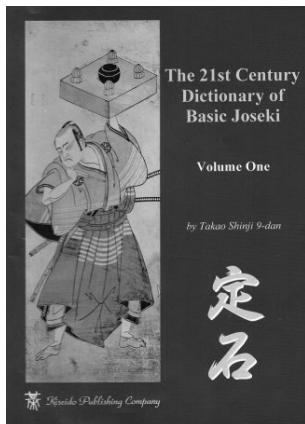


BOOK REVIEW

THE 21ST CENTURY DICTIONARY OF BASIC JOSEKI, VOL. 1

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This is a welcome and overdue major revision of Yoshio Ishida's 1977 "Dictionary of Basic Joseki Volume 1", which covers the 3-4 point. It is only slightly longer in page count (288 vs 265), but packs more information in those pages by adopting a dense, twin column format, and it has a better table of contents.

Much has changed in the intervening years, with many joseki falling into disuse and new joseki added on a regular basis. Joseki is in a constant state of flux and an immense subject, so this book necessarily aims to limit its scope to 'basic' sequences. It deviates from this, however, with

31 pages on the small and large avalanche joseki, but many will be interested enough in these to justify their inclusion.

The book is divided into five parts: the small knight approach, the one space high pincer, the large knight approach, the two space high pincer, and the rear approach move for the Chinese Opening. It is understandable that chapter 5 is a new addition (essentially covering joseki in a full board context), but bewildering to see that part 2 — the one space high pincer — was not covered at all in the original dictionary.

Before I proceed any further I should point out that I am 5k BGA (3k KGS), so the review is limited to that perspective. To a large extent, I cannot verify that the information presented is perfectly correct (the only error I found was a repeated diagram on page 8), nor that there are any important missing joseki. I did, however, discover some discrepancies between this book and Kogo's Joseki Dictionary (downloadable SGF file²) in some variations of the 5-5 attachment response to the one space high approach. Alexandre Dinerchstein, a European 3p, provides support for Kogo's dictionary and declared that the differences were on an obscure fringe of the main joseki, so not important.

¹www.kiseido.com

²waterfire.us/joseki.htm

This book can indeed steer you into long dark alleys, where most kyu players would struggle to follow or remember the variations — or, more importantly, see the value of each move and the value of the end product. It is clear that many of these ‘basic’ joseki are not so basic, and more like dan material than ready food for kyu players.

The book is much more valuable as a reference than as something to read sequentially. A good way to use the book is to learn a few variations and try to apply them in your games, returning to the book when your opponent fails to adhere to the ‘rules’ you are keen to apply. The book earns its stripes admirably with its many discussions of variations that deviate from joseki. These are often as informative as the true joseki.

The book also, helpfully, gives variations to exploit failures to complete josekis. Unfortunately, this is not consistently provided.

For example, one comment finishes with “Since Black’s extension lacks attacking potential, it’s quite common for White to switch elsewhere.” But there is no tenuki section to this chapter, so quite what Black should do if White does indeed switch elsewhere is missing.

The book cannot hope to cover all deviations you might encounter in practice, however the narratives frequently explain why moves are made. This is the essential part of joseki study — to understand the rationale behind moves more than the precise sequences: better to learn good style than in parrot fashion. The effect

of studying this book is more that you will acquire a feel for the right moves, much as studying tsumego does for life and death positions.

I spent a few weeks playing the aforementioned 5-5 attachment to the one space high pincer. It was not long before I realised that my instincts were poor when my opponent deviated from the joseki lines, and the book helped me understand why.

I can recommend this book, but feel it is important to point out that there are usability shortcomings that somewhat weaken its value.

Some specific problems and missed opportunities I noted were: labelling of sections not matched to the variations indicated on diagrams; no logical relationship between diagram numbering and variations; not enough forward and backward references; variation stone numbering always starting from 1 instead of continuing from the main sequence.

My feeling is that the sheer scale of work required to construct such a book was already a large enterprise for the potential sales, but by failing to check on usability, all that good work was unnecessarily compromised. I feel strongly enough about this to offer my services to make the changes required. I would strongly suggest that Volume 2 does not suffer in the same way. Volume 1 is a good book, but a book that could have been great.

Volume 2, completing the two-volume set, will be available in early 2012.

The Review copy was kindly provided by Pentangle Puzzles and Games³.

³www.pentangle-puzzles.co.uk