

Mah-Jongg Encyclopedia Article

Mah-Jongg

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Mah-Jongg

Mah-Jongg, an ancient gambling game which originated among the Chinese ruling class over 2000 years ago, gained widespread popularity in the United States from the 1930s, particularly as a leisure pastime among American Jewish women. Recognized the world over by its ritualized play and the satisfying clack of tile against tile, Mah-Jongg is a complicated four-handed game, whose rules are similar to the card game rummy. It is played with 152 tiles, colorfully painted with three suits (bamboo, characters, and dots), four winds, eight flowers, and three dragons. The popularity of the game spread through all classes in China and soon throughout Asia and the world, with different versions evolving in Japan, the Philippines, Europe, and the United States. Since 1937, The National Mah-Jongg League has governed the rules of the American game, although enthusiasm for Mah-Jongg faded at the end of the 1960s, due in part to the increasing popularity of contract bridge. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, the game began to enjoy something of a renaissance as nostalgic baby-boomers sought to revive the once-favored social pastime of their mothers.

Further Reading:

Greene, Susan. *The Mah-Jongg Group*. Port Washington, New York, Ashley Books, 1974.

Millington, A. D. *The Complete Book of Mah-Jongg*. London, A.Barker, 1977.

Shiu, Priscilla. *The Mystic Mah-Jongg Game*. New York, Exposition Press, 1973.