

# Japanese Toys and Games

## **Takoage** (Kite-flying)

Japanese kites are usually square shaped, made with paper glued on a bamboo frame, and pictures of warriors (*Samurai*) or *Kabuki* actors are drawn on the surface together with Japanese writing.

*Tako-age* used to be practiced to celebrate a child's growing up and to pray for the child's happiness in the future, but now it is enjoyed as a traditional New Year's activity too.

There are regional *Tako-age* tournaments, besides at New Year, where large kites from a few meters to 10 or more in size are flown and even kite-fighting events. Giant Kite Festivals are held at riverbeds of *Fussa*, *Zama* and other places around Children's Day, a Japanese national holiday.

## **Hyakunin-isshu** (The hundred poems by one hundred poets)

This generally refers to the poetry anthology entitled "*Ogura Hyakunin-isshu*," compiled by *FUJIWARA-no-Teika (Sadaie)*. It gathered 100 *waka*--the classical Japanese poem, specifically in this case poem in 31 syllables--one each by the most outstanding poets from the *Heian* Period (794-1185) and the early years of the *Kamakura* Period (1185-1333). From the time of the *Edo*

Period(1603-1867), this poetry anthology was widely spread and used as the poem cards. The overwhelming majority -- 43 selections-- are love poems, followed by seasonal poems--32 selections.

79 of the poets are male, 21 female, and they express thoughts of love, nature and the seasons with a refinement unique to the Japanese people. It has become well-known as the representative work of classical Japanese literature. It's one of the essential game of New Year.

We will introduce an easy game "*Bōzu mekuri*" using only pictured cards of *Hyakunin-isshu*.

## **Sugoroku** (Japanese backgammon)

One of the Japanese traditional games people play on New Year's days.

Several players using a piece of paper with many sections and pictures drawn on it. Each player advances from the start (*Furidashi*) by the count on a die that he has thrown, and the first one to reach the goal (*Agari*) is the winner.

## **Fukuwarai** (a game like "pin the tail on the donkey")

Another Japanese traditional game people play on New Year's days. A player has to put facial pieces on a shape of the face wearing a blindfold. Laughing out loud will occur at funny faces.



## **Koma** (Tops)

Koma for centuries have been one of the most popular playthings for children. Most are round and made of wood and pierced through the middle with a rod that is the axis for rotating.

In addition to wood, they are made of other materials like bamboo, shells and iron; they are rotated by hand and string and played with by spinning them separately and by bumping them into other *Koma*.



They come in various forms; one with holes in the body even makes a sound when spinning. Another tells your fortune by the stop position of spinning. They are also used in traditional feat, such as sliding them on the string.

They originally came from China, by way of Koma in the Korean Peninsula, in the eighth century, and that is the source of the name *Koma*. At first they were a game for court people and the nobility, but in the *Edo* Period (1603-1867) they became widespread and gradually came to stay as a game for children.

## **Kendama** (Cup and ball)

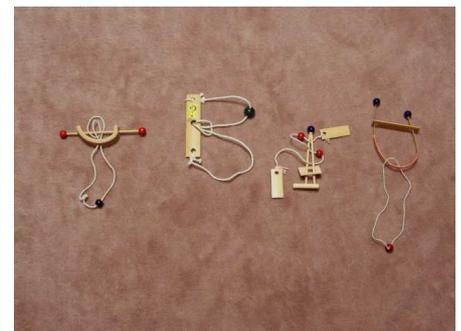
*Kendama* is a wooden toy consisting of a wooden stick with one end sharpened, the other end shaped like a dish, and a ball with a hole in it connected to the stick by string.

The object is to balance the ball on the dish part and to stick it on the sharp end of the stick. There is a similar game in Europe, as well, but there are even *Kendama* championships held in Japan.



Since the *Taisho* Period (1912-1926) the shaft has been cross-shaped and has three dish parts in total.

## **Other toys**



**Wanage** (quoits)

**Take-tombo** (small bamboo Japanese toy that flies when spun between the palms of one's hands)

**Ohajiki** (tiddlywink)

**B-dama** (glass balls)

**Menko** (a childrens game in which a thick card is slapped down on the ground to overturn a card)

**Bamboo snake**

**Acrobat monkey**

**Pattering square boards**

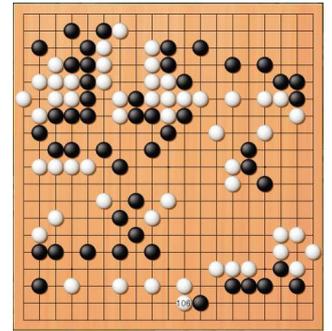
**String puzzles**

**Ayatori** (string figure / cat's cradle)

## Igo (Go game)

Igo, a representative Japanese indoor game, was introduced from China in the eighth century. At first it was a game for the nobility, but from about the thirteenth century on it spread to the masses.

This game is played by two persons using a square go board with a grid, which has 361 intersecting points called me (eyes). The players alternately play their go stones--one using black, the other white--on the me. One can take the opponent's stones by surrounding them with his own; the one who takes the most stones wins.

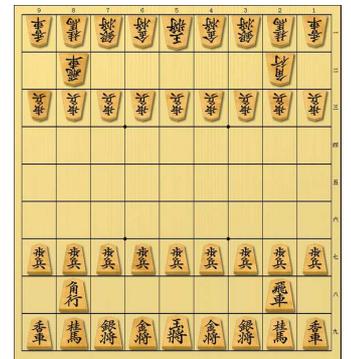


A skilled player uses the white stones, and the player with black stones is given priority to start the game. There is a rule establishing that some black stones must be placed on the Go board in advance, to accommodate the relative differences in the players' ability. Thus, even players of different ability can have even matches.

## Shōgi (Japanese chess)

This is a traditional Japanese game which came to Japan from China together with the game of go in the eighth century, and became popular after distinctive improvement. It is quite similar to chess, but with the difference that a player can re-use as his own the pieces taken from the opponent.

Characters indicating rank and role, such as king or Shōgun, are written on the pieces, which are made of wood carved in an irregular pentagonal shape. In all, there are eight different ranks.



Two opponents move their pieces on the Shōgi board which has 81 squares. Each player has 20 pieces, lined up at the beginning in fixed positions. They move their pieces by turns and the first one to corner the opponent's king wins. A national championship for master players is held every year.

## Other ways for kids to play with Igo and Shōgi

### Mawari-Shōgi (left)

Four Kin are used as dices to decide. Each player advances from its corner by the count on Kin's pose that he has thrown, and the first one to reach the original corner is the winner.



### Gomoku-narabe (middle)

A game in which two players compete to line up five stones of their own color on a Go board. The condition of simultaneously linking a row of three stones and a row of four stones is forbidden.

### Shogi-kuzushi (right)

The object of the game is to take Japanese chess pieces from a pile with one finger and not let the pile crumble. Similar to Jenga. First you decide who goes first with "Rock, scissors, and paper".

You use only one finger and slide the chess pieces off the board. If you successfully bring a chess piece off the board you win that piece. If you knock down pieces or make a sound by disrupting the pieces you lose your turn to the next person. The game is over when all the pieces are gone.