

The Image of Baduk in the West

Marketing Baduk to the public in the United Kingdom

1. Introduction

There are many Baduk enthusiasts in Western countries. In the UK, for example, there are around 70 clubs for the game, and there are tournaments taking place most weekends during the year.

However, Baduk remains much less popular here than many other competitive board games such as Chess, Backgammon and Scrabble. And it does not come anywhere close to the popularity it has in the East Asian countries where it has traditionally been played. Moreover, in recent times the popularity of Baduk in many Western countries has stagnated. In the UK there has been no great growth in the game since the 1970s when the British Go Association had over 1000 members.

Some have suggested that the reason Baduk has not managed to attract more enthusiasts is due to the image that people have of the game. The purpose of this paper is to look at what image Baduk has in the UK and in the West generally, and to see whether this image is holding back the development of the game. We will also draw some comparisons with other mind sports.

Section 2 contains a statement of the perceived problem with some anecdotal reports of attitudes to Baduk. **Section 3** looks at the image of Baduk in more detail by presenting a large-scale analysis of views on Baduk taken from the thousands of reviews and comments on the BoardGameGeek website. **Section 4** summarises the findings on perceptions of Baduk in the West. **Section 5** makes a comparison with the changing image of Chess in the UK. **Section 6** looks at some of the features of current Baduk organisation and publicity in the UK, and **Section 7** makes some suggestions for future action.

Appendix A gives information about the author. **Appendix B** has some success stories of club or tournament formats that have worked well in the UK.

2. The Image of Baduk in the UK

Many approaches have been used in promoting Baduk in the United Kingdom. Sometimes enthusiasts have stressed the antiquity of the game, its relatively exotic nature, the challenge it presents, or the fact that it cannot be played by computers.

A recurring theme is that Baduk is often presented as a game which will reward the effort of studying it, and the main marketing leaflet used by the British Go Association describes Baduk as “The most challenging game in the world”.

Over a period of time the author of this paper noticed over some reasons that people gave for not being interested in Baduk. Some of his observations were:

- ? When teaching Baduk to children who play Chess, most children are interested in Baduk and enjoy it. But those who do not most usually say that they are not interested because they don't think they can be good at playing the game.
- ? At the Mind Sports Olympiads held in London many people seem keen to try different games they have not played before. However, it seems that not so many people want to try out Baduk. When asked why, a common response is that it is known to be a very difficult game.
- ? A successful games company whom we approached said that they felt Baduk would never be popular in the UK unless it could change its very serious image.
- ? Some people visiting a local school to give demonstrations of scientific experiments commented that they didn't play Baduk because it was difficult and was too much hard work to learn.

- ? Beginners at Baduk often comment that at clubs and tournaments in the UK there only seem to be players much stronger than them.
- ? A mind sports equipment supplier who was asked to suggest suitable games for schools in the Middle East remarked that he recommended Othello, but not Baduk because he thought it was too difficult to teach.

All this seems to add up to an image of Baduk as a game which is difficult, takes a lot of time and effort, and is perhaps somewhat elitist and only for very clever people. Perhaps the game is not often seen as providing a lot of fun or enjoyment.

Coupled with this there is the fact that many Baduk tournaments and clubs in the UK seem “top heavy” in that they have a relatively large number of strong and experienced players but few novices. It almost seems as if new players inevitably have to improve quickly to reach a certain standard or else give up. Also, there are relatively few junior players, and few clubs or tournaments where juniors can play other young players.

In order to get some more clear evidence we decided to try to find somewhere where we could look more systematically at the opinions of a large number of people about Baduk.

3. Opinions of Baduk at BoardGameGeek

BoardGameGeek is a website about board games which has been established for many years. It contains information about a huge range of board games, both traditional and modern. There are many reviews and ratings of games by users of the website. Baduk is one of the highest rated games on the site.

We decided that this website would be a very useful place to look at opinions of Baduk. Firstly, the users are people interested in board games, so they represent the sort of people most likely to be

interested in playing Baduk. But also they are people who are keen on all sorts of games, from role playing to word games to wargames, so they are not all natural enthusiasts for traditional abstract two-player games and are likely to give an interesting variety of responses.

The BoardGameGeek website contains a huge amount of data, with about 3,000 people giving Baduk a rating from 1 to 10 and over 1,000 giving their comments on why they do or do not like the game. Baduk currently rates 29th most popular among the huge number of games featured, despite the fact that the majority of the BoardGameGeek community prefer themed games.

We set out to summarise these comments in order to determine what people like and dislike about the game and what they see as its main features.

First we looked at the opinions of people who gave the game a low rating. These were people who gave the game a rating of 6 or less, or else who gave the game no rating but expressed a negative comment.

These were the most common negative comments they made:

- ? The game takes too much study/dedication to play (58)
- ? I am terrible at this game (36)
- ? The game is too abstract (36)
- ? I can't understand the rules/scoring (24)
- ? The game is too complex/difficult for me (24)
- ? This is not the sort of game I usually like (22)
- ? I can't find people to play with (17)
- ? I prefer Chess (14)
- ? I find the game boring (13)
- ? The game is not enough fun (12)
- ? It takes too long to play (9)
- ? It is not possible to play casually, in the family etc. (8)

The most common positive comments made by the people who gave Baduk a low rating were:

- ? It is a beautiful/elegant game (25)
- ? It is a classic/timeless/historic game (21)
- ? It is very deep strategically (20)
- ? The rules are simple (17)
- ? The playing equipment is very nice (7)
- ? The handicapping system is good (3)
- ? It is better than chess (3)

Next we looked at the opinions of people who had been most positive in their scoring of Baduk. We looked at all the people who had given the game a rating of 10 out of 10.

The most common positive comments made by these people were as follows (excluding the many comments which just described Baduk as “perfect” or “the best”):

- ? It is very deep strategically (85)
- ? The rules are simple (72)
- ? It is a beautiful/elegant game (68)
- ? It is better than Chess (27)
- ? It is a classic/timeless/historic game (23)
- ? The handicapping system is good (11)
- ? The playing equipment is very nice (10)
- ? It is rewarding (7)
- ? You can play on different board sizes (6)

It is notable that all the top seven reasons above are the same most popular positive comments made by people who were not so generally positive about Baduk.

The other thing that was striking about the comments of people who gave the game a high score was the huge diversity of things

people like about Baduk. Some of the more unusual comments included:

- ? A very sensual, tactile game
- ? The only game I have played in dreams
- ? Brain tingling / mind blowing
- ? A meditative, philosophical game
- ? The only game you can imagine being played on other planets
- ? An analogy for life
- ? A game that reflects your personality
- ? Martial arts on a board
- ? More like art or poetry than just a game
- ? An adrenalin rush
- ? Warm, human and organic
- ? Awe-inspiring / majestic

The few negative comments made by people who gave Baduk a high rating reflect those of people who did not like the game:

- ? I am terrible at this game (29)
- ? I can't find people to play with (20)
- ? The game takes too much study/dedication to play (9)

As the biggest negative comment about Baduk appears to be that it takes too much dedication to play the game to a level that is enjoyable, we thought it would be interesting to see whether similar comments were made about other games which can be hard to play at a high level. As examples we looked at Bridge, Chess and Scrabble.

Bridge can be notoriously difficult to learn, and a friend of the author commented that she had been on an evening class to learn to play and it was several weeks before the class actually got to the stage of playing the game. However, the negative comments about Bridge at BoardGameGeek focus on the initial problems of learning complicated rules and conventions rather than the problem of improving to a high standard.

Competitive Scrabble has been described in the book *Word Freak* and is shown as an activity where a high level of dedication is required to excel. In the book, players are described as learning many thousands of words without learning their meaning; and also learning the same words with their letters rearranged in alphabetical order in order to facilitate finding anagrams. However, in the BoardGameGeek database the main negative comments about Scrabble were from people who did not enjoy word games generally or who disliked (or felt they were not good at) spelling. *Word Freak* actually featured in some of the positive comments as being an inspiring introduction to the game.

In the case of Chess many of the negative comments on BoardGameGeek described the game as not being social enough and relying too much on rote learning (especially of openings).

4. Summary of Findings

Taking the evidence from the BoardGameGeek site together with anecdotal evidence about the image of Baduk, we would summarise the situation as follows:

- ? The biggest problem in the perception of Baduk appears to be not that it is inherently difficult or even that it is hard to play well, but that people think that in order to enjoy the game you have to be dedicated and play it at a high level. This perception does not appear to be shared for other games such as Chess, Bridge and Scrabble which may be difficult to play well but are often seen as games which can be played casually and enjoyed at many levels.
- ? People are often put off the game because they feel they are bad at it (although of course this is a relative thing).
- ? Some people find it hard to understand the rules and scoring.
- ? Many people have trouble finding opponents.
- ? Some people think Baduk takes too long to play.

- ? Baduk's biggest assets are its beauty/elegance and the contrast between the simplicity of the rules and the strategic depth of the play. People's responses to the depth and beauty of the game are very varied and interesting.
- ? Many people find Baduk and Baduk equipment visually appealing.
- ? Many people find the long history and culture of Baduk interesting.
- ? Being able to play with handicaps and on different sized boards is appealing.
- ? Other comparable games are often criticised for requiring rote learning, while Baduk is praised for offering more scope to individual style and intuition.

Also it is clear from comments about strategy games generally that people are more attracted to them if they feel they involve some social interaction rather than being played in a dry, silent atmosphere.

5. The Changing Image of Chess in the UK

It is interesting to make a comparison with the image of Chess in the UK. In the 1970s and 1980s, even though there was a revival of interest in Chess due to the Fischer-Spassky match in the early 1970s, the game did appear to have an image problem. It was often portrayed as a game played by old men, and images of children or women playing were few and far between.

Children's Chess in the UK has since undergone a huge and successful surge in popularity. Many older children are now much more likely to regard Chess as a game that younger children play, rather than as a game for the older generations.

The main driving force behind the change has been the UK Chess Challenge, which is perhaps the largest and most successful chess competition in the world. This annual tournament regularly

attracts over 2,000 schools and over 70,000 individual children to take part.

The promotional material for the UK Chess Challenge has many recurring themes:

- ? The educational advantages of the game are stressed repeatedly, in order to appeal to teachers and parents.
- ? There are many images of both boys and girls, of all ages, playing the game. The competition is structured so the boys qualifying for the later stages do not greatly outnumber the girls.
- ? Chess is described as cool, fun and exciting; it is not described as difficult.

There could be much to learn from this in terms of reshaping the image of Baduk.

6. Current organisation/promotion of Baduk in the UK

In the UK we need to have a broader base of players if we are to have more strong players at the top. But we start from a position where we don't have a large critical mass of existing players, and we don't have a big pool of casual players or even people who know the rules.

It seems clear to the author that promoting Baduk as a difficult and challenging game is always going to limit its appeal. Many already think that it is a game not worth playing unless you are prepared to put in a lot of effort and learn to play at a relatively high level. This is definitely contradicted by the experience of the author who learned to play Baduk as a child and played many happy games with his friend at primary school when they knew little more than the rules.

Even among those who don't set out to portray Baduk as a difficult game there are ways that this message is inadvertently given out:

- ? The rating system used in Europe starts at 20-kyu, giving the feeling that anyone who has not yet reached that level is too weak to be considered a player at all.
- ? Players around the 10-kyu or 15-kyu level are sometimes described as "beginners", even though they may have been playing for some time.
- ? Many tournament formats are not so friendly for beginning players and juniors; for example, tournaments where there are just three 19x19 games of Baduk in one day.

In general there seems to be a lot more emphasis on continuing to learn and moving to a higher level than there is on enjoying the game and its social aspects.

Many of the positive aspects of Baduk are underused in promoting it. For example, the handicap system means that Baduk is an excellent game for families and for school clubs, as everyone can compete on equal terms.

Despite this, many things are already being done well to promote Baduk:

- ? Images of children and young people playing are used in promotional leaflets.
- ? Images and references to art, culture and the history of Baduk are heavily used.
- ? Cartoon rules devised in Europe have been used to introduce the game more simply, and rules with pass stones have been adopted to simplify the end of the game for beginners.
- ? Different types of tournaments and clubs have started to appear. There are more small board tournaments, including the UK Go

- Challenge for schools and the popular Cambridge Sonoyama tournament which has a very successful handicapping system.
- ? A junior mind sports club in Cambridge has shown a successful way of getting more junior players into the game.

And most importantly of all, 5,000 beginners in the UK are being introduced to Go every year by Peter and Sheila Wendes, who have set up a self-supporting business introducing Go at schools, museums, festivals, etc. More information about their work is at their website, <http://www.zenmachine.co.uk>

7. The future and possible changes

In terms of improving things for the future, we suggest that the following is needed (Some of these suggestions centre on trying to make a change in perception of what is considered a good/reasonable player and at what level Baduk can be enjoyable to play):

- ? Some research/testing should be carried out on simple versions of the rules to ensure that we have the best possible easy description which can be used by beginners with no extra help. The current cartoon version of the rules used in the UK and Europe could serve as a starting point.
- ? Research needs to be collated or carried out to establish the educational and health benefits of Baduk, as this would greatly help in promoting Baduk to schools and to the UK government.
- ? Baduk promotional material should stress the elegance, beauty, creativity and depth of Baduk and the simplicity of the rules rather than the difficult and challenging nature of the game. They should emphasise that by using small boards and handicaps Baduk can be a fast-paced and fun game which families or clubs can enjoy, as everyone can play on equal terms.
- ? More tournaments are needed which weaker players feel able to attend. These could include more small board handicap events.

- ? The availability of more junior mind sports clubs would help to promote Baduk

Annex A: About the author

Paul Smith was born in North Shields in 1962. He was educated at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and at Queens' College, Cambridge where he was awarded an MA in Mathematics. He currently works as a computer developer for the Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust.

His areas of experience in the field of mind sports are:

- ? Organising mind sports clubs, events and tournaments
- ? Holding senior positions in the British Go Association
- ? Teaching mind sports to juniors and adults
- ? Writing mind sports articles online and for journals, and producing teaching materials
- ? Playing mind sports competitively

Organising mind sports competitively

- ? Founded the games festival MSO Cambridge and was the main organiser for the first four years. The festival has featured over 30 mind sports and has attracted over 600 competitors in some years. It is still going strong.
- ? Founded the UK Go Challenge for schools and ran it in its first year when 23 schools took part. The Go Challenge is still running today.
- ? Founded the Cambridge Junior Chess & Go Club which is still running after 14 years and has produced many strong junior Chess & Go players. Ran the club congress for many years and produced a club newsletter.
- ? Founded the Cambridge Youth Go project and in the first two years raised more than £1000 funding to promote youth Go in the region.

- ? Founded the Cambridge Go Tournament Novices section, the most successful tournament in the country for novice level players
- ? Ran the British Small Board Go Championships for several years.
- ? Founded three school Go clubs in Cambridge, all still going.

Positions held at various times in the British Go Association

- ? Youth Development Officer
- ? Regional Representative for East Anglia
- ? Youth Regional Representative for East Anglia
- ? Mind Sports Council Representative – Still in post and has taken a leading role in getting the UK Mind Sports Council set up.

Teaching mind sports to juniors and adults

- ? Many school visits to teach juniors to play Go
- ? Teaching Go to beginners at various events and exhibitions
- ? Teaching Go to beginners at the Mind Sports Olympiad
- ? Teaching Chess, Othello and Oware at the Cambridge Junior Chess & Go Club
- ? Teaching Chinese Chess at four exhibitions at the British Museum.

Writing mind sports articles and teaching materials

- ? Spent two years as professional Web writer for the Mind Sports Olympiad, writing articles about various traditional and modern board games
- ? Author of various articles for the British Go Journal and for the British Othello Federation newsletter.
- ? Produced a collection of Go puzzles suitable for beginners up to 10-kyu, which are currently being used by British Go Association in their scheme of certificates for junior players

- ? Produced documentation for the UK Go Challenge, including an easy version of the rules of Go.

Competitive experience of mind sports and mathematical puzzles:

- ? Represented the UK in the International Mathematical Olympiad in 1981
- ? Together with Nick Wyke, won the Cambridge Archimedeans Problems Drive in 1984
- ? Medals at MSO for Mathematical Puzzles and IQ Puzzles
- ? Played chess for school, college (board 1 for Queens' College, Cambridge) and county
- ? Played board two for school in finals of Sunday Times competition in 1978
- ? Graded 2-dan at Go
- ? Placed third in British Open Go Tournament in 1996
- ? Played board two in UK Go Team in European Team Championships
- ? Twice placed fourth in British Othello Championships
- ? Silver medal for Shogi at Mind Sports Olympiad
- ? Placed in top 10 in UK Chinese Chess Championship
- ? Winner of Oware British Open Championship and for many years top rated player in the UK
- ? Reached the final 10 of the national Sudoku tournament organised by the Independent newspaper.

Annex B: Some Success Stories

(B.1) Cambridge Junior Chess & Go Club

This is a report on the Cambridge Junior Chess & Go Club in Cambridge written by the club organisers. The club has been very successful in getting juniors involved in playing Go.

A successful junior Chess and Go club in Cambridge has been running now for 14 years. When we started it, we wanted to have

a club where juniors could play Go and we thought that if we also played Chess and occasionally other games at the club then it would attract a lot more children to join. This has indeed been the case; we have regularly had around 40-50 members at the start of the school year, and an attendance of around 30 each week carrying on throughout the year. Almost all the children who come to the club have not heard of Go when they first arrive but are soon playing enthusiastically.

We started our club as a joint venture with our local adult Chess club. This seems to work very well. After a while we set up a committee to run the club with representatives from the Chess club, Go club and parents.

We have tried meeting in a church hall and in a school classroom. Both of these worked well. One key issue is having plenty of parking. It is important to meet at a time convenient for organisers and not too late for most children. An important issue is how much to charge per session so as not to put people off but to cover costs.

In terms of equipment, we started off by borrowing sets but later we had enough funds to buy our own cheap sets.

We make sure that people who actively organise the meetings are CRB (police) checked. This is organised through the local council and as long as people are checked as volunteers it is cheap and only needs to be done once.

The main form of advertising that works well for the club is to deliver leaflets to schools each September. We get thousands of A5 size flyers photocopied and deliver them to school offices. Experience shows that if we deliver a certain number of leaflets, we can expect 0.5% to 1% of that number to actually try out the club.

We have found that it is best to advertise to children aged 7-11, in a school that does not have its own Chess club. Children have been known to travel some distance to come to the club, so we have advertised to around 30 schools in and around the area, not just to the nearest ones.

We have found it useful to get listed on any local registers of clubs and children's activities. And it is good to take leaflets to local junior chess events.

We have occasionally held special events to advertise the club, including a stall in the local library, in a bookshop and in a shopping centre. We also try to get local radio/newspaper coverage if any of our members wins anything impressive.

We keep in touch with existing members by sending out a regular email newsflash.

At ordinary meetings the children mostly play games. We put out several Chess and Go sets and a couple of sets for Othello and Oware. We generally have a few drinks and snacks for sale at the club too.

We have usually had a rota of Go players to help at the club, although it is very helpful to have a couple of people who are keen and come fairly regularly as then they get to know the children.

Often we have a short talk on Chess or Go at the start of the meeting. It is important that it doesn't last long and that it isn't too complicated. Anything which is interactive works best, and it often works out well to hand out some puzzles (especially if there is a prize for solving them!). We use one of these short talks to introduce Go in the autumn term to new members.

Twice a year we have a club Chess competition and a club Go competition. We have a shield which the winner keeps for six

months. We generally have other small prizes such as book tokens or small boxes of sweets. We run heats of the UK Chess Challenge and UK Go Challenge which are both popular.

Stronger players play handicap games against the juniors so juniors can see their progress; and it is possible to give kyu diplomas on the basis of this. Another approach we have tried is to use the BGA Certificate series of puzzles.

If we have a lot of new members in the autumn term we teach them Go as a group. We describe the basic rules and get them to try out atari Go. Generally they almost discover real Go themselves by carrying on games of atari Go once pieces have been captured. We tell them how to count up soon though, not later than the second meeting at which they play.

If we get small numbers of children starting later in the year we have to teach them one to one. If they come with a friend who can already play, it often works fine for their friend to teach them.

We believe it is important to give lots of praise for good moves, and not to make too many criticisms. We try not to teach children too many things at once. Children will often learn something better and more happily from an informal discussion after a game rather than from formal teaching.

Each year we run a congress. This has various Chess sections by age and sometimes a section for adults too; and a 13x13 Go competition. One good feature of this is that we can run a Go teaching stall and continuous 9x9 tournament that the junior chess players can take part in between rounds. This generally works very well and we have sometimes had over 40 juniors playing in it. This event is also a good place to meet teachers which has resulted in some school Go clubs getting set up.

We have started Go clubs in five local schools now, and we have made visits to four others. These contacts have generally come either from parents whose children have come to the Chess & Go club or from Chess teachers we have met at our annual congress and/or the local Chess Megafinal.

(B.2) The UK Go Challenge for Schools

Here is some information about the UK Go Challenge for schools.

The UK Go Challenge for schools was established in 2004. Like the very successful UK Chess Challenge, this is a tournament where schools can run their own heats and successful players can qualify for finals where they play against competitors from other schools.

The first stage of the tournament takes place each spring. Heats are played in all participating schools. These are normally played once a week, either during lunch break or in an after-school or evening session. Five rounds of Go on a medium size board (13x13) are played, during which time the children will win various small prizes, for example bookmarks or fridge magnets.

The rules of the tournament have been kept simple so that a teacher who has just learnt Go can run it. Help is available by phone, email and on the website. We also arrange for visits by Go volunteers or expert Go teachers to any school or club that is just getting started. Go equipment is available at a special price for schools.

Any schools which want to find out more about Go first before entering the Go Challenge can order an evaluation pack which includes a Go set and rules.

The UK Go Challenge for schools has helped to increase Go-playing in schools in the UK. In the first year, 23 schools took part, over half of them completely new to Go. Several hundred children

take part in the tournament every year, with around 40 or 50 of the best attending the national finals.

(B.3) The Cambridge Sonoyama Tournament

This is a report on the popular small board handicap tournament run by the Cambridge Go club.

Back in 1991, Cambridge Go Club received a phone call to say that a Hitachi vice-president, Dr Sonoyama, was due to visit Cambridge soon and wanted to find some local Go players during his visit because he was a very keen player.

What followed was that four members of Cambridge Go Club were invited to a Japanese meal in one of the Cambridge colleges, followed by some games of Go. Dr Sonoyama presented us with a trophy which he suggested that we should use for some club competition.

We wanted to have a competition that we could run regularly and that would appeal to everyone in the club from dan players down to beginners. And we wanted something that could be run in just a few hours, so that people who were busy would have some chance of fitting it into their schedule.

What we came up with was a 13x13 handicap tournament, to be run at the end of every University term. The first one was held during a weekend, with 10 players, but we decided after that it would be better to hold it on an ordinary club night. The handicap system we started off with was adjusted after the first three years or so to try to even things up between the stronger and weaker players. The new version of the handicap system now seems to work extremely well, with players of all different strengths having a chance to win.

The tournament has now been run 50 times and is still going strong. Numbers playing have varied from the initial 10 to more than 30 players in recent times.

The tournament is played with a time limit of ten minutes sudden death and there are six rounds. There is free placement of handicap stones, and the handicap system is as follows:

| Grade Diff. | Handicap | Komi | | Grade Dif. | Handicap | Komi |
|-------------|----------|------|--|------------|----------|------|
| 0 | 1 | 6 | | 15 | 7 | 6 |
| 1 | 1 | 2 | | 16 | 7 | 2 |
| 2 | 2 | 8 | | 17 | 8 | 8 |
| 3 | 2 | 4 | | 18 | 8 | 4 |
| 4 | 2 | 0 | | 19 | 8 | 0 |
| 5 | 3 | 6 | | 20 | 9 | 6 |
| 6 | 3 | 2 | | 21 | 9 | 2 |
| 7 | 4 | 8 | | 22 | 10 | 8 |
| 8 | 4 | 4 | | 23 | 10 | 4 |
| 9 | 4 | 0 | | 24 | 10 | 0 |
| 10 | 5 | 6 | | 25 | 11 | 6 |
| 11 | 5 | 2 | | 26 | 11 | 2 |
| 12 | 6 | 8 | | 27 | 12 | 8 |
| 13 | 6 | 4 | | 28 | 12 | 4 |
| 14 | 6 | 0 | | 29 | 12 | 0 |

The youngest winners of the tournament were Tom Eckersley-Waites in the 17th tournament and William Brooks in the 22nd one. Both were only 10 years old at the time of their victory.

In conclusion, the tournament seems to have been a great success in establishing a format that experienced and novice players at the club can enjoy together, and it has attracted junior players to take part too.