

Shogi Rules



Learning the basic rules of shogi is quick and easy. Many young children play Japanese chess. If you have ever played Chess, you have a head start, but knowing Western Chess is not a prerequisite to learning Japanese Chess.

Traditionally, Japanese calligraphy is used to mark the pieces in Shogi. Don't let the kanji on shogi pieces scare you off. There are other styles of shogi sets that have pictures, arrows or letters instead of kanji. Later, once you've become familiar with shogi, you'll probably pick up the Japanese symbols. But, that's later.

Shogi boards aren't easily found outside of Japan. You can check Amazon or other retailers for boards. Also, for a cheap quick board, you can print out some of my PDF's of shogi boards and pieces for a do-it-yourself shogi set that doesn't cost much.

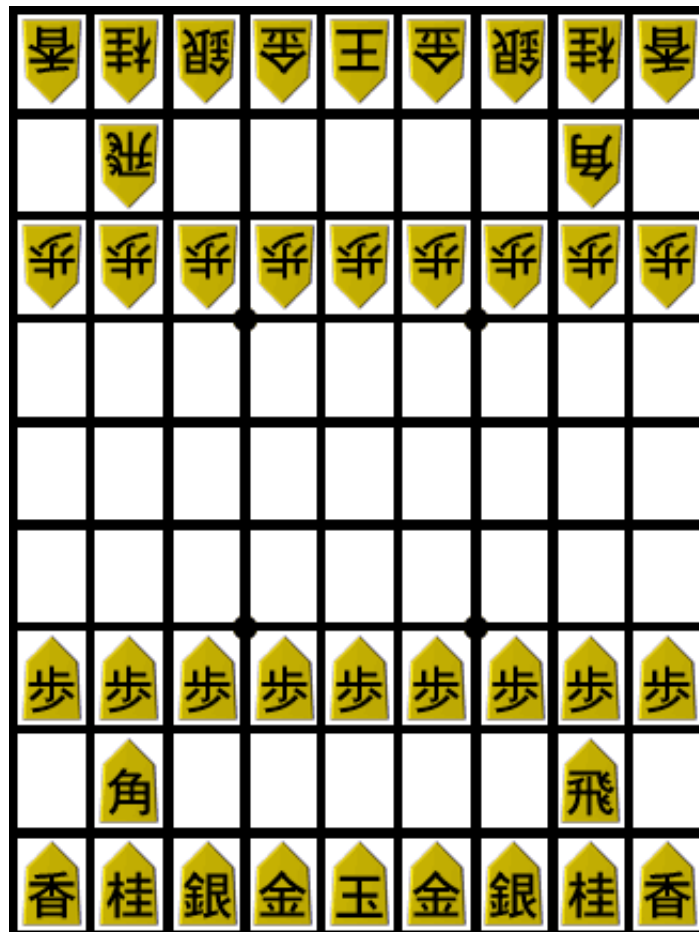
I wrote the following shogi rules explanation several years ago, and included a version of them in my book, [Tsume Puzzles for Japanese Chess](#).

Rules of Shogi

The game of Shogi is similar to the game of Chess. They both derive from the same game. One version evolved as it travelled to Europe, and the other changed as it made its way to Japan. Shogi traditionally uses kanji to distinguish which piece (called a token) is which. To people that know kanji, the pieces are attractive and full of imagery.

Shogi Board Setup

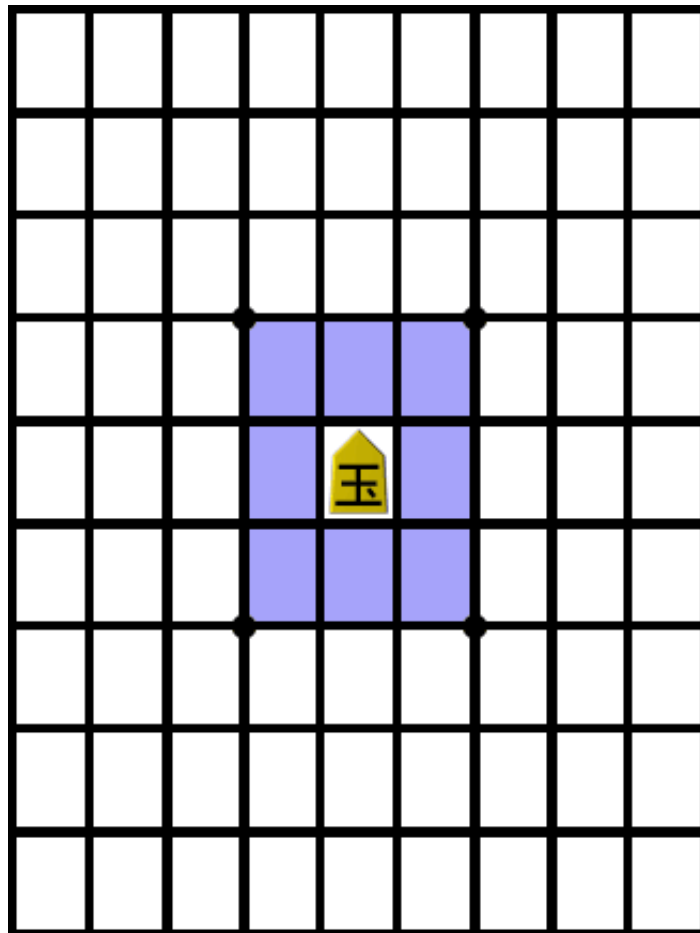
The board is set up as seen below. A player's tokens always point away from him. If tokens are pointing at you, they're not your pieces.



King

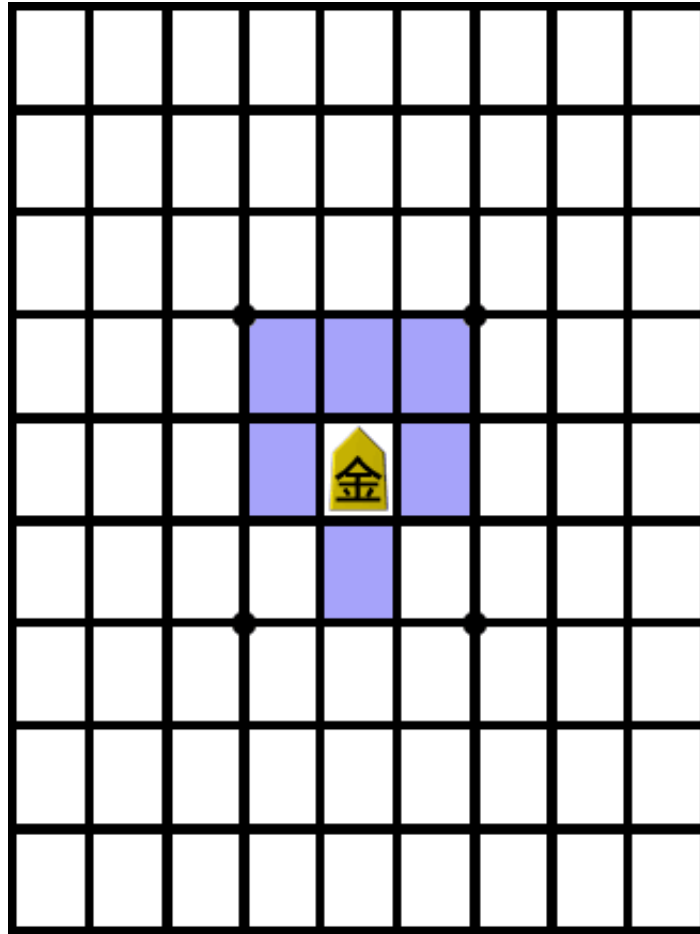
Everything about the King in Shogi is the same as the King in Chess. They

look different, but that is all. The king in Japanese chess can move one space in any direction per turn. The image below shows the shogi king's valide moves.



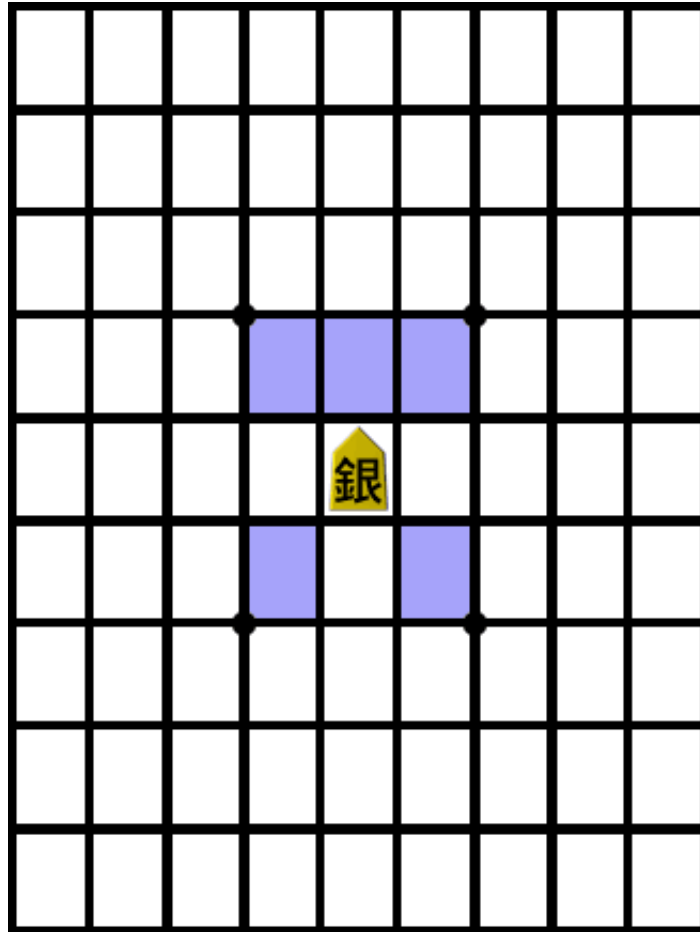
The object of Shogi is the same as the object of Chess. Capture your opponent's King. Capturing the King results in victory. Unlike Chess, there is no requirement to warn the opponent by saying "Check" or "Checkmate." Though as a courtoisy, in many non-professional game, the word "ote" (pronounced OH-tay) is said when a piece could take the opponent's king. The King is permitted to let itself be captured if the player is careless. There is no rule against moving into check!

Gold General



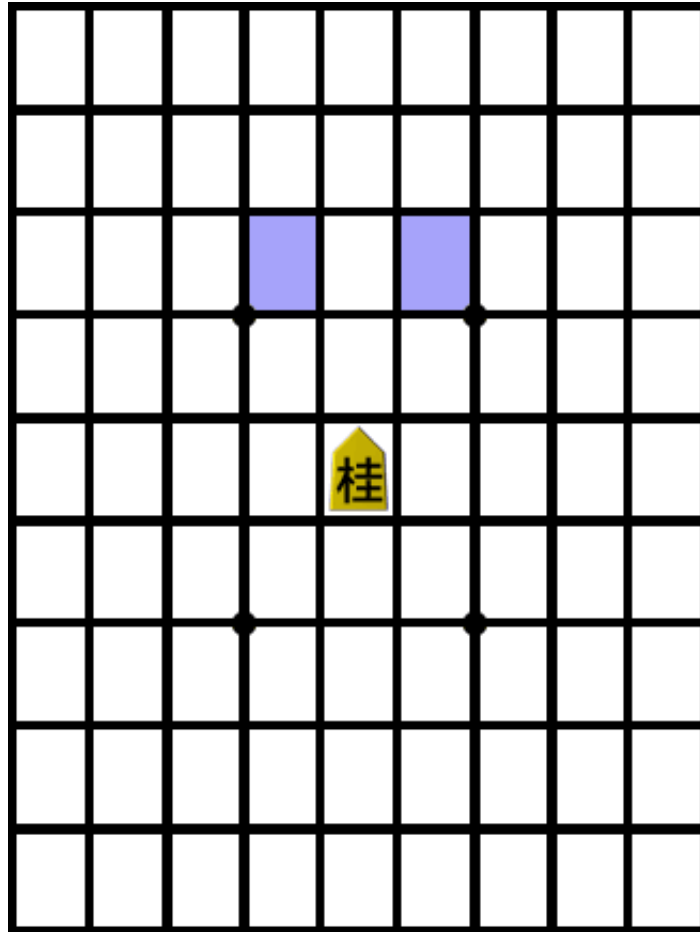
Gold generals move one square in any direction except diagonally backwards. Gold generals excel at offensive manoeuvres, but don't do well when retreating. Be sure not to get your gold general trapped. His attacks are usually one way trips to the other side of the board.

Silver General



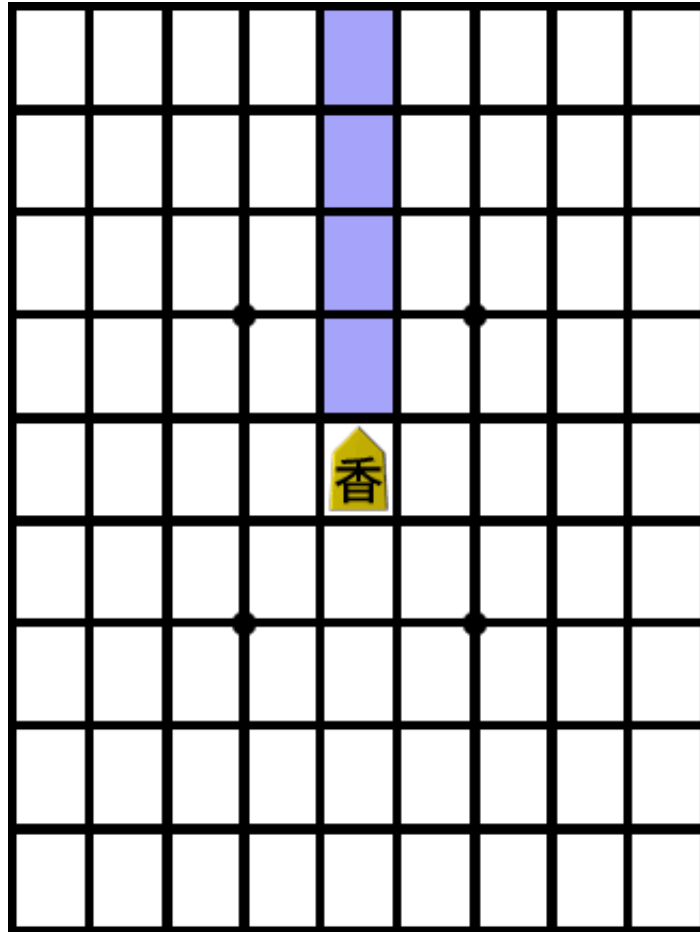
Silver Generals move one square in any direction except straight backwards or to the left or right horizontally. Silver generals excel at moving through crowded regions of the board.

Knight



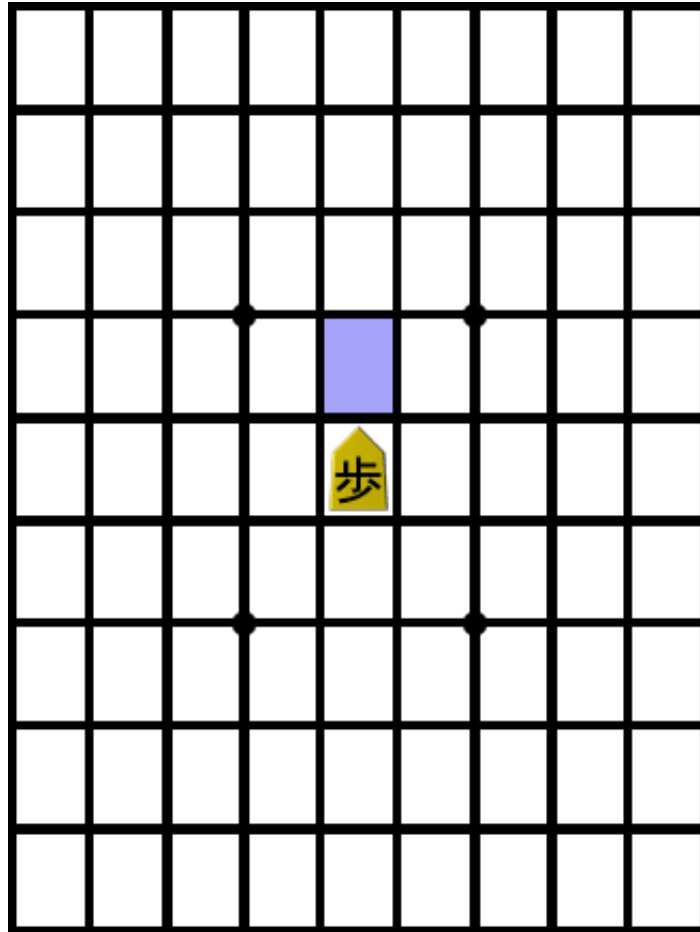
Knights move similarly to the knight in chess, but with more restrictions. It is the only token that can jump over other tokens. (Think of a knight on a horse jumping over soldiers on a battlefield.) Knights move forward in an "L" shape, but no other directions. In other words, two spaces forward in conjunction with one to the side, either left or right. Let's face it, the image describes it better than my words.

Lance



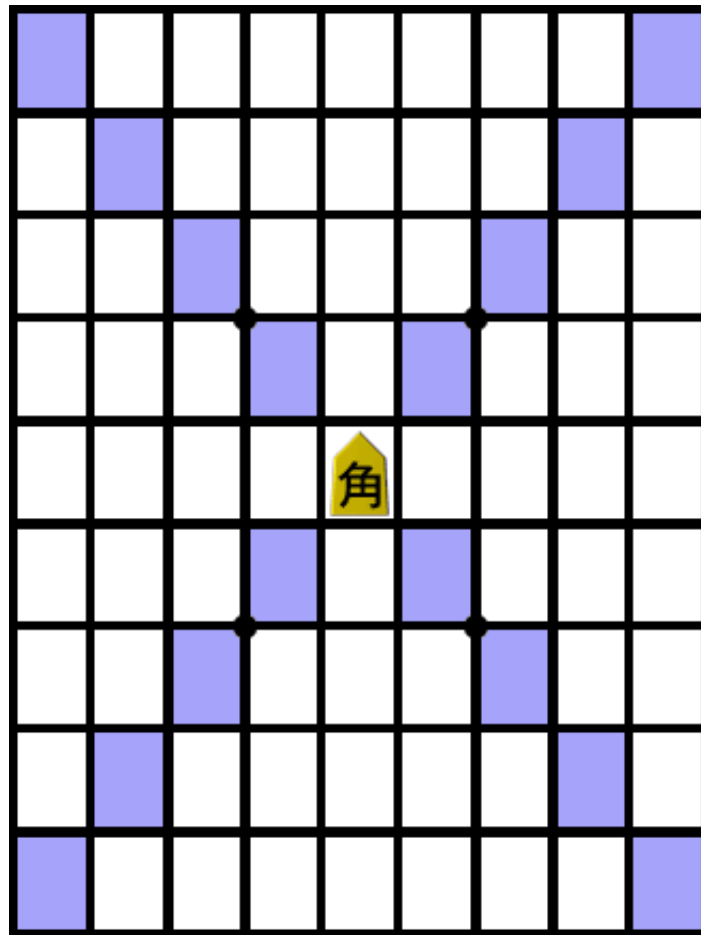
The Lance, sometimes called a spear, moves straight forward as many squares as it wants, but cannot jump over any tokens. The lance cannot retreat. Do not move this piece forward unless you are completely certain you need to. This piece is very powerful when you have it on your side of the board, but attacks less and less squares as it moves forward towards your enemy's camp.

Pawn



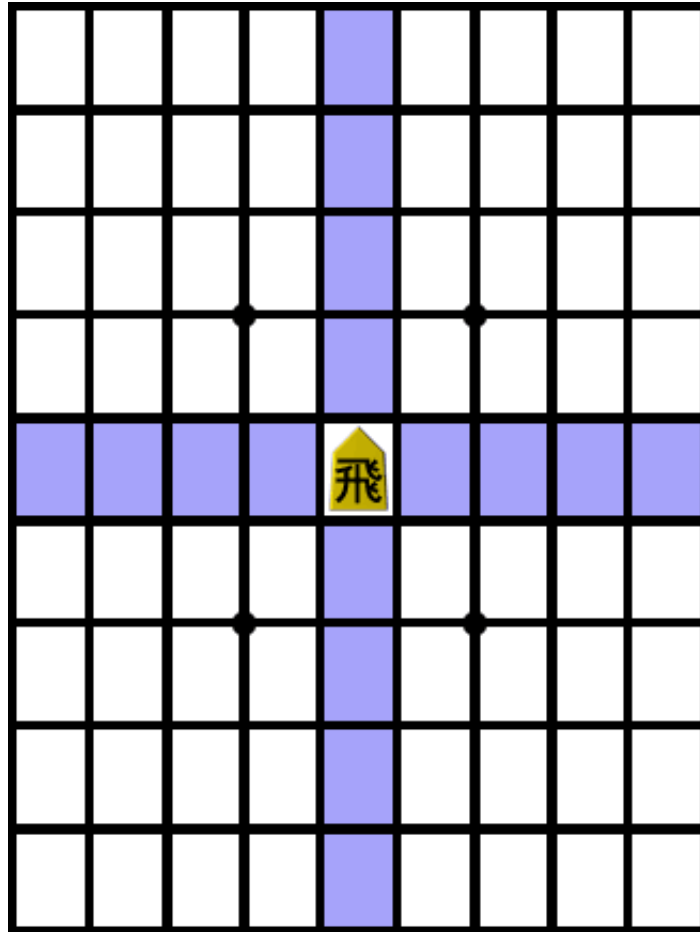
Pawn's move one square forward. Unlike Chess, pawns cannot move two squares on their initial move. Also, shogi pawns capture the same way they move. They don't capture diagonally as in Chess.

Bishop



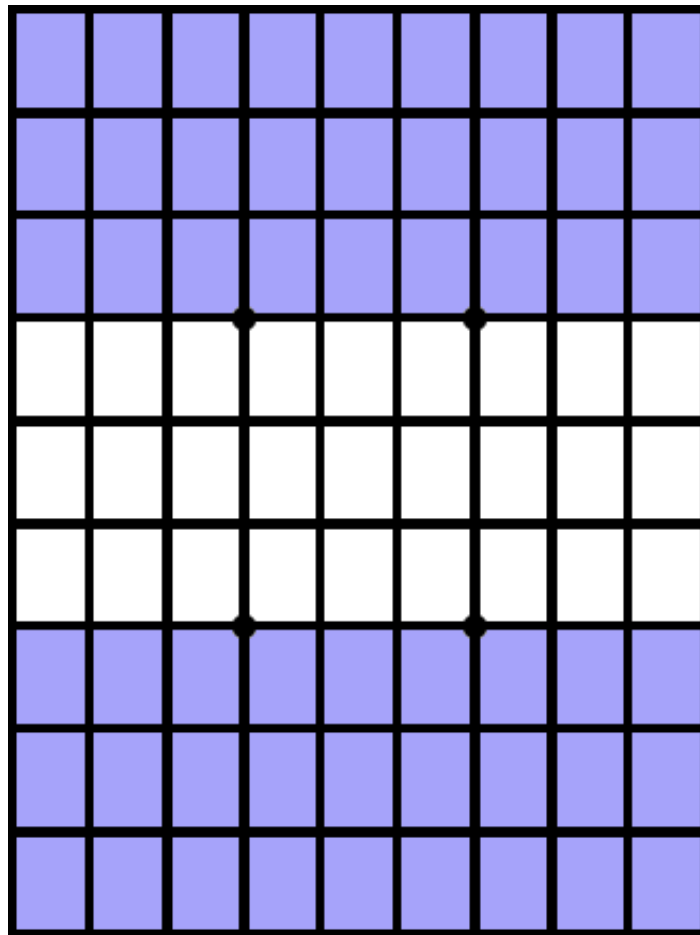
The Bishop can move as far as it wants diagonally. It cannot jump tokens, though. Because it moves diagonally, the Bishop is great at moving through crowded sections of the shogi board.

Rook



The Rook moves as far as it wants straight back, forward or to the sides. It cannot jump over tokens though. The rook is the most powerful piece on the board. Be careful not to box him in. He needs unrestricted access to move around the board.

Promotion Zones

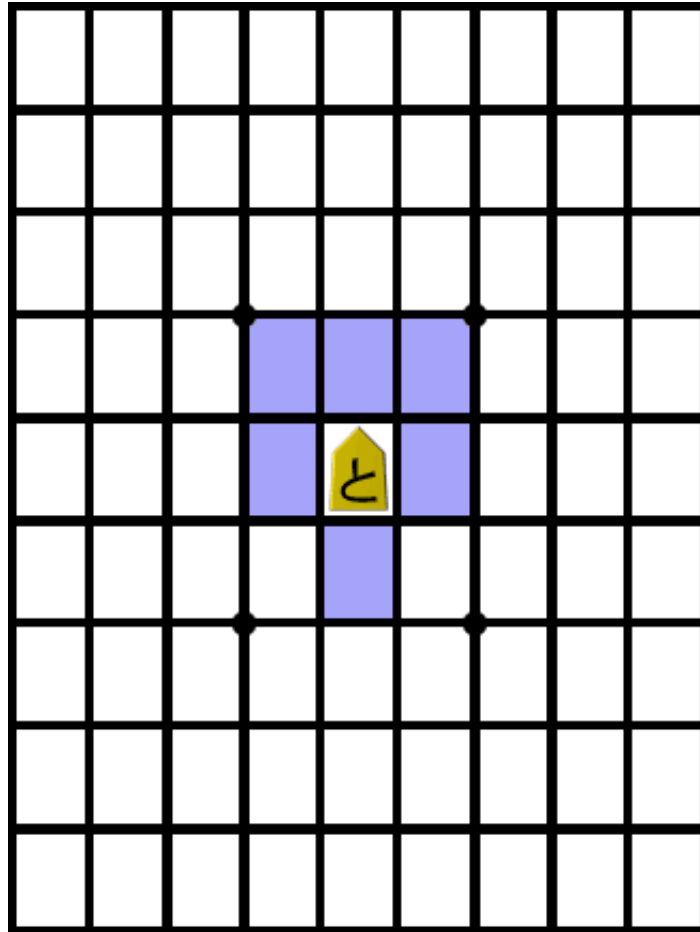


Now is a good time to discuss another variation Shogi takes from Chess. Shogi allows promotion, but it is different than Chess. All tokens except for the king and gold general may promote. The rook and bishop gain the movement capabilities of the king in addition to keeping their old movement capabilities when they promote. All other tokens exchange their movement capabilities for that of the gold general when they promote.

Promotion (with few exceptions) is never mandatory. When a token moves into, out of, or in the last three rows of squares on the opposite side of the board from their starting position, they may choose to promote.

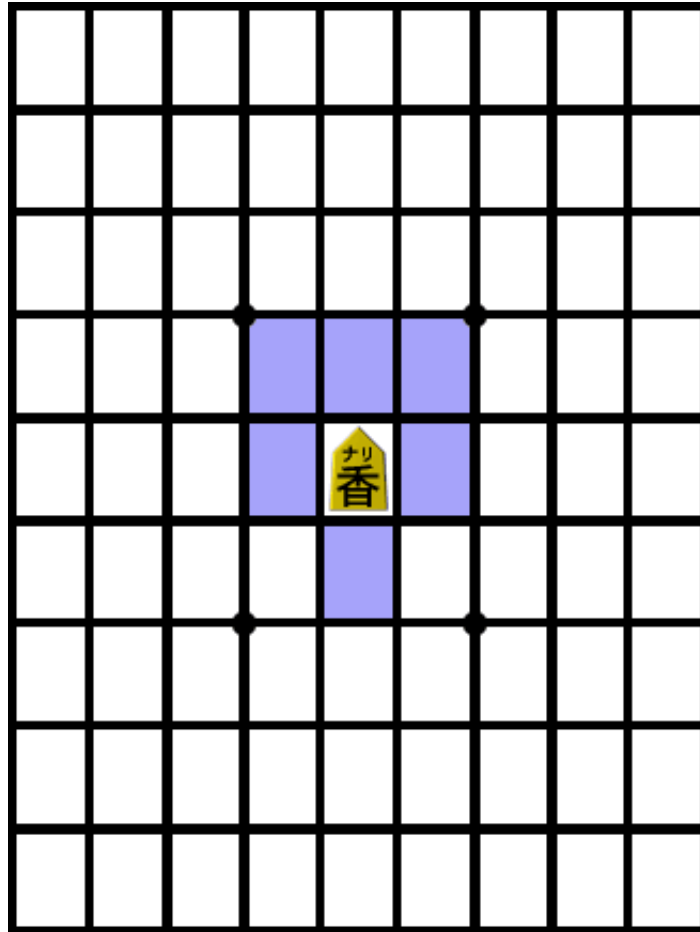
Mandatory promotion happens if any token moves to a square where its only legal move is prohibited by the edge of the board. Mandatory promotion only affects pawns, lances, and knights.

Promoted Pawn



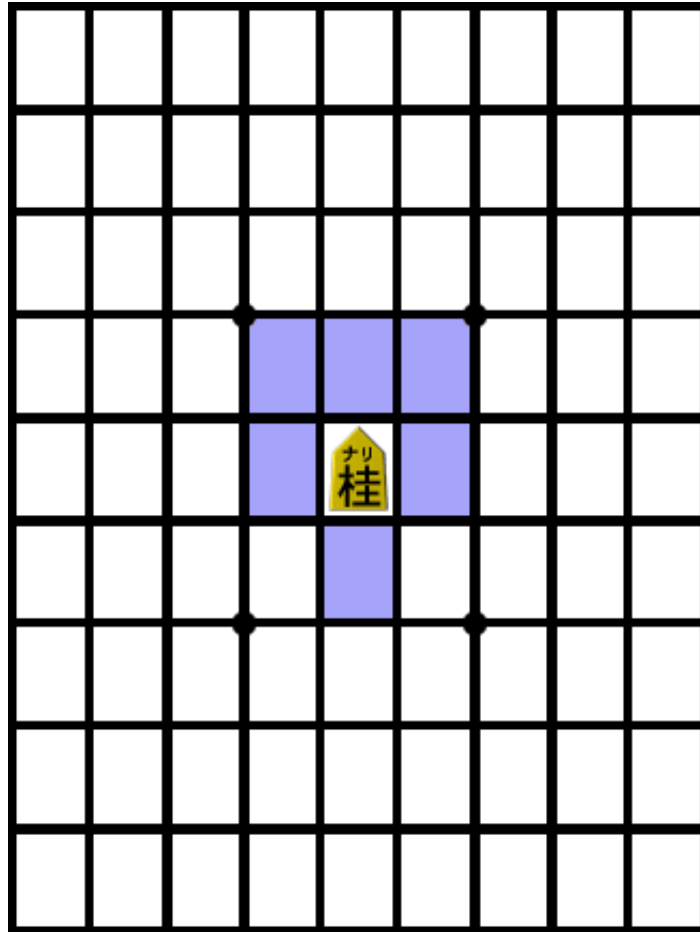
The promoted pawn moves like a gold general. However, a pawn is only a pawn, so your opponent won't want to exchange a real gold general for a pawn. This gives promoted pawns a tactical advantage over real gold generals.

Promoted Lance



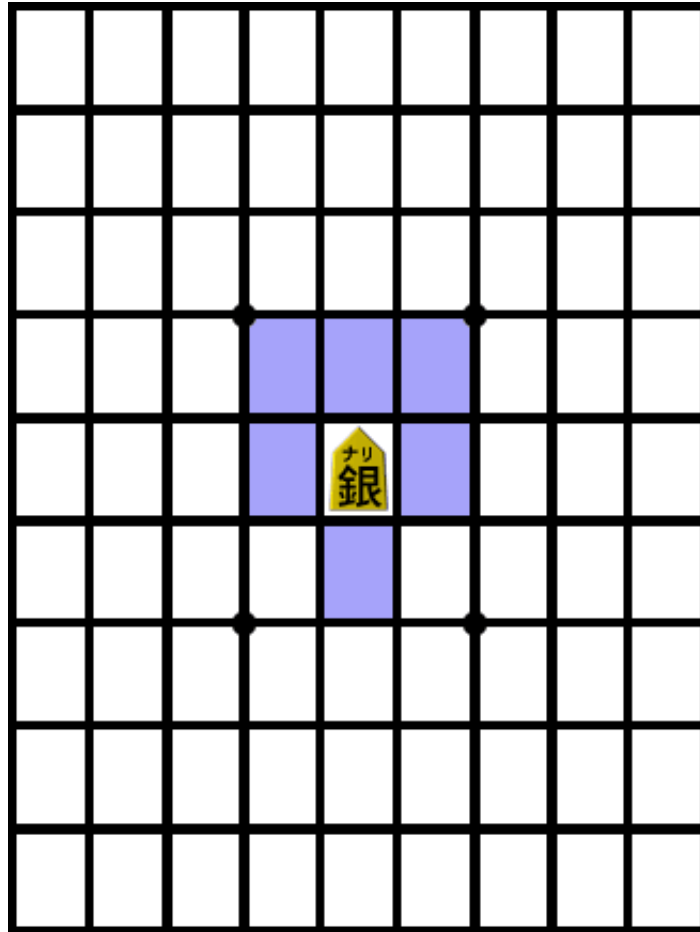
The promoted lance moves like a gold general.

Promoted Knight



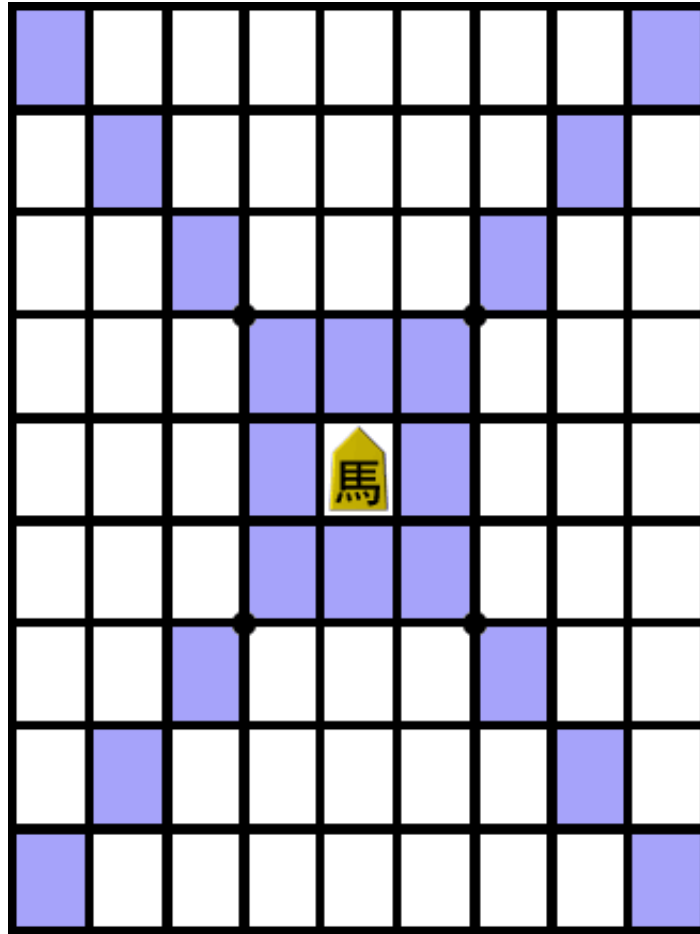
The promoted knight moves like a gold general.

Promoted Silver General



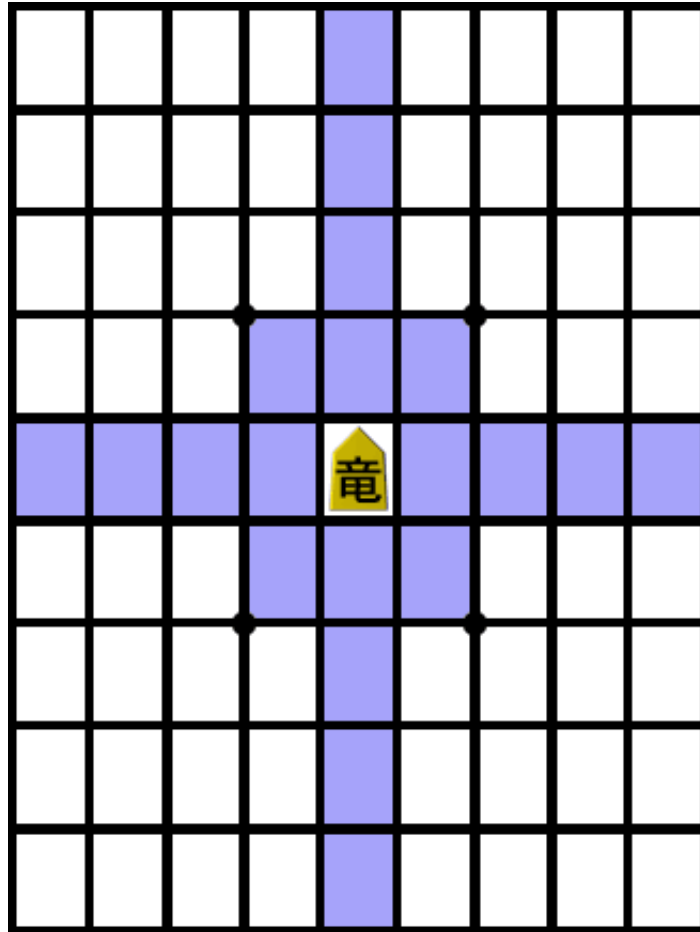
The promoted silver general moves like a gold general.

Promoted Bishop



The promoted bishop moves like itself and a king combined.

Promoted Rook



The promoted rook moves like itself and a king combined.

Dropping

All tokens captured in Shogi are NOT removed from the game. Instead, captured tokens are placed in plain site in the player's reservoir. Instead of moving a token during a turn a player may choose to drop a token back onto the board. That means a winning player can grow the size of his army!

Tokens are always dropped in demoted status, even if they had already been promoted when they were captured.

Two special rules apply to pawns when dropping. First a pawn may not be dropped in a column that contains an unpromoted pawn owned by the player dropping the pawn. Also a pawn may not be dropped in a position that places an opponent's King in checkmate. In other words, the winning

move of a shogi game can never be a pawn drop. Attacking the king with a pawn drop is fine, though, as long as the drop doesn't end the game.

Tokens may not be dropped on a location from which the only legal move is prohibited by the edge of the board. (This rule only affects pawns, lances and knights.) If the token will never be able to move after it is dropped, it is an illegal drop. That means a pawn and lance must not be dropped onto the farthest row from their home camp, and the knight may not be dropped on the last two rows in the enemy camp.

Illegal Moves

In tournament play if an illegal move is made, even accidentally, the player loses immediately. In casual games it is customary to allow players to take back accidental illegal moves. That keeps friendly games friendly.

Black and White

Shogi has black and white players too, though the tokens are not colored. The player who moves first is considered to be the black player and the other is the white player. This is reversed from Western chess. The squares on the board (which might actually be rectangles) are labeled from the black player's perspective. The squares are one to nine from right to left. The squares are labeled 'a' to 'i' from top to bottom. For example the bottom left square from black's perspective is 9i and contains a lance at the start of the game.

Sennichite (Repetition)

Everything about the board and the captured pieces is called the "position" of the board. If everything about the board is the same twice in the game, the position is said to be repeated. If the position is repeated four times the game is a draw, or in tournaments, it is replayed with players' colors swapped so that a different person starts. The exception is

that if the repetition occurs because one player is forcing it with a check of the King, then the checking player loses the game for having forced Sennichite.

Remember, ... repetition is of the same position of the board, not a repetition of the moves, though this can result in a repetition of position of the board and reservoirs.

Jishogi (Impasse)

When both Kings have reached the enemy's side of the board, and the capture of a King seems impossible, the players may decide to count pieces and end the game. Rooks and Bishops count as five points, Kings are not counted, and all other tokens are counted as one point.

If one player has 24 points or more, but the other has less than 24 points, then player with the greater points wins. If both players have 24 or more points the game is a draw and may be replayed with players swapping colors.

If one player would like to invoke Jishogi, and the other does not then the game continues. If one player has managed to get all of his tokens into the last three rows of the enemies side of the board and they are all protected by other tokens, then he may force Jishogi and all pieces are counted, ending the game.

Finally...

Those are the rules of Shogi. Strategy is a whole other topic, that I plan on getting into more on my blog. I hope you have many enjoyable years of playing this ancient game. Remember, if you need a cheap board and pieces to play shogi with, try printing out paper versions from the free PDFs provided on the shogi boards page. If you just want to get use to how the pieces move, try out my shogi app.

