Go in Competition

“The blue sky has a round eye, the earth is a Go board; ... the surface of the board is our ephemeral existence, the stones black and white are day and night”

- CHINSHHU

Foreword

Talking about GO, Naoki Sanjugo, the Japanese author said: "... If you say it has no value, it means that it really has none at all, and if you say it has value, then it has an absolute value." But what actually is GO?

GO is without any doubt a logical game. I would even go further, it is like a game of intelligence - probably only a certain type of intelligence, but nevertheless a game of intelligence - and this is the reason why it is normally associated with Chess.

It is a domain whose limits are hard to define in spite of the fact that it appeared around 4000 years ago. Professional players have concluded that if somebody played perfectly, then that person could give to any of them 3 to 4 handicap stones. Let us not forget that these professionals (from 1-9 Dan), when playing amongst themselves, can not give more than three stones handicap - so four stones, in these circumstances, could just as well be a synonym for "infinity".

One of the most celebrated players of the last quarter century, Mr. Fujisawa Shuko (9 Dan), made, at the age of 60, the claim that he knew only about 15% of GO. Given the well-known Japanese modesty, we might suspect that this figure is too low, but it begs the question: in what other areas can such a personality make such a statement? … We remember that a professional player begins GO early in his childhood, reaching the rank of 1 Dan (professional) at the age of 14-16 years at the latest; So when the statement was mentioned, Mr. Fujisawa had spent about 60 years of intense study of GO.

Regarding the degree of difficulty, this game is often compared to Chess. It would be hard for me to decide strongly in favor of one or the other, because if I consider myself of a medium level in GO, in chess my experience is extremely low. But I can not stop you from discovering that many Chess players have started lately to switch to GO, but I have never heard of a player who abandoned GO for Chess.

This work is aimed at those who, having read the "Introduction to GO", they want to know more about the secrets of this game, it is not necessarily for a certain category of players, but for all those who wish to embark on the difficult road to Shodan. Why Shodan? ... Because around this rank something essential changes in the GO Player.

We begin by learning how to capture one stone (or more) and how a group can survive on the board: these are the basic rules. When trying to apply them, however, we can immediately see that things are not nearly so simple, and to reach a relative mastery of the rules - that is to be able to give any possible sequence of correct moves - will take a pretty long time (a time dependent on our inclination for the game, but still of a certain magnitude). As the strength of our play increases, we will discover relationships between stones (or groups of stones) which are increasingly further apart on the board, this will lead us to discover strategic concepts. However, a game plan, no matter how well designed, can easily fail if it is not well supported from the point of view of technique. Somewhere, around the level of 1 KYU-1 DAN, the strength of your game is sufficiently large to enable the conception and execution of a solid, homogeneous strategy. Here you actually start Go and only now can you begin to understand its complexity.

We should not give a false impression that "playing technique" and "strategy" are two different things: they are intimately related, influencing each other so deeply that they simply can not operate independently. Each move, each stone placed on the board - an integral part of the chosen strategy - should have the maximum efficiency locally and not give the opponent a favorable response. This assumes, of course, an accurate assessment of the possible responses of our opponent, which could lead us, ultimately, to the conclusion that in a game of GO every fight is actually against ourself, the opponent doing nothing else than to confirm (or not) the accuracy of our own calculations. If we judged correctly, our opponent may not just give the answers we expected (so favorable to us); but, the opponent may also respond in a different way than we expected (but in a correct way), then we have not calculated well enough. There is a beautiful Chinese saying that "... if you calculated and have concluded that you lose, you have not calculated enough; if you calculated and do not know the exact outcome, it means you have not calculated at all. ". The seven games that follow are nothing but pretexts to discuss GO. The comments which accompany them cannot be considered as a "technical manual of GO", they raise, rather, problems that are only partially solved, problems which the new player has not yet started to ask himself. I am convinced that in GO one of the most important things is to know HOW to choose a problem (for once we set the problem, it is already much easier to solve it). This is in fact the purpose of this book, and if after reading it the reader will even only slightly change his viewpoint regarding GO, then this goal will be met.