

Short-Term Scientific Mission Grant

- APPLICATION FORM¹ -

Action number: **CA22145**

Applicant name: **Marco Tibaldini**

Details of the STSM

Title: Ancient and Medieval boardgames common to Chinese and European tradition

Start and end date: 22/09/2025 to 13/10/2025

Goals of the STSM

A few decades ago, the few studies about ancient Chinese board games were written by European or American scholars specialized in Chinese culture. Recently Chinese historians and scholars started to research in the domain of Game Studies, with remarkable results. In terms of international cooperation and knowledge about board games other than the Chinese, which are also connected to Chinese traditions (for example the famous Roman Tabula), their knowledge is still at its beginnings. My plan is to go to China and meet local historians and discuss their findings with them, personally looking at Modern manuscripts (early Chinese-Latin dictionaries) and archaeological materials that are largely unpublished, in search of elements that can attest a point of contact with Ancient or Medieval European games, and shed a light on cultural contacts or contamination processes that introduced them to China.

Working Plan

My plan is to reach Beijing and meet with Lei Tianyue and her supervisor Cao Xinyu and have the time to discuss with them about their findings in the domain of Chinese boardgames. Lei Tianyue presented her findings in 2 board game studies colloquia, but we had the impression that there is much more and that some of the materials must be carefully scrutinized and checked on site. In particular, the analysis of the Shuang Lu game, derived by the Roman Tabula, is very promising.

It will be useful to delve into this topic, watching its earliest preserved boards (Middle Age) in search of artistic and stylistic elements that may lead to a Western origin, and scrutinize and analyse the game variants, comparing them with Latin and Byzantine sources.

Before the travel I'll check with them the further possible sources of materials related to ancient Chinese board games and will spend the second week in scrutinizing those materials, eventually in cities other than Beijing.

¹ This form is part of the application for a grant to visit a host organisation located in a different country than the country of affiliation. It is submitted to the COST Action MC via-e-COST. The Grant Awarding Coordinator coordinates the evaluation on behalf of the Action MC and informs the Grant Holder of the result of the evaluation for issuing the Grant Letter.

In the last week of the mission, I plan to reach Fangyi Cheng at the Sun Yat Sen University in Canton, who is also starting very promising research in the field of ancient Chinese board games and has found remarkably literary materials on the Shuang Lu game. I really look forward to having the time to scrutinize them with him and compare them with the literary and archaeological sources of the European Antiquity and Middle Age.

Expected outputs and contribution to the Action MoU objectives and deliverables.

I expect to write at least one paper with Cao Xinyu & Lei Tianyue, and one with Fangyi Cheng, bringing together a European and Chinese sources, and a tentative reconstruction of the historical process that introduced the Tabula game in China, and report about further eventual findings.