

TEMPLE ORACLES IN A CHINESE CITY

A Study of the Use of Temple Oracles
in Taichung, Central Taiwan*

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Prelude

In the early morning of February 26, 1978, our group of over a hundred pilgrims from Taichung arrived in the city of Peikang, one of the major centres of the Matsu cult. The *ch'ao-t'ien* temple there was first built in 1694 and enlarged in 1775. The whole previous day had been spent in visiting temples in other places and burning incense to prepare for this solemn visit. As we arrive, the sedan chair of the goddess which we had brought from Taichung is carried toward the temple gates by ten strong men; the pilgrims follow behind, while musicians blow highpitched trumpets and beat gongs and drums.

Soon our group disappears inside the temple gates, while the great bell and drum are beaten to welcome the visiting Matsu. All the courtyards and halls are crowded with worshippers. It is still three weeks before the deity's birthday celebration but already every day large crowds of visitors pour into the small town from all over Taiwan. Peikang is the seat of the mother temple of Matsu on the island, and hundreds of temples claim affiliation with it.

While the visiting gods and goddesses are carried into the inner shrine and seated on the altar tables to pay homage to the Peikang Matsu, the crowd of pilgrims go about their private devotions. They offer incense to all the deities enthroned here, pray to Matsu, tell her about their problems and uncertainties at home, and ask her advice. Matsu's counsels have been embodied in her temple

* To prepare this survey I was greatly inspired by my learned friends Mr. Liu Chih-wan, a research scholar at the Academia Sinica in Taipei, Institute of Ethnology, and by Professor Wolfram Eberhard of the University of California at Berkeley. I am also indebted to the untiring efforts of Miss Ch'en Yu-mei in Taichung, who collected many samples of the temple oracles. I finally wish to recognize my gratefulness to the Tunghai University in Taichung: my team of anthropology students, 1977-78, contributed to the completion of the Taichung sample collection, while the Centre for Environmental Studies kindly offered me office space. (Dr. Pas is professor of Religious Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.)

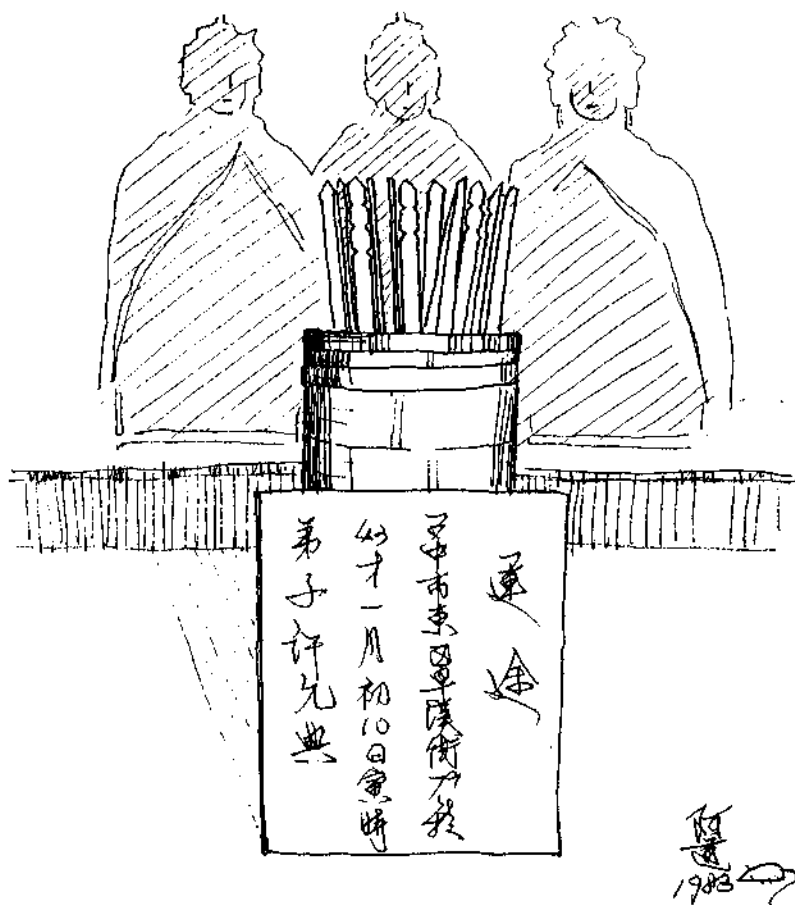
oracles. Many deities in China have their own set and devotees consult them for all important questions, problems or difficulties. They believe that after honest prayer and a gift of incense or other offerings, the compassionate goddess will manifest her advice through the paper oracle slips, printed by the temple officials.

On the altar are several bamboo tubes, each containing 60 bamboo sticks numbered from one to sixty; they can be found in almost any temple in Taiwan.* Here in Peikang, however, there is a large number of sets since the flow of pilgrims is endless. Moreover, in many larger temples of wide reputation, one can nowadays see huge oracle containers three or four feet high, made of dark green marble, extracted from the Hualian mountain quarries. The bamboo sticks in these marble containers are very long.

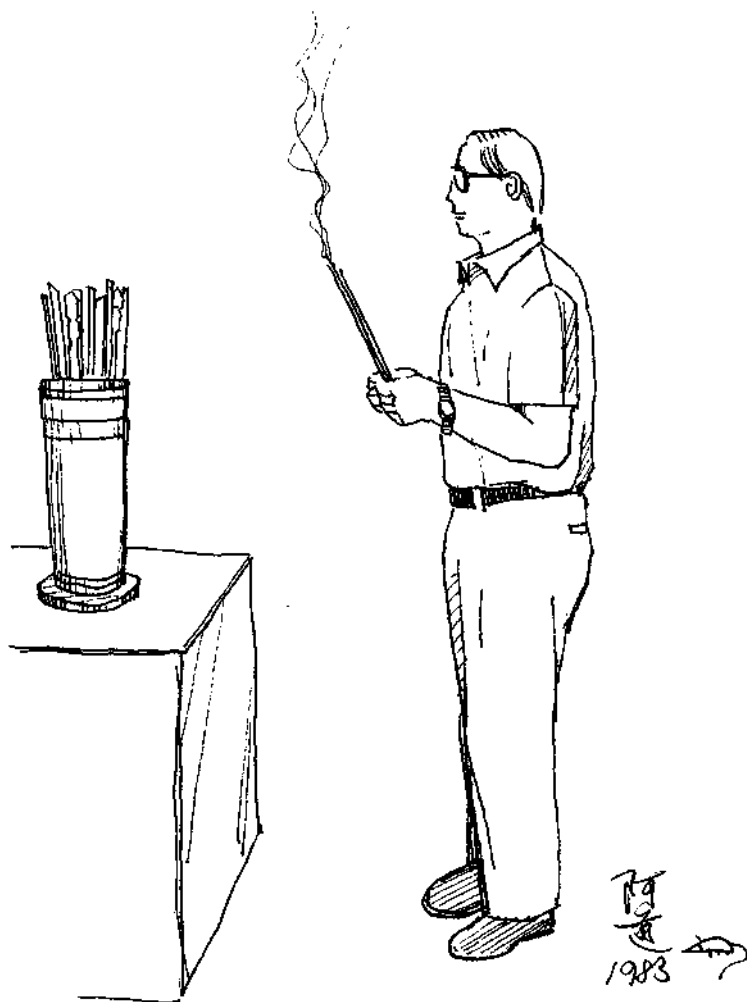
With almost no elbow space the people kneel on the floor in front of the sacred images. Incense smoke curls up to the carved beams and one hears the unceasing noise of shaking bamboo sticks and the accompanying clapper of the small or large moon-shaped divining blocks dropping on the temple floor. The noise in non-stop but there is reverence in the atmosphere, and the worshippers believe that Matsu's spiritual power is at its strongest here in her Peikang shrine.

I am standing near a pillar on the side, watching the whole scene of devotees coming and going, of groups leaving the temple, and groups arriving to the joyous sounds of bell and drum. I watch the people, study their facial and bodily expressions and realize that their sense of religion is perhaps different from the Western type. Yet, there is faith in their actions and an implicit trust in the power of the goddess. Her oracles are the especial focus of this power. An older lady goes to the marble container, shakes the sticks (she cannot lift the heavy container itself, of course) and picks up one of them. She puts it on the altar table, takes a set of small divination blocks — there are dozens of them here — and holds them with both hands at the level of her chin. Her lips mutter prayer; she must be asking the goddess whether the numbered stick she has just taken is her true and correct answer in this case. The situation

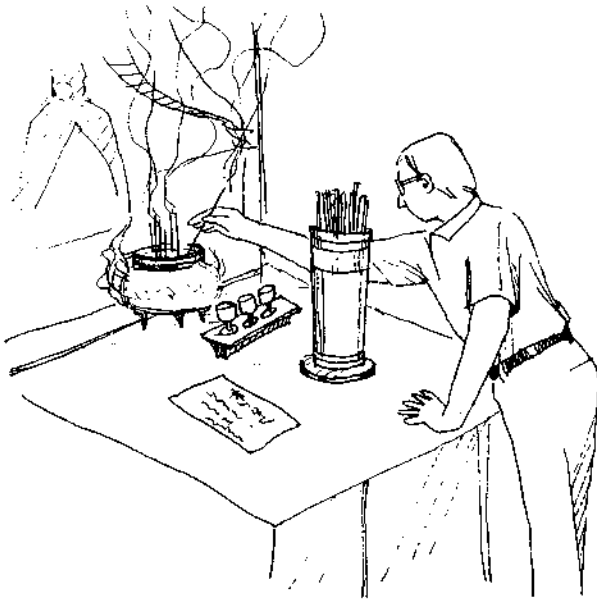
* See line drawings on following pages, by Ho Yu-dao, of Taichung, Taiwan.



The tube containing 60 numbered bamboo slips is placed on the central altar table to front of the divine images.

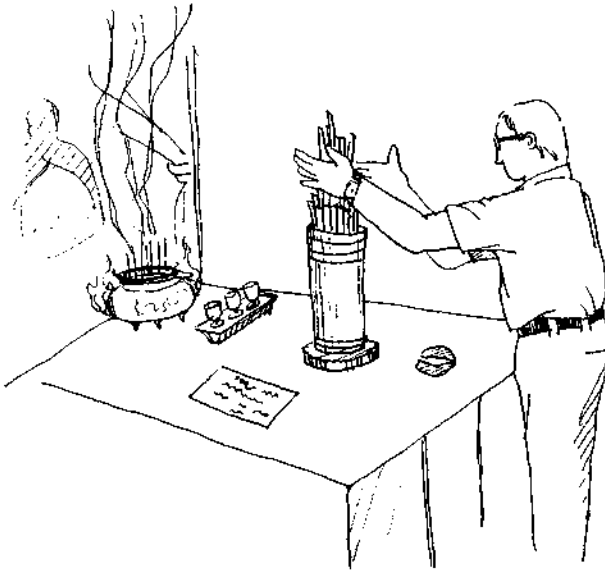


A devotee approaches, prays to the god and offers three incense sticks.



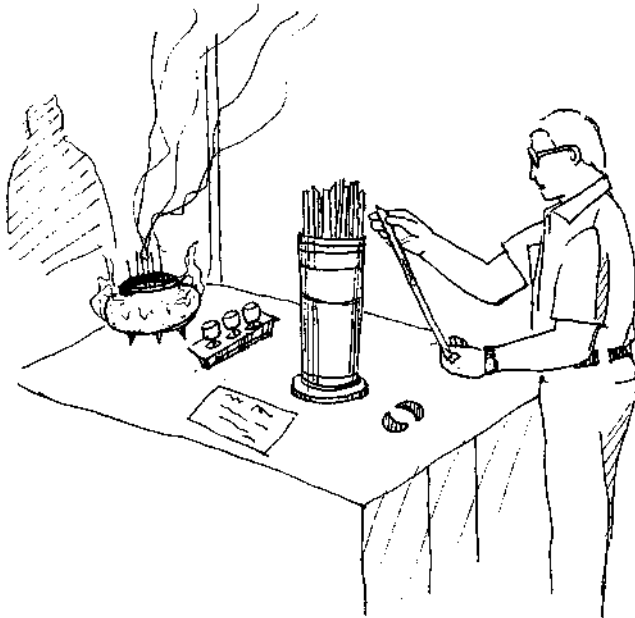
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The incense sticks are put in the incense burner.

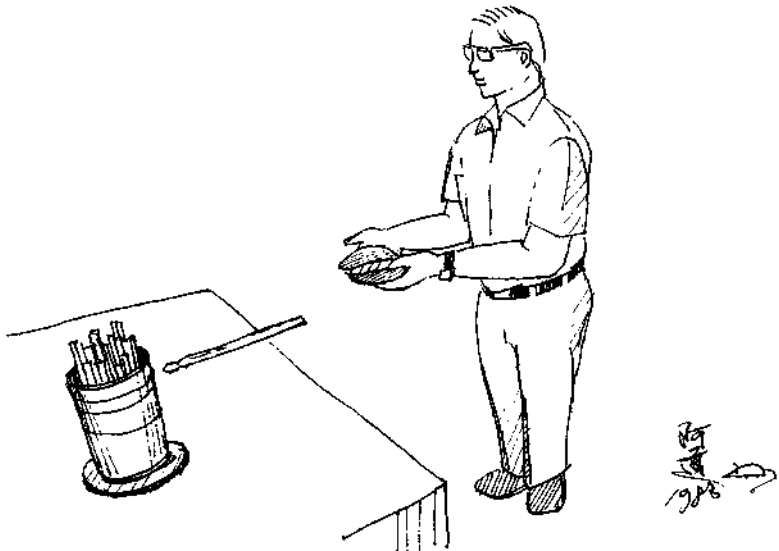


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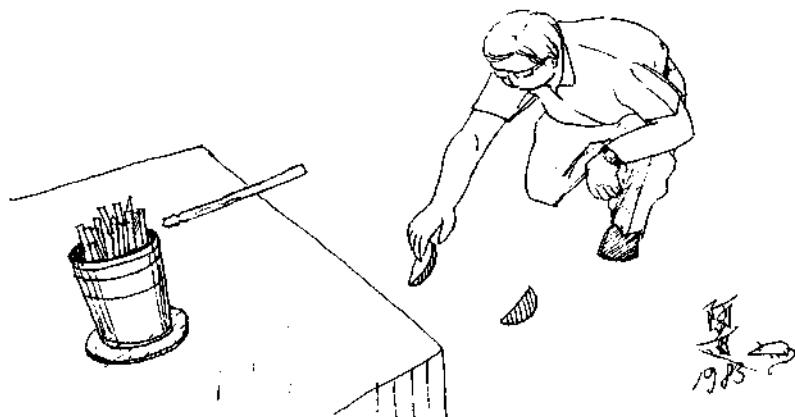
The devotee shakes up the divination slips.



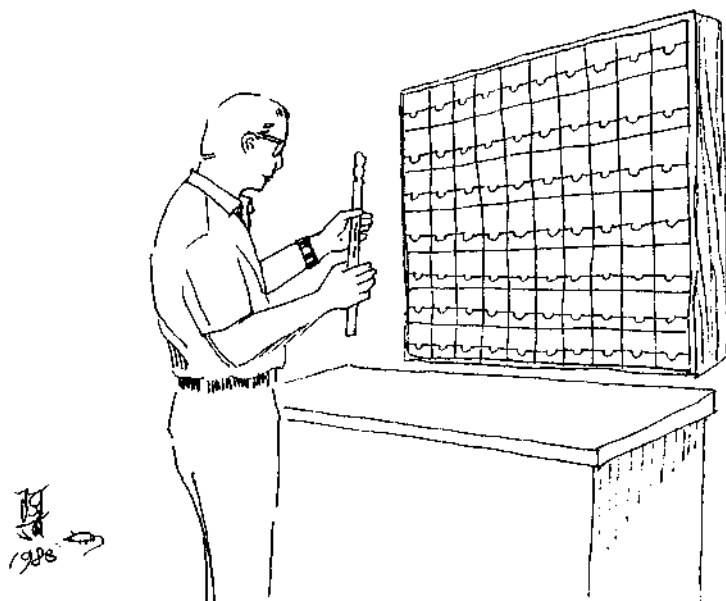
He has selected one stick at random and reads the number.



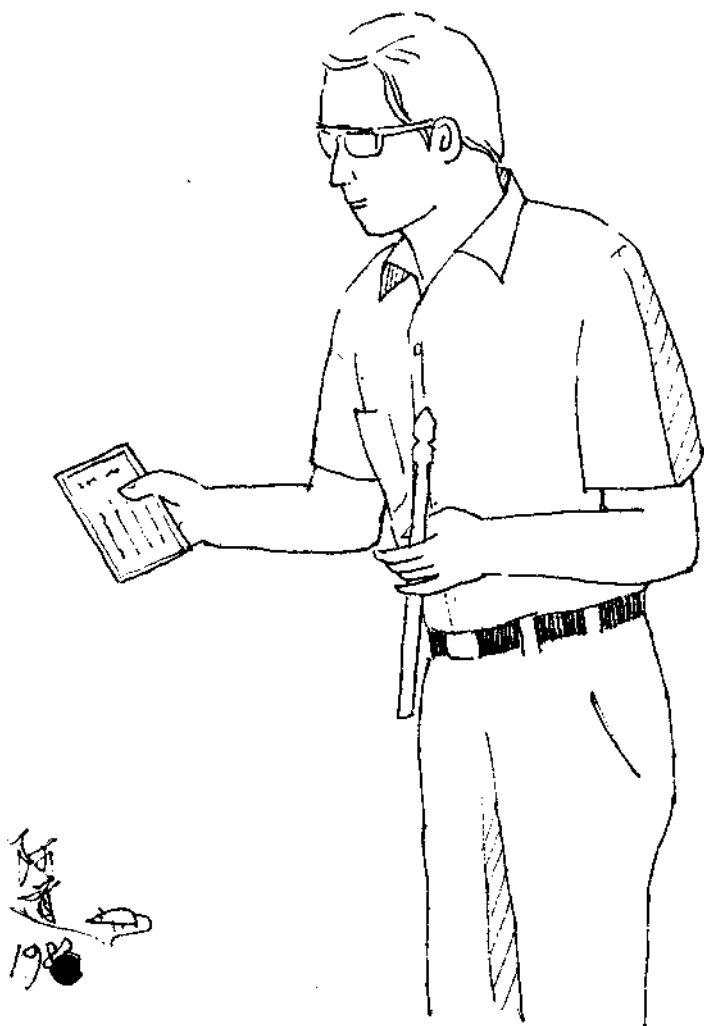
To check whether this is the correct choice (the divine advice) the "moon-blocks" are used.



The blocks have fallen in a favourable position.



The devotee goes to the side wall and looks for corresponding printed sheet numerically arranged in 60 small drawers.



The advice given by the deity is read and analysed.



The slip is finally returned to the tube and a prayer of thanksgiving is offered to the deity.

must be important: at home she could go to the temple at any time of the day, any day of the month. The same oracles are available there, for Matsu's counseling is standardized with few variations. If a grandchild has an aching tooth, grandma will rush to the temple and ask Matsu whether the pain will soon pass or not. Today, however, is not an ordinary day: the occasion is solemn, the questions asked concern matters of great importance: a planned wedding engagement, difficult relationships in the family, matters of life and death. Therefore the correct stick must be ascertained. The woman's eyes look up at the large decorated image of the goddess; with confidence she throws up the blocks, and click, clack, they drop noisily on the floor. Both flat sides are up, the curved sides touching the floor tiles. The goddess is laughing. Perhaps the woman did not concentrate enough, but at least, Matsu is in a good mood. If the blocks fell both on the flat side, they would express the goddess's anger, and one would interpret it as rejection for one's insincere, impure motivation. The woman picks up the blocks, returns the bamboo stick, shakes the bundle again and repeats the whole process. Her face is more concentrated and shows more tension, even anxiety. After a short pause, she drops the blocks once more, and look: they fall in the correct, desired way: one flat side up, one down. It shows harmony, for if the blocks are held together their opposite sides match like the *yin* and the *yang*. The goddess has said that this slip expresses her true advice in this particular situation. The woman picks up the blocks, returns them to the altar table and then holding the selected bamboo stick requests the corresponding slip of paper from the temple attendants. Several of them have their desks along the side wall of the major hall: they receive donations, write out receipts, hand out oracle slips and protective talismans, and upon request, explain the meaning of the oracle, if the text is not clear enough by itself.

Later, back in the touring car, I ask the woman about her oracle. She tells me she had consulted the oracle several times: some relatives had commissioned her with their own problems, but the very last one was her own. The result was not too encouraging: the slip she received was no. 16, one of rather gloomy forecast. The question addressed to Matsu was whether a proposed engagement between her son and a young girl from a neighbouring village would be advisable. From a merely human viewpoint, everything

seemed to be favourable. But our human eyes do not see all the factors involved, we only see the externals. Matsu, powerful and wise, knows better. This is her oracle:

Do not implore blessings nor pray for luck
 Your scheme and efforts will get stuck
 The world of the living knows not the realm of death:
 A burning furnace is its law: no freedom is granted.¹

In small print the leaflet gives details about the major concerns of human life: here, the section 'marriage' is the one that counts. But the expectations are not too good: "difficult to succeed" is the verdict. After reading the slip for herself, the woman had consulted one of the temple diviners: his view was that powers from beyond the grave are causing trouble and for some reasons trying to oppose the union. The woman is disappointed but her faith in Matsu is not shaken: the oracle has at least helped her in opposing a wedding that would end in failure, or would even never materialize. Where human eyes cannot see the truth, the gods and goddesses will offer guidance to help men follow the path of correct action.

Historical Precedents of the Temple Oracles

The above narrated scene took place in 1978: a thousand years earlier, in A.D. 978, the 3rd year of the Sung Emperor T'ai-tsung, a similar scene could have taken place anywhere in China, with a different worshipper addressing a different deity concerning the same frustrating problem.²

Again, another two thousand years before that, in the year 1022 B.C., in a different situation, a similar question could have been addressed to the imperial ancestors or the divine spirits of the Chinese realm. The divining technique used at that time must have been different: either the old Shang method of heating up animal bones (scapulomancy or osteomancy), or else the manipulation of yarrow stalks or milfoil sticks, later replaced by bamboo (achilleomancy).

In any case divination combined with ancestral sacrifices is one of the oldest expressions of Chinese religiosity. Whereas the Shang

(Yin) oracle practice is well documented, there is up to now almost no evidence about the assumed transition from osteomancy to the use of *I ching* related divination. And yet many authors believe that there was a transition or change from the use of oracle bones to a different, yarrow stalk related type of divination, which ultimately crystallized into the *Book of Changes*.³ One can, however, with equal or even more probability assume that consultation by means of the dried stalks of yarrow or milfoil had an independent origin and that the *I ching* type of divination somehow resulted from a combination of scapulomancy and achilleomancy.

That the ancient form of divining from oracle bones was not completely or immediately abolished by the use of milfoil stalks, is evident from texts such as the *Shu ching*: it is stated there several times that rulers resorted to the double consultation of the tortoise and the milfoil stalks.⁴ During the Chou, however, the diagrams of the *I ching* started to prevail. It is believed that King Wen and the Duke of Chou had a role in the creation of the diagrams, although legend holds that they go back to the mythical ruler Fuhsi. The origin of the linear patterns is not known. Few researchers have come up with a probable hypothesis concerning the original meaning of the basic diagrams -- and —. Their identification with *yin* and *yang* is almost certainly secondary; even their description as “whole”, and “broken” or “divided” does not seem to correspond with their origin. In my view, the most plausible theory is to see them as an early expression of number symbolism related to the use of sticks or stalks as counting tools. This is the assumption made by Miyazaki Ichisada, who admits that he does not understand much of the *I ching*, “the most difficult and the most unintelligible” book among the Confucian classics.⁵ I agree with him that the figures called *kua* are the basis of the whole text, and that the later commentaries are philosophical rationalizations of an ancient simple divination technique.

His main argument consists in the etymological analysis of several Chinese characters related to divination: for example the characters *chi* “good luck, good fortune” and *hsiung*, “bad luck” actually express an odd and an even number respectively. This indicates that originally the yarrow stick divination proceeded as follows: “a certain number of sticks were placed in a box; one took

away some at will; the remaining ones were counted to see whether they were even or odd. To avoid making a mistake, they were arranged by twos, each pair in the shape of a cross . . . If at the end one cross remained (an even number), the result was a bad indication, *hsiung* (凶 : 2 sticks inside a container); if only one stick remained, it was a good omen, *chi* (吉 : the top shows 3 sticks, which is clearer than just one; the bottom shows a 'mouth', probably replacing an older writing of a container)"⁶

This originally very simple technique, in which only 2 kinds of answers were obtained, "yes" and "no", developed into more complex forms: perhaps the question was repeated several times (cp. the present-day "moon-block" divination) and the results written above each other. In that case, an even number was expressed by two short lines written in an horizontal way: -- It had nothing to do with *yin* or a 'broken line'. An odd number was expressed by just one line —. The *I ching* philosophy started from the trigrams: at one time the eight different answers obtained by repeating the oracle three times were interpreted in a cosmological way. That left the door open for further speculation and resulted in the 64 hexagrams. At this stage, numerology lost its meaning. The only trace of the older method of counting sticks in a container is found in the use of 50 yarrow stalks: they are still counted, but merely to obtain one of the 64 hexagrams, not any longer to find a positive or a negative answer to one's question.

There are many other ways of using a number of dried stalks in divination: several methods are found in China as well as in other cultures, and it is not certain that the old milfoil method has always been a uniform technique. One other hypothesis is that a number of sticks were thrown at random on the ground and the diviners would draw interpretations from the configurations obtained. This is suggested by the definition of "geomancy" as given in Webster's dictionary: "a kind of divination by figures or lines formed by a handful of earth cast on the ground, or by dots or points drawn at random."⁷

One can clearly see how lines can be obtained by throwing a handful of stalks. To go even one step further: one can find a strong similarity and perhaps a historical link between oracle bone

divination and the use of milfoil. The former method as practised by several Mongolian tribes produced various linear patterns in the shoulder blades of sheep when they were roasted in fire. These lines, caused by fissures and cracks due to the heat, appear to be much more complicated than the ones found on the Shang oracle bones and show a strong affinity with lines obtained through the use of stalks.⁸ The milfoil may have been an alternative method used whenever bones were not available.

Yet another method of using sticks or stalks consists in numbering or marking a certain amount of them, and then drawing one at random. This technique is also called sortilege or "the act or practice of drawing lots; divination by drawing lots."⁹ A related method is called *belomancy*:¹⁰ drawing an arrow to obtain an answer to a problem. The ancient Babylonians used this technique: they put arrows in a container; after shaking they took one out at random to determine further action. These arrows had previously been marked with signs.¹¹ Moslem authors describe the same method as used by the Arabs: seven arrows without points or feathers, each marked with a significant word, were put in a container and mixed. After prayers to the main temple deity one arrow was drawn.¹² The use of sticks was common to all tribes of Scythians in Asia, and from there was transmitted to the Chinese.¹³

Although this type of divination with stalks is quite different from the more complex *I ching* consultation, there may have been a definite connection between the two. I would like to presume that the simpler way of using numbered sticks was a popular adaptation made available to the non specialized layman. The *I ching* developed into a very complex system not only in its philosophy but also in its manipulation of the sticks. The common people needed a simpler way for obtaining answers in difficult situations. All the data were on hand in the *I ching* system: what was needed was a simplification of the texts and an easier technique. At what time such an adaptation was first attempted, is as yet not known. But the still surviving and in some places of the Chinese world very popular custom of consulting the temple oracles is very likely an offshoot of the old *I Ching* related methodology.

The Present-day Temple Oracles

The temple oracles, described in modern historical writings and still found in contemporary practice in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc. can be traced back as far as the Sung dynasty. Yet such a long interval between the milfoil-*I Ching* oracles of early Chou and the Sung practice does not necessarily mean a historical continuity. But although today the literary links are missing, some scholars have assumed a continuous line of development. J. Needham is very definite when he states that "The milfoil, . . . has descended continuously to the Taoist temples of the present day, where simple folk choose a stick from a box . . ." ¹⁴ This method of using sticks is, in Needham's opinion, different from the use of the *I Ching* symbols, although he admits that, in the latter, milfoil sticks were also used.

More recently a German anthropologist Werner Banck, has focused his attention on the study of temple oracles. A first volume of his work, a large collection of temple oracle texts, was published in 1976. ¹⁵ (A second volume is promised in which the author will analyse and evaluate the collected source materials). In his foreword to Banck's work, Wolfram Eberhard clearly expresses the belief that there is continuity between the contemporary oracles and the tradition of the *I Ching* and the Han alternative version, embodied in the *T'ai-hsuan ching*. W. Banck himself shares this opinion and plans to examine the literary tradition of China for more exact information.

A possible reason why direct evidence is not easily available consists in the very nature of the contemporary temple oracles: they are used by the people in the temples. Two conditions make such a practice possible: the existence of temples and the availability of printing. This double factor only started to materialize toward the T'ang period and therefore it seems plausible to look for the origin of temple oracles in the middle or later T'ang era. Before that time, people who wanted to consult the oracles in private matters, could visit diviners, who did not need temple oracles since they could read the *I Ching* and similar texts and cast the oracles for their clients.

From Sung times on, the blockprint method made the spread of temple oracles much easier. I also believe that once one temple started using the oracles, the practice must have spread as quickly as fire to other temples to attract worshippers and increase temple revenue. Nowadays the great majority of temples in Taiwan have sets of bamboo lots for the use of visitors. Few temples, mostly those of Buddhist affiliation, can afford not to include them in their paraphernalia, and even then many Buddhist temples do make use of them. Taking over a successful practice, however, does not necessarily mean downright imitation. Personal inspiration and possibly competition amongst the temples resulted in an incredible variety of oracle texts. These texts, written by diviners, priests and even poets share the same basic orientation or purpose: to give answers to people in distress or uncertainty. It is believed that when the worshipper shakes the container, the divine influence will make the right answer appear. Besides this one universal characteristic, each set of oracles has its own individual traits, as will be shown below. The oldest set of oracles discovered so far probably dates from the Sung dynasty (ca. 1250) and was reprinted in 1958.¹⁶ In W. Banck's text edition, oracle no. 78 of that blockprint series has been reproduced: it is interesting to notice that in the interpretation given, the character *kua* 𠄎 is used; this immediately links this oracle to the diagrams of the *I Ching* which are always called *kua*.

Local influences, individual tastes and the talents of their creators must have given each series its own particularities. Obviously competition among various shrines must have also influenced the authors. In modern times the rich variety of oracle sets is amazing: in W. Banck's collection 55 different sets are photographically reproduced: 46 sets were collected in Taiwan temples, the remaining ones are from Hong Kong (3), Macao (1), Malaysia (3), Bangkok (1) and even California (1). Besides these, I collected in Taiwan some other sets not included in Banck's collection. One wonders how many more sets were once in use in mainland temples, since the varieties found in Taiwan mostly reflect the situation in Fukien and in a more limited way in Kuangtung.

The *Taotsang*, the collection of sacred writings of the Taoists¹⁷ has preserved 7 or 8 oracle series, probably derived from other

geographical areas of China: none of them with the exception of one has been so far spotted in Taiwan or other places outside China. Although the number of oracles in each series can be almost anything between a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 365, it appears that some numbers are favoured more than others. In the Banck collection and my own samples the favourite number are:

28:	8 different sets
32:	6 sets
60:	12 sets
64:	3 sets
100:	11 sets

The *Taotsang* has, moreover, one set of 64, and one of 100, plus two sets of 49. In some of these cases, the numerological symbolism is evident: 64 is in imitation of the *I Ching* (32 just half of it); 60 is in imitation of the classical time-cycle of 60, while 49 is the number still used today for *I Ching* consultation. It will take a prolonged effort to compare all those sets, not merely in their material appearance, i.e. the number of characters for each verse, number of commentaries added, etc. but more importantly from the viewpoint of contents and from the mathematical viewpoint of their divinatory forecasts. As W. Eberhard indicates, the 100 oracle series has 25 oracles that are very favourable, 25 very unfavourable and 50 that are average.¹⁸ Not every series has the same statistical probabilities, but it would be worthwhile to test and compare all of them in this regard.

The presumed probability of a historical link between the *I Ching* related divination methods and temple oracles is strengthened by some of the numbers of oracles: especially 64 and 49. The former is too obvious to need further comment, but it should be mentioned that one series of 64 oracles is somehow a simplified *I Ching* text: it is the set found in the Taipei temple of Huang Ti (*Huang Ti Fu Kung*, Banck #32),¹⁹ in which each oracle starts with one of the 64 hexagrams, followed by a stanza in four lines of 7 characters. The number 49 also has a strong affinity with the *I Ching* or even milfoil technique: nowadays when one consults the *I Ching*, one takes 50 milfoil stalks, and after some preliminary rituals of worship and incense offering, one stalk is taken away and

does not play any role in the actual consultation: only 49 stalks are thus used. Although two sets of 49 oracles are found in the *Taotsang*, none has so far been spotted in actual use in Taiwan or other places.

A Sample Study in Taichung, Central Taiwan

My own research and collecting of samples in Taiwan started in 1977-78 and was continued in 1980. Each time when I visited a temple, I tried to obtain a few sample sheets of the oracles either hanging on a side-wall in the temple, or stacked away in specially built wooden cabinets with small drawers for each oracle. Whenever I came across a new variety, I asked the temple superintendent's permission to collect sample sheets of the whole series. I did not always receive a friendly welcome but in most cases the response was excellent especially when I explained that I was studying and trying to understand all aspects of Chinese folk religion. A donation to the temple made all wrinkles of doubt disappear. In the autumn of 1978, I discovered W. Banck's publication, which increased my interest in this area but left quite a few questions unanswered. I hope he will soon complete his second volume. In the meantime, I decided to examine the relative frequency of each type of oracle sets, and to test the possibility that the proper character or affiliation of a temple also indicates the type of oracles that can be found there. After collecting about 340 samples throughout Taiwan, I came to certain basic conclusions: the set of 100 oracles, called the *Kuan Ti* series (Banck #2),²⁰ is always found in temples dedicated to Kuan Ti (obviously) but is also usually adopted in city god temples, and often but not always in temples in honour of Hsuan-t'ien Shang-Ti, Yu-huang Ta-ti, and even Sakyamuni Buddha. In other words, this oracle is almost never found in the temples honouring the common folk deities (there are a few exceptions). It is certainly not the most frequently found oracle, as will be pointed out below. By far the most popular series is the 60 slips Matsu oracle. (Banck #1)

Then I decided to take the city of Taichung as a sample case. It is located in central Taiwan and has a fast growing population, being already of over 600,000 inhabitants. The newly built harbour will continue to influence the city's growth for many years to

come. From a religious viewpoint, Taichung is a rather average and conservative town: there are no very old and large temples of provincial reputation, attracting large crowds of tourists or pilgrims. In that respect, Tainan and Taipei are more famous, and of course so are other old places like Peikang and Lukang, once very flourishing fishermen's settlements but unable to keep up with modernization. Still, their temples keep attracting steady flows of pilgrims from afar.

In recent years the provincial and municipal governments have taken a more active interest in the religious life of the people. This can be seen as a continuation of the old imperial system, when religion was strongly supervised and even controlled by the officials, but the present day practice includes quite a few innovations. One innovation is the requirement that all temples should be legally registered. In municipalities this can be done at the city hall. The administration of the cities includes a department of population (*min-tsu pu*), which in turn has a sub-department of religious affairs. In 1976 the Taichung city hall printed a list of all the temples duly registered; upon request I obtained a copy. Later on I was allowed to borrow and photocopy a similar list in Tainan, whereas in Kaohsiung no such list had been printed yet: I was permitted to look through the register containing all the filled out registration papers sent in to the city hall by the temples.

I expect that all the major cities in Taiwan (Taipei, Keelung, Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung, Yangmingshan) will have such a list by now, and each county or *hsien* government has started to register all the temples within their own jurisdiction. Copies of all these registers have to be sent to the provincial government. This will hopefully make future temple research much easier: to me and others it has often been a time-consuming and frustrating experience not to find up-to-date temple lists providing the most basic information, especially in a rapidly changing urban environment, where temples are continuously being broken down and rebuilt elsewhere.

The city of Taichung was one of the first to complete a list of the city temples. (Tainan was earlier: my copy dates from 1974.) When I visited the "religious officials" again in the autumn of

1980, I received photocopies of the new additions to the register. The 1976 register lists 107 temples: they are numbered according to their location within the city. By the end of 1980, the number had gone up to 154. The main reason of such a drastic increase was the inclusion of churches. As a matter of fact, the new list with handwritten additions so far contains 21 Christian churches (2 Roman Catholic, 19 Protestant), 1 mosque, one *Ta-t'ung* and one *Tenrikyo* shrine (two new religions).

The Taichung city hall list provides for each temple the following details: district, name of the temple, the main deity worshipped, the religious affiliation, the correct postal address, the person in charge (*Kuan-li jen*) and the number given by the city. I presume that much more data is contained in the city's files, for I looked at the local file in Kaohsiung and found that many more details regarding temple properties, income, and regular activities are contained in the full register. But the Taichung city hall list is a useful, practical document, making it possible to go and visit the temples for interviews. I visited roughly half of the listed temples myself, while the other half were taken care of by assistants and college students as a field work project. One of the purposes of the visit was to collect samples of their oracles. Each different type of oracle has been given a number, preceded by B: this is the numbering found in W. Banck's text edition, which I adopt here (see Footnote 15). He allotted numbers according to the frequency of the oracles he found: in most cases this frequency coincides with my field work experience, but there are occasional discrepancies.

The categorization of temples as "Taoist" or "Buddhist" is found in the listings of Taichung City Hall. I have reservations about the category of "Taoist" temples, as the official lists simplify the affiliation of temples: whatever is not a Confucian or Buddhist temple, is said to be a Taoist temple. That is stretching the concept too far; most of these temples are community temples and belong more properly to the folk religion.

The table shows that at least 85 out of 115 temples make use of temple oracles, which is almost 74%. There are certainly more temples using them, for the group "not available", contains a number of temples where we could not obtain samples, because

Table 1: Registered Temples in Taichung City
(112 temples with 115 oracles)

	B-1	B-2	B-6	B-9	Not Avail.	Other	Total
(Confucian)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Taoist	43	15	-	1	11	-	70
Buddhist	14	6	6	-	18	-	44
	57	21	6	1	30	-	115

occasionally the temple management was unwilling to oblige. The other "not available" temples are the ones where no oracles are being used:

- six are of Buddhist affiliation;
- two are folk religion temples, but closely related to the state cult, and therefore, as in the case of the Confucius temple, no oracles are used;
- one is an earth-spirit shrine, (*T'u-ti-kung miao*) not using any oracles;
- in ten Buddhist temples no oracle samples could be obtained, because the personnel were unwilling to give them out;
- two other temples were not visited: one was a Buddhist monastery; the other, an earth-spirit shrine which do not always carry oracles.

Finally two temples presumably have B-2 oracles, but are not included in the results. Five temples, one Buddhist and four Taoist, had been moved to other locations, mostly because of urbanization but sometimes because a larger building was needed and the original site was not spacious enough.

The above Table 1 clearly indicates that the temples in Taichung show very little diversity: among the 85 temples where oracles were found, 67% use the B-1 type ("Matsu" oracle); 24.7% use the B-2 type ("Kuan Ti" oracle), while only 7%, all of Buddhist affiliation, use the B-6 type ("Kuan Yin" oracle). The only other type is unique in the city: the B-9 type. It is a variety of oracles found in temples dedicated to the legendary deified doctor, Pao-sheng Ta-ti; other varieties of this god's oracles were spotted out-

side Taichung, especially in Tainan City.

The majority of temples using the B-1 oracle (Matsu) are not dedicated to the goddess Matsu, but to a variety of gods and goddesses of the popular cult. In most cases Matsu has her image in these temples as well, but many deities do not have a particular set of their own and borrow the most commonly used one. Most of these oracle slips are printed in Taichung by a local printing shop, which also publishes the Matsu, Kuan Ti and Kuan Yin oracles in booklet form. (See Appendix I and bibliography).

Besides the above listed temples, duly registered in the city hall of Taichung, I discovered during my marathon walks crisscross through the city, a considerable number of smaller temples, often essentially private family shrines to which the public are allowed access, which also contain temple oracles for the use of worshippers. These temples are not found in the City Hall list since the owners do not wish government interference in their operations. Moreover, there is no strict rule that these semi-private shrines have to be registered. It is also possible that these smaller shrines do not fully satisfy some of the conditions outlined by the government.

*Table 2: Non-registered temples or shrines in Taichung City
(36 temples: 37 oracles)*

	B-1	B-2	B-6	B-43	Not Avail.	Total
<i>Taoist</i>	26	6	1	1	-	34
<i>Buddhist</i>	2	1	-	-	-	3
	28	7	1	1	-	37

The grand total of Tables 1 and 2 combined are as follows:

Table 3: Registered and Non-registered Temples in Taichung City

	B-1	B-2	B-6	B-9	B-43	Other	Not Avail.	Total
<i>Confucian</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
<i>Taoist</i>	69	21	1	1	1	-	11	104
<i>Buddhist</i>	16	7	6	-	-	-	18	47
	85	28	7	1	1	0	30	152

In this 2nd table all temples have oracles since I left out the very few cases of a non-registered temple where no oracles are being used. Moreover, it appears that almost no Buddhist shrines omit official registration: therefore I found only three shrines of Buddhist affiliation in this category.

The relative frequency of the oracles in Taichung City is that the 60-slip Matsu oracle (B-1) is used three times as much as the runner up: B-2: 85 vs 28; on the other hand, B-2 is used three times as often as all the remaining ones combined: 28 vs 9. There is, of course, no guarantee that the city of Taichung is representative of Taiwan as a whole. To determine the relative spread of the temple oracles in the whole of Taiwan would be an enormous task, even if only representative samples were taken in each area. My own field work was not done systematically enough in this regard but I shall indicate the results for what they are worth: I collected 207 oracle samples from 195 temples around the island. The selection was rather casual, only on five occasions did I visit a temple mainly to collect their oracle set, (after I had found the information in Banck's publication): this was the case for B-6, -17, -24, -32, and -40; all the other ones I discovered myself.

*Table 4: Temples in Taiwan, not including Taichung City
(195 temples with 207 oracle sets)*

	B-1	B-2	B-3	B-4	B-6	B-7	B-8	B-9	Other-B	Not in B	Total
<i>Confucian</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
<i>Taoist</i>	89	50	8	2	-	3	6	3	21	5	187
<i>Buddhist</i>	12	3	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	-	19
	101	53	8	3	1	3	6	3	23	6	207

The overall picture of Taiwan oracles shows that B-1 and B-2 still carry the great majority: B-1 reaches almost 50%, B-2 ca. 25% with no other serious contenders competing. However, a great diversity can be noticed: many more different sets are to be found than in Taichung City, even if many sets are only found in one temple (B-5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 17, 19, 21, 24, 27, 31, 32, 34, 40, 43, 44,

46, and 54) or in two temples (B-12, 38 and 55). In a few older cities or towns one finds the richest variety:

Tainan:	5 different sets (cp. Banck, who has 9)
Taipei:	8 different sets (cp. Banck: 12)
Lukang:	3 different sets (cp. Banck 6)

In Banck's collection are also included the Pescadores (P'eng-hu) islands: he has 6 sets from there, whereas I did not collect there at all. The great variety in older centres of immigrant settlements indicates that those sets were very likely brought to Taiwan from different "mother-temples" (*tsung-miao*) in the mainland; whereas in later times newly constructed temples took over the more popular sets available in Taiwan itself. In Taiwan, the more popular a cult, the larger the number of "daughter-temples" (*fen-miao*) it produced: that would explain the popularity of B-1 and B-2.

To summarize my findings, I'd like to combine the data shown in tables 3 and 4 and then conclude with some final considerations:

Table 5: Joint Survey of Temple Oracles in Taiwan

	B-1	2	3	4	6	7	8	9	Other	B Not in	B Not Avail.	Total
Confucian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Taoist	158	71	8	2	1	3	6	4	22	5	11	291
Buddhist	28	10	-	-	6	-	-	-	2	-	18	18
	186	81	8	2	7	3	6	4	24	6	30	357

One important remark concerns the representative value of this survey: in my view, the sample taken cannot be considered to have general validity, except with regard to table 1 (and perhaps tables 2 and 3). A more detailed and carefully prepared research would produce a more accurate knowledge of the spread of the oracles. Taiwan nowadays counts between 4,000 to 5,000 registered temples, and a large number of non-registered shrines. Among the latter group are literally thousands of *T'u-ti-kung* shrines, sometimes small roadside chapels or altar-like structures, which have no oracle sets available.

A more carefully planned survey would make sure that all areas of Taiwan are included. In my survey, some are totally omitted, although I do have representatives from most administrative units throughout Taiwan (and 2 samples from Hong Kong).

Cities:	Taipei:	19	Tainan:	17
	Keelung:	-	Kaohsiung:	23
	Taichung:	115+37	Yangmingshan:	-
Counties:	Taipei:	4	Yunlin:	6
	Ilan:	-	Chiayi:	11
	Taoyuan:	9	Tainan:	4
	Hsinchu:	16	Kaohsiung:	7
	Miaoli:	8	Pingtung:	5
	Taichung:	31	Taitung:	5
	Changhua:	23	Hualien:	1
	Nantou:	18	Penghu:	-

Final Considerations

The practice of divination appears to be a universal phenomenon in the history of religion: universal both in time and in space. The modalities display an immense variety, and to come up with a complete list of types would require another essay. The Chinese temple oracles seem to belong to a category of numerological divination types in which the probability of certain results can be calculated according to mathematical laws. The other type of Chinese folk divination, using two "moon blocks", follows similar probability patterns, and is often used in combination with the temple oracles.²¹

One can wonder about the reasons why this type of divination remains so popular among Chinese temple goers. There may not be a simple answer to the question and it very likely touches on the borderline between conscious and unconscious motivation. Consultation of the oracles, moreover, is not dissimilar to gambling, with the important difference that the oracle consultant believes implicitly in the divine guidance and control of the oracle result. Although aware that probability patterns are involved, the ordinary believer is still convinced that the outcome of his consulta-

tion is divinely pre-ordained and therefore contains a message which is the best possible in the particular circumstances. That even applies to medical temple oracles, which at first view is rather shocking. Some devotees will hardly consult a medical doctor when a health problem arises. They will go to the temple, usually dedicated to one of the deities of healing (for example Pao-sheng Ta-ti, Shen-nung Ta-ti), where medical divination slips are still being used. The pattern of consultation is the same as for ordinary temple oracles, but the end result is different: the devotee will receive a divination slip which contains a herbal recipe. This is taken to a traditional drug store where the divine prescription is filled and if followed with confidence and trust in the deity, health will supposedly gradually be restored.

Whether or not the results of divination are authentic, i.e. whether or not there really is a deity behind the scene who makes a decision in each individual case concerning the best solution, is psychologically unimportant: the worshipper accepts the premises of divine guidance and with one stone hits two birds: he believes in the supernatural outcome of his consultation, and also circumvents the painful process of decision-making on his own. As a psychological support for action, as a method of divine counseling, divination appeals to a great number of people. Since the temple oracles are easy to manipulate, they are very popular, just as the *I Ching* consultation keeps its strong appeal — also in the West — for more educated people.

The Chinese temple oracles have, moreover, another way of exercising a strong attraction: most of the sets included in this survey are rather complex in that they contain various appendices to their basic texts. The oracles are usually written in verse form: four lines of either five or seven characters. What happened to the *I Ching*, has happened here in a similar fashion: commentators added their own interpretations or characterizations to the text (the “wings” of the temple oracles?) Two types of these commentaries need further elaboration: first, areas of concern and secondly, historical precedents.

1. Most sets of oracles list out the areas of vital concern which for most worshippers cover the majority of cases about which they

normally consult the deity, and indicate the response of the deity in each area of concern in each oracle stick. This list is not uniform in the various collections of temple oracles. To illustrate this point, I want to refer to the samples listed in Appendix I:

B — 1, the sixty Matsu oracles (sample 1): contain between fourteen and twenty-six areas of concern, depending on the edition.

B — 2, the 100 Kuantu oracles (sample 2) only list seven or eight areas: fame (or reputation), happiness, litigation (in court cases), ailment, marriage, pregnancy and travel. One edition of B-2 has no listing at all.

B — 6, (sample 3) has an extended list of 36 concern areas.

B — 34, (sample 4) is a simplified set and reduces the areas of concern to six.

B — 54, (sample 5) is irregular in that it presents two separate lists: one of twelve concern areas, which look more or less like the traditional ones, and second, one of six, possibly adapted to the particular situation in Hong Kong. The latter list includes 'geomancy' as one of the areas, which is amazingly not found in any other oracle collection available to me.

B — 55, (sample 6) does not have any detail at all; only sample 13 of the same B-55 has additional commentaries, which, however, do not include the concern areas.

B — 0, not included in Banck's collection, (sample 7), lists eight concern areas, which are almost identical with *B-2*.

A comparison between the various lists makes it clear that worshippers go to the temple to ask the deity's advice (and forecast) about any of the more important issues in life: health and happiness, marriage, birth, education, longevity, wealth, success in business enterprises, success in career, travel, building or renovating the house, the weather, especially about rain, visitors and lost property. For medical advice they can consult the medical oracles, which are usually differentiated into several groups: man, woman, child; sometimes there is a special set for eye diseases.

The answers to their questions are of course stereotyped: they are printed on leaflets and apply to all cases in general terms. Worshippers may eventually wish to consult diviners inside the temple or sometimes in the neighbourhood to obtain more indi-

vidualized advice, or to supplement the temple oracle with information gained through other divinatory practices, such as face and hand reading, or the casting of horoscopes. The Wong Tai Sin temple in Hong Kong is a famous shrine where everyday crowds of people go to consult the oracles. In the temple neighbourhood dozens of diviners have their small stalls, where they often receive visitors after they have consulted the temple deity.

Although the temple oracles do have a "life" of their own, i.e. are strictly speaking independent from any other practice, still they must be seen and interpreted within the wider context of overall religious beliefs and practices of the Chinese people. One example has already been given: the results of the oracles can be checked and compared with information from other sources. I also found from different types of field work experience, that many believers consult the temple oracles as a matter of routine, even in matters of no great urgency, or even, and especially in the case of young people, with a strong dose of scepticism. In situations that border on urgency or desperation, the believer would forego the temple oracle, but ask for more immediate or direct advice from gods or goddesses through consultation of a medium. In that case, the advice is also more personal, as opposed to the stereotyped answers received in the temple.

The issue of stereotyping human problem situations, however, cannot be easily dismissed as being meaningless or irrelevant. Many types of divination — if not all — imply the belief in set patterns of answers for similar or identical situations. The *I Ching* is not an exception: it provides a map for human action, based on 64 variations of vital concerns in life. These 64 hexagrams somehow summarize all possible situations of doubt, anxiety, even perplexity. In a more popular way, the temple oracles have done the same thing in different ways: they have changed the number of situations and answers, but the exact number is not too relevant. What underlies any particular number of oracles, is the common presumption that human reactions to problem situations follow certain patterns, because in general, human lives follow the same processes of development. The creators or innovators of the temple oracles have sensed this phenomenon and have incorporated it in their oracles.

2. Historical precedents: many of the sets of temple oracles, and certainly the major ones (B-1, B-2), contain somewhere near the edge of the printed slips short sentences which are rather titles than complete sentences. W. Eberhard has done a preliminary examination of these and states that they refer to historical or legendary events from China's past often known to the general public through popular dramas. Although traditionally the majority of the rural people in China were illiterate they would naturally know the stories referred to in the oracle slips from their own experience of stage performances in the village. Drama, and in modern times puppet theatre, have been effective ways to educate the people in the countryside, especially since these stories usually contain a moral lesson, and extol such national virtues as filial piety, righteousness, integrity, loyalty, patriotism, etc. By attaching a reference to a famous event of the past to the oracle, the ordinary uneducated worshipper would understand the basic meaning of the oracle: what happened long ago to hero so-and-so, also applies today to the problem at hand. Eberhard quotes eleven examples from set B-2 (the Kuan Ti oracles), from which I pick the following one:

"No. 10: Meng Chiao passes the examination at fifty", thus very late in life. Meng was a friend of the scholar Han Yu (768-835) . . . The oracle indicates that success will not occur until very late . . ." ²²

The application from the story to the particular request made by the worshipper seems to be very clear: Whatever was asked for will not be immediately granted but the petitioner will succeed in the end. The worshipper is encouraged not to give up but to remain patient.

In a table at the end of his article, Eberhard lists for B-1 and B-2 the number of plays or stories that he has been able to identify, i.e. to find the corresponding drama and/or story in literature. Very likely some titles refer to local dramas and are thus not easy to identify. In B-1 (the 100 Kuan Ti oracles) 83 are identified, whereas for 10 oracles the titles are missing (I presume in the set available to him). What is interesting, is that the titles of the two sets under study (B-1 and B-2) are not the same, and they are probably

also different in other sets. This point, however, needs further detailed study. One example may serve as a warning to prevent rash conclusions: in set B-1 1 (or 12), there is reference to a play or story which is at first view similar to the one quoted above (no. 10 of the B-2 set):

“No. 47: Lady Kao Ta becomes famous at fifty.”²³

Although the story referred to is different, still the moral drawn from it may be similar. Therefore a detailed analysis of all the story/play types should be undertaken.

From all this it is obvious that Chinese history is here used as a rich source for moral examples, or for predictions concerning one's future. Human life in its endless chain of apparently personal events, still can be reduced to a number of prototypes; although the exact details vary ad infinitum, the models resemble each other in their basic orientation. What happened 2,000 years ago to so and so, may happen again to me right now, if my action follows the same pattern, and is inspired by the same intention. Chinese history has been well known to all levels of society through drama performances at the community stage or in the temple precincts, and through story telling or reading. Good and bad examples abound in the rich heritage and are used in divination as promises or warnings in our present situation.

Religious literatures of other traditions offer parallel examples, where past events are used as models for action or even for divining purposes. St. Augustine describes his own experience in his *Confessions* (Book 8): during his 32nd year he passed through a painful crisis of doubt: The Christian way of life attracted him strongly but his old habits of worldly attachments kept him back. In this intense struggle a special event shook him up: he divined the Scriptures and the answer he received helped him to overcome all further obstacles.

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighbouring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, “Take up and read; Take up and read.” Instantly, my counte-

nance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: *Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me:* and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: *Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence.* No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

Maybe the official teaching of the Christian Churches would not approve of such an approach but I see the definite possibility of composing a set of 60 or 100 oracles based on Biblical stories: the books of the Bible, Old and New Testament, abound with events and actions which can be used as models for the present. If one maintains a strong belief in divine guidance, it is not a priori unacceptable that one would cast a Christian oracle and obtain a Christian answer parallel to those of the Chinese temple oracles. To mention just a few random examples, first from the Old Testament: Abraham leaves his home: obedience to God's will; Abraham sacrifices his son: God tempts the faith of his devotee; Joseph in Egypt: virtue is sometimes tested, but will ultimately triumph. From the New Testament: John the Baptist's message: if you do not repent, you will perish; Mary's acceptance of a superhuman mission; the poor widow's contribution to the temple; the healing power of Jesus for those who have faith.

Such an experiment may not be welcomed by the Church authorities, not because the examples are not relevant, but because of the divination approach involved. However, it could be interpret-

ed as a particular method of prayer and if the right belief in God's guidance is maintained, we could have a new and popular way of Christian prayer, adjusted to the need of many Christians.

One final concern about the validity of *I Ching* and temple oracles has to be expressed: it is assumed and often clearly stated that the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching* summarize and symbolize all human situations and contain advice for all possible conflicts. If that is correct, it also follows that the temple oracles do likewise. In other words, the value of all these oracles depends largely on their completeness with regard to human life. A city map which leaves out important roads or central buildings would not be very useful. So the question arises: do these oracles actually fulfill this condition? So far as I am aware, no one has ever checked and questioned the *I Ching* in this regard. But in the case of the temple oracles, it seems that in modern times which create new situations and therefore result in new decision making problems, the oracles may need to be complemented. One example will illustrate this: when a devotee questions the oracle about marriage, it refers to customs of traditional China, where matches were made by the families, not by the individuals concerned. This has now changed. Furthermore, the question about marriage, as expressed in the temple oracles, always assumes that a marriage has not yet taken place: the question is whether it will be advisable to proceed; whether it will work out all right. There is an implicit assumption that marriages will last. If a conflict arises 5 or 10 years later, and husband and wife doubt whether they should stay together or not, there is no answer to be found in the oracles. This is a case where the oracles need adjustment in order to keep serving a truly advisory purpose for the benefit of the believers today.

APPENDIX I: A SELECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE
SAMPLES OF CURRENT TEMPLE ORACLES

Although Werner Banck has published a voluminous collection of 55 complete sets of temple oracles (hereafter abbreviated as B), I believe that the following selection of samples can be meaningful and useful for comparative purposes. Seven samples taken from printed editions commonly used by the temple personnel are presented: these samples show the variations of commentaries attached to the basic oracular verses.

For each case I have only chosen the first oracle, but this is sufficient for our purpose of limited comparison.

Sample No. 1 (B-1)

This is oracle no. 1, taken from the most popular of all temple oracles: the 60 oracles Matsu set. (See bibliography, *Sheng-ch'ien chu-chieh*). Many temples not only have printed leaflets for the use of devotees with each oracle printed on a separate leaflet, but have booklet editions available for the use of specialists counselling devotees.

This set of oracles is characterized by its usually added subsections or areas of concern for which devotees most frequently cast the oracles. They are the major concerns in life, such as "employment", "disease", "dwelling", "wealth", "marriage", "expectation of rain", etc. When devotees consult the oracles they would in most cases ask about only one of these areas. The B-1 type of this variation distinguishes between 14 and 16 concern areas.

第一籤 (○○○○)	甲子籤 屬金利在秋天宜共四方						
	日出便見風雲散 光明清淨照世間 一向前途通大道 萬事清吉保平安						
移居得安	年冬平常	詞訟 <small>平印而亡 事在揆</small>	歲君 <small>滿吉</small>	六甲 <small>生男難養</small>	尋人 <small>日光在</small>	病人 <small>末日瘥</small>	作事難成
		求雨尚	求婚尤	功名有	失物左	疾病平	求財輕
		求	成		方	安	微
							包公請雷驚仁宗

Sample No. 2 (B-2)

One of the more complete versions of the Kuan Ti oracles printed in book form as appendix to *Kuan Sheng-ti chun ying-yan t'ao-yuan ming-sheng ching* (See bibliography).

This edition has a total of 5 commentaries, perhaps inspired by the "ten wings" of the *I Ching*. The last two commentaries are written in poetry, one attributed to Su Tang-po and the other to Pi-hsien.

吉 大 甲 甲 籤 一 第		洲 滿 登 士 學 八 十			
釋義		解曰		聖意	
雲間。青雲之上也。龍龜獨步。許其足踏青雲也。玉殿千官。乃是天 曹仙吏。第一班。仙吏之最貴者也。榮華富貴。自天作主。天已付之 。自然福壽無涯。如海。言福之廣遠。如山。言壽之堅永。上上大吉 。須要入地相當則應。		功名遂。福祿全。訟得理。病即痊。桑麻熟。婚姻圓。子生子。行人還 此籤謀望事緒。無不遂意。但各有所主。官員占此。有超越之喜。士 人有功名之慶。占前程者。福壽綿長。占事業者。根基穩固。若謀望 求財。多主有名無實。為語多空虛也。		巍巍獨步向雲間 玉殿千官第一班 富貴榮華天付汝 福如東海壽如山	
解		披		東	
意稱謀望 謀厚壽高		皆天所相 終身光顯		名登甲第 拔羊起群	
註		仙		碧	
萬事足無 疑		求謀皆稱 意		成名步玉 桂	
				月裡攀丹	

Sample No. 3 (B-6)

A sample from the Kuan Yin oracles occasionally but by no means exclusively found in Buddhist temples.

This set of only 24 oracles also carries short references to drama or stories; its areas of concern are extended to 36. (See bibliography *Kuan Yun ling-ch'ien chu-chieh*).

<p>觀音籤第一</p>		<p>上吉</p>	
<p>善才叅</p>		<p>寶馬盈門吉慶多</p>	
<p>世尊</p>		<p>官司有理勸調和</p>	
<p>萬般得利稱全福</p>		<p>一箇紅心定中科</p>	
<p>高杏</p>	<p>求得元籤宜報恩</p>	<p>金雲</p>	<p>此籤謀望事緒皆吉但各有所</p>
<p>庄註</p>	<p>易成易就不須論</p>	<p>鶴解</p>	<p>主如謙恭正道則事多順境若</p>
<p>功名</p>	<p>人情最喜雙親悅</p>	<p>身命</p>	<p>妄作詐貪則後凶</p>
<p>善處得來</p>	<p>須看前時參世尊</p>	<p>謀望</p>	<p>彼此同心</p>
<p>婚姻</p>	<p>十二分吉</p>	<p>產育</p>	<p>生後太平</p>
<p>置產</p>	<p>前即積心</p>	<p>家宅</p>	<p>丁財俱發</p>
<p>求財</p>	<p>貧安少利</p>	<p>遷移</p>	<p>老年不吉</p>
<p>出行</p>	<p>船遇貴人</p>	<p>六畜</p>	<p>無一不宜</p>
<p>學館</p>	<p>盡善盡美</p>	<p>尋人</p>	<p>前察前途</p>
<p>年歲</p>	<p>天佑下民</p>	<p>進人</p>	<p>口神佑</p>
<p>中保</p>	<p>至事難詳</p>	<p>失物</p>	<p>東南急尋</p>
<p>病症</p>	<p>求佛消災</p>	<p>口舌</p>	<p>宜解忌結</p>
<p>醫藥</p>	<p>另卜他方</p>	<p>脫貨</p>	<p>若有利息</p>
<p>根基</p>	<p>有善有根</p>	<p>鬼神</p>	<p>金佛驅邪</p>

Sample No. 4 (B-34)

A unique set of 38 oracles is found in the Changhua Matsu temple "Nan-Yao kung". The text is reduced to a minimum: short verses with a very short interpretation. (See bibliography *Ch'ien-shu chu-chieh*).

<p>彰化市華山路二二三號 電話：二四〇八七號 振東印刷廠敬贈</p>	<p>東風得意好 枯木新發枝 富貴從人愿 麻衣換錦衣</p>	<p>角 字</p>
<p>角乖離宿 自重慎之 舊莫去 袖此籤者宜 祈可謀</p>	<p>論 斷 行人好 音信通 婚失約 運途通 前程依適 問事咸宜</p>	<p>解 曰</p>

Sample No. 5 (B-54)

An unusual type of oracle is found in the temple of Wong Tai Sin ("the great immortal Huang") in Kowloon, Hong Kong. This temple attracts great crowds of worshippers but especially devotees concerned with some aspects of their future. The open temple courtyard is often filled to capacity with people shaking small bamboo tubes of oracle slips, available for rent. In the neighbourhood of the temple is a covered hangar, crammed with small stands of diviners. An extremely picturesque scene!

文本

晉濟壇黃大仙靈簽

第一枝 上上

占驗
古人龍虎渡姜公

靈籤求得第一枝 龍虎風雲際會時
一旦凌霄揚白樂 任君來往赴瑤池

機仙

功名遂
家宅隆
孕生子
快如龍

求財豐
病即愈
婚姻同
若謀望

六畜吉
垂有功
行人至
盡亨通

問風水發貴兼丁財
問遺失即得回原物
問自身四季俱平安
問天時豐稔又可喜
問交易到處有喜色
問出行往來皆合心

附註：周朝興國功臣姜太公又名尚。當時龍虎得風雲會合。則龍飛到上天去。揚揚快樂。即瑤池仙家地方。亦可到矣。此是榮華發達之象也。求得此簽者。定百事如意。真第一枝上簽也。

Sample No. 6 (B-55)

Lu Tung-pin's oracles have been printed in booklet form both in Taiwan and in Hong Kong. Several editions only carry the oracle verses without any extra commentary. Only the Hong Kong edition has short commentaries. (See bibliography: *Lu Ti ling-ch'ien hsien-fang; Po-chi hsien-fang, and Fu-Yu Ti-chun*).

<p>第五籤 柔順而靜 坤之六爻皆吉 陰盛於陽 不怕亢龍之悔 若此消息 只待羊兔相宜</p>	<p>第三籤 明一天地 月當三五 得一天地 來自無私 意陽來已 復時</p>	<p>第一籤 蓬萊東闕 玉桃香 順水行舟 仙賜方 宜男正好 卜圖全計 不必他方 卜地長</p>
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Sample No. 7

(Not in B). A rare set of 50 oracles, not listed in the Banck source edition, but found in the very popular temple of Mamingshan. Several commentaries are attached to it. (See bibliography, *Wu-nien ch'ien-sui ling-ch'ien chi-chieh*).

第壹籤 乾乾 大吉	
周文王 居西岐	首籤原註文福齊 白雲深處白雲西 婚姻喜遇釣璜客 貿易又逢磻水溪
王意	功名顯 福祿全 訟得理 病即痊 谷豐稔 婚團圓 孕生子 行人還
江仙解	福齊原註 富貴華榮 地極深處 訟可完情 寺遇克復 祿壽康寧 貿易財進 孕卜男生
雲詔註	文明景運顯西陸 祿籍科名錫步蟬 求謀稱意最達時 諸事吉祥實不疑
解曰	此籤謀望諸事無不遂意但各有主持官員占之有超越之喜 士人功名有謀望庶人占之省事者吉求財有名無實語多空 虛也
釋義	文王修德行道為斯文寄託一身關係萬古其福孰大非徒泊 政政績千秋可法占此首句善心為主白雲可到首雲之路 進身所喜而東床亦得佳婿至貿易譬如水之漲退漲者吉退 者不吉深處或作淺處凡事皆前世註定福緣善慶守正而行 方有明效大驗
占驗	一士魁終身前程後科甲出身位極外藩方伯當貴甲於一郡 歸休林下

APPENDIX II: CHINESE DIVINATION TERMINOLOGY

The terminology used in the context of ancient Chinese divination practices is often conflicting and confusing. It is therefore appropriate to define the terms, both in English and in Chinese.

A. *English Terminology*

The two basic types relate to bone divination and to plant (stalk) divination.

1. *OSTEOMANCY, general term for Bone Divination*

Dates from the Shang period or even from earlier times, and includes divination types using a variety of animal bones, especially bovines, sheep or pigs, later also tortoises. Subdivisions, using specific kinds of animal bones:

(a) *SCAPULIMANCY* or *SCAPULOMANCY*: using the shoulder blades of sheep, oxen, etc. This term is often inaccurately used for bone divinations in general.

(b) *CHELONIOMANCY*: using the carapace of tortoise or turtle;

(c) *PLASTROMANCY*: using the 'plastron' (lower bone) of tortoise.

2. *ACHILLEOMANCY*: divination of Chou origin (probably) using a number of stalks derived from the milfoil plant, also called yarrow. One of the methods using stalks is the *I CHING* consultation, which is perhaps an early ancestor of the popularized temple oracles.B. *Chinese Terminology*

卜 *pu* (Karlgren or K. no. 757) to divine by tortoise shell; to divine (shows fissures in heated shell).

兆 *Tsao* (K. no. 1182; Mathews or M. 247) prognostic, omen (cracks in burnt tortoise shell, read as prognostics)

兆 a sign, omen.

爻 (K. no 217; M. 2583) *Yao* — intertwine; change; lines in the hexagrams of I-ching.

Miyazaki (p. 162): this character *yao* "is nothing else but the figure of two of those crosses", obtained by counting divination sticks, to see whether their number was odd or even.

凶 (K. 161) (accident), calamitous, unfortunate, sad; of bad omen; cruel [a man falling with legs upwards into a pit]

Miyazaki: (p. 162): two sticks remaining in a box or container: means "bad omen, unlucky", since representing an even number.

吉 (K. 325) auspicious, lucky, good, (an affair 士 which may be spoken of, not taboo).

Miyazaki: three sticks (odd number) remaining in divination: therefore 'good omen, lucky'. For unknown reason, 'container' replaced by 'mouth'; perhaps pronounced aloud.

卦 (K. 433): 8 trigrams, basis of I ching

(from 卜 & 兆 2 × three *yao* plus 'divination')

占 *chan* (K. 1162; M. 125) to discern omens, inquire into prognostics, prognosticate, to divine; a lot (to 占 interpret 卜 prognostics); to divine by casting lots; to observe signs, to foretell

- etym, (variant): 卜 = cracks; 骨 = scapula
- 占 (K. 1192) enquire by divination; auspicious, good, virtuous; firm, solid; chaste, pure, (from 占 and 貝 diviner's fee?)
- 龜 (K. 462) tortoise, divination by aid of the cracks in heated tortoise shell
to draw lots; a lot
- 圃 [this character is a strange mixture: enclosure or "border prairie" with possibly 2 sets of stalks on top of a tortoise: 2 types of divination mixed together]
- 筮 (K. 894; M. 5763) to divine by stalks of milfoil; (from 巫 magic and 竹 bamboo-stalks)
- 蓍 (M. 5801) milfoil ("achillée")
[the character suggests a plant, and elder person, and a mouth: oracle of old sage?]
- Characters derived from 爻 :
- 巫 hands manipulating divining sticks on a table
 覈 to perceive 爻 name of king, Kao, a diviner
 學 to learn 教 to teach (to learn + whipping)

NOTES

¹ The Chinese text of this oracle is found in *Sheng-ch'ien chu-chieh* (see bibliography)

² While this article was already in press, I obtained new information stating that there is a still older example of Chinese oracles, dating from the 5th century A.D.:

"The earliest example of a Buddhist oracle-sequence can be dated to the middle of the fifth century, and is found in the printed Buddhist Canon. It forms the tenth book in a work entitled *The Book of Consecration* (*Kuan-ting ching*, T. 1331)."

Although this text is not necessarily a temple oracle, yet it is so far the earliest book containing 100 oracle stanzas in a style similar to the later temple oracles.

(Michel Strickmann, "Chinese Oracles in Buddhist Vestments", p. 27 of an unpublished paper delivered at the Berkeley Conference on Chinese Divination and Portent-lore, June 20-July 2, 1983).

³ See for example L. Vandermeersch, "De la Tortue à l'Achillée", p. 46.

⁴ Fung Yu-lan, in his *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1 (1952), pp. 27-28: quotes the *Ch'ien Han Shu*, which in its turn refers to the *Shuching*: "The divination plant (*shih* 蓍) and the tortoise shell (*kuai* 龜) are used by the Sages. The *Shu* says: 'when you have doubts about any great matter, consult the tortoise shell and divination stalks'"

See also J. Needham, *Science & Civilization in China*, vol. 2 (1956), pp. 347-349. On page 348 there is a reproduction of a drawing dating from the late Ch'ing dynasty, which shows the legendary emperor Shun and his ministers consulting the oracles of the tortoise-shell and the milfoil.

⁵ Miyazaki Ichisada (1966), p. 161.

⁶ Miyazaki (1966), p. 162.

⁷ *Webster's New 20th century Dictionary of the English Language* (1979), p. 765.

⁸ Andree Richard (1906).

- ⁹ *Webster's Dictionary* (1979), p. 1733.
- ¹⁰ *Webster's Dictionary* (1979), p. 170.
- ¹¹ Lenormant (1875), p. 18.
- ¹² Lenormant (1875), p. 19.
- ¹³ Lenormant (1875), p. 30.
- ¹⁴ Needham (1956), p. 349.
- ¹⁵ Banck (1976).
- ¹⁶ CHENG, Chen-tuo, Editor, *T'ien-chu ling-ch'ien* 天竺靈籤 (Reproduction of the Earliest Preserved Set of Temple Oracles) Folklore & Folk Literature Series of National Peking University. (reprint), Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service, 1958.
- ¹⁷ I have used the *cheng-t'ong* or Ming edition, as reprinted in Taipei.
- ¹⁸ Eberhard (1970), p. 193.
- ¹⁹ *Huang-ti shen-kung* 黃帝神宮, Banck (1976), #17.
- ²⁰ Eberhard (1970), p. 191-192.
- ²¹ Jordan (1982).
- ²² W. Eberhard (1970), p. 195. The Chinese text: 孟郊五十發第
- ²³ The Chinese text: 高達夫五十得名
- ²⁴ St. Augustine's *Confessions*, translated by William Benham (New York: Collins & Son, 1909), pp. 141-142.

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