

A REGULAR FEATURE CAPTURING THE CULTURES THAT THRIVE IN RICHMOND

VOICES & VISIONS

Three coins offer fortune of knowledge

By BILL LAM

All he needs for a computer are three coins and a turtle shell.

With these devices, Sherman T.C. Tai says he has helped alleviate worries, solve problems and chart the lives of clients ranging from doctors and lawyers to engineers, accountants, housewives and movie stars.

"My method is scientific," states the 39-year-old fortune teller who uses the three ancient Chinese coins that can produce for him up to 168,000 possible combinations.

Based on I Ching, the Chinese ancient Book of Changes, Tai says he interprets the engravings on the faces of the coins after shaking them vigorously in the turtle shell and tossing them onto a red mat on his desk. With the use of a mathematical diagram, consisting of six lines (solid and broken) Tai says his answers to clients' queries score an accuracy rate above 90 per cent.

Ironically, it was through unpleasant circumstances that the Hong Kong - born Tai started building the foundation of this science. The eldest of seven brothers and sisters, he was sent to live with a monk at a young age. "My parents were too poor to support me when I was eleven years old."

The monk instilled in him the science of I Ching along with the principles of Buddhism which he practises to this day. "At first I had no time for religion, and I rejected all the knowledge he was preaching." He confesses he was more interested in the Beatles and other Rock groups of his generation. "I wore my hair long and enjoyed

life along with my friends." Nevertheless, the monk was persistent and often urged Tai to take his teachings seriously.

He said he remained skeptical and often believed his master was superstitious especially when he claimed his psychic abilities revealed that Tai would one day be a fortune teller.

In one incident, Tai said the discussion became so heated that he shot back at the monk: "If you're so good at telling fortune, why don't you improve yourself?"

Replying to that rebuke, the monk took Tai the following day to an area of Hong Kong where the homeless gather. There they saw an old man eating. He was seated under a bridge, which served as the only roof over the heads of many. On a makeshift table was a bowl of congee (thick form of rice broth) and a cup of wine. After each spoonful of broth, he would pause and smile contentedly; lower his spoon, sip his wine, then pause, and again the smile would creep over his wrinkled face.

"Who is happier," the monk turned to the young companion, "the man enjoying his meal, or a wealthy man riding in a Mercedes Benz? Tai admits he didn't have an answer.

Tai lived with the monk until he finished post secondary school. He later was accepted at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he majored in mechanical engineering. There he met a professor of Oriental philosophy who renewed in him



TOOLS OF HIS TRADE - Sherman Tai with coins and turtle shell (Dan Toulgoet photo)

the values of Chinese culture and philosophy. He became re-enlightened and realized that the monk's teachings of I Ching were based on sound principles.

Upon graduation, he returned to Hong Kong where he worked for several years as a project engineer for the Hong Kong Electric Company, a prestigious firm.

Part of his duties involved entertaining numerous clients, with whom he practised fortune-telling, and this became a popular party event. Simultaneously, unknown to his subjects, Tai was conducting his own research to reinforce his talent.

He claims he has interviewed several hundreds of people ranging from women escorts, to prisoners, lawyers, dentists, accountants and successful executives. In each instance, he has been able to trace their life

histories, and noted the events that have led to their successes and/or failures.

It is the accumulation of this data that he says has helped him advise movie stars and millionaire developers, one of whom owns the Aberdeen Centre, where his office is located. Much of his hands-on research required that he met clients after regular office hours. "The meetings were so many and so intense that for eight years I did not go home for dinner. I just had to eat out."

Born of an illiterate mother and a father who was a blacksmith with only three years of schooling, Tai said he vowed to improve his lot in life and at the same time use his talent to help others explore their talent. "I tell my clients one of the conditions for success is hardwork, but unfortunately, hardwork does not guarantee success.

"I try to help each person find the spark that will make their lives more meaningful. My answers to their questions have an accuracy rate of 98 percent. But they have to make their own decisions"

So how's life treating Tai? Business is good. When he first arrived in Richmond he says he knew only two persons: a former movie star and the millionaire developer. Today his appointments are booked solid, he adds, pointing to a stack of notes and analysis he has completed for clients

And is there a downside? The bespectacled Tai focuses on his desk, picks up the coins in one hand as he strokes the turtle shell with the other.

Without glancing up, he replies: When you know too much about your future, you lose a lot of happiness. Good surprises bring with it a lot of joy, but for me, life has no surprises.