

# SUNKA - A TRADITIONAL FILIPINO GAME

Sungka is a Philippine mancala game which is today also played wherever Philippine migrants are living; e.g. in Taiwan, Germany, and the USA. Like the closely related congkak it is traditionally a women's game. Sungka was first described outside of Asia in 1894 by the American ethnologist Stewart Culin.

Sungka is similar to many other Southern Asian mancala games such as naranj (Maldives), dakon (Java), congkak (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia) and tchonka (Marianas). The game differs from kalah which is known in North America and Europe in being a multi-lap game. Another important difference is that the first move is executed simultaneously in sungka which is meant to balance the game. Sungka is distinguished from congkak by being played counterclockwise and also by some other minor rule differences. Sungka is an important means for creating identity, particularly for Philippine migrants. This can be seen in sungka competitions, which are organized in the Philippines, and in the representation of Philippine culture at cultural festivals through Sungka demonstrations. The identity forming function of the game is also a central theme in *Sungka and Smiling Irish Eyes, A Boy discovers what it means to be Half-Irish and Half-Filipino* by Natalie Gonzales-Sullaway. The feminist poet and communication scientist Alison M. De La Cruz wrote in 1999 a one-woman performance called *Sungka*, which analyses the societal and family-related expectations in regard to gender-specific behavior and sexuality, race and ethnic affiliation, by comparing it to a game of Sungka. De La Cruz also reflects in her performance how she has come to terms with her lesbian coming-out. Her poem *That Age*, which was part of the performance, has become well-known in the America.

Moreover, sungka is still used by fortunetellers and prophets, which are called on the Philippines *bailan* or *maghuhula*, for divinatory purposes. Older people hope to find out with their help whether the journey of a youth is favorable at a certain day, and girls, whether they will marry one day, and, in case they will, when this will be. The game is usually played outdoors because there is a Filipino superstition about a house will burn down if it's played indoors.

In past times sungka boards were also used for mathematical calculations, which were researched by Indian ethnomathematicians.

Although the sungka rules are not much different from those of congkak, sungka is perceived as a genuinely Philippine game by native players.

SOURCE: <http://wikimanqala.org/wiki/Sungka>