

have been viewed as national heroes for centuries. In China, the birthplace of go, it was suppressed during the Communist era, but came back stronger than ever in the 1980's. Koreans were playing at least 1200 years ago, even before the Japanese, but began taking their play more seriously in the 1950's. Today the world's strongest players come from Korea. With hundreds of millions of fans in these three countries and growing popularity in the West, it may be the most popular game in the world today.

When you play go, you are doing something that billions of people have done for thousands of years. Many centuries ago, people were doing the exact same thing, in the exact same way.

5. Every game has a winner.

Some games, notably chess, can be difficult to win. Chess matches can go on for months as draws, stalemates, and **zugzwangs** pile up. Go results are based on a final score, and White wins ties (because Black has the advantage of playing first) so there's a winner every time.

6. All players are equal.

Because the game begins with an empty board, it is easy to level the playing field between two players of different strengths. The weaker player simply makes several plays in succession to begin the game. Thus any two players, no matter how far apart in playing strength, can have a mutually challenging game.

Even among equal players, the one to go first gains no advantage because he/she must pay a **komi** (compensation) to the other player for the advantage of going first.

7. You always know where you fit in.

Most games require players to be equally

skilled in order to enjoy a fair contest. The go handicapping system, similar to the system used in golf, allows any two players in the world to compare strengths and compete on even terms.. The world of go is the ultimate meritocracy -- your place in it depends strictly on your ability.

8. It's easy to learn from mistakes.

"A stone laid is a stone played." It's easy to study and improve, because each move remains on the board for the rest of the game (unless captured and removed by the opponent). Each game is a record of itself, and the player can reflect on the consequences of early mistakes that are still starting him/her in the face. Thus, as in life, players have to live with their mistakes. But unlike life, the player can learn what went wrong and try again in another game.

9. Ancient rituals impart important values.

As in the martial arts and other ancient Asian disciplines, many traditions have been passed down among go players that allow us to express respect for the opponent, humility, and other important virtues. Time-honored traditions govern every aspect of the game.

10. Go is about building, not destroying.

Many popular games involve setting up positions at the beginning, then attacking the enemy. Go begins with an empty board. The object is to create strong, flexible structures, not run around chasing the other guy's pieces. "Life and death" issues may arise, but many games end without the capture of a single stone.

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WHAT IS GO?

From the American Go Association website.

Go is a fascinating board game that originated in China more than 4,000 years ago. Also known as **baduk**, **wei ch'i**, **weiqi**, and **igo**, it is played today by millions of people, including thousands in the United States. In Japan, Korea, China, and Taiwan, it is far **more popular than chess** is in the West, and professional players compete for large cash prizes. Its popularity in this country continues to grow, more than fifty years after the founding of the American Go Association.

It is said that the rules of Go can be learned in minutes, but that it can take a lifetime to master the game.

Two players alternate in placing black and white stones on a large (19x19 line) ruled board, with the aim of surrounding territory. Stones are never moved, and only removed if they are completely surrounded. The game rewards **patience and balance** over aggression and greed; the balance of influence and territory may shift many times in the course of a game, and a strong player must be prepared to be **flexible** but **resolute**.

Like the Eastern martial arts, Go can teach **concentration, balance, and discipline**. One cannot disguise one's personality on the Go board.

The game combines **beauty and intellectual challenge**. It can be played on a traditional, carved wooden board, with black and white stones made from slate and clamshell, or on a paper board with plastic stones. In either case, the patterns formed by the black and white stones are visually striking and can exercise an almost hypnotic attraction as one "sees" more and more in the constantly evolving positions.

"Good shape" is the highest compliment one can pay to a move in the game of Go. The game appeals to many kinds of minds -- to musicians and artists, to mathematicians and computer programmers, to entrepreneurs and options traders. Children learn the game readily and can reach high levels of mastery.

Because Go lends itself to a **uniquely reliable system of handicaps**, players of widely disparate strengths can enjoy relatively even contests. The game can be a casual pastime for the idle hour -- or a way of life. Michael Redmond, the only Western player to have won status as a middle-level professional player in Asia, when asked why he had devoted his life to Go, replied, "Because I love the game."

TOP TEN REASONS TO PLAY GO

From the American Go Association website.

1. Go is the simplest of all games.

The object of go -- to surround and capture -- is also the only rule. There are no arbitrary conventions, special exceptions or other burdensome technicalities.

2. Go is the most complex of all games.

Nearly all known games have been "solved" for the computer -- that is, the strongest computer programs can defeat the best human players. Even chess now falls into this category. However, the strongest go programs, after decades of effort, are routinely trounced by Asian schoolchildren.

Why is go so hard for computers? Because go is much, much more complicated than chess. There are many more possible games of go -- as much as 10 with more than 700 zeroes! -- than there are sub-atomic particles in the known universe.

3. Go is the most popular game in the world today.

Although largely unknown in the West, go is wildly popular in Asia, where there are more than 100 million active players. Major tournament winners are international celebrities. With daily newspaper coverage, popular weekly and monthly go magazines 24-hour "all-go-all-the-time" cable stations, go is an incomparably intense part of Asian culture, and its popularity is growing quickly in the West.

4. Go is the oldest game still played in its original form.

Go probably originated in China or Tibet, no one really knows. 2500 years ago, Confucius advised his readers to avoid frivolous pastimes and learn the virtues of this already ancient and venerable game. In Japan, the strongest players