

HAND TECHNIQUES OF **TANG SOO DO**

BY WILLIAM OTT

The great karate master Gichin Funakoshi is famous for being known to say that a martial arts practitioner should throw at least two hundred punches a day, every day. This golden bit of advice is almost one hundred years old and is as valid today as when first spoken by Funakoshi. To be able to do something well you must do it a lot. This includes forms, fighting, kicking, punching, self defense etc. Being a Korean stylist for the last fifteen years it has become glaringly clear that Korean stylists use all too few hand techniques. In many Korean style schools (Tang Soo Do, Tae Kwon Do, Hwurang Do, etc.) punching is discouraged during free sparring and in some schools it is forbidden to punch toward the face. this is also true of some Korean tournaments, and also in the Olympics.

This is a dreadful, oversight while



claiming to teach a complete martial art. The arguments that many old style Korean masters give for the lack of hand techniques are numerous. It takes five times longer to train the legs as it does the hands, it is too dangerous to practice close quarter punching, your leg is longer than your arm therefore it will reach your opponent with less distance traveled, etc. These are all true points but not valid reasons for the lack of training with the hands by Korean martial arts.

Training the Hands

As stated before repetition is key to developing proficiency with the hands. Starting of course with the reverse punch, the student must develop what I call natural movement. This means that the student does not have to think about using his hands and therefore the hands are not forced into action. Repetitious practice either in a fighting stance or a more

Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan Master William Ott closes in on Senior student Joe McDonald.

Ready for reverse punch (1), weight is equal on both legs.



Reverse punch complete (2). Weight has shifted over to front leg while waist is twisted. $Mass + Velocity = Force$.

traditional position will go along way in developing the hands. This type of practice must be done everyday. This practice should be done just like you would do warm-up. If not done daily or at every practice session, the student will soon regress into previous habits.

When training the hands, conditioning is very important. Conditioning the hands must be done so the student strengthens his hands and also so the student learns what the hands feel like

when striking something while in the correct position. Once the student knows what position his hands are supposed to be in when contacting a target, their proficiency should then increase. Conditioning aides can include heavy bags, hand held targets, makiwara board, breaking boards, sand buckets, etc. Care should be taken when conditioning the hands as to not do more damage then good, and certain conditioning aides should not

be undertaken by children whose bones are not yet fully developed.

Reverse Punch & The Block and Punch

The reverse punch which is karate's favorite technique is pretty much the ultimate weapon when used correctly. A fairly easy technique with quick fight stopping power while maintaining an upright position. The reverse punch is thrown by the backhand. The body's



Punching exercise ready stance (1). Forefist straight punch (2). Twist into reverse punch (3). Finish with straight punch, exercise to be done at least 50 times a class (4).

weight sits in the middle of the practitioners stance, in the beginning of the technique the trunk of the body is quickly shifted forward over the front leg with the punch as the waist is also twisted to maximize the force being thrown into the technique.

Many practitioners just twist their waists without shifting their weight which just grinds their energy into the ground and producing a punch which has limited power. When delivered correctly the practitioner's full weight should be behind the punch. Speed is also a very important aspect when delivering this technique.

The body should remain in a ready

position, not loose and not tight. The technique is thrown with pure speed not strength. Speed and mass determine force not how much strength is used in the technique.

This technique although easily utilized in the beginning does take many hours of practice to perfect each and every time. Tang Soo Do practitioners use their punches in a variety of different ways. The first skill that every Tang Soo Do student learns is to block and punch.

This is the most basic of skills and is taught to the youngest practitioner. The way most Tang Soo Do schools teach the block & punch is to have students

face each other and while one side executes and attacking technique the other side uses a circular or a checking action to block the attack after which the student immediately launches his reverse punch. The punch must be thrown immediately after the attack is blocked, otherwise timing (a key element in the martial arts) will be lost. If a practitioner waits too long to punch the aggressor will have time to cover his weak points and an opportunity for a retaliatory strike is gone. If mastered correctly and timing is impeccable the Tang Soo Do practitioner needs only these two techniques (block and punch) to successfully defend him or



Opponents square off (1). Straight left is delivered (2). Opponents front hand is trapped while finishing reverse punch is landed (3).

herself in almost any situation be it in the streets or the ring.

Combination Punching

In Tang Soo Do the first key to good hand techniques is the ability to block and punch and the second is the ability to perform correct combinations. I don't mean wild almost out of control techniques that you might see in a boxing match where if the boxer misses his opponent he goes flying offbalance.

I mean controlled blows that if even when not landed do not disturb the

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momentum of the fighter throwing them. In this instance we will contain the discussion to reverse punch and straight punch. Unlike a jab, a straight front hand punch has weight behind it, and is not just a set up. (Just ask any Wing Chun Kung Fu practitioner as it is their main weapon).

Once the straight punch has been thrown the twist of the waist while throwing the reverse punch adds that much more force to the technique. The practitioners own instincts and abilities should decide when these punches are



Opponents square off (1). Aggressor launches a roundhouse kick, which is immediately blocked by defender while at the same time defender attacks over his own block to surprise his opponent before he can recover his leg (2).

best served and in what situation they would be best served. Usual combinations would be a high low combination followed by a step forward after which the two techniques might be thrown from the other side.

A fighter should always try to be proficient with either hand and either punch. combinations can be thrown while going forward or backwards by an experienced fighter. Switching feet after combinations can give the fighter an opportunity to exploit an opening that was not available with the fighters previous position and will give the fighter a different angle of attack thereby doubling his striking possibilities.

Once this basic combination is learned and becomes instinct the Tang Soo Do fighter can add other techniques to his combinations. Other attacks the fighter might add might be back fist, ridge hand, uppercut, finger punch, etc. When using combinations, the Tang Soo Do fighters goal is to continue his attack until his opponent has been defeated or surrenders. This is an essential element in martial arts fighting, because once you have gotten past your opponents legs or inside his

first line of defense you try to stay inside. The fighter stays inside and uses his hands so he does not have to repeat the procedure. (Back off and try to get inside again).

This is why you must have some sort of combination within your repertoire. So many karate schools teach you to just reverse punch and stop. This is a way of thinking that is perhaps traditional and has a place in the martial arts but is a little bit outdated.


People that train this way are following an old adage which is to be able to end a fight with one blow. This however is a way of mentally training and isn't necessarily a way of physically training. This is a very poor practice and does little to teach the student to follow up their techniques and ends up teaching the student to stop his attack prematurely.

Trapping

For many years the value of trapping and grabbing techniques has not been overshadowed in the martial arts. Whether it be in martial arts forms, or in the fighting techniques, trapping has been an essential part of the fighting arts. Standard trapping in the martial

arts forms would be evidenced by trapping and pulling an opponent into an elbow or a kicking technique.

In fighting the premise is not lost. An opponent's front hand can be grabbed and briefly held or trapped while an attack can go over or under the trapped arm. Another variation of this would be to grab and pull your opponent into your attack. In Tang Soo Do the trap and grab is used to open an opponent up for attack.

By combining many traps and grabs in a short amount of time the opponent is manipulated and kept off balance always providing a viable opening. Because blocking and parrying in Tang Soo Do is done with a more circular motion than in it's cousin Tae Kwon Do we feel this leaves a greater opportunity to use the hands in a more effective way thus eliminating the need to use only the feet for attack. Please remember that just because the kicks are flashy there is more to a Tang Soo Do stylists bag of tricks. 

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