

GINKAMMURI

No.1 JANUARY 2025

THE MINSK SHOGI CLUB MAGAZINE

ITŌ TAKUMI

Through Minsk to the Eiō Title



SERGEI KORCHITSKY

"I DON'T SEE A CLEAR STRATEGY FOR
PROMOTING SHOGI GLOBALLY"

BACK IN 1907

THE STORY OF THE EARLIEST KNOWN
COMMERCIAL LOCALIZATION OF SHOGI
OUTSIDE JAPAN



TAKADA SYSTEM

THE FAVORITE OPENING OF BELARUSIAN TOP
PLAYERS



Photo from Ginkammuri

December 8, 2024

Winners of the Family Pair (Child + Adult) Tournament:

Andrei Pashinsky, Bogdan Pashinsky, Maria Kurakova, Alexander Kurakov, Elena Teploukhova, Alex Teploukhov.



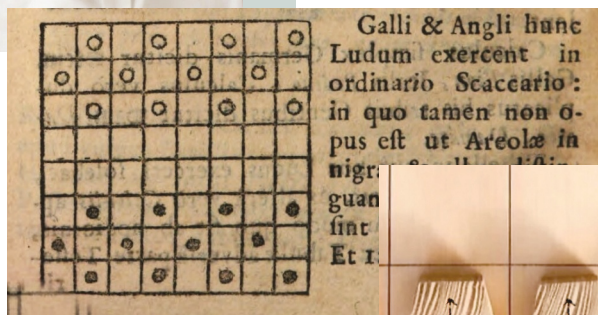
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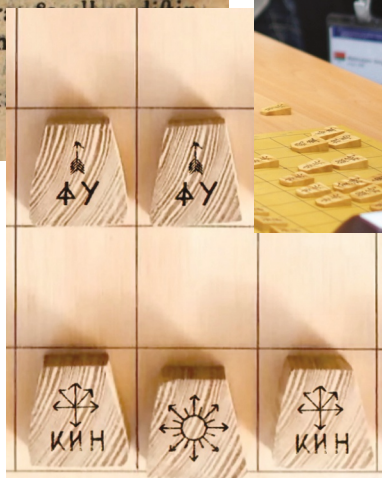
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Masahiro Itō and Takumi Itō



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GINKAMMURI

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We Are Taking Off!

We always have an excuse as to why we do nothing to pursue our dreams. Our cautious mind generates dozens of reasons to remain idle. We consider, consult, and still back off in the end. Or, in the worst case, we are to remain uncertain for much longer. Such prudence makes sense with regard to safety, however, in deeds, the one to act is the one to succeed!

Over the 24-year history of the Minsk community of shogi lovers, when we leaped into action without hesitation, then and only then we progressed. Holding tournaments without equipment, teaching kids without experience, starting a club without sufficient resources – those were among many risky, yet right decisions, that became possible only following the principle “Whatever you decide, do it already”. It seemed to many that the very idea of promoting a Japanese board game with foreign hieroglyphs was a dead end. It's like growing exotic fruit in an apple orchard – different climate, too much shade from the apple trees. Why even sweat over this weird fruit, when there are all the apples you can eat right here? But we took a chance.

So now, the instance we got an idea to assemble our numerous events, archives of materials, and shogi expertise into a monthly magazine, we immediately rushed to prepare a pilot issue for release. We were so inspired by this idea, as if we already had experience in this



area, had no other projects, and had no doubts that the magazine would be in demand and, most importantly, supported by readers. But again, we follow our own principle: as long as there is enthusiasm and interest, we start without thinking. No matter how long our flight will last.

No sooner said than done.
Commencing countdown: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

We are off!

Andrei Lysenka

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COLUMN BY

Sergei Lysenka

Photographs by Ginkammuri

Over the years of the Minsk shogi community and the Ginkammuri club's existence, we have come to what appears to be a simple truth: the game itself, which forms the foundation of our association, is not the primary element fostering cohesion. Any other board game could replace shogi. I won't reveal a great secret by saying that much more significant factors for the club are the well-established processes and the atmosphere within the community, which makes it crucial not to become overly fixated on the central object of interest. The main value lies in the people: from the participants who don't miss a single chance to play, to the grandparents who bring their grandchildren to classes.

On the other hand, would the Ginkammuri club have happened if we hadn't gotten into shogi? This wonderful game, despite its appeal, has proven completely ineffective in global promotion. Despite its obvious merits,



shogi is poorly advertised outside of Japan, often overshadowed by its main competitor — chess. The hieroglyphs, monochrome appearance, and seemingly complex rules deter newcomers.

Therefore, to some extent, we were fortunate with Japanese chess. We quickly realized that attempts to attract as many people as possible to the game at this stage would not yield the desired results. So the team didn't scatter our efforts and focused not on attracting but on nurturing new players. It was clear that we needed to work with the younger generation, to create an environment, even if isolated, in a small club, that would be capable of nurturing masters and ensuring continuity of generations. It is precisely along this path that we are moving. Who knows, perhaps in the future, it will lead us to a professional sports organization and a significant increase in the number of shogi enthusiasts.



“Shogi is the only major

mind game that doesn’t

have an international

federation.”

—Sergei Korchitsky

Sergei Korchitsky is a philologist and Latinist. One of the founders of the modern Belarusian shogi community (2000). He is the most decorated shogi player in Belarus, an enthusiast, and a promoter of alternative chess variants. Korchitsky is also one of the strongest European players in hexagonal chess (European Champion, 1998), shogi (European Champion, 2013 and 2021), and xiangqi (European Champion, 2018, among non-Chinese and non-Vietnamese players).

Interview by **Andrei Lysenka**
Photographs by Andrei Lysenka
from Yuri Teper’s archive
from Sergei Korchitsky’s archive

You are a prominent figure in the European shogi community, and shogi is neither the first nor the last strategic board game that you play on a serious level.

Yes, I've been passionate about various mind games since childhood. Before shogi, I played chess, Gliński's hexagonal chess and Go. Currently, I am actively studying and playing xiangqi. However, I have undoubtedly devoted the most effort to shogi.

We first met in 1995 at the chess club of the Belarusian State Pedagogical University. Somehow, and rather surprisingly, a group of enthusiasts for unconventional mind games formed there.

This was largely due to hexagonal chess, which had a well-developed community in Minsk. I became part of this community in 1989 and started university in 1993. During those 4 years, I had time to take part in various tournaments, win something, and I already had certain hopes associated with hex chess. Since many people from that hex chess crowd, with whom I was already familiar, were either students or staff at the pedagogical university, I consciously chose it, knowing it housed a hex chess center.

What is so fascinating to you about hexagonal chess? You were successful in regular chess too.

In the Republic, I ranked as the vice-champion in chess in my age group. I was supposed to become the champion: had a winning position in the last round, but someone brought a magazine and I got distracted, like a



A hex chess tournament in Kalinin, USSR (1990).
Sergei is in the center of the bottom row.

child would. *[Smiling.]* You know what kind of magazine it was? *Intellectual Games*, where you could find Go, Renju, Othello... I wanted to keep up with everything.

It was then that I learned about another kind of chess. It turned out that there was an alternative, which was a cultural shock for me. There were three bishops, 91 cells, permeable diagonal pawn chains, different players, different champions, and a history we knew nothing about. Moreover, traditional chess emanated a sense of red-tapism, while hex chess attracted me with its cozy atmosphere. It was a circle of people united by a common cause—almost like a cult (in the best sense of the word)—an engaging club with real people who didn't come there for a paycheck. There was a spirit of selfless devotion, an air



of novelty. Naturally, this was important for a child; it provided socialization and new experiences.

The peak popularity of hexagonal chess occurred in the late 1980s. However, after the death of its creator, Vladislav Gliński, in 1990, interest in the game gradually faded.

Yes, 1989 was the heyday, it was the peak. Hex chess was primarily popular in Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Gliński's chess also experienced a significant boom in Poland.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Gliński's passing, international ties were disturbed. In 1995, with my active involvement, it became possible to glue together Belarusian and Hungarian hex chess worlds for a while. Currently, tournaments are held exclusively in Hungary.

You mentioned that you used to play Go, why didn't you develop a passion for this game?

Yes, when I was 16, in the early 1990s, I attended a Go class. I practiced, took notes on joseki, and I still have those notes. The game is quite deep and from the first duel I got it going. While I wouldn't say I found it boring, there simply wasn't much activity. A small group of people gathered on Sundays to play with each other, but that was all. If there had been a larger club in Minsk, I believe I would have gotten more involved, but I didn't even play in a single tournament. I often mention that



Today there are two countries in the world where shogi is more developed than Go: Japan and Belarus.



How did you get to know Japanese chess?

My aunt had a good command of the German language. Once, the leader of the Minsk hex chess community gave her a German chess encyclopedia to translate. I handed it over to her. This was around 1990. Naturally, I got curious, leafed through the book, and that was the first time I came across shogi. The language was incomprehensible to me, and the only thing I could make out from the diagrams was that the pieces in shogi were very weak, and perhaps it was some form of historical chess, like chaturanga.

My second encounter with shogi occurred at a hex chess tournament in Hungary in 1997. Two people were playing shogi during a break; they had a shogi set. It took me by surprise back then: why would anyone be interested in some ancient chess with confusing hieroglyphs when there is a real, living game played by real people? Of course, we didn't know about the existence of the large shogi culture in Japan back in those pre-Internet days.

In the late 1990s, you were a leading figure in hex chess in Belarus. Why did you decide to switch to shogi?

By 2000, hex chess activity had largely stalled. Significant efforts were made to revive the movement, but I grew tired of pushing against a locked door and wanted

to try something new. And since I had heard about shogi a couple of times, I decided to check it out. I shared the idea with my friend Andrei Kasperovich, and together we began searching—in libraries and on the Internet.

It turned out there was a professional league and established theory. We found some games and downloaded a book titled *How to Defend in Shogi* by Ōyama Yasuharu in English. One day, Andrei Kasperovich came to my place, and right then and there, I cut out 40 pentagons from cardboard, drew hieroglyphs on them, and created a simple makeshift shogi set. Still, it was enough for us to play a couple of games, even though we were confused about some of the finer points of the rules.



With Andrei Kasperovich (2006)

Was it in the summer of 2000?

Yes, August 2000.

I remember that set. In September 2000, Andrei Kasperovich used it to explain the rules to me. I was the third person in Minsk to be introduced to shogi. It even seems that the pieces were made of paper rather than cardboard.

My pieces were definitely made of cardboard. Most likely, Andrei

had his own makeshift set.

It looked extremely unappealing. No wonder shogi didn't impress me at first. [Laughing.] However, in November of that year, we held a tournament with such makeshift sets for eight participants. I also made one for myself. I thought that since the color of the pieces didn't matter, they could be multicolored to help distinguish them.

You had the most attractive set back then. Although now, we probably wouldn't even touch something like that. [Laughing.]

Let's fast forward to 2005, when you first went to Japan for the International Shogi Forum. What were your impressions of that trip?

My impressions of both shogi and Tokyo were the most vivid. I was astonished by the city: three-dimensional, with high-speed highways between skyscrapers and numerous forks in the road. Many things there were absolutely new to me. And, of course, meeting the shogi professionals: back then I managed to beat Suzuki Daisuke (8-dan) in a training game with a rook handicap.

As for the tournament, despite finishing in a certain position [Ed.: 6th among 20 participants], I knew very little about the game at that time. Looking back at my games, I realize that I was still quite inexperienced, both theoretically and practically, lacking knowledge and serious tournament experience.

After your success in hex chess [Ed.: Sergei is the 1998 European Champion], you studied shogi intensively for several years, achieving dominance in Belarus. However, the results in international amateur tournaments suggested that there was still a long way ahead of you to master the new game. Were the losses discouraging?

Objectively, it was a period of apprenticeship. At that time, I wasn't at the level to get upset about losses. International tournaments allowed me to test myself against players who already knew something about Japanese chess: it was a great school. Back then, I was just starting to get a feel for shogi. It was interesting to figure out how this game was structured in general. Since there was a lack of literature and no serious sparring partners in Belarus, I had to take on the role of a locomotive in terms of theory, figuring everything out on my own, which took a lot of time. But it was a path that had to be taken.

After 2005, it became easier: I brought some Japanese shogi books, and the Internet continued to develop.

Over the past 15 years, you have been one of the strongest European shogi players. Have you ever had ambitions to enter the Japanese profes-

sional system?

There were absolutely no illusions. I started playing shogi only at the age of 25 and practiced seriously much later. As I've mentioned before, when we started, there was neither literature nor shogi sets. For a long time, I didn't progress in shogi because a certain environment is necessary for growth. We were all beginners here. And when beginners play against beginners, you can't make progress quickly.



European Championship Final 2013.

It takes time for any endeavor to gain momentum.

Besides, I think more in a European way. I mean, it would be great to have the opportunity to compete with Japanese professionals, but not to be integrated into the Japanese or any other local system.

How do you imagine it?

For example, it could be a tournament held every two or three years, with the strongest players from various countries participating.

Isn't the tournament held at the International Shogi Forum something like this?

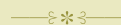
Today, this is the only serious global tournament in the shogi world. Some even consider it an amateur world championship, but that is not the case. I prefer to call a spade a spade. Essen-

tially, this is the world championship for non-Japanese players. To be more precise, it is a blitz championship, given the short time control and the number of games played per day.

By the way, the open tournament within the European Championship is not an amateur world championship either. Unfortunately, at the moment, there is no world championship in shogi in the generally accepted sense. There is no unified global player classification, as there is no international federation.



Shogi is the only major mind game that doesn't have an international federation.



But an international federation is a union of national ones. Currently, in the world of shogi, there is only one major national federation: the Japanese one. In the rest of the world, we are more likely to see small national shogi communities and clubs.

Yes, I agree. Therefore, unfortunately, there is no international federation, and none is expected in the near future. Some people say that it is better to do nothing than to do something poorly. But I believe that, in the case of shogi, it might be better to have at least some international federation, at least some world championship. Perhaps national federations should begin to unite and organize an international federation, even without Japan at first. However, of course, the initiative to promote shogi worldwide is primarily ex-

pected from Japan.

Let me give you an example: since 2017, I have been actively playing another type of Asian chess—Chinese chess. In the world of xiangqi, unlike in shogi, there is an international federation and world championships, and the strongest European players are allowed to enter tournaments and compete not just with masters, but with top grandmasters. I have played against champions from Europe, North America, Singapore, and Vietnam. I have sat at the same table with multiple world champions! Competing at such a level is a unique experience.

I remember discussing this with Karolina Fortin [Ed.: *European champion 2014, women's professional of the Japanese Shogi Association 2017–2023*] at the International Shogi Forum (ISF) in Kitakyushu in 2017. I expressed my regret that there were no world championships and that I would gladly participate, to which she reasonably pointed out, “Who will finance the participation of amateurs?” We were talking, and literally two weeks later, I found myself in Manila at the World Xiangqi Championship, where the strongest Chinese professionals were competing. I fully financed that trip myself. So I countered Karolina by saying that if I had known that, in the World Shogi Championships, for example, Habu Yoshiharu and Watanabe Akira would be playing from Japan, I probably would have found the means to meet them at the board.

—❖—

Unfortunately, I don't see the Japanese having a clear strategy for promoting shogi globally.

—❖—

Or maybe such a strategy existed, but they despaired for some reason: either the kanji characters are to blame, or perhaps Europeans are incapable of loving shogi.

By the way, how would you assess the level of the strongest European players compared to the Japanese professionals?

In 2013, the Japanese assessed my playing level to be approximately equal to the 2nd professional dan. It's clear how they reached this conclusion. In January 2013, I traveled to Japan for



A TV game against Ōno Yaichio (2013).

an official match against professional player Ōno Yaichio (7-dan) for the cable television channel Igo-Shogi TV. Ōno gave me a handicap of a bishop. Prior to that, I played two training games against professionals with the same handicap, and I succeeded in all those games. A bishop handicap corresponds to a difference of about five ranks.

We can also recall the visits of shogi professionals to Minsk,

during which Vincent Tanyan defeated Masuda Yuji (6-dan), and Anton Strykevich and I defeated Takada Shohei (6-dan). [Ed.: *These were handicap-free matches as part of simultaneous games held by active professionals in Minsk in 2017 and 2018. The Minsk players Sergei Korchitsky, Vincent Tanyan, and Anton Strykevich are the only Europeans to achieve the 5-dan rank of FESA (as of 2024), and have been European champions in different years.*]

Therefore, I believe that at least the top Belarusian players play at the level of some professional dan.

So, there isn't a huge gap between Japanese professionals and amateurs from other countries?

What could such a conclusion be based on? Are there any statistics? Show me at least one official game between a Japanese professional and a top non-Japanese amateur. Or is this conclusion based on our performance here, with only half an hour per game? As we know, short time controls are especially challenging for amateurs. For example, I'm interested in many games but cannot study the theory of all of them deeply. I spend half of the game time on what a professional spends seconds on — they know it from theory and experience. Therefore, short time controls are not a valid indicator.

—❖*❖—
Can anyone guarantee that, if there were regular world championships with serious time controls, the first place would definitely be taken by a Japanese professional?
 —❖*❖—

Imagine how much a player's motivation would increase if they knew they could face a hypothetical Habu, that this match would be broadcasted, and they would have to make a good impression.

It's a pity that talented players outside of Japan today have no opportunity to properly showcase their skills. It's not a problem for me, as I'm already an older player, but the young talents that have emerged in Minsk are phenomenal. They went through a rigorous selection process, competed against me, with me as their benchmark, and eventually beat me. These players, who don't come from a chess background and for whom shogi is a native game, have achieved success in Europe. Unfortunately, they have no incentive to continue progressing in shogi today.

You mentioned that you actively play Chinese chess as well. Moreover, you are the chairman of the Belarusian Xiangqi Federation. How did you first come across Chinese chess? What attracted you to it?

I had heard of xiangqi, but I hadn't paid much attention to it until around 2012, when a Malaysian enthusiast appeared. He started publishing xiangqi-related materials daily and cre-

ated the largest English-language website on the subject. Since I am interested in all kinds of mind games, I visited this website almost every day. This lasted for about five years, but it hadn't truly caught my attention until I tried playing it myself. There were already some xiangqi enthusiasts in Minsk, and I also started participating in online tournaments, which ultimately captivated me.

Can you pick your favorite game to date from all the ones you've played?

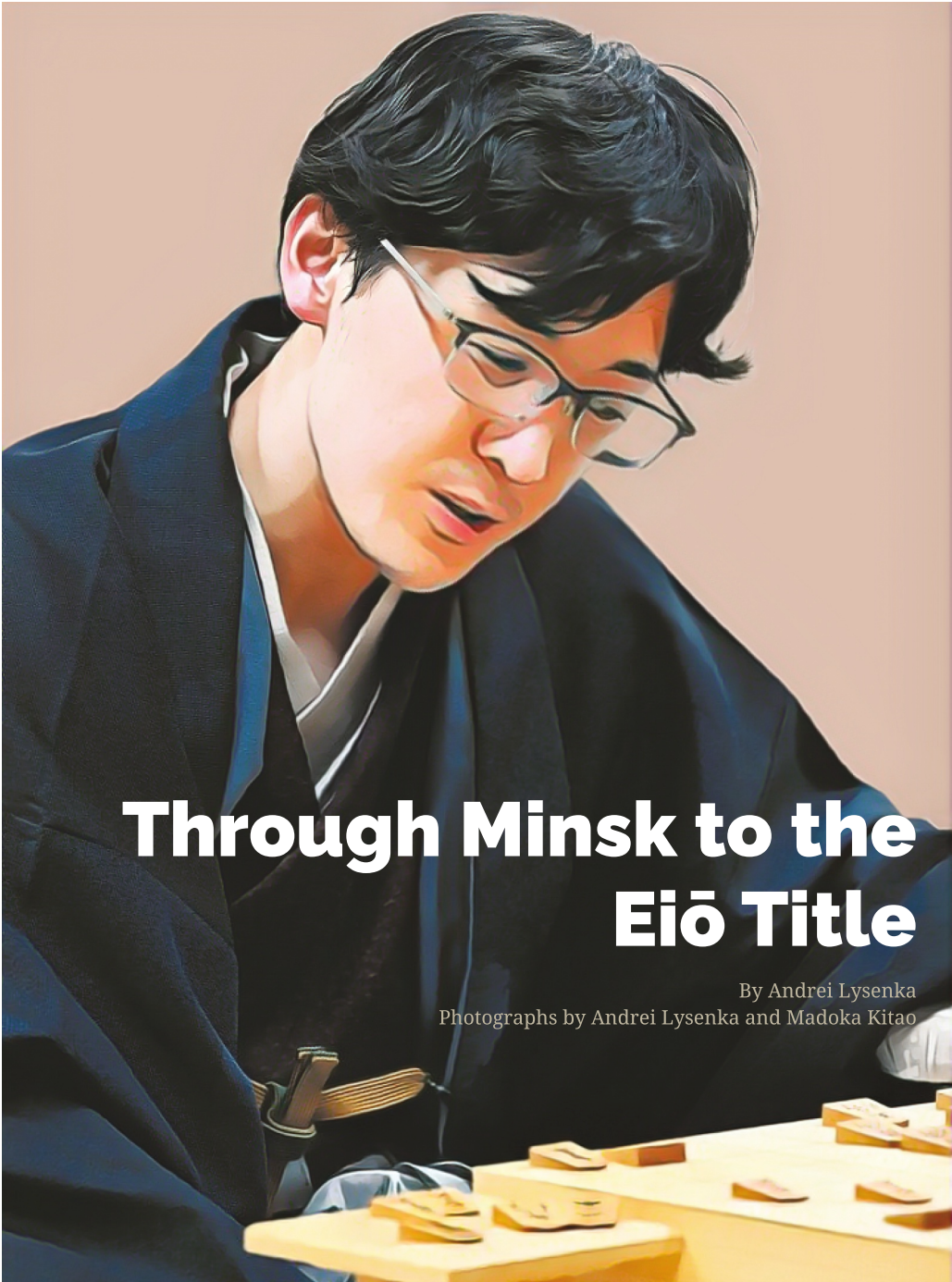
I have changed over time and evolved. Now, I look at games more deeply. I am interested in tactical and strategic mechanisms, rather than just the breadth of possibilities. Comparing, for example, chess and hex chess, I still prefer hex chess, but I have started to view chess differently—not through the eyes of youthful maximalism. The preference for one game or another is a matter of taste, depending on what someone likes.

Some people argue that chess has a first-move advantage and a plethora of draws. In xiangqi, the first-move advantage is even greater, and there are also draws (though less frequently than in

chess). Nevertheless, millions of xiangqi players love this game despite these two drawbacks. Why? Because there are certain feelings experienced during the game that make you forget about these drawbacks. You can make any game boring for yourself. In shogi, for example, I find closed positions with ai-anaguma boring. But at the same time, in any game, you can find something attractive for yourself.

Britain's Tony Hosking wrote a book titled *Four Great Games: Chess, Shogi, Xiangqi, and Go*. I think all of them are very interesting and profound. To each their own—it's just about how it goes. In my case, it just so happened that I enjoy both shogi and xiangqi—wonderful games that complement each other greatly.





Through Minsk to the Eiō Title

By Andrei Lysenka
Photographs by Andrei Lysenka and Madoka Kitao

In 2017, Japanese professionals Masuda Yuji and Yamamoto Shinya attended a children's tournament in Minsk called the "Young Generals Cup." Out of curiosity, I asked them about their experience playing against the shogi superstar Habu Yoshiharu. To my surprise, they admitted, somewhat sadly, that they had never played against him. If even Japanese professionals—a relatively small and elite group of players—may never get a chance to face such a legend, what hope is there for ordinary fans of the game, especially those living thousands of kilometers away from Japan?

Although the probability of a Japanese champion facing a European amateur in a tournament seems negligible, that is precisely what happened in Minsk in July 2013, during the open tournament of the European Shogi Championship. At that time, however, no one could have predicted that a future shogi star was among the participants—no one, except for one person: Itō Masahiro. He genuinely believed in his son, who was deeply passionate about shogi, and supported him wholeheartedly on the path to achieving his dream. This included encouraging him to take part in that European tournament.

Back then, a 10-year-old Japanese schoolboy, Itō Takumi, caused a sensation by defeating all nine of his opponents. Among them were three Japanese players and six strong European



competitors, all of whom had been continental champions at various times: Karolina Styczyńska, Uladzislau Zakrzheuski, Sergei Korchitsky, Artem Kolomiets, Jean Fortin, and Victor Zapara.

By September 2013, Itō Takumi entered Shōreikai, the Japan Shogi Association's apprentice school. In October 2020, he attained





Takumi Itō vs Karolina Styczyńska

full professional status as a 4-dan player, and in June 2024, at the age of 21, he claimed the prestigious Eiō title by defeating the seemingly invincible Fujii Sōta.

Looking back at Itō Takumi's victorious march in Minsk, it can't necessarily be said that he was head and shoulders above his opponents at that time. This is evidenced by his game against 17-year-old Minsk resident Uladzislau Zakrzheuski (then a 1-dan FESA, who started playing in 2010 and became the European Champion in 2022). Zakrzheuski, given the opportunity, might have been able to fit in quite well at the Shōreikai.

I will present this game here, slightly supplementing it with my comments.



Takumi Itō vs Uladzislau Zakrzheuski

European & World Open Shogi Championship,

Round 5

Minsk (City Youth Center), July 20, 2013.

⌚ : 45 minutes + 30 seconds byoyomi

♣ Uladzislau Zakrzheuski

△ Takumi Itō

1. ♣P-26 △P-34 3. ♣P-25 △B-33 5. ♣S-48
 △P-84 7. ♣G-78 △P-85 9. ♣P-16 △S-22
 11. ♣P-96 △P-94 13. ♣P-36 △P-86 15. ♣Px
 △Rx 17. ♣S-37 △R-82 19. ♣P*87 △R-32 (diagram 1)

(1) 20. △R-32



The rook is suddenly brought to the other flank. White switches to furbisha with loss of tempo, but with a pawn in hand.

21. ♣S-46 △K-62 23. ♣P-56 △B-51 25. ♣P-76
 △G41-52 27. ♣G-58 △K-72 29. ♣B-66 △K-82
 31. ♣S-88 △P-74 33. ♣P-86 △S-72 35. ♣K-69
 △S-83 37. ♣S-87 △G-72 39. ♣K-79 △S-33
 41. ♣N-77 △B-73 43. ♣K-88 △P-44 45. ♣P-55
 △R-42 47. ♣G-57 (diagram 2)

Black completes the opening with a slightly better position. White was relying on counterplay against an anticipated attack from Black on the rook side with 47. ♣P-35 △P-45 ♣S-57 △S-44..., but their opponent

(2) 47. ♣G-57



disrupted this plan. On the right side, Black opts for a passive defense, while on the king's side, they unexpectedly advance, committing their reserve — the right gold. Normally tasked with defensive duties, the gold now boldly moves forward to join the attack in the center of the board.

48. △P-45 49. ♣S-37 △P-64 51. ♣G-56 △G52-63 53. ♣P-85 △P-65 55. ♣B-57 △P-54 57. ♣P-75 △Px55 59. ♣Gx65 △R-52 61. ♣Px74 △Gx (diagram 3)

(3) 62. △Gx74



The first thing that comes to mind is 63.▲P*75
△Gx65 ▲Nx △B-62 ▲P*53.

63.▲Gx △Sx 65.▲P*75 △S-83 67.▲N-65 △B-51 (diagram 4)

(4) 68.△B-51



(5) 106.△K-62



107.▲G*73 △Kx52 109.▲S*43 △K-41
111.▲+Bx12 △Lx 113.▲R*81 △N*51 (diagram 6)

(6) 114.△N*51



After 67.▲N-65, White had a choice of several poor continuations and ultimately settled on what was perhaps the worst one.

69.▲G*53 △R-12 71.▲P*52 △B-62 73.▲Gx
△Gx 75.▲P-84 △S-72 77.▲B*64 △P*73
79.▲P-74 △G*63 81.▲Px73+ △Nx 83.▲Nx+
△Sx 85.▲B-31+ △P*77 87.▲Gx △N*65
89.▲P-83+ △Kx 91.▲N*75 △K-72 93.▲+Bx21
△Nx57+ 95.▲Nx63+ △Gx 97.▲N*75 △N*85
99.▲G*83 △K-62 101.▲Nx63+ △Kx 103.▲Gx73
△Kx 105.▲P*74 △K-62 (diagram 5)

Neither of the opponents is playing optimally, but Black is successfully expanding their lead, while White's position appears to be dire (this moment is captured in the photo). For example, after 107.▲S*64, White has no choice but to admit defeat (the hope for 108.△Nx77+ ▲Kx △B*59 ▲N*68 turns out to be in vain).

The crucial moment and an unexpected turn in the game. Under time pressure, Black, fearing a possible tsume (which doesn't exist in this position), instead of making the natural moves to win — 115.▲G-62 or 115.▲P*52 — captures the dangerous knight with 115.▲Rx85+, giving away all their advantage. White doesn't miss this opportunity.

115. ♚Rx85+ ♜Nx43 117. ♚+R-81 ♜K-32
119. ♚+Rx91 ♜S*68 121. ♚+R-82 ♜B*42
123. ♚L*79 ♜Sx= 125. ♚Kx ♜G*68 127. ♚Rx
♜+Nx 129. ♚Kx ♜B*57 131. ♚Kx ♜L*56
133. ♚K-68 ♜R*58 135. ♚K-79 ♜G*88 137. ♚K-
69 ♜R-59+ Mated (diagram 7).

(7) 138. ♜R-59+



The winners of the open world tournament within the 2013 European Championship in Minsk:
Artem Kolomiets (3rd place, Ukraine), Takumi Ito (winner, Japan), Sergei Korchitsky (2nd place, Belarus)



Backstory

In the late 1990s, groups of shogi enthusiasts began to emerge in various parts of the post-Soviet space. We felt like pioneers in the exploration and popularization of Japanese chess in our regions. At that time, there were neither game sets nor tutorials. Overall, there were difficulties in finding publications on this topic; even the rules initially caused confusion. The spread of shogi in Western Europe, where organized communities and

the first tournaments had appeared 20 years earlier, in the 1970s, wasn't much better. For example, in 2000, there were only 130 active players on the combined rating list of Europe and the USA. It seemed that, thanks to the internet, shogi was just beginning to open up to the Western world.

However, over time, it became clear that for many of us, our acquaintance with the game occurred long before we became seriously interested in it: we had seen it somewhere earlier, heard something about it, or encountered mentions of it in periodicals and books. For example, some

Russian-speaking players recalled first learning about shogi from the collection of games by Glyazer, Samson V., *Work Done, Have Your Fun!*, Moscow, 1962 (С.В. Глязер, *Делу — время, потехе — час!*). In this book, a footnote states that the information on Japanese chess was provided by “a great lover of the game of shogi [шogi], Modest M. Urban,” who worked as the head of a library in Moscow. This note suggests that there might have been a circle of shogi enthusiasts in the Soviet capital at that time.

The example of Modest Urban inspired me to search for the forgotten

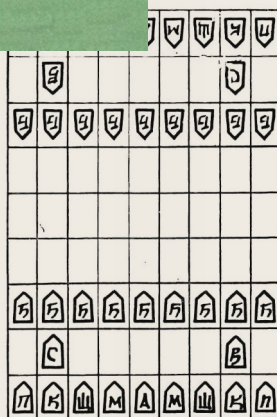


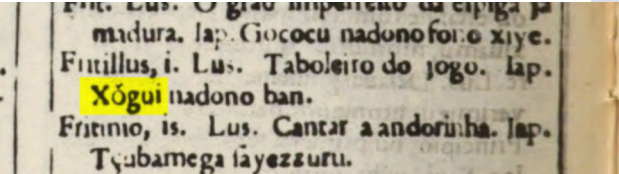
Рис. 30. ШОГИ.
Расположение фигур перед началом игры.

направлении, и чем фигура более значима, тем богаче ее ходы. Для того чтобы не размышлять и не запоминать, какая фигура куда ходит по игровому полю, ее декоративное изображение сочетается со схемой*.

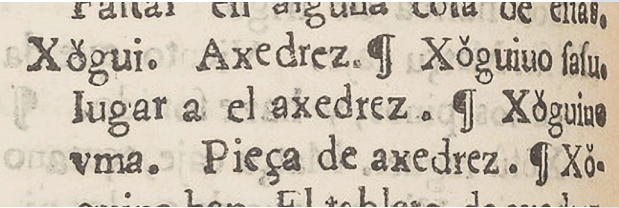
По правилам игры снятые с игрового поля фигуры могут снова вводиться в игру, для чего играющие выставляют их на поле, поворачивая верхним углом каждой фигуры к противнику.

Игра в шogi достаточно подробно разработана. Мы же вам даем самое краткое изло-

* Эти схемы разработаны у нас большим любителем игры в шogi Модестом Миронозичем Урбаном.



Dictionarium latino lusitanicum, ac Iaponicum (1595)



Vocabulario de Japon declarado primero en portugues, por los Padres de la Compañia de Jesus de aquel regno (1630)

shiyogi, is a favorite game, and is played by all classes. The boards are painted upon small tables about a foot high, and contain eighty-one squares, with twenty men on each side, arranged as follows.

車	留	將	金	王	金	將	留	車
	車						車	
兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵
			1	2	3			
			4	0	5			
			6	7	8			
兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵	兵
	角						車	
車	馬	銀	金	王	金	銀	馬	車

The central man on the uppermost row is called *ô* 王, and is the king; he moves one square each way, and when checkmated the game is lost. The next at the right hand is called *kin* 金, and moves one square at a time, from 0 into 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7, but cannot enter into 6 or 8. Next to it is called *gin* 銀, which also moves one square from 0 into 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8, but cannot enter 4, 5, or 7. The third is *kei* 馬 or the knight, but unlike the knights in European chess, his power is limited to moving forward; as from 7 to 1 and 3. The fourth or last one is *yari* 車, which can move forward like a castle any number of squares, but cannot go sideways nor retreat. The *kaku* 角 is like the bishop in European chess, and the *shiya* 車 has the same powers as the castle, both moving backwards as well as forwards. The pawns, called *hiyo*, move directly ahead one square; when one has reached the pawn row on the opposite side, the piece is turned over, and becomes a *kin*. The *gin*, *kei*, and *yari* have the same privilege.

The Chinese Repository (1840)

heroes of the past. I was deeply fascinated by the idea that in different years and in various parts of the world, there might have been people like Modest who were passionate about shogi and contributed to the game's spread outside Japan, but about whom we know almost nothing.

I began to explore the topic and discovered numerous mentions of shogi in Western sources. The earliest ones date back to the 16th century, when Europeans (specifically the Portuguese) first came into contact with the Japanese. With Japan's opening to the world in the 19th century, the first detailed descriptions of the game began to appear in the West, although they weren't always accurate (for example, the rule for dropping captured pieces might have been omitted).

The most promising time period for research was the *Belle Époque* (1871–1914), a period of peace and progress in Europe, when Japan and Western countries actively collaborated, and the number of publications on shogi increased significantly. These materials were distributed quite widely in periodicals, in-

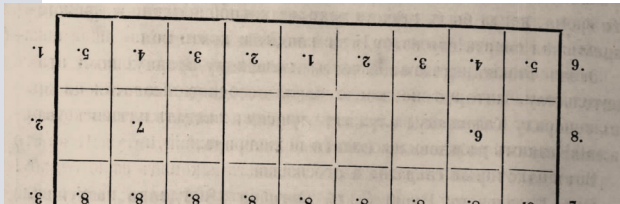
cluding translations into European languages. The opportunity to learn about the game at that time wasn't limited to printed sources: millions of people in Europe could see shogi with their own eyes in Japanese pavilions at international exhibitions. For example, it's known that shogi was presented at the World Exhibition in Vienna (1873) and at the Japanese Village in London (1885–87).

I was certain that during this golden period in the West, local enthusiasts and groups of shogi fans must have emerged. I sought both direct and indirect confirmations of this. For example, any reference to the game without a connection to Japan could serve as indirect evidence, indicating an interest in shogi as an engaging intellectual pastime rather than merely something exotic curiosity from Asia. That kind of evidence was exactly what I found in Minsk, my hometown, at a book flea market.

My attention was drawn to a publication from 1914: *Through Siberia and Japan. An excursion of students of the Warsaw Educational District June 8–August 8, 1913. Compiled by S. M. Nikonov. With 62 photographs taken by excursion par-*

ЯПОНСКАЯ ШАХМАТНАЯ ИГРА, или ШО-ГОЙ-Е.

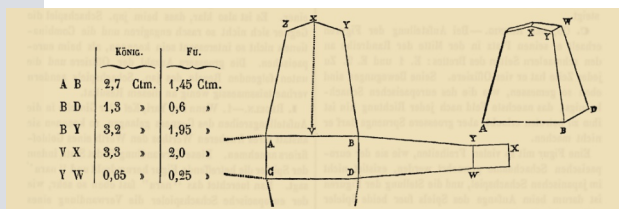
Прекрасная игра в шахматы заимствована Европейцами из Азии, но во многих странах своей родины утратила первобытную простоту и естественную замысловатость правил. Вот, под какими странными формами утвердилась она в Японии, где число ее страстных любителей весьма значительно.



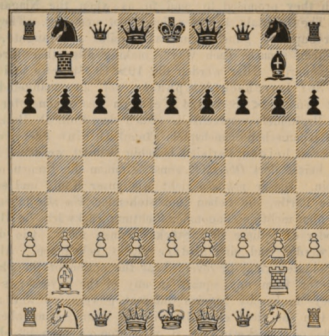
Живописная русская библиотека (1857)

DAS JAPANISCHE SCHACHSPIEL.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
I	Ya		Fu				Fu		Ya	I
H	Ke		Ka				Hi		Ke	H
G	Gi		Fu				Gi		Gi	G



Viktor Holtz, *Das japanische Schachspiel*, in: *Mitteilungen der deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* (1874)



Dschapanisches Schach.

Antonius van der Linde, *Geschichte und Litteratur des Schachspiels* (1874)

Among other curious discoveries is the Lafayette College Shogi Club (1889, Easton, Pennsylvania), which turned out to be a chess club with an unusual name, likely suggested by one of its founders - a Japanese student at the college.

A chess club under the name of the Lafayette College Shogi Club, has recently been formed by a number of admirers of the game. The membership of the club is as follows: Chalfant, '89, Armstrong, '90, Dewey, '90, Davis, '91, Holmes, '91, W. O. Johnson, '91, Mills, '91, and Yamada, '91. A tournament is now in progress in which each member plays three games with each other member. At the close of the tournament the victor will be the King of the Club, the next two Knight and Bishop, and the poorest players the Pawns.

ticipants (По Сибири и Японии. Экскурсия учеников средних учебных заведений Варшавского Учебного Округа с 8 июня по 8 августа 1913 года. Составил С. М. Никонов. С 62 фотографиями, снятыми участниками экскурсии).

The book was in poor condition, and since I couldn't find a digital copy, I decided to purchase and restore it, entrusting it to the specialists at the National Library of Belarus.

When I finally had the opportunity to read the book, I unexpectedly found evidence that shogi was played in Minsk as early as 1913! It was mentioned in passing, among other games played by Warsaw gymnasium students in the excursion carriage of a train traveling through Minsk. Here is an excerpt from the book (pp.20-21):

*"Some of the students woke up early on the first day of their journey and immediately pressed their faces against the windows, as we were already passing through a stretch of Minsk's forested landscapes. In Minsk, the students on duty brought boiling water, prepared tea, and served their comrades... Gradually, the characters of our excursionists began to emerge. Some were busy writing letters, journaling, or sorting through a large basket of books we had brought from Warsaw... Others were already playing chess, tric-trac, **shogi** [шogi], galma, and other games,*

chatting among themselves, or quietly lying on their benches or sitting by the windows, watching the rather monotonous scenery and life pass by."

Thus, the excursionists had a set (or several sets) of some "shogi" [шogi] game, and this game is mentioned in the book as something self-evident, not requiring additional explanations.

In the same 1913, some "shogi" [шogi] was also provided for the cadets of the Petrovsky Poltava Cadet Corps. In the book by Romashkevich A. D., *Materials on the History of the Petrovsky Poltava Cadet Corps from October 1, 1912, to October 1, 1913.*

(Ромашкевич А. Д., *Материалы по истории Петровского Полтавского кадетского корпуса с 1-го Октября 1912 г. по 1-е Октября 1913 г.*), I found the following lines (p. 66):

“For playing [to the cadets] were provided: balls, croquet, two billiards, babki, kegelbahn, draughts, chess, **shogi** [шogi], giant steps, scrakli, stilts, and darts for throwing.”

And again, “shogi” [шogi] appears in the text as a game requiring no additional explanation, which would be unusual if it referred to an exotic Japanese set. These examples led me to suspect that there might have



Bishop Sergius of the Japanese Orthodox Mission with Warsaw excursion participants (some of whom played shogi) near the Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Tokyo, 1913

been a board game released under that name in the Russian Empire at that time. This assumption led me to take a fresh look at a 1907 brochure whose history had already intrigued me for some time.

St. Petersburg Studio of Useful Games

For the first time, I learned about the existence of a small Russian guide to shogi, dated to the beginning of the 20th century, in 2010 from the following message on the Belarusian shogi web forum:

“Good day! I have a book: ‘Guide to Studying the Japanese Game of SHOGI (Japanese Chess)’ [Руководство к изучению японской игры ШОГИ (японские шахматы)], compiled by B. G. G-t-n, published by the St. Petersburg Studio of Useful Games, 1907, 12 pages.

Would you kindly tell me who the author is



Правила игры.

Каждый изъ играющихъ имѣеть слѣдующія фигуры.

- 1)  Фу—пѣхотинецъ—ходитъ какъ наша шахматная пѣшка, т. е. на одну клѣтку впередъ, но по діагонали **не** бьетъ.
9 фигуръ.

- 2)  Кáку—косой—имѣеть тѣ же ходы какъ и нашъ шахматный лейферъ, т. е. по діагоналямъ во всю доску, впередъ и назадъ.
1 фигуру.

- 3)  Хишá—летучая колесница—движется какъ наша шахматная тура, т. е. по прямой линіи во всю доску, по всѣмъ 4-мъ направленіямъ.
1 фигуру.

- 4)  Кóша—душистое колесо—ходитъ лишь **впередъ** во всю доску. Назадъ и въ сторону **не** ходить.
2 фигуры.

- 5)  Кéйма—конь—ходитъ по ломаной линіи, какъ нашъ шахматный конь, но лишь **впередъ**. Напр. В 1—А 3 или же В 1—С 3 (конечно, если
2 фигуры.

and how much it might be worth?”

Then, in 2010, I was deeply intrigued by the fact that a hundred years ago, there might have been a certain 'studio' in our region where people not only knew about shogi but also felt compelled to publish a special manual on this game.

A copy of this guide was found in the Russian National Library, and its nature soon became clear. The book contained a description of Japanese chess, the rules, and examples of games — all the things typically included in shogi review materials. This might suggest that it was merely a reprint. However, the brochure featured

distinctive elements that indicated its originality and possibly even some precedence. For instance, it employed a design of pieces understandable to a Western reader, with arrows instead of hieroglyphs. It also included the earliest known (to me) records of games involving a European, played by the author of the brochure against a certain Japanese **Mr. N-ra** [г. Н-па].

These facts only fueled my interest in the *Studio of Useful Games*, but the initial attempts to gather information about it were unsuccessful. In the reference books of St. Petersburg from 1906 to 1908, I found no traces of its existence. The Studio was the main clue, since the author of the brochure provided no other information about himself, apart from the initials **B. G. G-t-n** [Б. Г. Г-т-нъ].

I put the case on hold for a while and returned to it when, as I mentioned, I took a fresh look at the brochure. Initially, I considered the book to be a handout from a club of mind games enthusiasts. However, it turned out to be not just a manual introducing the game, but a well-thought-out promotional product. Here is a fragment from the booklet to illustrate:

“It's not hard to notice the vast difference between European and Japanese chess; thus, in essence, shogi is a completely independent game, equally serious and entertaining, due to the variety of pieces and the diversity of strategies. What makes this game especially interesting is that it reflects the national

traits of the Japanese, who, thanks to their energy and high level of development, have managed to amaze the world with their extraordinary achievements in all areas of human creativity.

However, given the ancient origins of the game of shogi and its widespread popularity among the Japanese, it's possible that the character of the Japanese people and their development have been shaped by this game, which, being both highly intricate and entertaining, is undoubtedly a great exercise for the mind, encouraging it to refine various combinations. It also serves as an excellent means of developing thoughtfulness and caution in one's actions, while simultaneously fostering perseverance in achieving one's goals.

As for Europeans learning the game, despite its complexity and the novelty of the names and moves, it's nevertheless quite easy to learn how to play shogi, even for someone unfamiliar with chess, as each piece is labeled with its name and its moves are indicated by special arrow markings."

It's surprising that I didn't realize it right away, but at some point, it occurred to me that the booklet from the Studio of Useful Games was nothing more than a promotional brochure or an insert-guide for the board game "Shogi." I resumed my search, focusing in this direction, and found advertisements from the Studio of Useful Games in periodicals from 1907 to 1908. Here is an example of one such advertisement:

Вышел Б. А. Рязанский.

684 1908 ВОЕННЫЙ Составил Г. КАЛЕНДАРЬ. В. В. Петровский.

НА 1908

ЯПОНСКАЯ ВОЕННАЯ ИГРА „ШОГИ“ (ЯПОНСКИЕ ШАХМАТЫ).

Осчитается из Японии лучшим средством для развития ТАКТИЧЕСКИХ способностей. Игра эта, кроме того, очень интересна, как по своей занимательности, так и потому что она, будучи продуктом Японского национального творчества, особенно отражает в себе индивидуальные особенности японского ума и характера.

Игра издавна известна русскому языку со всеми деталями, присущими японскому оригиналу. Научиться играть в „Шоги“ очень легко, а к каждой фигуре обозначено ее название и приписано ей ходы, помощью стрелок. Комплект игры состоит из 40 дерев. клинообразных фигур, игровой доски из 81 поле и брошюры-руководства (с примерами, правилами, законами и т. д.).

Цена в С.-Петербурге: за комплект с обыкновен. фигурами 4 руб., а с фигур. из настоящ. черного дерева 5 р. 50 к. Ся пересылкой из предд. Европ. России дорожке на 50 к., а в Сибирь и Закасп. край — на 90 к., при условии ссылки на эту газету.

Обращаться: „СПБ., Студия полезных игр“, Владимирский пр., д. 19, кв. 12. 1-1

The famous JAPANESE GAME 'SHOGI' [ШОГИ] (Japanese Chess) has been released in Russian.

This game is highly engaging, clever, and fascinating as a product of Japanese folk creativity. Learning to play is quite easy, as each piece is labeled with its name, and its moves are indicated by special arrow markings. The game set consists of 40 wooden wedge-shaped pieces, a game board, and a guidebook (with sample games), all packaged in a single box. The price in St. Petersburg is 4 rubles for the set with regular pieces, and 5 rubles 50 kopecks for the set with pieces made of genuine black wood. The price increases by 50 kopecks for shipping within European Russia, and by 90 kopecks for delivery to Siberia and the Transcaspian region, subject to reference to this newspaper.

Вышла изданием на русском языке знаменитая

ЯПОНСКАЯ ИГРА „ШОГИ“ (ЯПОНСКИЕ ШАХМАТЫ).

Игра эта очень занимательна, остроумна и интересна, как продукт японского народного творчества. Научиться играть — очень легко, так как на каждой фигуре обозначено ее название и приписано ей ходы, помощью стрелок. Комплект игры состоит из 40 дерев. клинообразных фигур, игровой доски и брошюры-руководства (с примерами, правилами, законами и т. д.).

Цена в С.-Петербурге: за комплект с обыкновенными фигурами 4 руб., а с фигур. из настоящ. черного дерева 5 р. 50 к. Ся пересылкой из предд. Европ. России дорожке на 50 к., а в Сибирь и Закасп. край — на 90 к., при условии ссылки на эту газету.

Обращаться: „СПБ., Студия полезных игр“, Владимирский пр., д. 19, кв. 12. 1-1

Японская игра „ШОГГИ“ очень занимательна и остроумна (ЯПОНСКІЕ ШАХМАТЫ).

Игра эта очень занимательна и остроумна.
Подробное описание высылается бесплатно:
«СПБ. Студія Полезныхъ Игръ, Отдѣлъ
«Н». С.-Петербургъ, Садовая, № 32, кв. 36.

Inquiries: “SPB, The Studio of Useful Games,” Vladimirsky Prospekt, 19, Apt. 12.

The advertisements mention two types of sets — “standard” and “premium.” It would be fascinating to see these products in person, but unfortunately, I have not yet been able to locate either a complete set or any of its individual components, such as the packaging, game board, etc. However, based on the images in the brochure, one can roughly envision what the pieces from this set might have looked like.

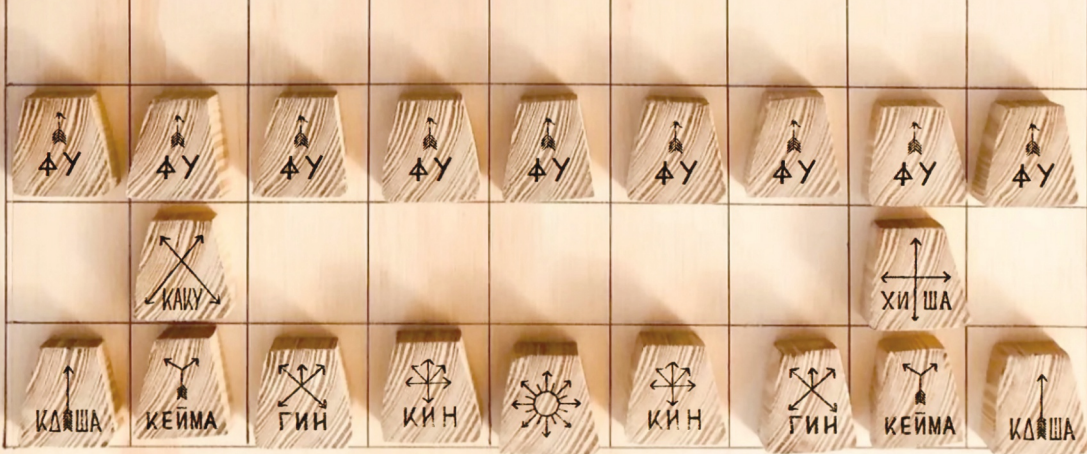
When I realized that I had uncovered evidence of what could be the first commercial localization of the game outside Japan in the history of Japanese chess, my determination to learn more about this event grew significantly.

Moreover, new clues began to emerge. For instance, the advertisements I found allowed me to accurately identify the author of the brochure, who had been concealing his identity behind the initials **В. Г. Г-т-н** [В. Г. Г-т-нъ]. These new facts revealed additional details, and gradually, an entire mystery began to unfold.

I would like to note that throughout my investigation, I relied exclusively on open electronic sources. Of course, I could have gathered more information if I had

Расположеніе фигуръ на доскѣ.

	И	Г	Е	Д	С	В	А	
1								
2								
3								
4								



utilized, for example, the full resources of state archives. However, the geographical scope of this case proved to be quite extensive, and pursuing it would have required an excessive amount of time and effort.

Although several questions still remain unanswered, I believe I have managed to shed light on many aspects of this story, including an exploration of an interesting but little-studied episode in Russian-Japanese relations at the beginning of the 20th century.

To be continued...

...на доску независимо отъ того, чѣмъ и кѣмъ данная линия занята.

За одинъ и тотъ же ходъ больше одной непрятельской фигуры на доску ставить нельзя.

Рокировка, допускаемая въ европейскихъ шахматахъ, въ „Шоги“ не допускается.

Партіи для упражненія въ игрѣ.

Нижѣ мы приводимъ 2 партіи, разыгранныя между авторомъ и японцемъ, г. Н-ра. Партіи эти, по нашему мнѣнію, вполне достаточны для усвоенія ходовъ и приемовъ игры.

Г-нъ.	Н-ра.
1) С 3—С 4	В 7—В 6
2) В 1—С 3	В 6—В 5
3) С 3—Д 5	Г 9—Г 8
4) Д 5 беретъ С 7	В 9 беретъ С 7
5) С 4—С 5	В 5—В 4
6) С 5—С 6	С 7—Д 5
7) В 3 беретъ В 4	Д 9—Д 8
8) Н 2—С 2	С 9—С 8
9) В 2—Е 5	*) Ставить Кейма на Д 6
10) Г 1—Г 2	Ј 7—Ј 6
11) С 2—С 5	Д 5 беретъ Е 3
12) F 2 беретъ Е 3	В 8 беретъ В 4
13) *) Ставить Кейма на С 7	Н 8—Ј 7
14) Переворачиваетъ Кейма на С 7 на другую сторону и превращаетъ въ Нарикинъ	Ј 7 беретъ Е 3

*) Изъ резерва, т. е. изъ снятыхъ раньше фигуръ противника.

A fragment from the brochure with examples of games, accompanied by the following comment: “Below, we present two games played between the author and the Japanese Mr. N-ra. In our opinion, these examples are sufficient for mastering the moves and techniques of the game.”



Petr Scheslenak and Yoshiharu Habu
(November 2024, Tokyo)

Belarusian SHOGI MAGISTER

By Andrei Lysenka & Sergei Lysenka
Photographs by Ginkammuri

One of the main advantages of a local gaming community with its own venue for competitions is the ability to organize tournaments that go beyond the usual amateur formats. In such an environment, there is the freedom to choose tournament structures, time controls, and dates.

When the Ginkammuri club opened in Minsk, we, of course, began to hold not only fast weekend tournaments but also large-scale, multi-stage championships with exciting finals. Some readers may have followed our matches thanks to live video broadcasts from the club. These competitions became a kind of crowns of Belarusian shogi, and we particularly highlight them within the community, hoping that they will eventually evolve into professional tournaments.

One of these “crowns” became the Minsk Shogi Classic, a three-stage competition consisting of a group stage, playoff rounds, and a final match for the title of Magister. The seventh Minsk Shogi Classic took place in 2024, with 46 players participating. The games were held at the Ginkammuri club from April to June and culminated in the Magister match between Yaroslav Kondratov (2-dan FESA) and Petr Shcheslenak (4-dan FESA). Petr secured a convincing victory, winning the title for the first time.

To immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the Magister series (with a classic time control rare for amateur shogi — 2 hours per game and 60 seconds of byo-yomi), we recommend visiting our YouTube channel

[@MinskShogiDojo](#)

Here, in the pages of the magazine, we will share the game that became a highlight of the Minsk Shogi Classic 2024 — the semifinal duel



between Petr Shcheslenak and the tournament's front-runner, Sergei Korchitsky (5-dan FESA and NSR). In this confrontation, both opponents demonstrated a high level of play. We are providing a recording of this game with brief commentary.





7th Minsk Shogi Classic, Semifinal

Minsk (Ginkammuri),

June 15, 2024.

⌚ : 60 minutes + 30 seconds byoyomi.

▶ youtu.be/rjQ8elfgKrE

■ Sergei Korchitsky

□ Petr Shcheslenak

1. ■P-96 □P-94 3. ■P-26 □P-34

5. ■S-48 □R-42 7. ■P-25 □B-33

8. □B-33



After the game, Sergei admitted that he had intended to play a *migi-shikenbisha* against a *shikenbisha* with an open bishop, which Petr had often used in his recent games. However, at the last moment, Sergei changed his mind.

9. ■P-76 □S-32 11. ■K-68 □Bx88+
13. ■Sx □S-33 15. ■K-78 □K-62

16. □K-62



17. ■P-86 □K-72 19. ■N-77 □K-82

21. ■S-87 □S-72 23. ■K-88

□G41-52 25. ■G-78 □R-22

26. □R-22



A counter-bogin is brewing on the rook side for White, and perhaps Black should have made a preventive move ■P-36 here. Although it was not a mistake, Sergei regretted not playing that way in hindsight.

27. ■P-46 □P-24 29. ■Px □Sx

31. ■B*66

31. ■B*66



In this position, Sergei also considered going 31. ■B*32. After that, the sequence could have been □G-42 ■P*23 □Rx32 ■Rx24 □B*35 ■R-25 □N-33 ■R-28 □P*26 ■S*21 □B*54 (diagram 1), which would have led to an approximately equal, sharp position.

Countering the White attack can also be achieved with 31. ■B*56. If

(1)



White continues straightforwardly, for example, with $\triangle S-25$ $\blacktriangle Bx34$ $\triangle S-26$ $\blacktriangle P*23$ $\triangle R-32$ $\blacktriangle Rx26$ $\triangle Rx34$ $\blacktriangle P-22+$ $\triangle B*35$ $\blacktriangle R-23+$ $\triangle R-24$ (diagram 2), this could lead to a position that is slightly more favorable for Black.

(2)



32. $\triangle B*33$ $\blacktriangle Bx+$ 34. $\triangle Nx$ $\blacktriangle P-36$
36. $\triangle S-25$ $\blacktriangle N-37$ 38. $\triangle S-26$
 $\blacktriangle B*15$

39. $\blacktriangle B*15$ 

After 38. $\triangle S-26$, it became clear that White were likely to succeed in

the attack, but Black could neutralize this breakthrough. Sergei chose a spectacular continuation 39. $\blacktriangle B*15$, although the best option here might have been to switch to a more resilient defense: 39. $\blacktriangle R-29$ $\triangle S-27=$ $\blacktriangle P*25$ $\triangle P*28$ $\blacktriangle R-39$ $\triangle P-35$ $\blacktriangle Px$ $\triangle Nx25$ $\triangle G-58$ $\triangle Nx37+$ $\blacktriangle Sx$ (diagram 3).

(3)



40. $\triangle P*27$ $\blacktriangle Bx33+$ 42. $\triangle Px28+$
 $\blacktriangle Bx22$ 44. $\triangle R*29$

44. $\triangle R*29$ 

Petr plays with great precision and has a noticeable advantage. Now, the best move for Black is to bring the rook back to their camp on the ninth rank to slow down White's advance. In the attack, it would be advisable to focus on an edge attack on the king's side. However, it's difficult to justify sending such a valuable asset as the rook into defense.

45. $\blacktriangle G-58$ $\triangle P-38$ 47. $\blacktriangle S-59$
 $\triangle P-49$ 49. $\blacktriangle S-68$ $\triangle Sx37+$
51. $\blacktriangle B+55$ $\triangle P-48$ 53. $\blacktriangle R*31$
 $\triangle N*64$

54. $\triangle N*64$ 

Sergei doesn't let his opponent relax, but Black has no resources to escalate the game and force the opponent to make a mistake. Petr masterfully — or rather, magisterially — guides the game to victory.

55. $\blacktriangle Gx48$ $\triangle Sx$ 57. $\blacktriangle S-79$ $\triangle S+58$
59. $\blacktriangle P-85$ $\triangle S+69$ 61. $\blacktriangle Rx11+$
 $\triangle Sx79$ 63. $\blacktriangle Gx$ $\triangle G*68$ 65. $\blacktriangle Gx$
 $\triangle B*79$ 67. $\blacktriangle K-78$ $\triangle R-59+$
69. $\blacktriangle L*69$ $\triangle Bx68+$ 71. $\blacktriangle Lx$ $\triangle S*79$
 $\blacktriangle Resigned.$

72. $\triangle S*79$ 

TAKADA SYSTEM

Takada Shōhei at the Ginkammuri Club (July 2018)
Photographs by Ginkammuri



By Vincent Tanyan

5-dan FESA
Belarusian Champion (2017, 2019–2024)
Silver Crown (2020, 2022, 2023)
Belarusian Magister (2023)
European Champion (2017, 2019)

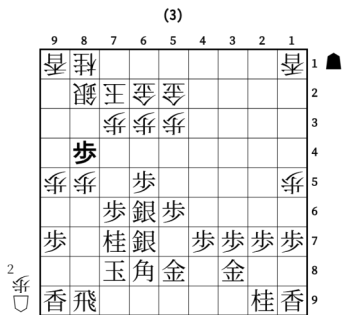
The strategy, with its most effective piece placements shown in the diagrams on the left, was developed by professional player Takada Shōhei (7-dan) and is known as the Takada System. It is relatively unpopular among strong players and almost entirely unknown to weaker ones.

Despite this, in my opinion, the Takada System is an exceptionally strong response to an opponent's ranging rook. Its main idea is to position



the king on the safe left side, where the attacking forces are also concentrated. At the same time, the relatively empty right side remains well-protected and serves as a platform for the opponent's attack.

This formation provides a strategic advantage in the middle game due to its ability to launch a sudden attack with minimal resources. For example, in diagram 1, two pawns in hand allow for a pawn tesuji “joining” and “dangling” on the rook file: ♠P-84 △Px ♠P*85 △Px ♠P*84 (diagram 3).



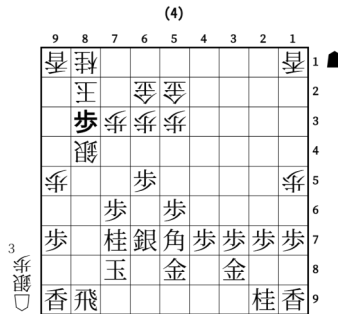
Let's also consider an attack using a silver and a bishop (from the position in diagram 2) as an example, with the same two pawns in hand: ♠P-84 △Px ♠P*83 △Sx ♠P*82 △Kx ♠Sx84 △Sx ♠P*83 (diagram 4). In this scenario, the opponent has no way to defend against the in-

vading rook.

However, the Takada System has its weaknesses, with the main one being its lengthy for-

will play a crucial role in defense.

In addition to the basic arrangement, alternative setups are presented in diagrams 5 and 6.



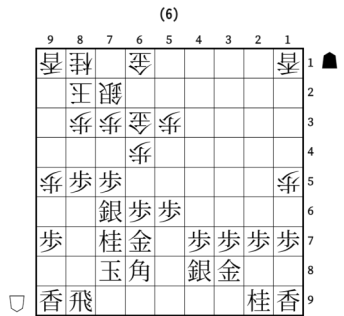
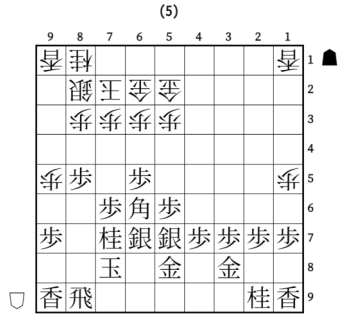
mation stage. This is likely the primary challenge you will encounter when applying this strategy in practice.

Here are some tips:

1. Move the vanguard pawn forward as early as possible, as it plays a key role in this scheme.

2. Offer to exchange bishops. This will be to your advantage, as developing a bishop on the board requires more effort.

3. Don't forget to lower your rook to the bottom rank — it



Anton Starykevich
Karolina Styczyńska

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| | 香 | 桂 | 金 | | | | 角 | | 香 | 1 |
| | | 銀 | 玉 | 金 | 銀 | | | | | 2 |
| | | 歩 | 歩 | 歩 | 歩 | 桂 | 歩 | 歩 | | 3 |
| | | | | 歩 | | 飛 | | 歩 | | 4 |
| | 歩 | 歩 | | 歩 | | | | | | 5 |
| | | | 歩 | 銀 | 歩 | | | | | 6 |
| | 歩 | | | 銀 | 歩 | 歩 | 歩 | 歩 | | 7 |
| | | 飛 | 角 | 金 | | 金 | | | | 8 |
| 歩 | 香 | 桂 | | 玉 | | | 桂 | 香 | | 9 |

37. ♀N-77 ♀P-44 ♀K-69 ♀S-43

40. ♀S-43 ♀51%



41. ♀S-75 ♀P-74 ♀S-86 ♀P-45

44. ♀P-45 ♀52%



45. ♀K-78 ♀P-64 ♀Px ♀Bx

48. ♀Bx64 ♀53%



49. ♀P*65 ♀B-53 ♀B-57 ♀K-62

52. ♀K-62 ♀51%



53. ♀P-75 ♀Px ♀P-84 ♀Px

56. ♀Px84 ♀52%



57. ♀Sx75 ♀G-72 ♀P*74 ♀P-55

60. ♀P-55 ♀54%



61. ♀S-64 ♀B-31 ♀Bx84 ♀K-61

64. ♀K-61 ♀51%



65. ♀P-73+ ♀Nx73 ♀Bx+ ♀Sx73

68. ♀Sx73 ♀50%



69. ♀R-81+ ♀P*71 ♀Sx73+ ♀Gx

73. ♀S*82 ♀S*62 (♀G-72 +12%)

74. ♀S*62 ♀59% (74. ♀G-72 ♀53%)



75. ♀Sx73+ ♀Sx ♀P*72 ♀K-51

♀Px71+ ♀K-42 ♀P-72 ♀R-84

(♀K-32 +30%)

82. ♀R-84 ♀90% (82. ♀K-32 ♀60%)



83. ♀G*41 ♀K-53 ♀R+84 ♀Sx

♀Gx31 ♀P*66 ♀Sx ♀B*76

♀B*64 ♀K-44 ♀Bx55 ♀K-35

94. ♀K-35 ♀100%

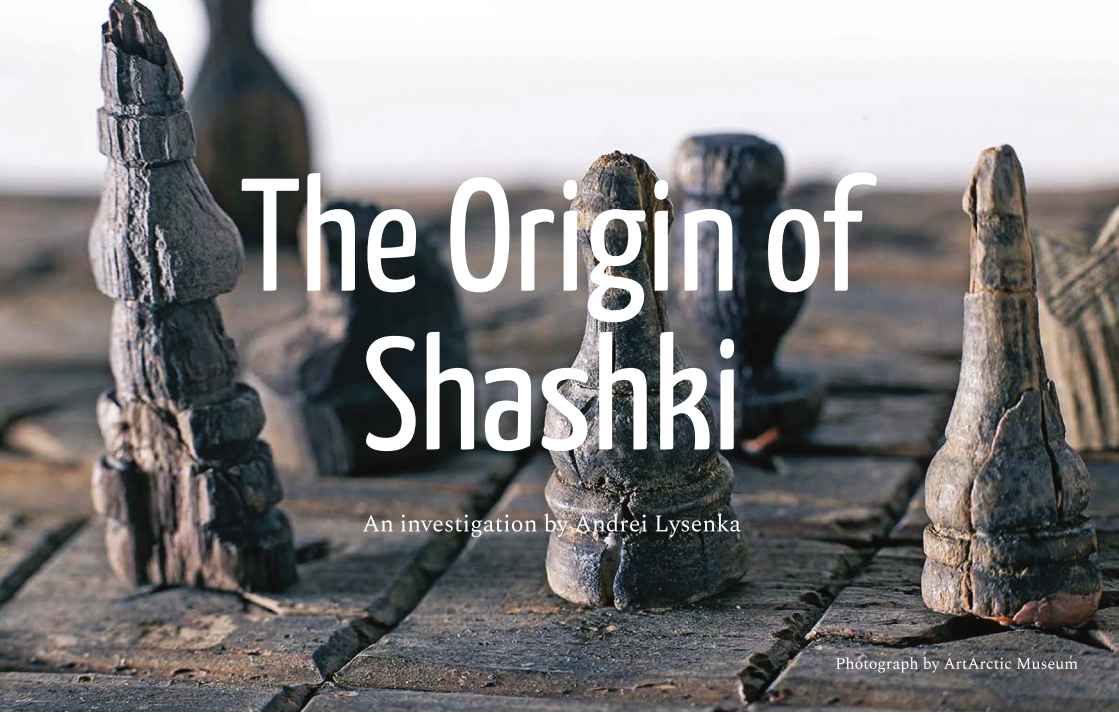


95. ♀P-36 ♀K-24 ♀N*16 ♀K-13

♀Bx33+ ♀S*87 ♀K-69 ♀R*49

♀R*59 ♀P*68 ♀Kx ♀P*67

♀K-57 ♀Resigned.

A photograph of three wooden shashki pieces, which are traditional Russian draughts pieces, resting on a wooden board. The pieces are dark, weathered, and have a distinctive conical shape with a flared base. The background is blurred, showing more of the same pieces and the wooden surface.

The Origin of Shashki

An investigation by Andrei Lysenka

Photograph by ArtArctic Museum

Games are an integral part of human culture and leisure, accompanying us throughout the course of human history. They reflect the values, traditions, and customs of different peoples and are one of the most important ways to understand the world around us. Over the centuries, games have appeared in a wide variety of forms and types. Some remained purely local phenomena, while others gained popularity, spread across the globe, and evolved, giving rise to new variations. Some, having lost the competition, dissolved over time, leaving behind only faint traces. Each game has its own historical fate and unique development path, the study of which is a fascinating pursuit.

When I first became interested in the history of board games in our region, *shashki* caught my attention. It quickly became a convenient

starting point for the exploration of this topic. Both the origin of a particular game (draughts or checkers), its derivatives, and the history of the word “*shashki*” (in Russian: шашки) itself intrigued me. I was particularly struck by its significant linguistic influence in the world of board games. In this series of articles, I will share some results of my research. As an introduction, I would like to begin with historical linguistics and use a few examples to show how important it is to consider words in their historical context.

Example one: In the late 18th and early 19th century, there were two episodes in the history of Russian-Japanese relations that were connected by a cause-and-effect chain. Japanese sailors spent several years in Russia, while Russians spent time in Japan. Without delving into the details of these events, it is worth noting that one of their outcomes was

the publication of two works:

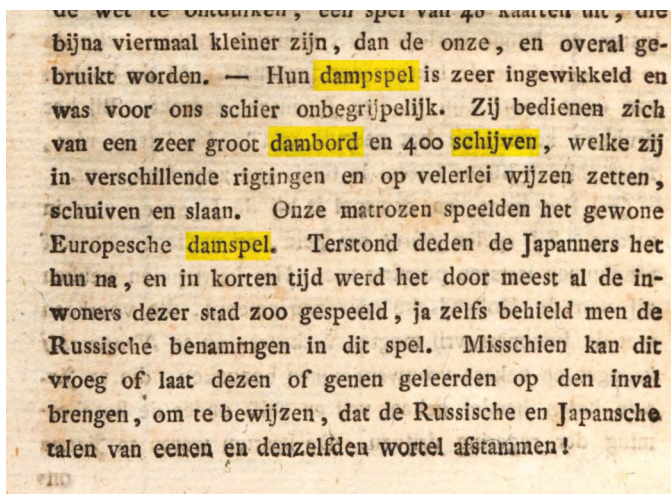
Katsuragawa, Hoshu. *Hokusa Bunryaku* [In Japanese: 桂川甫周 『北槎聞略』 *A Brief Account of What Was Heard in the Northern Regions*]. 1794. Edited by Takataka Kamei, Sanshūsha [In Japanese: 亀井高孝校訂 『北槎聞略』 三秀舎], 1937.

Golovnin, Vasily Mikhailovich. *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan, During the Years 1811, 1812, and 1813 With Observations on the Country and the People* [In Russian: Записки флота капитана Головнина оключениях его в плену у японцев в 1811, 1812 и 1813 годах. С приобщением замечаний его о Японском Государстве и народе]. Part 1, Saint Petersburg, 1816.

In Vasily Golovnin's book, there is a fragment (p. 274) describing a Japanese board game. Here is a literal translation from Russian:

“Their game of *shashki* [шашки] is very sophisticated, and we could not make any sense of it. They use an oversized *shashki* board and approximately 400 *shashkas*, which move and capture in various directions and in different ways.”

When we read this text today, a certain image takes shape in our minds, influenced by the modern meaning of the word “*shashki*” in Russian. Firstly, *shashki* refers to a well-known board game (draughts or checkers), or rather, a family of games. Secondly, it is the name of the pieces used in this game — small discs (in Russian, “*shashka*” is the singular form of the plural “*shashki*”). Thus, while reading Golovnin's account, we instinctively imagine



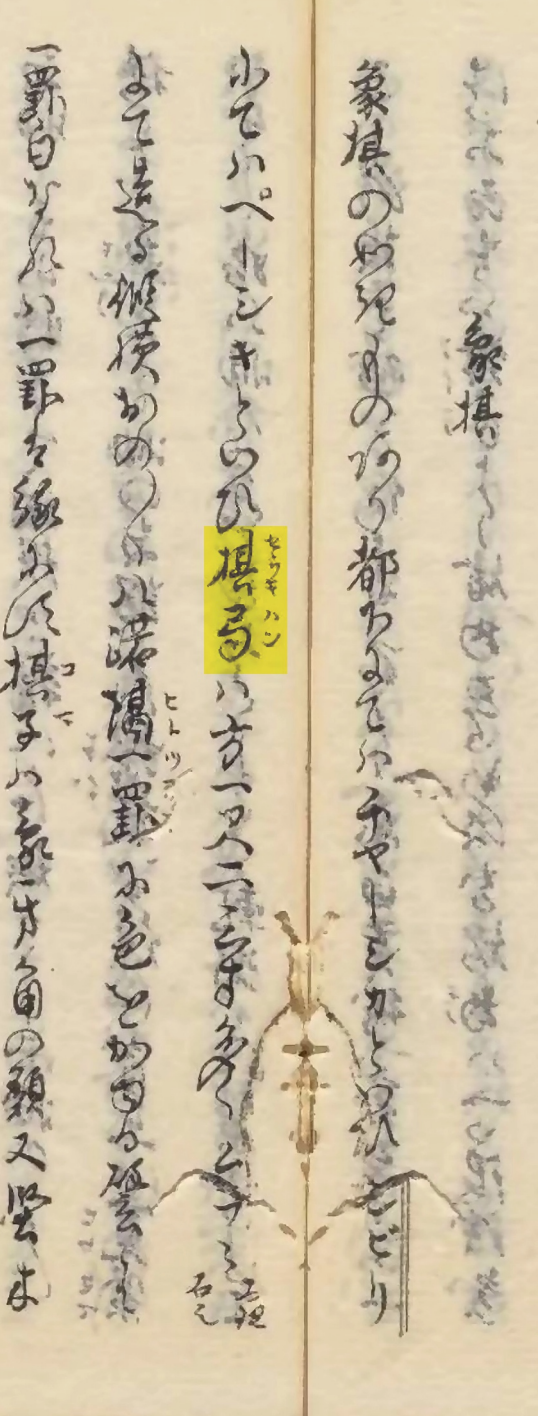
Excerpt from the Dutch edition of Golovnin's *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan* (1818)

some kind of board game with uniform, equivalent round pieces.

Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan was translated into many European languages during those years, and it is noteworthy that the translators, Golovnin's contemporaries, shared a similar understanding of the term “*shashki*” at the time. In the English edition of the book, the word was rendered as “*draughts*,” in French as “*jeu de dames*,” in German as “*Damenspiel*,” and in Dutch as “*damspel*” (with the pieces referred to as “*schijven*,” meaning “*discs*”). If we then add to the emerging image of Japanese *shashki* the detail that the game board is very large and there are about 400 pieces, it is natural to assume that Golovnin might have been describing the Japanese game of Go¹.

Hokusa Bunryaku also includes descriptions of various games played in Russia. Notably, the book contains a separate article titled “*Shogi*,” which is dedicated to Western chess. The

¹ Dinerstein, Alexander. “The History of Go in Russia” (История Го в России). *Games and Toys* (Игры и Игрушки), no. 2, 2022, p. 24.



A fragment of the Hokusa Bunryaku manuscript (1794) mentioning "shashki".

opening sentence of this article reads as follows (translated from Japanese by V.M. Konstantinov¹):

"There is a game similar to shogi. In the capital, it is called 'shashki,' while in Siberia, it is known as 'peshki.'"

Thus, European chess may have been mentioned for the first time in Japanese sources under the name "shashki." Now that we understand Golovnin was describing Japanese chess, his words about shashkas that "move and capture in various directions and in different ways" no longer seem puzzling, as they would if he had been referring to Go. The large game board and the multitude of chess pieces suggest that Golovnin witnessed a game of tai shogi (played on a 25x25 board with 354 pieces). I can well imagine the Japanese aiming to impress their captives with such a spectacle.

I have demonstrated how the modern lexical meaning of a word can distort the interpretation of a written source. Similarly, the terminology used can influence the perception of archaeological artifacts. For instance, referring to small round flat objects as "draughts" or "checkers" or "shashki" might lead to the unwarranted assumption that they are necessarily associated with the game of draughts as it is understood today.

In 1969, during excavations at Staraya Ryazan in European Russia, which was burned down by Batu Khan in 1237, several curious bone artifacts were unearthed. Here is how the head of the archaeological expedition, Vladislav

¹ Katsuragawa, Hoshu. *Brief News of the Wanderings in the Northern Waters* (Краткие вести о скитаниях в северных водах). *Hokusa Monryaku* (Хокуса монряку), translated by V. M. Konstantinov, edited by V. N. Goregryad, Moscow, 1978, p. 226.

Darkevich, described the finds (a literal translation from Russian)¹:

*“Not far from the storerooms, while clearing the shapeless debris of an adobe oven that had stood outside the house, a bone circle^{Fig.1} featuring the image of a footsoldier was found (diameter 2.8 cm, thickness 0.5 cm). It may have belonged to a rich set of **shashki** or, possibly (as a secondary use?), served as a pendant... Based on the type of weapon depicted, the **shashka** dates back to the 12th or early 13th century... Another bone **shashka**, with a double-sided circular ornament, was found nearby.”*

Darkevich used the word “shashka” to mean “a game piece in the form of a disc” without specifying a particular game. However, he referred to his other work, which suggests However, he referred to his other work, which suggests that the found bone circles were most likely used in a medieval variation of backgammon².

Nevertheless, this terminology in the description of the Ryazan find did not sit well with the prominent Soviet chess historian Isaac Linder, who, for some reason, believed that Darkevich was referring to the modern game of draughts³:

“It's difficult to agree with this opinion. First of all, there is no evidence that the game of draughts, as we understand it today, existed at that time. Even if it had been common in Russia back then, the standard design of these pieces would not have required such a complex additional description.



Fig. 1.

However, its appearance becomes quite understandable and natural in the context of a rich set of travel chess for a prince or a noble warrior. Especially since the found circle was not unique (which rules out another purpose), as there was another disc nearby, but without any design. Most likely, in the presumed set, the pawns were the pieces without images, represented by blank discs. For example, in the 12th-century pictorial sets of Viking chess, pawns were abstract.”

Thus, by rejecting the notion that draughts required highly artistic pieces, Linder proposed his own interpretation of the Ryazan find. He identified the bone disc featuring the image of a footsoldier as a chess king, which later inspired enthusiasts to conceptualize the forgotten ancient column chess, with the “Ryazan king” as its symbol. This game, “revived” in the 1990s, has since been successfully developed in Russia under the name *Tavreli* (also known as Russian chess).

To be continued...

¹ Darkevich, V. P. “Excavations at the Southern Settlement of Staraya Ryazan (1966–1969)” (Раскопки на Южном городище Старой Рязани (1966—1969 гг.)). *Archaeology of the Ryazan Land: A Collection of Articles* (Археология Рязанской земли: Сборник статей), edited by A. L. Mongait, Moscow, 1974, p. 43.

² Darkevich, V. P. *Works of Western Artisanal Craft in Eastern Europe (10th–19th Centuries)* (Произведения западного художественного ремесла в Восточной Европе (X—XIX вв.)). Moscow, 1966, p. 59.

³ Linder, I. M. *Chess in Russia* (Шахматы на Руси). Moscow, 1975, p. 90.

Although many Minsk players had been regularly practicing online, the Ginkammuri club paid little attention to online competitions until 2020. The primary reason for this was our preference for live tournaments and our strong advocacy for face-to-face interaction — a natural stance for a club that, at the time, did not wish to become an exclusively virtual community. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 compelled us to adapt and engage more actively in the online space, leading to a reassessment of our attitude toward online tournaments. They provided a unique opportunity to foster international connections, break down geographical barriers, and facilitate the exchange of playing experiences in a way that would not have been possible otherwise.

Yet, despite the abundance of convenient online game servers offering tournament features, one major obstacle remained: none of them provided a platform for organizing online tournaments that closely adhered to the standards of offline competitions. We wanted to host tournaments that included features such as transparency, where players would not hide behind anonymous usernames, a strict schedule, and the ability to use familiar

tournament formats like the Swiss or McMahon systems. Additionally, we sought a platform that could manage the entire process automatically — from registration and pairing to the submission and publication of results. These elements were crucial to us. Unable to find a suitable solution, we decided to take matters into our own hands.

To address this need, Andrei Lysenka took the initiative and developed a custom service that allowed us to organize tournaments using the popular game server 81Dojo. This development marked the birth of Ginsen, the online tournaments of the Ginkammuri club, available at

ginsen.shogi.by

Since the initial test launch on May 23,

2020, our platform has hosted 81 tournaments, with nearly 300 players from 32 countries participating. We warmly invite readers of the magazine to join our online tournaments and test their skills in duels against the top Minsk players!

As an illustration, I present the tournament table from the recent November Club Online Rapid Shogi Championship.



Deanonimized online shogi competitions!



Scheduled Tournament

47th Ginkammuri Online Rapid Shogi Championship

An open McMahon system tournament with two groups: 16 best rated players (with 1 initial point) and the rest (with 0 initial point). Sent by mail if required.

28 - 29 Dec 2024. Number of participants: 0.

Elapsed Tournament

46th Ginkammuri Online Rapid Shogi Championship

An open McMahon system tournament with two groups: 16 best rated players (with 1 initial point) and the rest (with 0 initial point). Sent by mail if required.

23 - 24 Nov 2024. Number of participants: 23.

45th Ginkammuri Online Rapid Shogi Championship

An open McMahon system tournament with two groups: 16 best rated players (with 1 initial point) and the rest (with 0 initial point). Sent by mail if required.

10 - 11 Nov 2024. Number of participants: 23.

By Yaroslav Kondratov
The chief arbiter of
the online tournaments of the Ginkammuri Club

GINSEN

46th Ginkammuri Online Rapid Shogi Championship.

<https://ginsen.shogi.by/81>

An open McMahon system tournament with two groups: 16 best rated players (with 1 initial point) and the rest.
23–24 Nov 2024 Rule: Rated 10-30. Arbiter: Yaroslav Kondratov.

						Rounds							
Nr	Players	Nationality Locality	Rank	Rating	Stats	1	2	3	4	5	6	Pts	MMS
1	moorhuhn Tanyan Vincent	  Tokyo	6d	2227	167 (55,7%)	11+	9+	5+	2+	3+	4-	5	6
2	VasyaBatyaPro Starikov Anton	  Warsaw	5d	2104	518 (69,5%)	16+	12+	3+	1-	8+	5+	5	6
3	Melkor256 Borisov Anton	 Bonn	5d	2129	664 (52,3%)	8+	14+	2-	7+	1-	10+	4	5
4	starbuckscoffee Shimizu Yuki	 Saitama	5d	2100	46 (60,9%)	12-	16+	7-	14+	10+	1+	4	5
5	PumpkinSaladMan Kashima Keiichi	 Tokyo		2120	0 (0%)	7+	13+	1-	10-	9+	2-	3	4
6	menhera_kawaii Miyamoto Yusei	 Tokyo		2120	0 (0%)	-	-	-	+	7+	8+	3	4
7	Gingingo Kamo Dan	  Hamburg	3d	1835	435 (60,9%)	5-	17+	4+	3-	6-	15+	3	4
8	Tooro Gusev Alexander	 Vladivostok	3d	1877	1701 (47,4%)	3-	23+	16+	11+	2-	6-	3	4
9	MacaroniSaladWoman Tsuzuki Mika	 Tokyo		1970	0 (0%)	17+	1-	12-	18+	5-	14+	3	4
10	PashaLioshir2head Val'kov Pavel	 Minsk	4d	2016	550 (43,5%)	13-	22+	14+	5+	4-	3-	3	4
11	zakkerman Zakrzhevsky Vladislav	  Opole	3d	1943	2890 (70,6%)	1-	18+	13-	8-	17+	22+	3	4
12	ramunenon Ota Nonno	 Nagoya		1464	1 (100%)	4+	2-	9+	-	-	-	2	3
13	moonsun Inoue Nachi	 Nagano		1450	0 (0%)	10+	5-	11+	-	-	-	2	3
14	hbayer Bayer Hans	 Bogotá	2d	1733	1370 (59,3%)	20+	3-	10-	4-	18+	9-	2	3
15	sadakiti_y2 Yamazaki Kyohei	 Saitama		1970	0 (0%)	-	-	-	19+	16+	7-	2	3
16	Dima2306 Chernashevich Dmitry	 Minsk	1d	1593	257 (46,3%)	2-	4-	8-	22+	15-	19+	2	3
17	Pigwidgeon Takayanagi Kaito	 Braunschweig	1k	1435	37 (56,8%)	9-	7-	24+	23+	11-	21+	3	3
18	Nikodim Marinov Nikodim	 Ruse	9k	1039	9 (33,3%)	19+	11-	22+	9-	14-	24+	3	3
19	katy Shvadronova Ekaterina	 Minsk	5k	1222	790 (38,5%)	18-	-	+	15-	23+	16-	2	2
20	Gleb123 Strelow Gleb	 Dal'negorsk	8k	1100	34 (35,3%)	14-	24+	23+	-	-	-	2	2
21	AJMC2002 Mosquera Crespo Adrian	  Vladivostok	5k	1237	172 (39%)	-	-	-	24+	22+	17-	2	2
22	nastia Arabey Anastasia	 Minsk	6k	1170	52 (15,4%)	24+	10-	18-	16-	21-	11-	1	1
23	Tapok1322 Zayats Alexey	 Vladivostok	10k	982	29 (31%)	+	8-	20-	17-	19-	-	1	1
24	anafro Frolov Anatoly	 Vladivostok		1036	3 (66,7%)	22-	20-	17-	21-	+	18-	1	1

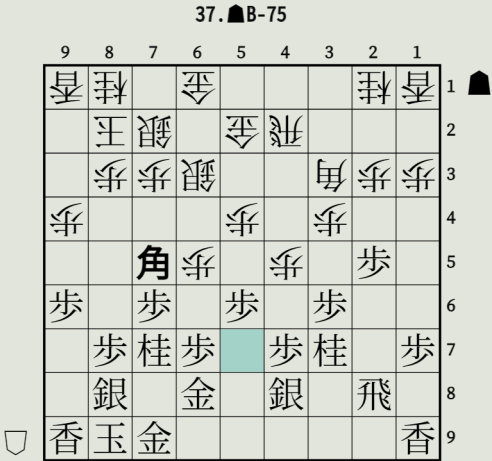
I would also like to share an interesting game episode that caught my attention during that championship. In future issues of the magazine, I plan to include such mini-analyses as a regular feature of this section. This time, we will examine the key moment from one of the tournament's central duels between **Anton Borisov** (Melkor256) and **Vincent Tanyan** (moorhuhn).

Below is a screenshot showing the position that had developed by move 37 in their game.



The opponents played Ibisha Millen-nium against Shikenbisha, and by the end of the opening stage, an approximately equal position had been established on the board. White has built a castle and is ready to initiate active play, which can begin with the next moves before Black completes their defensive formations.

The previous move, 36.△P-54, was the final preparation step for White's attack, aiming to follow up with 38.△P-54... △P-55. However, this same move provoked Black to launch a counterattack with 37.▲B-75.



This is probably the best move for Black in this position. The expected continuation was 38.△R-41 ▲N×65 (diagram 1), with the threat of ▲N-53=.



The following sequence could proceed as: 40.△S-74 ▲N-53= △R-42 ▲N×61+ △S×75 ▲Px△S×61 ▲S*77 (diagram 2), resulting in approximately equal chances for further success.



However, in response to 38.△R-41, instead of 39.▲N×65 (diagram 1), Black opted for ▲N×45, pursuing what initially appeared to be a highly promising

continuation with a bishop promotion in White's camp: 40.△R× ▲B-31+. However, this plan overlooked White's strong counterplay 42.△N*44!



Black's unsuccessful attempts to minimize losses only exacerbated their position: 43.▲+B×21 △N×36 ▲+B-32 △B-15 ▲N*37 △R-35 ▲P-16 △N×28+ ▲Px15 △+N-38 ▲P*36 △R×36 ▲S-57 △+N×37. By move 57, their position had become nearly hopeless.



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