

Shogi and the mystery of the five-sided pieces

● Characteristics of shogi pieces

(1) The pieces are identified by the characters drawn on them.

(2) Other chesses such as Western chess and Chinese chess make the distinction between the two players' pieces by their different color, but in shogi, pieces for both players are undifferentiated.

(3) Pieces captured from the opponent can be used again.

[Shogi] → Pieces can be dropped back on the board to be used as own pieces.

→ Upon reaching the promotion zone near the opponent's setup zone, pieces can be turned over and promoted.

[Other chesses] → Captured pieces are permanently removed from the board.

(4) The direction of movement is indicated by the orientation of the characters drawn on the pieces with their pointed tip facing forward. This is unique compared to other types of chess. Even if there is no similarity with the pieces of the game boards preceding shogi, it is thought that pieces with some similar shapes were used as models for ones used now for shogi.

● In other words

(1) Unique five-sided shapes like the ones of shogi pieces existed in Japan from ancient times to the Middle Ages.

(2) Moreover, they were fairly common and easily noticed.

(3) Written characters on the surface explained content and character.

Items like itabi (memorial tower dating to the Kamakura period) and kyōchitsuhai (label attached to a sutra wrapper) fulfilled the above conditions.