

# Bazi and the Five Elements: The Historical Transmission and Modern Application of Traditional Cultural Semiotics

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**Abstract.** According to the phenomenon of the contemporary Chinese masses' craze for metaphysical fortune-telling, topics related to metaphysics continue to emerge from the Internet. Among them, noticed that compared with Western Metaphysics, Eastern Metaphysics is clearly characterized by words, images, and meanings, that is to say, through words, a series of things are formed, and with reference to the operation of the things among them, different scenes are formed, and from the scenes, one's life is interpreted. And therefore, interviewed two masters of the trade and many documents and annotated editions of traditional ancient books to confirm my hypothesis. In the end, discovered the origins of Bazi fortune-telling and how it has evolved to date, and explained that the reason for the current metaphysical craze is that people are looking for comfort in an increasingly evolving society, to understand the root causes of what is happening around them, and to eliminate the subjective mindset to get rid of stress.

**Keywords:** Bazi, Eastern Occult, Five Element, Folklore.

## 1. Introduction

This study focuses on the current craze for metaphysics amongst the Chinese masses, exploring the origins and meanings of Chinese metaphysics in general and Bazi fortune-telling in particular. This study is of great significance in exploring the integrity of the traditional Chinese occult system, and in doing so, it can be integrated into the understanding of ancient Chinese philosophy. This study focuses on the understanding of words, images, and meanings in traditional Chinese culture to break down the arithmetic principles of Bazi, which lies in the underlying idea of Taoism's reverence for nature, which has also surfaced. This article uses the literature analysis method to find relevant information and literature and read ancient books and real-time interviews with fortune-tellers in the industry, the advantage of this method is that it can be perfect to obtain evidence-based ready-made arguments, combined with real-time interviews with current practitioners and ancient literature, but also to obtain the most first-hand information as evidence, which is conducive to the conduct of a more complete study. The ultimate goal of this study is to unravel the root causes of the current craze for fortune-telling and, at the same time, to improve the inadequacy of the current academic research in order to achieve the goal, social observation, literature review, and the combination of ancient sources of aggregation, to draw conclusions.

## 2. Eastern Occult Origins

The origin of Bazi fortune-telling can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty and was influenced by the Yin-Yang and Five Elements ideas and the Tian Gan and Di Zhi system. The doctrine of Yin-Yang and Five Elements was gradually formed from the end of the Warring States Period to the Two Han Period and unified everything, providing a theoretical basis for creating the Bazi Fortune-Telling Technique. The Tian Gan and Di Zhi originated in the Xia and Shang Dynasties and were initially used for dating and later used for dating. During the Jianwu period of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Tian Gan and Di Zhi began to be used for dating and then gradually extended to dating the month and the hour, which provided the four characters for the Bazi Fortune-Telling Technique [1]. It has been really used in fortune-telling since the Tang and Song dynasties to form a more comprehensive look at the pattern of the Bazi (that is, the operation of the five elements below

to take the phenomenon after taking the meaning) until the Ming and Qing dynasties to master a comprehensive view of decline and prosperity [2]. Therefore, Bazi fortune-telling has a long history. Among them, due to the various types of elephants that can be formed by operating the five elements of the Bazi System, it can be interdisciplinary at the same time and form a unique skill of observing people, which ancient officials used to select people [2]. For example, there are not only the five elements in the Bazi, but also the Shi Shen, which are Zheng Guan, Zheng Cai, Shang Guan, Bi Jian, and Shi Shen, etc., and each of which represents the things that will be present around the person in his/her life, for example, friends, knowledge, position, partner, and wealth.

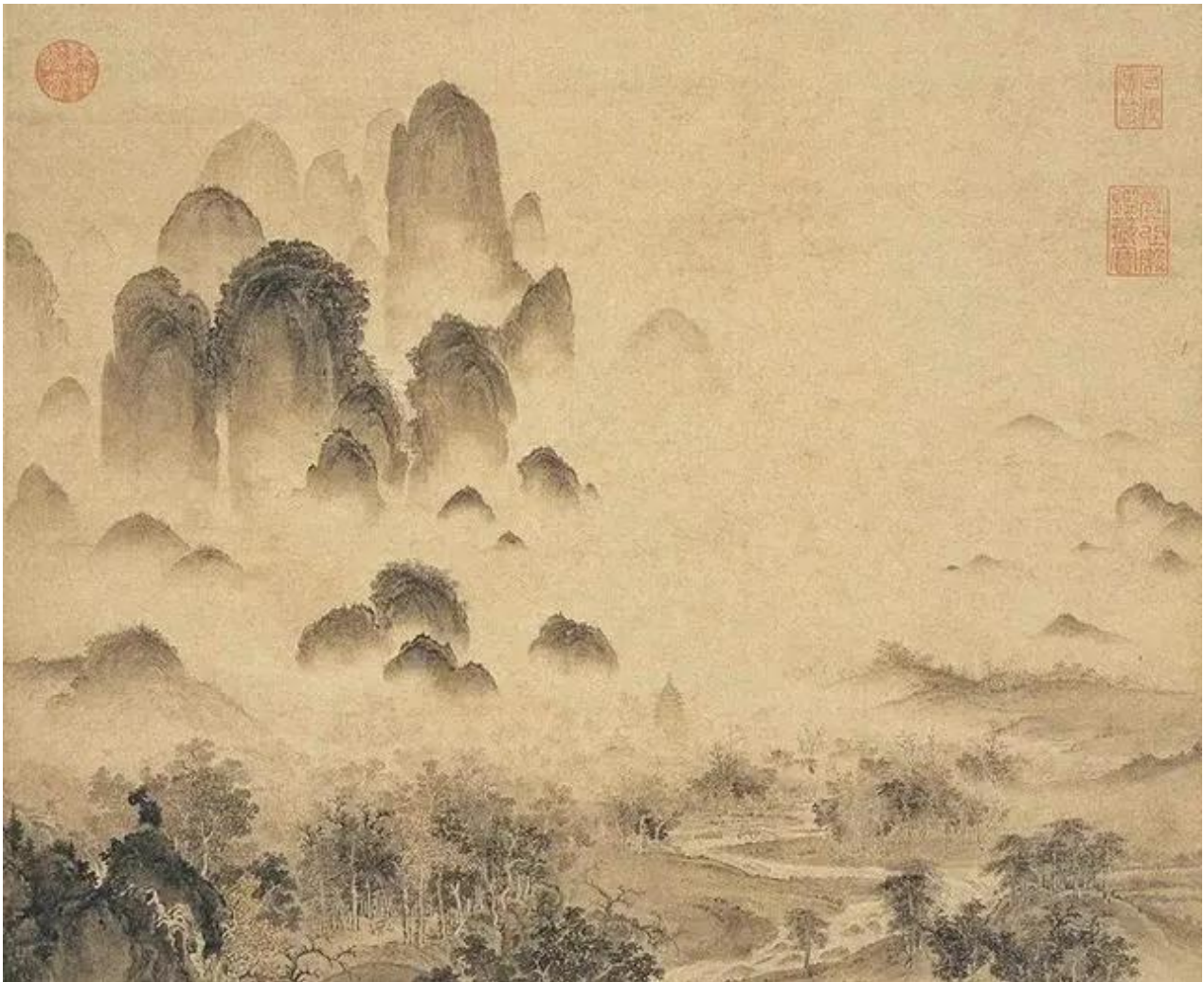
There are the Cai and Guan signs, and Cai and Guan represent people's real values: Cai is wealth, and Guan is position. The running of the Bazi for wealth and promotion of official means that people will consider asking for a position when they have money, because the official protects the wealth, and there is a position to keep the money guarded. The officials who also represents the higher institutions in the society also have to need money to do bigger and stronger, so the human resources of the institutional units in the society will choose to hire or not through a person's Bazi. However, the information in the Bazi is not only based on the operation of the five elements and Shi Shen, but also contains elements that are interrelated with the Twelve Solar Terms. The twelve solar terms are converted into twelve months using the ancient Chinese lunar calendar and are named after the characteristics of each month, e.g. Li Chun, Xia Zhi, Qiu Fen, and so on. The first month of the lunar calendar, February and March is spring, when everything grows, so the five elements are wood, which means growth; April, May, and June of the lunar calendar are summer when it is hot, so the five elements are fire; July, August and September of the lunar calendar are autumn, when everything begins to slump, which is the main meaning of the depression, and the five elements are gold; October, November, and December of the lunar calendar are winters, when there is a great deal of snow and cold, so the five elements are water [3]. Earth is the source of growth of all things, so the table nurtures all living things. So the four seasons have five elements of the word earth, respectively, spring is Chen earth, summer is Wei earth, autumn is Xu earth, and winter is Chou earth, and in the context of the Bazi for the meaning of the "storehouse," a more embodied in the characteristics of the earth can accommodate all things [3]. Therefore, due to the unique characteristics of the five elements of the earth, it is the carrier of nurturing regardless of the four seasons, reflecting the importance that ancient societies placed on the development of agriculture.

### **3. Semiotics of "Words, Images and Meanings"-Taoist Paintings**

In the ancient Chinese system of Zhouyi, an ancient Chinese classic, is not only a book for divination, but also a highly complex system of symbols. It describes the structure of the world and the pattern of change through symbols such as yin and yang, bagua and lines [4]. "Words, images and meanings" are an integral part of the expression and understanding of the relevant symbols of the Yijing language [5]. Words: refers to symbols or forms of language, i.e., the surface carriers of language, such as sounds, words, symbols, etc. It is a specific form of symbols that people use to communicate, similar to the "signifier" in Western semiotics. In written language, it refers to specific words; in spoken language, it refers to syllables and pronunciation. Image: The figurative world or image to which the signifier refers is the representation and concrete referent of "speech," also known as "image" or "imagery." Image is the figurative object or concept conveyed by the symbol, which is the mapping of the symbol in reality, similar to the "referent" in Western semiotics. Meaning: refers to the meaning, thought, or intention behind the symbol, i.e., the spirit or connotation that the symbol conveys. It is the intrinsic meaning of the symbol, which goes beyond the figurative "image" to a more abstract level of thinking [6]. It is similar to the "signified" in Western semiotics but pays more attention to ideological and cultural connotations.

In the Zhouyi culture, for example, the five elements are divided into metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and the five elements are the images referred to by different words. For example, Bing is fire, Jia is wood, Xin is metal, Hai is water, and so on. Moreover, the operation between each other is a

new image, so that the new dynamic image produces the final meaning. This spiritual intention to be commensurate with nature not infrequently reflects the Taoist concept of pursuing a complementary relationship with nature.



**Fig. 1** Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, Autumn Colors in the Western Mountains, 960-1279 A.D., Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei

Taking the landscape painting Autumn Colors in the Western Mountains (Fig. 1) as an example, the large area of white space is used to express clouds, mist, smoke, and wild water, with a tendency of a lyrical atmosphere. The scene of fishing in the autumn colors of the streams and mountains implies that although Song Huizong was an emperor, he also aspired to a life free from the world and away from the mundane in the general Taoist way of life [7]. Through Bazi's five elements theory, the painting implies that wood is overpowering the earth (the roots of the tree are stuck in the earth) and earth is overpowering water (the earth restricts the area of water, and the earth absorbs the water) [8]. The season expressed in the painting is Autumn, which in the Bazi is the metal of the five elements, and as the fire, Yang fire: Bing fire and Yin fire: Ding fire, is gradually receding, Autumn, in combination with the nature of metal in nature, implies a sense of depression, which in Bazi is the Yang metal: Geng metal, and the Yin metal: Xin metal [3]. And because the fire is receding, and in the five elements metal produces water: due to the formation of water droplets on the surface from the cold, and water opposes fire, the sun is not seen in the painting, but rather a mist, like the water vapor formed when water extinguishes a flame. Thus, Bazi is, in fact, a reflection of the ancient understanding of nature.

#### 4. Contemporary Folklore Significance

Since China's economic reforms in the 1980s, there has been a gradual relaxation of state control over religious beliefs and divination activities, leading to a revival of these practices [9]. The Yi Jing, an ancient divination and philosophical text has re-entered the public eye as an important tool for decision-making in a rapidly changing and uncertain society. It offers a naturalistic worldview that helps people understand and cope with the decisions of everyday life. Therefore, it is seen in contemporary China as an effective way of solving everyday problems. Although many people regard it as a "superstition", it provides them with psychological comfort in the face of uncertainty (Fig. 2). However, the industry is also controversial. Those who engage in and believe in the industry are considered by society to be scientifically illiterate. However, professional fortune tellers in Hong Kong, which ranks fourth in China in terms of education level, will not only provide one-on-one counseling services, but also run special programs in newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio stations to explain various kinds of Feng Shui fortune-telling difficulties to the public. Various kinds of books on numerology and luck prediction are even more numerous on the market in Hong Kong [10]. Regardless of whether the economic situation is good or bad, these books have steady sales. Therefore, whether one believes in numerology or not is not determined by one's level of education.

Many clients seek a neutral and blameless way to understand their situation when consulting a fortune teller. Fortune-telling enables clients to take some control over their destiny while easing their psychological burden by attributing possible failures and misfortunes to external factors rather than their own decision-making. In the contemporary status quo of reading the Bazi chart, the client would like the master to be accurate and hit the nail on the head, but the Bazi only determines 80% of a person's fate, the remaining 20% is an acquired effort, not only because the Bazi are reasoning and not a magical power, but also because all fortune-telling contains two sides [11]. For example, when someone has five elements in the metal, the metal is like the human lungs and skin, so a person's metal is affected not only by respiratory diseases but also skin diseases. Therefore, the fortune-telling industry nowadays is more like an objective natural point of view, through the inheritance of traditional culture, to provide customers with a sense of psychological "control" of their lives in the ever-changing environment of modern life: through the transformation of the five elements of the Bazi to form a variety of elephants and take the meaning, to help understanding the changes and workings of one's surroundings, and looking at the whole framework of one's life from an objective point of view, in order to reconcile oneself with one's environment.

#### 5. Conclusion

The result of this study is that Bazi, at the very beginning was not originally used for fortune-telling, but was a kind of ancient Chinese traditional way of dating, and with the development of ancient China, Bazi began to be used in institutions and so on, and only gradually had the purpose of fortune-telling, which further led to the conclusion that Bazi was born in Taoism, and was also associated with the thought of Taoism's naturalism, and therefore Bazi's word image Bazi's words and meanings are mostly natural products and the natural operation and transportation between them, and thus Bazi fortune-telling brings people the perspective of the object to relieve the psychological stress caused by the changes in the contemporary environment. Therefore, this study provides a lot of valuable references for future research in this direction, mainly affecting the study of the prevalence of anxiety and stress in today's society as well as philosophical and religious healing, and future research should be more focused on the study of the general psychological stress of the contemporary population for in-depth investigation.

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