

## History of Taekwondo

# Problems in the Identity and Philosophy of T'aegwondo and Their Historical Causes

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Note: The phonetic translation from Korean is somewhat difficult to follow: t'aegwondo is Taekwondo, Ch'oe Hong-hui is Choi Hong Hi, and Yi Chong-u is retired WTF Vice President Chong Woo Lee, for examples.

### **1. Introduction**

It has been postulated that *t'aegwondo* is Korea's most effective diplomatic tool, achieving what Korea's most skilled diplomats have been unable to accomplish; that is, bring the citizens of advanced western countries to an attitude of respect before the Korean flag.<sup>1</sup> It has been further argued that *t'aegwondo*, as the Korean national sport, and one of the repositories of traditional, indigenous Korean culture, plays a vital role in preserving traditional Korean culture in the face of western cultural imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

*T'aegwondo*, a martial sport, has been given these rather weighty responsibilities *because t'aegwondo* has been popularized as a unique product of Korean culture, continuously extant in Korean history since the beginning of the Three Kingdoms period, some 1300 years ago. The importance placed on (his history of unique development within Korea is understandable as it provides *t'aegwondo* with a Korean pedigree (*chokpo*) granting legitimacy as a traditional Korean institution imbued with an ancient and mysterious past which not only holds great appeal to non-Koreans, but also serves as a source of national pride to Koreans themselves who crave an internationally recognizable symbols of their culture. The overemphasis on establishing and asserting *t'aegwondo's* indigenous Korean origins and development, however, has actually been an impediment to *t'aegwondo's* potential growth and development. *T'aegwondo* seems to have reached its goals of international recognition upon its inclusion as an official sport in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, testimony to the incredible growth of *t'aegwondo* as a sport in the last 35 years, that *t'aegwondo* is now grappling with serious philosophic problems, regarding its identity and future development.

The main cause of these problems is found in the history of *t'aegwondo's* origins. The fact that *t'aegwondo* was first brought into Korea from Japan in the form of Japanese *karate* around the time of the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule, and the way this fact has been dealt with in Korea has left many serious inconsistencies [81] in the way *t'aegwondo* has been developed within Korea and propagated abroad.

This process of development can be broadly outlined as follows: Japanese *karate* called *kongsudo* or *tangsudo* was introduced to Korea just after liberation from Japan by Koreans who had learned *karate* in Japan. Upon returning, these Koreans opened *karate* gymnasiums promoting what they were teaching as *karate*, much like the process followed by the early *Judo* instructors. Well after these schools became established, the need to "Koreanize" was felt. The process of Koreanization consisted of three main aspects. The first was the selection of a new, non-Japanese name. The second was the creation of a system of techniques and training which was distinctly different from that of *karate*, and the third was the attempt to establish *t'aegwondo's* existence and development within the historical flow of Korean civilization. The development of a new system of techniques and training was under-taken by moving away from *karate's* nature as a martial art of self-defense through the development of *t'aegwondo* as a sport? This has been called the "competitionalization" or sportization of *t'aegwondo*.

This, however, is where the problems which still plague *t'aegwondo* had their genesis. First of all, the concept of martial art based on the Chinese philosophical concept of *tao* was developed in Japan beginning with the transformation of swordsmanship from a battlefield necessity to a form of philosophic human movement.<sup>4</sup> This philosophical concept, as it was applied to fighting skills by the Japanese, did not exist in Korea.

Rather, during the last half of the Choson dynasty, physical activity, especially of a martial nature, became all object of scorn and a sign of low breeding as seen in the royal court attitude of valuing learning and disregarding martial skill. Koreans' first concrete exposure to this concept of martial art was through the martial arts training *judo* and *kendo* under the militaristic education policy affected by the Japanese during the colonial period. This concept was reinforced with the entry of *karate* into Korea.

The propagation of the philosophies associated with *karate* flourished as did many other Japanese policies and methodologies. This was especially true in the sport and physical education realms as can be seen by the fact that the faculty of the physical education department of Seoul National University at that time consisted almost exclusively of Japanese trained educators whose teaching and training methods were exclusively Japanese.<sup>6</sup>

While attempting to escape the stigma of Japanese *karate* through the creation of a new system of techniques based on competition, Korean *t'aegwondo* had already put itself in a quandary by asserting that its origin was rooted in traditional Korean martial arts such as *subakhui* or *t'aekkyon*. So while the nature of *t'aegwondo* was developing towards that of a martial sport of unique Korean creation and away from its Japanese nature of a martial art of self-defense, *t'aegwondo* leaders were unable or unwilling to acknowledge *t'aegwondo* Japanese origins. Doing so would have freed them from the burden of maintaining an inconsistent position regarding the nature of *t'aegwondo* and also would have allowed development of a compatible philosophical basis for the newly emerging phenomenon of sport *t'aegwondo*.

Instead, the *t'aegwondo* of the 1960s, one which had been accepted as a sport in the Korean National Sports Festival in 1963 and rapidly promoted throughout Korea as a martial sport totally different from *karate*, could not let go of characteristic Japanese techniques and [81] training methods, and more importantly, Japanese philosophical concepts which formed its original basis. This was due to the fact that *t'aegwondo* leaders were still relying, to a great extent, on the foundation which these techniques and philosophies provided. This lack of investment in a philosophical foundation for the newly emerging phenomenon of competition *t'aegwondo* in the 1960s and the dependence on Japanese concepts and philosophies (which correspond more to a Zen martial art of self-defense than to a martial sport) have left *t'aegwondo* split into two identities. One is the competition identity, the only form which realistically exists today in Korea and which is responsible for *t'aegwondo* having a structure distinguishable from that of *karate*. The other is the so-called martial art identity which is ironically referred to as "traditional" *t'aegwondo* but which is still strongly based, both technically and philosophically, on the foundation of Japanese *karate*. This problem results from efforts by *t'aegwondo* leaders to distort the real history of *t'aegwondo's* development by not acknowledging its Japanese origins. Therefore, competition *t'aegwondo* which is actually "traditional" *t'aegwondo* by virtue of the fact that it was developed wholly in Korea in keeping with Koreans' traditional affinity for competitive forms of physical activity is regarded as subordinate to the martial art nature of *t'aegwondo* which has very little relation to traditional Korean customs or thinking, at least as they existed in the last several hundred years. Consequently, the techniques and training systems of competition *t'aegwondo* which were developed exclusively in Korea are not recognized for their value as the original core of *t'aegwondo* because to do so would be to acknowledge that Korean *t'aegwondo* is a very recent phenomenon, having a history of not more than a few decades. Because of this, little effort has been given to investigating and formulating a philosophical and educational foundation for competition *t'aegwondo* which could help in overcoming the weaknesses inherent in competitive sport and help to establish a universal culture which will, ultimately, do more for its development than ethnocentric assertions regarding its heritage.

This paper will examine *t'aegwondo* modern history and development and analyze the identity problem that arose as a result of the lack of recognition of competition *t'aegwondo* as that *t'aegwondo* which was actually developed in Korea and which possesses an original nature different from that of *karate*. Furthermore, this study will propose that *t'aegwondo's* nature and identity were decided by the process of formation and development in the course of its "competitionalization" in Korea. Finally the basis for a philosophy of *t'aegwondo* will be proposed which, it is hoped, will assist in overcoming its division into sport and martial art, as well as, aid in providing a proper understanding of the identity and nature *t'aegwondo* as determined by the actual techniques, training methods and culture of *t'aegwondo*.

## **II. Problems in the Popular Treatment of T'aegwondo's History**

Most historical treatments of *t'aegwondo* follow approximately the same syllabus. The textbook published by the Korean Minister of Education in 1976 serves as a good

example of the typical writings regarding *t'aegwondo* history which begins with two pages dealing with the probable need and origin of fighting skills in prehistoric, tribal Korea. Next are about 20 pages dealing with the *sonbae* of Koguryo and the hwarang of Shilla and their practice of *t'aegwondo* which was then called subak or *taekkyon*.

Following are five pages regarding the *subakhui* of the Koryo dynasty. Then five pages regarding the *t'aekkyon* of the Choson dynasty, and, finally, two sentences dealing with the fortunes of *t'aegwondo* in the period from the end of the 19th century until the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. A review of the available literature shows this to be a typical pattern. From an academic point of view, however, this seems an illogical treatment of the history. Much more effort is devoted to attempting to demonstrate that some sort of unarmed fighting form existed in Korea during a period in which there is little or no written historical documentation, while practically no attention is given to the period in which *t'aegwondo* actually began to appear in its modern form in Korea, and for which there is much more historical evidence. This paper does not require an examination of the period before the end of the Choson dynasty except for some comments regarding the nature of subak during the Choson dynasty. The general assertion that *t'aegwondo* is the direct descendant of *t'aekkyon* is substantially the issue which demands objective investigation. Therefore, the nature and status of *t'aekkyon* from the late Choson period until the time that the first *karate* gymnasiums began to appear in Korea circa 1946-1947 is of much greater historical significance.

Two of the more prominent *t'aegwondo* leaders of that period, Hwang Ki and Ch'oe Hong-hui, had practiced *t'aekkyon* and later incorporated its kicking techniques into the methods of Japanese *karate*. Most *t'aegwondo* histories will not admit to any relation to *karate* whatsoever. Hwang uses this relation with *t'aekkyon* to explain *t'aegwondo's* emphasis on *foot* techniques.<sup>10</sup> Primarily, it is important to understand the nature of *t'aekkyon* in Choson and early colonial society.

We can find the first references to *subak*, which, it is claimed, is the predecessor of *t'aekkyon*, in the *Koryosa* (History of Koryo) circa 1147.<sup>11</sup> These references to *subak* continue into the Choson dynasty, however, even as early as 1343 *subak* was being referred to as a spectator sport and not a martial art.<sup>12</sup> The first reference to *t'aekkyon* comes from a book called the *Chaemulbo* written by *Yi Song-gi* during the reign of King Chongjo (1776-1800) where it is referred to as *t'aekkyon*. In the mid 1800s, an artist of the royal court named Yu Suk (1827-1873) painted a mural called the *Taek'oedo* in which *t'aekkyon* and *ssirum* are being contested as folk games in the midst of much smoking and drinking.

In 1921, at the age of 70, Ch'oe Yong-nyon described *t'aekkyon* in his book, *Haedong chukchi*, as a game in which two partners squared off and tried to knock each other down with their feet. He went on to say, "This became a means of exacting revenge for a slight or winning away an opponent's concubine through betting. Due to this, the game was outlawed by the judiciary and eventually disappeared.<sup>13</sup> Many writers have tried to assert that *t'aekkyon* was forced underground as a result of being outlawed by the Japanese during the colonial period due to its potential as a source of anti-Japanese revolt. In fact some have gone a step further and, after stating that the Japanese outlawed *t'aekkyon*,

attempted to explain the use of the name karate (*kongsu* and *tangsu*) in post-liberation Korea and the use of *karate forms*, (*hyong*) by stating that, due to *t'aekkyon's* similarity to karate, the Japanese forced Koreans to use the name *karate* in referring to *t'aekkyon* and to include Japanese forms in its practice.<sup>14</sup> This seems to be an apparent contradiction. If the Japanese had banned the practice of *t'aekkyon*, how and why would they force Koreans to call it karate or incorporate karate techniques into it? This is a moot point. According to both Ch'oe Yong-nyon and Song Tok-ki, the last progeny of Choson *t'aekkyon*, *t'aekkyon* had, for the most part, faded out of folk culture shortly after the turn of the century. Ch'oe Yong-nyon stated that due to gambling and other unsavory aspects deemed harmful to the preservation of healthy social customs, *t'aekkyon* was forbidden and even youngsters seen playing it were chased with a switch by the village elders. In this way it soon disappeared.<sup>15</sup>

*T'aekkyon* seems to have suffered the same fate as that of another Choson era folk game called *p'yon ssaum* which was an organized rock fighting between two teams, usually two villages. This game was popular since the Koryo dynasty and was watched by kings, as was subak. However, King Sejong was so horrified by the primitiveness of it that he ordered it banned.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless it survived repeated attempts at prohibition by the judiciary<sup>17</sup> which finally succeeded in abolishing it sometime after the turn of the century.<sup>18</sup> Both *t'aekkyon* and *p'yon ssaum* are listed in a book called *Korean Games* written in 1895 by all American scholar named Stuart Culin who describes *t'aekkyon* as a game in which the object is to kick the opponent's leg out from under him or catch the opponent's kick and throw him to the ground. He goes on to say that the game was also played in Japan.<sup>19</sup> In a similar book called *Han'guk-ui minsok nori* (Korean Folk Games), written in 1975 by a Korean scholar of Korean folk customs named Shim Usong, a good deal of attention is given to rock fighting but there is no mention of *t'aekkyon*.<sup>20</sup> Further testimony to the completeness of *t'aekkyon's* disappearance from Korean folk customs is given by Song Tok-ki the Choson's "last *t'aekkyon* player" who was invited in 1958 to give a demonstration of *t'aekkyon* on the occasion of then President Syngman Rhee's birthday. In spite of searching in "100 directions" he was unable to locate even one person versed in *t'aekkyon* with whom he could demonstrate.<sup>21</sup>

This in spite of hundreds of *t'aegwondo* schools throughout the country. Song Tok-ki goes on to say that *t'aekkyon* was never thought of as other than a game and existed almost exclusively in Seoul where it was played regularly in a few locations.<sup>22</sup> These are crucial points in the argument that *t'aegwondo* came from *t'aekkyon*. Especially when Ch'oe Hong-hui, the individual who claims to have combined the techniques of *t'aekkyon* and karate, says he learned *t'aekkyon* from his calligraphy teacher Han Il-dong in Hamgyong-do province, in what is now North Korea.<sup>23</sup> This statement conflicts with the testimony of Song Tok-ki who said that *t'aekkyon* was mostly a Seoul phenomenon. And further, it is highly unlikely that the rough and tumble atmosphere of the *t'aekkyon* matches was a place where an artist of calligraphy like Han Il-dong would have been found, especially in light of the distaste the educated of the late Choson had for the rustic folk play of the common class.

Ch'oe, who graduated from the law school of Japan's Chuo University in 1943, admits to having attained a second degree black belt while in Japan and says that upon his return to Korea he combined this training with *t'aekkyon* techniques to create *t'aegwondo*. Ch'oe

was not, however, the first or foremost among those who started martial art gyms in Korea. He was not one of the founders of the original five schools, or p'a. These schools were the Chongdogwan founded by Yi Won-guk, the Mudokwan, founded by Hwang Ki, the Yonmugwan founded by Chon Sang-sop, the Kwonbop Tojang, founded by Yun Pyong-in and the Songmugwan founded by No Pyongjik.

All five of these original school founders received their training in Japan in Japanese *karate* and of the five gyms, all but the Kwonbop Tojang used the name *karate* (either *kongsudo* or *tangsudo*).<sup>25</sup> Ch'oe himself later became the honorary head of the Chongdogwan in 1953 while it was still using the name *tangsudo*.<sup>26</sup> Ch'oe was responsible for proposing the name *t'aegwondo*, a name he says he chose for its similarity in pronunciation to *t'aekkyon*. The name was proposed at a meeting of prominent businessmen, soldiers and martial artists in 1955; however, it took 11 more years before the name was to be officially accepted, when in 1966 the Korean T'aesudo Association changed its name to the Korean T'aegwondo Association.

What is more significant than the fact that practically all the schools in Korea were using the name *karate* and the Japanese terminology for the techniques, is that the forms and training methods were also Japanese, with no techniques or terminology resembling those of *t'aekkyon*.<sup>27</sup> For these early instructors this was not a problem. The nationalistic and political motivations to portray *t'aegwondo* as having Korean origins would not be felt until sometime after the more pressing problems created by the Korean War had started to fade away.<sup>28</sup>

Once this movement to "Koreanize" *t'aegwondo* started, there were three major projects to be undertaken. First was finding a suitable Korean name. The more difficult task of providing a historical basis for *t'aegwondo* followed, along with the most difficult part of the process: developing an original system of techniques by which to distinguish *t'aegwondo* from *karate*.

The fact that in the period from after liberation until the early 1960s *t'aegwondo* consisted of Japanese terminology and techniques was the most awkward obstacle in trying to assert that *t'aegwondo* originated in Korea. This is perhaps the reason why this crucial period receives so little historical treatment. The second generation of instructors who had received their training exclusively in Korea under first generation Japanese trained instructors solved the problem by an original system of techniques by developing a method of competition radically different from the Japanese system. This attempt was made, however, in the face of much opposition from the first generation instructors such as Ch'oe Hong-hui and Hwang Ki.<sup>29</sup> In spite of that, this effort was successful, perhaps even beyond its creators' expectations. Through the competition of *t'aegwondo* a system of interrelated kicking techniques, footwork, and balance of attack-counterattack-re-attack evolved the likes of which had never before existed. Opposition to this newly developing system of sparring and training was strong, however, and came, surprisingly enough, from those first generation instructors who, while trying to assert that *t'aegwondo* was different from *karate* were, at the same time, reluctant to give up the techniques and philosophies they had learned from the Japanese. Ch'oe Hong-hui and

Hwang Ki for instance, were. Not only opposed to a change in the emphasis away from forms training toward sparring<sup>30</sup>, but as late as 1966, Ch'oe who was honorary chairman of the Korean T'aesudo Association, was advocating exclusive use of the non-contact sparring system of *karate* due to his reluctance to alter his philosophy that *t'aegwondo* was, above all else, a lethal martial art which can kill with one blow.<sup>31</sup> This is the Japanese concept of "one blow one death," a good example of the Korean instructors' dependence on Japanese philosophical concepts which impeded them from developing a philosophical basis for the newly emerging Korean *t'aegwondo*. [86] Ch'oe was insisting on the continued use of the Japanese competition system which did not use a body protector, did not allow hard contact and did not prohibit punching to the face, the three major reasons that *t'aegwondo* was able to develop a unique kicking system which distinguished it from karate. This in spite of the fact that the Korean T'aesudo Association had already implemented the changes in the sparring system that Ch'oe opposed starting in 1963 with *t'aegwondo's* inclusion in the Korean National Sports Festival and including various major competitions, under this system in 1964, 1965 and 1966 including national middle school, high school, and university competitions.<sup>32</sup> It was precisely at this point, where *t'aegwondo* was actually beginning to develop its own unique techniques and culture, that the split into sport and martial art had its genesis and that competition *t'aegwondo* missed the opportunity to develop its own unique philosophical basis and identity as the real "traditional" Korean *t'aegwondo*. What was called martial art in Korea was based almost entirely on Japanese principles, concepts and techniques and remains largely so today. These principles and philosophies support the perception of *t'aegwondo's* nature as that of a martial art of self-defense whose core training methods consisted of the so-called "four elements" of forms (*p'umse* or *hyung*), breaking (*kyukpa*), sparring (*kyorugi*) and self-defense techniques (*hoshinsul*).<sup>34</sup> The *t'aegwondo* that was developed wholly in Korea based mainly on sparring and institutionalized as sport competition was, and still is, perceived to be a subordinate element of the "parent body" of *t'aegwondo*, that is, martial art.

In Korea, it is generally recognized that the development process of competition *t'aegwondo* produced a technical system and training format separate and unique from martial art *t'aegwondo*,<sup>34</sup> but the general assertion is that the goals and values of the two are different. Some of these stated differences are as follows;

- 1) The goals of the martial art *t'aegwondo* are self-development and spiritual improvement, while the goals of competition *t'aegwondo* are demonstrating one's superiority over an opponent, i.e. winning.
- 2) Martial art *t'aegwondo* reflects eastern values while competition *t'aegwondo* reflects western ones.
- 3) Martial art *t'aegwondo* is process-oriented, while competition *t'aegwondo* is result oriented.
- 4) Martial art *t'aegwondo* is formalized while competition *t'aegwondo* is not.<sup>35</sup>

These distinctions illustrate the fact that while the competition process enabled *t'aegwondo* to form its unique and characteristic technical system, this technical system (the sparring system) was not recognized as the parent body of *t'aegwondo* and little research was done which might have given competition

*t'aegwondo* the philosophical and conceptual basis it needed to supplant the recently adopted philosophies and concepts of *karate*. Instead these were maintained as the foundation of *t'aegwondo* leading ultimately to the contradictions and divisions that *t'aegwondo* now faces.

One of the main reasons for the divisions and inconsistencies in *t'aegwondo* is the fact that the history of *t'aegwondo's* development process has not been objectively treated. Furthermore, the political and nationalistic nature of most of the literature regarding *t'aegwondo* not only make an honest and realistic treatment of *t'aegwondo* increasingly difficult, but the utilization of *t'aegwondo* for political and nationalistic [87] purposes is creating further obstacles to the establishment of an identity for *t'aegwondo* based on its uniqueness apart from karate.

An example of this political and nationalistic nature can be seen in the value placed on *t'aegwondo* as a tool to be used for diplomatic purposes and the economic benefit of Korea. *T'aegwondo* serves as a method of increasing economic profits for Korea, as well as a tool for the accomplishment of political objectives in newly developing countries.<sup>36</sup> *T'aegwondo's* efficacy in achieving various political and nationalistic objectives rests squarely on its image as the unique and traditional martial art of Korea.

If the perception that *t'aegwondo* is somehow related to Japanese *karate* is spread, this could deal a fatal blow to *t'aegwondo's* ability to achieve these objectives.<sup>37</sup> The extent to which *t'aegwondo* has been politicized and nationalized can only contribute to the reluctance to objectively clarify *t'aegwondo's* historical development and the identity and formative characteristics which were produced by this process of development. And this in turn will impede the clarification of *t'aegwondo's* educational and philosophical values as they are formed by these characteristics.

### **III. Significance of the Process of *T'aegwondo's* "Competitionalization"**

The significance of *t'aegwondo's* technical development away from the nature of purely martial self-defense toward a competition of physical skill and mental strategy can be seen in the following points: First, as examined above, was the creation of an original and unique technical system which developed kicking techniques to a level never before reached. Second were the changes in the social and philosophical nature of *t'aegwondo* elicited by this process.

#### *1. Social Changes: The Modernization of the Martial Arts*

Looking first at the social changes that *t'aegwondo* encountered when it began to develop into a sport, we must consider the evolution of martial arts in general. The process of the evolution of martial art from a soldier's tool to a method of spiritual and physical education has, almost without exception, been accompanied by the development of a safe means of competitive sparring. This began with the transformation of *kendo* in Japan from a method of large-scale battlefield warfare to that of a method of personal combat between two individuals, culminating, with the legal and social changes in Japanese society, in a safe method of physical and mental training. This process can be seen in the evolution of civilization in which fighting using lethal force became the domain of the

military or constabulary and not that of the individual citizen. *Judo* underwent a similar process in which it evolved from a "technique" of actual fighting to a "process" of education. This was done in both cases by making necessary modifications to the techniques and training methods so that the degree to which the techniques had been embodied by the practitioner could be tested through sparring, and ultimately, competition.<sup>38</sup> Sparring took the place of actual combat in the process of training. Many *karate* instructors in Japan, however, did not understand the significance of this process and by insisting that *karate* must maintain its lethality, actually hindered its development. The first generation instructors in Korea were also [88] greatly influenced by this thinking and this was, as stated above, one of the reasons that sparring was not recognized as a proper core element of *t'aegwondo*.

This reluctance to give up the pre-modern perception of martial art, that is, the acquisition of lethal combat techniques as the ultimate technical objective<sup>39</sup> and that philosophical value is based in *not* using them against another human being,<sup>40</sup> created some inconsistencies in the philosophy of technique. The main reason that forms and repetition of the basics were the main training methods of pre-competition *t'aegwondo* is because the actual application of the techniques was considered impossible due to their supposed lethality, and therefore, philosophically unacceptable; therefore, breaking inanimate objects became an important element of the training process to overcome this inconsistency between the practice of technique and the prohibition of the use of that technique. As the process of modernization centered the focus of training on sparring, *kendo*, *judo*, *t'aegwondo*, and, to some extent *karate* took on the characteristic of sport. Paradoxically, westerners who have a long tradition of competitive sport and rational empiricism were initially much more fascinated by the enigmatic mysticism of the noncompetitive aspects of the martial arts. Westerners, without really understanding the differences between that which is eastern custom, or culture, and that which is philosophy unique to martial art, were captivated by what they perceived as a mystical short cut to wisdom and power not found in their culture,<sup>41</sup> something that some Korean instructors were quick to perceive and clever in exploiting when teaching *t'aegwondo* to westerners.<sup>42</sup> The values of competition *t'aegwondo*, being similar to that of sport and physical education, were based on hard training and actual application of techniques against an opponent, while the nature of non-competition martial arts was such that their actual performance (real fighting) was something, it was taught, to be avoided at all costs, thus creating a convenient sanctuary from which instructors could teach exotic looking techniques and expound profound philosophies which would likely never be tested. This mentality remains strong in westerners, who seem to prefer the mysterious tantalization of exotic techniques and philosophies to that which can be concretely and objectively explained applied and evaluated through competition.

## 2. Philosophical Significance of Competition *T'aegwondo*

As previously stated, the major significance in the development of *t'aegwondo* through competition was the creation of a new system of techniques which established the basis, not only for *t'aegwondo's* differentiation *karate*, but also for more universal philosophical and educational values which could be directly realized through the training process.

The aspects of the competition system which generated the development of the original techniques by which *t'aegwondo* became clearly distinguished from *karate* and in which new, more modern training values were posited are as follows:

- A. The prohibition of attacking the face with hand techniques.
- B. The prohibition of attacking below the waist.
- C. The prohibition of grabbing the opponent.
- D. The use of body protection making full-contact possible.[89]
- E. A scoring system which awarded points only for accurate blows of substantial power (full-contact).
- F. The regulations which allow continuous fighting without interference from the referee (except in cases where the flow of the match must be re-established or a warning given).

All of these points were radically different from the competition regulations of *karate* at the time.

The initial result of these regulations was, first and foremost, an intense period of experimentation with new ways to kick and new footwork patterns which would provide the ability to kick in various combinations. This process produced a new technical system which included totally new kicking techniques as well as substantial development in the speed, power, and manner of execution of existing kick<sup>43</sup> including the instep which had not been used before the development of the new sparring system.<sup>44</sup>

Another radical development was the change from *karate's* technical philosophy of attack-block-counterattack to that of attack-counterattack. This change in philosophy (away from victory, i.e. symbolic death, being decided by one technique) and the accompanying evolution of the technical system ultimately created a perfect mutual balance of techniques wherein technique A defeats technique B, technique C defeats technique A, while technique B defeats technique C, ad infinitum. In *karate*, blocking the opponent's attack before counterattacking is emphasized in all the training patterns.

As *t'aegwondo's* techniques evolved through constant experimentation in competition, the blocking stage disappeared due to its ineffectiveness in the new system of techniques. The natural interrelation or synchronicity of techniques made blocking obsolete. For example, in the case of a kicking attack coming to the chest, to block the kick and then counter-kick required so much time that the opponent would have already moved to make the counter ineffective. Competitors realized that it was possible to kick at the same time as the attacker, or with only a slight delay, and counter the attack almost simultaneously without blocking. This was possible due to the synchronicity of the techniques and the system of footwork which developed. The footwork system of *t'aegwondo* radically

differentiated it from *karate* and made possible simultaneous counterattacking as well as combination kicking attacks which did not exist in *karate*.

Not only did *t'aegwondo* develop away from the techniques of karate through competitionization, but also escaped from some of the philosophical inconsistencies inherent in *karate's* nature as self-defense technique. The objective of training in a technique is the acquisition of that technique. Of course, the process of that acquisition has important philosophical value, still, the objective of technique itself is to perfect a technique to the point where it can be successfully utilized. The implicit objective of *karate* technique is to strike an opponent with enough force to disable, or kill if necessary. That is why, it is said, that competition is unrealistic, "*Karateists* cannot easily engage in their art for the sake of sport .... It is too lethal a game ... *karate* does not provide a convenient arena for relatively harmless contests.... That's not to say that some people aren't attempting to make it into a sport.... I prefer no-contact *karate*, in which participants aren't allowed to touch or are not allowed to do each other harm. It preserves the look and philosophy of *karate* and maintains all the benefits of fullcontact." <sup>45</sup> Herein lies the inconsistency, the training methods of main-[stream *karate* (there are some schools which have moved away from this thinking, most notably the Kyokushinkai style) prohibit, by their philosophy, accomplishing the objectives of their techniques. That is, there is no way short of actual combat, which is to be avoided at all costs save one's life,<sup>46</sup> to accomplish the successful execution of a technique. The reason that breaking was developed as a method of training was to test the "lethality" of a technique. However, this is only a partial fulfillment of the objective of the technique. The missing element is a skilled and resisting opponent.

*T'aegwondo*, by developing a system of competition in which the technical values were posited not in the ability to defeat an opponent in actual combat, but to successfully execute technique in a full-contact contest of predetermined skills, overcame this inconsistent limitation which existed in karate. The objective of technique was changed from the one blow-one death orientation which was, realistically speaking, an abstract philosophy to most trainees, to the perfection of high level techniques which *could* be successfully applied to in equally skilled and determined opponent. This system gives value to the factors of power, accuracy, and strategy, and further, recognizes the player who executes the more difficult techniques through a scoring system which rewards the execution of superior technique (a face kick being more valuable than a body kick). The philosophy of technique can be seen in the following three elements: A. Opposition (*sangdaseong*)-Technique, including the element of strategy, only reaches its full significance in interaction with, and application against, opposing technique and strategy within the principle of the emptiness and fullness of time and space. This is the governing principle of *t'aegwondo* sparring. Time refers to the relative timing, including speed, of the two bodies' motion. Space refers to the relative distance between the bodies and the "emptiness" or "fullness" of that space. When a technique is executed, it exists within the dimensions of time and space as do all moving bodies. What this means is that when a body moves it creates "full" space and "empty" space depending on the characteristics of that motion. In *t'aegwondo*, for example, when a face kick is executed, the space occupied by the leg and foot is "full," however, at the same time an "empty" space has

been created, in this case the body area. So when a face kick is attempted, the space around the body of the attacker becomes "empty" and vulnerable for a counterattack. Likewise with time, the speed and the relative timing of both players' motions determine the duration in which a space will remain empty before becoming full. The understanding, and manipulation of these principles and the unique techniques of *t'aegwondo* make its sparring system different from all others. None of these points have meaning, of course, without an opponent. It is precisely the existence of an opponent which makes the completion of technique possible.

B. Completion (*sonch'wisong*)- Because of the presence of an opponent and the nature of the system of sparring (the rules), *t'aegwondo* techniques can attain full completion or their objective. That is, the technical objective of training can be fully realized; the technical objective being the powerful and accurate execution of a recognized technique to a legal target area. Completion is something that was not possible, short of mortal combat, when the stated objectives of technique were to injure or kill. Therefore, by making the attainment of sparring techniques the ultimate technical objective, it became possible to test and perfect technique on a daily basis through sparring. The sense of accomplishment which accompanies the [91] successful execution of technique against a skilled and resisting opponent became a common occurrence. Further, these frequent opportunities to successfully complete technique made the goal of perfecting technique possible.

C. Perfection (*wanbyoksong*) Due to the design of the *t'aegwondo* sparring system and the nearly perfectly balanced interrelation of techniques, the number and type of technical exchanges and situations is finite. In fact it is quite limited according to the principle of the emptiness and fullness of time and space. This gives *t'aegwondo* sparring the element of predictability. That is, through control and manipulation of the opponent's time and space it is possible to anticipate or create the unfolding technical situation. This makes it possible to execute techniques that are "perfect" in relation to the technical demands of the situation. Further, due to the fact that the progress of sparring is not unnecessarily interrupted, this situational anticipation and response can be continuous making the ideal goal of the "perfect game," the continuous, total technical and psychological manipulation and domination of the opponent, theoretically possible.

As a philosophical value, establishing this technical perfection as the objective of training places the demands of ceaseless mental and physical training upon the trainee; it also adds the element of artistry. In this case, artistry can be defined as bringing order to chaos through skillful technique. Put another way, this can be seen as the moment when the disorder existing in the time and space between two forcefully opposing bodies is put into order by the "perfect" (successful) execution of one technique against another technique or situation. The player has the ability to create (creation being the basis of artistry) dependant upon subjective perception (anticipation) and skillful execution. This is what Slusher is speaking of when he says that in sport, "particularly competitive sport, the player gets the opportunity to be purely self engaged in the act of becoming.... To open oneself up, and, in the process transcend the self."<sup>47</sup> Esposito says regarding this, that "Sport ... does make such forms of transcendence possible.... It is precisely one's Opening

oneself to possibilities that produce the feelings of achievement or failure so essential to the awareness of having become something one was not at an earlier point."<sup>48</sup>

These above concepts form the foundation for the technical philosophy of *t'aegwondo*. However, much more effort in the fields of research into philosophy and the realization of that philosophy in the training halls and competition arenas is needed. It is vital for the future development of *t'aegwondo* to establish and promulgate a philosophical and educational basis upon which the actual nature and modern identity of *t'aegwondo* can be securely founded.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

*T'aegwondo* currently faces something of a crisis in identity and direction as a result of the confusion and distortion regarding its historical origins and process of development. This is due in large part to the efforts to portray *t'aegwondo* as a unique product of Korean culture, developed over the long course of Korean history since the Three Kingdoms period. The fact that *t'aegwondo* is the product of Japanese *karate*, introduced into Korea just after liberation, and the efforts to deny or conceal this fact have left *t'aegwondo* divided into two identities: that of martial art based on self [91] defense and that of competition.

It is due to this reluctance to deal objectively with the fact that *t'aegwondo* evolved away from *karate* through the process of developing from a martial art of self-defense into a modern system of competitive sparring based on an original system of techniques, that sparring, the essential nature of *t'aegwondo*, has not been fully recognized. And further, that a contradiction exists wherein so-called, "traditional *t'aegwondo*" is still largely based on the training principles and philosophies of *karate*. This while competition *t'aegwondo*, which was originated wholly in Korea, is considered only a subordinate element of the "whole" of *t'aegwondo*. This reluctance to acknowledge *t'aegwondo's karate* background made it impossible for early *t'aegwondo* leaders to let drop some of their dependence on *karate* philosophies and principles and actively pursue the task of establishing philosophical and education goals for competition based *t'aegwondo* which would have helped it to retain the values of a martial art while possessing a modern, universal nature. The fact that competition *t'aegwondo* was exclusively developed in Korea without this foundation led to its loss of recognition as other than a game lacking deeper value as physical education practiced by young semi -professional athletes, small children, and new army conscripts. Further, this has led to a severe split in, and misunderstanding of the actual identity of *t'aegwondo*.

The fact that competition *t'aegwondo* is imbued with plentiful philosophical and educational values sufficient to establish it as the core, universal nature of *t'aegwondo* is tantalizing, but difficult to realize due to the reluctance and lack of effort on the part of those who administer *t'aegwondo*. As time goes by, the task of rectifying this will become increasingly more difficult, and the price *t'aegwondo* will have to pay increasingly heavy.

## NOTES:

1. Kim Young, Oak, *T'aegwondo ch'olhak kusong wollli* [Principles Governing the Construction of the Philosophy of *T'aegwondo* (Seoul: Tongnam. 1990), p. 131.
2. Regarding *t'aegwondo's* role as a means of combating the "invasion" of western culture, Shin Ch'ang-hwa asserts that *t'aegwondo* has actually brought about a reverse cultural domination by subordinating western culture through dissemination of Korean value and belief systems in the west. This, of course, becomes problematic when the degree to which *t'aegwondo's* methodology and philosophy still relies on Japanese thought is examined. Shin Ch'ang-hwa, "Han'guk oegyo-ui munhwajok sudan-uroso t'aegwondo-e kwanhan yon'gu [A Study of *t'aegwondo* as the Cultural Measure of Korean Diplomacy]" (Masters thesis, Yonsei University, 1993), p. 85.
3. Yang Jin Bang, "Haebang chikhu han'guk t'aegwondo-ui paljon kwajong-gwa ku yoksajok uimi [A Study on the History of Modern Korean *T'aegwondo*]" (Masters thesis, Seoul National University, 1986). p. 85.
4. Draeger Donn, *Classical Budo* (New York: Weatherhill. N.Y., 1973). p. 36.
5. Yang Jin Bang. op. cit.
6. Kim Dahl Woo and Oh Jeong Seok, "Deciding Factors in Korean School Physical Education Korean," paper presented at the Seoul International Sport Science Congress, 1955, pp. 36-37.
7. Korean Ministry of Education. *T'aegwondo* (1976), pp. 15-47.
8. For an excellent treatment of the history of the development of martial arts in Korea, focusing on the so-called traditional martial arts, see Ch'oe Pok-kyu, "Han'guk chont'ong muye-ui chaejongni-wa kundae uimi [Reconstitution of Korean Martial Arts and Modern Significance]" (Masters thesis, Seoul National University, 1995).
9. Ch'oe Hong-hui, *T'aegwondo kyobon*, [*T'aegwondo* Textbook] (Seoul: Kyeryang Publishing, 1970), p. 41.
10. Hwang Ki seems to contradict himself in that he states that *T'aekkyon* was a technique for ruffians and gangsters which had no relation to *t'aegwondo* (called *tangsudo* by Hwang) but he then says that *t'aegwondo's* foot techniques are based on *t'aekkyon*. Hwang Ki. *Subakto kyubon* [Subakto Textbook] (Seoul: Kyeryang Publishing, 1970), p. 41.
11. Na Hyon-song. *Han'guk ch'eyuk kyokuska yon'gu* [Research on the History of Korean Physical Education] (Seoul: Kyohaksa, 1991) p. 41.
12. Na Hyon-song, *ibid.*
13. Yi Yong-bok, *T'aekkyon* (Seoul: Taewon, 1995), p. 15.
14. Chong Ch'ang-mo, *T'aegwondo* (Seoul: Tongyang, 1982), p. 24; Korean Ministry of Education. *T'aegwondo* (1976), p. 47.
15. Yi Yong-bok, op. cit.

16. Shim U-song, *Han'guk-ui minsok nori* [Korean Folk Games] (Seoul: Taegwang Publishing, 1976), p. 175.
17. Shim U-song, *ibid.*
18. Shannon McCune. *Korea: Land of Broken Calm* (Canada: D. Van Norstrand, 1966), p. 183.
19. Stewart Culin, *Korean Games* (University of Pennsylvania. 1895), p. 39.
20. Shim U-song, op, cit.
21. Yi Yong-bok, op. cit.
22. Song Tok-ki and Pak Tong-gwon, *T'aekkyon* (Seoul: Sorim Publishing, 1983), p. 8.
23. Ch'oe Hong-hui, *T'aegwondo chich'im* [T'aegwondo Pocket Guide] (Seoul: Chongyon Publishing, 1983), pp. 355-356.
24. Ch'oe Hong-hui, op. cit.
25. Yang Jin Bang. *ibid.*
26. Ch'oe Hong-hui, op. cit.
27. Yang Jin Bang. op. cit.
28. Kim Yonng Oak, op, cit.
29. Yang Jin Bang, op. cit.
30. Ch'oe Hong hui, op. cit.; Hwang Ki, op. cit.
31. Ch'oe Hong hui, *ibid.*
32. Yang Jin Bang, op. cit.
33. Song Nak-chun, "T'aegwondo kyonggi-ui kawson pangan [Proposal for the Treatment of Problems in Competition T'aegwondo]," paper presented at the Seminar for the Globalization of T'aegwondo sponsored by the Korean T'aegwondo Association, Aug 8th, 1995, pp. 36-37.
34. This type of logic which precludes competition from having any philosophic or educational value stems from a lack of understanding of the modernization of the martial arts. Furthermore, the statement that martial art T'aegwondo reflects eastern values while competition t'aegwondo reflects western values denies to *T'aegwondo*, as a whole, the quality of universality. Song Nak-chun, *ibid.*
35. Song Nak-chun. *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
36. Shin Ch'ang-hwa. op. cit.. p. 64.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
38. Steven D. Capener, "*T'aegwondo ch'o1hak-ui ponjil-e k-wanhan yon'gu* [A Study on the Nature of *T'aegwondo's* Philosophy]" (Masters thesis. Seoul National University, 1994), p. 22.
39. Ch'oe Hong-hui, op. cit., p. 21. [94]

40. Ibid. P. 70.

41. Steven D. Capener, "Factors Impairing *T'aegwondo's* Educational Effectiveness in the United States," paper presented at the 2nd T'aegwondo Philosophy Seminar organized by Dr. Kim Young Oak. Dec. 7-9. 1999.

42. Kim Young Oak, *ibid.*, p. 132.

43. This according to prominent *T'aegwondo* leader Chong Man-sun. Yang Jin Bang, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

44. In an interview with Yi Chong-u, past president of the Chidogwan and past Secretary-General of the World T'aegwondo Federation, he stated that the use of body armor and the other innovations in the competition system in the early 1960s stimulated a process of technical development which resulted in many new techniques which had not existed before. (Personal interview conducted on Oct. 12th, 1995, at the Nam Seoul Hotel).

45. Russel W, Scott, *Karate: The Energy Connection* (Delcourt Press, 1976), p. 18.

46. Funakoshi Gichin, *Karate: My Way of Life* (Kodansha International, 1959), p. 94.

47. Slusher Howard. *Man, Sport and Existence: A Critical Analysis* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1967), Ch. IV,

48. Esposito Joseph, *Play and Possibility* (Champaign. Ill.: Morgan & Meier, 1988), p. 180.