

*Tang Soo Do* *interview with*

# GrandMaster M.K. Loke

*Part One*

GrandMaster Loke is a true “Chinese Hand” technician and innovator. He held the post of Technical Director and Secretary General of the UKTSDF from 1975 until resigning in 1993. Since then he has progressed Tang Sau Dao to a new level so I thought it was time to catch up with him again and discuss the past and future direction of the art.

*GrandMaster Loke I am aware that you have made many progressions to the art. Would you please give us a flavour of how and why you made these changes. I appreciate that many of these points require hands on teaching but I feel it would be of great interest to students throughout the UK to hear your views:*

**GM LOKE:** It is very true that hands on teaching is crucial to learning a technique or style. I will try my best to contribute and open up discussions so that Tang Soo Do students and Masters may ask questions of what they have been taught. All too often “Senior Masters” rely on the obscure bona fide of their seniority and reliance on oriental mystique to justify their teaching. Often they expect students to simply follow a robotic “monkey see and monkey do, don’t ask questions as its disrespectful” approach to learning. Such an approach simply shows a lack of in depth knowledge, a sense of fear and insecurity with the



only aim being to maintain their over rated position and vested interest. My belief is that as instructors we should analyse the techniques we teach in terms of philosophy and practicality and if necessary create or re-invent. We should pass on our knowledge to the next generation so that they can be better equipped than us in every way. I think it is our duty to follow this path and have a more sincere Master to pupil [and vice versa] relationship .

When I left the UKTSDF in 1993 I was free to introduce and implement what I strongly believe are vital components for any traditional fighting art to be practical and effective. I included the all important centre line theory, evasion and footwork, distance and timing. Evade, if at all possible, and strike back from an advantageous position from both closed and open sides. Block only when you are surprised or when you can anticipate but with a more devastating aim of destabilising and smashing your opponents balance or limbs. Block and counter concurrently rather than solely rely on the basic Karate/Moo Duk Kwan consecutive actions. Study both long range hip and short range power for any given situation. This requires a closer look on how we are going to teach the principles of power generation. We need to emphasise economy and the natural flow of movement so that we may practice throughout our natural life especially from middle age onwards [this last objective separates martial artists from sport fighting]. To achieve these stated aims , first of all I had to revamp and refine the techniques from the first basics ie stances, punching, striking, kicking techniques in line with my original Chinese learning together with my own personal touch and approach.

My personal history began with a Chinese instructor Lim Cheng Hock who taught me a style deriving from his own wide experience in Chinese systems, Thai boxing and modern systems of Karate. [see our Ren Yi Wu Kwan development history [www.tangsoudao.com](http://www.tangsoudao.com)]...In the sixties Master Lim was much ahead of his time as he always questioned all that he came across with the only objective that mattered ‘does the technique work in a real

fight or self defence scenario', he was not bothered with what rank you hold or even the history or lineage of your system. He even questioned his own Chinese arts regarding the limited value of just practicing forms and hand conditioning without free sparring. As part of his ongoing personal development we both became involved in mainstream Karate, he won the MW gold at the 6th Asian Karate Championships 1969 in Manila . This is when we first met the Moo Duk Kwan and the Japanese Rembukai teams. These early championships began in 1956 and ended in 1974 by which time World Union of Karate Organisation [WUKO] was established and the Moo Duk Kwan also branched out internationally.

*This is all very interesting GrandMaster Loke. I would like to clarify a few points now if I may. Firstly, it is largely true that in the UK only a basic version of the art has been passed on and much as you have done this leads certain individuals to delve deeper and look for greater meaning and practicality. Is it possible for you to accept that these aspects were there all the time waiting to be discovered providing we look beneath the surface ? For example, KJN Hwang Kee instructed us to learn the meaning of each movement in our hyungs both for offense and defence. This surely incorporates many of the points you mention including simultaneous block/strike, evasion and footwork, etc. He also incorporated the uppercut punch into the Pyung Ahn to demonstrate short range power - this technique is not shown in the Shotokan version.*

**GM LOKE:** As you have rightly observed, individuals will delve deeper into what they have been taught, especially when they can clearly see that in the UK the art has largely remained technically basic for more than 3 decades plus the fact they have not been allowed or encouraged to ask probing questions. So one must move on to find ones own path forward. My approach to teaching is more direct....I like to call a spade - a spade! As to the meaning of each movement lets ask ourselves - 'If we send a soldier to battle and expect him to defend us and stay alive, should we not first tell him exactly what the weapon's capabilities/functions are? I also find the existing 'Okinawan/Shotokan originated' Moo Duk Kwan forms too much of a straightjacket so I decided to inject new techniques. In the general sense, there are similarities between my Ren Yi Wu Kwan in comparison with the Moo Duk Kwan or any other mainly non grappling style - the difference lies in the technical emphasis and personal style / approach.

*The Chinese arts you have incorporated include a mix of White Crane (evasion and swift counter) Wing Chun (centre line theory) as well as smashing limbs (Praying Mantis). Did you find any difficulties in merging these diverse arts together ? Also, considering your background did you also include elements of Malaysian Bersilat in your system ?*

**GM LOKE:** Personally I do not find much difficulty in merging these Shaolin based arts - as I do it in my own personal Way in taking what I feel is best and practical - and striving to provide a wider syllabus for a student base of all ages and abilities. Many have followed my development since the seventies and eighties, so greater refinements in hand techniques/power delivery and less dependence on high kicking are vital ! Some students are



already practicing together with their grand children as well as children! It is so humbling to see such dedication and loyalty. I do not include elements of Malaysian Bersilat but I am sure this Malay art also shares much as we have discussed above. What I do share is our relaxed Malaysian warmth, friendship and food, whenever possible.

### *How do you test effectiveness in combat ?*

**GM LOKE:** Testing combat effectiveness is the most difficult stage, as we are increasingly living in a health & safety and litigation conscious society. We also need to ask a most important question ...What are we fighting/defending ourselves against ? If we fight for self preservation or for our loved ones, then even the most skilful attacker in the world will have a big problem! There is no popular sports stage fighting system that can allow complete no holds barred fighting, however gruesome they may appear to be. But back to your question, constant grounding of well taught defence/attack techniques, footwork and delivery of power are essential. In addition more serious Duan level sparring, if possible by improving existing competition rules, eg allowing counter attack to back area to prevent contestants from simply charging forward and losing recovery or turning the back when close up. But I do not favour wearing protective armour as this will inevitably discourage defense/evasion techniques which is our main objective. So we can only try our best to increase combat effectiveness as we see fit while enjoying our practice in improving our physical health, mental focus and most important to be able to go about our daily lives without serious injury.

### *Can you please give your interpretation of how a basic technique, for example, inside to out block, can be turned into a practical movement for personal protection ?*

**GM LOKE:** The basic inside to outside Moo Duk Kwan block has a basic value say for beginners up to green belt, it's easy to learn but falls short on practicality ie: the delivery position is too slow [and counter attack slower due to lack of centre line] . If you are surprised the opponent strikes a split second earlier than you and you have to swing from a distance some time later! A more advanced technique would be 'karn ching sou' or mirror open hand block, which can be delivered smoothly from a relaxed hands down unguarded or both hands up guarded position in ONE thrusting move. It can be used straight on, or with a slight side step attacking the eyes and warding off the attack. It demonstrates short range power [without the need for hip] with tightening of the tan tien lower abdomen. It represents a much more effective defence, compact and immediate but requires more attention to fine tune and teach the technique. On the other hand if you see the attack coming, why not just evade or intercept to destabilise or smash his limbs with another appropriate technique. In addition to each of the other basic punches, strikes and blocks, I have also introduced more advanced effective ones as I see fit.

*GrandMaster Loke, Thankyou for the benefit of your experiences. I shall certainly be working on "karn ching sau" over the coming months. I look forward to discussing further Tang Soo Do matters with you in the near future.*

*Yours in Tang Soo! allertondavid@yahoo.com*

