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The cover background is taken from the 1640 edition of the Shiji (6,30b). It includes Sima Qian's observation that those who do not forget the past are masters of the future.

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No decorative arts in China have aroused as intense modern academic interest as the TLV mirror that was mass-produced in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–C.E. 220). Scholars from different fields have strived to rival one another in identifying its obscure design since the beginning of the twentieth century. With new evidence, particularly a mirror and a wooden board unearthed in 1993 at Yinwan 尹灣, it is time to settle and set aside the old disputation about identification, and to move on to the intellectual adventure that explores the cultural significance of the TLV mirror in Han China.

This paper first considers the complex of art, game and divination. According to the recently discovered self-explanatory examples, the TLV design cast on mirrors represents the liubo game board and is intended to prevent the invasion of evil spirits. Through an investigation of the Yinwan board that bears the same TLV design, I elucidate the umbilical connection from game to divination, proving the numerological and hemerological transformation of the game. I then argue that only with

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the divinatory application of the game can the game board represented on mirrors be considered a talisman capable of fending off the inauspicious.

This paper further proposes to view the TLV mirror as a cultural sign that illustrates the Han “auspicious mentality” through the interplay of iconic representation and symbolic appropriation. From the game’s entanglement with the practice of divination, the legend of immortal beings and the metaphorical approach to the cosmos, I demonstrate that the TLV mirror may have denoted the game board as proclaimed by inscriptions, but it would have inevitably connoted good fortune, immortality and longevity. Within the framework of auspicious mentality, moreover, I discuss how all the connotations can be blended into one matrix that stands for the very Han wish to transcend destined ephemeral life on earth.

Identification of the Design

The so-called “TLV mirror” refers to a mirror that bears the TLV design on its unpolished back. The design normally contains a square at the center, four T-like marks extended from the square, four horizontal L-like marks rendered next to Ts, and four V-like marks arranged to the four corners of the square. Although it merely describes formal elements and reveals complete ignorance of the design, the term “TLV mirror” has been widely used in the west since the early twentieth century.4

The incomprehensibility of the TLV design is due to the fact that the design itself was all but forgotten after the decline of the Han dynasty. The earliest literary evidence of rediscovery of the TLV mirror in China appears in the twelfth century imperial catalogue Xuanhe hougu tu 宣和博古圖. Names given to the eighteen registered TLV mirrors in this


4. It is difficult to trace the first use of this term, but Sidney M. Kaplan, in “On the Origin of the TLV Mirror,” Revue des Arts Asiatiques XI (1937), 21–24, has mentioned that “Among the most ancient of Chinese mirror forms, is a common type known loosely as the TLV; the name being derived from the conspicuous figures on the back” (quotation on p. 21).
catalogue\textsuperscript{5} include “shierchen jian” 十二辰鑑 (mirror inscribed with the twelve earthly branches) and “Shang Fang jian” 尚方鑑 (mirror inscribed with the brand Shang Fang), which was adopted from cast inscriptions,\textsuperscript{6} and “sishen jian” 四神鑑 (mirror decorated with the four cardinal deities), which describes zoomorphic images represented on mirrors without inscriptions (Fig. 1).\textsuperscript{7} None of the names acknowledge the TLV marks.\textsuperscript{8} The same approach is found in the eighteenth century imperial catalogue Xiqing gujian 西清古鑑. TLV mirrors without inscriptions are identified as “baru jian” 八乳鑑 (mirror decorated with eight nipples), which only

\textsuperscript{5} Among the eighteen TLV mirrors, seventeen are attributed to the Han dynasty while one is attributed to the Tang. See Chongxiu Xuanhe bogu tu 重修宣和博古圖, ed. Wang Fu 王馥, compiled before 1125 (Wenyuan siku quanshu 文淵閣四庫全書 ed.; rpt. Taipei: Shangwu, 1983), 28.1–40.

\textsuperscript{6} The name “shierchen jian” is given to four of the recorded TLV mirrors; “Shang Fang jian” is given to two. Originally, the term jian 鑑 refers to a particular type of bronze basin in the Eastern Zhou period; see Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, Gudai Zhongguo qingtong qi 古代中國青銅器 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue, 1995), 142–43, 227. Since people could also check their appearance from the reflection on the water contained in the basin, jian 鑑 and jing 鏡 became interchangeable in later documents. For further discussion of this issue, see Nie Shimei 需世美, Linghua zhaoying: Zhongguo jing wenhua 蓮花照影: 中國鏡文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1994), 19–25.

\textsuperscript{7} Another image-based name in Xuanhe bogu tu is “siling jian” 四靈鑑 (mirror decorated with the four spirits)

\textsuperscript{8} Schuyler Cammann already noticed the lack of attention to the TLV design in the Xuanhe bogu tu in his article, “The ‘TLV’ Pattern on Cosmic Mirrors of the Han Dynasty,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 68.3–4 (1948), 159–67.
pinpoints the nipple-like protrusions above the surface (Fig. 2). The conventional method of classifying TLV mirrors—based on inscriptions first and decoration second—strongly influenced connoisseurs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even Luo Zhenyu, one of the most renowned antiquarians in the modern era, also uses the title “sishen jing”四神镜, failing to recognize that it is the square with TLV marks, rather than zoomorphic images or nipple-like protrusions, that plays the key role in the ornamentation. The first modern scholar who acknowledges the significance of the TLV design is probably Harada Yoshito. He began to label the TLV marks as “guiju wen” 規矩文 (pattern representing compasses and try squares) in the early 1920s. His identification, as Komai Kazuchika

9. *Xiqing gujian* 西清古鑑, ed. Liang Shizheng 梁詩正, compiled in 1749 for the Qianlong Emperor’s collections (*Wenyuange Siku quanshu* ed.; rpt. Taipei: Shangwu, 1983), 39.40–41. Six TLV mirrors are recorded in this catalogue. Two are called “Shang Fang jian,” one “shenren jian” 神人鑑 (mirror with the inscription depicting immortals), and one “shierchen jian.” The only two without inscriptions are entitled “baru jian.”

10. For example, Liang Tingnan 梁廷楨, *Tenghua ting jingpu* 腾花亭镜谱 (preface dated 1845, Shunde: Longshi zhongheyuan, 1934); Chen Jieqi 陈介祺, *Fuzhai cang jing* 瓦窰藏镜 (preface dated 1865, Shanghai: Tanlu, 1925).


12. Hamada Kosaku 濱田耕作 and Harada Yoshito, *Senoku Seisho* 泉屋清賞 (Tokyo:
駒井和愛 later clarifies, is based on the fact that ancient Chinese considered Heaven to be round and the earth to be square, and that they always compared compasses to Heaven and try squares to the earth. This identification has been disputed by Hayashi Minao, who particularly refutes the formal connection between the T marks and compasses by raising a contemporary pictorial counter-example preserved in the Left Chamber of the Wu family shrines (Wushi ci 武氏祠). Even so, the term “guiju jing” 規矩鏡 (mirror with the design representing compasses and try squares) has remained dominant in most of the Japanese and Chinese publications.

The major breakthrough in unveiling the mystery of the TLV design was the discovery of mirrors that contained both the design and the inscription decoding it. In 1986, Nishida Morio 西田守夫 introduced the inscription “Engrave the bo board so as to expel the inauspicious” kelou boju qu buxiang 刻窻 (鏡) 博局去不羊 (祥) that appears on the rubbing of a TLV mirror in the Tokyo National Museum collections (Fig. 3). Based on the inscription, he confidently concluded that the TLV design was borrowed from the playing board for the game liubo 六博. In 1987, Zhou Zheng 周錦 presented another rubbing with an almost identical inscription in the collections of the Chinese History Museum in Beijing (Fig. 4), and further advocated re-naming this type as “boju jing” 博局鏡.

Kokasha, 1921–24), pt. 2, note for Fig. 31. Nakayama Heijirō 中山平次郎 discusses the TLV marks in his 1918 articles, but he does not treat these marks as a whole. See Nakayama Heijirō, “Koshiki Shina kyōkan enkaku” 古式支那鏡鑑沿革, Kōkogaku zasshi 古古學雑誌 9.2 (1918), 145–59; 9.3 (1918), 189–96.


15. Nishida Morio, “Hōkaku kiku kyō no zumon no keifu: kokurō hakugyoku kyo fuyo no meibun motsu kyō ni tsuite” 「方格規矩鏡」の図紋の系譜 — 刻窻博局去不羊の紋文もつ鏡について, Museum 427 (1986), 28–34. The inscription along the circular rim reads, “The Xin has fine copper that comes from Danyang. [I have] smelted it with silver and tin, [producing this] clean and bright [mirror]. The Dragon on the left and the Tiger on the right command the four quarters. The Red Bird and the Dark Warrior conform to the yin and yang forces. Eight sons and nine grandsons govern the center. Engrave the bo board so as to expel the inauspicious. [May your] family constantly [amass] great wealth that is fit for a lord or king. [May you have] a thousand autumns and ten thousand years, and [may you have] joy without end” 新有善銅出丹陽, 和以銀鍊清且明. 左龍右虎掌四形, 朱爵玄武順陰陽. 八子九孫治中央, 刻窻博局去不羊. 家常大富宜君王, 千秋萬歲樂中央. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are mine. Judging from the rubbing, what Nishida transcribes as zhang sifang 掌四方 should be zhang sipeng 掌四彭.

16. Scholars had long speculated on the connection between the design on the mirror and that on the game board, but none could provide concrete evidence as Nishida Morio does.
Fig. 3: TLV mirror. 18.6 cm. diam. Collection of the Tokyo National Museum. From Museum 427 (1986), 31. A: Rubbing. B: Detail

Fig. 4: TLV mirror. 20.5 cm. diam. Collection of the National Museum (formerly the Chinese History Museum), Beijing. From Kaogu 1987.12, 1117. A: Rubbing. B: Detail
Playing the Game

Since the TLV mirror is intended to borrow the design of the liubo game board, as stated by inscriptions, we need to learn more about the appropriated in order to understand the nature of the appropriation. Archaeological finds are of great help in supplying us with physical information about the game. For instance, a game set unearthed from Tomb No. 11 (d. 217 B.C.E.) at Shuihudi 睡虎地 in Hubei consists of a square wooden board, twelve bone chessmen and six bamboo sticks (Fig. 6). A pottery

17. Zhou Zheng, “Guiju jing yinggai cheng boju jing” 规矩镜应改称博局镜, Kaogu 考古 1987.12, 1116–18. There are two rubbings of the same TLV mirror in the Chinese History Museum. This mirror is slightly larger than the Tokyo example. The inscription along the circular rim is, however, shorter by one sentence: “新有善銅出丹陽. 和以錫清且明. 左龍右虎□□□, 朱爵玄武順陰陽. 八子九孫治中央, 刻㕮博局去不幸. 家常大富宜君君.” Zhou transcribes the verb as keju 刻具, but judging from the rubbing, it should be kelou 刻畱. Likewise, what he transcribes as□為□ should be □四□, whose complete expression is likely zhang sipeng 掌四彭 as shown by the Tokyo example. The same revision has also been made in Kong Xiangxing 孔祥星 and Liu Yiman 劉一曼, Zhongguo tongjing tuidian 中國銅鏡圖典 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1992), 266.

18. See n.2 above. The dating of the tomb is based on the coins of daquan wushi 大泉五十 found in the tomb, which were circulated under the reign of Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9–23 C.E.).

19. This is a difficult sentence. My translation reads jian 兼 as “and,” which links two adverbs zhong 中 (at the center) and fang 方 (in the shape of a square). My translation also treats kezhi 刻治 as a verb meaning “engrave,” which is comparable to kelou 刻畱 in the aforementioned examples from Tokyo and Beijing.

20. Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu bianxie zu 雲夢睡虎地秦墓編寫組, Yunmeng Shuihudi
model excavated from Zhangwan 張灣 in Henan suggests that the game is played by two persons who alternately throw six sticks and move six chessmen on each side (Fig. 7).\(^{21}\) A stone carving found in Peixian 沛縣

Qin mu 雲夢睡虎地秦墓 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1981), 55, pl. 24. For more examples of game accessories, see Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一, “Hakuhashi hakugo hakuchin hakugyoku” 博畝博棋博鏡博物, Tōyōshi kenkyū 東洋史研究 9.5–6 (1947), 39–45; Fu Jyouu 傅纂有, “Lun Qin Han shiqi de boju, boxi jianji bojuwen jing” 論秦漢時期的博具, 博戲兼及博局紋鏡, Kaogu xuebao 考古學報 1986.1, 21–42.

21. Henan sheng bowuguan 河南省博物館, “Lingbao Zhangwan Han mu” 靈寶張灣漢墓, Wenwu 文物 1975.11, 75–93. The pottery figurines were unearthed from Tomb No. 3, dated to the Eastern Han, probably from the late second century to the early third century. Notice that two dice are presented in this model. How dice and sticks work together in a game is unclear. Yan Zhitui 顏之推 thought that players threw sticks for the liubo game but cast dice for the xiaobo 小博 game. See Yan Zhitui, Yanshi jiaxun jijie 頭氏家訓集解, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1981), 527–28 (“Za yi” 唐藝). For more examples of figurines playing the liubo game, see Fu Jyouu, “Lun Qin Han shiqi de boju,” 25–26; Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寛, “Rokuhaku no jinbutsu zazō
Fig. 6: *Liubo* implements. Late third century B.C.E. Excavated in 1975–76 at Shuihudi in Yunmeng, Hubei. Drawings from *Kaogu xuebao* 1986.1, 22. A: From Tomb No. 11 (d. 217 B.C.E.). 32 cm × 29 cm (game board). B: From Tomb No. 13. 38.5 × 35 cm (game board).

Fig. 7: Figurines playing the *liubo* game. Late second century C.E. Glazed pottery. 24 cm. tall. Excavated in 1972 at Zhangwan in Lingbao, Henan. Drawing from *Wenwu* 1975.11, 81.
in Jiangsu is further evidence of the arresting spectacle of liubo-playing (Fig. 8). These examples all agree with the explanation offered by Wang Yi 王逸, a court collator active in the first half of the second century, that because players throw six sticks and move six chessmen, the game is called “liubo.”

It goes without saying that the engraved design on the square boards in these examples is identical to the pattern on TLV mirrors. The square board is usually called “ju” 局 in the received texts. It is occasionally called “ju” 楹 to emphasize that it is made of wood, as shown by a funer-

dōchin to hakugyokomon ni tsuite” 六博的人物像銅鏡と博局紋について, Koshi shunjū 古史春秋 5 (1989), 27–49.


ary inventory unearthed from Tomb No. 8 at Fenghuangshan 鳳凰山 in Hubei. On a wooden board extracted from a Han tomb at Yunmeng 雲夢, the game board is also recorded as "huaqu" 畫 "，which can be literally understood as "the drawn bending marks " ".” The term vividly describes the most distinguishable element of the game board that Huang Mao lin goes so far as to propose to read "ju" 局 as a pictograph that simply combines " " " " marks in various directions. For him, the pictographic "ju" 局 is a de facto combination of a square, (half of) a T, an L, and a V.

The liubo game is said in the received texts to have been popular from the mid-fourth century B.C.E. In a conversation with King Wei of the Qi 齊威王 (r. 356–320 B.C.E.), for example, the game was mentioned as part of the repertoire for entertaining at aristocratic banquets. The game was also included in a description of the city life in Linzi 臨淄, the rich and populous capital of the Qi, under the reign of King Xuan 宣王 (r. 319–301 B.C.E.). Archaeological finds more or less agree with these records, but have also complicated our understanding of the TLV design's association with the game. Two exquisite stone game boards unearthed from the royal cemetery of the Zhongshan state 中山國 (414–296 B.C.E.) provide good examples. The decoration on one board looks similar to the TLV design, but with four additional lines; while the decoration on the other board differs significantly from the TLV design, as it lacks the central square and the Ts (Figs. 9, 10). A plainer example was also discovered in a Qin tomb at Fangmatan 放馬灘 in Gansu, bearing the TLV design on a rectangular rather than square wood board (Fig. 11). All these

24. Changjiang liuyu dierqi wenwu kaogu gongzu renyuan xunlianban 長江流域第二期文物考察工作人員訓練班, "Hubei Jiangling Fenghuangshan Xi-Han mu fajue jianbao" 湖北江陵鳳凰山西漢墓發掘簡報, Wenwu 1974.6, 41–61. The slip was unearthed from Tomb No.8.

25. Hubei sheng bowuguan 湖北省博物館, "Yunmeng Dafentou yihao Han mu" 雲夢大墳頭一號漢墓, Wenwu ziliao congkan 文物資料叢刊 4 (1981), 1–25. The tomb is dated to the Western Han, probably the second century B.C.E. The phrase "漆印畫 " " written on the board refers to the painted laquer liubo game board buried in the tomb.


27. Sima Qian 司馬遷, Shi ji 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982), 126.3199 ("Guji liezhuan" 滑稽列傳).


29. Hebei sheng wenwu guanlichu 河北省文物管理處, "Hebei sheng Pingshan xian Zhangguo shiqi Zhongshan guo muzang fajue jianbao" 河北省平山縣戰國時期中山國墓葬發掘簡報, Wenwu 1979.1, 1–31. In addition, a lacquer board dated to the first half of the fourth century B.C.E. was excavated in Hubei. This lacquer board is also far from the TLV design and similar, though not identical, to Board B (Fig. 10) from the Zhongshan state. See Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 湖北省荊州地區博物館, Jiangling Yutaishan Chu mu 江陵雨台山楚墓 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1984), Fig. 80–3, pl. 63–2.

30. Gansu sheng wenwu kaogusuo 甘肅省文物考古所, "Gansu Tianshui Fang-
specimens suggest that the game boards were not yet standardized in the era prior to the Han.

The *liubo* game ceased to be in vogue sometime after the fall of the Han. As reported by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–590), how the game was played became an unfamiliar subject in the sixth century.\(^{31}\) Lien-sheng Yang in his 1952 article thus strives to reconstruct the rules of the game through available written documents, the most useful being a formula


composed by the Han expert player Xu Bochang 許博昌 (ca. 156–141 B.C.E.). The formula, in an almost palindromic format, states,

方畔揭道張,  
張畔揭道方。  
張究屈玄高,  
高玄究究張。  

Fang pan jie dao zhang,  
zhang pan jie dao fang.  
Zhang jiu qu xuan gao,  
gao xuan qu jiu zhang.

33. Xijing zaji jiaozi 西京雜記校注, ed. Xiang Xinyang 向新陽 and Liu Keren 劉克任 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1991), 4.203. According to Xijing zaji, the formula also
Yang very tentatively translates this esoteric formula as:

From the corner of a “square” area there is a rising way to the “extension” area,

From the corners of the “extension” area there are rising ways to the “square”;

Throws taking one from the “extension” area to the “benders” beat the mysterious and high,

The high and mysterious beats such throws by taking one from the “benders” to the “extension” area.34

Identifying fang 方 as the Vs of the TLV design, zhang 張 as the Ts, and qu 屈 as the Ls, Yang further conjectures that a liubo player must have started at the open end of an L, moving his men to the corner of a square marked by a V, and reaching to a T in the center of the board via a diagonal line (Fig. 12).35

In his 1964 article, Lao Gan 劳斡 offers an alternative reading of Xu’s formula (Fig. 13).36 He surmises that the Ls, Vs, and four points on the game board signal conditions for various moves. With the Ls serving as starting points, a player must have been allowed to attack his opponent in the open Ts and at the boundless four points, but not in the closed Vs.

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reads as “張道揭畔方，方畔揭道張。張究屈玄高，高玄屈究張。” The two versions differ only in the wording of the first couplet.

34. Yang, “An Additional Note,” 137.
35. Yang, “An Additional Note,” 137. I rendered Fig. 12 to make Yang’s hypothesis more accessible.
Dividing the board into four quarters, Lao identifies Xu’s *fang* 方 as the quarter to the immediate right of the player who is making a move, *zhang* 張 as the quarter to the far right of the player, *xuan* 玄 as the quarter to the far left of the player, and *gao* 高 to the immediate left of the player. Lao then suggests that a *liubo* player would have had to find ways to move his chessmen from the quarter *fang* to the quarter *gao*, passing through the quarters *zhang* and *xuan*.

A highly condensed palindrome to be memorized for ready use, Xu Bochang’s formula for the *liubo* game is so obscure that we can judge neither Yang’s hypothesis nor Lao’s proposition. A wooden board unearthed in 1993 at Yinwan helps us move beyond this dilemma. With an inscribed TLV design for divination, the board brings us closer to the formula. Not only does the Yinwan board demonstrate the interrelation of divination and play; it also sheds light on why the TLV design was appropriated from the game to the mirror.

The Practice of Divination

The wooden board was excavated from Tomb No. 6 (d. 10 B.C.E.) at Yinwan. Measuring 23 cm long and 7 cm wide, the board is inscribed with

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38. Lianyungang shi bowuguan, *Yinwan Han mu jianju*, 21, 125–26, 162–66. Four of the boards unearthed from Tomb No. 6 bear precise dates, the latest being the third
texts and diagrams on both sides. The back side contains a diagram similar to the TLV design and a chart composed of five rows and ten columns (Fig. 14). The diagram, aside from the TLV design, includes the character *fang* 方 in the center, the two characters *nanfang* 南方 (south) at the top, and the sixty chronograms designating dates at either one or two sides of the lines that constitute the design (Fig. 15). The rightmost column of the chart enumerates events that require divination, which from the top lists inquiries about marriage (*qufu jianu* 取婦嫁女), excursions (*xing* 行), imprisonment (*xi* 橫), disease (*bing* 病) and abscondence (*wang* 亡) (Fig. 14B). The top row of the chart shows the signs for divination, which from the right reads *fang* 方, *lian* 廉, *jie* 極, *dao* 道, *zhang* 張, *qu* 曲, *chu* 諛, *chang* 長 and *gao* 高. The places where columns and rows intersect then display the corresponding oracles that help make the prediction.

It is certain that the TLV diagram with its explanatory chart on the wooden board was used for divination, but exactly how is unknown. As the authors of *Yinwan Han mu jiandu* speculate, the divinatory signs in the charts may represent different positions in the TLV diagram. When one practices divination, he would look for an oracle in the chart with reference to the sign of the inquired day in the diagram.39 More specifically, if one intends to learn if the day *guihai* 畢亥 is suitable for marriage, as explained by Li Xueqin 李學勤, he would first search for the day in the diagram, locating it in the north of the central square and obtaining its sign *fang* 方 (Fig. 15). Then, he would explore the chart where the column marked by *fang* 方 intersects with the row labeled for the inquiry about marriage. The oracle at the crossing point—“family would be sustained and children would be born” *jiashi zhong* shengchan 家室終生產—provides that it would be auspicious to hold the marriage on the day *guihai* (Fig. 14).40 Li’s explanation appears comprehensive, but except for *fang*, the positions of the other eight signs in the TLV diagram are uncertain. The practice of the TLV divination still remains a riddle.

The nine signs at the top of the chart are the first key to the riddle. They strongly resemble the nine words used in Xu Bochang’s *liubo* formula—four are exact matches, one is identical in terms of pronunciation and reference, and two are comparable in meaning.41 The exact matches are *fang*, *dao*, *zhang*, and *gao*. The pair with identical pronunciation and reference is *jie* 極 in the divinatory chart and *jie* 極 in the *liubo* formula.

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39. *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 3.
41. Li Xueqin and the authors of *Yinwan Han mu jiandu* have noticed the similarity between the two.
Fig. 15: Re-drawing of the TLV design on the Yinwan divination board, Fig. 14A. Numbers added to show sexagenary sequence. Circled numbers indicate transcription errors.

Both words contain the meaning “marker”: jie 榜 refers to posts, while jie 揭 suggests things that help to raise high or to reveal. The two pairs with comparable meanings are chu 蜸 and qu 屈, lian 廉 and pan 畔. Chu and qu are exchangeable and mean “to bend.” Both lian and pan imply

42. From Zhouli zhengyi 周禮正義, ed. Sun Yirang 孫詠讓 (Sibu beiyao 四部備要 ed.; Taipei: Zhonghua, 1983), 70.6b: “If there is someone who dies on the road, then have him buried and erect a post” ruoyou si yu daolu zhe, ze ling mai er zhijie yan 若有死於道路者, 則令埋而置揭焉.

43. For instance, Mount Emei was said to be the sign that marks the position of a nearby city called Quanyang 泉陽 (Emei wei Quanyang zhi jie 峨眉為泉陽之揭). See Guo Pu 郭璞, “Jiang fu” 江賦, in Quan shanggu san dai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, ed. Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1958), 120.2147–48 (“Quan jin wen” 全晉文).

44. In Xunzi 荀子, for example, “chu” is used to describe “bending five fingers” chu wuzhi 揭五指. Yang Jing 楊倞 notes that “chu” is the same as “qu”. See Xunzi jijie 荀子集解, ed. Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (“Quan xue” 勵學) (Zhuzi jicheng 詶子集成 ed.) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1990), 1.9.
"side": pan usually indicates the bank of a river or a lake; lian, meaning "edges and corners," can be extended to point out the opposite edge of an angle.45 The similarity between the divinatory signs and the liubo formula are of great significance. On the one hand, as the divinatory signs denote different positions in the TLV diagram, the formulary words also most likely indicate positions on the game board.46 On the other hand, the nine words are rendered as a palindrome in the formula, which insinuates that the order of the nine positions, either on the game board or in the divinatory diagram, could be reversible.

The second key to the riddle is the order of the nine positions. Although the nine positions are crucial to both the TLV divination and the liubo game, fang is the only one that can be located. Since the sexagenary cycle in the diagram bears a strong sense of order, arranging these dates in sequence may help us to determine the other eight positions. We should note that south is located at the top of the diagram, as it is often so rendered on early Chinese maps.47 It is also essential to know that dates in ancient China are calculated through the collocation of celestial stems and terrestrial branches. Ten celestial stems (jia 甲, yi 乙, bing 丙, ding 丁, wu 戊, ji 己, geng 庚, xin 辛, ren 王, gui 癸) and twelve terrestrial branches (zi 子, chou 丑, yin 寅, mao 卯, chen 辰, si 巳, wu 午, wei 未, shen 申, you 酉, xu 戌, hai 亥) are combined to form the cycle of sixty days. The sixty days in the diagram begin with jiazi 甲子 at the northwestern V and end with guiha 亥亥 to the north of the square (Fig. 15). Writing errors may explain for three missing days: 9 (renshen 王申), 28 (xinmao 辛卯), and 29 (renchen 王辰). They are also responsible for four repetitive days: 18 (xinsi 辛巳), 19 (renwu 午午), 37 (gengzi 庚子) and 59 (renxi 王戊). These errors make the diagram almost impossible to understand. Only from the error-free southwestern zone can we retrieve a certain sense of order. The days from 43 to 51 move out of the square, consecutively run through the T, L and diagonal line, and finally reach to the V before the movement is reversed back from day 52 to day 60. The nine moves,

45. Jia Yi 賈誼 once used the metaphor of steps and a hall to illustrate the relation between subjects and their ruler. He said, “When the lian is far from the earth, the hall is high . . . when the lian is close to the earth, the hall is low” lian yuandi, ze tanggao . . . lian jindi, ze tangbei 廂遠地, 則堂高 . . . 廂近地, 則堂卑. Here, lian can be understood as either the raised angle of the steps or the height of the steps. For the latter, lian means the opposite edge of an angle. See Ban Gu 班固, Han shu 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), 48.2254–55.

46. The formula is thus a compilation of positions, instructing moves of chessmen. No verbs or adjectives, as Yang and Lao suggest, are interwoven to make the sentences comprehensible.

Fig. 16: Restoration of the TLV design on the Yinwan divination board, Fig. 14, with the corrected sexagenary cycle and divinatory signs. Romanization for the nine positions: 方 fang; 廉 lian; 榔 jie; 道 dao; 張 zheng; 曲 qu; 𨀒 chu; 長 chang; 高 gao. Numbers refer to the sexagenary sequence as follows:

1 甲子 jiazì  16 己卯 jimaò  31 甲午 jiawù  46 乙酉 jiyou
2 乙丑 yichou  17 庚辰 gengchen  32 乙未 yiwèi  47 庚戌 gengxì
3 丙寅 bingyìn  18 辛巳 xinsi  33 丙申 bingshen  48 辛亥 xinhài
4 丁卯 dingmao  19 壬午 renwu  34 丁酉 dingyou  49 王子 renzi
5 戊辰 wuchen  20 己未 guíwei  35 戊戌 wuxù  50 癸丑 guichou
6 己巳 jisi  21 庚申 jiashen  36 己亥 jihái  51 甲寅 jiayin
7 庚午 gengwu  22 乙酉 yiyou  37 庚子 gengzi  52 乙卯 yimào
8 辛末 xinwei  23 丙戌 bingxù  38 辛丑 xinchou  53 丙辰 bingchen
9 壬申 renshèn  24 丁亥 dìnghai  39 壬寅 rényín  54 丁巳 dingsì
10 癸酉 guiyòu  25 戊子 wuzì  40 癸卯 guimào  55 戊午 wuwù
11 甲戌 jiaxù  26 乙巳 jichou  41 甲辰 jiachèn  56 己未 jìwei
12 乙亥 yihài  27 庚寅 gengyìn  42 乙巳 yìsi  57 庚申 gengshèn
13 丙子 bingzì  28 辛卯 xínmao  43 丙午 bingwù  58 辛酉 xinyì
14 丁丑 dìngchóu  29 壬辰 renchen  44 丁未 dìngwèi  59 王戌 rénxù
15 戊寅 wuyìn  30 己巳 guisì  45 戊申 wushèn  60 癸亥 guihài
or moving positions, should correspond to the nine signs in the chart. Most likely, fang (43) refers to the inside of the square; lian (44), to the outside of the square; jie (45), to the vertical line in the T; dao (46), to the horizontal line in the T; zhang (47), to the vertical stem of the L; qu (48), to the base of the L; chu (49), to the diagonal line; chang (50), to the left stem of the V; and gao (51), to the right stem of the V (Fig. 16).

Based on the moving pattern established in the southwestern zone, we can correct the written errors enumerated earlier. In the southeastern zone, for instance, if we replace the repetitive days along the T—18 (xinsi 辛巳) and 37 (gengzi 庚子)—with the missing days 28 (xinmao 辛卯) and 29 (renchen 王辰), the days from 26 (jichou 己丑) to 34 (dingyou 丁酉) would form nine consecutive chronograms. In the northwestern zone, likewise, if we replace the repetitive 19 (renwu 王午) inside the square with the missing 9 (renshen 王申), then days 9 (renshen 王申) to 17 (gengchen 庚辰) would become another group of nine consecutive chronograms. The ensuing day 18 (xinsi 辛巳), misplaced far to the northeastern corner, should be moved back to the position beneath 17 (gengchen 庚辰). The displacement produces one more group of nine consecutive chronograms from 18 (xinsi 辛巳) to 26 (jichou 己丑). In the northeastern zone, since the irrelevant 18 (xinsi 辛巳) has been moved out, the repetitive 59 (renxu 壬戌) should also be deleted. The days from 1 (jiazi 甲子) to 9 (renshen 王申) thus become consecutive. With all the corrections, the chronograms in the TLV diagram are no longer intangible. By sharing three days located inside the square—9 (renshen 王申), 26 (jichou 己丑) and 43 (bingwu 丙戌)—the sexagenary cycle perfectly accommodates the TLV design through the array of nine days in seven groups (1-9-17, 18-26-34, 35-43-51, 52-60). Since six out of the seven groups show a consistent moving path, we can further fix the first group by displacing 7 (gengwu 庚午) to the west of the position jie, and 8 (xinwei 辛未) to the west of the position lian.

The recognition of the nine signs in the diagram demystifies the practice of the TLV divination. Since the diagram contains two modes of

48. Liu Lexian's article on the Yinwan diagram came out after I had delivered mine for publication by the end of 1998. As Li Jiemin has pointed out, Liu reads the diagram as a mathematical document, making the corrections as I do, but he does not penetrate the relationship between the TLV divination, the liubo game and Xu Bochang's formula. See Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, “Yinwan Han mu chutu shushu wenxian chutu” 尹灣漢墓出土數術文獻初探, in Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun 尹灣漢墓簡綜論 (Beijing: Kexue, 1999), 175-86.

49. I did not include the two corrections in my 1999 article. After Liu Lexian noticed the oddity of 7 (gengwu) and 8 (xinwei), Li Jiemin proposed his remedy by moving only 8 (xinwei) to the position lian. To strictly follow the moving path of the other six groups, however, we should also rearrange 7 (gengwu) to the west of the position jie.
index—dates and positions—a diviner is welcome to employ either mode to meet his need. To use dates as an index, for example, if one would like to know the condition of his sick father on the day yisi 乙巳 (42), he would first search for the day in the diagram and find its position is llian. He would then turn to the chart for the corresponding oracle under the sign lian and learn the grim possibility that his father would be soon beyond cure (kong buqi 恐不起). To use positions as an index, if one is to get married and wants to know the personality of his wife-to-be, he can learn from the oracles that the sign dao 会 would enhance his wife’s being easy-going (fu jianshan shiren 婦見善室人), and the sign qu 频 would grant him a discreet wife (fu huijin shao yanyu 妻惠謹少言語). If he decides to have a discreet wife, he can locate in the diagram all the dates in the position qu—4 (dingmao 丁卯), 14 (dingchou 丁丑), 21 (jiashen 甲申), 31 (jiawu 甲午), 38 (xinchou 辛丑), 48 (xinhai 辛亥) and 51 (wuwu 戊午). He can then select the most suitable day among the seven for his marriage to take place.

Convenient but mechanical, the practice of the TLV divination is an appropriation of the liubo game for everyday use. While it does not involve the play of the game, the TLV divination borrows all the game’s design, terminology and rules. It may not be a groundbreaking invention, if one looks into the Han fascination for the “arts of numbers” (shshu 數術) that produce numerous astro-calendrical and hemerological texts. Nevertheless, the Yinwan board bears witness to a very rare combination of calendar, numerology and game.

Before the discovery of the Yinwan board, scholars were slow to explore the interrelation between divination and game. Michael Loewe, for example, overlooked the liubo game, and exclusively focused on the shi 式 divination based on an instrument with a circular disc on a square board (Fig. 27). He goes so far as to declare that the TLV mirror was deliberately made as a stylized version of the shi instrument to exemplify and perpetuate the most favorable position. The Yinwan board shows, however, that the liubo game is not subordinate to the practice of shi divination, but has its own distinctive divinatory function. From his more careful reading of historical documents, Li Jianmin 李建民 does penetrate the divinatory significance of the game. He speculates that throwing sticks as indication of chance should have been the key to the


51. Loewe, Ways to Paradise, 80–81. The connection between the TLV mirror and the shi instrument has been loosely made in Kaplan, “On the Origin of the TLV Mirror,” 23–24.
practice of divination through the liubo game. Nevertheless, the Yinwan board proves that one can determine the most appropriate time for action without throwing any sticks. Even so, there was probably more than one way to practice liubo divination, as a manual entitled Zhandou boxi dengfa 戰鬥博戲等法 was recorded with a group of divinatory documents in Sui shu 隋書, the official history of the Sui dynasty (581–617) compiled in the seventh century.

The resolution of the riddle of the Yinwan board also contributes to our understanding of the liubo game in at least two respects. First, according to Xijing zaji 西京雜記, a work attributed to the Han scholar Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 B.C.E.–C.E. 23) but likely compiled around the fourth century C.E., Xu Bochang’s formula was so well-known that children in the capital Chang’an and its environs were able to recite it. The statement proves not ungrounded, for only the most well-known game rules could have provided a framework for predicting good and ill fortune in daily life. Particularly, there are no hints of the nine positions (except for fang) in the divinatory diagram, which confirms how familiar Han people must have been with the liubo game.

Second, the nine moves in the divinatory diagram, expressed by seven of the nine groups of dates, should be the positions to which both the nine signs in the divinatory chart and the nine words in Xu’s formula refer. And yet, whether the moving sequence in the diagram was identical to that on the game board is unclear, because the reciprocation—how chessmen move backwards and forwards—in the diagram is built upon the base 9, while the reciprocation in Xu’s formula is built upon the base 5. More likely, the inconsistency suggests that there was more than one way to play the game. Otherwise, there would have been no need to compile various game guides like Zabo xifa 雜博戲法, Shuangbo fa 雙博法, Huangbo fa 皇博法, Daxiao bofa 大小博法 and Bosai jing 博塞經, as mentioned in the Sui shu.

53. Wei Zheng 魏徵, Sui shu 隋書, 34.1030 (“Jingji zhi” 經籍志). The author and the date for compiling this manual are unknown. Judging from the title, the manual was supposed to give instructions on how to manipulate liubo divination for military purposes.
54. Xiang Xinyang and Liu Keren, Xijing zaji jiaozhu, 203.
55. Wei Zheng, Sui shu, 34.1016–17. Except for Bosai jing, which is attributed to Shao Gang 邵鎔, the authors and the dates for compilation of these guidebooks are unknown. The existence of these guidebooks in the seventh century when the Sui shu was compiled may not contradict Yan Zhitui’s comment mentioned earlier (n. 21, 31). Yan Zhitui said, “In the past, [players used] six sticks for the dabo game, and two dice for the xiaobo game. At the present, there is no [player] who can understand [those rules]. What is popular now is using one dice and twelve chessmen; the shallowness
To sum up, the representation of the game board at the mirror back is to “expel the inauspicious,” as announced by inscriptions. The TLV diagram with an explanatory chart for choosing good days presumably helps people to conduct daily activities and to keep the unpropitious at bay. The TLV design at the mirror back is therefore an icon of TLV divination, alluding to its function of evading the inauspicious. The iconic representation not only makes the TLV mirror a talisman, but further reveals a double appropriation: The TLV mirror as talisman is an appropriation of TLV divination, which is in turn an appropriation of the game *liubo*.

**The Association of *Liubo* with Immortals**

In addition to divination, the game *liubo* was also associated with immortals in the Han dynasty, as shown in two self-explanatory examples. Lien-sheng Yang in his 1945 article introduces the inscription “immortals playing the *liubo* game” (*xianren liubo* 仙人六博) on a mirror said to have been acquired in Shaoxing 绍興 in Zhejiang (Fig. 17). The inscription identifies the scene on the mirror of two winged figures playing at a board with a simplified TLV design. In 1988, another equally compelling example was unearthed at Guitoushan 鬼頭山 in Sichuan (Fig. 18). The inscription “immortals playing the *bo* game” (*xianren bo* 先 (仙) 人博) also identifies two carved immortals with tall feathered hats and spread wings playing the *bo* game at a board with several throwing sticks. Wang Chong 王充 (27–c. 100 C.E.) in his disquisitions confirmed that picturing immortals as humans with wings was indeed in fashion during the Han period, although as an empiricist, he did not appreciate this pictorial invention.

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in the arts of numbers is not fit for play” *gu wei dabo ze liuzhu, xiaobo ze erqiong, jin wu xiaoze. bi shi suoxing. yi qiong shierqi, shushu qian duan, buzu kewan* 古為大博則六箸, 小博則二罫, 今無曉者. 必世所行, 一罫十二棋, 數術淺短, 不足可觀. For Yan, the ancient *bo* games were played with either six sticks or two dice, while the contemporary game was played with one dice and twelve chessmen. Except for *Daxiao bofa*, we do not know with which tools (sticks, dice or chessmen) the various *bo* games recorded in *Sui shu* were played.


Fig. 17: Immortals playing the *liubo* game. Second century C.E. Detail of a bronze mirror. Photo from *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 9 (1945), pl. 1

Fig. 18: Immortals playing the *liubo* game. Second century C.E. Stone carving. Excavated at Guitoushan in Jianyang, Sichuan. Rubbing from *Zhongguo huaxiang shiguan yishu*, 7

Archaeological finds show the wide spread use of the motif on carved stones and decorated bricks in Sichuan, Henan and Shandong, but few contemporary documents supply us with the reason why it was so favored to associate the game *liubo* with immortals.⁵⁹ One possible cause

⁵⁹. *Nanyang Han dai huaxiang zhuan* 南陽漢代畫像碑, ed. Nanyang wenwu yanjiusuo 南陽文物研究所 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1990), pl. 180; *Anqiu Dongjiazhuang Han huaxiangshi*
was, as suggested by Lien-sheng Yang, the wish to transfer the power of the immortals through game-playing. In a conversation with King Zhao of the Qin 秦昭王 (r. 306–251 B.C.E.), for example, a bold young man from Hengsi 恆思 was said to offer to play the bo game with the deity of a grove (shencong 神叢), wagering that, should he win, the deity would lend him his spiritual power. King Zhao himself is also said to have ordered artisans to climb Mount Hua to make throwing sticks and chessmen with the heartwood of pines and cypresses, and to inscribe for him on a stone the words, “King Zhao once played the bo game with heavenly deity (tianshen 天神) at this place.” A similar story was attributed to Emperor Wu of the Han 漢武帝 (r. 140–87 B.C.E.), who was believed to have played the bo game against an immortal on his way to perform at Mount Tai the fengshan 封禪 ritual that presumably would enhance the immortality of both his reign and his life. The depiction of a person playing the game with a winged immortal on a carved stone discovered at Taishangcun 台上村 in Jiangsu may express this human attempt to borrow the power of the immortals (Fig. 19).

The legend of immortals playing the liubo game is also transformed and fused with the TLV mirror. For instance, the immortals, who are riding on a sheep, trifling with birds or playing the zither, are grouped with auspicious animals and rendered among the TLV design on a mirror excavated in Luoyang 洛陽 (Fig. 20). Part of the inscription along the circular rim singles out the image of immortals and imparts the very quest for immortality:

尚方作竟(鏡)真大巧。上有仙人不知老。渴飲玉泉肌食棗。壽而
金石天之保。}

61. Liu Xiang 劉向, Zhanguo ce 戰國策 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1995), 5.197.
64. Xuzhou Han huaxiangshi 徐州漢畫像石, ed. Xuzhou shi bowuguan 徐州市博物館 (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishi. 1985), Fig. 178. For other examples in Sichuan, see Gao Wen, Zhongguo huaxiang shiguan yishu, 25-1, 27-1, 55.
65. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo Luoyang fajue due 中國社會科

66. My translation with the added “may you” follows the convention established by
This mirror made by the Shang Fang truly is very fine. Upon it are immortals who do not know old age. They quench their thirst with the springs of jade, and satisfy their hunger with jujubes. [May you have] long life like [that of] metal and stone, and [may you have] Heaven’s protection.

Another example, also unearthed in Luoyang, shows an immortal interacting with a dragon in a cell defined by the TLV design (Fig. 21).67 Part of the accompanied inscription articulates the similar pictorial theme and decorative intention, but with a different formula,68


67. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjusuo Luoyang fajue dui, “Luoyang xijiao Han mu fajue baogao,” Fig. 21-1, pl. 8-4. The mirror is from Tomb No. 7052, dated to the early phase of the Eastern Han.

68. For further discussion of the formulaic nature of Han mirror inscriptions, see
Fig. 20: TLV mirror. First century C.E. Bronze, 23.2 cm. diam. Excavated in 1957–58 from Tomb No. 10025 in Luoyang, Henan. Rubbing from Zhongguo tongjiing tudian, 270

Fig. 21: TLV mirror. First century C.E. Bronze, 16.7 cm. diam. Excavated in 1957–58 from Tomb No. 7052 in Luoyang, Henan. Rubbing from Zhongguo tongjiing tudian, 293
The immortals feed on the essence of jade, and drink from the sweet springs. Yoking the flying dragon to their chariot, they mount the floating clouds. Led by the White Tiger, [you will] ascend to Mount Tai. With the phoenix dancing, [you will] see the deities and immortals. [May your] long life be ensured, and [may your] longevity be of ten thousand years.

With the presence of immortals both in image and text, the two TLV mirrors not only maintain their talismanic power, but also embrace the prospect of immortality.

It is probably due to this linkage between the liubo game and immortals that the Han commoners who crowded to the capital Chang’an for a mass uprising in the year 3 B.C.E. were reported to have prepared the game board for worshiping Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母), a deity in charge of the immortal land. On this occasion, written amulets for reaching immortality were also distributed. The story about King Mu of the Zhou 周穆王 (r. 956–918 B.C.E.) who was said to have played the bo game with Jing Gong 井公, a hermit or immortal, on his way westward to meet with Xiwangmu may also have provided a pretext for using the game board as a ritual object to worship Xiwangmu. Cast with the scene in which Xiwangmu, identifiable by her distinctive crown (sheng 勝), is receiving an immortal, the TLV mirror unearthed in Yangzhou 扬州 bears witness to the merging of the two legends — immortals playing the liubo game and Xiwangmu — that are both derived from the fervent quest for immortality (Fig. 22).

Bernhard Karlgren, “Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions”; Lin Suqing 林素清, “Liang Han jingming chutan” 兩漢鏡銘初探, Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan 63.2 (1993), 325–70. The two examples from Luoyang represent two major inscribed formulae that describe immortals. Variations may be found from mirror to mirror. Notice that the two formulae may not always go with TLV mirrors, and that TLV mirrors with visual representations of immortals may also match with other inscriptions.

69. Ban Gu, Han shu, “Wuxing zhi” 五行志, 27c-a.1476. For the association of the Queen Mother of the West with the belief in immortality, see Loewe, Ways to Paradise, 86–126.

70. Mu tianzi zhuan 穆天子傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1989), 43–44. The text was found in 281 C.E. in the tomb of King Xiang of the Wei 魏襄王 (r. 318–296 B.C.E.). For further discussion of the discovery and compilation of this text, see Rémi Mathieu, “Mu t'ien tzu chuan,” in Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 342–46.

71. Yangzhou bowuguan 扬州博物館, “Yangzhou shijiao faxian liangzuo Xin-Mang shiqi mu” 扬州市郊发现两座新莽时期墓, Kaogu 1986.11, 987–93. For further analysis of the iconography of Xiwangmu, see Wu Hung, “Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West,” Orientations 18.4 (1987), 24–33; Jean M. James, “An Iconographic Study of
Metaphor of the Cosmos

In addition to divination and immortality, Han people also employed the game board as a metaphor for the earth. The earliest extant textual evidence appears in one of Cao Zhi’s 曹植 (192–232) poems, composed not long after the fall of the Han dynasty, if not at its very end:

仙人攬六著（箸）， 即 Immortals grasp six throwing sticks,
對博太山隅。 Playing the *bo* game in the coigns of Mount Tai.
湘娥拊琴瑟， The lady of the Xiang plucks the zither,
秦女吹笙箎。 While the girl of the Qin blows the panpipe.
玉尊盈桂酒， Jade vessels are filled with cinnamon wine,
河伯獻神魚。 The River Lord offers magical fish.
四海一何局， The Four Seas are but like a game board,
九州安所如。 How can the Nine Provinces be even comparable?

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Xiwangmu during the Han Dynasty,” *Artibus Asiae* 55.1–2 (1995), 17–41; and Li Song 李淞, *Lun Han dai yishu zhong de Xiwangmu tuxiang* 論漢代藝術中的西王母圖像 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 2000).

The poem depicts the wonders of the immortal world. Both “Four Seas” and “Nine Provinces” are expressions that refer to the world under Heaven, that is, the earth. It is from the cosmology that Heaven is round while the earth is square that the game board comes to be a metaphor of the earth. More plainly put, “Heaven is round like an open canopy while the earth is square like a chessboard” tianyuan ru zhanguai, difang ru qiju 天圆如张盖，地方如棋局,73 a cosmography firmly held by the school of Canopy Heaven (gaitian 蓋天) that can be traced back to the pre-Han period.74

It is noteworthy that a mirror, often of round shape, may itself have been a metaphor of Heaven. The authors of Taiping jing 太平經, a Daoist document probably compiled in the third century, claim that “if the form of Heaven can be fathomed, it must be compared to a clean and bright mirror” tian zhiwei xing, biruo mingjing 天之為形，比若明鏡.75 Wang Jian 王儉 (452–489) later crystallizes the metaphor in an edict composed for the court, figuratively describing the sage kings whose legendary reigns were thought to be approved of by Heaven’s mandate as “holding the heavenly mirror” (wo tianjing 握天鏡) and “gathering up the earthly bonds” (zong diwei 總地維).76

Therefore, the TLV mirror alone can be viewed as a symbol of the cosmos, an ingenious pairing of its circular body and the design of the square game board. This cosmic implication is related to the desire for longevity, as declared by the inscription on a Han mirror unearthed in Guangzhou 廣州 in Guangdong: “[May you] be as long-lived as Heaven, and [may you] be as enduring as the earth” yu tian xiangshou, yu di

73. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, Jin shu 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982), 11.279 (“Tianwen zhi” 天文志). It is necessary to point out that the chessboard mentioned here may or may not be identical to the liubo board, but they are both of square shape.
75. Taiping jing hejiao 太平經合校, ed. Wang Ming 王明 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 117.660 (“Tianjiu siren rudaо jie” 天皆四人辱道).”
76. Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯, Nan-Qi shu 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1971), 1.21. Xiao Zixian’s exact wording is: “Ever since the Yellow Emperor, from what was recorded in ancient documents and from what was allowed to be spoken of, no one was more esteemed than Yao and Shun. [They] were wrapped with golden ropes, holding the heavenly mirror; [they] opened jade boxes, gathering up the earthly bonds” zi Xuan Huang yijiang, fensu suoji, liie yanzhe, mo chonghu Yao Shun; pi jinsheng er wo tianjing, kai yuxia er zong diwei. 自軒黃以降，冢宰所紀，略可言者，莫崇于堯舜。披金纓而握天鏡，開玉匣而締地維。Robin Yates kindly brought my attention to the divinatory documents entitled Tian jing 天鏡 (Sui shu, 34.1038) and “Tui siweia” 推四維法 in Li Quan 李筌, Shenji zhidi Taibo yin jing 神機制敵太白陰經 (Shijiazhuan: Hebei renmin, 1991), 10.137. I cannot judge from the context in the Nan-Qi shu if any divinatory implication is intended.
xiangchang 與天相壽, 與地相長. A more compelling instance is another Han mirror discovered at Yangzishan 羊子山 in Sichuan (Fig. 23). The circular mirror bears a simple design of the square at the center, both the circular and square shapes being accentuated by additional raised double lines. The similar inscription, "[May you] be as eternal as Heaven, and [may you] be as enduring as the earth" yu tian wuji, yu di xiangchang 與天毋極, 與地相長, perfectly deciphers the design while being part of it. Replacing the simple square with the liubo design, the TLV mirror presents a more sophisticated version of the wish to be assimilated to the perpetual cosmos.

Scholars in the past have generated great interest in the cosmological implication of the TLV mirror. W. Perceval Yetts in his 1939 catalogue considers the TLV mirror an imitation of the astronomical instrument called “gui” 畿. The three self-explanatory examples introduced earlier—the Tokyo and Beijing rubbings, and the Yinwan mirror—undoubtedly refute

Fig. 24: Gui instrument. Second to first centuries B.C.E. Stone, 27.68 x 27.04 cm. Probably discovered in 1932 at Jincun in Luoyang, Henan. Photo from Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu tuji, Fig. 40

this argument, but the resemblance between the gui instrument and the TLV mirror deserves further discussion. The gui instrument, shaped like a square board with a gnomon standing at the center, is designed to observe the solar shadow either for the purpose of measuring time or for the purpose of determining direction (Fig. 24). While the lines with numbers radiating from the center help record the solar shadow, the TLV design seems not to perform any specific function for empirical observation, particularly when it can be carved as carelessly as shown in the example said to be acquired in Inner Mongolia at the end of the nineteenth century (Fig. 25). Very likely the TLV design was added only to draw attention to the metaphorical association of the game board

80. Liu Fu 刘復, “Xi-Han shidai de rigui” 西漢時代的日晷, Guoxue jikan 國學季刊 3-4 (1932), 573–610, advocates that the instrument was used for measuring time. Li Jiancheng 李堅澄, “Guiyi: Woguo xiancun zui gualu de tianwen yiqi” 暦儀－我國現存最古老的天文儀器, in Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu lunji 中國古代天文文物論集, ed. Zhongguo shenhui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo (Beijing: Wenwu, 1989). 145–53, argues that it was used for determining direction.

with the earth, making the astronomical instrument an embodiment of the cosmos. As the radiating lines form a circle to indicate Heaven, the TLV design stresses the square shape to indicate the earth. It is thus more plausible to conclude that the TLV mirror and the gui instrument were both generated as a result of the Han fascination for the cosmology of round Heaven and square earth, in which the game board appears to have been a widely known metaphor for the earth.

Intrigued by the cosmological implication of the TLV mirror, Hayashi Minao employed the scheme of two cords and four hooks addressed in Huainanzi 淮南子, a book compiled before 139 B.C.E. under the patronage of Liu An 劉安 (?179–122 B.C.E.), to seek more precise cosmic matches of

the TLV mirror (Fig. 26). Scholarly efforts in the past decade have proven that the scheme was indeed widely applied in the Han dynasty, including the design of the shi instrument (Fig. 27), the documents regarding afterbirth (Fig. 28), and the documents regarding punishment (xing 刑).


Fig. 27: Shi instrument. 173 B.C.E. Lacquer, 8 cm. diam. 2 cm. high. Excavated in 1977 from the tomb of Marquis Ruyin in Fuyang, Anhui. Drawings from Wenwu 1978.8, 25

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Fig. 28: Detail of Taichan shu. Early first century B.C.E. Ink on silk. Excavated in 1973 from Tomb No. 3 at Mawangdui, Hunan. Redrawn after Mawangdui Han mu boshu, vol. 4, pl. 2
and virtue (de 德) (Fig. 29). Nevertheless, one can hardly argue for the adoption of the cord-hook scheme in the case of the TLV design. Even if we accept that the Ts are a fragmentary variation of the two crossing cords, how the Ls would fit into the scheme remains unclear. Moreover, as Marc Kalinowski points out, the first liubo board appeared more than two centuries earlier than the most ancient known examples that bear the cord-hook scheme. Instead of debating which originates from which, it is more reasonable to assume that the TLV design and the cord-hook scheme are both meant to express the more general notion of “earthly bonds” (diwei 地維), but likely entail different visual strategies for different purposes. The TLV design is thus a composite metaphor that contains not only the layout of the square earth but also the imagery of the earthly bonds.

The association of the TLV mirror with the cosmos, which points to the fervent wish for longevity, is fully compatible with the aforementioned association with immortals. Both intend to prolong life. Nothing better illustrates this favorable conflation of immortality and longevity than Wang Bao’s 王褒 (?–577) poem, which was composed three centuries later than the Han but still penetrated the auspicious context that had encouraged the production of the TLV mirror.

天地能長久，
神仙壽不窮…
誰能攬六博，
還當訪井公。

Heaven and the earth can last forever, Immortals live without end. . . .
Who can grasp the liubo game? One probably still has to visit Jing Gong.

“Auspicious Mentality”

All considered, the references of the TLV design on mirrors are multiple. When it refers to the TLV diagram used for divination, the design is endowed with the power to prevent misfortune. When it refers to the game played by immortals or the board used to worship Xiwangmu, the design

87. Kalinowski, “The Xingde Texts from Mawangdui,” 143n44.
88. Kalinowski, “The Xingde Texts from Mawangdui,” 144–45. Kalinowski notices an intriguing representation of the game board whose design looks closer to the cord-hook scheme on a glazed tile from Sichuan. Unless future archaeological finds shed new light on this issue, however, we are still unsure of whether this is an exceptional case or whether the TLV design and the cord-hook scheme are indeed interchangeable in some instances.
89. Wang Bao, “Qingju pian” 輕舉篇, in Guo Maoqian, Yuefu shiji, 64.923.
bestows a prospect of immortality. When it refers to the metaphor of the cosmos, the design grants a wish for longevity. The three references—one protecting life and two prolonging life—are anything but conflicting wishes, and can therefore be further considered as a whole standing for auspiciousness. The TLV mirror design may have been intended as an iconic representation of the game board. By representing the game board, however, the TLV design symbolically appropriated the cultural contexts where the game board had been situated, including the practice of divination, the fantasy about immortality, and the metaphorical approach to the cosmos. With the interplay between iconic representation and symbolic appropriation, the TLV mirror not only infers the three roles attached to the game board respectively; it more significantly points to the common wish to protect and prolong life, which interweaves the three roles of the game board into a single matrix. With these manifold connotations, the TLV mirror thus befits a cultural sign that articulates the “auspicious mentality”—the collective attitudes toward auspiciousness and inauspiciousness—in Han China.

In the Han dynasty, the iconic representation of the game board occasionally appeared on artifacts other than mirrors. For example, the TLV design was applied to talismanic money. As Figure 30 shows, the wuzhu五銖 coin, five zhu in weight, bears the TLV design at the back and the additional blessing words on the front, “[May you] escape [from evil] easily and may benefit come to [your] sons and grandsons” tuoshen yi, yi zisun 脫身易, 宜子孫.\(^{90}\) Judging from the inscription, the divinatory connotation of the TLV design is evidently invoked. The TLV design has also been found carved on the base of stone coffins as unearthed at

\(^{90}\) Xu Limin 徐力民, “Lun zongjiao yu woguo gudai de yansheng qian” 論宗教與我國古代的養生錢, Zhongyuan wenwu 中原文物 1988.3, 76–81. The TLV design also appears on the back of a daquan wushi 大泉五十 coin. See Li Zuoxian 李佐賢, Guquan hui 古泉匯 (preface dated 1859, Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1992), 4.2b–3a, (“zhen” 鎮).
Lin’yi in 1984 (Fig. 31) and at Zaozhuang in 1990 (Fig. 32).\textsuperscript{91} The TLV design on coffins could, if associated with the TLV divination, work as a talisman protecting the deceased in the world of the hereafter. Located in a place where the corpse lay, the TLV design may have been expected to help the deceased to reach immortality and longevity in the other world, as the game board was often connected with immortals and the cosmos in the Han mind.\textsuperscript{92} These examples all attest to the similar


\textsuperscript{92} Both Donald Harper and Marc Kalinowski notice the appearance of the cord-hook scheme on the boards lining the bottom of the coffin in several late fourth century B.C.E. Chu tombs. See Donald Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought,” 839; Kalinowski, “The Xingde Texts from Mawangdui,” 141–42. If the TLV design and the cord-hook scheme are to express earthly bonds, then their application to the coffin base may indicate the wish to be assimilated with the
Fig. 32: TLV design at the base of a stone coffin. Late first century B.C.E. Excavated in 1990 at Xiaoxishan in Zaozhuang, Shandong. Drawing from Wenwu 1997.12, 36

...everlasting cosmos. Only, the connotation of the TLV designs seems richer than that of the cord-hook scheme.
interplay of iconic representation and symbolic appropriation from the game board.

It is yet noteworthy that even without the TLV design, the mirror itself can be regarded as a talisman, as the inscription on a mirror discovered in Yangzhou announces (Fig. 33).93

The origin of the [inscription with] seven words has its own record. [I have] smelted copper and tin and removed their dregs. [The mirror] expels the inauspicious, and [it] benefits [your gains from] the market.

How could a bronze mirror possibly ward off the inauspicious? Emperor Xuan of the Han 漢宣帝 (r. 73–49 B.C.E.) was said to wear all the time a precious mirror that could reflect evil spirits and brought good fortune to its owner, and therefore he survived harsh political strife before as-

93. Wang Qinjin 王勤金, Li Jiuhai 李久海 and Xu Liangyu 徐良玉, “Yangzhou chutu de Han dai mingwen tongjing” 揚州出土的漢代銘文銅鏡, Wenwu 1985.10, 90–96, Fig. 22.
The Han has fine copper that comes from Danyang. [I have] smelted it with silver and tin, [producing this] clean and bright [mirror]. [I have] engraved the liubo [board] at the center and [in the shape of] a square. The Dragon on the left and the Tiger on the right rove among the four quarters. The Red Bird and the Dark Warrior conform to the yin and yang forces. Eight sons and nine grandsons govern the center. [May you] long preserve [your] parents, and [may] benefit come to [your] brothers. [This mirror] complies with the four seasons and corresponds to the Five Phases. [It] models after Heaven and the earth, and [it is like] the light of the sun and moon. This clean mirror reflects the spirits, and [its owner] will be a nobleman or a king. All the immortals [engraved on the mirror] are as fine as the essence of jade. [May you have] a thousand autumns and ten thousand years, and [may you have] constant joy without end.

The inscription first guarantees the power of reflection from a carefully...
made mirror. It then promises two decorative motifs that are thought capable of averting the ominous: the game board and the four cardinal guardians (Green Dragon in the east, White Tiger in the west, Red Bird in the south, and Dark Warrior in the north). It further assures that these motifs are in concert with the motion of the cosmos (expressed by the yin-yang forces, the four seasons and the Five Phases), and can thus aid the owner to be assimilated with the perpetual cosmos. It finally relates visual production to personal welfare, pledging everlasting prosperity, glory and happiness.

The iconic representation of the game board amidst these auspicious indicators still maintains its symbolically appropriated connotations that associate with good fortune, immortality, and longevity. The integration with the cardinal guardians, aside from reiterating the efficacy of expelling the evil, only brings out the central position of the game board and makes it as "earth," part of the Five Phases—metal, wood, water, fire, earth—that are rendered as a successive and incessant circuit. The TLV mirror is thus not only the spatial layout of the cosmos in miniature, but further embodies the boundless energy that is generated from the constant motion of the cosmos, and that gives birth to the myriad creatures. Only when it alludes to the origin of life can the TLV mirror relieve the Han anxiety about inauspiciousness, an anxiety that apparently desires both protection and prolongation of life.

It is yet necessary to point out that the TLV mirror reflects only part of the Han concerns toward auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. As Robin Yates argues, the discourse of purity and pollution—likely a more inclusive antithesis than auspiciousness and inauspiciousness—can be found in the realms of music, of sexes, of law and administration, and of warfare in early China. As Mu-chou Poo also attests, Han people's


98. For further discussion of the Five Phases, see Aihe Wang, Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75–128, and for further comments on the interlocking of the yin and yang forces, the four seasons and the Five Phases, see Cheng Te-k’un, "Yin-yang Wu-hsing and Han Art," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 20 (1957), 162–86, reprinted in his Studies in Chinese Art (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983), 117–35; (Lillian) Lan-ying Tseng, "Picturing Heaven," 346–61. In the Yinwan case, two of the cardinal guardians are considered to accord with the yin and yang forces. The four cardinal guardians as a whole are also comparable to the four seasons. The four cardinal guardians with the game board at the center further signal the Five Phases.

major religious activities concern issues pertaining to the life cycle (e.g., birth, marriage, sickness and death) and everyday life (e.g., food, clothing, living environments, and travel). The inquiries on the TLV divination confirm the observations made by both Yates and Poo, including "marriage" and "disease" in the category of life cycle, "excursions" in the category of everyday life, and "imprisonment" and "abscondence" in the realm of law and administration. The connotations of the TLV mirror, however, focus more on the auspiciousness of the life cycle, expressing the wish to make the best of marriage (producing offspring and securing succession), and to go beyond the threat of death (assimilating oneself with immortals and integrating oneself into the cycle of the universe).

Epilogue: Decorative Art and Cultural Sign

Scholars of Chinese decorative arts in the past have heatedly debated over two very fundamental questions: First, can decoration possess meaning? And the second, does decorative form develop evolutionarily from the simple to the complicated? For the first question, my study of the TLV mirror demonstrates that decoration can indeed possess meaning. Only it works not iconographically but semiotically. The TLV design may denote the game board according to the self-explanatory examples. Nevertheless, what distinguishes the TLV design in cultural history is that it connotes something other than the game board, such as longevity, immortality and good fortune.

For the second question, my study of the TLV mirror also provides a different perspective. The earliest TLV mirror with a precise date found so far was excavated at Mancheng 滿城 in Hebei from the tomb of Dou Wan 臧緯, consort of Prince Jing of the Zhongshan state 中山靖王, who

was believed buried before 104 B.C.E.104 This mirror shows a TLV design put on top of an interlaced dragon pattern, a pattern already in fashion no later than the third century B.C.E. (Figs. 34, 35).105 The TLV design as a new element is apparently superimposed upon the given pattern without any adjustment, which marks the early stage of appropriating the TLV design in mirror-making. Other mirrors with the leaf pattern likely cast during the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 B.C.E.) also testify to the superimposition of the TLV design (Figs. 36, 37).106

In the subsequent stage, the TLV design on mirrors was no longer super-imposed upon but blended with other decorative elements while retaining its dominant position. The mirror discovered in a Han tomb dated to the late first century B.C.E. serves as an excellent example.107 Stretching without being pressed, the interlaced dragons on the mirror are rendered along, rather than beneath, the TLV design (Fig. 38). The Yinwan mirror made in the early first century C.E. displays a similar feature.108 However intricate they may be, the animals and immortals on the mirror are all assembled in the blank spaces among the TLV marks (Fig. 5). The TLV design, overlaid on the given pattern in the previous stage, becomes the given with which others accord. The change indicates that having undergone conceptual superimposition, Han artisans attained to a more harmonious visualization of “Engrave the liubo [board] at the center and [in the shape of] a square.”

In the course of re-arranging decorative elements to complement the TLV design, Han artisans also exhibited an interest in excessive embellishment. On the one hand, as seen on a mirror unearthed from an early


105. Higuchi Takayasu 樋口隆康, *Kokyō* 古鏡 (Tokyo: Shinchūyōsha, 1979), 64–67. Most of the mirrors with the interlaced dragon design were unearthed from Chu tombs dated to the middle and late phases of the Warring States period. Fig. 34 shows the mirror excavated from Tomb No. 11 (d. 217 B.C.E.) at Shuihudi in Yunmeng, Hubei. See Yunmeng Shuhiudi Qin mu bianxie zu, *Yunmeng Shuhiudi Qin mu*, 45–46, Fig. 63.


107. Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館, “Changsha Shumuling Zhanguo mu Amiling Xi-Han mu” 長沙樹木嶺戰國墓阿彌嶺西漢墓, *Kao gu* 1984.9, 790–97. The mirror was found at Amiling in Tomb No. 7, which, comparable to Tomb No. 401 at Yangjiashan, was dated to late Western Han.

108. As mentioned in n.18, the date of Tomb No. 4 at Yinwan is based on the unearthed coins of daquan wushi 大泉五十, which were mainly circulated under the reign of Wang Mang and might have still been in use early in the reign of Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57 C.E.).
Fig. 34: Mirror with the interlaced dragon design. Late second century B.C.E. Bronze, 15 cm. diam. Excavated in 1975 from Tomb No. 11 (d. 217 B.C.E.) at Shuihudi in Yunmeng, Hubei. Rubbing from *Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu*, Fig. 63

Fig. 35: TLV mirror. Late second century B.C.E. Bronze, 18.4 cm. diam. Excavated in 1968 from Tomb No. 2 (d. 104 B.C.E.) at Mancheng, Hebei. Rubbing from *Mancheng Han mu feijue baogao*, Fig. 178
Fig. 36: Mirror with the leaf design. Mid-second to early first centuries b.c.e. Bronze, 13.8 cm. diam. Excavated in 1992 from Tomb No. 25 at Gaotai in Jingzhou, Hubei. Rubbing from Jingzhou Gaotai Qin Han mu, 110.

Fig. 37: TLV mirror. Mid-second to early first centuries b.c.e. Bronze, 13.7 cm. diam. Excavated in 1992 from Tomb No. 28 at Gaotai in Jingzhou, Hubei. Rubbing from Jingzhou Gaotai Qin Han mu, 110.
first century tomb in Luoyang, the regularity of the TLV design seems to be strengthened by a double square in accordance with the square center (Fig. 39).\textsuperscript{109} The extra double square, however, creates four rectangular spaces that allow more trivial lozenges. These geometrical elaborations compete with the TLV design and inevitably reduce its visual prominence. On the other hand, the regularity of the TLV design is challenged by an added concentric circle that complies with the round rim, as shown on a mirror unearthed from another early first century tomb in Luoyang (Fig. 40).\textsuperscript{110} The contradictory circularity is further cemented by the ambiguity of “mirror within mirror,” as the concentric circle decorated with a saw-toothed border appears to mimic the outer rim of the mirror. Such ambiguity undoubtedly confuses the visual integrity of the TLV design. Diminished by the new details and overall structure, the TLV design yields its dominant position either to the squaring that agrees with the center of the mirror, or to the circling that echoes the rim.

The TLV design began to lose its totality about the time when ostentation cost its visual dominance. As if to give more space to the juxtaposed animals, for instance, the Ls are removed from the TLV design on a mirror discovered in an early first century tomb in Yangzhou (Fig. 41).\textsuperscript{111} More mirrors with the incomplete TLV design were produced in the Eastern Han, such as those unearthed from the tombs whose date falls in the first half of the second century in Zixing, Hunan.\textsuperscript{112} While the Vs and the vertical stems of the Ts disappear on one mirror, the Ls and Vs are all gone on another (Figs. 42, 43).

The ornamentation of the TLV mirror evidently does not follow a linear evolutionary path from the primitive and simple to the refined and complicated. Rather, the archaeological finds show three stages of formal development, with superimposition leading the first, accommodation defining the second, and ostentation as well as fragmentation coexisting in the third.\textsuperscript{113} What these mirrors illustrate is not the life of

\textsuperscript{109} The mirror was unearthed from Tomb No. 60 at Shaogou in Luoyang, Henan. It was in the company of twenty-one daquan wushi coins, and was thus dated to the reign of Wang Mang or shortly after. See Luoyang qu kaogu fazue dui 洛陽考古发掘隊, \textit{Luoyang Shaogou Han mu} 洛陽燒溝漢墓 (Beijing: Kexue, 1959), 167–68, 234.

\textsuperscript{110} Luoyang chutu tongjing 洛陽出土銅鏡, ed. Luoyang bowuguan 洛陽博物館 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1988), 5–6, Fig. 30. The mirror, dated to the reign of Wang Mang, was unearthed from Tomb No. 123 at Tieluizhanxian 鐵路站線 in Luoyang, Henan.

\textsuperscript{111} Yangzhou bowuguan, “Yangzhou shijiao faxian liangzuo Xin-Mang shiqi mu,” 987–93. The mirror was found with fifty-four daquan wushi coins in Tomb No. 5, and was thus dated to the reign of Wang Mang.

\textsuperscript{112} Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館, “Hunan Zixing Dong-Han mu” 湖南資興東漢墓, Kaogu xuebao 1984.1, 53–120. Both mirrors were unearthed from the tombs dated to the middle phase of the Eastern Han.

\textsuperscript{113} The superimposed TLV mirror ends in the first stage, but the accommodated TLV mirror continues to the third stage.
Fig. 38: TLV mirror. Late first century B.C.E. Bronze, 13.5 cm. diam. Unearthed in 1974 from Tomb No. 7 at Amiling in Changsha, Hunan. Rubbing from *Kaogu* 1984.9, 795, Fig. 9–1.

Fig. 39: TLV mirror. Early first century C.E. Bronze, 10 cm. diam. Unearthed in 1952 from Tomb No. 60 at Shaogou in Luoyang, Henan. Rubbing from *Luoyang Shaogou Han mu*, 167, Fig. 74–3.
Fig. 40: TLV mirror. Early first century C.E. Bronze, 16 cm. diam. Unearthed from Tomb No. 123 at Tieluzhanxian in Luoyang, Henan. Rubbing from *Luoyang chutu tongjing*, Fig. 30.

Fig. 41: TLV mirror. Early first century C.E. Bronze, 10 cm. diam. Unearthed in 1984 from Tomb No. 5 in Yangzhou, Jiangsu. Rubbing from *Kaogu* 1986:11, 987, Fig. 2.
Fig. 42: TLV mirror. First half of the second century C.E. Bronze, 12.6 cm. diam. Excavated in 1978 from Tomb No. 282 in Zixing, Hunan. Rubbing from *Kaogu xuebao* 1 (1984), 96, Fig. 42–6.

Fig. 43: TLV mirror. First half of the second century C.E. Bronze, 10 cm. diam. Excavated in 1978 from Tomb No. 523 in Zixing, Hunan. Rubbing from *Kaogu xuebao* 1 (1984), 98, Fig. 43–4.
form, but the life of a cultural sign. The TLV design must have ceased to be the (or the only) favorable sign to stand for immortality, longevity and good fortune some time in the early first century, which inexorably resulted in either ostentation or fragmentation of the TLV mirror. The emergence of the fragmentary TLV mirror is particularly telling. When the TLV design could be decomposed for the sake of decoration, whether it denoted a game board was no longer the main concern, regardless of the manifold connotations that had been attached to this sign.