

# So You Want to Play Go?

*Level 2: 19 kyu to 10 kyu*

By Jonathan Hop

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## Foreword

Welcome to level 2 of the “So you want to play Go?” series, intended for 19 to 10 kyu players. If you have read level 1 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 actually 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.

The ranks of 19 to 10 kyu are really enjoyable because it is the time in your Weiqi playing career that you begin to learn more about the basics of strategy and get to experiment with them freely in your games. That is not to say, that you do not get that same thrill when you are a stronger player, but being a beginner means that the world is open to you. It is like watching a really great movie for the first time. Sure, when you watch it later with friends or see it replayed on TV it’s entertaining, but not quite the same experience as when you had first seen it. It is the same with Weiqi. When you first learn how to apply invasion principles or a new tesuji you’ve been meaning to play, you get a true feeling of satisfaction.

From now on we will be going over a lot of the fundamentals of Weiqi to get you to 10 kyu level. Once you have reached this stage and enter the ranks of the single digit kyus, you will from that point on refine what you have previously learned. Weiqi is not about learning a new 100 move joseki or memorizing 1,000 professional games (although this couldn’t hurt of course), it is about applying the basics of the game in just the right manner for the board position. Adopt this attitude and watch the game change.

## About the Author

Hello! My name is Jonathan Hop and I am a graduate student at the University of Michigan studying Japanese. I am also an AGA 3 dan. Since this book is aimed at 19-10 kyu players I thought I'd share some fond memories of when I was at this strength. I had started Weiqi in 2003 around January, I believe, but did not really get into it until the summer of that year. I played like a maniac, getting in up to six or seven games a day. I bugged stronger players to review my games and I watched the mythical four and five dans whenever I got the chance. As you can imagine, I plowed through the arena of double digit kyus quite fast. However playing online was rather empty since there was no interaction. By the end of summer, I remembered that U of M had a Weiqi club that met at Borders. I had been there before but did not have time during the school year to go, and I mistakenly assumed they did not meet over the summer. One fateful day in September, I thought to myself, "What the heck, maybe I'll stop in".

The University of Michigan Weiqi club used to meet at the coffee shop in the local Borders. It was a nice locale with a good atmosphere for playing Weiqi, and it was only a ten minute walk for me. I was a little shy at first as I sheepishly meandered over to a board where people were playing and watched. Eventually one of the other newcomers asked me for a game. I accepted, but then found out that I was now facing someone who was quite stronger than me, a 6 kyu! We played evenly, and somehow, I miraculously won against someone five to six stones stronger than me. My opponent and I shook hands, and the night of playing had ended. I felt fantastic!

The thing was, my Weiqi was lopsided at the time. Not having read anything on strategy or theory, I only knew the bare basics of the opening of the game and the end. I was mostly on my own to figure out how to play, so I developed a middle game that was far more advanced than the other sections. This means, that as far as knowing which groups were weak, and which were strong, as well as the stone for stone reading, I was maybe 6-7 kyu. However as far as opening, theory, and endgame, I was maybe 15 kyu. My rank had settled somewhere in the middle, but usually my opponent had to survive the middle of the game

to win. I had no fear of cutting, I had no fear of creating a weak group in enemy territory, and I had no fear of getting into intense fights where either myself or my opponent would be decimated. Perhaps there are some of you reading who can relate to this?

This was the most entertaining time in my Weiqi playing career because the world was wide open. I was free to play whatever move struck my fancy at any given time. Yes, sometimes I would get horribly destroyed and all of my stones would get captured, but I also had some brilliant successes. I could envision myself entering the sacred lands of the single digit kyus in no time. Of course I needed a reality check, but why not savor it for as long as possible?

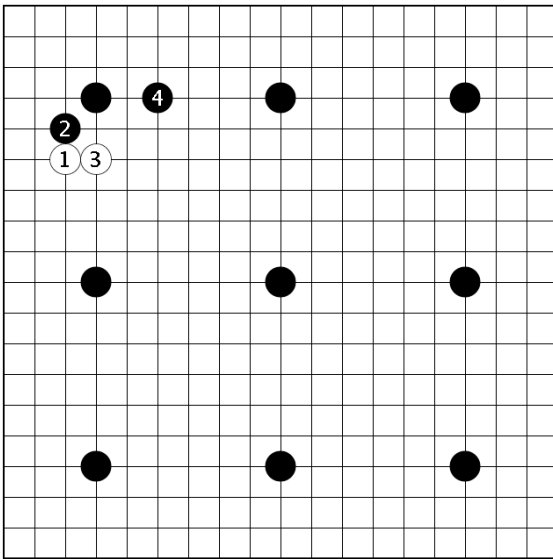
By the way, the next time I played that 6 kyu he crushed me. I would be taking handicap from him for a while. Talk about your reality checks.

“I know but I understand how this works though. It’s simple. Last game I made a silly move you clobbered me.”

“I see your point but you’ve got to press your advantage. Attacking is how you control the game, especially with 9 stones. I know more complicated moves lead to mistakes, but you need to test yourself a little to get better.”

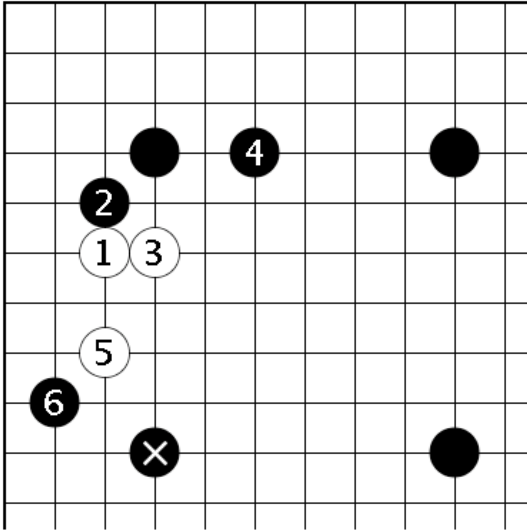
“Mind showing me how that attacking thing goes again?”

“Sure.”



What if Black were to kick White with 2? This is a contact play, and if you know anything about those, they have nasty follow ups. White will need to reinforce his stone with 3, and Black will map out the top of the board with 4. Now, to focus on how to direct your attack as Black, I want you to change the name of the game from “Weiqi” to “How are you going to make eyes now White?”

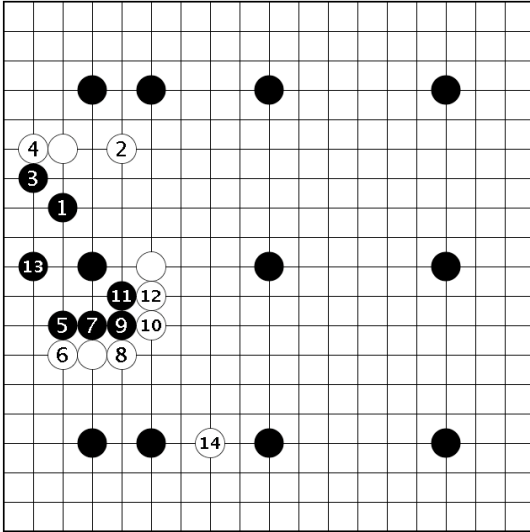
It’s perfectly all right if you say the new name of the game in your head with the voice of the announcer from the “Price is Right”. Because you have so many stones in place, real estate is at a premium for White, as he will have to make his groups live. If White neglects defensive moves, he is opening himself up to either suffer horribly or just plain be captured.



The marked stone at X is preventing White from making an extension along the side. White could try the very small extension of 5, but his group has not taken hold of six spaces along the side (remember the magic numbers?), so his group is in limbo. At this point, Black could attack and seal White from the left side by playing the keima at 6. White is frowning.

If you are noticing that Black's stones are forming walls around the open, point rich sections of the board while White is living in the equivalent of a cheap apartment in Tokyo, then you are witnessing how attacks work in Weiqi. When Black plays 2, he is taking claim of the upper side, and the territory the White group needs to make life. When Black plays 2 and 4, he is asking "How are you going to make eyes now White?" Is the top side 100% Black territory? No, absolutely not, but it is under heavy Black control. When White extends to 5, Black 6 reminds him that he is still a contestant on "How will you make eyes now White?" and that the brand new car is still out of reach. As long as White is still figuring out the answer to how his stones will see the light of day, Black will be making points. Force your opponent into the narrow spaces of the board where it is hard to live, and take the rest for yourself. If your opponent does not defend himself and instead tries to take your hard earned territory from you, then keep his groups split and keep up the attack!





In the actual game, Black played 1, trying to make eyes for his group on the side. This move is a bit weak spirited, but my friend was clearly afraid of losing his group. Black continues banging around, allowing White to wall him in. Never once does Black think about running out into the center. Instead, his moves are clearly aimed at making two eyes as fast as possible. The reasoning behind 13 still eludes me.

After I gained a fairly nice wall towards the outside, I slammed down the invasion at 14 to try and make trouble at the bottom. Now, of course my wall still has weaknesses so it's not perfect, but I never in my wildest imagination thought I would get pure thickness so early in the game anyway.

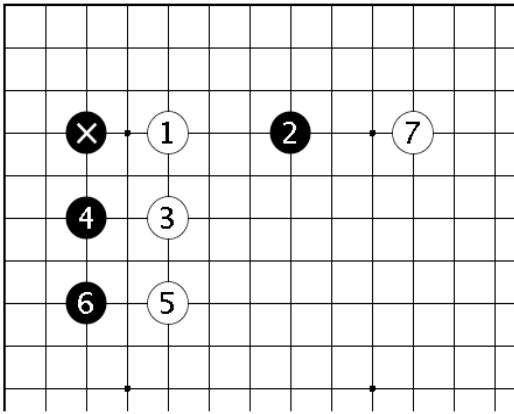
“You remember the thing about influence and territory, right?” I asked as my friend was deep in thought, staring at White 14. The music switched to a gothic punk version of Celine Dion.

“Sort of. I remember you saying usually that when one player gets one, the other guy gets the other one.”

“Right, if you take territory, then your opponent should be getting stones facing the outside. Your territory isn't for free. If your opponent can use his wall to make or destroy more points than what you gained in territory, then your opponent is ahead in the exchanges.”

“Wait, huh?”

“Here let me rephrase...”



Let's review this one more time, because it's really important to understand this idea. Let's say we have a game where this sequence occurs. White approaches the X marked Black stone with 1, and he gets pincer with 2. White jumps out to the center since he does not have eyes, and Black follows him with 4. The jumping

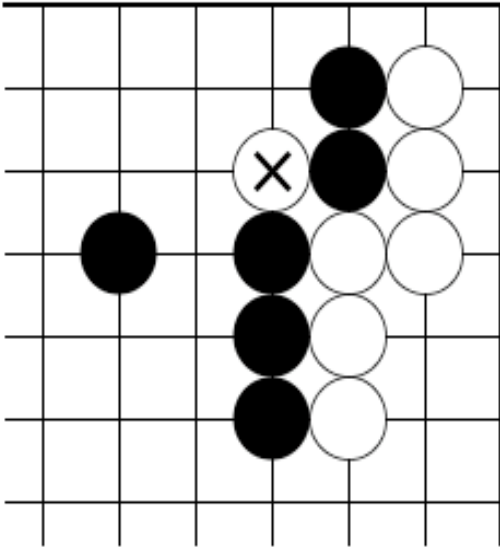
continues until Black 6, when White turns around and attacks Black 2 with White 7.

If you look closely, you should notice that White 1, 3, and 5 do not directly surround territory, they merely create a wall. The Black stones on the left side DO take territory and as it stands right now, Black is the one with points. However, when White attacks Black with 7, he can use the attack to make points along the top, his wall is in perfect placement for it. Think of it this way. White 3 and 5 allowed Black to make points but formed a wall. White's wall cost him the points Black made, like an investment. White paid Black however many points Black will get on the side, for the territory he wants to make with White 7. While Black's points are tangible, White's points are in the future. If he makes it big in the stock market, then Black will have to sit at home and watch as White toasts him with his champagne glass atop his yacht. But I digress. One person gets stones facing the outside, the other, territory. This is the basic balance of Weiqi. If you are getting both outside influence AND territory, then your opponent is doing something horribly, horribly wrong.

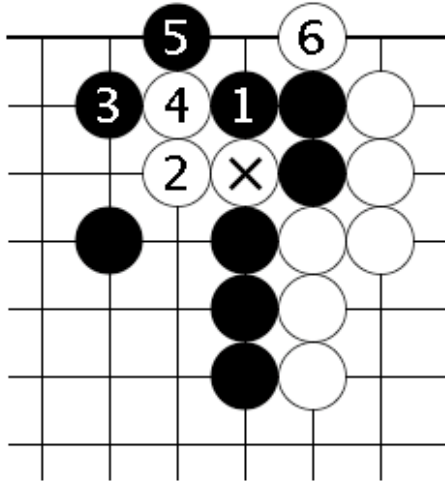
pay. When you are thinking of reinforcing a stone, ask yourself “Can I sacrifice it instead?”

### Loose Ladders

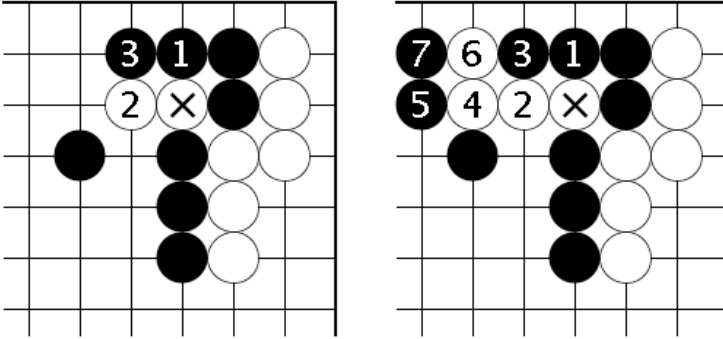
This tesuji gets pretty rough as far as how many moves you must read to be able to see it, but don't worry, once you do you will be a terror on the Weiqi board. Let's look at an example.



This situation might be familiar to many of you. White has just cut with the stone marked “x”, but this cut miserably fails. Try reading it out in your head first, then turn the page for the explanation when you're ready.



The first thing you should notice is that the net does not work for Black at all. After White 6, Black is stuck with a shortage of liberties and a frowny face.



Black 3 is the key move and sets up the loose ladder. It's loose because unlike an actual ladder, every Black move isn't atari. When White plays 4, Black can keep White's liberties low with 5 and 7, and White is dead. Count the liberties to confirm this for yourself. The inside Black group has three liberties and the White group only has two.