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CHINESE CHESS

Xiang Qi is usually translated as Chinese chess. It is a descendent of the Indian game Chaturanga. Obviously, Xiang Qi is a sibling of our (Western) chess and as such it belongs to the family of games for which the pages of the *ICGA Journal* are open. In fact, being a chess game, articles on Xiang Qi were welcome in the preceding *ICCA Journal*, too. Over the last fifteen years, many Xiang Qi tournaments have been held in the game tournaments of the eight Computer Olympiads. So, our readers should be familiar with Chinese chess since tournament reports have been published extensively.

In this issue of the Journal we have two articles on Chinese chess. They deal with (1) the current state of computer Chinese chess (by Shi-Jim Yen, Jr-Chang Chen, Tai-Ning Yang, and Shun-Chin Hsu) and with (2) checking indefinitely in Chinese-chess endgames (by Haw-Ren Fang, Tsan-Sheng Hsu, and Shun-Chin Hsu). It turns out that the rules for perpetual check are rather difficult. But there is more, even the names of the pieces are difficult. Your Editor assumes that in Chinese chess they will have the same names. However, in the translation into English different sets of authors use different sets of names. In the first article we see that the pieces are called: King, Advisor, Elephant, Rook, Horse, Cannon, and Pawn (with abbreviations: K, A, E, R, H, C, and P). In the second article they are translated as: King, Guard, Minister, Rook, Knight, Cannon, and Pawn (K, G, M, R, N, C, and P).

The current days of Internet allowed me to figure out what has happened with the Chinese-chess terminology. At http://horse1.gte.net/res1bup4/chess_intro.htm I found *An Introduction to Chinese Chess* by (Terence) Peter Donnelly, in which he provides the proper translations for the Chinese names: General (King), Mandarin (Assistant), Elephant, Chariot (Rook), Horse, Cannon, and Soldier (Pawn). In brackets we see the names which are used for the standard abbreviations (given above in the first series of abbreviations). Moreover, our (Western) readers may be challenged by the syntax of the names of the Chinese authors. In this issue preference is given to the authors' choices.

Donnelly also elaborates on the meaning of the name. "*Qi* 棋 means a strategy game, and *xiang* 象 is the character that appears on the so-called elephants of the black side." The intricacies of the game led him to the observation that "Chinese chess is more a tactical game than a strategic one." It even results in the personal

conclusion that Chinese chess is all "middle game". Your Editor is not convinced of the truth of those statements, but they can be seen as provocative, meaning that it is high time for the Western world to focus on Chinese chess. According to the authors of the articles Chinese chess is the immediate successor of chess when looking at the next contest between the human World Champion and a chess-like computer program. The authors expect that the human World Champion will be defeated before 2010.

Besides the two articles on Chinese chess, this issue contains contributions on bridge, chess, give-away checkers, and Fischer numbers. The report by Eric van Reem on HYDRA shows how internationally oriented our computer-chess community is. HYDRA is affiliated to the United Arab Emirates. It won the 13th International Paderborn Computer-Chess Championship (IPCCC) and outclassed all other participants. The team members are: Chrilly Donninger, Ulf Lorenz, and Erdogan Guenes. Competition is the magic word to increase playing strength. Therefore, we are pleased that Donninger has not withdrawn from the scene as announced after Graz 2003, but that he re-entered in a new setting.

Chess, Chinese Chess, Shogi, and Go, they are all prepared to reveal their secrecies to persistent researchers. It will go step by step, progress will be slow, but soon honours will be given to the next computer World Champion (for chess) and the next Computer Olympiad winners (for the other games). As we may believe our own contributions, this procedure will continue at least to 2010 and for Go even longer. I am curious to see how much progress will be shown in Ramat-Gan.
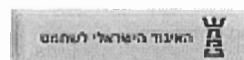
Jaap van den Herik

The sponsors of the ICGA events at the Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Israel.

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