

An Introduction to Sheng Ji (升级)

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1 Introduction

This document introduces the Chinese card game Sheng Ji (升级). It aims to give a standard set of rules for playing the game, noting variants where appropriate. Additionally, it aims to define the format of weekly Sheng Ji Nights at Colonial Club. The intended audience is anyone and everyone with an interest in playing the game, whether novice or expert, Chinese speaker or not, math major or econ major.¹

¹Please send all comments and corrections to the author at benzhang@princeton.edu. The author apologizes in advance for any errors, omissions, or flagrant misuse of Chinese characters.

2 Background

The card game Sheng Ji (升级) is played in China and many Chinese immigrant communities. In recent years, it has taken root on the campus of Princeton University, where students, having learned the game from their parents, have spread it to many comrades across campus, particularly in the Colonial eating club.

The name “Sheng Ji (升级)” actually refers to a family of closely-related card games.

- **Si Shi Fen (四十分)** (literally, “Forty Points”) is played with one deck and four people in fixed partnerships.
- **Sheng Ji (升级)** (literally, “Advance Level” or “Promote Level”) is played with two decks and four people in fixed partnerships. Other names include:
 - **Ba Shi Fen (八十分)** (literally, “Eighty Points”)
 - **Tuo La Ji (拖拉机)** (literally, “Tractor”)
- **Zhao Peng You (找朋友)** (literally, “Finding Friends”) is played with multiple decks and more than four people, with partnerships that change from hand to hand.

This document will focus on the most common variant, henceforth “Sheng Ji”, which is played with two decks and four players in fixed partnerships.

3 Sheng Ji Nights

[This section subject to change]

There will be both competitive and casual games. Competitive games will be played in the traditional Sheng Ji format, with two decks and four players in fixed partnerships, under the rules set forth in this document. Partners may be selected beforehand, but partnerships will be randomly assigned to each other. The games will be **rated**; that is, game results will be tracked to compute Elo ratings for players who participate. There will be a leader-board of individual players, updated over the course of the semester as more games are played.

Games will be started at an initial level of 8, so that they will actually finish in a reasonable amount of time.

4 A Note on Rules; Penalties

The following rules in Section 5 should be familiar to veterans of the game who have played before. However, this section, Section 4, is important and should be read by all players.

Concerning overriding a declaration of the trump suit: No player may directly override himself or herself. Overrides take effect instantly; a player may defend against an override only by showing a second card to pair his or her declared card *before* another player overrides. The full details are somewhat involved; see sections 5.4.5 and 5.5.5.

Any invalid play, such as not following suit or structure, must be immediately retracted and corrected during the current trick. If an error is not discovered until later, the offending player and his or her teammate automatically lose the hand.

Furthermore, **if a player leads an invalid combination of highest singles and pairs in a suit**, he or she must retract the play and lead the single or pair that can be beat; ie. is not the highest remaining single or pair. The player who holds the higher single or pair is not obligated to play it.

5 Rules of Play

Sheng Ji is a trick-taking card game played with four players and two decks of 54 cards (ie. the jokers are included). The players are divided into two teams of two, with teammates sitting across the table from each other. One team is denoted the **Declarers** (庄家), and the other team is denoted the **Opponents** (副家). The **Dealer** is one of the two players on the Declarer team. The game involves both a **trump rank** (one of the card ranks) and a **trump suit** (one of clubs, diamonds, hearts, or spades). In general, cards of either the trump rank or the trump suit (主牌) outrank all other cards (副牌), so they are nice to have. The Declarer/Dealer/Opponent labels, trump rank, and trump suit change with each hand.

5.1 Objective

The objective of the game is to advance past level Ace (hence the name Sheng Ji (升级) - “advance level”).² Each team has a **level**, and teammates advance levels together. The levels follow the usual card ranks in a 54-card deck: 2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-J-Q-K-A from low to high. In every hand, teams advance levels by winning points above certain thresholds, as explained later in Section 5.7, by taking tricks containing point cards.

5.2 Card Rankings and Points

The kings, 10s, and 5s are **point cards** (分牌). Kings and 10s are worth 10 points each, and 5s are worth 5 points each, for a total of 200 points in the deck. Winning tricks containing these point cards is the primary focus of the game.

The ranking of cards is as follows, from high to low (recall that two decks are used):

1. Big (colored) joker (大鬼/大王) (2)
2. Small (black) joker (小鬼/小王) (2)
3. Cards of the trump rank and trump suit (2)
4. Cards of the trump rank but not trump suit (6), all equal
5. Cards of the trump suit but not trump rank (24), from Ace to 2

²Advancing past level Ace may only be achieved while winning as Declarers at level Ace; in other words, Ace “must be played”. See Section 8.2.1.

6. Cards of neither the trump suit nor the trump rank (副牌) (24 per suit = 72), from Ace to 2

Cards of types 1-5 are all considered part of the **trump suit** (主牌), for a total of 36 trumps. If there is **no trump suit** (无主), only cards of types 1-4 are part of the trump suit (ie, only jokers and the trump rank, for a total of 12 trumps), and types 3 and 4 are necessarily equivalent as there is no trump suit.

As an example, suppose that the trump rank is 8 and the trump suit is hearts (♥). The ranking of cards is then:

1. Big joker
2. Small joker
3. 8♥
4. 8♣, 8♦, 8♠ (all equal)
5. A♥ - K♥ ... - 9♥ - 7♥ - ... - 2♥, in this order
6. A - K - ... - 9 - 7 - ... - 2 in ♣, ♦, and ♠. None of these three suits outrank each other, but there is an ordering within each suit.

5.3 Setup

At the start of the game, each team starts at an initial level which is set as desired - usually at 2 or 8. Higher initial levels will shorten the game, as fewer advances will have to be made to advance past level Ace.

5.4 Starting the First Hand

5.4.1 Determining the Trump Rank

For the very first hand, the Declarer, Dealer, and Opponent labels will be assigned during the deal, and the trump rank is set to the initial level.

5.4.2 Shuffle

One player thoroughly shuffles two decks of standard playing cards, including the jokers.

5.4.3 Determining the First Player to Draw

The first player to draw is assigned randomly. See Section 7.1 for one possible algorithm.

5.4.4 Drawing

The player to the left of the first player to draw cuts the deck, and the first player to draw begins the draw by drawing a card. The players take turns drawing a card in counter-clockwise order until **all but 8 cards** have been drawn (so the number of cards in each hand is 25). Players should sort their cards by suit, taking care to sort all trumps together. For example, if 8s and hearts are trumps, then 8♣, 8♦, 8♠, and jokers should be sorted together with the rest of the hearts.

5.4.5 Determining Declarers, Dealer, and the Trump Suit

During the draw, any player may become the Dealer (thus seizing the Declarer label for his or her team) by throwing a card of the trump rank onto the table (亮牌, 抢庄). Because it is advantageous to be the Declarer team, the first person to draw a card of the trump rank should do this. The suit of the card thrown is **declared** as the trump suit for the hand (叫主).

Another player may **override** this declaration by throwing down two identical cards of the trump rank in a different suit; this player becomes the new Dealer, and the trump suit is set to the suit of these two cards. Overriding with cards of the trump rank may only be done once and not by the original declarer. The only way for the original declarer to prevent being overridden is to **reinforce** his or her original declaration by throwing down the only other card in the deck that matches both in suit and rank, *before* another player overrides.

However, at any time, any player may throw down two identical jokers to declare **no trump suit** (无主), as long as he or she is not directly overriding himself or herself.³ Overriding with jokers may be done even after the original player has reinforced or has been overridden with cards of the trump rank. The player declaring no-trumps does NOT become the new Dealer (unless he or she is the first person to declare; ie. no cards of the trump rank have been declared).

To clarify, no player may directly override himself or herself. Overrides take effect instantly; a player may defend against an override only by showing a second card to pair his or her declared card *before* another player overrides.

If no player declares a trump suit or no-trumps during the draw, the trump suit is determined according to the rules in Section 7.2.

5.4.6 Kitty

The last 8 face-down cards are given to the Dealer. The Dealer adds these 8 cards to his or her hand and discards any 8 cards from his or her hand. These discarded cards are denoted the **kitty** (底牌) and are set aside for the duration of the hand. Point cards put in the kitty are subject to special rules regarding scoring; see Section 5.7.

³Therefore, the original declarer may override with jokers only if another player has overridden him or her with a pair of cards in the trump rank, and a player who overrides the original declarer with a pair of cards in the trump rank cannot later declare with jokers.

5.5 Starting Subsequent Hands

5.5.1 Determining the Declarers, Dealer, and Trump Rank

For every hand after the first, the Declarer label is assigned to the team who won the previous hand; see Section 5.7. If the Declarers in the previous hand won the previous hand, the Dealer role passes to the Dealer's partner and the Declarers remain Declarers; otherwise, the Dealer role passes to the Dealer's immediate right and the Declarers and Opponents switch labels. The trump rank is set to the Declarers' level.

5.5.2 Shuffle

One player thoroughly shuffles two decks of standard playing cards, including the jokers.

5.5.3 Determining the First Player to Draw

The Dealer is the first player to draw.

5.5.4 Drawing

The player to the left of the Dealer cuts the deck, and the Dealer begins the draw by drawing a card. The players take turns drawing a card in counter-clockwise order until **all but 8 cards** have been drawn (so the number of cards in each hand is 25). Players should sort their cards by suit, taking care to sort all trumps together. For example, if 8s and hearts are trumps, then 8♣, 8♦, 8♠, and jokers should be sorted together with the rest of the hearts.

5.5.5 Determining Declarers and Declaring the Trump Suit

During the draw, any player may declare the trump suit by throwing a card of the trump rank onto the table (亮牌, 抢庄). The suit of the card thrown is **declared** as the trump suit for the hand (叫主).

Another player may **override** this declaration by throwing down two identical cards of the trump rank in a different suit; the trump suit is then set to the suit of these two cards. Overriding with cards of the trump rank may only be done once and not by the original declarer. The only way for the original declarer to prevent being overridden is to **reinforce** his or her original declaration by throwing down the only other card in the deck that matches both in suit and rank, *before* another player overrides.

However, at any time, any player may throw down two identical jokers to declare **no trump suit** (无主), as long as he or she is not directly overriding himself or herself.⁴ Overriding with jokers may be done even after the original player has reinforced or has been overridden with cards of the trump rank.

⁴Therefore, the original declarer may override with jokers only if another player has overridden him or her with a pair of cards in the trump rank, and a player who overrides the original declarer with a pair of cards in the trump rank cannot later declare with jokers.

To clarify, no player may directly override himself or herself. Overrides take effect instantly; a player may defend against an override only by showing a second card to pair his or her declared card *before* another player overrides.

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5.6 Playing Tricks

Play revolves around playing tricks. A **trick** is defined as one rotation of play in which each player takes one turn in counterclockwise order to play a card or cards. In each trick, every player plays the same number of cards.

5.6.1 Leading

The Dealer starts the first trick. In subsequent tricks, the winner of the previous trick leads. Every lead must contain cards of exactly one suit. Valid leads are as follows:

- Any **single card** (单张)
- Any **pair** (对子), defined as identical cards matching in both suit and rank
- Any set of **consecutive pairs** (“tractors” (拖拉机)), defined in section 7.3
- Any **combination of highest singles and pairs in the same suit** (甩牌), defined in section 7.4

5.6.2 Following

The following players, in counterclockwise order, must play the same number of cards as the first player (the “leader”) did, subject to these rules:

1. If possible, players must follow suit and structure (singles follow singles, pairs follow pairs, etc.)
2. Otherwise, players must follow suit to the extent possible, adding cards of other suits if necessary to match the number of cards played.
3. Otherwise, players may play any cards they wish.

Full details are given in Section 7.5.

5.6.3 Winning Tricks

In general, the highest set of cards that match the structure of the leading cards will win the trick, with sets in the trump suit outranking (“trumping”) sets in the suit led. Any cards played in other suits automatically lose the trick; therefore, a player can win the trick only if he or she plays cards entirely in one suit: either the suit led, or the trump suit. Ties are won by the earliest player.

Full details are given in Section 7.6.

5.6.4 Taking Points

Any point cards (Kings, 10s, 5s) played during the trick are taken by the team of the player who wins the trick, and all other cards are discarded. If the Declarers take the points, the point cards are also discarded. If the Opponents take the points, the point cards should be kept face-up in front of a player on the Opponent team.

5.7 Ending the Hand and Scoring

The hand ends when the last trick is played. All players will deplete their hands at the same time.

The Opponents calculate the number of points they won over all the tricks in the hand by adding the values of the face-up point cards.⁵ Additionally, if the Opponents win the last trick (掘底), they take the cards in the kitty (底牌), compute the total number of points in the kitty, multiply this sum by a bonus factor, and add this product to their point total. The bonus factor is equal to 2^n , where n is the number of cards in the largest unit (single, pair, or consecutive pairs)⁶ played by the leader.

After computing this point total, one team’s level is adjusted according to the following table. Opponents need to reach a threshold of **80 points** out of a nominal total of 200 to win the hand and gain Declarer status for the next hand.

If the Opponents take __ points:	Then:	And:
0	Declarers advance +3 levels	Declarers remain Declarers
5-35	Declarers advance +2 levels	Declarers remain Declarers
40-75	Declarers advance +1 level	Declarers remain Declarers
80-115	No level change	Opponents become Declarers
120-155	Opponents advance +1 level	Opponents become Declarers
160-195	Opponents advance +2 levels	Opponents become Declarers
200-235	Opponents advance +3 levels	Opponents become Declarers
...
$[80 + 40n, 80 + 40(n + 1) - 5]$ $n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$	Opponents advance n levels	Opponents become Declarers

⁵Recall that kings and 10s are worth 10 points, and 5s are worth 5 points.

⁶In particular, the largest unit within a highest combination of singles and (consecutive) pairs, if one is played on the last trick. Thus, n can be 1, 2, or 4.

Point totals above 200 are possible if the Opponents gain extra points through the kitty.⁷

6 Basic Strategy

- **Declaring trumps:** During the draw, a player should declare the trump suit by throwing down a card of the trump rank if he or she has already drawn many cards of the suit, as it is good to have many trump cards. This general rule may be adjusted for various factors. For example, it may be more advantageous to declare the trump suit when playing a hand in which the trump rank is also a point card (King, 10, 5), and it may be less advantageous to declare the trump suit if your partner is the dealer. It is also fun to declare no-trumps on a hand when King or 10 is trump, because leading the pair of jokers will force all players to play jokers or points.
- **Kitty:** The dealer should attempt to eliminate at least one entire suit from his or her hand, so that he or she has more opportunities to play trump cards and win tricks. Of course, this must be balanced by the risk of putting points in the kitty, as all points in the kitty are doubled. If there are points in the kitty, the dealer should have sufficiently strong trump cards in his or her hand, in terms of both length and rank, to prevent the Opponents from winning the last trick.
- **What cards to lead:** Many players choose to follow a standard procedure when leading:
 - Early in the hand, lead aces and highest combinations.⁸ Since it is early, the risk of being trumped is decreased, and one's partner may play points.
 - Play consecutive pairs as soon as possible, so that they are not “broken up” by another player's lead of one pair.
 - To pass the lead to one's partner, one can play a low trump card, in the hope that one's partner will win the trick with a high trump card.
 - If one knows that one's partner has no more cards (“void” - 绝) of some suit, one should lead cards in that suit, so that the partner can trump or discard low cards in other suits. Conversely, by the same reasoning, if one knows that one's opponent is void of some suit, one should *not* lead cards in that suit.
- **What cards to follow:** The simple rule of thumb is to play points if one's team is winning the trick, and to play low non-point cards otherwise.
- **Count cards.** It is useful to keep track of when high cards in each suit are played and who is void of which suit, so that one can make better decisions concerning which cards to play and lead.

⁷Assume that a player on the Opponent team draws a hand so good that he or she can win the first trick and play the rest of his or her hand on the second trick. Assume further that the Dealer puts 80 points in the kitty. Then the Opponents could theoretically take $200 - 80 = 120$ points from the cards in players' hands and $80 * 2^{24} = 1,342,177,280$ points from the kitty, for a total of 1,342,177,400 points. They would then advance $\lfloor \frac{1,342,177,400-80}{40} \rfloor = 33,554,433$ levels, thus winning the game $33,554,433 \div 13 = 2,581,110 \frac{3}{13}$ times and losing 2 friends.

⁸Two members of Colonial are known to flout this rule. Incidentally, they also win with very high probability.

7 Appendix

7.1 Starting the First Hand: Determining the First Player to Draw

The person who shuffled lifts a contiguous range of cards from the top of the deck, looks at the card at the bottom of the cards lifted, and puts the cards back on the deck. Denoting n as the rank of the revealed card, the shuffler then counts n players counterclockwise, starting with himself or herself as 1, and this player is the first to draw a card. For the purposes of determining the first player to draw, Jack is considered 11, Queen 12, King 13, and Ace 1. If a joker is revealed, the cards should be replaced and another card revealed. (Thus, the shuffler draws first if an Ace (1), 5, 9, or King (13) is revealed.)

7.2 Starting the Hand: No Declaration of Trump Suit

If no player declares a trump suit during the draw, the trump suit is set to the suit of a card from the bottom 8 cards according to the following order of precedence:

1. The first card of the trump rank, if one exists.
2. Otherwise, the highest-ranking card. Here, rank is determined only via the usual ordering Ace, King, ... 3, 2, and jokers are excluded. If multiple cards are tied for the highest rank, the first one takes precedence.

Note that this rule will sometimes require the dealer to reveal all 8 of the bottom cards.

7.3 Valid Leads: Consecutive Pairs

Consecutive pairs are defined as a set of pairs such that the pairs are of adjacent and distinct rank. For example, let the trump rank be 8 and the trump suit be hearts (♥). The following examples are consecutive pairs:

- 4♣-4♣-5♣-5♣
- 7♠-7♠-9♠-9♠ (since 8♠ is in the trump suit, not spades, making 7 and 9 adjacent)
- 10♥-10♥-J♥-J♥-Q♥-Q♥
- 7♥-7♥-9♥-9♥ (since 8♥ ranks above all other hearts and is not adjacent to 7♥ or 9♥)
- A♥-A♥-8♣-8♣ (since 8♣ is also in the trump suit)
- 8♣-8♣-8♥-8♥
- 8♥-8♥-Small joker-Small joker
- Small joker-Small joker-Big joker-Big joker

- A♥-A♥-8♣-8♣-8♥-8♥-Small joker-Small joker-Big joker-Big joker⁹

The following examples are NOT consecutive pairs:

- A♦-A♦-2♥-2♥ (since the pairs are of different suits, even though the ranks could be considered “adjacent”)
- 7♠-7♠-8♠-8♠ (since 8♠ is in the trump suit, not spades)
- 7♥-7♥-8♥-8♥ (since 8♥ ranks above all other hearts and is not adjacent to 7♥)
- 8♣-8♣-8♦-8♦ (since the pairs are of the same rank, not distinct ranks)¹⁰

7.4 Valid Leads: Highest Combinations

A valid combination of highest singles and (consecutive) pairs in the same suit is such that no remaining singles in the suit are strictly higher than any single in the set, no remaining pairs in the suit are strictly higher than any (non-consecutive) pair in the set, and no remaining consecutive pairs in the suit are strictly higher than any consecutive pairs in the set.

The following examples are valid combinations (assume spades are not trump):

- A♠-K♠-K♠ is always valid. There is no remaining single spade higher than Ace, and no remaining pair of spades higher than King, because one of the two A♠ is already in the combination.
- Suppose an A♠ and a K♠ have already been played. Then A♠-K♠-Q♠ is valid, because there is no remaining A♠ or K♠ to outrank the Q♠.
- Suppose an A♠ and a Q♠ have already been played. Then A♠-K♠-J♠-J♠ is valid, because there is no remaining A♠ to outrank the K♠ and no remaining pairs of spades higher than jacks.

7.5 Valid Follows

1. If possible, players must follow suit and structure. For example:

- If the leader plays a single card, the other players must also play a single card in the same suit.
- If the leader plays a pair, then the other players must also play pairs in the same suit.
- If the leader plays consecutive pairs, then the other players must also play consecutive pairs in the same suit, if possible (this is very rare); otherwise, they must play pairs in the same suit.

⁹If you draw this, everyone will hate you.

¹⁰In some variants, “consecutive pairs” are defined as a set of pairs such there are no other cards strictly in between the highest and lowest rank of the set. Under this definition, the last consecutive pair above would not be a consecutive pair, because the 8♦ and the 8♠ are not included, but the last non-consecutive pair above would actually be a consecutive pair, since the 8♠ (not included) is not strictly between the 8♣ and the 8♦.

- If the leader plays a combination of highest singles and pairs in the same suit, then the other players must also play the same number of singles and pairs in the suit to the extent possible.
2. Otherwise, players must follow suit to the extent possible, adding cards of other suits if necessary to match the number of cards played. For example:
 - If the leader plays a pair of spades, and a following player has two or more spades but no pairs of spades, then the player must play two spades.
 - If the leader plays a pair of spades, and a following player has only one spade, then the player must play the spade and any other card.
 3. Otherwise, players may play any cards they wish.
 - Note that if the leader plays a pair(s), and a following player does not have enough cards of the corresponding suit, then the player is not obligated to play pairs in other suits.

7.6 Winning Tricks

- If the leader played a single card, then the highest trump card will win. If there were no trumps played, the highest card of the suit led will win. If there is a tie for highest card, the first player to play the highest card wins.
- If the leader played a pair, then the highest trump pair will win. If there were no trump pairs played, then the highest pair in the suit led will win. Note that two single cards that do not form a pair cannot win the trick, even if they are trumps.
- If the leader played consecutive pairs, then the highest trump consecutive pairs (of the same length) will win (rare). If there were no trump consecutive pairs played, then the highest consecutive pairs in the suit led will win (almost always the leaders'). Note that singles and non-consecutive pairs cannot win the trick, even if they are trumps.
- If the leader played a combination of highest singles and pairs in a suit, then the highest set of trumps that match the structure of the combination will win, where “highest” is determined by first comparing pairs and then singles. If such a matching set of trumps was not played, then the leader will automatically win, since (by definition) there cannot be a higher combination in the suit led to outrank the leader’s combination.

8 Variants

The following variants are included for entertainment purposes only; they are not standardized for Colonial play.

8.1 Re-deals

This minor rule allows a re-deal if a player has no trumps or less than a specified number of points in his or her hand (usually 10 or 0).

8.2 Modifications to Sheng Ji: Levels

The following variants simply add special scoring rules at certain levels.

8.2.1 Bi Da (必打) - “Must Play”

This condition can be applied to certain levels - usually 5, 10, Jack, and/or King. Note that Ace is always a must-play level, even in the normal version of Sheng Ji. When active at a given level, each team can only advance past the level by playing a hand satisfying three conditions:

- The trump rank is equal to the must-play level.
- The team trying to advance is playing as the Declarers (so the team is at the must-play level).
- The team trying to advance wins the hand.

The effect of these conditions is that a team cannot “skip” past the must-play level by scoring well on a hand played while the team is below the must-play level.

The third condition is sometimes eliminated, so that only one (successful or failed) attempt at advancing past the level while playing as Declarers is required.

8.2.2 Gou Dao Di (勾到底) - “Hooked to the Bottom”

When playing level Jack, the Opponents have the opportunity to reset the Declarers’ level from Jack down to 2.¹¹ This occurs if and only if two conditions are met:

- The Opponents take 80 points or more.
- The Opponents win the last trick using a trump jack (and possibly other cards).

If these two conditions are met, the Opponents advance levels and become Declarers as usual, and the Declarers are now at level 2.

8.2.3 Quan Yi Ban (圈一半) - “Looped by Half”

When playing level Queen, the Opponents have the opportunity to reset the Declarers’ level from Queen down to 6.¹² This occurs if and only if two conditions are met:

- The Opponents take 80 points or more.
- The Opponents win the last trick using a trump queen (and possibly other cards).

¹¹The “hooking” refers to the shape of the letter “J” in “Jack”.

¹²The “looping” refers to the shape of the letter “Q” in “Queen”.

If these two conditions are met, the Opponents advance levels and become Declarers as usual, and the Declarers are now at level 6.

8.3 Chao Di Pi (炒地皮) - “Bidding for Land”

This rule adds an extra dimension to the process of placing the kitty.

The process for starting hands outlined in sections 5.4 and 5.5 proceeds as normal. However, once the Dealer places the kitty, the other players, in counterclockwise order, may override the Dealer as described below. This allows the overriding player to declare a new trump suit (or no trumps), take the 8 cards in the kitty, add them to his or her hand, and replace the kitty with any set of 8 cards from his or her hand. Multiple players in succession may override the previous players, declare a new trump suit (or no trumps), and replace the kitty.

A player may override a previous player by throwing down a pair of cards higher than what the previous overriding or declaring player threw down. From high to low, the possible throws are:

1. A pair of big jokers
2. A pair of small jokers
3. A pair of spades of the trump rank
4. A pair of hearts of the trump rank
5. A pair of clubs of the trump rank
6. A pair of diamonds of the trump rank
7. Any of the above may be thrown to override a single card of the trump rank that was thrown during the draw.

On an overriding throw, the trump suit is set to the suit of the cards thrown (no trumps in the case of jokers).

8.4 Si Shi Fen (四十分) - “Forty Points”

In this variant of Sheng Ji, only one deck is used. Therefore, there are no pairs. All other rules remain unchanged; in particular, combinations of highest singles may still be led.

8.5 Zhao Peng You (找朋友) - “Finding Friends”

This popular variant of Sheng Ji expands the game to 5, 6, 7, or (theoretically) more players.¹³ The number of decks d to use for n players is $d = \lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor$, the Opponents need to take $40d$ points to win, and the scoring table increases and decreases in increments of $20d$. The number of cards in the kitty is either 6 or 8 - whichever allows the remaining cards to be evenly distributed among the players.

¹³For more than 8 players, it is usually best to split the game into multiple games.

The main difference with the normal version of Sheng Ji is that partnerships are not fixed, but rather change with every round. Therefore, individual players maintain their own levels.

The Dealer label may either be assigned to the player who declares the final trump suit during the draw, or to the first player to the previous Dealer's right who was on the winning team in the previous round.

The Declarer team consists of $\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor$ players, where n is the total number of players. The Dealer, who is always on the Declarer team, will call a number of non-trump cards equal to the remaining number of players on the Declarer team, and the players who play these cards during the course of the hand will become members of the Declarer team. The other players are then members of the Opponent team.

During the hand, point cards are kept separately for each player. A player's points are discarded if he or she joins the Declarer team. Scoring is done as usual, with the scoring table modified as described above and each member of the winning team advancing individually. A dealer with fewer partners than usual receives a bonus for winning.

Finally, special consideration must be given to triples, if three or more decks are used, when determining valid plays. In most cases, the general principles from Section 5.6 generalize.

9 References

- “Sheng Ji”. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng_Ji
- “Rules of Card Games: Tractor”. Pagat. <https://www.pagat.com/kt5/tractor.html>
- Various Colonial members, for spreading the game to even more members and enhancing the author's understanding of the game.
- The author's parents, for graciously teaching the game to the author and ruining his productivity.