

International Mahjong Rules

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International Mahjong Rules PDF File
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World's *FIRST*
comprehensive set of
written rules of mahjong,
governing every step of play. TM

by Cofa Tsui

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INTERNATIONAL MAHJONG RULES

Version 05.01.2001

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A. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

What is International Mahjong?

International Mahjong ("IMJ") is a mahjong game that is uniquely designed based on the games of Cantonese Mahjong. Cantonese Mahjong, also known as "Hong Kong Mahjong" in or around 1960's or "Hong Kong Old Style" as quoted nowadays by most people other than Chinese, are widely played by people in Hong Kong, China and in most parts of the world where the game MAHJONG is of interest.

The concept of transferring Cantonese Mahjong into International Mahjong was first created in 1990. It intended to introduce the Chinese game of mahjong to the world in a new form, with a rule set that was as complete and as close to the Cantonese Mahjong as possible. In addition, names of playing pieces and many terms and phrases of the rules were either uniquely created or selected from existing English words to have similar

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pronunciations of names and terms of the Chinese language. International Mahjong was further developed to its final form in 1991 and 1992, during which period the term "International Mahjong" had become a registered trademark and copyright of the written rules entitled International Mahjong Rules was registered.

IMJ is well designed for today and for the future. It comes with a comprehensive rulebook that gives you the full set of rules of the game, all by one rulebook. It not only lets you learn fast and easy to play mahjong with your friends and relatives; it also lets you learn mahjong in its fullness and enables you to play mahjong with people from among other parts of the world with mutual understanding.

If you have been hesitating about learning the game of mahjong, or are not satisfied with the results you are currently playing, IMJ is able to bring you new achievements in life!

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About The Rules

International Mahjong Rules ("IMJ Rules") is not a new set of mahjong rules. Instead, it is a complete set of written rules of the world's most popular "Cantonese Mahjong", including modifications widely played throughout the 1990's and beyond. Some modifications and verifications are purposely made to the rules so as to eliminate any known grey areas of play. Such modifications and verifications are also necessary if one has to put the rules in writing. IMJ Rules was the result of the author's twenty years experience in active mahjong playing.

International Mahjong Rules was first published in 1991, in the form of a game rules and game manual attached to the sample packs of the card game "International Mahjong" for distribution in the Hong Kong Toys and Games Fair 1992, held January 20-23, 1992 in Hong Kong. International Mahjong Rules was further refined in December 1996, in 1997 and 1998 on an on and off basis.

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In 1998 the paperback rulebook International Mahjong Rules (version 05.00.1998, ISBN 0-9683687-0-0) was first available for sale on the Internet. In essence, it was more an *art* than a *book* because each rulebook was carefully hand-made. Since then, rulebooks have been sold via Amazon.com and the IMJ Official Website. In August 1999, IMJ Rules (version 05.00.1998) was also available in PDF files, sold however only on the IMJ Official Website. As of August 2001 version 05.00.1998 (both rulebook and rule file) was replaced by version 05.01.2001 (see next paragraph).

As the initial intend of the IMJ Rules was to reflect the true version and completeness of the rules of Cantonese Mahjong, there haven't been any material changes made to the original rule set since it was first written in 1991. The current edition of IMJ Rules (version 05.01.2001) was finalized in August 2001, with changes mainly made to the introductory section of the book and to some names, terms and phrases used in the rule section.

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As a general notice, readers, especially those who have already involved in the game of mahjong, should be aware that IMJ Rules *is unique* when compared to any existing mahjong variants. It inevitably contains unique terms and phrases that were to make the rule set ready for the future developments of IMJ related products and services.

B. TERMINOLOGY USED IN INTERNATIONAL MAHJONG

Names, Terms And Phrases Are Unique

In International Mahjong, names of the playing pieces (symbols) and many terms and phrases of the rules were either uniquely created or selected from existing English words. As a common practice, most names, terms and phrases used in connection with International Mahjong (the game and the rules) should be written in a form such that the first letters of the words be capitalized, except for some terms or words that are used as verbs. For a

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list of terms and phrases used in IMJ Rules please refer to the Index of IMJ Rules.

As part of its long-term developments, International Mahjong comes with a set of new images (symbols) for the playing pieces. Art. 4 of IMJ Rules defines names of all symbols and Schedule One of IMJ Rules provides a conversion table for the playing pieces of International Mahjong and of traditional mahjong. Practically, IMJ Rules can be referred to in games played with any existing mahjong playing pieces and facilities.

Why The Uniqueness In Terminology?

People who have already involved in mahjong games in one way or other might find it strange that the playing pieces, commonly referred to as "tiles" in many mahjong variants, are called "Pies" in International Mahjong ("Pie" or "Pies", note the "Capitalized" first letter). In addition, IMJ uses terms or phrases like "Bobby" instead of white dragon or white honor, "Bango"

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instead of pung, pong or triplet, etc. That is, IMJ uses many unique terms and phrases rather than existing terms and phrases of other mahjong variants. Why? Well, other than any commercial considerations related to its long-term developments, there are many reasons why IMJ should have its unique terms and phrases:

(If you are new to the game of mahjong, you don't have to be confused by the deviations in terms and phrases used among books of different authors, as all terms and phrases should be new to you anyway. In fact, when you later on read through the IMJ Rules, and if you are really new to mahjong, you'll find out most terms and phrases used in IMJ Rules are more "English like" than those used in other rulebooks or articles about mahjong.)

- There has never been a "unified" set of terms and phrases for the games of mahjong. Terms and phrases in the Chinese language are basically common and "unified". However, terms and phrases used outside the Chinese language domains are basically introduced by individual writers

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about mahjong in the writers' languages, and are therefore hardly common among individual articles or books. In addition, a term or phrase being common in one variant of mahjong may be "strange" in other variant. IMJ is simply part of the fact of the real world.

- IMJ uses terms and phrases of or closest to the English language, with the consideration that each term or phrase should: (a) have a similar pronunciation corresponding to spoken Chinese or (b) have a closer meaning of the English words used. For instant, the mahjong playing pieces are called "PAI" in the Chinese language. In IMJ the playing pieces are called "Pie" or "Pies", which includes *both* "tiles" and "cards" of the game.
- In the Chinese language, "PAI" refers commonly to the "playing pieces", *not* specifically to the "tiles" or "cards". Where necessary, you must specify either "tile PAI" or "card PAI". This similar philosophy is used in the selection of English words for use in the IMJ Rules, allowing the closest possible reflection of the true spirit and completeness of the original game.

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- In the 1920's when mahjong was first introduced to places outside China, readers did not have any problem accepting the "new" terms and phrases used by the writers in their own languages, mainly because all readers were "new players". Today, IMJ is targeting a large population of "new players" to the game of mahjong, therefore "UNIQUENESS" is important and vital to its long-term developments.
- For new players and existing players alike, terms and phrases in existing English words could mean easier to learn and to memorize. Games can then be processed in a sense closer to the Chinese original games, too!
- Once products and services related to IMJ developments are being promoted and marketed worldwide, it is expected that all terms and phrases referred to in the IMJ Rules and in other related documentation may become common and "unified", just like those used in the Chinese language.

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C. COMPARISON BETWEEN IMJ AND TRADITIONAL CANTONESE MAHJONG

International Mahjong Rules is claimed to be the "World's *FIRST* comprehensive set of written rules of mahjong, governing every step of play." The *First* is for both "comprehensive" and "written", and it really governs "every step of play". Since International Mahjong ("IMJ") was developed based on the custom and playing practice of Cantonese Mahjong, and since there was no comprehensive written rules of Cantonese Mahjong prior to the IMJ Rules, it was necessary for the IMJ Rules to define or modify some grey areas of play. Following is a list of material variations between IMJ and traditional Cantonese Mahjong:

1. The Symbols - IMJ has a new set of symbols (images of playing pieces) which were created for the purposes of easy learning by people not used to Chinese words, and for the purposes of making IMJ a worldwide game. However, IMJ Rules and all traditional mahjong games are fully compatible.

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You may apply IMJ Rules to games played with any existing mahjong playing pieces and facilities. Consider IMJ Rules the only standard rules of your mahjong games, and you'll find it especially easy to play mahjong games with people from other parts of the world!

2. The Poles - In traditional mahjong these Poles are called "The Winds" (equivalent to the "compass directions"), i.e., East, South, West and North. However, in mahjong these directions are counted anti-clockwise, thus contradictory to the compass directions. The Poles are counted with numbers, i.e., 1 Pole, 2 Pole, 3 Pole and 4 Pole, and are used with the intention of substituting the abnormal directions of East, South, West and North in mahjong games.

3. The Break - A Break is a completion of four Rounds (Art. 5.8). In Cantonese Mahjong there was originally no such a term as "a Break", therefore, the term of "four Rounds" or its multiplied number of Rounds may also be used.

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4. The Heaven may be won by players other than the Jonga - It is a grey area whether a player (other than the Jonga) may win before the Jonga discards his first Pie. Art. 25.1 provides a ruling.

5. Can one win in a Game with too many or too few of Pies in hand? It is also a grey area whether a player is allowed to win on the Seven Flowers or the Eight Flowers, while he has too many or too few of Pies in his hand. Both Articles 25.4 and 25.5 provide a "second life" chance to a player who is in possession of too many or too few of Pies in hand.

6. The Kong To Fourth - Some say that the Kong To Fourth (Art. 25.6) is a Winning Hand that is almost impossible to happen, and is therefore superfluous. The inclusion of this winning pattern in IMJ Rules is to provide a "spirit" to the game that there is always the "highest goal" any player is yet to achieve! Note that when winning on Kong To Fourth in IMJ, the winning player is not required to possess a pair of Eyes. In the future in an

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open or public IMJ tournament, the one who wins on the Kong To Fourth would certainly write a world record!

7. "The Chucker pays for all" was a modified rule that was readily common in early 1990's (see Art. 5.20 for definitions of "Chucker" and "to chuck"). The rule required that the Chucker should pay his share (full share), PLUS shares of the other two players (half share each), to the winning player. In IMJ, this rule was further modified to become "The Chucker pays his share only". Since the concept of both modified rules was to provide a relief to the two "innocent" players who did not chuck, it should neither increase the burden of the Chucker, nor maintain the winning player's receivables at the level of the "old" rule. Therefore, the Chucker should be required to pay only his share to the winning player, not the shares of the other players. Art. 30.3(2) provides a logical ruling related to this concept.

8. The Alert and Bound To Lose - Since the Chucker is always required to pay his own share of scores only, the amount the winning player receives

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will be the same whether he wins on a regular discard or wins on a discard when the "9 Piece Alert" or other forms of Alert are in effect. Therefore, the "Bound To Lose" penalty becomes meaningless when a player chucked whenever an Alert is in effect. On the other hand, when the winning player selfmakes while his Alert is in effect, he will receive scores from all three players (Art. 30.3(1)). If a player has assisted the winning player to achieve the goal of higher rank while the Alert is in effect, the one who has assisted deserves a penalty and shall pay for all - Refer to penalty clauses of Articles 33.1 through 33.3 for full details.

9. The Charged Hand - The paying of scores related to a Charged Hand (Art. 33.4) is clearly defined as a penalty, and must be paid to *each of the other three players*. Since it is not an award of scores due to the effort of the winning player, none of the paying patterns (or reverse) of Art. 30.3 shall apply. Note also that a *true* Win may further be declared after a Charged Hand - Refer to Art. 34.7.

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10. A new Standard Scoring Chart (Art. 30.1) is adopted effective with the rule version 05.01.2001. With the new Standard Scoring Chart, number of scores awarded to a winning hand is easier to calculate (and to memorize, too). It also provides better balance, in the author's opinion, between the difficulty and award of those winning hands in the higher-ranking range.

D. YOUR NEW ACHIEVEMENTS IN LIFE!

You Have The Questions. We Have The Answers!

If you are new to mahjong and want to learn mahjong in its fullness (the complete rules, the play; not the history of the game), International Mahjong Rules is for you! International Mahjong Rules lists ALL rules that you need to play the game with. In addition, rules are listed in the flow of play, allowing new players to learn and start playing the game step-by-step. More importantly, whenever you have questions about rules, you'll find answers based on the written rules that are all covered in just one rulebook!

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If you are experienced player, you'll find International Mahjong Rules familiar, perhaps, very familiar! International Mahjong Rules is a complete set of written rules of Cantonese Mahjong, with some modifications and verifications to eliminate any grey areas of play. If you have ever encountered any problems or disputes about any ruling of play, or if you are asked to teach someone to learn to play mahjong, International Mahjong Rules is surely the complete rulebook you can refer to!

Throughout the IMJ Rules you will find that each term is so precisely defined you can hardly find any question about rule that IMJ Rules could not answer. If you have been hesitating about learning the game of mahjong, or are not satisfied with the results with the type of mahjong you are currently playing, IMJ is able to bring you new achievements in life!

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Your New Achievements In Life!

Play mahjong with a goal to meet the world! Whether you have been hesitating about the game or you are experienced in a specific style, start playing by International Mahjong Rules today and soon you'll reach your new achievements in life! In particular, you'll find these unique features in International Mahjong ("IMJ"):

- The rule set is in writing and is comprehensive, all by one rulebook.
- IMJ is similar to Cantonese Mahjong, one of world's most popular mahjong styles. If you learn and are familiar with IMJ, you'll be able to play with most people around the world.
- Learning is easy. The rulebook is written in English and all rules are listed in the order of the flow of play. New players can learn the game step-by-step, and in its fullness.
- Teaching is easy, too! IMJ Rules is authentic, comprehensive and full, all by itself. It will provide the answers related to any questions of play,

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whenever you are asked.

- Compatibility. Players playing other variants of mahjong can play mahjong by IMJ Rules without the need to change any existing facilities (all existing mahjong tiles, table, dice, chips, etc., can still be used to play IMJ).
- Non gambling nature. International Mahjong has been designed with an essence that it can still be entertaining and exciting without the nature of gambling, making it a game that is suitable for all ages. With IMJ, you don't worry about how much money you would lose. Instead, you worry about how high the scores you could get, in your lifetime!

EasyPlay - Learn Mahjong Step-By-Step By The IMJ Rules

International Mahjong Rules ("IMJ Rules") is the fundamental part of the IMJ developments. With the IMJ Rules, you can:

- learn the game of mahjong in its fullness, all by one rulebook;

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- play with people from other parts of the world with mutual understanding, by one rule set; and
- be well prepared for the future of the game of mahjong!

You can learn to play International Mahjong by just referring to the rulebook. All rules are listed in the order of the flow of play. The following is a list of the chapters of the rules, with brief descriptions of the contents of individual chapters. Once you have four players who are ready to start learning the game, each player should first read through the rules once, and in a gathering discuss among yourselves any portions of the rules that are not understood. Once you have all instruments and facilities ready (refer to "Play With A Goal To Meet The World!" next), you all may start playing International Mahjong the very first time, step-by-step, by referring to Chapter Three and onward.

Chapter One: General Terms

This chapter deals with the coverage of game rules (i.e., "jurisdiction" in the

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world of mahjong game) and excludes any "rules" that are not mentioned in this exclusive rule set.

Chapter Two: Definitions

This chapter identifies all mahjong playing pieces, defines all moves of play and other instruments and accessories that are used in the game. Memorize the names, terms and phrases and understand their meanings.

Chapter Three: Starting Procedures

This chapter tells you how to proceed when four players are ready to start playing at the game table.

Chapter Four: Dealing of Pies

This chapter shows you in details, how the Pies (mahjong tiles or mahjong cards) are being shuffled, stacked into columns and walls, how the dice are cast and how Pies are being delivered to players (and who is the first to receive it).

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Chapter Five: Procedures Leading to Winning

This chapter stipulates in clear details what you should, can and cannot do after the Pies have been dealt (delivered) to you. It shows you without any uncertainty how a player can bang, kong, seam or draw a Pie, or declare Win.

Chapter Six: The Forms and the Scoring of Winning Hands

This chapter lists all "Special Winning Hands" recognized under the IMJ rule system, and all "Award Patterns" that would add awards to a winning hand. An "IMJ Check List" is provided at the end of the rulebook to help you easily determine the Rank of a winning hand.

Chapter Seven: Scoring Chart and the Settlement of a Winning Hand

This chapter stipulates that only one player can win in each Game and who has the right to win in case more than one player has declared Win. It also sets the number of scores payable depending on how the Pie causing the

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Win is obtained.

Chapter Eight: Restrictions and Penalties

You'll find detailed definitions of certain restrictive situations and how penalties are applied if a player is found not complying these terms.

Chapter Nine: Rules Adopted to Mahjong Cards

This chapter deals with games played with the use of mahjong cards. In particular, it provides details how Pies (cards) are being dealt and handles situations where shortage or excess is found.

Play With A Goal To Meet The World!

Start playing mahjong by International Mahjong Rules today and soon you'll find yourself the ability of meeting players around the world, all with the same understanding of rules and of the game.

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Organize games from within your own proximity, ask your relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours and anyone you know if they would like to form a mahjong group and play regularly (or occasionally). Tell them to visit the IMJ Official Website and view IMJ Rules online and get familiarized with the game rules. Use your existing mahjong facilities if you have, or that available from the public, and start having fun!

The following are some suggestions on how you could organize your games:

EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES OF YOUR OWN

(1) The following items are necessary to start your mahjong group: Mahjong set (tiles or cards); Game table; Copies of rules or rulebook to be passed among players of the group; Chips; Record of events and scores; Record of expenses and contributions (where applicable).

(2) Equip yourself at your own costs and keep all facilities to yourself

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forever, OR discuss with your group members to see if they'd like to share the costs for all equipment and facilities.

(3) Decide on some "group rules":

- How often shall the group meet?
- Where to meet?
- How costs/expenses are shared?
- How and by whom shall the records of accounts be kept?

(Hints: Meet once a week or once a month. Choose the home of members, in turn, for the gatherings. Play 3~4 hours in a no-work afternoon then eat out after the event! Each player (and visitor as well) pays a sum to cover costs/expenses of all refreshments and the dinner. Set a prize: The player who gets the highest scores in the event gets his share back. Keep the balance for the next event!)

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PLAY AT PUBLIC FACILITIES

(1) If allowed by laws, many Chinese restaurants in your local areas may offer "special packages" that allow your group to play mahjong in the restaurant and have dinner after the game, as long as your game does not involve gambling. The restaurants will provide you with mahjong facilities (tiles, chips, and game table with table lighting), and tea and food may also be served. After the game you shall have dinner in the restaurant. Call your local Chinese restaurants and find out if they offer this type of "special packages" and how much they charge it for.

(2) Your group of four players may play mahjong in the restaurant and save the cost for the facilities. Try several restaurants first and eventually choose a good one you are satisfied with (service and food quality, etc) and use the restaurant as the place for your regular gatherings.

(3) Members to fill one or two tables may join. Friends can also join the

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meeting and watch the game only without playing. Finally, those who stay and have the dinner shall share the costs.

(4) Play 3~4 hours in a no-work afternoon and gather as often as possible! Each player (and visitor as well) pays a sum to cover costs/expenses of all snacks and the dinner. Set a prize: The player who gets the highest scores in the event eats free!

E. IMJ INTO THE FUTURE

New Developments Of Mahjong Games

In the past, almost all publications on mahjong games did not provide a complete set of written rules, people therefore have to learn the game by practice and this has led to the creation of many variants of mahjong all over the world. This in effect has hindered mahjong from being developed as a worldwide game, a game that can be played by people around the

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world without the difficulties of mutual understanding. The variants of mahjong also create barriers which effectively scare new players from joining the games.

International Mahjong Rules is designed to eliminate such difficulties and barriers. Along with the comprehensive set of rules, International Mahjong can be further developed to become a worldwide game of mahjong. As part of the concepts of the IMJ developments:

- New comers can learn to play mahjong with a comprehensive rulebook, step-by-step and to its fullness.
- Players from different parts of the world can play together whenever they meet, by one common set of standardized rules, without the difficulties of mutual understanding.
- In time, international games can be organized and participated by people around the world, and records of scores and worldwide ranking of players can then be centrally maintained and internationally recognized.

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If properly promoted and developed, International Mahjong and related products and services may serve the needs of millions of new and existing mahjong players. An official web site has been set up to promote and develop IMJ into a worldwide game of mahjong. If you are interested in learning more about the progress of such development, please visit IMJ Official Website at www.imahjong.com for any updated information.

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SUMMARY OF CHANGES MADE TO PREVIOUS VERSION

Previous rule version: 05.00.1998

Current rule version: 05.01.2001

Effective date of changes: August 2001

Inquiry or suggestion on rule modifications: GENERAL@imahjong.com

1. Change of terms and phrases:

AWARDED FORMATS replaced by AWARD PATTERNS

CLEAR SAME replaced by PURE SAME

FORTUA replaced by FORTUNE

FULL SCORING SYSTEM replaced by SCORING CHART

GREAT POLES replaced by GREAT ALL POLES

GREAT YOUTHS replaced by GREAT ALL YOUTHS

JOH replaced by JOE

MELDED KONG replaced by MERGED KONG

OFF KONG replaced by UNFOLDED KONG

SEMI SCORING SYSTEM replaced by SCORING CHART

[View IMJ Rules Online - International Mahjong Rules - Version 05.01.2001](#)

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SOFT POLES replaced by SEMI ALL POLES
SOFT YOUTHS replaced by SEMI ALL YOUTHS
THIRTEEN YULS replaced by THIRTEEN YOGLES
YULS replaced by YOGLES

2. Rules modified:

- (a) Articles 5.15 through 5.22 were newly added, to included many terms and phrases to be part of the rule section.
- (b) Art. 7.2 was deleted (which dealt with the decision on which Scoring System to be adopted), as only one Scoring Chart (Art. 30.1) will be used in the new version. As a result, Articles 7.3 and 7.4 were both moved up one number, respectively.
- (c) Art. 23.4 was refined.
- (d) Art. 34 (leading message portion) was refined.
- (e) The awards of patterns Pure Same (Art. 26.5) and All Hugles (Art. 26.10) were reduced from 9 Folds to 6 Folds.
- (f) Minor changes of wordings or corrections were made throughout.