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Buddhist astrology and astral magic in the Tang Dynasty

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Buddhist Astrology and Astral Magic in the Tang Dynasty

Jeffrey Theodore Kotyk

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Dr. A. Palumbo (SOAS, University of London)
Dr. H. van der Veere (Universiteit Leiden)
Dr. F. Lin (Universiteit Leiden)

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Abstract

This study demonstrates that various systems of foreign astrology, originating in India, Iran and the Hellenistic world, played a significant, albeit hitherto largely unrecognized role, in the development of Buddhism during the Tang dynasty, which subsequently deeply influenced religious traditions across East Asia for several centuries. Although Indian astrology was made available in China from the fourth to seventh centuries, it was never widely implemented in China in these centuries, for it was only in the eighth century with the introduction of Mantrayāna that Chinese Buddhists came to have a pressing need to observe astrology. This subsequently sparked popular interest in foreign astrology among Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities in China, a development that fostered the simultaneous development of astral magic comprised of elements from multiple sources, including some traced back to Greco-Egyptian and Near Eastern traditions. Around the turn of the ninth century, translation of astrological materials shifted from Indian to Iranian sources as a result of Persian astronomers operating at the court. The popularity of astrology additionally facilitated the proliferation of uniquely Chinese astral deities in Chinese Buddhism, most notably Tejaprabhā Buddha and the seven stars of the Big Dipper. This understudied interaction that resulted from deep interest in astrology marks a significant transmission of cultural and religious knowledge through multiple civilizations.

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This project was facilitated by a generous grant provided by BDK Canada (2015), which was administered by McMaster University. James Benn of McMaster University assisted with this, and later kindly read over a paper related to the topic of this dissertation. He then agreed to become the co-promoter for this dissertation. I deeply appreciate his assistance in producing this study. In 2016, I received the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in Buddhist Studies. I want to thank the foundation, as well as ACLS, who administered the scholarship, for all their support. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Ishii Kōsei, who was my MA advisor (2009–2011). He kindly arranged for me to return to Komazawa to conduct a year of research between 2015–2016 at the Institute for Comparative Buddhist Literature. Cody Bahir, my *sempai* from Leiden University, has for several years made himself available to proofread and critique my work. He has furthermore always shown himself to be a good friend. Joseph Elacqua, my colleague and friend, proofread my work and offered many helpful suggestions. Wei-ren Teng and Luke Gibson facilitated my stay in 2015 at the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts in Taiwan. I have worked with Charles Muller on the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism (DDB) since 2010. He has always encouraged me in my research and professional development. In the process of writing entries for the dictionary, I have developed a better understanding of content related to my dissertation topic. Terry Russell, who was one of my undergraduate instructors at the University of Manitoba, offered critical suggestions when I was writing the initial research proposal for this project, and continued offering valuable advice, especially with respect to Daoism. I have received pointers and clarification on various matters related to Chinese and Indian systems of astronomy from Yano Michio and David Pankenier. The latter also kindly read the first draft of this dissertation and corrected several of my mistakes. Charles Orzech read over a section of the dissertation early on and offered valuable comments. I studied the techniques of Hellenistic astrology via an online course created by Chris Brennan. Martin Gansten read this dissertation and offered solid feedback and criticism. I must finally thank my good friends and colleagues who have read my work in various stages and provided feedback and corrections: Channa Li, Ruixuan Chen, Chia Siang Kim, Mark Crosbie, Michel Gauvain, Claudia Kirshner (who checked my Latin citations) and Tyler “Jikai” Dehn. Finally, I must thank my family and friends for all their encouragement over the last several years. In particular I should like to mention Elsa Dikkes, Arina Mikhalevskaya, Damien Tidmarsh and Michael Schapers.

“For, in the first place, we should consider that even with events that will necessarily take place their unexpectedness is very apt to cause excessive panic and delirious joy, while foreknowledge accustoms and calms the soul by experience of distant events as though they were present, and prepares it to greet with calm and steadiness whatever comes.”

- Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* (I.3)



“Note also that knowledge has three properties, of which the first is that it always gains and never diminishes, the second that it fosters virtuous habits, and the third that it does not increase unless the knower wills it and delights in it, and seeks after it with the reason and will.”

- The *Picatrix*

Table of Contents

	Abstract
	Acknowledgments
i	Table of Contents
iv	List of Tables and Figures
vi	Abbreviations and Conventions
vii	Preface
	Chapter 1: Introduction
1	1.1. Preliminary Considerations
6	1.2. State of the Field
11	1.3. Aims of this Study
14	1.4. Primary Sources
16	1.5. Methodology
18	1.6. Chapter Outlines
	Chapter 2: Astrology and Eurasian Civilizations
21	2.1. Definitions: What is Astrology?
22	2.2. The Ecliptic in Three Civilizations
25	2.3. Occidental Astrology
31	2.4. Chinese Astrology
39	2.5. Astrology in Early Buddhism and Brahmanism
41	2.6. Astrology in Sūtra and Vinaya Literature
48	2.7. Astrology in Mahāyāna and Tantra
50	2.8. Astrology in the Chinese Buddhist Context
53	2.9. Conclusion
	Chapter 3: Early Buddhist Astrology in China: the Fourth to Seventh Centuries
55	3.1. Translations of the <i>Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna</i>
58	3.2. Astrological Elements in the <i>Mahāsaṃnipāta</i>
64	3.3. Early Buddhist Hemerology in China
66	3.4. Brahmanical Astrological Literature in Chinese Translation
68	3.5. Conclusion

	Chapter 4: Buddhist Astrology in the Mid-Tang: the Eighth Century
70	4.1. The Historical Yixing: Buddhist Monk and Astronomer
76	4.2. Tantric Hemerology
82	4.3. Early Astral Iconography
93	4.4. Amoghavajra and Astrology
95	4.5. <i>Xiuyao jing</i> 宿曜經 (T 1299)
120	4.6. Indian and Persian Astronomers at the Tang Court
124	4.7. The <i>Duli yusi jing</i> 都利聿斯經: Dorotheus in China
139	4.8. Cao Shiwei's <i>Futian li</i> 符天曆
142	4.9. Conclusion
	Chapter 5: The Sinicization of Occidental Astrology: the Ninth Century
144	5.1. Popular Astrology in the Late-Tang
147	5.2. The Tejaprabhā and Sudṛṣṭi Cults
151	5.3. <i>Qiyao rangzai jue</i> 七曜攘災決 (T 1308): Mature Buddhist Astrology
160	5.4. Buddhist and Daoist Astral Magic in the Late-Tang
188	5.5. The Legendary Yixing
191	5.6. <i>Xiuyao yigui</i> 宿曜儀軌 (T 1304)
194	5.7. <i>Qiyao xingchen bie xingfa</i> 七曜星辰別行法 (T 1309)
197	5.8. <i>Beidou qixing humo fa</i> 北斗七星護摩法 (T 1310)
200	5.9. <i>Fantian huoluo jiuyao</i> 梵天火羅九曜 (T 1311)
202	5.10. Worship of the Big Dipper
205	5.11. Conclusion
	Chapter 6: Astrology in Post-Tang East Asia
207	6.1. Dunhuang and Bezeklik
210	6.2. Astrology and Astral Deities: Song to Ming Dynasties
216	6.3. Astrology in Korea, the Liao and Tangut Xixia
218	6.4. Astrology and Astral Magic in Japan
223	6.5. Sukuyōdō Horoscopy
237	6.6. Conclusion
239	Conclusion
245	Bibliography
272	Appendix 1: Timeline of Buddhist Astrology and Astral Magic in China
273	Appendix 2: Tejaprabhā Maṇḍala

274	Appendix 3: Tejaprabhā and the planets. Khara-Khoto
275	Appendix 4: Planetary deities from <i>Kuyō hiryaku</i> 九曜秘曆
284	Summary in Dutch
285	Curriculum Vitae

List of Tables and Figures

24	Table 2.1. Chinese lunar stations and <i>nakṣatra</i> -s
33	Table 2.2. Astro-Terrestrial Associations
61	Table 3.1. Zodiac signs of the <i>Candragarbha-parivarta</i>
63	Table 3.2. Zodiac signs of the <i>Sūryagarbha-parivarta</i>
84	Table 4.1. Astral Deities of the Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala
100	Table 4.2. <i>Xiuyao jing</i> (fasc. 2) Pakṣa Cycle
101	Table 4.3. <i>Xiuyao jing</i> (fasc. 2) Presiding Deity Cycle
106	Table 4.4. Planet Names in <i>Xiuyao jing</i> (fasc. 2)
107	Table 4.5. <i>Nakṣatra</i> -weekday Convergences
110	Table 4.6. Twelve Zodiac Signs <i>Xiuyao jing</i> (fasc. 1)
113	Table 4.7. Revised Table of Twelve Zodiac Signs <i>Xiuyao jing</i> (fasc. 1)
114	Table 4.8. <i>Nakṣatra</i> -Lunar Day Correspondences <i>Xiuyao jing</i> (fasc. 1)
130	Table 4.9. Lunar Stations – Zodiac Signs – Solar Terms Correspondences
157	Table 5.1. Twelve Places in the <i>Qiyao rangzai jue</i>
161	Table 5.2. Zoomorphic Icons of the <i>Qiyao rangzai jue</i> (fasc. 1)
165	Table 5.3. Iranian-Mesopotamian Icons of the <i>Qiyao rangzai jue</i> (fasc. 2)
170	Table 5.4. Planetary Deities – Correspondences
2	Fig. 1.1. “Tejaprabhā Buddha and the Five Planets”
3	Fig. 1.2. Planets of the 'Aja'ib al-makhlūqat (<i>Wonders of Creation</i>)
84	Fig. 4.1. Aries – Meṣa
84	Fig. 4.2. Taurus – Vṛṣabha
85	Fig. 4.3. Gemini – Mithuna
85	Fig. 4.4. Cancer – Karkāṭa
85	Fig. 4.5. Leo - Simha
86	Fig. 4.6. Virgo – Kanyā
86	Fig. 4.7. Libra – Tulā
86	Fig. 4.8. Scorpio – Vṛścika
87	Fig. 4.9. Sagittarius – Dhanus
87	Fig. 4.10. Capricorn – Makara
87	Fig. 4.11. Aquarius – Kumbha
88	Fig. 4.12. Pisces – Mīna
88	Fig. 4.13. Sun – Āditya
89	Fig. 4.14. Moon – Candra
89	Fig. 4.15. Mars - Aṅgāraka
90	Fig. 4.16. Venus - Śukra
90	Fig. 4.17. Mercury – Budha
91	Fig. 4.18. Jupiter - Bṛhaspati
91	Fig. 4.19. Saturn - Śanaīścara
92	Fig. 4.20. Rāhu
92	Fig. 4.21. Ketu (課星神)

93	Fig. 4.22. Kampa
93	Fig. 4.23. <i>Nakṣatra</i>
158	Fig. 5.1. <i>nakṣatra-puruṣa</i>
161	Fig. 5.2. Sun
162	Fig. 5.3. Moon
162	Fig. 5.4. Mars
162	Fig. 5.5. Mercury
163	Fig. 5.6. Jupiter
163	Fig. 5.7. Venus
163	Fig. 5.8. Saturn
164	Fig. 5.9. Dendera ceiling
164	Fig. 5.10. Dendera ceiling
165	Fig. 5.11. Venus
166	Fig. 5.12. Jupiter
166	Fig. 5.13. Mercury
167	Fig. 5.14. Mars
167	Fig. 5.15. Saturn
175	Fig. 5.16. Kronos Stone
175	Fig. 5.17. <i>Lagnacandrikā</i> Saturn
176	Fig. 5.18. Saturn 土曜
182	Fig. 5.19. Rāhu in the <i>Kuyō hiryaku</i>
182	Fig. 5.20. Ketu in the <i>Kuyō hiryaku</i>
187	Fig. 5.21. Saturn
187	Fig. 5.22. Jupiter
187	Fig. 5.23. Venus
187	Fig. 5.24. Mercury
187	Fig. 5.25. Mars
188	Fig. 5.26. Nū / Śravaṇa (Osaka)
188	Fig. 5.27. Nū / Śravaṇa
188	Fig. 5.28. Niu / Abhijit
188	Fig. 5.29. Wei / Mūla
188	Fig. 5.30. Qi / Pūrvāṣādhā
188	Fig. 5.31. Shi / Pūrvabhādrapadā
188	Fig. 5.32. Liu / Aślesā
195	Fig. 5.33. Star Spirit
197	Fig. 5.34. Or.8210 / P6
203	Fig. 5.35. Goddesses of the Big Dipper
209	Fig. 6.1. Mercury and Ketu
213	Fig. 6.2. Yuebei in the <i>Kuyōtō zuzō</i>
213	Fig. 6.3. Khara-Koto Yuebei
229	Fig. 6.4. <i>Sukuyō unmei kanroku</i> horoscope

Abbreviations and Conventions

- DZ Daozang 道藏. Wenwu Chuban edition (1986)
- Fasc. Fascicle (*juan* 卷)
- G *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類從. 18 vols. Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一, ed. Tōkyō: Keizai Zasshisha, 1898–1902.
- PGM *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (see Betz 1986)
- SKQS *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書. *Ying yin Wen yuan ge Si ku quan shu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書. 1500 vols. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1983.
- SZ *Shingonshū zensho* 真言宗全書. 44 vols. Ed. Shingonshū Zensho Kankōkai 真言宗全書刊行会. Kōyasan: Shingonshū Zensho Kankōkai, 1933–1939.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934. Digitized in CBETA (v. 5.2) and SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (<http://21dzk.l.u-Tōkyō.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php>).
- TZ *Taishō zuzō* 大正圖像. 12 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Ono Genmyō 小野玄妙, eds. Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan Kabushiki Kaisha, 1932–1934. Digitized in SAT Taishōzō Image DB (<http://dzkings.l.u-Tōkyō.ac.jp/SATi/images.php>)
- Z *Zoku gunshoruijū* 續群書類從. 37 vols. Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一, ed. Tōkyō: Zoku Gunshoruijū Kanseikai, 1923–1943.
- ZH *Zoku gunshoruijū hoi* 續群書類從補遺. 4 vols. Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一, ed. Tōkyō: Zoku Gunshoruijū Kanseikai, 1928–1930.

- Chinese and Japanese reign years and eras are converted into modern years based on the *Tōhō nenhyō* 東方年表 (Kyōto: Heiraku-ji Shoten, 2013).

- Although modern Chinese and Japanese titles and names may use simplified forms, for the sake of consistency, all Chinese characters are presented in their traditional (繁體字) forms.

- Romanization of Sanskrit follows the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration.

- All Japanese and Chinese names, both modern and pre-modern, are given surname first followed by the given name.

- The planets, as well as the Sun and the Moon, are capitalized.

- Foreign vocabulary is italicized and indicted as plural with an appended “-s”.

- Taishō references are cited as follows: T text#, vol.xx: pp.

- Texts from the T, TZ and DZ are excluded from the bibliography due to their volume.

- Modern publications are cited using the Chicago Manual of Style.

- Premodern Chinese histories are generally cited as modern printed editions with volume number and pages provided. They are listed in the bibliography separate from secondary sources.

Preface

In the process of writing this dissertation I also produced the following publications. Some of the content of this dissertation therefore overlaps with these articles.

“Astrological Iconography of Planetary Deities in Tang China: Near Eastern and Indian Icons in Chinese Buddhism.” *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 30 (2017): 33–88.

“Can Monks Practice Astrology? Astrology and the Vinaya in China.” In *Rules of Engagement: Medieval Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Regulation*, eds. Susan Andrews, Jinhua Chen and Cuilan Liu, 497–511. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2017.

“Iranian Elements in Late-Tang Buddhist Astrology.” *Asia Major* 30, no. 1 (2017): 25–58.

“Kanjiken no bungaku ni okeru saihō–senseijutsu no yōso: tōzai bunka kōryū ni okeru Bukkyō no yakuwari” 漢字圏の文學における西方占星術の要素：東西文化交流における佛教の役割 [Elements of Occidental Astrology in Literature of the Sinosphere: a Role of Buddhism in Eurasian Cultural Exchange]. *Bukkyō bungaku kenkyū* 佛教文學研究 19 (2016): 85–110.

“Tejaprabhā.” In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. (Forthcoming)

“Yixing 一行.” In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. (Forthcoming)