

Jō

2014, Phil Leduc, <https://sites.google.com/site/theowlsnest02/home/jo>

Jō is a two-player abstract game loosely themed on Japanese stick fighting. A jō is a type of Japanese wooden staff.

Components

- 5 x 5 x 5 hexagonal board
- 2 sets of 27 player stones, in two colors
- 6 neutral stones in a third color

Place the board between the players and position the neutral stones as shown in Figure 1.

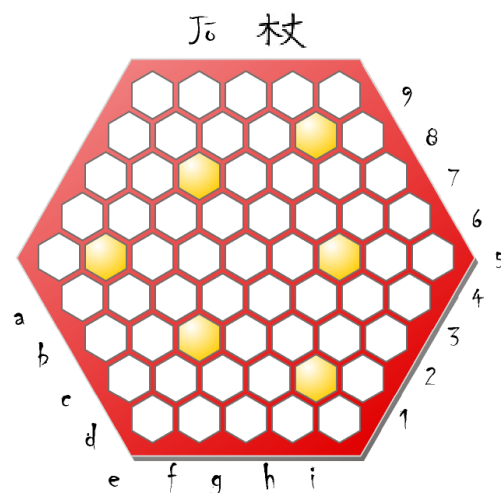


Figure 1. Standard setup

Players decide who will play first and each takes a set of stones as their reserve. Turns alternate, no passing a turn.

On a turn a player must place two stones in two adjacent empty spaces. This placement may affect any combination of opponent or neutral stones that are adjacent to and aligned with the two placed stones – in the two custodial spaces. The following optional actions are usually beneficial.

- Adjacent opponent stones may be replaced with the moving player's stones and the opponent stones are returned to their owner.
- Adjacent neutral stones may be moved to any empty or opponent occupied space on the board. If the space is occupied, the opponent's stone is replaced by the neutral stone and the displaced stone is return to the owning player. This is a good way to “neutralize” an opponent's lead in the game.

Game End

The game ends when a player cannot place two stones either because there are no adjacent spaces left on the board or the player to move has fewer than two stones in reserve.

Winning the Game

The player with the most three-in-a-rows on the board wins. Three-in-a-rows can share common stones or intersections. For example, a four-in-a-row contains two three-in-a-rows. The three-in-a-rows can be in any direction, horizontal or on either diagonal. If tied, the player with the most stones in reserve wins (fewest on the game board). If still tied, the player who moved last wins. See Figure 5 for a scoring example.

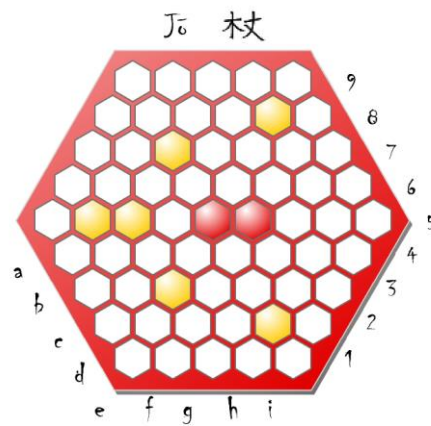


Figure 2. Red plays to the center. The neutral stone at g5 moves to c3. Notice that the red stone at e5 can be flipped from two directions only.

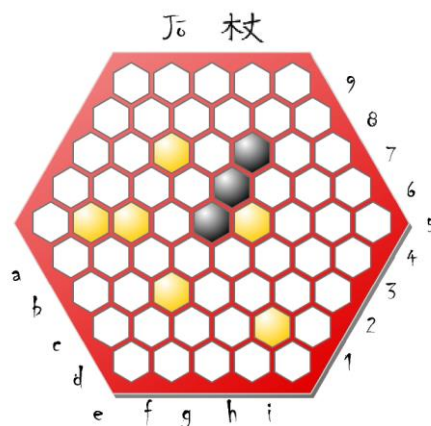


Figure 3. Black counters. The red stone at e5 is replaced/flipped with a black stone and the neutral stone at e8 is moved to f5 replacing the red stone that was there.

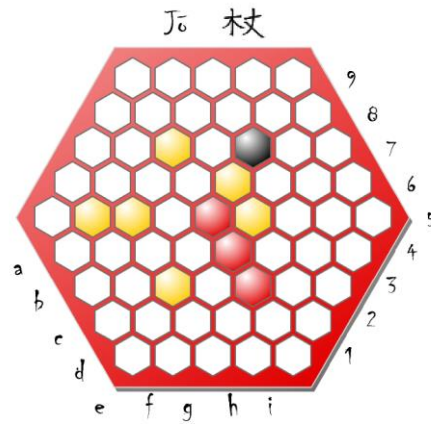


Figure 4. Red strikes back. The black stone at e5 is reconverted to red and the neutral stone at h2 removes the black stone at e6. The red stone at e5 is temporarily safe from more conversions but should the neutral stones at f5, e3, c5 or c7 be moved, it can again be converted. In any case, no stone is stable until all neutral stones are inaccessible.

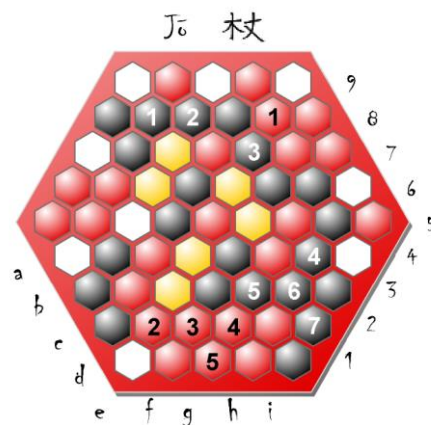


Figure 5. Scoring Example. Black wins 7 to 5.

Designer Comments

Jō was to be game three of a stick trilogy. My first attempt was *Nooks* a slightly flawed game which eventually morphed into [Siege Master](#). My second was [Dot Dash](#) which has not been introduced yet to the BGG but can be found at my Google site.

Jō started out, as do all my designs, with a seed of an idea, usually a mechanism idea that I feel is rarely used or unique. In the case of *Jō*, I thought to try a reversal of custodial capture. By placing stones between opponent stones you capture the bookend stones. Neutral stones were not initially part of the game and I did not have any particular game goal in mind.

Capturing worked okay but I wanted a game that was short with a definite pace to the end of the game. For this reason, capturing became flipping the bookend stones.

Jō will last around 14 rounds! I played around with other board sizes and decided the hexhex5 board seemed about right to me.

After more play testing, I found that the game felt too much like the game *Hexxagon*. Stones surrounded by other stones were static and could not be flipped. This was the catalyst for creating the neutral stones. Bombs away!

The 3-in-a-row goal came about because I wanted to get away from the largest group wins mentality which tends to be the first goal I think of and causes clumping in the center of the board as the divide and conquer strategy is applied. By switching to 3-in-a-row and using neutral pieces to break them up. Players will, at least initially, try to spread out more and time when would be the best moment to create a 3-in-a-row. Late in the game when the neutral stones are inaccessible, clumping starts to win the game.

These are the *Jō* traits that I like:

- It's quick and if people like it, it will be addictive – let's play just one more.
- Contending with the neutral stones gives *Jō* some unique character.
- Stone placement creates some interesting material swings. Normally, a two stone lead can quickly become a two stone deficit. So the material lead tends to swing back and forth until someone decides to use a neutral stone which will usually lose material. If an opponent blunders and lets you flip two stones, there is a huge material swing and two 3-in-a-rows in your favor.

Copyright (c) 2014, Phil Leduc

Please note that these game rules **may** be duplicated and distributed via the web but the rules may not be altered and full credit must be given to the designer, Phil Leduc. Otherwise, all rights are reserved. Those that wish to program or sell this game in any form should contact the author at philleduc.pled@gmail.com for permission or a license to do so.