

Introduction to Chinese Chess

Tie Zeng Nov. 11, 1993

Chinese Chess is a cousin of Chess. In China, Chinese Chess is called Chess (XianQi), while Chess is called International Chess.

Chinese Chess is a very popular game among Chinese. When you visit parks in China's cities, you can easily find groups of people playing the game. At night, when you walk along the sidewalks, you can find many people playing Chinese Chess under street lights.

The game is also very popular in many other parts of Asia. But the game is relatively new to the western world. Hopefully this program will help change that.

For westerners who would like to read an introduction to the game, I recommend the book ***Chinese Chess for Beginner*** written by Sam Sloan. The book is very easy to read and has everything you need to know to play Chinese Chess. The book is published by Ishi Press International. Their address in US is:

Ishi Press International
76 Bonaventure Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-2123
USA
Telephone: (408) 944-9900.

The cost is under \$10 I believe.

There is another introductory book:

"CHINESE CHESS"
(ISBN 0-8048-1495-3)
Author : H. T. Lau
Publisher : Charles E. Tuttle Co. Inc.

P.O. Box 410
Rutland, Vermont 05701
USA
telephone : (802)-773-8229

I haven't read this book yet. So I don't have any comments on it.

For people who would like to keep improving the strength in the game, I recommend you subscribe to ***XiangQi Review***, a bimonthly magazine published by David W. Woo, Chinese Chess Institute. The yearly subscription rate is \$10.00 for the US and Canada and US \$15.00 overseas. The quality of the publication's content is very high and I highly recommend it. To order, send a money order in US currency to:

Chinese Chess Institute
P.O. Box 5305
Hercules, CA 94547-5305
U.S.A.

Chinese Chess is played by two players over a board. Each player has 16 pieces. Each player makes moves by turn. And whoever catches the opponent's King first win the game.

Chess Board















The Board diagram is in the file 'The Board'. There are 9 vertical lines and 10 horizontal lines. There is a blank space in the middle, which is called a **River**. When playing, you can imagine those vertical lines are connected instead of broken. Pawn changes its behavior after crossing the River.

Please note that Pieces are placed at the intersections instead of squares like many other Chess games do.

There are two places on each side of the board where there are diagonal lines crossing the squares. There are called 'Palace' for each side. Kings and Guards can only move inside the own Palace.

Pieces

The pieces in Chinese Chess are very similar to International Chess. There are two sides. One is Red (or white in this computer version) and another is Black. Each side has 16 pieces. They are:

| | <u>Red</u> | <u>Black</u> |
|----------------|---|---|
| King: |  |  |
| Rook: |  |  |
| Cannon: |  |  |
| Knight: |  |  |
| Elephant: |  |  |
| Guard(Bishop): |  |  |
| Pawn: |  |  |

There are other English translations. Here are some of them:

| | |
|----------|------------------|
| Rook : | Chariot |
| Cannon: | Gunner |
| Knight : | Horse |
| Bishop : | Assistant |

There is no **Queen** in Chinese Chess.

Movement and Captures

Rook:

Both sides have two Rooks which behave the same as in Chess. A Rook can move horizontally or vertically and with no restriction on how many squares it can move.

Knight:

There are also two Knights for each side, which move the same as in Chess except one difference, its moves can be blocked. A Knight moves in a 'L' shape path. Two squares in first direction, then one square in an orthogonal direction. If there is another

piece right next to the Knight, then that direction movement will be blocked.

Bishop : Chinese Chess has two bishops also. They move in diagonal and inside the Palace only. Each time a Bishop can move along the diagonal line inside the Palace by one square. Its functions are mainly defending the King.

King :

Of course the game has a King, which also move like in Chess except it can't walk out of its Palace. A King moves either straightly or diagonally along the lines in the Palace, one square at a time.

Pawn :

There are five Pawns on each side. They can never be promoted. Pawn can only move forward before it crosses the river. After a Pawn crosses the river, it can move in all directions except backward. Pawn can move one square each time.

Elephant :

There are two Elephants on each side. Its main purpose is defending the King. Elephant's Chinese is 'Xian'. And 'XianQi' means 'Elephant Chess'.

Cannon :

There are also two Cannons on both sides. There is no counterpart in Chess. Cannon moves like Rook. But it can't capture anything on its way like a Rook does. It can capture an opponent's piece if there is one piece (the color of the piece doesn't matter) in between the Cannon and the piece to be captured. That is, a Cannon needs to jump over a "screen" to capture an opponent piece.

Speical Situation for King:

Kings could not face to each other directly. If you move your king into a position directly face to another King, no matter how far away they are, you lose the game.

The value of each piece

Here are roughly the values of each pieces:

Rook: 9 point

Cannon: 4.5 point

Knight: 4 point

Bishop: 2 point

Elephant: 2 point

Pawn:

1 point before crossing the river

2 point after crossing the river

Cannons' values decrease when there are less pieces on the board, which normally happen towards the end of a game. Knights' values increase in the same situation as there are fewer pieces to block the Knight's move.

Game Openings

I will not touch this topic here. But I suggest you can learn the openings by watching the program play both sides. In this situation, the first 10 moves are from the cchess.book file. And all the openings in the file are well studied and very solid openings.

More Info

I will let you read the Chinese Chess rules to find out the details. Sorry, the complete rules are not included in this release, but you can learn the rules by observing the program playing both sides.

You can utilize 'Chinese Chess Pro' to learn the game. You can set the program to play both sides and watch games play out. Then you can save the game and repeat the game to study it. Another way to learn is to play against the program.

For people who already know the game, I hope you will find that playing against the program is entertaining and challenging. I also hope you can find it is a very useful tool to study the game. I don't know what this program's strength is. I will find it out when more people play against the program. I will try to improve the program's strength. Hopefully, one day the program can stand up against a Chinese Chess Master.

You can also play games over AppleTalk networks with your friends. This is one of the nice features of the program. To play over a phone line, you need to run AppleTalk Remote Access (ARA).