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PREFACE

Chess is often depicted in the arts, used for example as a metaphor of a struggle of two, as a symbol of cold logic, or - in the spirit of mediaeval moralists - as an allegory of society's life. Significant works, where chess plays a key role, range from Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* over *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll to *The Royal Game* by Stefan Zweig or Vladimir Nabokov's *The Defense*.

Chess is also present in the contemporary popular culture. For example, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* plays "Wizard's Chess" while the characters of *Star Trek* prefer "Tri-Dimensional Chess" and the hero of "Searching for Bobby Fischer" struggles against adopting the aggressive and misanthropic views of a real chess grandmaster.

Chess is one of the oldest games of mind sports. It is also listed as one of the oldest game of war, sharing a similar antiquity to the Chinese "Go" and the Japanese "Shoji". Chess is generally said to have developed in the north of India at some period around A.D. 500. Some historians say that the trial of chess leads back to about B.C. 500.

The first reference to chess in literature appeared in *Brahmajala Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya*. In this *Sutta*, Buddha

admonished monks: "Monks, Where as some ascetics addicted to such idle pursuits such as eight row or ten row chess, chess in the air (mental chess), hopscotch, spillikins, dicing, ball games, guessing letters, hand pictures, guessing thoughts, mimicking deformities, playing with toy ploughs the ascetic Gotama refrains from such idle pursuits". (*Digha Nikaya*, Maurice Walsh, page 70).

Due to the lack of systematic records, it cannot be said exactly about the year chess was introduced. Then it is found out that during the sixth century, inhabitants of India were playing *Chaturanga*, a game substantially like modern chess. The original pieces, far less mobile than their modern counterparts, represented units of the ancient Indian army; soldiers, cavalry, armed chariots and of course, elephants.

It is believed that chess reached to Myanmar around A.D. 600 via Rakhine (Arakan). Ancient Myanmar people loved to play chess and it was adopted in their own way by making special rules and regulations different from international chess. Then chess spread to Thailand in A.D. 1100. By Southeast Radiation, chess spread early and easily through Myanmar into the Malay Peninsula via Thailand. It reached a dead end in Borneo and Java where Sanskrit chess was later to be covered by the modern form of the game brought in by the British and Dutch traders.

On linguistic evidence alone, chess in Southeast Asia displays its closeness to the Sanskrit *Chaturanga*. In Myanmar language, chess is called *Sit-tu-yin* quite similar its original Sanskrit word *Chaturanga*.

The most significant and interesting parts of Myanmar Traditional Chess are initial set up positions and pawn promotion.

Different from other chess variants, only pawns are placed in fixed positions and other pieces are subject to the players' wishes and ideas to set up in their own territories.

Pawn promotion is also another interesting and logical part playing vital role in Myanmar Traditional Chess. Even though the pawns are due to get the promotion by reaching the relevant squares, they cannot be promoted as long as the same-coloured general is existing on the chess board. One army must have a general only. What a lovely idea of old Myanmar chess founders!

In this booklet, it is tried my best to explain how to play Myanmar Traditional Chess. I cannot guarantee about becoming the master of this old chess variant, but I believe that it can cover all you need to know to start playing. Enjoy it!

The Author