Copter Mai Pai / Bamboo Helicopter

Site of Documentation

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

Description

*Bamboo Copter* is a traditional toy played with by Tai Yuan children living in the Mae Wang district, Chiangmai, Thailand. The toy gained its present day name from a popular Japanese cartoon character called Doraemon, “Copter Maipai” or “Bamboo Copter”. Maipai is Thai for Bamboo and Copter is a short, nickname for Helicopter.

Who Plays?

This game requires a minimum of one player. It can be played alone, in pairs or in small groups of five or six players. Both boys and girls can play, aged from 5 to 12 years old.

Accessories/Equipment

The game requires one “Bamboo Copter” that as the name suggests, is constructed from Bamboo. Originally the toy would be hand made by older family members, although nowadays, they can also be easily purchased from the Oui Som Larn Group, an associative community of the Tai Yuan people, based in the Chiang Mai Province.
Time and Place

The game requires a large open space where the Bamboo Copter can be flown. It can be played outdoors throughout the year, as long as it is cool and dry. It should not be played when it is raining and the ground is wet and slippery. Children are most likely to play this game during their lunch break at school, at home over the weekend or at while with the Oui Sorn Larn Group. Each round of the game lasts less than a minute, as the Copter spins in the air before falling down to the ground.

Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

This game requires children to have strong arms and a steady grip. Players can develop good playing skills through frequent practice of the game. Children usually learn the game from their friends, older siblings or parents.

Popularity

As the game requires the children to have a Bamboo Copter, it is not played as often as some others. Popular with younger children, the game is played for fun, sometimes before they play another game with their friends.

History of the Game

Although no one knows the exact origins of the game it is possible that it was adapted from an older game called Kang Han Baimai (“Leaf Pin Wheel”). When members of the older generations were young, they would pick a strong Mango or Longan leaf and pierce it with a small twig to make a pin wheel. They would then run around, holding the pin wheel, so it spun around in the wind. The original name of the Bamboo Copter (if there was one) is not known, so it may be the game was created by the Oui Sorn Larn community inspired by their knowledge of the aircraft.

Preparation

1. First, players must cut a long, flat slice of bamboo from a larger bamboo shaft. The slice should measure approximately 10 to 12 cm in length.
2. Next, each end of the piece of bamboo should be sharpened to a point. The bamboo should also be shaved thinner on either end, making sure that the middle of the bamboo retains a thickness of 0.5 cm. Once complete, a small hole should be pierced in the middle of the Bamboo. When complete it should resemble an airplane propeller.

3. Finally, poke a small thin twig or stick (approximately 10 to 12 cm in length), through the hole, making sure that it is flush with the bamboo and wedged tightly into place.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1**: Players put their hands together, holding the thin stick between their palms.

![Image of hands holding a thin stick](image1)

**Step 2**: Then, the players need to roll the stick between their hands, spinning it as fast as they can go. The bamboo stick should rotate and if the player releases the toy at the right time, the Copter should lift up into the air and fly for a few moments.

![Images of hands rolling a stick](image2)