

## Report on the discovery of the stone chessboard (*mig mang*) in Lhasa valley

*Dralha Dawa Sangpo*

The study of go in Tibet is in a preliminary stage. It is preliminary because much more is unknown than known. Everything we know of the people, ideas and events of the early Tibet lies in a confusion of ruin, records and remembrances that have been preserved, altered or lost for many reasons. Tibetan chess, which we Tibetans call Migmang, is a unique component of the ancient culture of the Tibetan people. From very early on, both ordinary people and high level official played chess for fun or making important decision. There are rich historical records, which shows that people in Tibet playing go in very early stage of the history and it has been a long tradition throughout the history of Tibet.

The first article on chess in Tibet was written in 1982 by Cheng Xiao Liu, a Chinese chess researcher based in Beijing. He is 6-dan player. Mr. Cheng proposed that the Chinese brought chess to Tibet in 7th century, and those stories about Tibetan playing chess before this were made up later. This article was discussed by Yasunaga Hajime in the *Japan Go Magazine*, and by Peter Shotwell in the *American Go Journal*. In 1990, Sonam Chogyal, researcher from the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, translated two English articles which are *Go in the Snowland* by Peter Shotwell and *Study on the Tibetan Chess* by John Fairbairn, respectively. These two translated articles influenced scholars in Tibet to pay attention to Tibetan chess, and as a matter of fact, now there are already several scholars who engage with studies of the Tibetan chess and published numbers of articles both in the *Journals of the Tibetan Studies* and *the Tibetan Culture*.

In 1993, an article, *Symbolism of Black and White in Tibet*, was written by Yian zhen Zhong in Chinese for the magazine *Tibetan Culture*. Mr. Yian, a founder of the *Tibetan Strange Occurrences Society*, considerably enlarged Cheng's efforts with many new stories and records. While not entirely focusing on chess, nor following out the conclusions, he argued that there was a parallel development of Tibetan and Chinese chess, and that early tales of its being played in Tibet were accurate.

In my article, I agree with Mr. Yian's opinion that chess was played by the Tibetan people as early as 6th century. I analyze all the ancient records on chess, which have never been used by other scholars before and I myself also concluded that chess is one of the very important elements of the Tibetan culture and it was played by the Tibetan people in all level throughout the centuries and it became a very popular game among the aristocratic families in Lhasa, as well as among the Muslim people in Tibet.

Recently, culture investigators have discovered a chessboard in the ruin of the Palace of the King Songtsan Gampo, which was built in the region of Medro Gongkhar, in the vicinity of Lhasa city. This discovery illuminates the study of the Tibetan go and the stone chessboard is displayed in the Museum of Tibet in Lhasa, the capital of Tibetan Autonomous Region of Tibet. As far as I know, the stone chessboard is stored in the Museum, but there is no any conclusion of when it was made and how old the stone chessboard is. Therefore, the stone chessboard is in need of scientific examination in order to draw out a final conclusion.

My paper is organized by four parts.

- 1, Introduction: The general history of the Tibetan go based on historical references.
- 2, Those who have studied Tibetan go have not been anthropologists, historians or Tibetans, and those who have studied Tibet have not known a great deal about go. Both have missed much.
- 3, The rule and play of the chess in Tibet.
- 4, Further investigation will be difficult task. Tibet is enormous. The area where people play Tibetan chess covers the modern territory plus large part of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan Provinces in China, and extends into Nepal, Bhutan, Mustang, and Sikkim in Northern India. Most future research will have to be done in the countryside where is difficult to travel. While the spirit of the culture remains, the content is disappearing rapidly. Tibetan chess will die with the older men of this generation.