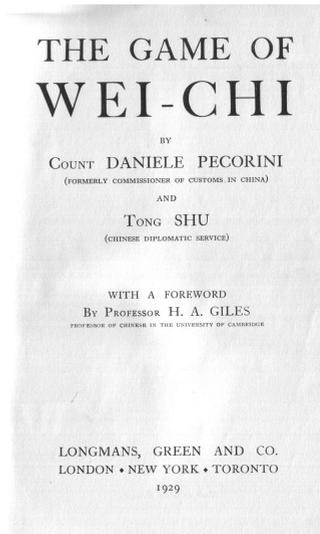
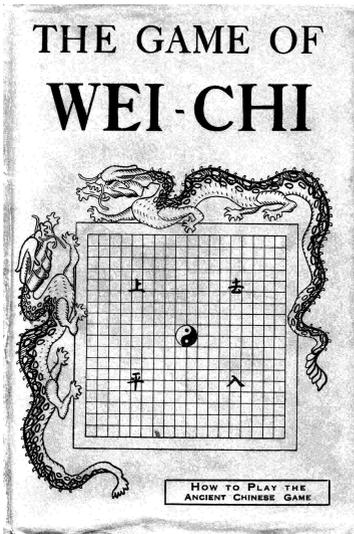


# THE MANY NAMES OF XU TONG-XI

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The previous article of this series ended with a Chinese Go writer, Shu-Tong. We know him under the name Tong Shu as co-author of “The Game of Wei-Chi”, published in London by Longmans, Green & Co. in 1929. (See: “A Milestone from Far Abroad” by Franco Pratesi, BGJ, No. 129, pp. 30–32). From this article, we know that Count Daniele Pecorini is named as the first author, but Shu is the real author. His book was not only published in Great Britain, but earlier in Italy and later in China. The book provided original information and a rather unusual method for teaching how to play, with analysis of actual games and some search for the general principles underlying the play.



Chinese names often pose problems when transliterated to a Western language. Languages have their own transliteration system; some languages have even used different systems through the years. This makes it difficult to know the real Chinese name. On top of that, Chinese can change their given names when they reach a certain age, or use another name for special occasions.

In the title page of the Chinese edition of his book we find the author's name of Xu Qu-Ji instead of Tong Shu, with

yet another name, Tong-Fu. He was in the Chinese Diplomatic Service, had been in Siberia in 1919, and came to Rome in 1924, where he stayed for three or four years.

Here new information is presented. Finding it required a number of different approaches. At first, information about Xu Tong-Xi in the “Foreign Affairs Bulletin”<sup>1</sup> caught my attention. A search on Google provided further interesting results. In particular, the archive of the Institute of Modern History, Academia

<sup>1</sup>Published by the Chinese Department of Foreign Affairs.

Sinica in Taiwan, holds at least 25 original documents related to Xu Tong-Xi, including a document (a draft telegram) written by Xu from Irkutsk, Siberia, dated November 26, 1919. This information provided a promising connection between diplomat Xu Tong-Xi and Go writer Xu Qu-Ji.



Cover of the Chinese edition

Further information was derived from "The Government Gazette". The Beijing Government (1912-1928) had been publishing the Government Gazette daily (almost) from May 1, 1912 to June 12, 1928; 5663 issues in total. In 1988, the Second National History Archives in China photolithographed those files into 240 books, with an average of 600 pages. It will be indicated as GG in the following.

Another lead was that Xu Tong-Xi compiled a genealogy in 1933, and stated that he came from Liu-Cheng. This is a famous and historic ancient town near Shanghai; its modern name is Jia-Ding. Our Go writer also stated he was from Liu-Cheng in the preface of his Chinese Go book. This provided a possible connection

between genealogy compiler Xu Tong-Xi and Go writer Xu Qu-Ji. Finally, a mimeographed copy of the genealogy, collected by the Shanghai Library, provided the conclusive evidence: diplomat Xu Tong-Xi, genealogy compiler Xu Tong-Xi and Go writer Xu Qu-Ji are indeed the same person.

The author's name should now be written in a more complete and correct way as Xu Tong-Xi (in the Chinese Pinyin System). Xu compiled a genealogy of his family in 1933 before he turned 50, the age Chinese called "knowing one's own destiny". According to his genealogy, Xu's official name is Xu Tong-Xi, another name (normally taken at the age of 20 by Chinese tradition) is Qu-Ji, and his literary name is Tong-Fu. The last two names were shown on his Chinese Go books (in both the Italian and the English version of his book, co-authored with Daniele Pecorini, his name was not spelled completely, but just as Shu Tong).

徐同熙	Xu Tong-Xi
徐去疾	Xu Qu-Ji
徐通甫	Xu Tong-Fu

Xu was born on October 10, 1884. He attended the Hankou Lu-Han Railway School (probably in the late 1890s) and then the Hanyang Iron and Steel School, which was established in 1902, located in two neighbouring towns in central China; the latter also required that students had knowledge of French. He then studied abroad in the College of Electrical Technology in Paris, but did not graduate. He

came back to China and taught French in two different schools; one was in Henan Province and the other in Yunnan Province. All these activities took place before 1910.

In 1910, still in the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911), Xu started his diplomatic career; his first assignment was to Rome as an apprentice interpreter. We do not know how long he stayed in Rome; probably less than two years.

I found further information in GG. The World Expo was held in 1911 in Torino, where he worked as a Vice-Supervisor (probably in charge of the Chinese exhibition) and was awarded a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade King's Crown and Star medal by the Italian Government. There were 18 Chinese people at work for the World Expo who received medals, and Xu's was the second highest. Related information was published in GG, September 13, 1913.

After coming back to China, Xu was formally hired as a clerk by the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Beijing Government (1912-1928) on September 18, 1914, by Department order No. 39 (GG September 21, 1914), ranked 8<sup>th</sup> class (the lowest rank of all officials was 9<sup>th</sup> class), by the Department order No. 41, September 21, 1914 (GG September 23, 1914). He was then promoted to 6<sup>th</sup> class on December 28, 1917, by Department order No. 146 (GG December 30, 1917). In 1918, Xu was appointed as a member of the Import Taxation Reform Committee, and he was awarded a 5<sup>th</sup> grade medal by the Chinese Government.

On June 17, 1919 (GG January 27, 1920), Xu was officially assigned, as a Vice-Consul, to the newly-established Consulate General of the Republic of China at Omsk, Siberia. However, all four members of the Consulate

General were actually assigned earlier and departed from Beijing to Siberia on April 22, 1919, according to a confidential urgent telegram from the State Council of the Beijing Government to military commanders of several Northeast provinces, dated April 20, 1919.

A little more Russian history would help us to understand why the Beijing Government (1912-1928) established a Consulate General at Omsk. In 1919 Russia was in the middle of the Civil War (1917-1922), and Omsk was the capital of the White provisional government. This was led by Admiral Alexander Kolchak (1873-1920), and was formally recognized by international powers such as the UK, USA, France, Japan, and also China (the Beijing Government). Omsk was captured by the Soviet Red Army on November 14, 1919. From Irkutsk, Xu sent a telegram to the Department of Foreign Affairs, dated November 26, 1919, and mentioned that he and other two colleagues had been ordered by the Consul General to leave Omsk on Nov 7. Xu wrote: "The situation was extremely dangerous by the end of October; radicals (Red Army) were attacking with full power, military advisers from all countries agreed to withdraw and no consuls suggested staying..."

The Consulate General of the Republic of China at Omsk existed for about a year officially, but its actual life could have been less than six to eight months. The Consul General resigned on July 31, 1920. Xu was transferred to the Consulate General at Vladivostok, Siberia, as Vice-Consul and later acted as Consul General, but without an official department appointment. When he was called back to China his title was still Vice-Consul at the

Consulate General of the Republic China at Omsk.

The Siberia experience was very important to Xu as a Go player. According to the preface of his Chinese book “Weiqi Rumen”, he became interested in Go as a child while watching people playing the game; however, people who knew the game were only willing to teach him a few basic techniques (such as how to kill a stone, etc). He also tried to learn the game from books, but all of them (mostly game records) were too difficult to understand, so his desire to study the game became weaker as time passed by. In the Spring of 1919, in Siberia, he met a colleague, Li Wei-Ru, who happened to be a strong player, and the two played the game whenever they had some free time. Altogether, Xu and Li were colleagues in Omsk, Irkutsk and Vladivostok for something more than 15 months. Li was ready to answer any question asked by Xu, and Xu could thus gradually understand the game more deeply.

With the help of the GG, I also found some information about Li. His original name was Li Guo-Wu, and another name was Wei-Ru. As a Go player, Li got his reputation around 1909, often listed after his cousin Li Zi-Gan (whose original name was Li Guo-Dong — in the past, all Chinese Go books or articles only mentioned their other names, Li Zi-Gan and Li Wei-Ru). They belonged to a famous family in the late Qing Dynasty. Li Guo-Wu’s granduncle Li Hong-Zhang (1821-1901) was the most powerful court official for about 25 years, and all his brothers and brothers-in-law were also important court officials. Li Guo-Wu was born on May 12, 1891. Li’s specialties were Russian and accounting. He, his elder brother and

two brothers-in-law all worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs in the Beijing Government (1912-1928). He was assigned as a clerk to the Consulate General at Omsk, and then to the Consulate General at Vladivostok, Siberia. Li worked as an accountant in the later part of his life, and died in 1944 in Shanghai.

The information about the Go activities of the Li brothers came mainly from an article about the Go circle in Shanghai from the early 1900s to 1949, written in 1983 by Go historian Xu Run-Zhou (1899-1984), and a Go book published by Li Guo-Dong in 1909. According to Xu Run-Zhou, the Li brothers often held Go parties at home — their grandparents had made great fortunes in Shanghai — to host famous players and elite members of society of the time. Li Guo-Dong’s book collected 130 games from the late 1890s to 1909. Xu commented that Li Guo-Dong’s strength, judging from his game records, was about that of playing first (i.e. taking black) against the best players of the time, and Li Guo-Wu was a little weaker. Xu did not say how weak he was, so it is difficult to guess, maybe taking 2–3 stones from the best players.

Xu was called back to China on October 18, 1920. According to the postscript of Xu’s “Weiqi Rumen”, it was in Beijing in 1921 that he started to write his Go book: he began to compile the Go material for fun, whenever he had spare time. Much of the material collected by Xu, however, had been lost before he left China again; what he received later on in Rome was only 40–50% of his original writings.

Xu’s next assignment was to Rome in 1924, and he ended his diplomatic career there in 1928. For this activity

we have further information from the "Foreign Affairs Bulletin": in issue No. 33 (Mar, 1924), Xu was assigned to the Chinese Embassy in Rome as a Third Secretary on January 28, 1924.

Xu's name also appears in issues No. 42, No. 54, No. 56, and No. 81. In issue No. 42 (December 1924) Xu wrote a report after attending the 1<sup>st</sup> International Law Seminar (from July 14 to August 12, 1924) organized by the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In issue No. 54 (December 1925) Xu reported on the annual conference of the International Statistical Institute held in Rome in September 1925. In issue No. 56 (February 1926) there is the good news that Xu was promoted to Second Secretary (December 5, 1925). Then in issue No. 81 (Mar 1928) there is a bad news: Xu was suspended on March 6, 1928. The order from the Department of Foreign Affairs was very short. It stated that Xu was assigned to be in provisional charge of the Embassy after the Ambassador was called back to China in July 1927. However, he violated a departmental rule by making a decision in an international matter without authorization. There was another Presidential Order, dated March 10, 1928, ordering the

Disciplinary Committee for high-ranked officials to give Xu and two other attachés involved in the incident punishment according to the law.

Since the Beijing Government (1912-1928) was soon dissolved, we do not know what punishment Xu received — no such record exists in the last issue of "Foreign Affairs Bulletin" (April 1928) or all the remaining issues of GG, whose last edition was June 12, 1928 — but it is easy to imagine that Xu's diplomatic career had thereby reached its end.

Xu probably came back to China in late 1928, and worked as a mathematics instructor at the Institut Technique Franco-Chinois de Shanghai, a college jointly financed and operated by the governments of France and China from 1921 to 1940. This was his last job listed in the genealogy. Xu had only one child; a daughter who was born in 1914 and went to Italy in 1924 with her family, but died young in 1930.

In the last part of Xu's personal records in his genealogy, he wrote: "Lifetime hobbies are Weiqi and poems; wrote a book 'Weiqi Rumen' and an anthology of poems; also loved martial arts and have been practicing Tai Chi for more than ten years."

As a result of this study, Go writer Xu Tong-Xi is now better known, and many facts of his life have been firmly established. This is important for the history of Go in Europe, because a new way of teaching Go to the European players had its origin in London in the late 1920s. On the way back to China (probably in the middle of 1928), Xu was able to stay some time in London. This occurred almost at the same time that Liu Guang-Han was using a new teaching method with Commandant Lancelin. On the London Go events of the time, an article in this series has already been published in the BGJ<sup>2</sup> and others will be soon.

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<sup>2</sup>BGJ No. 155, p. 19–21