

EARLY GO IN WESTERN EUROPE

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In the 1980s, a series of books, “From East To West”, was published by a government-owned publishing house in Hunan Province, China. Its entire contents were diaries and travel notes written by Chinese diplomats or private citizens who visited foreign countries in the late 19th or the early 20th century. They planned to print 60 books, about 70% relating to the Western World; however, only 38 of them were eventually published. The project was taken over by another publishing house in Hunan province, and was expanded to publish 100 such diaries. The first 10 volumes, published in 1985-1986, contained about 34 diaries, mostly the same as previous published. But that's all, no follow-up is known.

There are certainly more similar diaries written by Chinese diplomats, students and other travellers, but we might never have a chance to read them. I learned for instance that all the students studying in the Royal Navy College had diaries. So far I have found and studied about 30 books, about 20 or so related to Europe, and I have quickly gone through seven important books. The aim of my research has been to find information on the introduction of weiqi into Europe. Here is a first report —

The Qing government of China was forced to open the door to Western countries after the Opium War with Britain in 1840. For about thirty years, the Qing government relied on foreign interpreters, who could speak several languages including Chinese, to deal with foreign affairs. It was obvious that the Qing government could not trust them completely in every situation, so native interpreters were in urgent need. There were a few Chinese who could translate a little, for example some businessmen could speak foreign languages and missionaries in China also taught a little to some poor kids, but they were not well educated and not qualified enough for assisting in foreign affairs. This was exactly the situation that Giles¹ described in his text on weiqi.

The Qing government opened the first school of foreign languages in Beijing in 1862, and ten children around 14

years old were chosen from the “Eight Banners” (the Manchurian military administrative system, directly under Qing Emperor’s control). Zhang De-Yi (1847-1918) was one of them, studying English. Because of his excellent performance, Zhang and another two students were chosen in 1866 for a tour through ten European countries with Sir Robert Hart (1835-1911). As an interpreter for the diplomatic missions of the Qing government, Zhang went to America and Europe in 1868-1869, to France in 1870-1872, to England in 1876-1878 then to Russia until 1879 and to Germany in 1887. He became an English teacher for the Emperor in 1891. He travelled to England, Italy and Belgium as a counsellor at the Chinese Embassies in 1896 , and to Tokyo, Japan, in 1901.

At last, Zhang became ambassador to England for 1902-1906.

¹Ed: Interesting — see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Giles

Four members of the Chinese diplomatic delegation to England in 1876 wrote and published diaries about this journey. They were ambassador Guo Song-Tao (1818-1891), vice-ambassador Liu Xi-Hong, counsellor Li Su-Cang (1837-1897), and interpreter Zhang De-Yi (1847-1918). Only Zhang recorded some information about weiqi activities in England. Guo Song-Tao was an important court official in the Late Qing Dynasty, and a weiqi player known in the court, however he did not mention anything about the game in his diary. I don't know whether he ever played the game in England with anyone, but we do know that there were other members in the delegation who played the game, for example Li Xiang-Pu and Zhang De-Yi.

Altogether Zhang De-Yi made eight journeys overseas, and he wrote eight diaries, one for each journey. Of Zhang's eight diaries, the 7th was destroyed by himself, because in its contents there were "his duties in Japan that brought dishonour to the country". I have gone through Zhang's diaries. His diary 3, for the journey to France in 1870, recorded a small piece of information about weiqi, though it was indirectly mentioned. The French ship that Zhang boarded started off from Yokohama, Japan, so there were some Japanese passengers, and at least nine names were mentioned in Zhang's diary. In the diary dated on December 21, 1870, he wrote: "the majority of Japanese on board played the game that has the same form as the Chinese". Apparently, this game must be Go. There is no information related to weiqi in Zhang's Diaries 1, 2, 5 and 8.

In his diary 6 for the journey to England from 1896 to 1900, there is only a piece of information, which moreover appears to be wrong. In his diary of August 3, 1897, Zhang translated all 1999 names of newspapers, magazines and journals that were sold in London at the time, and listed them one by one for 57 pages! There was one monthly magazine named Yingguo Weiqi Bao. Yingguo is England in Chinese. Bao can be newspaper, magazine or journal in Zhang's translation. If it is translated back into English, this title should thus be British Weiqi Journal, or English Weiqi Magazine, or another similar name. We know there could not be such a monthly weiqi magazine in England in the 19th century, so Zhang must have translated wrongly. The most likely explanation is that Zhang intended a journal of draughts — indeed, the inverse mistake of finding weiqi mentioned as draughts is very common in the old European literature on board games.

In 1878, Zeng Ji-Ze (1839-1890) replaced Guo Song-Tao as the ambassador from the Qing Court to both England and France, and he stayed on in the post up to 1886. Zeng Ji-Ze was the eldest son of Zeng Guo-Fan (1811-1872), one of the most important court officials in the late Qing Dynasty. Zeng Guo-Fan could be called a weiqi fanatic. His diary records that he played two or three games a day in his later years, right up until the day before his death.

Almost all of Zhang Guo-Fan's family members, including his wife, three sons and at least one daughter, played weiqi. This tradition passed to Zeng Ji-Ze's family, his wife played both weiqi and xiangqi and later on she taught his sons and daughters to play

these games in England. Zeng Ji-Ze studied English only in his thirties and he had several friends from Western countries: English diplomat William Frederick Mayers (1830-1878); Scottish missionary doctor John Hepburn Dudgeon (1837-1901); English missionary Joseph Edkins (1823-1905) and American missionary William Alexander Parsons Martin (1827-1916).

Zeng was an avid weiqi player, and he left numerous records in his diary about his weiqi activities inside the Embassy. Zeng played the game with his wife, his younger sister, and at least five Embassy counsellors and attachés — the number could be larger because later on he often omitted the name of the person he played with. Normally he played two games a day — one after lunch and one after dinner — when his family was around (he often had to go back and forth between London and Paris and his family was not always with him). Otherwise he would play more games, often two-four games a day. In a few occasions he played six games in a single day! According to his diary, he had more game books with him. Zeng

Ji-Ze played weiqi and xiangqi too and later also learned to play chess in England.

Unfortunately, some weiqi-playing with Europeans was recorded only twice in his diary. In the diary dated on November 24, 1878, on board of the ship from China to France, he wrote "watching Fa Lan-Ting (Joseph Hippolyte Frandin) who played a weiqi game with Lian Zi-Zhen". In the diary dated on March 25, 1879, Zeng wrote: "An English man named Taylor came and wanted to see what the game of Weiqi and Xiangqi are". Zeng and two interpreters Zuo Zi-Xing and Frandin showed him both games. According to a Chinese dictionary, Dictionary of Foreigners' Entry into China in Modern Times, Joseph Hippolyte Frandin (1852-?) was a Frenchman, with the Chinese name Fa Lan-Ting. He came to China as an interpreting student at the French Embassy in 1875. In 1880 he became interpreter at the Consulate of France in Tianjin, then promoted to acting counsellor in 1883-1884 and to first-class counsellor in 1889. There is no further information about Frandin in the dictionary.

That is all information related to the game of weiqi in Europe that I have found from the diaries written by diplomats from late Qing Court published in the 1980s. The interpreter Zhang De-Yi provides the most valuable information, and more will be communicated in a subsequent BGJ.