

World-Class Mahjong

with World Champion Mai Hatsune

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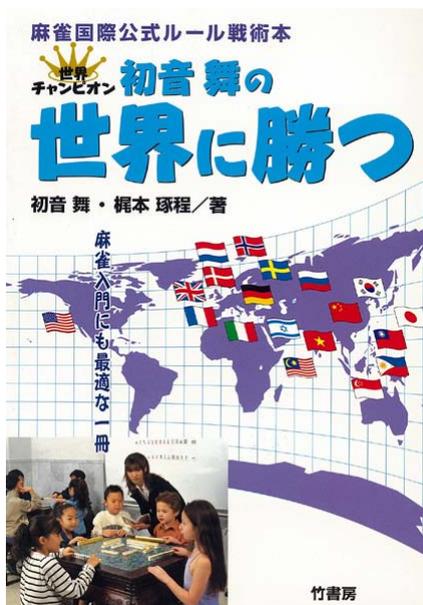
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1. Introduction



A note on the English language version of “World-Class Mahjong with World Champion Mai Hatsune,” an international tournament rules strategy book by Mai Hatsune and Takunori Kajimoto.

This book was first published in Japanese in June, 2005. Thanks to a translation of the text by Ryan Morris, planning and presenting by Kyoichiro Noguchi (Chief director of Mahjong Museum), the concepts and strategies devised by these pro players have become accessible to the international mahjong community. When the authors wrote the original text, they assumed that readers would be familiar with the Japanese form of the game, and thus contained several references to that style as a form of comparison. In order to avoid complicating the text, and to make it more accessible to an international audience, such references have been removed or rewritten as deemed appropriate.

About the Authors:

Mai Hatsune

born in 1978. Winner of 2002 World Mahjong Championship. One of Most famous Mahjong Players in Japan.

Takunori Kajimoto

born in 1971. Winner of the 2nd Noguchi-Kyoichiro award. Commentator of the Mahjong specialty TV program.

Kyoichiro Noguchi

is Chief director of the Mahjong Museum. The Mahjong Museum completed the English translation version of "World-Class Mahjong with World Champion Mai Hatsune,". We will open it to the public free of charge on web for more of those who love playing Mahjong. It wishes for the Mahjong game to boom to roll and to happen all over the world because it sees this page.



2. The Origin of International Tournament Rules

In January of 1998, the China State Sports Commission officially recognized mahjong as the 255th sport. The following September, a set of International Tournament Rules were created which would become the new standard of mahjong.

Until recently, the rules of mahjong varied from region to region of vast China, be it Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao, Shanghai, Ningbo, or Guangzhou. Once the game was recognized as a sport, it became necessary to create a unified set of rules so that domestic tournaments could be held. Unified rules were also needed to make international competition possible.

Nine mahjong experts from across the country gathered to debate the new rules. After two years of intense efforts, 440 hands from various regions were reduced first to 200, and finally to 81, which is the official count today.

Their great undertaking was quickly fruitful: the World Championship in Mahjong was held in 2002, and the International Tournament Rules would spread around the world with impressive speed. In 2005, the first Open European Mahjong Championship was held in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The 2nd Open European Mahjong Championship will be held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2008. And in 2009, the Second World Championship in Mahjong will be held in Beijing.

Undoubtedly, these rules will be adopted in countless international tournaments for decades to come. Players around the world are feverishly devising strategies and techniques to use in competitions of the new international rules. Become a part of the excitement and find out what it takes to excel at the new standard of mahjong.

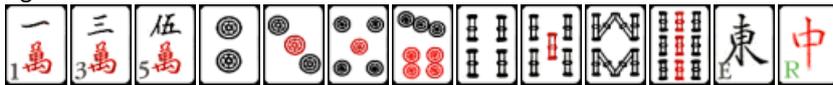
3. The Basic Combinations

3.1. First, look for Mixed Triple Chow

International Tournament Rules of mahjong require that you have at least 8 points to finish. Unlike some forms of the game, you cannot simply go out with the first four sets (and pair) that you manage to complete. Instead, you must deliberately build combinations that add up to 8 points. The International Rules emphasize building combinations over speed of finishing.

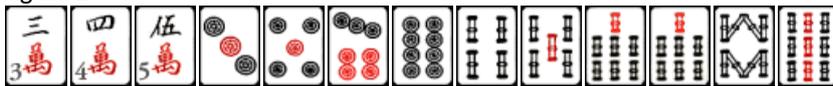
The easiest combination to build that meets the 8-point requirement is Mixed Triple Chow. If you have the pieces needed to build a Mixed Shifted Chow, don't hesitate to meld sets and finish as fast as you can. Mixed Shifted Chows earns enough points (8) for you to go out without combining it with any other combinations. When you're first starting out, you can try concentrating on this combination.

Figure 1



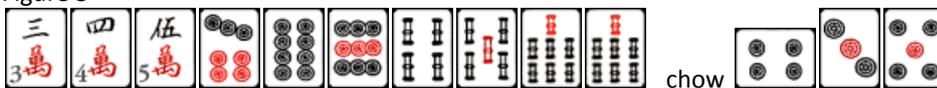
In Figure 1, you have the makings of a 345 Mixed Shifted Chow. Start by discarding  and . Take the quickest route to completion while preserving the pieces of your Mixed Shifted Chow. Now, let's assume you've reached the point shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2



If you can meld chows with  and , you'll be one tile away from making ready on Mixed Triple Chow. If you can make a pair of  and discard , you'll make ready as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3



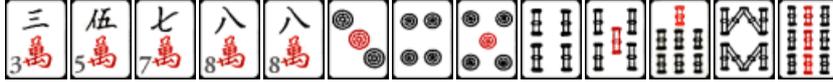
If you complete the hand with , you'll earn Mixed Triple Chow (8 pts.) and All Chows (2 pts.) for a total of 10 points.

3.2 Three Chows, Three Colors

Let's assume you're trying to build a 345 Mixed Triple Chow. You hold , but pick  instead of . Or you hold , but pick  instead of .

Well, there's nothing wrong with that, because you can go for a combination that is closely related to Mixed Triple Chow and scores just slightly less: Mixed Shifted Chows (6 pts.). This is the perfect backup plan for when your Mixed Triple Chow doesn't come through as you were hoping.

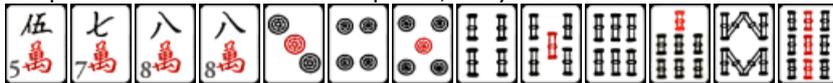
Figure 1



For example, in Figure 1, you can make ready on a Mixed Triple Chow if you pick  or . But let's say you pick  instead. You're Mixed Triple Chow failed, but you can discard  and make ready on Mixed Shifted Chows (6 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + Closed Wait (1 pt.) + Short Straight (1 pt.). This gives you enough points to go out on an opponent's discard (Figure 2).

Figure 2

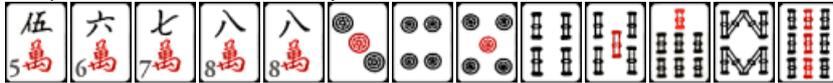
You picked . You will lose two points, but you should shift to Mixed Shifted Chows.



Or, let's say you have the hand shown in Figure 1 but picked  (Figure 3).

Figure 3

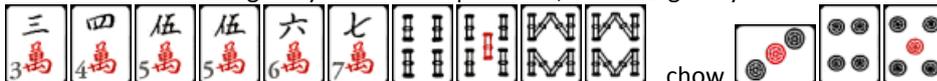
You picked . What should you discard?



With , you will complete Mixed Shifted Chows and have enough points to finish. But with a , you don't have enough points. Even if you pick the winning tile by yourself, you will only earn 7 points: Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.). So, what should you do? We recommend discarding . Now, you can go out using , which will give you Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Short Straight (1 pt.). Furthermore, if the player on your left discards , don't hesitate to meld a chow and discard : now you've guaranteed your Mixed Shifted Chows, and can go out on either  or  (picking  yourself will also do fine: discard .

Figure 4

A 2-chance hand:  gives you Mixed Triple Chow, and  gives you Mixed Shifted Chows.



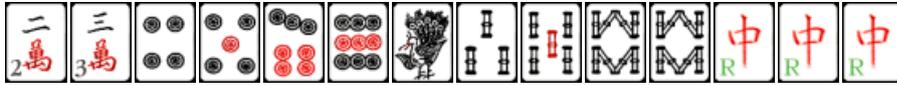
Mixed Triple Chow and Mixed Shifted Chows are like siblings: Mixed Triple Chow is elder brother at 8 points, and Mixed Shifted Chows is younger at 6. Figure 4 shows a 2-chance hand that guarantees at least one combination or the other. One tile, , gives you Mixed Triple Chow, and another, , gives you Mixed Shifted Chows. It's a fairly rare instance of a 2-chance hand where each chance finished a different combination. With the bonus given to self-drawn hands, you're in an excellent position anytime you have a 2-chance or better hand.

3.3. More on Mixed Shifted Chows

In the last section we discussed shifting a hand toward Mixed Shifted Chows when a Mixed Triple Chow doesn't work out. This section discusses strategy for a dedicated Mixed Shifted Chows hand.

Figure 1

Which discard moves the hand toward an 8-point Mixed Shifted Chows?



For example, see Figure 1. Mixed Triple Chow is much too distant to attempt, but Mixed Shifted Chows is certainly in range. In any case, the player must discard something. Mixed Shifted Chows is a 6-point combination, making it necessary to earn 2 more points to meet the minimum. The most common 2-point combinations are All Simple, All Chows, or a pung of either a dragon, prevalent wind, or seat wind. In Figure 1, the player has a pung of to earn the additional 2 points necessary to go out. Which discard makes it possible to use as the pair and build Mixed Shifted Chows? The answer is to discard . What is another strategy for earning the remaining 2 points? The No Honors + Terminal Pung combination. This may appear difficult at first, but with a little practice it will become second nature. By keeping the Mixed Shifted Chows + No Honors + Terminal Pung combination in mind, you'll find yourself able to meld in the blink of an eye in situations like the one shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

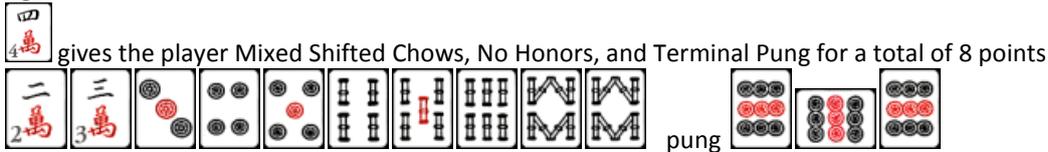


Figure 3

Round: South. Seat: West.



In Figure 3, the player can aim for the 345 Mixed Triple Chow while also considering the 123-234-345, or even 345-456-567 Mixed Shifted Chows. When you find yourself with scattered tiles like these, the optimal strategy is to leave multiple Mixed Shifted Chows possibilities open until the hand fleshes out a bit more. This makes discarding the best choice. This is because will prevent you from building both All Chows and All Simple.

Figure 4

Round: South. Seat: West.

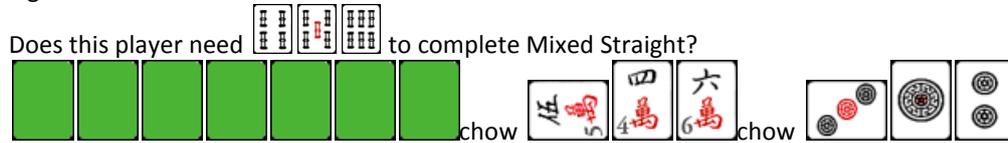


In Figure 4, you should discard a or . The key to building Mixed Shifted Chows is to leave your chow possibilities open.

3.4. Meld a Prime Chow to build Mixed Straight

The 123, 456, and 789 chows are called prime chows. Melding only prime chows gives your hand flexibility. That way you can change plans down the road if the tiles required for your hand go dead. In addition, it gives opponents less information.

Figure 1



For example, take Figure 1. Despite the fact that the player has melded two chows, it is difficult to pin him on a hand. It may appear that he is building Mixed Straight and needs to complete  chow, but he may in fact have the hand shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

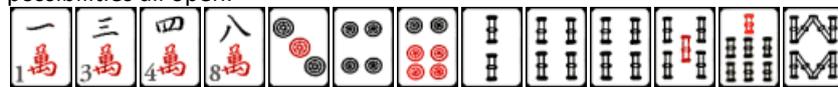
As it turned out, the player was going for either Pure Straight or the 789 Mixed Triple Chow



His hand appears to be Mixed Straight, but could in fact be any one of Mixed Triple Chow, Mixed Shifted Chows, All Types, Outside Hand, or Pure Straight. When an opponent melds such chows, it is not possible to determine what tiles he may need or what combination he is building, so it is usually best to proceed as normal and build your own hand as fast as possible.

Figure 3

Meld  into 123 and  into 456 in order to leave the 123-234-456, 234-345-456, and Mixed Straight possibilities all open.



If you are building a Mixed Straight with a hand like the one in Figure 3, you should meld prime chows as much as possible. By doing so, you can retain the Mixed Straight possibility while simultaneously leaving outs open for other combinations, such as Mixed Shifted Chows. Meld chows that will form the core of your hand, then adjust accordingly depending on what tiles you pick. You will find that when your Mixed Straight fails, one of your backup combinations is likely to work out instead.

Figure 4

 gives the player Mixed Straight, and  gives the player Chicken Hand (note: the latter cannot be self-picked)



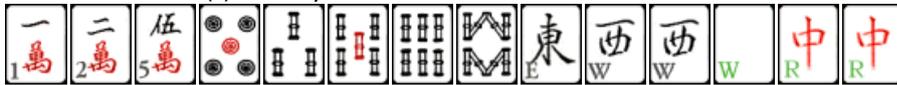
Also, keep in mind that it is often make ready on both Chicken Hand and Mixed Straight. In Figure 4,  gives you Mixed Straight, and  (provided that it is taken from a discard) gives you Chicken Hand.

3.5. Make an early decision on All Types

Honors often pose a difficulty when trying to create an 8-point combination in International Tournament Rules. As a result, most of the time you should discard honors early. However, when your starting tiles include a pair of both a dragon and a wind, you have a great shot at All Types or Half Flush. The other players will have difficulty using honors, and you will have plenty of chances to meld needed tiles.

Figure 1

What combination(s) would you build with these starters?



In Figure 1, your starting tiles include pairs of and . Some players might choose to pursue Half Flush with this starting hand, but in International Tournament Rules, All Types is the better choice. The reason has to do with the equal distribution of the three suits in the tile set. With all other things equal, you will have a much easier time making 1 set in each of the 3 suits rather than 2 or 3 sets in a single suit. With this particular hand, you have a couple extra bamboos, but they don't give you much added flexibility, so you will find it much easier to build All Types rather than Half Flush. Plan to build a set using , another around , and complete a chow by drawing a or by building around . One important point: if you meld a pung of , you should not meld a pung of afterwards. The reason is to avoid ending up with a single wait, since such waits tend to be difficult to complete. You would rather keep your pair of and create a 2-chance hand with 2 pairs or even a closed wait. Ideally, you would end up creating an open-ended wait to a chow.

Figure 2

These are your tiles. What do you do if is discarded?



But Figure 2 is an exception: in this case you should meld up to two pungs, since you have a total of three pairs. You can meld pungs of and and still have a pair remaining to complete your hand.

Figure 3

What if is discarded?



Next, examine the starting hand in Figure 3. You may decide to build a standard combination and start by discarding your honors. However, melding is not a bad option. Your plan would be to create sets in each of the suits, then create a single wait using one of the dragons. But in order to prepare for the worst, that is, the possibility of all the dragons being discarded before you are even ready, it is wise to devise a backup plan and build toward a Mixed Straight or Mixed Triple Chow as well. At least one pung of honors is needed to complete All Types. Dragon Pungs, Prevalent Winds, and Seat Winds score 2 points. Combining one of these pungs with All Types will earn the minimum 8 points. However, in Figure 4, the pung of is only worth 1 point, so that the hand totals 7 points.

Figure 4

Your are in the North Seat, South Round. Can you go out on a discard with this hand?

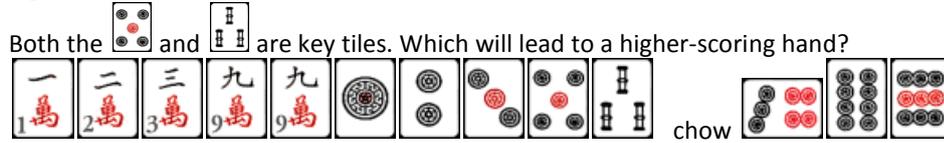


This player cannot go out on a discard, and must draw the tile to score an extra point for Self-drawn. If you choose to claim a 1 point honor pung, like this player did, you must plan to score at least 1 extra point elsewhere in the hand.

3.6. Why does Pure Straight score more points than Mixed Triple Chow?

Both Pure Straight and Mixed Triple Chow are nine-tile chow-based combinations. So why, you might ask, does Pure Straight (16 points) score double the points of Mixed Triple Chow (8 points)?

Figure 1



Consider Figure 1. You are one tile away from going ready on either Mixed Triple Chow or Pure Straight. All you need to do is pick the right tile to connect to the  or . Picking a  or  is preferable to a  or , since the Pure Straight (16 pts.) scores more than a Mixed Triple Chow (8 pts.) + Outside Hand (4 pts.).

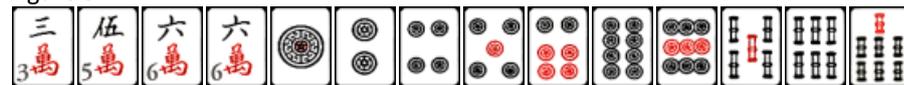
Figure 2

Picking  will lead to higher points. But a different choice allows you to complete your hand faster



Why would a Mixed Triple Chow score less than a Pure Straight? The answer is because Mixed Triple Chow is a more flexible combination. Take Figure 2. In order to go for the higher-scoring hand, you must discard a dot or bamboo. But this decision results in a hand which hinges on filling the edge wait by picking . The choice which offers more flexibility is trashing the edge wait,  , and attempting to build a 789 Mixed Triple Chow. Even if you pick a , you will be able to make use of it with by picking  or  on a subsequent turn. Either of these tiles will allow you to shift to a 678 Mixed Triple Chow. Furthermore, picking  or  allows you to pursue Mixed Shifted Chows. To build the Pure Straight, you must either pick  or claim it from the player on your left. In comparison, Mixed Triple Chow offers far more flexibility, and is thus rewarded less points.

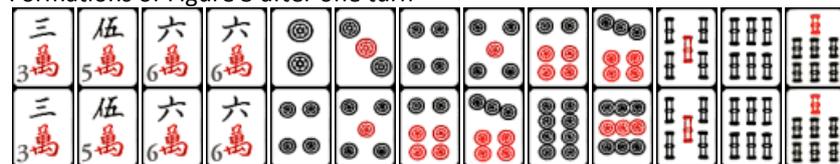
Figure 3



A commonly-seen pattern can be seen in Figure 3. You are one away from making ready, and the Pure Straight is very tempting. However, rather than discarding   and building a Pure Straight, we recommend discarding . This discard allows you to make ready by picking , and puts you one tile away from various states of readiness as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Formations of Figure 3 after one turn



3.7. Pure Straight...or perhaps Pure Shifted Chows?

Figure 1



Pure Straight is formed by tiles 1 through 9 in a given suit. See Figure 1. By discarding , you can make ready with Pure Straight by melding pungs of  or . However, don't forget that in a Pure Straight you can often find chances at building Pure Shifted Chows. In Figure 1, a  will complete the Pure Straight. At the same time, however, a  will complete the 123-345-567 Pure Shifted Chows. With this in mind, the best discard is .

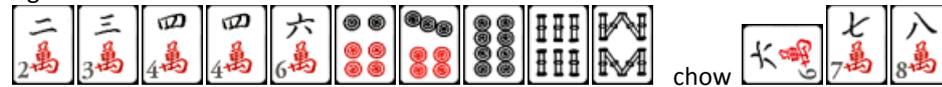
Figure 2



In Figure 2, you are one away from making ready on a 678 Mixed Triple Chow. Most players realize that you should meld chows when , , or  is discarded by the player on your left.

But take a closer look. What if a  is discarded? Melding this will result in the configuration shown in Figure 3, which gives you a multitude of outs.

Figure 3



Meld a chow with  or pick  or  to make ready with Pure Shifted Chows. Meld or draw , , or  for Mixed Triple Chow. These possibilities increase both speed and potential points, making the  a must-claim tile.

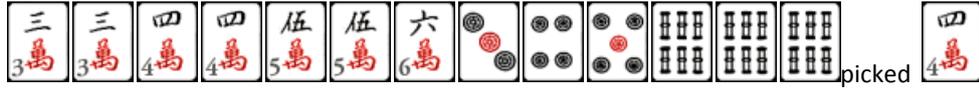
The chows forming a Mixed Shifted Chows can only be offset by one step, but chows forming Pure Shifted Chows can be offset by one or two. In actual play, you will find that you will rarely see the one-step Pure Shifted Chows. This is because the one-step Pure Shifted Chows is much more difficult because it requires three of the same tile. Figure 4 compares the one-step Pure Shifted Chows (upper diagram) with the two-step version (lower diagram).

Figure 4



Note the difference in the number of identical tiles needed for each. The two-step Mixed Shifted Chows only requires, at maximum, two of any single tile. Be sure to recognize situations like the one shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5



You are waiting on two chances,  or , but have just picked . Discarding  will allow you to build Three Concealed Pungs, but you will be dependent upon picking the last tile by yourself. Instead, you can discard  or , and wait for the , which will complete a very large hand. Think these possibilities through before hastily discarding a tile which may play a key role in your hand.

3.8. Master the 6 point combinations: Half Flush and All Pungs

Completion of Half Flush and All Pungs requires aggressive melding of sets. When building these combinations, you should be melding sets early (not waiting for developments, as is often advisable). But what kinds of starting tiles do you need to make such a commitment?

Figure 1

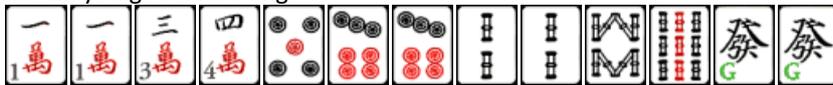


To go for a Half Flush, you'll want at least 8 tiles in a suit, as in Figure 1. This is an appropriate time to build Half Flush or Full Flush. When you build these combinations, your discard pile will be recognizably biased. If you go for a Half Flush in characters, your discard pile will be full of dots and bamboos. This will be immediately apparent to your opponents.

But do not worry. Even if your opponents know what type of Half Flush you're building, they are not likely to block your tiles. The reason is simple: they, too, are trying to finish as fast as they can. You can assume that players won't be blocking tiles that they can't use. There's no need to be concerned about hiding your intentions. Don't hold back; just meld as many sets as needed.

Figure 2

Should you go for All Pungs?



All Pungs is a bit more difficult to handle. In Figure 2, you have 4 pairs, and are 2 tiles away from Seven Pairs. You have a difficult decision of whether to meld pungs or to wait it out. In Japanese mahjong, there is a saying that goes "Never go for All Pungs without a pung." Does this apply to International Tournament Rules?

The authors (Hatsune and Kajimoto) would not claim pungs with the hand shown in Figure 2, because it does not include enough honor pairs. If you did claim one of these pungs, you would likely have trouble claiming many more. When deciding whether to build All Pungs, remember that "players toss honors, players keep

suits." Let's say you meld a pung of 發 (Green Gung). You're likely to have trouble melding the remaining 1 萬 (10000), 2 筒 (20000), 1 條 (10000). If that happens, you need to be able to shift to Half Flush or All Types, but these options are unlikely to materialize with the hand shown in Figure 2. Conclusion: do not meld pungs with this hand.

Figure 3

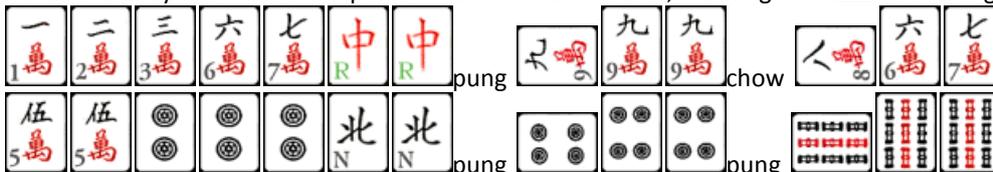


But in Figure 3, you have two backup plans: All Types and Outside Hand. As a result, you may claim pungs and shoot for All Pungs even without any pungs in your hand.

Finally, don't forget that Half Flush and All Pungs score just 6 points. The hands shown in Figure 4 do not score the minimum 8 points.

Figure 4

Hands that may not meet the 8-point minimum In both cases, finishing with 5 萬 (50000) does not give you 8 points



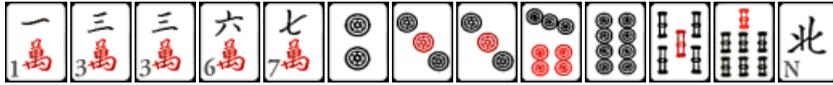
The easiest way to guarantee a 6-point combination is to be sure to meld a pung of dragons, your seat wind, or the prevalent wind.

4. The Importance of Keeping your Hand Concealed Proper Timing for Melding

4.1. Not all melds help your hand

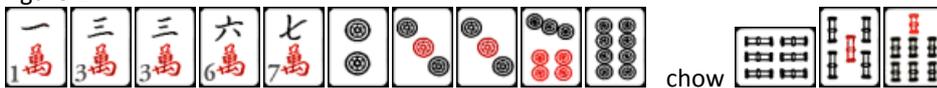
International Tournament Rules do not severely penalize players for melding sets. It's true that you don't lose many points for exposing your hand, and as a result, many players believe that you should meld early in order to build sets quickly.

Figure 1



However, it is wise not to make the assumption that every meld is a good meld. Take Figure 1. You probably wish to build 567-678-789 Mixed Shifted Chows. And so, when the player to your left discards , you figure that it is a key tile to your hand, and happily claim it. However, there is a hidden disadvantage. Figure 2 shows your hand after claiming .

Figure 2



In order to build Mixed Shifted Chows, you need  and . Picking  or  will improve your hand, but it will not make you ready for lack of sufficient points. Although it appeared that when you claimed  you were left with two open-ended chows of  and , in fact they are only 1-chance chows when the needed points are considered. In summary, early melds can in fact slow you down by limiting the possible hands that can be built.

Assume that you pass up the option to claim the  and instead proceed with your hand fully concealed. Furthermore, assume that you picked several useful tiles, albeit not the precise tiles that you had wished for, and you have reached Figure 3.

Figure 3

What possibilities does this configuration offer?

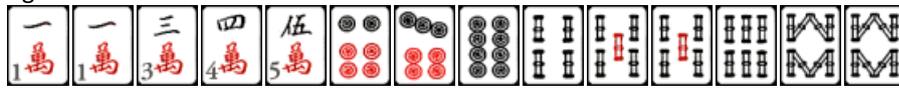


With this hand, you can go out if you pick the last tile yourself, earning Fully Concealed (4 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + Closed Wait (1 pt.) + Two Terminal Chows (1 pt.). Alternatively, if you draw , , , , or  you can discard  and go for a higher-scoring hand that will allow you to go out on an opponent's discard. In this way, you will find that keeping your hand concealed for as long as possible will allow for more possibilities. Some players are reluctant to build a hand like the one shown in the above example since it is not possible to go out on an opponent's discard. However, do not forget that you gain at least 50% more points from picking your last tile. This somewhat offsets the disadvantage of having a hand that can only be self-drawn.

4.2. Power combo: Concealed Hand + All Chows + All Simples

All Simples is easy to build, since most of the tiles count toward it. However, it only scores 2 points. But add Concealed Hand and All Chows, and the hand is suddenly very close to finished.

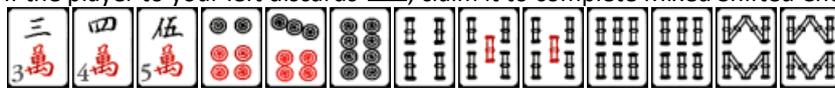
Figure 1



Take Figure 1. You're one tile away from making ready on Mixed Shifted Chows, but our recommended play is to break up the hand and discard . Once you make a hand like the one shown in Figure 2, you're very close to finishing.

Figure 2

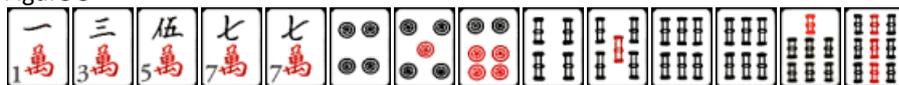
If the player to your left discards , claim it to complete Mixed Shifted Chows.



You cannot go out on an opponent's discard, but if you pick the tile yourself you'll score Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.). In other words, with a combo of these three hands, you're guaranteed to make the minimum 8 points.

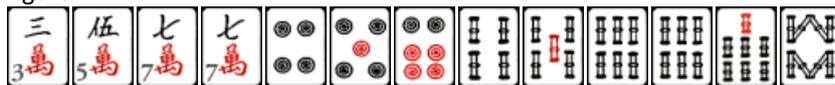
Remembering this simple fact will make it easier to build hands properly. For example, take Figure 3.

Figure 3



You could discard  or  to be one tile away from making ready with a Mixed Straight. But you would do better to discard  and leave your options open, rather than rely on two specific tiles ( and ). Let's assume you follow our advice, and make ready with the hand shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4



You've lost the Mixed Straight, but you can go out on an opponent's discard with this hand, since it scores Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.) + Closed Wait (1 pt.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) for a total of 8 points. The combo of Concealed + All Chows + All Simples gives you 6 points, so you need only add two more through some combination of Mixed Double Chow, Pure Double Chow, Short Straight, or one of the 1-chance waits. The best strategy is often to avoid narrowing your possibilities, and concentrate on building chows with the simple tiles.

4.3. Master the Fully Concealed Hand

Some players, in their rush to make ready, will meld sets without much of an idea of where their hand is heading. For example, a player might make the mistake of claiming tiles with the hand in Figure 1, just for the sake of making ready.

Figure 1



More experienced players realize the value of keeping a hand concealed. Self-drawing a tile only scores 1 point after claiming one or more tiles, but 4 when the hand is concealed. The difference is a precious 3 points.

Figure 2



Consider Figure 2. You cannot go out using an opponent's discard. If you draw or , you may be tempted to discard and go for Pure Straight. However, let's take a closer look. Picking or yourself will give you 8 or 9 points: Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + Dragon Pung (2 pts.) + Short Straight (1 pt.) + Voided Suit (1 pt.), and an extra point for Mixed Double Chow when is drawn.

When you're going for a fully concealed hand, you should focus on how to earn the 4 remaining points. First, consider your possibilities for All Chows (2 pts.). If you can complete those two hands, you have already guaranteed 6 points. And since All Chows is full of chows, you can easily earn another couple of points by building some combination of Mixed Double Chow, Pure Double Chow, Voided Suit, Two Terminal Chows, or one of the 1-chance waits.

Figure 3

All Chows + Fully Concealed Hand combos with sufficient points

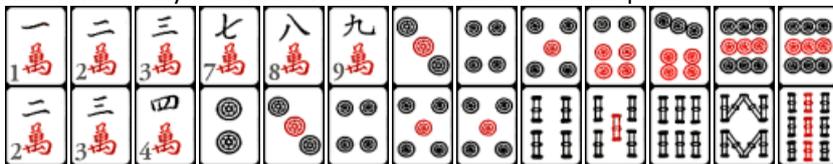


Figure 3 shows hands that will score at least 8 points if you pick your tile. But there are cases when you cannot earn the needed points.

Figure 4

All Chows + Fully Concealed Hand combo that lacks needed points



Figure 4 shows a hand that has no additional points. In order to complete this hand, you will have to add a Mixed Double Chow and change to a single wait. As you can see, mastering the 1-point hands is key to mastering the Fully Concealed Hand.

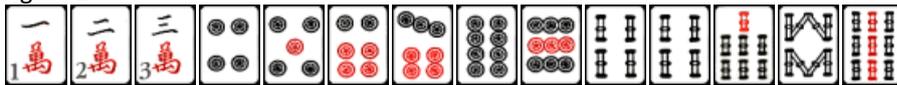
4.4. Notes on combining hands

Do you know why No Honors does not combine with All Chows? Or why No Honors does not combine with All Simples? The reason is that both All Chows and All Simples are already defined as having no honors. That which is implied by a hand is not scored. Similarly, Mixed Triple Chow does not score additional points for the Mixed Double Chows that form its parts, and All Pairs does not score additional points for Concealed Hand.

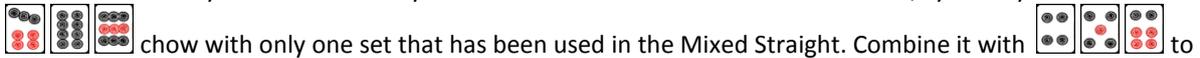
A non-repetitive rule governs the scoring of multiple patterns. According to this rule, after scoring sets in a combination, any sets not already scored may be combined with only one of the already-scored sets to form additional combinations.

That may seem a bit wordy, so let's look at an example.

Figure 1



The hand in Figure 1 is a combination of Mixed Straight, All Chows, a Short Straight in dots, and a 789 Mixed Double Chow. When scoring, first count All Chows (2 pts.). Next, score Mixed Straight (8 pts.). At this point, you have combined three of your chows to form Mixed Straight. This is your first combination. You have one chow remaining (789 in dots), and since "after scoring sets in a combination, any sets not already scored may be combined with only one of the already-scored sets to form additional combinations," you may combine the



create a Short Straight (1 pt.). Alternatively, you can combine it with to form a Mixed Double Chow. But you cannot do both.

Figure 2



See Figure 2 for another example. This hand includes a 234 Pure Double Chow as well as a 234 Mixed Double Chow. Score the as your first combination. Now score the remaining .. But

you can only combine it with one of the already-scored sets. Combine it with for a Pure Double Chow, or with the for a Mixed Double Chow.

4.5. Fully Concealed Hand + All Chows combo

As discussed in section 3-03, Fully Concealed Hand and All Chows yield 6 points. Two additional points are needed to complete the hand. What are the best techniques for building the remaining 2 points?

Figure 1



With the tiles shown in Figure 1, you cannot go out even if you pick the winning tile yourself. However, if you pick or , you will be one step toward Mixed Straight. If you do indeed draw or , break your ready hand and discard to shift your hand to gain the needed points. Furthermore, your hand could end up like the one shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2



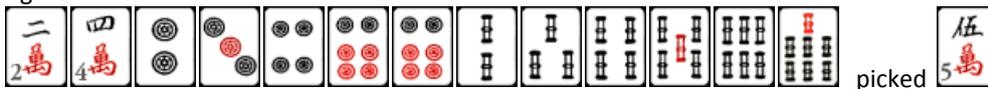
By picking the last tile, you will have Fully Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (2 pts.) + Single Wait (1 pt.) for a total of 8. In order to gain extra points, you must keep an eye out for opportunities to slide chows over to create Short Straights, Mixed Double Chows, and Two Terminal Chows. In Figure 1, gives you Two Terminal Chows and a Mixed Double Chow. Tiles and give you Mixed Double Chows. In summary, there are four tiles that will give you a viable hand. With the tiles in Figure 2, picking and switching to a single wait on a simple tile results in Figure 3.

Figure 3



At this point, you have well over enough points. In fact, you now have earned enough points to go out on an opponent's discard (Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Single Wait (1 pt.).

Figure 4



How about Figure 4? If you pick , you may be tempted to discard it in order to preserve your Mixed Triple Chow. However, let's consider this carefully. What happens if you discard and change to a two-chance hand? Tallying up the points, we have Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Short Straight (1 pt.) for a total of 8 points. You sacrifice points, but if you can double the chances of picking the tile by yourself, you should exercise that option.

Figure 5

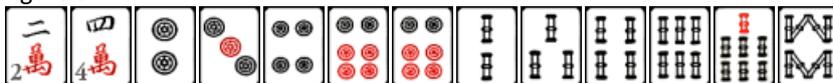


Figure 5 appears similar to Figure 4, but without a Short Straight the same strategy cannot be employed even if you pick . However, you should bear in mind that if you manage to first pick and later pick , you

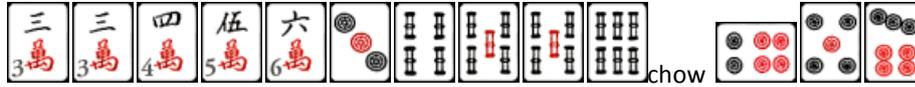
should follow the above strategy and change to a two-chance hand, realizing that with the extra point, you have enough points to go out with an opponent's discard even without Mixed Triple Chow. Practice using the above techniques and soon you will find yourself able to increase your chances of finishing intuitively. Each tile can greatly alter the possibilities of your hand. Learn to adjust to the changes, and avoid pinning yourself to a single hand.

4.6. The Crossroads: Concealed vs. Melded

So far in this section, we have discussed the importance of keeping your hand concealed. The reason: in many cases, you would rather retain flexibility rather than meld, and thus lock up, part of your hand. However, this hardly means that you should never expose your hand.

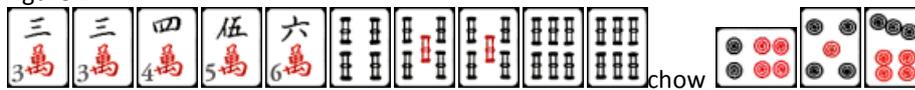
There are many times when you should exercise your option to meld. For example, see Figure 1.

Figure 1



Claiming  will complete Mixed Shifted Chows. But sometimes you will draw the wrong end of the chow by picking  (shown in Figure 2). Some players might choose to discard the  and keep the . But let's reconsider: indeed, the hand in Figure 2 does not earn the needed points.

Figure 2



However, it has more flexibility than you might think at first glance. You can meld  and discard , pick  and discard , pick  and discard , or meld  or  and discard  and build a hand like the one shown in Figure 3. The possibilities are many.

Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 4 shows the Figure 1 hand before claiming any tiles. If the player to your left discards  or , you should claim it.

In other words, you should meld as long as your hand will still be relatively flexible even after locking up a set. If you can preserve possibilities for at least two different hands, then it's likely the correct choice to meld.

Figure 5

Prime chows allow for extensive possibilities

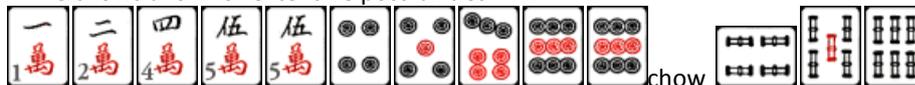


Figure 5 shows the prime chow meld introduced in Section 2-05. It's far from being a completed hand, and is not an ideal configuration. Yet, the possibilities of Mixed Straight, Mixed Shifted Chows, and Mixed Triple Chow make the decision to meld a chow correct.

4.7. Misguided melding

Be careful when melding tiles to build the 6-point combinations Mixed Shifted Chows, All Pungs, or Half Flush, or the 4-point Outside Hand. Careless melding will result in hands that do not earn the remaining 2 points needed to earn the 8-point minimum.

For example, let's say that you melded tiles starting with those in Figure 1 to build the hand in Figure 2.

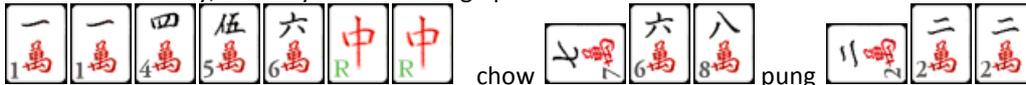
Figure 1

Your goal is Half Flush



Figure 2

You've made ready, but do you have enough points?



A player discards , you announce "hu," and show your hand. Except, you have erred: your hand lacks sufficient points. You have only Half Flush and Terminal Pung for a total of 7 points. In order to go out using , you would have to pick it yourself. If you combine Half Flush with a Prevalent Wind, Seat Wind, or Dragon Pung, you will earn 8 points, but without one of these you must consider building Short Straights, Two Terminal Chows, Pure Double Chows, and other combinations to build your score.

Figure 3

Not even a self-drawn tile will help in these cases

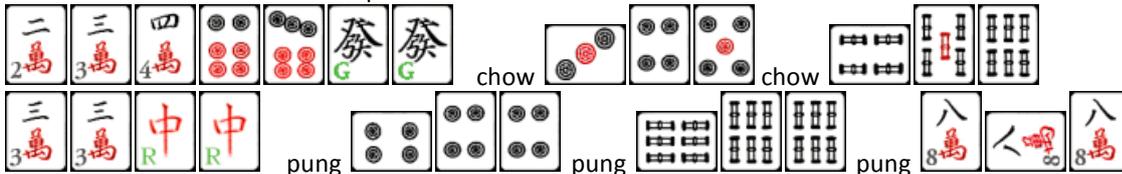


Figure 3 shows examples of similar quandaries. The first shows Mixed Shifted Chows, and the second shows All Pungs. In either case you cannot go out on an opponent's discard. In fact, you cannot even go out with a self-drawn tile (in the second example,  would complete your hand). Without a Prevalent Wind, Seat Wind, Dragon Honor, or even a Terminal Pung, you can only earn 7 points even when the last tile is self-drawn. When building Mixed Shifted Chows or All Pungs, you should plan on adding at least All Simple or a Prevalent Wind, Seat Wind, or Dragon Pung. Or, when building Mixed Shifted Chows, you can discard all honors and add All Chows.

Figure 4

You will have to self-draw these Outside Hands

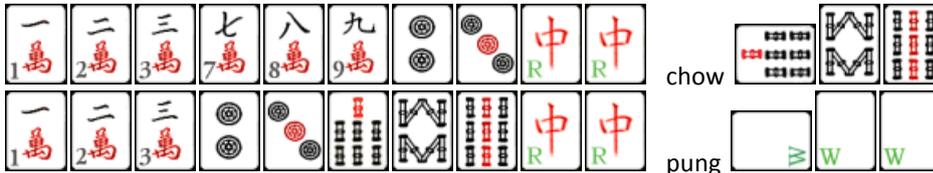


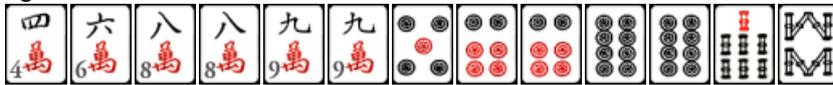
Figure 4 shows an Outside Hand that cannot be completed using opponents' discards. The first example is Outside Hand (4 pts.) + Two Terminal Chows (1 pt.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) for a total of 7 points. The second example is Outside Hand (4 pts.) + Dragon Pung (1 pt.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.), also for a total of 7 points. In either case, your only hope is to pick  yourself. When building Outside Hand, one way to guarantee sufficient points is to combine it with Mixed Triple Chow. Another is to build a

5. Melding Early with Incomplete Hands

5.1. Three tiles away from Upper Four or Lower Four? No problem!

Given the right starting tiles, it can be easy to go for Upper Four, which must be constructed of tiles 6 or above, or Lower Four, which is made with tiles 4 or below. But some International Rules players tend to steer away from these combinations.

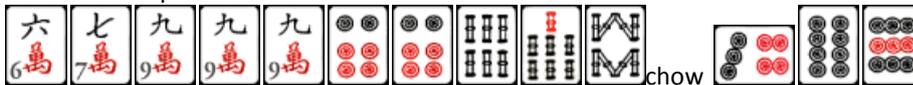
Figure 1



For example, take Figure 1. Some players would discard  and  and go for a Mixed Shifted Chows/All Chows combo. But the superior move is to go directly for Upper Four. You would prefer to be able to meld pungs from any player rather than to be dependent upon melding chows from the player on your left. The hand shown in Figure 1 has plenty of pairs, making it an ideal opportunity to pung aggressively and go for a high-scoring combination.

Figure 2

Either tile completes the hand



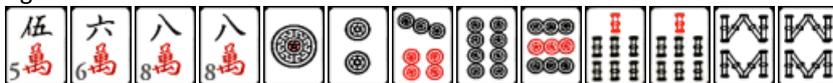
Next, consider Figure 2.  completes your hand, giving you Upper Four. But  completes your hand, as well, giving you Mixed Shifted Chows (6 pts.) + No Honors (1 pt.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.). Such hands, which allow you to build simultaneously toward Upper Four and Mixed Shifted Chows (or Lower Four and Mixed Shifted Chows), do come up occasionally, but normally you should concentrate on Upper or Lower Four. These hands are worth more points, but perhaps more importantly, they are quite flexible. For example, meld a pung of  in Figure 2. This results in Figure 3, a two-chance hand with a guaranteed Upper Four.

Figure 3



If you see the makings of Upper Four or Lower Four, are three tiles away from making ready, and have at least two pairs, then it's a good time to consider taking action on an Upper/Lower Four combination.

Figure 4



In Figure 4, you would rather take advantage of your pairs and meld pungs to make Upper Four rather than go for Mixed Straight or Mixed Shifted Chows.

5.2. The Power of Upper Tiles and Lower Tiles

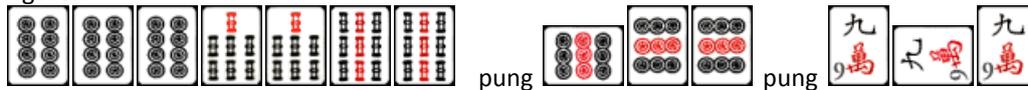
In section 4-01, we discussed Upper Four and Lower Four, two 12-point combinations which can be easily constructed provided decent starting tiles. Upper Tiles and Lower Tiles are more powerful versions of the same combinations. Upper Tiles must be constructed with tiles 7 through 9, while Lower Tiles is constructed with tiles 1 through 3. Both score 24 points.

Figure 1



In Figure 1,  gives you Lower Four, but  gives you Lower Tiles + Mixed Triple Chow.

Figure 2



In Figure 2, Upper Tiles is guaranteed, while  will give you Mixed Shifted Pungs (8 pts.) and  will give you Triple Pung (16 pts.).

Upper Tiles and Lower Tiles are powerful combinations due to this ability to combine with other high-scoring combinations. But do not allow yourself to make the mistake of aiming for these combinations excessively. Take Figure 3.

Figure 3

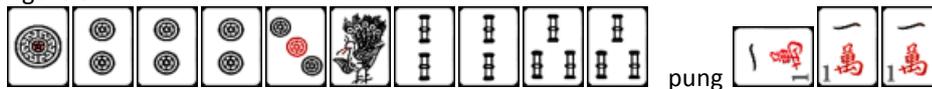
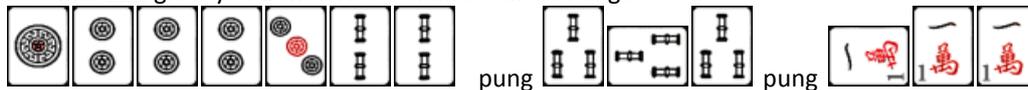


Figure 4

The final  gives you Lower Tiles + Mixed Shifted Pungs



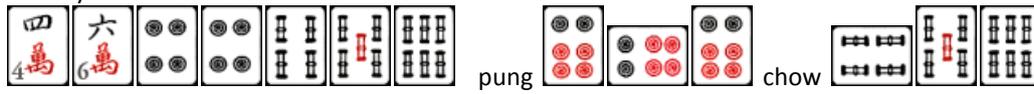
Picking  will give you Lower Tiles, and  will give you Lower Four. If a player discards  or , would you pung it to guarantee Lower Tiles? We advise against it. Yes, melding  would give you Figure 4,

guaranteeing Lower Tiles and gaining the possibility of Mixed Shifted Pungs if you can catch a . But with only three tiles remaining to complete your hand, you may be waiting for a long time. When playing International Rules, your priority should be to finish your hand quickly. It is vital to make ready on a hand that has multiple chances. This has the all-important bonus of making it easier to self-draw your last tile and gain a large point reward.

Another combination is built with suit tiles 4 through 6.

Figure 5

A ready hand of Middle Tiles



It is called Middle Tiles and also scores 24 points, although it is more difficult to complete than Upper or Lower Tiles, since players are less likely to throw middle tiles (the most useful tiles in the game). But all of these hands have one thing in common: they can be easily missed if you don't make a conscious effort to look out for them. Be sure to arrange your tiles properly so that you will notice if your suit tiles are clustered in one of the high-scoring regions.

5.3. Meld pungs early to build a Triple Pung

Triple Pung (16 pts.) requires very specific tiles to be completed, and is thus a rare combination.

Figure 1

What would you meld with this hand?

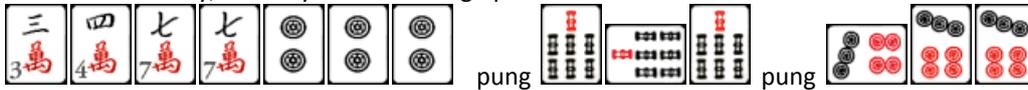


But what if you had the hand shown in Figure 1, and a player discarded ? You may opt to let the , and discard the  to build a Fully Concealed Hand + All Chows + All Simple combo. But the truth is, melding the pung is not a bad choice. You can shoot for All Pungs and try hitting a back door Triple Pung. It is an option you should consider. Triple Pung is the type of combination that you should meld aggressively while building another combination simultaneously.

Let's say that you were fortunate enough to meld two pungs. Now you have the ready hand shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

You've made ready, but do you have enough points?

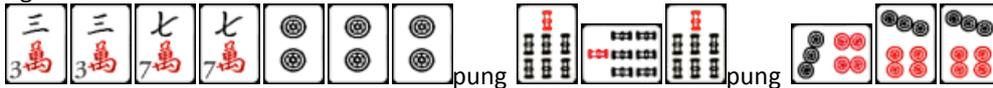


But you cannot finish with this hand, even if you pick your last tile. There are, however, three ways that you can complete it.

First, let's consider the rare case of Last Tile. Last Tile will give you an extra 4 points, which will be just enough: you already have 4 points with All Simple (2 pts.) + Double Pung (2 pts.).

Next, you can meld a pung of  to make ready on a viable hand by completing Triple Pung. You could then discard  or  to add All Pungs and create a single wait, but you should consider the other option. You already have 16 points from Triple Pung, and 2 points from All Simple. The superior choice is to break up the pung of  and give yourself the maximum number of chances to finish your hand with the open-ended chow.

Figure 3



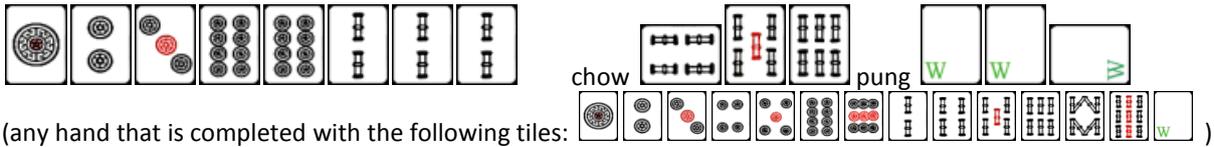
And thirdly, if you draw a  or , you will make ready on All Pungs with the possibility of completing Triple Pung as well. This is shown in Figure 3. You are guaranteed at minimum All Pung (6 pts.) + All Simple (2 pts.) + Double Pung (2 pts.).

Like with other combinations, you should keep your options open while building Triple Pung. At the same time, you must be assertive about melding needed elements. A proper balance these factors, keeping your options open and melding to speed up your hand, is a key to the game.

5.4. Reversible Tiles and All Even

Figure 1

Reversible Tiles

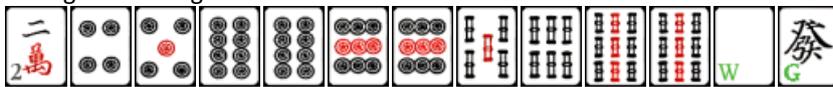


(any hand that is completed with the following tiles:)

One of the more unique combinations is Reversible Tiles (Figure 1). It is a combination constructed of the 14 mahjong tiles which are vertically symmetrical. It is a difficult combination that only scores 8 points. In order to go for this combination, you will need to start out with almost no character tiles or honors (except for). If you have consecutive pairs of or , you may want to get busy melding them into pungs. Figure 2 shows a good opportunity to go for Reversible Tiles.

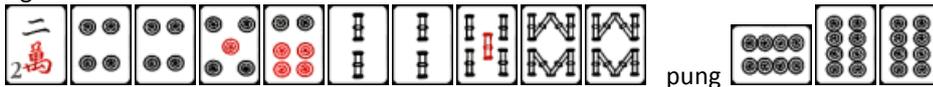
Figure 2

The right time to go for Reversible Tiles



If you decide to build Reversible Tiles, it is important to keep another combination in mind: All Even.

Figure 3

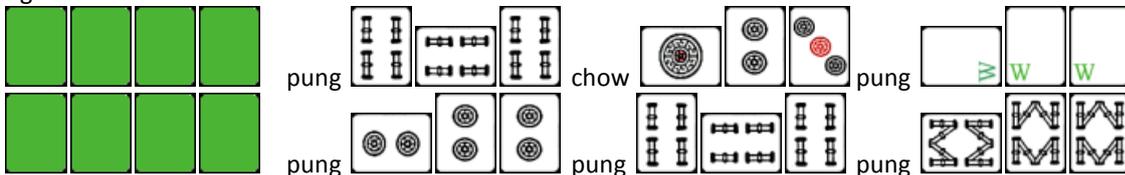


In Figure 3, you have melded in order to work toward Reversible Tiles. But you still need to build off of or pick to replace (be careful: is not a reversible tile).

But consider this: what if you drew another or ? It would be a perfect opportunity to give up on Reversible Tiles and switch to All Even. All Even, at 24 points, is well worth your while. All Even uses many of the Reversible Tiles, so the two combinations work well together. Tiles that can be used in both hands are . So, if your hand has several even-numbered bamboo pairs, that may be a good time to simultaneously build towards Reversible Tiles and All Even.

Finally, let's consider proper reading of opponent's melds.

Figure 4



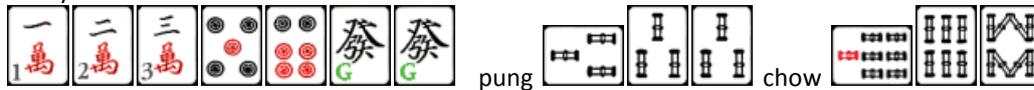
When faced with the three melds shown in the first example in Figure 4, you can proceed as normal. Even if the player uses your discard to complete Reversible Tiles, you need only pay for an 8 point hand. Furthermore, the hand could be All Types, and it is difficult to pinpoint the dangerous tiles. But in the second example, you are best to proceed with caution. You should avoid discarding even-numbered suit tiles as much as possible, lest you give away a 24-point hand.

5.5. Chicken Hand is not for chickens

If your hand has exactly zero points, you qualify for the Chicken Hand (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Ready with a Chicken Hand



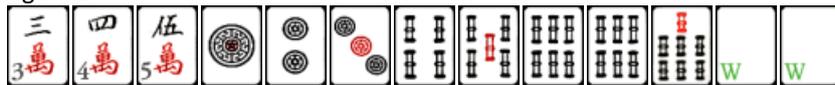
Winning discard

It is a difficult hand to say the least, since you must have knowledge of all the possible hands in order to build it. As a result, many beginning and intermediate players are not confident enough to build this hand. However, if you master a few pointers, you will find that the Chicken Hand is not so difficult after all.

First, remember that your pair, and only your pair, must be built with honors. This eliminates No Honors, All Simple, All Chow, and all honor pung. Next, you must have at least one set each of characters, dots, and bamboos. This eliminates Voided Suit. Next, you must avoid building Mixed Double Chow, Pure Double Chow, and Two Terminal Chows. You must wait on at least a two-chance hand, you cannot self-draw your last tile, and your hand cannot be concealed.

This may seem like a long list, and the Chicken Hand is indeed difficult. And after all this trouble, it only scores 8 points, and you cannot self-draw the hand, so that it adds only 32 points to your score (excluding points scored for flower tiles). But the master of the Chicken Hand has an extra weapon at his disposal. For example, take Figure 2.

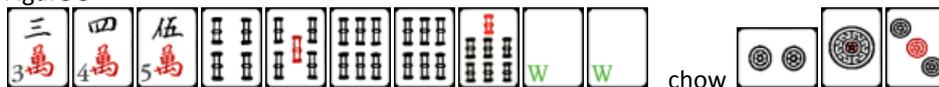
Figure 2



You have come this far, and have made ready without having a chance to get rid of the pair of . But with this hand, you cannot even go out even if you draw your tile and score for Fully Concealed Hand. And yet, the master of the Chicken Hand knows that he is one step away from a proper ready hand. By melding chows with

any of the following tiles, you can make ready on the Chicken Hand:

Figure 3



Would you imagine that there are hands that go well with the Chicken Hand? It may seem like an oxymoron, but it isn't: both All Types and Mixed Straight are often very close in nature to the Chicken Hand.

Figure 4

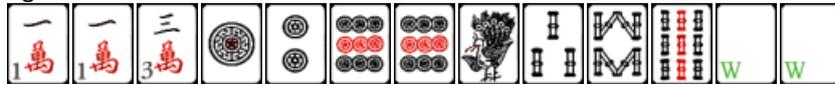


Take Figure 4. You can go for All Types, but what if you cannot manage to draw another ? With the Chicken Hand option at your disposal, you can also draw , discard the , and make ready.

5.6. Got three pairs of terminals? Consider All Terminals and Honors

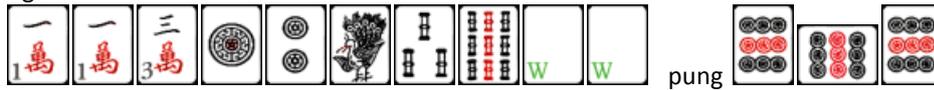
What would be your strategy if you had the hand shown in Figure 1?

Figure 1



You should meld any pungs immediately. For example, let's say that you meld a pung of . You're your next discard should be (Figure 2).

Figure 2



The reason is that you want to keep more possibilities open than just All Terminals and Honors. Depending on what tiles you draw, you may be able to switch to an Outside Hand or a 123 Mixed Triple Chow. If you are fortunate enough to draw , or , you can go straight for All Terminals and Honors. Normally, when playing International Tournament Rules, you should try to build a quick hand, but Outside Hand is hardly a quick combination, in which case you should leave the possibility open for the higher-scoring All Terminals and Honors. Let's say that a few turns later you have reached the point shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3



If you discard , you will be ready on an Outside Hand. But before you do so, take a close look at the board, and what tiles have been discarded. If the is still live, you may want to discard and go for All Terminals and Honors. Of course, if other players appear close to going out, you should stick with an already-completed hand.

All Terminals and Honors can also combine with Seven Pairs (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

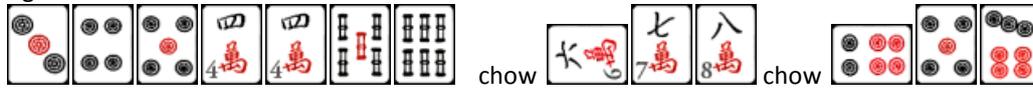


This is one combination that could practically knock an opponent out in one blow: All Terminals and Honors (32 pts.) + Seven Pairs (24 pts.) tallies up to a devastating 56-point total.

5.8. Last Tile

When building Mixed Triple Chow or Mixed Shifted Chows, you will often find yourself with a two-chance hand that is effectively a one-chance hand, because only one of the two chances gives you the 8 points needed to finish.

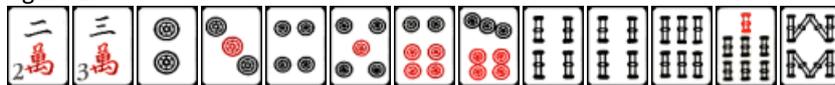
Figure 1



In Figure 1, will give you Mixed Shifted Chows (6 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.), but does not give you enough points. But be aware of the number of tiles on the board (including tiles shown in players' melds). If you see three tiles on the board, the last will give you an extra 4 points for Last Tile. In Figure 1, you would earn All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Last Tile (4 pts.) for a total of 9.

Last Tile is not a common occurrence, but it generally comes up two or three times in a 4-round game.

Figure 2



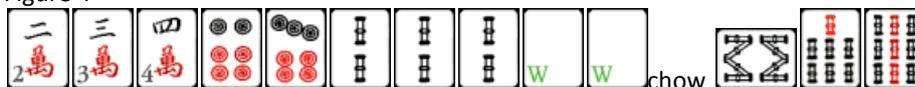
In Figure 2, you can go out with since it gives you Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + All Simples (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pts.) + Short Straight (1 pt.). But the does you no good, even if you draw it yourself. But what if three tiles are exposed on the board? In that case, gives you enough points, even if it is discarded by a player.

Figure 3



What about Figure 3? Do you recognize this configuration? It is a case similar to the one discussed in section 4-05. This hand is one step away from a Chicken Hand, but in order to qualify you must meld something in the hand. If you do so, as shown in Figure 4, you will be able to go out on an opponent's discard.

Figure 4

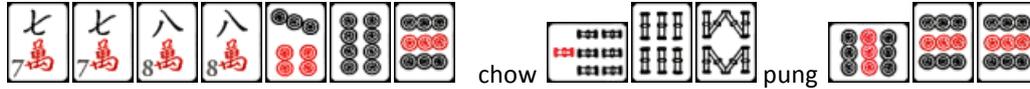


But what if three of the tiles, or three of the tiles, or three each of both tiles are already exposed? When that happens, you can no longer qualify for the Chicken Hand. In such a case, you should keep your hand concealed as in Figure 3. This way, in the event that you do draw that last lucky tile, you can score Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + Last Tile (4 pts.) for a total of 8 points. "When your tiles are nearly dead, you have a new lease on life." That's the lesson of Last Tile.

5.9. Never underestimate a Tile Hog

Tile Hog is earned when you use all 4 of a tile in two or more elements in your hand. A Concealed Kong scores 2 points, and a Melded Kong 1 point. Tile Hog scores the same amount of points as the Concealed Kong, or 2 points. Tile Hog does not mesh well with All Chows, and most players consider it an extra bonus that comes up occasionally when you're shooting for a combination like Upper Four, as in Figure 1.

Figure 1



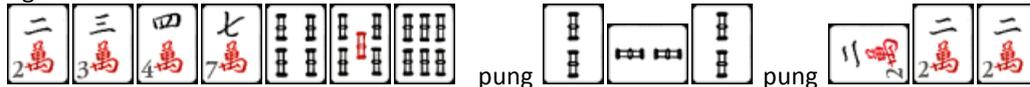
But what about the hand shown in Figure 2?

Figure 2



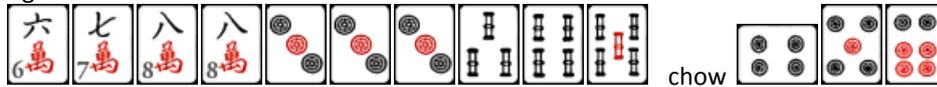
At first glance, the hand appears to lack the needed points. But take another look: if you draw your last tile, you will end up scoring All Simples (2 pts.) + Tile Hog (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Voided Suit (1 pt.) + Single Wait (1 pt.) + Self-drawn (1 pt.) for a total of 8.

Figure 3



And take a look at Figure 3. With All Simples (2 pts.) + Tile Hog (2 pts.) + Double Pung (2 pts.) + Voided Suit (1 pt.) + Single Wait (1 pt.), now you have enough to go out with an opponent's discard.

Figure 4



Furthermore, you can often combine Tile Hog with Last Tile. In Figure 4,  gives you All Simples and Mixed Shifted Chows, but  only gives you All Simples --- not nearly enough to go out. If a player discards , you should immediately meld a pung with it.

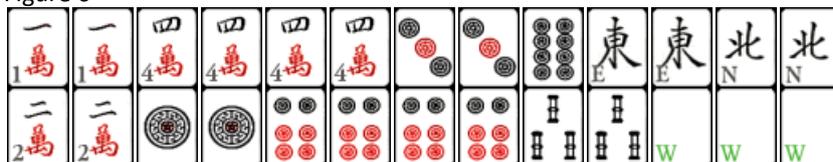
Figure 5



Now the last  will give you All Simples (2 pts.) + Tile Hog (2 pts.) + Last Tile (4 pts.), bringing you to the needed total of 8.

Tile Hog also combines with Seven Pairs. Two ready hands are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6



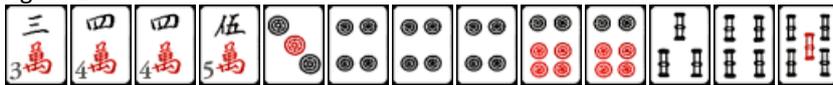
In the second example in Figure 6, you are waiting on the last . If it is discarded, you will score Seven Pairs (24 pts.) + Tile Hog (2 pts.) + Tile Hog (2 pts.) for a total of 28. But the possibilities don't end there. What if you draw , or ? In that case, of course, you will kong the tiles and go for Four Concealed Pungs, one of the highest-scoring patterns in the game.

5.10. More to the game than prime chows

Prime chows (chows of 123, 456, or 789) are extremely useful, because they can be used to build a wide variety of chow-based hands. But remember: in some situations, you must be brave and meld sets other than prime chows. Many players are willing to meld a set as long as it immediately gives them an 8-point or more combination, but have a hard time melding sets when the finishing combination is still several steps away. Such players are concerned about not having enough backup plans for when the primary plan fails.

However, don't forget that there are always the last-resort escape hatches provided by Melded Hand (6 pts.) and Last Tile (4 pts.). When you first play, try melding sets aggressively without concern for failure. By doing so, you will learn which patterns work and which do not.

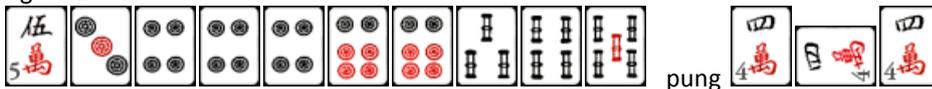
Figure 1



Let's look at an example of smart melding. In Figure 1, you are one away from making ready. But you are not in an enviable position: even if you get  or  you won't be able to finish, even if you pick your tile yourself.

But you have an unusual escape hatch. Try melding a pung of  (Figure 2).

Figure 2

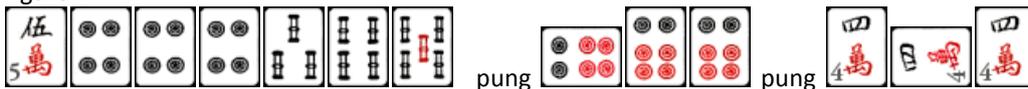


Now you are close to a Double Pung. But even with All Simples (2 pts.) + Double Pung (2 pts.), you're still will not have reached the needed 8 points. Next, try to meld a pung of either  or  (Figures 3 and 4, respectively). Now you need only make sure you have enough points.

Figure 3

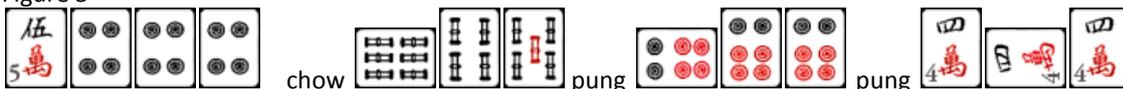


Figure 4



In Figure 3, you have All Simples (2 pts.) + Double Pung (2 pts.) + Tile Hog (2 pts.). If you pick , you'll add Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.) + Self-drawn (1 pt.) for a total of 8 points. In Figure 4, you are still several points away. But what if you meld a chow by claiming ? You will end up making ready with Middle Tiles as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

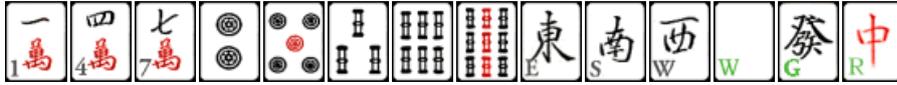


As you can see, claiming the pung of  gave you some incredible options. When building your hand, the most important thing to remember is this: never fixate on a single combination. You must keep your mind open to a range of possibilities.

6. Unique Combinations, Unique Strategies

6.1. You have nothing? Search for Knitted Tiles and Honors

Figure 1



In Figure 1, you have all single tiles. No possible melds. No pairs. But this hand scores for Lesser Honors and Knitted Tiles (12 pts.).

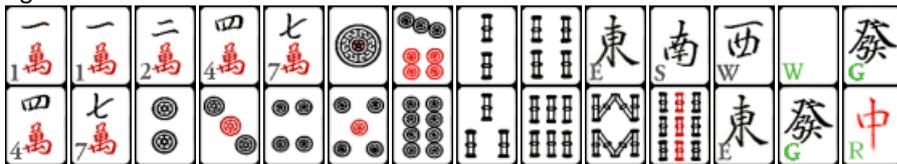
Figure 2



In Figure 2, you have singles of all 7 honors. This combination is called Greater Knitted Tiles and Honors and scores 24 points.

After learning these combinations, you will be tempted to build them anytime that you start out with a hand that has many single honors. However, in order to build the Knitted Tiles and Honors combinations, the number of single honors should not determine your course. As point in case, compare the hands shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3



Which is closer to a Knitted Tiles and Honors combination? The first hand has 5 honors, and might appear at first glance to be well on its way to completion. But the second example is in fact far closer to making ready. It's more important to count the number of tiles needed to make ready rather than simply the number of honors. Normally, you will want to aim for this combination when you are 3 tiles away from making ready. The problem

with the first example in Figure 3 is that the , and are all in the same knitted series. As a result, and are all useless tiles. This hand is, in fact, fully 4 tiles away from making ready. But in the second example, although you may be tempted to make use of the completed chow in dots, you have a nice collection of knitted tiles that are in different series: , and . In fact, you are just 2 tiles away from making ready. You should immediately discard .

Are you wondering what your best hope is with the first example, a rather anemic starting hand? Discard and go for Outside Hand, Half Flush, or Thirteen Orphans.

6.2. A Knitted Straight needs just 5 more tiles

As discussed in section 5-01, Lesser Honors and Knitted Tiles scores 12 points, while Greater Knitted Tiles and Honors scores 24.

Figure 1



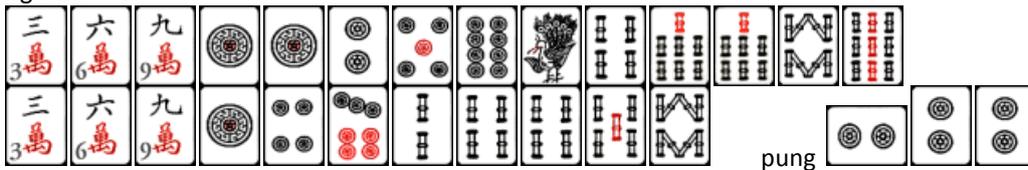
Great Honors and Knitted Tiles is shown in the second example in Figure 1: it has all 7 honors + 7 suit tiles. If you complete your hand with 6 honors + 8 suit tiles, you will score for Lesser Honors and Knitted Tiles. But what if you have 5 honors + 9 suit tiles, as shown in Figure 2?

Figure 2



In this case, you combine two combinations: first, you score for Lesser Honors and Knitted Tiles (12 pts.), and second, since you have 9 suit tiles, you also score for Knitted Straight (12 pts.) for a total of 24 points. Knitted Straight is composed of suit tiles in different "knitted" series. One suit must be in 1-4-7, another must be in 2-5-8, and the last must be in 3-6-9. Once you've completed these 9 tiles, you have a Knitted Straight. If the remaining 5 tiles are all single honors, you have also completed Lesser Honors and Knitted Tiles.

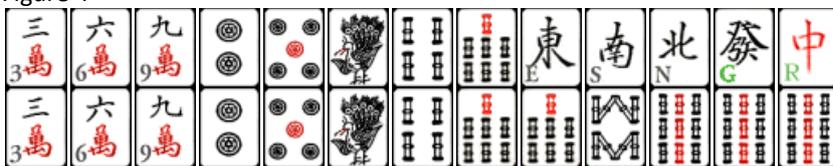
Figure 3



In the examples shown in Figure 3, the 9 tiles completing the Knitted Straight are counted as 3 chows, and the remainder of the hand can be anything. In the first example, you score for Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + Knitted Straight (12 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.). The second example counts for Knitted Straight (12 pts.) + No Honors (1 pt.). With 12 points already scored for a Knitted Straight, you need only create a final set and a pair to complete your hand.

However, remember that the Knitted Straight must specifically be completed with 9 suit tiles in groups of 3 belonging to different suits and different knitted series. The combination is not to be confused with Knitted Tiles and Honors (although it can be combined).

Figure 4



For example, in Figure 4, you have a 3-chance Knitted Tiles and Honors hand (Knitted Tiles and Honors is always a 3-chance hand when ready). If you finish with , you will score for Lesser Honors and Knitted Tiles. If you finish with , you will score for Knitted Straight as well. In the second example, only  completes your hand. This hand also scores for a Single Wait (1 pt.).

You should decide from the very beginning whether to aim for Knitted Straight and/or Honors and Knitted Tiles. But if you are considering a Knitted Straight, you can start with your regular strategy of discarding honors, and go for the Knitted Straight only if you accumulate at least 7 of the needed 9 tiles.

6.3. Seven Pairs, or All Pungs?

Seven Pairs scores 24 points. That's more points than for Mixed Triple Chow and Pure Straight, and the same number of points as Pure Flush. Although Seven Pairs is not easily completed, nor is it the fastest of combinations, you must take advantage of its high scoring potential and adjust your strategy accordingly. One decision that you must face is when to break up Seven Pairs and make a commitment to All Pungs.

Figure 1



In Figure 1, you have 5 pairs, which is one away from making ready on Seven Pairs. But even at this point you face two problems. You cannot meld anything to build your hand, and there are only three tile types that will make you ready. "Seven Pairs is one step farther from completion than you think" --- this is a famous Japanese mahjong saying. It illustrates the fact that, even when you are, for example, 2 tiles away from making ready on Seven Pairs, it is equivalent to being 3 tiles away from making ready with other types of combinations. This is because with other combinations, there are many more tiles which will bring your hand closer to ready. Seven Pairs is, comparatively, a very slow combination.

In this case, we should consider the hand in Figure 1 to be not 1 but 2 tiles away from making ready. If you were to build All Pungs, you would be 3 tiles away from making ready. Therefore, you are closer to finishing Seven Pairs (roughly speaking: 2 tiles away versus 3).

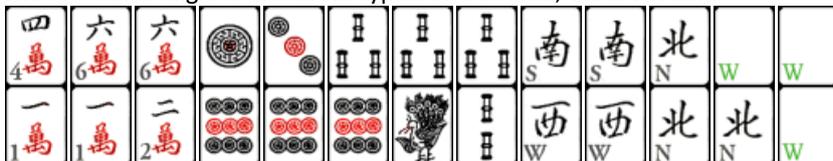
Figure 2



How about Figure 2? If you go for Seven Pairs, you are approximately 3 tiles away (strictly speaking, 2 tiles away, but add 1 to adjust for difficulty). If you go for All Pungs, you are 3 tiles away. In this case, and considering the ease of melding the pairs that you have in your hand, you should probably build All Pungs.

Figure 3

The first hand might become All Types. The second, Outside Hand.



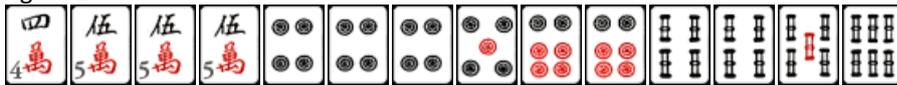
With the hands shown in Figure 3, you should certainly meld sets. You are equally distant from completing your hand whether you go for All Pungs or Seven Pairs, but by melding the first hand you can also build All Types (6 pts.), and by melding the second hand you can simultaneously shoot for All Terminals and Honors (32 pts.) and Outside Hand (4 pts). In the first example, you are 2 tiles away from making ready on All Types, which is preferable to being (the equivalent of) 3 tiles away making ready with Seven Pairs.

6.4. Gather in the Middle

Many hands are based on numerical biases. Upper Four and Lower Four each score 12 points. Upper Tiles, Middle Tiles, and Lower Tiles each score 24 points.

Although players tend to remember the hands that are built on the edges, namely Upper Four, Lower Four, Upper Tiles, and Lower Tiles, they often forget those built in the middle: All Fives and Middle Tiles. The reason is probably because tiles grouped in the middle tend to form into chows that extend outside of the range of these combinations, and players tend to first notice the more common combinations that are made possible by this flexibility. Before you notice a possible All Fives or Middle Tiles, you are likely to notice a nearly-completed Mixed Triple Chow or Mixed Shifted Chows.

Figure 1

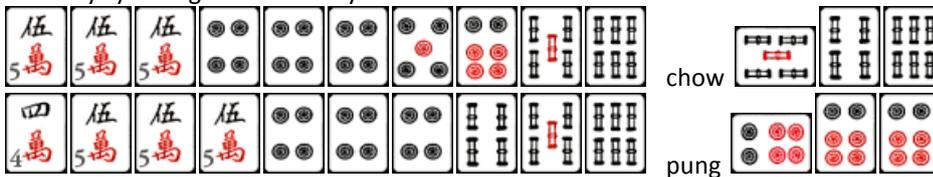


Consider Figure 1. We'll discuss what tile to discard later. For now, take note of the possibilities. You could make Mixed Shifted Chows in the 345-456-567 range, or a 456 Mixed Triple Chow. But if you take a second look, you'll notice that all the tiles in the hand are between 4 and 6 --- a great opportunity to shoot for Middle Tiles. And since Middle Tiles scores 24 points compared with a measly 8 points for Mixed Triple Chow, you

should certainly try for the former. A player who doesn't see the potential for Middle Tiles might keep the , but you know to discard it: by doing so, you can meld pungs of  or  or claim tiles ,  or  to meld chows to make ready on a gigantic hand. Or, if you discard , you can claim one of the dots and create wait on tiles  and  (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Two ways you might make ready



A similar combination is All Fives. All the sets in your hand and your pair must include fives. For example, the hand in Figure 3.

Figure 3



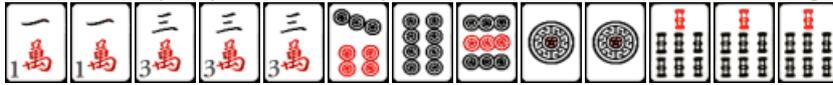
You have a three-chance hand (  ), but only  gives you All Fives. The fact that your pair must also be built with fives makes this a very difficult combination.

To build either of these combinations, you will need to have plenty of 5 tiles, hopefully in all three suits. You won't find too many opportunities to shoot for these combination, but when you get the right starting tiles, these two combinations are well worth the while.

6.5. The unusual thing about Three Concealed Pungs

Figure 1

You'll need to pick your tile to complete this hand of Three Concealed Pungs



In Figure 1, you cannot go out on an opponent's discard. And yet, if you draw the last tile yourself, you'll gain a total of nearly 100 points. This unusual situation occurs with the combinations that must be concealed: it's difficult to complete your hand, but when you do, the reward is great.

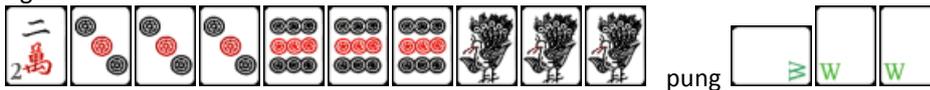
Figure 2



What if you have already completed Three Concealed Pungs? If you go out on an opponent's discard with the hand shown in Figure 2, you will score Concealed Hand (2 pts.) + Three Concealed Pungs (16 pts.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.). Adding the 8 points additional points obtained from each player, you gain a total of 44 points. And with an open-ended wait, you have a higher likelihood of drawing the last tile yourself than you did in the last case (8 tiles to finish you hand versus 4).

But what would you do if a player discarded ?

Figure 3



If you meld a pung, you'll have Three Concealed Pungs (16 pts.) + All Pungs (6 pts.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.) + Single Wait (1 pt.) for a total of 25 (Figure 3). Whether you pick your winning tile or go out on an opponent's discard, you'll gain a few extra points. But, take note of the fact that you have gone from a two-chance (8 tile) hand to a one-chance (3 tile) hand. This means that for a few extra points, you have lowered your chances of picking your winning tile by more than half. In other words, this pung only gives you proper odds if it more than doubles your score.

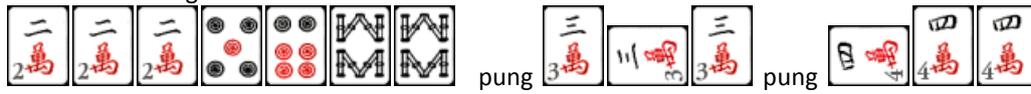
Figure 4



But in Figure 4, when you have only have a one-chance hand to begin with, you would prefer to meld the pung, because your chances of picking your last tile hardly change, and you can easily change your winning tile to something that is more likely to be discarded.

Figure 6

Pure Shifted Pungs

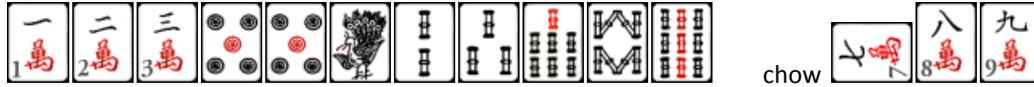


Three offset pungs in the same suit is called Pure Shifted Pungs --- a more difficult version of Mixed Shifted Pungs that's worth triple the points (24 pts.). But, like Mixed Shifted Pungs, Pure Triple Pungs is a very difficult combination. Again, do not make Pure Triple Pungs your primary goal.

6.7. Don't forget Three-Suited Terminal Chows

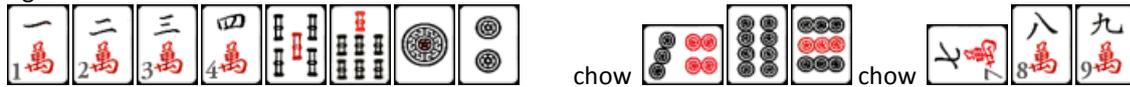
Three-Suited Terminal Chows is built with Two Terminal Chows in two different suits and a pair of fives in a third (Figure 1).

Figure 1



This is a combination that even intermediate players tend to miss. The main reason is simple: they first tend to see the more common combinations that bear similarities: Outside Hand, Pure Straight, and Mixed Triple Chow.

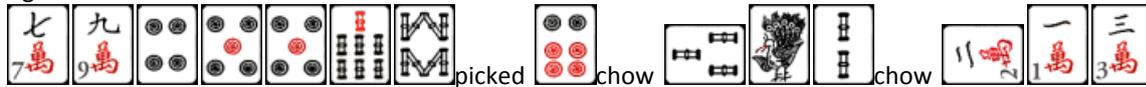
Figure 2



Take Figure 2. Many players would discard  in order to build either a 789 Mixed Triple Chow or a Pure Straight in characters. But in both cases, you cannot make ready in 1 tile.

Your best choice is to trash either Mixed Triple Chow by discarding  or trash the Pure Straight by discarding . This way you will be 2 tiles away from one combination, and 1 tile away from Three-Suited Terminal Chows. Claim  for a 123 chow, or pick a  and you'll make ready on the hand.

Figure 3



How about Figure 3? You were one away from making ready on Three-Suited Terminal Chows, but then you pick . You'd like to complete Three-Suited Terminal Chows, because it scores more points. But if you take that route, you will be dependent on catching two specific tiles:  and . Your play is to discard the .

The superiority of this choice is demonstrated by the number of tiles that will make you ready:     .

Figure 4



Three-Suited Terminal Chows is an easier and more common combination than players tend to think. With the hand in Figure 4, you need a  to finish, and if you feel the need to change your wait, you only need to draw an honor to change to an Outside Hand.

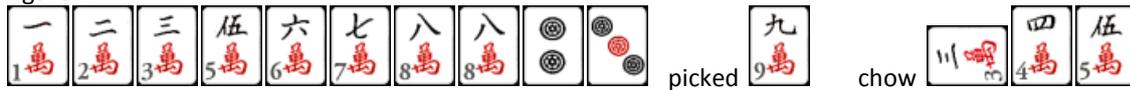
Figure 5



In Figure 5, if you think your opponents are blocking your  outs, you can recover by building a Pure Straight in characters. The magic of Three-Suited Terminal Chows is not its score (the same 16 points as the Pure Straight), but its convenience.

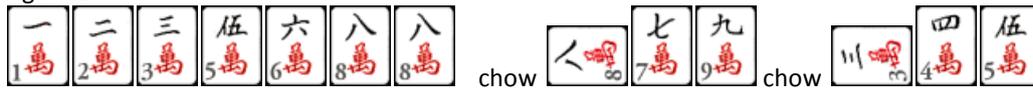
6.8. When to go for gold

Figure 1



In Figure 1, you have a two-chance hand with Pure Shifted Chows. But what happens next? You pick . That's a tough decision. Do you break up your hand and try to add a Full Flush to your hand? Or do you discard it, and keep what you have? It's certainly tempting to go for gold and try for a higher score --- especially considering the fact you might even make Four Shifted Chows (Figure 2).

Figure 2



However, the proper play is to discard the . You have a large hand. You have an open-ended chow draw, giving you 8 tiles to finish. If your hand were the one shown in Figure 3, which has half the chances of finishing, you would have a good reason to break up your hand.

Figure 3



But even in that case, you should discard starting with the . The reason? If you draw  your best choice is to discard  and restore your Pure Shifted Chows, this time with double the chances.

Figure 4



What about the hand shown in Figure 4? You are ready with All Types (6 pts.) + Honor Pung (1 pt.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.). An opponent discards . Do you meld a pung and create All Pungs? The answer is no: again you should keep your two-chance hand. The increased chances for a self-drawn finish are too valuable to give up. Self-drawing an 8-point hand gives you 48 points total. That's the equivalent of taking a 24-point hand using an opponent's discard. A hand with 8 or more tiles to finish (as in the two-chance hands above) has a high expectation. The value of being in this position must not be underestimated.

Figure 5



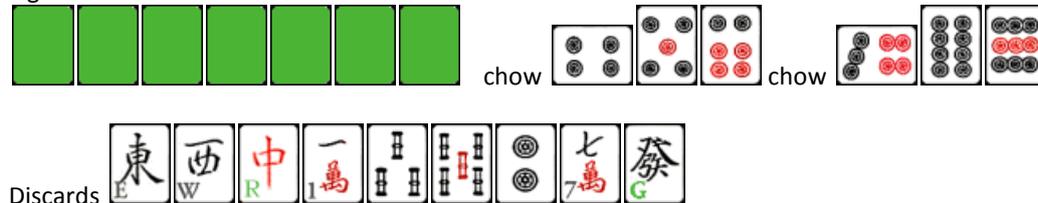
Are there exceptions? Of course. Take Figure 5. You are ready on a hand of Two Dragons (6 pts.) + Voided Suit (1 pt.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.). Then you pick . Suddenly, you have a chance at a 64-point hand. And your opponents can only see one of your dragons. If you can make ready soon, you are almost certain to make a large score on the unlucky player who draws the next . Some players might opt to keep what they have, but we recommend going for gold. Take a look at the board, determine what tiles are live, and discard either  or .

7. At the table

7.1. Time to throw in your hand

The rewards of a self-drawn hand are enormous. So much so that many players figure, “I’d rather throw my opponent’s winning tile rather than let him finish with a self-drawn one.” But as with all games, these issues are situational. Depending on what tiles you hold, you will have to make the decision to block certain tiles or throw in your hand. For example, the player to your right has melded the two chows shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



He has discarded the 9 tiles shown. It appears that he is building a Pure Straight. But if you make ready, you should be willing to throw  or  ( is hardly even a concern, since he has discarded it earlier).

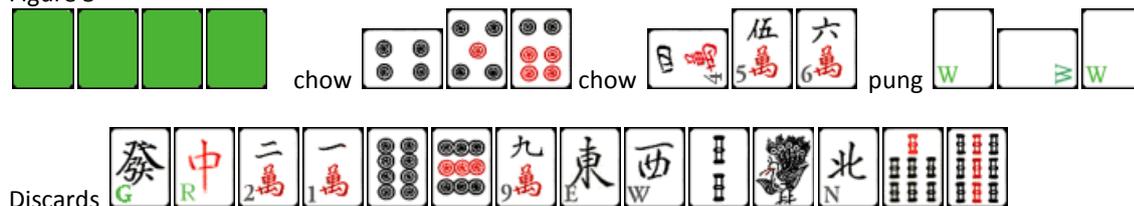
However, if you are still 2 tiles away, you are advised not to throw  or . If you are that far from completing your hand, you should not be so willing to assist an opponent. The problem is this: if you give the opponent the winning tile, your score will fall behind all three opponents. Even the other two players, the “bystanders,” will gain almost a 20-point lead on you. Perhaps even worse, if the opponent holds the hand shown in Figure 2, throwing  will guarantee his Pure Straight.

Figure 2



Now that you’ve given him the points he needs, he’s very close to finishing. If he picks his last tile, all three remaining players will take a big hit. Remember, in many cases, it’s more devastating to help a player make ready than it is to give him a winning tile.

Figure 3



Next, consider Figure 3. The melds of this player suggest All Types or Mixed Triple Chow. In this case, you need not block honors, but you should block suit tiles. With his discard,  is dangerous honor that could complete All Types, and ,  or  are the dangerous bamboos that could complete Mixed Triple Chow.

The difference is this: when you block the , you have nearly no chance of completing your own hand. But when you block ,  or , the chances of recovering are high. If you don’t have much of a chance of finishing, you may want to play it completely safe. But if you have a decent chance of building a hand, you should throw .

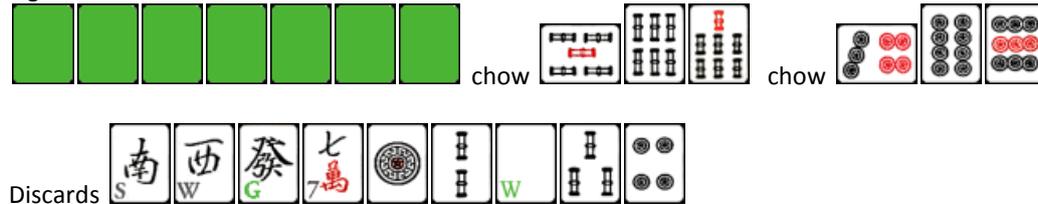
7.2. Reading a player's hand

"I swear, I can read a player's hand." Well, it's easier said than done.

Consider a player who is on the offensive. That player might meld a prime chow or two (a prime chow is a chow of 123, 456, or 789). What advantages do prime chows offer? They are flexible. They can be used in many different combinations. "I melded a chow to build a Mixed Straight, but I ended up finishing with a Pure Straight." That's hardly an uncommon occurrence. Now, surely if the player himself isn't even sure of what combination(s) he's going to finish with, how can you be expected to read it?

However, once a player melds a non-prime chow, things begin to change. You can start reading his hand now. Why? Because now you can start a process of elimination. Figure 1 shows a player's melded chows and discards.

Figure 1



First he melded a prime chow of . Then a non-prime chow of . This reveals quite a bit.

You know that a will complete Mixed Shifted Chows. Granted, he could be going for a Pure Straight or Mixed Triple Chow, but the probability of those combinations is less (and there are too many such lesser possibilities to make a useful prediction). The tiles that you should consider dangerous are those that complete (in this case, the in the discard makes and the dangerous tiles).

Figure 2



Next we will introduce the concept of "disaster avoidance." Figure 2 shows a hand that has a revealed Pure Straight for a minimum of 16 points. The remaining tiles could be just about anything, and if you give up the winning tile, you'll pay a fair price. In such cases, you should toss the safest of tiles --- tiles in that player's discard pile, or tiles that have been very recently discarded.

Figure 3



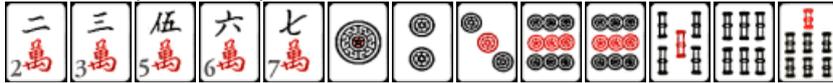
But in Figure 3, the player's melds do not add up to 8 points. This reveals a few things about his remaining tiles. It's impossible to create a Mixed Triple Chow or Mixed Shifted Chows with only 4 tiles left. This hand could only be All Types or Little Three Dragons. Now you know that the dangerous tiles are bamboos and honors. Although he may have Little Three Dragons, throwing a bamboo cannot result in a devastatingly large loss of points. Don't be afraid to challenge this player with a dangerous discard if you're sitting on a hand that scores enough points to take the risk.

7.3. Need to pick your last tile to win? No problem!

Players quickly become comfortable with the easier combinations, such as Mixed Shifted Chows, Mixed Triple Chow, Mixed Straight, Pure Straight, and All Types. They have a bit more trouble making 8 points with an All Chows (2 pts.) + Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) combo that requires a few extra points. It is more difficult to combine the smaller combinations than it is to build a single larger combination. For example, take Figure 1.

Figure 1

When self-picked, you have at least Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pts.). With the , add another Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.). With the , add a Short Straight (1 pt.). In either case, you have 8 points.



If you pick your last tile, you will score enough points to go out. But you cannot go off another player's discard. This is a position some players like to avoid. But what is the value of this hand? It gains value from being a 2-chance hand. It's limited by the fact that you must pick your last tile. But this is somewhat counterbalanced by the fact that when you do successfully pick your last tile, you gain a very significant point bonus.

When you are ready on combinations like Mixed Shifted Chows, Mixed Triple Chow, Pure Straight, or All Types, you will find that you will usually be dependent on a single tile to finish (even if you have a 2-chance hand, one of the chances often does not score sufficient points --- as in Figure 2).

Figure 2

You've made ready, but will any tile do?



If you are trying to pick your last tile, the hand in Figure 1 is double the value of the hand in Figure 2 (because it has double the winning tiles). In most cases, of course, you will want the chance to go out on players' discards. Therefore, in general, you should aim to create a hand like the one in Figure 2. But the added value gained by the 2-chances in Figure 1, when compared to the more commonly seen 1-chance hand in Figure 2, is significant. Now, for a quiz. What tile would you discard with the hand in Figure 3?

Figure 3

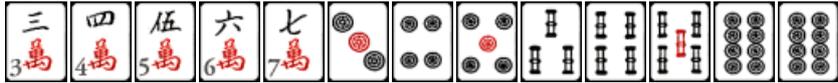
Discarding the  gives you Mixed Shifted Chows, All Chows, and Short Straight. Discarding the  gives you just enough points, but you must pick your tile: Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + All Chows (2 pts.) + Short

Straight (1 pt.) + Mixed Double Chow (1 pt.). Either the  or  will do.



The authors (Mai Hatsune and Takunori Kajimoto) prefer to discard . Our reasoning is that, with the added value afforded by self-drawing a hand, why sacrifice a 2-chance hand just to make a 1-chance hand that can be taken off an opponent's discard? Even if an opponent throws the winning tile, the hand is really not worth that much. In that case, we'd rather go for a larger hand, even if it means that we have to self-draw the winning tile. Finally, take a look at the 3-chance hand in Figure 4.

Figure 4



If an opponent discards any of these tiles, you can finish your hand. If you had this hand very early in the game, you should seriously consider letting a tile or two through, so that you can have a shot at picking the tile yourself and substantially adding to your score.

7.4. Master the 64 and 88 point combinations

By far the most common 64-point combination is Little Three Dragons. Big Three Dragons scores 88 points. The scores for Little Four Winds (64 pts.) and Big Four Winds (88 pts.) are similarly related.

The next most common 64-point combination is Four Concealed Pungs. All Honors is a very difficult combination but scores just 64 points. Perhaps this is because it easily combines with Little Three Dragons and Little Four Winds (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



All Terminals and Pure Terminal Chows are also 64-point combinations. Both of them can be melded, so they are not as difficult as they may first appear (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Example of melded Pure Terminal Chows

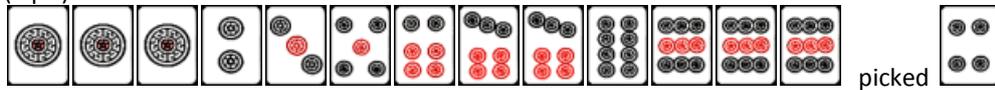


Thirteen Orphans is the most common 88-point combination, and Seven Shifted Pairs is another which is realistically achievable. Four Kongs is worth 88 points, but is so rare that it hardly warrants mention. Another extremely rare 88-point combination is Nine Gates, which must be concealed, and must be completed as a 9-chance hand. The remaining 88-point combinations are All Green, Big Four Winds, and Big Three Dragons.

Figure 3

You must have a 9-chance hand to score for Nine Gates

This hand scores for Fully Concealed Hand (4 pts.) + Pure Flush (24 pts.) + Short Straight (1 pt.) + Terminal Pung (1 pt.).



7.5. Engineering a come-from-behind win

In international tournaments, table points are earned depending on your rank at your table at the end of each game. First place scores 4 points, second place scores 2, third place scores 1, and last place scores 0. As the game nears its end, you need to start building your hand with specific goals in mind (depending on how many points you must earn to finish with the desired rank). In particular, for the very last hand it is vital that you determine exactly how many points you will need to achieve the desired results. This section teaches you how to calculate the number of points and type of win needed to overtake a player.

First, count the number of points between yourself and your target (the opponent that you wish to overtake in score). This is just a simple matter of subtraction. Next, subtract 32 from this number (32 is the gain in points that you are guaranteed if you finish: 8 points from each player, 8 of those points being from your target, so that a 32-point gain is made). The resulting number tells you how many points your hand must be to beat the target when you go out on one of the other opponent's discard (Equation 1).

Equation 1: Calculating the number of points needed to overcome a point spread (when tile is taken off an unrelated player)

$$\text{Needed points} = (\text{Target's score} - \text{your score}) - 32$$

For example, you're in 2nd place. The leading player is 60 points ahead of you. Sixty minus 32 equals 28. If you finish off a "bystander's" discard, your hand must be 28 points or more to overtake the leader and win the game.

Next, divide this number by 2 (Equation 2).

Equation 2: Calculating the number of points needed to overcome a point spread (when tile is taken off target)

$$\text{Needed points} = [(\text{Target's score} - \text{your score}) - 32] / 2$$

This is the number of points your hand must be if the winning tile is taken from the target himself. Next, divide the number by 2 once again. Now you have the number of points required to overtake the leader when the winning tile is self-picked (Equation 3).

Equation 3: Calculating the number of points needed to overcome a point spread (when tile is self-drawn)

$$\text{Needed points} = [(\text{Target's score} - \text{your score}) - 32] / 4$$

Continuing with the same example, if the opponent in 1st place has a 60 point lead on you, subtract 32 from 60, and you get 28 points. Divide this by 2 for 14 points. Divide it again, equaling 7 points. This is the number of points you need to win if you pick your tile. In other words, any hand will do, since you must have at least 8 points to go out. It's worth noting whether or not your opponent is more than 64 points ahead of you. If he is, you should go for a self-drawn hand. The reason is as follows: with a 64-point lead, you would need to take a 32-point hand off one of the other opponents, or a 16-point hand off the target. Neither of these is an easy task. But a self-drawn hand must only be the minimal 8 points, and given these options, gives you the most hope of making up for the point spread. This once again emphasizes the extra value that is awarded to a self-drawn hand.

Number of points gained on a target player by going out

Hand value	Off bystander	Off target	Self-drawn
8	40	48	64
9	41	50	68
10	42	52	72
11	43	54	76
12	44	56	80
13	45	58	84
14	46	60	88
15	47	62	92
16	48	64	96
17	49	66	100
18	50	68	104
19	51	70	108
20	52	72	112
21	53	74	116
22	54	76	120
23	55	78	124
24	56	80	128
25	57	82	132

26	58	84	136
27	59	86	140
28	60	88	144
29	61	90	148
30	62	92	152
31	63	94	156
32	64	96	160
33	65	98	164
34	66	100	168
35	67	102	172
36	68	104	176
37	69	106	180
38	70	108	184
39	71	110	188
40	72	112	192

8. Ways to master International Mahjong Rules

8.1. Mahjong players want to know!

This FAQ covers specific rules questions, common misunderstandings, and other details concerning the Official International Rules. Read this section to learn the ins and outs of the world standard of mahjong!

Q: Why is it not possible to score for No Honors when a hand includes All Chows or All Simples?

A: All Chows and All Simples are each defined as having no honors. In other words, both patterns already imply no honors, and therefore, the point for No Honors is not counted. As a rule, **points are not counted for elements that are implied by the completion of a pattern**. Similarly, consider the patterns that are by definition concealed hands (such as Seven Pairs and Four Concealed Pungs). If you pick the tile to complete one of these hands, you do not score 4 points for Fully Concealed Hand, but just 1 point for Self-Drawn (since it can be taken from another player, and Self-Drawn is therefore not implied).

Q: Experienced players are aggressive about melding sets, but as a beginning player, I have trouble determining what the proper timing is for taking action. Can you offer any hints about melding for the beginning player?

A: The initial challenge for a new player is envisioning possible patterns. Take a look at a starting hand, and think of all the possible patterns. The more patterns you can think of, the more flexibility you will afford yourself. And once you learn to recognize all the possible patterns, you will be able to make judgments about which tiles to claim, and at what timing.

But it will take time to master this approach. Therefore, if you are a beginning player, try this: start out by melding a **“prime chow.”** Prime chows are chows of 123, 456, or 789. The value of these chows is high, since they can be used toward building many of the core patterns of International Rules, including Mixed Triple Chow, Mixed Shifted Chows, Mixed Straight, Pure Straight, and Pure Shifted Chows.

For example, imagine that you are holding  and the player to your left discards . That's right, it's time to meld a prime chow of . Now you have 

 which sets you up to build either a Pure Straight or Pure Shifted Chows. Pick  and complete Pure Straight. Pick  and complete Pure Shifted Chows. Or, claim one of

these tiles from the player to your left, as in  to be one tile away from Mixed Shifted Chows.

If you are not sure what patterns to build, start by melding a prime chow. This way, you can complete a core set that can be used as a building block for a variety of patterns. The tiles you draw after melding the chow will determine which patterns you will build. It may seem like a blunt strategy, but you will be surprised at how effective it can be.

Q: I saw a player pass up a winning tile thrown by a player, and then self-draw the same tile. He said it was worth the chance, since one gains more points by finishing self-drawn. Was this player's strategy correct?

A: This player was certainly correct in pointing out that self-drawn hands score higher. As illustrated by the graph below, the higher-scoring the hand is, the more points are gained from self-drawing the hand as opposed to going out on a player's discard. For a minimal hand of 8 points, self-drawing yields 150% the score. But for very large hands, a score can jump up by as much as 260% when self-drawn. The larger the hand, the more a player gains from self-drawing the winning tile.

However, this also tells us that for smaller hands, the point difference is minimal. What does this imply? That you should not let a winning hand slip through your fingers in an attempt to earn a few extra points.

In many cases, even if you hold a two-chance wait, only one of the tiles will complete your pattern and allow you to go out. In other words, with so few tiles to complete your hand, it is often difficult to win self-drawn. In such cases, we certainly do not recommend passing up winning tiles in an attempt to pick the tile yourself. The best way to take the lead is to go out repeatedly on quick, small hands rather than one large hand. If you must

pass up winning tiles, **only do it when you have a multiple-chance wait** where every tile completes your hand, or when you're on the very last hand of the game and you need a specific number of points to win the game.

Q: At times, I find myself with no high-scoring pattern and instead with just a lot of small-scoring ones. When this happens, I'm not sure if I have 8 points or not. Are there any simple techniques for handling the more detailed scoring?

A: Many players are surprised by the number of patterns in the Official International Rules. And of course, every player must learn to build patterns that add up to at least 8 points. As one strategy, players begin by learning the patterns that score at least 8 points by themselves, or patterns that are very close to 8 points (such as Mixed Shifted Chows and All Types). But this presents a problem. Sometimes you will not be so lucky to have a high-scoring pattern within reach. You will not always be able to meld prime chows. And in these cases, you should keep your hand concealed, and try to just barely clear the 8-point minimum. If you wish to master scoring, we recommend **using a special solo practice technique**. First, ignore all hands. Next, draw and discard until you have made ready. When you do, count up, precisely, the number of points. By repeating this process, you will learn which hands can be completed on a player's discard, which must be self-drawn, and which are completely lacking in sufficient points. Once you can quickly spot the 1-point hands (such as Pure Double Chow, Mixed Double Chow, Short Straight, Two Terminal Chows, Terminal Pung, Honor Pung, No Honors, and Voided Suit) and the 2-point hands (Double Pung and Two Concealed Pungs), you will be a big step toward mastering the fine points of scoring.

Q: One person told me "When in doubt, just discard your honors." Is this correct strategy?

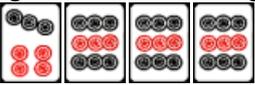
A: Well, the short answer is, usually. The reason is that All Chows-based hands are easy to build, and inclusion of any honors prevents you from building these hands. The player you spoke with probably meant "get rid of your honors, then consider what patterns you can build from there," which is not a bad strategy.

However, you will not always have starters that allow you to build an All Chows-based hand. Sometimes you will find yourself with many honors. In such cases, you should be building one of the pair-friendly hands (All Pungs, Half Flush, All Types, Seven Pairs), in which honors will play an important role. In other words, you should not develop a habit of automatically discarding honors, but should rather **consider the types patterns that are optimal based on your given starters**.

Q: I can score 1 point for a single wait or for a closed wait. Why can't I score a point for a 2-chance single wait

such as  ?

A: The point for your wait is scored only if you are waiting on one distinct tile. Open chow waits and double pung waits score zero. Single waits, closed waits, and edge waits score 1 point. When you have a pattern such

as  which can be interpreted as a combination of a single wait and a closed wait, you

score nothing because you are waiting on 2 or more tiles. The corollary to this is .

This can be seen as either an edge wait or a closed wait, but since the only tile you can complete it with is

, you score 1 point despite it being a "combination" wait.

Q: Is it possible to practice Official International Rules with just three players?

A: Official International Rules can be played by three players.

In fact, there are official rule adjustments for use in international tournaments. First place scores 4 tables points, second place 2, and third place 1. So, if you end up with a three-handed table, at least you know you won't leave without at least gaining a point!

However, with three players, you play only 12 hands. In the standard 4-player game, you would play 16 hands, but with three players, you play 3 hands each of rounds East, South, West, and North. With fewer hands, players who play for the faster, smaller hands will have an advantage.

Introductory Questions

8.2. Discard Quiz

Given these 14 tiles, which tile would you discard? This introductory quiz will help you build a foundation for optimal play.

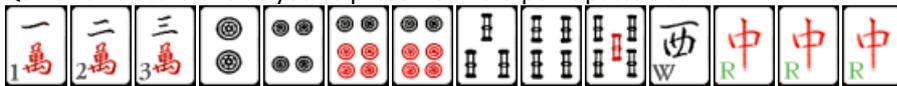
Q1 Pure Double Chow often does more harm than good



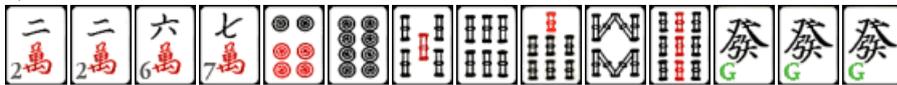
Q2 You stand at a crossroads



Q3 Which discard allows you to preserve two 6-point patterns?



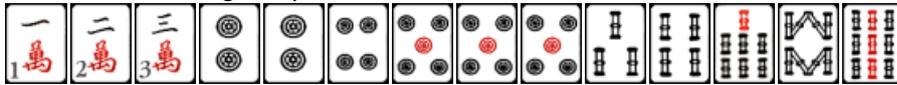
Q4 Find the tile that cannot be used in Mixed Shifted Chows



Q5 Avoid making ready without sufficient points



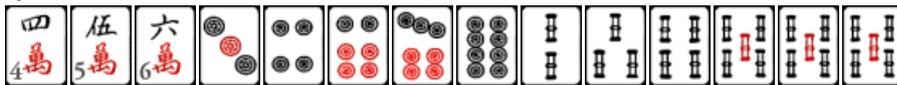
Q6 Is it worth making ready with this hand?



Q7 Is there one pattern to be made in characters, or two?



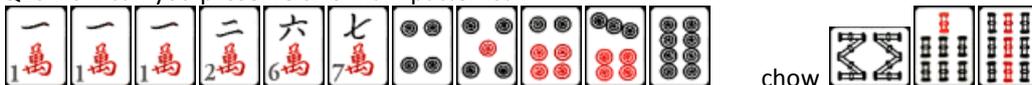
Q8 There is a clear difference between 1st- and 2nd-best discard



Q9 Focus on chows? Or pairs?



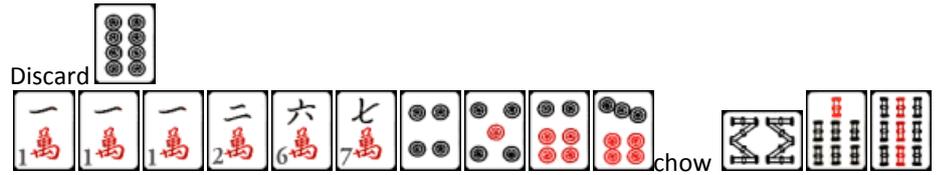
Q10 How can you preserve two main patterns?



chow



A10



Mixed Shifted Chows is possible whether you discard , , or . But only  allows you to keep your chances for Mixed Straight open. If you pick  later, discard .