

20th Memorial Editorial

**SUBMITTED
ARTICLE**

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Written by Grand Master Dr. George Vitale



최 홍 히
Choi Hong Hi

남자 Male

1918년 11월 9일 Born on Nov 9, 1918

조선사람 Korean

전 국제태권도련맹 총재
(1966년 3월~2002년 6월)

First President of International
Taekwon-Do Federation
(Mar 1966~Jun 2002)



Choi Hong-Hi

Former Ambassador and Army General

Author, Artist and Teacher

The principle founder of the Original Taekwon-Do

Founder of the 1st Korea Taekwon-Do Association (KTA)

Founder of the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF)

Founder of the International Martial Arts Games Committee (IMGC)

General Choi would say he had two names. The one given by his parents, *Choi Hong-Hi* and the one given to him by heaven, *Taekwon-Do*.

The man, Choi Hong-Hi came into this world November 9, 1918.

He was reportedly born in Hwa Dae, Myongchon, a Kun or county in North Hamgyong Providence in the northern part of Korea.

The name Taekwon-Do, that he conceived came into this world on April 11, 1955.

(The story of that follows this 20-year memorial note).

As stated, General Choi was born on November 9th 1918.

This was on the lunar calendar used by Koreans.

That year, November 9th coincided with December 22nd on the western calendar.

It is interesting to note that General Choi moved to Canada, relocating the ITF there in 1972.

He continued to celebrate November 9th as his birthday, which it was, but now the date was the one on the calendar the west utilizes.

When General Choi was born, Korea was united, but suffering from a forced occupation by the Imperial Japanese government.

Today, this location falls in what is the Democratic People's Republic of (north) Korea, (DPRK).

When Korea was liberated at the end of WW2, it was sadly divided by foreign powers, namely the victorious Allied

Powers, led by the UK, USSR and the USA.

Mr. Choi, then 27 years old, made his way to the southern half, where he joined the Army, becoming a founding member, by virtue of graduating from their inaugural training academy.

General Choi lived in the southern half of Korea for exactly 27 years, after living the same number of 27 years in the northern half.

In 1972, to escape political persecution at the hands of the military dictatorial regime, he fled for his safety to Canada, becoming a favorite adopted son, who earned many accolades and awards for his work with his Original Taekwon-Do.

This recognition included being nominated by the Canadian government for the Nobel Peace Prize.

20-Year Memorial:

This year, 2022, marks the 20th anniversary of the passing of Ambassador Choi Hong-Hi.

The year 2002 will be viewed as a painful year in the history of Taekwon-Do and of its Founder, General Choi. The year 2002 was a critical year for Tae Kwon Do.

Of course the world was mourning the passing of a true legendary figure, our Founder, Teacher and President. But the ITF, his organization, was suffering fragmentation.

At the previous world championships, there was some dissension over presidential succession.

During the Congress a proposed settlement was accepted. However, afterwards there was a growing feeling that this would not be conducive for the upcoming negotiations between the ITF and the World Taekwondo Federation, (WTF, now called WT), that were to be held under the auspices of the Reunification Ministries of both halves of a tragically divided Korea.

Therefore General Choi and the ITF called for a special meeting that was referred to as an extraordinary congress. This meeting was held in Vienna Austria, the city of the ITF Headquarters since 1985.

Dissension there resulted in some members breaking away from the ITF and General Choi's leadership.

People circulated correspondence from the WTF stating there were no merger talks then or ever.

Of course this statement, from an organization led by a corrupt politician, was not accurate. There were indeed negotiation talks over many years, dating back to the early 1980s. In fact, one effort actually resulted in a signed agreement to merge, which was sadly never implemented.

More importantly, what was clear was that merger talks on Tae Kwon Do and exchanges of demonstration teams between the Koreas were most definitely part of the outline their Unification Ministries were working on.

This was all the result of a historic meeting of both leaders of the Koreas that took place on June 15, 2000.

The news was monumental and widely documented and reported on by numerous media outlets around the world towards the latter half of 2001.

Finally General Choi would sit at the table, across from his long time nemesis Dr. Kim Un-Yong, the WTF President.

It was a lifelong dream of Ambassador Choi to use his Taekwon-Do and the ITF to help reunite his beloved homeland of Korea.

This is evident through his teachings and the fact that he named the final Pattern, (Tul), TONG-IL, which means reunification.

Sadly General Choi passed from this world on June 15, 2002. So he could not participate in the upcoming events in person, on earth.

But he was indeed looking down from heaven on these historic events.

Ever the strategist, General Choi advocated that his successor be Professor Chang Ung, an official International Olympic Committee (IOC) Member from the DPRK.

Professor Chang was a popular and respected Member of the IOC and a leading international sports leader.

He had a good working relationship with his IOC counterpart, Dr. Kim, who was the founding president of the WTF.

The two leaders led negotiations of the joint efforts of both Koreas with their landmark participation in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Their work was celebrated globally.

The wishes of General Choi resulted in additional dissension that led to some members leaving the ITF. In the fall of 2002, at the ITF offices in Vienna Austria, the Executive Board approved General Choi wishes by filling his opening on the Board with Professor Chang.

At the next Congress, their decision was reaffirmed. Professor Chang oversaw the exchange of demonstrations from the north to the south and from the south, to the north. The team from the north was comprised of ITF members of the Korean Taekwon-Do Committee (KTC), the official NGB of the ITF in the DPRK.

The team from the south was made up of WTF Kukki Taekwondo members of the KTC's counterpart.

Over the years many advances and inroads with the WTF were accomplished under Professor Chang's presidency.

After serving two elected terms, he retired from the ITF and entered in a role of Honorary Life President of the ITF.

He was succeeded by the capable leadership of Master Ri Yong-Son.

President Ri served many roles in Taekwon-Do on the local, regional, national and international level.

He worked directly under General Choi at the ITF offices in Vienna Austria.

President Ri also worked with Professor Chang, traveling internationally with him for years.

In addition to his duties at the KTC, President Ri serves as Vice President of the DPRK's National Olympic Committee, (NOC).

Under President Ri's leadership, the ITF International Demonstration Team has performed at the Kukkiwon, the new Taekwondowon, at the WT's world championships and even the 2018 Winter Olympics, nicknamed the Peace Olympics, as well as the IOC headquarters in Switzerland and the ITF's home city of Vienna Austria.

President Ri has met with the WT at both of their offices and the WT President; Dr. Chou Chungwon has met with him at the ITF offices.

The presidents signed landmark agreements under the watchful eye of the IOC and its president Dr. Thomas Bach.

Their unprecedented work has seen monumental progress, with the WT officially accepted ITF certification and the ITF as like organization for the global benefit of all Tae Kwon Do.

This has opened the door to the Olympics for ITF members. The legally registered ITF in Vienna Austria still occupies the same exact office building where General Choi's ITF was headquartered.

The ITF prevailed in the judicial system of Vienna, the lawful entity empowered by Austrian law to examine all evidence and make a binding decision, according to the facts, when legal disputes arise.

That contentious matter has been forever solved.

The ITF will continue its work with the WT and the IOC.

Now it is hoped that all students who do ITF Taekwon-Do, will work together to further implement our Founder's wishes and make his lifelong dream come true!

It is also hoped that all students of Tae Kwon Do will pay respects at the gravesite of General Choi. Prior to his passing, General Choi longed to be buried in Korean soil, as he loved his homeland of Korea, his birthplace.

General Choi was a fiercely patriotic Korean nationalist. His supporters reached out to both the governments of the ROK and the DPRK.

Sadly a corrupt politician blocked his request and he was not granted his dying wish to be buried in a National Veteran's Cemetery for members of the ROK Army, which he was a founding member of.

The DPRK government did indeed grant his wish.

Upon his passing, they held a State Funeral and buried him in a Patriots' Cemetery in Pyongyang. This cemetery is for patriots and nationalists that resisted the Imperial Japanese colonial occupation.

The story of General Choi's efforts during the brutal colonial oppression is now becoming more known by all Koreans.

THE NAMING OF TAEKWON-DO

As informed students of Taekwon-Do will know, it is a modern martial art.

It was initially developed starting in the Republic of (south) Korea's (ROK) Army under the leadership and vision of General Choi Hong-Hi.

Taekwon-Do is not 2,000 years old. Yes it is highly probable, even definite that Korea had indigenous fighting systems needed to defend their interests like most other places on the planet did. However it was simply not Taekwon-Do.

Koreans studied rudimentary karate from Japanese sources. When they opened the original Korean Karate Kwans back in Korea they used labels like Kong Soo Do, Kwon Bup and Tang Soo Do to describe the Karate they were doing. The developmental paths that these Karate based Kwans subsequently would take, would eventually lead to different styles or systems called Taekwon-Do.

It is also crystal clear that the original Taekwon-Do was the system that General Choi and the soldiers under his command were creating at first in the ROK Army.

This would later spill over into the other branches of the ROK Armed Forces, as well as the civilian side.

This was especially true of the Chung Do Kwan, where General Choi served as the Honorary Director. The Chung Do Kwan would overwhelmingly staff the Military Gym called the Oh Do Kwan, co-founded by General Choi and Colonel Nam Tae-Hi reportedly on April 1, 1954.

General Choi stated that he started to teach his soldiers basic karate as early as 1946 when he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant.

As he rose up the ranks he was tasked to form the 29th Infantry Division.

He was sent to JeJu Island where the training was to commence.

While there he came across a young Lieutenant by the name of Nam Tae-Hi.

He was a senior student of the Chung Do Kwan and had an iconic or legendary reputation as a fierce fighter because of his heroic exploits during an epic battle in the Korean Civil War. Sergeant 1st Class Han Cha-Kyo was a junior student at the Chung Do Kwan who studied under Lieutenant Nam.

The 3 formed the team that would start Taekwon-Do. They would later become the first 3 Masters of the new Art.

However on JeJu Island it was still basic karate that was being taught to the Troops. The difference was that it was now being done on a grand scale, a Division wide basis. General Choi nicknamed his new Division the "Fist Division" and JeJu Island would become known as the "Womb of Taekwon-Do."

To celebrate both the anniversary of the Division's formation and the birthday of the first ROK President, Dr. SeungMan Rhee, PhD, a martial arts performance was held for the President in the fall of 1954.

What was demonstrated was the karate that was being called Tang Soo Do. The President was so impressed that he directed General Choi to teach this to all the Troops. Reportedly he called what he saw Taek Kyon, which was apparently an indigenous Korean Art. However it was clear that what they were doing was still very karate based.

This prompted General Choi, a proud Korean nationalist to come up with a name to label the Art he wanted to move further away from the karate roots. Readers should know that General Choi was a highly educated and sophisticated man.

He was well versed in the Chinese Classics. This of course is required, along with deep knowledge of Chinese Characters (HanJa) in order to be a calligraphy artist. General Choi studied calligraphy and eventually became an award-winning artist. He was also educated in Japan and received advanced training in America.

So by the time of this exhibition he was all ready somewhat versed in 4 languages.

General Choi began to search Chinese dictionaries in order to find a new name.

It is important to note that Korean is a phonetic based alphabet. It is newer than Chinese and in order to get at the root meanings, the Chinese characters need to be consulted.

Chinese characters or HanJa, as the Koreans call it, is a series of picture grams that tell a story by one character at a time. Each character or symbol represents a concept or word, so there are thousands of characters.

The character KWON was already widely used in the fighting arts. It means fist method and can be looked at as Chinese boxing. The HanJa for DO was in even more widespread use as it means Dao (or Tao), as in Daoism, a Chinese Religious tradition, or philosophical or ethical system. However the HanJa character TAE was very rare and not known to many, especially in Korea, as the Empire of Japan, had forced Japanese on the Koreans, and clamped down on education during the brutal occupation.

So General Choi combined the 3 Chinese HanJa characters into the new name he would call the martial art he was developing.

However he thought that the naming of the Art would be an important step of some national significance. Therefore he thought that it should have presidential authorization. However since Dr. Rhee had expressed a preference for Taek Kyon, this presented an obstacle for General Choi.

One of the reasons why researchers claim that Taek Kyon is indigenous to Korea is that it apparently does not have any underlying Chinese HanJa, indicating it may not have Chinese roots.

But since Dr. Rhee wanted to write Taek Kyon, General Choi knew he would use Korean HanGul, since there was no HanJa for it.

Therefore General Choi coaxed him to use Chinese characters as that was what made calligraphy sophisticated and much more elaborate from an artistic standpoint. So General Choi persuaded him to show off his calligraphy hand by using Chinese.

Of course General Choi provided the HanJa, which phonetically sounded somewhat similar:

TAEKWON (DO) = TAEK KYON

The strategy proved successful and the President using the Chinese HanJa penned the calligraphy.

Dr. Rhee signed the scroll presented to General Choi with his Pen Name U-Nam. This served as the basis for the original presidential authorization of the name TAEKWON-DO.



*Taekwon-Do in
Chinese Characters*



*Taekwon-Do in
Korean Characters*