

Flow Book 1:  
AWAKENING YOUR MAHJONG POWER

SAKURAI Shouichi

translated by anon

## How this book was made

This book is a Sakurai Shouichi's mahjong strategy manual that he bestows to everyone who wants to get stronger at mahjong.

In the late Shouwa 30's (early 60's) the author, who was a student at the time, was introduced by a friend to mahjong, and made to unfold his genius as master of victory and defeat. From then on, he split his attention between the world of a real job and winning money in high stakes mahjong for 20 years, during which he left behind the astounding record of not losing once; but in the mid Shouwa 50's (around 1980) he felt the emptiness of winning and retired. In his days as a high stakes gambler, he continued to chain win after win, staking his life unbowed by threats or violence; he ascended to unprecedented regions without the use of underhanded techniques, just by manipulation through thinking of the tiles; and earned himself the nickname of "mahjong demon".

In this life of ultimate stakes, he noticed that playing with a view that values the calculation of profit and loss clouds the power of one's heart, one's feeling.

This book is written in a question-and-answer form, so that you can become stronger by reading from anywhere, but I'll give you the details of how this book was created.

On 16 February 2014, the "Mahjong Saikyousen 2014 Special Pro Commentary Qualifier feat. Sakurai Shouichi and Moriyama Shigekazu" was held. The Saikyousen is a yearly mahjong tournament that is open to both pros and amateurs. In this qualifier, one of the 8 participating pros would win and advance to the finals to be held in December.

This project that featured mahjong demon Sakurai and Japan Pro Mahjong Federation president Moriyama commentating young pros' mahjong was livestreamed on Nico Nico and was also released on DVD.

However, the author felt that there were numerous parts that he could not explain in the live transmission format, despite feeling that the mahjong style of the pros contained many problems. The mahjong level of strong gamblers that the author played with in the past was simply not being attained by today's famous pros. The author, having succeeded in life after encountering mahjong, felt strongly that he wanted the pros to get stronger, and let the readers know about the correct, winning mahjong that is not deluded by calculations.

Therefore I placed the paifu from that day on the table and went through them discard by discard, raising various kinds of questions, and summarized them in this book in question-and-answer form. It is the first book by the 20 year undefeated legend Sakurai Shouichi that has him answering questions by a person who is not a “mahjong demon style” disciple of his.

By repeatedly reading this book, the quality of your mahjong will change, and you are guaranteed to become closer to a true strong player.

t. the editor

### **Participating pros**

#### **Table A**

Katsumata Kenji, Ishibashi Nobuyuki, Shibukawa Nanba, Takizawa Kazunori

#### **Table B**

Sasaki Hisato, Arai Keibun, Suzuki Tarou, Sarukawa Masatoshi

#### **Playoff**

Sasaki, Katsumata, Arai, Ishibashi

#### **Winner**

Sasaki



## 1.2 Correct iishanten rather than wrong tenpai

### Question

Why do you say that ending a round with a good iishanten is better than getting a bad shape win? Is it because of winning more easily in the next round?

### Answer

**Even without that it's better to aim for the correct sequence of plays.**

You can win a round and take 1st place by winning even with a bad hand, right? The other 3 players are winning bad hands and making bad plays, but bad things don't necessarily occur to them.

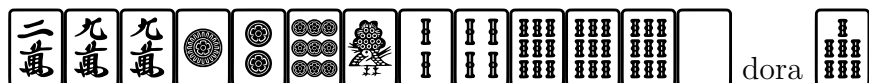
**However, not just in mahjong, whenever something happens, there is a reason for it.** This can be some close situation or something quite far away.

By not playing to win the obvious hand, but advancing the correct style of play just a little bit, something will certainly spring into life. That is the flow of luck.



## 1.4 Notice the invisible sanshoku doukou

### Question





South seat, turn 1

Would you call anything?



### Answer




This is clearly chanta. You can also see the sanshoku doukou of 9.

If you draw , you will be happy, but you should also call  pon before.

In the game, another player discarded  on the first turn, but you can't ignore this.

You must think "Ah! He didn't discard  but .

The player who discards the second  is important. For that person, he discarded it because it was a terminal, but from your standpoint he killed your hand, so from a luck standpoint he has the upper hand of you two.

That is what you must think.

## 1.5 Don't get confused by hindsight

### Question




With this chanta hand,  came out on turn 5.






It's a 2000 point bad shape so would you call?


(In the game, Shibukawa called and was wedged between dealer riichi and a yakuhai dora 3 call, and dealt into mangan.)

### Answer

Yes.

In the game, the player called chii and cut , which is okay. Calling is not for winning, but to advance one step.

However, after the dealer called riichi, he folded with  and dealt in, while I would have pushed . Also, the  came from kamicha's hand which was , and he should have normally discarded . When the caller dealt in it was not his fault, but rather the kamicha who let him call was weak.

If it had been me, I would have called pon on  on turn 4 and completely changed everything.

## 1.6 Instantly call yakuhai

### Question





South 1, 1st place, West seat

Another player's first discard was , do you call?


### Answer

Yes. Discard .

Because the dora is in souzu, you get rid of the far away pinzu and move towards honitsu in manzu.

After the pon, you would rather have  or  than the dora. Honitsu yakuhai 2 is an easy mangan.

**From this we understand how important honors are.** Using multiple yakuhai exhibits enormous power. Its ultimate expression are the yakuman daisangen and daisuushii.

Calling and narrowing the hand to 10 tiles narrows the necessary tiles ( here) as well, which I think increases clarity of thought.

With honitsu, we can make mangan in two ways.

1. honitsu yakuhai 2
2. honitsu toitoi

**Calling does not equal cheap hand, calling creates big yaku.**

## 1.7 Call from completed mentsu and create yaku

### Question



Turn 2, dealer behind on points. How do you move forward with the dora pair?

### Answer

Tanyao.

If comes out, you must always chii with . This has better taste than having a closed hand with .

You should also chii and pon . After calling, discard . After all tiles are tanyao, discard .

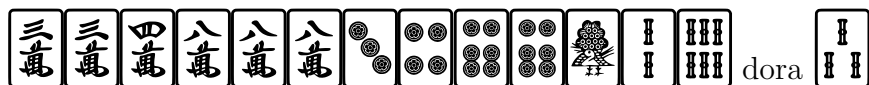
You can draw another so don't discard it yet. You have the ryankan, but you must discard soon and ignore . If you don't ignore it, it might come and you'll be left with an unfinished hand when someone calls riichi.

In the game, Ishibashi got the hand on turn 5 and didn't call chii on . I would absolutely chii and cut . This creates a mobile shape that can chii or . He is lazy for not calling this. He must have not seen from the start.

This is like 1st grader mahjong. Even an elementary school 1st grader can win a closed hand by drawing all the tiles. I am worried if pros don't attain 6th grade level mahjong.

## 1.8 Tanyao is better than dora 1


### Question



South 2, 1st place, South seat, turn 2


What would you call?

### Answer

Only pon .

Discard , and foresee tsumo of  .

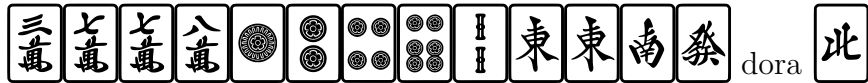
Exactly because you are in 1st and in South seat, you must move yourself to disrupt the dealer. Moving invigorates your own hand and the field.

**Because dora 1 and tanyao are both worth 1 han**, ignore the dora  acceptance and prefer open tanyao.


Don't call   and .

## 1.9 Don't hold safe tiles

### Question



East 1, North seat, turn 3

Would you call ? The hand is cheap and it looks like it will have few safe tiles against a riichi.

**Answer**

**Call.**

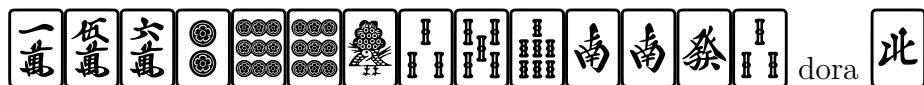
**It's not bad because you have no safe tiles, it's interesting.** This is the feeling you must have. Desiring effort instead of ease is necessary in mahjong.

**Do not pay attention to score before South 3.** Whatever the score, moving and facing to the win is important, and if you want to win against truly strong players, you must risk victory or defeat in difficult places.





## 1.11 Recognize the toitsuba

### Question








East 1, South seat's haipai

Discard , but would you call ?

### Answer

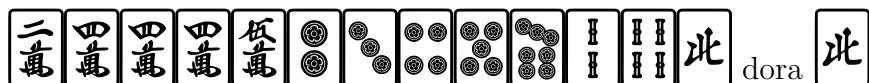
Of course.

With yakuhai, you should see extra han from honitsu or toitoi. After drawing a  pair with the first tsumo, you can feel the toitsuba with 3 pairs. With the  pair, attach importance to the  yakuhai and the  and  pairs, aiming for toitoi. You must leverage vertical combinations (honors) as well as horizontal (numbers).



## 1.13 Call the bad shapes and retain the good shapes

### Question




East 1, West seat, turn 5

Would you call anything?

### Answer

Call .

Only don't call . Move with tanyao and maybe sanshoku.

When calling, increasing the speed of the hand is important, but it's necessary to pay attention to the shape. Kanchan is a less comfortable wait than ryanmen. **In daily life, isn't it better to start off with the uncomfortable things? Resolve the difficult shape of the kanchan and leave behind an easy shape.**

Leaving the ryanmen and waiting with it until the win will also leave good results in the next haipai. On the contrary, if you win with an uncomfortable shape, the next haipai will also be uncomfortable. If you win by flailing about, another hand of floundering will come.







## 1.17 Chapter summary

1. Chii the dora indicator tile
2. Call with tanyao or yakuhai and no dora
3. Safe tiles are not needed
4. Check for sanshoku doukou
5. Combine honitsu with yakuhai and toitoi
6. Create yaku by calling from completed sequences
7. Complete kanchan first
8. Improve the wait by calling from tenpai
9. Pay attention to toitsuba

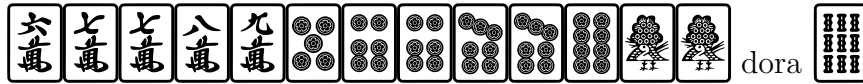
**Remember: calling invigorates your hand and the field!**





## 2.3 If someone is going for honitsu, call riichi even on an off-suit wait

### Question



When someone is going for honitsu in souzu, would you riichi with a manzu wait? What about a souzu wait?

### Answer

**Riichi with either.**

If he is going for honitsu of souzu, call riichi and tell him “I’m waiting on tiles that you can’t use.” With a souzu wait, call riichi too with the sense of going for his overflow tile.

Also, in the case it becomes a tsumo contest, the opponent’s hand is expensive while yours is just pinfu, so if you win and destroy the opponent’s decisive hand, it can be said to be an extremely meaningful win. Even if your hand is just 2000 points, if you destroy the opponent’s 8000 point hand, you can add it for a total value of 10000 points. You must not forget this added value. **Winning even a 1000 point hand in a decisive place like this, is like scoring a goal in soccer, an extremely valuable thing.**

There are many winning hands in mahjong, but my favorite is pushing a dangerous musuji against 3 riichi to win a 1000 open hand. I think exactly that is the real pleasure of mahjong. It’s not winning haneman or baiman.

### Mainstream theory

Same suit → won’t come so **riichi** for tsumo

Different suit → easy to come out from other two players so **dama**

### My theory

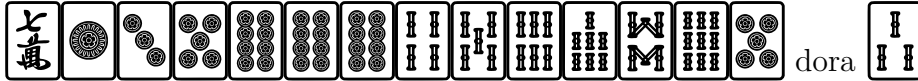
Same suit → **riichi** aiming for the overflow tile

Different suit → **riichi** aiming for the tile he can’t use

Let go of the idea that you can win stealthily with dama.  
 Call riichi to invigorate the field.

## 2.4 Let go of the preconception that opponents will fold

### Question



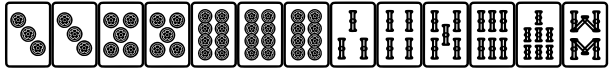
South round, 3rd place North seat

Is it good to take tenpai and riichi for kanchan? has not been discarded yet.  
 (Shibukawa called riichi)

### Answer

Discard and dama.



Calling riichi here must be because you think that everyone will fold if you do. With players that don't fold against riichi, you wouldn't call a 1300 kanchan riichi on turn 7. This hand wants to draw and in the future and become



If the keeps coming out before the hand improves, don't regret not having called riichi, but say "let's do it over" and abandon , looking for another taatsu. In mahjong, this kind of revision behavior is also necessary.




Not taking tenpai might be surprising, but in my mahjong you should sometimes not even declare ron, so it's only natural to sometimes not take tenpai. **There seems to be a saying that a kanchan without yaku should riichi, but this hand has yaku.** You can see both pinfu and sanshoku.

Only if  comes should you riichi with an unfortunate (仕方がない) feeling, and if  comes it's good to riichi shanpon with the idea to tsumo the dora.

In the game, the pro called riichi immediately, but it is a sad riichi. Did he not understand that this hand can still move forward?

**The very word, the idea of the dealer's confining riichi is funny.** It is something that destroys mahjong, a mahjong-destroying riichi. You must not destroy the game. You are also part of the game, so it is like destroying the boat you are sailing on.

The dealer is the captain. The captain must not destroys the boat and run away. Have responsibility for the game. This riichi is an irresponsible riichi.

While you can call kanchan  riichi in the special case that there are no tiles left, calling it on turn 6 is like when just after a show starts, "THE END" suddenly appears.

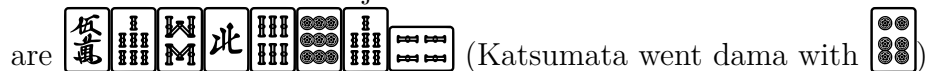
You might say that you won't draw a ryanmen with , but pursuing the possibility that it might: that is mahjong.

## 2.7 Closed honitsu kanchan is dama

### Question



You are in the South seat just after the dealer has called riichi. The dealer's discards



### Answer

Discard 22222 but don't call riichi.

Take damaten and foresee accepting 20000 50000.

However, in this situation even if you draw 20000 and you can wait for 10000 40000 70000, 10000 was already discarded once, so the acceptance was poor, and you can understand that after waiting for an upgrade a few turns it's no problem to riichi.

There is also the upgrade to sanankou.

## 2.8 Closed honitsu sanankou is riichi

### Question



In the same situation as previous question, you have improved the hand to tsumori

sanankou. Call riichi? The dealer's riichi has discarded

(Katsumata stayed damaten with )

### Answer

**After improving to sanankou in damaten, the waiting had effect, so accept that improvement and call riichi.**

In the game, the player continued damaten with , then drew later and seeing that the dealer's first discard was , cut , missing a tsumo with .

Had he called riichi, he would have had baiman tsumo, and instead it was a draw. Sad!

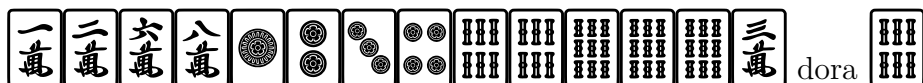
Having come so far with this hand, you should push all dangerous tiles, and since you must win this at all costs it's good to call riichi. After drawing , you should go **"It passed!?! He must have completed that wait first (入り目でした)."** Indeed it was. Discarding the tile that gave tenpai to the opponent (入り目) and winning: you must burden razor's edge risks like that at some point.

During the live broadcast I also said "Shouldn't he riichi?" If you riichi this, even supposing you deal in you must accept it.

**Take great pains to attack! Call riichi! When your hand says this and you get fucked from not calling riichi, you destroy your own flow.**

## 2.9 Deny kanchan instant riichi

### Question



South 1, South seat (2nd place)

With a dora pair, you are tenpai for kanchan. Instant riichi? (Katsumata cut and called riichi.)

### Answer

Wait one turn.

Instant riichi is not bad, but there are several possible improvements. can make ryanmen, and or can make a dora shanpon.

In order of how happy you will be, you should try waiting for

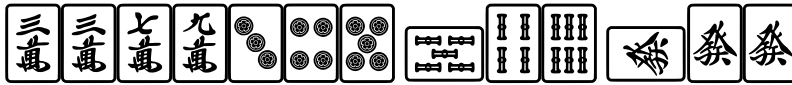
1.


2.

3.





If comes, you should think that the situation is good.

In the game, the player called instant riichi, and his ippatsu draw was . Had he stayed damaten, he could have cut to switch to dora shanpon, but was shimocho's winning tile, with



At times like that, don't think that calling instant riichi would have been good: rather, you should reflect about how it's you who made a mistake by letting shimocha call  into tenpai.

In the game, the player avoided dealing in by calling instant riichi, but afterwards last place tsumo'd a haneman and he ended up losing 3000 points. Wouldn't it have been better to deal into shimocha for a mere 2000 points?

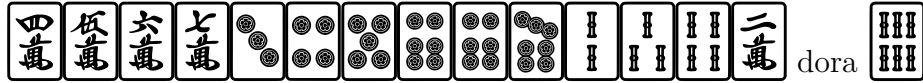
Let's think a bit about why he drew . As seen in the previous question, this player (Katsumata) missed a   shanpon menhon sanankou the previous round. Because he was dragged down by that bad form, he deals in with .


**If you make a mistake one round, pay attention the next: it's important to think of such things when you play.** It's good in the end to deal in, but still you must pay attention. Dealing in while paying attention and dealing in without understanding have completely different meanings.

On the other hand, you should attack after winning a good hand. Although a good hand does not necessarily mean that it must be expensive.

## 2.10 Calmly know the balance


### Question




In the South round, you are clearly in last place with only 5700 points. 2nd place has called riichi, and 3rd place has called and appears to be in tenpai. Would you call oikake riichi with  kanchan? (Ishibashi did)

### Answer

Since 2nd and 3rd place are fighting with a riichi and a call, this is a situation where other people are having a good fight, so don't intrude on the contest for 1st place.

Here, only if you draw  for 234 sanshoku, can you be one of the party, and take part in the contest.

In the game, the result was ippatsu tsumo with ura  for haneman, but it certainly can not be called a good win.

Rather than that, it would be better to tsumo 500/1000 without calling riichi.



## 2.12 Summary: riichi decision

1. Riichi with the final shape
2. Don't rely on ron, aim for tsumo
3. If there are possible improvements, stay dama for one or several turns
4. If the winning tile comes out while in damaten, there are cases where you shouldn't call ron (to make the hand more expensive)
5. Don't take meaningless kanchan tenpai
6. Dora shanpon is okay




**You must think every time whether the hand can win or can not win.  
When the hand reaches the final shape you envision, discover your joy  
and call riichi!**

## 2.13 Chiitoitsu hell wait is forbidden

### Question







South 3, 3rd place West seat

Chiitai doradora tenpai.  has just been discarded twice,  is live. What would you discard? (Arai went dama on )

### Answer

Take the  wait.

You must look at the field. For me, there is no reason at all to take the  hell wait. After the game, the player said “The live  wait felt bad.” If you think that because toimen just discarded  the last one will come out from somewhere, you must not think such soulless things.

Had he called riichi with , it would have been ippatsu tsumo, but unfortunately it was a draw.

## 2.14 There is no dealer riichi

### Question

A dealer riichi has an average value of 9000 points, so I have been taught to fold from iishanten...

### Answer

**I think the reason is that in the teaching of the world people say “You must fold because the dealer called riichi.”**

Because they have this mistaken prejudice, the result is that they allow the dealer to renchan, and make the game’s situation one-sided.

There are people who will drop an anko of a safe tile against a riichi to fold. You must have learned the teaching that you must fold clearly whenever you fold. I can’t stomach this pathetic, embarrassing giving up without a fight at all. Against a riichi, I will not allow myself anything but to keep advancing as far as possible.

**There are no dealers or non-dealers. You must not recoil from advancing.**

## 2.15 Designate an imaginary first place

### Question

If you are tenpai with tanyao nomi while in first place, should you stay dama?

### Answer

There is a saying that the rich man should not pick fights (金持ち喧嘩せず). This is the way of thinking that you should always take a stance that can fold, in order not to lose your hard-earned money.

**However, exactly because you are rich, you should advance more and more not to spoil your current good hands.** Instead of shifting the round with tanyao only, press on the opposition call riichi, believing in the tiles. Preserving your point sticks while losing the energy of the tiles is unfortunate. On the contrary, losing points in this game without losing the tile energy is fine.

When I gambled, **even if I was ahead by 30000 points, I would ignore that I was in first place and designate for myself an imaginary first place opponent, so that I could delude myself into thinking I need one more win, just a little bit to overtake him, as if I was in a close second instead of a faraway first.** Like that, I dispelled the situation and could always face forward, and created the way of the great lead dispersing complacency.