Ba Kang Wo / Spinning Top

Site of Documentation
Tai Yuan in Oui Sorn Larn Group, Mae Wang district, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

Description
Ba Kang Wo is a traditional Lanna toy made of bamboo that it played with by Tai Yuan children living in the Chiang Mai province of Thailand. The toy is a simple spinning top, that when released will spin around quickly on the ground and make a “Wooooo” sound from where it finds its name.

Who Plays?
This toy can be played with alone or with a small group of friends. Both boys and girls can play, aged 7 to 14 years of age.

Accessories/Equipment
To play the game, players will need to make a Ba Kang Wo from a piece of bamboo, a wooden stick and a length of cotton string. Traditionally the toy is made by the children’s parents or grandparents, although these days groups such as the Oui Sorn Larn produce the toy for sale during cultural events.
Time and Place

A *Ba Kang Wo* can be played with either indoors or outside, throughout the year. On average a game takes under 3 minutes to play and is usually played on the weekends or during a lunch break at school. It doesn’t require much space, although it is important the floor is smooth and flat so that the toy can spin easily.

Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

Players need to have good coordination and strong arms to hold the toy still, pull the cord and release it when it’s ready to spin. Children usually learn how to work the *Ba Kang Wo* from older family members or friends. It may require some practice to be able to balance and spin the toy easily.

Popularity

Children often play this game for fun, either alone or in a small group. The name “*Ba Kang*” means “Top”, and is also known by hill tribe people as “*Ba Kang Doi*” which means “Top of the Hill”. Spinning tops are very popular in hill tribe groups and many different types of spinning tops and games that use them are still played to this day, although primarily only on special occasions.

Learning about the Toy

The *Ba Kang Wo* comprises of five main parts; the cylindrical body, the flat discs, the stick, the cord and the handle.

1. The cylindrical body is the largest part of the spinning top and measures approximately 7 x 10 centimeters. As the body is made of hollow bamboo, two flat discs are cut to size and attached to the top and bottom of the body, to keep the mechanics in place and make the top stronger. On one side of the body a rectangular shaped hole (measuring approximately 4 x 40 mm) is cut.
2. The most important piece of the toy is a long thin, bamboo stick measuring about 20 centimeters in length. One end of the stick is thinner than the other and sharpened to a blunt point. It is on this that the top will spin. The stick is inserted into the body and wedged (or glued) into place.

3. Finally a length of string is tightly wound round the long thin bamboo stick. The remaining end is then threaded through an additional flat wooden or bamboo stick that is used as a handle.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** First the players must wind the length of string (usually just under a metre long) around the long stick that pokes out the top of the spinning top.

**Step 2.** The string must be wound from the top of the body right up to almost the tip of the stick (around 6 cm of the stick should be wrapped in string).
Step 3. Finally, the end of string must be threaded through the small hole on the stick that is used as a handle.

Step 4. Players must gently balance the spinning top on the ground and using their free hand, pull the string very fast so that it unwinds and the top spins away across the floor.
Step 5: As it spins, the toy will hum, “Wooo”, which is the sound that this game is named after.

Rules

1. If the players want to have a competition with their *Ba Kang Wo’s* they need to determine a game area or race track. This should be on a concrete floor that measures around 1 x 1 metres in size and should be free from bumps and obstacles.

2. All the players must wind their toys and get ready for them to spin. When the signal is given, the players must let their spinning top go. The top that can spin for the longest wins the game.