

THE SLOW WAY WEST: OR HOW BADUK TRAVELLED FROM CHINA TO EUROPE – CHAPTER 4

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In the beginning of the 19th century several books were written by people in one way or other connected with the Dutch settlement on Deshima in Japan.

Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796 – 1866) was a great scientist and can be compared to Matteo Ricci as a pioneer of cultural exchange between Europe and Asia. What Ricci did for China, von Siebold accomplished with Japan. He was born in Würzburg in Germany and started as a physician. He went to Holland and from there to the Dutch East Indies. He was appointed physician and scientist at Deshima in 1825. He studied and collected Japanese flora and fauna and introduced Western medicine into Japan.

He ran into trouble with the Japanese government about very detailed Japanese maps in his possession and had to return to Holland in 1829. He settled in Leiden where the largest part of his collection of Japanese flora and fauna and all kinds of things Japanese was safely stored in different museums; it is still of great scientific significance. He published many books about Japan, the most important being his 'Nippon'¹, a standard work in seven volumes.

The information collected in Nippon contains a section about Korea where an interesting illustration has been found. It shows fishermen while playing and observing a game of baduk.



Korean fishermen

These fishermen were shipwrecked off the Japanese coast and sent to Nagasaki where Von Siebold had the opportunity to visit them. He wrote, among other things, the following about their pastimes:

'I have often seen them play Japanese checkers and Go-ban, with a whole group of people sitting around them, absorbed in the game. They place black and white pieces on the square fields of the board, and try to surround the

¹Siebold, Philipp Franz von *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan* etc., 7 vols. Leiden, 1832–1852. *Nippon VII: Die Neben- und Schutzländern von Japan. Nachrichten über Koorai* etc. Textband II, p. 1163.

pieces of their opponents, or push them back, to claim territory'.²

It is good to see that at that time baduk was not only the game of the elite, but that it had evidently reached the lower classes. This is the earliest Western mentioning known of the game there. After the Chinese Confucian mandarin and the Japanese samurai, we can now add the Korean fisherman to the stereotypical oriental baduk player.

Gustaaf Schlegel (1840 – 1903) was the first university professor of Chinese in Leiden, where a collection of oriental literature had been collected over the course of centuries. His dissertation was devoted to Chinese games and habits; it was published in 1869 at the University of Jena. He analysed various Chinese games, many for the first time in Europe. Schlegel describes baduk in the chapter on draughts, but he never gives us the Chinese name of the game. He just calls it draughts, but a *'more difficult variation'*. I guess that since his thesis was about Chinese games in Europe, he chose the name draughts for baduk, so Europeans could relate to it. For the record, the game of draughts wasn't even known in China.

Schlegel provides references from Chinese history and literature. He says that the game has an astronomical origin and he gives the Chinese names for all the 19 lines

on the board. He also tells about the original connection between the game and earth, day versus night, and so on. Schlegel gives a cute excuse for why he doesn't explain how the game should be played.

'It would be getting too far off the subject to enter at length into the way of playing of the game, because it would be impossible to do so without giving a good representation of a diagram of the board'.³

Antonius van der Linde (1833 – 1897) compiled bibliographies on chess that are considered milestones in the field. In his work *Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels* (History and literature of chess) from 1874, he ordered all his material in a historical framework with many comments and further information based on original historical research. He also investigated the literature and the history of chess variants, of draughts, even of playing cards.

While describing Chinese chess, he provided information on a few old Chinese books on wei-chi; he also reported that Go had been mentioned in the USA in 1860 by the Japanese diplomatic mission.⁴

The most interesting information that van der Linde provides on baduk, however, can be found in *Quellenstudien*, his later book.⁵ Van der Linde directly asked Johann Joseph Hoffmann (1805 – 1878), professor

²Walraven, Boudewijn *Korean Studies in Early-Nineteenth Century Leiden* Korean Histories, 2010, Vol. 2, nr. 2, p. 75-85. Baduk: p. 83.

³Schlegel, Gustav. *Chinesische Bräuche und Spiele in Europa : Inaugural-Dissertation der philosophischen Facultät der Universität zu Jena.* – Breslau : s.n., 1869, p. 12-14. reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fsl/object/display/bsb10445825.00001.html

⁴Linde, Antonius van der, *Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels : erster Band (mit 415 Diagrammen.)* Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1874, p. 91-92, 94, 95.

⁵Linde, Antonius van der, *Quellenstudien zur Geschichte des Schachspiels* Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1881. p. 270-273, 278.

of Chinese and Japanese languages in Leiden, for information on baduk. Hoffmann gave him new references from old Chinese and Japanese sources.

Van der Linde was an opinionated man who wasn't afraid to change his views. He was blessed with an enormous zest for work. He was critical, sharp-witted and sometimes very funny, but he was also quarrelsome and insulting to his opponents. We will see that in his review of Schlegel's thesis in the second volume of his *Geschichte*⁶ in the part on card games. This is an unexpected place. He received a copy of the dissertation in July 1874 after three years of searching in vain. His *Geschichte* was about to be published and he felt that he had to write about this thesis. The only way he could incorporate this information was to put it in a note in the chapter he was working on.

Van der Linde was a man of temper and he had a way of putting down people who were of a different opinion, especially if he got the impression that they delivered sloppy work. The long awaited thesis didn't hold up to Van der Linde's standards. He was allergic to claims of great antiquity of games without proof, like myths on origin of all kinds of games. We can see all of that in some examples of Van der Linde's treatment of Schlegel's text.

'This looks very 'historical' and 'philosophical', that is why we will also look at the other games and dress them down with 'professional rudeness. According to an old tradition [Schlegel had

promised us 'historical notes', not old wives' tales!]) Emperor Yao [nice to meet Your Majesty again], 2357 BC, would have taught the game to his son Tanschu [This family image is touching, just like the precision of the year]. This game has absolutely nothing to do with the game of draughts! It is eternally the old history of blunt board game mix-up by an incompetent scribbler'.

Van der Linde does believe that all kind of myths and stories can be found in books, but he also demands a critical evaluation of its contents. If this isn't done he gets angry.

Hoffmann provided van der Linde with the same kind of information, but mostly from Japanese sources that quote Chinese texts. Van der Linde however judges that information 'critical' and treats Hoffmann respectfully. He ends with mentioning that the Japanese museum in Leiden possesses a beautiful baduk board. This museum still exists, but the board has mysteriously disappeared.



Baduk board (Photo: National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden)

That is to say, I asked the museum if this board was still in their possession,

⁶Linde, Antonius van der, *Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels: zweiter Band (mit 125 Diagramme)* Berlin : Julius Springer, 1874. p. 382-383.

but all they were able to find was this heavily damaged board with only two remaining legs. This board was probably part of Siebold's collection.

Conclusion

What is the result of almost four centuries of contact between the Western world and the Far East? To sum it up:

A short, incomplete, but widely published reference to a Chinese game with many playing pieces, which is played by the elite; an almost complete description in a game book in Latin with the name of the game; some pictures which could depict the game and one good illustration; a printed diagram and a baduk board with only two legs in a museum.

So we cannot say that baduk travelled far; we have found only a few vague footsteps. On the other hand, what more could we expect, given the limited possibilities for direct contact between potential players?

We should bear in mind that the history of Go in Europe is still little investigated, and it should be possible to find further sources. The task of reading countless travel journeys, with the aim of extracting any quotation about Go, is a hard one however, especially because old items, unpublished in part, are kept in many different libraries and archives.

To be continued . . .

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