

RIVERBEND TAE KWON DO ACADEMY

HISTORY OF TAE KWON DO

Before I get into the history of Tae kwon do, I would like to define what it means. I read the definition from many books and the one that I like best comes from the book Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts written by Donn F. Draeger and Robert W. Smith. "Tae kwon do is an empty-hand combat form that entails the use of the whole body. Tae means "to Kick" or "Smash with the feet," Kwon implies "punching" or "destroying with the hand or fist," and Do means "way" or "method." Tae kwon do thus, is the technique of unarmed combat for self defense that involves the skillful application of techniques that include punching, jumping kicks, blocks, dodges, parrying actions with hands and feet. It is more than a mere physical fighting skill, representing as it does a way of thinking and a pattern of life requiring strict discipline. It is a system of training both the mind and the body in which great emphasis is placed on the development of the trainee's moral character."

Tae kwon do is a martial art that in "today's" form of self-defense has evolved by combining many different styles of martial arts that existed in Korea over the last 2,000 years and some martial arts styles from countries that surround Korea. Tae kwon do incorporates the abrupt linear movements of Karate and the flowing, circular patterns of Kung-fu with native kicking techniques. Over fifty typically Chinese circular hand movements can be identified in modern Tae kwon do. A few of the earlier martial arts styles that contributed to Tae kwon do are: T'ang-su, Taek Kwon, also known as Subak, Tae Kwon, Kwonpup and Tae Kwonpup. There are also influences from Judo, Karate, and Kung-fu. Three ancient kingdoms have been identified as central to the origin of Tae Kwon Do: Koguryo, Baekjae and Silla. The Koguryo Kingdom, founded by Kojoomong, existed from approximately 37 BC to 668 AD. Paintings of men engaging in what appears to be martial arts have been discovered in Korea, and have been dated back to the Koguryo Kingdom.

Although Tae kwon do first appeared in the Koguryo kingdom, it is the Silla's Hwarang warriors that are credited with the growth and spread of Tae kwon do throughout Korea. Silla was the smallest of the three kingdoms and was always under attack by Japanese Pirates. Silla got help from King Gwanggaeto and his soldiers from the Koguryo kingdom to drive out the pirates. During this time a few select Sillan warriors were given training in Taek Kwon by the early masters from Koguryo. The Taek Kwon trained warriors then became known as the Hwarang. The Hwarang set up a military academy for the sons of royalty in Silla called Hwarang-do, which means "The way of flowering manhood." The Hwarang studied Taek Kwon, history, Confucian Philosophy, ethics, Buddhist Morality, and military tactics. The guiding principles of the Hwarang warriors were loyalty, filial duty, trustworthiness, valor, and justice. The makeup of the Hwarang-do education was based on the Five Codes of Human Conduct written by a Buddhist scholar, fundamental education, Taek Kwon and social skills. Taek Kwon was spread throughout Korea because the Hwarang traveled all around the peninsula to learn about the other regions and people. Today, the original Five Codes of Human Conduct have been correlated into the so-called Eleven Commandments of modern day Tae kwon do, which are:

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

During the Silla dynasty (A.D. 668 to A.D. 935) Taek Kyon was mostly used as a sport and recreational activity. Taek Kyon's name was changed to Subak and the focus of the art was changed during the Koryo dynasty (A.D. 935 to A.D. 1392). When King Uijong was on the throne from 1147 through 1170, he changed Subak from a system that promotes fitness to primarily a fighting art.

The first widely distributed book on Tae kwon do was during the Yi dynasty (1397 to 1907). This was the first time that Subak was intended to be taught to the general public, in previous years the knowledge was limited to the military. During the second half of the Yi dynasty, political conflicts and the choice to use debate instead of military action almost lead to the extinction of Subak. The emphasis of the art was changed back to that of recreational and physical fitness. The lack of interest caused Subak as an art, to become fragmented and scarcely practiced throughout the country.

In 1909 the Japanese invaded Korea and occupied the country for 36 years. To control Korea's patriotism, the Japanese banned the practice of all military arts, Korean language and even burned all books written in Korea. This ban was responsible for renewed interest in Subak. Many Koreans organized themselves into underground groups and practiced the martial arts in remote Buddhist temples. Other people left Korea to study the martial arts in other countries like China and Japan. In 1943 Judo, Karate and Kung-fu were officially introduced to the Korean residents and the martial arts regained popularity. In 1945 Korea was liberated. In the last few years before liberation, there were many different variations of Subak/Taek Kyon in Korea. This was due to all of the other martial arts influence on it.

The first Tae kwon do school (Kwan) was started in Yong Chun, Seoul, Korea in 1945. Many different schools were opened from 1945 through 1960. Each school claimed to teach the traditional Korean martial art, but each school emphasized a different aspect of Taek Kyon/Subak. This caused different names to emerge from each system, some of them were: Soo Bahk Do, Kwon Bop, Kong Soo Do, Tae Soo Do and Kang Soo Do.

The Korean Armed Forces were also formed in 1945 and in 1946 Second lieutenant Hong Hi Choi began teaching Taek Kyon at a Korean military base called Kwang Ju. Americans were first introduced to Taek Kyon when Choi instructed Korean Army troops and some American soldiers stationed with the 2nd Infantry Regiment. Later in 1949 Hong Hi Choi attended Ground General School at Ft. Riely near Topeka, Kansas in the United States. While in the U.S., Choi gave public Taek Kyon demonstrations for the troops. This was the first display of Taek Kyon in America.

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The greatest turning point for Korean martial arts started in 1952. During the height of the Korean War, President Syngman Rhee watched a 30 minute performance by Korean martial arts masters. He was especially impressed when Tae Hi Nam broke 13 roof tiles with a single punch. After the demonstration Rhee talked with Hong Hi Choi about the martial arts, he then ordered his military chiefs of staff to require all Korean soldiers to receive training in the martial arts. This caused a tremendous surge in Taek Kyon schools and students. President Rhee also sent Tae Hi Nam to Ft. Benning, Georgia for radio communications training. While there, Tae Hi Nam gave many martial arts demonstrations and received considerable media publicity.

During this same time period in Korea, special commando groups of martial arts-trained soldiers were formed to fight against the communist forces of North Korea. One of the most famous Special Forces was known as the Black Tigers. The Korean War ended in 1953. In 1954, General Hong Hi Choi organized the 29th Infantry on Che Ju Island, off the Korean Coast, as a spearhead and center for Taek Kyon training in the military.

On April 11, 1955 at a conference of kwan masters, historians, and Taek Kyon promoters, most of the kwan masters decided to merge their various styles for mutual benefit of all schools. The name "Tae Soo Do" was accepted by a majority of the kwan masters. Two years later the name was changed again, this time to "Tae kwon do". The name was suggested by General Hong Hi Choi (who is considered the father of Tae kwon do). "Tae kwon do" was suggested by Choi because of its resemblance to Taek Kyon, and so provides continuity and maintains tradition. Further, it describes both hand and foot techniques.

Today, over 30 million people practice Tae kwon do in more than 156 countries.