

## FOREWORD

The casual foreigner visiting Japanese Buddhist temples or Shintō shrines will have noticed how some visitor, seeking a consultation, shakes an oblong box containing divination sticks bearing numbers, until one of them falls out. That person then takes it to a booth and exchanges it (for a small fee) for the corresponding oracle—a slip of paper called *omikuji* (“divine fortune”), which is usually inscribed with a Chinese verse and a “judgment” (“great good luck,” “good luck,” “bad luck,” “great bad luck,” and so on). When the oracle is negative, the client can get rid of it (thus warding off the bad luck) by tying it to a branch of a sacred tree or to some auspicious figure. This practice can be traced back to an ancient form of Chinese divination.

For most people, the mention of Chinese divination immediately calls to mind the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing*, or *I-ching* in the Wade-Giles transcription adopted by Strickmann). Many other similar oracular texts existed, however, some of which were authored by Taoists, and others by Buddhists. Although their oracles were often placed under the patronage of a particular deity, their pragmatic content was usually in line with conventional morality, and did not follow sectarian fault lines. They constitute a vast literary corpus, halfway between oral and written cultures.

Here is an example, marked “Great Good Luck”:

The pagoda, built of the seven precious things,  
Rests on the summit of the high peak;  
All men look up to it with awe,  
Let there be no neglectful glances.

And another, marked “Bad Luck”:

The household path has not reached prosperity,  
But is exposed to danger and disaster.  
Dark clouds obscure the moon-cassia-tree.  
Let the fair one burn a stick of incense.

[Aston 1908: 117]

Finally, a translation of an entire oracle:

Number Nine: Bad luck  
Omikuji of the Inari main Shrine  
The Omen of Speaking First.

Since this is an omen that depicts adverse conditions in all matters, it should be used reverently and discreetly. At any rate, failures will ensue from the lower classes. There will be trouble among descendants. Be exceedingly cautious.

Directions (of the compass)	Northwest is good
Sickness	Will recover
The Person Awaited	Will come, but with losses return
Lost Articles	Will come forth
House Building, Changing Residence	Good
Starting on a Journey	Good
Marriage Proposals	At first troublesome, afterwards exceedingly good
Business	Great losses; nevertheless, if pushed hard good will result
Matters of Contest	Bad

[Buchanan 1939: 189]

Michel Strickmann’s untimely death in 1994 prevented him from seeing through to the completion of the publication of several manuscripts. The present work, the first draft of which was written in 1990, is one of them. Coming after *Mantras et mandarins* (Gallimard, 1996) and *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford University Press, 2002), it offers a guide to a neglected genre of Chinese religious literature, and its influence goes well beyond China. It also deals with the issue of oral and written media in Chinese culture. This kind of literature provided Strickmann with an excellent means

for examining fundamental methodological questions. Indeed, temple oracles represent a living example of oral tradition and lend themselves to field-work observation. Written in classical Chinese, they are intimately related to the written tradition. They also illustrate the continuity between “elite” and “popular” cultures, as well as between the medieval and the modern periods, and between East Asia and the rest of Eurasia. In other words, they require a combination of philological, historical, anthropological, and comparative methodologies. The comparative approach is indeed one of the most fascinating aspects of this work, which shows, for example, the penetration of Hellenistic elements into Chinese mantic systems.

Had he lived longer, Strickmann would, in all likelihood, have continued to improve both his arguments and the work’s organization. In the process of editing the manuscript, I was tempted to modify a few sections for greater coherence. Since this is a posthumous work, however, I have decided to keep changes to a minimum.

I would like to place this work briefly in the context of Strickmann’s oeuvre and of contemporary scholarship. My account draws on his “Thèse présentée en vue de l’habilitation à diriger des recherches,” entitled “Histoire des syncrétismes religieux taoïstes et bouddhistes en Chine et au Japon,” Université de Paris X, 1991, under the supervision of Professor Léon Vandermeersch.

Strickmann began his studies on East Asia in Leiden (The Netherlands), where he studied Chinese language and literature under the direction of Professor A. F. P. Hulsewé, medieval Chinese history and Buddhism under Professor E. Zürcher, modern and classical Japanese with Professor F. Vos, and Tibetan language and the history of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism under Professor D. S. Ruegg. He graduated in June 1968 with a diploma in East Asian Studies. He then decided to pursue the study of Daoism in Paris under the direction of Professor Kaltenmark at the Fifth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, as well as Sino-Tibetan studies with Professor Rolf A. Stein at the École Pratiques des Hautes Études and the Collège de France. This is when he became interested in mythology and ritual.

In 1970 he decided to focus his dissertation on medieval Daoism after discovering a collection of fourth-century texts in the Daoist Canon, which were based on revelations made to a thirty-six-year-old man, Yang Xi, by a cohort of goddesses and gods descended from the Shangqing Heaven. This

collection of songs and poems was later found and edited by the great Daoist erudite Tao Hongjing (456–536) under the title *Zhengao* (“Declarations of the Perfect Ones”). This text is notoriously difficult, written in a literary style that often verges on extravagance, and, apart from Chen Guofu’s reliance on it as one of the primary sources for his work on the origins and development of the Daoist Canon (1941), it had not been the object of any serious study.

Strickmann set out to reconstitute the social milieu of the first adepts of the Shangqing School. He soon realized that he had set his hands on a real ethnographic treasure. These fourth-century texts were so rich in detail on the everyday life of a circle of Daoist practitioners that there was nothing quite like it—at least not until ethnographic researches of the twentieth century. Strickmann was thus able to complement the work of Kristofer Schipper and Japanese scholars by reconstituting the social background from which these texts emerged. He was also able to reattach them to the aristocratic milieu of the kingdom of Wu, located in the Nanjing region. These milieux consisted of aristocrats who had lost their hereditary functions with the arrival of the court, when the latter took refuge in the South after the fall of the imperial capital at the hands of non-Chinese invaders. The religion of the newcomers was the Daoism of the Celestial Masters.

Stymied in their official careers by the influx of the Northern nobility, the Southern aristocrats turned their talents and ambitions to the elaboration of a new form of Daoism. For this, they used their own expertise regarding the exegesis of the *Book of Changes* and the *Book of Rites*, as well as alchemical and occult practices. They accepted the Daoism of the newcomers, but gradually modified it. The fusion of these various traditions into a new synthesis was achieved within the framework of a revelation.

In order to consider the *Zhengao* in this sociohistorical context, Strickmann was led to consider Daoism in its totality, including its scriptures. Indeed, the poetic genius and literary talent of Yang Xi (330–?), the young man who recorded his visions, was to pave the way to a long scriptural tradition, the effects of which were still being felt at the end of the Chinese Middle Ages. Strickmann’s researches in this tradition led to his Ph.D. dissertation (Thèse de doctorat de troisième cycle), defended at the University of Paris VII in 1979, under the direction of Professors Marc Kaltenmark and Léon Vandermeersch. The following year he received the Diploma of the Fifth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, under the direction of Professor Schipper. The “report” was written by Professors Vandermeersch

and Hartmut Rotermond. A revised and expanded version of his dissertation was published in the *Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises* in 1981, under the title *Le taoïsme du Mao Chan, Chronique d'une Révélation*.

Apart from his French dissertation, Strickmann published several articles in English on medieval Daoism, including "The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy," published in the sinological journal *T'oung Pao* in 1977, and "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," in *Facets of Taoism*, a volume coedited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel in 1979. He also examined the renewal of Daoism under the Song, which he called "the Daoist renaissance of the twelfth century," in "The Longest Taoist Scripture," published in *History of Religions* (1978). Lastly, he attempted to show the cultural continuity from the twelfth century till today, in "History, Anthropology and Chinese Religion," published in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1980), as well as the extension and penetration of Daoist ideas in popular Chinese culture and in non-Han culture, in "The Tao Among the Yao," in the *Festschrift* volume for the Japanese scholar Sakai Tadao (1982).

In September of 1972, Strickmann was invited to an international colloquium in Japan, where he remained over the next five years. During that time, he benefited from the hospitality of members of the Hōbōgirin Institute—Hubert Durt, the late Anna Seidel (another much-missed scholar of Daoism), Antonino Forte, and Robert Duquenne. Like many other scholars (including myself), he was able to use the Hōbōgirin library—a veritable treasure trove of primary and secondary source material. Soon, however, his own library came to rival that of the Hōbōgirin; the walls of his house on Mt Yoshida, at the back of Kyoto University, overflowed with books.

The ideal nature of the location of this house, which soon became known as the "Ānanda Panda Institute," perfectly situated in the midst of Buddhist temples, Shintō shrines, and ancient cemeteries, need hardly be emphasized. Just across the street was Shinnyodō, an old Tendai temple. Down the street were other important temples belonging to the Zen and Pure Land Schools. The prestigious Research Institute in Humanistic Studies (Jinbun kagaku kenkyūjō) of Kyōto University was a short walking distance away, as well as the "Philosopher's Path" (*tetsugaku no michi*). This neighborhood contributed significantly to the new direction Strickmann's research soon took. The defining moment was perhaps a certain morning, when he was awakened by the sound of a ritual performed literally on his doorstep, in a shrine connected to Shinnyodō. This ritual was dedicated to the fox-spirit Dakiniten.

The name of this deity took him back to the two Asian traditions he had studied in Europe: that of the Tantric *ḍākinī*, observed in Tibetan rituals, and that of the fox-spirits of medieval China.

This discovery of Japanese Tantrism was for Strickmann a kind of epiphany, revealing to him both the spread and impact of this religious phenomenon. The almost total lack of Western works on the topic, and the strongly sectarian nature of Japanese works, written from the standpoint of Shingon and Tendai esotericism, led him to focus, above all, on Tantric practice. He was fortunate to find, in the person of a young Shinnyodō monk named Okumura Keijun, a precious informant who, over the course of five years, initiated him into the rituals of the Tendai sect. The ritual most often performed at Shinnyodō was the *homa* (Japanese *goma*) or oblation ritual. It was performed twice a month on behalf of Ganzan Daishi (tenth century), the founder of the Shinnyodō lineage, and the putative ancestor of the *omikuji* (Eanzan Daishi) (which were to become the object of study of the present book), and once a month on behalf of Dakiniten. This *homa* ritual also played an important role in Shugendō, the school of mountain ascetics, in which Strickmann also found certain practices of medieval Daoism. While preserving the Indian nature of its origins, it also presented notable differences, in particular the act of burning wooden tablets inscribed with the names of the faithful. The incineration of a written memorial addressed to the god is a fundamental characteristic of Chinese popular religion and of Daoism. The study consecrated by Strickmann to this type of ritual was published as an article in Frits Staal's monumental work on the Fire ritual, *Agni*; and as a chapter of Strickmann's work on Chinese Tantrism, *Mantras et mandarins*. These essays, by showing the genetic relationships between a certain number of Tantric rituals found from one end of Asia to the other, led Strickmann to redefine Tantrism, detaching it from the pejorative connotations that had accompanied it since the first writings of Étienne Burnouf in the mid-nineteenth century.

Unlike most of his predecessors, Strickmann endeavored to consider the domain of Tantric studies under its dual aspect—synchronic and diachronic. In India, its place of origin, Tantrism survived most notably (in its Shaivite, rather than Buddhist, form) at the two ends of the subcontinent: Tamil Nadu in the Southeast and Kashmir in the Northwest. Outside of India, Tantric influence is found all the way from Mongolia to Bali, from Nepal to Japan. These multiple variants have unfortunately led the various subfields

of Tantric studies to develop in isolation from each other. This is particularly true in Japan, where sectarian scholars, intent on proving the specific “purity” of their brand of Shingon or Tendai esotericism (*mikkyō*), have downplayed the common elements.

In reaction against this tendency, Strickmann set out to study Tantric rituals and beliefs in their broader historical and cultural contexts. In order to overcome ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian barriers, he attempted in particular to formulate a definition of Tantrism that took into account such common ritual elements as mantras, mudrās, and visualization practices, as well as cultic paraphernalia such as the scepter (*vajra*) and the vajra-bell. However, what struck him as particularly significant was the ritual grammar of Tantrism, a syntax based on the laws of Indian hospitality: after purifying himself, the officiant would invite the deity and its retinue into the ritual area, and make offerings to them. What characterizes Tantric ritual, though, is the fact that the officiant goes on to unite with the deity. Empowered by this fusion, he is then able to attain his goal. Having done so, he comes out of this fusion and eventually sees off the deity. This ritual schema is what, for Strickmann, constitutes “Tantrism.” It is in complete opposition with that of Daoist ritual, which takes place around an incense-burner (rather than a homa hearth), and includes the delivery of a written document—in the style of Chinese bureaucracy. Nevertheless, Daoist Ritual also involves identification of one’s body with the body of a deity.

Both models seem to have influenced East Asian religions. In China and Japan, many rituals combine the two aspects. If Tantric Buddhism disappears from the Chinese stage as a distinct social entity around the twelfth century, it survives in what Strickmann calls “Tantric Taoism.” Indeed, a substantial part of Daoist rituals and iconography, and consequently of Chinese popular culture, derives from Tantrism. It is from such a viewpoint that Strickmann, in 1979, embarked on the publication of the *Études tantriques et taoïstes* in honor of Professor Rolf Stein, the first scholar to have brought together the study of Tantrism and Daoism in China and Tibet. Three volumes (out of four originally planned) of these Tantric and Daoist studies were published in the series *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, edited by Hubert Durt.

In 1978, Strickmann was invited to teach at Berkeley as an Assistant Professor, and in a record time was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor with tenure. During the next decade, his innovative teaching influenced a generation of students, some of whom (Judith Boltz, Terry Kleeman, Steve

Bokenkamp, Donald Harper, Edward Davis) went on to become leading scholars of Daoism and Chinese religion in their own right. Toward the end of that period, his scholarship was stimulated by a series of seminars he held at the Fifth Section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, where he had been invited by K. Schipper, the first time in 1987, and again in 1990. Upon returning to the United States, he was invited to spend one year at the Woodrow Wilson Center of the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. In 1991, he relinquished his position at Berkeley, and, at the invitation of the French sinologist André Lévy, accepted a position in Chinese Religions at the University of Bordeaux. The manuscript that resulted from this new approach, *Mantras et mandarins*, was submitted in 1991 to the French publisher Gallimard. It was eventually published in 1996, owing in large part to the hard work of Brigitte Steinmann, two years after Strickmann's death. An English translation is forthcoming from Princeton University Press.

During his teaching years at Berkeley, Strickmann, increasingly influenced by anthropology, and still trying to reach, beyond doctrinal controversies, the heart of everyday practice, had tackled another problem: that of the healing rituals in medieval China. Working on mostly unpublished materials, he aimed essentially at bringing to the fore the medieval ritual synthesis that was at the heart of the modern religious synthesis. From September 1983 to January 1985, he was invited as Fellow at the *Wissenschaftskolleg* in Berlin, and participated in 1984 in an international conference on "Classic Rituals in Asia and Ritual Theory." In this stimulating context, he was able to continue his research on ritual.

The result of this research was a manuscript, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, which he unfortunately was unable to complete, and which was posthumously published in 2002 by Stanford University Press. In it, he examined once again side by side the Tantric and Daoist traditions, revisiting the Shangqing texts with which he had begun his sinological career. However, rather than a modern vision of Chinese medicine (centered on acupuncture and other treatments), he described a demonology that developed against an eschatological and apocalyptic background. In the troubled times of early medieval China, the privileged method of ensuring salvation was through a kind of "homeopathic demonology," and in particular through the cult of powerful demons who had converted to the true (Daoist or Tantric) Law. Among the exorcistic techniques that constitute that "magical medicine,"



Strickmann documents, in particular, the use of carved seals and of induced possessions.

A third direction of Strickmann's research, one that found its fruition in the present book, was determined by the fact that his position in Berkeley's Department of Oriental Languages was labeled as "Chinese Language and Literature." In response to the needs of his students, he was led to emphasize the cultural history of China, the cultural transmission from India to China ("India in the Chinese Looking-Glass", 1982), and "syncretistic" traditions represented in the so-called apocryphal scriptures of Buddhism—that is, texts produced in China ("The *Consecration Sūtra*: A Buddhist Book of Spells," 1990). He was also able to integrate purely literary texts into a broader corpus (including, for example, medical texts or Daoist scriptures) and into a broader social context.

It was during his stay in Japan that Strickmann became interested in particular in divination systems, which he had observed there. The first draft of the present work was completed in 1990. It was originally intended to appear in French under the title "Poésie et prophétie en Chine," as a volume in the series *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*. Owing to the kindness of the series editor, Hubert Durt, this manuscript was eventually submitted to Stanford University Press as a companion volume to *Chinese Magical Medicine*.

I would like to thank all the friends and colleagues who have helped at various stages in the publication of this work. In particular, Hubert Durt for making the manuscript available to me, Brigitte Steinmann for providing me with documentation, Helen Tartar for accepting the manuscript at Stanford University Press, Irene Lin for typing it, Steve Bokenkamp and Donald Harper for reading it and offering precious suggestions, and Muriel Bell and all the others at Stanford University Press for seeing it through to completion. Lastly, I would like to thank Michel's parents, Leo and Marjorie, his brother Pete, and his sister Bonnie.

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