



New Evidence Found: Table Tennis in China in 1901!

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China is in the news, not surprising after yet another clean sweep at the recent World Championships in Zagreb. But this news is 106 years old!

This picture postcard was sent by registered mail on 25 January 1902, from Tientsin (now Tianjin, sight of the 1995 World Championships), to Belgium. The card might otherwise be overlooked were it not for the handwritten message in French, translated as follows:

"Around here we play in every European home a sort of parlor tennis game that is very enjoyable. It consists of a net that is placed on a large table, two rackets made of drum leather, and celluloid balls and is played as on a field, the table being the limits of the game. Players play at the table's ends. This game is extremely popular here ..."

Note the German postage stamps, overprinted **China**. There were many western settlements next to the old city, and mail posted from within those settlements used stamps from that country.

By estimating the time for the sender's long journey to Tientsin, and some time for the new game to catch on and become so 'extremely popular', we can safely conclude that the game arrived in China in

1901. This was shortly after the so-called Boxer Rebellion, an uprising against western influences, was settled by a Protocol.

Previously we did not have evidence of how and when the game arrived in China, only speculation. This wonderful card, showing a Chinese doctor with elongated fingernails and smoking what appears to be an opium pipe, is hard evidence of the new game sensation all the rage in Europe having found its way to China. Little did they know back then that a mega dynasty would occur in China a hundred years later!

The second illustration was presented to me at the 2005 World Championships in Shanghai., said to be from a book, "100 Beautiful Women Painting" in 1902. A loose translation of the old Chinese text:

"At the dinner party you bring in the Spring breeze, Silk divider separates in the middle, suddenly it seems far. Home-made, poplar-wood paddle is like a light fan, Playfully swings the shooting star, it spins and floats." signed Dan Fu, and the artist, Bai Cheng.

Can anyone confirm the origins of this illustration and poem? The scene seems to have a rather western flavor.



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