

The History of the HWA-RANG-DO

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Hand to-hand combat is as old as the human race, and the different fighting styles that prevailed in different regions of the world took generations to evolve. Each individual country developed different combat skills in order to protect their country and their people. The evolution of the Korean combat skills began about 5000 years ago when Cho-Sun was established. Cho-Sun was a country that started on the Korean peninsula. This country established a strong military warrior ship tradition, and their territory spread. Their territory spanned far from the original peninsula, and eventually included all of Manchuria and all most half of China.

The martial art name Hwa-rang-do, "The Art of the Flower Knights," originated from the combat skills of the Hwa-rang-do system of the ancient Silla kingdom of Korea. These secret combat skills, which were called Um Yang Kwon, have survived the passage of time, and have been passed for 58 continuous generations.

Hwa-rang - "Flower Knight" The title given to the leaders of the youth group from the ancient kingdom of Silla. This title was only received by the youth of royal family members, and not civilians.

Rang-do - "Soldiers" The title of the Hwa-rang's fellows. These people were the student's disciples, and soldiers of the Hwarang, and all came from the civilian class.

Hwa-rang-do - The term used to refer to the ancient Hwa-rang warriors. The Hwa-rang and Rang-do together were called the "Flower knights." In reference to these individuals as a group of people, the Hwa-rang (leaders) and Rang-do (soldiers), two terms are used. Most references simply say Hwa-rang, but there are some later references that also use Hwa-rang-do. The "DO" suffix used here means a group of people. So the term pronounced Hwa-rang-do means a "group of flower men."

As you can see the martial art name Hwa Rang Do (The Way of the Flowering Manhood) and the ancient Hwa-rang/Hwa-rang-do (Flower knights) youth group of Silla are different identities. They have the same Korean and English spellings, however their meanings are different. The "DO" term associated with the ancient Hwa-rang/Hwa-rang-do means a group of people.



However, the "Do" term associated with the martial art Hwa Rang Do means the "Way" or "Art." The Korean language uses Hanja (the characters of the Chinese writing system) as well as Hangeul (the Korean alphabet) to produce the written meanings of their language. This combination has created a circumstance where words that have the identical Korean pronunciations also have completely different meanings. For example the Hangeul word pronounced, "DO" in Korean has 45 different meanings associated to it because of this connection with the Chinese language. Another example of this is the Hangeul word "Mudo" This word means martial (military) arts, another "Mudo" means inhumanity, and also another "Mudo" means dance. Even the word "Hwa-rang" has multiple meanings. One is Flower Man and the other is a picture gallery "Hwa-rang". Because of these problems with translations, and the difficulties that surround the terms of these languages, we will show the Hangeul and Hanja meanings with a phonetic spelling for an English equivalent.

[Historical Development of the Hwa-rang system](#)

The tradition of the Hwa-rang system has existed for over 2,000 years, and during this time it has developed into an incredibly influential force. The impact of the Hwa-rang system and people was strongly felt in the East Asian region in ancient times, and has also reverberated through time, leaving a lasting mark for us. The Korean combat skills originally began over 5,000 years ago with the formation of the Cho-sun kingdom. In order to protect the people and their territory this kingdom began the development of a strong combative system. Later, over 2,000 years ago, the kingdom of Silla (BC 57) was formed and they began the development of their own warrior system.



This Hwa-rang-do system eventually spread to Japan and was very influential in the development of the Japanese Samurai system and Bushido (Korean-Musado, this is the moral mentality of the Hwa-rang and Samurai).



During this time much of the Japanese culture originated from the Korean kingdoms of Silla, Koguryo and Paekchae. Along with social customs, martial aspects were passed across the sea to Japan. So the counterpart of the Silla Hwa-rang was the Japanese Sho-gun, and the counterpart of the Silla Rang-do was the Japanese shogun's soldiers, Samurai. It is also thought that the family of the

founder of Ju-jitsu was also connected to the Hwa-rang warriors. The name of this "Ju-jitsu" founder is "Shinna Sabro " and the Korean pronunciation of his name is "Silla Sam-rang." There were many Koreans who moved to other countries, and because they still felt strong ties to their homeland they used this kingdom's name as their maiden name. The meaning of this founder's name is "Silla third man," so it is thought that this founder's ancestors came from the kingdom of "Silla".

Japanese soft styles such as Judo (mostly a sport version of throwing and chocking), Daitoryu Yawara (same as Aiki Jujitsu - mostly throwing, joint manipulation, and grappling), and Aikido (mostly the use of an opponent's strength, and joint manipulation) were the same skills that evolved from Ju-jitsu. But, in Japan the Daitoryu yawara (Aiki Ju-jitsu) and Ju-



jitsu - name has been disbanded, and presently these branch schools are called Judo and Aikido schools. However, the Ju-jitsu that has become popular in present times is called Brazilian Ju-jitsu and is mostly focused on grappling and ground locks. All of these Japanese soft style skills share many similarities with the soft style "Yu-sool" skills of the ancient secret combat skills of the Hwa-rang which are called "Um

Yang Kwon" (Yu-sool -soft skills and Kang-sool -hard skills). Because of these many similarities and the meaning of the founder's name, it is thought that Ju-jitsu's roots lie in the Hwa-rang tradition of Korea.

Much of the influence of this Hwa-rang tradition is due to the arrival of King Chin-Hung (540 AD), who was also a Hwa-rang. The Hwa-rang system existed before King Chin-Hung, but he was the individual who greatly developed the power and strength of this system within his administration and military. After his arrival, there was a long period of wars of expansion with the larger kingdom to the north, Koguryo. However, before the northern kingdoms were engaged, King Chin-Hung took on the task of driving out the Japanese colonies to the east, which was in alliance with the Yamato clan of Japan. Ten years later, King Chin-Hung turned his armies onto the fertile valleys of west and central Korea, between the Han and Im-jin Rivers. This was the Paekchae kingdom, and the conquest of the Han-Im-jin river area brought great wealth to Silla through the acquisition of the richest agricultural lands in the peninsula additional military service and the labor of the peasantry. This conquest

also opened an easier route to China through the capture of the ports on the Yellow Sea. Because of the Hwa-rang warriors of Silla, these three countries were unified for the first time.

Who were the Hwa-rang?

One of the most significant acts by King Chin-Hung was the development of the Hwa-rang system within his military service. This Hwa-rang system was organized by groups of youths who went to mountains, rivers and other places of natural beauty to learn to develop human morality, loyalty, and mental and emotional control along with their combat skills. Through this development of strong mental, physical and spiritual training they were taught to act as models of their culture and chivalrous warriors. They were Silla's elite warriors. They were called Hwa-rang (Flower Knights) and Rang-do (a Hwa-rang's disciple or soldier). These were young men who exemplified the warrior-intellectual that influenced the Silla kingdom's history for many centuries. A 13th century monk recorded that the Silla kingdom had "issued a decree and chose boys from good royal families who were of good morals and renamed them Hwa-rang (title of leader or General). Hwa-rang Sor Won was to be admitted as a Kuk-son (Dae Jang Gun or head General). This was the beginning of the Hwa-rang (Jan Gun-General) and Rang-do (Sa Byoung -soldiers) special integration within the military system. During this time these warriors were called Hwa-rang-do (Hwa-rang and Rang-do group of people) which means the flowering knights and their warriors.

Besides religious instruction, the Hwa-rang were taught traditional dance and songs for their emotional development. Literature, the arts, and sciences were taught for their academic development. They were also taught the art of warfare, archery, combative skills etc. Their combat skills are based upon the concept of the unity of opposites embodied in the yin-yang. Their empty-handed fighting techniques were known for their blending of the hard and soft, linear and circular attacks. A linear thrust punch could break through the wooden armor of an opponent and kill him instantly. They could also spin kick at such speeds that their enemies frequently thought that the feet of the Hwa-rang warriors were swords. Also they learned 108 different weapons within their curriculum.

The eighth century Silla historian, Kim Taemun, noted in his Hwa-rang chronicle. "Sagacious counselors and loyal ministers follow the Hwa-rang and Rang-do; they produce great generals and brave soldiers." The rank of Hwa-rang signified the position of a teacher of their combat skills and he commanded 500 to 5,000 students, who were called Rang-do. A Kuk-son possessed the rank of head general (Dae Jang Gun) in the army. The ferocious fighting spirit of the Hwa-rang warriors became legendary, and their exploits were recorded for posterity in Hwa-rang poetry and literature. The Hwa-rang narratives of the Silla dynasty became the basis of the classical novel that formed the backbone of Korean literature for a thousand years.

Examples of the Strong Moral Mentality of the Hwarang

One of the most famous stories eulogized by Hwa-rang literature is the martyrdom of the son of General P'umil, who died in the wars of unification. Kwan Chang was a Hwa-rang commander at the age of 16. He was captured during a battle with Paekchae, one of the

western kingdoms. Since his high ranking battle crest indicated he was the general's son, he was taken before the Paekchae general. Lifting his war helmet, the Paekchae general was taken aback at his youth. Thinking of his own young son, he decided against execution, which was the usual fate of the captured officers, and returned him to the Silla lines. Kwan Chang went before his father and asked that he be sent back into battle at the head of his men. General P'umil agreed. He was captured after a day-long battle, but after he was disarmed, he broke loose from his guards, killing both of them by hand and attacked the Paekchae general's second in command. A leaping, spin kick killed the commander as he sat on his horse, a full eight feet in the air. Finally subdued, he was taken before the Paekchae general. Much distressed over the loss of his chief commander, he told Kwan Chang, "I gave you your life once because of your youth, but now you return to take the life of my best field commander." This time the Paekchae general returned the boy's head attached to the saddle of his war horse. At the Silla line, General P'umil grasped his son's head and wiped off the blood with his sleeve. "My son's face is as when he was alive!" he shouted to his men. "He was able to die in the service of the king. There is nothing to regret." The General rode back into battle to



complete the final defeat of Paekchae. This was the famous Hwang San Bul battle and the story became legendary throughout Korean culture.

Heroic legends of the Hwa-rang warriors were preserved in many forms: dances, poetry and literature. They were told and retold from one generation to another and provided an example for the young of each generation to follow. The

fighting spirit of the Silla warriors was so widely known that even the most powerful enemies hesitated to attack.

One of the most famous stories that illustrate the respect that the country of Tang (as China was known in this period) had for the people of Silla is told about the young Hwa-rang general named Yoo-Shin Kim. General Kim was 15 at the time he became a commander in the army. Some year's later China and Silla were in an alliance in a war against Paekchae. The Silla armies had engaged Paekchae in a battle and defeated them. But the battle had taken several days and it caused the Silla commander, Moon Kyung Kim, to be late for a meeting with the Chinese general, who was the top commander in this temporary alliance.

The Hwa-rang commander and General Kim went before the Chinese General Jung Bang So to report the good news of their victory. But the general so wanted to punish the Silla Commander for his disobedience and late arrival, so he ordered his execution! Suspecting treachery, that China's real intentions were to first take Paekchae and then turn on Silla, General Kim spoke out angrily, "Are we your allies or your slaves?" Then in a burst of fury he exploded, "I will first fight with your army and then we will defeat Paekchae." Kuk-son Yoo Shin Kim's sword rose from its scabbard by itself into his hand and he was about to take the life of the Chinese general. It was thought in those times that the sword was the soul of the warrior and that it followed the mind of its master. Seeing this, General so was taken with fright. He quickly apologized to General Kim and rescinded the order of execution.

Paekchae was defeated and Silla prepared for a war with China. However the General So was afraid to attack Silla and returned home to China. Asked by the Emperor why he had not taken Silla also, General So said, "It is true that Silla is a small country, but their King is very wise and the generals are fierce and loyal. All the people are united in a strong camaraderie." He repeated the incident with the Hwa-rang commander and said, "They are small, but we cannot defeat them."

Another story which revealed the depth of familial bonds of the Silla period concerned the death of the Hwarang General Bi Yeng Ja. Asked by General Kim to lead a suicide attack against a large Chinese force. Hwarang Bi Yeng Ja replied, "You have given me a great honor to show loyalty to my king and country." He then requested that the general watch over his son and prevent him from following him into battle. Since Hwarang Bi Yeng Ja had only one son, he was concerned that his family name live another generation. General Kim assured him that he would watch over his son. Hwarang Bi Yeng Ja entered battle and was killed. Upon witnessing the death of his father, the son mounted his horse and followed his father into battle and was killed too. Then followed the house manager and servant who were also killed. The whole Silla army witnessed this act of loyalty and, swept with a wave of sympathy for this act of sacrifice, charged into battle to avenge the death of the Bi family. They defeated the Chinese armies and saved Silla from almost certain conquest.

Fraternal loyalties among the Hwa-rang warriors were frequently as strong as familial ties. Another story is about Hwa-rang Sa Da Ham who was 15 years old when he became a Hwa-rang under King Chin-Hung. In a war with the Northern kingdoms, Sa Da Ham pleaded with the King that he be allowed to lead the first attack. In spite of Hwa-rang Sa Da Ham's young age, the King consented so as to demonstrate the bravery of the Hwa-rang youth. Sa Da Ham led the army into battle against a fortress and he was the first to breach the gate. For his bravery, King Chin-Hung gave him 300 slaves from the defeated army, but Hwa-rang Sa Da Ham gave them their liberty and wished no personal rewards for his deeds.

In this war, Hwa-rang Sa Da Ham lost his closest comrade, Hwa-rang Moo Kwan Rang.



From early childhood the two young friends had a death pact that obliged each to commit suicide should one or the other die in battle. Sa Da Ham heard of his friend's death and fell into remorse and mourning. He refused to eat or sleep for seven days. He died on the seventh day, and his sacrifice was eulogized in Hwa-rang novels for centuries to come.

The story of Hwa-rang Won Sool, the second son of Dae Jang Gun Kuk-son Yoo Shin Kim, commander of the Silla army, is similar in its importance. Hwa-rang Won Sool was a lieutenant in the army when it suffered a defeat at the hands of Chinese troops. Upon his return, his father requested permission from King Moon Moo to execute his son for the disgrace he brought on the family and the country. But King Moon Moo replied that the boy was not in command and therefore was not responsible for the defeat. But the father banished his son into exile in the mountains as a monk. When the father died Won Sool came back down from the mountain to face his mother, but she refused to see him replying that she would not violate the father's command.

Won Sool returned to Tae Bak Mountain. Some years later China launched another war. Hwa-rang Won Sool heard of the impending war and returned to the King to request that he be allowed to enter the battle. He was given a command and performed brilliantly. King Moon Moo wanted to reward him, but Won Sool refused, saying that his family held him in shame and that he could not accept. He returned to his mountain once again to live out his life as a hermit monk.



These stories, which became part of the Korean folklore and heroic legend, were not idle fairy tales, but models of the martial code of chivalry. This code evolved into a system of ethics and morality that was essential to the Hwa-rang warrior's mentality. The ego and self-interest was never sufficient to sustain such a commitment.

The development of a code of ethical behavior was achieved by the monk Won Kwang Bopsa. He told his young disciples Hwa-rang - Kwi San and Chu Hang, "The society of the Silla people already had five rules called Sae Sok Ohkae, but I command you to give these five rules to the Hwa-rang warriors for their rules of life." From this point on these five rules are called the Hwa-rang Ohkae. These five rules have been passed down and held by the Hwa-rang warriors from every generation since Won Kwang Bopsa first gave them to his two Hwa-rang disciples.

[The End of an Era](#)

This Hwa-rang system was passed through the Koryo dynasty. However, the name of this system was changed to Kuk-son-do and Pung-weal-do during this time. Even so, this system existed in the same capacity until one Hwa-rang Jang Gun (general) Sung Gae Yi (or Lee) took over the Koryo kingdom and established the new country of Cho-sun (1392 AD). The third king of Cho-sun, King Tae Jong (the fifth son of Sung Gae Lee) destroyed the Hwa-rang system when he initiated a policy that ordered all of the independent Jang Guns' (Hwa-rang generals) personal soldiers to be under his control. King Tae Jong was afraid of the power that the individual Hwa-rang generals had. King Tae Jong believed that the possibility of another strong Jang Gun attacking his reign was great. So this policy was created in order to destroy all of the power that these individual Jang Guns held. This act eliminated the Hwa-rang system from the public which was based on the relationship between the Jang Gun and his soldiers.

After giving the king their soldiers, some Hwa-rang generals left the kingdom. They left society and turned to mountain life or became monks. It was almost 600 years that the Hwa-rang system and these Hwa-rang combat skills did not exist in the public society of Korea. The combat skills of the ancient Hwa-rang were only passed secretly from one monk to one monk, until they were passed to Suahm Dosa. He is the 57th generation Hwa-rang title holder and master of the secret ancient Hwa-rang combat skills called Um Yang Kwon.