



YON BI RYU SIPALKI GRANDMASTER YOO SOO NAM FROM BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, SHOWING A PRESSURE POINT ON AN ATTACKER'S ARM.

Ki (weapons-dominated) trend is not known to have mixed with these hand and foot fighting systems, it is probable that any Korean soldier with knowledge of both trends would have merged them.

To understand the probable way Ship Pal Ki combat training evolved to the present time, we should consider the training received by modern members of the special forces (Cremona, personal interview, November 2001). They practice shooting with long weapons; physical conditioning; swimming; diving; close-quarter bare-hand and bladed weapons combat; explosives instruction; indoor combat tactics; urban and open field (including forest and jungle) tactics; rappel training;

parachute basics, etc. This relates the fundamental ideas behind ancient Ship Pal Ki to survival of a certain family group, according to its leading authority in Argentina. Ship Pal Ki included a series of different combative skills—mostly related to weapons—that set this discipline apart from the more popular naked-hand combat arts. Ship Pal Ki techniques never became “overspecialized” in any single ability, in the same way that special forces members are not extraordinary swimmers, champion marksmen, or accomplished martial artists, but are highly functional in each area to make up extraordinary human weapons. This martial art continued its evolution keeping the ability to deal with life or death situations at the core.

Staffs and swords are out of place in modern society, and the increasing lack of reality in their practice (which was Ship Pal Ki's original goal) may have caused Master Yoo's Ship Pal Ki school to concentrate on practicing bare-handed combat skills. Among its features are a peculiar strategy of surprise and fierceness, a wide-range of technical resources (circular hand motions and footwork unusual for karate-derived traditions), the extensive use of grabbing while striking, an emphasis on combat against multiple opponents, and the use of the fingers to hit sensitive areas with rapid movements. These make up the arsenal of this Korean style as taught in Argentina (Yoo, n.d.).

During the last thirty years, the Yoo Soo Nam Ship Pal Ki system has also incorporated kicking techniques found in other Korean systems, enlarging and giving more detail to the weaponless one-on-one combat practice (without losing the weapons techniques), thus trying to preserve the effectiveness and original *raison d'être* of this martial art.

EPILOGUE

Research for this article was conducted in the hope of finding a realistic explanation connecting historical development to the technique of Korean martial arts as they are performed today. From an historical perspective, it becomes apparent that any appeal to the *Muye Dobo Tong Ji* as evidence for the antiquity of any Korean modern art is unacceptable today. The nationalistic arguments that have so frequently distorted the historical truth can no longer be accepted.

It is clear that, in the past, national borders had little importance if any in the development of martial arts of the Far East. Although the concept of “style” is not new in combative training, the idea of different “martial arts” as separate activities networking with affiliated instructors and followers all around the world is indeed a novelty which has both positive consequences (i.e., access to organized knowledge which might otherwise be difficult; standardized curriculum, etc.) and negative side effects (i.e., excessive focus on the style’s identity and its methods, unawareness of alternative ways used by other systems to solve the same problems).

The larger the group, the less frequently the head of a martial art system will be able to train and personally instruct a significant proportion of his students. In these cases, there is a tendency for such a system to have fewer changes than one in which the group is closely bound. As in the first case, the style will probably have difficulties going beyond the understanding of the essential concepts that give distinct identity to that style. The smaller the group, the more rapidly changes will be introduced. A clear example is Bruce Lee’s backyard style which evolved at incredible speed.

Another feature to be taken into account is the focus of the technical central authority of the style, and the (distant) instructor’s priorities. In widespread styles, it is frequent to see important divergences between the ideas supporting a style and the mindset of some of its instructors (Is the style, as taught by the central authorities, geared towards keeping a tradition? Is it about cultivating a sport? Is it mainly for self-defense? How do these categories relate to the proposed style, and to the way classes are taught? Are the students conscious of what they are getting, or do they have a distorted or fantastic image?)

The ancients had no trouble in accepting foreign teachings when their security depended on it. When doing so, they were careful to learn from specialists in those martial arts—a wise and humble attitude, unlike the common behavior of intending to gain knowledge from other martial art systems by the do-it-yourself “copy-and-paste” system. On the other hand, as survival seems not to be an issue in most present-day martial arts, many profitable pseudo martial arts “corporations” have developed on the basis of convincing speeches and dubious techniques. The very basics of bare-handed training



A TAE KWON DO JUMPING TWIST KICK (*TIMYO BIT-URO CHAKI*) DEVELOPED ON THE BASIS OF TAEK KYON’S *JAE CHA KI* (WHICH STRIKES WITH THE INSTEP), BUT USES THE METATARSAL AREA OF THE SOLE FOR CONCENTRATED IMPACT.

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In gratitude to my teacher Pedro Florindo, his instructors masters Lee Chong Seo (Moo Duk Kwan) and Yang Dae Chol (Ji Do Kwan), and those preceding them. If not for their commitment to the martial Way, I would have not received such a wonderful gift, which I get to open, enjoy, and share every day. I also want to thank my right-hand man instructor Leo Di Lecce and my other students, specially the Discioscias (father and son) and Diego Cruz.

according to the Korean manuals—to boost courage in the battlefield by providing the soldiers with strong, agile and well-balanced bodies—seems to be fading away. Each instructor is responsible for what he teaches to his students, and he must decide whether to follow Master Han Kyo’s example of making an effort to study in order to give his troops the best training available, or to abrogate that responsibility to a “federation” headquartered many miles away, whose interests may be other than the authenticity and combat value of what is taught in class.

If we learn from history, the past will prove useful for our lives. If we as martial art instructors make the right decisions, it will be our technical and moral contribution to this Oriental martial art legacy. In other words, our work as instructors, if only to a small extent (but noticeable to our students), will have improved the world we live in.



NOTES

- ¹ Regarding terminology used in this article, “k.” stands for Korean; “j.” for Japanese; and “ch.” for Chinese terms. Other than certain terms referring to weapons used in southern China, for which their Cantonese name is shown with a “c.”, all Chinese terms are Mandarin. Korean and Japanese terms are written without following any standard romanization system, as they have been available from different sources derived from their phonetic version. Okinawan weapon names are referred by their widely known Hogen dialect, labeled as Japanese.
- ² This work has been largely based on the illuminating studies on the ancient Chinese and Korean manuals and related subjects authored by Kimm (1999), Kim S.H. (2000), Young (1993), Henning (2000), Della Pia (1994, 1995), Pieter (1994), Cook (1998, 1999, 2001), and McCarthy (1996).
- ³ This kingdom is nowadays called “Ko” (old) Choson, as opposed to the modern Choson period running from 1392 to 1910 CE.
- ⁴ For that reason, Dan Gun is the name of the International Tae Kwon-Do Federation’s (ITF) second pattern.
- ⁵ For this patriotic deed, Moon Moo is the name of the ITF’s 21st pattern.
- ⁶ The 9th WTF form bears this name.
- ⁷ In his honor, the ITF’s 23rd pattern is called *Se Jong*.
- ⁸ Choi Hyong Un became known as So San, and his name is remembered in the ITF’s 22nd pattern.
- ⁹ Admiral Yi was called Choong Moo, after whom the ITF’s 9th pattern was named.
- ¹⁰ For very diverse descriptions of the *hwarang*, refer to Pieter (1994), and also Lee Joo Bang (2000).
- ¹¹ Both Yuk Ro and Ship Dan Kum are names currently designating Soo Bahk Do forms recreated by Hwang Kee; Du Mun is the name of the first of the six Yuk Ro forms.
- ¹² According to Hayes (1999-2000), seventh star of the Big Dipper (Ursa Major) that points to the North Star in the Little Dipper (Ursa Minor).

¹³ One of the advanced forms taught at the Korea Taek Kyon Association is an empty handed sequence called *Yon Dan Sip Pal Soo*, which provokes more questions on the true origin of number 18 in Korean martial arts. Furthermore, Anne Loo (1984: 25) was introduced during her youth to “a Korean version of Shaolin Kung Fu called Sip Pal Ki Sorim Kwan in Korean.” In China, Shaolin monks are said to have adopted 18 weapons from Tang Dynasty (618-907) officials before expanding their repertoire, and by the Song Dynasty (960-1279) referring to the “18 military weapons” had become common usage, these weapons subject to different listings according to the different times and accounts. So the Shaolin connection remains a possible ancestor to some modern Korean Sip Pal Ki lineages, and would prove an alternative to the Sip Pal Ki of the *Muye Shinbo* military manual.

In connection with Taek Kyon’s barehanded Sip Pal form, it is hard to imagine a relation with a set of 18 weapons, either Korean or Chinese. In Chinese martial arts there exists the “18 hands of the enlightened” (ch. *Shi Ba Luo Han Shou*) taught by some as a martial art in itself (DeMarco, 2003), and by others as a set of exercises believed to preserve the roots of Bodhidharma/Damo’s original teachings at the Shaolin Temple (López, 2002). Taek Kyon seems to be closer to the shamanistic folk practices of inner Korea than to any Buddhist tradition, which would suggest that chances for it being related to Shaolin are slim. Still, a study of their similarities and differences and their historical relation, if any, awaits further research.

GLOSSARY

CHINESE CHARACTERS LISTED BY KOREAN PRONUNCIATION

- BON KUK KOM: Indigenous sword of the country (Koreans referring to Silla’s sword). 本國劍
- BONG: Staff (j. *bo*) 棒
- CHANG: Spear. 倉
- CHOSON: “Morning placid”; name for Korea during the Yi period (1392-1907). According to Samguk Yusa records of Korean legendary times, that was the original name Dan Gun adopted for his country in the 24th century BCE. 朝鮮
- CHUK KYE KWANG: Korean name for the Chinese author of the *Ki Hyo Shin Su*. 戚繼光
- DO: Blade, saber (j. *to*; ch. *dao*). 刀
- HANKUK: The “Han” country/people. Korea. Reportedly meaning “bright/optimistic country/people”. 韓國
- HWARANG: “Blossom/flower youth/boy.” Organized group of young men in Silla during the 7th century. According to some accounts, it was a selected group of noble teenagers that received instruction in martial and fine arts and Buddhism to serve as officers in the country’s army, resulting in heroic and ferocious deeds in battle. Traditionally, Korean martial art proponents have compared Korean Hwarang to Japanese samurai. For a revisionist perspective on the nature of the Hwarang, refer to Pieter (1994). 花郎
- HYUNG: Form (ch. *xing*; j. *kata*). 形
- JANG KWON: Long fist/boxing (ch., *changquan*). Northern Chinese martial 本國劍

- system that is believed to be the basis of the original Shaolin technique.
- 正祖 • JUNG JO: Korean king who ordered the preparation of the *Muye Dobo Tong Ji*.
- 高句麗 • KOKURYO: Name of the largest realm (lasted from 37 BCE-668 CE) of the Korean “Three Kingdoms age.”
- 劍術 • KOM SUL: Sword art/technique (j., *kenjutsu*). Although from the ideographic analysis “kom” refers to a double-edged blade, it became a generic term used for single-edged sabers as those used in medieval Japan.
- 棍 • KON: Club (ch. *gun*; j. *kon*).
- 空手 • KONG SU: “Empty hand” (ch. *kong shou*; j. *karate*), alternative characters to the original writing for “karate” adopted by Hanashiro Chomo and Funakoshi Gichin when such Okinawan art was introduced to the Japanese ethnocentric society of early 20th century.
- 高麗 • KORYO: Korean historical period from 927 to 1394.
- 弓 • KUNG: Bow (j. *kyu*).
- 拳法 • KWON BOP: “Fist/boxing methods” (ch. *quanfa*; j. *ken po*), the Korean version of the most widely used name for Chinese-derived weaponless martial arts in eastern Asia.
- 茅元儀 • MO WON UI: Korean name for the Chinese author of the *Mubiji*.
- 武備志 • MUBIJI: *Book of Military Preparation* (ch. *Wubeizhi*; j. *Bubiji*) Chinese 17th century manual written by, Mao Yuanyi; also name of a southern Chinese White Crane boxing manual of unknown author, fundamental to Okinawan karate.
- 武道精神 • MU DO JUNG SHIN: Righteous Spirit of the Martial Way.
- 武德館 • MU DOK KWAN (Moo Duk Kwan): “House of the Martial Virtue” (ch., *wu de quan*; j. *bu toku kan*). The name of Hwang Kee’s dojang. For a serious treatment on the morality historically associated with Asian fist arts refer to Yang (1996).
- 武藝圖譜通志 • MUYE DOBO TONG JI: An illustrated martial arts manual written circa 1790 in Korea by Yi Dok Mu with collaboration of Park Je and Park Dong Su by order of King Jung Jo.
- 百濟 • PAEKCHE: Name of one of the “Three Kingdoms,” which lasted from 18 BCE to 660 CE.
- 八卦 • PAL KAE: “Eight hexagrams” (ch., *ba gua*). According to Daoism, the eight primary manifestations of the creative interaction of *um* and *yang* (ch., *yin* and *yang*) represented by hexagrams.
- 鞭 • PYON: Whip.
- 十八技 • SHIP PAL KI: “Eighteen Techniques.” Name by which the *Muye Shinbo* Korean manual was popularly known. It currently identifies certain folk-derived Korean martial arts out of the mainstream styles.
- 新羅 • SILLA: Name of the smallest of the “Three Kingdoms” from 57 BCE to 935 CE.
- 少林寺 • SORIM SA: “Little Forest Temple” (ch. *Shaolin Ssu*; j. *Shorin Ji*). Name of the monastery in Henan Province, China, in which Indian Buddhist missionary Bodhidharma is believed to have introduced *Dyana* (j. *Zen*; ch. *Chan*; k. *Son*) around 530 CE and in which reportedly his yogic teachings merged with previous Chinese fighting methods creating a legendary martial art. Okinawan karate styles have kept this name.
- 手搏 • SU BAK: “Hitting hand” (ch., *shou bu*). Name used for weaponless martial art in the Chinese-based *Muye Dobo Tong Ji*; also thought to be name of ancient

Korean barehand martial art (the characters shown correspond to those used in the *Muye Dobo Tong Ji*).

- TAE KUK: “Great principle” (ch., *taiji*; j., *tai kyoku*). According to Daoism, the underlying principle of existence. Adopted as the name for a Chinese martial art system. 太極
- TAE KWON DO: “Way of the fist and feet.” Name proposed by General Choi Hong Hi in 1955 to replace the *tang su / kong su* names that were used for karate derivatives in Korea. Along with this change, he proposed a number of technical modifications that in the aggregate resulted in a new martial art system which are believed to reflect many features of the Korean people. 跆拳道
- TAEK KYON: “To push shoulder.” Taek Kyon (also called *gak hi*, k.) is considered by many to be the only original, Korean martial art (Ouyang, 1997); proponents of this theory argue that the name has no associated Chinese characters. The characters shown (and respective meaning) are provided by Henning (2000), according to whom this martial art is also Chinese-related, and suggests the modern Korean pronunciation “Taek” replacing “Tak” may be the result of a deliberate or casual vocal change that suited supporters of Taek Kyon’s Korean origin. According to Pieter (1994), Chinese characters for *gak hi* are available, meaning “foot-play.” It should be noted that present-day Taek Kyon does not have any technical resemblance to any known Chinese martial art. 托肩
- TANG SU: “Tang (dynasty) hand”; “Chinese hand” (ch. *Tang shou*; ok. *Toudi*; j. *karate*), along with kenpo, was one of the names by which Chinese boxing became known in Okinawa. 唐手
- WAE KOM: Name (“foreign sword”) used in *Muye Dobo Tong Ji* for the Japanese sword. 外劍
- WOL DO: Moon blade. 月刀
- YI DOK MU: Name of (Korean) author of the *Muye Dobo Tong Ji*. 李德懋
- YON BI RYU: “Flying swallow lineage” (j., *Em Pi Ryu*). Ship Pal Ki family tradition inherited and led by Yoo Soo Nam from Argentina. 燕飛流

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