The Duel between the Grand Masters of Old and New Times: Zhou Lanyu (white) vs Guo Bailing

Cheng Xiaoliu (6 dan)*

September 9, 1992

*Mr. Cheng Xiaoliu was born on January 26, 1949. He became 6 dan in 1982. He won 3rd and 5th place each once in the National Mens' Individual Championships. He was also the challenger in 1982's New Physical Educational Cup against Nie Weiping but lost (2-3). He is now a reporter in the New Physical Education press and also a editor for the Chinese Go World magazine. The original Chinese version of this article was published in the Chinese Go World, Vol. 3, 1990.

1 Introduction

Guo Bailing was born in Wuxi county, Jiangsu Province. He was an epoch-making figure in the history of Weiqi (Go) and was the leader of the Go-playing society at the end of the Ming Dynasty and at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty.

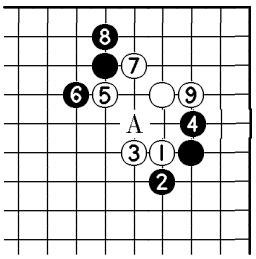
From the historic records, most of Guo's go activities were during the Ming Dynasty and he was named as "the No.1 Grand Master" of China then. According to the Annals of Wuxi County, Guo Bailing was very good at playing go at a very young age and he was brought to the Capital by the Prime Minister then and became very famous. So all the high-level players from everywhere, far and wide, came to challenge him. Guo outplayed everyone, so everyone respected him and named him the "Grand Master". Although the Annals may over-praise a local figure in order to publicize local figures, scenes, and social customs, after all we can still see his majestic position looming large in the go playing world then.

After entering the Qing Dynasty, although Guo was still active in the go-playing world, he lost more games than he won.There are probably two reasons for this: he was very old and had poor health, but his techniques were also conservative and couldn't follow the leaping changes with the times.

His most important contribution to go is his works. He presided over editing and sorting out the masterpiece of the Ming Dynasty "Xian Ji Wu Ku" (Tricks and Secrets of Gods). Not only were many errors corrected in the previous versions, but many prevailing variations were added in the new version. The contents were greatly enriched. He also had three widely circulated books: "Endgame", "Handicap-3 Games" and "Handicap-4 Games". The "Endgame" has various life and death problems of 1478 figures and still thought to be a masterpiece. He had only twelve games remaining today. Most of them were played against Zhou Lanyu.

Zhou Lanyu was born in Jiaxing County, Zhejiang Province and was a unique figure at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty.

He played ten games with Guo Bailing and won most of them. He became very famous since. He traveled around the country and played with local players. He met Wang Hannian and Zhou Donghou of Anhui Province (also two very famous players then) in Yangzhou and he outplayed both of them. So the crown of No.1 Grand Master belonged to him since. He was a brilliant talent. It's a pity he died in his forties. But in the legend it says he did not die, he sailed to an island in the Pacific Ocean and stayed there for the rest of his life. His understanding of Go is very deep and he made very many good corrections in the techniques of local combat. For example, in Dia. 1, in the "Double Flying Swallows" joseki, the usual play for white is A, but he changed to the moves as shown. This new variation up to move 9 is still in use today.

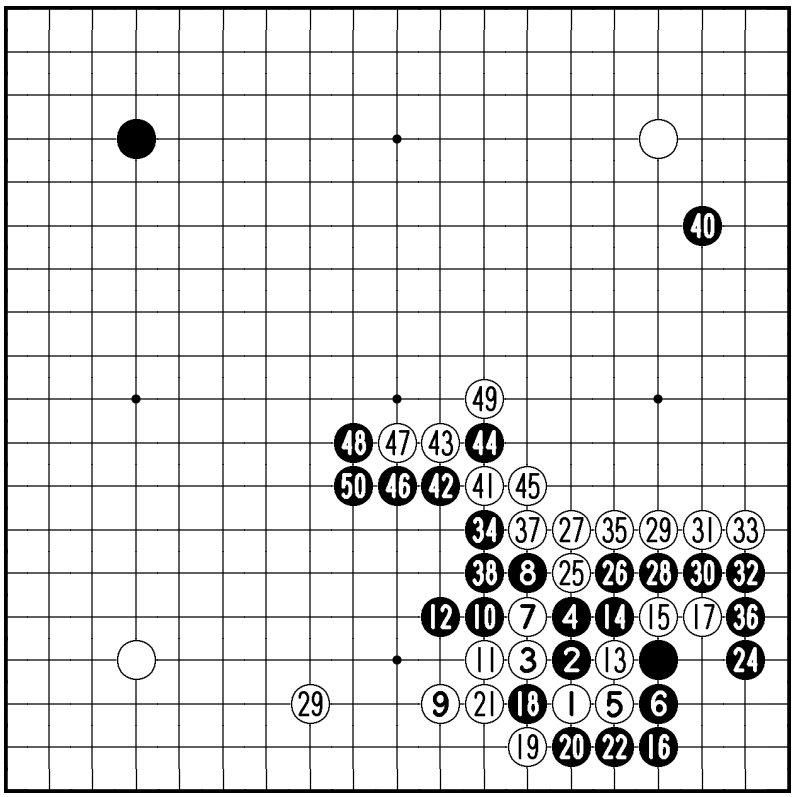


Dia. 1

Also, he paid attention to the balance of the whole board and proposed 'if you can get sente everywhere you will never lose'. This represented the gradual change of Chinese-style of playing from purely stressing middle game combating to paying attention to the whole board balance. This was very beneficial to the development of go techniques then.

Next, let's enjoy one of the ten games between these two grand masters to get to know about the fragments of the 'duel' between them.

2 Figure 1 Move 1 to 50



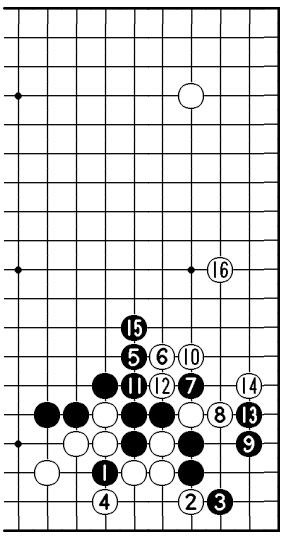
㉓ = ⓲

Fig. 1 Move 1 to 50

For white move 1, the black move 2 is called "cover". Guo liked the "cover" joseki most. Anytime his opponent played move 1 like this, he most likely played the move 2 "cover". He made thorough study of all variations involved. Although the "cover" joseki is very thick, straightforward and easy to master, it has fewer variations and has a drawback of being less effective. So since then, the go masters after Guo rarely used the "cover" joseki. It's a big improvement from the historic point of view.

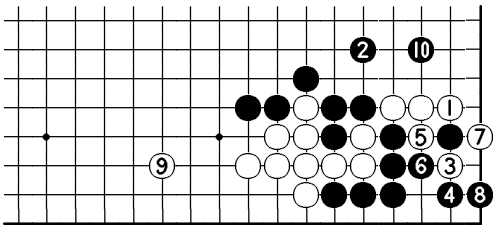
Black ⓾ is usually played at ㉘ to make black strong, but here black plays ⓾ and ⓬ in Figure 1 to make a change. White ⑬ and ⑮ moves are a severe counterattack. If black ⓰ cuts as in Dia. 2,

black should know enough to deal with white's variations to play move 2 first. One of the games between them proceeded in the way as shown in Dia. 2, the result shows that white is better locally.



Dia. 2

White ㉕'s cut and atari is an inevitable move. If this move is played as in Dia. 3, then black ❷ will make a good shape. When white plays move ⑨ to avoid being attacked, black ❿ is a good move. Apparently, it is disadvantageous for white.



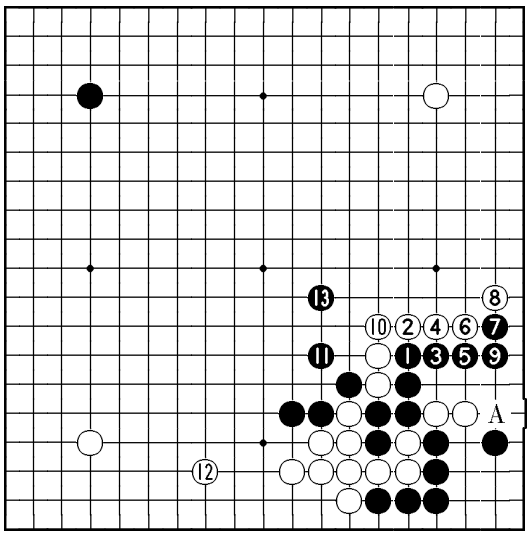
Dia. 3

Black ㉘ bending is not a good move, this move should be played as move 1 in Dia. 4. Although white may play A to make a seki, white also have defects, so black's situation is better than in Figure 1.

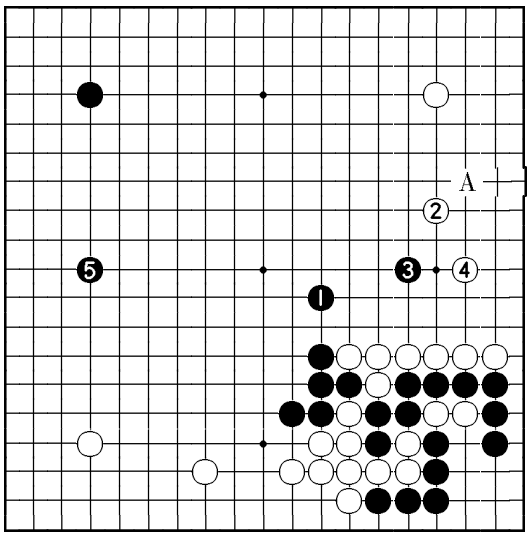
White ㉙ succeeds in building a wall and potential by giving up two stones. After white ㉙, although black gets 18 points at the lower-right corner, the central black group is very weak. It will be a very large burden for black in future combat. Up to now, white obtains some advantage from the lower-right corner fight.

Black ㊵ is not good, it should be played at ❶ as shown in Dia. 5. It's a crucial point for the whole board. Next, regardless where white plays, for example, ② or position A, black can play ❸ to limit white's future development first, then play ❺. If the game proceeds like this, the game is still a long way to go.

After white's quick-witted moves ㊶ and ㊸, the white wall is thicker and thicker, and the influence is stronger and stronger.



Dia. 4



Dia. 5

Black ㊽ is very reluctant, but black has to manage to play here. Otherwise, when white plays at ㊽, then the whole board is more unfavorable to black. White ㊾ is weak, this move should have been played at ㊿. Regardless wherever black plays, white will be in an advantageous position in fighting. After black ㊿ avoids the cut, the tension in the central part is relaxed a little bit, but overall, white is still leading.

3 Figure 2 Move 51 to 100

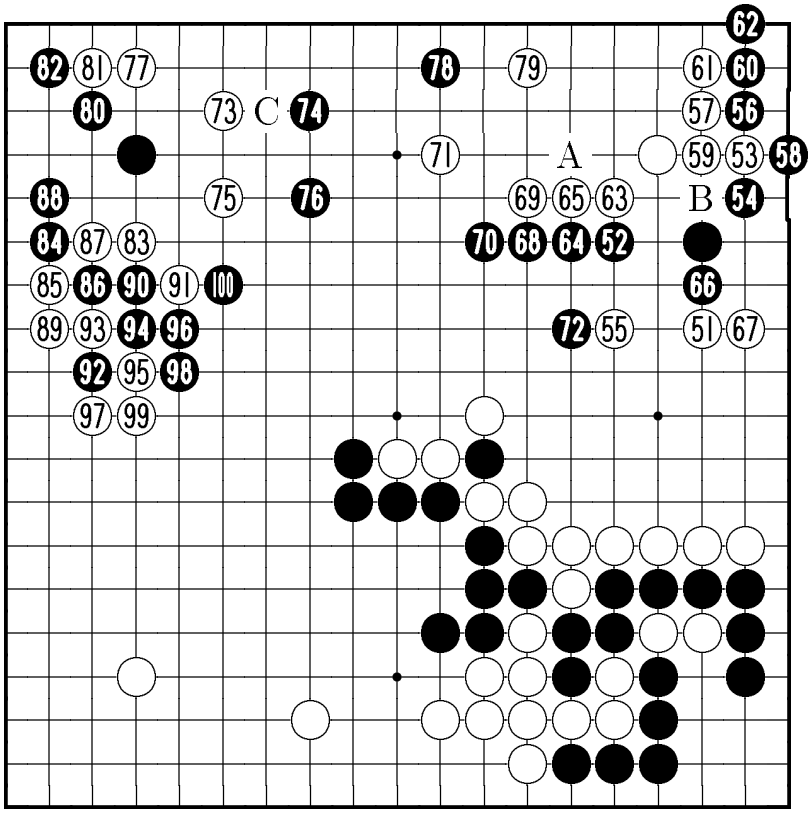
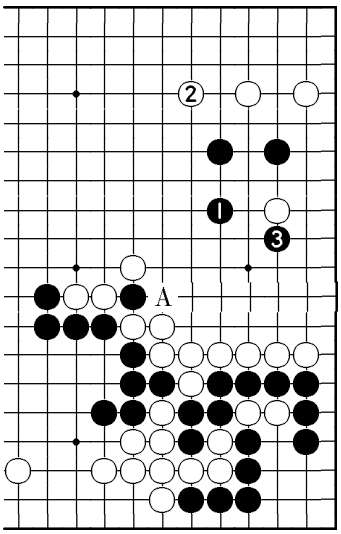


Fig. 2 Move 51 to 100

White ㊸ is too aggressive. This belongs to the old way of playing go which stresses giving no place for the opponent to settle down. But at this time, since black is unable to get settled down immediately at the right edge, it's not necessary for white to press so hard on black. White ㊸ should be played at A. Even if white wants to press hard on black to avoid black to ignore him, white should play at B.

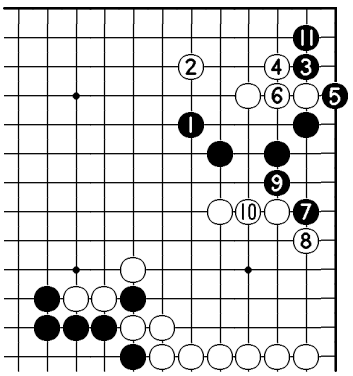
But black ㊹ is unreasonable. At this time, black itself is very weak here, there is no time for black trying to disconnect the white groups. Black ㊹ should be played at ❶ as shown in Dia. 6, if white plays ②, black can play ❸ to get a good shape and reduce some white's future territory while white has to worry about black's escaping from A. So when black plays ❸, white has no effective measures to attack black here.

After white makes a jump (㊺), black ㊻ is too early to invade the corner, especially black's ㊷ is not urgent. As in Dia. 7, black should play ❶ first to get out, when white plays ②, then



Dia. 6

black comes back to invade the corner. If the game is proceeding this way, black's situation is much better than in Figure 2.

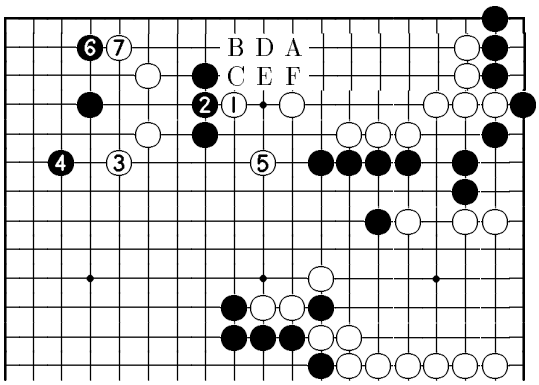


Dia. 7

White ⑥③ is the crucial point for attacking. Black has to play ❻❻ (point-losing move) in order to avoid being cut. After ⑦①, black's situation is more unfavorable. Black ❼❷ is not urgent, this move should have been played at C in order to keep the balance of the whole board's territory regardless what happened! When white plays ⑦③, black looks like he is going to lose.

In the first half game, Zhou made use of several questionable moves by Guo and took advantage by actively attacking black. This shows his good whole-board balance sense and flexible playing style.

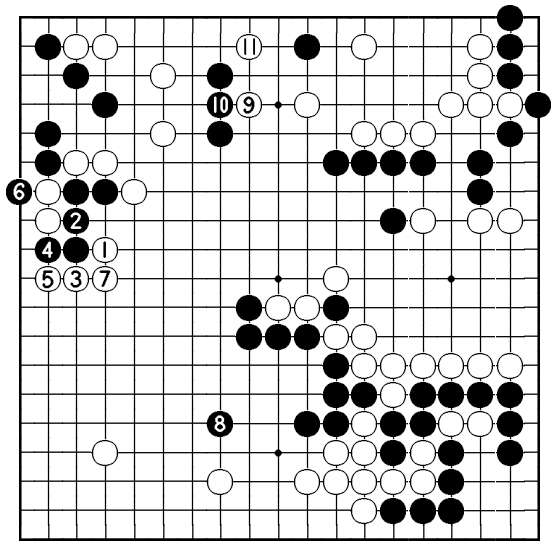
Black ❼❹'s invasion is tenacious. If black couldn't mess up the situation here, black might have no chance to compete with white. White ⑦⑦ starts a wrong sequence, this move should have been played as ① in Dia. 8. After black's connection, white can get out by ③ and ⑤. As several black groups are not safe all together, black will have a difficult struggle. In Dia. 8, it is not good for black to play A any more, because white can play B, black C, white D, black E, white F.



Dia. 8

When white plays (81), black 82 is unreasonable and makes very few points. Black 82 should be played at 86 to free itself from the predicament. White (83) and (85) are severe, although black 88 is very inconvenient, it is a must for black. Otherwise, black doesn't have enough territory to compete if black gives up this corner.

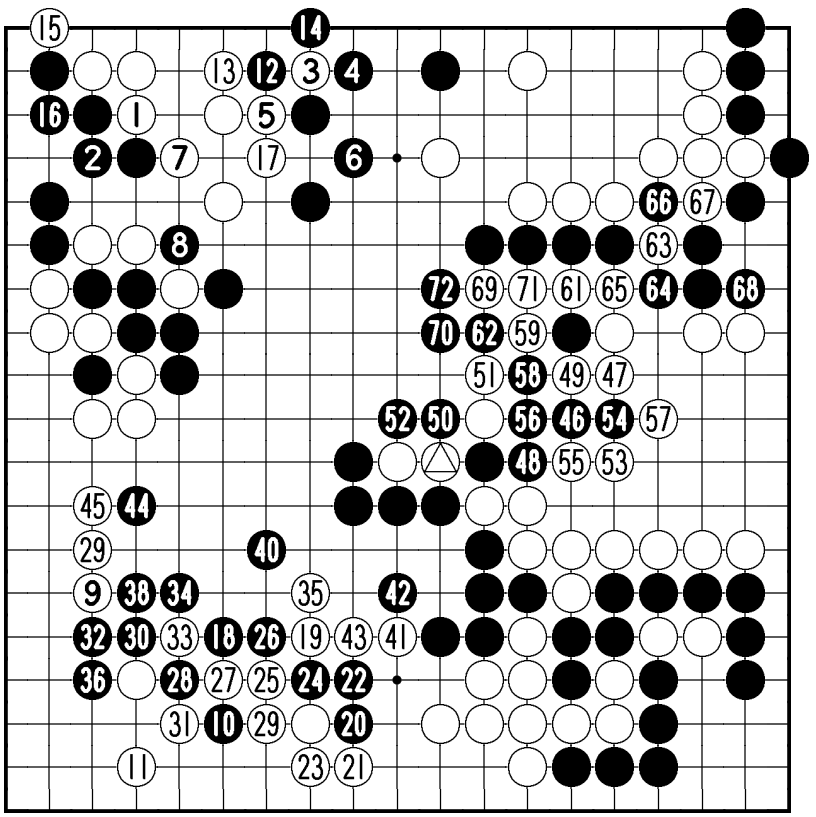
White (93) and (95) makes a strategic mistake to get one black stone. As in Dia. 9, white (1) and (3) is a beautiful sacrifice technique, after white (7), white takes overall advantage, because the central black group is very weak. When black plays 8 to strengthen the center, white (9) and (11) are sente moves. If the game proceeds this way, black has no target to attack and has no hope for the game.



Dia. 9

After black 100's atari, the upper-left corner white group stones are already hurt, and black's central group is greatly strengthened.

4 Figure 3 Move 101 to 172



㊲ = ❷❽　　❻❵ = △

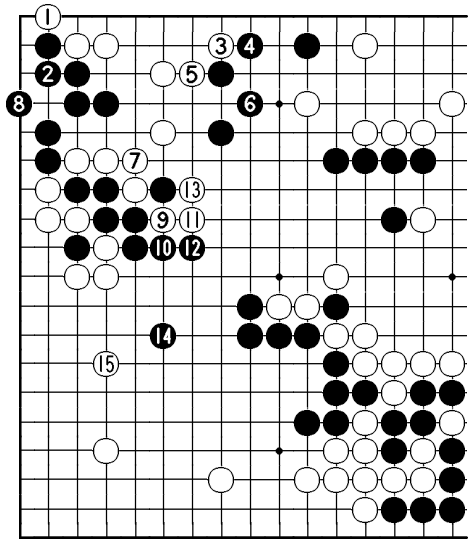
Fig. 3 Move 101 to 172

White ③ and 5 suffers a big loss by giving black a good shape. White makes such awkward moves in order to be safe but plays a wrong order. White should play, as in Dia. 10, ①, after black's ❷, white ③ and ⑤ are correct order. After black's ❻, white ⑦ sticking is critical. These two white stones threaten the safety of the central black group and must be saved. If black plays ❽ to make itself safe, white ⑨ cuts the black here. It's very powerful for white to keep itself safe and attack black at the same time. When black plays ⓮ to strengthen the central group, white could take the opportunity to keep the edge. Compared to Fig. 3, this result is much advantageous for white.

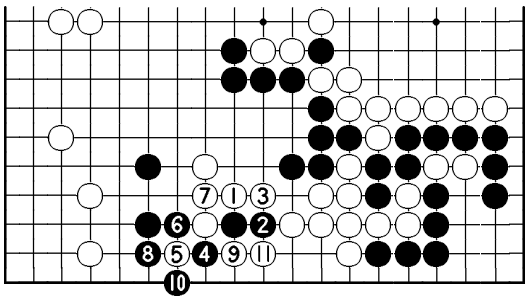
After black ❽ gets one white stone, even ⓬ and ⓮ become sente, the weak black parts are greatly strengthened and now black has time to fight back. White ⑪ is a little slow, it is not as good as ㉛ to make black heavier and easier for white to attack black. But, even after white ⑲'s jump, black still faces great difficulty, if black simply escapes ❿ and ⓳ stones. Overall, white is still leading.

Black ⓴ is a do-or-die move like burning black's own boat. If black doesn't make unusual plays, black has no way to change the situation. At this life-and-death point, the following moves by white are very weak. White should calculate the variations and make face-to-face fight with ⓴.

As in Dia. 11, white ① is the strongest defense. If black ❷ and ❹ attempts to connect, white

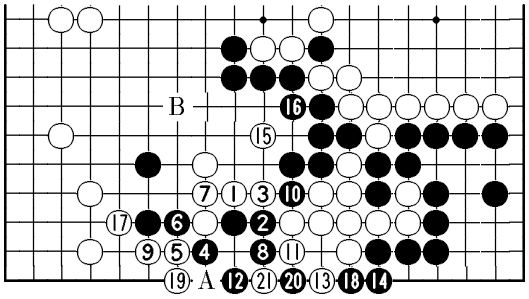


Dia. 10



Dia. 11

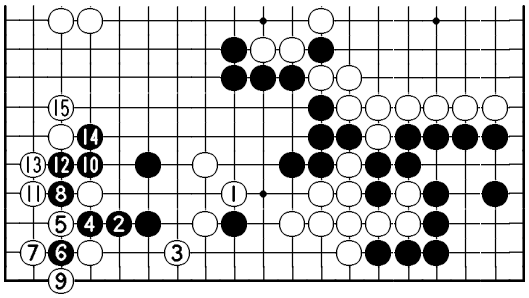
⑤ is a good move, if black ❽ atari one white stone, after white gets two black stones, not only the left ❹ and ❽ group is not safe yet, but the central black group also becomes weak. If the result is like this, black doesn't get any advantage here.



Dia. 12

If as in Dia. 12, black plays ❽ this side, white calmly connects from below. If white ⑨ is played at position A, black may play ⓬ to make a ko, the situation will be very complex. If white ⑨ is erroneously played at ⓬, after black plays at ⑲ to atari a white stone, white will get nothing.

As in Dia. 12, if ko situation occurs, white's burden is not heavy, even if white fails to win the ko, once white plays position B to escape, the overall advantage is still in white's hand.



Dia. 13

If black plays ❷ as in Dia. 13, white can play ③. As proceeded up to ⑮, the black left and right groups are still not safe yet. Black will have no chance to come back.

As the game continues in Fig. 3, when white ⑲ is cut by black, white already suffers. White ㉗ in Fig. 3 is not good again and white should restrain to play at ㉙. After black ㉚ and ㉜ break the left edge, white's loss increases. When black plays ㊻ jump, white ㊼ should be played at ㊽ to get one stone, black can't empty white's left edge territory completely, then the game is still close. If white lost this game, white ㊼ would be the cause.

Black ㊿'s atari is very powerful. White has to give up two stones. If white plays at ㊷, black can play at ㊶ to counter-atari, white has no way to capture black.

When the game proceeds to black ㉒, the central black group is very thick and strong, and have the potential to form some territory. Now, black has the advantage.

From black ⑳, Guo's strong fighting capability was carried out vividly and thoroughly.

5 Figure 4 Move 173 to 239

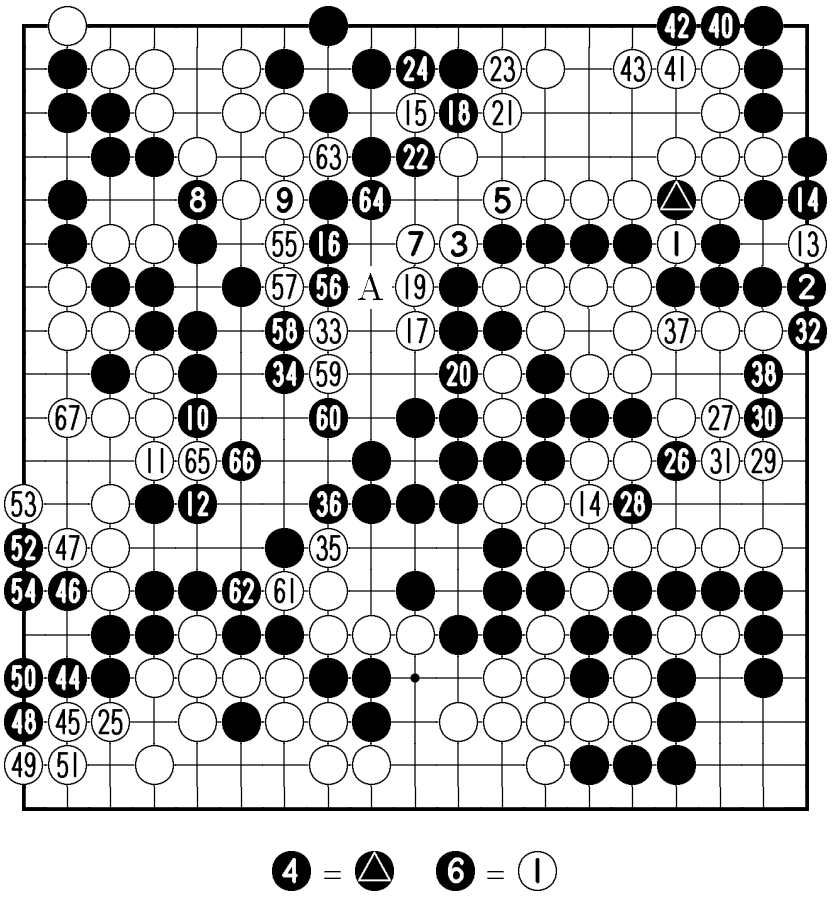


Fig. 4 Move 173 to 239

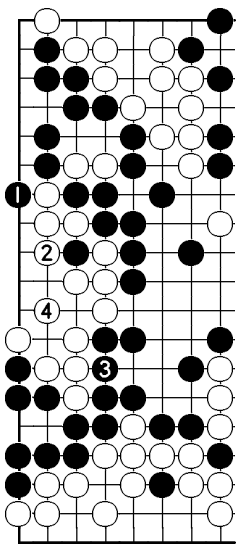
White ③ and ⑤ are necessary in order to reduce the central black territory. Black ⓬ is not urgent, if this move is played at position A to keep the central territory, black already wins.

Black ㉚ is a good endgame move, white has to retreat here. Black ㊺ is the final cause of loss. If this move is played as in Dia. 14, black gets 3 points by sente, then black can win 1 point.

White ⑰ is a good move and gets the last 3-point yose.

The original record ends at ⑰. White is leading by 3 points on the board, as white has to return one stone komi (2 points), so finally, white wins by 1 point.

239 Moves In Total White Wins By 1 Point



Dia. 14

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The translator acknowledges having used Miss Hanna Kołodziejska (of Poland)'s LaTeX typesetting program and thanks her for providing such a wonderful program!

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