

A Study of Side Piercing Kicks and How Their Placement in the Patterns Reflects the Growth of a Taekwon-Do Student

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Introduction:

The Korean martial art of Taekwon-Do, as founded by General Choi Hong Hi in 1955, is an art set up to reflect the growth of its students. It well-known that General Choi borrowed heavily from Shotokan Karate, which he studied during his time in Japan, to create his own martial art. This is evident by the similarities of many Taekwon-Do techniques to their Shotokan Karate counterparts. In fact, any Taekwon-Do student looking at Shotokan Karate *kata*, Karate's equivalent of Taekwon-Do's patterns, will notice entire sections that are nearly identical to some of those within the Chang Hon patterns set. General Choi developed his 24 patterns with the help of some colleagues over many years, beginning with Pattern Hwarang in 1955 and finishing with Pattern Juche in the early 1980s (Anslow, 2013). Based on this information, it's not unreasonable to believe that General Choi took the Karate he had studied, slightly altered some of the techniques, mixed up the order they appeared, and called it Taekwon-Do. This is not true. Taekwon-Do is a well-developed and considered martial art, which caters to the Taekwon-Do student and their development over time. This can be demonstrated by tracing the use of the side piercing kick throughout the 24 patterns. The kicks begin at a basic level, for the lower level student, and as the student progresses through the ranks and their ability increases, the difficulty of the side piercing kicks also rises. The difficulty peaks, just as the physical ability of a student does, and subsequently tapers. This thesis explores this topic.

Side Piercing Kicks (Yopcha Jirugi):

As a martial art, Taekwon-Do is primarily known for its devastating and diverse range of kicking techniques. Perhaps the most common of these are side piercing kicks. Side piercing kicks can be performed in a number of different situations, including flying or on the ground, to the low, mid, or high section, as a mid-air kick, as a single, double, or triple kick, as part of a consecutive kick, combination kick, two direction kick, or performed with a twin foot. This is not an exhaustive list of how side piercing kicks can be delivered, which shows how prevalent the technique is. These techniques are ingrained in us by our instructors, every single lesson. We drill side piercing kicks during line work and it appears no fewer than 48 times across the 24 patterns. It is one of the most utilised sparring techniques by world champions, and can be considered the Taekwon-Do equivalent of a boxer's jab. Social media is brimming with *Taekwon-Do* "yopping", a colloquialism referring to posting a picture of the performer demonstrating a side piercing kick, usually taken in a picturesque or historically significant location. The side piercing kick is one of five techniques used during

the power test event and the flying high side piercing kick (*twimyo nopi yopcha jirugi*) is one of five techniques assessed during the special technique event at ITF World Championships.

The importance of the side piercing kick can be seen by its placement within the Encyclopaedia. It is the first technique mentioned in the Offensive Techniques (*Gong Gyok Gi*) section under the Foot Techniques (*Bal Gisool*) heading in the Condensed Encyclopaedia (Choi, 1999). As the name implies, a side piercing kick is a piercing kick. Piercing kicks (*cha jirugi*) are very similar to punches (*jirugi*), in that they focus on a small attacking tool¹ and arrive at the target in a revolving motion. The attacking tool is the footsword and targets include the temple, armpit, floating ribs, and neck artery. This kick is delivered in a straight line towards the target. Before executing this kick, the footsword of the kicking foot must be brought to the inner knee joint of the standing leg. At the kick's full extension, the kicking foot should be pointed down slightly. This helps to expose the footsword and ensure the line of power is going in the correct direction. The standing foot should be pivoted about 75 degrees towards the rear. In New Zealand, this technique is part of the syllabus for 8th gup and students are required to have knowledge of this technique in order to grade to 7th gup.

Side Piercing Kicks in Patterns:

In patterns, the side piercing kick first appears in Pattern Won-Hyo. In total, this technique appears in patterns 48 times. In fact, there are only five patterns in which the side piercing kick is not featured: These are Patterns Chon-Ji, Dan-Gun, Do-San, Toi-Gye, and Po-Eun, although *Po-Eun Tul* features a pressing kick (*noollo chagi*) which looks quite similar. Tracing side piercing kicks across all patterns shows an interesting trend. As the student learns more patterns, the side piercing kicks become increasingly difficult, both physically and mentally. This difficulty reaches a peak at Pattern Moon-Moo and the difficulty begins to taper off in the ensuing patterns. This is a reflection of the student's journey in Taekwon-Do: As they become more proficient, the side piercing kicks become more and more difficult. Once a student's physical ability begins to dip, so too does the difficulty of the side piercing kicks in the fifth and sixth degree patterns.

Pattern Won-Hyo

In Pattern Won-Hyo, both side piercing kicks are middle (*kaunde*) and are performed after first performing a bending ready stance A (*goburyo junbi sogi A*). Performing this preparatory stance first gives the student the chance to gather their balance and lower their centre of gravity before performing the side piercing kick.

Pattern Yul-Gok

¹ This is an example of concentration, one of the five subcategories of the Theory of Power. Big muscles, particularly around the hips and abdomen, are concentrated into the attacking tool, in this case the footsword, to increase the overall effect of the blow.

In Pattern Yul-Gok, the student also performs a bending ready stance A before the side piercing kicks but this time, the second bending ready stance A is performed while turning 180 degrees. This is more difficult and requires the student to focus on maintaining their balance.

Pattern Joong-Gun

In Pattern Joong-Gun, the two side piercing kicks are performed without first adopting a bending ready stance A. Instead the kicks are delivered using the rear foot from an L-stance (*niunja sogi*). This gives the student a chance to show they are pivoting correctly, on the ball of the foot. Also, it is important to ensure the footsword of the kicking foot passes close by the knee of the standing foot, as is one of the principles for a correct side piercing kick.

Pattern Hwarang

The next time a side piercing kick appears is in Pattern Hwarang. In this pattern the side piercing kick is performed using the front leg, again, without the preparatory bending ready stance A. It is performed as part of the releasing technique during movement 12². In the previous movement, the student moves the rear leg of their walking stance (*gunnun sogi*) towards their front leg and their hips become half facing. This allows for an easier transition to the side piercing kick, again ensuring that the kick passes through the correct preparatory phase. This is also the first time that students perform a side piercing kick, without simultaneously performing a high punch. Instead, their hands are pulled towards the opposite hip. The student must exercise caution not to over-rotate their hips.

Pattern Choong-Moo

The following pattern, *Choong-Moo Tul*, features four side piercing kicks and a spike in difficulty appropriate to the student who has reached the pinnacle of the coloured belt grades. The first side piercing kick is delivered after performing a bending ready stance A. Following the kick however, the student must recoil the kicking leg correctly, in order to maintain their balance, as they must then perform a knifehand guarding block (*sonkal daebi makgi*), facing the opposite direction to the direction they kicked. Directly following the knifehand guarding block, the student performs a flying side piercing kick (*twimyo yopcha jirugi*). Naturally, this is more difficult than performing side piercing kicks on the ground. The student must ensure they execute the kick while both feet are in the air. To help the student get the required momentum, they are allowed a single step. What makes this slightly more difficult, however, is that the student must maintain a half-facing position while taking that step. This means that the student is required to turn their hips completely in the air to correctly execute the flying side piercing kick. The last two kicks are during movements 25 and 26. They are performed one immediately following the other and allow the student a

² In the 1999 edition of the Condensed Encyclopaedia, the picture demonstrating this technique is of New Zealand's very own Master Paul McPhail (Choi, 1999, p.546).

chance to ensure they're pivoting correctly and sufficiently to deliver both kicks. This is the first time students come across a side piercing kick as part of a combination kick (*honhap chagi*).

Pattern Kwang-Gae

As the student reaches first degree, the difficulty rises again. In Pattern Kwang-Gae, the two side piercing kicks are performed after pressing kicks and without first putting the kicking foot down. This is the first appearance of a consecutive kick (*yonsok chagi*). Again, the student does not perform a high punch with the side piercing kick. Instead, the hands remain in the knifehand low front block (*sonkal najunde ap makgi*) from the previous technique. This also adds to the difficulty of the technique as the student must maintain balance without the use of their arms.

Pattern Ge-Baek

Pattern Ge-Baek has two side piercing kicks, with the first taking place after the student has performed a low stance reverse flat fingertip thrust (*nachuo so bandae opun sonkut tulgi*). Because of the length of the low stance, the side piercing kick has a long distance to travel. Students must also ensure the footsword of the kicking leg passes beside the inner knee joint of the standing leg. The student's hands are also pulled in the opposite direction to the kick, as in Pattern Hwarang. Because of all of these factors, maintaining balance and correct rotation of the hips is harder than one might be led to believe. The second is the only other appearance of a flying side piecing kick across all the patterns. Unlike Pattern Choong-Moo, the student is no longer allowed to take a step to gain momentum and must make a two-footed take off. They can use the momentum of the previous technique, however, a middle turning kick (*dollyo chagi*), to help them attain the needed height. In addition, the student no longer has to turn their hips in the air as they are already in a primed position.

Pattern Eui-Am

Building from the first side piercing kick in Pattern Ge-Baek, *Eui-Am Tul* now sees the student performing a side piercing kick from a sitting stance knifehand side strike (*annun so sonkal yop taerigi*). Unlike, Pattern Ge-Baek, the student now performs the side piercing kick from a side-facing position, rather than a full-facing one. This is much harder than the side piercing kick in the previous pattern, as the hips now have to travel about 180 degrees to deliver the technique, as opposed to only about 90 degrees. The student must be even more conscious not to over-rotate, or under-rotate the hips while executing this kick.

Pattern Choong-Jang

Pattern Choong-Jang reduces the difficulty of its sole side piercing kick, which is performed with the front leg after an L-stance knifehand guarding block, while pulling the hands in the opposite direction. This is perhaps to accommodate for the following technique, a rear foot stance twin palm pressing block (*dwitbal so sang sonbadak noollo makgi*), which is new to the student in this pattern.

Pattern Juche

In *Juche Tul*, perhaps the most dynamic pattern of all, there are four explicit side piercing kicks and one that is part of a flying two direction kick (*twimyo sangbang chagi*), all of which are extremely challenging. The first two are almost hidden, making it easy to forget that they are side piercing kicks at all. They are performed in slow motion before the student transitions into a slow motion high reverse hooking kick (*nopunde bandae dollyo gorochagi*), in a consecutive kick. The slow motion side piercing kick is performed middle and the hands remain in the outer forearm parallel block (*bakat palmok narani makgi*) from the previous movement. This is the first time students perform slow motion kicks in a pattern. Slow motion kicks are automatically more difficult than their normal motion counterparts as students cannot rely on momentum to perform the techniques. Instead they must utilise their own muscle strength, particularly the muscles surrounding the hips and core. The other problem students face with this technique, is that it gets overshadowed by the even more difficult high reverse hooking kick, immediately following the side piercing kick. Because many students focus too much on the high reverse hooking kick, they don't put enough focus on the side piercing kick. This can have the effect of making not only the initial side piercing kick look poor, but also makes the reverse hooking kick even more difficult as the student's body is not primed to perform the technique correctly. The next two side piercing kicks in Pattern Juche do not get any less challenging either. Like the first two, they are also performed as part of a consecutive kick, this time as the second part. They are delivered after the student performs a hooking kick (*golcho chagi*). The side piercing kick is performed to the high section (*nopunde*), a first for side piercing kicks to this point. Naturally high section kicks are more difficult than their middle and low section counterparts but what makes these kicks more difficult is the way students must manipulate their hips in order to execute the side piercing kicks. At the hooking kicks' point of impact, the student's hips are mostly front facing. The student must then rotate their hips against the direction of their momentum, in order to correctly deliver the side piercing kicks. This can only be achieved by utilising the muscles surrounding the core. *Juche Tul* crescendos with one of the most dynamic and physically demanding techniques across all the patterns, a flying two direction kick. The student simultaneously performs a twisting kick (*bituro chagi*) with their left foot and a side piercing kick with their right. To add to the difficulty, the student must land with both feet simultaneously into a diagonal stance twin palm rising block (*sasun so sang sonbadak choogyo makgi*). This requires a great deal of height in the jump and speed to deliver both kicks and then withdraw them in time to land correctly. The kicks in this pattern are certainly more difficult than what has come before and more physically demanding, in some cases, than what comes after.

Pattern Sam-II

In the patterns taught at third degree, the degree of physical difficulty decreases slightly, but the student is now introduced to a variety of new ways and situations in which side

piercing kicks are delivered. In Pattern Sam-II, both side piercing kicks are delivered while performing guarding blocks. The first is performed with a knifehand guarding block and the second is performed with a forearm guarding block (*palmok daebi makgi*). This is the first time the student throws such a side piercing kick. Even though these side piercing kicks appear similar, there are subtle differences which are important to highlight. The first side piercing kick is delivered using the front leg, after the student has performed an L-stance knifehand guarding block. In this situation, the hands remain in the knifehand guarding block from the previous position. After delivering the side piercing kick, the student lowers their kicking foot to their standing foot and performs a walking stance front elbow strike (*gunnun so ap palkup taerigi*) in the opposite direction. The second side piercing kick is performed using the left leg of the student's sitting stance W-shape block (*annun so san makgi*). Unlike the previous side piercing kick, the student must now form the guarding block, rather than maintaining it from the previous position. After delivering the kick, instead of stepping together as in the last kick, the student now lowers the kicking foot, pivoting into an L-stance knifehand low guarding block (*niunja so sonkal najunde daebi makgi*). Failure to step correctly will mean that the student will not finish on the same spot they started on.

Pattern Yoo-Sin

In Pattern Yoo-Sin, the two side piercing kicks are performed in a similar manner to those in *Sam-II Tul*, in that the student must simultaneously form a forearm guarding block. What makes these two side piercing kicks more difficult is that they are performed after a crescent kick (*golcho chagi*) in a consecutive kick. The student must maintain their balance. Unlike the hooking kick to side piercing kick consecutive kick in *Juche Tul*, this time the momentum of the crescent kick allows the student to flow into the following side piercing kick. The challenge here is to not allow over-rotation in the hips, which is an easy mistake to make.

Pattern Choi-Yong

Pattern Choi-Yong's four side piercing kicks are performed in two distinct styles, one very challenging and the other less-so. The first two side piercing kicks are again performed as the latter part of a consecutive kick, the initial technique being a high reverse hooking kick. The side piercing kick is also performed while pulling the hands in the opposite direction. The main reason students struggle with this technique is due to the momentum generated from the reverse hooking kick. To combat this, it is important to look at how the reverse hooking kick is delivered. General Choi states, "[The reverse hooking kick] has dual purposes; one is to kick, and the other to hook the opponent who moves in during the execution of kicking" (Choi, 1999, p.274). While the first purpose is appropriate for the other reverse hooking kicks in patterns, including movements 37 and 44 of this pattern, it is not appropriate for this consecutive kick. This is because if the reverse turning kick is delivered with a purpose to kick, the attacking tool must pass through the target, opening the hips

completely to generate as much power as possible in a horizontal direction. Once the hips are open, it is counter-productive to then draw the knee of the kicking leg in, towards the chest, to deliver the side piercing kick. It also makes little sense from a combat perspective, as after throwing the reverse hooking kick in such a way, the opponent will no longer be in a position for the side piercing kick to be effective. For this consecutive kick to be effective, the reverse turning kick must be thrown with a hooking purpose in mind. The difference is that instead of generating massive power by allowing the hips to open completely, the student emphasises the hooking motion, drawing the opponent in towards their body. Rather than a horizontal direction of power, the kick now has an inwards trajectory consistent with a pulling motion. The opponent is then in a more appropriate position for the student to deliver the following side piercing kick. In addition to this, the act of hooking the opponent draws in the student's centre of gravity, making it significantly easier to maintain balance. The other two side piercing kicks are significantly easier than the first two; however they aren't without their own challenges. They are performed from a bending ready stance A, for the first time since Pattern Choong-Moo. The main difference here is that they are performed while maintaining the forearm guarding block from the bending ready stance A. The real challenge is ensuring correct withdrawal of the kick in order to prepare for the following technique, a jumping x-stance backfist side strike (*twigi kyocha so dung joomuk yop taerigi*). If the side piercing kick is not performed correctly, the jump and x-stance will be unstable.

Pattern Yon-Gae

In Pattern Yon-Gae, there are two side piercing kicks and two mid-air kicks (*twio dolmyo chagi*). The two side piercing kicks are performed in the same fashion in both instances, although one on each side. They are performed as the second part of a combination kick. The first technique is a high reverse hooking kick and the following side piercing kick is also delivered to the high section. In addition to the height of the kick, the challenging part of this technique is the foot placement between the two kicks. After the reverse hooking kick, the student must lower their kicking foot, not on the centre line, but to the side of it. This forces the hips to maintain an almost side-facing position after the reverse hooking kick, then to execute the side piercing kick, the student must rotate their hips about 180 degrees. Because the standing foot of the kicking leg is not on the centre line, the student must ensure they move their centre of gravity off the centre line too. They do this by making sure the standing foot is directly underneath the student's hip. Failure to do this means the student will be prone to leaning over, making it impossible to maintain balance. Towards the end of the pattern, the student performs two mid-air kicks. Although the name is not very reflective of the technique, mid-air kicks are a flying side piercing with a rotation. They can be performed with 180 degree or 360 degree rotations. Across their four patterns appearances, the mid-air kicks are performed with 180 degree rotations in all cases. In the case of Pattern Yon-Gae, the mid-air kick is performed from an L-stance and, following the kick, the student performs a knifehand guarding block. As with all mid-air kicks, the most

difficult part is turning the hips enough to perform the technique. Under-rotation of the hips causes the technique to look like a flying back piercing kick (*twimyo dwitcha jirugi*) and over-rotation causes the body to make a V-shape, which is ineffective based on the principles of a side piercing kick.

Pattern Ul-Ji

Pattern Ul-Ji has only a single side piercing kick but it is performed in a unique way. Prior to the side piercing kick, the student performs a close stance twin side elbow strike (*moa so sang yop palkup tulgi*). Following this, the student steps their left foot in front of their right foot, landing in an x-stance, maintaining their hands as they were in the previous position. The student then performs a right side piercing kick, again, keeping their hands in the same position as before. In order to perform this correctly, the student must maintain a strong, straight back, or the technique will look poorly executed. *Ul-Ji Tul* also features a mid-air kick. Unlike the previous pattern, after the mid-air kick, the student now lands in a walking stance. This makes the movement slightly harder as the student must prepare to step into a comparatively longer stance as well as deal with all the other difficulties of this particular technique.

Pattern Moon-Moo

Pattern Moon-Moo contains the most difficult instances of side piercing kicks. They are also the only instances of double kicks (*i-jung chagi*) across all the patterns. The side piercing kicks are performed from a bending ready stance A, and delivered consecutively, without lowering the kicking leg. The first is performed in slow motion to the high section; the following is also delivered to the high section, this time in normal motion. This technique is incredibly difficult but, when performed correctly, is a magnificent sight. Not only does the student need to demonstrate excellent flexibility to reach the required height, they also need to show balance, strength, and stamina. This technique is so difficult because, in slow motion, even the smallest errors are easy to spot. In addition to this, Pattern Moon-Moo also features a mid-air kick. It is performed in a very similar fashion to those in *Yon-Gae Tul*. The technique begins and ends in an L-stance and the student deals with the same difficulties as those previously mentioned. It can be said that these movements are the embodiment of the student's entire training life, up to this point. This pattern is usually learned at fourth degree and General Choi considered fourth degree black belts to be experts in Taekwon-Do (Choi, 1999, p.726). This is certainly reflected in this pattern.

Pattern So-San

Pattern So-San contains four side piercing kicks. The first two are performed as part of consecutive kicks. Rather than being the latter part of the consecutive kick, like most other patterns, in this case, they are the initial part. Prior to the kick, the student performs a parallel stance twin knifehand horizontal strike (*narani so sang sonkal soopyong taerigi*).

The student then performs a high side piercing kick, keeping the hands as they were in the previous movement, before pivoting and performing a high turning kick in the opposite direction. In order to execute this properly, the student must maintain balance after the side piercing kick, in order to pivot for the turning kick. This can only be achieved by correctly withdrawing the side piercing kick to bring the student's centre of gravity close to their body. The following two side piercing kicks are performed as movements 63 and 69 of this very long pattern. Like the side piercing kicks towards the end of *Choi-Yong Tul*, these kicks are also performed from a bending ready stance A and delivered while maintaining the position of the hands as they were in the bending ready stance A. Unlike Pattern Choi-Yong however, these two kicks are executed to the high section.

Pattern Se-Jong

In Pattern Se-Jong, there is only a single instance of a side piercing kick. The student delivers the middle side piercing kick using the front leg of their L-stance twin forearm block (*niunja so sang palmok makgi*). What makes this technique interesting, however, is that the L-stance is performed towards A but the kick is executed towards D. This means the student must pivot 90 degrees before executing the kick. Directly following the kick, the student lowers the kicking foot towards D then performs their next technique towards F. This is mentally challenging for the student, as this is the first time they have come across such stepping in patterns.

Pattern Tong-II

The final pattern, *Tong-II Tul*, also contains only a single side piercing kick. Like in Pattern Se-Jong, this side piercing kick is delivered in a unique way. The student performs a high side piercing kick using the front leg of the walking stance from the previous technique. While the walking stance faces BD, the kick is executed toward D. Immediately following this, the student lowers the kicking leg to form a close stance twin side back elbow thrust (*moa so sang yopdwi palkup tulgi*). This is challenging because following the kick, the student must withdraw the kick and form a stance facing the same direction as they kicked. This goes against the direction of their momentum and therefore the student must demonstrate balance and strength in order to perform this movement correctly.

Conclusion

By following the instances of side piercing kicks across all 24 patterns, it becomes apparent that General Choi carefully considered and crafted Taekwon-Do in such a way as to reflect the student's progression over the course of their Taekwon-Do life. In the beginning, the side piercing kicks appear only after the student is given considerable preparation time. The difficulty slowly increases and increases until the student is also performing the kicks flying, as part of a combination kick, a consecutive kick, a two direction kick, a double kick, in slow

motion, and as mid-air kicks. Once hitting a physical and mental peak, the difficulty tapers off slightly to reflect the nature of the student's own physical ability.

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