HOW TO PLAY GO

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Introduction

The game of 'Go' has its origin in China 4,000 years ago. It is more than 1,300 years since 'Go' was introduced to Japan. During these centuries, the ancient Chinese form of 'Go' has been modified and improved by the Japanese. 'Go' as it is played today is an indoor game which has no further room for improvement.

It has taken roots deep in the life of the people of Japan. The total number of people who play 'Go' is estimated to be about seven million.

There are many 'Go' players outside Japan - a fact which should be a source of joy for us. Now, what kind of game is 'Go?'

A Game for Winning Territory

'Go' is a game in which two players contest for territory. One of the two players uses black stones and the other white stones to mark out their respective territories. The player who has captured more territory at the end of the game is the winner. Since the players are to fight against each other over territory within a limited space, the game involves many varied forms of contest. This is what makes 'Go' so interesting.

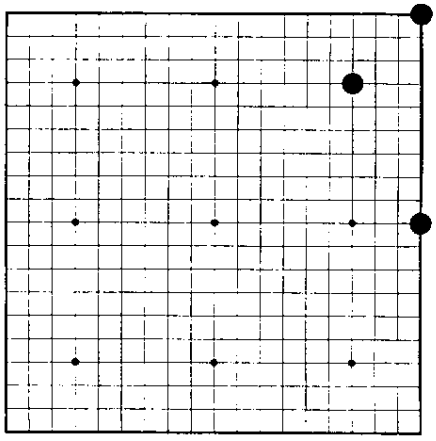
Intersection

The players place stones alternately, with the first move made by the player with black stones. A stone once placed cannot be moved. Diagram 1 shows the grid pattern on the surface of the 'Go' board. It consists of 19 vertical and horizontal lines. Stones may be placed only at the intersections of these vertical and horizontal lines.

Territory

Territory is called 'ji' in Japanese. Diagram 2 shows some examples. The continuous lines formed by the black stones form the limits of the territories. The size of territory is expressed in terms of the number of open intersections within it. The unit is called a point, 'moku' in Japanese. The territories marked A, B and C are all of the same size--12 points for the black player. Incidentally, it is obvious here that to form territory, it is most efficient to make use of the edge lines as in the case of Pattern A. Pattern B, which makes use of one edge line is not as economical as A, but more economical than C, which must be entirely bounded by lines of stones.

Dia. 1



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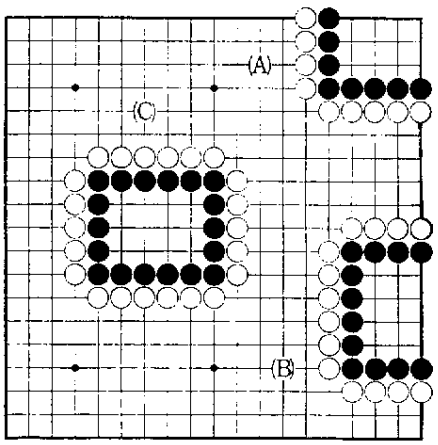

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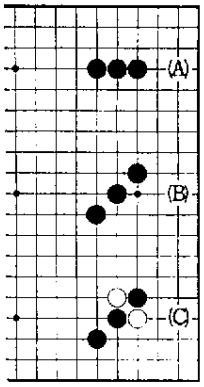

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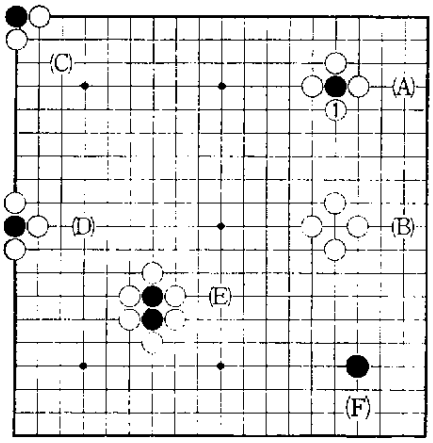

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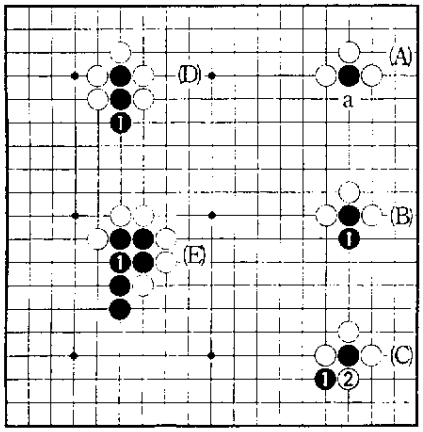
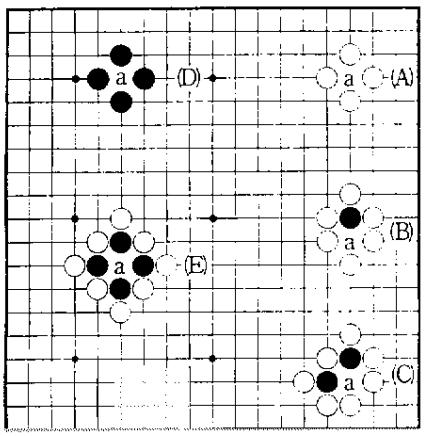


Dia. 6



Contiguity of Stones

The unit for the number of stones is also called 'moku'--the same as in the case of territory. All stones are of equal power, but like soldiers in a battle, the stones in a good configuration are more powerful than those in a poor pattern, in which the stones cannot function as effectively and economically.

Stones of the same color form a firm line when they are placed contiguously along a straight line as in (A) in Diagram 3. These three black stones cannot be cut off. When they are diagonally continguous as in (B), however, they are not directly connected with one another. Therefore, they can be cut off if the opponent places his stones as in (C). Remember an isolated stone means less power for the contestant who has such a stone.

Life of a Stone

A stone has life and it may be killed. This is the crucial element that makes 'Go' an interesting game.

In Diagram 4, Pattern A shows a black stone being surrounded by three white stones. When the fourth white stone is placed at (1), the black stone is killed and is immediately removed from the board by the white player. Pattern B shows the result of the removal of the black stone. Patterns C, D and E all show black stones that are dead because they are surrounded by the stones of the adversary. In Pattern A of Diagram 5, the black stone would be killed if the white player places the fourth stone at (a). This situation is called 'atari.' The player whose stone is in an 'atari' can 'run.' This may be done by placing another black stone next to the one on the board as in Pattern B. But if the second black stone is placed diagonally as in Pattern C, it is meaningless, because the white player, by placing the fourth white stone at (2) can still kill the first black stone. The black stone to be placed at (1) in Patterns D and E shows the black player's attempt at running away from capture. Pattern F in Dia.4 shows a stone with four liberties (breathing spaces).

Forbidden Moves

In the game of 'Go,' a player may place a stone at any intersection on the 'Go' board. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. In Patterns A, B, and C in Diagram 6, the black player must not place his stones at (a) because (a) marks a 'dead spot.' In Pattern D, the black player, of course, may place his stone at (a) because it is not a 'dead spot' surrounded by the stones of his adversary. In Pattern E, however, he can not place a black stone at (a).

Exception

The rule of a 'dead spot,' however, is not absolute. Under certain circumstances, a player may place his stone on a seemingly 'dead' spot. In Pattern A in Diagram 7, (a) marks a spot where, according to the rule mentioned above, the black player cannot place a stone because it is surrounded by white stones. But in this case he may because by doing so he can kill the white stone marked △. This means that the rule for placing a stone to kill an enemy stone overshadows the rule forbidding the placing of a stone in a 'dead spot.' Thus, after the black player placed a stone at (a) and removed a white stone, the pattern would be like B. Likewise, the placing of a single stone, which results in the removal of enemy stones, changes a pattern from C to D and from E to F

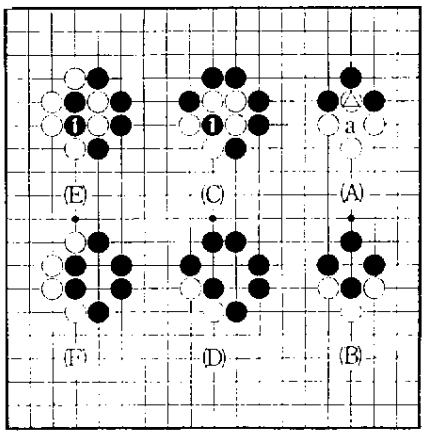
Stones That Never Die

The rules against certain moves are of crucial importance to the life and death of stones. In Pattern A of Diagram 8, the white player

may place a stone at (a) as we mentioned earlier. What about placing one at (a) in Pattern B, then? The black stones are completely surrounded by white stones. But even if he places a stone at (a), the white player can not put the black stones in 'atari.' Therefore, he cannot place a stone at either (a) or (b). A pattern of black stones like this, which has two open spots within it is said to have 'eyes.' A pattern with 'eyes' never dies. In Pattern B, the 'eyes' are the spots marked (a) and (b). The expression 'eyes' is derived from the importance of the two eyes for a human being to 'live.'

Thus, making 'eyes' is the minimum condition for survival in 'Go.' A configuration with more than this minimum requirement never 'dies.' Pattern C in Diagram 8 resembles B, but actually it is different in nature. The reason is that the white player, by placing a stone at (a), can remove the three black stones marked ▲.

Dia. 7

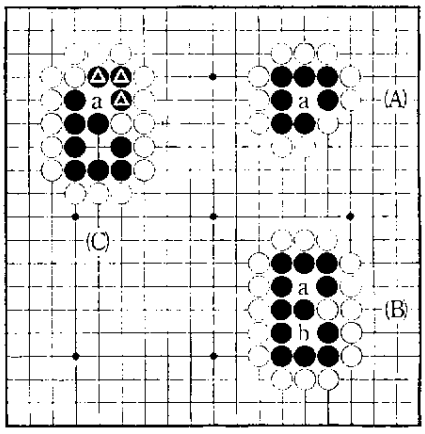


Surrounded Stones

When a stone or stones are removed after going through an 'atari,' this means 'instantaneous death.' On the other hand, there is another kind of 'death' for stones--those stones which, though kept on the board, are destined to die. Patterns A and B in Diagram 9 show such doomed stones. If a match ends with these stones in the same condition, they may be simply removed by the white player.

In short, surrounded stones 'die' so long as they cannot make'eyes'.

Dia. 8

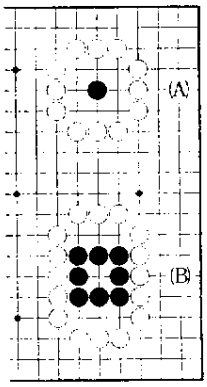


'Ko'-A special position.

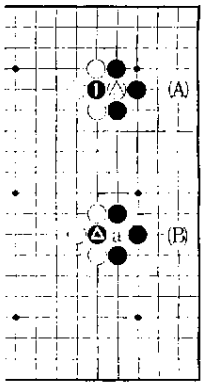
There is only one more move that is barred. In Pattern A of Diagram 10, the black player can place a stone at (1) to capture a white stone marked △. As a result, however, in Pattern B, the white player, too, can place a stone at (a) to remove the black stone marked ▲.

If this is done, the pattern reverts to A and the moves may be repeated ad infinitum. To avoid this, the rule is that when the configuration changes from A to B, the white player must not repeat the move. He can place his stone at (a) only after placing a stone elsewhere. This kind of situation is called 'ko.'

Dia. 9



Dia.10



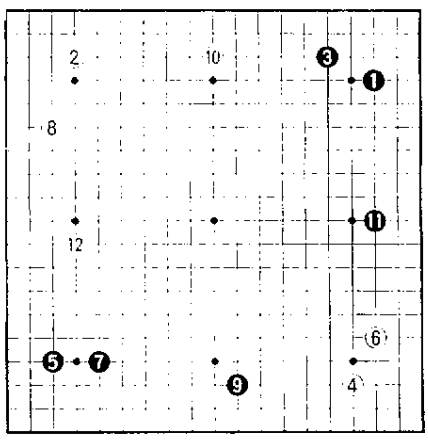
'Fuseki'-Opening Game.

The rules of 'Go' are practically all concerned with the 'dead' and 'live' stones mentioned above. Now, let us see how a match might progress.

At first, both players stake out territory by placing stones some distance apart, rather than continguously. This phase of operation is called 'fuseki' or 'spreading stones.' In Diagram 11, black stones are placed from 1 to 11 consecutively. The first four stones placed by both players are near the edges and corners. This is because, as we said earlier, it is more economical to establish territory by using corners. The black stones 1 and 3, 5 and 7; the white stones 2 and 8, 4 and 6 are not placed continguously. This is also for the reason of efficiency--to claim territory with a minimum number of stones. More stones may be placed as need arises--when the adversary approaches with his stones to interfere with your plan.

After securing corner territories, players are likely to place their stones at such points as 9, 10, 11, and 12.

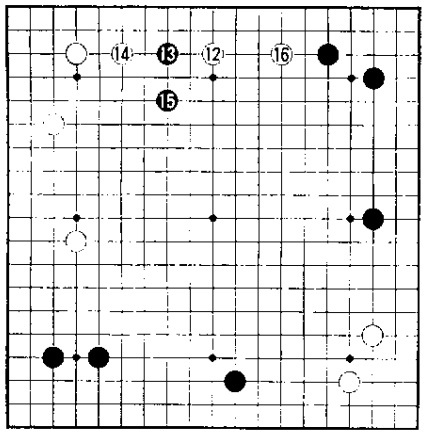
Dia.11



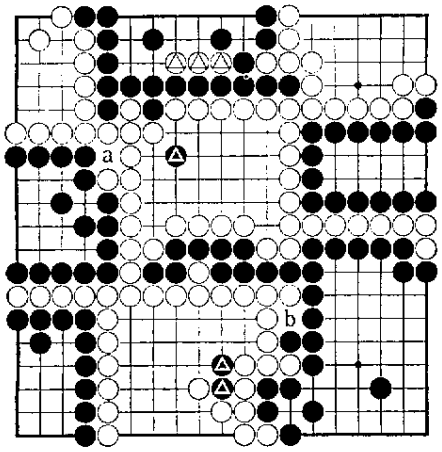
'Chuban'-Middle Game.

Diagram 12 shows the stage of game immediately following that shown by Diagram 11. The black player has placed a stone at 13 in order to cut into the white territory to obstruct the white player's plan to consolidate his own area. This is an open challenge and such a

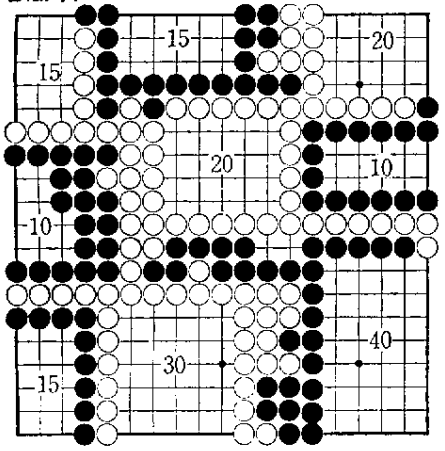
Dia. 12



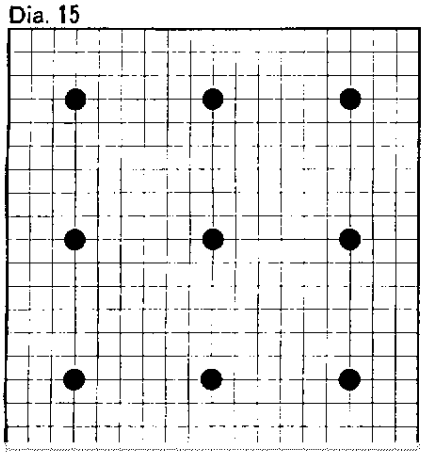
Dia. 13



Dia. 14



Dia. 15



move as this signals the beginning of the middle phase of a game. This is called 'chuban' (literally, 'middle board').

The 'Go' match is in essence a contest for territory.

Now, follow the progress of the game from black 13 to white 16. The Black stones 13 and 15, which are placed with one intersection between them are said to form a pattern called 'ikken tobi' ('one point jump'). Although there is one intersection between the two, these stones, as they are now, are fairly secure because of their closeness. But, of course, they have as yet no 'eye.' The White stones 12 and 16 to the right, on the other hand, have to some extent secured ground by making use of an edge line. This means that these stones have a fairly good chance of forming 'eyes.' Thus, in this particular area, the white player is in a better position than the black. This is because the black player has placed his stone at 13, after white placed his at 12, in order to cut into the white territory. Even though a battle formation seems in good shape at an early stage, it does not necessarily lead to a successful operation of encircling and 'killing' enemy stones. It takes clever tactics to utilize such a battle formation to the greatest advantage

'Shuban' and 'Shukyoku'-End Game.

After the battle is over, a game of 'Go' enters the last phase called 'shuban.' In this phase, the contestants complete their respective boundaries which are not yet definitely established. This operation is called 'yose.' When there are no more moves available for both contestants, that would either increase or decrease their territories, the game ends. This is called 'shukyoku.'

Diagram 13 shows a match at 'shukyoku,' where the territory gained by both players is to be counted. The spots marked (a) and (b) are located behind the boundaries of both players and, therefore, do not affect the territory of either. These spots are filled up by the two players alternately. Then the 'dead' stones must be removed. The white stones marked ⓐ and black stones marked ⓐ are 'dead' and are picked up by the adversaries. Then the players use the captive stones to fill in the territories of their respective adversaries and rearrange the configurations in such a way so that it is easy to compute the exact number of intersections won.

After such rearrangement has been completed, the surface of the 'Go' board may look like Diagram 14. The number in each block of territory is the number of open intersections. For the white player, these add up to be 85 and for the black player 90. Thus, black has won by a margin of five.

The stones removed during the game are also used to fill up the opponent's territory. This means that the more stones you capture, the more damage you can inflict upon your adversary.

'Okigo'-Handicap Go.

When there is a gap in skill between two players, a handicap is given to the inferior player in terms of stones placed before a match is begun. This is called 'okigo.' When such a handicap game is played, white, the superior player, always plays first. Diagram 15 shows an 'okigo' game with a handicap of nine stones. The nine-stone handicap is called 'seimoku.' A beginner starts learning the game of 'Go' with this nine-stone handicap.