

PREFACE

This book began as a break for me from the long slog of presenting a series on Go Seigen's ten-game matches. The match series, also published by Slate & Shell, now has three volumes: *Kamakura* (Go Seigen versus Kitani Minoru), *Final Summit* (Go versus Takagawa Kaku) and *9-Dan Showdown* (Go versus Fujisawa Kuranosuke). These books span the period roughly of the second quarter of the 20th century. Although I describe the general go scene at the time in some detail there, there is obviously little room for games or incidents that fall outside the ten-game match format. Yet there are three or four really famous other games in this period that I thought I would also like to cover. This one is the game to mark the retirement of the patriarchal Honinbo Shusai and the handover of his traditional titles of Honinbo and Meijin to start a new era of modern tournament go. It was also the game featured in a famous novel by Nobel prize-winner Kawabata Yasunari.

The present book is thus the first attempt at an occasional series. In some ways, it was a busman's holiday. At first glance the format here will seem similar to the ten-game match series. Still, there are two main differences. One is that the amount of scene setting and background colour is relatively limited, largely because it has been given in the earlier books. On the upside, however, there is more game commentary.

Famous games have naturally been published many times, but normally the amount of commentary is limited to a few pages, for obvious economic reasons but also often because the game is famous for what happened off the board more than for what happened on it. I thought I would like to change the balance and look at the actual game in much more detail.

More is not necessarily better, of course, and I am one of those who can easily go glassy eyed when faced with a swathe of variation diagrams. However, if it is done right and the context is explained, it can be rewarding to study a game in great depth. In any case, I do believe a short commentary is really a travesty when it comes to games where two players spent two or three whole days on them, as in the ten-game matches. How much more that is true for a game that lasted six months!

As mentioned, Kawabata Yasunari even decided it was worth an entire novel, *The Master of Go* (that is, Meijin). Almost every western go player must have heard of it. I have an impression, however, that many who have read it end up with a feeling of frustration or with unanswered questions.

One problem, for a go player, is that it doesn't offer much commentary on the game. In fact, in the original Japanese, the game record is not even given. Using go, however skilfully, as a sustained metaphor for an elegiac commentary on the passing of the old ways is all very well, but go players tend to ask: was it a good game? And, yes, it's a partly fictionalised account, but how faithful was it to real life? I have therefore decided to add an appendix to the present book which will address many of the questions that go players raise about Kawabata's book, or, more usually, about Edward Seidensticker's translation of it.

I don't intend to turn to literary criticism here, though I will try to illustrate a couple of the problems in that regard. My main aim there will be to enable go players to enjoy this translation even more by commenting on some of the mass of go details.

In that appendix, I have included a brief summary of each chapter of the translation. You may find some slight discrepancies depending on which edition of *The Master of Go* you have. However, while there are editions in Japanese with significant differences (the book started as a colour commentary for the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun* newspaper, then morphed into a magazine series and then into a book), the differences in the English editions seem to be minor and will be ignored here. In all cases, for the convenience of English-speaking readers, I am referring here to the English translation by Edward Seidensticker (see the Bibliography for references to translations in other languages). You do not need a copy of the original novel or the translation to make sense of the notes, but I do recommend reading either one.

As to the main part of the book, the commentary, as with the ten-game matches, is my distillation of the many professional commentaries I have collected, along with factual snippets from here, there, and everywhere. Much of the material here, as with the ten-game match books, comes from the previously unpublished archives of Games of Go on Disk—GoGoD. What that pretentious phrase really means is that over many years I filed away translations and notes in shorthand, which meant they were of little use to anyone else. The obvious use of sharing them by turning them into books was precluded by the need to create camera-ready copy for the previous generation of go publishers. To add all that work onto the work of writing the book for a small niche market was more than I could face. Then along came Bill Cobb of Slate & Shell with an offer to do the diagram layout. If you do enjoy these books, he is the man to thank.

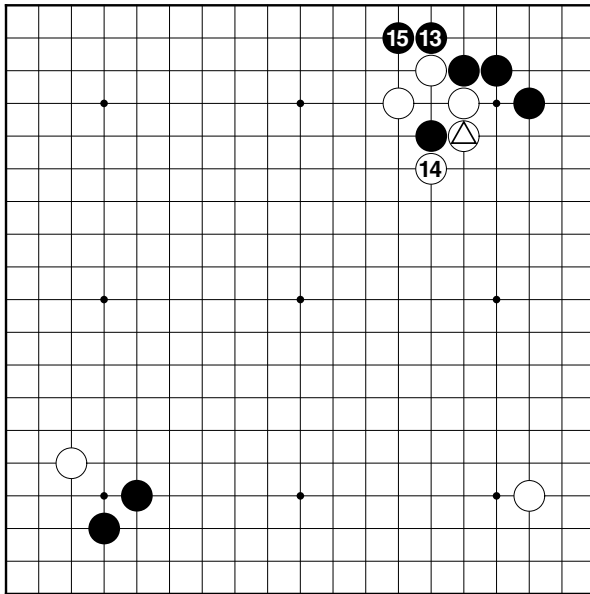
The sponsor wanted an exquisite game, and so the arrangements were special. As Shusai was not in the best of health, the time limits were set at 40 hours each, playing once every five days. After the scandal of Shusai's arbitrary adjournments against Go Seigen, a rule was introduced that players were to seal moves upon adjournment. This applied to whichever side was to move, Black or White, but it applied for the first time to Shusai. However, this new rule was to backfire on Kitani somewhat as he created a scandal of his own (at least in Shusai's eyes) by sealing a simple forcing move, as described in the commentary.

Another special feature was a technical commentary by Go Seigen, even though this meant delegating a reporter specially to visit Go every so often in Hakone, where Go was ensconced in a sanatorium (and also even though Go was hardly likely to do a Nozawa and comment frankly on the moves of Shusai, or even of his friend Kitani).

Most famously of all, the entire game was chronicled by the novelist Kawabata Yasunari. Of course he was not then known as a Nobel prize-winner, but he was still reasonably famous. He had emerged as a notable talent with *The Izu Dancer* in 1926, and in 1937, the year before the Retirement Game when he was 38, he had just published the even better known *Snow Country*. He was already known for melancholic touches in his work, but the work inspired by this game, even though it occurred before the war, did not appear in book form as *The Master of Go* until 1954, by which time the traumatic effects of the lost war had deepened this aspect of his writing.

A question go players have is: how good was Kawabata at go? There were a couple of published games with pros after the war. In 1954 he was allowed a six-stone game with Iwamoto Kaoru 8-dan to mark his promotion to 2-dan, and in 1963 he also played Sakata Eio 9-dan on six stones. He won both, but he largely lost touch with the go world after the Nobel Prize in 1968.

He also had a game published in 1938. It is mentioned in the novel. One of the referees in the Retirement Game, Onoda Chiyotaro 6-dan, perhaps conscious of the fact that the game was conspicuous by its absence in *Kido*, prepared a short article describing a scene when he arrived at Hakone on 10 July. This was to be the first resumption of the game after the first, short opening sessions in Tokyo. After the evening meal, everyone was relaxing and drinks were proffered. Shusai had a few cups of sake but only Onoda joined him in this. The rest were temperate, taking only "cider" (that is, lemonade). In the conversation it transpired that Kawabata had played a



13 – 15

13: Go was staggered when Kitani told him he had thought about ignoring 12 (△). Go said he would then expect White to play at ① in Diagram 6, forcing ②, which he thought bad for Black. Apart from having been forced, he now has no real momentum to develop from here, and of course White becomes thick in the centre.

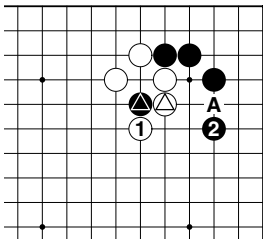


Diagram 6

What Kitani had toyed with was the idea that, without the △-△ exchange, White A was admittedly very severe, but making the marked exchange may just be enough to lessen the efficiency of A, so that he can justify moving first to the upper left corner. Yet instead he stuck to his solid line of play with Black 13 and 15.

15: ① in Diagram 7 has an obvious appeal in place of the slow crawl of the game. If Black could be sure White would play as shown, this ① is clearly in a better position than it would be at A.

However, Black has to consider whether White can first exploit the thinness of the knight's move before deciding how to proceed on the other side. Diagram 8 on the next page is one possibility.

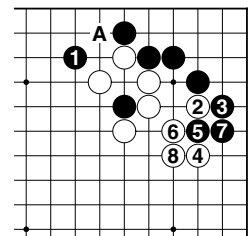
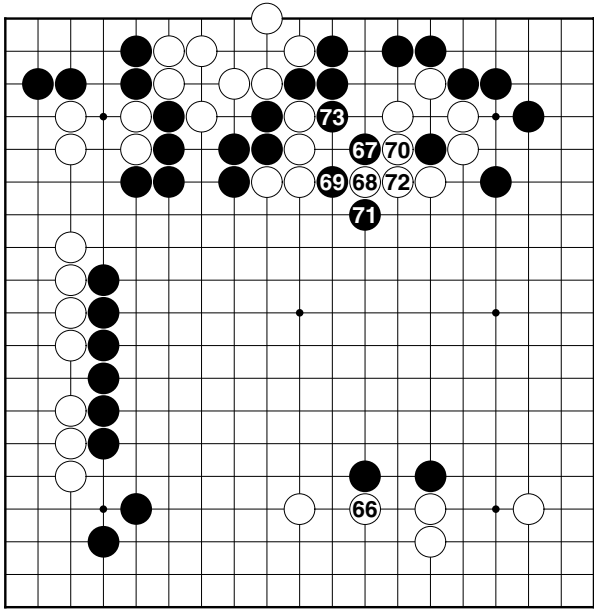


Diagram 7



66 – 73

Ⓣ69 apparently disconcerted Shusai so much that it put him off his lunch. He spent one hour forty-six minutes on his reply (spanning the lunch hour; his second slowest play, after Ⓣ90—he played as soon as he returned from lunch). It seems likely that Kitani had already planned this move during the recess between this and the last session, yet when the sealed move was opened, he took a further 20 minutes before playing Ⓣ67 and Ⓣ69 in rapid succession. Nonetheless, Shusai did not expect it, and indeed it has to be handled carefully if he does not want to lose control of the whole board.

Ⓣ70: Referee Onoda Chiyotaro considered this a brilliant reply. It concedes some gains to Black but gives White freedom of action and flexibility. Kitani’s assumption had been that White is inhibited now from playing Ⓣ70 as in Diagram 72 precisely because of the ▲ stones, as these aid Black’s attack.

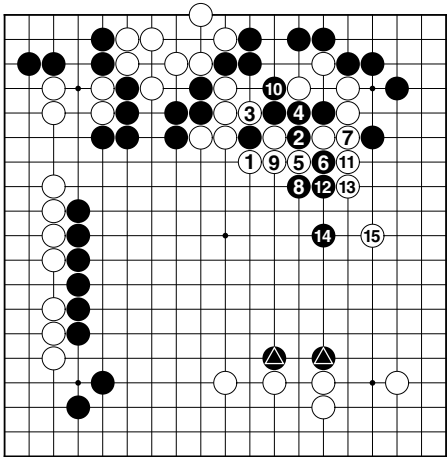


Diagram 72

73: If Black connects on the outside, at ① in Diagram 73, with a view to stealing White's eye shape, note that ② is clodhopping play just for the sake of sente. White ends up with one eye and offers Black a thick squeeze.

Diagram 73

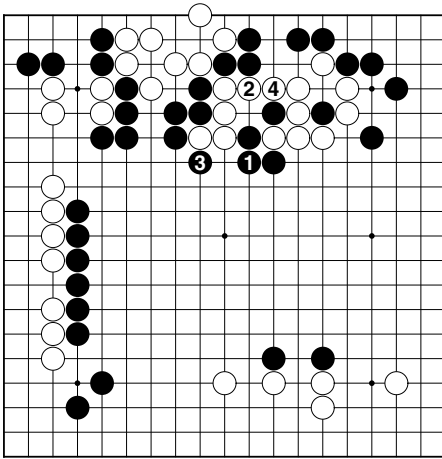
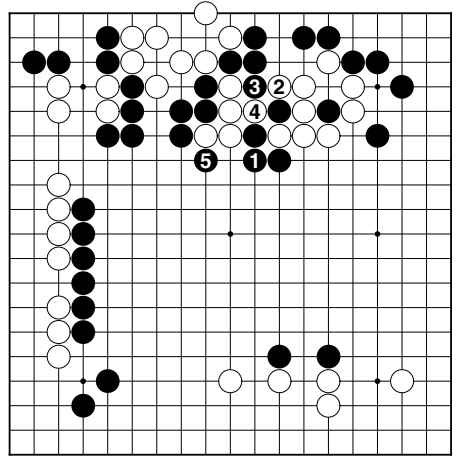


Diagram 74

The right play is ② in Diagram 74, which leaves White with one and a half eyes and Black has no squeeze.

That was a piece of advice from Shusai, but Go Seigen claimed that Black could have forced the bad shape of Diagram 73 if he wanted to play this way, because he can force first with the descent of ① in Diagram 75, which gives his stones on the top edge a crucial extra liberty.

② apparently cannot be at ③ because Black at ② would kill him, but since now White A doesn't work, it makes this idea seem better than 73 in the game.

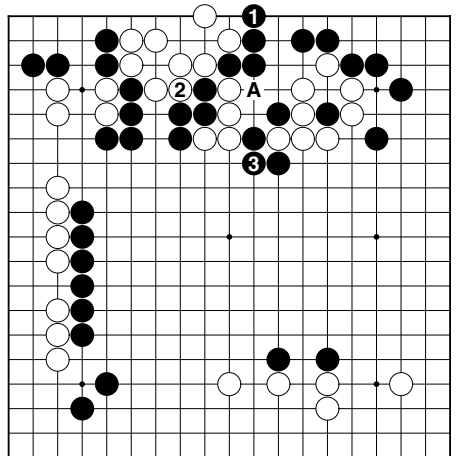


Diagram 75

APPENDIX

The novel, *The Master of Go*

This section summarises the book of the game by Kawabata Yasunari, referring to the original and to the Edward G. Seidensticker translation, so that I can add my own notes and comments. These are mainly, but not exclusively, intended for those who have read one or the other.

Although some notes simply add details, such as the notes on players mentioned, some comments focus on what I regard as problems for go players in reading the translation. This will inevitably mean claiming a few mistranslations or misunderstandings, but I do not wish thereby to convey the impression that the translation is badly flawed. In fact, in many ways it is excellent. I am myself a great fan of Seidensticker's own works and his translations of other authors, and I don't think it demeans Kawabata to claim that Seidensticker's translations played a great part in Kawabata's Nobel Prize.

Yet *The Master of Go* is very much about go. I feel it is fair to say that the game did not really engage Seidensticker (1921-2007), and he may not have given the game the attention we western go players think it deserves. He may well have been surprised to learn that enough western go players even exist to care about the nitty gritty! Nevertheless there are, and for us go players there are significant hiccups in the translation. I hope that by remedying them I will make the English version even more interesting for go players.

Apart from taking a different view on some of the go details, I think there is also a dense texture to Kawabata's writing which often gives room for more than one interpretation. I have therefore also made a couple of comments where I believe an interpretation of mood different from Seidensticker's can be sustained. These are mainly by way of illustration from a go player's perspective. I am not attempting literary criticism.

A translator working with two cultures as different as Japanese and British or American is probably always going to have to focus on recreating the overall mood, using emotions that we share, rather than focus on knowledge of details that we may not share. Seidensticker himself was fond of reminding readers that translators are counterfeiters, and he was a very skilful "counterfeiter". I do recommend all his works.