



HWANG KEE

Founder of Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan

Article and photos by James Praytor

Tang soo do moo duk kwan is a strong style, and in its advanced stages is sublimely spiritual and mental in nature. This is because of the philosophy of Hwang Kee, its 70-year-old founder. He walks with the grace and confidence one would expect of a great martial artist. He displays resoundingly powerful philosophical wisdom. He says, "Many people could not understand my philosophy. It would take several books to discuss it."

From April through June, Hwang visited the United States. An interview was gained with him when he stopped at the dojang of his past student, Yong Ju Lee, in Huntsville, Alabama. Although the interview was difficult due to the language barrier, I have tried to produce here the essence of what was said.

Many people wonder about the founding of a style. When asked about the founding of tang soo do moo duk kwan, Hwang replied, "There isn't time now to discuss that the way I would want to. I do not wish to confuse people. I plan to write a book and tell the whole story. I will say that it is a well-known fact that I went to Manchuria in 1936 to study and develop my style. Many Koreans studied there during that period. I was influenced by some Chinese arts.

"Tang soo do is derived from soo banki, the original Korean martial art. But I developed tang soo do moo duk kwan entirely as my style. It is 100 percent Korean martial art. I returned to Korea in 1945 after nine years in Manchuria and began teaching in Seoul. I cannot briefly explain the founding, or the art itself. I have already said this. But I wish to emphasize that tang soo do is much more than just kicking and punching."

Why develop a style? What was it to accomplish? In answer to such questions Hwang replied, "The reason I developed it was because my country needed a style to teach people discipline and respect. It was developed to make people stronger and healthier. People who are disciplined and strong are at peace within themselves and can be at peace with others. Fear starts more conflicts than bravery. Disciplined

At 70 Hwang Kee limits his practice of tang soo do karate to attempts to imbue his students, whether mature or young, with the spiritual essence of the art.





persons are able to accomplish difficult tasks.”

To spend time with Hwang Kee (in English the name would be Kee Hwang) is the only way to understand the patience and the peaceful attitude of the man. Although kept busy and treated as a very important person, his manner is most reserved and polite. There is no boastfulness about him, but when in his presence one cannot help but feel a tremendous difference in this man from others around him. The old adage that says a master need not walk around like a rooster about to crow must be true. The discipline and respect

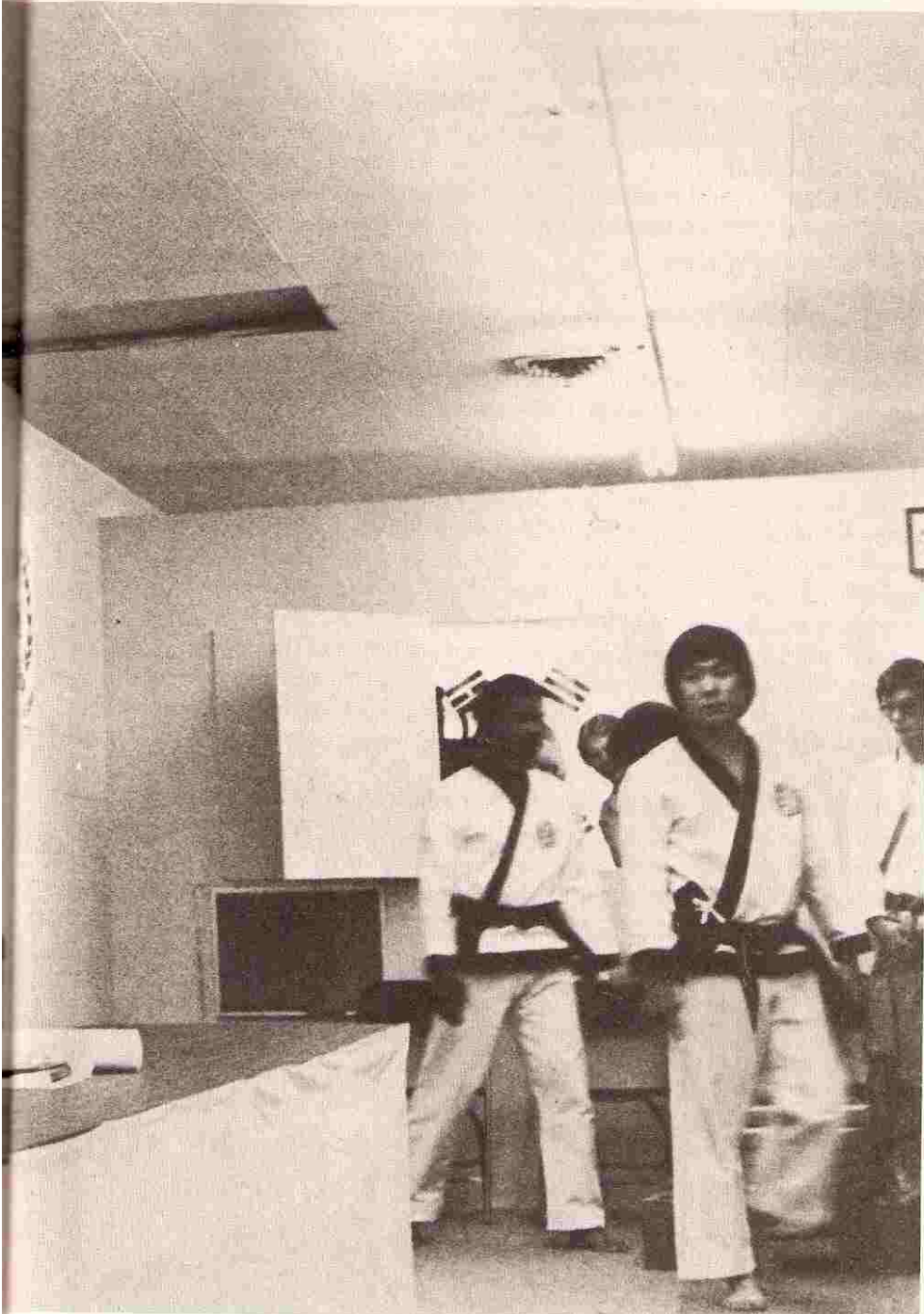
he speaks of is something practiced and not merely preached.

Thoughtfully, Hwang said, “I look around today and feel saddened. Many students of martial arts do not have respect for their teachers. All they want to learn is punching and kicking. This is not martial arts, it is only fighting! Tang soo do is not going after money or trophies. It is not taught as a sport, but as a martial art. Tang soo do is going the martial way.”

In the early 1960s when tae kwon do was developed from tang soo do for the purpose of tournament competition, Hwang was busy with tournament

plans also. He was instrumental in developing the first tournament rules. He told us, “In 1960 I was responsible for the first international karate tournament. This was when Japanese karateka came to Korea. I formulated the original tournament rules. At that time I looked around and saw that the world needed to understand martial arts—the discipline and respect taught in them. Mental and spiritual discipline are very important aspects of martial arts. The martial way should be preserved.”

“Today, I’m not much interested in tournaments. Anyone, regardless of rank, can train hard and win the tour-



At left, Hwang Kee shares an honored inscription with onlookers. Wherever he travels, Hwang Kee is revered by hundreds of tang soo do stylists.

them. My style in its highest form is spiritual. It encompasses the whole body and mind. Someday people will understand these things more. Someday I will explain more about them, but even then it may take a whole lifetime to understand."

What does Hwang think about American students? Leaning forward to explain, he said, "I'm pleased with what

Hwang Kee is joined by his students and black belts in a martial arts farewell. "Tang Soo!"



I've seen in America. The instructors are teaching original martial art. The students are gaining discipline and respect. It is not desired that tang soo do moo duk kwan become a sport, but that it continue in the martial way. Students should train hard to achieve the highest goals of this art and to preserve it in the martial way."

Hwang Kee is truly one of the great martial artists. It is fortunate that men like him are still living and teaching the styles they founded. He oversees the preservation of tang soo do moo duk kwan the way he originally intended it to be.

Anyone who meets Hwang Kee, founder and head of a great martial art, will be left with a profound impression and a lasting appreciation. He has never sought fame or fortune from his style, but is certainly worthy of both. Practitioners and non-practitioners alike, should salute Hwang Kee, a man who has spent his life in the true martial way. Tang Soo!! 卍

nement. Hard training is good and important, but all the other aspects of an art should not be forsaken. You can never achieve the highest skills and philosophy of an art if you only want to punch and kick, and have little respect for others."

Hwang believes the martial arts have much to offer of value. He believes that undisciplined, disrespectful, and generally unhealthy people, when trained properly, will consistently become better people. Moo duk kwan means: to stop the conflict. Martial arts can stop both inner and outer conflicts, thereby bringing about peace. When

respect and discipline are present, the martial arts are actually more peaceful than a football game. Hwang feels that the philosophy behind a style and the seeking of peace are the important paths to follow once one has attained discipline and respect through training.

Why has Hwang Kee devoted his entire life to tang soo do moo duk kwan? "Why!" he said. "It was to continue the martial way. To develop special skills and techniques. What people see is not all there is to my style. I have continued to develop it. Not many people know of the special skills. It would do no good for me to try to explain