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# Taekwondo

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Ancient Wisdom  
for the Modern Warrior

Doug Cook

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Boston, Mass. USA

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## Foreword

Following many years of diligence and hard work on the part of the World Taekwondo Federation under the direction of Dr. Un Yong Kim, taekwondo has finally gained recognition as a full-medal Olympic sport. This is a major accomplishment considering the high standards set by the International Olympic Committee. As a native Korean, I am particularly proud of this achievement since it characterizes the true nature of the taekwondo spirit. However, it is important to recall that first and foremost taekwondo is a uniquely Korean martial art, as well as a world sport, with roots that date back to antiquity. It is rich in tradition and espouses a philosophy that if approached with sincerity has the potential of enriching the practitioner's life in a variety of ways.

Primarily, taekwondo remains an effective means of self-defense. From the days of the Hwarang warriors of ancient Silla to the present it has consistently demonstrated its defensive value on the field of battle. Aside from its dynamic kicking techniques the art features a complete palette of hand strikes, arm locks and sweeps capable of disabling any assailant. In an effort to instill courage, the taekwondoist drills repeatedly in a series of controlled sparring techniques that strives to eliminate the fear associated with a physical confrontation. Moreover, through the application of the traditional forms, or poom-se, practitioners learn to defend themselves against opponents attacking from various directions thus cultivating agility, focus and strength. In addition, taekwondo has the ability to challenge the mind while nurturing the spirit through a ritual of disciplined practice; perseverance and patience are inculcated as the student moves through the ranks and develops advanced skills.

With the above in mind, it is essential, therefore, that we as martial artists look beyond the modern, competitive aspects of taekwondo in an effort to uncover the treasures that await through a holistic program of comprehensive training. In the past this has proven difficult at best given the scarcity of written material relating to the moral and philosophical components of the martial arts. Having personally authored several books on the subject, I have endeavored to map out the physical techniques of taekwondo in conjunction with their philosophical principles. Both students and colleagues alike have responded well to my

work by finding great value in its pages. Consequently, it now gives me great pleasure to look on as one of my students assumes the literary mantle in an effort to forge yet another link in the great chain of knowledge as it relates to taekwondo.

It is clear to me that Mr. Cook is very much devoted to the martial arts through his treatment of the material in this book. Rather than address the physical techniques of the art in a “how to” fashion, as so many have done before, he has chosen instead to juxtapose advanced concepts of taekwondo in parallel with a blueprint for their application in daily life. While reading his work, I have often reflected upon a question many people have inquired about: whether I have ever needed to use my defensive skills in a realistic setting. My reply is that I rely on my knowledge by interacting on a social level with people on a daily basis. Likewise, by embracing the lessons in this book, the martial artist will learn to apply their skill each and everyday in a benign and beneficial manner. The chapters relating to meditation, ki development and personal defense are particularly useful in propagating a greater sense of well being, while the historical sections will animate a past wrapped in conflict and valor.

Furthermore, as a certified black belt instructor Mr. Cook speaks with authority and conviction in describing the many facets of the martial arts. The experience he has gained over the years in establishing his school, the Chosun Taekwondo Academy, has added to his credibility both as a martial artist and a teacher. Truly, if one can teach a technique effectively, they can claim it as their own.

In a world where commercialism prevails, the practice of taekwondo is often misused as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement. Mr. Cook, while maintaining a successful environment in his school, has instead chosen to take the high road by providing his students with a curriculum steeped in tradition. His work here only serves to fortify his elevated approach to an art replete with virtue and wisdom. It is my sincere hope that this volume will act as a global reference guide for generations of taekwondo students to embrace, now and in the future.

*Grand Master Richard Chun  
9th Dan Black Belt  
United States Taekwondo Association*

## Preface

In my search for knowledge concerning the philosophical and traditional aspects of the martial arts, I have come across a wealth of printed material focusing on various techniques and theory, but very little regarding the practical application of our discipline in living daily life. This void is further compounded when a practitioner enters the martial arts at an advanced age. Many mature students to whom I've spoken share my desire to find documentation to help them find a way to incorporate dojang practices into daily activities. I recall reading a book during an early phase of my training that did address these issues. The emotions it elicited were heart warming to say the least, and fortified my resolve and commitment to the martial arts even further. It was comforting to know that I was not alone in pursuing an endeavor that many would consider a long and difficult road. Taekwondo, my discipline of choice, is built on a foundation of foot and hand techniques that requires the practitioner to develop, among other attributes, strong leg muscles and quick reflexes. Demands placed on the individual by the vigorous training methods can sometimes seem overwhelming, and any sympathy with this frustration is indeed welcome. It is my intention, then, to demonstrate my devotion to the martial arts by attempting to provide a volume worthy of consideration by the serious student.

In today's world, it can be said that a person's moral fiber can be measured by the manner in which they cope with the adversities life sets before them. The way in which the situation is approached and solved, relative to our anxiety, is a function of the ethical stamina we've gained through our life experience. I propose therefore, that diligent training in the martial arts, at whatever age, can prepare the individual to face the aforementioned adversities with the spirit and courage of a modern day warrior.

## Acknowledgments

There have been many people and places that have either directly or indirectly influenced this book in some way. It is important to me that I make mention of them here.

Grand Master Richard Chun for his untiring devotion to his many faithful students and to the martial art of taekwondo. Masters Samuel Mizrahi and Pablo Alejandro for their fine instruction and patience. Master Edmund Ciarfella for showing me the path in the first place. The student body of the Chosun Taekwondo Academy for their support. Hoyong Ahn for a great training experience in Korea. David Ripianzi at YMAA for making a dream come true. David Ganulin, my editor and fellow soulmate in the martial arts. Master Jou Tsung Hwa and Loretta Wollering of the Tai Chi Farm in Warwick, NY. Master Yang, Jwing Ming for allowing me to introduce myself. Ms. Johanna Masse of YMAA for answering my emails. John Jordan III and John D. Blomquist, Esq. for reading the drafts. My friends John and Irene Lord, for giving to our dojang. Jose at 1776 Coffee Shop, the Alpine Gourmet Coffee Shop. The Gingerbread House, Cape Hatteras, NC, my tranquil place. My Macintosh IIsi for putting up with my prose on those cold, early mornings. Starbucks coffee. Miss Wiener, my high school English teacher who brought life to my writing. Denny, Dave, and Dawn. Ian Turner Cook, an extraordinary martial artist. And, of course, two of the greatest people I have ever known, my parents, Roy and Joan Cook—the true warriors.



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## Richard Chun Taekwondo Center, Inc.

Dear Mr. Cook:

As your Grand Master and President of the United States Taekwondo Association, I congratulate you on the excellence of your book, *Warriors of a Different War...Taekwondo Tradition and Philosophy*.

Your work speaks with authority based not only on your outstanding qualifications as an instructor, but also with the authority of The Richard Chun Taekwondo Center and the United States Taekwondo Association since your school, The Chosun Taekwondo Academy, is fully accredited by us.

Furthermore, it is obvious to me that your deep devotion to taekwondo has contributed greatly to the value of your book. Those searching for the rich, underlying philosophy that lies within the martial arts, will do well to make this work a welcome addition to their taekwondo library.

I am delighted to write this letter of recommendation and wish you and your taekwondo center every success.

Sincerely yours,

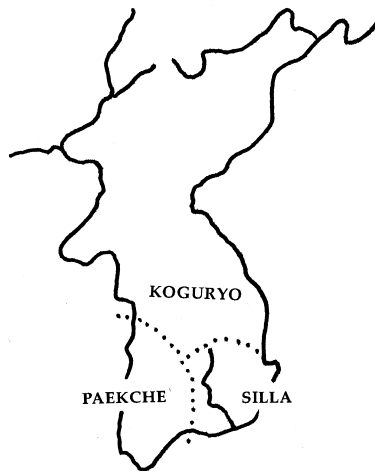
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Chun".

Grand Master Richard Chun  
9th dan black belt  
President  
USTA

# In the Shadow of the Hwarang

You are standing on the Kyongju plain in the ancient kingdom of Silla. The year is 669 A.D. In an effort to secure unification, war has been declared against the neighboring kingdoms of Paekche and Koguryo. All around a battle is raging and sounds of combat fill your ears. Without warning, a soldier on horseback bears down on you. His razor sharp sword gleams brightly in the midday sun. Subordinating all conscious thought, you execute a high, arching crescent kick. The charging animal is startled as the kick makes contact and the horse tumbles to the ground, pinning its rider beneath. Astonished at the potency of this technique, you think back on the endless sessions of intense training this kick took to develop. The gratitude you feel towards your instructor is reflected in a renewed burst of confidence. Safe, at least for the moment, you turn to see from which quarter danger approaches next. Later that night, if a stranger were to eavesdrop on the hushed conversation going on between comrades-in-arms, he might be surprised by the lack of boastful comments regarding those vanquished earlier that day on the field of battle. You and your allies are no ordinary soldiers. You are Hwarang warriors—patriots sworn to live by a strict code of honor.

The dawning of this golden age in Korean martial arts history can be traced back to the mid-seventh century. It was during this period that the tiny



Map of the Three Kingdoms.

Taekwondo—Ancient Wisdom for the Modern Warrior



Tong-II Jeon Palace is situated on the training fields of the Hwarang in what was once the ancient kingdom of Silla.

kingdom of Silla requested aid from neighboring Koguryo in defending its shorelines against the ravages of Japanese pirates. King Gwanggaeto responded by deploying an elite contingent of soldiers numbering 50,000 strong. The warriors brought with them knowledge of *kwonbop*, an advanced system of empty-hand fighting skills. These specialized techniques were, in turn, transmitted to the Sillian army in strict secrecy. In an attempt to increase internal stability, Silla, the smallest and most vulnerable of the three kingdoms, reorganized its government while consolidating its citizenry in answer to the nation's changing needs. This resulted in strong leadership and institutions that reflected the nationalistic spirit of the day. The Hwarang exemplified such an institution.

Founded under King Jin Heung, Hwarang-do or “the way of the flowering manhood,” represented a fraternity of Silla's noble elite composed of young people drawn from prestigious families. In addition to being trained in *kwonbop* and *subahk*, yet another native fighting style, the Hwarang were governed by the Five Codes of Human Conduct. These Five Codes served as a set of moral standards handed down by the Buddhist monk, Wonkwang Popsa, after he was approached by Kwisun and Chuhang, two Hwarang warriors seeking ethical guidance. Among these tenets were those emphasizing loyalty to one's country, the demonstration of respect towards elders, and restraint against the wanton spilling of blood in battle. In an effort to satisfy their spiritual as well as their martial needs, the young warriors of the Hwarang



The mission of the Hwarang Educational Institute, built in 1973, is to develop the spirit of the Hwarang in today's Korean students.

also studied a mixture of music, dance, poetry, and philosophy.

Both Sillian culture and Hwarang-do were heavily influenced by the three major Eastern philosophical paradigms of the day. From the teachings of Confucianism came devotion to state and family, from Buddhism, a heightened sense of commitment to the common good, and from Taoism, belief in the harmonious balance of nature. Originally, divine worship was never intended to play any part in these philosophies-turned-religions. Rather, they were viewed as a path to self-enlightenment or, in the case of Confucianism, a blueprint for ethical behavior. Therefore, by fusing the secret techniques of kwonbop and sub-ahk together with the above principles, Silla's warrior elite was unwittingly setting the stage for a single, cohesive martial philosophy that would endure throughout the centuries. The Korean martial art, taekwondo, as we know it today, is a direct descendant of this rich heritage. Moreover, the ethical standards endemic in its teachings stem from the Hwarang Code of Honor. Shrines and temples still exist that overlook the great expanse of the Kyongju plain, dedicated to the legendary courage and stunning victories of the Hwarang.

Proficiency in the martial arts proved a valuable asset to those living in the seventh century on what would later become the Korean peninsula. But political and geographical considerations have evolved dramatically over the years. Clearly, the martial arts of today are vastly different from those practiced by the Hwarang warriors of the past both in form and spirit. Historically, these styles of empty-hand combat were instituted as a means of unarmed self-defense by those unable to acquire weaponry due to tribal economics or social standing. In all probability, these arts held little philosophical value other than that found in the pride of victory, or the humiliation of defeat.

It was not until the time of Wonkwang Popsa and the Zen patriarch Bodhidharma that a spiritual and ethical tradition began to flourish and permeate the underpinnings of martial philosophy establishing both a virtuous response to threat and a 'way' or 'path' towards superior living. Once imbued in the warrior's structure of thinking, however, it was only a matter of time (albeit centuries) before these elements would cause what was once exclusively battlefield tactics to evolve into the martial

arts we are familiar with today. This leads us to the principle question around which this work revolves: What possible benefit can a study of the martial arts, with taekwondo leading the way, offer in a world where we are no longer burdened by the threat of hand-to-hand combat on a daily basis? In order to give this question the proper attention it deserves, we will first examine the history and tradition of taekwondo, determine its definition, and later analyze the physical, psychological, and spiritual promise it holds for the modern day warrior. Let us begin our journey, then, at a most unlikely place—a walk through the fateful shadow cast by the deeds and actions of the noble Hwarang.

Looking back, the period between 660 and 935 A.D. epitomized a true renaissance in Korean societal history. Hwarang-do continued to prosper under Silla's united, highly civilized culture. Maritime trade flourished with Korean ships ruling the waves. The arts and education thrived. State sponsorship of Buddhism resulted in a free exchange of thoughts and ideas between Sillian clerics and their Chinese counterparts. Monasteries were constructed, and a general sense of social consciousness pervaded the country with its rulers effectively leading by example. During this time *taekkyon*, an indigenous martial art featuring circular kicks, enjoyed popular acceptance by the citizenry with demonstrations being performed at festivals and government functions. Students and military personnel were taught the martial arts at specialized training centers located high in the mountains. Much of the prosperity enjoyed during this period has been attributed to the Hwarang who, through indomitable spirit, were responsible for maintaining a strong Korean identity. Even so, by the start of the tenth century, Sillian power began to wane.

It is sometimes difficult to imagine what sociopolitical dynamic would cause a culture as vibrant as Silla's to diminish in stature and eventually dissolve. In truth, the causes were not very distant from those faced by many contemporary societies. Disparity between classes, increasing taxation, and external political pressures all contributed to a shift in government. In what was perhaps the first example of a controlled transfer of power in Asian history, King T'aejo assumed leadership of the

self-named Koryo dynasty, establishing its capital in Sondong. The years between 918 and 1391 A.D. saw many changes in the fabric of Korean society. Although undue taxation was eliminated and a high level of education maintained, the Koryo population suffered many hardships at the hands of the marauding Japanese and Mongol forces, pushing the nation's spirit and defenses to the limit. During this period, gunpowder and other forms of advanced weaponry made an appearance on the field of battle resulting in what was to become a gradual decline in the practical application of the martial arts. Still, the Koryo kings used the native disciplines of subahk and taekkyon as forms of entertainment during state rituals and sporting events. However, the repeated attacks by Japanese pirates and roving bands of Mongols finally took their toll during the latter part of the fourteenth century, destabilizing the government to the point of dissolution.

It was during this period that General Yi-Song Gye stepped in to take control over the disheartened nation. He established the longest surviving government in Korean history. From 1392 to 1910 A.D., the Yi dynasty distinguished itself under the leadership of King Sejong, by creating the Hangeul alphabet in 1443—a set of phonetic characters still in use and the pride of the Korean people. Through the use of this alphabet, education evolved even further by allowing the publication of many classical works. Mirrored by a disenchantment with Buddhist beliefs, Confucian ideology had become firmly ensconced in Yi culture as reflected by a strict adherence to literal art rather than those of martial origin. Concerned more with struggles for power, the prevailing leadership allowed the practice of taekkyon and subahk to diminish.

The full effect of this trend would not be felt until 1592 when Japanese forces launched a massive attack against China, using the Korean peninsula, known then as Chosun, as a stepping stone in the process. Essentially defenseless, the population managed not only to survive, but triumph by drawing on the talents of guerrilla units that had been secretly trained in the martial arts at monasteries and estates throughout the region. Out of this conflict came the heroic Admiral Yi, a strategist of unsurpassed proportions whose radical approach to naval warfare

played a major role in permitting Chosun to remain independent. Furthermore, the royal government, realizing the error of its ways, began once again to support the martial arts and bolster defenses.

One remaining artifact of this renewal is a volume entitled the *Muyedobo-Tongji*, a text illustrating martial arts techniques fully resembling those practiced today in taekwondo. Nevertheless, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found yet another suppression of the martial arts, this time officially sanctioned. Intellectual activities were on the rise, accompanied by the introduction of Christianity. Japan continued its fight for the Korean peninsula, battling first with China and then Russia for dominance over the strategically important nation. Finally, in 1910, after centuries of hostilities, the formal annexation of Korea took place effectively bringing an end to the five hundred-year-old Yi (Chosun) dynasty, and placing the nation under Japanese imperial rule.

During this darkest of times, the Japanese forces attempted to eradicate all vestiges of Korean culture by closing schools, destroying historical documents, and curtailing all practice of the martial arts. Fearing reprisal by their tormentors, many of the original masters of the martial arts went underground after witnessing the persecution and execution of their brethren. Some chose to go into exile, traveling to China or America. Others, forced to serve out the war working in Japan, continued in the martial arts by studying *karatedo*. Fortunately, the spirit of the Korean martial arts was kept alive by rebels training in ancient monasteries and villages scattered throughout the stricken country.

Following the ravages of the Second World War and later the Korean conflict, the nation finally gained its long sought independence from the Japanese and Chinese aggressors. Korean masters returning to their native land once again began to practice the martial arts forbidden by law under the Japanese occupation. In an effort to restore a national identity, the various *kwans*, or martial arts schools, began negotiations in April of 1955 aimed at uniting their styles under a single banner that would eventually come to be known as taekwondo. Since that time, the Asian martial arts have become a combined source of



mystery and curiosity in the minds of many Westerners. American military personnel returning from battle-torn Korea brought with them tales describing unarmed fighting arts in sharp contrast to the pugilistic sporting styles familiar to those back home.

As legend had it, masters of diminutive stature would send brawny servicemen flying through the air with a simple twist of the hips. Others, it was claimed, endowed with a secret knowledge of mind over matter, could kill with a single, well-placed blow. Some veterans who wished to continue their training after gaining proficiency in the martial arts overseas, acted as sponsors in obtaining American citizenship for their Asian mentors. Aside from a show of gratitude and respect, this action was undoubtedly motivated by the realization that there were very few teachers in the United States at the time capable of offering quality instruction. Original taekwondo pioneers such as Richard Chun, Henry Cho, and Jhoon Rhee continue to leave their mark on the martial arts community. Consequently, it was not long before schools began to spring up—first on the West Coast and then in major cities across the nation. Even suburbia, no longer immune to what can only be characterized as an explosive growth curve, boasts an abundance of training halls located in the ubiquitous strip malls and shopping centers.

In the distant past, many of the Asian martial arts were considered secret weapons by the family, tribe, or nation by which they were developed. Clearly, this is no longer the case. With differing styles jockeying for legitimacy and the recognition of taekwondo by the International Olympic Committee, what began as a system of self-defense in the 1950's has matured into a \$1.5 billion American industry. Although this trend has spurred heated controversy in certain circles given the traditional values associated with the martial arts, one cannot deny the impact it has had on making instruction more accessible to the masses.

This is particularly evident in the case of taekwondo where the flicker of hope that existed in post-war Korea eventually ignited an intense flame of interest in a portion of the general public inclined towards a study of the martial arts. This acceptance was partially driven by the high standardization of various

techniques and forms unique to the Korean martial art. Organizations such as the World Taekwondo Federation under the direction of Dr. Un Yong Kim, the United States Taekwondo Association founded by Grand Master Richard Chun, and the International Taekwondo Federation headed by General Choi Hong Hi, have been responsible for blending these techniques into a cohesive curriculum that has made taekwondo the fastest growing martial art in the world today.

Literally translated, taekwondo is defined as ‘foot-hand way,’ or the art of smashing with hands and feet. These translations, while direct, are incomplete at best since they only hint at the myriad of moral and ethical benefits associated with this noble, Korean discipline. For decades taekwondo has been the perfect vehicle for cultivating inner strength, extraordinary endurance, and an effective arsenal of defensive skills. In its current iteration it can be thought of as a direct reflection of modern society’s desire for a ritualized discipline devoid of religious dogma, but complete with both physically and spiritually enhanced sets of ethical principles by which to live. Beyond this, as the reader will soon come to realize, lies a universe filled with intangibles relating to the very essence of the art. For one, taekwondo has a proclivity for transforming even the most cynical man or woman into a spiritually enlightened person displaying a renewed passion for life. This seemingly impossible task is accomplished by constantly reminding the practitioner of their self-worth and unique place in the cosmic scheme of events.

Because we are living in a world of sometimes overwhelming proportions, technology, financial obligations, even the size of the buildings in which we live and work, can result in a feeling of insignificance. Therefore, by shunning conformity in the name of art, taekwondo allows room for personal expression beckoning the student to cultivate self-esteem through individuality. Moreover, taekwondo is an empowering art. It is a holistic method for nurturing internal strength by way of acquired skill. By this standard, the more frequently one trains and becomes proficient in the martial arts, the more one realizes they have less to defend against. Confidence begins to replace fear. Defensive skills become ingrained, resulting in one’s ability to walk life’s path appreciating its simple pleasures rather than being blinded

by its daily perils. Therefore, contemporary taekwondo, taught in a traditional manner, is not merely about physical enhancement (although that will occur naturally over time), but about spiritual fulfillment—the goal of which is to clear a path in preparation for the martial artist to embrace the virtues and rewards life has to offer.

The emotional wars the modern day warrior must face on a daily basis are most likely very different from those fought by the Hwarang. While many of the physical techniques have remained intact, the weaponry and protagonists, being of a starkly dissimilar nature, have radically changed over time requiring an improved suit of armor. This garment must be woven with the threads of self-esteem, the leather of confidence, and the metal of perseverance. Traditional taekwondo, as the reader shall discover, if practiced with diligence and sincerity, is certain to provide the raw materials necessary to construct just such a suit of armor.

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## About the Author

Doug Cook holds a third degree black belt in the Korean martial art of taekwondo, and is certified as an instructor by the United States Taekwondo Association and World Taekwondo Federation. After training twice in Korea, he went on to become a five-time gold medalist in the New York State Championships and the New York State Governor's cup competitions. He holds a D3 status as a U.S. referee and has received high honors from Korea in the form of a "Letter of Appreciation" presented by Grand Master Richard Chun, and signed by World Taekwondo Federation president, Dr. Un Yong Kim.



The author and his students are credited with the creation of the Chosun Women's Self-Defense Course—an effective workshop geared towards women of all ages, generally offered to corporate or civic groups as a community service. Recently, in response to a request for training from the U.S. Army National Guard/42nd Division, the author developed the Chosun Military Self-Defense course.

The author is a self-described traditionalist and places great emphasis on the underlying philosophical principles surrounding taekwondo. He demonstrates this belief by infusing meditation, breathing exercises, strong basic skills, and attention to the classic forms in his instruction.

Aside from continuing his martial arts education in New York City under the tutelage of world-renowned, ninth degree black belt, Grand Master Richard Chun, the author owns and operates the Chosun Taekwondo Academy located in Warwick, New York. The academy specializes in traditional instruction and internal energy development.

The author currently shares his knowledge of taekwondo through a series of articles he has written for *Black Belt* and other martial arts magazines. He is editor of the *United States Taekwondo Association Journal*.

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