

## **Chinese Pictorial Board Game Prints**

In antiquity people in China played many board games using set patterns for the players to follow, but apparently these did not include pictorial images. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, pictorial game board prints for games involving throwing dice were popular. A wide range of pictorial themes were portrayed in these game board prints. Some thirty-three different pictorial board game prints are known today. Twelve of them are analysed here. Images are arranged in a squared spiral, a spiral, or a wavy spiral; the motifs are usually placed in the intersection between two lines. Based on the throw of the dice, each player sought to move along each image to ultimately obtain the happiness pictured in the central panel, such as longevity or wealth. The Eight Immortals and the Twelve Animals of the Zodiac were frequent motifs. In addition, many pictorial game board prints with stated themes also include secondary auspicious motifs conveying wishes for longevity and wealth. There are also representations of everyday objects, along with labels, and illustrations to novels. A significant local preference is found in game board prints produced in North China which differ substantially from those printed elsewhere in the country.