

HISTORY

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ITF Taekwon-Do's General Choi Hong Hi: A Peace Profile

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Abstract

Background. Referring to a Republic of Korea (ROK) army general and founder of martial art as a man of peace seems paradoxical until his life is fully explored. Regularly misunderstood and sometimes unfairly criticized by them, academics have, until recently, ignored ROK Army Major General Choi Hong Hi's contributions to Taekwon-Do in the academic literature.

Problem and Aim. In the interests of creating a more balanced and holistic account of Taekwon-Do and General Choi's role in its global propagation as well as to better elucidate the origins of the use of Taekwon-Do for peace, this article aims to rectify General Choi's reputation by framing him as a man of peace within a Peace Studies lens.

Methods. Qualitative analyses of literature reviews of Taekwon-Do academic and lay literature, including General Choi's monographs, were performed to contextualize General Choi's peacebuilding work. Interviews with three Taekwon-Do grand-masters were also conducted to provide insight into General Choi and his martial art to better understand how he elucidated his underlying beliefs to his students.

Results. General Choi's vision and work for Taekwon-Do, although somewhat nationalistically minded, became a blueprint for grassroots soft diplomacy efforts. By implementing oaths of peace into the practice of Taekwon-Do, General Choi's educational peace philosophy seems to advocate *peace through strength*.

Conclusions. General Choi was a man of contrasts. Although a soldier and someone who taught a martial art and combat sport throughout his life, he wished to advance peace and global prosperity. To do so, he provided the world with a self-defense means that strengthens individuals physically, mentally, and spiritually so that their efforts would advance the cause of peace in their societies.

Introduction

Honoring South Korean Army major (two-star) general Choi Hong Hi (1918-2002) with a peace profile seems paradoxical; until, that is, his life is better understood. Even a brief account of his life, which is more thoroughly expounded in his three-volume autobiography and other sources, can elucidate why this man who taught the martial art of Taekwon-Do relentlessly for nearly five decades deserves distinction as a peace educator. General Choi's preference of his military title over *President*, *Grand Master*, or *Founder* further complicates the issue of understanding him as a man of peace despite the fact that he was the first president of the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF), created the first international organization headquartered in the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea), and was the

principal founder of the martial art known worldwide as Taekwon-Do [Augustyn 2019]. Nevertheless, “[f]ew...can challenge the centrality of Choi Hong-hi in the sport's development” (Korea Foundation, 2013, p. 44).

Because he self-identified as a soldier, he perhaps knew his military-provided discipline enabled him to live his philosophy of “building a more peaceful world” [Choi 1983a: 240], an ideal he commanded all Taekwon-Do students to swear to at the outset of every class. Standing at merely 5', this “Little Giant” [Gillis 2016: 202] introduced a martial art praxis that would eventually become mandatory in the ROK army. He helped popularize it into a worldwide martial art (a different form of Taekwondo later became the Olympic sport) used for self-cultivation, Korean rapprochement, and peace promotion. Regularly misunderstood and unfairly criticized throughout his life as well as after his passing, ROK

Army Major General Choi Hong Hi's contributions to Taekwon-Do were ignored in the academic literature on that martial art and combat sport until recently [Johnson, Lewis: 2018].

Despite Gillis [2016] and Moenig's [2017] well-researched efforts to elucidate Taekwon-Do history and General Choi's part in it, there still exists a mythical account of the martial art's history in Korea and abroad. This account, which Song [2016] labeled the Traditionalist Viewpoint of Taekwondo History, is most often promulgated by the ROK organizations for the Olympic sport of "Taekwondo," which were at odds with General Choi and his ITF for decades. For instance, the history section of the *Kukkiwon Textbook* [Kukkiwon 2005] fails to mention General Choi's contributions to the spread of Taekwondo. The Kukkiwon is the educational and testing headquarters of Olympic (i.e., Kukki) "Taekwondo," which is the dominant style practiced in the ROK; thus, their whitewashing of General Choi and the ITF's contributions to Taekwon-Do's global popularity contribute to and promulgate an inaccurate view of its history. Instead, it seems many Koreans wish to maintain Taekwondo is 2000 years old and imply Taekwondo was passed down through Korean history since then [Kukkiwon 2005]. While ROK Taekwondo texts have mentioned General Choi briefly [see for example: Kim 2011 and KTA 2015], there is still a question of how he should be viewed within Taekwondo history by ROK historians [Johnson, Lewis 2018].

While a mythological account of Taekwon-Do may have importance and offer benefits to martial art education [Back 2017: 23], Wetzler [2017] states in reference to Bowman [2017], "all mythology is on the verge of creating hierarchies of power, power that can and often will be abused and result in injustice" [Wetzler 2017: 78]. Accuracy and authenticity are of the utmost importance in academic research. To achieve those objectives, the current research has adopted the Realist Viewpoint in which supporting historical evidence is of the utmost importance [Song 2016]. As such, the authors attempted to identify and exclude Korean patriotism and nationalism from the findings.

As such, the mythological history often cited on Olympic Taekwondo websites and textbooks, most of which have ignored General Choi's contributions until very recently, can be misconstrued as factual and final. Consequently, an unbiased account, which arguably truly began with Gillis [2016] and Moenig's [2017] seminal works, is still emerging. By adopting a chronological structure, this article aims to rectify that somewhat by adding to the existing, albeit limited, academic literature by framing General Choi within a Peace Studies lens. The central issue and goal of this paper is to educate and propagate a more objective view of General Choi's views in and to academia to create a framework for Taekwondo Peace Studies, an emerging area of academic interest. To

do so, this study builds upon previous historical works [Gillis 2016; Moening 2017] to create a more balanced and holistic historical account of Taekwon-Do, not to mention General Choi's role in its global propagation, as well as to better explicate the origins of the use of Taekwon-Do for peace begun by Johnson [2018] and Johnson and Vitale [2018].

Terminology Notes

With the exception of Taekwon-Do (a loan word), Korean terms are presented according to the Revised McCune-Reischauer system. Nevertheless, practitioners, researchers, and authors have over the years Romanized 태권도 (*T'aegwŏn-do*) in numerous ways, but to avoid confusion General Choi's spelling of "Taekwon-Do" has been used throughout this study except in proper nouns. Korean names are presented in the Asian tradition with the surname first and rendered in the person's preferred Romanization to avoid confusion. In addition, the ITF began splintering after General Choi's death in 2002, and more than a dozen organizations currently claim rightful heir to General Choi's legacy and use the ITF name or some close variation thereof. As this article deals with General Choi and his life, the term "ITF" refers to the organization he was president of from 1966 until his death unless noted otherwise.

Methods and Materials

By presenting new empirical evidence, the current study brings forth new understandings of the Korean martial art Taekwon-Do and General Choi Hong Hi. Qualitative analyses of literature reviews on existing literature on General Choi, his ITF, and Peace Studies materials were performed to contextualize General Choi's work. As such, this study conventionalizes Taekwon-Do philosophy (and therefore the ultimate objective of its physical practice) within a Peace Studies lens. This study furthers Gillis [2016] and Moenig's [2017] historical works on Taekwon-Do and builds upon Johnson's [2020] work to frame the martial art within a Peace Studies lens; it is also comparable to research on Idokan Karate philosophies [Cynarski 2016, 2017] and Aikido and peace [Bryant 2019].

The findings of the present study were then cross-referenced with the ITF's philosophical and technical training manuals. Interviews with three Taekwon-Do grand masters (Choi Jung Hwa, General Choi's son and a current ITF president; Lee Yoo Sun, General Choi's direct student and former Taekwondo Demonstration team member; and George Vitale, an ITF historian and executive) were also conducted to elicit data on General Choi and his martial art. These semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews sought and gained information on

General Choi's opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings on peace and his grassroots soft diplomacy work. They provided insight into General Choi and his martial art to understand how he elucidated his underlying beliefs to his students. More importantly, the interviews revealed how General Choi taught his peace theory outside of his written works and provided evidence that he supported peace ideals genuinely.

Results and Discussion

General Choi Hong Hi was born on November 9, 1918 in Hwa Dae, Myong Chung District during the Japanese occupation of a then-unified Korean Peninsula. Born in what is now the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea), he was a small and frail boy who studied calligraphy in hopes of finding a suitable living. He claimed to have also practiced *taekkyōn*, a Korean folkgame and martial art, but evidence suggests that claim may just be "wishful thinking" on his part [Moenig 2017: 74].

General Choi later distinguished himself enough to be sent to and educated in Japan (1937-1942), where he studied English, Japanese, mathematics, and other subjects. By his own account, he became involved in a gambling dispute with a local bully just prior to his departure to Japan. While in Tokyo he also devoted himself to the study of Shotokan Karate-Do, an Okinawan martial art that had been introduced to Japan by Funakoshi Gichin, in order to be able to fight off the bully when he returned home [Choi 1983a; Gillis 2016; Moenig 2017]. Funakoshi's Confucian-inspired Karate-Do pedagogy likely taught him more than self-defense as its pedagogy instills a sense of higher purpose and calls for practitioners to better their societies. Interestingly, Kano Jigoro, the founder of Judo and the person accredited for imbuing the Confucian concept of *Do*, or Way toward a virtuous life into the modern Japanese martial arts [Back 2012], befriended Funakoshi. Kim et al. [2016] showed how the pedagogy and philosophy of Judo, the only other Asian martial art turned Olympic sport than Taekwon-Do, likely influenced Funakoshi's later teachings of Shotokan Karate-Do. (Although the International Olympic Committee [IOC] has accepted Karate into the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games, the organizing committee for the 2024 Games has rejected it, causing doubt about its Olympic future.) Indeed, these arts' concepts of *Do* are what likely influenced the underpinnings of General Choi's Taekwon-Do [Johnson 2017]. For General Choi, the *Do* of *Taekwon* was constituted in the concepts of using mostly practical concepts of self-defense for moral self-cultivation and ultimately for building peace, which can be considered the East Asian philosophical underpinnings of his conceptualization of Taekwon-Do [Johnson 2018].

It is important to remember that Korea was unified at the time General Choi was studying in Japan, but it was under the iron-fist control of Imperial Japan. Koreans were, amongst other brutalities, considered second-class citizens, compelled to speak Japanese in public, take Japanese names, forced to labor for the Japanese, and had their historical works and sites destroyed. Later, during the Second World War, many underwent conscription into the Japanese military and had war crimes perpetrated upon them by their occupiers. The Japanese government squashed viciously Koreans' attempts to self-govern. Anti-Japanese protestors, some of whom were secondary school students, were often arrested, tortured, and killed. Other nations similarly occupied by Imperial Japan, like Taiwan, also resisted, but most eventually succumbed to their oppressors. Koreans, however, never ceased their independence efforts until they were granted independence as part of Japan's unconditional surrender at the end of World War II. While these events are used in Korean nationalistic, anti-Japanese rhetoric and narratives, they nonetheless did occur and spurred many Koreans, North and South alike, to rebuild and strengthen their countries. Then from 1950-1953, the Korean Peninsula became the first proxy battleground between the democratic and socialistic ideologies of the Cold War. The ROK and DPRK have never signed a formal peace agreement, and the two countries remain in a state of war today, albeit not an actively fought one. Ramifications from these events of the first half of the 20th century are still felt seven decades later in both ROK and DPRK societies and shape much of their national identities and international political policies.

It is in this context that we must view General Choi's life. In 1942, he returned to the Korean Peninsula and attempted to avoid conscription into the Japanese Army. He claimed that he was eventually forced to join in 1943 [Choi 1983a], but Moenig [2017] calls some doubt into whether he was conscripted or joined willingly. Nevertheless, Choi was arrested for trying to escape and join the Korean Liberation Army. He was also "implicated as the planner of the Korean Independence Movement, known as the Pyongyang Student Soldiers' Movement" [ITF/USTF n.d.] and was thusly arrested. During his incarceration, General Choi self-reportedly taught Karate-Do to other inmates and prison guards to pass the time. Upon his conviction, he received a death sentence that was to be carried out on August 18, 1945. The emancipation of Korea just three days prior to his date of execution and his subsequent release from prison gave General Choi his freedom.

The newly liberated Korea required an army, and Choi enlisted. He was a graduate of the first class of the ROK's Military Academy (Army Serial #10044). His previous record as a student soldier and a lack of qualified personnel facilitated his meteoric rise in rank. He was promoted to full colonel in 1949 and was sent to the

United States' Fort Riley Ground General School. His education in America allowed him to author the first ROK Army's military intelligence book. By the outbreak of the Korean War, Choi had been promoted to brigadier (one-star) general. Although often not discussed in the literature on his life, General Choi saw combat in the Korean War in a battle lost due to the superior tank weaponry of the enemy [Lee 2018].

In 1954, he was promoted to his final ROK Army rank, major general, after he had formed the 29th ROK Infantry Division on Jeju Island. Possibly influenced by Funakoshi who felt "karate was originally developed to condition the mind and body, cultivating vitality toward the creation of competent individuals to benefit the whole of the country" [Funakoshi 2010: 103], Choi ordered his troops to learn Karate-Do to instill "character, strength, fighting skills and instill esprit de corps" [Juanjo 2009]. From this it is evident that he recognized the possibility for martial arts to transform people's lives and their societies.

At a historic martial arts demonstration before ROK President Rhee Seungman, members of General Choi's 29th Division displayed their skills. At one point during the demonstration, Lieutenant Nam Tae Hee broke thirteen tiles, a feat which impressed President Rhee greatly. The ROK President told General Choi that the skill resembled *taekkyŏn*, a Korean folkgame and now martial art. Moenig [2017] claims that President Rhee had no knowledge of martial arts and was likely drawing a hasty comparison. Knowing what he taught was not *taekkyŏn* in addition to his belief that Korean soldiers should learn a Korean martial art, not one from the culture of their former oppressors, prompted General Choi to modify what he was teaching and find a new name for it [Choi 1983b; Moenig 2017].

General Choi, with assistance from his subordinate Lieutenant Nam, coined the name "Taekwon-Do" for the new art. The name was likely chosen to phonetically resemble *taekkyŏn*, but the aim was also for it to be descriptive. Drawing from his calligraphy background, General Choi based the art's name on Hanja, or Chinese ideograms used in Korean writing.

The first character, *tae* (Korean: 태), is a compound character consisting of the Chinese ideogram for foot (足; pronounced *bal* [발] in Korean) and *platform, pedestal, or stage* (台; pronounced *tae* [태] in Korean). The compound character 跆 (pronounced *t̃ae* [태] in Korean) suggests a foot that is elevated, hence the term is often translated as a foot used for trampling or kicking. During an interview, Lee [2018] suggests that General Choi based his choice on another compound character found in Korean, *pyŏlt̃ae* 별태, a combination of the Korean word for star and 台. However, this interpretation does not match Choi's own definition of the term as "jumping or flying, to kick or smash with the foot." [Choi 1983a: 21]. Lee [2018] claims that Choi was the first to

combine the characters 足 and 台 into the compound 跆 and since this new Hanja was coined by a Korean for a practice created in Korea, the name *Taekwon-Do* became something uniquely Korean [Lee, 2018]. While the compound ideogram 跆 is indeed very rare in Chinese (especially prior to the inception of Taekwon-Do), it is difficult to prove that Choi was the first to combine these ideograms, as there are very similar compound characters in Chinese, such as 抬 (a combination of the ideograph for *hand* with 台 which means *to lift something up, with the hands*).

The second ideogram *kwon* (Chinese: 拳; Korean: 권) is a term well recognized within the Chinese martial arts tradition. Its literal meaning is *fight*; however, Koreans used it connotatively to refer to some form of fighting (particularly with the hands), hence translators use it regularly for *boxing* or *pugilism*. This character is commonly associated with traditional Chinese martial arts, i.e. *quán-fa* (拳法), for example *Tàijí quán* 太極拳. There are also some references to *Kwŏnpŏp* (권법) in classic Korean martial arts texts. *Kwŏnpŏp* is the Korean transliteration of the Chinese *quán-fa*. By choosing this ideogram, Choi's goal may have been to situate Taekwon-Do contextually within the long tradition of East Asian martial arts.

On the other hand, by choosing *Do* (Chinese: 道; Korean: 도) as the final character in the name Taekwon-Do, his goal may have been to also situate Taekwon-Do among the modern (Japanese) martial arts traditions, such as Judo and Karate-Do. Kano, the founder of Judo, and Funakoshi, the founder of Karate-Do, incorporated the *Do*-suffix to suggest that these systems are means of self-improvement within an East Asian philosophy context. *Do* denotes a *Way* or *road* but is also applied philosophically to suggest a journey of (spiritual) growth.

In short, by choosing the name Taekwon-Do (태권도/跆拳道), General Choi was positioning Taekwon-Do geographically, historically, and philosophically within a specific group of martial arts. Phonetically, the first two ideograms of the name link it to Korean martial arts as they are similar in sound to *taekkyŏn*, the activity for which ROK President Rhee Seungman mistook it. The second syllable refers to traditional Chinese martial arts, and the final character positions Taekwon-Do as one of the new modern martial arts, like Karate-Do, Judo, and Aikido, that emerged in Japan in the 20th century.

The Korean purity of the name *Taekwon-Do*, which General Choi specifically wrote according to Hanja, thus comes into question. Of note here is the fact that *taekkyŏn* is not spelled in Hanja indicating that *taekkyŏn* is a pure Korean concept [Moenig 2017]. Although modern mythical accounts often claim *Taekwon-Do* to be a purely Korean invention, the name itself suggests non-Korean influences. It is possible that the reason Choi based the name for the new martial art on Hanja (rather than pure

Korean) was to lend a sense of legitimacy or prestige to it through this etymological association with the East Asian philosophical tradition. One mark of a learned person's ability is to read and write calligraphy using Chinese characters, and Koreans may have seen Choi's ability to coin a new term in Hanja as a sign of his intelligence and education, which may have provided him with the credibility and authority to create the name.

Later, the second ROK President Park Chung Hee, a dictatorial leader, appointed Choi as the first ambassador to Malaysia. This was not a promotion per se as General Choi openly opposed Park after his March 16, 1961 *coup d'état* [Kang, Lee 1999: 19]. More than likely, the 'promotion' was an effort to limit General Choi's influence in the ROK [Moenig 2017; Johnson 2018]. While in Malaysia, General Choi was free to develop his vision for Taekwon-Do. He also gave public displays that garnered the interest of the Malay media, which allowed General Choi the opportunity to introduce Taekwon-Do and "the strength of the Korean people" [Johnson 2018: 1648] at a time when little was known about the country. He would later help establish the Malaysian Taekwon-Do Federation in July 1963 and the Singapore Taekwon-Do Association in 1964. In 1964, he also traveled to Vietnam to teach his style of Taekwon-Do and promote his Taekwon-Do book. This was when Taekwon-Do first became a type of soft diplomacy in order to garner interest in Korea and its culture [Vitale 2018].

Previous studies have framed the Japanese [Moenig, Kim 2019a], ROK [Capener 2016], and the DPRK [see: Johnson, Lewis 2018] governments' promotion of their martial arts for nationalistic intentions, but this may not be true for General Choi, at least not at first. General Choi did see Taekwon-Do as a way to educate the world about Korean history and culture [Vitale 2018], so he began developing new techniques and *tul* (patterns, originally called *hyung*), which are codified sets of offensive and defensive movements used to determine and develop a practitioner's skill in a martial art. Seeing as he named the art, he believed his *tul* to be the basis of the art. Indeed, he wished to "proliferate knowledge of Korean culture internationally through the ITF patterns" [Johnson 2018: 1650; cf. Johnson, Vitale 2018: 239]. Moreover, many aspects of his *tul* were based upon Shotokan Karate forms [Moenig 2017; Moenig, Kim 2019b], but were renamed and reformulated into something unique. He named his *tul* after important Korean people, events, and cultural concepts [Johnson 2018]. While Moenig [2017] interpreted this as nationalistic, General Choi saw it as a means to ensure Korean history and culture were never eradicated [Choi 2000c] as was attempted by the Japanese occupation of Korea (1905-1945) [Vitale 2018]. Although several of Choi's *tul* are named after men of war (such as admirals, generals, and freedom fighters), there are also curious allusions to peace and reconciliation. For instance, *Sam-Il Tul*

refers to the March 1st Independence Movement that occurred on 1 March 1919, when 33 Korean nationalists read the Korean Declaration of Independence, the start of a series of non-violent resistance protests involving around 2,000,000 protestors. Choi named the final *tul* in his curriculum *Tong-Il Tul*, the Korean term for the hopeful reunification of the DPRK and ROK. Several movements in this *tul* act out the separation and hopeful reunification of the Korean peninsula [Anslow 2013; Johnson, Vitale 2018].

Meanwhile in the ROK, martial arts leaders came together under the name Taesoodo. They were still using Shotokan Karate-Do techniques and patterns [Moenig 2017]. ROK Government Decree #6 stated that Taesoodo could become a sport, and it "accepted and acknowledged the unification efforts in Taesoodo" [Kang, Lee 1999: 25]. Some individuals recognized a problem with this, since Koreans practiced Taesoodo as a martial art rather than a sport at that time [Son, Seo 2017: 99]. The idea of sport Taekwon-Do is to decide a "victor" through sparring, which General Choi felt was "unreasonable" [Son, Seo 2017: 104]. He felt that students should practice a martial art physically for practical self-defense and spiritually for self-cultivation.

Johnson and Ha's [2015] division of martial arts, combat systems, and combat sports help elucidate General Choi's dislike of sport. They stated combat systems are used for self-protection and lacks a moral code or philosophy. On the other hand, a martial art is for self-defense only and possesses a philosophy, or Way, in which practitioners should use their martial knowledge to improve their lives. A combat sport, such as mixed martial arts (MMA), Greco-Roman wrestling, fencing, and Olympic Taekwondo are these reimagined and practiced for the sake of sport [Johnson, Ha 2015].

Sport is furthermore a Western concept wherein an athlete develops oneself through competition with others. Conversely, martial arts such as Taekwon-Do are often claimed to be steeped in Eastern concepts, such as Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist perspectives [Back 2012], where the practice for self-defense and development of the self is paramount, yet combat should be avoided if at all possible. However, Spivey, as quoted by Back [2012: 237], claims that the Olympic model of improving "moral character" through physical exercise "was not drawn from the ancient world, [but] rather the [1880s'] British public-school system" [Spivey 2004, p. 244]. Also, according to Spivey [2004], the Germans viewed physical exercises such as gymnastics as spiritual, both of which are nearly identical to the abovementioned Asian martial arts viewpoints. Indeed, Benesch [2020] claims sport greatly influenced Japanese martial arts, and that the Japanese developed their self-cultivation from this Western concept, a concept supported by Back [2012] who goes further and states that these concepts harmonize with the above perspectives.

Nevertheless, those who adhere to the self-cultivation ideology of martial arts practice may always interpret fighting competitively to win a prize or title as the antithesis of an Eastern martial art's philosophy and purpose. These individuals believe martial art sparring should be performed to develop and hone one's self-defense skills and to cultivate one's overall self; winning and losing should be ancillary. Martial arts practitioners can learn from the experience of sparring introspectively rather than learn from the process of competition. Sport may actually harm one's moral health as opposed to a martial art [Back 2012].

Johnson [2017] outlines how Taekwon-Do's stratified pedagogy progresses from learning self-defense techniques and skills (*musul* or 'martial technique'; Korean: 무술; Chinese: 武術) to applying that knowledge via personal expression (*mye* or 'martial artistry'; Korean: 무예; Chinese: 武藝) to a way of life (*mudo* or 'martial Way'; Korean: 무도, Chinese: 武道). Johnson and Vitale [2018] later expressed that Taekwon-Do's Way, or *Do*, is working toward building a peaceful society. Interestingly, the Olympic philosophy "harmonizes with Confucian ideals of virtue (*te*)" and the combination of amateur sports, which distains the concept of winning, may have inspired Kano's vision for Judo [Back 2012: 220], which—as stated previously—probably inspired the peace and self-cultivation pedagogies of Shotokan Karate-Do and Taekwon-Do.

This may be why General Choi became enraged when he returned to the ROK in 1965 to find the martial arts leadership renamed his Taekwon-Do to Taesoodo and were moving toward a sport-based approach. In January of that year, he became the third president of the Korea Taesoodo Association [Kang, Lee 1999: 24], which had become the center of the Korean martial arts community by late 1964, and was able to change the name of the organization back to the Korea Taekwon-Do Association (KTA). He also demanded that all KTA members practice the forms he created, which caused a considerable amount of problems since they were still using the old Karate-Do (i.e., Japanese) patterns. Within a year of being elected the KTA president, however, he was forced to resign due to a vote of no confidence created in part by his unrelenting vision and unwillingness to compromise [Moenig 2017].

From there, he took his vision for Taekwon-Do and created the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) in Seoul, ROK on March 22, 1966. General Choi stated the ITF's purpose was in part to promote Taekwon-Do in order to foster friendship and cultural exchanges between member countries [Vitale 2015] and "to achieve a peaceful society" [Johnson 2018: 1649]. Nevertheless, Choi knew that practitioners needed to be steered away from the possible misuse of Taekwon-Do techniques for brutality. For that reason, he required all ITF practitioners to recite five tenets and an oath in each class. The Tae-

kwon-Do tenets are integrity, courtesy, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit, which are vital to the "success or failure" of a student's Taekwon-Do practice [Choi 1983a: 15]. The tenets are vague enough to have subjective and deeply personal meanings to the vastly multicultural ITF. For instance, *courtesy* can mean holding a door open for someone in New Zealand while a South Korean would understand it as paying homage to their seniors. Although some tenets and other aspects of Taekwon-Do philosophy were taken directly from Shotokan Karate-Do [Moenig 2017] and Taekwon-Do proponents have not always lived up to those standards [Gillis 2016], they nevertheless provide students with morality to which they should strive.

The ITF Student Oath provides further guidance:

1. "I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do.
2. "I shall respect the instructor and seniors.
3. "I shall never misuse Taekwon-Do.
4. "I shall be a champion of freedom and justice.
5. "I shall build a more peaceful world." [Choi 1983b: 170]

General Choi's son and now leader of one of the ITFs, President and Grand Master Choi Jung Hwa confirmed the oath acts concentrically starting within the practitioner via a Confucian pedagogy [Choi J.H., 2019]. Confucius envisioned the family unit as a microcosm of society with a clear order of relationships where seniors provide care and juniors give respect. Confucianism extends this pattern beyond the family: like a parent, the king protects his subjects, and the subjects are loyal to the king.

Comparably, the first line of the ITF oath instructs students to obey and internalize the tenets, indicating Taekwon-Do knowledge begin within the practitioner. The second line of the student oath asks for respect to one's Taekwon-Do seniors, supposedly in- and outside the training area. With this line of the oath students are beginning to use the tenets to guide their actions and relationships, thus utilizing the concepts learned from Taekwon-Do practice in other ways unrelated to self-defense. The next line, never misusing Taekwon-Do, indicates Taekwon-Do should be used only for self-defense, suggesting that Taekwon-Do fits perfectly within Johnson and Ha's [2015] definition of a martial art. It furthermore indicates students must not use their newfound Taekwon-Do skills and knowledge for personal benefit. On one hand, the physical component of Taekwon-Do knowledge is clear: do not use Taekwon-Do to injure others outside of self-defense. Yet, Taekwon-Do also cultivates mental and emotional fortitude, so on the other hand is an idea of not using Taekwon-Do to threaten or dominate others. Hence, we can understand Taekwon-Do as being part of the *social contract* of civil rights and responsibilities. The oath's fourth line, in which students vow to ensure freedom and justice prevail in their immediate society, reinforces this latter idea. Stu-

dents can interpret their home, city, state, nation, or wherever they may influence freedom and create a just society as their immediate society. The final line gives the directive to work toward a peaceful world, or the broadest sphere of influence possible for a human being. It also provides a conclusive learning objective for Taekwon-Do practice: to build peace.

This oath summarizes General Choi's concepts of moral culture and Taekwon-Do philosophy, both of which he expounds on in his *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do* [Choi 1983a: 45-68, 88-90]. Its value lies in that it indicates and directs Taekwon-Do students to use their skills and knowledge for a higher purpose, something beyond themselves. It is also elegant in the way it so succinctly directs students away from violence toward using their strengths forged from Taekwon-Do training for the betterment of all.

What General Choi meant by "peaceful" is, again, relative to the practitioner. Most probably, he was unaware of the various definitions of peace and violence as they are defined today in the field of Peace Studies. Yet, we can presuppose due to 1) the fact that General Choi taught a martial art (an inherently violent activity), 2) his adherence to his military title, and 3) his lifetime being dominated by various aspects of the Cold War that he would advocate a *peace through strength* strategy. This strategy "assumes human beings are inherently violent and that the world is a competitive place" [USIP n.d.]. As such, Taekwon-Do could provide peace via the strong protecting the weak who were inevitably in danger of oppression or violence. Indeed, Choi's Taekwon-Do philosophy states that practitioners should "be gentle to the weak and tough to the strong" [Choi 1983a: 89]. Much like Funakoshi, Kano, and other traditional martial artists, General Choi taught Taekwon-Do in a manner that trained the body rigorously for self-defense in a manner that also emphasized mental conditioning to overcome the harsh realities of life. In so doing and by being guided by the tenets, student oath, and "an ideal of noble moral rearmament" [Choi 1983a: 21], Taekwon-Do practitioners should possess the physical, mental, and moral strengths to stand up to injustice [Johnson, Lewis 2020]. Taekwon-Do, though a practice that teaches punching and kicking, is therefore intended to provide the capabilities to withstand and overcome difficulties in whatever fashion they present themselves.

General Choi explicated his understanding of morality in several ways, always drawing upon the wisdom of the Great Asian Sages. He peppered his textbooks with quotes from Confucius, Mencius, Lao Tzu, and other Asian philosophers. Additionally, he explained his decision-making processes by relying on these sayings repeatedly throughout his multi-volume autobiography and the ITF *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do*. To ensure students had easy access to his vision for Taekwon-Do morality, one of his final written works was his *Moral*

Guide Book. In it, he translates hundreds of aphorisms and maxims that he hoped would provide students with "timeless wisdom" [2000a, 9].

Ironically, his adherent belief that Taekwon-Do as a martial art should be practiced by all as "a source of affirmation to all religions, races, ideologies, and nationalities" [Choi 2000c: 331] played a huge role in Olympic Taekwon-Do's success. Since the ROK funds the Taekwon-Do practiced there directly, ROK Taekwon-Do instructors, who by the 1980s practiced a sport-centered style of Taekwon-Do, were unable to enter socialist countries. Taekwon-Do of any style was not practiced in these countries until General Choi introduced his ITF style Taekwon-Do to them. His willingness to ignore the political mood of the Cold War (or rise above it morally, depending on one's political views) allowed him to give demonstrations in the DPRK, USSR, and other countries behind the Iron Curtain. To him, passing along Taekwon-Do and its lessons of self-cultivation for peace were of the utmost importance [Vitale 2018], a belief supported by General Choi's ITF Student Oath [Choi 1983: 170; Johnson 2018], his Taekwondo-Do philosophy (e.g., instructors should "[b]e a willing teacher to anyone regardless of religion, race or ideology" [Choi 1983a: 89], and throughout his memoirs [cf. Choi 2000c: 61].

General Choi "sought asylum in Canada in 1972" from ROK President Park Chung-Hee's junta [Kim D.H. 2018]. Soon afterwards the ROK-backed Taekwon-Do organization, the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF, now World Taekwondo [WT] and the international organization for the Olympic sport "Taekwondo"), was established and sought Taekwondo's inclusion into the Summer Olympic Games.

By the late 1970s, however, sport or Olympic "Taekwondo" had hit a major hurdle. The ROK's financial and political support for the WTF facilitated its dwarfing of the ITF in size and popularity around the globe, thereby reducing General Choi to an almost insignificant voice in the Taekwon-Do world. Nevertheless, the IOC required a demonstration sport to be practiced worldwide before it could be considered for Olympic status. Knowing that General Choi had worked for years to introduce Taekwon-Do in countries where WTF instructors could not enter, the WTF simply stated that Taekwon-Do was practiced in Eastern bloc countries. Ignorant of the fact that General Choi's ITF martial art was now fundamentally different from the WTF's sport, the IOC accepted Taekwon-Do as a demonstration sport at the 1988 Seoul Olympics and later confirmed it as an official Olympic event for the 2000 Games [Vitale 2018].

General Choi took pride in the fact that Taekwon-Do was an Olympic event even though he fought ardently against the WTF's efforts to do so. His efforts to slur the WTF and prevent Taekwon-Do from entering the Olympics only increased animosity against him. He nevertheless facilitated the acceptance of the sport

into the Summer Olympic Games by spreading Taekwon-Do in regions inaccessible to the WTF [Johnson 2018], thus helping spread Taekwon-Do's peace pedagogy and the IOC's Olympism philosophy of blending sport with culture, education, and international cooperation for the betterment of all.

There is no doubt that General Choi was a polarizing man. Many people in- and outside of ROK Taekwon-Do circles still revile him for going to communist countries at the height of the Cold War. Many of his direct students left him for that. Yet, few outside of the ITF have recognized General Choi publicly as someone who fought for peace and Korean rapprochement notwithstanding: 1) his war record of leading troops against the DPRK; 2) the fact that he could have moved to the DPRK at any time after 1980 but never did; 3) his final wish to be buried in the ROK (a request denied by the ROK government) despite his birthplace being in what is now the DPRK [Vitale 2019]; 4) his unwavering staunch belief that Taekwon-Do should be taught to *anyone*; 5) no record exists of him promoting socialist ideals in the decades of interviews and his personal monographs, including a 1500-page autobiography (published in Korean and English); and 6) his unrelenting work to unite different peoples through Taekwon-Do, an act of clear grassroots soft diplomacy. In fact, promoting Taekwon-Do as the ROK ambassador to Malaysia may have been that country's first act of government-sponsored soft diplomacy.

The lone exception to the above is that General Choi replaced one *tul* with another named Ju-Che Tul after he introduced Taekwon-Do to North Korea. *Juche* is the nationalistic North Korean philosophy that permeates through all aspects of life there [Ouellette 2016] to the point where “*Juche* is the DPRK and the DPRK is *Juche*” [Cynarski, Johnson 2020: 3]. However, such a DPRK-centric reading of the notion of *Juche* is questionable. The word is not a North Korean invention, nor exclusively used in the DPRK. Koreans adopted the term as a loanword from the Japanese term *shutai*, who in turn used it as a translation of the German philosophical concept of *Subjekt*; furthermore, ROK President Park Chung Hee South Korea also used the concept in his political rhetoric [Myers 2014]. General Choi moreover does not mention North Korea in the official description of the *tul*. Rather, it seems he appropriated the term and contextualized it within a martial art perspective: *Juche* “is a philosophical idea that man is the master of everything and decides everything, in other words, the idea that man is the master of the world and his own destiny” [Choi 1983a: 158]. In defining it so, the ITF literature seems to imply that *Juche* is synonymous with *self-reliance*, a contemporary mistranslation [Myers 2014]. Nevertheless, “self-reliance” is a moral within martial arts practice [Draeger 2007: 56, 66-68]. Even if General Choi wished this *tul* to emphasize his ITF students should be resourceful and autonomous, that supposition does not cover up the

clear connection between *Juche* and the DPRK. Furthermore, according to General Choi's autobiography, North Koreans attempted to force him to take a very pro-*Juche* stance in his Taekwon-Do literature, something that he claims to have fought against adamantly [Choi 2000b: 468]. Nevertheless, since the *Juche* ideology is inseparable from the DPRK, the reasons for its inclusion in the ITF curriculum remain disputed.

Testifying to General Choi's belief that Taekwon-Do could assist in peaceful pursuits is the fact that the ROK and DRPK used it successfully to quell political and social tensions on the Korean Peninsula [Johnson 2018]. The most successful of these attempts occurred at 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics when the ROK invited the DPRK Taekwon-Do demonstration team to perform at a pre-opening ceremony event alongside World Taekwondo (WT; formerly the WTF) demonstrators. Taekwon-Do demonstrations throughout the ROK and in Pyongyang (DRPK) under the theme “Peace is more precious than triumph” followed quickly afterwards the next summer. These demonstrations and other Taekwon-Do tours, such as the two DPRK Taekwon-Do Goodwill Tours through the US, illustrate that Taekwon-Do is an effective sports diplomacy tool. Despite the partial and short-term success that these recent soft diplomacy tactics have had on ROK-DPRK relations [Johnson, Lewis 2020], they have been called “one of the greatest examples of sporting diplomacy” [Gillen 2019].

Conclusion

Notwithstanding his advocacy for peace, by no means can we state General Choi's life was serene. For one, he was branded a traitor to the ROK for introducing Taekwon-Do to the DPRK in 1980. There were also frequent assassination and kidnapping plots against him [Choi 2000b: 242, 355-357], his family, and his students throughout the world [Choi 2000b: 360] by the ROK President Park Chung Hee regime. The Korean Central Bureau of Intelligence (KCIA) also harassed and intimidated Choi's supporters for years [Gillis 2016; Lee 2018; Vitale 2018].

Even long after Park's death, Kukkiwon and World Taekwondo Federation (WTF, now World Taekwondo [WT]) leaders in the ROK and their followers persecuted and slandered General Choi. These two organizations, which are respectfully the education and testing center and the International Federation (IF) for the Olympic sport of Taekwondo, are the political powerhouses for the combat sport of Taekwondo that now dwarfs the ITF in global popularity. General Choi endured as he watched as their combat sport moved away from his vision of a martial art while retaining the name he created. Yet, Taekwondo as combat sport would become an Olympic event and thereby completing his goal of informing the world about his beloved Korean culture and history

through 'Taekwondo.' In addition, it was only in 2016 that he received any recognition in the ROK, the country for which he went to war for, for his contributions to the globalization of Taekwon-Do when the ROK's Taekwondo Promotion Foundation (TPF, or Taekwondowon [Taekwondo Park]) recognized him as one of the "Greats in Taekwondo History" [ITF, 2016].

The epistemological problems of explaining the whole of a human being by using his or her written works and the ideals that they taught is the primary limitation of this study. After all, what one claims as their ideals often contradicts their actions. Individuals quoted as often and who are as prolific as General Choi was throughout their lifetimes are often held to something they said or did decades earlier. Researchers' must take a holistic account of a person's life rather than hold them accountable for a certain period of their lives. This article has done that but limited its scope to tracing however briefly General Choi Hong Hi's peace efforts.

As such, we can infer that General Choi was a man of contrasts. Although a soldier and someone who taught a martial art and combat sport throughout his life, he wished to improve peace and global prosperity. He desired to provide the world with a means to strengthen the individual physically, mentally, and spiritually so that their efforts would have peaceful ripple effects on their societies [Johnson, Lewis 2020]. His pedagogy today continues to develop practitioners' senses of justice and peace, and his 1999 nomination for the Nobel Prize for Peace recognized this [Szumowska 2001]. We can therefore conclude that based upon General Choi's personal, pedagogical, and philosophical writings as well as the direct lessons taught to his students, that he was a man of peace in principle and purpose even if his personal conduct sometimes contradicted his best intentions. As such, this study attempts to help correct the injustice that General Choi did not receive recognition for his lifetime of peacebuilding.

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General Choi Hong Hi z ITF Taekwon-Do: Profil Pokojowy

Słowa kluczowe: Międzynarodowa Federacja Taekwon-Do (ITF), taekwondo olimpijskie, miękka dyplomacja, studia nad pokojem, dyplomacja sportowa

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie. Określanie generała armii Republiki Korei (ROK) i twórcy sztuki walki mianem człowieka pokoju wydaje się paradoksalne, dopóki szczegóły z jego życia nie zostaną w pełni ujawnione. Powszechnie był on niezrozumiany i czasami niesprawiedliwie krytykowany. Naukowcy do niedawna ignorowali w literaturze naukowej wkład generała dywizji armii Republiki Korei Choi Hong Hi w rozwój Taekwon-Do. Problem i cel. W celu stworzenia bardziej zrównoważonego i całościowego obrazu Taekwon-Do i roli generała Choi w jego

globalnym rozpowszechnianiu, jak również w celu lepszego wyjaśnienia źródeł wykorzystania Taekwon-Do dla pokoju, niniejszy artykuł ma na celu poprawienie reputacji generała Choi poprzez przedstawienie go jako człowieka pokoju w ramach Peace Studies.

Metody. Przeprowadzona została analiza jakościowa literatury akademickiej i popularnej na temat Taekwon-Do, w tym monografii generała Choi, w celu kontekstualizacji pracy generała Choi w zakresie budowania pokoju. Przeprowadzono również wywiady z trzema wielkimi mistrzami Taekwon-Do, aby zapewnić wgląd w życie generała Choi i jego sztukę walki, aby lepiej zrozumieć, w jaki sposób wyjaśniał on swoim uczniom swoje podstawowe przekonania.

Wyniki. Wizja generała Choi i jego praca na rzecz Taekwon-Do, choć nieco nacjonalistycznie nastawiona, stała się wzorem dla oddolnych działań miękkiej dyplomacji. Poprzez wprowadzenie przysięgi pokoju do praktyki Taekwon-Do, edukacyjna filozofia pokoju generała Choi wydaje się popierać pokój poprzez siłę. Wnioski. Generał Choi był człowiekiem kontrastów. Choć był żołnierzem i przez całe życie nauczał sztuki walki i sportów walki, pragnął szerzyć pokój i globalny dobrobyt. Aby to osiągnąć, dostarczył światu środek samoobrony, który wzmacnia jednostki fizycznie, psychicznie i duchowo, tak aby ich wysiłki przyczyniły się do postępu w sprawie pokoju w ich społeczeństwach.