

Divination in Contemporary Japan A General Overview and an Analysis of Survey Results

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This article presents an overview of the multifaceted practice of divination in Japan, a subject upon which there is at present almost no academic research. An attempt is made to present a simple categorization of the many different types of divination by focusing on the channels through which the general public comes in contact with them. In the latter half of the article an examination of divination is presented, based on the results of a survey targeting a group of enthusiastic divination "consumers." The article focuses on young women, who form the group most interested in fortune-telling, and attempts to shed light on both the level of their awareness of the divination arts and their goals in using the various techniques.

LAST NIGHT, LIKE EVERY NIGHT, large numbers of young office women sought consultation from the numerous fortune-tellers on the streets of Tokyo's entertainment districts. This morning women students on the commuter trains in Osaka pored over articles on divination in their magazines. And today, throughout the length and breadth of Japan, people are buying divination magazines, contacting telephone fortune-telling services, and accessing computer divination programs.

Divination in its various forms is a subject that is truly close to the awareness of the general public. Indeed, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that fortune-telling in all its diverse manifestations comprises a distinct culture of its own, particularly in the nation's urban areas.

This article presents an overview of divination in contemporary Japan. The first section gives a rough outline of the milieu of divination that surrounds the general public living in Japan today. The latter

*This article was translated from the Japanese by Robert Kisala.

half of the article attempts to shed light on the attitudes of young women involved with divination, young women being one of the most important consumer groups for this activity.¹

Divination's Face-to-Face Channel

It is possible to discern two general "channels" by which the general public comes in contact with divination: face-to-face channels and non-face-to-face channels. Face-to-face channels, as the name implies, involve the physical presence of a diviner and a client who are in direct, mutual communication; the fortune-teller typically provides the place where consultations are held. In the non-face-to-face channels the information flows only in the diviner-to-client direction. Let us turn first to the face-to-face channels.²

The classic, and most popular, face-to-face channels are the street fortune-tellers, who are found wherever people gather in the entertainment districts. As the neon lights flicker on and the city shows its evening face, these fortune-tellers set up shop near the corners of office buildings and in front of closed shops, arranging the tools of their trade—immediately identifiable as objects for divination—in front of them. In most cases their place of business consists of nothing more than a folding table and two simple chairs, with an advertising placard to the side. On the table are their books and implements, along with paper-covered oil lamps with the names of different types of divination written on them. The fortune-teller sits quietly until a customer arrives—only rarely do you find a barker. Consultation fees are generally two or three thousand yen, with the price varying according to the content of the consultation and the time required. Perhaps twenty or thirty such booths can be found in the entertainment districts near large urban stations, and despite the keen competition long lines will form in front of some of the more popular practitioners. Such fortune-tellers are occasionally featured in the mass media; occasionally one sees magazine clippings displayed on their advertising placards.

¹ Although I generally employ a rather broad definition of divination, one that includes certain spiritualistic and shamanic divining techniques, for the purposes of the present article I have narrowed my usage to such activities as astrology, tarot cards, palmistry, physiognomy, and Chinese augury. All of these can be performed without assuming either the presence of a divine or spiritual being or the use of spiritual powers.

² Concerning diviners see TSUYUKI 1993. Although Tsuyuki is a journalist, his book, based on numerous interviews and long-term research, is one of our best resources given the present lack of academic studies on this subject.

Another type of face-to-face channel is the “home fortune-teller,” a diviner who keeps regular hours and maintains a set place of business (usually the fortune-teller’s home or a private office). Such fortune-tellers often require appointments, and their consulting fees are generally high. Although hard evidence on this group is hard to come by, anecdotal data indicates that home fortune-tellers are numerous, and that they generally possess a regular clientele.

Both street fortune-tellers and home fortune-tellers have a long history, forming part of the daily environment in urban areas from, at the very latest, the Edo period (1600–1868). Essays and “Who’s Who”s from the late Edo period suggest that street fortune-tellers were common in the city of Edo itself, and that certain home fortune-tellers enjoyed great popularity. Later, as Japan proceeded on its push to modernization following the Meiji Restoration (1868), street and home fortune-tellers continued their divinatory functions while exhibiting continual change in terms of both approach and scale.

The 1970s saw a sudden diversification in style, especially among the home fortune-tellers. In areas where young people congregated one began to see “divination halls” (*uranaikan* 占い館) lined with booths of fortune-tellers, while in department stores “divination corners” became regular features. These places are managed by commercial enterprises, which contract fortune-tellers to report to their stations at set times, just like ordinary white-collar workers. Payment is on a commission basis. These divination halls and corners, offering set prices and a variety of fortune-tellers to choose from, soon gained a clientele and helped fuel a new wave of popularity for divination.

Another form of home fortune-telling appeared in the 1980s when NTT, the national telephone company, introduced a pay-dial service and diviners began to offer consultations by phone. Although this form of fortune-telling is no longer face-to-face, the fact that it involves direct, mutual communication between the diviner and the client allows its inclusion in this category. Pay-dial fortune-telling offers the client freedom of choice in terms of time and fortune-teller, with the added benefit of anonymity. Despite its recent appearance it has enjoyed considerable commercial success, as attested to by the numerous advertisements for the services in occult magazines.

There is a third type of diviner that falls somewhere between the street fortune-tellers and the home fortune-tellers. This is the touring fortune-teller, who appears for limited periods of time at special events.³ These may be special functions sponsored by companies or

³ This type of channel has a relatively long history. There are reports of professional diviners making the rounds of villages from before the beginning of the Edo period.

conventions on divination held periodically in provincial hotels and inns. In the case of the company functions, where fortune-telling is considered only one among many attractions, the diviners are sent by agencies at the request of the sponsoring organization. This relatively recent phenomenon was probably inspired by the impromptu fortune-telling stands seen at university festivals and the like. The fees at such events are about the same as those charged by street fortune-tellers, or perhaps somewhat less. The situation is different with the consultation conventions, however, where fortune-telling is the central purpose of the gathering. Here organizations of fortune-tellers handle all of the planning and execution, from negotiating for the hall to distributing fliers. These organizations are generally associated with the Takashima Divination Association (Takashima Ekidan Kai 高島易断会); in the Tokyo phone directory alone one can find almost ten of these organizations listed. The Takashima Divination Association has a relatively long history, with the oldest of the groups originating in the latter half of the Meiji era.⁴

Let us now consider what types of divination techniques are utilized by the various fortune-tellers we have mentioned. Although objective statistical data is lacking, personal observation and a perusal of magazine articles suggest that palmistry and physiognomy are overwhelmingly predominant in street fortune-telling. One can often see street fortune-tellers reading palms in entertainment districts, even when their placards advertise other forms of divination. Next in popularity would be either Chinese augury or Eastern astrology (which is intimately connected with augury). Eastern astrology (*shichū suimei* 四柱推命 or *kyūsei jutsu* 九星術), which is based on a nine-star system, matches the client's date of birth (and occasionally the exact time of birth) against a special calendar to yield predictions concerning the client's fate and compatibility with others.

Home fortune-telling, too, relies heavily on palmistry and Eastern astrology techniques. However, in this form of divination one also sees techniques of Western origin, such as tarot-card reading and Western

⁴ Consultation conventions held under the auspices of the Takashima Divination Association offer a rather unique type of fortune-telling, as witnessed by the author during his fieldwork. The techniques employed are not unique in themselves, as they consist mainly of Chinese augury, Eastern astrology, and fortune-telling based on the number of strokes in the Chinese characters of a name (Western forms of divination are not used). What is unique is that in giving the results of the divination concepts such as spirits and karma are introduced, and the client is told that in order to change his or her luck for the better it is necessary to use the association's secret prayers. Although the Takashima Divination Associations usually advertise consultation fees of between two and three thousand yen, amounts of over 100,000 yen are requested for such prayers, offering a clear example of excessive commercialization of divination. Such practices can also be seen among some diviners not associated with Takashima.

astrology. Another frequently seen technique is *seimei handan* 姓名判断, a form of fortune-telling based on the number of strokes in the Chinese characters of the client's name; practitioners often advise people on how to change their names in order to better their fortunes. *Kasō* 家相, another method, predicts a family's fortunes based on the shape and arrangement of the family's house; this can influence construction or renovation. Finally, all of these occult techniques without exception can be found in tour fortune-telling.⁵

Non-face-to-face Channels and Divination

Although we have dealt first with face-to-face forms of divination, in contemporary Japan it is in fact the non-face-to-face types that enjoy the advantage in terms of actual contact with the general population. Although they cannot compete with the former in terms of content, relying as they do on some kind of medium and not allowing for interactive communication, they have ridden the prosperity of the mass media to an unprecedented popularity.

Although non-face-to-face divination utilizes many of the various forms of media, it is the written media—and particularly the magazines—that surpass all others in this area. Many weekly and monthly journals aimed at young women include columns by famous fortune-tellers entitled something to the effect of, “Your Fortune This Week (Month).” Magazines aimed at men also offer similar columns, though not to the same extent as the women's magazines. Most of the columns are based on Western astrology, and allow the reader to determine her fortune by simply referring to the zodiac sign under which she was born (young people in Japan today, almost without exception, know their birth signs). In addition, every year several magazines run special reports on divination. These serve to familiarize the readers with various divination techniques, such as tarot-card reading, palmistry, physiognomy, and Eastern astrology. Famous fortune-tellers are featured in the articles, and their addresses and consulting fees are listed. We may assume, therefore, that the articles lead many of their readers to face-to-face channels of divination.

The role of magazines in promoting divination reaches its height in specialty magazines on divination. If we count only large-circulation

⁵ There are examples of Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples, as well as certain New Religions, engaging in face-to-face divination. In the case of shrines and temples, divination is often employed by the priest at the request of parishioners, and this then contributes to the operation of the shrine or temple. In New Religions where the founder was a devotee of divination, such practices are often incorporated into the religious activities of the group.

journals found in most bookstores, there are at present seven such magazines. Although all of them target young women (low teens to 30s), there are slight differences in the respective age groups and niche markets the magazines aim at. There are even some journals that organize their readership and hold events and social gatherings. The content of these magazines centers on more detailed accounts of the same sort of matter covered by the general women's magazines in their special divination issues, plus explanations of charms, spells, and other occult matters. The circulation of these magazines ranges up to 440,000 for *My Birthday*, the oldest among them.

Books also serve as an important source of information on divination. One can find in most bookstores numerous volumes that explain the various divination practices, written in a way that allows even a beginner to practice fortune-telling on her own. These explanations usually focus on a single technique, and tend to be far more specialized and detailed than the magazine articles mentioned above. They are, in addition, written by professional fortune-tellers, not journalists as in the magazines. Several dozen of these books are published every year, and tend to sell so well that many stores set aside a special shelf for them. Often several books by a particularly popular author, famous from appearances on TV and in the press, can be found lined up on these shelves, with an occasional best-seller among them.

Although not exactly a divination book, there is a hidden best-seller that appears at a fixed time every year: the almanac. Almanacs use the *kyūsei jutsu* type of Eastern astrology to give short fortunes for every day of the year according to each of the nine stars in the *kyūsei* system. They also provide brief descriptions of the various types of divination at the end of the volume.

Recently bookstore divination sections have been offering volumes in which spiritualists describe their experiences and present the particulars of consultations held for various clients. The inclusion of such books among the more standard volumes on fortune-telling provides evidence of a broadening of the definition of divination.⁶

Non-face-to-face types of divination are also offered by the broadcast media and various electronic media. The programming on the national radio and television networks includes daily and weekly

⁶ Another form of fortune-telling that can be regarded as non-face-to-face divination entails the use of *omikuji* おみくじ, slips of paper that are drawn by lot or received from coin-operated machines. Originally a means of discerning the divine will, the *omikuji* are now generally seen as a simple, chance-based form of fortune-telling. Visitors to shrines or temples, particularly at New Year's, pay one or two hundred yen for these slips. Divination of the divine will is still practiced in certain shrines; a typical rite is the *toshiura* 年占.

Western-style horoscopes, as well as special corners for soothsayers who divine the future of society or the fortunes of famous people. There are also feature programs devoted to divination techniques or the works of some fortune-teller. Computer divination is a newer form of the art, having accompanied the spread of these machines throughout everyday life. Computer divination machines are found in game centers and shopping malls, and can read palms or compute fortunes on the bases of date and place of birth. Divination software for home computers has been a hit as well. Computerized fortune-telling is also offered through pay-dial services and electronic communication networks, where it can be reached at the touch of a button.

In this way the various non-face-to-face channels have provided the general public with increased access to divination. None of these media is able to provide interactive communication, however. Thus the flow of information remains one-way, and the information itself is limited to the type of "processed data" that these media can handle.

We might distinguish, then, three general categories of information provided by the non-face-to-face types of divination. The first category is introductory information on individual fortune-tellers. This is most typically presented on television and in the magazines, and describes where the fortune-teller may be found, what divination technique he or she uses, and in what way the technique is used. This information is intended, of course, to lead people to face-to-face forms of divination. The second category involves the *results* of divination: one provides information (date of birth, blood type, etc.) to a magazine column, radio program, telephone service, or computer, and receives the outcome of its computations in a quick and efficient manner. In the process, however, that which comes between the input and the output—the real substance of divination—is lost. The third category explains the *method* and *substance* of divination, enabling one to conduct divination for oneself. In principle anyone who acquires this information is able to divine for themselves, although differences based on experience and ability do, of course, remain. The media richest in this kind of information is, of course, the written media: the divination books and specialty magazines that explain the techniques and outlooks of the various types of fortune-telling.

A Survey of Divination Consumers

In the previous sections I have attempted to give an outline of the milieu of divination that the general public encounters all around them in contemporary Japan, focusing on the particular forms that

divination takes. Let us now turn to the “consumers” of that divination, the enthusiasts who actively seek out information on fortune-telling and become clients of its practitioners.

What characteristics define this group? How influenced are they by media reports on divination? How deeply are they committed to its practice? What functions does it fulfill for them? These are some of the questions I have attempted to answer through a questionnaire and interview survey of visitors to a divination hall. The results are not, of course, representative of everyone who utilizes the face-to-face types of divination, and are therefore of somewhat limited applicability. At present, however, our sources of information on divination are quite limited. Fortune-telling being what it is, the clientele of the average practitioner is not easily available for questioning; even the customers of the divination halls—a much more accessible group—have not, to the best of my knowledge, been previously surveyed. I thus present this analysis, despite its limitations, in the hope that it will be of some use to those interested in divination.

The survey was conducted in January and February 1995; three hundred people responded to both the questionnaire and the interview. To help insure as unbiased a sampling as possible everyone who entered the divination hall (called “Libra” here) during a certain period of time was approached and asked to participate in the survey; some, of course, refused. The hall is located in an area of central Tokyo famous for its young crowds; it is not unusual, especially on weekends, for it to be filled to capacity. It was founded ten years ago, making it one of the more established institutions among the divination halls in Tokyo. Its name recognition factor is quite high because of frequent reports in the media and advertisements in the magazines. Although its entrance is rather narrow, the hall has some depth, allowing for ten booths where eight to ten fortune-tellers (who change daily) practice their craft. Consultation fees vary depending on the age of the client, with adults paying three thousand yen for a twenty-minute consultation. The hall also operates a pay-dial service and a school for training fortune-tellers.

The Clientele

The clientele of the Libra is overwhelmingly female, with women comprising a full 95% of the respondents to this survey.⁷ About 3% of

⁷ Since most of those who refused to participate in the survey were men, the actual number of male clients would be somewhat higher than the survey results indicate.

Table 1: SOCIAL STATUS OF THE CLIENTELE

Full-time employee	56%
University/Professional school student	16%
High school student/Student preparing for university exams	13%
Part-time employee	6%
Housewife (including those employed)	3%
House worker	2%
Junior high school student	2%
Other	2%

the respondents were fifteen years old or under (junior high or less), 13% were between sixteen and eighteen (high school), 31% were nineteen to twenty-two (college), and 34% were twenty-three to twenty-six. Only 11% were twenty-seven to thirty, and the numbers fell off even more drastically in the age brackets above that. Table 1 indicates the social status of the clientele; we can see that more than half the respondents were employed as office secretarial help. Only 3% of the clients were married. The vast majority of Libra's clients are thus young single women in their late teens and twenties.

How influenced are these young women by the information on divination carried in the media? When asked how they learned of Libra, 32% identified magazines as the source and 5% identified TV. Together these respondents slightly exceeded the number of those who heard about Libra by word of mouth (36%). When asked why they chose a particular fortune-teller at Libra, 53% responded that they had done so on the spot, 14% that they had read about the fortune-teller in a magazine, and 10% that they had heard of the fortune-teller from an acquaintance. Thus information in the media appears to have influenced the respondents to some extent in their choice of divination hall and fortune-teller.

When asked if they read divination columns in magazines, 68% responded that they do so regularly and 25% that they do so occasionally, for a total of 93%. When asked if they take the information seriously, 58% responded that they do to some degree. Thus an overwhelming number of Libra's customers exhibit an interest in such information, and a majority profess concern about what is written. Also well received by Libra's clientele is the third type of information

mentioned above, that which helps one read one's own fortune. When asked if they had ever tried a divination technique described in a book or magazine, 79% of the respondents replied in the affirmative; of these 79% said that they were prepared to accept the advice resulting from the divination, and 64% said that they were quite concerned about the results. We can see, therefore, that these young women were certainly influenced by the information on divination carried in the media, and that they have accepted that information to a remarkable degree.

Commitment to Divination

As we have seen, 93% of the respondents in our survey reported use of the divination columns in the press. When the same young women were asked if they had ever used a pay-dial divination service, 25% responded in the affirmative. This result is much higher than that obtained in another large-scale questionnaire survey conducted among sixteen-to-twenty-nine-year-olds.⁸ It is perhaps only natural, however, that people who visit a divination hall would have a greater interest in divination than the general public. The unusually high level of interest in divination among these young women is indicated by the fact that 80% had had their fortunes divined before (and of these, 91% had had this done by a professional fortune-teller).

The survey results further indicate that the interest does not stop at the level of mere curiosity. When asked if they follow advice received from fortune-tellers in their everyday lives, 11% responded that they follow it without fail and 60% that they follow it occasionally; thus more than 70% of the respondents permit fortune-telling some degree of influence over their daily lives. This conclusion finds further support in other results yielded by the survey. A total of 67% answered in the affirmative when asked if they utilize the results of divinations performed by themselves on the basis of techniques acquired in divination books. When asked if they intended to follow the advice received during their present visit to *Libra*, 64% of the respondents said that they would do so fully and 34% said they would do so in part, yielding a positive response rate of close to 100%.

The faith of these young women in divination is also reflected in their tendency to rely on it when facing problems and difficulties, with

⁸ This survey was conducted by the Research Group on Youth (Seishōnen Kenkyūkai 青少年研究会). Of their respondents, 75% read divination columns in magazines either regularly or without fail, while 7% reported using divination pay-dial services.

a total of 61% responding that they “almost always” or “occasionally” turned to divination at such times. Although 39% answered negatively to this question, even among this group 35% had visited Libra at least two times and 65% had practiced divination on their own. Furthermore, over half of the respondents said that they had used divination to help them reach decisions on matters they were unsure of. Even of those who responded negatively to this question, almost half replied affirmatively to the earlier question on whether they rely on divination when in difficulty. These results indicate the degree to which the clients of a divination hall, with their high level of interest in fortune-telling, tend to rely on it in their daily lives.

Faith in Divination

We now face the question of just how deeply these young women believe in divination. When questioned directly on this, 21% professed a high level of belief and a further 75% some level of belief, for a total of 96%. This figure mirrors that obtained in response to the earlier question on whether the advice of fortune-tellers is followed in daily life. While such an outcome is hardly surprising in a survey of those prepared to pay money to get their fortunes told, the near unanimity of the result suggests that it should be accorded some weight. Let us examine the background of this belief in divination.

One thing that might be expected to increase a person's faith in fortune-telling is the experience of having a divination prove true. And indeed, the young women who participated in this survey claimed, both in interviews and on the questionnaire, to have had such experiences. For example, when asked whether they had ever benefited from following the advice of a fortune-teller, 75% of the respondents replied that they had, either frequently or occasionally. When asked why they believed in a certain form of divination, nearly 60% of the women answered, “Because it often proves to be true.”

While faith in divination is undoubtedly supported internally by such personal experience, it seems also to be supported externally by the existence of a kind of loose community of the like-minded. In the interviews the young women often mentioned that they enjoyed talking with their friends about the divination columns in magazines; on the questionnaire 20% reported talking frequently with family members or friends about divination, and a further 56% reported doing so occasionally. A total of 72% had talked with someone about the result of a reading, and 90% knew of someone close to them who believes in divination. (The breakdown on this figure can be found in Table 2.)

Table 2: Close Friends or Relatives Who Believe in Divination

(Multiple Responses)	
Friend	76%
Mother	20%
Sister	12%
Grandmother	5%
Relative	5%
Father	3%
Brother	2%
Other	4%
None	10%

Furthermore, over 60% of the respondents reported that they had come to Libra not alone, but with a sister or female friend. Over 40% had read the fortune of a family member or friend or had had such people read their (the respondent's) fortune.

All of this points to the existence of a network of close relationships that supports and encourages these young women's belief in divination. Although this network may be weak as a community, its activities—discussing divination, reading fortunes for family and friends, and providing companionship for visits to fortune-tellers—all serve to create a rhetorical and behavioral atmosphere conducive to belief in divination. Although lacking the continuity and magnetism of religious communities, the loosely-knit divination network, with its verbal exchanges and occasional practice of divination, can be quite effective in providing a frame of support.

Is Divination a Form of Counseling?

Let us now consider what it is that young, unmarried women in contemporary Japan are looking for when they visit a divination hall. Given the popularity of divination in Japan today, it would appear to be providing a necessary service to those who turn to it. Divination has a number of uses and functions, the effective application of which has allowed it to fulfill certain needs and desires throughout the ages. Which, then, of these functions are especially sought after by young women in contemporary Japan?

It has often been pointed out that one role played by divination is that of counseling. According to this explanation, divination helps alleviate feelings of psychological uncertainty. Fortune-tellers function as street counselors, helping their clients avoid or overcome mental crises by means of their skilled manner and helpful advice. Self-cast divinations serve much the same purpose, as do the divination columns in the printed media, aiding the attainment of peace of mind and a positive attitude. This, it is maintained, is precisely what people seek from divination.⁹

This “divination as quasi-counseling” theory has undoubtedly identified one function sought after by people in the contemporary world. Indeed, recent years have seen the emergence of a school called psychological astrology, an offshoot of Western astrology. Additionally, one of the “consultation principles” (business principles) espoused by Libra is that divination is a “spiritual pick-me-up”; the fortune-teller is thus a “fortune-counselor” who offers not only divination but also healing.

The fact that people committed to divination look for a quasi-counseling function is further reflected in the results of our survey. When asked what they seek from divination, 52% of the respondents answered either “Help in attaining a positive attitude” or “The solution to something I am currently worried about.” This indicates that one in every two of Libra’s customers is looking for help that is primarily psychological in nature. Again, when asked to describe divination, over 60% of the respondents cited the following two characteristics: “It is something I can count on,” and “It is something that helps me get my worries and fears out in the open” (see Table 3). Here, too, we see a strong psychological aspect to people’s interest in divination.

It would be a mistake, though, to conclude that counseling is the only thing that people who visit a fortune-teller are seeking. Divination is fundamentally a technique for obtaining, through mysterious means, information that is not available through normal perception, a technique for eliciting advice, seeing the future, and discovering hidden explanations. The counseling effects of divination are the result of these unique, mysterious techniques, and are therefore a side effect of that technique. People do not visit a divination hall primarily to receive counseling from a fortune-teller, but rather to hear the narrative woven by the fortune-teller. While this narrative may indeed have a counseling effect, it is a narrative that only the unique technique

⁹ The theory that divination functions as a substitute for counseling is often propounded by psychologists. See, for example, KIRUCHI et al., 1995.

Table 3: What Is Divination?

(Affirmative responses when given a yes-no choice)

Something that can be used to achieve happiness and success . . .	91%
Something to consult in planning my life	89%
Something that provides the impetus to carry out things I'd wanted to do	89%
Something that indicates talents and faults that I wasn't aware of myself	86%
Something that helps give me resolve on matters about which I couldn't make up my mind	83%
Something I can count on	68%
Something that helps me get my worries and fears out in the open	67%
Something that seems to put me in touch with the mysterious. . .	59%
Something I can't live without	19%
Just something that provides a topic for conversation	4%

called divination can produce. Let us now take a closer look at what this narrative is.

Spinning the Narrative

Two features frequently cited by the respondents when asked to describe divination were, "Something to consult in planning my life" (89%) and "Something that indicates talents and faults that I wasn't aware of myself" (86%). Since divination is the only technique claiming to reveal the movement of destiny and uncover hidden traits of personality, it is only natural that people would turn to it when seeking answers to problems in these areas. One would expect, though, that a single consultation would suffice to determine such fixed and unchanging facts. Yet, as we have seen, most of Libra's clients have used divination several, if not many, times—almost half the respondents had visited Libra at least twice, a third had been there three or more times, and a quite significant proportion had attempted fortune-telling on their own and/or engaged in divination at venues other than Libra. We can only conclude, therefore, that information on destiny and personal characteristics is not all that these people are seeking from divination.

What else do they hope to gain from their repeated consultations?

Among the other characteristics frequently cited to describe divination were, "Something that provides the impetus to carry out things I'd wanted to do" (89%) and "Something that helps give me resolve on matters about which I couldn't make up my mind" (83%). Both characteristics assume importance when one is facing a major change, a situation experienced by the average person many times in the course of life. The frequency with which the young women cited the above two characteristics clearly indicates that they believed divination to be capable of playing a role in resolving such situations. What most people want at times of change is information on their present condition, on how things will develop if they decide to go along with the change in question, and on how they might alter themselves in order to insure happiness and success. They hope, in other words, for a narrative on their own situation up to and after the change. Such narratives give one the courage to decide,¹⁰ and it is these that people are seeking when they turn to divination at times of change.

This view is supported by the responses to a question concerning the content of the consultation sought at Libra. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (74%) said that their consultation concerned love and the opposite sex. Love, with its risks and uncertainties, can be a time of head-spinning change. What the young women are seeking is an outlook on an unclear situation and a clearing up of confused feelings. The same is true of the other topics most frequently consulted upon: marriage (26%), work problems and job changes (26%), and "the future" (including career selection) (16%), all of which are situations entailing risk and uncertainty. At such times people want an unequivocal narrative concerning their immediate future, a narrative that starts with their present self in their present situation and carries them through the proposed change. They want, in other words, to know what they lack at the moment, what they really desire, what the proposed change might mean for them, and what direction they should take in the future.

Evidence for this is provided by the fact that the clients of Libra favor those techniques of divination that provide exactly this type of information. When asked what divination technique they found most credible, the respondents most often cited tarot-card reading (28%), followed by palmistry (22%). The 50% accounted for by these two techniques far surpassed the 20% attained by *shichū suimei* astrology and Western astrology combined, indicating just how overwhelming

¹⁰ This, I believe, is where divination derives its value as counseling.

is the trust given the techniques. This trust is all the more remarkable given the fact that Western astrology enjoys a near monopoly in the divination columns of magazines, thus benefiting from publicity not shared by the other two techniques.

As noted above, tarot and palmistry supply what the young women are looking for: information on their present situation, on the possibilities of change, and on the nature of future developments. Both techniques are seen as ways to accurately divine a person's present circumstances, the starting point for future change. This is a view that enjoys wide circulation, not only in word-of-mouth type public opinion but also in the magazines and other media. Tarot cards are believed to indicate the present in the lay of the cards; palmistry is thought to indicate the same in the configuration of the palm lines.

Potential changes and future developments are thought, in tarot-card reading, to be indicated by the type and the position of the cards that appear in a certain set position of the overall card layout; discerning change in the near future is, in other words, an integral part of this technique. This feature is something that anyone who consults a tarot-card reader would know. Palmistry also provides various signs for foreseeing change and divining the future. Although these signs are generally seen as indicative of major life transitions rather than short-term permutations, small marks and wrinkles that suddenly appear on the surface of the palm are believed to signal change in the near future. The fact that palmar lines show constant small alterations is seen by its advocates as further evidence for their predictive powers. Many of those interviewed remarked that they had believed hand patterns to be permanent, but had found that they are in fact in a state of flux, a fact also noted in many divination books and magazine articles.

Thus tarot-card reading and palmistry are both seen as especially appropriate for spinning narratives on change and the immediate future, and their popularity indicates that that is exactly the service sought by those who turn to divination. Both techniques have an additional strength, however. Put simply, they are capable of producing narratives that are unique and original to each individual (or, at least, that are perceived to be so). In tarot-card reading this impression is fostered by the fact that the cards are shuffled by the client herself as she concentrates on the question for which she seeks an answer, then laid out into a different pattern every time. Hence even individuals with exactly the same date and place of birth are provided with original, personalized readings. In palmistry the explanation is even more obvious, since the palmar lines are part of the individual's body, are unique, and change distinctively over time. The clear differences in

Table 4: Why A Certain Divination Technique Is Found Most Credible

	multiple responses	single response
Because in fact it often proves true	57%	34%
Because it is precise and can divine the differences between individuals	49%	31%
Because it contains an element of the mysterious	25%	3%
Because it has a long history and tradition	22%	8%
Because it relies on the unique ability of the diviner	18%	7%
Because it contains a truth beyond scientific understanding	18%	5%
Because it is generally well known	16%	1%
Because it relies on statistical data	14%	4%
Other	8%	6%

people's palms are, furthermore, associated with the uniqueness of fingerprints, which are widely used for identification. Hence it is easy to feel that a palm-based reading is original and meant "only for me."

Those who consult fortune-tellers are thus interested not only in learning about themselves and their futures, but in obtaining a distinctly original and *personal* narrative in which they themselves are the main character. The presence of this desire is attested to by further data obtained in the survey. For example, when asked if the fate and fortune of each individual is different, 99% of the respondents answered in the affirmative. People who believe this are bound to be dissatisfied with a "typical" narrative. Furthermore, to a question regarding why a certain divination technique is believed in (multiple answers permitted), the second most common response, after the above-mentioned "Because in fact it often proves true," was, "Because it is precise and can divine the differences between individuals," with a 49% rate of support (Table 4). When respondents were asked to choose only one response, the 31% support rate garnered by the latter response closely followed the 34% received by the former. Among those who chose tarot cards or palmistry as the most credible technique, this support rate climbed to 40%. Although one would expect reliability to be a major factor in judging the credibility of a divination technique, it is

significant that individuality is seen as nearly as important.

To summarize, we can say that the unmarried young women who participate in face-to-face channels of divination are seeking an original and unique narrative concerning changes in the immediate future, one that directly addresses the “one and only me” living in this particular situation.

Conclusion

In this article we have described two channels of divination in contemporary Japan. In the first part of the article an attempt was made to cover in broad strokes the types of contact with divination, while in the second part we examined the results of a survey of active users of a face-to-face channel. While our results and conclusions are limited in applicability, it is hoped that they have something of universal value to say on one of the two major types of “divination consumer” in contemporary Japan.

The author is aware, of course, that many questions have been left unanswered. Although this is due partly to the brevity of the present article, it is more generally the result of the undeveloped state of academic research on divination. The author is of the opinion that such research can, by comparing faith in divination with religious faith and by contrasting the personal narratives of the fortune-teller with the larger narratives of religion, contribute to a better understanding not only of those forms of religiosity closest to everyday life but of “the religious” in general. It might also be of use in bringing into the open the hidden aspects of the lives of ordinary people living in a post-modern world. In this way such research has the potential of being both meaningful and productive, benefits that are certainly not limited to Japan alone.

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