shows how divination has been evaluated and treated by the state, the intellectual elite and ordinary people, from the beginnings of Chinese civilization until more recent times. History shows that divination has always had an ambiguous position as a popular but disdained practice and knowledge system. However the cosmology behind divination was only overturned in modern times.

Chapter Two introduces divination both as a knowledge system and as a business. This chapter highlights the similarity of techniques and beliefs of diviners as well as their inner diversity and stratification. I describe divination's techniques and cosmology, which comprise the basic frameworks of its intellectual legitimacy. The idea of 'good fortune' in divination dovetails with contemporary popular concepts of 'success', which constitutes another level of the legitimatization of divination. After categorizing diviners from various angles, I explore the identity of diviners as an occupational group.

Chapter Three looks at divination's customer base in contemporary China and illustrates examples of the use of divination in daily life. Drawing on typical customers' stories, the chapter provides an analysis of the social motivation for consulting diviners. I argue that individual aspiration and desires activated by new economic and social conditions have to compete with political constraints and social customs. Uncertainty is merely a trait of fate on the surface; the determinate social, structural constraints on agency occupy the foundational layer of fate.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven comprise the main body of this book. They are structured around the critical activities diviners use to legitimate their practice in public. Specifically, divination is presented by diviners in four ways: (1) the provision of moral advice, (2) an aspect of 'traditional culture', (3) a form of psychological counselling, and (4) an academic profession.

Chapter Four argues that although divination implies a concern about individual interests and a utilitarian view on worldly success, diviners have a strong tendency to deliver moral messages to customers. Their moral advice and guidance emphasize relational values and have an affinity with Buddhism. Moral

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discourses are not only instrumentally functional in presenting divination as a socially meaningful practice but also make divination's verdicts infallible.

Chapter Five traces how diviners use cultural nationalism and the values of a revived tradition. By aligning themselves with one of the most important ancient texts, *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), diviners regard themselves as protectors of 'traditional culture' and promoters of 'China's national wisdom'. The alignment with the national tradition not only enhances divination's social status but also generates more profit for diviners and constructs a limited affinity with official ideology.

Chapter Six describes how diviners borrow the established legitimacy of psychological counselling, which is growing fast in China. This chapter explores counsellors' reactions to this 'mingling'. I suggest that both divination and counselling are not based on sound institutional foundations and that this may be one reason why mingling can take place.

Chapter Seven discusses diviners' public activities in various academic-style associations and conferences as well as their strategies to circumvent censorship in China. I explain how diviners' efforts at self-professionalization are an imitation of the modern expert system. Their expert system is highly commercialized, as a diviner can get material profit and symbolic capital through 'purchasing credit' from association memberships and conference experiences. I argue that such imitation and commercialization is also a result of the strict censorship on civil bodies and the official ban on divination-related activities.

These four approaches are not mutually exclusive, as they have an inner relationship and overlap with each other. Professionalization and the comparison to psychological counselling are often involved with institution building. The diviners' self-justifications in terms of morality and traditional culture also play a central role in building value for their occupation. To complement an instrumentalist understanding of action, my analysis also pays attention to the 'passionate structures of internalized emotion and commitment' (P. Smith 2001: 64) involved in their 'bragging'.

These four aspects of the legitimation of divination are not exhaustive; there are also other methods. However, the four I highlight are dominant and typical in the contemporary public performance of divination. Diviners constantly address these legitimation strategies in their daily practice and rhetoric, consciously or not.

Due to methodological limitations, this book has touched on but has not been able to describe in depth the relationships among diviners and the communication modes used between professional diviners, amateurs and disciples. Neither has it been able to discuss in detail the social perceptions of divination. It provides only the first step to understanding how divination has been legitimized with limitation through the actions of diviners. Future research is required to fill these lacunae

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by examining how the diviners' legitimizing actions gain social acceptance. This should greatly improve our fundamental understanding of how people engaged in certain marginal social activities justify them (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and how the everyday reasons we give for our actions are dictated by, and help to constitute, our social relationships (Tilly 2006).

This book not only documents the practice of divination in today's China but also reflects upon the way diviners understand their work and the historical and contemporary discourses that have propelled changes in Chinese divination. By doing so, I shed new light on the reflective and critical stances of diviners themselves.

Notes

1. Chapter 1 contains a more detailed account of the legal status of divination-related activities since 1979.
2. For the politics of divinatory perception within Western societies, see Newman (1999).
3. Most anthropologists would like to attribute most expressions of fate to the third line, as they typically maintain that cosmological and divine power are essentially social.
4. Inspired worth refers to spirits possessing an inspired person. It often invokes an inner exploration of mind and is manifested by feelings and passions. See Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 159–64).
5. In daily English, the words justification and legitimation are often interchangeable. However, here a distinction is needed. 'Justification' refers to whatever is provided as grounds to prove or defend one's claim or conduct. In this regard to seek justification for a statement or action is the fundamental characteristic of a rational being. Legitimation, on the other hand, refers to the process whereby an act, process or ideology becomes desirable, proper or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms (Suchman 1995: 574). Compared to justification, legitimation thus has a stronger relation to social recognition and to law, customs, and standards. Justification has an open result, but legitimation implies that something becomes acceptable and normative. Following this distinction, the legitimation of divination cannot be complete without the recognition of law and social standards. As I mainly look at discourses that aim at achieving political and social legitimacy, I use the word legitimation most frequently in this book.
6. To avoid the stigmatization related to divination, magic or other religious issues, the survey uses 'unknown phenomena' as a more neutral expression.

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