

## PEDAGOGY AND TOURISM, AND MARTIAL ARTS TOURISM

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### Taekwon-Do in North Korea: A Pedagogical Case Study

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#### Abstract

**Background.** Notwithstanding the fact that the style of Taekwon-Do taught by the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) was inaugurated in the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) during the 1950s and 60s by the ROK Army General Choi Hong Hi, that style is known around the world as “North Korean Taekwon-Do” since it is also practiced in the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea).

**Problem and Aim.** General Choi introduced Taekwon-Do to the DPRK in 1980. Since then, no academic studies on Taekwon-Do as it is practiced in the DPRK have been conducted. This preliminary study aims to establish if there are differences in the pedagogical style and purpose of Taekwon-Do as practiced in the DPRK from those that General Choi mandated.

**Methods and Materials.** A descriptive, non-experimental case study of one subject (Singaporean female; aged 36 yr.) who traveled three times to the DPRK specifically to practice Taekwon-Do was conducted. A systematic literature review of ITF pedagogical materials was performed, and a multipurpose, qualitative questionnaire was implemented. The “Composition of Taekwon-Do” was identified as the ITF’s intended physical curriculum, and the Stratified Taekwon-Do Pedagogy Theory was used to explain how a method of self-defense can be used for personal and societal development. Qualitative analysis of the questionnaire data and follow-up interviews were performed.

**Results.** Evidence of both the “Composition of Taekwon-Do” and the Stratified Taekwon-Do Pedagogy Theory were found in the subject’s Taekwon-Do practice in North Korea indicating all five areas of the ITF’s curriculum and the three levels of Taekwon-do pedagogy may be present in Taekwon-Do practice inside the DPRK.

**Conclusions.** Despite its limitations, this study indicates Taekwon-Do is taught in the DPRK for self-cultivation and societal improvement purposes as General Choi intended.

#### Introduction

In many Eastern martial arts, various Western sports competition conventions have been introduced making them multiform as self-realization paths, self-defense systems, and combat sports [Johnson, Ha 2015]. Taekwon-Do, one such art, has been divided historically into many styles or systems, the two largest of which are World Taekwondo (WT; the governing body for the Olympic sport of Taekwondo located in the Republic

of Korea [ROK; South Korea]) and the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF). The ITF was established in the ROK on March 22, 1966 by the ROK Major General (two-star) Choi Hong Hi [Johnson, Vitale 2018] (Figure 1). Just prior to his passing in 2002, General Choi’s ITF began splintering and is now in several organizations, all claiming to be the rightful leader of General Choi’s vision. One the largest of these is headquartered in Vienna, Austria and staffed by citizens of the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea).

This is the organization that governs the education, testing, and competition of Taekwon-Do as practiced in the DPRK [Wasik 2014]; it is also the organization with which WT conducts its soft diplomacy tactics exclusively [Johnson 2019].



**Figure 1.** A young General Choi Hong Hi, the first International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) President, with the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) flag. Originally published in 1966 in Choi's *Taekwon-Do - The Art of Self-Defense* [Choi H.H., 1965], this photograph was taken long before General Choi introduced Taekwon-Do to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) in 1980. Photo courtesy of [www.taekwondoitf.org](http://www.taekwondoitf.org).

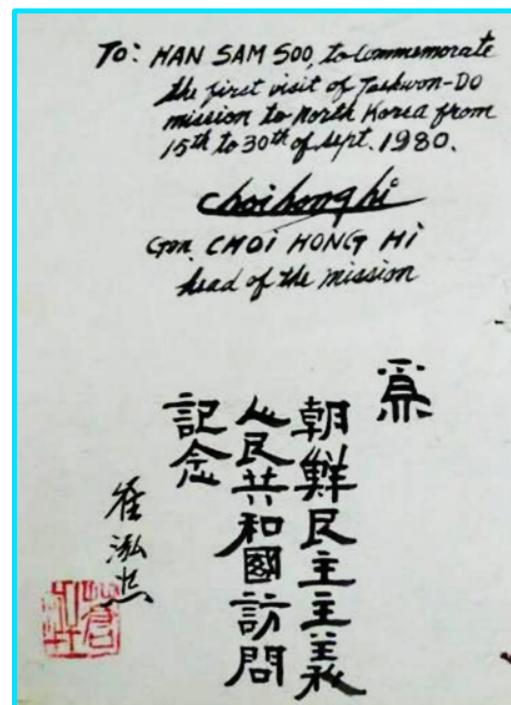
General Choi first visited the DPRK from September 15-20, 1980 (Figures 2 & 3) to introduce Taekwon-Do during a demonstration event at the Pyongyang Stadium [Ahn 2009] and traveled there for Taekwon-Do purposes for the rest of his life. He was eventually buried there after the ROK government declined his request to die in that country in 2002. Despite these facts, General Choi never claimed allegiance to the DPRK. Furthermore, his family members [Choi J.H. 2008: 30], Taekwon-Do historians [Vitale G. 2017, personal communications, August 7], and long-time students [Hawkins 2008: 17] of General Choi deny vehemently that he was communist. There is a consensus amongst those who knew General Choi best that he taught Taekwon-Do as a vehicle for peace, and research is beginning to show this to be true [Johnson, Vitale 2018; Johnson 2019].

Presently, the ITF is being branded “North Korean Taekwon-Do” erroneously in the ROK and elsewhere throughout the world due to the fact that DPRK citizens practice that style of the martial art/combat sport.

Compounding this reputation are the allegations that the DPRK has sent its Taekwon-Do instructors abroad as espionage agents [Henderson, Kim 2008]. However, after being exiled from the ROK by President/dictator Park Jung Hee, General Choi began spreading Taekwon-Do to communist countries under his belief that, in his own words, Taekwon-Do should be taught “throughout the world without regard to ideology, race, religion, or nationality” [see: Kimm 2000: 56].



**Figure 2.** Retired Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) General Choi presenting Kim Il Sung, the first leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea), a copy of the *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do*. The *Encyclopedia* is General Choi's 15-volume tome on Taekwon-Do philosophy, techniques, and history. Image captured by the author [ITF Taekwon-Do 2017].



**Figure 3.** A certificate given to Han Sam Soo by General Choi Hong Hi for his participation in his first visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea). The purpose of the visit was to introduce Taekwon-Do to the DPRK. Photo courtesy of Han Sam Soo [Han 2019].

Since its introduction to the DPRK, no academic studies on Taekwon-Do as it is practiced there have been conducted by researchers outside of the DPRK. The most likely reason for this is the highly restricted access the DPRK places on Taekwon-Do facilities and the nation's populace. What is known can only be gleaned from first-person accounts and videos from media outlets. Combining these sources and then examining them through a behavioral-rational orientation of the ITF curriculum, this study's primary research question was *How is Taekwon-Do taught in the DPRK?* As such, its secondary research objective was to answer *Has Taekwon-Do pedagogy been lost in the DPRK?*

### Terminology

The Romanization of the Korean word *Taekwon-Do* adheres herein to the preferred spelling of the ITF whereas World Taekwondo's (WT) preferred spelling of *Taekwondo* is more common in literature [Johnson, Lewis 2018]. Additionally, Korean names have been rendered in the individual's preferred spellings with the surname followed by the individual's given name(s) in the Asian tradition; e.g., 'Choi Hong Hi' rather than 'Hong-hi Choi.'

### Images

The subject of this case study gave both written and verbal permission to use and publish the images and pictures presented throughout this research. She also gave permission to publish images of her face.

## Methods and Materials

### Case Study

The heavily restricted travel regulations placed on those entering the DPRK impairs the collection of data from direct sources who practice Taekwon-Do in the DPRK. Even non-Koreans who travel frequently to the DPRK for Taekwon-Do purposes do not have access to Taekwon-Do schools and students there [Vitale G. 2017, personal communications, August 7]. Instead, they practice at the DPRK's two Taekwon-Do centers in Pyongyang: the Taekwon-Do Holy Center and the Taekwon-Do Palace. Both buildings were constructed to hold large Taekwon-Do events such as ITF congresses and tournaments, and they contain Taekwon-Do museums, meeting rooms, Taekwon-Do practice halls, and other facilities.

Thus, the primary method used for this study was a descriptive and evaluative case study [Skinner, Edwards, Corbett 2015] of individuals who traveled to the DPRK primarily to practice Taekwon-Do. Individuals who had traveled to North Korea for other Taekwon-Do purposes,

such as tournaments, and non-Taekwon-Do practitioners traveling there were excluded. Similar methodologies have been employed in other DPRK studies [*cf.* Li, Ryan 2018; Li, Wen, Ying 2018; Kim, Timothy, Han 2007] and the martial arts [Cynarski, Swider 2017].

Taekwon-Do practitioners who had traveled to the DPRK to practice Taekwon-Do were identified initially through their pictures and videos posted on Facebook, as well as snowball sampling. Only 7 prospective subjects were found and contacted via Facebook's personal messaging service. They were informed of the purposes of the study, the need to perform at least one follow-up interview after the completion of the questionnaire, and their right to withdraw from this study at any time. Out of the seven individuals contacted, only 2 replied. Following the return of the two surveys, one of the questionnaires was rejected: the respondent completed some parts of the questionnaire incorrectly as well as gave conflicting answers. The sole subject was a 36-year-old (at time of data collection) Singaporean female employed as a corporate lawyer in her country (Table 1).

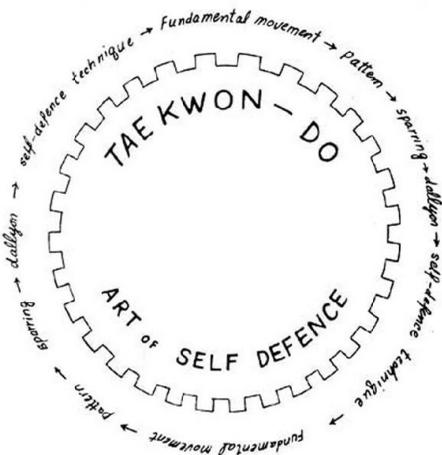
The subject also consented verbally and in written form to the use of her personal image and images obtained from her notes, personal and professional Facebook accounts, and her Taekwon-Do school's website. The subject provided all of the photographs and images of her notes taken during her practice in the DPRK. She was fluent in English, the language used during the interviews, and no instances of comprehension difficulty were noted.

### Literature review

General Choi Hong Hi, the first ITF president [Johnson, Vitale 2018], was one of the most prolific martial arts authors. He is credited for writing the first book on Taekwon-Do in 1958 [Moenig, Cho, Kwak 2014], and many of his works on Taekwon-Do have been translated into numerous other languages. His *opus maximum* was the 15-volume *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do*, which details nearly every aspect of the type of Taekwon-Do practice he espoused over his lifetime [*cf.* Choi H.H., 1985a, 1985b]. The *Encyclopedia* is used as the primary source for ITF Taekwon-Do pedagogical knowledge and is cross-referenced often during international ITF educational courses.

General Choi separated the physical practice of Taekwon-Do into five categories: fundamental techniques, patterns, sparring, *dallyon* (forging or conditioning of the body), and self-defense in what he called "the Composition of Taekwon-Do" (Figure 4) [Choi H.H., 1985a: 236]. Fundamental techniques are the stances, blocks, strikes, kicks, and all other movements that constitute Taekwon-Do as an activity. Patterns, or forms [*cf.* Kim, Back 2002], "contain the fundamental techniques teachings of the martial art and combat sport of Taekwondo" and

are referred to in Korean as *tul* in the ITF and *poomsae* by Kukki Taekwondo organizations (*i.e.*, WT) [Chung, Johnson 2018]. ITF patterns are named after important historical Korean people, events, or concepts. Sparring in ITF practice includes prearranged sparring (that has the sub-classifications of 3-, 2-, and 1-step sparring), semi-free, foot technique, and model sparring [Choi H.H., 1985b: 18]. *Dallyon* is conditioning of the body, both through various strengthening, cardiovascular fitness drills, and the toughening and callusing of various parts of the hands and feet. Finally, “[o]nce a student has applied himself to fundamental movements, patterns, sparring, and dallyon, then the time has arrived for the student to test his coordination, speed, balance, and concentration against spontaneous attacks; *i.e.*, self-defence” [Choi H.H. 1985a: 237]. An educational scaffolding can be inferred in that fundamental techniques are needed to perform patterns (and the other components of the cycle). Knowledge contained in patterns, such as footwork and distance drills, can then be used to devise various step sparring sets and implemented in free sparring. Yet, these five practices are not necessarily procedural in nature: General Choi stated students “will have to return [to] fundamental movements to perfect [their] sparring and self-defence techniques” [Choi H.H. 1985a: 236]. The Composition of Taekwon-Do has been called “the heart of Taekwon-Do” [Rai 2012], since it comprises what General Choi conceived to be the essence of Taekwon-Do practice. It is thus used herein to identify the components of ITF physical practice and the components of General Choi’s intended pedagogy.



**Figure 4.** “The Composition of Taekwon-Do” or “The Cycle of Taekwon-Do” from General Choi’s *Encyclopedia* [Choi H.H. 1985a: 238]. The outer circle repeats the five components of Taekwon-Do physical practice: fundamental techniques, patterns, sparring, *dallyon*, and self-defence.

Although “no clear consensus on the exact nature of taekwondo’s pedagogy” exists [Capener 2005], General Choi nevertheless stated that Taekwon-Do practice should, in theory, use the mental and physical strength

skills acquired through practice to develop one’s self and one’s society outside of the Taekwon-Do school. To date, only Johnson’s Taekwon-do Pedagogy has outlined how this can be described [Johnson 2017]. He states Taekwon-Do pedagogy can be considered a three-staged, stratified process that leads students from learning Taekwon-Do fundamental techniques (Korean: *musul*) to a personal expression of those skills (Korean: *muyae*) “to a way of life” (Korean: *mudo*) [Johnson 2017]. For ITF Taekwon-Do, the two final praxis objectives are 1) to prepare oneself for self-defense/combat (*i.e.*, the physical learning objective) [Choi H.H. 1985a: 237] and 2) to create a more peaceful world (*i.e.*, the moral/social/behavioral learning objective) [Johnson, Vitale 2018; Johnson 2019]. Founded on the works by Yang [1999], Funakoshi and Nakasone [2004], Kano [2005], the Kodokan [2009], and Draeger [2007], Johnson [2019] elucidates a stratified pedagogy that guides students from Taekwon-Do’s physical techniques (*musul* and *muyae*) to a life of morality that benefits society (*mudo*). When seen through a sport pedagogy lens, this can be understood as teaching *about*, *in*, and *through* taekwondo, respectfully [Armour 2013: 13].

As stated above, General Choi’s curriculum is based within the behavioral-rational approach. This is a means-end approach to curriculum design where the learning of content and physical activities are devised to achieve specified learning objectives, and “[e]verything the students do must be observable as this is the evidence that the student has achieved the goals and objectives” of the lesson [Ellis, Evans, Horton N.D.]. We have identified the ITF “Composition of Taekwon-Do” as General Choi’s intended physical curriculum. On the other hand, Johnson and Vitale [2018] and Johnson [2019] have advanced the idea that ITF moral/social/behavioral learning objectives are begun within the ITF Student Oath, which ends with a promise to build a more peaceful world [Johnson, Vitale 2018; Johnson 2019]. Furthermore, Johnson’s [2017] Taekwon-Do pedagogical process illustrates how these are combined in order to explain how a method of self-defense can be directed ultimately toward personal and societal development.

For the purposes of this study, the ITF “Composition of Taekwon-Do” and the Taekwon-Do pedagogical process were used to ascertain if Taekwon-Do is taught today in the DPRK as General Choi originally directed. Johnson’s [2017] stratified Taekwon-Do pedagogy theory was then employed to determine if Taekwon-Do inside the DPRK is being used for self-cultivation purposes or the more nefarious goal of spreading a political ideology. Thus, the scientific framework of our study included the General Theory of Fighting Arts [Cynarski 2016], sport pedagogy, curriculum design and evaluation, and the pedagogies of fighting arts in general [Cynarski 2011; Johnson 2017].

## Questionnaire

In a multi-purposed questionnaire that employed multiple-choice and open-ended questions, the subjects answered questions regarding their Taekwon-Do practice in the DPRK. They were provided space and time to elaborate and expound on their answers. As shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3, the questionnaire's first section posed standard demographic questions about subjects' ages, genders, and nationalities ( $n = 12$ ); whether they practiced Taekwon-Do as directed in the ITF literature; how long they had done so; and their Taekwon-Do ranks ( $n = 7$ ). The latter two types of questions were used as indicators of their Taekwon-Do expertise. Another section of the questionnaire ascertained the details of the subjects' Taekwon-Do practice in the DPRK. These questions verified the length of time they studied Taekwon-Do in the DPRK ( $n = 5$ ), the content of their studies ( $n = 5$ ), and their motivations for traveling to the DPRK to advance their Taekwon-Do knowledge and skills ( $n = 5$ ) (Tables 3 and 4). Prior to receiving the questionnaire, the subjects agreed to participate in subsequent interviews in order for their answers to be elucidated fully.

**Table 1.** Subject's demographic data at time of data collection

Age ( $n = \text{yr}$ )	36
Gender	Female
Nationality	Singaporean
Profession	Lawyer & Taekwon-Do instructor
Total practice time ( $n = \text{yr}$ )	10
Taekwon-Do rank	4 <sup>th</sup> degree black belt (international instructor)
Number of trips to the DPRK	3

**Table 2.** Subject's purpose of travels to the DPRK

Dates	Time ( $n = \text{days}$ )	Primary purpose of travel
June 6-18, 2016	13	Practice Taekwon-Do
Sept. 9-18, 2017	10	Practice Taekwon-Do
Nov. 1-13, 2018	13	Practice Taekwon-Do

DPRK: Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea); ITF: International Taekwon-Do Federation

**Table 3.** Details of subject's Taekwon-Do practice in the DPRK

Dates	Rank at time	Amount of practice ( $n = \text{days}$ )	Hours of practice
June 7-13, 2016	2 <sup>nd</sup> dan	7	AM: 2-3 PM: 2-3
Sept. 10-17, 2017	Arrived as 2 <sup>nd</sup> dan, departed as 3 <sup>rd</sup> dan	8	AM: 2-3 PM: 2-3
Nov. 1-13, 2018	3 <sup>rd</sup> dan	7	AM: 3-4 PM: 3-4

DPRK: Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea); dan: black belt degree, dojang: martial art practice hall

## Video evidence

The DPRK Taekwon-Do Demonstration Team has been filmed numerous times performing around the world at various competitions and other events. Online videos of these demonstrations were viewed and analyzed to determine if aspects of the Composition of Taekwon-Do were performed by the DPRK team members and thereby practiced in the DPRK.

## Notebook and photographic evidence

Znanięcki [1918] recommended viewing a situation from a subject's position of perception by using personal documents, such as diaries and letters. It was learned during the initial stages of contact with the subject that she had taken extensive notes on the dates, times, locations, duration, and contents of martial arts tourist activities during her three trips to the DPRK (Figures 5-7, 10-11, and 16). She provided scans of these notes, which were examined with the context of her questionnaire answers in order to formulate subsequent interview questions.

## Interviews

Follow-up questions were composed after a qualitative content analysis of the subject's responses to the questionnaire. The subject was given time to elaborate on her answers provided in the questionnaire in video interviews. Interviews were conducted via Skype and Facebook messenger in English.

## Results

For the purposes of this study, only the subject's answers to the five questions on the ITF's Composition of Taekwon-Do curriculum and her practice in the DPRK were considered. The following section provides those questions and summarizes her responses from the questionnaire and information gained in the subsequent interviews.

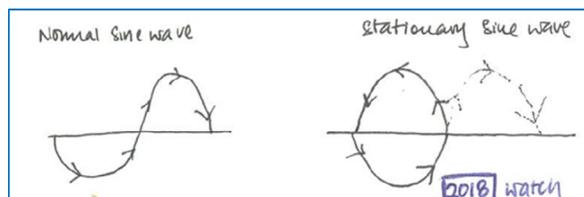
### Did you practice fundamental techniques in the DPRK?

ITF fundamental techniques are the strikes, kicks, blocks, and other motions that consist of the martial art's curriculum; they are, in fact, what makes ITF Taekwon-Do distinct from other martial arts (including other Taekwon-Do styles). The subject approximated that 80% of her Taekwon-Do practice in the DPRK focused on fundamental techniques. She specifically mentioned her instructors drilling *walking stance middle front punch* and *L-stance inner forearm middle block*, two

techniques taught to beginning students in Chon-Ji, the first ITF pattern. She also stated her DPRK instructors corrected her "exhibited erroneous habits" on techniques such as *walking stance straight fingertip thrust* and *walking stance twin upset punch*, two techniques taught at the intermediate level of Taekwon-Do (i.e., at the green belt level, which is obtained typically after a year of Taekwon-Do practice). Figures 5, 6, and 7 are images taken from the subject's notebooks that illustrate how she was instructed to perform Taekwon-Do fundamental movements using sine wave motion, a type of motion unique to ITF practice, and the level of detail provided by the subject's DPRK instructors. Further evidence of her practice of fundamental techniques was obtained from the pictorial and video files (not shown) provided by the subject.



**Figure 5.** A note and illustration of how to perform sine wave motion. The note on the right reads, "No 'HAND SINE WAVE,'" and "Only your feet control the sine wave."



**Figure 6.** The differences between "normal sine wave" motion (left) and "Stationary sine wave" (right). The subject updated her understandings in different ink colors in later visits, hence "2018" in blue (exact note not shown).



**Figure 7.** Image taken from the subject's notebook detailing the correct movement for L-stance knife-hand high inward strike as performed in Won-Hyo Tul, the fourth pattern in the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) curriculum. From left to right, the subject's notes read, "Angle still the same" and "Since wave up only."

### Did you practice patterns (tul) in the DPRK?



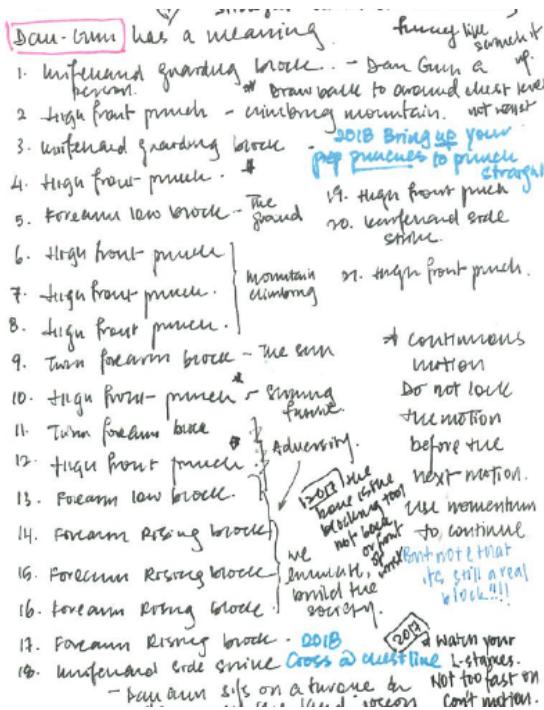
**Figure 8.** The subject performing movement 7 (right bending ready stance A) from Won-Hyo Tul in the Taekwon-Do Palace (Pyongyang, DPRK).



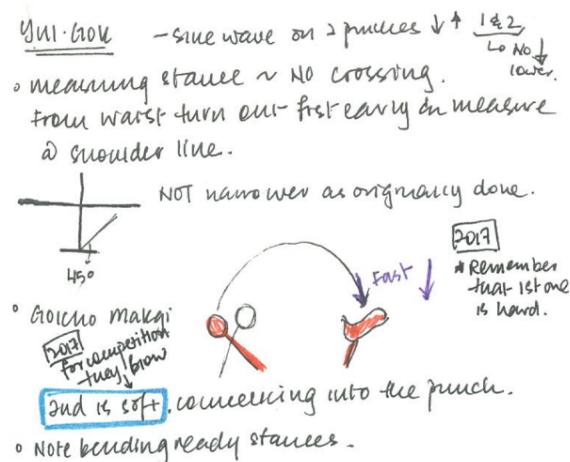
**Figure 9.** The subject performing movement 8 (middle side piercing kick with the left foot) from Won-Hyo Tul.

The subject stated her DPRK instructors focused on a different group of patterns in each of her three visits. In 2016, the focus was "on colour belt patterns to correct [the subject's fundamental techniques]... in particular, Chon-Ji, Dan-Gun and Do-San." The focus on those three patterns (i.e., Chon-Ji, Dan-Gun and Do-San), which are the first three patterns in the ITF curriculum, underpins the DPRK instructor's desire to ensure the subject performed exactly and understood the foundations of Taekwon-Do precisely. In 2017, "more focus was placed on black belt patterns as [the subject] was competing in the World Championships." However, "special focus was placed on all patterns, though more on the basic patterns" in 2018. This was, the subject stated in a subsequent interview, to help her prepare for her upcoming 4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt examination. As this rank is considered "instructor" level in the ITF, it was more important pedagogically to ensure her understanding of and her ability to perform the physical requirements for that rank as well as the incurred responsibilities it carries (e.g., ensuring that she will teach them properly). Figures 8 and 9 were taken during the subject's practice session and exemplify the physical practice of Taekwon-Do pat-

terns she underwent in the DPRK. Figures 10 and 11 were taken from the subject's personal notes and illustrate the depth her DPRK instructors went into during their pattern instruction. Further evidence of her practice of patterns was obtained from the pictorial and video files provided by the subject.



**Figure 10.** A page from the subject's notebook that outlines the first 18 movements of the Dan-Gun Tul, the second pattern in the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) curriculum.



**Figure 11.** A page from the subject's notebook that describes the unique movements executed in Yul-Gok Tul, the fifth pattern in the ITF curriculum. The subject updated her understanding in blue ink during later visits.

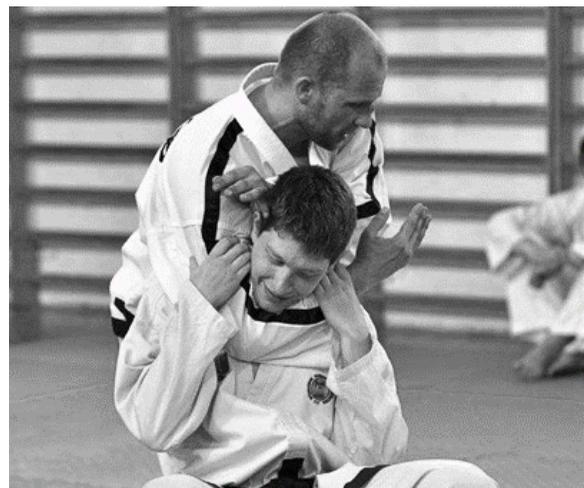
**Did you practice sparring/dallyon/self-defense in the DPRK?**

The subject stated she did not practice any of the types of sparring outlined by General Choi in his *Encyclopedia*

of Taekwon-Do. The primary reason, in the subject's own words, was that "...with patterns training there was no time to practice anything else." Her instructors also realized a greater need to focus on fundamental techniques and patterns than sparring, *dallyon* (Figure 12), and self-defense (Figure 13). However, her DPRK instructors did teach some self-defense techniques in 2017 as well as discuss the self-defense techniques taught in the patterns.



**Figure 12.** A *dallyon* (the physical conditioning of the body) practice tool and the results of striking it repeatedly. Photo provided by the authors.



**Figure 13.** An image of a self-defense drill executed by International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) practitioners. Image courtesy of London Taekwondo.

When only examining the results of the case study, it appears that Taekwon-Do instructors in the DPRK are concerned solely with teaching proper fundamental techniques. However, further evidence of how Taekwon-Do is taught in the DPRK was ascertained through the numerous online videos of the Taekwon-Do teams from the DPRK. In these videos, several types of sparring are demonstrated. Moreover, male DPRK demonstrators

are often shown enduring strikes on their bodies with wooden implements (Figure 14) and various full-power Taekwon-Do blows as well as breaking thick boards and bricks with their hands and feet, feats impossible without proper training and conditioning of the body. These demonstrations also feature self-defense performances using Taekwon-Do techniques, indicating that Taekwon-Do is being taught for self-protection purposes in the DPRK. Although subject received very little sparring and self-defense instruction and no *dallyon* training whatsoever from her DPRK instructors, secondary evidence provides evidence that all five aspects of General Choi's Composition of Taekwon-Do are being taught there.



**Figure 14.** DPRK ITF Demonstration Team members withstanding blows to the abdomen. This image indicates that *dallyon*, or the physical conditioning of the body, is undertaken by Taekwon-Do practitioners from the DPRK. Image courtesy of H.J. Kim.

It was also evident that the subject's practice corresponded with Johnson's [2017] stratified Taekwon-Do pedagogy theory. The first level of Johnson's theory, martial technique (*musul*), was obvious in the DPRK instructors' heavy emphasis on teaching fundamental techniques. Each martial art's fundamental techniques and principles of motion are what make it distinct. As the subject emphasized the practice of these more than any other category of General Choi's Composition of Taekwon-Do, it is abundantly clear that *musul* is in Taekwon-Do practice in the DPRK.

The second level of the Taekwon-Do pedagogy theory is the martial artistry, or *muyae*, level, which was less evident in the subject's practice in the DPRK. Johnson [2017] explains *muyae* occurs when "practitioners [are] capable of executing the art's fundamental techniques fairly much at will at some point in their training" [2017: 6]. He summarizes Dziwenka [2014] by further elaborating it is "a personal expression of systemized group of fundamental techniques (i.e., an art form) [that] can only be achieved after thousands of repetition[s] and internalization" [*ibid*; Dziwenka 2014]. Nonetheless, as evidenced in the DPRK's Taekwon-Do demonstration videos, many types of ITF sparring are practiced in that country. Because General Choi did not detail what tech-

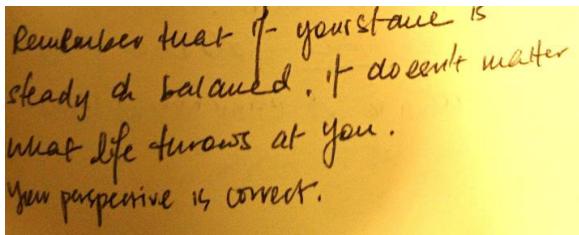
niques should be taught specifically during the various types of prearranged sparring (he specified only the procedure and educational objectives), personal preferences are implemented when creating these routines. Furthermore, the DPRK's sparring demonstrations have changed over the years (*cf.* "North Korea Taekwondo Committee," "Taekwon-do ITF North Korean Team," and Mookas), thus indicating that their understanding and preferences have likewise evolved.

Prearranged sparring necessitates skills and tactics individual to a Taekwon-Do practitioner due to their individual body shapes and sizes, instructors' education and pedagogical goals, purposes of training, and a host of other factors unique to practitioners and their situations. It is in fact this type of sparring that is most often performed during ITF international competitions. Furthermore, DPRK ITF competitors are often victorious in their respective sparring weight classes in international competitions. Most commonly known as "free sparring," ITF competitive sparring is not arranged at all, and competitors are allowed to execute their individually-preferred kicks, blocks, and strikes at will to an opponent who is attempting the same in hopes of achieving more points to win the match. Since 1) Taekwon-Do practitioners from the DPRK have been recorded performing various types of sparring as outlined by General Choi, 2) video evidence of various demonstrations shows their sparring understanding and preferences has evolved over the years, and 3) they are highly proficient in the sparring demonstrated in those videos as well as free sparring in international competitions, it is safe to assume that *muyae* would be found in Taekwon-Do practice inside the DPRK if complete access to their citizens was granted.

The final level of the stratified Taekwon-Do pedagogy theory is *mudo*, or the martial "way." Johnson [2019] states Taekwon-Do "instruction should in theory emphasize using one's mental and physical strengths, newfound through taekwondo practice, to build a more peaceful world." As above, this begins with developing the self through the practice of an art (i.e., self-cultivation) in the Confucian tradition, an idea that was confirmed by Grand Master Choi Jung Hwa [Choi J.H. 2019], a former Taekwon-Do instructor in the DPRK, General Choi's son, and president of the ITF headquartered in England in addition to another Taekwon-Do master [Fitzgibbon S. 2018]. Dziwenka and Johnson claim that Taekwon-Do practitioners should "include the goal of syncretizing the mind, body, and technique with the goal of internalizing and intuiting this syncretism" [2015: 3; also see: Dziwenka 1990, 2014]. Likewise, Sandford and Gill state "physical experience, social expectations, and mindful training" are three facets found within martial arts training [2017: 31]. Sandford and Gill's latter concept, mindful training, can be understood as *mudo* in the sense that it is knowledge extracted from physical practice (i.e. *a posteriori* knowledge) by practitioners which is applied

to their individual daily lives in a personally meaningful way (i.e., *a priori* knowledge) [Johnson 2016]. In more definitive language, *mudo* occurs when the Taekwon-Do practitioner utilizes what is taught in Taekwon-Do in their daily lives [Johnson 2017].

It is difficult to determine *mudo* due to its esoteric nature, yet self-cultivation is one the most important as aspects of ITF Taekwon-Do [Choi H.H. 1985a; Choi J.H. 2019; Johnson 2019]. One passage in particular from the subject's notebook demonstrates the possibility of *mudo* in Taekwon-Do as it is practiced in the DPRK. Figure 15 is a quote from one of her instructors when he taught her *parallel ready stance*. This stance is typically the first stance taught to Taekwon-Do students as it has them stand at attention, feet shoulder-width apart with the body's weight distributed equally on both feet, and arms relaxed in front of their lower abdomen. The DPRK instructor used this stance, a physical skill found in Taekwon-Do, and then adapted its primary physical characteristic of balance to the subject's life (i.e., finding a personal balance with her work and social life decisions). Ideas and knowledge inferred from Taekwon-Do practice were used therefore to assist the subject in her daily life, just as described by Johnson [2017]. Later, the subject stated that her DPRK instructors did this "plenty" of times and were "full of those" types of examples of how to use Taekwon-Do to improve her life. The use of Taekwon-Do knowledge to enhance life is at the core of General Choi's educational goals for Taekwon-Do practitioners [Choi 1985a] and fits squarely within the stratified Taekwon-Do pedagogy theory definition of *mudo* [Johnson 2017]. Consequently, it can be concluded that *mudo* exists in Taekwon-Do as it is taught in the DPRK.



**Figure 15.** An excerpt from the subject's notebook that reads, "Remember that if your stance is steady & balanced, it doesn't matter what life throws at you. Your perspective is correct."

## Discussion

This study aimed to determine how ITF Taekwon-Do is taught in the DPRK today with a secondary research objective of ascertaining if General Choi's Taekwon-Do pedagogy has been lost in the DPRK. Subjects who traveled to the DPRK for Taekwon-Do instruction were identified and issued a questionnaire. A successive interview was conducted to dive deeper into the subject's responses. Other evidence (i.e., pictorial and video evi-

dence provided by the subjects, videos of Taekwon-Do demonstrations performed by various DPRK teams, and notebook accounts provided by the subject) were used to collaborate and verify the information provided in the interviews and for cross-referencing purposes. In accordance with Krippendorf [2014], all data was analyzed, and the wider thematic discourse was then considered and incorporated in the study's conclusions.

The results indicate that Taekwon-Do instructors in the DPRK teach all five aspects of General Choi's Composition of Taekwon-Do. In addition, the three strata of the Taekwon-Do pedagogy theory were found in our subject's practice in the DPRK. Following the stratified Taekwon-Do pedagogy, Taekwon-Do's fundamental movements and patterns are formalized, but certain individual differences, such as adjustments for practitioners' body styles, can be permitted. As practice continues and students become more proficient, individual and unique expressions of the martial art become more perceptible, most notably in sparring and, later still, in how various skills and knowledge acquired through practice can be applied to practitioners' everyday lives.

In the case of our sole subject, it was determined that Taekwon-Do instructors in the DPRK are teaching the martial art in the manner for self-cultivation and societal betterment purposes as General Choi mandated. However, since DPRK citizens were unable to participate in this research project, we can only speculate how they would define "self-cultivation" and "societal betterment" in their socialist society. For our subject, however, this meant her DPRK instructors were concerned with her overall well-being, health, and happiness when she returned home.

This study suffers from the same limitations as all case studies with an extreme low sample population. First, the typical case study limitations apply; it is difficult to generalize the study's results to the wider DPRK population, the interviewee's and researchers' subjective feelings may have influenced the findings, and selection bias could be a factor. The fact that the data collected from a subject visiting, rather than being a citizen practicing Taekwon-Do in the DPRK, is most limiting.

Nevertheless, the current research project opens the door to a myriad of future studies. Due to a lack of contact with Taekwon-Do practitioners in the DPRK, this research could not determine how Taekwon-Do is being taught to the DPRK populace at large. Forthcoming research on this area may be possible if the DPRK welcomes academic research on its citizens. Additionally, the stratified Taekwon-Do pedagogy is just one explanation of martial art education. Comparisons to other martial arts with similar educational goals to Taekwon-Do are therefore warranted. For instance, it could be compared to Japanese Shotokan Karate concentric pedagogy [*cf.* Koch 2015] to determine which provides faster and/or better moral/social/behavioral benefits.

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## Taekwon-Do w Korei Północnej: pedagogiczne stadium przypadku

**Słowa kluczowe:** *musul* (technika walki), *myuae* (sztuka walki), *mudo* (sposób walki), General Choi Hong Hi, Międzynarodowa Federacja Taekwon-Do (ITF), behawioralno-racjonalne projektowanie programów nauczania

### Streszczenie

Tłó. Niezależnie od faktu, że styl Taekwon-Do nauczany przez Międzynarodową Federację Taekwon-Do (ITF) został zapoczątkowany w Republice Korei (ROK; Korea Południowa) w latach 50. i 60. ubiegłego wieku przez generała armii ROK Choi Hong Hi, styl ten jest znany na całym świecie jako „North Korean Taekwon-Do”, ponieważ jest praktykowany w Koreańskiej Republice Ludowo-Demokratycznej (KRLD, Korea Północna). Problem i cel. General Choi wprowadził Taekwon-Do do KRLD w 1980 roku. Od tego czasu nie prowadzono żadnych badań akademickich nad Taekwon-Do w formie, w jakiej jest praktykowane w KRLD. Niniejsze wstępne studium ma na celu ustalenie, czy istnieją różnice w stylu i celu pedagogicznym Taekwon-Do w postaci, w jakiej jest praktykowane w KRLD, w stosunku do tych, które zalecił General Choi.

Metody i materiały. Przeprowadzono opisowe, nieeksperymentalne studium przypadku jednego podmiotu (Singapurka; w wieku 36 lat), która trzykrotnie wyjeżdżała do KRLD specjalnie na praktykę Taekwon-Do. Dokonano systematycznego przeglądu literatury dotyczącej materiałów pedagogicznych ITF oraz wdrożono wielofunkcyjny, jakościowy kwestionariusz. Zidentyfikowano „Strukturę Taekwon-Do” jako zamierzony program nauczania w ITF, a także wykorzystano Warstwową Pedagogiczną Teorię Taekwondo w celu wyjaśnienia, jak można wykorzystać metodę samoobrony do rozwoju osobistego i społecznego. Przeprowadzono analizę jakościową danych zawartych w kwestionariuszu oraz wywiady uzupełniające. Wyniki. W praktyce Taekwon-Do w Korei Północnej podmiotu badania znaleziono dowody na istnienie zarówno „Struktury Taekwon-Do”, jak i Warstwowej Pedagogicznej Teorii Taekwondo, wskazując na wszystkie pięć obszarów programu nauczania ITF, a trzy poziomy pedagogiki Taekwon-do mogą być obecne w praktyce Taekwon-Do w KRLD.

Wnioski. Pomimo swoich ograniczeń, badanie to wskazuje, że Taekwon-Do jest nauczane w KRLD dla celów samorealizacji i poprawy społecznej zgodnie z zamiarem General Choi.