

Six Degrees of Separation - Preserving Moo Duk Kwan

By Kregg P. J. Jorgenson

With over a half century of martial art experience, Grandmaster Song Ki Kim has been the instructor of many of the finest Tang Soo Do masters now living in the United States. Over ten years ago, he formed an organization to preserve the traditions of the founder of his art and works toward uniting all its practitioners.

Recently in Seattle I had the opportunity to sit down and pose some questions to Grandmaster Song Ki Kim of the World Dang Soo Do Union about Tang/Dang Soo Do in general, its history, and his hope for the future of this celebrated Korean martial art.

Grandmaster Song Ki Kim's martial arts legacy stretches back for well over a half century and to the



Grandmaster Kim (left) with Master Brooks Matsuda (right) and Grandmaster Mariano Estioko

formation of modern Korean martial arts. He began his Tang Soo Do training while attending Seoul Technical High School in 1951 under Master Kim Jong Suk (Jung Suk Kim) where he received his first-dan black belt in 1953.

He received his second-dan ranking, number 312, from the Korean Soo Bahk Do Association. After his master passed away, Grandmaster Kim received his advanced training directly from Grandmaster Hwang Kee who created the Moo Duk Kwan in 1945.

In 1956, Grandmaster Kim opened the Tang Soo Do School at Osan Air Force Base, then known as K-55, the U.S. Air Force airfield designation. He would then open the Kyung Ki Do Province regional headquarters in Songtan, South Korea, in 1957, and worked continuously to preserve the art.

In 1996, he founded the World Dang Soo Do Union to promote and preserve the traditional Tang Soo Do as he learned from the founder.



The list of his former students reads like a veritable Who's Who of Tang Soo Do. The list includes Grandmaster Estioko, Grandmaster Kim's first black belt and the second American to earn a black belt in Tang Soo Do, Grandmaster C. S. Kim, President of the International Tang Soo Do Federation, Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi, President of the International Martial Arts Association, Grandmaster Chong S. Kim, President of Pan-AM Tang Soo Do Federation, Grandmaster Min Yong Ee, President of the Donyang Tang Soo Do Federation, and Grandmaster Tong Mun Kim, President of the Global Tang Soo Do Federation. Grandmaster Jae Chul Shin was also a hired instructor at Grandmaster Song Ki Kim's dojang where the famed Chuck Norris studied.

Here it should be noted that the 'Dang' pronunciation of the word Tang is more in line with the Korean pronunciation and reflects homage to the Land of the Morning Calm.

Kregg Jorgenson:

What is the overall goal or objective of the World Dang Soo Do Union?

Grandmaster Kim:

With the passing away of the founder, Grandmaster Hwang Kee, and numerous other reasons, many Dang Soo Do practitioners spread out. I would like to bring them together because if we are united as a martial art, we can accomplish much more than we have previously.

Why is important to bring the Tang Soo Do family back together?

Dang Soo Do has spread out all over the world; however the root is slowly disappearing day by day. As a high senior in Dang Soo Do, I feel it is my duty to maintain and further develop these strong roots for future generations of Dang Soo Do practitioners. I have no selfish ambition in uniting the many scattered Dang Soo Do practitioners; I truly feel it is my duty out of love for juniors and this martial art to preserve our strong traditions.

I worry that future generations won't know where their martial art roots came from.

Why is tradition important to the style in this regard?

The traditions of Dang Soo Do can clearly be traced back over 660 years to the Hwa Rang Do of Korea's Shilla Dynasty, the Cho Hee of the Koryo Dynasty—all the way to today. If we change these traditions, then the martial art itself loses meaning. In this world everything changes, but traditions are the only things that don't change if we maintain them. It is a way to connect us to history.

What do you see for the future of the organization?

As the World Dang Soo Do Union grows I see a bright future with many possibilities.

How do you view the martial arts community in general? Have we gotten too far away from their traditions?

The martial arts as a whole, I believe, have progressed much and evolved quite a bit in a short time over the last fifty years. There are, however, many people doing things that I would not consider martial arts because what they do does not have the same goals and philosophy as traditional martial arts.

What message would you like to stress or convey to prospective members?

Anyone who has a true Dang Soo Do mind and follows the original Moo Do philosophy of the founder is a welcome member of the World Dang Soo Do Union. I feel, at this point in my generation, Dang Soo Do practitioners know their roots, but I worry that future generations won't know where their martial art roots came from. In many ways there are a lot of practitioners out there who are like orphans. They don't know who their parents are, or who their parents were, or where they came from. I truly do not wish for this to happen. **TKD**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Award winning writer Kregg P.J. Jorgenson writes humorous jokes, poems and short stories for national publications and is the author of the best-selling book, *Acceptable Loss*, as well as other books about the Vietnam era. He has been a contributor to TKDT for over 20 years.

MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR: My thanks goes out to Master Mike Shintaku, the head of the Dang / Tang Soo Do Union in Washington, for inviting me to interview Grandmaster Kim. A student of Grandmaster Mariano Estioko, Shintaku is a highly-respected former Karate and Tae Kwon Do Champion and holds the Gold Medal for Martial Arts at the 1988 International Goodwill Games.