

# The Game of Go: Speculations on its Origins and Symbolism in Ancient China

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*This is an unexpurgated, clarified and corrected version of 'Speculations on the Origin of Go' in Bozulich (ed.); The Go Player's Almanac 2001; Kiseido; 2001, which itself was a revision and update of the original article 'The Earth, the Dead and the Darkness' in Go World No. 70; 1994.*

*Just as new evidence has turned up in recent years which has helped strengthen the original theses, future scholarship and excavations of the multitude of China's archeological sites that remain underground will undoubtedly influence future thought. The author welcomes communications regarding new data or comments. He can be reached through the American Go Association at [www.usgo.org](http://www.usgo.org).*

## Relevant Dates

Huang Di (The Yellow Emperor)*	c. 2600 BC
Yao, Shun and Dan Ju*	c. 2100 BC
Xia Dynasty*	c. 2100-c. 1575 BC
Shang Dynasty	c. 1575-1046 (or 1027) BC
Zhou Dynasty	1046 (or 1027)-771 (or 256) BC
Spring and Autumn Period	c. 710-476 BC
Warring States Period	476-221 BC
Qin Dynasty	221-207 BC
Han Dynasty	206 BC-220 AD
Tang Dynasty	618-907 AD
Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty	1271-1368 AD
Ming Dynasty	1368-1644 AD
Qing (Manchu) Dynasty	1636-1911 AD

\* Legendary, mythical or semi-historical

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# Introduction

## Modern Theories of the Origins and Symbolism of Go

Extolled by those who play it as a game unlike all others, go is thought to be the oldest board game of mental skill in the world that is still being played. Its simple rules draw the player into a complexity that baffles definitive analysis, and to play demands both art and skill. Since facts are few, fragmentary, and elusive, pursuit of its origins and history as a cultural artifact also requires both art and skill. (1)

With a few exceptions, serious academic studies do not exist. This is unfortunate since many interesting questions arise when apparently credible hypotheses about the game's history and early symbolism are critically examined.

The presentation of the literary history of go in popular books usually begins with the myth of King Yao teaching his eldest son Dan Ju to play the game c. 2100 BC. First appearing (with no mention of its source) in written form in the *Shi Ben*, a lost book of the Warring States period, the story surfaces in Han dynasty commentaries and was recorded by Du Yu in his *Tong Dian*, around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. There were comments made that Dan Ju became a very good player, or even the best.

Beginning in the Han Dynasty, some writers noted there were variations on who originated the game. In one, Shun, Yao's chief minister, invented it on Yao's instructions for the benefit of Dan Ju. Another had Shun, after his ascent to the throne following Yao's abdication, inventing it for his own eldest son. A third variant told of a later king, Qiao, (c. 1800 BC), doing the same for his first-born. The sons in all these versions rebelled and died fighting their father or whoever replaced their father on the throne.

On the other hand, several versions of the Yao cycle made no mention of the game at all and there are other versions that began with Huang Di, the mystical Yellow Emperor. This led some historians to theorize that go-playing Han writers inserted the game into their accounts to endow it with an age and prestige greater than it possessed. This was done, it was proposed, because the Han scribes were promoting Yao and other kings of the Golden Age – the semi-mythical Xia Dynasty (c. 2100-1575 BC) – as exemplars of an idealized virtue.

To buttress the argument that go is not as ancient as those early histories portray, it is usually pointed out that the oldest known go boards and stones were found only at Han-age burial sites, and the earliest board known to have been played on dates only from c. 2-300 AD.

In addition to the lack of archaeological evidence of a great age for the game, there are the relatively late dates of historical references. The first written (and plausible) reference to go appears in 91 BC, chronicling an event of 681 BC. An event in 547 BC in the Spring and Autumn period, which has been generally accepted as relating to go, was written in 434 BC.

Assuming that the game was played before this time, most modern writers conclude that it first appeared during the Zhou or early Spring and Autumn period, c. 1000-700 BC. Some think likely to have originated as a game of chance played between rival diviners on a board that mirrored the night skies and might have harbored a moveable compass. In thinking this, they followed the lead of Joseph Needham, who linked together the origins of chess, go, magnetism, astrology and divination in his monumental *Science and Civilization in China*.

An alternative thesis could be made for the idea that it could have been the children of diviners who might have made up a game using their parents' tools, as sometimes happened in North America.

There are some stories that add more to the idea that there were early shamanistic connections. One tells of a musician-sorcerer who suddenly sprouted insect wings and flew up to a mountain peak to play with Huang Di, the semi-mystical Yellow Emperor. Another story has the Yellow Emperor inventing go to develop strategies for fighting a semi-mythical creature, playing it with a fairy, and then transmitting the game through a dream to Yao, who then taught Dan Ju with the same results – that the lessons and his prowess at the game did him no good.

The idea that astral symbolism underlies the development of go seems to accord with another suggested line of thought – that the board was used to measure time as an early calendar. These theories followed on ideas first implied in Han commentaries and later presented fully in Zhang Ni's *The Classic of Go*, published between 1049 and 1054 AD:

*The three hundred and sixty intersections correspond to the number of days in a year. Divided into four corners like the four seasons, they have ninety intersections each, like the number of days in a season. There are seventy-two intersections on the sides, like the number of five-day weeks in a year. (2)*

In sum, the prevailing thoughts of the modern go community and interested scholars have been:

1) That the game is unlikely to be as old as the myths of Yao suggest, and its presence in these tales reflects the caprices and biases of Han historians.

2) That its actual invention occurred at some point during the star-worshipping Zhou period or soon thereafter, leading to the board and stones' association with both the 'Sky' and 'Time.'

3) From this, it has generally been thought, especially in the West, that there has always been a 'spiritual aura' surrounding the game because playing it seems to bring about moral and mental development as the players are brought into harmony with the forces of *yin* and *yang* in the universe. (3)

### **A Thematic Overview of this Essay**

There are several problems with the standard theories of the history of go, beginning with the evidence presented by Needham. Basing some of his work on the ideas of chess historian H.J.R. Murray, he wrote at a time (1962) when the literary and archeological evidence for the early age of Chinese board games was not available or was being misinterpreted. Because, like the earliest go boards, the first examples of the use of throwing stones down on 'sky boards' (*shi ban*) dated only from the Han period, he found it easy to assume that Sky divination practices led directly to the invention of board games, and that therefore, Chinese board games did not predate the Han period.

Since then, such things as a Zhou period *liu bo* dice game board have been found and the literary evidence was examined more closely. Additionally, the idea of chess and its representational pieces was disentangled from the surrounding principles of go, with the effect that, in what little there is of scholarly writing on the game, the origins were generally pushed back to the Spring and Autumn or Zhou periods, c. 700-1000 BC.

However, many lozenge-shaped pottery pieces dating as old as c. 5000 BC have recently been found near ancient homes in Anyang. Small piles of game-like stones painted in two groups of colors were also found at later sites in Shang tombs (c. 1575-1046/27 BC). At a 4,000 year old Siberian site, small mounds of 'checker-like' stones shaped like Chinese go stones with one side convex and the other flat, were dug up. Chinese archeologists say that these were 'probably' game-stones.

Thus, one can theorize that games played on perishable cloth or dirt boards, especially one as simple as go (which basically has only two rules), could have preceded Sky divination.

One plausible beginning might be that, as in numerous games around the world, stones were put down on a board to keep track of the results of dice throws. However, as in North America, the use of dice does not necessarily imply divining. In regard to Sky divination, one must also pay

attention to the fact, as attested by their oracle bones, the Xia and Shang civilizations were Earth- and not Sky-oriented like the Zhou and the Han.

However, no matter what religious significance was given or not given to the game, the mechanics of this simple pebble game was quite likely accidentally 'discovered,' evolving from the idea of capturing of stones by surrounding them to the concept of having two safe 'eyes' that form the basis for living groups surrounding territory, which is the principle of the game of go.

Another problem in untangling the history of go is that the writings about myth of the Han followers of Confucianism have generally been taken at face value by go historians, with little or no allowance given to their political and propaganda aims, and the changes of purposes they might have made. New analyses of history by structural anthropologists have confirmed that many of these writings were didactic and produced to advance the interests of the emperors whom the chroniclers served. For example, the original Yao myth cycle undoubtedly dealt with the 'control of the floods' and was altered by the Han into a tale about the workings of a government very much like their own.

In league with that Confucian Han aim of government control, a chief interest (that has continued until today), was that rival philosophies be misrepresented and undermined. In regard to go, it was the warrior/philosophers associated with what is generally labeled the Daoist School of Strategy, who would have had reason to advance a game that fully illustrated their philosophy of action. The Daoist Strategists' game-like attitude toward life was in sharp contrast to Confucian ideals, and their concepts, which were almost fully developed by c. 250 BC, laid the philosophical basis for almost all Chinese rebellions ever since. (4)

Thus, it seems unlikely that these Confucian go players or historians would have cared (or dared) to try to enhance the image of a game that, with few exceptions, was denigrated in almost all their early references to it. The underlying message appearing in their renditions of the Yao myth was that, although it might look like a worthy activity, it was ultimately a waste of time and aroused irrational passions usually associated with gambling and unfilial behavior. This lesson was so compelling and useful to the writers that, as structural anthropology has shown happened with many other themes in their histories (they have not studied go), it was repeated several more times when events were fabricated for the histories of Shun and Qiao.

Thus it was that misunderstandings in both East and West regarding the nature of the debate between the early Daoists and Confucians have clouded the issue about the age and historical meaning of go playing.

When these problems are taken into account along with the archeological finds, a radically different interpretation can emerge of the physical and cultural evidence that is known today.

This new point of view can suggest why go appears in some versions of the Yao myth and not in others; why it could have originally been an 'Earth-oriented' and not a 'Sky-oriented game;' and why it could actually date back to the Shang or even Xia periods.

This is because:

1) It is quite probable that go and Yao were associated in at least some of the early oral versions of the myth because commentators would have noticed if it were simply a fabrication.

2) The Warring State author of the lost book probably wrote before the promotion of Yao as the pinnacle of virtue, so, (although he might have had other motives), it is unlikely he would have had the same moral reasons as the Han to include (or eliminate) the game from his account.

3) Although no solid evidence has turned up that Yao actually lived, recent excavations have established that a Xia dynasty of kings existed and was not a mythical invention.

4) Even though the game may not be as old as the Yao myths state, a strong case can be made that early symbolism of go would have been very compelling to the Earth-orientation of the Xia or the Shang who followed them. Throughout the ancient world square game boards were considered to be temple-like recreations of the earth. While a Zhou or Han practitioner of *feng shui* (geomancy) would have identified as celestial the objects mirrored on his go board, a Xia or Shang adept would probably have been paying attention to how the placement of stones and evolving shapes of groups were influencing, blocking, and capturing the forces of *qi* coursing over the surface of the board. This would be in congruence with development at that time of proto-acupuncture and *yin-yang* theory.

5) With the idea of the movement of *qi*, the lines on go boards can be seen as channels of water (somewhat like rice paddies) which the stones are blocking, releasing and/or storing up. This idea would agree with early Chinese geography which pictured their square world (i.e. China) was divided into a 9x9 pattern (based on an early magic square) that was floating on the flat oceans that also surrounded it.

6) These ideas about Earthly symbolism would have been culturally acceptable (and a reason for the game to survive that did not involve religious or divinatory reasons) because the principal of 'surrounding' (and not directly capturing as in chess) has always been central to Chinese culture. 'Surrounding' is also the principle of early Chinese hunting, which began with the use of nets and dogs to hunt large animals 5000 years ago. It is even conceivable that go was originally a hunting 'action' game. This

could have happened before or while spiritual symbolism was being attached to the equipment, as in North America where games like this would not have implied divining about successful hunting, but would have been ritualized, gambled at, and would have been played at certain seasons before the hunting occurred.

(7) As illustrated by the development of Daoism, from those early times, 'surrounding' formed the basis of war aims and tactics, and was also was the principle of not only what many Chinese regard life is, but also how it should be conducted.

8) Almost paradoxically, although go may have begun without religious intent or at least without a connection with divination, its place in early Chinese society and myth would be revealed further by investigations into the links that games of skill and chance have with diviners and shamans as they appear in stories from China, Tibet, Mongolia and Siberia. Hints of mysterious associations with psychedelic mushrooms even spring up to further tantalize the imagination. However, almost no work has been done in this field.

9) When the Yao myths are looked at with those considerations in mind, can the presence of go in the original version, or its interpolation at a time before the Zhou, indicate a recognition that a game of rational skill rather than chance signaled an advance in human consciousness? Could the 'control of the environment' theme also include 'control of the mind?' This idea might account for the position of the Shang game-stones being buried near the heads or right shoulders (the game-playing hand?) of the occupants of the tombs.

Aside from the basic arguments between the Daoists and the Confucians, there are perhaps two explanations for why these Earth-centered possibilities have not been considered in go literature, traditional or modern.

The two forms of *feng shui* – the one focused on the Earth, the other Heaven-centered – were not united until the Tang, around 900 AD, since which time the distinctions between the two strands have become less apparent.

Also, as evidenced by the new poetry-as-art form, after 6-900 AD, the playing of go began gaining favor as a worthwhile, ethically and spiritually-uplifting activity at the courts and among the Confucian *literati*. At this point, descriptions about the game became even more ethereal because Daoist and Confucian thought became blended with a Heaven-oriented Buddhism, which also gave the game much of its modern terminology.

Long before this sanctification of go play, Mencius and Han Confucians complained bitterly about gambling and the passions that were so easily aroused by playing. Though normally screened from view at



traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Korean go clubs and almost never written about, this has remained a ubiquitous activity, as illustrated in Hong Sung Hwa's recent semi-autobiographical novel, *First Kyu*. In fact, despite its aura of dignity, professional go is still an act of gambling, though the stakes are put up by a third party. (5)

This historical association of gambling and go leads to a further analysis of the game's presence in the Yao myth. In traditional societies, betting on games is a very 'sacred' activity – one which takes the participants in their passion close to a state of divine transcendence. In China, for example, the gods would bet their immortality playing at *liu bo*; in India the very universe is a never-ending strip dice game played between Shiva and Shakti. Seen in this vein, the Yao myth can be considered as a gambling myth similar to those told by the North American Indians (which may have even originated in Asia). Like Yao, some of the Indian gods came down to earth to gamble and created chaos, a situation which was only remedied by extreme measures.

Thus, if the idea that go was a sacred activity because of, and not in spite of, its association with gambling, then its presence in the Yao myth could, in a single cultural artifact, be seen as an artful way of combining and symbolizing not only the highest rational qualities of humankind, but also those of its most irrational.

# I. Han Historical Revisions, Structuralism and the Yao Myths

## Yao, Shun and Dan Ju

According to many versions of the myth, Yao's reign occurred midway in a series of Golden Age kings. Associated with calendars and divination, he was identified as one of those who civilized China. No mention was made of his ancestry, and he was said to have descended from the 'Heavens.' By many wives he had many sons, and the first-born, by his first wife, was Dan Ju.

Dan Ju was not an 'idiot' as is sometimes recorded in go histories. The accurate meaning of the adjective ascribed to him is 'quarrelsome.' Some have conjectured that a possible reason is that he quarreled with the sons of Yao's other wives, equally ambitious to inherit the throne. Another translation of the term is 'unruly.' One story relates that, after his father's ministers had succeeded in taming the floods of the Yellow River, Dan Ju partied with friends on boats pulled by peasants across the now-dry fields.

After learning go from his father, Dan Ju became a 'good' or even the 'best' player. In one version, he lost interest, however, inventing his own form of chess by riding with friends on elephants and rhinoceroses through a grove of mulberry trees, especially planted for the purpose. In another version, he played so much that he was good for nothing else.

Most of the extant versions of the myth concurred that Yao tired of the wild antics of Dan Ju and disinherited him. Then, after abdicating, he passed the kingdom on to Shun, a virtuous and hard-working farmer whom Yao elevated to friend, trusted advisor, in-law and heir. Dan Ju fled, allying himself with the primitive San Miao tribe, and died fighting Yao and Shun. Shun then went on to found the first semi-historical dynasty of China, the Xia.

This tale seemed to be the first time in mythic Chinese history that kinship rights of inheritance were passed over because of the unfilial behavior of an eldest son and intended heir, and this cautionary story has been told and retold to their children by countless generations of Chinese parents.

There are, however, inversions of elements of the story that provoke some questions. In the case of one narrative, Shun is said to have usurped the kingdom from Dan Ju by tricking Yao, and Dan Ju is presented as being justified in trying to regain it. In another, some of Yao's ministers

strongly objected to a commoner inheriting the throne, and as a result were executed or exiled.

Questions regarding the presence of go come to mind. Of the versions that mention it in conjunction with Yao, none suggested its origin or that he invented the game, only that he transmitted it. If it came from the Heavens with him, did other mythical beings also play the game? Why was it taught, and why was it that it was the only thing mentioned that Yao taught his son? Despite the thoughts of the Confucian writers that go would not subdue an unruly nature and was a waste of time, what is the significance that its lessons in strategy-making would be helpful for Dan Ju to outwit his opponents for the throne and foster the rights of the eldest son? Aside from general strategic questions, are there links between go and gambling that might have had a deeper significance when the tales were composed? And, why was it that most versions of these myths did not mention go at all? (6)

## **History and Chinese Myth**

Myth scholars have noted that in contrast with the Greeks, who tended to euhemerize or mythologize their history, the Chinese – in particular the Confucian writers serving the ambitions of Han dynasty emperors – tended to historicize their myths.

Unlike the Greek or Biblical myths, the recurring subject of Chinese cosmogonies, or myths of origins, was the gradual ordering of elemental forces in an environment where human beings played a very minor role. In conflict were the 'Heavens,' the 'Waters,' and the 'Earth.' Yao came from Heaven, whereas Dan Ju was associated with Water. One of the various interpretations of his name was 'Red Pearl,' and when he battled Yao and Shun he endowed his San Miao allies – who lived in the middle regions of the Yellow River and whose descendants may have become seamen – with magical properties for walking and fighting on water.

Shun, the heir to the kingdom, however, was clearly of the Earth and human in origin. His parentage was an element in the narrative and, before ascending the throne, he labored at menial agricultural tasks.

When these stories are discussed, it must be remembered that any speculation about their meaning is just that – speculation. By the time of the Han, the mythical figures of these groups had become complex amalgamations of real persons, groups, concepts, lineages, totems, and history, and their original meaning had long been obscured. Even the concept of tribal groups was unclear in early China, as it was in North America, because conquerors often appointed artificial leaders of groups, where before there had been only loose, or even no associations.

Probably, the civilization process also extended to the recording of the myths themselves, as demonstrated by the fate of many American Indian gambler myths after they were recorded by hierarchically-minded whites.

It has been noted that such myths – which may have originated in Asia – lacked formal plot structure. Instead, they were accretions of loosely interconnected clusters of action and motivation, pertinent first to one character and then another, until the nature of each had been represented. There were no villains, no heroes, no minor characters, and the conflicts and battles waged by such contending forces as ‘Good and Evil’ or ‘Light and Dark,’ can be seen within a larger context of a search for equilibrium and resolution. Not only did oral versions of a given story vary greatly, but the act of narration could involve risk to the teller and thus cause entire portions to be suppressed. (7)

For example, in several versions of his myth, Yao is said to have been the first to bring civilization to China. Yet, to strengthen their claim to an ancestry more ancient than the Shang, the Zhou (who vanquished them in 1046 or 1027 BC) inserted the presence of others before him. In the earliest written examples that survive – not necessarily the oldest or principal versions – Yao was not a king and there was no abdication. Only much later, with the rising influence of Confucianism during the periods of the late Warring States and early Han – and with the active encouragement of the emperors – did Yao become a popular prototype of the virtuous ruler of a government both bureaucratic and hierarchical, one depicted as resembling, not surprisingly, that of the Han.

Nevertheless, anthropologists studying this interweave of fact and fiction from a structuralist point of view have been uncovering what were likely to have been the original constructions and intentions of their first tellers.

Despite conflicting stories and lack of early written records, most of those sinologists who accept structuralist theories have concluded that the Yao stories originally dealt with the ‘control of the floods.’ To illustrate this, they cite the portrayal of two of Yao’s ministers, Kun and Gong Gong by the most famous of the Han Confucian scribes, Sima Qian (c. 145-c. 86 BC). In Sima’s *Records of the Grand Historian (Shi Ji)*, which is generally considered reliable for the historic period, but less so for prehistory, Yao appointed first Kun and then Gong Gong to control the calamitous annual flooding of the Yellow River, following the snow-melt in the Himalayas. Both tried to block the waters with brute force by building dams which eventually burst from the increased pressure of the waters. In response, Yao killed Kun and exiled Gong Gong. (8)

Interestingly, it has been observed by linguist William Boltz that ‘Yao’ derives from the word for ‘mountain,’ and ‘Gong Gong’ from the term for ‘quarrelsome’ or ‘unruly’ – the adjectives frequently used to describe the ragings of the Yellow River. The similarity of their fates, and the fact that in another version Kun gave a caesarian birth to Gong Gong, indicate that originally they shared the same mythological identity. Thus, Boltz and others have speculated that Kun and Gong Gong were the floods that Yao subdued.

This theory is provocative for go lore in that ‘quarrelsome’ was also how Dan Ju, who represented Water, was described. The parallelism becomes more intriguing because the two other Confucian versions involving King Shun and King Qiao (or their ministers) c. 1800 BC, bundled together the same elements that constituted the Yao/Dan Ju story.

In all of these tales, elders taught rebellious elder sons to play go, but it was implied or stated that the lessons either failed to discipline their spirits or they spent so much time playing (and presumably gambling at it) that they were good for nothing else. In other words, they ‘forgot their parents,’ so that all the kings abdicated their thrones and gave them to lowly-born and trusted friends, and the sons died fighting their fathers or their fathers’ friends.

As in the Yao myths, there were also ‘reverse-versions’ that approved the rebellions of the sons and presented the king’s doings as wrong. However, in no version did the son succeed in his aims. And none of these anti-versions mentioned go.

## **Structuralism and Chinese Myth**

Applying the structuralist theories of Levi-Strauss, Sarah Allan and others have investigated Han histories that recorded the transfer of power and their recurring patterns of themes, motifs, and artifacts. She demonstrated conclusively how the Han writers, who, with the exception of Sima Qian, were considered base hacks, shaped their stories to illustrate moral points that fitted the Confucian conception of the nature, origins and aims of man, government, and morality that their rulers – their employers – naturally favored. That Sima was not exempt from this process is illustrated by his rendering of the Kun and Gong Gong stories into early hydraulic failures in a virtuous, Han-like bureaucratic government. (9)

Didacticism in the furtherance of political and moral aims, with selective emphasis applied to what might seem minor in meaning, did not, of course, originate with the Han Empire. For example, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, Han Fei Zi, royalist advisor to the first emperor of China, wrote in terms which made Kun and Gong Gong allies (or even cognates) to Dan Ju:

*When Yao wanted to transfer the rule over All-under-Heaven to Shun, against such a measure Kun remonstrated with him, saying. How inauspicious! Who would transfer the rule of All-under-Heaven to a commoner?' Yao never listened to him [Kun] but raised an army and killed him in the vicinity of the Feather Mountains. Likewise, the Minister of Public Works [Gong Gong] remonstrated with him, saying, 'Nobody should transfer the rule over All-under-Heaven to a commoner.' Yao never listened to him but also raised an army and banished the Minister of Public Works to the City of Yu Zhou. (10)*

As one observer commented:

*Completely divested of their mythic attributes, and completely severed from their connections with the flood, Kun and Gong Gong are here made to embody the reactionary force against the promotion of commoners, or even against the system of 'rule by virtue' itself. The account quoted above may thus be regarded not so much as a faithful rendition of the myths of Kun and Gong Gong as a representation, within the framework of their myths, of the practice of non-hereditary selection which may have prevailed in historical times. (11)*

There seems to be much at work beneath the surface in the Yao myths, even before Han historians began writing their glosses.

Unfortunately, however, Sarah Allan did not investigate go and there have been no other academic commentaries on the questions these myths pose for historians. Thus, there has been no attempt to account for:

- 1) The same attribute of 'unruliness' used to characterize Dan Ju, Kun and Gong Gong.
- 2) The mention of go in three versions written by Confucians.
- 3) Its omission from versions that are not Confucian, apparently of a greater age and from more remote regions.

For some possible answers to these questions, it is fruitful to consider the incongruities arising from the popular notion that Han Confucian writers inserted the game into their versions so as to promote its prestige.

### **Go and the Rivalry Between the Confucian and Daoist Schools of Strategy**

Confucius (551-479 BC) and his dedicated adherent and interpreter Mencius (371-c. 289 BC) (or those who transcribed their beliefs) clearly had little regard for go. They counseled their aristocratic feudal employers

that go and *liu bo* were, at best, a ‘small art,’ only somewhat better than ‘thinking about nothing with full bellies’ (at a time when the general population was doubtless on a near-starvation diet). At worst, Mencius wrote that go-playing encouraged gambling and classed it with drinking wine as a dangerous activity inducing young men to forget their filial obligations. (12)

Most prominent among those to challenge Confucian thought (and developing independently during the ‘Flowering of the 100 Schools’ at the time of the Warring States) was the *Bing Jia*, the School of Strategy, sometimes called the School of Thunder. Loosely allied with the Legalists of Han Fei Zi, and the Mohists (specialists in defending besieged cities and creating grammatically logical puzzles), the School of Strategy became known as ‘The Dark Way’ or ‘Way of Deception’ of what is now called Daoism. As attested by the fact that over 70% of their early texts (including the *Dao De Jing*), were secret military instruction manuals often written in obscure and mystical styles by warrior-philosophers, whose philosophy had little to do with the placid ideas popularly known in the West by that name. (13)

Recent work by Chad Hansen and others makes it evident that, from the beginning, Confucians were steadfast clients and supporters of the feudal families who ruled the small countries during the Warring States period. Opposing them were the Mohists, Legalists, and Daoists who generally preferred the peace of a central empire. It was Legalist Han Fei Zi who urged the use of Daoist ‘horizontal and vertical alliances’ to Qin Shi Huang in order to put an end to the Warring States and unify China in 221 BC. (It was Qin who built the Great Wall, purportedly burned all the books except the *Yi Jing*, and buried alive all – presumably non-Legalist – scholars).

The Confucians also opposed the founding of the Han Empire that rose from the ruins of Qin’s spectacular but short-lived efforts. Once established, however, it became advantageous for Han emperors to encourage the dissemination of Confucian beliefs advocating obedience and loyalty.

In contrast, it was Daoist generals and politicians such as Sun Zi, who wrote *The Art of War*, along with others more mystical in outlook, who became the inspiration for both the idealism and strategic methods of most of the great rebellions of Chinese history, including the White and Yellow Turbans and even the recent Falun Gong. It was probably inevitable that Confucian historians wrote with an animus when denigrating Daoist beliefs, interpreting them as an inexplicable and mystical form of a nature religion, and it was this impression that was passed on to the West by their students, the 17<sup>th</sup> century missionaries.

Confucian scholars throughout history also declared many early Daoist, Legalist, and Mohist writings to be forgeries containing dangerous ideas. Even when their works were conceded to be historically authentic, their writers were derided as hired mercenaries and propagators of 'effeminate' trickery unworthy of men of character.

By around 200 AD, the Han emperors succeeded in reducing the unruly and objectionable principles of Daoism to a state-directed religion led by a pope-like figure, who was directed by dreams to rule a supernatural kingdom. Fittingly, it consisted of strict, submissive hierarchies that closely conformed with those of the ideal Chinese government as conceived by the Han and the dynasties that followed.

While it is often said that a blend of Confucianism and the various types of Daoism occurred early on in the Chinese mind (to which was added, after the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism), it can also be said that the two philosophies represented distinctly opposing approaches to life. Whereas Confucianism was concerned with socially appropriate behavior toward family and ruler, the teachings of Daoism pertained to dealings with strangers and those one did not trust. This system developed strategies, attitudes and behaviors applicable not only to war but for functioning in business, government and even the bedroom.

The Dark School's idea of gaining inner happiness with the least expenditure of effort amounted to getting what one wanted in the most efficient way. This was not achieved by balancing one's *yin* and *yang*, as in Western self-help books, or by the harmony with a mysterious 'One,' as in Confucian interpretations. Rather, according to the relativistic thinking of early Daoists, *yin* and *yang* were never a matter of being statically in balance, but were always in constant flux. Were one astute enough to ascertain the current state of affairs, there was not one *Dao* but many forms of *dao*, or 'ways' to learn how to take advantage of those imbalances or change them.

Thus, many Confucian Han writers expressed their feelings about go in ways similar to those of Yang Xiong in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD:

*Some believe that criminal law corresponds to Dao because it too is spontaneous. But I say that criminal law, like wei qi, like fencing and magic practices which confuse the eye, although they are all spontaneous, still have a true Dao only generally speaking, but in their particulars they have a perverse Dao. (14)*

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, Wang Yao wrote:



*Limits are so exceeded that some even bet their clothes and personal objects . . . [as a game progresses] tempers change, honesty and correctness are abandoned and expressions become not only choleric but even violent . . . the game is not included in the [Confucian] Six Arts . . . Adopting inconsistency and fraud as methods of play is a demonstration of the use of incorrect and disloyal principles, employing technical terms like jie [‘invasion’] and sha [‘killing’] means being devoid of ren [humanity]. Lastly, spending the day deserting one’s occupation brings no advantages and so we may wonder if there is any difference between placing stones on a game-board and simply throwing stones . . . where can we find on the [wei qi] board any relation with a prefecture? And the three hundred pieces with an army of a thousand soldiers? Imperial robes, bells and musical stones are much more important than pieces and game-boards: who would exchange one for the other? (15)*

### **Go and the Yao Myths**

Requiring a constant flexibility of judgment in weighing present advantage against a future benefit, the ‘Way’ of the game of go would clearly have been useful in achieving Daoist aims. One conceivable interpretation of the Yao myth by a discerning Chinese audience would have led to the conclusion that a virtuous king was teaching his son go to improve his ability to deal strategically with hostile forces.

Because of go’s early association with gambling, another conclusion would have been that Dan Ju was the world’s first gambler, and that the Yao story may have originally been a gambling myth similar in structure to some American Indian gambler tales (which may have even originated in China). In those myths, divine gamblers descended to earth to win first the property, then the women and children, and then the men, who had to sell themselves into slavery. As in the Yao myths, extraordinary methods had to be taken by men and the gods to restore social equilibrium.

These underlying connotations of the Yao myth must have presented a conundrum for the Han Confucian writers. The Warring State author of the first surviving literary record probably wrote before the Confucian promotion of Yao as the pinnacle of virtue, so it is unlikely he would have had the same motives a Han period writer would have had to include (or eliminate) the game from his account (although of course, there may have had other reasons to include it or exclude it at that time). However, since some Han commentators said they didn’t believe that Yao invented the game, go must have been present in at least some of the circulating oral versions of the myth chanted out in the marketplaces and tea houses, or in now-lost written versions. If it had been inserted as a sheer fabrication in

the Warring States period, it is likely it would have been noticed and commented on.

In any case, it seems that some Confucian storytellers tried to make use of its existence in this First Great Division story of the separation of Earth and Water, and the rebellion, and defeat of the quarrelsome Dan Ju/Yellow River by Yao/Shun/Earth. It worked for them to present go playing as they did in other writings: as something whose ostensible purpose might have been to encourage mental discipline, but which only nurtured further rebellion and disrespect once the student learned how to win and grew old enough to gamble and apply these Daoist methods to politics and other activities. Even worse, as in some of the versions, Dan Ju formed an addiction and wasted all his time playing so it was the only thing he was good at. (See FN. (31))

In order to drive the point home, this strange story about a good king teaching the world an evil pastime and atoning for his mistake by disinheriting his star pupil was significant enough to be repeated twice more in the Golden Age. The interesting question then becomes: If the Confucians found they could use go as a moral exemplar, why would it not appear also in non-Confucian, presumably earlier versions?

Perhaps it was that in the period that the myths developed as oral stories, the teaching and playing of go might have been considered a remarkable feat that was worth mentioning in a story about the development of civilization. Later, by the time the myth might have been written down, perhaps learning at least the rudiments of the game had become part of every privileged education, as it has continued to be up to the present. Therefore, it might not have been worthy of special mention, especially since no 'moral' points could be scored with it.

On the other hand, if there were moral points to be gained, the process might work in reverse. Assuming that there was an early negative association with gambling, mention of the game might have been dropped in the 'anti-versions' which promoted Dan Ju's right to the throne, in order to overcome any objections that so much playing might have adversely affected his character and his right to the throne.

In any case, as in so much of the historical record of go, there are many interesting questions and few answers.

## II. Sky-Oriented and Divination Theories of Go's Origins

If it was not as a consequence of historical revisionism by Confucians that go appeared in some Golden Age myths, what may be the cause? For possible answers, the second popular theory of go's origins – that it was created by star-gazing shamans at the time of the Zhou during the Spring and Autumn or Warring States periods c. 1000-700 BC – bears a similar close scrutiny.

### The Zhou-Han Star-Oriented Cultures

The Yao/Dan Ju/Kun/Gong Gong story is a myth of the Xia and/or Shang dynasty (c. 1575-1046/27 BC) that celebrated the First Great Division of Earth from Water. The dynasties that followed – the Zhou and the Han – celebrated the Second Great Division, that of Earth's separation from the Heavens. The Xia and Shang worshiped and were guided by the authority of their ancestors, buried in the earth.

The Zhou were more interested in the skies and wrote their histories like this:

*Formerly, when King Wu of Zhou first attacked . . . the Shang capital of Yin, Jupiter was in Quail Fire; the moon was in Heavenly Quadriga; the Sun was in the Ford that Separates Wood; the New Moon was in the Handle of the Southern Dipper, Mercury was in the Heavenly Turtle; the locations of Mercury, Sun, and New Moon were all in the northeast corner . . . and Jupiter was in the region of the heavens allotted to us, the Zhou.*  
(16)

Going even further, the Han introduced the cult of the ruling Sky god, Tian Di (*Tian* means 'Heavens' and can also mean 'Emperor'). Intimacy with the gods of the Shang system had ended, and, according to one story, the ladder to Heaven was cut in two.

After this change, the Chinese began to challenge, displace, and relocate their gods. In the histories of the Confucians serving to consolidate the new empire through the promotion of rationalism and moral values, the great mythological beings that surrounded Yao's world were organized into a hierarchical bureaucracy, with their new functions often suggesting the nature of their roles in earlier myths.

After this, descriptions of go regularly included Heavenly references if not regarding the board, at least to the stones.

### **The *Shi* Board Divination Theory**

It has been suggested by many that it was on *shi ban* divination boards that the early casting of stones took place as an activity leading to the development of go. The circular lids of *shi* boards represented the Sky, the square base, the Earth. On the surface of these sections there seems to have been a spoon-shaped compass needle which may have resembled the Great Bear constellation and a circular device that apparently moved. There is considerable academic debate, however, about how these operated since only pieces survive.

It is important that there were no coordinates or grid-patterns drawn on either the Sky or Earth sections of the earliest boards. The upper halves of the oldest ones found, c. 200 BC, displayed stars and constellations, while the edges of the lower parts were engraved with the Eight Directions. Even if only the bottom halves were used, they didn't seem to function or resemble anything like a go board. In fact, a discussion took place in the first few issues of the journal *Early China* over whether *shi* boards could be game boards, and the consensus was that they were not. The question of whether they were the first go boards was not even raised.

Further, the earliest record of casting stones onto *shi* boards for purposes of divination did not appear until the first century AD, well into the Han period. Go stones, however, were not used for that purpose, and the pieces that were thrown were cast onto the upper, not the lower half. In outlying areas of China and Tibet, colored stones are still thrown on the earth for divining purposes, but these systems are time- and fate-oriented.

Boards are not used nor is the process direction-based. In Siberia, also, as described in *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*, stones were once cast for divination purposes, but into a bowl of water.

### **Astral Symbolism and Go**

Regarding 'star theories' of go's origins, the misconceptions of some observers may have resulted from assuming that the great, later homilies about go expressed feelings that were always felt about the game. Closer readers of, for example, the great 18<sup>th</sup> century Japanese *bunraku* puppet play, *The Battles of Coxinga*, by Chikamatsu, may have simply misinterpreted the symbolism.

The stirring second act opened with some Immortals visiting China from their home on the moon. Seated atop their sacred mountain, they were playing a game of go, one of them commenting:

*The ordinary man, confused of mind, takes it for a mere contest between go stones . . . the fish swimming in the water . . . mistakes it for a fish hook . . . the bird soaring above the clouds . . . is frightened, thinking it a bow . . . (17)*

Although the two Immortals were observing that one can see on a go board anything one wishes, as they spoke they were not looking at the 'Sky.' The 'it' they viewed as mirrored on their mystical board referred to the waning and waxing of the forces of *yin* and *yang* over the land of China displayed before them – the cause of the hero's exile in the face of the invading Manchu hordes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The Immortals then discussed how their placement of white and black stones over the 361 intersections represented the passage of the days and nights of a year. However, it was by means of alternately placing black and white stones representing day and night (sun and moon) – not as the movement of stars and constellations on the board.

The number 361 that results from multiplying 19x19 does not support the notion of an original astral symbolism, either, since the first boards mentioned in the literature were 17x17 lines, and the size of all early Han tomb boards varied. (One tomb board was even 18x21).

In Tibet – whose early contacts with Manichean Persia gave them the symbolism of Black and White that permeates their thought – any astral symbolism underlying the game would be expected to have survived, yet the standard size in Tibet is 17x17, and, at least today, no one seems to care if the board is a line or two more or less.

In China, the board did not seem to have been standardized at 19x19 until around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Edward Schafer once suggested that Tang astrologers may have drawn two extra lines through the center of the old-style 17x17 boards to conform with changes they were making in their astrological systems. (18)

Nor did Chikamatsu refer to the center point of the board as ‘the pole star,’ which is what several writers seem to have thought. In fact, the most popular early Chinese astral theory envisioned a heavenly canopy with holes to allow in starlight as the planets, sun, and moon roamed below. This is a bit inconsistent with the pole star-plus-sun-and-moon theory. Also, pre-Han Chinese saw only five planets and seven pole stars. It was later that two additional (invisible) pole stars and a planet were added by mystic Daoist astronomers.

A more telling argument against a Sky interpretation of the board’s significance was the nature of constellations in ancient Chinese thought. In Zhou astrology, locations of constellations marked the seasons, but, as indicated in the earlier quote from their histories, it was the movement and location of planets and other roving objects in the sky that had importance. Such motions do not correspond with the principles of go, whose Chinese name is *wei qi* – the ‘surrounding game.’

### **A Calendar Theory of Go’s Origins**

Another astronomy-centered inquiry was developed by the Japanese go player and amateur historian Yasunaga Hajime. He suggested that go boards originally were heavenly calendars placed atop a representation of a square earth. He proposed that a survival of this practice might be found in Tibet. It is true that Tibetan go places 12 black and white starting stones around the board, which they say signify, among other things, astrological houses. Yet, although the size of their board seems irrelevant, Yasunaga tried to build a historical case out of a combination of this idea and the use of the duodecimal system in the northern Yin dynasty of China (1384-1112 BC). (19)

It was my experience while playing go in Tibet that these 12 stones are regarded primarily as mundane ‘scarecrows’ or protectors of their fields, the smaller ones being called *diu* (small, tough rocks, or anything small and tough). In Mongolia (which interacted politically and culturally with Tibet), small ‘dog’ stones surround and protect the six larger ‘bull’ stones.

The central area of the Tibetan board is called *kong* (‘empty’) and belongs to everyone. The center point is frequently marked off with a symbol of *Vajra* (‘Sudden Enlightenment’), much as the *yin-yang* sign

presides over traditional Chinese boards, and, as is also the case with the ornamentation on Han tomb boards. Also, flowers are often sewn onto the borders (I saw only cloth boards there).

The 12 starting stones and the areas around them were thought to indicate the 12 regions of Tibet and the 12 palaces of the square city of Omolungring (the Shangri-la of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion, from whence the Good Kings will ride out at the end of the world). The symbolism of the board is also said to represent the 12-month calendar year but this idea seems only coincidental with the sacred nature attached to the number 12.

As for their common practice of placing six stones each down on the board before beginning a game (which also occurred in early Korean go), it is easy to theorize that this custom, besides according with the religious system, also made it easier for provincial players to enjoy the game by simplifying the opening and encouraging immediate fighting, rather than requiring the build-up of elaborate *fusekis*. A similar practical reason can be found for the Chinese fashion of placing two stones each on the board before a game begins. In Tibet this development may have occurred after go was introduced or invented there independently, since the practice of using six stones never appeared in China. (20)

In any case, the fundamental problem the Sky-centered theories seem to face is that they are based on a perception of the 'original' go boards as developing out of religious practices as a counters of Time and not as measurers of Space.

### III. An Earth-Oriented Theory of Go's Origins and Symbolism

Unlike the Han and Zhou, whose *shi* boards charted their skies, the Shang and Xia were a people whose civilization was based on agriculture, and their primary interests lay in the basic divisions of land and water and how best to utilize them. A most compelling reason for thinking that go equipment and playing did not originally have to be agreeable to a Sky-oriented religious symbolism is that, throughout the world, square game boards not only represent, but are in fact, sacred re-creations of what was once thought to be the shape of the earth. For example, the four areas of Chinese boards have always been referred to in terms of East, West, South and North. Somewhat like a go board, China itself was thought to be square, divided into a 9x9 grid, floating on and surrounded by water.

It can also be shown that the principles of go playing (or the play of a proto-go involving the capture of stones on a grid-like pattern) can be better explained by invoking Earth instead of Sky symbolism, if indeed the game was first involved with religion or divination at all.

#### **Earth-Oriented *Feng Shui* and the Symbolism of Go**

An element missing from most go histories is the consideration that in early China the game and its inherent symbolism were probably perceived very differently than is now the case. The separation of Earth from Water, the first Great Division in Chinese myth, was celebrated by the two oldest dynasties, the Xia and the Shang. The Xia, once thought to have existed only in myth, seem historically confirmed by recent archaeological discoveries.

In some myths of the Xia and the Shang, it was Yu the Great who finally controlled the floods after Kun and Gong Gong (or Yu's father) had failed to halt them with dams. Yu was assigned the task in some versions by Yao, in others by Shun, while in still other variants he preceded them. His method was a truly Daoist solution of 'accomplishing much by doing little' – in the manner of rice-paddy farming, he dug irrigation ditches to siphon off the unruly waters, thereby controlling and directing the flow in an orderly fashion over the landscape on the way to the sea. After channeling these, Yu divided up the newly drained land (still afloat on water confluent with the surrounding oceans) into nine great square sections bordered by rivers. This design (like many other works of Chinese art and philosophy)



was patterned after a 3x3 (with 9x9 lines) magic square he had received during a mystical encounter with a river god.

On the grid of a go board, especially the 9x9 board that beginners learn on today (conceivably the original size of those used in prehistoric times), it seems not implausible that the first go players would have beheld, like Chikamatsu's Immortals, not a map of the Sky, but a map of China.

What players are doing on this board accords even more with principles underlying other efforts by the Chinese to control elemental forces as their civilization advanced. As recorded on the earliest oracle bones, proto-*feng shui*, *yin-yang*, and acupuncture theories were already being developed during the Shang dynasty as early expressions of scientific impulses.

In other words, it would seem likely that the players of the first games of go would have been characterizing their play as attempts to block and release *qi* by placing their stones down on the board according to the tenants of *feng shui* (literally 'wind and water'). (This is not the *qi* of *wei qi* – the characters are different – but the *qi* of 'energy').

Interestingly, there were two spheres in which *feng shui* operated. Based on astrology and numerology, one concerned matters of time. Among its aims was the determination of auspicious days on which to act, probably by using *shi* boards (where 'the male was slowly moved to know the female').

The second, called the School of Earth Forms, concentrated on ascertaining the most favorable alignments for situating buildings for both the living and the dead by charting the flow of *qi*. In the most ancient literature extant on the subject:

*The Classic says, Where the earth takes shape, qi flows accordingly, thereby things are born . . . For qi courses within the ground, its flow follows the contour of the ground, and its accumulation results from the halt of terrain . . . Veins spring from [low] land terrain; bones spring from mountain terrain. They wind sinuously from east to west or from south to north. Thousands of feet [high] is [called] forces, hundreds of feet [high] is [called] features. Forces advance and finish in features. This is called integrated qi.*  
(21)

In short:

*. . . Water is the blood and breath of the earth, circulating as if in vessels and veins . . .* (22)

Today, too, when a *feng shui* expert examines a traditional Chinese landscape painting or takes a stroll in the countryside, he will point out how the *qi* is furiously coursing along the ridges of the hills and down through the valleys of the streams, and how its positive and negative forces are being blocked or attracted, influenced, deflected, trapped or repelled by the shape of the features that impinge on a site. As Stephen Field noted:

*Terrestrial features that block the wind are necessary to prevent the dissipation of the natural flow of qi in and along the ground. Flowing water, like wind, also attracts qi like a magnet, and the auspicious lair [burial site] is one that encourages water to linger in its vicinity. The terrestrial features serve to block the wind – which captures qi and scatters it, but also to channel the waters – which collect qi and store it. Feng shui . . . is merely shorthand for an environmental policy of hindering the wind and hoarding the waters. (23)*

In the *feng shui* School of Earth Forms, good and bad shapes are ‘convex’ or ‘concave,’ ‘hollow’ or ‘pointed,’ ‘open’ or ‘closed.’ In a similar fashion, *yin-yang* theory measures the ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ of shapes, and the earliest of the Daoist Dark Way philosophers continually spoke of the ‘emptiness or fullness’ of troop formations relative to the formations of land and water. Beyond this was the basic early Daoist tenet that no shape or situation was ever permanent – one had always to keep adjusting to take advantage of the changes in the balance or imbalance of *yin* and *yang* that were encountered.

As go players engage in surrounding and capturing groups, and accumulating territory, the most important consideration is whether their groups of stones have good or bad shape, i.e. how they are controlling the *yin* and *yang* of the *qi* of the moment. Most of the other terms – ‘influence,’ ‘walls,’ ‘solid territory,’ ‘light and heavy,’ ‘alive or dead groups,’ etc. – merely expand on this governing idea. In fact, beyond the concepts of shape, it seems likely that the earliest go strategies would have been heavily influenced by *feng shui* principles.

### **The Go Board as Sacred Space**

Anthropologists have noted that, like playing fields, game boards began as altars to the sacred. Within the silent confines of these temple-like precincts consisting of marked-off spaces, nothing seemed fortuitous and everything was significant. It was there that magicians, priests, and gamers could commence their work.

*[Here] duality is inherent . . . reflecting Nature itself. The processes are composed of opposites seemingly working against each other: day-night, summer-winter, male-female, birth-death. Games were played to bring harmony to those forces continuously fighting for ascendancy . . . the thrust and parry of the polarities characterized by the Chinese yin as the female principle and yang as the male. (24)*

It is likely that ancient go players would have been observing not the stars, but how the forces of *yin* and *yang* were creating Space from Time and Time from Space, as they funneled through the ritual discipline of the rules made manifest on the board. Chinese go boards have always measured almost exactly one square *feng shui* 'foot' (about 17 3/8 inches), the unit by which practitioners measure indoor objects. On it, the *yin* of space would have included the setting of the lines (*yang*), and the resulting squares (*yin*). The material and the shape of this area was *yin* – source of the present 'wood' radical used in the character for go. Depending on the shape of the bowls, boxes, and stones, they were *yin* or *yang*. The stone material was *yang* – source of the earliest radical for the word 'go.'

From the primordial chaos within the boxes or bowls to which the stones would eventually return, the adepts would select their stones. White would have been advantaged and characterized as *yang*, Black as *yin*. As the game progressed, the *yang* of Time, the Past of the game (and their games – also *yang*) would be leaching the chaotic *yin* of the Future. After their groups had formed, the interiors of which would be *yin*, the exteriors *yang*, they would live with what we now call two 'eyes' (*yang*), similar to their belief that every human had two souls – a concept that was beginning to emerge at least by the Shang.

Conceivably it was under the influence of such a tradition (more strongly felt in China than in Japan) that the contemporary Chinese genius Wu Qing Yuan (known as Go Seigen in Japan) commented that, while playing go, there are not four directions he considers, but six, taking into account such intangibles as the 'heaviness' or 'lightness' of stones and groups.

In China, deep-rooted feelings regarding *feng shui* may also account for the puzzle of why ancient Chinese games, until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, began with two white stones and two black, while the Japanese for nearly a thousand years have started with an empty board. For Chinese players, the feeling aroused by an empty board with no *feng shui* might have been akin to those of a medieval Christian encountering someone who had no soul.

In conclusion, some of the scholarly confusion over the symbolism of Time and Space, and Earth and Sky, on Chinese go boards may have resulted from two factors.

One is that by the 9<sup>th</sup> century the two schools of *feng shui* had fused, developing changes that led to modern *feng shui*.

Almost simultaneously, by the time of the Song, c. 1000, the blending of Confucianism with forms of Time- and Heaven-oriented Buddhism and an altered Daoism was sufficient to have led to the development of Neo-Confucianism, which approved go as a worthwhile activity for the *literati*.

An indication of this changed attitude was the appearance of *The Classic of Weiqi in Thirteen Chapters*, which, first of all, was remarkable because it meant that go knowledge was beginning to be spread by texts and not oral teaching, which would have certainly de-mystified, for a much larger audience, many of the obscure aspects of playing the game. More important for its acceptance, its use of many Buddhist terms to describe go positions (such as the word for the 'ko' situation, which signifies 'eternity'), heavily encouraged the 'sanctification' of the game. In a process that had begun in the Tang dynasty and intensified by the time of the Ming c. 1350, go had become one of the four great accomplishments for the cultured *literati*.

In other words, the game's sinister associations with Warring State Daoism could have come to an end in China, along with the possible 'collective memories' of its earthly origins, symbolism and associations.

# IV. The Age of Go

## The Archaeological Record

Archaeologist Tang Ji Gen was a visiting scholar at Harvard's Yen-ching Institute in 1994, and is in charge of excavations at Yinxu, near Anyang, Henan province in northeastern China, the last capital of the Shang dynasty before it fell to the Zhou. Tang is a strong amateur go player and has described some mysterious stones that have turned up in about 25 of the tombs. (25)

In Tomb 1713, about 25 stones were found near the head (No. 37), and in other tombs as many as 50 have been located near the right shoulders. All are about 2.5-3.5 cm in diameter. Slightly more than half were painted off-white, while the rest were painted red, but the colors may originally have been evenly distributed since paint could have faded or been washed away. Pointing out that the stones were always found near the right shoulder, the 'game playing' hand, he said, 'Although no boards have been found so we cannot definitely call these go stones, most Chinese scholars would agree that they were probably used for some kind of game.'

Tomb 1713 is the tomb of a nobleman and is important because from inscriptions on bronze vessels it can be accurately dated to about 1040 BC. The body was placed within a second inner wooden coffin, and two other bodies, conceivably servants, were interred as well. However, the appearance of stones in both single- and double-coffin burials suggests

that, irrespective of their meaning or function, the significance of the stones was not confined to the aristocracy.

Another mysterious series of Shang and pre-Shang tomb objects are pieces of pottery, lozenge-shaped and orange-painted, about 4 cm. in diameter. A number of these have been dated to before 5000 BC. Several are colored on one side, others on both, but mostly the color has not been preserved. Unlike the stones, these were found alone and in pairs, not only in tombs but also in and around houses. There is no mention of game stones or pottery pieces in Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, but, whatever their purpose, they remained in use into Zhou times since they were found in Baoji, Shanxi province, the site of the ancient state of Yu.

Compounding the mystery is the following passage from the *Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, referring to the remains of a Neolithic settlement on the Bay of Pkhusun in Siberia:

*. . . Most curious in this stratum are small discs cut from soft stone, one side of which is convex, the other flat. What these stone 'checkers' were used for remains a mystery. The settlement is especially interesting because it has been dated by the radio-carbon method and proves to be 4170 +/- 60 years old. (26)*

Traditional Chinese go stones have this shape. However, according to the editor Dennis Sinor, both the author, A. P. Okladnikov, and translator are dead, there were no footnotes, and the original (Russian) manuscript has vanished.

### **The Origins of Go?**

Today, a casual tour of any Chinese city will reveal at least a half-dozen varieties of pebble games being played out on simple dirt-drawn grid boards, so there are many possibilities for how these stones were used. It may have just been 'discovered,' say by children, from a simple process of idly surrounding stones and taking them off the board, like the modern game of 'capture' that is used to teach Japanese youngsters the principles of go. Once the idea of capturing more than one stone is changed to the more interesting task of capturing as many as possible, the idea of two eyes making 'living (or 'eternal') groups and territory naturally evolves. (27)

Or, a game like go could have evolved from the use of the stones as markers to keep track of dice throws, as happened in North American Indian games. Another possibility, which will be discussed in greater detail later, is that go may have originally been a hunting game based on the principle of surrounding prey.

In any case, there is no reason to believe that the earliest games were played on boards larger than 9x9, the shape of the first magic squares. This is the size that beginners now often learn on. Possibly it was not until later in history that play would have become sophisticated enough to warrant bigger and/or more permanent boards of wood or silk, like an almost entirely deteriorated *liu bo* dice game board found in a Zhou tomb. (The later go boards from Han tombs were all made of stone, but were never meant to be played on except by the dead).

## **V. Divination, Shamanism, the Cultural Matrix of the Yao Myth and Go**

If go did not result from diviners casting down stones onto boards representing the Sky – or the Earth, for that matter – paradoxically, some of the clues as to its place in the early cultures that played it can perhaps be gleaned from stories that relate the game to divination and shamanistic activities. Unfortunately, as with other mysteries about the game's place in the Yao myths, little study has been done.

### **Go and Divination**

King Yao was the first 'civilizer' in many versions of Chinese mythical history. Besides bringing go down from the Heavens and teaching it to his son, he was credited with introducing the art of divination to the Chinese. Along with go, divination was frowned on by the Han rulers and their writers as being an 'un-Confucian activity.' Perhaps this was because, as in the Hellenistic Greek world, diviners could not only become dangerously independent with their own followings, but individuals employing them could develop dangerously independent ideas about what they should do and not do.

Again, as with the presence of go in the Yao myths, a virtuous king was associated with something that was not so virtuous. It is just a suggestion, but it is quite possible that this was the source, in Han times as well as in Joseph Needham's time and afterwards, of the early symbolic association between go and divination. After all, in a strategy game, knowing the 'future' is all-important.

On the other hand, divination in traditional societies is not really about 'telling the future.'

Philosophy in early China and Tibet was generally of a dualistic nature, indicated by, among other things, oppositions of color. In Tibet, for example, black is the color of death, evil, night, the darkness within the body, wild yaks and the Underworld. White is the color of the stone they place atop their houses, the bones within the darkness of their bodies, the snow on their mountains and the yaks they breed with cattle in order to tame them. The first mortals in their dualistic Persian-based system were black and white.



To interpret and manipulate the meanings of these and other symbols in these cultures, a special class of men and women were needed. In Tibet, these were the Bon (a designation of the practitioners, not their religion) – rivals of the invading Buddhists from India. Today, they retain a strong presence in parts of rural Tibet, claiming many of the more esoteric practices of Tibetan Buddhism were borrowed from them. (28)

In China, (where, incidentally, the color of death is White) the men who read the oracle bones and turtle shells for the Shang and later kings eventually became known as the Fong Shi. Some lived as hermits, others became attached to courts, performing alchemy for many kings with the aim of achieving their immortality (but often resulting in their deaths).

In Siberia such people were known by the catch-all term ‘shaman,’ which is now often used in a general sense, and they interpreted signs to divine the auspicious moment for action.

In ancient China, questions were asked of the dead by means of interpreting the pattern of cracks on burnt oracle bones and turtle shells. Today in Taiwan and other parts of the Chinese diaspora, Daoist mediums still travel by way of trances to the Underworld in order to pose questions.

The dead, however, only know the past, and while they are thought to understand the causes underlying present matters, knowledge and control of the future is beyond their power. The questions asked usually concern the correctness of current or contemplated actions – and if ‘yes,’ or ‘no,’ what bearing the choice will have on present circumstances.

A recent ancestor might be consulted regarding the correctness of a potential marriage, or asked whether current financial problems are a result of failing to perform a burial according to the protocols of *feng shui*. A more distant one would be concerned with more abstract issues, such as the weather, floods, invasions, etc. They were not gods by our definition and by implication only were their answers predictive.

A Tibetan story involving go illustrates the concept of the future in a dualistic society.

*A young boy’s father had been murdered and the boy and his mother wanted revenge as quickly as possible. At last, when she felt he had grown old enough to take action, she took out a go set to see whether the moment was propitious. As he played out a game with himself, his right hand taking White, his left playing Black, at crucial moments the mother shouted Bon power-mantras at him, and the boy’s guardian-spirit sat on his right shoulder offering timely advice. Finally, White (that is, he) won, indicating the time was auspicious for finding and killing the man, which he promptly did. (29)*

The mother and son were not fortune-telling, nor seeking omens or trying to read the future in our sense of it. They were ascertaining the state of the universe at that moment: was the time auspicious or ill? Who was playing the black stones? Who was playing White? No one. It was the stones that were 'playing' the boy, just as a shaman might be 'danced' by powers greater than himself.

This was not fatalism as Muslim or Christian understands it – it was not the future that had been decided. Nor was it a Tibetan Buddhist salvation-event occurring within a cycle of ever-recurring *Kalpas* in the Hindu manner, where certain stages are good or bad depending on their position in the continuous creation, destruction, and re-creation of the universe. The game was taking place in a continuous present – a Black win would only have indicated that the moment was unpropitious and, therefore, it was dangerous to proceed.

### **Go and Shamanism**

There are other interesting tie-ins between go and some of the religious features of the ancient dualistic societies of Asia that provide many more questions than answers about the role the game may have played in early myths, such as Yao's.

For example, there is the shadowy role of Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, in the game's development. In one story, (which was also associated with the invention of the compass), Yao fell asleep and dreamed of Huang Di inventing the game and playing the fairy Yong Cheng to develop strategies for his battles with the rebel monster, Chi You. After he learned the game, Yao taught Dan Ju with the same results as in the other stories. (30)

Another Yellow Emperor tale involves the abilities of shamans to 'fly.'

*Mr. Chang, musician-companion to the Yellow Emperor, assumed wings and was given the name of Teacher Huang Yai. At the summit of Chung-nan Mountain he played go. (31)*

This is arguably the oldest mythic reference to go (the game most likely being described) and, although not recorded until the later Han, it is reasonable to assume that the story speaks from a very early period.

Needham and others have argued that this kind of 'flying' was done with the aid of psychedelic mushrooms. In this passage, the insect wings of Huang Yai can be identified with the gossamer-winged insects that feed off Siberian magic mushrooms and figure frequently in their shamanist lore. Psychedelic mushrooms have been shown to be cultural motifs in many

different cultures throughout the world. For example, in China (where, unlike Japan, the shape of go stones are mushroom-like), the species of deer that appear so frequently in Daoist iconography is the same that Siberian shamans use to locate their magic mushrooms.

Also to be considered in the relationship between go, shamanism, magic mushrooms and divination is a Tungusic Manchu folk epic called *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*, an oral story that was not written down until the early 1900s. It came from a Siberian area where mushroom-trance divination was replaced by alcohol, perhaps under reverse-cultural pressure, following the Mongol conquest of China in the 1600s.

Teteke was a high-spirited, young, and beautiful shamaness, beseeched by an assistant of a rich official to retrieve from the Underworld his patron's dead son. Before deciding to undertake the trance-induced journey to the accompaniment of drumming, she cast a handful of go stones into a bowl of water and 'observed' them.

This was translated as an 'act of divination,' but, as in the Tibetan case, Teteke was not seeking to know the future. Instead, she was ritually asking about the state of the universe before proceeding with an action, in this case, a piercing of the earth.

In Tibet, flying female spirits played go on natural stone boards or during storms with black and white clouds, but how important was it that the shamaness in this story was female? The reversal of many kinship roles in the story indicates that she was representative of the earlier Manchu matriarchal system that was opposed to the patriarchal sinofication of the Manchu culture.

In this tale, Teteke would presumably have been using Chinese go stones, which, like those employed in Tibet and in the old Siberian site, are flat on one side and round on the other. In Tibet, similar decisions about impending actions were often based on the number of go stones cast that fell on one side or the other, and this is how go players also formerly decided Black or White in games – certain combinations meaning different things. In Tibet the color of the stones – unmentioned in the Siberian tale – seemed of no importance.

On the other hand, for the Manchu listeners hearing it unfold, the story's interest may not have been with the stones but the water into which they were thrown. The frequency of references to water – the rivers crossed by the official's assistant to find the shamaness, the several rivers she forded to arrive in the Underworld, her tears, the washing of her face before and after her journey, and, not least, the bowl of water into which she cast the go stones – suggested a motif of separation of the irrational from the rational, marking an individual's transition from a state of ignorance to greater knowledge. Whether it was usual among the Manchus

to use go stones or even ordinary stones in such a manner, or whether this also was a Chinese (or Tibetan) custom, has not been commented on. (32)

There were a number of motifs in the story-telling of Mongolia and Tibet that functioned like those of water in the *Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*. Although go is not mentioned, in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, important events in Genghis Khan's life were marked off by the appearance of the number '9.' In this fashion, in some versions of the longest folk tale in the world, the semi-mythical early Tibetan-Chinese frontier war-lord Gesar, (cf. the Byzantine word 'Caesar'), played a divinatory go game before making important decisions.

As in the Yao myths, there are many tantalizing questions and few answers about how go interwove itself with shamanism, magic mushrooms, and divination in Asian belief systems. This is unfortunate because such studies could lead to more information about the physical and symbolic origins and foundations of the game.

### **Games and Rationality**

The oldest games of humankind were undoubtedly games of chance:

*. . . (By) inventing a little game around the number of two-sided dice falling solid-side, black-side, or convex-side up . . . the binary quality of these pieces began to be associated with 'yes' or 'no' . . . Before long, players attempted to appropriate the future by risking something of value against it. The two activities passed into one another and in many cultures were practiced as one and the same. The magician drew lots to learn of the future and the gambler to decide the future; the difference between them was that of 'will' and 'shall.'* (33)

For these kinds of games to survive, however, they had to involve more than play or magic. The 'action' they generated in their microworlds had to be compatible to the interests and goals of both old and newly emerging social groupings in the macroworlds of the cultures.

They had to be games that not only *could* be played, but ones that players, especially parents, thought *should* be played. Recently, these principles have been expressed in Meme Theory, which considers cultural artifacts to be like 'genes' that pass 'horizontally' through generations and 'vertically' through social relations. (34)

Another way that anthropologists look at games is to identify them as representing something the society values. Looked at in this way, go survived because it was adopted as something 'good to do' by every major

power group in Chinese and Japanese history. This process probably began with the earliest Chinese, who might even have thought of the game in terms of hunting and only later attached religious significance to the equipment it was played with.

Games get involved with religion in other ways because of their special relation to the past, fate and the future. 'Recreation' was not always an idle word.

It was discovered rather recently, for example, that the dice game *liu bo*, which survived for perhaps more than a thousand years before vanishing, had a mystically patterned game board which appeared on the back of sacred bronze 'TLV' mirrors in the Han period.

However, *liu bo* was largely a game of chance, like backgammon, and go was a game of skill. They differed in the ways they created the ideas of the 'future' in the shared consciousness' of the players.

In the case of the Tibetan boy playing go with himself, it would not have mattered if he was playing go or throwing dice, because the universe was 'speaking' through the game. Nor did it matter for the gods of China who were gambling their immortality on *liu bo*, or the Immortals whom Chikamatsu and the Chinese so lovingly described on top of mountains playing games that could last as long as 100 human years. They could not foretell the 'future' in terms of who was going to win any better than a human diviner. (35)

However, strict medieval Muslim theologians and rulers often punished chess players who were 'thinking they were thinking' they could outwit God's Fate on their boards. On the other hand, dice playing was approved because the players were humbly accepting 'His Will,' which was speaking through the numbers that came up.

In Christianity, 'Chance,' however, was the 'Enemy.' Medieval Christians generally frowned on dice, since it brought the 'Chaos' and 'Passions' of the Devil into one's life, but they often thought that chess might be good for the development of the rational part of the mind.

Tibetan and Indian Buddhism, (unlike the Chinese style), frowned on its monks playing games of skill which took their minds off their studies. Instead, for recreation, they sanctioned the old Indian dice game of snakes and ladders because its goal was the 'salvation' of the player and the goal of Buddhism.

These types of interactions between cultures and their games can change in the course of history. If it is postulated that the Yao myths were composed in the context of the Earth-oriented, ancestor-worshiping Xia and Shang peoples, one finds a number of elements in the stories that might have been of primary concern to them, but which might not have been so noticeable to later generations, when the tales were written down.

The Yao myth's 'reverse-Oedipal' elements, for example, might point to the idea that Dan Ju, in refusing to obey his father, could be seen as 'making' his own 'future' or 'destiny.' This would be notable in a culture where, as evidenced by their oracle bones, their ancestors were still advising them on how to live. In fact, as some scholars have proposed about this same period of time in the Middle East, the cognitive development of the concept of what the 'future' was, as we think of it, might not have even evolved yet. (36)

Thus, if the Yao myths were composed during the Xia/Shang period, in the act of teaching a strategy game to Dan Ju, Yao could have been seen as passing along, not only the mechanics of a game, as it might have been with *liu bo*, but a whole series of principles of action that could be seen as applying to the conduct of life. The irony was that in doing so Yao would have been seen as also casting away his own immortal future. The cost of 'coming down from the Heavens' to marry and teach humans their civilization was his own mortality. The cost of throwing aside his eldest son, who might have learned his lessons too well (depending on which version was being listened to), would be that, from the grave, he would have no one to look after him and no one to advise.

In short, this was a time when the emerging ability to even play a strategic game of deliberation might be looked on as a very significant event, with many resonating consequences, especially after it began to live on through the generations of humankind.

Of course, go could have been interpolated at a later date into the myths because these cultural concepts fit so well. However, while awaiting the evidence of future archeological excavations, can we still speculate that the presence of go in the Yao myths signified that a certain jump had been made in the evolution of consciousness in early mankind? Along with the increasing control of Nature during the Great Divisions, was the 'rational control' of the mind also being celebrated?

### **Go and the Irrational**

After c. 500 AD, as evidenced in the development of the new form of poetry-as-art, the Confucian attitude about go playing began to change to one we are familiar with today – that go playing is a high and spiritually uplifting art, one of the 'Four Great Accomplishments' (or 'Pleasures') along with painting, music and calligraphy. Scrolls with calligraphy of three Confucian 'virtues,' *Li* ('Propriety'), *Chi* ('Wisdom'), and *Ren* ('Human-heartedness') were first associated with go by a late Tang emperor, and now adorn the walls of many go clubs. (37)

Another signal of its new reputation as a worthy pursuit was the appointment of champion go players to official positions in the 8-10<sup>th</sup> century AD Tang court. If they could manage the micro-world, it was felt they could certainly govern the macro-world. One, in fact, even became a 'shadow' emperor for a short time.

Along with the blending of the two *feng shui* schools came the amalgamation of changed forms of Daoism and Confucianism with Time- and Heaven-oriented Buddhism and the 'sanctification' of go was complete.

As the 17<sup>th</sup> century Catholic missionary Mateo Ricci wrote in one of the first descriptions of go playing to reach the West:

*Most important among them is a . . . game. On a board of three hundred cabinets, several play together with two hundred stones of which some are white, others black. . . . Upon this game the Officials pounce most eagerly and often they spend the major part of the day on playing . . . He who is experienced in this game is, though he did not distinguish himself in any other matter, respected and invited by all. Yes, even some also choose them as teachers, according to the customs usual to them, in order that they may thoroughly learn from them the theory of the game.*  
(38)

This was a far cry from the early Confucian complaints and the citations in old Japanese, Chinese and Tibetan chronicles about the pervasiveness of gambling in the game. In fact, as early as c. 6-700 BC, a character for 'gambling' might have been synonymous with the character for *wei qi*. Today, as seen in traditional Korean, Japanese and Chinese clubs, and so vividly demonstrated in the modern Korean novel, *First Kyu*, the go culture is still actively involved in this activity. It just stays out of sight and under the tables and is not generally talked or written about, especially in popular go histories (and not at all in academia). (39)

As in Ricci's time and of course, long before, go has always supported a whole class of players who could make a good living as professional gamblers, as in the Western realms of poker and horse racing. In professional go today, the fact a third party puts up the prize money does not change the situation. In fact, putting a stake on a game and losing against a stronger player has always been regarded as how one paid one's teacher. (40)

However, what modern players might consider to be a dark background of denial about gambling on what they think of as a 'sacred' game can, when an early cultural setting is taken into account, also be seen as something which actually enhances go's sacred qualities.

Many of China's early gods were addicted to gambling on *liu bo* and their stories of lost immortality illustrate the sacred irrational passions that gambling induced in traditional (and even in modern) societies. Like drinking to excess or taking psychedelic mushrooms, gambling, especially with extremely high stakes, furnished a traditional ecstatic transportation out of the mundane and ordinary into the divine. In India, for example, Shiva and Shakti continue to play an on-going strip-game of Pacheesi that is the mainspring of the universe. In the North American gambling myths, the games that men lost to the gods with often had a sacred aura about them, being performed only in a ritual manner at certain times of the year. Sometimes, even the equipment was ritually sacrificed.

When this marriage of sacred and not-so-sacred qualities of gambling is added to the sinister Daoist philosophical associations made about go by the Confucians, it becomes even clearer how misperceived the history of the game of go is.

It was only in the last thirty years that archaeological finds of early Daoist writings have been made, before which most of these had been thought by Confucian *literati* to be forgeries. This has helped give a new understanding as to how the *Gui Dao*, sometimes called, the 'Effeminate Way,' intertwined itself in unacknowledged ways with Chinese thought.

One problem was that Confucian-oriented scholars were encouraged to accept the idea that the spheres of *wen* (the civil) and *wu* (the military) were separate and that a strategic system of action was not fit for cultured *literati* to study, although everyone was aware of its tenants.

However, and in contrast with the other 'Ways,' by the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Daoist system of strategy was almost fully developed. One of its first teachers was Sun Wu (Sun Zi), author of *The Art of War*. He was a deviser of tactics familiar to all players of go: 'One should first prepare a counter to the enemy's strategy, attack his alliances (i.e. connections), then his armies (i.e. his solid groups), and last of all, his walled cities (i.e. territory).' Most important, Sun Zi usually wrote that the idea of managing successful warfare was to maneuver oneself into a position of numerical and strategic superiority, so that '10,000 could defeat one.'

Next was a mysterious personage called Gui Guzi, whose name translates as: 'The Master of the Valley of Death.' He was said to have lived 300 years and, along with his student Wu Qi, who lived around 100 years later (c. 400 BC), he was the true founder of something that did not evolve in Europe (and in a different form) until more than 2000 years later – Chinese praxiology, or a philosophy of action in how to get something done.

Gui Guzi and Wu Qi only appeared to be Confucian-oriented in advising that, in the same way a good go player captains his game and can



kill a large group with one well-placed stone, generals could properly manage affairs with correct 'spiritual attitudes' (and organizational skills), so that 'One could defeat 10,000.'

'10,000' in Chinese literature has never referred to merely soldiers, but alludes to the generality of worldly phenomena – 'The 10,000 Things and Affairs of the World.' Since '10,000' can imply '10,000 Dangerous Entanglements' to be avoided, this manner of thinking can be paradoxically labeled a method for seeking not war, but peace. In China, one who triumphed by not fighting was a true winner because one who always battled was one who was always exhausted and therefore vulnerable. This thinking extended into all spheres of life.

For example, the mystical Dark Lady came at night to teach the Yellow Emperor in his bedroom about how to succeed in love and war – the winning stratagems were the same. She declared that the first to relinquish his *qi* would lose. All go players will recognize that: 'One must spare one's own force while utilizing that of the opponent,' and 'One must begin by yielding in order to catch the enemy unawares thereafter.'

Again, *wei qi* is the game of 'encirclement' and it has been shown that these Daoist techniques derived from early hunting strategies which always avoided direct involvement. Instead, the idea was to lure large beasts down from the mountains to the plains where they could be surrounded and weakened with nets and dogs and then easily killed.

These techniques common to war, go and the bedroom were expressed more explicitly in an early Daoist text (with glosses by its Ming commentator):

*While I am in no hurry, the enemy is hard pressed for time and throws all its forces into the battle [and keeps climaxing]. While the arms clash, I advance and withdraw at will, using the enemy's proviant and exhausting its food supply. Then I practice the tactics of the Turtle; the Dragon, the Serpent and the Tiger. [The four techniques to delay emission: The Turtle withdraws into itself; the Dragon inhales; the Serpent swallows and does not let go; the Tiger lies patiently in wait for its prey]. The enemy finally surrenders its arms and I gather the fruits of victory. This is chi-chi [Completion] and ensures peace for one generation. I withdraw from the battle-field [descend from my horse] and dismiss my soldiers. I rest quietly to regain my strength while I convey the booty to the storeroom [the bone marrow where the yang from the unreleased semen is stored], thereby increasing my power to the height of strength [in the ni-huan point in the brain]. (41)*

Even when practicing the art of painting, one marshaled one's equipment and resources like commanders preparing for battle and dealt with the same order of *feng shui* conditions that gamers, lovers, politicians, and the military contended with: 'emptiness,' 'fullness,' 'form,' the 'formless,' 'absence,' 'force,' 'straight action,' and 'maneuver.' Thus it seems that sometimes, even for those who considered the art of war *yin* and worthy of contempt, the *yang* methods could still be considered worthy of approval.

Even social relations and psychology were not exempt from the Daoist gaze. Master Zhuang, one of the rediscovered Strategists, extended the precepts of Daoism into the realm of psychology, writing of everyday life in terms recognizable to anyone who has played in a go club:

*In [human] relations and unions, everyday fighting of the minds is going on, sometimes irresolute, sometimes sly, sometimes secret. While those with little fears are careful and trembly, those with great fears are deliberate. Some bound off like an arrow or crossbow pellet, certain that they are arbiters of right and wrong. Others cling to their position as though they had sworn to be in league with it, intending to defend their position until victory. Others fail like autumn and winter, such is the way they dwindle day by day. Others drown in what they do, you cannot make them turn back (. . .) Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candour, insolence – music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one know from where they sprout. (42)*

The tactics of the Dark School were best summarized in an anonymous book of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century called, *The 36 Strategies*, although it could have first been written as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Lost until 1941, it resurfaced as a secret military manual of the Chinese Communists and was not released to the public until after the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution died down in the late 1970s.

On the surface, its advice seemed simple. For example, 'Fish in muddy waters' – in other words, complicate the situation. This is, of course, standard advice in go manuals for what White should in a handicap games. 'Sacrifice the plum to save the peach' might just as well describe the enticement in a *tesuji* and the benefits of sacrifice. 'Kill with a borrowed knife' may refer to playing on one side of the board in order to attack on the other. A Chinese champion, Ma Xiao Chun, wrote *The Thirty-Six Stratagems Applied to Go* to illustrate the use of these principles in the fluidity of middle-game fighting. (43)

The natural affinities between go and the principles of the School of Strategy appear to have been well developed by the time of the writing of the *Zuo Chuan* in the 5th century BC:

*Ning-tsu is dealing with his ruler not carefully, as he would at go. How is it possible for him to escape disaster? If a go player lifts his stone without definite object, he will not conquer his opponent. How much more must this be the case when one tries to take a king without a definite object? He is sure not to escape ruin. Alas that by one movement a family whose heads have been ministers for nine generations should be extinguished! (44)*

One reason that these early perceived connections between war, go, and philosophy went largely unremarked, however, is that the writings of the Strategists were generally kept inaccessible to scholars and the general public until, in time, they were assumed lost. As a philosophy, these teachings were passed on orally, sometimes by using deliberately enigmatic and mystical language.

The individual tactics, on the other hand, were readily available in historical books such as, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Water Margin* and *The Records of the Grand Historian*. The last was Sima Qian's stirring chronicle of the complicated warfare that swept through China after the fall of the Qin, and which the writer of *The 36 Strategies* often used as examples. The strategic lessons were summed up in what is called *cheng yu*, or folk expressions. One book listed over 1000 of them. Nor were the illiterate masses excluded from this knowledge base since stories from these books and others were hugely popular, available everywhere to be seen and heard as theater, comic books, New Year's cards, or ballads chanted and acted out in teahouses and marketplaces.

Even in modern times, Mao Zi Dong's explanations of his strategies as being based on *cheng yu*, and descriptions of the often unconscious use of the 36 Strategies by Chinese negotiators in commercial dealings with Westerners, are indications of how the Strategies were simply part of the culture and could go largely unnoticed by their users. (45)

So it might have been with the history of the playing of go. Probably since well before the written history was largely recast to exclude mention of Daoist influences, go was part of the education of relatively every member of the upper and military classes and apparently considered not important enough to warrant much notice.

That scarcity of early written records on go must have concealed the interesting developments of which we today have only hints – for example, the feat, (first mentioned in a late Han text), of being able to replay an entire game from memory, or the development of the ideas underlying

*joseki*, the first sign of which appears in a probable 13<sup>th</sup> century forgery of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century game.

Thus it was that in the effort to ignore or denigrate as nonsense and un-philosophical the Dark Way's rival view of reality, the Confucians managed to hide one of the great achievements of early Chinese thought – the recognition of the game-like and protean qualities of war, art, and life – something the West has become aware of and begun to study in the form of game theory and philosophy only within the last century.

Meanwhile, written about positively, negatively or secretly, or not at all, throughout the game's long existence, it was only within the precincts of gaming boards that the remarkable creative and syncretizing impulses of the abstract Chinese mind could come alive without hindrance of rank, age, sex or even skill.

There, this mind was driven to exercise its utmost powers of rational thought by its most unruly passions. In finding that 'life is to go as go is to life' or, as Nobel Prize winner Manfred Eigen once said, ' . . . all the universe is the play of probability,' it seemed to be discovering an amazing synthesis of rational and irrational pleasures that was perhaps once known only to the gods. (46)

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# Footnotes

(1) This essay is intended to be informative without being tedious. Since nearly every paragraph and often every sentence could be argued about and footnoted, space limitations and reader interest have necessarily kept references to a minimum. I have tried to indicate where the thinking is original and, if an opinion is not generally accepted academic thought, whose it is.

(2) Paolo Zanon; 'Qiyng Shisanpan (The Classic of Go in Thirteen Chapters): Its History and Translation'; *Annali Di Ca ' Foscari, Estratto XXXV No. 3; Rivista della facolta di Lingue a Letterature Straniere Dell' Universitadi Venezia 1996*; pp. 382-3.

(3) For a scholarly background and bibliography of the history of go see especially John Fairbairn's webpages at <http://www.msoworld.com/mindzine/news/orient/go/go.html> and at <http://www.harrowgo.demon.co.uk>.

For a 'star-oriented divination' theory about the Zhou origins of go, see: Donald Potter; 'Go in the Classics'; *Go World* No. 37; Autumn; 1984 and No. 42; Winter; 1985-6.

For the origin of that theory, see Joseph Needham; *Science and Civilization in China*; Cambridge Univ. Press; Vol. 4; 1962; pp, 315-32.

For a calendar theory, see Yasunaga Hajime; *Chugoku no Go (Go in China)*; Jiji Tsushin-sha; Tokyo; 1977.

For shamanism (as separate from divination) and go, the only reference seems to be: William Pinkard; 'History and Philosophy'; *The Go Player's Almanac*; Ishi Press; 1992; pp. 7-8.

(4) By c. 250 BC, there seemed to be four loose groupings falling under the general label of philosophical Daoism: the 'mystics' and 'individualists,' who laid an emphasis on personal cultivation; the 'primitivists,' who opted for a revival of an older, simpler society; and the 'rationalists' or 'syncretists' – those who realized the inevitability of conflict in the search for peace and unification during the Warring States period and thus combined inner potency with actions in the civil sphere to realize the Dao and general peace. See, for example, Christopher Rand; 'Chinese Military Thought and Philosophical Taoism'; *Monumenta Serica* No. 34; 1979-80; pp. 171-218.

For a detailed exploration of the School of Strategies agenda both ancient and modern, see especially Krzysztof Gawlikowski; 'The School of

Strategy [*bing jia*] in the Context of Chinese Civilization'; *East and West* 35; 1965; pp. 167-210 (which supplements his work with Joseph Needham in Vol. 5, No. 6 of *Science and Civilization in China*) and Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*; Oxford; 1992 which considerably updates the conflicts between the Confucians and the Daoists.

For a recent overview of the field, see: Karel van der Leeuw; 'The State of Chinese Philosophy in the West: A Bibliographic Introduction'; *China Review International* (U. of Hawaii); Vol. 6; No. 2 Fall, 1999; pp. 312-353. Also available at <http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/cri/6.2leeuw.pdf>

For recent bibliographies, see works by Thomas Cleary and Ralph Sawyer.

For a military-based interpretation of the *Dao De Jing*, see, for example, *The Dao of Peace: Lessons from Ancient China on the Dynamics of Conflict*; Wang Chen; Ralph Sawyer (trans.); Shambala; 1999.

For comparison with the Western point of view on subjects such as cunning, see Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant; *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Janet Lloy, trans.); Univ. Of Chicago Press; 1978.

For modern, often unconscious use of the 36 Strategies in China, see: Tony Fang; *Chinese Business Negotiating Style*; International Business Series; Sage Publications; 1999. (His description of the relation of early Daoism to Confucianism seems slightly flawed, however, perhaps because of his Confucian sympathies).

(5) Hong Sung Hwa; *First Kyu*; Good Move Press; 1999.

(6) See FN (31) for a variant tale.

(7) Kathryn Gabriel; *Gambler Way*; Johnson Books; 1996; pp. 21-5. Most of the North American Indian game and gambling observations come from this unique book.

(8) See for example William G. Boltz; 'Kung Kung and the Flood: Reverse Euhemerism in the Yao Tian'; *T'oung Pao* LXVII; 1981; 3-5; Lo Chung Hong; 'The Metamorphosis of Ancient Chinese Myths'; *Journal of Oriental Studies* XXXIII No. 2; 1995; and Walen Lai's cross-cultural writings in *History of Religions*.

(9) Sarah Allan; *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*; Chinese Materials Center; San Francisco; 1981.

(10) Lo Chung Hong, *op. cit.* p. 192

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) Capitalizing the word 'Dao' was a missionary-inspired device that mirrored their concept that there could be only one God, therefore, there could only be one *Dao*.

The 'small art' quote from Mencius:

*Now go playing is but a small art, but without his whole mind being given and his will bent to it, a man cannot succeed at it. Go Ch'iu is the best go player in all the kingdom. Suppose that he is teaching two men to play. The one gives to the subject his whole mind and bends to it all his will, doing nothing but listening to Go Ch'iu. The other, though he seems to be listening to him, has his whole mind running on a swan which he thinks is approaching, and wishes to bend his bow, adjust the string to the arrow, and shoot it. Although he is learning along with the other, he does not come up to him. Why? – Because his intelligence is not equal? Not so.*

Translated by James Legge; *The Ch'un Ts'ew with The Tso Chuan; The Chinese Classics V* (reprinted by Southern Materials Center; Taipei, 1983; p. 517), quoted by Donald L. Potter; 'Go in the Classics'; *Go World*; No. 37; Autumn; 1984.

Mencius's moral parallelisms were often mocked by his more rigorous and logical-minded rival philosophers. See Chad Hansen, *op. cit.*

(13) See Footnote 3.

(14) Paolo Zanon; 'The Opposition of the Literati to the Game of Wei Qi in Ancient Times'; *Asian and African Studies*; Slovak Academy of Sciences; Vol. 5 No. 1; 1996; p. 72.

(15) Zanon, *op. cit.*; p. 74.

(16) D.W. Pankenir; 'Astronomical Dates in Shang and Western Zhou'; *Early China*; Vol. 7; 1981-2.

(17) *Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu*; edited by Donald Keene; Columbia; 1961; p.120. For the importance of *yin* and *yang* in the play, see C. Andrew Gerstle; 'Circles of Fantasy: Convention in the Plays of Chikamatsu'; *Council on East Asian Studies*; Harvard; 1986; 109-111.

(18) I have misplaced the reference.

(19) Yasunaga *op. cit.*

(20) See Shotwell; 'Go in the Snow'; *Go World* 69; Autumn; 1993 and in the reedited version on this website: *Go in Ancient and Modern Tibet*. Another interesting anomaly of Tibetan go – that one must wait a move before killing a group or before playing on territory where a stone has been killed, would seem to stem from the influence of later, benevolent Buddhism.

(21) Stephen L. Field; 'The Numerology of 9-Star Feng Shui: A *hetu luoshu* Resolution of the Mystery of Directional Auspice'; *Journal of Chinese Religions*; Vol. 27; 1999; pp. 13-21 especially.

(22) *Ibid.*

(23) *Ibid.*

(24) Gabriel *op. cit.* pp. 14-5.

(25) *China Archeological Journal*; August; 1986. Mr. Tang was very generous in sharing his unpublished thoughts about these findings, which I published originally in *The American Go Journal* 30, No. 3.

(26) *Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*; edited by Dennis Sinor; Cambridge; 1990; p. 91.

(27) See Shotwell; *The Games of Go and Chess: Reflections in Language, Philosophy, Psychology, Computer and Educational Studies*; pp. 1-2 on this website for a fuller explanation. See also my forthcoming book for Charles Tuttle Publishers.

(28) A Bon challenged an encroaching Indian Buddhist to a game of go in a best of three match. The Bon won (presumably because he had played the game more than the Indian). See Yian Zhen Zhong; 'Symbolism of Black and White in Tibet'; *Tibetan Culture Magazine*; 1992. (In Chinese) and Shotwell; 'Go in the Snow'; *Go World* No. 63 Winter 1993, revised edition: *The Game of Go in Ancient and Modern Tibet* on this website.

(29) From Yian Zhen Zhong; *op. cit.*; translation by Sonam Chogyi.



(30) [Emperor Yao] had a habit of touring his kingdom with the company of his administration and observed the need of his people. One day, he came to the Xuan Yuan Mountain of I County (Anhui) and was tired. Yao fell asleep and had a dream. He dreamt of Emperor Huang Di playing a game of Weiqi against a fairy Yong Cheng. Yao had never seen this game before. Huang Di explained to him that he invented this game in preparation for a battle against the fierce tribal leader Chi You. Black and White stones represent soldiers from both sides. With this game, Huang Di defeated Chi You. Yao asked Huang Di to teach him the game. After he woke up, Yao reconstructed the rules based on his memory. Because of this, Zhang Hua of Han Dynasty wrote in *Bowuzhi*, 'Yao created Weiqi.' Dan Zhu was the son of Yao's concubine San I. After Yao grew up, he loved to play and had no interest in studying. To enlighten Dan Zhu, Yao taught Dan Zhu Weiqi. Due to Dan Zhu's playful nature, he was quick in learning the game and soon beat his father. Zhang Hua recorded in *Bowuzhi*, 'Dan Zhu was great in Weiqi.' Unfortunately, Dan has no interest in anything else besides Weiqi. When Yao was advanced in age he decided to elect a Tiandi Official to replace Yihe. His followers recommended Dan Zhu but Yao disagreed, stating that Dan was no good in anything else other than Weiqi. Yao appointed Shun as his successor, giving his two daughters to Shun as wives. Eventually Dan Zhu was exiled to Yan (Yan Zhu Cheng of Shandong).

From <http://www.yutopian.com>

Perhaps this non-standard variation is a later-period tale. Along with its strong Daoist folktale-like overtones, it retains the Confucian Han prejudice against go and the idea that Yao did not invent, but only transmitted the game of go.

(31) Pinckard, *op cit*.

(32) Margaret Nowak and Stephen Durrant; *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness: A Manchu Folk Epic*; Univ. of Washington Press; 1977.

(33) From Edward Tyler; 'The History of Games'; *The Study of Games*; Avedon and Sutton-Smith editors; John Wiley & Sons, 1971; pp. 63-76, quoted in Gabriel, *op. cit.* p. 11

(34) When it comes to details, Meme Theory is very controversial, but the basic ideas seem sound enough to use as an illustration of the process of transmission of cultural artifacts.

(35) The Tang poet Meng Qiao wrote a Daoist-inspired poem after visiting the Stone Bridge area. The rainbow the woodcutter sees indicates he is coming back from the 'Other Side.' When he returned to his village, everyone he knew was dead and his name had been forgotten.

*In the immortal world what one day sees  
For the human world a thousand years lacks*

*Two qi players have not surrounded their positions  
While 10,000 earthly matters have emptied*

*The woodchopper turns to the path home  
His axe handle rotten from the wind*

*The only thing left is the Stone Bridge  
He alone sees across an orange-red rainbow*

(36) For an interesting commentary on the subject, see the controversial 'historical psychiatrist' Julian Jaynes; *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*; Houghton-Mifflin; Reissue Edition 1990. Although Jaynes did not include China in his survey of early consciousness (which seems to fit his case perfectly), his theory (which has been heavily criticized by historical scholars) is related to other 'non-traditional' attempts to link the changes in religious worship and culture to changes in the evolving nature of consciousness and the development of writing.

(37) For a general overview of these attitudes, see Donald Potter; 'The Three Virtues of Go'; *Go World*; No. 41; Autumn; 1985, Paolo Zanon; 'The Opposition of the Literati to the Game of Weiqi in Ancient China'; *Asian and African Studies*; Vol. 5; No. 1; 1996; pp. 70-82, Zu-Yan Chen; 'The Art of Black and White: Wei-Qi in Chinese Poetry'; *Journal of the American Oriental Society*; Vol. 117; No. 4; 1997; pp. 643-53.

See also, Peter Shotwell; 'Doers and Dreamers: The Go Poetry of Su Shi and Chi Yun'; *American Go Journal*; Vol. 33; No. 3; Fall; 1999, updated and expanded on this website, which extends Chen's discussion of the Daoist 'peaceful' elements in Shi and Yun's poetry to include what seem to be implicit and subtle motifs of revenge.

(38) Japp K. Blom; 'Go in Europe in the 17th Century'; *Go World*; No. 27; Spring; 1982 p. 51 and in his expanded version in Bozulich (ed.); *The Go Player's Almanac 2001*; Kiseido; 2001.

(39) The second oldest reference to go, if it is authentic, states:

*Pu Song (or Wu Cao), an immortal or a learned person of the Warring States Period (c. 700 BC), (played?) (made?) (gambled at?) wei qi.*

This was written down during the Ming dynasty c. 1300 AD by a writer who was quoting an earlier source. Liu Shan Cheng, the editor of *Zhunguo Weiqi*, denies its authenticity because, he says, 'In the books that have survived, Wu Cao is only mentioned as making (*zuo*) *liu bo* (and not *wei qi*).' This does not make much sense, as Li Jin Zhou of the University of Hawaii pointed out in a personal communiqué:

*In the Ming quote, the "gambling" character mentioned in the text as part of a two-character phrase does not mean "learned," as it sometimes does, since here it has the "shell" (money) radical. This is followed by the characters for wei qi. Thus, the case for saying or not saying, 'Wu Cao gambled at go,' will have to rest until the original source is discovered.*

(40) Before his death, Dr. Hong Sung Hwa, author of *First Kyu*, commented that the Korean practice of *bagneki* betting – the greater the win, the greater the amount won – also results in a wilder style of games. Stirred on by 'trash-talking,' the player who is ahead wants to win by a lot and the one behind tends to take greater chances on long shots, deepening the drama and psychological involvement.

(41) The text and Ming commentary in Chinese appear in Robert van Gulik; *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period With an essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty BC 206-AD 1644*; 2 folio 91/12; Tokyo, 1951 as quoted in Gawlikowsky, *op. cit.*; pp. 194-5. Much of the material presented in this section comes from his article.

(42) Translated by Watson, Pozdneeva and Gawlikowski in Needham, Yates, Gawlikowsky, McEwen, and Ling; *Science and Civilization in China*; Vol. 5 No. 6; 1994; p. 90.

(43) Ma Xiaochun; *The Thirty-Six Stratagems Applied to Go* (translated by Roy C. Schmidt); Yutopian; Santa Monica; 1996.

There were more subtle meanings that could be extracted from the 36 Strategies, often by looking at the hexagrams that accompanied them (At least some in the *I Jing* have always been thought to have contained war instruction).

For example, on the surface, the 15th Strategy, 'Lure the tiger down from the mountain,' seems to mean that it is easier to hunt a tiger on the plains than in its mountain jungle habitat, or as the go proverb advises, 'Do not play where your opponent is strong.'

In a larger sense, it could also mean that it was wiser to net a tiger than to try to meet him head-on. Once this was done, dogs rather than men could be used to finish the tiger off. As mentioned in the text, this was the technique of early Chinese hunting which evolved into war techniques as demonstrated in A.A. Serkina; 'Znacenie oboty v Kitae v epobu gadatelnyh kostej' ('On the Significance of Hunting in the Oracle-bone Period'); *Kratkie Izvestija Instituta Narodov Azii AN SSSR*; 1963; no. 61, pp. 88-95, cited in Galikowski; *op. cit.*; p. 188.

Since the strategies were Daoism in action, they did not focus on giving set answers to specific situations. Rather, their purpose seems to be for awakening the reasoning powers when analyzing a situation. The point of the 15th strategy seems to call attention to who is the hunter and who is the hunted. Consequently, who thought they were the hunter (and acted accordingly) and who thought they were the hunted could be used by the astute strategist. It might be, as happened continually in the war that Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Ze Dong fought in the 1930s and 40s, that in some situations, the important thing was not the tiger, but the tiger's home in the mountain, which would be left defenseless when it was down on the plain.

The 23rd strategy, 'Befriend those far-away while attacking those near-by' (and whose hexagram is 'Fire on the Lake') was one that Qin Shi Huang was advised to use in order to forge the first empire of China out of the Warring States.

However, since the intention is that those far away will soon become neighbors, the idea of this strategy is to imply that, in order to remain strong, it is best to create suspicions as to who is a friend and who is not. That way they will fight each other and become weak. In other words, as on the go board, the advice is to 'think globally, act locally' and steer the opponent towards contradictions and self-destruction in a true Daoist way.

(44) James Legge; *The Ch'un Ts'ew with The Tso Chuan; The Chinese Classics V* (reprint); Southern Materials Center; Taipei, 1983; p.

517, as quoted by Donald L. Potter; 'Go in the Classics'; *Go World*; No. 37; Autumn; 1984.

(45) See Fang, *op. cit.* Scott Boorman's book, *The Protracted Game: A Wei-Ch'i Interpretation of Maoist Revolutionary Strategy*, Oxford; 1969 maintained that Mao's strategies were 'like' go strategies, however there were many flaws in his reasoning. Mao himself said his thoughts were based on *cheng yu* (beginning with *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and Chinese professional go players told me that it was only a pleasant 'myth' that he was thinking of go. Surprisingly, although there are many references to go as war, there are very few tales of warriors laying out battle strategies with go stones.

(46) Manfred Eigan and Ruthilde Winkler; *The Laws of the Game: How the Principles of Nature Govern Chance*; Harper and Row; 1983.

**Two Additions to  
'The Game of Go: Speculations on its Origins and Symbolism  
in Ancient China'**

By Peter Shotwell

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I. A Synopsis and Commentary on Dr. Paolo Zanon's 'Philosophical Discussions on the Game of Weiqi in the Times of the Warring States and the Han Dynasty'

II. The Application of a Structural Anthropological Interpretation of the Yao Myths to Dr. Wim van Binsbergen's Analysis of the History of Board Games and Divination from the Marxian Point of View of the Shift in Food Production from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic Periods.

*When I revised 'Speculations' in early 2002, I was unaware of two articles which would have greatly added to its various theses. One was*

*the most elegant presentation in English of the theory that go developed from, or at least was associated with Warring State divination practices. With his permission, Dr. Paolo Zanon's article is now posted in the Bob High Memorial Library at this site and it should be read in its entirety. For the sake of coherence and focus, however, a synopsis of it is presented before my commentary.*

*The second Addition is the result of applying the mythology and principles of go to the Dutch anthropologist Dr. Wim van Binsbergen's study on the history of the gaming and divination aspects of mancala in Africa and the Mideast. The completed form of his work was only recently posted on the Internet, although it was published in preliminary forms in various European journals over the last decade.*

**I. A Synopsis and Commentary on Dr. Paolo Zanon's 'Philosophical Discussions on the Game of Weiqi in the Times of the Warring States and the Han Dynasty' (*Ludica, annali di storia e civiltà del gioco*, 2, 1996; Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche/Viella; pp. 7-19).**

### **Synopsis of the Article**

Dr. Zanon first noted the paucity of early literary references except for mainly negative Confucian and Mohist reactions. These reactions, he suggested, were not necessarily the personal opinions of the authors. Instead, they perhaps represented philosophical inclinations fostered by the game's association with their rivals, the Daoists.

The Daoist features of go included the principle of two antagonizing forces in a perpetual struggle; the principle of a *qi* energy flowing through the lines of the board that makes the stones live; the filling of emptiness with fullness while leaving parts empty to insure life of the stones; and the spontaneous (*ziran*) way of go playing. Because the ancient Daoist texts



do not mention the game, however, indications that go was part of the Daoist matrix must come from other sources.

Dr. Zanon cited two appearances of the word *qi* ('pieces') – *qi* was the Southern name of the game and also of its implements – as being associated with go and divination practices in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. He also brought forth Joseph Needham's theory (from *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 4 1962, pp. 315-32) that Chinese board games derived from Daoist divination practices associated with a proto-*xiangqi* ('chess') game, consisting of image pieces and magnets.

Apparently, Needham disputed his collaborator Yang Lien-sheng's translation of the words *xiang qi* in the poem *Zhao Hun*, from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC *Chuci*, (*The Elegies of Chu*). Appearing together, they would have meant 'chess,' but not until the Tang Dynasty c. 700 AD, when the game seems to have been invented or introduced from foreign sources. Dr. Yang and most translators agree that the appearance of the two words side-by-side in *Zhao Han* was coincidental and *xiang qi* meant, in this case, 'ivory pieces' for the game *liu bo* (*xiang* is also the word for 'elephant').

However, Dr. Zanon, along with Dr. Yang, agreed with Needham that go and other board games had divinatory origins, and Dr. Zanon drew attention to the fact that the poem is about the shamanistic summoning the soul of a dead person. However, Needham and Yang did not identify the type of divination that might have been involved.

Dr. Zanon, looking at the system developed by the contemporary Sinologue Pang Pu for classifying three early schools of divination on the basis of their numerology, suggested that in the South, where the game was known by the word *qi*, go stones were the 'same' or 'similar' to the implements used in the dualist divination system that developed in the Yangzi River Valley. Later, this system became part of the more formal philosophies of the schools of Daoism and *Yin-Yang* theory.

When divining, the proto-Daoist practitioners threw sticks of split bamboo onto the ground. In silhouette, these were shaped like modern Chinese go stones, with one side flat and the other convex. Different meanings were attached to different combinations when they landed on one side or the other.

Noting that *qi* has a wooden radical, Dr. Zanon quoted the *Hanfeizi* to the effect that a king had ordered stick-like wooden 'pieces' (*qi*) to be made along with throwing sticks which he presumably used to 'play . . . with the heavenly deities' on a mountain top.' (p. 12)

Similar to the divining sticks were *jian*, split pieces of bamboo that were used to write on before the invention of paper. One obscure text notes that, 'In Eastern Han (25-230 AD) the heart of *jian* was black and white and this is why some people reject *wei qi* players.' (p. 12)

Dr. Zanon then suggested that early Confucians might have objected to the game, not only because of its relationship with gambling and un-filial behavior, but because playing the game suggested to them the worthless, time-wasting Daoist practice of using their divining sticks to obtain answers from the dead.

When go was taken up in the north, Dr. Zanon proposed, it had no shamanistic associations and the word *yi* was used, with a radical of two counterpoised hands that emphasized the contestual aspects of the game.

However, the Mohists and Confucians still philosophically associated the game with war and Legalism (an off-shoot of Daoism) and this was the feeling that carried over into the Han Confucian period (206 BC-220 AD), as testified by their negative remarks. In that period, *wei qi* ('surrounding *qi*') had become the common word for the game, while *yi* was retained as the literary name. However, Dr. Zanon suggested, its shamanistic roots were gradually forgotten, as shown by an exegesis of a confusing passage of Sima Qian, describing the constellation Ji. Dr. Zanon showed how the constellation might have originally been associated with *qi* pieces and, for this reason, might have had divinatory overtones. Not knowing this, the passage had been mistranslated by later commentators.

In conclusion, as he demonstrated more fully in his other two articles on go (available at <http://www.figg.org/docs/index.html>), Dr. Zanon proposed that, until the time of the Song dynasty (c. 1000-1100 AD), the *literati* generally rejected the game until the Confucians were able to assimilate the Daoist elements of the game into their own world-view, as

he shows, in the best analysis in English, how the atypical Ban Gu and Huang Xian had done long before during the Han period.

### **Commentary**

Dr. Zanon's research would have enhanced the material in my essay by adding details about the relationship of go with the philosophical world-views of early Daoism, Confucianism, Mohism and Legalism, and the linking of go with earth-oriented divination, rather than the sky-oriented versions that have commonly appeared in go histories.

However, his evidence does not necessarily confirm that an evolution occurred that transformed Daoist divinatory practices into go, or that go implements were ever used for divination.

Even though the poem *Zhao Hun* is an invocation of the spirit of a dead man, Dr. Zanon cautions that the *qi* does not mean go stones and there is no suggestion that the *liu bo qi* pieces were meant to be interpreted as being anything other than part of a list of his grave goods.

As for Needham's theses, when he wrote in 1962, Chinese board games were thought to be no older than the Han period, so he was quite

likely looking only at artifacts of that age. Possibly, he was thinking of uses for divinatory *shi* boards, which sometimes employed a spoon-like magnet whose uses may have been more wrapped in mystery in his time than they are today (one is illustrated in my essay). There is no evidence that his image game ever existed and, in the first few issues of the magazine *Early China*, a debate among Sinologists concluded that no games were associated with its use.

Moreover, the other appearances of the word *qi* in the early literature indicate only that *qi* (derived from *qizi*) was a general word meaning 'pieces.' In the passage quoted from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* ('. . . on the top [*of that mountain*] there are some stones, called "Emperor's pavilion pieces" [*qi*], multi-coloured and striped, shaped like quail's eggs. Emperor's pavilion stones are used to invoke all the ghosts and, if eaten, prevent intestinal worms' [p. 10]) does not really describe go stones, which cannot be multicolored or rounded. In no case do the passages where the word appears imply that go pieces were being thought of, let alone were being used in a divinatory way.

On the other hand, Dr. Zanon's thesis that the similarities of the two activities – the use of black and white colors and the similarity of the 'action' and the words – could certainly have encouraged Confucius and others from the North to draw analogies between the uses of the two types of *qi*. But this does not imply that one activity led to the other in historical terms.

As discussed in the second section of these Additions below, there is a possibility that strategy board games and divination could have developed side-by-side from a common source of ritual as a result of the changeover from Paleolithic hunting/gathering to Neolithic agricultural and animal husbandry styles of food production. This was demonstrated by Wim van Binsbergen to be possible in the history of mancala in Africa and the mid-East, and it might have also happened with go and divination in China, if go is that old. Go, after all, begins as a hunting game and ends with the acquisition of territory. Coupled with an examination of the structure of the myth that King Yao descended from the heavens, bringing the game *and* divination tools with him, it seems that go might fit into van Binsbergen's thesis down to the finest details.

When these new ideas are coupled with the facts that divination sticks and go stones do not look alike, that go is such a simple game that it would not necessarily have needed to be ‘invented’ from divinatory tools – it could have been simply ‘discovered’ – and, given the discoveries of 4-5,000 year-old Chinese and Siberian piles of ‘game-like’ stones and their position near the right shoulder in the Shang period tombs, pause should be given before accepting the standard anthropological analysis that divination practices (and/or games of chance, for that matter) necessarily led to the development of strategy board games.

In regard to the question of when the game became acceptable to the Confucian *literati*, a wide popularization occurred in the Song period with the publication of *The Classic of Go*, but Go had already been termed one of the ‘Four Arts’ by c. 750 AD. Also, as illustrated by Dr. Chen Zu-yan’s ‘The Art of Black and White’ (elsewhere in the Bob High Library), a favorable Confucian/Daoist/Buddhist fusion-inspired poetry began to appear as early as c. 600 AD.



## **II. The Application of a Structural Anthropological Interpretation of the Yao Myths to Dr. Wim van Binsbergen's Analysis of the History of Board Games and Divination from the Marxian Point of View of the Shift in Food Production from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic Periods.**

*Adapted from a paper delivered to the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Go sponsored by the Department of Baduk Studies, Myongji University at the 2003 European Go Congress in St. Petersburg, Russia.*

*Dr. Wim van Binsbergen is a Marxist-oriented Dutch eclectic anthropologist who argues that the game of mancala and mancala used as a divination tool enjoyed a parallel development from ritual and that the former activity did not evolve from the latter practice. Instead, they – and board games in general – were a necessary response to the changes that occurred as humankind moved from late Paleolithic village hunting/gathering, in which people were more or less equal, to a food production system in the Neolithic that required hierarchies and new thought processes to develop and manage the techniques needed for the development of agriculture and animal husbandry. This is because*

*archeology has revealed that the game and the divination system appeared at that certain point in cultural development in many societies spread from Africa to China.*

*van Binsbergen cautioned that he was only speculating and was often moving outside his field of expertise, but that those interested in the history of games ‘would understand’ (as I hope they do also about my own work!). Facts are few about early board games, but examining them carefully, he feels, can lead to a greater understanding of those vast social changes that occurred so long ago.*

*His remarks about the change from Paleolithic to Neolithic as fostering the development of board games can easily be extended to the myth of King Yao in China descending from the Heavens with his go board, divinatory equipment, calendars, and agricultural and animal husbandry techniques. Not only that, but they can also shed light on a fuller meaning of what happened afterwards.*

*There are many versions of the Yao myth, but in the best-known, his first-born son by his first earthly wife, Dan Ju, became the ‘best’ player of the court. However, Dan Ju was ‘rebellious’ and ‘quarrelsome,’ so his*

*father 'tired of him.' When Yao abdicated the throne and passed it on to his friend and advisor, the common farmer Shun, Dan Ju fled, allied himself with a primitive tribe who lived along the Yellow River, and was killed fighting Yao and Shun. Shun then went on to found the Xia dynasty, one that is now known to have actually existed. It is important to note, however, that in other versions, Dan Ju was portrayed as rightfully fighting Shun for his inheritance, because it was Shun who had usurped the throne by tricking Yao.*

*It should be emphasized that I am only concentrating on what is related in the myth of Yao, and not on the reality of the time of the changeover from Paleolithic to Neolithic to the Bronze Age in China. One estimate for the end of the Neolithic in China is c. 1900 BC, and Yao dates to 2100 BC, so the myth may have been formed before this, or perhaps it summed up events from a much earlier time.*

*It does not seem important to this argument that go and mancala developed in different ways. Aside from the use of two differing names – yi in the north and qi in the south – there is little to indicate that go emerged independently in different regions as it did with mancala.*

*Also, although Chinese civilization is now known to have developed in a number of regions outside the Yellow River basin, other than the superficial resemblance of go to Daoist divination that was noted in the first Addition, no parallel system of divination seems to have developed using go equipment as it did with mancala. Instead, the emphasis in this article is how, from the structural anthropological point of view described in my essay, the Yao myth might be interpreted as a memorial of the changes wrought in China by the shift in food production and how the presence of go in the story might interrelate to them.*

*Because a book that was going to include his article was not published, van Binsbergen's 'Board-games and Divination in Global Cultural History: A Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Perspective on Mankala and Geomancy in Africa and Asia' is available only at his website (without page notation) at*

[http://www.shikanda.net/ancient\\_models/gen3/mankala/mankala1.htm](http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/gen3/mankala/mankala1.htm)

*Like my own articles, it should be read for further details, footnoting and bibliography that are not provided in this Addition. It should also be*

*noted that I quote him extensively in order to more accurately portray his thought.*

van Binsbergen began by discussing the first problem with finding patterns of 'mancala-style' depressions in rocks (which go back 35,000 years) and early clay bricks (c. 7000 BC). This is to resist the modern anthropological tendency to call them 'game boards.' For example, in one site he investigated, he thought that the cup-like depressions cut into a rock were quite probably the representation of a constellation and were not involved in either divination or game playing, but were rather the result of ordinary rituals which perhaps had filled them with food offerings.

Turning next to cultural anthropology, he was able to discuss, with an insight uncommon in anthropology, the problem of the origins of divination and board games and how these developments interrelate. This is probably because he was, for a number of decades, a practicing 'shaman' in Africa, where he presumably became a skilled mancala player like a number of other anthropologists who have studied the game.

*In ways which create ample room for the display of cosmological and mythical elements, divination and board-games constitute a manageable miniature version of the world, where space is transformed space: bounded, restricted, parceled up, thoroughly regulated; and where time is no longer . . . 'real time' . . . [This] is clearest when divination makes pronouncements about the past and the future. Utterly magical, board-games and divination systems are space-shrinking time-machines.*

*. . . [Moreover,] divination is meaningful because it actively and explicitly reconstitutes the person in relation to the social and natural environment. And much as theoreticians of play would tend to emphasise the escapist or deliberately non-utilitarian, purpose-free nature of play, in board-games too there is this element of reconstitution, of learning from vicarious experience which, if nothing else, conveys the message that basic configurations of man's confrontation with the natural and social environment (including competition and conflict) be represented, schematised, played out, and thus be rendered more transparent and manageable.*

There is also a similarity between board games and divination if one looks at the narrative qualities of the two activities.

*[It is clear] . . . that the temporal structure of the game is complex, ambiguous, dynamic, opaque. It cannot be readily reduced to only one of the three popular formulae of linearity, circularity and punctuality which have haunted the philosophical and anthropological literature on time . . . In fact, all three forms of temporality occur at the same time, in an admixture which may well constitute one of the basic characteristics of the mankala family of games, as well as the main reason for their virtually ubiquitous distribution and appeal . . . The game is not only a time machine, it is a time symphony, and it amounts to a practical philosophy of time.*

*A similar case could be made with regard to the divination session. . . . Against the diffuse and unbounded structure of everyday life is offset the session's structured temporal format, with a clear beginning and end, and with a sequential temporal structure where question-throw-verbal interpretation-question-throw etc. succeed each other . . . the temporal structure of the divinatory session consists in a subtle combination of all*

*three major modes of conceptualising time as can be distinguished analytically. This is why the divination session constitutes the minimal ritual par excellence, . . . in fact, much of what I have said about divination applies to ritual in general, and suggests that ritual, much like the music that often accompanies it, is a form of time art.*

*The argument so far suggests that the board-game and the divination session are not just alternative, parallel ways of dealing with time. They are not merely complementary to whatever may exist in the way of a conceptualisation of time in everyday life; alongside the latter they are the opposite of being unnecessary, playful, virtual. On the contrary, I submit that as implicit models of time the conceptual effects of these formal systems and the ‘virtual’ experience they engender, shades over onto everyday life. Here they provide some of the few available conceptualisations of time within the local culture. Starting out as models of everyday temporality, they turn around and breed a more structured sense of temporality in their own right. Thus they seem to provide the experimental grounds upon which a structured time sense is tested out*



*and from which it may be extended so as to temporally restructure experiences in everyday life.*

*The formal nature of divination and board-games lies not merely in the existence of formal rules, but in the saturation of these rules with fundamental structural themes (e.g. such basic oppositions as odd/even, male/female, life/death, high/low, white/ black), which form the basis for a rich imagery and inform the dynamics of the session. . . . their articulation would seem to be related to man's most fundamental formalism, the one with the highest survival value: early forms of counting, arithmetic, representation and manipulation of numbers.*

For van Binsbergen, the one difference between game playing and divination is that, in seeking knowledge, the client and diviner are confronting an unknown force greater than themselves. This is true for games, he wrote, only if the game is one of chance, using for example, dice, to generate the moves. However, his argument could be easily extended to games of strategy (like mancala) if the old Chinese view about go is inserted: the opponent is symbolic of unpredictable Nature, particularly of the Flood (due to its association with Yao as Flood-tamer).

In a strategy game, one can never be sure of what the opponent is going to do.

van Binsbergen continued that both divination and gaming produce a narrative between two people (the two players or the client and the diviner) that unfolds as the action proceeds. This story could concern the future of an individual, but it also could symbolize the handling of cattle, the handling of women, the hoarding of kings, and so on, as the pieces (usually seeds) move around the mancala board and accumulate or are taken off the board. It is after the game/session that the knowledge gained is returned to the real world in the form of strategies, changes in worldview, etc.

In conclusion, he suggested that there might have been a parallel and not a sequential development – divination did not necessarily engender the game of mancala, but both were concerned with the same things and probably developed side by side using the same implements. In the case of mancala, as mentioned, he proposed that they sprang from earlier ritual – the placing of offerings to the dead in multi-holed receptacles of various patterns. These offerings would have been

products such as food and liquid that sprang from the earth, which the ancestors who lived there gave to the living.

The reason that divination and game playing developed from ritual was because they were part of a 'protean package' which included new political structures, roles and personal outlooks resulting from the shift in the modes of food production from late Paleolithic hunting/gathering to Neolithic agriculture and animal husbandry. This caused the greatest changes in the concepts of Time and Space in the history of humankind

Early agricultural space, van Binsbergen suggested, was separated from the wildness of nature by not only fences, but by geometry (which later developed into geomancy). In the process of developing the agricultural potential, (ideally square) fields would be tilled in straight lines or would be molded into a grid system of dykes or irrigation ditches that could hold, charge or discharge water. This geometry is what is incorporated into the symbolism of early games and divination, he contended, along with the symbolism of the action of the game, such as the aforementioned Neolithic-styled hoarding and/or distribution principles in mancala. In fact, some early clay mancala boards resembled narrow go

boards, with square, raised intersections forming a grid, within whose spaces the mancala playing or divining pieces would be placed.

It is interesting to contrast the facts that mancala play takes place inside the square depressions, while go takes place on the intersections. The Chinese have, since the times of the oracle bones, held the basic philosophical view that the flow of *qi* acts much like water and can be controlled. If the stones in go were placed inside the squares, it would not make sense with the Chinese idea of *qi* running along protrusions in the landscape, such as along the square dyke ridges or along the courses of water, as outlined in my essay and in Dr. Zanon's article above. However, in mancala, the placing of seeds in the depressions would fit into the African/Mideast conceptions that the ancestors provided food for the living that would grow up from the centers of their fields (there is also an analogy to animal corrals).

The word 'recreation' not being an idle word, it is easy to extend van Binsbergen's thesis to a game like go, whose central principle not only recreates the Paleolithic hunting styles with its capture-by-surrounding principle, but then naturally evolves into the new Neolithic-style

acquisition of arable land as a mark of success, as the idea of territories on the board naturally form out of the process of making internal eyes and controlling 'inner' space.

Additionally, besides containing the symbolism of what it takes to be successful in the new economy, the grid of the board recalls the former economic-generating patterns of nets and traps, a symbol which appears abundantly in the earliest pottery in China and throughout the world.

Indeed, as van Binsbergen points out, according to the Sinologist Wang Hongyan, the prototype of the Chinese sign for 'field' may have originally represented the footprints of game. How the two activities were even further symbolically related was commented on by van Binsbergen:

*. . . let us not close our eyes for the temporal and spatial dimension of hunting as an earlier form of food production, and once perhaps just as much of a revolution as compared to simple food gathering, as the Neolithic revolution was as compared to hunting. Especially when using traps, hunting also involves the transformation of the natural environment in the form of bounded space (the trap as against its surroundings) and articulated time (the rhythm of inspecting, emptying and re-charging the*

*traps; and especially the cultivation of the right infinitesimal moment, for the trap to spring or for the hunter to make the kill . . . [or for the agriculturist to make the harvest]).*

*The presence of hunting imagery in board-games and divination systems . . . is probably not merely a playful, nostalgic reminder of obsolete, once dominant, forms of food production. [Several authors have argued that] . . . abstraction was already taking place in the Upper Paleolithic. In other words, the Neolithic is not a total break, a total innovation, and certain features of hunting . . . must have helped to prepare Man for board-games and divination, for formal systems in general, perhaps for religion in the stricter sense of the word, and possibly even, to some extent, for agriculture and animal husbandry. . . .*

The revolutionary changes in the use of Space then necessitated a change in the concept of Time. It was altered from the built-in seasonality of the previous Paleolithic hunting period to a more rigorous need for knowing the critical moments of when to plant, cultivate and be rewarded with a harvest. This generated a need for thinking about and trying to divine the 'right moment' for taking action. (In early China, this concept,

explored by Michael Lowe, was called *kan yu*). Since board games, particularly strategic board games, demanded the same mental efforts, both activities would have been useful in preparing people's minds for the new kind of thinking that was needed in the new environment.

Noting that the representation of the character for 'field' is also the basis for 'male' in both the Mideast and in China (where it is its radical), van Binsbergen added to his analysis:

*Finally, the redefinition of space and time could only mean the redefinition (or the creation, in the first place?) of the notion of person, situated in new time and new space, and represented (both in board-games and in the divinatory apparatus) by external tangible, often anthropomorphic material objects moving, in his or her stead, through time and space – usually interacting with other persons so represented. Board-games and divination externalise, and offer new models of a redefined relationship between man and his physical environment, as well as between man and his social environment – with major roles of confrontation and competition being externalised in the apparatus and redefined as opponents in a schematised exchange dominated by explicit*

*rules (board-games), or as likely partners, enemies and witches (divination).*

Next, as kings and their courts and diviners replaced the traditional local authority based on status and cosmology, the need to control their new water-based agricultural systems created needs for men who could construct the formal and abstract proto-sciences of calendars, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, and writing, and a top-down centralized, political organization that could administer and protect their subjects from floods, wild beasts and other dangers.

Once order was established, playing board games and having the time to play them well was, in the case of mancala (and sometimes still is), an important signifier of royalty, along with such other objects as musical instruments. (One recalls the importance of the possession of bronze and musical instruments in ancient China.) In some areas of Africa, there are inaugural rituals that take place involving the king's game set or the creation of an auspicious new one.

van Binsbergen again cautioned about the extreme speculative nature of his proposals and added:



*Granted this, we should not fall into the trap . . . of assuming that between the structure of a production form, and the cultural forms associated with such a production form, a clear-cut one-to-one relationship should exist. Games emerging under conditions of Neolithic production may borrow – not only their underlying, tacit assumptions about space, time and the person but also – their symbolism and imagery from agriculture and animal husbandry. But it is equally likely that, while necessarily set within an implicit framework defined by these underlying assumptions, their explicit iconography is not excessively or even mainly taken from topical Neolithic referents but rather from other, earlier forms of production. The latter were once dominant and have subsequently been relegated to the periphery of the overall production system, where they then yield additional delicacies instead of staples, allowing producers to engage in exciting pastimes and specialisms (such as hunting and fishing) instead of day-to-day routines shared by everyone (such as tilling and herding). After all, we are dealing here with games, which are about fun and escape, not with manuals about how to be a good farmer or herdsman. Free variation, departure from everyday forms, norms and*

*routines, and a measure of unpredictability, are the hall mark of recreation as indeed they are of art and religion.*

van Binsbergen also discussed the development of astral symbolism in early board game/divination, which could have been the same in the Chinese experience. The First Great Division between Earth and Water took place during earth-oriented Shang and Xia dynasties and it was during the sky-oriented Zhou period when the Second Division took place between the Sky and Earth.

*. . . many board-games can be construed to have, among others, an astronomical or astrological reference. The grid, whose iconographic connotations with hunting and agriculture we have explored, and which is the basic pattern for the kind of structuration of space effected by the layout of the board-game, appears in Late Babylonian magic as the cuneiform representation of the constellations . . .*

*Taking on these astronomical elements, board-games certainly reflect a Neolithic concern with time reckoning and determining the correct time for planting, but the imagery is no longer agricultural. . . . A conceptual link can be surmised between the field and the stars: for the*

*field is not exclusively a useful patch of soil, it also stands out as the most conspicuous way in which man imposes his imprint on nature and thus creates order, culture, out of chaos . . . The game-board signifies both aspects, food and order, and as such can be said to be a veritable symbol of the world.*

It is possible to add several more thoughts about the application of the Chinese context to van Binsbergen's theses.

Since playing a strategy game as opposed to a game of chance requires a constant flexibility of judgment in weighing present advantage against a future benefit, one conceivable interpretation of the Yao myth by a Chinese audience would have been that a virtuous king was teaching go in order to improve his son's ability to deal strategically with hostile forces, such as other sons or the commoner Shun.

Since confrontations on strategic game boards mean there will be winners and losers – and 'yes' and 'no' answers on the diviner's board will be tested for their truth or falseness – the idea of gambling about the outcomes of predicting the future should probably also be included in the protean package that Yao was recorded as having brought down from the

Heavens to China. In this way, another link between board game playing and divination – and their possible parallel development – can be demonstrated.

As I wrote in my essay:

*[The] historical association of gambling and go leads to a further analysis of the game's presence in the Yao myth. In traditional societies, betting on games is a very 'sacred' activity – one which takes the participants in their passion close to a state of divine transcendence. In China, for example, the gods would bet their immortality playing at liu bo; in India the very universe is fueled by a never-ending strip game of parcheesi played between Shiva and Shakti.*

*Seen in this vein, the Yao myth can be considered as a gambling myth similar to those told by the North American Indians (which may have even originated in Asia). Like Yao, some of the Indians' gods came down to earth to gamble and created chaos [by winning the wives, children and finally the freedom of the men], a situation which was only remedied by extreme measures [of both men and other gods]. (p. 17)*

. . . . . *[In addition,] anthropologists have noted that, like playing fields, game boards began as altars to the sacred. Within the silent confines of these temple-like precincts consisting of marked-off spaces, nothing seemed fortuitous and everything was significant. It was there [where duality is inherent and reflects the opposites in nature] that magicians, priests, and gamesters could commence their work.*

*Thus, if the idea that go was a sacred activity because of, and not in spite of, its association with gambling, then its presence in the Yao myth could, in a single cultural artifact, be seen as an artful way of combining and symbolizing not only the highest rational qualities of humankind, but also those of its most irrational. (pp. 26-7)*

Looking at the Yao myth from a structural anthropological point of view, as outlined more fully in my essay, adds even more to the depth and strange beauty of the Yao story. Despite the many variations (in which no studies have been made of the differing role of the elements of go), there is general agreement that the original form of the Yao myth was a story of the ‘Taming of the Waters.’ Dan Ju – who is described in the same terms as the raging Yellow River – represents Water, Yao – whose

name means 'mountain' also represents the Sky, while Shun symbolizes the earth. In the traditional Chinese scheme of things, this was the 'First Great Division' between Earth and Water, because other parts of the Yao myth show how he controlled the floods for the first time – not by the brute force of dams, which burst, but by siphoning off the water with a series of ditches, much like the pattern of rice paddies – and go boards.

Thus, the way van Binsbergen looked at mancala adds to this scenario an image of a male sky god-become-king coming down from the heavens to protect and fertilize the Great Mother Earth, abode of the ancestors, with his calendars, divination tools and implements for developing agriculture and the keeping of animals. He also has his badge of Kingship and a sign of Her approval tucked under his arm – a square, earth-shaped go board with bags of stones (or seeds) to try to teach his first son how to think in conscious terms and survive in this brave, new world.

As Yao took his first stone from the 'world pool' in his bowl and placed it on the board, giving it 'life' as it absorbed the *qi* running along the lines, would he have seen this as a reenactment of his act of 'coming

down' onto Mother Earth? And when he made his first group with two eyes, was he showing his son how this act corresponded to the ancient Chinese idea that to be a complete personality, humans needed two souls. Was his go board also a 'textbook' for success in the new economy – the more land one had, the better off one was?

As for Dan Ju, a beginner, when he began putting his stones down, would he be at first thrilled to be playing a 'surrounding game' (cf. the 'modern' term *wei qi*) that was recreating the excitement of the hunting, trapping and warfare that came from the time of his mother and ancestors? Would he, however, have been able to see how that act of capturing would lead to even greater riches, not only because of the principles of surrounding would lead to the idea of making internal territory, but because he would be learning clever strategies, (later to become incorporated into the wisdom of the Dark School of Daoism) to acquire even more?

van Binsbergen, following many other Marxist thinkers, argues that playing board games also prepared humans symbolically, and in a more gentle fashion, with the idea that, in the new order, they had to accept the

fact that there were going to be those on top and those on the bottom of the social fabric. Instead of the old Paleolithic village where everyone was equal and related, and decisions were made in unison or by local authorities, the idea of kingship went hand in hand with the idea of oppression. Were the 'Dan Ju-friendly' versions of the Yao myth trying to say that it was these realizations that ultimately drove him to rebel, flee, link up with his more 'primitive' tribal allies and then try to destroy the system?