

Promise and Fulfillment

In the Art of Taekwondo

By

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Master Sang Kyu Shim wrote this book with the intention to offer deeper insight into the cultural and historical heritage which has played such a significant role in the development of Taekwondo. The book explains the history of Korea, its cultural, social and religious development and the role it has played in the growth of Taekwondo. The book then back tracks to the early stages of Taekwondo and its development as science, sport and an art.

The history of Korea dates back thousands of years. There is archaeological evidence that the Korean peninsula had been occupied for 30,000 years and history shows 4,000 years ago families and tribes began to form into the people or nationality of Korea. The first myth dates the foundation of a specific Korean cultural identity to 2332 BC, with the establishment of the Ko-Chosun (Ancient Korean) state.

The attempt by the Chinese in 108 BC to occupy the peninsula brought about a resistance by its people and fostered a desire for political unification to repel the foreign invaders. Smaller tribes came together and steadily grew in strength. These tribes developed into the three kingdoms- Koguryu, Paekche, and Silla and their military history brought about substantial combat development.

For three and one-half centuries, Korea was ruled by the Three Kingdoms. Koguryu in the northern part of the country was initially the largest and most powerful. They were nomadic and warlike and were dedicated to the expulsion of the Chinese. Paekche which bordered the southwest coast was more open to constant outside influences and attempts at control because of its location. It was only the Silla kingdom, in the southeastern part of the peninsula, which was able to retain its ancient characteristics, institutions and practices and ultimately become the successful force in the nation.

Partly because of its isolation, Silla was not prone to attack and thus was free to improve and enjoy their culture without being consumed by the continuous need to defend them selves. The people were settled and able to maintain cooperative relationships and practice age old philosophies and religious practices. Although it was the smallest and most vulnerable of the three, it was never overtaken by the others.

Silla continued to grow and to develop institutions to meet the challenges of the times. At the fore-front, was the military group known as the Hwarang. This provided the courageous leadership and martial valor that helped to develop the cohesive strength Silla needed to overcome opponents and unify the peninsula. During this period of peace the martial arts enjoyed great prestige. It was a large part of the education of the young and the training of the military. This

period of prosperity and advancement was made possible by the dedicated spirit of the Hwarang do which flourished from the sixth to tenth centuries.

The Koryo dynasty lasted from 918-1391, almost 500 years. During this time there were many invasions from the north. The government was also under rule of a less able descendant which had Confucian advisors. Throughout the Koryo dynasty, learning was wide spread. Excellence also flourished in other areas including ceramic ware and Korean paper. At the end of the Koryo dynasty, Korea was invaded by Mongols, who were fierce and without mercy. At the end of the invasions, Korea was exhausted.

The Yi dynasty was founded in 1392 General Yi Sang-Gye. During this time Korea survived two major Japanese invasions, the fall of Ming, the Manchu invasions, and the entire span of the “Ch’ing dynasty”. The Yi dynasty ended in 1910 when Japan annexed Korea and renamed the country Chosun.

Even without official sponsorship of martial arts during the Japanese occupation, the Korean people kept their martial arts alive. During this occupation, “Independence Armies” using techniques which included Taekwondo, arose from local communities, Buddhist monasteries, and schools where martial arts were practiced. With the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, Korea once again took control of its own martial arts. Taekwondo was restyled and reached its present level of development in 1950. The United States intervened in the Korean civil war during which Koreans began to immigrate to the U.S. bringing with them elements of their culture including their national martial art, Taekwondo.

The social, cultural and religious development of Korea was the combined result of the innate temperament of its native people and the many complex nuances of outside influences. Common to all these forces, both domestic and foreign, was the discovery of a central principle of harmony operative in an individual, social and universal phenomena, and, then, action in accord with it.

Confuciansim and Buddhism played the most significant roles in the development of Korean religious philosophy. The Confucian element stressed social and scholarly virtues and upheld the values of correct conduct and filial piety. Buddhism extolled compassion and charity and was a more dynamic and individualistic form of religion the Confucianism. Buddhism also supported and refined the code of the Hwarang do. The Hwarang combined the best of each of the major religious influences. From Confucianism, the Hwarang adopted the teachings of filial piety and loyalty to the state. From Taoism they borrowed the practice of ordering the management of affairs (action by non-action) From Buddha they accepted the commitment to reject evil and effectively act for good. Developing the whole person was critical in the Hwarang do. While the knowledge of military arts was essential, it was only one part of life. Fullness of life demanded that the individual’s spiritual aspirations as well as his physical and intellect received proper development.

By the middle of the sixth century a plan was developed by King Chinhung, to select leaders from leading families. This was called the WonWah. Even

though this eventually failed it lead to the development of the Hwarang. They identified young men of outright character and of noble upbringing, who were then trained according to a very strict regimen. The Hwarang helped youth that flocked to the Hwarang, to refine their morals by dedication to the highest standard of honesty, sincerity, loyalty and integrity. Translated the Hwarang means “Flower of Youth”, the promise of a nation and the hope of the future. The five commandments of the Hwarang, and still basic to Taekwondo, are loyalty to the king, filial piety to parents, non-retreat in battle and selectivity in killing of the living being. Training involves both physical and mental attainments. “Taekwondo is the out-flowering of the Hwarang spirit”.

The immediate objective of Taekwondo is the welfare of the one practicing it, in other words, the development of character involving the growth of the whole person. Taekwondo may be viewed on three levels- as a science, a sport, and as an art. As a science, Taekwondo abstracts forms and from these deduces theories, hypothesis and formulas. The movements of Taekwondo can be demonstrated, can be analyzed and are practical and functional. You can also measure its progress in terms of effectiveness and fulfillment of its aims.

As a sport, Taekwondo requires dedication to developing skill and respect for the quality of the game. Winning in Taekwondo is described in terms of a certain relationship to fulfillment that is a result of having put forth your best effort.

As an art, Taekwondo allows each individual to create something uniquely personal. Through the evolution of individual training comes independent interpretation and expression. In Taekwondo, these parts together, science, sport and art have as a goal, the development of the total individual.

The weapons of Taekwondo are the effective use of the hands and feet that require discipline, training, determination and a sense of moral control. Now we may observe how these techniques are applied in Taekwondo. In describing this he explains the importance of concentration, focus, breath control. In addition the need for proper rhythm and maintaining balance and equilibrium. The effective mechanics and timing in kicking is discussed with the help of diagrams. Finally practicing with free sparring helps in the perfecting the physical skills and also deepen the intangible principles of mental discipline, humility, respect and the sense of preservation rather than destruction.

In conclusion he states; “The expression “one who is a whole person” that is to say, someone who can dare to be unique and still be a vital part of a complex, total universe.”