

BORDERLESS DEFINED

Newsletter of Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC



All or Nothing

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一か八か / イチカバチカ (*ichi ka bachi ka*) is a commonly used proverb in Japanese that is often rendered as "all or nothing," "sink or swim," "taking chances," etc. in English.

For instance, the Mainichi Shimbun article below uses this saying in the title, which can be translated as "Ruling Party (the LDP) Officials View PM Kishida's Decision (on lifting COVID restrictions) as an All-or-Nothing Gamble."



与党関係者「首相判断、イチかバチかだった」

3/17 21:05  [深掘り](#)

政府は17日、新型コロナウイルス対策のまん延防止等重点措置を21日で全面解除すると決めた。岸田文雄首相は、行動制限がさらに長期化すれば夏の参院選にも影響が出かねないと懸念。感染抑え込みから社会経済活動再開…

When my husband saw this headline, he asked why the proverb uses 一／イチ (one) and 八／バチ (eight). I actually had no idea about its etymology, and upon some digging, I discovered that there are a few theories.

[This entry](#) on Kotobank indicates that the saying potentially derives from 一か罰か or "one or nothing" with 罰 being a number other than one on the dice in gambling. One would mean success while a non-one number would not.

Another potential theory is that the top strokes of the kanji characters in 丁か半か (*cho ka han ka*) were taken. 丁 and 半 apparently mean even and odd numbers, respectively, in the context of gambling (again).

I hope you found the origin of this proverb as intriguing as I did!

The next Borderless Defined will be in your inbox in the week of March 28th. Thanks for reading!

Noriko Rogers
Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC

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Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC

Plain City, Ohio, USA

+1 (614) 705-5068

URL: www.borderlessinterpreting.com

Contact: noriko@borderlessinterpreting.com

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