

Can Tenjiku Shogi be played without restricting the opening move?

C. P. Adams

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Abstract

This article examines whether it is necessary to restrict Black's choice of the first move in Tenjiku Shogi, as suggested in *The Struggle for Survival*. As such, it is almost entirely concerned with developing the opening theory presented in part II of that book.

1 Corrections to *The Struggle for Survival*

1.1 The Schmittberger-Nordgren Gambit

I spent a lot of time revising and re-writing chapter after chapter of *The Book of Tenjiku*. Each time I revised a chapter, I found errors, or other reasons, that caused me to re-write several other chapters. So as to stop this spiralling process, I finally decided to call a halt to the process, and to publish the material as it stood, on Sunday 14th February 1999.

So I spent most of that day tidying up the final text of what was published as *The Struggle for Survival*. During that final polishing process, I observed Black's fifth move of VGn - 10k on page 76 (The Schmittberger-Nordgren Gambit). This upset my previous conclusion that White had adequate defences against the gambit. Because I was in a hurry, I did not spend sufficient time evaluating the position afresh. Instead, I hurriedly revised other references to this variation, including adding the Opening move of GGn x 9a to the list of moves that might need to be restricted, in order to give White a fair chance.

After I went to bed that night, I suddenly realised that if White is less greedy, that is, he does not try to hold on to all of the sacrificed material, he can easily defeat the gambit. To be more specific, on move four, White should simply play B - 15b. This allows Black a combination on 10e, but that leaves White with a very easy game. And if Black does anything else, White can play VGn - 3j.

In short, the opening move of GGn x 9a is not a problem for White.

1.2 Symmetrical defence to 1. P - 8k

Although GGn x 9a is not a threat after 1. P - 8k, P - 8f; this does not mean that P - 8f is an adequate defence to P - 8k (as we shall see later). Therefore we shall later be looking at the variation 1. P - 8k, P - 9f; 2. GGn - 3g. On pages 63-64, I implied that GGn x 8p next was good for White. In fact, I knew that I had to look at the following variation, and did so ten minutes after publication:

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|----|-----|-------|--|-----|------|
| 1. | P | - 8k | | P | - 9f |
| 2. | GGn | - 3g | | GGn | x 8p |
| 3. | G | x 8p | | FiD | - 8f |
| 4. | GGn | - 14g | | | |

This last move is the vital one. Black now threatens to play B - 15o, and then capture the Fire Demon. If White were to now play FiD - 4j x! 5k, Black simply plays B - 2o, and awaits events. So the following sequence (or some minor variation of it) is forced:

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|----|-----|---|-----|-----|------------------------------|
| 4. | | | VGn | - | 11f |
| 5. | GGn | x | 10c | FiD | x 14l x! 13l,13m,14m,15l,15m |
| 6. | GGn | x | 9b | G | x 9b |
| 7. | DH | - | 16k | | |

This position is very bad for White — I think Black has a won game. But this rules out 1. . . ., P - 9f as a defence, since:

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|----|-----|---|----|-----|---|-----|
| 1. | P | - | 8k | P | - | 9f |
| 2. | GGn | - | 3g | GGn | - | 14j |
| 3. | FiD | - | 9k | | | |

is too good for Black. Now White cannot play symmetrically, as FiD - 8f, FiD x 3e is threatmate (well, anyone who pursues this line will find it is far from simple — but I think Black can establish a clear, decisive lead). If White continues:

3. GGn - 9e

then FiD - 13g x! 12f leaves White helpless.

Alternatively (and this line is perhaps the clearest), Black can play like this:

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|----|-----|---|-----|-----|---|-----|
| 1. | P | - | 8k | P | - | 9f |
| 2. | GGn | - | 3g | GGn | - | 14j |
| 3. | GGn | x | 7c | GGn | x | 10n |
| 4. | GGn | x | 10c | GGn | x | 7n |
| 5. | GGn | x | 9b | | | |

This leads to the clear lead of a Free King, with no Fire Demons on the board. Now it should be just a matter of technique.

2 1. . . ., P - 8f fails v. Wayne Schmittberger's Opening

2.1 A decisive coup

In Chapter 16 of *The Struggle for Survival*, I expressed the opinion that the line concerned might be too strong for White to cope. In looking for stronger moves for White, I tried SE - 3f for White's second move. This didn't work, but whilst examining the variations, I noticed that Black had a decisive move in all these variations. As an example:

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|----|-----|---|-----|-----|---|----|
| 1. | P | - | 8k | P | - | 8f |
| 2. | GGn | - | 3g | VGn | - | 6f |
| 3. | GGn | x | 7c | GGn | x | 7c |
| 4. | RGn | x | 7e+ | | | |

The promotion prevents White from capturing the Fire Demon on his fourth move. So next Black plays FiD 7n - 9k, and will win.

2.2 Trying the Soaring Eagle

Since the previous variation suggests that the Great General cannot be allowed to reach 3g, I next tried the following:

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|----|-----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | P | - | 8k | SE | - | 3f |
| 2. | GGn | - | 7k | | | |

Now it looks like P - 7f is necessary, but Black will then play VGn - 10k, and White is helpless. Clearly SE - 3f is a wasted move. Ah! Why not *start* with P - 7f? Ridiculous! Such a move is clearly too slow! At least, that was my thought, but . . .

3 Pure Defence

1. P - 8k P - 7f

Well, I have to admit that such a purely defensive move, with no counter-attack lined up, could possibly work. “Obviously” White will be crushed. But I had better look at it, I suppose . . .

Several second moves for Black suggest themselves. Here are the ones I have considered (not in the order I thought of them, though):

1. P - 9k
2. VGn - 10k
3. GGn x 9a
4. GGn - 3g
5. GGn - 7k

The last is the strongest, but we shall look briefly at the others:

3.1 2. P - 9k

Black’s thought is that since P - 10f hinders White’s development (pass is better, considering only the Fire Demon on 10c), he might as well go and capture the Fire Demon on 10c.

In fact, if this is what he is going to do, then VGn - 10k is a better move — it accomplishes the same maneuver (getting the Vice General on the 1k-14g diagonal), but leaves a vacancy on 9k for the Fire Demon, so . . .

3.2 2. VGn - 10k

Now, however, it appears White has a saving move — GGn - 5g. This stops a Fire Demon coming out to 9k, and prevents VGn - 14g. Next VGn - 8f will leave him with just enough room to complete his development. It appears White has equalised — i can see no promising continuation for Black.

3.3 Sacrifice

1. P - 8k P - 7f
2. GGn x 9a G x 9a
3. FiD - 9k RGn - 7e

White has perfect shape in defending against the Fire Demons — this is the point of P - 7f. Now, although White is somewhat shut in, he has plenty of time, as Black cannot develop a quick attack either.

Alternatively, White can play GGn - 7e, aiming at the Fire Demon (next B - 2b is planned). But I do not think it is wise to go ahead with the exchange, so i prefer the simpler line (being a Great General ahead).

3.4 Orthodox, but equal

1. P - 8k P - 7f
2. GGn - 3g GGn - 7e

Black is stuck. He must exchange, as he cannot play FiD - 4h, and FiD - 9k is met by the following clever line:

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|----|-----|--------------|---|-------|
| 3. | FiD | - 9k | B | - 2b |
| 4. | FiD | - 13g x! 12f | B | - 15b |

Now FiD x 10e etc. is met by FiD 7c x 10e, and the Fire Demon on 7n is still en prise. And if GGn x 7c first, VGn x 7c holds the line!

4 2. GGn - 7k

Black first forces White to commit himself. White would like to play RGn - 7e in response, making perfect shape, but this is just too slow, as Black responds with VGn - 10k (forcing GGn - 7d), and then FiD 7n - 9k. This threatens VGn - 14g, GGn - 3g and GGn - 10h, any of which would win a Fire Demon. So the following sequence results:

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|----|--------|-------|-----|-------|
| 1. | P | - 8k | P | - 7f |
| 2. | GGn | - 7k | GGn | - 7e |
| 3. | VGn | - 10k | BT | - 12b |
| 4. | FiD 7n | - 9k | P | - 9f |

VGn - 10k is better than FiD - 9k, as it develops faster. BT - 12b looks like the best response (incredibly — that is two purely defensive, non-developing moves), as the Fire Demon is relatively safe on 11b, and will still be on a developing diagonal. SE - 14f instead, only becomes a target for the Fire Demon.

P - 9f starts White's development. It prevents GGn - 3g, GGn - 10h and GGn - 11g, so White is still in the game. Next VGn - 11f, followed by B - 2b would complete White's development, so Black must decide how he is to attempt to win material. I can see two lines of attack.

4.1 FiD x 3e

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|----|-----|------------------------|-----|------|
| 5. | FiD | x 3e x! 2d,2e,3d,4d,4e | GGn | x 3e |
| 6. | GGn | x 7c | VGn | x 7c |
| 7. | SE | - 3k | GGn | - 1g |

Black trades his Great General for three pieces and three Pawns.

I find it difficult to assess this result. It is probably better for Black, but maybe not. It is definitely less good for Black than winning a Free King, which is what happens after 1. P - 9k. So if we decide that it is not necessary to restrict P - 9k as an opening move, then we automatically decide not to restrict P - 8k either. But if we wish to restrict P - 9k, we are not obliged to also restrict P - 8k.

If there were still four Fire Demons left on the board, then I would favour White, as the Great General would have that much more weight. If there were no Fire Demons left at all, then I would prefer Black. As it is, I suspect Black is a little ahead, but I am quite prepared to play White's position. So let us look at the other possibility I can see for Black:

4.2 White gets a choice of Type VIIIa or Type IV Opening

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|----|-----|--------------|-----|-------|
| 5. | VGn | - 14g | FiD | - 11b |
| 6. | FiD | - 13g x! 12f | FiD | - 8f |

White cannot play B - 15b, as then VGn - 16g, followed by FiD x 10e etc.. Nor can he play VGn - 10f, as then follows:

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|----|-----|------------------------------|-----|-------|
| 7. | FiD | x 14e x! 13d,13e,14d,15d,15e | GGn | x 14e |
| 8. | GGn | x 7c | BGn | x 7c |
| 9. | VGn | x 14e | | |

Now it gets complicated:

