

# **Hyung – The Essence of Tae Kwon Do**

First Dan Thesis

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## **What is Hyung?**

In General Choi Hong Hi's 1972 condensed encyclopedia, Taewon-Do - The Korean Art of Self Defense, he defines Hyung as "various fundamental movements, most of which represent either attack or defense techniques, set to a fixed and logical sequence". Comparisons have been made between Hyung and dance. While Hyung is aesthetically pleasing to watch and requires intense physical effort on behalf of the performer, the similarity really ends there. Hyung, sometimes called "poomse", "tul", "forms" or "patterns" represent the foundation of the Korean martial art of Tae Kwon Do.

## **The Origins of Hyung**

The Martial Arts are rich in historical traditions that date back thousands of years. One such tradition is the practice of forms or patterns. The individual elements or techniques that make up the Hyung are not random. In ancient times, it is believed that when victorious warriors returned from the battlefield they would demonstrate the techniques that allowed them to survive the fighting to eager recruits. History also shows that Buddhist monks living in solitude would cultivate a strong body and disciplined mind by practicing Hyung.

Up until the latter part of the 1900's full contact sparring did not exist as a training method. Due, in part, not only to a lack of protective equipment, but the martial arts were a means of self-defense where techniques were thought to be practiced full force. Obviously, techniques applied to a living opponent in this manner would result in serious injury or even death. Out of this historical perspective the idea of martial art training using forms was born.

The characteristics of form training identifies a given martial art style, whether it be Tae Kwon Do, Karate or Kung Fu. Most martial art styles use forms or patterns as a basic method of training. Chinese styles tend to be more circular while Korean and Japanese styles are more angular and linear.

During the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, Korean martial artists, including General Choi, trained in the Japanese martial arts, mainly Shotokan Karate. The early Korean martial arts were heavily influenced by Karate techniques. In 1971, General Choi became caught up in political disputes with the South Korean government and left Korea and formed the International Tae Kwon Do Federation (ITF). His original patterns with their Shotokan influence are still used by the ITF today.

The practice of Hyung is also one way to differentiate a martial art from a martial sport. Anyone can kick or punch; it is the Hyung that earns the martial artist the belt. Without Tae Kwon Do Hyung there is no Tae Kwon Do and it is through Hyung that the movements we know as Tae Kwon Do are passed down from generation to generation.

There are 24 patterns in Tae Kwon Do. General Choi pondered that the life expectancy of a man might be as long as 100 years. He thought that this is but a day compared to eternity. General Choi's legacy is the 24 Hyung that represents 24 hours, or one day, of his life.

From White Belt to First Dan Black Belt there are nine Hyung.

1. Chon-Ji (19 movements) – means ‘Heaven and Earth’ and the creation of the world or the beginning of human history. This is the first Hyung learned by the beginner.
2. Dan-Gun (21 movements) – The legendary founder of Korea in the year 2333 BC.
3. Do-San (24 movements) – A nick name for the patriot Ahn Ch’ang-Ho who devoted his life to the education of Korea and its independence.
4. Won-Hyo (28 movements) – A monk that introduced the Buddhist religion to Korea in 686 AD.
5. Yul-Gok (38 movements) – A nick name for a Korean scholar known as the Confucius of Korea.
6. Joong-Gun (32 movements) – A patriot who played a part in the Korea-Japan merger.
7. Toi-Gye (37 movements) – A pen name of a noted Korean Scholar.
8. Hwa-Rang (29 movements) – Named after the Hwa-Rang youth group which eventually became the driving force behind the unification of Korea.
9. Choong-Moo (30 movements) – The given name of a Korean Admiral, is said to have invented the armored battleship now known as the submarine.

The foundation Hyung have been passed down from teacher to student remaining basically unchanged over time. Although there may be minor differences in the interpretation from instructor to instructor this adds to the traditional relevance of the Hyung. While we may be unique in our interpretation of Tae Kwon Do we continue to be partners in Hyung.

## **Performing Hyung**

Hyung should begin and end at exactly the same place. Not only does this requirement help to determine the accuracy of all of the combined movements and stances, it has philosophical significance as well. As in life we are all born, as we shall die, naked, bringing nothing into the world and taking nothing out of it, returning to our creator.

Before beginning the Hyung, while standing at attention, the practitioner should take a deep breath using the diaphragm and concentrate on what he/she is about to do.

When the Hyung begins, the practitioner systematically deals with several imaginary opponents using attacking and blocking tools from different directions. The imaginary opponents are persons approximately the same height as the practitioner. This is so the targets can be consistently imagined and the technique can be properly aimed at precise target areas all while applying the proper force necessary to immobilize the opponent. The Hyung should be performed with realism.

Throughout the Hyung, the practitioner should maintain correct posture and facing. The body should be relaxed until the moment of impact when all internal energy is focused on a single point in space to achieve maximum effect. Each strike should be clear and defined. The Hyung should be performed with rhythm, proper breath control and should not be robotic.

Breathing should emphasize the diaphragm rather than the chest. The practitioner should exhale simultaneously with the last action in each position. Proper breathing is critical. It is as much a part of the form as the physical movements. By breathing properly the student will appear relaxed and at ease adding to the aesthetic quality of the form.

The beginning student should concentrate on accuracy of technique then build up speed. Through the demonstration of Hyung, the student can show how completely, precisely and definitively they have mastered the techniques. This becomes an objective measurement of a student's progress through the art of Tae Kwon Do.

Each form should be regarded as unique to the student's current abilities and not just a series of kicks and punches. The practitioner should know the purpose of each movement in the Hyung and each pattern should be perfected before moving on.

Through practice hundreds of times the movements become fixed in the student's memory giving an instinctive response should a situation arise that requires self-defense.

### **The Benefits of Performing Hyung**

Hyung practice has many benefits such as: the development of sparring techniques, improved flexibility of movement, improved ability to shift the body and balance, builds muscles, better breath control and develops fluid and smooth motions and rhythm.

The practice of Hyung improves the student's ability to concentrate and focus. This ability to concentrate in the face of distractions will enable the practitioner to focus his whole being into a single purpose at will. This ability of self-control can assist when dealing with the stresses of daily life.

Within the Hyung, many techniques are mirror images of one another. We tend to favour one side of the body. Hyung practice results in the muscular development and dexterity of both right and left sides. By applying proper rhythm and force necessary to make the techniques effective, practicing Hyung is an intense aerobic exercise. The result is a dramatic increase in stamina.

In general, there is no other activity that develops the body more completely than the martial arts and, in particular, the practice of Hyung. Hyung make your body move in every possible direction. You must use every single muscle group in each and every part of the body.

The correct breathing that comes from practicing Hyung fills the body's core with much needed oxygen and expels carbon dioxide and other toxins. Deep breathing also massages the internal organs.

### **Hyung – A Physical Meditation**

Executing Hyung requires total concentration of effort, perseverance and strong self-control. The mastery of the art of Tae Kwon Do can only be achieved when the student is proficient in Hyung.

With constant practice the student will become aware as the body and mind begin to flow together. A strong spirit will result that automatically unites the physical and mental self.

Through Hyung, the practitioner develops physical and mental discipline. He/she develops balance, control, coordination speed and agility and learns to concentrate and empty his/her mind of conscious thought so that the body can move more spontaneously.

The Tae Kwon Do Hyung are not only pleasing to watch but are physically demanding and philosophically satisfying. The most profound result, once the movements, rhythm and mechanics of Hyung are mastered, is that the pattern can be done without conscious thought. At this point the student can use synchronized breathing, sequenced movement and hard and soft motions to give a meditative quality to the Hyung. This ability requires long hours of concentration and diligent practice. By working toward this goal, the true essence of Hyung training will reveal itself to the practitioner adding to the spiritual rewards of the art.

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