Historic Foundation of the Kwang Gae Pattern

William Antico
May 7, 2012

Within the world of Taekwondo, there are 24 different patterns, representing the 24 hours in the day. The first nine patterns have been written about extensively. I chose to investigate and write about the history behind the 10th pattern, Kwang Gae, which is the first black belt pattern.

What was the inspiration for the creation of this pattern that must be mastered in order to advance from 1st Degree Black Belt to 2nd Degree Black Belt?

General Choi Hong-Hi, regarded by many as the “Father of Taekwondo”, designed Kwang Gae. He did this to immortalize the legendary monarch King Gwanggaeto, who is considered to be one of Korea’s most important historical figures. His full posthumous name roughly translates as “Very Greatest King, Broad Expander of Territory, buried in Gukgangsang.” His accomplishments live on in each movement of the Kwang Gae pattern.

The Kwang Gae pattern consists of 39 movements, corresponding to the first two numbers in the year 391 AD, which is the year that King Gwanggaeto ascended to the throne. Born in 374, he was only 17 years old when he replaced his deceased father as king. His reign lasted 22 years, from 391-413. The movements of this pattern tell the story of the expansion and recovery of lost territories that occurred under his reign.
Throughout this time, there were three kingdoms in the Korean peninsula: Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. Goguryeo was the northern-most kingdom. Baekje was in the central part of the peninsula and Silla was in the south. Also sharing the southern peninsula was the Gaya confederacy, which would later be annexed by Silla. All three kingdoms shared similar, but distinct cultures and languages.

Baekje was the prominent power in Eastern Asia at the time of King Gwanggaeto’s birth. It established and maintained superiority over Goguryeo and a variety of southern Chinese dynasties. In a weakened state, the rulers of Goguryeo found it more effective to avoid conflict and to establish relationships with others. In this manner, they were able to avoid invasions and/or complete destruction.

When King Gwanggaeto came to power, he continued this isolationist non-threatening position with the neighboring kingdoms. However, during his first year, in power, he focused on improving and building up his naval fleet and retraining his cavalry. His goal was to reclaim lost territory and expand his sphere of control.

According to legend, in 392, King Gwanggaeto went on the attacked, personally commanding his troops in an extensive campaign to the south. The first attack was aimed at the Baekje Kingdom with 50,000 cavalry
troops. He captured 10 walled cities along the two dynasties mutual border, completely angering king Asin, who counter-attacked. Once again, he was soundly defeated. The attacks and counter-attacks continued, with the same results.

Soon, Baekje began to crumble politically, with Asin’s leadership ability clouded in doubt. The final straw came in 395, when King Gwanggaeto again attacked his neighbor. This time, he used his naval forces by sea and on the rivers. King Asin had been expecting a ground attack and was completely taken by surprise. He surrendered. In an attempt to bring about peace, but still remain in power, King Asin even handed over his own brother as a captive. King Gwanggaeto had finally overpowered his longtime rival, thus establishing superiority within the Korean peninsula.

King Gwanggaeto continued his mission by traveling north. He conquered Beili, a small portion of the Khitan Tribe in central Manchuria, also in 395.

During this time, Goguryeo was not immune to attacks by others. In 400, The Murong clan of the Xianbei (which is in the present-day province of Liaoning province in southeastern China) attacked Goguryeo. King Gwanggaeto swiftly counterattacked and regained all of his territory. More attacks followed in 402.

To protect his own kingdom from further threat from the north, King Gwanggaeto launched his own attack on Later Yang. In the same year, he defeated the Xiempei.
Invasions continued with the conquering of Liaodong in 408, resulting in domination of the entire peninsula. He also defeated tribes in Inner Mongolia, bringing these areas under his control.

This same year, he sent a peace delegation to GaoYun of northern Yang and a settlement was reached because GaoYun was a descendent of the Goguryeo royal house. Goguryeo held control of the Liaodong region until the Tang Dynasty took over the area until the late 7th century.

In 410, King Gwanggaeto began his conquest of Buyeo, which suffered a series of defeats in the face of the superior cavalry. King Gwanggaeto’s forces conquered 64 Walled cities and 1400 cities.
King Gwanggaeto focused on his domination of the Southern part of the peninsula once again. Around 400, the southernmost Korean kingdom, Silla, petitioned Gogoyera for protection from raids by Baekje, the Gaya Confederacy and the Japanese who were recruited by Baekje. King Gwanggaeto responded with 50,000 troops in the eventual defeat the attackers. He made all submit to his authority, thus unifying the three kingdoms of Korea. In 402, he returned the city of Silseng to Silla as a good faith peace gesture.

In addition to conquering and controlling 2/3 of the area that is present Korea and a large part of Manchuria, King Gwaggaeto impacted other cultures. Some Korean historians believe that his influence reached far north to such countries as India, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

He was at war, conquering new territories until his Death in 413. He was only 39 years old. He died of unknown causes.

His son King Jiangsu erected Gwanggaeto’s Stele, which is located in on the border of present day China and North Korea, in 414 to mark his grave. A Chinese scholar rediscovered it in 1875. The largest engraved stele in the world, Gwanggaeto’s monument retells his many accomplishments, providing a great amount of

Gwanggaeto Stele stands at nearly 7 meters.
information about his reign. It is also a source of controversy because of the mention of the presence of the Japanese in the Korean peninsula during that time period. This is a view widely rejected by Korean scholars.

King Gwanggaeto was a legendary force who left behind a legacy as a master of tactics. His conquests are said to have marked the high tide of Korean History. Never before has such a vast territory been controlled by a Korean Kingdom. By so doing, he is credited for elevating the Korean monarchs to the level of their Chinese counterparts. Gogoyara remained the dominant empire in the region for more than a century.

Koreans regard King Gwanggaeto, the Great as one of their most prominent heroes in history. The title “Great” was added to King Gwanggaeto’s name posthumously. This honor has been bestowed on only one other, King Sejong, the Great, who was the creator of the Korean alphabet.

Historic connections became apparent while researching this topic. I could not help but noticed the similarities inherent in numerous cultures throughout world history. The feudal caste system is one example. Such systems have been in existence since earliest known times. Practiced by numerous cultures throughout the world, it was also an important feature of most Asian cultures, including those of the Korean Peninsula.
In this area, becoming king was based on the Bone Rank System, with six ranks in the hierarchy. These ranks determined the destination of one’s role in society. Highest rank, or the Sacred Bone Rank, was comprised of members of the royal family. The 2nd rank, known as the True Bone Rank, consisted of Royal family members on one side, and noble family members on the other. The lowest rank, being commonest rank, was comprised of peasants who could not hold government positions and were not even mentioned in history.

Another historic similarity common among many cultures was the building of walled fortifications to enclose settlements and city-states as a means of protection from invaders. This practice dates back to pre-historic times throughout Europe and Asia. Native peoples in South America, Central America, and North America constructed walled defenses. In the United States, the pilgrims and later settlers built walled communities to protect themselves from the natives who inhabited the areas, as well as invaders from Europe. Native peoples, such as the Anasazi, used similar fortifications for protection from the south, as well as other tribes. In order to protect themselves, their culture, and their property from invaders, the ancient Koreans also built fortified walled settlements and city-states. Defense was the

Suwon, Korea
best protection. Of all the walled cities that were built in Korea’s history, Suwon is the only remaining. It is a popular tourist destination.

Throughout its history, Korea’s geography has presented a unique problem in terms of safety. As a peninsula, it provides easy access to its mainland by water on three sides. This has left the country vulnerable to such powerful neighbors as Japan and China, who both viewed Korea as valuable property from medieval times to more recent times.

Additionally, the mountainous terrain created its own barrier, hindering communication and travel between the settled areas of the peninsula. Individual kingdoms developed with their own unique beliefs, languages, and governments.

To me, this history behind the creation of Kwang Gae as the 10th Taekwondo pattern is fascinating. Each movement in the pattern created by General Choi Hong-Hi is representative of King Gwanggaeto’s grand conquests. Faced with the ever-present danger of domination or annihilation, he became the aggressor in a lifelong campaign of expansion. In so doing, he elevated his kingdom to a position of dominance in the Korean Peninsula and he secured his place in history as a cultural hero. With this knowledge, one can be reminded of these accomplishments while executing Kwang Gae, the 10th Taekwondo pattern.