

Archaeological Discoveries and Tang-Song Period Sports and Games

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After the first climax in the history of China during the Qin-Han Period and via low ebb in the Three-Kingdoms Period through the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Chinese ancient sports and games experienced a new flourishing age in the Tang-Song period. The archaeological data accumulated for decades provided abundant pictorial and material evidence for us to research the sports and games of this period. This paper tries to give systematic analyses to some events with striking influences in this period based on the observation to the relevant archaeological data and references of historic literatures.

Ball Games

In this period, the three most significant ball games were *Cuju* 蹴鞠 (“Ball Kicking”), Horse Polo and *Chuiwan* 捶丸 (“Ball Hammering”).

1. The *Cuju* game derived from that of the Qin-Han Period had made noticeable progress in Tang-Song Period. Air-filled Ju (ball) was rather popular; this new invention good for bouncing and jumping made a fundamental change to this old game, new terms and playing ways emerged because of this.

In the Tang Dynasty, *Cuju* game had very diversified forms, the two most popular ones of which were recreative *Cuju* game without goal and competitive *Cuju* sport with goal. The recreative *Cuju* game was also called “*Baida* 白打 (lit: bare play)” with ten events from “one-player event” to “ten-player event”; the competitive *Cuju* sport had the goal erected in the middle of the field and a hole was opened in the middle of the net set on the goal and the two teams played on the two sides of the goal without entering the opponents’ side. This game

in this sense was similar to the modern volleyball, with the difference of playing by foot and by hand. Compared to the goalless formal game, this competitive sport was more intensive but less skillful.

In the Song Dynasty, *Cuju* became an indispensable program to add to the fun of the court banquets or the reception of foreign envoys. The painting titled “Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty Kicking Ball” was a vivid reproduction of the *Cuju* game at that time (Figure 1).

In the Song Dynasty, *Cuju* also had two forms, one of which was played without goals (“*Baida* 白打” as that in the Tang Dynasty, see Figure 2) and the other was played with a goal. The two teams were wearing different uniforms while their captains were wearing different headgear from their teammates – the captains wore *Futou* 幞头 hat with straight wings and other players wore *Futou* with curling wings. The goal was about thirty



Figure 1. “Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty Kicking Ball” copied by Qian Xuan (Original Painting by Su Hanchen, Collected in Shanghai Museum)

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Figure 2. Three-Player Event of Cuju Game in the Song Dynasty (From Cuju Tupu)

chi in height (10 meters or so) and in the middle of the net knitted with colored yarns a hole (*Fengliu Yan* 风流眼) one *chi* in diameter was opened (Figure 3).

On the backs of two bronze mirrors of the Song Dynasty collected respectively by the National Museum and Hunan Museum, scenes of *Cuju* game playing were cast (Figure 4).

2. The Horse Polo sport (*Maqiu* 马球 – “Horse Ball”; or *Jiju* 击鞠 – “Ball Hitting” called in ancient times), which was originated in the Han Dynasty, was also very popular in this period. The polo fields at that time were usually built exquisitely; in the imperial palace, the pri-



Figure 3. The Cuju Goal of the Tang-Song Period (From Cuju Tupu)



Figure 4. The Cuju Scene Cast on the Bronze Mirror of the Southern Song Dynasty (Collected in National Museum)



Figure 5. Stone Inscription of Hanguang Hall Mentioning Polo Field Unearthed from Daming Palace

vate residences of the princes and high-ranked officials in Chang'an and the official buildings of the local governments in the prefectures, special fields were set for horse polo playing. In 1956, the stone inscription of Hanguang Hall, which noted that Hanguang Hall had a polo field attached, was unearthed from the ruins of Daming Palace of the Tang Dynasty in present-day Xi'an City (Figure 5); In July 1971 through September 1972, the mural of "Horse Polo Playing" was found in the mausoleum of Li Xian, the Prince Zhanghuai of the Tang Dynasty (Figure 6); and also in 1972, the color-painted clay polo-playing figurine (Figure 7) was unearthed from a Tang tomb in Astana Cemetery in Turfan, Xinjiang. All of these textual and pictorial materials are invaluable for us to research the history of sports field building in the Tang Dynasty.

In the Song Dynasty, horse polo was more popular than in the Tang Dynasty. A brick carving with horse polo playing scene collected in Sports Museum of China (Figure 8) reflected this history. Moreover, in 1990, a piece of mural showing horse polo playing scene (Figure 9) was found in Tomb No. 1 in Pijianggou Cemetery of the Liao Dynasty at Baoguotu Township, Aohan Banner, Inner Mongolia; in 1983, a brick carving showing horse polo playing scene was unearthed from Quli Village, Xiangfen County, Shanxi Province. These cases proved that in the nomadic people of the Northern Frontiers, the horse polo sport was also very popular and significant.

In the Tang Dynasty, a kind of "Horseless Polo" was also popular, in which the players were playing on foot. At the end of the Tang Dynasty and in the Five Dynasties Period, the people developed a new game based on this horseless polo, in which the ball was not driven into the hole on the net but on the ground, and this new game was named "Chuiwan (Ball Hammering)".

The earliest record in historic literature was *Wan Jing* 丸经 (Ball Classics, whose author's penname was "Ningzhizhai 宁志斋") published in the nineteenth year of Zhiyuan Era (1282 CE) of the Yuan

Dynasty, which was a monograph on the *Chuiwan* game. It announced in the preface that "even Emperors Huizong of the Song and Zhangzong of the Jin Dynasties all favored *Chuiwan*"; which implied that at least in the seventh year of Xuanhe Era of the Northern Song Dynasty (1125 CE), the *Chuiwan* game had formed. At that time, *Chuiwan* was also favored by children; a pottery pillow cataloged in Chen Wanli's *Tao Zhen* 陶枕 (Pottery Pillow) had image of a *Chuiwan* playing scene



Figure 6. Polo Game Scene in Tang Tomb Mural (From Prince Zhanghuai's Mausoleum)



Figure 7. Pottery Figurine of Polo Player of the Tang Dynasty (From Tang Tomb at Astana Cemetery)



Figure 8. Brick Carving of the Song Dynasty with Horse Polo Playing Scene (Collected in Sports Museum of China)



Figure 9. Tomb Mural of the Liao Dynasty with Horse Polo Playing Scene (Tomb No. 1 in Pijianggou Cemetery, Inner Mongolia)

with vivid and animated figures of players (Figure 10).

After the Song Dynasty, *Chuiwan* was more popular; the mural “*Chuiwan* Scene” in the Mingyingwang Hall of Guangsheng Temple located in Hongtong County, Shanxi Province (Figure 11) may be seen as a supplementary evidence for the *Chuiwan* game in the Song Dynasty. Referred to the records in *Wan Jing* and the relevant archaeological data, this game resembled the golf game in modern times: the stick used in *Chuiwan* game was very similar to the golf club in both size and shape, but the systematization of the rules of *Chuiwan* became mature 472 years earlier than that of golf.

Therefore, it is reasonable for us to believe that golf, a sport attracting thousands of people all over the world, has somehow relationship with *Chuiwan*, a game flourishing in China for over a thousand years, in history.

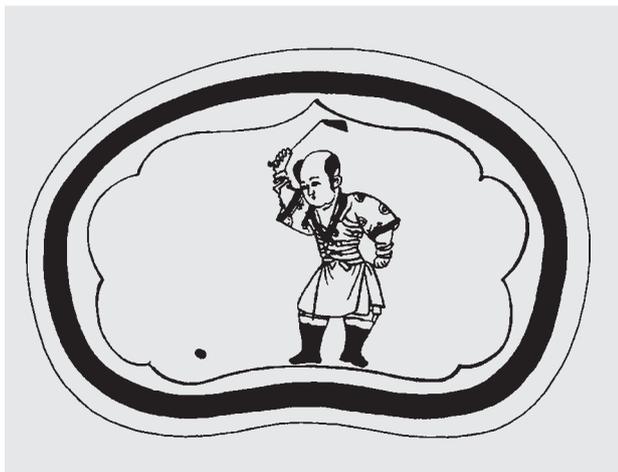


Figure 10. Pottery Pillow of the Song Dynasty with Image of a Child Playing *Chuiwan* (Cataloged in *Tao Zhen* by Chen Wanli)



Figure 11. *Chuiwan* Game of the Yuan Dynasty (From Mural of Mingyingwang Hall, Guangsheng Temple, Shanxi)

Board Games

The board games represented by *Weiqi* (aka. Go in Japanese), *Xiangqi* (Chinese chess) and *Liubo* were very popular in this period.

1. The *Weiqi* game developed since the Qin-Han period was more and more popular in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, especially in the Tang Dynasty, official position of “*Qi Daizhao* 棋待诏 (lit. *Weiqi* Player awaiting Imperial Order)” was set in Hanlin Academy, whose responsibilities were playing *Weiqi* with or for the emperors and teaching the palace maids to play *Weiqi*. The silk painting of “*Beauty Playing Weiqi*” unearthed from Tang tomb No. 187 of Astana Cemetery at Turfan, Xinjiang in 1972 showed us that during the Tang Dynasty, the women in the frontier area were also fond of this game (Figure 12). Moreover, the wooden *Weiqi* board unearthed from Zhang Xiong’s tomb in Astana Cemetery (Figure 13) in 1973 and the *Chongping Hui Qi Tu* 重屏会棋图 (A *Weiqi* Gathering in Front of a Double Screen) painted by Zhou Wenju in the Five Dynasties Period (Figure 14) collected in the Palace Museum all reflected the deep root of *Weiqi* game in the society of the Tang and the Five Dynasties.

Following the tradition of the Tang and Five Dynasties, *Weiqi* in the Song Dynasty was also very popular or even more favorable. There were also more textual and pictorial materials on *Weiqi* game of this period survived to the present, such as the *Qi Jing shisan Pian* 棋经十三篇 (the 13-chaptered Classics of *Weiqi*) by Zhang Ning (Figure 15) and the *Shanju Duiyi Tu* 山居对弈图 (Hermits Playing *Weiqi* in the Mountain) collected in the Palace Museum and so on were all the evidences of the popularity of *Weiqi* in this period.

Xiangqi (Chinese chess) emerged in China as early as in the pre-Qin period; but it developed into a competitive board game as late as in the Tang Dynasty. The earliest textual works on *Xiangqi* were the *Xiang Jing* 象经 (*Xiangqi* Classics) commented by Wang Bao, *Xiang Jing* (a different work from the previous one) commented by Wang Yu, *Xiang Jing* (still another work with same title) commented by He Tuo, and another *Xiang Jing* attributed to Emperor Wudi of the Northern Zhou Dynasty but appeared in the early period of the Tang Dynasty, and so on.

In the Northern Song Dynasty, the form and rules of *Xiangqi* developed into the fixed design as they are in the present and widely played in all of the classes of the

society. In 1981, an intact set of bronze *Xiangqi* pieces of the Northern Song Dynasty was unearthed from Changbu Commune, Anyi County, Jiangxi Province (Figure 16); in 1997, an intact set of porcelain *Xiangqi* pieces was unearthed from a tomb of the Northern Song Dynasty in Luoyang, Henan Province (Figure 17); in Sports Museum of China, some bronze *Xiangqi* pieces were displayed (Figure 18). All of the artifacts vividly showed us the popularity of *Xiangqi* in the Song Dynasty.

Along with the zeal of *Xiangqi*, the system of Qi Daizhao assigned for *Weiqi* in the Tang Dynasty was also adopted to *Xiangqi* in the Song Dynasty: in volume six of *Wulin Jiu Shi* 武林旧事 (Former Events in Hangzhou) by Zhou Mi, which noted 504 persons in 55 lines of businesses, ten names of Qi Daizhao of *Xiangqi* were recorded. This also reflected the popularity of *Xiangqi* game and the plenty of talented *Xiangqi* players.

3. During this period, another board game named *Shuanglu* 双陆 was also very popular from the court to the countryside. The important physical and pictorial

materials related to this game are the *Shuanglu* board inlaid with mother-of-pearl designs unearthed from a Tang tomb in Astana Cemetery at Turfan, Xinjiang in 1973 (Figure 19), the Sandalwood *Shuanglu* Board with painted patterns collected in Shōsōin, Nara, Japan (Figure 20) and the scene of beauties playing *Shuanglu* in the *Neiren Shuanglu Tu* 内人双陆图 (captioned as “Ladies Playing Double Sixes” by the collectors) attributed to Zhou Fang of the Tang Dynasty collected in Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (Figure 21), all of which are invaluable data for us to understand this game at that time.

In the Song Dynasty, *Shuanglu* was still popular in the imperial court and literati. In 1974, a lacquered wooden *Shuanglu* board was unearthed from a tomb of the Liao Dynasty at Yemaotai, Faku County, Liaoning Province (Figure 22); the *Shi Lin Guang Ji* 事林广记 (Through the Forest of Affairs) by Chen Yuanliang around the end of the Song and the beginning of the Yuan Dynasties also had the illustration of “Playing



Figure 12. Silk Painting of “Beauty Playing Weiqi” of the Tang Dynasty (From Tang Tomb No. 187 of Astana Cemetery at Turfan, Xinjiang)



Figure 13. Wooden Weiqi Board of the Tang Dynasty (From Zhang Xiong’s Tomb in Astana Cemetery)

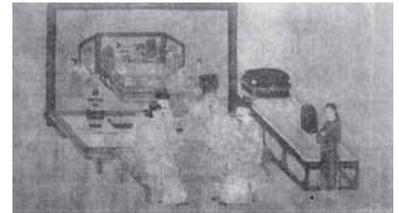


Figure 14. Chongping Hui Qi Tu (A Weiqi Gathering in Front of a Double Screen) by Zhou Wenju in the Five Dynasties Period (Collected in the Palace Museum)

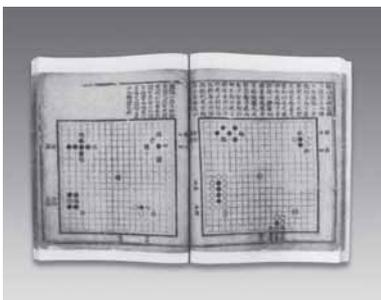


Figure 15. Qi Jing shisan Pian (the 13-chaptered Classics of Weiqi) by Zhang Ning (Collected in China Bookstore)



Figure 16. Bronze Xiangqi Pieces of the Northern Song Dynasty (From Anyi County, Jiangxi Province)



Figure 17. Porcelain Xiangqi Pieces of the Northern Song Dynasty (From Luoyang City, Henan Province)



Figure 18. Bronze Xiangqi Pieces of the Northern Song Dynasty (Collected in Sports Museum of China)



Figure 19. Shuanglu Board inlaid with Mother-of-pearl Designs (From a Tang tomb in Astana Cemetery at Turfan, Xinjiang)



Figure 20. Sandalwood Shuanglu Board with Painted Patterns (Collected in Shōsōin, Nara, Japan)



Figure 21. Neiren Shuanglu Tu ("Ladies Playing Double Sixes") attributed to Zhou Fang of the Tang Dynasty (Collected in Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)

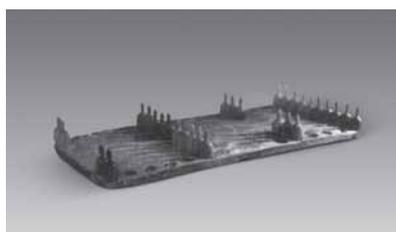


Figure 22. Lacquered Wooden Shuanglu Board with Pieces of the Liao Dynasty (From a Tomb at Yemaotai, Faku County, Liaoning Province)



Figure 23. The Illustration of "Playing Shuanglu" in Shi Lin Guang Ji (Through the Forest of Affairs) by Chen Yuanliang around the Song and Yuan Dynasties

Shuanglu (Figure 23)", both of which displayed the pattern and rules of Shuanglu in the Song Dynasty.

Shuanglu flourishing in the Tang Dynasty was also introduced into Japan along with the cultural communication, and improved Japanese board games.

Wrestling

Wrestling, as a traditional sport of China, had a new name since the Six Dynasties – "Xiangpu 相扑" and it was used together with the old name "Juedi 角抵" during the Tang-Song Period.

Wrestling was so popular in this period that professional wrestlers and specialized wrestling sport associations emerged in the society, in which some strong and swift wrestlers participated. The "Wrestling Scene" mural in Cave No. 290 of the Dunhuang Caves painted

in the Northern Zhou Dynasty vividly depicted this sport (Figure 24). In the Song Dynasty, wrestling was played both in the troops and common people. Specialized wrestling teams were organized for the imperial court in the Northern Song Dynasty, the players of which were not selected from the civilians but from the soldiers, who were titled as "Neidengzi 内等子 (internal guardians)". The court graded these wrestlers into top, middle and end ranks and off-rank, and their selection, promotion, demotion and elimination were done tri-annually.

The wrestling sport was also very popular among common people in the Song Dynasty, professional wrestlers and specialized wrestling associations also emerged in large amounts. Archaeological materials about the wrestling sport in this period are plentiful; for example, the two clay wrestling figurines (29.7 and 29.4cm tall respectively) of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234 CE) unearthed from Weinan City, Shaanxi Province in 1986, recreated the figures of two sinewy wrestlers preparing for the starting severe fighting (Figure 25).

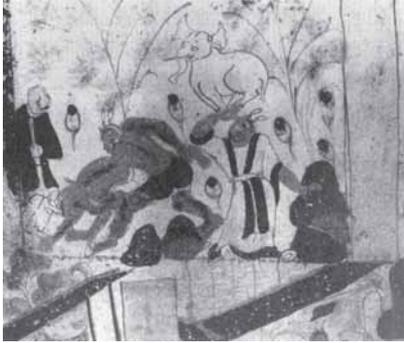


Figure 24. The “Wrestling Scene” Mural of the Northern Zhou Dynasty (In Cave No. 290 of the Dunhuang Caves)



Figure 25. The Clay Wrestling Figurines of the Jin Dynasty (From Weinan City, Shaanxi Province)



Figure 26. Green-glazed Pottery Wrestling Children Figurine of the Song Dynasty (Collected in Henan Museum)

At the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty, a writer with penname Tiaoluzi 调露子 wrote a book named *Jueli Ji* 角力记 (Records of Wrestling) specially on the wrestling sport. This book consists of five chapters, which are *Shuzhi* 述旨 (Introduction), *Mingmu* 名目 (Names and Terms), *Kaogu* 考古 (Tracing the Ancient Origins), *Chuchu* 出处 (Citations and Quotations) and *Zashuo* 杂说 (Miscellany), recording the history of wrestling over 1700 years since the Spring-and-Autumn and Warring-States Periods to the Five Dynasties and Ten States Period, introducing the diffusion and popularization of wrestling and the changes of the names and relevant terms of this game. It was the earliest monograph on wrestling sport.

In addition to the competitive wrestling sport mentioned above, the wrestling games as performance, such as “*Qiao Xiangpu* 乔相扑 (costumed wrestling)” and “*Xiao'er Xiangpu* 小儿相扑 (children wrestling)” which were pleasing and enjoyable. The green-glazed pottery wrestling children figurine was the reflection of the “*Xiao'er Xiangpu*” game at that time (Figure 26).

Conclusion

The typical traditional sport and game events mentioned above reflected the following facts: first, in this period the systemized sports and games showed larger scales and more diversity, and the rules and skills all have developing courses to track. Second, along with the cultural communications among the domestic ethnic groups and other nations, many Chinese traditional sports and games, such as ball games, wrestling, *Weiqi* (Go) chess, were introduced abroad and also some sports and games were introduced into China, which influenced and en-

riched the forms of sports and games. Third, the development of urban economy urged the popularization of traditional sports and games among citizens and the appearance of sport and game organizations in the styles of club, which again improved the development of the sports and games in urban citizens of this period. Fourth, the development of social economy and the prosperity of culture, especially the development of urban handicraft and commerce during the Song Dynasty, made it more possible to have the events of sports and games noted down and, along with the progress of printing technique, printed in large amounts, which preserved precious materials of the rules and forms of sports and games rather intact to the present.

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