Contents at a Glance

Introduction 1

Part 1: Mastering Cantonese Mahjong 7

CHAPTER 1: Setting Up to Play 9
CHAPTER 2: Starting the Game: A Step-by-Step Guide 21
CHAPTER 3: Playing via Claiming and Discarding 33
CHAPTER 4: Scoring Cantonese Mahjong and Winning Big Time 47
CHAPTER 5: Starting the Next Round, Passing the Dealer, and Minding Your Manners 67

Part 2: Mastering American Mah Jongg 73

CHAPTER 6: Playing in a Whole Different League with American Mah Jongg 75
CHAPTER 7: Starting the Game: A Step-by-Step Guide 97
CHAPTER 8: Playing via Claiming and Discarding 111
CHAPTER 9: Scoring and Strategizing in American Mah Jongg 127
CHAPTER 10: Starting the Next Round and Passing the Dealer 147

Part 3: A Quick Guide to Other Regional Variants 153

CHAPTER 11: Cranking Up Your Brain with Japanese Mahjong (Riichi): Game Setup and Initial Play 155
CHAPTER 12: Cranking Up Your Brain with Japanese Mahjong (Riichi): Winning and Scoring 181
CHAPTER 13: Exploring Taiwanese Mahjong 205
CHAPTER 14: Feeling the Pressure of Sichuan Blood Battle Mahjong 219
CHAPTER 15: Going Wild with Southeast Asian Mahjong 233

Part 4: The Part of Tens 263

CHAPTER 16: Ten Ways to Play More Mahjong 265
CHAPTER 17: Ten Common Mahjong Customs from Around the World 271
CHAPTER 18: Ten Things You Need to Host the Perfect Mahjong Party 275

Index 279

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 1
About This Book 2
Conventions Used in This Book 5
Foolish Assumptions 5
How This Book Is Organized 5
Icons Used in This Book 6
Beyond the Book 6
Where to Go from Here 6

PART 1: MASTERING CANTONESE MAHJONG 7

CHAPTER 1: Setting Up to Play 9
Exploring the Unique Nature of Cantonese Mahjong 9
Dissecting Your Mahjong Set 10
Keeping all those tile numbers straight in your head 10
Digging deeper: Suits, Honors, and Bonus tiles 11
Using the accessories: Dice, Wind indicators, tile pushers, and chips 15
Choosing the first dealer 16
Assigning player positions and Seat Winds 17
Understanding rounds and Winds 18

CHAPTER 2: Starting the Game: A Step-by-Step Guide 21
Step One: Shuffling Tiles and Building the Tile Wall 22
Mixing them well: "Washing the tiles" 22
Building four tile walls 22
Step Two: Drawing Tiles to Form Your Initial Hand 24
Breaking the wall for tile drawing 24
Understanding tile drawing and other playing directions 27
Comparing a dealer's hand with the hands of other players 29
Step Three: Arranging Your Tiles for Strategy 30

CHAPTER 3: Playing via Claiming and Discarding 33
Aiming for the Win 34
The basic structure of a winning hand 34
And They're Off! Starting the Game as the Dealer 36
Choosing the best tile to discard 36
Drawing a tile from the tile wall 38
Claiming a discard tile: Chow, Pung, and Kong explained 38

Determining priority in claiming discards 43
Discarding a tile to your advantage 44
Waiting to Win: Ready Hand (聽牌) 45
Completing a Winning Hand and Declaring Victory 45

CHAPTER 4: **Scoring Cantonese Mahjong and Winning Big Time** 47

Looking at Cantonese Mahjong Fan Scoring Elements 48
Breaking down the fundamental Cantonese scoring elements 49
Kicking it up a notch with additional Fans 55
Reckoning Points for Payments 56
Step 1: Counting the Fan score 56
Step 2: Converting Fan scores to base points 59
Step 3: Transferring points between players 60
Capping the maximum Fan 62
Setting a minimum Fan 63
Taking into account strategic considerations when scoring 64
Dealing with Errors, Penalties, and the Finer Points of Cantonese Mahjong Scoring 65

CHAPTER 5: **Starting the Next Round, Passing the Dealer, and Minding Your Manners** 67

Passing the Dealer and Dealing New Hands 68
Setting Up the Wall for a New Round 68
Exploring Common Customs and Etiquette in Cantonese Mahjong 69
Keeping Your Fingers Crossed: Mahjong Superstitions and Rituals 70
Recognizing the importance of feng shui when it comes to seating 70
Working on your luck maintenance 71

PART 2: MASTERING AMERICAN MAH JONGG 73

CHAPTER 6: **Playing in a Whole Different League with American Mah Jongg** 75

Understanding the Basics of American Mah Jongg 76
Looking at the unique rules and gameplay of American Mah Jongg 77
Getting up close and personal with your American Mah Jongg set 78
Using the Accessories 82
Managing tiles with the racks 82
Not sweating the small stuff: Dice, chips, and other tools 83

Arranging the Game Table 84
Using the National Mah Jongg League (NMJL) Official Standard Hands and Rules Card: A Quick Guide 85
Winning the NMJL card way 86
Internalizing the Rules for Using Joker Tiles 92
Jokers: Your retrievable wildcards. 92
Flowers: Don't Just Smell Them 95

CHAPTER 7: **Starting the Game: A Step-by-Step Guide** 97
Kicking Off the Game by Choosing the First Dealer 98
Seating players at the table 98
Placing tiles on the table and distributing tile racks. 98
Dealing Tiles to Form Your Initial Hand 98
Organizing and Examining Your Initial Hand. 102
Sorting by suits and rank 102
Looking for multiples and patterns 103
Isolating the "odd balls" 103
Not Your Great-Grandma's Charleston 103
Defining the Charleston: Seeing how the tile passing works 104
Following Charleston etiquette and dealing with special situations 107
Devising your juggling strategy: Knowing what to pass and what to keep 109

CHAPTER 8: **Playing via Claiming and Discarding** 111
Essential Actions: Claiming a Tile, Then Discarding a Tile 112
Having the dealer discard the first tile 112
Claiming discards to form exposures. 113
Following the rules for claiming discards. 114
Claiming Tiles from the Tile Wall 117
Using Jokers: Rules and Strategic Use for Claims 118
Jokers can only be used in combinations of three or more identical tiles 118
No natural tiles, no problem 119
Redeeming Jokers from racks ("the Joker swap") 119
Deciding when to use Jokers 121
Working with Concealed versus Exposed Hands 122
Concealed hands marked "C" 123
Exposed hands marked "X" 123
Evaluating the advantages (and disadvantages) of "X" and "C" hands 123
Switching plans when needed 124
Having a hand labeled dead due to wrong exposure 124
Completing Your Hand and Declaring Mah Jongg 125
Recognizing readiness 125
Mah Jongg! Defining the rules for declaring a win 126

CHAPTER 9: **Scoring and Strategizing in American Mah Jongg** 127
Settling Scores and Payments 127
Reckoning points between players 128
Handling errors and disputes 131
Winning Tips for Beginners: How to Build Toward Mah Jongg 134
Recognizing patterns in your hand 134
Noticing outstanding features like triplets and pairs 134
Prioritizing the candidates closer to completion 135
Evaluating hand values versus hand risks 137
Keeping multiple options open as long as feasible 138
Don't fall in love with your first idea 141
Avoid overcommitting too soon 141
Narrow down your options by mid-game 141
Maximizing Jokers for scoring advantage 142
Knowing when to switch strategies during the game 143
Avoiding common pitfalls in American Mah Jongg 144

CHAPTER 10: **Starting the Next Round and Passing the Dealer** 147
Determining the Next Dealer According to NMJL Rules 147
Customs and Etiquette in American Mah Jongg 148
Traditions and unwritten rules for respectful play 149
Handling disagreements on card interpretations 150

PART 3: A QUICK GUIDE TO OTHER REGIONAL VARIANTS 153

CHAPTER 11: **Cranking Up Your Brain with Japanese Mahjong (Riichi): Game Setup and Initial Play** 155
Knowing Your Riichi Mahjong Set 156
The standard Riichi tiles 157
Riichi accessories: Dice, scoring sticks, and Wind marker 161
Setting up a Riichi Game Step by Step 164
Step1: Determining the dealer 164
Step 2: Building the walls of tiles 165
Step 3: Breaking the Live Wall and establishing the Dead Wall 166
Step 4: Dealing the tiles 167
Exploring Dora bonuses hidden in the wall 168
Working with discards and mastering tile placement 170
Looking at Wind rounds, game length, and seat rotation 171
Casting the First Tile: From First Discard to First Win 173
Formulating a winning hand 173
Parsing the gameplay process: Claiming and discarding tiles . . . 175

Declaring a winning hand 176
Dealing with a "no win" situation 177
Declaring Riichi for strategic advantage 177
Comparing open and closed hands 178
Minding your Furiten manners 179
Dealing with the Dead Wall and Kan Doras 179

CHAPTER 12: **Cranking Up Your Brain with Japanese Mahjong (Riichi): Winning and Scoring** 181
Starting Out with the Basic Yakus 182
Advancing with advanced Yakus 187
Saying yes to Yakuman (役満): The legendary limit hands 190
Sussing out the Riichi Scoring System 194
Handling Han: Determining the value of Yaku and Dora 195
Figuring out Fu: Minipoints 195
Calculating base points using Han and Fu 198

CHAPTER 13: **Exploring Taiwanese Mahjong** 205
Playing Bigger Hands with Taiwanese Mahjong 206
Looking at Taiwanese mahjong tiles and the game setup 207
Playing by the rules: Core rules and gameplay mechanics 210

CHAPTER 14: **Feeling the Pressure of Sichuan Blood Battle Mahjong** 219
Scoping Out the Setup and Equipment 220
Mastering Gameplay 221
No Chows allowed 221
Voided suit (定缺) 222
Waging the Blood Battle (血战到底) 222
Shared discards: Multi-win rule (一炮多响) 223
Winning order affects dealer rotation 224
Scoring and wall exhaustion scoring 225
Paying the Piper: Handling Cash Payouts 232

CHAPTER 15: **Going Wild with Southeast Asian Mahjong** 233
Starting in Animal-Loving Singapore 234
Tracking Down Singapore Mahjong's Unique Animal Tiles 234
Scoring Singapore-Style and Examining Strategy Highlights 236
Tai: The building block of scoring 236
Calculating maximum and minimum Tai 237
Exploring distinct hand combinations 237
Dissecting the instant payment rules 240
Moving on to Malaysian Three-Player Fei Mahjong (三角麻将) 241

Setting up the game 241
Taking a closer look at tiles 242
Building the tile wall and getting everyone seated 242
Getting the Party Started: Key Gameplay Mechanics and Rules 244
Taking flight with Fly tiles (Fei 飛): The wildcards that can do it all 244
Keeping score: How the points add up in Malaysian Fei mahjong 245
Going Crazy with Vietnamese Mahjong: The Wildest Version Yet 250
Setting up the game 250
Walking through gameplay 254
Demystifying Phán and Mủn: The scoring system for Vietnamese mahjong 255
Paying the winner 257
Staying on the straight and narrow: Tips and etiquette for Vietnamese mahjong 261

PART 4: THE PART OF TENS 263

CHAPTER 16: Ten Ways to Play More Mahjong 265
Join Local Mahjong Clubs and Meetups 265
Practice with Mahjong Apps on Your Phone 266
Play Online on Your Computer 267
Host Your Own Mahjong Night 267
Invest in an Automatic Table 268
Teach Friends or Family to Play 268
Enter a Tournament 268
Join a Mahjong League or Start One! 269
Volunteer at Senior Centers 269
Travel and Try Regional Mahjong Styles 269

CHAPTER 17: Ten Common Mahjong Customs from Around the World 271
House Rules Reign Supreme 271
Don't Move Before the Previous Player Has Finished 272
Respect the Tile Wall and the Tiles 272
Don't Talk About Your Winnings Mid-Game 272
No Mid-Game Player Switching 273
East Position, Extra Luck 273
Don't Tap Shoulders 273
Wash Your Hands to Refresh Luck 274
Switching Seats to Change Luck 274
Avoid Sitting with Your Back to a Door or Window 274

CHAPTER 18: **Ten Things You Need to Host the Perfect Mahjong Party** 275
The Right Table Setup 275
Comfortable Seating 276
Proper Lighting 276
A Great Mahjong Set 276
Side Tables for Snacks and Drinks 277
Food Strategy: Breaks Only, Please 277
Dress Code to Set the Mood 277
Matching Accessories for a Themed Touch 277
Money, Chips, or other Play Tokens 278
A Winning Playlist 278

INDEX 279