

All of a flutter: Chinese bet big on World Cup

July 4 2018, by Albee Zhang



Fans watch the 2018 Russia World Cup round of 16 football match between Brazil and Mexico at a China Sports Lottery outlet in Shanghai

At Xia Lugen's run-down, smoky betting shop in downtown Shanghai, hordes of young men cluster around banks of computers, as betting slips

and a huge World Cup chart adorn the walls and a projector beams matches onto a makeshift screen.

China may not have a team at the World Cup in Russia but this has not dampened the enthusiasm of the country's gamblers, with bets in the first three weeks already outstripping the whole of the 2014 tournament in Brazil.

Energetic betting in these technically illegal, but officially sanctioned shops reflects the prevailing attitude towards sports, which are seen as a chance to make money as much as a spectacle to be enjoyed.

Before the first knockout game between France and Argentina, punters—known as caimin, or "lottery citizens", in Chinese—queued up to place large bets.

Gao Liushun, 55, had previously lost a bundle on Argentina, so doubled down on an Argentinian win because "I need to win back what I lost, right?"

He lost 1,000 yuan (\$150) after France's thrilling 4-3 victory, his heaviest loss of the World Cup so far.

Fellow gambler Xia Junmin, a 25-year-old freelancer, lost five times that amount after wagering on a draw.

Underground betting

The World Cup-inspired surge in betting is borne out in the official figures.



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This is more than double the roughly 11.5 billion yuan wagered during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and does not take into account underground betting and syndicated gambling, which is widespread in the country.

China's underground gambling networks are often cited as an impetus for match-fixing incidents worldwide, usually in obscure leagues but also in Italy's Serie A and occasionally in World Cup qualifiers.

Although all gambling is technically illegal in China, it is permitted in the country's hundreds and thousands of "lottery shops".

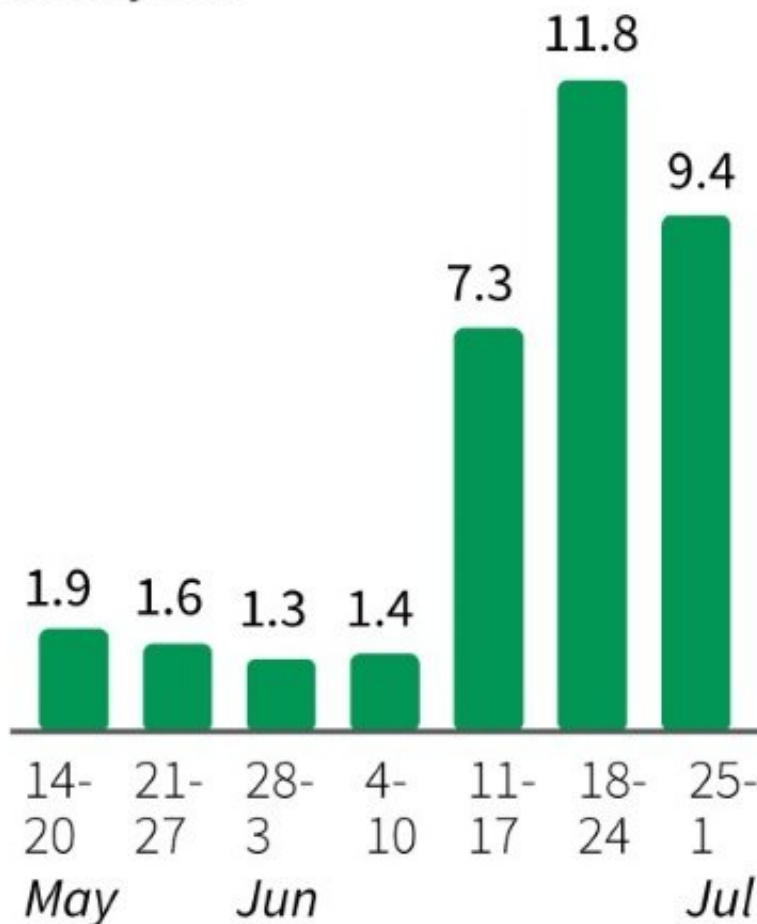
These are run by China's Sports Administration with part of the proceeds ploughed back into sport ranging from financing stadiums to training the next generation of Chinese athletes.

However, the government remains vigilant and dozens of unauthorised "lottery ticket" apps, which enable punters to place a bet with a single click, were closed down in the first week of the World Cup.

China bets on the World Cup

Chinese punters are gambling big money on football's greatest tournament

Sales of football lottery
billion yuan



Source : Sporttery.cn

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Chart showing sales of football lottery in China.

'Everyone is watching it'

Xia converted his auto dealership into a "lottery shop" six years ago and business has boomed during the World Cup, with hundreds of thousands of yuan being bet daily—more than 10 times the stakes for a normal day.

Despite the absence of home interest, the World Cup "has brought out the passion from people who were not interested in football before", he told AFP.

"Everyone is watching it. People who didn't bet are all betting now," said the 59-year-old Shanghai local, who also has cashiers taking bets over the phone.

Like punters all over the world, many gamblers in China lost a packet during some of the tournament's more surprising results, especially the demise of defending champions Germany, who failed to get out of the group stage for the first time since 1938.

Li Feng, a gambler who has rigged up a big screen at his fried chicken joint to show the games, said he had lost 1,000 yuan betting on Die Mannschaft to beat the unfancied South Koreans in the group stage.

But in one of the biggest shocks in World Cup history, South Korea beat the footballing superpower 2-0 with two late goals to break German hearts—and Li's.



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"No sane person would have bet on South Korea to win," he complained bitterly.

Gao Liushan, a regular at the bookies, said he was disappointed that China did not make it to the World Cup finals this time around.

"To be frank, China not making it was harmful to us," he said.

"But President Xi Jinping said don't forget your first love. The Chinese

dream will be realised one day. I also believe in Chinese football. The dream will be realised in the near future."

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