

Lesson 5

Connecting and Cutting

The fundamental aspect of each and every battle in Baduk is to connect and cut. In general, it is good to connect your groups, and to cut your opponent's group into two or more.

Connecting

Diagrams 1-2: Strictly speaking, stones are connected only when they are located at adjacent points in a line. Therefore the stones in Dia. 1 are connected while the stones in Dia. 2 are not connected completely. If White can play two consecutive moves here, he can cut the black stones as the two marked white stones do below.

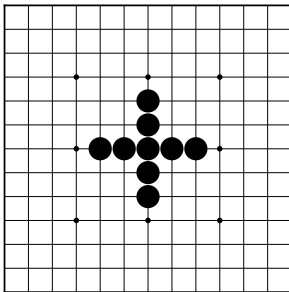


Diagram 1

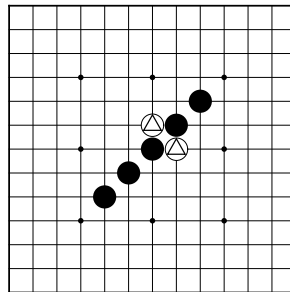


Diagram 2

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The Opening 4

In Baduk, the opening may be the easiest part to learn, yet the hardest to master. If you have learned the basic opening principles, it is possible for you to imitate the openings of professionals to a certain point and pretend to be strong. On the other hand, even world-class players sometimes do not know what the best move is in the opening. The Baduk board is so big, especially during the opening stage, so that it is not always possible to find the best move at a given moment.

Hence, there are several opening formations invented by the experts as examples of ideal openings. In this lesson, you're going to see some popular opening formations. You can just imitate them at first, but it is not enough to just follow the sequences without extracting principles from these examples.

Three-star Formation

The three star formation is one of the most famous opening patterns in which Black occupies all three star points of one side with 1, 3, and 5. This opening enables Black to make a strong wall toward the center, and so players of the influence style love it. Actually, the star point in the center is called chonwon which means 'the center of the universe,' because the ancients regarded the Baduk board as a symbol of the cosmos. And since this formation is for having power in the center around the chonwon, it is nicknamed the 'CosmicStyle.'

However, the formation has also a disadvantage; it lets the opponent gain profit in advance and makes the player himself struggle to build territory out of the potential influence. It is somewhat risky, because if the opponent succeeds in invalidating the influence, the player would be left lacking territory.

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The Middle Game

It is said that the middle game begins when the opening is finished, and the opening usually ends following 40 to 50 moves. After the outlines of territories have been set, you should think about how to enlarge your territory, or at least how to defend it and also how to reduce the opponent's territory.

Compared with the opening, the middle game is more difficult to learn, because there is no pattern, no formation to follow. During the opening, it is possible for you to stick to developing your own territory; i.e. just mind your own business. But in the middle game, you should check your opponent so that he doesn't get more territory, which leads both players to fight often, and there is no standard rule in those fights.

On the other hand, owing to the complexity of the conflicts, the middle game is regarded as the most exciting part of the three main phases of a Baduk game, opening, middle game, and endgame. Players depend on nothing but their own reading abilities, and no one can tell what will happen beyond a certain point.

There are at least two main concepts in the middle game; we call them attack and defense. these two are the beginning and the end of all possible fights.

The Attack

It is not possible to attack all the opponent's stones all the time. You can attack only when your opponent shows a weakness.

Diagram 1: The marked white stone is alone near Black's enclosed corner. If it is Black's turn, which place is correct for Black's attack on the white stone between 'A' and 'B'?

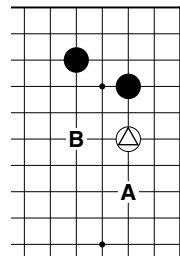


Diagram 1

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Haengma

Haengma is a Korean word literally meaning ‘the movement of horses.’ In Korean board game terminology, a ‘horse’ refers to a game piece, which is a stone in Baduk. There is no movement but only the placement of stones in Baduk, so what ‘movement’ means in this context is the relationship between stones. For instance, some of the moves we’ve already seen, such as the knight’s move and the diagonal, can also be called the knight’s haengma and the diagonal haengma.

The use of the concept of haengma can be interpreted as a classification of the moves. By classifying them, we can extract the uniqueness of a certain kind of move and sort them under the term of haengma. Without a doubt, it is very helpful to know the characteristics of certain moves in choosing one’s next course of action in a game.

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Haengma 2

Correct Answers to an Attachment

There is a proverb about attachments that states, ‘bend [hane] when attached.’ This means that to bend is the most common and the strongest counter against an attachment. For instance, if Black attaches at 1 in Dia. 1, then A and B are possible bends for White. However, it is not a simple matter to select between these two moves. Let’s start with the meaning of the direction of a bend. In Dia. 2, A, a bend from the corner, and B, under the attaching stone, are for profit; bends from the side, C and D, over the attaching stone, are for influence.

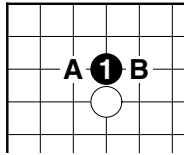


Diagram 1

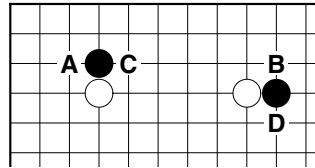


Diagram 2

More often than not, the direction of the bend is your choice. For example, if you want to secure the territory, you may play from the corner as shown in Dia. 3. On the contrary if you want to build up outside influence, you may play from the side and confine the opponent in the corner as in Dia. 4.

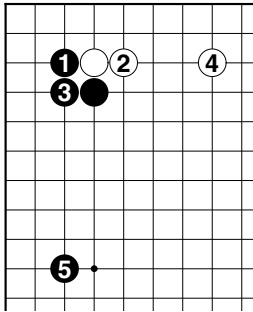


Diagram 3

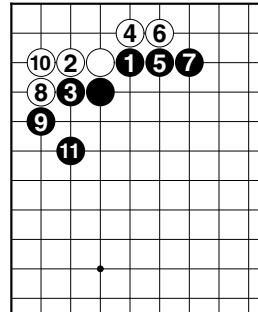


Diagram 4

However, when the opponent's stone is at a one-space distance as in Dia. 5, the answer is no longer the player's option. In other words, if White attaches with A or B, Black must inevitably bend with C or D. If not, Black will be in trouble for being cut by White.

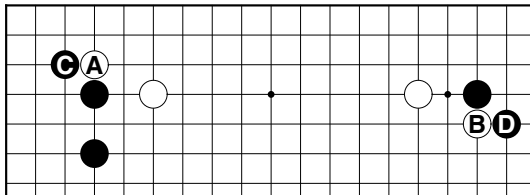


Diagram 5

What is difficult is the fact that to bend is not always the optimal move. Sometimes it is better to stretch instead.