

Yom Chi Taekwon-Do Association Presents



The Hwarang

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The Hwarang

6th DAN THESIS

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During the three kingdoms era, military personalities were among the well-known prominent national leaders. This society and philosophy of military orientation led to the development of military warrior groups, such as Koguryo's "chouisonin" of which the individual members were called "Sonbae", and the sixth century Silla warrior nobility group known as "Hwarang-do" of which the individual members were called Hwarang. During this era both of these groups adopted Subak training as one of their important learning subjects and both used the same organizational and hierarchical structure in their development. The best known translation for the name of Hwarang-do is; (Hwa) of flowering, (rang) youth, (do) way. The members of this group were also called other names such as, flower of youth corp, flower of knighthood, flowering knights, flowering youth, and flower boys. Even though this group was nick named "knights", the Hwarang movement had no similarities to the Knights of medieval Europe. Some believe the Hwarang and the Japanese samurai were similar, but the Hwarang movement pre-dates the samurai and did not have the political influence of the samurai. Also, Silla youth did not remain Hwarang for life, as did the Samurai, and they were not born into the group and its privileges. The Hwarang movement remains a unique spiritual and physical training that has never been duplicated in Korea or anywhere else in the world. The modern Tae kwon do hyung "Hwa-rang" is named after the movement.

Of the three ancient Korean kingdoms, Silla was the first formed, but during this era it remained the smallest and least civilized of the kingdoms. During this time, the two larger kingdoms, along with Japan, constantly attacked Silla, which at this time was known to be weak and disorganized. Since the coastline of the Silla Kingdom was constantly under attack by Japanese pirates, the Silla appealed to King Gwanggaeto, the 19th in the line of Koguryo's monarchs, for help against the continual attacks. Gwanggaeto sent a force of 50,000 soldiers into neighboring Silla to help the smaller kingdom drive out the pirates. During this time, the "Hwarang" youth military group developed.

Later when the kingdom of Koguryo became so strong that Silla was unable to defend itself, Silla saw the need for special warriors. Although it had an army, the soldiers were not of a high caliber, so through numerous battles, it could not defeat Koguryo or Paekche. During this time, King Chin-Hung (534-576 AD), the 24th Silla King, in his 37th year of reign, called up strong and patriotic youths throughout the country and formed a national youth military group called the "Hwarang-do." The problem he faced was how to find and evaluate high caliber aristocratic men for the group. One way to achieve this was to gather young men, teach them the higher levels of Buddhism, honor, and the arts, and then pick the exceptionally talented ones for the group. In the Hwa Rang Segi, also known as the Annals of the Hwarang, Kim Tae Mun states, "Ministers and loyal subjects shall be chosen from this group and good generals and brave soldiers will be born." As part of the plan to attempt to gather the

young men, two beautiful court women, Nammo and Chunjung, were selected to attract men around them. During this time the women were very successful in gathering a great number of men around them. The plan failed when jealousy between the two developed and Chunjung poisoned Nammo's wine, and threw her into a river, killing her. The royal court sentenced Chunjung to death as punishment for killing Nammo. After Chunjung was executed the group of men that had been gathered by the two women was disbanded. The next method of selection by King Chin-Hung's was to choose handsome male youths of noble birth, some as young as twelve years old. These youths were dressed in the finest clothing, their faces were attractively painted with elaborate make-up, and they were extensively instructed in Buddhism, poetry, and song. It was believed that those who did well in these activities had the grace to become competent warriors, so they were selected as Hwarang trainees. A young man by the name of Sor Won was the first to be selected for the Hwarang and was made a "kuk-son" also known as general.

The Hwarang-do began to develop and consisted of two primary groups: the leaders and the cadets. The "Hwarang" also known as leaders, were selected from among the sons of royalty between the ages of 16 and 20. The "Nangdo" also known as cadets, were assembled from the rest of the young nobility, totaling between 200 and 1000 at any given time. The sons of low ranking families were also allowed to participate and be members. However, not all Hwarang were men, some women served in the upper hierarchy. Each band of Hwarang was led by a woman known as "Won Hwa", also known as the "original flower" who acted as a mother figure to the young men and only engaged in combat when and if absolutely necessary. The Hwarang groups were organized as a clan or village with the basis of a fixed social structure. They learned traditional values through communal life and rites, and learned mutual understanding and friendship through military arts, poetry, and music. The young men were educated in many disciplines, to include history, Confucian philosophy, ethics, and horse riding. They were taught to use the sword, staff, hook, spear, and bow and arrow. They were extensively trained in archery both while mounted on horses, and un-mounted as well. They were also trained to have excellent swordsmanship, military tactics, and of course, in Subak. The martial art itself was taught but the Buddhist ideals of self-sacrifice, and compassion for the weak were also stressed. They were trained in the Buddhist doctrine of the Maitreyanna, Future or Messiah Buddha, sect. Many Buddhist priests, including the famed Won-hyo (617-686 AD), for whom the Tae kwon do hyung "Won-hyo" is named, were Hwarang during their youth. Other notable members were Kim Yu-Sin and Kim Chun-Chu, both of whom contributed to the unification of the three kingdoms of Korea.

The Hwarang groups were also well-trained in filial piety, loyalty to the kingdom, and sacrificial devotion

to society. The Hwarang-do was a philosophical and religious code followed by valiant warriors—not just a fighting style. In the beginning, the Hwarang primarily fought using Subak. They studied Subak as a systemized martial art at their learning houses and it gradually became popular among ordinary people. The Hwarang and their exploits were recorded in the Hwarang Segi, by the Eighth Century scholar Kim Tae-mun. Although this book did not survive to be a historical record, passages and synopses from it were recorded by Kim Pu-sik (1075-1151 AD), the Koryo historian said to have compiled the History of the Three Kingdoms, also known as the Samguk Sagi, in 1145 AD. The Hwarang were a group of warriors who were disciplined at an early age and trained to endure all types of weather and many hardships. As fighters and warriors, the Hwarang were legendary in history. The Hwarang further developed the art of Subak, which until then was primarily practiced as an art form. The addition of hand techniques, kicks, mental discipline, and other principles were implemented to develop and transform it into a useful combat skill. The Hwarang were well known for their extensive mountain running endurance training which gave them strong legs. As their leg muscles developed, they began to incorporate formalized kicking techniques into the art of Subak. The Hwarang developed a martial art system of foot fighting which was called Subak-gi, which is believed to be the beginning of the influence and initial source of the extensive number of kicking techniques used in the Korean martial art styles.

The Hwarang were well known on the Korean peninsula for their courage and skill in battle, gaining respect from even their bitterest foes. Their feats of valor were legendary. Many of these brave, young warriors died on fields of battle in the peak of their youth, some as young as fourteen or fifteen years of age.

From within the ranks of the Hwarang developed a dark and mysterious sect of fighters called the “Sulsa”. These warriors were specially trained, highly skilled fighters similar to the modern day Special Forces such as the Army’s Airborne, the Marine’s Recon, or the Navy Seals. These warriors were experts in trickery, diversion, killing, kidnapping and survival. They were specialists in the infiltration of enemy camps. The leaders of the Silla kingdom sent their Sulsa warriors into Koguryo and Paekche to integrate into their cultural and social environment. After being accepted into the society, the Sulsa would wait patiently for an order to carry out a predetermined mission.

The sulsa trained in two aspects of warfare to include, Jeong-do which is the practice in the way of the true sword. Rather than relying on deception, its strategy was to overwhelm the enemy. The second aspect is Am-ja, which is described in literature as the way of darkness. It specialized in trickery, diversion, deceit, stealth and camouflage to aide in the defeat of the enemy. Am-ja was subdivided into three studies. The first is Jham-bok-sul

which is defined as the study of camouflage, and its ability to assist in hiding for long periods of time. It focused on techniques of hiding by adapting and emerging the body and spirit into the environment until one achieves a balanced state where differences no longer exist and all things merge into one. The second is Jham-ip-sul, the study of infiltration and living amongst the enemy which included techniques in traveling swiftly, climbing, acrobatics, stealth, and camouflage were learned. The third was Shin-gong, mental power, Bok-shin-sul; power to read minds, In-sul, and the development of patience, Choe-myun-sul, which is putting a person to sleep, and Sa-sang-bop, the study of human types, and Bo-bop, the study of stalking, stealth, and fast movement.

Legend has it that the sulsa were able to walk on water and fly. These legends may be attributed the technique of Jham-soo-sul that allows a sulsa to survive under water for extended periods and to use boots containing large air sacks to walk on the water. The accounts of flying may be attributed the way sulsa would leap from tree to tree or rooftop to rooftop using ropes and special equipment. The sulsa believed that since they were involved in killing, they must also know about healing. Every sulsa studied herbal medicine and basic first aid, which was helpful to villagers as well as themselves. The sulsa wore whatever clothing that helped them blend into a particular culture. They also wore a black uniform similar to that worn by the ninja, except, instead of a hood, the sulsa wore a three foot by three foot piece of cloth on their head, which, when not being worn as camouflage, was used as a carrying bag.

Courage, self-sacrifice, and the steadfast ability to face death with reckless indifference were the foundation of Hwarang character. They searched for the basic principles of the universe and for man's connection to the whole. They worked for complete harmony, inner calmness, and resolution derived from certainty and balance. This philosophy was reflected in their list of nine virtues: humanity, honor, courtesy, knowledge, trust and friendship, kindness, wisdom, loyalty, and courage. Hwarang-do education based its guiding principles on the Five Codes of Human Conduct, a code of honor based on rigid loyalty to the nation, respect and obedience to one's parents, interminable loyalty to friends, courage in battle, and prudence and restraint on using violence. The code was created by the Buddhist scholar, Won Kwang Bopsa. Two young Hwarang warriors asked Won Kwang Bopsa for some commandments to guide men who could not embrace the secluded life of a monk. In response to their request Won Kwang Bopsa developed and taught the Hwarang warriors the principles of the five codes.

The Hwarang Five Codes of Human Conduct are as follows:

1. Loyalty to your country

2. Obedience to your parents
3. Trustworthiness to your friends
4. Courage to never to retreat from the enemy
5. Justice to never take a life without cause

The codes became a way of life for the young men and guided their moral behavior and the use to which they put their Subak training. The codes formed the philosophical background for modern Tae kwon do, which is reflected in the so-called Eleven Commandments of Tae kwon do. As with the original five codes, these modern axioms are used to guide the moral development of Tae kwon do students. Students must fully understand these tenets to master the true essence of Tae kwon do. The eleven axioms that were identified are listed below:

1. Loyalty to your country
2. Respect your parents
3. Faithfulness to your spouse
4. Respect your brothers and sisters
5. Loyalty to your friends
6. Respect your elders
7. Respect your teachers
8. Never take life unjustly
9. Indomitable spirit
10. Loyalty to your school
11. Finish what you begin

Due to the superb fighting skills of the Hwarang Warriors, Silla was victorious over Paekche in 668 AD and Koguryo in 670 AD, and the Hwarang leader, General Kim Yu-Sin, unified the three kingdoms. Following the unification of the three kingdoms, a time of relative peace followed, which led to a decline of the Hwarang as a military organization. Subak was popularized in Koguryo by the Sonbae and handed down to the Hwarang warrior group in Silla, as evidenced by the following; the word "Hwarang" in Silla had the same meaning as the word "Sonbae" in Koguryo. During their development, both the Hwarang and Sonbae had the same organizational and

hierarchical structure. In efforts to identify and select candidates by testing their skills, as well as training, both the Sonbae and Hwarang played Subak games at festivals. During Koguryo's initial stage of national foundation, the kingdom organized the Sonbae in its attempt to concentrate its power.

According to historians, the word Sonbae means "a man of virtue who never recoils from a fight." Sonbae warrior cadets were chosen at festivals called "sin-su-do," held during March and October. Special events that were used to select Sonbae cadets included archery, sword dancing, and Subak. The Subak competitions sometimes involved fighting in pits with wild animals. After the Sonbae were selected, they lived together in a group. The Chronicle of Old Joseon describes how the Sonbae immersed themselves in learning Subak, fencing, archery, riding, military tactics, and sometimes enjoying various games including Korean wrestling, which was known as Ssirum. The book also describes how that, during peacetime, the Sonbae wore the finest silk and devotedly guarded the kingdom, constructed roads and fortresses, and acted as teachers, all for the benefit of society. In wartime, they would organize and defend the kingdom with their strong willed bravery, always ready to sacrifice their lives for the nation. The Sonbae became legendary for their feats of bravery. The Koguryo government operated on a merit system where the best warriors were appointed to the highest positions.

Just as Sonbae in Koguryo competed in Subak games at the time of their national festivals, the Hwarang in Silla also played Subak games, such as "dokkyoni" and "taekkoni," at such festivals as "palkwanhoe" and "hankawi." During the dan-o festivals which took place on the 5th of May of the lunar calendar, the Subak competitions were held along with games of Korean wrestling, tug-of-war, and hopping contests. In the months of July and August, an annual national festival was held for the Hwarang to demonstrate their martial art skills. Another game of amusement was "doo-ho" a game of pitching arrows into a pot.

The famous Korean historian, Dr. Danjee Shin Chae Ho, in his writings of ancient Joseon, describes the contests of skill and courage under grueling conditions:

"Dancing with swords and certain water sports were held on the frozen river to test a contestant's courage and perseverance. Archery and Taekkyon contests were held to test skill and power. The winner of the hunt was given the title of son-Bi. All of the above were judged to be necessary prerequisites of the warriors, and the winners were held in esteem by all."

Dr. Danjee states further, that the art of Subak was eventually introduced to China as kwon bup and as a form of

Jujitsu to Japan. Although Subak first appeared in the Koguryo kingdom, the Hwarang-do is credited with the growth and spread of the art throughout Korea. A rich warrior culture, a martial art, a "do", never again replicated or practiced by any other society

The strength of the warrior, the warrior spirit, the code of the Hwarang, the tenets of Tae Kwon Do, the commandments of Tae Kwon Do, the relationships between the student and the instructor, all handed down through the generations, has been passed down to me.

