



Observer report for Kuni Taikai 2016, Warsaw (Riichi, MERS 2)

Observer: Ian Fraser

Date: November 19th – 20th 2016

Place: Asia and Pacific Museum, Warsaw, Poland

Website or other source(s) of information: Information on the website of Polska Liga Mahjonga: concerning timing outline, registration detail and participant list.

Participants: 36 players. Poland 28, UK 4, Czech Rep. 2, Sweden 1, Ukraine 1.

Playing schedule: 2 days, 7 rounds (4+3) of 90 minutes

Location: Excellent, well-lit playing conditions. Room size ideal for the number of participants



Equipment: A varied assortment of sets and mats was used – all of good quality. Paper scoring used.

Refereeing: Szymon Lasota and Dominik Kolenda were playing referees and administrators.

Catering: Water provided and some snack bars on both days. No tea/coffee. Good quality hot lunch in adjacent facility on Saturday. No food on Sunday.

Prizes: Medals and prizes (board games) for top four ranked players. Consolation prize for the unluckiest player of the weekend.

Information / communication during the tournament: Computer timer projected onto a large screen set at 90 mins. A verbal announcement was made at the 75 minute point in each session. Score/ranking information available/projected only at the end of Day 1 (Hanchan 4) and at the end of the 6th (with 15 min delay) and 7th (final) Hanchan. This information was also published overnight on PLM Facebook page. Some difficulty was encountered in accessing this via mobile devices.

Complaints: * Too numerous to mention about players' bad luck! * Just a couple of whimpers concerning the absence of food on Sunday, although given the pricing of the tournament at a maximum of €10, from a financial standpoint this could certainly not be said to be unreasonable. * Lack of advanced warning of a non-standard scoring system

Possible Learning Points: * Earlier opening of website would assist distant travellers in considering logistical arrangements (and their participation in experimental formats?). * Not all players were at ease in using the paper scoring provided – add in a 'Riichi bank' column and some reference to repeat counters? * It would be wisest to brief any approved deviation from EMA norms/expectations well in advance of the tournament. (see under for comments in **Addendum Scoring System**) * Use of non-playing administrator to improve the provision of results information.

Sessions: The FFF criteria (fair-play, friendly and fun) were comfortably met.

Additional Entertainment was provided on Saturday after play, in the form of a Japanese Tea Ceremony attended by many of the participants. It explained and demonstrated the significance of the activity in the context of Japanese culture.

Overall Conclusion: As always, a most pleasant weekend experience with mahjong friends

Addendum - Scoring System

The organisers briefed a change in scoring system at the beginning of the tournament supported by the rationale that:

- a) its impact was more reflective of skill than luck
- b) the system had been regularly used in Poland for many years.
- c) the topic of tournament formats had been raised but not discussed at the recent EMA meeting held at ERMC2016

Instead of the conventional (recently revised) EMA standard of cumulative tenbo including Uma of +/- 15k/5k, the system operated in the following way:

1. Table points of 10, 7, 4 and 1 were awarded based on table placing and the aggregate of these points was to become the primary determinant of the tournament outcome.
2. The EMA Uma was applied to final scores at each table (assumed to be for 'compliance' reasons only, since it was then removed again at a later stage of calculation).
3. Tenbo aggregate scores (i.e. the sum of all variances v. zero, and by now without EMA Uma) were first multiplied by 0.0001 (i.e. 1/10,000th) and the result added to/subtracted from the table points to provide a final score for each player.

The approach had not only its supporters, and its detractors, but also its 'totally neutrals', who commented that they saw little difference in the validity of any of the principal scoring systems – specifically including the two under discussion – 'The PTP (Polish 10/7/4/1 Table Points) version, and the official EMA system.

The PTP system's detractors expounded the view that de facto the UMA had been increased from 15/5k (a difference of 10k between placements) effectively to a difference of 30k between placements, since the cumulated tenbo scores made negligible impact after the application of a 0.0001 multiplication – and that therefore the entire contest became one based on placement or, otherwise expressed, on a significantly enlarged 'Uma'! They further argued that this led to a greatly increased emphasis on open tanyao as an offensive strategy, adducing anecdotal evidence to support this view. This group also argued that there was a collateral effect on penalties. Taking Chombo as the example, the charge was reduced from the equivalent of two table places (20k v 10k per EMA place) to less than one (20k v 30k per PTP place).

In practice there were only relatively minor, albeit keenly felt variations in the final placings, whether using the PTP system or the cumulative score approach. The most successful players, those with high tenbo count were, predictably enough, at the top of the final standings. The least successful, i.e. those with large negative tenbo count were not!

The unifying factor, however, was the view that any such changes/experiments/deviations/improvements (delete according to taste) should be broadcast well in advance of, rather than on the day of any tournament.

Much ado about nothing? That would certainly be the position of the 'totally neutrals', if not the others.