

Abstract

Divination is a popular practice in modern Hong Kong. This thesis investigates divination in Hong Kong from three perspectives: destiny, ethics, and adherence to divination advice. First, my fieldwork on Fengshui divination showed that many people regularly perform Fengshui divination for themselves in their homes or offices, with the aim of intervening to change their destinies. I argue that, rather than just accepting the existence of the tension between destiny's contradictory features of malleability and fixity, that paradox is necessary to allow people to claim ownership of and take responsibility for their own lives. Fengshui divination is the means which its practitioners use to exert agency in their destinies. Second, I explored divination practitioners' practical ethics by reference to their notion of karma: *jip lik*. The working principle of *jip lik* is that a person's destiny is set in the cosmic realm and that diviners should not disclose or interfere with it. If a client followed divination advice, and if that action changed their destiny, then the diviner who gave the advice would be responsible for the unpermitted alteration achieved, and therefore the diviner, or worse, his descendants, would suffer cosmic punishment. The *jip lik* mechanism and the diviners' personal ethics guide how far diviners go in performing divination for their clients, and how they deal with the ethical dilemma posed by the conflict between altruism and self-preservation. Lastly, I investigated how Hong Kong parents use divination to discover an auspicious date and time to give birth (by Caesarean section)

and how they use nominative analysis to find auspicious names for their children. Although Hong Kong parents are fate-conscious, believing that divination (and its advice) can help them improve their children's destinies, they do not follow divination advice unconditionally, but weigh it against their personal preferences and practical circumstances.