

*Newly Discovered
Game Board Rock
Carvings in Hong Kong*

Apotropaic Symbolism
or Ludic Culture?

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Games in general, and board games in particular, have been an essential element of cultures in the East and West, ancient and modern, not only functioning as a major source of entertainment, but also embodying a social and religious significance that extends far beyond the boundaries of ludic spaces. Chess was once a metaphor for world order, and *liubo* boards have been associated with auspiciousness, divination, and ritualized descriptions of the cosmos.¹

The presence of game boards carved on stone in the natural landscape, excised from their accustomed and more conventional space indoors, is a well-studied phenomenon within the Western regions of the Roman Empire and its sphere of influence. By comparison, in East Asia, game boards—more specifically, the subcategory of alquerque-like boards—have been overlooked. For instance, isolated carved boards resembling the strategy games nine and twelve men's morris (in which players must align three pieces to remove an opponent's piece) discovered in northern and western China have been received with lukewarm interest and researchers are prone to regarding them as contemporary creations.² Hong Kong and Macao

constitute notable exceptions, both in terms of the number of these game boards and the amount of research they have generated.³

Mostly distributed across isolated regions within Hong Kong, the so-called game board rock carvings (*qipán shíkē*) comprise eight groups of geometric patterns, appearing in pairs and resembling the strategy game twelve men's morris. Initially, the discovery in 1962 of the first game boards led some archaeologists to place them in the wider context of other, more complex prehistoric carvings in the territory, thus considering them to be Neolithic or Iron Age symbolic representations with unknown religious meanings. For instance, William Meacham has suggested that they should be dated to 300–100 BCE or even 500 BCE.⁴ On the other hand, these newly discovered rock carvings attracted the speculative attention of journalists, whose reports drew specialists into debates over the authorship and age of the carvings. Countering Meacham's claims, some journalists stated that the boards were in fact carved by recent hikers, and noted they were like those still used by local people in parks. The latter, however, are in fact *weiqi* boards different from the ones discussed by journalists. The unseriousness with which ludic activities and manifestations have been treated led the media to consider these game boards historically inconsequential and most likely modern; relevant authorities have done little to preserve or study them.⁵

Such dismissive treatments notwithstanding, this article holds that the Hong Kong game boards can help us unveil forgotten “transitory moments,” as noted by Kopp, “in which the real world and the otherworldly situation meet . . . having an active part in the shaping and performing of society.”⁶ This chapter introduces preliminary results from newly unearthed and formerly overlooked rock carvings with geometric patterns in the shape of game boards in Hong Kong. I start with a brief archaeological description and situate them temporally and spatially in order to understand their place within local communities. Next, I draw parallels with similar examples of rock art across the globe, focusing on possible social functions and the ways in which visual rhetoric connects to other key aspects of the cultural landscape. I argue that these game boards are ludic manifestations that local communities adapted from European games that, through commerce and intercultural exchange, spread across the regions of Macao and Hong Kong between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

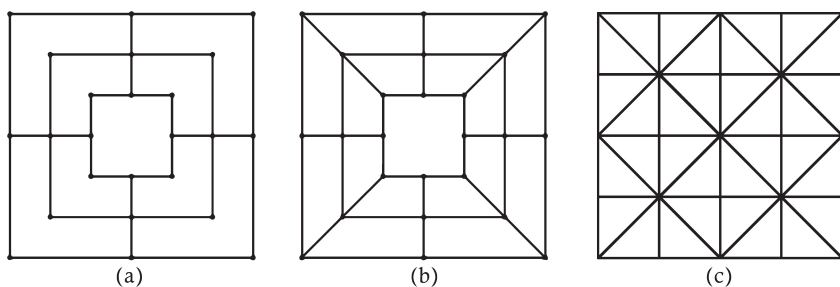


FIG. 2.1. Types of alquerque: (a) nine men's morris; (b) twelve men's morris; (c) alquerque of twelve.

Nine and Twelve Men's Morris Alquerque

Both nine and twelve men's morris are types of a strategy game played on a board on which three concentric squares intersected by two perpendicular lines from the sides have been drawn. (In the twelve men's morris variation two diagonal lines from the corners are added to the board). Usually these lines do not converge at the central point. Each player has twelve game pieces that can be placed in any of the twenty-four intersections created in the board. The objective is to align three pieces vertically or horizontally in order to remove one of the opponent's pieces. Once all pieces are on the board, players can move them to adjacent positions to form new groups of three until the adversary is left with no moves. Nine and twelve men's morris are played in the same way, since the additional lines do not change the number of intersections, but mobility across the board is increased in the twelve men's variation of the game.⁷ Another variation, the alquerque of twelve, follows the same rules with a less sophisticated composition (figure 2.1).

The use of these boards seems to have been restricted to areas influenced first by the Roman Empire and later by European trade, including and as far as colonial examples in Peruvian temples in South America.⁸ In Europe, where we find the highest concentration of carved boards, they usually appear in religious buildings; outdoors near military outposts, where soldiers carved them to entertain themselves while keeping watch; or along the coastline, where merchants waited for their ships to sail off.⁹

Questions of Temporality and Spatiality

According to their distribution, Hong Kong's game boards can be classified in two major groups. The first includes a twelve men's morris in Nei Lak Shan, Lantau Island, discovered in 1994, since lost; a three-in-a-row and an alquerque of twelve board in Upper Shek Pik; a twelve men's morris in Shui Hau, discovered in 1986, since lost; and a twelve men's morris in Tung Chung.¹⁰

Whereas the Shek Pik carvings include two different game boards, the remaining examples are all twelve men's morris and were believed to be composed of only one board. This was proven wrong when I visited the site of the Tung Chung carving in 2018. A second board, highly eroded, is next to the first, visible only in dim light.

A second group of carved boards is located in the eastern region of the New Territories, between villages on both sides of the Pat Sin Leng mountain range: a twelve men's morris with a three-in-a-row board in Ting Kok; a pair of twelve men's morris near the abandoned village of Tsat Muk Kiu, discovered by the author in 2017; and a twelve men's morris in Luk Keng, discovered in 2000, since lost.¹¹

All these game boards are similar in size (18 × 18 cm to 25 × 25 cm) and morphology (except for Shek Pik, all present at least one twelve men's morris), and all the surviving examples appear in pairs. Among them, only the carvings in Shek Pik, Tung Chung, and Ting Kok were registered in archaeological publications.

Finally, an isolated—and probably moved from its original location—example of a twelve men's morris game board was found by the author in 2018 at Wing Lung Wai, a village in the Yuen Long district. This board is carved into the surface of a rock brick of 52 × 26 cm used for construction abandoned near the entrance of the village. Despite its assumed modernity, it should be noted that the village was founded during the Kangxi reign (1661–1722) and some of its buildings date to the seventeenth century.¹²

Early statements from villagers in Ting Kok and Shui Hau supported a recent creation date for these carvings, but in later interviews residents were unable even to recall their existence.¹³ Conversely, villagers in Hoi Ha still remember the location of a Chinese *weiqi* board rock carving, even though they haven't seen it for decades. Therefore, while we should not summarily

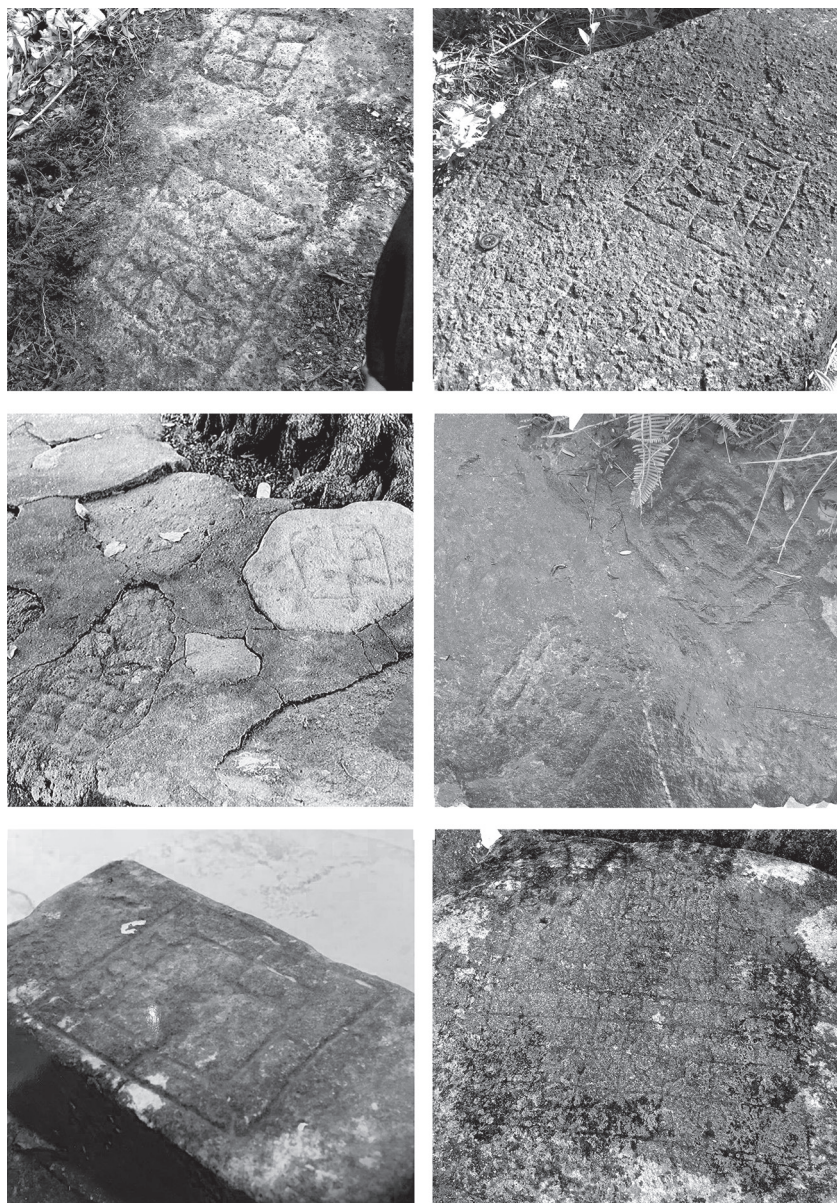


FIG. 2.2. Game board rock carvings in Hong Kong. From left to right, top to bottom: (1) Upper Shek Pik, (2) Tung Chung, (3) Ting Kok, (4) Wang Shan Keuk, (5) Yuen Long, (6) Hoi Ha *weiqi* board. Photographs by author.

dismiss these accounts, they should be weighed against empirical data and within the wider context of the sociological phenomenon of game and observations derived from comparative history.

The recent discovery of the new game boards in Tung Chung and Tsat Muk Kiu and the recovery of early reports unknown to the archaeological community provide us with two new pieces of topographical information: First, carvings do not appear randomly distributed, but exist along two different groups of ancient tracks that connected villages and facilitated trade across the regions of Lantau and the New Territories.¹⁴ Although the age of these tracks is unknown and some of the existing routes could be traced back to the Song and Ming dynasties, they may have been rebuilt after the Great Clearance (Qian Jie Ling) order was lifted in 1669, when hundreds of Hakka families returned to the land they had abandoned and reestablished the northern villages along these tracks.¹⁵ There has been no specific research into the nature of these tracks, but aerial photographs of Hong Kong as recent as 1924 show that these locations were thriving with activity and connected through tracks built along small streams.¹⁶

Second, carvings are concentrated in two areas with identical toponyms. The village of Luk Keng lies at the foot of his homonymous mountain, at the opposite site of Nam Chung village, whose location was also known as Shui Hau in the past.¹⁷ The fishing village of Shui Hau in Lantau Island is also situated at the foot of a small hill called Luk Keng Mountain.¹⁸ The resemblance in nomenclature between these two regions, strengthened by the parallel names of Tung Chung and Nam Chung (Eastern Stream and Southern Stream, respectively), could be the result of population mobility in early times after the Great Clearance, a phenomenon of toponymical migration for which similar examples exist in Hong Kong.¹⁹

This correspondence between trade routes and identical toponyms seems to indicate that these boards date from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Indeed, aside from a game board found in Mycenae (Greece), all known examples of carved alquerque-like boards are either Roman or Christian, thus making it very unlikely that these boards had appeared in Hong Kong and Macao in the Iron Age and reemerged later in the Roman world.²⁰ Moreover, the typology of these boards is consistent with their European counterparts: they appear in pairs, of which one is always

a twelve men's morris—except for the Upper Shek Pik boards—and the other is a three-in-a-row board, an alquerque of twelve, or a twelve men's morris.²¹ Similar combinations are common in Western Europe, and we find identical arrangements in the Cathedral of Ourense (Spain) and Santa Caterina's Church (Canosa di Puglia, Italy), among many other examples.²² The question of provenance and who created these carvings remains, therefore, since as Meacham has pointed out, it is unlikely that they would be “the only known example of Ch'ing dynasty abstract rock art by Chinese villagers.”²³

Leisure amidst Commerce and Confraternity

Two more pieces of independent evidence appear to support the possibility that the fountainhead of these carved game boards streams from seventeenth- or eighteenth-century contacts with Western players or gamblers who, in all likelihood, spread them through trade and movement of individuals to Macao and Hong Kong, where they became localized as a common practice among village tradesmen and tradeswomen (in the latter, given the lack of these artifacts outside the southeastern coast of Macao). First, archaeological evidence from the excavated sites at Coloane (Macao), where we find a number of these game boards, reveals the presence of more complicated carvings, identified with two masted European trading ships, as well as two unidentified Western coins.²⁴ These vessels resemble autochthonous representations of boats in eighteenth-century maps of Hong Kong and Macao, with all their different constituent parts depicted in great detail.²⁵

The existence of boats carved next to nine or twelve men's morris boards has been documented extensively across Europe, from the Canary Islands to Northern Italy, where they appear combined with Christian symbolism and inscription in Latin alphabet, and it is widely agreed that these are seventeenth- and eighteenth-century representations engraved by sailors and merchants stationed in the area.²⁶ Everything seems to indicate that the Macao and Hong Kong game boards exist within the same cultural and social context of sea trade and intercultural relations, a fact reinforced by the discovery of two European coins during the excavations, now in the Museum of Taipa and Coloane History. Thanks to high-resolution imagery

provided by the museum, I have been able to identify one of these coins as a Dutch half stuiver from Surabaya, dated 1826 or 1836, which suggests that the carved ships and game boards may be of this period.

A second, less conclusive piece of evidence comes from the local name attributed to some of these game boards in Hong Kong: *zau kekkat*.²⁷ It seems to be a variation of other southern Chinese game board names such as *zou cheng*, *zou tongqian*, *zou hu*, or *zou niujiaosai*, all of which include *zou* (walk) as their initial syllable.²⁸ The word *kekkat* is a strange combination of an infrequent character—*kek* (bend in a river)—and an interjection of regret, and may be a transcription of a foreign word. *Kekkat* sounds close enough to the Western name of the nine and twelve men's morris board, “alquerque,” from Arabic *quirkat*, which is still preserved in Portuguese.²⁹ Although the possibility is certainly remote, local tradesmen or tradeswomen may have incorporated the pronunciation heard from Portuguese merchants playing the game while they were stationed in Macao.

Ludic Culture as Social Lubricant and Social Adhesive

In the light of the above evidence, and given the coincidence in typology and their grouping into identical combinations of three-in-a-row board, alquerque of twelve, and twelve men's morris, as well as their association with sites in Macao connected with trade and Western contacts, it seems feasible to conclude that these game boards were, both in their conceptualization and conveyance, of premodern European origin, probably created during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rather than autochthonous images evolved independently and spontaneously. The borrowing, adoption, and use of complex strategy games by agricultural societies and communities with simpler ways of life is neither an oddity nor a product of relatively modern contacts, since “geographic distribution of games points to a history of trade and migration.”³⁰ Similar cases of transmission and expansion of games, carved or drawn in sand, are well attested across areas of European and Ottoman influence, both through trade and colonialism, and particular cases have been studied, for instance, in the African communities of the Comoros Islands.³¹

Despite the apparent fact that games seem rather unproductive, not only

do they change the players inwardly, as is the case with cognitive games, but they dramatically alter the very physical constitution of the shared space, both redefining and circumscribing the actual environment where games take place. This is particularly true for game boards carved in the open, where the otherwise natural space has been transformed into a small recreation ground of social significance for the community or individuals therein. An interesting example of how game redefined the landscape can be seen at Jebel Jassassiyeh, a small limestone hill on the Qatari littoral, where the recurrent carving of boat imagery and board games resulted in the establishment of a gathering place for pearl merchants and financiers who watched for incoming cargos and engaged in trade and banking activities from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.³² The parallels to the coast of Macao are certainly intriguing.

A modern example of how the urban landscape can be and has been transformed in Hong Kong itself through the creation of ludic spaces can be seen in the well-known Community Centre Rest Garden in Yau Ma Tei, situated right in front of the touristic Tin Hau temple. This square was formerly a bustling market, but it developed gradually into a place frequented by prostitutes, drug dealers, art traffickers, fortunetellers, wandering singers, and other members of the traditional Chinese “underground,” and became known as a “poor man’s nightclub” (*pingmin yezonghui*) by the locals.³³ When the new square was refurbished in 1970, underground activities moved to the surrounding areas, and the square itself has since been transformed into an area for social gathering and everyday gaming. Numerous modern Chinese *weiqi* boards scattered along the garden have served to reinforce community ties and modify the way people understand and engage with the urban landscape, functioning as a sort of social adhesive that strengthens connections between social agents who otherwise would remain strangers.

Nevertheless, there is more to play than its immediate physical manifestation and the changes it brings to the landscape and society. It is well established that culture, as a set of common rules, is an “act” played following the imprint of nature on our own consciousness, suggesting an interdependent connection and functional relationship between being (*Sein*, in German, as a philosophical concept) and playing.³⁴ It is in this “acting,” in the sense of both “action” and “masquerade,” that social life becomes

possible, for culture presumes the compulsory acceptance of and respect for a common set of rules through which a civilization expresses its interpretation of the world, as it is imbued and enhanced with the supra-biological forms acquired by experience and play.³⁵ This is concomitant to the idea that the natural conditions of the real world disappear when faced with the artificial creation of egalitarianism that lies beneath the very idea of game, where everybody is supposed to start from the same initial conditions.³⁶

These games have then a transformative impact not only on the natural landscape but also on the social environment and interactions between communities and cultures. They become particularly important when they are shaped within an intercultural context, as with the game boards carved in Macao and, we presume, also in Hong Kong. Since the act of playing requires a performance in which both participants are equally constrained by the same rules, games evolve from representations of the self and the other to spaces of uniformity and mutual agreement that unite them under a shared collection of values that hammers away the rigid boundaries of inherited cultural differences.³⁷ At a time when cultural and scientific contacts between divergent cultures were still of a limited nature and often led to disturbances in the belief systems of both worlds, games provided for the creation of meta-realities or, as Huizinga calls them, a “Paralleluniverse” that, however concocted, draw players together into an inclusive subculture.³⁸ This process of socialization and cultural understanding is characterized by immediateness, resulting in a special case of social communication between agents of different cultures (and communities) sharing the same space.

Games certainly changed and evolved between cultures over time, but they also, however temporarily, united and consolidated intercultural bonds. Games function as “social lubricants,” as their liminal nature—their disregard for socially constructed boundaries—facilitates interaction across cultural landscapes both before and after the game starts.³⁹ Sinicization of twelve men’s morris game boards may have been a process not very different from the Hellenization and Romanization experienced in Egypt after the conquest of Alexander or during Roman rule. Although we do not understand the rules behind these carved game boards, it is possible to infer that they may have been played like their Western counterparts, as is the case with other South American and African imported games

mentioned above, for which we have more detailed documentation and surviving practices.

Although these reflections about intercultural shared spaces hold particularly true for Macao, where rock carvings are coastal and include representations of ships, there is no evidence that this was also the case for Hong Kong. Given the extreme locations where these carved game boards have appeared—in most cases far from the sea but near land routes—it seems more likely that they were transmitted to Hong Kong by an indigenous population that adapted them to their own ludic spaces between trade routes. An exception to this may be found in the rock carvings in Tung Chung, which are located on the top of a small hill called Yuen Shek Dung, 70 meters above sea level, outside of the track crossing the mountain and overlooking the nearby Tung Chung Bay. This spot provides a complete view of incoming ships and may have served a military purpose in the past. Interestingly, a gravestone located 210 meters from the rock carving, as well as the nearby Tung Chung Battery built in 1817 to protect the bay from pirates, may indicate the presence of an old cottage or minor settlement on the hill.⁴⁰ The presence of two identical boards in the same rock suggests, as with the Qatari rock carving mentioned above, “pairs of lookout men, whiling the time away,” and not merely isolated bystanders.⁴¹

We have seen how the remaining seven groups of game boards in Hong Kong can be related with reasonable certainty to two seventeenth-century trade routes extending across Lantau Island and the northern New Territories, and we have sufficient evidence to support the claim that at least one of these routes was used daily and intensively by men and women engaging in trading activities from Ting Kok to Luk Keng. According to local reports, women from Ting Kok and other villages nearby would walk the Pat Sin Leng mountain range twice a day to cut straw and collect wood for the fireplace, and tradeswomen from Tsat Muk Kiu would get to the market in Sha Tau Kok, across the bay from Luk Keng, to sell their wood in exchange for other goods.⁴² Setting aside the obviously transformative process by which what was originally a men’s game could have become a women’s occupation, which surely demands further research and more specific approaches to be taken in the future, there is a significant impact on the landscape in terms of both its environmental and social conditions. Undoubtedly, there are multiple spots, paths, and trading routes to be

walked by and rested on, but establishing a recurrent point for entertainment or leisure, gathering or relaxation through socializing activities such as playing board games consolidated these routes as static ludic spaces, otherwise mutable and uncertain.

These boards were carved into the naked landscape with such diligence and perfection, for the obvious purpose of lasting for a long period of time, that we cannot but conclude that they were the instruments of a recurrent activity—a perhaps gratifying respite from day-to-day burdens. Game works as a diversion—something that diverts us from the repetitive roughness of our daily lives, a sort of interlude or *adagio* in the otherwise hasty *allegro* movement of human existence. As Huizinga points out, game also becomes a repetitive necessity itself “both for the individual . . . and for society by reason of the meaning it contains.”⁴³ The Dutch historian calls this tension between the relaxation of diversion and the monotony of repetitiveness “abreaction,” a technical term for cathartic experiences borrowed from late nineteenth-century psychoanalysis denoting “an outlet for harmful impulses, as the necessary restorer of energy by one-sided activity.”⁴⁴ The constant, almost spiritless to and fro through the inhospitable mountain ranges of Hong Kong, backs fully loaded with trading goods, surely accounts for such psychological excess. It is not hard to visualize tradesmen and tradeswomen recurrently engraving these game boards in specific places in order to rest and relax, socialize and exchange stories, before continuing with their daily jobs.

Conclusion

Although several questions must be resolved by future studies, the glimpses presented herein allow us to classify the game board rock carvings of Hong Kong within a context of international commerce and intercultural exchanges that spread across the area during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, adapting these ludic manifestations to the new settled communities and shaping, however temporarily and briefly, these societies. The foregoing analysis of carved game boards, in Hong Kong and elsewhere, is perhaps best understood against the background of the former criticism and subsequent neglect that these ludic manifestations experienced both in academic and journalistic debates. Because these games were not only

defined by social practices and cultural exchanges—thus becoming witnesses to forgotten stories—but also emerged as definers of those shared spaces and daily activities, the significance of these findings goes beyond the popularly defined boundaries of game as a frolicsome practice of little relevance to the serious scholar.

The game boards once carved and played across the mountainous trade routes in Hong Kong reflect two important spheres of influence, transforming the natural or urban space through the conscious and constant repetition of ludic behaviors associated with the locations where they have been engraved. On the one hand, they require players to be confronted with an identical set of rules that transcends their individual differences, cultural or otherwise, hammering away the boundaries of familiarity that separate communities and societies. In this respect, they catalyze inter- and trans-cultural relationships, functioning as social lubricant to enhance the communication process between those describing each other as outsiders to their respective inherited traditions. This was most likely the case throughout Macao, where they are clearly associated with trade, and whence they reached Hong Kong as well.

On the other hand, they also establish recurrent spaces of shared activity that strengthen intracultural bonds, resulting in deep transformations of landscape functionality, as was the case with Qatari merchants and bankers who gathered around the recurrently carved game boards in Jebel Jassassiyeh. As social adhesives they bind people together into temporal communities assembled around these newly created ludic manifestations, thus altering their natural surroundings, perpetuating common routes, and easing the long walks across villages with the prospect of a well-deserved recess from their daily burdens.

The study of these game boards, concentrated in a precise area of southern China, highlights the importance of commerce and trade and opens new windows into the quotidian life of hitherto forgotten communities. Their apparent triviality should not mislead us to the oversimplified conclusion that, just because they do not hold the same arcane meaning as their Neolithic counterparts, they lack ethnographic relevance to the study of games and society. It is in this intersection that leisure pursuits and international contacts find common ground, extending beyond the limitations and specificities of East and West, of men and women, and

creating a fictional yet necessary dimension where differences dissolve into a crucible of cultural and gender undifferentiation.

Notes

1. Vanina Kopp, "Aachen, Baghdad, Constantinople: The Intercultural Function of Play and Games in the Early Middle Ages," in *Il gioco nella società e nella cultura dell'alto medioevo*, vol. 1 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2018), 72; Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), 71–72, 84; Zhou Zheng, "Guiju jing' yinggai cheng 'boju jing,'" *Kaogu* 12 (1987): 1117; Armin Selbitschka, "A Tricky Game: A Re-evaluation of Liubo Based on Archaeological and Textual Evidence," *Oriens Extremus* 55 (2016): 105–66.

2. Anthony Siu Kwok-kin, *Tan ben suo wei: Xianggang zaoqi lishi lunji* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 2015), 208. Two boards had been discovered in Dali (Yunnan) and Kuqa (Xinjiang), as reported by Bernard Quinet in "Signes et symboles à travers les siècles," *Bulletin du GERSAR* 28 (1987): 25–26, and "Triples-Enceintes asiatiques," *Bulletin du GERSAR* 36 (1992): 48.

3. For the Macao rock carvings, today buried under the Golf and Country Club, see T. N. Chiu and William Meacham, "Rock Carvings in Macau," *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 11 (1984–85): 134–35; William Meacham, *Rock Carvings in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: William Meacham Publications, 2009), 75–81.

4. William Meacham, *The Archaeology of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 126–28.

5. For the polemic, see Meacham, *Rock Carvings*, 65, and the original publications in Lu Hao, "Dong Yong jihe tuxing shike shifou guji yin ren caiyi," *Dung-fong Yatbou*, September 14, 1982, 14; San Rao, "Dayu Shan shike yinqi guangfan taolun," *WenWeiPo*, September 16, 1982, 15; Lu Hao, "Dong Yong shike de zhen-glun," *WenWeiPo*, September 21, 1982, 25; and Gan Heng, "Dong Yong shike xin 'faxian,'" *WenWeiPo*, September 24, 1982, 4. The most virulent criticism came from Leung Hui-Wah (1937–2002), for instance, in Leung, "Dayu Shan Shui Kou [Shui Hau] bandao faxian guji?" *WenWeiPo*, April 19, 1988, 17.

6. Kopp, "Aachen," 61.

7. Ralph Gasser, "Solving Nine Men's Morris," *Games of No Chance* 29 (1996): 102–3.

8. Friedrich Berger, "From Circle and Square to the Image of the World: A Possible Interpretation for Some Petroglyphs of Merels Boards," *Rock Art Research* 21, no. 1 (2004): 15; César del Solar Meza and Rainer Hostnig, "Litograbados

indígenas en la arquitectura colonial del Departamento del Cusco, Perú,” *Actas del Primer Simposio Nacional de Arte Rupestre* 12 (2007), fig. 48.

9. José Manuel Hidalgo Cuñarro, “Los juegos de tablero medievales de la Catedral de Ourense,” *Porta da airoa* 12 (2008): 117–21; William Facey, “The Boat Carvings at Jabal al-Jussasiyah, Northeast Qatar,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 17 (1987): 205.

10. Leung Hui-Wah, “Ba Xian Ling [Pat Sin Leng] beipo faxian guji,” *Wen-WeiPo*, February 25, 1997, B2; S. G. Davis, Shirlee Edelstein, and Madeleine H. Tang, “Rock Carvings in Hong Kong and the New Territories,” *Asian Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (1974): 1; Leung, “Dayu Shan,” 17; Lu Hao, “Dong Yong faxian gu shike,” *WenWeiPo*, September 14, 1982, 5; Meacham, *Rock Carvings*, 65.

11. Solomon Bard, *In Search for the Past: A Guide to the Antiquities of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1988), 57, 60, plate 48; Leung Hui-Wah, “Quanshui gang shang xin faxian,” *WenWeiPo*, May 16, 2000, C11. Although Hong Kong’s archaeological community was unaware of the existence of the Tsat Muk Kiu rock carving, I came to learn that local media had also reported this and other findings, none of which seem to have reached academic circles. See Leung, “Ba Xian Ling.”

12. Anthony Siu Kwok-kin, “Xinjie weicun dingwu,” *WenWeiPo*, June 3, 1989, 33.

13. For these early statements see Bard, *In Search*, 57; Leung, “Ba Xian Ling.” Personal interviews by Witney Cheung Kwan-wai and the author in Hoi Ha (January 1, 2018), Ting Kok (April 2, 2018), and Shui Hau (January 13, 2019) among ten elderly residents who claimed to have been living in those villages all their lives. Except for Hoi Ha villagers, none of them recognized the photographs of the rock carvings that were shown to them.

14. For these track ways, see Nigel Spry, “Trackways,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 12 (1986): 169–72. Maps can be accessed at <http://www.hkmaps.hk>.

15. Pak-sheung Ng, “The Lords Zhou and Wang Memorial Study Hall: Local Cultural Traditions and Historic Preservation,” in *Indigenous Culture, Education and Globalization: Critical Perspectives from Asia*, ed. Jun Xing and Pak-sheung Ng (New York: Springer, 2016), 102.

16. See photographs in the National Collection of Aerial Photography in Edinburgh, dated 1924, ref. no. PEGASUS/RN/H/0028, <https://ncap.org.uk/>.

17. For the New Territories’ Shui Hau, see Sima Long, *Xinjie cangsang hua xiangqing* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1990), 142.

18. A survey of the eighteen volumes of the nineteenth-century *Guangdong tushuo* shows only three Luk Keng and six Tung Chung, but fifty-three Shui Hau, a name meaning a curved path around a *feng shui* wood. Richard Webb, “Earth God and Village Shrines in the New Territories of Hong Kong,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 34 (1994): 187.

19. A similar case is reported in Siu, *Tan ben*, 69.

20. A small piece of clay carved with a rude nine men's morris board from the Hellenistic Period (323–31 BCE) is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae, ref. no. 26, although it seems no studies on this piece have been conducted. A similar gameboard unearthed in Rhodes has been dated to the Ottoman occupation of the island in Konstantinos Saranditis, "Pílino epitrapézio paichnίδi apó tin póli tis Ródou," in *Sofia Ádolos*, ed. Pavlos Triantafyllidis (Rhodes: Archaeological Institute of Aegean Studies, 2014), 359–67. All examples of pre-Roman alquerque-like carvings adduced as evidence for the antiquity of the Hong Kong game boards (Meacham, *Rock Carvings*, 65) can be dismissed. See Berger, "From Circle and Square," 15; Christian Wagneur, "Inventaire-La mystérieuse triple-enceinte," *GESAR* (1995), unpublished report, and for the references to Sri Lanka, see Robert Charles Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (New York: Dover, 1979), 84; Henry Parker, *Ancient Ceylon* (London: Luzac, 1909), 577; and James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1860), 606n4. The oldest example of a men's morris that can be dated with some accuracy is carved on a Roman tile found in Germany and produced between the years 193 and 407. See Norbert Hanel, "Sonderkeramik in der Militärziegelei? Zu einer Tabula Lusoria mit Mühlespiel und Legionss-tempel," *Kölner Jahrbuch* 30 (1997): 319–20.

21. A possible Chinese game akin to twelve men's morris called *qiandao* or *weizhi* is described in a single Buddhist source: "two persons, face to face, each one with twelve pieces, three straight result in defeat, thus it's called seize the way (*qiandao*)," in the *Commentary on the Tiantai Bodhisattva Precepts* by Mingguang (d. 623), *Tiantai pusajie shu* 2, T.1812:40.595b5, my translation. The same game is mentioned without further particulars in several Buddhist texts from the Taishō Tripitaka and the Zokuzokyo (Xuzangjing), dated Sui to Ming (*Daban niepan jing shu* 14, T.1767:38.122c6; *Liangchu qingzhong yi* 1, T.1895:45.842c19; *Fanwang jing pusajie zhu* 3, X.691:38.582a10; *Zaijia lu yao guangji* 3, X.1123:60.524a15 and X.1123:60.524b1). There is no archaeological evidence or artwork depiction for this game board. It seems to me that this is merely a local variant of the well-known and totally different *liubo* game board, where "two persons, face to face, sit in front of the board; the board is divided into twelve paths, two ends, with a central area called water; twelve pieces are used, which according to tradition are six white and six black" (Zhang Zhan, *Liezi zhu*, 8.12a–b, *Qinding si ku quanshu* edition, my translation). Cf. the Western Han figurines playing *liubo* unearthed at Gansu's Mozuizi Tomb no. 48, in "Wuwei Mozuizi san zuo Hanmu fajue jianbao," *Wenwu* 12 (1972), fig. 5.

22. Cuñarro, "Juegos de tablero," 130–36; Govert Westerveld, *The History of Alquerque-12*, vol. 1 (Murcia: Blanca, 2013), 26; Werner Pichler, "Die

‘Spiele-Darstellungen’ unter den Felsbildern Fuerteventuras,” *Almogaren* 27 (1996): 155–68; A. M. Cubbon, “Merels Boards,” in *Excavations on St. Patrick’s Isle, Peel, Isle of Man, 1982–88*, ed. David Freke and E. P. Allison (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 277; Marisa Uberti and Giulio Coluzzi, *I luoghi delle triplici cinte in Italia* (Aprilia: Eremon, 2008).

23. Meacham, *Rock carvings*, 80. There is, of course, the *weiqi* board at Hoi Ha village mentioned above, but experts agree that the site seems to be modern, and it is certainly isolated from the other game boards. The nearby coral lime kilns at Hoi Ha, built in the early twentieth century, may provide historical context for this carving.

24. Chiu and Meacham, “Rock Carvings in Macau,” 34; William Meacham, “Hac Sa Wan, Macau, Phase III,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 11 (1984–85): 99.

25. Guo Fei, *Yue daji*, ed. Huang Guosheng and Deng Guizhong (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2014), *juan* 32, 29b–39a, and 35b for the map of Macao’s Hac Sa Wan. The Hong Kong Maritime Museum holds both the Gentiloni Paintings and a number of enameled dishes featuring this type of ship.

26. Hans-Joachim Ulbrich, “Communicating with the Gods: Superstition on Fuerteventura and Lanzarote,” *Expression* 10 (2015): 64; Pichler, “Spiele-Darstellungen,” 165–67; Fabio Gaggia, Carlo Gavazzi, and Pierangelo Manuele, “Navi scolpite sulle Alpi. Le imbarcazioni nelle incisioni rupestri alpine,” *Rivista Marittima* 11, supplement (2001): 13, 40, 43, and figures 45, 49, 57–58, 66, 76, 79–83a.

27. Leung, “Ba Xian Ling,” B2.

28. Deng Qilong, *Kaifang de Lingnan wenhua* (Guangzhou: Jinan Daxue Chubanshe, 1998), 58.

29. Lúdia Fernandes and Marcos Osório, “Tabuleiros de jogo e outras gravações no Castelo de Vilar Maior,” *Sabucule* 5 (2013): 97.

30. Alex de Voogt, “Strategic Games in Society: The Geography of Adult Play,” *International Journal of Play* 6, no. 3 (2017): 308; Philip Townshend, “Games of Strategy: A New Look at Correlates and Crosscultural Methods,” in *Play and Culture: Proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play*, ed. H. B. Schwartzman (New York: Leisure Press, 1978), 217–25.

31. Alex de Voogt, “The Comoros: A Confluence of Board Game Histories,” *Board Game Studies Journal* 13 (2019): 1–13.

32. Facey, “Boat Carvings,” 206–7.

33. Chen Canyon, *Yiguo xiangqing* (Shijiazhuang: Huashan Wenyi, 1982), 183; Chen Kelun, *Gang shi Gang qing* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 1990), 169.

34. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston: Beacon, 1949), 15–16, following Leo Frobenius, *Kulturges-*

chichte Afrikas: Prolegomena zu einer historischen Gestaltlehre (Zurich: Phaidon-Verlag, 1933), 23.

35. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 46.

36. Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 60.

37. Game as a mirrored representation of selfhood and otherness was not uncommon in the wide range of Chinese conceptions of game board entertainment, specifically in the relationship between the *weiqi* player's response to the game's outcome and their personal temperament; see Berge-Becker, "Groups on the Grid," this volume.

38. As mentioned in Jörg Sonntag, "A Matter of Definition? Game, Play, and Ritual in Medieval Monasteries," in *Il gioco nella società e nella cultura dell'alto medioevo*, vol. 1 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2018), 335, although I have been unable to trace the source.

39. Walter Crist, Anne-Elisabeth Dunn-Vaturi, and Alex de Voogt, *Ancient Egyptians at Play: Board Games Across Borders* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 168–69.

40. For the Tung Chung Battery, see Bard, *In Search*, 86–88. Apparently there were other coastal fortifications in the area.

41. Facey, "Boat Carvings," 206.

42. Yau Tong, *Xinjie fengwu yu minqing* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1992), 43–44; Patrick Hase, "Eastern Peace: Sha Tau Kok Market in 1925," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33 (1993): 201–2174.

43. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

44. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 2.