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The Robinson Go Collection

Few persons outside the American Go Association (AGA) membership know of the Karl Davis Robinson Go Collection housed in the Rare Book Room of the Gest Oriental Library. The gift to Princeton University Library in 1974, consisting of 229 titles in 514 volumes of mainly Japanese books and periodicals, comprises the collection of the late Karl Davis Robinson (1884-1961), a "pioneer" who introduced the game of go to the United States. Robinson first learned the game in 1909 and was one of the founders of the original American Go Club in 1915 and later the American Go Association in 1934.

Go, or igo as it is also called, was ignored in the West until the latter part of the nineteenth century, although it had flourished in the East through many centuries. The game of go is said to have originated more than 4,000 years ago in China, probably under the name of yi, and later developed into the game known as weich'i. From China, go was brought to Korea and then to Japan in the fifth or sixth century A.D. The game is depicted in one of the memorable scenes from the Tale of Genji Scroll, describing the elegant court life of eleventh century Japan. Go in Japan enjoyed tremendous popularity and was subsidized in the seventeenth century by the Tokugawa Shogunate, which set up four go schools: Hon'inbō, Hayashi, Inoue, and Yasui. Go reached its highest development in Japan, and Japanese go masters today are the best in the world.

In 1949 Robinson became the first editor of The American Go Journal, which provided literature in English on the game of go and reported on visits by go professionals and the tournaments that were held. Robinson was instrumental in initiating Japan-U.S. go contacts and in having numerous Japanese works translated into English. The books which he collected between 1909 and 1950 now constitute the largest collection of Japanese books on go outside the Orient. Among the older works in the collection is one by Hayashi Genbei (1778-1861) 林元美, entitled Gokei Shūmyō 暮經象妙, published in Tokyo in 1813, in four volumes. Several other works in the collection date from the early 1800s.

In 1954 Robinson gave his collection to the American Go Association for the benefit of the AGA members. One of the trustees appointed to administer the library was the late Ralph H. Fox, Professor of Mathematics at Princeton University. Fox served as curator for nearly twenty years. It was after Fox's death that the AGA presented the collection to Princeton University Library, where it has been made available to go players throughout the country by interlibrary loan. A bibliography of the Robinson Go Collection was included in the 1975 issue of The American Go Journal. The collection itself and several copies of the bibliography in book form are kept in the Gest Library for public use.

(Mariko Shimomura)