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# Coping with the Future

*Theories and Practices of Divination  
in East Asia*

*Edited by*

Michael Lackner



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## The Allegorical Cosmos: The *Shi* 式 Board in Medieval Taoist and Buddhist Sources

Dominic Steavu\*

Sacrifice to the ancestors, as if they are there, sacrifice to the gods, as if the gods are there. The Master said: "If I do not offer a sacrifice [as if they are there], it is like not sacrificing at all."

祭如在，祭神如神在。子曰：吾不與祭，如不祭。

*The Analects* [*Lunyu* 論語] 3.12

### 1 Introduction

In his recent reconsideration of James L. Watson's contributions to the anthropology of Chinese religions, Donald Sutton refers to the above epitaph from the *Lunyu* in establishing the centrality of 'as if' fiction in ritual.<sup>1</sup> The effect of a ritual, he argues, is accomplished through one's state of mind. The effectiveness of the sacrifice hinges not on whether the gods are verifiably present or not, but on the officiant's sincerity in acting as if they were. Thus, in sources spanning from the *Doctrine of the Mean* [*Zhongyong* 中庸] to Qing (1644–1912) liturgical handbooks for magistrates, sincerity (*cheng* 誠) is a crucial component of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) and is deemed vital to ritual efficacy.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Sutton insists, sincerity "had a *bodily* aspect: earnest

\* I would like to thank Donald Harper, Marc Kalinowski and Fabrizio Pregadio for their precious insights and close reading of this article. I would also like to thank the reviewers for their comments. Any mistakes that may remain are entirely mine.

1 Sutton, "Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy in China," 14; I borrow the term "as if" fiction" from Roetz, *Confucian Ethics*, 326, n. 13.

2 See for example, *Zhongyong* 16, for a passage that echoes the lines from *Lunyu* 3.12: 子曰：

「鬼神之為德，其盛矣乎！視之而弗見，聽之而弗聞，體物而不可遺。使天下之人齊明盛服，以承祭祀，洋洋乎如在其上，如在其左右。《詩》曰：『神之格思，不可度思！矧可射思！』夫微之顯，誠之不可掩如此夫。」

"The Master [Confucius] said, 'How abundant are the gods and ghost's acts of power! Yet, if one looks for them, one does not see them. If one listens to them, one does not hear them. They inform all things, yet they cannot be traced. They cause all people under

disposition made visible in physical acts and attitudes. It was not a purely 'internal state' at all. Neither, on the other hand, is *li* a purely *external* state like our [academic and post-enlightenment understanding of] 'ritual.'<sup>3</sup> The *Xunzi* 荀子 for instance, explains: "Rites (*li*) reach their highest perfection when both emotion and form are fully realized. In rites of the next order, emotions and form in turn prevail. In the lowest order of rites, all reverts to emotion [...]."<sup>4</sup> In their highest expression, the formal elements of ritual, considered both internal and external, and the informal features, expressed outwardly and inwardly, commingle.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the ceremonial aspects of ritual must be performed 'as if' they perfectly express intent, while the intent must be 'as if' it were a flawless emotional translation of the ceremonial component, to paraphrase the exhortation from the *Lunyu*. In this circular logic of 'as if' mimesis, the two aspects blend, mirroring both internal dispositions and external performance simultaneously.<sup>6</sup>

Although informative, the dichotomy that Watson and other anthropologists upheld between ritual and belief, or action and thought, does not reflect all indigenous Chinese discourses on ritual.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, this brief consideration

Heaven to fast and purify, and don splendid attire in order to undertake sacrifices to them. [Their presence is] Overflowing! As if they were [right] above them, as if they were to their right and left. Thus, the *Classic of Poetry* says: 'The approaches of the gods, cannot be surmised! All the more are they not to be disregarded!' The manifestation of the subtle and the impossibility of obstructing sincerity are like this!"

3 Sutton, *ibid.*

4 故至備，情文俱盡；其次，情文代勝；其下復情以歸大一也；*Xunzi*, 19.12; English translation from Knoblock, "*Xunzi*", 3:16.

5 文理繁，情用省，是禮之隆也。文理省，情用繁，是禮之殺也。文理情用相為內外表裏，並行而雜，是禮之中流也。故君子上致其隆，下盡其殺，而中處其中；*Xunzi*, 19.16. Knoblock, "*Xunzi*", 3:62, translates: "When form and principle are emphasized and emotions and offerings are treated perfunctorily, there is the greatest elaboration of ritual. When emotion and offerings are emphasized and form and principle are treated perfunctorily, there is the greatest simplification of ritual. When form and principle, and emotion and offerings, are treated as inside to outside, external manifestation to inner content, so that both are translated into action and commingled, there is the mean course of ritual. Thus, the gentleman [...] dwells in the mean of its mean course."

6 I rely on Michael Taussig's notion of mimesis, which he develops principally from Walter Benjamin's ideas; see Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.

7 Among the proponents of the "interpretive approach," we may also cite Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss; among its detractors figure Catherine Bell, Pierre Bourdieu, and Stanley Tambiah, who argued for a "performative" model in which the social dimensions to ritual are prized (as a line of investigation) over that of the individual; see, for instance, Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, and, more succinctly, Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," 123–166, in his *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*; for an overview of why ritual (action) is not separable from thought (belief) in the Chinese context, see Rawski, "A

of ritual in China offers a methodological springboard into the world of the instrument known as the *shi* 式 board. The implement was likely devised for the purpose of astrocalendrical computation, but specimens from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) suggest that even early on, the device was used in hemerology, that is, the determination of auspicious and inauspicious times, days, or periods. From the early medieval period, the *shi* was increasingly adapted to a variety of other prognosticatory and increasingly ritual contexts that required less technical knowledge or expertise than strictly astrocalendrical calculations. Although some official sources contain examples of the *shi* board's more ritual permutations, the Taoist and Buddhist canons preserve the most striking examples of such re-appropriations. In these, the general principles of the *shi*'s operation, deriving from a desire to know or alter fate—the 'internal intent,' so to speak—are preserved, but the external display of that intent is modified in accordance with new parameters dictated by the practice. Likewise, although the external form of the *shi* board—defined by the spatio-temporal markings that it bears—is highly fluid, its 'internal form,' that is to say, its basic features as a cosmograph, is consistently maintained.<sup>8</sup> Even in its most figurative embodiments, the *shi* still operated in the same way as its earlier astrocalendrical or hemerological cousins.

The present article will contribute observations towards answering the question of why certain mantic traditions, despite having *a priori* very little to do with hemerological computation, opted for the *shi* board as their ritual implement of choice. To put it differently, why did the traditions in question deem it necessary or advantageous to appropriate and reformulate the *shi* board, a tool whose manipulation required fairly specific technical training that was traditionally valid only within a fairly restricted context? Preliminary impressions will be gleaned through a close examination of *shi* board literature in the Taoist and Buddhist canons, although official sources will also be considered. In the concluding discussion, I will attempt to answer the question of what ritual mechanisms were at play when the *shi* was de- and re-contextualized. First and foremost, however, a few clarifications concerning the implement are in order.

Historian's Approach" and Feuchtwang, *The Imperial Metaphor*; as well as the discussion thereof in Sutton, "Ritual," 3–21.

8 See also Hayek's contribution in this volume.

## 2 Toward a Typology of the *Shi* in Early and Medieval China

Although the topic of the *shi* board, or, alternatively, the *shi* 'cosmograph,' has generated numerous studies and elicited a number of notable debates, the exact functions of the instrument remain poorly understood.<sup>9</sup> Some scholars, including Joseph Needham and Christopher Cullen, have stressed the *shi*'s astrometric dimensions in the structuring of time and space, while Donald Harper has insisted on its role in divination and the reckoning arts (*shushu* 數術). Most specialists agree on the astronomical undertones, which are in fact, more accurately described as astrocalendrical undertones and are inherent to the instrument's structure and use in hemerology.<sup>10</sup> Marc Kalinowski has most recently cleared up some of the misconceptions that have plagued previous studies in order to pave the way for a more accurate typology of the device and its applications.<sup>11</sup> But the exact boundaries that delineate calendrical astrology, hemerology, or technically cruder forms of divinatory and para-divinatory

9 For relatively early impressions on the *shi* and its potential applications, see Yan Dunjie, "Guanyu Xi-Han," and Yin Difei, "Xi-Han Ruyin." For a debate around the *shi* that sums up many of the issues encountered in Chinese literature, see Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board (*shih* 式); Cullen, "Some Further Points on the *shih*"; Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board"; and Cullen, "The Han Cosmic Model"; see also Li Ling's masterfully synthetic, "Shi' yu Zhongguo gudai de yuzhou moshi" in his *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 89–176, originally published under the same title in *Zhongguo wenhua*; and, more recently, Lu Yang, *Zhongguo gudai xingzhan xue*, 298–523.

10 The word used to translate the *shi* 式 is often reflective of the author's understanding of the device. Echoing Needham's "diviner's board," Harper suggests "cosmic board"—while Cullen answers with "cosmic model," a direct translation of the Chinese term "yuzhou moshi" 宇宙模式; see the previous footnote for references. Throughout this article, I have elected to leave the term untranslated, adding "board" as a suffix to clarify that it is a tangible technical instrument that is under discussion—a notion that the modern Chinese term *shipan* 式盤 conveys. In addressing its cosmological nature, I will on occasion refer to the *shi* as a "cosmograph," following Stephen Little; see his "Cosmos, Cosmograph, and the Inquiring Poet." This moniker has the advantage of encompassing the notion of "cosmic model" and that of "*shitu* 式圖" ("cosmogram") preferred by Li Ling, without the inconveniences of being overly descriptive or too general. For example, it may refer to both material computational tools or *shi*-derived diagrams and schemata that are traced on paper or on the ground. More recently, Kalinowski has proposed the elegant term "mantic device" to reflect the Chinese *zhanpan* 占盤 adopted from Yan Dunjie, although it is my understanding that this would not apply to *shi* that are used for non-prognosticatory ends, such as apotropeia; see Kalinowski's "The notion of 'Shi 式.'"

11 Kalinowski, *ibid.*

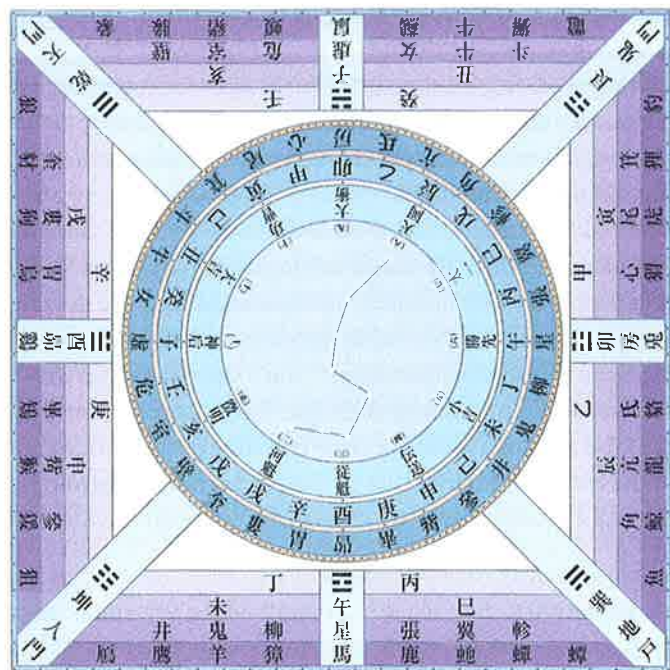


FIGURE 6.1  
A two-dimensional  
representation of a  
Six Dynasties  
(220–589) Liuren 六  
壬 divination board  
with its round  
“heaven plate” and  
square “earth plate.”  
Reproduced on the  
basis of Abe no  
Seimei to Onmyōdō  
ten 安倍晴明と陰  
陽道展 [Abe no  
Seimei and the Way of  
Yin and Yang;  
The Exhibition], 53.

methods involving the instrument or its derivative diagrams remain difficult to ascertain.

For heuristic purposes, I propose we view these three categories as a continuous spectrum along which technical knowledge is progressively diluted and replaced with abstract or impressionistic substitutes of that knowledge. In other words, the farther one moves along the spectrum, the more astro-calendrical values are replaced with cosmological or even theological counterparts. Through this prism, the cases examined in the next few pages, which chiefly exhibit highly abstract data with only symbolic astro-calendrical value, can still be integrated in a broader taxonomy of the *shi*.

Yet, this schematic simplification of the instrument does not amount to a *carte blanche* in formulating misleading generalities. It would be mistaken to assume that the applications and varieties of *shi* can be divided along neat social or sectarian lines, with official sources conserving the comparatively “practical” hemerological uses and the symbolic or conceptual uses being relegated to religious sources unsusceptible to the logical rigors of representational accuracy. That is not to deny that in their formalistic and technically demanding incarnations, *shi* boards were connected to the practices of the official sphere—whether determining the proper course of military action, divining the auspiciousness of an emperor’s dream, or formulating

meteorological predictions on the basis of which agricultural policies could be implemented. The implement was indeed associated with statecraft, but it was not the exclusive preserve of the governing elite.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it is precisely because it immediately evoked power and authority that the *shi* was a valuable commodity for many who were not directly involved with ruling, religious specialists among them.

### 3 Taoist Technical Manuals on *Shi* Divination

Among its wealth of treatises on prognostication, the Taoist Canon [*Daozang* 道藏] houses a triptych of texts that deal with the manipulation of the *shi* in a way that presupposes advanced technical knowledge.<sup>13</sup> The first of these is the

<sup>12</sup> For early accounts of the application of the *shi* in relation to official matters, see for example, Ban Gu’s *Hanshu* 漢書, 99.2; and Sima Qian’s *Shiji* 史記, 128. By the Tang (618–907), *shi* divination for official purposes was fully regulated by the Office of Divination (*Taibu shu* 太卜署), itself under the administration of the Ministry of Rites (*Taichang si* 太常寺). Kalinowski, “Mantic Texts,” 114–115, explains: “In the 8th century, it comprised 92 members including instructors and students, 20 diviners (*bushi* 卜師), and 15 exorcists (*wushi* 巫師). The *Tang liudian* which describes its composition also mentions the four main specialties practiced by members of the Office: divination by turtle (*gui* 龜), signs (*zhao* 兆), milfoil (*yi* 易) and mantic astrolabes (*shi* 式). The work further cites a fifth specialty named ‘Various Yin-Yang Prognostications’ (*yinyang zazhan* 陰陽雜占), which was again subdivided into nine categories.”

<sup>13</sup> Most of the divination techniques described in the Taoist Canon do not require a *shi* board. Those that do are discussed in the following pages. A third category of texts present methods that involve cosmographs, most often in the form of computational tables or diagrams, bearing some relation to the *shi*, although this is not made explicit; see for example the Song (960–1279) or Yuan (1279–1368) period *Ziwei doushu* 紫微斗數 [*Reckonings from the Big Dipper’s Palace of Purple Tenuity*] and its treatment in Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 74–81; see also *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 [*Seven Lots from the Bookcase of the Clouds*; DZ 1032], 107.10b for a description of an intriguing “celestial globe” (*huntian xiang* 渾天像) that Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) devised. In this third category of texts, I also include two groups of *dunjia* 遁甲 (hidden stem) divination treatises. The Tang dynasty *Huangdi taiyi bamen rushi jue*, 黃帝太一八門入式訣 [*The Yellow Emperor’s Instructions on Entering the Cosmograph through the Eight Gates of Supreme Unity*; DZ 586] *Huangdi taiyi bamen rushi bijue* 黃帝太一八門入式祕訣 [*The Yellow Emperor’s Secret Instructions on Entering the Cosmograph through the Eight Gates of Supreme Unity*; DZ 587], and *Huangdi taiyi bamen nishun shensi jue* 黃帝太一八門逆順生死訣 [*The Yellow Emperor’s Secret Instructions on Inverting and Following the [Processes of] Life and Death through the Eight Gates of Supreme Unity*; DZ 588] form a first group. A second group of interrelated scriptures, this time from the Song, is made up of the *Taishang liuren mingjian fuyin jing* 太上六壬明鑑符陰經 [*Book of the Luminous Mirror*

*Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Dragon Head* [*Huangdi longshou jing* 黃帝龍首經; DZ 283], a two-juan Liuren 六壬 treatise first mentioned in the fourth-century *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity* [*Baopu zi* 抱朴子].<sup>14</sup> Among its seventy-two headings, readers will find instructions for a variety of prognosticatory purposes including “interrogating convicts and obtaining the truth” or “determining the docility of servants and other members of the underclass.”<sup>15</sup> The sixty-eighth entry's typically jargon-laden instructions concerning the method for “divining burial matters” (*zhan zangshi* 占葬事) suggest the source was primarily intended for a readership of technical specialists:

One must first determine the [positions] of the five phases. If the branch value<sup>16</sup> below the hour [matching] Victorious Precedence does not correspond to the stem of the current day, then be cautious when operating the *shi* not to make the Dipper face the current day's stem and branch, nor should the White Tiger be made to face a direction of potency.<sup>17</sup> Thus, [the situation] will be greatly auspicious and there will be no misfortune thereafter. As for not complying with this method, it is the first step in stirring up calamity.<sup>18</sup>

必先定五行，若勝先時下辰與今日日[辰]不比，及推式，慎無令魁罡臨今日日辰，又勿令白虎臨有氣之鄉，即大吉，後乃無咎。不如法者，禍起之始。

of the Six Ren Tallying with Yin; DZ 861]. and the *Taishang dongshen xuanmiao boyuan zhenjing*. 太上洞神玄妙白猿真經 [*Perfect Scripture of the Mysterious and Wondrous White Monkey*; DZ 858] The last pair exhibits overlap with a number of official divination sources from the Tang and Song, among them the *Taibo yinjing* 太白陰經 [*The Hidden Scripture of Venus*] by Li Quan 李筌 (fl. ca. 743), its antiquarian re-edition of (1044) under the name *Wujing zongyao*, 武經總要 [*Complete Essentials of the Classic of Warfare*] and *Jingyou dunjia fuying jing*, 景祐遁甲符應經 [*Scripture of the Resonant Talismans of the Hidden Stem from the Jingyou era* (1034-1038)] on which, see below.

14 See Ge Hong, *Baopu zi*, 19.307.

15 *Huangdi longshou jing*, 1.15ab and 2.3ab, respectively. The text dates from the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) or early Six Dynasties (220–589 CE) period.

16 Sexagenary binomes are composed by combining one of the ten celestial stems with one of the twelve earthly branches. In a hemerological context, *chen* 辰 most often refers to the branch half of the binome. I am thankful to Donald Harper for pointing this out.

17 The expression *Kuigang* 魁罡 is here a synecdoche for the Big Dipper. It combines the names of the first and last stars of the asterism.

18 *Huangdi longshou jing*, 2.18a. I am thankful for Marc Kalinowski's assistance in rendering this passage.

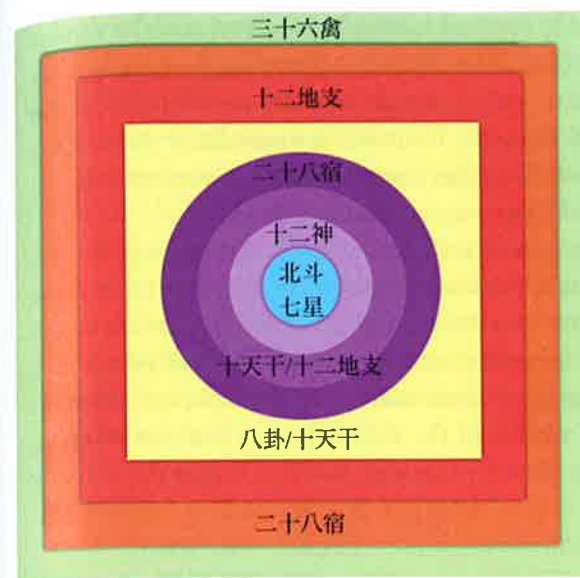


FIGURE 6.2  
Schematic representation of the general features and markings of a typical medieval *shi* divination board

The cryptic directives continue throughout the text. Yet, from the mention of Victorious Precedence (Shengxian 勝先),<sup>19</sup> one of the Twelve Monthly Generals (*shi'er yue jiang* 十二月將) and the exhortations to refrain from making some of them ‘face’ (*lin* 臨) certain values, it is safe to assume that the *Longshou jing* is describing the operation of a *shi* cosmograph, or at the very least the elaboration of a *shi* diagram, in accordance with the Liuren divination method (see figure 6.1 and figure 6.2). What is more, the passage explicitly enjoins practitioners to “operate the cosmograph” (*tuishi* 推式), confirming that ritual did indeed rely on some material support.<sup>20</sup>

Written in the same technical language as the *Longshou jing*, the two other sources from the Taoist Canon—the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Gold Casket and Jade Scale* [*Huangdi jinkui yuheng jing* 黃帝金匱玉衡; DZ 284] and

19 Sometimes listed as Shengguang 勝光 (Superior Radiance).

20 Since these issues have already been addressed at length, I will refrain from elaborating on the operational details of the Liuren *shi* or the astrocalendrical significance of its markings. See Marc Kalinowski, “Les instruments” and “La transmission”, 788–791; see also Yan Dunjie, “Shipan zongshu”; and Ho Peng Yoke, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 124–129. In early and medieval Japan, the Liuren *shi* was also used according to Chinese principles of operation, thus offering valuable insight into the practice in China; see the instructive three-part article series by Kosaka Shinji, “Onmyōdō no rikujin shikisen ni tsuite” and more recently by the same author, “Rikujin chokusen to nijūhasshuku.” Kosaka has devoted the better part of the last thirty years to studying *shi* board divination, with particular attention to the Liuren method.

the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Dark Maiden Transmitted to his Three Sons* [*Huangdi shou sanzi xuannü jing* 黃帝授三子玄女經; DZ 285]—equally cater to specialists of the divination arts. Although only the first is listed in the bibliographic catalogues of dynastic histories, the similarity in content between the sources lends to believe that the Liuren methods encountered in all three treatises would have been in use in official circles.<sup>21</sup>

The two latter sources are just as technical as the *Longshou jing*, but the question of whether an actual material cosmograph is employed is more ambiguous. References to the manipulation of an actual *shi* device or the elaboration of a *shi* diagram are comparatively oblique. The *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Gold Casket and Jade Scale* stands out in that it proposes what appears to be an abstracted version of the *shi* device, one that the officiant, standing at the center of a projected ritual area modeled on the *shi*, partially embodies<sup>22</sup>:

The Yellow Emperor said: I will transmit to you these two [documents], the *Chart of the Gold Casket* and the *Scripture of Jade Scale*, but you must keep these secret [...] Without even leaving the house, all under heaven can be known; without walking out of the door, perfected rule can be achieved. That which Ascending Brightness faces [determines] auspiciousness. [...] The Revered Spirit of the Heavenly One is positioned in the Central Palace. He takes hold of Jewel and Pearl [the 'carriage' of the Big Dipper] and the Jade Scale [the handle of the Big Dipper], controlling the four seasons, holding Yin and Yang in rein. In his hands, he grasps the

21 For a list of the bibliographic treatises that include the *Longshou jing*, see Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 112–119, esp. 114. Given the truncated nature of its content and its relatively short length, the *Shou sanzi xuannü jing* was likely a subsection of a larger Liuren divination text, perhaps the *Longshou jing*, as its title refers to the transmission narrative presented in the latter's preface; see *Longshou jing*, 1.1a: Concerning the circulation of the *Jinkui yuheng jing* in official circles, the scholar-official Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591) cites a *Jinkui* 金匱 [Gold casket] while the *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋 [Spring and Autumn of Wu and Yue] mentions a *Jinkui* together with a certain *Yumen* 玉門 [Jade gate], an expression used interchangeably with "yuheng 玉衡"; see Kalinowski, "Les instruments," 398–400; and for an abridged account in English, see, by the same author, "Huangdi jinggui yuheng jing", 85–86. Both of these passages are part of a broader overview of the three Liuren scriptures from the *Daozang*; see Kalinowski, "Les instruments," 396–401; and the English counterpart in Schipper and Verellen's *The Taoist Canon*, 84–87; see also Yan Dunjie, "Shipan zongshu."

22 Marc Kalinowski, "Les instruments," 397–398 first proposed this reading of the *Jinkui yuheng jing*, which I follow.

plumb line, positioning in order the stars of the Big Dipper. *Fang* [fourth equatorial mansion] is on its left, *shen* [twenty-first equatorial mansion], on its right, *xu* [eleventh equatorial mansion] to its back, and *zhang* [twenty-sixth equatorial mansion], to its front. The Revered Spirit of the Heavenly One joins the twenty-eight [mansions] to the eight directions, with [the trigram] Qian as compass and [the trigram] Kun as ruler. He exhales Yin and exhales Yang, [positioning] the five [Generals] before him and the six [Generals] behind. And thus, he makes auspiciousness manifest. [...] [This scripture presents] thirty-six uses of the Gold Casket and Jade Room,<sup>23</sup> and in all of them, the Heavenly One is the most venerable, for he is lord ruler. Commanding the center empowers the spirits; how lofty and magnificent!<sup>24</sup>

黃帝曰：吾授汝此圖金匱、玉衡經二，子秘之 [...] 不出房戶，可知天下，不出戶房，可致真主。明視登明，所臨吉凶。[...] 天一貴神，位在中宮，據璇璣把玉衡，統御四時，攬撮陰陽，手握繩墨，位正魁罡，左房右參，背虛向張，四七布列，首羅八方，規矩乾坤，嘯吸陰陽，首五後六，以顯吉凶。[...] 三十六用，金匱玉房，天一最尊，為之主王；將中威神，巍巍堂堂。

The *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Gold Casket and Jade Scale* is just as hermetic as its two sister scriptures, but even casual readers may discern the features of a Liuren method *shi* board, from the twenty-eight mansions and the Eight Trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) to Ascending Brightness (Dengming 登明), one of Twelve Monthly Generals. The passage focuses on the celestial deity Heavenly Unity (Tianyi 天一), the mobile pivot and center of the ritual area and one of the Twelve Heavenly Generals (*shier tianjiang* 十二天將).<sup>25</sup> Together with the Twelve Monthly Generals, these divine figures are closely associated with *shi*-based Liuren rituals.<sup>26</sup> Practitioners are subsequently instructed to configure the rest of the *shi*'s parameters in relation of what appears to be their own position at the center of the ritual area, that is, in the position of Heavenly Unity. The multiple references to statecraft and governing solidify the identity between the officiant, Heavenly Unity, the center, and the cosmocratic political

23 Manifestly, *fang* 房 here, as *men* 門 elsewhere, is a variation of *heng* 衡.

24 *Huangdi jinkui yuheng jing*, 1a–2a.

25 The *shier tianjiang* 十二天將 (Twelve Heavenly Generals) are also known as the *shier shenjiang* 十二神將 (Twelve Divine Generals), or the *shier shenjiang* 十二神 (Twelve Spirits/Twelve Gods).

26 *Huangdi jinkui yuheng jing*, 2a, omitted above.



embodiment of that position, the emperor. This is not uncommon in early or medieval religious sources. *Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Five Sciences* [*Longshu wuming lun* 龍樹五明論; T.1420], a Buddhist text dated to the late sixth century, contains a similar Liuren divination ritual in which the adept acts as the mobile heaven plate (*tianpan* 天盤), pacing across a ritual area that reproduces the composition and markings of a static earth plate (*dipan* 地盤).<sup>27</sup>

Whereas the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Gold Casket and Jade Scale* and other texts from the Taoist Canon still emphasize the specialized knowledge required to operate the *shi*, other, and especially later sources diminish the technical aspects of divination methods in order to stress the material aspect of the *shi* device. In this way, the divination board is no longer a tool that translates the knowledge or authority of the officiant, but it is the direct materialization of that knowledge or authority. The *shi* becomes a talisman of sorts, evoking power through a symbolic shortcut. For example, after giving precise instructions on how to engrave the board, the *Scripture on the Liuren [Method] for Alleviating Doubt Compiled During the Jingyou era* (1034–1038) [*Jingyou Liuren shending jing* 景佑六壬神定經] recommends that the device is to be ritually consecrated, properly adjusted, and then, rather anticlimactically, “placed in a cloth purse and carried around [at the waist] on one's person.”<sup>28</sup> “The prestige of tradition,” as Kalinowski puts it, is often enough to justify the ritual use of the divination board.<sup>29</sup>

Again, the fact that this passage appears in a source that was compiled by the eminent official of the Astronomical Bureau, Yang Weide 楊維德 (d. after 1054) and commissioned by the Emperor reveals that the apotropaic applications of the *shi* were not the sole purview of religious specialists. Similarly, technical applications of the cosmograph can be found in religious sources such as the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Dragon Head* just as well as in official sources.

27 See *Longshu wuming lun*, 958 bc.

28 *Jingyou dunjia fuying jing*—slightly modified from Kalinowski, “The Notion of ‘Shih 式,’” 346.

29 Kalinowski, *ibid.* See also Kalinowski's comments on the decorative function of the related “cord-hook” diagrams (composed of the “two cords” *er sheng* 二繩 and the “four hooks” *sigou* 四鉤) in “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts,” 138–145, and “Time, Space, and Orientation,” 137–142.

#### 4 The Cosmic Body: *Shi* as Self in Taoist Sources

Beyond the niche market of hemerological specialists, the *shi* cosmograph proved alluring to a wider group of users. In the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Gold Casket and Jade Scale*, technical knowledge is still a requisite for operating the *shi*, but the text stands out in identifying the officiant with the implement, heralding a transition to increasingly abstract and figurative applications. Pushing the equivalence between *shi* and adept even further, and this time combining it with an almost complete abandonment of hemerological computation, *Laozi's Central Scripture* [*Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經] projects the layout of the entire *shi* board onto the body, complete with a lower earth plate (*dipan* 地盤) and an upper heaven plate as well as astrocalendrical markings that are anthropomorphized as corporeal deities.<sup>30</sup> The following passage supplies the clearest evidence of the indebtedness of *Laozi's Central Scripture* to the *shi* cosmograph. Beginning with the central pivot of the heaven plate, the text describes the bureaucracy of internal officials radiating outwards in concentric layers:

The navel is the fate of humans. At times it is called the Middle Ultimate, at other times it is known as the Great Abyss, Kunlun, Solitary Pivot, or the Five Citadels. Within the Five Citadels, there are the Five Perfected (The Five Citadels are the Five Emperors). Outside the Five Citadels, there are the Eight Envoys (They are the gods of the Eight Trigrams, together with Supreme Unity, they form the Nine Ministers).<sup>31</sup> Beyond the Eight Trigrams, there is the Twelve-storied Tower, with its Twelve Princes (these are the Twelve Grand Officials) [...]. And thus, the Perfected of the Five Citadels take charge of submitting accounts [of merits and misdeeds] at [the interstices of] the four seasons, and the Eight Spirits take charge of submitting accounts on the days of the eight nodes. The Twelve Grand Officials take charge of the twelve months, submitting accounts on the last day of each month [...] Thus, at midnight on the evening of the first and last days of every month and on the days of the

30 On the *Laozi zhongjing*, see Katō Chie, “*Rōshi chūkyō* to naitan shisō no genryū”; Lagerwey, “Deux écrits”; Liu Yongming, “*Laozi zhongjing*”; Maeda Shigeki, “*Rōshi chūkyō* oboegaki”; Pregadio, “Early Taoist Meditation”; Schipper, “Le calendrier de jade” and “The Inner World.”

31 I have added parentheses to the English and Chinese texts to signal a subsequent layer of annotations to the text. The *Laozi zhongjing* is dated to the second to fourth centuries, but the notes likely date from the Tang. I am indebted to Fabrizio Pregadio for pointing this out.

eight nodes, Supreme Unity beats on the drums of the Five Citadels to summon all the spirits. They revise tabulated acts and discuss the recorded merits and misdeeds. Those who have a [positive] record will have their life extended, and the spirits will hold them aloft; those who have none will perish, and the Director of Destinies will expunge their name from the register of Life. This is why at the time of going to bed on the evenings of the first and last day of every month and on the days of the eight nodes, one must meditate on the Supreme Unity of the upper cinnabar field, the Supreme Unity of the middle cinnabar field, and the Supreme Unity of the lower cinnabar field, [and ponder] the Perfected of the Five Citadels and Twelve-storied Tower.<sup>32</sup>

臍者，人之命也，一名中極，一名太淵，一名崑崙，一名特樞，一名五城。五城中有五真人（五城者，五帝也）。五城之外有八吏者（八卦神也。并太一為九卿）。八卦之外有十二樓者，十二太子（十二大夫也）。[...]。故五城真人主四時上計，八神主八節日上計，十二大夫主十二月，以晦日上計。[...] 故太一常以晦朔、八節日夜半時，五城擊鼓，集召諸神，校定功德，謀議善惡，有錄者延命，眾神共舉，無錄者終亡，司命絕去生籍。故常以晦朔、八節之日夜欲臥時，念上太一、中太一、下太一、五城、十二樓真人。

Sprawling out from the central position—that is, from the navel, occupied by the Supreme Unity (Taiyi 太一)—the administrative circles are successively populated by the Five Perfected (*wu zhenren* 五真人) of the Five Directions and the gods of the Eight Trigrams (*bali* 八吏). Together with Supreme Unity, these form the exoteric circle of the Nine Ministers (*jiuqing* 九卿), which is followed by an outer layer of administration, the Twelve Grand Officers *shi'er dafu* 十二大夫, also known as the Twelve Princes (*shi'er taizi* 十二太子) of the Twelve-storied Tower (*shi'er lou* 十二樓).

As Lagerwey has pointed out, this passage appears to map out a *shi* board associated with the Nine Palaces (*jiugong* 九宮) divination method, onto the inner plane of the body.<sup>33</sup> In a rich analogical tapestry, the passage conjugates

32 *Laozi zhongjing*, 14, in *Yunji qiqian* (DZ 1032), 18.10b–11a. See Lagerwey, “Deux écrits,” 8–9, for a French translation of the same passage; see also Schipper, “Le calendrier de jade,” 79. The *Taishang Lingbao Wufu xu*, 1.20b, contains a similar passage, explaining: “the gods of the Eight Trigrams are eight in number. Together with Taiyi, in the navel, they form the Nine Ministers” 八卦神八者并臍太一為九卿。

33 Lagerwey, “Deux écrits,” 18–19. The absence of the equatorial divisions of the twenty-eight lunar mansions along with the emphasis on the Nine Ministers and the suggestion of concentric circles recall the structure of the Nine Palaces *shi*; see Kalinowski,

astronomical, hemerological, and physiological registers, thereby articulating the interpenetration of the macrocosmic and microcosmic planes. For example, Supreme Unity, which, in astral form is the immobile Pole Star around which the Big Dipper rotates, is also located in the “center” (*zhong* 中) of the body, namely the navel, or lower Cinnabar Field (*dantian* 丹田). Quite fittingly, it represents here the central pivot of the imagined cosmograph. Likewise, other sets of data that are typically featured on *shi* boards are translated into the idiom of the inner landscape: the five directions or five seasons appear as the Five Viscera (*wuzang* 五臟), which double as the Five Citadels (*wucheng* 五城), and the twelve months are incarnated as the Twelve Princes of the trachea, the Twelve-storied Tower.

At a higher level of abstraction, another section from *Laozi's Central Scripture* sketches out the contours of the microcosmic *shi* within the body. In the space between the two kidneys, there is a vast ocean (*dahai* 大海) where the Divine Tortoise (*shengui* 神龜) swims:

On the back of this turtle, right in the center [of its shell], are the seven stars of the Big Dipper. This tortoise is yellow in color, and it has the appearance of a golden disc. To its left and right shine the moon and sun. Thus, the area below the navel is the center of the Earth. This is where the Five Peaks and the Four Seas, the rivers and springs connect, where Kunlun Mountain and the Ruoshui waterway sink deeper and deeper—it is the abyss of the Mysterious Abstruse. Following the orbit of the sun [sic] and moon, the heavenly daytime sun shines on the Earth below, and the myriad spirits all receive its brilliance. Humans are also modeled on this: the daytime sun, is found in the navel. It descends to shine on the lower Cinnabar Field, and the myriad spirits within the navel receive its brilliance. The evening sun is the stomach, and it rises to shine in the chest [...]. The evening moon is in the navel, it descends to shine on the myriad spirits. The daytime moon is in the stomach, it rises to illuminate the myriad spirits in the bosom. Moving up and down, up and down, [continuously,] without rest.<sup>34</sup>

“Instruments,” 324, and “La transmission,” 777. The circulation of Supreme Unity through the Nine Palaces is evoked in another meditation from the *Laozi zhongjing*, in which the Yellow Spirit (*Huangshen* 黃神), a hypostase of Supreme Unity, performs a tour of inspection akin to those undertaken by officials and the emperor in early imperial China; see *Laozi zhongjing* 53 in *Yunji qiqian*, 19.18b. It has been argued that these administrative practices were the basis for the “Circulation of Taiyi through the Nine Palaces” divination method (*Taiyi xing jiugong* 太一行九宮); see Lagerwey, “Deux écrits,” 15, n. 59, and 16, n. 62.

34 *Laozi zhongjing* 20 in *Yunji qiqian*, 18.15ab.

神龜上有七星北斗，正在中央。其龜黃色，狀如黃金盤，左右日月照之。故臍下為地中，中有五岳四瀆，水泉交通，崑崙弱水，沈沈漚漚，玄冥之淵也。日月之行，故天晝日照於地下，萬神皆得其明。人亦法之，晝日在臍中，[下]照於丹田，臍中萬神皆得其明也。夜日在胃中，上照於胸中，[...]。夜月在臍中，下照於萬神；晝月在胃中，上照胸中萬神。更相上下，無有休息。

The passage first elaborates on a sacred testudine in the shape of a disc or plate (*pan* 盤), with the pattern of the Big Dipper inscribed at the very center of its golden shell—a description that immediately evokes the image of a *shi* board.<sup>35</sup> Like the *shi*, the Divine Tortoise is an autonomous cosmic egg comprising all of space and time. A parallel passage relates how the Director of Destinies (*siming* 司命) and the Director of Emoluments (*silu* 司祿), mounted on the tortoise's shell, endow the amphibian with the prophetic faculties of forecasting the course of adepts' lives—a feature that it shares with the ritual implement.<sup>36</sup>

The text then proceeds to detail some of the topographical attributes of the inner landscape, artfully connecting Kunlun (崑崙) Mountain, the central anchor of Earth, to the physiological center point of the lower Cinnabar Field, the area immediately behind the navel. This is followed by the superimposition of astrocalendrical, and thereby chronological, components onto the breath (*qi* 氣) rhythms of the body. In this case, what appear to be solar day counts, alternating between sun and moon phases, define corporeal time cycles. The

35 See Lagerwey, "Deux écrits," 17–18; Schipper, "The Inner World," 126; for more passages describing the Divine Tortoise, see *Laozi zhongjing* 10, 19, 23, and 25 in *Yunji qiqian*, 18.6ab, 18.4b–15a, 18.17b–19b, and 18.20a–21a, respectively.

36 *Laozi zhongjing* 25 in *Yunji qiqian*, 18.20a–21a. In his "De la tortue à l'achillée," Léon Vandermeersch discusses the role of tortoises in Chinese mythology: "Enfermée dans sa carapace, ne représente-t-elle pas l'oeuf cosmique, et par là la totalité du monde spatial? De plus, sa longévité proverbiale en fait également l'emblème de la totalité du temps. La tortue est donc le signe global de tout l'univers spatio-temporel. La carapace, dans sa partie dorsale, est ronde comme le ciel. Sa partie ventrale est plate, et même carrée par la forme de ses deux épaulements latéraux, ainsi que les Chinois imaginent la Terre; composée de neuf écailles, elle reproduit les neuf continents de la géographie mythologique. Y reporter les figures divinatoires, c'était replacer les événements symbolisés par celles-ci dans le contexte général du monde, les intégrer à l'ordre universel." Schipper, "The Inner World," 127, adds with insight: "Thus, the inner world is a total space, where according to a few fundamental structures such as the trinity and the five agents, the entire mythical universe can be classified. The system is closed and completely self-containing, yet it is also open because it can accommodate any amount of diverse elements. Like the ocean between the kidneys, it contains space where there is no space" (41).

rules of time and space apply to the microcosm of the inner landscape as they do to the universe at large. Similarly, just as the *shi* board grants its user insight into and control over the workings of fate, so too does the 'manipulation' of the bodily gods. Beyond the imagery reproduced in individual sections of the text, scholars have suggested that the textual structure of *Laozi's Central Scripture* itself imitates the layout of the divination board. Every member of the internal pantheon that is manifested in the adept's body and described in the text has a celestial equivalent that is represented on the *shi* in astrocalendrical terms.<sup>37</sup>

This source, along with the three Taoist scriptures that were discussed earlier, fit in a trajectory of gradual abstraction of *shi* board features. Already during the late Han dynasty, an observable shift in *shi* design takes place from boards known as 'Dipper devices' or 'Dipper astrolabes' that relied on astrographic and calendrical notions from the Warring States (475–221 BCE) to Liuren boards bearing deities that govern time and space. The Liuren cosmograph retained its currency well into the Six Dynasties, and while some sources, including religious ones, preserved its earlier applications as a tool of hemerological computation, the gradual divinization of its markers rendered the *shi* an increasingly figurative or symbolic ritual instrument.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the

37 Lagerwey, "Deux écrits," 17–18.

38 In the Six Dynasties (220–589 CE), the Big Dipper definitively vanishes from the heaven plate of the Liuren board, and markings including the thirty-six beasts (*qin* 禽), based on the six decades of the sexagesimal cycle, make their appearance. Other elements are divinized: the solar mansions (*richan* 日躔) for instance, become the twelve spirits (*shier shen* 十二神) of the year; see Kalinowski, "Instruments," 354–356. Already during the Han dynasty, the Eight Trigrams began to be correlated with the Eight Directions on cosmographs, marking a new phase in the development of an increasingly allegorical *shi* board. Out of these "eight gates" (*bamen* 八門; not to be confused with the Eight Gates of the later *Qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲 [Hidden Stem of the Strange Gates] divination method), only the four ordinal directions, the Four Corners (*siwei* 四維) or Four Gates (*simen* 四門), were routinely displayed. These were originally used to represent the sun's points of exit and entry on the horizon during the winter solstice (the beginning of the astronomical year) and were associated with prognosticatory literature from very early on, most notably in the *Weishu* 緯書 (literally, "weft-texts") corpus, where they figure in the *Yiwei qiankun zuodu*, vol. 1, 80–82; see also Xiao Dengfu, *Chenwei yu daojuan*, 295–300. In later incarnations, the Four Corners lose all astronomical and even astrocalendrical significance; see Kalinowski's discussion of the merging of the Four Corners with the Eight Trigrams in "Les instruments," 376–377, n. 5. The Eight Gates of the *Yiwei qiankun zuodu* are based on the eight Great Images (*daxiang* 大象), the archetypal manifestations of the Eight Trigrams from which all other phenomena take their form (*xing* 形). The Great Images take on the meaning of a cosmic template or model (*fa* 法), a notion that is not extraneous to the principle of the *shi* board, which is a microcosmic blueprint in its own right.

abstraction of the *shi* that began in the Han continued and found new expressions in early medieval and medieval China, especially in the context of religious traditions such as Taoism, and Buddhism as well.

## 5 Matching Cosmologies: The *Shi* in Buddhist Context

The figurative turn of the *shi* board was to be anticipated in some respects. From the outset, the instrument's layout adhered to chiefly cyclical calendrical principles, thus aiming for geometric symmetry rather than arithmetic accuracy.<sup>39</sup> Because of this fundamental feature, the *shi* was eminently adaptable to various contexts, including those in which astronomical precision were relegated to the status of secondary concerns.

During the early medieval and medieval periods, Buddhists too, recognized the symbolic potential of the *shi* board in a brand of prognosticatory methods that were, like those of *Laozi's Central Scripture*, more akin to self-cultivation. Yet, as with its Taoist cousin, technical Buddhist divination literature also circulated concurrently. Famed esoteric monk and astronomer Yi Xing 一行 (683–727) was a consummate diviner credited with what, judging from the surviving titles, appears to have been a pair of divination treatises: the *Scripture of Heavenly Unity and Supreme Unity* [*Tianyi taiyi jing* 天一太一經] and the *Scripture on the Supreme Unity Configuration of the Hidden Stem* [*Divination*] [*Taiyi ju dunjia jing* 太一局遁甲經].<sup>40</sup> Owing to the word “configuration” (*ju* 局) in its title, it stands to reason that the second of these sources especially, would

39 See Harper, “The Han Cosmic Board,” 54–57, citing Shigeru Nakayama, *A History of Japanese Astronomy*; Harper sees the Dipper dial, which unevenly spaces the twenty-eight lunar mansions according to their actual positions along the celestial equator, as the astronomical precursor to the heaven plate (*tianpan*) of the *shi* board; see *ibid.*, 48, and “The Han Cosmic Board (*shih* 式).” By the Song (960–1279), some, including Shen Gua 沈括 (1031–1095), were arguing for a revision of markings on the Liuren *shi* board in order to increase their astronomical precision; see, for instance, Shen's *Mengxi bitan* 7.1b–2a; see also Kalinowski, “Les instruments,” 403. For a translation of the passage, see Ho Peng Yoke, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 113–115.

40 *Longxing fojiao bianbian tonglun*, 15.185b. A line from Yi Xing's biography in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 5.733a states, “He divined calamity and fortunes as if pointing to [something] in his palm” (*zhan qi zai fu ruo zhi yu zhang* 占其災福若指于掌). The expression “pointing to his palm” (*zhi yu zhang* 指於掌) is sometimes used to denote that something is achieved “with great ease,” but it could also indicate that Yi Xing was practicing a form of Liuren divination that involves projecting the cosmograph onto the palm of the hand; cf. the account of Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 employing a similar method in the fourteenth-century *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 [*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*], where it is written that “while

have included the manipulation of a *shi* board, or at the very least, that of a *shi*-based cosmograph or diagram.

Unfortunately, these sources are lost, but the Sino-Japanese *Tripitaka* has preserved two texts that offer a glimpse into how Buddhism, with its own rich and distinct cosmological systems, absorbed the *shi* board into its repertoire of divination practices. The earlier among the two sources is the *Sutra of the Esoteric Cosmograph of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas for Instantaneous Great Accomplishment* [*Wuda Xukong zang pusa suji dashenyan bimi shijing* 五大虛空藏菩薩速疾大神驗秘密式經; T.1149], hereafter *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas*, purportedly translated by Vajrabodhi (Jingangzhi 金剛智; 669–741).<sup>41</sup> This text is essentially a user's manual for a building and operating a Buddhist *shi* board. After the obligatory introductory verses extolling the method's virtues it immediately addresses the topic of construction materials:

One may use white sandalwood, or [a similar material] like oak or cypress. Any wood will do as long as it comes from a numinous tree of [at least] a hundred years of age. The heaven plate should be made circular and have a diameter of either 2 *cun* and 5 *fen* or 3 *cun* [roughly 2.5 or 3 inches]. The earth plate is to be 6 or 7 *cun* on each of its four sides. As the color of the sky, all [sections of the Heaven plate] should be blue. The inner tier of the earth plate should be yellow, the central tier blue, and the outer one red. Below [the outer tier of the earth plate], the four edges of the square should be blue, and the back [of the plate] should be painted yellow. The heaven plate must be made 3 *cun* in thickness, and the earth plate 1 *cun* in thickness.<sup>42</sup>

riding his horse, he divined a prognostication in his sleeve” 在馬上袖占一課; cited from Ho Peng Yoke, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 135–36.

41 See Donald Harper's brief discussion of the text in “The Han Cosmic Board,” 55–56; he speculates that the structure of the *shi* board in this source was possibly adopted from unspecified “Taoist sources.”

42 *Xukong shijing*, 607b. Verified against the measures given in the Song-dynasty *Jingyou liuren shending jing*, 2 par. 13, the specifications in the *Xukong shijing* are for building a *shi* board that is to be used by commoners and minor officials. Instruments with a Heaven plate over 3 *cun* in diameter are reserved for high officials, and those over 4 *cun* for princes/local rulers. Those with a diameter of 6 *cun* and over are for emperors only. For a translation of the *Liuren shending jing* passage on the proportions of *shi* boards see Kalinowski, “Les instruments,” 319–321; cf. also the earth to heaven plate ratios presented in Kalinowski, *ibid.*, 372; and Yan Dunjie, “Guanyu Xi-Han,” 335.

白檀若柏桂。又經百歲靈木。用天盤造圓。方二寸五分又三寸。地盤四方六寸又七寸。又天色皆經青。地內院黃。中院青。外院赤。下方四面空青下黃。天厚一寸三分。地厚一寸。

In this passage, the *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas* is unambiguously instructing its readership how to build an actual, operational *shi* board. The second canonical source that unpacks the intricacies of the Buddhist *shi* board is the *Cosmograph Method of the Saintly Deva Vināyaka* [*Sheng huanxitian shifa* 聖歡喜天式法; T.1275], hereafter the *Method of Vināyaka*. It opens much in the same way as the *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas*, with indications on the size and materials to be used in fashioning a functional and tangible device.<sup>43</sup> A fragrant variety of white wood is preferred and the recommended size is approximately the same (3 to 4 *cun* for the heaven plate and 7 *cun* for the earth plate) as that prescribed the previous text.

43 This source was compiled by Prajñācakra (Banruo Rejieluo 般若惹羯羅; fl. 847–882) of the Tang dynasty; for an overview and a translation of the text, see Duquenne, “Gaṇapati Rituals in Chinese,” 326–328 and 346–350 respectively. Prajñācakra has a biography in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* (T.2061) 3.723a; his name is transliterated “Banruo zhojia” 般若斫迦 and translated as Zhihuilun 智慧論, or “wheel of wisdom.” On account that he was said to be Enchin’s 円珍 (814–891) master (and a disciple of Amoghavajra 不空), Japanese sources are more voluble about his accomplishments; for a synopsis of these, see Mochizuki’s *Bukkyō daijiten*, 4.3550c–3551a, which notably lists him as the author of the *Huanxitian shifa*. The relative paucity of information on Prajñācakra in Chinese sources, combined with the absence of the *Huanxitian shifa* from ninth-century catalogues of Chinese scriptures in Japan, and the fact that the only surviving manuscript copy of the text (and the basis of the *Taishō Tripitaka* edition) is from a Japanese monastery, has fueled speculation about the Buddhist *shi* method having been devised in Japan. Stephen Trensou has defended this interesting possibility, despite Duquenne’s, *ibid.*, and Michel Strickmann’s, *Mantras et mandarins*, 261, views to the contrary; see Trensou, “Shingon Divination Board Rituals”. Trensou further argues that the *Xukong shijing* was also possibly composed in Japan. However, Harper unambiguously considers it a Chinese document; see “The Han Cosmic Board,” 55–56. Although I side with Duquenne, Strickmann, and Harper, in both instances, the origin of the scriptures does not have a significant impact on the thrust of this study’s argument. It should be pointed out that the Dakiniten 吒(茶) 吉尼天 and Kangiten 歡喜天 (*Shōten* 聖天) Liuren *shi* board methods (in this case centering on Dakiniten 吒(茶) 吉尼天 or Kangiten 歡喜天/*Shōten* 聖天) are preserved in a handful of manuscripts held at the Kanazawa bunkō 金沢文庫 outside Yokohama; for a list, reproduction, and discussion of the manuscripts, see the *Onmyōdō kakeru Mikkyō* catalogue published by the Kanagawa prefectural Kanazawa library; see also Nishioka Yoshifumi’s “Aspects of Shikiban-Based Mikkyō Rituals.”

After the *shi* boards are fabricated, both Buddhist sources enjoin adepts to depict an array of cosmic bodhisattvas and devas. For the *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas*, each of the four cardinal directions of the heaven plate is first decorated with a different Siddham character that “changes into” (*biancheng* 變成) a different manifestation of Ākāśagarbha.<sup>44</sup> Precise iconographic details are supplied for the four bodhisattvas; colors, accoutrements, hand positioning, vestments, and seat—usually a lotus of varying color—are covered *in extenso*. A fifth Ākāśagarbha occupies the central portion of the heaven plate, but it is to be drawn around the image of the King of the Big Dipper (*qixing wang* 七星王), who rests at the summit (*dingshang* 頂上) and pivot of the *shi* board.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the *Method of Vināyaka* specifies that four Vināyakas must be portrayed in the four directions of the heaven plate. Again, each is assigned its own color, dress, appearance, paraphernalia, and so forth. In the center, the image of the Dipper is replaced with a manifestation of “the four devas all in one body” (*sitian jie yiti ye* 四天皆一體也), a possible reference to the embracing non-dual esoteric form of Vināyaka. This form is typically represented as an elephant-headed male and female couple in deep embrace.<sup>46</sup>

The descriptions of the earth plates are identical in both texts: in the first tier, the four cardinal and four ordinal directions are invested by the *lokapālas*, Indian guardian deities of the eight directions, in their usual arrangement: Indra (Dishitian 帝釋天) to the east, Yama (Yanmotian 焰/魔天) in the south, Brahma (Fantian 梵天) or Varuṇa (Shuitian 水天) in the west,<sup>47</sup> and Vaiśravaṇa (Pishamentian 毘沙門天) in the north; Agni (Huotian 火天) protects the southeast, Rakṣasa (or Nirṛti) (Luoshatian 羅刹天) guards the southwest, Vāyu (Fengtian 風天) presides over the northwest, and Maheśvara (Dazizaitian 大自在天) defends the northeast.<sup>48</sup> Two subsequent tiers are occupied by the

44 The text first stipulates that the heaven plate should be “divided into eight sections” 又八分作之, which signals that there was probably a smaller compartment where the Siddham character was depicted and a larger one below, where the *bodhisattva* would appear; see *Xukong shijing*, 607b.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Huanxitian shifa*, 324a. The text specifies that this figure may be substituted with a “Deva of Many Waves” (Duopotian 多波天); for a discussion of the non-dual Vināyaka, and more generally, Chinese esoteric Buddhist sources featuring Vināyaka/Gaṇapati, see Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, 243–290; for the Japanese context, see Sanford, “Literary Aspects.”

47 In the *Xukong shijing*, Brahma, who is usually associated with the zenith in a ten-direction scheme, replaces Varuṇa in the west; see *Xukong shijing*, 607b.

48 Rather than listing them individually, the *Xukong shijing* simply states that the “Four Heavenly/Deva Kings of the four corners” 四角四天王 should be represented in their respective directions; see *ibid.*

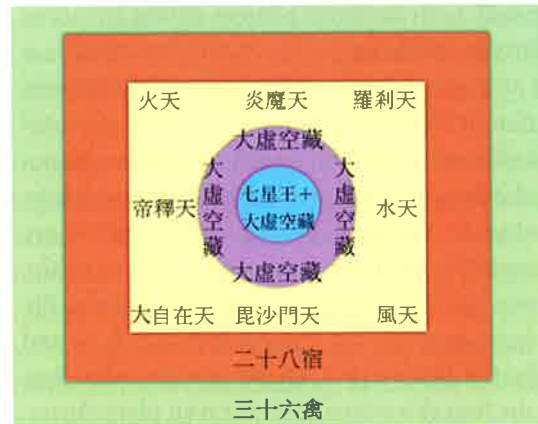


FIGURE 6.3  
Schematic rendering of the  
Buddhist shi board described in the  
Sutra of the Five Great  
Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas  
(T.1149).

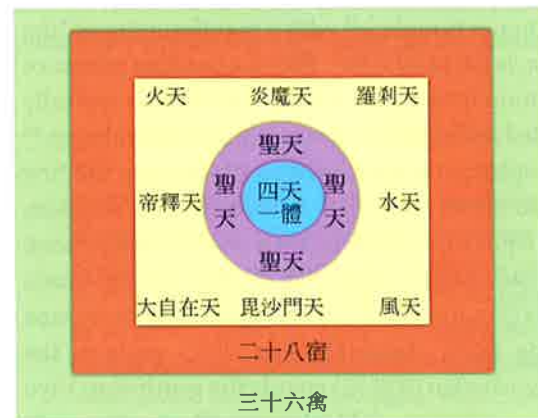


FIGURE 6.4  
Schematic rendering of the  
Buddhist shi board described in the  
Method of the Saintly Deva  
Vināyaka (T.1275).

twenty-eight equatorial mansions (*ershiba su* 二十八宿) and the thirty-six beasts (*sanshiliu qin* 三十六禽) (see figure 6.3 and figure 6.4).<sup>49</sup>

49 The *Huanxitian shifa* is succinct: “position the twenty-eight equatorial mansions and the thirty-six beasts” 安廿八宿卅六禽; *Huanxitian shifa*, 324b. By contrast, the *Xukong shijing*, 607c, stipulates that the mansions should take on a human form and hold ritual implements (*qizhang* 器仗) in their hands; they should be divided into four groups of seven, each group bearing robes and a matching complexion in the color of their respective direction (blue/green for the east, red for the south, white for the west, black for the north); the source then suggests that the thirty-six beasts should be depicted as *yakṣas* (*yecha* 夜叉), or names of *yakṣas*, in accordance with iconographic conventions. Although the twenty-eight *yakṣas* are not unheard of—see for instance the *Fomu da kongque mingwang jing* 佛母大孔雀明王經 [Sutra of the Great Peacock Wisdom King; T.982], 19.426b, where they appear in the description of a *Mahamayuri* mandala that is

Aside perhaps from the presence of the Dipper on the Ākāśagarbha board, these last sets of parameters are the ones that most readily recall the *shi* boards that are presented in technical sources. Yet, the twenty-eight mansions and thirty-six beasts appear to be principally decorative in these Buddhist sources, mere vestigial reminders of the implement’s hemerological applications.<sup>50</sup> The five *bodhisattvas* or *devas* and the eight *lokāpalas* are actively used in the Buddhist manipulation of the *shi*, but the last two tiers of the earth plate, including the Dipper on one of the boards, are purely emblematic. They are strategically inserted to: a) better integrate Indian (Buddhist/Hindu) cosmology with its Chinese counterparts, and b) to elicit by transitivity the same aura of factuality and legitimacy that *shi*-based divination methods enjoyed in official circles.

As with the visualization methods of *Laozi’s Central Scripture*, the manipulation of the Buddhist *shi* board required almost no computation. With the exception of the directive of selecting an “auspicious day” (*yi jiri wei zhi* 以吉日為之) for the drawing of the images on the instrument,<sup>51</sup> there is absolutely no concern for hemerological, let alone astronomical calculations. After the deities are summoned by means of incantations, a series of ritual hand gestures (*mūdras*, or “seals”; *yin* 印), the ingestion or impression of talismans (*fu* 符),<sup>52</sup> and a number of other ritual prerequisites, the board becomes formally activated. Thereafter, the divination process begins. Its principles, in a nutshell, consist of the following: depending on the nature of their wishes, adepts are required to rotate the heaven plate in order to match (*jia* 加) one of its figures with a figure on the top tier of the earth plate. For instance, one of the scenarios from the *Method of Vināyaka* reads:

If you are among those who wish to purloin the money and riches of others, then match the moon-love Vināyaka [of the heaven plate] with Maheśvara [on the earth plate].<sup>53</sup>

若欲得他人財寶者。以月愛天加大自在天。

strikingly similar to the *shi* of the present source—a grouping of thirty-six *yakṣas* is uncommon to my knowledge.

50 In the *Huanxitian shifa*, the gods of the twenty-eight mansions are invoked as a group in only two (out of twenty-seven) operations described, but they are solicited as part of the retinue of Maheśvara and Vaiśravaṇa and do not affect the configuration of the heaven plate vis à vis the earth plate; see *Huanxitian shifa*, 324c and 325a.

51 This appears in the *Huanxitian shifa* alone; *ibid.*, 324a.

52 The talisman is only included in the *Huanxitian shifa* version of the ritual; see *ibid.*, 324b.

53 *Ibid.*, 324c.

Another example from the same text instructs the readers as follows:

If you are among those who wish to cease afflictions of the stomach or head, then match the solar-disc Vināyaka [of the heaven plate] to Yama [on the earth plate].

欲止腹病頭病者。以日輪天加炎魔天。

The matching of markings from one section of the *shi* to those from another section is one of the most important steps in configuring the board for divination in hemerological methods. The step appears invariably in Liuren divination manuals, including the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Dragon Head* and the *Yellow Emperor's Scripture of the Gold Casket and Jade Scale*, examined above. Typically, this is a preliminary operation in which the officiant revolves the heaven plate so that the Monthly General corresponding to the month in which the divination takes places matches the double-hour's branch value on the earth plate. Although this basic keying of the instrument is not considered a part of the actual divination, in medieval Buddhist texts, it constitutes its central component. In the *Method of Vināyaka* there are thirty-two potential combinations (4 Vināyakas × 8 *lokapālas*) for matching the Buddhist deities of the heaven plate to those of the earth plate. Yet, only twenty-seven are listed, indicating that the text is fragmentary. The *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas* includes the fifth and central Ākāśagarbha as an active component, bringing the number of potential combinations to forty (5 Ākāśagarbha × 8 *lokapālas*), although only thirty-seven possibilities are discussed, suggesting, again, that the text is truncated or has lacunae.<sup>54</sup>

The wishes that the divination is intended to fulfill are thematically identical in both texts and decidedly worldly in scope: eliciting love in another person, obtaining a post, causing illness in others, protecting oneself against evil charms, and so forth. However, the combination of deities for analogous pursuits are sometimes different. For instance, while the *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas* prescribes matching the [Ākāśagarbha] *bodhisattva* of the north to the deva in the west [Brahma] for returning curses onto those who cast them, the *Method of Vināyaka* urges matching the solar-disc Vināyaka of the east to the Rākṣasa *deva* in the southwest for the same purpose. Nonetheless, aside from these directional discrepancies, both practices are

54 This suspicion is echoed in an annotation toward the end of the text: "The secret arts listed above likely number forty" 已上祕術條四十數; see *Xukong Shijing*, 608b.

undertaken in the same exact way.<sup>55</sup> Deities are invoked (*hu* 呼) and supplicated (*qi* 祈; *qishen* 祈申) to descend and grant the practitioner's wishes.

Although this is not mentioned explicitly, it appears that at the keying stage adepts were intended to visualize the deities gradually merging into each other, or transforming from one into another. These mental acrobatics are already alluded to in the instructions for fashioning the heaven plate. In both Buddhist texts, Siddham characters "change into" (*biancheng*) deities—a feat that would be problematic to undertake with the fixed images of the *shi* board. The *Method of Vināyaka*, in fact unequivocally urges practitioners to "contemplate" (*guan* 觀) the characters morphing into Vināyaka.<sup>56</sup> It is thus highly probable that the crucial process of "matching" (*jia*) deities from the heaven plate with those of the earth plate involved some visualization component as an accompaniment to the manual operation of the *shi* board. Thus, in the Buddhist context, the board itself could be understood as a type of mandala—a material, tangible and visible representation of the cosmos that also incorporated an immaterial visualization component.<sup>57</sup>

## 6 Visualization as Cosmic Computation, Technology as Ritual

In this respect of the *Sutra of the Five Great Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattvas* and the *Method of Vināyaka*, we are approaching Laozi's *Central Scripture* territory, where the *shi* as a whole or at least its markings are internalized, and the device is wiped clean of its technical significance and computational capacities. The pair of Buddhist texts recalls a class of Taoist contemplation practices in which

55 Compare *Xukong Shijing*, 608b to *Huanxitian shifa*, 324c.

56 The term is used for each of the four directions on the heaven plate; see *Huanxitian shifa*, 324a.

57 This function of the *shi* would explain the uncanny likeness between the description of the board in the *Huanxitian shifa* and an Edo period (1603–1868) "Image of the Vināyaka's Esoteric Mandala" (Shōten himitsu mandara zu 聖天秘密曼荼羅圖) from Kongōbuji 金剛峰寺 in Japan. The twenty-eight mansions and thirty-six beasts are absent, but the mandala displays four Vināyakas in a circular section with an additional pair of embracing, "single-bodied" Vināyakas in the center. The eight *lokapāla* are represented in an outer square, in addition to four *devas*, absent from the textual counterpart, namely Bonten 梵天 (Brahman); Jiten 地天 (Pṛthivi); Nitten 日天 (Sūrya, Āditya), and Gatten 月天 (Candra). While their respective iconographies pertain to distinct traditions—the appearances of the Vināyakas notably do not match—the functions of the *shi* board and the mandala undoubtedly overlap in a Buddhist context; for a reproduction of the mandala, see *Tenbu no shoson*, 30.

adepts visualize the transformation from one aspect of a god into another. For example, the *Scripture of the Jade Pivot of the Perfected on the Five Viscera and Six Receptacles of the Yellow Court* [*Huangting wuzang liufu zhenren yuzhou jing* 黃庭五臟六腑真人玉軸經; DZ 1402], a brief treatise on the visualization of the gods of the Five Viscera, first describes the shape of each viscus allegorically (“the appearance of the kidneys is like that of round stones”).<sup>58</sup> In a second step, the text presents and depicts the indwelling spirits of the Five Viscera in animal form (dragon, vermilion bird, white tiger, phoenix, and a two-headed white deer for the liver, heart, lungs, spleen, and kidneys respectively) before finally explaining that adepts undertaking the meditation will see them “turn into” (*huawei* 化為) human figures: jade boys or jade maidens holding a variety of objects from batons to dragons and libations.<sup>59</sup> Such lavish iconographic precisions were useful guides for contemplation practices, but they were also intended for the production of actual illustrations or diagrams (*tu* 圖; see figure 6.5) that would, much like the *mandala*, serve as meditation aids (and not meditation replacements) and objects of worship: once produced the images could be venerated as animated icons, live manifestations of the bodily/cosmic gods that inhabit them.

Other coeval sources on visualizations of the gods of the Five Viscera are explicit in instructing practitioners to produce similar images and to suspend them (*xuanxiang* 懸象)—a term usually reserved for describing celestial bodies dangling in the sky—on the wall before meditating on them. The hanging images act as meditation aids, objects of worship, and apotropaic talismans, keeping at bay the disease demons that are susceptible to harm the Five Viscera.<sup>60</sup>

In *Laozi's Central Scripture* and medieval Buddhist sources, the *shi* board completes its transition from an instrument of hemerological technology to a strictly ritual implement. Internalization, either by transposing the cosmograph within the body and identifying it with oneself or by undertaking its operation within the mind's eye, was key in the *shi's* transition to unmitigated

58 夫賢者，[...] 其象如圓石; *Huangting wuzang liufu zhenren yuzhou jing*, 8b.

59 See *ibid.*, 2b–9a; see also *Yunji qiqian*, 14.4b–14a. The descriptions of the illustrations of the spirits of the Five Viscera differ in both sources; see Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 70–71 and 71 n.49 especially, for variations and correspondences pertaining to the meditations; see also Jean Levi's entry on the *Huangting wuzang liufu zhenren yuzhou jing* in Schipper and Verellen's *The Taoist Canon*, 350–351, for a more complete picture of the passage's relation with respect to other prominent Five Viscera meditation manuals.

60 See *Taiping jing chao*, 2.3b–4a; for an overview of the passage in question, see Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 64–66.



FIGURE 6.5

Illustrations from a fifteenth-century Korean medical encyclopedia titled *Uibang yuch'wi* 醫方類聚 [Classified Collection of Medical Methods] depicting the Five Viscera along with their corresponding trigrams, breaths, animal spirits, and deities. The images are based on medieval Taoist meditation texts.

Figure modified from Pregadio, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1079.



allegory. By using the *shi* 'as if' it were a fully external and functional computational device, practitioners preserved the 'internal intent' and 'internal form' associated with the device, but the 'external intent' and 'external form' were modified. Otherwise put, the *shi* board lost the superficial features pertaining to 'style' while retaining its fundamental 'function' as a schematic representation of cosmic time and space that offers determination over one's welfare.

But how is it that astrocalendrical and hemerological technical knowledge, such a defining aspect of the *shi* board historically, would be discarded as extraneous artifice during successive reformulations? Part of the answer lies in the consideration that neither 'style' nor 'function' have precedence over the other. Nor are they separate, as one informs the other and *vice versa*; the distinction between them is merely a product of decontextualization. Teleological readings of technology are notoriously impervious to acknowledging the ritual dimensions of technical knowledge and activity, let alone the role of 'magical' or 'religious' elements in the construction of an efficacious enactment of technical knowledge.<sup>61</sup> As a result, there appears to be some inherent contradiction when technical knowledge is cast aside in the transmission of a technical instrument. However, in bringing the full breadth of its experience to bear, it would be more pertinent to speak of technology as inclusive *technique*, a notion that integrates a system of material resources, tools, operational sequences, and skills, verbal and nonverbal knowledge, including conceptions pertaining to 'magic' or 'religion,' as well as specific modes of work coordination—a large part of which is ritual.<sup>62</sup> When fully restituted to its specific sociohistorical and microcultural contexts, the 'style' of the *shi* board, namely its external features, is indeed its 'function.' The ritual and the technical are commingled, as the etymology of the graph *shi* 式 betrays.<sup>63</sup> This should come

61 See, for example, Robert Spier, *From the Hand of Man*, cited in Pfaffenberger "Social Anthropology of Technology," 497 and 501; Pfaffenberger offers a lucid critique and deconstruction of what he calls the "Standard View of technology" (*ibid.*, *passim*).

62 Paraphrasing Pfaffenberger, *ibid.*, 497, following Pierre Lemonnier's definitions; for more, see Lemonnier, *Elements*; and Lemonnier and Latour, *L'intelligence des techniques*. Pfaffenberger adds sociotechnical systems and material culture as the two other distinct subjects of the social anthropology of technology but for the purpose of our analysis, I will treat the social and material aspects of technology as ingredient to the notion of *technique* (as do Lemonnier and Latour to a large extent).

63 *Shi* 式 denotes at once a body of prescriptions relative to the proper performance of a rite or ceremony (not unlike *yi* 儀) and a model (or plan, even a law; *fa* 法) or blueprint used in the realization of an implement or tool; see Kalinowski, "Les instruments," 312. For more on the meaning of the term *shi* and its principal variants (式; 拭), see Cullen, "Some Further Points," 31; and Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board," 47–48.

as no surprise after having highlighted the interpenetration of ritual 'form' and 'intent' in the *Lunyu* and especially the *Xunzi* (another argument for how ritual and technology are thoroughly enmeshed). The reason why the Buddhist cosmograph is bedecked with *devas* while the Taoist one is adorned with anthropomorphized cosmic gods in administrative garb is because they have fundamentally different purposes for their respective communities of practice and operate according to very different cultural registers.

## 7 Concluding Discussion

We are left with a rather untidy picture of different *shi* doing very different things. This indirectly solves the issue of classifying the instrument according to its uses, as there would be simply too many uses to classify. Far from an aberration, such plasticity confirms that the interconnection between the 'function' and 'style' varies in these tools. According to Daniel Miller, this is a central feature of human technology. As he elaborates, "Technology could be analyzed as the systematic exploitation of the range of methods used in order to produce patterned variation."<sup>64</sup> Succinctly stated, the development of *shi* cosmographs with abstract, allegorical, or figurative markings was the result of emerging circumstances from the Six Dynasties onward in the context of which hemerological technical knowledge was judged to be increasingly less ingredient to the board's use.

Yet, the semblance of earlier *shi* boards persisted in each successive incarnation. Its perennial functions of representing the cosmos and its agents, and offering ascendancy over fate were transmitted through external stylistic traits; a round pivoting heaven plate, a square earth plate, spatiotemporal markers. Mimesis helped to preserve the symbolic capital accrued by the *shi* in official circles and transmit it to other spheres, that of religious traditions where ritual specialists could directly benefit from it. Some early medieval Taoist sources preserved the technical knowledge required to operate prior Han versions of the *shi*. It should be underscored once more that these Han Liuren cosmographs, in replacing astrocalendrical markers with deities (the Monthly Generals and the Heavenly Generals), were part of a broader transition towards progressively allegorical understandings of the implement and its functions. But even in the most technical of Taoist hemerological sources, this transition

64 Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 201; cited in Pfaffenberger, "Social Anthropology," 505; see also Miller, "Things Ain't What They Used to Be."

can be observed: parts of the device are internalized in such a way that the officiant's movements in the ritual area during the divination correspond to the rotation of the heaven plate. Around the same time, other sources from the Taoist canon, *Laozi's Central Scripture* chief among them, divested the *shi* from its hemerological background and applied it instead towards self-cultivation, thereby capitalizing on the device's association with ordering time, and thus fate and lifespan as well. In this reformulation of the *shi*, its structure, features and markers were completely transposed onto the somatic plane. All the elements or deities that composed it are identified with the self, thereby overlapping the microcosm of the practitioner's body with the macro-cosmography of the *shi*. The figurative cosmological aspects of the *shi* were emphasized even further in medieval Buddhist texts, to the detriment of astrocalendrical or hemerological uses of the implement. Some of its formal features were maintained, including its keying procedure, but the Monthly Generals and Heavenly Generals of the Liuren board gave way to *bodhisattvas* and *devas*. Moreover, the divination procedure and the manipulation of the *shi* were internalized as well, this time, as components of visualization practices. This relationship between ritual image and internalization is prefigured in certain Taoist contemplation manuals, where deified and anthropomorphized cosmic elements and their images (*xiang* 象) on one hand, and the interior space of practitioners (either their bodies or their mind's eye) on the other, are considered equally accurate and interchangeable representations (*xiang* 像) of cosmic reality.

We have tangentially touched upon the subject of how framing a divination practice or para-divinatory contemplation practice as a *shi* method offered a number of advantages. We may review these benefits one last time. First, Buddhists in particular found in the *shi* an opportune interface for correlating Indian and Chinese cosmologies and demonstrating their compatibility.<sup>65</sup> That Indian cosmology could be expressed on a canvas that prized geometrical symmetry instead of arithmetical accuracy in its representations was a significant detail for Buddhists, one that easily translated into political relevance. Cosmology in China—like governing, to which it was intimately

65 In discussing the ritual adaptations of talismans (*fu* 符) and charts (*tu* 圖), Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures," 367, analyzes the Buddhist adoption of distinctly Chinese grammars of legitimacy: "It was an accepted means of declaring allegiance to the authorities and of flattering the ruler, and the foreign religion was in special need of demonstrating its adaptation to Chinese ways." This assessment can be extended to the *shi* cosmograph, in many respects a *tu* or chart as well.

tied—emphasized neatness and symmetry. Irregularities were not tolerated as they were symptoms of a disturbance in the order of things.<sup>66</sup> Thus, aside from constituting an inbuilt potential for abstraction, the *shi* board's geometric cosmography established an affinity between Indian cosmology, Chinese statecraft, and cosmographic imperial sacraments.<sup>67</sup>

Secondly, as it was couched in themes of governance, the *shi* also elicited a tenor of imperial authority. Manipulating the board in early medieval and medieval China was akin to ordering the realm, a metaphor that is particularly vivid in *Laozi's Central Scripture*. In this way, the *shi* underwent the same process of renegotiation as the talisman (*fu* 符): originally an administrative implement employed to verify the legitimacy of orders, it was later absorbed into Taoist and Buddhist ritual lore and reframed as a badge of authority over gods and demons.<sup>68</sup>

Lastly, tied to the idea of authority are the parent notions of factuality and precision. *Shi* board divinations were believed to be effective because they initially operated on the grounds of precise computations; they were driven by the exactness of astrocalendrical cycles, the very rhythms of Heaven and Earth. Whether the prognostications derived from *shi* boards were actually verifiable mattered very little since the twin burdens of factuality and precision were deferred and imposed on the officiant operating the instrument. Much in line with the Confucian views on ritual that were cited at the outset, the magic of mimesis, Taussig would argue, displaces the sleight of hand so that 'as if' simulation itself becomes technique, replacing the application of technical knowledge and even constituting a 'higher form' of that knowledge.<sup>69</sup> What mattered was that the *shi* ritual would have been verified at one time, even if only once: "truth lies in a never attainable beyond and [trickery] is merely the

66 See John B. Henderson, "Chinese Cosmographical Thought: the High Intellectual Tradition," cited in Bray, "Introduction," 57.

67 The paired *Hetu* 河圖 [*River Chart*] and *Luoshu* 洛書 [*Writ of the River Luo*] are two classical examples of the *tu* as imperial sacrament; see Seidel, "Imperial Treasures"; and Bray, "Introduction."

68 See Seidel, *ibid.*, 291–294. It is no coincidence that the talisman also falls into the class of objects known as imperial sacraments. Seidel argues that Taoist badges of priestly investiture and communication with the unseen world—namely talismans (*fu* 符), but also charts (*tu* 圖), registers (*lu* 籙), and tallies (*qi* 契)—were elaborations upon the Han theme of imperial treasure objects, the revelation and consequent possession of which conferred both imperial and spiritual mandates to rule. This is also true of Buddhist reformulations of the talismans and diagrams.

69 Taussig, "Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism," 306.

continuous and expected prelude to the mere possibility of authenticity, for behind this [trick] stands the receding shadow of the real in all its perfection."<sup>70</sup>

Far from being watered-down vulgarizations, the mantic methods performed with the allegorical and figurative *shi* of medieval China were more potent and 'authentic' to practitioners and adepts than those undertaken with the instrument's hemerological counterparts, as "the probability of an ideal being actualized increases the farther you go from home; the magic of the Other is more truly magical, and faith lies in distance and hence difference."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, in this light, why would carrying about an eloquent shorthand of the universe in one's pouch or visualizing its operations in the mind's eye be any less effective than operating a *shi* board through complex and lengthy heremerological calculations?

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70 Ibid., 302–303.

71 Ibid., 302.

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## Divining Hail: Deities, Energies, and Tantra on the Tibetan Plateau

*Anne C. Klein*

Hailmasters are involved with harming and making trouble for the beings who bring hail.

This is quite unscrupulous and I have no wish at all to be involved in such activities.

Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche, a revered Lama and hailmaster<sup>1</sup>



### 1 Overview of the Tibetan Context

When we speak of "divination" in a Tibetan context we are actually referring to a cluster of important and deeply embedded understandings of mind, body, space, landscape, and the social contract. Reflecting on these introduces a world and logic quite in harmony with the project of fending off hail through connecting with powerful non-human forces, and linking this with certain standards of everyday behavior.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This and other descriptions of the actual process of hail prevention taken from Anne C. Klein and Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche, "Hail Protection."

<sup>2</sup> The same or similar logic would apply to practices of prognostication (*mo*), or feats of clairvoyance and prophecy and, with some possible modification, to the use of a text such as the *Yijing*. I have no personal knowledge of the *Yijing*'s currency among Tibetans, though I have understood from Dr. Smith that there is a Tibetan (Tibetanized?) *Yijing*, which I have not yet seen. David Germano in an informal communication reported to me by Prof. Richard Smith seems to conclude that the case requires considerable further investigation. He suggests that one would have to consult the works of Thu'u bkwan's predecessors, Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje and Mgon po skyabs, to see how they rendered the title, but it does seem that in Thu'u bkwan's case, (Thu'u bkwan p. 337 in the trans.), the *Zhouyi* is referred to as a text explaining *Spor thang*, and the latter is clearly not used as a book title (Thanks to Richard Smith for bringing my attention to this).