

HISTORY

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The Origins of World Taekwondo (WT) Forms or *P'umsae*

Submission: 30.09.2018; acceptance: 20.10.2018

Key words: *P'algwae*, *T'aegük*, *Taiji*, *kata*, *hyöng*

Abstract

Background. In early taekwondo training, during the late 1940s and 1950s, the forms (a solo-performance of a practitioner of a sequence of movements) used in training consisted mostly of Japanese karate *kata*; however, during the 1960s, a variety of new forms, and sets of forms, were developed to escape the karate association. Subsequently, during the early 1970s, the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA) discarded the karate *kata* completely, and since that time, indigenous Korea-developed forms have been used exclusively in training and promotional test.

Problem and aim. This study will concentrate on the origins and evolution of forms in World Taekwondo (WT), the philosophies presented in connection with these forms, and the relationships that these forms have to sparring.

Method. The methodology of this article is an extensive literature review of early Korean sources, more recent English and Korean publications, and interviews with expert taekwondo practitioners.

Results and conclusions. The taekwondo establishment discarded the old karate *kata* and introduced newly developed forms to distance and obscure taekwondo from its Japanese karate origins. Nationalism and Korea's complicated colonial relationships with Japan were the motivating forces. During the late 1960s, the terms *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* were chosen for the newly developed beginner forms by taekwondo leaders for a variety of reasons. Both terms are very recognizable in Korean and East Asian culture, since they find expression in all walks of life. Moreover, they are connected to Korean nationalism, and were chosen to invoke patriotic sentiments. However, the practical application of taekwondo forms for self-defense, or as a preparation for sparring is very questionable and appears highly unrealistic.

Note on Romanization

The Romanization of words was conducted according to the McCune-Reischauer system for Korean, the Hepburn system for Japanese, and the Pinyin system for Chinese. However, personal names of well-known individuals were usually left according to their popular usage. East Asian names are rendered according to tradition, with family names first.

Introduction

General training activity in many martial arts¹ tends to divide between some kind of forms or pattern training

and a free sparring activity. However, the importance that martial arts and individual practitioners prescribe to these activities varies, and some martial arts, such as *aikidō*, do not feature free sparring as a training activity at all. Many Asian martial arts, for example, Japanese sword fighting (nowadays referred to as *kendo*) and *karate*, adopted free sparring only over time, due to modernization and gradual 'sportification.' Generally, apart from game-like wrestling and boxing activities for entertainment and ritual, some kind of forms training predates free sparring activities in most martial arts training.

Large [2012: 25-9] describes the possible origins of forms training in Asian martial arts as descending from ancient "martial dances," when Chinese soldiers reenacted battles in a ritualistic manner. The activity supposedly served their spiritual needs and also enforced their military hierarchies. Moreover, the traditional, educational doctrine in China and East Asian

¹ The term 'martial arts' is very broadly used in this study and includes also western fighting activities and combat sports, such as boxing.

societies is based on Confucianism, which is very structural, hierarchical, with an emphasis on repetition. For instance, constant repetition is the fundamental method of mastering the Chinese writing system. A mastery of calligraphy and knowledge of the Chinese classics were the standards with which the Chinese also considered a Confucian scholar. This emphasis on rigid repetition is the general *modus operandi* of traditional Chinese education. So, learning Chinese writing, and training forms in China-based martial arts shares some common characteristics.

However, among the various Asian martial arts and in western combat activities, the definition of what constitutes ‘forms training’ or the exact activity that represents forms training differs greatly. Although nobody usually uses the term ‘forms training’ in the context of western boxing, wrestling, or modern mixed martial arts (MMA), ‘forms training’ in these arts could be defined as the repetition of certain biomechanical movement patterns and combinations, performed with partner or without, in the air (shadow boxing), on a target, or on a heavy bag.

This kind of ‘forms training’ does actually not much differ from the definition of forms training in most traditional Japanese martial arts and their modern offspring, such as judo and kendo. In these martial arts, forms training consists mostly of different sets of prearranged movement patterns with a partner. On the other hand, in most Chinese, Okinawan, and Korean martial arts, ‘forms training’ represents a solo-performance by a practitioner of lengthy, prearranged sets of movement patterns [Friday, Humitake 1997: 105]. These patterns are repeated over and over again with the main goal of copying the teacher. For example, even though most karate forms had been changing slightly over time, when handed to the next generation, the fundamental movement patterns and their sequence have usually been staying very static and unchanged. Consequently, this kind of forms training tends to be much more rigid compared to the former, which is less orthodox and tends to be evolving.

The purpose of this article is to examine forms training in taekwondo, which is part of the latter category, namely, a static, solo-performance by a practitioner. This study will concentrate on the origins and evolution of forms in the World Taekwondo, WT (formerly the World Taekwondo Federation, WTF), the philosophies presented in connection with these forms, and the relationships that these forms have to sparring. Initially, this article will briefly discuss the forms which were used in early taekwondo, the reasons for developing new forms, and the kind of new forms that had been developed. Subsequently, this study will discuss the philosophical and cosmological significance of the terms *P’algwae* and *T’aegŭk*, which the new taekwondo forms were named. Furthermore, this article will discuss the development and the philosophical rationalization

presented in connection with the *P’algwae*, *T’aegŭk*, and the newer, contemporary black belt forms. Lastly, the discussion focuses on the practical value of these forms and their relationship to free sparring.

Background: early forms in taekwondo and reasons for developing new forms

Despite the ‘official’ and established portrayal by the taekwondo community of taekwondo’s ancient, indigenous Korean origins, the martial art of taekwondo formed only recently, and originated largely from Japanese karate. ‘Karate,’ which was later renamed ‘taekwondo,’ was only transferred at the end of the colonial period (Japan subjugated Korea from 1910 to 1945). The so-called original five taekwondo *kwan* (館 literally, ‘hall,’ but refers to a martial arts ‘school’ or ‘style’) were all established between 1944 and 1946. This process is actually well-documented [Yang 1986; Capener 1995; Kang, Lee 1999; Madis 2003; Song 2005; Hō 2008; Moenig 2013; Moenig 2015], despite often opposing claims of taekwondo’s indigenous roots in historical antiquity. During karate’s introduction to Korea, free sparring, in the form of non-contact sparring, existed as training activity, but was clearly subordinated in terms of ideology and actual training content (in terms of volume) to forms training. And, since taekwondo originated from Japanese karate, the forms practiced in early taekwondo consisted largely of Japanese karate forms. However, this changed during the late 1950s and 1960s, when some taekwondo leaders, for mainly political reasons, started to develop their own forms and slowly discarded the old karate patterns [Moenig 2015: 66-97].

The use of karate forms in early Korean martial arts schools throughout the 1950s and 1960s is also well-established [Moenig *et al.* 2014; Moenig 2015: 66-83; 208-10]. The majority of the founders of the initial *kwan* or martial arts schools or styles studied the *Shōtōkan* karate-style under Funakoshi Gichin and his third son, Funakoshi Gikō, in Japan. As a result, the *Shōtōkan* karate forms were very prominent in Korea.

Many of these forms originated in Okinawa, where Funakoshi learned karate before moving to Japan in the early 1920s. Although lacking definite, historical artifacts and documentation, it is generally agreed that Okinawan karate originated in some way from, or was at least strongly influenced by, Chinese martial arts [see for example, Bittmann, 1999: 151-5; Hassell 2007: 3-4; McCarthy 2008: 14; 78-85; 92]. Funakoshi’s own position on the origins of karate was somehow contradictory, on the one hand he insisted that karate was an indigenous “Okinawan martial art” [1973: 3], and on the other hand, he [1973: 7] invented the narrative that karate’s origins could be traced back to Bodhidharma, the mythological founder of the Shaolin temple and its famed fighting arts. Ultimately, Funakoshi longed for karate’s acceptance

as a 'Japanese' martial art. As a result, he changed some, and renamed many of the forms, since these forms bore names evoking Chinese descent [Funakoshi 1973: 35].² During the 1930s, Japanese imperialism was in full swing and the Japanese army invaded Manchuria in 1931, which was followed by a full-blown Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. In the nationalistic, anti-Chinese atmosphere of those days, Funakoshi tried to distance his art from needless association with China, hence, the change of martial arts terminology during the 1930s.

In addition, Funakoshi developed also some new forms for reasons of simplification and educational structure, such as the *Taikyoku* (太極 Chinese: *Taiji*) pattern, referring to the Chinese philosophical concept of *Taiji*, which was obviously also very popular and widespread in Japan in relationship with Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. The *Taikyoku* forms represented the beginner forms and became an educational tool in step by step, structural learning. We can only guess if Funakoshi had any knowledge of the existence of the Chinese *Taiji* forms, since the Chinese martial arts (and Okinawan karate) before the twentieth century were generally very secretive regarding their teachings. On the other hand, the beginning of the twentieth century also presented the time when the Chinese martial arts (and Okinawan karate) started to shed their secretive nature and became more public and open. Moreover, karate instructors also traveled frequently to China in search for new ideas. Most likely, the main reason for Funakoshi choosing the term *Taikyoku* or *Taiji* was its general, popular appeal. Associating karate with such popular concepts as *Taiji* served Funakoshi's goal of providing karate some underlying, philosophical framework, which karate did not have in Okinawa. The original Okinawan karate was perceived in purely practical terms, as simply a method for self-defense. Funakoshi's aim was to make karate more appealing to the general Japanese public by associating karate with popular, recognizable ideologies and religious concepts, such as Zen Buddhism [Clayton 2004: 129-30].

However, other karate styles also flourished in Korean martial arts schools of the 1950s and 1960s [see the forms used by various *kwan* in Korea, in Moenig 2015: 208-10]. Moreover, a few Chinese forms, which played a very minor role in the formation of taekwondo overall, were also taught in a small number of Korean martial arts schools, such as the YMCA Kwönböp Pu, and the Mudök Kwan, and the later-established Kangdök Wön and Ch'angmu Kwan. In addition, during the 1950s, some instructors started to develop their own forms. Yet, by and large, the

majority of forms used during training and in promotion tests consisted of Japanese karate forms, most prominently Funakoshi's, well into the late 1960s [Kang, Lee 1999: 45-6; Madis 2003; Moenig 2015: 66-83].

Japanese karate forms are called '*kata*,' and the Korean transliteration of the term is pronounced, '*hyöng*.'

Table 1.

Chinese characters	Japanese pronunciation	Korean pronunciation
型 or 形*	<i>kata</i>	<i>hyöng</i>

* Friday and Humitake [1997: 107, footnote] explain, the former Chinese character (型), it "is argued, better represents the freedom to respond and change-albeit within a pattern-essential to success in combat." This character is associated with the traditional Japanese *bugei* (martial arts). In contrast, the latter character (形) "implies a rigidity and constraint inappropriate to martial training [according to the traditional Japanese *bugei*]." However, ordinary practitioners in Korea do not seem to make any distinction between the characters.

The term *kata* or *hyöng* has never been used in Chinese martial arts and describes exclusively Japanese and Japan-based Korean martial arts.

Choi Hong Hi, the principal name-giver of the term, 'taekwondo,' in 1955, was the first to develop a whole series of new forms. Choi, an influential general in the South Korean army, was fond of martial arts and, initially, became one of the main forces to spread taekwondo internationally. He claimed of having studied under Funakoshi, while residing in Japan from 1938 to 1942. Choi's claim is disputed, though, since he had only rudimentary karate skills when returning to Korea. However, due to his powerful position in the military, other martial arts leaders in Korea respected him and promoted Choi quickly to higher ranks during the 1950s. Choi was also a highly political figure and tentatively supported the military coup of Park Chung Hee, in 1961. However, Choi harbored personal animosity toward Park, which also would eventually contribute toward Choi's gradual demise [Madis 2003; Gillis 46-69; Moenig 2015: 46-7; Moenig, Kim 2017].

When Choi was sidelined in the military and appointed ambassador to Malaysia from 1962 to 1964, he finished developing a series of new forms, called, Ch'anghön (Chang Hon) *hyöng ryu* (*ryu* 流 refers to 'style' or 'school,' commonly used in the Japanese martial arts), named after Choi's penname. Some of these forms were developed already during the late 1950s, but the whole set of 20 forms was presented in 1965, in Choi's book, *Taekwondo-Do The Art of Self-Defence*. Actually, the forms were developed mostly by his subordinates in the Odo Kwan (Oh Do Kwan, established by Choi in the military), by individuals such as Nam T'ae-hüi. However, the forms are stylistically not very different from *Shötökan* karate *kata*, since most of the members

² For the same reason, Funakoshi altered the meaning of the term 'karate' (唐手) from 'Tang hand,' referring to the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-906), to 'empty hand' (空手). Both pairs of characters have the same *kun reading*, namely 'karate,' in Japanese.

of Odo Kwan learned martial arts in Chŏngdo Kwan, which teachings closely resembled *Shōtōkan* karate. The various *Changhŏn* forms are named after mythological and historical Korean figures and patriotic events in Korean history. The names of the forms are essentially a reflection of Korean nationalism. Precisely, nationalism was also the reason that Choi developed his own forms, and advocated the disposal of the old karate *kata* for use in training and promotional events. Moreover, Choi eventually replaced the karate term *hyōng* with a new name, *t'ul* (機 literally ‘frame’) [Madis 2003; Moenig 2015: 46-7, 157].

Choi had been always a decisive and controversial figure in the Korean martial arts community and was disliked by many. This situation resulted into the final break between Choi and the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA), in 1965. Consequently, in the period between 1965 and 1966, Choi founded his International Taekwondo Federation (ITF), which developed into a fundamental split in the taekwondo community, which endures until present times. Until Choi's final break with the Korean taekwondo community, the various Korean taekwondo *kwan*, as well as the KTA, used both, the old karate patterns and some of Choi's new forms during training and in promotion events, although in various compositions and variations. With the departure of, and break with, Choi, the KTA was forced to develop a new set of forms, since they did not want any further use of Choi's forms. In addition, during the 1960s, the karate past of taekwondo became increasingly a political liability. Nationalism in connection with Korea's complicated colonial relationships with Japan, and the desire to white-wash history of Japanese elements, where the motivating forces in leaving taekwondo's karate past behind. Since all of the founders of taekwondo collaborated with the Japanese to various degrees, and had basically a pro-Japanese past, they had to redeem themselves and rewrite taekwondo's history [Madis 2003; Moenig 2015: 55-6]. As a result, many karate elements, such as terminology, its historical narrative, and *kata*, became progressively replaced with new, purely Korean inventions and traditions. For instance, karate terminology was replaced with new names and sometimes purely Korean terms (words which are not rooted in Chinese vocabulary). Taekwondo's karate history was denied and recast as a two thousand year old, indigenous Korean tradition. And the old karate *kata* became eventually replaced with the newly developed *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* forms, and a variety of new black belt patterns. Moreover, the individual movement patterns and sequences of the new *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* forms were connected on a philosophical level with mythical ideas originating from Chinese cosmology, but which are prevalent in all walks of life in Korean society and culture. This development was not so much different from Funakoshi's quest when he tried to shed karate's past in Okinawan and Chinese traditions,

and substituted them with well-known, local ideological and religious elements. In both cases, politics, nationalism, and racial animosity provided the stimulus for inventing traditions [Capener 2016; Moenig, Kim 2016].³

The philosophical background of the *P'algwae* and *T'aegük*

P'algwae and *T'aegük* are terms connected to philosophical ideas originating from Chinese cosmology, blended with religious, mythical, and other esoteric elements. In fact, the symbolism of *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* finds expression in all walks of life in East Asian societies. *P'algwae* (八卦 Chinese: *Bagua*) translates to ‘eight symbols,’ which consist of different trigrams arrangements of three broken (*Yin* lines) and/or unbroken (*Yang*) lines. Each trigram is a symbol for a certain element, such as heaven or sky, lake or marsh, earth, fire, wind, thunder, mountain, and water. The concept of *P'algwae* originates from Taoist cosmology and is related to the *T'aegük* (太極 Chinese: *Taiji*) or the ‘Supreme Ultimate.’



Figure 1. The symbol of the *T'aegük* or *Taiji* in the center is surrounded by the eight trigrams of *P'algwae* or *Bagua*
Source: Commons

In this way, the *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* are related to and possibly rooted in the dualistic *Yin* and *Yang* (陰陽 Korean: *Ŭm* and *Yang*) doctrine, which symbolizes the fundamental opposing forces of the universe, such as dark and light, and negative and positive. Furthermore, the *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* are also associated with the Five Elements (五行 literally; ‘Five Movements’; Chinese: *Wu Xing*; Korean: *Ohaeng*) theory, which is a fivefold conceptual system to explain various phenomena and their interaction in cosmic cycles, nature, and humans affairs in relationship to a vast range of matters; among them, Oriental medicine and also martial arts.

These various ideas, philosophies, and esoteric teachings are blended in the *I Ching*⁴ (易經 *The Book of*

³ For the concept of ‘invention of tradition,’ see Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983, and for invention of tradition in taekwondo, see Moenig and Kim 2016.

⁴ The term *I Ching* (Pinyin: *Yi Jing*) was left according to its popular usage.

Changes; Korean: *Yökkjöng*), which is an ancient, mythical Chinese divination text, considered the oldest among the Chinese classics. The contemporary *I Ching*, however, includes many much later added commentaries and essays, which are much disputed and their interpretations vary. The original and oldest section of the *I Ching* consists of 64 hexagrams with very short paragraphs, called *gua* in Chinese (卦 'symbol'; Korean: *kwae*). The *gua* are six-line symbols representing various configurations of always two *P'algwae* trigrams in different arrangements. Each of the 64 hexagrams has different divine meanings drawn from the two trigrams from which it is formed. The *gua* are randomly generated by various methods, such as throwing sticks, and the commentaries serve as an oracle. Nowadays, Koreans usually use coins or little stones. Accordingly, believers in the *I Ching* consider it a divine book of wisdom, which is able to predict the future based on the esoteric insights of the modus operandi of the cosmic forces.⁵

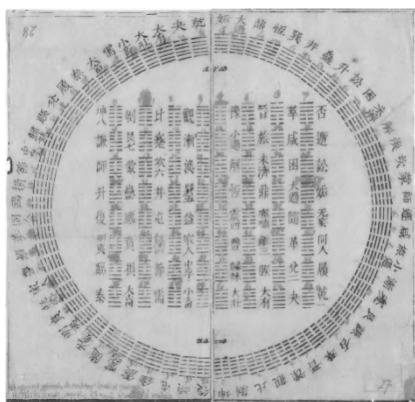


Figure 2. Diagram of the *I Ching*, displaying the 64 hexagrams
Owned by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716)
Source: Commons

The hexagrams correspond to astrology, geomancy (風水 Chinese: *Fengshui*; Korean: *P'ungsu*), human anatomy, the family, nature, and many other circumstances and conditions in combination with fortune telling. Belief in, and acting according to, the divine guidance of the hexagrams is highly widespread in South Korean society and culture. For example, even nowadays, Korean women visit fortune tellers in great numbers before marriage, and other important events in their lives, to receive divination and guidance according to the *P'algwae* and 64 hexagram arrangements in the *I Ching*.

In addition, the symbols of *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* are also connected to Korean nationalism, since the South Korean flag or *T'aegükki* (太極旗) resembles the *T'aegük* in the center, which is surrounded by a simplified *P'algwae* image, reduced from eight symbols to

four. B. R. Myers [2014], a professor in Pusan (South Korea), who contributes frequently on Korean political issues, argues that “the South Korean flag functions... as a symbol of the [Korean] race,” since it connects ethnic Koreans all over the world. The *T'aegükki*, a symbol of Korean resistance against the Japanese during the colonial years, has certainly always evoked strong nationalistic sentiments in Koreans, such as during the 2002 World Cup, held in Korea. During this event the *T'aegükki* provided a rallying symbol for the entire nation, with outpour of emotions ranging from cheerfulness to hysteria. Conversely, the *T'aegükki* is also strongly rejected and detested by the North Korean regime and Communist sympathizers.



Figure 3. The South Korean flag or *T'aegükki*
Source: Commons

In summary, *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* symbolism is related to traditional Korean cosmology, folk beliefs, and superstition, which finds expression in all walks of life. In addition, *P'algwae* and *T'aegük* symbolism is connected to Korean nationalism and identification as a people and race. Consequently, the choice of the names of the taekwondo forms, *P'algwae* and *T'aegük p'umsae*, have to be considered in this context.

The development and the philosophical rationalization of the *P'algwae* and *T'aegük p'umsae*

As previously discussed, the terms *P'algwae* or *Bagua* and *T'aegük* or *Taiji* are extensively used in Asian martial arts, most prominently in the Chinese martial arts where the terms originate in association with martial arts. *Bagua* and *Taiji* are both famous internal or soft Chinese styles developed during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). Both styles are as much associated with esoteric ideas, health aspects, and well-being as with practical fighting. In reality, *Bagua* and *Taiji* are rather generic terms, since both styles feature many variations and a great diversity of training activities and movement patterns, distinctive in schools and regions. The first written reference to the *Bagua* style dates back to 1774. On the other hand, the exact origins of the *Taiji* style is greatly disputed and history and mythology are often blended [Lorge 2012: 205-8].

⁵ There exist a great many publications and translations about the *I Ching*. For this study, see Wilhelm and Baynes' [1997] and Rutt's [2002] publications which provide some background and information.

During the early twentieth century, a variety of training manuals had been published on the subject in China, such as *Baguaquan xue* (八卦拳學 *The Study of Bagua Boxing*, 1916) and *Taijiquan xue* (太極拳學 *The Study of Taiji Boxing*, 1921), by Sun Lu Tang.⁶ This was a time when the Chinese martial arts became more open and accessible to the public. Moreover, during the period of the Republic of China (1912-1949), the ideas that practicing martial arts were for “health reasons” and a “form of physical exercises” for the masses accompanied this modernization process [Kennedy, Guo 2005: 182-7].

In particular, the term *Taijiquan* (太極拳 the character 拳, literally: ‘fist’; however, in this context referring to ‘form’) has gained world-wide prominence and popularity during the latter half of the twentieth century. As mentioned, the term refers actually to a multitude of martial arts forms. However, the most famous one that people are generally familiar with is a simplified form, which consists of 24 movement patterns, only developed in 1956, upon instructions by the Chinese Sports Committee of Communist China as a method of physical training for the vast population. Moreover, this kind of *Taiji* training is rather known for well-being, health practice, and non-violence; association with real fighting appears far removed.

In the Korean martial arts community after Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, only two of the five founders of the so-called original *kwan* had some Chinese martial arts background. Of them, Hwang Kee, the founder of Mudök Kwan (Moo Duk Kwan), mentions the name *T’aegükkwön* (*Taijiquan*) among many karate *kata*, but without any illustrations or descriptions in his 1958 [19] publication. Only in a later publication [1970: 604-22], does Hwang illustrate an entire *T’aegükkwön* form, suggesting that the Korean martial arts community was at least aware of the existence of the Chinese *Taiji* forms.

As mentioned before, Funakoshi used the term as well, when he named a series of basic karate patterns, *Taikyoku*, which is the Japanese transliteration of the term *Taiji*. The patterns, developed by Funakoshi, were intended to instruct beginners. The *T’aegük p’umsae* in taekwondo served the same purpose, to instruct beginners up to the black belt level. Therefore, the name and idea for the *T’aegük p’umsae* was likely borrowed from Funakoshi and not from the then lesser known Chinese *Taijiquan*.

On the other hand, the Korean term *p’umse* (not *p’umsae* yet) for forms was a purely Korean invention and introduced by the KTA around 1968 [Sö 2015], but not used in publications until Lee Chong Woo’s *Taekwöndo kyobon* [*Taekwondo textbook*], of 1972. Lee, as the Chairman of the Technical Committee of the KTA,⁷

exclusively displayed the newly developed *P’algwae*, *T’aegük*, and black belt forms, without mentioning any of the former-used karate *kata*. All earlier Korean martial arts publications showcase, for the most part, karate *kata* [Moening 2015: 208-10]. Lee’s publication coincided not by accident with taekwondo’s promotion to a so-called ‘national sport’ of Korea by President Park Chung Hee, in 1971. At this point, taekwondo’s karate past had become a liability; therefore, the KTA changed terminology and forms, in addition to rewriting taekwondo’s history as an ancient, indigenous Korean martial art.

Table 2. Timeline of Korean terms for forms

Used until	before 1987 품세 品勢 literally: ‘form movement, power, or flow’	after 1987 폼새
early 1970s 型 or 形		
<i>hyöng</i>	<i>p’umse</i>	<i>p’umsae</i> *

*In popular literature, and by the WT, the term ‘*p’umsae*’ is usually romanized, ‘*Poomsae*’, which represents an arbitrary Romanization and is not part of an official Romanization system. No use of Chinese characters.

Lee Won Kuk, the founder of the first *kwan* or karate school (Chöngdo Kwan or Chung Do Kwan, established in 1944) in Korea, still used the term *hyöng* in his 1968 publication when referring to the *P’algwae* forms, two of the *T’aegük* forms (apparently, only *T’aegük 1 chang* and *2 chang* had been developed during that time), as well as a variety of the newly developed black belt forms, such as the *Koryö* and *Kümgang hyöng*.

The *P’algwae* and *T’aegük* forms are actually both sets of forms, consisting of eight forms each. Just as Funakoshi’s *Taikyoku* forms, they represent beginner (pre-black belt) forms intended to teach taekwondo technique in a structural way. The forms and individual techniques become increasingly more complex and difficult.

The *P’algwae* forms (and the black belt forms) slightly predate the *T’aegük* forms and were developed during the late 1960s. Lee Chong Woo [1972: see foreword] states that the development of the *P’algwae* forms and various black belt forms were already completed in 1968. Moreover, in an interview he stated that he developed these forms [as cited in Yook 2002: 307]. However, more likely, Lee oversaw their development, instead of creating them all by himself. The development of the whole set of *T’aegük* forms was only completed during the early 1970s. Subsequently, with the full completion of all eight *T’aegük* forms, the *P’algwae* forms became gradually sidelined. Teaching both sets of forms to beginners was probably too time consuming and the *T’aegük* forms were, possibly, perceived easier to learn. Moreover, the *P’algwae* forms, which feature much wider stances than the *T’aegük* forms, still look very similar to *Shötö-*

⁶ See a variety of publications in Kennedy and Guo [2005].

⁷ Lee Chong Woo (1929-2015) was the most influential leader for the development of Olympic-style taekwondo after

Kim Un Yong. Lee held a variety of posts in the KTA, WTF, and Kukkiwon over the years.

kan karate kata, which was perhaps another reason for their demise. Nowadays, the Kukkiwon (the self-named, 'World Taekwondo Headquarters' established in 1973), which became responsible for forms training issues, forms, competition rules, credentials and promotions, and content, and the various taekwondo organizations affiliated with the WT world-wide are only using the *T'aegük* forms in training and promotion tests. However, some schools, which are only loosely affiliated with the WT, are still teaching the *P'algwae* forms.

The *P'algwae* forms are associated by Lee Chong Woo [1972: 94] with cosmic forces and various esoteric ideas. However, the *P'algwae* forms are less important for this study, because they are not used by the WT any longer. Instead, this study will focus more on the *T'aegük* forms. Lee [1972: 238] refers in connection with the *T'aegük* forms to Korea's national flag and the love to the country and family. These kind of crude references appealing to Korean nationalism have been a mainstay in taekwondo writings, presentation, and ideology.

In connection with the technical features of the *T'aegük* forms, Lee provides an esoteric explanation. According to Lee, the movements of the *T'aegük* forms mirror the principles of *Yin* and *Yang*, such as in attack and defense, speed and slowness, and gentleness and power [Lee 1972: 238]. Moreover, Lee explains that the movement patterns in each of the eight *T'aegük* forms reflect the lines of one of the eight trigrams of the *P'algwae*. For example, the first *T'aegük* form, represents 'heaven' (天), which symbolizes the beginning of the universe. Therefore, it is the first step and the core of taekwondo's body. The inexperienced taekwondo novice is introduced to the basics, such as walking and standing with a straight torso, and basic blocking. Lee connects each *T'aegük* form with a certain element, such as (progressively listed) heaven, lake or marsh, fire, thunder, wind, water, mountain, and earth, symbolizing one of the eight different trigrams of the *P'algwae*. The *P'algwae* movement lines are supposed to reflect progress; correspondingly, the forms and single techniques are getting increasingly more complex and difficult [Lee 1972: 239-79]. Furthermore, the unbroken *Yang* lines are related to leg movements (or stepping) in coordination with the execution of techniques, whereas the broken *Yin* lines represent static stances, featuring the execution of hand techniques only [for example, Lee Chong Woo 1972: 239, 242, 246]. This supposed principle, however, does not make much sense when looking at all the individual movement patterns of the eight *T'aegük* forms.

In addition, the *T'aegük* forms and the *P'algwae* trigrams are also connected with the Chinese character 王, which means 'king.' Even though, this theory is not explicitly stated by Lee Chong Woo, he displays the progression or sequence lines. The idea that these lines resemble the Chinese character for 'king' was probably added later. All eight *T'aegük* forms follow this progression line, and the practitioner is moving along these lines when executing

a form [explained in Lee Kyu-Hyung 2010: 169-278]. The upper stroke of the 'king' character symbolizes 'heaven,' the middle stroke 'humans,' and the lower stroke 'earth,' in similar arrangement as the *P'algwae*. The upside-down stroke connects them, represented by the king. In ancient tribal societies, the bond between heaven, humans, and earth was the shaman, where the symbolism originates.



Figure 4. *T'aegük 1 chang*, sequence or progression lines
Source: Commons

Several of the black belt forms were associated with other Chinese characters. For example, the *Koryö* form (named after the ancient Korean kingdom, 918-1392) is associated with the Chinese character 士 (Korean: *sa*), which means 'scholar,' and the *Kümgang* form (金剛 'diamond,' a reference to strength) with the Chinese character for mountain, 山 [Lee Chong Woo 1972: 153, 163]. The practitioner is again supposed to move along these progression lines when executing a form.

Lee Chong Woo uses the trigram patterns of the *P'algwae* by invoking a mythical narrative of the *T'aegük* forms, while somehow blending the concepts of *P'algwae*, *T'aegük*, and other esoteric ideas. As a result, the practical notion of self-defense was obscured with notions of Oriental mysticism. Perhaps Lee introduced these Oriental, cosmological principles to the body of taekwondo as a way to market the martial art better, since many in the West were drawn to Oriental philosophies and esotericism. Moreover, the concepts had very popular appeal in Korean society, in connection with religious and cosmological beliefs, in addition to nationalism. However, apart from giving the taekwondo forms a superficial aura of Oriental wisdom, the practical application and value of these philosophies in association with actual taekwondo techniques (striking, kicking, and blocking), education, and self-defense appears to be shallow and far-fetched.

The taekwondo establishment has been promoting Lee's philosophical and esoteric narrative of the taekwondo forms ever since. For example, Lee Kyu-Hyung,⁸ the most influential Korean leader in regard to demonstration taekwondo and forms training during the last thirty years, cites a very similar account of the taek-

⁸ Lee had a variety of posts as trainer of famous Korean demonstration teams, among them, head of the Korean National Taekwondo Demonstration Team. In addition, he was briefly the president of the Kukkiwon from 2013 to 2014.

wondo forms in his book, *What is Taekwondo Poomsae?* (2010). On the other hand, lately, the Kukkiwon and the WT removed such content on their official homepages, instead emphasizing more the newly introduced competition element of forms training.

During the last decade, forms training developed and changed significantly with the introduction of forms competitions, which emphasizes more the aesthetic aspect than esoteric considerations. The first *p'umsae* competition was introduced as part of the first Taekwondo Hanmadang (a martial arts festival), also featuring breaking and taekwondo gymnastics among other events, in Korea in 1992. Although in Europe, forms competitions had been pioneered already in 1985, as a demonstration event during the European Championships in Turkey. On the other hand, the first official World Taekwondo Poomsae Competition was only held in Seoul, in 2006. At the same time, a variety of competition *p'umsae* have been developed as well, some introduced in 2006, [Lee Kyu-Hyung 2010: 40-4], and some more recently in 2016. Yet, taekwondo forms competitions, especially Creative Forms (or Freestyle Forms) competitions, look more like gymnastics exercises and aerobics than martial arts matches.

The practical value of taekwondo forms and its relationship to free sparring

Free sparring training and competitions tend to differ greatly in various martial arts. However, free sparring is often either a purely grappling- and throwing-based activity, such as in judo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and wrestling, or a purely striking-based activity, such as in taekwondo, boxing, and kendo. Moreover, in the striking-based martial arts there exists a divide between, full-contact, light-contact, and no-contact striking during sparring. However, a variety of martial arts, such as Muay Thai (or Thai-boxing), diverse karate styles, and the mixed martial arts, blend these activities and aspects to various degrees.

Moreover, the two fundamental training activities in martial arts, forms training and free sparring, match to various degrees in training and competition, depending on the martial art. In Western combat sports, and for the greatest part in judo and kendo, all training activities serve as a preparation for free sparring, and generally match the actual biomechanical movement patterns performed in free sparring. On the other hand, in some martial arts and, especially, in taekwondo there seems to be a fundamental disconnect in terms of biomechanical movement patterns, purpose, and spirit between forms training and free sparring.

Even though the taekwondo establishment often pretends that forms training and sparring training harmoniously connect and complement each other; in reality, taekwondo consists of two fundamental different

and not-matching training activities. The individual techniques of forms training, such as punching and kicking, are extremely static and biomechanically often entirely different from the techniques applied in sparring. Forms training is not a preparation for free sparring in taekwondo, since there is an entire technical and biomechanical disconnect between them. The techniques do not match; neither do the training elements nor its purpose. In fact, there exist two different kinds of taekwondo, the so-called traditional, forms-based taekwondo, and the sparring-based, sport taekwondo [see a detailed discussion in Moenig 2015: 175-85].

In addition, the taekwondo establishment and the Kukkiwon maintain that forms training is a preparation for self-defense. According to Lee Kyu-Hyong [2010: 63], who quotes the Kukkiwon's [2005] position, “[e]ach Poom in Poomsae was made based on sparring technique for survival, and it is a scientific marvel made for the purpose of...self-defense.” Lee [2010: 68] goes even further in his own definition and calls taekwondo *p'umsae* training a “system...which can be trained by yourself on [the] assumption that you are in a real battle.” However, the practical value of the *T'aegük* and other taekwondo forms for self-defense and “real battle” is highly questionable. The rigid and static nature of the kind of techniques used in forms training makes them mostly unrealistic for real fighting. Moreover, apart from visual imagery, students are not exposed to any free interaction with an opponent. Furthermore, students do not learn agile stepping, free movement, and timing. Also, the biomechanical execution of punches, kicking techniques, and blocks in free fight situations tends to be technically very different from the ones used in forms training. Finally, the crucial failure of using forms as a preparation for sparring, can be found in the absence of full resistance and impact, and the absence of contact; that is, actually hitting, and being hit. The mixed martial arts competitions have very well demonstrated what works and what does not. So called ‘traditional martial arts techniques’ have no place and value in these competitions, which come closest to actual hand-to-hand combat conditions [Moenig 2015: 191-2; Bowman 2016: 926].

Conclusion and discussion

In early taekwondo until the late 1960s, the forms used during training and promotional tests consisted mostly of karate *kata*. In addition, a small number of Chinese forms were used, but only by a few schools, and not extensively. Over time, the taekwondo establishment decided to discard the karate *kata* and introduce newly developed forms to distance and obscure taekwondo's karate origins. This was a political decision, since taekwondo's karate past had become an increasing liability for the taekwondo community in the growing anti-Japanese atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s. Korean nationalism demanded a purely, indigenous Korean tradition for

taekwondo, especially, with taekwondo's promotion to a so-called 'national sport' in 1971.

The terms *P'algwae* and *T'aegŭk* for the new forms were chosen by taekwondo leaders for a variety of reasons. Both terms are very recognizable in Korean and East Asian culture, since they find expression in all walks of life. The terms connect to cosmological and religious concepts and ideas present throughout Korean culture and society. Moreover, the terms are connected to Korean nationalism and were chosen to invoke patriotic sentiments. However, the popular terms *P'algwae* and *T'aegŭk* for forms' terminology had already earlier been used extensively in the Chinese martial arts and in Funakoshi's *Shōtōkan* karate, as well. Therefore, the choice of the names *P'algwae* and *T'aegŭk* might have been also an attempt to gain greater legitimacy in this respect, which, however, also contradicts the efforts to 'Koreanize' taekwondo.

The taekwondo leaders associated the *P'algwae*, *T'aegŭk*, and the newly developed black belt forms with various esoteric teachings and mythical narratives, which appear, however, very superficial and fantastic in association with practical fighting and self-defense. Moreover, the fundamental, practical value of these forms for real fighting is highly questionable, since the individual movements and techniques are largely unrealistic for use in real fight situations. Furthermore, *p'umsae* training is also not a realistic preparation for free sparring in taekwondo, because the techniques of both systems do not match biomechanically, or practically. Training *p'umsae* for taekwondo sparring and competition makes as much sense as practicing football drills for a basketball game. Forms training is technically far removed from the sparring element of taekwondo. In reality, there exist two very different kinds of taekwondo under a common name, the forms-based, so-called 'traditional' taekwondo (which includes its offspring, demonstration or performance taekwondo), and the sports-based, sparring taekwondo.

The former World Taekwondo Federation (now World Taekwondo), was successful in lobbying to include the sparring element of taekwondo training activities as an official sport in the Olympic Games, first officially recognized in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. In recent times, great efforts exist to promote forms contests to equal rank and position as sparring contests. The introduction of forms competitions was also a way of re-invigorating an increasingly obsolete, and as often, boring perceived taekwondo activity. However, if forms competitions will ever become part of the Olympic Games remains to be seen. Due to a variety of factors, such as the subjectivity of judgment of those matches, the great number of sports in the Olympics present already, competing lobbying efforts of various Asian nations concerning their martial arts, and the debut of karate in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as yet another Asian martial art with similar attributes as taekwondo, the promotion of taekwondo forms competitions to an Olympic sport seems rather unlikely.

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the *Youngsan University Research Fund of 2019*. I would also like to thank Dr Gregory S. Kailian, 'S' class international referee, for technical input.

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Pochodzenie światowych form Taekwondo (WTF) lub P'umsae

Słowa kluczowe: P'algwae, T'aegük, Taiji, kata, hyöng

Abstrakt

Tłó. Ogólina aktywność szkoleniowa w wielu sztukach walki ma tendencję do dzielenia się pomiędzy formami lub wzorami i wolnym sparingiem. Artykuł koncentruje się na pierwszych z nich, w szczególności na formach szkoleniowych w World Taekwondo (WT). We wczesnych treningach taekwondo, pod koniec lat czterdziestych i pięćdziesiątych, formy (solowy pokaz ćwiczącego sekwencję ruchów) używane w treningach składały się głównie z japońskich kata w karate; jednak w latach sześćdziesiątych powstało wiele nowych form i zestawów form, stworzonych po to by oddzielić się od formalnego stowarzyszenia karate. Następnie, we wczesnych latach siedemdziesiątych Koreańskie Stowarzyszenie Taekwondo (KTA) całkowicie odrzuciło kata, a od tego czasu lokalne formy opracowane przez Koreę były wykorzystywane wyłącznie w testach szkoleniowych i promocyjnych.

Problem i cel. Badanie to koncentruje się na pochodzeniu i ewolucji form w Światowym Taekwondo (WT), filozofiach przedstawionych w związku z tymi formami oraz nastawieniu, które te formy mają wobec sparingu.

Metoda. Metodologia tego artykułu jest obszernym przeglądem literatury o wczesnych źródłach koreańskich, nowszych publikacjach angielskich i koreańskich oraz wywiadach z ćwiczącymi taekwondo.

Wyniki i wnioski. Zarząd organizacji taekwondo odrzucił stare kata w karate i wprowadził nowo opracowane formy, aby zagmatwać reguły i oddalić taekwondo od japońskiego pochodzenia karate. Siłą motywującą do tego były nacjonalizm i skomplikowane związki Korei z Japonią. W późnych latach sześćdziesiątych pojęcia P'algwae i T'aegük zostały wybrane z nowo powstałych form przez przywódców taekwondo z różnych powodów. Oba terminy są bardzo rozpoznawalne w kulturze koreańskiej i wschodnioazjatyckiej, ponieważ znajdują one wyraz we wszystkich dziedzinach życia. Co więcej, są one związane z koreańskim nacjonalizmem i zostały wybrane do wywoływania uczuć patriotycznych. Kojarzyły się też z ezoterycznymi naukami i mitycznymi narracjami, które wydają się jednak bardzo powierzchowne i fantastyczne w połączeniu z praktyczną walką i samoobroną. Praktyczne zastosowanie form taekwondo do samoobrony lub przygotowanie do sparingu jest bardzo wątpliwe i wydaje się wysoce nierealne, ponieważ techniki obu systemów nie pasują do biomechaniki. W rzeczywistości istnieją dwa bardzo różne rodzaje taekwondo pod wspólną nazwą, tak zwane tradycyjne, oparte na schematach taekwondo i sparingowe taekwondo sportowe.