

HISTORY OF TAEKWONDO

Translated from HONG-GEUK MUL (Korean Language), TAE means "to kick" or "to strike with the foot," KWON means "fist" or "to strike with the hand," DO means a "discipline" or "art, way." Together, TAEKWONDO means the art of kicking and punching or the art of unarmed combat. Modern-day TAEKWONDO, developing over the years, is a unique martial art incorporating both the quick, straight-line movements that characterized the various Japanese systems & the flowing circular movements of most Chinese styles. What truly distinguishes TAEKWONDO are the many varied and uniquely powerful kicking techniques. It is this prominent use of leg and kicking stems. Yet, TAEKWONDO is far more than simply a system concerned with physical prowess, for it is also an art directed toward the moral development of its students.

The earliest records of TAEKWONDO practice date back to about 50 BC. During this time, Korea had three kingdoms: **Silla**, founded on the Jyongju plain in 57 BC; **Koguryo**, founded in the Yalu River Valley in 37 BC; & **Baekche**, founded in the southwestern area of the Korean peninsula in 18 BC. Evidence of the practice of TAE-KYON (the earliest known form of TAEKWONDO) found in paintings on the ceiling of the Muyong-chong, a royal tomb from the Koguryo dynasty. These & other mural paintings show unarmed combatants using techniques that are virtually identical to those of modern-day TAEKWONDO. Of particular interest are details that show the use of the knife hand, fist & classical fighting stances, all components of modern TAEKWONDO.

Although TAEKWONDO first appeared in the Koguryo kingdom, it is Silla's warrior nobility, the hwarang, where credited for the growth and spread of the art throughout Korea. Of the three kingdoms, Silla was the first to be formed, but it remained the smallest & least civilized. Its coastline was constantly under attack by Japanese pirates. After Silla appealed for help against the continual harassment by the Japanese pirates. King Gwanggaeto, the 19th in the line of Koguryo monarchs, sent a force of 50,000 soldiers into neighboring Silla to help the smaller kingdoms drive out the pirates. At this time the introduction of TAEK-KYON to Silla's warriors by early masters of the art.

These TAE-KYON trained warriors became known as the Hwarang. Founded initially as a military academy for young nobility of Silla, the society of the Hwarang-do ("the way of flowering manhood") adopted TAEK-KYON as a part of its basic training regimen. The society was an elite group, consisting of the Hwarang, or leaders, selected from among the sons of royalty ages 16 through 20, & the Nag-do, or cadets, assembled from the rest of the young nobility & who totaled from 200 to 1000 at any given time. The young men within the society evolved in many disciplines, including history, Confucian philosophy, ethics, Buddhist morality, riding, archery, sword play, military tactics and, of course, TAEK-KYON. The principles of the Hwarang-do education are based on the **Five Codes of Human Conduct**, as established by the Buddhist scholar Wonkang. These axioms are:

Be loyal to your country
Be obedient to your parents
Be trustworthy to your friends
Never retreat in battle
Never make an unjust kill

TAEK-KYON was taught in conjunction with the Five Codes of Human Conduct so that it became a way of life for the young men. These codes of moral behavior that served to guide their lives & the use to which they put their training in TAEK-KYON.

Today, these codes reflect the so-called **11 commandments** of modern TAEKWONDO. As with the original codes of conduct, these modern axioms are used to guide the moral development of students of the art. Only students who fully understand these tenets can ever hope to master the true essence of the art.

Loyalty to your country
Respect your parents
Faithfulness to your spouse
Respect your brothers and sisters
Loyalty to your friends
respect your elders
Respect your teachers
Never take life unjustly
Indomitable spirit
Loyalty to your school
Finish what you begin

Along with their training in fundamental education & military skills. The Hwarang were also skilled in poetry, singing and dancing. Students were encouraged to travel throughout the peninsula in order to learn about the regions & people. These traveling warriors were responsible for spreading TAEK-KYON throughout Korea during the Silla dynasty, which lasted from 668 AD to 935 AD. During this era, TAEK-KYON remained primarily a sports and recreational activity designed to improve physical fitness (although it was a formidable system of self-defense). It was not until the Koryo dynasty, which began in 935 & lasted until 1392, that the focus of the art changed. During this time, TAEK-KYON became known as SUBAK. Also during the reign of King Uijong (between the years of 1147 & 1170) it changed from a system designed primarily to promote fitness into a fighting art.

The first book widely available on the art was during the Yi dynasty (1397 to 1907) to promote the art among the population. Prior to this book, these arts were primarily for military nobility. The publication of this book & the subsequent popularizing of the art among the general public was responsible for the survival of SUBAK during this era. During the second half of the Yi dynasty, political conflict & the de-emphases of military activities in favor of more scholarly pursuits led to a significant education in the practice of the art. Records of the practice of SUBAK are sparse during this time. The art again returned to its former role as a recreational & fitness activity, with the exception that now it was the general population that maintained the art & not the nobility. Subak as an art became fragmented & diffused throughout the country, & its practice continued to decline until only incomplete remnants remained. What limited knowledge there was of the art was handed down from one generation to the next within individual families that generally practiced it in secret.

It was not until 1909 that Korea's fighting arts experienced a marked resurgence, for in that year the Japanese invaded Korea, occupying the country for the next 36 years. During this time, the Japanese resident general officially banned the practice of all military arts for native Koreans. Ironically, this very act sparked a renewed growth of SUBAK. Patriots, fueled by a hatred of their subjugators, organized themselves to study the martial arts. Still others left Korea to work & study in China & even Japan itself, where exposed to the fighting arts native to those countries. In Korea, SUBAK / TAEK-KYON stayed through a number of famous masters of the Korean fighting arts. The underground nature of the martial arts in Korea changed in 1943, first JUDO & then KARATE & KUNG-FU officially introduced. The following two years saw a dramatic increase in interest in the martial arts throughout the country. It was not until Korea's liberation in 1945 that its own fighting arts finally took root and began to flourish.

For many years, a variety of Korean martial art styles existed throughout the country. These styles varied from one another according to the amount of influence each master had absorbed from the numerous Chinese and Japanese styles. The extent to which the native SUBAK / TAEK-KYON were modified over many years.

The first *kwon* ("school") to teach a native Korean style of martial art opened in 1945 in Yong Chun, Seoul. This *dojang* (gymnasium) named *Chung Do Kwan*. Later that same year, the *Moo Duk Kwan* & the *Yun Moo Kwan* also opened in Seoul. The following year, the *Chang Moo Kwan* followed by the *Chi do Kwan* were established. Seven other major schools formed in 1953 through the early 1960's. The most prominent being *Ji Do Kwan*, *Song Moo Kwan* & *Oh Do Kwan*, all of which opened between 1953 & 1954. Although each of these schools claimed to teach the traditional Korean martial art, each one emphasized a different aspect of TAE-KYON / SUBAK & various names emerged for each system. Styles became known as *Soo Bahk Do*, *Kwon Bop*, *Kong Soo Do*, *Tae Soo Do* & *Dang Soo So*. There are many of whom claim to teach traditional TAEK-KYON.

Dissension between the various *kwans* prevented the formation of a central regulating board for 10 years. Yet, during those years, the martial arts gained a strong foothold within the newly formed Korean Armed Forces (1945), with TAEK-KYON becoming a regular part of military training. In early 1946, masters of the art began teaching TAEK-KYON to troops stationed in Kwang Ju. This set the foundation for the great turning point in the Korean martial arts in 1952. That year, at the height of the Korean War, President Syngman Rhee watched a half-hour demonstration by Korean Martial arts masters. President Rhee was so impressed with what he saw that he ordered training in the martial arts be adopted as part of regular military training. This single act was to have a far reaching effect on the Korean martial arts. Later that same year, a master was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for special training in radio communications. The master had been one of those to perform before President Rhee. President Rhee had taken special notice of his abilities prior to his assignment to the United States. During his stay in Georgia, the master demonstrated his art to both the military & the general public, further publicizing Korea's fighting art. In Korea Special Forces was well known as the protectors of South Korea. The most famous of these Special Forces units were the **Black Tigers**, who staged many espionage missions across the borders in hostile territory. Occasionally they performed assassinations. Many great martial artists lost their lives during this time, including the founders of the *Chang Moo Kwan* & the *Yun Moo Kwan*.

Following the end of the war in 1953, the Korean 29th Infantry Division headquarters on Che Ju island. This unit was responsible for all TAEK-KYON training in the Korean Army. Two years later, on April 11, 1955, a meeting convened to unify the various *kwans* under a common name. The name of *Tae Soo Do* was accepted by the majority of the *kwon* master. They then agreed to merge their various styles for the benefit of all schools. However, two years later the name changed again, this time to what is known as TAEKWONDO. Chosen both because it accurately describes the nature of the art (comprised of both hand and foot techniques) as well as for its similarity to the art's early name of TAEK-KYON. TAEKWONDO has been the recognized name for the Korean martial arts since that day. However, although most of the *kwans* merged under this common name, there were a few who did not. It has never been clear which of the original eight did in fact merge in 1955. Those who did not, only *Hapkido* remains as a recognized separate art in itself. Yet, despite the historical merging, dissension between the *kwans* did not end at that meeting in 1955. Until the formation of the Korean Taekwondo Association on September 14, 1961, & indeed for a few years thereafter, there remained much animosity between the various masters.

The first leaders of the Korean Taekwondo Association saw the potential for the spread, growth of their art. Using their authority to send instructors & demonstration teams all over the world, spread rapidly from the army into high schools & colleges. *Dojangs* for the general public sprang up everywhere. TAEKWONDO had begun to blossom. Within a very brief time, the art had developed such a reputation for being an effective fighting system. That during the Vietnam War, the South Vietnamese government requested instructors to train its troops.

During the 1960's, thousands of TAEKWONDO demonstrators performed around the world before fascinated governments, which with few exceptions followed up such exhibitions with calls for Korean instructors to teach in their countries. By the beginning of the 1970's TAEKWONDO had firmly established itself worldwide.

May 28, 1973 a new, worldwide organization, the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF), was formed. Since that day, all TAEKWONDO activities outside of Korea are coordinated by the WTF, the only official organization recognized by the Korean government as an international regulating body for TAEKWONDO. Also in May 1973, the first biannual World Taekwondo Championships were held in Seoul as a prelude to the inauguration of the WTF. Since then, the world championships are hosted in many countries around the world, including the United States, West Germany, South America & Denmark.

It was TAEKWONDO's prominence in the circle of international sports that brought the art to the attention of the **General Association of International Sports Federation (GAISF)**. GAISF is an association of all international sports, both Olympic and non-Olympic, with direct ties to the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**. After the recognition of TAEKWONDO as a sport introduced to the IOC, which recognized & admitted the WTF in July 1980. Following this initial contact, at the General Session of the IOC in May 1982. The crowning achievement of TAEKWONDO as a sport came when the art was designated as an official Demonstration Sport for the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea.

In the short time since the inception of the WTF in 1973, TAEKWONDO has grown with unprecedented rapidity as a worldwide sport. Today, TAEKWONDO is one of only two martial arts systems (the other being Karate-do) practiced all over the world. Boasting an international membership of more than 30 million practitioners in over 174 countries, making it the most practiced martial art style in the world.

Considering the unparalleled growth of the art the TAEKWONDO & its acceptance into the circle of Olympic sports, there seems little doubt that it will continue to enjoy its rapidly expanding popularity around the world. TAEKWONDO is a highly complex system composed of many elements, & it is in this diverse nature where the true strength of the art lies.