

## Chapter I.

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# HISTORY OF TAEKWONDO



# 1. Taekwondo in Ancient Times

The historical background of Taekwondo development will be explained following the chronological order of 4 different ages; Ancient Times, Middle Ages, Modern Ages and Present Times.

## A. The Origin of Taekwondo

Man by nature has the instinct to preserve his own life as well as his race, and therefore engages himself in doing physical activities all the time either consciously or unconsciously. Man cannot do without physical motions and he grows and develops on them, regardless of time and space. In ancient times people had no means other than the bare hands and body to defend themselves; so they naturally developed the bare-hand fighting techniques.

Even at the times when arms were developed as the defensive or offensive means, people continued to enjoy the bare-hand fighting techniques for the purpose of building physical strength as well as showing off through matches at the rituals of tribal communities.

In the early history of the Korean Peninsula, there were three tribes dwelling there, each enjoying warrior's martial art contests during the ritual seasons.

At that time people learned techniques from their experiences of fighting against the beasts whose defensive and offensive motions were also the subject of analysis. It is believed that this was exactly the true grounding of today's Taekwondo, whose name has descended from "subak", "taekkyon", "takkyon" and so on.

Later in the latter part of ancient times on the Korean Peninsula, three kingdoms came into existence, always rivaling among themselves for the hegemony. They were Koguryo, Paekje and Silla, all indulged in growing national strength with trained warriors. Therefore, the Korean history tells that there were military personalities among the well-known prominent national leaders of the three kingdoms, which proves the military tendency of ruling hierarchy.

As a result, youth warrior's corps were organized, such as "hwarangdo" in Silla and "chouis-onin" in Koguryo, which both adopted the martial art training as one of the important subjects of learning. A renowned martial art book of the days, called "muyedobo-tongji" said; "Taekwondo(the art of hand-to-hand fight) is the basis of martial art, enabling one to build strength by means of using the hand and foot freely and training arms and legs as

well as the body to be adaptable to any critical situations, which means Taekwondo was already prevalent in that age. Thus, it can be easily assumed that Taekwondo was originated from the days of tribal communities on the Korean Peninsula.

Silla was a kingdom founded in B. C. 57 on the southeastern part of Korea and Koguryo founded in B. C. 37 on the northern part of Korea along the Yalu River, both making great efforts to raise their youngsters into strong warriors called “hwarang” and “sonbae” respectively, certainly with Taekwondo as one of the principal subjects of physical training.

## B. Koguryo’s “sonbae” and Taekkyon

Koguryo was founded on the northern part of Korea, surrounded by the hostile Han (Chinese) tribes in the north. Therefore, in its initial stage of national foundation, the kingdom organized a strong warrior’s corps called “sonbae” in its attempt to consolidate the centralized power.

According to the scholars of history, the word “sonbae” is meant by a man of virtue who never recoils from a fighting, that is, a member of the warrior’s corps. Later a history book on the old Chosun dynasty described the life of Koguryo days, saying: “People gathered on March 10 every year at a site of ritual, where they enjoyed a sword dance, archery, subak (taekyon) contests and so on”, implying that subak(Taekwondo) was one of the popular events for the ritual in the Koguryo days. It also said that “sonbaes lived in groups, learning history and literary arts at home and going out to construct roads and fortresses for the benefits of society, always devoting themselves to the nation.”



A scene of kyorugi on the mural painting of an old Warrior’s Tomb



A hunting scene on the mural painting of an old warrior’s Tomb

Therefore, it is altogether natural that Koguryo put the priority of interests on the taekkyon which was the basis of martial arts, as can be proved by the wall paintings discovered



A mural painting of one of the Royal Tombs depicting the scene of a Korean wrestling bout

at several tombs of Koguryo days. A mural painting at the Samsil Tomb shows two warriors engaged in a face-to-face match in takkyon(Taekwondo) stance, and a third at the same tomb shows the scene of Korean wrestling bout, clearly distinguishing it from the taekkyon.

It can be assumed from the painting of taekkyon match that the dead was either a taekkyon practicer or the subject of condolence with dances and martial art.

## **C. Silla’s “Hwarang” and Taekkyon**

The Kingdom of Silla was founded on the southeastern part of the Korean Peninsula under the circumstances of no immediate threat from outside, but along with the birth of Paekje Kingdom on its west flank and the start of invasions by Koguryo from the north, Silla was impelled to arm itself with the development of martial arts.

In fact, “hwarangdo” is the typical example of Silla’s martial arts, which is an assimilation of Koguryo’s “sonbae” system. The members of the youth group of hwarangdo were well trained with the senses of filial piety, loyalty to the kingdom and sacrificial devotion to society to become important personalities for the rein of kingdom. Notable among them were Kim Yu-Sin and Kim Chun-Chu who made a definite contribution to the unification of those three kingdoms.

The Chronicle of Old Chosun described the life of hwarangs, members of hwarangdo: “hwarangs were selected by the kingdom through contests and, after selection, they lived together in a group, indulging themselves in learning, exercising subak(old form of Taekwondo), fencing and horse-riding, and sometimes they enjoyed various games including the Korean wrestling(Ssirum). In peace time, hwarangs served for the benefits of communities, working on emergency aids and construction of fortresses and roads, and they were always

ready to sacrifice their lives at the time of war.”

Hwarangs were particularly influenced by the Buddhistic disciplines and therefore the bronze statues of a Hercules(a man of great physical strength) currently exhibited at the Kyongju Museum clearly indicate that martial arts were practiced at temples by showing a strong man's bare-hand defensive and offensive stances.

Especially the shape of a fist shown on the statue of Kungang Yoksa(a strong man) exactly resembles that of a “jungkwon”(right fist) in the contemporary term of Teakwondo. The statue also shows today's “pyon jumok”(flat fist) and the use of legs which are seen in today's Teakwondo.

It is really noticeable that in that Silla epoch the terms of “subak”(hand techniques) and “taekkon” appear together, signifying that both hand and foot techniques were used in martial arts as shown in today's Taekwondo.



Statue of warrior Kungang in Sokkuram cave



Shapes of warrior Kungang's fist



Bronze statue of warrior Kungang

## D. Taekkyon Transmitted from Koguryo to Silla

As the art of taekkyon was popularized in Koguryo, it was also handed down to Silla, which is justified by the following points of view;

(1) “Hwarang”(or sonrang) in Silla has the same meaning with the word “sonbae” in Koguryo by indicating both the youth Warrior's corps from their etymological origins.

(2) Both hwarang and sonbae had the same organizations and hierarchical structure with each other.

(3) According to historical records, as sonbaes in Koguryo used to compete in taekkyon games at the time of their national festivals, hwarangs in Silla also played taekkyon games (subak, dokkyoni or taekkoni) at such festivals as "palkwanhoe" and "hankawi", thus systematically developing the ancient fighting techniques into the taekkyon(or sonbae) as the basis of martial arts by around A. D. 200. From the 4th century the hwarangs took the taekkyon lesson as a systemized martial art at their learning houses to make it also popularized among ordinary people, so much so that their techniques were depicted on the mural paintings of ancient warrior tombs.

Again, it is also true that taekkyon, coming down to Silla, was further developed into a school of martial art with the division of techniques, i.e., bare-hand techniques and foot techniques, which can be proved by the fact that both hand and foot techniques are clearly shown in the ancient sculptures and Buddhistic statues.

## 2. Taekwondo in the Middle Ages

The Koryo Dynasty which reunified the Korean Peninsula after Silla and lasted from A. D. 918 to 1392 had the taekkyon developed more systematically and made it a compulsory subject in the examinations for selection of military cadets.

The techniques and power of taekkyon martial art grew to become effective weapons even to kill human beings. In the military, a pattern of collective practice, called "obyong-subak-hui (5 soldier's taekkyon play), was introduced so that it might be used in a real war.

In the early days of Koryo Dynasty, martial art abilities were the only required qualifications to become military personnel because the kingdom utterly needed the national defense capabilities after conquer of the Peninsula. A certain plain soldier who mastered the taekkyon techniques was promoted to a general, and young people were invited to taekkyon contests where the skilled ones were selected to become military officers. There were lots of other examples in which many taekkyon-mastered youths were picked up as officials. At that time there already existed certain judgement norms of taekkyon contests, which is proof that Taekwondo sports was originated in that epoch. The Chronicles of Koryo Dynasty said; "At a power contest of taekkyon techniques, Lee Yi-Min punched a pillar of the house with his right-hand fist, then some of the props of the roof were shaken. Another taekkyon practicer had his fist pierce through the clay-wall."

Especially the kings of Koryo Dynasty were much interested in "subakhui" (taekkyon contest), making it a compulsory course of military training. Therefore, subakhui was also popular among the populace because contests of subakhui were organized wherever a king went out for inspection tours in the villages.

However, the Koryo Dynasty in its latest years had gunpowder and new types of weapons available at hand, thus slowing down its support of martial art training. Therefore, the subakhui remained as the folk games to be transmitted as such down to the modern Korea, Chosun.



Taekkyon explained in the Koryo History book

### 3. Taekwondo in Modern Times

In the Modern Times of Korea, which cover the Chosun (or Yi) Dynasty (1392~1910), the Imperial Korea and the Japanese Colonial Rule until 1945, Taekwondo was rather called “subakhui” than “taekkyon” and it suffered an eventual loss of official support from the central government as the weapons were modernized for national defense, although the subakhui was still popular in the early days of Chosun.

The Yi Dynasty (Chosun) was founded on the ideology of Confucianism, which resulted in rejecting all Buddhistic festivals and giving more importance on literary art than martial art. Nonetheless, the Annals of Chosun Dynasty tell stories about the contests of subakhui ordered by local officials for the purpose of selecting soldiers and others ordered by the kings who enjoyed watching subakhui contests at the time of feasts. It was also ruled by the Defense Department that a soldier should be employed when he won out three other contestants in the subakhui bouts.

However, as the systematic organization of government progressed, the government officials began to lay more importance on power struggles than on the interest of defense, naturally neglecting promotion of martial arts.

Then, it was only in the days of King Jungjo after the disgraceful invasion of Korea by the Japanese (in 1592) that the royal government revived strong defense measures by strengthening military training and martial art practice. Around this period there was a publication of the so-called Muye-dobo-tongji, a book of martial art illustrations, whose 4th volume entitled “hand-fighting techniques” contained the illustration of 38 motions, exactly resembling today’s Taekwondo poomsae and basic movements. Of course, those motions can not be compared with today’s Taekwondo poomsae, which has been modernized through scientific studies.

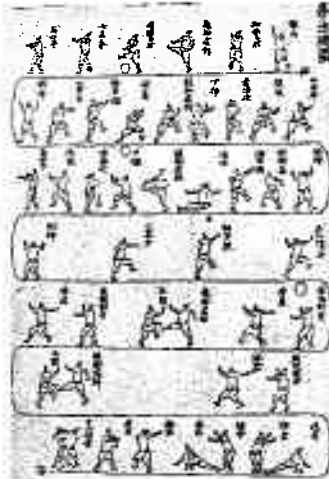
Even under the Japanese colonial rule, some famous Korean writers, such as Shin Chae-Ho and Choi Nam-Sun, mentioned about Taekwondo, saying “Present subak prevailing in Seoul came from the sonbae in the Koguryo Dynasty,” and “Subak is like today’s takkyon which was originally practiced as martial art but is now played mostly by children as games.”

However, the Japanese colonial government totally prohibited all folkloric games including takkyon in the process of suppressing the Korean people. The martial art taekkyondo (Taekwondo) had been secretly handed down only by the masters of the art until the liberation of the country in 1945. Song Duk-Ki, one of the then masters, is still alive with the





Explanation of taekkon techniques in Muye-dobo-tongji



General illustrations of techniques



Scene of contest

age of over 80 and testifies that his master was Im Ho who was reputed for his excellent skills of taekkyondo, “jumping over the walls and running through the wood just like a tiger.”

At that time 14 terms of techniques were used, representing 5 kicking patterns, 4 hand techniques, pushing-down-at-the-heel 3 patterns, turning-over kick 1 pattern and 1 technique of downing-the-whole-body. Also noteworthy is the use of the term “poom” which signified a face-to-face stance preparing for a fight. The masters of taekkyondo were also under constant threat of imprisonment, which resulted in an eventual fade-out of taekkyondo as popular games.

## 4. Present-day Taekwondo

Upon liberation of Korea from the Japanese colonial rule after World War II, the Korean people began recovering the thought of self-reliance and the traditional folkloric games which resumed their popularity. Song Duk-Ki, afore-mentioned master of teakkyondo, presented a demonstration of the martial art before the first Republic of Korea President Syngman Rhee on the occasion of the latter's birth-day anniversary, thus clearly distinguishing Taekwondo from the Japanese Karate which had been introduced by the Japanese rulers.

Martial art experts began opening their Taekwondo gymnasiums all over the country and after the end of Korean War (1950~1953) Taekwondo was popularized among the

Dan-grade black-belters within the country, also dispatching about 2,000 Taekwondo masters to more than 100 countries for foreigners' training.

After all, following the nomination of Taekwondo as a national martial art in 1971, the present Kukkiwon was founded in 1972 to be used as the central gymnasium as well as the site of various Taekwondo competitions. Then a year later on May 28, 1973 the World Taekwondo Federation came into existence, currently having 108 countries as its members.

In 1973 the biennial World Taekwondo Championships was organized, the final results of which up to 1985 are shown Table 1.

Again in 1974, Taekwondo was admitted to the Asian Games as an official event. The results of Asiad Taekwondo Championships are shown in Table 2.

In 1975 Taekwondo was accepted as an official sport by the U. S. Amateur Athletes Union (AAU) and also admitted to the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), followed by the adoption of official sports event by the International Council of Military Sports (CISM) in 1976. In 1979 President of the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) was elected chairman of the World Federation of Non-Olympic Sports. The WTF became an IOC-recognized sports federation in 1980, making Taekwondo an Olympic sport. Then the adoption of Taekwondo as an official event was followed by the World Games in 1981, the Pan-American Games in 1986, and finally by the 2000 Olympiad to be held in Australia.



IOC members watching the 7th World Taekwondo Championships

**Table 1 : World Taekwondo Championships and Standing by Country**

Order of Meet	Time	Site	Participating Countries	Players & Officials	Final Results (Standing by Country)
1st	May 25~27, '73	Seoul, Korea	19	200	1. Korea 2. USA 3. Taipei, Mexico
2nd	Aug. 28~31, '75	Seoul, Korea	30	256	1. Korea 2. Taipei 3. Mexico
3rd	Sept. 15~17, '77	Chicago, USA	46	720	1. Korea 2. Taipei 3. Mexico, USA
4th	Oct. 26~28, '79	Stuttgart, Germany	38	453	1. Korea 2. Mexico 3. W-Germany & Netherlands
5th	Feb. 24~27, '82	Guayaquil, Ecuador	50	456	1. Korea 2. Ecuador 3. W-Germany
6th	Oct. 20~23, '83	Copenhagen, Denmark	66	783	1. Korea 2. Spain 3. Turkey & W-Germany
7th	Sept. 4~8, '85	Seoul, Korea	53	506	1. Korea 2. Ivory Coast 3. Turkey

**Table 2 : Asian Taekwondo Championships and Standing by Country**

Order of Meet	Time	Site	Participating Countries	Players & Officials	Final Results (Standing by Country)
1st	Oct. 18~20, '74	Seoul, Korea	10	93	1. Korea, 2. Taipei, 3. Khmer (Cambodia)
2nd	Oct. 16~17, '76	Melbourne, Australia	10	127	1. Korea, 2. Australia, 3. Philippines
3rd	Sept. 8~10, '78	Hong Kong	11	143	1. Korea, 2. Australia, 3. Iran
4th	Nov. 14~16, '80	Taipei	9	132	1. Korea, 2. Taipei, 3. Jordan
5th	Nov. 9~11, '82	Singapore	17	158	1. Korea, 2. Taipei, 3. Australia
6th	Nov. 9~11, '84	Manila, Philippines	25	200	1. Korea, 2. Philippines, 3. Taipei
7th	Apr. 18~20, '86	Darwin, Australia	18	132	1. Korea, 2. Taipei, 3. Australia

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