**上海外国语大学 2020 –2021学年第一学期**

**期末考试试卷**

课程名称 中国文化概要

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任课教师 江帆

姓名 邢悦

学号 0203700993

**Please write an essay about 500-800 words in English, explaining a cultural phenomenon in China. A comparative perspective is encouraged.**

After burying myself in a wealth of movies and books during the two weeks of home quarantine, I decided to get some fresh air and went to a park where I used to go jogging in the morning. Wandering by the lake, I found several senior citizens playing Chinese chess (“Xiangqi” in Chinese), which is actually a normal scene in every park across the nation before the pandemic struck. With their masks and gloves on, which could keep them from the virus and coldness, they chose to sit down at a chessboard with their friends even during the horrid pandemic. What I saw behind this is people’s consistent enthusiasm and attachment for this traditional tactical Chinese art. As a matter of fact, Chinese chess, along with so many other traditional Chinese cultural forms like calligraphy, painting, Chinese medicine and Peking Opera, has been kept alive since the Warring States period and still prevails among Chinese citizens. I’d like to explain such phenomenon respectively from cultural, educational and social perspective.

To begin with, Chinese Chess is the epitome of traditional Chinese culture that bears wisdom of our ancestors. It has absorbed the principles of Yi, the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, the military tactics and insight of the Strategists and the metaphysical and logical systems of the Logicians. Especially, the rules in Chinese Chess reflect the five virtues that Confucianism stressed, benevolence, righteousness, manner, wisdom and credit. Besides, Chinese Chess keeps players mentally sharp. People who play Chinese Chess develop thinking abilities which enable them to better process and solve problems at a placid and collected state. Multiple modern studies have shown that playing Chinese Chess is beneficial to mental health, which is why it is preferred by countless people. Furthermore, Chinese Chess is an art that enjoys vast popularity among Chinese citizens, instead of a superior entertainment confined to upper class. In a time when there was no television, no cinema and no other modern entertainment, the game of chess was a tool of entertainment for millions of Chinese families. It is not a passive game, but one in which people participate directly and enjoy themselves, often giving them a sense of accomplishment and novelty, thus it maintains a timeless charm deeply rooted in Chinese culture. In summary, Chinese Chess not only bears wisdom and insight in ancient times, but also is of great educational and social significance.

On the other hand, though, Chinese Chess, whose audience is to some extent limited to elderly Chinese players, enjoys less popularity compared to International Chess (or European Chess). Two reasons will be emphasized as follows by illustrating the main differences between them.

Firstly, Chinese Chess’s pieces are flat circles with Chinese characters printed on them, which make it difficult for foreigners to read and tell the difference between pieces because they need to learn Chinese first before they can play. By comparison, International Chess uses stereoscopic pieces that are made based on the real items, which enable players from all nations to differentiate pieces without much effort.

Secondly, the movements of pieces in Chinese Chess are rather confined in comparison with those in International Chess. For example, the General is confined to the fortress and can only move one step at a time vertically or horizontally while in International Chess the King is more flexible as shown in the tactic called castling, a special defensive maneuver in which the King moves two spaces to its right or left, while the Rook on that side moves to the opposite side of the King. It is also a reflection of the cultural backgrounds that Chinese Chess embodies Chinese feudal political system and the classification of social status while International Chess is developed in the early stage of capitalism and liberalism.

In my personal experience, I learned how to play Chinese Chess at a young age and it was my grandfather who taught me with great patience and witnessed my progress as time went by. His wisdom inspired me to lead a better life and I benefited a lot from my time spent on the chessboard with him. I’d like to share some personal reflections from such tactical traditional Chinese art. The first thing I learned from Chinese Chess is that we should be cautious with every move, in other words, think twice before we act. Secondly, it gradually came clear to me that it is critical to see from other people’s perspective, rather than to stay self-focused. Playing chess helps me to develop the ability to anticipate my opponents’ next moves and to have deep contemplation and forethought. Thirdly, it taught me to look at the bigger picture, not just temporary gains and losses. Sacrifices sometimes are needed for long-term interests.