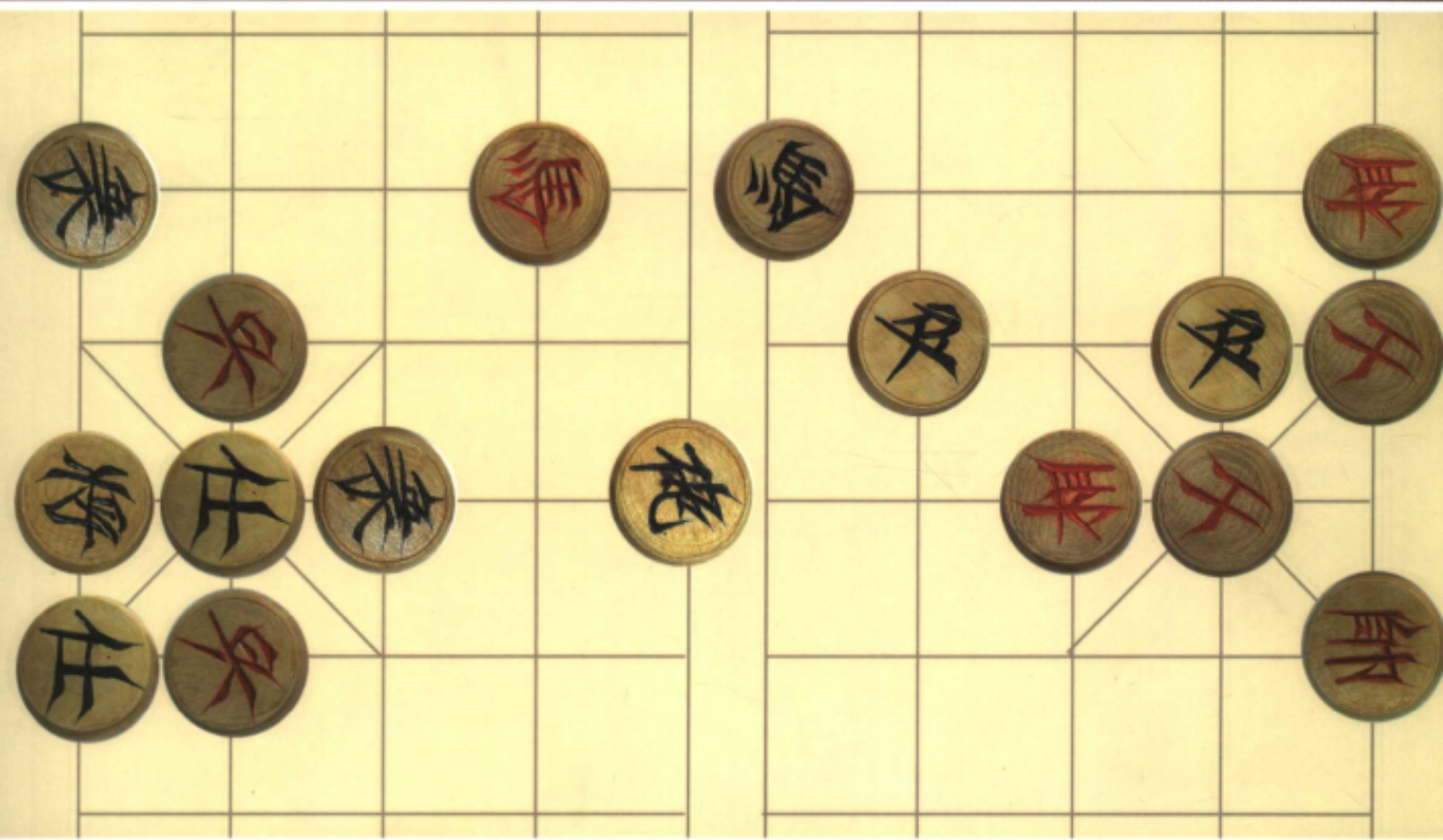


HOW TO



Chinese Chess for Beginners



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Alex Liu

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To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

- Sun Zi, *Art of War*

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Chapter 1 The Board and the Pieces

In this chapter, we will

- ◆ **become familiar with the chessboard and the pieces**
- ◆ **learn how to move each chess piece**
- ◆ **learn how to write down moves**
- ◆ **play a novice game**





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1. The Board

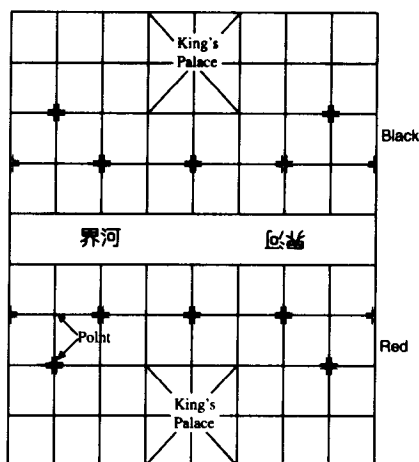


Fig. 1

Chinese chess is played on a board with 9 vertical lines and 10 horizontal lines. In the middle of the board, there is a “river” which breaks the vertical lines and separates the board into two sides. A game of chess is played between these two sides, the red side and the black side. The red pieces are placed on the red side and the black pieces on the black side. Sometimes the chess pieces are blue or green, but in this book the two sides are always referred to as “red” and “black”. Please see Fig 1. The four squares containing the diagonals are the king’s palace. It indicates where the king’s domain is. The pieces are placed on the intersections of the lines, which are called “points”, not in the squares as in international chess. Some of the points are surrounded by wedges, which serve as indicators for the starting positions of the cannon and pawn pieces.

2. The Pieces

A chess set has 32 pieces altogether. Each side has one king, two rooks, two knights, two cannons, two bishops, two guards and five pawns. Please note the pieces 帅(仕)相(兵) on the red side are identical in moving and capture ability to the pieces 将(士)象(卒) on the black side.

Red	Black	Name in English	Name in Chinese	Pieces of Each Side	Values of each piece	Ability to Cross River	Abbreviations
帅	将	King	Jiang	1		no	K
车	车	Rook	Ju	2	9	yes	R
马	马	Knight	Ma	2	4	yes	N
炮	炮	Cannon	Pao	2	4.5	yes	C
相	象	Bishop	Xiang	2	2	no	B
仕	士	Guard	Shi	2	2	no	G
兵	卒	Pawn	Bing	5	1.5	yes	P

3. Movement of the Pieces

Movement Terminology

1) Basic Movement

One piece moving from one point to another is one movement. All the pieces can move either horizontally, vertically, diagonally or a combination of the two. Only the cannon moves differently, when it captures an opponent's piece.

2) Capturing

You can capture an opponent's piece by moving one of your pieces to the position that is currently occupied by that opponent's piece.



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The opponent's piece will be taken off the board and never be returned to the board for the rest of the game. Note: the cannon captures differently. See the movement of the Cannon.

3) Blocking

Sometimes a piece may not complete a certain move because another piece (of either side) blocks its way. See the movement of the knight and bishop.

4) Checking

Checking occurs when the king of one side is in immediate danger of being captured by the opposing side. When the king is being checked, it should be moved out of check in the very next move.

5) Checkmate

When a king is being checked, and it cannot move out of check, we say the king is "checkmated". The object of the game is to checkmate your opponent's king while keeping your own king from being checkmated. Checkmate is immediate and final. It ends the game and decides who has lost and who has won.

6) Stalemate

When one side has simply no point to which he can move his pieces on his turn, it is a stalemate. In international chess, a stale-

mate is a draw, whereas in Chinese chess, it is taken for granted that the one who cannot move his pieces loses the game.

Movement of the Pieces

Pawn 兵 卒

Pawn is called “Bing” in Chinese, literally meaning soldier. The Chinese characters of these two pieces are different, but their moving and capturing abilities are identical.

- ◆ The pawn moves one point forward only.
- ◆ The pawn can never move backwards.
- ◆ Unlike the pawn in international chess, the pawn in Chinese chess does not capture by moving diagonally. It captures and moves in the same direction.
- ◆ The pawn can cross the river. Once the pawn crosses the river, it acquires the power to move and capture side ways as well as forward.
- ◆ The pawn doesn't get promoted after it reaches the bottom line of the opposite side. See Fig. 2.

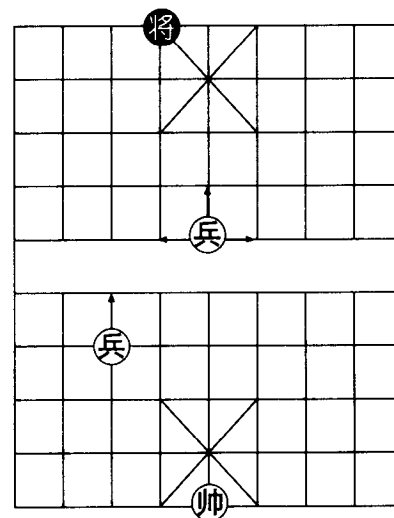


Fig. 2

Rook 车 车

The rook is called “Ju” in Chinese, meaning warrior's chariot. If a pawn were a foot soldier, then the chariot implies the rook's swift movement and powerful fighting aggression.

- ◆ The rook moves exactly like the rook in international chess. It travels in a straight line, forward, backward or



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sideways, but not diagonally,

- ◆ The rook can move to any position as long as there is no obstruction in its path, or until it encounters an edge.
- ◆ If there is a piece of the same colour along its path, the rook cannot move to that point, nor can it move beyond it.
- ◆ If there is a piece of the opposing side along its path, the rook cannot move beyond it. However, it is able to move to the point occupied by that piece of the opponent, thereby capturing it, whereupon the move ends.
- ◆ The rook can cross the river.

King 帅 将

The piece is called “Shuai” or “Jiang”, literally meaning “Marshal” or “General”. The two pieces have different Chinese characters, but their moving and capturing abilities are identical. The king is the soul of the game. To capture the opponent’s king and keep one’s own king from being captured is the object of the game. It is the most important piece in the game.

- ◆ The king only moves one point horizontally or vertically, not diagonally.
- ◆ The king can never leave the palace.
- ◆ See Fig. 3. When the king is on position F, it can move to C, E or I; when on position E, it can move to B, D, H, or F; when on position A, only to B or D; when on position H, to G, E or I.
- ◆ There is one very special restriction on the king in Chi-

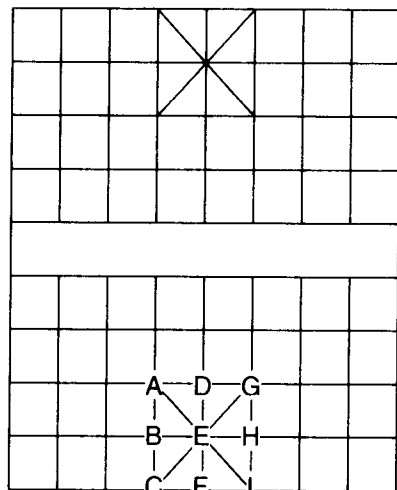


Fig. 3

nese chess. The two kings cannot oppose each other directly across an unobstructed board without any piece in between. In other words, when the two kings are in a face-off situation, a king acts like a rook checking the opponent's king. See Fig. 4. The red rook puts the black king in check. To move out of check, the black king is forced to move to the central line, but this will bring the two kings into a face-off situation, which is prohibited. Therefore, the black king is captured. In this situation, the red king plays like a rook controlling the central line. This is the king's hidden killing power.

Knight 马 马

The knight is called "Ma" in Chinese, which means "Horse".

- ◆ The knight moves in the same way as the knight in international chess, but with one important difference: the knight can be blocked.
- ◆ The knight's move is a combined move of one point in any direction horizontally or vertically, plus one diagonal move immediately following.
- ◆ If the first point of the horizontal or vertical move is occupied by a piece of either side, then the knight is blocked and cannot move in that direction.
- ◆ See Fig 5. The black knight's movement is that it travels vertically to position A, then diagonally to either C or D. But when there is a piece of either side on position A, the

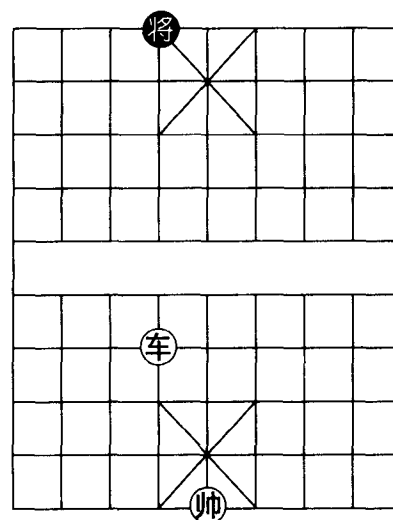


Fig. 4

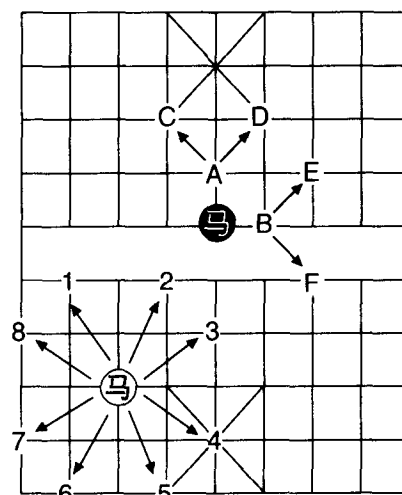


Fig. 5



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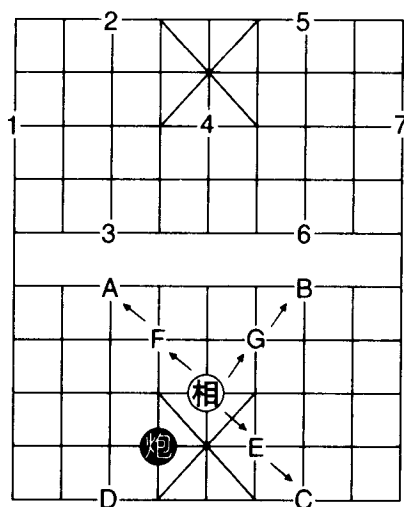


Fig. 6

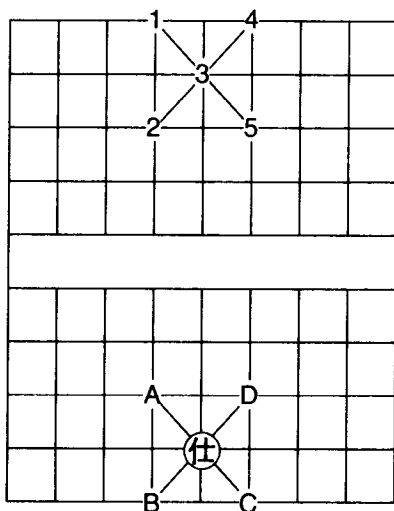


Fig. 7

knight cannot move to position C, or D. It is blocked. Similarly, a piece on position B blocks the knight's movement toward position E or F.

- ◆ See Fig 5. If the red knight is not blocked, it is able to jump to any one of those 8 points and capture the opponent's piece on that point.
- ◆ The knight can cross the river.

Bishop (相 象)

This piece is called "Xiang" in Chinese, minister or elephant. "Xiang Qi", literally meaning "Elephant Game", is the name for the game in Chinese. Historically, the game was used to learn military strategy, and elephants were employed in Chinese military.

- ◆ It moves exactly two points diagonally.
- ◆ When a piece of either side occupies the intervening point of the bishop's movement, it is blocked.
- ◆ The bishop cannot cross the river, so its purpose is defensive in nature.
- ◆ See Fig. 6. The black bishop is restricted to the 7 points indicated, and can capture the opponent's pieces on those points.
- ◆ The red bishop in Fig. 6 can only reach A, B, or C. The direction toward "D" is blocked by the black cannon. Similarly, a piece of either side on F, G or E blocks the movement toward A, B or C respectively.