

An elaboration of Taekwon-Do Jungshin

Based on cultural and historical interpretation

A thesis by Bjarne Morris

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태권도정신
예의염치인내
극기백절불굴

跆拳道精神
禮義廉恥忍耐
克己百折不屈

茶師存池點

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the people that have become vital in the completion of this document...

My good friend and Korean teacher, 최지연 선생님 Choi Jiyeon Seonsaengnim

My brother from another mother and Pinyin pro, Seng Ang

My other brother from another other mother, Angad Nayyar

And last but certainly not least my fiancée Ngachi Chiu

"I'm filled with nothing but appreciation and adoration, both at your love and ability.

Truly I am blessed that God has seen fit to place me under the guidance and in the company of such outstanding people.

With all my heart and being Thank You, 謝謝 and 고맙습니다!"

Preface

I love Taekwon-Do. There's no other way to express the highs, the lows, the difficulty and reward, the pain and satisfaction. Taekwon-Do is a fine art and one that I'm proud to be a practitioner of, though I feel that some of the more complex parts of Taekwon-Do, particularly the Do, are locked away, not intentionally but through cultural incompatibilities and nuance.

Students of Taekwon-Do first learn our tenets at 10th Gup and for most at that point, they are little more than words. At 4th Gup, those words are bolstered with explanation but again, for many the true meaning of those words remain in a juvenile state and are merely something to learn and recite to get to another grade.

"Was General Choi a good man?"

I recall hearing this question presented to a grading candidate, while I was marshalling at a Gup grading. This set my mind racing, as I queried my knowledge of Taekwon-Do and its history. There were many directions my brain pulled. In the frenzied squall my mind had engineered to consolidate a concise yet worthy response (despite the question not being aimed at me and also being semi-rhetorical), I was most surprised to find not an answer but a question...

"Am I a good man?"

Since then, I've been assessing myself and my character, critiquing my flaws and trying to improve the answer to that question. This has set me thinking a great deal about Jungshin. Can you take Korean concepts and apply them so directly to a western audience. Is what we learn literal? Or is there inherent lingual or cultural dilution? After all, practicing a martial art doesn't automatically align your outlook with the philosophies supporting and origins of that art.

About a year ago I made the decision to begin formally learning the Korean language and elements of Korean culture. I made this decision for reasons of personal interest and for philosophical reasons associated to Taekwon-Do. Given a great extent of my previous Korean awareness was from Taekwon-Do, I made sure any opportunities to connect my previously constructed understandings were capitalised on. One lesson in particular made specific connection to me, regarding the history of the Korean language itself.

'The verbally right sounds meant to teach the people.' -세종대왕 (Sejong the Great)

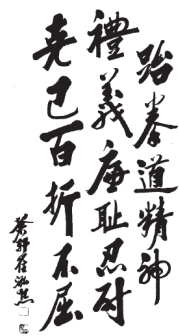
At the advent of the 15th century the Korean people were stagnant. Illiteracy was rife and only those from the higher echelons of society had access to formal education. Political power in the Kingdom of Joseon had been recently consolidated making way for an exponent and a prodigious change within the region.

In 1446, the Hunminjeongeum was made widely available by the Great King Sejong and revolutionised the way the Korean people communicate with each other. Native Korean (Hangeul) flourished and extended literacy to common and peasant classes. Prior to this point aristocratic society utilised 'Sino-Korean', best described as applying Korean meaning to complex traditional Chinese characters.

Even now a large part of the Korean language is comprised of Sino-Korean that is expressed through Hangeul. For this reason it's not surprising to see Chinese characters popping up throughout even modern Korean text. The calligraphy of Sino-Korean (Hanja) and its cultural and historical relevance tell a story.

'Finally, it all clicks!'

It must, by now, seem like I'm floating in random tangents but there is a point. When I started training in Taekwon-Do, I recall seeing the General's calligraphy of the Jungshin and being told its meaning but still I didn't understand completely.



For the longest time I couldn't draw the connection between a Korean man, founding a Korean martial art and Chinese calligraphy.

Fast forward to the present and I now have a much clearer understanding.

When this calligraphy was written, it very easily could have been executed using Hangeul characters but the General opted to paint in Hanja. What this tells me is that the concept and philosophy of Jungshin predates the 15th century and likely bares significant Chinese definition as well. Once I made this link, it became important for me to understand the purest meaning in its original form, to better understand Jungshin and become more efficient at teaching it and hopefully a "Good Man" by employing those components that make up Jungshin.

This thesis is the fruit of my investigation. It is my hope that at the very least, one person will feel inspiration to look inward, alter their thinking and hopefully become a better person for it.

Ye Ui

禮儀

예의

Courtesy ('kə:tisi)

[Mass noun] *The showing of politeness in one's attitude and behaviour towards others.*

-Oxford Dictionary

Courtesy is the first tenet we learn and for the most part it's the most simple in concept. In its rawest form courtesy means to be nice. Extrapolating this concept further one could elaborate that the purpose of courtesy is to generally facilitate the creation of a peaceful world. If everyone in the world was courteous, would there be conflict? Would there be war? I tend to believe that courtesy can't create or sustain peace, as it doesn't change viewpoints or beliefs nor does it alleviate the differences that separate people. So why then is courtesy important?

Translated literally, 禮(lǐ) means etiquette and 儀(yí) means ceremony; together 禮儀(lǐyí) can be defined as 'etiquette ceremony'. When I think of Ye Ui(예의) in this way it holds a lot more weight than the English definition of courtesy.

Ye Ui (lǐ and yí) are deep rooted components of Confucian thought along with loyalty, filial piety and altruism. Li in particular is a very complex idea that is difficult to relay into a direct translation. In the west the idea of a rite takes on considerably more form and specificity than in Chinese text. The word rite or ceremony is as close as you can reasonably get to a specific English translation. The first written account of Lǐ and Yí is in the 11th century text "Yǐlǐ" (The Rites of Zhou) written by the Duke of Zhou, who is also accredited with writing the I-Ching. The text, while widely considered bombarded with trivial text, gives a snapshot of the daily regime of the common Chinese man living in the Zhou Dynasty circa 80 CE. It details appropriate behaviours for a range of different social and professional interactions. In reading this and comparing it to the modern interpretation of courtesy, a clear evolution of sorts has occurred.

The concept of making every day, social, professional or filial etiquette an almost ritual of sorts, in my opinion dictates a far more powerful idea, than just 'courtesy' alone. We regularly hold ceremonies or rites of etiquette in the do-jang. Relatively simple gestures such as mutual respect and acknowledgement of seniority are expected, with only occasional enforcement required.

In this day and age rudeness is rife and it's common in all areas. Work, schools, the internet and social media are all prime examples where you'll find people using offensive language and acting in an aggressive manner. You don't have to go far to find people exhibiting discourteous behaviour, oblivious to the effects that type of conduct has; not only on the people directly affected by their actions but also the impression given to other people.

All too often people get jaded by the idea of courtesy, confusing a true courteous nature with feigned smiles, compliments and general niceness. Ye Ui is not these things. Ye Ui is actively assessing your approach to situations and applying as much respect as possible. Ye Ui is evaluating what you say and how you say it in the perspective of anyone potentially listening and censoring tone or content accordingly.

Describing Ye Ui as a ceremony gives it a feeling of greater importance and instills a sense of accountability. When you apply accountability to how things are conveyed it changes the outlook of the conveyor. It's not about always saying nice things, but more about being actively aware of your presence, verbal or otherwise in any and all situations.

It's important for us as Taekwon-Do to rise above and set the greatest example possible for our students and the rest of humanity. Through Ye Ui the world does become a more liveable and pleasant place with mutual respect for everyone.

Yom Chi

廉恥

염치

Integrity (In 'tɛgrɪti)

[Mass noun] *The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.*

-Oxford Dictionary

In Taekwon-Do, it is stated that the integrity we are taught has a looser definition than the one presented in the dictionary. One word is the primary delimiter between the dictionary explanation and the practical definition embodied in the Taekwon-Do lifestyle. That word is honesty. I like to think of myself as a great believer in honesty. Honesty is a great quality to possess and is related to integrity in some ways, however, when you use the word honesty in explaining, to a student, the integrity we use in Taekwon-Do that becomes the domineering concept.

Translated literally 廉(lián) has varied meanings. On one hand it could mean incorruptible and on the other it can be defined as a form of hatred. 恥(chǐ) means shame or humiliation. 廉恥 can be extrapolated as having an incorruptible spirit and to know shame, should that spirit be found wanting.

Shame isn't the most common feeling in the west. It is, in extreme scenarios, felt but by no means is it regular. In the east however it has significant importance both historically and in a contemporary sense. So what is shame? Oxford defines shame as a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour.

In researching this component of Jungshin, I spoke with a great friend about the differences in eastern and western points of view in respect of shame and Yom Chi. We spoke of historical social castes from both western and eastern history. This led to direct comparisons between a medieval knight and a samurai from a similar time period

If a knight was tasked with a particular mission and had failed to achieve that mission many variables would be considered in deciding the knight's fate. That is, of course, if the knight remained around long enough to receive said punishment. For some shame would just be wallowed in. The knight's chivalric code had no provision for a set course of action in the event of dishonour. In the east however, samurai who failed their Shogun would experience great shame and would instinctively perform hara-kiri, a form of ritual suicide.

This wasn't enough for me though, so I probed further. Was the act of falling on one's sword an attempt at redemption through self-punishment or is it a means to avoid a worse punishment? The answer I received summed it up perfectly. If that samurai failed there would be nothing but shame left in their being. At that point there would only be one course of action. There was no active choice with an elaborate justification, more (excuse the pun) a dead end.

In the west we leverage the shame we feel against our course of action. The shame we feel is a grey. In order to truly achieve Yom Chi we should strive to deem shame in absolutes; not in a shade of grey but in black or white. If inappropriate action makes us feel shame, that shame should be absolute to ensure we don't repeat our mistakes. If one can convince themselves out of feeling shame, there's every possibility they can also convince themselves to blur or even break the line between right and wrong. If someone does something wrong they should not throw away their life but it's important for Yom Chi that experiencing shame, as a result of poor conduct, is unacceptable and offensive. This will ensure that people strive to not incur that shame again and consequently live in an upright fashion.

In Nae

忍耐

인내

Perseverance (pəːsɪˈvɪər(ə)ns)

[Mass noun] *Persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success.*

-Oxford Dictionary

‘Good things take time’, much more than just a ‘cheesy’ slogan. The tenet of perseverance rings home considerable truth both inside and outside of the do-jang. If we look even deeper into the true definition of perseverance it would be fair to suggest the final outcome of anyone prepared to utilise this tenet is the eventual success in whatever they’re attempting to achieve. In this way patience can logically be viewed as a buffer of the time until something desired is attained or achieved.

The description presented in the Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do makes reference to Confucius, who generalised the importance of patience in even trivial matters and the relationship between successes in matters of triviality to those of great importance where patience is lacking.

Translated literally 忍(rěn) means to bear, endure, or to tolerate and 耐(nài) means resistant or to be patient. Together 忍耐(rěnnài) means patience and to exercise restraint.

It’s easy for the word patience to evoke feelings of passivity or inaction. The term itself is defined by Oxford dictionary’s as ‘*the capacity to accept tolerable delay or suffering without becoming annoyed or experiencing anxiety*’. In Taekwon-Do and in particular it’s vital to identify the distinction between real patience in the context of perseverance and inaction.

For example 2 yellow belt students perform a side piercing kick. The instructor looks at the kicks and identifies several issues with both. After pointing out these issues the instructor tells the student to have patience and they’ll improve. The first student goes home and finds solace in that his technique will improve in time. The second student goes home, thinks about the feedback they received and takes the opportunity to work on those areas pointed out. Fast forward and these two are green belts learning Won-Hyo tul. The first student can’t understand why his side piercing kick is poor. The second student’s side piercing kick isn’t perfect but has shown considerable improvement, especially when compared to the first students. Both students have shown patience but one has shown true meaning of In Nae. Patience coupled with hard work is where success is achieved.

It’s extremely important when teaching In Nae that this distinction is also made. Strict perseverance with hard work will eventually lead to success with techniques. There are points in life that requires the employment of perseverance in non-physical ways. Perseverance will sometimes mean staying the course and fighting the urge to do or say something when it is inappropriate or could even mean biding time to achieve other more complex goals.

When perseverance is looked at in this way it almost becomes inter-related to self-control. For this reason it’s a lot easier to teach In Nae solely as a means to ensure hard work is engaged by students but senior students and those with the capacity to understand that perseverance is the commitment to see any course of action to its conclusion.

Guk Gi

克己
극기

Self-Control (self-kən'trəʊl)

[Mass noun] *The ability to control oneself, in particular one's emotions and desires, especially in difficult situations.*

-Oxford Dictionary

Self-control is one of the most important tenets for range of different reasons. The first and most obvious when considered in relation to a martial art is the aspect of physical restraint. For Taekwon-Do to lose control of themselves and begin using the physical lessons we learn would be disastrous for the Taekwon-Do, their target and for Taekwon-Do on the whole. Self-control is significantly more than just this however.

Translated literally 克(kè) means to subdue or to overcome and 己(jǐ) means oneself. When we combine these concepts we get 克己(kèjǐ) to overcome oneself.

The description in the Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do refers to a statement by Lao-Tzu, which represents the true meaning of Guk Gi but is actually quite vague. In investigating the concept of Guk Gi further, I've learned more about what was meant by Lao Tzu, which has redefined the tenet entirely for me.

In the past I was among the many that viewed self-control as a tenet primarily addressing physical conduct. My previous overview of Guk Gi could be summed up by one statement from the Art of War *Therefore one who is good at martial arts overcomes others' forces without battle, conquers others' cities without siege, and destroys others' nations without taking a long time.* What I took this to mean was that self-control is about getting to the point where you can control every situation without physicality.

What I've since come to learn is that what is meant by Lao-Tzu, is that the greatest and most frequent opponent we encounter is ourselves. Guk Gi is not just that you must control yourself but more fight yourself on everything. From the second we wake up we begin fighting ourselves. Our human nature makes us want to stay asleep but we fight ourselves in order to do what is expected. We must always fight against our own desires and greed. We fight what we want to do in favour of what we should do. We fight against our base animal instincts and even a momentary lapse of control can be very regrettable.

In addition to this Guk Gi plugs into the previous Jungshin. We have to fight our natural state to remain courteous, preserve what is right and to persevere when things are difficult. This is what makes this tenet the hardest. It's difficult because the fight is constant.

To master Guk Gi what is required is to take our consciences off auto pilot, assess our every action in detail and then fight ourselves in every action to do what is right. Of course this is a near impossible task to perform all the time. When you're accountable for your every action it's important to be in control and stand by decisions made whether it is an action or even inaction. That it's difficult is what makes it worthwhile.

Baekjeol Boolgool

百折

不屈

백절불굴

Indomitable Spirit (in 'dɒmɪtəb(ə)l 'spɪrɪt)

[Noun in singular] *The prevailing or typical quality, mood, or attitude of a person, group, or period of time that is impossible to subdue or defeat.*

-Oxford Dictionary

Indomitable spirit is probably the most difficult tenet to express. Examples of indomitable spirit are usually conveyed in the context of glorious ancient battles where a small group combats a significantly larger one. Expressing this concept becomes complicated when we remove the physical factor. In today's politically correct minefield of social improprieties we can't be seen to be promoting battle, particularly as ambassadors of peace. So I want to approach this tenet from a different angle completely.

Translated literally 百(bǎi) means one hundred, 折(zhé) means to break, fracture, to suffer loss, or destruction 不(bù) means not or never and 屈(qū) means to bend. When we put all these piece together we get 百折不屈(bǎizhébùqū) which means to never bend despite suffering one hundred destructions. My feeling is the most important component of this is 屈(qū). The concept of us being susceptible to bending internalises the tenet and makes the tenet far more applicable in every situation.

Humans are a bit like plants in that we grow and our environments have a direct influence on the people we become. Just like branches, we can be bent and we can be broken. Baekjeol Boolgool dictates that despite our environment and despite whatever trials we undergo we must not bend. The path of life holds many obstacles for everyone and our spirit must be firm, in order for us to be what we want to be. As Taekwon-Do we strive to be the best people we can be. This is near impossible if we allow our spirit to be twisted and broken.

This may not clarify Baekjeol Boolgool completely. When we look at this tenet in relation to the others, Baekjeol Boolgool is the backbone that gives the others stability and most of us never even think of it. In researching this I was overwhelmed by what is being asked by the tenets and that our aim is to achieve them all, all the time. It's almost as though the tenets are insurmountable odds that we are all faced with.

When I think of Baekjeol Boolgool, I think of the legend of 계백장관님 (General Gyebaek) who in his final battle led 5,000 Baekje soldiers to their deaths as the final defensive line from an overwhelming Tang Silla unified force of over 100,000. Before he left for battle it is suggested that he murdered his wife and son. Some question his motives behind this course of action but I'm of the opinion that this was another facet of his indomitable spirit. Surely he knew 황산벌 (Hwangsancheol) would be his final battle and that should he fail, the Tang troops would make slaves of his family. In the face of this his spirit could not be crushed. He did the only thing he could do to make sure his family's suffering was as minimal as possible before facing definite defeat with unfaltering courage.

While not the most relevant contemporary example, thinking of the multi-faceted nature of Gyebaek's Baekjeol Boolgool makes it easier to apply the same concept to other everyday scenarios as well. School may seem overwhelming with classes and the amount of schoolwork you're tasked with. Maybe work is becoming difficult with colleagues conspiring against you. Friends may be pressuring you to engage in activities you aren't comfortable with. These are all situations that are experienced by many but through utilising our indomitable spirits we can overcome those things that attempt to break us down and become something we don't want to be.

Conclusion

In researching this topic I've learned a lot about Korean history and base Korean philosophies, stemming from their Chinese heritage. I feel closer to the mind-set where our Jungshin ideology was founded. The more I think about these components the more affected I feel by them. I find I'm removing myself from every situation and analysing my intended actions.

The more I analyse my own actions against what is expected by the Jungshin, the more I realise how interconnected each element truly is. When you look at each tenet in their original Chinese form it's very easy for one tenet to start bleeding into the definition of another.

I'm in awe at how these concepts have stood the test of time. From ancient eastern philosophies to principles being utilised in the modern day, General Choi was quite an effective philosopher in relaying Jungshin to Taekwon-Do students the world over, even over a decade after his passing.

In relation to the question that sparked this investigation "am I good man?", as much as I'd love to say I am, realistically I'm not in any position to say that I am. All I can say is I am a man who tries his best every day and tries to live by the principles of Jungshin and hope that my best is good enough.

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