# an artistic interpretation of the patterns

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#### introduction

"Art" is any form of expression designed to evoke an emotion or image in the mind of an audience. The diversity and creativity of human expression is represented in countless media, with messages conveyed through paint, sculpture, music, dance, film, mime... to name a very few.

The phrase "Martial Art" is not often associated with these other media. The emphasis tends to be placed on the word *martial*—"of or pertaining to war". Even General Choi begins the description of Taekwon-do in his Encyclopedia with the sentence : "Taekwon-do is a version of unarmed combat designed for the purpose of self defence."

But Taekwon-do is more than a martial system, or combat style. It is an art. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Taekwon-do can evoke emotions or images in an audience, specifically through the medium of patterns.

# on characterístic Beauty

The patterns can be viewed in more than one light. There is a simple and essential purpose : "Pattern practice enables the student to go through many fundamental movements in series, to develop sparring techniques, improve flexibility of movements, master body shifting, build muscles and breath control, develop fluid and smooth motions, and gain rhythmical movements." When performing patterns to this end, technical precision is desirable. Every punch, from Chon-Ji to Tong-II, should be identical. A guarding block from Won-Hyo should be indistinguishable from the same technique in Choong-Moo.

A pattern performed like this can be wonderful to watch, with the movements crisp, powerful, and precise. It is, however, simply a string of techniques. It requires skill, certainly, but a skilled practitioner could take any string of movements and make them just as crisp, as powerful, as precise.

What patterns lack when performed in this manner is *characteristic beauty*. The individual movements may be beautiful, but there is nothing to make each pattern *distinctive*. And where better to look for an individual flavour for every pattern, than the pattern meanings?

By adding feeling, flair, and style to the way we perform a given pattern, we can use the movements to express an idea, emotion, or concept; to tell a story; or to bring to our audience a sense of the person for whom the pattern might be named. The pattern is not simply *named* "Won-Hyo" – the pattern *represents* Won-Hyo, the person, and we are charged with the task of bringing forth a veritably tangible feeling of Won-Hyoness when we perform it.

Herein I have attempted to address this issue of characteristic beauty, by suggesting a possible style in which each pattern may be performed to evoke the pattern meaning. This is, of course, a purely personal view on my part – others may disagree with my choices or interpretations, and may see something I have missed entirely. Technical purists may feel it heretical to suggest that artistic license extends to distinctive styles for each pattern, and this is a valid viewpoint. My wish is simply to give people something to think about.

The following pages contain two sections. The first is devoted to ideas on adding characteristic beauty to certain techniques, whichever pattern they may occur in, as I feel those movements have unique qualities that should be exploited and displayed. The second section contains my stylistic interpretations for each of the first 9 patterns, Chon-Ji through Choong-Moo. Some of these use the pattern to tell a story, while others attempt to bring out a personality or concept.

# on certain techniques

#### Fast / Continuous Motion

Attempting to find a difference between these two motions can drive the technical purist to distraction. It seems that if one uses one pattern to demonstrate how the two are distinct, another pattern will refute the definition.

My suggestion is that the difference between the two is not one of technical execution, but of artistic performance. While the physical movements of given techniques performed in either fast or continuous motion might appear identical in some cases, the *emotional sense* of the techniques is very different.

Techniques performed in fast motion should evoke a sense of *frantic action*. Without losing the accuracy of the technique, the practitioner should give the impression that the movements are instinctive, life-saving reflexes in a hard-pressed situation. Fresh opponents are appearing out of the very air and must all be dealt with, with no time for conscious thought.

Continuous motion, however, should convey a sense of *graceful flow*. Each movement should seem to move very naturally into the next – the very idea that any other technique could possibly have fitted in there should strike the viewer as foreign and wrong. The practitioner should appear relaxed, as if using the Force to anticipate every movement in advance.

#### Hooking Block, Scooping Block

I refer to these as "soft blocks". While the purpose of most blocks which may, at first glance, appear similar to these is to deflect or destroy an attacking tool, the hooking and scooping blocks have a different aim. A knifehand side block executed with full power could conceivably fracture an attacker's wrist and send his arm hurtling away from the point of contact. Since a hooking block, in practice, is generally followed by a grasping block, it is rather counterproductive to have this sort of effect on the target. It is far preferable for the attack to be minimally deflected, remaining in contact with the block. Likewise, the scooping block is not intended to fling a kick away. The objective is to keep the kick elevated, leaving the attacker off balance. A "soft touch" is once again required.





To reflect this in a pattern, the sharpness can be removed from the end of the block. This is sometimes misinterpreted, leaving students performing movements in slow motion. To describe the motion, I prefer to ask students to imagine how their techniques feel when, having just performed thirty patterns, they are told to do another with "full power!" The resulting fuzzy feel is usually just right. To enhance the effect for the spectator, the practitioner can also soften the accompanying exhalation - rather than the sharply cut-off breath that partners most techniques, a less defined breath better matches the sense of a soft block.

#### **Double Forearm Block**



Of the double forearm block, General Choi says "This is one of the strongest forms of blocking". It can easily be shown why. The double forearm block is less "cautious" than most of Taekwon-do's hand techniques. Other attacks and blocks make use of reaction force in the off arm. This allows the practitioner to exert full power and maintain balance, even should the technique unexpectedly meet no resistance. In the case of the double forearm block, the off arm moves in the same direction as the blocking arm. Because of this, the practitioner must have complete confidence that the block will, in fact, meet its target, lest a lack of resistance result in an undignified tumble to the ground. Given this confidence, however, the full power of the practitioner's shoulders and body may be thrown behind the block. This total commitment to the technique is where the strength of the block originates.

When a double forearm block is performed in a pattern, there is of course no resistance to be met. The practitioner should, nonetheless, attempt to portray the technique as it is intended - "one of the strongest forms of blocking". By use of hip, shoulder, and body power - and careful attention to balance - one can evoke the impression that only the impact of the technique with an imaginary opponent's attack prevented an uncontrolled spin. Too often, double forearm blocks in patterns appear cautious – and weak - failing dismally to showcase the technique's potential.

#### X-Stance Forward Jumping Techniques : Backfist Side Strike, Double Forearm Block, Backfist Downward Strike

One of the wonderful advantages of the X-Stance is the sheer enthusiasm with which one can launch oneself into a forward-jumping technique, secure in the knowledge that the trailing foot will act as a brake to prevent overbalancing. It is always a shame to see a pattern where this advantage is not utilised fully.

In his visit with the General in 1998, Master Choi Jung Hwa demonstrated the backfist strike from Yul-Gok for the seminar participants. From a tightly-coiled intermediate position, he exploded into both the jump and the strike.

As with the double forearm block, it is common to see these techniques blend in to the rest of a pattern, performed much the same as every other technique. Displaying the power they deserve can add excitement to a pattern, and better demonstrates the meaning and application of the techniques to a viewer.



### chon-jí tal

Chon-Ji literally means "the Heaven the Earth". It is, in the Orient, interpreted as the creation of the world or the beginning of human history, therefore it is the initial pattern played by the beginner. This pattern consists of two similar parts; one to represent the Heaven, the other the Earth. The pattern diagram represents the number ten, or the number of kup grades, and the pattern has 19 movements, the total of kup and dan grades.



I like to consider the first eight movements of Chon-Ji as the Earth, the next eight as the Heaven, and the final three punches as a transition state of sorts, binding the two together.

My reasons for choosing the first eight to be the Earth come from an examination of the two different blocks used in the pattern, the walking stance forearm low block and the L-stance inner forearm middle side block. In the low block the blocking tool, the forearm, points downward towards the earth, while in the middle block the forearm points upward towards the heaven. The walking stance is a very solid, stable stance, suggestive of the ground, and the L-stance is a more mobile, flexible stance, more representative of the fluidity of the air.

This imagery can be enhanced by the performance of the two sections.

The tempo of the Earth section can be slowed, with a perceptible pause between each movement. Every stance should be palpably solid and stable, as if the practitioner's feet had merged with the ground. The power should be visible and audible in every movement. A vague hint of stamping motion adds to the Earth image – not a true stamping, but enough of a raising of the foot to give an audible *thud* to every step.

By contrast, the next eight movements – the Heaven section – should return to normal speed. The pauses between movements should vanish, giving enough graceful flow to the movements that it approaches the feel of continuous motion. While retaining good stances, the practitioner's feet should glide from movement to movement as though walking on air. Where possible, stepping noises should be eliminated completely to add to that illusion.

Since the pattern begins and ends in parallel ready stance, rather than a "heaven hand" stance, I feel that the practitioner should begin and end the performance in the Earth sense. Thus, the final three punches should mark a transition from Heaven back to Earth, with the tempo slowing, the pauses gradually reappearing, and the heaviness and sound of the steps returning. The audience should gain an impression of someone stepping down out of the sky at the end of the pattern.

### oan-gan tal

Dan-Gun is named after the Holy Dan-Gun, the legendary founder of Korea in the year 2333 BC. The 21 movements refer to the 21 days in the legend of Dan-Gun.

The story of Dan-Gun is so enjoyable that I feel the performance of the pattern must tell that story in some way. Here is that story in condensed form :

Once upon a time there was a bear and a tiger. Whan-Ung, the Son of the Creator, overheard them say one day that they wished to become human. Whan-Ung gave them some garlic and artemisia to eat, and told them if they could remain in a cave for 21 days, they would become human. Both animals did so, but due to the fierce nature of the tiger, it could not stand confinement for so long, and fled. The patient nature of the bear allowed it to fulfil the task, and was transformed into a woman. When she emerged from the cave, she cried out "Give me a son!" And Whan-Ung heard her again, and breathed upon her, and she became pregnant. Her son was named Dan-Gun. He was found by the men of the "nine wild tribes" and made king. He led these people south to Pyongyang, Korea's first capital, and brought civilisation with him to the primitive people who lived there. Dan-Gun ruled Korea for 1,211 years, until a migrating Chinese army forced him to flee and return to Heaven.

Each of the two knifehand-guarding-block-high-punch pairs at the start of the pattern symbolises one of the two animals. The first pair should be performed fiercely, with emphasis on power over control, perhaps with heavy feet, to represent the tiger. Plenty of ferocious facial expression! By contrast, the second pair representing the bear should be performed more slowly, more technically cautious, with the power present but subdued. A sense of control and patience is important.

The low block, movement 5, is the descent into the cave. The three high punches represent the three weeks the bear spent in the cave - each should be performed differently to show the progression of time. The first punch is determined, enthusiatic, powerful. Eyes up defiantly! The second punch, after a week with no sun, is less powerful, more resigned, with the light of enthusiasm gone from the face. The third punch, at the limits of endurance, is slow, a trudging movement, the eyes down in exhaustion.

Success! Exultation! The twin forearm blocks are performed with shining eyes, flinging the arms out happily to show the bear's joy at becoming a woman. The punches are performed the same way, with the eyes up towards Heaven thanking Whan-Ung and beseeching him for a child.

Movements 13-17, travelling towards C, show Dan-Gun's journey south civilising the tribes who would become the Korean people. The low block shows their primitive status, while the rising blocks represent Dan-Gun's spreading of knowledge and the goal of civilisation the people are aiming for. Over the course of the four rising blocks, the eyeline should gradually rise from low to high, and the technique should become sharper and more refined - beginning slightly rough, ending with the most perfect rising block of which the practitioner is capable.

Despite the end of the legend, there is little shame and much achievement in a twelve century reign and the civilisation of a country, so I feel the last four movements should be proud and strong, a solid finish to the story of one of Korea's most important figures.

### oo-san tal

Do-San is the pseudonym of the patriot Ahn Chang-Ho (1876-1938). The 24 movements of the pattern represent his entire life, which he devoted to furthering the education of Korea and the Korean Independence Movement.

My interpretation of Do-San focuses not on the life of Ahn Chang-Ho, but on his goals. To me, the pattern should celebrate the freedom that the Independence Movement eventually won for Korea, rather than lamenting the long struggle under the Japanese occupation.

To this end, I feel that Do-San should be performed with no feeling of either constraint or restraint. Intermediate positions should be open and relaxed; techniques should be large, and free, and flamboyant.

While I have been unable to find a chinese character which equates to the pattern diagram, I find it appropriate to note the striking similarity to the symbol of another champion of independence :



The characteristic style of Zorro suits perfectly the image in my mind of how Do-San should be performed. Where some patterns have a solid, sharp, powerful style, Do-San to me should flow, and float, almost as if the whole pattern were performed in continuous motion. (The many whirls and turns of the pattern would look marvellous in a flowing cape, don't you think?)

Certain techniques in particular are frequently "restricted" by practitioners, perhaps for a safety margin of balance. In this interpretation of Do-San, however, this is counter-productive. The first backfist side strike, with its full turn, is a perfect candidate for demonstrating freedom and independence, but is often slowed and constrained. In fact the entire sequence, from straight fingertip thrust, to releasing motion, to backfist strike should flow like water, or a dance.

Front snap kicks, also, are often reined in by cautious practitioners. In this pattern in particular, the short, flicky movement should give way to long, graceful movements and full extension of the leg.

When performing Do-San in this way, relax and enjoy. Remember, it is a celebration of freedom!

# won-hyo tal

Won-Hyo was the noted monk who introduced Buddhism to the Silla Dynasty in the year 686 AD.

Won-Hyo spent over twenty years as a Buddhist priest in Korea, and in his capacity as a popular and influential monk did much to reduce the rivalries between the five major Buddhist sects existing in Silla at the time.

Buddhism at the time, however, relied much on the study of Chinese literature, and as such was generally unavailable to the mostly illiterate populace. In his early forties, Won-Hyotook a new slant on Buddhist philosophy, developing the "Pure Land" sect, based on the premise that diligent prayer is enough to warrant salvation. At this point he left the priesthood, and spent the remainder of his life bringing his new Buddhist philosophy to the common people of Silla.

Pure Land Buddhism is inherently gentle, and thus the performance of the pattern bearing the name of its founder should portray this gentleness. The usual sharp, crisp ending of movements should be softened slightly, in the fashion of a hooking block or scooping block. The sharp exhalation of breath accompanying each movement is also extended, becoming more of a soft "puff".

To exaggerate the attitude of diligent prayer, the tempo of the pattern is slowed noticeably. No trace of hostility should enter the facial expression or the eyes, again reinforcing the air of serenity and piety.

Won-Hyo, performed in this fashion, almost ceases to be a "martial" pattern. "Soft and gentle" should dominate the thinking of the practitioner.

# yal-gok tal

Yul-Gok is the pseudonym of the great philosopher and scholar Yi I (1536-1584), nicknamed the Confucius of Korea. The 38 movements refer to his birthplace on the 38° latitude, and the diagram represents "scholar".



Yul-Gok and Toi-Gye are two closely related and yet opposite patterns. Both Yi I (Yul-Gok) and Yi Hwang (Toi-Gye) were important figures in Confucian scholarship in 16th century Korea, but the two men were leaders of two opposing schools of philosophical thought.

According to Neo-Confucianism, all existence reflects two vital components, *i* and *ki* (sometimes written *li* and *ch'i*). The first, *i*, is the formative element. This describes the nature and behaviour of a thing. The second, *ki*, is the energising element. One cannot exist without the other.

The argument between the two schools, therefore, is not to do with the definition or existence of these two components, but rather their relative importance.

Yul-Gok believed that *ki*, the energising element, was the primary and fundamental factor. To this school, *i* exists only to govern the motion of *ki*, to give it form and direction.

Accordingly, the performance of the pattern Yul-Gok should stress *ki* over *i*. Energy takes precedence over form. The physical movement of a technique is only required to provide a channel, a medium, for the *power* of the technique.

This is not to say that technique should be sloppy, but precision is of definite secondary importance.

Yul-Gok is a good pattern to display this energy. Fast motion punches suit a display of power and vitality. Several of the techniques encountered for the first time in the pattern - front elbow strike, jumping backfist strike, double forearm block - are also by nature inclined to vivaciousness.

When performing Yul-Gok, simply let go, and let the *ki* flow through you.

# joong-gan tal

Joong-Gun is named after the patriot Ahn Joong-Gun, who assassinated Hiro Bumi Ito, the first Japanese Governor-General of Korea, known as the man who played the leading role in the Japan-Korea merger. The 32 movements refer to Mr Ahn's age when he was executed in Lui-Shung prison in 1910.

In 1905, the Japanese army occupied Korea. Ostensibly, they were "rescuing" Korea from the French and Russian troops which had entered northern Korea during the turmoil in Asia surrounding the Boxer Rebellion in China at the start of the century. However, their ulterior motive was the use of Korea as a stepping stone for their subsequent imperialist expansion into China and Manchuria.

Hirobumi Ito, a Japanese elder statesman, forced the Korean Government to sign a "Protectorate Treaty", inviting Japanese forces to remain. However, this did not reflect the wishes of the Korean populace.

Ahn Joong-Gun left Korea for southern Manchuria, where he formed a guerilla army, raiding across the border to harass the Japanese. The success of this and similar groups provoked a Japanese military response in the Kando region of northern Korea, where many of the raids took place, and eventually the Japanese sold the region to China. It was this action, of selling off part of his country, that drove Joong-Gun to his plan of assassinating the Governor-General.

When Joong-Gun shot Ito at a train station in 1909, he did so in the full knowledge that certain capture, torture, and death awaited him. It is said that throughout five months of vicious torture preceding his execution, his spirit never broke.

The spirit and anger of the rebel is an important part of the character of Joong-Gun, and it is essential that these are present in the eyes of the practitioner while this pattern is performed. To contrast this spiritual fire, however, the physical movements of the pattern reflect the oppression of Korea and its people, and the imprisonment of Ahn Joong-Gun.

Intermediate positions are close to the body, tighter than they would normally be performed. Stances are perhaps very slightly shorter than normal. The performance of the pattern should give a sense of restriction, inhibition, and confinement.

The only exceptions to this are movements 15 and 16, 18 and 19 - releasing movement and high punch. These movements represent striking a blow for freedom - in this case the assassination of Ito - and should be unfettered and open. At these instants, the fire in the eyes should blaze even more strongly.

"Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way... you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions."

#### toi-gye tal

Toi-Gye is the pen name of the noted scholar Yi-Hwang (16th century), an authority on Neo-Confucianism. The 37 movements refer to his birthplace on the 37° latitude, and the diagram represents "scholar".

Toi-Gye and Yul-Gok are two patterns which share a common background, yet take an opposing approach in execution. As described in the description of pattern Yul-Gok, Yi Hwang and Yi I were both Neo-Confucian scholars in 16th century Korea. Yi I, Yul-Gok, was the foremost philosopher of the school that stressed the primacy of *ki* over *i*. Toi-Gye, on the other hand, thought otherwise.

To Yi Hwang's thinking, *ki* played a purely supporting role to the obviously dominant *i*. He believed that spiritual essence is found through one's actions, and that it is only through the realisation of moral principle that the spirit is given meaning.

I see *ki* represented in Taekwon-Do through the spirit of the practitioner and the power of the movement, while *i* is shown in the precision and perfection of individual movements. The performance of the pattern Toi-Gye must, therefore, stress *i* over *ki*.

Where some patterns require fire and spirit in the eyes, Toi-Gye subordinates this spirit to technique. The face and eyes, therefore, are calm and serene, well-controlled. Every technique should be perfectly placed, stopping exactly at the point of impact, with no "bounce" or overshoot whatsoever. This sense of precision can be emphasised by slowing the performance of the pattern slightly, to show that careful attention is being paid to each movement.

The pattern should still display power, but not the zealous exuberance of Yul-Gok or Hwa-Rang. Instead, the power should result from sine wave and pure technique.



Aristotle

"Retreat, hell! We just got here!" Captain Lloyd Williams, USMC Battle of Belleau Wood, 1918

# hwa-rang tal

Hwa-Rang is named after the Hwa-Rang Youth Group, which originated in the Silla Dynasty in the early 7th century. The 29 movements refer to the 29th Infantry Division, where Taekwon-Do developed into maturity.



The Hwa-Rang were the military leaders of the Silla Dynasty.

Members of the order were taught dance, literature, arts and sciences; social etiquette, music and songs, and patriotic behaviour; they learned kindness, justice, courtesy, intelligence, and faith. The Hwa-Rang were well-rounded people.

But it is their military exploits and achievements which are remembered.

The preceding patterns have related to scholars, monks, religious figures and patriots. But Hwa-Rang is, above all, a *martial* pattern. "Never retreat in battle," states a line of the Code of the Hwa-Rang, and indeed, there is not a backward step evidenced in the pattern.

The courage and ferocity in battle of the Hwa-Rang is legendary, and this should be reflected in the facial expression of the practitioner while performing the pattern. A fire barely short of the berserk should show in the eyes. At the instant of the side piercing kick, movement 12, I even feel a feral grin is perhaps appropriate. ("Grab my arm, will you? *Bad* idea!")

Every technique in this pattern, without exception, should be executed with the utmost power the practitioner possesses. Any movement which travels forward - especially sliding motions - should emphasise the use of body mass adding to the power of the technique. Always forward. Never retreat. Be relentless.

### choong-moo tal

Choong-Moo was the name given to the great Admiral Yi Soon-Sin of the Lee Dynasty. He was reputed to have invented the first armoured battleship (Kobukson) in 1592, which is said to be the precursor of the present-day submarine. The pattern ends with a left hand attack to symbolise his regrettable death, having no chance to show his unrestrained potentiality, checked by the forced reservation of his loyalty to the king.



Admiral Yi Soon-Sin is remembered as one of the greatest naval leaders in history. His innovations in naval construction and tactics yielded him many victories against Japanese fleets - generally fleets which vastly outnumbered his own.

From 1592 to 1597, Admiral Yi wreaked havoc on the Japanese invasion navy. Eventually the Japanese realised that any successful invasion of Korea would first require the removal of the Korean Admiral. To this end they made use of a double-agent in the camp of a Korean general to discredit Yi in the eyes of the Korean king, Son-Jo. Based on information from the Japanese agent, the king gave Yi orders which the Admiral knew to be nonsensical, and which he refused to execute. For this seeming disloyalty, he was stripped of rank and demoted to a common infantryman.

His replacement promptly went out and got the Korean fleet annihilated.

The king reinstated Yi, who took the remaining dozen boats of the Korean navy and drove off a Japanese force over ten times the size, going on to attack an even larger fleet, killing its commander and forcing the other ships to flee.

The next year, in 1598, Yi was killed by a stray projectile while the combined Korean and Chinese fleets routed the Japanese once more.

I see the pattern divided into four parts.

The first and longest section represents the first five years of Admiral Yi's campaign against the Japanese. The facial expression should be confident and strong, the movements powerful. To evoke the maritime nature of Yi's life, sine-wave should be over-emphasised, bringing a feeling of swells and rolling decks to the pattern.

The jump of movement 19 seems a natural transition point to the next section, Yi's time in disgrace as a foot soldier. The feel of the pattern is no longer bold and triumphant, but resigned and obedient. Movements are slower, restrained, and sine wave should fade to a bare trace, highlighting the difference between the free ocean and the solid ground. Facial expression here is stoic and bland.

Movement 25, the first side kick of the "two salvo fire" (one of Yi's naval tactics) shows the Admiral once more in command. From the depressed section preceding, these kicks are once more *alive* and excited, this feeling continuing through the next three hand techniques.

We are told in the pattern meaning that the last movement symbolises Yi's death. While some may feel this a touch melodramatic, I see a slight jerk of the body following the rising block - the impact of the fatal projectile - with the final breath of the punch coming as more of a gasp, and the head lowered, eyes to the ground.

"In comparing various authors with one another, I have discovered that some of the gravest and latest writers have transcribed, word for word, from former works, without making acknowledgment." *Pliny the Elder, <u>Natural History</u>* 

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