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Intermediate
1600 headwords

Go: A Game of Wits

The game of Go has very few rules and is easy to learn. Yet through the game, players develop clever ways of thinking that help them to win, and even gain a deeper understanding of life. Learn how the game is played and how it improves the minds of millions of players around the world.

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Go: A Game of Wits



Go: A Game of Wits

For Review Only

Before You Read

This book is about the game *weiqi*, more commonly known as Go, and its strong connection with Chinese culture and Chinese customs. While Go is played throughout China, one place highlighted in the book is Zhejiang **Province**,¹ in eastern China south of Shanghai.



A. *Weiqi* or Go? Read the paragraph. Then complete each definition with the correct word.

Weiqi is an ancient game of **strategy**² which was invented as early as 4,000 years ago. It is played with white and black pieces called “stones” on a board. The word *weiqi* means “surrounding game,” because one object of the game is to surround the other player’s pieces. Around the Southern and Northern **Dynasties**³ (420–589), the game was brought to Korea and then Japan, where it became popular. In Korea the game was called *baduk*. Meanwhile, in Japan the game was called *igo* (a translation of *weiqi*), although many people use the short form *go*. Despite its popularity in East Asia, *weiqi* was only introduced to the West in the late 19th century through Japan. Accordingly, most non-Chinese know the game by its Japanese name and use Japanese terms while playing it. To avoid mistaking the name “go” with the English word “go,” the first letter of the name of the game is usually capitalized: Go.

1. The word “a_____” means the same as “for that reason” or “therefore.”
2. The word “a_____” means “very old.”
3. When we i_____ something, we create something new.
4. We use “m_____” when we want to say “at the same time.”
5. The goal or purpose of an action is its o_____.
6. Something that goes all around another thing s_____ it.

¹**province**: one of the districts that some countries are divided into with its own local government

²**strategy**: skillful planning to achieve success in war, sports, etc.

³**dynasty**: a period of time when members of the same family rule a country

B. Becoming a Professional Go Player. Read the letter and look at the photos in this reader. Then answer the questions below.

Dear Tim,

In your last letter, you wanted to know about what I do at the Go **association**.⁴ So, let me try to explain. The goal of this association is to train us to be professional Go players. Since it is thought that to become a professional you have to start young, this association **only** accepts new students who are between the ages of 5 and 18. We spend each Saturday and Sunday playing against each other at the association hall so that we can improve in **rank**.⁵ At the lower levels, the ranks are 32-kyu to 1-kyu. Once you pass the 1-kyu level, you are considered an advanced player. From there the ranks are 1-dan to 7-dan, with 7-dan being the highest. For professional players, the ranks are 1-dan to 9-dan. We all take our training quite seriously, as very few Go players can become professionals. When I am not playing Go, I am studying Go games and reading books on Go strategy. My hero is the world champion, Ke Jie. He turned professional when he was 11 years old, and reached the rank of 9-dan when he was 18. Unfortunately, I am already 16 years old, and I still haven’t been able to become a pro. While I’ll probably never be as good as Ke Jie is, Go is my life, and I never intend to give it up. Anyway, I have to get back to my studies. I’ll write more later.

Yours,
Yingying

1. What do you know about the game of Go and how it is played?
2. Why do you think the game is so popular?
3. What other traditional Chinese games do you know about?

⁴**association**: an official group of people for a particular purpose

⁵**rank**: the position somebody has in a group, club, society, etc.



It is May 27, 2017. The world's number one Go player, 20-year-old Ke Jie from Lishui, Zhejiang Province enters the Future of Go Summit in Wuzhen. He sits at a blue table with a Go board in front of him, a time clock on his left, and some snacks and tea on his right. Across from him sits Aja Huang of the AlphaGo Master team. (AlphaGo Master is an artificial intelligence program developed by the Google-owned AI lab, DeepMind.) After an announcement explaining the ground rules of the Chinese Weiqi Association, the match begins. The AlphaGo team member sits waiting, watching his computer screen until AlphaGo shows him the first move. Meanwhile, back in Mountain View, California, the AI program decides what to do. After one minute, the move shows up on the screen, and the man from AlphaGo puts the first black stone on the board. Ke Jie then places a white stone on the board, and they continue in turn—man and machine—until a little more than 3 ½ hours later, the board is now covered in white and black stones. Seeing that AlphaGo has the advantage and that he cannot win, Ke Jie places three stones on the board at once, admitting defeat. For the first time ever, a computer has done what most people thought was impossible—it has beaten the world's No.1 player at Go.



Though Go looks quite simple, it is actually one of the most complicated games there is. In fact, there are so many possible moves in Go that a whole new field of mathematics has been created just to describe the game. While this shows the level of thinking skills that Go players must have to become champions, it also shows the difficulties involved in creating a computer program that can play the game well. At the same time, many top Go players, including Ke Jie, have been excited by AlphaGo's play because the program uses winning strategies that no one had thought of before. It has therefore opened up whole new worlds of possibilities in the game of Go, and many Go players now use AI programs like AlphaGo to help them improve their playing skills.

Fact Check

1. Where is AlphaGo located?
2. About how long did the match between Ke Jie and AlphaGo last?
3. Why was Ke Jie excited about AlphaGo's play?

Korean children watching the live show of AlphaGo competing against Lee Sedol, another world champion, in 2016



⁶**grid**: a pattern of straight lines that cross each other and form squares
⁷**intersection**: a place where two or more roads or lines cross each other
⁸**territory**: an area
⁹**capture**: to gain possession of

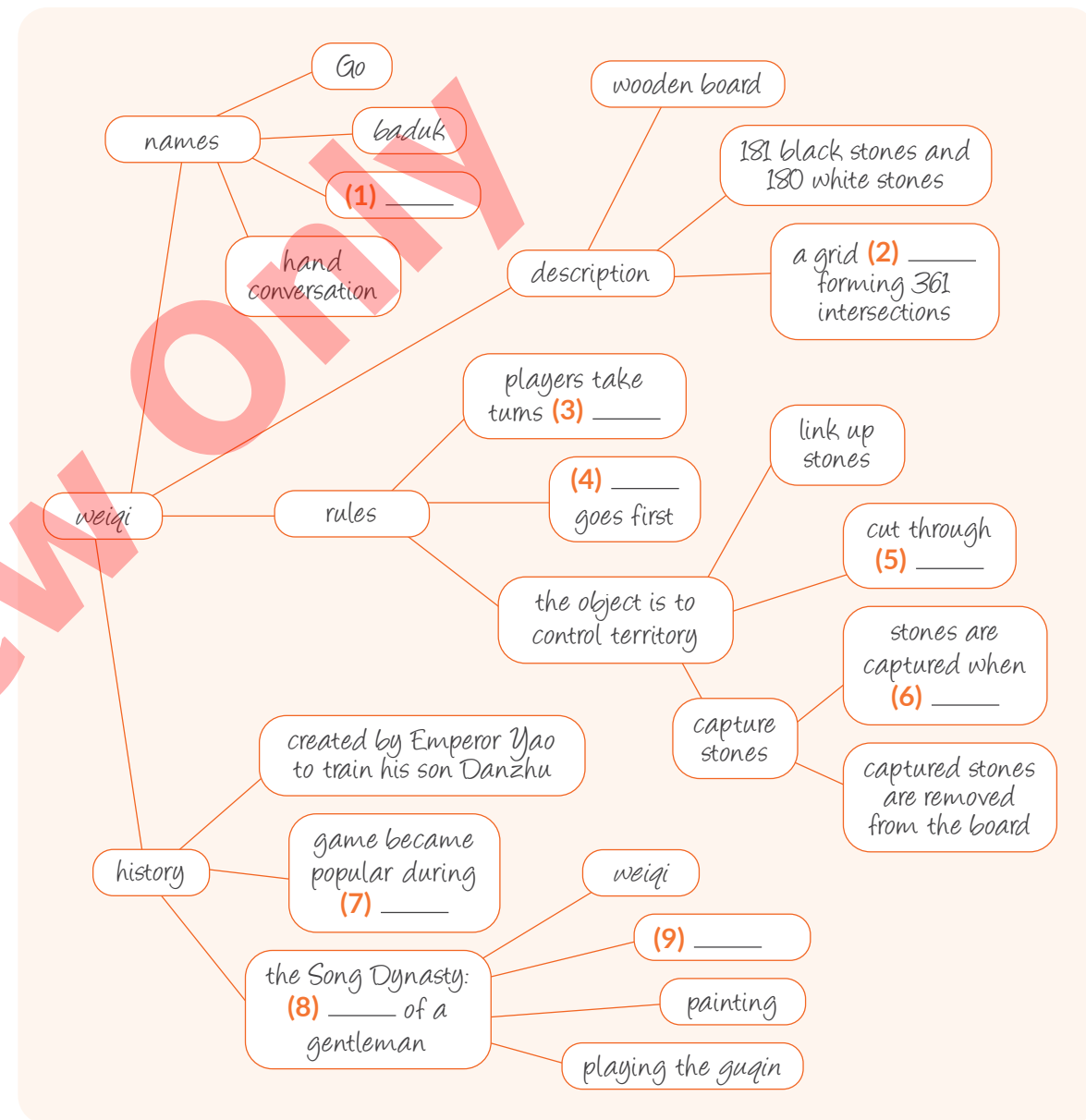
For a game that no one thought a computer could ever play well, the rules of Go are actually quite easy to learn. The game is played on a board, usually made of wood, which has a **grid**⁶ of 19 lines on it, forming 361 **intersections**.⁷ Each player has a bowl full of small, round stones—one player has 181 black stones, while the other has 180 white stones. The object of the game is to control **territory**.⁸ The players do this by taking turns placing stones on

the board, with black beginning first. The player places the first black stone in the top right corner of the board as a gesture of courtesy. As the game goes on, the players will try to link up their stones in a line, with everything within that line becoming their territory. Players will then work on building up their own territory, while at the same time trying to cut through the opponent's line or to **capture**⁹ stones or territory from the opponent.

A. Multiple Choice. Answer the questions below by choosing A, B, C, or D.

- In Go, a *liberty* is _____.
 - a line coming from an intersection beneath a stone
 - a line coming from an intersection without a stone
 - a place where an opposing player can place a stone
 - a freedom or right
- A game of Go usually continues until one player admits defeat or _____.
 - all the intersections on the board are filled and there are no more stones to play
 - both players decide to give up
 - both players decide to stop
 - there is no more time left on the time clock
- When the passage says that Wang Zhi was *coming to himself*, it means that he _____.
 - realized that he had been acting strange
 - became aware of what he should be doing
 - woke up from a deep sleep
 - had gone home
- What is NOT used to describe the game of Go?
 - Strategy.
 - Killing.
 - Silence.
 - Poetry.
- The phrase *flights of fancy* on page 18 means _____.
 - difficult ideas
 - things which a person wants
 - things that are stylish
 - pleasant ideas which show great creativity

B. Complete the Mind Map. Complete the mind map with words from the passage.



C. Answer the Questions. Use information from the passage to answer the questions below.

- Why does the author think that playing a game of Go with AlphaGo might not be as satisfying as playing with a human?
- Think of another board game you are familiar with and enjoy playing. How is Go the same as or different from that game?
- What does Go tell you about the Chinese culture?

Chinese Chess

Track 2

If you travel to nearly any Chinese city in the summertime, you will see people—mostly men wearing T-shirts—sitting out on the sidewalks on low chairs in the shade, playing a game with large round disks of wood. If *weiqi* is the ancient Chinese game of the gentleman, this game—*xiangqi*, or Chinese chess—is the game of ordinary people. And, though it may look quite a bit different than Western chess, *xiangqi* is actually quite similar in what the pieces can do and how the game is played.

Like Western chess, the object of the game is to capture the other player's "king" (actually, in *xiangqi* he is just a general). Unlike Western chess, but like in *weiqi*, instead of placing the pieces in squares, the pieces are placed on the intersections of lines. Another big difference between Western chess and *xiangqi* is that the middle of the board has a large empty space called the "the Chu River and the Han Boundary," which the elephants (the bishops in Western chess) cannot cross. This space refers to an area in China where the opposing armies of Liu Bang, who later founded the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), and his main rival Xiang Yu, faced off in a life-or-death war. The war was so influential that "the Chu River and the Han Boundary" has become a metaphor referring to any boundary between two opposing armies. When the Chinese people today see this name on the board, the

fierce battle scenes come to their mind, as though they are surrounded by thick smoke, able to hear the beating of war drums. An intense battle is about to take place on this small chessboard.

There are many small differences with Western chess in how *xiangqi* is played, one of which is the cannons. Each player has two cannons, and a cannon can only capture a piece if there is another piece between them. Its ability to jump over one piece to capture another makes the cannon a strong piece in the game. Several sayings related to the Chinese chess piece are in common use in China today. The first saying is "horse-cannon checkmate," which refers to putting your horse between your cannon and the opposing general, so that the cannon can attack the general and the general cannot escape. In modern Chinese, this saying has come to mean "taking actions when it is already too late." The second idiom is "sacrifice the pawn to save the rook," which is used today to mean sacrificing the small things to save the big things.

The game *xiangqi* dates back as early as the Warring States period. While experts have different opinions as to who created *xiangqi* and how it is linked to Western chess, there is no doubt that by the Tang Dynasty (618–907) *xiangqi* was a popular game in China. During the Qing Dynasty (1636–1921), its popularity grew, and in the 20th century both Sun Yat-sen (known in China as Sun Zhongshan) and Zhou Enlai were big fans of the game.

Word Count: 503
Time: _____

