

I’m very happy. To be happy, you have to have good health, and I have a lot of things to do. Although I am busy, I don’t have the sort of stress young people have

YUL KWON, WHO STILL RUNS HALF-MARATHONS AT THE AGE OF 90 > LIFE B11

LIFE

It’s written in the AI stars



Sean Chan has over 15 years of experience in classical Chinese metaphysics and sees AI as a way of allowing people to take back their agency and autonomy from “misdeeds and exploitation” in the unregulated industry. Photos: Sean Chan, Sun Yeung



Singapore-based astrologer Sean Chan has created a platform to give Chinese horoscope readings for his clients, but not all his fellow practitioners are keen on following his lead

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If you seek enlightenment, you can consult Gabi, a robot monk in a South Korean temple. If you want to meditate, download an app and let a computerised voice guide you towards inner peace. Now, if you want to analyse your Chinese astrology to check your financial prospects, you can look towards artificial intelligence (AI).

This is what Singapore-based astrologer Sean Chan has been working on: Tian Qi, an AI-powered Chinese metaphysics reading platform.

Chan “vibe-coded” his platform – he builds code by feeding instructions into AI software – in under two months earlier this year. Within two months of launching, the platform registered more than 12,000 users.

It is a format familiar to all astrology lovers. Punch in your birth date and time and you can have your chart analysed by this machine mystic. But unlike a typical AI-powered app that crawls the internet for information, Chan says he trained his platform directly on his own archives – more than 9,000 written consultations and analyses of his past clients.

Trying out Tian Qi for myself, I input my birth date, time, gender and birthplace into the website. Within milliseconds, I was informed that my core identity, which was represented as a “Day Master”, belonged to Yin Earth. Though I did not know what it meant, the various charts and numbers that exploded on my screen further piqued my curiosity.

Chan’s website also listed out my five-element distribution, which represents my personality traits – my dominant elements are earth and wood – and 10 Gods distribution, which refers to how the cosmic archetypes are spread across my life.

The AI picked a “useful God” for me – water – to help me bridge clashing elements in my chart. However, the website flags that “the AI’s useful Gods pick is still in training and can be wrong on edge cases”. This part of the website subsequently provides an engine trace, where the AI presents how it came to this conclusion.

As a Buddhist, when I see an AI robot [as a] Buddhist monk, I’m perfectly fine with it ... it’s just a different way of presenting the principles

SEAN CHAN, ASTROLOGER

Even without signing up for a subscription, the platform offers an array of information in a mix of Chinese terminology and brief English explanations, including the lucky phases in your life, auspicious and inauspicious markers, and how the different pillars in your chart interact with each other.

As a novice to Chinese astrology, it is a little hard to fully understand what all this means based solely on the interface. Plus, the website also told me my chart and its “useful God” sit “in nuanced territory”, so a further consultation was recommended.

Those with burning questions – and a website subscription – can prompt the AI through a chatbot that is coded across Chinese astronomical calculations such as *ba zi* and *zi wei dou shu* as well as Western astrology. You can ask the heavens anything from “Where does money come into my chart?” to more vague questions such as “Is this a year to push, or to wait?”

Chan says that he “wants to use AI to educate the masses, and to me that is the biggest ethical achievement that I feel I could bring to the public ... take your autonomy and your agency back”. He cites the unregulated industry of metaphysics, which is rampant with “misdeeds and exploitation”.

For him, embracing AI was a

natural evolution of his practice. “Other companies actually wanted to recruit me into their companies to build an AI astrology app ... long story short, it didn’t work out.”

So he decided to embark on his project alone. “AI essentially closed that technical gap that I lacked all along, which is coding.”

Chan says that since all the different astrological methods across East and West should paint a “congruent picture” when cross-referenced on the platform, it is less likely to hallucinate compared to other AI-powered platforms.

“A lot of the AI astrology apps out there [are] actually essentially ... just a ChatGPT wrapper,” Chan explains. “They take the ChatGPT platform, they put aesthetics on it ... but it doesn’t actually have the formula for plotting the charts.”

He adds that Tian Qi is not designed to be a neutral “Google search” engine – it is instead an extension of Chan himself, with his own voice and opinions.

“The AI is not perfect; it still makes mistakes,” he admits. “But the important thing is I take those mistakes, and I plug those gaps so that the model becomes better.”

Data privacy and security remain major concerns when using AI, particularly when Tian Qi users input their personal birth details, and past client readings are being fed into the training model.

Chan says there is no “identifiable” information about the clients the AI draws from. It is simply trained on the language of the analyses, he says.

“If you read one of my previous reports, it really is just about the techniques and the logical breakdown of the chart.”

As for data security, Chan says that he is taking it “extremely seriously”, having set up Cloudflare and firewalls on his website.

“I was very fortunate to have some friends who are software engineers help me with security features ... the data privacy laws here in Singapore are very strict so we’re doing everything we can to adhere to them.”

While Chan is just one of many pioneers of AI in his field, not all astrologers and metaphysicists share the same philosophies on how ancient crafts should meet modern technology.

“I don’t use them to write articles or analyses for me. Never,” says Belinda Lai, a Hong Kong-based Western astrologer.

She believes in taking a holistic approach to astrology, and therefore uses AI to help collect research on world events to

inform her readings. When it comes to creative ideation for lectures or client work, Lai uses AI as a sounding board – not for definitive answers, but to spark her own analytical thinking.

“I tell AI, ‘OK, I have this idea, what could be an outline?’” she says. “Of course, it will always give me rubbish. It doesn’t matter because I just need some stimulation, and that may lead me to think about something new.”

Lai ultimately sees AI-powered platforms “as a tool” rather than replacing the actual work of an astrologer, comparing them to astrology websites that predate ChatGPT and Gemini.

“Before AI, we already had many websites ... [where] you input your data, and they show you some brief explanation. It’s just that these are now expressed by AI,” she says.

“But you can’t train an AI to take into account all the possibilities [for a chart reading].”

Lai has no plans to build a similar AI platform for her services.

Similarly, for Hong Kong-based feng shui master Andrew Kwan, confronting AI also involves a concern about reduction and simplification.

“Some mass-market educational institutions or masters only bring people together to teach them formulas to make it easy. They treat fortune-telling like ‘A+B=C’ ... to keep it simple, they turn it into a formulaic routine,” just like these AI-powered models, he says.

If you want something cheap and simple, AI can satisfy that basic demand. You can treat AI like a toy

ANDREW KWAN, FENG SHUI MASTER

The possible benefit of relying on such a mechanical method to teach is that it may make it easier for future generations of astrologers to enter the craft, Kwan suggests.

“But fortune-telling isn’t just about blindly accepting a fixed fate,” he explains. “When a couple of elements interact over a period of time, they transform into something else. Fortune-telling requires both intuition and logic. When certain conditions trigger other variables, entirely different outcomes unfold.”

Kwan, who holds a bachelor’s degree in management science and quantitative methods, is sceptical about the back-end data driving AI algorithms, believing that no data set can fully comprehend the vastness of the human experience.

“I have known some of my longest-standing clients for 27 years,” Kwan says, and even then, he would not be able to know or predict every single minor thing – yet AI platforms base predictions on simply inputting details such as one’s birth date and time.

He compares his work as an astrologer to a police officer solving a case. “AI can list all the evidence present at the scene for you, but that doesn’t mean it can piece it together the way a human investigator does,” he says.

“Of course, if you want something cheap and simple, AI can satisfy that basic demand. You can treat AI like a toy.”

Chan is not concerned with AI taking over his job and agrees there is a certain aspect of “human intuition” that AI cannot replicate; he hopes his platform will introduce more clients to his consultation services. But where critics worry about losing ancient tradition to technology, he sees cultural preservation.

Pointing to the tenets of the Yi Jing, or I Ching, one of the oldest foundational texts for Confucianism and Taoism, he views adaptation even to AI as a spiritual rule.

“To be resistant to change is already going against what practitioners ought to believe in,” Chan argues.

“As a Buddhist, when I see an AI robot [as a] Buddhist monk, I’m perfectly fine with it ... it’s just a different way of presenting the principles.”



Users of Sean Chan’s platform can input their date, time and place of birth and have their chart analysed.



Hong Kong-based Belinda Lai uses AI to help collect research on world events to inform her readings.