Teen Mai / Jumping the Bamboo

Site of Documentation
Ban Nayang Tai, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Description

Jumping the Bamboo is a unique game of movement and rhythm that was played by members of the older generations living in Ban Nayang Tai, Luang Prabang, when they were young. In the game a team of players hit together bamboo poles in special sequence of movements, to create a musical beat. The beat accompanies a tune played by musicians, throughout the game. As the beats are played, their opponents have to try to skip over each of the bamboo poles. The player that can make it across all of the poles and back again without tripping over or colliding with them - wins.

Who Plays?

This game requires a large group of at least nine players. The players have to be split into two teams. One team must consist of an even number of players, and should be twice as large as the other. For example, if Team A consists of six players, Team B must consist of three players.

Two additional participants are also needed to play the music that will accompany the game.
**Accessories/Equipment**

Each player needs to have one long bamboo pole, plus two additional poles that will be placed on the ground. If necessary the bamboo can be substituted by long, slim pieces of wood. Each pole must measure around 1 to 2 metres in length although their exact size will vary according to the number of players. The more players, the longer the poles will be to allow lots of participants to play at once.

The musicians will need to bring a drum, violin or other instrument with which to play the game’s music.

**Time and Place**

The duration of the game is usually decided on before the game commences. Usually children do not play for more than one hour, depending on the skill and fitness of players. The environment the game is played in can affect the game’s duration, as children can become exhausted quickly. As a result, children usually play this game where they can find a large space with smooth ground (such as a concrete floor or grass lawn) and shade. Traditionally the game was played only on special occasions, such as festivals, Buddhist lent and other celebrations.

**Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player**

This game requires players to have excellent rhythm, balance, speed, and focus; all skills that can be acquired and improved through frequent play. An accomplished player will be able to swiftly skip over each of the bamboo poles without pausing. There are numerous techniques and strategies that can be utilised to improve a player’s performance. These include ensuring that they only start skipping once the player ahead has reached a rest area, and moving on one side of the game area only, to give themselves plenty of space from other players. Both these strategies are important and lessen the likelihood of collisions. The most talented players also try to avoid putting both feet on the ground at the same time, instead they alternate their feet as they skip across the poles with the rhythm of the bamboo beats.

**Popularity**

Although this game was popular among older generations, when they were young, it is no longer played or known by the children of Ban Nayang Tai. Back then, it provided youngsters with the opportunity to strengthen friendships and forge new bonds with other children. It also helped them improve their coordination, focus and gave them a good physical work out.

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**Preparation**

1. Players must agree on a piece of music to be played by the musicians. Usually it is a piece that all the players are familiar with and has a simple beat running through it.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** First players must split themselves into two teams. One team (Team A) must consist of an even number of players, and should be twice as large as the other (Team B). For example, if Team A consists of six players, Team B must consist of three players.

**Step 2.** Players in Team A need to split themselves into two groups and sit in lines on the ground, facing each other. Each player has to have a partner located directly opposite them. Both players lay out their bamboo poles in front of them, so their partner can hold one end of it. Both players must be holding one end of a pole in either hand, so that each pair has two poles.
Step 3. The two additional bamboo poles are slid in front of each line. Throughout the game Team A will tap the poles on the ground with the poles in their hands, to create a beat. The sequence of taps goes as follows: The player's tap the poles they are holding in their hands against the ones on the ground twice; and then tap the poles in their hands against each other once.

![Image of people tapping poles](image1.png)

Step 4. The musicians start playing the tune, and as they play, Team A starts to tap their poles to the beat. The sequence of taps is repeated over and over. Once the rhythm is going, it's Team B's turn to attempt the challenge.

![Image of people playing poles](image2.png)
Step 5. One by one, the Team B players have to try to skip over each of the poles, held by Team A. They must do this in time with the beat to ensure they don’t trip or collide with the bamboo. Players are allowed to pause after making it past each pair of Team A players, by standing in the empty space between them (known as a rest area). Once they have managed to reach one end of the game area, they have to turn around and repeat the challenge. If they can make it back to the start without tripping or being hit by the bamboo they win the game.

Rules

1. Players in Team A must tap their poles in rhythm and must be careful to not hold them too high in the air as they do so.

2. If a player in Team B trips or gets hit by a pole, they will switch place with the nearest Team A player.

3. If the game area becomes too crowded, players can walk back to the starting point (outside the game area) and begin their turn again.

4. Players can wait in a rest area between Team A players, before completing their turn. When waiting in the rest area they must watch out for players coming up behind them.

5. Players can choose faster tunes and more complicated sequences of beats to make the game more exciting.