



KAZOKU KARATE -TANG SOO DO

Keeping with tradition, breaking with the past!

When Eddie Boon went to his first Tang Soo Do class to keep his nine year old son company in 1989, little did he imagine how the martial art would have such an impact on both their lives. 18 years later, and now both masters, they both run probably the first Tang Soo Do class in the UK that does not rely on the old Moo Duk Kwan traditions.

“Kazoku Karate - Tang Soo Do is, if you like, a ‘freestyle’ version - although I tend not to like that phrase because it conjures up images of people in multicoloured uniforms doing a watered down sports version of karate,” says Master Eddie Boon, 4th Dan. He explains how his son Russell, 26, came up with the name Kazoku Karate when he was living in Japan three years ago studying K1 and Kendo whilst supporting himself teaching English. “He said the Japanese word ‘Kazoku’ meant ‘family’ and as we are family and looking for a new name for our club, we decided to use it. It also hints at the Japanese element that can be found in Tang Soo Do. Tang Soo Do is basically Shotokan karate with the high kicks of older Korean arts

such as Soo Bahk Ki thrown in.”

Both father and son used to practice Moo Duk Kwan Tang Soo Do but split with their first organisation because of disagreements about how the association was being run. They set up their own small club to simply practice what they enjoyed. Before long, the club was growing and they were having to put more and more time in as instructors. “We decided that if we were going to run a club, we would do it properly,” says Russell. “Too many Tang Soo Do clubs stick rigidly to the Moo Duk Kwan tradition and won’t look elsewhere. I wanted to bring in my experience of contact fighting and kickboxing and my father’s knowledge of pressure point fighting and Aikido style locks and trapping. Usually Tang Soo Do is pretty basic: no take-downs, no contact fighting, just basics up and down the hall and patterns. We wanted to move away from that and produce more rounded students.”

Although they keep Tang Soo Do founder Hwang Kee in high regard and still highly respect their first instructor, they believe that

Tang Soo Do in general is not as well taught as it should be. “There doesn’t seem to be the same emphasis on quality,” says Russell. “I have been to some classes and just despaired at the standards. My orange and green belts are a much higher standard than some so called ‘black belts’ out there, I’m not joking. I’m not saying my orange belts are super-human, only that standards have slipped over the last decade and people are getting black belts years before they are ready. It is a shame because when standards are lowered it gives Tang Soo Do as a whole a bad name. There is only one other Tang Soo Do club I respect and I have been involved in the martial arts world for 18 years. That is saying something.”

What is Kazoku Karate - Tang Soo Do then? Korean kickboxing with a few locks? Hardly. Kazoku Karate is a traditional martial art. Russell explains, “We practice basics, the Pyung Ahn hyungs (patterns); we do the one/three step and such like, but we also practice contact fighting; we use low kicks, elbows and knees; we put on Judo uniforms



Master Eddie Boon still going strong

and go to the ground; we do “realistic” self-defence, i.e. we move away from simple wrist grabs, and we have introduced five of our own patterns to act as a counter balance to the Japanese derived Pyung Ahn forms.”

The new patterns feature walking stances and a lot more kicks but the shape of them, the footwork, comes from Japanese laido sword form kata and the techniques within them correspond to the detailed grading syllabus. “They are based philosophically on the Korean concept of Um and Yang (Yin and Yan). The Pyung Ahn forms are Yang and the new patterns, the Kazoku forms, are the Yin,” explains Eddie. “We are freestyle in that we like to incorporate anything that we think is worth including but we do it in a traditional framework. When we first set up, we were tempted to move right away from the familiar. We only go up to 6th dan in our style. The founder of Karate-do, Gichen Funakoshi was only a 6th Dan, so how can we ever be any higher?”

Russell was keen on dropping the usual belt system and just having the three grades: white, red, black, similar to how they do things in the orient. “However, we came to realise that people need promotion to remain enthusiastic about training. Realistically, we need to fund the club too. Halls are not cheap and neither is training equipment, such as focus pads, kick shields and such like. All this has to be paid for. At some point we would like to take a contingent of students to Korea to train.”

At the moment, the masters run just three

classes in the Stockton-on-Tees area. In the future they would like to expand into other regions. Classes at the moment are run by themselves and John Paterson, 1st Dan. “We have up and coming potential Chodans (1st Dans) but we are not rushing anybody through for the sake of having black belt instructors. It is vital to make sure standards are high and those standards are respected,” says Eddie.

Anything else for the future? Russell describes, “We are a little isolated at the moment insofar as we are not part of a massive organisation. We don’t want to be part of a large organisation because I, for one, am sick of politics and the bad standards. We would like to be the benchmark for other Tang Soo Do practitioners, we don’t want to be kow-towing to some “Chief Instructor” we have never met either here in the U.K. or abroad. At the same time, we want to forge ties with other Tang Soo Do schools.” With this aim in mind, they joined the International Tang Soo Do Society based in Michigan USA and run by Master David Zacker, 8th Dan. They hope that this will allow for greater communication and increased opportunities to meet people with similar hopes and aspirations.

In the short term they are focused on running a well-disciplined, friendly club in their local community. “We have just completed a charity event for the Butterwick Hospice and raised over £2500. We did a 12k run and a one hour non-stop fight-a-thon. We hope to



do one event per year. The basic principles of Tang Soo Do stress respect for others and we like to get everybody involved from the toddlers to the old crumbles like my dad!” says Russell.

For more information about Kazoku Karate - Tang Soo Do, telephone club secretary Emma Rutter on 01642 655211 or email: kazokukarate@yahoo.co.uk

