

Heung / Stick Hitting



Site of Documentation

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Description

Heung is a traditional game played by children living in suburban communities surrounding Phnom Penh, Cambodia. In the game, players take turns to flick or hit a short stick called *Koun Heung* with a long stick called *Me Heung*. The more skilled the players are at hitting the stick, the more points they can win. A game of hand-eye coordination and team work, *Heung* is best played in an open space that is free from nearby buildings and bystanders that could be accidentally hit during play.

Who Plays?

This game can be played by both boys and girls, aged between 11 and 12 years old. A minimum of two players is required, but it can also be played in larger groups divided into teams of at least two players.

Accessories/Equipment

This game requires two sticks; a long stick about 40 to 50 cm long and 2 cm in diameter, called *Me Heung* and a short stick about 15 cm long and 2 cm in diameter, called *Koun Heung*. Both sticks are made of wood or bamboo and can be found on the ground or cut from trees. Although sticks can be found in the school playground, they are most often brought in from home.

Time and Place

A game of *Heung* usually takes about 15 minutes to play. It can be played at any time of the day as long the

weather is cool and dry. Children like to play this game in school lunch breaks, at home in the evenings or during holidays. The game requires an area of flat, soft ground at least 4 x 10 metres in size, so that players can dig a hole for the *Koun Heung* and have enough space to flick and hit the sticks.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

The game requires excellent hand-eye coordination. The best players are those that can make precise hits with the sticks. Those that can accurately throw the stick and catch it will also often have an advantage over others. Players also have to be good humoured and be able to accept their 'punishment' with grace if they lose the game.

Popularity

This game is mostly played by boys living in the suburban areas of Phnom Penh. Although the game is well known, it is not frequently played, as without a spacious game area it is easy to injure other children or damage buildings. Many schools actually prohibit *Heung* which may have led to its popularity waning.

History of the game

Heung has a long history and has been played by many generations of children in Cambodia. Traditionally it was popular with children living in the countryside who would play it while out herding cows. In days gone by, the game also had a powerful traditional belief attached to it which limited its play. In Cambodian society, people believed that if children played this game often, it was a sign that their country would soon face famine, drought or desperate situations.

Older members of local communities can also recall playing another version of *Heung* called *Heung Kwak* (Blind *Heung*), which carried a different system of punishment. At the end of a game, winners would flick the stick as far as they could away from the hole. Losers would then have to return it blindfolded (or with closed eyes), back to the hole. *Heung Kwak* was considered highly entertaining, but as a more testing punishment (the losers would have to repeat the exercise over and over to find the hole) this version is not prevalent nowadays.

Preparation

1. To set up the game players have to decide how many points they are going to play for. The target depends on the skill of the players and the time available, but is usually around 50 or 100 points.
2. Next, the players need to find two sticks; a long stick called *Me Heung* and a short stick called *Koun Heung*.
3. Finally, the players need to dig a shallow oval-shaped hole (called *lo*). The hole needs to be around 5 cm deep and 10 cm long but this will vary depending on the size of the sticks.

How is the Game Played?

Step 1. Players need to divide themselves into two equal teams and identify which team will start the first game. To do this, the teams play a traditional game called *Tress*.

- a. In a game of Tress, each participant uses the *Me Heung* to hit the *Koun Heung* up in the air. The player keeps hitting the *Koun Heung* up as many times as possible until they miss, and it falls to the ground. For each successful hit the player is awarded one point.
- b. The next player repeats the process and after each team member has taken their turn, the points are added up to give a total team score. The team that has the highest score starts the game.

Step 2. The first player from the starting team (Team A) has to stand behind the hole, facing the players of Team B, who stand at a distance of around 5 metres from them.

Step 3. A game of *Heung* has three levels; *Chhkeus*, *Paeng Thomada* and *Paeng Ko Tear*.

LEVEL 1

Chhkeus (Flicking)

1. Players from Team A become the 'hitters'. One by one, they place the *Koun Heung* across the oval-shape hole and using the *Me Heung*, flick it high into the air. Once the first player has made their hit (or flick) they must lay the *Me Heung* one stick distance away from the hole, pointing towards Team B.
2. Team B must try to catch the *Koun Heung*. If they are successful, the hitter is disqualified and it's the next player's turn.
3. If Team B can not catch the *Koun Heung* they need to pick it up and throw it back towards the hole. If the *Koun Heung* hits the *Me Heung* or lands in or near the hole, the hitter is also eliminated.
4. If the *Koun Heung* lands at a distance more than one stick length from the hole, the hitter passes Level 1 and gains points.
5. The number of points they are awarded depends on where the *Koun Heung* fell. The distance is measured using the *Me Heung*; if it is one *Me Heung* length away from the hole they win one point, two lengths away they gain two points and so on. The hitter then moves onto Level 2 of the game.



LEVEL 2

Paeng Thomada (Normal Hit)

1. In Level 2, the hitter from Team A holds both sticks in their hands. They then throw the *Koun Heung* up in the air and use the *Me Heung* to hit it as hard as they can.

2. If they miss or if Team B catches the *Koun Heung*, the player is eliminated.
3. If Team B cannot catch it they will once again measure for points from the spot where the *Koun Heung* lands. After being awarded their points the hitter then continues to Level 3.



LEVEL 3

Paeng Ko Tea (Hitting the Duck's Neck)

1. In this final level, the hitter pushes one end of the *Koun Heung* into the ground, pointing up at a 45 degree angle. They then use the *Me Heung* to hit it up into the air and before it lands on the ground, they hit it again.
2. If the player misses on either hit, they are eliminated. If Team B catches the *Koun Heung*, the hitter is out and Team A's points will drop to zero. The next player from Team A can continue playing, but they must start from Level 1 with zero points.
3. If the *Koun Heung* is not caught, the points will once again be measured and added to the total score.



Step 5: When either team reaches the target number of points, they win the game. If the game has been played for a financial bet, then the winning team is awarded the pot of money. If the game is played for 'punishment' the winning team makes the losing team 'Heung'.

Step 6: The team's punishment begins with a winning team member playing *Tress* and accumulating a number of points. Each of these points will represent the number of times that the winning team will be allowed to hit the *Koun Heung* as they did in Level 2.

The greater the number of hits, the further the *Koun Heung* will be away from the hole and the harder the punishment is.

After the winners have hit the *Koun Heung*, the losing team then takes turns to pick up the *Koun Heung* and run back towards the hole while humming a 'Heung' sound. The players have to continuously hum, "Heuuuuung" as they run and can not stop until they reach the hole. If the players fail to do this, another member of the winning team will play *Tress* again and the losers have to repeat the process until they can do it successfully. Once the punishment is complete the teams can play again.



Rules

1. The team that earns the most points during *Tress* starts the game.
2. A player is eliminated if their opponents catch the *Koun Heung* or if they hit the *Me Heung* when they throw the *Koun Heung* back to the hole.
3. If a player swings for the *Koun Heung* and misses, they are eliminated. When a team player is out, the next player takes their place and the game continues and until all players have been eliminated and the teams swap sides.
4. Each time the teams swap, they resume their play from the number of points achieved in previous rounds. The overall winner is the team that reaches the target number of points first. Points are calculated by measuring the distance of the *Koun Heung* from the hole, using the *Me Heung*. One stick length is equal to one point.

5. Teams can play for money or for punishment. Winners can either keep the pot of money or punish the losers by making them *'Heung'*.