

# TAE KWON DO



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## History of Tae Kwon Do

Tae Kwon Do, a distinctly Korean martial art, has an interesting history, which spans several thousands of years. Tae Kwon Do has been practiced as a sport and as a martial art since its inception. The study of Tae Kwon Do not only improves one's physical fitness and health but also employs as its highest goal inner peace and serenity. The lengthy history of Tae Kwon Do, and its association with the principles of Zen Buddhism, is reflected in the basic forms and skills of this combination of healthful sport and mental discipline. The evolution of Tae Kwon Do from its origin as a martial art and sport in a relatively small Asian country to its present day worldwide popularity is involved and complex. It is the purpose of this article to describe the influences of Korean history on the development of Tae Kwon Do over a span of millennia, to its position today as an internationally acclaimed martial art.

The origin of Tae Kwon Do is obscured by four thousand years of Korean history. In its earliest form, it was probably practiced as a means of protection from the attacks of wild animals. Since these attacks could originate from any direction, a series of self-defense movements was developed that allowed one to instantly and reflexively defend himself from any possible attack. Specific stylized patterns were formed for instinctive self-defense, and these patterns became a system of blocks, kicks, and punches that was the ancestor of today's modern Tae Kwon Do.

There has been some speculation that Tae Kwon Do is not indigenous to Korea, but a synthesis of martial arts from China and other Asian countries. The evidence, however, does not support this conclusion. The legendary origins of the eastern martial arts are, as a rule, ascribed to a Buddhist monk from India, Bodhidharma. According to legend and Chan Buddhist texts, Bodhidharma came to China in the sixth century AD. He founded a monastery at Shaolin-So where he began to teach special techniques of breath control and meditation. His followers were physically incapable of practicing the strenuous techniques.

So Bodhidharma taught them methods of strengthening their bodies and at the same time, their spirit. These methods later combined with the principles of the I-Ching and Taoism formed the basis of the Chinese martial art forms of Kung Fu, Kempo, and Tai Chi Chuan.

In Korea, the first tangible evidence of a martial art form that resembles modern Tae Kwon Do dates from the Three Kingdoms period. A mural painted on the wall of a tomb which was built in the kingdom of Koguryo (37 B.C.-66 AD) located in southern Manchuria (N. Korea) clearly shows "two youths engaged in Tae Kwon Do sparring."<sup>1</sup> Since the Myung-Chong tomb is located in Tunsoko, capitol of Koguryo from 3 AD until 427 AD, the evidence indicates that Koreans were developing a native martial art form long before Bodhidharma arrived in China. The tomb mural shows one man in the left forward stance protecting his midsection with his left hand in the left forward position while his sparring partner is in an attacking position with his left hand outstretched. Both of these positions correspond closely to movements used in modern Tae Kwon Do sparring. Since the tomb mural has been dated between 3 AD and 427 AD, "It can be safely said that Tae Kwon Do was known by this time at the latest."<sup>2</sup>

Further evidence that Tae Kwon Do has been long practiced in Korea as a sport as well as a martial art form has been found in another tomb of the Koguryo period. A mural painted on the wall of this tomb depicts a man in a drill suit with a belt around the waist, much like the modern belted doboks (or practice uniforms) used by modern students of Tae Kwon Do. The figure in the tomb painting is posed in a pattern using his left hand to protect his head with an overhand block. Both blocks are used in modern Tae Kwon Do forms and sparring.

In the kingdoms of Paekje (18 B.C.-600 AD), which was located along the Han River in southwestern Korea, martial arts were sponsored by the Paekje kings. The ancient records show that horseback riding, archery, and barehanded fighting arts were very popular among both military men and common people of this era. Records, which have survived from this time "have it that in ancient days there was a self defense art using both the arms and legs."<sup>3</sup> The fact that unarmed combat skills were practiced by the common people as well as by military men emphasizes again the body building/sport aspect that has characterized Korean martial art forms since their inception. The records from Paekje offer more evidence that Tae Kwon Do is a native Korean form handed down from the earliest recorded eras in Korea's history.

It was the kingdom of Silla (57 B.C.-936 AD) which existed along the southeastern portion of the Korean peninsula, that the Korean martial art forms reached their highest level yet. Silla unified the Three Kingdoms and, after taking over Paekje in 668 AD and Koguryo in 670 AD, held control for three centuries. A military, educational, and social organization started by King Jin Heung, and known as the Hwa Rang Do, played a major role in the unifying of the Three Kingdoms. The Hwa Rang Do was made up of youths of noble families, devoted to cultivating mind and body in order to better serve Silla. The martial spirit represented by the Hwa Rang Do "became the root of Silla's national morality and strength."<sup>4</sup> They followed a code of honor comprised of rigid loyalty to the nation, respect and obedience to one's parents, unswerving loyalty of friends, courage in battle, and prudence on using violence or taking life. This code of honor remains the philosophical backbone of Korean martial arts even today. The Hwa Rang Do trained in all forms of martial skills, including an unarmed fighting form known as Soo Bak, which they refined into a highly effective series of combative movements. In addition to advocating the study of unarmed combat as a part of physical and military training, the Hwa Rang Do also recommended it as a recreational activity. Korean culture and the native martial arts were strongly influenced and enriched by this group of men, and modern students of Tae Kwon Do owe them a debt of gratitude for preserving and refining the various forms of unarmed combat present during this era. Modern students would do well to study and live by this code of honor followed by the Hwa Rang Do, as an understanding of this philosophy is still an essential part of mastering Tae Kwon Do.

During the Koryo Dynasty (935 A.D.-1392 AD) the study of unarmed combat in Korea reached its greatest early popularity. Soo Bak Do, as Tae Kwon Do was then called, was practiced as sport with detailed rules as well as being a martial arts form. It was also during the Koryo Dynasty that "the science was first technically organized and systemized by the leading masters of those times."<sup>5</sup> The study of Soo Bak was supported by the royal family and those skilled in the art were often favorably considered for promotion in the military or civil service. The kings of Koryo staged matches and demonstrations of Soo Bak annually. Military men and masters of the art were invited by the royal family to demonstrate their skills at the royal court. The support given to Soo Bak by the royal family military men and the general public during this period indicates the strong social position it occupied as a martial arts form and a recreational activity.

With the coming of the Yi Dynasty in 1392 AD, however, the strong emphasis placed on military training, physical fitness and the ability to defend the nation was weakened. King Taejo, founder of the Yi Dynasty, replaced Buddhism with Confucianism as the state religion. The ruling class adopted Confucian guidelines in their political and cultural outlook as well as in their personal lives. Confucian thinking advocated classical Chinese learning and played down physical activity. According to the Confucian way of thought, the "superior man" spent his time reading the Chinese classics, composing poetry or learning to play musical instruments. Only "inferior men" engaged in strenuous physical activities such as the martial arts. With ideas like this dominating the ruling class, "it is little wonder that popularity of Tae Kwon Do, then known as Tae Kyon, began to decline among the people and that its technical development was also hindered during this period."<sup>8</sup> Civil officers gained higher esteem than military officers, socially as well as politically, and the development of Korean martial arts was stifled during the reign of the early Yi rulers.

Fortunately for the later generations of Tae Kwon Do students, one Yi Dynasty ruler, King Chongjo, took an active interest in the native martial arts of Korea. In 1790 AD he ordered General Lee Duck Mu to compile an official textbook on all martial art forms then presented in Korea, including a chapter on the forms of unarmed combat. This volume, known as the Muye Dobo Tongji, is now considered a definitive early classic of martial arts of Korea. The Muye Dobo Tongji was a martial arts manual of the time using drawings from carved wooden blocks and consisting of about forty pages of Korean style paper. The illustrations and text of the volume describe the Korean martial arts of the Yi Dynasty very clearly. The traditional Korean unarmed combat skills, including Soo Bak and Tae Kyon, are codified and illustrated in the Muye Dobo Tongji as well. While King Chongjo was not able to reverse the trend of disinterest in the martial skills, the volume he ordered General Lee Duck Mu to compile preserved a written record of the native Korean forms for the instruction of future generations.

Military training and national defense continued to be neglected in Korea during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No organized instruction was available and the forms were handed down from father to son, or teacher to disciple, always in the greatest secrecy. As the Yi Dynasty came to a close in 1909 AD with

the Japanese occupation of Korea, the practice of military skills declined even further. The Japanese colonial government banned all cultural activities, including team sports and the practice of martial arts, in the attempt to destroy the Korean identity. Some martial arts instructors continued to practice their skills in secrecy, and in this way the Korean martial arts were kept alive. Japanese Karate and various Chinese forms were introduced into Korea during this time, and the teachers of Soo Bak and Tae Kwon further developed and incorporated these foreign techniques into the Korean forms already being practiced. A hybrid form developed utilizing Soo Bak as its core and including techniques from Chinese Shaolin-Su martial arts and Japanese Karate. This new form was called Tang Soo Do or Kong Soo Do.

After liberation of Korea in 1945, Tae Kwon Do began another developmental leap. Because of the foreign influence on Korean martial arts during the Japanese occupation, many instructors saw the need to unify the various styles present in Korea. Immediately after World War Two, many masters returned to the traditional Korean forms of unarmed combat and combined them into a unified, organized national sport. There was much discussion among the master instructors about how best to unite the various dojangs (martial arts schools) and recover traditional Tae Kwon. The first conference that attempted to unite the different dojangs took place in 1946, but without much success. Still, there was a continuing and conscious effort to unite the major schools and standardize instruction methods throughout the country. What the master instructors sought was a return to a distinctively Korean form of unarmed martial skills, as free as possible from the foreign influences Tae Kwon had undergone during the years of the Japanese occupation. Finally, after years of discussion and debate, the leaders of six major schools were able to agree on a new, unified form, and standardized methods of instruction. The name chosen for this form was Tae Kwon Do. In Korean language, "Tae means to jump or kick or smash with the foot; Kwon means to punch or strike with the hand or fist; Do means, "a philosophical way or ways of life."<sup>7</sup> In English this new unified form translates as "the way of fist and foot fighting." The form the master instructors finally settled on was characterized by four basic kinds of skills; blocking, punching, and kicking techniques, coordinated sequences of basic techniques called forms, or Poomse, free sparring, and breaking methods, a measure of concentration or focus. Finally, after years of intense discussion and research, the master instructors had developed a Korean martial arts form, one that used traditional ancient Korean movements, those in use before foreign influences had altered the native methods of unarmed combat.

The vision of the men who made up the Korean Tae Soo Do Association, to make Tae Kwon Do into a national sport as well as a martial art form, began to be realized in the early 1960's. By governmental decree, the Tae Soo Do Association was recognized and given official membership in the Korean Amateur Sports Association in 1961. Tae Kwon Do was admitted as an official event for the first time at the forty-third Korean National Games in October of 1962. In August of 1965, the Korean Tae Soo Do Association, the name Tae Kwon Do was fully accepted by all Koreans, however, the effort to make Tae Kwon Do into a national sport was far from finished.

In January of 1971, Dr. Un Yong Kim was elected president of the Korea Tae Kwon Do Association. The dynamic leadership of this man provided the impetus to develop Tae Kwon Do activities even more extensively. Under Dr. Kim's able guidance, the Korea Tae Kwon Do Association "has been significantly developed and advanced spiritually, physically and technically, both in Korea and internationally." In May, 1973, the World Tae Kwon Do Federation was organized under Dr. Kim's leadership to promote Tae Kwon Do on an international level. In addition, Dr. Kim was instrumental in helping to organize the building of the Kuk Ki Won in Seoul. The Kuk Ki Won, literally the Institute for National Sport, has become the "Mecca of World Tae Kwon Do" and the main educational and training center for the Korea Tae Kwon Do Association."<sup>9</sup> In addition to the World Tae Kwon Do Federation, there are two other major Korean martial art organizations that promote the native martial art skills of Korea on a local and international level; Korean Soo Bak Do, under the leadership of Grandmaster Hwang Ki, and the International Tae Kwon Do Federation, under General Hi Hong Choi. In May of 1973, the First World Tae Kwon Do Championship was held at the Kuk Ki Won. Over two-hundred champions from seven different nations competed in this event. The success of this event was proof that Tae Kwon Do had been internationally recognized as a method of promoting physical fitness and as a valid sport, in addition to being an extremely effective method of self defense. The preceding history of Tae Kwon Do gives some insight into the roots and traditions of the Korean unarmed combat skills, but it does not

satisfactorily explain why Tae Kwon Do has become so popular in the United States and the rest of the world in the past fifteen years. In the United States, very few people had heard of martial arts until well after World War Two. In 1952, Master Masutatsu Oyama of Japan traveled across the United States, giving demonstrations of intricate karate katas. Few Americans were able to appreciate his skill, however, and his demonstrations were met with boos and hisses until Master Oyama began to demonstrate board and brick breaking techniques. This effective demonstration of the potential power of Karate was something the American audience could appreciate and the boos changed to applause. Unfortunately, this method of getting the audience's attention implanted a false notion of what martial arts are all about in the minds of most Americans. In reality, breaking techniques play only a small part in Karate and Tae Kwon Do training, but the exaggerated emphasis placed on them has changed very slowly in the American concept of the Eastern martial arts. Today, most Americans, and certainly those who practice some form of Oriental martial art skill, recognize that Tae Kwon Do is a complex art and sport as well as an effective self-defense technique.

Unfortunately the spiritual side of Tae Kwon Do, and its relationship to meditation and Buddhist principles of non-violence, is still somewhat neglected by many American students. While they are readily able to grasp the self-defense and physical fitness aspects of Tae Kwon Do, the spiritual side of the art seems to elude them, especially at the lower ranking levels. As one advances in Tae Kwon Do and gains a better understanding of its history, and philosophy, the spiritual aspects become more readily apparent. Holders of upper Dan grades (Black belts) especially, are likely to seek out qualified instructors to show them this neglected side of their training. Tae Kwon Do is, after all, both a mental and physical exercise. According to Master Kiel Soon Park, President of the International Council on Martial Arts Education, "Tae Kwon Do is a way of life. It's purpose is to enable men and women to realize their full potential both mentally and physically. If the mental aspect is ignored, its physical aspect is meaningless." These worlds bring to mind the code of honor followed by the Hwa Rang Do who deplored unnecessary violence and practiced Tae Kwon Do for spiritual as well as physical improvement. Tae Kwon Do has a long history behind it; the average American student would do well to learn both the history and philosophy of the form in order to become truly proficient in it.

With the influx of qualified instructors into the United States during the last twenty years, it is no wonder that interest in the Oriental martial arts has greatly increased. Many American servicemen returning home after being stationed in Japan or Korea, and studying Karate or Tae Kwon Do there, brought their interest in the martial arts home with them. There were very few qualified Tae Kwon Do instructors in the United States, however, until the late 1950's and early 1960's, when a small number of Korean masters, attracted by the growing interest in Tae Kwon Do among Americans, came to the United States. Among the "early pioneers" and masters of Tae Kwon Do in America were Jhoon Rhee, Ki Whang Kim in the Northeastern States, Dae S. Kim in Georgia, Henry Cho and Richard Chun, as well as approximately twenty-five other "master instructors." These men offered highly qualified instruction in the martial arts bringing with them the years of experience in Tae Kwon Do, Judo and other Korean martial arts. Unlike some other Eastern martial arts forms, which were being taught in the U.S.A. by unqualified instructors, the early migration of skilled instructors has supported the quality instruction in Tae Kwon Do.

From this beginning in the late 1950's, the practice of Tae Kwon Do has increased dramatically, both as a sport and self-defense form. Today, there are over one-thousand Korean master instructors in the U.S. and the total number of students has increased accordingly. A number of regional Tae Kwon Do associations were formed in the early 70's to handle organizational problems and promote local tournaments. In addition, colleges and universities in the U.S. formed associations of their own. In 1972, the American Collegiate Tae Kwon Do Association was formed to sponsor tournaments and insure quality Tae Kwon Do instruction in American universities. In October of 1979, Tae Kwon Do was admitted into the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States. This was largely due to the efforts of Mr. David Rivenes, then president of the Amateur Athletic Union, and Mr. Ken Min of the University of California at Berkeley. This official recognition of Tae Kwon Do as an amateur sport launched it into a period of substantial growth. The First Annual National AAU Tae Kwon Do Championship was held at Yale University in March of 1975, followed by the Second National Championship held in Kansas City in March of 1976. A third national championship tournament was held at the University of Berkeley in California in 1977. In September of 1977, the AAU hosted the Third Tae Kwon Do World

Championships at the Chicago Amphitheater. More than forty-six national teams, consisting of over five hundred contestants, officials and master instructors participated in the event. Each year hundreds of Tae Kwon Do championships are held in the United States under the sponsorship of various Tae Kwon Do organizations. Interest in Tae Kwon Do has obviously increased a great deal in the U.S.A. since its introduction here in the late 50's.

Tae Kwon Do has also continued to become more and more popular on an international level. The World Tae Kwon Do Federation became an affiliate of the General Assembly of International Sports Federation in October of 1975. In 1976 the International Military Sports Council recognized Tae Kwon Do as an official sport and added it to their list of events. In 1979 the Fourth World Tae Kwon Do Championships were held in West Germany and the Fifth World Championships are scheduled for the spring of 1982. Tae Kwon Do's status as an internationally practiced sport has recently been elevated to that of an Olympic sport by the International Olympic Committee in 1980. This recognition of Tae Kwon Do as a competitive sport that promotes physical fitness as well as being an effective martial art form has contributed greatly to the prestige it enjoys today.

Even with the preceding history of Tae Kwon Do, from its inception as a self-defense form to its current position as an Olympic Games event, the exact reason as to why Tae Kwon Do's history and evolution cover four thousand years of recorded history and the reasons for its continuing popularity are involved and complex. Many Americans still incorrectly assume that "Tae Kwon Do is simply a technique to forge hands and feet into lethal weapons."<sup>10</sup> The history of Tae Kwon Do proves that it is far more than a self-defense form or a method of hurting people. As the writers state "Tae Kwon Do develops balance, speed, agility, strength and rhythm, it offers both a physical and mental challenge."<sup>11</sup> Far from leading a person into violent or savage behavior, regular practice of Tae Kwon Do encourages self discipline, self control and inner peace. Tae Kwon Do provides a setting for a feeling of emotional well being, free from stress and fear. Tae Kwon Do sparring teaches a trust in one's instructors and fellow students. Its link to Buddhist techniques, meditation and concentration make Tae Kwon Do a much more involved sport than most. In short, in addition to encouraging positive moral values such as trust and courage, Tae Kwon Do develops self confidence and respect. In combining all different aspects of martial arts skills such as philosophical reflection, sport, physical fitness, Tae Kwon Do emerges as a truly unique approach to living. When practiced as a way of life, Tae Kwon Do can help one to see problems in a ma?? which benefits everyone concerned. For all these reasons, Tae Kwon Do has remained popular and its popularity is certain to increase in years to come.

## **What is Poomse**

The Tae Kwon Do poomse consist of stances, blocks, punches, strikes and kicks arranged in a meaningful order in response to attacks from multiple imaginary assailants attacking from several directions. The poomse were formerly the only means masters had to transmit the essence of Tae Kwon Do and their interpretation of the art to their students. Until the twentieth century, free sparing as we know it today did not exist. Students were taught to execute techniques full force and adequate safety equipment had not been developed.

Through seemingly endless repetition of the poomse (over 1,000 times each for complete understanding), the student learns the true nature and meaning of each poomse. Balance, focus, coordination, proper breath control and self discipline emerge as benefits of continued poomse practice. After many years, the student begins to discover the mental and spiritual nature of Tae Kwon Do through the poomse. Watching one who has mastered a poomse perform it is a breath taking sight.

Poomse practice is considered extremely important by Tae Kwon Do masters. It comprises 40-50% of testing requirement for promotion to higher rank. It is impossible for the student to understand the art of Tae Kwon Do without thorough understanding of poomse.

Taegeuk 1-8 or Palgae 1-8 plus Koryo are required for promotion to Cho Dan (1st degree black belt). The forms are learned in order as the student's ability prepares him to assimilate the more advanced forms. The student should never seek to learn advanced poomse without the consent and permission of his instructor. A beginner who attempts to learn advanced poomse can not hope to understand them as he has not properly understood the ones appropriate to his level.

Each poomse has its own distinct essence and character. Each is understood in terms of an organic whole rather than as an assortment of separate techniques. There is an inherent unity to each poomse. Ultimately this unity is perceived and understood by the student as he becomes able to perform the entire poomse without the intervention of conscious thought regarding sequence and timing of the component movements.

In addition to improving and developing the student's understanding of the technical aspects of Tae Kwon Do, i.e.: how to respond to and defend against multiple attacks from different directions and what types of defenses and counter attacks apply to different situations, the poomse also train the student's mind and spirit. We are each our own worst enemy. We must all overcome the tendencies to be complacent, lazy and to let our attention wander. The poomse serve to open the door to making mind, body and spirit one. Through long practice of poomse, we polish the rough edges of our characters and eventually come to understand that Tae Kwon Do is an art and much more than merely a means of self defense.

## **The Ten Commandments of Form Training**

1. Memorize the line of movement, the sequence and direction of techniques in the form.
2. In assuming the ready stance be calm, cautious and courageous. Even if this attitude is not outwardly expressed, it must be felt each time the form is begun.
3. In learning the form make the movements slowly accurately and precisely. As you learn the forms, gradually speed up the movements, being careful to maintain good form in the execution of the techniques.
4. The execution of each movement must be dynamic. When a yell (Kihap) is called for, it must be sharp and loud, reflecting the strong Spirit of the performer.
5. Maintain an objective focus. Look straight forward in executing a block, punch or kick, you should see and visualize the target area but not "look at" it. The gaze should not wander or concentrate on a specific technique or stance being executed.
6. In turning, look first, then turn, remember that in the forms one defends against multiple, imaginary attackers. One must see the direction from which an attack is coming before he can defend against it.
7. In walking, maintain poise, balance and good stance. Hips and shoulders should both move on an even plane and not up and down from one stance to the next.
8. Relax while assuming the stance and executing the technique until the instant the technique would impact the opponent. Then focus sharply on the end of the technique bringing all of the body's strength (momentarily) into the technique. One must not be tense throughout the movement as this inhibits speed and both aesthetic quality and effectiveness of the technique.
9. Be certain to practice the forms from the different angles so as not to become disoriented if the form is practiced in strange surroundings. The movements should be performed one per second except when instructions call for a slow movement performed with tension.
10. Return to the ready stance, calmly, gracefully and with satisfaction. Remember that the forms are best learned from a master instructor.

# **A Comprehensive View of the Oriental Martial Arts: The Foundations of Tae Kwon Do<sup>1</sup>**

There is a great deal of confusion in the Western view of the Oriental Martial Arts. These barehanded or simply armed skills, rich in history and tradition, are often misrepresented by Western mass media. The typical media image places Eastern martial arts both in the shadowy realm of foreign intrigue and the dazzling light of superhuman achievement.

Their complexity and sometimes foreign methods have even caused misunderstandings among some sincere Western students. As with any taught discipline, a student's conceptions are often those of his instructor, whether critically evaluated or not, and mistakes in techniques or doctrines may be multiplied as students in turn become instructors. Luckily, there are now martial arts associations to help guarantee the quality of instructors and the clarity of doctrines.

Even so, the recent popularity of exploitation movies involving martial arts, though often not presenting accurate techniques, seldom emphasize the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of these martial arts. These factors and others give the public exaggerated notions of the capabilities and commitments of one who practices Oriental martial arts.

This paper attempts to correct some of the popular misunderstandings of the Oriental martial arts and give some insight into their philosophical foundations. The following considerations are divided into seven parts: I. A Brief History of the Oriental Martial Arts; II. The Physical Benefits of Tae Kwon Do; III. Tae Kwon Do as a Moral Practice; IV. Tae Kwon Do's Aesthetic Interest; V. Tae Kwon Do's Psychological Benefits; VI. Spiritual Links; and VII. Philosophical Considerations.

## **I. A Brief History of the Oriental Martial Arts**

The history of most Oriental martial arts begins, oddly enough, in India. Bodidharma, an Indian Buddhist priest is said to have traveled to a Chinese Kingdom in the sixth century A.D. to correct some Chinese misunderstandings of Buddhist doctrine. Unfortunately the Chinese Emperor Wu did not appreciate Bodidharma's attempts to correct their beliefs. Banished from their kingdom, Bodidharma traveled North, finally entering the Buddhist monastery at Shaolin-ssu. The monks were easy prey for bandits prevalent in those days. Bodidharma taught them methods of meditation and exercises for self-defense, Kempo. These self-defense techniques were later taught to neighboring farmers for their own protection and through them Kempo spread across China.

Even before Bodidharma's visit to Shaolin-ssu, ancient Korea had developed its own techniques of systematic armed and unarmed fighting. The origins of modern Tae Kwon Do can be discovered in archeological findings of Koguryo, Paekje, and Silla (the three kingdoms of ancient Korea). Tomb paintings from the Koguryo dynasty show martial arts practice. Sculptures from Silla and documents from Paekje also prove the Korean martial arts had a long and independent tradition before the spread of Kempo across China. This tradition was exemplified by the Hwa Rang Do, a select organization of noble youths dedicated to excellence, established during the Silla dynasty. The Hwa Rang Do's honor code required allegiance to one's country, respect for one's parents, integrity in one's friendships, courage in battle and restraint from unnecessary cruelty or killing. For the Hwa Rang Do, Tae Kwon Do was an enjoyable recreational sport as well as an intense military discipline.

The forerunners of Tae Kwon Do achieved their greatest early acceptance during the Koryo dynasty (918-1392). In this period these martial arts were systematized and encouraged for the entire nation, citizens and military alike. There were even annual competitions sponsored by the government.

Unfortunately, with the advent of Confucianism in the Yi Dynasty under King Taejo, strict guidelines controlled the public and private lives of the citizens and the precursors of Tae Kwon Do suffered a decline.

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□ *This article has been published in the Moo Duk Kwan Journal, co-authored with Richard Goldgar.*

<sup>1</sup> *This article is a reprint, some of the terminology is in Japanese.*

This decline in physical excellence also allowed for power struggles in the later years of the Yi Dynasty. Tae Kwon Do became a recreational practice of the common people and the only major advancement of the native martial arts of this time in an official textbook on military arts written in 1790 by Lee Duk Mu, which included careful descriptions and excellent illustrations of many martial arts including early Tae Kwon Do.

The Yi Dynasty's decline ended in its annexation to Japan and the Japanese suppression of all native Korean cultural activities; an attempt to deny Korea's individual heritage. Japan's oppression lasted until Korea's liberation in 1945. During this time Korean martial arts were practiced in secret and many serious native martial artists left the country in exile.

After Korea's liberation, the native arts were revived. During their suppression, the martial arts of Korea had synthesized with various other martial arts from other neighboring countries as well as developing idiosyncrasies of style resulting from private practice. Still the individual leaders reinstated schools in Korea, using names of earlier Korean martial arts like Su Bak Do Kwon Bup, and Tang Soo Do.

In an attempt to recover and unify the traditional Korean martial arts the instructors in Korea met in 1946. They did not succeed however this meeting laid the foundation for further discussion and finally, the leaders of six major schools adopted the name Tae Kwon Do. Tae Kwon Do was nationally accepted as the modern descendent of traditional Korean martial arts. Today, through the leadership of people like r. Un Yong Ki the president of the World Tae Kwon Do Federation, and other dedicated practitioners around the world, Tae Kwon Do is universally recognized as one of the major and most popular martial arts.

Today the three best known bare handed Oriental martial arts are Chinese Kung Fu, Korean Tae Kwon Do, and Japanese Karate. As the preceding history indicates, their traditions are mingled and to a layman they may not appear to differ in practice. However, even by one simpler manner of classification, the soft/hard style distinction, they present obvious differences. A soft style such as Kung Fu depends primarily upon circular movements, flowing transitions and seemingly trancelike energy (ki). A hard style such as traditional Karate emphasized strong direct techniques and abrupt movements. Tae Kwon Do, a synthesis of soft and hard styles utilizes direct attacks in combination with flowing transitions.

## **Martial Arts in the West**

Teddy Roosevelt was an avid fan of Judo and American G.I.s developed a strong interest in both Karate and Judo during WWII, but until WWII the West actually knew little of Eastern Martial Arts. In 1952 Karate Master Masutatsu Oyama displayed some of the intricate dance-like forms (katas). However, Americans failed to appreciate his skill. Only when he performed brick and board breaking techniques did the public respond. Yet breaking techniques, a test of strength and concentration, are only a small part of Karate's training.

The first major surge of Western interest in Tae Kwon Do occurred during the late 1950's when any American G.I.s stationed in Korea became intrigued with the native martial arts. These soldiers became some of the earliest Western practitioners of Tae Kwon Do. Seeing the need for qualified teachers in America pioneers like Jhoon Rhee, Richard Chun, Henry Cho, Dae S. Kim, and others brought Tae Kwon Do to the United States. By 1974 Tae Kwon Do was accepted as an official sport of the Amateur Athletic union of the United States and today Tae Kwon Do is even an international Olympic sport.

## **II. The Physical Benefits of Tae Kwon Do**

Anyone who has visited a martial arts practice hall (Dojang) immediately realizes Tae Kwon Do practice involves strenuous exercise. Tae Kwon Do develops virtually the entire body. Let us for a moment consider two extremes of physical training, weight lifting and long distance running. A few individuals are genetically advantaged to perform naturally well at one or the other of these extremes. Some have a muscle structure such that they can optimally give relatively short strong bursts of energy as a weight lifter might. Others have muscles composed such that they may superbly perform prolonged medium or light strength skills such as long distance running.

Most of us are not either extreme. Our muscle tissue is usually somewhere in the middle range and most likely we would not be among the world's best either at weight lifting or long distance running. yet the skills developed in Tae Kwon Do precisely suit those of us in the middle range. In addition, as we know from physics, force is a function of mass and acceleration. For Tae Kwon Do this means that a light but quick attack or defense technique proves just as effective as a stronger but slower one. Therefore size is not an inherent advantage.

Tae Kwon Do's dependence upon both supple acrobatic skill and powerful accuracy requires the development of nearly all parts of the body. For example, few other athletic practices demand that one be capable of curling toes back, kicking above one's head, pivoting 180 degrees on one foot and punching or blocking all simultaneously. Many techniques of Tae Kwon Do, though easily visualized are not easily described; suffice it to say that perhaps only ballet equals Tae Kwon Do in its manifold of the entire body.

Tae Kwon Do's emphasis on control as well as power, accuracy as well as speed, requires numerous physical activities: calisthenics to build strength, warm-up and stretching exercises, skills practice, free-fighting and meditation. Tae Kwon Do ranks with jogging and cross-country skiing in terms of cardio-vascular and respiratory work out yet provides motor skills development similar to dance. Tae Kwon Do, like other highly athletic activities simultaneously helps lower one's heart rate and increase the oxygen supply to the blood.

Of course, much more could be said of Tae Kwon Do's physical benefits. Unfortunately, comparatively little scientific research deals with these aspects of the martial arts. Indeed, most of the biomedical and biophysical research involving the martial arts (somewhat predictably) investigates breaking abilities. Yet, even in this area the results have been supportive. For example, popular knowledge of breaking techniques conjures fears of progressive crippling and deformation. Yet x-rays and tests on Master Oyama's hands, hands which have broken many rocks and bricks, indicate no physical differences between his hand structure or capabilities and those of anyone else.

Tae Kwon Do brings together the best of the various athletic endeavors. It is on a par with running in terms of its benefits to the heart and lungs. It requires the grace and coordination of ballet and develops the entire musculo-skeletal without biasing any particular part.

### **III. Tae Kwon Do as a Moral Practice**

The physical benefits of Tae Kwon Do differentiate it from say jogging or swimming. Yet Tae Kwon Do also teaches a unique set of skills sometimes using unique methods. Obviously Tae Kwon Do is an effective self-defense skill, one with a peculiarly ethical orientation not shared by mere exercise or even most competitive sports.

It might seem odd that a martial art, a set of skills aimed toward making one capable of great violence, can be claimed to promote good moral character and a non-violent attitude through teaching its martial skills. Yet this claim is central to Tae Kwon Do. It is reasonable to assume that aggression is a deep-seated human drive. Tae Kwon Do channels aggressive tendencies, ritualizing and controlling them. Tae Kwon Do lets one release aggression in a healthily directed and morally acceptable manner.

This is a world of modern weapons and Tae Kwon Do is no match against bullets. However, it is often the case that much greater violence could be prevented if a violent situation were stopped in its first moments. Tae Kwon Do gives on the confidence of knowing how to avoid serious conflicts as well as serious harm either to oneself or another. Modern Tae Kwon Do teaches many techniques which merely immobilize or disarm an antagonist without necessitating further harm.

Free-fighting, a 20<sup>th</sup> century invention, puts one in a stress confrontation situation a situation which demands self-control. In free-fighting one spars with an opponent, learning to anticipate, block and counter attack.

In spite of its martial skills training, Tae Kwon Do encourages the avoidance of conflict. Often the first words a novice will hear from his teacher are: "If you are faced with a dangerous situation, avoid it if possible, run if you can." Tae Kwon Do is not meant as a tool for "proving" oneself. Rather it is a personal practice in which non-belligerent attitudes are rewarded. A major prerequisite for attaining higher belt ranks is "good

moral character." When faced with a potentially violent situation, courage in refusing violence becomes a moot point for one incapable of self-defense. When one backs such a refusal with confidence in one's own abilities, claims concerning non-violence are more clear.

The Tae Kwon Do workout creates a microcosm of situations in which one's moral character is tested, developed and strengthened. It may be considered a kind of lifesaving course for dry land. Just as we are taught to deal with life threatening situations in Red Cross water safety courses Tae Kwon Do teaches one to calmly handle life threatening situations on land. The skills taught in Tae Kwon Do emphasize avoidance and neutralization as a reaction to conflict. Tae Kwon Do translates undirected aggression into a positive personal practice, teaching self-control in stress situations self-confidence and a non-violent attitude. Tae Kwon Do also emphasizes respect. An instructor will not tolerate horseplay, maliciousness, or disobedience in class. Students learn a bow of respect to their instructor fellow students, and even the Dojang. Tae Kwon Do demands patience perfection, and enterprise. It takes many years of training to receive a black belt and decades of dedication to progress high in the Dan ranking of the black belt.

Yet one may ask, "What are the characteristics of a person with a good moral character?" The field of ethics has generated a history by concerning itself with problems such as whether moral virtue can be taught. We do not propose to solve or even come close to formulating questions about these problems nearly so well as philosophers like Plato. Rather, we merely assert that how one reacts to various practical, morally problematic situations is in part determined by one's capabilities and upbringing in society. In this regard, Tae Kwon Do attempts to meet the moral concerns of civilized man realistically. It does not approach some utopian community, free of violence, nor does it encourage violence. Tae Kwon Do vitally expands one's ability to deal with potentially violent situations, corresponding opening one's positions. Even more importantly aside from its effective self-defense training, Tae Kwon Do practice encourages what we might call abstract moral virtues commonly considered important in our culture: self reliance, courage, and self-control under stress.

#### **IV. Tae Kwon Do: An Aesthetic Practice**

As we have seen above, fighting skill forms only a part of Tae Kwon Do's complex interest. Indeed, fighting skill need not be the main goal of Tae Kwon Do practice. Still it surprises one to learn that Tae Kwon Do may internally guide one toward an aesthetic appreciation of its art.

An aesthetic experience is an odd beast, often the result of chance. A pattern of leaves on a hill, the evening sun through the trees or just an oil stain on the road all might give one an aesthetic experience. In contrast, the "fine arts" are considered to deliberately engage one's aesthetic sensibilities. Yet the manner in which these arts excite our interest is a source of debate among aestheticians, making it difficult to justify how even very traditional arts such as classical music and ballet give us aesthetic pleasure.

In such a tangle of philosophical controversy, it might be easier to argue for the similarities between Tae Kwon Do and the traditional arts instead of expounding yet another aesthetic theory. If Tae Kwon Do can be considered an art for many of the same reasons that the traditional arts are so considered, it follows that Tae Kwon Do should be a source of aesthetic pleasure.

Tae Kwon Do involves a skill to be mastered, yet one with room for personal style and self-expression. Tae Kwon Do has a ranking and a rigid set of requirements for proficiency in its art, yet competency in the martial skills should not be equated with a multitude of identical practitioners. On the contrary, mastery of skills is only a prerequisite for discovering and emphasizing techniques most suited to and effective for the individual. A Tae Kwon Do student develops a set of core techniques and transitions which he or she may call their own. These skills form the foundation of one's unique style, just as a pianist or ballet dancer can be said to have mastered specific skills and yet personalized those skills to create their own style.

Rhythm and timing are essentially important to Tae Kwon Do as they are to traditional fine arts. Similarly to dance, Tae Kwon Do emphasizes breathing techniques to help one develop an internal rhythm and balance one's practice. In addition, "focus" is a main goal in Tae Kwon Do practice. For Tae Kwon Do, "focus" means the execution of a technique such that it is positioned precisely and with maximum force. Tae Kwon Do also emphasizes what may be called excellence in performing macrorhythms of its practice. Tae

Kwon Do's macrorhythms involve the transitions between two techniques while its microrhythms involve the speed and timing within a given technique.

Tae Kwon Do is an individual practice. It therefore allows for precise control in its performance. Even in free sparring one's actions are not chance happenings but directed responses to an opponent allowing full concentration upon one's practice.

Form practice (Poomse or Hyung) shows even stronger ties with the traditional arts. The numerous forms involving complicated transitions and techniques, are reminiscent of cultural dance forms and dances of older dance traditions such as those of Bali. Historically the core of Tae Kwon Do practice (until this century there was no free-sparring), the forms may be considered analogous to traditional showpieces of music and dance.

Some might claim that Tae Kwon Do, as a "violent" practice, is in opposition to aesthetic appreciation. Tae Kwon Do does not have violence as a goal any more than archery or fencing. Even if Tae Kwon Do is claimed to provide one with a potentially violent set of skills, this does not preclude its ability to engage one's aesthetic interest. Indeed, this is the puzzle of violence in art. Some aestheticians wish to claim violence in art distracts from the aesthetic attitude. This is a thorny area of dispute. However, without launching into a full blown theory, we assert that though moral considerations can prevent one from having an aesthetic attitude toward certain art object or events, this is a function of the situation and individual rather than an essential character of art. After all, a relative minority of people would claim David's "The Rape of the Sabine Women" or Picasso's "Guernica" are not aesthetically pleasing though they depict violent scenes.

Perhaps the seemingly moral claim that violence is destructive to aesthetic appreciation is really the aestheticians claim that distraction is destructive to the aesthetic attitude. Tae Kwon Do as an individual, highly directed practice ought to provide its participants with an atmosphere markedly free from distraction. In fact, since its training emphasizes focused concentration and detachment from external concerns, Tae Kwon Do seems better equipped to engage one in an aesthetic attitude than other fine arts. Its practical nature also allows even novice spectators initial understanding and interest, while developing that interest with its complex variety.

## **V. Psychological Benefits of Tae Kwon Do Training**

As a means of self-expression and controlling aggression Tae Kwon Do provides an excellent way of reducing anxiety. The tensions of modern life are great. One need have some manner of channeling pent up hostility and frustration in a healthy, productive manner. Tae Kwon Do provides a release of built up tensions of everyday living without diverting or repressing them.

Tae Kwon Do also provides a means of personal achievement. The advancement of the individual in Tae Kwon Do is solely dependant upon his or her personal dedication and achievement. Unlike many signs of status in our modern society, the belt ranks of Tae Kwon Do are earned, not bought. This means that a Tae Kwon Do practitioner's belt rank provides a clear sign of his ability to himself and others, an unmistakable indications of his dedication to a personal goal. Dedication and success in turn improve one's self-concept.

Tae Kwon Do also provides an opportunity for healthy social interaction. Unlike some competitive sports where one is encouraged to win at all costs, Tae Kwon Do requires control and respect for the individual. Since Tae Kwon Do gives one lethal skills, it cannot encourage a deadly winning at all costs attitude. On the contrary, a Tae Kwon Do workout requires serious concern for the well being of one's opponent and careful consideration for his as well as one's own improvement. Such an atmosphere of respect and concern encourages the positive aspects of competition. In Tae Kwon Do everyone is a student and a colleague.

## **VI. Spiritual Links**

From their roots, the Oriental martial arts have been intertwined with Buddhism. Buddhism in an Eastern religion founded on a process philosophy. The general tenets of any process philosophy includes the belief that phenomena are actually sets of processes in constant flow. The Zen (Sun in Korean) sect of Buddhism is an offshoot which preaches that one's enlightenment must be gained by non-rational means through austere meditation and as a direct personal experience, not by intellectual cognition.

These beliefs may seem odd to Westerners who are often used to rational doctrinal religions and personified deities. As a religion adamantly centered on practice, Sun Buddhism does not so much conflict with Western ideology practically as theoretically. In fact, Sun's primary theoretical principle appears to be in disdain of theory.

The importance of Sun (Zen) practices in Oriental martial arts cannot be under-estimated. Each of us in some way encounters and attempts to cope with what Western philosophy calls the mind-body problem. However, where Western philosophy has attempted cognitive or metaphysical descriptions of this dualism, either emphasizing it or intellectually reducing one of its terms, Sun (and some other Eastern philosophies) attempted to rid one of a dualistic self-conception through meditation and other practices. The true meaning of Sun lies in the individual's enlightenment, his or her unification of body and mind, or what is sometimes called the state of "immediate reality." The Oriental martial arts, far from merely teaching martial skills, stress their way of life as a means of achieving this unification of mind and body. For one involved with Sun, it seems moot whether one would characterize this dualism as merely psychological or metaphysically actual. Sun process philosophy foundations treat the dualism as a given perception, yet one which may be actually overcome.

For the martial arts practitioner, the Eastern martial arts are the path to this union, Sun methods allow the martial artist to achieve perfection in physical and mental control, through concentration and self-discipline. Sun expresses this perfection as being simultaneously consciously unconscious and unconsciously conscious.

Using Western constructs and terminology poses a problem in describing what is essentially an attempt to overcome cognitive understanding. Yet, keeping this in mind, we might characterize the Sun achievement of immediate reality as that perfection of mind and body such that every action, every thought, is reciprocally and simultaneously animated by both intellect and body, the often idealized but seldom claimed synthesis of form and content in the microcosm of self. Yet even this conception is somewhat misleading for Sun is sometimes called the religion of no self. The self is supposed to be extinguished when one reaches an enlightened state. Sun unites the Eastern martial arts both historically and spiritually. For a Westerner, the methods of Sun, which after all form its true teachings, are the source of the martial arts power and focused precision.

## **VII. Philosophical Considerations**

Philosophy is concerned with foundations and essences. The preceding sections of this paper give some determination of the essence of Tae Kwon Do, its psychological, physical, moral, aesthetic, spiritual and historical aspects. Still one need answer how Tae Kwon Do may encompass and unify these parts into a coherent whole. Tae Kwon Do is a ritualized athletic and martial tradition. It is the tradition of Tae Kwon Do which provides its unity. This is especially true today. After earlier centuries witnessed a decline in the Korean native martial arts, this century's Tae Kwon Do practitioners revived the art, and not by merely asserting a single style nor reaching back to the past alone. Those who revived Tae Kwon Do, preserved its past and recognized its future. The tradition of Tae Kwon Do includes its continuing concern for martial skills and sport. It includes the spirit of the Hwa Rang Do's code of honor and the individual path to enlightenment preached by Sun Buddhism. The tradition of Tae Kwon Do, like the philosophy it embraces and the discipline it teaches, involves process. Tae Kwon Do is an evolving practice. The poomse today preserve the tradition, yet each generation interprets that tradition anew. This is the foundation of Tae Kwon Do, to make its heritage live anew with each student.

**TAE KWON DO  
MARTIAL ARTS  
PERSONAL INTERRELATIONSHIPS**

1. Honor and support your family, with sacrifice and without expectation of return. Next to your family, honor and support your teacher as a parent. Give your fellow students your help as you should your brothers and sisters. In giving, you will become stronger.
2. Senior students should treat junior students as peers and equals. Junior students should treat senior students with respect and understand that the humility of the senior student is a sign of a deeper understanding of the martial art.
3. No matter how long you have trained, if you begin to think of yourself as knowledgeable, you commit an error. Display humility which comes from an understanding of the long and apparently endless path to true accomplishment.
4. Respect the strengths of others and help them with their weaknesses. This will strengthen you as well.
5. Senior students are responsible for setting an example by their behavior, even outside of class. This shows an understanding that the martial art is part of life and will strengthen both your practice and your ability to teach the martial art.
6. Regardless of your current agreement with your teacher's policies, do your best to understand and support them. Never criticize your teacher to others. This is the same attitude juniors should have toward seniors. Progress in the martial art may bring a new understanding of others.
7. Allow your teacher to be human, rather than the ideal of perfection. Your teacher's errors and problems will provide you with another opportunity to grow internally, if you can treat them with understanding and kindness, and if you can respect your teacher as a person growing toward an ideal of the martial art.
8. Regardless of the length of time you have trained in the martial art, do your best to show proper courtesy whether in or out of class. You will thereby gain respect and strength.
9. Gratefully accept and seriously consider criticism, even by juniors. Often it is the case that a helpful truth can only be seen from the outside. Long experience may not be necessary for such observations. Disregarding criticisms because of pride in knowledge is a sign of ignorance.
10. At all times, in class or out, on the telephone, etc., show respect to black belts and instructors by addressing them as "Sir" or "Ma'am."

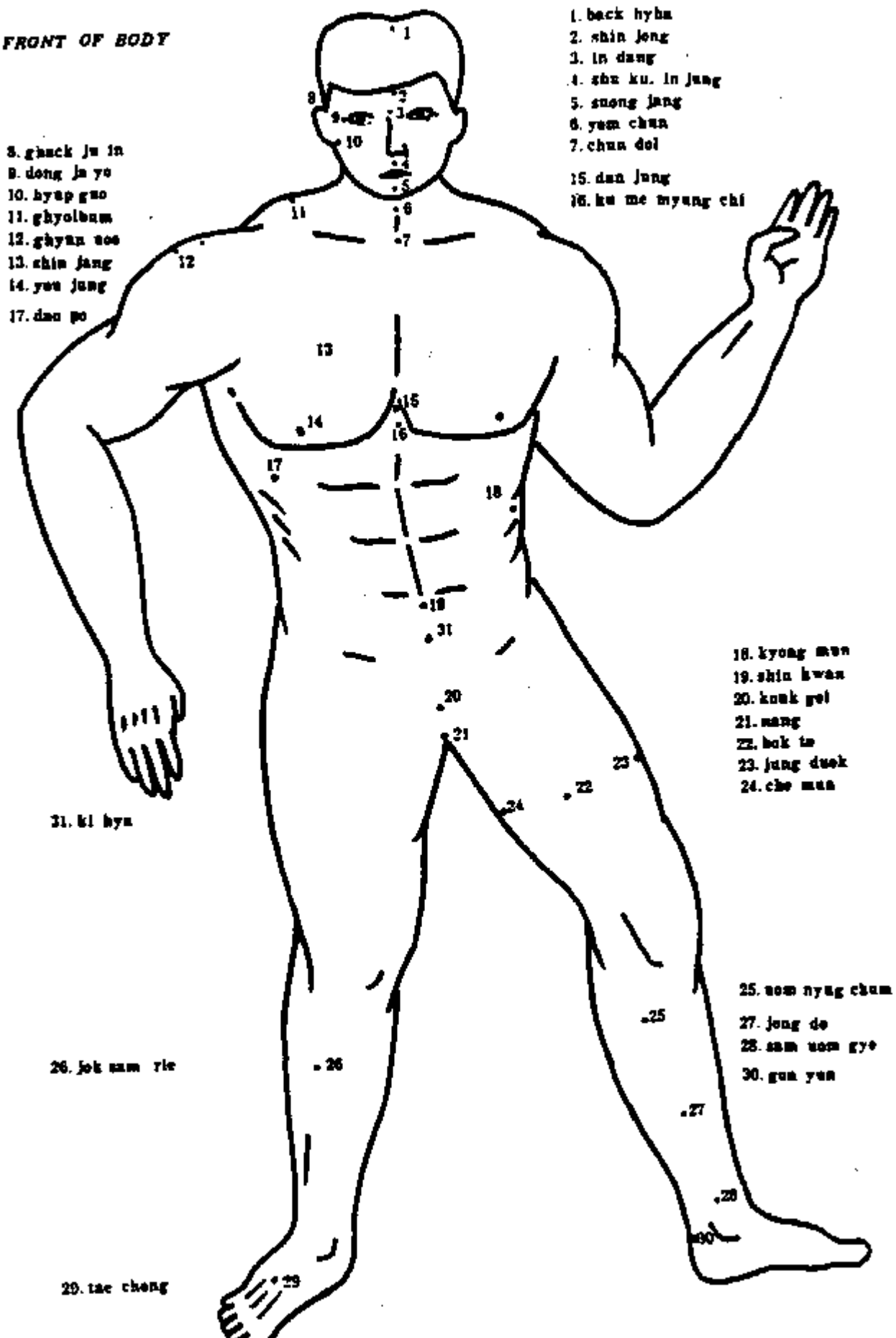
Master Lee

03-30-91



1. Front stance has 70% of the weight on the front leg and 30% on the back leg.
2. Horse stance has 50% of the weight on each leg.
3. Cat stance has 30% of the weight on the front leg and 70% on the back leg.
4. Back stance has 40% of the weight on the front leg and 60% on the back leg.
5. Palm heel attack strikes the chin.
6. Long fist attack strikes the nose.
7. Tiger claw strikes the eyes.
8. Eagle claw strikes the adams apple.
9. Flat hand attack strikes the trachea.
10. Spear thrust attack strikes the sternum.
11. Upper cut attack strikes the nose.
12. Inverted knife hand attack strikes the trachea.
13. High punch attack strikes the nose.
14. Middle punch attack strikes the sternum.
15. Low punch attack strikes the groin.
16. Ridge hand attack strikes the mandible.
17. Inside knife hand attack strikes the neck.
18. Overhand knife hand attack strikes the collar bone.
19. Overhand hammer fist attack strikes the collar bone.
20. Side knife hand attack strikes the throat.
21. Side back fist attack strikes the jaw.
22. Overhand back fist attack strikes the nose.

**FRONT OF BODY**



# PRESSURE POINT OF HUMAN BODY

## BACK OF BODY

