

Appendix IX

Seven Common Misconceptions Concerning the History of Go in Ancient China

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Note: For more than 2000 years, Eastern and Western speculations on the history of Go ("Wei Qi") in China have engendered many errors. The following is a brief sampling of the most common that have been taken from my longer essay, "Speculations on the Origins of Go" and its other appendices in this e-Library of the American Go Association. For the cause of brevity, the commentary is not footnoted but can easily be found with Word searches in the sources that are mentioned.¹

Additionally, there is some very new material concerning the "real" Yao-Dan Zhu-Shun-Yu-Qi origins of Go stories whose long and evolving train of source materials are listed.

¹ www.usgo.org/bob-high-memorial-library

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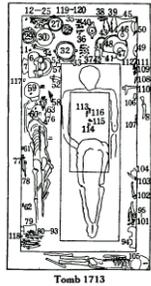
**The Misconceptions
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The Misconceptions

1. That Go is "4,000 years old" because of one of the variations of the stories of "Golden Age" Emperor Yao coming down from the Heavens c. 23-2100 BC and teaching Go to Dan Zhu. This was his unruly half-human son who rebelled and was killed after Yao abdicated and gave the throne to his commoner prime minister Shun.
2. That Yao or Shun or their ministers invented Go to cure their sons' "stupidity."
3. That the Confucian Han Dynasty (206 BC-220) writers inserted Go into the "Golden Age" stories because it was their favorite game and they wanted to make it look older and more prestigious than it was in their time.
4. That Confucius who died in 479 BC thought little of Go and that a minister was cautioned in Go terms about plans to kill his king in 548 BC, thus "proving" that the game existed before these dates.
5. That the brilliant general Sun Zi (trad. 544–496 BC), author of *The Art of War*, must have played Go because his strategic system so closely resembled that of Go. Also, that success in both is the result of a harmonious inner "balancing" of *Yin* ("Female" energy) and *Yang* ("Male" energy) under the auspices of the *Dao* of the *Dao De Jing* (*The Book of Changes*). This made Go a "Sanctified" and "Ethereal" game as attested to by the appearance of the three Confucian "virtues," *Li* ("Propriety"), *Chi* ("Wisdom"), and *Ren* ("Human-heartedness") on scrolls that adorn the walls of many Go clubs.
6. That Mao Zedong used Go strategies to defeat Chiang Kai-shek in the last Chinese civil war because he mentioned the game several times in his writings.
7. That, as part of the "Sanctifying" process, Go boards and stones may have first been a divination tool when two competing shaman started playing a competitive game while casting black and white stones onto early maps of the stars.

Some Go History

As will be explained, the reality is much different than the above misstatements indicate but this does not necessarily mean that Go has not been around for four or more thousand years.



Anthropologists have long speculated that learning board games would have been a great help in the inevitable re-organization of human minds as civilization passed from individualistic or clan-based hunter-gathering to the mass political, social and cultural systems needed for centrally-controlled water and agricultural projects. Within this context, there are up to 5000 year-old painted lozenge-shaped pottery pieces scattered around the grounds of the 1350-1046 BC Shang dynasty capital. In the tombs, there are also small piles of what Chinese archaeologists have called "game stones" which were placed next to the heads (the "brains"?) and the right shoulders (of the "playing hands"?)

Further north and east, c. 4170 BC stones, flat on one side and convex on the other—the shape of traditional Chinese Go stones—have been found in the Bay of Pkhusun in Manchuria.  This area is now claimed by Russia, but long before this, according to the semi-mythical *Chronicles of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors*, its Tungusic Sushen peoples paid tributes of bows and arrows to Emperor Shun (trad. 2233-2184 BC) after he succeeded Yao (trad. 2356-2255 BC), and also later to the rulers of the Zhou dynasty (trad. 1046-256 BC) who followed the Shang.

But were these stones used for Go? It could very well be since Go is possibly the simplest competitive game between two people that can be imagined on a board with a grid. (That is, unless the less logical two- instead of four-stone ancient Greek custodial capture game of Polis is considered).²

In Go, there are only two rules necessary to play because if one is "surrounded" and can't "breathe," one is "dead," and also, like the flow of a river, no position can be repeated. The idea of two invulnerable eyes then naturally emerges and if players can capture only when it is their move (as in an "I-speak-then-you-speak" conversation), snapbacks become legal and suicides are simply "non-moves." If this evolution occurred during the Shang dynasty (trad. 1600-1046 BC), or later, then the creation of such a game and its appearance in the Yao/Shun myths might have consciously or unconsciously symbolized an advancement of human consciousness to its framers, whoever they were.

Also, the Chinese originally used Japanese counting whereby captured pieces are kept aside and remain visible which would have made it ideal for gambling whether territory or stones are counted. Gambling has always been a sacred and "sanctified" activity in primitive societies and continues, despite the propaganda of the modern puritanical view, out of sight in every Chinese and Korean Go club (although perhaps

² Because Polis may have traveled from Greece through the Roman Empire to Bactria and then to Tibet, for a description, see my article on "Go in Ancient and Modern Tibet" and its appendices in this e-Library and eventually on <https://www.academia.edu>.

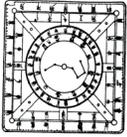
not so much in Japan), and openly in professional tournaments where the money is put up by a third party. In fact, in China, at least, putting a stake on a game and losing against a stronger player has always been regarded as how one paid one's teacher. Also, especially in old Japan, whole classes of players made good livings as roving professional gamblers, just as is done today by wanderers in the Western realms of poker and horse racing.

Looking back further into the symbolic structures of the game, if Go activity took place during the Earth-oriented Shang period, as happens with the flow of water in rice paddies, players would have been characterizing their play with stones and groups as attempts to impede or encourage the flow of *qi* energies that keep the stones "alive" by coursing along the lines of the board. With these thoughts in mind, they would have been placing their stones down according to the tenets of the then-developing theories of acupuncture and "Wind and Water" *feng shui*. From the point of view of the opposing "School of Earth Forms," the shapes of Go groups would have also been thought of as "convex" or "concave," "hollow" or "pointed," "open" or "closed." Developing *Yin-Yang* theorists and the earliest warrior/philosophers (and Go players?) then would have been classifying the "passiveness" or "aggressiveness" and the "emptiness" or "fullness" of the formations of the groups. Outside of Go, this relativism and impacts of forms on forms is seen most strikingly in traditional Chinese paintings of mountain sceneries.

On a more ethereal level, no matter when Go appeared, its players would have been observing 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. That is, a *Yin* wood board lying under the *Yin* of Space would have had *Yang* lines, *Yin* squares and *Yang* stones. From the primordial chaos within the boxes or bowls to which the stones would eventually return, superior White would have been characterized as *Yang*, inferior Black as *Yin*. Then, as the game progressed through the *Yang* of Time, the *Yin* of the Past would be leaching out from the chaotic *Yang* of the Future. After their groups had formed, the interiors of which would be *Yin*, the exteriors *Yang*, they would be alive with two *Yang* "Breaths" which would be similar to the developing belief in the Shang period that every human possessed two souls.

On the other hand, if the game emerged during or after the following star-worshipping Zhou dynasty, this would account for the astral and calendrical symbolism that is commonly thought to exist on Go boards today. For example, Chang Nui wrote sometime between 1049 and 1054 AD in his *Classic of Go*:

There are on the Go board 360 intersections plus one. The number one is supreme and gives rise to the other numbers because it occupies the ultimate position and governs the four quarters. 360 represents the number of days in the [lunar] year. The division of the Go board into four quarters symbolizes the four seasons. The 72 points on the circumference represent the [five-day] weeks of the [Chinese lunar] calendar. The balance of Yin and Yang is the model for the equal division of the 360 stones into black and white.



There is, however, no evidence that Go was ever used for astral divination because this was always done on very dissimilar *Shi Ban* ("Sky Boards") and the mysteriously arranged playing surfaces of the dice game Liu Bo ("Six Sticks").

Moreover, the reason that so few Go sets and so many Liu Bo sets have been found in the tombs is because Liu Bo, besides being used for sacred divination, was a Fate-driven game that was also played by the gods who would sometimes bet their immortality on the outcomes. As for Human-driven Go, its early boards and stones were just that and had no connections or connotations with life before or after death. The earliest fragment of a board is from a c. 140 BC scratched out roof tile and the first complete "tomb" board dates only from the later Han period where there is no indication that it was anything more than sentimentally the deceased's favorite board.

The Earliest Writings

According to a strict interpretation of the earliest Yao myth found in the Shang dynasty oracle bones, he had no parents or lineage so he would have come down to earth already playing Go, but in other later versions, he was a mortal and he or Shun, his prime minister, invented the game. Thus, the earliest authenticated comment about Go occurs in the *Shi Ben* ("Worldly Origins") that was written during the Warring States period (trad. 475-221 BC). It simply stated that "Yao invented Go and Dan Zhu was adept at it."

Go was also very briefly noted in several other early books, but the four fullest comments have been erroneously thought to have anonymously come from about 548 BC or from before 479 BC when Confucius died, or even before 289 BC when Mencius passed away. However, the true age of these writings can be ascertained for the first time because of the work in *The Original Analects* by E. Bruce Brooks of the Amherst College Warring States Project. With his approval (he was not a Go player and had not investigated the subject), I found that the first passage that uses Go was written between 330 and 313 BC by the writers of the *Zou Zhuan*, a history from 722 to 479 BC of the small northwest state of Lu. They were trying to project the cultural and Confucian values of their own time onto the past and, along with many other motifs, they added Go to a story about a careless prime minister who was admonished by his uncle and who later lost his life.

*Ning-tsze 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!*³

Taking the whole story of this "earliest" account, it presented a complicated issue for the Confucian writers—who was to be obeyed and not betrayed? Was it one's ruler or the ghost of one's parent who had once plotted against that ruler? It seems obvious that this artful employment of Go to expound on Confucian-type questions stimulated disciples of the recently-dead Mencius and the even longer-dead Confucius to use the game in their writings before their school was closed by invaders and rival Confucians in 249 BC.

In 280 BC, "Mencius" wrote that:

³ James Legge; *The Chinese classics: The Ch'un ch'iu, with the Tso chew* Vol. 2; p. 517

There are five things which are pronounced in the common usage of the age to be unfilial. . . . The second is gambling and [Go] playing, and being fond of wine, without attending to the nourishment of his parents. ⁴

In c. 270 BC, "Confucius" wrote that:

There are problems ahead for those who spend their whole day filling their stomachs without exercising their heart-and-mind. Are there not diversions such as the board games [Liu]Bo and Yi [Go]? Even playing these games would be better than doing nothing. ⁵

However, by carefully taking into account the contexts surrounding the Go passages, one discovers that the commentary of the last two thousand years that Confucius and Mencius at best "thought very little of the game" is simply not accurate. Instead, for the faithful students, the game seemed to be just a minor fact of life (like checkers is today) that could conveniently be used to illustrate and comment on their ever-evolving systems of belief. These included the ideas that Human Nature was basically good but could be corrupted (vs. some rival Confucian ideas that it was basically bad but could be improved); the role of proper respect for superiors and proper demonstrations of filial piety (vs. the Mohist idea that all men are equal and that funerals and their ceremonies should be short and economical); and the value of education (vs. "Primitive Daoist" ideas that advocated the dissolution of "civilization" so that the goal in life would simply be "happiness" because everyone would be living harmoniously with their fellow neighbors in "Nature").

Incidentally, in the second "Mencius" quote of c. 260 BC, perhaps brought about by increasing prosperity in Lu where there was no active fighting, one can trace a development in Go technique and "respectability" because it featured a "master" who was teaching two students. That is, the passage was promoting the value of education because with study, man's basically good, rational nature was capable of gaining independence from the tyranny of the gods and Heaven. In this pedagogic instance, one student was eager to learn while the other was thinking only about shooting a swan with his bow and arrow, so "Mencius" asked the reader, who benefited more?

It now becomes clear why Sun Zi and other Warring States generals did not use Go to illustrate their theories despite the fact that it must have existed in their time. The disciples were able to use the game without explanations because everyone "knew about it," but it is also likely that it was played on small boards. If not, rather than grand strategies as are used today, probably small-goal tactics of chasing after groups were used. In fact, this was how I played for years with other untutored friends. Since we were unaware of any theory, it was great fun, but then it was a revelation when I found a strong Japanese player who showed me how stones and groups on one side of the board could affect those on the other side! In other words, developing Go strategies would have taken a long time.

⁴ Legge; *The Works of Mencius*; Courier Corp.; 2013; pp. 337-8

⁵ Edward Slingerland; *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*; Hackett Publishing; 2003; p. 210

Carrying this logic further, there was more than 500 years of continual warfare during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods as about 150 kingdoms and city-states, largely cut off from the rest of the world, were slowly and brutally reduced to one (trad. 771-221 BC). Thus, it was only when the peace of the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) that the Confucian *literati* would have had the leisure time and peace of mind to develop the intricate strategies characteristic of modern Go. This was not a simple process, however, because they had to deal with Go's Confucian-perceived affinities with Daoism.

However, at that time, this was not the "friendly" Daoism that Westerners are accustomed to despite the fact that Go featured its ages-old principles. These included "two antagonizing forces of *Yin* and *Yang* in a perpetual struggle" along with the principle of a "*qi* energy flowing through the lines of the board" that enables the stones to "live." There was also the "filling of emptiness with fullness" while "leaving parts empty to insure life" of some of the stones, along with the general nature of go playing the Daoists linked with "*Ziran*," (the desirability for "Spontaneity") in living "Life."

However, the Jesuit priests who came to China in the 1700s had been told by court-based scholars that, as opposed to their peaceful Confucian "Harmonies," "Daoism" was a strange "Nature" religion that centered around something relativistic and invisible called "*Dao*" whose adherents advocated mysterious ways of doing "Nothing" in order to get "Something Done." (This would have been instead of contentiously "Doing Something" like maintaining empires and acting filially towards one's ancestors, parents, teachers and rulers).

Furthermore, believing there was only one God, the Jesuits therefore postulated that there could only be one *Dao* which had to do with a "Balancing" of the strange interlocking forces of "Female" *Yin* and "Male" *Yang* energies that permeated the universe. After taking the *Dao De Jing* (*The Book of Changes*) back to the West, it became the second most translated book next to the *Bible* as a source for finding inner happiness, comfort and tranquility.

The problem is that Daoism actually taught that there are many *dao* (with small *d*'s) and it more or less meant the "right" way of doing things. This implied a very different relationship with the forces of *Yin* and *Yang* and their roles in Nature and the Universe than the Confucians proposed. That is, Sun Zi and players of Go had similar relativistic ideas about the world that were directly opposed to Confucian stable, rule-based and hierarchical thinking, and these ideas extended even to language. Thus, there was a natural "dark" side of Daoist thinking that involved not a "balancing" of *Yin* and *Yang* but a taking advantage of the *imbalances* which was especially useful during times of war. In other words, while Confucianism was good for dealing with those one knew and trusted, "Dark Daoism" as it developed in that early period was for dealing with those one did not know and did not trust.

The teachings of the *Bing Jia*, the "School of Thunder" or "The Left-handed Way" was largely unrecognized in China and the West until the 1970s because Confucian scholars throughout history had thought that many early Daoist, Legalist, and Mohist writings were 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 and these attitudes only changed when some of the originals were discovered in the tombs.

In fact, 70% of early Daoist literature, including the *Dao De Qing*, were secret military treatises whose language could only be understood by the initiated. These books taught that one does not win wars by "balancing" *Yin* and *Yang* as in Western self-help books, or by mysteriously harmonizing and making as "One" "Humans," "Heaven" and "Nature" as in Confucianism.

According to the realistic and relativistic thinking of the 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, the many forms of *dao* were "ways" or "methods" to take advantage of those imbalances or to change them. That is, the School of Thunder taught the "Way" of using the least expenditure of effort to get the most of what one wanted.

For example, on a large scale and in agreement with what would become good Go strategy, Sun Zi advised that as a matter of economy one should not attack directly. Instead,

One should first prepare a counter to the enemy's strategy, attack his alliances (his connections), then his armies (his groups).

Sun Zi's passage can be compared with the *Xin Lun (New Treatise)* by Huan Tan (43 BC-28 AD).

When starting, the best strategy is to spread the pieces far apart and stretch them out, to encircle and attack the opponent, and thus win by having the most points vacant. The next best strategy emphasizes cutting off the enemy to seek advantage. In that case the outcome is uncertain and calculation is necessary to decide the issue. The worst strategy is to defend the borders and corners, hastily building eyes so as to protect oneself in a small area.

However, there is something that is largely ignored in Western misconceptions of the wisdom of Daoism and Go playing and in books like Henry Kissinger's *On China*, Scott Boorman's *The Protracted Game* and other books that focus only on the "beauty" of slowly building an advantage. Instead, the idea of managing successful warfare was to maneuver oneself into a position of numerical and strategic advantage so that "10,000 could defeat One" and the stunning, unstoppable crushing of the enemy would be like "logs rolling down a hill," as Sun Zi put it. Think of the buildup and launching of the Tet Offensive by Ho Chi Min, who had translated *The Art of War* for his Vietnamese officers.

But this is not the whole story of Dark Daoism. Sun's forbearer Gui Guze, "The Master of the Valley of Death," taught that in the same way a good Go player can kill a large group with one well-placed stone, generals could properly manage affairs with correct "spiritual attitudes" and organizational skills that would enable "One to defeat

10,000." However, "10,000" in Chinese thought has never referred to merely soldiers, but alludes to "The 10,000 Things and Affairs of the World." And paradoxically, since "10,000" can imply "10,000 Dangerous Entanglements," this manner of thinking can be a method for not seeking "War," but "Peace," because one who is always battling is soon exhausted and therefore becomes vulnerable. In fact, the Daoists supported the idea of the peace that an empire could bring in those disjointed times, while the hierarchical Confucians tended to establish themselves within the smaller feudal kingdoms such as Lu as long as they survived. In this way, the relativism of Daoism and then Dark Daoism was the source of a praxeology—a "philosophy of action in how to get things done"—which was something that did not evolve in the West until more than 2000 years later with the work of John Nash (1928-2015).

The suggestions for using the components of Dark Daoism in action that had appeared in the strategies of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States generals and had been extensively commented on in Chinese literature was encapsulated in *The 36 Strategies*, a tattered 18th century pamphlet which was found in a used-bookstore in 1941. At first suppressed by the Chinese army until the end of the Cultural Revolution, since then it has been eagerly applied by more than a thousand writers in Asia and the West to not only war, but politics, government, business and even the bedroom, where long ago the Dark Lady first instructed the Yellow Emperor in the "Game of Love."

It has been shown that these ancient Daoist techniques derived from early hunting strategies which always avoided direct involvement. For example, tigers are at home in the mountains and invulnerable to one-on-one attacks, but if lured down to the plains by offers of food, they could be "surrounded" with nets and then safely attacked with spears and dogs. In fact, this is the tenant of the "13th Strategy," "Lure the Tiger down from the Mountain," which was illustrated in *The 36 Strategies in Go*, a book for advanced players by one of China's greatest Go professionals, and briefly, for beginners, in my revised *Go! More Than a Game*, and, even more completely, in Appendix VIII in the AGA e-Library. ⁶ This is the first linguistic attempt to explain why the East plays Go and the West plays chess, and why the two have traditionally strategized in very different ways.

Moreover, every Chinese is consciously or unconsciously aware of the tenets of the 36 Strategies in various forms. Often un-named or referred to as proverbs, they appeared in many famous books and were chanted out in ballads and acted out in theaters, teahouses and marketplaces. In modern days, they appear identified or not in movies and TV, comic books, poetry and novels. There is also the example of Mao Zedong's explanations of his strategies as being "like" those of Go although he did not play seriously and they were actually based on the ancient *cheng yu* folk sayings that are related to the Strategies and *The Art of War*, which is what Go players who had fought with him told me in 1985.

Also, in *Chinese Business Negotiating Style* by Tony Fang of Yale University, the Strategies were not mentioned by name but he provided vivid descriptions of their unconscious use when China opened up and began dealing with Western businessmen

⁶ Peter Shotwell; *Go! More Than a Game*; Tuttle; 2003 revised and updated 2010
http://www.usgo.org/files/bh_library/ApdxVIII.pdf

in the 1980s.⁷ Since I knew nothing of the Strategies, I naively learned about this, also in 1985, when I listened to their un-understanding frustrations in the lobby of the Beijing Hotel. To Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's consternation, the Strategies had also been used by Mao and Zhou Enlai in the 1972 visit during which it has been shown that China easily out-maneuvered the also uncomprehending Americans.

In fact, it is no wonder that Dark Daoism and the Strategies have been denigrated by top-down Chinese governments because they have been the functional basis for every Chinese rebellion including the White and Yellow Turbans and the present day Daoist-based *Falun Gong*. It is also the reason that the early Daoist spirit- and folk-based temple system that is so ubiquitous around the world today was encouraged to flourish, and after c. 200 AD, led with government encouragement by pope-like figures. Directed by dreams, they ruled their supernatural kingdoms with strict, submissive hierarchies that closely conformed with those of the ideal Chinese government as conceived by the Han Confucians and the dynasties and rulerships that followed, but in the present one at least, without the mention of Confucius who, until recently, they had been deriding.

⁷ Tony Fang; *Chinese Negotiating Style*; Sage; 1999

The “Real” Yao, Dan Zhu, Shun, Shang Jun, Yu and Qi? ⁸

One can now understand why Go was inserted into some versions of the Yao myths by the Han Confucians and why it did not appear in non-Confucian renditions. Like everyone else in the Warring States years, the Han had used the Dark Daoist relativistic methods to conquer their enemies but once they had achieved victory, their emperors' interest centered on promoting ultra-Confucian-styled loyalty to emperors. Thus, their mostly hack writers continued the Warring States practice of adopting and adapting the ancient “Taming of the Flood” and other myths that had been modified and passed down by contending thinkers in order to serve their competing ideological needs for more than a thousand years. These were then gradually molded into a coherent whole in which the presiding courts of that mythical time began to resemble the ideals if not the realities of the Han court.

But this was also not a simple process.

The first thread of the Yao-Dan Zhu-Shun-Yu-Qi story begins in the *Yao Dian* (*The Canon of Yao*), a part of which seems to have survived in its original Shang oracle bone form. This was the cosmogonic myth of a “High Lord” passing a “Heavenly Charge” of rulership from Yao to Shun to Yu.

In the original Shang version, Yao began as an immortal from the Heavens who was said to have covered the four extremes of the earth horizontally and reached to the worlds above and below. As he gradually assumed a more human form, he ordered the arrangements of the calendar and the seasons. He then addressed the problem of the Flood waters coming down from the Himalayas via the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers and flooding the plains in between by appointing Gun, a minister who failed at his task for nine years because he continued building dams and dykes which kept bursting.

Meanwhile, the *Yao Dian* relates that after reigning for 70 years, Yao wanted to step down but found everyone inadequate in virtue. This included Dan Zhu, his first-born son who was described as “intelligent” but “too quarrelsome.” Finally, Yao found Shun, a common farmer who had become famous for his “true” filial piety in spite of the (necessary) condition of being evilly mistreated by his father, stepmother and half-

⁸ This section is derived from the following sources whose details are too numerous to individually footnote in a paper of this size, since they interweave and have built on each other since the 1920s.

Ursula Richter; “Historical Skepticism in the New Culture Era: Gu Jiegang and the “Debate on Ancient History””; *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanuu Jikan* (23); 1993; pp. 355-389

http://www.mh.sinica.edu.tw/MHDocument/PublicationDetail/PublicationDetail_788.pdf

Sarah Allan; *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*; Chinese Materials Center; 1981

Sarah Allan; *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China*; SUNY Press; 1991

<https://books.google.com/books?id=01Tx9CQipygC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Yuri Pines; “Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign’s Power”; *T’oung Pao*; 91; 2005; pp. 243-300 <http://www.eacenter.huji.ac.il/uploaded/fck/abdication%20TP.pdf>

Mark Edward Lewis; *The Flood Myths of Early China*; Univ. of New York Press, Albany; 2006

Sarah Allan; *Buried Ideas; legends of abdication and ideal government in early Chinese bamboo-slip manuscripts*; Univ. of New York Press, Albany; 2015

brother. After being passed over for the throne, Dan Zhu revolted and died fighting with the San Miao tribes (who were actual enemies of the Shang) who could "walk and fight on water" on what is now called the Dan River.

Shun then appointed the first son of Gun, Yu "the Great," who successfully built channels to the sea to dilute the force of the waters and peacefully supply the rice paddies and who afterwards organized the now-dried land into "nine-fold" units. Yu then received the empire when Shun abdicated because Shang Jun, Shun's son, who had also been deemed "intelligent" in the *Yao Dian* description, was just as unruly as Dan Zhu.

Moreover, by the time of the Han, the emphasis had changed from Yao simply "inventing" or "bringing Go down from the Heavens" to the idea that either he or Shun wanted to "instruct" their wayward sons who were so bad that they could not be transformed even by the virtue of the best of kings. This led one writer to conclude that Dan Zhu was "too stupid" to learn it--in other words, by defaming the game in this way, it indicated that it was incapable of improving the mind and hence was a waste of time which would have been better spent learning how to manage real people in the real world. A thousand years later, defenders of the game narrowed down this idea and simply said that "Go was not a game that could cure stupidity," thus relieving the virtuous Yao of any blame for the failure.

Next, after a dalliance with a sage who refused to mount the throne, Yu passed it onto his son Qi who finally, at least for a period, established the principle of familial inheritance when he became the first emperor of the Xia dynasty. Thus, Qi was transformed from being the progenitor of the Shang lineage into a king of the probably fictional Xia dynasty by the Zhou for reasons that will be looked at later in this section.

Meanwhile, Qi's inadequate-for-ruling son or sons Wu Guan ("Wu" also means "Five") was either killed or banished in the same manner as Dan Ju and Shang Jun after learning to play Go was not able to reform or instruct him in better ways. This scenario was then followed by another son, Tai Kang, who inherited the throne but ruled very badly.

However, despite recently abandoned Chinese efforts, there is no convincing evidence that the "Golden Age" Xia dynasty was not made up by the Zhou to legitimize their conquest of the Shang as the legitimate passing on of "The Mandate of Heaven." In fact, the period was probably just a reflection of the passage from the hunter-gathering Neolithic to the urban, mass-water and agriculture-based Shang dynasty.

Moreover, there was a problem with the construction of the Flood myth because, while Yu appears in the earliest parts of the *Yao Dian*, Yao, Shun and the abdications only appeared much later in the Warring States period. Before this the two were only independent figures serving various cults in various regions who were reshaped and fitted together. However, this was not done by the Confucians who believed that "abdications" were highly "anti-filial" and, besides, were highly contradictory to the political realities of the time.

Instead, it was probably the ethically-motivated Mohists fearing practical political consequences who reached into the past for an exemplar that replaced their highly unique idea that "stepping down for one's superiors" was an honorable method for

curing the many evils of that war-torn and politically divided era. This idea has been bolstered by the discovery of pro-meritocracy bamboo slip discoveries in what was once Chu-territory in the South. This, of course, creates a contradiction as the popular Yao-Dan Zhu story comes out in favor of the advancement-through-meritocracy point of view.⁹

In any case, Yao and Shun, who had never been known for virtue or for being in favor of abdications, were “moved ahead” of the already-established Yu Flood myth accompanied by the theme that they had “harmonized the 10,000 kingdoms.” The Confucians were then able to justify all these contradictions in filial relations by claiming that this all happened in the time before “proper families” had evolved. After they supposedly had, the development of the idea of a regenerating “Mandate of Heaven” or “enforced abdication” legitimized the conquest of the Xia that had become corrupt by the virtuous Shang, the degenerate Shang by the virtuous Zhou, the grown-degenerate Zhou by the Qin, (who had possibilities for being virtuous with their at-long-last united Empire), but whose government quickly disintegrated. Thus, they were conquered by the virtuous Han and this process has continued through to modern times.

However, before the proper development of “families,” there is more that took place behind the Confucian casting of the relationship between fathers such as Yao, Shun and Yu with sons such as Dan Zhu, Shang Jun and Wu Guan and Qi (at least to some extent) and the stories that learning Go playing, even though they were good at it, had far from “cured” them from their rebellious ideas.

Overall, in the Warring States and Han periods, there was a general trend of concentrating geographical and political power in “the center” in order to control the “peripheries” which included everything from family units to the rulership of the various warring kingdoms and eventually to the Han empire. Thus, the relationships of fathers to sons was seen to be mirrored in the relationships of the rulers to their ever-dangerous ministers. That is, there was a philosophical quandary in that becoming a father was making a duplicate and therefore an equal of oneself. This presented the danger that the son would occupy the same position in the world as the father by symbolically or actually transforming him into nothing but a dead relative. But there is more to this scenario because there is a pattern of conflict that runs through it between inheritance of the throne by family or by merit vs. the “virtuousness” of Sage-like figures. These appeared in each case and were offered but rejected ruling or only ruled for a short period of time indicating that the characters involved were philosophical constructs derived from myth rather than real persons. Nevertheless, advocates for and against them lined up on all sides from the Warring States period well into the Han period and beyond.

In other words, the transference of rule was either peaceful, as in the most popular versions, or was accomplished by force. Thus, in one variant, Shun held Yao prisoner while fighting off Dan Zhu and this was followed by similar conflicts between Shun and Yu and their ministers. These “historical” instances were also accompanied

⁹ In 2002, after two newly-found Warring States pro-abdication treatises were published, Jiang Zemin, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, stepped down from his position in favor of his designated successor, Hu Jintao. It was the first abdication-like power transfer since the mythic version of the replacement of Yao by Shun.

with paeans about the proper virtuous rewarding of rulerships despite the fact that most of these tales were spun in the period of the Warring States where the reality made such a utopian hope impossible.

On one of several opposite views of the “moral fence” that seemed to exist in those times, there was the extreme position of the “Primitive Daoists” who felt that the socially-organizing mythological emperors were evil because the people had been happier and better off when they were living harmoniously in nature side-by-side with the animals while plowing and weaving to peacefully supply their food and clothing. In a curious way, this mimics the differences between the structuralist theories of the European Claude Levi-Strauss that focused on the struggle between Culture and Nature in primitive societies and the Chinese intellectualized struggles between Virtue, Necessity and Heredity that took place as their mythical personalities were euhemerized by making humans out of semi- or non-humans. Thus, the Chinese were faced with conundrums such as the idea Yao had no right to pass on the Kingdom to humans or half-humans because it was a Charge that came from Heavenly Gods that he had no power to alter. There was also the idea that Yu had trespassed on his proper filial obligations when he took the place of his father Gun who had been demoted or executed for failing to stem the Flood.

To further compound the Han rulers and therefore their writers’ analyses of the situation, in the course of the establishment of “theories” useful for the establishment of legitimate inheritance, they found it convenient to regard the Floods as the result of “criminal” rebellions. That is, the bad minister Gun or his associates had an evil “individualistic attitude” in blocking the good *qi* energy of the water that was flowing into the sea. This meant that they were doomed for punishment since Yu, the good minister, was able to transform the situation by making virtuous use of the internal tendencies of the liquid, rather than trying to control it by brute “animalistic,” primitive “uncivilized” force.

This idea of “passive” control was expanded by the manipulations of myths into the all-encompassing duty of the emperor and his dynasty to create an orderly space out of the Chaos by emulating Yu who had separated the Land from the Water that had been commingled by the Flood. Thus, in the mythology that was constructed, the results of the tamed Flood were that animals were divided from humans, men from women, sons from fathers, criminals from the law-abiding, the living from the dead and so on through the geographical, social and political order of the empire on down to the very organization of the human body.

Thus, to mythologically organize a system whereby good ruling fathers (Yao, Shun and Yu) had to be conveniently distinguished from bad sons (Dan Zhu, Shang Jun and Qi), while a good emperor (Yao) had to first have had a bad prime minister (Gun) who had a good son (Yu) who was able to pass the rulership to his nominally bad son (Qi) who although “good” at first, turned out to be a bad ruler. Nevertheless, Yu and Qi somehow managed to establish the hereditary principal of the (fictional) Xia dynasty which indicated that the age of proper families and “organized society” had begun to arrive, but which also meant that the dictates of top-down Legalism in the guise of conservative Confucianism came to be imposed—in short, that “virtue” was dangerous

when rulers, the ruled and ruling are concerned. As Han Feizi (c. 280-233 BC), one of the originators of this type of thought, opined, this was what cost Yao and Shun their thrones. This type of idea has been carried through to recent times by the Communist Party as it clings to power because he is now quoted in speeches by the president (Xi Jinping 1953-) in the name of maintaining “order.”¹⁰

There were also other practical underlying currents of those far-away times when Go in China began to be played that would have been obvious to onlookers whether they were Confucians or Daoists. One was that in some accounts was the errant sons spent so much time playing and gambling at Go that they became good for nothing else. Also, by the earliest accounts, Dan Zhu, Shang Jun and Qi must have had brothers to play Go with and who were silently passed over. This may be a sub-theme representing the replacement of the older practice of clan unity but it also points to the idea that teaching Go to their first-born and presumably favorite son would have improved their efforts to fight off other sons by other, lesser wives.

In conclusion, then, perhaps these stories are actually about legitimizing the establishment of family inheritance but with a Confucian caveat, since the Yao-Dan Zhu-Shun disinheritance drama has been a cautionary tale that has been told to every Chinese child since those times.

In other words, perhaps the final versions of these tales were constructed after the brief non-committal comment about Yao, Dan Zhu and Go in the *Shi Ben* because in its time there was nothing more to comment on—something the later Warring States and Han Confucians became eager to change.

¹⁰ See, for example, Ryan Mitchell; “China’s Machiavelli’ Now Its Most Important Political Philosopher?”; *The Diplomat*; Jan. 26, 2015

Go after the Han Dynasty

Keeping in mind that the reason ancient games survive is that parents think of them as something good to pass on to their children, after the first known positive comment about Go came in 141 BC—"To play but one game of Go is insufficient to know wisdom"—poems were written by some Confucians that demonstrated that *dao* existed in Go in the same way that they had in "good" instances of history. For example, Ban Gu (32-92) wrote that:

... If you solidify your bases and expand yourself, the enemy will be in dread. If out of three parts you have two, but let them go and do not punish them, this is like Wen of Zhou's virtues, and is the concern of a wise man. If having already suffered defeat you can still estimate the weak and strong, you can hold back and act like a kindly teacher. If you defend the corners and rely on the sides but on the other hand continuously defend your weak group, then though you may lose once you will not perish. This is like the wisdom of Mu, and is the method of the Golden Mean. . . .

Thus, some and then more Confucian players began a campaign to change the minds of their anti-Go colleagues who were reluctant to support what they thought had been the strategic basis of the tragedy of the Warring States. These attempts presaged a heavy increase in playing and skill by famous participants during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280).¹¹

The next step was the acceptance of Go by the Buddhists who had begun arriving in China and spreading their beliefs after the 3rd century BC. This was important for the public perceptions of Go because among other things, the game illustrated their ideas about "small" and "large" deaths and the lifting of the "27 Veils of Ignorance" that disguised the "true reality" of the situations which appeared to bungling players on the Go boards.

A favorable Confucian/Daoist/Buddhist fusion-inspired poetry then began to appear as early as c. 600 and into the Tang dynasty (618-907) where another signal of its new reputation as a worthy pursuit was the appointment of champion go players to official positions. It was felt that if they could manage the micro-world, they could govern the macro-world, and one even became a "shadow" emperor for a short time.

Next, by the 9th to the 11th century, the two schools of *feng shui* fused, adding a rich symbolism to the blending of Confucianism with forms of Time-and Heaven-oriented Buddhism and an altered Daoism with its concerns about the "Harmony" of *Yin* and *Yang*, all of which led to the development of Neo-Confucianism that approved of Go as an even more worthwhile activity for the *literati*.

For example, an indication of the change was the appearance in c. 1050 AD of *The Classic of Weiqi in Thirteen Chapters* which taught, for the first time, much more

¹¹ See the otherwise un-recommended book by Shirakawa Masayoshi; *A Journey in Search of the Origins of Go*; Yutopian; 2006; Chapter One: "Go and the Three Kingdoms." It is reviewed in Appendix III and will be updated in <https://www.academia.edu>.

sophisticated strategies to a widening reading public. Following this, during the patriotic revival of the Chinese-based Ming dynasty (1368–1644) that replaced the foreign Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), and culminating a process that began around 750, Go became one of the “Four Great Accomplishments” (or “Pleasures”) of the Chinese *literati* (and their Geisha) along with painting, music and calligraphy. In this way, scrolls with calligraphy of the three Confucian “virtues,” *Li*, *Chi*, and *Ren* that were first associated with Go by a late Tang emperor now adorn the walls of many go clubs.