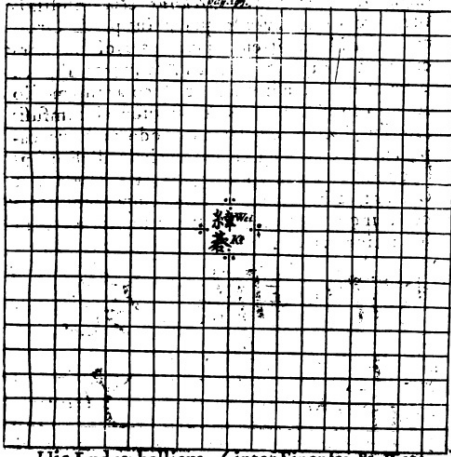


A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY REFERENCE TO Go

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Original depiction of a Goban

This is a translation of those paragraphs of a book on oriental games by Thomas Hyde, published in 1694, that refer to Go. His informant, Michael Shen Fu-Tsung, was a Jesuit priest, who taught him Mandarin. Hyde was the second professor of Arabic at Oxford after Edward Pococke, and mastered many oriental languages, as he demonstrates in this book. The book is a trilogy, the parts having very long and disparate names. The short title of the paragraphs translated come under 'Two books on Oriental games'. He writes in a simple Latin style, with contemporary usages, rather than imitating Cicero.

The translation would be improved if I had taken the trouble to read the rest of the book, or at least as much as is in Latin, to acquaint myself better with his style and usages. I apologise for translating *Orbiculus* as 'Disk'.

I cannot think of a better noun that covers the shape of a Go stone.

I cannot tell if Yunze stones are intended (so flat on one side). Of more interest is the suggestion that the game started with two black and two white stones on the board. In his diagram Hyde has these stones placed half way down the sides rather than at the 4-4 points. This would be a relatively minor misunderstanding. Starting with four stones on the board would have been about 50 years out of date in Japan; but perhaps not in China.

I have reproduced the diagrams. Photographic copies of the original text are to be found on the web; look up 'De Ludis Orientalibus'.

The two figures add charm rather than information. One shows a Go ban that is empty apart from some Chinese Kanji round Tengen, and the other shows a miniaturised Go ban with the four misplaced starting stones, and a diagram to show how an eye is created by capturing an opponent's stone. This figure is dominated by the Kanji for Go, for an eye, and for 'It is finished', with transcriptions 'Hoi Kî', 'yèn', and 'huan leáo'. The Kanji for an eye is accompanied by a beautifully drawn hand pointing to the wrong intersection. Hyde points out that the Kanji for Go is not the same as the Kanji for Backgammon. He also makes obscure grammatical remarks about 'huan leáo' for which the characters taken from the book are also rendered below.

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These two characters together have two different pronunciations and meanings which are represented in pinyin as wánliǎo and wánle. Wánliǎo is a verb which means to come to an end, be over. Wánle means 1) to be finished, 2) to be done for, 3) ruined, 4) gone to the dogs, 5) oh no.

I am grateful to Jaap Blom, David Cantrell, John Fairbairn, Gerry Gavigan, Geoff Kaniuk, and Richard Mullens for valuable input and encouragement.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHINESE SURROUNDING GAME

We first heard imperfect and mutually inconsistent Descriptions of this Game from the Jesuits. And later a truer and more perfect Description was given to me by the Chinese.

On this subject Mr./Dr. Semedo writes as follows. [A few lines of Italian follow. I omit them because I am incompetent in Italian, and they are simply a loose translation of the text by Trigantius that now follows. Nicolaus Trigantius (1577–1628) was a Jesuit who visited and wrote about China. I have not traced Hyde’s version back to the writings of Trigantius.]

Mr. Trigantius gives the following (equally imperfect) description in his Book on China: *The most Serious type of Game amongst them is as follows. They compete on a Board of two hundred cells [three hundred in Semedo’s version] using more than two hundred Stones, of which some are white and some are black. With these stones each player alternately plays in the middle of the board to make a capture, in order to dominate later with the remaining Stones. At the end, he*

who controls most Cells on the Board is proclaimed the Winner. Officials play this game with great enthusiasm, and they often spend the greater part of the day playing. For amongst those who are skilled at playing, a single game can take a whole hour. He who is skilled at this game, even if he is not distinguished at anything else, is respected by others, and is praised. Indeed, Officials are not infrequently chosen solely on the strength of this skill, so that they can teach people to play this game well.

From the Dutch embassy to China one reads *There is a Game of high Status, in which two hundred Disks, some black and some white, are played on a Board that has been cut out, with three hundred little houses side by side. The player who occupies more of the little Houses is the Winner. The officials themselves spend whole days at this Game, and he who excels at it is received with glory and honour amongst the rest.*

[This is an abbreviated extract from the report of the embassy, led by Pieter de Goyer and Jacob de Keizer of the Dutch East India Company, to the emperor of China. It was published in Dutch by Johannes Nieuhof, and translated into English by John Ogilby in 1673. The report became very influential in Europe, and was translated into various languages. To what extent these translations were translated from the Dutch or from other translations I do not know. I reproduce Ogilby’s translation below. The idea, in his translation, of cutting a hole in the centre of the goban and trying to push your opponent’s stones through it is intriguing. Above, ‘a Board that has been cut out’ translates ‘Tabulam excavatam’. You might translate this as ‘A board that has had a hole cut in the middle.’

This is what Ogilby writes:

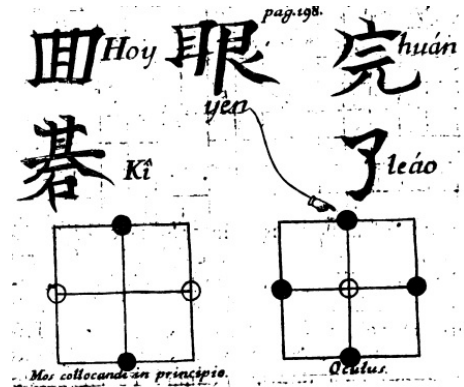
Neither is there among the better sort any form of Gaming; but among the Vulgar, Cards and Dice are sometimes us'd. The Nobles and other Great Persons divert themselves with this Recreation: They play upon a Board which has a Hole in middle, and three hundred little Houses circularly plac'd around it, with two hundred Pegs, the one half whereof is white, and the other black; which being divided betwixt the Play-mates, each strive to force the others Pegs into the Hole, and to get to himself all the Houses; for herein consists the winning or losing of the Game; but although he cannot attain all, yet if he can get the most Houses, he still wins the Game. With this sportive Diversion the Magistrates themselves are much taken, and spend much time at it; and if they play with Judgment, sometimes they spend a whole hour or more before they make an end of one Sett. And such is the Humor of this People, that whosoever are very skilful herein, are highly honor'd and respected, though they're excellent in nothing else.]

But when these Descriptions had been sent [to me] Mr. Shen Fu-Tsung, a learned native of China, drew a diagram for me like this, and explained the Game as follows.

This war Game (representing War between the Chinese and the Tartars, whose Board represents a Battle Field) is wont to be played by many important Personages of China with round glass Disks, 360 in number, on a Board (with Rows and Columns consisting of 18 small Squares) whose Sides are of length two feet, and sometimes of a smaller size.

This Chinese game is called *Hoi Kî*, i.e. *The Game of Circles*, or *The Circle Game*; or alternatively *Wei Kî*, with the same meaning: for *Wei* means *Around*, or *Circle*, or *Circuit* etc. This

is to be understood, moreover, as the *Surrounding* by which a glass Disk or Soldier of one side, having been surrounded by many Enemies, is captured, as can be seen in the Etching below, where a Disk placed at the central Angle of four small Squares is surrounded by four Enemies placed around it, and having been surrounded in this way is captured. This shape or rule of surrounding in a square is called in Chinese *Yen*, i.e. an *Eye* or *Little Eye*: and any Player desirous of Victory always tries to make *Eyes* in this way, since by this device he will win.



Kanji and diagrams

Initially then the said Board is set up for play with only a limited number of Disks or Soldiers from each side, for there are not enough small Squares for them all to fight at the same time, nor is that wont to happen. Now the Players, alternately and in turn, place their Soldiers one at a time, as you see in the other square Etching, where two Soldiers of the two sides are seen standing in battle array at the Corners of 4 small Squares. Now playing in turn they aim (as far as possible) to make an *Eye* as depicted in the above Diagram, as this is always the Goal

of either party: and with every *Eye* made in this way he can confine and surround one enemy Soldier with 4 of his Soldiers, (as in the above mentioned Etching the method of capturing a surrounded Enemy is taught and illustrated) so he captures it and leads it into Captivity, as a Chinese would a Tartar, or *vice versa*.

Now in order for me to be able to teach the nature of this Game, and the method of playing, in greater detail, each Player should have at least 180 Disks or Soldiers, which he takes out of a small Vessel as needed: for (as I have mentioned) it is not necessary to put them all in the middle at once. It is customary for a player to begin round the middle: for the greatest Skill lies in the initial arrangement of the Soldiers, and later in advancing them, so that they are well placed to capture one of the Opponents by surrounding it. To achieve this the two sides have equal rights to lay an ambush, and to create an opportunity to make a capture, for each at his turn places, one at time, just one Soldier, which is carried out as far as possible to lay an ambush.

Now amongst these plays, others capture others, and it [the ambush?] is not to be looked for until all have been played on the Battle Field. For this Game represents two Armies, or Hosts of Men, contending for some Region, with the enemies, both together and as individuals, seeking an opportunity to surround. And for this reason, with Military Men standing in battle array, battle is joined, as, for example, an Enemy is captured when surrounded by four Opponents (forming what is called an *Eye*), and by the rules becomes a Captive, since he will not be able to leave, or to flee from the place, for they are all restrained to move in a straight line through the vertices or intersections of lines

(and not otherwise), from Vertex to Vertex along these straight lines: nor can it break out or escape, unless some Vertex is empty, and remains unoccupied. And so those that seek to surround others must eliminate and occupy Exits.

Now when an *Eye* is to be formed, if someone does not have [stones] on the *Board* to complete it, he takes new [stones] from his little Vessel, and if one part of the Board, or Battle Field, is excessively occupied by Enemies, he then plays his in another part: but then the Enemy follows him, placing his [stones] wherever it pleases him, by playing in turn, in such a way that he can capture the Soldiers of his opponent either openly or by an ambush. And moreover, when many parts of the Field are occupied by the other party to the battle, the soldiers of this party having been routed and diminished, so that there no longer remains any hope of victory or escape then (if the other does not wish to play) the game being over the Victor calls out *Huan léáo*, *i.e.* *It is Finished*; for these words mean *the end, finished, to finish, etc.* when a distinction of meaning can be discerned from their position and grammatical context in the sentence in the same way that is taught (above) in the use of the word *Wei*. And *léáo* is in general a Term denoting completion in Time past.

Now when this has been done each Player counts how many parts of the Field he then possesses, because he has soldiers at its edges. But if the other player undoubtedly possesses some large or larger part of the field it is necessary to count his soldiers since there is no doubt concerning the Field. And he who occupies and holds more parts of the Field states: I possess so many parts; you possess

fewer, and fewer Soldiers, therefore *I win*. But whoever holds fewer parts of the Field, if he has more Soldiers on the edges then he wins.

From all this it follows that this Game is not subject to Chance and Fortune, but is ruled by pure skill; and so there is no doubt that everyone considers it to be lawful. [Was gambling illegal?].

Moreover it is to be observed that the Kanji for Game is written differently by my Chinese [informer], as can be seen by comparing it with that which is used in the Game of the Table [Backgammon]; I have set this forth for the purposes of instruction, lest anyone should suppose that the discrepancy that I have mentioned arose from my carelessness.