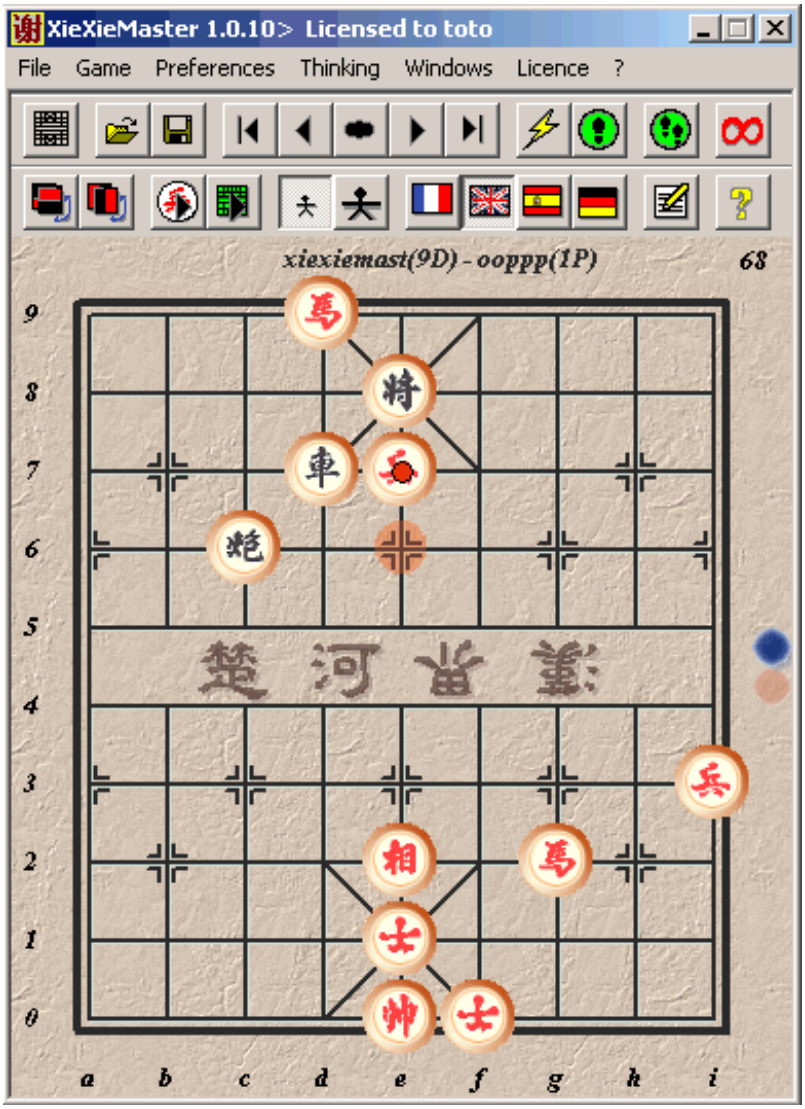
XieXie Master 1.0.10 User Manual



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2 Starting out

2.1 Introduction

XieXie Master belongs to the top Chinese chess program on the world. XieXie Master is the big brother of XieXie Junior who did very well in the internet tournaments.

Main XieXie results :	
First tournament summer 2002 at CXQ	3rd,
6th Computer Olympiads 2002	3rd, bronze medal
7th Computer Olympiads 2003	2nd, silver medal

XieXie's level improves every released version.

2.1.1 XieXie is designed for the beginner

Special novice levels have been included:

- First Steps 1
- First Steps 2
- First Steps 3

These levels are adaptive but are easier to beat. These are the spirit of these levels:

- First Steps 1 can never win (it is not designed to).
- First Steps 2 can win but cannot see all the tactical combinations
- First Steps 3 can win; see more tactical combinations than First Steps 2.

It is the best way to start playing Chinese chess and to improve.
You can also play handicaped games if needed (more below).

Game analyze helps also the beginner in Chinese chess what move is wrong and what is the correct move in a given position.

2.1.2 XieXie is designed for advanced players

XieXie Master gives the advanced players the possibility to:

- configure the XieXie's chess engine
  - Chinese chess pieces value
  - Chinese chess knowledge
  - Contempt factor
- analyze the games
- comment the game
- annotate the moves
- understand standards like AXF, WXF.

Level Advanced player is not the highest level of XieXie. To get a stronger level let XieXie think longer. Use menu Level/custom to set the time XieXie must think on a move.

2.2 System requirements

XieXie runs under Windows NT 4, Windows 2000, and Windows XP. XieXie could tun under Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows Millennium but with some minor graphics bugs.

2.2.1 Minimum system requirements

You will need a PC with a 486 DX2 66 processor and 64 MB of RAM. XieXie will run under such a system but needs more powerful hardware to play at full strength.

2.2.2 Recommended system requirements

The recommended configuration is a PC with a fast processor (Athlon XP or Intel Pentium IV), with 128 MB of RAM or more and a sound card for the sound effects and the tutorial commentary.

2.3 Features

- Respects 99% the complex Chinese chess repetition rules.
- Accepts game comments
- Accepts moves' annotations
- Adaptive levels
- Analyzes your past games and tells you the right move
- Reads games from internet Chinese chess site such as MoveSky or Club Xiang Qi.
- Plays games from any position
- Engine configuration:
  - Size of hash tables
  - Contempt factor
  - Amount of knowledge used
  - Value of pieces
  - Use learning or not
- Learn from human players and from good moves
- Score curve window
- Play human vs. human game
- Play human vs. computer game
- Position setup possible
- Several timing (game / time, time/move, fixed depth, etc.).
- Infinite thinking
- Hint
- Supports AXF and WXF notation
- Endgame knowledge inside
- Next best move
- Printing
- Horizontal and vertical symetries for the board representation

2.4 Starting a new game

Press button “ ” to start a new game. To play red, just move the pieces at the beginning of the game.

To play black, at the beginning of the game press button That forces XieXie to play the current side: the red side.

2.5 Moving pieces

There are 2 possibilities to enter moves: by drag and drop (default mode) or by click and click. See menu preferences/Move selection.

To review your game, you can replay and unmove using cursors of your keyboard (arrows left ← and right →).

To review your game, you can click on the score curve window.

3 The game

3.1 XieXie's menu

3.1.1 Menu File

New game	Restarts the current game. Red always move first.
Load game	Loads the game onto the chessboard.
Save game	Save the current game
Save on each move	Automatic game saving. This is used to recover the games if the PC crashes.
Copy to clipboard	You can copy the chess board or the game list onto the clipboard. This is used to paste the chessboard or the game list in your own editor.
Print	Print the move list
Exit	Exit program

3.1.2 Menu Game

Goto move	Select this item to go to a required move number.
Take back	Take back move or take back all
Replay	Replay a move or replay all
Level	Choose your level
Handicap	Allows you to play in handicap mode
Setup	Allows you to set a new board position
No computer mode	Allows you to input free moves without XieXie starts thinking
Stop thinking!	Stop the chess engine

3.1.3 Menu Preferences

Vertical symetry	This option applies a vertical symetry to the board.
Horizontal symetry	This option applies a horizontal symetry to the board.
Board style	Choose the board style
Pieces style	Choose the pieces style
Board size	Choose the board size
Move Selection	You have a choice between drag and drop and click-click.
Animation	Allows you to choose the speed of the piece's animation.
Notation	Choose the notation used in the game list
Board coordinates	Choose the board coordinate system
Language	Select a language
Sounds	Use sounds or not. Using sound slow down the speed of XieXie especially in fast games.

3.1.4 Menu Thinking

Ponder	If this item is checked, XieXie will think on the opponent's time.
Opening book	- none : no book is used - normal : randomized book - tournament : normally best book. - blitz : most common book
Chess engine configuration	Customize XieXie chess engine. See below.
Play on the current position!	Asks XieXie to start thinking on the current position. When new game, press that button to force XieXie plays Red.
Analyze a game	Tells XieXie to analyze the game. Select this menu item again if you want the analyze to stop.
Next best move	Asks XieXie to find out the second best move. For that XieXie would take back the current move and look for the next best move.
Hint	Gives a possible move. Warning : this is not the strongest move.

3.1.5 Menu Windows

Clock	Shows or activates the clock window
Thinking window	Shows or activates the thinking window.
Game list	Shows or activates the game list window
Bar graph	Shows or activates the bar graph window. This window show the evolution of the score during the game.
Game status	Shows or activates the game status window. This window is used to enter information about the game.
Comments	Shows or activates the comments window. This window enables to comment the game and annotate the moves.
Logs	Shows or activates the logs window. This windows is only used for debug.

3.1.6 Menu Licence

Generate licence	Generate a licence file. The popup menu tells you where he has generated the licence file.
Enter registration code	You can enter or modify the registration code.

3.1.7 Menu?

About XieXie	Shows the about dialog

3.2 The toolbar

	New game
	Open game file
	Save game file
	Unmove all
	Unmove
	Goto move
	Replay

	Replay all
	This option applies a vertical symetry to the board.
	This option applies a horizontal symetry to the board.
	Choose set of pieces
	Choose set of boards
	Small board
	Big board
	Select French language
	Select Spanish language
	Select German language
	Select English language
	Enter “Edit mode”. This mode is used to enter moves from a game. If this button is not pressed, XieXie start thinking after each user’s move.
	Stop thinking !. This button tells XieXie to stop thinking and to play the best current move.
	Start thinking. This button tells XieXie to start the thinking on the current position.

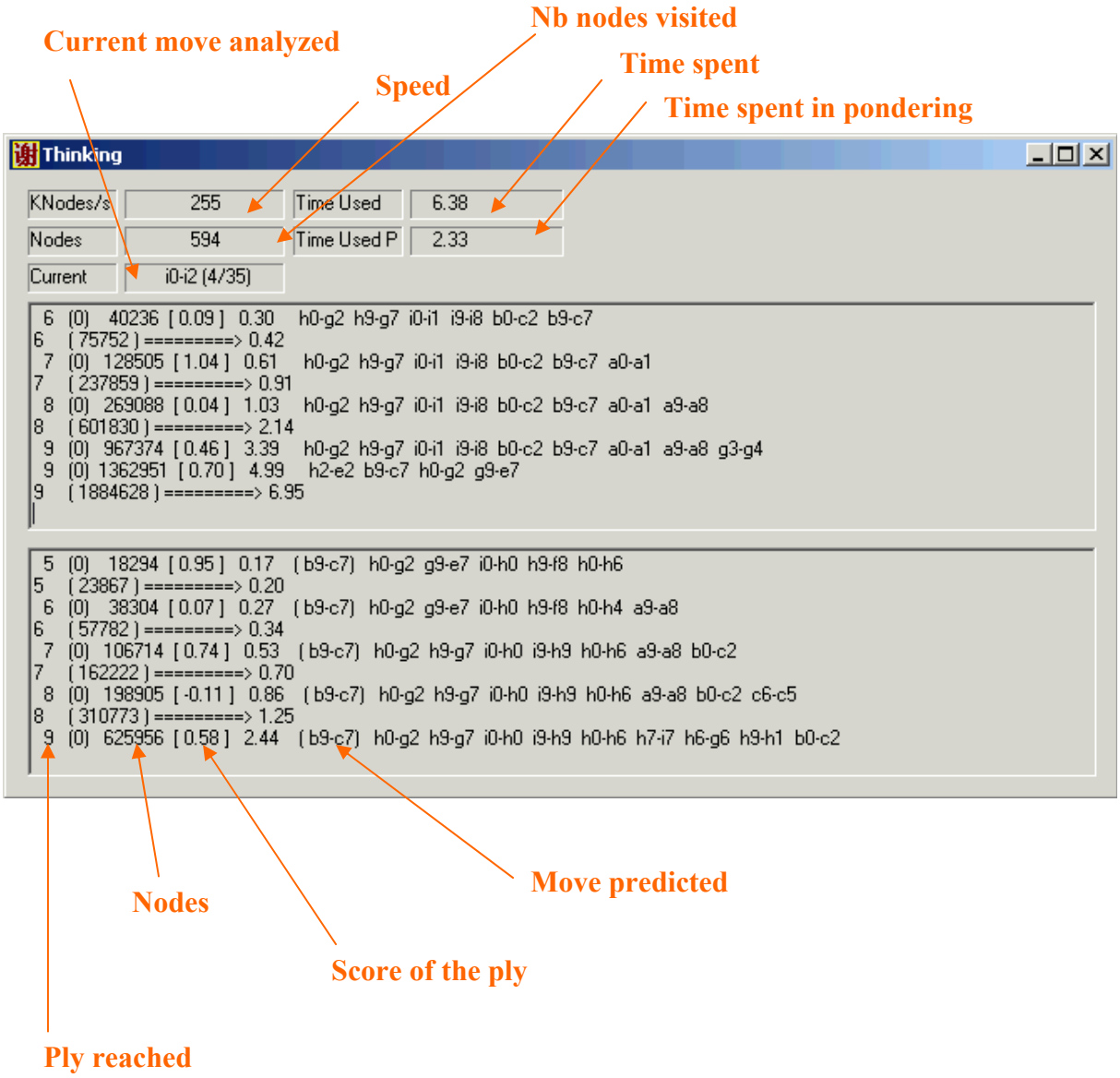
	This button tells XieXie to ignore last move and try to find another move.
	Level Infinite. If selected, XieXie will thinks undefinitely until the user press the button .
	Tells XieXie to give an idea on how to move (Hint).

3.3 Keyboard shortcuts

You can use the keyboard arrows to replay or take back a move.

3.4 Auxiliary windows

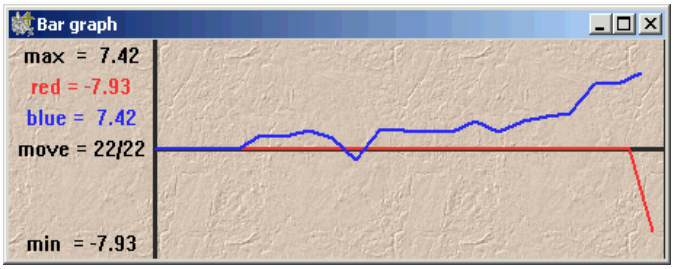
3.4.1 Thinking window



When characters # is displayed on the thinking windows, this means that the winning side is going to kill the weak side.

3.4.2 Bar graph window

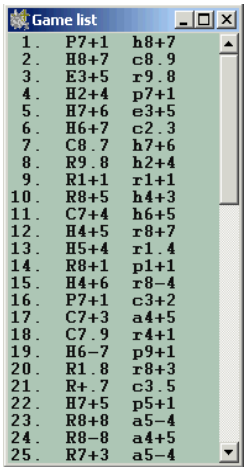
The bar graph window displays the curve of XieXie evaluation function (also called score curve). This is very useful if you play against XieXie when you have done a mistake.

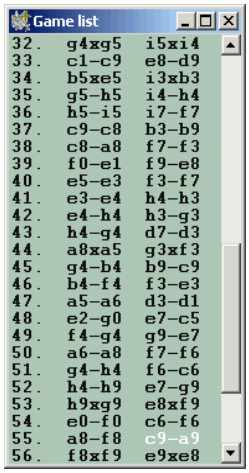


You can also click or move the mouse on this window to go to the position in the game you want.

3.4.3 Game list window

Depending on the notation used (AXF, WXF, etc.); each move is recorded on a game sheet. If you go back on your moves, the move is automatically dimmed on the sheet.





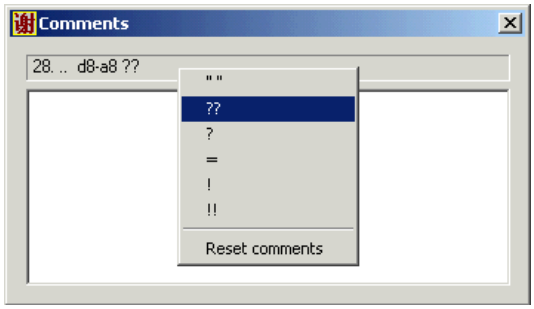
If the game is a long one and not all the moves appear in the game list window, use the scroll box on the right-hand side. The next moves will automatically be entered at the end of the list whatever the section of the list currently displayed.

3.4.4 Logs window

This window is only used for debugging purposes.

3.4.5 Comments window

This window is used to enter comments and annotations for each move.



Right-click on the window to open the popup menu.

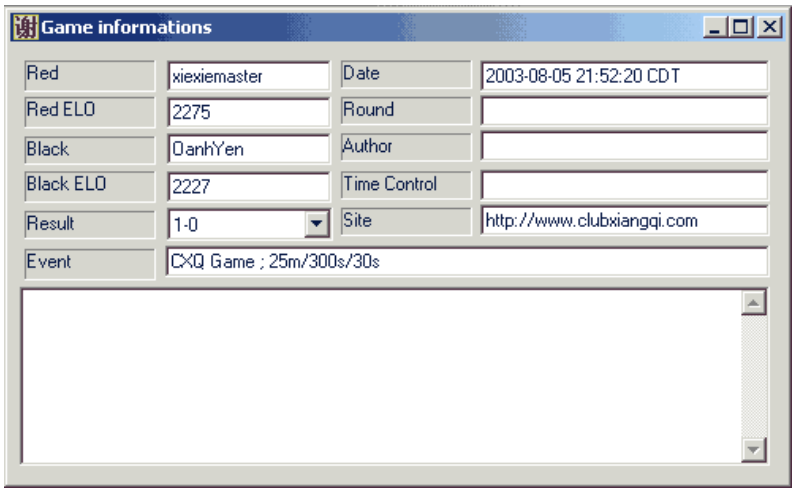
Possible annotations :

??	Very bad move
?	Bad move
=	Even
!	Good move
!!	Very good move

During a game, XieXie annotates the best moves “!” automatically.

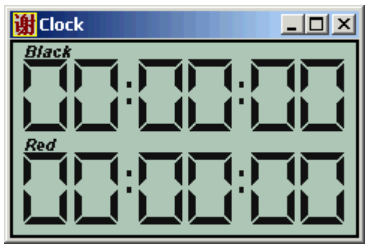
The Edit box in the comments window is used to enter comments on the game.

3.4.6 Game informations window



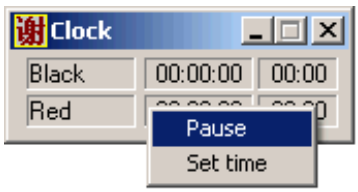
This window is used to enter information on the game. When saving the game, the same dialog appears.
Here, you can input some comments which are valid for the whole game.

3.4.7 Clock window



Rescalable clock.

3.4.8 Miniclock window

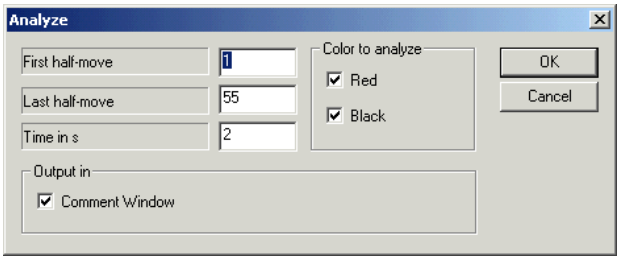


This clock is used when there is no room in your screen. You can right-click on it to set time or to pause clock.

Advanced operations

3.5 Analyzing a game

XieXie is able to analyze the games you have played and give you his opinion. Just use menu “thinking/Analyze” the game...



Note 1: First move and last move is expressed in half moves.

Note 2: Time in seconds is the time you allocate to analyze 1 move. The greater is this value, the more accurate is the evaluation.

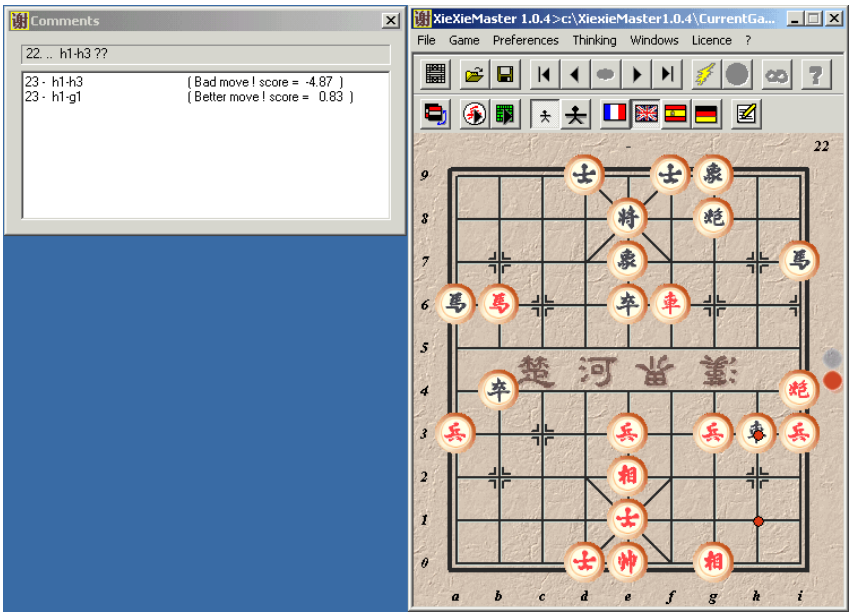
At any moment, you can stop the analyze by selecting again the menu “Thinking/Analyze the game”.

If you have checked “comment window”, the results can be reviewed in the comment windows. What you only have to do is to replay the moves and see what thought XieXie in the same position.

Example :

After XieXie has analyzed the game, we can see that in the position below XieXie doesn’t like black’move (h1-h3), he prefers h1-g1.

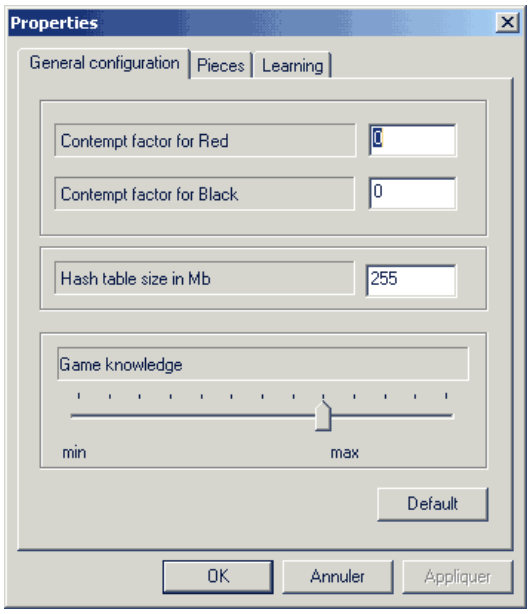
Hence, the move “h1-h3” is annotated as very bad move (??).



3.6 Customizing the chess engine

3.6.1 Configuring XieXie engine

You have the possibility to customize the A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) engine. Use menu “Thinking/Chess menu configuration” (Or just double-click the chessboard)... The following dialog appears:



3.6.2 General configuration

Contempt factor: This factor goes from -500 to +500 (you can put higher, but that’s nonsense). The higher it is the more coward is the play of XieXie. That is useful against very strong players. XieXie will always look for a draw. Against weak player, it is recommended to set the factor of the XieXie’s color negative, so XieXie will try to avoid repetition draw. Default value is 0.

Hash table size: Hash table is an allocated memory to store computed positions. That allows XieXie to think faster while she doesn’t need to recompute computed moves. The more memory you have, the faster is the search. But it is recommended not to set the size to high (It must be strictly inferior to available free memory).

For fast games, set the hash table smaller. For instance, you can take about 5-10 Mb for games using 5min/move.

Game knowledge: If knowledge is set to 0, XieXie will play like a “robot”, that means tactically very strong but strategically very weak. The more knowledge you use, the slower is the thinking of XieXie.

Press the default button if you want to play with the standard XieXie. This must be the best choice.

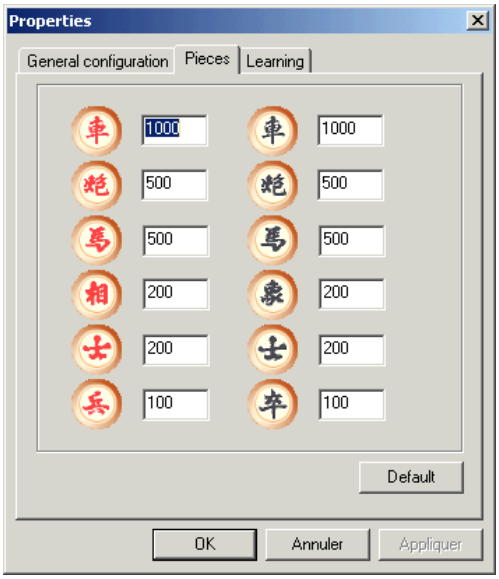
3.6.3 Scoring function in XieXie engine

Evaluation of XieXie is based on material score :

Pieces	Score
Pawn	100
Advisor	200
Elephant	200
Horse	500
Cannon	500
Chariot	1000

For instance XieXie has a score of +5.00, that means XieXie is ahead of 1 cannon or 1 knight or a great positional advantage.

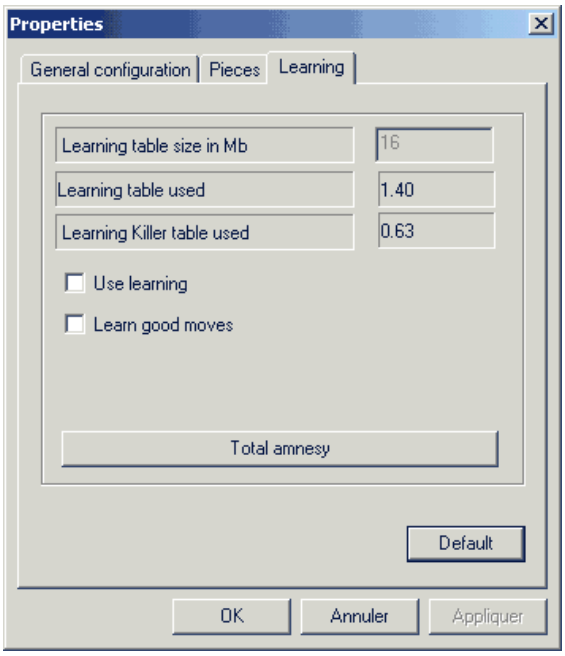
If you don't agree, you can change pieces' values and then XieXie will play a different style according to your new settings.



Suppose XieXie is playing black. If you set red cannon to 600 and black horse to 400, XieXie will try to trade opponent's cannons with his own horses as his horses have less points. This is useful when you know XieXie's opponent likes to play cannons.

3.6.4 Learning

Here you can configure how XieXie learns from good moves.



3.6.4.1 Learning table size

It represents how much memory in Mb, XieXie used for learning. Usually, 4 Mb is enough.

3.6.4.2 Learning table used

It represents the percentage of the tables filling up. If it exceeds 50 %, that means the learning table is maybe too small. The size of the learning table must be enlarged.

3.6.4.3 Learning killer table used

It represents the percentage of the tables filling up used for killing moves. If it exceeds 50 %, that means the learning table is maybe too small. The size of the learning table must be enlarged.

3.6.4.4 Use learning

When this option is checked XieXie to use his experience from past games. So XieXie cannot fall into the same traps. But checking it slows down the search.

3.6.4.5 Learn good moves

When this options is checked, XieXie learns the moves from his opponent. That option is not CPU time consuming.

4 Tips and tricks

4.1 Getting games from MoveSky

Use the save button of the MoveSky client. Then use XieXie to open and study the game with your favourite Chinese chess program: XieXie. :o).

4.2 Getting games from Club Xiang Qi

1) Go to Records section
2) Choose your player.
3) Right Click on the game number and select “save target as...”
4) Save your file. Filename must be ended with .html.
5) Read the saved file with XieXie

4.3 Back to defaults

If you want XieXie come back to defaults value : press the “Shift Key” while starting XieXie.

5 Frequently Asked questions

5.1 How can I play a lower level?

If XieXie is too strong for you, you have a few possibilities:

- Set the strength lower in the Game/level menu. For example choose First steps 1.
- Retrieve *pondering* option (see further).
- Retrieve learning option in menu Thinking/Learning/Use learning.
- Inhibit all XieXie Experience by clicking menu Thinking/learning/Use learning
- Set handicap for red side in the game/Handicap menu: there you can free 2 horses if you want…Handicap is always set on red side. Flip the board in the menu preferences/Rotate board or directly click to the toolbar. Force XieXie play first by choosing the menu: Thinking/Play on the current position (or in the toolbar the green circle button).
- You can simulate 3 moves first by using the setup position function: choose game/setup position menu, make your 3 moves, and choose game end Setup position menu.

How can I play a higher level?

If XieXie is too weak for you, you can:

- Set the strength higher in the Game/level menu. For example choose 20 seconds per move: XieXie will think 20 seconds to move.
- You can play with handicap.
- You can change your computer. Chinese chess program strength is strongly related to your hardware. Maybe your computer is too slow or has too little memory.
- Check that “pondering” is enabled
- Verify the configuration of the chess engine
    - Hash table size (must be small fro fast games)
    - Knowledge must not be 0 (except against some sw players).
    - Pieces values must be set to default
- Note that to play at his highest level, XieXie must have his learning option enabled (See engine configuration): That allows XieXie learn and use his opponent’s best skills!
- In fast games, disable all sounds (Menu “preferences/sound/None”). Using sounds can slow down XieXie.

If the thinking time is too long, you can force XieXie play faster with one click on the Flash button on the toolbar.

Level Advanced player is not the highest level of XieXie. To get a stronger level let XieXie think longer. Use menu Level/custom to set the time XieXie must think on a move.

5.2 Files format supported?

XieXie reads the following formats:

XBF/XGF/EGF	XieXie binary file format
CCF	AXF/WXF format
AXF/WXF	AXF/WXF format
MXQ	Move sky file format
XQN	Proprietary ASCII file format

So, you can easily view internet games or exchange data with other Chinese chess programs with XieXie.

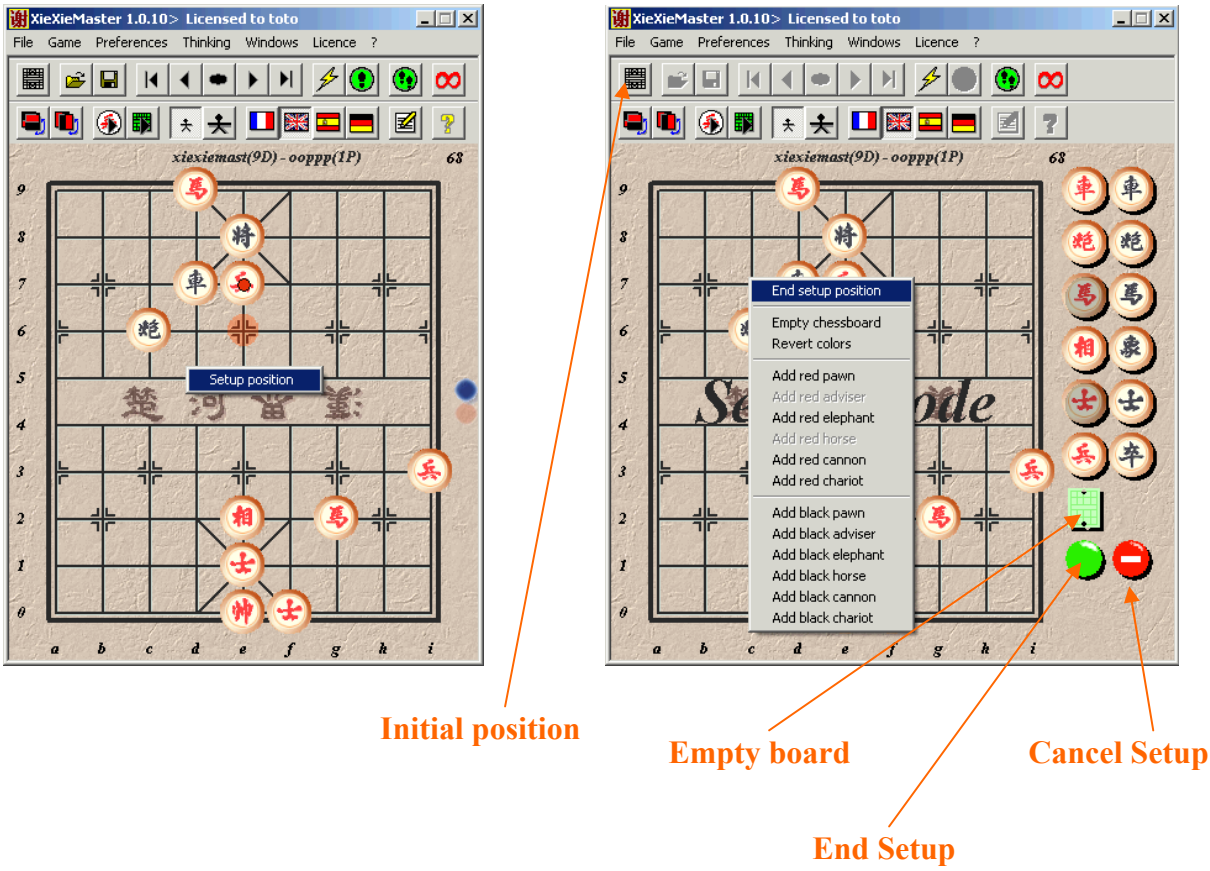
5.3 How can I save a game?

Use the File menu, or the toolbars. If you can't save, that's maybe because the XieXie is still thinking. To stop the thinking, click on the flash button ( ) in the toolbar.

You know XieXie is thinking when the thinking window has activity.

5.4 How can I setup a position?

To setup a position, choose menu game/Setup Position. When you are in setup mode, the word "Setup Mode" is displayed on the board. When the desired position is set, click on game/End setup position (You can also use mouse's right button).



Move your piece freely, if you want to remove a piece, just put it out the chessboard. To add pieces, choose among those which are at the right of the chessboard and drag them on the board. If the piece (on the right) is grayed, that means that all available pieces of this kind are already on board. To get more features, please use the mouse right button on the chessboard.

5.5 How can I search mates or Chinese chess problems/puzzles?

Setup the position, click on the infinite symbol on the toolbar and let XieXie think all night, week, month…

5.6 How can I enter a game?

In the default mode, you play against the computer, to enter a game just deactivate computer by choosing the

Game/No computer mode menu (Or click on the toolbar). When this button is pressed, you only have to enter your moves without being "disturbed" by XieXie.

5.7 What is pondering?

XieXie is able to think on the opponent's time: this is called *pondering*. This option is set by default.

5.8 How can I choose the opening book?

You can choose the kind of opening in the menu thinking/opening book.
You have 3 kinds of books:

- Tournament : lines used by GM in tournament games
- Normal : Random book.
- Blitz : most common opening book

5.9 How can I use the contempt factor?

The contempt factor is used to control draw situations :

- By repetition
- By unsufficient attacking pieces

This is normally set to 0. It is expressed in cent-pawns. For example, if you want XieXie to be more aggressive and not to claim for a draw, just set the contempt factor to -100 or -200 for the color XieXie plays.

If XieXie plays with a stronger player, contempt factor of XieXie must be set to 200, because a draw is a good result. If XieXie must play with a weak player a draw is not a good result, so the contempt factor of XieXie must be set to -200 or more for example.

5.10 When I open the logs, clock, bar graph.... Does it affect to the speed of search?

Opening windows does not affect the speed of search. So open as many windows you can display on your screen monitor !

5.11 How many Elo is XieXie?

This question is very difficult to answer as XieXie is not allowed to play against humans in human championship. But this is my estimation:

Computer	5 minutes/game	10 minutes/ game	1 hour/game
AMD K7 2800+	2450 ELO	2380 ELO	2350 ELO
K7 1.5 GHz	2420 ELO	2350 ELO	2300 ELO
K7 800 MHz	2380 ELO	2300 ELO	2220 ELO
Celeron 600	2310 ELO	2250 ELO	2170 ELO

Read this carefully, that doesn't mean that in 5 min/game XieXie plays better, that only means XieXie wins stronger player when the timing is short. In theory, XieXie program plays better if you let him think longer…

5.12 How can I update the version/get support?

Just send a mail at tang.pascal@free.fr (or ptang@caramail.com) with your home and Internet coordinates. If you find a bug, you can also report it to the authors. They will do their best to deliver a corrected version.
If you need any answers about the program feel free to email them, they will answer as soon as possible.

For XieXie updates (opening books, news, etc.), just go to site:

www.cc-xiexie.com

Note: Don't make illegal copies of XieXie! Or you will kill Xiang Qi software development! Thanks!