

Reflections on English Go Literature

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Recently, I have been puzzled by the English technical literature on go. I know that the number of go books printed in the languages of Japan, China and Korea is even greater, but among the European languages English go literature is by far the richest. There are several sections to distinguish, however. If I am interested, as actually I am now, in the European go literature, I find that the English go literature of European origin is not so large. It turns out that precisely the rich English literature of international provenance may represent a good reason against a wide publishing of English works in England proper. Let us thus briefly consider the English go books according to their country of provenance. This information is known to readers, but some reflection on it may be useful.

On the Chinese literature we are recently becoming informed thanks to English translations by Yutopian, based in the USA. Janice Kim slowly lets us become acquainted, again from the USA, with a seemingly fundamental didactic work of Korean provenance.

However, in publishing go literature in English, Japan by far appears to be the leading country. To begin with, the Nihon-Kiin itself has made some effort. It suffices to think of three old milestones of go didactics, Takagawa's *How to Play Go*, 1956, followed by his *The Vital Points of Go*, 1958, and Segoe's *Go Proverbs illustrated*, 1960. Less important seems to have been then the two volume book, *Go: The most fascinating game*, printed anonymously in 1972 - even if it was also published at least in French, German, Russian, and Spanish.

Charles Tuttle published in the Sixties three common handbooks, *Stepping-stones to Go* and the reprints of the two classical books by Smith and Korschelt. These have been reprinted many times both in hardbound and paperback issues and until now have been the most commonly available books in general bookstores.

But it has mostly been Ishi Press, now Kiseido, providing the basic English go literature, with half a hundred essential works. The range is a complete one, from beginners' level up to a few advanced treatises.

This company also helped in producing or selling books by other publishers, and printed periodical literature too.

What about countries where English is the mother tongue? Several great countries such as Australia and Canada have hardly any appreciable go literature. Usually there are a few newsletters or congress proceedings, which cover a few years and/or local associations.

The USA go literature is instead rather large, only second to that of Japanese origin. Craig Hutchinson has recently published a bibliography (*AGA Historical Bibliography, June 1996*) which aims to cover all the go literature in the Western world. This useful work not only lists go books but also – and this it does especially for the USA – go references from journals, books of general literature, and so on. It has been the main source for my comments here and I would appreciate being informed of any edition that escaped my attention.

Also in Europe some English go texts can be found originating from countries different from Great Britain, due to the international character of the language. For instance, the proceedings of the European go congresses and tournaments are usually published in English, independent of the country in which they take place.

Thus, various countries and many English books have been encountered before we reach Great Britain proper. Now, the question is, “What has been the British contribution to go literature?” (My attention is focused on treatises on go. For instance, I do not take the early reports of travellers or missionaries into account.) To begin with, several fundamental books on board games have been printed in England. Works by authors with such renowned names as Hyde (1), Falkener (2), Murray (3) and Bell (4) must be taken into account even when their section on go is small.

The earliest contributions of England to the history of go actually deal with Chinese weiqi, with the first information brought to Europe, beginning with Hyde. Interesting early contributions derived from sinologists such as Herbert Giles (5) and Volpicelli (6). In particular, the first British book entirely devoted to go was printed in Hastings at the author’s expense (7).

Later on, an outstanding work appeared, which can be considered as the most detailed book on weiqi to have been published in the Western world, with several quotations from the classic Chinese sources (8). The Italian original edition had been printed one or two years earlier, but it apparently had an extremely limited circulation.

An English treatise was compiled in 1962 by the International GO-Friends Union and authored by the President of the BGA (9). Later on, as common for the national federations, a series of publications has aimed to spread the knowledge of the rules (10), of the federal organisation (11), tournaments (12), and so on. They are usually in the form of booklets or leaflets with some essential information.

Starting in 1967 and now at number 112, the most fundamental source is the British Go Journal; a useful index of its contents has appeared recently (13). For some months, a newsletter also appeared (14). Another newsletter is active now.

Translation of Japanese advanced treatises is also remarkable, particularly due to the activity of John Fairbairn (15), a scholar in Japanese language. He is one of the leading experts in go history and literature and is also present among the authors with his elementary handbook (16), printed by a well known publisher.

Among so many books of Japanese origin, we thus find some compiled by authors, accustomed to describe games to European readers. David Pritchard is one of the most active writers on games at a European level. In particular, he has published a whole introductory book on go (17), which, as far as I know, is the most detailed among the British contributions to the subject.

A remarkable attention to go literature occurred toward the middle of the Seventies, in correspondence with the 1976 European Go Championship and the foundation in London of the European Go Centre (18). Apart from technical books circulating among go players, there were two interesting Penguin books published in 1976— the documentary novel by Nobel prize winner Kawabata (19) and a reprint of the elementary handbook (20) published by Ishi Press under the name of Iwamoto Kaoru (a book translated in many European languages, more than any other among go books for beginners).

Other booklets were published, devoted to such special subjects as proverbs (21) or in a particular style (22). There can be mentioned the presence of a go section in a known journal devoted to games in general (23).

There is also a topic where the British editions appear to be the most original, even though the matter is rather limited – song books: at least two of them (24) appeared in England! I do not know of any other country which may approach this record.

In conclusion, the British go literature is certainly only a fraction of the editions published in English. However, it is rather complete in itself, with enough elementary books, some translations from Japanese advanced works, a few completely original contributions. The problem with these editions is usually that they soon get out of print and are then hard to find (if any reader has used items to offer, including old years of BGJ and several books out of print, for instance Cheshire and Fairbairn, please tell Gerry Mills for me). It may be concluded on the whole that only a couple of the other European countries have a similarly comprehensive go literature and only in Germany can a comparable production be found for early times.

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