

Kortchnoi – Wang Yeu Amsterdam, August 2008

The young Chinese player has dominated at the competition against experienced grandmasters; effortlessly, not having invested any theoretical novelties, let alone emotions he won all 5 games against strong players of different style, people famous for their outstanding ideas, appreciated by the chess world. And adopted by the chess men and the chess computers. It was not easy to grasp where the skill of Wang has come from - Obviously, he has just memorised everything, what the computer says and recommends. Not much profundity, but who cares?! So was a thread of my thinking, when I made up my mind to play against him something what is not 100% solid, but what is almost forgotten by the great teacher of the modern young players...

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6

By the way: how it happens, that Chinese, Dutch, Bulgarian young players have chosen to play one and the same opening! O, well, they have the same coach - the machine!

3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 d5 5.Ne5!? b5 6.g3

You see, black prepares to play the Slav set-up, but white moves the game upon the Catalan rails. Actually - it was me who introduced this line into the grandmaster's practice some 25 years ago. The variation was explored for a couple of years but then lost in a view. As to me, I have recently discovered my old game from the Dutch chess competition and got inspired by it.

6...Bb7 7.Bg2 a6

In the above-mentioned game it happened: 7...Qb6 8.0-0 e6 9.e4 Nbd7 10.Be3 c5 11.N:d7 N:d7 12.d5 Be7 13.Re1 Bf6 14.a4 b4 15.a5 Qa6 16.d:e f:e 17.Na4 0-0-0 18.f4 Qb5 19.Qg4 Bd4 20.Q:e6 Rhe8 21.Qf7 Rf8 22.Qh5 B:e3+ 23.R:e3 h6 24.Qe2 g5 25.f:g h:g 26.e5 rde8 27.e6 Nf6 28.Re5 Kb8 29.N:c5 Bd5 30.R:d5 N:d5 31.Qe5+ Nc7 32.e7 Rf7 33.Rd1 a6 34.Rd8 1:0 (Kortchnoi-Cuijpers, 1983) 8.0-0?

I started with this game, waiting for inaccuracies of my opponent, but was the first who committed an error: castling should wait, 8.a4 had the first option. It is true - after 8.a4 e6 (after 8...Nd5 black had to reckon with 9.B:d5 cd 10.a:b; losing back a pawn) the combination 9.a:b c:b 10.R:a8 B:a8 11.Nb5? c:b 12.B:a8 would fail due to Qa5+, but then 9.Bg5! was strong - 9...h6?! 10.a:b! c:b 11.R:a8 B:a8 12.Qa1 Bb7 13.Qa7 with clear plus to white, or 9...Qb6 10.e4 - white has considerable pressure.

8...e6 9.a4 Nd5

Of course! Every exchange of pieces will simplify the black task to repel white's initiative. But to move the knight c3 away hardly works out - after 10.Ne4 f6 both white knights would hang in the air...

10.e4 N:c3 11.b:c Nd7

How to maintain the pressure upon the black position? Just to burn the bridges And to continue f2-f4, what is certainly sharp but not flawless strategically?

Whether right or wrong,I still abstain to push my pawns and hope to inflict difficulty to black by well- developed active pieces.

As long as bishop b7 does not take part in the fight,white has a compensation for a pawn.

12.Bf4 Be7

Just in case of 12...Nb6,we hasten to remind to the youthful fans of the Slav defence about the following combination,some years ago discovered by G.Sosonko: 13.Qh5 g6?!(13...Qe7) 14.N:g6 fg 15.Qe5,winning the rook h8.

And after 12...Nf6 white could continue the assault with Qb1,threatening N:c4...

13.Qg4 g6

13...Bf6 was also playable- 14.Nd7 Qd7 15.e5 would not promise much because of an intermediary 15...h5!

14.N:d7

White bishop must move to h6 in order to hinder free development of black pieces,but not to allow Nd7:e5.

14...Q:d7 15.Bh6 f6

When the black bishop comes to f8,then,of course Qf4.

16.a:b

Somehow I believed that I have to make this move before black by move Kf7 would connect his rooks and after a:b R:a8 B:a8 Ra1 for some time enjoy a possession of the open file.

16...c:b

Played instantly.Presumably in Asian chess double pawns is a shame.Also by taking b:c black puts his bishop b7 into play.For that white gets a pawn majority in the centre...

17.Rfe1

A bit quizzical move.Normally the rook first should be put to d1.But somehow I believed I have to be ready to the opening of the file e.

17...e5!

Played after long contemplation.The exclamation mark is mine.Black wants to simplify the position and by all standarts to have some edge.Why the edge? Well,in endgames,as a rule,passed pawns on a side of the board are more dangerous than passed pawns in the centre.

18.Q.d7 K:d7 19.de fe 20.Bg7 Rhe8

Played again after a long think.How to locate the pieces the most active way, eventually not sacrificing,not losing anything? Black decides to take as a target the pawn f2.But it turns out,black loses a fight for the only open file.

21.B:e5 Bc5 22.Bh3+

It was possible to play Bf6 at once.But cheque is more tricky-black has to find a secure place for his king.

22...Kc6

Logically,black believes the king has to support pushing of pawns on the queen's side.After 22...Ke7 the game could proceed the following way: 23.Bf4

Kf8 24.e5 Rad8 25.Bg2 Bc8 26.Be4.Let us not forget:after 17...e5 I considered the position slightly better for black...

23.Bf6 Kb6 24.e5

The bishop f6 is now very important piece,provided white`s control along the d-file.On the other hand,it does not take part whatever will happen on the queen side.

24...Rf8 25.Red1 Rae8 26.Rd2 Be7?!

A sudden,not quite understadable a change of a plan-one could expect pushing of passed pawns- a6-a5,or b5-b4;in both cases a sharp,but preferable for black play.Here we have to talk about psychological features of Wang.I have not seen The games of that strong tournament,played in July in Sochi,but know that Wang has won there 2 games and has not lost any!Presumably he is a careful player;who tries to avoid any incalculable complication of the position.What certainly would happen after pushing the pawns,since the black king stays behind these pawns.

Regarding the position,I managed to find a draw after 26...b4: 27.c.b B:b4 28.Rb1 a5(28...Kc5?! 29.R:b4 K:b4 30.Rb2+ Kc3 31.R:b7)29.Rc2 Kc5 (29...Be4 30.R:b4+ a.b 31.R:c4=) 30.Bf1 c3 31.R:c3! B:c3 32.R:b7 a4 33.Bb5 Rb8 34.Be7+ Kd5 35.Rd7+ Ke6 36.B:f8 R.b5 37.R:h7 with an approximated equality of chances.Or 33...a3 34.B:e8 R:e8 35.Rd7+ Kb4 36.Be7+ R:e7 37.R:e7 a2 38.Ra7 a1Q 39.R:a1 B.a1 39.f4,achieving a draw without difficulties;32...B:e5 33.Be7+ R:e7 34.R:e7 Bd4 35.Rc7+ Kd5 36.Rc2 a4 –black stands better;but white has enough resources to save the game.

But the black move allows to white take over the initiative due to control of the central file.

27.B:e7 R:e7 28.f4 Kc5

Judging by continuation of the game,Wang does not look as an experienced endgame player.28...a5 would lose a pawn after 29.Rd6+ Bc6 30.Bg2 Rc7 31.R:c6+ B:c6 32.B:c6 K:c6 33.R:a5,but then 33...Rd8-possession of the central file would become a good compensation for a pawn.Such or similar ideas never occured to the Chinese player;but I still had to keep them in my mind and not try to grab nonimportant pawns,allowing the opponent to strengthen location of his pieces.

29.Bg2

Another move,that comes to consideration,in order to creat a mating net around the black king,is 29.Rd6!?

29...B.g2 30.K.g2 Re6

30...Ra8? 31.Rd6 and there is no salvation against Rad1+ Rd1-d5 mate.

31.Kf3?!

In order to activate his central pawns white needs his king to e4,but this maneouvre could

wait.The move 31.Rd7 was strong and I think could put black position into real jeopardy.

After 31.Rd7 h5 32.Kf3 R:e5 33.R.a6 g5? 34.Rdc6 black is totally lost. Relatively better is 33...b4. After 34.Ra5+ Kc6 35.R:e5 Kd7 36.cb Ra8 37.Ra5 Rb8 38.Rd5+ Ke6 39.Re5+ white has good winning chances. By the way in case of 31...Ra8 white does not grab the pawn but puts his king to e4 and then pushes his pawns: g3-g4, f4-f5 and so on.

31...R:e5 32.R:a6 Rd5

Frankly, I overlooked this move. The position becomes equal.

33.R:d5+ K:d5 34.Ra7 h5

I wonder, was taking the h-pawn a real threat? Say, 34...Rd8 35...R:h7 Kc5 36.Rc7+ Kd6 37.Rg7 Kc5 38.R:g6 Rd3+ 39.Ke4 R:c3 40.Rg8 Rc2- Analyses show chances are about equal. Or 36.Re7 Rd3+ 37.Re3 b4 Now the only reasonable move is 38.Ke2 and after R:e3+ 39.K:e3 b3-draw.

35.Ra6

To lose the pawn g6 would be more painful to black, but he can avoid it.

35...g5

A threat to win some space by g5-g4 is unpleasant.

36.h3 Rf5?

Such an ugly move a literate European player would never produce!!

It is true, black has had already some difficulties. I analysed for some time the line 36...Rg8 37.f5 g4+ 38.hg R:g4 I could not find a forced win for white, but the position is alarming for black. I believe, the best chance for him would be 36...gf 37.gf b4 38.Ta5+ Kd6 39.cb Tb8, where eventually, black due to a strong pawn c, gets good counterplay.

37.Ra5 K e6

37...Kc5 38.Ke4 Rd5 39.R.d5+ , 38...Rf8 39.fg; winning. Or 37...Kc6 38.Ke4 Rd5 39.Ra6 Kc5 40.Ra8 Rd1 41.fg or 41...Rd3 42.f5

38.Ke4 Rc5 39.f5+ Kf6 40.g4 h:g 41.h:g Re5 42.Kd4 Re1 43.Ra6+

Here white had an alternative: 43.R:b5 Rd1+ 44.K:c4 Rg1 45.Rb6+ Ke5

46.Re6+ Kf4 47.f6 K:g4 48.Kd5 Rf1 49.Kd6 Kh5 50.Ke7 Kg6 51.c4 g5 52.c5 g3 53.Re3, winning. More complicated is white's task after 46...Kf7 47.Kd5 R:g4 48.Ke5 Rc4 49.Rb7+ Kf8 50.f6 g4 51.Ke6 Rc6+ 52.Kf5 g3 53.Kg6 Rc8 54.Rh7 Ke8, where white fails to win.

43...Kf7 44.Rg6 Rd1 45.Kc5 Rc1 46.K:b5 R:c3 47.R:g5 Kf6 48.Rg6+ ?! Ke5

This move, indeed, creates more technical difficulties to white, than to remain with the king on f7. This move was not expected by me. Otherwise more exact was 48.Rg8.

49.Kc5 Rc1 50.Rg8

Well, how long the game can continue? 50...Ke4 51.Re8+ Kd3 52.Rd8+ Ke3 53.f6 Rf1 54.g5 c3 55.Rc8 Rf5+ 56.Kd6 Kd4 57.R:c3 K:c3 58.Ke6 R:g5 59.f7 Rg6+ 60.Ke5 Rg5 61.Ke4 and so on; winning. Or 50...c3 51.Kc4 Ke4 52.Kb3 (52.f6? Rf1 53.Re8+ Kf3 54.f7 Kg2 55.f8? Rf8 56.Rf8 c2) Kd4 53.Rd8 Ke5 54.Re8 Kd4 55.f6 Rb1 56.Kc2 Rb2 57.Kc1 Rf2 58.g5 Rf1 59.Kc2 Rf2 60.Kb3 Rf2 61.g6, finally winning. But what in fact has happened?

50...c3 51.Re8?? Kf6

Suddenly I realised-I have to run with the king downwards,but pawn g4 is nonprotected.I was on the verge of crying.Draw agreed.