

## *Weiqi* (围棋) or Go

### A game of Strategy

Perhaps better known by the name of its Japanese derivative, Go, *weiqi* (围棋, *wéi qí*) is a territory control game played with a gridded board and 361 disc-shaped pieces. Unlike western Chess, there are no prescribed, piece-specific directional moves in Go, so that the combination possibilities are almost infinite. In the Tang Dynasty, one's ability to play Go was a measure of a person's gentility among the elites (men and women alike), along with calligraphy, music, and painting.<sup>1</sup> The earliest reliable record of the game comes from 548 BCE, making it possibly the oldest game that has been continuously played.<sup>2</sup>



The standard size Go board consists of a grid of 19 by 19 intersections, but variant boards have existed throughout history. The earliest extant board, a fragment from the mausoleum of Emperor Jing (r. 157-141 BCE) is 17 by 17.<sup>3</sup> Two more 17 by 17 boards were found in an Eastern Han Dynasty (dates) tomb and official Cao Teng's tomb (mid-second century). A 15 by 15 board was found in a tomb dated to the late Western Han Dynasty, and similar variants may have survived into the Tang or Liao periods. (dates).<sup>4</sup> The earliest 19 by 19 board is made of porcelain and dates to 595, and another is from the early Tang Dynasty, found in the tomb of Ran Rencai (598-652), who was Prefect of Yongzhou.<sup>5</sup>

To play *weiqi*, players take turns placing black and white stones on the board's intersections. Stones that are surrounded by enemy stones can be captured. Diagonal orientation does not count when assessing territory. The object of the game is to completely surround territories. Points are counted by the number of intersections a player controls, not counting the intersections covered by stones, and the number of opponent stones captured. The game ends when there is no territory left to claim or when both players agree to end the game.

Above: A woman playing *weiqi*, Astana Cemetery tomb 187, 8th century.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, C. & Finkle, I. (2004). p.187.

<sup>2</sup> American Go Association. (n.d.). *A brief history of Go*. Retrieved from <https://www.usgo.org/brief-history-go>

<sup>3</sup> Mackenzie, C. & Finkle, I. (2004). p.187

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.188

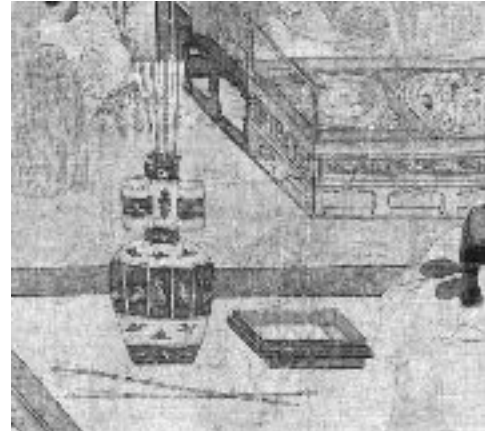
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> 围棋仕女图. [Painting of a Lady Playing Go.] (c. 744). [Mural.] Tomb 187, Astana Cemetery, Turpan, Xinjiang, China. Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum. Retrieved from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anonymous-Astana\\_Graves\\_Wei\\_Qi\\_Player.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anonymous-Astana_Graves_Wei_Qi_Player.jpg)

## Pitch Pot

A game of Skill

Pitch-pot (投壺, *tóu hú*), also known as *tōko* (とうこ) in Japan and *tuho* (투호) in Korea is a game of skill in which players take turns throwing blunted arrows into a vessel with a large belly and tall, narrow neck. When the game was created - likely by archers or soldiers passing the time - a run of the mill wine pot was probably pressed into service.<sup>7</sup> Pitch-pot is a game that splits the difference between similar skill-games played by children, such as tossing coins at a target, and more ritualistic and ceremonial archery competitions engaged in by adults.<sup>8</sup>



Each round of the game consists of 4 throws by each player, accompanied by drum music.<sup>9</sup> When played inside, a game consists of 5 rounds; when played in the “hall,” a game is 7 rounds; and when played outside, a game is 9 rounds. Players stand 2.5 arrow-lengths away from the pot.<sup>10</sup>

The score-keeper places a counter for each player when they score and announces the score at the end of each round, exchanging the counters of the winner for a “horse.” The winner of the round is congratulated, and the loser is offered a drink by the winner. The loser drinking may help to ensure they did not improve their score in the next round. The overall winner is congratulated by the loser, and drinks again.<sup>11</sup>



Above: Detail from a handscroll painted by Zhou Wenju depicting Li Jing (916-961), the second emperor of the Southern Tang (during the Five Dynasties era), playing *weiqi*. This pitch-pot and arrows sits in the background.<sup>12</sup>

Left: Detail from a Ming Dynasty painting of Emperor Xuanzong, Zhu Zhanji, (r. 1425-1435) indulging in various sports and games, including pitch-pot.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mackenzie, C. & Finkle, I. (2004). p. 275

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Legge, J. [trans.] (1885.)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> 周文矩. (Five Dynasties). 重屏会棋图卷. [Double screen with chess players.] [Painting on silk handscroll]. The Palace Museum, Beijing. Retrieved from: <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/230460.html>

<sup>13</sup> 朱瞻基行乐图. [Zhu Zhanji's Fun Map.] (early 15th century). [Painting on silk handscroll]. The Palace Museum, Beijing. Retrieved from: <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228988.html>

## Shuang Lu (雙陸) or Double-Sixes

### A game of Chance

A variant of early forms of backgammon, which was introduced to China from Perisa, *Shuang Lu* (雙陸, shuāng-lù) was played with either flat or conical pieces on boards featuring either rectangles or rosettes.<sup>14</sup> The earliest records of it in China are from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589 CE), and it is mentioned in histories, poetry and novels through the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Unlike *weiqi*, because *shuang lu* is a game of chance and requires no skill, it did not have the same prestige as a courtly art of the aristocracy; however, it was still a very popular game.<sup>16</sup> The extant boards found in Tang Dynasty tombs, made of ceramic or wood, hold a striking resemblance to Sassanian boards, as well as the diagrams of play from the 12th century resemble modern backgammon.<sup>17</sup>



Song Wu (1260- c. 1347), a Yuan Dynasty poet, wrote a poem titled *Shuang Lu* which illustrates the game pieces and gameplay:<sup>18</sup>

Patterned mulberry wood with gold inlay, the cur board is solid;  
and the red clouds of inverted lotuses fill the pool.  
Stars circle the imperial palace, though not many;  
the moon casts its shadow on the Milky Way, and there are two crescents.  
Moving the pieces according to the dice, one seems to hear the sound of cloth-beaters  
on the plain silk;  
calculating points, the ivory cash counters fall like petals.  
I am accustomed to the bitterness of lowly living [using a standard game piece],  
Always returning late [being behind in removing pieces from the board], I am penalized  
with paying for a grand banquet.

Above: Detail of *Palace Ladies Playing Double-Sixes*, traditionally attributed to Zhou Fang (c. 730-800).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Mackenzie, C. & Finkle, I. (2004). pp.97-100

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 97-99

<sup>18</sup> Gu, S. (1987). p. 1290 (as cited in Mackenzie, C. & Finkle, I. (2004). p. 99)

<sup>19</sup> 周昉. (mid-8th century). *Palace Ladies Playing Double Sixes*. [Painted silk handscroll]. The National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1939.37/>

## Goblet Authority, or Wine Rules

### A game of Camaraderie

Drinking parties among the aristocratic and scholarly elite in the Tang Dynasty are described in poetry and histories as popular diversions.<sup>20,21</sup> The “goblet authority” (觴政, *shāng zhèng*) or “liquor rules” (酒令, *jiǔ lìng*) games combined literature and drinking, elevating the cultural level of the entertainment. One extant game for which both the pieces and rules survive is the Analects Jade Candle. It consists of a beaten silver and gilded cylinder covered in floral and fauna designs and a set of 50 lots, each made of beaten and engraved silver, inscribed in gold with lines from The Analects of Confucius.<sup>22</sup>



The lines on the lots serve as instructions for the players, often using the Analects t. When a lot is pulled and read aloud, the player is expected to follow those instructions, either drinking themselves or pouring a drink for someone else. The amounts are in *fen* - one *fen* is approximately 0.3 cm, presumably the depth of the liquor poured.<sup>23</sup> Three participants served as officials during the game - the Illustrious Prefect was the ultimate judge (assigning additional drinks as punishment), while the latter two served as rule-enforcers:<sup>24</sup> The Statute Registrar pulls additional lots to set before rule-breakers, and the Sconce-Breaker Registrar keeps the party from getting too rowdy.<sup>25</sup> The Statute Registrar and Sconce-breaker Registrar used a miniature spear with a flag and pole with a small fish pennon attached to alert players when they committed infractions.<sup>26</sup>

Here are some examples of the lots, translated by Donald Harper (2013):<sup>27</sup>

- Being with friends who have come from distant quarters, is it not also joyous? The most honored guest, five *fen*.
- Choose what is excellent in them and follow it. The person whose vessel is great, forty *fen*.

Above: A gilt silver canister and lots of The Analects Jade Candle, dated to the Tang Dynasty.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Pollack, D. (1979). pp. 209-210

<sup>21</sup> Harper, D. (2013). p. 69

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 79-80

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73, 80

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 85-89

<sup>28</sup> 鑲金銀酒籌筒. [Gilt-Silver Wine-Drinking Game Set.] (8th-9th century). [Gilt silver game set]. Kaikodo Gallery of Asian Art, New York. Retrieved from [http://www.kaikodo.com/index.php/exhibition/detail/the\\_immortal\\_past/505](http://www.kaikodo.com/index.php/exhibition/detail/the_immortal_past/505)

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