

From the Editor:

Asian Games! What do we mean by that?

Specifically, we mean the exhibit *Asian Games: The Art of Contest*, which the Institute is opening just in time for our Asian New Year Celebration on February 4. Our curator of collections, Meg Gibson, tells you more about it in her fascinating lead article.

In a more general sense, it is amazing to see how many of the board games, card games, tile games, and athletic games that your students enjoy trace their origins to China, India, Persia, or some other land on the vast continent of Asia. Even games that seem very “western,” such as chess, or very modern, such as chutes and ladders, have roots beyond the West and arrived in Europe and America via the Silk Road or later trade routes.

We decided to utilize the highly motivating topic of games to learn and practice some important Social Studies knowledge and skills. This issue’s class activity focuses on finding and corroborating information using many different games as individual mini-research topics. Students will search three resources and compose one sentence. You will supervise their library and computer research and quickly grade a half-page chart and sentence. Everybody wins!

In addition, we offer a Webliography about a new and an old Asian game, sudoku and mahjong, respectively, and a second Webliography giving resources for teaching about New Year celebrations throughout Asian lands. We’ve included a wordsearch puzzle—a game itself, one which allows learners to catch hold of names and other vocabulary words in a given category—and, of course, a guide to TEKS applications of these lessons, one for each grade level.

Let the games begin!—

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Crossroads of Culture

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GAMES WE PLAY

The pre-modern Asian roots of America’s favorite games

by Meg Gibson, ITC Curator of Collections

One of my favorite board games as a child was chutes and ladders. I’d roll the dice and hope to land on a “ladder” so that I could skip ahead of my brother and sister to win. Too often,

it seemed, I would experience the dread of landing on a “chute” instead and have to slide to the bottom of the board. The game board and plastic pieces looked all-American; little did I know that chutes and ladders, like many of the games we play today, originated in pre-modern Asia.

No doubt you have a similar memory of playing a favorite game with roots in Asia. In fact, more games originated there than in any other region of the world. “Asian” games such as chess, parcheesi, playing cards, backgammon, dominoes, chutes and ladders, and polo have helped to shape leisure culture all over the world.

Some may consider games to be for children only, but many historians and anthropologists say that games teach real-world skills. Universally, people like to test their physical skills, sharpen their strategy, or take a chance

with their luck through game-playing to improve their skills and prepare themselves for similar situations in everyday

life. For example, military cadets

who play chess hone their battle tactics by carefully weighing their attacks or retreats against an opponent. In this situation the game is both recreational and instructive.

Games generally fall into four categories: chance, memory and matching, strategy, and physical skill. Some games fit into more than one category, but all have at least one of these elements.

The most common and probably the oldest of all are games of chance such as dice, parcheesi (pachisi, parchesi, parchisi), backgammon, liubo, and snakes and ladders (chutes and ladders). The ancients often consulted the fates to see what the future had in store for them, using arrows and sticks as fortune-telling devices. Over time dice and cards replaced these

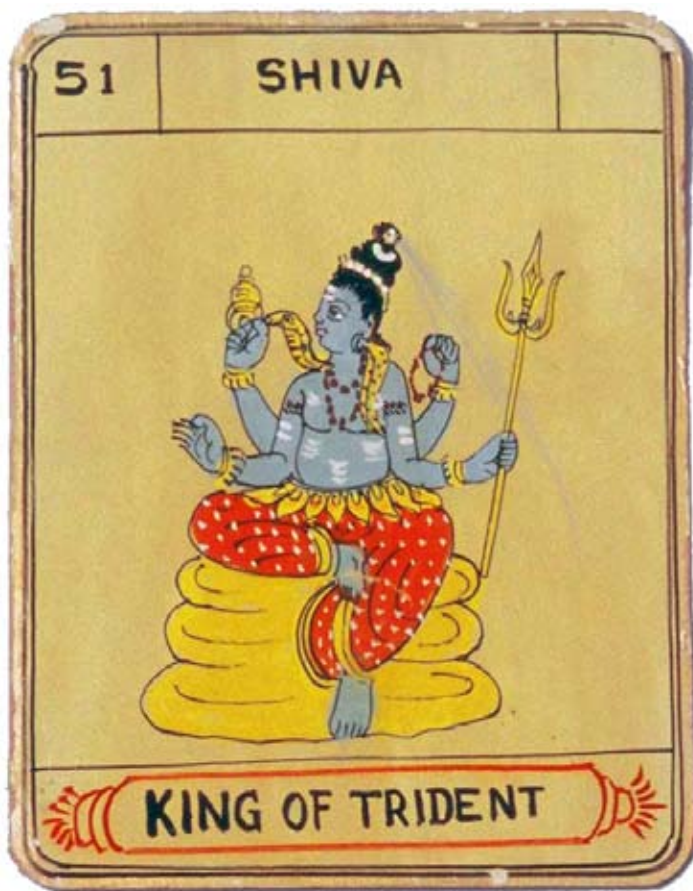




A game of chance—Shiva and Parvati playing chaupar, a game related to the board game parcheesi

more basic game pieces. Chance games frequently were developed to teach moral values; in India, for example, snakes and ladders was used to teach children that good is rewarded and evil is punished. The game is still played in India today, although it is sometimes modified to teach other values, such as dental hygiene.

Memory and matching games emerged in Asia between the 12th and 14th centuries, and most, like mah-jong, dominoes, and playing cards, involved cards or tiles. The most likely origin of playing cards is China before the



A game of memory and matching—Hand-painted mughul ganjifa card

Ming dynasty (1368-1644), for the Chinese had invented both printing and paper by that time. Interestingly, playing cards did not migrate early to nearby Japan; in fact, it wasn't until the 1500s, and even then they were brought indirectly, by Portuguese sailors who had learned card games from the Chinese! The Japanese card game of karuta had many forms, including a matching game in which verses of a poem were divided onto two cards, and the player had to match the parts.

The apparent simplicity of chance and matching games is countered by the complex nature of games of strategy, which mimic real-world situations. Chess and



A game of strategy—Go board with pieces

weiqi (or Go) are considered to be the greatest strategic board games of all time. These would have been very important to the military cultures of pre-modern Asia. Chess is a recreation of a battlefield, with the ultimate goal being to capture the opponent's king.

Most historians agree that chess began in India sometime around A.D. 600 and traveled westward to Iran and Mesopotamia, reaching Europe in A.D. 1000. Although it traveled far and long, the rules remained remarkably the same. Chess was played by the elite and literate in each culture it reached, perhaps explaining its consistency in rules. The game pieces and names, however, changed in the different cultures. For example, the original elephant piece in the Indian game became a "bishop" in Catholic cultures. In Persia the "king" piece is called the "shah," and the phrase "checkmate" comes from the Persian "shah-mat" meaning "the shah is helpless."

When you think of polo, do you think of the regal fields of England and princes on horseback? Surprisingly, this game of physical skill arrived in Europe only recently, in the 1800s. Games of physical skill are linked to hunting



A game of physical skill—Siyavush plays polo before Afrasiyab from the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp by Mir, c. 1525-1530

and warfare and rely upon strength, stamina, and coordination. Since polo was dangerous and required physical skill and courage, it was deemed the embodiment of heroic values. One possible origin of polo is in Persia, where horses were an integral part of the culture and heroic deeds were considered a virtue.

Historians can trace the movement of games across time and space. Games were introduced over trade routes and by exploration and western colonization and, more recently, immigration.

Just as the games of pre-modern Asia are now played by people all over the world, we have to ask ourselves how our modern phenomenon of computer game-playing will affect the culture of generations to come. It is my hope and belief that face-to-face games will continue to be played. I would not have enjoyed beating a computer in chutes and ladders. Technology can never replace the thrill of gloating over my little brother as I climbed a ladder to victory!

Meg Gibson is ITC Curator of Collections. This article was adapted from the programming guide provided by ExhibitsUSA for the exhibit *Asian Games: The Art of Contest*.

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A New Asian Game: Sudoku

Using logic to solve a problem

Here are three corroborating sites about the 25-year history of sudoku:

<http://www.sudokuonline.net/history.php>

http://www.nikoli.co.jp/puzzles/1/index_text-e.htm

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudoku>

Here is an online game:

This site has a new puzzle each day that you can solve online or print and solve on paper, a worksheet so you can develop your own sudoku puzzles, a sudoku helper to assist you in keeping track of possibilities, and much more.

<http://www.sudoku.org.uk/daily.asp>

Sudoku for kids: Solve puzzles with 4, 6, or 9 digits. The simpler versions are a great way to learn the game and to build understanding of the concept.

http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/sudoku_for_kids.htm

For learning, try this online game with high-interest graphics and instant error notice in red.

<http://www.su-doku.net/>

An Old Asian Game: Mahjong

Using visual discrimination to match tiles

Two online three-dimensional interactive solitaire games require students to match the beautiful and intricate Chinese calligraphic symbols for numbers, the four directions, seasons, and other traditional mahjong tiles. To play either, click two matching tiles consecutively, and they both disappear, but you can't always clear the board. One game lets you time yourself; the other asks you to "beat the clock." Tiles are stacked, and it takes a bit of patience and practice to be able to "see" which tiles are free to be removed.

<http://www.shockwave.com/sw/content/mahjong>

<http://www.by-art.com/mjong/mjong.php>

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