Wa Noi Ook / Odd Hands Out

Site of Documentation
Tai Yai group, Mae Hong Sorn province, Northern Thailand

Description
O-Wa Noi Ook is a game that is used by Tai Yai children from Northern Thailand to eliminate or select a player (or team of players) before starting an actual game. For example, if children want to play a game of “Tag” they would play O-Wa Noi Ook to pick which of them would be the ‘Catcher’. There are four variations of this game: O-Wa Noi Ook, O-Wa Chab Khuu, O-Wa Mua Krai Plaek Pra-Lard and O-Wa Kuen Korn. The games all involve the children reciting a rhyme and turning their palms up or down. Which variation children choose to play depends on the type of game they want to play afterwards.

Who Plays?
Each variation of O-Wa Noi Ook requires at least three children to play. Played by both boys and girls, the maximum number of players and their ages will depend on what the next game to be played is. Each game can have as many players as is needed and they can be of any age group.

Time and Place
Each round of O-Wa Noi Ook takes as little as a minute to play and can be played anywhere, at anytime.
Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

O-Wa games are simple and for the most part only require listening and hand movement skills. Some versions of the game such as O-Wa Mua Krai Plaek Pra-Lard are more complicated, as they require the players to follow a sequence of movements specified by each rhyme.

Popularity

O-Wa Noi Ook has been a popular with Tai Yai children for many generations. Children are usually taught this game by their peers or older siblings.

History of The Game

Although no one is sure where the game orginated from, it is played in a similar way throughout Thailand. The name of the game differs from region to region. In Central Thailand, the game is also called O-Wa Noi Ook while in the Thai Yoan community this game is known as O-Wa-Pae.

How is the Game Played?

Step 1: Based on what game the children want to play next, they must select which of the four O-Wa games is most suitable.
TYPE 1

1. *O-Wa Noi Ook* is used to select a player to start a game or when someone is needed to play a solo role in a game.

2. All the players must stand in a circle and chant the words, “*O-Wa Noi Ook*”. At the end of the word “Ook”, everyone has to turn their hands either palm up or palm down.

3. Count who flip the palms up and who flip down. For instance, if there are more players who flip their palms up more than those who flip down, the ones who flip the palms down will be out of the game, and vice versa.

4. The players who are still in the game keep playing until there are only two players left. The two players will play *O Chub* in order to find the winner who will be the game starter of the game you are going to play.

TYPE 2

1. *O-Wa Mua Krai Plaek Pra-Lard* is also used to select a player to start a game. Similar to *O-Wa Noi Ook*, but the players instead take out those who flip the hand to one direction more than the other. Moreover, this game has a number of different rhymes that are sung at different stages of the game. These are: “*O-Wa Mua Krai Plaek Pra-Lard Kon Nan Pen*” (which means “O-Wa Whose Hand is Odd, that Person will be [the starter]”), “*O-Wa Krai Yak Pen Kor Tong Plean*” (“O-Wa Who Wants to be [the starter], Must Change the Hand”), “*O-Wa Ta Deed New*” (“O-Wa Hitting the Finger”), and “*O-Wa Yee-Sip New*” (“O-Wa Twenty Fingers”).

2. The game starts with the players chanting, “*O-Wa Mua Krai Plaek Pra-Lard Kon Nan Pen*” (“O-Wa Whose Hand is Odd, that Person will be [the starter]”), as they say the word “Pen” (meaning “will be”), the players have to once again show their hands, either with their palm (up) or the back of their hand (down). The player whose palm is turned in a different direction from the others is the game starter.
3. If all of the players palms are facing in the same direction, they have to say, “Krai Mai Plean Pen” (“Who does not change the hand will be [the starter]”) upon which, each player needs to flip their palm in the opposite direction. Any player that forgets to switch, becomes the game starter.

4. If the group has still not been able to select a single player, everyone should chant the words, “O-Wa Ta Deed New” (“O-Wa Hitting the Finger”). As they do so, they have to form a circle with their thumb and their forefinger. Whoever fails to do this movement is the game starter.

5. If still no one has made a mistake the group will chant, “O-Wa Yee Sib New” (“O-Wa Twenty Fingers”) and everyone has to put up between one and five fingers on one hand. The group will start to count the number of fingers up on each hand, the player whose finger is number 20 will be the game starter.

**TYPE 3**

1. **O-Wa Kuen Korn** is another game used by children to select a player to start a new game or when they need to when they need someone to play a solo role in a game. It’s similar to O-Wa Noi Ook but easier.

2. The players sing, “O-Wa Kuen Korn” then flip their hands out in the middle of the circle. But instead of taking the fewer ones out of the game, the players only need to keep playing until there is only one player who flips the hand in different direction to the rest. That player is the game starter.

**TYPE 4**

1. **O-Wa Chab Khuu** is used to divide a group of players into 2 teams. All the players must stand in a circle and chant the words, “O-Wa Chab Khuu”.

2. At the end of the word “Khuu” everyone needs to turn their hands either palm up or palm down.

3. Those with palms facing up will form one team, and those with palms facing down will form another. However, the number of players in both groups has to be equal for the teams to be fair. If more players have their palms facing up than facing down, then they should repeat the game until they have equal numbers.

*Children play O-Wa Ta Deed New*
Rules

1. In O-Wa Noi Ook, O-Wa Mua Krai Plaek Pra-Lard and O-Wa Kuen Korn, the player who turns his hand in a different direction from the others is the selected player.

2. When playing O-Wa Chab Khuu, if the number of players with hands facing up is the same as that with hands facing down, those with hands facing up will form one group and those with hands facing down will form another.