

# Wanting too much

When correcting one sort of mistake, it's easy to get carried away and start erring in the opposite way. Because the previous section was about wanting too little, it is natural enough that this one should be about wanting too much.

Some of the ideas discussed in the previous section are keeping *sente* whenever possible, strengthening yourself by attacking, rather than defending directly and using thickness to stake out large frameworks instead of small territories. The problem is that it's easy to get carried away, to start omitting crucial defensive moves in order to take *sente*, to attack violently without taking time to build up strength and to expand one's *moyo* to the point that it becomes thin and falls apart in face of an invasion. While the tendency to sell oneself short is endemic among double-digit *kyus*, this opposite problem comes to a head in the single-digit *kyu* ranks, when many players begin to get cocky about their strength, not realising just how difficult those last ten rungs to *shodan* can be to climb.

Although you should usually take as much as you believe you safely can, it is also important to remember that you do not need all the points to win, only "half the board plus one." Whether out of egotism, fear of slipping behind at the last minute, or simply being too lazy to count the score, many players are not satisfied with simply taking the lead - they want to obliterate the opponent and leave him with nothing at all. Playing as if every scrap of territory must be invaded and every weak group must be killed is what is known as "greedy go."

Greedy go is a difficult disease to cure, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is so widespread that it's likely that an entire group, or even an entire Internet server of players will suffer from it - unless players have a chance to play someone with a calmer, more reasonable style, they may never realise that they're doing anything wrong or that

there's any other way to play. Secondly, the usual result of greedy play is a violent fight; although that fight may be unfavourable to the greedy player, it is also likely to be so complicated that the end result is decided by a later blunder by one player or the other, so that the original greedy attack or invasion is not identified as the real problem. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, these violent fights lead to large, unpredictable swings in the score and exciting, back-and-forth games. The thrill of this sort of game is addictive, so that many players continue to play this way out of the belief that a calmly-played game is less interesting. The truth is that the subtleties of a game played in good style are far more interesting than a *kyu*-style bloodbath, but only if you have the patience to discover them.

Of course, many of those who play this way will pass it off as a matter of style, and point to certain contemporary professionals (particularly certain young Koreans, known for their gritty fighting style) as examples of why their way of playing is not necessarily wrong. Indeed, the difference between fighting spirit - a good thing - and overplay - a bad thing - is subtle. It is one of context. There is certainly room for a good fight in any game of Go, and some players are quicker to ignite one than others. Strong players pick their battles, however; even the most violent of professionals will not start a fight if the surrounding conditions are unfavourable, or if his lead is enough to ensure a win without one.

Covered in this section are a number of situations that will usually lead to unfavourable fights or outright losses. Learning to avoid them does not mean that your play needs to become "boring" or peaceful, only that you will need to learn the right time to pick a fight, and the right way to choose your battlefield.

# Creating two weak groups

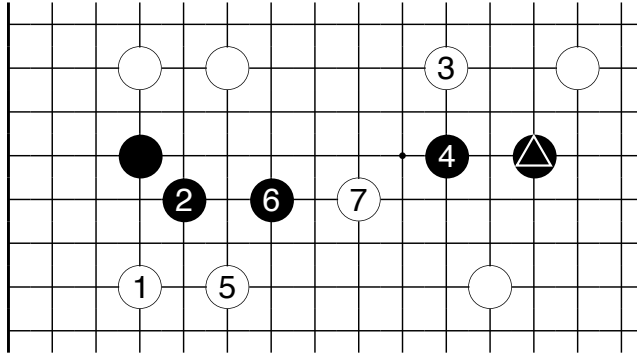


Diagram 2.1: A splitting attack

## The mistake

You often hear players describing groups, or individual stones, as being either “strong” or “weak.” What, exactly, is meant by this? It is harder to give a firm definition for these terms than you might expect, because the relative strength or weakness of a group is not purely intrinsic to the stones themselves, but depends on their surroundings as well. In the most general terms, a group is weak if it does not have two eyes, and lacks a clear and foolproof means of establishing them or connecting to a stronger friendly group nearby. However, even a living group can be considered somewhat weak (although the usual term is “thin”) if the opponent has several useful forcing moves he can make against it.

Weak groups are an inescapable part of Go. Unless there is a serious mismatch in strength between players, it is not very unlikely for one of them to win a game without ever creating a weak group. Although one weak group is manageable, the problem arises when a player creates more than one weak group and has to juggle them all simultaneously. Most players have heard the advice that they should avoid creating a weak group if they already have one on the board; nonetheless, greed and bloodlust drive many amateur players – *dans* included – to play recklessly and ignore this warning.

## The rationale

*“I need to invade before he can make this whole area into territory - I don't have time to defend this other group first. Besides, both of my groups can run, so what's the problem?”*

## The reality

Firstly, there's usually no pressing need to create a second weak group. Patience is a virtue, in Go as in life. If there's a place you would like to invade, or an attack you would like to make, the correct approach is usually to strengthen your own weak groups first, and keep the option of attacking or invading open for later. Perhaps your opponent will take the opportunity to fix his own weakness as well, but then you've both spent a move to reinforce yourselves, so you haven't fallen behind.

More importantly, creating a second weak group will usually precipitate a loss. A common misconception is that twice as many weak groups means only twice as much liability. This would be true if the groups could be managed independently, but nothing is truly independent in Go.

Even if the groups begin far away from each other, as both run out into the middle, the moves made to attack one will begin to have an effect on the other as well. At the very least, the opponent should be able to manage a leaning attack, in which he makes forcing moves against one group, strengthening it but also himself, so as to attack the other more severely.

Worse, if it is possible to keep both groups weak while chasing them, a clever opponent may be able to arrange a splitting attack by chasing them towards each other, then cutting through the gap between them at the last moment. Imagine, for instance, that the triangle-marked stone in Diagram 2.1 is part of a weak group fleeing from an attack elsewhere on the board. When White starts a new attack with W1, it is risky for Black to try to save everything. If he moves out solidly with B2, White can chase both groups towards each other with W3 and W5, then split them with W7. The groups cannot connect and, unless there is a great deal of support nearby, things will not go well for Black.

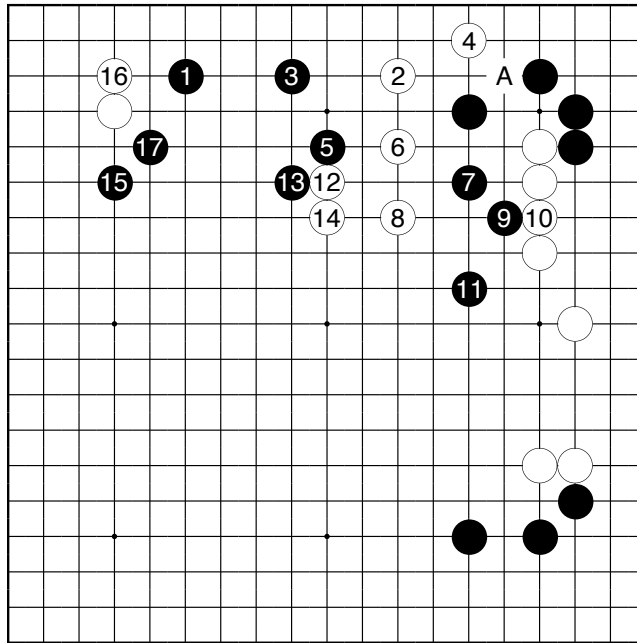


Figure 2.1: White's corner becomes weak

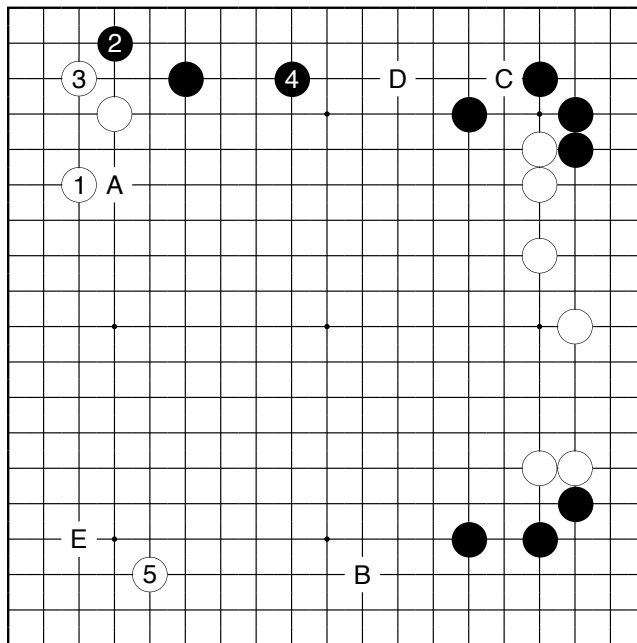


Figure 2.2: Black's weakness can be left for later

## Example 1 (Fig. 2.1)

Black: 10 *kyu*, White: 10 *kyu*. No handicap.

It is early in the game, and because of early White approaches in the upper and lower right, there is still an unoccupied corner. Black has left weaknesses in his shape in both corners, while White is overconcentrated on the right side, so things are fairly even so far.

Black has *sente*, and chooses to approach the upper left with B1 instead of claiming the lower left corner. By playing calmly, White should be able to handle the upper left in *sente* and be the first to play in the lower left. Unfortunately, greed and aggression drive her to play more rashly.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. White knows enough to spot Black's weakness at A in the upper right, but lacks the wisdom to wait for an opportunity to exploit it. She attacks immediately with W2. Perhaps she hopes that Black will be scared into defending his cutting point, thereby allowing her to pincer him, with W2 nearby for support. Black is not so easily intimidated, and stabilises his approach stone with B3, attacking White in the process.

W4 is a terrible, weak-kneed move – if you make a threat, you have to be willing to follow through with it, in this case striking through the knight's move with A. Please verify for yourself that this would allow White to create a base for W2, or else sacrifice it and take the corner.

Now that White has made not one, but two moves peeping to aim at the same cutting point, Black could simply defend it and come out ahead, but instead continues to attack with B5. White has another opportunity to cut at A and stabilise her group, but instead jumps out with W6 and W8, inducing Black to move out as well with the moves up to B11. The cut at A still works, in the sense that it would cut Black's stones off from the corner, but they've run out too far to be captured cleanly. Therefore, the cut no longer guarantees the safety of White's group – her stones are now officially weak, as is her *hoshi* in the upper left corner, since she still has not answered B1.

White makes good shape in the centre with W12 and W14, but this gives Black the opportunity to make a second approach on the corner with B15. Ordinarily, White would like to respond to such a move by moving out towards the centre and allowing Black to invade the corner, but with so many Black stones nearby, and her other group still weak, this would be risky.

White timidly protects the corner with W16 and Black seals her in with W17. Although not lost yet, the game is already shaping up to be unpleasant for White.

## Improvement 1 (Fig. 2.2)

It's very early, and the game is close. There is no need for anything fancy or aggressive. W1 (or A) is a totally adequate move – Black doesn't have a perfect move on the top side, so it isn't urgent for White to play there.

It's not easy to choose Black next move, because the top side is full of holes. In cases like this, when no move is entirely satisfactory, a professional might choose to *tenuki*, but B2 and B4 are also reasonable, and likely to be familiar to players this level. White ends in *sente*, and can play first in the lower left corner with W5. The choice to play W5 at the 3-5 point is made because it aims to extend in the direction of B, Black's other weak point. Nonetheless, other moves in the lower left corner are also playable.

The point here is that there was no move for Black that would adequately protect both his approach stone and the weakness at C. There was no rush, therefore, for White to play around there, and in fact, there still isn't. White will of course aim at invading at D later, threatening C, but it is far too early at the moment. Black will probably play on the lower side now, leaving White to enclose the lower left with E. If play proceeds in that fashion, White will emerge from the *fuseki* with a reasonable position.

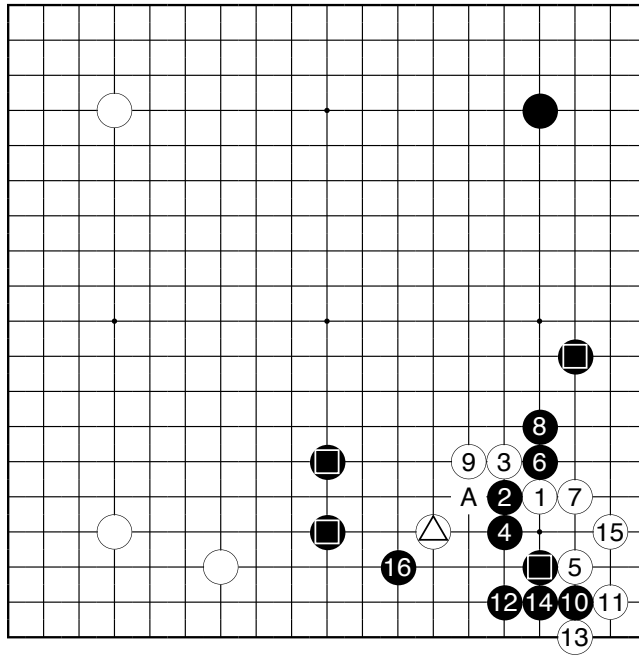


Figure 2.3: White is too greedy

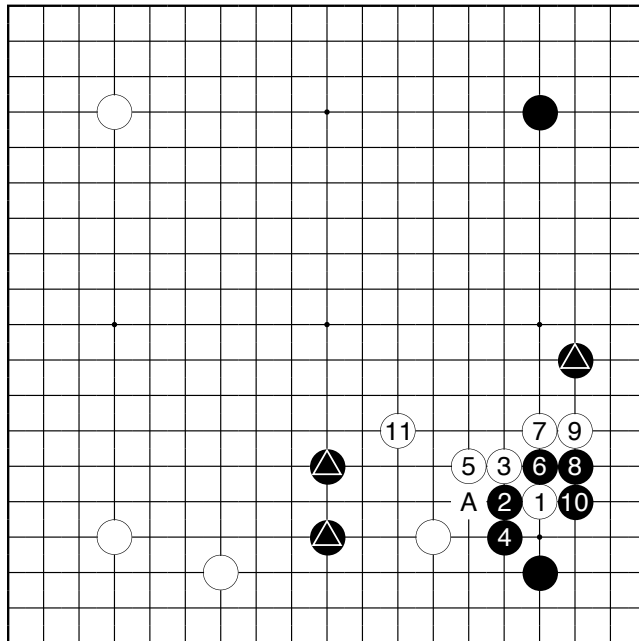


Figure 2.4: White gives Black the corner

## Example 2 (Fig. 2.3)

Black: 2 *kyu*, White: 2 *kyu*. No handicap.

White has put off defending her weak, triangle-marked stone, and now finds it all but surrounded by the four square-marked Black stones. Defense cannot be put off any longer, lest Black it up on a large scale and take a massive corner.

When greatly outnumbered like this, sacrifice is usually the best plan, and large knight's moves are generally aimed at sacrificing one stone or the other. Knowing this, and seeing W1, an observer might nod approvingly and imagine that White knows what she is doing.

Seeing White's thin connection, Black strikes immediately at B2. This must surely be what White expects, and if she plays right, she should get strong on one side or the other. Playing this way is unavoidable for Black, however, since he cannot allow his corner to be surrounded without a fight.

White plays *hane* on the outside with W3, perhaps imitating the moves of a common two-space high pincer *joseki*. She is probably hoping that Black will follow along by playing B4 at A, allowing White to sacrifice the triangle-marked stone in order to live in the corner, but Black has other plans.

Black draws back at B4, and White proceeds to panic. She was planning on sacrificing the outside to take the corner, but now Black wants the corner! Instead of adjusting her plan accordingly, White tries to cling to the corner with W5.

Black cuts with B6, of course, and now White has a problem. Instead of sacrificing one stone, she has now made two groups of two stones, both of which are harder to sacrifice now than they were a few moves before.

Still unwilling to give up on the corner, White draws back at W7, provoking B8. There is still time to sacrifice, by playing W9 at B14 and taking a decent-sized corner, while leaving a bit of ladder *aji* on the outside. Instead, White stubbornly pulls out at W9.

Black attacks the corner with B10. White turns out to have a trick up her sleeve, because she plays the *tesuji* of W11 to make small life in the corner. When Black connects out with B16, however, White's other three stones are adrift in the middle, now too heavy to sacrifice easily, but too much of a burden to save. This is not an adequate result for White, even considering that she was outnumbered four to one to begin with.

## Improvement 2

White's problem most likely stems from misunderstanding her own first move. Perhaps because of the usual result of the aforementioned *joseki*, she seems to believe that she has no choice but to sacrifice the outside in order to live in the corner. This is far from being the case.

In fact, the usual idea of the large knight's move in cases like this is that the two stones are *miai* for sacrifice. Black decides which one he wants, and White gives it to him while strengthening the other. The reason that B4 is not considered *joseki* for Black during the regular two-space high pincer sequence is that it allows White to sacrifice the corner for an outside wall, which is usually better for her than taking the corner.

White should draw back at W5. Black is strong all around, so he might consider pushing and cutting with A to start a fight, but his shape would be very ugly, so White could probably manage something.

If Black plays more naturally, by cutting at B6, White gets exactly what she wants. W7 and W9 force B8 and B10, and then White can make beautiful, light shape with W11. Now Black's triangle-marked stones are all cut off from the corner, and he is the one with two weak groups. White is still a little weak, of course, but that is only to be expected, given the disadvantage she began with; overall, this is an excellent result for her.





## Breaking the habit

The only antidote to this habit is patience. The more you develop your reading ability, the more weaknesses in your opponents' positions will become apparent. This is, of course, a good thing, but it carries with it the risk of being tempted into playing hastily.

The proverb to keep in mind is: Make a fist, then strike. By making your weak groups strong, you aim at not just one cut or invasion, but at all the opponent's weaknesses across the entire board. Chances are, he won't be able to defend against all of them, and with no other weak groups on the board, you will be able to fight aggressively when the time comes to strike.

Whenever you feel the urge to give in to temptation and ignore this advice, consider the losses entailed by making a weak group versus the benefits provided by a strong group. A well-known proverb states that a *ponnuki* in the centre is worth 30 points, because it radiates influence all over the board. The same might be said of any strong, efficient group with significant central influence. Conversely, a weak group in the centre allows the opponent a number of attacks and forcing moves to gain power elsewhere. You can think of a weak group as having negative influence – perhaps as an “anti-*ponnuki*,” worth minus 30 points. If you have a choice between making one weak group strong, or creating a second weak group, the difference in influence can therefore be 60 points or more. Is the cut or invasion you're eyeing so urgent that it's worth taking such a loss? Probably not, so keep that number in mind when your fingers are dangling over the board, about to play that second invasion. It may be enough to convince yourself to play the safe move instead.

## Exceptions

Creating two weak groups, with proper reading and positional judgement, can be a form of *miai* strategy. In this case, the plan is to sacrifice whichever group the opponent attacks, in order to make the other group strong. This is dangerous, as the opponent may find a way to kill both at once, or force you to make them both heavy, so sacrifice is no longer as appealing.

Two weak groups may also be an acceptable risk if there is no chance of a splitting attack. Usually, this means that the groups are far apart and one or both have the option of living on the spot instead of running. Still, having to make life in *gote* is painful, so be sure to consider the overall position carefully before trying something of the sort.

# Invasion instead of reduction

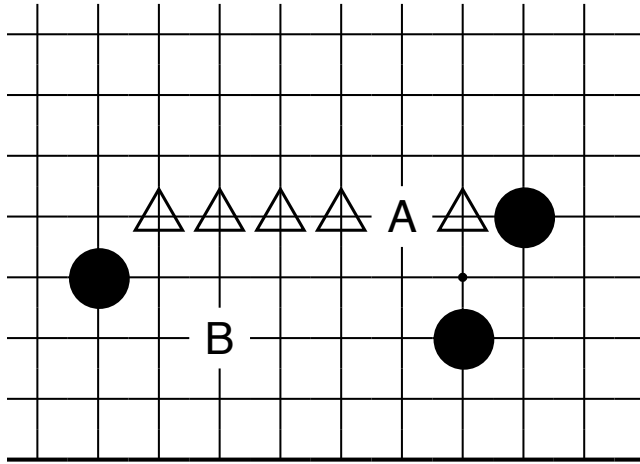


Diagram 2.2: Shallow reduction versus deep invasion

## The mistake

When the time comes to deal with the opponent's *moyo*, there are two possible approaches. You can invade deeply and fight your way out, or make a shallow reduction around the outer edge of the framework. In Diagram 2.2, the triangles mark the approximate edge of Black's framework, so a White move at A, inside that border, would be an invasion, while B, right on it, would be a reduction.

The advantage of an invasion is that it takes away more territory in the immediate area and may end up dividing the opponent into two groups. The downside is that the invading stone will usually come under severe attack and, even after it escapes, is more likely to be a burden than to prove useful elsewhere. A reduction, on the other hand, takes a more modest bite out of the *moyo* and allows the opponent to connect underneath, but seeks to avoid coming under attack while also building useful influence towards the centre.

Because an invasion destroys more territory locally and the influence gained by a reduction is hard to quantify, many players systematically underestimate the value of reduction. They forget that there is more than one way to deal with the opponent's *moyo* and consequently invade deeply when gentler tactics are called for.

## The rationale

*"The more deeply I invade, the more territory I destroy. I think this is the deepest move I can make and still escape, so it must be correct. If I played any more shallowly, it would be underplay, because I'd be allowing him more territory than absolutely necessary."*

## The reality

Needless to say, an invasion that dies without compensation is a failure, but the opposite is not necessarily true. Merely surviving or escaping is not enough to make an invasion a success. It is small-minded to judge the merits of an invasion solely by the amount of territory it destroys locally. Regardless of whether or not the invading stones escape, the opponent will take profit elsewhere while attacking. In the case of an unreasonable invasion, the opponent's gains elsewhere will likely be greater than the amount of territory destroyed in the first place.

Meanwhile, the value of a reduction is not limited to the amount of territory it destroys. By definition, a reduction is shallow enough to avoid direct attack, so the opponent can only defend underneath, or else ignore it. In the first case, the *moyo* is limited in sente, without serious repercussion, and in the second, the reducing stone will support a deeper invasion later on. Meanwhile, because it is safer from attack than an invasion and has access to the centre, the reducing stone will have some influence to aid in fighting elsewhere, or possibly even to help you build a *moyo* of your own.

When you subtract the value of the counter-attack from the territory destroyed by an invasion, and add the value of the reducing stone's influence to the territory it destroys, quite often the reduction turns out to be worth as much or more than an invasion, and without all the complications. This is the way you need to think when choosing the best point to reduce or invade; simply figuring out the deepest move that you think you can make live is not enough.

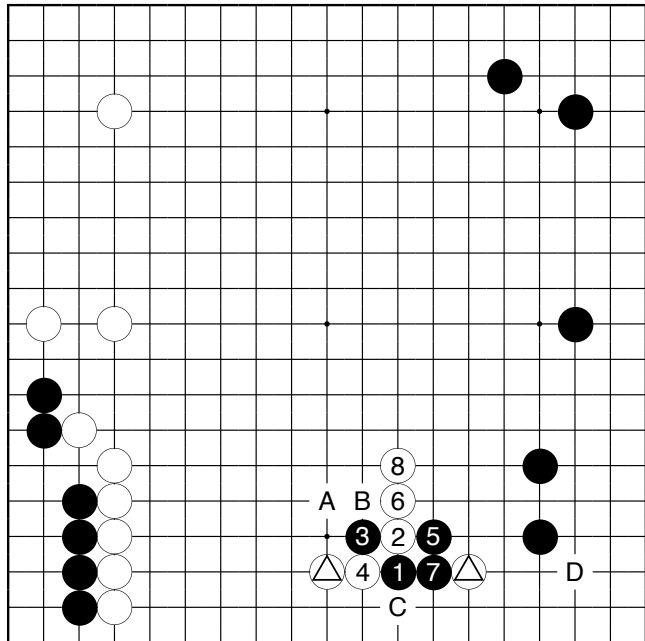


Figure 2.5: Black's invasion only helps White

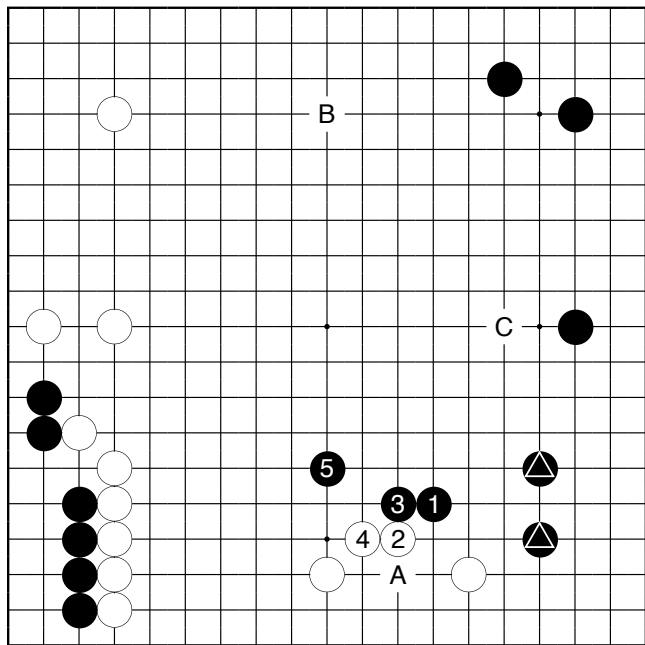


Figure 2.6: Black enlarges his own moyo while reducing

## Example 1 (Fig. 2.5)

Black: 3 *kyu*, White: 2 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

Black has just finished invading the lower left corner, putting himself ahead in territory but White ahead in the balance of power. He has ended in *sente*, and the critical issue is now the *moyo* contest between White's lower side and centre against Black's right side. If Black can keep White's expansion in check without damaging his own positions elsewhere, his chances in the game are good.

B1 is both hot-headed and short-sighted, aimed at destroying a few points of territory while ignoring the competing frameworks on either side. With the White wall looming so close to the left, Black cannot afford a complicated fight here. However White goes about attacking, it is likely that she will expand her own *moyo* out into the centre, while Black's right side (or at least the lower right corner) will sustain some damage. Were the whole space between the two-triangle marked stones to become territory, it is only between six and ten points, so an invasion here is not that large, even in absolute terms, and worth almost nothing at all in comparison to both players' *moyo* prospects.

W2 is also a mistake, attaching to a weak stone (see "Attaching to Weak Groups" in Section III: Helping the Opponent). Almost any other response would be better; attacking aggressively with a diagonal move at W5, jumping to A or B, or even attaching underneath with c (as a sacrifice to build influence above).

B3 is a third blunder in a row, allowing White to get a good result despite W2. If Black played B5 first, instead of B3, his result would be much better than in the actual game, though still not as good as if he hadn't played B1 to begin with. Please investigate the continuations on your own to discover why the move order is so important.

Most of the time, W6 would be a mistake, since the usual goal of this pattern is to establish connection between the triangle-marked stones (see "Invasion in a Three-Space Extension" in Section V: Commonly Blundered Patterns). Here, however, it is good. Black cuts off one stone with B7, but his gain is not so large, because the corner is still open for invasion at D. Meanwhile, White's *moyo* has been enlarged, and is now so strong that it can almost be regarded as territory.

## Improvement 1 (Fig. 2.6)

Although B3 in the game diagram is partly to blame for Black's bad result, W2 was a mistake as well. In a sense, those tactical blunders cancel each other out, so the strategic blunder of B1 must be held ultimately responsible for the disaster. If Black had stopped for a moment to consider options other than invasion, the situation could have been the complete opposite.

B1 is a very common move in *moyo* battles like this. The horse's head shape formed between B1 and the two triangle-marked stones is very strong, and B1 lands on a pivotal point between the two *moyos*, expanding Black's position while reducing White's. Furthermore, Black aims next at the invasion of A, which would now be much more successful as a result of the support of B1.

If White clings to territory with W2 and W4, Black will get to press with B3 and then jump to B5. The result is that White's *moyo* has been flattened out, while it is now Black whose position extends well out into the centre.

Of course, White should not defend at W2. She may instead take the big point at B, or try a pre-emptive reduction of Black's *moyo* around C. In those cases, however, Black has still succeeded in neutralising the White lower side *moyo* and will look for a chance to play A or another strong follow-up on the lower side. Either way, B1 is of huge strategic value.

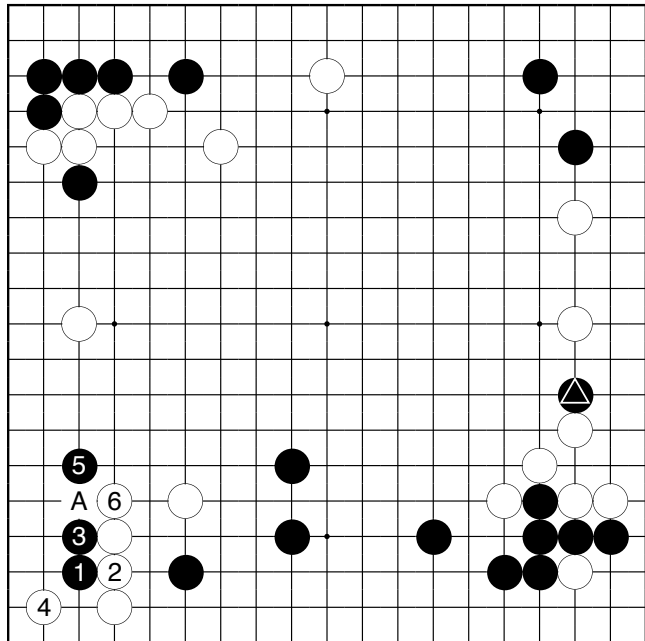


Figure 2.7: Black's invasion is unreasonable

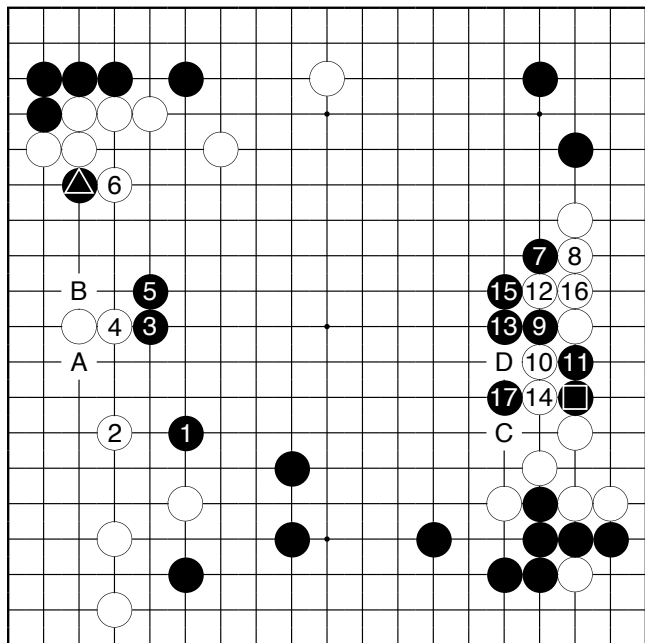


Figure 2.8: Reduction aims at controlling the centre

## Example 2 (Fig. 2.7)

Black: 4 *kyu*, White: 3 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

As a result of a mistake Black made in the lower right, White has managed to take a significant bite out of his territory there and cut off the triangle-marked stone in the process. White seems to have a lot of potential on the left and in the centre, so Black has fallen behind, but he does have a lot of solid territory, so things are not hopeless.

Perhaps upset with his loss in the lower right, Black rashly tries to steal White's corner, tit for tat, with the peep of B1 followed by the extension of B3. White undermines Black's eyespace with W4, then B5 and W6 are fairly natural.

The fight that ensues is not shown here, because it is complicated and distracts from the main point. A glance is enough to see that it won't be easy for Black. Anyway, White could simply have played W4 at A, and although Black could probably make small life in the corner, it would be *gote*, and he would have failed to address the more pressing issue of White's central influence.

B1 and B3 are desperate moves, of the sort one should try only when the game is already lost, in order to seek complications one last time before resigning. The situation was not nearly that hopeless, so Black should have tried a more subtly aggressive strategy.

## Improvement 2 (Fig. 2.8)

A reduction may seem like a more passive move than an invasion, but this is not necessarily true. After an invasion, it is usually the invading player who ends up on the defensive. A reduction, on the other hand, aims to force the opponent to defend his territory or else risk a deeper invasion. In this sense, it is an aggressive move, seeking to push the opponent around in *sente* or set up a later attack.

An opponent with a moderate lead is a prime target for this kind of bullying strategy. Instead of invading, imagine Black plays B1 here. White, knowing she has the lead, would like to avoid complications, so she is likely to defend, rather than counterattacking or ignoring it.

W2 secures a fairly large corner, but Black has the lead in solid territory, so he can afford to allow his opponent some. Because White defended passively, Black can reduce further with B3.

B3 aims at attaching at A or B, so White may be tempted to defend against both at once by butting with W4. Black next stretches to B5, aiming at setting the triangle-marked stone in motion. White would risk having her wall become heavy and weak if she ignored this, so she defends with W6.

Black has done all he can on the left side, so he turns to the right to bully White some more with the help of the square-marked stone that was cut off earlier. Up to B17, White has solidified a lot of territory, but not much more than Black, while it is now Black, rather than White, who has a great deal of potential in the centre. B17 may look a bit strange, but it is good for the centre, because it makes gives Black either C or D in *sente*.

Of course, a strong player, playing White, would not allow her lead to be snatched away so easily. At some point, she would say "enough is enough" and resist Black's reductions. Nonetheless, at that point Black would have achieved the complications he wanted, without needing to make a suicidal invasion. Victory might not be easy, but at least the fight would be fair.





## Breaking the habit

There are many standard patterns for reduction, and they are usually simpler than invasion techniques. Take the time to study some of them, like the capping move of B in Diagram 2.2, the horse's head reduction of B1 in Figure 2.6 and the shoulder hit of B7 in Figure 2.8. You can find many examples of these moves in both professional and amateur games. From watching these, and experimenting in your own games, you will learn the common continuations. Once you know what to expect, you will be able to visualise the result, and see how it fits in with the whole board position. Most of the time, it will look pretty good, much better than running for life with a weak group.

Quite often, the opponent will defend underneath your reducing move. In doing so, his territory will become solidified. Do not think of this as "giving him" territory. If he has invested several stones in a *moyo*, it is to be expected that he will make some profit as a result, be it locally or as a result of attacking an invasion. You cannot take all his territory away, no matter how hard you try, so you're only "giving" him what he had to begin with. If your opponent defends, think about it as limiting him in *sente* and building some influence for yourself, instead.

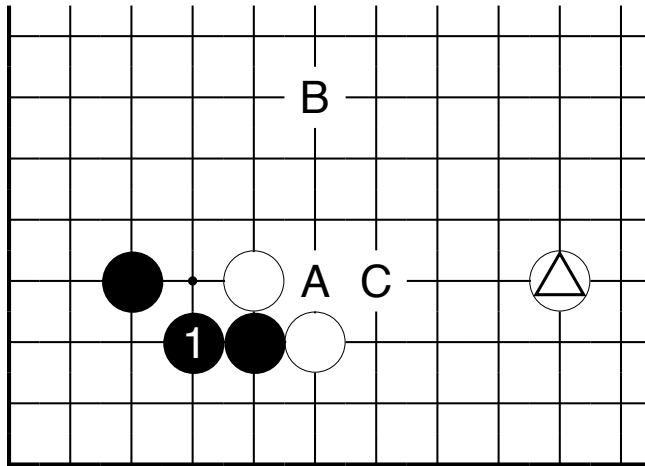
Conversely, when you're thinking about an invasion, do not think about it as attacking your opponent. It is you that will be attacked. Don't think about it as taking territory away from him, either; you're only forcing him to make his territory elsewhere. Sometimes, that may be what you want to do, but make sure you understand the meaning of your move before playing it.

## Exceptions

The most common reason an invasion may be preferable to a reduction is that one or both sides of the opponent's *moyo* will become weak groups once the invading stones are safe. In this case, the invasion has implications for attack & defence, which make it much more worthwhile than an invasion that is just about territory.

Late in the middlegame, most areas of the board will have been played out already. At that point, it may be hard for the opponent to find anywhere to take profit by attacking an invasion. If it is possible to invade successfully after the surroundings have all been stabilised, then it may be a good way to shift the balance of territory.

# Heavy play



*Diagram 2.3: The colour of the marked stone is crucial*

## The mistake

One of the things that confuses many beginners about Go is that the same arrangement of stones can be either good or bad, depending on the surroundings. “Light” and “thick” are words often used to praise two different kinds of good shape, while “heavy” and “thin” are used negatively. The trouble is that the same shape might be light in some circumstances and thin in others, while another shape might be thick in some cases and heavy in others.

Let’s introduce some new terms to talk about shapes themselves, independent of the surroundings. How about “tight” and “loose”? Stones of the same color that are solidly or almost solidly connected together would be “tight,” for example, while ones with large gaps between them, like large or extra-large knight’s moves would be “loose.” Either type of shape has its advantages; tight moves are solid, strong, inseparable. Loose moves are more efficient and flexible. Accordingly, they both have their downsides: tight moves are inflexible and make sacrifices and exchanges difficult, while loose moves risk getting cut.

When tight moves render your stones impervious to attack, they are called thick and moves that leave cutting points would be called thin.

However, in a situation where being cut would allow a favourable sacrifice, while keeping one’s stones connected merely allows the opponent to attack the group as a whole, loose moves are called light, and tight moves are called heavy. This is usually the case when one is heavily outnumbered, such as while invading the opponent’s *moyo*.

Consider Diagram 2.3, which shows a pattern commonly seen in the opening. After B1, it is White’s turn to move. With the triangle-marked stone in place, White should make the solid connection at A. Because of the support of the friendly stone, this is a thick move. However, imagine that the triangle-marked stone was Black, rather than White. Now, a would merely make it impossible for White to sacrifice his stones and bring her under attack. It would be a heavy move. Surrounded on both sides like that, White should instead make the light jump to B. If Black was to cut at a, White would happily play atari at C, willing to give up one stone in order to build a wall. This sort of sacrifice option is the defining feature of light shape.

Because of the confusion between “heavy” and “thick,” many amateurs allow their groups to become heavy in hostile territory, and consequently end up in serious trouble.

## The rationale

*“I’m under attack, so I need to play safe, solid moves. If he cuts and I end up with two weak groups while he’s so strong all around, one of them is bound to get killed. Besides, if I make myself thick, I can counterattack later.”*

## The reality

It’s true that ending up with two weak groups is always a bad thing. Certainly, if there are two groups of stones to be linked, neither of which can be sacrificed, then the safe, solid move is the right one. However, you can usually sacrifice single stones without regret, as long as you get compensation of one form or another. This is especially true in situations when you’re outnumbered; inside the opponent’s sphere of influence, saving every stone should not be your goal – establishing a living group or access to the centre should be. If you have to cut loose a few stones in order to achieve a viable shape, you shouldn’t shed too many tears about it.

As for the belief that solid moves are always thick, the definition of thickness requires that it be impervious to attack. It is that safety that makes it useful, freeing your hands to fight without reservation in the vicinity. A solidly connected group that is under attack is far from thick - it is a liability. In fact, although the two sometimes resemble each other in terms of the arrangement of the stones, thickness and heaviness are the exact opposites of one another in their effect on the game.

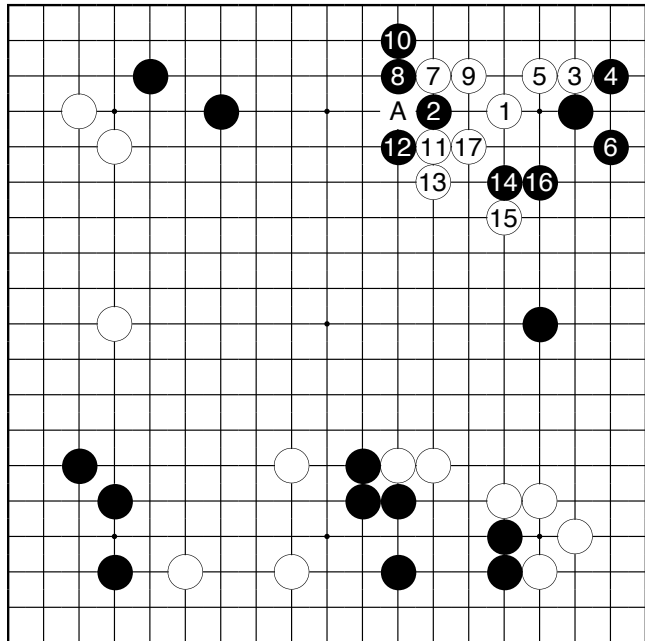


Figure 2.9: White has bad shape and no base

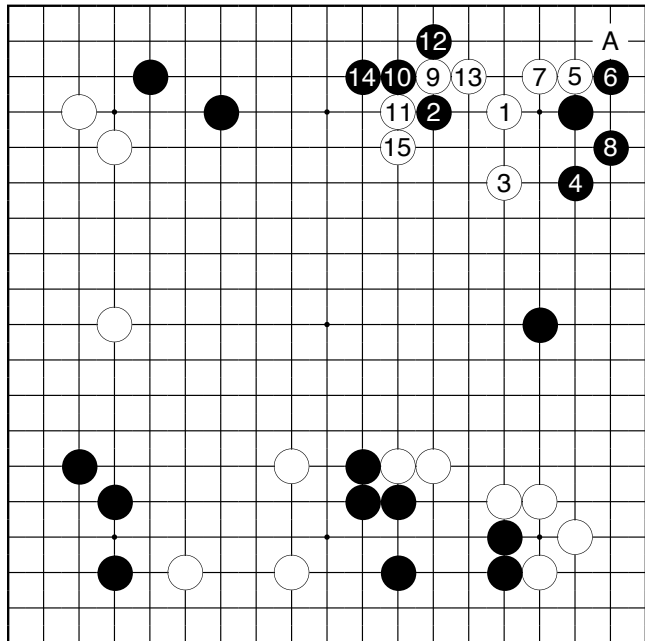


Figure 2.10: The crosscut is a lighter way to play

## Example 1 (Fig. 2.9)

Black: 5 *kyu*, White: 5 *kyu*. No handicap.

With three corners of the board pretty much settled, White has decided that the time has come to approach Black's *komoku* in the upper right. There is nothing very wrong with W1, although approaching at W9 instead is also worth thinking about.

Black has friends nearby on both sides and therefore pincers, choosing the most severe one possible – the one-space high pincer of B2. Most of the time, the best answer to a pincer is some sort of jump towards the centre, but perhaps White fears the attack she'll face there, and chooses instead to attach immediately in the corner with W3. This move is not unplayable; the bad moves are still to come.

Black, of course, makes the *hane* of B4 to prevent White from living easily in the corner. Drawing back solidly with W5 is already a bit heavy, but still not so bad. Black must continue to defend the corner with B6 to prevent White from finding life there.

Next, White attaches on the other side with W7. This is questionable, but might be playable if the plan is to answer a *hane* with a crosscut or counter-*hane*, both of which are light moves. Black does play *hane* again with B8, but White draws back again at W9. It wasn't so bad the first time, but to do it twice is unbearably heavy. Black descends to B10 to undermine White's eyespace.

The clamp of W11 is a terrible move, since the natural reply of B12 means that White has lost the chance to cut at A. Next, White should draw back to W17 immediately, but she tries to move out more quickly with W13 instead. B14 is a great move – one worth studying – since it hits White directly on the vital point of her shape.

At last, White tries something a little bit light and flexible by attaching at W15, but it is already too late. Once a shape is heavy, it can never become light again; Black simply draws back at B16 and White has no choice but to make an empty triangle with W17. The attack will continue from here, and although White's group is unlikely to die, the havoc Black can wreak elsewhere while chasing it will make this a difficult and painful game for White.

## Improvement 1

Even though Black has support nearby, there is nothing wrong with jumping out to W3 – after all, there is a proverb stating that a one-space jump is never bad. Black cannot allow his corner to get sealed in, so he jumps to B4. Playing W5 and W7 is better now than it was in the game – Black must still play B8 to prevent White from settling in the corner with A, so now B4 looks rather slow. If White had played W5 and W7 first, Black would not answer W3 with B4

Just as in the game, White can proceed to attach on the other side with W9, but the critical difference is W11. Instead of drawing back, White crosscuts, willing to let either W9 or W11 go if it means safety for her group as a whole.

Black can respond to the crosscut in a variety of ways, but playing *atari* at B12 and drawing back to B14 is considered *joseki* in most cases. After White extends outwards to W15, swallowing up B2, she is thick, not heavy; her group is solidly linked up and has enough eyeshape to be considered alive. This sequence shows that light moves, such as the crosscut of W11, can turn into thickness later. Heavy moves, on the other hand, are usually doomed to remain heavy.

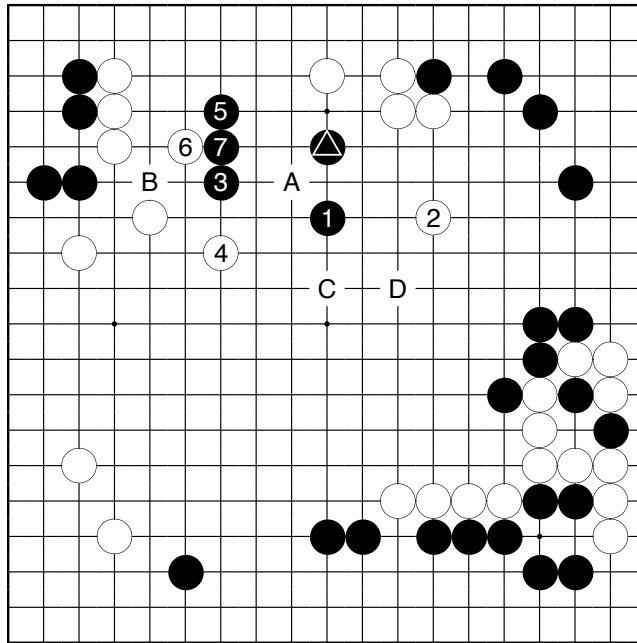


Figure 2.11: Black doesn't understand his own shape

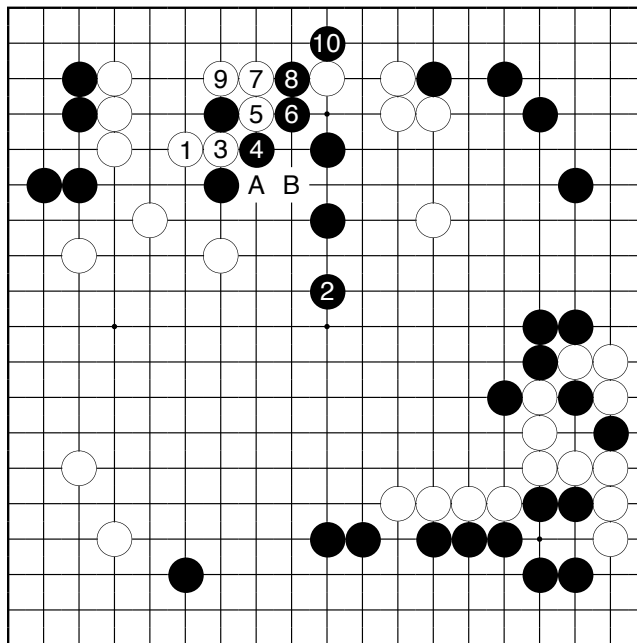


Figure 2.12: The cut is not threatening

## Example 2 (Fig. 2.11)

Black: 4 *kyu*, White: 3 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

Light shapes can become heavy in the blink of an eye; it only takes one unnecessary stone for a group to lose its flexibility, as this example will illustrate.

When Black begins his defense of the triangle-marked stone by jumping out to B1, he is starting on the right foot. White correctly attacks from the weaker side by jumping to W2, but this misses the chance to peep at A and make Black heavy. Black seizes the opportunity to make good shape and prevent the peep at A by playing B3.

White caps with W4, and Black cleverly spots the fact that B5 makes further good shape while also creating *aji* around B. White doesn't like this weakness, so she fixes it with the peep at W6, to which Black connects at B7.

Many players would find nothing wrong with this sequence – indeed, each move by both sides seems to have plenty of justification. There is something wrong, however, and that is with the last move – the connection at B7.

I think I hear someone shouting: “But I thought that even a moron connects at a peep!” Well, so says the proverb, but proverbs aren't always right. Before B7 was played, B3 and B5 were light. Now that they are solidly connected, they have lost their flexibility – Black can no longer sacrifice one without also sacrificing the other, and has invested too much to let all three stones go. Furthermore, the connection is *gote* and does little to improve the eyeshape of the group. To call it a wasted move would be going too far, but Black has given White the initiative to attack aggressively with C or more cautiously with D, so his situation is not good.

## Improvement 2 (Fig. 2.12)

Black's two triangle-marked stones are already doing their job – making some potential eyespace for his group while simultaneously preventing the White group on the right from connecting to friendly forces. There is no need to reinforce them further. If Black did want to protect himself from being cut, B6 would be the correct shape, rather than the direct connection. However, even that would be too timid.

If Black stops to think for a moment, rather than assuming that he must answer W1 because it is peep, he will realise that he has little to be afraid of.

Imagine that Black ignores the peep and jumps to B2. If White tries to “punish” Black for his *tenuki* by pushing in at W3, Black can block at B4. If White insists on cutting with W5, Black is very happy to force twice with B6 and B8, then *hane* with B10, seriously injuring White's group to the right.

If White cut on the other side, with a, Black would *atari* once with B, then connect at W5 for a similarly favourable result. Since either cut gives Black a good result, White naturally will not play either of these sequences, but will simply accept the fact that W1 was *gote* and play elsewhere.

These possibilities are very simple to read out, so there is no excuse not to do so before assuming that a connection is needed. Unnecessary moves are bad moves, so as soon as it is clear that the damage done by ignoring the peep will be minimal, it is better to turn elsewhere and defend the group as a whole.

There is nothing deep or special about B2, but it is a good move nonetheless. Black moves out into the centre, where it will be easy to connect to either the lower side or the right, and there is a good chance that White's top side group will come under attack. Black is far ahead in territory, so steady moves like this will make for an easy game.





## Breaking the habit

Trying to save every stone is the most common reason players find their groups becoming heavy, so the most important thing is to train yourself not to become attached to individual stones. If you have a few stones scattered in your opponent's *moyo*, you don't have to connect them all together in order to succeed; connecting any one of them to the outside is usually enough to take a big chunk out of your opponent's potential territory. Letting one stone go usually provides you with one or more useful forcing moves to strengthen the others.

It's also important to understand the way light play works. Simply mimicking light moves you've seen in stronger players' games is not good enough; if you make light moves, but then try to save everything when the opponent attacks, you'll get a bad result and feel like giving up and going back to your old, heavy ways. For light play to work, you have to learn to dodge attacks. Experience is really the only way to do that, but watching the follow-ups to light play in professional games should speed up the process.

Lastly, you need to be able to identify when light play is necessary or appropriate, and when more solid defences are in order. One good rule of thumb is that eyeshape and access to the centre take precedence over solidity. If you already have eyes and/or a clear route to the centre, you may be able to afford to make solid connections. Otherwise, make your escape lightly and worry about stitching up your weaknesses later.

## Exceptions

Light play only works if any one part of the group can be given up to solidify the rest. If there is some part of your group that cannot be sacrificed – a cutting stone, or a connection to another weak group for instance – you may have to play heavily, as painful as that is.

Light play also requires a certain amount of room to manoeuvre. When invading in tight quarters, conditions may be too cramped to play as lightly as one might otherwise like. This is one of the reasons that reduction is often a better idea than invasion; because they are played on the boundary of a framework, rather than inside it, they usually have ample space for light tactics, whereas invasions are more prone to becoming heavy.

# Leaving multiple cutting points

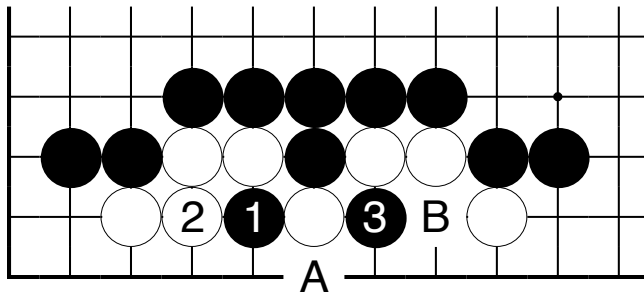


Diagram 2.4: Two cuts, combined, can be deadly.

## The mistake

One of the most fundamental strategic principles in Go is maintaining connection between your own stones and separating those of the opponent. It is therefore somewhat surprising that so many players systematically underestimate the losses that can result from leaving unprotected cutting points for the opponent to exploit.

Although reckless style and overconfidence in their own fighting ability is part of the problem for many of these players, even conservative players may fall prey if they consider their cutting points as independent local problems, instead of looking at the situation as a whole.

Just as two weak groups pose a much greater burden than one (see “Creating Two Weak Groups,” earlier in this section), multiple cutting points are a greater danger than the sum of their parts. A classic example of this is shown in Diagram 2.4. Neither of the two cuts B1 and B3 would work on its own – whichever is played first can be captured easily, as W2 shows. However, the second cut is then fatal; B3 makes *miai* of A and B. This position, or one much like it, should be familiar to most players – what beginning Go player has not fallen into this pitfall a few times before learning his lesson? Sometimes, however, the implications of multiple cutting points are further-reaching, and harder to see.

## The rationale

*“At the moment, these cuts aren’t much of a problem. None of my stones are so weak that they’ll die if they get cut apart; I can just fight it out. Besides, if one of the cuts starts looking more dangerous as the game goes on, I can always protect it later. Meanwhile, I have more urgent things to attend to, like attacking my opponent; if I stop to defend, he’ll be able to save his group.”*

## The reality

Even if two cutting points in question are further apart than the ones in Diagram 2.4 – even if they are at opposite corners of the board, in fact – they cannot always be considered independently. Tactical matters (such as the double atari of B3 in Diagram 2.4) aside, there is a strategic balance that needs to be preserved in your whole board position. Even if it means lagging a bit in territory, a thick overall position helps your chances in the long run, creating later opportunities as if by magic. Conversely, a position with a large number of individually minor weaknesses (bad *aji*) will tend to fall apart in surprising ways as the game goes on, leaving you wondering where you went wrong.

The trouble with the idea of putting off defending until it becomes necessary is that by the time it becomes necessary, there may not be time to make a *gote* defensive move. When later fighting sends weak groups running towards your unprotected cutting points, the value of preemptive reinforcement becomes apparent.

Multiple cutting points can arise from being too greedy in your attempts to make territory, but perhaps more commonly from overzealous attacks on your opponent’s weak groups. When the opponent has a weak group nearby, it is easy to feel like you need to make the most severe attack possible. Solidifying your own position feels too passive, like defending when one should be taking the offensive. The truth is that making a thin group thick is often a good way to attack, because it tends to make it much harder for the opponent to obtain good shape and makes later attacking moves from the opposite side much more severe, since they chase him or her towards thickness, rather than thinness.

Conversely, trying to attack too severely when your shape is thin is a good way to blunder a good position into a disaster. Multiple cuttings points mean giving the opponent many options to counterattack and capture some stones, making eyes in the process. Even if the opponent cannot exploit the cuts immediately, an attack cannot be considered a success if it leaves behind too many weaknesses to be patched up later.

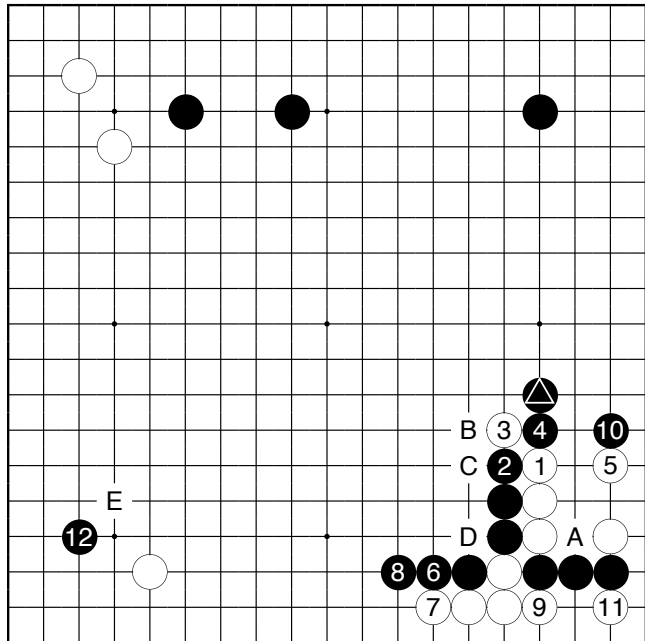


Figure 1.13: Black's cutting points are a huge burden

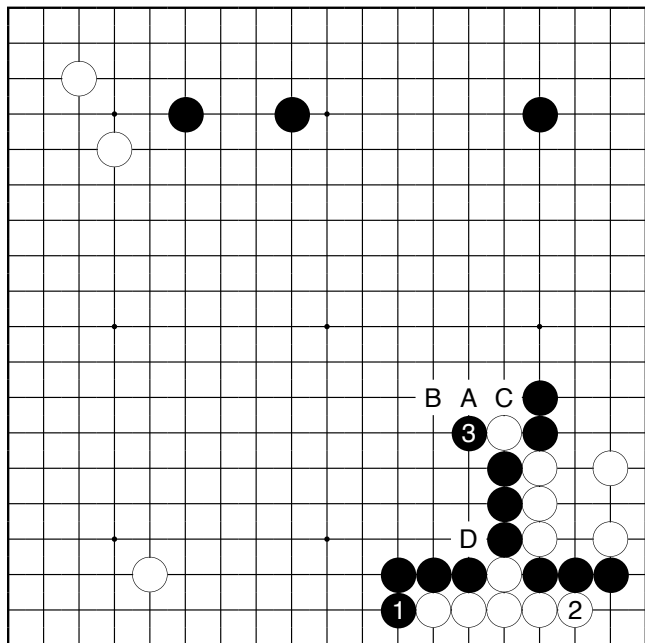


Figure 1.14: Black is unbelievably thick

## Example 1 (Fig. 1.13)

Black: 2 *kyu*, White: 1 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

The position in the lower right may seem a little bit unusual, but all the moves before W1 follow a two-space high pincer *joseki* seen once in a while in professional games. W1, however, is a bit slack; it is usually played at A, to take the corner and cede Black thickness, or else at B2 to provoke a complicated fight.

B2 is inevitable and leaves White in a bit of a predicament, because Black's triangle-marked stone is perfectly placed. For White to play at B4 and allow Black to play at W3 is no good, so White makes a *hane* at W3, leaving Black no choice but to cut with B4.

Unfortunately for White, the tenuous situation of her stones on the right makes it unreasonable for her to fight with B or C. She must instead defend them, which she does with W5. Black gets to play B6 and B8 in *sente*, forcing White to crawl on the second line to keep her hold on the corner.

B10 and W11 are both mistakes, since W11 is not needed – White is ahead in the capturing race on the right side anyway, so B10 should have been *gote*.

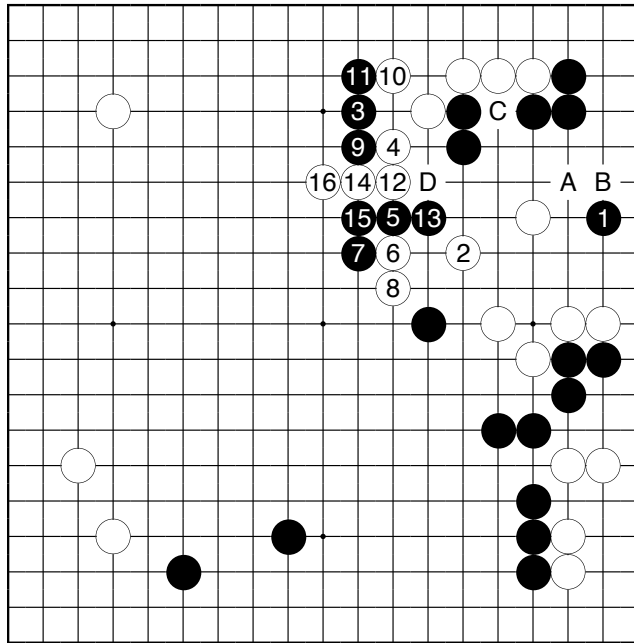
Because White responded to B10, Black still has handled both the right and lower sides in *sente* and can now deal with the cut of W3. Instead, he ignores it and turns to the lower left with B12.

Perhaps Black he feels that W3 does not pose much of a threat, since it is unlikely that either his stones on the right or on the bottom will die. This is missing the point, however. White can choose between moving out with B or attacking Black's shape more directly with C. Both moves aim at the Black's second weakness at D, so he will have to defend the lower side and allow White to attack his group on the right. Whatever happens, his central influence will be ruined and he will have no compensation for the profit he gave White in the corner. Worse, because he approached at B12, White has the option to press at E to build influence whenever she needs it.

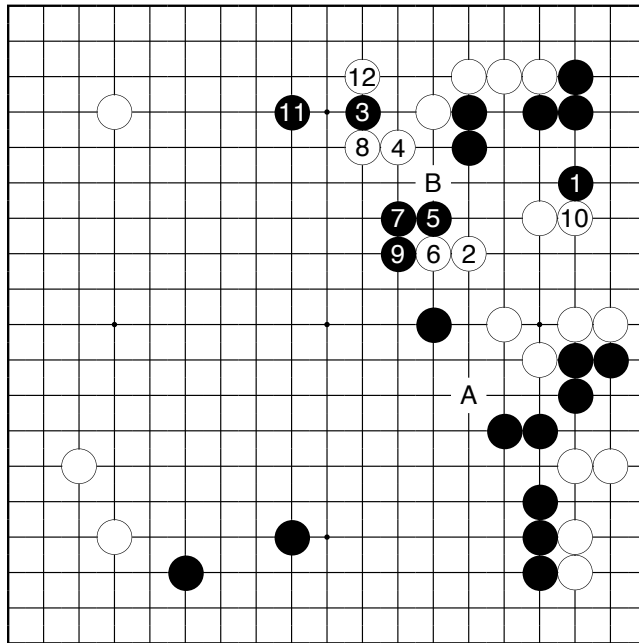
## Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.14)

After forcing with B1 (which, unlike B10 in the game diagram, actually does have to be answered), Black should capture the cutting stone in a ladder with B3. Of course, he would prefer to capture in a net if that was possible, but it isn't – please verify for yourself that neither A nor B works without extra support nearby.

Even if the ladder was good for White, it would not be reasonable for her to run out at C immediately, so Black will get to make a *ponnuki* capture there, and should do so as soon as possible to remove all *aji* from the position. It may seem a bit slow to play like this, but Black's thickness will be awe-inspiring – not even the possibility of a peep will remain of the former weakness at D. Meanwhile the potential of his top-side *moyo* will be greatly increased, while building one on the left will be harder for White. The game is quite favourable for Black at this point.



*Figure 1.15: Black's reckless attack backfires*



*Figure 1.16: A more modest attack succeeds*

## Example 2 (Fig. 1.15)

Black: 3 kyu, White: 2 kyu. 1 handicap.

This is an extreme example of what can go wrong if one tries too hard to attack severely, instead of putting safety first. White has invaded the right side and Black has managed to prevent her from connecting to the lower right corner, albeit at the expense of making bad shape for himself.

Black begins his attack with B1 to sweep out White's eyespace. This move is questionable for two reasons; first of all, it goes against the principle of cutting off escape routes first (see "Attacking Eyespace Before Escape Routes," later in this section). Secondly, a White move at A would simultaneously threaten to cut off B1 with B or to cut through Black's wall with C. This is a good example of how multiple cutting points pose local, tactical problems, but worse things are to come.

Despite these problems with B1, it isn't terrible for Black. White lacks an extension from her group on top and the route to the centre is uncertain for the group on the right, so by removing its eyes, Black can aim for a splitting attack. White moves out with W2 – a good shape, locally – and Black has to decide how to continue his attack.

B3 is certainly severe, but probably overplay. Still, Black is aiming for a splitting attack, so there is some justification for it. White moves out at W4 and Black splits her groups with the diagonal jump to B5, leaving another obvious weakness at D. However, the situation becomes complicated if White attempts to exploit it immediately, so she decides to continue running with the attachment at W6 instead.

Black chooses to play *hane* with B7, creating yet another cutting point, and White escapes with W8. Black next tries to continue his attack on the top group with B9. Already, his stones are starting to look weaker than the White groups they're supposed to be attacking, so Black should be happy when White defends timidly at W10.

Black has more weaknesses than he can protect with a single move, but because his opponent has played so passively, he can still obtain a passable result if he plays solidly from here on. Instead, he continues his bloodthirsty flailings with B11. This is really too much.

When White plays W12 to connect her groups, Black should accept that his attack is over and play at W14 to make a wall outside – at least he will have some compensation for allowing his corner group to become sealed in. Instead, he stubbornly resists with B13, allowing White to

push through and ruin his position with W14 and W16 (see "Split Shape" in Section IV: Bad Shape).

With the three weakness at A, C and D, it will be impossible for Black to prevent White from either connecting her groups or capturing B1 to live on the right. Meanwhile, Black has gained nothing at all from his attack and White will be able to gain great profit by tormenting Black's three stones on the top side and the four that are soon to be cut adrift in the middle by White D. The game is more or less over for Black.

## Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.16)

Almost every move in the game diagram is more aggressive than it needs to be. Black could go about attacking in a completely different manner, but here is one way to keep some of the same ideas he had without leaving so many weaknesses as to fall apart completely.

It isn't necessarily a bad idea to start off by limiting White's eyespace. B1 prevents White from settling her group by peeping at the same point. If White responds immediately at W10, Black can try to seal her in, but if she doesn't, he threatens to take away all her eyespace by pushing there himself.

If White still moves out with W2 as she did in the game, then Black can squeeze at B3. It isn't as risky as in the game, because B1 is more solid. If White still plays W4, then Black can play B5 – again, a slightly tighter, safer move than the diagonal jump in the game.

If White pushes out with W6, then Black extends with B7. There is no need to try to seal White in by playing a *hane* at B9 immediately – that would only leave a cutting point at B7. B7 threatens to seal in White's top side group, so she pushes at W8 and Black gets to turn at B9.

White could try to get out with A, but Black is strong in that direction, so she might deem it safer to try for some eyes with W10. Black can jump lightly to B11 and White will probably clamp at W12. White's shape is not good on the top side and her group on the right is not clearly alive. Meanwhile, Black's weaknesses at A and B are not so serious, because the rest of his shape is quite good. Most importantly, Black has huge prospects in the centre, so the game is good for him.





## Breaking the habit

Learn to recognise the difference between thickness and influence. A wall with multiple cutting points or peeps that can be made against it still has influence, but it is not thick – it may even end up being more of a burden than it's worth. Thick shape requires that there be no defects, and is worth much more than thin influence. Watch professional games and look for any moves that appear to you to be too slow; these are likely to be *honte* (“honest”) moves that you should learn from – watch how things go later in the game and you'll see why thick play pays off.

When deciding whether a cutting point is a serious danger or not, don't think only about what happens if the opponent cuts immediately. It may be that you can capture the cutting stone as things stand, but look carefully to identify which moves in the vicinity would render the cut a real threat. For instance, if you plan on capturing a cutting stone in a net, look at the places that would end up being peeps against that net. Would an enemy stone on one of these weak points also aim at another weakness nearby or be helpful in a fight that is likely to occur? If so, you might need to defend. In particular, beware of relying on ladders to protect your cutting points – ladder *aji* is just about the most serious there is.

Take a more relaxed view of attacking. Remember the proverb, “Make a fist, then strike.” If you find yourself getting stretched too thin for comfort, take a breather and fix your cutting points. If your opponent responds by defending his group, you've made thickness in *sente*. If he doesn't, your attack will be that much more severe when you resume it.

## Exceptions

If your overall position is fairly strong in the vicinity, directly fixing a cutting point may leave you overconcentrated. Even so, there may be a way to fix it indirectly while expanding the position at the same time, perhaps by leaning on one of the opponent's groups.

If a cutting point is already deep inside a friendly *moyo*, attacking it directly may be too deep an invasion for the opponent to attempt. In that case, defense may not be needed, but be sure to chase any invading stones away from, rather than towards your weaknesses.

Protecting against a cut might also be optional if there are only one or two stones on one side of the cutting point, and they are not pivotal to a territory or *moyo*. In such cases, however, you must remember that by leaving the cut open, you are accepting that it may be necessary to sacrifice the stones if the opponent cuts.

# Approaching from the closed side

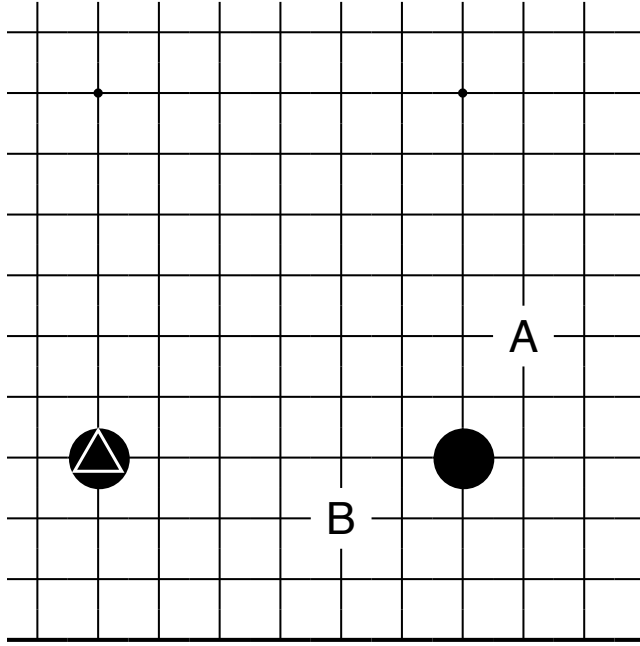


Diagram 2.5: The right side is open

## The mistake

Assuming both players play their first moves in the corners as usual, at some point in almost every game, it becomes necessary to approach a corner controlled by your opponent. Sometimes there is only one side from which an approach is possible, but more often, there is a question of which direction to approach from, especially when in the case of symmetric corner moves like *hoshi* or *san-san*.

As with most strategic issues in Go, there is a proverb available to serve as a rule of thumb when faced with uncertainty. It is: “Approach from the open side.” Here, “open” means the side where the opponent has fewer stones (or none at all), or where his stones are further away.

For example, consider the situation shown in Diagram 2.5, which occurs very frequently in the opening. Black has a stone on the *hoshi* in the corner, and has made a wide extension to the triangle-marked stone, in the middle of one adjacent side, while neither player has yet played on the other side. If White wants to approach Black’s corner, A and B are the points that would first spring to mind for most players. But which to choose?

What does the proverb tell us? Black has a stone on the right side, and none on the bottom – therefore the right is the closed side, and the bottom is the open side. The correct move in most cases, then, is A. Nonetheless, I often see weaker players choosing moves like B, usually getting themselves into all sorts of trouble.

## The rationale

*“He already has some stones on that side of the board. If I approach from the open side, he’ll add yet another stone to his side, and then I’ll never be able to invade.”*

## The reality

The idea that you must play in the areas where the opponent has the most stones in order to prevent him from making territory there is absurd. When fighting a war, is it generally preferable to attack from a position where you have the support of your own forces (or at least neutral ground to fall back to) or from one that is surrounded on all sides by hostile troops? Why should Go be any different?

It is neither necessary nor possible to prevent the opponent from making any territory at all, so any argument that begins with “he was going to make some territory there, so I had to…” is almost guaranteed to be wrong. The correct attitude, most of the time, is to seek to establish a position for yourself, while limiting the opponent’s expansion.

Here’s another way to look at it. What is your first impulse when the opponent makes a pincer attack? Depending on the particular situation and your style, it may be to dive into the corner, to jump into the centre or, more rarely, to attach to the corner or pincer stone. *Tenuki*, however, is not usually the first thing that springs to mind when you come under attack like this. This is exactly what you’re doing by approaching from the closed side – by playing your approach from a direction where your opponent already has a pincer stone in place, the position becomes identical to one in which you ignored a pincer and let the opponent get two moves in a row. Why ask for trouble?

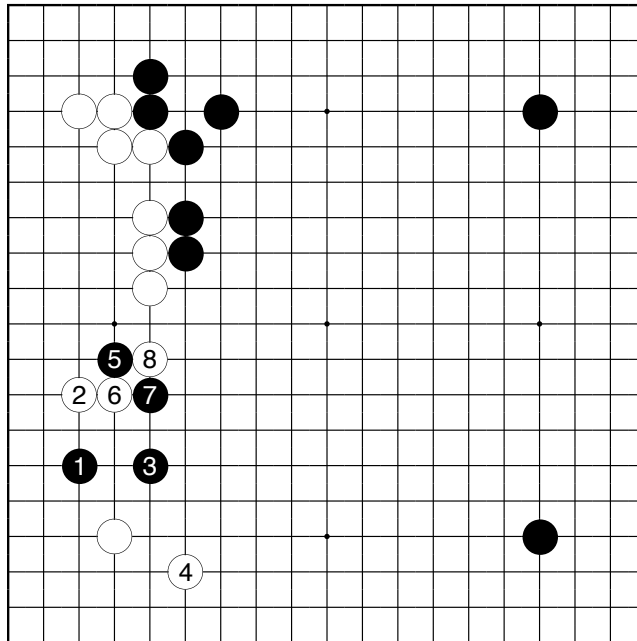


Figure 1.17: White doesn't have to follow joseki

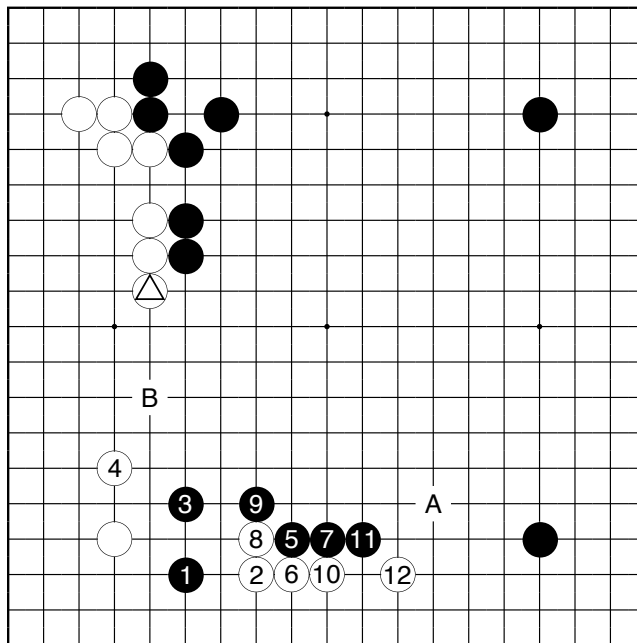


Figure 1.18: Black dominates the centre

## Example 1 (Fig. 1.17)

Black: 8 *kyu*, White: 7 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

The result in the top left is that Black has established a very thick shape facing his *ni-ren-sei* position on the right side. In return, he has had to push White along the fifth line. Understandably, he does not want White's territory to swell out of control, so he decides that some sort of approach is needed in the lower left. Feeling bad about having given White such a high position, he decides to try to undermine it by approaching inside with B1.

With W2, one already sees the trouble with Black's logic. The low pincer thwarts his idea of undermining the fifth line stones and brings his approach under attack. The primary disadvantage of a pincer, under most circumstances, is that it tends to be left weak if the opponent runs out. Here, when Black comes out with B3, that is not the case, because of White's thick formation above. Instead of B3, Black could have invaded the corner, but White would cut off B1 and end up with a large, more-or-less unassailable territory.

W4 should have been played one line higher, but nonetheless, protecting the corner is the right idea, since she is so solid above.

Black tries to follow *joseki* by playing B5, but it is foolish to imagine that the White stones above will have no effect on the outcome. Cutting with W6 and W8 is normally overplay, but here White has the strength nearby to back it up. After B7 and W8, the situation is grim for Black.

## Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.18)

It's true that an approach in the lower left is fairly urgent, but it should really be from the open side. White has many possible answers to B1, but imagine that she plays the one-space low pincer again at W2. Invading the corner would be bad, so Black jumps out to B3. If White protects the corner with W4, Black gets to press with B5.

This is the same *joseki* that Black was trying to play in the actual game, but now it works, because the approach was from the correct direction. White must crawl with W6 and the sequence up to W12 ensues. Black establishes thickness towards the centre, which works well with the wall he already had. Black A is likely to be *sente* as well, so he is well on his way to establishing a whole-board *moyo*.

As for White's territory on the left, it may look large, but because Black was patient and approached from the open side, there is still a large gap between W4 and the triangle-marked stone. At the right moment, Black can gently reduce around B, helping his *moyo* in the process and limiting White to about 30 points on the left side. Note that the lower left corner is still open to invasion.

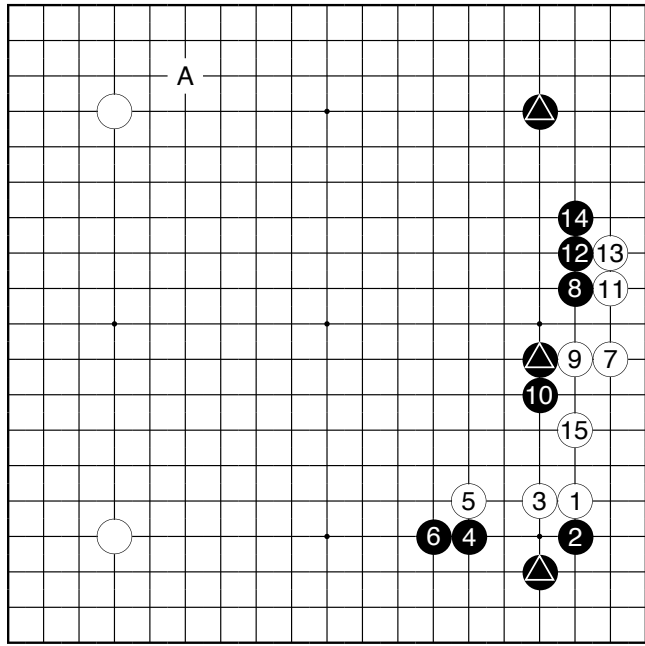


Figure 1.19: White enters Black's moyo immediately

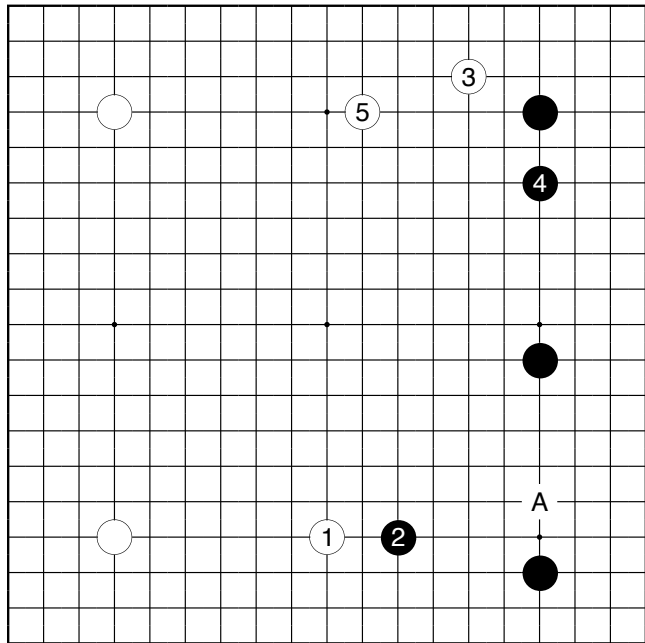


Figure 1.20: Choi Cheol-Han (W) vs. O Meien (B)

## Example 2 (Fig. 1.19)

Black: 1 *kyu*, White: 1 *kyu*. No handicap.

Black has chosen the high Chinese *fuseki* on the right side, which is familiar to most players and feared by many. The reason many players have trouble dealing with this opening is that they feel compelled to play moves like W1, which are exactly what Black wants.

One can't say that W1 is completely unplayable – even pros have experimented with it a handful of times – but the conventional wisdom is that it is too early to enter the opponent's sphere of influence at this stage of the game. Up to B6, Black has established territory on the lower side, while White's thickness is neatly erased by the stone Black already had in place.

This might be okay if White could use the influence she has built in order to attack Black's stone, but her stones are too weak to fight strongly, so she seeks quick life by sliding to W7 (see "Living on the Second Line" in Section I: Wanting Too Little). Up to W15, she manages to stabilise her group, but Black has obtained territory in the lower right, thickness in the upper right, and has *sente* to approach at A, with support from his thickness. This is decidedly a bad result for White.

## Improvement 2

Because of the popularity of this opening, there are countless professional games that you can study to get an idea of the normal way to play. One popular move (played hundreds of times more often than W1 in the example diagram) is W1 here, which works well with White's *hoshi* in the lower left and also limits Black's *moyo* by preventing his ideal extension to the same point.

W1 would provide useful support if White was to approach the lower right around A, so Black might extend to B2. This is not as far as he would have liked to go if W1 was not there, so White has already gained something. W3 follows naturally, and if Black extends to B4, White might make the short, stable extension to W5 to keep her hands free for a later *moyo* invasion. These particular moves are taken from a game between Choi Cheol-han (White) against O Meien in the 2000 Nongshim Cup, but similar variations come up all the time in professional play.





## Breaking the habit

This is an easy habit to break, once you know that it is a mistake. Identifying which side is open and which is closed is usually a simple matter, so if you think an approach is necessary, just make it on the open side. If you're tempted to approach the closed side, ask yourself why. If the answer is "because I don't want him to make territory there," put that thought aside and play the move you now know to be correct. You actually want the opponent to make territory where he's strong, since it's likely to overconcentrate him.

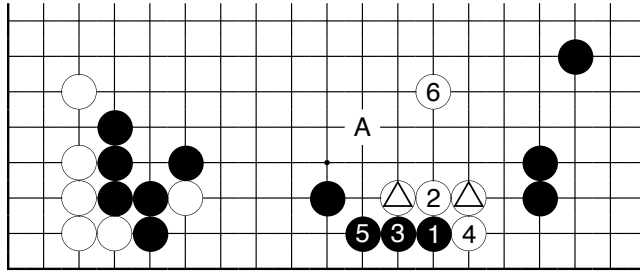
If the approach from the open side doesn't look right to you, it may be that it isn't the right time to approach at all. Try playing further away on the adjacent side instead, or strengthening yourself elsewhere to prepare for an invasion. In the case of *hoshi*, remember that the opponent has no way of completing the corner in a single move, so holding off on an approach or invasion until he's played in the area a second time may be correct. Depending on where he plays, the open and closed side – relatively speaking – may become reversed, allowing you to play where you were tempted to originally.

## Exceptions

If either the corner or the extension on the closed side will become weak as a result of a splitting move, approaching the closed side may be good. To keep the purpose clear in your mind, however, you should think of it as an invasion or a splitting attack, not as an approach. Keep in mind that it is unlikely that the continuation will resemble any conventional *joseki*.

If you have a very strong group close by on the open side, an approach from that direction may overconcentrate you. In such situations, approaching from the closed side will push the opponent's corner stone towards your thickness, while the proximity of the strong group will reduce the severity of any attack on your approach stone. Again, this is not so much an exception as a bit of confusion about terminology – perhaps it is better to think of your own thickness "closing" that direction and making it uninteresting for both players, just as if it was your opponent with strong stones there.

# Attacking eyespace before escape routes



*Diagram 2.6: White has no eyes, but escapes easily*

## The mistake

Remember the list of priorities from the earlier chapter on Living on the Second Line (in Section I: Wanting Too Little)? Base, Escape, Eyespace, Vital Point. This order applies just as much on offence as it does on defence, and is frequently bungled in either circumstance.

Consider the position in Diagram 2.6. It isn't too hard to imagine something like this happening in an amateur game; Black has a wall in the lower left and a good extension from it. White has a weak group consisting of the two marked stones, and Black has already defended his corner territory. Next, he wants to attack White, but how? It is immediately obvious, even to a beginner, that White could establish at least one eye on the lower side with a move there, such as at B1 or B5. To some players, the only logical course of action would seem to be to attack at B1, attacking the eye before it can be formed.

To do so, however, would be to ignore the conventional wisdom about escape before eyespace. White can respond calmly at W2, and if Black continues with his plan by connecting out at B3, White gets to force at W4 (threatening a later reduction of Black's territory in the lower right as an added bonus) before jumping out at W6. By obsessing too much about eyes, Black has let his prey escape.

## The rationale

*"Eyes are fundamental to life and death and an attack is not an attack if it does not carry a threat to kill. If my opponent makes two eyes, I will no longer be able to attack him. Therefore, my first priority should be to prevent him from making eyes."*

## The reality

It is too simplistic to think that all that matters in an attack is the threat to kill. First of all, one mustn't forget that the purpose of an attack is to profit, not necessarily to kill. If the attack does carry a threat to kill, that is the means to its end, not its true meaning. Secondly, although it's true that a move must carry some sort of threat to be called an attack, it doesn't have to be a threat to kill. There are other, more subtle things that an attack can threaten, such as sealing the opponent in and forcing him to live small or gaining several forcing moves.

There is usually a lot of room to manoeuvre in the centre of the board – once a group gets its head out there, it becomes hard to attack effectively. Denying a group access to the centre is often the right way to begin an attack, even if it means allowing the group some room to make eyes along the edge. Your opponent might live easily, but that doesn't mean the attack was a failure; the moves spent fencing him represent a gain in central influence, which will play an important role in later fighting.

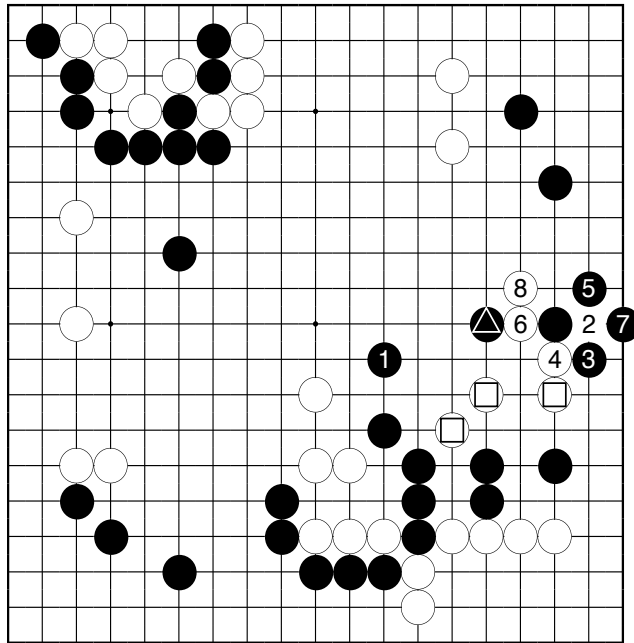


Figure 1.21: The outcome is uncertain

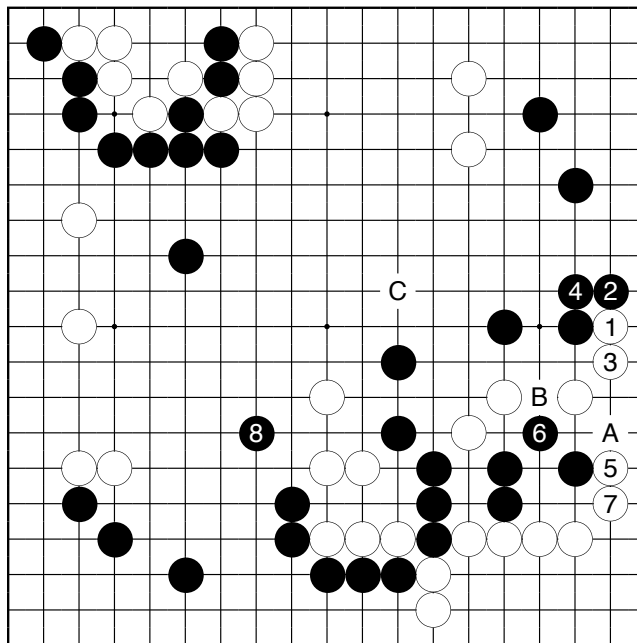


Figure 1.22: White lives on the right, but Black is strong

## Example 1 (Fig. 1.21)

Black: 6 *kyu*, White: 5 *kyu*. No handicap.

The result in the upper left corner favoured White, so Black should have had a tough game ahead of him. However, as a result of a White overplay in the lower right, Black has an opportunity to turn the game around. He has one weak group between two of White's – generally a good situation to be in – and his thickness in the upper left is starting to look more useful.

When Black jumps out at B1, White's three square-marked stones are almost completely sealed off. With no easy way to sacrifice them to profit elsewhere, White desperately attaches at W2 in an attempt to escape or make eyes. Black, consumed with bloodlust, makes the inside *hane* at B3 – a risky move that is wrong more often than it is right.

White spots her opportunity and cuts with W4, forcing Black to capture with B5. She then forces again with the *atari* at W6 and escapes with W8.

Now, it's true that Black has succeeded in depriving White of eyes and can continue his splitting attack. In fact, the game still looks promising for him. However, the triangle-marked stone has been severely damaged and Black's middle group is still weak, so the situation is quite unstable – there is plenty of opportunity, especially for a *kyu*-level player, to go wrong and let White turn the tables once more. When you have the advantage, a calm and solid way of playing is called for.

## Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.22)

When White attaches underneath at W1, the outside *hane* of B2 is the most common response, because it is clear, simple and solid. White draws back at W3 and Black has a choice. He could play at A to cut White off and try to kill her. In fact, he would probably succeed. However, capturing a mere five stones on such a small scale is not an overwhelming gain. Furthermore, Black's position would be so thin that keeping those stones dead would be a burden on him for the rest of the game. He might win the game, but there would be many pitfalls along the way.

Continuing with his thick strategy, Black can play B4 instead. White will then of course attach on the other side with W5, connecting to the corner. An immediate *hane* on either side would be overplay for Black (confirm this for yourself), so he peeps at B6 first. If White connected, Black could then *hane* at W7, so White plays W7 herself.

To cut immediately at B would be too concerned with petty profit – because B and C are more or less *miai* for the safety of Black's stones, B can be thought of as an endgame move, worth around 10 points. Attacking the remaining weak White group is far more urgent. B8 is not the only way to attack, of course, but it is the sort that should seem natural to most players. Again, the important thing is not to kill White, but to gain profit and solidity through attack; whether or not White lives, Black will become thick everywhere, and will then be able to invade the left side or the top. It should not be too hard for him to coast to a modest victory in this way.

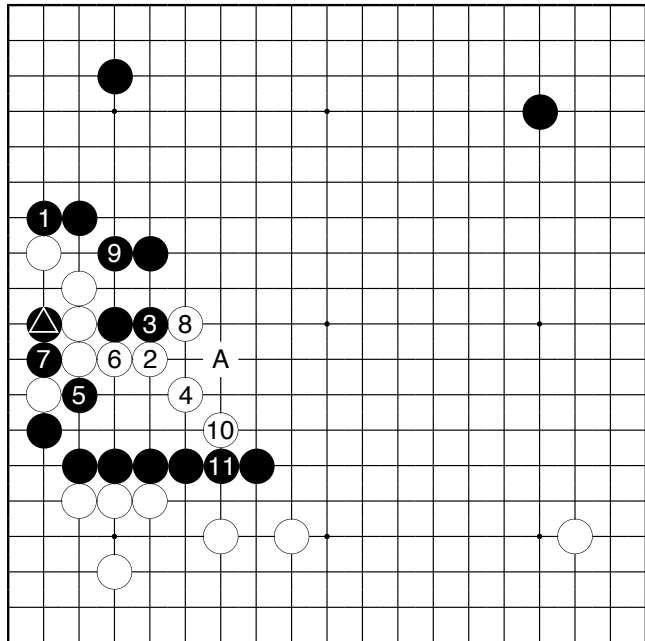


Figure 1.23: White has access to the centre

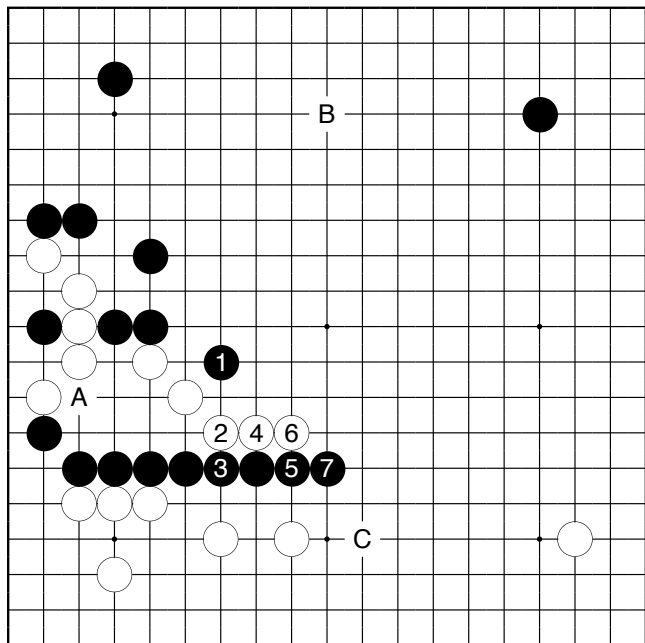


Figure 1.24: Black occupies the shape point

## Example 2 (Fig. 1.23)

Black: 4 *kyu*, White: 3 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

Black is in the process of attacking White's weak group on the left side. He has already played the triangle-marked stone to ruin White's chances of making two eyes along the edge, so when he blocks with B1, White has no choice but to run with W2. No matter what happens, coming under attack when so heavily outnumbered should be a disaster for her – the question is how Black can punish her most effectively.

B3 is an aggressive answer, concerned with preventing White from making another eye by capturing a Black stone. Because Black has so much strength nearby, this is not necessarily wrong, although playing at A instead would have been good shape and a nice, calm strategy to allow White to live while sealing her in.

W4 is really White's only option for continuing her escape, but it is quite thin. Black spots her weakness at B5 and plays there immediately, but this is a mistake. White connects and W6 and Black rescues his triangle-marked stone with B7. He feels happy that he has made a base for his wall, while simultaneously taking away White's eye along the edge, but this is a short-sighted way of looking at things.

White can now force with W8 and W10, obtaining easy access to the centre and, more importantly, *sente*. If she next plays a move to further stabilise her group and become strong in the centre, Black will no longer be guaranteed the easy victory he deserved when he began his attack.

## Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.24)

The thing to remember about a move like A is that, although it is important – taking away an eye from White and making two for Black is certainly big – it is not urgent. A White move to prevent it would be *gote* and still leave White with only one eye, so White does not have time to play there for the time being. If the attack goes awry and Black finds his wall in trouble, he can always come back to A later. So it isn't that A is a bad move in an absolute sense, just that there are more urgent matters to attend to.

B1 is a powerful move, because it restricts White's access to the centre, while also occupying a vital point for shape. White might peep at W2 in order to creep out with W4 and W6, but Black is perfectly happy to push along with B5 and B7.

White's group is still very much in danger and Black still has A in reserve if it ever becomes necessary for the life of his wall or to kill White. Meanwhile, he can look forward to staking out an enormous *moyo* with B, or ruining the lower side around C. Provided Black does not become so obsessed with killing White that he overextends himself, victory should be all but certain.





## Breaking the habit

First of all, stop thinking about killing as the goal of an attack. This point is made again and again by most teachers and at several points in this book, but can never be stressed enough. There are times that it is necessary to kill to win, usually when the opponent has made an unreasonably deep invasion late in the game or you have already fallen far behind, but most of the time it is enough to let the opponent's groups live in return for some profit or influence. Attacks aimed at killing fail more often than they succeed, and moves directed at the eyespace and vital points of a group that eventually lives will turn out to be small endgame moves at best, and outright losses at worst.

Secondly, remind yourself constantly of the following fact: living in *gote* is bad, so forcing the opponent to do so is good. If you attack the opponent from the outside and he responds with a move inside his own group to make two eyes, try not to feel disappointed at the lost opportunity to kill. Instead, give yourself a pat on the back – you have made a useful play on the outside, while he has done nothing but ensure himself of meagre life. You have gained a full move, almost as if you had convinced your opponent to pass in the middle of the game. That can't be bad, can it?

## Exceptions

If you are very thick all around, there may be nowhere for the opponent to run – even if he escapes your grip locally, he will encounter nothing but your walls as he attempts to flee. In such cases, you can rely on your friendly surroundings to trap the opponent on a larger scale, and focus your efforts on denying him eyes. This is often the case when handling unreasonable invasions, especially those made in the endgame by a desperate opponent who finds himself far behind.

Sometimes, there is more to be gained by chasing a group than by sealing it in. This is not often the case, however, and requires excellent positional judgement to spot. Nonetheless, if you are sure that chasing the opponent is what you want to be doing – if he has another weak group on the other side of the board, for instance, and you want to aim at a splitting attack – then go ahead. If it doesn't work out, at least you will have known from the outset that you were trying something unusual and will learn from your mistake.