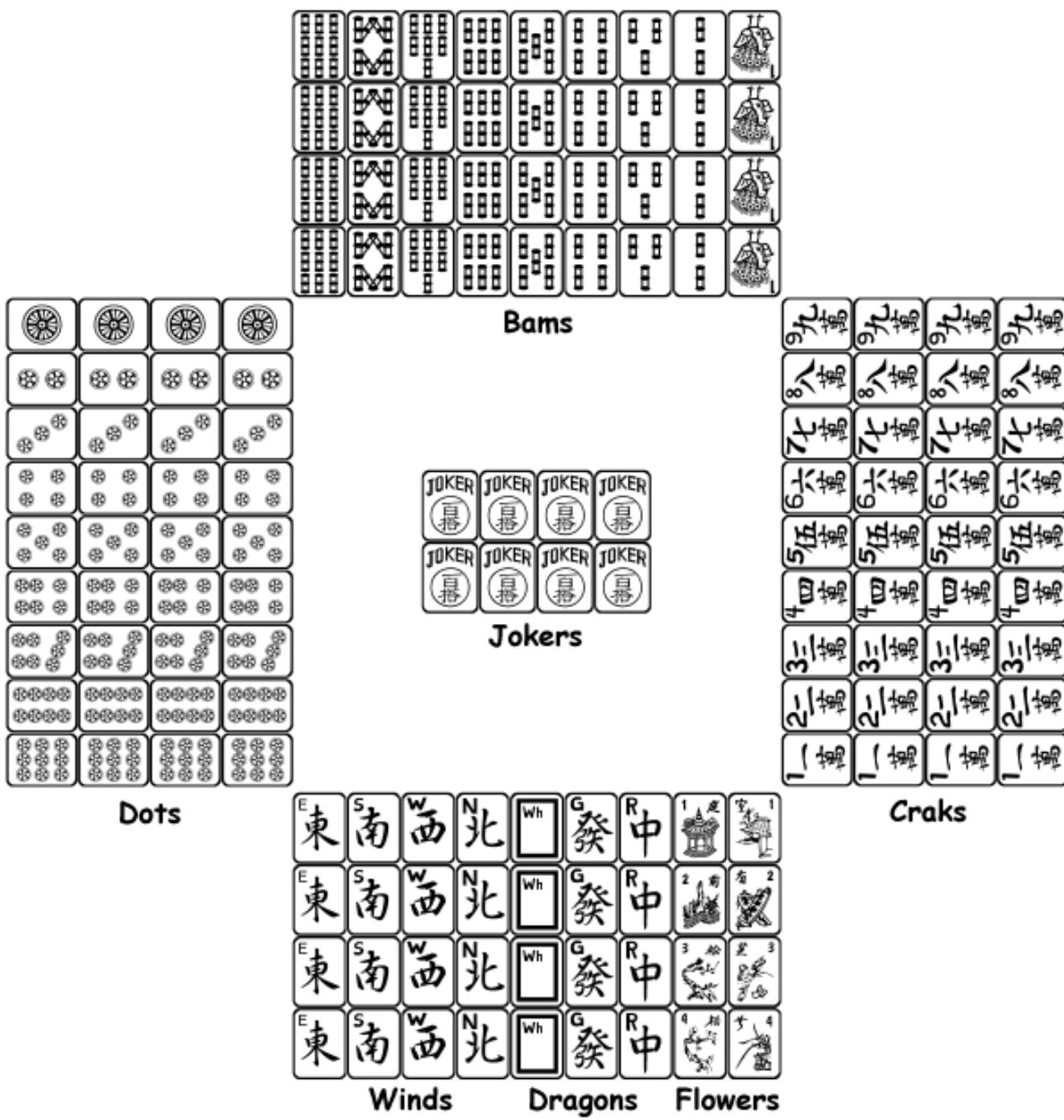


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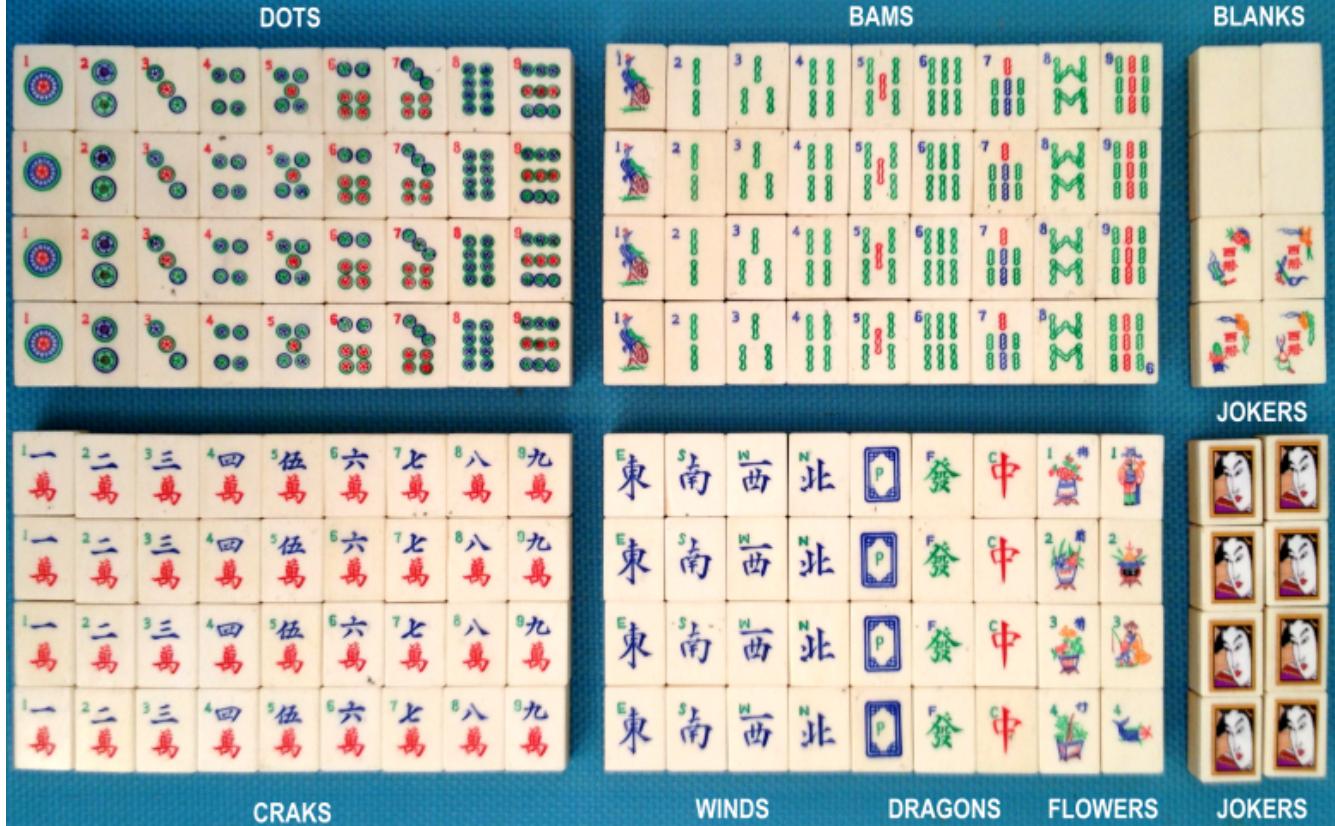
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FAQ 7e. Those Mysterious Special Tiles That Come in Some Mah-Jongg Sets

If you are reading this, you probably have some tiles that you aren't sure what they are. "Mystery tiles." I recommend laying out all your tiles in "the big square," like this:



Or you can lay them out like this:



Just laying them out, you'll identify "gaps" in your set, and you'll know that some of your mystery tiles have to be tiles that fill your gaps.

If you think you don't have any One Bams, then look for birds with the number 1 on them. Those are your One Bams. If you think you don't have any White Dragons, then look for blank tiles. Four of those are your White Dragons.

Once you have identified and arranged all the suit tiles and the winds and the dragons (and there don't seem to be any of those basic tiles missing), then your other mystery tiles are probably either flowers or jokers (or you may have both).

It is not unusual for sets to come with 16 or more flowers. Flower tiles might represent flowers, seasons, trades (occupations), virtues, historical scenes, games, or animals. Flower tiles might be marked with Arabic numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, or even 5. Or they might instead be marked with Chinese numerals 一, 二, 三, 四... or they might even be marked with Roman letters E, S, W, N ... or "SUM" "AUT" "WIN" "SPR."

Those who use flowers in the traditional Chinese way are already familiar with the fact that the 1 flower is the East seat flower, the 2 flower is the South seat flower, the 3 flower is the West seat flower, and the 4 flower is the North seat flower. Most of the time, our flower tiles just have numbers on them, but sometimes our flowers instead have season names on them (many times, but not always, numbers too) -- OR Roman wind letters. If you are playing and using flowers in the traditional Chinese way, you would see Roman wind letters as very convenient, and you would instinctively know why they are so marked.

If you have flower or season or animal tiles marked with numbers 1 through 4 or E,S,W,N, just call them all "flowers" and don't worry about it!

Or your "mystery tiles" might be other special tiles...

Most of the time, your "mystery tiles" are either FLOWERS or JOKERS. Sometimes they are just DRAGONS that look different from what you're used to. But there are also other kinds of special tiles. For example, Japanese sets come with "red fives" (*akago* or *akapai*) such as these:



Red fives are bonus tiles that double the score. Each red five contained in the winning hand counts as a "dora" (worth one fan). See [FAQ 4b](#) if you want to find websites that describe the Japanese rules.



Jokers come in a variety of styles. They can sometimes help determine a set's age.

Jokers are usually used as "wild tiles," a tile that can be used to represent any other tile in the set. This [Wikipedia discussion of jokers](#) in playing card games might prove helpful in understanding how to use jokers in a variant other than American mah-jongg. For information about the special requirements of joker usage in American/NMJL, see [FAQ 19](#). If you don't play American/NMJL rules, you can decide for yourself how to use jokers. Read [FAQ 14](#).

For the rest of this FAQ, it seemed best to simply share some questions & answers about "mystery tiles" that were asked and answered on [the Maj Exchange Q&A Bulletin Board](#):

Name: Tom Sloper
Date: 28 May 2001

Comments

Hello Peter van Oort, you emailed me:

>I've a question about the meaning of the character on my tiles It's about the Flower and Season I've scanned the tiles and I send them as .tif with this mail I hope you can give me an answer which one is the spring summer autumn and winter and which one is the plum, orchid, chrys and bamboo Maybe you can explain the characters on it

Peter, the tiles at the bottom are seasons, and the four tiles at the top are Singapore-style "animal" flowers.



Here's how Singapore "animal" flowers work:

Flowers are used the same way they're normally used in un-American forms of mah-jongg: they are exposed for bonus points (they are not used in the hand).

In Singapore, a variety of rules apply to the animal flowers.

According to one correspondent, an animal flower is scored the same as your own flower (the flower whose number matches your seat), 1 fan. And a matching animal pair (see Strauser & Evans' "capture" list below) is scored the same as having both of your own flowers: you collect \$2 immediately from all other players if you have both your own flowers, or a matching animal pair.

According to another correspondent, if anyone gets all four of the animal flowers, there's a 4-point bonus added after converting the fan to points.

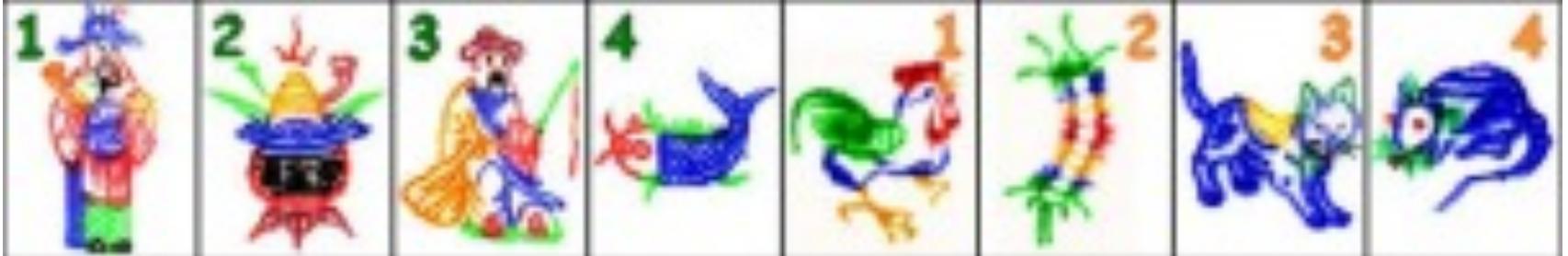
As described by Strauser & Evans ([see FAQ 3](#), some Australian/Western players give holders of animal flowers the ability to capture others. If your set has CAT and RAT flowers, then cat captures rat. Here's what captures what (each set varies; may contain different animal flowers):

- CAT captures RAT
- FISHERMAN captures FISH
- RICH MAN [Zhao Gong Ming] captures POT OF GOLD
- COCK captures WORM
- LIU HAI* captures THREE-LEGGED FROG*

This adds a bit of extra strategic play to the game. If you pick a RAT flower, and nobody has yet exposed a CAT flower, you are likely to keep it concealed in the hand as long as possible. If you have to expose it, it's possible that someone else will have the CAT flower and will expose it, capturing your RAT. Then he/she has two flowers, and you have none. It's also possible that the rat is in the dead wall. *Players of the American and Japanese games probably won't know what I'm talking about; American players don't use flowers the same way Asian players do, and Japanese players don't use flowers at all.* [Portion in red was not in original reply to Peter - was added to FAQ for the benefit of readers.]

Have fun! -- Tom

* New information added August 3, 2006, thanks to Dan Pasek of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who pointed out that these figures, Liu Hai and the Three-Legged Toad, are discussed in "Outlines of Chinese Symbolism & Art Motives" by Williams. See, it helps to be a scholar of Chinese history, literature, and mythology to decipher some flower tiles.



Animal flower tiles: Rich Man [Zhao Gong Ming], Pot Of Gold, Fisherman, Fish, Cock, Worm, Cat, Rat

Name: Tom Sloper

Date: 25 May 2001

Comments

Hello Mike Meulemans (vmmeule), you posted a "Sets Wanted" post (on our Sets Wanted board) and also a mah-jongg question:

>I would appreciate any information you have regarding these [Vietnamese] types of sets, the palying rules and where the sets can be purchased.

Mike, we recently had a thread about Vietnamese sets and rules. It was deleted to make room for more posts (old posts have to be cleared off after about 10 days or 2 weeks due to the volume of posts here), but here it is again.

= = = = =

The Vietnamese game uses a set of 160 tiles, broken down as follows:

- + The usual basic set of 136 tiles (bams, craks, dots, winds, dragons)
- + 16 flowers/seasons/whatever (call them all flowers or call them all seasons, I don't care what you call them -- they should all be numbered 1-4 (four 1s, four 2s, four 3s, four 4s.).
- + 8 special jokers (illustrated below).

I am giving here: my own names for these tiles -- then Alan Kwan's translations of the Chinese writing -- and lastly the actual Vietnamese names of the tiles, sent to me by Chuong Bui Van in 1998.



The 4 red-character jokers in the photo (in order, left to right):

- * Emperor -- almighty joker -- "To^?ng"
- * Lord of Bams -- bamboo joker -- "Soo.c"
- * Lord of Craks -- myriad joker -- "Ma`n"
- * Lord of Dots -- circle joker -- "Thu`ng"



The 4 blue-character jokers in the photo above:

- * Lord of Winds -- wind joker -- "Hy?"
- * Dragon Lady -- dragon joker -- "Nguye^n"
- * Big Flower -- double flower -- "Da.i Hoa"
- * General (joker that can represent any suit tile only) -- honor joker -- "Ha.p"

Bigtime thanks to Erik Roenholt for the picture, to Alan Kwan for the identification, and (some years after the fact) to Chuong Bui Van for the Vietnamese terminology.

So -- the next challenge is actually finding a set like this. If you don't make it to Vietnam much, or if you don't live in a big city with a large Vietnamese community, this may be difficult. So you could try what I do -- I have made one by taking two sets and applying labels to some of the tiles from the 2nd set. Then, of course, that leaves you with some extra parts, but those can be sold on eBay.

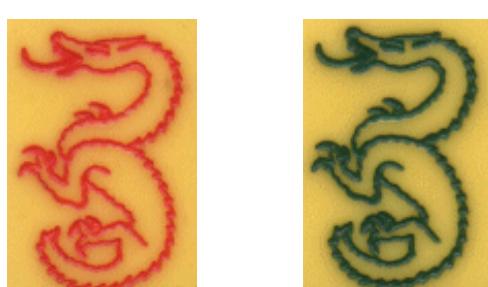
As for the rules of the game, I don't have many specific details. But from the information I've collected, I believe you play the classic Chinese game.

- Hold 13 tiles in the hand, go out on 14 tiles. (This info and the below info is from FAQ 2, Part II, collected from various contributors to the mahjong newsgroup over the years.)
- There are 19 ways of going Out. -- This number coincides with the number of special hands allowed in Chinese Classical. Therefore I believe that in order to qualify to go mah-jongg, the player MUST make one of the special hands (with all those jokers, this makes a lot of sense). Any good book on Chinese Classical or HKOS will list these 19 special hands. See FAQ 3 (link above left). Or find a good website in FAQ 4.
- Scoring is based on the 19 ways of going Out. -- In the absence of clearer info than that, use either classic Chinese scoring or Hong Kong scoring, as applies to the 19 special hands.
- Only the winner is paid. -- Unfortunately, I don't know what this implies in terms of who pays the winner. Perhaps all players pay regardless of who threw (dealer paying and collecting double) as is done in CC, or perhaps only the discarer pays (as is done in Japanese Modern), or perhaps the discarer pays double (as is done in American). Use whichever rule you prefer (and your other players agree).

You may use any rules you devise (the mah-jongg police will not arrest you). Be prepared to adapt to the rules of other players when playing at their table. Just be flexible (see my 3 rules on table rules at the bottom of FAQ 13 -- link is above left).

Hope this is enough to get you started! -- Tom

Red Dragons and Green Dragons come in lots of different styles:



I am often asked what the Chinese writing on mah-jongg tiles means. It's an FAQ! (^_^\n

Name: Tom Sloper

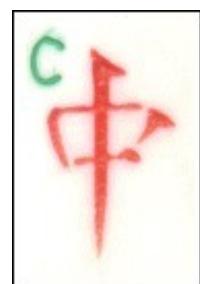
Date: 25 Nov 2001

Comments

Hello konderla (kabsi),

>I found in my ancient HOngkong Mah JOngg book that the red dragon is called CHUNG, the green dragon is called FAT and the white dragon is called PO. Can you tell me what that means in english?

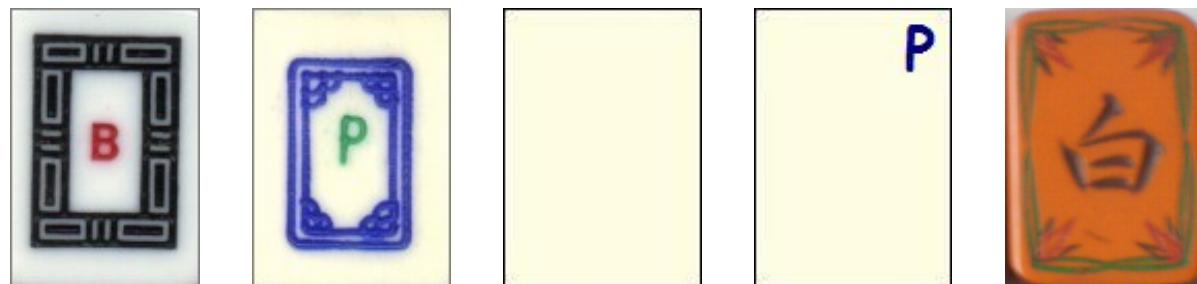
I think this might be covered in one of the FAQs, but here goes anyway.



Chung means "center." Some folks say "hung chung" which means "red center." This is why sometimes red dragons are marked with the letter "C." In Cantonese Jyut Ping (a system for writing Cantonese words for use by Westerners), it is written as "Hung4 Zung1."



Chinese can be Anglicized (Romanized) in many different ways, and there are many different Chinese dialects. So you are likely to see the translation of the Green Dragon character written in any of a number of different ways. "Fa choi." "Fart choy." "Chingfa." In Cantonese Jyut Ping, it is written Faat3 Coi4. "Fa choi" means "Get Rich." The character "fa" by itself means only "get" -- the Chinese automatically add "rich" in the mind, so that the connotation of "get" is therefore "get rich." Now you know why green dragons are sometimes marked with the letter "F."



Po means "white" or "blank." Some tiles come marked with a letter "B" or "P." Why "B" or "P"? In Mandarin Chinese, most people these days call the white dragon tile "bai" or "bai-ban" (sounds like "buy" or "buy bonds," er, I mean, "buy bon"), meaning "white" or "white board." In Cantonese, the white dragon is usually called "bok" or "bok bon" (as in "bok choy" which means "white vegetable"). In Cantonese Jyut Ping, "bok bon" is written as "Baak6 Baan2." In some parts of China, what we Westerners think of as "B" can be pronounced "B" or "P" depending on the word and the local dialect. Originally, white dragon tiles

were all blank. More on this below. The fifth tile at the right (thanks Chris W) is marked 白 - the Chinese character for "white." It looks somewhat similar to the Chinese character for "hundred," 百, but they are different characters, "hundred" having an extra stroke. In fact, the Unicode for 白 is 白 and for 百 is 百;

The Chinese character that is most frequently used on the Green Dragon (see image below) was the subject of a discussion at the mahjong newsgroup in June of 2001.



In a footnote at [FAQ 7b](#) I state:

"The Chinese writing on the green dragon is pronounced *fah*t and means fortune. The Chinese do not call this tile a "dragon"--only we Westerners call them that. See FAQ 6 for more on the variety of names people call these tiles by."

On 19 Jun 2001 Kevin Gowen commented on the mahjong newsgroup:

```
>>I was reading the FAQs today when I noticed the [above] in the
>>"Tom's Footnotes" section of FAQ 7b.
>>
>>This character has the meaning of "to shoot out" or "send forth". For
>>example, combining this character with the character meaning "sound"
>>gives the word "fayin" in Mandarin ("hatsuon" in Japanese), meaning
>>pronounce/pronunciation. I've never seen the meaning of "fortune"
>>attributed to this character.
```

My response:

I make no pretense of being able to read Chinese myself. My two main sources for this interpretation of the character are mah-jongg authors David Li and Cofa Tsui. See FAQ 6, the "Rosetta Stone."

As for the Japanese meaning of the character, I have anecdotal learning from my mah-jongg playing. It appears that this character is the one that's used in the term "ippatsu," which I've been told can be interpreted as "one hit" or "one shot." (When you declare reach, if you manage to win within one turn around the table, you have "hit it" in your "one shot" at doing so.) So that would seem to be consistent with the meaning "to shoot out."

But I've interrupted Kevin, who also wrote:

```
>>It is interesting to note that the version of "fa"(pinyin)/"hatsu"
>>(Japanese) used on the green dragon tile is the classical version,
>>still used where classical Chinese is written; Japan and mainland
>>China have simplified this character in unique ways.
```

Alan Kwan, a trilingual (English, Cantonese, Japanese) mah-jongg scholar in Hong Kong, added his remarks on June 19, 2001:

>It gets that meaning when joined with the character for "wealth" to
>make the compound which means "get rich". The compound with the
>character for "arrival/reach" also has a similar meaning.

>
>Chinese is a very complicated language; each character may have a
>large number of different meanings, including both literal ones and
>implicit, subtle ones. In the case of mahjong, we're lucky if the
>correct character is still known; it would be hard to determine which
>shade of meaning a character is supposed to take on in this context.
>I myself don't have any take on this one.

So the question "What does the Chinese writing on mah-jongg tiles mean?" can be a complicated one!

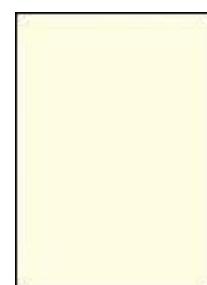


Above: "red dragon" (left) and "green dragon" (right). I put those in quotes because the Chinese do not call these tiles dragons (as one can see in **FAQ 6**, the Mahjong Rosetta Stone FAQ).

Note that the characters are (L to R): "leung" (pronounced "loong"), meaning Dragon, Emperor, an emblem for China -- and "feng" (pronounced "fung"), meaning Phoenix, Empress, Prosperity. The leung and feng dragon tiles were sometimes used in earlier sets, up through the 1920's.

Q: "What is the deal with these blank tiles?"

A: If your set has blank tiles, the blanks are either white dragons, or the blanks are extra tiles which you can use as replacements or jokers. Some sets' white dragons have a black rectangular design, or a black-outline picture of a dragon. If the set does not have such tiles, *and* it has blanks, then four of the blanks are your white dragons.



If your set has **extra** blank tiles, it is a good idea to swap the spares with the white dragons every now and then, and use them in play. If you don't, and you eventually must use a spare, you don't want it to look too obviously new and unused.

Originally, white dragons were blank tiles. That was fine when tiles were made with bone on one side and bamboo on the other, but it caused a problem when tiles were made of plastic (without a differently colored back). People were always turning the tile over to see what was on the other side (revealing to others that the tile was a white dragon). So a rectangular design was added. *[Added Nov. 24, 2004]* American players thought the blank tile looked like a bar of soap, so they call this tile "soap" to this day.

Comments

Hello joe alvarez (munchkin_alvarez), you emailed me:

>what are the other four flowers in mahjonng season tiles ?

I guess that depends on which four you mean by "other" (do you mean the flowers or the seasons?). The four seasons are Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter. Unless you mean Plum, Orchid, Chrysanthemum, Bamboo (the usual four flowers).

Or do you have a set that comes with Singapore-style flower tiles? Old Man, Pot of Gold, Cat, and Rat. Or Fisherman, Fish, Cock, and Worm. *See above in this FAQ (scroll up).*

Have fun! - Tom

Name: Tom Sloper

Date: 04 Jan 2002

Comments

Hello Joe (munchkin_alvarez), you emailed me:

>woops, sorry . I should have been more pecific i know the four flowers (plum, orchid, etc.) but, which flowers are presenting the seasons in the chinese type sets?

Joe, the images on the flower tiles vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, and sometimes from set types of one manufacturer. I imagine that the depictions of the flowers are just whatever the artist renders.

And they might not be flowers at all, of course (or they might not be seasons either, for that matter). We just call them "flowers" or "seasons" according to our whim.

I just took a quick peek at the season tiles from two random tile sets (one from Hong Kong and the other from Taiwan); the Winter flower (for example) of the HK set bears no resemblance whatsoever to the Winter flower of the Taiwanese set.

You would have to provide a photo of your specific season tiles to someone who is conversant with flowers; then that person might be able to identify your flowers for you. And whatever real-life flowers might be represented on your season tiles would not necessarily correspond to the flowers represented on someone else's set.

Tom



Season tiles from a Taiwanese set in my collection.



Season tiles from a Hong Kong set.

See? No correlation between the flowers on the two. And what do I know of flowers anyway? I'm no gardener! (^_^)

Name: Tom Sloper

Date: 21 Jan 2002

Comments

Hello karole couture, you emailed me pictures of your two mystery tiles and wrote:

>The alligator you say is common ...

It's not an alligator, I tell you! It's a dragon! (^_~) And I didn't say it was common. I'm not saying it's UNcommon either.

>...but have not seen the china man with the letter j.

OK. But since it's not a dragon, not a wind, not a flower, and not a suit tile, then what's left? Jokers.

Coincidentally enough, this one is (as you said) marked with the letter J. There is no question what this tile is.



We must not allow ourselves to be confused by the wonderful variety of mah-jongg sets - we should instead EMBRACE the wonderful variety, and enjoy it! I refer you again to the series of columns I'm writing for the AMJA newsletter. <http://www.amja.net>.

>LMK what you think about the vintage of this set.

It's not from the 1930s, IMO. The NMJL introduced jokers in the 1960s. But I suppose it's possible that the notion of jokers was already in use in mah-jongg prior to that time. But most likely it's from after the introduction of jokers by the NMJL.

>Seems like we have 151 pcs ...

Even more reason to assume that the set is considerably newer than the 1930s, then.

>... and missing one pc.

See our "Tiles Wanted" and "Tiles For Sale" bulletin boards. Read the text at the top before you post (there are several sources for replacement tiles).

>No markings on the set as of a manufacturer.

Yeah. It's a mystery to me why manufacturers don't put their names on their products. It used to be the standard practice but it isn't anymore.

Name: Tom Sloper

Date: 18 Feb 2002

Comments

Hello betjoe926, you emailed me:

>about the men on the flower tiles what year did they go from men to flowers on the flower tiles?
betjoe, like I wrote to you (on the bulletin board) on Feb. 10:

>>You are assuming that "little men" were "the norm" at a specific period, with specific beginning and ending dates. That ain't the case.

betjoe, I don't know where you got the idea that "men" CHANGED TO "flowers" but that idea is erroneous.

Some flower tiles depict men.

Some flower tiles depict flowers.

Some flower tiles depict animals.

Some flower tiles depict musical instruments, games, boats, pagodas...

Flower tiles depicting men were made as early as the 1900s-1920s, and flower tiles depicting men, animals, boats, etc. are still made today. There was never a period in between, during which flower tiles

depicting men were "discontinued."
I say again: your question is based on an erroneous assumption. I hope this satisfies your mah-jongg group.
When you have another mah-jongg question, please post it on [the mah-jongg Q&A bulletin board](#).
Tom

Name: Tom Sloper
Date: 13 Aug 2002

Comments

Hello Kate Cohn (k8_cohn), you emailed me:

>I have a question about a ring I recently bought to give to some one... I was told that it was a bonus tile, or joker, but I am unsure of the meaning of the characters. I have attached a picture (if it works). I was traveling when you emailed me, and I didn't have a program that could handle a .PSF file.



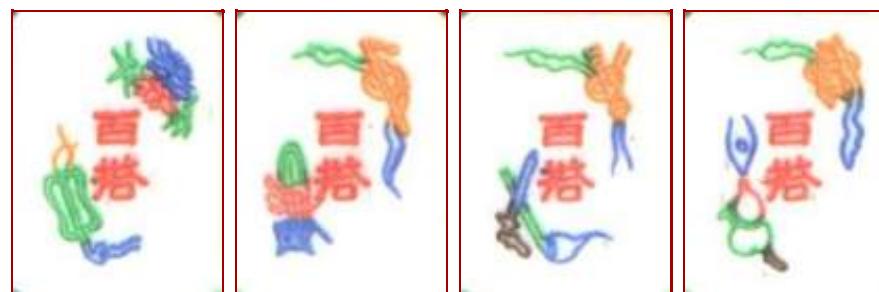
This is a Chinese joker tile. I wrote about these in my article on jokers for the AMJA newsletter (<http://www.amja.net>). The Chinese writing on the tile means "100 uses."

>Do you have any suggestions?

Next time you send someone a picture, it should be JPG format rather than PSF! (^_^)

Tom

6/24/04 Update. These Chinese jokers usually come in fours, with each one having different corner decoration:



Typical "100 Uses" tiles. The different corner decorations have no significance in play.

10/27/2012 Update. The writing on the Chinese joker tiles, 百搭, is pronounced "bǎidā." nciku.com translates "baida" as "joker." (Thanks to Ray H for the tip.)

Name: Tom Sloper
Date: 03 Sep 2002

Comments

Hello Chuck Longstreth in Duluth, MN (kxj), you emailed me:

>Hi Tom - I have a question about the type of characters used on the

>Wans.

>Is the type of character used to indicate the '10,000' a sign of the

>age of the set?

>(i.e. the more simple vs. the more elaborate)

No. It cannot be used as a definitive guide.



Most early (1920s) sets used the simpler-style crak character. But not all.



Most modern (1970s to date) sets use the more elaborate-style crak character. But not all.

>Or is it just a matter of how fussy the engraver wanted to be?

For some engravers, perhaps. I'm sure there also other factors behind the choice of which kind of crak to use.

Tom

Name: Tom Sloper

Date: 06 Oct 2002

Comments

Hello Eric Stott, you wrote:

>My set has five numbered flowers and five numbered seasons. All the books and directions I've looked at tell how to use these in sequences of four. Why five?

Since you've seen different books and other descriptions of mah-jongg rules, you will understand the "un-American" concept that the numbers on the flower tiles have significance. (The reason I call that "un-American" is that in modern American mah-jongg, the numbers on flowers are meaningless.) The number on the flower matches one player at the table. Mah-Jongg is usually played with 4 players, thus the flowers usually are numbered 1-4. With me so far?

Well, back in the 1930s or so, before the NMJL decreed flowers as wild (beginning the meaninglessness of flower numbers), when 5 people wanted to play mah-jongg together, the 5th player (who would sit out) had to have his/her own rack (since back then players used the chips stacked up on the left side of the rack). And I guess there was a way that the 5th flower tile could be used too, but I haven't yet come across a detailed description of that.



Folks probably played Chinese Classical, or an Americanized version of it, thus the number on the flower only scores points for the player holding his own flower ("seat flower"). So unless the 5th player was able to score points even while sitting out, or unless the 5th player doesn't sit out, it's difficult to figure out exactly how a #5 flower would work.

If anybody has a writeup showing how the 5th flower was used, please let us know! (Maybe it's even in one of my old books - if it's in a book, let us know that, and I probably have the book.)

For pictures of special tiles used exclusively in antique mah-jongg sets, see [FAQ 11](#).

For more about the symbolism of mah-jongg, see [FAQ 18](#).

Tom

Date: Thu, 28 Oct 2004 00:52:15 -0400

From: G [nethippie]

Subject: Mahjongg set tile identification

>Attached is a scan I made of two types of tiles I can't identify. I'm trying to determine if this set I just acquired is complete or not.

Hello, G for George. Read FAQs 7a, 7b, and 7e.

>All of the three suits, the winds, and the dragons are accounted for. There are two blank tiles, >3 sets of the tiles in the upper row of the picture, and 4 sets of the tiles in the lower row of the picture. There are no tiles marked "joker." Total of my count for all tiles present is 166, which seems to be the right number.

Right number for what? (^_^) See FAQ 2b.

>I know for sure that it's an older set, as there is a rule card from the American Mah Jongg league from the 1963-1964 year. Manufacturer of the set is "Cardinal Products Company."

> Any info you might have on this set would be appreciated.

> Thanks!

> George



Flower tiles

Please ask me specific questions after you read those FAQs. I don't do well with these "any info" type of questions (I can't write you an entire book). Always a good idea to read the FAQs before asking a question - I promise you I'll make sure you get your exact answer, but the FAQs are always the place to start.

Tom Sloper

tomster@sloperama.com

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

Oct. 27, 2004



These tiles are used in Malaysian mah-jongg. From left to right: **White Dragon**, **Fly** (joker), **Face** (flower tiles).

For more about how these tiles are used in Malaysian mah-jongg, [click here](#).

In December 2012 there was a [bulletin board](#) discussion about another tile from that part of the world: reader Stefan L. sent this picture of a tile in a set he purchased in Singapore.



Stefan added, "In addition to the normal Chinese tiles there are also animal tiles, fly tiles, face tiles and blanks. But there are also four more tiles thrown in. They have the characters 聽用 (simplified 听用)." The post prompted an exchange with noted mah-jongg scholar Michael Stanwick.

>From: Michael Stanwick

>Sent: Sunday, December 9, 2012 10:34 AM

>In my article in The Playing-card Volume 37, Number 1, I document the use of this tile as it appears in the 1941 edition of the book titled "Maque de jingyan yu jiqiao" (Maque's Experiences and Skills) by Liu Yishu. According to Liu " we have "Multipurpose" tile ting yong, engraving two characters "ting yong" on a blank tile, means this tile can act as any of the 'Cash', 'Strings', 'Myriads', 'Directions', or 'Center', 'Fortune', 'Blank'.

>In case your reader has not read my articles on the game set of maque, these tiles are, respectively, in common parlance, 'Circles' or 'Dots', 'Bamboos', 'Cracks or 'Characters', North, South, East, West and 'Red Dragon', 'Green Dragon' and 'White Dragon'.

>... soon you will be able to read all my articles, plus view research books and papers plus view Chinese money suited playing cards and many types of MJ sets on my web site.

>For the time being however, the presence of these eight jokers is in accord with a type of MJ called Changsha's Wang Ma Que or Changsha's Kings MJ. It has eight wang tiles that are what we call Inner Flowers and these Inner Flowers function as substitutes for the particular target groups, be it the Suits or the Directions or the 'Dragons' or combinations of these.

>There is a variant of this game in Vietnam which sports similar tiles for similar functions to these tiles in Wang Maque. This was reported to me by Thierry Depaulis and he suggested that this type of Wang game is a southern variant. If this is the case then perhaps we are dealing with another version of the tile set used to play a version of this southern variant?

>For further information I would urge your reader to obtain a copy of my article from Playing-card journal from the i-p-c-s.org website.

>Best Regards

>Michael



Michael,

I look forward to seeing your website. I'm guessing from what you're saying that the Fly tile and the Ting Yong tile may be different types of jokers, akin to the different joker types in Vietnamese mah-jongg.

>From: Michael Stanwick

>Sent: Monday, December 10, 2012 4:37 AM

>Subject: mystery tile part 5

>Hello Tom. Yes. It may be that the different types of jokers are Inner Flowers that are used as substitutes for the tile groups that are used to form melds for scoring purposes. Because they are Inner Flowers they are concealed in the player's hand, as opposed to Outer Flowers that are exposed upon acquisition.

>So one group of jokers, say for example the face tiles, might serve as substitutes for the Suit tiles, whereas the fly tiles, for example, might serve as substitutes for the Directions and Dragons and the ting yongs might serve as a substitutes for the three Suits, Directions and Dragons.

>This is one probable explanation based on the similar set of Changsha Wang ma Que and the Vietnamese tile set.

>Regards

>Michael

My Vietnamese mystery tiles, part 2

>From: "Darren

>Sent: Thursday, March 5, 2009 3:04:34 PM

>Subject: RE: Mah-Jongg Q+A

>Thanks Tom,

> I didn't see these mystery tiles in **FAQ 7e**, so here is a picture of them.

>Thanks,

>Darren



Hi Darren,

Sorry, I misspoke earlier. Turns out I didn't have photos of this type of tile in FAQ 7e (until now). But compare that photo with this photo from **FAQ 7b**:



I call your tiles the "kings & queens." They're a common feature of Vietnamese sets. They're used just like extra flowers (which is why they're numbered the same way flowers are).

Tom Sloper

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on mah-jongg East & West.

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

March 5, 2009

>Date: Fri, 30 Sep 2005 15:48:15 -0500

>From: Adam

>Subject: Special Unknown TIles

>I recently purchased a mahjong set with 168 acrylic tiles. 24 of the tiles were blank (though 4 seemed to have been digitally printed with images of flowers) Of the remaining 144 tiles there are a complete 136 suits and honors, but no season or flower tiles. However, there are eight tiles in their place. I have attached a JPG of these tiles. There are four tiles matching each of the two tiles in the image. 4 tiles with the Chinese character "Ruler" in orange, and four with a four-point star pattern with a rhinestone (!) embedded in the center.



>I have other info: The plastic trays are stamped with the Nintendo logo, so I assume they are the manufacturer (though I can find no information on the web regarding this)

>Any helpful ideas an how these tiles might be used?

>Cheers,

>Adam

>PS - through examination I have found

>The set uses only two inks: Black and red, and the tiles all seem to have been created from molds rather than stamped as they are completely identical without variance in detail between identical tiles. Except for: The 4 white dragons (simple black double border), the Rulers, and the Stars, Which all seem to have been engraved by hand, which leads me to believe that this set was customized with these tiles as well as the digital flower tiles (which would explain the use of the orange ink which is out of place). There were some cheap stickers on the blank tiles, so am assuming this set was customized to play NMJL games, but that still doesn't explain these 8 tiles. Is there anything more info you can offer? It's more of a curiosity than anything, since I collect out of the ordinary sets. Thanks!

Hello Adam,

Very interesting out-of-the-ordinary set you have there! Nintendo sets are not common here in the U.S. I have one, but mine is a normal Japanese set. Nintendo, of course, used to make all sorts of game supplies before they got into video games in the 1980s.

You didn't mention if your set has Western indices on it or not. I assume not, since as far as I know Nintendo made stuff for sale within Japan only. Which makes it odd that it would have been adapted for play by NMJL players, since Americans can rarely read the Chinese characters on the craks and winds.

You also didn't say if your set includes the original paper materials that usually came with the set. The writing on the orange tile says "white king" (or white "ruler" as you say). Presumably, it could be used as a joker. And the star tile too, I suppose. The real mystery is why the set has so many blanks. There's no mystery why the set has only 4 manufactured flowers (see FAQ 7a). And a minor mystery is what the heck you mean when you say the 4 other flower tiles are "digitally printed" - I guess you mean somebody put home computer-printed stickers on them.

I'm going to add your picture to FAQ 7e. Maybe somebody will know more and will write me.

Tom Sloper (湯姆スローパー)

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

September 30, Year of the Rooster

>Date: Fri, 30 Sep 2005 18:27:53 -0500

>From: Adam

>Subject: Re: Special Unknown TIles

>Thanks for the info - you are correct, no Western indeces. The four flowers I mentioned are not typical engraved tiles - the flowers are actually digitally printed directly onto the tile.



>The ink on the fourth one was covered up by a sticker and came off when the sticker did. I have been trying as delicately as possible to remove the stickers from the remaining tiles. The fourth tile in the picture is a stickered tile to show you what I mean - it is not a tile-sized sticker; the sticker is just a glitter heart shape itself. The first three are the flower tiles I mentioned - those pictures have been digitally (I think inkjet) printed onto the acrylic. As of now there are six true blanks, and 14 what I assume are blanks with the glittery heart stickers. The center compartment of the case, which I assume was for chips or sticks, is filled with these tiles that I guess were added to the original 144 from other sets. Maybe?

>Cheers,

>Adam

Hi Adam,

The thing that confused me is when you used the word "digital." Digital printing is a very recent invention, so when you say something is digitally printed, I have to assume we're talking about something made very recently (since the early 1990s at the earliest).

The practice of adding flower graphics or even heart stickers most definitely bolsters your theory that the set was modified to play the NMJL game. You said the set had 8 extra (decal or sticker) flowers? Besides the 4 that came with the Nintendo set originally? For a total of 12 flower tiles in the set? And no joker stickers? If so, that would mean that the modification to NMJL would have occurred about 1943 (during the war against Japan).

Oh wait, I just re-read your email. There are 14 heart-sticker flowers, and 4 printed flowers, and 4 manufactured flowers, for a total of 22 flowers (and no jokers). That would place the modification at 1956-57. And that makes more sense.

But I assure you, digital printing most definitely did not exist in the fifties, so if you're sticking with the "digital" thing, then there really is a mystery. (I think you're wrong about them being digitally printed.)

Tom Sloper (湯姆スローパー)

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

September 30, Year of the Rooster

Nintendo, part 3

>From: Dale

>Sent: Monday, October 26, 2009 9:47 AM

>Subject: Mah-Jongg Q+A

>My mah-jongg question or comment is: I was just reading you FAQ 7e and saw your discussion on Nintendo sets. I just wanted you to know that the first set I purchased was in 1974 was a Nintendo set which I still have, was from a Korean gift shop on Olympic Blvd. in Los Angeles. This set has Western indices on it, so Nintendo did make sets with them. I just thought you would like to know.

>Have a great day!

>Dale



Okay, thanks Dale!

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

October 26, 2009

I am occasionally asked what the Chinese writing on flowers and seasons means. This photo is courtesy of Colin Bisasky, who asked this very question in early January 2006. I added the text. "Mum" is short for "Chrysanthemum" (I would have had to make the writing much smaller to fit such a long word).



Not every set uses the same Chinese writing on its flower tiles. The flowers, although usually these same four flowers, are not necessarily numbered in this order. But the seasons are always numbered in this order. East corresponds to Spring, South corresponds to Summer, West corresponds to Autumn, and North corresponds to Winter. The wind is said to come from the indicated direction in the indicated season.

Another sort of flower tiles



Photo courtesy Stella Pethick, February 2008

TOP ROW: I honestly don't know what the pictures are supposed to represent*. The red 2 looks like a

gong or drum - the red 4 is, of course, a flower. I don't read Chinese myself, but I know a website that's very good for identifying Chinese characters. You can try it yourself too. At <http://www.zhongwen.com/> you can look up characters by stroke count, which is the only one of several options Zhongwen offers that you and I can actually make use of. Guoyu (<http://140.111.34.46/newDict/dict/index.html>) can also be useful, but it's much harder to use so let's forget that one and stick with Zhongwen.

*Update, May 2015 - Ray Heaton has provided information about these tiles; keep on reading.

1. The first character (the #1 tile) is "yī" (pronounced "ee") and it means "one." Easy.
2. Five brushstrokes, says Edwin Phua. 年 is pronounced as "nián," meaning "year."
3. 四 - If you're familiar with mah-jongg, you know this one means "four." The Chinese pronunciation is "sì."
4. I count eight strokes. On Zhongwen I start looking for eight. I found it about halfway down on the right side. It's pronounced jì and Zhongwen seems to be saying that it has to do with seasons of the year. I looked it up in my Japanese book and in Japanese this same character does indeed mean "season."

So the writing across the four red-numbered flower tiles says "yì nián sì jì" ("yi" is pronounced as fourth tone here, says Edwin Phua) - "one year, four seasons."

BOTTOM ROW:

Sometimes these old flower tiles have writing that isn't used any more in China. The second row's characters are more complex and I couldn't find any of them on Zhongwen. Edwin Phua says these tiles depict the Four Arts of the Chinese Scholar [see [Wikipedia](#)]: 琴棋书画 ("qín qí shū huà"), representing zither, board game (go/weiqi), calligraphy, and painting.

But you can still just call them all "flower," of course.

Mystery tiles

>From: Donna <puffins
>Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2015 10:50 AM
>Subject: Mah-Jongg Q+A
>My mah-jongg question or comment is:
>Hi Tom!
>I looked through your photos of 'misc' tiles but do not find these. They are four extra tiles in a set that I am looking at. The tiles are three layered green, clear, white.
>Hoping you might be able to tell me a bit about these.
>Thank you for all of your wonderful help with MJ!!
>Donna
>California



They're flowers, Donna. Look again in FAQ 7-E, under the heading "Another sort of flower tiles."

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg [East & West](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

May 14, 2015

Mystery tiles, part 3

>From: RayHeaton

>Sent: Friday, May 15, 2015 3:59 AM

>Subject: Donna's Mystery Tiles

>Hi Tom,

>There are two different partially complete tile runs in Donna's flower tiles, (May 14th).

>The left hand pair of tiles with blue numbers show two images from "the four arts of the Chinese scholar"; the four arts are depicted by a Zither-like musical instrument, the game of Go, Calligraphy and Painting.

>Donna's tiles show on tile (blue) number 1 a Qin (also called a Guqin), 琴, the zither-like musical instrument and on tile (blue) number 2 the game Qi, 棋, depicting the strategy game of Go or Chinese Chess (these are two quite distinct games, either one gets used within depictions of the four arts); in Donna's case, it looks more like the game Go.

>As you said, these are shown in FAQ 7-e.

>This grouping of four accomplishments has been written about since at least the Tang Dynasty (the years 618-907, so the best part of a millennia and a half) but have been called the Four Arts (or in Chinese Si Yi, 四藝) since about 1600, when the grouping were also called "the four leisure time pleasures", (as described by Guqin scholar, John Thompson).

>The right hand pair of tiles with green numbers show two of the "Four Noble Professions", Fisherman, Woodcutter, Farmer and Scholar. The tile (green) number 3 shows a plow (plough, to us non-Americans!) or other hand tool for tilling the soil together with a farmer's hat and is representative of the Chinese word 耕, Geng, meaning "to plow" and here depicting the profession of a Farmer. Tile (green) number 4 shows a book, implying the word 讀, Dou, to Read or Study, and is representing Scholar.

>Fisherman, Woodcutter, Farmer and Scholar may reflect the values revered in the traditional Chinese agricultural society, in which people are encouraged to work hard to be self-sufficient on the one hand, and to cultivate good morality and try for an official career through studying on the other. Alternatively, they may be the ideals of the Chinese officials - once they had passed the Chinese civil service examinations and achieved high status, they dreamed of retiring to the 'simple life' of working on the land.

>Regards

>Ray



Great info, Ray. I'll add this to FAQ 7E. Cheers!

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg [East & West](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

May 16, 2015

My mystery flower tiles

>From: Robert C

>Sent: Friday, December 12, 2014 5:00 PM

>Subject: Four Joker/Flower Tiles

>Greetings, Tom,

>I have been a fan of your great website for years but have never sent a question. Here goes.

>I bought these (4) four tiles to serve as Jokers for my bone and bamboo set. They were so unusual, that I didn't want to put a sticker over them before I had some idea as to what they were.

>Two of the characters seem to be holding some sort of flower and the other two are holding some type of tablet or scroll, etc. Could you help with what these tiles represent or who the characters are. I assume that they are some type of flower, scholar, worker, etc.

>Your insight is certainly appreciated.

>Regards,

>Bob



Hi, Bob.

Nice to hear from a "silent visitor" at last! (^_^)

Checking FAQ 7E, here's what I get for the writing on the tiles:

Top #3: AUTUMN

Top #4: WINTER

Bottom #2: BOARD GAME (qi, same character as in the bottom row, FAQ 7E, "Another sort of flower tiles")

Bottom #4: PAINTING (huà, see FAQ 7E, same reference)

As for your "four" personages: they look to me like they're all the same guy (notice his costume and hairdo is always exactly the same). The top 2 are holding flowers, as you say (I don't think it's important

what flowers they might be, and I don't know if that's knowable). Bottom #2 is holding a game board, and bottom #4 is holding a painting; those represent two of the Four Arts of the Chinese Scholar; see Wikipedia, and see FAQ 7E, "Another sort of flower tiles," "BOTTOM ROW." Your #2 and #4 correspond exactly to the #2 and #4 flowers in that image. And the season names are right there in FAQ 7E also. Too bad you're missing the other 4 tiles that match those four. If I were you and I needed four jokers, I wouldn't stick over those lovelies. I'd just tell anybody playing with me "the four man tiles are all to be used as jokers."

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Creator of [the weekly Mah-Jongg column](#) and the [Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations appreciated](#).

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg [East & West](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

12/12/14

My mystery flowers, part 2

>From: RayHeaton

>Sent: Sunday, December 14, 2014 3:05 AM

>Subject: My Mystery Flower Tiles

>Hi Tom,

>The flower tiles that Robert asked about (12th December) show boys holding the Flowers of the Four Seasons, a common group of flowers in Chinese culture; each flower representing one of the four seasons.

>The two that Robert has are the Chrysanthemum on the Autumn tile (#3) and the Plum Blossom on the Winter tile (#4). The missing two are Orchid for Spring and Lotus for Summer.

>These differ in sequence and flower to the group you showed (Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, Mum), there is no Bamboo in Robert's grouping, the Lotus making its appearance - though both groupings are correct, they just mean slightly different things.

>Regards

>Ray



Excellent, Ray. I'm so glad you keep an eye on the board to help out with questions like

Robert's.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Creator of [the weekly Mah-Jongg column](#) and the [Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations appreciated](#).

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg [East & West](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

12/14/14

Identify my Chinese Opera characters

From: "cynthia gallagher" (chiquitaroad)

Sent: Monday, March 10, 2008 10:46 AM

Subject: Mah-Jongg Q+A

> My mah-jongg question or comment is: Hello, I have a bone and bamboo♦
> set with Chinese Opera characters, men, for the 8 Flower/Season♦
> tiles.♦ I've tried finding who they represent on the net but♦
> unsuccessfully.♦ Can you help me with this quest?♦ Do you know which♦
> characters they represent?♦ Thanks, Cyn



Hi Cyn,

Chinese Opera, huh? I don't know anything about Chinese Opera. Are you sure that's where these guys are from? Because I've usually heard this sort of tile referred to as "Scholars." Wolfram Eberhard, in his book, "A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols," says that "scholar" is one of "the four callings," and that the scholars are symbolized by "the eight precious things." Eberhard doesn't give a list of the eight top scholars and how to identify them, but if you're interested in Chinese symbolism, I recommend his book to you - and also that of C.A.S. Williams, "Outlines of Chinese Symbolism & Art Motives." Both books are listed in **FAQ 3**, above left. Williams lists "The Eight Immortals," who may be what your flower tiles represent. It's too much work for me to try to help you identify which is which from Williams' book, but if you really want to know, I recommend you get his book. It's easy to find on Amazon (that's where I got my copy, if I recall correctly). And of course, a Google search on "the eight immortals" or "the eight scholars" might give you your answers as well.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper / トム・スローパー / 湯姆 斯洛珀 / 탐 슬로퍼

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

March 10, 2008

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on mah-jongg [East & West](#). Available

In late December 2008, reader Ellejai sent this photo of her "mystery flowers." Over the course of the correspondence, and with help from the Internet and her son who has studied Chinese and Japanese culture and languages, Ellejai was able to learn a few things.



Top row:

1. Spring - The Monkey King wears golden chain mail and a phoenix feather cap. He walks on clouds.
2. Summer - The Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin (Kwan Yin). She's depicted with a water jar in the right hand, a willow branch in the left, and wearing a Buddha crown. In the book "Journey to the West," Guan Yin enlisted the Monkey King as a bodyguard for the monk Tripitaka.
3. Autumn: This is Liu Hai, and the next tile is his 3 legged frog or toad. You can find the story of Liu Hai on the Internet.
4. Winter: Liu Hai's 3 legged toad with a string of coins, symbolizing fortune and wealth.

The bottom row:

1. Rich man sitting on an ornate chair.
2. Pot of gold with three symbols inscribed on the pot.
3. Acrobats superimposed over the obverse of a Chinese coin with a square hole in the center. One acrobat is lying on his back flipping the other up in the air (like we used to see on the Ed Sullivan show when I was a kid), in a traditional Chinese acrobatic style possibly known as Wushu. Ellejai explained, "The two red symbols on either side of the coin are written in Manchurian (Boo Su or literally Su then Boo) and translate to "Soochow Mint", which is located in the Kiangsu Provence." Possibly this is an indication of where the set was made.
4. Not sure what the last tile depicts. Ellejai wrote that It "looks like 5 men sitting around a table in a cone shaped basket. The man at the head of the table is important and seems to have a crown or a some kind of hat on. There is something on the table, it looks like a kite? with three streamers that have symbols on the ends of the strings."

Zhao Gong Ming and his pot of gold

>From: "Ticktoc25
>Sent: Friday, January 30, 2009 7:56:59 AM
>Subject: Mystery Tiles cont.
>Hi Tom,
>I've researched the tile commonly called the "Rich man" and "pot of gold". The Rich man is really the Daoist god of wealth, Zhao Gong Ming. In one hand he is holding a gold ingot and in the other a magical iron whip. The magical whip is usually depicted in the form of a rì yù scepter which carries the

meaning of "everything you wish". He is usually surrounded by jewels, gold, pearls, coral etc.



>The "pot of gold" more correctly should be referred to a "basin filled with treasure". Three Chinese characters are often present on the basin. The first one means "Basin" or "tray", the second means "Treasure" and the third translates as the word "together". ("Basin and treasure together".) The basin of treasure is filled with 3 gold ingots. In China ingots look like a rounded hat with a ball in it's center. Three of these ingots together carry the meaning of "prosperity". The basin is also contains some of the other treasures mentioned above.

>I still have my number 3 and 4 "flower" tiles to interpret, but all in all my set seems to have a carver who had a Daoist background.

>LJ



Wow, LJ!

Good job! So where did you find this information? Future seekers will want to know.
May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on mah-jongg East & West.

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

January 30, 2009

Zhao Gong Ming and his pot of gold, part 2

>From: Ticktoc25

>Sent: Sunday, February 01, 2009 12:22 PM

>Subject: Mystery Tiles continued.

>Hi Tom,

>In response to your question as to how I discovered the information for the commonly called "Rich man" and "Pot of Gold" tiles being "Zhao Gong Ming" and his "Basin of Treasure" all I can say is that I spent hours and hours of work. After deciphering Quan Yin and the Monkey King, and Liu Hai and the 3 legged toad, I realized that there must be more to the "Rich man" than met the English eye. And frankly it bugged me that I didn't know that the words on the basin were! I will share a bit of what I did.

>

>I visited many web sites about Chinese mythology and ideology. My son helped me with Chinese symbols and words. Wikipedia, and Godchecker.com were helpful, as were web sites with pictures and commentary. Once I determined that my tiles were specifically of Daoist (Taoist) origin, I was able to narrow the search down. A book called "Five-Fold Happiness" by Vivien Sung is a good reference, though by the time I discovered this book I had pretty much found out as much as I could. I also went to one of my local Chinese Restaurants and found a person who is fluent in both English and Chinese. He helped me with the translation of the characters on the Basin.

>

>What I can say is that, at present, there is no one place that all the information can be found. Only by searching and putting together all the pieces can the answer be discovered. I've enjoyed learning about the Chinese culture and how it has been engraved in our MJ tiles! I'm thinking of writing a book about special MJ tiles so others will be able to discover the rich meaning of their tiles also.

>
>Alas, my Chinese friend was unable to help me with my last two tiles, so I am now looking for a Daoist who may be able to help get me started with the meaning of those. I'll let you know what I find out.
>Ellejai aka LJ



Hi Ellejai,

Wow. So many people come here looking for instant gratification to their mystery flower questions, and are disappointed when I can't help them. Those people don't appreciate that the quest itself can be so rewarding. What fun you had -- what dedication to the quest for knowledge. I think it's a wonderful subject for a book, and I hope that you will write one.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on mah-jongg East & West.

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

February 1, 2009

And another "mystery flowers" exchange on the [Mah-Jongg Q&A Bulletin Board](#), this one with Johni and Lori, from early September 2008:



Someone Lori knows who can read Chinese translated the writing as follows:

- 1: Benevolence (with open gate symbol)
- 2: Religion/Belief (woman kneeling and praying)
- 3: See (verb) (woman standing and gazing ahead)
- 4: Mother (empty chair image)

N: Moon (man walking under moon holding long scroll)

E: Middle (man deep in thought)

W: Appreciate/Enjoy (man standing, gazing up and ahead, one hand raised)

S: Autumn (person on ground in front of broken swing or chair?)

Note that Johni and Lori play American-style mah-jongg, so they arrange winds as "NEWS," but the Chinese arrange them as "ESWN." So the order of the wind flowers is wrong in the photo, and would not make a proper sentence. They should be read this way:

E: Middle

S: Autumn

W: Appreciate/Enjoy

N: Moon

"What do my flower tiles say" is a fairly common question, and doesn't always get the happy answer. By which I mean, you find out that the characters say some nonsense thing like "Benevolent Religion See Mother, Mid Autumn Enjoy Moon." (See, so now you have to figure out what the heck *that* means!) So what you need, if you want to figure out what your mystery flowers mean, is for someone who's fluent in Chinese (not just the language but also the culture) to see the tiles and explain them for you - someone who's fluent in Chinese AND also willing to read an email in English and reply in English. You can also use a website like <http://zhongwen.com/> to try and read the characters yourself. Either way you go, good luck -- you're on your own if you want to try.

From the Mah-Jongg Q&A Bulletin Board:

What do these flower tiles say, part 2 (from September 11, 2008)

From: "Amy Chapman"

Sent: Sunday, June 06, 2010 1:16 AM

Subject: Re: What do these flower tiles say?

> My mah-jongg question or comment is:

> I looked at the unidentified set of flower tiles from September 2008

> that say 中秋賞月 仁宗見母. 中秋賞月 is a clear reference to celebrating

> the Mid-Autumn Festival. Not knowing much about China, I did some

> research on 仁宗見母. I couldn't find a clear-cut reference, but my best

> guess is that the tiles are meant to be read "Emperor Renzong meets his

> mother" and tell some version of Emperor Song Renzong learning about his

> birth mother, a low-ranking palace woman (he had been raised by the

> Empress). In one version, she had been exiled to the Cold Palace (the

> characters above the gate may be 冷宮 "cold palace", but I'm unsure on

> the first). In this version, she was still alive after he came to power

> and learned the truth, so I'm not sure where the empty chair fits in.

> Another version has it that the Emperor's mother had died before he

> found out the truth, which explains the empty chair. The story was used

> in opera and might have been popular. I wouldn't feel comfortable fully

> endorsing any version, but this could help.

> Thank you for having such a nice site!

> Amy



Hi Amy,

You're referring to the flower tiles Johni and Lori asked about on September 11, 2008 (see FAQ 7e, <http://www.sloperama.com/mjfaq/special.htm>, and <http://www.sloperama.com/majexchange/bulletinbd-archive6.htm>).

I'll add this to FAQ 7e.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, California, USA

6/6/2010

My mystery tiles

>From: Hanan B

>Sent: Mon, October 4, 2010 2:06:57 AM

>Subject: Mystery Tiles

>Dear Mr. Sloper,

>First of all many, MANY, thanks for your wonderful website so heavily loaded with wonderful & useful information. I'm so glad I found it after long searches in the internet.

>As to my question:

>During a trip for my employer to the rural zone of Jiangsu in eastern China I was presented with this nice set of Mah-Jongg.

>I can positively identify the standard 108 tiles and also the 28 tile of dragons and winds.

>But then there are the ones shown in the attached photo:

>Thanks to your website I now can identify the Jokers (bottom) and the "flowers" (Rich man [Zhao Gong Ming], Gold pot, Fisherman and Fish) in the center. However, there still remain the top characters:

>The first man is obviously a well-to-do character if he can afford a horse, or maybe a high official, if not the Emperor himself ?

>The second character with his exposed belly seems to be a farmer holding a rake behind his back ?

>The third character I don't know how to describe. Maybe a philosopher holding a long scroll ?

>The last one looks to me like a warrior. Maybe because of his heavy clothes ?

>But what do they represent ? The seasons ?

>I show also two blank (spare ?) tiles. The one shows the face and the other the back but both in slanted position to show the "sandwich" structure: Back and face are some hard plastic and the pink filling is probably polyester, judging from the terrible strong smell it has been emitting in our balcony for over ten years !

>Thanking you in advance,

>Hanan B

>Jerusalem



Shalom Hanan, you wrote:

Q Thanks to your website I now can identify the Jokers (bottom) and the "flowers" (Rich man [Zhao Gong Ming] , Gold pot, Fisherman and Fish) in the center. However, there still remain the top characters

A So you seem to have found FAQ 7e, the Mystery Tiles article. But you seem to have stopped reading it about halfway through. Did you see the letters at the bottom, like the one From: "cynthia gallagher"

(chiquitaroad) Sent: Monday, March 10, 2008 10:46 AM and the one with Johni and Lori, from early September 2008? Or the link at the bottom to Jesper Harder's site which has a discussion about the Chinese writing on mahjong tiles? Those parts of the FAQ suggest ways you can obtain your own answers to your questions.

Q The first man is obviously a well-to-do character if he can afford a horse, or maybe a high official, if not the Emperor himself ?

>The second character with his exposed belly seems to be a farmer holding a rake behind his back ?

>The third character I don't know how to describe. Maybe a philosopher holding a long scroll ?

>The last one looks to me like a warrior. Maybe because of his heavy clothes ?

A I don't know, Hanan. You can do some reading about Chinese personages and legends, if you are driven to do so.

Q But what do they represent ? The seasons ?

A The tiles do not have season names on them. Chinese players surely say "hwa" ("flower") when using these tiles during play (in other words, these are what I call "flower tiles" -- and flower tiles and season tiles are pretty much synonymous).

Q I show also two blank (spare ?) tiles... to show the "sandwich" structure

A Okay...

Q the pink filling is probably polyester, judging from the terrible strong smell it has been emitting in our balcony for over ten years !

A Stinky plastic tiles should have become considerably less stinky in all that time. I have some tips about plastic stink in FAQ 7o (seven oh, not seventy).

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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湯姆 斯洛珀

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg East & West.

Los Angeles, California, USA

October 4, 2010

My mystery tiles, part 2

>From: Edwin Phua

>Sent: Tue, October 5, 2010 11:35:54 PM

>Subject: Re: Mystery tiles

>Dear Tom,

>Hanan's first set of flowers are the characters from the classic Chinese novel Journey to the West. They are respectively: the Buddhist monk Xuanzang (or Tang Sanzang) riding his white horse; and his disciples Zhu Bajie (Pig), Sun Wukong (Monkey), and Sha Wujing (Friar Sandy). The Chinese characters are 僧唐取经 sēng táng qǔ jīng (僧唐取經 in traditional characters), which refers to Xuanzang's pilgrimage to India (the 故est♦) and quest to bring back sutras to China.

>Interestingly, the more typical order of the phrase is 唐僧取经 rather than 僧唐取经.

>Best regards,

>Edwin



Excellent! Thank you, Edwin. I hope Hanan comes back to get the info.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "The Red Dragon & The West Wind," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg East & West.

Los Angeles, California, USA

October 6, 2010

Mystery tiles symbolism

>From: Bill P

>Sent: Tue, October 12, 2010 4:59:50 AM

>Subject: Emailing: Mystery Tiles

>Dear Mr.Sloper,

>I attach a picture of two tiles which may be of interest to your readers.

>

>I have researched the symbolism of these two tiles and discovered, in "Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives" the spider is described as one of the Chinese "Five Poisons" used in traditional medicine to cure a variety of ailments .In some societies such images are made in black silk and attached to children during the" first five days of the fifth month to ward off pernicious influences"

>As the spider is used symbolically for protection I feel that the image is a positive one unlike in western society.

>

>The parrot,if that is what is represented, is looked upon as a symbol ,warning women to be faithful to their husbands.This follows a Chinese legend that a talking parrot reported the actions of a faithless wife to her pearl merchant husband,The wife's intrigues had almost bankrupted the unfortunate husband.

>

>As most of your female readers are busy playing Mah Jongg any thought that this refers to any of them is purely coincidental.

>If any of your contributors can add,contradict or otherwise comment on this I would love to hear from them.

>Yours sincerely,

>Bill P

>Chelhlanga Rocks,Durban,South Africa

>The message is ready to be sent with the following file or link attachments:

>Mah jong sets 2010 building works 063

>Note: To protect against computer viruses, e-mail programs may prevent sending or receiving certain types of file attachments. Check your e-mail security settings to determine how attachments are handled.



Hi Bill,

Or it could just be "bird eats spider." (^_~) Hadn't seen those two tiles before! Cheers.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg East & West.

Los Angeles, California, USA

October 12, 2010

My mystery tiles, part 2

>From: mstanwick

>Sent: Mon, 22 Aug 2011 22:21

>Subject: My mystery tiles part2

>Hi Tom.

>I have about 8 of these type of tile sets [from Alison B's bulletin board post of 8/22/2011].



>In my opinion they are very
 >underrated as the engraving quality is absolutely superb. They date
 >from 1951 to about 1969. I have never come across a set with a
 >provenance dated after 1970. There may be sets after that date but I
 >have never seen any. Most come from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore.
 >These sets commonly come in flattened rectangular boxes with slide top
 >lids usually with characters in grass script on the cover.
 >I agree with you about the likely area these personages may represent.
 >The Five Kingdoms saga is a very popular subject as are other early
 >Chinese historical sagas.
 >Regards
 >Michael Stanwick

My flowers, part 2

>From: Edwin Phua
 >Sent: Wed, August 24, 2011 11:10:26 AM
 >Subject: Flower tiles and their symbolism
 >Dear Tom,
 >I write regarding the most recent [8/24/2011] query from Alison B on the symbolism of her flower tiles.



>While I am no expert on Chinese history and literature, I can at least take those characters and do a quick search. From what I see, these sets of flower tiles refer to episodes in Chinese history and literature, in particular the historical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Where possible (i.e. if I know), I include an explanation of the phrase. I suspect that these phrases in particular refer to operas depicting the episodes from the novel. (After all, opera characters are frequently depicted in mahjong flower tiles. But this could just be a coincidence.)

>1) 桃園結義 / 桃园结义 táoyuánjiéyì

>誓aking an oath in the peach garden♦, this refers to a famed incident from Romance of the Three Kingdoms, where the three warriors Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Liu Bei become sworn brothers in a ceremony.

>2) 孔明吊孝 kǒngmíngdiàoxiào

>摠ong Ming mourns for the dead♦, Kong Ming being the style name for Zhuge Liang, the famed strategist.

>3) 過江赴宴 / 过江赴宴 guòjiāngfùyàn

>犧rossing the river to attend a feast♦, referring to an episode where Guan Yu go to attend a feast alone. Actually, a more common title for this episode is

>单刀会 dāndāohuì or 单刀赴会 dāndāofùhuì (literally 犧 Single Sword going to the Meeting♦ which actually means 摠uan Yu attending the banquet alone♦).

>4) 蒋幹盜書 / 蒋干盗书 jiānggāndàoshū

>掩iang Gan steals a letter♦, referring to Jiang Gan, a subordinate of Cao Cao, stealing a letter from Zhou Yu. This stolen letter leads Cao Cao to think two of his generals were plotting treason, and he thus executes them, but the letter is actually false and is Zhou Yu抯 trickery.

>If you look carefully, perhaps the tiles depict the characters and events. For example, Tile 1 from 桃園結義 shows an altar, most likely used for the swearing of brotherhood ceremony, while Tiles 2, 3, and 4 show men in a pose that indicate obeisance and solemnity. Tile 3 from 孔明吊孝 shows an altar that may be used for a funeral, while Tile 2 shows a man holding a fan that is characteristic of Zhuge Liang.

>Best regards,

>Edwin



Great, Edwin. So that means that the correct order is:



May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Creator of [the Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations welcome](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

August 24, 2011

My flowers present two mysteries

>From: "ak49er"

>Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2015 11:07 PM

>Subject: Symbols and colors (red/black) on Flower/Season Tiles

>Tom,

>Thank you for your reply; however, I could not find my answer in your FAQ's (something close, but not).

>I had another reply to my question from someone named "Mel" and he/she asked me to send a photo:

>and decided to send it to you also.

>The original question was vague, so I have tryed to ask it differently:

>*See attachment of the 16-tiles I currently have.

> Set-1: has 4-tiles with different symbols (which I do not understand) with red numbers

> Set-2: has 4-tiles with symbols of flowers and black numbers

> Set-3: has 4-tiles with number in red, SPR-SUM-AUT-WIN in black and symbols of flowers

> Set-4: has 4-tiles with number in red, SPR-SUM-AUT-WIN in black and symbols of flowers (duplicate)

>a) What do the symbols in the Set-1 mean?

>b) Why are there no color diffences between Set-3 and Set-4?

>I am a Core Volunteer at the Anchorage Senior Activity Center (ASAC) and have decided to use

>Set-2 with black numbers and Set-3 with red numbers: so the players (age 70-80) can make a

>bouquet of 4-tiles of the same color. I first started playing with the younger players (age 60-70)
>and found the house rules strange (must have a doubler to go out, sequence of dragons is a
>Pung/doubler, going out with any number "5" tile is also a doubler, and 5-flowers of any color
>is a "true" bouquet and worth 2,000-points/player).

>So I bought my own set of tiles (American-Modern per your FAQ's) with 4-pushers and a book:
>"A MAH JONG HANDBOOK How to Play, Score, and Win" by Eleanor Noss Whitney.

>Now I seem to have a following of players at my table who are enjoying the game a lot more.

>Thus, I will probably be on your website more often when I can't find my answers in the book.

>I also teach Canasta, Dominoes-Mexican Train, and Scrabble (with real words). I am unable
to work and enjoy the company of Seniors. I am considered an Associate Member (age-54).

>Thank you for sharing your time. ?-Cows

>Diane P

>*This is a shared email with my spouse.



Hi, Diane. I owe you an apology, but I'm confused!

- I let your question slip through the cracks, and never read it until today. My apologies for the delay.
- I'm confused because you seem to be saying that you or your spouse wrote me before (and recently), but I cannot for the life of me figure out when that might have been!

To get to your questions:

Q Set-1: has 4-tiles with different symbols (which I do not understand) with red numbers... What do the symbols in the Set-1 mean?

A I don't know, Diane. Ray Heaton, a regular reader of this board, can surely read them. He might be along sometime with a translation for you.

Q Set-3 [and] Set-4: has 4-tiles with number in red, SPR-SUM-AUT-WIN in black and symbols of flowers... Why are there no color differences between Set-3 and Set-4?

A Those tiles are intended for use in the American style of play, in which all the flowers are considered identical (American players always ask me why the flowers are NOT identical!).

Q found the house rules strange (must have a doubler to go out, sequence of dragons is a
>Pung/doubler, going out with any number "5" tile is also a doubler, and 5-flowers of any color
>is a "true" bouquet and worth 2,000-points/player).

A Sounds like Taiwanese, or at least some variant of Chinese mah-jongg.

Q I bought my own set of tiles (American-Modern per your FAQ's) with 4-pushers and a book:
>"A MAH JONG HANDBOOK How to Play, Score, and Win" by Eleanor Noss Whitney.

A Whitney describes three ways to play in her book: classical Chinese, classical Japanese (or at least early *riichi-dora*), and classical Western-style. Personally, I find her book difficult to navigate, because she doesn't segregate the three styles cleanly.

Q I will probably be on your website more often when I can't find my answers in the book.

A Please be sure which style of play you are using, when asking me a question.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Creator of [the weekly Mah-Jongg column](#) and the [Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations appreciated](#).

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg [East & West](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

September 17, 2015

My flowers, part 2

>From: "heaton.ray"

>Sent: Thursday, September 17, 2015 2:17 PM

>Subject: Diane's flower tiles

>Hi Tom,

>Diane's flowers that she can't read have the following characters;

>#1 is 福, Fu, good luck or happiness.

>#2 is 祿, Lu, good fortune or prosperity.

>#3 is 寿, Shou, long life.

>#4 is 貴, Gui, meaning rank, or nobility.

>The first three, Fu Lu Shou, are three very well known "star gods" in China and appear all over the place as an auspicious trio. When these three appear on Mahjong tiles the fourth is usually 喜, Xi, meaning happiness, so there's a possibility that the fourth tile here comes from a different common set of four, 榮華富貴, Glory Splendour Wealth and Rank.

>Ray



Very nice, Ray! I'll be sure to add this information to the "mystery tiles" FAQ. - Tom

How old and how much, part 2

- > From: Ray
- > Sent: Friday, January 10, 2014 11:06 AM
- > Subject: Kerry's set of flowers
- > Hi Tom,
- > I thought I'd help out Kerry with the translation of her fabulous and beautifully carved flower tiles shown with the rest of her set on Monday [January 6, 2014].
- > Green characters, right to left, 山林泉石.
- > 山, Shan, Mountain
- > 林, Lin, Forest or Woodland
- > 泉, Quan, Spring (as in Spring-water, not the season. The unusual shape just under the red flower is a common way of depicting a Well, and so can be thought of as the source of the spring-waters). Quan can also translate to 'Mountain Stream' or as 'the source (or mouth) of a Spring'.
- > 石, Shi, Rocks.
- > So that would translate simply as the Forests, springs and rocks in the mountains. I have also seen this translated along the lines of "Mountain forest and waters" and as "the mountain forest and upland stream"
- > Red characters, also right to left, 江上清風
- > 江, Jiang, River and is usually the Changjiang river, or Yangtse river of Central China. In some Classical Chinese poetry, the Jiang is used to mean "rivers of exile" where less favoured civil officials were sent.
- > 上, Shang, Above
- > The third tile from the right is 清, Qing, meaning Clear or Pure
- > 風, Feng, Breeze
- > This would translate to "a clear wind above the river", or possibly "a refreshing wind above the river"!
- > Regards
- > Ray



Great, Ray! I hope Kerry comes back and sees it.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, California, USA

January 10, 2014

"This beautiful Mah Jongg set"

>From: Ray Heaton

>Sent: Tuesday, September 2, 2014 12:42 AM

>Subject: Re "This beautiful Mah Jongg set"

>Hi Tom,

>Gary's flower tiles shown on Monday [September 1, 2014] are beauties, aren't they (and I couldn't see similar ones shown in FAQ7e).

>Flower tiles are a bit of a passion of mine, and I have seen examples using the same Chinese characters as Gary's several times before. The tiles show the following:

>

>The lower set with the green Chinese characters...

>西, West (Xi),

>湖, Lake (Hu),

>佳, Beautiful, (Jia) and

>景, View (Jing).

>

>Together these mean "Beautiful views of the West Lake" or the "Beautiful scenes of West Lake", and refer to the West Lake in Hangzhou; in China the lake is well known as providing inspiration for poetic works and has been commemorated since the Song Dynasty in the Xihu Shi Jing,

>西湖十景 or the "Ten Scenes of West Lake". The tiles show examples of these "ten scenes", tile #1 for

instance shows Leifeng Pagoda. The ten views are easily found on the internet.

>

>The top set with the pagodas and red Chinese characters...

>樓, Lou, a multi-storied building, tower

>臺, Tai, terrace. The set uses a simplified version of this character, 台

>亭, Ting, pavilion, kiosk

>閣, Ge, two-storied pavilion. The set uses the simplified version, 閣

>

>I have seen this translated to "high towers and pagodas" and is sometimes used in literary works, poems etc., where they provide 'nostalgic associations with imperial palaces or the vanished glories of remote or bygone eras' and the buildings give open views of distant landscapes prompting 'transcendent aspirations'!

>Regards

>Ray



Awesome, Ray! You've come through again!

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Los Angeles, California, USA

August 2, 2014

What the heck is it?

>From: John O

>Sent: Tue, February 15, 2011 2:40:59 PM

>Subject: Mah-Jongg Q+A

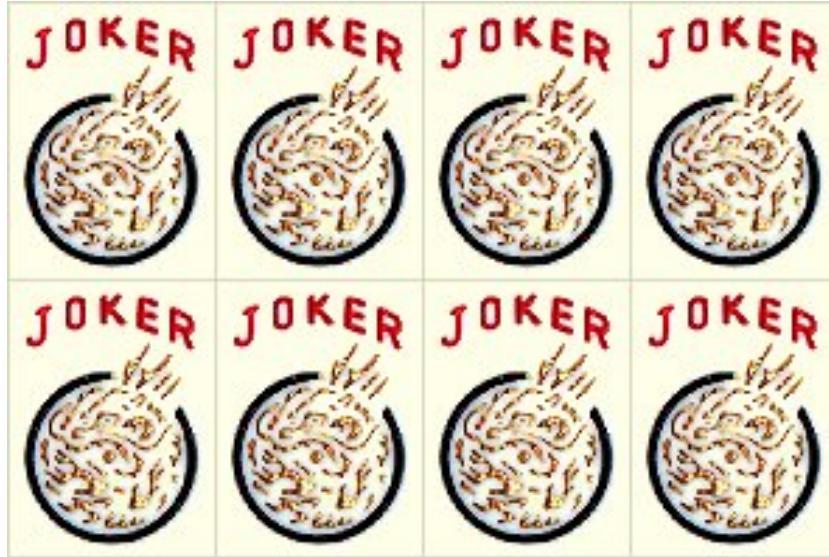
>My mah-jongg question or comment is:

>Honestly, I looked in the FAQ but didn't find the answer to this one...

>What is the image/pattern shown on the standard "Joker" tile? You know... the circle filled with gold squiggly stuff with a kind of stumpy comet's tail sticking up? All the other tiles make sense, even some of

the obscure flower and season tiles, but the Joker has me stumped. Maybe that's it's purpose?

>Thanks,
>John



I don't know, John.

I think it's supposed to be a dragon. I think I can see its head, but I can't tell if its mouth is open or not, or what the other details are.

I'm adding this to FAQ 7E. May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, CA (USA)

February 15, 2011

What the heck is it, part 2

>Date: Sun, 06 Mar 2011 08:04:58 -0600

>From: Chris Schumann

>Subject: Joker Tile Image

>I found this image while browsing eBay. It looks very much like the current American-style joker, but is in color. I can see how this became the joker we have today.

>Chris



Hi Chris,

Thanks. Would be good to know more about the set you found that joker in (especially, how old that set is, information about the manufacturer). But you are right, it does help understand the monochromatic version. I'll add this to FAQ 7e, thanks to you.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, California, USA

March 6, 2011

NMJL member tiles

>From: Sherry M

>Sent: Wednesday, July 23, 2014 6:51 PM

>Subject: Member tiles

>Tom,

>I have recently been collecting Bakelite tiles that are stamped with National Mahjongg Member tile. The ones that I have found are either red or yellow, have a hole in them for a keychain, and a couple have decoupage flowers on them. I have asked NMJL about them and originally they replied, 擦E HAVE NEVER SOLD THOSE!?. I sent them a photocopy of my tiles and was rewarded with a reply that yes indeed NMJL had sold them but when, why and for how long was unknown. (Wouldn't you think they would have records SOMEWHERE regarding them?)

>The last tile I bought I asked the seller if she had had any information regarding them. She told me that they were sold with mahj sets through the NMJL and these were attached to the case of the member that had purchased them. She dated them during WWII and the profits were donated for the war effort. I have recently bought a vintage set from the early 30's and in it were 3 member tiles! Along with the 3 member tiles, there was also 2 blank Bakelite tiles with the exact same decoupage flower on them.

>So I'm wondering if you have ever seen them and if you have any additional information regarding who long they were sold for and where?

>Thank you!

>Best regards,

>Sherry M



Hi, Sherry. You wrote:

Q (Wouldn't you think they would have records SOMEWHERE regarding them?)

A Not necessarily. I used to work at Atari. When I joined, the company had been bought and sold twice. I had more information about their products than they did. Then I worked at Activision. The company was bought and sold while I worked there, and a lot of "records" were being thrown away - I snagged some from the trash, and wound up being a repository of company history afterwards. The NMJL has been around a LOT longer than that. They would need someone who dedicated herself to archival storage, and that's not a top priority for businesses.

Q She dated them during WWII and the profits were donated for the war effort. I have recently bought a vintage set from the early 30's and in it were 3 member tiles!

A That's great information you got there!

Q Along with the 3 member tiles, there was also 2 blank Bakelite tiles with the exact same decoupage flower on them.

A I explained the deal with those flower tiles in FAQ 19-AI and [column](#) 509.

Q was wondering if you have ever seen them

A Just pictures.

Q and if you have any additional information regarding who long they were sold for and where?

A No, sorry. You know more about them than I do.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, California, USA

July 23, 2014

R mystery tiles

>From: Katherine H

>Sent: Friday, August 10, 2012 5:57 AM

>Subject: mystery tiles

>Hi Tom,

>These four tiles were found stickered as jokers in a vintage Chinese Bakelite set. Wondering your thoughts regarding the meaning of the R. The tile tops are bone, the base made of ebony. Do you have knowledge of a complete set with similar tiles?

>Thank you, Cat



Hello Cat, you wrote:

Q found stickered as jokers in a vintage Chinese Bakelite set.

A I wish I could remember what "Chinese Bakelite" is* - but I presume these tiles do not match the tiles in that set. And I should mention again that I do not know what "vintage" means, either (see [column 502](#)).

Q Wondering your thoughts regarding the meaning of the R.

A That's a mystery, all right. As described in the Mystery Tiles FAQ, we usually see a B or P on white dragon tiles. And it doesn't make sense to label a blank (that would defeat the purpose of the blank). U stumped me, Cat!

Q Do you have knowledge of a complete set with similar tiles?

A Nope, never saw one of those before.

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Creator of these [Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations appreciated](#).

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg **East & West**.

Los Angeles, California, USA

August 10, 2012

**There's info on so-called "Chinese Bakelite" in [FAQ 7C3](#).*

Extra info for the FAQs

>From: Nicholas Cheung

>Sent: Thursday, November 15, 2012 5:19 PM

>Subject: Extra notes on FAQ 13c and FAQ 7e

>Hi Tom:

>Just want to let you know on a couple of uncommon variants with Japanese

>mahjong...

>For FAQ 13c-

>I'd like to add that one variant of 3-player Japanese mahjong that does

>happen, but very rarely, is not to treat the north winds as "flowers."

>As such, they count as separate 1 han dora each in a winning hand, and if

>the West wind is the dora indicator, each north wind counts as 2 han dora in

>a winning hand - and the "dead wall" will contain 14 tiles as normal instead

>of 18 tiles.

>For FAQ 7e-

>Most Japanese sets come with red fives, but a very small number of Japanese

>sets come with red threes or red sevens instead of red fives. With that

>said, the San Group conglomerate of mahjong parlors is well known for using

>red threes (specifically, two red 3-pin tiles), instead of any red fives.

>Thank you again.

>Nicholas Cheung



Great info, Nicholas. I'll add that right away. Sorry your email fell through the cracks. When I was mentioning red fives in my response to Elizabeth, I realized I hadn't yet acted on your email. Better late than never, I suppose!

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper
トム・スローパー^{トム・スローパー}
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Creator of these [Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations appreciated](#).

Author of "[The Red Dragon & The West Wind](#)," the definitive book on Mah-Jongg [East & West](#).

Los Angeles, California, USA

November 23, 2012

Which ones are my winds, dragons, and flowers?

> From: vivian m
> Sent: Friday, April 25, 2014 2:45 PM
> Subject: Can you identify winds and flowers in this set?
> This set has 4 of each of the pictured tiles, plus 8 jokers made with stickers on blanks. My question concerns the bottom row. I infer that 1,2,3 are white, red, and green dragons, respectively. (Correct me if I'm wrong.) I assume the 24 tiles represented by 4-9 are flowers and winds. Can you identify them for me?
> Thanks.
> Vivian M



Hi, Vivian.

I have no idea how the set's creator intended those tiles to be apportioned. Of course you'd want a sequential group of 3 to be the dragons, and yes, the first three do seem most logical - but which should be "red dragon"? Looking at the craks in your set (which, by the way, is weirder than most of the weird sets in my own collection!), it looks like those tiles all have green on them, so the #3 tile (the green dinosaur) might best be the "dragon" that goes with your craks. And the #2 tile (the castle) is architectural, so goes nicely with your bams, leaving the #1 tile (the blue dragon) to go with your dots (yin and yang). As for which are flowers (#4 and #5, OR #s 8 and 9), that is entirely up to you. I recommend you make a reference card each player at your table can use while playing.

Afterthought: your #7 tile is the Big Dipper, which points North - so most likely your #4, 5, 6, and 7 tiles are E, S, W, and N respectively, leaving #s 8 and 9 as your flowers.

And another afterthought: your 8-bams are upside-down in the picture. Notice how all the bams are letters. I, T, K, X, A. Then HI, ON, BY, WE. I don't think there's any rhyme or reason to those (they don't spell out a sentence that means anything, like "Itkxa hi on by we," which is nonsense) except for the number of lines (pen strokes).

May the tiles be with you.

Tom Sloper

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Creator of [the weekly Mah-Jongg column](#) and the [Mah-Jongg FAQs](#) -- [donations appreciated](#).

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Los Angeles, California, USA

April 25, 2014

As you can see, a lot of the questions above are about unusual flower tiles. **For further resources** to help you decipher your special flower tiles, [Jesper Harder's site](#) in Denmark has a discussion about the Chinese writing on mahjong tiles. And the following books and websites are also very useful if you are researching your flower tiles or other mah-jongg symbolism:

WHAT CHARACTER IS THAT?: AN EASY-ACCESS DICTIONARY OF 5,000 CHINESE CHARACTERS, by **Ping-gam Go**. Simplex Publications, ISBN-13: 978-0962311352 - second edition, paperback - May 1, 2002. Most Chinese dictionaries sort by the complexity of the character, IE the number of strokes in the character. ♦ The unique feature of this dictionary is its arrangement: first by the English word of the character's root, and then by the number of strokes. ♦ This simple arrangement dramatically narrows your field of search for any given character. ♦ This dictionary teaches you how to identify the radicals and also provides etymology to help you memorize it. (Thanks to Bruce Bacher)

A DICTIONARY OF CHINESE SYMBOLS: HIDDEN SYMBOLS IN CHINESE LIFE AND THOUGHT, by **Wolfram Eberhard**. Routledge, London, 1986. ISBN 0-415-00228-1. Originally published in German as *Lexicon chinesischer Symbole* by Eugen Diederichs Verlag, Cologne, 1983. Not about mah-jongg - the title is self-explanatory. Useful for mah-jongg researchers and historians.

OUTLINES OF CHINESE SYMBOLISM AND ART MOTIVES, by **C.A.S. Williams**. Dover Publications, ISBN-13: 978-0486233727 (multiple editions; available in paperback and hardcover). Not about mah-jongg, but useful for mah-jongg scholars, and those wishing to better understand their ornately carved tiles or unusual flower tiles in collectible sets.

[MANDARINTOOLS.COM](#) is a good site for researching Chinese writing.

[ZHONGWEN.COM](#) is another good site for researching Chinese writing.

Occasionally someone sends me a photo of their "mahjong" set and it turns out it isn't mahjong at all, but rather Rummikub (sometimes made under alternate names):



Rummikub. NOT mahjong.

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Thanks also to British mah-jongg scholar Michael Stanwick; his research has informed some aspects of this article.

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