

# 妖言惑眾

*yaō1 yan2 huō4 zhōng4*

If someone says you are going to win the next lottery and asks you to buy products and services to bolster your luck, you would probably tell that person to go and take a hike (走開).

But there must be many trusting people in America because one million of them fell for this trick, contributing a total of US\$180 million (HK\$1.4 billion) to the fraudsters, buying things like “crystal talismans,” which were mass-produced in China.

New York police arrested the crooks in the “fake psychic scam,” including two alleged psychics from France. Companies based in Canada and Hong Kong were also reported to be involved.

Police said the fraudsters “preyed on the superstition and desperation of millions of vulnerable Americans” by claiming they could boost people’s chances of inheriting money or winning the lottery. What the con men did was “妖言惑眾” (*yaō1 yan2 huō4 zhōng4*).

“妖” (*yaō1*) is “evil spirits,” “a demon,” “evil,” “wicked,” “言” (*yan2*) “words,” “speech,” “惑”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

(*huō4*) “to confuse,” “to delude,” “to mislead,” “to fool” and “眾” (*zhōng4*) “the public,” “a crowd.” Literally, “妖言惑眾” (*yaō1 yan2 huō4 zhōng4*) is “evil words to fool public.”

It means “to mislead,” “to baffle the mass by spreading fallacies and lies,” “to spread wild rumors to bewilder people.”

The witch hunting days are long over and nowadays there is no such offense as “妖言惑眾” (*yaō1 yan2 huō4 zhōng4*) in the law books. But when con artists make false claims to scam money from people, law enforcers can slap them with a host of other charges, most notably, fraud, and shut down their operations, like shops that claim to offer cancer cures.

**Terms containing the character “眾” (*zhōng4*) include:**

觀眾 (*guan1 zhōng4*) - spectators; viewers; audience

公眾 (*gong1 zhōng4*) - the public

眾多 (*zhōng4 duo1*) - numerous

眾議院 (*zhōng4 yi4 yuan4*) - the House of Representatives; the Lower House