

A Milestone from Far Abroad

Franco Pratesi

Let us examine a milestone of the English Go literature, coming from far abroad: Count Daniele Pecorini and Tong Shu *The Game of Wei-Chi. With a Foreword by H.A. Giles*. London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929, 155 pp. More than once it has been observed that this book contains the most detailed English description of Go, its history and literature, if considered from the Chinese point of view – which as far as we know corresponds to its country of origin. It also contains a reprint of: *Wei-chi, or the Chinese Game of War*, by Herbert Giles; namely, the first description of the game that ever allowed it to be played by European readers, originally published in Temple Bar in 1877.

Continuing interest in this book derives from the fact that its Chinese approach is far less common with respect to depending on Japanese sources. It may thus not be surprising that it has been recently reprinted at least three times – Singapore: Graham Brash, 1991, 155 pp. ISBN 9971-49-259-8. The same, 1994. ISBN 981-218015-X, on a somewhat thinner paper, and, finally Torrance, CA: Heian International Inc., 1999. ISBN 0-89346-922-X. First American Edition, still printed in Singapore. Before publishing its own edition, Heian International had officially distributed the Singapore editions within the USA since about 1993.

Theo van Ees had already reviewed this work as early as in 1979, but he did it in Dutch, for the Go journal of his country, and unfortunately found few readers abroad. With the appearance of the recent reprints, the book became better known in the Go environment and several experts could comment on it. For a more available review, readers can search issue 103 of this Journal, Summer 1996. On page 19, Harry Fearnley summarises its contents and highlights the special merits connected with the Chinese origin, the historical parts, the peculiar terminology, the old kind of rules that can be preferred by mathematicians, and so on. My aim now is not of repeating comments on this book, but

to provide some new information on editions in other languages, and on its authors.

Pecorini also wrote a novel, *Japanese Maple*, which contains much autobiographical material. It was first published in 1935 by Geoffrey Bles, in London, while the original Italian book, *Foglia d'acero*, was only published in 1937, after the author's death. This novel gives some insight into the situation in the Orient, and especially in Korea, during the years of the Russian-Japanese war. About the author I could extract from this book, and from the introduction to its Italian edition, some biographical information (*Stone Age* 21, 1997, pp.5-8) summarised below. In 2001, the Italian text has been published again in Palermo by Sellerio, edited and coauthored by Luisa Adorno, who affirms to belong to the same family, even if by somewhat indirect links. She has reduced the original text to about one half, updated its language, inserted a lot of personal comments and a little further information on the author and his relatives.

Daniele Pecorini was born in Padua in 1872 and certainly belonged to the noble Italian family of Pecorini Manzoni, still present with its Southern branch in Catanzaro; whether he really deserved the title of Count is however doubtful. He studied law in Padua University. Soon after graduating, he rode his bicycle through Europe – apparently, a pioneer in this respect too. In London he saw the proclamation of a competitive examination for officers of the Imperial maritime customs. He took part with success and entered the service as British Commissioner of Customs in China. In 1897 he was assigned to Shanghai, then went to Peking better to study Chinese and was selected as the officer to be sent for civil service in Korea. His service there first took place in Seoul and later on in Chemelpo, where he stayed for several years. After the Japanese occupation of Korea, Pecorini continued his service in Shanghai, until 1910. Then he retired from the British service and came back to Italy. In Rome he was nominated to the post of consul for China. At the same time he entered the business environment and cared for ordering his Oriental collections and memories. The last years of his life he then spent in his native region, at Bassano del Grappa, where he died in 1936.

Providing information on Daniele Pecorini has not been easy, but doing it for Shu Tong is much less so. The only written information on this co-author that one finds in all of the Italian and English editions is

simply the indication Chinese Diplomatic Service, printed under his name in the front page of the London 1929 book.

Since Pecorini was in charge as Chinese Consul in Rome, it is easy to imagine that both authors were for some time working together for the Chinese diplomatic service there. It is also easy to imagine that Shu could teach the game to Pecorini and some other Roman beginners, thus justifying the publication of the book, to be sold together with Go sets. Better however is if imagination can be supported by documents.

Some progress has actually been made thanks to the kind and valuable assistance of Guoru Ding, who found further information on the basis of a Chinese dictionary (*Thao Zhiyun, Xu Wanyun Weiqi Cidian*, Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1989).

We have first to complete the name of this Chinese author. His family name of Shu should now be better written as Xu. His first name, unmentioned in the translations, was Quji. His other name was actually formed by two Chinese characters, Tong Fu, out of which only the first was considered in the known editions.

From the same description it is evident that Xu had been the real author of the book. Several drafts he had written in China already in 1921, but his work remained unfinished. In 1924 he arrived in Rome, where he found with Pecorini the encouragement and the assistance needed for completing and publishing his work. Parts of his previous texts on the subject he could receive from China, other parts were compiled in Rome, checked and translated together with Pecorini.

First the book was translated into Italian and published, probably in 1927: Shu T., Pecorini D. *Il wei-ci o giuoco della guerra: Il più antico e affascinante giuoco Cinese per la prima volta introdotto in Italia*, Roma: s.n., [1927], 201 pp. It was privately printed and offered for sale – as indicated in the book – in the main bookstores of Rome and at Pecorini's house, together with a rather expensive Go set. This Italian book is extremely scarce (only a few years ago, thanks to Alberto Rezza, Go experts became acquainted with a copy existing in a Roman public library) and no specimens are known of the game sets offered with it. In the Italian version, in addition to the contents known from the English edition, we find a priced list with several Chinese books on the game, suitable for advanced players, and the indication of a bookshop in Shanghai where they could be ordered.

The Chinese manuscript was also translated into French and English, and eventually published in its original version. Indeed, when Xu came

back to his country, he could publish his Chinese book too: *Weiqi Rummen*, Shanghai: Shanghai Wenming Shuju, 1929. Of course, a book of this kind, especially addressed to beginners, cannot represent a milestone in the rich Chinese literature on the game. Seemingly, the main reason for its publishing in China was the fact that it had already found a way to the press in Europe.

Nothing is known of the French version, which at most could enjoy a very small circulation, if any, in its typewritten form.

Of course, the English version has been the most successful of them all, as recalled above. The original 1929 edition was produced in full cloth with cover, by a known London publishing house that had branches in the USA and Canada. We have already seen that this book had a foreword by Herbert Giles, whose first description of the game was also reproduced at the end of the book. But the London edition was not only linked to the past – it had some influence on future events too. Together with the publication of the book, some activity was performed to spread the game in London. Even if witness about this is now hard to find, it induced some beginners to further apply and study the game. As a consequence (maybe, in a rather indirect way), in the 1930s a small group of players was established in London, under the leadership of John Barrs. This Go group was then dissolved, but after WW2 John Barrs himself, together with a few other players, founded nothing less than the BGA.