**Games Ancient and Oriental, and how to Play Them: Being the Games of the Greek, the Ludus Latrunculorum of the Romans and the Oriental Games of Chess, Draughts, Backgammon and Magic Squares**

[Edward Falkener](http://www.google.fr/search?hl=fr&tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Edward+Falkener%22)

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THE HIERA GRAMME OF THE GREEKS,

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AND THE ORIENTAL GAMES OF CHESS, DRAUGHTS, BACKGAMMON

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XXIII. Wei-K'i and Go : The Chinese and Japanese game of Enclosing 239

XXIII.

THE GAME OF ENCLOSING.

Chinese WEI-KI

 Japanese GO.

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| T'ao hua ch'üan ("The book of Peach flower"), in 8 volsHsien chi wu k'u | Quoted by Mr. Giles. |

Trigantius — De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas - 1616

Semedo— Relatione della Grande Monachia della China - 1643

Hyde— De Ludis Orientalibus ... 1694

Giles (Herbert A.) — Wei-ch'i, or the Chinese game of war[[1]](#footnote-1) 1877

Playing with Chinese and Japanese gentlemen 1865, 1872, 1889

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Mr. Giles, our Consul in China, who is a proficient player, and an enthusiast in the game, informs us that “several voluminous works have been entirely devoted to elucidating its principles, and many shorter treatises on the subject have appeared in collections of miscellaneous writings. Most of these are adorned with cuts showing advantageous positions, and giving problems to be worked out by the student."

He tells us that the game, like all other Oriental games, boasts of great antiquity. It is said to have been invented by the great and excellent Emperor Yao,[[2]](#footnote-2) 2300 B.C., but the earliest record of the game is in 300 B.C.

Like all other games, it is said to be, as Mr. Giles describes it in his title, a game of war. Here we have not merely typical representatives of the various arms, but the armies themselves, some 200 men on each side: they form encampments, and furnish them with defences; and they slay not merely a single man, as in other games, but frequently hosts of men. The eye of the general is supposed to be all over the field at the same moment, watching not only the points of attack against the enemy, but the weak places of his own defence.

The game is played on a board of eighteen squares each way, forming 361 points: for the pieces are placed on the points, not in the squares. The pieces are not moved when once placed down, but they are supposed to move, and therefore have their connection one with another along the lines, but not diagonally.

The pieces are called *Tze* in Chinese, and *Ishi* in Japanese. They are rounded at top, and flat at bottom, and are made of glass, marble, or composition, and generally are of *black* and *white* colours. Each player has about 200 of these pips, though perhaps not 150 are played, but the others are used to assist in counting, as we shall presently see. Being so many, the pips are placed in bowls of wood or china, which are always seen in paintings representing this game. When a player is in doubt as to playing a piece, or he wishes to show why he played in a certain manner, he reverses any of the pips he transposes, to show that they have been moved and must be replaced in their proper position.

The Chinese board has the central points 63, 7 5, 189, 303 and 315 marked out with four angles, and the four side points, 9, 180, 198 and 369 with two such angles. The Japanese board has the points 63, 69, 75, 183, 189, 195, 303, 309 and 315 distinguished by dots. Such boards are, in China, printed on paper, with the printer's name attached, so as to be ready either for playing the game, or for scoring a game: and there is a margin at the top for writing remarks, such as noting a point from which a pip of one colour has been taken up, and into which a pip of the other colour has subsequently been played, as 94 and 283 in the accompanying game, in each of which a black pip was played first, and a *white* pip afterwards.

The game is begun by placing two pips of one colour on the points 63 and 315, and two pips of the opposite colour on 75 and 303. But should the players not be of equal skill, all these, or even the whole of the marked points may be given to the weaker player.

The players then place pieces alternately, one by one, placing some few pieces on intermediate points all round the board: after which the fight begins.

A player now endeavours to fence off or enclose a field or camp, *Kwei* in Chinese, *Shini-ishi* in Japanese, in any portion of the board, but while so doing he finds his opponent is surrounding him on the outside. He must therefore take care to preserve some open space behind him, called an eye, into which the enemy cannot enter, such as we see in No. IV in the accompanying game. This camp may be regarded as a fortress having a court-yard for the exercise of the troops. By entering a fresh piece at 78 or 98 he could make two eyes or court-yards. No. Ill has two eyes, 378, and the other a very large one[[3]](#footnote-3). No. II has two small eyes, of one point, and one of two points. No. V has three small eyes of only one point, 11, 30 and 69, and No. I has one small eye and one larger one. Now if the enemy were to fill in this larger one he would take off sixteen of Black’s men, for they would be penned in all round, but Black would not allow him to do so ; but when White had filled in five of the points. Black would fill in the sixth and then take off Whites five pieces. Suppose that this attempt were repeated by White four more times. Black entering a fresh piece every time, there would at length be only one vacant point remaining; and then Black would have two small eyes, and 2, into neither of which could White enter. But if Black were inadvertently to enter a piece at 2, he would then leave only one up, 0, and White would enter there and take off all Black's men in that camp. For it will be understood that though a piece cannot enter a single eye (where he cannot immediately take any of his opponent's pieces) without being taken : yet if by voluntarily entering into such eye he can surround his enemy, his own piece, instead of being dead, captures all the enemy's pieces which he has thus surrounded. Black however would not wait for Whitens attempt to fill in this large eye^ but would place one piece at 22 and another at 41, and he would thus form five small eyes of one point each, 0, 2, 40, 42 and 61, We see then that unless the eye is a large one, there must be two small eyes to render a camp secure. But these small eyes should be in the rear of the camp where the enemy cannot reach them:

I ^ A-^ for if on the outside, the enemy might plant

v4-6-W>- three men outside White's eye, and then boldly

''tVH" putting a man inside the eye he would destroy the eye by taking off one of the pieces^ and at the same tune would gain an eye for himself: and this would lead to a seensaw.[[4]](#footnote-4)

From this it will appear that —

A piece is lost which enters an enemy's single eye, if he cannot by so doing take any of his opponent's pieces; but if by so doing he takes any of his opponent's pieces, his own is not lost ;

Any number of pieces when surrounded and entirely shut in by the enemy, as Black's 94, 193 and 283, and White's 2, 22, 40, 41, 42 and 61 ; and 336, 337, and 357 are taken off immediately they are closed in ;

Pieces enclosed, but not entirely shut in, and which have no eyes, as Black's 113, 132 and 133, and White's 251 and 274 are taken off immediately before counting;

Pieces enclosed, but having two small eyes, or one large one, are perfectly safe.

It must be remembered that 94, 193 and 283 were originally covered with Black's men, and that 94 and 283 were afterwards covered with White's men.

When each player has completed his operations, and the further playing in of more pieces will not affect the game, it is said — *Huan leao*, It is finished.

The Game

State of the Game when finished.

Each player now declares how many camps he has made. Black claims five, and White two: so White takes off three of Black's men, say 195, 196 and 216.

They then take off the pieces enclosed by the opposite side, as Black's 113, 132 and 133, and White's 251 and 274.

The game is now ready for counting.

The vacant points of each camp of one of the players, say Black's^ are now filled in with spare pips of the same colour, and the following is the result.

As it is not necessary to count both sides, the Whiter are now pushed aside where in the way, so as to arrange the Blacks in a solid mass in each camp, which is done, where possible, in rows of five, to facilitate counting ; and we then have this form.

By this we see that

Black’s camp I has 5x5 + l = 26

„ II „ 5 X 5 + 4 = 29

.. „ m.. 8;;^) =65

„ IV „ 8x 3 + 2-26

„ V „ 7 X 5 + 1 - 36

Total number 361

182

Therefore White has 179

The difference between the two being 5, the Whites are said to lose 2.5, and the Blacks to win 2.5

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We have thus given a game by the study of which anyone may be able to play Wei-Ki. But “the very look of the game will be enough to frighten " some:

for who would not suppose that if the game consists in surrounding the enemy, the Whites have the best of it, and indeed that they have surrounded, and therefore taken every one of the *Blacks*. But the *Blacks* equally surround the Whites. This however is not the game:

but, as we have seen, each camp or group of pieces may be considered as a fortress, which must have court-yards, however small, called *eyes*, for the forces to move about in. Then it is impregnable, and hostile forces around it are powerless to take it ; but if it has no court-yards, then the garrison is considered to be so crowded together with men, women and children, that they cannot move, and the enemy takes the fortress and all within it.

In the game we have given as an example the *Whites* have two camps or fortresses, the left one of which has five eyes, 6, 26, 46 ; 65 ; 104, 105, 125, 126 ; 141, 160, 161 ; and a larger one at the bottom ; and the right one three *eyes*[[5]](#footnote-5) 75; 134, 153, 154, 174 ; and 237, 256, 257, 258, 278 ; and, as we have seen, the Whites are only five fewer than the Blanks. It is therefore a very even game and well fought.

The game however is so intricate that it requires great practice to play it well, and accordingly it is not a game for idle play ; it must be made a study ; and thus Mr. Giles, who as Consul has long dwelt in China, and is a practised player, assures us — " None but the educated play at Wei-ch'i. A knowledge of this difficult game stamps a man in China as somewhat more than an ordinary person. Its subtleties are beyond the reach of the lazy; its triumphs too refined for the man of gross material tastes. Skill in Wei-ch'i implies the astuteness and versatility so prized amongst the Chinese. They could hardly believe a man to play Wei-ch'i well, and yet be possessed of only indifferent abilities as a practical man of the world. It would amount to a contradiction of terms. All the more so, as nearly all those who enter upon a literary career make a point of attempting to learn the game; but many faint by the way. To a beginner a mere knowledge of the rules for a long time seems hopeless: and subsequent application of them more hopeless still. The persevering ones play on day by day, until at last — suddenly as it were — the great scheme of Wei-ch'i dawns upon them in all its fullness and beauty; and from that day they are ardent enthusiasts in support of its unquestionable merits."

The photograph at the beginning of this article represents a diminutive board and men in my possession, the board being only 7 3/4 inches square, and the pieces 3/8 of an inch in diameter. It stands 3 3/4 inches high, and is japanned with the same design as that of the Japanese chess-board. It is however generally played by the natives on large wooden folding boards about 20 inches square, with pieces of about the size of a shilling, which are kept in japanned bowls.

Ladies, however, sometimes appear to play on small japanned boards with china cups.

The photograph at the end is from the dossier of a Chinese draught and backgammon table in my possession, representing a Chinese gentleman and lady playing the game, with another lady looking on. The gentleman has evidently got the best of the game, at which his wife sitting behind him is greatly pleased; while the lady consoles herself with her delicate pipe of tobacco.

1. Published in " Temple Bar," Vol xlix, No. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ' K'ang Hsi’s Dictionary. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 386, 837 and 357 are not an eye, but were occupied by the enemy. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mr. Giles's Essay on Wei'Ch’i gives an exhaustive account of these eyes, their modes of attack, and their defence. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 113, 132 and 133 were occupied, and 193 and 195, 196, 216 are not eyes but were occupied by the enemy. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)