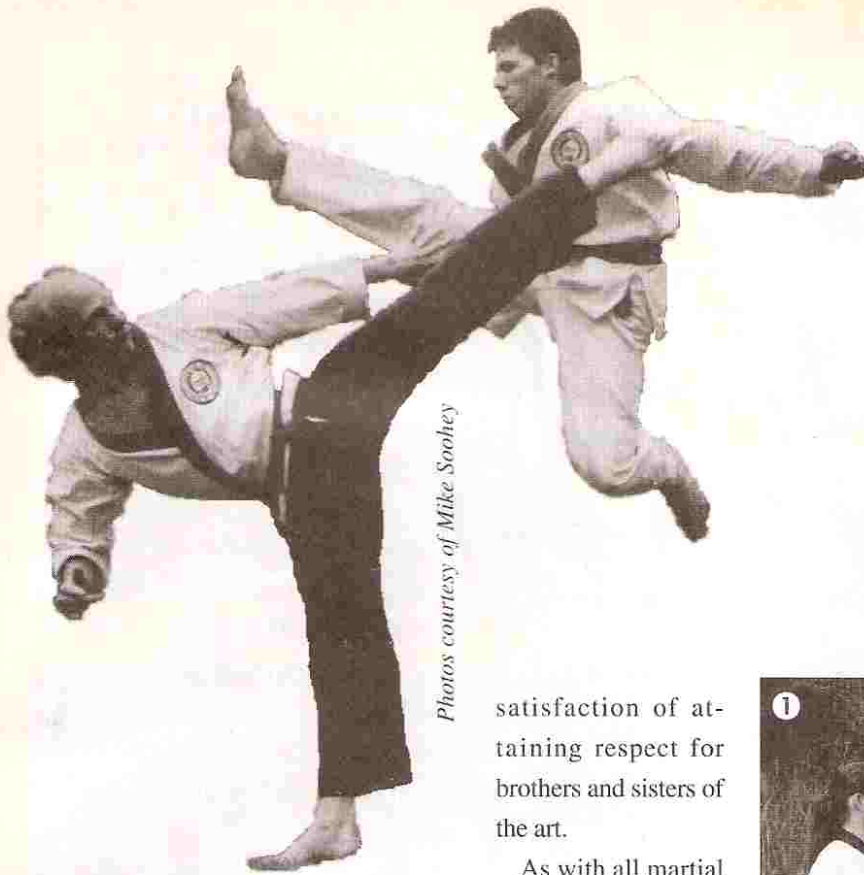


TANG FIGHT



Photos courtesy of Mike Soolhey

satisfaction of attaining respect for brothers and sisters of the art.

Train hard to better yourself, but always with respect and a pure concern for humanity." Through a humbling journey of mind and body, the Tang Soo Do practitioner not only hones martial art skills, but gains a valuable experience of life. This is the

As with all martial arts, the basis of Tang Soo Do likely started with early ancestors who defended themselves using only bare hands and feet. However, its known origination came in 1945 from the experience



A representative Tang Soo Do sequence, showing the style's fighting spirit. Ready position.



Inside outside hook kick.



Ready for slap sweep.

G SOO DO'S TING SPIRIT

by Mike Soohy



Outside step around block.



Front round kick.



Left hand shoulder slap, left foot sweep to ground.



Reverse punch finish.



1 Ready position.



2 Front kick under attack.



5 Block with right hand.



6 Punch with left hand.

and practices of Grandmaster Hwang Kee who had been teaching a karate style called Soo Bahk Do. From Soo Bahk Do, Hwang Kee established the modern Tang Soo Do style under his Moo Duk Kwan Federation. In effect, Tang Soo Do separated itself from the popular practices of sport-oriented *tae kwon do*.

The purity of this richly traditional martial art is epitomized by the way Master Peter G. Oien teaches his classes. The president of the North American Tang Soo Do Association, Master Oien has been a disciple of the Tang Soo Do discipline for 18 years, and in 1990 founded the NATA to manifest his strong belief that traditional Tang Soo Do

guides the practitioner on a journey of self-discovery. At his Greensburg Martial Arts College in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, students drill in grueling physical training as well as the mental concepts of true Tang Soo Do. In directing his classes, Master Oien demonstrates a technique, then his class executes that same hand or foot movement in the identical manner as students of Korean martial arts hundreds of years ago. Modern Tang Soo Do practitioners touch the very soul of their fellow brothers and sisters of generations long past; this strong bloodline is the core of Tang Soo Do training. While the martial art itself contains an infinite number of techniques,

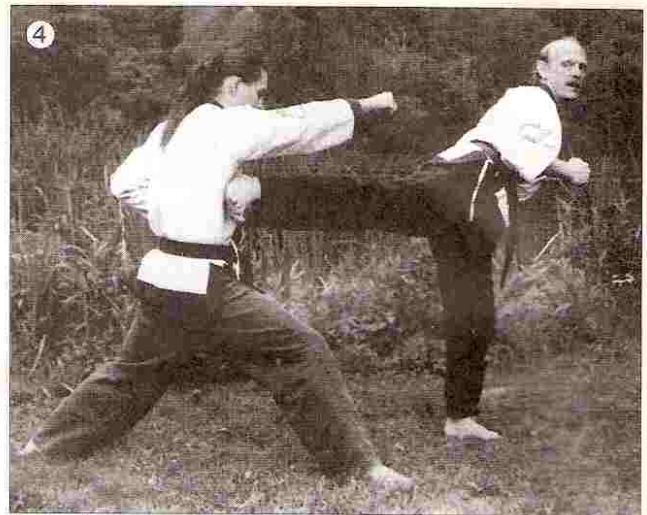
its basic and advanced movements have not been altered. Just as *sa bom nim* (teachers) of yesteryear passed their skills and knowledge to students who in turn became teachers and passed it to the next generation, so today's Tang Soo Do teachers continue to cultivate this spirit. As Master Oien points out with great pride, the classes are "very close to what it was like in Korea many years ago."

Teaching Growth

As Tang Soo Do students move to higher ranks, they not only strive to perfect technique but prepare themselves to teach. For this reason, Master Oien points to the necessity of becoming a good role



Return leg from front kick.



Back kick with same leg.



Block with left.



Arm up for tiger claw.

model. Clearly students are a reflection of the quality of instruction they have received. Master Oien started teaching Tang Soo Do only two and a half years into his training. After 16 years of teaching, Oien emphasizes a positive image. If he is upbeat and full of energy when leading class, the students are inspired to train and instruct in the same manner. The whole atmosphere encourages physical, mental and spiritual growth. In Tang Soo Do, the quest is not only to learn self-defense and develop into a competent martial artist, but also to become a moral individual.

The responsibility to grow and mature begins the moment a new Tang Soo Do



Tiger claw strike.



Defense against a punch. Ready position.



Step inside outside block.



Pivot right hand punch.



Pivot left hand palm strike.



Ready turn to back kick.



Back kick to solar plexus.

practitioner puts on a training *dobok* (uniform). This development is mirrored in the Tang Soo Do belt rank structure, as the concept of the style's belt colors correlates with the four seasons. A new student starts with a white belt to signify the winter when everything is covered with snow. As balance, coordination, and understanding develop, the "snow" gradually melts into the exuberance of spring. Here the practitioner's confidence grows, and physical skills begin to ripen. In this developmental period, belt colors change from yellow to orange to green symbolizing the summer season. The red belt rank is a time to achieve personal growth—as the summer sun connotes passion and strength, so the red belt shows the practitioner's desire to shine in the art. Becoming a first-degree black belt denotes that the practitioner has mastered basic Tang Soo Do and is ready for advanced training. A Tang Soo Do practitioner's black belt is actually midnight blue, signifying the deep blue skies of autumn, when the air is fresh and one seeks further knowledge by tapping the mind and body's unlimited powers. As Master Oien explains, "in Tang Soo Do, black signifies a stoppage in growth." This is why a *cho dan* and eventually a higher rank represent a never-ceasing journey of developing a higher physical, mental, and spiritual self.

Mind and Body

Master Oien notes that he can teach his students sound and powerful technique, but without fortitude behind the movement, it will be weak in a self-defense situation. One must always train in Tang Soo Do with the ferocity of a tiger and the courage of a warrior, whether engaged in punching and kicking drills, one or three-step sparring, breaking, or free sparring. The individual has to cultivate inner mastery to develop true technique power. It is not enough to kick high and hard, or be able to break

through six boards. The mind must be strong enough to face danger fearlessly, ultimately leading to a justifiable and honorable victory. Master Oien elaborates on this harmony between mind and body by telling his students that "your inside has to be as strong as your physical outside, or you have nothing. While technique is important, you must have the mind guiding it."

Master Oien incorporates strictness in his teaching to help students develop a responsible character. By showing respect and discipline, a Tang Soo Do stylist will learn humility, patience, and courage to persevere. Master Oien refers to Korean martial artists of centuries ago: Students promoted to black belt were strong mentally as well as physically. The mentally weak were weeded out, because the Korean martial art teachers wanted their black belts to be able to think through every situation and be unaffected emotionally. Although you may possess strong physical skills, an opponent can beat you if you are not mentally strong; this is the concept behind Tang Soo Do's overall training. Structured with an idealistic concern for humanity and practices that promote harmony between mind and body, Tang Soo Do's membership in the United States and abroad continues to grow rapidly.

Attitude and Respect

According to the philosophy of Master Oien and the NATA, proper attitude is vital to success in Tang Soo Do. From attitude springs the strength to train hard and be the best one can be—the heart and soul of traditional Tang Soo Do training. As Master Oien explains, "No amount of sacrificed time, no amount of effort, no set of circumstances is too hard an obstacle to hurdle in order to succeed or overcome."

A Tang Soo Do teacher's highest responsibility is to mold the students into believing that they can succeed at all times. This conditions them to consis-

tently put forth unrelenting effort. Such tenacious training forms a winning attitude in every endeavor—whether in the class or outside.

Another primary foundation in Tang Soo Do training is to respect all life, whether brothers and sisters of the Moo Duk Kwan Federation or the enemy. As Tang Soo Do stylists must respect every practitioner's individual skills, so they respect a ruthless attacker's physical and mental character. Even in a life-or-death situation, the practitioner must revere Tang Soo Do's nature by using no more force than necessary to stop an assailant. This regard for humanity is most prevalent inside the training dojang, where the junior member recognizes every senior member by bowing. In return, the senior member or instructor shows respect by bowing back. This respect extends to the country that developed Tang Soo Do as well as that of the school: Before entering the training floor, every member salutes the American and Korean flags by holding the right hand across the chest with the palm facing the heart.

Il Gup P'il Sar

Tang Soo Do is characterized as a hard style based on the application of power. Master Oien illuminates Tang Soo Do's power development by looking at nature in its purest form: Based on Newton's second law of force, the key to harnessing powerful techniques is to properly apply the bodyweight. Whether in hand and foot techniques or in forms training, the Tang Soo Do artist achieves power by twisting the waist when executing a technique.

For example, when performing a reverse punch it is important to twist from the waist while delivering the strike—a waist motion which activates the lower body as well as upper body into one cohesive movement. "This waist twisting is actually a method toward obtaining greater velocity for your technique," says

Master Oien. The greater the velocity, the greater the force. This higher rate of kinetic energy—which is created at the body's axis, the waist—will produce greater power.

In training to achieve power, the Tang Soo Do artist constantly strives to attain the fighting spirit of "Il Gup Pil Sar." This Korean term refers to the ability to stop a conflict using only one technique. Master Oien reiterates that every technique in Tang Soo Do is powerful enough to render an adversary defenseless. Through constant repetition of various techniques, the practitioner develops greater speed and power. This in turn provides the Tang Soo Do artist with a very destructive force if needed.

Master Oien is extremely proud of Tang Soo Do training's concentration on techniques with snap, crispness, and power. Under Master Oien's watchful eye, students perform techniques as he notes which body parts contribute most to overall power. This consistent critique of anatomy, waist and hip twisting, and correct body position makes a well-timed blow all the more powerful. And each student's performance centers on conscious efforts to minimize wasted muscle action—focusing technique output to specific areas.

Tang Soo Do is an effective arsenal of punches, kicks, and blocks. Yet the style's most noted attributes lie in kicking prowess. Much like tae kwon do, Tang Soo Do specializes in kicking techniques that can possess up to five times the destructive power of hand strikes.

Class usually begins with blocking and hand strikes. Next the practitioner trains on improving his kicking skills. Through line repetition and partner drills, all students focus on perfecting technique and increasing the kicks' speed and power. By elevating these key attributes, the martial artist develops the needed de-

structive power to crush a menacing assailant's charge. An example of this training lies in Tang Soo Do's many thrusting, whipping and snapping kicks. Five of the most highly used techniques practiced are the front, side, roundhouse, crescent and back kicks, which form the nucleus of Tang Soo Do's many turning, jumping and leaping variations. And of course, students are taught the importance of extra conditioning and flexibility exercises in developing explosive power.

Tang Soo Do Forms

While punching, kicking, free sparring, board-breaking, and numerous self-defense drills make up Tang Soo Do's core training, it is forms—termed *hyung*—which mold the spirit and are the benchmark of this classic discipline.

Virtually every hand and foot technique that is practiced is performed within both traditional and original Tang Soo Do forms. Master Oien speaks of *hyung* as a way to touch Tang Soo Do's true roots, and teaches them not as mere assorted movements that must be learned to move up in rank, but as a way to create harmony within the art.

Forms are a nurturing experience that educates practitioners about their physical and mental selves. Physically, forms perfect hand and foot technique. It is not enough to run through the movements; the Tang Soo Do stylist must concentrate on his balance in the different stances, the smoothness of his footwork, the precision as he varies his speed, breath control, and the effectiveness of his *ki hap* (energy yell) and power.

Mentally, forms are a valuable training tool. Each *hyung*—from the most basic to the very advanced—is conceptualized to make students think of the offense and defense techniques they are displaying. This makes them aware of different attacks that can be mounted

against them. The practitioner also gets a practical feeling of what it is like to counter and defend from various angles and stances, as well as insight into defenses against multiple attackers. Honing such movements will develop understanding of Tang Soo Do as a martial art, and nurture the students' self confidence.

Free Sparring

The culmination of Tang Soo Do's learning and practice is free sparring—a one-on-one engagement of Tang Soo Do techniques in which each practitioner tests his skill level in preparation for possible combat or street assault. Master Oien feels that free sparring at the end of class increases the students' skill levels, develops inner and outer strength, and elevates their confidence.

During the free sparring, students exchange techniques to improve eye, hand and foot coordination, along with fighting skills. The key in Tang Soo Do free sparring is not to get the better of a fellow practitioner, but to ensure that the technique is used to its best advantage. Free sparring against a trained martial artist is necessary to gain a full understanding of the Tang Soo Do spirit.

PyungAhn

Ultimately, the student's self confidence will lead him to develop *pyung ahn*—the internal peace that is gained upon entering the realm of Tang Soo Do understanding. It is a true state of training where the martial artist demonstrates humility, courage to overcome difficulties, and the background to show respect to all people, no matter who they are. This code is forever honored with great care and wisdom in the training and art of Tang Soo Do. ■

About the author: Mike Soohy is a Latrobe, Pennsylvania-based Tang Soo Do practitioner and freelance writer.