

History (*)

The oldest ancestor of taekwon do is an amalgamation of unarmed combat styles developed by three rival Korean kingdoms of *Goguryeo* or *Koguryo* (37 BC – 668 AD), *Silla* (57 BC – 935 AD) and *Baekje* (18 BC – 600 AD). Young men were trained in unarmed combat techniques to develop strength, speed, and survival skills. The most popular of these techniques was *subak* (hand technique), with *taekkyeon* (foot technique) being the most popular of the segments of *subak*.



Soldier's uniforms from the Koguryo, Silla, and Baekjae Kingdoms

As the *Goguryeo kingdom* grew in power, the neighboring *Silla kingdom* became comparatively weaker, and an effort was undertaken among the *Silla* to develop a corps of special warriors. The *Silla* had a regular army but its military training techniques were less advanced than those of the *Goguryeo*, and its soldiers were generally regarded as being of a lesser caliber. The *Silla* selected young men, some as young as twelve, and trained them in the liberal arts. Those who demonstrated strong natural aptitude were selected as trainees in the new special warrior corps, called the *Hwarang*, meaning young warrior. *Hwarang* was instructed by a monk, *Won Kwang Bupsa*, who was also the author of *Sesokokye*, the following five student commitments:

- Be loyal to your country
- Honor your parents
- Be faithful to your friends
- Never retreat in battle
- Use good judgment before killing living things

It was believed that young men with a talent for the liberal arts might have had the grace to become competent warriors. These warriors were instructed in academic as well as martial arts, learning philosophy, history, a code of ethics, and equestrian sports. Their military training included an extensive weapons program involving swordsmanship and archery, both on horseback and on foot, as well as lessons in military tactics and unarmed combat using *subak*. Although *subak* was a leg-oriented art in *Goguryeo*, *Silla's* influence added hand techniques to the practice of *subak*.

In spite of Korea's rich history of ancient and traditional martial arts, Korean martial arts faded into obscurity during the *Joseon Dynasty (Chosun or Yi)*. The Yi Dynasty was the last dynasty of Korea, beginning 1392 and ending in 1910. Like *Koguryo* and *Baekje*, the Yi dynasty held Subakki contests for the purpose of selecting soldiers. Subsequently, Korean society became highly centralized under *Korean Confucianism* and martial arts were lowly regarded in a society whose ideals were epitomized by its scholar-kings. Remnants of traditional martial arts such as *subak* and *taekkyeon* were banned from practice by the general populace and reserved for sanctioned military uses although folk practice by the common populace still persisted into the 19th century.

Foreign Influence

During the *Japanese occupation* (1910-1945), the practice of *taekkyeon* was banned. Although practice of the art nearly vanished, *taekkyeon* survived through underground teaching and folk custom. As the Japanese colonization established a firm foothold in Korea, the few Koreans who were able to attend Japanese universities were exposed to *Okinawan* and *Japanese martial arts* with some even receiving black belts under *Gichin Funakoshi*, *Kanken Toyama*, and other notable masters. Koreans in *China* were also exposed to *Chinese martial arts*. By 1945, when the Korean peninsula was liberated from Japanese colonization, many martial arts schools were formed and developed under various names such as *Tang Soo Do* reflecting foreign influence.

At the end of World War II, several *Kwans* (schools or clans of martial artists) arose. They were: *Chung Do Kwan*, *Moo Duk Kwan*, *Jidokwan* (or *Yun Moo Kwan*), *Chang Moo Kwan*, *Han Moo Kwan*, *Oh Do Kwan*, *Jung Do Kwan*, *Kang Duk Won*, and *Song Moo Kwan*.

Modern Tae Kwon Do

By the end of the *Korean War*, nine martial arts schools (translated as *kwan*) had opened, and *South Korean President Syngman Rhee* ordered that the various schools unify under a single system. A governmental body selected a naming committee's submission of "**tae-kwon-do**". Following the submission of the name "tae-kwon-do" on April 11, 1955, the Korean Tae-kwon-do Association (KTA) was formed in 1959 to facilitate the unification. Shortly thereafter, Tae-kwon-do made its debut in North America.



Standardization efforts in South Korea stalled, as the *kwans* continued to teach differing styles. Another request from the Korean government for unification resulted in the formation of the Korea *Tae Soo Do Association*, which changed its name back to the *Korean Tae-kwon-do Association* in 1965 following a change of leadership. This new leader was *General Choi Hong Hi* who founded the *International Tae-Kwon-Do Federation* on 22nd March 1966 in South Korea. Subsequently, General Choi moved his organization to Canada in 1972.

General Choi required the Korean police, army, and air force to receive Tae Kwon Do training.

In 1972, the Korea Tae-Kwon-Do Association Central Dojang was opened. A few months later, the name was changed to the *Kukkiwon*. The *Kukkiwon* remains the World Tae-Kwon-Do Headquarters to this day. The following year, the *World Tae-Kwon-Do Federation (WTF)* was formed. The *International Olympic Committee* recognized the WTF and Tae-Kwon-Do sparring in 1980, and the sport was accepted as a demonstration event at the 1988 Seoul and the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympic Games. It became an official medal event as of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Tae-Kwon-Do is one of two Asian martial arts (*judo* being the other) in the *Olympic Games*.

Features

Tae-Kwon-Do is famed for its use of kicking techniques, which distinguishes it from martial arts such as *karate* or southern styles of *kung fu*. The rationale is that the leg is the longest and strongest weapon a martial artist has, and kicks thus have the greatest potential to execute powerful strikes without successful retaliation.

Tae-Kwon-Do as a sport and exercise is popular with people of both genders and of many ages. Physically, Tae-Kwon-Do develops strength, speed, balance, flexibility, and stamina. An example of the union of mental and physical discipline is the breaking of boards, which requires both physical mastery of the technique and the concentration to focus one's strength.

A Tae-Kwon-Do student typically wears a uniform (*dobok* 도복), often white but sometimes black or other colors, with a belt (*tti* 띠) tied around the waist. The belt indicates the student's rank. The school or place where instruction is given is called the *dojang* 도장.

Although each Tae-Kwon-Do club or school will be different, a Tae-Kwon-Do student can typically expect to take part in most or all of the following:

- Learning the techniques and curriculum of Tae-Kwon-Do
- Both anaerobic and aerobic workout, including stretching
- Self-defense techniques (*hosinsul* 호신술)

- Patterns (also called forms, *pumsae* 품새, *teul* 틀, *hyeong* 형)
- Sparring (called *kyeorugi* 겨루기, or *matseogi* 맞서기 in the ITF), which may include 3-, 2- and 1-step sparring, free-style, arranged, and point sparring, and other types
- Relaxation exercises
- Falling techniques
- Breaking (using techniques to break boards for testing, training and martial arts demonstrations)
- Exams to progress to the next rank
- A focus on mental and ethical discipline, justice, etiquette, respect, and self-confidence

Some Tae-Kwon-Do instructors also incorporate the use of pressure points, known as *ji ap sul* as well as grabbing self-defense techniques borrowed from other martial arts, such as [Hapkido](#) and [Judo](#).