

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

THIRTY-FIRST CONGREGATION

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa

A Citation

Mr. Wu Qingyuan (Go Sei Gen)

Human intelligence may be applied to art, science, as well as commerce, industry and politics, thereby giving birth to glorious civilisations; it may also be applied against its own kind, thereby bringing oppression, war and destruction. The art of the board game is deeply fascinating and enticing, perhaps precisely for the reason that it provides a way of pitting one intelligence against another, thus in a peaceful way giving vent to the fighting instinct deep down in human nature. Weiqi is extremely simple and natural in its rule, but immeasurably complicated in the variation it gives rise to, much more so than any other board game. It is not accidental that for two thousand years it has permeated the Chinese life and thought, and grown into an integral part of Chinese culture and history; or that after being exported to Japan, it has become even more refined after centuries of careful studies, and was eventually elevated to the status of a "national art" of the country.

Weiqi playing reflects the pattern of thinking: the style of the individual gives cue to personal trace, whereas the national style allows an insight into the character of a people. In China, for instance, weiqi playing is an expression of flair and intelligence; it is also a symbol of ease and leisure. Stories abound in which the incomparable poet restored an upset game without difficulty, a prime minister went on playing in the face of an invading army, or the master player was easily beaten at the game by the goddess whom he happened to meet in a mountain dwelling. Whereas in Japan, weiqi takes on the character of a duel, in which technique, strength and will power are of supreme importance. Weiqi professionals exhausted themselves fighting each other within a closely regulated system of tournament and ranking, and often became martyrs of the art, such as amply illustrated in the stories of Akahosi and Mizutani. As for Mr. Wu Qingyuan (Go Sei Gen) who now stands in front of you, who with supreme talent and diligence became a national champion at thirteen, and after emigrated to Japan created a new era of weiqi through the discovery of the "New Opening" and was for twenty years the undisputed master of the weiqi world, who at the same time was for his whole life a deeply religious person in search of peace ----- he is no longer what can be understood from the viewpoint of a single people. Rather, his art of weiqi as well as his remarkable life are both testimony to the conflict as well as the amalgamation of the two peoples and the two cultures of China and Japan.

Wu Qingyuan's exceptional talent and deep love for weiqi are rare inborn gifts. From the age of seven when he first started playing he immediately became deeply immersed in the wonderful world of the

weiqi board together with its black and white playing stones, and with insatiable desire he began to bore into the ancient Chinese and modern Japanese weiqi classics bought by his father. He emerged as a leading player in Beijing after only three to four years, and at the tender age of thirteen achieved what masters of a bygone age such as Guo Bo-ling and Wang Longshi did several centuries ago, namely to win national championship, and moreover, was even able to square off with the senior Japanese professionals who were then far in advance of Chinese players. However, he was not destined to enjoy the leisurely life of a Chinese weiqi master such as Shi Xiang-siz or Fan Xi-ping: after the sudden death of his father, his mother had no choice but to accept repeated invitations from Japan, and in 1928 took the fourteen-year old Qingyuan to that country in search of a new world for her talented son.

His playing strength confirmed upon arrival in Japan, Wu was very exceptionally awarded the rank of the Third Dan, and thus secured the position of a professional player. During the following four to five years, under the care of his teacher Segoe Kensaku, Wu enjoyed a steady and happy life, and was soon able to distinguish himself in many tournaments, attaining the exalted rank of the Sixth Dan when he was barely twenty. At that time Wu Qingyuan and Kitani Minoru who was five years his elder were arch rivals as well as close friends. On the occasion of a trip together to the Jigokutani Springs in 1933, the two of them conceived of the "New Opening", which then set in motion a revolution of weiqi. At that time the Shusaku School which advocated first methodically and firmly establishing one's position in the corners of the weiqi board had already dominated the Japanese style of playing for almost a decade. The "New Opening" emphasised the opposite, and advocated all manners of new lines of play aimed at speedily and flexibly gaining dominance at the center of the board. Such a totally new thinking immediately captured the imagination of the professional players as well as the amateurs, and its advantage and usefulness soon became apparent. In no time at all, this thinking became the main stream of twentieth century weiqi playing and also became the forerunner of the 'Chinese School' created by Chen Zu-de in the sixties as well as the 'Universe School' created by Takemiya Masagi which is currently a pre-dominated school. It was thus that the free and unrestricted thinking of young Wu ushered in a new era of weiqi.

However, a price must be paid for challenging an established tradition, and in the hostile atmosphere then prevailing between China and Japan, it was also inevitable that there would be those who would look askance at a foreigner like Wu. Indeed, in the same year as the "New Opening" appeared, Wu courageously adopted the new style of play in an open game against the honinbō Shūsai, who as meijin was also the acknowledged grand master of the time, and immediately incurred the wrath and hostility of the conservatives in the Japanese Go (Weiqi) Association of which he was a member. Thus unimaginably severe pressure was brought to bear on the young man of nineteen who was all alone in an alien land. Besides, the many games that he had to play almost without stop upon attaining the senior rank also started to take toll of his already poor health, and gradually his body was yielding under pressure as well. Exhausted body and nerve were probably responsible for his sudden decision to return to Tientsin to join the Red Swastiki Society in 1935, his naturalization as a Japanese under social pressure the next year, and his need for complete rest in a sanatorium in the year that

followed. When he regained health and came out of the sanatorium in 1939, the epoch in which the title of honinbō was handed down within the master's family whereas the title of meijin was awarded by consensus, and which had lasted several decades had finally ended. What followed was a new epoch in which the champion was to be decided by open tournament.

Weiqi is an art and also a war. While it was exciting for a professional player to create a new style, yet there was no way of excelling among one's peers other than to do battle and vanquish one's opponents on the weiqi board. The so called "ten-game challenge tournament" was the traditional Japanese system for judging the relative strength of players and deciding upon professional positions. In such a tournament the player who had lost four games in a row had to accept the fate of losing standing vis-a-vis his opponent, and to a true professional this is tantamount to staking one's life-long reputation at one big gamble. It was therefore also called "the sword fight on the cliff". It was at the time when the guns of the Second World War began to thunder in Poland that the two young rivals, Wu and Kitani Minoru, started the well-known "challenge tournament of Kamakura", which lasted all together three years and ended with Kitani losing his standing by one step, that is down to the position of senaisen. However, victory did not as in the past brought Wu the coveted title of honinbō or meijin: it merely earned him the right to fight on without a respite. During the next fifteen years, he had to do battle in no less than nine more "ten-game challenge tournaments", meeting practically all the best Japanese players, including all the honinbō after Shūsai. Standing alone against wave after wave of top warriors who all tried their very best, Wu fought through a total of almost one hundred games and, unbelievably, was actually able to stand his ground. Apart from the senior player Karigane who ceased playing half way through the tournament, he was able to force all other opponents such as Fujisawa Hosai, Hashimoto Utaro, Sakata and Takagawa Shukaku down to the lower position of senaisen or even josen, namely a position lower by two steps. Such an unprecedented and probably unduplicable record in weiqi history made that period unarguably the Wu Era, proving that he was not only an ingenuine weiqi artist, but also a great weiqi warrior, the incomparable foremost player of the time.

Unfortunately the brilliant battle record and elevated title by no means brought him a secure position or even special consideration in other tournaments. Indeed, the epoch of the real "challenge tournament" had already passed; in the "title tournaments" which replaced it all new entrants to the tournament have to start from the same point, and no exception was made even for Wu who had demonstrated superiority over all other strong players. Shabby treatment and years of lonely fight now tired him and dampened his enthusiasm, and by the late fifties the brilliance with which he shone began to dim. In August 1961 Wu who was then in the middle of the first meijin title tournament was hit by a motor cycle during a traffic accident, which caused considerable injury and left the problem of periodic attacks of migraine and psychosis, bringing to a premature end of his professional life as the reigning weiqi master. While Wu dominated the weiqi world for almost two decades during the forties and fifties, somehow he was destined not to win even a single title of the many major open tournaments such as the honinbō which started in the late thirties, and the meijin, the Ōza and the

Jindan which started in the sixties; and even the rank of the Ninth Dan was not awarded to him until after long delays. How utterly capricious and unjust can fate be at times when it comes to distribute rewards among men! His student Lin Hai-feng whom he discovered as a young boy was by comparison far more fortunate: during the mid sixties Lin in his early twenties was able to win the titles of both meijin and honinbō, and became the very first of the post-War generation which has since dominated the weiqi world.

While weiqi is but a peaceful match of intelligence, yet for the professional players who constantly have to struggle for hair-thin victory and can never relax the slightest in his calculation at the board, weiqi could wreck havoc on one's nerves much the same as war would ravage the countryside. To gain balance in life, Wu has from his early days been very much drawn towards religion, from which he seeks peace and balm of the mind, and his religious fervour was such that he had, for a few years, even totally given up weiqi in devout pursuit of a different world. For him weiqi belongs to the warrior's world of victory and defeat, whereas religion belongs to the gentle world of peace. Even though weiqi has brought him fame and success, whereas religion once led him into painful experience, he is nevertheless equally devoted to both. His strong commitment to either of these two pursuits is characteristic of the Japanese soul, while his ability to harbour and balance the opposite worlds of war and peace within one mind perhaps is a manifestation that after his long stay in Japan he nevertheless remains deeply affected by traditional Chinese culture.

To be sure, the game board is very much like the political stage, on both of which victory and defeat, gains and losses are both fleeting. Perhaps even the art of weiqi itself is but a milestone, albeit an important one, in the long history of human progress: it is well known that the computer is already an almost unbeatable checker player and also an excellent chess player. Even though the computer is still an extremely poor weiqi player at the moment, yet with the appearance of large-scale integration of parallel processing units which functions much as the brain does, it is now totally impossible to predict what the computer is eventually capable of. Still, wherever science and technology may lead us, the unceasing search of Wu for the ultimate in life remains a manifestation of the very best in human spirit, and it is also the driving force which brings progress, and as such can never fail to draw deep admiration and respect.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of Wu Qingyuan's immense contributions to weiqi during the past sixty years, in recognition of the dignity and high moral standard with which he withstood abuse and pain, and of the harmony he has been able to bring among different peoples, and also in recognition of his life-long search for the ultimate meaning in life, may I request your Excellency to confer upon Mr Wu Qingyuan the Degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa.

October 30, 1986