E-Keb / Throwing and Catching Rocks

Site of Documentation
Tai Yai group, Mae Hong Sorn Province, Thailand

Description

_Ei Keb_ is a game of speed and hand-eye coordination that has been enjoyed by generations of Tai Yai children living in the Mae Horn Sorn province of Thailand. In it, players have to throw a small stone into the air and before catching it, pick up a number of other rocks and handle them in a particular sequence of movements.

Who Plays?

This game requires a minimum of two players. Both boys and girls can play aged 7 to 16 years old.
**Accessories/Equipment**

The players need to have five small, thumb sized rocks to play the game. They can be rough or smooth and are found in abundance at home and at school. Small, smooth pebbles are usually easier to play with. Alternatively players can substitute rocks with a small chain made of plastic, similar to what is used in a Cambodian game of *Chravak*.

![Image of colorful rocks](image)

**Time and Place**

On average, a game of *Ei Keb* takes around an hour to play. It is best played in an open space that has a smooth, flat concrete ground, such as a school courtyard or the porch of a house. The game can be played all year round as long as the weather is cool and dry. Most children play this game during their lunch break, when they can easily find willing participants.

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

Requiring speed and accuracy, the best players of *Ei Keb* possess exceptional coordination and are quick with their hands. These skills are easily developed through practice. Those that play frequently often become very precise and have the competitive advantage against others. A key strategy for winning the game is to throw the first rock up as high as possible so that players have more time to handle the other rocks.

**Popularity**

*Ei Keb* is very popular particularly among Tai Yai girls. Players enjoy learning how to become quick with their hands and testing their skill against that of their peers. Most children were taught this game by their friends or family. The game is similar to the Tai Yuan game of *Maak-Kep* although *Ei Keb* has a number of additional complex levels and rules which illustrate the children’s skill and creativity.

**How is the Game Played?**

**Step 1.** First, the order of players must be determined. To do this each player has to pick up all five rocks and throw them up into the air and catch them using the back of their hand. The order the players play in depends on how many rocks they caught. The player that catches the most rocks goes first.
Step 2. Each player plays this game to complete all 34 levels:

**Level 1: Ei Nung (First level)**

The first player places all of the rocks on the ground and picks up one from the pile. They throw up first rock up into the air, pick up another rock from the ground and catch the first as it falls back down. They repeat this process again and again, picking up a rock from the ground each time, until finally they hold all five rocks in their hand. They need to be careful not to touch any of the other rocks while picking one from the ground, if they do, they must wait for their next turn to try again.

If the player accidentally drops a rock they are holding onto the pile of rocks their turn is also over.
**Level 2: Ei Song (Second level)**

When the players have mastered picking up one rock at a time, the game becomes more challenging. In the Levels that follow, players have to pick up more and more rocks. In Level 2, the process is similar, with the rock being thrown, another being picked up before catching the rock as it falls back down. The only difference is that in this round the player must pick up two rocks (rather than one) each time they throw.

**Level 3: Ei Sam (Third level)**

In Level 3, the process is similar, with the rock being thrown, another being picked up before catching the rock as it falls back down. The only difference is that in this round the player must pick up three rocks after the first throw, and one rock after the second. The rocks must be picked up in this order to pass the level.

**Level 4: Ei Si (Fourth level)**

In this level, the player must pick up all four other rocks, before catching the rock.

**Level 5: Ei Ha (Fifth level)**

This time the player needs to hold all five rocks in their hand and throw one up, place the others on the ground before catching it as it falls down again. To complete the level, the player has to then throw the rock into the air once again, pick up the four rocks on the ground and catch it as it comes back down.

**Level 6: Ei Luek Ngai (Easy pick).**

In this level, a team mate selects one of Levels 1-4 for the player to repeat. The player must select a rock prior to the level being picked, and can not change it before undertaking their challenge.

**Level 7: Ei Sai Fon (Raining)**

In this level the player places all of the rocks on the ground and picks up one from the pile. They throw up the first rock up into the air and before it hits the ground they have to pick up another rock from the pile. They don’t have to catch the first rock as it falls back down.

They repeat this sequence of throws until they have picked up and thrown each of the rocks on the ground.

When they have the fifth and final rock in their hand, they have to throw it up and pick up the first two rocks they played with, before it comes back down. In this sequence the players must be sure to only pick up rocks that were not played in the previous steps.
They then throw these two rocks, and before they hit the ground they pick up two other rocks from the ground.

They then throw these rocks and pick up one other rock from the ground, before catching it again.

Finally, they throw this rock into the air and pick up all four rocks off the ground, before catching it again as it comes back down.

In this level, the actions must each be done very quickly, so that the rocks fall almost continuously, like rain, down to the ground.

**Level 8: Ei Yard Fon (Rain Drop)**

The player places all five rocks on the ground. They throw up the first rock and before catching it, pick up a second rock. They then throw both these rocks into the air, pick up a third rock and catch only one of the two thrown up. The other should fall to the ground. Once again, in this sequence the players must be sure to only pick up rocks that were not played in the previous steps.

The player then throws the two rocks in their hand up into the air, picks up another rock and catches only one of the rocks as they fall back down.

The player throws the two rocks in the air, picks up another rock and catches only one of the rocks as they fall back down.

The player then repeats the previous step, picking up a new rock from the ground.

The player then throws all three rocks in their hand up in the air and picks up one rock, letting all three rocks in the air fall down the ground.

Finally, the player throws the rock in their hand up into the air and picks up all four rocks from the ground before catching the falling rock.

**Level 9: Ei Roo Poo Nung (Crab Hole 1)**

The player must place all five rocks on the ground. They pick up one, throw it into the air and before it comes back down they pick up another one from the ground. Rather than catching it, the player forms a ‘crab hole’, by joining their thumb and forefinger together. The stone must fall through the hole as it comes back down. They must repeat this sequence of movements until all the rocks have been picked up.

**Level 10: Ei Roo Poo Song (Crab Hole 2)**

The player must place all five rocks on the ground. They pick up one, throw it into the air and before it comes back down, they pick up another two rocks from the ground. Once again they must form a ‘crab hole’ with their fingers for the stone to fall back down through. They repeat the sequence of movements for the last two remaining rocks on the ground.
**Level 11: Ei Roo Poo Sam (Crab Hole 3)**

The player must place all five rocks on the ground. They must then pick one up, throw it in the air, pick up three rocks from the ground and catch the falling rock. To finish the level, they have to throw one of the rocks in their hand into the air, pick up the final rock from the ground and then catch it as it comes back down.

**Level 12: Ei Roo Poo Si (Crab Hole 4)**

The player must place all five rocks on the ground. They must then pick up one rock, throw it in the air, pick up the other four rocks from the ground and then form a 'crab hole' for the rock to fall back down through.

**Level 13: Ei Roo Poo Ha (Crab Hole 5)**

The player holds all four rocks in their hand, places one rock on top of their crab hole and tosses it into the air. They then put all the other rocks back onto the ground and form a crab hole for the rock to fall back down through. The player then throws the rock into the air again, picks up the remaining four rocks and catches the rock as it falls back down.

**Level 14: Kep Dok Mai Nung (Picking Flower 1)**

The player places all five rocks on the ground. Then they throw one rock in the air and pick up another rock from the ground with their right hand, pass it to their left hand before catching the rock again as it comes back down. They repeat the sequence for each of the remaining rocks, making sure they use their right hand to both pick up and throw the stones.

**Level 15: Kep Dok Mai Song (Picking Flower 2)**

This level is played in the same way as “Picking Flower 1”, but the player must pick up two rocks each time, rather than one.

**Level 16: Kep Dok Mai Sam (Picking Flower 3)**

This level is played in the same way as “Picking Flower 1”, but the player must pick up three rocks on their first throw, and one rock on their second throw.

**Level 17: Kep Dok Mai Si (Picking Flower 4)**

This level is played in the same way as “Picking Flower 1”, but the player must pick up all four rocks at once.
**Level 18: Kep Dok Mai Ha (Picking Flower 5)**

The player places all four rocks in the palm of their hand and one rock balanced on their wrist. They then tilt their hand so each of the rocks in their palm falls to the floor and the rock on their wrist rolls into their palm. The player must then throw this one remaining rock into the air, pick up the other four rocks from the ground, pass them to their other hand and catch the rock as it falls back down.

To finish the level, they need to throw the rock they caught back into the air and catch it with the other hand, by positioning their hand on the floor and letting the rock fall into the palm.

**Level 19: Ei Roub Yod Nung (Gather Together 1)**

The player must throw all five rocks into the air and use the back of their hand to catch them again. No rock can fall on the ground. Then the player flicks the back of their hand and throws the rocks back up into the air. They must catch one of the rocks as they fall back down. They must then repeat the sequence for all five rocks.

**Level 20: Ei Roub Yod Song (Gather Together 2)**

One again, the player must throw all five rocks into the air and use the back of their hand to catch them again. No rock can fall on the ground. Then the player flicks the back of their hand and throws the rocks back up into the air. They must catch two rocks as they fall back down. They then repeat the process to catch two rocks once again, and on the last flick catch one rock.

**Level 21: Ei Roub Yod Sam (Gather Together 3)**

One again, the player must complete the actions as in ‘Gather Together 1’, but this time they have to flick the back of their hand to catch three rocks with after the first flick and two rocks after the second.

**Level 22: Ei Roub Yod Si (Gather Together 4)**

One again, the player must complete the actions as in ‘Gather Together 1’, but this time they have to flick the back of their hand to catch four rocks with after the first flick and one rock after the second.

**Level 23: Ei Roub Yod Ha (Gather Together 5)**

In this final sequence the player must throw the rocks as they did in ‘Picking Flower 5’, the only difference is, at this level the last rock thrown in the air and has to be caught by the same hand.

**Level 24: Ei Tob Yoong Nung (Hitting Mosquito 1)**
The player must follow the sequence of actions from the Level 1 (Ei Nung) but before they catch the rocks they must clap their hands or hit their arm (as if they were hitting a mosquito).

**Level 25: Ei Tob Yoong Song** (Hitting Mosquito 2)

The player must follow the sequence of actions from the Level 2 (Ei Song) but before they catch the rocks they must clap their hands or hit their arm (as if they were hitting a mosquito).

**Level 26: Ei Tob Yoong Sam** (Hitting Mosquito 3)

The player must follow the sequence of actions from the Level 3 (Ei Sam) but before they catch the rocks they must clap their hands or hit their arm (as if they were hitting a mosquito).

**Level 27: Ei Tob Yoong Si** (Hitting Mosquito 4)

The player must follow the sequence of actions from the Level 4 (Ei Si) but before they catch the rocks they must clap their hands or hit their arm (as if they were hitting a mosquito).

**Level 28: Ei Tob Yoong Ha** (Hitting Mosquito 5)

The player must follow the sequence of actions from the Level 5 (Ei Ha) but before they catch the rocks they must clap their hands or hit their arm (as if they were hitting a mosquito).

**Level 29: Ei Sab Moo** (Chopping Pork)

Chopping Pork Hand and Rock Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>B3</th>
<th>B4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| L1 | L2 | L3 | L4 |

Note: B represents rock placement. L represents placement for the side of the hand.

The player must put all four rocks in front of them as shown in the picture. They then throw the final rock into the air and 'Chop' the side of their palm twice down behind the first two rocks in the row (L1 and L2). Next, they repeat the sequence, throwing the rock up and 'Chopping' their palm behind the final two rocks in the row (L3 and L4). Next, they repeat the process but this time they have to 'Chop' behind all four rocks before catching the thrown rock as it comes back down. To complete the level, the player throws the rock in the air and picks up all four rocks from the ground before catching it as it comes back down.
**Level 30: Ei Sab Kai (Chopping Chicken)**

In this level the player places four rocks on the ground in the positions shown in the picture. Chopping Chicken is similar to Chopping Pork, although the placement of the hand is slightly different.

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        B1
        \  O  /  \
        \    /   
B2     O       O   B3
        /     \  
        /     O   
        B4
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First, the player throws the remaining rock in the air and uses the side of their hand to chop between two rocks. It doesn’t matter which rocks they chop between and once they have done this they must catch the rock as it comes back down.

Next, once again the player throws the rock and chops between two rocks twice, before catching it as it comes back down. They are not allowed to chop on the same place as in their first go.

Then, the player throws the rock and chops between two rocks three times, before catching it as it comes back down. Once again they must chop on a different place as they did in their last turn.

Finally, the player throws the rock and chops between two rocks four times, before catching it as it comes back down. Once again they must be careful to chop on a different place from before.

**Level 31: Ei Khao Tham (Into the Cave)**

The player must place all their rocks on the ground in front of them. By curving one hand, palm down onto the ground they must form a ‘cave’, next to the rocks. Next, they must pick up a rock, throw it up into the air, use their fingers to sweep a rock into the ‘cave’ and catch it as it comes back down. They then repeat the sequence until all the rocks are in the cave. Players are not allowed to move their ‘cave’ during play.

**Level 32: Ei Lord Tham (Through the cave)**

The player must place all their rocks on the ground in front of them. By placing all the tips of their fingers and thumb onto the ground, they must form another ‘cave’ next to the rocks. This cave should be open at both ends, a little like a tunnel. Next, they must pick up a rock, throw it up into the air, using their fingers sweep a rock through the ‘cave’ (so it comes out the other side) and catch it as it comes back down. They then repeat the sequence until all the rocks are through the ‘cave’. Players are not allowed to move their ‘cave’ during play.
Level 33: *Ei Kham Rua* (Jumping Fence)

The player must place all their rocks on the ground in front of them. By placing the side of their hand on the ground, they must form a ‘fence’ next to the rocks. Next, they must pick up a rock, throw it up into the air, pick up another rock and throw it over the ‘fence’ before catching the other rock as it comes back down. They then repeat the sequence until all the rocks are on the other side of the fence. Players are not allowed to move their ‘fence’ during play.

Level 34: *Ei Mue Phii* (Ghost’s Hand)

The player must repeat Levels 1 to 5 (*Ei Nung to Ei Ha*) from the beginning of the game, but this time the player can use only one hand to both throw and pick up the rocks.

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**Rules**

1. Players can not touch any rock other than the one they are picking up or throwing. If they do, they fail their task and must let the next player take their turn.

2. On each turn, players continue from the level they reached in the last level.

3. If players fail to catch the falling rock or drop a rock they are holding, they must let the next player take their turn.