Site of Documentation

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

Description

*Tao Kala* is a traditional Lanna toy that is still played with by Tai Yuan children from the Chiang Mai province in Thailand. Constructed by hand from natural materials, these simple wind up turtles provide hours of entertainment for children playing alone, or better still when raced with a group of friends.

Who Plays?

Children can play with the *Tao Kala* alone, although if they want to race, they will need a minimum of one other player. Races can involve unlimited numbers of players depending on the width of the race track. Both boys and girls can play, aged 5 to 13 years old.
**Accessories/Equipment**

To play the game, players need to construct a Tao Kala, a traditional Lanna toy made from natural materials. To do this they will need to gather together half a coconut shell, a wooden reel or piece of wood of a similar cylindrical shape, one large rubber band, a piece of string, a small stick and some additional coconut husk to decorate it with. These toys usually have to be handmade, although some groups such as the Oui Sorn Larn, do make them to sell to local children.

**Time and Place**

On average, each game of *Tao Kala* lasts around 1 minute. The game can be played indoors or outdoors throughout the year as long as it is cool and dry. As the game is fairly quick, children usually play against each other during break times at school. Playing the game on a flat, raised surface (such as a large table top) is ideal as it helps the toy move freely.

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

Children often try to build their *Tao Kala* using a particularly long piece of string, so that the turtle will move as quickly and as far as possible. Although how well the toy is constructed and the surface the game is played on is key, it is also important that children have strong, long arms, with which to pull the rope.

**Popularity**

This game is played for fun by many Tai Yuan children. The *Tao Kala* toy was introduced to local children by the Oui Sorn Lam group, who produce them by hand ready for sale. Local schools have also been known to provide the *Tao Kala* toy for children, so that they can play during their lunch breaks. Nowadays, children are most likely to have learned to play this game from attending Oui Sorn Lam group workshops and cultural events.
Preparation

1. First, drill a small hole at the centre of the coconut shell.

2. Next, make two "V" shaped notches on either side of the shell. The cuts should be approximately 3 cm apart from each other, depending on the width of the reel.
3. Then, make two long slits on both sides of the reel, deep enough so the rubber band can slot comfortably inside them. The slits on the reel should line up with the notches on the rim of the coconut.

4. Place a rubber band into the notches on the coconut rim and stretch it over, tight into the notches on the other side. When taught, the rubber band should easily slot into the slits, on either side of the reel, holding it in place, suspended at the centre of the shell.
5. Tie one end of the string securely to the reel and wind the rest around the reel, leaving a small amount to thread back through the hole.

6. Once threaded, tie the other end of the string to a small stick to make a handle.

7. Finally, decorate the coconut with pieces of wood or coconut husk to make it look like a turtle.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** To set the *Tao Kala* in motion is easy. Players must place the toy on the ground and in one swift movement; pull the string that is attached to the stick.

![Image of a Tao Kala](image1)

**Step 2.** As the players pull the string, they wind up the rubber band inside the toy. When they release the string, the rubber band rapidly unwinds, causing the reel to spin and the turtle races across the floor.

![Image of a child pulling a Tao Kala](image2)
**Step 3.** As the turtle races across the floor, the string winds back onto the reel, ready to be pulled again. Players can pull the string and repeat the game as often as they like.

**Racing the Tao Kala:**

**Step 1.** To race the *Tao Kala*, players first need to locate a decent race track. This can be a smooth flat concrete floor or large table that is free from bumps and obstructions.

**Step 2.** Next, each player needs to place their *Tao Kala* at the start line of the race track. Each toy should be an arms distance away from each other, so they don't collide during the race.

**Step 3.** Each player must hold the *Tao Kala* steady in one hand and pull back the string with the other, ready to go.
**Step 4.** The judge needs to give the players a starting signal which can either be counting “One, Two, Three” or “Ready, Set, Go”. When the start signal is given, the players all have to let go of their *Tao Kalas* and watch them race!
Step 5. The *Tao Kala* that travels the furthest wins the game!

Rules

1. The player whose *Tao Kala* travels the furthest, wins the game.

2. Players that let go of their *Tao Kala* prior to the judge’s signal are usually disqualified from the game. It is at the discretion of other players to decide whether a player let go accidentally and can still remain in the race.