

So You Want to Play Go?

Level 3: 9 kyu to 1 kyu

By Jonathan Hop

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Other publications:

“So you want to play Go?” Level 1 and 2

“Power Builder Series: Tsumego Collection”

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Foreword

Welcome to level 3 of the “So you want to play Go?” series, intended for 9 to 1 kyu players. If you have read level 1 and 2 of the series then you know what to expect, but for those of you who are just getting acquainted I wanted to say a few words. First off the title is a bit of a misnomer. While the name of the game is known as “Go” in the West, because of our relationship to Japan, the game was invented in China 4,000 years ago, and the Chinese call it “Weiqi” (pronounced Way-Chee). I think that it is important we remember this heritage, so I will be referring to the game as “Weiqi” for the remainder of the book.

Now the road to 1 dan is laid out before you, and let me tell you it’s going to be an interesting trip. In order to improve further as a single digit kyu, you will have to master the fundamentals rather than necessarily learn complicated techniques. Learning a 100 move joseki or memorizing a bunch of openings is not really what is going to skyrocket your strength (although if you do manage it, my hat is off to you). Instead, I would rather you take your time to make sure each of the fundamentals is clear to you, and by the time you are a high level kyu player, to begin working on your ability to judge positions.

Being a single digit kyu is also a lot of fun, because you can really begin to appreciate the many different types of strategies there are. You understand all the basic building blocks of the game and it is now time to fit the pieces together. Begin to be more discriminating about your own moves. Try and adopt the attitude that you should not settle for less than what you should be getting. Also, if you have the time and the energy, increase the amount you play per week. Studying pro games, doing Weiqi problems, and reading books can realistically only teach you so much. Actual playing experience can teach you volumes. You know your own ideas best.

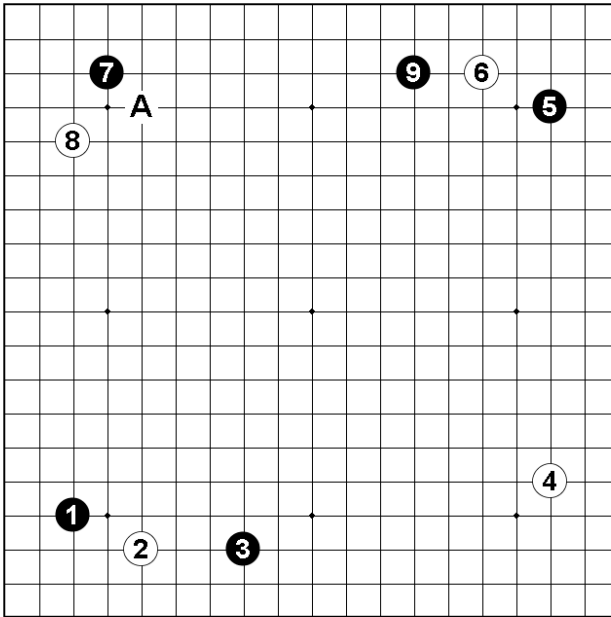
About the Author

I remember when I turned 9 kyu and entered into my second tournament. The first one I participated in when I was around 11 or 12 kyu but I did not do so well. Now that I was a single digit kyu, I felt that I could conquer the world of Weiqi. The University of Michigan Spring Tournament was held at the Michigan Union and ran by Jin Chen, 7 dan who served as Tournament Director. I had arrived late as I had mixed up the location of the tournament, so I did not have time to chat and had to sit and immediately begin playing. My first opponent was someone from the Kalamazoo Go Club. Since they are nearby, people from both the University of Michigan Go Club and the Kalamazoo club know each other pretty well. The game was indicative of my style at the time, intense and complicated fighting. At the end of the tournament I won second place next to Albert Guo who managed to not only play six games in one day, he also won them all.

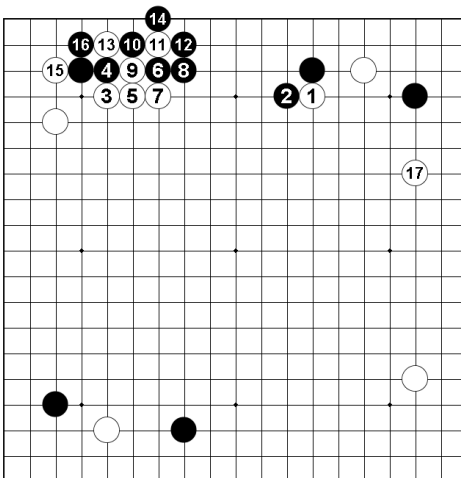
Let me tell you, Weiqi players love tournaments, it's in our blood. There is nothing like the tense and quiet atmosphere of a tournament, where the only sound is the light tapping of stones hitting the boards. There's also nothing like the joy of winning game after game in a tournament, where you feel like you are practically invincible. But one must also learn to accept defeat gracefully. This is something I had a hard time with. Sure, I would say "thanks for the game" but I didn't really mean it. While I was putting away the stones, I'd beat myself up over all of the silly mistakes I played, or all the times I was not able to punish my opponent. I'd tell myself "Man, he played a silly move and won because I let him. He didn't deserve to win." Honestly, I'm embarrassed to even admit such a thought crossed my mind, because it's not only against the spirit of the game, it's also pretty egotistical. I'm also sure I'm not the only one who has ever had this thought.

Saying your opponent did not deserve to win is against the philosophy of the game is because your opponent *did* win. I'll say it once and I'll say it again, Weiqi is not a game of chance. The person with the better strategy wins. Your opponent won because he played better moves overall, and even if he did make a mistake, you made more. Your opponent played better, so he deserved to win. Your ego is just going to have to take it.

What I liked about going to Weiqi tournaments is that they taught me about what winning and losing was about. Yes, you are a single digit kyu and that is something to be proud of, but in the grand scheme of things you are only so high on the Weiqi ladder. Your opponent is probably the same strength as you are and has just as much of a chance to win as you do. Losing does not mean that you are not as good as you thought you were, but it does mean that you still have plenty of weaknesses and room for improvement. Do not let your attitude towards losing affect your ability to learn more about the game.

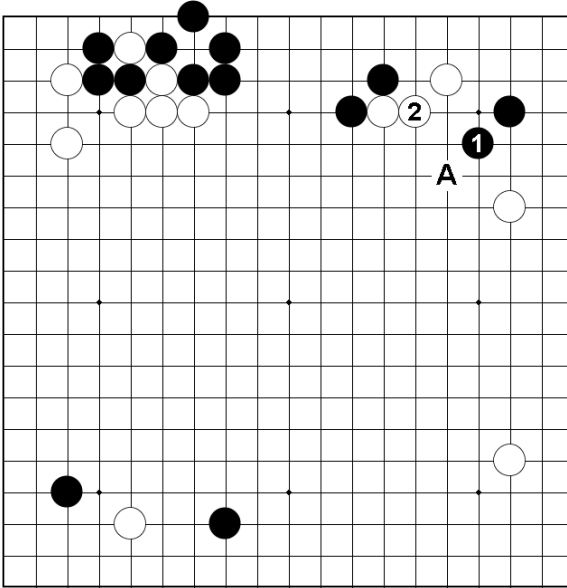


The first 9 moves should be pretty easy for you, but let's analyze what White's strategy is from here. White A is sente, otherwise White destroys Black 7. Black has just played a low one space pincer at the top, so all his stones there are low. White has several moves he can use to force Black to answer in a specific way, and after reviewing the game yourself I'm sure you're already aware.



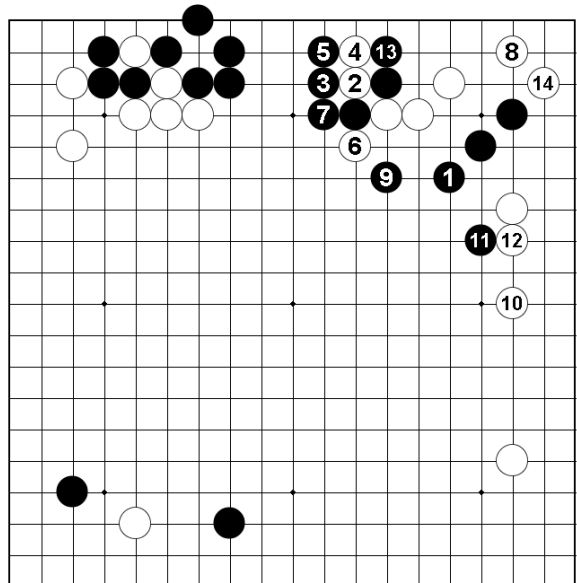
White plays a contact play at 1 that Black will answer, then uses his sente moves at the upper left to force Black to spend many moves there. Convince yourself that they are indeed sente. Now what may not be quite so clear is White 17. After all, White 1 still only has two liberties. We'll look at the whole board and try to

answer that question for yourself. White has a mokuhashushi stone in the lower right, so White 17 has some backup. Secondly, Black has to deal with his upper right stone because in one more move it will be sealed in and not have much use.

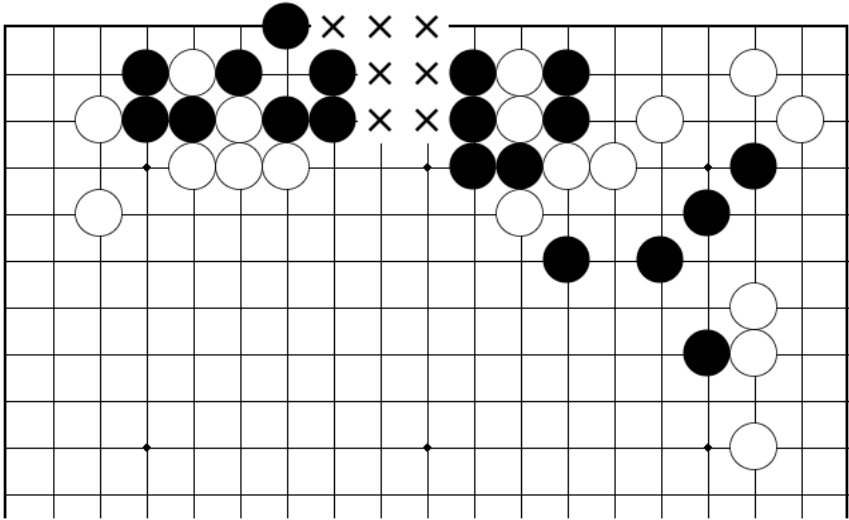


Black has to walk out or be blockaded, and now it is time for White to help his weak stone, which also threatens to close Black in with A. Black will have to continue to walk out or risk being sealed in, and at the same time White can strengthen his stones.

Black continues to walk out, and now it is time to cut. White 8 might seem weird, as White needs to add a move after he cuts to capture the one Black stone, but 8 is worth more because it erases the eye space of the Black group. Black walks into the center with 9, and now White has some spare time to defend



on the right. Black plays a forcing move then kills the two White stones, but White can still defend his group and make some eye space with 14. Now that we understand the reasoning behind each move, let's move onto the important part, analyzing the result and determining who gained what and whether or not the stones are efficient.



The problem for Black is he has two very thick positions only two spaces away from each other. Sure White lost three stones at the top but those three stones were not important in terms of keeping White safe; all three of his groups have eye space and sturdy shapes. Black is over-concentrated at the top.

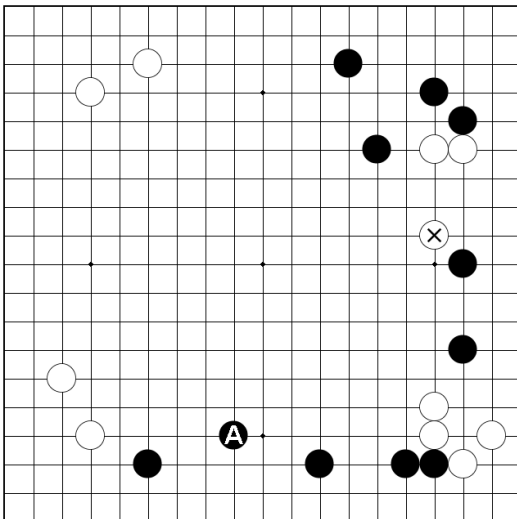
Have you noticed that making our opponent over-concentrated oftentimes involves sacrificing a few stones to force our opponent to play on inefficient spots? The previous example was a bit grand, as it involved looking at many parts of the board and linking them together, considering the vital spots. You are much stronger now so you will have to do this in your games more and more! Look at the whole board and consider the effectiveness of each move.

Attack in order to profit!

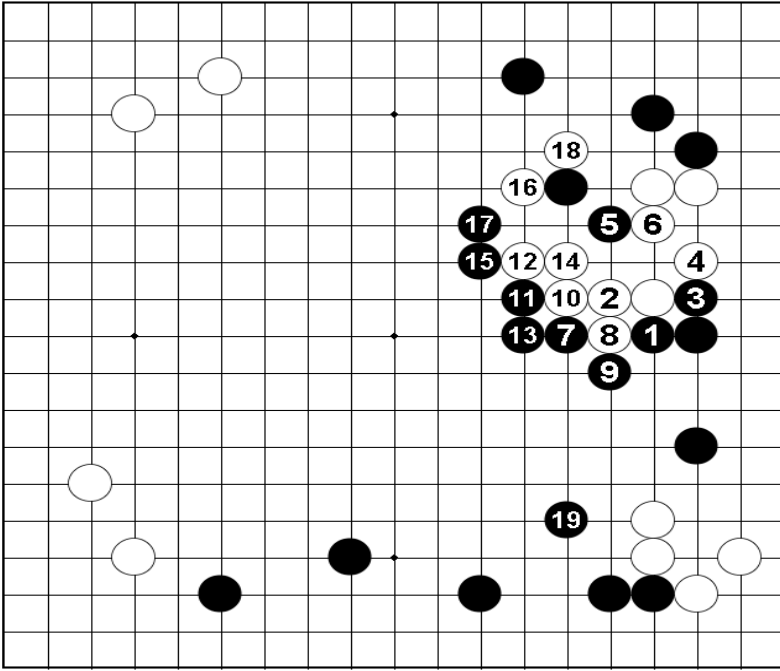
This may seem absolutely obvious to you, but all too often when we play Weiqi, we flagrantly attack our opponent and chase them down, only to find out that our offensive did not result in much gain. In Weiqi you attack your opponent in order to receive some type of benefit, be it points, thickness, or life for one of your groups. We do not attack just to attack. With this in mind, next time you play you can plan ahead and think about what you need to gain, and how you can attack to fulfill your plan, rather than just swinging your sword wildly in the air. I think we should do this systematically.

Attacking to construct a moyo

The easiest to grasp method of benefiting from an attack is to use the stones you gained by attacking to construct a large territorial framework. You can think of it as building your moyo in sente. The pitfall is oftentimes we attack and instead of building a framework we push our opponent into our potential. Another common mistake is to play bad shape or misread and somehow let our opponent punch through our blockade, spoiling what we spent so much time and energy to build. First, let's look at some examples of building a moyo through attacking.



Take this fine specimen of a group. White has just played “x”, trying to strengthen his very weak group on the right side. Black is stroking his chin in a nefarious manner, planning on how to use this weak group to his advantage. Do a little thinking before going onto the next page. Remember, “A” is high so it can build potential. How to attack?



Black 1 and 3 are pretty easy to understand as they are normal responses to when our opponent plays a shoulder hit against us. What you have to love is a move like Black 5. It strikes right at the heart of White's shape, keeping it fragile and weak. Black plays the important move of 7, which covers White from the center. Now White's escape route towards the center is totally sealed off. White creates some weakness in Black's shape by banging around, but at the same time Black is slowly building up influence facing the center. After White captures the two Black stones and lives, Black covers the center with 19, linking all of his stones into one cohesive fighting force. When you see the moves played out, the direction we should attack seems so simple. What Weiqi forces us to do is to visualize our moves ahead of time. Maybe you weren't as exact or you didn't find the hard hitting moves like Black 5, but if you were aiming to attack the White group to encircle the center, you get a gold star.