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# Introduction

## Background

This is a machine-assisted translation of “Frequently Appearing in Actual Games! Mahjong Lectures” by the 10d-rated Tenhou player Yuusei. The first three chapters, on basic block theory and tile efficiency, are omitted.



Throughout the examples in the book, the dora will be indicated in the following manner:

Dora: .

In this case, the dora is  and the dora indicator is .



## Dora Designation - Check Your Understanding

You are non-dealer with the below tenpai hand. You have not declared riichi.

 Dora: 

Shimocha discards  and you declare ron. How do you score the hand?

**Answer:** The hand is 3 han 40 fu - 5200 points.

The three han come from iipeikou, the akadora , and the dora, .

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# 1 Hand Building

## 1.1 When “Perfect Iishanten” Isn’t Perfect

Today’s lesson was inspired by a message I received. It read, “Yuusei, I don’t want to reduce my winning chances, so I always take perfect iishanten. However, I often deal in later because the tile I must discard for tenpai has become dangerous. This iishanten does not seem perfect at all. What’s going on?!”

**Perfect Iishanten:** 

Perfect iishanten is loved by the digital mahjong community. The idea of ‘camouflage’ by fixing the ryanmen pair into a ryanmen has generally been dismissed given the reduction in ukeire and digital tendency to maximize acceptance at iishanten. However, recent research (citing Jangoro K’s ‘Modern Mahjong Latest Theory’) is at odds with the digital devotion to perfect iishanten - finding that there are very real scenarios where one may want to cut from the ryanmen pair at iishanten, and ‘go slim’.



First - when is it good to take perfect iishanten?

### When to Take Perfect Iishanten: ABCD Criteria

- (A) When you have another yaku that allows you to pon into tenpai
- (B) Early game (pre-6th turn)
- (C) When the blocks may improve (for instance, an isolated pair near dora, or a structure with overlapping acceptance)
- (D) Late game (post-13th turn)

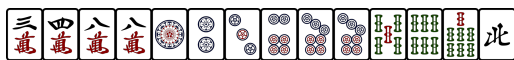

Let’s discuss each in minor detail.




(A) Provides the ability to quickly call for high-value hands with yaku, for instance, the 3-han hand below:

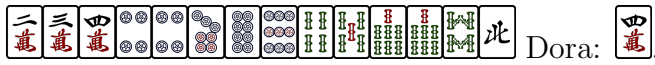
 Dora: 

(B) Simply maximizes acceptance for closed tenpai

(C) Allows for value upgrades, like cutting  from the hand below hoping to draw .

 Dora: 

Or cutting  from the hand below to potentially draw  or  to increase acceptance (since the acceptance in souzu is currently overlapping).



(D) By the 13th turn, cutting from the ryanmen pair is already likely to be dangerous, so it may be disadvantageous from a safety perspective to needlessly cut it. Also, given the turn, the chances of your hand winning are low, so any advantage to win rate obtained by preemptively cutting from the ryanmen pair is low. Keep the two-pair structure and prioritize being able to pon for keiten to get the tenpai payments.

A good guideline for formal tenpai is to call at the 15th turn. Calling too early makes it more difficult to defend when an opponent attacks. Also, you don’t want to call so early that you lose the small (but still real) chances of winning in the late game. Calling for keiten at turn 15 is a good general guideline.

### When to Cut from the Ryanmen Pair: 1234 Criteria

1. Two of the four tiles with shanpon acceptance are depleted
2. The tile is relatively dangerous to hold (3-7)
3. Going slim guarantees pinfu or gives the potential for another yaku (e.g. sanshoku)
4. Mid-game (7-12th turn)

When at least **two of the four** above criteria are met, it is appropriate to cut from the ryanmen pair and ‘go slim’.

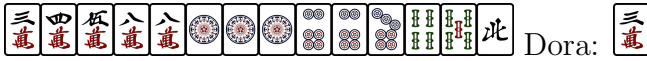
Let’s discuss each criteria in more detail.

- (1) With two tiles for shanpon acceptance depleted, the loss in tile acceptance is marginal. Going slim may also improve the win rate if it sets a trap in the discard pool.
- (2) From a defensive standpoint, holding onto 3-7 number tiles until tenpai can be dangerous. Cutting them early is a sakigiri technique. While 3/7 are slightly less dangerous than 4/5/6, an early 3/7 cut makes the resulting ryanmen (23, 34, 67, 78) wait strong.
- (3) Going slim increases the win rate of the resulting tenpai and, when pinfu is guaranteed, ensures a value bonus. If there are other potential upgrades to value, like sanshoku, it’s even more advantageous to go slim.
- (4) Going slim in the middle-game increases your ability to defend at the stage when opponents are most likely to attack or declare riichi. As the round progresses, the chances of dealing in with your overflow tile increase.

In general, if two of the four criteria are met, there is a substantial advantage conferred by ‘going slim’. However, these criteria are not totally mutually exclusive to the criteria for

maintaining perfect iishanten, so use your best judgment. With your newfound knowledge, the next time you go slim, boldly cut from the ryanmen pair and say to yourself, ‘This is the deciding factor!’.

Let’s see an example. WWYD?



**East 1, East Seat, Turn 5,** **both fully live**

Here, criteria (2) and criteria (B) are met. It’s early. Maintain perfect iishanten by discarding .

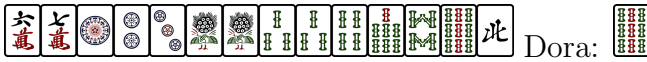
**East 1, East Seat, Turn 8,** **both once-discarded**

Here, criteria (1), (2), and (4) apply. Since more than two criteria for going slim are met, cut . Don’t forget to say ‘This is the deciding factor!’

**East 1, East Seat, Turn 15,** **both fully live**

Here, criteria (2) and (D) are met. Cut hoping to call for keiten.

Let’s try another example. WWYD?



**East 1, North Seat, Turn 5,** **both fully live**

Here, criteria (2), (3), and (B) are met. While it’s still early, the benefit of cutting to increase the win rate of the ryanmen outweighs the additional acceptance. Cut .

**East 1, North Seat, Turn 11,** **both once-discarded**

Here, criteria (1), (2), (3), and (4) apply. The more ‘going slim’ criteria are met, the easier it is to make a decision. Cut .

**East 1, North Seat, Turn 15,** **both fully live**

Here, criteria (2), (3), and (D) are met. Note that in the endgame, the benefits that going slim confers to win rate and sakigiri are both diminished. Since it’s already dangerous to discard and we want to call for keiten, we discard . **Note: of the ABCD criteria for maintaining perfect iishanten, (D) is the most important.**

Employing the ‘go slim’ criteria will naturally improve your sakigiri judgment. If you

regularly apply the sakigiri technique, you may develop a reputation as a player whose riichis are difficult-to-read! This provides great advantage in situations where you are playing the same opponents regularly - with friends, or in parlor tournament settings. That’s it for today’s lesson. Thank you for your hard work.

### Going Slim vs. Perfect Iishanten - Summary


If two of the following four conditions are met, generally\* go slim:

- Two of the four tiles with shanpon acceptance are depleted
- The tile is relatively dangerous to hold (3-7)
- Going slim guarantees pinfu or gives the potential for another yaku (e.g. sanshoku)
- Mid-game (7-12th turn)

\*The benefits of going slim diminish in the endgame.

### Going Slim vs. Perfect Iishanten - In Practice



#### Q1

East 1, South Seat, Turn 5,  completely live



Hand:  Dora: 

#### Q2




East 1, West Seat, Turn 7,  once discarded

Hand:  Dora: 

**A1**

Cut  for the 567 sanshoku play. This choice meets the criteria of (2) and (3), where the  cut can be considered sakigiri and going slim ensures pinfu and possible sanshoku. It’s still technically early, but we’re not going to pon this hand - so just focus on the fact that criteria (2) and (3) are met and make the iron cut.


**A2**

Cut . It’s true that criteria (2), (3), and (4) are met if we cut . However, with the compound shape in manzu, doing so would lose 8 tiles of acceptance. If you lose more than 4 tiles of acceptance don’t bother going slim. Keep it simple and discard  for maximum acceptance.

## 1.2 Sakigiri with Open Hands

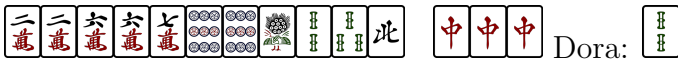
“My opponents seem to know my waits when I have an open hand and I never win. Please give me some advice!”

In this lesson, we’ll talk about effectively utilizing sakigiri in open hands to increase win rate. The theme is similar to the last lesson (Section 1.1), where in some cases, we learned it was appropriate to ‘go slim’ from perfect iishanten in menzen hands by fixing the ryanmen pair into ryanmen. However, the criteria are slightly different when the hand is open vs. closed.

First of all, with an open hand, it good to prioritize keeping pairs for pon material. For instance, in the hand below, nobody would cut .





Still, there are times when moves like this are appropriate. What are they? **When an open hand is iishanten with three pairs, including a ryanmen pair, it may be appropriate to fix the ryanmen pair into ryanmen.** For example, the below hand:









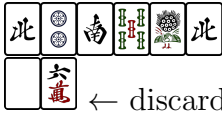
Here, we should keep the  and cut . Let’s highlight the pros of keeping .






**Pros of Keeping  over .**




- Greater acceptance (14 vs. 12 tiles)
- Can pon  for tenpai (shanpon)

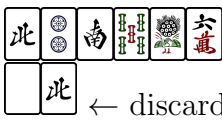
However, these pros are marginal for a couple of reasons. First, the boost in acceptance is small at 2 total tiles. Second, as a middle number tile,  is poor pon material.


The benefits of discarding  early as sakigiri have more to do with the order of your discard pool in the likely case we pon  or  for tenpai. If we cut , then two turns later called either  or  for tenpai, our discard pool would look like this:



Our wait of   is nearby (sobaten) to the  discard after pon-ten. Many players study the tiles discarded after a call and are cautious to not discard in the surrounding area. There are tons of players who absolutely refuse to deal into a sobaten wait (myself included, haha). This makes it harder to win on the  .

If instead we originally cut , then two turns later ponned either  or  for tenpai, our discard pool would look like this:

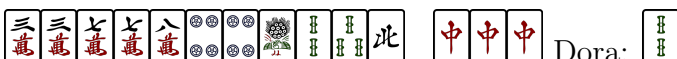















Now, even though the wait is the same, opponents are less wary of discarding tiles nearby the  because it was not the tile discarded after the pon into tenpai. **This is the key advantage of cutting early from the ryanmen pair.**

All pairs in ryanmen pairs are number tiles from 2-8. Of these, tiles between 3-7 are especially poor pon material. So when weighing the limited benefit of two tiles of shanpon tenpai acceptance for a tile unlikely to be discarded and ponned, versus ending up in sobaten tenpai with players on high alert to your wait, **the advantages of cutting from the ryanmen pair outweigh the drawbacks.**

We do not aim for the fastest tenpai - rather, the fastest win! And this principle also guides the decision to 'go slim' from perfect iishanten discussed in Section 1.1.


If the pairs for pon-ten are excellent pon material, like honor tiles, this technique is even more effective. You may have concerns about cases where all the pairs in the hand are poor pon material, like in the following example hand:



However, when the floating pairs are middle number tiles, the resulting hand after cutting  will retain wide acceptance for upgrades (          ). The hand upon drawing 

is shown below.



At this point we should drop  to take a perfect iishanten guaranteed to result in a ryanmen final wait. *Cut from the ryanmen pair even when the other pairs are middle number tiles since there are many other upgrades.*

**Exception: Toitai.** When aiming for toitai, fix the ryanmen pair into a pair instead.



Discard .

### Sakigiri with Open Hands - Summary

- If iishanten for an open hand with three pairs, one of which is a ryanmen pair, fix the ryanmen to avoid a sobaten wait.

Sakigiri with Open Hands - In Practice

Q1

East 1, North Seat, Turn 7




Hand:   Dora: 

Q2












East 1, North Seat, Turn 7

Hand:   Dora: 

## A1

Cut . With a valuable hand we should fix the ryanmen and commit to the sakigiri. Take every measure to maximize winrate. And if we called  or , we wouldn't take the shanpon anyway.

## A2

Cut . The  dora changes things. The upside with ponning or drawing  is huge, and we can even draw around it (e.g., ) to form two blocks. On calling  or  we should take the shanpon tenpai. If  were the dora instead, we would still cut , thinking about possibly drawing another  and breaking one of the  or  pairs.

## 1.3 Pursuing Value

Let's begin. A reader writes in, saying, "When I go for a big hand, it never works out. What do I do?" Well, let's discuss constructing high-value hands with intent.

Earlier in the book we discussed natural and unforced hand development (tenari) intended for riichi. However, this is not always the correct way to play a hand. For example, if we're non-dealer in South 2 and only have 10000 points, it might not mean much to win a riichi nomi 1300 point hand. We have to aggressively create value when building the hand and target a score that will have an impact on our placement. When scores are relatively even, it may still be appropriate to go for value, since, as will be discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, hand value plays a significant role in push-fold judgment. A high-value hand is worth pushing. If we win a big hand in East we will have more freedom and generally, an easier time, in the rounds to come.

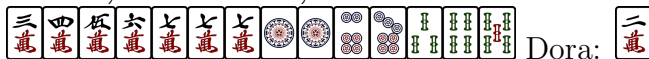
Sometimes, value arises naturally when building a hand. But other times, we need to consciously pursue the added value, even from haipai. In what situations should we deliberately go for a high-value hand? There are generally five main scenarios.


### 5 Situations to Aim for a High-value Hand

1. When low on points and advancing the round with a cheap hand is unfavorable
2. With a slow hand unlikely to be first to tenpai
3. When the 'normal' menzen hand is cheap but opening for a 'gimmick' hand like toitoi or honitsu could be effective
4. Placement considerations in South 3 or oorasu
5. When your hand is so fast that you can afford to break tenpai for greater value

Situation 5 is unlike the others so we will begin our discussion with it. Take, for example, the following hand:

#### East 1, South Seat, Turn 3



It's so early that it would be a tragedy to declare riichi nomi with this hand, so cut . We can get riichi, tanyao, dora, pinfu, and hope for mangan. Go for points when you can and don't miss easy opportunities to boost your score and gain an advantage throughout the hanchan.

If you plan to break tenpai for added value, these criteria must be met:

- 2+ han can be added by breaking tenpai
- The tenpai hand is riichi nomi
- It's early in the round

If even one of these isn't met, it's likely better to simply insta-riichi.

Another related scenario is when a normal hand transitions into a somete (flush, i.e. honitsu/chinitsu) hand. For instance, with the following hand:

**East 1, South Seat, Turn 3**



Please don't accept the riichi nomi. Cut  and go for honitsu/chinitsu.

When it comes to Situations 1-4, we often must decide to go for value via non-traditional hand development from haipai. There are three tips for going for value from haipai. These are important, so write them down or take a screenshot for your smartphone background.



**Tips for Creating High-value Hands**


1. Move towards dora or a scoring yaku
2. Early on, discard the 'cheap' tiles that will not contribute to hand value
3. Once you have decided on a route, fully commit to it

Let's begin with an example.

**Example Hand A: South 2, North Seat, 18000 Points, 4th Place, Turn 1**



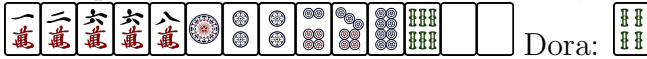
WWYD? Well, if this were East 1, we could proceed normally. But if were to enter South 3 with this point spread, we're unlikely to end the game in first or second place. This is Situation 1 - where we have few points and thus do not want to win a cheap hand to advance the round. In this context, we look to pursue value and recall Tip 1 - **'Move toward dora or a scoring yaku'**. If we build around dora, we should envision the hand assuming we do draw dora , and see the possibility of 345 sanshoku. If we build around a scoring yaku, souzu honitsu is the obvious candidate. With a yakuhai and  we could reach mangan.

The best discard is therefore the  penchan, which has nothing to do with either dora or souzu honitsu. This follows Tip 2 - to **cut the 'cheap' tiles from the hand that do not contribute to hand value**. Also, the penchan would be a bad wait at tenpai and cannot be

used in pinfu or tanyao hands and thus *in general* penchan shapes are not good candidates for a high-value hand. The penchan takes up two wasteful tiles in the hand so it is often effective to cut it early and ‘make space’ when a high-value hand is needed.

To elaborate on the concept of ‘making space’, let’s discuss a separate example.

**Example Hand B: East 1, West Seat, Turn 1**



If we cut 8-10,000 or 1-1 and keep the 1-10,000 2-10,000 penchan, we will be in an awkward spot when drawing marginal improvements to other shapes, for instance when drawing 1-10,000.

Discard 1-1 → Draw 1-10,000: 1-10,000 2-10,000 6-10,000 6-10,000 8-10,000 1-1, 2-1, 3-1, 4-1, 5-1, 6-1, 7-1, 8-1, 9-1, 10-1, 11-1, 12-1, 13-1, 14-1, 15-1, 16-1, 17-1, 18-1, 19-1, 20-1, 21-1, 22-1, 23-1, 24-1, 25-1, 26-1, 27-1, 28-1, 29-1, 30-1, 31-1, 32-1, 33-1, 34-1, 35-1, 36-1, 37-1, 38-1, 39-1, 40-1, 41-1, 42-1, 43-1, 44-1, 45-1, 46-1, 47-1, 48-1, 49-1, 50-1 → Discard ... hmmm ...

Compare this to cutting 1-10,000.

Discard 1-10,000 → Draw 1-10,000: 2-10,000 6-10,000 6-10,000 8-10,000 1-1, 2-1, 3-1, 4-1, 5-1, 6-1, 7-1, 8-1, 9-1, 10-1, 11-1, 12-1, 13-1, 14-1, 15-1, 16-1, 17-1, 18-1, 19-1, 20-1, 21-1, 22-1, 23-1, 24-1, 25-1, 26-1, 27-1, 28-1, 29-1, 30-1, 31-1, 32-1, 33-1, 34-1, 35-1, 36-1, 37-1, 38-1, 39-1, 40-1, 41-1, 42-1, 43-1, 44-1, 45-1, 46-1, 47-1, 48-1, 49-1, 50-1 → Discard 2-10,000

When cutting penchan, we can discard 2-10,000 the turn after on drawing almost any tile and be fine. Penchan are cut as a set of two tiles, which gives ‘room for an additional tile’ on the move after.

Going back to Example Hand A, when we cut 1-10,000 from 1-10,000 2-10,000 6-10,000 6-10,000 8-10,000 1-1, 2-1, 3-1, 4-1, 5-1, 6-1, 7-1, 8-1, 9-1, 10-1, 11-1, 12-1, 13-1, 14-1, 15-1, 16-1, 17-1, 18-1, 19-1, 20-1, 21-1, 22-1, 23-1, 24-1, 25-1, 26-1, 27-1, 28-1, 29-1, 30-1, 31-1, 32-1, 33-1, 34-1, 35-1, 36-1, 37-1, 38-1, 39-1, 40-1, 41-1, 42-1, 43-1, 44-1, 45-1, 46-1, 47-1, 48-1, 49-1, 50-1, 東, 北, 發,

we can then naturally cut 1-10,000 on drawing a tile that nudges the hand toward the dora-containing pinfu sanshoku or souzu honitsu! ‘Making space’ is important when looking for a scoring yaku or dora. When chasing value, cut the penchans unrelated to the scoring yaku or dora as quickly as possible, even from haipai, to ‘make space’.

**Key Point: When chasing a scoring yaku or dora, cut penchans that are unrelated to either as soon as possible to make space.**

Let’s assume the hand has progressed into either Example Hand C or D (below).

**Example Hand C: Turn 3**













**Example Hand D: Turn 3**



WWYD? Now we get to Tip 3 - **once a route is decided, fully commit.** At first glance, we might consider balancing both sanshoku, pinfu, and honitsu. But proceeding while keeping

both options open can lead to both routes losing out on speed.

Example Hand C is closest to a souzu honitsu. With a paired yakuhai, , or ittsu, we are on a course for mangan. Cutting  to keep the pinfu possibility open with   is a fatal error. Imagine we cut , then draw  for    ryankan. Now, if we cut another yakuhai to keep the , our souzu honitsu potential is neutered, and simultaneously our hand is in bad shape for pinfu. When keeping two options open, the speed and potential of both is decreased. We should simply fully commit to souzu honitsu.

For Example Hand D, the main approach should be to go for riichi dora sanshoku. Cut the yakuhai since they cannot be used for pinfu.

### Pursuing Value - Summary






























- Move towards dora or a scoring yaku
- Discard the ‘cheap’ tiles that will not contribute to hand value early on
- Once you have decided on a route, fully commit to it
- When chasing a scoring yaku or dora, cut ‘cheap’ penchans that are unrelated to either early on to ‘make space’

### Pursuing Value - In Practice



WWYD?

#### Q1




East 1, West Seat, Turn 1

Haipai:                                  

## A1

**Discard** . This hand falls into Situation 2 - cheap and slow if progressed normally. With zero good shapes or complete blocks we will not be the first to a closed tenpai. If we started by discarding honors, we would be at a loss defensively when the other players attack. By discarding , we can pursue atypical hands that involve terminal tiles or some. This retains defensive power but keeps the door open for a high-scoring hand. Aim for pinzu honitsu, honroutou toitoi, or chiitai.






## A2

**Discard** . This is a Situation 3 hand - where the normal closed hand is cheap so gimmick hands like honitsu or toitoi are considered. We have three souzu blocks so souzu honitsu is a serious possibility. We can begin by cutting the bad shape kanchan. We may also draw into chiitai. Tanyao should be avoided given we would have to discard dora and would also not have much defensive recourse holding only middle tiles. Cut  in case we draw , at which point we could consider progressing the hand in a more natural manner.



not going to riichi a bad wait since we have the lead in South'. So chances are we would have cut the penchan anyway (unless it filled early).

Here is the formula behind cutting the penchan:  
 (Don't riichi a bad wait) + (Move toward a yaku) = (Cut penchan)

Cutting the  first keeps the , and we could draw a  which marginally helps for tanyao. But if we don't draw  soon we should cut the . Again, defense is the priority.

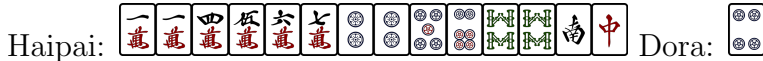
Imagine our hand looks like this after 5 turns have passed:





Such a hand stands a good chance of winning while retaining defensive value. Let's reinforce the concept with another WWYD.

**South 1, Turn 1**

West (You): 37000  
 East: 19000  
 South: 21000  
 North: 23000



I recommend cutting the  pair, again weighing the dual possibilities of tanyao and yakuhai. If this hand were to proceed closed, it would be slow and difficult to incorporate the  pair anyway. The floating yakuhai are more valuable. When leading, chiitai is not recommended. Chiitai will lead to a tanki wait and has limited flexibility when defending (for the purposes of maintaining tenpai at ryuukyoku). More on chiitai in section 1.5.

**When you Have to Riichi**

Sometimes we will be in scenarios or be dealt haipai where we are essentially forced to riichi at tenpai. If this should happen, foresee it early on, and preemptively break apart your bad shapes to achieve a good wait as soon as possible. Take the following scenario. WWYD?

**South 1, Turn 4**



South (You): 41000  
 East: 25000  
 West: 10000  
 North: 24000









**A1**

Cut   is a possibility but it's not ideal if we want to keep both tanyao and pinfu options alive. Let's cut the penchan and hope to draw into one of our floating yakuhai. Once we get a better sense of the hand we can attack. Proceed with a yakuhai as a 'safe tile' in case we need to defend.

**A2**

Cut . This hand looks fast for both tanyao and pinfu. Let's try to win quickly before any opponent can counterattack. We cut  since if it pairs up we lose pinfu and we might have to riichi for yaku. Cut the yakuhai and keep the otakaze.

## 1.5 Quit ‘Balancing’ Mentsu (Block-based) Hands and Chiitai

Let’s talk chiitai.

**WWYD?** (East 1, West Seat, Turn 5). Assume no relevant tiles have been discarded.



You may notice that the hand is iishanten for both a mentsu approach (block-based) and for chiitai. Discarding keeps both options open. However, is the wrong choice.

Today, we will graduate from the school of ‘balancing’ mentsu and chiitai hands. Repeat after me: *“Today, we graduate from the school of balancing mentsu and chiitai hands!”*

Let me explain. **In cases where there is potential for both a mentsu hand and chiitai, prioritize the mentsu hand.** This is primarily due to the quality of the final wait.

For the hand in question, discarding to leave chiitai open results in an iishanten waiting on 17 tiles of 6 types (). Discarding to exclusively pursue a mentsu hand waits on 15 tiles of 5 types (). However, discarding is far more likely to lead to a poor wait.




If we discard :

- Draw or (4 tiles) → ryanmen wait (7 tiles)
- Draw (3 tiles) → shanpon (4 tiles) **OR** tanki (3 tiles)
- Draw (4 tiles) → shanpon (4 tiles)
- Draw or (6 tiles) → or tanki (3 tiles)

If we discard :

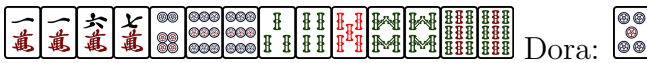
- Draw , , or (8 tiles) → ryanmen wait (7 tiles)
- Draw or (7 tiles) → shanpon (4 tiles)

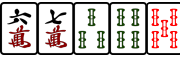



First, notice the number of tiles that lead to a good (ryanmen) wait. When discarding , 4 tiles () lead to a good wait. When discarding , 8 tiles () lead to a good wait, twice as many compared to cutting . Furthermore, if we do reach chiitai tenpai after



cutting , our wait quality is terrible, a tanki on a middle  or . When a hand has potential for both mentsu and chiitai, it is often the case that the hand has many middle number tiles (3-7), poor choices for tanki waits. Also, when ‘balancing’ chiitai and a mentsu hand, one won’t be able to cut the middle number tiles for better tanki candidates (e.g., honors or terminals) before tenpai, since doing so would likely stall mentsu hand progression.

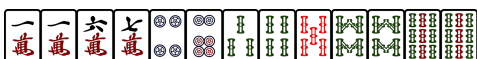
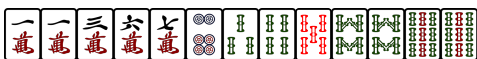
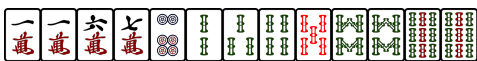
*In mahjong, the speed of the win is more important than the speed to tenpai.* Simply being the first to tenpai is not enough. If we rush to a bad wait tenpai, we will have poor tsumo chances and be at a disadvantage against other attacking players. *Focusing on the number of tiles that result in good wait tenpai rather than total tiles for tenpai will increase your win rate and stabilize your results.* Thus, we abandon the chiitai that always results in a tanki wait to prioritize the added probability of good-shape tenpai.

Another example. **WWYD?** (Turn 5)



This time, we are ryanshanten for both the mentsu and chiitai hand. Again, we should prioritize the mentsu hand. If we instead ‘balanced’ the mentsu and chiitai hands, we would be pursuing chiitai while holding onto , all terrible candidates for final tanki waits. Since we probably wouldn’t discard the , we may likely end up on an awful middle tanki for the 3 remaining . Here, we should just cleanly give up on chiitai, and cut one of our pairs like .

As we drop the  pair, we will draw tiles that improve the rest of the blocks, potentially sticking to  (dora acceptance). This is unlike the ‘balancing’ approach, where we would have to tsumogiri everything that doesn’t either make a pair or complete a block. In a few turns, the hand may look like any of the below:



Like I mentioned in the section on creating value (1.3), once you decide on a route to play the hand, stick to it.

**Key Point:** Once you decide to go for a mentsu hand, completely disregard chiitai and full commit to the mentsu hand.

However, there are cases where we should pursue chiitai.

### When to Go for Chiitai:

- With no complete blocks and only one good block candidate
- With three or more pairs, one of which is a dora pair or contains aka
- If the mentsu hand would be too cheap based on the situation
- When paying the noten penalty would not impact the overall result

These are just some of the considerations. To elaborate on the last bullet - chiitai is a hand that has to be completely self-drawn. Unlike a mentsu hand, we cannot chi or pon in the endgame for keiten. Thus, do not pursue chiitai in scenarios where tenpai payments are critical. Basically, you should treat it as an option when a mentsu hand seems impossible, when the chiitai hand appears easily achievable with a decent wait, and when the mentsu hand is otherwise unattractive.

Chiitai is weak in showdowns against other players (e.g. chase riichi or opponent zentsu with a big open hand). Thus, we must be crafty to increase our chances of winning by ron as much as possible.

### Building Chiitai Hands:

1. Early on, start with terminals and 2 or 8 tiles to disguise the chiitai
2. In the mid-game, focus on holding tiles that are likely in the wall or those that would make for excellent waits, and forget about disguising the discard pool
3. Keep one honor tile (or terminal) that you have already discarded to use as the riichi declaration tile (sengenpai)

1 - Camouflages the chiitai.

2 - Helps with defending by avoiding risky discards later in the hand.

3 - Camouflages the chiitai. Opponents may think this is a ryanmen wait since one would generally not keep already-cut tiles in hand when pursuing chiitai (to avoid furiten). However, it won't be furiten if the already-cut tile is used as the sengenpai since the wait is the other tanki tile. (But don't keep 2 already-cut tiles in hand, lol)

### Quit 'Balancing' Mentsu Hands and Chiitai - Summary

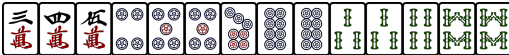

- Avoid simultaneously pursuing mentsu hands and chiitai
- Once you decide on a mentsu hand, fully abandon chiitai and hard commit to the mentsu hand

Quit 'Balancing' Mentsu Hands and Chiitai - In Practice

Question: WWYD?


Q1

East 1, South Seat, Turn 5

Hand:  Dora: 


Q2

East 1, East Seat, Turn 7









Discard Pool (Self): 

Hand:  Dora: 

**A1**

**Cut** . The hand is ryanshanten for both a mentsu hand and chiitai. We have good shapes for a mentsu hand with potential for mentanpin sanshoku. The pinzu shapes have overlapping acceptance so we fix the ryanmen in souzu, which also leaves the option open of calling for kuitan. Also, the mentsu hand can naturally accept dora.

**A2**

**Cut** . If we discarded either  or  we risk furiten. Discard  and plan to use  as the riichi declaration tile if  or  is drawn for tenpai. Decide in advance which wait you would take if  is drawn for tenpai to immediately riichi.



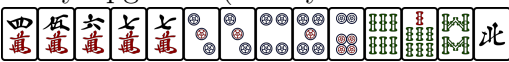
From Statistical Mahjong Strategy (SMS) by Miinin - the round expected value (EV) of a 5th turn headstart riichi kanchan dora 1 is positive at 1600. At the 8th turn the EV is 800. By comparison, remaining no-yaku dama at the 5th turn is 500 EV and 0 at the 8th round. On its face, clearly riichi is the correct choice.

Decisions to pursue a good final wait by breaking apart bad shapes should generally not be done at tenpai. Rather, if you are a player who is reluctant to riichi these bad shapes, you need to be proactive early during hand building far from tenpai, following the procedures for ensuring a good wait described in Section 1.4. If you are first to tenpai, riichi is the default. If you want to break apart a bad shape or go damaten after reaching tenpai to avoid a bad wait riichi, it means you are not thinking rationally about the hand.

I stated earlier that the most important factor in deciding to declare headstart riichi is whether you would consider yourself to be the first to tenpai. If an opponent has already declared riichi, clearly, you are not the first to tenpai and one should instead apply the oikake riichi judgment criteria discussed in the next section. However, oikake riichi judgment criteria may also be applied in cases where an opponent is signaling tenpai without having declared riichi (for instance, with an threatening open hand, or alarmingly suspicious discards). Admittedly, without a riichi it can be difficult to conclusively determine an opponent as being in tenpai, and if we are unsure we should generally err on the side of declaring headstart riichi so as to not lose our scoring opportunity.

That said, there are exceptions to declaring headstart riichi.

### When to Remain Damaten Instead of Headstart Riichi


- Guaranteed haneman (5 han good wait is riichi given the value upgrade)
- Ultra bad wait (single 2-8) when only two or fewer tiles of your wait remain. The win rate is so low that the risk is greater than the reward.
- Many upgrades (ideally more than 28 tiles from 8 kinds), for instance in  (Turn 6, Dora: ). With fewer upgrades than this, generally riichi.
- When having yaku and the lead in oorasu, since dama has a higher winrate.
- Non-dealer bad wait riichi nomi in the midgame (after the 7th turn). This is because the dora are likely in the other players' hands and, since it's already the 7th turn, their hands have likely progressed to the point where you may be quickly chased.

If these specific scenarios aren't met - riichi!


Oikake (chase) riichi judgment will be discussed in the next section.




**A1**

**Riichi cut** . Good shape dama 5 han is a riichi. The 4000 extra points when going from mangan to haneman are a big deal. If we get lucky with some combination of ippatsu, aka, ura, and tsumo we may even get baiman and will have an overwhelming advantage in a hanchan. This is what riichi is for.

**A2**

**Riichi cut** . Do you see the 456 sanshoku? It's nice to dream but the reality is there are too few upgrades to wait around for improvements. Dealer riichi is less likely to be chased.

Drawing the  upgrade after riichi is less of a backfire since it sets up the suji trap. With a bad wait, it's even more important to preemptively riichi to pressure opponents into folding, since we are often at a disadvantage if chased. The longer we wait, the more time opponents will have to build counterattacking hands.

## 2.2 Oikake Riichi Judgment

Here we continue our riichi judgment discussion, this time in the case of oikake (chase) riichi.

The recent publication of the data-driven book ‘Modern Mahjong Latest Theory’ by Jangoro K has caused a stir. One of the more controversial contentions in the book is as follows: ‘Against dealer riichi, discarding genbutsu to chase with bad wait riichi nomi has a greater round balance EV than betaori’. This claim has had a deep impact on the mahjong world. But how does it fare in practice?

These EV calculations (tn: and those throughout SMS) are based on round balance—the average gain or loss for a single round—and do not reflect the resulting impact that the different discrete outcomes in score may have on placement. While it’s true that, compared to folding, chasing with a bad wait riichi nomi increases winrate, chasing also exposes us to dealing into dealer riichi. If we win, we do prevent the dealer’s win, but it’s not as if first place would therefore be guaranteed as a result.

However, a dealer riichi is on average about 8800 points, so if we lose this riichi battle and deal in, our likelihood of getting 4th place increases tremendously. This is an *overwhelming* disadvantage, not only in the Tenhou ruleset, where avoiding 4th is the priority, but also in free rulesets which have a placement bonus. If instead we chose to fold, our round losses would be somewhere between 0 (lateral movement) and -4000 points, should dealer tsumo mangan.

So while round balance EV has its uses, when considering oikake riichi, we must give more thought to how winning or dealing in may affect our chances of getting 4th place. In practice, this translates to being more conservative than the round EV calculations would dictate, and only pursuing those chase opportunities where the risk-return ratio is in our favor from a placement perspective.

Let’s discuss the factors which influence our decision to oikake riichi using the language of risk and return. As mentioned in the last section, these criteria should also apply to situations where we suspect another player is in tenpai for an expensive hand. If the opponent’s hand looks cheap it can be ignored.

- **Dealer or non-dealer.** As dealer, our riichi will be more valuable, which increases the return. Also, if we fold and the opponent tsumos we will have to pay the oyakaburi penalty, so the EV distribution associated with folding is worse than when non-dealer, increasing the return. Conversely, against dealer riichi, the risks of oikake riichi increase.
- **Good shape or bad shape tenpai.** Compared to a bad wait riichi, a good wait riichi is more likely to win and potentially more valuable due to increased odds of ippatsu and tsumo, increasing the return. Also, since we’re more likely to win with a good wait, the opponent is less likely to win, thereby reducing the risk compared to bad wait riichi.
- **Hand value.** The more valuable the hand, the greater the return. Oikake riichi with a big hand can decide a whole hanchan.
- **If the dora is a 2-8 number tile.** If the dora is easily incorporated into opponents’ menzen hands, the score of an opponent riichi is likelier to be high, increasing the risk of

oikake riichi. However, the risk decreases based when a greater number of dora tiles are visible.

- **Danger of the riichi declaration tile.** Think twice about discarding double-musuji 4/5/6 for a bad wait riichi. With a low winrate to begin with, compounding the likelihood of dealing in by discarding a dangerous tile greatly increases the risk.

If we combine these five criteria, we can define some general guidelines for oikake riichi.

### Oikake Riichi Flowchart

- Dealer, against non-dealer riichi: **Riichi everything.**
- Non-dealer, with good shape, against either dealer or non-dealer riichi: **Riichi everything.**
- Non-dealer, bad shape worth 5200 or more, against either dealer or non-dealer riichi: **Riichi.**
- For everything else (non-dealer 2600 [riichi + 1 han elsewhere] or less), if one has to discard double musuji 4/5/6 to take tenpai: **Do not riichi.**
- Non-dealer, bad shape 2600, declaration tile not 4/5/6 double musuji, against non-dealer riichi: **Riichi.**
- Non-dealer, bad shape 2600, declaration tile not 4/5/6 double musuji, against dealer riichi: **Riichi if the dora is a terminal or honor tile.**
- Non-dealer, bad shape riichi nomi, declaration tile not 4/5/6 double musuji, against non-dealer riichi: **Riichi if the dora is a terminal or honor tile.**
- Non-dealer, bad shape riichi nomi, declaration tile not 4/5/6 double musuji, against dealer riichi: **Do not riichi.**

Perhaps it's more practical to list the scenarios where we *do not* oikake riichi.

### When Not to Chase

- Do not chase as non-dealer with bad wait 2600 or less if you have to discard double musuji 4/5/6 for tenpai.
- Do not chase a dealer riichi when non-dealer with bad wait 2600 or less if the dora is a 2-8 number tile.
- Do not chase as non-dealer with with bad wait riichi nomi. (Exception: against non-dealer when the dora is a terminal or honor)

Everything not captured in the above three bullet points is a riichi. Compared to the round EV-based guidance, this standard factors in added risks to reduce unfavorable matchups. But it does seem rather aggressive, no? If it seems this way, you may not yet appreciate that folding is in itself a negative EV choice. The returns of winning a chase riichi - preventing the

opponent's win, gaining points yourself, and not giving up points due to tsumo or tenpai payments, are considerable. Follow this guidance, avoiding unfavorable matchups and your results will improve. Thanks to nisi-san and 'Modern Mahjong Latest Theory' for the foundational data.

What are some broader points we should we take away from this guidance? First - it is important to build your hand for good shape and value. Additionally, it is dangerous to hold on to double musuji 4/5/6 longer than necessary. Of course, adherence to these guidelines will vary based on the current point situation and whether it is East or South. With the lead in South, play more conservatively, since there is little benefit to adding points and great risk to placement on dealing in.

Finally, I'll discuss oikake riichi vs. dama judgement in the case we have yaku and are waiting on genbutsu of the opponent riichi.

### **Oikake Riichi vs. Dama (with yaku) Waiting on Genbutsu of the Opponent**

- With a good shape and value less than 5200 (3900 for dama ron): **Riichi**.  
(As dealer 5800 dama ron is a riichi). The value boost from riichi outweighs the loss in winrate.
- With a good shape and value 5200 or greater: **Remain damaten**.  
The added value is not worth the loss to win rate.
- With a bad wait: **Remain damaten**.  
The winrate is already low, since it's at least once-cut to be genbutsu, so we cannot sacrifice any further loss in win rate by declaring riichi.

That is all! What a long lesson. You should now consider yourself a Riichi Master.



### **Oikake Riichi Judgment - Summary**

Do not chase riichi if:




- Non-dealer bad wait 2600 or less and either: 1. The riichi declaration tile is double musuji 4/5/6 or 2. You are against dealer riichi and the dora is a 2-8 number tile
- Non-dealer bad wait riichi nomi (unless against non-dealer, and the riichi declaration tile is not double musuji 4/5/6, and the dora is not a 2-8 number tile)
- Everything else is a oikake riichi
- With the lead in South play more conservatively




**A1**

**Riichi cut**   is musuji against dealer, but we have a good shape. Don't be shy - the good wait has a high probability of winning and can prevent the dealer from scoring. Playing boldly in this manner is necessary to improve your first-place rate.

**A2**

**Dama cut** . Dama and wait for the genbutsu  to be discarded. It's not terribly bad to riichi for 5200, but doing so in this scenario would likely prevent opponents from discarding , significantly harming our win rate. Furthermore, bad wait riichi generally fares poorly in a head-to-head riichi battle. With a yaku and a bad wait, remain damaten if waiting on genbutsu.


**A3**

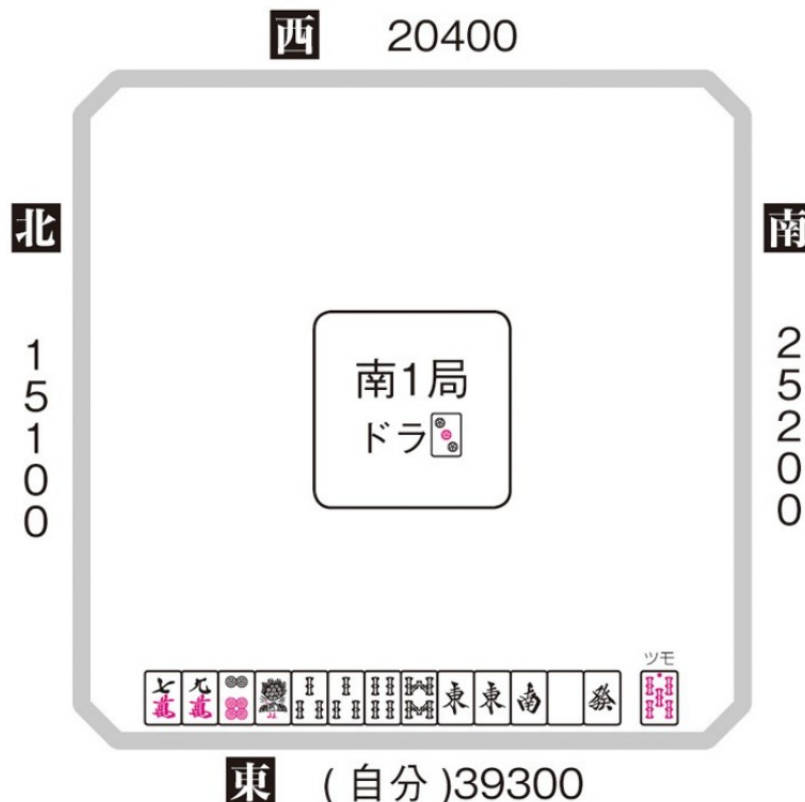
**Riichi cut** . Somewhat similar to Q2 - but with good shape tenpai, so iron riichi. Good waits are more likely to win, provide more value (from ippatsu/tsumo chances), and reduce risk, since the opponent is less likely to win. In this case, the value boost on riichi outweighs the reduced win rate compared to staying dama.

## 2.3 Ensuring Victory - Techniques

This lecture is inspired by a reader question. “Even if I have the lead when South round comes, I often end up dropping in placement. I don’t know what to do and I would like your guidance.”

While winning hands is one way to maintain your lead in South, it’s not the only way. This lecture is about intentionally cultivating a game-state where your lead in 1st is less likely to be jeopardized by others. For this lesson, we will assume the Tenhou ruleset with a 7d scoring distribution (1st +90, 2nd +45, 3rd +0, 4th -135). However, these techniques can also be applied to free rulesets.

Take a look at the below figure (South 1, East Seat, Dora: ). Imagine you are dealer in this scenario. The question posed to the reader is: ‘What would be the ideal outcome of this round?’



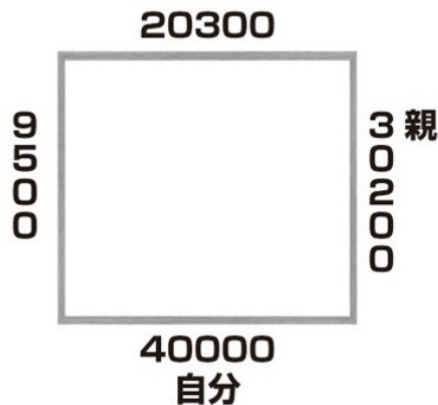
Perhaps your instinct is that, as dealer, we should aim to further extend our lead, and pursue yakuhai dora. Not an unreasonable thought. Assuming we do indeed win the hand, which opponent would you most prefer to deal-in? Given the overwhelming 4th place penalty in Tenhou, perhaps your thought is that it would be most beneficial for the North player, currently in 4th, to deal-in, thus minimizing our own chances of dropping to last place.

Not so - **the key to maintaining 1st place in Tenhou is to put the fear of 4th place into the hearts of those in 2nd and 3rd.**

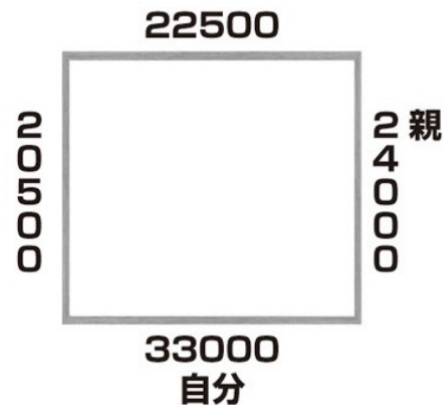
Let's compare two scenarios to illustrate the point. In both scenarios, it's South 2 and your shimocha is dealer.

In which situation are you more likely to end the game in 1st place?

### パターンA



### パターンB



Scenario A (left) is what I will refer to as a ‘vertical point distribution’. Here, there is a large gap of over 20000 points between 2nd and 4th place. As a result, 2nd place has greater freedom to aim for a boost in placement since they are unlikely to drop to last place. Additionally, the player in last place has to build a valuable hand to escape 4th. The end result is that all opponents are motivated to pursue high value hands, threatening your current placement. The vertical point distribution disincentivizes other players from pursuing cheap wins to progress the round. This game could very well turn into a mangan-fest, even in South.

In Scenario B (right), (You) have 7000 fewer points than in Scenario A. However, the difference in scores between 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place is small. The dealer could drop to last place with a targeted 2000 point deal-in into the current 4th place player. The dealer is therefore motivated to prioritize speed over value, and may also be wary of declaring riichi, given the 1000 point bet will further shrink his narrow lead over 3rd and 4th. Riichi itself is a fearful thought for dealer, because being defenseless against a chase could be devastating. He is more likely to pursue a fast open hand or dama-ten as a result. Finally, the player in 4th is also motivated to go for speed, since an expensive hand isn't necessary to escape last.

In summary, for pattern B, the players in 2nd and 3rd are unlikely to pursue expensive hands that threaten your current position in 1st place. In Scenario B, the points are more likely to minimally fluctuate and the first-place player's lead is more likely to be protected.

**Key Point:** To maintain 1st place in a 4th place avoidance ruleset (Tenhou), rather than a vertical point distribution with a large gap between 4th and 2nd/3rd, ideally the players in 2nd and 3rd will be competing to avoid 4th place. The best case scenario is where both 2nd and 3rd place are in danger of falling to last.

Let's return to the first example in the section. Your hand does not look great and is unlikely to win. If someone else wins, we'll hope it's cheap and simply advances the round. But what if it's medium or expensive - *if an opponent were to win an expensive hand, who would you most prefer it to be?* The answer: **North - the player currently in 4th**. If North tsumos mangan, you will still have a 10000 point lead against 2nd/3rd, but the score distribution will be very much akin to Scenario B, where we are likely to squeak by and keep our lead. It should even be considered welcome to deal into North directly for 3900, since the resulting point spread places 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place in a dead heat, leaving (You) still 10000 points ahead. Losing the renchan is fine to put the game-state in a Scenario B-esque situation.

Now, consider the situation where West (toimen) wins from North. This would result in a Scenario A (vertical point distribution), which threatens our placement. On the other hand, if West wins from South, the situation isn't changed much from the perspective of our lead being threatened. The absolute worst scenario for us would be South winning off of North. This shrinks the gap between us and 2nd and extends the gap between 4th and 3rd, leading to a vertical point distribution.

Let's work through an example. Say South tsumos a 1000/2000 point hand, leading to the following scenario/point distribution:

**South 2, North (You): 37300; East: 29200; South: 19400; West: 14100**

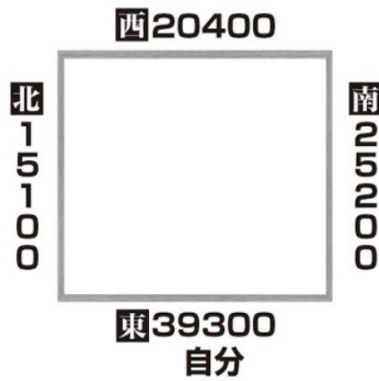
With this point distribution, if our shimocha (East) is advancing an open hand, we should try our utmost to shibori (choke) their progression, within reason. In Section 3.5, we will learn that shibori slows both ourselves and the shibori target, giving the other two opponents a greater chance of winning. This is the ideal situation to shibori. When in the lead, we should place great value on closing the gap between those below us in placement.

**Key Point: To maintain your lead, try to reduce the distance between 4th place and 2nd/3rd.** This can be done by:

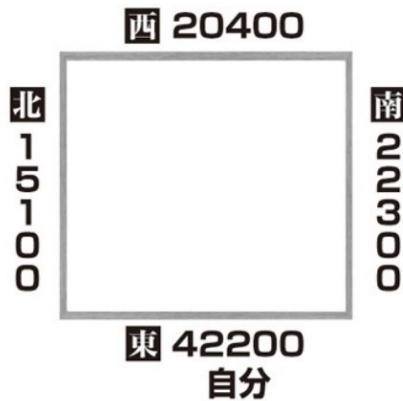
- Selectively targeting players such that 4th place doesn't fall too far behind in points
- Choking opponents we prefer not to win

Let's once again revisit the initial scenario of the section, which I've minimally reproduced below. Let's work through the resulting point distribution upon winning a 2900 point hand via ron on either South, West, or North.

Starting Scenario (South 1, East (You))

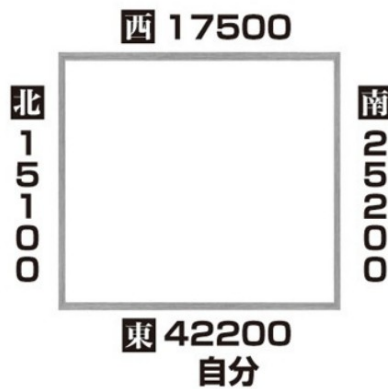


After Ron on South (South 1, Honba 1, East (You))



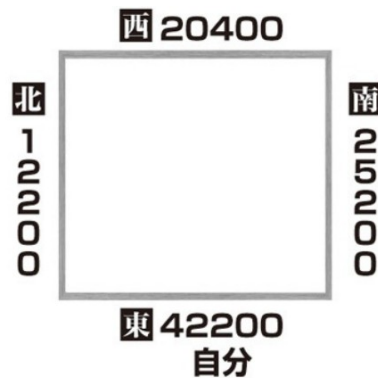
Good. We have extended our lead and closed the gap between 2nd, 3rd, and 4th.

After Ron on West (South 1, Honba 1, East (You))



Good. We have closed the gap between 3rd and 4th. With these scores, all players are somewhat motivated to pursue speed over value, which is good for protecting our lead.

After Ron on North (South 1, Honba 1, East (You))



Not good. We have altered the score distribution in a way that widens the gap between 4th and 2nd/3rd. South is unlikely to fall to last, giving them leeway to push for first. North is motivated to push for value, and we may have to defend against high-value riichi. All this puts our first-place in greater jeopardy. Finally - our cheap hand leads to renchan and doesn't advance the round. We came away with an extra 2900 points, but, desu, the vertical point distribution we've created is a greater disadvantage than the value we get from the additional 2900. Unless the situation was dire (for instance, South or West threatening a high-scoring hand), we would be better served by *skipping ron* on North, and selectively targeting West or South to avoid an unfavorable point distribution.

**Key Point: Even when winning, be cautious about widening the gap between 4th and 2nd/3rd.**

So, what did you think of the lesson? In Tenhou, you can't win simply by winning. During the game, think hard about 'Who should I let win?', and 'Who would I prefer not to win?', and shape the game to your advantage.





### Ensuring Victory - Techniques - Summary

To maintain 1st place in the Tenhou ruleset ...




- Avoid vertical point distributions, and prefer scenarios where 2nd, 3rd, and 4th are in a tight race
- Play in a manner that puts 2nd and 3rd in a position of having to avoid last place

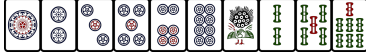




You might want to push dora  since we're dealer, but is that really the right call? The thing is, once we discard , we'll have to cut either  or , both unsafe, to take tenpai. **Generally, if two dangerous tiles have to be discarded from iishanten to take tenpai, it's better to fold.**

If we apply the same line of thinking as we did in the ryanshanten case, the following would have to occur for us to win the hand:

1. Two dangerous tiles in the hand must pass ( and one of  or )
2. All additional dangerous tiles drawn from now that do not lead to tenpai must pass
3. We must reach tenpai before the opponent wins
4. We must win the showdown against the opponent in riichi

Compared to the ryanshanten case, the difficulty of steps 2 and 3 is reduced in the case of pushing iishanten (though it's still not easy). We may draw any of  and be forced to cut an additional dangerous pinzu or souzu tile in the pursuit of tenpai. My recommendation is to generally fold iishanten against riichi when tenpai cannot be obtained without pushing two dangerous tiles. Live to fight another day.

**Key Point: With an iishanten hand against riichi, if two dangerous tiles need to be discarded to take tenpai, fold or mawashi.**

If we are iishanten and would only have to push one dangerous tile to take tenpai, it may be acceptable to push. However, it depends on many factors, including but not limited to the hand value, the quality of the final wait, the acceptance for tenpai, the danger level of the tile to be pushed, the likely value of the opponent hand, the current point distribution, the turn number, and whether we are the dealer. To be clear, I am stating that the act of pushing a single dangerous tile from iishanten may be justified depending on the situation, and am not making a categorical recommendation to push when only one dangerous tile has to be cut.

As in the earlier cases, it is not just the singular dangerous tile that would have to be discarded when pushing iishanten, but *all* drawn dangerous tiles that do not advance the hand to tenpai. It is also important to not get tunnel-vision after making an initial decision to push from iishanten. If when pushing iishanten, if we find that suddenly two dangerous tiles would have to be discarded to reach tenpai, we should fold.

The difference between iishanten and tenpai when it comes to push-fold judgment cannot be overstated. Iishanten can be considered a 'pre-value' stage of the hand - it cannot win, and has no value with regard to tenpai payments. However, once the hand is tenpai, it now has value, and is generally advantageous to push with (see section 2.1 and 2.2 for push-fold judgment with tenpai hands).

**Key Point:** Depending on the situation, it may be justified to push iishanten if only one dangerous tile must be discarded for tenpai. But fold if two dangerous tiles would have to be discarded.

There are also situations where we have no safe tiles. Just because we have no safe tiles doesn't mean we discard whatever tile we want. We still don't want to needlessly deal in. If our hand isn't worth pushing we can resort to the general ranking of tile safety:

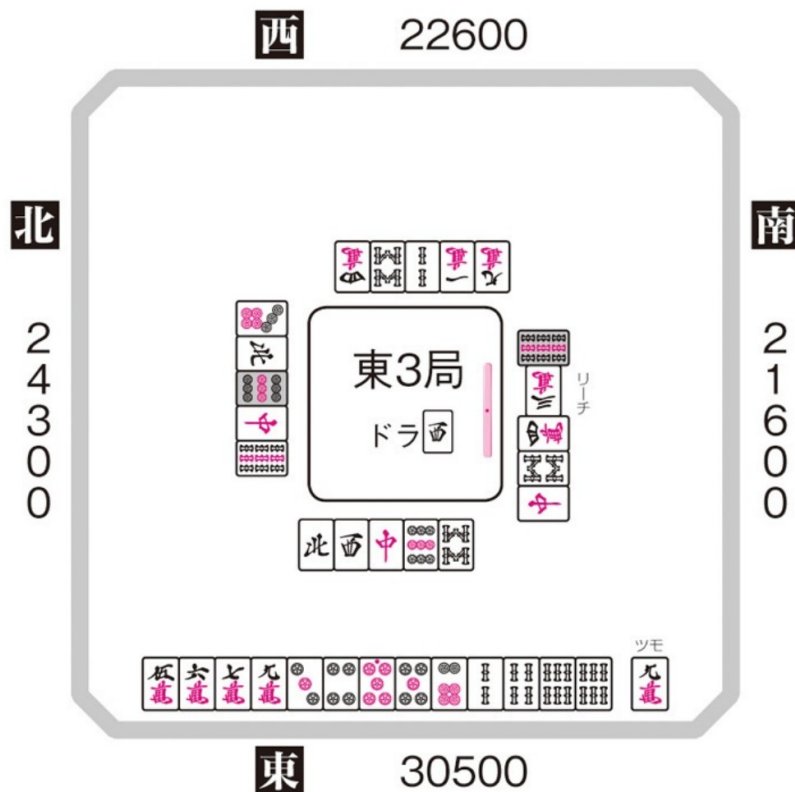
**From Least Dangerous to Most Dangerous:**


Honors → 1/9 → 2/8 → 3/7 → 4/5/6

A strategy when lacking safe tiles is to cut the tile of lowest risk from any pairs or ankou we have in the hand to buy a future turn(s) of safety (and hopefully gain more information about other safe tiles in the meantime).

For instance, in the following example:

**Example Situation 3.** East 3, East Seat, Dora: . Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.



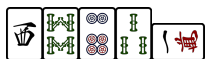
We can discard the pair of  and maintain iishanten, which provides us additional chances for both offense and defense.

**Key Point:** If we don't have any safe tiles and shouldn't push the hand, we can start by discarding the safest tiles present in a pair or ankou.

**Supplement: Suji Counting**

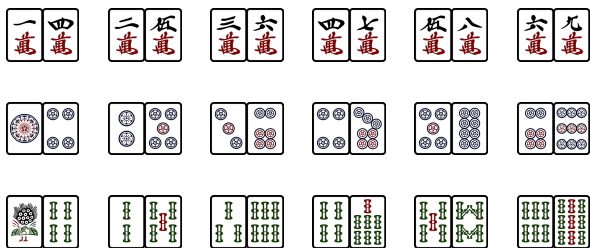
Throughout much of the discussion of push-fold judgment, we have discussed having to push one dangerous tile, two dangerous tiles, or ‘X’ number of dangerous tiles. However, individual tiles will have different danger levels depending on the bakyou. Here, I will briefly describe the technique of suji counting as a method to estimate deal-in rate. An assumption built into suji counting is that the opponent has a ryanmen wait. This is helpful in games to quickly estimate the danger of discarding a specific tile.

Let’s say an opponent has declared riichi with the following discard pile:



The question is, ‘What is the probability of dealing in when discarding ?’

Well, if we assume a ryanmen wait, there are 18 total suji intervals they could be waiting on:



Their discards of eliminate the possibilities of the waits (note the cut eliminated two suji intervals at once), a total of five suji intervals.

The deals into a single suji interval (). With  $18 - 5 = 13$  suji intervals remaining for the opponent’s final wait, we can estimate the deal-in rate of to be  $1/13$ , or 7.7%

Compare this to . deals into two possible suji intervals, and . The estimated deal-in rate of is therefore  $2/13$ , or 15%. The 4/5/6 tiles are associated with two suji intervals, and if unsafe to both, are deemed ‘double-musuji’ and should be considered as having two tiles’ worth of danger for push-fold judgment and decision-making. If maintaining iishanten would require a double-musuji 4/5/6 discard, it may be appropriate to fold or mawashi.


**Key Point:** If a double-musuji 4/5/6 must be discarded to maintain iishanten, it’s better to fold or mawashi.

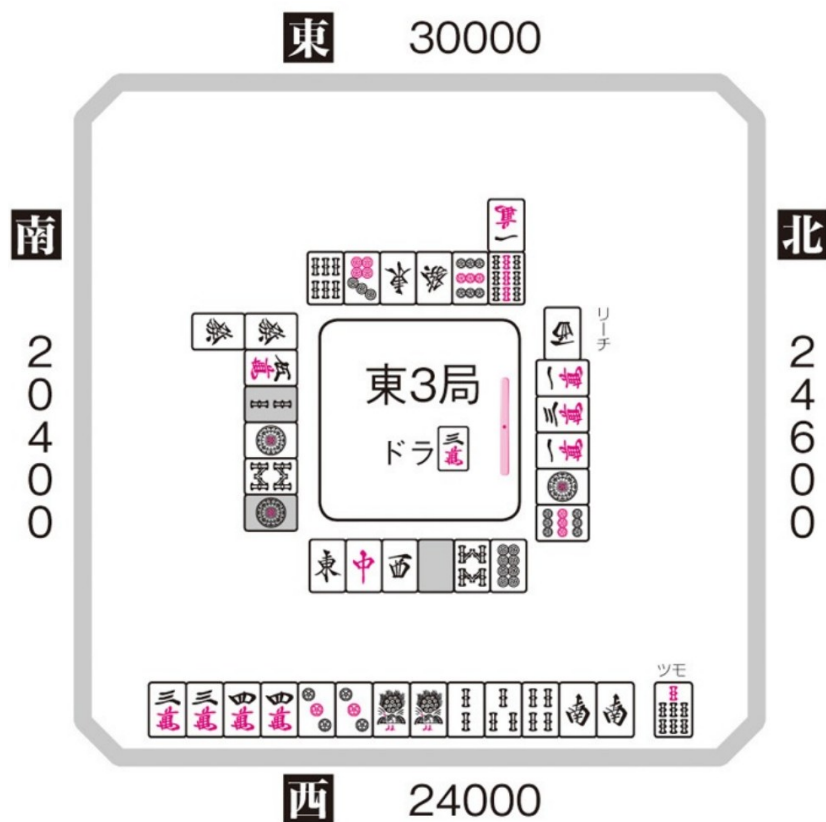
That’s the end of the lesson. Thanks!







### Push-Fold Judgment Against Riichi - Summary


- When ryanshanten, do not push against riichi or a threatening open hand
- When iishanten, do not push if two dangerous tiles would have to be discarded for tenpai
- When iishanten, if only a single dangerous tile would have to be discarded for tenpai it may be acceptable to push, but this is situation-dependent

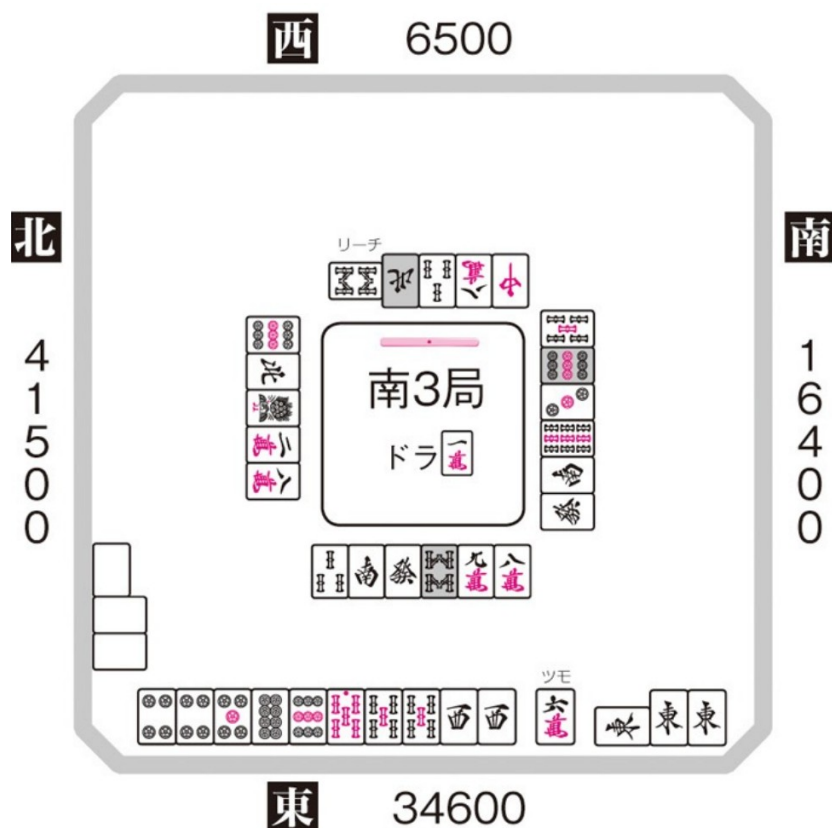
### Push-Fold Judgment Against Riichi - In Practice










**Q1:** WWYD? Note shimocha has declared riichi. (East 3, West Seat, Dora: ) Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.




**A1:** Cut . The hand is chiitai iishanten but we'd have to cut two dangerous souzu for chiitai tenpai, so it's better not to push. But full folding with  is playing too passively. With the    in shimocha's discards it's unlikely they're chiitai tenpai or waiting on a bad shape. We can mawashi with the  pair and see how the round unfolds. We may end up able to take tenpai by discarding a single dangerous tile.


**Q2:** WWYD? Note toimen has declared riichi. (South 3, East Seat, Dora: ) Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.
















**A2:** Cut . To maintain iishanten, we'd have to push any of , all of which are double-musuji. We cannot push here.  looks okay, but we notice the  was cut two turns ago, when one other  was visible in the discard pool. This could have been a case of rejecting shanpon acceptance from  and fixing an ryanmen waiting on . Therefore, we should break apart the  pair and see what happens. If we continue to draw dangerous tiles, we should discard the  ankou hoping it buys additional turns of safety. Only push if the hand improves smoothly.











Most would probably consider , the rationale being that we are iishanten and a deal-in to a riichi from 4th place would be devastating, especially since we are close to oorasu.

Furthermore, maintaining this iishanten by discarding  to fully attack (zentsu) will likely lead to a bad wait at tenpai, which stands a poor chance against toimen's riichi.


All true. However, our lead is not large, so gaining points would be beneficial, and we don't want to lose out on tenpai payments if possible. In this scenario, I recommend to not recklessly zentsu with , nor to full betaori with , but to mawashi—with the  pair. The key point of this lesson is as follows: **The most important thing to consider when pursuing mawashi is whether you can safely discard the backfires.** In beginner tile-efficiency resources, the general guidance is to minimize backfires as much as possible when building your hand. Here, a similar logic applies.

Let me clarify using the earlier example. If we fold with , our backfires are , , and . All  are unsafe against the opponent riichi, so after drawing them, our hand is completely dead with no avenue for progress and we must either zentsu or betaori. Let's also explore the backfires of discarding  (assuming it passes) instead of the  cut. The backfires in this case are , , and , all of which are dangerous. It would be difficult to progress on drawing any of them.

This is why I recommend . While not genbutsu, the honor pair is relatively safe since it only deals into tanki or shanpon. On discarding  and , if we don't draw something safe, we will end up discarding the  anyway. As such, it is justifiable to drop the  pair first, leaving open the possibility of keiten or even winning the hand, planning to draw around  or , and then taking tenpai (if appropriate) by discarding only one, singular, dangerous tile. Do not preemptively kill your chances to win the hand.


Let's say our hand looks like this in two rounds after discarding the  pair:



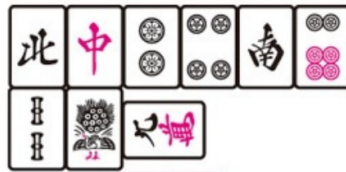
We would riichi, discarding . Bear in mind that each additional tile discarded by the opponents may reveal new information that can lead to further opportunities to mawashi. If our hand ended up looking like this:



and we learn that  is genbutsu, we can proceed to discard  and continue to mawashi.







This would not have been possible had we not initially decided to mawashi with the  pair. Anyway, the point is - **when pursuing mawashi, avoid making discards that would lock you into committing to either zentsu or betaori on drawing the backfires.**










Another example. East 1, and the dealer has declared riichi with this discard pool. (Dora: )















Our hand is as follows:



We are iishanten with no dora. We are not likely to oikake riichi a bad shape tenpai. If we can manage a good final wait we'll chase riichi but a bad shape tenpai will do for tenpai payments. If we cut  we won't be able to accept most of the good manzu upgrades so our choice of discard is between the two penchan. The  and  in  are genbutsu, and the  is a relatively safe tile due to sotogawa and  suji. WWYD?

Apply the technique of aiming to minimize unsafe backfires with our choice of mawashi discards. If we cut the , then draw the backfire , we could still reasonably push the  since it's suji to the  in the discard pool. However, if we cut the  and draw the backfire , our hand is dead. Therefore, I recommend cutting the , starting with , despite the  not being guaranteed to pass.

On cutting , we can imagine a variety of ways the hand could progress:


- If we drew  for  we could riichi (or dama, depending on the situation).
- If we drew  for  we should cut the relatively safe  until we draw into good wait tenpai to chase riichi.
- If we drew a dangerous tile, like  for  we should cut the relatively safe  and continue our mawashi.
- If we drew  for  we should cut  to take bad wait tenpai, and if we later draw a dangerous tile, cut the  penchan to continue the mawashi.

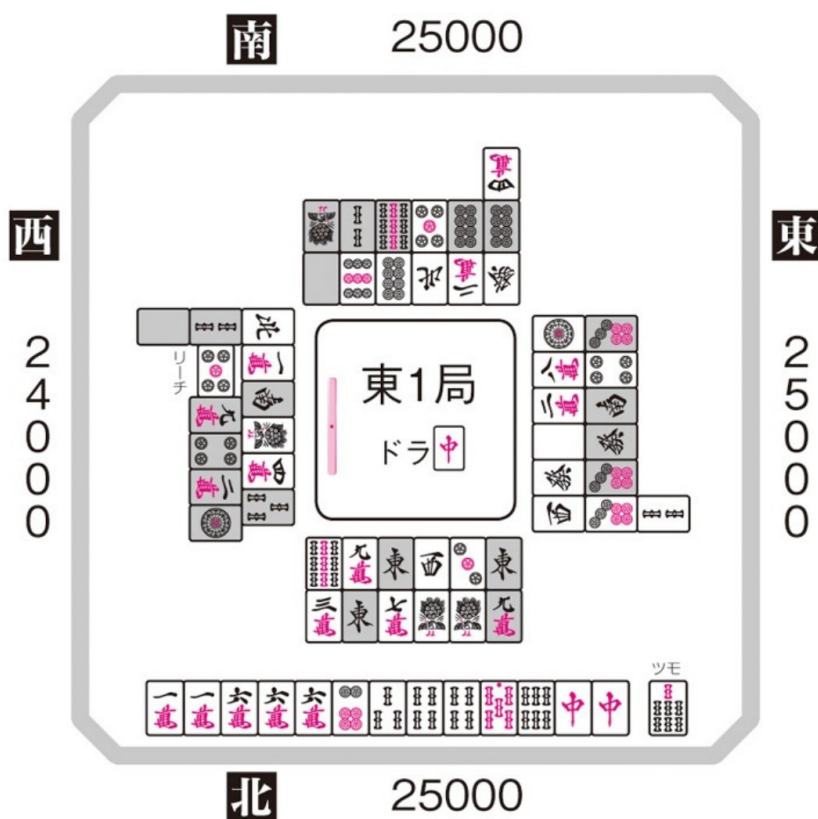
That's the end of the lesson. For mawashi, think about the possible backfires of the tiles you are planning to discard, and lean towards cutting those tiles with safer backfires. This approach will maximize your counterattacking/mawashi opportunities while minimizing the amount of times you are forced into committing to full zentsu or full betaori.















### Comparing Backfires to Guide Mawashi - Summary

- When pursuing mawashi consider the backfires of the potential discards
- Choosing discards with safer backfires will maximize your mawashi opportunities

### Comparing Backfires to Guide Mawashi - In Practice

Q1: WWYD? Note kamicha has declared riichi. (Dora: )




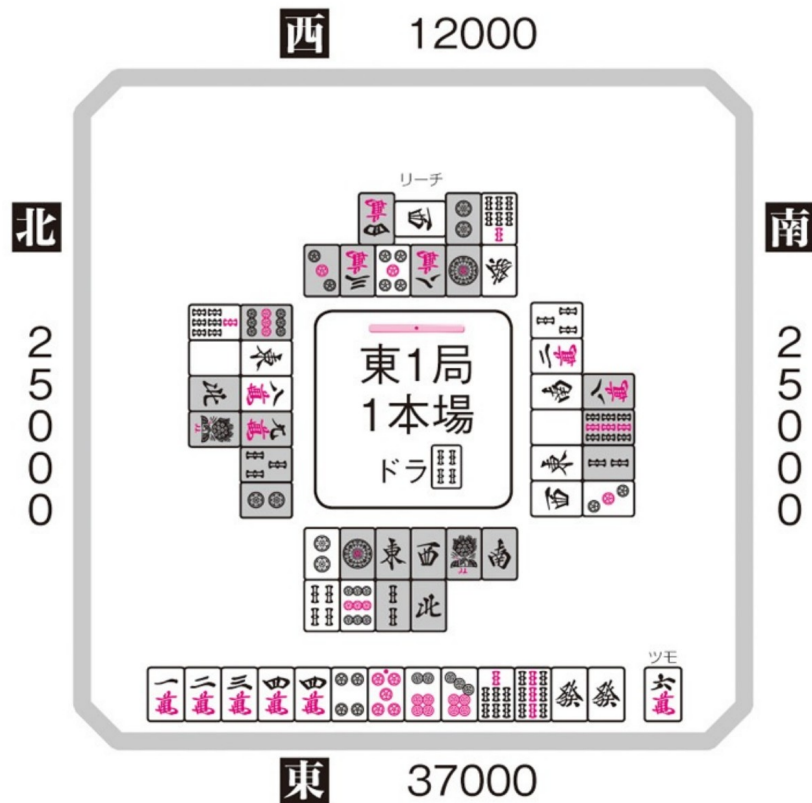
**A1:** Cut . Even with dora 3, it's tough to push two dangerous tiles ( ) with iishanten, both of which are double musuji. On the other hand, cutting  has backfires of     , making it difficult to incorporate further souzu in the hand. Also, if we cut , our tenpai will be a bad shape and unlikely to win. Here, we cut , hoping to stick to either the  or . Should that happen, we can always call  for an expensive tenpai later. If we reach tenpai in the endgame, it's often worth it to risk one singular dangerous tile (unless it looks extraordinarily bad).





## 2.6 Be Aware of Players Pushing Against Riichi

The inspiration for today's lesson comes from a very good 10d Tenhou player: "When I'm defending against a riichi, sometimes another player will riichi, and I end up dealing in. But I also want to try my best to get the tenpai payments. What is the proper balance?"

Today's lesson is about being aware of all opponents when someone has declared riichi or has a threatening open hand. It's not terribly difficult to fold or mawashi against a single player, but navigating multiple opponents in tenpai can be difficult. We have all had situations where we are sandwiched between two riichi and end up dealing in under pressure. Do not miss the signs that a second riichi is looming and prepare in advance for when it comes. Let me illustrate with an example.

Look at the below diagram. WWYD? (East 1, East Seat, Dora: . Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.)









Perhaps you would drop the  pair to not fully destroy the hand, knowing that we have the safe tiles of  just in case. Yes ... I see ...  would be correct if this were a one-on-one battle against toimen. But look closely at kamicha, who just discarded the musuji . We should see this as a sign that he is preparing to chase. If a player is willing to push against riichi, their hand is likely to be more expensive than usual.




When we observe a player pushing against riichi, it can generally be categorized into one of five scenarios.

1. Pushing from iishanten
2. Pushing dama with a wait on opponent genbutsu
3. Pushing bad wait dama
4. Pushing expensive dama tenpai
5. Pushing a bad wait dama while leaving the option to fold (usually cheap hands)

The logic for this categorization is that a player who has not declared oikake riichi is either not tenpai, or if tenpai, has a reason to remain dama. Among these, pushing iishanten (pattern 1) is relatively common.

Returning to the diagram, note that kamicha's discards, including the , have been tsumogiri since the 8th turn. This means that, regardless of kamicha's category (1-5), the toimen's recently discarded  can be considered safe against kamicha (unless some hijinks are at play). Discarding  (a 'follow-cut') is a play that both buys future safety and is jointly safe against kamicha and toimen. If, instead of discarding , we cut our  pair, our only remaining jointly safe tile we have against both players would be the single . This would put us in difficult spot if and when kamicha declares oikake riichi or tedashis for damaten with an unknown wait.

**When an opponent is pushing against a player in riichi or who is showing an expensive open hand, apply the follow-cut technique to discard tiles that may later become dangerous to the opponent who is pushing, saving common safe tiles for later.**

It may seem pessimistic, but we should always be aware of the worst-case scenario when we notice someone pushing against a riichi. Do not become too attached to your own hand. Be willing to prepare for a chase from kamicha even it means breaking apart your own hand. A round with two opponents pushing until the end, as in the case of oikake riichi, increases the likelihood of lateral movement, but the opponents not involved in the battle may still deal in. Rounds like this do not tend to reach ryuukyoku and usually end in a tsumo or ron. **Since the round is unlikely to reach ryuukyoku, the relative value of pursuing keiten for tenpai payments is reduced, and the value of being able to defend is comparatively increased.** In any case, this hand was unlikely to win or even reach tenpai if we dropped the  pair to mawashi so cutting  is no big sacrifice. If kamicha again discards by tsumogiri on the next turn we should cut the other .

### Be Aware of Players Pushing Against Riichi - Summary

- If you spot an opponent pushing against a riichi, prioritize cutting tiles that may later become dangerous to the player who is pushing (the follow-cut strategy may be useful here), and keep common safe tiles for later
- Since the round is less likely to reach ryuukyoku, there is limited value in pursuing formal tenpai

Here is some supplementary info about the situation where the pushing player may be damaten waiting on genbutsu (situation 2). If we have plenty of common safe tiles to safely fold against both the player in riichi and the player who is pushing, we should prioritize folding against the player we suspect to be in damaten. If we do not have enough common safe tiles, we should prioritize preparation against a potential oikake riichi by cutting tiles safe against the riichi but that may become dangerous against the pushing opponent, hoarding common safe tiles.

It's true that you never know for certain if a player is damaten waiting on genbutsu or pushing iishanten. But as a general thought, dealing into an oikake riichi is probably going to be more expensive than a surprise damaten. Sometimes you will deal in to an unexpected damaten by treating the pushing player as if they were in iishanten, in which case, omigoto nanoja. The more dangerous tiles a pushing player has discarded, the more likely they are to be damaten. However, every additional dangerous tile they discard will increase your pool of common safe tiles, making it easier to defend against both players.

A final bonus tip: players in tenpai tend to discard without hesitation. If an opponent snap-pushes a dangerous tile against riichi, pay attention - they may be damaten. Some players rely on long thinking times to read hands, but instant discards can also be telling. Just because it's not an obvious part of the bakyou doesn't mean it can't be useful.





Let's break it down.

I've copied dealer's (kamicha) discard pool below. What do you make of it?



If you said, “Boring! Nothing out of the ordinary to me ... speed level C!”, *you have fallen into the trap!* This discard pool is a classic example of a ‘standard hand’ (riichi-oriented), where honor tiles and terminals are discarded first, followed by 2s, 8s, then eventually 3-7 number tiles.

**Key Point: Menzen riichi-oriented ‘standard hand’ discard pools are characterized by:**

- Otakaze (non-yakuhai guest winds) → Yakuhai → Terminals → 2 and 8 number tiles → 3-7 number tiles

Of course, sometimes a tile type will be skipped. Obviously, an opponent cannot cut a tile that they do not have.

If we use this general pattern to identify that an opponent is pursuing a menzen riichi hand, we can apply speed-read principles to roughly estimate their hand progression. If we see *one* 3-7 number tile discarded, they are speed level B. Prior to any 3-7 number tile discards, the hand may be considered speed level C. The logic behind this is that the overflow of 3-7 number tiles will occur when the blocks have sufficiently formed to the point where extra 3-7 tiles are cut, including isolated tiles and those from compound shapes or from fixing ryanmen. One tip to incorporate this into your play is to think to yourself, “It’s about time” when an opponent discards a 3-7 number tile.








Furthermore, if a player has cut *two or more* 3-7 number tiles, treat their hand as being speed level A. Prepare for a riichi at any moment - and even consider collecting safe tiles.

You may have been throw off by toimen’s unusual discard pool. But the biggest concern is the dealer.

**Key Points: Speed Reading Patten 1: Menzen Riichi-Oriented Hands**

- The menzen riichi-oriented ‘standard hand’ discard pool is characterized by:  
**Otakaze → Yakuhai → Terminals → 2 and 8 number tiles → 3-7 number tiles**
- If no 3-7 number tiles have been discarded: **Speed Level: C**
- If *one* 3-7 number tile has been discarded: **Speed Level: B**
- If *two* 3-7 number tiles have been discarded: **Speed Level: A**

Note that for discarded pairs and kanchans, we don't have to apply any special treatment beyond the criteria described earlier. Just count the number of discarded 3-7 number tiles and you're set.

- Discarding a pair of terminals : **Speed Level: C**
- Discarding an inner kanchan (2x 3-7 number tiles, like    ): **Speed Level: A**
- Discarding an outer kanchan (1x 3-7 number tile, like  ): **Speed Level: B**
- **Exception:** Any ryanmen discard should be treated as **Speed Level A** - it's basically a red flag that their blocks are complete and all good shapes. Consider preparing safe tiles.

A unique case arises when a pair of yakuhai are discarded. Interpreting this really requires a careful read of the bakyou, as it could be a rejecting a cheap hand, a break for tanyao, planning for a big riichi, or something else. It's okay to treat a yakuhai pair drop as **Speed Level: C** but if a riichi follows - be careful - it's probably expensive.





**Key Point: For discarded pairs and kanchans, simply apply the standard 3-7 discard criteria. Treat any discarded ryanmen as Speed Level A.**

Let's discuss the dora. If a 2-8 number tile dora is discarded, or a dora-accepting block is cut, it's highly likely that the hand has progressed to **Speed Level A**. Fortunately, dora discards are conspicuous so this should be easy to incorporate into your play. When the dora is a terminal or honor tile, they are often discarded early as part of the normal menzen hand progression. In that case, do not read too deeply into them. But if a live terminal or honor dora is played mid-game, the hand is **Speed Level A**.

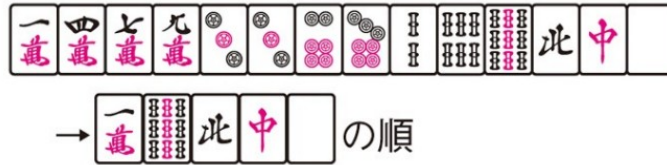
**Key Point: A discarded 2-8 number tile dora, or a mid-game discarded live terminal/honor dora indicates the hand is Speed Level A.**

There's been quite a lot in this section, but I want to emphasize that incorporating speed-reading of the count of 3-7 number tiles in the discard pool is likely to provide the greatest benefit. It's slightly harder to keep track of the count of 3-7 number tiles than noticing a ryanmen or dora drop, but it will pay off.

But I am not done yet. There are special cases worthy of attention. For instance, the hand is likely to be slower than normal when the terminals are cut before otakaze as in:

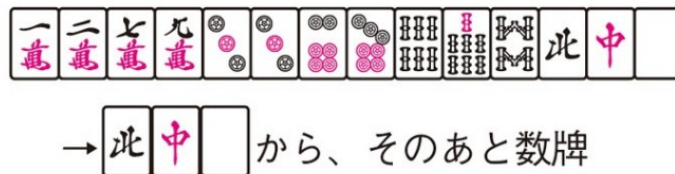
**Terminals** → **Otakaze** → **Yakuhai** → **and so on**. This is because a discarded  or  cut before otakaze was likely part of a hand with an weak or isolated  or , respectively, as shown in **Example 1**.

**Example 1** (Terminals → Otakaze → Yakuhai → and so on)



In contrast, if terminals are discarded after yakuhai, it may suggest that the terminals were part of a block originally, like in **Example 2**. Discarding them may suggest the player has progressed their closed hand and is deciding between blocks.

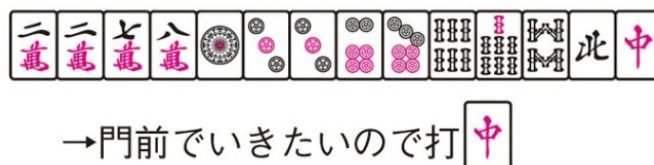
**Example 2** (Otakaze → Yakuhai → Terminals → and so on)



One way to remember this information is that in **Example 1**, the player is ‘holding on to honors’ to boost defense. In **Example 2**, the player is declaring, ‘I can proceed closed without these yakuhai!’ - indicating discard pools like those in **Example 2** are likely to progress more quickly. A player with an **Example 1** discard pool has a good chance of getting stuck at **Speed Level C**.

Finally, there’s the case where yakuhai are discarded prior to otakaze and terminals, like in **Example 3**. This is likely to be a fast-progressing menzen hand, since the early yakuhai cut signals the intent to proceed closed right from the start. When a terminal is cut from this type of hand it is already at **Speed Level B**, so be cautious.

**Example 3** (Yakuhai → Otakaze → Terminals → and so on)



**Key Points: Estimating Menzen Hand Speed from Early Discards**

- **Terminals → Otakaze → Yakuhai → and so on** - Slow. May remain **Speed Level C**
- **Otakaze → Yakuhai → Terminals → and so on** - Normal.
- **Yakuhai → Otakaze → Terminals → and so on** - Fast. *Beware!* This is **Speed Level B** when a terminal or 2/8 is cut!

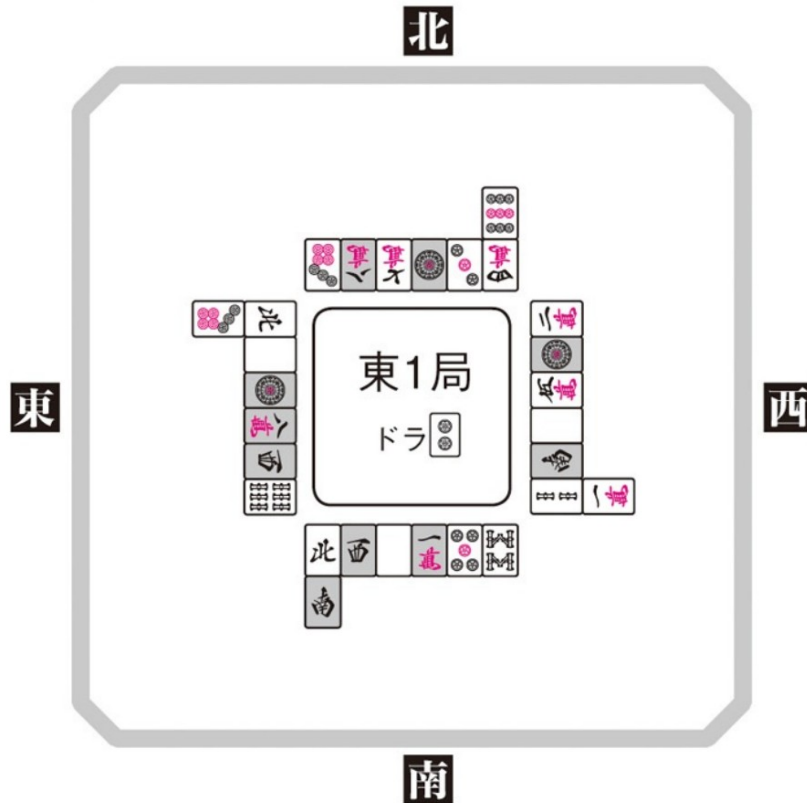
Reader ... are you okay? Do you feel dizzy? There was a lot covered but I want to leave you with a couple more points. First, practice these skills by thinking about how developing your own hand shows in your own discard pool. For instance, when you yourself discard 3-7 number tiles, it generally means the hand progressed to a good state. And if we are in a situation to discard a ryanmen, it suggests the rest of our hand is comprised of equally good or superior blocks! Try to use your own experience building hands according to the principles of tile efficiency to appreciate how discard pools are built from hands and how the hands are reflected from the discard pools. Finally, this speed-reading strategy is only applicable to standard menzen riichi-oriented hands, and does not apply to honitsu, other irregular hands, or open hands. We will discuss honitsu and other hand types in the next two sections. Good luck!

### Speed-Reading Discards - Pattern 1 (Menzen) - Summary

- Standard menzen riichi hands generally follow the discard pattern of Otakaze → Yakuhai → Terminals → 2 and 8 number tiles → 3-7 number tiles
- If no 3-7 number tiles have been discarded: **Speed Level: C**
- If *one* 3-7 number tile has been discarded: **Speed Level: B**
- If *two* 3-7 number tiles have been discarded: **Speed Level: A**
- A ryanmen discard means **Speed Level: A**
- A discarded 2-8 number tile dora, or a mid-game discarded live terminal/honor dora is **Speed Level: A**

### 3.2 Speed Reading Discards - Pattern 2

Let's continue analyzing the diagram from the last section. Take a look at toimen's discard pool. What type of hand are they going for and how fast does it seem?



For convenience, the 4 categories of hand progression are copied below.

#### Four Categories of Hand Progression

- (S) High probability of tenpai. Take extreme caution. Consider folding even if they don't declare riichi.
- (A) High probability of iishanten or damaten. A riichi may come soon. Be cautious.
- (B) Either iishanten or ryanshanten. Have them on your radar.
- (C) Ryanshanten or worse. No need to worry.

Toimen's discards are reproduced here.



This is obviously a honitsu or chinitsu (somete) hand in souzu. **The discard pool pattern for somete hands is as follows: Offsuit tiles → Honor Tiles → Tiles of the flush suit.** Sometimes twice-cut (at the time of the discard) honor tiles are discarded among the offsuit tiles - these can generally be ignored.

When it comes to estimating the speed of somete hands, we don't need to worry until the opponent discards a once-cut or live honor, or a number tile in the flush suit. If they are still discarding off-suit tiles, their hand has not progressed far. Even pair or block drops of off-suit tiles should not signal hand progression. Some players may see the unusual discard pool and start to defend early, but until we see the once-cut/live honor, or number tile in the flush suit, we should proceed as normal.

### Estimating Speed of Honitsu/Chinitsu (Somete) Hands

- The discard pattern of a somete hand is **Offsuit tiles → Honor Tiles → Tiles of the flush suit**
- Do not worry until the opponent discards a once-cut/live honor, or a number tile in the flush suit
- If they are still discarding off-suit number tiles, their hand is **Speed Level: C**

Honitsu and chinitsu hands are frequently opened for speed. It is worth treating our approach to estimating their progression differently based on the number of calls.

### Closed or 1-call Somete Hands

- When a once-cut or live honor tile is discarded - **Speed Level: B**
- When a number tile of the flush suit is discarded - **Speed Level: A**

Discarding a once-cut/live honor tile is a sign that the off-suit tiles have been dealt with, and that the opponent has a number tile (presumably with greater acceptance) that they wish to prioritize over the honor tile. The flush-suit blocks are nearing completion, so it is speed level B. At this point, they should be on your radar to potentially reach tenpai. If you are the flush player's shimocha or toimen, it would be worth considering cutting any risky tiles now as a form of sakigiri. If you are kamicha to the opponent pursuing somete, think hard before discarding any tiles in their flush suit, since a single call has a good chance of giving them tenpai. If your hand is bad, consider shibori (more on this in Section 3.5).

The next milestone is when ‘overflow’ tiles in the flush suit are discarded by the somete player. Overflow tiles in the flush suit suggest completion of a block. With one overflow tile, the speed level is A. With two overflow tiles, the speed level is S (and we should assume tenpai). We should fold from ryanshanten, and use our best judgment when pushing hands from iishanten.

### Key Points: Closed or 1-call Somete Hands

- When a once-cut or live honor tile is discarded - **Speed Level: B**
- When *one* number tile of the flush suit is discarded - **Speed Level: A**
- When *two* number tiles of the flush suit are discarded - **Speed Level: S**

### 2- or 3-call Somete Hands

For somete hands with 2 or 3 calls, the number of blocks required to complete in the menzen portion of the hand is reduced. We can treat 2- or 3-call somete hands as **+1 Speed Level** compared to the closed or 1-call criteria.

- When a once-cut or live honor tile is discarded - **Speed Level: A**
- When *one* number tile of the flush suit is discarded - **Speed Level: S**

### Standard Hands Which Transition to Somete

There is another particularly dangerous type of somete hand not yet discussed. Imagine the opponent has a standard, menzen (riichi-oriented) discard pool (i.e., Otakaze → Yakuhai → Terminals → 2 and 8 → 3-7 number tiles), and then suddenly calls melds from one suit. This indicates that the hand was already relatively far in progression, but that their draws naturally led them to open for honitsu/chinitsu. If an opponent with a discard pool in this pattern has discarded an off-suit block (especially ryanmen), they are **Speed Level: A**. This applies to chinitsu as well, which can be expensive.

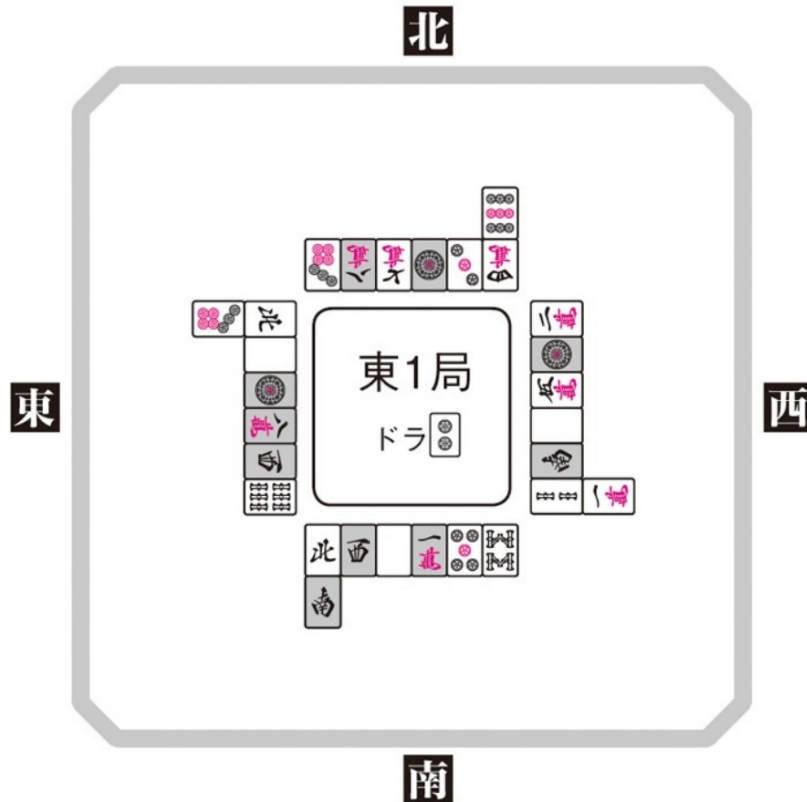
**Key Point: Be wary of hands that ‘transition’ from standard to somete. If an off-suit block is discarded, they are Speed Level: A.**

### Speed-Reading Discards - Pattern 2 (Somete) - Summary

- Until either a once-cut/live honor tile, or a number tile from the flush suit is discarded, their hand is **Speed Level: C**
- When closed or with one call, when a once-cut or live honor tile is discarded - **Speed Level: B**
- When closed or with one call when *one* number tile of the flush suit is discarded - **Speed Level: A**
- When closed or with one call, when *two* number tiles of the flush suit are discarded - **Speed Level: S**
- With 2 or 3 calls, when a once-cut or live honor tile is discarded - **Speed Level: A**
- With 2 or 3 calls, when *one* number tile of the flush suit is discarded - **Speed Level: S**

### 3.3 Speed Reading Discards - Patterns 3 and 4

Now let's focus on shimocha's discard pool. What type of hand are they going for and how fast does it seem?



For convenience, the 4 categories of hand progression are copied below.

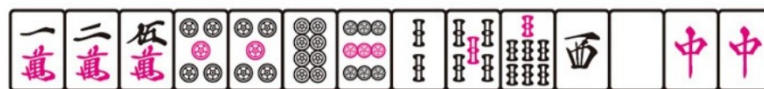
#### Four Categories of Hand Progression

- (S) High probability of tenpai. Take extreme caution. Consider folding even if they don't declare riichi.
- (A) High probability of iishanten or damaten. A riichi may come soon. Be cautious.
- (B) Either iishanten or ryanshanten. Have them on your radar.
- (C) Ryanshanten or worse. No need to worry.

Shimocha's discards are reproduced here.



This one is pretty weird so I'll just tell you the answer. A discard pool that looks like this is a hand with a yakuhai pair with many bad shapes. For example, a haipai that could result in the discard pool above is shown below.




How could we possibly read this from the discard pool? There are two key revealing factors. **First, a 2 or 8 number tile was the first discard.** Let me explain. In this hand, there are terminals, but they are involved in weak blocks, so the isolated 2 or 8 number tiles are discarded first. Isolated 3-7 number tiles are kept as floaters, hoping to draw into ryanmen. For a normal, menzen-oriented hand, we would expect to see the otakaze and yakuhai discarded first, with 2 and 8 number tiles cut afterwards. For a somete hand, we may see 3-7 number tiles cut prior to the 2 and 8 in the off-suits. 3-7 number tiles are also cut prior to 2 and 8 tiles for toitoi and chiitai. And for tanyao, the honor tiles and terminals are cut before the 2 and 8. There are very few haipai in which it makes sense to discard a 2 or 8 as the first tile, which is why we can already infer the possibility of a yakuhai pair with many bad shapes.

Of course, it may also be the case that the 2 or 8 number tile is cut first as part of a very promising menzen hand when there are no isolated terminals, so this is not a certainty. But it is highly suggestive.

The second important feature of this discard pool that allows us to read the hand is that **a yakuhai is discarded later by tedashi.** This hand looks unlikely to win without opening, so the relative value of isolated yakuhai increases. Once blocks begin to form elsewhere in the hand, the isolated yakuhai are shed (generally by turn 6 or 7). Sometimes the yakuhai will flow out as a follow-cut when they are once-cut in the discard pool.

With this hand structure, the bad shapes are generally not cut very early. This is because they can be chi'd and the opponent may rely on the yakuhai pon for yaku/atozuke as a

backup. In this specific example, it looks like the  penchan was cut at turn 6-7. This is an egregiously slow hand. If closed, we can generally treat it as **Speed Level: C**, and we only need to be concerned when either 2 calls are made or the opponent declares riichi (which almost never happens).

**Key Points: Speed Reading Discards - Bad Shapes and Yakuhai Pair - Pattern 3**

- Discarding a 2 or 8 number tile on turn 1, followed by a tedashi yakuhai later, indicates a hand with a yakuhai pair and many bad shapes
- This hand can be ignored and treated as **Speed Level: C** until 2x calls at which point it is **Speed Level: A**
- If the yakuhai is not visible after two calls the hand is almost certainly atozuke

Let's now move to **Pattern 4**, starting off with an example.



This is a typical chiitoe discard pool. The first giveaway is that **4 and 6 number tiles are discarded early**. In aka nashi (no red fives) rulesets, 5 also tends to be discarded early. 4 and 6 tend to be early discard choices for the possibility of suji traps on 1/7 and 3/9, respectively. When chiitoe is a possibility, they also tend to flow out naturally from the

following shapes: . **The second sign of chiitoe is that a promising taatsu is discarded.** In this case we see a ryanmen was cut, but this can also apply to an inner kanchan. When you notice the discard of a promising block and wonder, 'Why would you discard that?' - always consider chiitoe as a possibility. If they discard two or more promising taatsu, it's almost certainly a chiitoe hand. **The last sign that the hand is chiitoe is the later tedashi of 2 or 8 number tiles, terminals, and honors.** They are reserved in the hand for last because they make strong tanki waits. If they are cut as tedashi late in the hand pay attention, a riichi is likely to occur after 2 or 3 more discards and we can consider the opponent as likely iishanten with **Speed Level: A**.

**Key Points: Speed Reading Discards - Chiitoe - Pattern 4**

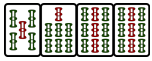

- Discarding 4 and 6 early, followed by promising taatsu (ryanmen or inner kanchan), then tedashi of 2 or 8, terminals, or honors indicates a chiitoe hand
- The later tedashi of 2 or 8 number tiles, terminals, or honors indicates **Speed Level: A**

With chiitoe, the opponent progression is usually slow, and it is a hand where riichi is usually declared. Generally, we don't have to worry too much until they declare riichi. When defending (either against a suspected chiitoe riichi, or if our hand is bad and not worth fighting a potential dama chiitoe) - a key defensive tip is this: **Do not discard any tiles that would serve as better tanki waits than the tiles they have cut from their hand.**

## Review of the 4 Major Patterns Amenable to Discard Reading

- **Pattern 1: Normal (Riichi-Oriented).** Excess 3-7 number tiles suggest the hand is nearly ready.
- **Pattern 2: Somete (Honitsu/Chinitsu).** Once-cut/live honors and number tiles in the flush suit suggest the hand is nearly ready.
- **Pattern 3: Yakuhai Pair and Bad Shapes.** No obvious signs of progression, but Pattern 3 can be recognized from the early discards.
- **Pattern 4: Chiitoi.** Excess 2s, 8s, terminals and honors suggest the hand is nearly ready.

The progression of some hand types, particularly open hands, is difficult to glean from the discard pool. One example is the simple early yakuhai pon. The discards are not necessarily expected to follow a standard riichi-oriented discard order (i.e., winds, yakuhai, then number tiles from the outside-in) since the hand is not closed. Opponents may prefer to cut inner

4/5/6 tiles and keep pairs of honors or terminals for pon material (like in  or ) or to set up preferential terminal waits. It is tough to read toittoi, since it can

either be a full commit from haipai or a mid-game toittoi break. Tanyao too, is tricky, one reason being that 4 and 6 are sometimes cut early to fix an aka 5.

For open hands (yakuhai pon, toittoi, tanyao), the discard pool can be of limited value in estimating hand progress. However, block-reading and shibori, which we will discuss in later sections, serve as useful countermeasures.












Great work everyone!

### 3.4 Easy Block Reading








We will use this lesson to discuss some common and practical discard patterns, and how we can use them to infer the shapes of blocks that remain in the hand.














The string “→ → →” is used to mean “several turns later, the latter tile was cut from the hand (tedashi, as opposed to tsumogiri)”.

**Pattern 1:**  → → → 

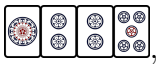
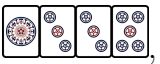

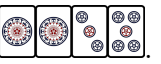

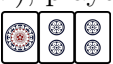




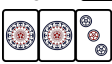





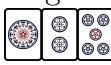
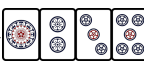


In this pattern,  was discarded first, followed by  as tedashi. The opponent frequently originally had the  shape. The  cut suggests that the opponent potentially drew  to complete the  sequence, or fixed the block into a  penchan. Another possibility is that the opponent first cut  from the  shape. Regardless, we should read the opponent has at least one  and that there is a block in lower souzu (e.g., .

**Pattern 2:**  → → → 








This discard pattern arises when  is cut from  and then  is cut to fix the  pair. If  is the riichi declaration tile (sengenpai) or is cut just prior to declaring riichi, be very wary of a  shanpon wait. (Though it’s completely possible that the  is in an ankou.)



There are, of course, other possibilities, like cutting  from , drawing , then cutting . Or , discarding , drawing , then cutting  for ryanmen. Or , discarding , drawing , then cutting  to slide the sequence. Anyway, we should feel confident they have a block in lower manzu (.












**Pattern 3:**  → → → 





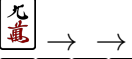
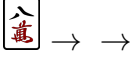





It is most likely one of the following patterns: , , , . Especially in hands which already have yaku (e.g., yakuhai), players will aim for waits closer to the edge for winrate improvement. So cutting  from  or  for the shanpon wait on / is common, as is discarding  from  for the  kanchan wait. Be wary of discarding  or  against a riichi that shows the  → → →  pattern. It might also be  or a slide ( cut  draw ). Regardless, we can read they have a block in lower pinzu.










**Pattern 4:**  → → → 

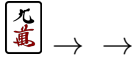
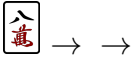







There are many patterns that result in this discard order, including , , , and .  is an especially dangerous tile, as it deals into the potential shanpon from  and ryanmen of . There is a lower souzu block in play.

**Pattern 5:**  → → →  → → →

















While there are many possibilities as to the original hand shape, it is almost a certainty that there is a  in the opponent's hand. The only shapes where you would keep an  in the hand after discarding  are: , , , , , , , and .

The shapes , ,  do not have , but are unlikely to result in the  → → →  pattern. First, an early cut of a single  from  or  is unlikely unless the hand is extremely fast. Also, if it were a  shape, you would expect the second  to be cut as a pair drop.

**In short, if the opponent can keep  in the hand after cutting  they must have a .** (Excluding the rare cases where a  is still present in the hand or when  is a pair). And to reiterate, since the  is cut by itself, the chance of it actually being an  pair shape is virtually zero, and cutting a single  early from a shape with two  originally is unlikely unless the hand is very fast.



So if you see the  → → →  pattern, we should safely assume the opponent is holding a . The  cut can happen upon block completion (i.e., drawing a  into , or on drawing  to improve the  acceptance). Use the assumption about the  being present in the opponent hand to inform your choices during hand building, wait selection, and include it for purposes of calculating kabe/one-chance when defending.







**Useful Gyakugiri Patterns: Summary**

-  → → → . They have a  in their hand and a block in lower souzu.
-  → → → . They have a block in lower manzu.
-  → → → . They have a block in lower pinzu and  and  are especially dangerous.
-  → → → . They have a block in lower souzu and  is especially dangerous.
-  → → →  → → → . They have a  in hand and a block nearby the .

**Honor Tiles Discarded After Number Tiles**












The next section concerns reading blocks using honor tile discards. Rather than specifically identifying the shape of blocks, this technique is more about determining 1. If a block is present, and 2. If the block is more or less likely to be part of the final wait at tenpai (wait reading).

**Pattern A.  or  cut prior to otakaze (non-yakuhai guest winds)**











This is the classic  cut (or ) from the  or  shapes. You can read they have a weak or isolated  or  in the hand which will likely form a block.

**Pattern B. 3-7 number tile cut before a tedashi honor**




If a 3-7 number tile is cut, and an honor tile is later cut by tedashi, the final wait is less likely to be related to the number tile cut prior.

For example, if one had  and  in the hand, we generally discard  for tile acceptance. **3-7 number tiles cut prior to a tedashi honor are generally isolated tiles, or were involved in blocks that became complete.** Recognizing the tedashi honor is a very importance technique. The earlier it occurs, the more reliable the read. This type of read dovetails with sotogawa, where the outer   are safer against an early , and   are slightly safer against an early  cut. However, with 4 and 6 discards there is the possibility of fixing aka in hand (i.e., discarding  early from ).





**Pattern C.** 

Honor tile cut in-between ryanmen. This means the wait is *more* likely to be . Why is this? If the  were unnecessary to the hand, the opponent would have been able to replace it with the honor tile, which is slightly safer to hold on to. But keeping the  until tenpai, especially after discarding the , suggests that  provided some added acceptance. Very likely, the  sengenpai was cut from  for a  final wait (or  was drawn to reach tenpai). You can also use the assumption that they have a  in hand for push-fold decisions (e.g., kabe/one-chance calculations).

**Pattern D.** 












Honor tile cut after ryanmen discard. This means the wait is *less* likely to be . Why is this? The  was unnecessary to the hand, so the opponent held on to a safer honor tile instead. What this means is that a better final wait than  was chosen - potentially one with aka or dora, or that the hand was chiitai. To distinguish between these possibilities, you have to look at the entire discard pool (see sections 3.1-3.2).

### Honor Tiles Discarded After Number Tiles: Summary

-  () cut before otakaze. They have a  () in hand.
- **3-7 number tile prior to tedashi honor.** The final wait is unlikely to be related to the earlier cut number tile.
- **Honor tile between ryanmen discard.** The wait is more likely to be related to the discarded ryanmen.
- **Honor tile after ryanmen discard.** The wait is less likely to be related to the discarded ryanmen, and the opponent either has a better wait or switched to chiitai.

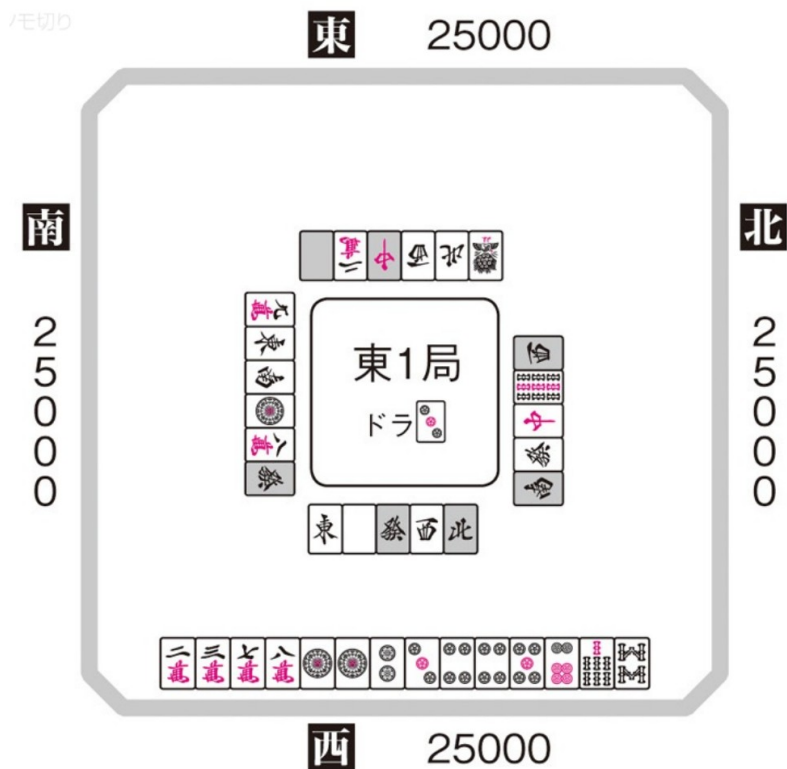
Wow. Quite a lot! I have a final bonus tip. *An opponent who holds on to an isolated honor dora and discards it as tedashi late is often unhappy with their hand value.* If they had a strong and valuable hand (e.g., mentanpin), they would be more comfortable cutting the honor dora early. So if someone holds onto honor dora hoping to pair it up, they tend to be holding out to increase their hand value.










Easy Block Reading - Summary (Frequent Patterns)

-  → → → . They have a block in lower pinzu and  and  are especially dangerous.
-  → → → . They have a block in lower souzu.  is especially dangerous.
-  → → →  → → → . They have a  in hand and a block nearby the .

Easy Block Reading - In Practice

Q1: WWYD? (East 1, West Seat, Dora: . Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.)



A1: Discard . We're choosing between the  , and  ryanmen. They look relatively equal, but notice the  → → →  → → → pattern in kamicha's discard pool. We can read they have a  in hand, making there at most six tiles of  in the wall. Discard the  ryanmen.



### 3.5 Tiles Discarded After Calls

“The tiles nearby to the tile cut immediately after a call are sometimes safe, and sometimes not, which is confusing. Can you give me some hints?”

Sure. The theme of today’s lesson is call reading. Pon and chi advance the hand. The tile discarded after a pon or chi can generally be thought of as useful up until the call, and unnecessary afterwards. Since at one point they were useful to the hand, paying attention to them can be a helpful source of information for reading blocks and waits. Even if you tend to focus on your own hand, simply glancing up to note the tile discarded when you hear ‘Pon!’ or ‘Chi!’ will have a big impact.



**Key Point: Pay attention to tiles discarded after a call.**

Keeping track of every call can be overwhelming, so for now, let’s focus on the second or third calls by opponents and assume that their last call brought them to tenpai. Then we can attempt to deduce the wait. If you pay attention to the tile discarded after the call and avoid careless deal-ins, your results will definitely improve.

First, the case of pon for tenpai (pon-ten). Most often, a player who pons into tenpai will have two or more pairs at the time of the pon.



For example:





Pon  → Discard .

This is a common shape, where after a pon, a pair-containing block is fixed into the head. This indicates that the tile discarded after a pon is frequently near a pair, a useful pattern to remember. A common refrain is that, “The tile cut after a pon fixes the head, so the wait is not nearby.” Not always true. The wait may be shanpon, or even something else (see below).



Pon  → Discard .



Pon  → Discard .

In the above two scenarios, the final wait was nearby the tile discarded after the pon (sobaten). So we should not make a general assumption that the area around the tile cut after the pon is safe, but rather think carefully about each situation.

### Key Points: Tiles Discarded After a Pon Into Tenpai

- The tile discarded after a pon is often unrelated to the wait
- A pair is often present in the area around the tile discarded after the pon
- Do not assume that the area around the tile discarded after a pon is safe

If there is only one isolated head at the time of the pon, the resulting wait may be a nobetan, aryanmen, or tanki.



Pon → Discard

Sometimes, an opponent may pon from a bad wait tenpai to take a tanki wait (like below).



Pon → Discard

When the tile discarded at the pon and the next tile discarded from the hand (tedashi) form a bad shape block, the opponent is often on a tanki wait. Most commonly, the bad wait block will be cut from the inside-out. This is a reading technique worth remembering.

(continuing from above hand)



Draw → Discard

**Key Point:** A tanki wait is likely if the tile discarded after pon and the next tile discarded by tedashi form a bad shape block.

Let's switch topics to tiles discarded after a chi, again assuming the chi brings the opponent to tenpai (chi-ten) after the second or third call.

It is relatively easy to make a read after a chi if the tile discarded after the call is unrelated to the chi. For example, take the following two hands:



Chi → Discard



Chi → Discard

In each case, the tile discarded after chi was unrelated to the chi, and the final wait was around the tile discarded after chi. It is very often the case that the final wait involves a tile matagi (adjacent) to the discard (e.g. discarding from or for waits on or , respectively). This pattern frequently occurs when calling from a perfect iishanten structure, so please remember it.

**Key Point: If the tile discarded after chi is unrelated to the chi, the final wait often involves a tile adjacent to the discard.**

In cases where a player calls chi-ten and both matagi waits to the discarded tile are guaranteed safe, there are three major patterns.

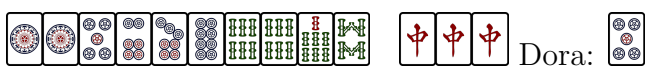
First, the tile may have been discarded from an ankou to confirm the head.




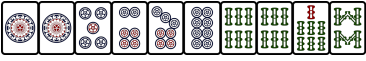



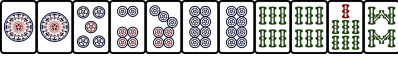
Chi → Discard

You can judge if this structure is likely based on how many copies of the discarded tile are visible.

Second, the tile may have been called into an extended/complex shape to improve the wait (kuinobashi), like below:








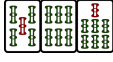

Chi → Discard

This becomes more likely if surrounding tiles of the complex block have *not* previously been discarded. If, for instance, a  was in the discard pool, the hand is very unlikely to have been  at the time of the  chi, since it would mean the opponent rejected tenpai (cutting  instead of  from ) at an earlier stage. Use the discard pool to identify contradictions in possible kuinobashi structures.

Thirdly, the tile was kept as a floating tile in the hopes of improving on a bad wait. However, the upgrade never occurred. Take the hand below:



Chi  → Discard .

Here, the opponent had hoped to stick a draw to the  to improve upon the poor  penchan. However, it did not occur. Note that if  did improve with a  draw, the  would not have been discarded. The final wait is more likely to be in the region without any nearby discards. Discarding a floating tile after chi-ten is most often a sign of trying to improve a bad shape, but it can also suggest trying for value/wait improvement

(e.g.   Dora: , holding onto  in case another dora  is drawn).

The key to not dealing into to these open hands is to notice that in all three patterns, at no point did the final wait have a supporting tile (i.e., it was not a three-tile block candidate like a ryanmen pair). The area with few discarded tiles is the most dangerous. Furthermore, the tiles adjacent to those discarded before tenpai are slightly safer (with the exception of pattern 3 when trading ryanmen waits for value or wait quality).

### Key Points: Patterns when the Matagi Waits to the Tile Cut After Chi are Safe

- Pattern 1: Tile discarded from ankou to fix the head
- Pattern 2: Kuinobashi
- Pattern 3: Floating tile to improve from a bad wait (or improve value)
- The area with few discards is dangerous
- Tiles adjacent to discards made before tenpai are safer



Be careful not to put too much faith in these types of reads. It may be the case that the tile discarded after a call into tenpai was simply a 'leftover' tile, a dangerous tile that was kept until tenpai, or even a tile kept for intentional deception to throw off attempts at hand reading. Be sure to apply these techniques based on the flow of the table.

Waits cannot be read with 100% accuracy. However, learning and internalizing these patterns will lead to situations where you can be more confident in tiles being safe or more likely to deal in. If you ever think, when in a match, 'Hey, this is just like in the book!' - congratulations, your hand reading skills have improved.

Good luck!

### **Tiles Discarded After Calls - Summary**

- After a pon for tenpai, if the tile discarded after pon and the next tile discarded via tedashi form a bad shape block, the opponent is likely on a tanki wait
- After a chi for tenpai, if the tile discarded after chi into tenpai is not related to the chi, the wait likely involves a tile matagi (adjacent) to the discard

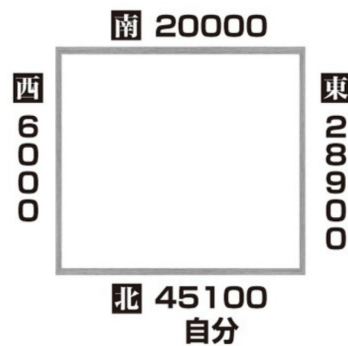
### 3.6 Shibori

This reader writes in saying, “I can never shibori my shimocha properly. They end up calling my discards and taunt me, saying ‘Thanks for the tiles, Kami!’. I get so tilted trying to shut them down that I deal into someone else’s riichi. What do I do??”

Ok - let’s discuss the topic of choking (shibori), meaning to restrict or slow down an opponent’s hand. **Specifically, to shibori means to sacrifice your own hand to slow down someone else’s hand.** Sadly, the notion that shibori is a total loss because it slows your own hand has become widespread - however, it has its uses which I will describe in this section. In some cases, allowing a specific opponent to win can be extremely disadvantageous.

For example, take the following scenario.

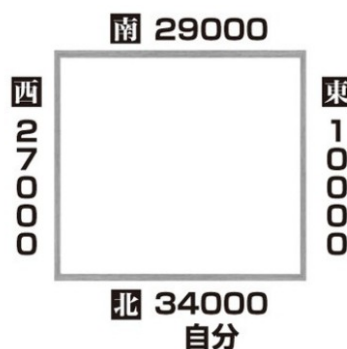
**East 2.**



Imagine you are North and dealer (shimocha) begins pursuing a honitsu hand. Since you are kamicha to dealer, you should shibori tiles in their flush suit to prevent them from winning, which would threaten your lead. Be proactive and choke their progression hard. Of course, shibori is not always appropriate. Recall that shibori slows both yourself and the shibori target - leading to more frequent wins from the other two players.

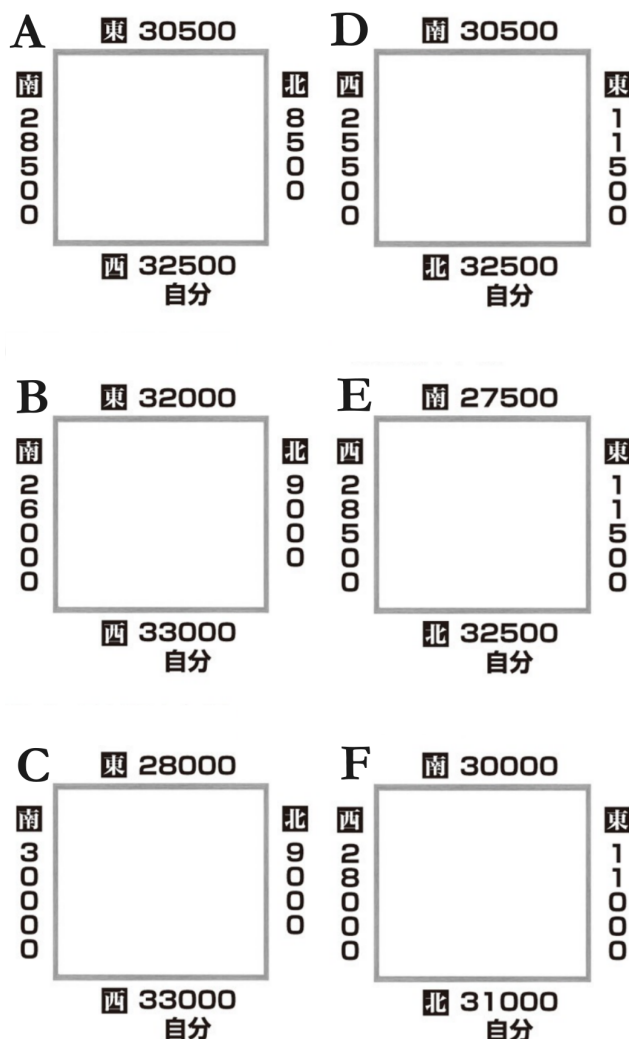
Let’s discuss an example where the scores are tight in South.

**South 3**



Here, if we shibori the dealer, West and South may win the hand instead, threatening our first-place. We should not make it easier for them to win and allow ourselves to get overtaken.

Imagine this round goes to ryuukyoku. How will the bakyou and point distribution change based on tenpai payments?



- A. North (You), East (Dealer) Noten; South and West tenpai → South 4, 1 honba  
 B. North, East, West Noten; South tenpai → South 4, 1 honba  
 C. North, East, South Noten; West tenpai → South 4, 1 honba  
 D. North, West Noten; East and South tenpai → South 3, 1 honba  
 E. North, South Noten; East and West tenpai → South 3, 1 honba  
 F. North Noten; East, South, West tenpai → South 3, 1 honba

In all cases where we remain noten (even moreso when dealer is tenpai), our lead shrinks and our first-place is under greater threat from our opponents. Regarding shibori of a dealer honitsu - while we should avoid dealing in, we don't want to shibori so hard we kill our winning chances. If a tile does not advance our own hand, just cut it. If dealer tsumos for 2000 all - it's not bad; in fact, it's even better for our first-place chances! And South or West dealing into dealer, or us being tenpai with everyone noten, would be even better. This scenario is an example of when we do not want to severely slow our own hand to shibori the dealer, because it would be especially bad to let South or West win, and having East win by tsumo or ron on a different opponent is not terrible for us.

## Key Points: Shibori

- To shibori means to sacrifice your own hand to slow down a specific opponent
- Whether to shibori is highly situation-dependent

## Practical Tips for Shibori

Now, I will introduce practical tips for shibori. Shibori of yakuhai atozuke pon (applicable against all opponents) is often very effective, since there are only 4 copies of each tile. If you suspect an opponent whom you *definitely* would not to win the hand is atozuke for yakuhai dora pon, **be thorough in your shibori**. However, note that holding a lone honor will make it challenging to complete your own hand. If the opponent's hand seems cheap, or you need to win or collect tenpai payments - it may be better to cut the yakuhai early rather than ruin your own hand.

A different scenario. You suspect the opponent is tenpai for yakuhai atozuke or honitsu. You have a valuable iishanten you would like to push, but end up drawing a live honor tile! How awful! *Do not give up*. The situation may change. For instance, if another opponent calls or declares riichi, the shibori target may end up folding with their honor tiles. Cutting the honors from called hands to fold is relatively common since there are fewer options to fold with. So when you draw the spooky live honor, hold on to it for now and try to keep your hand relatively intact. Then, should the shibori target fold with the yakuhai, you can follow-cut and continue attacking.











## Shibori - Yakuhai/Honors



- Often very effective against the shibori target. Be on alert for other opponents attacking
- If you draw a scary live honor, do not give up - the situation may change







Next, we discuss shibori when shimocha is the target. In the case of a somete hand, it can be relatively simple to shibori by exclusively discarding off-suit tiles. It becomes trickier when the hand involves yakuhai and may be high value (e.g., dabuton or when the dora is a 3-7 number tile). There are two main reading strategies that help with shibori of shimocha.

## Shibori - Shimocha

- Tiles adjacent to very early-cut number tiles are rarely critical for hand progression
- Number tiles cut later as tedashi are more likely to be related to their hand

Starting with the first bullet point - if a  is cut early on, the opponent is unlikely to have cut it from a bad shape like  or . In these shapes, the  would have been retained to support the weak blocks. While  may have been cut from , , or  - it's only the latter  shape where  would constitute a tile critical for

hand progression. Since  is unlikely to be cut when it is supporting a bad shape, and early terminal discards are frequently isolated, it's fair to assume shimocha is not waiting on an  to complete a bad wait shape that is bottlenecking their hand progression.

We can shibori by discarding  in response to a very early  discard by shimocha. If shimocha calls the  from a   ryanmen, we should infer that their 5 blocks are already set. And since they've already cut the useless tiles (e.g., the ) from their hand, we should interpret their future discards as revealing information.

This leads nicely into the second bullet point. When the opponent's hand has progressed and they cut number tiles by tedashi - be wary of the surrounding tiles. It is likely that the later tedashi discards were from a block. In contrast, the tiles around early discards are more likely to pass. So as the hand develops, avoid discarding tiles near the opponent's later tedashi (especially if the area is not well-represented in the overall discard pool) and instead cut tiles out to the early discards. This approach should reduce the chance that your tiles are called by shimocha.

A final tip: *Don't forget about the other two opponents - a riichi may come at any time!*

## Shibori - In Practice

**Q1:** WWYD? (East 3, North Seat, Dora: . Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.)


The scores are:

North (You): 37900

East (Shimocha): 25000

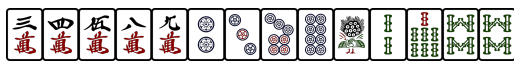
South: 17000








West: 20100


The dealer's hand and discard pool are shown below. The  was discarded after the dabuton pon.

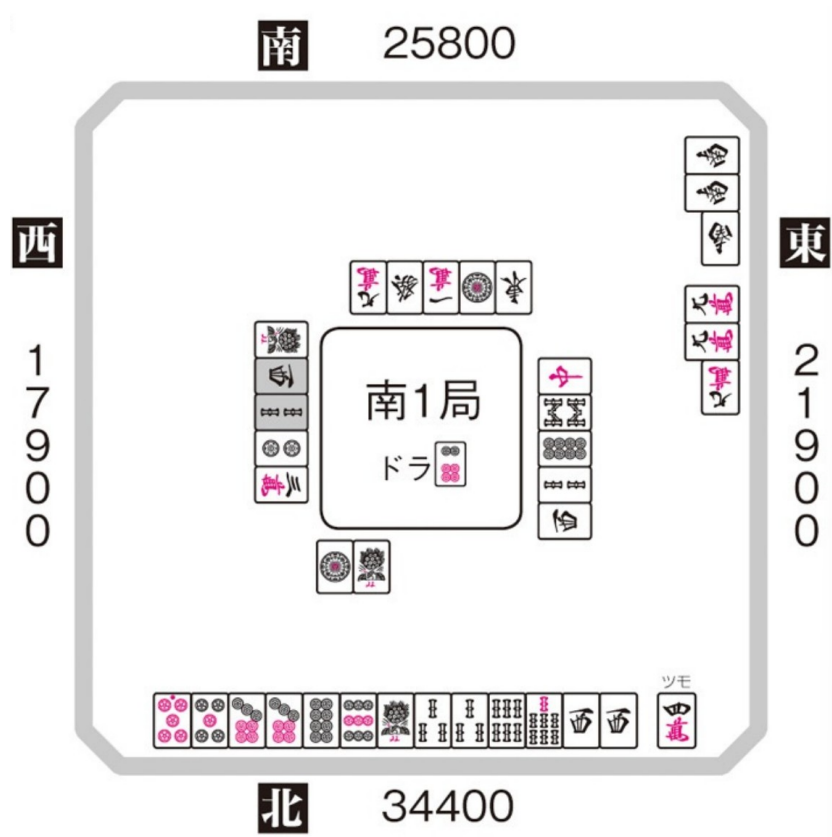








Our own hand is as follows:



**A1:** Discard . We're choosing between the  and  penchan. The dealer discarded  late by tedashi, suggesting he may have a block in upper manzu. In contrast, the  was discarded very early, and adjacent tiles to early discards are less likely to be called. We cut the  over the  for safety.

Q2: WWYD? (South 1, North Seat, Dora: . Shaded tiles are tsumogiri.)



A2: Discard . The dealer has held onto  over souzu and pinzu number tiles and has not discarded any manzu. Honitsu is likely. We are ryanshanten with bad shapes. We should not needlessly feed the dealer and thus we shibori. The second observation is that the 4th place West has just cut  and is likely preparing for riichi. If we cut our pair of  we would kneecap our defensive ability. Anticipate a kamicha riichi, hold onto the  pair, and for now, cut the dora indicator  which is likely to become ultra-dangerous later.




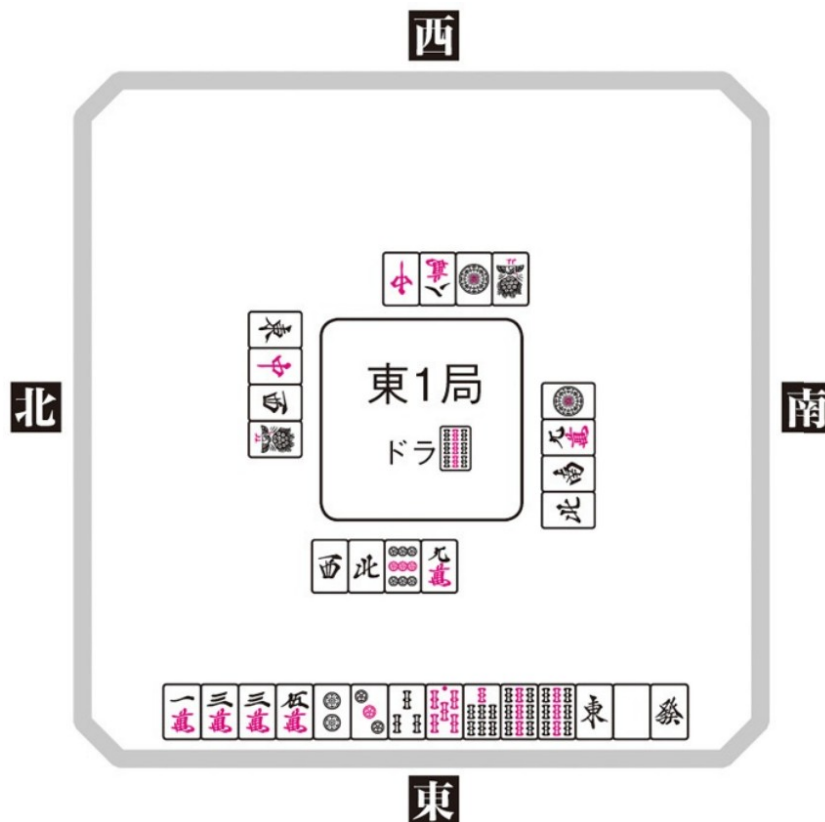






It can be tricky to balance how long to keep an honor tile. We must balance our desire to pair them up versus holding onto them for too long such that they become dangerous. For 'Level 1' hands, it's easy - cut the honor tiles first. For 'Level 4' hands, it's also easy - hold onto them until they're twice-cut. But the difficulty lies in Level 2/3 hands, and also mid-game Level 4 hands.


My approach to balancing pairing potential with late-game defense is to use hand reading and give priority to keeping a once-cut honor tile over a completely live honor tile.














The reads I use for this strategy rely on common habits of most modern mahjong players, who tend to: 1. Keep live honors over once-cut honors (statistically, live honors are more likely to pair up until round 8); 2. Avoid calling twice; and 3. Discard dabuton/dabunan (if not their own wind) before other yakuhai. We can use these principles to infer if an opponent has either zero or at least one copy of an honor tile.


Let's discuss an example. WWYD? (East 1, East Seat, Dora: ) Assume all discards are tedashi.



One might say , since the hand has three dora, will likely be mangan anyway, and  is once-cut compared to the live  and  and therefore more difficult to draw into. *Wrong!*

*Make sure to keep !* One of the advantages of holding onto a once-cut honor tile is that it is easier to read if an opponent has it or not. Take the North player. North has aggressively





cut yakuhai and is unlikely to need them for their hand progression. We can assume they have 0 copies of , since they've already cut one. Next, we can look at South. South has followed the discard order of otakaze → yakuhai → 1/9 discussed in Section 3.1 for a standard riichi-oriented hand. He has cut the live , his own wind, so it's unlikely that he would be holding a copy of the , which is both once-cut and dabuton to dealer. It's also unlikely that he skipped a  call (though it's not impossible he had one copy on the turn  was cut by North then drew into a pair the turn after). We can assume South has 0 copies of  (though there is a infinitesimal probability of them holding 2). Finally, West. West has discarded 1/9/2/8 tiles prior to the once-cut  so we can infer they have interest in yakuhai to build their hand. It is likely that they hold a pair or even ankou of  or . However, West would have generally cut a lone  over a lone  given the greater danger of dabuton. Again, it's technically possible he skipped an early  call but in all likelihood, West also has 0 copies of .

In summary, we read the bakyō as very likely (though not 100%) that all opponents have 0 copies of . **Generally, if a once-cut yakuhai was not called, and other copies of the yakuhai were not cut by other players during the early-game where honor tiles are sorted out, it is highly likely that the remaining copies are in the wall.**

**This type of read is especially reliable for dabuton and dabunan, when ton or nan, respectively, is your own seat wind.** Reading the bakyō and pairing up a once-cut dabuton/dabunan is an excellent play, since it's 2 han, the fourth copy is easily discarded by opponents, the honor pair provides good defensive value, and keeps the hand flexible for calling.

*I call this the 'Secret Technique of Keeping a Once-Cut Double Wind!'*

**Key Point: If you hold one copy of your double-wind, and it was once-cut in the early game when honor tiles are sorted out, the remaining two copies are likely in the wall. Keeping it in hand gives great offensive and defensive value when paired (and good defensive value even when unpaired). Keep them!**

Returning to the example, it's a bit trickier to read  and . West or South may have 0-3 copies of either  or ! By the way, the defensive value of a live honor versus a single-cut honor is night and day. Keeping live honors in the hand for too long can be dangerous. An honor tile pair that is once-cut is stronger defensively than an honor tile pair that is live in the pool. Anyway, unless your hand absolutely requires pairing up your honor tiles, I recommend keeping the once-cut tiles, which will provide both offensive and defensive value.

The greater the number of opponents that are pursuing similar types of hands (honor-heavy versus honor-poor), the more reliable the ‘cheap’ versus ‘expensive’ reads of honor tiles will be. You could also use these reads to infer waits for chiitai, honitsu, and toitai. Thanks for listening.

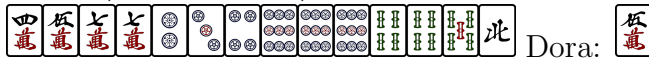
### **Reading Honor Tiles - Summary**

- Just like number tiles, if honors are ‘expensive’, avoid them, and if honors are ‘cheap’, collect them



Now let's discuss the relationship between hand-building and the speed of opponents. Take the hand below and imagine how we would play in in each of the following situations:

### East 1, South Seat, Turn 7



1. All opponents Speed Level: C, no relevant tiles discarded
2. 1 opponent Speed Level: C, 2 opponents Speed Level: B, 1 copy of discarded
3. 2 opponents Speed Level: C, 1 opponent Speed Level: S for souzu honitsu (1 copy and 2 copies of discarded)

Recall the criteria for keeping perfect iishanten versus 'going slim' are found in Section 1.1.

In situation 1, we note that two criteria are met for 'going slim' - it's mid-game and the is a middle 3-7 number tile. However, since all opponents have slow hands, there's little reason to sakigiri the . For now, it's okay to keep the perfect iishanten to maximize our odds of a headstart riichi.

In situation 2, since two criteria for 'going slim' are met, we cut the . Prepare for an opponent riichi.

In situation 3, it is too reckless to push our iishanten against an opponent in likely souzu honitsu tenpai. Even the hell wait is not worth discarding to maintain the iishanten. Cut the pair while keeping an eye on the opponents' discards. If we can reach tenpai without discarding it's okay to cut and riichi.

**You will need to adjust your hand according to the point distribution and speed of the opponents.** Pay close attention to the speed level, and play mahjong with an emphasis on 'relative speed'.

**Key Point: Make judgments and adjustments to hand-building criteria based on the point distribution and speed of the opponents.**

Finally, styles of play vary from person to person. We may be at a table with a beginner or a grizzled mahjong veteran. When considering calls or riichi judgment, change your standards to suit your opponents' playstyles.

For calling decisions, if your kamicha is not the type to shibori, play it straight, call aggressively, and take the fast tenpai. If your opponent has shibori tendencies, we may need to be more restrained in our calls, and only call those tiles that would otherwise bottleneck the hand. We may even attempt to camouflage, perhaps by intentionally leaving an off-suit

tile in the hand when pursuing honitsu. If a kamicha who does not usually shibori is shibori, their hand is probably pretty bad. On the other hand, if someone who would usually shibori is pushing aggressively, they likely have an expensive hand.

For riichi decisions, if at a table with highly aggressive players, aim to reduce the frequency of bad wait riichi. We will often be chased and deal-in. However, with a good wait, riichi confidently, even with a high-value hand, and take advantage of ippatsu and ura. If at a table with highly defensive players, bad wait riichi is stronger, and you will be more likely to tsumo your wait or win off of suji traps. If the table is ultra-defensive, we may even damaten hands like pinfu dora 3 to increase our win rate.

### **Key Points - Calling Judgment Based on Opponent Playstyle**

- If kamicha does not tend to shibori, play it straight and aggressively call
- If kamicha tends to shibori, be judicious about calling and consider camouflage

### **Key Points - Riichi Judgment Based on Opponent Playstyle**

- If opponents play aggressively, avoid bad shape riichi, but confidently riichi high-value good wait hands
- If opponents play defensively, bad wait riichi is stronger, and consider damaten for high scoring good-shape hands

That concludes the lessons in the book. Hopefully these tactics are useful in modern mahjong games.

However, tactics are cyclical. For example, avoiding sobaten waits used to be widespread. Now the theory is to always take perfect iishanten, and not doing so is considered not 'digitally optimal'. Because of this, players now pay close attention to sobaten waits. And because players are now wary of sobaten waits, rejecting perfect iishanten has become an effective strategy. Perhaps the day will come where rejecting perfect iishanten becomes the new metagame, players will catch on that the sobaten waits are safe, and simply keeping perfect iishanten to maximize acceptance will be the next cycle of mahjong theory.

For myself, I will continue to work hard in actual games and continue my study. When the next era of modern mahjong comes, I'll have a new tactics book ready to go!

Until next time!

### **Relative Mahjong Theory - Summary**

- Use the score distribution, opponent speed, and opponent playstyles to make adjustments to your game