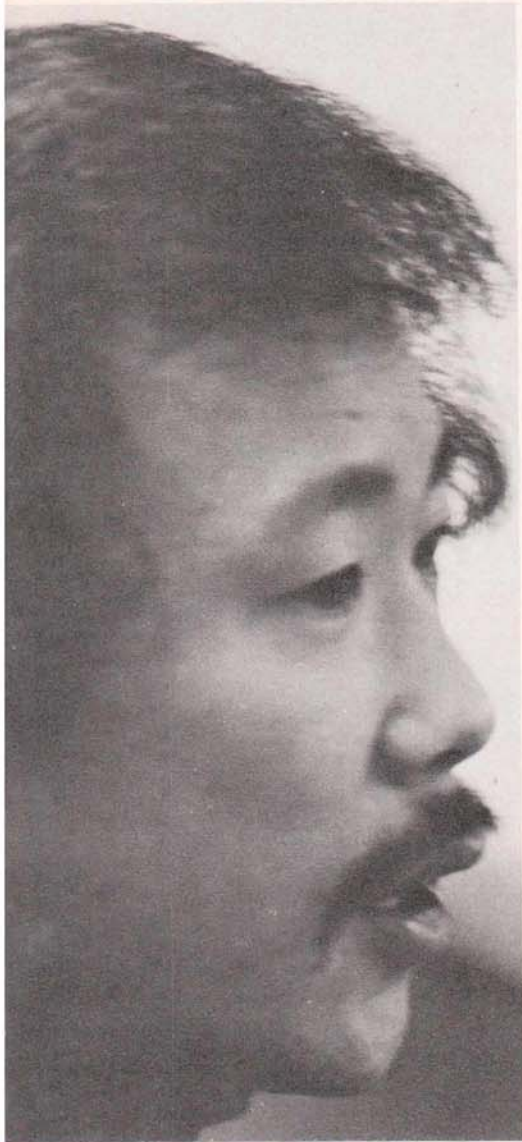


In 1945, Moo Duk Kwan was found (sic) in order to spread, prosper and create understanding of SOO BAHK DO (Now called Tang Soo Do), which is the special martial art of Korea, and has a long history and tradition."

Thus begins a skinny, typewritten pamphlet, bearing the caveat: "to YOUR STUDENTS ONLY", which seems to be the only in-depth description — in English



arts" period. For another, its founder braved extraordinary conditions — including nine years-in-exile in China and two major wars — to develop and promote something he believed in. However, what impressed me most was a chance audience with the man responsible for it all: Master Hwang Kee, founder of the Moo Duk Kwan.

On the final leg of a month-long North American tour, highlighted by his presiding over the First National United States Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan Convention (held in Burlington, New Jersey, November 30, 1974), the Master was in Los Angeles — probably the capitol of West Coast Tang Soo Do — for several days. And it was there that for the better part of a memorable December morning last year, he talked about his art and life.

Looking extremely trim and fit and accompanied by his son, Jin Mon Hwang, who acted as interpreter — the 60-year-old Karate Master and President of the Korean Soo Bahk Do Association (the official title of Tang Soo Do's international organization, headquartered in Seoul, South Korea) began our conversation on a humble note, thanking *me* for giving *him* the opportunity to explain the full meaning behind Tang Soo Do and the formation of the Moo Duk Kwan (loosely, "Institute of Martial Virtue").

Jin Mon Hwang, who did an admirable job as interpreter during his father's recent visit to the United States.

Looking back, I recall that my initial impression was reinforced many times during our talk: Here is a man who truly embodies the ethereal "spirit" of the martial arts. I couldn't help but feel that I was somehow in the presence of someone very special — one of those rare individuals who had long ago mastered the magnetic art of non-verbal communication, *to a T!* A single gesture or facial expression, transcending the Gulf of Tongue, was worth — as the saying goes — a thousand words. Whenever one of my inquiries, receiving only a cryptic reply, hastily offered without reflection, must have been frivolous — I instinctively knew better than to try and pursue *that* particular line of questioning.

"The main purpose of his trip," replied the Master's son to my opening question, "is to view the present situation of martial arts in America and visit the branches of the Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwans. Since he is the founder of the Moo Duk

Kwan organization, he wanted to see about the future of the Moo Duk Kwan in the United States and give inspiration and words of encouragement to the Moo Duk Kwan members, who are contributing to the [growth of] martial arts here.

"Since the last time he was here, in 1970, he can see that the people have worked very hard and are beginning to settle down; he is very happy to see that. At that time everybody was acting individually, but now they realize that they should work together as brothers toward unification. He can also see that they care about the future of the martial arts [in general.]"

As for the future of Tang Soo Do — promising, indeed. Today the art compiled by Master Hwang Kee just three decades ago flourishes in many countries, among them: England, Greece, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, Canada, Japan and parts of Latin America. Since 1945, the Association has certified more than 18,000 Black Belts, ranking to the eighth degree. In all, it is estimated that there are well over one million Tang Soo Do practitioners worldwide — a figure that is increasing virtually every day. And in America, where there is a goodly number of enthusiasts but very little organization, Master Hwang Kee anticipates a major breakthrough, as he revealed in a newsletter published on the eve of his departure:

TO ALL TANG SOO DO BLACK BELT MASTERS:

... At the convention in Burlington, New Jersey, on November 30, about 50 voting delegates, all of them American, decided to form a United States Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation. They elected a task force, consisting mainly of Americans, whose responsibility is to develop a specific agenda of proposals for the formation of the federation. You will formally invited to vote on these proposals at the Charter Convention in June 1975. . .

Is there any difference in the way Tang Soo Do is practiced in Korea and America?

"Now it is very similar," said Jin pausing for a moment to digest his father's words, "because the way they are teaching comes from Korea. But in the future, the program will be changed. Once he sets up his program, he would like to give it to the people. His basic idea is that in the past, people were practicing the external techniques — like how to get more power into their kicks and punches; but he would like to see them pay more attention to the mental thing, so that it will make them better persons. The main ob-

— to date of this modern martial art based on traditional sources and philosophies. (Fortunately, a situation that is being remedied, as we shall see.)

Approximately a dozen 8" x6" pages on, the anonymous text concludes, having recounted the history of Tang Soo Do and a most remarkable man in some detail; and after reading it, I was impressed. (I should confess, here, that I am not a student of Tang Soo Do — only an interested bystander.) For one thing, the origins of the art date back more than 2,000 years — to the so-called "flowering of the

jective for studying Tang Soo Do is to make you a better person; that's why he would like to see them pay more attention to teaching the mental aspect.

"The basic purpose for training in Tang Soo Do is not to injure the enemy, but instead to develop a person who is more advanced in both the mental and physical aspects of life. It is based on the [various] nature principles of Oriental philosophy. This kind of concept contributes to peace and happiness for all mankind."

Master Hwang Kee was born in the portion of Korea now known as the DMZ. "Originally," said Jin, "he loved sports; and when he went to military school he ran track. Through family [contacts], he had a chance to see and practice the traditional Korean arts — Soo Bahk Do and Tae Kyun."

The martial arts of Korea are some of the most ancient known to man (no doubt owing to her close proximity to China), generally thought to have originated during the "Three Kingdoms" period over 2,000 years ago. It was then that an elite corps of young aristocrats (*Hwa Rang Dan*), renowned for their martial skills and five-point code of ethics, inspired the people of Silla to unite and overthrow the kingdoms of Koguryo and Paickche — thus uniting the Korean peninsula for the first time. Also during this period, the primitive art of self-defense called Soo Bahk Ki (foot and body fighting) was combined with the warrior principles of the *Hwa Rang Dan*, and the traditional art of Soo Bahk Do was the result. Later, Soo Bahk Do merged with other combat forms; and shortly after World War II, these were the techniques from which Master Hwang Kee would borrow and rename Tang Soo Do.

"And at the age of 23, he went to China and studied their arts." That was in 1936, and Hwang Kee was already a well-known Soo Bahk Do Master, his training having commenced as a boy. But ever since the beginning of Japanese occupation in 1909, Koreans were forbidden to practice any form of martial arts. Nonetheless, the home-grown product survived — going underground, secretly passed on by a few courageous and oppressed stalwarts. Master Hwang Kee was one. And under constant pressure he fled to China, where he experienced his technical maturity.

Spiritual enlightenment, naturally, is only possible when one returns to his roots.

So after nine years-in-exile, during which time he was exposed to many diverse styles and systems, Master Hwang

Kee was thankful to be in his homeland once again with the conclusion of hostilities. And considering the untold hardships he surely had to endure, it is small wonder that he now sought a higher level of understanding from his art. Realizing that all methods are only as good as the persons who practice them, he founded the Moo Duk Kwan on November 9, 1945, for the purpose of preserving the worthwhile philosophies and traditions of Tang Soo Do.

"He created the Moo Duk Kwan — not Tang Soo Do," said Jin, setting the record straight. "The Moo Duk Kwan is his own organization; Tang Soo Do is the name of the art. He didn't create Tang Soo Do.

"He traveled all over China and experienced different martial arts; so you can say that he was influenced by China. But basically, he learned the traditional Korean art of Soo Bahk Do. Tang Soo Do doesn't have any special meaning. 'Tang' refers to the Tang dynasty in China; Soo means hand; Do means way."

Tang Soo Do (and the Korean arts generally) puts more emphasis on the feet than most other forms of martial arts. This may be due to geography, since Korea is dotted with hills and steep valleys which would account for its inhabitants having well developed legs. Or it may be because of the harsh lifestyle, where man is still often the primary beast of burden. One interesting theory holds that the Koreans — worshippers of fine handicraft — regarded the hands as delicate creative instruments, and therefore relegated such practical tasks as self-defense to the feet. In any case, when the Master good naturedly rolled up his pants leg to demonstrate his theory for effective kicks, I could see that he had it down to a science. "He has looked into this for many years," said Jin, "and finds that it gets back to the art of Tae Kyun, which means only feet."

What does one gain from practicing Tang Soo Do? As our discussion was drawing to a close, Jin offered this on his father's behalf:

"He will gain confidence spiritually and physically and learn how to defend himself. The mental aspect is the main thing, but he will also stay very healthy if he practices. Tang Soo Do should be thought of as a way of life — not as a means of self-defense. To better explain these things, [my father] plans to publish a book that will contain the philosophy of Tang Soo Do. It will be available in 1976."



The cornerstone of Master Hwang Kee's philosophy has to do with a deep understanding and appreciation for the origins, traditions and beliefs relating to an ancient art that has been modified to accommodate the constantly fluctuating demands of the 20th century. It is his firm belief that those who — despite possessing excellent technical skills — stray from the right path, do so because they lack the proper historical perspective for realizing the true meaning of the art. This no doubt explains why nearly half of his forthcoming text, which contains several hundred pages, is devoted to the history and development of Tang Soo Do.

However, that is not to say that the technical aspect should be overlooked. For he also delves into the physical applications in great detail, including many pages of photos and diagrams to illustrate the various concepts.

What does the skinny little pamphlet, to which I alluded in the beginning and which will soon be replaced by the Master's superb text, have to say on the subject? "Lacking the correct knowledge of its (Tang Soo Do) history can effect (sic) your relationship with your master, pupils and the public. Misinformation and misinterpretation can lead only to a physical relationship between master and pupil, rather than create spiritual ties. These two aspects of the martial arts — the physical and spiritual — must be one and balance in order to attain a mutual satisfaction in the martial arts field." One's physical life. One's spiritual life. Master Hwang Kee makes no distinction between the two.

