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March 1869 → March 2019: 150 years Rebuilding Shogi World!

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

~learning with the pros of the past~

By John Fairbairn

There are several ways of annotating a game. Shogi mercifully lacks the vain and flatulent "Interesting . . . I played a similar move in the XYZ Bus Mechanic's Championship" type of comment so frequent in chess; but it has its own peculiarities.

Whereas notes to chess games are generally appended directly to the relevant moves, in Japanese shogi commentaries the notes are normally given en bloc at the end of a block of moves. The chess player thus finds it easy to play through a game and read the notes simultaneously; but he has few signposts to how the game is ebbing and flowing. The shogi player, on the other hand, has to backtrack through what may be a long sequence of moves once he has reached the text, but in compensation the junctures at which text is interpolated almost invariably represent useful markers to pause points and turning points. Of course, this method simply reflects the fact that shogi, with its many local battles, can be presented in discontinuous phases, whereas a chess game tends to be more a single continuum.

Yet there is another way of annotating a shogi game, rarely seen in print now but still the norm if you have a teaching game with a pro. In this method only one or two brief comments are given on the entire game, at the end, and these are supposed to highlight the most important moves, or the winning point, or maybe a new idea. The pupil is expected not only to think about the comment itself, but to compare it with his own perception of what was most important in the game, and to ask himself why that comment was chosen above all others for utterance, why certain things were not mentioned. This auto-didactic method is a feature of Japanese pedagogy, and it might well be added that the pupil would not normally dare to interrogate the master further.

The influence of zen, notably the importance of what is not expressed, or which cannot be expressed — the sound of silence, should be obvious.

For me, the classic example of this method came in a game of go on which Honinbo Shūsai gave one comment: "Black 126 was good."

Commentaries on shogi games are not normally quite so Lacedemonian, — they often have two sentences!

This style of annotation was the norm in old shogi (and go) books, when the bulk of shogi activity was vested not in tournaments based on the individual ethic but in the orderly progression of the master-pupil relationship. The comments published were simply the comments given from master to pupil, and were not explications for the benefit of weak amateurs, as is the case now.

Even though we are amateurs, I thought it could be interesting, and probably useful, to give some of these games and original comments. I suggest you play through the game first, picking out yourself the highlights, and then compare your choice with the master's.

The games I have selected come from the old book *Meiji Meika Teawase* (Games by Celebrated Players of The Meiji Era) and the annotations are by the Meijin Sekine Kinjiro, Mino Tashichiro, 7-dan; Kawai Bokyo, 7-dan and Doi Ichitaro, 8-dan.

There is an ulterior motive too. The Meiji era (1868–1912) was in its early stages a distressing one for most shogi and go players, as the old Takugawa system fell apart and Western fads flooded in, swamping the traditional art and pastimes. Shogi and go historians have had enormous difficulty in piecing together the history of this period and it is only in the last few years that a coherent, though still patchy, picture has emerged.

By giving shogi profiles on the principal players, I hope if not to open the door on this era at least to unblock the keyhole.

There is also the merit that many of the games are handicap games between professionals — rare nowadays.

Game 1: L/Lance handicap — 16th March 1869 at the house of Ohashi Soyo.

Black: Oya Tokichi
White: Ito Soin

In the same month that this game was played, Soin and Soyo, heads of the old families that had enjoyed government patronage until October the

previous year, set themselves to rebuild the shogi world. For this they founded a publishing house, publishing games, more or less in the manner given here.

Ito Soin, 11th Lifetime Meijin, became a pupil of Ohashi Sokei when he was 10. He was thus a rival of Amano Soho. In 1845 he was adopted by Ito Soken and changed his name from Ueno Bojiro to Ito Inju.

He took the name Soin on becoming Meijin in 1879.

He tried many things to support shogi at its time of crisis, notably by publishing *Shogi Shinpo*. After his death in 1893, aged 68, Kosuge Kennosuke published a collection of his games in two volumes. Like most old shogi books they are extremely rare.

Oya Tokichi reached 1-dan when he was 13 and moved from Tokorozawa (Saitama prefecture) in Tokyo to hone his skill.

He was said to have beaten Amano Soho in a game when he was 16. He died in 1892, still young but having reached 7-dan and being ranked among the very best players.

1. ..., P-3d; 2. P-7f, P-4d; 3. P-2f, P-3e; 4. P-2e, B-3c; 5. P-1f, R-3b; 6. S-4h, K-6b; 7. P-1e, K-7b; 8. K-6h, S-4b; 9. K-7h, G-4a-5b; 10. G-4i-5h, P-9d; 11. P-9f, K-8b; 12. P-1d, P-1d; 13. L-1d, P-3f; 14. P-3f, P-1c; 15. L-1c+, N-1c; 16. R-1h, R-1b; 17. R-1f, L-1a; 18. N-1g, R-3b; 19. P-3e, S-4c; 20. P-4f, N-2e; 21. P-1b, B-2d; 22. N-2e, L-1b; 23. N-3c+ (Diagram A), B-3c; 24. P-1c, B-2d; 25. P-1b+, R-3e; 26. +P-1c, R-1e; 27. R-1e, B-1e; 28. R-1a, S-7b; 29. +P-2c, R-1h; 30. P-9e, P-9e; 31. P-9c, P-3g; 32. S-3g, P-1d; 33. P-2f, R-3h+; 34. R-1d+, B-5a; 35. S-4h, +R-3e; 36. +R-2e, +R-2e; 37. P-2e, P-7d; 38. L-9b, L-9b; 39. P-9b+, K-9b; 40. L-9d, K-8b; 41. P-9c, L-9a; 42. N-8e, R-3e; 43. P-9b+, L-9b; 44. P-9c, N-9c; 45. R-5e, R-3h+; 46. L-9c+, L-9c; 47. B-6f, L-9a; 48. N-9c+, L-9c; 49. N-8e, N-8a; 50. N-9c+, N-9c; 51. L-9d, N-8a; 52. L-9c+, N-9c; 53. N-9d, K-9b; 54. L-9e, P-8d; 55. L-9i, L-9a; 56. P-2d, P-9g; 57. N-8b+, K-8b; 58. P-9d, N-8a; 59. P-9c+, L-9c; 60. L-9c+, N-9c; 61. L-9g, N-8e; 62. R-8e, P-8e; 63. B-9c+, K-7c; 64. N-6e, K-6b; 65. L-7c, S-8a; 66. L-7a+, G-7a; 67. N-7c+, K-7c; 68. +B-7a, P-9f; 69. L-9f, R-9h; 70. S-8h, N-8d; 71. N-6e, K-6d; 72. P-9i, R-8h+; 73. K-8h, N-7f; 74. K-7h, S-5d; 75. P-7g, S-8e; 76. P-7f, P-8f; 77. N-5f, K-5e; 78. +B-8a, P-8g+; 79. K-6h, N-4e; 80. P-4e, N-6f; 81. +B-8b, S-7c; 82. N-4g, K-4e; 83. R-5e, K-3f; 84. G-3g, +R-3g; 85. R-3e, K-2g; 86. R-3g, K-2h; 87. R-2f, Resigns.

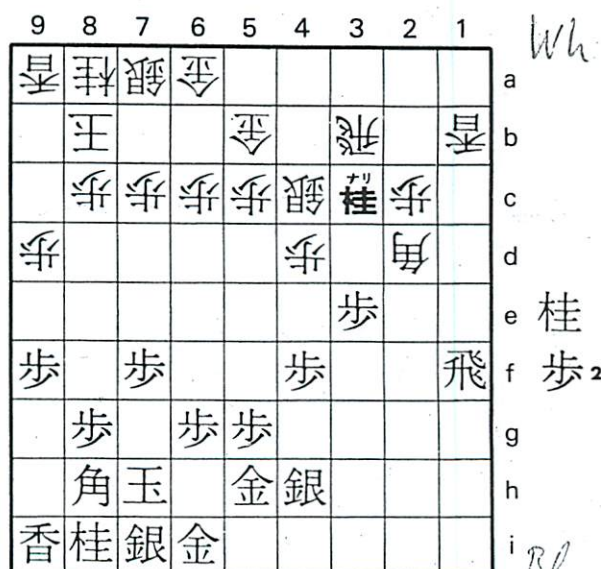


Diagram A

"Black's N-3c+ was interesting. R-5e was full of meaning."

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Game 2: Rook handicap — 16th March 1869 at the house of Ohashi Soyo.

Black: Nakahara Shimaru, 2-dan
White: Ohashi Sokei, 8-dan

Ohashi Sokei was the 11th head of his family (the main branch). He was Amano Soho's teacher, and like him was unable to acquire the Meijinship. Few of his games remain and his son, Sokin, had little shogi talent and did nothing to sustain the glory of the Ohashi name. Sokei died in 1874. When Sokin died in 1910 the Ohashi main line came to an end. Nakahara Shimaru (originally called Taga Shishin or Kakunosuke) was more of a scholar than a shogi player. He never rose above 2-dan but did sterling work in producing shogi books. His son, Taga Tsuneo, reached 4-dan.

1. ..., S-6b; 2. P-7f, P-5d; 3. P-7e, S-4b; 4. R-7b, S4b-5c; 5. P-7d, Px7d; 6. Rx7d, S-6d; 7. R-7f, B-3a; 8. K-4h, K-4b; 9. K-3h, K-3b; 10. P-1f, P-1d; 11. G6i-5h, P-8d; 12. P-9f, P-9d; 13. B-9g, P-8e; 14. S-6h, S6b-7c; 15. S-7g, S-8d; 16. R-7d, S8d-7c; 17. R-7f, B-5c; 18. S-6f, B-4d; 19. N-7g, P-9e; 20. Nx8e, S-8d; 21. R-7d, P*8c; 22. Bx6d, Px6d; 23. Rx6d, G-6b; 24. S*4e (Diagram B), B-5c; 25. R-7d, N-7c; 26. R-7i, Sx8e; 27. P*7d, B-6d; 28. Px7c+, Gx7c; 29. N*5f, B*8h; 30. R-8i, B8h-9g+; 31. Lx9g, Bx9g+; 32. B*8b, G-7b; 33. Bx9a+, L*7c; 34. P*7e, +B-9h; 35. R-5i, P*6e; 36. Sx6e, +Bx8g; 37. S6ex5d, +B-8f; 38. +B-8a, P*7a; 39. N-6d, Lx7e; 40. Nx7b+, Px7b; 41. R-8i, N*8g; 42. L*2f, L-7h+; 43. Rx8g, +Bx8g; 44. N*3e, N*3a; 45. +B-7a, P*5a; 46. +B-6b, P-3d; 47. Sx3d, +Bx5d; 48. Lx2c+, Resigns.

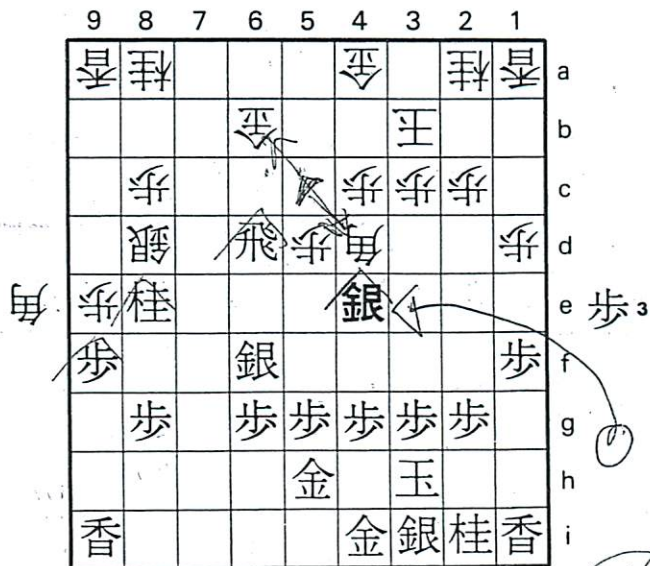


Diagram B

"White's P-3d was a miscalculation."

Game 3: L/Lance handicap — 13th March 1869 at the house of Ohashi Soyo.

Black: Hamana Yakichi
White: Ohashi Soyo

Ohashi Soyo, né Katsuta Senkichi, later Katsuta Keisen, was adopted into the collateral branch of the Ohashi family. It is believed he was born about 1835. He died in 1881 and with him the cadet Ohashi line ceased. He reached 7-dan.

Hamana Yakichi used to be a student of Soyo's. He supported Ito Soin's Shogi Shinpo and many of his games appear there. He was 5-dan.

1. ..., P-3d; 2. P-7f, P-4d; 3. P-7e, P-5d; 4. R-7h, S-6b; 5. P-7d, R-7b; 6. Px7c+, Sx7c; 7. R-7f, S-3b; 8. P-1f, S-7d; 9. P-1e, P-2d; 10. R-3f, S-2c; 11. K-4h, G6a-5b; 12. K-3h, K-4b; 13. S-4h, K-3b; 14. K-2h, G-4c; 15. G-3h, P-2e; 16. S-7h, S-2d; 17. R-1f, K-2c; 18. R-5f, P-3e; 19. P-9f, G-3b; 20. P-4f, N-3c; 21. S-4g, S-7e; 22. P-9e, B-3a; 23. B-9g, P-8d; 24. S-7g, S-6d; 25. G-5h, P*7e; 26. G5h-4h, N-7c; 27. B-8h, N-8e; 28. S-6h, P-7f; 29. P-4e, Px4e; 30. R-6f, R-7c; 31. P-8f, P-7g+; 32. Nx7g, Nx7g+; 33. Sx7g,

S-5e; 34. P*7d, R-8c; 35. R-7f, N*4f; 36. S-6f, Nx3h+; 37. Sx3h, P*7e; 38. R-7i, G*8g; 39. B-7g, P-7f; 40. B-5i (Diagram C), Sx6f; 41. Px6f, P-7g+; 42. Bx7g, Gx7g; 43. Rx7g, Bx8f; 44. R-7f, B-5i+; 45. G*4i, +B-6i; 46. P-7c+, R-8a; 47. +Px6c, P-3f; 48. Px3f, B*5e; 49. P*4f, Px4f; 50. P-5f, B-4d; 51. R-7b+, R-3a; 52. S*3g, P*3e; 53. P*4e, Nx4e; 54. Sx4f, G-3d; 55. N*4g, Px3f; 56. P*3c, G3bx3c; 57. P*3e, Sx3e; 58. Sx3e, Gx3e; 59. Nx3e, Bx3e; 60. P*4g, S*3g; 61. Nx3g, N*1f; 62. Lx1f, S*1g; 63. K-3i, Px3g+; 64. Gx3g, Nx3g+; 65. Sx3g, +Bx4g; 66. S*1b, K-3d; 67. Resigns.



Diagram C

"White's K-3b and R-7b both perform several jobs. K-3b is an unusual tactic to meet the exigencies of the situation and should not be imitated except by outstanding players. The endgame is exceedingly good."

Game 4: L/Lance handicap — 22nd April 1869 at the house of Ohashi Soyo.

Black: Tokari Eiyu
White: Ohashi Soyo

Soyo had a perfect style. Tokari Eiyu had a powerful father, Fukatsu Omi no Kami, who was a shogi fan. The son was playing as 5-dan in the mid-Meiji period but then he went to Hokkaido and obscurity. He was about the same age as Soyo, that is around 35 at the time of this game.

1. ..., P-3d; 2. P-7f, P-4d; 3. P-2f, P-3e; 4. P-2e, B-3c; 5. S-4h, R-3b; 6. P-1f, K-6b; 7. P-1e, K-7b; 8. K-6h, S-4b; 9. K-7h, P-9d; 10. P-9f, G4a-5b; 11. G4i-5h, K-8b; 12. P-1d, Px1d; 13. Lx1d, P*1c; 14. Lx1c+, Nx1c; 15. R-1h, R-1b; 16. B-1d, S-4c; 17. P-4f, B-5a; 18. N-1g, S-7b; 19. P-4e, Px4e; 20. P-2d, S-3d; 21. P-3f, Px2d; 22. Px3e, S-2c; 23. R-1f, N-2e; 24. Rx1b+, Sx1b; 25. P*4b, P-7d; 26. P-4a+, B-7c; 27. Nx2e, Px2e; 28. R*2b, S-1c; 29. R-1b+, P*3f; 30. +P-4b, G5b-6b; 31. N*8f, R*5d; 32. B-3c+, P-3g+; 33. S-5i, P-4f; 34. +P-5a, G-7a; 35. P*4h, P-8d; 36. +B-4c, B-5e; 37. +Bx5d, Px5d; 38. Nx7d, K-9c; 39. Nx6b+, N*8e; 40. +Nx7a, L*7g; 41. K-6h, Lx7i+; 42. Gx7i, Bx9i+; 43. L*8h, +Bx8i; 44. Gx8i, B*5e; 45. G*8c, Sx8c; 46. B*8b, Bx8b; 47. +Rx8b, Kx8b; 48. G*7b, Sx7b; 49. +Nx7b, K-8c; 50. Resigns.

"White's endgame was brilliant, but appeared somewhat lucky. Black must have regretted the way he played."

continues

