

China's 'lucky' phone number

It may be lucky for some, but is the telephone number 8888 8888 really worth paying 2.33m yuan (\$280,000) for?

A Chinese airline seems to think so, after purchasing the rights to the number at a special auction on Monday in the south-western province of Sichuan.

Many Chinese people consider the number eight to be lucky, because it sounds similar to the Mandarin and Cantonese word for getting rich.

So an eight-digit number containing only the number eight is considered especially auspicious.

"Everyone at the company believes the number was worth the price we paid," Xing Bing, a spokesperson for Sichuan Airlines, told the Associated Press news agency.

The company is said to be planning to use the number for a 24-hour customer hotline.

Traditional Chinese practices such as choosing lucky numbers and consulting "feng shui" experts to improve one's environment have enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in recent years, correspondents say.

But Sichuan Airlines said it did not purchase the number to promote superstition.

"The number is easy to remember," said Xing Bing. "It's a number that will make customers happy when they call."

Nearly 100 other telephone numbers were sold off at Monday's auction - many of which included the digits six and nine, which are also considered highly auspicious in China.

However, the luckiest winner of all may have been the local government, which made a total of 7.13 million yuan as a result of the auction.

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