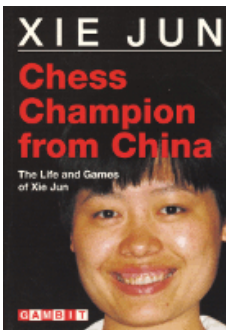




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Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

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Journey from Beijing

by Eugene Manchester

Chess Champion from China, by Xie Jun, 1998 Gambit Publications, Paperback, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 223pp. \$22.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$9.95)

It was only about three decades ago that players from China began to participate in the international chess arena. Anyone who took note of the entry of Chinese players into international tournaments might have wondered how long it would take the Chinese to establish a presence at the grandmaster level. After all, one out of every six people on earth was/is Chinese. That is quite a population pool from which to draw.

The answer was not long in coming. It was apparent that China would be represented by strong players, players who could hold their own at the highest levels. And then, one player emerged from the ranks of women's chess in China to win a world championship. Her name is Xie Jun and *Chess Champion from China* is her story.

The book is an account, written in the first person, by Xie Jun, of her career. There are forty well annotated games by the author and a dozen "puzzles" - combinations from her games. Each game is also put into perspective: What other events were going on in her life that may have influenced her play, her mental and physical state, playing conditions and so forth. It portrays a modest young traditional Chinese woman struggling and somewhat intimidated as she strives to attain excellence in the unfamiliar forum of foreign tournaments and matches.

At every significant point in her career, she takes care to explain to the reader her fears, hopes and expectations. The result is a unique, almost intimate perspective as the reader accompanies a young Chinese girl on a journey as she develops into a young woman and world champion. Typical of her self-effacing, reserved approach that dominates the book is the recounting of the game with former Women's World Champion Nona Gaprindashvili.

Nona Gaprindashvili - Xie Jun

Candidates tournament, Borzhomi 1990
King's Indian, Averbakh [E73]

I have always considered it a privilege to play against Nona Gaprindashvili.

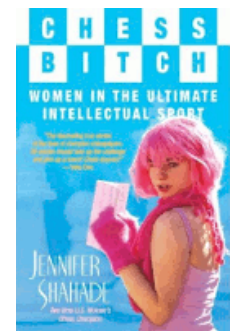
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Playing her in Georgia, her home country, is a special experience. Prior to every game, some handsome young man would come up to her on the stage and give her a bouquet of flowers. Apparently, there is a statue of Nona in her native town and she drives in a car with the special number plate 5555 (or 555, I do not remember exactly) related to the fact that she was five times World Champion. This tournament was probably her last chance to get back to the top and she fought extremely hard to qualify.

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Be2 0-0 6 Bg5 Na6 7 Qd2 e5 8 d5 c6



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/pp3pbp/n1pp1np1/3Pp1B1/2P1P3/2N5/PP1QBPPP/R3K1NR w KQ - 0 9"]

9 h4

Back in 1990, this was the normal move-order in the Averbakh Variation. Nowadays, White more often chooses to start with 9 f3 to keep the option of g2-g4. I have had some experience with this line myself: 9 f3 cxd5 (another interesting move is 9...Qa5, e.g. 10 g4 h5 11 h3 cxd5 12 Nxd5 Qxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Nxd5 14 cxd5 f6 15 Be3 f5 16 g5 Bd7, as happened in Yusupov-Smirin, Erevan Olympiad 1996) 10 cxd5 Bd7 11 g4 (11 Bb5 Bxb5 12 Nxb5 Qb6 13 Nc3 Nc5 14 Rb1 Nh5 15 Be3 Nf4 is the latest try, as in Yusupov-Gelfand, Dortmund 1997) 11...h6 12 Be3 (12 Bxh6 Nxe4 followed by ...Qh4+ is a well-known motif in the King's Indian) 12...h5 13 h3 Nc5 14 0-0-0 Qb8 15 Kb1 Rc8 16 Rh2 b5. This was the continuation in Alterman-Xie Jun, Cap d'Agde 1994 (see Game 23). Later, my attack on the queenside proved decisive.

9...cxd5 10 cxd5 Qa5



[FEN "r1b2rk1/pp3pbp/n2p1np1/q2Pp1B1/4P2P/2N5/PP1QBPP1/R3K1NR w KQ - 0 11"]

To be honest, I had mixed up 10...Qa5 with the move 10...Bd7, which was played by almost everybody up until then. I played my move quickly as if to indicate that I knew the position. I had no idea that move-order mattered here and was surprised when my opponent sank into deep thought. There was nothing else for me to do but start thinking myself and, rather slowly, I began to understand why Nona took her time over move 11. For instance, if White pretends that nothing is going on and plays 11 f3, then Black can continue 11...Nh5 threatening 12...Ng3. Moreover, Black's other option, 11...Nc5, is also interesting given the possibility 12...Nb3. I would like to add that, apart from 10...Qa5 and 10...Bd7, other moves have also been seen, such as 10...Qe8 11 f3 Bd7 12 Nh3 Nc5 13 g4 h5 14 Nf2 hxg4 15 fxg4 Rc8 16 Be3 Nh7 17 Nd3 Nxd3+, Ivanchuk-Topalov, Erevan Olympiad 1996.

11 Rb1

11 Rc1 leads to a complicated position after 11...Nc5 12 f3 Bd7 13 Nh3 Rac8, but I think that Black has enough counterplay here. During the game, I was most afraid of 11 h5, which may be the strongest move. However, it seems to me that Black maintains a playable position after 11...Bd7 (11...Nc5 12 h6 Bh8 13 Rb1 Qb4 14 f3 Bd7 15 g4 Rfc8 16 Nh3 Rc7 17 Nf2 Rac8 18 0-0 leads to an unclear position as well) 12 h6 Bh8 13 Nh3 Rfc8 14 f3 Rc7 15 Nf2 Rac8 16 0-0 Nc5. Black has chosen a flexible set-up and it not easy to see how White can strengthen her position.

11...Bd7



[FEN "r4rk1/pp1b1pbp/n2p1np1/q2Pp1B1/4P2P/2N5/PP1QBPP1/1R2K1NR w K - 0 12"]

12 Kf1?

This is possible, of course, but should White really resort to this kind of solution? Why not the more natural 12 h5? Maybe Nona disliked the continuation 12...b5!? 13 Nxb5 Qxa2 (even 13...Qxd2+ is possible, since Black has full compensation for the pawn after 14 Bxd2 Nxe4 15 Nxd6 Nxd2 16 Kxd2 Nc7 17 Bf3 Rab8) 14 Nc3 Qa5 15 hxg6 fxg6 with an interesting position. I would probably have played 12...Rac8, leading the game along quieter paths.

12...Rac8

Now Black is well on top, having the more harmonious development.

13 h5 b5 14 a3

White is already in trouble. Alternatives are clearly worse and lead to positions that are very advantageous for Black, e.g. 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Rc1 b4 or 14 hxg6 fxg6 15 a3 Rxc3! 16 Qxc3 (16 Bxf6 Rxa3!) 16...Qxc3 17 bxc3 Nxe4.

14...b4 15 axb4 Nxb4 16 Nh3



[FEN "2r2rk1/p2b1pbp/3p1np1/q2Pp1BP/1n2P3/2N4N/1P1QBPP1/1R3K1R b - - 0 16"]

I now saw that the rook sacrifice on c3 would give Black a promising

position. However, an important psychological factor came into play. As a matter of fact, I simply could not believe that Nona Gaprindashvili would give me such a chance. I was playing someone whose name I had read hundreds of times, in so many chess magazines, and I was convinced that this woman possessed some magical powers. There had to be a pitfall somewhere! The fact that I had lost to her only two months earlier, almost like a beginner, played a part in this as well. In the short post-mortem, Nona told me that she had known the type of position for the previous twenty years (i.e. from before I was born!). During the game I told myself to wait for a while and, if I could not find any better move than rook takes c3, I would go for it on the next move. This was silly, for I almost missed this opportunity to keep my advantage. I should have played 16...Rxc3 !!, which leaves White basically with two options: 17 bxc3 Nxe4 and White has nothing better than 18 Qe1 (18 Qe3 Nxd5 19 Qxe4 Bf5 wins the white rook) 18...Nxd5 with a superior position for Black, or 17 Qxc3 Nxe4 18 Qa3 Qxa3 19 bxa3 Nxd5 20 Bf3 Ndc3. Once again, Black is almost winning. White will be struggling to find useful squares for her pieces, whereas Black's position plays itself. Instead, I played the timid...

16...Rc7?! 17 Be3 Rxc3!

Here, I failed to see any moves that I thought were better than the rook sacrifice and grabbed my second chance. Luckily it is not too late.

18 Qxc3 Nxe4 19 Qel Bb5

This eliminates the piece that eyes the light squares. From now on, the black knights will take up positions controlling the centre of the board.

20 Ng5

After 20 Bxa7, Black should not continue 20...Bxe2+ 21 Qxe2 f5 22 Be3 Nxd5 23 Qc4 Rf7 24 Qc8+ Rf8 25 Qe6+ (25 Qc4 leads to a move repetition) 25...Rf7 26 hxg6 Nxe3+ 27 fxe3 hxg6 and the advantage has disappeared - although the position remains murky. But Black does not have to allow these complications. Much better is 20...Bh6 21 Kg1 Bxe2 22 Qxe2 Nd2 23 Rd1 Qxa7 24 Rxd2 Bxd2 25 Qxd2 Qb7, which gives White plenty to worry about. The pawns on d5 and b2 are weak and White still needs several moves to complete her piece development.

20...Nf6 21 hxg6 hxg6 22 Rd1 Bxe2+ 23 Qxe2 Nbx5



[FEN "5rk1/p4pb1/3p1np1/q2np1N1/8/4B3/1P2QPP1/3R1K1R w - - 0 24"]

A sharp position has arisen. Black has ample compensation for the exchange and should now think how to mobilize her centre pawns. But how is White to proceed and finish her development? One idea is 24 g3, after which I intended 24...Nxe3+ 25 Qxe3 Qb5+ 26 Kg2 Qb7+ 27 Nf3 Rd8 28 b3 Nd5 29 Qd2 (29 Qe4?? Nf4+) 29...Nc7. Black is ready to play ...d6-d5. Some chess players would look at the immediate 24 Rh4 but the prospects of this rook along the fourth rank, let's say after 24...Rc8, are not too bright for the moment. Nona decides on another move.

24 Bc1 Rc8 25 g3

25 Ne4 forces the exchange of one pair of knights, but Black is nonetheless better after 25...Nxe4 26 Qxe4 Qa6+ 27 Kg1 Nf6.

25...Ne7 26 Rh4

Finally, White's h1-rook is activated.

26...Nf5 27 Rc4 Rf8



[FEN "5rk1/p4pb1/3p1np1/q3pnN1/2R5/6P1/1P2QP2/2BR1K2 w - - 0 28"]

28 Bd2?!

Nona by now had little time left, and she makes an inaccurate move. 28 Kg1!, which controls the d5-square, would have been more precise. Black has several plans and they usually include the move...d6-d5. It is extremely difficult to give an exact assessment of the many positions that can arise. The following variations illustrate some of the rich possibilities: 28...Qb5 29 Rc2 (29 Qd3?! d5 30 Rc7 Qb6 gives Black the initiative) 29...Qb6 is possible, but Black can also put the queen directly on b6 with 28...Qb6 29 Qc2 Nd4 (29...d5!? is interesting) 30 Be3. The situation is unbalanced.

28...Qd5 29 Nf3??

Now White's position is lost immediately. This was her last chance for 29 Kg1, even though White can no longer prevent Black from controlling the a8-h1 diagonal with 29...Nd4 30 Qf1 Bh6 31 Ra4 Qb7.

29...Nd4 30 Rxd4 exd4 31 Bc3 Qc6 32 Bxd4 Re8 33 Qd3 Ne4 34 Kg1 Bxd4 35 Nxd4 Qd5 36 Qb5 Re5 37 Qd3 Ng5

I realized that the win would only be a matter of time.

38 Kh2 Re4 39 Qb3 Qc5 40 Qb8+ Kg7

At last, White had passed the time control but her position is without any hope of survival. Nona took a long time before making her next move. In the meantime, I felt overcome by a feeling of sadness. It would be the end of Nona's chance to qualify, and maybe she would never get another chance to play for a world championship title.

41 b4 Qe5 42 Nc6 Qf5 43 Kg1 Qh3 0-1

At this moment, when Nona realized that she had no more chances and I was about to mate her, I could see the tears in her eyes. Every time when Georgian players won a game, the three to five hundred spectators applauded enthusiastically, but now there was a dead silence in the hall. It was evident that many people had come especially to watch her play. Then, after some thinking, she resigned.

I could not feel as happy as one would normally expect after winning such an important game. The whole situation had touched me and I felt too much sympathy for my opponent. Little was I to know that Nona would still get her chance in the last round of the tournament. Nona has always impressed me for her fighting chess and she was one of my great examples when I was a junior.

In fact, I was delighted when I heard that one year later, in 1991, she took first place at the Interzonal tournament in Yugoslavia.

There is an unfortunate tendency in the world today either to ignore or to fail to give proper credit to the trials, tribulations, and accomplishments of women. This holds true for the chess world too. Do not fall victim to trivial, knee-jerk reflex actions. This book deserves your attention. As you play through these games, you get the feeling that you are sitting next to Xie Jun, experiencing her doubts as she sorts out variations, wincing when she miscues, smiling when things go well. This is a worthwhile journey; take it with her. You will be glad you did.

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by Xie Jun

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