

## Taekwon-Do Journey as a Korean

[Identity]

The most question I come across in my TKD journey is 'What is ITF Taekwon-Do?'. I was never tired answering this question over and over. Because I am a unique Korean training Taekwon-Do, which may sound normal but not when it comes to ITF Taekwon-Do.

International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) was developed from the form of Taekkyon and Karate, founded by Korean General Choi Hong-Hi in Seoul, 1955. President Park Chung-Hee and his fellow regime attempted to manipulate ITF as a spying tool to look over North Korea by utilizing dispatched demonstration team. However, General Choi's purpose was to expand Taekwon-Do to all over the globe. This conflict became political and President Park forced ITF to exit its origin country. General Choi, after deciding on a voluntary exile, relocated the headquarter to Toronto, Canada in 1972. The South Korea Government founded rival Taekwon-Do organization by changing techniques and syllabus including its own history, and named it World Taekwondo Federation (WTF). This was lead by Kim Un-Yong, who became the first president of WTF, inaugurated in 1973. Their plan of brainwashing whole Korea with the false history, that WTF is originated from Silla Dynasty, still continues on. Even though the country lost the valuable Art, WTF still regarded as powerful, scientific martial art in human history as ITF and attracts millions of people globally. Hence why information on ITF is very limited especially if you have grown up and were educated in Korea. South Korea Government's propaganda against ITF and continues to call it 'North Korean Taekwon-Do'. This was well timed with General Choi's Taekwon-Do introduction to North Korea in 1979. KCIA committed sabotage ITF under directions of Government even after the exile of ITF. This continued until the opposition rebel assassinated President Park.

Since from Primary school, students are expected to take extra curriculums outside the school in Korea. Since sometime, it seems everyone is to attend academic institutions to catch up with the school work, to play sport in order to keep the stamina up and to have creative art class for their creativity. This is because Korea's education system focuses only in high academic results due to strong competitive environment, hence why most students drop out all sporting/creative activities in order to focus on academic studies. Among many sports, Taekwon-Do is the most popular sport in Korea where many starts around age 7 – 10, but as mentioned above, not many continues especially after Intermediate school. For this reason many of my Korean friends and colleagues thought that I was doing what they thought was a "children's activity".

At the age of 10, I was in fear of body contacts, I refused to train Taekwon-Do and rather did calligraphy for couple of years. Interestingly, I found out that General Choi was also known as famous calligrapher and often give out his pieces as a gift to welcomers and visitors.

My Taekwon-Do journey took off when I was 20. Like most other Koreans, I also started with WTF. However, I wasn't very committed. Than one of my close friend, Kyokushin Karate trainer showed me a video clip of sparring match between Kick-boxer and 'North Korean Taekwon-Do'. This short low quality

video clip showed fierceness and powerful technique, which attracted me in one single run. I searched closest ITF club in my area and gave a visit on the next day for the session. I was determined to sign up for the membership in Glenfield Club after watching people training – and am still a proud member.

Studying the lost history mentioned above catalyzed me into the training as I made the progress towards to the black belt. This discipline built me who I am now and set my personal aspiration of what I wanted to achieve as a Korean. The philosophy that reflects human morality and dignity, technical materials and references based on scientific research, the historical idea behind this Art made my mind unshakable. There is possibility that Taekwon-Do could contribute in part of unification process and this was General Choi's dearest wish. There were a few Northern ITF / Southern WTF Taekwon-Do demonstration teams visited back and forth crossing the only ceasefire line left on earth. I may not be directly involved in this uncertain reunification process, but if my ambition could help current and future generations to build many stepping stones towards to it that eventually plays direct involvement, I would feel honorable as a Taekwon-Do trainer.

Going back to the questions I frequently get, I will never get tired of introducing ITF Taekwon-Do and its history. Sometime before, I used to introduce ITF TKD to my friends for several hours at a night out until they understand or get tired of listening.

#### [Discipline]

Starting all over from white belt was a beginning of big challenge. The vast theories and detailed scientific techniques made me realize that I was just starting a very serious martial art that was competitive with WTF. As I was only exposed to copying someone else's moves as best as I can then develop in my own way beyond, this well-built techniques engaged mind blowing experience and even until now still surprises me how well formed every single techniques are.

I had a chance to join ITF club in Seoul for 4 months. I tried to find the club of same organization that ITFNZ was affiliated to, but there were none. Unfortunately ITF has divided into 3 different organizations after General Choi passed away in 2002. In the 10 Million populated city there were only 2 ITF clubs which belonged to the other Organization based in North Korea. It is quiet uncommon to see some organization linked to the Northern neighbour. I assume it was able to survive because the recent change in regime aims for open-door policy towards to North, that the South Korea Government started to initiate from year 2000. Anti-Communism Law under South Korea National Security Act that came enforced since 1948 when the country was divided, still strictly prohibits any intended activity or suspicious behaviour supporting North Korea's regime/ideology. It was strengthened until 1980s then abated significantly. The club I visited was the organization linked to North. The instructor and people training there are local Korean people who pursue to learn martial art, no matter what their belief in political ideology. The instructor was also a certified WTF instructor. He was in charge of many different classes, filling whole week covering both ITF, and WTF styles. Even merged two styles together for inter-club tournaments. The most noticeable difference in adult class training programme is the lack of details and repetitive of fundamental exercises. Maybe the reason behind this is that the average Korean

personality is impatient preferring to progress in fast pace in almost everything. Although impatience might seem like a negative personality trait of Koreans, it's also what makes Korea so adaptable and responsive to the newest trends. The proof for this example is exponential economical growth from early 1960s to the late 90s, the post Korean War era. This characteristic affects negatively in learning process, where not focusing basics and mostly stick to only current level of syllabus. I used to crave for the faster progress towards the black belt, eager to obtain next grades as fast as I can, putting grading higher in priority rather than mastering technique itself to the level that I am confident of. There is no short cut for mastering techniques. Long term repetitive practice is the key and New Zealand has it well implicated to training programmes, especially always coming back to the basics and keeping it included in development loops. That's probably why all New Zealand black belts have done and still doing Cheon-Ji Tul thousand times, learning something out of it.

*"I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once,  
but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times."*

*-Bruce Lee-*

It is known that, Bruce Lee has developed and mastered his sidekick from early Taekwon-Do practitioner, since their tournament exchange in 1964. I do teach the importance of side piercing kick to all juniors and encourage them to become a master of it, because I believe everyone has potential ability to surpass the legend and create new legend.

Besides, terminology is the one I never thought that I would have trouble with, especially Korean terms. General Choi had to assemble words of body parts together to create terms used for attacking and defending tools, as there were no one clear single words available to describe best. All these terms were unfamiliar to me in first place so I had to learn like everyone else both in English and Korean. Even though there were only little advantages to me as being a native Korean, I still have to learn all the new terms I come across and recall histories back from what I've learned more than 15 years ago, at the age of 10-12.

[Aspiration]

As a Korean, I always feel it is pity that ITF is unrecognized among its origin people but at the same time as a New Zealander, I am the fortunate one. We have solid structured organization and committees since 1970s that made to become one of the strong, competitive country in ITF Taekwon-Do. I am proud to be a member of ITKD organization, hoping that ITF in New Zealand could introduce back what we have accomplished through many years of effort, if opportunity allows. Even if this re-initiation is achieved, placing firm root of Taekwon-Do to where it first grown would take several decades or maybe centuries as new Taekwon-Do generation replaces. On the other hand it could be the matter of time Korean people acknowledges ITF's true value, but cannot ignore current political barriers ITF is facing.

I may not witness my aspiration achieved in my lifetime but I still would be honored and feel achieved as if it's been accomplished, just by being one of the passionate Taekwon-Do-In.

The motto I created and make myself proud is 'The World's Best Martial Art ITF Taekwon-Do'.

(최고의 무도 ITF 태권도)

It is objectively unfair to judge which martial art is the best, as all other Arts have its own pros. It would be fair to say which martial art is best fit to you, best to enjoy throughout your lifetime. Referring back to the motivated video clip, now I understand that although the ITF competitor seemed invincible, it was that person who made hard efforts to get to that stage, not the martial art itself. It's totally up to me to prove my motto is correct. Winning some competition or getting someone out of trouble physical way will not prove it but it would be judged by the person who I am, how I conduct inside and outside the training area. The way I see the Art of Taekwon-Do is more about disciplining your inner nature; for example presenting who you are, figuring out ways to overcome difficult situations etc. thus the Art emphasizes its philosophy. These internal disciplines primarily will equip you with justice and wisdom to support yourself and help others. Physical discipline is the tool to search these potential abilities, as well as improves power and ability to apply skills into real situations.

Power without justice is violence, Justice without power is incompetence.

I believe my Taekwon-Do journey is still long way to the end, maybe there's no end but it's how far I can master until my time allows. I am hoping that this essay encourages new starters and future generations no matter what cultural backgrounds are, motivates to find the true value of their own and ultimately build a better world through the gift from General Choi.

### Bibliography

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