

## Tangram History

Tangram is a puzzle game that can be enjoyed by the entire family members. It does not require an inordinate amount of skill—just patience, time and, above all, imagination! There are hundreds of dissection puzzles—plane or solid figures cut into various pieces. Tangram is the most outstanding of all the dissection puzzles.

Little is known for certain about the inventor or the origin of the Tangram. Even the origin of the name is obscure.

According to Samuel Loyd, the American puzzle expert, the God Tan invented the puzzle 4,000 years ago and described it in the Seven Books of Tan. Each volume contained over 1,000 puzzles which were supposed to illustrate the creation of the world and the origin of species. The seven pieces were taken from the sun, the moon and the five planets of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury and Venus. His story later uncovered as a baseless elaborate and scholarly spoof.

According to some, the name Tangram is a corruption of the obsolete English word trangam, which meant a puzzle or trinket. Other says it was derived from the Cantonese riverboat tanka girls who entertained American sailors. Other explains that the word was derived from the Tang Dynasty of China. One story tells that Tangram was invented by a man named Tan accidentally while he tried to put broken pieces of a porcelain tile. In Asia, it is called 'Seven Plates of Wisdom'.

The earliest known reference is a wood cut from 1780 by Utamaro. The earliest known book was published in 1813 in China. It seems certain that it is already old in 1813. One of Tangram-like puzzles first appeared in a book published in Japan in 1742. Scholars assume that Tangram began in Orient before 18th century and then spread westward. By 1818, Tangram publications had appeared in the United States, Germany, Italy, France and England. It swept through Europe and America at the beginning of 19th century and its popularity continues to this day. In 19th century China, it was so popular that the shape of the pieces found their way into the design of dishes, lacquer boxes and even tables.

Toward the end of 19th century, a German industrialist began to produce stone versions of Tangram and other dissection puzzles under the name of 'The Anchor Puzzle'. The Anchor puzzles were so successful that over 30 new designs of puzzle sets were followed. During the World War I, its popularity reached to the highest level among the troops in the trenches of both sides. Thomas Edison and U. S. President Grover Cleveland publicly endorsed the puzzles in the puzzle booklets.

There were many other famous fans of Tangram. During his exile in St. Helena, Napoleon found in the Tangram an absorbing interest. Literary men like Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe are known to have played the game extensively.

Tangram has been loved by many as entertainment, educational and mathematical tools. It is said that Pythagorean theorem was discovered in the Orient with help of Tangram pieces.

As popularity continues to 20th century, Tangram attracted many mathematicians' interest, and lots of articles were written. Computers were used to show its geometric properties and to generate

more puzzles. Now Tangram is getting popular again in schools and homes on the personal computers. The Macintosh application enables the users enjoy Tangram with realistic mouse movement, thousands of puzzles and various help tools without frustration and losing parts.

Tangram is really a timeless game loved and played for centuries.