

MINUE

HAENG-MA

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Introduction

This tutorial will help kyu players get an idea of haeng-ma, or “correct (reasonable) moves in local fights”. The literal meaning of haeng-ma is “the movement of horses [stones]”. It is used in a local context to describe the way your stones develop and flow, and how they prevent the opponent’s stones from developing. Correct and reasonable haeng-ma will make your local positions solid, strong, and efficient, and eventually these good local positions will be converted into territory.

Learning how to build, connect, and make your stones develop efficiently is neither easy nor simple. It is time-consuming and requires experience. Furthermore, due to the complexity of the game, it is impossible to memorise correct moves in all possible positions. However, by studying some standard and common positions, we can gradually learn what reasonable plays look like, and then apply them to other situations. This is the purpose of the material.

I will assume that you are familiar with some elementary Go concepts and tactics, like atari, liberties, ko, territory, the corner, the centre, tengen, nets, and ladders.

Stability and Development of Stones

Before learning about haeng-ma in detail, we should familiarise ourselves with the two properties of stones. Simply put, the two properties are:

- Stability of stones (**strength**)
- Direction of development (**growth**)

Stability of Stones (Strength)

There are many factors which are relevant to the stability of stones.

- Number of liberties
- Location on the board
- Shape
- Surrounding stones
- Connectedness and eyes

But the most basic factors are **the number of liberties** and **the location on the board**.

Liberties

Other things being equal, more liberties equal greater stability (strength). We can simply regard the liberties of stones as their “paths of breathing.” In fact, in Korean, “path of breathing” is one of the meanings of “liberty”. As the liberties of a stone are getting reduced, the stone will suffer from a “lack of oxygen”, and will eventually die.

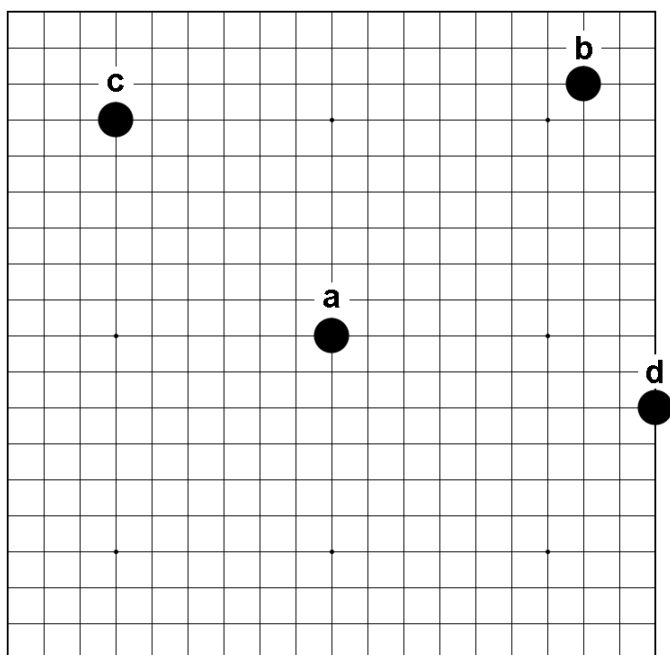


Figure 1: Three stones (**a**, **b**, and **c**) have four liberties, while one stone **d** at the right edge has only three. So, considering the number of liberties, Black's stones from **a** to **c** have more stability than **d** (which is feeling uneasy now because it has fewer liberties).

Location

This is another important factor that affects the degree of stability (strength) of your stones. If your stones had infinite liberties they would be unconditionally alive; however, the Go board is finite, and we cannot make infinite liberties for our stones! Another way to make unconditional life is to make two eyes. As you know, it is easier to make eyes in the corner (in other words, make a base), than it is in the sides or centre. It is probably easy to see intuitively why this is so. It is shown in figure 2.

So, assuming all else is equal, stones in the corner are best at stability than stones at the side, and stones in the centre are worst at stability.

In figure 1: **b** is the most stable stone (this stone has all its liberties, located in the corner), **c** is a bit weaker than **b** (**c**'s position is a little higher, and closer to the centre, so it is harder to give it a base than **b**). The stone at tengen, **a**, is third, and the worst is **d**.

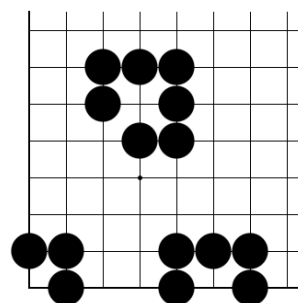


Figure 2: Eyeshape in different parts of the board.

Directions of development

For convenience, regard stones on the board as living things (cells, bacteria, or whatever you want). Each stone has its own life, and each wants to make as many copies of itself as possible, spreading out over the whole board. The degree of stability (power, or strength) is different for each stone. Some might be very healthy, having enough liberties (paths of breathing), a comfortable base (plenty of eyes), or many friendly stones around them. These are strong stones. But others might be weaker due to lack of liberties, or lack of eye shapes (not having a base).

The point is very simple. All stones want to develop over the whole board, and grow bigger and bigger. In other words, they want to make as many copies (stones of the same color) as quickly as possible on the board.

If they can grow and grow (develop) in an efficient and healthy way then they will get solid control of the board, and this result will come up in the form of secured territories.

Let's see what this single stone at hoshi wants to do in figure 3.

This stone has four directions to develop across the board, from **a** to **d**. Why not **e**? Of course, that can be a direction to develop too.

But in Go, all stones want to develop (grow, flow) along **straight** lines if possible. When they are aligned in straight lines, they are stronger and more powerful than stones aligned in diagonal lines.

In ordinary Go terms, stones that make straight lines are said to be thicker than ones making diagonal lines.

This is a very fundamental and important principle in haeng-ma, so I will provide more specific explanations and examples about this principle later.

A bit more on simple positions of single stones

Some of my Go friends believe (or guess) that tengen is the best move as Black's first play. Although most Go players (including pros) are reluctant to play tengen for their first move, it seems that tengen is attractive to at least some people.

In the beginning, nobody can show which opening play is best. So, asking pros which move is best in the opening is actually considered as a kind of joke in the Go world (at least in Korea).

I have seen for a long time that many Go players, especially beginners, don't have a correct understanding of the reasons why corner plays in the opening are common and are regarded as "reasonable moves" (although we cannot be sure that corner plays are really better than tengen). The following contains some explanations on advantages and disadvantages of tengen (including centre oriented plays) and corner plays, which you should get to know.

- Go is not a game of making territory, but a game of survival of stones. Therefore, territory is just a shortcut (or a fast and convenient way) for measuring how much and how well your stones

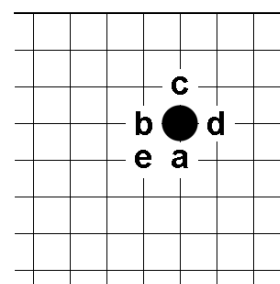


Figure 3: Direction of development for a stone at hoshi.

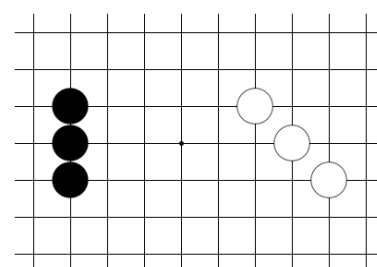


Figure 4: The 3 black stones in the centre have a stronger and more powerful position than the 3 white stones. In other words, the position of Black is thicker than the position of White. So, if we consider just the thickness of stones, Black's position is better (thicker), than White's. Correspondingly, the three white stones are a bit thin.

succeeded in controlling the board. In other words, secured territory is nothing but a by-product of the “strength of stones”. If your stones are organized in a way in which the positions are stronger and more efficient than the opponent’s stones, then territory will be made naturally and “automatically”.

So, the life of stones is more important than just making secured territories. Survival of stones is the first thing to care about, territory is the second thing. Urgent moves are more important than wide or big moves which only make territory.

- To build territory, wider areas are better than smaller areas. In this view, the centre would be better than the side, and for the same reason, the side is better than the corner. In other words, considering just the fast development of stones, plays in centre are best. If so, why are corner plays the standard way of opening? It’s because of the survival of stones.
- For survival, corners are better than sides, and sides are better than the centre. Why? Because we can make a base for our stones much more easily in the corners than on the sides or in the centre.

Thus, the main and basic reason of getting corners is making solid and stable launchpads to develop into the sides and the centre without worrying about the life of our stones, not for taking the corner territory.

Let’s summarize: for just fast development of stones, the centre is surely better than the corners. But the disadvantage of the centre is the difficulty of making a base there. Stones in the centre without connection to a side or corner are like trees with no roots. It is hard to settle them easily and as a result we will have trouble forming solid positions of such stones.

Now, time to evaluate 3 moves in the opening (sansan, hoshi, and tengen), considering their own attributes.

- The 3-3 point is best at making a solid and stable base fast. But, due to its low position, it is weak at development into the sides and centre. Generally speaking, 3rd line moves are good at making a solid base.
- Hoshi (the 4-4 point) is a more centre oriented move than the 3-3 point. So this move is much better for fast development to the sides and centre, but is worse for making a base in the corner than the 3-3. Traditionally, the fourth line is said to be the “influence line” (simply speaking, “influence” is another word for “potential of development of stones”).
- Tengen is best choice for speed of development, but a much thinner move compared to corner plays.