

Sanma book 1

Owata

TN: I will focus on getting the mahjong theory across, I'm not going to worry about perfect translation accuracy outside of that. Some sections will be cut or only paraphrased. I'm not always going to point this out. I will never cut actual theory, but there is plenty of fluff that I don't want to spend time on (e.g. things specific to tenhou, interviews unrelated to sanma theory, etc.). Also I won't spend time trying to make this pdf look nice.

1 Introduction to sanma mahjong

1.1 He who masters honour tiles masters sanma

A difference of 5 percent

In sanma, manzu tiles 2-8 are not used. So unlike yonma, it only has 27 kinds of tiles rather than 34. Accordingly, as you can see below, the amount of honour tiles increases by about 5%, so they're more important than in yonma.

Yonma: 7 kinds of honour tiles, 34 kinds of tiles total => roughly 20% honour tiles

Sanma: 7 kinds of honour tiles, 27 kinds of tiles total => roughly 25% honour tiles

There's another reason that honours tiles are important. Chii does not exist in sanma, so honours that can give you 1 han with just a pon have high value.

They're also compatible with honitsu. Additionally, you can aim for several yakuman with them.

Because they are speed boosters, they can increase the speed of one's own hand. When other players need them, it's possible to stop them from winning by not giving them the honour pon they need.

The sanma tile cut sequence

When you have enough groups, start with isolated terminals. Yakuhai are more valuable.

Especially , the least valuable tiles in sanma, should be cut first. They cannot make sequences, and are mostly used as safe tiles of for tanki waits.

When I don't have enough groups early game, I have a system for what order I cut tiles in. See this list:

1.  (cannot form sequences)
2. isolated terminals (considering ura dora rate, discard 1 before 9 of the same suit if you have both)
3. guest winds
4. round winds
5. dragons
6. seat winds

Round winds are cut earlier so they're less likely to be called by players for whom they are worth 2 han, seat winds are cut last because they can also be used as safe tiles. They're the most valuable yakuhai. I don't think this order is absolutely correct, and maybe my thinking will change in the future.

In any case, if you have your own standard, you'll have to worry less about the order. When you always discard them fast, it will be harder for your opponents to read your progress.

It's hard to notice if your opponents are tenpai in online mahjong; the thinking time is one of the few clues you have.

Of course, this order assumes that all other conditions are equal (e.g. all tiles are live, or all are once discarded, no strange discards from opponents etc.). It's essential to be flexible and respond to the situation as necessary. For example, when two tiles are both once discarded and one of them is dealer genbutsu, you should keep that one and discard the other first.

It's not an exaggeration to say that your judgement on when to cut honour tiles, and on whether to cut them at all, determines your power level in sanma.

1.2 Making full use of your skills

Missing out on a win is fatal

Fully using your own arsenal of techniques and skills is more important in sanma. One main reason for this is that there is one less player.

Unlike yonma, in sanma you are making one third of all decisions rather than one fourth. In other words, your own mistakes will more readily transform into points for your opponents, and with skillful play you can find a path to winning a hand almost anywhere.

The basic image to have in mind is that in yonma, it's fine to win one in four hands, and in sanma you should win one in three hands.

TN: When I searched 技術介入 to find out what it means (as it isn't in jisho) I mostly got pachinko related results.

Making a mistake and still winning, missing tenpai and as a result avoiding a deal in, being unfairly punished even with perfect play. These scenarios are common in yonma, but in sanma such distortions are less common.

It's often the case that your points are merely the consequences of

your own actions.

The accuracy of reads

The other main reason that makes your arsenal of skills more important is that the manzu suit is missing seven tiles. This leads to more situations where you can read your opponents' hands.

Let's look at some examples. "The ura suji of an early game discard is more dangerous, while for an endgame discard the matagi suji is more dangerous." You can apply this theory more straightforwardly in sanma. With fewer kinds of tiles, there are fewer exceptions.

It follows that in the endgame, where lots of information is available, it is possible to read others' hands and the wall with high accuracy.

1.3 Concerning Pei

An explanation of nukidora

Pei can be used as a guest wind within a hand as well, but it's not treated as nukidora in that case. Therefore you'd use them this way for yakuman, or as a tanki wait in a hand you absolutely want to win.

TN: Writing "[East/South/West/North] Wind" all the time is annoying so I'll be using the Japanese terms (Ton, Nan, Xia, Pei) for them.

Even when you have a Pei triplet in your opening hand, it's better not to view it as a triplet and declare them all as nukidora to increase hand value. By the way, in the 巷 region*, you can't use Pei in your hand unless it's yakuman, so be careful.

The time to declare your Peis is usually immediately. Unlike a kan, it doesn't increase your opponents' hand values, and it doesn't give away information about your own hand either. You'll want to declare all of them so you can build your hand better. Also, you can declare Pei even while in riichi, so even a riichi nomi hand can instantly turn into a riichi tsumo rinshan peidora mangan.

There are also cases where you can hold onto a Pei. It can be discarded, so with terrible hands it's possible to hold one of them as a safe tile candidate. Declaring Pei after a riichi can break ippatsu. However, one of the joys of sanma is to see your hand evolve with every draw, and even the slowest hands will turn into something respectable by endgame, so the basic approach should still be to

declare Pei as soon as possible.

TN: I have no idea where 巷 is so I left it untranslated since I don't know the English name, and making one up would just make it harder to find. I did at least check the names of all the Japanese prefectures, but it wasn't one of them.

Push-fold criteria

On average you get more than one Pei per round, and getting one after being tenpai can sometimes give you rinshan. This is a reason for the higher average hand values in sanma. Whether you have declared Peis or not has a big influence on push-fold judgement. Combining these with regular dora and akadora, the following is the basis you should have in mind.

0 – 1 dora = tend towards defence

2 – 3 dora = tend towards offence

4 – 5 dora = offence

6 + dora = push everything

Declaring all four Pei puts a lot pressure on the other players. They will have to adjust and fold sooner. In the same vein, when faced with an opponent with three Pei declarations, make your preparations to fold sooner than usual.

Number of tile draws

In yonma, in a round where nobody makes any calls, the East and South position players will end up drawing 18 tiles from the wall, the others 17 each. In sanma, it's 17 plus however many Pei redraws you get. Since you mostly don't use Pei in your hand, effectively you get 17 draws. There are 28 fewer tiles, but there's also a missing player and all his draws. In the end, it balances out such that sanma basically has the same number of tile draws and turns as yonma.

1.4 Sanshoku doesn't exist in sanma

Sanma doesn't have chii

When you think of a beautiful yonma hand, you may picture tanpin sanshoku. Even without dora, it can be up to haneman while closed, and the wait is good as well.

However, sanma doesn't have the middle manzu tiles and so sanshoku doesn't exist. Tanyao is also less common, as is pinfu.

What this means is that in sanma, the key yaku are 1) yakuhai and 2) riichi.

You can easily get value with nukidora and akadora, so building your hand's yaku is not as important as in yonma.

As there is no chi, toitoi is more important, and also outside of toitoi, in callable hands it's standard to keep pairs in ryankan+pair shapes, as seen below.



In terms of acceptance, there is no difference between 1p, 3p, and 5p discards here. But as you can only call pon you should discard 1p or 5p and keep the pair.

On the other hand, with pinfu or other uncallable hands the standard practice is to keep the ryankan and discard 3p.



1.5 Dealing with calls

Think of all opponents as toimen

The way to deal with calls in sanma is decidedly simple: Discard tiles that may be poned later.

It's the same as when dealing with an open toimen hand in yonma. Let's consider a shimocha who's doing honitsu. Our hand is this:



Then shimocha calls pon on Chun and his discards look like this:



In sanma, when a player drops a ryanmen group around the time of a yakuhai call, his hand often involves honitsu or toitoi.

A honitsu in the dora suit can easily be mangan and constitutes a threat. The chance it has other honours is high as well, cutting Haku or Hatsu and having them called can kill your own hand in

the blink of an eye.



In this example we have to commit to using the dora and cut 2s.

There's no chi in sanma, so cutting 2s here can save you. Cutting honours first, having them poned and then dealing in with 2s is the worst case scenario.

This is what I mean when I say think of your opponents the same way you think of your toimen in sanma.

It's fine to cut Haku and Hatsu when your hand advances, and if it doesn't then you can deny the honitsu opponent more honour calls and discard the 1m pair instead.

Keep in mind that denying honours is not important enough for you to force your own hand to be as slim* as possible. It's common for opponents to call from a hand with bad shapes, in which case cutting honours before he can call them is also an option. Your reads are important here.

TN: Most regulars know this already but I might as well explain again just in case. A "slim" hand is one where you sacrifice some acceptance in favour of safety, for example keeping a twice discarded guest wind over 3s in a 334s shape.

1.6 Dealing with yamiten (ponten)

Only be on guard against hands that look expensive

Generally, hands without Pei and no riichi declared tend to have low value, so it's not necessary to sacrifice efficiency to guard against them.

It's only in situations like when dealer has two or more Pei and gives off the impression of being tenpai that you have to take countermeasures.

Let's look at an example. If an opponent has discards two or more middle tiles from his hand and after that repeatedly tsumogiris, it's quite possible that he is tenpai.

Of course, it's also possible that after some initial honour and terminal discards he cuts a single middle tile to reach tenpai. It's difficult to see through everything.

Almost all low value closed hands will come with a riichi declaration. Sniffing out yamiten is important when the hand is expensive. As group selection only happens from iishanten or better, you should

think that it's not strange for a player to be in tenpai when he cuts a kanchan or a pair.

If a player makes a call after group selection, expect him to be tenpai.

You're more likely to draw useful tiles in sanma compared to yonma. Advancing shanten once every two draws is the kind of speed I have come to expect. It follows that tenpai is reached sooner on average. At the end of the first row of discards, you can expect one player to be tenpai.

Yamiten, being yamiten, means you cannot be 100% certain if a closed hand is tenpai or not.

I'm talking more about impressions here, so it may be hard to understand. If you feel that an opponent is tenpai and you are noten, you must absolutely avoid dealing dangerous tiles into it.

When you are also tenpai, compare waits and values, and if it's worth it, push some number of dangerous tiles.

However, don't just push every musuji. You want to have an internal red line, such as "I'll push one musuji but not two" or "If I draw the double dora I shan't deal in with it."

On the other hand, if your opponent has declared some number of Pei, if you feel he is noten get rid of your dangerous tiles early.

How to respond to dealer riichi

Fighting dealer as non-dealer is futile. Even if you have mangan, it's only 6k points on tsumo, but if you deal in you can expect to lose 10k or more points.

When you both have the same chance of winning, the gap in expected hand values makes it not worth pushing. Do not rush head-first into dealer riichi. That is standard practice.

How to respond to non-dealer riichi

As dealer, view it as an opportunity. Braving some danger is well worth it. With a good shape, you can even go full offence from iishanten.

As non-dealer, it depends on your hand. Full offence from iishanten is not allowed, try to manoeuvre safely and only enter the ring when you have caught up.

1.7 Deal-in rate of musuji

Musuji are more dangerous in sanma

This is the suji list in yonma.



There's six in every suit, for a grand total of 18.

Accordingly, if we assume that a riichi against which no suji has passed yet has a ryanmen wait, the chance to deal in with the first musuji is a bit more than 5%. It usually won't deal in.

Sanma only has 12 suji, so under the same assumptions the deal in rate of the first musuji jumps to about 8%.

Of course, middle tiles that belong to multiple suji are even more dangerous.

This means you need a stricter push-fold judgement in sanma. It's good to err on the side of cowardice.

From experience, cutting musuji against a tenpai opponent will deal in 20-30% of the time. In endgame, when many kinds of tiles have passed already, the deal in rate is in the 30-40% range.

In return, it's easier to read

With fewer musuji, it becomes easier to narrow down the danger zone.

The following scenario becomes very possible: A player declares an early riichi. You mawashi around it by not cutting dangerous tiles. As the pond of the riichi grows, you identify which tiles will deal in, and with the increased freedom of what tiles you can cut (as formerly dangerous tiles become safer) you reach tenpai.

With fewer kinds of tiles, drawing useful tiles is more likely, so even with mawashi you can reach tenpai and win the hand in the end.

This is one of the hallmarks of sanma. Mawashi is more effective than it is in yonma.

How to mawashi

So, how do we make it easy to get into tenpai with mawashi?

The simplest method is dropping pairs or triplets of honour tiles. It's the gold standard of mawashi, letting you reshape your hand without destroying it.

When you don't have pairs or triplets of honours and your hand is full of musuji, drop terminal pairs instead.

Dropping pairs and triplets like this is good because it doesn't separate sequences and by drawing something next to one of the pair/triplet tiles one can easily reach tenpai.

Biding your time for 2-3 turns is enough to reveal new safe areas. From there, you can fully fold or you can keep the mawashi going. When in mawashi, avoid cutting apart your sequences as much as possible. When you're forced to cut from a sequence, cut from the outside if possible.

As an example, if 123s have all passed, cut 1s. This way you can still complete the sequence again with 1s or 4s.

Keiten is not important

In yonma, keiten is considered important because the tenpai payments are not far off from average hand values. It's also possible to get there somewhat safely with chii calls.

By comparison, keiten in sanma is harder to reach due to not having access to chii calls, and it's also worth less compared to sanma hand values.

Pushing a dangerous tile to maintain tenpai is not a winning strategy in sanma. When you draw a dangerous tile in endgame, just fold.

1.8 Tsumo loss

TN: I'm going to paraphrase this chapter because it's just basic sanma rules.

Because there are only two other players in sanma, you get less points on tsumo than you do with ron (assuming equal han/fu). The key takeaways in the chapter are the following:

1. Dealer only gets 2/3 of the "actual" hand value on tsumo.
2. Consequently, a dealer mangan ron is the same value as a dealer haneman tsumo.
3. Dealer baiman tsumo is worse(!) than dealer haneman ron.
4. Calling riichi with a mangan or better hand as dealer is not good because the value upgrade can be nullified by tsumo loss.
5. Non-dealers get 3/4 of the "real" hand value.

6. For non-dealers, calling riichi becomes bad when the hand is haneman or better (haneman ron point gain = baiman tsumo point gain).

tl;dr Yonma can be said to be all about tsumo, but this is not true for sanma. There you want to ron if possible. This makes reading yamiten important.

1.9 Don't greed for dora, greed for good shapes

You can get dora later

I already touched on the fact that sanma is all about dora.

In addition to the four Pei there are akadora and regular dora, so it's easy to make expensive hands.

Don't focus on the regular dora too much, missing a win because you tried to keep a dora too much is putting the cart before the horse. Dora in a hand that doesn't win is like mochi drawn on a canvas. A dora 2 hand that can easily win is better than a dora 3 hand that has trouble winning. Even if you have to cut dora or downgrade yaku, if you can improve your waits or acceptance then do so.

Fast hands also allow you to shut down your opponents' hands. The best defence is a good offence, as they say. This is why good shapes are more important than dora.

Using dora to upgrade a 1k hand to 2k or a 2k hand to 3.9k is almost always not worth it if it costs speed.

Dora                                                                                   

In a hand like this, you are supposed to cut 8s.

Dora pon

With this hand, the dora is likely to come out later. Focus on winning chance and cut 8s now. Wider acceptance is more important than weaker value upgrades like 1k to 2k, 2k to 3.9k, or 5.2k to 8k.

East seat, East round, dora 

This hand is iishanten for honitsu. We want to get yaku so we can open, and so we cut the dora. It's the same line of thought as cut-

ting a terminal dora pair to aim for tanyao akadora 2.

TN: I assume he means tanyao akadora 2 in yonma.



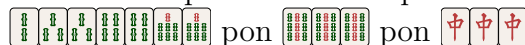
In a sticky iishanten like this, we should also discard the dora.

TN: I don't really see sticky iishanten being used a lot so I'm not sure if I should use it or not, but then "kuttsuki iishanten" isn't going to help EOPs either.

For those unfamiliar, a sticky iishanten is one where you have four completed shapes and some floating tiles. As soon as you draw something that connects to one of your floating tiles, you'll be tenpai. The acceptance of sticky iishanten is great, and if the floating tiles are next to sequences you can also often get a good final wait.

If you get a bad wait on the dora indicator here, it would be hard to win. A 6p draw is much better when it gives you a sanmenchan in pinzu. That or a wide souzu wait is what you must aim for here. Don't be picky with yaku either. Assume we draw 8s. We then have the choice between confirmed ittsumi with a 25p wait or confirmed pinfu with ittsumi chance with a 369s wait. The value difference makes it a bit awkward, but I would definitely choose the wider 369s wait.

A common open honitsu shape is something like this:



Now imagine someone discards 7s.

The current hand is worth 3900, but if you pon 7s you could get 8000 with toitoi. In this case as well you should focus on increasing your chance to win the hand, don't call the 7s and keep your ryanmen wait.

With 3 calls, other players will be on guard, and it'll be easy for them to hold onto your winning tiles. The 25s wait can become mangan with the red 5, and you can always upgrade with a Pei draw as well.

Since you already have yaku, don't be greedy and try to win sooner rather than later.

To summarise the priorities you should have, they are

shape > yaku > dora

Focus on win chance above all else, and if you end up coincidentally winning with dora in hand, consider it lucky.

1.10 Don't worry about shape too much

Dora 1 + penchan = riichi

As I touched on before, the basis of hand building is to focus on good shapes and good waits. Dora don't matter too much.

When you can choose a wait, you should always pick the better one. But don't delay getting to tenpai. Tenpai is better the sooner you get it.

It follows that in the following hand, with 1 dora and few chances to get better waits, you should immediately riichi when you get tenpai.

Dora

Kanchan waits like 24s or 79p, which can only draw one kind of tile to improve to ryanmen, should also be riichid immediately if you have at least 1 dora.



In this example hand, you should instantly riichi even without dora if you are dealer.

As non-dealer, the return from riichi is lower, so a bad shape wait with no dora makes for a risky riichi declaration. It's better to stay yamiten.

Let's think about other cases in which yakuless yamiten can make sense.

First, when your hand is too cheap. Having your riichi chased and then dealing into a big hit sucks, so going yamiten with something like pinfu nomi is reasonable.

TN: I don't know why he uses pinfu as an example when he said just a paragraph ago that we'll look at vakuless hands.

The next case is when your wait is depleted. When two tiles of your kanchan are already discarded, or you have a shanpon with two tiles dead. When you have no faith in a wait, consider not taking tenpai and wait for something to stick to an isolated tile.

These are the two main reasons to choose yakuless yamiten. The downside of yamiten is that the others can play their hands freely, and this is no small downside. Thus riichi with just 1 dora and a kanchan or penchan is usually correct.

Because there are fewer kinds of tiles, you can win on kanchan or penchan quite often.

So if you reach tenpai in a yakiless hand and 1 dora, riichi even with kanchan or penchan.

The downside of staying in yamiten to get a better wait is that it will take a few turns, and in those turns your opponents are not restricted in how they can advance their hands.

By calling riichi, you restrict the others' movements and gain additional safety by slowing them down. Truly offence is the best defence.

The importance of accurately assessing your hand value

Riichi judgement is really just about knowing what your hand is worth.

The value of tenpai depends on many factors:

- point situation
- remaining rounds
- hand value
- number of remaining winning tiles
- likelihood of your wait being discarded by others
- remaining turns in the hand
- whether the others are tenpai
- whether you have yaku
- whether you are dealer

There's complex interplay of these factors, so it's not possible to just make a simple formula for a theoretical "tenpai score". Balancing risk and return and correctly judging your own hand are both necessary to discern the true value of your tenpai. We can say that people who are good at this are good at mahjong.

1.11 Play 5 blocks in sanma

How to play from 2shanten

A hand like , which has no useless tiles, has good acceptance and can easily call. It's easy to reach tenpai with it.



Look at this 2shanten hand. It can be played in mainly two different ways. Option one is to cut 89s, which fixes which blocks we'll use. Let's call this 5 block style. Option two is to cut 3s from 334s, which leaves us with 6 blocks, and we don't yet know which block we'll cut in the future. Let's call this the 6 block style.

The advantage of 5 block style here is that 334s has the option to pon. Iishanten will have a good shape and should quickly morph into tenpai. While 2shanten, we can hold one or two safe tiles as well.

The merit of 6 block style is that it is wider, and we can more easily respond to the bakyou. It often confirms ryanmen shapes, making it easier to ron if that is the final wait as opponents may try to mawashi with a sotogawa tile.

The downside of 5 block style is that if a group's needed tiles are discarded over time, it becomes harder to win. However, in sanma you can often just toss a weak group and quickly draw useful tiles, bringing you back to tenpai. So this downside is small, and we can say that 5 block style is an excellent approach with few to no weaknesses.

On the other hand, 6 block style has more severe drawbacks. You have more excess tiles for longer, so if you are pre-empted by another player reaching tenpai first your acceptance will be useless and your defensive capabilities low. You'll also often be unable to call.

The conclusion is obvious: 5 block style is suited to sanma, from 2shanten onwards you should play with 5 blocks.

The 6 block style is more suited to yonma, where there are more kinds of tiles that make the extra acceptance more useful. The better chance of drawing useful tiles in sanma makes 5 block style the correct default choice in sanma.

Sanma should be played with 5 block style

In yonma, choose between 5 and 6 block styles based on the bakyou

1.12 How to advance your hand in early game

Do you have 2 dora?

When looking at your haipai, first count your dora and Pei. If you have at least 2, you can expect to get a mangan+ hand and so you can play for tile efficiency as usual. Focus on speed, don't worry

too much about difficult yaku, and consider riichi and yakuhai your main options.

If you're lacking groups, get rid of your honours, and if your shapes are bad, hope to pair up yakuhai to pon with to get more speed.

When you don't have dora you should also advance your hand, but do so in such a way that you can defend when your opponents attack.

It's fine to aim for bolder yaku like honitsu, chiitai, or toitoi. It's a bit slower, but it's easy to end up with safe honours which will boost your defence.

TN: I'm pretty sure he's still talking about hands with 0 dora on this page.

Pairs and triplets of 19m or honours can be used to mawashi if another player gets to tenpai first, so hands with them have high defensive power. Closed yakuhai triplets are the best of all. You can attack or defend with them, making hands with them some of the best.

Keeping groups that are somewhat safe is also good. It allows you to keep some defensive capability without making your hand too slim.

For example:

Zero dora, 

With this iishanten, we're up against a dealer that has declared three Pei with the following discards: 9m3z8s1s1p In this situation, we should keep the safer-looking souzu penshan and drop the more dangerous pinzu penchan.

If upper souzu seem safe against both opponents, it even becomes unnecessary to hold other safe tiles. We can then proceed without slimming our hand.

Two safe tiles is plenty. If you can avoid dealing into a riichi for two turns you'll get more safe tiles and you'll probably be fine.

Tenpai is reached more quickly in sanma

Keep in mind that keeping safer groups is an early game approach. In midgame and later opponents could already be tenpai and discarding a more dangerous group could already deal in. You'd want to get rid of the currently safer 89s group at that stage.

Your opponents and their discards can change how you play a hand, even when you have the exact same tiles. This is one of the fun

parts of mahjong.

In sanma, the average number of turns to reach tenpai is lower. Often one player will reach tenpai on the first row, in the second row at least two players will be tenpai and someone wins before the second row ends.

Because hands are so fast, early game decisionmaking is very important.

1.13 How to play the midgame

A boring tenpai should be folded

Now we'll consider the midgame. What I mean by midgame is the second row of discards, so turns 7 to 12. There's a high chance that one or more players are tenpai, and if someone has declared multiple Pei and his discard include several middle tiles, you must consider the possibility that he is yamiten.

The question of how to deal with yamiten is an eternally recurring one, but push-fold judgement against riichi is simple.

If you're not tenpai, fold. If you are tenpai, it mostly depends on waits and hand values, but against dealer it's usually correct to fold. Early game was about choosing a vision for the hand and what tiles to keep. Using your vision as a base, midgame is about how far you can take the hand you've built up to now and how to deal with your opponents, and it's the most difficult part of the game to play well.

I can't claim to have easily found all the answers, but after gaining a lot of experience in a lot of matches I think I found a good strategy. To summarise, it's the following:

- Don't push into riichi from noten.
- Even from tenpai, avoid pushing into dealer riichi as much as possible.
- Retreat quickly when your hand is cheap.

1.14 Endgame considerations

Noten payments are a necessary expense

Finally, let's talk about endgame (the third row of discards). Sanma hands don't often last this long. And with fewer draws and winning

tiles left than midgame, being tenpai in this stage is not very valuable.

Accordingly, the basic approach is not to cut musuji from noten. Dropping musuji into a tenpai opponent is more dangerous in sanma. In situations where it's likely for your opponents to be tenpai, you should not take the risk; break tenpai and discard safe tiles. Noten payments in sanma are only 2k, so it doesn't hurt much. Think of it as a necessary expense.

In summary:

Tenpai has little merit Musuji are quite dangerous Noten payments aren't that bad so don't cling to tenpai too much.

1.15 Situation awareness

An example of information processing

Situation awareness means the ability to objectively judge the different players' conditions and identify who has the advantage and who doesn't.

Your mahjong powerlevel is determined by your mental fortitude, tile efficiency, and situation awareness.

A strong mental game means that even when you get unlucky or are in a bad situation, you don't tilt out and find the best way to move forward.

Tile efficiency is the ability to know the best discard route to tenpai in any given hand. In a way it can be considered a "one man mahjong" skill, and it is most useful for offence. It's about equally as important as situation awareness.

To explain situation awareness in more detail, it involves answering questions. When you get your haipai, you need to answer the following questions:

- Declare kyuushuu or aim for kokushi?
- Can this haipai win? Do I go full efficiency, or should I keep defence in mind?
- What yaku can I aim for? Do I try for any of them?
- Should I strike a balance and switch to offence or defence based on later developments?

In the midgame the questions will be these. You only have a few

seconds to answer them.

- How fast are my opponents advancing?
- Should I push into this riichi?
- What are the odds that opponent X is yamiten?
- If he is, what is his hand value likely to be?
- Is it acceptable to deal into it, considering the current point spread?
- In what value range is it still fine to deal in?
- Do I open or do I stay closed?
- Should I let my opponents call or should I try to hold tiles they want to call?
- Do I riichi?
- Should I go for mawashi here or should I just fold?
- How many tiles can I push from dama?
- What are the dangerous tiles?
- Do I take tenpai or not?
- When having a choice of which wait to take, which one is best?

And similarly, the endgame questions.

- Are the other pushing or folding?
- When you want to advance the round, should you deal in on purpose (TN: i.e. sashikomi)?
- If yes, which tile is likely to deal in?
- Should you attempt keiten?
- If yes, what should you call?
- Is it acceptable to push danger tiles to stay keiten? If yes, how many?
- If you are tenpai, do you try to win? How far should you keep pushing?

Processing this much information perfectly is extremely difficult. As mere humans we cannot avoid making mistakes, but what we can

do is reduce our error rate over time.

The best way to improve your situation awareness is simply practice, practice, practice. Play more matches, study your game records, have your records examined by someone better than you and let them point out your weaknesses.

You can also watch players better than you. If you do, don't display information that player doesn't have (i.e. turn off full hand displays and colouring of deal in tiles) and try to imagine playing in his stead. When his play differs from what you would have done, think about possible reasons.

There's always a reason for why someone is stronger than you.

If you find an environment where strong players answer your questions and you have the emotional fortitude to accept these answers, you will certainly be able to level up.

Even if you're not blessed by such an environment, you can study game records of strong players or watch them play live. I think honest training like that can even be a shortcut to becoming strong.

1.16 How to get many-sided waits

The importance of sequential shapes

While the most important thing in sanma is hand value, the second most important thing is a good wait. As an extreme example, if you ignored your opponents and called riichi with a sanmenchan every single hand, you'd be unbeatable. You could always get your value from dora.

So how do we get these many-sided waits?

The trick to getting them is in making connected groups by joining tiles with inner tiles.

TN: This is the stupidest sentence I typed for this TL so far.

Sequential shapes like 3456s or 4567s are especially good. From a sticky iishanten they can each draw two kinds of tiles to make a sanmenchan wait.

Shapes closer to the outside like 2345s are a bit worse as they can only draw one kind of tile to get a sanmenchan.

When these shapes include terminals, e.g. 6789s, they cannot develop into a sanmenchan and are therefore the worst of these shapes when you are in sticky iishanten. (However, keep in mind that they can function as a nobetan wait when you don't have a pair.)

Nakabukure shapes like 3445s are valuable because they can easily become one sequence and one ryanmen, but they cannot make san-



From this tenpai on 25s, drawing 4s and cutting 6s leads to



That's a 12345s wait, with a possible suuankou on tsumo.

In the match, 2s and 5s were dead, so I cut 3s to get a wider wait.



Removing the iipeikou shape leaves 4445556s, which is a tanki shape. The wait is 4567s.

But that's not every tile the hand is waiting on. Remember that two consecutive triplets with three ears on either side can be seen as three sequences.

In this case we take the 4s and 5s ankou, remove them with 336s as the three ears, and then we're left with 1122s. Everyone can recognise this simple shanpon wait.

So the complete wait of the hand is 124567s.

Other shapes with three sequences like this are for example



This is one 234s and two 345s sequences. 223334445s can be parsed similarly.

Even 222333444s can be parsed this way, though it can also be counted as sanankou.

Now looking at the following hand, you should be able to tell that's is waiting on 25s with confirmed iipeikou:



There are other patterns as well. I hope that by becoming better with different shapes over time, you will reach the point where you can find the best wait in no time even in closed chinitsu hands.

1.17 Choose 1m or 9m as your tanki

The flexibility of tanki waits

One big merit of tanki waits is that you can choose your wait.

Like I explained earlier, by connecting your tanki wait to a triplet or sequence, you can easily get many-sided waits.

You can also choose to wait on tiles that are likely to still be in the wall, or tiles that other players will have trouble using.

For example, you can wait on 8s or 9s when you can see three or four 7s. Or you could wait on 9p when there's a pon or kan of 8p on the table.

Other options are waiting on a cheap suit, or waiting on the oppo-

site suit on another player's honitsu attempt.

When you have a tanki wait, you should think about the chances that you can connect it to a closed triplet or a sequence.

The best is when you can get a multi-sided wait on tiles that are likely to come out.

When that's impossible and it seems that you'll be stuck with a tanki no matter what, wait on 1m, 9m, or honours.

The best tiles to tanki on can be ordered as follows:

1. 19m
2. guest winds
3. round wind / dragons
4. terminals in souzu or pinzu
5. 2 or 8
6. other number tiles

The ordering based on remaining tiles is this:

1. Once discarded
2. live tile
3. twice discarded (hell wait)

Using 19m in a hand means it's a pair or a triplet, so a once discarded 1m or 9m will generally have two tiles left in the wall.

Even if the other copies are being held by another player, he may discard them when faced with an open tenpai or riichi. These things together make 19m the best tanki waits.

When waiting on a live manzu, it's more likely that someone else is holding a pair or triplet. But it's still very possible for all of them to be in the wall, and of course they can still come out from players that are folding or trying to mawashi.

The hell wait is something that other players will discard if they draw it, so it's very good in lategame when you declare riichi or the others are folding.

Keep in mind that the hell wait tile can be deadwalled and that it's sometimes possible for another player not to discard it. That's what makes the hell wait a gamble.

The rules of tanki waits

When changing tanki waits, it's essential to check that it's not furiten in advance. Don't hesitate for too long.

When you draw 1m or 9m, take a bit of time to notice it's furiten, and then discard it, the others may figure out that you're on a tanki. When other players know that you have a tanki, then they can push more tiles and counterattack more effectively. Tanki waits are a threat when the others don't know you have one, so them finding out turns it into a weak wait.

It's the same as when someone has a hadaka tanki.

Mahjong is a game with a lot of hidden information where conjectures about the state of the game are important. Try not to give your opponents additional information because of a lack of preparation on your part.

Tanki on a dora middle tile

The advantages of waiting on a tile like this are that your hand value increases, the dora can no longer be called, and you cannot deal in with the dora.

The big disadvantage is that it's hard to win with it.

As the other players will do their best to use convenient dora tiles like this, it's one of the most difficult tanki to win with.

So leaving aside chiitai, most hands will have Pei or an aka or two and as such can see mangan values or higher even without dora tanki. Don't be greedy in such a situation and go for a multi-sided wait or an honour tanki.

As I said before: "Don't greed for dora, greed for good shapes."

The exception to this is chiitai, where ura can give you haneman or better. In that case you should immediately riichi.

Tanki on terminals and honours

Sanma has Pei and thus many ways to get dora, so isolated dora honours are discarded more easily.

A tanki on such a tile has the same advantage as waiting on a dora middle tile, but it's not nearly as hard to win as a dora middle tile. It's relatively easy to win on from yamiten, after a yakuhai pon, or similar.

For chiitai, you can just wait for one to spill out of an opponent's hand, so yamiten is recommended.

1.18 Tsumogiri or tedashi (karagiri)

TN: Tsumogiri is discarding the tile you just drew, tedashi is discarding a tile from your hand, karagiri is discarding a tile in your hand that's the same as the tile you drew (which makes it look like tedashi to your opponents). Most of you should know these already, and the JP terms are way more succinct, so I'll be using them.

The beginning of a read

What are the differences between tsumogiri and tedashi?

For tsumogiri, the only information you give up is that the discarded tile is unnecessary in your hand.

When you tedashi, you reveal that the tile discarded in the previous turn was less important, and the tile you drew now is more important than the one you discard this turn.

In other words, it's possible to tell the relative importance of the now-discarded tile compared to the previously discarded tile.

Let's look at an example where you cut 5s and then next turn 2s. What can your opponents conjecture about your souzu shape from this?

A possibility is a starting shape of 2235s. Another is 125s, where you cut 5s and then also drop the penchan.

In case of a penchan drop, the next tile you discard might be 1s. If another player can choose a tanki, he may try to aim for this 1s drop.

Another conceivable shape is 112s, where you cut 2s to confirm the pair. There are other patterns as well, but what they have in common is that the lower edge of souzu is involved. As you cut 5s before 2s, other than the case where they were both floating tiles and you cut 5s first because 2s is safer, there is a high chance that you have a block in lower souzu.

If 5s were instead followed by 1s, we can think of possibilities like 122s where the pair was fixed, or 1235s where you drew 4s after and slid your sequence.

Reading hands is the process of accumulating bits of information like this and making conjectures from there.

Another effect of tedashi is that it implies the possibility of a hand change. You could have hit tenpai just now, or maybe you changed your wait, or maybe you drew a dangerous tile and decided to break tenpai. You can make the other players consider these options, among others.

A tedashi tile thus reveals more information. When you can choose between tedashi and tsumogiri, you can tedashi when the information revealed from it benefits you and tsumogiri otherwise.

With karagiri, you can make your opponents waver, reduce the safe zones available to them, and restrict the way they play their hands. To other players, karagiri looks like tedashi, so even though your hand hasn't changed at all, you can make them think that something in your hand changed or that you advanced in shanten.

Karagiri tends to be most useful starting from the midgame, where hands have been trimmed down somewhat.

Let's say kamicha drops a dangerous dora yakuhai while you have some honitsu calls. If you now karagiri a tile, what happens?

Shimocha can no longer drop that same dora yakuhai tile without risk. It's possible that it became your winning tile, or that you will be able to pon it now.

In short, you can turn a just discarded tile into something unsafe against yourself, from your opponents' points of view.

When to use karagiri

Confirming and remembering the tsumogiri/tedashi status of every single tile is not feasible. So when should you try to track this information? The answer is against opponents who have opened their hand.

A tile discarded after a pon is essentially a tedashi after shanten advancement and is thus quite meaningful. It's important to remember these. Turning this around, karagiri is most effective when we are the centre of attention after opening our hand.

An example: We have the following hand after ponning dora Hatsu into tenpai, and the discards are also shown.

Dora 
 pon 
 (discards)

We have mangan tenpai waiting on 69p. As we have ponned the dora, the others are paying attention to us. It won't be easy for our winning tiles to come out. This is where we want to use karagiri to our benefit.

If we draw any souzu from 1 to 6, we should karagiri to pretend that our wait has to do with souzu.

A 1s karagiri will make 235s look dangerous and lessen suspicion of a pinzu wait. In addition to that, musuji that passed before the

karagiri will become unsafe against us again. As a result, 9p may be discarded with a "Well, let's push a terminal while he may not be tenpai yet" logic. That's the kind of thinking we want to encourage with karagiri.

How to use karagiri

When tenpai with an open hand, karagiri tiles in the suit unrelated to your wait. Tsumogiri tiles in the same suit as your wait. Other than making the suit of your wait harder to read, you can also reset tiles that passed against you before the karagiri. This will restrict your opponents' options.

1.19 When you have two middle tile pairs, kill one

Closed hand iishanten with two pairs

When you have yakuhai, toitoi, honitsu or the like, pairs of honours or 19m are excellent blocks. But when your hand cannot be opened, they are weak. Let's look at different blocks and how many tiles can change them or turn them into complete groups:

TN: The "=" will tell us how many tiles complete the block, the next line (if present) will talk about possible changes (improvements).

Honour / manzu pair = 2 tiles

Other terminal pair = 2 tiles

Drawing 23/78 also makes it a kanchan with pair, letting the block accept 6 tiles total.

2/8 pair = 2 tiles

Can also gain kanchan acceptance as above, or draw 1 kind of tile for a ryanmen with pair shape (e.g. 223) accepting 10 tiles.

TN: Note that "1 kind of tile" and "X number of tiles" are not the same thing. 1 kind of tile in this case is just 4 tiles. Why is Owata like this

4/5/6 pair = 2 tiles

2 kinds of tiles for ryanmen with pair shape as above.

3/7 pair = 2 tiles

As above, but one of the ryanmen possibilities is an A-class ryanmen (i.e. 1-4 or 6-9).

Penchan = 4 tiles

Kanchan waiting on 2/3/7/8 = 4 tiles
1 kind of tile to change to ryanmen.

Kanchan waiting on 4/5/6 = 4 tiles
2 kinds of tiles to change to ryanmen.

Ryankan 135/579 = 8 tiles
1 kind of tile to change to ryanmen. Worse than ryanmen because it uses 3 tiles rather than 2.

Ryankan 246/468 = 8 tiles
1 kind of tile to change to ryanmen, but can accept red fives and works with tanyao.

Ryankan 357 = 8 tiles
2 kinds to change to ryanmen.

Ryanmen 3-6 or 4-7 = 8 tiles
The tiles waited on are easy to use, so can be hard to win with.

Ryanmen 2-5 or 5-8 = 8 tiles
It's easier for 2 or 8 to come out. Also accepts aka, making it good for both value and defence.

Ryanmen 1-4 or 6-9 = 8 tiles
It's much easier to win on 1 or 9.

Ryanmen with pair = 10 tiles
The strongest of blocks. It's almost guaranteed to become a complete block, and you can pon with it as well.

This list is ordered from least to most valuable block shape. If you choose blocks according to this list, you'll have wide acceptance and good shapes.

When do pairs become complete groups?

To become closed triplets, pairs can only accept 2 tiles. When those are discarded, they become even worse. It's better to keep isolated tiles (even non-manzu terminals) over such bad pairs.



This hand becomes iishanten upon cutting 2p or 8p, so many people will just cut 8p. However, if one of the manzu pairs has a tile already discarded, I recommend dropping that pair instead and going back to 2shanten.

Even if dropping 8p is iishanten, that iishanten has 3 pairs and so can accept at most 6 tiles to get into tenpai. That tenpai may be easy to win, but if useful tiles are cut before then this hand cannot call them, which makes the hand shape very weak.

We can see that the hand is likely to only reach tenpai by endgame, and then may only have a shanpon with 1 tile left.

If you quickly shift your mind into mawashi mode and drop a pair, you'll note that any pinzu draw will be useful. With 2 blocks in pinzu and 2 in souzu you'll have wide acceptance and it's easy to get good shapes.



This, too, is a hand where you should drop your manzu pair. I'm sure there are people that would cut 7p or 9s, but with the next useful draw they'd be left with a difficult hand to play.

Rather than expecting to draw the last 1m, let the 7p or 9s pair be your head and hope for your pinzu or souzu shape to develop. Your hand will be more flexible, and on the next useful draw you can easily cut the second 1m.

Dropping the 1m pair also makes your pond stronger, and when you riichi your opponents will find it hard to fight back.

I use this approach in vonma as well.

The following example is from the RMU Open League 2017, the second finals match.



1s and Ton were both live tiles, but the hand like this will probably be riichi nomi, and the manzu shape isn't great anyway.

Allowing my tenpai to come a bit later, I decided to aim for good shape with pinfu iipeikou chance and went back to 2shanten by cutting 1s.

The winning shape was the following:

Riichi, tsumo on , ura dora 



As an extra charm point, the hand was furiten due to 5m. I didn't get sanshoku, but getting tsumo on a desperate riichi (chasing dealer riichi) for 1300-2600 allowed me to come back from 4th to 1st.

If I hadn't gone back to 2shanten it's questionable if I could have even reached tenpai, and certainly this win wouldn't have happened. I was really happy about using my approach on a big stage with big stakes, and having it pay off.

1.20 Considerations about ranked points (hanchan)

TN: This chapter is technically about tenhou ranked points, but some of it applies to majsoul as well. I'll abridge as necessary.

Aiming for first is the standard

In sanma ranked, getting first is more important than in yonma ranked. As there are only three players, it's harder to avoid last. So rather than focusing on avoiding last place, try to make taking first place your main goal.

When you find yourself in last place, remember that you can recover even from large point differentials. Don't just tilt out.

Getting a direct mangan hit or baiman tsumo is surprisingly realistic.

Landing a direct hit on first place for a comeback to first happens fairly often. With less people who you may have to decline ron on, it's just easier to do.

Also, because everyone will be aiming for first place, it's less common for last place to be stuck in a shitty situation.

Accordingly, I think it's best not to pay too much attention to players below you and aim for first until your South dealer turn is over. With the easy value in sanma you can aim for an upset from pretty much anywhere. While there's nothing wrong with being in first place, don't focus on your current placing too much.

Rather than trying to play according to the current point spread,

play each hand individually to the best of your ability. I feel that people that do this are more suited to getting first places.

Yonma techniques like calling chii for a quick and cheap win, dealing in on purpose, stopping last place from calling, playing nicely with first place, and others, are more suited towards a last place avoidance playstyle, and I think they're not really needed in sanma. The reason is that sanma ranked rewards most points for getting first.

In tenhou yonma ranked, going 1st-1st-4th results in $90+90-180=0$ ranked points, whereas in sanma 1st-1st-3rd would be $135+135-180=+90$ points.

TN: Majsoul ranked uma also force you to take more first places than last places to rise through the ranks, so even though the exact numbers are different the logic still mostly applies.

Making difficult gambles to avoid last place are not really needed. My being houou rank despite being poor at keiten and calling is evidence of this fact. I'm not saying this in self-deprecation, I really think this is proof.

1.21 Reading lag

See through fake lag

One big characteristic of online mahjong is the possibility to make reads based on lag. Lag happens when a player has the chance to call a tile, which in sanma means either pon, kan, or ron.

When there is lag after a discard, it means that a player other than the one that discarded it has at least a pair of that tile.

When you were the one discarding the tile, you don't know which of the others is causing the lag, but sometimes you can tell based on discards.

You don't have to think about sequences because there is no chii in sanma.

Lag in sanma gives you more precise information, so it's more important than in yonma. Keep this information in mind when choosing blocks and waits.

Let's say there was lag on 3s and your hand is



The double 3s ryanmen looks very weak here because we expect at most one 3s to still be in the wall. Knowing this we can cut 4455s

down into a single block or drop 8s and hope to extend our pinzu shape. This is the way you want to use information derived from lag. Another thing to consider is that if you allow lag to happen on 19m or an honour, others may be able to read what yaku you have. E.g. if the second copy of a yakuhai tile is discarded, and there's lag on it but you don't call, together with your pond this can allow the others to read that you are going for chiitai.

When you tanki riichi with such a chiitai, they will consider the possibility that you may be aiming for a pair drop mawashi from one of them. Thus for hands like chiitai, pinfu iishanten, or similar, you'll want to click the "no calls" button to prevent lag from happening. By the way, tenhou also creates random lag on tiles that cannot be ponned from time to time.

TN: The same is true for majsoul.

So it will be a problem to guess whether lag is genuine or fake.

The only clue you get is the length of the lag. It seems that fake lag on tenhou is about 2 seconds.

TN: I don't know if fake lag on majsoul has a fixed length or not, in any case the points mentioned here seem interesting so I'm not skipping any paragraphs.

So if the lag disappears almost instantly, say in 1 second or less, we can assume it was real lag. When the lag is 3 seconds or longer, we should also assume that it's real.

From another perspective, this means that if you are the cause of the lag, you should hold it for about 2 seconds to make it harder for the others to judge whether it was real or fake.

Compared to tells that exist in real life mahjong, lag is more restricted in the info it gives you, but it's also more precise.

There may be people who thinks it's unfair to use lag information, but as everyone is playing with the same rules and the same tools, not using it will leave you at a disadvantage.

That's it for my thoughts on lag reading. I think you shouldn't get too hung up on it; focus on the basics first and consider lag info to be an occasional "plus alpha."

1.22 Call judgement

The basic rule for yakuhai is to pon the first one

Having 1 han is valuable, so it's almost always good to call yakuhai at the first opportunity. You lose riichi but you get one confirmed han, and you can still choose to attack or defend later.

The exceptions to this rule are hands that are cheap and would lose almost all defensive capabilities, or when it's early and the hand can easily reach closed tenpai. An example below:

No dora, 中 is discarded



It's also good to decline a call when it wouldn't advance your shanten, like in this hand:

dora, 一 is discarded



A call here would greatly increase acceptance, but the head would be lost and there's a high chance the final wait would be a tanki. A call here may bring you closer to tenpai but it's not clear that you can actually win faster. It's easier to win by drawing into one of the ryanmen and then declaring riichi.

However, when a hand has a closed triplet and so wouldn't end on a tanki wait, it can call to confirm 1 han even when doing so doesn't advance shanten.

Pros and cons of atozuke

When you have a backup yaku like toitoi or honitsu feel free to call. Taking a ponten (TN: Calling pon to get into tenpai) in endgame with a shanpon wait that can only win on one of the pairs should be avoided except when the hand is expensive. When the others refuse to drop your atozuke tile, it'll become a risky round, and it's not worth giving up riichi just to get tenpai a little earlier. When counterattacked, it's common to drop the yakuhai pair in mawashi, in which case you won't be able to get into tenpai with yaku again.

When to aim for honitsu

There's only two suits and comparatively more honour tiles in sanma, so it's easy to aim for honitsu.

Just forcing honitsu every hand dooms you to failure. Try to properly judge based on your hand whether to aim for it or not.

Pros of honitsu

It's 3 hand closed and still 2 han when open, so with dora and yakuhai it can easily get into mangan+ value range.

Cons of honitsu

It's easy to read so the other players can easily avoid discarding your winning tiles. There's also an entire suit you cannot accept into your hand, so as a closed hand it's slow.

With this in mind, it's good to aim for honitsu when you have at least 2 blocks of honour or terminal pairs that make your honitsu callable.

No dora



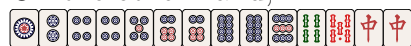
From this hand we can cut 0s even though it's part of a ryanmen.

Dora



This hand can easily call 1s and 5z, so we can drop the dora-containing kanchan.

On the other hand,



This haipai has separated shapes, ponning 4p or 6p doesn't advance shanten, and ponning 8p leaves 9p as an isolated tile. It's difficult to recommend honitsu here.

Therefore, even if you can call Chun you shouldn't go for honitsu and cut 1p (which doesn't reduce acceptance).

1.23 Rebuild your hand so that you can have good shape after pon

The first tenpai is not the final shape

Making calls that don't advance shanten to improve your shapes can be done both in yonma and sanma.



From this hand it's good to pon 4s or 9s to get a wider wait. 9s would be especially good as you would get a 3-sided wait.



The penkan* wait on 3s can be improved by calling pon on 2s and switching to a 25s wait, or by ponning 9s and then choosing a 25s or 14s wait.

TN: This is the first time I've seen the expression penkan, but as you can see it's just a combination of penchan and kanchan.

Calling pon with your head and then switching to a tanki wait that

combines with another shape should become a habit.

Pon from hands with sequential shapes

With sequential shapes you can get wider waits. Consider



Pon on 1m from here lets you cut 1s to improve to a 23s wait. And if you draw any of 568s, your wait will improve further.



An iron pon on 1m followed by an 8s cut leaves you with a 4-sided wait. Also notice that ponning 5s or 8s would give you ryanmen or better waits.



Discard 1s after calling pon on 1m or 3s to get a 3-sided wait.



Pon on 1p from this iipeikou-shaped hand will let you choose between two different ryanmen waits.

It's an excellent hand with different options depending on the bakyau.



Calling pon with the 1m head here lets you choose between two different sanmenchans.

With callable hands, always be aware of what calls you can make to improve your shape.

Tips for making multi-sided waits

- Call pon from your head or with a pair at the edge of a sequential shape, and choose a tanki
- Combine tanki with sequential shapes to improve your wait
- Tanki with a triplet is excellent
- Tanki with a triplet and sequential shape at the same time is a fantastic combo

Always think about possible shape changes so that you, too, can end up with scenarios like these:

Tsumo 5s



Tsumo 3s



1.24 Chiitoitsu

The role of chiitai in sanma

There's only 27 kinds of tiles in sanma, so it's easier to hit tenpai or ura dora with chiitai than it is in yonma.

However, even though you can choose your tanki you can only ever wait on at most 3 tiles. That's not great for competing with an opponent's ryanmen.

The number of winning tiles is quite important in sanma, so when you get chased chiitai's wait will be weak.

Therefore we should only riichi chiitai if we're first to tenpai or if we have confidence in the wait.

It depends on the bakyou, but if you have a chiitai nomi iishanten with some terminal or honour pairs that are easy to call, it can be good to call for toitai even if it's just 5200 points.

The main role of chiitai is defence. It's easy to use when others have openend or declared riichi.

Dropping safe pairs when you draw danger tiles can often lead you back to tenpai.

2 WWYDs

TN: These will be in image form, one image per page. There's nothing else to put on this page so here's Altina.



序盤編

Always assume it's your dealer seat East 1 starting hand unless stated otherwise.

Q1 ドラ 發

赤

九萬 四萬 三萬 二萬 一萬 七萬 六萬 五萬 四萬 三萬 二萬 一萬 發 中

Q2 ドラ 北

Commit to honitsu?

Q3 ドラ 

赤

																																																																																																															
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--

Go for maximum acceptance?

Q4 ドラ 北 2 East seat, 3rd turn 南 once discarded

赤

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This hand is kinda bad, but...

Q5 ドラ 東

赤

一萬 二萬 三萬 四萬 五萬 六萬 七萬 八萬 九萬 東 西 北

With 4 dora we have plenty of value, but...

Q6 ドラ  

赤

With how many dora do we plan to win?

Q 7 ドラ  北 2



Is this a horizontal or a vertical hand?

Q 8 ドラ 



Toitoi or chii-toi?

Q 9 ドラ  北 1



Is that a closed triplet or 3 dora?

Q 10 ドラ 



1. 9m

We don't have enough blocks. The least useful tile is 9m, which cannot grow into a sequence.

2. Xia

We're more excited by a yakuhai pair here than a pinfu pair candidate. Cut the guest wind.

3. 9s

We can see honitsu, so it's tempting to cut 13p. But with two dora already we should prioritise speed. Cut 9s to minimise backfires, and if we pair up a dragon tile later we can go honitsu.

4. South or 8p

For immediate acceptance either Haku or 8s would be best, but the once discarded South pair would make the final shape weak. As it doesn't look like the South pair will turn into a triplet anytime soon, we can discard South (or 8p) and hold onto 8s. That way 79s will be useful draws. We're going from 2shanten to 3shanten, but the better long term acceptance is good here.

5. Declare Pei

A haipai you often see in sanma, with 8 unpaired orphans. There's lots of useful tiles from here, so we aim for a normal hand. Cut 1m only after the declaration. If you keep the Pei in hand you're effectively playing with only 12 tiles and slowing down your hand, so just declare it immediately.

6. 1s

You have four dora, but the shape is bad. With 4 pairs we shouldn't kill chiitai. Discarding 1s is also the best way forward for a normal hand. Be prepared to cut 2p in the future in some situations. Ittsuu has low value in a world without chii, you can disregard it here.

7. Hatsu

With two dora via Pei we want to maximise speed. Discarding any numbered tile would drop acceptance, so cut Hatsu even if it's dora.

8. 3p / 7s / 8s / 9s (anything that's not from a pair is correct)

With a penchan and several kanchans this is a weak iishanten. For a normal hand you'd cut 3s, but that fixes what tiles you'd need. With such a slow normal hand it's good to aim for chiitoi, which can flexibly respond to the bakyou and any possible dora draws. If the iipeikou shape were ryanmen-type like 12233p, cutting 3s and going for a normal hand would also be an option.

9. 3p

With easily callable pairs and yakuhai we want to aim for toitoi and maybe chiitoi. Therefore we'll keep the tiles that we'd be happy to turn into pairs. Drawing 2p would turn this into a boring hand, so we don't care about it. By process of elimination, we discard 3p. Normal hands prefer inner tiles, but pair and triplet hands prefer outside tiles.

10. Declare Pei x3

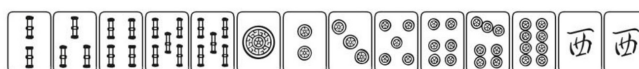
Dora 3 is more important than one complete group. Declare all your Pei even if you go back in shanten for it. Do it with the conviction that your 3 new tiles will complete at least one group. This will also pressure the others.

The Primary Sanma Tenhoui Owata

Looks like you may be first to reach tenpai.

This may be instant riichi in yonma, what about sanma?

Q3 ドラ 西 turn 3 西 once discarded



All last agari top, what do you do?

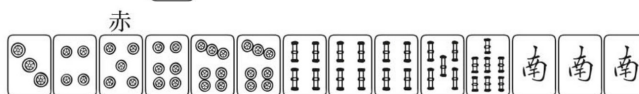
TN: Agari top = all last, and if you win this hand (with any score) you win the match

Q4 ドラ 中 turn 3, agari top



Two dora as dealer, WWYD?

Q5 ドラ  East seat, East round, turn 3

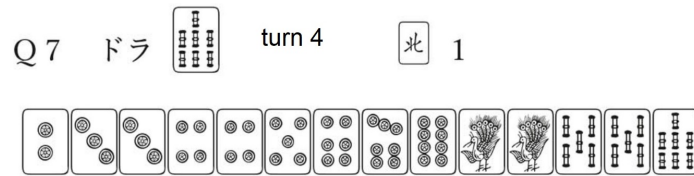


Maybe only because it's your dealer turn?

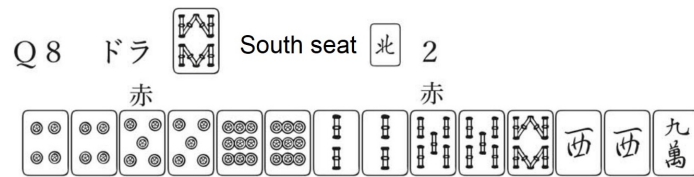
Q 6 ドラ  East seat, East round, turn 3



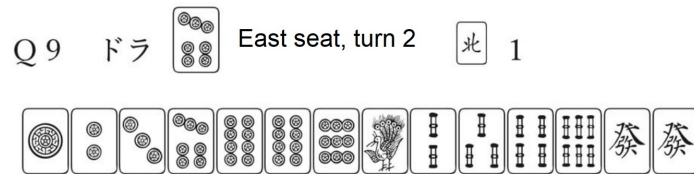
What about this no yaku tenpai?



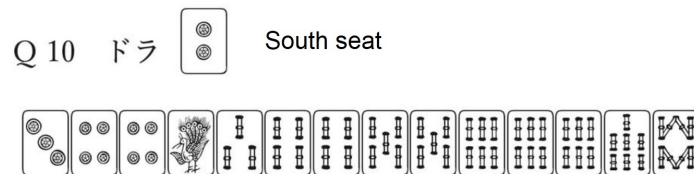
Do you aim for score or for an easier win?



Do you take tenpai here?



It's technically tenpai.



1. 9s dama

Yakuless doraless kanchan tenpai. With no dora whatsoever this is a hand with high risk and low return, and getting chased by someone with 3+ dora is not what we want to happen. Dama for now and see how things develop. If you improve your wait or value, you can reconsider.

2. 9s riichi

The same shape as in the previous problem, but having 3 dora changes things. With more dora in our hand, there's less dora for the others to have and thus less risk from pushing. And the value of our hand has increased as well. Riichi.

3. 5s

We want to cut 5s here for possible pinfu, ittsuu, or sanmenchan improvements. A 7s or 3p tsumo afterwards will be awkward, and we'll have to make a judgement again depending on the bakyou. The West backfire draw will let us get a good wait later on, so we don't mind it. Cutting 2s for a souzu iipeikou chance is almost an option, but we'd no longer accept 1s for pinfu, and on 6s we'd miss out on a sanmenchan.

4. 3s

This can be tenpai with a shanpon on 9m and 3s, but it doesn't have yaku. As first place* we don't want to take risk here, therefore cutting 3s for maximum pinfu acceptance is what I recommend.

TN: This answer is weird because Owata talks about the player in first position. I translated under the assumption that we are the first place, and what he says after does make sense for that interpretation, but there's no reason to assume we are in first just because it's agari top. We could be second and just 500 points behind, or maybe we're 3k behind but there's four riichi sticks in the pot, etc. If someone else is first place, then the advice would be "first doesn't want to take risks, so try to snipe him with dama pinfu." That still works as advice, but as we're waiting on 9m here I see it as a weaker point than assuming we are first, hence my choice.

5. 7s

With two dora we really want to win the hand, but no yaku kanchan

is rough. I'm not completely against instant riichi here, but leaving it up to the wall is just sad. With a 7s cut we put ourselves in sanmenchan sanmenchan iishanten, which should be the shortest path to victory. Even if we draw the 6s backfire we can still sanmenchan riichi from there.

6. 1p

No yaku tenpai with a double Ton pair, and the wait is on the dora indicator. We want to aim for double Ton or ittssu improvements here. Cut 1p first so that if we draw 3p, we can sanmenchan riichi. The basic approach for penchan dropping should be that if a backfire can give you a ryanmen shape, cut from the outside.

7. 5s dama

7s riichi isn't that bad, but we'd only be waiting on four tiles. If someone catches up to us it'd be risky, and at only 2600 points it's a bit cheap. Dama on the 6s kanchan for now, and hope to draw into iipeikou or another dora for shanpon riichi. 4s or 8s give us pinfu, and on a 9s draw we can riichi discarding the second 5s.

8. 8s riichi

Chiitoe with two or more dora should focus on win rate rather than more value. Aim for the 9m.

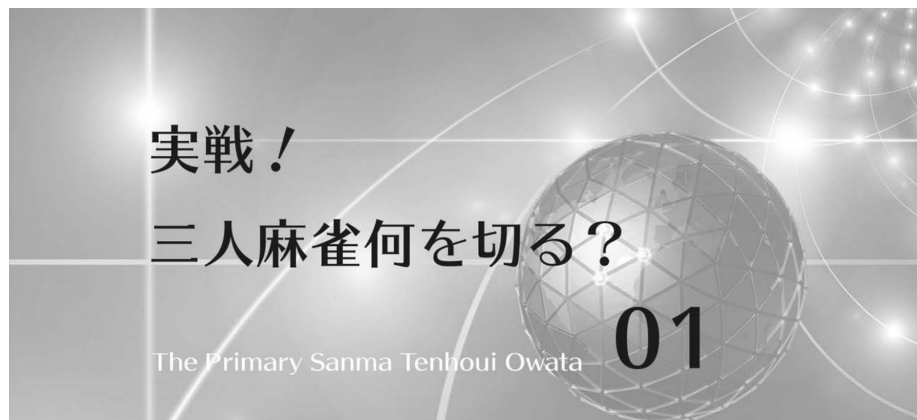
9. 8p riichi

It's also possible to dama, but we don't want to let our opponents play freely. A fast kanchan tenpai with one or more dora is usually riichi.

TN: This looks like it conflicts with the answer to problem 7 a bit, but here we're two turns faster and we're not waiting on the dora indicator.

10. 4p

It's best to go back to iishanten here. From there, 2p or 5p allows us a sanmenchan riichi on 369s. Drawing a souzu that doesn't give tenpai lets us aim for closed chinitsu. On a 2s backfire draw we can drop another pinzu tile for a dama tanki and also aim for closed chinitsu from there.



We have drawn the dora kanchan into tenpai. The overflowing 3s is a dangerous ura suji. Dealer has only discarded genbutsu so far. What do we do?

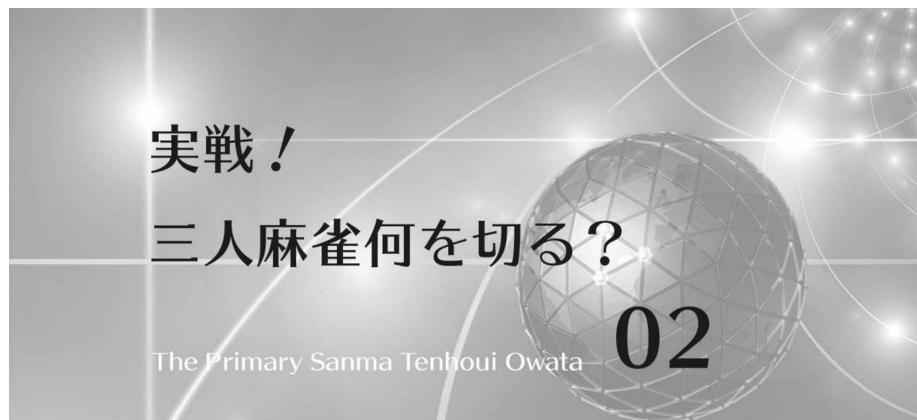


Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 123

3s riichi

Defence is important in sanma, but so is offence. With three dora and an A-class ryanmen, it's fine to push dangerous tiles. If you fold a hand like this, you won't have many chances to push. Choosing dama is half assing it; 14p isn't even genbutsu against the other riichi. Force the dealer to behave here and jump into a showdown with shimocha.

In the match this was a deal in, but we don't care about that at all.



It's South 2, we don't have any dealer turns left, and we're in last place. We have pinfu dora tenpai, but toimen has called Haku and Hatsu while the Chun are nowhere to be seen. We want to declare riichi, but is that really ok?



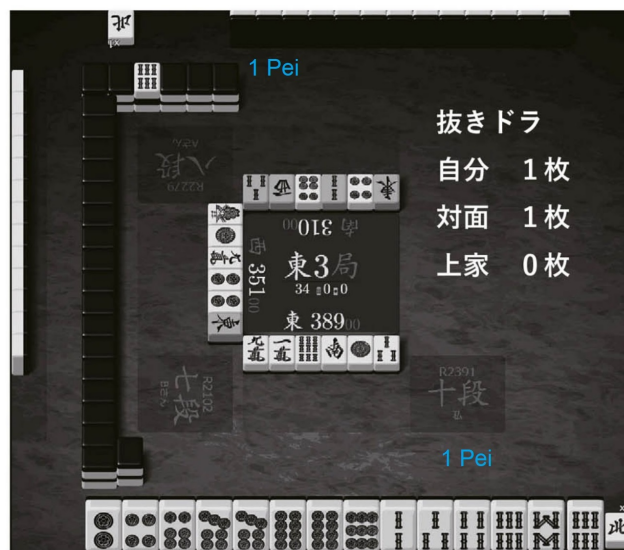
1s riichi

On tenhou, placement is everything. There's no penalty for busting out, so last place with positive points and last place with negative points aren't any different. So even if we deal in later with chun, we don't care that much; even if we just deal into mangan, our chances of climbing out of third place aren't great.

Also, winning 2000 points with dama doesn't accomplish much of anything. We'd still be in a terrible position in South 3. With all that in mind, take the plunge and riichi. In the actual match I did end up dealing into daisangen with Chun, but that's fine.



We're first place dealer and have hit tenpai, but the wait is no yaku kanchan on 3p. We do have a Pei dora at least. How should a tenhou act here?



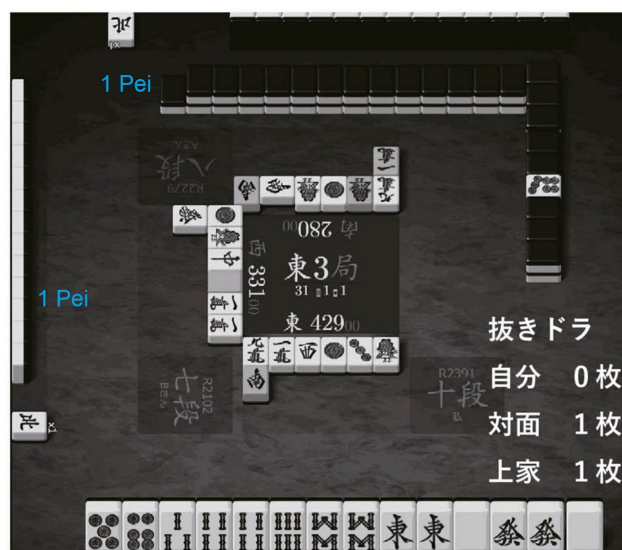
Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 127

8s riichi

Kanchan tenpai as dealer with one Pei dora. The only upgrade we could draw is 5p, and the bakyou looks good for 3p. Surely you know what that means. "Don't worry too much about shape." This is an instant riichi. With one ura we get 7700 on ron or 3900 all on tsumo, so we don't lack value. As we are dealer, the others can't push into our riichi easily. If two 3p were already out, it would be risky to riichi. In that case, considering the 5p upgrade or the 6p upgrade that's worth two han, we'd stay dama.



We are chiitoi iishanten as dealer, currently in first place. Our overflow tiles are not safe against toimen's riichi. If we drop pinzu we can even aim for menhon (TN: closed honitsu), but are we supposed to do that?



Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 129

Hatsu

Let's go for mawashi here. Chiitai can be a weapon when it's first to tenpai, but in this hand we're behind. We should play defensively. Aiming for a tanki that can snipe an easy-to-discard tile from an opponent is a tech to use when we're first to tenpai. We're not the main character in this round, let's just match kamicha's Hatsu discard and avoid dealing in.

The Primary Sanma Tenhoui Owata

This is the continuation of the hand in the previous problem. Do we pon the double Ton for tenpai?



Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 131

Pon

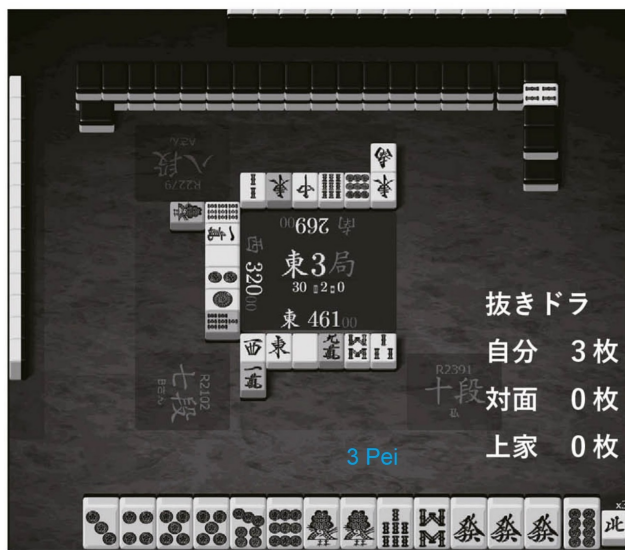
Ton is worth two han, and we have 5p and 2s as genbutsu against the riichi. It's good to call for now.

Drawing Pei or dora 8p from here (and cutting the genbutsu 5p in the latter case) gives us good value.

You should develop a habit of not giving hands up easily just because you had to defend once, and always checking if you don't have the ingredients for a counterattack.

The Primary Sanma Tenhoui Owata

We drew our 8p kanchan and have tenpai on 69s with yaku. We're also dealer and have three Pei dora. Is this an instant riichi or a dama?



Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 133

5p dama

Tsumo loss makes this a dama in my book.

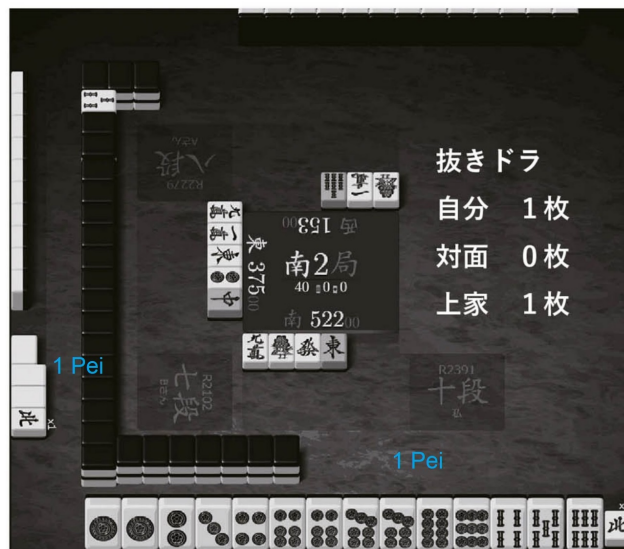
Making the others fold with riichi and then getting a tsumo haneman will yield 12000 points, the same as a mangan ron.

In that case, staying dama and waiting for a 9s to come out makes more sense.

Let's go for a reliable win.



We're in first place in South 2. With the 6s tsumo we could cut 9p for pinfu dora 1 tenpai with iipeikou chance. The additional value from riichi would be nice, but is it a good move?



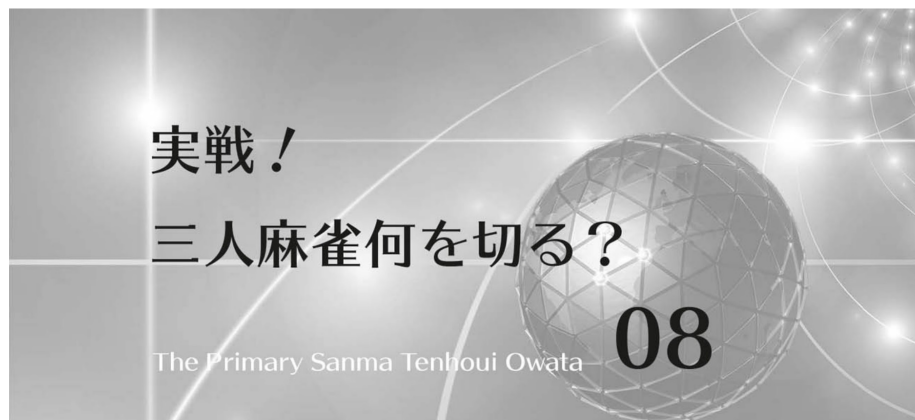
Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 135

9p dama

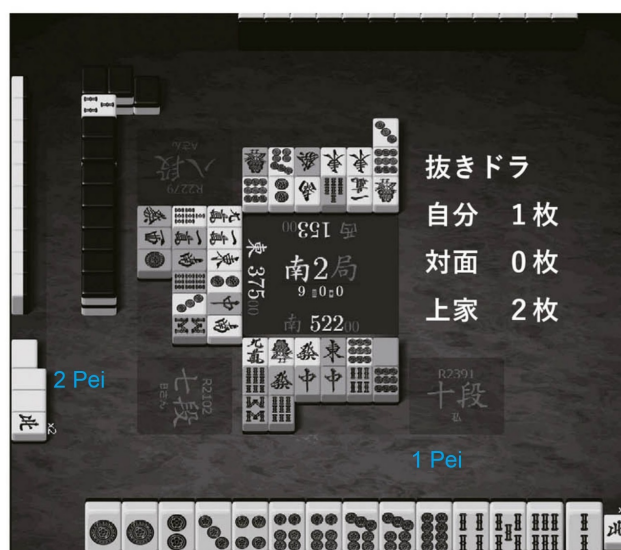
What you should notice first of all is that you will be dealer in South 3.

In other words, if you remain in the top spot with a good lead, the match is guaranteed to end in one more hand. There's no need to try for more points with riichi here. Just win with anything at all as fast as possible so you can head into all last with an overwhelming advantage.

Whether you win by 3900 or 8000 in this spot won't meaningfully change your position in all last.



The sequel to the previous question. We still haven't won with the 58p wait, and now we tsumo 2s. Kamicha has poned Haku. What did the first sanma tenhou do here?



Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 137

1p

Kamicha's repeated tsumogiri implies a likely tenpai. If it's a ryanmen wait, the only suji that haven't passed are 25s, 36s, and 58p. The chance of 2s dealing into oya mangan is then about 30%, not something we want to risk. By the way, this isn't something I considered when I drew the 2s. I'd been paying close attention to the dealer's discards since hitting tenpai on turn five. I was already thinking that I'd fold the next time I drew a musuji.



Ton comes out while we are chiitai iishanten. Pon or no?



Part2 三人麻雀何を切る？ 139

Pon

We'd do the same in yonma. After the pon on Ton we have two easy-to-call pairs in 1s and 2p, and so moving towards toitoi is reasonable. Toitoi is also good for value as we don't have dora. It's at least 5200, and if we draw another Haku or Hatsu it'll become mangan. I find myself abandoning chiitai for toitoi more often in sanma.

3 Studying haifu

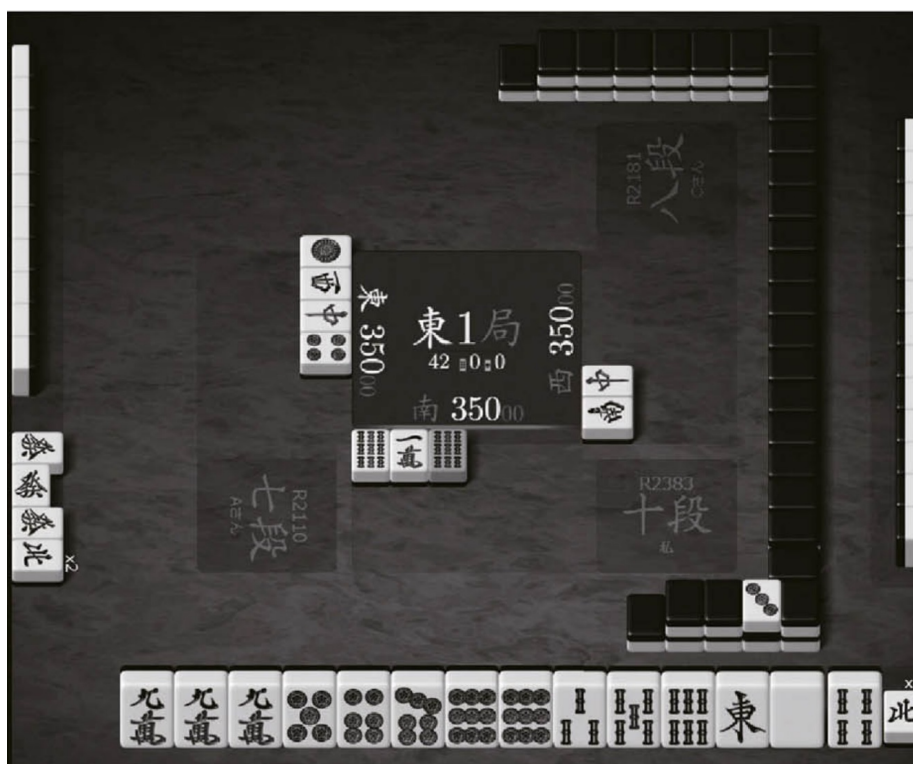
East 1

South seat

35000 points

—: Why did you want to look at this haifu rather than your tenhou promotion match?

Owata: I think you'll understand when you look at this East 1.



—: That seems to be the fourth turn of East 1, and your hand is iishanten.

Owata: Correct, however dealer has just called pon on Hatsu and discarded the dora 4p. This is a red flag in sanma. After a terminal, he cut some honours and then poned yakuhai and discarded dora 4p. It could possibly be honitsu, but in any case he's not messing around.

—: It certainly looks like a quick hand.

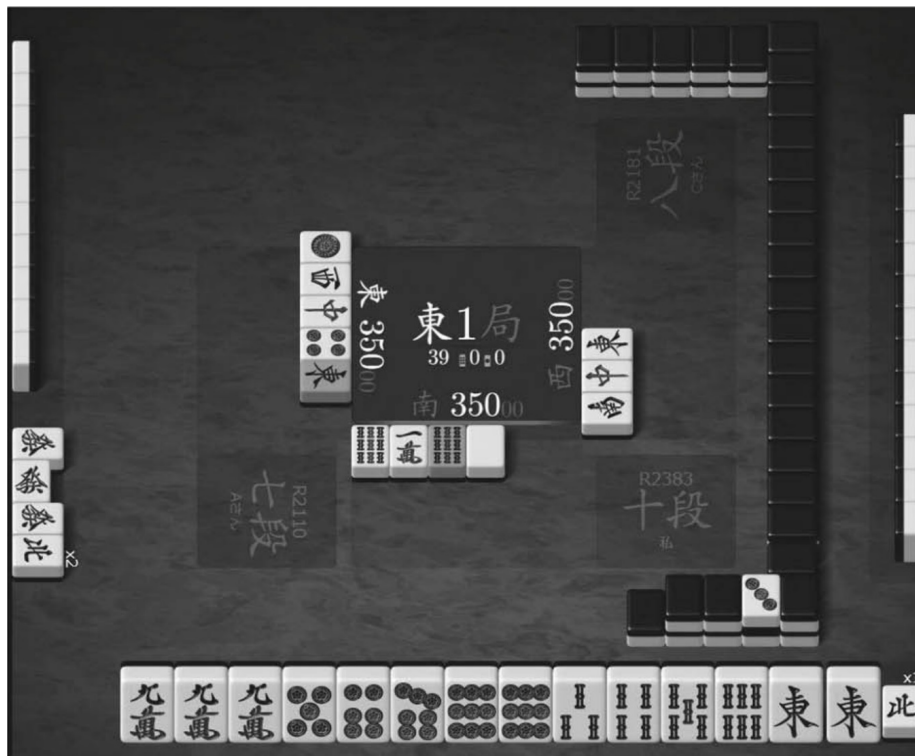
Owata: Exactly. It would be similar in yonma, but there's a difference in hand values. Dealer has two Pei dora, so with anything else such as aka dora he could easily have a dealer mangan.

—: That's a problem. Is this already a fold?

Owata: No, we really can't give up that easily. For now I cut Haku since I got a good tsumo.

—: Would you have cut Haku even if dealer hadn't discarded Chun earlier?

Owata: It's been nine years so I'm not really sure (laughs). But I think I likely would have discarded Haku all the same.



—: You cut Haku and then shimocha and dealer each discard Ton, and then you tsumo another Ton. This is tenpai.

Owata: We can't really call this tenpai. There's no choice but to cut Ton.

—: If you draw 2s or 7s afterwards, would you riichi?

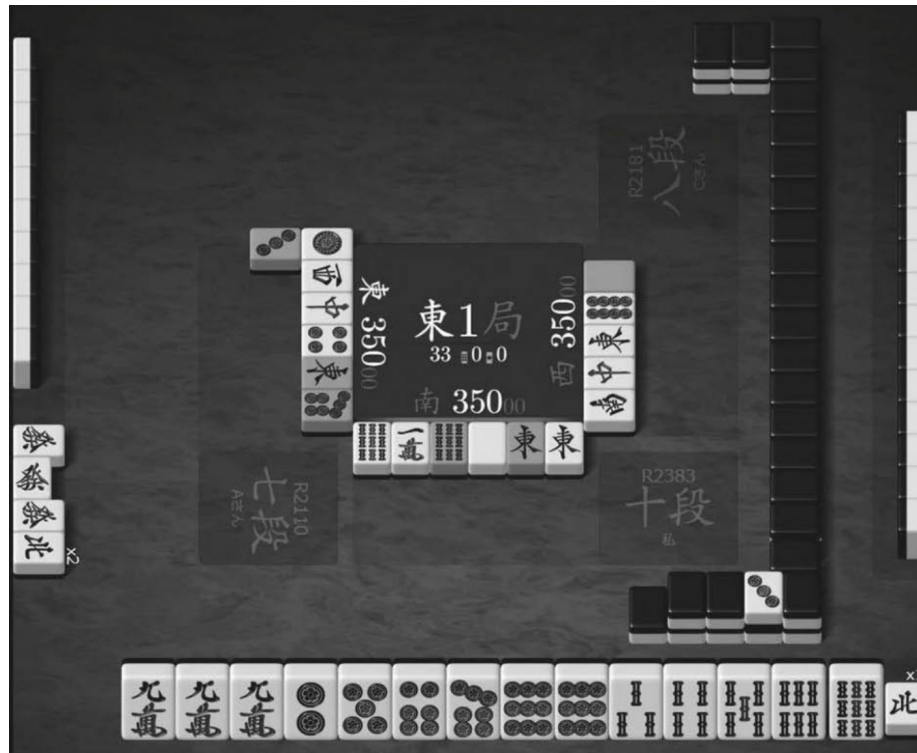
Owata: That's hard to say. This early it may be fine to riichi, but I think the old me would have chosen dama.

—: Eh? Dama with a sanmenchan even in sanma?

Owata: Precisely because it's sanma. With just one Pei dora the value isn't really there. Like I said before, it's not strange at all for dealer to have mangan tenpai. Winning a tsumo dora 500/1000 is perfectly fine with this hand. Increasing this to 1000/2000 with riichi doesn't change much.

—: You're being very careful.

Owata: This is one of those rounds where you have to be careful.



—: After the Ton pair drop we got 2p and 9s. With a 3p draw we'd have a good wait, so do we cut 9s here?

Owata: No, this is a fold. If you check the haifu, you'll see I cut 9m next.

—: Surely not because you missed a closed triplet with it?

Owata: No, that's not a criterion (laughs). After the dealer's 4p drop, he tsumogiri'd 7p and 3p, so he's probably tenpai. It would be fine to cut the safer-looking 2p for now, but even if we connect 9s to something it'll be hard to win with that.

—: So you dropped the 9m triplet.

Owata: This has a better chance to getting back to tenpai than a half-assed 7p cut.

—: You already mentioned that earlier in the book.

Owata: On top of that, a 2p or 7p discard could even deal into shimocha. He stands out a bit for cutting Ton and the like after all. Tenpai can happen very quickly in sanma, so you never know when the others are dama. With zero Pei dora it's probably not that important to be careful of shimocha, but it's really no good to

haifu later on.

—: Did you check immediately after promoting to tenhoui?

Owata: Not quite. When I decided on writing this book and was looking for some haifu, I went to check this one.

—: I see, so you picked this one because of that.

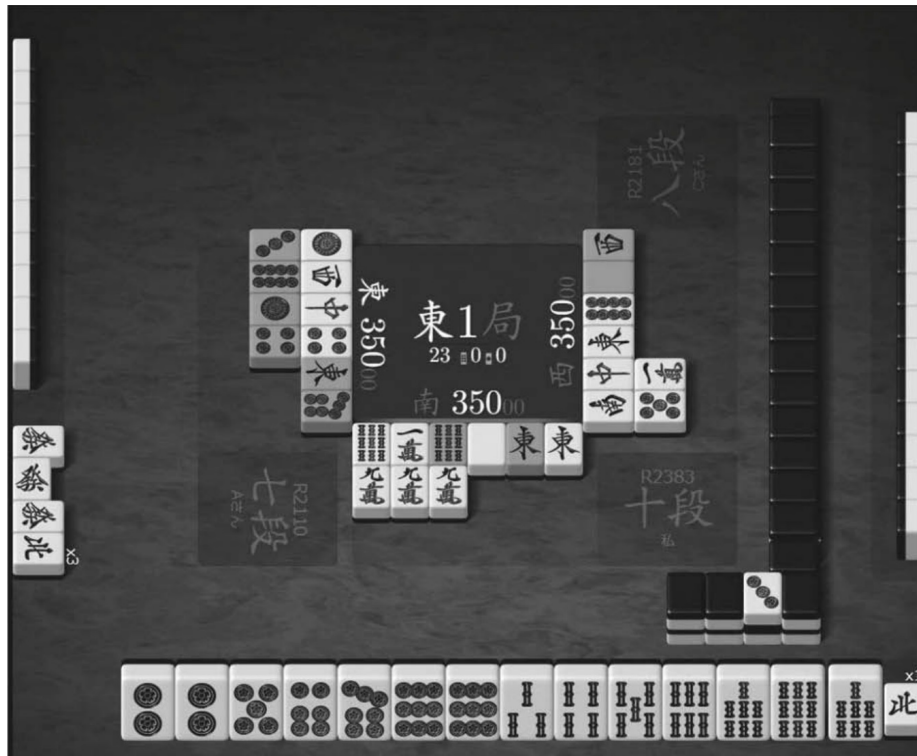
Owata: Well, it's not just this round but also others that nicely show off my style. So I thought it would make for a good match to study. This and the promotion match where I bankrupted an opponent with the flow on my side* for an easy victory.

TN: He says 絶好調で here, so this phrasing feels right. We also see that Owata is a nyagger at heart, so I had to mention it.

—: Ah. And if you hadn't avoided the deal in here, that win would have been meaningless.

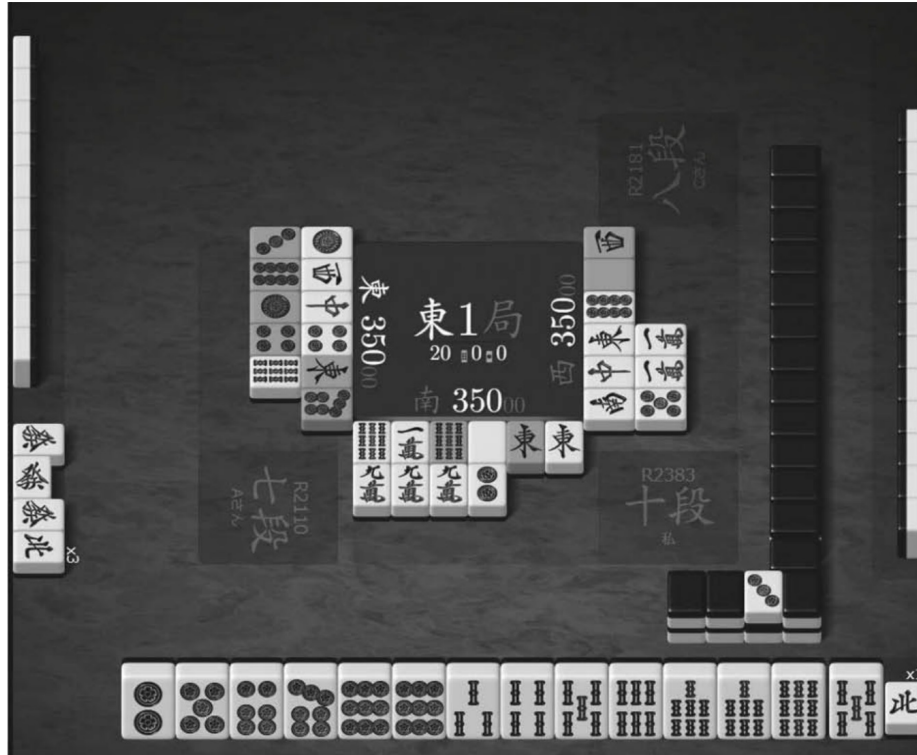
Owata: I wouldn't go so far as to call it meaningless, but I wouldn't have been promoted with it.

—: I understand. Then let's move on to after you'd finished dropping your 9m triplet.



Owata: True to the spirit of sanma, my hand just refuses to die this round. Somehow there's still a visible path towards a win. I cut the fairly safe 2p.

—: And then next turn you hit tenpai.



Owata: It doesn't seem like it can win, but hanging in there like this is the essence of my sanma style.

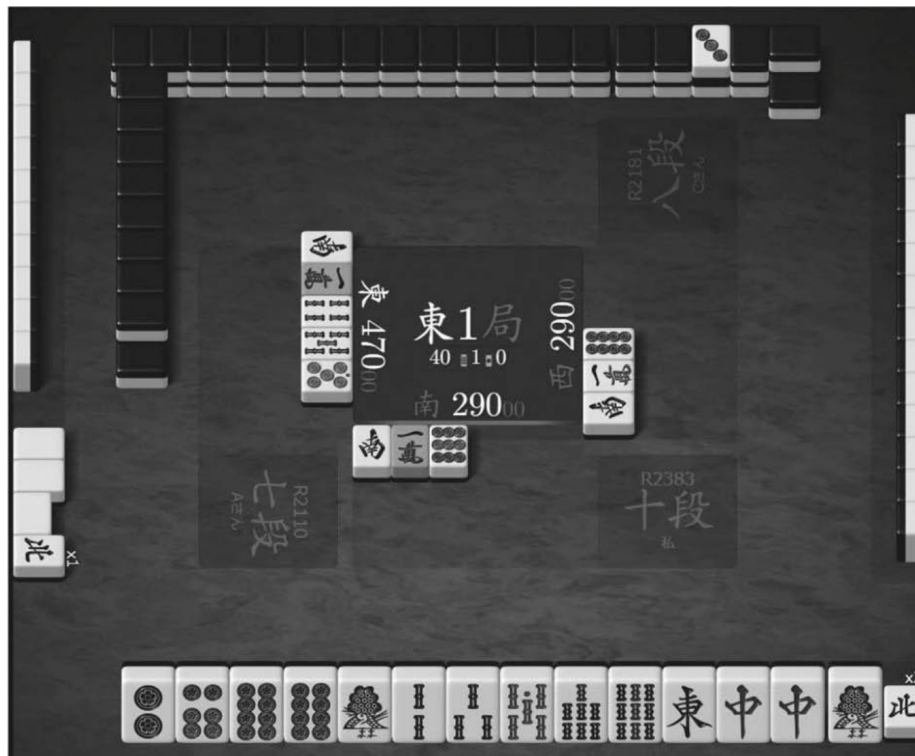
—: Dealer has discarded 9s.

Owata: I don't think I had thoughts like "Oh, so it wasn't a deal in" or "Ah, he wasn't tenpai." I was just focused on not dealing in. Maybe I was thinking that his wait had changed.

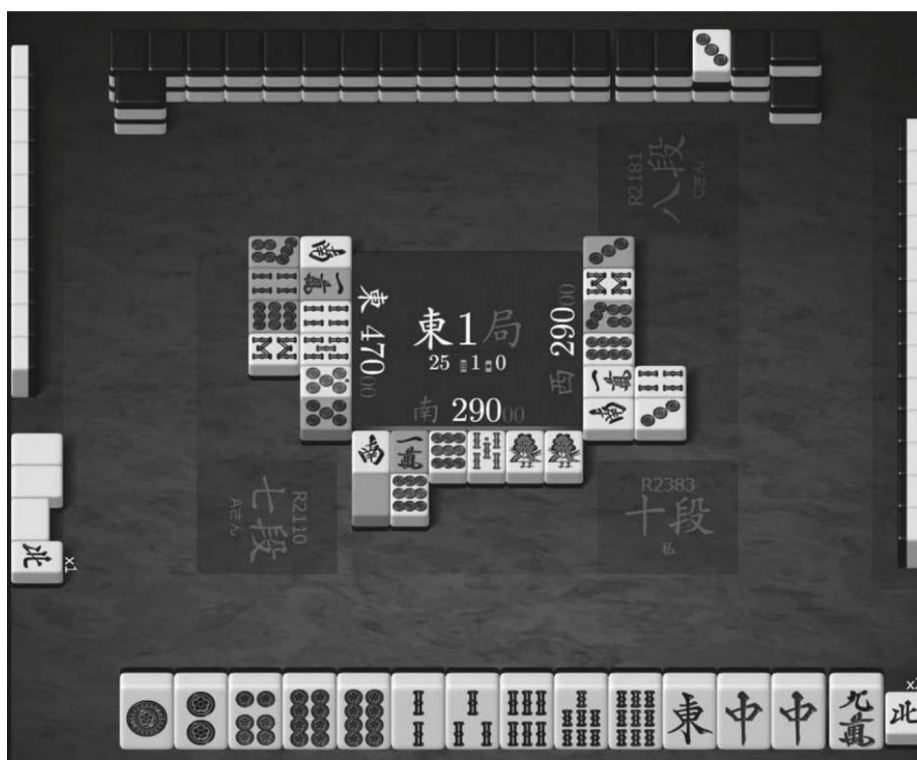
—: In the end, dealer got a tsumo for hatsu, honitsu, dora 3, hane-man. 6000 all. You can see the final shape in the next image.



East 1-1
 South seat
 29000 points



Owata: I had two Pei in this hand, so at first I aimed for a win.
 —: You drew 1s after the dealer's Haku pon. Wouldn't you normally cut 1s?
 Owata: The me at the time couldn't allow himself to lose no matter what, so I probably couldn't discard 1s. Like last hand, we have a red flag here. Dealer dropped a 45s ryanmen, and then after a yakuhai pon the red 5p. My choice afterwards was to discard 0s genbutsu.
 —: That almost seems to be too careful. Though in fact dealer had a dora 3 iishanten.
 Owata: Sanma can be scary like that.



—: On the 10th turn, your hand is in shambles and you're out of genbutsu.

Owata: What do you think is the safest tile in this hand?

—: I'd say 8p.

Owata: That's correct. From a 079p shape you wouldn't cut 0p, especially when 4p is dora. You'd cut 9p and hope to draw 4p later.

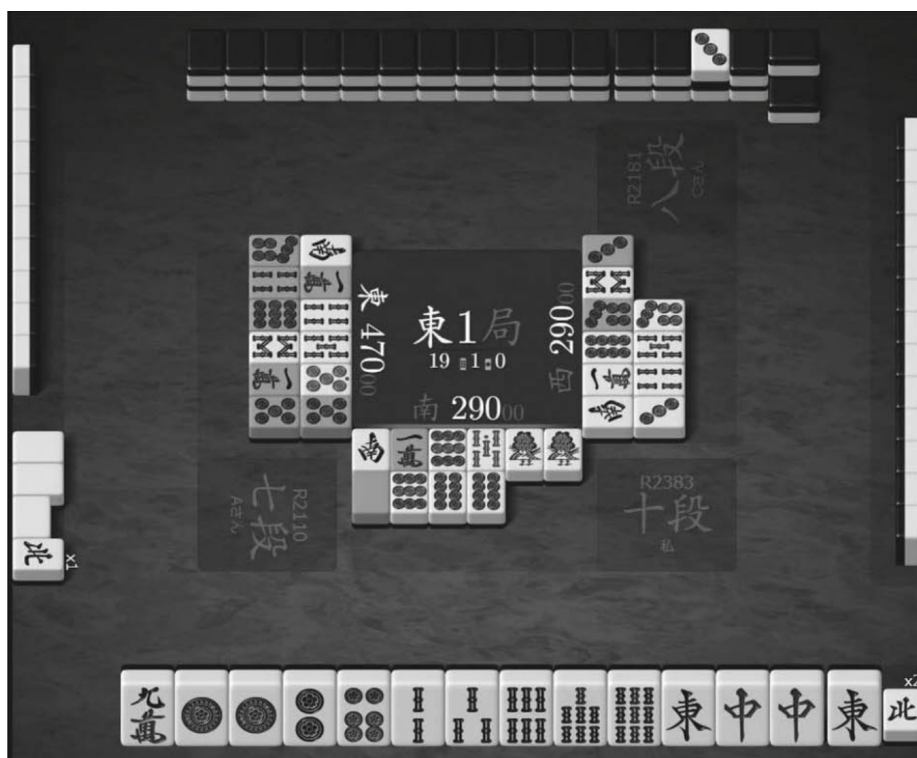
—: Shimocha has also discarded 8p once before, so it can't be a shanpon either.

Owata: Of course, we can't be 100

—: I thought sanma might be good for some stress relief by winning some big hands, but instead it's looking more and more like torture.

Owata: Well, sometimes it's just going to be rough. If you can gain the advantage you can stay on the offensive, and then it's quite fun.

—: And this is one of the tough hands. It currently looks like this.



Owata: It's not too bad, we have some safe-ish tiles. I cut the 6p this turn, and this is also due to the early 0p drop from dealer. The 9p has passed so it's not a 69p wait, and from 450p you wouldn't cut 0p, so a 36p wait is unlikely. And the 0p discard also means we don't have to worry about dealer having a 6p pair.

—: That makes sense.

Owata: While folding, we also have to consider shimocha. 6p seems safe against him. 3p is genbutsu against him, and with an early 8p cut and three 8p visible a 69p wait from him is not likely.



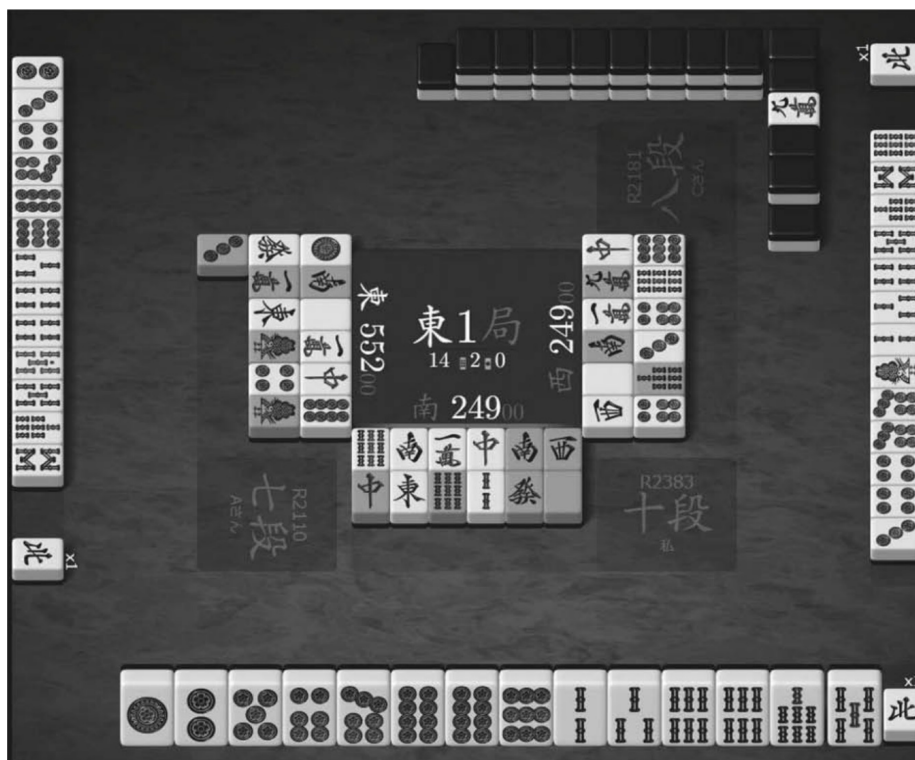
—: You avoided dealing in, and eventually dealer gets another tsumo.

Owata: A dealer tsumo is not too bad. It's only 8000, and we're still even with shimocha.

—: So you're already no longer aiming for first place this match?

Owata: Even in sanma with its high scores, the point difference has increased a lot. From here I wanted to avoid last place at all costs and then aim for tenhou promotion later down the line. That said, if I get a chance for an upset I'll consider it.

East 1-2
 South seat
 24900 points



—: In this round we're on turn 13, there's no calls or riichi sticks. Your hand is iishanten, do you not discard 6s here?

Owata: I cut 9p just in case. I may push 6s after drawing into the 3p penchan, but right now I'm only iishanten and the penchan is not great. I wanted to keep the possibility of having three groups in souzu open.

—: When we open the hands, we see that both kamicha and shimo-mocha are also iishanten. But both of them could wait on 6s after hitting tenpai.

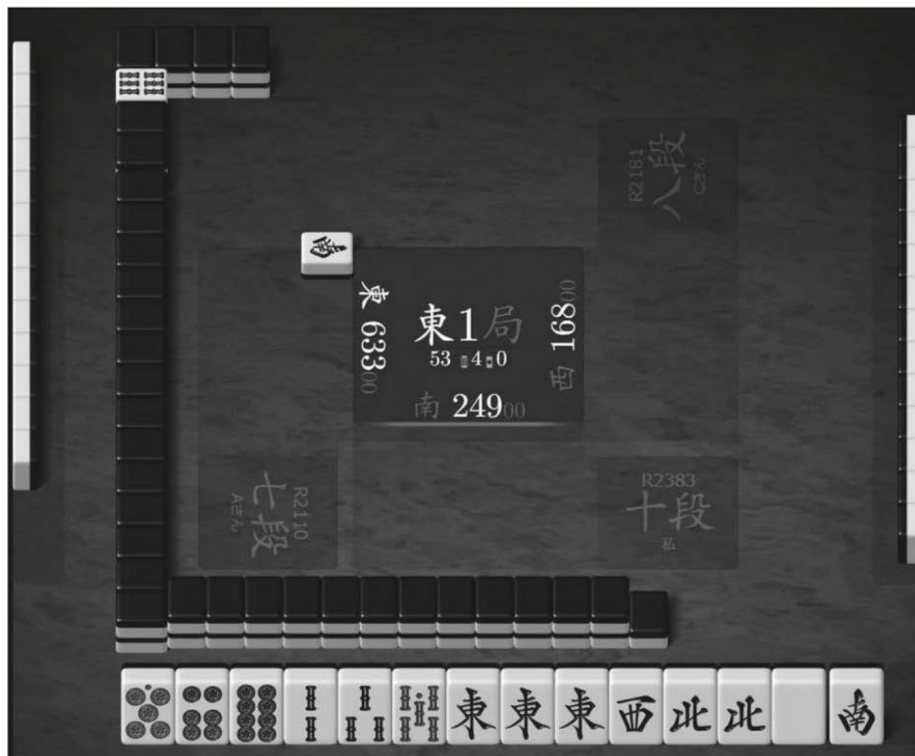
Owata: If I'd known that I would've wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible. But since I didn't, I had to look at my hand and think. We're entering the third row of discards, where tenpai becomes less valuable, and all I have is a bad shape dora 1 iishanten. I shouldn't overdo it.

—: In the end, shimocha deals in with 8s for 7700 points. This is lucky for you, right?

Owata: First place moved further away, but the chance of getting last place also decreased. I am okay with that outcome.

TN: The dealer's final shape was iipeikou dama with 8s tanki (screen-shot skipped).

East 1-4
 South seat
 24900 points



—: Dealer skipped East 1-3 with a kyuushukyuuhai.

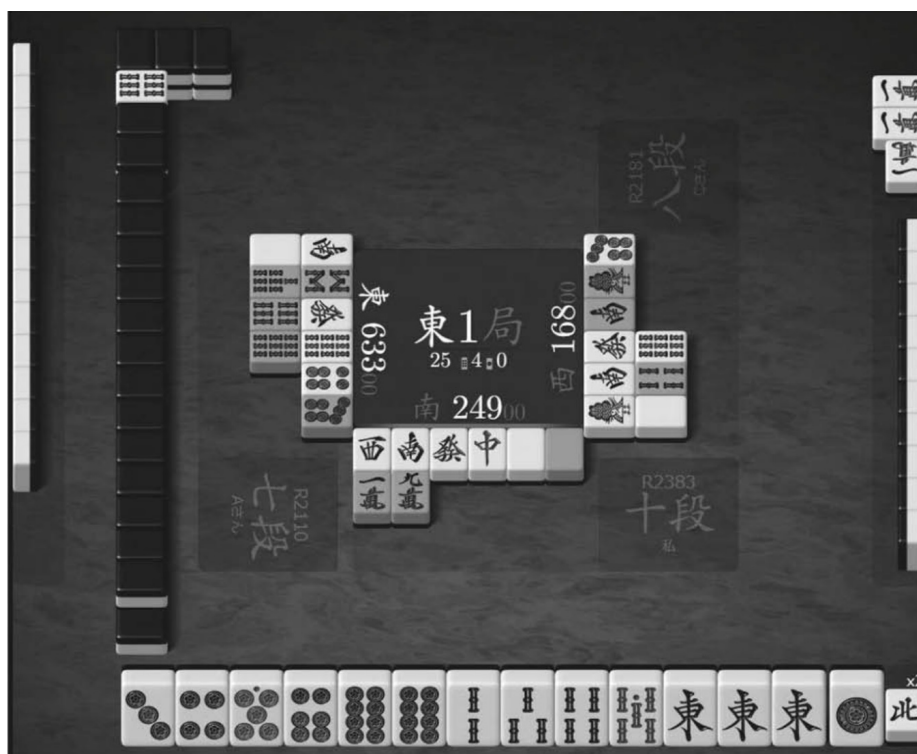
Owata: Kokushi is fairly common in sanma, so aiming there from 9 tiles happens sometimes, but as dealer kyuushu is the safe choice.

—: So, do we aim for little winds with this hand?

Owata: Not without one more wind pair. We can't pon Pei after all. I declare my Pei dora as usual.

—: You get Hatsu and 8p from your rinshan draws, then get 3p next turn.

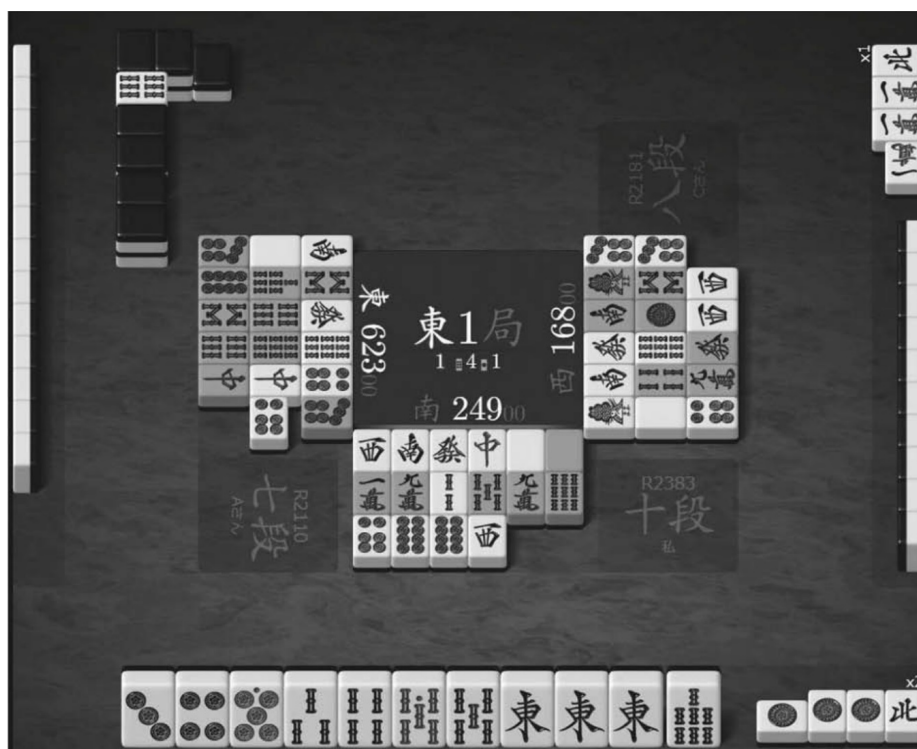
Owata: Many think that it's easy to get honitsu in sanma, and there are certainly hands where that's true, but in this hand we shouldn't force it. Let's proceed as we would in a normal hand.



—: The wait may be a kanchan, but this is tenpai with a yaku.
 Owata: I couldn't refuse tenpai there. I wasn't happy with it, and refusing tenpai with a 1p cut was an option, but as it was late I decided to take tenpai.



—: But you did pon the 1p discard from dealer two turns later.
 Owata: The wait may be furiten, but I can discard a safe tile into tenpai, and I even have safe tiles left over should I need to fold later. I often find myself in furiten waits when recovering from an earlier fold. If the furiten is ryanmen it's not even rare to win on it.



—: And then you draw dora 7s.

Owata: The 7s is genbutsu against dealer. It hasn't passed against shimocha but I cut it anyway. I didn't think Ton was safe necessarily safe there.

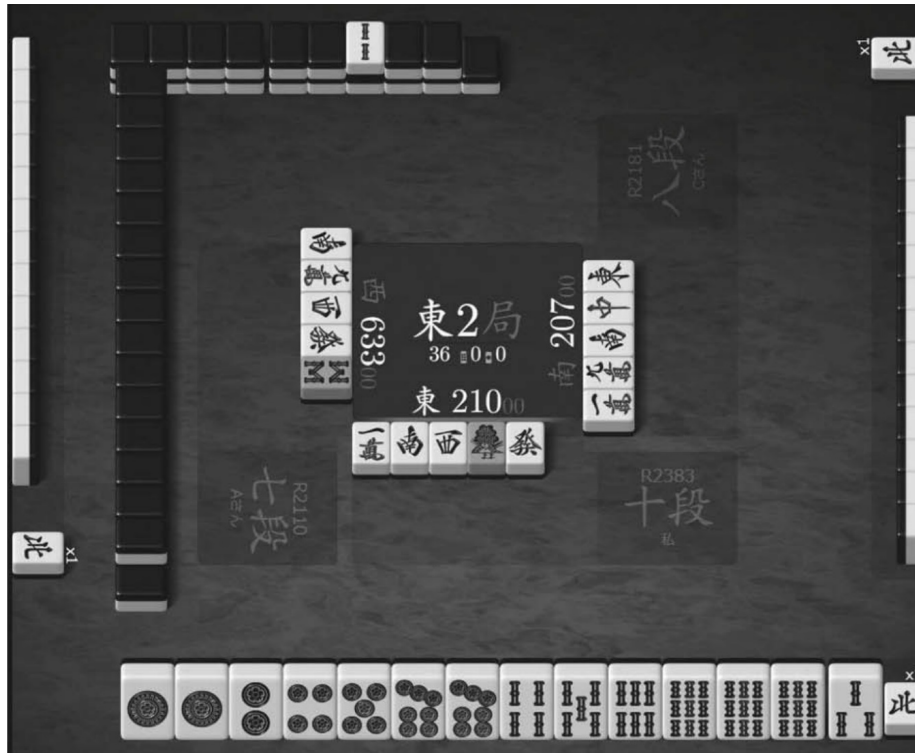
—: It's possible to tanki on it, after all.

Owata: That, and shimocha dropped a Xia pair. It looks to me like he's trying to mawashi.

—: It would be quite the shock to discard the safe-seeming Ton triplet only to deal into tanki. The round ends in a draw and dealer gets another renchan.

Owata: No, the possible upgrades are about the same, so I cut 5s instead to maximise the current number of winning tiles. 8s is also more likely to come out.

East 2
East seat
21000 points



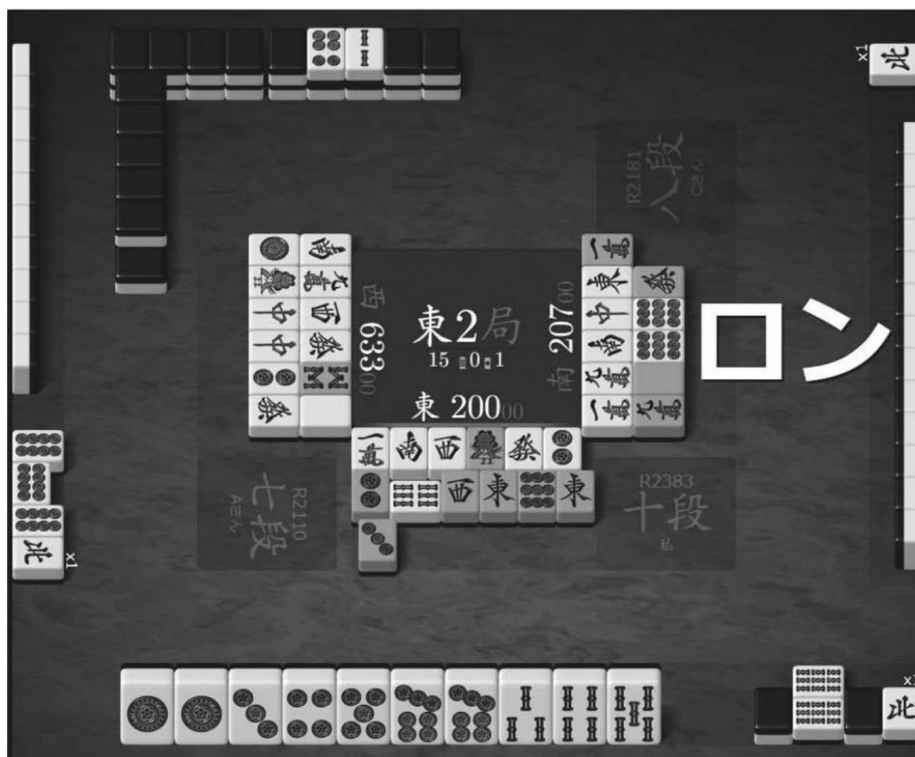
Owata: Since I already discarded 1s earlier, it may look like I'm about to cut 6s. In fact I cut 2p. I like this way of playing.

—: Oh, so this is one of the few differences between the old and the current you.

Owata: Hmm. 3p isn't much of a backfire after a 2p discard, so hoping for the souzu to develop by cutting 2p may be good. Maybe I should adjust my playing a bit.

—: You can make such a discovery while studying haifu?

Owata: Studying one's own haifu is quite useful. There's good and bad plays to find.



—: At the beginning of the third row you deal into shimocha again, with a 3p. The current you could have sakigiri'd 6s and after the 3p draw declared riichi with 1p, getting a 36p wait. Then you would have won with tsumo.

Owata: That may be the case, but let's not focus on what-ifs. It's normal to think "damn, of course it backfired," but nothing good can come from dwelling on it. Saying that 6s was correct because it would have worked in this case is nonsense.

—: That may be so, but missing a haneman tsumo as dealer and getting ronned for mangan instead must have hurt.

Owata: It definitely hurt (laughs). Now that I landed in last place the only thing I could do was to try and find a way to reclaim second.

South 1
South seat
12000 points



—: In East 3 kamicha got a turn 4 riichi, which shimocha dealt into for 3200 points. It's now the third turn of South 1.

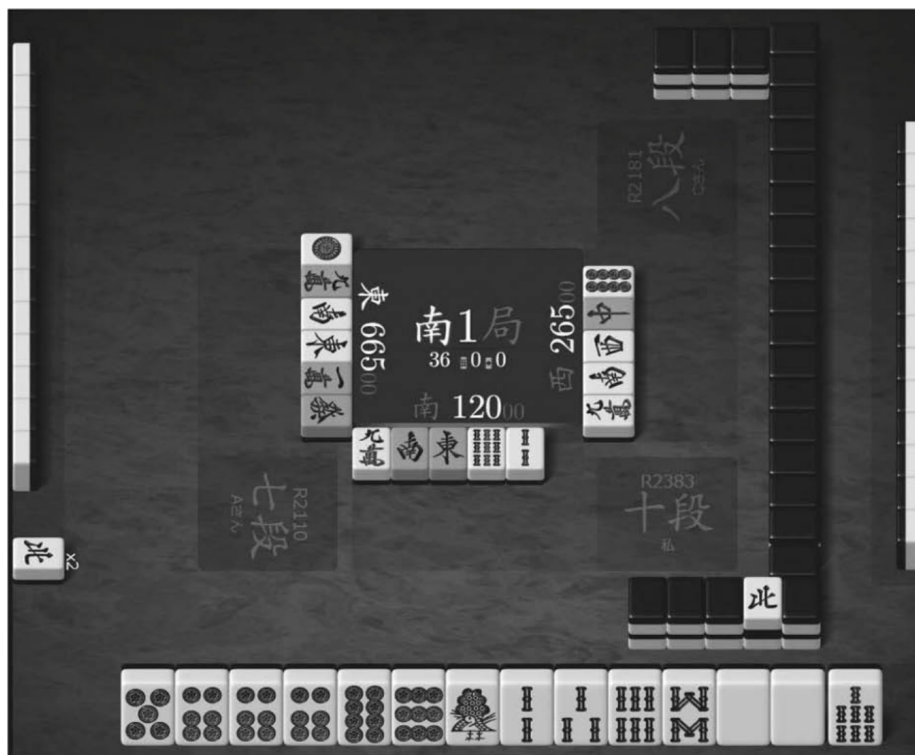
Owata: I just tsumogiri this Ton, huh.

—: Even though it's dora?

Owata: It would be nice to pair it up, but as a guest wind it's basically the same as a dora 1m or 9m pair. My goal was probably to advance the match to South 2. It was a choice that prioritised speed. It was better to cut it sooner as it was a yakuhai for dealer.

—: You mean before dealer gets a pair he can call it with.

Owata: That's right. However, if it were a hand that doesn't discard it there, you should never discard it. My actual hand was iishanten so I just played normally.



—: You get tenpai on turn 6.

Owata: Instand riichi even with a penchan. Sanma has less tiles, so for likelihood calculations the denominator is smaller. Thus winning a penchan is easier than in yonma. But if someone chases, it's also more dangerous. The opponent gets the same benefit after all.

—: And yet it's a riichi even with this potential risk.

Owata: The fact that I have a 6p triplet helps the 7p wait out a bit.

—: You're saying that since only 6p is left, it's harder for the others to use 7p.

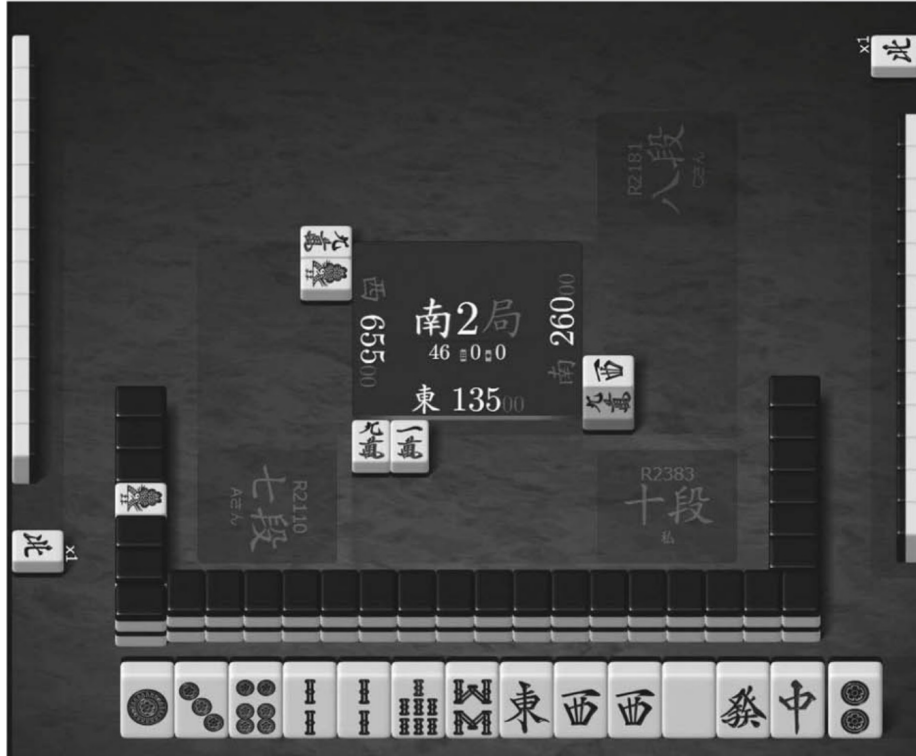
Owata: It's also possible that someone else has a 7p triplet. I can't know if that's the case. In last place I have to take some risks.

—: Do you think it's better to be aggressive when you're uncertain?

Owata: It would be different if I knew there was danger, but in general I think it's better to be aggressive when you don't know if there's danger. Folding against a threat that may not exist just seems like a waste.

—: Your push is rewarded with a tsumo. (TN: It's riichi tsumo, 500/1000, screenshot skipped.)

South 2
East seat
13500 points



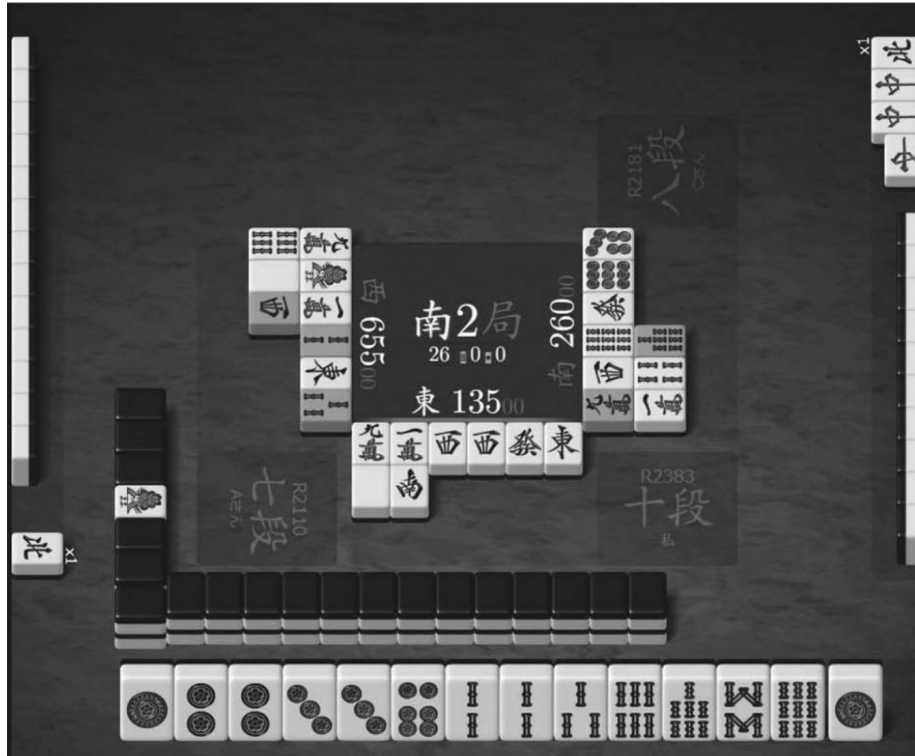
—: Personally I think this is your best discard in the entire haifu.

Owata: It's that amazing? (laughs)

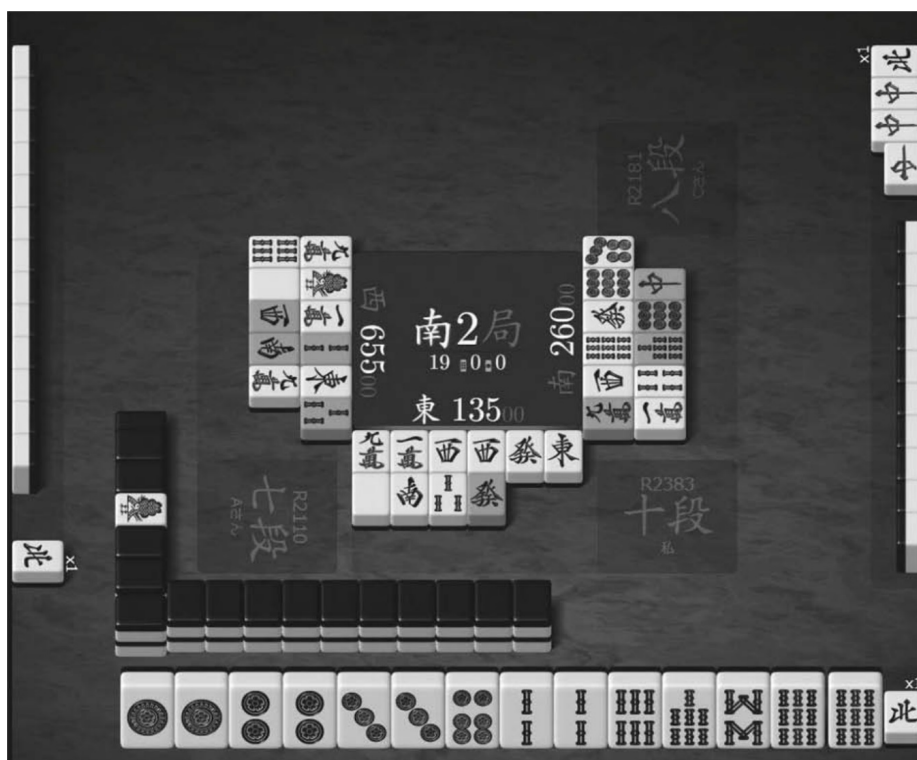
—: I think maybe if you had discarded something else you might not have become *tenhoui*.

Owata: Well, I was amazed at how broad-minded I was, too.

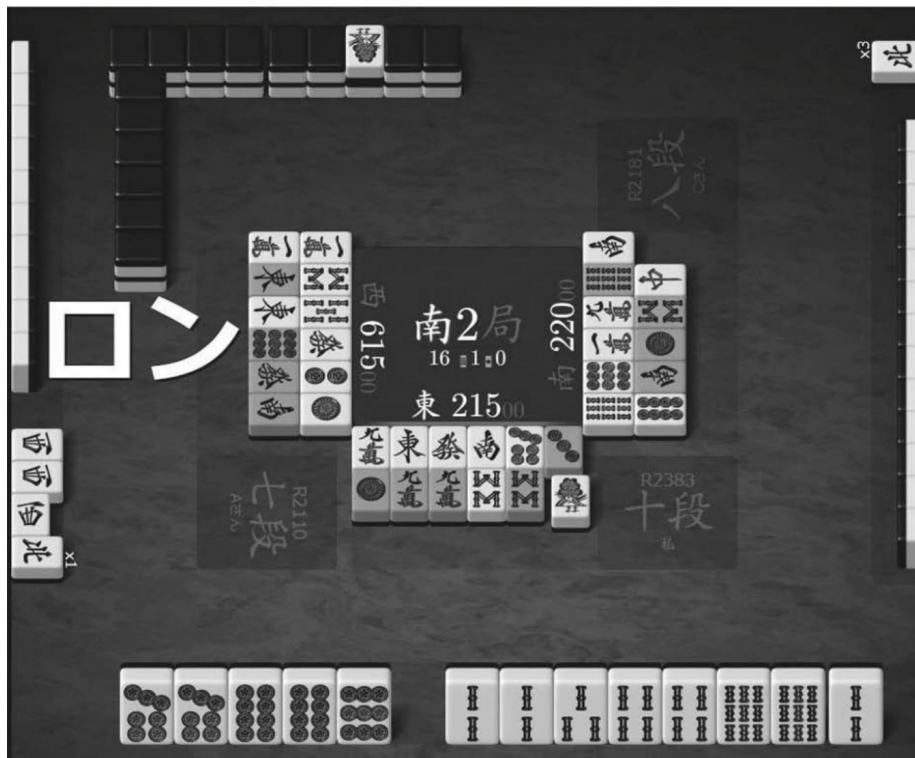
Owata: And that's while I have a dora pair. But in fact, it's precisely because of this that I couldn't bring myself to cut any of the single yakuhai tiles. I don't care which one, just please draw into a pair of one of them.



Owata: For a wider sticky iishanten, and to confirm the dora pair, I cut 3s. Pinzu are expensive and souzu are cheap, if I'd wanted more safety 9s would have been the choice. As last place dealer however I was prepared to push 6p should I draw 7s.



—: You then get a shanpon tenpai on the dora and 9s.
Owata: But I didn't take it. Pinzu are too dangerous.
—: You thought 6p would deal in?
Owata: Not necessarily, I just thought pinzu were dangerous. Even if the wait was 58p or 4p, I thought keeping the 6p was better.
—: I see. Even if 6p passes now you may not be able to push tiles next to it in the future.
Owata: Losing this dealer turn would put me in a grim spot, but exactly because of that I wanted to hand in there as long as possible.
—: And with that line of play you drew another 6p to get back into tenpai and tsumo another one for a mangan win.
Owata: This was a satisfying win for sure.

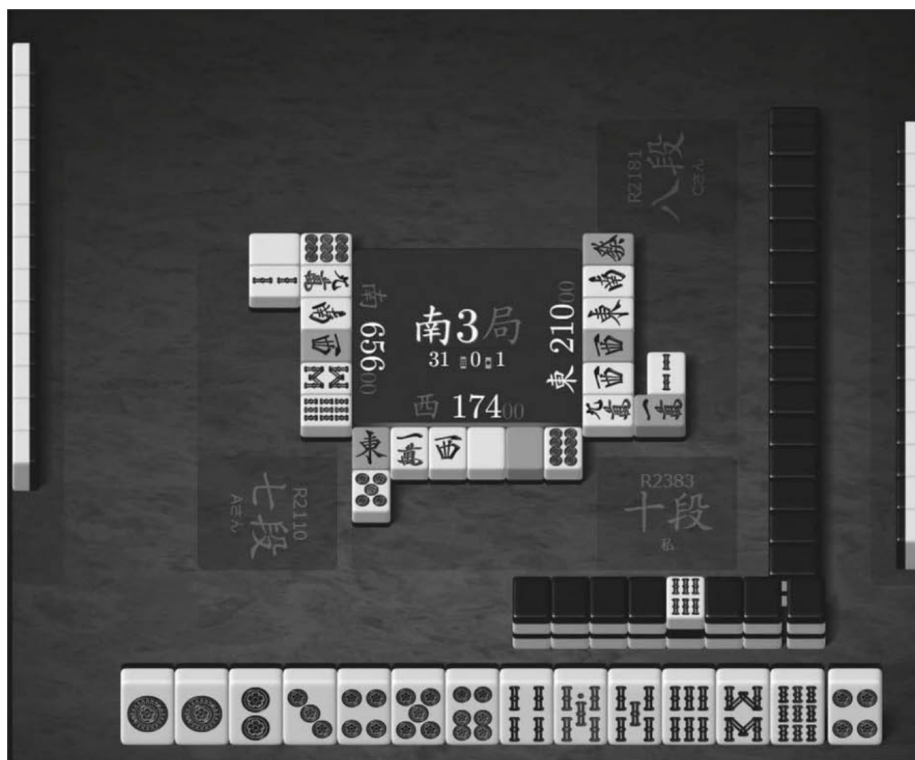


—: In your renchan, you deal in from a dora 3 iishanten.
 Owata: 1469 are the dangerous suji here, but I also had a 2s dora triplet. This is one of those deal ins you just can't avoid.
 TN: Screenshot skipped again, it's 4100 points.

South 3 (all last)

East seat

17400 points



—: In all last, you're 4600 points behind second place, who is now dealer. On the 8th turn there's a dealer riichi, then you reach tenpai in the same turn.

Owata: With the riichi stick the effective point difference shrinks to 2600. Cutting 5s for riichi and winning is 5200 even without ura.

—: The wait is a penchan though.

Owata: I thought the chance to win was better with a riichi rather than trying to find a better wait. So I went for instant riichi.

—: And three turns later you get the 7s tsumo, raising yourself to second place right at the end. You managed to stand your ground.

Owata: If I'd lost there, the tenhoui promotion would have been pushed back quite a bit. The 7s was important, but I think anyone would have played this hand this way.

—: There don't seem to be any other paths. Even if you don't take

tenpai, you'll draw 6s for a 47s wait which you'll win on the same 7s.

Owata: That's why I think the difficult choices that lead to this point were more important. Looking at the haifu like this you can really feel the importance of each discard. To everyone reading this book, please don't just look at haifu of strong players but also at your own. I'm sure you'll find some interesting things.

Winning run

East 1

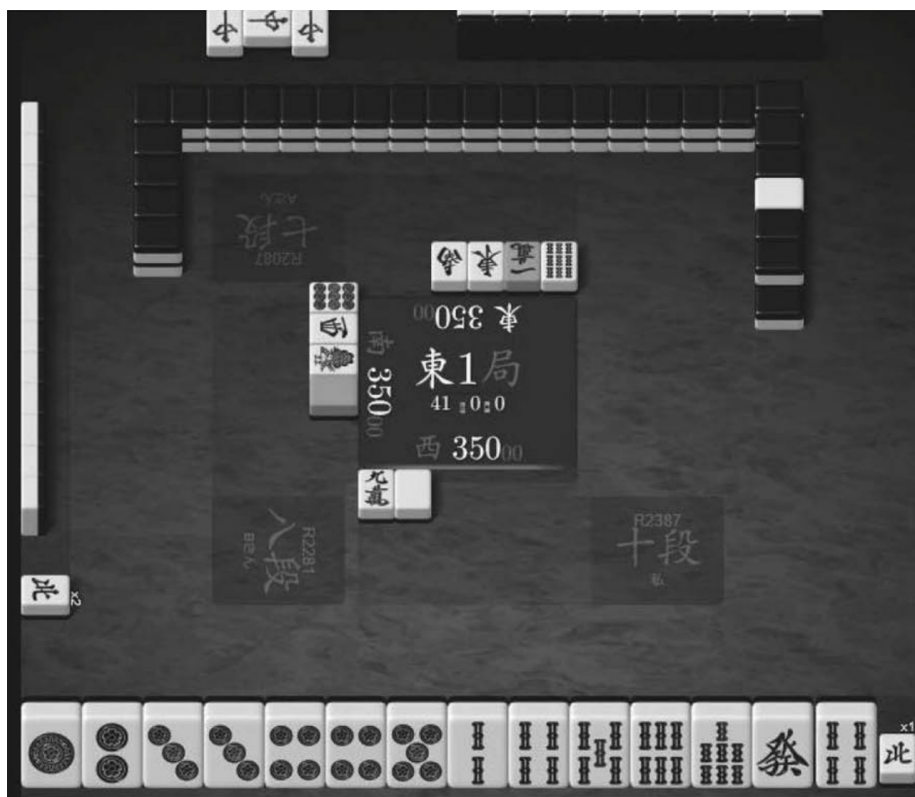
West seat

35000 points

—: And now we finally get a look at your promotion match. This was on the 18th of April, 2009, at 01:49 a.m.

Owata: This one had plenty of ups and downs as well.

—: Let's start here.



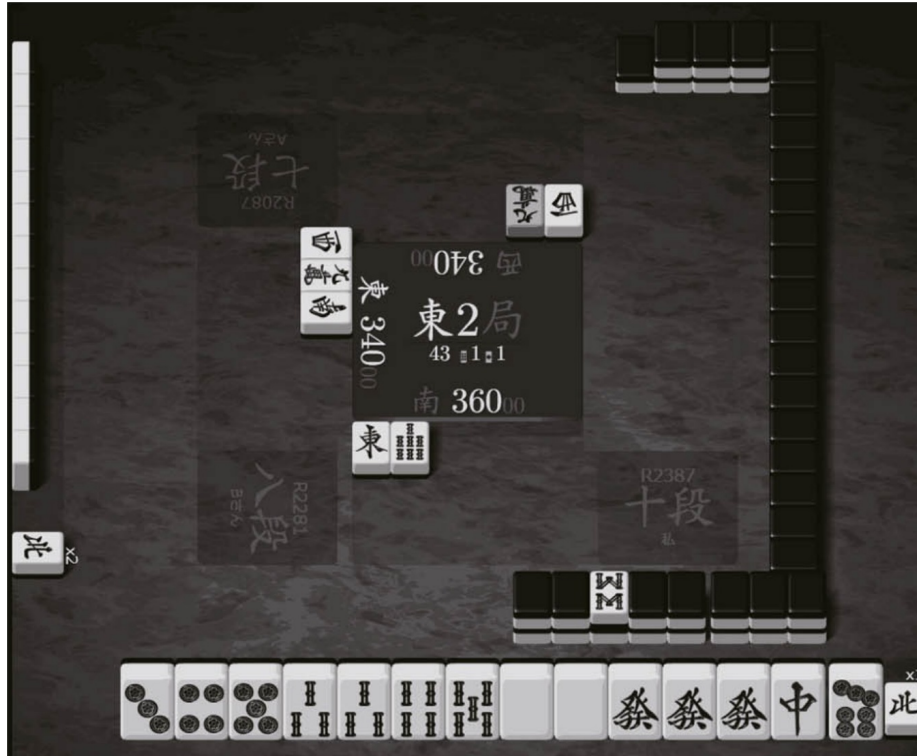
Owata: Yeah, that's a dora Hatsu discard.

—: With toimen having a Chun pon?

Owata: We should be cognisant of that, but it's still early so it's more important to take a wide iishanten.

—: Next turn you draw 6p, riichi with a 25p wait, and it ends in a draw with you as the only tenpai.

Winning run
East 2-1
South seat
36000 points



—: We can see daisangen here.

Owata: Actually no, we shouldn't do that. I got excited when I drew into the Hatsu triplet and cut 7s, but I think dropping Chun would have been correct.

—: Ah yes, even if you draw Chun it'll only be a shousangen with a shanpon.

Owata: This turn I regained my senses and kept 7p, discarding Chun.

Winning run

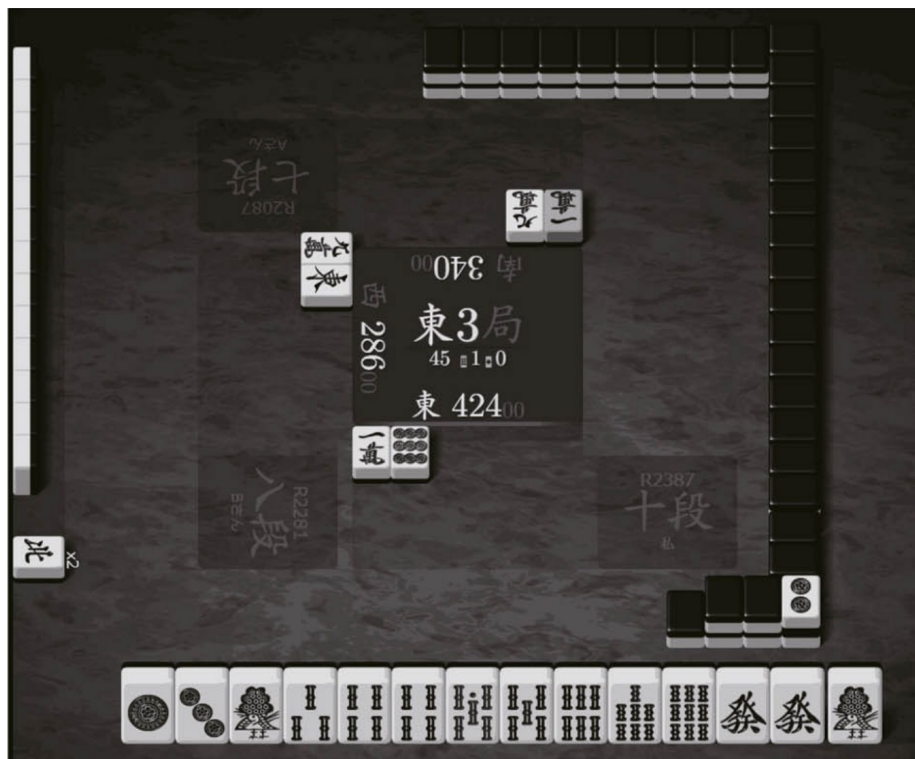
East 3-1

East seat

42400 points

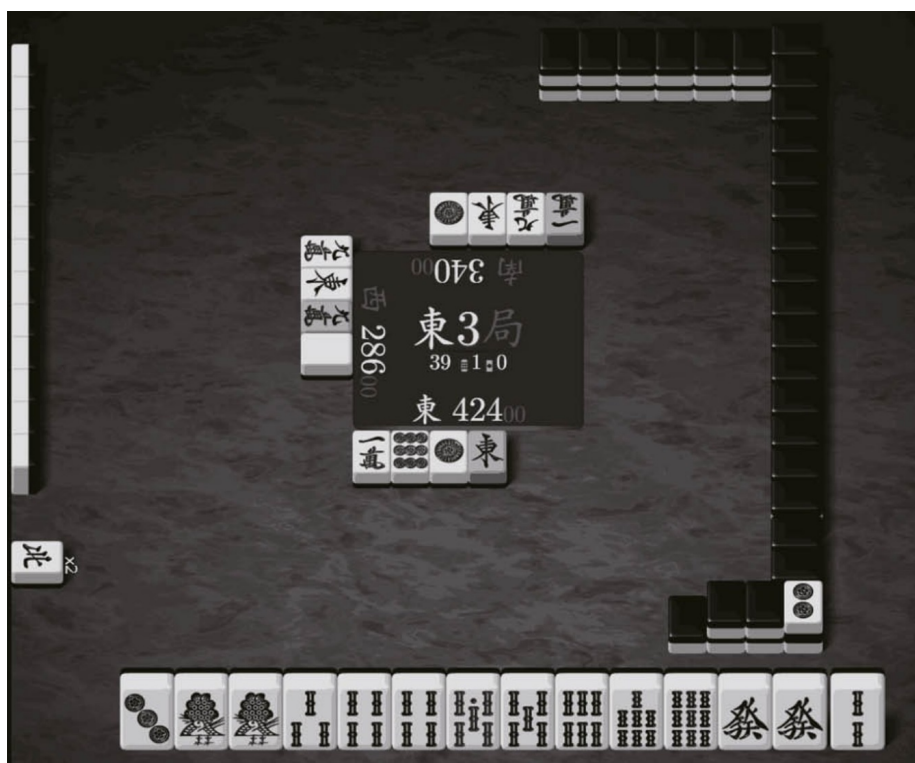
—: Your first dealer haipai was a kyuushuu draw.

Owata: In a match where I'm first and winning is a promotion to tenhoui, there's really no need to aim for kokushi. I held back on aiming for yakuman and declared a draw.



—: Now there's one honba, and you have 1s and Hatsu pairs.

Owata: There's no need to force honitsu when 3p is dora, but we do have enough five groups in souzu honitsu so let's go for it. Cutting 1p first means we can reconsider if we draw 4p.



—: Consistent with your previous logic you cut the twice discarded Ton instead of trying to sakigiri 3p. But how about now?

Owata: As you would expect this is finally the 3p cut. Before we could only accept 8s, 1s, and Hatsu to reach tenpai, but with the 2s we get additional acceptance of 3s and 6s.

—: Kamicha shifts the draws with his pon and you draw into the 1s triplet for tenpai.

Owata: When you reach tenpai while others have opened, there is great temptation to riichi. Maybe because you want to slow the open hands down, or maybe because you feel like it's fate. In sanma however, I strongly feel that dama much better. I already mentioned at the start of the book that winning with tsumo is worse, and that as dealer you want your mangan to be won with ron.

—: Toimen's riichi declaration 3s deals into you.

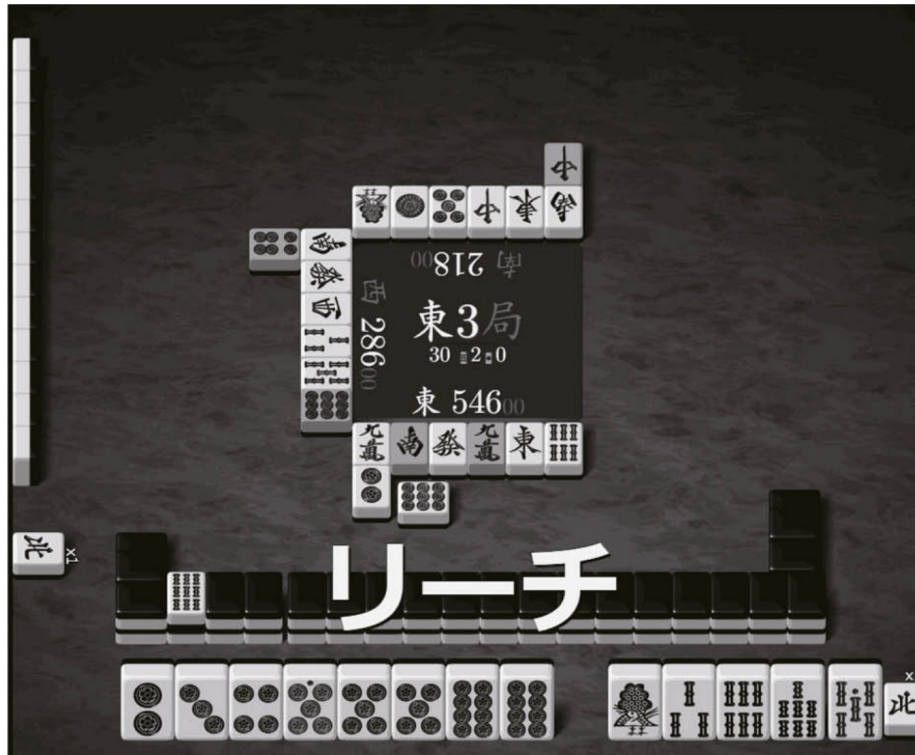
Owata: After hitting tenpai with a 9s discard I tsumogiri'd 0p and 7s, so I think he was aware that I might be dama. I wonder if he would still have dealt in if I had declared riichi.

—: It's also possible that he would have pushed 3s anyway, right?

Owata: That's correct, but then if I had riichi'd I might also have gotten ura for haneman, which on tsumo would lose 6000 points.

There's no end to the what-ifs if we go there. Not winning a hand that could win can be fatal, but just losing a few points is not that bad. To leave a good record in the world known as tenhou, one single firework rocket is not enough. You have to build it bit by bit.

Winning run
East 3-2
East seat
54600 points



—: In this round you are first to riichi with a kanchan on 2s. This hand could have improved to tanyao or sanmenchan, so was this instant riichi because 1s is dora?

Owata: No, that has nothing to do with it. As in the chapter on not being too concerned with shape, kanchan tenpai with not many ways to improve is an instant riichi. This would have been instant riichi even if 1s was not dora.

—: And this has nothing to do with flow or anything like that?

Owata: Not at all. It's a question of how many dora we have and what the point spread is. Turn 8 is late in sanma, and it's likely that our opponents have more expensive hands. Also, my opponents are close in score to each other so it'll be scary for them to push into me.

—: Especially because getting last place is hell in ranked.

Owata: I'm way ahead here so the others are likely to take a "aim for second" approach.

—: So with all this in mind you judged riichi to be the right choice.

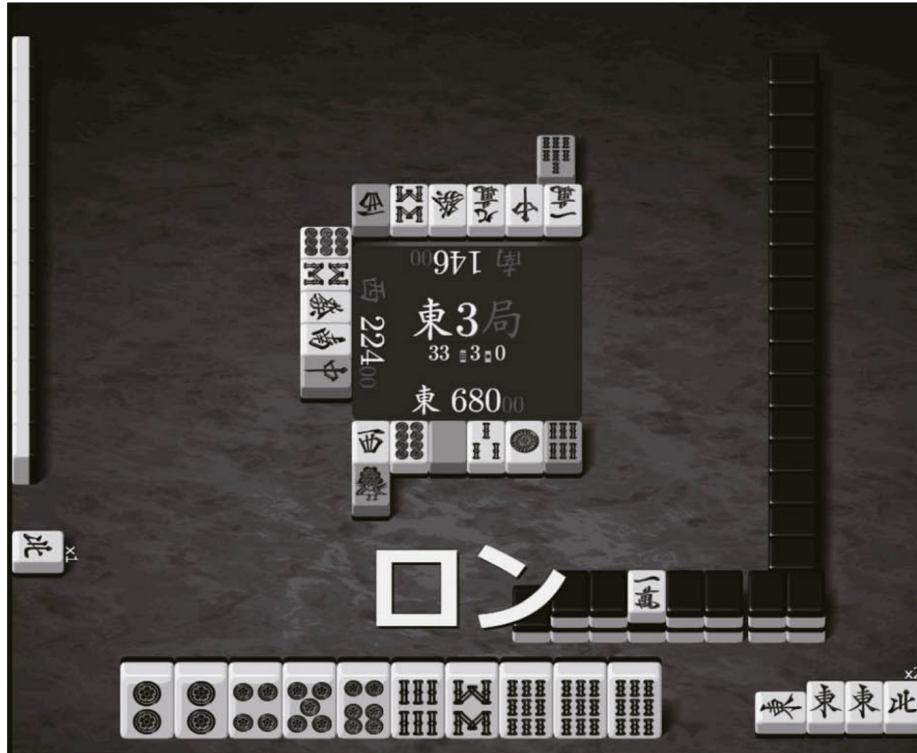
Owata: That's right. I can't say that this is 100% correct, but at the very least the me at the time thought so.

—: How about the current you?

Owata: I'd still riichi there.

—: The hand ends when you tsumo 2s on the haitei tile. The promotion to tenhoui is close now.

Winning run
East 3-3
East seat
68000 points



Owata: The first image of this hand is already the win (laughs). Certainly this hand was quick, I poned double Ton and then the winning 7s came out soon. There was one choice where I picked the 7s kanchan after seeing both opponents discard 8s, which made that wait look good.

—: You were rewarded with this because you made good plays so far.

Owata: You're basically saying I had good flow (laughs). I don't hate that thought, but let's not get carried away. At the time I was excited and kept thinking "At this point it's basically guaranteed, right?" The promotion to first ever tenhoui was coming into view.

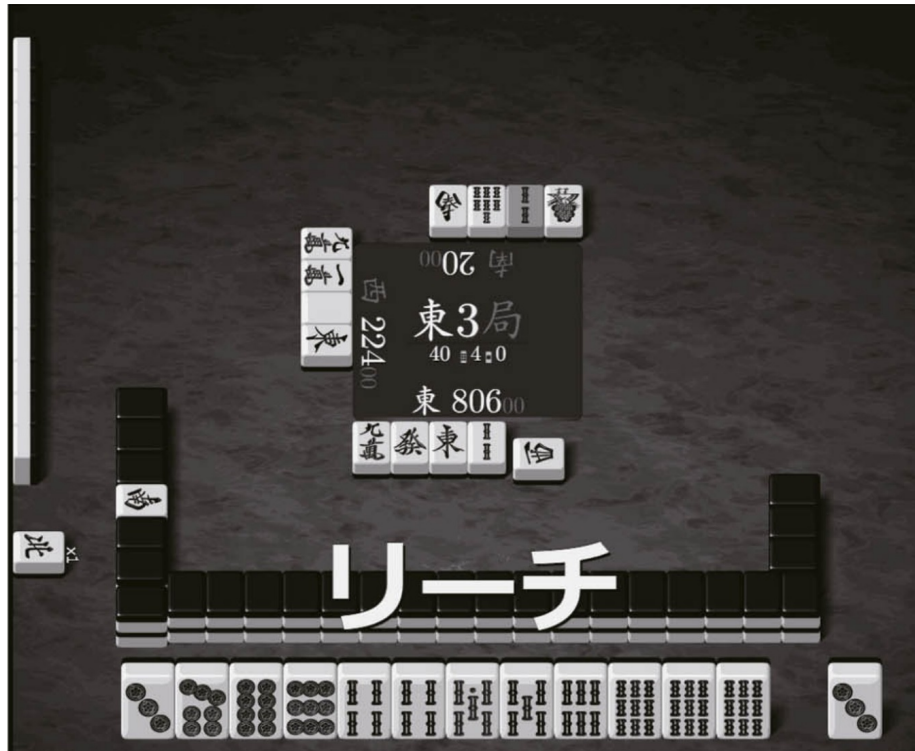
TN: This was mentioned in the interview I skipped, but at this point in time there were no yonma tenhoui. So Owata wasn't just the first

sanma tenhoui, he was the first tenhoui in general.

—: So you were aware of it?

Owata: Of course I was. I tried not to let it distract me, but I was certainly well aware of it.

Winning run
East 3-4
East seat
80600 points



—: You went for full efficiency in this hand and draw into a 3p pair for tenpai, which you riichi.

Owata: With this point difference there's really nothing to be afraid of anymore. I went full offence rather than choosing slim hands which could give the others a chance to do something.

—: Toimen chased on turn nine, but you get a 6s tsumo to bankrupt toimen and become tenhoui.

Owata: Sanma tenhoui, yes (laughs).

—: This was really impressive! You are currently also 10th dan in yonma. It seems like people good at sanma are also good at yonma.

Owata: This is just a personal opinion, but I think while there are many people who are good at yonma but not sanma, most people who are good at sanma are also good at yonma.

—: I heard you started playing sanma for a change of pace while being 6th dan in yonma.

Owata: Some things I learned in yonma I could carry over to sanma, while others were almost completely reversed. I think sanma is more straightforward than yonma. Basic hand building is very important. I especially recommend it to people who feel that yonma is too slow. It can also help you practice menchin waits. I'm still learning as well, sometimes when I get menchin hands I still panic (laughs). Let's all play more sanma!

Credits

Translation : Anon

Tech support : Anon

Emotional support : Several anons