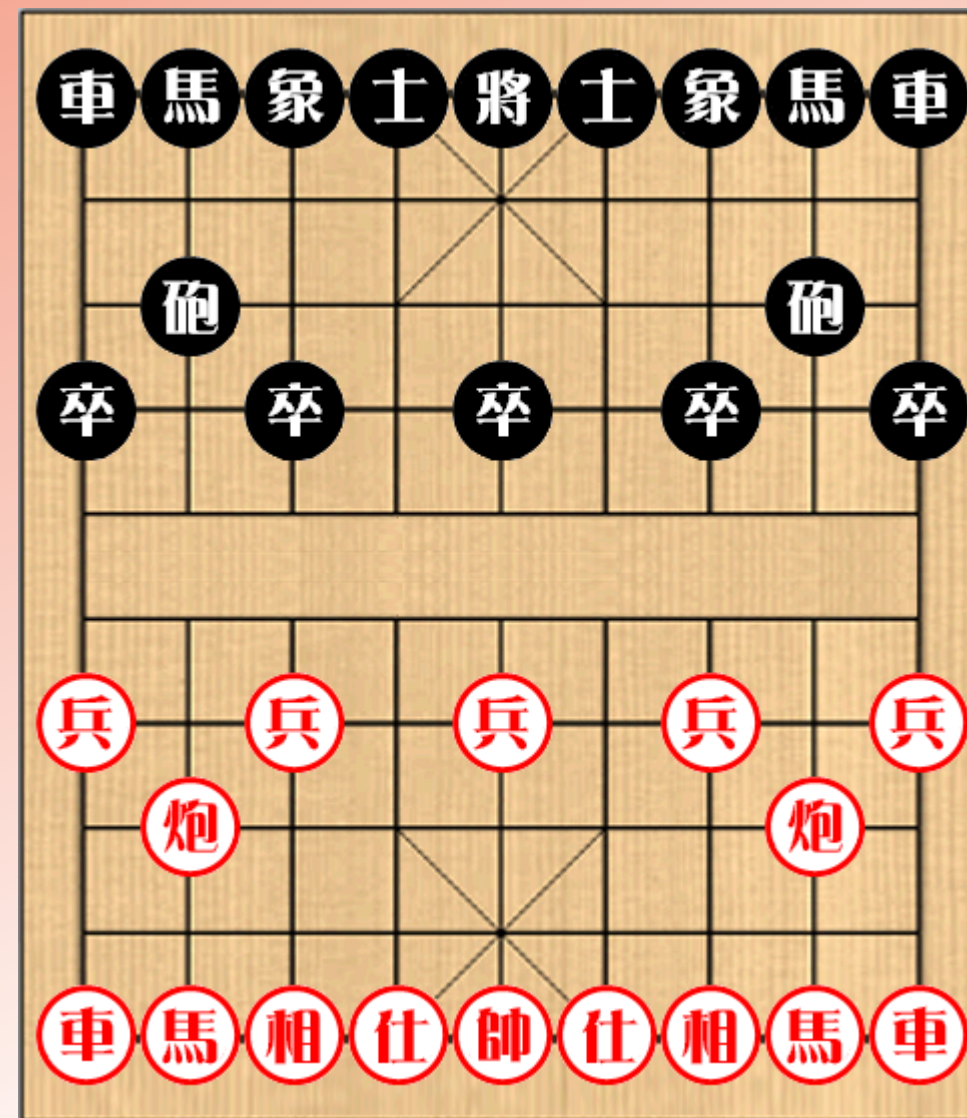




A Short Introduction to XIANGQI

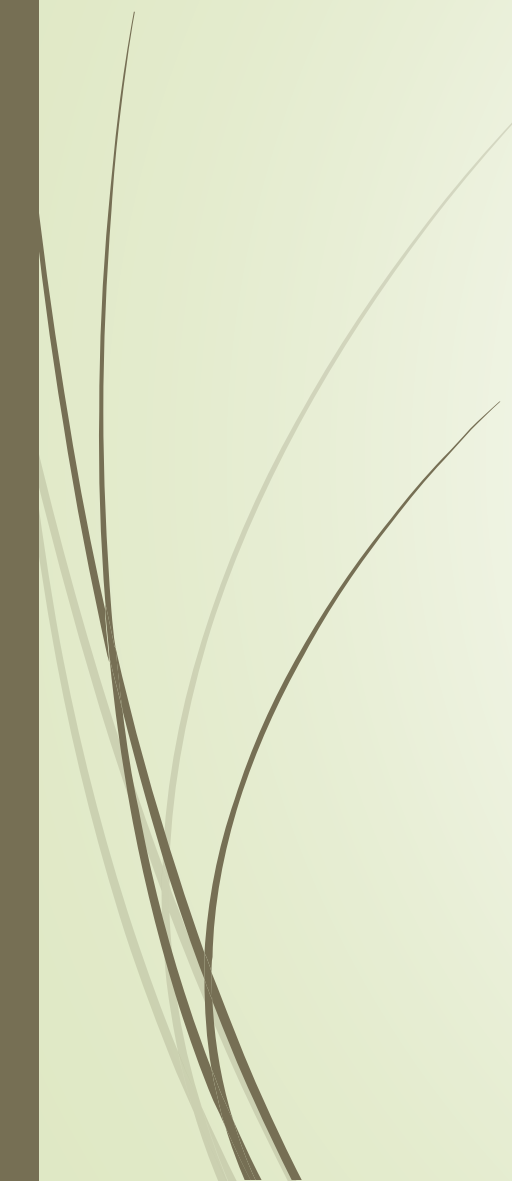
AKA CHINESE CHESS

Note: The Official Name is Xiangqi
(象棋).





Introduction

- Xiangqi = 象棋 (xiàng qí)
 - Aka Chinese Chess, Elephant Chess, Ivory Chess etc
 - Perhaps the most played board game in the world
 - Immensely popular in China and South-east Asia
 - Game of Strategy between 2 players (Red vs. Black)
 - Important part of the cultural heritage of the Chinese
- 

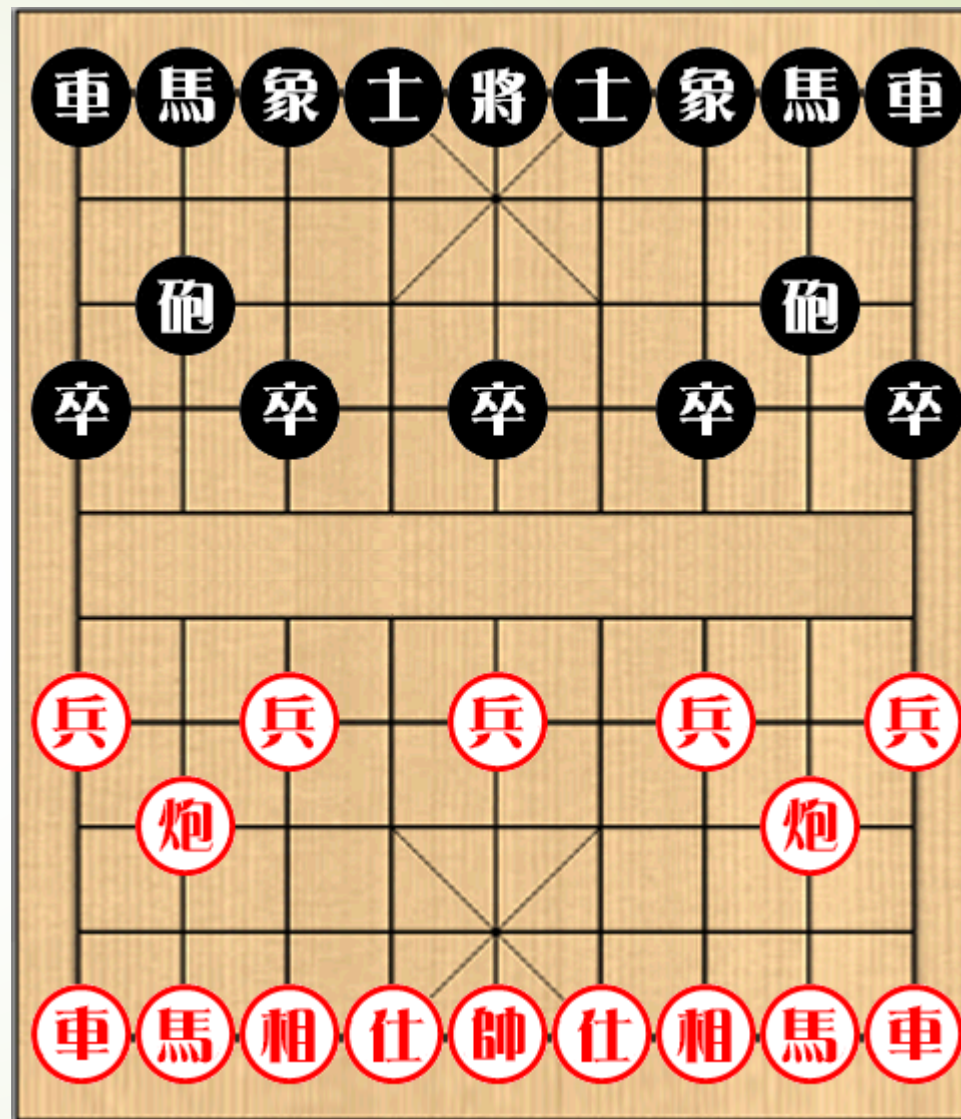
History of Xiangqi

- Modern Day Xiangqi took form no later than the Song Dynasty (960-1279AD) .
- Many theories about origins of Xiangqi before the Song Dynasty.
 - a) Pre-historic origins: Shen Nong (神农 shén nóng) God of Agriculture etc
 - b) Chu-Han Contention (楚汉相争 chǔ hàn xiāng zhēng , 206-202BC).
 - c) General Han Xin (韩信 hán xìn, 231BC-196 BC) as inventor.
 - d) Emperor Wu of Zhou Dynasty (宇文邕 yǔ wén yōng , 543-578 AD) and the Elephant Mantra (<<象經>> xiàng jīng).
 - e) Liu Bo prototype → Sai → ... → Xiangqi.

Et cetera...

Xiangqi Board Introduction

1. Nine vertical lines = Files.
2. Ten horizontal lines = Ranks.
3. Empty space in the middle = River.
4. River is also known as Chu River and Han Border (楚河汉界 chǔ hé hàn jiè).
5. Palaces at both ends of the board.
6. Diagonal Lines = Advisor Diagonals.
7. Boardstars (盘星pán xīng).
8. Opposing territories.
9. Array : Pieces are placed and played on the intersections.
10. Additional verses like:
11. 观棋不语真君子 = No Kibitzing.
12. 起手不回大丈夫 = No Takeback allowed.



Introduction to the pieces

2018 World Xiangqi Rules Official Standard

1) 楚河汉界 (Chǔ Hé Hàn Jiè = Chu River and Han Border) is to be added into the River.

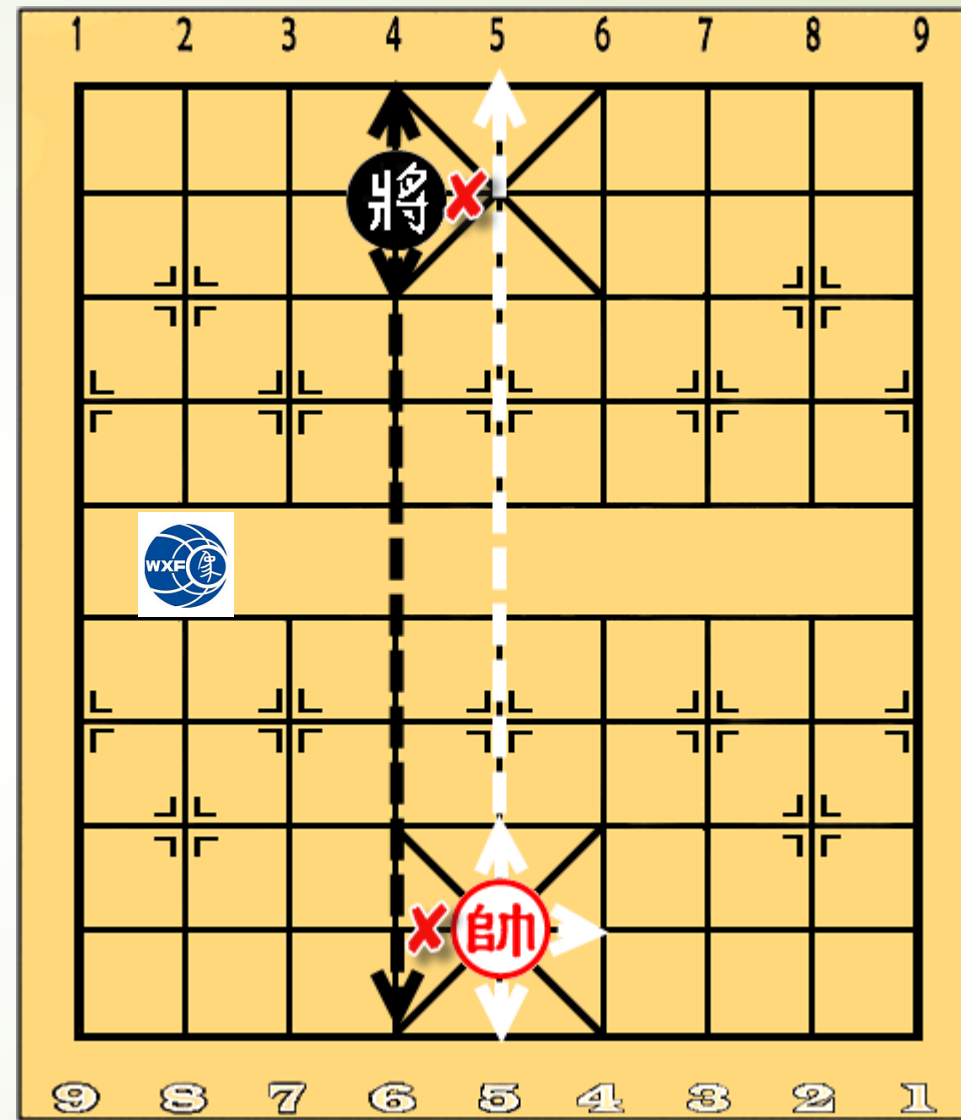
(Traditional Chinese is 楚河漢界)

2) Official Names of the Pieces

English Name	Chariot	Horse	Cannon	Pawn	Advisor	Elephant	King
Red Traditional	車 jū	馬 mǎ	炮 pào	兵 bīng	仕 shì	相 xiàng	帥 shuài
Black Traditional	車 jū	馬 mǎ	砲 pào	卒 bīng	士 shì	象 xiàng	帥 shuài
Red Simplified	车 jū	马 mǎ	炮 pào	兵 bīng	仕 shì	相 xiàng	将 jiàng
Black Traditional	车 jū	马 mǎ	砲 pào	卒 bīng	士 shì	象 xiàng	将 jiàng
Abbreviation	R	H	C	P	A	E	K
# per side	2	2	2	5	2	2	1

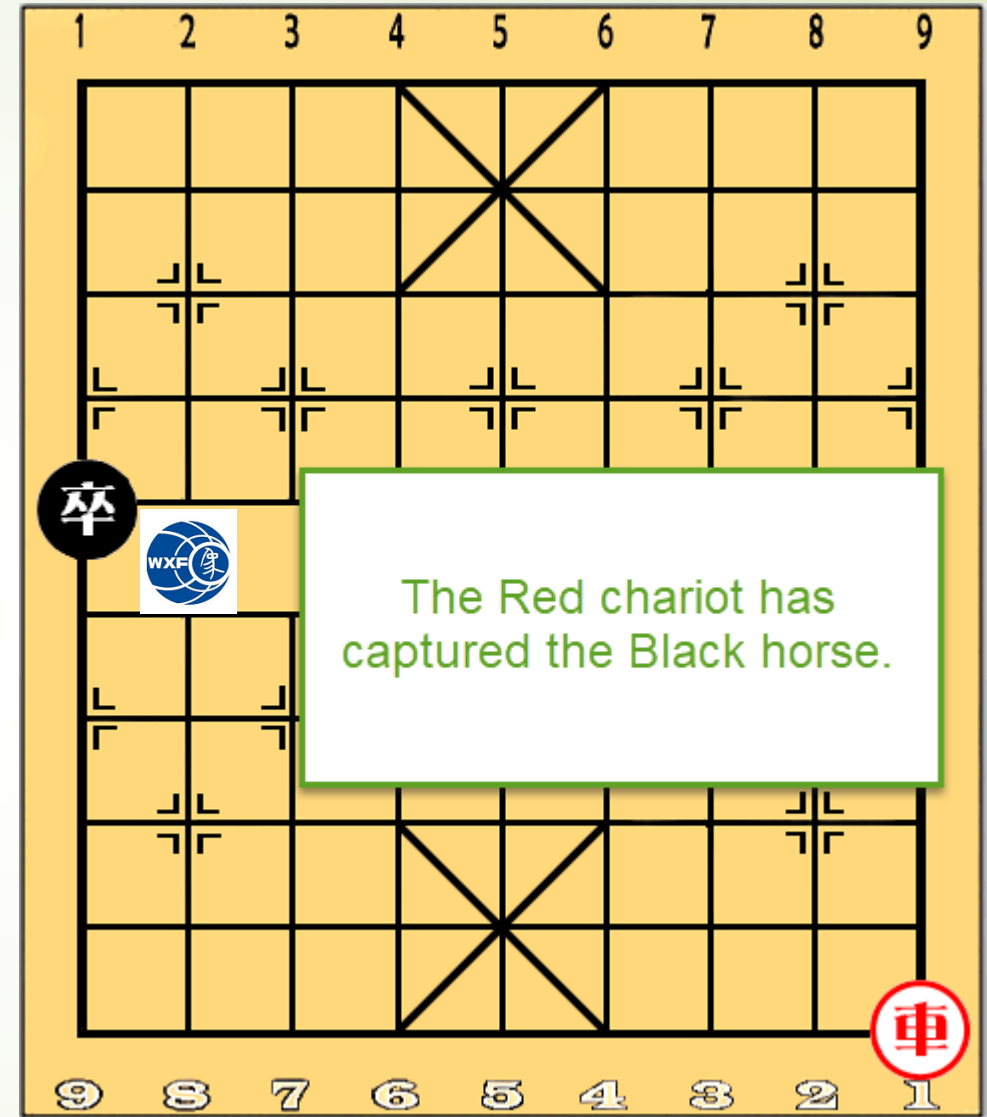
King

- ❖ Red King 帥 帅 shuài → focus on 巾.
- ❖ Black King 將 将 jiàng → reversed K for king.
- ❖ Only one such piece on the board.
- ❖ Cannot leave the palace.
- ❖ Move to the adjacent intersection.
- ❖ Can advance, retreat or traverse (move sideways).
- ❖ Cannot move diagonally.
- ❖ Captures enemy piece by occupying its intersection.
- ❖ **Royal Rule:** The Kings cannot face each other in the same file without any intervening piece.
- ❖ A king that is threatened by an enemy piece is placed under check and **must resolve that threat before making any other moves.**



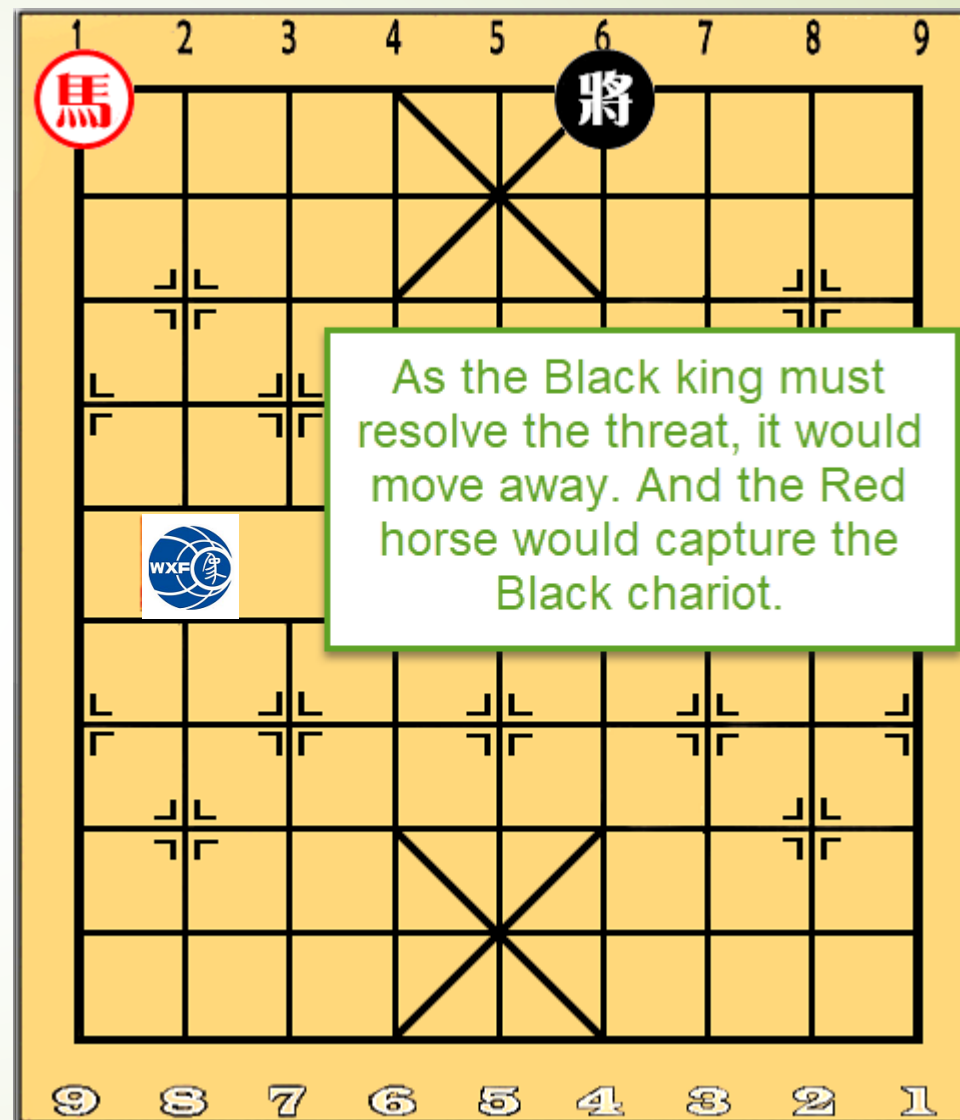
Chariot

- ❑ 車 jū → think of looking at a wagon pulled by a horse from an aerial view. Focus on 田.
- ❑ Can advance, retreat or traverse the board as many intersections as it wants provided there are no other pieces blocking it.
- ❑ Only piece in Xiangqi that behaves exactly the same as its International Chess counterpart (except for moving on the lines).
- ❑ Captures material by occupying the intersection of the captured piece.
- ❑ Most powerful piece in Xiangqi.



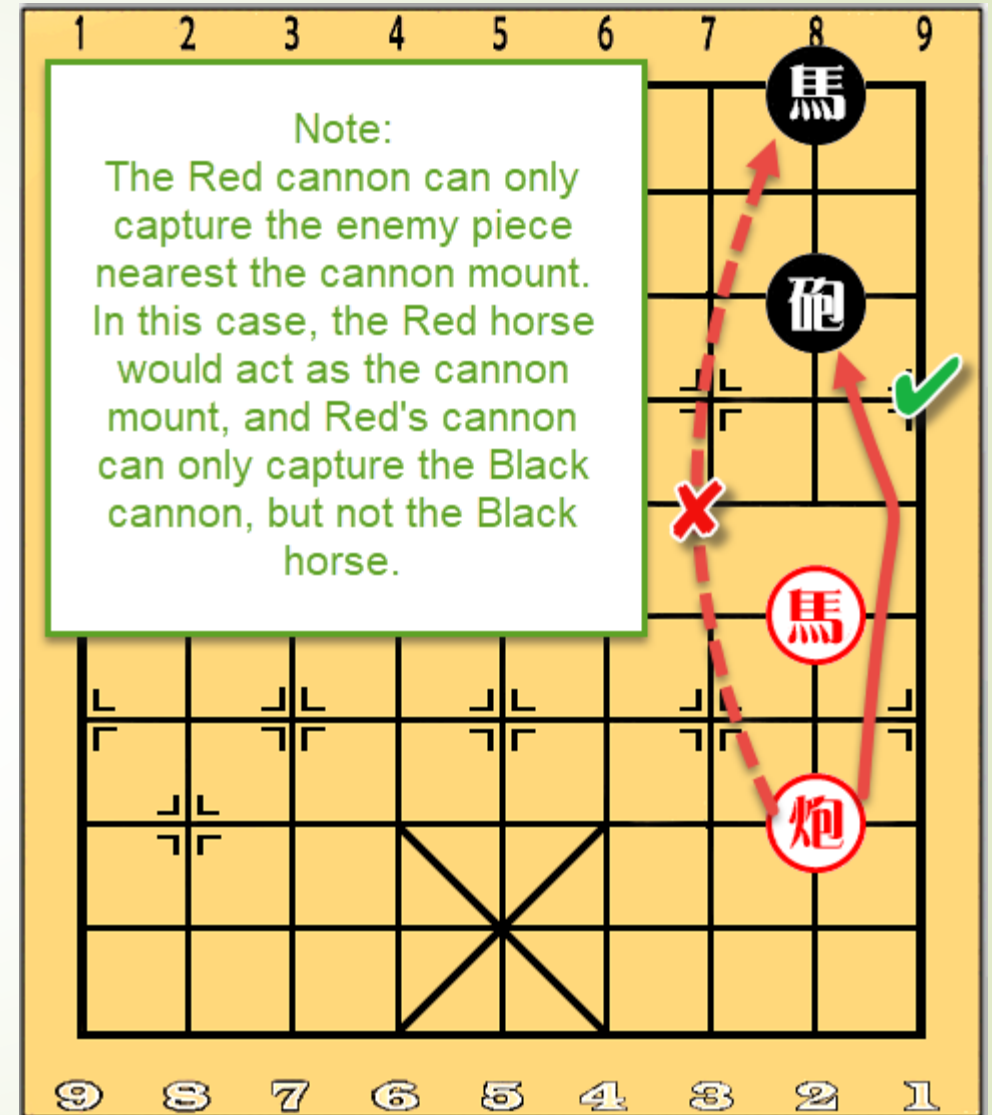
Horse

- 馬mǎ → focus on the four legs of the horse.
- Can advance or retreat but not traverse.
- Movement of the Horse: to the adjacent intersection followed by an adjacent diagonal in the same direction. Similar to the knight in International Chess
- **Horses can be blocked in Xiangqi!!!** *If the first adjacent intersection is occupied by a friendly or enemy piece, the Horse cannot move in that direction.*
- Captures material by occupying the intersection of the captured piece.



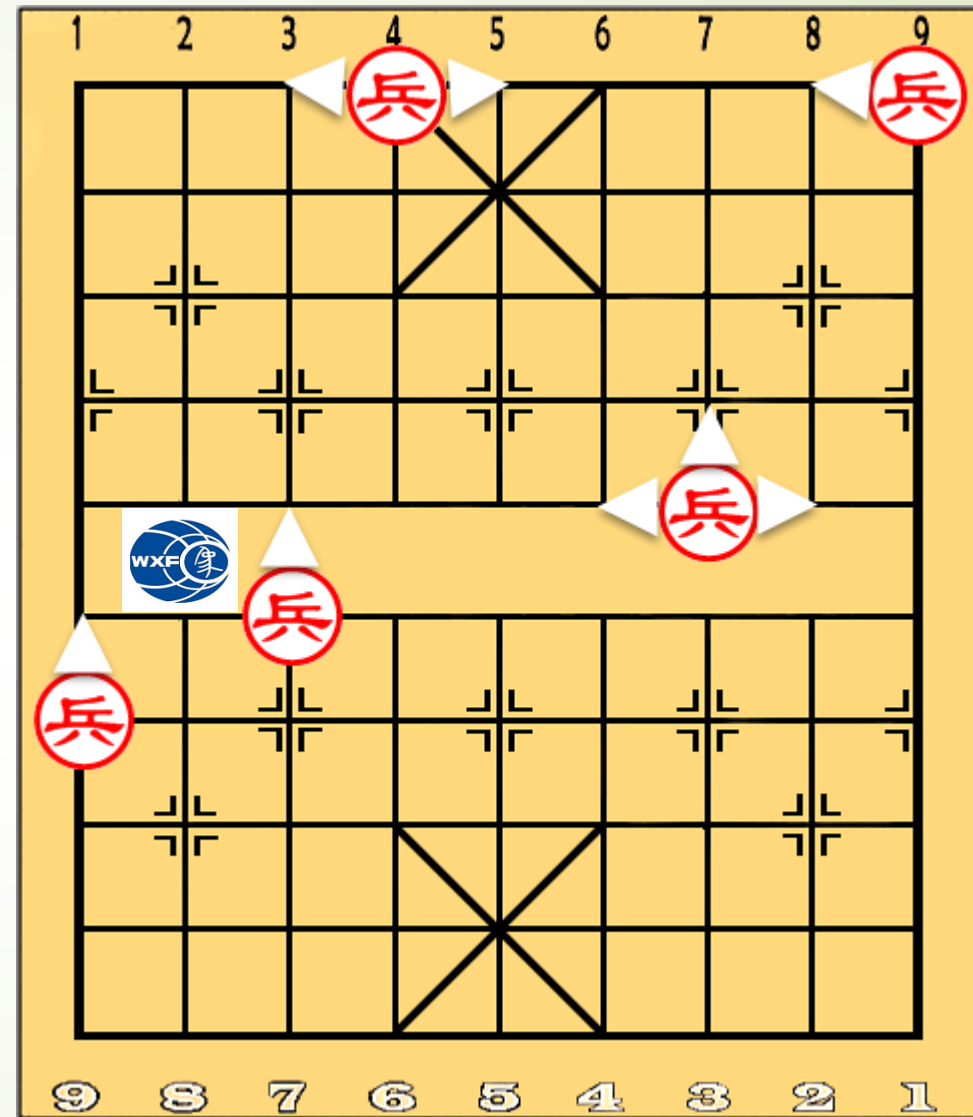
Cannon

- Red Cannon 炮 pào (with radical for fire) → focus on 包
- Black Cannon 砲 pào (with radical for stone) → focus on 包
- Unique to Xiangqi and its derivatives like Korean Janggi
- Movement of the Cannon is similar to the chariot, it can move as many intersections forward, backwards or in the same line, provided there are no other pieces to block it.
- Capturing material is what makes the Cannon special. It has to make use of another piece (which can be a friendly piece or an enemy piece) called a cannon mount. Capturing material is done by leaping over the cannon mount to occupy the intersection that belonged to the captured piece.



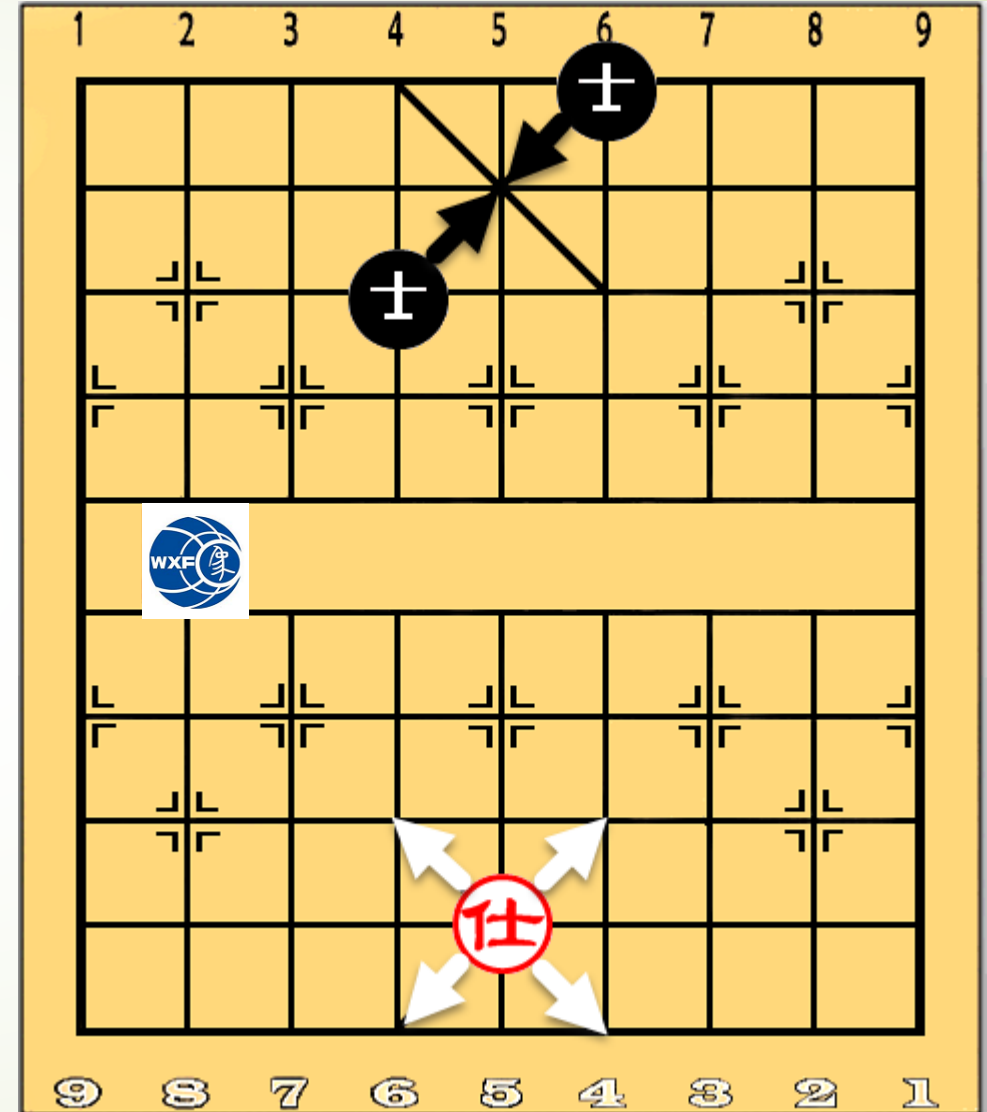
Pawn

- ✓ Red Pawn = 兵 bīng → would look like a soldier wearing a helmet with two legs.
- ✓ Black Pawn 卒 zú
- ✓ Pawns are easily identified because there are five of them each in the beginning.
- ✓ Movement of the Pawn must be discussed in three categories.
- ✓ Pawns that have not crossed the river can only advance one intersection forward.
- ✓ Pawns that have crossed the river can advance one intersection forward or traverse to the adjacent intersection.
- ✓ Pawns that have reached the enemy's bottom rank can only traverse to the adjacent intersection.
- ✓ Pawns capture enemy material by occupying the intersection of the captured piece.
- ✓ There are **no promotion** of pawns to other pieces, **no en passant**, and **pawns can never retreat!!!**



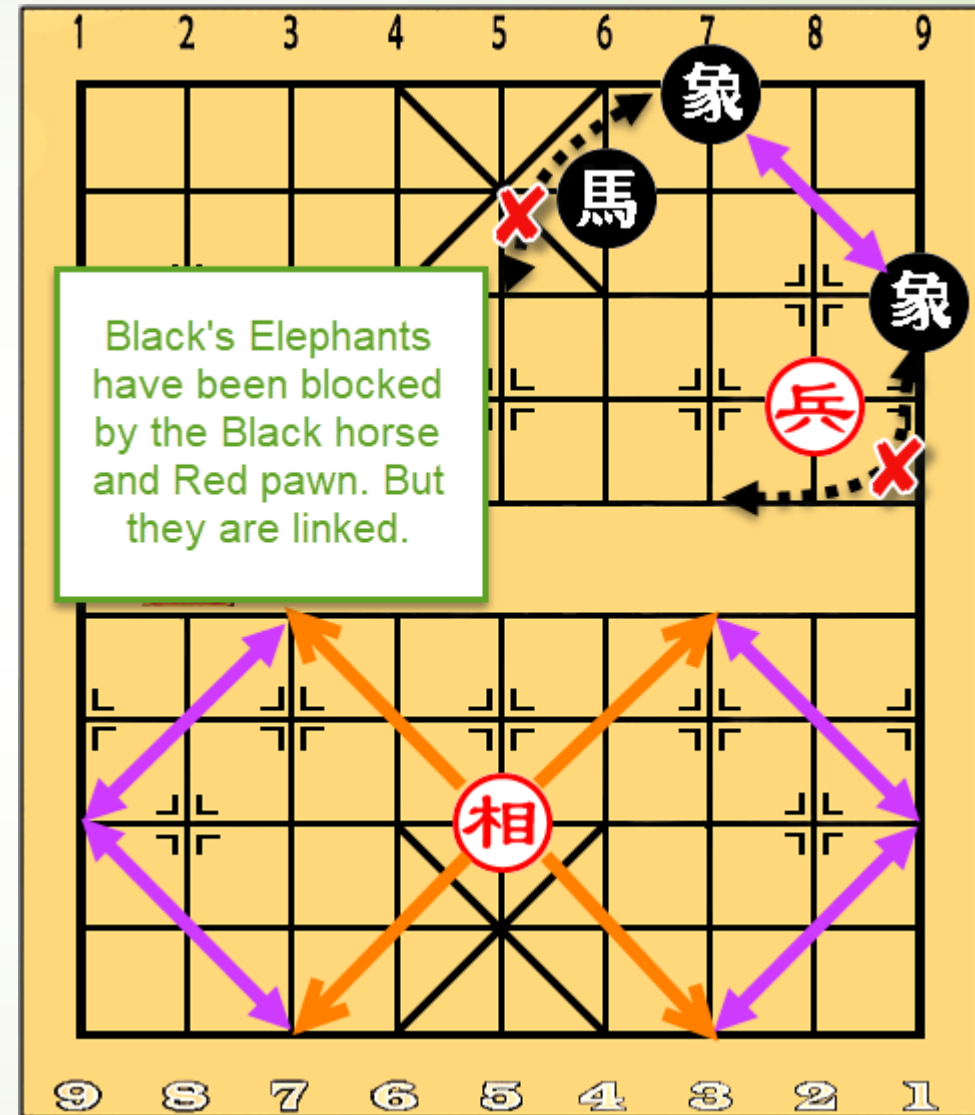
Advisor

- Red Advisor 仕 shì → focus on 士
- Black Advisor 士 shì → focus on 士
- Cannot leave the palace
- Move along the diagonal lines in the palace. There are only 5 intersections that the advisor can move.
- Mainly protective piece
- Captures material by occupying the intersection.



Elephant

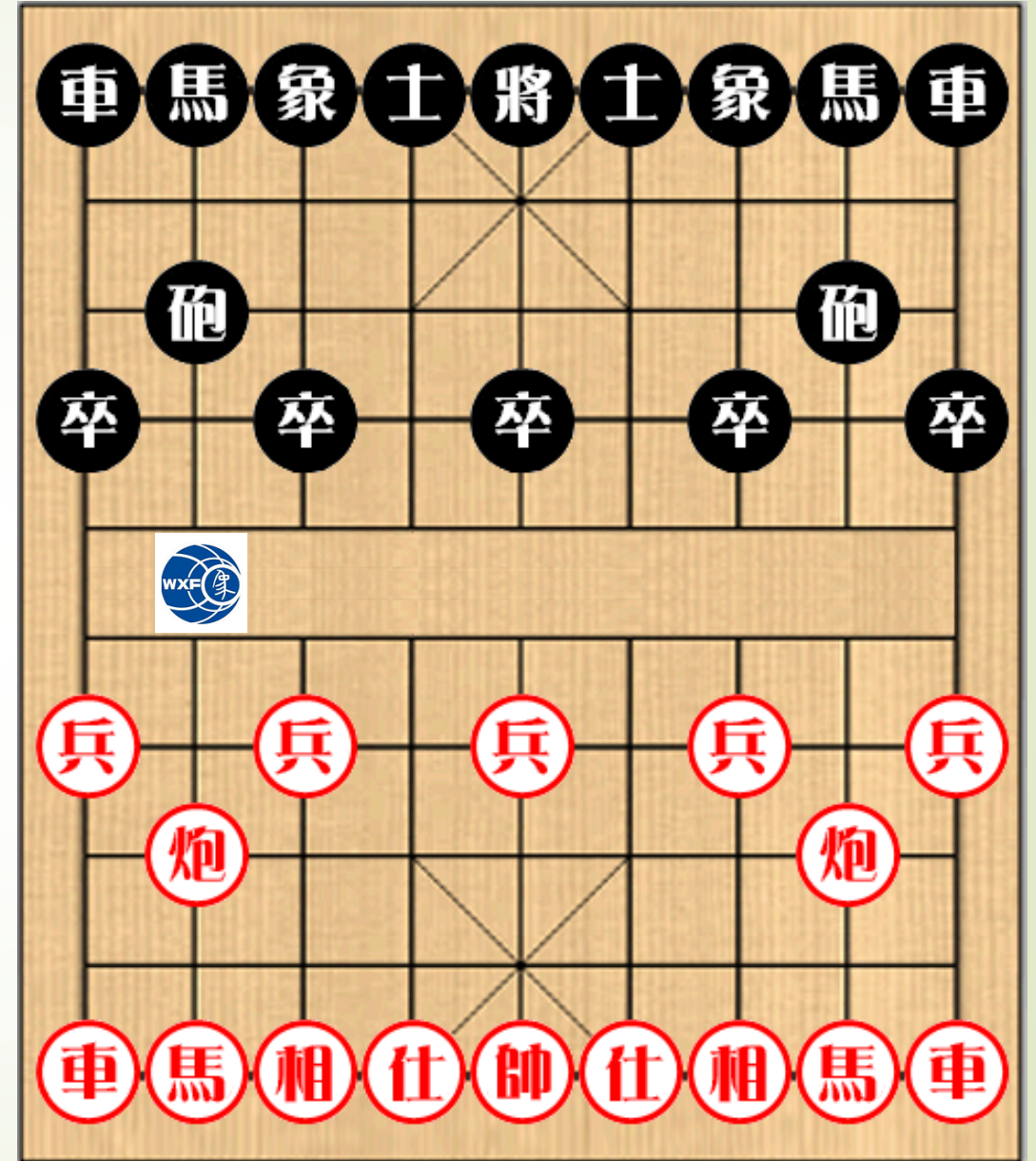
- Red Elephant 相 xiàng
- Black Elephant 象 xiàng
- Elephants cannot cross the river and are limited to their own territory
- A move by the Elephant consists of pushing in a diagonal direction two times. *If the first diagonal is occupied by another piece (friendly or enemy), the Elephant would be blocked and cannot move in that direction!*
- There are only seven intersections that the Elephant can move on the board.
- Mainly protective piece
- Captures material by occupying the intersection.



Array

The array is slightly similar to International Chess.

- On the bottom rank, the King is placed on the central file, where the advisors, elephants, horses and chariots are placed in adjacent order. That is why in early days, the advisor was called the queen, the elephant was also known as the bishop, and the horse was also called the knight.
- The two cannons are placed on the board stars on the third rank from the bottom, and the five pawns are placed on the fourth rank from the bottom, also on the board stars.



Playing the game and some simple rules

- Xiangqi is a turn-based game where Red gets to make the first move.
- Threatening to capture the enemy king is called a check, whereby **the opponent must resolve the threat before doing anything else**.
- When a player's king is captured, the game ends. The player whose king is captured would lose while his opponent would win. If neither player is able to capture the enemy king, it would be a draw.
- If a player has no legal moves to make but it was his turn to do so, he would lose the game. A stalemate is considered to be a loss for the player's king who is caught in a stalemate. Unlike International Chess, it is not a draw!
- The act of constantly delivering a check to the enemy king is called a perpetual check. Unlike International Chess, perpetual checks (长将 cháng jiāng) ARE NEVER ALLOWED and the player delivering them would have to change his moves or be penalized with a loss.

Simple Strategies

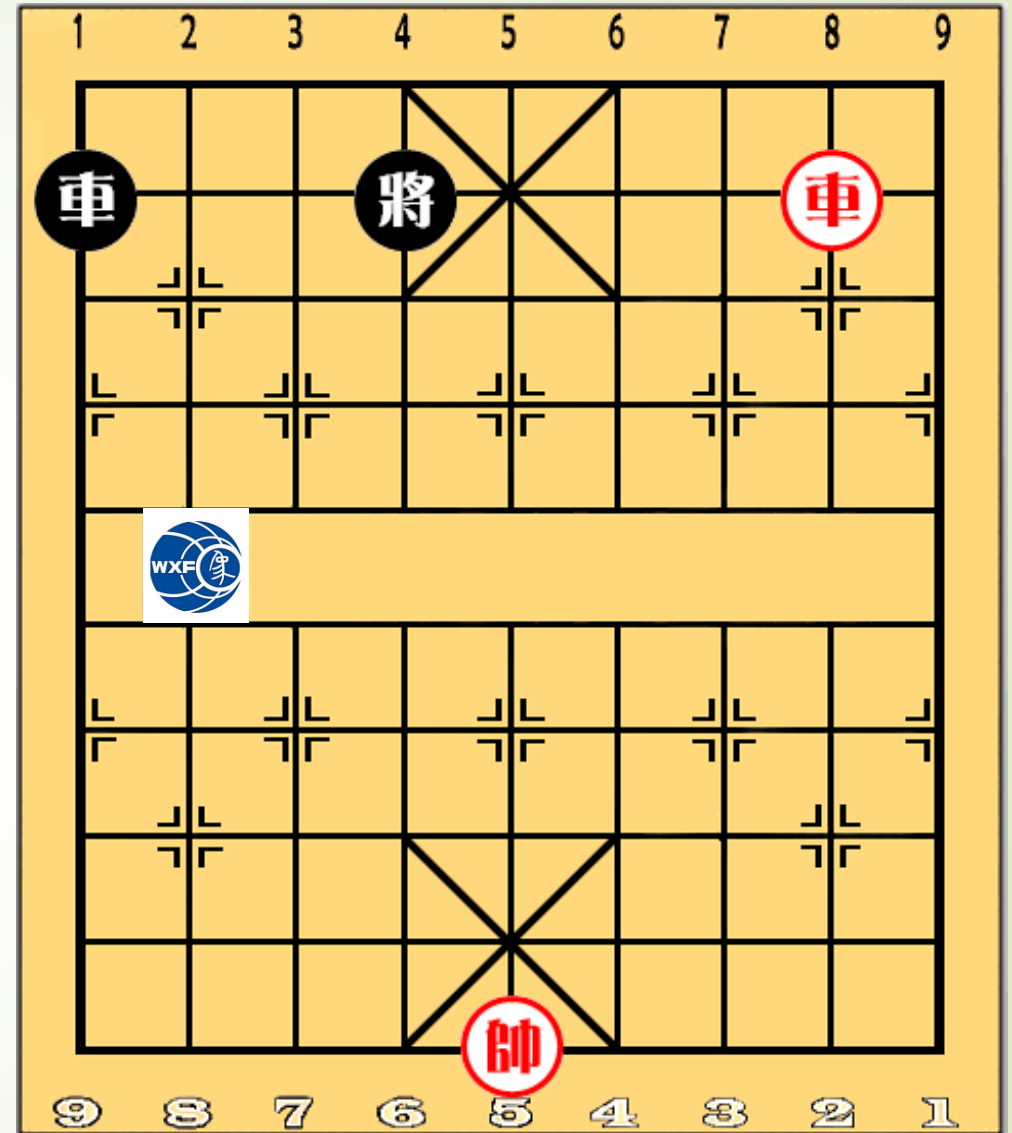
- Strategy is defined as the central idea in one's play, the idea which dictates the course of future actions.
- Attack to win when you have the advantage
- Defend to aim for a draw if you are at a disadvantage.
- Cover up weaknesses and wait or create chances to increase your advantage when the game is equal.
- From Sun Zi's Art of War: "The Skillful Warrior would make sure that your enemy cannot win, before the chance to win appears. You would have to shoulder the responsibility for losing, while the chance to win is dependent on the enemy." (Author's simple translation)
- 孙子曰：昔之善战者，先为不可胜，以待敌之可胜。不可胜在己，可胜在敌。

Where to look for more on Strategies?

- Xiangqi was based on warfare in the ancient times.
- Seven Military Classics in Chinese Literature are all applicable:
 - a) Jiang Ziya (Taigong)'s Six Secret Teachings (六韜 liù tāo)
 - b) The Methods of the Sima (司馬法 sī mǎ fǎ)
 - c) Sun Tzu's The Art of War (孫子兵法 sūn zǐ bīng fǎ)
 - d) Wu Qi's Wuzi (吳子 wú zǐ)
 - e) Wei Liaozi (尉繚子 wèi liáo zǐ)
 - f) Three Strategies of Huang Shigong (黃石公三略 huáng shí gōng sān lüè)
 - g) Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong (唐太宗李衛公問對 táng tài zōng lǐ wèi gōng wèn duì)
- Of course, the Thirty-Six Stratagems are also applicable.

Simple Tactics

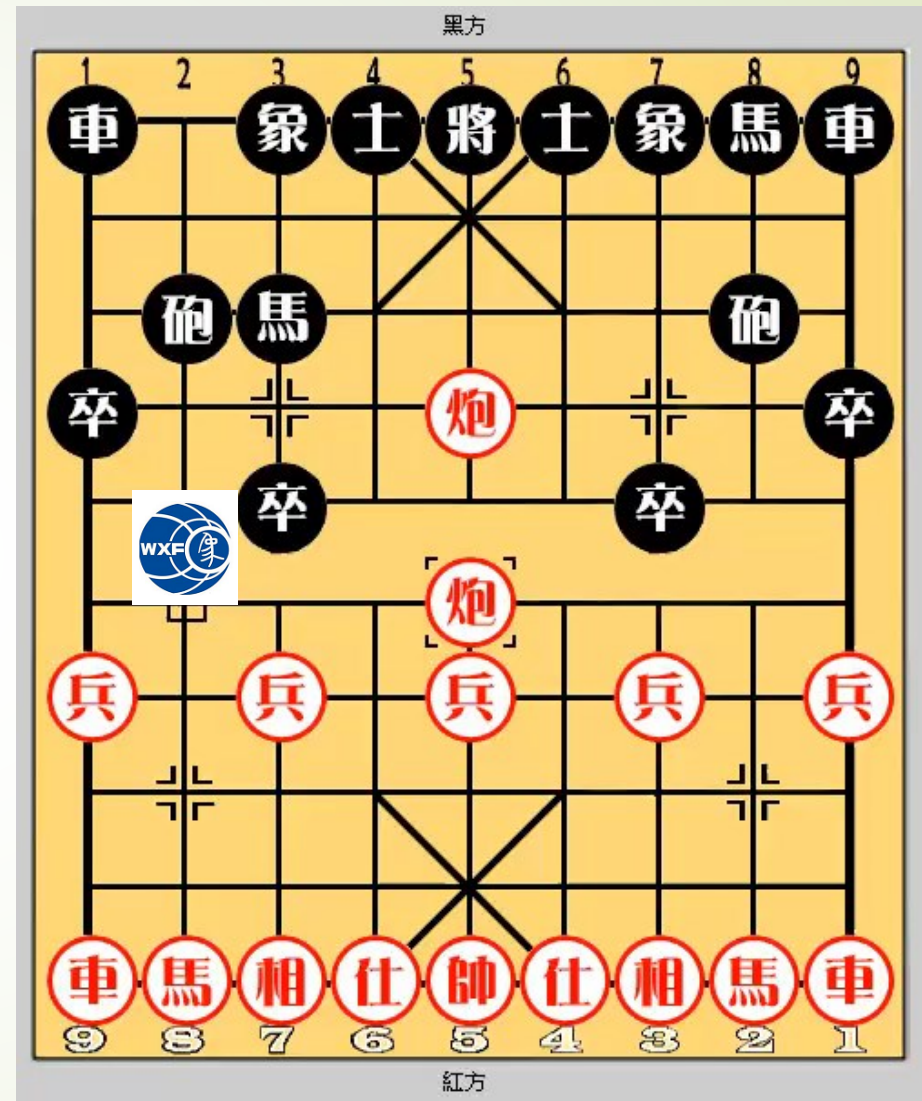
- Fork: When one piece can attack more than one enemy piece
- Pin: A piece is *pinned* when it cannot move without exposing a more important piece to capture.
- A piece is *skewered* when it is attacked and, by moving, exposes a less important piece to be captured.



The Study of Xiangqi can be divided into ...

- Basic Kills: About 30+ different basic checkmate formations.
- Opening Theory and Tabiat: (tons of literature)
- Midgame
- Endgame Theory and Tabiat (at least 150+ different endgame situations are considered basic)
- Endgame compositions or puzzles (mind-boggling)
- Xiangqi history and culture (exciting and interesting)
- Xiangqi and computers

Example of Basic Kill: Double Cannons Checkmate



How popular is Xiangqi?

- ▶ Tian Tian Xiangqi, the most popular Xiangqi site, boasts of at least tens of thousands of players at any time online. The picture on the right was taken at an off-peak time, at 1am with 84016 players. During the daytime, the number would easily multiply manifold.
- ▶ There are many other Chinese, Vietnamese websites with several thousands of players at any time.
- ▶ During transmissions of live matches, several million viewers can be seen watching online.



Why Play Xiangqi ?

- Ancient advice
- ***From INVINCIBLE AFTER TRAINING IN THE CAVES, a Xiangqi Manual before the Ming Dynasty still extant***
- 着棋三好: 好棋身, 好局势, 好思想.
zháo qí sān hǎo : hǎo qí shēn , hǎo jú shì , hǎo sī xiǎng
- The three gains of playing Xiangqi: you gain a healthy body, you gain a good position, and you gain the ability to think correctly.
- Modern Day Benefits:
- A getaway filled with excitement from the mundane world.
- A chance to train and exercise your mind and stimulate thought.
- Practise thinking logically
- Understand and appreciate the Chinese Culture
- It's fun!
- ... and many more reasons.




Where to play Xiangqi?

- Local clubs. Google or search for clubs on Facebook.
- Chess Associations: There are weekly gatherings in different chess associations in Europe, like in Belarus, Germany et cetera.
- Check out the list of local or nearby associations from the WXA website



Where to play Xiangqi online?

- Just Google and Search for Xiangqi or Chinese Chess and there will be a series of websites and apps available!
- 



Major Xiangqi Tournaments

- In China, the A-League, the Chinese Xiangqi National Individuals Tournament (Men & Women), BiGuiYuan Cup XiangQi Champion Invitational Tournament, Yang Guanlin Cup, Xie Xia Xun Cup, IMSA Elite Mind Games, WORLD MIND SPORTS GAMES... and a few dozens more
- Winners take home a purse of >10 thousand RMB (1USD = about 6.5 RMB) for major tournaments
- Biggest purse: CHU HE HAN JIE CUP KING OF XIANGQI WORLD TOURNAMENT. Winner takes home ONE MILLION RMB!
- International Tournaments: Tournaments organized by the Asian Xiangqi Federation, World Xiangqi Tournaments, and also the Huai Yin Han Xin Cup Xiangqi International Masters to name a few.