

Shogi Boom spreads across the borders!

~Overseas winds blow into our traditional culture~

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INTERNATIONAL SHOGI FORUM <http://isf.shogi.fr>

Hosted by:	Japan Shogi Association, French Shogi Federation
Supported by:	Japanese Embassy in France, City Rueil Malmaison Yomiuri Newspaper, Sankei Newspaper, Nikkei Newspaper Kumon Kyouiku Kenkyuukai



Teaching games by Meijin Moriuchi (near side) and 2-crown Habu

The Open Tournament was named, "George Hodges Memorial Open Tournament" after the late Mr. Hodges, the father of European Shogi Popularization.

A game in the World Championship.

The winner, Jean Fortin (left)

The 2nd, Laszlo Abuczki (right)





The 5th International Shogi Forum was held from 27th to 30th of October in Rueil Malmaison city close to Paris, France. The 1st Forum was held in 1999 in the aim of promoting shogi overseas and tightening international relationship, and this time was the first time it was held overseas. From professional players, Meijin Toshiyuki Moriuchi, 2-crown Yoshiharu Habu, 9-Dan Teruichi Aono, 7-Dan Naruyuki Hatakeyama, 6-Dan Yuuji Masuda, 6-Dan Yuusuke Ina, and Ladies 1-Dan Madoka Kitao participated. Ladies 1-Dan Madoka Kitao reports the scenes from the site.

Shogi Boom is starting not only in Japan but also all over the world.

Shogi is said to have good compatibility with the internet. The internet plays an important role in overseas popularization as well.

In social networking services that are popular over the world such as Facebook, shogi fans of each country form a group, and communicate frequently. Moreover, homepages of shogi organizations in many regions appear one after another, and we see all-inclusive info in each language, such as explanation of the rules, history, and equipment. We can see that their passion is as much as that of Japanese fans.

Tournament Staff from French Shogi Federation. On the right is the chairman Fabien Osmont.

There are many young players overseas who got to know shogi in the manga “NARUTO”, and they get information mainly on the internet.

Tomohide Kawasaki, a YouTube channel producer who distributes videos that introduce shogi in English, has made an online shogi playing website “81Dojo” in which English is used as the main language.

And now, players who became strong in this website are acting as the top-players overseas.

Held overseas for the first time

International Shogi Forum (hereafter ISF) this year was the first time it was held overseas. It had been held 4 times before in Japan, and this was the 5th forum. The forum is held every 3 years. The main event was the World Championship in which representatives from many countries participated.

During the 4-day period from 27th October, about 250 people visited the site, and an Open Tournament was also held together with the World Championship. It was impressive that there were many young participants and female participants. There were also married couples. I noticed the difference in the way of being involved in games.

Japan is popular there

In France, where the forum was held, “Japan” is very popular now. Japanese restaurants, T-shirts with kanji on them, Japanese-like art objects (*kokeshi* and Buddha statue etc.) are seen all over the city.

French Shogi Federation chairman Fabien Osmont leded two branches in Alsace and Paris, and planned this forum in collaboration with Japan Shogi Association.

The participants of World Championship were 22 players: representatives from 21 countries and the European Shogi Champion. According to their profile described on the pamphlet, many of them are Dan-holders, which illustrates how the level of shogi players around the world is being enhanced. There are also Kyu-players whose strength are thought be higher than being Kyu. (Because of the rating system called ELO, one needs to play many games in official tournaments to get high Dan.)

The main tournament is 8 games per player. It proceeded slowly, each game taking enough time. Between game hours and during meal time, shogi fans from many countries talked with each other and exchanged information and e-mail addresses etc. And at the hotel where most of the participants stayed, shogi boards were placed here and there every night, and games went on. Seeing this, I could not help thinking, “Shogi fans are all the same throughout the world.”



9-Dan Aono makes autographs on a book both in Japanese and English. On the right is chairman Osmont.



The middle in 3-board simultaneous game is Almira.

She makes an excellent victory in 2-piece handicap against Meijin.

Luxurious teaching game

Besides the tournaments, simultaneous games were played by professional players. With Meijin Moriuchi and 2-crown Habu joining, it was a luxurious teaching game event. Meijin Moriuchi commented, “Many of the opponents played carefully with deliberation on each move.” Although one reason may be that it was their precious opportunity to learn games from professionals, many of them seemed to be theorist type since there were few players who played fast in the tournaments.

Magnificent welcome party

A party was held on the night of the 2nd day. The tournament site Rueil Malmaison city and Japanese Embassy in France made their welcome speech. Including the speech by professional players, everything was translated into French, English, and Japanese. As an entertainment, 3-board simultaneous game by Meijin Moriuchi was played. The opponents were top chess players. The French champion, 17-year-old grand master from Netherlands, and the ladies champion of Europe.

Almira Skripchenko played a 2-piece handicap game, and was the only one who made a win.

Fan’s enthusiasm is the same

A historic victory

Jean Fortin, who has been winning European Shogi Championship three times in a row, is a student from France. He won this championship as well with an individual lead of 7 wins and 1 loss.

Three players followed him with 6 wins and 2 losses, and their ranks were decided according to their points. Ranked 2nd was Laszlo Abuczki from Hungary, who participated for the first time. Ranked 3rd was Eric Cheymol from France, a regular participant of the tournament. And Karolina Styczynska from Poland took the 4th.

In the last summer, Karolina studied shogi in Japan. She was given 4-Dan rank at a club of Japan Shogi Association, and is without question the strongest foreign female player.

The diagram shows her 5th game. Playing black was Karolina, and white was former Ladies Amateur Meijin Mako Yamaguchi from Japan. Karolina abandoned the rook with ▲Rx54 from here, and continued △Px ▲S*95, at which she “felt playable by capturing the rook.”



The features of her playing style are the light sabaki and the acute attack. She later dropped the rook in, and won the game after a violent exchange of attacks.

This was a historic achievement that a foreign female player won against a Ladies Amateur Meijin.

Her dream is “to become a professional player.” Needless to say, the path to become professional is steep, and she will have another hurdle of having to live in Japan. I wish she will play an active part and become a star that foreign players place their hopes on.



Jean Fortin, and Karolina Styczynska holding a book autographed by 2-crown Habu.

Tomohide Kawasaki, the pioneer in world popularization

Worldwide-famed "Hidetchi"

Shogi lesson videos on YouTube. Establishment of the international online shogi playing site "81Dojo". There is no shogi fan overseas who does not know him. He is also a member of "International Shogi Popularization Society", and has been from earlier developing his activities of shogi promotion on the internet on his own, in reply to the demands by shogi fans overseas.

Recently "Joseki at a Glance" has just been published, which he translated from "Shogi – Hitome-no-joseki". 150 copies were sold out at the site. When he had arrived, people stood in line to get his autograph as if they had been waiting for him.

Moreover, his original shogi piece design that features chess has good reputation. There was even someone who brought a self-handmade piece set with the design, and played games. His achievements as the pioneer in world popularization will surely be a story passed down from generation to generation.



On the right is Tomohide Kawasaki, also known as Hidetchi

Communicate with online shogi

A screenshot of the 81Dojo website lobby. The interface is in Japanese. It shows a list of players with their names, ranks, and nationalities. On the right, there is a 'Standings' table for the '3rd 81Ou League, B-Class' as of 2011-06-05. The table lists the top 10 players and their scores. Below the standings, there is a 'Recent Games' section showing the last few games played. At the bottom, there is a chat window and a list of time zones for various cities around the world.

In "81Dojo" lobby, national flags from all over the world are streaming. The top 4 players in the tournament are regular members at this website. The winner Jean plays with the handle "Tellmarch", and holds a title called "81Ou". Karolina plays with the handle "oneye". These two are rivals to each other, and compete every day and night.

Total registration is 5,800 as of the middle of November. It is said that there are registrations from 85 countries.

Although the common language at the lobby is English, the controls can be shown multilingual, and Japanese is available.

Of course the main thing is to play games, so there will be no problem only if you can play shogi. Since you can make greetings with a button, you don't need to be able to chat. Why don't you try the international communication through shogi?

"81Dojo" lobby, where world flags stand in line. It supports English and Japanese with manuals in detail. Registration is free. <http://81dojo.com/>



Teaching game by 2-crown Habu. Reaching his hand is Adrien.

Flood of information

So many encounters with shogi fans, and so many memories. The first ISF abroad was a succession of impressive events.

And I must write about what has happened after it ended.

Considerable numbers of photos and reports have been uploaded on Facebook and homepages here and there. The information flooded out.

There are so many people overseas who love shogi, and love Japan. It is the era when translation can be somehow done only by using a mouse. Shogi fans are being connected to each other across the borders, and this phenomenon is expanding. There are young people who wish “to go to Japan to play shogi.” The seeds that the predecessors had been steadily sowing have now started to sprout up. I think it is the duty for us, people related to shogi world, to grow them carefully.

Lights of hope

62 players participated in the Open Tournament which anyone could enter. The winner was Toshio Takashima (Brazil). 2nd was Adrien Levacic (France). And 3rd was Yasuhiko Utsunomiya (Japan).

Adrien is 15 years old. He is originally a chess player. One and a half years ago he participated in a game festival in Cannes and happened to drop by a shogi booth, where I taught shogi rules to him for the first time. This was his encounter with shogi.

He has been studying shogi 6 hours a day since then, and I hear that he has become so strong that he sometimes beats strong 4-Dan players.

A Greek youth, Stefanos is living a shogi-soaked life as well. His internet webpage is flooded with whatever shogi topics, such as photos at tournaments and his own kifu.

When I see these young people united on the internet and enjoying talks about shogi, they look pretty much shiny as if I am seeing the lights of hope. I feel that the advent of the first foreign professional player can happen in the not-so-long future.

In “Dobutsu Shogi Tournament” that was held on the first night, Thomas Pfaffel (Austria) won. Please refer to ISF homepage for the detail results of the tournament.