
Splendid Journeys
The Board Games
of a Late Qing Scholar

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Near the end of his voluminous collected works, the prominent late Qing scholar Yu Yue (1821–1907) includes his designs for two board games, A Map for Splendid Journeys (Sheng you tu) and A Map for Splendid Journeys on West Lake (Xihu sheng you tu). He owed his renown to his role as the leader of one of the most well-established Confucian academies and to his prolific publications. Although scholarship on the classics anchored his *Complete Works of the Hall Where Spring Remains* (Chunzaitang quanshu), his fame allowed him to publish many eclectic works as well. Placing his games last shows he deems them the most frivolous of the frivolous.

Yu Yue's games are a personal rendition of a flexible type with both Chinese and global antecedents and parallels: racing games in which players roll dice, move markers along a path, and experience consequences for landing on different squares, with the first player to reach the end winning.¹ His two games construct distinct thought experiments on the theme of journey: the first envisions six character types on a quest for advancement across an empire-wide landscape; the second depicts a circuit through a familiar regional tourist itinerary. Analysis and play of his games reveal his thoughtful interventions as a game designer. Rather than representing a departure from his philological scholarship, his games celebrate the same values: completeness, erudition, systematic arrangement of allusions from varied sources, and multiple paths to success.

Creation and Overview of the Games

In his preface, Yu places his games in the context of two dice games dating at least to the Tang: “grid for selection of talent” (*cai xuan ge*) and “diagrams for selection of immortals” (*xuan xian zhi tu*).² The paths of political advancement by means of the exam system and immortality attained through Daoist self-cultivation were often conceived as parallel. The game that directly inspired Yu incorporated aspects of both. He does not mention a less erudite tradition of dice games: an inward-turning spiral path of images, sometimes called “gourd games” (*bulu wen*) because of their shape. They could depict any recognizable, visually appealing series of figures: Daoist immortals, heroes of *The Water Margin*, calendrical animals, and so on. Playable by the illiterate and small children, they appeared among the popular printed ephemera of the Lunar New Year.³

Following his habitual approach to popular material, Yu Yue improved on an existing model. In the spring of 1891 he was lodging at the Transcendant’s Abode at Mount Yutai (Yutai Xianguan), next to his wife’s grave in the hills near West Lake in Hangzhou. His grandson-in-law visited and gave him a game, Seeing the Splendors (Lan sheng tu), attributed to Gao Zhao (early Qing).⁴ Intrigued but dissatisfied, with free time on his hands in his rustic retreat, he made his own version. Thus Yu’s game creation began in the familial context of a solicitous younger man trying to amuse his elder. Gao’s game was attractive to Yu Yue as a variation on the more common game of “ascending to office” (*sheng guan tu*), similar to the earlier *cai xuan ge*, in which game spaces are marked with official ranks and the dice dictate promotion and demotion.⁵ Unlike games focused exclusively on official careers, Gao’s game contained diverse definitions of victory. Yu taught at a Confucian academy that prepared men for the examination, but his own career had been derailed. He passed at the highest level only to be dismissed from office in a scandal related to exam questions, making it understandable that he believed in more than one path to success.⁶

He created two games, one national in scope and more closely modeled on Gao’s, and the other focused on Hangzhou. In 1892 they were published alongside rules for a card game and a domino game, then all four games were included in the 1899 edition of his complete works. He provided complete rules and incomplete game boards, with only some squares marked,

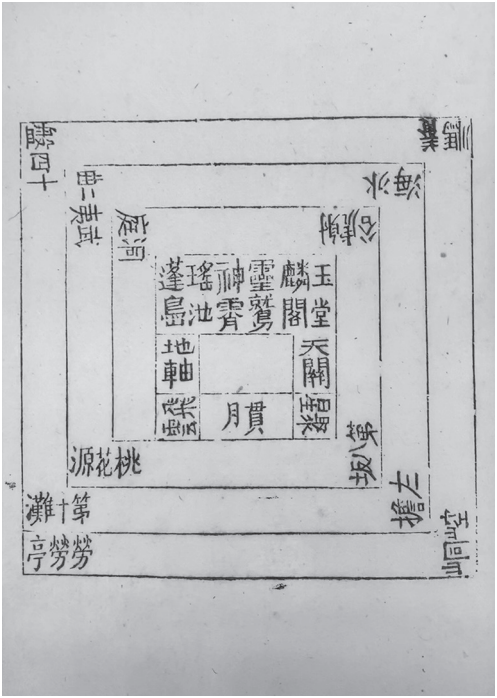


FIG. 3.1. Splendid Journeys game board design. Courtesy of Suzhou Library.

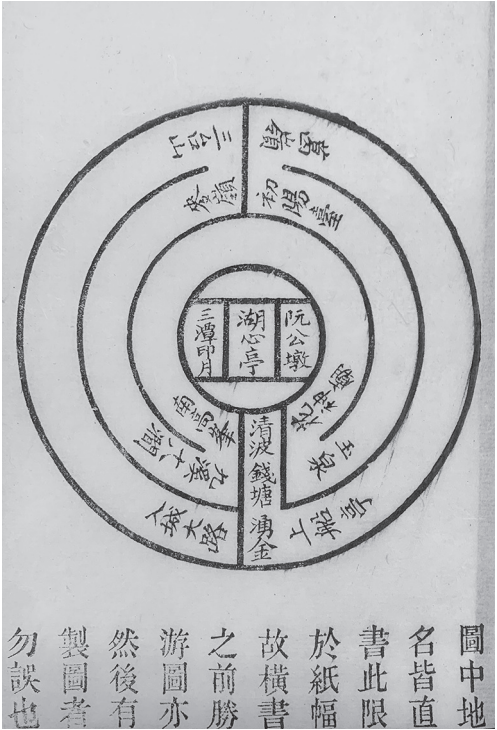


FIG. 3.2. West Lake Splendid Journeys game board design. Courtesy of Suzhou Library.

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presuming players would use his instructions to create their own boards (see figures 3.1 and 3.2). Yu closed his preface with the hope that the game might be transmitted alongside a Tang antecedent, rather than statements about play.⁷ He viewed his games as textual creations, not new traditions of practice.

In both games each player places some money in their personal stock and another portion in the collective pool. Then they roll dice (one in the first game, two in the second) to move along a path of named spaces that carry consequences: money is gained or lost, or forward motion is accelerated or limited. In the first game the path spirals inward, a structure shared by both its Chinese antecedents and international parallels.⁸ Game space is conceived as a route to traverse rather than a battlefield to control, as in *weiqi*. Adding an element of gambling, the first person to reach the end gets half of the pot, the second player gets half of what remains, and the division continues until the last-place player gets nothing.⁹ Yu's games bear the most resemblance to Goose, attested in Europe in the late sixteenth century, and Japanese *e-sugoroku* (pictorial double-six).¹⁰ Despite a few limited elements of choice in the first game, they are games of chance rather than skill.

Compared to the gourd games or *e-sugoroku*, Yu's games are more verbal than visual. His players move through a landscape made of words. Nonetheless he does seem to care about the overall visual design of the game boards, which are more carefully drawn than Gao's. The similarity between the square and circular boards and his playful transformation of his pen name Quyuan (Bend Garden) into a set of calligraphic rebuses he created the year before suggests a meta-joke (figure 3.3).¹¹ In any case, he makes a deliberate contrast between the square and the round as ways of ordering space, suggesting different experiences as players either turn corners or follow a circle around the lake.

Game One: Role-Playing

I will discuss Yu's first and more inventive board game in detail, exploring his conception of roleplay, game space, monetary stakes, and stages of play, with a briefer discussion of his second game for comparison. The race is complicated in *Splendid Journeys*, as in his source, by player roles being

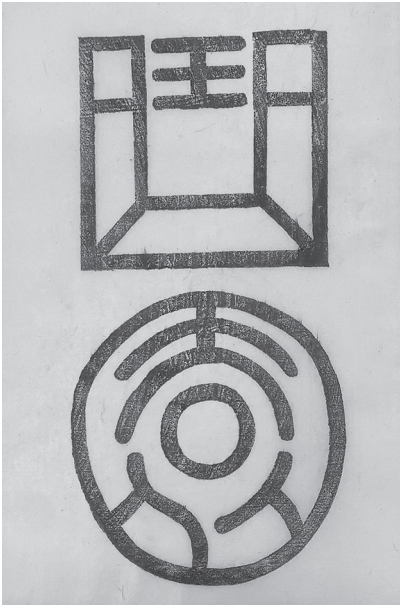


FIG. 3.3. Name of the Qu Yuan from *Quyuan moxi*. Courtesy of Suzhou Library.

assigned by a throw of the die. Gao's roles, a set of stock figures from Chinese popular culture, are poet (*cike*), Daoist (*yushi*), swordsman (*jianxia*), beauty (*meiren*), fisherman (*yufu*), and Buddhist monk (*ziyi*). Yu keeps the Buddhist and Daoist, slightly renames the fisherman (*yuweng*) and knight errant (*xiake*), and replaces the poet with the Confucian scholar (*rushi*) and the beauty with the woodcutter (*qiaofu*).¹² He does not say what should be used as game markers. The eighteenth-century novel *Lamp at the Crossroads* (*Qilu deng*) depicts a similar game with role-specific figurines made of luxurious materials—bronze, ivory, crystal, or jade—extravagance that could be fictional embellishment.¹³ A later game instructs players to write each role's name on a piece of paper.¹⁴

Yu's change of the poet to the Confucian scholar reveals favor for his own vocation. His addition of the woodcutter shows his preference for parallel roles: the scholar and the knight errant represent engagement in the world through learning or justified violence, the Buddhist and Daoist represent departing from the world for a religious vocation, and the fisherman and woodcutter represent rustic reclusion. The latter were long-standing elite ideals of retreat into nature rather than an attempt to imagine the actual

lives of working men. His most drastic change, removing the only female character, the beauty, seems motivated by discomfort with the erotic plots her presence on the journey implies. In Gao's game there are rewards if she and the poet land on the same spaces, suggesting a budding romance.¹⁵ At this point in Yu Yue's life, he would have been most likely to play games in a familial circle dominated by his daughters-in-law, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters.¹⁶ Should removing the beauty prevent improper jokes in these mixed-gender and intergenerational groups? Yet the alternative is everyone taking male roles, cross-dressing on the gameboard. Perhaps he was unable to conceive of female routes of advancement and travel that could be depicted in the game.

Although the roles are mostly parallel in terms of advantages and obstacles, the Confucian and the knight errant seem the most distinct and the Confucian the most privileged (see below). The knight errant has additional challenges and opportunities for reward. Since one opportunity involves saving extra dots for future use, he has more freedom of choice than other players.¹⁷ Yu Yue's editing of the martial arts novel *Three Knights and Five Gallants* (Sanxia wuyi), another example of his revision of popular entertainment media, reveals his interest in this figure.¹⁸

For the man making the game and many of his potential players, the Confucian is the only role that is not a fantasy. Though Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, woodcutters, and fisherman existed, it was unlikely that an upper-class man would choose any of those paths. In contemporary gaming terms, this resembles a hybrid of Life and a Dungeons and Dragons-style role-playing game.¹⁹ Unlike conventional promotion games on which Yu was trying to improve, even the Confucian scholar's advancement is not presented in terms of examinations and political appointments.

One rule of Goose and the gourd games lacking in both Yu's and Gao's games is that if a player lands on a space already occupied by another player, they switch places, with the first player going back to the space from which the second had started their turn. But in these games, other than in a few specialized parts of the board discussed below, the players do not displace each other. As the different roles experience the landscape, they do not occupy it to the exclusion of others. There is never a direct contest of ability between them: the Confucian and the knight errant never test whether the pen is mightier than the sword; the Buddhist and the Daoist never vie to

see whose faith is more efficacious. Direct interaction between the players is instead enacted through the medium of money.

Game One: Map and Money

Each role has his own track to success, but it is still a race. Even recluses and men of faith are racing. Despite setbacks, players tend to progress forward; shortcuts are also limited. If one is forced to move backward, it is only to the start of the present challenge or the present turn, not to an earlier stage of the game. Some situations are set up to create bonds among players, but the heart of the game remains individual luck and advancement, conceived of in terms of movement on the board and money in the hand.

There are no merchants among the roles, but even the most unworldly kinds of success are defined in monetary terms. The link of game progress to monetary stakes was present in Song dynasty versions of bureaucratic advancement games.²⁰ Yu Yue does not state the amount of money needed at the start of the game or what to do if someone runs out.²¹ This suggests actual currency, rather than the self-contained economy of Monopoly. Those who exhausted their reserves would find more cash or supply an IOU. In his domino game in the previous chapter of *Quyuan's Three Games*, he calls for low stakes, the cost of snacks or fruit, since this was a game to be played in the family with women and children. He deplores those who wager great fortunes on similar games.²² An 1878 collection of drinking games included a game like Gao's that used swigs of alcohol as rewards and forfeits; evidently Yu considered low-stakes gambling more appropriate than drinking for family entertainment.²³ In play-testing the amount spent proved higher than initial estimates, and more than one player had to replenish their savings to continue playing.²⁴

Yu Yue creates a longer path and more elaborate rules. Unlike Chutes and Ladders or Goose, in which most of the path consists of blank spaces, he follows Gao's game by naming and giving instructions, enforcing consequences for at least one of the player roles on every space on the board. This shifts emphasis from forward motion to the individual characteristics of the spaces. Yu's board creates a pathway of both earthly and fantastic places: the Three Gorges, the Five Sacred Peaks, Lake Dongting, and the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers appear along with the Kingdom of Rakshasas

(Buddhist demons) and a Wild Fox Peak.²⁵ He makes it clear that the board is arranged as conceptual rather than geographical space. For example, the Five Sacred Peaks linked to each of the cardinal directions are on five consecutive squares.²⁶ “Although the names of the mountains and waters have no order, they do have some significance.”²⁷ Players enjoy a progression of accomplishment and marvel rather than physical distance as they circle toward the center of the board.

As the allusions are of mixed dates, the historical setting of the journey is unclear. This differs from some of the promotion games that meticulously recorded the rank systems of past dynasties.²⁸ In some spaces it is suggested that the players might interact with figures from the past, as when ancient masters transmit knowledge appropriate to each role. In others one should honor the past as past: landing on the space marked for the Miluo river requires a price of one coin to mourn Qu Yuan.²⁹ When crossing the ocean, certain rolls allow players to get a steam paddlewheel boat, rather than a sailboat, and move farther, suggesting the game is set in Yu’s own nineteenth-century world.

Yu Yue’s sense of geography and time is illuminated by comparison with another adaptation of Gao’s game, fourteen years later. A Map for Global Travels (*Huanqiu lansheng tu*), printed in the periodical *Xiaoshuo lin* (Forest of fiction) in 1908, has its players assume modern roles: student (*xuesheng*), adventurer (*tanxian*), engineer (*gongshi*), merchant (*shangren*), missionary (*jiaoshi*), and ambassador (*gongshi*). The path starts in Shanghai, goes to Japan, then circumnavigates the globe from east to west, with Beijing as the finish line.³⁰ Although the game mechanics are the same as in Gao’s or Yu’s game, it models a different fantasy, in which Chinese players take on modern vocations, tour all the great sights of the world for the sake of knowledge and wonder, and finally win power and status in the capital.³¹ In contrast, Yu is not trying to remake the received game board with new content, but to deepen and balance the fabric of allusions and to differentiate the stages of play.

Game One: Stages of Play

The game has deliberately designed stages: the first thirty spaces, covering two of the outer sides of the board, each offer loss or reward for one

character. On the first six spaces, players pay one coin as a fee to receive some privilege, such as the transmission of knowledge. On the next six spaces, each role has to pay a penalty for landing somewhere inauspicious for their vocation. For example, at the Stream of Bandits, the knight errant pays a fine of one coin.³² There is a gap between game mechanics and game narrative: although two different verbs are used for payment, one more negative than the other, the monetary loss is the same. Six more spaces offer an opportunity to be rewarded from the shared pot for landing on places that signal accomplishment. Another set of spaces of success causes a player to be congratulated and paid one coin each by all the other players. This fivefold greater profit than that gained so far brings the characters into relation with one another. Again, there is a disjunction between the narrative level of the game and the transaction, for the festive “congratulations” is compelled. The next six spaces cause players to lose a turn. These pauses are framed in positive terms: the Confucian scholar lingers at the Mountain of Dreaming of the Brush, where the poet Jiang Yan had dreamed of being granted the colored brush signifying great talent by the earlier poet Guo Pu.³³ This initial game stage alternates two possibilities for loss with two possibilities for gain, followed by a potential pause before entering the next stage of play.

After the single squares of differentiated experience, Yu creates series of linked spaces. The next stage of game play, moving across the top of the board, down the left side, and starting into the next concentric circle, is marked by hazards of the terrain, restricting forward motion as the players become obstacles for one another. Modeled on a less complex precedent in Gao's game, most of this section is taken up by two stretches of eighteen spaces: a treacherous, winding mountain trail named for a place on Mount Tai in Shandong, and a narrow path through shoals of water named for a place in Liaoning. At the Narrow Road of Eighteen Bends players must stop on the first space and save any extra of their die roll to add one to each roll if they wish while crossing the Bends. Here the path is narrow, so players cannot land on the same space or pass one another; if they do, they must pay a fine and go back where their turn started. Only the woodcutter, skilled at climbing mountains, does not have these limits. If the knight errant does not reach this area first, he must roll the die to compete with the player who did, and only if he wins can he go forward; otherwise he

pays a fine of two coins and goes back.³⁴ On the Eighteen Shoals, the fisherman is the only one free of restrictions, and the knight errant must again contend with the others.³⁵ Yu conceives the knight errant as compelled to strive to be first even though he has no advantage in crossing rough terrain; winning or losing this contest has no effect on the other player involved.

Having players stop on the first space of these two hazards clusters them together, thus increasing the chances they will block one another's progress. Allowing the saving and use of the extra dots somewhat mitigates the challenge of getting through. Between the Narrow Road of Eighteen Bends and the Narrow Shoals is a space intended to strengthen connections between players just as they have been getting in each other's way. At the Hill of Meeting all players must stop and give any remaining dots on their die throw to the players ahead of and behind them (if it is an odd number, more goes to the one behind), and are rewarded with one coin from the recipients for doing so.³⁶ Giving more dots to the one behind is a limited attempt to equalize the players' positions.

The game's third stage (the latter half of the second spiral and almost all of the third) combines the features of the previous two sections—spaces for individual or shared benefit or cost and shared challenges—with obstacles that demand other roles throw the die on behalf of the players that land there. This binds players in another kind of transaction. For example, at the Perilous Ford all other players must ask the fisherman to roll for them. If he rolls a three, it is a boat, so they can move, paying him a reward of one coin. If after three turns they don't get a boat, they get to move and the fisherman pays a fine of three.³⁷ At the Kingdom of Rakshasas, others must enlist the Buddhist to role a four on their behalf to exorcise the demons; if he succeeds, he receives a reward and they move. Similarly, if he fails after three tries, he pays a fine.³⁸ There are similar spaces where each character takes a turn aiding the others: the knight errant slays tigers, the woodcutter carries others in a sedan chair, the Daoist exorcises fox demons. Protection is made parallel to transportation. Anticipating contemporary cooperative games, the characters are placed in relations of mutual dependence on those with different strengths.

Here Yu Yue's favoritism for the Confucian is revealed in two ways: at the space where the Confucian throws the die for others, Shengxian Qiao (the Bridge of Ascent to Immortality), where Sima Xiangru inscribed a

bridge and won the recognition of Han Wudi, he is not obligated to produce a particular result, and receives a reward regardless. His rolling for others is not given a narrative explanation like getting a boat or subduing demons, and thus he is not clearly depicted as serving his fellow players.³⁹ At the same time, the Confucian does not require the exorcist services of the Buddhist or Daoist to deal with rakshasas or foxes, though he still needs the knight errant to slay tigers.

In this section the terrain becomes the destination of pilgrimage as well as offering new varieties of obstacles. Players receive increasing congratulations from others according to how many of the Five Sacred Peaks they visit, and Yu has arranged the board so that the odds of landing on at least one are high. This penultimate section also contains spaces of historical commemoration. Other spaces demand certain numbers on die rolls to cross bodies of water. There is a series of spaces where one can move only slowly (by rolling one, two, or three), and another where can move only quickly (rolling four, five, or six).⁴⁰ For the first time there is also a space, the Pass of the Tumbling Horse (Daoma guan), also in Gao's game, that not only sends players back to where the present turn began, but demands rolling a second time and going backward.⁴¹

In the final stage of the game, the innermost part of the spiral, each player is on his own path to success, not blocking the others. Here Yu Yue also inscribes his own personal geography, making West Lake the beginning of the path to victory. Yu arranges the board so that each player must land on at least one of the Mountain of Nobility, the Waters of Fortune, or the Peak of Joy. While the value of congratulatory gifts increases, the endgame has the slowest progress. Giving the game a cyclical structure, Yu imitates his model by demanding that each player roll the number that assigned roles at the beginning (one for the Confucian, two for the knight errant, etc.) to reach his unique victory square. Although players cannot be pushed back to an earlier stage of play, they can go around the inner circle several times. To demand an exact roll to reach the finish seems common in racing games. It keeps the world of the game board self-contained, and slowing the attainment of victory allows other players to catch up, increasing competition and suspense.

Overall, the game is an optimistic vision of the journey. Loss is not the devastation of removing armies from the board or the destitution of

losing all one's resources. Halving the pot means that the group should keep playing until not only second place is decided but fifth and sixth. Although in monetary terms there is a loser, there is implicit assurance that each role can find his own way to success. None of the setbacks on the path are imagined as major moral failures, as corruption would be in games of official careers, or sins in Buddhist games. Yu rejects the model of the promotion games: success, even for the Confucian scholar, is not tied to rank or power. Compared to Gao's game that ends in Chang'an and the 1908 version that concludes in Beijing, his squares of victory celebrate accomplishment, renown, and transcendence on a celestial or otherworldly level.⁴² Yu's game ends as a verbal elaboration of the spiral of auspicious images shared at Lunar New Year.

Game Two: West Lake Journey

Yu's West Lake game deploys different understandings of role, space, and journey, showing that he is thinking through the possibilities of the board game as form. He introduces it simply: "In the past I had the Map for Splendid Journeys, which has already been printed in the *Three Games*. Now I also have this map, so I appended and printed it here." Its rules are simpler. West Lake Journey dispenses with distinct roles, and thus there is no set limit to the number of players. It lacks the limited elements of choice of Splendid Journeys and involves less interaction between players. There is one stretch where players cannot overtake one another, and they frequently congratulate one another, but they never roll for one another or give each other dots. Players throw a pair of dice rather than one, making for a swifter journey around the shorter path of ninety-one spaces.

Although the mechanics are simpler, the path is more complex. Yu has expanded a single space named West Lake in the previous game to fill the entire board. Unlike the steady inward spiral representing progress and cultivation, this journey moves in to the shores of the lake and then out again, back to the city. Depending on the first roll, there are three different starting points from three different city gates of Hangzhou. The Pavilion at the Heart of the Lake at the center of the board is not the ultimate goal of play, but a place some players will visit by chance, representing either a shortcut or a delay. Yu is not the first to envision a spiral gameboard path

representing West Lake; the game played in *Qilu deng* has Gao's six roles moving along this track.⁴³

All players are male literati tourists experiencing the landscape in the same way. Unlike in *Splendid Journeys*, the board is a stylized version of a representational map and a recognizable itinerary. Although the path doesn't match the physical West Lake perfectly, it follows a geographic progression, beginning on the north shore of the lake, moving west, exploring the hills west of the lake, then returning along the southern shore to the eastern side of the lake.⁴⁴ Anyone who lands on one of the ten celebrated West Lake scenes is rewarded with three coins by all other players.⁴⁵ Both of Yu's game boards satisfy Francesca Bray's definition of *tu* as "forms of symbolic mediation whose formal patternings of space created understanding or generated action by guiding the viewer through a strictly ordered trajectory," but the nature of the space represented differs: it is conceptual space for *Splendid Journeys* and a blend of physical and conceptual space for West Lake.⁴⁶

On the level of narrative, transportation and weather create obstacles; on the level of game mechanics, specific numbers are frequently required to leave a square. Unlike in the other game, Yu decides certain meanings for numbers that recur throughout the game: three and six can be either a small boat or a large boat allowing forward progress, or the wind and rain that prevent leaving a particular spot. There is no consistent lucky or unlucky number, as each roll's meaning is determined by the environment of the space where a player stands. When first leaving the city for West Lake on the three opening spaces, each turn on which a player doesn't get a boat results in increasingly high costs for tea, then wine, then food.⁴⁷ Spending money is consistently envisioned in terms of tourist consumption, as compared to its varied meanings in the previous game.

Additional dice rolls simulate literati activities: taking exams, composing poetry, buying sutras, and picking tea. These endeavors are not directly competitive: one player picking tea does not affect how much remains for others, and there is no limit to how many players can be rewarded for seeing the Spring Dawn at Sudi. For examinations there are two tests: if one player reaches the space on which the exam is held with a low roll, he is not a real graduate and must pay a fine of five and go back to the previous space. But once qualified to land on the examination space, everyone passes;

the only question is how high the pass. Rolling four or above on both dice is a high pass, rewarded by the other players with five; rolling below four on both is a low pass, rewarded by the other plays with one; a mixed result is a middle pass, rewarded by the others with three.⁴⁸ Thus a middle pass is identical in value to landing on one of the ten famous scenes. In Yu's previous game the examination system was elided altogether, while here the central enterprise of literati men's lives is rendered monetarily equivalent to tourist amusement. Unlike in real life, players do not compete with one another to pass, and there is no quota. Placing the exams at the Confucian academies by the lake rather than in examination cells in the city is also a fantasy, as the most they could offer in real life was practice exams.

Splendid Journeys evokes a fantastic range of experiences for players, but this game recreates plausible outings, summoning memories of actual journeys.⁴⁹ Although in his first game Yu Yue gives West Lake a privileged position as the entry point to the stage of victory, in his second he is sitting within the landscape on the gameboard as he creates the game, inscribing the scenes of his personal history there. Beginning in 1868, Yu split his time between teaching on the shores of West Lake and spending time at his family residence in Suzhou. He makes his own Confucian academy, the Study for Explicating the Classics (*Gujing jingshe*), a game board space interchangeable with other places where exams are held. Landing on Three Platform Mountain (*Santai shan*), the location of the retreat where he writes the game, earns the same congratulations from other players as anywhere on the list of ten West Lake scenes, even though it was less renowned. Li'an Temple, where he wished to journey with his wife but never did, and the Cold Stream Pavilion (*Lengquan ting*), which they memorably did visit, are on the path.⁵⁰ A favorite destination, the Nine Springs and Eighteen Waterfalls (*Jiu xi shiba jian*), resembles the narrow paths in his previous game, but the rules declare outright that it is the most splendid place in West Lake.⁵¹

The ending of the game is not transcendence but returning to the city. Although one must stop at the final space and roll either a two or a four to enter the city triumphantly in a sedan chair, it is considerably less complex than the "winner's circle" in the previous game. Some of that circling complexity is instead given to the Pavilion at the Heart of the Lake at the middle of the board. Although the conceptual stakes of the game are lower

than in the first game, the financial stakes appear the same, leading again to a contradiction between the narrative level and mechanical level of the game.

Eubanks writes of *sugoroku* racing games in Meiji Japan that “the point of the game is more oriented toward indulging in a group fantasy, using the board game to support imagination,” but that fantasy also teaches the geography of imperial conquest.⁵² Some creators of official promotion games stressed their value for teaching history and bureaucratic structure.⁵³ What didactic agenda did Yu’s games contain? Splendid Journeys taught a set of stock roles and associated allusions, as well as shared aspirations of travel and pilgrimage. West Lake modeled a tourist itinerary that gave equal attention to the hills and the lake, containing sacred sites and literary pursuits in the same repertoire of pleasure.

Stephen Roddy describes Yu’s defense of the much-criticized examination essay form in terms of playing a game by the rules. He argues that Yu Yue views playful essays as a productive means of learning to use this essential tool of moral and intellectual cultivation.⁵⁴ A properly constructed game could teach players that a scholar must sometimes depend on a fisherman though he would never trade places with him, that exams were only a few spaces along the path and not the whole path, and that one should celebrate other people’s fortunate encounters with gorgeous scenery or sacred mountains as much as one’s own. He does not ask whether in practice this narrative of interdependence and shared pleasure could override the selfish thrills of rolling the right number and having money in the hand.

In his board games Yu Yue manipulates the elements of language, numbers, sequence, spatial organization, and probability. He thinks through an impressive range of the numerical possibilities offered by a single die or a pair of dice, then assigns them in-game cultural significance. Among all his adaptations his games have the most kinship with his divination systems, using probability to navigate the tension between randomness and meaningful patterns.⁵⁵ The link of game with augury was both common in the culture and of particular interest to him: he entitles one of his early works on the *Yi jing* “Playing with the Changes” (*Wan yi pian*), his revised systems for different forms of divination *Record of Playful Arts* (*You yi lu*).⁵⁶ His card game is based on the eight trigrams (*bagua*). Elsewhere he improves a system for divination with dominoes by adding a suitable Tang poetic

couplet to each result.⁵⁷ Although games and divination systems differ in the relationship between in-system patterns and the outside world, Yu Yue had confidence that erudition, logic, and exhaustiveness could only improve imperfect modes of practice.

It is unclear whether Yu Yue or anyone else ever played his games. As he doesn't provide a full game board, they would be playable only after someone made their own. Hand-drawn games of the gourd type exist, so players doing this is not implausible. Although Yu claims the size of the page prevented him from supplying a complete board, textually dense game boards were printed during this period, so it would have been feasible for him if it was a priority.⁵⁸ Instead, he decided to fit his games among his other works, suggesting that he may have intended these game rules as texts for reading. They may have been armchair travel in an extended sense, imagining simulating travel with a game. His works on divination, for which he never includes examples of their application, also suggest he took great pleasure in completing and transmitting a system, even if it were never put into practice.

Conclusion

A decade later, in 1901, Yu Yue reports in a self-mocking poem that someone printed a thousand copies of his board games to earn money for charity in Shanghai.⁵⁹ He is amused, and coyly proud, that his earlier diversion can fetch a price. The combination of his famous name and an ephemeral entertainment product had a potential market beyond his complete works. Since I have not discovered a surviving example of this edition, I don't know whether the unknown entrepreneur reprinted the text and illustrations that appear in Yu's complete works or made a complete game board.⁶⁰

At the end of his life, he regrets his game designs, saying they encourage gambling, which could be very destructive for young people.⁶¹ The combination of money and chance was potentially too volatile for his narrative design to contain. In the novel *Qi lu deng* the beguiling game with six characters traveling around West Lake represents an early stage of the young protagonist's moral decline, one of the amusements of the first night he got outrageously drunk in questionable company.⁶² Like the defenders of *weiqi* as gentlemanly self-cultivation, Yu Yue was aware that he potentially

shared this form of game with gamblers, drinkers, and flirtatious players, yet he never bids the games be removed from his complete works.

Placing Yu Yue's board games among his other works of adaptation, the domino and card games, the poetic lines linked to divination by dominoes, the divination and calendrical systems, and the sequence of rankings of flowers, we see that he is committed to creating internally consistent systems by arranging erudite cultural references in received frameworks.⁶³ His omnivorous reading and prolific publishing gave him the confidence to believe he could improve on many parts of the textual tradition, from the serious to the playful.

The English version of Snakes and Ladders was published in the same year as Yu Yue's games.⁶⁴ The late nineteenth-century world was fascinated with journeys of chance, progress, and tourism, as commercial printing created a proliferation of miniature worlds for players to traverse. Staking his own place among these shared cultural flows, Yu represents self-cultivation of fantastic figures and genteel wandering in a well-known landscape as complementary trajectories.

Notes

1. See H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Board Games Other than Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), chapter 6, "Race-Games." For a collection of map-themed games, see Ernst Strouhal, *Die Welt im Spiel: Atlas der spielbaren Landkarten* (Vienna: Brandstätter, 2015).

2. Yu Yue, *Quyuan sanshua*, in *Chunzai tang quanshu* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 7:3.1a. For an overview of promotion games, see Andrew Lo, "Official Aspirations: Chinese Promotion Games" in *Asian Games: The Art of the Contest*, ed. Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 64–75. On a Ming Buddhist version, see May-Ying Mary Ngai, "From Entertainment to Enlightenment: A Study on a Cross-Cultural Religious Board Game with Emphasis on the Table of Buddha Selection Designed by Ouyi Zhixu of the Late Ming Dynasty" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2010).

3. See illustrations in Lo, "Official Aspirations," 70–71, and discussion in Sung Ping-jen, "Sheng guan tu youxi yange kao," *Taiwan shida lishi xuebao* 33 (2005): 60–61.

4. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 3.1a. *Lan sheng tu* is preserved in one of the latest installments of the compendium *Zhaodai congshu* (Collectanea of a Glorious Age), printed by Shen Maode. Gao Zhao, *Lan sheng tu pu*, in *Zhaodai congshu bieji* (Shi-

kai tang, 1833), *juan* 36. On *Zhaodai congshu* see Suyoung Son, *Writing for Print: Publishing and the Making of Textual Authority in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), particularly 108n65. The game Yu saw was a more recent reprint from Changshu. For changes Yu Yue made to his source, I use the 1833 edition of Gao's game, since I have not seen the later publication. I could be giving him credit for others' innovations.

5. For an introduction see Carole Morgan, "The Chinese Game of *Shengguan tu*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 3 (2004): 517–32; for an in-depth study see Sung, "Shengguan tu."

6. Yu describes his dismissal as "because of others' words." Yu Yue, *Quyuan zishu shi*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu*, 7:1.11b. Xie Chaofan, *Youxin yu chengyi: wan Qing wenhua shiyu xia de Yu Yue ji qi wenxue zhushu* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2009), 5; Rania Huntington, *Ink and Tears: Memory, Mourning, and Writing in the Yu Family* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 217n33; Stephen Roddy, "Heroes Play by the Rules: Yu Yue's Pedagogy for the Eight-Legged Essay," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2020): 238.

7. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.1a.

8. See Lo, "Official Aspirations," 66.

9. Parlett notes this variant of Goose. David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 96.

10. On Goose and its derivatives, see Parlett, *Board Games*, 95–101; Adrien Seville, *The Cultural Legacy of the Game of the Goose* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2019). On *e-sugoroku*, see Faith Katherine Kreskey, "Leaping Monsters and Realms of Play: Game Play Mechanics in Old Monster Yarn Sugoroku" (master's thesis, University of Oregon, 2012).

11. Yu, *Quyuan moxi*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu* 7:1.19a.

12. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.1b.

13. Li Lüyuan, *Qi lu deng* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Chubanshe, 1980), 1:17.175–77.

14. Shuangjianshi zhuren, *Huanqiu lansheng tu*, *Xiaoshuo lin* 9 (1908): 2.

15. This happens both on and off the board in the game played in *Qi lu deng*, in which the hero in the role of the scholar drinks with a courtesan in the role of the beauty. Li, *Qi lu deng*, 1:17.176–77.

16. On Yu Yue's female-centered family life in his widowhood, see Huntington, *Ink and Tears*, 32, 61.

17. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.

18. Xie, *Youxin yu chengyi*, 253–65. Roddy, "Heroes," 252–53.

19. See Strouhal on games of "the journey through life." *Die Welt im Spiel*, 53–63.

20. Lo, "Official Aspirations," 66.

21. A later similar game says each player should have one hundred copper cash. Shuangjianshi zhuren, *Huanqiu lansheng tu*, 3.

22. Yu, *Quyuan shanshua*, 7:2.3a–3b.
23. Cited in Ma Guojun and Ma Shuyun, *Zhongguo chuantong youxi daquan* (Beijing: Nongcun Duwu Chubanshe, 1990), 238–42. The game depicted in *Qilu deng* demands role-appropriate performances in addition to drinking: telling jokes, singing a song, or saying the name of Amida Buddha. Li, *Qi lu deng*, 1:17.175–77.
24. Thanks to Aaron Balivet, Alicia Foley, Wenting Ji, Josiah Stork, Luwei Wang, Christine Welch, Juliana Bergman, Declan Halloran, Freya Rosen, Sophia Pringle, Yuan Shi, Luke Williams, and Jie Zhang for play-testing. Complete translations of game rules are available upon request.
25. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b–4b.
26. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.
27. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.1b.
28. Sung, “Sheng guan tu,” 47.
29. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4b.
30. Shuangjianshi zhuren, *Huanqiu lansheng tu*.
31. See Yan Jianfu, *Wanqing xiaoshuo de xin gainian ditu* (Beijing: Beijing Lianhe Chubanshe, 2019), 25. Like Yu’s game but unlike the 1833 printing of Gao’s, each role has its own finishing square.
32. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.2b.
33. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3a.
34. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3a.
35. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.
36. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3a.
37. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.
38. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4b.
39. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.
40. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4a–4b.
41. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4a.
42. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.5a. Jin describes a version of Gao’s game with distinct victory squares, but I have not seen it. See Jin Xueshi, *Muzhu xianhua*, in *Zhaodao congshu bie*, juan 43, 1.8a.
43. Li, *Qi lu deng*, 1:17.175–77. They appear to move only inward, not returning to the city, and to finish in four or five turns, suggesting a shorter path.
44. For a similar, undated game featuring Yangzhou, see Wang Zhenzhong, “Youyi zhong de Shengqing chengshi fengqing: guji shanben Yangzhou huafang jiyou tu yanjiu,” *Anhui daxue xuebao* 2013.1:89–95.
45. On the development of West Lake as tourist destination, including many of the activities depicted in Yu’s game, see Xiaolin Duan, *The Rise of West Lake: A Cultural Landmark in the Song Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), especially 156–81 on the 10 Scenes (Views).

46. Francesca Bray, "Introduction: the Powers of *Tu*," in *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China*, ed. Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métaillé (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 4.
47. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.7a.
48. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.7a.
49. On 1869 journeys to Li'an Temple and the Three Pools Impressed by the Moon, see Yu Yue, *Chunzaitang shibian*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu* 5:4.7a–7b. On an 1873 journey to the Nine Springs and Eighteen Waterfalls, see *Chunzaitang suibi*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu* 5:6.1a–2a.
50. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.7b. For Hangzhou journeys with his wife, see Huntington, *Ink and Tears*, 17, 26.
51. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.8a–8b. See also Yu, *Chunzaitang suibi*, 5:6.1a–2a.
52. Charlotte Eubanks, "Playing at Empire: the Ludic Fantasy of *Sugoroku* in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 2, no. 2 (2016): 39.
53. Sung, "Sheng guan tu," 47.
54. Roddy, "Heroes," 252.
55. Roger Caillois discusses the link between games of chance and fortune telling, considering the latter a corruption of the former. Roger Gaillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961), 47–48. On the link between games and divination in early China, see Mark Edward Lewis, "Divining and Divination in Early China," *Sino-platonic Papers* 121 (July 2002): 1–23.
56. Volume 2 of *Di yi lou congshu*, *Chunzaitang quanshu*.
57. *Xin ding yapai shu*, *Chunzaitang quanshu*, vol. 7. Other works on divination include *Wuxing zhan* in *Quyuan zazuan*, *Chuanzaitang quanshu*, vol. 3; *You yi lu* *Chunzaitang quanshu*, vol. 7.
58. See Yeh on a *Hong lou meng* game, or Wang on a Yangzhou game. Catherine Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 165, 167; Wang, "Youyi zhong," 91.
59. Yu, *Chunzaitang shibian*:18.4b.
60. The Yangzhou game discussed by Wang provides a good example of single sheet ephemera. Wang, "Youyi zhong."
61. Yu, *Quyuan yishi yuyan*.
62. Li, *Qi lu deng*, 1:17.175–77; Lucie Borotová, *A Confucian Story of the Prodigal Son: Li Lüyuan's Novel "Lantern at the Crossroads"* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1991), 30.
63. *Shi'er huashen yi* in *Quyuan zazuan*, *Chunzaitang quanshu*, vol. 3.
64. Irving Finkel, "The Ups and Downs of Life: The Indian Games of Snakes and Ladders," in *Asian Games: The Art of the Contest*, ed. Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 204.