



## History of Weiqi

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Nobody knows for sure when Weiqi (Go) was invented. According to the legend, Emperor Yao (2357-2255 B.C.) invented Weiqi to enlighten his son Dan Zhu. It was also recorded that Shun's son Shang Jun was not bright and Shun (2255-2205 B.C.) invented Weiqi to teach him. The Encyclopedia Britannica records that it was invented in China in 2306 B.C. (Encyclopedia Americana, 2300 B.C.). Ancient literatures like *Zuo Zhuan*, *Lun Yu*, and *Meng Zi*, mentioned 'Yi' (Yutopian uses Yi as our logo), the ancient word for Weiqi. Yi has become the official name for Weiqi during the Han Dynasty (approximately the time of Christ, 2000 years ago). Xu Shen wrote in *Shuo Wen*, 'Yi is Wei Qi'. Yang Xiong wrote in *Fang Yan*, 'Wei Qi is known as Yi, people from Guan Dong to Qi Lu call this game Yi.' *Yi Zhi* (written by Ban Gu) mentioned 'Northerners call this (game) Yi.' In ancient Chinese language, it's not common to replace a single character name (Yi) by a compound name (Wei Qi). However Weiqi is an exception, because the name Wei means to surround, and it gives a nice description of the game. Surrounding, is a key element in the game of Weiqi. From this, we can understand why Wei Qi has replaced Yi and become the official name.

## Weiqi in Ancient China

The earliest mentioning of Weiqi in history can be found in '25th Year of Xian Gong in Zuo Zhuan'. In 559 B.C. (during Dongzhou Dynasty), Wei Xian Gong summoned his officials Sun Linfu and Ning Zhi. Sun and Ning were insulted by Xian Gong, for he did not take time to make himself presentable by getting out of his hunting outfit. To revenge, they conspired against Xian Gong, forcing him to flee to the Qi kingdom, and established Shang Gong as king. Sun and Ning broke up, and Ning Zhi's son Ning Shi agreed to reestablish Xian Gong as king in 547 B.C. Official Shu Yi was greatly disturbed by this, saying 'The way the Ning's are serving the king is worse than someone who picks up a weiqi stone and is indecisive where to make a move. Ning Shi will certainly fail.' Indeed, Ning Shi was soon executed by the new king he reestablished.

In 'Gao Zi of Meng Zi', it recorded a story about Yi Qiu, the best Weiqi player in Zhan Guo, who taught his two students to play Weiqi. One of them paid great attention and the other daydreamt and imagined a condor flying by the window and he was shooting at it with a bow and arrows. Although both of them have the same teacher, their progress in learning differed greatly. This has nothing to do with one's intelligence Meng Zi explained, 'Even a simple game like Weiqi demands one's full attention.'

## Weiqi During the Han Dynasty

During the Xihan Dynasty, the popularity of Weiqi continued. The founder of Xihan, Emperor Liu Bang was described as playing Weiqi and admiring flowers with his concubine Qi in 'Xi Jing Za Ji'. Unfortunately, there is only a handful of such stories in history. Most upper class people at the time criticized Weiqi as being addictive. For example, in 'Han Shu', Jia Yi described Weiqi as a disgrace because of its addictive nature. Shi You of 'Ji Ju Pian' also criticized Weiqi and Liubo players as being frivolous. In 'San Pu Huang Tu', it was recorded that Weiqi was played in the Han Palace as fortune telling, with the winner being healthy and prosperous the entire year and the loser gets sick and poor. Basically, during the Xihan Dynasty, most people still grouped Weiqi as in the same category as Liubo, a game of luck and gamble. This greatly harmed the image of Weiqi for years. Scholars in the Donghan Dynasty tried to give Weiqi a good name by emphasizing on its theory and strategy. One example is Ban Gu's 'Yi Zhi', which first stated the basics of Weiqi, followed by the differences between Weiqi and Liubo, Weiqi's variations, and how it conforms to the teachings of Confucius. According to ancient Chinese tradition, everything has to conform to the teaching of Dao or it is wrong. With 'Yi Zhi' trying to correct the image of Weiqi, the game became even more popular. Both 'Xin Lun' (by Hen Tan) and 'Jing Zhi Zi' of 'Sui Su' went one step further and attested Weiqi as a game of military stratagem. Ma Yong, also pointed out in 'Weiqi Fu', 'Weiqi is a game of military deployment, with the three feet table as the battle field.' This helped to raise the social status of Weiqi, stressing the scientific and practicality aspects of the game. It is noteworthy to point out a passage in 'Xin Lun' on Weiqi theory. It says, 'A topnotch player takes control of the whole board and wins without a fight; a so-so player cuts and attacks making it difficult to tell the outcome; a low level player defends the corner and sides and tries to make life passively.' These Weiqi concepts are quite applicable even after 2000 years. One of the reasons why scholars of Donghan rejected Weiqi was because the game was perceived as cunning (tricking the opponent to claim victory). This opposed the teaching of Confucius, requiring one to work hard the old fashion way. Huang Xian wrote in 'Ji Lun', 'The secret of winning Weiqi is trickery, the side that fails to trick the opponent loses...trickery in Weiqi is not to let the opponent know one's real plan...Everything in this world is trickery!' Trickery requires wit and that's the main difference between Weiqi and Liubo (which requires luck). Huang laid the foundation which eventually led to the awareness of the difference between Weiqi and Liubo. Between Donghan and the Three Kingdoms, the popularity of Weiqi grew by leaps and bounce. Weiqi seemed to have finally

shed its bad image and became a game of military stratagem. The world is a chaotic Weiqi game, and there are countless games that took place on the board. A number of such events are recorded in history.

## Weiqi During the Three Kingdoms

### I The Wei Kingdom

Cao Cao was a great Weiqi player during the Three Kingdom Period, and was evenly matched with great players like Shan Zidao, Guo Kai, and Wang Jiuzhen. Recently, the tomb of Cao Cao's grandfather, Cao Teng was excavated, finding a set of pebble Weiqi stones. From this, one can see that Cao's family had a long history of playing Weiqi. Cao Cao had 25 sons and among them, Cao Pi and Cao Zhang were known to play Weiqi with the former killing the latter in a game.

With Cao Cao being a Weiqi fan, it's not surprising that his followers also liked the game. Among the Seven Scholars of Jiangnan, Ying Yi (or Ying Yang) wrote *Yi Shi*, and Wang Can wrote *Weiqi Fu Xu*. Wang Can was also known for his great memory on moves. The Tale of the Red Mansion mentioned that Xi Chun studied Kong Rong's games. In reality, there is no support to claim that Kong Rong played Weiqi. However, his two sons were said to be playing Weiqi, when Cao Cao arrested them.

### I The Shu Kingdom

Among the three blood brothers, Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, Guan was known to play Weiqi during an arm surgery. General Fei Wei, Zhuge Liang's appointed successor for himself used Weiqi to deploy his army. Whether Zhuge Kong Ming himself played Weiqi has been a question of great interest. There is no indication in history pointing one way or the other. Allegedly, there are carvings of boards on rocks, left behind by him in Chengdu of Sichuan, Jiangling of Hubei, and Shaoyang of Hunan. The author of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms created a poem and accredited that to Zhuge Liang, 'The round (bowl) lid is like the sky and the board the land. The world is in black and white fighting over glory and name.'

### I The Wu Kingdom

Weiqi was very active in the Wu Kingdom with Yan Wu being known as one of the eight greatest players in Wu. He was known as the 'Qi Saint' together with Ma Suiming. The earliest Weiqi game record came from Wu and was known as the Wu Diagram, as mentioned in Du Mu's poem (Tang Dynasty). This game played between Sun Ce and Lu Fan, was recorded in Wang You Qing Yue Ji of the Song Dynasty. Because the board size is 19x19, a lot of people doubt its authenticity. Regardless whether it was played between Sun Ce and Lu Fan, it is the oldest Weiqi record in the world. Lu Sun of the

Wu Kingdom was known as to trick the Wei Army With Weiqi. One literature of the Wu Kingdom worth mentioning is Wei Yao's *Bo Yi Lun*, which recorded Prince Sun He as criticizing Weiqi as a bad influence within the palace. He said, 'In search of Weiqi as a war stratagem, it is not as profound as that of the Wu Kingdom; In examining Weiqi as a theory of Dao, it is not in same the class as Confucianism; Labeling the game as trickery, it is not what a trustworthy perso would do . Labeling the game as ko (original Chinese word for ko means to rob), it is not what a righteous person would do.' From his criticism, we can imagine the popularity of Weiqi in the Wu Kingdom.

## Weiqi During the Jin Dynasties

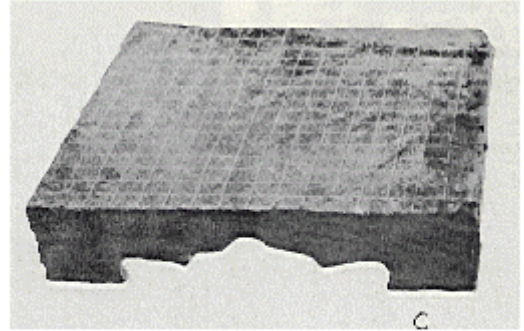
We know that the first emperor of the Jin Dynasty, Shima Yan, was a great Weiqi fan. This helps to shed light on the popularity of Weiqi during this period. There are two incidences about him in history. The first one happened in 279 AD when General Du Yu came to see Shima Yan urging him to attack the Wu Kingdom. Shima Yan was playing Weiqi with Zhang Hua at the time and Du illustrated on the board how a fast pace attack could bring a swift end to Wu. As a result, the Wu kingdom was eliminated. The second incidence happened right at the heels of the first with Sun Hao, the king of Wu brought in front of Shima Yan, who was playing Weiqi with his son-in-law Wang Ji. Wang Ji tried to mock Sun Hao by asking why he liked to skin people alive. Sun replied, 'Those who has no respect for the king, deserve to be skinned' (implying that Wang Ji showed no respect to him). Wang was stunned and for a long time could not make a move on the Weiqi board. Unfortunately, Shima Yan's son Jin Hui Di was a dumb king and he almost gave up the kingdom that his father had established. The Jin Dynasty never did recover from this.

There were two famous families in Weiqi during the Jin Dynasty, the Wangs and the Xies. Wang Dao was a high ranking official and had a prominent position (next to the king) in the administration of Dong Jin. He loved to play Weiqi with his oldest son Wang Yue, who was known for his piety and was approved by his father. However, Wang Yue became dead serious while playing Weiqi. One time, Wang Yue grabbed his father's hand and won't let him make a move during an argument over the game. Wang Dao was amused by his son's serious attitude and began to laugh, saying, 'Good thing I am your father. I hate to imagine what will happen if we were strangers.' Wang Yue's little brother, Wang Tian, was considered as one of the best players at the time. Wang Dao once played a game with Jiang Ban, who had the same reputation as Wang Tian. From this, one can conclude that Wang Dao was quite a player himself.

As far as the Xie family is concerned, Xie An was the most famous. During the Battle of Fei Shui, Xie An bet his villa on a game of Weiqi against his nephew Xian Zuan, to illustrate that if one is determined one can overcome a stronger opponent. As a result, although they were outnumbered by the Qin army, they won the battle. This story was recorded in *Xie An Zhuan* of *Jin Shu*.

## Weiqi Boards

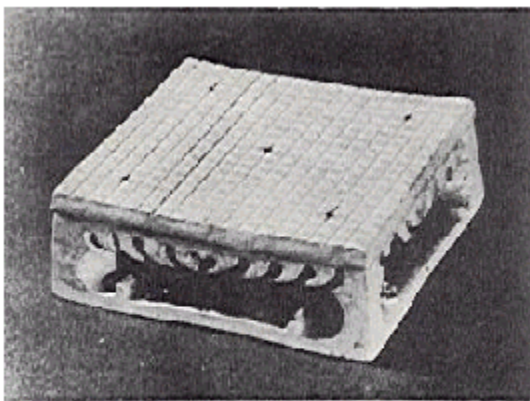
The rule of surrounding and capturing remain essentially unchanged throughout history, but the board had evolved. Nowadays, Weiqi boards are 19 x 19. But boards unearthed in China suggested that early boards were smaller. A board from the Liao Dynasty discovered in 1977 in Inner Mongolia is 13 x 13. On the other hand, a 17 x 17 board from Han Dynasty (25A.D.-220A.D.) was unearthed in WangDu, Hebei in 1954. A 17 x 17 board



This rock table belonged to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 8 A.D.) is one of the earliest tables ever unearthed. This table is 17 x 17.

is also seen in an ancient painting, Tang Lady Playing Go, unearthed in Xin Jiang. In 1971, a 19 x 19 board from the Sui Dynasty (581 - 618 A.D.) was unearthed in An Yang of Hunan. Although the number of grids is different on these ancient boards, it's always an odd number. There are two possible reasons for this. First of all, odd number grids can prevent tie games. Second, in early days (dating back to prehistoric times) the Chinese were known to start the game by playing in the center of the board; and this is only possible with odd number grids.

From the development of Weiqi throughout history, one can conclude that 17x17 and 19x19 boards were most popular. Two literatures during the NanBei Dynasty, *YiJing* and *DuQuGe* both mentioned 17 x 17 boards, indicating that it was quite popular at that time. Even today, 17 x 17 boards can still be seen in Tibet and XiJin. The earliest 19 x 19 board unearthed to



This porcelain table belonged to the Sui Dynasty (581 - 618 A.D.). Note the table has 19 x 19 grids.

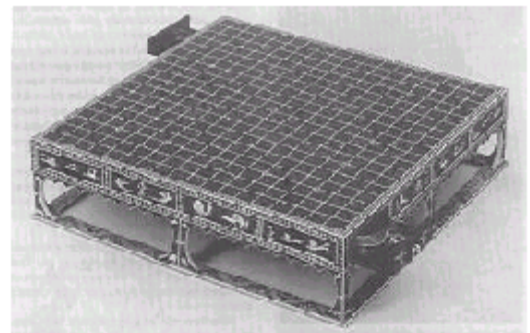
date is the porcelain table of Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.) found in Hunan. However, *SunZi Suan Jing* of DongHan (or BeiZhou) alluded to a 19 x 19 board, thus it is possible that 19 x 19 boards were invented as early as the Han Dynasty (time of Christ). Comparing the two board sizes, 19 x 19 is more scientific. First of all, it allows a balance of territory between the third and the fourth lines. For example, if White takes the outward influence by playing his stones on the

fourth line along each side to form a square, and Black gets the real territory

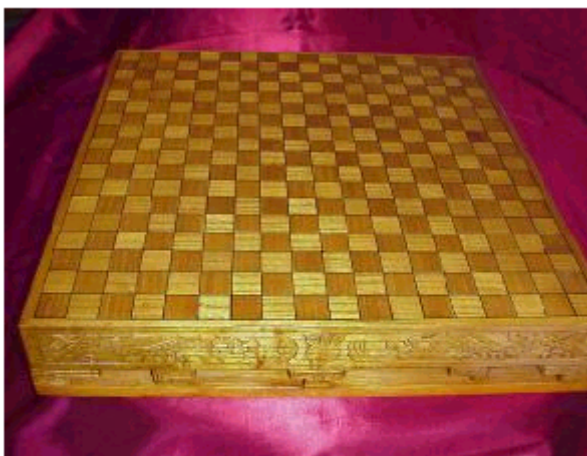


by playing on the third line around the board. White forms 169 points of territory with 48 stones for an efficiency of 3.52 points per stone, and Black gets 192 points with 56 stones for an efficiency of 3.43 points per stone. The stone efficiencies (3.52~3.43) are very close. The same cannot be said on a 17 x 17 board. White gets 121 points with 40 stones for an efficiency of 3.03 points per stone, and Black gets 168 points with 48 for an efficiency of 3.5 points per stone. In other words, it is much more beneficial to crawl along the third line on a 17 x 17 board because the stone efficiency of getting real territory is larger than that of taking the outward influence ( $3.5 > 3.03$ ). This makes cosmic style far less attractive on a 17 x 17 board. Moreover, it is far easier for Black to maintain the advantage of playing first, on a smaller board. Thus it was not surprising that the 17 X 17 board was eventually abolished towards the end of the NanBei Dynasty.

As we have pointed out, the 19 X 19 board has its scientific merit. However, historically, Chinese tried to justify this board size by other means. In the *Thirteen Passages of Wei Qi*, Zhang Yi wrote, "There are 360 plus 1 intersections, and 1 is the beginning of all numbers. It occupies the Tengen (center point) and drives the whole board. There are 360 days in a year. With four corners of the board symbolizing the four seasons, and the 90 intersections in each quadrant for each of the 90 days in every season. The



The above Sandalwood table was a gift from the Tang Dynasty Emperor (724-749 AD) to the Emperor of Japan.



**Dual Dragon Hand Carved Board**

This is a replica of a traditional Chinese Weiqi Table.

There are two types of playing surfaces,

- 1) woven top (as shown),
- 2) regular wood grain top.

72 intersections along the edge of the board, symbolize the weather." Thus the Chinese tried to correlate astronomy and meteorology with Wei Qi. Although not exact (e.g., there are 365 days in a year instead of 360), it does reflect the common thinking of the ancient Chinese. Another interesting point is the presence of setup stones at the four corners of the board in ancient games. As we mentioned earlier, the prehistoric Chinese probably started the game at the center of the board. It is thus conceivable that players can easily

delineate territory from the center of the board, at the onset of the game,

making it quite uninteresting. Thus it is possible that the setup stones were introduced to prevent this. The fact that opposite corners are occupied by setup stones of the same color tend to support this theory. With the setup stones, the development of the game is greatly limited. Thus the setup stones have been considered as the main reason why the strength of Chinese players had fallen behind the Japanese (who abolished the setup stones much earlier). On the other hand, it's not true to say that all ancient Chinese games involved setup stones. Stronger players usually do not put setup stones in the corners in handicap games, known as the "flowerless corner game records". The ancient Chinese did a lot of research on the opening of these games. The presence of the setup stones also reflects the intense fighting nature of the ancient Chinese players. Bao Ding of the Qing Dynasty wrote, "In games with the setup stones, it's important to attack immediately while defending; In games without the setup stones, one can leisurely set up one's territory."

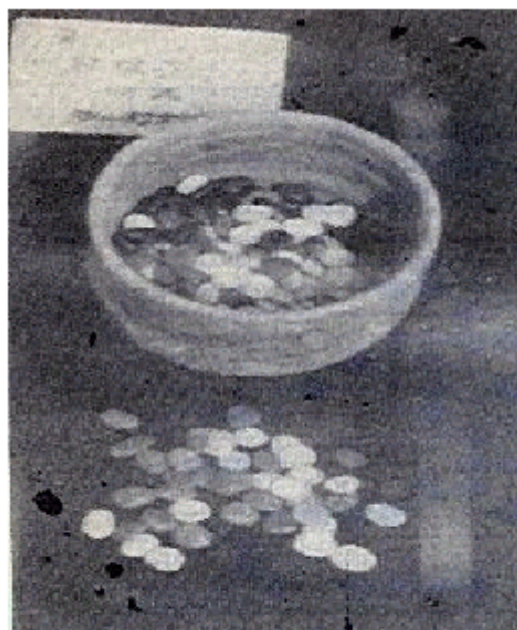
## Wei Qi Stones

### I Stones made of Ivory and Rhino Horns

*Yu Lou Zhi* recorded that Emperor Yao (2356-2255 B.C.) taught his son Dan Zhu the game of go using "mulberry wood as board, and rhino horns and ivory as stones." Although it's highly unlikely that the author would know what materials were used by Yao for the equipment, the materials alluded to above are not completely out of the question. Cao Lu of Xi Jin (265-316 A.D.) mentioned using rhino horns and ivory as black and white stones, indicating that these exotic material have been used as go stones as early as 1700 years ago. Since then, a vast variety of precious and exquisite go stones have been manufactured throughout history.

### I Wood and Pebble Stones

The fact that "wood" and "stone" are used separately in the two versions of the Chinese character of Qi (short for Wei Qi), tends to indicate that wood and stone were the two most popular materials used for making Go stones. Yang Xiong wrote in *Fa Yan*, "chop branches into Qi." Although some think that Yang was referring to another game Liu Bo, it's likely that wood was also used for the game of Go. Wei Yao wrote in *Bo Yi Lun*, 'three hundred pieces of Qi made from branches', shows that at least during the Three Kingdoms (220-265 A.D.), wooden stones were readily available. *Bai Kung Liu Tie* mentioned that stones made of precious wood like the purple sandalwood and Rui Long Nao were available in the Gui family in Guan Cheng. The other popular material used for ancient stones is rock or pebbles. A pebble go set that belonged to a famous general (301 A.D.) in Xi Jin was unearthed in China.

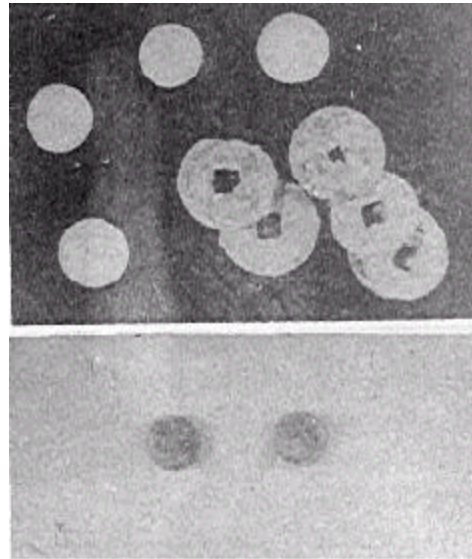


There are two popular versions of the Chinese character, Qi (short for Wei Qi), one with wood and the other with stone as part of the character. The above shows that stone and wood are the choices of material used for Go sets. A set of pebble stones from the Xi Jin Dynasty (265-316 A.D.) unearthed in China is shown on the left.

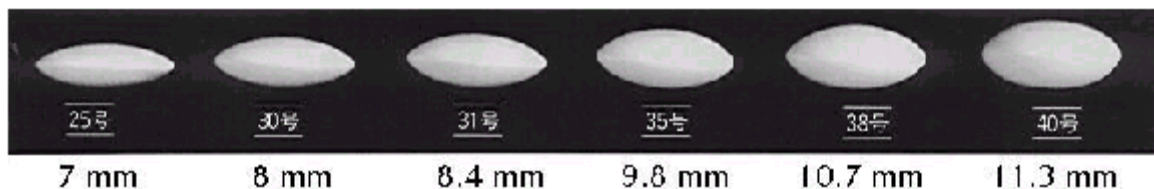
## I Clam-Shell and Jade Stones

Tang Ji wrote in *Xie Ren Hui Qi*, "Qi cut out of clam shells, look like stars falling from the sky." In 1987, twenty-two lens shape clam shell and green jade stones of the Tang Dynasty were unearthed in Xian.

Clam shell stones are very popular in Japan. But do you know it was an invention of the Chinese. Lens shape Go stones unearthed in China from the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD) were made of clam shell. On the left, clam shell (white stones) are shown on the top with some coins; "black" stones were made of jade (bottom). Clam shell Go stones were also mentioned in early Chinese literatures.



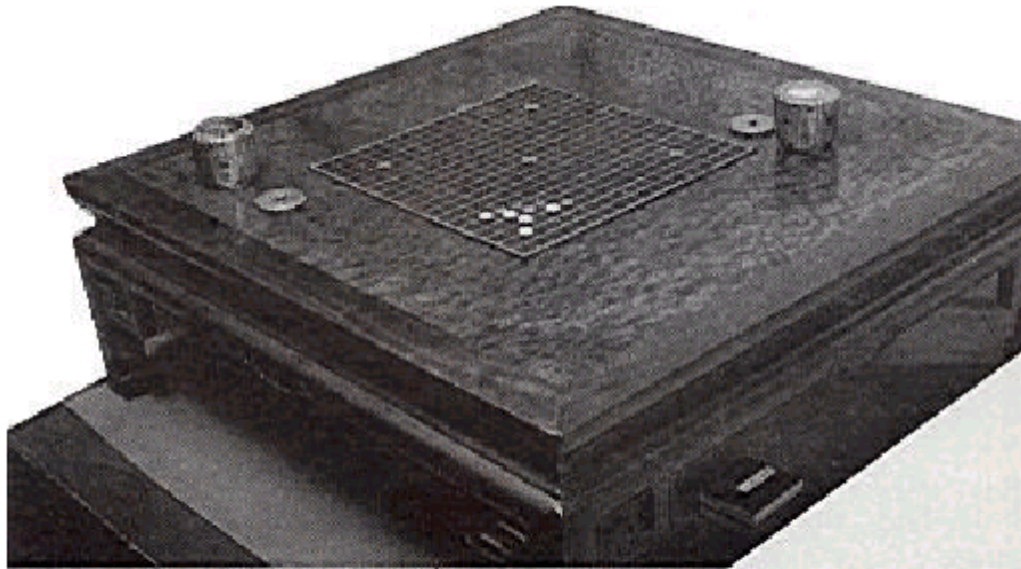
## I Clam Shell Clam-Shell and Slate Stones



All white stones are made of clam shell and black stones made of slate (volcanic lava). The clam shell stones come in three (3) grades. Jitsuyo stones have irregular grains; Tsuke stones have curved but parallel grains; and Yuki has straight and fine parallel grains. The high quality clam shell stones carried by Yutopian come from two sources. Take a look at the item number. If the second character of the item number is J, the stones come from Japan, and if the second character is K, they come from Korea.

(Note: Clam-shell stones are still used by the Japanese nowadays. The above discovery tends to indicate that the lens shape clam-shell stones were invented by the Chinese, and were introduced to Japan together with the game of Go). *Xin Tang Su- Di Li Zhi* recorded that jade stones were available in Ru Nan of the Chai Province. Du Mu (803 - 852 A.D.) a famous poet wrote a poem about playing a farewell game of go with his friend using jade stones and catalpa table. Jade was commonly used for Go stones in upper classes, in China. Nowadays, jade stones are still used in important games in China, e.g., the third game of the 5th Sino-Japanese Super Go (1989) between Sonoda Yuichi 9 dan and Zhang Wendong was played using a jade set.





Jade Go Set of the Qing Dynasty

Jade was commonly used for Go stones in upper classes, in China. The Go set on the left belonged to the Forbidden City of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.). Jade Go stones were also mentioned extensively in early Chinese literatures.

#### · Stones made of Ivory and Rhino Horns

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#### · Crystal, Quartz and Yunnan Weiqi Stones

*Song Shi* recorded that Emperor Song Tai Zhong (976-997 A.D.) awarded a set of crystal go stones to Qian Shu. Lee Dongyang of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) talked about "watching a battle of Qi with crystal stones" in his poem. Quartz stones were introduced during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.), as supported by artifact unearthed recently in China. It is worth mentioning here that the Yunnan Weiqi stones have earned itself a fine reputation in the history of go equipment.



Yunnan Weiqi Stones

*Nan Zhong Za Zhi* says, "A lot of places around Tian Nan make Weiqi stones, but only Yong Chang is the best... The white stones look like egg shell in color, and the black ones are jet black but look green (when held up against a strong beam of light.)" The Yunnan Weiqi stones were used as gift to the royal family as early as the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), and they are often compared to jade stones as far as quality is concerned.