

Tichu - game rules

From the leaflet with Tichu cards by Fata Morgana

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We thank Mr Chuang for everything. Tour leader, German language section, Nanking (Nanjing). Highly recommended. He knows everything. Lengths of bridges, meaning of Buddhas, number of lorries in the province. On request also meaning of bridges, number of Buddhas and length of lorries. Some monument with five goats and a heap of 38 resistance fighters is the landmark of the town. Or perhaps only three goats and 58 fighters - anyway, there are basically more fighters than goats. And to tell the truth - that stuff about landmarks could also be said of Canton (Guangzhou) or Wuhan. But in Nanking there stood a thousand Buddha temple - the area most certainly has a landmark.

Yes, Mr Chuang is an outstanding tour guide. He casts his own Nanking aside into the Yang Tze and leads us into an unknown land: a rock concert, a psychiatric clinic and a private audience with magician. Only with the game was he not so outstanding. Naturally he knows them - he knows everything. Yet the strange card game which the people are playing everywhere in all the parks and squares seems to be frowned upon. Again and again he lures us away from the knots of people.

The game is not to be explained.

Tichu is not to be explained

(If we had believed that there would be no rules with this pack. But we brought Mr Chuang round. He drummed up a game in the backroom of the souvenir shop of the Confucian temple. At first we were only allowed to watch. Then we played and the Chinese experts gave us good advice. A first rate introduction to the game, by the way. We recommend this method of learning most warmly.)

Tichu Nanking (4 players)

The cards, with their four suits (Jade, Swords, Pagodas, Stars), each of 13 values, correspond to the western bridge pack. The Ace is the highest in each family, the 2 the lowest. The 10s rank between the 9 and the Jack, as in most British and most US games (**not** between the King and the Ace as in the American Pinochle and many continental European games). Four extra cards bring the pack up to 56 cards: the Dragon, the Phoenix, the Hound and the Hemp-Sparrow (or Mah Jong).

The two partners in the two Tichu-teams sit opposite one another and try to help each other obtain points and opportunities to lead.

Before the game starts the winner of the previous round shuffles the pack, allows it to be cut and places it in the middle of the table. The Chinese do not deal cards they **take** them.

The dealer himself takes the top card. Now all in turn take one card at a time until the stock is exhausted and everyone holds a fan of 14 cards in his hand.

Now comes the **pushing**. Everyone gives everyone else one card from his hand, face down, thus giving away three bad cards and getting three unknown cards in their place. Obviously a player can only pick up the new cards when he has made his own three discards.

The game is begun by the holder of the Mah Jong. The player on lead may lay any of the following combinations on the table:

- a single card, for example a 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 allowable. Translator)
- 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 in serie pass, the player who played the last (highest) combination gathers in the trick and leads a new one. If this happy player has no cards left, the right to lead passes to his right-hand neighbour (passing further to the right if the latter has also got no cards left).

Among the **special cards**

the **Mah Jong** comes first, an interesting card of mixed reputation, with the properties that:

- its owner **opens** the game but need not lead the Mah Jong.
- the Mah Jong **ranks as a 1** and is therefore the lowest card in the pack. As a one, it can be included in suitable sequences (e.g. 1,2,3,4,5).
- whoever plays the Mah Jong has a **free wish**, that is, 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!). Someone who does not hold or cannot play a card of the desired value can play any lawfull 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 partner. (If partner has already gone out, it passes to his right).

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

- be built into any combination as a wonderful **Joker** replacing any normal card between 2 and Ace. (but cannot make up a bomb)
- played as a single card. It's value is half a rank higher than the card it's played on. (If an eight is on the top 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 is count as 1.5.

The **Dragon** is the **highest individual card** and counts **25 points**. It beats - when individual cards have been played - even an Ace or "Ace and a half" (the Phoenix over an Ace) and can itself only be beaten by a bomb. However: it cannot take part in a sequence.

The noble Dragon **gives the trick away** if it wins (including its own 25 points) to an opponent of its holder's choice.

Bombs are

- sequences of at least five consecutive cards in the same suit or
 - all four cards in the same rank
- Bombs can be played at any moment (e.g. out of turn) to take a trick. They **beat anything**, be it a single card or a combination. The higher bombs beat the lower. (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 if leading a new trick.

The round ends

immediatly if only one player has cards left in his hand.

Then the tailender (the last player with any cards) hands over his remaining cards to his opponents, his own tricks to the winner (the player who first got rid of his cards).

Now count

- - 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 in the hole pack, which are divided between the two sides.

If however the two players on one side achieve a **double victory** (going out first and second) the counting is skipped and they score **200 points**.

Oh yes - Tichu is a sort of doubling.

Each player has the right, **until he plays his first card**, to announce "**small tichu**". If he then wins the round (being the first out of cards) his team gets 100 extra points, otherwise they lose 100 points.

Note that a tichu is an individual undertaking. It can neither be arranged beforehand with the partner nor does the partner's victory help. The tichant (don't you like the word? How about tichurent?) must haul his own chestnuts from the fire. The 100 points for tichu are scored independently of, and in addition to, the normal scoring of the game.

A "tichu" can also be announced long before the player plays his first card. A call before the cards are pushed can be useful as a request for partner to hand over his best card.

Where the small tichu is romping around, there must be a grand tichu somewhere. An especially brave or desperate player may, **before taking his ninth card**, announce grand tichu, worth 200 extra points.

The actual object of the game is to score 1000 points. If both teams get there in the same round, then whoever have most points win.

For hints on tactics it would be best to ask a Chinese bus driver. In case such a person should prove unobtainable, we will gladly pass on a few tips from our wretched experience, although when placed beside the wisdom of our chinese tutor this must look like a dusty dog-biscuit beside the highest culinary delights of Nanking (for example the inevitable Sea Cucumber Soup).

Good tichu players

- first try to get rid of their rotten cards (low singletons and pairs) and are sparing with their Aces, Dragons and bombs. Someone who is left, after a dazzling piece of power play, with a singleton four is either the poor victim of a bomb or has not yet fully grasped the game.
 - unreservedly support their partner's "tichu". When playing the Mah Jong, they do not demand any card which might break up their partner's bomb, even less often do they take his trick (this is certainly lawful, but it is considered unrefined - unless very low ranks are involved)
 - try to bring down an opponent's "tichu" by consistent play against the tichor (tichufant?), the player before him making him take his tricks very dearly
 - keep an eye on the score. If the score is 630:970, for example, a grand tichu is begging to be played.
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FAQ

(You can find a German FAQ [here](#) but hopefully we have translated everything here)

Can the Hound be bombed?

No, **You are not allowed to bomb the hound or the right to lead.** Bombs can only be played (even out of turn) onto a card combination (or single card) on the table.

You are allowed to bomb your own trick (if you really want to).

After 3 players have passed any player may bomb before the trick is gathered.

An advanced example for experts:

Player1 leads the Mah Jong and wishes an 8. Between Player1 and 2 (out of turn) all players (including players1 and 2) may bomb (without fulfilling the wish).

When player2 has a hand like 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,J,D,K,K,K,K he may (before it's 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.

Does the Dragon give away a bombed trick?

No.

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. (But usually he has to lead for the next trick after the bomb and fulfill the wish then.) (See also example above.)

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

Yes. 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.

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 a card of the desired rank.)

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

The trick is ended immediately, but still normally taken or given away 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, nobody can claim to play a bomb at the same time (and therefore before the dragon). Whoever needs time to think about the situation may ask the other players to wait until his considerations are fulfilled.

And: after a bomb, the player to the right of the bombing player has priority. But this is a very artificial rule, only used if after a bomb 2

players try to play a bomb at the same time...

The proper chain of events should be the following:

- A plays a (ordinary) combination.
- B can play a bomb or not / C can play a bomb or not / D can play a bomb or not / A can play a bomb or not
- B can play a (ordinary) combination or pass

- C can play a bomb or not / D can play a bomb or not / A can play a bomb or not / B can play a bomb or not
 - C can play a (ordinary) combination or pass
 - and so on.
- (of course you don't want to slow the gameflow with rounds of "I do not play a bomb" on every occasion where players could bomb. But you'd still want to respect this chain and give other players priority based on it.)

Can I bomb my own lead?

Yes. But other bombs have priority. Therefore I have to lead, wait a reasonable time (say: 2 seconds) and then bomb.

We are aware of the vagueness of "reasonable time". It must be long enough to give other players the chance to bomb, but fast enough to prevent the next player to play an ordinary combination. - It might be shorter if I lead a single card and a bit longer if I lead a bigger combination...

Anyway: it only matters in the case of another player having a bomb and only one more combination in hand. (In which case he should better have bombed earlier...)

What if two players of the same team announce a great Tichu exactly 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. (But I'd not allow players always to claim having announced a Tichu at the same time and then discussing who might have the better cards and who might withdraw his call.

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

No. In effect this case is not covered by our rules but we may expect 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 (also not covered by the rules but who wants to give preference to those lucky players always having bombs...)

When can I call a Grand Tichu

Anytime before you take your ninth card. This is a personal decision based on the actual score, the (maximal 8) cards in hand and the information whether any other player (partner) called Grand before). No discussion or other communication with your partner allowed. Not even to stare at your partner for 10 mins and then call a Grand if you did not succeed conjuring him to do so...

Finally there IS a turn order:

- (calls on 1-7 cards are possible)
 - A takes his 8th card (and may call, based on that card)
 - C takes his 8th card (and may call)
 - A (seeing that C did not call may call now) A takes his 9th card
 - C (knowing that A did not, may now call) takes his 9th card.
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Threechu (Tichu Nanking for 3 Players)

Deal the cards as you would for a four-player game. The dealer plays with a dummy partner.

The dealer may not declare Large Tichu for either himself or the dummy.

Before any cards are exchanged, the dealer may look at both his hand and the dummies. Pushing cards is the same as in a four-player game, except that you only exchange cards with the opponents.

After cards are exchanged, the dummy is placed face up on the table.

The dealer plays on the dummy's behalf. The dealer may declare Small Tichu on behalf of the dummy before the first card is played 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 deal (and partnership with the dummy) passes to the left after each hand.

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)

In Tientsin (Tianjin) tichu is played six-handed, two teams of three seated alternating round 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 his 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 last but one to go out) gives his tricks up 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)

To be frank, we did not learn this version of the game in China, but prosaically 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.

Dogs not Admitted - yes, being a partnercard the Hound is utterly unusable. Grand Seigneur is **not a partnership game**, but rather a wrangle between individualists in a hierarchical system.

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.

PS. Collecting in the tricks, shuffling, given out the cards before play begins 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 left 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** can be added in. Obviously women use the corresponding forms, such as **Wretch (f)**.

The first round 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 round.

- 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
- the Burgher gives the Squire his best.

If five play one card less is handed over at each level.

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

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

The **objective of the game** does not exist. 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)

The **use of two packs** is recommended when 7 or more play Grand Seigneur. The Hound and Mah Jong must be removed from the second pack. Extra rules

- the second Dragon played beats the first
- only four cards of equal rank in different suits count as a 4-bomb.

Howgh!

(An ethnological error by our rule-writer, from which we Editors distance ourselves)

(Ignoramuses! Error be blown! The Chinese greeting “Knee Howgh“ (or “ni hau“) means “Person good“ and is part of the fundamental vocabulary of all China hands 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)