

# Appendix I

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

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*Based on generous private communications with John Fairbairn, this appendix has a few revisions since being posted in October 2006. They are marked with an asterisk (\*).*

### **Synopsis**

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

The Daoist features of go included the principle of two antagonizing forces in a perpetual struggle; the principle of a *qi* energy flowing through the lines of the board that makes the stones live; the filling of emptiness with fullness while leaving parts empty to insure life of the stones; and the spontaneity of go playing (*ziran*). Because the ancient Daoist texts do not mention the game, however,

indications that go was part of the Daoist matrix must come from other sources.

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

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

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

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

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

Noting that *qi* has a wooden radical, Dr. Zanon quoted the *Hanfeizi* to the effect that a king had ordered stick-like wooden 'pieces' (*qi*) to be made along with throwing sticks which he

presumably used to 'play . . . with the heavenly deities' on a mountain top.' (p. 12)

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

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

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

However, the Mohists and Confucians still philosophically associated the game with war and Legalism (an off-shoot of Daoism) and this was the feeling that carried over into the Han Confucian period (206 BC-220 AD), as testified by their negative remarks. In that period, *wei qi* ('surrounding *qi*') had become the common word for the game, while *yi* was retained as the literary name.

However, Dr. Zanon suggested, its shamanistic roots were gradually forgotten, as shown by an exegesis of a confusing passage of the great Han historian, Sima Qian, describing the constellation *Ji*. Dr. Zanon showed how the constellation might have originally been associated with *qi* pieces, and, for this reason, might have had divinatory overtones. Not knowing this, the passage had been mistranslated by later commentators.

In conclusion, as he discussed in more detail in his other two articles on go (available at <http://www.figg.org/docs/index.html>), Dr. Zanon proposed that, until the time of the Song dynasty (c. 1000-1100 AD), the *literati* generally rejected the game until the Confucians were able to assimilate the Daoist elements of the game into their own world-view, as he shows, in the best analysis in English, how the atypical Ban Gu and Huang Xian had done long before during the Han period.

## Commentary

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

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

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

As for Needham's thesis, when he wrote in 1962, Chinese board games were thought to be no older than the Han period, so he was quite likely looking only at artifacts of that age. Possibly, he was thinking of uses for divinatory *shi* boards, which, in later developments, sometimes employed a spoon-like magnet whose uses may have been more wrapped in mystery in his time than they are today (one is illustrated in my essay and their use is discussed in Appendix III). There is no evidence that his image game ever existed and, in the first few issues of the magazine *Early China*, a debate among Sinologists concluded that no games were associated with its use.

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

still is doubtful that *qi* refers to go stones and not just playing pieces of a game. His interesting comments are in the Footnote that follows the end of this Appendix.

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

As for the acceptance of go by the *literati*, it is true that a wide popularization occurred in the Song period, as demonstrated by with the publication of *The Classic of Go*, but Go had already been deemed one of the 'Four Arts' by c. 750 AD. Also, as illustrated by Dr. Chen Zu-yan's 'The Art of Black and White' (elsewhere in the Bob High Library), a favorable Confucian/Daoist/Buddhist fusion-inspired poetry began to appear as early as c. 600 AD.

## Footnote

John Fairbairn wrote in a private communication:

*. . . But what is odd is that the character for qi uses the wood radical whereas the context calls for a stone radical. Nor can I see why the passage should be assumed to infer divination— placatory worship at best?*

*I would quibble with 'Emperor's pavilion pieces' because Ditai was the name of a god (see both Liu and Morohashi)— the characters were probably just borrowed to write down an ancient name—and in any case platform or plateau would be much more likely than pavilion. Also, although it has no bearing on the go aspects, 'prevent intestinal worms' seems a bit of a stretch. The final character as used in the Zhou Li means 'be poisonous' (i.e. the stones are not poisonous). The implication of other usages, and of course of the worm in the character, is that some sort of maggot is involved, but this is defined as either a grain weevil or a maggot that appears in food that is in a bowl/container (the bottom half of the character). There is no reference to intestinal worms. The reason I mention this is that it raises the possibility of a major re-translation.*

*We need not take the character fu as 'taking medicine.' We could refer to the Shuo Wen where it says 'fu means to use.' We can*

*also refer to the usages in the Analects etc where it means 'get, obtain'. If we do that, we get a meaning in line with the components of the character, which is that people use or go and get this stone for storing food (which being marbled or speckled is probably an acidic, i.e. antiseptic, limestone) to stop it from becoming maggoty. Working back from that, we would then be talking about stone singular rather than pebbles plural, and we could render as: 'There is a stone on top of it which is known as Ditai's [game] board.' The reference to quails' eggs may then be simply to the pattern and not the shape. But, it must be said that fu in the sense of 'taking medicine' also appears in Confucius's Li. I'm nowhere near competent enough to take a firm stance on which meaning is best. But it's a good illustration of the complexities of translating ancient Chinese.*