

Chess Life

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We guide you through your myriad of options

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On The Cover

The number of options out there for playing chess on your mobile device can be bewildering. FM Mike Klein, winner this year of the "Best Tournament Report" category in the Chess Journalists of America awards for his reporting from the 2010 U.S. Championships, helps guide you through the choices, beginning on page 48.

iPad illustration by Jeremy Kortez; Cover design by Frankie Butler



GM Yasser Seirawan, declaring, "I'm ready!," comes out of retirement to join the U.S. team at the World Team event in China. See the feature beginning on page 28.

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A Chinese Chess Centenarian



Xie Xiaxun is the most important chess figure in China in the early twentieth century.

ONCE THERE WAS AN ORCHARD in which an enormous orange was growing. When the orange was peeled open, two men were discovered inside, playing chess together. Jin-Zhen Zhu Jinzhen recounts this fable in his seventeenth-century chess book, *The Secret Inside the Orange*. As fabulous as that sounds, the chess you find when you look inside China today is hardly less miraculous.

Since Dato Tan's 1974 promotion of the "Big Dragon Project" to develop Asia's potential for international chess, China

has achieved world-class status: multiple women's world championships (GM Jun Xie in 1991 and 1999, GM Chen Zhu 2001, GM Yuhua Xu 2006, GM Yifan Hou the current champion), the women's Olympiad, the women's FIDE World Cup, top-ten GM Yue Wang, Asian Team Championship, and World Youth Team Championship. Not only have Chinese excelled internationally, since 1980 China has hosted a number of international competitions. Underlying this success is China's tradition of its native version of chess (Xiangqi). Wenzhe Liu

(the first to defeat a western grandmaster in formal competition) and Women's World Champion Jun Xie, among others, began as strong Xiangqi players.

We do not know precisely when chess came to China. Some believe the game originated there and came to India, rather than vice-versa. We do know that Xiangqi has been around since the eighth century and probably earlier. It is more popular among Chinese but less prestigious than the more ancient game of Go (Weiqi). The modern international version of chess came to China with European missionaries and imperialists who established strictly segregated chess clubs in their colonies in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Contact probably came about in more informal venues. For example, Chinese merchants encountered international chess when traveling with foreigners by ship.

Xie Xiaxun is the most important chess figure in China in the early 20th century, born in 1888 near Wenzhou in Zhejiang province. At age four he observed his father and uncle playing Xiangqi and soon began to play. At ten years he was the city champion. Two years later he walked over 30 miles to seek out a renowned Xiangqi player to test his skill. Xie tied their three-game match, +1 =1 -1.

Xie married and began college, but his family faced hard times after his father died, and Xie was not able to complete his college education so he took jobs teaching in elementary schools. Xie had to support a growing family, but his heart was in chess. He took an opportunity to move to Shanghai to work as Xiangqi editor for a newspaper, where he published composed endgames with political themes that subtly protested the corrupt government of the early Republic. (Imagine modern endgame studies with titles such as "Mortgage Foreclosure Crisis" or "Debt-Ceiling Stalemate.") Thus they became popular among both players and non-players. With Pan Dingsi, Xie collected these studies and in 1916 published them as *In Remembrance of National Shame: A New Chess Manual*.

In 1916 a Dane, Charles Kliene (translator of *Seven Stars* (1916), the first Xiangqi manual published with widespread appeal in the west) sought out Xie for his knowledge of Xiangqi. Kliene also introduced Xie to international

chess. Xie must have shown a quick aptitude for it, because Kliene brought Xie to the Shanghai International Chess Association whose members were all westerners. There Xie defeated the president and some stronger members in casual games. Xie became the first Chinese member of the association and soon became a board member. As a result, the association opened meeting rooms for both international chess and Xiangqi, and an exchange began where Xie would introduce Xiangqi to foreign residents and international chess to Chinese through traveling exhibitions. This is the first organizational attempt to spread international chess among the Chinese population.

In 1918 Xie won the Xiangqi Individual Championship in Shanghai, a premier event that preceded the national championship system. In the following years, Xie toured China promoting both kinds of chess and began a four-volume magnum opus on Xiangqi that included a section on international chess. He is responsible for establishing the Chinese nomenclature used today for international chess. He gave blindfold and simul exhibitions. He also wrote about Go. In 1927 he was one of the first Chinese to participate in an international chess tournament in Shanghai, and he won games against Europeans over the next several years. In 1928 he was chief arbiter of China's first national Xiangqi championship.

Alexander Alekhine took a serious interest in the regional chess variants of Asia during his 1933 Far East tour. He thought it might be possible through comparative analysis to create an archetypal that would be more organic than the contrived variants advocated by Capablanca and others.

The Shanghai International Chess Association sponsored Alekhine's visit in January 1933. Xie was the sole Chinese among five from the association to welcome him. Alekhine called Xie "tops in Asia for chess." Two Chinese drew with Alekhine in the 47-board simul on the 27th. In the 11-board blindfold simul on the 29th, Xie, in consultation with Yang Wenkai, drew his game with Alekhine. Regrettably, that game score has not come to light.

Emulating the world champion, Xie undertook a southeast Asian tour in 1935 to promote both Xiangqi and international chess. In Singapore he met with several Chinese chess enthusiasts before being entertained by the Singapore Chess Club. Xie played a much-publicized game with the club president and previous champion, RAF Wing

Commander Paul B. Hunter. The *Singapore Free Press* chess editor described him thus: "Austerely clad in white linen garments, Mr. Cheh Hsieh Shun [Xie Xiaxun] is an impressive figure. His whole bearing, quiet and dignified, his kindly-humorous eyes, his shrewd, calculating mind stamp him as an aesthete" (25 April 1935, p. 2). They played at the Chinese Swimming Club and Hunter resigned in two hours, Xie dominating the endgame.

Queen pawn opening (D03)

Xie Xiaxun
Wing Cmr. Paul B. Hunter
Chinese Swimming Club, Singapore
April 24, 1933

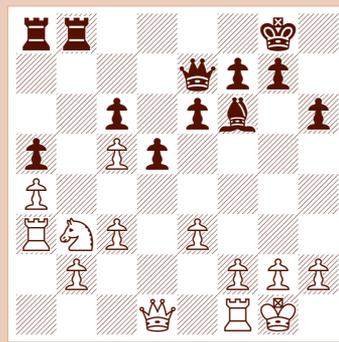
1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Bg5 Nbd7 4. e3 e6 5. Bb5 Be7 6. Nbd2 0-0 7. 0-0 c5 8. Bxd7 Bxd7 9. c3 Bc6

Also possible is 9. ... Ne8 10. Bxe7 (Also OK is 10. Bf4 Bb5 11. Re1 Bd6 12. Bxd6 [12. Ne5 f6 forcing the exchange] 12. ... Qxd6) 10. ... Qxe7 11. Ne5 Bb5 12. Re1 f6.

10. Ne5 h6 11. Nxc6 bxc6 12. Bxf6 Bxf6 13. dxc5 Qe7

13. ... Qa5!

14. Nb3 a5 15. a4 Rfb8 16. Ra3



After 16. Ra3

16. ... e5

This is premature. Black should have played 16. ... Qa7 17. Re1 White does not appear to have a single good move. 17. ... Be7 18. Qd4 e5 19. Qxe5 Bxc5 20. Nxc5 Qxc5 21. Rb1 (21. Ra2 Rb3 and again Black's game is preferable) 21. ... Qxa3!

17. Re1 e4 18. Qc2 Be5 19. g3 Kh8

19. ... Qf6 was indicated.

20. Re2 Bc7 21. c4 Rb4 22. cxd5 cxd5 23. Rd2 Rab8

23. ... Rc4 was best.

24. Rxd5 Qe6 25. Qd1 Kh7 26. Kg2 Qe8 27.

Rd7 Bd8

27. ... Rd8 was preferable.

28. Rd4

I was unable to witness the rest of the game, and the subsequent moves and comment were kindly supplied by a correspondent.

28. ... Bf6 29. Rxb4 Rxb4 30. Nxa5 Bxb2 31. Ra2 Qe6 32. Qe1 Qxa2 33. Qxb4 g5 34. Qb3 Qxb3 35. Nxb3 Be5 36. a5 Bb8 37. c6 Bc7 38. a6 Bb6 39. Nd2 f5 40. Nc4 Bxe3 41. fxe3 f4 42. exf4 gxf4 43. gxf4 Kg6 44. c7, Black resigned.

On May 4th, Xie gave a simul for the local players at the same locus, perhaps of international chess. In this extended tour, Xie played 241 games of Xiangqi (+175 =53 -13) as well as a smaller number of international chess games.

On his return to China in January 1936, Xie gave a simul in Guangzhou and stayed to compete in the "Silver Dragon Cup" international chess competition, hosted by the Victoria Chess Club. China was represented in this five-national tournament (Great Britain, USA, Germany, Austria) by Xie Xiaxun and Dr. Wu Guoliang. Although he had not had a chance to rest from his tour and prepare, Xie won the 20-round tournament with an overwhelming score (+18 =1 -1).

But the Japanese invasion of China was not far off. Between 1937 and 1939, Xie and his chess friends traveled to Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya, and Thailand, using chess to garner aid. In 1939, Xie returned to China where he had recruited numerous Chinese technicians. During the war Zhou Enlai met Xie and they played and discussed Xiangqi together, developing a life-long friendship.

After the war Xie held several leadership positions in national and municipal chess associations. He worked with some of China's future grandmasters, such as Xu Jialiang, before retiring to Wenzhou, which remains an important center of chess activity in China. He died in 1987; by the Chinese way of reckoning age, he was 101. He is primarily remembered as a strong champion and important promoter of Xiangqi. Although he did not develop his international chess play to its full potential, it was Xie who planted the orchard that grew the miraculous orange of international chess in China.

For more on Chinese chess (Xiangqi), visit the excellent website www.xqinenglish.com. The author thanks Jim Png Hau Cheng and Jianxin Taylor for invaluable assistance furnishing material and translations.

~Mark Taylor

2011 CJA ANNUAL AWARDS

More information about the Chess Journalists of America awards program, including this year's runners up, can be found at chessjournalism.org.

Best Story of the Year Award

"The Grandmaster Who Did It His Way"

Written by Larry Parr
appeared in *Chess Life* (March 2011)

Best Chess Column Award

Endgame Lab

Written by GM Pal Benko
appears in *Chess Life*

Best State Magazine/Newsletter Award

Georgia Chess

edited by Mark N. Taylor

Best Tournament Report Article Award

"Kamsky Bids Adieu to Championship Drought"

Written by FM Mike Klein
appeared in *Chess Life* (August 2010)

Best Chess Magazine/Newsletter Layout Award

The entire October-December 2010 issue
of *Chess Horizons*

Edited by Robert D. Messenger

Excellence in Chess Writing, Mainstream Media Award

"My Playing Weight"

Written by Dale Rigby
appeared in *Sport Literate* (Volume 7, Issue 1)

Best Regular Newspaper Column Award

Chess

Written by David R. Sands
appears in *The Washington Times*

Best Regular Newspaper Article of Local Interest Award

Chess: A Knight's Tour

Written by Bill Cornwall
appeared in the *Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*

Best Chess Photojournalism Award

Cover of June 2010's *Chess Life*

By Jeff Weiss

Best Features Article Award

"Involuntary Retirement"

Written by IM Jack Peters
appeared in *Chess Life* (March 2011)

Best Instructive Lesson Award

"Conversation with a Grandmaster"

Written by GM Boris Gulko and Dr. Joel R. Sneed
appeared in *Chess Life* (June 2010)

Best Review Award

"Frank Brady's Masterpiece"

Written by AI Lawrence
appeared in *Chess Life* (February 2011)

Best Humorous Contribution Award

"Weekly Chess News (April Fool's Supplement)"

By Mark N. Taylor
appeared in *Georgia Chess*

Most Notable Achievement in Correspondence Chess Award

"Enter the Centaur"

By FM Alex Dunne
appeared in *Chess Life* (February 2011)

Best Historical Article Award

"A Forgotten Chess Tale: Hapley's Project"

By Yasser Seirawan
appeared in *Northwest Chess* (November 2010)

Best Interview Award

"Profiling Brady"

By AI Lawrence
appeared in *Chess Life* (February 2011)

Best Chess Art Award

Cover of *Northwest Chess* March 2011 issue

Designed by Philip Peterson
appeared in *Northwest Chess*

Best Analysis Award

Keating, R-Karagianis, P

By Robert Keating
appeared in *Iowa Chess En Passant* (July 2010)

Best USCF State Chapter Website Award

www.calchess.org

Official website of the Northern California State's USCF chapter
Designed by Tom Langland

Best General Chess Website Award

www.uschess.org

Official website of the United States Chess Federation
Designed by Phillip R. Smith

Best Chess Blog Award

brokenpawn1.blogspot.com

"Broken Pawn"
By Hank Anzis

The Cramer Awards for excellence in Chess Journalism 2010 Best Books:

Endgame: Bobby Fischer's Remarkable Rise and Fall—from America's Brightest Prodigy to the Edge of Madness by Dr. Frank Brady.
A review of this book appeared in the February 2011 *Chess Life*.

Chess Masterpieces: One Thousand Years of Extraordinary Chess Sets by Dr. George Dean with Maxine Brady.
A review of this book by Dr. Tim Redman appeared in the November 2010 issue of *Chess Life*.