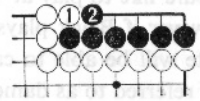
INTRODUCTION: Some Basic Concepts and their Definitions

There are a number of Go technical terms which do not refer to specific moves but rather to concepts which are basic to the understanding of certain tactics and strategies. Since most of these terms have no English equivalents (an average non-Go-playing Japanese would not understand the meaning of many of these words) and refer to a specific concept in the game, the reader should simply learn what is meant by them and add these words to his Go vocabulary. Henceforth, throughout this book, these terms will be used without any explanation just as if they were English words.

The concepts that these terms represent are very important and no one can hope to become a dan player without an understanding of their subtleties. In fact in the sequel to this book ('Strategic Concepts of Go') more than half the book will be devoted to a deep study of these concepts.

Sente and Gote

A move is called sente if it produces a threat so large that the other player cannot avoid making a direct response to this move. Gote, on the other hand, is just the opposite. It is a move which is basically defensive in nature (though many gote moves actually have some aggressive potential and so are not completely defensive) and the other player need not respond directly to this move but rather play elsewhere. Here is an example:



Dia. 1

Dia. 1

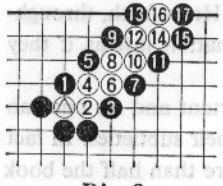
White 1 is sente as Black must respond to it by playing at 2. If Black neglects to play here, White will play at 2 and the Black stones in the corner die. Black 2, on the other hand, is called gote as it only defends the stones in the corner and now White can play elsewhere.

Shicho

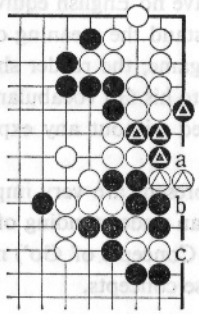
Shicho refers to a method of capturing stones in which the resulting pattern to many people resembles a ladder. Shicho is very important and no game is ever played without this situation at least being considered.

Dia. 2

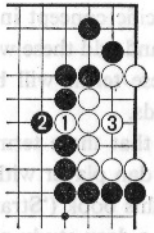
Black 1 will capture White △ by shicho. If White resists Black will drive him into the side and then capture all his stones with 17. If White had a stone in the vicinity of 10, before Black played 1, the shicho would not work and Black's efforts would end in failure. Such a stone is called a shicho-breaker and when considering a shicho, close attention must be paid to all stones in the line of the projected shicho.



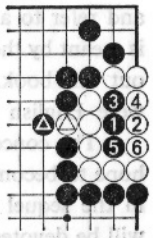
Dia. 2



Dia. 3



Dia. 4



Dia. 5 ❼ at ❶

Damezumari

Damezumari means shortage of liberties. This concept is very important and will often occur when we study tesuji. Many fights are lost because one player has fewer liberties than his opponent. Let us look at a few examples.

Dia. 3

In this example, Black would like to play at 'a' or 'b' so as to capture the two White stones marked △. However if Black plays at either 'a' or 'b' he puts his own stones in check i.e. White will be able to capture the Black stones with his next move. Such a situation is referred to as damezumari. In this case, Black must first capture three White stones by playing at 'c' and now White will play at 'a' capturing the Black stones marked ▲.

Dia. 4

In this example, White plays 1 and Black stops White with 2. This move creates damezumari for White and he must defend his stones with 3 or they will die.

Dia. 5

If, after White exchanges △ for Black ▲, White doesn't defend his stones with 3 as in Dia. 4, Black will play at 1 and after White captures three Black stones with 6, Black will play 7 at 1 and now White doesn't have two eyes so he will die.

Dia. 6

However as long as White still has a liberty at 'a', after Black plays 3, White will be able to play at 4, making two eyes. Later, when Black plays at 'a', White will simply capture the two Black stones. Notice that in Dia. 5, White couldn't play 4 as here because of damezumari.

Miai

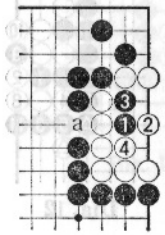
Miai refers to two points on the board which are related in such a way that if one player occupies one of them, then his opponent must occupy the other.

Dia. 7

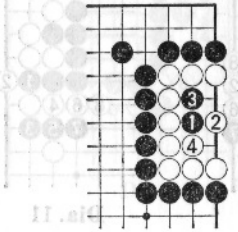
When Black plays 1, White must play 2 in order to keep his stones alive. On the other hand, if Black had played at 2, White would have had to play 2 at 1 in order to remain alive. The points 1 and 2 are called points of miai. Notice that 3 and 4 are also miai points.

Dia. 8

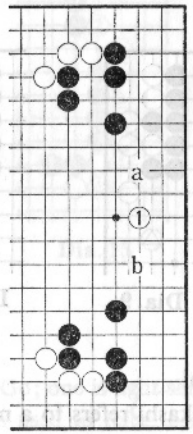
White has played a wedge with 1 between the two Black positions. He will now have no trouble stabilizing himself on the right side since if Black attacks at 'a', White will extend to 'b' and vice-versa. So, 'a' and 'b' are points of miai.



Dia. 6



Dia. 7



Dia. 8

Aji

Aji is perhaps the most difficult concept to define. It refers to latent threats that exist in some local situation. At the time when an aji situation first occurs the player who has these latent threats may be unable to utilize them immediately. However, as the game develops certain vital points in the vicinity of the existing aji will be occupied and suddenly these threats will materialize. Here is an example to clarify what has just been said.

Dia. 9

The White stones in the corner are not quite alive but White is connected to the outside with his stone △. However, White's position has many defects and Black has some aji against this formation.

Dia. 10

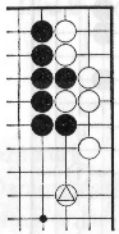
Black is mainly threatening to play the sequence in this diagram. After Black plays 3, if White plays 4, the sequence to Black 9 points out the flaws in the White position.

Dia. 11

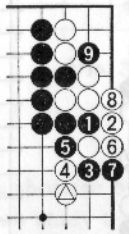
However, against Black 3, White at this point of the game can run away with 4, 6 and 8 and now the Black stones have become weak and vulnerable. So, Black must not play in this way.

Dia. 12

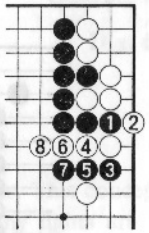
Later in the game, if Black is able to play a stone at ▲, 'a', 5 or 7 with sente he can then use the aji he has against the White position. Now the sequence beginning with Black 1 and 3 would be very effective. White must make life with 12 and now Black has the option of playing at 9 and capturing four White stones. Notice how White △ has now become isolated and useless against the thick Black wall which now radiates it's influence throughout the board.



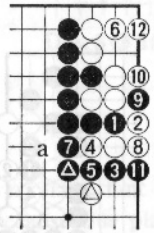
Dia. 9



Dia. 10



Dia. 11



Dia. 12

Kikashi

Kikashi refers to a move which must be answered in a certain way by one's opponent. A play is called kikashi if the opponent's reply is forced. Timing in making kikashi moves is of crucial importance for if they are played at the wrong time, the opponent may have several options as to how to respond. The reason one plays kikashi is to leave aji behind which may have the effect of allowing one to reduce the opponent's territory and or expand one's own. But here an example is worth a hundred words of explanation.

Dia. 13

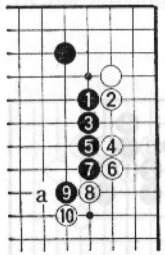
The sequence in this diagram is a famous joseki. After White 10, Black at 'a' is the vital point. However, before playing here, Black must make some important moves.

Dia. 14

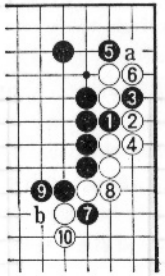
Black must first push through with 1 and then cut with 3. White must answer with 4 and not at 6 because of the defects at 8 and 4. Hence, Black 1 and 3 are kikashi as White is limited in his responses to this connection at 4. Now Black uses presence of 3 to play another kikashi with 5. This stone will severely inhibit White when he wants to expand his corner area. Next, Black plays his last kikashi at 7 and this stone has some aji, in that White will have difficulty expanding his area along the right side because of the presence of this stone. In fact, because of this stone, when Black plays 9, White can't play at 'b' and must instead play at 10. Next, Black will aim at the point of 'a' so as to enlarge his corner.

Dia. 15

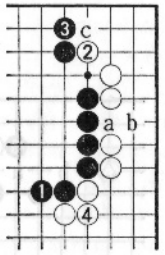
If Black doesn't play kikashi as in Dia. 14 but instead simply extends to 1, White will play at 2, forcing Black to defend with 3, and then White connects at 4. Now the exchange of Black 'a' for White 'b' has become meaningless. Notice that in this example, White can expand his corner by playing at 'c' and there isn't the annoying aji along the right side as in the previous diagram.



Dia. 13



Dia. 14



Dia. 15

Sabaki, Karui and Omoi

There are basically two kinds of katachi (shape) in Go; one is light shape and the other is heavy or clumsy shape. Sabaki is the term used to refer to a quick development while karui is a term used to refer to a single move which is basic to or may cause the formation of a flexible shape. Omoi katachi refers to a group of stones which are heavy and clumsy and have great problems in making an eye formation. Hence, such stones will usually come under severe attack as likely candidates for destruction. Even if such stones escape capture, one can gain a great advantage by chasing them, in that one can expand one's area of influence in the process. After playing sabaki stones will face up quite well against any type of attack launched against them because this kind of shape has great eye-making potential and will have a variety of tactics (including sacrifice tactics) with which to affect the completion of these eyes. Let us consider an example.

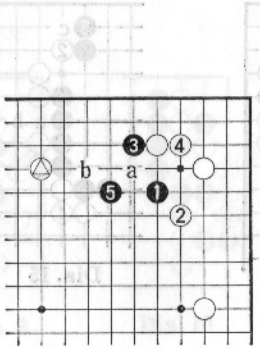
Dia 16.

The White formation in the upper right corner is becoming formidable and if White has a chance he will play at 1, making it very difficult for Black to reduce this area. So Black must eventually attack White at the point of 1. White 2 is one way of responding and next Black 3 is standard procedure. However, White draws back to 4 leaving his corner strong and almost invulnerable to attack. Next, Black 5 is karui (light move) forming a sabaki katachi for Black. If, instead of 5, Black had played this move at 'a', this would leave Black with an omoi-katachi and White would next attack by playing at 'b' and these three Black stones would be in great trouble as they would have to run away within the sphere of White's strength. In any event after Black 5, how would Black defend against a White attack?

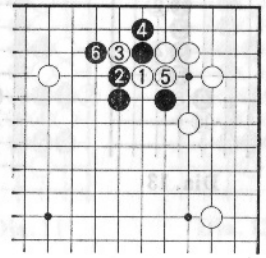
Dia. 17

If White attacks with 1, Black will play 2 and after White 3 and Black 4, Black will either capture White's stone at 3 or 1, depending upon which White chooses to defend. What ever happens, Black will have no trouble making life.

In conclusion, whenever faced with the position, in which one finds oneself within the enemy's sphere of strength or influence, one should always try to make a sabaki shape.



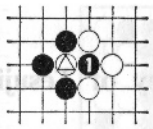
Dia. 16



Dia. 17

Ko

One of the basic rules of Go states that an endlessly repetitive situation is not to be permitted. This is applicable in the case of ko, where the arrangement of the stones is such that the two players are in a position to retake each others' stones ad infinitum. At times, whole groups of stones or indeed the whole game may hinge on the successful outcome of such a ko fight.



Dia. 18

Dia. 18

In this diagram, the formation of the stones will allow a ko to develop. If Black captures White △ with a play at 1, it is now possible for White to recapture the Black stone at 1 with a play at the now vacated point of △. This is therefore a repetitive situation and the rules stipulate that when such occurs, the recapture must be preceded by at least one play elsewhere. That is: White cannot play 2 directly at △, but must instead play 2 as a threat elsewhere drawing Black's response in some other part of the board; only then is White allowed to make his ko capture with White 4 at △. The ko is considered finished when one of the players chooses to ignore his opponent's threat and fills in the ko (i. e. either Black fills at △ or White fills at 1, according to the circumstances.)

CHAPTER 1: A Survey of Tesuji

In this, the first chapter, we are going to study the basic technique, known as tesuji, which occurs at all stages of the game. A firm grasp on the range of tesuji available combined with a good knowledge of the meanings and uses of each is essential to the improvement of one's game.

Tesuji is defined as a skillful play, which in a local situation allows a player to make the most efficient use of his stones. Such plays may also take full advantage of one's opponent's inefficient use of stones. A tesuji play can take many forms, sometimes occurring as a maneuver involving the sacrifice of stones or on occasion simply being the occupation of a vital point.

The opportunity for making such a play may arise at any point in a game. When, in the course of this book, we study joseki, we will meet many of the tesujis studied in this chapter. A large part of the last chapter on yose (end-game) is devoted to the study of yose tesuji. Tesuji constantly occur in middle-game fighting and it is recommended to any player who wishes to attain great power in Go that he devote many hours to their study.

In this chapter, we have classified the different types of tesuji according to the kind of move involved, giving a number of examples of each one. It is hoped that such a systematic method of presentation will help the reader to recognise these tesuji the more easily when they occur in actual play. Accordingly the second part of this chapter has been made up of problems, which are arranged in order from easy to difficult and which can be solved utilizing the techniques learned in the first part. In this way the reader will be able to judge his progress and understanding.

1) The Special Property of the Corner

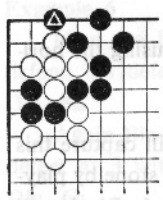
Semeais (races to capture) which occur in the corner are sometimes different from those which occur on the side or center of the board, in that the player attacking from the outside (i.e. the player who does not occupy the corner) may have to make one or two extra moves because of damezumari. Hence, one must be careful when counting the liberties in such situations. Here are two examples:

Example 1

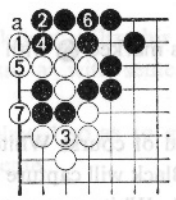
Black has just played △, leaving White's group in the corner with two liberties against Black's three. How can White save his five stones?

Dia. 1

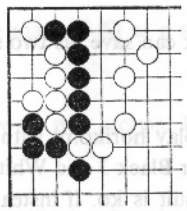
White plays on the 1–2 point with 1 thus utilizing the special property of the corner. Notice how Black can't play at 'a', without first playing at 6 (because of damezumari) and thus loses one liberty. As a result White captures three Black stones with the sequence up to 7.



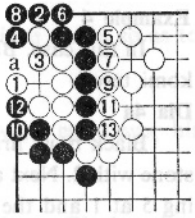
Example 1



Dia. 1



Example 2



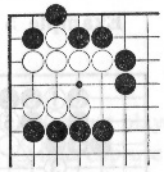
Dia. 2

Example 2

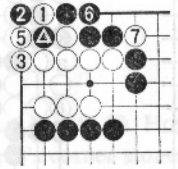
There is a semeai going on between the Black and White groups in the corner and it seems as if Black will have no difficulty in winning this fight since it appears he is ahead in liberties. However, White can win by utilizing the special property of the corner. How does he do it?

Dia. 2

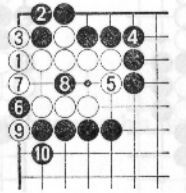
White 1 for Black 2 is a natural exchange and then White 3 gives the White group an eye. Now Black loses two moves as he must play 6 and 8 and after White 13, Black can't play at 'a' because of damezumari.



Example 3



Dia. 3a ❹ at ①



Dia. 3b

2) The Tesuji of Horikomi

This tesuji involves the sacrifice of one stone with the object of causing one's opponent's stones to take on a bad shape. This tesuji is quite useful for saving stones outright or by ko. Here are some examples:

Example 3

The White stones in this diagram appear to be dead but White has a tesuji to save these stones. Where should he play?

Dia. 3a

White 1 is called horikomi (the word literally means to "throw-in") and in this case it is the tesuji which allows White to save his stones. After Black takes the one stone with 2, White plays sagari (descent) with 3 and Black suffers a large loss with the sequence to White 7. Therefore, in answer to 3, Black should play 4 at 7 and simply give up the two corner stones at 2 and △. In any case, White has made life for his stones.

Dia. 3b

If White had simply played sagari (descent) at 1, Black would have connected with 2 and now White dies with the sequence up to Black 10.

Example 4

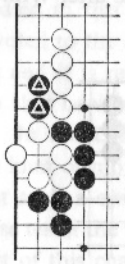
In this case, Black can save his two stones marked △ with ko using the horikomi tesuji.

Dia 4a

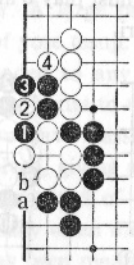
Black must first play horikomi with 1 and of course White will capture this stone with 2. Next after Black 3 and White 4, Black will capture one stone by playing 5 at 1 and the result is ko. If instead of 4, White connects at 1, Black will play at 'a' and 'b', capturing three stones and avoiding ko.

Dia. 4b

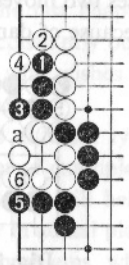
Black must not play 1 and 3, since after White 4, Black can't play 'a' because of damezumari. After White plays 6, he will have one eye whereas Black has none. In all such semeais (races to capture) the player not having an eye is at a disadvantage.



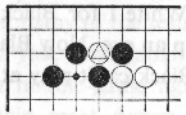
Example 4



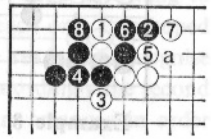
Dia. 4a ❺ at ❶



Dia. 4b



Example 5



Dia. 5

3) Sacrificing Two Stones instead of One.

Sometimes instead of sacrificing one stone it becomes more efficient to sacrifice two. Sacrificing in this way can allow one to make good shape or it can prevent the enemy from making a living shape as is shown in the following examples.

Example 5

How can White best use his stone marked △, as a sacrifice stone?

Dia. 5

It is tesuji for White to add one more stone and then give up both of them In this way he can play both the ate of 3 and the ate of 5. After Black 6, White 7 is sente and Black must play at 8. n.b. the kosumi (diagonal extension) of Black 2 also qualifies as a tesuji, as it leaves behind the White defect at 'a'. If instead of 2, Black had simply played at 6, White would have played at 2; now Black must play at 8 and when White plays at 5, White has no defects in his formation.

Please notice, also, that if instead of playing 1, White had played this move at 5, Black will play at 1 taking one stone and now the White plays at the points of 2 and 3 are no longer sente but are gote moves.

Example 6

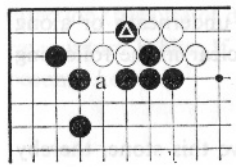
How can Black best utilize his stone marked △ as a sacrifice stone, so as to defend his defect at 'a' with sente.

Dia. 6a

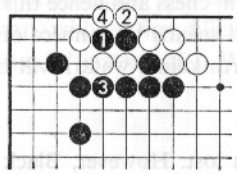
Again Black plays 1 so as to give away two stones. Now he can cover his defect at 3 with sente.

Dia. 6b

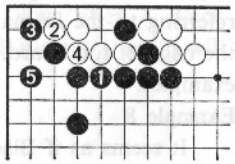
If Black immediately plays 1, White will play 2 and 4 and now Black ends in gote as he must defend himself at 5.



Example 6



Dia. 6a



Dia. 6b

Example 7

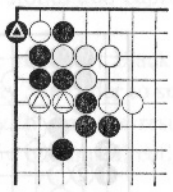
Black has just played ate (check) with △. How can White save his two stones marked △ and capture all of Black's corner stones?

Dia. 7a

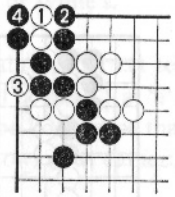
Once again White sacrifices two stones by playing sagari at 1. After the ate of White 3, Black must take the two stones with 4 and next—

Dia. 7b

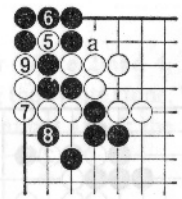
White plays the horikomi tesuji with 5 and then follows it up with another tesuji by connecting at 7 making it impossible for Black to win this semeai. If instead of 8, Black plays at 9, then White plays at 'a' and the result is the same.



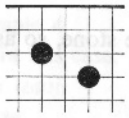
Example 7



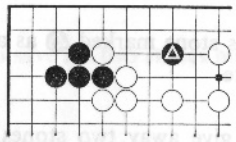
Dia. 7a



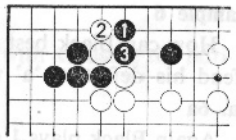
Dia. 7b



Reference Dia.



Example 8



Dia. 8a

4) Keima Watari Tesuji

This tesuji is a special technique used to connect seemingly isolated stones. Keima is a technical term used in Go to designate the type of relation between two stones as shown in the Reference Diagram. The relation between the stones corresponds to the knight's move in chess and hence this term is sometimes used when referring to the keima. Watari means to connect or bridge underneath or along the edge of the board. The term keima watari will become clear in the following examples.

Example 8

It seems as if Black ⓐ is lost. However, Black can save this stone, thereby destroying White's potential territory.

Dia. 8a

Black 1 is the keima watari tesuji and is the correct move. If White plays sagari with 2, Black will cut with 3 as shown. On the other hand if White plays at 3, Black will play at 2.

Dia. 8b

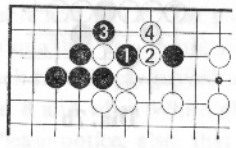
If Black hastily cuts with 1, White will play 2 and 4 and this result is vastly inferior to Dia. 8a.

Example 9

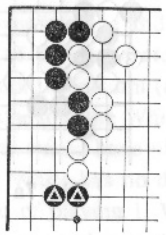
How can Black connect his two stones marked ⓐ with his group in the upper left corner.

Dia. 9

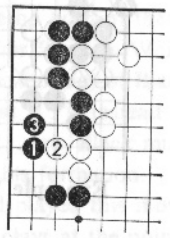
The keima watari of Black 1 is the only way. If White plays 2, Black simply plays hiki (draw-back) with 3 and Black is safely connected. Please assure yourself that against Black 1, White has no way to prevent Black from connecting while on the other hand Black 1 is Black's only hope for a connection.



Dia. 8b



Example 9



Dia. 9

5) Sagari Tesuji

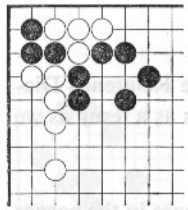
Sagari means to hang down or descend. In Go it refers to a move which extends downward toward the edge of the board. The main use of this tesuji is to increase the number of liberties of one's stones when involved in a semeai (race to capture). This tesuji quite often makes use of the special property of the corner. Here are some examples.

Example 10

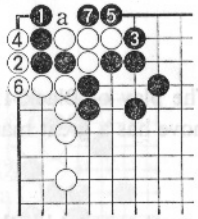
Black has three liberties against four for White. Yet Black can play so as to kill White. How?

Dia. 10

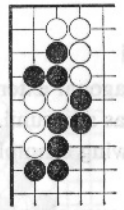
Black can play the sagari tesuji of 1 and utilize the special property of the corner. That is, White can't attack Black's four stones in the corner from either direction (because of damezumari) without first filling at 6. Now, after 7, Black can capture White. If Black plays 'a' instead of 1, White will play at 1 and it will become ko.



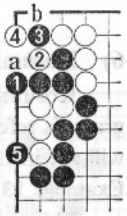
Example 10



Dia. 10



Example 11



Dia. 11

Example 11

Again it seems as if Black is lost in the corner. However he can play so as to save his stones and capture four of White's.

Dia. 11

The sagari of Black 1 is again the correct tesuji. After White 2 and 4, Black must play 5 in order to succeed. If he plays 5 at 'a' capturing the White stone, White will play 'b' and the result will be ko. Notice that White cannot attack the Black stones by playing directly at 'a' owing to damezumari.