

History of the Hwa-Rang

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Hwa-Rang was the name of a national institute, which trained its youth for times of national need.

Chinese contact with Korea began during the Qui Dynasty (221-206 B.C); Chinese military colonies were placed on the northern Korean peninsula. From this, the Korean peninsula was led into a period of advancement in agriculture, science and a formalised government.

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were all introduced from China.

Confucianism – Be filial to ones parents and loyal to ones sovereign

Taoism – Be at home in the action of inaction and practice the wordless doctrine

Buddhism – Avoid evil and do many good deeds

It was due to these advancements in civilisation and also growing individual tribal unities that the three kingdoms were formed: Paekche (18 B.C), Koguryo (37 B.C), Silla (57 B.C). This was the beginning of the “three Kingdom period” in Korean history.

During the sixth century A.D these three Kingdoms of Korea entered into a period of continued war against each other and the Tang Dynasty of China. This warring period instigated the first group of formally trained soldiers who utilised Kinetic energy (energy of movement) for other than medical purposes. This group were known as the Hwa-Rang warriors. The translation for Hwa-Rang is flowering Youth, the group were also known as the Flower Knights.

The Hwa-Rang warriors were organised by King Chin-Hung of the Kingdom of Silla in A.D 576.

Although the Silla Kingdom already had an army, its soldiers were of limited ability and were unable to defeat their geographical neighbours Koguryo, Paekche and the Tang Chinese, in a number of conflicts. When Koguryo became so strong that Silla was unable to defend itself, Silla saw the need for special warriors. This motivated King Chin-Hung to set about organising a group of young noblemen who were loyal to the throne. This group were to be trained in all forms of warfare to go successfully into battle.

Young males of noble birth were gathered together, some as young as 12 years. They were instructed extensively in Buddhism, medicine and the theory of Ki. They were also taught poetry, music, mathematics, writing, social etiquette and patriotic behaviour. It was believed that those who fared well in these activities had the divine grace to become superior warriors. Those who excelled were recommended to enter the ranks of the Hwa-Rang.

These young men were then trained in all forms of martial combat. This included military tactics, kicking, punching, joint manipulation, throwing, break falling, acrobatics, grappling, pressure point attacks, horsemanship and weapons. They were also taught traditional medicine, which involved treatment of the injuries they might sustain in combat or training. This included bone setting, acupressure and herbal remedies. They also received advanced Ki training from Buddhist monks who had refined their knowledge of Ki through years of meditation. Their meditative practices gave them mental powers that would be considered incredible by today’s standards; they could withstand extreme pain and perform feats of mind over matter.

This advanced Ki training taught the Hwa-Rang how to channel Ki energy, internally to strengthen their bodies against the fierce Korean climate, and externally to become more powerful warriors in battle.

To harden their bodies, they climbed rugged mountains, swam in turbulent rivers during the coldest months, and drove themselves unmercifully to prepare for the task of defending their homeland.

The Hwa-Rang were taught the art of Su Bak, the martial art itself was taught but the Buddhist ideals of self-sacrifice and compassion for the weak were also stressed.

Su Bak is the first documented martial art system to have existed on the Korean peninsula. The date of its origin relies predominantly on legend; historians believe Su Bak originated during the legendary rule of King Tan-Gun (2333 B.C). There is, however, no historical data to prove this. Paintings in the Kak Je tomb, geographically located in ancient Koguryo, depict two Su Bak practitioners sparring.

The Hwa-Rang also played Subak games, such as Dokkyoni and Taekkoni at festivals. Subak competitions were held along with Korean wrestling, tug-of-war and hopping contests. An annual festival was held in July and August for the Hwa-Rang to demonstrate their skills. They further developed Subak, which was until then practiced primarily as an art form, by adding hand techniques, kicks, mental discipline, to transform it into a useful combat skill. Their mountain running training gave them strong leg muscles so they began to incorporate formalised kicking techniques into Subak. They developed a martial art system of foot fighting called Subak-gi, this is believed to be the initial source of the extensive number of kicking techniques used in Korean martial arts.

To guide themselves they incorporated a code of conduct set out by the Buddhist Monk and Scholar, Won Kang Beopsa.

Its tenets are still of fundamental value to the modern day Martial Artist.

1. Loyalty to the King – Sa Koon Yi Choong

The King could be interpreted as your Instructor, or the School or Association you belong to. The student must never forget, be disloyal to or take for granted those who have helped them along the way to achieving their goals in their Taekwon-do career.

2. Respect to Parents and Elders – Sa Chin Yi Hyo

It should be self evident that one should respect their parents and elders, whether a martial artist or not. Inside the Do-Jang respect is paramount to the development of students, without this Taekwon-do becomes just a form of physical exercise.

3. Trustworthiness among Friends – Kyo Woo Yi Shin

By demonstrating this quality, even under difficult circumstances the Taekwon-do students wins the respect of his peers.

4. Never Retreat in Battle – Imam Jon Moo Ta

To the modern Taekwon-do student this could be interpreted as having the courage and perseverance to achieve one's goals. To never give up the pursuit of these goals no matter what obstacles are thrown in your way.

5. Do not take a Life Unjustly – Sal Saeng Yoo Taek

The Taekwon-do student must demonstrate integrity and never abuse their skills. The Instructor must teach students to avoid confrontation if possible and only use their skills in extreme circumstances.

The Hwa-Rang was the first group of trained warriors to ever to possess a spiritual attitude towards warfare. The Chinese focus was on the Confucian concept of political loyalty and not refined spirituality, as Korean Buddhism taught. Some believe the Japanese Samurai were similar to the Hwa-Rang; the Hwa-Rang movement pre-dates the Samurai and did not have the political influence of the Samurai. The Samurai were born into its group and its privileges, and remained so for life, this was not true of the Hwa-Rang.

The functions the Hwa Rang were supposed to fill

Lead others in Hwa Rang groups.

1. Teach its members about brave soldiers and dutiful subjects.
2. Teach P'ungwolto. (The modern translation of P'ungwolto is, a poet who delights in the beauty of nature and scenery).

Fight in the front line in wars, to set an example to the regular army.

Enhance the fortunes of the Kingdom.

The three scholar occupations

1. Royal Tutor
2. Instructor
3. Teacher

The six ways to serve the government

1. Holy Minister
2. Good Minister
3. Loyal Minister
4. Wise Minister
5. Virtuous Minister
6. Honest Minister

Be able ministers and loyal subjects

Be good generals and brave soldiers

Make sure that

1. The people respected their seniors
2. The people were gentle with their inferiors

Once a Hwa-Rang was fully trained, he was put in command of a military troop of 300 to 5000 young men. These "Student-Disciples" were called Rang-do, which means "disciples of the Hwa-Rang."

The battles won by the Hwa-Rang brought about the unification of the three Kingdoms of Korea.

In the 10th century a Hwa-Rang General named Wanggum gained control of the country and renamed it Koryo, this lasted until the 14th century. During this time the Hwa-Rang institution became fragmented and continued under different titles such as, Kuk So Do and Pung Wol Do.

In the 14th century another Hwa-Rang General named Yi Sung Gye overthrew the Koryo Kingdom, and the new country of Chosun established, this was the beginning of the Yi Dynasty. It was during this time that the Martial Arts fell into decline. The third King of Chosun, King Taejong felt threatened by the existence of the Hwa-Rang because he knew that they had overthrown two preceding Kings. He declared all Hwa-Rang bands must fall under the direct control of the central government, stripping them of independent control. He went on to establish Confucianism as the state religion.

Confucianism had a lot to do with the decline of the Martial Arts because soldiers were not considered part of society. Confucianism places great emphasis on academic learning, and traditionally ranks people in its society on four levels; Scholars, Peasants, Artisans and Merchants.

The Hwa-Rang who wouldn't follow King Taejong's decree fled to remote places and lived their lives like wandering hermits. They devoted themselves to passing on their knowledge of religion, healing techniques and combat skills to only a select few.

The government still maintained a combat skills tradition to protect the country. However, Hwa-Rang skills were passed on only in secret, from master to student. Many masters did not find students worthy of this knowledge and took their wisdom to the grave. This resulted in the disappearance of a great deal of the Hwa-Rang combat skills. This was the beginning of the end of Korea's golden age.

The poem by Siro captures the emotions and sense of loss felt by many Koreans towards the lost glory days of the Hwa-Rang warriors.

All men sorrow and lament

Over the spring that is past;

Your face once bright and fair,

Where has it gone with deep furrows?

I must glimpse you,

Even for an awesome moment.

My fervent mind cannot rest at night,

In the hollow rank with mugwort.

(Mugwort refers to the tomb of the Hwa-Rang warrior, whose passing, along with the greatness of his Hwa-Rang brothers, is lamented by the poet.)

Legends of the Hwa-Rang

There are many famous stories eulogised by Hwa-Rang literature, one famous story is the martyrdom of Kwang Chang who was the son of General P'umil and a Hwa-Rang commander at the age of 16. General P'umil later died in the unification wars.

Kwang Chang was captured during a battle with Paekche, as he was a General's son he was taken before the Paekche General. Taken aback by Kwang Chang's young age the Paekche General released him to return to the Silla lines. Kwang Chang asked his father to send him back into battle at the head of his men, General P'umil agreed. After a day long battle he was captured and disarmed, he broke loose from the guards killing both of them by hand. He then attacked the Paekche general's second in command, killing him with a spinning heel kick as he sat on his horse. Eventually he was subdued and taken before the Paekche General. Distressed over the loss of his chief commander the Paekche General had him executed and his head returned to the Silla lines attached to the saddle of his horse. At the Silla line, General P'umil grasped his son's head and said, " he was able to die in the service of the King, there is nothing to regret."

Another story tells of a 15 year old named Sa Da Ham. Although he was very young, King Chin Hung allowed him to lead the first attack in the war with the Northern Kingdoms. Sa Da Ham led his army to victory and was rewarded by the King who gave him 300 slaves from the defeated army. Sa Da Ham decided to release them, give them their liberty and asked for no personal rewards for his deeds.

Yoo Shin Kim, a commander of the Silla army had a son called Won Sool who was a lieutenant when the army was defeated in a battle with the Chinese. Upon the return of his son, Yoo Shin Kim requested permission from the King to have his son executed for the disgrace he had brought upon his family. As the boy had not been in command the King refused, despite this Yoo Shin Kim had his son banished to the mountains to serve as a monk. When his father died Won Sool returned to his family, but his mother wouldn't violate his fathers command and refused to see him. Won Sool returned to the mountain. A few years later Won Sool heard that China had launched another war and returned to King Moon Moo to ask to be allowed into battle. He was given a command and performed brilliantly, King Moon Moo wanted to reward him but Won Sool refused saying his family held him in shame and he could not accept. He again returned to the mountain and lived the rest of his life as a hermit monk.

Legends of the Hwa-Rang were preserved in many forms: Poetry, literature and dances. They were passed down through the generations and used as examples for young people to follow.

The Korean Dynasties:

The Koguryo Dynasty 37 B.C – A.D 668

The Silla Dynasty 668 – 935

The Koryo Dynasty 935 – 1392

The Yi Dynasty 1392 – 1909

Japanese occupation of Korea 1909 – 1945

Korean Independence 1945 -

Hwa-Rang; is named after the Hwa-Rang youth group, which originated in the Silla Dynasty in

the early 7th century. This group became the driving force behind the unification of the three Kingdoms of Korea. The 29 movements refer to the 29th infantry division where Taekwon-do developed into maturity.

The founder of Taekwon-do, General Choi Hong Hi, established the 29th infantry division, in 1953. The General selected his soldiers based on athletic excellence and ordered all soldiers to learn Martial Arts. This was the first step in his spreading Martial Arts throughout the entire Korean army.

Pattern Hwa-Rang

Ready position – Junbi Jase

Close ready stance C – Moa junbi so C

1. Sitting stance palm pushing block – Annun so sonbadak miro makgi
2. Sitting stance middle punch – Annun so kaunde jirugi
3. Sitting stance middle punch – Annun so kaunde jirugi
4. L-Stance twin forearm block – Niunja so sang palmok makgi
5. L-Stance upward punch – Niunja so ollyo jirugi
6. Fixed Stance middle obverse punch – Gojung so kaunde baro jirugi
7. Vertical stance knife-hand downward strike – Soo jik so sonkal naeryo taerigi
8. Walking stance middle obverse punch – Gunnen so kaunde baro jirugi
9. Walking stance outer forearm low outward block – Gunnen so bakat palmok najunde bakuro makgi
10. Walking stance middle obverse punch – Gunnen so kaunde baro jirugi
11. Middle side piercing kick – Kaunde yopcha jirugi,
12. L-Stance knife-hand middle outward strike – Niunja so sonkal kaunde bakuro taerigi
13. Walking stance middle obverse punch – Gunnen so kaunde baro jirugi
14. Walking stance middle obverse punch – Gunnen so kaunde baro jirugi
15. L-Stance knife-hand middle guarding block – Niunja so sonkal kaunde daebi makgi
16. Walking stance straight finger tip thrust – Gunnen so sun sonkut tulgi
17. L-Stance knife-hand middle guarding block – Niunja so sonkal kaunde daebi makgi
18. Middle turning kick – Kaunde dollyo chagi
19. Middle turning kick – Kaunde dollyo chagi, L-Stance knife-hand middle guarding block – Niunja so sonkal kaunde daebi makgi

20. Walking stance outer forearm low outward block – Gunnen so bakat palmok najunde bakuro makgi
 21. L-Stance middle obverse punch – Niunja so kaunde baro jirugi
 22. L-Stance middle obverse punch – Niunja so kaunde baro jirugi
 23. L-Stance middle obverse punch – Niunja so kaunde baro jirugi
 24. Walking stance x-fist low block – Gunnen so kyocha joomuk najunde makgi
 25. L-Stance side elbow thrust – Niunja so yop palkup tulgi
 26. Close stance inner forearm high side front block – Moa so an palmok nopunde yobap makgi
 27. Close stance inner forearm high side front block – Moa so an palmok nopunde yobap makgi
 28. L-Stance knife-hand middle guarding block – Niunja so sonkal kaunde daebi makgi
 29. L-Stance knife-hand middle guarding block – Niunja so sonkal kaunde daebi makgi
- Return to ready posture – Junbi jase
- Close ready stance C – Moa junbi so C

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