

## History of Mahjongg

1) Mahjongg, also known as mahjong, is a traditional Chinese game that dates back to the mid- to late 19th century in the provinces of China, where it quickly gained popularity for its **blend of skill, strategy, and chance**. By the early 20th century, mahjongg had spread across China and was eventually introduced to the United States and other countries, where it found a devoted international following.

The game is believed to have originated in China as a gambling game that became extremely popular **among men**. New variations of old games sprang up all the time. One such innovation was an old Chinese card game called **madiao**: instead of using cards, players substituted the cards with **ivory tiles**. The tiles made a clicking sound that reminded people of the noise **sparrows made as they twitter together**. In southern Chinese dialects, the word **sparrow** sounds like ma tsiang or ma chiang. Soon, the new game was called "**Sparrow**"- **Mahjongg** - and **pictures of sparrows** began appearing on some of the tiles. Players began using engraved bone and bamboo tiles instead of cards, which created the recognizable Mahjong tile set used today.

Originally played with sets of intricately decorated tiles, mahjongg became a social pastime, often associated with **gatherings** and **celebrations**. Over time, various regional and international rule sets developed, adding diversity to the ways the game is played today. In recent decades, digital versions of mahjongg have further expanded its reach, making it accessible to **new generations** of players around the world, popular with Americans from children to seniors.

By the late 1800s, Mahjong had spread widely across China. It was played in:


- ✧ homes
- ✧ tea houses
- ✧ gambling halls

Different regions created their own rule variations, something that still exists today.

Mahjong spread internationally and developed into different styles:

Each version has different rules, scoring systems, and strategies.

- ✧ Chinese Classical Mahjong Cantonese - Taiwanese
- ✧ Riichi Mahjong (Japan)
- ✧ Hong Kong Mahjong
- ✧ American Mah Jongg



## 2) Arrival in the United States (1920s)

Mahjong reached the United States around 1920, brought by travelers and businesspeople who had visited China.

A key figure in popularizing the game was **Joseph Park Babcock**, an American businessman who:

- ✧ simplified the rules
- ✧ published a rulebook called *Rules of Mah-Jongg*
- ✧ Mahjong quickly became a national craze in the 1920s. Sets were imported in huge numbers, and the game was played at parties and social clubs across the country.

## 3) American Mahjongg Develops (1930s) also known as Jewish Mahjongg

In 1937, a group of Jewish women in New York formed the National Mah Jongg League.

They created:

- ✧ the standard American rules \*
- ✧ the annual Mahjongg card used to determine winning hands

This version—American Mah Jongg—added:

- ✧ jokers
- ✧ specific hands on a card
- ✧ Charleston tile exchanges\*
- ✧ Today it remains especially popular in the United States, particularly in communities across places like New York and Florida. It is now very popular with many American ethnicities.
- ✧

## 4) Mahjong Today

Mahjong is now played:

- ✧ socially in homes and clubs\*
- ✧ competitively in tournaments
- ✧ online through apps and websites

It has also appeared in video games and pop culture, helping introduce the game to new generations.

## 5) Evolution of Mahjong Tiles

### Early Tiles (1800s China)

The earliest Mahjong sets from the Qing Dynasty were handmade and quite luxurious.

Tiles were made from:

- ✧ bamboo backs
- ✧ bone faces (often ox or cow bone)

They were carefully carved and painted by hand. Wealthy families sometimes had ivory sets stored in ornate wooden cases.

### 6) Original Tile Groups

The early tile sets already included many of the tiles we recognize today:

- ✧ Dots / Circles
- ✧ Bamboo
- ✧ Characters
- ✧ Winds (East, South, West, North)
- ✧ Dragons (Red, Green, White)

These symbols reflected Chinese culture, philosophy, and direction.

### 7) Decorative Sets (Early 1900s)

When Mahjong spread internationally in the 1920s, companies began producing beautiful export sets with:

- ✧ engraved tiles
- ✧ colored inks
- ✧ elaborate storage boxes
- ✧ racks and pushers

Many were exported through ports like Shanghai and sold in American department stores.

Collectors today still prize these early sets.

### 8) American Mahjong Tiles

American Mahjong added new elements not found in traditional Chinese Mahjong.

Key additions included:

- ✧ Joker tiles
- ✧ Flowers
- ✧ Season tiles

These additions came with the standardized rules created by the National Mah Jongg League in 1937.

Jokers especially changed the strategy of the game and became a signature feature of American Mah Jongg.

### 9) The Mahjongg Card (Unique to American Mahjongg)

Every year the National Mah Jongg League publishes a new official card. The card lists all the legal winning hands for that year according to NML.

### 10) Why It Changes Every Year

Changing the hands keeps the game:

- ✧ fresh
- ✧ challenging
- ✧ strategic

Players must adapt their strategies each year.

The card is released in April, and many Mahjongg groups hold “new card” parties to learn the new combinations.

### 11) Mahjongg & American Women (1930s–1950s)

Mahjongg became hugely popular among women in the United States.

In cities like New York City, groups of women began forming weekly Mahjongg games.

It became a social tradition that included:

- ✧ snacks and lunch
- ✧ conversation
- ✧ friendly competition

The game became especially associated with Jewish-American culture, where it became a staple of community and social life.

### 12) Mahjongg Today

Mahjongg is now played by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

Modern versions include:

- ✧ digital Mahjongg games
- ✧ international tournaments
- ✧ Mahjongg clubs and leagues

In recent years, Mahjongg has also seen a huge revival among younger players who love the design, strategy, and social aspect.

### 13) 10 Fascinating Mahjongg Facts

#### 1. Mahjongg Was Once Banned

After the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, the Chinese government discouraged Mahjongg because it was associated with gambling and capitalism.

Later, the game returned and is now widely played again across China.

#### 2. Mahjongg Was a 1920s Craze in America

When Mahjongg arrived in the United States in the early 1920s, it became a massive trend—similar to a modern viral game.

Stores across New York City sold out of Mahjongg sets almost overnight.

#### 3. Sets Were Extremely Valuable

Early Mahjongg sets made in Shanghai could cost a small fortune because they were made

from bone, bamboo, and sometimes ivory.

Collectors today can pay thousands of dollars for antique sets.

#### 4. The Sound of Mahjong Has a Name

The clicking sound of the tiles being shuffled is called “washing the tiles.”

Players mix the tiles face down on the table before building the walls.

#### 5. Mahjong Means “Sparrow”

The word Mahjong roughly translates to “sparrow.”

Some say the chattering sound of the tiles resembles sparrows chirping.

#### 6. Jokers Are Only in American Mahjongg

Traditional Chinese Mahjong does not include Jokers.

They were introduced in the American version when the National Mah Jongg League standardized the rules in 1937.

#### 7. The Annual Card Is Unique

American Mah Jongg players use a yearly strategy card issued by the National Mah Jongg League.

No other major Mahjongg version uses this system.

#### 8. Mahjong Was Played by Celebrities

Many famous people loved Mahjong, including:

- ✧ Bette Davis
- ✧ Lauren Bacall

It was a fashionable Hollywood pastime during the 1930s and 1940s.

Today, 2026 many celebrities have adopted the game

- ✧ Sarah Jessica Parker
- ✧ Jenna Bush Hager
- ✧ Savannah Guthrie
- ✧ Julia Roberts

#### 9. There Are Over 40 Mahjong Variations

Different countries created their own rule sets, including:

- ✧ Riichi Mahjong (Japan)
- ✧ Hong Kong Mahjong
- ✧ American Mah Jongg

Each version has different scoring and strategy.

#### 10. Mahjong Is Considered a Brain Game

Mahjong involves:

- ✧ memory
- ✧ probability
- ✧ pattern recognition
- ✧ strategy

Studies have suggested the game may help maintain cognitive activity as people age.

#### 14) The 8 Luckiest Mahjong Tiles

In many traditions, certain tiles are thought to bring good luck or strong hands.

##### Red Dragon

The Red Dragon symbolizes good fortune, happiness, and prosperity.

Players often feel lucky drawing this tile because it helps complete many hands in American Mahjong.

##### Green Dragon

The Green Dragon represents growth and renewal.

In some interpretations it also symbolizes wealth and success.

##### White Dragon

The White Dragon symbolizes purity and new beginnings.

Its simple blank design stands for an open opportunity.

##### East Wind

The East Wind is traditionally considered the most powerful wind because the round starts with the East player.

##### Flower Tiles

Flowers are often considered lucky because they give bonus points in many versions of Mahjong.

They symbolize beauty, prosperity, and the seasons of life.

##### Joker (American Mahjongg)

The Joker is the ultimate wild card in American Mah Jongg.

It became popular after the rules were standardized by the National Mah Jongg League in 1937, and today it's often the most exciting tile to draw.

##### #1 Bamboo (The Bird Tile)

The 1 Bamboo tile is often illustrated with a peacock or sparrow.

Because the word Mahjong means sparrow, some players consider this tile symbolic of the game itself.


##### The Last Tile

In many Mahjong traditions, drawing the last tile in the wall to complete Mahjong is considered extremely lucky.

#### 15) The 1920s Mahjong Craze in America

When Mahjong first arrived in the United States around 1920, it became one of the biggest game crazes in American history.

An American businessman named Joseph Park Babcock helped introduce the game after working in Shanghai. He simplified the rules and published a guidebook so Americans could learn the game easily.



Within just a few years:

- ✧ Department stores were selling out of Mahjong sets
- ✧ Clubs were forming across the country
- ✧ Newspapers were publishing Mahjong strategy columns
- ✧ Parties were organized specifically to play Mahjong

In cities like New York City, Mahjong sets became one of the most popular imported items.

### 16) Why Mahjong Became a Women's Social Game

In the 1930s, Mahjong became especially popular among women because it was:

- ✧ social
- ✧ strategic
- ✧ perfect for small groups

Many women began hosting weekly Mahjong afternoons, often with lunch or dessert.

In 1937, the National Mah Jongg League formed and created the official Mahjong card, which standardized American Mah Jongg.

That tradition still continues today.

Many Mahjong groups still gather weekly—just like they did almost 90 years ago.

### 17) A Fun Mahjong Tradition

When the new Mahjong card is released each spring, groups often celebrate with:

- ✧ New Card Parties
- ✧ learning the new hands together
- ✧ themed Mahjong events

It's one of the reasons Mahjong remains such a community game.

### 18) Short History of Mahjong

Mahjong is a tile-based game that originated in China in the 1800s during the Qing Dynasty. The game likely developed from earlier Chinese card games and became popular in the region around Shanghai. It was traditionally played in homes, tea houses, and social gatherings.

Mahjong was introduced to the United States in the early 1920s and quickly became a national craze. An American businessman, Joseph Park Babcock, helped popularize the game by publishing simplified rules for Western players.

In 1937, the National Mah Jongg League was formed in New York and created the standardized version known as American Mah Jongg, adding a second g, introducing features like the annual card of winning hands and the use of joker tiles.

Today, Mahjongg is played around the world in many variations and remains a beloved game known for its **strategy, skill, and social connection**.

## 19) 25 funny mahjong sayings

1. Mahjong is cheaper than therapy.
2. Just one more game... I promise.
3. Shhh... I'm counting tiles.
4. Eat. Sleep. Mahjong. Repeat.
5. Mahjong is my happy place.
6. Friends who Mahjong together stay together.
7. Mahjong first, chores later.
8. Tile happens.
9. Keep calm and Mahjong on.
10. Mahjong: where strategy meets gossip.
11. I came. I saw. I Mahjongged.
12. Mahjong: the original mind game.
13. Warning: Mahjong player at the table.
14. Mahjong is my cardio.
15. Mahjong hair, don't care.
16. Mahjong queens rule the table.
17. Powered by coffee and Mahjong.
18. Mahjong – the four-player puzzle.
19. My Mahjong face is on.
20. Born to Mahjong.
21. Mahjong is always a good idea.
22. Mahjong friends are the best friends.
23. Mahjong: serious fun.
24. Life is better with Mahjong.
25. One more tile and I win!

Even funnyman David Letterman caught Mah Jongg fever with his top ten of Mahjongg:

#10 I can't pick a tile to save my life!

#9 Is this the one bam?

#8 Worst Charleston ever!

#7 Is it my tuen?

#6 Oh my God, I really hate this game!

#5 I so miss that hand from last year

#4 Can I steal on this pass?

#3 I've totally gone the wrong way!

#2 Same tiles keep going around and around

And the number one thing you're likely to hear at your next Mah Jongg game:

Does this set have ANY jokers????