

White played first in those days.

As the centuries passed, the game gradually spread from the aristocracy to the Buddhist and Shinto clergy and to the samurai warriors. Nichiren, the monk who founded the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, is said to have been one of the best go players of his day (the mid-thirteenth century). He is also said to have introduced the practice of keeping game records; a record survives of a game between Nichiren and a nine year old disciple named Kisshomaru, dated the First Month of 1253. However, it should be said that most people believe that this game record is a nineteenth century forgery, and barring this record there is little evidence that Nichiren played go at all (although there is at least one classic whole board problem attributed to him).

Early game records, whether authentic or not, give a good idea of the way go was played in the old days. First, opening corner plays other than the 4-4 point were only seen in handicap games of 2 or 3 stones, where there were empty corners at the start of the game. In even games, due to the mandatory cross *hoshi* (star point) opening, with Black in the upper right and lower left, the only joseki seen were based on the 4-4 point. The earliest of these is believed to date from the tenth century. However, the joseki current in those days have long ago been discarded.

Another feature of go in the Middle Ages, probably the most striking to modern eyes, was its incredible aggressiveness. The modern ideas of *fuseki* (opening) development were far in the future, and games were marked by immediate savage fighting. The idea of building a moyo was totally alien and unheard of; instead, games tended to involve large numbers of small groups jostling for eyes from start to finish. Under these circumstances, fighting ability was the only criterion for strength at go. No wonder the samurai considered go a good way to pass the time between battles!

Finally, sometime in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the mandatory cross star point setup position was abandoned in favor of starting with an empty board as we do today. The cross star point pattern had been largely responsible for the old style of play. Abandoning it made the modern style of go possible, although it took a long time for the old super-aggressive style to die out. It could have been far worse—in the sixteenth century the Koreans adopted an alternative setup position consisting of *sixteen* stones placed at intervals along the fourth line, and furthermore Black was required to play his first move on the *tengen* (center point), so that this was effectively a seventeenth set-up stone, though it was never considered as such. (See the diagram on the next page.) The reform that swept all this away, which the Chinese and Koreans did not adopt until the 1920's, is the first reason why go developed to a higher level in Japan than in China or Korea, and was undoubtedly the most significant advance in the development of go since the establishment of the 19x19 board.

THE GREAT SENCHI

Satsugen died in 1788, and Retsugen became the tenth Honinbo. Retsugen had two main claims to fame. First, as a result of the castle game boom initiated by his predecessor, he was able to play more castle games than anyone before or after him (forty-six), and second, he arranged for the Honinbo heir to take precedence over the heirs of the other go heads, and therefore receive more money. Retsugen was a great player in his own right, reaching 8 dan in 1801, but he was overshadowed by a player who was over a century ahead of his time. This was the seventh Yasui, Senchi Senkaku, who became known as *O-Senchi* (the Great Senchi).

Senchi is sometimes called the father of modern go. He was a modern player born into the classical period. In those days, it was normal to emphasize the third line in the fuseki and play a territory oriented game, but Senchi played on the fourth and fifth lines and emphasized the center. He often began from the 4-5 and 3-5 points, and was extremely fond of making large moyos. Compared to the regular, somewhat unadventurous, style of play at the time, Senchi's go was spectacular. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. Nothing like it was seen again until the 1930's, when Go Seigen and Kitani Minoru developed what became known as New Fuseki Theory, both of them well aware that Senchi had anticipated them. (Kitani regularly used to visit Senchi's grave to pay his respects to him.)

Senchi was the son of Sakaguchi Sentoku, who was himself a prominent go player. Sakaguchi had been a pupil of Yasui Shuntetsu Senkaku and had founded his own Sakaguchi house, one of three minor go houses that arose during the Edo period. (The others were the Hattori house, which was associated with the Inoues, and the Mizutani house, which was associated with the Honinbos.)

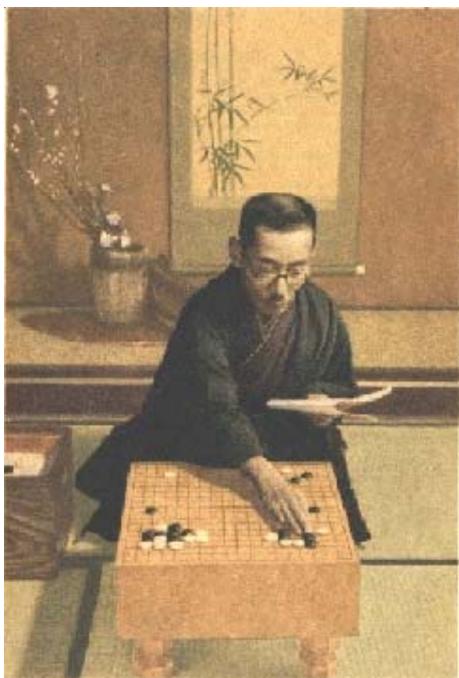
The Sakaguchis were closely allied with the Yasui house, so when the young Senchi showed signs of exceptional go talent he was sent to the Yasuis, where he could receive better training than the Sakaguchi house could give him. He was chosen to succeed as head of the Yasui house when the sixth Yasui, Sentetsu, died suddenly in 1780. This shows how confident the Yasuis were that they had a genius on their hands, for Senchi was at that time far from strong by professional standards—he was still only 2 dan, a ludicrously low rank for the head of a major go house. Fortunately, the Yasui house's judgement had not been awry, and it did not take Senchi long to improve dramatically. He was promoted extremely quickly for the time, reaching 6 dan only six years later. His record in the castle games was an impressive 18 wins to 9 losses with two ties.

By 1801 he was 8 dan, gaining this promotion at the same time as Honinbo Retsugen. Of the two, there seems little doubt that Senchi was the

a series of similar articles, but Shusai put pressure on the magazine editor and no further articles were accepted for publication. Nothing daunted, in 1918 Nozawa found a braver editor and continued his series until 1923, despite Shusai expelling him from the Honinbo house. (He was expelled from the Square and Circle Society as well, and for the same reason—he publicly criticized a number of commentaries by the president of the Society, Nakagawa Senji, who had succeeded Iwasaki in 1912.)

The Honinbo house may have suffered from authoritarian leadership, but by contrast the Inoue house in Osaka had no leadership at all. In 1919 the fifteenth Inoue head, Tabuchi Inseki, died without leaving an heir. After two years one of his pupils, Egeta Senjiro, unilaterally declared himself to be the new Inoue head, but the other Inoue pupils, annoyed at his presumption, responded by expelling him. For the next year the Inoue house continued without a head, but it was clear that they had no future without a recognized leader. In 1920 Egeta was readmitted and confirmed as the sixteenth Inoue.

It had become customary for the newspapers to sponsor matches between the top players, but by the 1920's these matches were getting seriously out of hand. A single game between Shusai and his old rival Karigane took six



SHUSAI

months, lasting from May to November 1920 with 20 adjournments. Shusai was to blame. Traditionally the player of the white stones had the right to suspend play for the day at any time, provided it was his move. Shusai (who, as Meijin, always played white) regularly abused this custom in important matches by suspending play for the day whenever he faced a difficult decision and then analyzing the position at home with his pupils.

This sort of thing was clearly unacceptable, and so in 1922 Karigane and three other players formed a breakaway organisation, separate from both the Honinbo house and the Square and Circle Society (and hostile to both) called the *Hiseikai* (Minor Sage Association). This was essentially a pressure group set up to lobby for a number of reforms, the most important of which were: the introduction of time limits; all games to be played on even

NIHON KIIN AND KISEISHA

The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 changed the Japanese go world overnight. All the Tokyo-based go groups suffered enormous financial losses. It became nearly impossible for them to continue independently, and a leading politician and patron of go, Baron Okura Kishichiro, went to great lengths to persuade the various factions to settle their differences.

In May 1924, a conference was held at the brand new Imperial Hotel in Tokyo—one of only a handful of buildings still standing after the earthquake, which had struck only two minutes before the hotel's official opening was scheduled to take place. It was attended by all the top players from Tokyo as well as delegates from Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka and Kyoto. As a result of this historic meeting, a single national go association, the *Nihon Kiin* (Japan Go Association), was founded in July 1924, and the Honinbo house, Square and Circle Society, and the Minor Sage Association ceased to exist. However, there was one notable dissenter—the sixteenth Inoue head, Egeta Inseki, refused to join the Nihon Kiin, disliking the infighting among its founders. (Egeta died in 1961, and the last of the classical go houses died with him, although he had named an heir, Tsuda Yoshitaka, who succeeded to the empty title of the seventeenth Inoue.)



ORIGINAL NIHON KIIN BUILDING,
DESTROYED DURING WWII

who were inevitably the keenest proponents of New Fuseki, experimented with ever more bizarre ideas such as the 5-5 and 4-6 points; an extreme example was set by one Tanaka Fujio, who often played his first stone on the center point. One of Tanaka's weirder openings was to play his first four moves on the 5-10 points.

The most famous game of the New Fuseki period was a game sponsored by the *Yomiuri* between Go and Shusai. The game was seen by many as an international match; it was certainly a clash of the old and new fuseki theories. Go played his first three moves on the 3-3 point, the opposite 4-4 point, and the center star point, allowing Shusai to make two *shimari* (corner enclosures) which was considered unthinkable by the old school.

Traditionalists were outraged, accusing Go of disrespect towards the Meijin, and extremists even threw stones at Go's house. Shusai won by two points, but despite this, New Fuseki Theory continued to be popular. It has been alleged that the crucial tesuji that won Shusai the game (White 160) was actually discovered by one of his pupils during an overnight study session. Shusai always denied this, but he had something of a reputation for this sort of thing, as has been mentioned earlier.

After about four years, the novelty value of New Fuseki started to wear off. The more extreme ideas were abandoned, and slowly the old style made a comeback. However, this was not the end of this theory. Fuseki play became a blend of the best of both styles, as it has remained to this day. New Fuseki changed opening play forever.

In 1937 Shusai announced that he was going to retire. He would play one last "retirement game" and then bequeath the title of Honinbo to the Nihon Kiin, to be competed for in a tournament to be held every two years.



KITANI VS. SHUSAI

Game Twenty-five

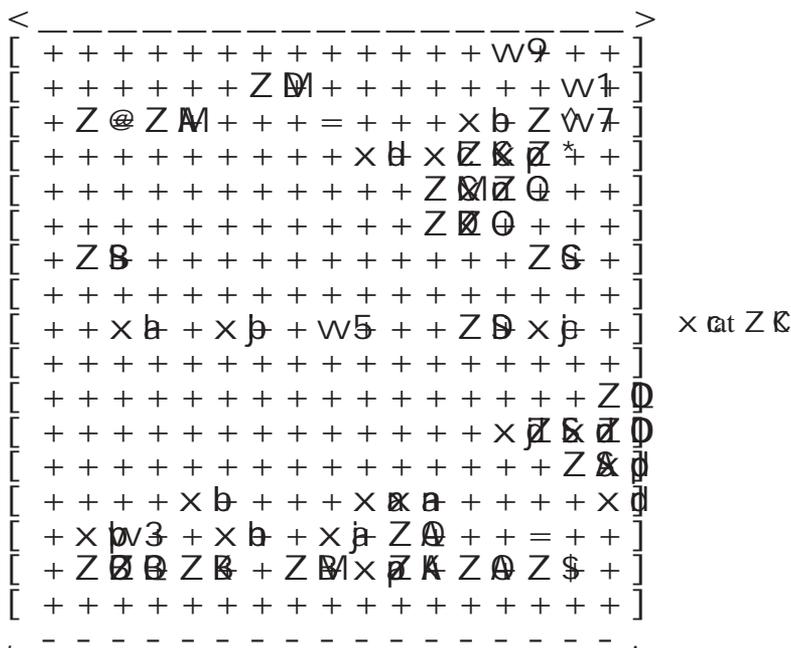
White: Honinbo Shusai, Meijin

Black: Go Seigen, 5 dan

Date: 16th Oct, Showa 8-19th Jan, Showa 9 (1933-34)

252 moves. White wins by 2 points

The famous “International Game” in which Go Seigen played the Meijin. This game was as much about politics as it was about go. Shusai was apprehensive because of the responsibility of representing Japan against the Chinese upstart, but Go was just as worried because he knew that his decision to use the New Fuseki approach against Shusai would be considered disrespectful by Japanese nationalists. Before the game, Go actually asked whether an early play on the central point was acceptable under the rules of Japanese etiquette.



1-50