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STEVE BOSCH/VANCOUVER SUN

*Fortune teller Sherman T.C. Tai with Chinese dancers at International Village, preparing for the Chinese New Year.*

# The coming Year of the Sheep looks like an uphill struggle

## Vancouver's foremost Chinese astrologist predicts trying times

By JOHN MACKIE

If you want to know about Chinese New Year, Sherman T.C. Tai is your man.

Tai is Vancouver's premier Chinese astrologist/fortune teller, an internationally known expert who dispenses sage advice seven days a week to corporations, individuals and even cities (he is the feng shui master for Richmond City Hall).

Chinese New Year begins today and runs for 15 days, and Tai will be shuttling between the Lower Mainland's New Year Festivals at International Village, the Pacific Coliseum, Lansdowne Mall in Richmond and Crystal Mall in Burnaby.

The festivals are a blend of traditional Chinese arts (such as opera and dance) and commercial booths selling a dizzying variety of merchandise.

At International Village, there are 150 booths where you can buy everything from karaoke videos to lights with waterfalls and \$19 toy cars that play pop songs and spin in a circle.

In the Chinese calendar, this is the year 4701. The Chinese calendar has a zodiac cycle of 12 animal astrological signs, and this is the Year of the Sheep. It is also sometimes known as the year of the ram or the goat, but the Chinese character is the same, the difference is in the translation.

Tai said the Year of the Sheep should be a "very interesting year," because the sheep has to climb a mountain and overcome much hardship.

"We have a lot of barriers," he said.

"The lower part of the mountain is hot, the upper part is very cold."

It sounds daunting, but he said there is a reward for those who persevere.

"If we could be more aggressive, we could improve ourselves," he said. "Try to be more optimistic and have more self-confidence. After we climb over the hill, a bright future is there."

He predicts the first half of the year will be particularly trying for British Columbia.

"We are on the western part of the country, and the western side this year is not a good direction, because west represents metal, and the year 2003 is wood," he said.

"Wood and metal counter each other. But in the second half of the year, after the hot season passes — the hot season is fire, and fire will damage the metal — B.C. will be better economically, financially and in general."

A couple of years ago, Tai met Gordon Campbell, and predicted he would be premier. He said the premier's current "embarrassing situation" over drinking and driving in Hawaii could be relieved by the autumn.

"But he needs to do something," said Tai. "His performance in the first six months is very important."

Tai also sees the B.C. economy recovering in the fall. "We will have some special opportunity coming up in this region," he said. "Maybe some sort of barrier will be solved . . . in the timber business or maybe the export business. The movie/entertainment business will get more exciting again."

The 50-year-old native of Hong Kong has been studying Chinese astrology since he was six.

"When I was young I didn't believe these kinds of things," he said. "I thought this was superstition, but over time I got more and more knowledge."

He doesn't promise miracles, he said he only tries to help people be all that they can be.

"I'm not Jesus Christ, I'm not God," he said. "I'm only the coach, and you are the football players. I cannot completely change your life."

"This is my way of advising people. There is no superstition — oriental philosophy has nothing related to religion."

He said feng shui is often misunderstood, even by people who think they're following its tenets.

"When I first come here [in 1989], I had an interview with *Reader's Digest*, who said 'You are the one who tells people to chop down all the trees,'" he said.

"Trees in more than 70 per cent of circumstances are good. People who chop down trees are superstitious, it is not feng shui. Feng shui is the way of making ourselves live in better harmony."

He will be telling fortunes at the various New Year's celebrations this weekend, and donating the money to charity. Last year, he raised \$3,000.

This year's big New Year's parade will be held from noon to 1 p.m. on Sunday in Chinatown. The parade route will begin at the Millennium Gate on Pender near Taylor and go along Pender to Gore, then up Gore to Keefer, and down Keefer to Columbia.