

Chi Chuen Chan · William Wai Lim Li  
Amy Sau Lam Chiu

# The Psychology of Chinese Gambling

A Cultural and Historical Perspective

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ISBN 978-981-13-3485-6      ISBN 978-981-13-3486-3 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3486-3>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018964564

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

*This book is dedicated to the loving memory  
of my father.*

陳智川  
2018 香港

# Preface

## The Dream of My Father

The dream of becoming a rich person is often the motivation of most ethnic Chinese. In Chinese communities, parents often teach children, early in their childhood years, to put good efforts in studies so that they can work as doctors, lawyers, and engineers when they grow up. These professions are among the highest-paid careers in China. Children are also trained to save money so that they can accumulate wealth as they start working at adulthood. With the money they save, they can then invest in company stocks and real estate and make more money in the process. For ethnic Chinese, getting riches through legitimate means such as engaging in useful studies and investment is the foundation of success. Yet, for those who are less fortunate and could not pursue a socially prominent career, non-orthodox channels such as gambling may appear to be another pathway for success. Hence, gambling, as this book will demonstrate, is a favorite pastime of Chinese individuals, especially across the lower socioeconomic classes.

This book is about Chinese gambling. We will start by browsing through the history of gambling in ancient China in Chap. 1. In particular, we will focus on the development of ancient Chinese games and what these games meant to Chinese individuals. Next, we will discuss the motivation and personality of Chinese gamblers. Emphasis will be on the similarities and possible differences between Chinese and Western gamblers. The last two chapters propose a treatment model and a conclusion to our analysis of Chinese gambling.

This book is dedicated to my teachers and mentors who have helped and supported me in my journey in the psychology of gambling. Among them, I am particularly grateful for Dr. Keis Ohtsuka of Victoria University, who supervised my doctoral thesis. Also, I have to thank Professor Alum Jackson of the University of Melbourne, Professor Alex Blaszczyński of the University of Sydney and the late Professor Bill Eadington of the University of Nevada, who graciously guided my doctoral research and gave valuable advice on my project. I also thank Mr. Louis Lee (Chap. 1) and Ms. Jamie Ting Chee Ku (Chaps. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7), who have

done a brilliant work editing my manuscripts. Lastly, I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, who passed away during the research and writing processes of this book. My father was never an academic person; he lived and worked a humble job all his life. I grew up in a poor government housing project in Hong Kong. My father saved every penny on his monthly paycheck to send me to excellent colleges in America. The former president of the United States, Mr. Barack Obama, once wrote in his best seller, *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), "...every man is trying either to live up to his father's expectations or make up for his father's mistakes... (p. 5)." I understand my father's expectations and dreams for me which, of course not just being rich, is the pursuit of excellence in knowledge and career. His hopes are always the motivations for my studies and work. In my 25 years of services as a psychologist, a teacher, and a researcher in psychology, I trust I am fulfilling his dream – everyday.

Hong Kong

Chi Chuen Chan

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## About the Authors

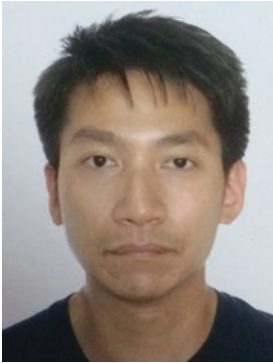


**Dr. Chi Chuen Chan**, Trained in the United States and Australia, he is a professional psychologist with over 20 years of clinical practices in Hong Kong and Macao. His more prominent services include serving as a clinical psychologist in the Hong Kong Government for 6 years. As the clinical psychologist in correctional services, Dr. Chan was successful in developing treatment programs for prisoners and staff working in prisons. His PhD in psychology was obtained from Victoria University in Australia. In addition to his training in psychology, Dr. Chan has a Master of Arts in Religion degree from Yale University and was appointed as a Yale Research Fellow in the summer of 1995. His mentor was the late Professor Rowan Greer.

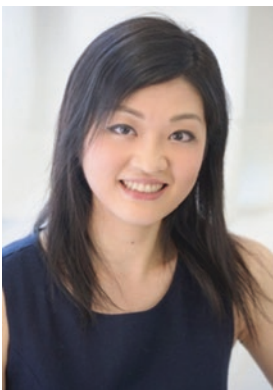
Dr. Chan's current research is in the area of gambling disorders and treatment. Funded by the Mother Mary Social Studies Centre in Macao, Dr. Chan (with his students) has authored two Chinese books in gambling psychology [賭博心理學 (*Psychology of Gambling*) and 十二步匿名戒賭互助小組工作手冊 (*A Twelve Steps Self-Help Manual for Problem Gamblers*)]. His latest book is *Problem Gambling in Hong Kong and Macao: Etiology, Prevalence and Treatment* (published by Springer in 2016). In the last decade, he has authored 21 journal articles and conference proceedings in gambling research. And his research team has presented 47 papers in international conferences. Dr. Chan's research interests are the personality and the psychological treatment of problem gamblers in Hong Kong and Macao. At present, he is a research fellow with the Mother Mary Social Studies

Centre in Macao and the managing editor of the *Asian Journal of Gambling Issues and Public Health*. Professionally, Dr. Chan currently serves as a consulting psychologist with the Union Concordia Medical Group, a major medical services provider in Hong Kong and Macao, and is on the adjunct faculty of the Upper Iowa University, Hong Kong Center.

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**William Wai Lim Li** is a professional physiotherapist with over 17 years of clinical practice in Hong Kong. At present, he is serving as a physiotherapist in mental health setting. His main responsibilities include providing physiotherapy and counseling for psychiatric patients. William has a master's degree in geriatric rehabilitation from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2005). His second master's degree is on mental health from the Chinese University Hong Kong (2016). He also has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a professional diploma in counseling and health psychology. Professionally, he is a registered certified gambling counselor, serving for a Hong Kong chapter of Gamblers' Anonymous (GA) on a weekly basis. His email address is [wailimli@yahoo.com](mailto:wailimli@yahoo.com).



**Amy Sau Lam Chiu** has long been interested in psychology since high school. Her passion in this area has been a driving force for her studies in the Upper Iowa University (Hong Kong Center), where she obtained her bachelor's degree in 2013. Her mentor is Dr. Chi Chuen Chan. In her research studies in problem gambling, she has presented three conference papers and published two journal articles. Further to her studies in psychology, Amy has achieved professional qualification in family mediation and family therapy. Professionally, Amy is a treasury accountant with a major business group in Hong Kong.

### Also from the First Author

Chan, C. C., Li, W. L. & Leung, C. I. (2016). *Problem gambling in Hong Kong and Macao: etiology, prevalence and treatment*. Singapore: Springer. ISBN 978-981-10-1066-8.

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# Chapter 1

## A Cultural History of Chinese Gambling I (From Ancient Period to Yuan Dynasty)



### 1.1 Chinese Gambling History

China is a land of diverse cultures and peoples. Kiang Fan in his book *The Gambling Chinese* (好賭的中國人) has argued that gambling in China began as Chinese civilization began. While contemporary academics from the United States and Australia define gambling as “risking something of value on the unknown outcome of some future event..., the ultimate hope of gambling is to realize a value greater than that risked” (Aasved 2003, p. 3), the Chinese conception of gambling carries a behavioral connotation much more than wagering. The Chinese words for gambling are “賭” and “博.” These two words “gambling in the Chinese way means wagering in a risky fashion.” The ancient word for gambling in Chinese is “簿.” This word means playing a chess game together with others. On this particular word, *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字), the earliest Chinese dictionary compiled by Xu Shen (許慎, 58–147) in the Han Dynasty, has this description – “Gambling is a table game: it is a game with six sticks and twelve chesses (簿, 局戲也。六箸十二棋也).”

Before going into the gambling history in China, a brief discussion of Chinese history is in order. Since ancient times, it has been home for a variety of tribes and clans who ruled specific locations for lengthy periods. Emperor Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇, 259 B.C.–210 B.C.) achieved the first unification of ancient China in 221 B.C. The establishment of dynasties and kingdom brought peace and prosperity to the land and her people. Table 1.1 illustrates a history of dynasties or ruling families in power over China’s 4000 years of history. In each of these dynasties, the ruling emperor never believed in true democracy. He was the source of all power based on the mandate he received from heaven. Further, there were no limits on his jurisdiction as the idea of a constitution with limits on power is a later foreign, mostly European, heritage. As such, he would be responsible for all rules, including those on gambling, for the country. The only checks and balances on his authority were his moral values and adherence to the Confucian beliefs that stress family relationships and interpersonal protocol known as *Li* (禮) or etiquette, which we will discuss

**Table 1.1** Ancient dynasties and modern political rulers of China

<b>Ancient period</b>			
The era of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors			
Xia 2100 B.C.–1600 B.C.			
<a href="#">Shang</a> 1700 B.C.–1100 B. C.			
<a href="#">Zhou</a> 1100 B.C.–256 B.C.	Western Zhou 1100 B.C.–771 B.C.		
	Eastern Zhou 770 B.C.–256 B.C.	Era of Spring and Autumn 770 B.C.–476 B.C.	
	Warring States Period 476 B.C.–221 B.C.		
<b>Periods of empires (era of feudalism)</b>			
<a href="#">Qin</a> 221 B.C.–207 B.C.			
West Chu (206 B.C.–202 B.C.)			
<a href="#">Han</a> 202 B. C.–A.D. 220	Western Han 202 B.C.–A.D. 9		
	<a href="#">Xin</a> 9–23		
	<a href="#">Hyun</a> Han 23–25		
	Eastern Han Dynasty 25–220		
<a href="#">Three Kingdoms</a> 220–280			
<a href="#">Jin</a> 265–420	<a href="#">Western Jin</a> 265–316		
	Eastern Jin 317–420	Five Barbarians and Sixteen Kingdoms 304–439	
<a href="#">Northern and Southern Dynasties</a> 420–589			
Sui 581–619			
<a href="#">Tang</a> 618–907			
(Wu Zhou 690–705)			
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 907–979		Liao 916–1125	Western Xia 1038–1227
<a href="#">Song</a> 960–1279	<a href="#">Northern Song</a> 960–1127	(Western Liao 1124–1218)	
	<a href="#">Southern Song</a> 1127–1279	<a href="#">Jin</a> 1115–1234	
<a href="#">Great Mongolia</a> 1206–1271			
Yuan 1271–1368 (Northern Yuan 1368–1388)			
Ming 1368–1644 (Southern Ming 1644–1662)			
<a href="#">Qing</a> 1636–1912			
<b>Modern period</b>			
<a href="#">Republic</a> of China 1912–1949			
People’s Republic of China (Mainland China) 1949–now		<a href="#">Republic</a> of China (Taiwan) 1949–now	

in detail later in this chapter. The rule of kingship and feudalism lasted until Mr. Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866–1925), who overthrew the government of Qing and put an end to feudalism in 1911. However, the beginning of the modern period did not immediately bring peace and prosperity to China. The warlord era and later the Japanese invasion in 1937 and the Civil War between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party (1927–1937; 1946–1949) created enormous hardships for the majority of the Chinese people. Political instability continued when Mao Zedong (毛澤東, 1893–1976) became the first President of People’s Republic of China

established in 1949 as he instigated a series of political campaigns (1950–1966) and the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命 1966–1976) in China. Not until the enforcement of “Four Modernizations (四個現代化),” the economic reforms proposed by President Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平, 1904–1997) since the 1980s have Chinese people begun living in a relatively stable political environment.

### 1.1.1 *Beginning of Chinese Gambling*

The earliest Chinese game is Liubo (六博) (Fig. 1.1). It was reportedly invented by Wu Cao (烏曹), a minister of the Emperor Xia Jie (夏桀, 1728 B.C.–1675 B.C.) during Xia Dynasty (2100 B.C.–1600 B.C.), the earliest dynasty in Chinese history (Guo and Xiao 1995). Liubo is a kind of board game played by two or four persons. In the beginning of each game set, the players have six chess to play with. The players have to employ specific strategies to beat the opponent, although there is a chance element in the game as the player has to roll a dice that has 18 sides, each signaling a specific number (see Fig. 1.2). The basic strategy is to take or kill the opponent’s chess. It’s been found that Mawangdui Han Tombs (漢代馬王堆古墓) contain Liubo with dice made of jade and precious stones. The gaming instruments were skillfully constructed and served more as cultural artifacts. The famous Chinese philosopher Han Fei Tze (韓非子, 281 B.C.–233 B.C.) once wrote: “In order to win the game, it is important to kill the opponent’s chess (博者貴梟,勝者必殺梟).” Han pictured the game as a competition and rivalry between opponents. And the winning of the game involves an element of hurting and destroying the opponent. No wagering was involved in the early version of the game – it was started as a mind game for the elite class. As the inventor of Liubo, Wu Cao was worshiped as a god by people running gambling stalls during Qing (清朝) Dynasty (Fan and Zheng 2010).

**Fig. 1.1** Liubo. (The figures were drawn by Olga, a professional artist. The copyright of these figures belongs to the authors)

