

Feilong (Flying Dragon) The China Game

Reviewed by Patricia Burleson

The board game *Feilong: The China Game*, a unique tool for learning and/or reinforcing learning about China, requires only a beginning knowledge of Chinese history and culture, but extends to challenge even the well informed. Players roll dice, answer questions from game cards, and move along the game board competing to be the first to land on a predetermined set of spaces. Eight playing pieces are included, but more players could easily play at the same time, or work in teams.

There are 600 two-sided question cards organized into three levels of difficulty, beginning, intermediate and expert. That's 1,200 questions, 400 at each level. Question formats include multiple choice, short answer, and true/false. I found level A questions rather easy, was comfortable with level B, and was challenged by level C. I do have a basic knowledge of Chinese history and culture, but as a middle level teacher I am by no means an expert.

At first it felt like a trivial-pursuit type of game. But on further examination, I noticed that the questions are well crafted and rich in content. When one has a basic knowledge of Chinese history and culture, it is possible to think through a question, draw on previous knowledge, and make an educated guess at most of the answers. I experienced this myself when playing the game at level C, then watched it happen with middle level students at levels A and B. The questions address more than trivial facts, they address concepts and connections between ideas.

Many question cards include extended information about the answer that enhances student learning. For example, most students of East Asian culture will know the answer to "Which of these animals does not appear among the 12 that make up the Chinese Zodiac? a. rat, b. dog, c. cat." They will know that there is no cat in the zodiac, but the added information about the correct answer tells us that: "According to legend, the rat had good reason to resent the cat and, thus, broke his promise to awaken the cat on the day of their meeting with the Buddha, who formulated the zodiac."

I appreciate this way of teaching information. For another example, instead of just asking a question about the Chinese calendar, the question does it in a way that offers opportunity for thinking and processing information: "Because the Chinese began numbering years



from the time the legendary Yellow Emperor became sovereign in 2697 BCE, what Chinese year was celebrated during the year 2000 of the Christian calendar?" Simple math results in the correct answer of 4697, but it requires a little interaction with the information and will therefore be remembered more readily by students.

I observed a group of middle level students learning how to play the game. They had studied East Asia for several months and came to the activity with a basic understanding of Chinese culture and history. They found the directions simple to follow,

and the questions at Level A challenging but not impossible. The students talked through what they knew and were able to develop appropriate answers to most questions. They loved playing this game and didn't want to stop! In this day of electronic entertainment, I found their enthusiasm about playing a board game delightful.

When asked for their opinions about this game they responded: It is NOT boring. The questions were hard but not impossible. You really have to think.

They recommended: Read the questions twice before answering. Remember questions that others answered because it can help with your question. Listening to the full question gives you hints.

At first skeptical about the value and effectiveness of a board game about Chinese history and culture, I have become an avid fan of this tool. Knowing it was developed at the Center for Asian Studies, University of Vermont, a project funded by a grant from the Freeman Foundation, gives me confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the information.

Feilong: The China Game sells for less than \$35. The Web page, <http://www.bethumpd.com/fechga.html>, includes ordering information and sample questions. ■

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