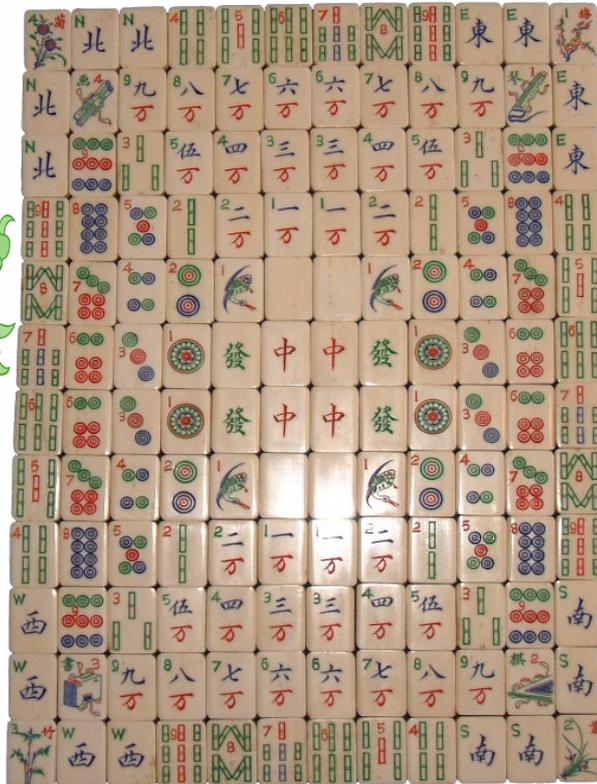


春 1 夏 2 秋 3 冬 4

1 2 3 4

# MAH-JONG

## British Rules



*Peter Gregory*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
Origins of the Game	.
Forms of the Game	.
The Rules Explained Here	.
More Information	.
<i>Mah-Jong, British Rules website</i>	8
<i>Some other websites</i>	.
<i>Buying a Mah-Jong set</i>	.
<b>Equipment</b>	<b>9</b>
The Tiles	.
<i>Characters</i>	.
<i>Circles</i>	.
<i>Bamboos</i>	.
<i>Dragons</i>	10
<i>Winds</i>	.
<i>Flowers and Seasons</i>	.
<i>Plain Tiles</i>	.
<i>Jokers</i>	.
Accessories	11
<i>Dice</i>	.
<i>Tallies</i>	.
<i>Wind discs and the Tong box</i>	.
<i>Racks</i>	.
<b>Learning the Game by Stages</b>	<b>13</b>
Stage 1 - Some Basic Rules	.
Stage 2 - Introducing the Winds and Some Scoring	15
Stage 3 - Introducing Flowers, Seasons, kongs and the kong box	16
Stage 4 - Introducing Additional Doubles	18
Stage 5 - Introducing special hands	.
Stage 6 - Using tallies	.
Stage 7 - Playing the goulash	.
<b>The Game</b>	<b>19</b>
The Aim of the Game	.
<i>General strategy</i>	.
Preparing to Play	20
<i>Distribute the tallies</i>	.
<i>Determine who is North, South, East and West Wind</i>	.
<i>Determine the prevailing Wind</i>	.
<i>Shuffle the tiles</i>	.
<i>Build the walls</i>	21
<i>Break into one wall</i>	.
<i>The kong box</i>	.
<i>Deal out the tiles</i>	22
<i>Select out any Flower or Season tiles</i>	.
Playing the Game	.
<i>Starting the game</i>	.
<i>Collecting sets</i>	23
<i>Special hands</i>	.
<i>Obtaining a new tile</i>	.
<i>Claiming the discarded tile</i>	.
<i>Flower and Season tiles</i>	24
<i>Concealed sets</i>	.
<i>Converting a pung to a kong</i>	.

<b>The Game (cont'd)</b>	<b>.</b>
Playing the Game (cont'd)	<b>.</b>
<i>One for Mah-Jong</i>	<b>24</b>
<i>Robbing the kong</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Finishing the game</i>	<b>25</b>
<b>Variations of Play</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>The goulash</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>The game for 2 players</i>	<b>27</b>
<i>The game for 3 players</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>The game for 5 players</i>	<b>28</b>
<b>Scoring</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Tile Classification</b>	<b>.</b>
<i>Minor tiles</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Major tiles</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Honour tiles</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Bonus tiles</i>	<b>.</b>
<b>Working out the Scores</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Overview of the calculations</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Calculating the basic score</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Doubling</i>	<b>31</b>
<i>Doubling and special hands</i>	<b>32</b>
<b>Special hands</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>Using the intrinsic value of your tiles</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Doubling three times</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Scoring 500 points</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Scoring 1,000 points</i>	<b>34</b>
<b>Example Hands</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>Mah-Jong hands</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Non-Winning hands</i>	<b>39</b>
<b>'Highest Possible Score'</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Settling Up</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Paying the winner</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Paying the other players</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Doubling for East Wind and the limit</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Example payments</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>An alternative method of paying</i>	<b>42</b>
<b>“Mah-Jong (Know the Game)” Corrections &amp; Clarifications</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>Special hand - Buried treasure</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Paying double when East Wind</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Scoring a double for a concealed hand when you go Mah-Jong</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Constructing the wall - How the corners should touch</i>	<b>44</b>
<i>Stopping the swapping in the goulash</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Wild tiles and the goulash</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Using the intrinsic value of your tiles in special hands</i>	<b>.</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Strategy and Rules</b>	<b>.</b>
<b>Some General Observations</b>	<b>.</b>
<i>Luck and skill</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Scoring</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>Going for a quick Mah-Jong or a high score</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>The power of doubling</i>	<b>46</b>
<i>Scoring some example Mah-Jong hands</i>	<b>.</b>
<i>How best to play</i>	<b>48</b>
<i>Enjoying the game</i>	<b>.</b>
	<b>.</b>

<b>Mah-Jong Strategy (cont'd)</b>	
<b>Detailed Strategy</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>Terms used</i>	.
<i>Deciding what to collect</i>	.
<i>Organising the tiles in your rack</i>	50
<i>Claiming others' discards</i>	51
<i>Your discards</i>	52
<i>Saving as the game progresses</i>	53
<i>Watching other players</i>	55
<i>Interacting with other players</i>	56
<i>End of game strategy</i>	58
<b>Questions Answered</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Equipment</b>	.
<i>Mah-Jong sets</i>	.
<i>Tiles</i>	60
<i>Tallies</i>	61
<i>Racks</i>	62
<i>Tables</i>	.
<b>Preparing to Play</b>	<b>62</b>
<i>Building the walls</i>	.
<i>The kong box</i>	.
<i>Numbers of tiles</i>	63
<i>Winds</i>	.
<i>Direction of play</i>	.
<b>Playing the Game</b>	.
<i>Chows</i>	.
<i>Pungs</i>	64
<i>Kongs</i>	.
<i>Pairs</i>	.
<i>Discarded tiles</i>	65
<i>Concealed and exposed sets</i>	.
<i>Winds</i>	66
<i>Kong box</i>	67
<i>Drawn game</i>	.
<i>Playing dirty</i>	.
<i>Special hands</i>	68
<i>Fishing</i>	70
<i>Going Mah-Jong</i>	.
<i>The goulash</i>	71
<b>Scoring</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>Basic score</i>	73
<i>Doubling</i>	.
<i>Special hands</i>	75
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>79</b>

# Introduction

**Mah-Jong** (variously known as Mah-Jongg, Mahjongg, Majong and Mahjong) is a charming Chinese game played with engraved tiles. Traditionally, the tiles have been made from ivory or bone dove-tailed into bamboo. But a variety of other materials has also been used including wood, Bakelite, resin and modern plastic.

The exotic tiles, the oriental associations and the rituals which surround the game lend it a certain mystique and perhaps make it somewhat forbidding. However, although the rules are quite intricate, the rudiments of play are surprisingly easy to master and it is not unusual for a beginner to do quite well.

## Origins of the Game

Although there have been claims for its antiquity, it seems most likely that the game originated in the Nongpo area of China in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It quickly spread to other countries in the early part of the twentieth century, becoming popular in the West in the 1920's.

## Forms of the Game

Along the way the rules mutated into a variety of national forms; Hong Kong, Japanese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Western Classical, American, etc. Even within one country there are home grown variations. This lack of standardisation is reflected in the many books which have been written on the subject. And it's shared by the, often obscure, rule books that accompany Mah-Jong sets. It's a confusion that can be quite frustrating for the newcomer trying to learn the game.

## The Rules Explained Here

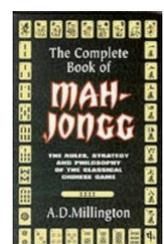
The rules explained here follow those set out in "**Mah-Jong (Know the Game)**" by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley. It was written in collaboration with the **British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA)** in an attempt to curtail the confusion over how to play and to allow the beginner an easier passage into the game. Unlike certain other versions, the British game is quite close to the original Chinese gambling game, but it is played differently and with only notional money.



## More Information

The Headley and Seeley book also contains a short history of the game, something on tactics and etiquette and - for the more serious player - tournament play rules and penalties.

"**The Complete Book of Mah-Jongg**" by A. D. Millington is considered to be an authoritative (but perhaps over wordy) guide to classical Chinese Mah-Jongg. Besides delving into the minutia of these rules it covers the history, philosophy and symbolism of the game and assesses its various rival forms.



# Equipment

## The Tiles

A Mah-Jong set has **144 tiles** (traditionally made from ivory or bone, dove-tailed into bamboo). These can be divided into sets of **Characters, Circles, Bamboos, Dragons, Winds, Flowers** and **Seasons**. Characters, Circles and Bamboos are known as “**suits**”. Often there also **4 spare tiles, 4 blank tiles** and sometimes another **4 joker tiles**.

Tiles can be classified into “**major**” and “**minor**” tiles. Major tiles are worth more than minor tiles. Suit tiles have both types. Dragons and Winds are major tiles, but are also known as “**honour**” tiles as they are able to increase your score further by doubling. **Flowers** and **Seasons** are **bonus tiles**.

## Characters

There are **4 sets of 9 tiles numbered 1 to 9** and show the Chinese symbol for the numbers 10,000 to 90,000. The 1 and 9 Characters are major tiles. The 2 to 8 Characters are minor tiles.



The appropriate Arabic numeral is also marked on the tile.  
It's typical of sets made for export to the West.

## Circles

There are **4 sets of 9 tiles numbered 1 to 9**. The tiles show the appropriate number of Circles. The 1 and 9 Circles are major tiles. The 2 to 8 Circles are minor tiles.



## Bamboos

There are **4 sets of 9 tiles numbered 1 to 9**. The tiles show the appropriate number of bamboos, except for the 1 Bamboos which often shows a picture of a bird (usually a sparrow or rice-bird). The 1 and 9 Bamboos are major tiles. The 2 to 8 Bamboos are minor tiles.



## Dragons

There are **4 Red Dragons**, **4 Green Dragons** and **4 White Dragons**. White Dragons are traditionally denoted by a blank tile and sometimes by a rectangle. **All Dragons are honour tiles.**



Red Dragon      White Dragon      Green Dragon



1      2      3      4

## Winds

There are **4 East Winds**, **4 West Winds**, **4 North Winds** and **4 South Winds**. East Wind has special significance. Winds are sequenced as follows: **1 East**, **2 South**, **3 West**, **4 North**.

By this sequence, East and West are the opposite of our world view. **All Winds are honour tiles.**

## Flowers and Seasons

There are **4 Flower tiles** and **4 Season tiles**, numbered **1 to 4**. This number associates the tile with the Wind of the same number. The depiction of Flowers and Seasons varies between sets. Note that in the Flower tiles shown below, Bamboo and Chrysanthemum are not in the normal order.



- 1 Plum
- 2 Orchid (Lily)
- 3 Bamboo (normally 4)
- 4 Chrysanthemum (normally 3)

The actual illustrations are thought to depict the Four Arts of the Chinese Scholar

Normally      Sometimes



- 1 Spring      . Fisher      . Zither (a stringed instrument)
- 2 Summer      . Woodcutter      . Board Game (Go / Weiqi)
- 3 Autumn      . Farmer      . Calligraphy
- 4 Winter      . Scholar      . Painting

## Plain tiles

Most sets have **4 spare plain tiles** of use when a tile is lost. (They often look exactly the same as a White Dragon).



## Jokers

Some sets also have **4 joker tiles**. These are “**wild**” and are used to replace the 2 Bamboos in a special form of the game called the “**goulash**”.

# The Game

## The Aim of the Game

The aim of the game is **to win the most points**, often represented by the special tokens (called tallies). You can play any number of sessions until you decide to finish. A session consists of:

- **Building** a four-sided City **wall** from the tiles
- **Dealing** out a portion of the tiles to each player
- **Assembling the tiles into sets or a special hand** by:
  - Picking a tile from the wall or claiming one discarded by another player
  - Discarding a tile you no longer want
  - ... until a completed hand is obtained
  - The first player to do this wins the session and cries “**Mah-Jong !**”
- **Scoring then exchanging tallies** based on who wins and the sets collected

### Example hand

The player who was South Wind went Mah-Jong with the following (exposed) hand.

It scored 544 points and South Wind collected 2.176 points in tallies from the other three players.



### Number of people

**Four** people are needed to play the game, though it can be made to work quite well with three. There are also versions for 2 and 5 people.

### General strategy

Winning is **helped by skill and knowledge** of the game, but there is a **large element of luck**.

Opinions vary on this, but I think **the game is made more interesting and exciting if people aim to achieve a high score** in each game, rather than complete a Mah-Jong as quickly as possible. To this end it is better to collect sets of the high scoring tiles (called major tiles) and to look for combinations which will double your basic score.

For a detailed discussion of Mah-Jong strategy see page 45.

# Preparing to Play

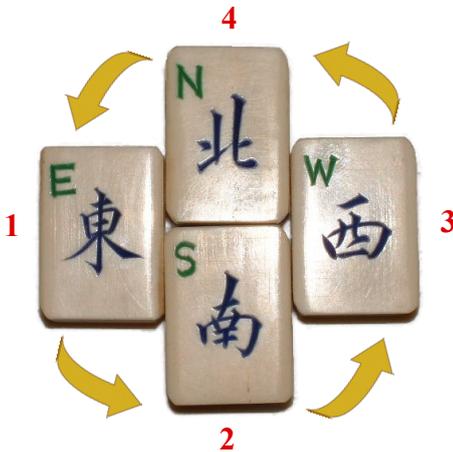
## Distribute the tallies

Before the first session **each player is given 2,000 points in tallies.**

If tallies are not available then each player can use a score sheet, marked with two columns showing payments and receipts.



2,000 points in tallies



## Determine who is North, South, East and West Wind

### First session

One of each of the four Wind tiles (or Wind counters) are placed face-down and shuffled.

Each player takes one of the tiles and then takes the seat appropriate to the Wind selected.

The clockwise order is **North, West, South, East**. This is a little confusing as West and East are opposite to the compass we are used to.

In Mah-Jong, one gets used to starting with East then moving **anti-clockwise**, rather than clockwise, to South, West and North. **Being East Wind is important** because that player always pays or receives double the score when **Mah-Jong** is declared (as explained later).

### Subsequent sessions

If the player who was East Wind declared **Mah-Jong** or the game was drawn, then there is no change. If another player declared **Mah-Jong**, the Winds rotate in an **anti-clockwise** fashion so that the player who was **South Wind now becomes East Wind**, and East Wind now becomes North Wind, etc. (When only 3 are playing East Wind always exists.)

## Determine the prevailing Wind

The **prevailing Wind** (also called the **Wind of the round**) always starts as **East Wind**.

It can change, but only in a long game of at least 5 sessions. If you collect a set of the prevailing Wind your score is doubled (as explained later).

### Changing the prevailing Wind

**The prevailing Wind only changes after everyone has been East Wind** (determined as explained above). It then becomes South Wind. When everyone has been South Wind (again determined as explained above) the prevailing Wind becomes West Wind. And eventually, North Wind).

The game officially ends when everyone has played as the prevailing North Wind !

## Shuffle the tiles

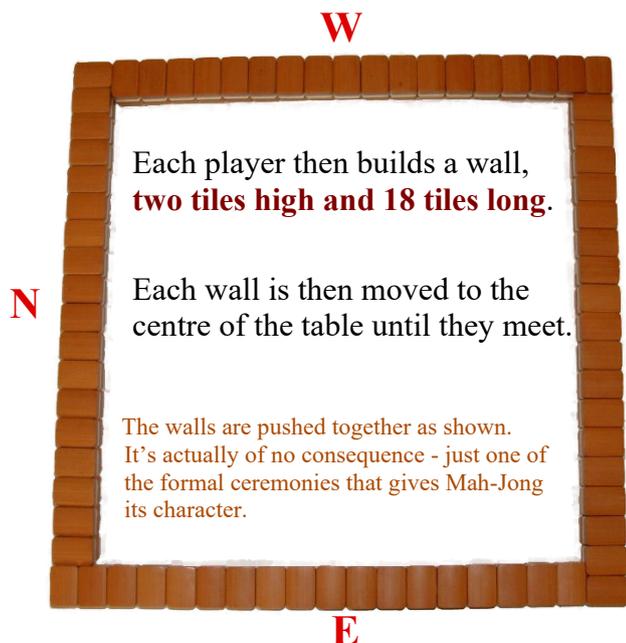
Put all the tiles (minus any blank and joker tiles) on the table, **face down**. The players who are **North and South Winds then shuffle**, or “wash”, them.

*The shuffling is called “Twittering of the sparrows”, from the distinctive noise it makes.*

*Mah-Jong literally means “The game of the sparrows”.*

When East Winds thinks that the tiles have been shuffled enough he says “**Pow!**” (meaning “Start”).

## Build the walls



The wall symbolises *the Great Wall of China*.

The four walls must touch to prevent Dragons or evil spirits entering !

## Break into one wall

### S Determine which wall to break

**East Wind** throws **2 dice** to determine which wall to break. Starting with the wall in front of East Wind, count **anti-clockwise**.



In this example, East Wind throws **6** then counts **anti-clockwise** to locate the wall in front of South Wind.

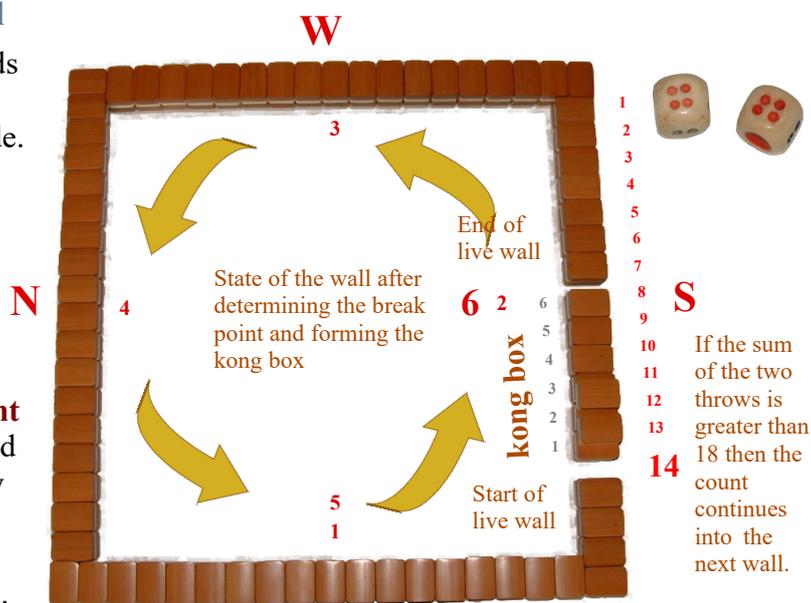
South Wind then throws **8**. The sum of the two throws is **14**. So he counts **clockwise** along the wall starting from his right.

## Determine where to break the wall

The player who sits where the count ends then **throws 2 dice again** to determine where in the wall the break is to be made. **Add** the numbers from the two throws together.

Starting from the **right** end of the wall, count towards the **left**. If the end of the wall is reached continue counting into the next wall.

**Pick up the two tiles at the break point** – the two tiles are called **loose tiles** – and put them on top of the tiles immediately to the **right** of the break so that the top-most tile lies furthest away from the break point. This is the end of the wall.



**E** Dealing begins from the start of the live wall. **E, S, W, N, E, S, etc.**

The tiles on the other side of the break point are the start of the wall.

So when tiles come to be dealt from the wall it will be in a clockwise direction.

## The kong box

At the end of the wall the last seven pairs of tiles (including the loose tiles) are moved away from the rest of the wall. These detached tiles are called the **kong box** or **dead wall**.

**Its function is to provide replacement tiles for kongs, Flowers and Seasons.** The loose tiles are taken in turn (the furthest from the end first) and replaced from the end of the kong box as required.

The session ends in a drawn game when the last tile in the live wall (the one before the kong box) has been taken and played without Mah-Jong being called. This is called a “Wash-out”. Note that the kong box is never replenished from the live wall. If the kong box is exhausted and another replacement is required then the game is drawn.

