象棋

Xiangqi

Chinese Chess

Xiangqi, known in the west as **Chinese Chess**, is an extremely popular game in the Eastern Hemisphere. It is currently played by millions (or tens of millions) in China, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Hong Kong and other Asian countries. Xiangqi has remained in its present form for centuries. It is commonly believed that both Xiangqi and Orthodox Chess derive from the original Indian game of Chanturanga, but some, such as Sam Sloan and David Li, maintain that Chess is actually Chinese in origin. Whatever the relation between Xiangqi and Chaturanga, it seems highly likely that they are related, for the similarities between them are too hard to explain as just coincidences. The two games are played by approximately the same rules, and except for the Cannon, every Xiangqi piece is very similar to the Chaturanga piece that occupies roughly the same position and bears a name similar or identical in meaning.

象 (xiáng) 棋 (qí) translates to Elephant Game. In Mandarin it is written as either Xiangqi, Xiang Qi or Hsiang-Ch`i and pronounced "Shiang-Chi". In Cantonese it is written as Jeuhng Keih and pronounced "Junk Kay". The name is written as two Chinese characters. The first is used in the game for the Elephant piece. The second means strategy game, and it also signifies one of the four arts -- qin (music), hua (brush painting), shu (calligraphy) and qí (strategy games) -- that a Chinese gentleman scholar was supposed to be proficient in. The word may have originally referred to the game now called Weiqi or Go, though in current usage it just means strategy board game.

There is much literature on Xiangqi, most of it in Chinese. There are, however, a few books available in English and other languages.

Rules

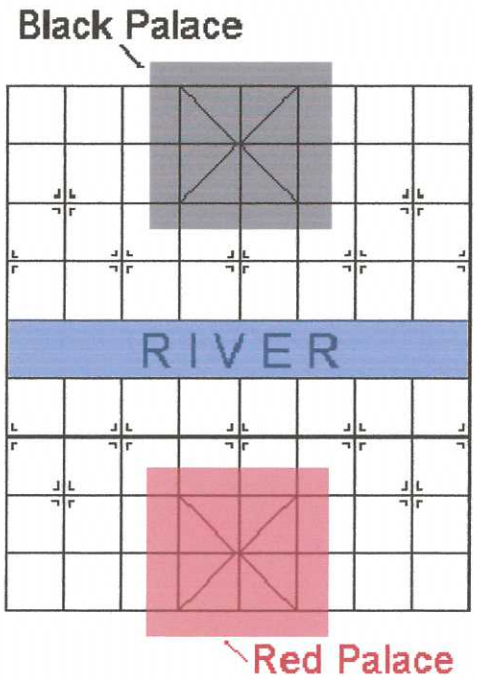
If you know how to play Chess, the rules of Xiangqi will be familiar. The general idea is the same. Each player controls an army of pieces, moves one piece at a time, and tries to get the opponent's royal piece. It differs from Chess mainly in the object, the board, and the pieces.

Object

The object of Xiangqi is to either checkmate or stalemate your opponent. Checkmate is the same in both games. In Xiangqi, the piece to checkmate is the opponent's General. You have checkmated your opponent when you have attacked his General (placed it in check), and he cannot eliminate the check with any move. Unlike Chess, where a stalemate counts as a draw, a stalemate in Xiangqi wins the game for the player delivering it. To avoid any confusion among Chess players who consider stalemate synonymous with draw, let me spell out the difference. Stalemate is when a player has no legal move. A draw is when a game ends in a tie. In Chess, stalemate is one condition in the game, among others, that leads to a draw. In Xiangqi, a player with no legal move loses.

Board

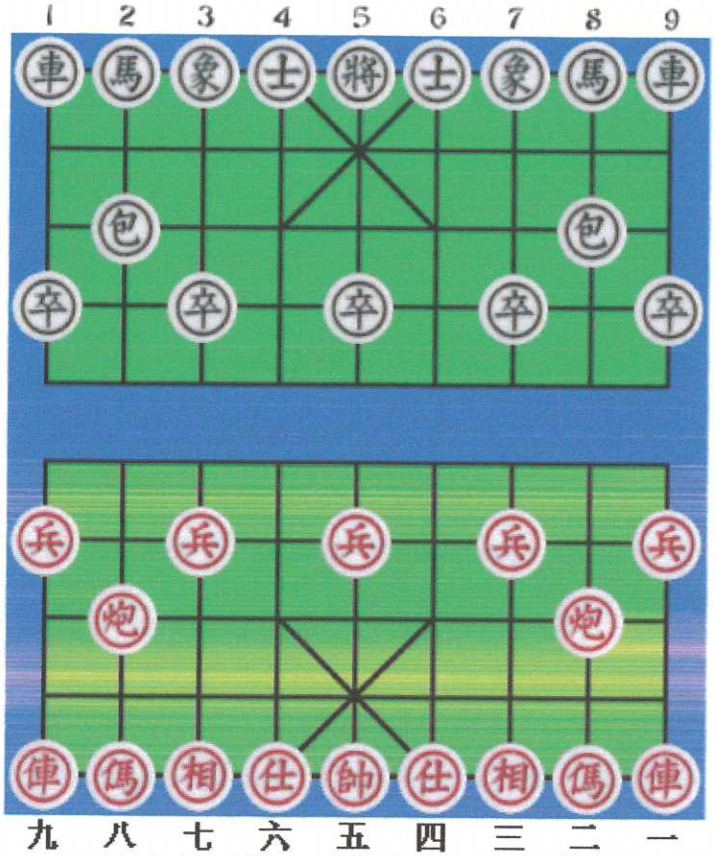
The traditional Xiangqi board is a grid of ten horizontal lines and nine vertical lines. The vertical lines are interrupted in the middle, so that the board appears as two grids of five horizontal lines by nine veritical lines. This interruption is called the river. It serves as a barrier to the Elephants. Other pieces can pass over it as though it's not there, Pawns gaining the ability to move sideways after crossing it. The board appears very similar to other uncheckered boards, such as the boards Shogi and Chaturanga are played on, but instead of going in the space demarcated by the lines, pieces go on the intersections. These intersections are called points. It is believed that this type of piece placement is borrowed from WeiQi (known in the west as Go). Two palaces are positioned at opposite sides of the board. Each is distinguished by an x-shaped cross connecting its four corner points. Throughout the game, each player's General and Advisors must remain in the palace.



The above board shows various L-shaped markings in order to mark the setup points of Pawns and Cannons. These markings are not present on all commercial boards, and they have no bearing on the course of the game.

Setup

At the beginning of the game, pieces are placed like so. Besides the traditional board described above, a checkered board with western pieces is also shown. The rules of the game do not require the traditional board, and western players may find the game less forbidding with more familiar equipment. The checkered board used here is patterned after one that came with a commercial Chinese Chess set called Cambaluc Chinese Chess. Like the traditional board, it marks the river, the palaces, and the spaces that Cannons and Pawns begin on.



Traditional Pieces, Board, and Notation

From left to right on the bottom and top rows, you see: a Chariot, a Horse, an Elephant, an Advisor, a General, an Advisor, an Elephant, a Horse, and a Chariot. On the third rows, you see the Cannons in front of the Horses, and on the fourth row you see the Pawns, one space between each Pawn. The side shown at the bottom of the board is normally called Red, the other side Black, though sometimes Blue or Green.

Pieces

Chinese Pieces	Movement	Westernized Pieces
	**Chariots / Rooks** The Chariot (or Rook) moves exactly the same as the Rook in Chess. It moves in a straight line horizontally or vertically across any number of empty spaces, stopping either on an empty space or the first space it comes to that is occupied by one of the opponent's pieces. It may not pass over occupied spaces. The character used for the Chinese piece, 車, is the pictograph of a chariot from above, showing wheels at top and bottom.	
	**Horses / Knights** The Horse, commonly known in Fairy Chess literature as the Mao, is capable of reaching all the same spaces that the Chess Knight can reach, but it cannot leap over pieces. When it moves, it first moves one space orthogonally followed by	

	one more space diagonally outward. When the first space it would move over is occupied, its movement in that direction is blocked. It may never stop on the first space of its movement. So it cannot reach any space a Chess Knight could not reach. Known as *mǎ* in Chinese, the character for this piece, 馬, is the pictograph of a horse, showing its head, mane, legs, and tail. The Chinese name is similar to the English word **mare**, which means female horse.	
	**Minister / Elephant** The Red piece is called a Minister, the black piece an Elephant. Some literature on Chinese Chess will stick to one name or the other. H. T. Lau calls them both Ministers, while the World Xiangqi Federation calls them both Elephants. We tend to favor Elephant, as shown in the western pieces used. By whatever name, this piece moves two spaces in the same diagonal direction. Like the Horse, it may not leap over occupied spaces. So if the first step of its move is over an occupied space, it is blocked and may not make that move. Additionally, Elephants are confined to their own side of the river. Due to these limitations, the Elephant can reach only seven spaces of the board. The two characters used for this piece are homonyms in Chinese, both transliterated as *xiàng*. The character for the Black piece, 象, is the pictograph of an elephant. The character for the Red piece, 相, shows an eye 目 behind a tree 木. The tree is the figure on the left, and the eye is the thing that looks like a ladder. As a verb, it means to examine or study. As a noun, it means prime minister.	
	**Advisors / Guards** The Advisor (also known as Councellor, Mandarin or Guard) moves one space diagonally. On the traditional board, the diagonal lines in the palace connect the points the Advisor may reach. It may never leave the palace. Aside from this restriction, it is identical to the Shatranj piece commonly known as a Ferz It's Chinese name of *shì* means scholar. The character for the Black piece, 士, combines the characters for 1 (一) and 10 (十) to mean one who knows all from one to ten. The Red character, 仕, combines the characters for person, 人, with scholar, 士, essentially keeping the meaning the same. The names of Advisor (used by the World Xiangqi Federation) and Councellor (used by H. T. Lau) are close in meaning to this. Councellor is a common translation of both *shì* and *ferz*, but Advisor has the advantage of not beginning with the same letter as Cannon while meaning essentially the same thing. The names of Guard and Mandarin were both popularized by John Gollon. The name of Guard describes the function of the piece in the game. A Mandarin was a kind of public official in the Chinese empire. Neither seems to be an accurate translation.	
	**General / King** The General moves one space orthogonally within the confines of the palace. The	



two Generals cannot face each other on an open file. For example, a red General on e1 and a black General on e10, with no piece on the e-file between them, is an illegal position. If either General sits exposed on an open file, the other General may not move to occupy that file. Unlike the King in Chess, the General may not move diagonallly.

The Black character for this piece, 將, tranliterated as *jiàng*, combines a character for law, 寸, in the lower right corner, with a phonetic. It means **will** or **going to**. The Red character, 帥, transliterated as *shuài*, combines characters for hill 埠 and banner 巾. The hill is on the left side, the banner on the right. As a noun, it means commander, as an adjective, handsome.



Cannons



The Cannon moves differently when it moves to capture than when it moves passively. It moves the same as the Chariot when it is not capturing a piece, and it moves in the same directions when capturing except that to make the capture it must hop over a single intervening piece, referred to as the screen. In other words, Cannons capture by hopping over a *second* piece in order to capture a *third* piece. For example, a Cannon on a1 can take a piece on f1 when exactly one of the spaces b1, c1, d1, or e1 is occupied by a piece of either color. Cannons only capture when hopping and only hop when capturing. They may never hop over more than one piece in a given move.

The character for the Red piece, 炮, shows fire on the left and the phonetic for its Chinese name of *pào*, 包. The character for the Black piece shown here just has the phonetic, but in some sets the Black piece is displayed as 砲, showing a stone 石 with the phonetic. The Chinese *pào* sounds like the English sound effect pow, and given that the character includes the phonetic for this sound, it is likely that the Chinese name for the Cannon is onomatopoeic.



Soldiers / Pawns



The Xiangqi Pawn moves one space vertically forward. Upon crossing the river, it gains the additional ability to move one space sideways. Unlike orthodox Pawns, its passive move and capture move are always the same, it never gets a double move, and it does not promote to another piece on the last rank. Being unable to move forward any longer, a Pawn on the last rank can only move left or right.

The Red piece, 兵, transliterated as *bing*, shows hands 廾 wielding an axe 斤. The Black piece, 卒, transliterated as *zú*, combines the pictograph of a cloak 衣 with the number 1 一. Both characters mean soldier.



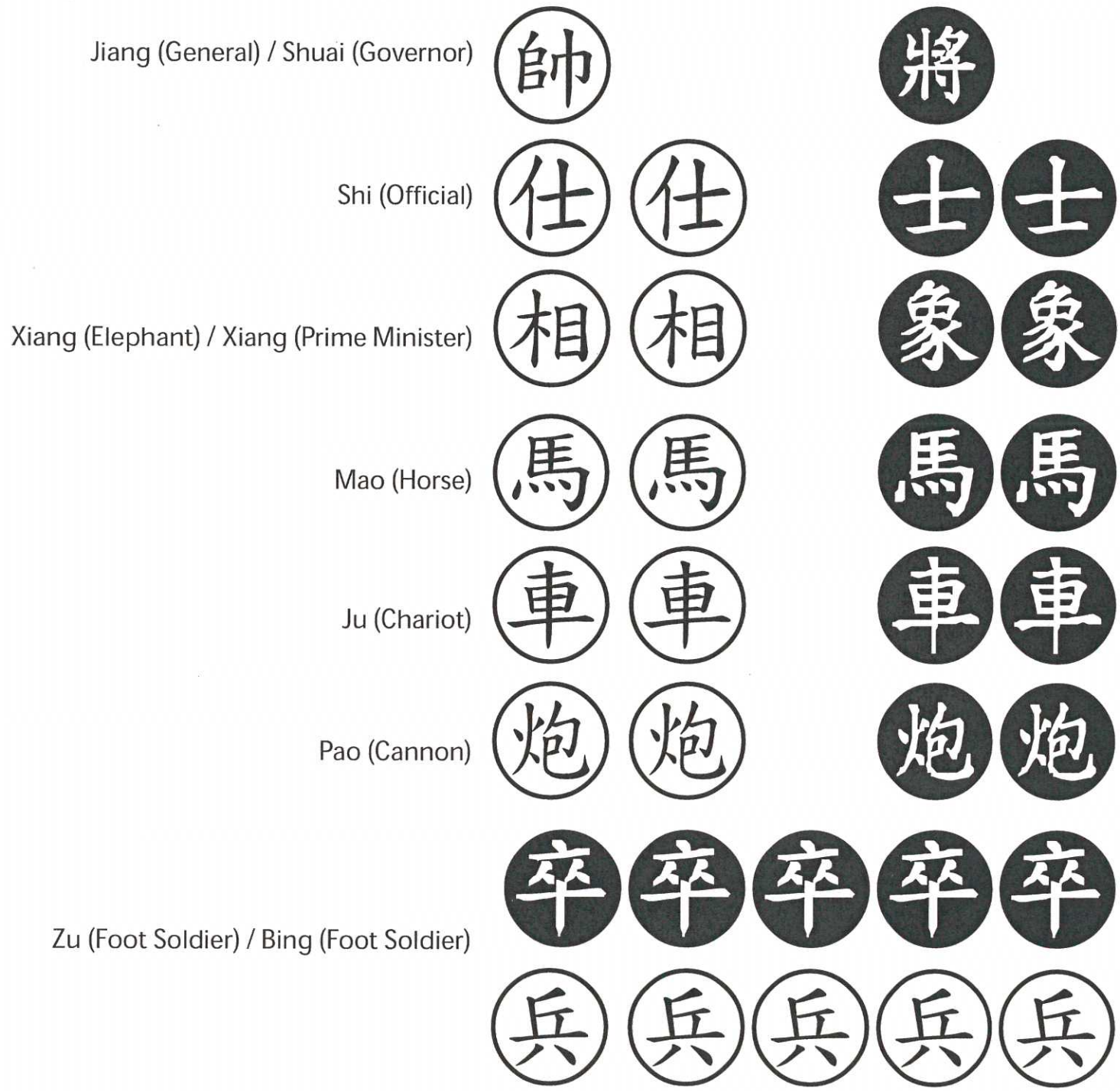
Other rules

1. Red moves first.
2. Perpetual check is forbidden. You cannot check your opponent more than three times in a row with the same piece and same board positions.

3. You cannot force an enemy piece to move to and from the same two spaces, indefinitely, in order to avoid capture. If you move a Rook to e5, threatening a Cannon on e6, and your opponent's only viable move is Cannon to f6, then you cannot force that Cannon to and from e6 and f6 by moving your Rook to and from e5 and f5, indefinitely. The purpose of this rule (and the above rule) is to avoid perpetual-check draws. Some of these situations are complicated, but the person who is forcing the perpetual move must usually break it off.
4. The game is a draw when neither side can force a checkmate or a stalemate.

象棋

Xiang Qi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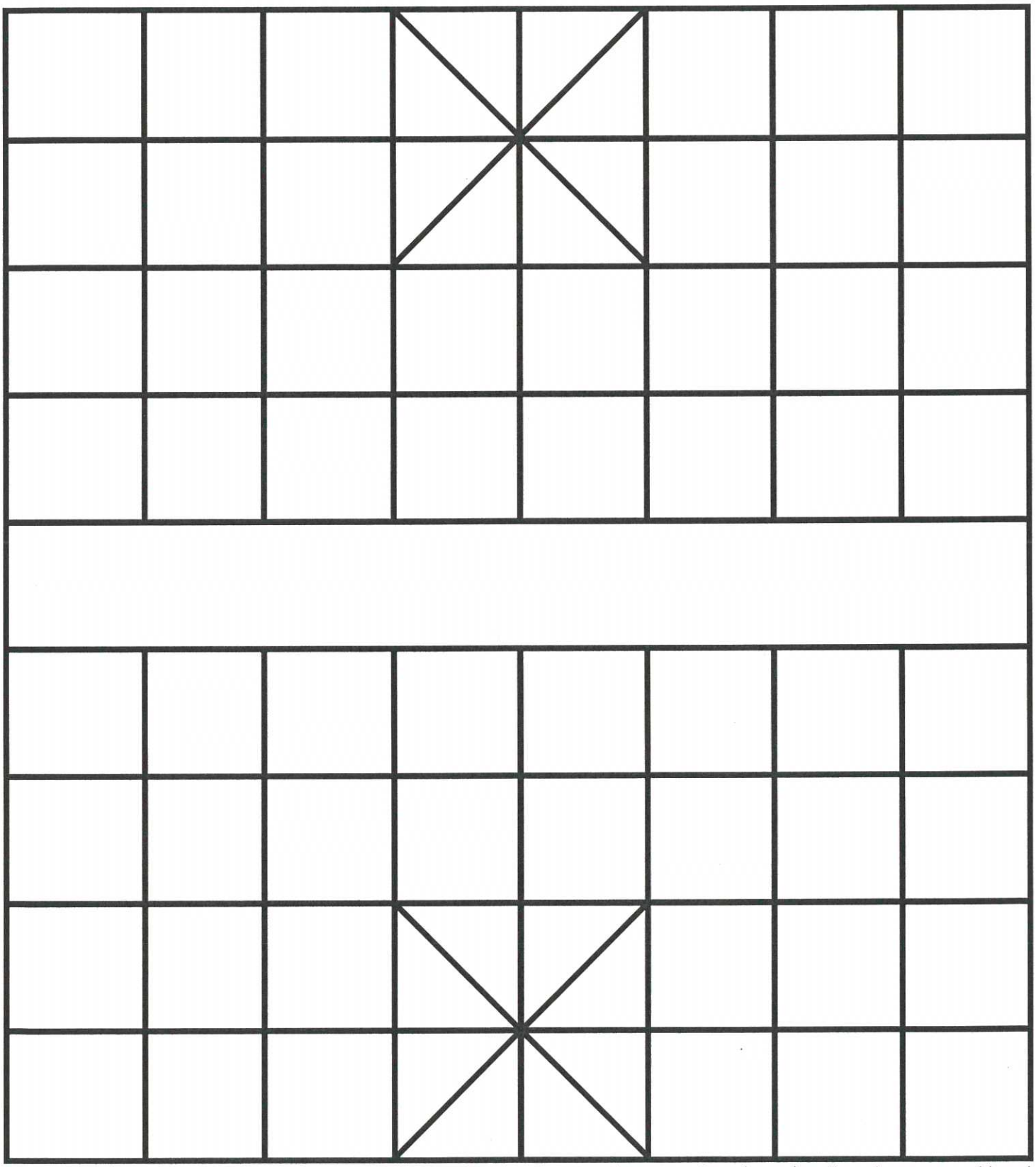

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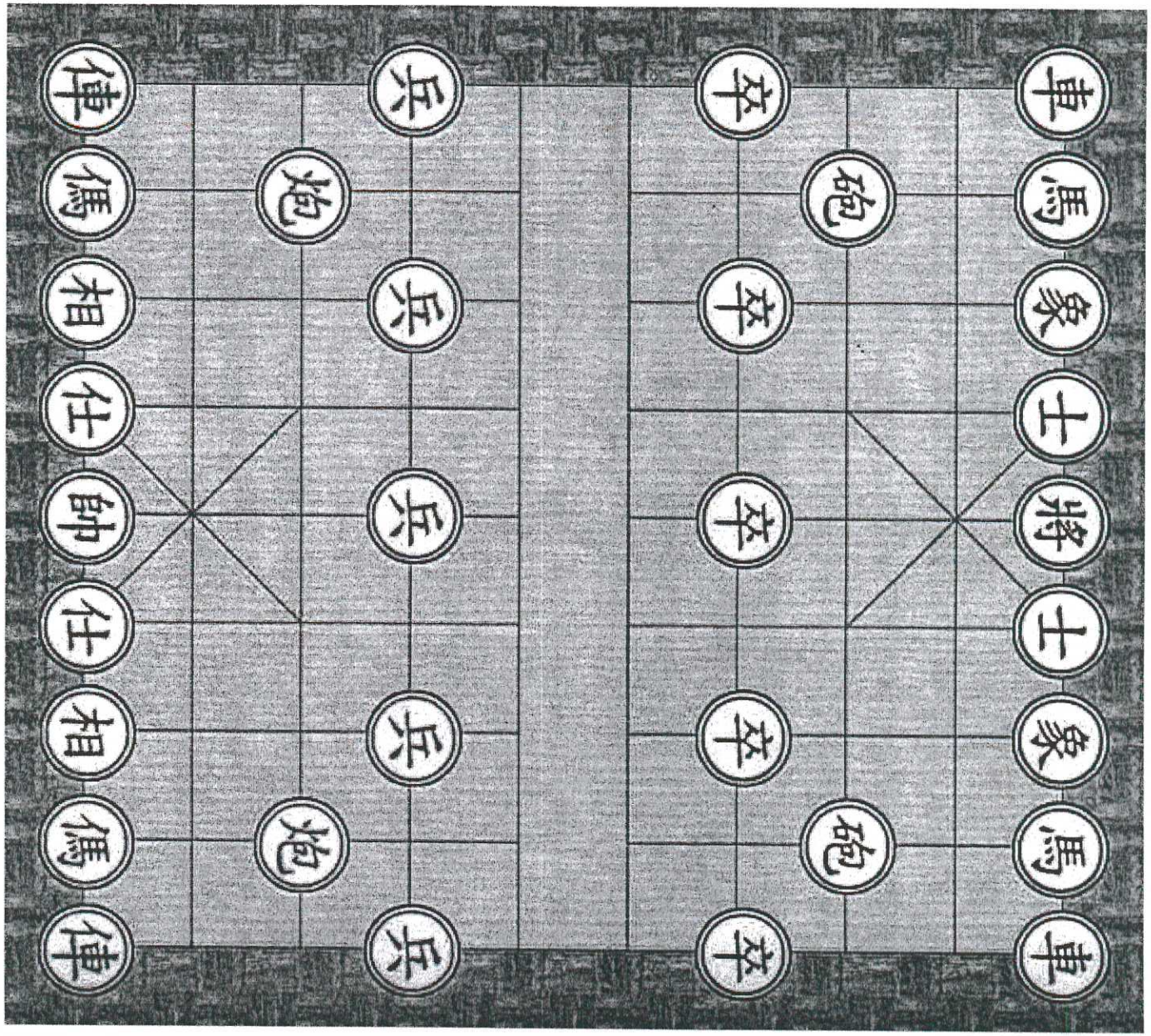
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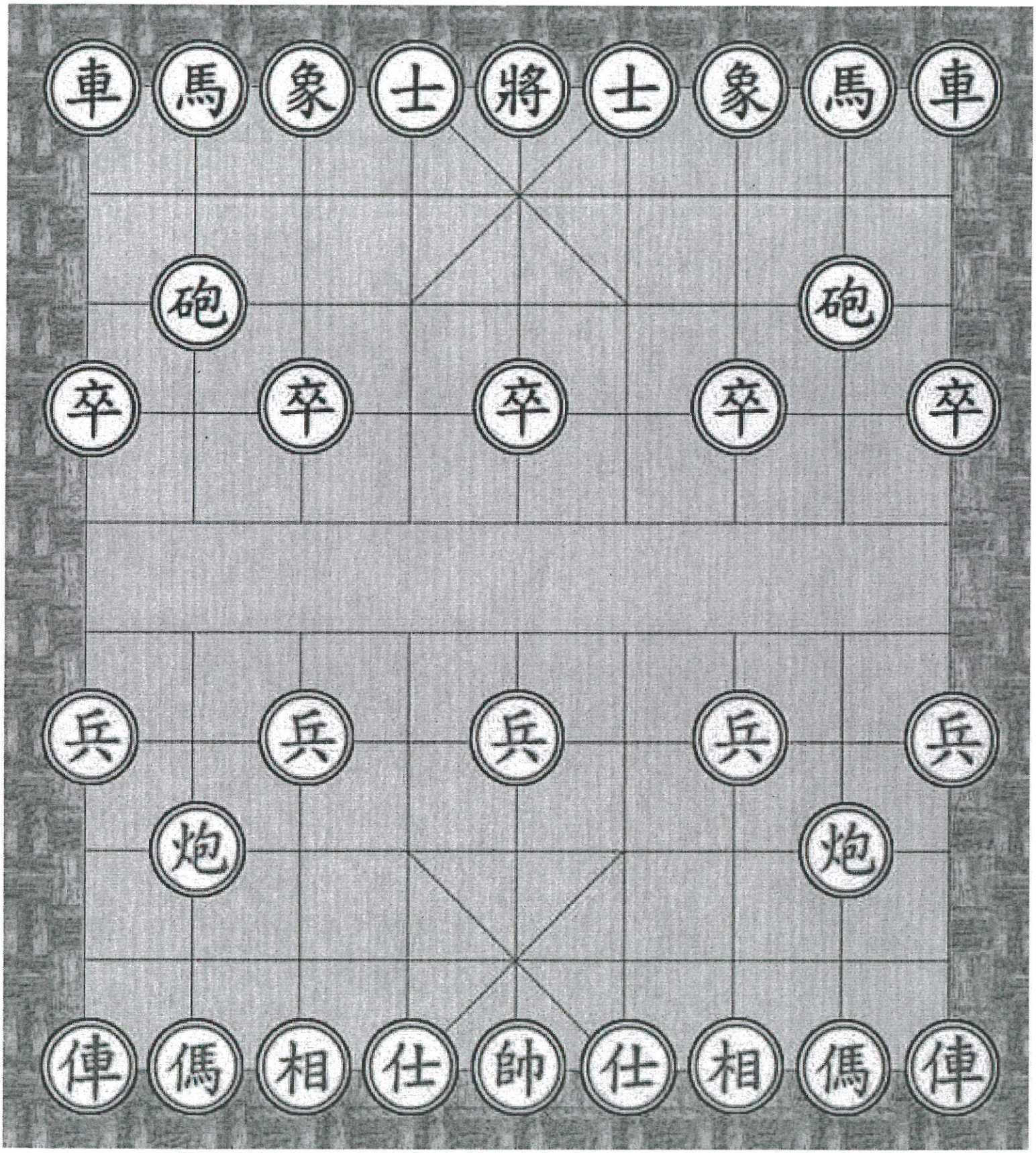
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