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HISTORY OF TAE KWON DO

Translated from Korean “Tae” means foot or strike with the foot, “kwon” means punch or strike with the hand, and “Do” means way of life. Taekwondo uses uniquely powerful kicking techniques, and it is this that sets Taekwondo apart from other martial arts, for it is also directed toward the moral development of its students.

The earliest records of Taekwondo were recorded at about 50 B.C. in what is now Korea. The country was divided into 3 kingdoms at this time Silla, Baekche, and Koguryo. Taekwondo first appeared in Koguryo, but it is Silla’s warrior nobility, the Hwarang that is credited with the growth of the art throughout Korea. Silla was constantly being attacked by Japanese Pirates. It was at this time at Taek kyon, the first name of Taekwondo was introduced to Sillian warriors.

Taek kyon was taught in conjunction with the Five Codes of Human Conduct. These codes are reflected in the 11 commandments of modern Taekwondo and no student who does not fully understand these tenets can ever hope to master the art.

The first book on the art was written during the Yi dynasty, but also during that period (1397-1907), Taek kyon, and Subak, (early forms of Taekwondo) became fragmented and defused. What limited knowledge of the art that was handed down from one generation to the next within individual families was practiced in secret.

In 1909 Korean fighting arts experienced a marked resurgence for Japan had invaded Korea, occupying the country for the next 36 years. The Japanese resident general banned the practice of all military arts and this act sparked the re-growth of Subak and Taek kyon. It wasn’t until 1945 when Korea was freed from Japanese occupation that its own fighting arts finally took root and began to flourish.

The first kwan (“school”) to teach a native Korean style of martial art was opened in 1945 in Yong Chun, Seoul. This dojang (gymnasium) was named the Chung Do Kwan. Later that same year, the Moo Duk Kwan and Yun Moo Kwan also opened in Seoul. The following year, the Chang Moo Kwan followed by the Chi Do Kwan were founded. Seven other major schools were formed between 1953 and the early 1960’s, the three most prominent being the Ji Do Kwan, the Song Moo Kwan and the Oh Do Kwan, all of which were opened between 1953 and 1954. In 1957 the Kwans banded together and unified the name Taekwondo for its similarity of the arts early name Taek kyon.

On May 28, 1973 a new worldwide organization, the World Tae Kwon Do Federation (WTF), was formed to unify the art. The WTF hosted the first biennial World Tae Kwon Do Championships held in Seoul. Since then they have been held in countries around the world. In 1980 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognized and admitted the WTF. Following this initial contact at the General Session of the IOC in May of 1982 Taekwondo was officially accepted as a demonstration sport for the 1988 Olympic Games, held in Seoul Korea. In the year 2002 Taekwondo was a full medal sport event at the Olympics, which were held in Sydney, Australia. It will again be a full medal sport at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece.

Today, Taekwondo is practiced in over 120 countries with over 20 million practitioners, and is the most practiced martial art style in the world.