

THE RED DRAGON & THE WEST WIND

By TOM SLOPER

Errata

Last updated: May 24, 2024

Note: RDWW was written in 2007, and since that time several clarifying rules have been issued by the National Mah Jongg League, so while this compilation is called "Errata," not all entries herein are errors. Most entries are clarifications and new rules from the NMJL.

p. vii - Font attribution - the book neglected to include attribution for the source of the tile graphics used throughout the book. The tile graphics were modified by the author (adding corner indices and a Joker tile) from a font created by Yoshiki Kita and available for free download at <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~mn8y-kt/font/font.html>

P. 3 - Above the picture, last sentence should read "In Europe, the cards led to tarot cards and thence our modern-day playing cards (used for games like rummy, solitaire, canasta, bridge, and poker)."

P. 30, very bottom. Change the last period to a comma, and add: "and so that you can set aside the extra tiles, as they are not used in play."

P. 34. Starting here and throughout the rest of the book, the term "dealer" should be replaced with the term "East." Exception: page 233 (see).

P. 42 - Add rule 1.a.: "If your set contains more than the necessary 152 tiles, set aside the extra tiles and do not use them in play."

P. 44 - Rule 18. Error: "counterclockwise from" should read "clockwise from."

P. 47 - Rule 39. Add Charleston exception: If East has a complete mah-jongg hand after receiving the initial dealt hand, no Charleston is played. East is paid double value of the hand from the other players.

P. 50 - Add rule 45.e.: "Discards are placed face-up in the center of the table, anywhere between the original locations of the four walls."

P. 51 - Rule 48. Append these words: "or redeems a tile for a joker or declares mah-jongg."

P. 51 - Rule 51. Error: "she should bring the wall" should read "she should bring the tile."

P. 51 - Rule 53. In a 2015 letter from Marilyn Starr of the League (who answered rule questions for 25 years until her death in March 2016) to Johni Levene in Los Angeles, the tile is "down" even if you merely *begin* to utter the tile's name. I checked every newsletter from 1997 to 2016. It says "Once a tile has been named" in the 1999

newsletter, and it says "Once you announce a tile" in the 2015 newsletter. It says "Once a tile is named" in the rulebook. If I've only said "S..." and you can't see the face of the tile, you can't know if I'm saying "Six" or "Seven" or "South," thus the tile has not yet been "named" or "announced," in my opinion.

P. 52 - Rule 59.c. Add: If the claim for the live discard is spoken at the precise moment that the next player after the discarder is racking the tile picked from the wall, the claim is honored (the claimant is permitted to take the live discard). The League stated this rule in a letter to Donna E. (as recorded in the Sloperama.com Mah-Jongg Q&A Bulletin Board in late October, 2016).

P. 52 - Add rule 59.d. A player may say "hold" or "wait" when a discard goes out. A spoken call for the discard made by the next in line overrides the hold. See column 796, note 17. My opinion is that calls to "hold" or "wait" should be infrequent and brief.

P. 52 - Rule 60.a. Delete last sentence.

P. 53 - Rule 60.c. This rule as written in the book was misconstrued from a rule given in a yearly bulletin from the National Mah Jongg League. The League clarified the rule in the January 2007 bulletin and in a letter to Lynn McDonald (as recorded in the Sloperama.com Mah-Jongg Q&A Bulletin Board in early March, 2015):

Once the player has either put the taken discard atop her rack or exposed tiles from her hand, she has committed to the play and may not rescind the move. See "Changes of Heart" (page 65 of original printing).

P. 53 - Rule 60.f. Exception: when beginning the turn with a called discard. The exposure must be complete when initially made with the discard. The player is not permitted to first expose only a pung, then redeem a joker in order to change the pung to a kong, before discarding. See rule 86.a.

P.53 - Rule 61. After a player has melded/exposed a set and is still not making mah-jongg, the player must discard a tile.

P. 54 - Rule 64. Add (iii): a discard may be claimed for mah-jongg regardless whether the hand is eXposed or Concealed.

P. 54 - Rule 66.b. This is a rule that some tournament organizers enforced before January 2013 when the NMJL issued a new rule: it is now permitted to put the taken discard into the hand just prior to exposing the hand for a win. Tournament rules are necessarily stricter than home rules, but now that the NMJL has issued a written rule, tournament organizers have to decide whether or not to continue using this rule.

Rule 66.e.

Q: I declared mah-jongg, exposing the whole hand at once without having made any prior exposures. But I arranged the tiles

incorrectly when exposing the hand. Can I rearrange them and collect my winnings, or did I screw it up?

A: You may rearrange your tiles and collect your winnings.

Source: 2019 newsletter

Rule 69.c.

Q: I declared mah-jongg, exposing the whole hand at once without having made any prior exposures. But I arranged the tiles incorrectly when exposing the hand. Can I rearrange them and collect my winnings, or did I screw it up?

A: You may rearrange your tiles and collect your winnings.

Source: 2019 newsletter

P. 57 - Rule 83. Add: An exposed set must include at least one natural tile (the called discard that initiated the exposure), since a discarded joker may never be claimed.

P. 58 - Rule 86.a. In January 2017, the League printed what appeared to be a change to the rule (that a joker redemption may occur anytime, not only on one's turn). But Larry Unger, the League President, confirmed to me that this was an unfortunately worded ruling (the rule is still that jokers may be redeemed only on one's turn).

P. 58 - Rule 86.a. The exposure must be complete when initially made with the discard. The player is not permitted to first expose only a pung, then redeem a joker in order to change the pung to a kong, before discarding. See exception to rule 60.f.

P. 58 - Rule 86.d. Wow, was I wrong when I said a player can just take a joker from another's rack. You should never touch someone else's tiles or rack. Total rewrite needed here. Also, the League added a new rule in 2023, and this is a good place to include that. New wording for 86.d.: "When redeeming the joker from another's rack, the player should hold out the natural tile and request the joker. The natural should not be placed on the discard floor in the process of making the exchange. If the natural touches the discard floor before the request for the joker is vocalized, the natural is considered discarded, and may not be exchanged."

P. 58 - Add rule 86.h. A discarded redeemable tile can only be taken to create a NEW set, for exposure or mah-jongg. (If for mah-jongg, a "set" can be as small as one, as described in rule 27.)

P. 58 - Rule 87 needs to point more directly to rule 107.

P. 59 - Rule 90.c. is wrong. If the wrong wall is used, game is thrown in. Note, though, that if someone made mah-jongg while the wrong wall was in use, the win is honored. Source: 1997 and 1999 bulletins.

P. 60, rule 92.b. Add that if any other player (other than the player at East's left) has wrong tile count at the end of the Charleston before East has discarded, the tiles are thrown in and redealt. Source: MJME2023 p. 17, rule 6.

P. 60 - Rule 93 needs splitting into two, with overall title: "Errors in picking."
New rule 93.a.: Per 2018 newsletter, error in picking from wrong end of the wall. If player picks from wrong end and racks, she is dead. If multiple people have picked from wrong end, hand is thrown in.
Existing rule 93 (picking ahead) should now be rule 93.b.

P. 61 - Rule 95.a. Add "or mah-jongg" to the end of the last sentence.

P. 61 - Rule 95.b. Add "or mah-jongg" to the end of the last sentence.

P. 61 - Add rule 95.d.: If the misnamed tile was wanted for exposure only (not for mah-jongg), but the error was not noticed until after the next player in turn had already picked and racked, closing the window of opportunity on the misnamed discard, then it's too bad for the player who wanted the tile for exposure. It was not only the misnamer who erred; every player who never bothered to look at the discard also erred, including the player who wanted the actual tile for exposure. It is every player's responsibility to keep her eyes open, not only her ears. No penalty to the misnamer; game continues.

P. 61 - Add rule 95.e.: If the misnamed tile was wanted for mah-jongg, but the error was not noticed until after the next player in turn had already picked and racked, closing the window of opportunity on the misnamed discard, the game cannot continue. The claimant wins, and the misnamer must pay four times the value of the hand to the player who wanted the tile for mah-jongg. No other players need pay. Deal and play the next hand.

P. 62 - Rule 98.a. Add: "If a player makes an exposure in the course of a mahj declaration and exposes no other tiles, the player may continue playing with the exposure remaining atop the rack."

P. 62 - Rule 98.b. The player making the erroneous mah-jongg declaration may be the first to realize that her hand is dead. Question: should she be permitted to call herself dead in this circumstance (this being an exception to rule 105)? This writer believes she should.

P. 62 - Rule 98.b.iv. Add 98.b.iv.1: In this instance, if another player had also claimed the discard for mah-jongg, she may have the tile. Add 98.b.iv.2: But if another player had also claimed the discard for mere exposure, the tile stays in the dead player's hand.

p. 63 - Change rule 100 to cover all "wrong wall" rules from MJME2023. The old rule 100 is moved to rule 101f., below. Change rule 100 as follows:

"100. Pushing out the wrong wall.

100a. If someone pushes out the wrong wall, and a tile is picked from that wall, the picker's hand is dead. Play continues on the wrong wall and then proceeds to the correct wall.

100b. If someone calls mah jongg while a wrong wall is in play, the winner collects from the player who pushed out the wrong wall (that player "pays for the party").

100c. If someone pushes out their wall before the previous wall was used up completely, AND someone picks from that newly pushed out wall, both players' hands are dead.

100d. The 2023 rulebook doesn't say what happens if nobody picks from the wrong wall, but it's reasonable to assume that the wrong wall can be put back."

P.63, rule 101c. Change to "Showing exposures that clearly indicate there is no hand that can be completed (as can be seen by discards and exposures)."

P.63, rule 101f. Change as follows:

"Picking ahead and playing out of turn are death penalty errors.

If the out-of-turn discard is wanted for mere exposure (not for mah-jongg), the call is honored (caller gets the discard) and game continues from caller.

If a player plays out of turn and discards another player's winning tile, discarder pays four times the value of the winner's hand (other players do not pay)."

P. 63, rule 101g. "A player may be declared dead for several reasons, as follows:..."

Delete sub rule g, "Peeking at the blind pass" (the League doesn't deem it a death penalty offense). Substitute "Picking from the wrong end of the wall, and racking the picked tile." (per January 2018 newsletter/bulletin)

P. 63. Add rule 101h. A player who redeems/exchanges a joker out of turn is dead. A joker may only be redeemed *after* acquiring a 14th tile in the hand, either by picking from the wall, or by calling and exposing a complete set (without that joker).

P. 64, rule 103. Change to: "If challenged for incorrect exposure, No Such Hand, Unwinnable, or Exposed Concealed Hand, the challenged player (challengee) has two possible choices of action:"

P. 64, add rule 103.c.: "If challenged for wrong tile count or rule violation, the challenge may not be refuted."

P. 64, rule 106. Add: "In the case of a Concealed hand, all exposures must be withdrawn."

P. 64, rule 107. MJME2023 adds a fine point about exposures that ought to indicate that the holder is dead, but it's not noticed and the player has not been called dead. It is legal to have redeemed a joker from that player's rack prior to the player's hand being called dead.

P. 65 - Rule 110. Once the wall tile has been lifted or moved in any way, the player may not change her mind and take the tile. Moving the tile commits her to taking the wall tile (see 2018 NMJL newsletter/bulletin).

P. 65 - Rule 111. The actual rule, direct from the NMJL: After claiming a discard, you can change your mind provided that you have not yet put the discard atop your rack or exposed tiles from your hand. Do either of those things and you're committed to taking the discard. Merely lifting the discard from the table does not commit you to taking the discard (this being a different case from picking from the wall).

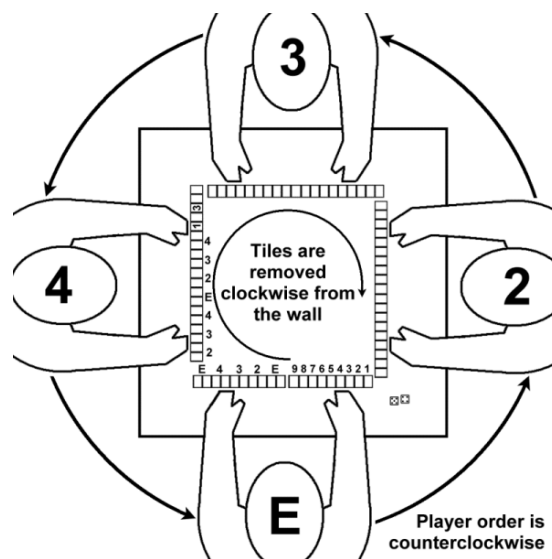
P. 65 - Rule 112. Add at the end of the rule: Question: If the player did make any exposures in the course of the erroneous mah-jongg declaration, may she put them back? New rule, MJME2023, p. 21 rule 3: If a player makes an exposure in the course of a mahj declaration and exposes no other tiles, the player may change the claim of mah jongg to a claim for exposure, and continue playing with the exposure remaining atop the rack. This is also stated in rule 98.a herein.

P. 65 - rule 116. In January 2017, the League changed the rule. Now the pivot changes seats after one round, not two.

P. 65 - rule 117. In January 2017, the League changed the rule. Now the dice go with the pivot. So now I no longer differ with the League on this rule.

P. 67 - rule 127. New rule, 2024: the League recognizes that some people play for cash (coins), and possibly for a limited purse ("Pie"). To make sure payment is fair, the League "recommends that all monies due are given to the declarer, in the event that one or more players may be Pie or short of the payment required. The declarer now gives half of all they have collected to the Bettor." (Source: NMJL FAQs, 2024.)

P. 70 - The line drawing in the middle of the page does not belong here. It's an unnecessary duplicate of the one on page 82. This image (below) is supposed to be there instead:



P. 88, bottom paragraph - Another instance that can close the window of opportunity: the next player might redeem a tile for a joker.

P. 91 - Joker redemption rule #1. "make an exposure" should read "make a complete exposure."

P. 93, bottom - Oops. Esther has to have bet on Betty, not Alice, in order to collect.

P. 97, 2nd para from bottom, 2nd sentence - Should read as follows: "Calling for a discard and picking it up are retractable actions, with no penalty." 3rd sentence should read as follows: "If she places a taken discard atop her rack or exposes any tiles from her hand, she commits to making the exposure."

P. 100 - Top of page (Taking a discard). The actual rule, direct from the NMJL: After claiming a discard, you can change your mind provided that you have not yet put the discard atop your rack or exposed tiles from your hand as part of the claim. Do either of those things and you're committed to taking the discard. Merely lifting the discard from the table does not commit you to taking the discard (this being a different case from picking from the wall).

P. 100 - 3rd paragraph (Winning). Should read as follows: A player can withdraw a spoken mah-jongg claim only if she has not yet exposed tiles from her hand or placed the taken discard atop her rack, and nobody else has made a fatal error pursuant to the vocal mah-jongg claim. Picking up a discard does not commit her to keeping it, as long as she has not touched it to the top of her rack.

P. 101, 1st paragraph. The tournament rule about being called dead for putting a taken discard into the hand is not enforceable in home games. In January 2013 the NMJL issued a rule that permits taking a discard into the hand just prior to exposing the hand for a win (rule 66.b.).

P. 101, 3rd paragraph. Change to: "If challenged for incorrect exposure, No Such Hand, Unwinnable, or Exposed Concealed Hand, the challengee must respond, either accepting or refuting the challenge. The challengee who denies the challenge does so without explaining what hand they are making. Then the game continues, either with or without that player, depending on the response to the challenge. If challenged for wrong tile count or rule violation, the challenge may not be refuted."

P. 101, paragraph 6 - Change "recommended that you" to "permitted to" (see 2005 NMJL bulletin, you cannot call yourself dead).

P. 106 - Although the photos show the tiles in the middle of the table as being face-down, discards are supposed to be face-up.

P. 110 - See reader email at bottom of this document.

P. 116, 4th bullet - The point of this paragraph is only that you shouldn't be in a panic to redeem that tile and do something silly or against the rules because you're worried somebody else might get it first. Certainly you are best advised to redeem that joker on your earliest opportunity. When you are ready for mah-jongg except for your redeemable tile, you should redeem it one turn ago! (^_^)

P. 116, bottom - Delete "It should be noted that this author disagrees with the NMJL permitting such a move." After further analysis (discussion with Ellen Roderick, 4/30/09 on Q&A BB) I've come to see the logic of the NMJL now.

P. 131 - Rule 17. Error: "(counterclockwise from)" should read "(clockwise from)."

P. 132 - Rule 23. A fifth hand structure needs to be added, as follows:

e. Nine single tiles comprising a Knitted Straight, plus a set and a pair.

P. 136 - Description of the kong promotion rule needs to include the info from page 170 about kong promotion.

P. 142 - Rule 75.d.iii and .iv - "Counterclockwise" should read "clockwise," and "clockwise" should read "counterclockwise." Same correction also on p. 172.

P. 142 - ERRORS & PENALTIES - Further clarification has been obtained from the WMO regarding the scale of penalties. This affects most of the rules on errors and penalties in the book.

P. 142 - Rule 77. The descriptions of the penalties should read as follows:

a. Minor foul - the first minor foul earns the player a warning from a judge or referee. Subsequent minor fouls incur a progressive penalty in the form of basic points deducted immediately from the player's basic score, as follows:

i. First foul: warning.

ii. Second foul: 5 points.

iii. Third foul: 10 points.

iv. Fourth foul: 20 points.

v. And doubling for each subsequent additional foul.

b. Erroneous exposure - forced discard of the exposed tile.

c. Major foul - any major foul results in the player's hand being declared dead, which is to say that the player continues playing but may not declare *hu* for the remainder of the current hand.

d. Super major foul - Loss of competitive rank; disqualification from the present and/or future tournaments.

P. 142 - Rule 79 should read: "Empty calling (changing one's mind about taking a discard for exposure, or speaking the call after exposing) constitutes a minor foul, to be penalized as described in 77.a. above."

P. 142 - Rule 80 should read: "Touching or viewing the wall tile before one's upper seat has discarded constitutes a minor foul, to be penalized as described in 77.a. above."

P. 143 - Rule 81 should read: "Putting a taken wall tile in the hand before one's upper seat has discarded constitutes a major foul, to be penalized as described in 77.c. above. If possible, the player should replace the taken tile; it may be retaken after the completion of the upper seat's turn, provided no other player calls the upper seat's discard."

P. 143 - Rule 82 should read: "Touching the tile on the wall commits the player to picking that tile; he may not change his mind and take the current discard instead. Doing so constitutes a major foul, to be penalized as described in 77.c. above. This rule was announced at the referees seminar at the World Mahjong Championship in E Mei Shan, Chengdu, in November 2007."

P. 143 - Rule 83 should read:

83. Timing.

- a. Declaring pung more than 3 seconds after a tile was discarded ("late pung call" constitutes a minor foul, to be penalized as described in 77.a. above.
- b. Drawing a tile too quickly (so that a player wishing to declare the current discard does not have time to do so) also constitutes a minor foul.

P. 143 - Rule 84.a. The following should be added to the end of the paragraph: "A hand is considered valid if the tile structure of the hand adheres to the permissible hand structures given in rule 23 above; for example, the hand consists of four proper sets and a pair, without any improperly constructed sets."

P. 143 - Rules 84.a. and 84.b. - The erroneous hand has been displayed. Now it must be returned to the upright/concealed position.

P. 143 - Rule 84.b. The following should be added to the end of the paragraph: "A hand is considered invalid if the tile structure of the hand doesn't adhere to the permissible hand structures given in rule 23 above; for example, the hand contains an improperly constructed set, such as F 2B 3B for instance."

P. 143 - Rule 84.d. Note that this rule is controversial, and some tournaments may not enforce it.

P. 144 - Rule 85.f. should be added, as follows:

- f. Failure to say "hua" or "kong" before taking the replacement tile constitutes a minor foul.

P. 145 - Rule 87 may possibly be a minor foul rather than a major foul.

P. 146 - Fan 4 (Nine Gates). See corrections about Nine Gates as described on page 177, below.

P. 149 - Fan 19 - Controversial ruling at referees seminar in Tianjin, 2006. When Seven Pairs is combined with All Green or All Terminals, Tile Hog may not be added. The EMA lodged an objection at the referees seminar in E Mei Shan in 2007, but until the rule is rescinded, that's the rule. (Also page 180.)

P. 150 - Fan 30.b. should read as follows: "Three chows in one suit, in which the first number of each chow is shifted up one number from the first number of the previous chow. May also be shifted up two numbers (the first number of each chow being shifted up two numbers from the first number of the previous chow)."

P. 151 - Fan 35 - Knitted Straight may not be combined with Edge Wait or Closed Wait, per rule added October 2006. (Also page 183.)

A controversial case would be the hand:

B14789 C258 D369 NN (waiting for 7B)

In this instance, 7B can complete either the knitted set 147 or the chow 789. It is not a "unique wait" exactly. Using the 7B to complete the chow to score Edge Wait is apparently permitted, whereas using it to complete the knitted set 147 apparently is not.

P. 152 - Fan 43 should have a comma after the phrase "honor pair" - the hand is waiting two ways (not the honor pair).

P. 152 - Fan 45.b. should read as follows: "Going out on the very last discard in the game."

P. 153 - Fan 51.b. should read as follows: "Three chows in three suits, in which the first tile of each chow is "shifted" up one number from the first tile of the previous chow."

P. 154 - Fan 58.b. should read as follows: "Winning on the 'case tile' (the last or fourth tile of its particular kind) when all players can plainly see, before the player wins on it, that the other three of its kind are present among the visible discards and/or melds."

P. 156 - Fan 73.c. should read as follows: "May not combine with Prevalent Wind or Seat Wind."

P. 170 - The description here of promoting a kong only when picking needs to be a rule. It should be a subrule under rule 50, on p. 136

P. 172, table - "Counterclockwise" should read "clockwise," and "clockwise" should read "counterclockwise." Also p. 142.

P. 176, chips - A good 5-color distribution would be:

Chip Value	Chip Count	Totals
100	2	200
50	3	150
10	10	100
5	8	40
1	10	10
		500

P. 177 - Fan 4 (Nine Gates). Short Straight, Pure Straight, and Two Concealed Pungs are permissible additions. Terminal Pung may not be added. This is per the referees seminar at the 2007 WMC in E Mei Shan. Additionally, the definition of Nine Gates should not specify "concealed pungs of both terminals" but rather "three of each terminal" to accommodate the possible inclusion of Pure Straight. Add after "(a nine-way wait)": "When completed, the hand can be formed as a standard 'four sets and a pair' configuration." (All foregoing corrections apply also to the entry about Nine Gates on page 146.) Lastly, the image of Nine Gates is incorrect in showing a space between the ones and the two, and between the eight and the nines.

P. 180 - Fan 19 - Controversial ruling at referees seminar in Tianjin, 2006. When Seven Pairs is combined with All Green or All Terminals, Tile Hog may not be added. The EMA lodged an objection at the referees seminar in E Mei Shan in 2007, but until the rule is rescinded, that's the rule. (Also page 149.)

P. 182 - Fan 30. should read as follows: "Three chows in one suit, in which the first number of each chow is shifted up one number from the first number of the previous chow. Or shifted up two numbers (the first number of each chow being shifted up two numbers from the first number of the previous chow)."

P. 183 - Fan 35 - Knitted Straight may not be combined with Edge Wait or Closed Wait, per rule added October 2006. (Also page 151.)

A controversial case would be the hand:

B14789 C258 D369 NN (waiting for 7B)

In this instance, 7B can complete either the knitted set 147 or the chow 789. It is not a "unique wait" exactly. Using the 7B to complete the chow to score Edge Wait is apparently permitted, whereas using it to complete the knitted set 147 apparently is not.

P. 185 - Fan 45 should read as follows: "Going out on the very last discard in the game."

P. 186 - Fan 51 should read as follows: "Three chows in three suits, in which the first tile of each chow is "shifted" up one number from the first tile of the previous chow. A very important pattern, much used by expert players."

P. 187 - Fan 58 should read as follows: "Winning on the 'case tile' (the last or fourth tile of its particular kind) when all players can plainly see, before the player wins on it, that the other three of its kind are present among the visible discards and/or melds."

P. 190 - Fan 73 should read as follows: "May not combine with Prevalent Wind or Seat Wind."

P. 193 - Combine-Once principle. Change "with no more than one set" to "with a set"

P. 199 - Reaching for the Wall, Touching Wall Too Early - The three paragraphs should be replaced by one short paragraph, as follows:

Touching the Wall Too Early

A player who touches, picks up, or views the wall tile before his upper seat has discarded has committed a minor foul; he must put the tile back. Taking the wall tile into his hand before his upper seat has discarded constitutes a major foul; he must put the tile back.

P. 199 - Late Call, Late Action - The first sentence should read as follows:

A player who wants to pung a discard must say so within 3 seconds from the time the tile is discarded; "late pung call" is a minor foul.

P. 199 - False Mahjong - The terms "valid hand" and "ready hand" need to be clarified, as follows: "A hand is considered valid or 'ready' if the tile structure of the hand adheres to the permissible hand structures given in rule 23 above; for example, the hand consists of four proper sets and a pair, without any improperly constructed sets."

P. 233 - Dealer - it should be explained here that sometimes people refer to the player sitting in the East seat as "dealer," but that this player does not distribute the tiles.

P. 235 - Finesse - A move in which a player is holding a redeemable tile in the hand, and uses it to redeem for a joker as the last winning move.

P. 236 - The glossary entry on Hop Toi should also include non-Easts taking 2 stacks (one stack from the end of one wall and the other stack from the beginning of the next wall).

P. 247 - Window of Opportunity - Other instances that can close the window of opportunity: the next player might redeem a tile for a joker, or might declare mah-jongg.

A reader letter from the Mah-Jongg Q&A Bulletin Board
(<http://www.sloperama.com/majexchange/bulletinbd.htm>):

The advice you gave in your book

>From: vze3cq4g

>Sent: Saturday, May 10, 2008 12:50 PM

>Subject: etiquette for novices

>Dear Mr. Sloper,

>A new player, I sent for your book *The Red Dragon and the West Wind*. It's very good; I doubt the official NMJL rulebook will add much to my understanding, but I'll send for it since you say so.

>

>My comment refers to page 110 of your book, where you imply that a newbie who struggles too long "with a jumble of disassociated tiles and an inscrutable card" is putting, as you uncharitably put it, winning over "just keeping up." And that when the experienced players at the table begin rolling their eyes and drumming their fingers, she has violated etiquette and should remember it isn't all about her, and just get on with things or she won't be invited back. If the new player pushed herself on them, naturally they will be irked when they find out she doesn't know how to play. But if they knew she was a newbie and invited her anyway, there is no excuse for their feelings. In either case, there is no excuse for their behavior. I wouldn't want to be invited back anyway.

>

>It would have been better if you advised the novice to find a real Mah Jongg class (senior and community centers are likely). Then round up other novices to play with every week so they can learn and progress together at their own pace, and not feel rushed and harassed to pass tiles before they understand what they're doing. That's no way to learn. Experienced players needing a fourth body at their table will just have to wait.

>LHF, in New Jersey

Hello L,

It's a good thought, and I thank you. I only wish it was that easy. And I fear that I've not stated my reasoning clearly enough.

In my experience (although each person's case is different and could vary considerably from my experience), it's easier to find experienced players than it is to find a mah-jongg class. And it's easier to find three experienced players than it is to gather three willing novices at one's own level.

It's also my experience that very few experienced players have the ability to teach, or the patience to deal with a slow novice player for more than one evening.

The people I play with, for example, are very nice - but they like the game to progress at a reasonable pace. If a new player joins even my nice group and she's so intent on winning that she can't maintain a reasonable pace, my nice friends won't want to play with her a second time. They might not say anything, and they certainly wouldn't drum their fingers. Okay, so they might roll their eyes after a few hours of slow playing. I guess what I'm saying is that a reasonable pace is normal to the game, regardless of the niceness of the players. To clarify, I have played with some fastfastfast players, and I don't enjoy such games. A reasonable pace is one that gives a player enough time to call a discard.

A player who starts off by taking her sweet time to think, in the company of other novices, will learn how to play slowly. Reasonably speedy play will take a long time to achieve in such a setting, in my opinion. And I fear that the novice group might lose interest in the game before the group reaches the level of reasonably-paced fun that most players find enjoyable.

So it's not my advice to suck it up and play with impatient and unkind experienced players, for the purpose of giving those other players a nice person to win coins from. The reason I advise novice players to sacrifice winning for harmony is not that she's violating the experienced players' etiquette - that's not my intent at all. I've seen many new players lose the chance for repeat play with nice people, and then to lose all interest in the game, due to their trying too hard to win, that's all.

My advice is to learn the game in a way that enables one to think "on her feet," an important ability in mah-jongg. Once the player has come up to speed, she'll enjoy the game and can then have the luxury of finding nice play companions.

I'm making a note, though, to add your suggestions to the book, assuming I get a chance to revise it for a second publishing run. And I'll try to state my point more charitably. (^_^) Mind you, I was that novice "with a jumble of disassociated tiles and an inscrutable card," struggling to win over "just keeping up" myself, once. I found that the game went more harmoniously if I just went along. And in fact, a player at the World Championship last autumn found herself intimidated by sitting at an actual table with live people. She'd been well accustomed to playing online, but found the experience of dealing with real tiles and real people discouraging. Another player and I gave her the same advice I did in my book - "don't worry about winning, just get comfortable at the table. The winning will come." And it did. She adapted and had a wonderful time. But now I'm rambling on far too long.

May the tiles be with you.
Tom Sloper
May 10, 2008