

I

Groups on the Grid *Weiqi* Cultures in Song-Yuan-Ming China

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Throughout imperial Chinese history, gentlemen (*shi*) saw in their *weiqi* boards a reflection of their own refinement. Like chess in the West, *weiqi* enjoyed an esteemed position among members of the cultured elite, who granted the game a lofty status by association with self-cultivation, cosmology, sagacity, and other gentlemanly ideals. Beginning in Tang (618–907), *weiqi* was grouped with painting, calligraphy, and the *qin* (zither) as a core set of sophisticated pastimes for sophisticated people.¹ It was a game to be played in secluded gardens and majestic pavilions, appreciated not only as a leisurely pastime but also as a sage art containing truths about morality, human affairs, and the workings of the cosmos.

This understanding of *weiqi* has endured for centuries and continues to play a foundational role in the collective imagination of modern scholars and players alike.² However, there is nothing inherently lofty or gentlemanly about two players taking turns placing their pieces (called stones or *zi*) on the intersecting points of a nineteen-by-nineteen grid, trying to capture and secure the most territory on the board. And the high-minded gentlemen who valued *weiqi* as a status symbol were not the only social group playing the game in middle-period China: their treatment of the game as a high art constituted only one aspect of a much broader world of *weiqi*. This chapter draws from Song (960–1279), Yuan (1271–1368), and Ming (1368–1644) dynasty sources to contextualize this gentlemanly *weiqi*

culture as just one of many within the broader world of *weiqi* in middle-period China, to demonstrate the problems inherent in continuing to privilege it as the de facto representative of an activity with many kinds of participants and modes of engagement, as well as to provide a more comprehensive picture of the world of *weiqi* in middle-period China.

Shade-Sitting (*Zuoyin*) and Hand-Chatting (*Shoutan*)

Wang Tingne (1573–1619) was a man of many identities. He was born to a wealthy merchant family, but instead of following in his family's footsteps he sought to enter officialdom. After failing to obtain a *jinsshi* degree, he purchased a post as a lowly salt distribution commissioner and then resigned soon after; he continued to hold various county-level administrative positions, but focused most of his efforts on a new career as a publisher, running his own prolific publishing house. Wang sought not only to profit from his publications, but also to use them to present his public persona as a gentleman: in his ca. 1600 publication *A Mirror of People: A History* (Renjing yangqiu), a collection of anecdotes about exemplary and moral men, Wang included a section on his own parents' charitable acts, as well as his own biography. He had his illustrator, Wang Geng, provide images of Wang demonstrating filiality by serving medicine to his ailing father, and the whole Wang family giving generously to the poor.³ In 1609 he published *Master Shade-Sitter's Weiqi Manual* (*Zuoyin yipu*), which provided him with another opportunity to present a gentlemanly public persona; as such, Wang's *weiqi* manual provides a concentrated dose of the values and symbols that constituted gentlemanly *weiqi* culture.⁴

Master Shade-Sitter (*Zuoyin xiansheng*), one of Wang's many sobriquets, was one of these symbols; its source is a fifth-century anecdote in which a gentleman and a monk refer to *weiqi* as "shade-sitting" and "hand-chatting."⁵ These names for *weiqi* appear often in later literary collections, associating the game with elegance, leisure, reclusion, and tranquility. Wang could have crafted an original sobriquet demonstrating his fondness for *weiqi*, such as Fond-of-Black-and-White-Stones Layman or Master Nineteen-by-Nineteen-Grid (I make no claims to creativity); his selection of this well-known literary reference, however, not only declared his personal allegiance to gentlemanly values through *weiqi*, but



FIG. 1.1.
Wang Geng's illustration, "Shade Sitting" from *Master Shade-Sitter's Weiqi Manual*. Courtesy of Guangxi Normal University Press.

also granted him credibility in the eyes of the clientele he hoped would purchase his manual.

Most of the volumes of Wang's manual are not extant, but among what remains is the original cover page, showcasing Wang's sobriquet in big, bold, red characters, and advertising in slightly smaller writing that the book contains poems and prose by famous gentlemen reproduced in their own calligraphic styles (several of these men were officials in Wang's own social network, who offered him prefaces and colophons for the *weiqi* manual). As he had done in *A Mirror of People*, Wang inserted his biographical information into his manual and had his illustrator Wang Geng compose another image of him, this time sitting in his garden (also named "Shade-Sitting"), playing *weiqi* with a Confucian while a Daoist and Buddhist watch.⁶ These lofty men and the peculiar craggy rocks surrounding them symbolically present Wang's garden as a paradise for the gentlemanly sort.

No longer the scion of a merchant family or the Confucian son that he was in *A Mirror of People*, Wang has become Master Shade-Sitter: a sage, reclusive, well-connected gentleman and *weiqi* connoisseur extraordinaire. The promotion of himself and his manual continues in a short text preserved behind the cover page, reminding readers of several mythical *weiqi* origin stories, each linked to Daoist immortals or a mythical ruler, claiming

that *weiqi* is “the pleasurable Way of the immortals, and a tool for cultivating oneself. Its profound depths are not something that those of little skill or intelligence can pry into!”⁷ The text criticizes recently published *weiqi* manuals for being jumbled and confusing and assures readers that *this* manual will not only help them achieve victory on the board but also master knowledge of an ideal activity for “whiling away one’s leisure hours and stepping back from the turmoil of the world.”⁸

Wang praises only one *weiqi* text besides his own: the *Thirteen-Chapter Classic of Weiqi* (Qijing shisan pian), which he says contains the utmost wondrousness of *weiqi*.⁹ The *Thirteen-Chapter Classic*, written by Zhang Ni in Northern Song (960–1127), is a core text of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture and was reproduced in full in later *weiqi* manuals. Wang’s praise of this text is strategic, as it signals to potential buyers that his manual belongs to its lineage and adheres to its ideals.

The *Thirteen-Chapter Classic* elevates the status of *weiqi* beyond that of a mere board game by linking it to classical cosmology. The three hundred and sixty stones represent the number of days in one year; the four corners of the board represent the four seasons; the stones are half black and half white, in accordance with *yin* and *yang*.¹⁰ *Weiqi* was not merely the placement of stones on a grid; understanding the rules of the game did not mean that one truly understood *weiqi*. One needed to grasp the machinations of the universe, to perceive the workings of *yin* and *yang* or the ineffable “Way” (Dao), and mastery of the game was therefore reserved for gentlemen of particularly high refinement. Yu Ji’s (1272–1348) preface to the manual *Mystery of Mysteries: The Classic of Weiqi* (Xuanxuan qijing) similarly describes *weiqi* as possessing the forms of Heaven and Earth, the principles of *yin* and *yang*, and the forces of nature.¹¹ And a preface in Wang’s manual notes that the Way of *weiqi* lies in

the machinations of the spirits and the movements of the heavens, congealing and dispersing like clouds, emerging and vanishing like dragons. A *weiqi* board may appear meagre, but in reality, it exceeds what the eyes and mind [can perceive]. This is not something commonly understood, grasped in one’s hands and told to others.¹²

In addition to its abstract cosmological associations, gentlemen understood *weiqi* as a means of demonstrating good character. The *Thir-*

teen-Chapter Classic emphasizes that players must be calm and collected, in control of their feelings, and engaged in careful contemplation throughout the game. It warns that only inferior players resort to immoral strategies of trickery and deceit and reminds readers, “Don’t speak [arrogantly] if you win; don’t talk [resentfully] if you lose.”¹³ Wang’s manual likewise expects players to “not be arrogant in victory, nor ashamed in defeat.”¹⁴ Deviation from such standards was recognized as the territory of lesser men; Ma Yu (1123–83) reflected poetically on his failure to adhere to such ideals, saying: “I boast of my good [*weiqi*] hand, greed arises in my heart-mind and goes unattended. Having made myself lowly, I advance towards danger!”¹⁵ Liu Yin (d. 1167) jokingly said of himself, “I’ve never once done the affairs of a lesser man, but when playing *weiqi* I cannot but be a lesser man!”¹⁶

When understood and played properly, *weiqi* could function for the gentlemanly sort as an avenue of self-cultivation. A common origin story states that the mythical sage King Yao invented *weiqi* to educate his son and cultivate proper virtue.¹⁷ In his preface to *Mystery of Mysteries*, Yan Tianzhang (ca. 1350) wrote:

Weiqi is an art, and although it is called a lesser art, it is also where the utmost principle resides, and its daily use cannot be neglected. If you enjoy it day and night, in order to enlarge your aspiration toward rightness and principle, then in responding to affairs, you will have more than enough, without missing anything in your heart.¹⁸

The overwhelming majority of gentlemanly writings on *weiqi* look like this, focusing on conduct, cultivation, cosmology, or poetic and abstract depictions of the game; technical descriptions of gameplay or strategy are noticeably absent. Chapter 11 of the *Thirteen-Chapter Classic* contains a list of *weiqi* terminology, but even the treatise itself does not actually *use* that terminology throughout; in keeping with gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, it instead seeks to connect each chapter with quotations from the classical canon, repurposed as vague advice about how to play *weiqi* properly. This is not to suggest that gentlemen weren’t interested in learning to play *weiqi* skillfully, but that demonstrating knowledge of advanced strategy or invoking technical terminology was clearly not valued in gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, which held greater esteem for more metaphorical invocations of the game. As Li Dongyang (1447–1516) once observed:

Su Shi (1037–1101) was among the ancients who were not good at *weiqi*. He said: “Victory certainly brings joy, but one can also delight in defeat.” From this we know that those who are not skilled at *weiqi* can still obtain great pleasure from it. People who attain this [understanding] can participate in conversations about *weiqi*. Those who are good at using metaphors to describe the world will certainly use *weiqi* [to do so]; rare will be the things that do not fit [when one] uses *weiqi* to observe the world.¹⁹

We may understand this gentlemanly *weiqi* culture as a *sticky culture*: “a body of understandings that glues participants to their community.”²⁰ Sticky cultures stem from routine interactions and help to build a sense of affiliation and belonging to a social group with shared knowledge, a collective memory, and a commitment to certain ideals.²¹ Community members do not need to adhere to the entire body of understandings available to them; however, as a man assiduously attempting to market his *weiqi* manual (and himself) to this gentlemanly community, Wang Tingne’s manual provides a concentrated dose of many of the values and symbols constituting this culture. These include a shared understanding of the game as an ideal leisure pursuit, an art reflecting the cosmos, a tool of self-cultivation, and an avenue for demonstrating one’s cultivated conduct to others; a shared awareness of how the game is played and the proper behavior expected of its lofty players; a shared knowledge of core texts like the *Thirteen-Chapter Classic*, and symbols and metaphors drawn primarily from the classical and literary canons.

Wang did not put a *weiqi* board on the cover of his manual; instead, he stamped his literary sobriquet in bold red characters. He told potential buyers that his manual contained calligraphy and poetry by famous men, but said nothing about the educational *weiqi* diagrams within. He did not try to convince customers that they were buying the manual of a master *weiqi* player but tried to assure them of his status as a proper gentleman by including prefaces with cosmological and metaphorical discussions of *weiqi* referencing the classical canon, an illustration of him playing *weiqi* with lofty men in an idyllic garden, and an advertisement reminding readers of *weiqi*’s illustrious origins, its usefulness for self-cultivation, and how wonderfully it serves to while away one’s leisure hours.

Winning was a secondary value in this gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, but it was essential in the contemporaneous culture of occupational *weiqi* players.

Weiqi Artisans and *Weiqi* Attendants

At some point in the eleventh century, Liu Zhongfu stopped at an inn in Qiantang (modern-day Hangzhou). People asked the innkeeper about him, but the innkeeper could only reply: “[Liu] Zhongfu stays at the inn, leaves to roam around the marketplace, and returns each night, knocking on the door [of my inn]. I have never known what class of person he is.”²² One morning Liu put up a banner offering three hundred pieces of silver serving ware as a prize to anyone who could beat him at *weiqi*. Word spread, and local strongmen (*tuhao*) gathered *weiqi* players to see who would face off against Liu in front of a crowd; in the end, one was selected to play black while Liu played white. After one hundred stones were placed, Liu’s opponent arrogantly boasted, “Now the positions on the board can already be judged. Black will certainly win!” But Liu replied, “Not yet.”²³ And after about twenty more stones were placed on the board, Liu was victorious. The crowd sighed with admiration, and Liu addressed them as follows:

I, Zhongfu, am a person from Jiangnan, who as a child was fond of this art [of *weiqi*] and immediately seemed to understand it. Through the praise of others, I was brought to attain [the status of] National Hand. In the following years, people have repeatedly urged me onward, wanting to recommend me for appointment as a Hanlin [Artisans Institute] Attendant [in the capital], but my heart desired to come to the great city of Qiantang [first], where lofty men and virtuous gentlemen are numerous, and which *weiqi* players call the “first hurdle.” If I was fortunate enough to win [here], then I could advance [to the capital and the Hanlin Artisans Institute]. I have stopped here for ten days, and each day I have observed *weiqi* gatherings and renowned players taking on the game and have thoroughly observed their levels of skill. It was for this reason that I dared to put up the banner—it was not done out of arrogance.²⁴

Liu then announced that if anyone in the audience could detect the one key move which allowed him to win, he would return home and never seek

renown through *weiqi* again. No one could figure it out, and when Liu pointed out a particular “move [that became] useful twenty moves later,” the crowd was amazed, giving him gifts and treating him as an honored guest for his remaining time in Qiantang.

Liu was one of many men in Song-Yuan-Ming China who made a living by playing *weiqi*. Some traveled from place to place and performed their art for crowds; some opened *weiqi* shops where they played, taught, and sold games.²⁵ A select few were employed at the Hanlin Artisans Institute as *weiqi* attendants (*qi daizhao*), tasked with playing *weiqi* for audiences inside and outside the imperial court. Liu became one such attendant, and some of the games he played with National Hands at the capital were recorded as diagrams in the *Collection of Pure Happiness and Forgetting Worries* (Wangyou qingle ji).²⁶ Liu earned a livelihood not only through his position at court and from winning games but also by traveling to the homes of various noble families at the capital to teach *weiqi*; he also took a fellow occupational *weiqi* player named Hou Xiaogong as his disciple.²⁷

An anecdote from the *Record of the Listener* (Yi jian zhi) emphasizes the importance of reputation for occupational players: it describes a young man from Caizhou of lowly social background who starts out as the best player in his village, then travels to Kaifeng and earns a reputation as a peerless player, and eventually ends up in Yan (the region of modern Beijing). At the time, a woman named Wayperson of Wondrous Contemplation (*Miaoguan daoren*) was a National Hand with her own *weiqi* shop in Yan, where she played with patrons and trained disciples. The young man visited her shop daily and pointed out mistakes in her gameplay; she did not want to see him again, but local aficionados wished to see a match between the two and offered a prize of 200,000 cash. She sent a messenger to the young man in advance; fearing that she would lose the match and suffer reputational damage, she offered to compensate him financially if he agreed to rig the game in her favor. The young man, however, refused her offer and won the games. Subsequently, the stakes were raised for an additional game: the young man wagered gold in exchange for her hand in marriage. He won the match, and the two were married.²⁸

Prestige was a vital asset for these players: it drew patrons to their shops, increased the amount of prize money offered by audiences, connected masters with disciples, and led to employment at court as *weiqi* attendants for

a select few. This prestige was not earned through tasteful poetic references to the classics or cosmology; it was accrued through winning games, or at the very least, successfully demonstrating one's skill prior to losing. The same processes of reputation building continued into the Ming dynasty, as revealed in Wu Cheng'en's (1500–82) poem about the National Hand Bao Yizhong:

Among those in the world who, at present, are praised for being good
at *weiqi*,
Bao [Yizhong] of Wenzhou occupies first place.
Twenty-five years ago, I
Already saw his incomparable wondrousness at the crisscrossed [*weiqi*
board].
At that time, as a youth, he travelled to Huai'an,
He later left his footprints throughout Jiangnan.
In rank he would not have yielded to Fan Yuanbo,²⁹
[So] he received reward and favor from Yang Sui'an.³⁰
Capable *weiqi* players came from all over to compete for cock of the walk,
But at once, upon encountering [Bao], they were all in low spirits.
Examination graduates and nobles [riding] decorated horses welcomed
[him],
The Hanlin Academicians inscribed poetry when visiting [him].³¹

The presence of renowned occupational *weiqi* players in major urban centers and in important *weiqi* manuals, paired with their undeniable skill at the game, had the potential to make them heroes for *weiqi* enthusiasts: people to discuss, appreciate, and even emulate, helping to constitute a sticky culture and bind a community together.³² However, in extant texts, these players are not described as heroes to be emulated but as spectacle. Gentlemen did not write about adopting their play styles or about the influence their strategies might have on their own gameplay. They did not applaud these men as cultured or erudite nor write biographies about them. Bao Yizhong drew audiences of influential gentlemen, was praised by the renowned Wu Cheng'en, and even appeared in the poetry of Wang Tingne; however, he and his fellow occupational players were never a selling point for Wang's *weiqi* manual, nor were they ever a core component

of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, which had only virtuous and high-minded gentlemen as its heroes.³³

There were some instances of overlap between these cultures. In Ming, the National Hand Fan Hong grew up studying the classics and playing *weiqi* for fun, but later decided to abandon officialdom to become an occupational player.³⁴ In Song, the gentleman Zhu Buyi was skilled enough to challenge Liu Zhongfu in front of a crowd; Liu stopped a game partway through, apparently because the shame of losing would be harmful to his livelihood. Liu himself may be an example of overlap, as he had clearly received enough education to author his own short treatise entitled “Secrets of *Weiqi*” (*Qi jue*); however, his treatise contains no cosmological claims or poetic allusions and focuses instead on strategic elements such as the placement of stones and principles of attacking and defending.³⁵ Despite these instances of blurred boundaries, the two cultures of occupational *weiqi* players and gentlemanly players remained mostly separate.

An “Art of Opportunistic Trickery” and a “Wooden Wild Fox”

“[Confucius] said: ‘People who spend the whole day eating, not applying their heart-mind to anything, are difficult! Are there not six sticks [*liubo*] and *weiqi* players? Doing that is still better than doing nothing!’”³⁶

Any gentleman wishing to follow the wisdom of the classics while enjoying *weiqi* during leisure hours would have to come to terms with the fact that Confucius was not a fan of board games. Commentaries on the *Analects* (Lunyu) broadly agree that this is not an endorsement of *weiqi*; Zhang Shi (1133–180), for instance, writes that

six sticks and *weiqi* are certainly not what is appropriate to do. However, is it not better to play those games and have one’s heart-mind focused on them than to be scattered to who knows what extreme? The passage may be summed up by saying that not applying one’s heart-mind and developing evil [ways] is to be feared. It is not to instruct people in six sticks and *weiqi*.³⁷

Mencius went a step further, including *weiqi* among the five “unfilial things” (*buxiaozhe*) that cause people to neglect caring for their parents;

he also associated *weiqi* with focusing the heart-mind in a parable about two students of this “lesser art” (*xiaoshu*): the student able to focus on his *weiqi* lesson is considered superior to the student who is easily distracted by the thought of hunting.³⁸ However, Mencius clearly does not believe that *weiqi* is something that one should apply one’s heart-mind to.

Gentlemanly *weiqi* culture did not encompass *all* gentlemen; though some saw *weiqi* as a sage art, others had nothing but disdain for it. Yu Ji’s preface to *Mystery of Mysteries* notes that many people didn’t believe that *weiqi* was invented by the ancient sage kings to educate their sons, as “the sages ought to teach their sons with the Way of humaneness, rightness, ritual, and wisdom; how could they have made a tool of crooked leisure—an art of opportunistic trickery (*bianzha zhi shu*)—which would increase their [sons’] stupidity?”³⁹ Yu argues against this position:

Since the sages in antiquity created tools with the essentials in their spirit, there were no [tools] that were not beneficial when put into practice. Thus, Confucius [said that] playing *weiqi* is better than doing nothing, and Mencius [said that] *weiqi* is an art which you will not master unless you concentrate your mind with utmost resolve.⁴⁰

Yu tactfully removed the word “lesser” (*xiao*) from the original Mencius line describing *weiqi* as a “lesser art” and made the sages appear fond of the game. His argument directly targets a separate gentlemanly culture that viewed *weiqi* as an art of vice, which expanded upon the classical canon’s perspective on *weiqi*. In prior centuries, men like Wei Zhao (204–73) and Pi Rixiu (838–83) wrote influential essays espousing the harms *weiqi* caused its players, ranging from moral degradation to the loss of wealth through gambling.⁴¹ These perspectives clearly persisted in Song, Yuan, and Ming. Zhu Yu (Northern Song), for example, referred to *weiqi* as a “wooden wild fox” (*mu yehu*), bewildering players into abandoning their responsibilities:⁴²

Weiqi [leads to] many abandoned tasks; regardless of [one’s] noble or low [status], those who become obsessed with *weiqi* all lose their livelihoods. For this reason, people perceive the *weiqi* board as a ‘wooden wild fox,’ and say that it bewitches people like a fox.⁴³

Exaggeration aside, men bewitched by the *weiqi* board did in fact lose wealth and status through excessive gambling. In Yuan, Wang Yi (1303–54)

issued a warning to farmers who might be enticed by gambling: “No one should ‘learn’ gambling; people who play six sticks and *weiqi* will certainly render their homes desolate and miserable.”⁴⁴ In Ming, Yu Zijun (1429–88) wrote that low-status men in the capital city from “military craftsmen” (*junqiang*) and “prisoners” (*qiutu*) to “delinquent groups” (*san wu cheng qun*) were squandering their family’s resources gambling on *weiqi* and other games, forcing some of them into destitution and banditry:

The winners obtain [enough] wealth to do what they wish, and the losers [are left with] their hands up their sleeves and nothing to be done. Thus, they become severely cold and hungry, and develop a thieving heart [out of desperation]. There are often wanton robberies occurring in the capital city, so the prevention of [these] minor [gambling] offenses cannot be delayed.⁴⁵

Yu’s concerns about gambling as a path to financial and moral ruin were shared by others. In Ming, a magistrate in Hui’an was traumatized as a child when his father erroneously believed he was gambling on a *weiqi* game and beat him:

When he was a child, [the magistrate] once played *weiqi* with someone; his late father spied on them and thought that they were gambling, [so he] beat [his son] twenty times. Now, in the middle of the night, [the magistrate] thinks of this and suddenly faints. Parents are always worrying that their kids are gambling; if they gamble then they will [become] impoverished, and then [become] thieves. [This leads to] lesser men violating the law, and noble men decreasing in rightness: there is nothing they won’t do!⁴⁶

As a result of this traumatic experience, and his belief that *weiqi* could turn proper gentlemen into miscreants and “lesser men” (*xiao ren*) into thieves, the magistrate went so far as to “criminalize” (*zui*) *weiqi* and other forms of entertainment “even if people were not gambling [on them].”⁴⁷

Gentlemen widely believed the pursuit of profit to be immoral and contrasted it with the noble pursuit of humaneness and rightness. Those who adhered to the gentlemanly sticky culture of *weiqi* and wished to bet on their games wagered poems, tea, ink sticks, and other small items of cultural significance that functioned primarily as tokens of friendship and remembrances of a shared moment of leisure and play.⁴⁸ Others were

willing to bet money as long as the stakes were low; Hong Mai (1123–1202) recorded the story of the Song gentleman Fan Duanzhi as a cautionary tale against being too fond of profits: each time he played *weiqi* against the concubines at his friend's house he wagered objects “not surpassing a few thousand coins in value” and always won, but when his friend offered him “three thousand strings of gold coins” if he could win the next match, he started overthinking his moves and lost. Hong wished for his readers to remember that “one cannot take excessive pleasure in wealth that is not one's lot. People who are fond of profits and forget rightness should reflect upon this.”⁴⁹

This was a lesson that women were expected to internalize as well. In the Ming novel *Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin ping mei*), Pan Jinlian bets one of her hairpins without incident, but when she later bets five mace of silver she is chastised and told to use her winnings to host a meal for the loser of the game.⁵⁰ By wagering small tokens of friendship or low monetary stakes, players differentiated themselves from the delinquents who gambled the entirety of their families' resources in the pursuit of wealth.

Thus, there were gentlemen and women who did not object so strongly to gambling; there were also occupational *weiqi* players like the young man from Caizhou who placed wagers on their own games. However, neither the gentlemanly sort nor occupational *weiqi* players were the primary constituents of the low-status sticky culture of *weiqi* gambling, whose core participants are described as pathological gamblers placing profits above prestige or reputation, and even sometimes above acting with humaneness and rightness. These gamblers came from a variety of social backgrounds; once ensnared by the wooden wild fox, they shared a desire for enough “wealth to do what they wished” and risked their livelihoods, their families' resources, and their reputations in pursuit of this goal.

Endgame

The time has come to succumb to temptation and follow in the footsteps of middle-period gentlemen by invoking *weiqi* metaphorically. On the *weiqi* board, single stones have little relevance to the game until they are connected directly or peripherally to a group; the strength of that group can only be considered relative to the other groups of stones on the board. Some

stones may prove to be in pivotal locations due to either luck or skill, and the roles they play may change as the game progresses. As the board reaches the midgame stage (*zhong pan*), most stones become connected to clearly established groups, but the boundaries of these groups remain porous and contentious. At this stage, the groups of stones on the grid-lined board become a convenient metaphor for the world of *weiqi* in Song-Yuan-Ming China and the various cultures and participants constituting that world.

Activities known as high arts in middle-period China are often assumed to remain in the hegemonic hands of gentlemen, who had the power to define good taste and impose their values on the rest of society. It is undeniable that they were expert discourse producers, and many values contained in the discourse of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture persist to this day. Many contemporary scholars and players alike regularly invoke this gentlemanly *weiqi* discourse in their own descriptions of the game, discussing its close connection to cosmology, tracing its history through classic texts, and even using abstract metaphors to praise *weiqi* as a high art.⁵¹ *Weiqi* is still commonly associated with self-cultivation, the sage King Yao, and the art of war; some members of modern *weiqi* communities still refer to the game as “hand-chatting.”⁵² The discourse of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture remains a useful glue for sticky cultures, giving *weiqi* high status as a noble pursuit and therefore a noble object of study.

However, this gentlemanly *weiqi* discourse represents only one subset of a much broader and richer world of *weiqi* in middle-period China. Its symbols, values, ideals, and understandings differ significantly from those shared by occupational *weiqi* players seeking prestige through winning games, “delinquents” and low-status sorts who pursued profit by gambling on *weiqi*, and the communities of gentlemen who rejected *weiqi* as a dangerous distraction from important matters (as opposed to an important matter in itself). The continuing dominance of gentlemanly *weiqi* discourse masks this rich variety of cultures and communities, occupied by participants of high and low status alike, and their distinct modes of engagement with the game. It privileges words over actions, pushing scholarly attention toward the study of *weiqi* metaphors and poetic ideals, while the strategies and techniques in extant *weiqi* diagrams remain understudied. As a result, it can cause us to forget that the core component of the world of *weiqi*,

shared by all its cultures and constituents, was not a discourse but the game itself: its rules, its objectives, and its basic material requirements. All kinds of people enjoyed (or disliked) it in distinct and creative ways, adhering to their own sticky cultures.

The gentlemen who claimed *weiqi* as a high art and who saw their *weiqi* boards as mirrors of their own morality were not a homogenous class of cultural hegemons: they were only one of the groups on the grid.

Notes

1. Zu-Yan Chen, "The Art of Black and White: Wei-ch'i in Chinese Poetry," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 4 (1997): 644.
2. For a good introduction to *weiqi* built on this foundation, see He Yunpo, *Weiqi yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Beijing: Ren Min Chubanshe, 2001).
3. Li-Chiang Lin, "Wang Tingne Unveiled Through the Study of the Late Ming Woodblock-Printed Book 'Renjing Yangqiu,'" *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 95/96 (2008-9): 291, 302-3.
4. A small number of extant Song-Yuan-Ming sources reveal that women were also participants in this male-dominated gentlemanly *weiqi* culture; see the introduction of this book, as well as Andrew Lo and Wang Tzi-Cheng, "Spider Threads Roaming the Empyrean: The Game of *Weiqi*," in *Asian Games: The Art of Contest*, ed. Colin MacKenzie and Irving Finkel (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 196-97; Chen, "Black and White," 644; Huang Jun, *Yiren zhuan* (Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1985).
5. Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* (Sibu congkan jingming yuan shi jia qu tangben), 21.163. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
6. Wang Tingne, *Zuoyin yipu* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2001), 58.
7. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*.
8. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*.
9. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*.
10. Yan Defu and Yan Tianzhang, *Xuanxuan qijing* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua Chubanshe, 1996), 5.
11. Yan Defu and Yan Tianzhang, *Xuanxuan qijing*, trans. Chen Xianhui (Taipei: Shijie Wenwu Chubanshe, 2002), 10.
12. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*, 31.
13. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (1996), 11, 15.
14. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*, 4.

15. *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, ed. Tang Guizhang (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), 287.
16. Zhang Duanyi, *Gui'er ji* (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben), 2.20. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
17. Marc Moskowitz, *Go Nation: Chinese Masculinities and the Game of Weiqi in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 34; Lo and Wang, "Spider Threads," 187.
18. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (1996), 4.
19. Li Dongyang, *Huailu tang ji* (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben), 36.330. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
20. Gary Alan Fine, *Players and Pawns: How Chess Builds Community and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 103.
21. Fine, *Players and Pawns*, 103.
22. He Wei, *Chunzhu jiwen* (Ming jin dai mishu ben), 2.12. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
23. He, *Chunzhu jiwen*, 2.13.
24. He, *Chunzhu jiwen*, 2.13.
25. Lu Xiangshan (1139–93) once visited a shop run by a *weiqi* artisan (*qi gong*) who challenged Lu to a game. Lu bought a *weiqi* board drawn on a scroll, took it home to examine, and after realizing it was similar in nature to astrological diagrams, returned to the shop to defeat the *weiqi* artisan twice in a row. See Luo Dajing, *Helin yulu* (Ming keben), 1.5. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
26. Li Yimin, *Wangyou qingle ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 13a–22b.
27. Chen Yuan, *Mo tang ji* (Sibu congkan san bian jing song chaoben), 19.162. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
28. Hong Mai, *Yi jian zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), vol. 4, 1728–29.
29. Yuanbo is the courtesy name (*zi*) of Fan Hong, a renowned Ming dynasty *weiqi* player.
30. Sui'an is the sobriquet of Yang Yiqing (1454–1530), a high-ranking official.
31. Wu Cheng'en, *Wu Cheng'en shiwen ji qian jiao* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1991), 33.
32. Fine, *Players and Pawns*, 107.
33. Pan Mengbu, "Mingdai yongjia qipai shulüe," *Zhejiang gongmao zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 12, no. 1 (2012): 86.
34. See Huang, *Yiren zhuan*, 140–41.
35. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (1996), 32.
36. *Lunyu* (Sibu congkan jing riben zhengping ben) (Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.), *juan* 9.45 (17.22). *Liubo* is another premodern Chinese board game, with sticks thrown like dice to determine movement on the board.
37. *Lunyu ji shuo*, compiled by Cai Jie (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben) (Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.), 9.121.

38. *Mengzi* (Sibu congkan jing song dazi ben) Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0., *juan* 8.69 (4B.30); *juan* 11.91–92 (6A.9).
39. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (2002), 10.
40. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (2002), 11–12.
41. Paolo Zanon, “The Opposition of the Literati to the Game of Weiqi in Ancient China,” *Asian and African Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 70–79.
42. For a Ming example, see Lang Ying, *Qixiu leigao* (Ming keben), 35.274. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
43. Zhu Yu, *Pingzhou ketan* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), 28.
44. Wang claims that he knows farmers find prose difficult and is therefore limiting himself to simple four-character phrases that will be easy for them to understand. Wang Yi, *Mune zhai wenji* (Qing Qianlong ershiba nian keben), 1.11. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
45. *Ming chen jingji lu*, compiled by Huang Xun (Qing wenyuan ge siku quan-shu ben), 40.764. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
46. Ye Chenji, *Shidong ji* (Qing wenyuan ge siku quan shu bu pei qingwen jin ge siku quan shu ben), 7.102. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
47. Ye Chenji, *Shidong ji*, 7.102.
48. For examples, see Cai Zhongmin, *Weiqi wenhua shici xuan* (Chengdu: Shurong Qiyi Chubanshe, 1989), 89, 139–40, 155, 166–67. As seen in Lo and Wang, “Spider Threads,” 197.
49. Hong, *Yi jian zhi*, 3:1387–88.
50. *Jin ping mei* (Ming chongzhen keben), 11.76, 23.171. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.
51. Most scholarship continues to treat *weiqi* in premodern China predominantly or exclusively as a high art of the cultured elite; for some examples see the works cited in this chapter.
52. Moskowitz, *Go Nation*, 37.