

Classic Chinese Mahjong (Oxenstierna version)

My parents (Christer and Carin Oxenstierna) bought a Mahjong game in Sweden sometime in the sixties. We used to play a lot; I have many happy memories of the family spending all evening gathered around the game. We used rules very close to “classic Chinese” mahjong. There are some differences, which I have noted at the end of this rulebook. I am not sure as to the origin of these differences. It is possible that my father added them, as he was an avid game player and was not unknown to “improve” rules. Certain recent additions have also been made by my brother and sister and their families.

There are numerous versions of mahjong, see for example the survey article in Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahjong>).

This rule book is based on the Wikipedia article cited above, the “classic Chinese” rules that came with a beautiful set I purchased in Hong Kong *circa* 2007, and the rules currently used in my family.

Equipment

Basic equipment: tiles, racks to hold the tiles, dice, wind markers to show who is dealer and which round is being played, and chips for scoring (optional).

There are three different simple tile suits numbered 1-9. They are bamboo, circles, and characters:



Circles Numbered 1 to 9



Characters Numbered 1 to 9



Bamboo Numbered 1 to 9

Honours

There are two different honour suits: Winds (north, east, south, and west) and dragons (red, green and white). They have no numerical sequence.



The East, South, West and North



The Red, Green, and White Dragons

Bonus tiles

There are 8 bonus tiles. Four flowers and four seasons (winter, spring, summer and autumn).



The four seasons (there is only one of each)



The four flowers (there is only one of each)

Choosing the first dealer

The dealer is chosen by placing the four wind markers (or one of each wind tile) face down and having each player randomly select one of the markers/tiles. East is dealer, the player to his/her right is South, across is West and to his/her left is North.

Prevailing Wind and Player's Own Wind

As noted above, each player is assigned a wind, with South always to the right of East. The dealer is always East. Wind markers are laid down in front of each player to show the players' winds. After each game the wind markers are rotated counterclockwise, unless East wins mahjong in which case they remain in place.

The "Prevailing Wind" is distinct from players' winds and must not be confused. It is always set to East when starting, then rotated counterclockwise with each game. Thus the prevailing wind will be South in the second game, West in the third, and North in the fourth, and again East in the fifth. The prevailing wind is always rotated, regardless who wins mahjong.

Wind position is significant in that it affects the scoring of the game. A Prevailing Wind marker can be used in addition to the players' wind markers; though I don't think we used one.

Dealing tiles

All tiles are placed face down and shuffled vigorously (all four hands thrown in and shuffled for a lengthy amount of time). Each player stacks a row of 18 tiles two tiles high in front of him (for a total of 36 tiles). "Honour points" are awarded the player who completes his/her wall first. Players push each side of their tiles together to form a square wall.

The dealer throws two dice. Counting counterclockwise starting with the dealer, a player's quarter of the wall is determined by the dice total. Using the same total on the dice, that player counts the stacks of tiles from right to left. The player places the tiles indicated by the dice total side by side on top of the stack to the right of the newly created "hole" in the wall, and says "puy". Starting with the pile to the left of the hole, the dealer deals four tiles at a time starting with himself and working counterclockwise until all players have 12 tiles. The dealer finally gives one tile to each player to make a 13-tile hand. The dealer takes one additional tile to start with 14 tiles.

Each player starting with the dealer now sets down any flowers or seasons they may have drawn and takes replacement piece(s) from the extra tiles previously placed on top of the wall. The player who previously counted out the starting place in the wall is responsible for replenishing the two extra tiles on top of the wall whenever none are left.

The dealer takes the next piece from the wall and adds it to his hand. Unless he/she completes a winning hand, he/she discards a piece by placing it in the space inside the walls. We kept good order among the discarded tiles, organizing them by suite and by number so it would be easy to keep track of which tiles had been discarded. In most other forms of mahjong the discarded tiles are not kept in any order, however.

Order of Play

Players take turn picking up either a tile from the wall or the tile just discarded by the previous player, and discarding either that one or another tile by placing it into the centre and announcing the tile out loud. Play continues this way until one player has a winning hand. At this point a player calls out mahjong and all players reveal their hands.

The player next in turn may choose to pick up the just discarded tile even if no combination is immediately formed. Note that in most other mahjong variants this is not allowed.

There are three ways in which this order of play can be interrupted: when a player needs the discarded tile to make a winning mahjong hand, form a pong, or form a kong. See further below.

When two or more players call for a discarded tile, a player taking the tile to win mahjong has precedence over all others, followed by *pong* or *kong* declarations. A tile cannot be called for to form a *chow*, only the player next in turn may pick it up creating a *chow*.

During play 13 tiles should always be maintained by each player, meaning in each turn a tile must be picked up and another discarded. Not included in the count of 13 tiles are flowers set to the side and the 4th added piece of a kong (mentioned below).

If the dealer wins the game, he will remain the dealer and an extra hand is played. The same occurs if there is no winner. The dealer position is significant in that he/she earns double the score.

The game ends if no one has achieved mahjong when only 13 tiles are left in the wall.

Winning Hand

A winning hand consists of 14 tiles (the 13 tiles in the hand plus a 14th tile picked up from the wall or stolen when a player discards a tile needed to complete a hand). A higher score is awarded for winning by picking a tile from the wall than from a just discarded tile.

The winning hand consists of 4 combinations (a specific pattern of 3 pieces) and an eye (a pair of two identical pieces). It is not allowed to go mahjong by completing a *chow* – the last tile must complete a pong or a pair.

There are special mahjong combinations in addition to the standard 4 pongs/kongs/chows plus a pair. They have special names and are awarded maximum (e.g. 800) points unless otherwise noted:

- *Heavenly blessing*: East wind makes mahjong immediately
- *Earthly blessing*: mahjong won with the first discarded tile
- *Three grand masters*: 3 dragon pongs/kongs + another pair
- *Four blessings*: 4 pongs/kongs with each of the 4 winds + another pair
- *Grand honours*: only dragons and winds
- *Thirteen miracles*: one tile of each 1 and 9 in each suite, each dragon and wind, plus a pair of one of these (1s, 9s, dragons, winds)
- *Heads & tails*: ones and nines only
- *Hidden treasure*: only hidden combinations
- *Grand waiting*: pongs in 1s and 9s, plus one tile from 2 through 8, all in the same suite. Mahjong can now be won with any other tile in the same suite (1 through 9)
- *Three small masters*: two dragon pong/kongs, one dragon pair, plus two other pongs/kongs/chows of any kind (earns three doublings)
- *Seven pairs*: the easiest and least noble of all the special hands (500 points)

When a player goes mahjong, he/she yells out “mahjong” and reveals the hand. This ends the game and scoring commences. If two or three players need the piece to win (rare) there are two ways to resolve the issue depending on agreed-upon table rules. Either the players compete to see who would have a better hand in terms of scoring; or the player closest to the discarder in order of turn wins the game. We used the latter rule.

When a player is one tile away from going mahjong, he/she must declare that he/she is “waiting.” We would additionally indicate this status by raising our wind marker against our rack. Sometimes, due to strategic considerations, a player may chose to step down from the “waiting” state. This must also be declared and the wind marker must be laid flat again.

Combinations

- **Pong** is a set of three identical tiles. For example:



A pong can be formed with any tile (except flowers as they are bonus tiles set to the side when drawn from the wall). The tiles must be identical (suits cannot be mixed). A pong can be formed in two ways:

- a) A hidden pong, formed when the player draws the third tile from the wall. A hidden pong is not revealed to other players
- b) An open pong, formed when another player discards the necessary tile. The player with the matching pair shouts out “pong” and lays down the combination face up in front of him/her. The turn is now the players’, who needs to discard another tile.

- **Kong** is a set of four identical tiles. For example:

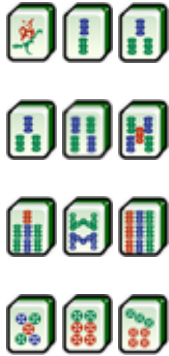


There are three ways to form a Kong:

- a) A hidden kong, formed when a player already has a hidden pong and draws the fourth matching tile from the wall. The player must reveal the hidden kong by announcing “kong” and laying it down. One of the tiles should be face-down to indicate it is hidden (extra points are awarded for hidden kongs).
- b) As above but the pong is open. All tiles should be face-up since this is considered an “open” kong for scoring purposes.
- c) An open kong, formed when a player has a hidden pong and another player discards the fourth tile. The player with the matching pong shouts out “kong” and lays down the kong. The turn is now the players’, who needs to discard another tile.

In any case, whenever a Kong is formed, an extra tile must be drawn (from the extra tiles on top of the wall) to maintain 13 tiles in the hand. The fourth tile of a Kong is not considered a part of the hand (only for scoring purposes as with flowers).

- **Chow** is a combination of three suited tiles in sequence. For example:



The *chow* must be in absolute numerical sequence, there is no skipping of numbers nor does 9 loop around to 1. The sequence must be in the same suit. Honours cannot be used to make chows nor flowers. Unless a player needs the tile to win mahjong, a player cannot steal a discard to form a chow unless no one else needs it, and only if the player who discards the piece is the player before them in turn.

- **Eye** also known as a pair, while not a combination (and thus cannot be declared, except if completing the pair completes the hand), is the final component to the standard hand. It consists of any two identical tiles. For example, this hand



The eye must be a pair of two identical tiles (same rank and suit). It cannot be stolen (called out) unless it is done to win the game (go mahjong).

Flower and Seasons

Whenever a player draws a flower or season, it is announced and then placed to the side (it is not considered a part of the hand but can earn bonus points) and a replacement tile is drawn from the extras (on top of the wall). This may happen twice or more times in a player's turn.

Flower and season tiles have numbers corresponding to winds:

- 1 – East
- 2 – South
- 3 – West
- 4 – North

This is important in the scoring system since extra points are awarded for flowers and seasons in the player's own wind.

Scoring System

The scoring system rewards players who collect certain types of combinations, in addition to winning mahjong. The person winning each game is not necessarily the person who will get the most points in that game. The overall winner of a match is the person who has collected the largest number of points in all the games combined.

Thus successful game strategy requires collecting combinations that earn the highest point values. The game is “esthetic” in the sense that certain tiles are deemed “nobler” than others – in particular winds, dragons, seasons, flowers, but also 1s and 9s. At the bottom of the point system are *chows*, since those are the easiest to collect and hence deemed the least noble.

At the end of each game, points are awarded as follows to all players (not just the person winning mahjong). First points are tabulated for each combination, then for each “doubling” the score is doubled. So if the point total is 40, the player earns 80 points if he/she has one doubling, 160 points if two doublings, etc. A high scoring game can earn the winning player 500 points or more.

Maximum score a player can earn in a single game is 800 points.

We wrote down points after each game to keep track and summed at the end of the evening to determine the overall winner. Chips or money (using a point conversion system) can be used as well.

Combination	Points	Doubling?
Chow	Zero	No
Pong – ordinary tiles - open	2	No
Pong – ordinary tiles - hidden	4	No
Pong – 1s or 9s – open	4	No
Pong – 1s or 9s – hidden	8	No
Pong – dragons or winds - open	4	1 doubling for dragons or own/prevaling wind
Pong – dragons or winds - hidden	8	1 doubling for dragons or own/prevaling wind
Kong – ordinary tiles – open	8	No
Kong – ordinary tiles – hidden	16	No
Kong – 1s or 9s - open	16	No
Kong – 1s or 9s – hidden	32	No

Kong – dragons or winds- open	16	1 doubling for dragons or own/prevailing wind
Kong – dragons or winds- hidden	32	1 doubling for dragons or own/prevailing wind
Pair – dragons or winds	2	No
Pair – players own wind or prevailing wind	2	No
Season or flower (other than own)	4	No
Flower or season – own	8	No
All flowers or seasons		3 doublings
Half suite (one suite only + dragons/winds)		1 doubling
Full suite (one suite only, or all dragons/winds)		3 doublings
Pong / kong hand (no <i>chows</i>)		1 doubling <i>if</i> player wins mahjong
Mahjong with open tile	20	
Mahjong with tile from the wall	20+2	
Mahjong with the last legal tile from the wall	20+10	
Mahjong by dealer (East wind)		1 doubling
Mahjong by “stealing the kong”, where another player could have formed a kong		1 doubling
<i>Heavenly blessing</i> : East wind makes mahjong immediately	800	
<i>Earthly blessing</i> : mahjong won with the first discarded tile	800	
<i>Three grand masters</i> : 3 dragon pongs/kongs + another pair	800	
<i>Four blessings</i> : 4 pongs/kongs with each of the 4 winds + another pair	800	
<i>Grand honours</i> : only dragons and winds	800	
<i>Thirteen miracles</i> : one tile of each 1 and 9 in each suite, each dragon and wind, plus a pair of one of these (1s, 9s, dragons, winds)	800	
<i>Heads & tails</i> : ones and nines only	800	
<i>Hidden treasure</i> : only hidden combinations	800	
<i>Grand waiting</i> : pongs in 1s and 9s, plus one tile from 2 through 8, all in the same suite. Mahjong can now be won with any other tile in the same suite (1 through 9)	800	
<i>Three small masters</i> : two dragon pong/kongs, one dragon pair, plus two other pongs/kongs/chows of any kind		3 doublings <i>if</i> player wins mahjong
<i>Seven pairs</i> : the easiest and least noble of all the special hands	500	
Mahjong with “worthless” hand (all <i>chows</i> , no flowers or seasons)	30	

Differences to Classic Chinese Rules

The “Oxenstierna” version differs from classic Chinese in a number of minor ways. I am not sure whether these differences were part of the rule book that came with the mahjong set my parents purchased in the 1960s (and thus represent some variant of classic Chinese) or whether my father made certain modifications. It is probably a combination – certainly some very minor modifications have also been made by the current generation in the family.

- A discarded tile can always be picked up by the player next in turn, even if the tile does not complete a combination that the player lays down. This is not allowed in classic Chinese or most other versions of mahjong
- A player cannot go mahjong by completing a *chow* in the Oxenstierna version
- The procedures for initial selection of the dealer and East winds are quite complex in classic Chinese. We simply pick the initial dealer/East wind at random, by picking wind markers laid face down on the table
- Doublings for half suite and full suite hands are earned by any player. In classic Chinese only the player winning mahjong wins these doublings