

TICHU

for 3 - 10 players aged 10 and up; length 30 - 90 minutes.

*From the booklet by Fata Morgana, translated November, 1992 by A.G. Smith; revised in 1993 (and 2004 by fatamorgana)
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112 circus cards – 2 complete 56 card Tichu decks
rule booklet

The cards, with their four suits (Jade, Swords, Pagodas, Stars), each of 13 values, correspond to a “normal” bridge deck. The ace is the highest in each suit and the 2 is the lowest. The 10 ranks between the 9 and the jack, as in most card games. Four extra cards expand the deck to 56 cards: the Dragon, the Phoenix, the Hound, and the Hemp-Sparrow (or Mah Jong).

SOME SAY TICHU CANNOT BE EXPLAINED,

but must be experienced. If we believed that, there would be no rules with this game. So, we talked Mr Chuang (the man who taught us the game) into helping us. He drummed up some rules in the backroom of the souvenir shop of the Confucian temple. At first, he only allowed us to watch. Later, we played and the Chinese experts gave us good advice. We recommend this method of learning most heartily, if you can find a Chinese expert to teach you. Below, you will find rules and other comments for four “Tichu” games, depending on the number you choose to play with.

TICHU NANKING (4 PLAYERS)

The game is played by pairs of two partners with the players of each team sitting opposite one another. During the game, the partners try to help each other score points and gain the lead. The game is played over several hands with the goal to be the first team to score a total of 1000 points.







Before the game starts, the players choose a starting player who shuffles the cards for the first hand and offers the shuffled deck to the player on his left, who may cut the deck. In subsequent hands, the winner of the previous hand shuffles the deck and offers it to be cut.

The player then places the deck face down in the middle of the table. The Chinese do not deal cards, but rather, they take them. The dealer starts by taking the top-most card. Then, all take turns, in counter-clockwise order, taking one card at a time, until the deck is exhausted and each player holds a fan of 14 cards in his hand. As in most card games, the players keep their cards secret from each other, including their partners.



Next, the players each **push** 3 cards, 1 to each other player.

They push the cards face down. Once a player has pushed 3 cards, he may pick up the cards pushed to him, adding them to his fanned hand.

The player holding the Mah Jong begins by leading (playing face up on the table) any of the following combinations of cards from his hand:

-  a single card, for example: 4
-  a pair of cards of equal rank, for example: 8,8
-  a sequence of pairs of adjacent value, for example: J,J,Q,Q,K,K (the example is a sequence of three pairs. Other numbers of pairs are also allowed.)
-  a trio of cards of equal rank, for example: 2,2,2
-  a full house (trio + pair), for example: 5,5,5,9,9
-  a sequence of length at least 5, for example: 4,5,6,7,8,9

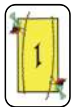
The next player (to the right - the Chinese play to the right, like the Swiss and the Hopi) now has the choice of




-  passing or
 -  playing a similar combination of higher value
- A single card can thus only be beaten by a single card of higher value, a sequence of two pairs only by a sequence of two higher pairs, a sequence of eight cards only by a higher sequence of exactly eight cards, a full house only by a higher full house (in full houses the value of the trio is what counts). Exception: Bombs (see below).

Play continues to the right. As soon as 3 players pass in turn order, the player who played the last (highest) combination gathers in the trick and leads a new combination. If this player has no cards left, he has “gone out” and the right to lead passes to his right-hand neighbor (passing further to the right if the latter has gone out as well).

THE SPECIAL CARDS

The **Mah Jong** is an interesting card of mixed reputation, with the following properties:



-  its owner starts the hand (but need not lead the Mah Jong).
-  the Mah Jong ranks as a 1 and is, therefore, the lowest card in the deck. As a one, it may be included in a suitable sequence (e.g. 1,2,3,4,5).
-  when a player plays the Mah Jong, he is allowed to wish for a certain rank (for example an 8 or an Ace, but not a special card). The next player who has a card of the desired rank, and can lawfully play it, must play it (possibly in a bomb! or rarely in a sequence). A player who does not hold or cannot play a card of the desired rank can play any lawful card or pass.

The wish remains in force until someone fulfils it.



The faithful **Hound** has no trick-taking power at all. It can only be played by leading it as a single card and it transfers the right to lead to the player's partner. If the player's partner has already gone out, the lead passes to the partner's right.



The ever-changing **Phoenix** is the most powerful card in Tichu. However, it counts minus 25 points. It can be played:



- ♣ as a joker - it can take the place of any normal card in a combination, but may not be used to make a bomb!
- ♣ as a single card. It's value is half a rank higher than the card it's played after. If an eight is the current highest card played, the Phoenix counts as 8.5, and can be beaten by a nine or higher. The Phoenix can beat an ace, but not the Dragon. If led, the Phoenix counts as 1.5.

The **Dragon** is the highest individual card and is worth 25 points.



When single cards have been played, it is higher, even than an ace or "ace and a half" (the Phoenix over an ace), and can itself only be beaten by a bomb. However: it cannot be part of a sequence.

If the noble Dragon **wins** a trick, he gives the trick (including its own 25 points) to the opponent of its holder's choice.

A **Bomb** is:

- ♣ a sequence of at least five consecutive cards in the same suit
- ♣ or all four cards of the same rank

Bombs can be played at any time, even out of turn, to take a trick. They beat anything, be it a single card or a combination. A higher bomb will beat a lower bomb, so a bomb can be played on a bomb. The rank of bombs is determined: (1) by the number of cards and (2) by the rank of the cards. A player can even lead a bomb when leading a new trick.

END OF A ROUND

The round ends immediately when only one player has cards left in his hand.

Then the tailender (the last player with any cards) hands over the cards remaining in his hand to his opponents and the tricks he won to the winner (the player who has gone out first in the hand). Next, the round is scored.

SCORING A ROUND

Players turn over their tricks and score:

- + 10 for each king and each ten
- + 5 for each five
- + 25 for the Dragon, and
- 25 for the Phoenix

There are, thus, 100 points for the whole hand, which are divided between the two teams.

If, however, the two players on one team achieve a double victory (being both first and second to run out of cards), the round ends immediately, the counting is skipped, and this team scores 200 points.

THE TICHU!

A Tichu is a way for players to score even more points, but with a risk.

Small Tichu

Each player may, until he plays his first card in a hand, call "small tichu". If he then wins the round (going out first) his team gets 100 extra points. If he does not go out first in the hand, his team loses 100 points.

Calling tichu is an individual undertaking. The partners cannot discuss it nor arrange it beforehand. Once called, of course, his partner may play to help him during the play of the cards, but they still cannot discuss strategy as they play. And, the tichant himself must go out first. If his partner goes out first, the team loses the 100 points! Also, the 100 points for tichu are scored independently of, and in addition to, the normal scoring of the hand. Also, a player can call "tichu" long before the player plays his first card. A call before the cards are pushed can be useful as a request for a partner to push over his best card.

Grand Tichu

Of course, where there is a small tichu, there must be a grand tichu, as well. An especially brave or desperate player may, before taking his ninth card from the deck at the beginning of the hand, call "grand tichu". If he then goes out first in the hand, his team scores 200 extra points. If not, his team loses 200 points, as in the rules for his smaller brother.

END OF THE GAME

The team which reaches (or exceeds) a total score of 1000 points at the end of a round wins the game. If both teams are over 1000, the team with the most points wins. In case of a tie, the game continues until a team has 1000 or more at the end of a round and there is no tie.

TACTICAL TIPS

For hints on tactics, it is best to ask a Chinese bus driver. Since such a person may not be available to all reading these rules, we offer the following from our small experience. Naturally, when placed beside the wisdom of our Chinese tutor these will taste like a dusty dog biscuit beside the highest culinary delights of Nanking.

- ♣ First, try to get rid of your rotten cards (low singletons and pairs). Also, be sparing with your aces, Dragons, and Bombs early in the hand. A player who has a singleton 4 after a dazzling display of power, was either the victim to an unexpected Bomb or does not understand the game yet.
- ♣ Keep an eye on the score. If the score is, for example 630:970, a grand tichu is begging to be called.

- Unreservedly support your partner's "tichu". When playing the Mah Jong, do not demand a card which might break up your partner's bomb and do not take his trick (this is certainly legal, but it is likely dangerous unless very low ranks are involved)
- Try to bring down an opponent's "tichu" when the tichant is the player to his left by making him take his tricks expensively.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can the Hound be bombed?

No, Bombs cannot be used to take the hound (and the right to lead). Bombs can only be played (even out of turn) on a card combination (or single card) on the table. You may bomb your own trick, if you want. When 3 players pass in turn order, any player may bomb before the trick is considered over.

When can a bomb be played on a Mah Jong?

The best way to answer is with an example. Here is an example. Player 1 leads the Mah Jong and wishes an 8. Between Player 1 and 2 (out of turn) all players (including players 1 and 2) may bomb (without fulfilling the wish).

When player 2 has a hand like 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,J,Q,K,K,K he may (before his turn) play the K-bomb. After all other players have passed, he must lead the next trick (and fulfill the wish) with his sequence. If another player had a sequence bomb with an 8 he'd have to play it over the K-bomb in his turn.

When must a player fulfill the wish of the Mah Jong?

In his ordinary turn only. A player does not need to fulfill a wish of the Mah Jong when playing a bomb out of turn. However, if he wins the trick with the bomb, he has to lead the next trick and must fulfill the wish then (see also the example above).

Does the Dragon give away a bombed trick?

No. As the Dragon did not win, he does not control the trick.

Do I have to use the Phoenix to fulfill a wish?

If a player does not have a card of the desired rank, he is not obliged to fulfill the wish even if he has the Phoenix (which is not considered a card of the desired rank, even though it can be a joker). The next player who has a card of the desired rank and can lawfully play it, must play it. Even if he has to play a bomb or a sequence of appropriate length with the Phoenix.

What happens to the last trick of the hand (when the 3rd player plays his last card(s))?

The trick is ended immediately, but is still given away if won by the Dragon.

What happens if two players want to play a bomb at the same time?

This happens very rarely and the solution of the problem is usually obvious.

However (if you need a rule): Tichu should not be a game of reaction, fast play should not give any advantage: bombs can be played before ordinary combinations and multiple bombs can be played in order of play. BUT: if a player after 5 seconds of thinking decides to play the Dragon, no other player can claim to play a bomb at the same time (and therefore before the dragon). If a player wants more time to think about his play, whether it is his turn or not, he must ask the other players to wait until his considerations are done.

What if two players of the same team call a Tichu at the same time?

This is a problem with online games, but very rare in normal games. In a tournament, I'd say that the second player, in turn order, may withdraw his Tichu if he wishes. However, do not allow players to claim having called a Tichu at the same time, unless it was really simultaneous. If there is a delay, the two Tichus stand, giving that team a serious problem.

Is 3,3,3,3,Phoenix a valid full house?

No. This case is not covered by our rules, but we require the owner of a bomb and the Phoenix to play his hand without this strange kind of full house.

Can I play a sequence-bomb as a normal sequence?

No. This is also not covered by the rules, but who wants to give preference to those lucky players always having bombs?

Can we play in clockwise order instead?

Yes, if you are more comfortable with clockwise order of play, please use that instead. Just change all the rules to switch the direction of play. If you are also more comfortable dealing the cards instead of taking them, then have the person who shuffles the cards also deal them.



If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please write us with them to RioGames@aol.com.

You can also visit our website at: www.riograndegames.com.



THREECHU (TICHU NANKING FOR 3 PLAYERS)

Shuffle and take cards as you would for a four player game. The shuffler plays with a dummy partner.

The shuffler may not declare Grand Tichu for either himself or the dummy.

Before any cards are pushed, the dealer may look at both his hand and the dummy's.

Pushing cards is the same as in a four player game, except that players only push cards to their opponents (two cards instead of three are pushed).

After cards are pushed, place the dummy face up on the table. The shuffler plays on the dummy's behalf. The dealer may declare Small Tichu on behalf of the dummy before he plays the first card from the dummy. The dummy does not have to fulfill any wish.

Scores are kept individually, even for the dummy. Each player in a partnership receives the same number of points that the team would receive if it were a four player game. The shuffle (and partnership with the dummy) passes to the left after each hand.

The game ends after a certain number of hands (divisible by three). We do not recommend a game to 1000 points, as the dummy player is likely to win such a game.

TICHU TIENTSIN (6 PLAYERS)

Tientsin (Tianjin) tichu is played six handed with two teams of three seated alternating around the table. We thank Mr Zhu, an exceptional tour guide, for this variant.

The rules of the game are the same as for the four handed version, except that:

Grand tichu must be announced before the seventh card is taken.

Each player pushes only two cards, to his own partners and gets one card back from each of them.

The hound transfers the right to lead to its holder's choice of partner.

In the scoring, the last loses not only his remaining cards but also all his tricks to the opposition; the fifth (the second to last to go out) gives his tricks to the winner of the round.

There is no special reward for a double victory, but a triple victory (one team gets rid of all its cards while all three opponents still hold cards) scores 300 points.

GRAND SEIGNEUR (5-12 PLAYERS)

Grand Seigneur is not a partnership game, but rather a wrangle between individualists in a hierarchical system. To be frank, we did not learn this version of the game in China, but in Europe in the mid 80s, from a Japanese student of Criminology at Aix-en-Provence.

A simplified version has appeared as "Career Poker" by Hexagames.

We recommend the use of two decks when playing Grand Seigneur with 7 or more players. As there are no partners, dogs are not allowed in the game. Before beginning, remove all Hounds from the deck(s). Also, remove the Mah Jong from the second deck. Also:

In a trick, the second Dragon played beats the first.

Only four cards of equal rank in different suits count as a 4-bomb.

The refinements of the game of Tichu are of no worth in the rough and tumble of Grand Seigneur. No one bothers about points. Everyone just wants to get rid of his cards as quickly as possible. No one will announce "tichu!", no one will lovingly gather up his trick and count - just away with the cards! Tricks are taken only for the paltry right to lead.

And, collecting the tricks, shuffling, giving out the cards before play begins (yes, in this variant, the cards are dealt!), and all other dirty work is the duty of the poorest of the poor - the Wretch.

The seating order is the Alpha and Omega of Grand Seigneur. At the head of the table, in the most comfortable armchair in the house, sits the Great Lord himself. On his left is the number two in the hierarchy, the Lord. Further to the left, in third place, sits the Squire. In fourth place the Burgher. Number five is the Pauper. In last place - so at the right of the Great Lord - sits the Wretch on a simple kitchen stool.

The number of places corresponds to the number taking part. If need be, obscure forms such as Grand Burgher or Petty Pauper should be added.

The first hand is a simple round of tichu, without any pushing of cards or any point values, in which everyone tries to get rid of his cards as quickly as possible - to be elected as the first Great Lord of the day. Whoever gets rid of his cards second becomes the first Lord and so on. The players then move into the seats to which they are entitled.

The social injustice of the game of Grand Seigneur appears in the pushing in the second hand:

the Wretch pushes his best three cards to the Great Lord (including special cards, which rank Dragon, Phoenix, Mah Jong.), the Pauper gives the Lord his two best cards. and the Burgher gives the Squire his best card.

When five play, one card less is pushed at each level.

The recipients simultaneously push the corresponding number of cards back, but presumably useless cards of their choice.

The Mah Jong begins, the uneven contest takes its course and the winner becomes Great Lord and the tailender becomes the Wretch. The players take their new-won places, provided that any positions have changed. The Great Lord is difficult to overthrow.

There is no "normal" objective in the game. It is all for fun. At any rate, the Great Lord should be able to enjoy unrestrictedly all privileges and comforts of the house (a cup of tea, a little dance performance, a parasol, choice of TV channel, even the desire to continue this lordly game for another round).

Howgh!

The above is an ethnological error by our rule-writer, from which we Editors distance ourselves.

The editor responds: ignoramuses! Error be blowed! The Chinese greeting "Knee Howgh" (or "ni hau") means "Person good" and is part of the fundamental vocabulary of all Chinese games, except these dumb editors at Fata Morgana).

The Editors distance themselves from this distancing of their distancing. Hair splitting in poor taste has no place in serious game rules.

