

A Short Version of Appendix VIII

Why the West Plays Chess

and the East Plays Go:

How Classical Chinese and Ancient Western Grammars Shaped Different Strategies of War, *Weiqi* and Chess

By Peter Shotwell

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Note: This version was presented at the Oct. 12-15 2013 Hangzhou China Weiqi Culture Summit Conference. It covers all the major points of Part Two, the language section of the longer version, but only briefly Part One, the historical background, and Part Three which discusses cunning and gives examples of its use in the Thirty-six Strategies, and the Coda which discusses the fall of the Qin dynasty in 207 BC.

This is the first look in English and probably the first look anywhere into what I see as the ultimate origins of war, go and Western chess strategies in the grammars of ancient China and Greece. If language affects thinking and by implication, the world views of cultures, it stands to reason that the influences in the area of strategic thinking might be profound, especially if the languages involved in a comparative study are very different.¹ This notion would extend to the choice and techniques of playing strategic games that emulate war because cultures have chosen to perpetuate in the sense that, consciously or unconsciously, they have been deemed a worthwhile activity.

Thus, in terms of go, this article will try to trace the process that led up to the cultural integration and intense playing that began in the Han period (206 BC-220 AD) and which followed its humble beginnings as a simple game that was used by early Confucians in the late 4th and early to mid-3rd century BC to illustrate their evolving ideas about filial piety and human nature, (which will be discussed later in this essay). It will also trace the equal European fascination with chess that began around the 12th century AD when feudal Europe began to "see itself" in the game and which blossomed into popular play in the 19th century.

¹ Whether languages affect behavior is the subject of the Whorf-Sapir debates in anthropology. The general consensus today is that they do. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic_relativity

After the basic differences between chess and go from the point of view of language are examined, it will become easier to see why the Chinese style of thought—its cultural “matrix” so to speak—would develop its war strategies and absorb go so readily after it was developed and why the West would develop different war strategies that are reflected in its attraction to chess.²

I want to note that this is only a brief survey of some very complex matters which, since all these elements have never been put together in a single work, was as much to satisfy my own interest as well as those of readers who want to know about the historical backgrounds of go and chess. When appropriate, weiqi, the Chinese word for go is used.

The main article and its appendices along with my other writings can be found in this e-Library of the American Go Association at www.usgo.org/bobhighlibrary. Many of them are summed up in the aforementioned Go! More Than a Game.

I should note that no single system of spelling Chinese names and places is used. And, as in my other articles, nearly every sentence could be footnoted, but I have done so only in the most important places or where there is controversy.

I gratefully thank sinologist David Moser, who was not a go player but whose PhD thesis provided much of the framework for this essay and who was also kind enough to review it with much constructive criticism. Many thanks are also due to John Fairbairn, Roy Laird, Alex Trotter and Christine Mathieu for their reviews of its initial phase.

Background

David Moser’s PhD thesis, along with A.C. Graham’s *Disputers of the Tao* and Chad Hansen’s *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* provided much of the linguistic material for this essay.³ They all noted that a distinguishing feature of these two languages is that apparently from the beginning, the West had a class of marked abstract nouns along with the verb “to be” in their language that China did not have.

This meant that the West, unlike China, constructed abstract nouns which didn’t physically exist but were treated as if they did by a process known as hypostatization or reification. That is, they regarded abstractions as having an independent existence though their ontological status is open to question. (This term comes from the Greek *hupostatos*, “placed under,” “substantial,” which is from *huphistasthai*, “to stand under,” “to exist”). For example, one can see “white” but not “white-ness” and it is the same for “happy” and “happy-ness,” etc.

² The Greek, Arabic and Western Indo-European languages in countries where chess is extensively played and interwoven into the culture is called “the West” in this article. It includes Russia but not India which has the verb “to be” and where chess may have been invented but the game never became important in a cultural sense. Russia uses the verb in the past and future tenses and, in not-so-distant times, “to be” was used in the present tense.

³ David Moser; 1996 Univ. of Michigan PhD thesis *Abstract Thinking and Thought in Ancient Chinese and Early Greek* A.C. Graham; *Disputers of the Tao*; Open Air Press; 1989 Chad Hansen; *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*; Oxford Univ. Press; 1992

Here is a short example of the process:

Then this—I mean justice—is a certain thing?

Certainly.

Then, too, by wisdom the wise are wise, and by the Good all good things are good?

Of course.

And these are real things, since otherwise they could not do what they do.

To be sure, they are real things.

Then are not all beautiful things beautiful by the Beautiful?

Yes, by the Beautiful.

Which is a real thing?

Yes, for what alternative is there? (Hippias Major, 287 C-D) ⁴

Moser described the overall situation:

. . . If we think of abstraction as involving the high-level attention to and flexible manipulation of categories and qualities of the physical and mental world, then it goes without saying that there are no non-abstract languages . . . [However, abstractions codify the features of the world and once done] . . . they can be used by the Greeks to develop a theory of essences and qualities, or by Chinese correlative cosmologists to catalogue the various objects in the world according to the principles of yin and yang, or by the Neo-Mohists in order to expound a theory of how names relate to things.

. . . My attempt is to demonstrate how the Chinese language was an adequate vehicle for abstraction, yet did not motivate thinkers to make theories about abstractions. We may indeed characterize Chinese thought as non-abstract, as long as the above points are kept in mind. ⁵

This philosophical, two-tiered dualism of the West more or less began with the “Ideas” of Plato—for example, we know what a triangle is because there is the idea of an ideal triangle either in our heads or “elsewhere” that doesn’t change. This was followed by the equally abstract (but in a sense different) Universal Categories of Aristotle which also dealt with the unseen and unchanging aspects of reality. ⁶

The two philosophers manipulated their highly inflected language to suit their purposes by working from their heritage in the Orphic religion—which also developed from the use of abstract nouns—in which immaterial, eternal and divine souls in flawed material bodies underwent a “grievous cycle” of reincarnations. Eventually, in the West,

⁴ Moser; p. 49 There are two other examples in the long version.

⁵ Moser; p. 219 He notes elsewhere that modern Chinese now adds suffixes equal to the Western “-ness,” “-ity,” “age,” etc. but without the verb “to be.”

⁶ The inner-complexities of the definitions and levels of Western abstraction are thoroughly discussed in the longer version.

this view of the world came to need a single God who, as an explanation of our humble existence, must have created a beginning and an end with ultimate purposes for us. The two-tiered system became a cosmological and teleological cultural matrix as exemplified by the mass, unquestioned acceptance of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian religions along with their systems of logic. This meant that "History" and later, "Scientific Progress," were seen as moving in a "Straight Line" through Time (that was independent from Space) from a beginning to an end that was either known or unknown, depending on one's beliefs.

In Classical China, on the other hand, although they could posit and talk about abstract entities and concepts, these were not marked explicitly in the grammar so no attention was paid to them. This was because the Chinese language was composed of mostly monosyllabic morphemes, was uninflected in terms of number, person, mood or tenses, had no distinctions between verbs, singular or plural nouns, no definite articles, no clear demarcations between verbs, adjectives and nouns and adjectives, no default subject-predicate sentence structure, and also no paragraphs proceeding in an orderly march from a beginning to an end, as in Western languages.⁷ The result is that characters act like word stems or even the figures of symbolic language. In other words, to them, everything was "as it appeared to be."

Two Dualistic Outlooks Lead to War, Chess and Go Strategies

The reason that the differences were so important is because China and the West developed dualistic outlooks based on these aspects of their languages and then used them to explain the world to themselves and to guide their behavior. However, the dualisms were very different and a large result was a differing sense of war strategies and a small result was that full-board go became popular with the Chinese early on, and later on chess became popular with Arabic and Indo-European speakers.⁸

To fully understand the background of these developments, Part One discusses the effects of 550 years of constant warfare between 771 and 221 BC during the Spring and Autumn, and Warring States periods. This was when about 150 cities and states fought each other for supremacy and reduced themselves to one while being cut off from the rest of the world.⁹ Along with the lack of abstract nouns and the verb "to be," (which will be described in more detail later), this had strong effects in the social, political, economic, philosophical and strategic spheres, one of which was the

⁷ The last remark is evident to anyone who has taught English composition to native Chinese students. The biggest problem is always trying to get them to organize their thoughts into a "beginning, middle and an end" in a march of orderly paragraphs that progress down in an orderly "straight line." In Chinese, the most important points, as in their grammar, tend to be put first and, to our eyes, what follows does not proceed in a logical pattern.

⁸ I am not including *go*-playing Korea and Japan in this article because they imported go after its strategies had developed in Classical China from its linguistic roots.

⁹ In isolated regions in Peru, Mexico and Mesopotamia, this happened in other areas of the world.

development of the “Hundred Contending Schools of Philosophy” who tried to explain the evolving nature of the new reality—what it was and what it was not, and what should be done or not done about it. One consequence was that 70% of early Chinese books, many of them now famous like the *Daodejing*, concerned military matters, though often (to Westerners) in a veiled philosophical manner.

One of the theories that developed was the relativism of Daoism, whose tenets included “Action through Non-Action” and how the “Soft” can conquer the “Hard.” Thus, as the states grew fewer and the initial feudalistic style of fighting evolved into mass-warfare with armies of hundreds of thousands, a new kind of non-feudal leadership was called for, so a “Darker” side of Daoism emerged. Its principles and strategies, which will be examined later, eventually appeared in books like *The Art of War* by Sunzi.¹⁰ They were also summed up in the “Thirty-six Strategies,” which is discussed in Part Three in the longer version.

Before this, the longer version covers the effects of how the linguistic differences between East and West affected mental attitudes, strategies and their entire cultures, including the board games they played. What is presented below is expanded in great detail and is followed by quotations from the *Qijing Shisanpian* and the *Yi Zhi*, two early prominent works on go that show the links between Sunzi’s ideas and go strategies that developed after a simple, “feudal” stage. Once the linkage with Sunzi’s strategies was established and expanded, the game became more intriguing and so was accepted (or rejected by some) into the culture of the *literati* and hence the game became an acceptable part of the cultural matrix of the nation after peace was established in 206 BC.

The developments in China can be compared and contrasted with the similar linguistic origins of the principals of Western war strategies that became embodied in chess and led to its mass acceptance and improvement of play that followed its own simple, “feudal” days. This change-over also coincided with the changes in European feudal-style warfare that were uprooted by Napoleon’s commanding use of the mass-armies of France in the early 19th century. In chess, there is a goal—the killing of the king—that players try to reach as best and as fast as possible. The words of the Western “philosopher of war,” Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), who was in Napoleon’s entourage and elaborated on his theories, echo this refrain:

*Our position, then, is that a theater of war, be it large or small, and the forces stationed there, no matter what their size, represent the sort of unity in which a single center of gravity can be identified. That is the place where the decision should be reached; a victory at that point is in its fullest sense identical with the defense of the theater of operations.*¹¹

¹⁰ A second *Art of War* was written by Sun Bin.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz; *On War*; Michael Howard & Peter Paret (trans.); Princeton University Press; 1984; p. 198
<http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/TOC.htm>

It would seem that the analogies to Western methods of thinking about war was a major reason why chess became so popular as a war game in the Islamic and Christian Worlds. It had a beginning with the pieces lined up with a single-minded intention. It used cooperating abstract pieces on abstract checkered boards that all had “two-tiered” meanings beyond their appearances. The Indian inventors called their new game *chaturanga* or the “four ranks” of an army and when it passed from Arabic Persia into Europe, the elephants became “judges” (and then, much later, bishops), the horses became knights, the military chariots became rooks, the male Muslim vizier was turned into a queen and the pawns were carved to represent trades and artisans. The knight had to have a blacksmith and the king had to have a money changer, for example. These were then allegorically turned into abstract moral, religious, romantic and political interpretations as, in many of the books that have survived, the medieval world, which included many women players, tried to “see itself” on the chessboard.¹²



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Some of the Medieval Lewis chess pieces found in Scotland

However, this scenario dramatically changed in the late 15th century when chess became simply a war game again and no longer mirrored the medieval world. This was because, among other changes, the queens and bishops who previously could only move diagonally one space and two spaces respectively were granted the full lethal powers they have today and this shortened the games and soon made them unattractive to women. However, in the transition, chess did not lose its abstract qualities because its temporal, spatial and directional elements were only magnified—the chess pieces had become even more effective armies and their battles to the death increasingly violent.

¹² This was amplified by the Cult of Mary who appears on chess boards as the Queen in some of the literature of the time, and the Cult of Romantic Love as fostered by the wandering Troubadours who carried chess sets from castle to castle. Their ballads contained many happy occasions when they had been “killed” while enraptured by their love for a beautiful woman.

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_chessmen

The people of ancient China, on the other hand, without the explicit framework and markers for abstraction, had no “cognitive focus” when they thought about the world and the things in it. In other words, there was no “essence” intervening between name and object—there was no *being* an ox anymore than there was *being* white. An ox or triangle was an “ox” or a “triangle” because it resembled what people called similar looking objects, which could change in the future.

Furthermore, because there was no “to be” in Classical Chinese, there was no confusion between existence and essence as there was in the West. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, for many centuries philosophers confused the distinction between the copulative linking function of “be” as in “Roses are red,” and the “existence” function as in “Roses are” (i.e. “Roses exist”). Similarly, “There is a teacup on the table,” (meaning it exists) vs. “The teacup is white,” (meaning its essence is “white”). It was treacherously easy to conflate the two or to fail to maintain the distinction.¹⁴

Instead, the Chinese used *you* “have” for existence and the “post-posed” copula *ye* for essence, however this essence was completely unlike its Greek counterpart. *Qing*, the quality without which something called “X” could not be named was not the equivalent of “essence” in Greek thought since it was tied to naming and not to a supra-natural “being.” Naming was a performative act; the name simply pointed to the thing itself, denoting an example of things that are also called by this name. Unlike the Greeks, there was no evoking of an abstract “essence” or abstract domain in which the thing itself participated. The thing was what it was, and the name referred to that thing only.

Thus, although the later Mohists were concerned with what we would call third-order abstractions, they never hypostasized them to make them “real,” and the opaqueness of their extreme non-inflected language directed their attention almost solely to correctly matching names with objects and actions.

All this does not mean that the Chinese had no “ideas” in their heads. It just meant that there was no postulated mental world where these ideas originated.¹⁵ The tools to build a two-tiered world were certainly there and Moser has suggested that had the Mohists survived and the language evolved, they might have worked out something like the Aristotelian essences and Platonic Ideas. However, it seems that because of the lack of inflection and the opaqueness of the structure of the language, there was no interest in examining them to the extent that the Greeks did. Instead, again and again, as he notes, the emergent quasi-Platonic Ideas were left to sophistries such as those of the philosophical “School of Names” who exploited the lack of abstraction and hypostasization, as in the famous “A white horse is not a horse.”

Again, to the Chinese, there was only one continuous concrete world that was the source and locus of all their experience and the written Classical Chinese language reflected that “unabstracted” non-dualistic world-view. Within that view, to make sense

¹⁴ In the Greek Bible, when God says “I am,” it means “I exist” which would translate into Chinese as “I live” with no “existential” overtones.

¹⁵ The factors that impinge on this discussion—the differences and hazy lines between “thought” and “thinking” and also between “psychology” and “philosophy”—are thoroughly discussed in the longer version.

of what they saw, felt, heard and tasted, the Chinese deduced it was filled with two dualistic invisible, classifiable forces resulting from an original division of pulsating fluid *qi* energy.¹⁶ However, following the principle that the Chinese language had no “to be,” opposites were not “opposite” as in the West. Instead, they were joined and the boundaries were indistinct. Thus, objects and actions that were “female,” “soft,” “yielding,” “passive” and “indirect” were *yin*. Those that were “hard,” “active,” “aggressive” and “direct” were “male” and *yang*. These forces were all *within* and not separate from objects and actions and so, again, the Chinese world was “what it appeared to be.” Though they talked about the existence of “being” (*you*) and “non-being” (*wu*), these were only nouns and not verbs so one could not say something like “the tree has being.” Instead, it was the invisible, unsubstantial ontological forces like *qi*, *yin*, *yang* and *dao* (that will be discussed later) which made sense of their world.

Moreover, *yin* and *yang* were not separate entities—they could only be defined by each other so that in objects, for example, “maleness” could not be thought of without knowing what “femaleness” was.¹⁷ In actions such as warfare, the two could be in constant flux and their proportions could constantly change. In warfare on the go boards, it was the same—*qi* was surging up and down the lines being blocked, diverted and manipulated by the stones that made up groups that came to have *yin* or *yang* qualities and shapes that could change during a game. Consequently, it was important for generals and go players to constantly assess the situation and devise *yin* or *yang* strategies to take advantage of those shifting balances and imbalances. Many fine examples of these assessments are shown in the Thirty-six Strategies section of the longer version.

Within this dualistic context, the important thing was that generals, politicians, lovers or go players could appreciate the virtues of *yin* that are not inherently present in Western strategic thinking. This was most apparent in the changeover from “feudal” warfare to the mass warfare of the resulting larger units in the Warring States period, when instead of bravely leading loyal lords into battle on chariots, the generals were expected to stay out of sight (like a go player playing his stones) and command their troops with banners, drums and other distant signals. These generals also had a staff of experts of various martial techniques and they had to make decisions concerning what was strong and impervious and could not be changed (*yang*), and what was weak and vulnerable and could be changed (*yin*). With these factors in mind, they studied the conditions of the terrain, the weather, the spirit of the two opposing troops and leaders and, most important, the information brought in by spies and observation.

All this was balanced by a need to know one’s own strengths and weakness i.e. self-knowledge on the part of the commander was as important as knowledge of his opponent. Then, by successfully planning combinations of the “orthodox” (“standard” or

¹⁶ The concept of *qi*, as described by A.C. Graham, developed as a cosmology from the “demonic” powers of the “First Sages.”

¹⁷ Similarly, “Nothing” is an entity just as “Something” is. This leads to the idea that the usefulness of a pot or a room is its emptiness as are the empty spaces of two eyes within a group of stones—the two cannot exist without each other.

“fixed” positions and strategies) and the “unorthodox” (“surprising” and “unexpected” methods), *shi* or “overwhelming” strategic, psychological and positional advantage (*xing*) could be built up. The Sunzi-like strategic roles of such maneuvers on the go board include *joseki* (*dingshi*), *fuseki* (*buju*), *tesuji* (*shoujin*), sacrifice (*qizi*), *sabaki* (*tengnuo*), *yose-miru* (*shiyingshou*) and *kikashi* (*xianshouli*), etc. These illustrate the type of thinking which is opposed to *li* strategies that are typically used in the West which emphasize the taking of immediate, obvious profits instead of waiting to take profits at the end.

However, most Western interpretations of the buildup of *shi* cannot escape being single-minded and simplistic because the fluidity of Chinese strategic thinking is not conveyed. Examples from Appendices VI and VII are Henry Kissinger’s *On China* (which discussed only part of it), Scott Boorman’s *The Protracted Game* (which did not) and hedge fund financier Mark Spitznagel’s article in *Forbes* magazine (which misinterpreted it). For example, Sunzi strongly emphasized that the orthodox and the unorthodox are ever-changing into each other as if they were joined together in a ring. Each situation is different and ever-evolving so that thinking in these terms is only advice to try to determine which is which at the appropriate time. Moreover, they felt there was a beauty in yielding and letting the enemy think that it was gaining advantages and strength, but then using that so-called strength against the foe to deliver a critical blow, as in the way *kungfu* differs from boxing.¹⁸ Put another way, the concept of *dao* or “way” emerges from the idea that *yin*, correctly studied and applied, can lead to mastery of the body (for example, in the famous case in the *Daodejing*, of butchering oxen) or the mind (by playing go).¹⁹ In military terms, as game historian John Fairbairn once proposed, instead of “shock and awe,” as in Kuwait and chess playing up until the mid-19th century, it was “awe and shock,” as in successful guerilla tactics and go playing.²⁰ In short, using *shi* strategies is the essence of go playing and playing for *li* returns is the essence of chess.

Time and Space in Go and Chess

Another reason that go was largely adopted by the *literati* is that like *yin* and *yang*, Time and Space were joined and could not be separated. This was unlike in the West and these differing conceptions were echoed on the go and chess boards.

¹⁸ This is called a *shi-li* strategy which was followed, for example, by the Sunzi-reading Ho Chi Min in Vietnam where it culminated in the Tet Offensive and later in the Easter Uprising. (See Appendix VII for details).

¹⁹ Properly, it is not capitalized since there are many *dao*, however, due to mistakes by early Jesuit missionaries, in the West the capitalized “Dao” is wrongly a singular unit and somewhat of an imitation of the concept of “God.”

²⁰ The culturally uncharacteristic *yin*-like tactics used by Russia against Napoleon and Hitler are explained by the theories of imperialists H.J. Mackinder and K.E. Haushofer in that the central Eurasian land mass is so large that it forms a natural fortress that renders *yang*-like attacks useless. In China, on the other hand, the Communists knowingly used *yin* tactics and strategies against the Japanese and Nationalists. (See Part Three of the longer version for details).

Within a cultural context that there was no specific beginning of the world and no differentiation between ancestral lineages and the living, different seasons (Time) of the year dictated various activities (Space) in ancient China. Spring (New *Yang*) was associated with the Wood “Element” or “Phase” as in “germination” and affected the East. Summer (Full *Yang*) was associated with Fire (“drought”) and the South, Fall (New *Yin*) associated with Metal (“cutting,” “killing”) and the West while Winter (Full *Yin*) associated with Water (“ice,” “cold”) and the North. Earth (*Yang-Yin*) then became the centralizing fifth agent where the four Elements met in Space, and the point where the *Yang* Phase was changing into *Yin* in Time. Thus, *shi* or “seasonality” referred to doing something at the appropriate time. For example, Spring was the time for agriculture and Fall was the time for war and punishments.

By the time of the Han dynasty, the end result of these lingual and cultural developments was a series of three cycles whereby the Five Elements or Phases generated, controlled or “insulted” each other in everything in the world—from the organs of the body to the Five Colors, Five Sounds, Five Tastes, Five Smells . . . and when they were out-of-balance trouble ensued for everything from political systems to individuals. Thus, “Everything” and “Everyone” was part of a “Greater Whole” that eventually could be understood and acted upon by interpretations of the *Yijing* (*The Book of Changes*) after it evolved from the *Zhouyi*, a Spring and Autumn manual for simple divination.

Since everything was tied and “resonating” to everything else in the extreme Chinese correlative system, one can say that the universe divides down from a greater whole of Time and Space by using *you* “has” as in the word order of “The teacup has white.” Or, in a different way, in go, it can be construed that the empty board (in old China there were four set-up stones) was the beginning of a little universe and the filled-up board at the end was the final division of things.

In the West, on the other hand, the general idea is that the universe is the aggregate of individual things that are separated (cf. the lined-up pieces of chess) which are then worked up through the two-tiered world to the ultimate, single, abstract idea of “God” that towers over all. This order is also present in sentence order and emphasis as in the Western default subject-predicate sentence order, “The teacup is white,” and in the singular symbolism of the king’s death in chess.

Thus, in chess, Time and Space are separate since the pieces move (in more or less straight lines) from one square to another. (Moreover, as mentioned, these are only given meaning by installing abstract qualities—pieces can only move in certain ways on squares that are different colors, which are meaningful for the diagonally-moving bishops and the placement of the king and queen). And, of course, the West separates Time and Space in general thought—the two have no connection.²¹

²¹ This may be why sacrificing a piece or two in chess cannot really be expressed as a “*yin* strategy” in the spirit of Sunzi. The action is just too small and can’t be seen as an integral part of the correlative Time-Space totality that the concept of *yin* is involved with in Chinese warfare or a go game. However, perhaps *yin* and *yang* could be conceptualized as racing around the boards as an unseen dimension of the “Games of Chess Love,” played by the Medieval troubadours with the ladies of the castles while their men were otherwise occupied.

Also in go, the board resonates in Chinese thought with its use of the grid in its organization of the world.

Mark Lewis writes:

Although the four quadrants [of the earth] remained conventional, early writers also developed new models of the world. An important example was the grid which played several roles. First it provided an image of creating multiplicity from unity. One line divides a plane into two parts, another creates four and each additional line increases the number of bounded spaces. Thus, the grid depicted the standard cosmology . . . of a structured multiplicity created out of an undifferentiated whole by repeated divisions. Second, the grid divided space into bounded units for the regulation of human activities. This was sketched in accounts of the grid structure of major streets in the city and stalls in the market. Third, in the divinatory charts unearthed in early Han tombs and in later magic squares, the grid provided an image of the manner in which mathematical structures underlay a special order. In this way the grid became one of the most powerful tools for applying to space the numerological mode of thought that became so important by the end of the Warring States. . . . it also constituted the most important mechanism for correlating early events to astral phenomena. Finally the grid provided an image of cyclical movement through a controlled space, thus forming a frame for linking cosmological models and ritual actions. . . .

*Thus grids were a feature of life, both in the cities and the countryside. Since the square of the four directions had long been basic to world structure, the application of grid-squares to world models was an easy step. . . .*²²

Thus, there is an inner-connectivity of all the stones on a non-abstract board where, as in their culture, Time and Space cannot be separated—a move (Time) is defined by the Space where the stone is put down, the “shorthand” interpretation of which is accomplished by books on *joseki*, *fuseki*, etc. Moreover, writing the “bare boned” Classical Chinese language character by character resembles the act of placing stone after stone down on the board with the meaning coming only because of the syntax of its other members towards the end.

In fact, this process of building groups can be looked at as a perfect illustration of the School of Phenomenology’s theories on discourse.²³ That is, go is a conversation since I “speak” (play) then you “speak” (play), then I speak . . . etc. while the “meaning” of it all is always in motion until the end.²⁴ Thus, it is easy to see how the

²² Mark Edward Lewis; *The Construction of Space in Early China*; State University of New York; 2006; pp. 247-9. Strangely, he does not mention go boards in his treatment of grids.

²³ Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. This ontology can be differentiated from the Cartesian method of analysis which sees the world as objects, sets of objects and objects acting and reacting upon one another. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

²⁴ This automatically allows snapbacks but disallows suicides as a “non-moves.” Phenomenology and go are discussed in the article mentioned in footnote 25.

final board position is more or less a record of the “conversation” that took place. This is unlike the “abstract” remains of the slaughter in chess.

Differences in Overall Thought

That the difference in “world outlooks” also enters into thinking processes is evident from perception studies in go and chess described in my article “Go and Cognition” and its Appendix in the AGA e-library and in Part Two of the longer version, and by Richard Nisbett in his *The Geography of Thought*.²⁵ He found that because Asians are inclined to focus on relationships between things and Westerners tend to perceive individual things, Asians will tend to look at the context of a “whole” picture first and notice the outstanding details later, which is opposite to how Westerners habitually think. He used a picture of some fish swimming in water, one of which was prominently larger and had spots and noted that Westerners focused on the big fish as a central item, while Easterners looked at the context of a stream or pond with some rocks and plants on the bottom. In other words, Nisbett said, “If it wasn’t moving, it wasn’t noticed by Westerners.” Nisbett didn’t discuss go or chess, but perhaps this is an important reason for the superiority of players of go, the “surrounding game,” in the East and players of chess, “the killing game,” in the West. Also, it is probably significant that the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans use visual languages while Western languages use phonetic alphabets.

Another factor which probably predisposed the welcoming of go into Chinese society was the principle of building groups with two eyes that flowed naturally from what they saw as the course of life. The game started on an empty board and there were two “rules” to follow as it progressed—if you were surrounded and could not “breathe,” you were “dead” and, like flowing water in a river, no position could be repeated. Moreover, the game, also like life, ends at one point, but in a very different way than the regicide of the king in chess. Pieces are put down that contribute to a whole until the game ends in stasis. This is a fate conducive to the Chinese who, it is popularly thought, like to say that they might be Confucian or Buddhist when young, but when they approach old age, they become Daoists, though in the sense of “peaceful Daoism”—a reunification with Nature—and not the “Dark” Warring States type.

On the other hand, chess has individual pieces that have directionality built into their meanings (how they can move) and destinies i.e. an ending time when they will die.

These differences in overall thought also seem to be reflected in how individual characters in early Greek and Chinese literature are presented—for example, Chinese heroes are sketchy exemplars of what “should be done,” rather than the full-scale portraits with all the sordid details of one who, like Ulysses, “was doing it.” Similar to

²⁵ My articles on the subject are at http://www.usgo.org/files/bh_library/goandpsych.pdf and http://www.usgo.org/files/bh_library/Cog%20Psych%20Appendix%201.pdf

this kind of difference are the elaborate characters on a chess board vs. the simple stones on a go board.

There are still other thoughts about why go fit so nicely into the Chinese thinking processes and the longer version discusses in length how “go-think” is embedded in the ideas of spontaneity in the *Zhuangzi*, the general pursuit of mastery and *dao*, the strategic speeches of classical rhetoricians, the patterns of classical poetry, and in the suggestiveness of the language of aesthetics, which depends so much on parallelism for meaning. As Professor Ming Dong Gu summed it up:

*What is valued in language is subtle reserve (hanxu). That words may end but implications are endless is a supreme adage under heaven. On the zither of the Purity Temple, one string is plucked and three others will echo in sighs, thereby producing lingering notes.*²⁶

One almost sees here the subtle beginnings of a go game—the aesthetic qualities of the delicate balancing of influence and profit in the opening and how the play in one corner affects the play in the other corners—unlike the aesthetically unappealing opening of a chess game with its two lined-up sides facing each other.

Concerning Abstract Games Played in the East and Non-Abstract Games Played in the West

Looking at the other side of my argument, it is true that China has or has had abstract games like the extinct dice game of *liubo*, and, since about 700 AD, *xiangqi*, Chinese chess with a river running through its board. The Koreans play *janggi* (Korean chess without a river), and the Japanese avidly play *shogi* on a Western chess-like board with squares, all of which are or were more popular than go, *igo* (the Japanese word for go) or *baduk* (the Korean name).

The West, on the other hand, has had non-abstract games. It was checkers (in England draughts) and now go, while the ancient Greeks played *poleis* and the Romans *latrunculi*, which were custodian-capture games played with stones on a grid.²⁷ However, despite their popularity, none of these games had anywhere near the cultural significance for the two cultures that go and chess grew to have as their players and principles became deeply intertwined with the history, literature, art, science, mythology and, most important, the symbolism of their cultural milieus.

And there is more as to why go and chess reign supreme icons in their cultures.

²⁶ Ming Dong Gu; p. 496 quoting Yang Zai; "Shifaj iashu" (Transmitted poetic methods)

²⁷ Custodian capture occurred when a piece was surrounded on two opposing sides: o●o.

Chess and *Weiqi* Strategies Develop in Tandem With the Strategies of European and Chinese Mass-Warfare

Europe

Before the 2nd century BC in China and before the 18th century AD in Europe both go and chess were, in general, only aristocratic amusements. For the games to expand and increase playing skills, places to play and leisure time had to be made available. But because of the nature of these strategic games that imitate warfare, there also had to be a catalytic change in the style of thinking.

In Europe, this process is less clear than in China. By the beginning of the 18th century, its popularity had increased due to the changes in the mobility of the queens and bishops, which made games faster and checkmates easier, as was mentioned. By this time, chess had become a fixture in some of the cafes populated by the well-off who had the time and/or could afford to gamble on their playing prowess. However, the games had an *ad hoc* romantic and simplistic attacking quality, and it wasn't until the mid-century ideas of André Danican Philidor (1726-1795) about the importance of pawns and the center that began to give the game a structure that was beyond "the next few moves."



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One of Philidor's massive Black pawn attacks in London 1790

However, this improvement was still largely tactical in nature and it wasn't for almost a hundred years that the Industrial Revolution created more leisure time to think about chess and "whole-game" strategies were developed that made it more intriguing and popular.

Within that time, it could be surmised that a deeper reason for those developments was that Napoleon's *yang*-like "mass war" strategies for massive armies that utterly replaced the old feudalistic, short-sighted, defensive methods in Europe influenced the same changes in chess. For example, in the 1830s and 40s, Howard Staunton (1810-1874) answered central pawn structures with *fianchetto* attacks of his bishops in order to rake the center like Napoleon's cannons did to enemy armies.

²⁸ http://www.thegameofchess.com/chess_ideas_theory/philidor-and-the-soul-of-chess/



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A White bishop fianchetto aims at a central Black pawn

Napoleon's style of warfare was, after all, a hot topic in the salons and general discourse of the time. However, history-of-chess studies do not mention this possibility and only discuss the new freedom-to-play factor.³⁰ On the other hand, there have been discussions on the Internet that conclude that at least eight of the underlying principles that the "Little Corporal" crystallized in his thinking are followed by modern chess players.³¹ About a century ago, 27-year World Chess champion Emanuel Lasker summed it up:

*The process of making pieces in Chess do something useful (whatever it may be) has received a special name: it is called the attack. The attack is that process by means of which you remove obstructions.*³²

However, from an overall point of view, in contrast to the Chinese pervading "yin-think," the "pattern of chess thought" is really paralleling how the modern West deals with adversaries. This is with single-focused "straight line" yang-style attacks as advocated by the principal European "philosophers of war," the aforementioned Carl von Clausewitz who, along with Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869) and Napoleon, never wrote about yin-like guerrilla warfare because they didn't understand it. This narrow kind of Western thinking is apparent in the American Civil War, both World Wars and after these, the wars fought against Asians and Muslims in Malaysia, Vietnam, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq, where the emphasis on one strategic point gave Westerners directionality in the beginning, but produced an ending they didn't anticipate. It is also shown in the longer version how this style of strategic thinking penetrates Western thinking even down to marketing strategies.

²⁹ <http://rosssimmonds.com/2013/03/22/board-games-business-strategy> The *fianchetto* fell out of favor until the Hypermodern School revived it during the 1920s

³⁰ It was also recognized by the early 17th century that chess was too "small" a game to fully accommodate that kind of thinking, so *kriegspiel* games began to be invented for the training of military officers. However, with an increasingly immense number of abstract "cells" and pieces, these games were only about improving chains of command to make officers more independent in specific battles, and were not about overall strategic thinking.

³¹ <http://www.chess.com/forum/view/general/napoleon-on-strategy-striking-chess-parallels>

³² <http://www.chessquotes.com/topic-strategy>

Early China

In China, on the other hand, as outlined in Appendix V in short and long versions, before the 2nd century BC, go was a game that “everyone knew about” since the earliest Confucian comments didn’t have to explain it for their audiences. A careful reading of their context reveals that the first three passages were examples of evolving thoughts about filial piety. The first was written between 330 and 312 BC in the *Zouzhuan*, where the idea of 4th century BC go playing and Confucian values were imposed on a 6th century BC event. Taking the whole story into account, it presented a complicated issue for the Confucian writers—who was to be obeyed and not betrayed, one’s ruler or the ghost of one’s parent? This inspired two imitations—the first “Mencius” statement appeared c. 280 BC, at least a decade after its purported author’s death, and was written by disciples in his school. Next, the “Confucius” passage appeared in c. 270 BC, more than two hundred years after the Sage’s demise.³³ These have traditionally been thought to show a dislike of *go*, but actually the focus of attention is not on go—there is a neutral feeling about it—but how addictive playing leads to the neglect of live and dead parents. There are also oblique references to Primitive Daoism which also appear in the second “Mencius” comment of c. 260 BC, but which is mainly about evolving Confucian thoughts on human nature. Here go was used to illustrate the higher principles of evolving Mencian thought which began to promote the idea that with study, man’s basically good, rational nature was capable of gaining independence from the gods and heaven.

Because go was written about in this anecdotal manner, it was probably regarded as lightly as we Westerners consider checkers and was likely to have been played on boards of a similar size. Even if the go board was a larger size in Sunzi’s time, the fact that he and other writers of the period did not write about it indicate that the early game must have involved only tactical and not strategic thinking.

However, as mentioned, after the 550 years of warfare ended, relative peace finally came about in 206 BC with the beginning of the Han dynasty. The increase of leisure time for the highly educated *literati* finally allowed them to seriously think about the game so it suddenly blossomed, particularly since the 17x17 board size (whether it was new or not) accommodated the thinking of the *yin* war strategies of the previous period. This adoption made the depths of the game much more understandable and intriguing and so, as also mentioned, two of the translated treatises illustrating their application conclude Part Two version.

³³ The dating was done from E. Bruce and Takeo Brooks’ *The Original Analects*; Columbia University Press; 1998. There have been some arguments about their conclusions, but none about their dating of the go passages. Before I contacted them, they knew nothing about go or its placements in these passages. For their Warring States Project see <http://www.umass.edu/wsp>.