

## CHECKMATE – JIANG JUN



Where did you learn to play Xiangqi (Chinese Chess)? For some, it was in primary or secondary school. Do you remember the post exam free periods? Students would bring their chess sets and playing cards to school. Teachers would be busy marking examination scripts while students partake in chess warfare. At the end of the day, one will be crowned king or queen of the battlefield.

In this issue of K-Bytes, we will talk about the history and benefits of Xiangqi. We will also introduce you to Singapore's first ever Charity Xiangqi Championship.

Xiangqi translates to elephant game. It is played by tens of millions in China, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Hong Kong and other Asian countries.

'Xiang' is a piece used in the game – the Elephant piece, while 'Qi' means strategy game, which also signifies one of four areas a Chinese scholar was supposed to be proficient in<sup>1</sup>. The four areas are: qin (music), qi (strategy game), shu (calligraphy) and hua (painting).

Although there are many versions to the origins of the game, one plausible variant is that the game was invented by a military commander named Han Xin around 200BC. The game was used to represent an upcoming battle as Han Xin's troops waited out the winter holding their ground. It was named Xiangqi, taking after the name of the opposing army's commander<sup>2</sup>.

Strategy board games such as chess and Xiangqi are known to yield a number of cognitive benefits in children and elderly alike.

Specifically, it boosts brain power in kids. There is a reason why our teachers encouraged chess over playing cards! Kids between primary and secondary school are expected to reap the most brain benefits as it enhances analytical, critical thinking and visualisation skills. In a study conducted in Venezuela, results have shown that children who took chess classes for 4 ½ months have increased IQ points<sup>3</sup>.



Furthermore, board games bring people together regardless of race or socioeconomic status. So the chess games you had during your post exam periods helped improved your emotional intelligence and psychosocial skills as well<sup>3</sup>.

Clearly, chess is highly beneficial for children but what about the elderly? Chess aids to preserve mental alertness in the elderly. As the brain works like a muscle, it needs exercise to be healthy and ward off injury. A game of chess is like an exercise for the brain and has been proven to be highly effective in protecting the elderly from neuro-degenerative conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's disease<sup>3</sup>.



### Join in the Cause!

On 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Kidney Dialysis Foundation (KDF) is organising a Charity Xiangqi Championship with Singapore Xiangqi General Association. A turnout of about 300 participants is expected. This event aims to increase public awareness of kidney disease and raise funds for needy kidney patients at KDF.



## 2015年全国慈善 象棋锦标赛 Charity Xiangqi Championship 2015

碧山民众俱乐部大礼堂  
Bishan Community Club Multi Purpose Hall  
51 Bishan Street 13 S(579799)

13/06/2015 • Saturday • 2pm - 9pm  
14/06/2015 • Sunday • 10am - 6pm

开放给所有新加坡的象棋爱好者  
Open to all Xiangqi enthusiasts in Singapore

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### References:

- [1 http://www.chessvariants.org/xiangqi.html](http://www.chessvariants.org/xiangqi.html)
- [2 http://ancientchess.com/page/05.htm](http://ancientchess.com/page/05.htm)
- [3 http://examinedexistence.com/does-playing-chess-make-you-smarter/](http://examinedexistence.com/does-playing-chess-make-you-smarter/)