



Hugvísindasvið

Go in Japan

What makes Japan so central to the game of go.

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Hafsteinn J. Haraldsson

May 2009

Háskóli Íslands

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Japanska

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Abstract:

Go is thought to be a Chinese game, as it originally originated in China but I believe that Japan actually played a much more central role in the development of the game we call go today.

Go came from China and became immensely popular in the Japanese high society. Paid professional go players came into existence as a result of this, almost 400 years ago in Japan. Because it was prestigious to be a good go player in Japan these players developed and advanced the game of go, in order to become the best player in Japan. And no other country really had an opportunity to participate in the development of go, as the Japanese had closed off their borders to foreigners during this period.

The game of go that we play today is heavily influenced by the changes and strategies developed by the Japanese. Some of these Japanese professionals are even known all over the world today, even if they lived over a hundred years ago. The Japanese go organization (Nihon Kiin) is also the main organization regulating and controlling go in the world today.

This essay is about what makes Japan so central to the game of go that we know and play today.

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Introduction:

I have been interested in the game of go since a co-student of mine introduced me to the game, while we were studying Japanese together. Its deep tactical, yet simple game play is something that has constantly kept me interested in the game.

Because there are extremely few go players on Iceland, there's only one go club. While it has around 10-12 members, only 3-4 show up every week. Together we play go and talk about tied to the game. During such discussions, I soon noticed how Japan seemed very central to the game. It might be because my seniors at the go club are big fans of the Japanese players, but then there has to be a reason for the Japanese players to be so famous. I mean... you have to be quite famous if a player in a tiny go club, on the other side of the world knows your name. As my seniors at the go club have been teaching me go, I have also noticed that a lot of the strategies in go have been invented by Japanese players. My seniors told me the reason for this was the *golden age* go had in Japan.

My seniors couldn't tell me a lot about this golden age because they simply didn't know much about it, so I thought of this essay as an opportunity for myself to research the history of go. I looked for books on go here on Iceland, but as it's not a popular game on Iceland, I didn't find anything I could use. So I went looking for material on the Internet. Most of the books you could get on line were "teaching books" where the author attempts to explain strategies or "problem books" which depict problems that the reader is supposed to solve. Neither of these books helped me at all; as I wanted to learn about the history of go.

After searching the Internet for quite some time and receiving some support from my seniors at the go club, I finally found a magazine and a book that looked promising. The book was called "400 Years of Go in Japan" and the magazine was "Go world". The book went into the development of go in Japan; while the magazine was about go in general, distributed for English speakers in Japan. Everything I had gathered so far seemed to place Japan in a unique position when it came to the world of go. All my source material focused on Japan, and my seniors thought highly of Japan, this lead me to question myself "What exactly makes Japan so central in the world of Go?"

Origin of Go in Japan.

The main idea I started with, was that Japan was historically significant to the game of go and that the Japanese players had been important to the development of go. After only a brief look at the history of go in Japan, it seemed pretty clear to me that the four *go houses*¹ that were created in Japan in the 17th century had to be important to Japan's fame.

To explain how the go houses became so important to go in Japan, I am going to tell you how they came to exist. Around the 8th century the Japanese upper class was very interested in the Chinese court. The Japanese upper class actually tried to imitate the Chinese court to the best of their ability. Anything that was considered exquisite or exiting by the Chinese court became exquisite and exiting in the Japanese high society. So even though go had existed in Japan for hundreds of years, it didn't become popular until Kibi no makibi, an ambassador to China told the Japanese upper class that go was popular in the Chinese court. Go then became a big hit within the Japanese high society and it's even mentioned in many great Japanese literary works dating back to the eleventh century. The most notable work that mentions go is "The tale of Genji".

During the warring states era in Japan (15th – 17th century) go became increasingly popular amongst the samurai class. The samurai saw go as a brilliant strategy game. But records from this era indicate that their play style was overly focused on *Fighting*². By the end of the warring states period, the warlord Oda Nobunaga had begun the process of reunifying the country. Oda Nobunaga was an enthusiastic go player, and during a visit to Kyoto in 1578 he sent for the monk Nikkai, who was supposed to be the best go player in Japan. Nikkai is believed to have been as strong as a low "Dan"³ player of today. Nobunaga challenged Nikkai to a game few games, and by the end of the day Nikkai had beaten Nobunaga down to a five stone *handicap*⁴. Nobunaga was clearly impressed with Nikkai's performance and started

¹ The Go houses were in a sense "Go schools" but not limited to children. Any one could come and study Go at these establishments, given they had some talent. There was no formal teaching, as the members of each house were expected to learn and develop their game simply by playing one another.

² When either player attempts to capture the other player's stones, it's considered fighting. Basically, games during this era lacked focus on moves to create territory (points).

³ The ranking system today goes from *30Kyu*, the worst *Kyu* rank and the worst rank overall to *1Kyu*, the best *Kyu* rank. Then it starts on *1Dan* the worst "Dan" rank and moves on to *9Dan*, the best Dan rank and best rank attainable.

⁴ Handicap is measured by how many stones the weaker player has to place on the go board before the stronger player plays, in order to make the game somewhat even.

referring to him as “*Meijin*”⁵, a title that was going to become synonymous with the strongest go player in Japan.

After Oda Nobunaga’s death in 1582, his work of reunifying Japan was continued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Toyotomi Hideyoshi was also a strong go player, and employed Nikkai as his teacher. In 1588 he gathered players from all of Japan, to what seems to have been the first castle game of many. Nikkai won the games as expected, and as a prize he would receive an annual salary from Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi also decreed that Nikkai was only to take white in all his future games. In 1605 Nikkai changed his name to “Sansa” and adopted the surname of “Honinbou” after the house where he lived. And it is as Honinbou Sansa he is best known today.

The go houses.

After the reunification of Japan was completed around 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu became *shogun*⁶. Like his predecessors Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Tokugawa Ieyasu was quite interested in go. To ensure the future development of go, Tokugawa Ieyasu formally established the governmental post of *godokoro*⁷. *Godokoro* was to become a position of great influence, since it was responsible for all go matters. For example the *godokoro* was also the only person that could promote other players. The *godokoro* was also the shogun’s private teacher and as such the title held an immense prestige value. Not only in the world of go but also regarding other matters, as the *godokoro* had the opportunity to convey his opinions directly to the shogun. To become *godokoro*, it was necessary to first be known as *Meijin*. The title of *Meijin* was only awarded to one player at a time and that player had to be generally recognized as the strongest player in Japan. And because there were so many competing for the title, there were periods when no *Meijin* and subsequently no *godokoro* existed.

Tokugawa Ieyasu also formally established the so called “*o-shiro-go*” (castle games) around 1605. These castle games were official tournaments between the top go players of their times. The games were even played in the shogun’s presence and by looking at the number of “extra

⁵ *Meijin* translates to “Name person” / “Great man” / “Expert”. Today it’s a title that can be earned by winning the annual Meijin tournament in Japan (founded 1976).

⁶ The shogun was the real ruler of Japan, ruling in the emperor’s name.

⁷ The *godokoro* controlled all things connected to Go. He was also the only person that could officially promote another player.

games” that the shogun could request, it can be seen how interested each of the shoguns were in go. The Castle games became the most important event in the go calendar.

The most important change, that has had the most effect on go as we know it today, was the establishment of the go houses. Sansa himself founded the most prestigious household Honinbou. His pupils went on to form two other households. Shibukawa Rokuzo founded the Yasui house and changed his name to Yasui Santetsu and Nakamura Doseki founded the Inoue house. Monzaburo, a pupil of Sansa’s old rival, founded the Hayashi household. Over the next 250 years, these houses fought a bitter war over the go board as each of them sought the title of *Meijin*. Often they even resorted to tricks, and political means to get their opponents out of the way⁸.

Each of the four go houses got paid an annual salary by the government and each player got paid by his respective house depending on his *Dan* rank. This situation is unique to Japan. No other place, anywhere in the world had paid professional go players 400 years ago. These players kept track of and recorded their games in order to develop their game and reach a higher rank. And their records still exist today, which makes Japan unique in another way. Japan is the only country in the world that has clear records of their old go games. Even though go is said to have originated in China⁹, the Chinese do not have anything except references to the game. The Chinese do not have any old records showing how they actually played go.

Having old game records and documents such as the ones created by the Japanese professionals gives historians the ability to see how the game was developed. The records let us see what the game of go looked like before it came to Japan and it allows us to see what changes were made. For example; because the Japanese have records closely linking the game of go to the Shogunate and positions of power within the ancient Japan, the game retains some

⁸ Examples of this:

Grant, Andrew. *400 Years of Go in Japan*. Page 67 - 68. The Story of Jowa and Gen’an

Grant, Andrew. *400 Years of Go in Japan*. Page 38 - 39. Dochi wanted to become Meijin.

Grant, Andrew. *400 Years of Go in Japan*. Page 43 - 44. Chess players attempting to use political means to change funding & alliances between the houses to prevent others from becoming Meijin

⁹ Potter, Donald L. (Winter 1985 - 86). Go in the Classics(ii): The Tso-chuan. *Go world magazine* 42. page 19-21.

of its ancient prestige today. Most notable are the *Meijin* and *Honinbou title cups*¹⁰, these titles wouldn't be anything more than meaningless names if it wasn't for their historical ties.

So the records that remain today lets a country prove how they affected the development of history, and in this case the game of go. If you take *Donald Potters words*¹¹ as an example, go was not invented by any one country, but slowly came to be the game we know today through constant development through the centuries. Japan is the only country in the world that has such clear proof of their development of go. And this proof shows us that the game we call go today was quite different from the go played when it arrived in Japan. It also shows us how the game slowly became more and more similar to the go we know today, through changes brought on by the Japanese.

Notable differences can be pointed out between the go we know today, and the go that first came to Japan. The standard board size was 17x17 as opposed by the 19x19 board size we use today. Players also started by diagonally occupying a pair of 4-4 (*hoshi*¹²) points as their starting position, and it's believed that the white player played first as opposed to black today. There were no handicap points for white, as the rule of "*Komi*¹³" didn't exist yet and no ranks existed for the players to measure themselves with.

Amongst countless of game play strategies developed, the changes I mentioned earlier were all made by the Japanese. Korea and China didn't get to participate in the development that took place in Japan, because Japan isolated itself from the rest of the world in 1633 shortly after the go houses came into existence. After Japan opened its borders again in 1853-54 the Chinese and Koreans were very far behind, but have gradually caught up to the Japanese in the 20th century.

¹⁰ "<http://www.nihonkiin.or.jp/match/meijin/index-e.html>" The Meijin title cup.

"<http://www.nihonkiin.or.jp/match/honinbo/index-e.html>" The Honinbou title cup.

Two cups that are highly thought of in Japan and in the rest of the world because of their history.

¹¹Potter, Donald. (1995-96). Invention or Evolution. *Go world magazine* 75. page 9.

¹²The Hoshi, or "star" points on the Go board are at the 4-4 location in each corner. In the center of the Go board.

And on the center of each "side" of the board on the 4th line (4-10 on a 19x19 board).

¹³Komi is the practice of giving the white player extra points in an even game, to make up for the head start black gets from playing first. Ex: in an even 19x19 game today, white gets a 6.5 point head start.

The go players.

Countless go players were created by the go houses and the players developed go into the game we play today. I have picked 4 of the Japanese players and one Chinese player that I have heard about from my Seniors at the go club. I am going to present them to you and tell you about the changes they brought upon go. Of course the changes they made to go, made these players famous. But because these changes were made in Japan, they also served to strengthen Japans influence on go.

Honinbou Dosaku (1645 – 1702)

Honinbou Dosaku is known as one of the best go players ever to have existed, and he's one of two players that are referred to as “go saint”. He was so overwhelmingly strong that even his closest rivals were forced down to a 2 stone handicap against him. When Honinbou Dosaku became *Meijin* and subsequently *godokoro*, there was not a single that could oppose him. But what made him so strong and what did he bring to the game of go?

Up until this time go had been overly focused on fighting. Something that became the norm during the warring states, as the samurai loved *fighting* in go. A normal game back then would usually break out into a single massive fight over a corner, even before the rest of the corners or sides had been taken care of. The game would literally be over after this one, large, deciding fight. Honinbou Dosaku was one of the first players to start focusing on *territory* before *fighting*. In his opening theory, he would first focus on the corners, then on the sides, and after both were accounted for he would start focusing on the center of the board. This way of playing go later became the standard, and it's even how most professional players play today. The reason behind his play was that, Dosaku had invented a way to analyze the efficiency of the stones. A strategy he referred to as “*tewari*¹⁴”

Honinbou Dosaku is also recognized as the inventor of the modern grading system used in go. Before the time of Dosaku, the only ranks that existed were *Meijin*, *near Meijin*, and *jozu*. The system Dosaku started using was derived from the martial arts, where the highest rank you can possibly attain is *9Dan*. The rank of *9Dan* became the rank held by the *Meijin*, so only one *9Dan* could exist at a time. The rank of *8Dan* was given to the players ranked “*near Meijin*”,

¹⁴Fairbairn, John. (Spring 1990). *Tewari: How to Analyze the Efficiency of Your Stones. Go world magazine* 59. page 59-68.

and then counted down to *1Dan*. *1Dan* was the rank given to players ranked *jozu*. This was the standard grading system until the 20th century, at which point amateur ranks “*Kyu*” were added. *1Kyu* is slightly weaker than *1Dan*, and *30Kyu* is the worst rank attainable.

Even if Dosaku's play style focused on *territory*, it's not to say he wasn't strong at fighting in go. Far from it, Honinbou Dosaku was excellent at *fighting* and he has left a number of games showcasing his brilliance¹⁵. He often came up with brilliant *tesuji*¹⁶ problems that won him games. The players from the Yasui house whom had become famous for their extraordinary talent at fighting in go, couldn't lift a finger against him and were continuously humiliated by Dosaku. They simply couldn't cope with his territorial game play and strong fighting skill.

The only thing history criticizes Dosaku for, is that he like many other go players, was quite self centered. Dosaku wanted his pupil named Dochi to become the next godokoro. To ensure the future and success of this pupil Dosaku forced another one of his most promising pupils called Kuwahara to renounce his aspirations of becoming godokoro himself, promise to take care of Dochi and become his teacher. This promise that Dosaku forcefully extracted out of his most promising students in front of a number of witnesses is thought to have been extremely unreasonable. Kuwahara became the best player in Japan and even received the title of Meijin but because of his promise the other go heads wouldn't let him be promoted to godokoro. In the end he managed to trick them into promoting him for one day, just so that he could promote a famous go player (The godokoro was the only person that could perform this promotion). After he became godokoro however, he never renounced the title and kept it until he died. The Honinbou today still criticize Kuwahara for doing this, but historians today think Dosaku was at fault for forcing him to make such a promise.

Tewari

The most important change Dosaku brought to go was the analytical method of tewari. It's a more advanced form of “*reading ahead*” in games. Reading ahead refers to the process of predicting what moves your opponent will play to counter your moves. Most professional players can predict their opponents moves 20-30 moves into the future, given the right

¹⁵No specified author. (2003). Honinbo Dosaku's Brilliant Tesujis. *Go world magazine* 59. page 57-60.

¹⁶A tesuji literally translates to “clever play” “手筋.” It's generally used in Go when you manage to get your way on the Go board, while your opponent can't do anything to stop you. I.e. you play moves that also force your opponent to play where you want him to.

situation. *Tewari* adds another dimension to this, where you are forced to ask yourself; have I wasted any stones, made good *form*, forced the opponent to make bad *form* and have I taken more *vital points* than my opponent. Most notably *tewari* has been applied to *josekis*¹⁷ in order to remove redundant stones, so *tewari* is one of the fundamental reasons for the opening play we use today.

“The great Segoe Kensaku once summoned it up this way: If you buy something for ¥100 and it’s worth ¥100, then you have bought well. But if you spend ¥100 on something and it’s worth only ¥50 or ¥70, you have wasted money. Tewari is just like that”¹⁸”

The quote refers to what *tewari* is used for. In essence *tewari* lets you analyze a situation and determine whether an exchange of moves has been/or will be profitable for you. This is done by taking away an even number of unnecessary stones from each player, and then evaluating and working out whether or not the remaining stones wouldn't have been sufficient. If they are sufficient, you could/can normally save yourself a number of moves. Or it can be applied by inverting or changing the arrangement of existing stones, to see whether one would still have responded so that the actual position results. If this is not the case, then that tells you something about the previous moves.

A few very simple examples of *tewari*.

All figures recreated from by myself : Shukaku, Takagawa. (1990). *Tewari. Go world 59*. page 59-60.

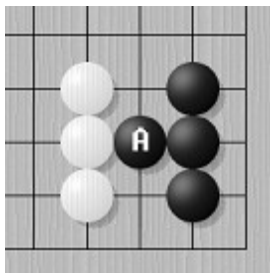


Figure 1.

The efficiency of stones has to be taken into account. In this figure the stone marked with “A” is doing nothing to help black. It's actually doing quite the opposite by giving black two *empty*

¹⁷A joseki - a number of games (normally around the corners) that players have developed. A joseki sequence generally leaves both players in an equal position.

¹⁸Shukaku, Takagawa. (1990). *Tewari. Go world 59*. page 59 - date unknown.

triangles. *Empty triangles* are known for being over concentrated and a very bad formation in go. Using *tewari*, the black player could analyze his moves up to this point, and figure out what he could have done differently to avoid this situation. Then he could use that knowledge in the future when presented with the same, or a similar situation.

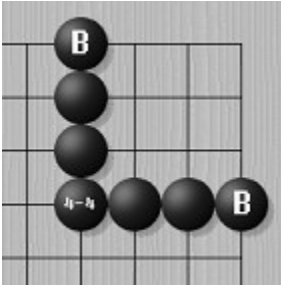


Figure 2.

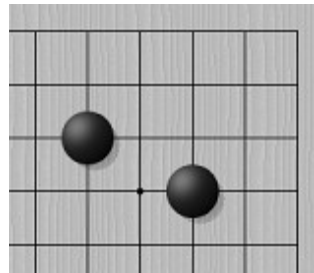


Figure 3.

How many stones does it take to secure a corner? On figure 2 you can see a picture where black has spent seven stones to form a territory worth nine points. Using *tewari*, one could easily conclude that the stones marked as “B” could have been removed, and played elsewhere. The stone at the 4-4 point is also redundant and could have been played elsewhere. Then you are down to four stones securing a nine point territory.

Black can actually get the same effect by using no more than two stones. Figure 3 shows the most popular corner enclosure in go. It's called a “*shimari*” and like figure 2, it secures the nine points in the corner. The *shimari* corner enclosure became, and still is one of the most popular starting *forms* in go.

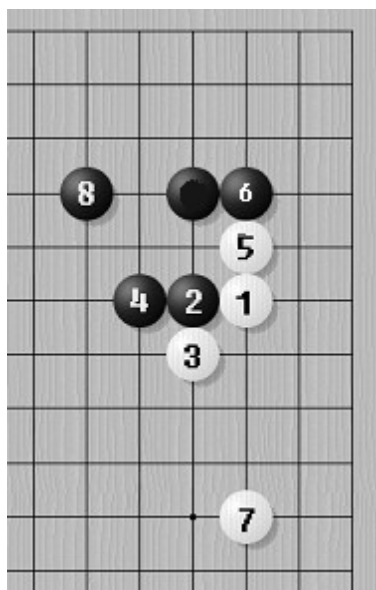


Figure 4

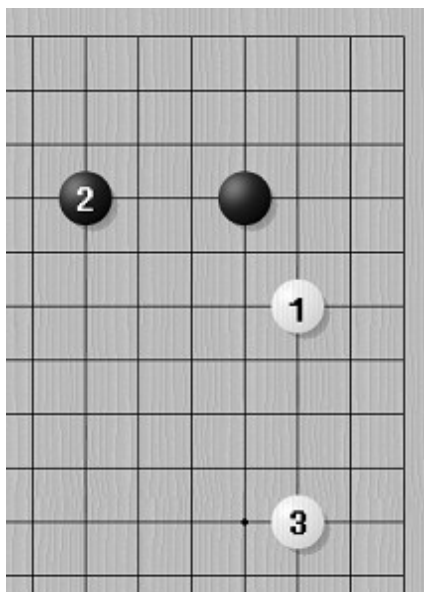


Figure 5

Lets take an actual example. Figure 4 is an actual joseki that was popular once, bit isn't as popular now due to the application of *tewari*. That's because figure 4 and figure 5 both give a very similar result, but in figure 4 moves one and three are over concentrated and black doesn't gain much from them while he strengthens white's position. Another thing is that white finishes with *sente*¹⁹ in figure 4, while black has *sente* in figure 5. That means black can choose where to play next if he responds with “2” in figure 5, something that is worth several points if used right.

Tewari immediately had a great impact on the josekis that existed in the 18th century. And it's still used to weed out redundant moves in modern day *josekis*. It's used by professional go players while they play and it's used by go teachers when they explain strategies to their students. *Tewari* is even used by TV commentators today, to show the audience alternative moves that could have been made, point out missed opportunities and to display how the situation would be if the opposite player had played instead.

Honinbou Shusaku (1829 – 1862)

Honinbou Shusaku was the second “go saint” along with Dosaku. Shusaku was a child prodigy. When he was seventeen years old, Shusaku played Gennan Inseki. Gennan was

¹⁹Having sente, means you have the initiative and can choose where you want to play next. If your opponnet is attacking your groups, and you always have to respond to his moves, you do not have sente.

roughly fifty years old and head of the Inoue house, so this was a great honour for Shusaku who was a mere 4dan at the time. Shusaku used a two stone handicap, but after 102 moves Gennan stopped the game and made Shusaku simply take black because two stones was clearly the wrong handicap. The following game didn't start as well for Shusaku as he misplayed the *joseki*²⁰ that Gennan used. By the end of the day Gennan was ahead. On the second day when the game continued, Shusaku played one of the most famous moves in go history. A move later known as the “*ear-reddening move*”²¹ as Gennan's ears flushed red as he was taken by complete surprise. The move totally reversed the flow of the game, and Shusaku gradually took over and won the game. Shusaku even went on to beat Gennan two more times. Another reason for Shusaku's fame is that he's the only person in go history to have achieved a perfect win record in the castle games. Shusaku played a total of 19 castle games. During the 1850's no one was able to match his strength. The only player that came close was Ota Yuzo, a player that might have spoiled Shusaku's perfect win record. However there were rules that demanded participants in the castle games to wear a monks attire and shave their heads and that was something Ota Yuzo simply wasn't prepared to do. Ota Yuzo never participated in any of the castle games.

During modern day Japan, Shusaku has been used as a poster boy for go in an attempt to attract new players. Because he had many qualities that would seem cool or attractive to new players. He was young and an extraordinary strong player during his youth. In the anime *Hikaru no Go*, one of the main characters was a portrayal of Shusaku's ghost and he guides the main character on his path to become a great go player. The anime was aired in 2001 to combat the lack of interest young Japanese people have in go today in the 20th and early 21st century. As a result of the anime, nearly twice as many children started attending go classes at the Nihon Kiin²² Sunday schools.

Even though he was a great player, there are a number of things he can be criticized for. For one, Shusaku only lived to 33years of age, at which point he died to cholera. A tragedy of course, but it also helped him keep his perfect win record. Shusaku was also a very humble man, something that played out into his favor. Shusaku almost always let his opponents play

²⁰Starting play sequence around the corners of the board. If misplayed, it can be quite devastating.

²¹The game containing the ear-reddening move can be found on pages 85-89 in the book “400 Years of Go” by Andrew Grant.

²²The Nihon Kiin is the Japanese Go organisation that exists today.

white if he had the option to do so. It's unknown whether this was a conscious strategy developed by him or not, but Shusaku was virtually invincible as black. The reason he literally never lost as black was because of his *fuseki*²³. His fuseki was later named the Shusaku fuseki and became one of the most popular openings as black until komi was added to the game in the 20th century.

Shusaku fuseki

All figures recreated from : Honinbou, Kato. (1978). How to improve at Fuseki. *Go world* 8. page 34.

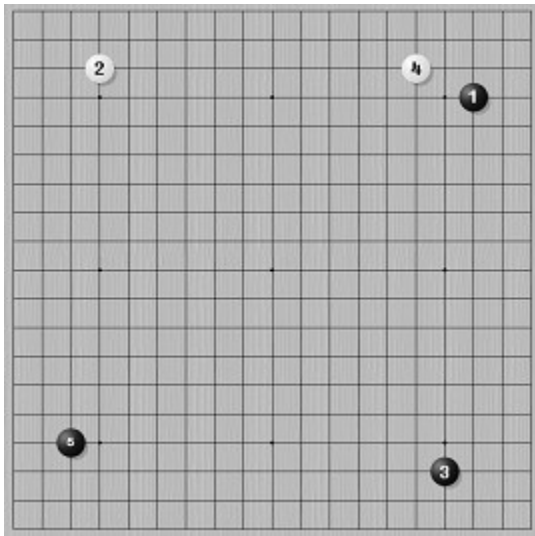


Figure 1.

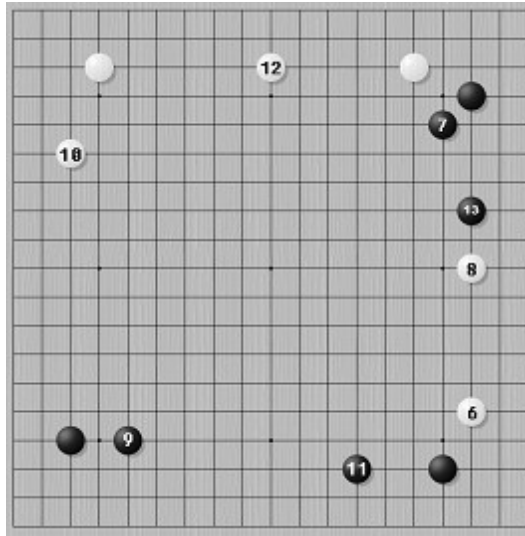


Figure 2.

The fuseki pattern that Shusaku invented became the leading pattern through the Meiji (1868-1912) and the Taisho (1912 – 1926) periods. This pattern is only viable as black. The black player starts by occupying the 3-4 *points* in each corner as shown in Figure 1. White can prevent this pattern from ever happening by occupying the other corner, by playing “4” around “5”. But the *shimari* corner enclosure was considered too big to ignore before *komi* got implemented.

Because *shimari* corner enclosures were held in such high esteem, white normally followed up by playing 4 as shown in figure 1, something that prevented black from creating it. But in doing so it gives black the opportunity to occupy the last remaining corner with “5”. Black pretty much controls the game until the end of figure 2. But then he has already achieved what

²³In go fuseki refers to a strategy, or a pattern of moves.

he set out to do, to limit white's potential for growth. If black plays a simple and solid game, without making any mistakes after this point he should win with around three points.

Komi makes the *Shusaku fuseki* obsolete because it requires black to win with more than 6.5 points. Moves such as “7” in figure 2, are simply too slow for them to be viable. Even though the *fuseki* is considered obsolete by most modern players, it is still obligatory study material for people studying go. Many variations of the *fuseki* have been developed, but none of them have become particularly effective.

Honinbou Shusaku was one of the most skilled players in go history and his contribution to the game can't be argued. He did develop the most popular starting play in go, and although it became unpopular with the implementation of *komi-go* many alternative versions of the *Shusaku fuseki* have been invented. Even though the alternative versions aren't as good as the original one, they are still viable openings in their own right. The *fuseki* that Shusaku invented remains as a prime example of how go was played before *komi-go*.

Honinbou Shusai. (1874 – 1940)

Tamura was given the Honinbou title in 1908 and promptly changed his name to Shusai. He went on to become one of the strongest and most influential go players of the 20th century, getting promoted to *Meijin* in 1914. He was also to become the last head of the Honinbou household.

Shusai is not just known for being a strong player though. He is infamous for being one of the most authoritarian leaders of the Honinbou house and go world in general. Even though it's considered to have been a blessing in disguise, as the other go houses were struggling with their leadership. For an example the Yasui house disappeared, as their last head died in 1903 without naming a successor and the Inoue house almost suffered the same fate as they barely managed to advert their demise in 1920.

Shusai was very conservative. Shusai can be considered the last real “old-style” player. This conservatism created a sharp contrast to the “new style” brought upon go by Go-Seigen and Kitani Minoru. This contrast also serves to make him more famous today. However Shusai is most known for his rule as *Meijin* and the head of the Honinbou house. He wielded immense

power in the go world. Any newspapers criticizing him were pressured until they stopped, and if players criticized him there's examples²⁴ of them being expelled. If players were expelled from the Honinbou household by Shusai their careers in the world of go were literally over, as the smaller go organizations that had sprung forth in the 20th century didn't dare extend a helping hand to someone that had angered Shusai.

The thing was most criticized for was his abuse of old rules and regulations made for go tournaments. For an example the white player could halt play at any time for a day at a time, provided it was his turn. Because Shusai was *Meijin* he always played white, and he abused this to no end. During the “day off”, Shusai returned to his pupils where he consulted with them on where to play next and on the next day he would return and play his move, only to repeat the endeavor the next time he felt pressured. This caused a single game between Shusai and his rival Karigane to last six months, from may to November 1920.

It wasn't as much what Shusai did for go world, instead it can be argued that his dictatorship forced the go world to act on it's own. The stranglehold he held on the system itself caused breakaway organizations to form. The most notable organization was the *Hiseikai* (Minor sage association). The Hiseikai was lead by his rival Karigane. Karigane wanted all games to be played on even terms and with even time limits. Alone the Hiseikai wasn't enough to force Shusai to back down, but when Shusai lost his pupil whom he had been grooming to become the next Honinbou, and the Kanto earthquake occurred in 1923, Shusai literally gave up.

The Kantou earthquake in 1923 caused massive financial losses for all of Japan. A politician and patron of go named Baron Okura Kishichiro somehow managed to convince the various go organizations to settle their differences during these difficult times. In 1924 a grand conference was held, where all the major actors within the go world were present. The outcome of this meeting was to become the Nihon Kiin also known as the *Japan Go Association*. The Nihon Kiin is still the association within Japan that takes care of all matters in connection with go today. The Honinbou household and the most notable organizations disappeared as they all joined the Nihon Kiin.

²⁴Grant, Andrew. *400 Years of Go in Japan*. Page 104-105. Nozawa Chikucho gets expelled from the Honinbou house for writing articles criticizing Shusai.

At first glance it doesn't seem like Honinbou Shusai brought much in the ways of strategies to go. While he was an extremely strong player, he preferred to use the techniques created by the old Japanese masters. However, Shusai literally forced the go world to revolutionize. Something that has had immense effect on the go we know and play today. Shusai also donated his titles to the Nihon Kiin after he resigned. The *Honinbou* and *Meijin* titles have great historical relevance and are immensely prestigious titles. The titles each have their respective title match tournament today, where players annually battle it out over the go board to see who gets to hold the title each year.

The Nihon Kiin

The Nihon Kiin marks the changing point in go history, as the old go houses had more or less disappeared with the Kiin's creation. The Inoue house was to become the last go house. When the sixteenth head, Egeta Inseki died in 1961 the last of the go households was dead. Even though Egeta had named a heir, his successor got nothing more than a empty title, as the go houses literally had no power any more.

The Nihon Kiin implemented a number of changes in go. Most notably was the addition of *time limits*, sixteen hours per player. Sixteen hours might seem like ridiculously much today, but back then there were players that didn't want any time limits at all. Another notable change was the introduction of *komi-go*. At first a lot of players refused to accept *komi-go* as “real go”. When the first Honinbou title match where the final match was supposed to be played without komi, ended in a 3-3 draw, where each player had won all their games using black, the idea of *komi-go* slowly became accepted. Today playing go using *komi* has become the norm. First off in the 1950s the handicap white received for playing 2nd was 4.5 points. Later in the 1970s it got increased to 5.5 points and recently around 2000 it has been increased to 6.5 points.

Before the Nihon Kiin had come into existence the go houses had taken care of *Dan* grading, and the small organizations had taken care of *Kyu* grading. But with the creation of the Nihon Kiin, the Kiin became the first organization to control both forms of grading. The Kiin created *the Oetai* (Great match play) to serve as a grading tournament. By beating a number of games at the Oetai, players could prove their right to a higher rank.

And finally the Kiin established title matches for the title of Honinbou and Meijin. Because the rank of *9Dan* wasn't strictly linked to the title of Meijin any more, it also became possible for two *9Dan* players to exist at the same time. The first example of this was when Go-Seigen was promoted to *9Dan* during the same time as Fujisawa. Something that sparked a interesting match up that the newspapers who sponsored the go tournaments pursued vigorously.

Go-Seigen (1914 -) and Kitani Minoru (1909 – 1975)

Go had declined greatly in China since it's peak in the 18th century. The Chinese were in general almost 3 stones weaker than the Japanese during the early 1900s. Wu Quan or “Go-Seigen” as he became known as in Japan, had studied go using old books his father had bought for him during his trip to Japan. By 12 years of age Go-Seigen was discovered by a Japanese professional player visiting China. After some financial difficulties had been overcome, Go-Seigen went to Japan in 1928 to study go and arguably become the strongest player of the 20th century.

Go-Seigen went on to befriend of the of the Nihon Kiins most prominent players, Kitani Minoru and together their skills increased rapidly. They even went on holiday together in 1933. It's during this time that these two players came up with the *shinfuseki*. A play style that was going to cause a massive uproar within the world of go.

Up until now, the standard play had not changed much since the time of Dosaku. The opening play could be summed up in three words; corner, sides, center. Kitani and Go-Seigen thought that the center of the board had been undervalued. Their new opening strategy put the emphasis on rapid development, and control of the center with the influence you'd generate by playing *high moves*²⁵. This pressured your opponent to play within your influence, where you naturally had better control of him.

The *shinfuseki* sparked amazing interest in new go players. And players experienced with all kinds of radical new openings. Even the 5-5 and 4-5 points became somewhat popular

²⁵High moves are closer to the centre of the board. Low moves are closer to the edges of the board. A stone lying on the 4th line isn't considered high or low, i.e. the 4th line is the middle point.

openings. The most extreme example was set by Tanaka Fujio, who often played on *tengen*²⁶ first.

The Yomuri newspaper managed to arrange a match between Shusai and Go-Seigen in 1933-34. This was to become one of the most famous matches in history, as it was seen as a international match between China and Japan. It was also going to become a clash between the old style and the new style. During the match Go-Seigen let Shusai take two corners with the *shimari* corner enclosure, while he himself played on the 3-3 *point*, the opposite 4-4 *point* and the *tengen* (center) *point*. This kind of opening was unthinkable by the old standard of play derived from the time of Dosaku. Shusai won the game by two points, but that didn't stop traditionalists from throwing stones at Go-Seigen's house. Many players thought Go-Seigen had insulted Shusai by using such a strange and unorthodox opening.

After a few years the *shinfuseki* had lost some of its popularity. But modern go as we play it today has been greatly influenced by the theories these two players brought to the game. Many new modern josekis have been developed using the *shinfuseki* theories. For an example the 3-3 and 4-4 openings which were thought unplayable up until this time, have become standard openings.

Not only did Go-Seigen and Kitani Minoru affect go as we know it today, they also traveled around and made go popular in China and Korea. When Go-Seigen returned to China after being promoted to 9dan he was celebrated as a national hero. Kitani Minoru on the other hand trained Cho Chikun, a Korean child that was going to become the main promoter of go in Korea²⁷. Go-Seigen and Kitani are the easiest examples to make, since they became so famous, however they were far from the only Japanese players to travel abroad to popularize go.

²⁶Tengen is the centre of the board. i.e. the 10x10 point on a 19x19 board.

²⁷No specified author. (1985). Cho Chikun: Between Japan and Korea. *Go world magazine* 40. page 30-33.

Go today.

Today Japan seems to have lost some of its former glory. Japan's Nihon Kiin still functions as an important element in controlling the development of go, but the Japanese players aren't as dominating as they were before. Korean players are today considered the best players in the world, based on their win records in official games. So, even though Japan still is important to go at the present date, the world around it is catching up.

Japan and the rest of the world are considered quite even today. China, Korea and Japan all claim to be the best but because go has become such an international sport, it's hard for anyone to prove their claims. Modern development has given go developers many new aspects to focus on. What makes go interesting for the younger generations of today, is far from the same as it used to be. Women have also begun to take an active interest in go computers have begun to close in on the professional players.

Interest in go.

The interest in go, in Japan has fluctuated somewhat over the last 400 years. During this time there have been shoguns that did not care much for the game, something that can be seen today by the number of "extra games" they asked the players to play in their presence at the castle games. During times when the Shogun showed lack of interest in go, the players suffered and disappeared. So it's clear that the interest in go then was because of the prestige gained from being close to the ruler of Japan. Over time, notable changes were even made to the castle games in order to keep the shogun interested. As the players progressed in their evolution of go, the games naturally became longer as more thinking was required. The shogun did not have much time on his hands however and couldn't afford to attend a game lasting for more than one day. So in order to keep their ruler interested, the go players started playing out the games one week before the castle games actually took place, then they recreated the games in front of the shogun.

Another good example of how the interest the Japanese have had in go is directly linked to their ruler, was after Commodore Mathew Perry forced open Japan's borders, something that made the Japanese upper class interested in the "out-side world". Everything western became incredibly popular, while classical things such as go became unpopular. Some of the go houses

almost went extinct during this period. When the ruler of Japan didn't pay attention to the game. During the times of war or natural catastrophe when the government lacked funding, the interest people had in go also dwindled.

During the 400 years go was being developed in Japan, Korea and China's interest in the game remained more or less unchanged. Before the Japanese started popularizing the game outside their own borders, go was nothing more than a gambling game in Korea and a simple way to pass time in China. After the Japanese had made the game popular in these countries, the Chinese and Korean players most often moved to Japan in order to progress their skills due to the lack of competition in their own country. However during the 20th century this has changed. All the countries surrounding Japan today have a go organization of their own, and enough members to keep their own domestic tournaments running.

Today go is viewed as “a game for old men” by most youngsters in Japan. Even though the Nihon Kiin have attempted to raise the interest in go through various ways, such as the anime Hikaru no Go, there is still a lack of young Japanese players. But the fact remains that most of the Japanese 9Dan professional players are in their 60s (ex: Kobayashi Koichi and Takemiya Masaki) while their Korean and Chinese counterparts are in their late 20s (Ex: Cho U and Lee Changho). This shows that Japan has been lacking new players for a long time.

The Japanese professionals have also struggled to win many of the international tournaments. Some people blame the time limits, because the Japanese tournaments generally operate with 8 hours per player and a 5x5 minute *byo-yomi*²⁸ after that time expires. The Japanese time limit is roughly 2 times as long as the time limits used in other international tournaments, where the time limit is normally 3 hours per player, and 5x1 minute *byo-yomi*. However a more simple and straight forward reason to their poor performance, is that most of the Japanese players are simply out of their prime. Though the Japanese professionals were dominating 20 -30 years ago, the ones that were dominating back then have not been able to keep up their excellent play and no new players have been able to take their place.

²⁸(example given using 5x5 *byo-yomi*) After the initial time runs out, each player has 5minutes to make his next move. If a player does not act within his 5minutes, his *byo-yomi* is reduced to 4x5minutes. If a player with 1x5minute *byo-yomi* does not act within his 5minutes, he loses on time.

The Nihon Kiin has tried to attract new players to go through various means, most notably the Kiin fund go schools all over Japan. The anime Hikaru no Go also attracted a great amount of new players to these schools. What remains to be seen, is whether or not these young players stick with the game and whether or not they become truly good players, which is what Japan needs.

What makes go popular today, has changed. The ties the game once had to the Japanese upper class only helps the game retain a certain amount of prestige, but it's not enough of an incentive to attract new players. The Japanese players are in a decline while the Koreans are experiencing the exact opposite, a influx of new players. What do the Koreans have, that the Japanese do not have? What makes go popular today?

Before the Japanese introduced go as a worthwhile pastime in Korea, the game was considered vulgar, as it was a gambling game and gambling was not something a honest man should do. This view of go has disappeared over time, and today go is almost the exact opposite in Korea. Parents in Korea even make their children attend go schools alongside their normal studies. Not because they expect their children to become great go players, but because go is thought to foster desirable traits in their children.

“Go is commonly credited with fostering the following virtues²⁹:

- 1. concentration*
- 2. logic*
- 3. the ability to reason*
- 4. perseverance*
- 5. early intellectual development*
- 6. good manners.”*

Korea also has a number of young and incredibly strong go players, something that evidently also makes go more popular in Korea. After Lee Changho started dominating in the international tournaments, there was a huge increase in new go players in Korea. Lee Changho is today the strongest player in the world based on his international win record³⁰. If a country

²⁹Quote: Oshima Masao. Compiled and translated by John Power. (Autumn 1999). The Korean Go Boom. *Go world magazine* 86. page 56.

³⁰Records based on : Sensei's Library. [May 2009]. International Title Statistics. <http://senseis.xmp.net/>
[InternationalTitleStatistics](http://senseis.xmp.net/) . Visited May 10th 2009.

has the strongest player in the world automatically increases the attention said “sport” gets, it doesn't matter whether it's soccer, running, high-jumping or go in this matter. A country takes pride in it's achievements and gives the “sport” in question increased media attention.

Headlines are what fuel the media society that we live in today. Increased media attention automatically leads to an increased awareness and then to a increased interest. And the Korean professionals have been excellent at fueling the media.

Surely Japan has great players too, but one has to take into account that most of the Japanese players are past their prime. The Japanese players were a lot stronger twenty years ago. The reason Japan is not able to keep up with their neighboring nations, seems to be a change of values. The values that used to fuel people's interest in go were prestige and the connection to the upper class hierarchy in Japan. Today, there are many children in Japan that don't even know their own emperors name, so it's obvious they are not going to be attracted to go via this link. What makes something popular today is dictated by the media and the media only focuses on things that will attract viewers. What would go a long way in increasing the popularity of go in Japan, would be one exceptional young player that still with untapped potential. A player that is able to dominate the world scene, and bring the medias attention in Japan to go.

Women in go.

Records mention female go players existing in China as far back as the Jin period (265-420). During the Tang period (618-907) go became one of the “four accomplishments”, namely; lute, go, calligraphy, and painting. Historians assume go was quite popular even amongst women. However there is no mention of any female professionals until the nineteenth century. Even during the nineteenth century there only existed a handful of professional go women in Japan and each of them was linked to a go household in some way or another, in that they were introduced to the game at a very young age.

The most likely reason behind the lack of female involvement in the development of go before the twentieth century is cultural. Not just countries in Asia, but countries all over the world had certain expectations of their women. However some of these cultural tendencies are still present in large parts of Asia today. For an example: women are expected to get married and

start a family, preferably before they are 24 years of age. This cultural pressure is something that has caused³¹, and will cause promising young women to stop their careers

Japan had the first female professional go players and the first female go tournaments but today the rest of Asia has caught up. Western countries such as America might even be considered ahead of Japan in this development, as they appointed a woman to become the chairman of the American go association (AGA)³².

Go and computers

Because we live in an age of technology, some people might believe the next step in the development of go would be as a digital game. For an example, computers can have become able to play chess at top professional level. The development of “computer go” programs has been ongoing for years now, however computer go programs have yet to reach the professional level. That is because go is astronomically more difficult for a computer to grasp, than chess. The key differences being the number of allowed moves at any given time. For an example, chess normally has around 10-20 legit moves at any time and the number of legit moves decrease as the players kill each other's men on the go board. Go on the other hand starts out with 19x19 legit moves, and even though the number of possibly moves decrease by one every turn, each move also gives the game an added complexity.

The interview with David Erbach in 1988 tells us that the level of go programs back then was around 12-15Kyu. “The many faces of go³³(Version 12 - 2008)” which is the best go program today, is able to play at about the same level as a 2Kyu player. Even though the programs have evolved somewhat over the last twenty years, 2Kyu is still very weak and not nearly strong enough to rival a professional go player.

³¹Example: No Author. (Summer 1989). Two Perspectives on Women's Go. *Go world magazine* 56. page 64.

³²Jonathan Wood. (Autumn 1988). Barbara Calhoun: America's Ambassador of Go. *Go world magazine* 53. page 55-58.

³³David Footland. [Changes last made on: February 26th, 2009]. The many faces of go. <http://www.smart-games.com/manyfaces.html> . Visited May 10th 2009.

Last words

People might think that go was simply invented in china and that all the other Asian countries just copied it. However that is not the case. Today, the rest of the world looks towards Japan when faced with questions regarding go. Even though the Japanese player base is in a decline today, Japan was the main developer of go for the last four hundred years! That is not something that can be overlooked. Japan also has the most prestigious title matches in the world because of their history.

However Japan is not as central today in the twenty first century, as they once were. The other nations of the world are catching up to Japan at an alarming rate and some have even surpassed Japan. Today, Japan is not what it used to be within the world of go. So what makes Japan so central to the world of go, has to be something that occurred before the twenty first century. Before the changes in value occurred that plunged the Japanese go into a Decline.

I think the decline of Japanese go is somewhat linked to their aging population. In that the old Japanese champions have difficulties getting used to the modern inventions brought by newer players, which today are coming from China and Korea. Even if the Japanese are in a slump, they haven't given up on go. Japan still has many go schools and centers sponsored by the Nihon Kiin and even more go clubs exist privately. And along as the Nihon Kiin doesn't loose focus of developing new players, I think it's only a matter of time before a new generation of players comes forth.

Based on the *shinfuseki* developed by Kitani Minoru and Go-Seigen the other go nations, China and Korea have begun developing go strategies that rival the Japanese inventions. Simply put, Japan is not the sole developer of go *fuseki* anymore. Even though this seems to threaten Japans importance in the world of go I do not think it will have much affect. Japan's importance to the game of go is based on the fact that the Japanese literally were the ones that developed the game we call “go” today and because of this I think go is as much a Japanese game as it is Chinese.

The main question now is, “who will develop go in the future?” If the Japanese don't recover from their lack of interest in go, the development of the game falls to players from other countries. If the game itself gets developed so much by other nations that it stops resembling

the go of today, Japan will lose its influence over the game. However it is unlikely that any one country will be able to take credit for any changes made, because the communication between countries today is a lot better now than during the isolation of Japan. So because Japan has the historical evidence available that proves how they were the first real developers of go, Japan will always be important to the world of go.

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“Go world” magazine published all their magazines dating from from 1977 through 2006 on a 3 DVD collection and called it “Go world archive” containing issue 1 – 108.

(<http://www.kiseidodigital.com/gwa.html>) which is what I have used.

A sample issue can be downloaded from (<http://www.kiseidodigital.com/index.html>)

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