

Traditional Culture: the Essence of Chinese Weiqi Chess (Go) Is Not About Winning or Losing

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(Clearwisdom.net) The four major arts of ancient Chinese culture are music from traditional instruments, calligraphy, painting and chess. Chess refers to Chinese Weiqi chess, the modern name for "Go" in China. Along with the wisdom of Confucius, Buddhism and Taoism and other cultural arts, it is a part of the thousands of years of Chinese culture.

Weiqi has a long history. There are many legends about its origin--one says it was discovered by Emperor Yao. Zhang Hua of the Jin Dynasty mentioned in his *Treatise on Curiosities* (or *Account of Wide Ranging Matters*): "Emperor Yao invented Weiqi to teach his son, Danzhu." Luobi from the Song Dynasty explained in *Lu Shi Hou Ji* that Emperor Yao married Fuyishi, who gave birth to their son, Danzhu. Danzhu did not conduct himself well, so the emperor sought the guidance of immortals. On the bank of the Fen River, he saw two immortals sitting across from each other under a green Chinese juniper. He watched them draw grid lines in the sand. They placed black and white pieces along the grid in a battle array. The emperor approached them and asked how he could improve his son's behavior. One immortal said, "Danzhu is good in competition but is foolhardy. Take what he is good at and develop his character that way." One immortal pointed at the sand lines and stones. "This is called a Weiqi chess board. The board is square and static, while the pieces are round and in motion. It follows the pattern of heaven and earth. From the time when we invented this game, nobody

has truly mastered it." (from *Almanac of Immortals*) Danzhu then learned Weiqi from his father and made rapid progress. The ancients invented Weiqi not for the sake of winning or losing, but for nurturing character, cultivating morality and temperament, growing wisdom, and expressing one's artistic talent. Weiqi is also associated with celestial phenomena, the changes of government, military strategy, the management of state affairs, and bringing peace and stability to the country.

From the *Annals of Zuo*, *Analects of Confucius*, and *Mencius*, it's apparent that Weiqi was very popular in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. During the great Tang Dynasty, Weiqi flourished. Tang Emperor Xuanzong established an official position for chess players called Imperial Attendant of Chess, a counterpart for the Imperial Attendant of Painting and the Imperial Attendant of Calligraphy.

Some of today's masters of Weiqi believe it symbolizes the universe, which is composed of 360 celestial bodies. There are 19 vertical lines and 19 horizontal lines on the board and 361 points altogether. An extra point in the middle, called Tianyuan, reflects the Taiji, which represents the center of the universe. The number 360 is the number of days in a lunar year, which is divided by four. The four corners are spring, summer, autumn and winter. The white and black chess pieces represent day and night, and signify heaven and earth.

Judging from the arrangement of the black and white points in *Hetu* and *Luoshu* from the *Original Meaning of the Book of Changes*, Weiqi may well have a relationship with those works, as well. Like the *Luoshu*, the Weiqi board has 361 cross points, eight orientation stars, and 72 cross points along the periphery, which correspond to 360 days, the eight diagrams and 72 seasons. The playing piece is flat on the bottom, with a rounded, mound-like top. The two colors of black and white symbolize Yin and Yang. The *Chess Scripture* of the South and North Period that

was found in the Mogao Cave, Dunhuang City, Gansu Province, said that "the 361 paths follow the numbers of a year."

From a cultivation perspective, like the *Book of Changes*, *Hetu*, *Luoshu* and the Eight Trigrams, Weiqi was not created in this period of civilization, but during a prehistoric civilization. They were given to us by gods. *Li Xuan Man Yan* stated that "Weiqi was not from the human world originally. It was found first in the tomb of Emperor Zhou Muwan, located in Sichuan Province and later in a stone chamber on Shang Mountain. It was a tool for immortals to cultivate temperament and enjoy the Tao."

Playing Weiqi is deceptively straightforward. There are only black and white pieces, and the rules are very simple, too. However, its complexity is much greater than other chess-like games. There are only 361 chess points, but the combinations are nearly endless. In *Sketchbook of the Brook of Dreams*, Shenkuo discussed the number of changes in Weiqi: "It amounts to 3 to the 361st power."

The implications of Weiqi are profound and broad reaching. As a part of culture given to humans by immortals, over the course of thousands of years, Weiqi has been greatly enjoyed by emperors, generals, scholars, and commoners. It has also given birth to many legends and oft-repeated stories, beautiful literature, even books on military strategy and managing the country. Weiqi is a beautiful flower in the history of Chinese civilization.

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