Ancient Thai Teases

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The following is a short list of active Thai teases which have been handed down orally from generation to generation. The teases are primarily used with children, although in some cases they can be used with adults. Rhyme is a common feature, with reduplication and onomatopoeia occasionally occurring to fill them out.

The phonemic rendition shows the pronunciation of the words according to the system used by Mary R. Haas in her *Thai-English Student's Dictionary*. The teases were collected with the assistance of Thai acquaintances including my four-year-old nephew. Variations will occur.

The first five concern hairstyles. *phömphia* is hair worn in braided ponytails, or pigtails; *hùalón* is a cleanly shaven head; *phömçùg* is the topknot style of long ago, with the hair long and knotted on the top of the head, and the sides and back of the head cleanly shaven; *phöm màa* ‘horse hair’ refers to bangs.

1. phömphia
   maa lia khîkòb
   phráʔ láj tôb
   hūabîi hūabèen
   ponytail (braided hair)
   come-lick-wood-shavings
   monk-chase-slap
   head-crush-head-flat

Hey, you with the braids! Come and lick wood shavings! The monk will chase you, and slap you till your head is crushed flat!

2. phömphia
   maa lia bajtōnŋ
   phráʔ tii kloŋŋ
   taluŋ tūŋ chēe
   or (talùm tûm mēŋ)
   ponytail (braided hair)
   come-lick-banana-leaf
   monk-hit-drum
   imitative sounds
   (imitative sounds)

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1 This manuscript was sent to us by Don Goral from Thailand in April 1981. Mr. Algaier, who got to know Don in Bangkok, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia and Thailand, and subsequently taught English in Japan. He and his wife collected these taunts in their spare time.
Hey, you with the braids! Come and lick the banana leaf! The monk beats the drum, boom, boom, cha-boom!

3. hüalóon  bald head
    koon màjmàj  shave-new-new
    khwág khîkàj  scoop up-chicken shit
    sâj hüalóon  put on-bald head

Bald head, your head is freshly shaven! Pick up chicken shit, and put it on your head!

4. phôm cùg  topknot hairstyle
    khúug nâmplaaj  mix-fish sauce
    mën khîmàa  smell foully of-dog shit
    nân cóngòu  sit-cowardly, quietly, looking dumb

Hey, topknot! You mix fish sauce with your hair! You smell like dog shit, and you sit quietly like a coward!

5. phôm máa  hair-horse
    nâa mỳan mëw  face-like-cat
    duu paj liëw  look-go-already
    nâa mỳan màa  face-like-dog

With your hair cut in bangs, your face is like a cat, but the longer I look, your face is like a dog.

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The next two teases, or insults, are usually said fat girls. tùm, in the second example, means fatso or fatty.

6. ?ūan tú?-tá?  fat (with intensifiers)
    kin marâ? cîm khîi  eat-bitter melon-dip into-shit
    ?ūan màj dii  fat-not-good
    kin khîi cîm marâ?  eat-shit-dip into-bitter melon

Hey fatso, eat melon dipped in shit! Being fat is no good; eat shit dipped in melon.
7. tūm tseq
   maa lēg tūm dii
   tūm sāj khī
dāj mii khon ?aw
large clay jar-break
come-exchange-jar-good
jar-put in-shit
not-have-person-take

The big jar is broken, trade it in for a better one; no one will take the jar containing shit.

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The next two teases are used with children who are crybabies and tattletales, respectively.

8. khīne
    khāaj dōc khī
    khāaj māj mōd
    rōc hāaj nēnē
given to crying; crybaby
sell-"khī" flower (an edible flower used in curries)
sell-not-completely
cry-imitative of crying

Crybaby! You try to sell flowers; when you can’t sell them all, you cry like a baby!

9. khūmāa sāam sōc
    pañ bōc mēcjaaj
    mēcjaaj māj jūu
    cāb ?ii nūu tēnra...
ride a horse-three-cubits
go-tell-mother-in-law
mother-in-law-not-be (in place)
grab-derog.-you (child)-dance

You ride a horse three measures to go and tell your mother-in-law; if she isn’t there, you grab the girls and dance!

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Though you don’t often hear the following tease in its entirety, the first line is common enough. It’s said in situations where “it serves you right” is appropriate, and is used with both children and adults.

10. sōm nāmnāa
    kalaa hūa cō?
    lūuģsāaw khraj mō?
    jōg hāj pañ lēej
as befits-face, looks
coconut shell-head-puncture
daughter-who-suitable, fitting
lift, raise-give-go-utterly
It serves you right; your skull is cracked! If you can find a girl that will accept you, take her away!

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This tease is said by parents to children when their children try to sleep between them in bed.

11. noon klaŋŋ  
    kin raŋŋ mǎa nâw  
    noon rim  
    kin thábthim thcoon  
    lie-middle  
    eat-trough-dog-rotten  
    lie-edge  
    eat-pomegranate-gold

If you sleep between us, you eat from the trough of a rotten dog; if you sleep beside us, you eat golden pomegranates.

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The following can be said either to children, as when unattended by adults, or to adults, as when unattended by spouses.

12. mɛɛw mâj jùu  
    nűu rāareeŋ  
    mɛɛw klàbmaa  
    länḵẖaa pẹŋ  
    cat-not-be (in place)  
    mouse-jovial, in high spirits  
    cat-return  
    roof-blows off

When the cat's away, the mice make merry; when the cat comes back, off blows the roof.

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The final insult is said to older men that have married young girls. It is used by scamps and scalawags who will earn a fair beating if caught.

13. taa kêe  
    jàag mii mia săaw  
    thỳy májtháaw  
    jàgjëe jágjan  
    maternal grandfather-old  
    want-have-wife-young girl  
    carry-walking stick  
    hobble-hobble

The old man wants a young wife, yet he hobbles with a cane!