

TICHU



We thank

Mr. Chuang, tour guide for the German speaking department in Nanjing, for everything. He is highly recommended as a guide, for he knows everything: length of bridges, the meaning of Buddha, the number of trucks in the province. On request, he also knows the meaning of bridges, number of Buddhas, and length of the trucks. He can tell you about the statue with 5 goats and a hill and 38 warriors that is the symbol for the city. Perhaps, the statue has 3 goats and 58 warriors, but, in any case, there are more warriors than goats. And truthfully said: the statue could also be the symbol for Guanshou or Wuhan. But, in Nanjing there are over 1000 Buddha temples; definitely, this area has its symbols. Yes, Mr. Chuang is a wonderful tour guide. He throws his Nanjing in the Yangtze and takes us into an unknown world of rock concerts, psychiatric clinics, and private meetings with magicians. But with the game he does not speak so easily. Of course, he knows it. He knows everything. But, about this game, that the people play in all the parks and all the meeting places, he will say nothing. It is not politically correct. He leads us away from the groups playing this game, saying this game cannot be explained. Tichu cannot be explained! ¹

The two partners

of both Tichu teams sit opposite each other at the table and try to help each other in the game when playing cards and scoring points.

¹ If we had believed that, there would be no rules for the game. We finally brought Mr. Chuang around. In a back room of a souvenir shop near a Confucius Temple, he gathered players for a game of Tichu. First, we were only allowed to watch. Then, we played, and the Chinese experts gave us good advice on playing the game. This was a great introduction to the game. We strongly recommend this method of learning the game.

The cards

are arranged in four families 🍀 jade ⚔️ sword 🗼 pagoda ★ star; each with thirteen values like a western bridge deck. The ace is the highest card in each family, and the 2 is the lowest. The 10 falls between the 9 and the jack.

Four special cards are added to make up the deck of 56 cards: the dragon, the phoenix, the dog, and the Mah Jong.

Before each round

the winner of the previous round shuffles the cards, offers the deck to an opponent, who may cut the deck, and then places the deck in the middle of the table. Chinese players do not deal cards - they take them! Thus, the players take turns taking the top-most card from the deck, one at a time, starting with the 'dealer', until the deck is exhausted and all players have 14 cards in their hands. Now the players push cards. Each player gives each of the other players a single face-down card from his hand. Thus, each player also receives 3 cards, but may not take them until he has given his 3 cards, pushing them toward each other player.

The game

begins with the player holding the Mah Jong.

He may play one of the following **combinations** on the table:



a **single card**



a **pair**



a **group of pairs** of neighboring values



a **trio**



a **fullhouse**
(trio+pair)



a **straight** of
minimum length five



The following player ² now has the choice

- to pass or
- to play the **same combination** with a higher value.

A single card can only be beaten by a higher single card, a group of two pairs may only be beaten by a group of two higher pairs, a straight of eight cards can only be beaten by a higher straight of eight cards, a full house can only be beaten by a higher full house (the value of the trio), and so on.

Exception: bombs (see below). The game continues to the player on the right. If a player passes, he may play when his turn next comes. When three players pass in turn, the player who played the last (highest) card combination takes the trick (all the cards) and leads a new card combination. If the player has no cards left in his hand, he is done for the round, and the player to his right continues the round. ³

Bombs are
all **four cards** of the
same value, or



straights of at least
five cards in the **same**
family (straight flush).



² To his right! The Han-Chinese, like the swiss and the Hopi, play to the right instead of the left.

³ If the next player also has no cards, the lead passes again to the right.

Bombs may be played outside of normal turn order to beat any cards. And bombs do beat everything: be it a single card or card combination. Bombs may be played against bombs, with higher bombs beating lower bombs. The number of cards in the bomb determines its value against other bombs (straight bombs beat four card bombs). After three players have passed any player may bomb before the trick is gathered. A player may also lead a bomb if he chooses.

Of the special cards

the **Mah Jong**, an interesting card of infamous reputation, comes first:

- Its owner begins the game (he need not play the Mah Jong, however).
- The Mah Jong has the value 1 and is, thereby, the lowest card in the game. The owner may play it as a “1” in a straight (e.g.. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).
- When the owner plays the Mah Jong, he gets a free request, meaning he may request a specific card value be played (e.g. an 8 or an ace, but no special card). The next player, who owns the requested card and may play it in a legal card combination, must play the card (if need be also as a bomb!). If a player does not have the requested card or cannot play it in a valid card combination, he may play any valid card combination or pass. The card request remains until it has been fulfilled by one player.

The faithful **dog** has no trick value and cannot be played in a trick. However, when a player leads a trick and plays the dog his partner immediately gets the right to lead for the next trick.

- If the players partner has no more cards, the leading right passes to the player on his partner’s right.



The **dragon** is the highest single card and counts 25 points in the scoring of the round. The dragon beats any single card, even an ace or ace $\frac{1}{2}$ (when a phoenix is played after an ace) and can only be beaten by a bomb. The dragon



- cannot be played as part of a straight.
- can cause a player to win a trick, but the player must give the cards in the trick, including the 25 point dragon, to one of the players on the opposing team.

The adaptable **phoenix** is the absolutely strongest Tichu card. But, it counts -25 points in the scoring of the round. The phoenix can



- be played as a single card. When played alone, its value is $\frac{1}{2}$ point higher than the previously played single card. For example, if an 8 is the current highest single card, the phoenix has a value of $8\frac{1}{2}$ and can be beaten by a 9 or higher. The phoenix can beat an ace, but not a dragon. When led as a single card, the phoenix has a value of $1\frac{1}{2}$.
- be played as a Joker (taking any value from 2 to ace) in any card combination (but cannot be used as a bomb).

The round ends

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

For Scoring

the player with cards left in his hand gives

- the cards remaining in his hand to the opposing team.
- his collected tricks to the winner of the round (the player who first ran out of cards).

Now count:



the fives are 5 points each



the tens are 10 points each



the kings are 10 points each



the dragon is 25 points



the phoenix is -25 points.

If the players on one team score a double win (they end the round as first and second to run out of cards), they immediately score 200 points for the round, ending the round! There is no further play nor further scoring for this round.

Announcing Tichu

Before playing his first card in the round, each player may declare **small tichu**. When a player declares small tichu and wins the round (being the first out of cards), his team scores an additional 100 points. However, if he does not win the round, his team loses 100 points.

Note:

- A Tichu is a personal choice. A player may not confer with his partner before declaring it, nor does a win of the round by his partner score the points. Of course, during play his partner may help, but the declarer of Tichu must win the round or his team loses the points.
- The 100 small tichu points are in addition to the normal scoring, are added or subtracted to the team's score, and have no other influence on the round.
- A player may declare small tichu any time before his first card play, even on another player's turn. A player may even declare small tichu before the players push cards at the beginning of the round, giving his partner a signal to push his best card to him. When a small tichu has been declared, can the large TICHU be far behind? Before a player takes his ninth card⁴, a very daring or desperate player may declare **large TICHU** ... with a value of 200.

⁴ compare the Chinese special way of 'dealing' cards.

The eventual goal

is 1000 points. If both teams reach this goal on the same round, the team wins that has the most points.

For tactical hints

we suggest you ask your Chinese bus driver. If you cannot find one who will help you, you may want to try our ineffective hints, some of which were gleaned from our Chinese teacher, but remember that these will compare to those from the Chinese bus driver as tasteless dog cakes do to fine Nanjing cuisine.⁵

Good Tichu players

- try to first play their low cards as single cards or pairs, saving their aces, dragons, and bombs for later. A player who, after a strong powerplay, has just a single 4 left in his hand does not understand the game or likely was the victim of a bomb!
- try to support their partner's declaration of small or large Tichu without restraint; a Mah Jong player should try to avoid naming cards his partner will use for a bomb; try to avoid taking a trick that his partner is winning, unless he is winning it at a low value.
- try to attack an opponent's small or large Tichu to cause it to fail, even if this means giving up high-valued tricks in the process.
- always have an eye on the score of the game so that with a score of 630:970, for example, a player may want to declare large TICHU.

⁵ e.g., the special sea cucumber soup.

FAQ

and their answers can be found on the internet at
<http://www.fatamorgana.ch/tichu/>

For people, who do not speak Chinese, here are the most important, in brief:

- No, - bombs beat all card combinations, but do not inhibit the right to lead the trick. The personal right to lead the trick is holy to the Chinese.
- No, also not the dog. - It is no common card, it quickly brings the leading right to a player's partner. When the dog is played, the change is immediate - there is no time for bombs!
- Yes, that's right. - You can bomb your own trick when you feel the need or urge.
- Yes - of course, when the 3rd player takes a trick with his last card, it still counts. And when it is taken with the dragon, it is given to a player on the other team before the round ends.
- No, it does not belong to him - the dragon does not give away a bombed trick.
- I know, what you think, and you are right ⁶ – the players in Munich deal the cards because taking them takes too long after they have had a few drinks!
- If a player did not fulfill the request of the Mah Jong player by mistake, the opposing team scores 200 points as a double win. Any declared Tichus are added and/or subtracted.

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⁶ Quote from Honolulu