

Chinese Gamblers are a very superstitious and odd bunch of people. Among other things, the luck of the dice cards or slot reels can be determined by a number of superstitious signs throughout the year. I know this because I am one. Chinese that is!

Chinese too have their lucky and unlucky numbers. The number “4” is phonetically pronounced “say or sai”, which rhymes with hay, in Cantonese. With a slight tonal difference, this can also mean death or die. And like how few buildings have a 13th floor in this country, you may have a difficult time

if you believe, you want the spirits on your side, even the gambling ones. Prosperity, wealth and happiness are common threads in many Chinese proverbs and often wished upon in prayers for the living and the dead.

Are you Superstitious?

by John Yee

For the Chinese, gambling or games of chance have been ingrained in their culture for thousands of years. Even when the Chinese were working on the Transcontinental Railroad, they were not only contributing fine cuisine of “Chop Suey” and Ketchup; they also brought forms of gambling to this new land of America literally translated as “Gold Mountain” in English. Keno is a game of Chinese origin dating back as far as 200 B.C. In fact the ancient Chinese used Keno

finding a 4th floor in Hong Kong. Another lucky number is “8” because again phonetically pronounced “bot” is very similar to development, eternity, or prosperity. Therefore car license plates in Hong Kong with the number, “888” are very expensive and highly sought after. Even quantity of chips targeted to Asian players come in quantities of 888. Nines are also lucky because that number refers to eternity and power. How important are numbers for the Chinese? From the period between 1973 and 1980, the Hong Kong government reported that auctions of auspicious car license NUMBERS raised more than \$3 million. Personalized automobile license plates ordered by Chinese owners with the numbers “8” or “9” symbolized longevity and prosperity for their owners.

For example when Lucky Chances, a card room located in Colma, California, was built amongst several gravesites, a Chinese priest was summoned. Coma is the home to a majority of San Francisco’s dead. After 1902 it became illegal to operate a cemetery in San Francisco. Burial plots in San Francisco were relocated to this area approximately 6 miles south of San Francisco. To this day, there are more dead residents than living ones in this small town (1.5 million people buried, 1,100 living). Anyway, the priest was summoned to make the Asian gamblers and anyone else who needed reassurance that the evil spirits had been cast away and only the good spirits were shining down on the cards.

“few buildings have a 13th floor in this country, you may have a difficult time finding a 4th floor in Hong Kong”



proceeds to help finance the “Great Wall” and their armies. Another ancient Chinese dice gaming making a reappearance is Sic

Bo, meaning dice pair and is played with three dice.

The study of numbers and their cultural impact is called numerology. Numbers play a very important role in Chinese culture too. Similar to the number “13” in this country as being unlucky and “7” being lucky, the

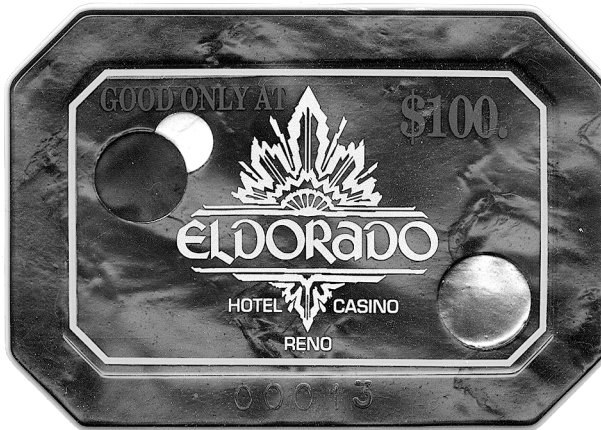
There’s even a philosophy called Feng Shui which allows for maximum energy flow (or qi pronounced chi) in the home and work by repositioning common objects and changing the surrounding environment.

Some would say all this is poppycock, ludicrous, even hilarious but

In another example of superstition having an impact on gaming was the remodel of MGM’s entranceway on the four corners in Las Vegas. It is very bad luck to enter the mouth of a lion and therefore after a few years came a new entrance. I’ve also heard that the silver strikes at the McCarran airport depicting a black jack hand with the spades suit were pulled because in many cultures, the spade is a sign of death and I would

imagine that's not something a flying passenger would want on their mind prior to boarding a flight.

Here's my personal story of superstition and gambling. After Howdy Herz's dig in Gardnerville a few months back, my friend Mark Bufton and I decided to have dinner at the El Dorado buffet. As a beginning collector of plaques manufactured by Bourgogne et Grasset of France, I had to buy in for one at the baccarat table. The lowest denomination plaque is a \$100 and each is serial numbered. Upon looking at my new plaque to my amazement I received plaque #00444, which literally translates into "die-die-die" in Cantonese. Not even giving it a second thought, I asked the Asian pit boss to exchange the plaque for another. He examined the plaque and understood fully what the dilemma



was. I overheard a few Asian players asking the pit boss what I was doing because I was obviously disrupting their game. He responded "sai, sai, sai". When I received the second plaque it had the number #00013. I said to Mark, "This is an omen. I just don't know if it's a good one or bad one." I would soon find out.

I was staying at the Atlantis while in Reno and mark needed to get

some play on his slot card to keep those room comps coming. We scoured the casino floor and although I wanted to play 25¢ video poker to hone my skills, Mark led us to the \$1 Radical Royals, a progressive video poker machine. Normally not a video poker player, I was a bit apprehensive to feed the machine \$5 a hand. After placing my 3rd \$100 bill in the machine I started to complain to Mark that this

machine was cursed. Then it happened! I held a 10, Jack, and King of diamonds and the Ace and Queen came up. A Royal Flush! My first ever and on a dollar machine. I sat in my usual calm composed self and said, "cool". I looked up and saw the jackpot at \$4,106.83. Mark said the odds of hitting a royal flush are somewhere near 1 in 40,000. We joke about the "omen" and good fortune the number "13" plaque had brought me and had a few laughs. ♦