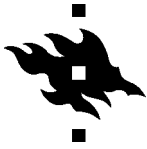


# Taekwondo in Finland

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## An Ethnographical Approach to Korean Culture in Finnish Taekwondo Community

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<p>In this thesis, I have approached taekwondo from the cultural perspective using ethnographic methods. This martial art form is often associated with Korea; however, its origins seem to lie in the Japanese <i>karate</i> – although Korean sources often claim it to be even 2000 thousand years old tradition practiced in Korean peninsula. Foreign scholars such as Udo Moenig, on the other hand, have conducted convincing studies that illustrate similarities between these two martial forms. Furthermore, many martial art schools – that are considered as the “founding schools” of the “modern taekwondo” - were established after the Second World War.</p> <p>This controversy offered inspiration to look further into taekwondo as an “invented tradition”. In short, according to Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger’s definition, “invented traditions” are often created by repeating and even manipulating origin stories to establish the preferred history. Moreover, it often strengthens the local nationalism. Therefore, it is important to look into Korean nationalism to understand the reasons to highlight taekwondo’s Korean roots. In the modern day another concept related to taekwondo and Korean nationalism is the so-called “Korean Wave”, also known as <i>hallyu</i> by its Korean name. Especially scholars such as Jin Dal Yong and Kim Bok-rae define <i>hallyu</i> as a “soft power” to disseminate Korean culture globally through cultural products such as television shows, music, food and even sports.</p> <p>Hence, studying foreign people, who do taekwondo or in other words <i>taekwondoin</i>, to see if taekwondo really promotes Korean culture and inspires people to learn more about Korea became the main focus of the project. I decided to focus on the Finnish context because I have been learning taekwondo myself. Additionally, as a Finnish person I am familiar with the Finnish culture due to which understanding both cultures helps to explain the differences between the two cultures. Furthermore, I wanted to see, how much Korean cultural features have been adopted in the Finnish taekwondo gyms. To do this, I observed and attended taekwondo classes in three different taekwondo associations in Southern Finland, and I interviewed seven people with different belt ranks from beginner to master.</p> <p>In Finland taekwondo is typically seen as a martial art form with Korean background. Certain traditions such as bowing to greet and yelling as a response to commands are often associated with martial arts generally. Korean language is used in the class variedly depending on the instructor, but many seem not comfortable memorizing the terms and most common technique names have been translated to Finnish. In addition to this, teaching taekwondo is almost purely volunteer-based, the classes are after work hours, and the space to train is rented and so shared with other sport associations. Although taekwondo gyms might not remind people of Korea, the preserved traditions are seen as a way to pay homage to the founders of the sport.</p>			
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## INTRODUCTION

*“Baro!” the instructor yells, and everyone stops their exercise turning towards the instructor and taking the so-called ready stance. “Charyeot!” he continues and everyone takes the attention stance – standing legs together facing front and hands are tightly to the sides of the body. “Gyeongnye,” and we bow to the instructor while he bows to us. It is almost the time to end the class, and the instructor yells: “To the formation!” As soon as the command is given someone asks: “How many lines?” We are told to construct four lines. The highest ranks quickly find their on spot in front row while the lower belts are struggling to find their place.*

*“Four lines” indicate that there are four in a row – so the instructor facing the trainees sees four lines. The highest rank takes his or her place in the right upper corner of the formation, from the trainees’ perspective, and then the remaining spots are filled in the rank order row by row. Hence, typically the lower belts end up waiting for the higher ranks to settle before they can find their spots. Last ones in the order are white belts and then those who are not wearing the uniform, who typically are beginners. Sometimes, if the instructor is not happy with the formation – for example the students are taking too long to settle – he or she might tell us to run to the other side of the room and then to form the lines again.*

*However, today despite the confusion the instructor patiently waits for everyone to settle. We wait for the next commands quietly standing in our places. “Dwiro dora”<sup>1</sup>, the instructor yells and we turn around to straighten the uniform and belt. “Dwiro dora,” he yells again, and continues “Charyeot. Gyeongnye,” and we all go on our knees and bow all the way to floor – foreheads touching the ground – immediately standing up again. The instructor calls us by name to collect our taekwondo passes in which the class attendances are marked on. “Minna!” he finally calls my name, and I reply “Ne!” running quickly to him. I put my left hand under my right arm as I receive my pass from the instructor, who acts exactly the same when he hands it to me; simultaneously we both bow to each other. Once everyone has received their passes, the instructor yells: “Charyeot. Gyeongnye!” We bow and thank for the class clapping our hands together. The class is dismissed.*

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<sup>1</sup> In Hangeul 뒤로 돌아, in English ‘turn backwards’.

The anecdote above introduces a typical routine part of my daily life as a taekwondo trainee, or *taekwondoin*<sup>2</sup> (태권도인) which refers to a person who does taekwondo. Hence, I am familiar with the Korean commands – especially the words *baro* (바로), *charyeot* (차렷), and *gyeongnye* (경례)<sup>3</sup>. Often these words in the context of taekwondo are translated ‘as you are’, ‘attention’, and ‘bow’. With the anecdote I have tried to display the most visible features of Korean culture in taekwondo classes. According to my earlier experiences, Korean language is partially used during the class. In addition to this, bowing and using two hands to give and receive objects is considered rather typical patterns of interaction in Korean society. Furthermore, bowing to greet your instructor in taekwondo classes is similar the greeting customs in South Korea. When I lived in Seoul as an exchange student in 2016-2017, I developed a habit of bowing every time I greet someone simply by following the example of the locals. These are not habits common to Finnish culture, although slightly bowing when shaking hands with someone is not unusual either.

One of the reasons to choose this particular topic has been my personal interest towards taekwondo as I have trained taekwondo several years now. My initial motivation to start taekwondo was my curiosity towards martial arts, and the available beginner’s course in my hometown at the time. However, I lost my interest to practice after two years. Yet years later, when my freshman year at the University of Helsinki started in 2011, I slowly started missing the demanding exercises and disciplined nature of martial arts. Soon I found myself searching for taekwondo associations in my new hometown, and in January 2012 I finally joined a local association.

At the time, taekwondo was just another martial art among many others to me. Nevertheless, now I have learned more about the philosophy and the technical differences when comparing to the other forms of martial arts. Furthermore, I have become more aware of slight differences among the taekwondo schools too. For this reason I became curious of the origins of taekwondo and the possible differences on global level. Apparently the South Korean government has named taekwondo as one of its ways to export Korean culture, which offers an interesting point of view towards the issue – nationalism and the use of so called soft

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<sup>2</sup> I will use this term to refer those who are learning taekwondo as it is neutral to one’s rank within the taekwondo community.

<sup>3</sup> The romanization styles differ from manual to manual. Hence, I have decided to use the official Revised Romanization System of Korean endorsed by the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

powers. I will return to this in later parts of the thesis, but it is important to keep in mind that the Ministry of Culture of Korea is actively trying to promote Korean culture through the exportation of cultural goods such as films, music, and food.

I was also partly inspired by my exchange year in Seoul that introduced me further to Korean culture and the daily life of Koreans. Certain patterns of behavior appear when Koreans interact with other people, and these norms are reflected among those who learn taekwondo to some extent. For example bowing, as a mean to greet someone, is also taught to Finnish *taekwondoins* as demonstrated in the introductory anecdote. Furthermore, I have heard multiple variations of the technique names: different pronunciations of the Korean words, abbreviations, and Finnish translations. This suggests that there is no universal language to taekwondo classes, which supports the idea that the customs may also vary.

Therefore, in my Master's thesis I decided to focus on taekwondo in the Finnish context. I am interested in researching, how much of Korean culture has been adopted by the Finnish *taekwondoins*. I am also interested to see if it has inspired them to learn more about Korean culture and language. In other words, I wish to assess if taekwondo has been successful in promoting Korean culture in Finland, or if it is considered more as a sport hobby learned for the sake of health benefits.

## Contents of the thesis

In the first chapter, I will introduce ethnographical research methods used, and I will explain why I decided on the ethnographical approach to the topic. The chapter also includes descriptions of the field and how the material was gathered. Moreover, the ethical issues related will be discussed as well.

After discussing the methodology, I will introduce the context of the study starting with the developments of the modern taekwondo known worldwide in the following chapter. Since my topic focuses on taekwondo culture in Finland, the postwar developments play an important role in the dissemination of taekwondo to Finland as well. Furthermore, the late 20<sup>th</sup> century changed and shaped taekwondo from self-defense focused martial art to competitive martial

sport – as Udo Moenig<sup>4</sup>, a lecturer in the Department of Taekwondo at Yeongsan University (영산대학교)<sup>5</sup>, refers in his recent works. Before this project, I thought that the taekwondo is old Korean tradition with a history of hundreds of years. To my surprise it is more likely a product of adaptation – or maybe one could say even representation – of karate in the postwar Korean peninsula. This clash of different interpretations of history will also be explained shortly. In addition to this, when it comes to sports as a hobby in Finland, it is important to understand, how the sports association system works in Finland. Instead of sport academies, the associations are more common, and they offer classes which are often taught by volunteered teachers.

The key concepts of this study are introduced in chapter 3. Especially, the history debate and dissemination of Korean culture through taekwondo both contribute to the Korean nationalism and the theory of “invented traditions”. The South Korean government has supported the exportation of cultural products to improve the international image of South Korea (Forrest & Forrest-Blincoe 2) – these cultural products include nowadays not only music and films, but also food, cosmetics and language, for example. Hence, I am interested in the perspective of taekwondo as an invented tradition, and how it does contribute to South Korea’s national image.

The observations based on the field work will be analyzed in chapters 4 and 5. I try to include my past experiences and knowledge on Korean culture combined with taekwondo manuals that describe such issues as guidelines to proper class etiquettes and teaching. Finally, in the last two chapters I reflect on the work and findings of the study, and I evaluate further the significance of the study, and how it might contribute to future research.

### **About the Terminology and Romanization**

Since this research will focus on Korean culture and its dissemination, the terminology naturally will include Korean based words and translations. Also some Finnish terms are difficult to translate into English, because either the meaning slightly changes due to cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Udo Moenig has a long history with taekwondo, and has long academic career focusing on East Asia related studies. Most of the articles refer to his articles. Hence his works became the main source on taekwondo history in my study as well.

<sup>5</sup> Often, including the English website of the university, it is written in English as Youngsan University.

differences or the word does not exist in the English language. Therefore, I have translated the words and defined them in detail whenever the context has required it.

In addition to this, a disclaimer considering the issue of the two Koreas is required. Chapters 2 and 3 include time periods before the division and also after the Korean War due to which these sections will specify which Korea the text refers to, if necessary. On the other hand, because both North Korea and South Korea share the history, these two countries feature similarities especially when referring to historical traditions and culture. If not declared otherwise, in this thesis word Korea refers to Korean peninsula when discussing the area before the Korean War, and in the context after the war it refers to modern day South Korea.

When it comes to Korean words, I have both translated the words and offered the originally written form both in Hangeul, Korean alphabetic system, and in Roman alphabets using the official Revised Romanization system. However, certain names and terms have already established Romanization forms, or majority of my materials used the same romanization different from the official system. Especially, Korean names such as Park Choi Hee and Choi Hong Hi I have decided to use in the same romanized form as in the materials, because based on Google researches and previous articles I have read they are relatively common versions. Similarly, many East Asian martial art names are not changed according to official system – *taekkyeon* and *kumdo*, for example. In addition to Korean terms, the thesis includes few terms of Japanese origin. Since it is matter of only few words, they are presented in the same romanized form as they appeared on the materials quoted or referred to.

Additionally, if the authors of the materials quoted in this thesis have a romanized name, I have used the same romanization both in the text and the “Works Cited” -page. Lastly, in the text the Korean names of people in this thesis are written the last name first, while the other names are presented the given name first and then the last name.

### **The Purpose of the Research**

The previous taekwondo research has mainly focused on either the historical aspects or the physiological and medical aspects of taekwondo as a form of sport. These approaches will be shortly discussed in following chapters. However, there barely are any studies involving



cultural perspective. Furthermore, I have yet not encountered any previous ethnographical research on taekwondo, but I have read cultural research on other sports. Thus, I was inspired to look into taekwondo through the lens of culture.

This research will be located in the context of Finland, where I already have connections to taekwondo associations. Also I personally find the idea of cultural flow interesting, and South Korea is known for its image building through culture. Thus, I believe by observing taekwondo classes, I will be able to assess if this cultural promotion through taekwondo has been successful in Finland. Therefore, in the analysis I will be focusing on the following questions:

1. What Korean cultural features are displayed in Finnish taekwondo classes?
  - a. Is Korean language used during the class, for example?
  - b. Which Korean customs have been adopted?
2. Has taekwondo encouraged people to learn more about Korea and Korean Culture?
  - a. Is their knowledge on Korean culture and language limited only to the context of taekwondo?

Based on my personal experiences and discussions with the people I train with, it seems that taekwondo is appreciated in Finland as a martial art and sport. They do associate taekwondo with Korean culture; however, the majority seems to have not gained any further interest towards Korean culture. Thus, I would suggest that in Finland taekwondo is associated with Korea, but it does not encourage people to learn about Korean culture more than necessary for the taekwondo classes. Therefore, taekwondo as a soft power to disseminate Korean culture seems to have had barely any significant effect to Finnish *taekwondoins*.

Moreover, the historical narrative and nationalistic aspects interest me as it seems to majority of the people I know are familiar with the so-called “official” history endorsed by the South Korean government and Kukkiwon, which will be looked further into in the next chapter. These institutions often support the idea of taekwondo as a centuries old tradition with Korean origins. In regards to language, I already know that certain Korean terms are used. However, it might not apply to all taekwondo associations in Finland. Sometimes different ways to pronounce these terms cause confusion, which might encourage the use of translated terms

instead. Additionally, certain traditions, such as the salutation of the Korean flag before the start of the class, seem to have been dropped from class curricula.

Nevertheless, the first issue I encountered was the choice of a method for the study. As I was gathering background materials for my study, I soon found out hardly any taekwondo manuals or other types of taekwondo related work of Finnish origin can be found. Thus, to conduct the study in the Finnish context, I would be required to contact actual *taekwondoins* and especially taekwondo instructors.

I debated myself whether to interview people or prepare questionnaires. If I was to rely on interviews or questionnaires, the main concern would have been that the research would not cover all the possible nuances. Interviewing would require extremely well-prepared questions. But what if I would forget to ask something? The more I thought about the nature of my interests the more convinced I was to try conducting a short term field research involving ethnographical research methods. Especially, the possibility of observing taekwondo classes attracted my mind; it would be the most natural way of studying the norms that might slip out of the minds of the interviewees. On the other hand, a full ethnography would not be an option with this schedule, and the amount of work it requires is not sensible for any master's degree level thesis. Nevertheless, these are issues that require further discussion; therefore, the following chapter will introduce how the research was conducted.

# 1 METHODOLOGY

I shortly described in the end of previous chapter few reasons, why I decided on ethnographic as my main tools for this research. Firstly, my questions are closely related to social interactions and behavior. In addition to this, pure interviewing might result in insufficient data due to lacking set of questions. On the other hand, in an interview the interviewee is not set in a natural situation, which can cause stress and affect his or her answers to the questions. Creating a questionnaire would result in similar problems, as the questions – despite a careful conduct – can be interpreted in varying ways and these variances are difficult to see from written answers.

Therefore, choosing a method that allows observing people and interviewees in natural settings was necessary. Ethnographical research methods offered the answer to this need. The following section will introduce ethnographical research in more detail, after which I will introduce taekwondo as a field.

## Ethnographical Research Methods

Before starting this research I already had some experience in ethnography through an ethnographic method course arranged about a year earlier at the University of Helsinki. However, as a further reading and guidance I used two books: *Ethnography* by John Brewer, and *Social Research* by Alan Bryman. The latter also offered help in having a general view on participant observation and interviewing methods, but in the end Brewer's work offered more detailed definitions and guidelines.

John Brewer suggests two ways of defining, what ethnography is, and these two are referred to as a “big” ethnography and a “little” ethnography (10). This “big” ethnography equates it with qualitative research as a whole (Brewer 10, 17-18), while the “little” ethnography restricts itself to “field research” (10, 18), which he proceeds to define in the following way:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally. (Brewer 10)

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that ethnographic research is not one pure method. Rather it can be referred to as a methodology, in other words as a certain style of research involving several methods.

Ethnography is not one particular method of data collection but a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given ‘field’ or setting, and its approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in, this setting. (Brewer 11)

So ethnography can be thought as a set of methods that are applied fit to the chosen **field** or **setting** for the research. The aim in social sciences is to understand people’s actions and experiences of the world, and ethnographer role is involved with acquiring the familiarity with the day-to-day practice and the meanings of social action. The relevant methods typically include **in-depth interviewing**, **participant observation**, personal documents, and **discourse analysis** on natural language. (Brewer 11)

Brewer raises two major critiques of ethnography within the social sciences: **natural science critique** and **postmodern critique**. The natural science critique mostly revolves around the clashes between the natural science model in social research, and more flexible ethnographic methods of data collection, as the researcher is actively involved with his or her field. (Brewer 20-21) Especially, the issue is the role of the researcher: “The natural science model of research does not permit the researcher to become a variable in the experiment, yet ethnographers ... are themselves part of the study or by their obtrusive presence come to influence the field” (Brewer 21). Secondly, the natural science model seeks to describe and measure social phenomena dealing with quantity and collecting numerate data. Although ethnography also describes and measures, it achieved by the means of extracts of natural language – dealing with quality and meaning. (Brewer 21)

Responses to the natural science critique evolved so-called **humanistic ethnography**, which “sees itself as producing a very privileged access to social reality and is often associated with the forceful assertion that social reality is constituted by people’s interpretative practices” (Brewer 23). In other words, it abandons natural science models of research, such as hypothesis testing and deductive analysis, “in favour of understanding naturally occurring behavior in its own terms” (Brewer 37). However, another response resulted in a postmodernist view that rejects both the natural science and humanistic models. These ethnographers claim that all the research is subjective questioning the ability of any method to represent “reality” accurately, and so they turn the critical lens on themselves (Brewer 23-24). Hence, the postmodern critique heightens four main problems for ethnography: the legitimacy of its representation of the field, the value placed on the so-called “**thick description**”<sup>6</sup>, the reliability and validity of its data, and the construction of the ethnographic text (Brewer 25).

Despite the criticism, ethnography remains as an important method or set of methods to understand social phenomena. It offers tools to view the phenomenon within, and the personal experiences add depth to understanding the perspectives of the participants. For this reason, I decided on ethnographical methods as my main data collection tools.

Naturally every research starts by learning about the context of your topic, and so in this case identifying your field and its context (Brewer 57-59). By field ethnographers refer to the research site or setting relevant to one’s research topic. This is an important step in order to identify the relevant data collection techniques, and more importantly to find the key figures, **informants** and the so-called **gatekeepers**, to be able to access the field.

In the field the main tool often is **participant observation** that includes interacting with the informants through watching, talking, and other means of participating in the activities. According to Brewer, participant observation is likely the data collection method that is the most closely associated with ethnographical research (59). This method involves data gathering by participating in the daily life of informants, or the **participants**, in their natural setting in order to discover their interpretations, social meanings and activities. Since the researcher in this case is closely involved with the setting and the participants, it is important for the researcher to maintain the appropriate balance between **insider** and **outsider** status by

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<sup>6</sup> Brewer implies to a definition provided by Geertz, by which he referred to a description of the social world from the inside (25).

becoming close with the informants while maintaining the professional distance from them. (Brewer 59-61)

Another important method used by the ethnographers is **in-depth interviewing**. Generally, “[i]nterviews collect verbal reports of behavior, meanings, attitudes and feelings that are never directly observed in the face-to-face encounter of the interview but that are the data the question is supposed reveal” (Brewer 63). Consequently, the technique is based on two critical assumptions: respondents’ verbal descriptions are a reliable indicator of their behavior, meanings, attitudes and feelings, and the questions are a reliable indicator of the subject of the research (Brewer 63). The interview techniques are versatile from structured and formal to unstructured and informal. However, especially ethnographers lean on towards the use of unstructured interviews that appear almost like a natural conversation between people with an established relationship. Furthermore, it is often combined with participant observation and other techniques. (Brewer 66-67)

Here I have introduced the main methods used in the ethnographical fieldwork. Naturally, analyzing the notes from the field and the interviews touches upon such methods as discourse analysis on natural language. Furthermore, the approach is partly material-driven, because the original assumptions on the topic are bound to change during the process accordingly to the discoveries based on the material. In the following section I will describe more in detail, how the field work for this research was actually conducted.

### **Taekwondo Associations as a Field**

Finding associations that would agree to let me observe their classes was the first issue before starting the actual observation work. Through asking my taekwondo friends and acquaintances, I was able to find three associations, which will be referred to as ***Taekwondo One***, ***Taekwondo Two*** and ***Taekwondo Three***. These three associations are based in Southern Finland partly due to more convenient distance and also the location of my contacts. Similar in size with 250-300 members *Taekwondo One* and *Taekwondo Three* are offering several classes per week and have also both volunteers and instructors who are paid for teaching<sup>7</sup>. On

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<sup>7</sup> Volunteered instructors often either receive a discount for the membership fee or it is completely free. However, in this case some of the instructors are being paid a salary based on their working hours at the association.

the contrary, a lot smaller association in size – approximately 40 members – *Taekwondo Two* has classes only twice a week, and the content of the classes depend on the volunteering instructor.

I approached the head instructors of these three associations via email introducing myself and explaining what this study was for. My plan had been four associations, but unfortunately the fourth one never replied to my message<sup>8</sup>. Since my plan was to observe the classes in general, and not focusing on certain people, receiving permission only from the head instructors was sufficient enough for me to join and observe the classes. However, for those I wanted to interview, I prepared a consent form to ensure that the interviewees understood what for this research is, how the recorded materials will be handled and by whom, and how the information would be presented in the published work.

Depending on the class and my own health<sup>9</sup>, I would either attend the class or simply watch from the side. Especially attending the class was important for the first visits to introduce myself to the participants and also to become more familiar with them. Later this helped me to find people to interview – or some even volunteered without having to ask.

The first visits were made December 2018 to *Taekwondo One*, which was the first association I contacted. My schedule had been postponed due to personal issues, and when I eventually contacted *Taekwondo One* and *Taekwondo Two*, the season was about to end. Both of the associations replied that the timing was bad, because the belt rank promotion tests were approaching. However, *Taekwondo One* offered classes that were also not focusing on the upcoming tests, because of which I was able to start my visits. Later in January 2019 I reached out to *Taekwondo Three*.

Following the records of my field diaries, I observed and participated in taekwondo classes for more than 19 hours in both *Taekwondo One* and *Taekwondo Three*. Recorded *Taekwondo Two* classes counted up to 6.5 hours. The interviews vary from one hour to 2.5 hour sessions. Including both interviews and observations there were diary entries from 27 different dates

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<sup>8</sup> The person who received my message accidentally send it forward back to me. I informed him/her that his message seems to have been forwarded to wrong address, and I received a reply saying that it was the case. However, after this no one has contacted me.

<sup>9</sup> Because of my studies and work, I have not been able to attend taekwondo classes more than twice a week. For this reason suddenly jumping into several classes a week seemed risky. Furthermore, I have old injuries on my knees and left shoulder because of which I cannot perform all the exercises.

starting from first of December in 2018 last being from 19<sup>th</sup> of June in 2019. Majority of the observation entries are from January-March, while the interviews, six in total, were recorded mainly in April and early June. In addition to this, I did spend time with the participants outside the times that were recorded in my journal.

Due to the distance and the schedules, *Taekwondo Two* was visited the least amount of times. In the case of *Taekwondo Two* with the active amount of participants per class being less than 10 people, I was automatically expected to participate myself. On the contrary, the amount of participants at *Taekwondo One* and *Taekwondo Three* allowed me to sit on the side observing everyone. Especially, for children's classes it was typical to have the parents watching from the sides, so my existence did not cause any disturbance.

To understand the context of the early 80s, when taekwondo was still in taking its baby steps in Finland, I was able to interview Master Hwang Dae Jin (황대진). Master Hwang was born in 1942 in the colonized Korea. He started learning *kongsudo*<sup>10</sup>, corresponding Korean name for karate, in *Jido Kwan* (지도관) under master Jeon Il Seop (전일섭) when he was 14. The *Jido Kwan* -style differed from other schools by its active and developed sparring, and Master Jeon's teaching was based on good manners and extreme *mudo* ('martial way')<sup>11</sup> training. In the early 1960s the most successful fighters – including Hwang who started competing at the age of 17 – were Master Jeon's disciples. Having won two national *kongsudo* competitions, he was accepted to the national team of South Korea at the age of 21 in 1963. Later in the same year he won the Korean championship in *kongsudo*. After his military service Hwang worked as the a coach for the competitive team of Incheon Dong Sang Middle and High School (인천 동산중고등학교 Incheon Dongsang junggodeunghakgyo) in 1969-72, and later he trained the South Korean army's special forces in 1973-76. ("Suurmestari"; Lee; Hintsanen 58) Master Hwang arrived to Finland in 1979, and soon after started organizing first events to promote and teach taekwondo to Finnish people and to this day he is still actively teaching in Helsinki.

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<sup>10</sup> This will be introduced in the next chapter in further detail.

<sup>11</sup> Moenig and Kim for example contrast this term with the Japanese *budo*, which has the same meaning, 'martial way' ("The Invention" 142).



The Finnish interviewees included Jarkko<sup>12</sup>, who belongs to the generation that first started learning taekwondo – in his case in 1982 – after Master Hwang’s arrival to Finland. However, due to his injury he had to stop training for a while. He did not return to the taekwondo gym until he and his wife started looking for a place for their older son to start training martial arts. Looking for a taekwondo gym Jarkko noticed that Master Hwang is still actively teaching in Helsinki, and took his son there. Soon he found himself dressed in taekwondo uniform, also known as *dobok*, and enjoyed the classes aimed for the 30+ years old adults taught by Master Hwang. Now he has the 1<sup>st</sup> Dan black belt, and also assists teaching classes for the children of various ages in the taekwondo association he is a member in.

Mika and Paula represent the rare case of Finnish *taekwondoins* earning their living as taekwondo teachers. Through an old training friend of mine, I became acquainted with them, and I also participated in a poomsae workshop they organized in late April. Mika carries 4<sup>th</sup> Dan black belt, therefore he is considered a master in taekwondo circles. He is the head instructor and especially focuses on sparring. Paula is an instructor with 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan black belt, and also works as a coordinator of the association. Both of them emphasize the importance of creating a safe space for the youth to enjoy training.

I also had an opportunity to interview Laura, a mother who started taekwondo about a year ago. Her husband and son were interested in starting to learn martial arts as hobby, and eventually they found a local taekwondo association that offered classes for younger children and their families. She had never considered herself as someone who would do martial arts, but now she has become the most active participant to the classes in her family. Through her I was able to receive fresh insight to taekwondo, and so different perspective on the cultural issues too.

Taina on the other hand found joy in taekwondo in her 50s, and now after retirement dedicates a lot of her time to improve her taekwondo techniques out of classes too. Following her words, as someone who has long history in yoga, she wanted a new hobby that had roughness to it. Taina’s friend talked her into joining a taekwondo association together, but quickly she noticed that the instructors there had hardly any experience teaching older people. She enjoyed training, but because of personal reasons she had to quit for few years. However,

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<sup>12</sup> Names of the interviewees are changed excluding Master Hwang.

her interest towards taekwondo encouraged her to start again, and this time she looked for associations that offered classes suitable for older members. Her search was rewarded and now in her 60s she is regularly attending the classes, and actively training at home whenever she has free time.

Through Mika and Paula, I was introduced to Jaana who also has experience from few different associations in Finland, and furthermore from training in the national team. Currently, she is a university student and a part-time taekwondo teacher with her 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan black belt that she recently was granted. Furthermore, Jaana has been fascinated by martial arts and East Asian cultures ever since she was young, and she even has lived in Japan as a child because of which Korean culture does not seem as foreign to her as many other Finnish people.

In addition to interviewing Finnish people, since I have no personal experience of training taekwondo in South Korea, I decided to interview Korean people via Internet. I approached a Korean acquaintance of mine, who currently works as a professor in a local university there. Through him I was able to contact a taekwondo expert, who helped to find eight students majoring in taekwondo to answer open questions related to taekwondo in Korea and the training culture. I chose open questions so that the respondents would be able to express themselves as much as they can in a text, which would serve better for the chosen ethnographic approach.

The Korean respondents were students<sup>13</sup>, majority in their 20s, with approximately 10-15 years of experience in taekwondo. One of the respondents seemed to be over 30 based on his or hers 25 years of experience – the rank of 5<sup>th</sup> Dan was also highest of the group. Rest of the respondents were all equivalent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Dan<sup>14</sup>. Therefore all the Korean respondents had rather long background with the sports. I did not ask, what the role of the respondents is in their taekwondo community, but I would assume majority of them focuses on training themselves for the time being as they are students. However, they are already considered as “masters” in title-wise.

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<sup>13</sup> I did not ask the gender or age of the respondents, because these questions were purely related on the culture. Furthermore the aim of this analysis is to offer a deeper insight to Korean culture and taekwondo, which helps us to understand better the differences between the Finnish culture and Korean culture.

<sup>14</sup> Majority actually said they have the 4th Pum rank. The Pum ranks correspond with Dan ranks, however, they are granted to the *taekwondoins* 15 years old or under. This suggests that these respondents have not been promoted after the age of 15.

First of all, I was curious of, how the Koreans themselves view the history of taekwondo. As discussed in earlier parts, the invention of a tradition often is involved with manipulation of the history: In this case, the previous studies suggest that the Korean origins were emphasized leaving out the influences from Japan after the World War II. This is reflected in the responds; the respondents discuss taekwondo as an old tradition that has gained its modern form due to the influences outside and developments into a sport<sup>15</sup>. Only one respondent did not refer to the ancient martial art forms such as *subakhui* or *taekkyeon*.

To gain a deeper perspective to the Korean culture and tradition and its relation to taekwondo, I asked the respondents about the class procedures, proper etiquette, and relations between different taekwondo gym members. Every respondent interpreted the question from the physiological and educational perspective, and told about the regular warming-up and exercising routines.

The follow-up questions and their responses, on the contrary, explain a little typical social interactions and traditions within in Korean society. Certain behavior patterns during the class are associated with taekwondo classes only. One respondent compares the process of learning the correct etiquette to the development of ones skills and rank promotion: “Learning the etiquette is the basis of taekwondo, the white belt. In other words, when one first comes to taekwondo gym they learn the basic etiquette. First one learns the greeting, then honorific language, basic behavior patterns and so on.” Majority of the respondents mentioned talking politely using the honorific language to the leaders, masters, and teachers. Furthermore, all the respondents described the class time to be highly restricted and everyone is focused on the class. However, outside the class time the atmosphere was described to be relaxed, and relationships with the other members are typically close.

For Koreans the hierarchical system guides how to act towards others, but it also depends on the situation. For example a married couple might use honorific forms while talking to each other in a public setting; yet, at home they may use the informal language to communicate. This is visible in the responses as the respondents say that during a class everyone is focused and the instructor is extremely strict with the students while out of class they might be as

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<sup>15</sup> Scholars such as Udo Moenig discuss taekwondo as a martial sport rather than a martial art in his latest works.

close as family members are – naturally depending on the individuals and their relations to the others.

Here, I have shortly introduced, how Korean respondents describe training taekwondo in South Korea. The aim has been to understand the possible differences in the class etiquette due two cultural differences between Finland and Korea. However, the data gathered is different to the field work, because of which I have included this short discussion here.

Furthermore, this work will not be a pure ethnography. Rather I have applied ethnographical methods to the research. A true work of ethnography requires much longer periods of observation and involving oneself with the field more closely. However, I hope this inspires people in the future to maybe conduct a proper field work on similar issues, because I believe similar research would offer extremely interesting insights to globalization and cultural flow from the perspective of sports and sports culture.

### **Ethical Issues Related to the Research**

Firstly, my main concern was the protection of privacy of the participants – especially of those who I interviewed. Not only was I worried about possibly revealing their identity or bringing up personal issues without their consent, but I was also concerned with the legality of my research. I was mostly concerned whether I need consents from all the members of the associations I had planned to work with. Nevertheless, the participant observation of the classes does not require collecting personal data. Rather I would describe people by their belt rank or any other characteristics that could not be strictly connected to them. The characters appearing in this research are either based on one person, or multiple people I observed in the field. After all, the main purpose of this study is to shed light on the culture, not on the individuals.

However, the major problem occurred in regards to few people, who are well-known in taekwondo circles also abroad. Therefore, the consent form included a question if the interviewees were willing to permit me to use their name in the paper, because their information is valuable but difficult to express without exposing their identity. Otherwise, all

the people are being protected by changing their name and not discussing their background in detail.

Additionally, preparing the email interview questions for the Korean respondents turned out more problematic than expected. I tried to format the open questions in a way that they leave room for individual interpretation in hope for personal background stories and personal experiences. Although I did ask, for example, to explain in detail how the taekwondo classes are executed, some did not explain them – a part of me was expecting the answers to be short. As a result the answers did not convey much of individual, personal characteristic of the interviewees. On the other hand, I might have not explained some questions clearly enough, and the respondents have interpreted the question differently from my perspective. In my mind the point is culture, and therefore I was hoping answers that would describe typical behavior patterns. On the contrary, the interpretations were associated with physiological studies and sports.

Another major concern revolved around my role as a *taekwondoin* and a researcher. I have learned taekwondo several years now so I am familiar with the sports, and naturally with the people I train with. For this reason, my first decision when choosing the associations to study was to not include my home association. Of course, I will apply my previous knowledge and experiences, but conducting the actual field work with people I have known for years was not an option; maintaining my role as a researcher would have been impossible. Despite working with people I had never known before, I sometimes lost my sense of professionalism to simply enjoy the exercises during the classes in which I actually participated. However, I believe it only helped me to establish my legitimacy as a long term *taekwondoin*, which in the end helped me to connect with the people I would interview. I noticed that I appeared more approachable, and people gladly shared taekwondo related conversations with me.

Nevertheless, the biggest issue bothering my mind is the reliability of the study. It is undeniable that further research is required to offer proper information. But this is a case study from a cultural perspective that intends to raise discussion to inspire future research. Even with the three associations I was able to discover differences, although taekwondo is considered as a highly disciplined martial art with a strict set of etiquette rules. Hence, I wanted to interview Koreans too to highlight the cultural environment differences as well. I chose to conduct the interviews via email partly due to my concern of not being able to

interview fluently in Korean. Also, according to my personal experiences, many Koreans are not comfortable using English to communicate. Naturally face-to-face interview would have been a better option: however, in my case I decided it was better to focus on the actual field work. In addition to this, the focus is on taekwondo in the context of Finland so interviewing Koreans was secondary priority to the research.

I will reflect on the research and its results in further detail later in chapter 6. Now let us continue to discuss about taekwondo and its Finnish context. Not only does the sports culture have a slightly unique tone to it, but also martial arts are rather new form of exercising in Finland.

## 2 TAEKWONDO AND FINNISH SPORT SYSTEM

Taekwondo is an officially acknowledged international sport originated in Korea and is today practiced worldwide. Taekwondo uses the whole body, particularly the hands and feet. It not only strengthens one's physique, but also cultivates character via physical and mental training. Coupled with techniques of discipline, taekwondo is a self-defense martial art.

*(Korean Cultural Heritage 93)*

According to my personal experiences, taekwondo is just another Asian martial art to most people. However, among those who are learning taekwondo – or have background in martial arts generally – refer to it as “the one with lots of kicking techniques”. When one takes a look at taekwondo matches, at the Olympic Games for example, it cannot be denied; most of the fight is executed through kicking.

Taekwondo practice methods can be divided into sub-sections in varying ways, but the popular division is the so-called “four elements”: form (품새 ‘poomsae’, or often referred to as ‘pumsae’), competition (겨루기 ‘gyeorugi’, or ‘kyorugi’), breaking (격파 ‘gyeokpa’, or ‘kyukpa’), and self-defense (호신술 ‘hosinsul’). Another approach is the tripartite division – basic techniques (기본 ‘kibon’), forms, and competitions. (Hintsanen 69) The basic techniques form the basis for other areas of practice, and they are commonly divided further into following sub-categories: blocks (makki 막기), punches (jireugi 지르기), and kicks (chagi 차기). These can be divided into smaller sub-categories based on the part of the body with which the technique is performed. (Hintsanen 70; Kukki-won 78-132)

Taekwondo is often included to the category of martial arts, which nowadays are associated mainly with East Asia. However, especially modern taekwondo is more than simply a martial art form, and the focus has shifted towards the sport educational approach. (Hintsanen 63-66) Because the focus of taekwondo is not limited to only one part of certain practice and has been developed to be available for greater masses of people, Hintsanen suggests that the secret to popularity of taekwondo lies in its versatile possibilities (66). Furthermore, Udo

Moenig highlights the fact that the transformation to “martial sport” rather than martial art has challenged the identity of taekwondo. According to him, taekwondo has divided into smaller units among which the most important division is between traditional and competitive taekwondo (Moenig 1,2).

The name **taekwondo** (태권도) is actually rather new, and it was coined for the first time in 1955 (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 134). Before 1955 the major martial art schools in Korea used several names such as *tangsudo* (당수도 ‘dangsudo’) or *kongsudo* (공수도 ‘gongsudo’)<sup>16</sup>. Creating a new name was the first step in uniting the schools, and it was followed by the foundation of the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA). Furthermore, “[w]ith the foundation of the Korea Taekwondo Association in September of 1961, taekwondo officially became a sport” (*Korean Cultural Heritage* 101). These developments especially accelerated taekwondo’s journey to an official Olympic game and the shift from traditional martial art to a competitive sport.

Hence, it is extremely important to understand the context of the time. In the following section I will offer a deeper insight to the background of the situation in the postwar Korean peninsula, and also the developments in taekwondo that took place in postwar South Korea.

### Developments after the Second World War to Present

Before looking into the events of the Second World War (WWII), it is important to remember that Korea was colonized by the Imperial Japan. The Japanese Occupation over Korean peninsula had started by Japan’s victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905. Both Russia and Japan exercised direct power in Korean affairs in the 1890’s, and several times they tried to find an agreement to divide the peninsula into spheres of influence. However, the negotiations failed, and the conflict evolved into a war in 1904. Foreign powers such as the USA and England “acknowledged Japan’s right to take appropriate measures for the ‘guidance, control, and protection’ of Korea” (Eckert 238-239), and in 1905 the peace

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<sup>16</sup> Both of these terms are rarely romanized using the revised system; hence, I believe it is better to use the forms *tangsudo* and *kongsudo* so that a non-Korean-speaking reader can search for further information more easily.



treaty was signed, and Korea became Japan's protectorate, lasting till the end of the WWII. (Cumings 141-143, 183)

Under the Japanese governance, especially during the WWII, Korean culture was oppressed by forcing the practice of Japanese traditions, and Japan tried to break the Korean national identity (Hintsanen 26; Cumings 181-182).<sup>17</sup> During the WWII Korea was used for Japan's war efforts as a base for resources and logistics, and Koreans were forced to work to support the Japanese army (Hintsanen 26).

Common understanding is that the right to practice martial arts was denied from the Koreans during the occupation (Hintsanen 27; *Taekwondo Textbook* 27). Anyhow, it also seems possible that only the Korean martial art forms were banned, and the Japanese forms were endorsed. For example, in 1914 judo and kendo were introduced to both Korean and Japanese public school curricula (Capener 69). Nevertheless, four martial art forms of Japanese origin remained after the WWII and the liberation in 1945: *yudo* (유도, in Jap. *judo*), *kumdo* (검도 'geomdo', in Jap. *kendo*), *-yusul* (유술, in Jap. *jujutsu*), and *kongsudo* (in Jap. *karate*) (Hintsanen 27).

The martial art schools that later became the so-called “**foundation schools of taekwondo**” were established by founders most of them having studied martial arts in Japan before and during the WWII (Capener 68; Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 133-134; “Taekwondo History”). These schools were called *kwan* (관 'gwan')<sup>18</sup>, and they consisted of a variety of martial art styles and fighting methods under several different names. (Moenig & Kim, “A Critical Review” 1324-1325)

The WWII was followed by an era of confusion within the Korean peninsula, as multiple foreign forces tried to win influence over the country. The Japanese occupation was over, but next in line was the USA, “Americans operated a full military government from 1945 to 1948” (Cumings 185). Eventually, this led to division of the peninsula; The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), also known as North Korea, was proclaimed on September 9 in 1948, and the Republic of Korea (ROK), South Korea, was formed three weeks later

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<sup>17</sup> For example Koreans had to adopt Japanese names, and the language used in schools was Japanese.

<sup>18</sup> This word seems to be romanized more often with the initial 'k' than 'g' in my sources due to which I have decided to follow the example of my materials.

(Cumings 235). Eventually, the conflicts in the peninsula due to the influence of Russia and the USA led to Korean War in 1950, and the armistice to end it was signed in 1953.

During and after the Korean War, new martial art schools emerged due to either missing leaders or disagreements between members. This disunity resulted in the use of various names for their martial art styles, the most popular ones being *tangsudo* and *kongsudo*, which both are respective transliterations of Japanese term *karate-dō*<sup>19</sup>. After a long struggle, the school leaders agreed on the term “taekwondo”, and the Korea Taekwondo Association<sup>20</sup> was founded in 1961. (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 134; “A Critical Review” 1325; “Taekwondo History”)

Although the term was coined in 1955, it was universally accepted in 1965. The disunities continued despite the foundation of KTA. Moreover, KTA was not able to fully dissolve disagreements within the association until the late 1970s. Some of the leaders moved abroad, where they kept their original school and organizational affiliations. (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 134) An example of these leaders is Choi Hong Hi (최홍희 ‘Choe Hong Hui’)<sup>21</sup>, who is known as one of the masters of the so-called “founding *kwans*” and also a military general. Despite being the first to suggest the name “taekwondo”<sup>22</sup>, he gained unpopularity in the Korean martial art community. Eventually he was expelled from the KTA because of his disagreements with the association. To form a rival association, he founded the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF). (Moenig & Kim, “A Critical Review” 1325-1327)

Ever since 1950s taekwondo had been introduced to the outside world via the postwar diaspora and immigrating Koreans, but it was not until the early 1960s that the South Korean government started interfering in the activities of taekwondo groups and organizations. For

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<sup>19</sup> “[T]angsudo (唐手道, ‘way of the Tang hand’; ‘Tang’ referring to the Chinese Tang Dynasty) and kongsudo (空手道 ‘way of the empty hand’)” both are respective translations for karate, depending on the used Chinese characters for the term *karate-dō* (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 134). The latter set was used in Japan from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-1930s. (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 134)

<sup>20</sup> Originally the association was known as the Korea Taesudo Association (“Taekwondo History”).

<sup>21</sup> I have chosen to use Choi Hong Hi, as the name appears in this form in the majority of my sources.

<sup>22</sup> Leaders such as Choi Hong Hi wanted to distance themselves from their karate past, and consequently Choi created the name “taekwondo”. In 1959 he forced several important *kwans* to join an organization under his leadership, the Korea Taekwondo Association. However, the association was short lived, and the following year, *kwans* broke from the association. In 1965 Choi gained presidency of the Korea Taesudo Association (the modern KTA founded in 1961), and renamed it Korea Taekwondo association. Hence, the already unpopular Choi and his actions were seen as authoritarian and arrogant within the community, which concluded him to be expelled from the association (Moenig & Kim, “A Critical Review” 1326-1327)

example the Vietnam War offered an opportunity to promote taekwondo; thus, taekwondo trainers were included to the first troops that were sent to Vietnam to teach martial art skills to the Vietnamese soldiers. (Moenig 51-52)

On the other hand, under the Park Chung Hee (박정희 ‘Bak Jeong Hui’)<sup>23</sup> regime a policy of cultural revival was introduced, which was highly associated with spiritual, moral and cultural restoration through sports. (Moenig 51-52) Taekwondo served well Park’s visions for “diligence” and “self-discipline”, due to which Park endorsed taekwondo and later it was upgraded to “national sport” of Korea in 1971 (Moenig 52). In 1972 Kukkiwon – “the headquarters of taekwondo” – and in 1973 World Taekwondo Federation were established to set headquarters in Korea, and to propagate and manage the sports-based taekwondo style internationally (“Taekwondo History”; “About the Federation”; Moenig 52-53).

[D]ue to the South Korean government’s continuous financial and political support, the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) was recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1980. Consequently, taekwondo was first included into the Olympics as a demonstration sport in the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Finally, taekwondo was contested as an official Olympic sport, during the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Subsequently, the Korean Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sport designated taekwondo as a key element of traditional Korean culture. (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 132)

At this point I want to remind the readers that, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, WTF-style (or KTA-style) does not represent all the variations of taekwondo and taekwondo schools, as it has been mentioned that some of the leaders did not agree with the developments under KTA. There are nowadays two major taekwondo organizations on the international level<sup>24</sup>: World Taekwondo Federation (WTF)<sup>25</sup> and International Taekwondo Federation (ITF). Although techniques are similar, patterns, sparring methods and such differ

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<sup>23</sup> Despite the last character being the same as in Choi Hong Hi’s (최홍희), this name is typically romanized as Park Chung Hee instead of other variations.

<sup>24</sup> Moenig and Kim remind their readers that in fact, “taekwondo” as a term, includes varying methods of practice, focus shifting from sports to martial arts. Furthermore, “a range of different, independent and competing groups and associations have been established over the years.” (“A Critical Review” 1323-1324) WTF and ITF are not the only international organizations, but the clearest difference is showcased between the two.

<sup>25</sup> The federation is now known as “World Taekwondo”; however, it was not changed until June 2017. Therefore, in this thesis I have used the older name according to the materials and context.

in these two factions. Therefore, one must not mix these two different practices. Both organizations were established to promote and govern taekwondo globally, but eventually WTF was the organization to be recognized by the Olympic Committee.

In this project I have only studied the more common WTF-style taekwondo. I have no personal experience on ITF-style taekwondo, and moreover the majority of the Finnish *taekwondoins* represent the WTF-style<sup>26</sup>. Hence, anything commented in this study is to be associated with WTF-style taekwondo that became admitted as an official Olympic sport in 2000. However, certain steps towards more competitive style were required before the admission.

Especially, Moenig has researched the developments of taekwondo into a full-contact combat sport, or sparring sport, which likely contributed to developments as a competitive sport and the inclusion of taekwondo as an official Olympic sport. Until the 1950s, free sparring was clearly a subordinate method of training in karate styles. Meanwhile in Japan free sparring remained a marginal method of training, in Korea it was endorsed by the new martial art school leaders, which started the development towards a competitive sport. (Moenig 88-94)

The original competition rules were influenced by early non-contact karate competitions, and also to some extent by boxing as the rule of victory by legal knock-out for example exists (Moenig 98-99). “In addition to the introduction of full-contact sparring with a body protector, the basic sparring rules profoundly shaped the technical direction of taekwondo” (Moenig 99). Furthermore, procedural changes and the introduction of new rules and equipment acted as means to influence and improve the technical direction of sparring over time. Minor adjustments of the regulations occurred almost on a yearly basis, but there were several important periods that had greater influence. (Moenig 99)

The 1960s and 1970s included important changes regarding the appropriate techniques, point system and the fighting court (Moenig 100). However, from the cultural perspective the most interesting major changes occurred first in the 1980-90s, when taekwondo was included as a demonstration sport for the first time in 1988 Seoul Olympics. To gain the admission a variety

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<sup>26</sup> The Finnish ITF Taekwon-Do Federation (Suomen ITF Taekwon-Do Ry, SITF) constitutes of only 33 associations, while the Finnish Taekwondo Federation (Suomen Taekwondoliitto Ry, STKDL) constitutes of 72 associations, three of which represent ITF-style (SITF, “Jäsenseurat”; STKDL, “Jäsenseurat”). These can overlap; therefore, I believe probably there are 33 ITF taekwondo associations.

of equipment modifications were needed in order to match the safety standards of the IOC: “shin guards, forearm guards, and headgear were gradually adopted as mandatory safety equipment” (Moenig 101). Also the soft mat was added to protect injuries in the case of falling, and weight divisions were reduced from ten to eight. The advancement in gear was partly due to the growing global market for the equipment. Furthermore, to attract the audience better the judges were advised to grant more points. During the time points required a technique executed with considerable power which naturally was subjective to judge. Now that the lighter hits were also awarded the preference in the sparring techniques shifted to kicks performed with the front leg, which was faster although the impact was weaker. (Moenig 101)

Similarly to be admitted as an official sport in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, another set of adjustments were required. The IOC limited the number of participating taekwondo athletes: consequently, the weight divisions were reduced to four, and pre-qualification tournaments were required. In addition to this, during the 1990s Korea was still the leading figure in international championships winning the majority of the gold medals, because of which the IOC limited the maximum participation of a nation to four athletes: two male and two female participants. Another concern was that many perceived taekwondo as too boring to watch: passive sparring style of the athletes due to preferential choice the techniques included only few variations of roundhouse kick to the body, and some questioned the scoring transparency. During the 1990s and early 2000s, in response to the criticism, WTF’s rule modifications included a re-introduction of multiple point scores for kicking techniques. Other ones were a ten second “stall rule” to punish passivity, fighting time was reduced from three to two-minute-rounds, and ring size was reduced when the shape was changed to octagonal ring. More protective gear was introduced which helped to prevent injuries, and the competition could be proceeded without interruptions. To improve the scoring accuracy and transparency an electronic scoring body protector was gradually introduced, and it was finally introduced to the Olympic venue in the 2012 London Summer Games. (Moenig 102-103) Even to this day amendments to the competition rules are made almost annually.

Here I have introduced the major changes since the WWII that have influenced the modern competitive taekwondo. However, Moenig does not introduce the poomsae competition rules. For this reason, I assume that since poomsaes are based on the basic techniques and accuracy of the performance of the techniques, there might not have been any need for modifications.

On the other hand, according to my knowledge the modern forms differ from the original forms to some extent. For example the movements have become more straightforward, and stances have slightly changed. It is interesting that in none of the previous research papers that these changes had not been brought up. Thus, I want to remind the reader that throughout the history of taekwondo, there have been changes to the basic forms and training techniques as well, and not only to the competition rules.

This has been a short introduction to what kind of a martial art form taekwondo is today, and how it became internationally acknowledged competitive sport. However, the debate of the history of taekwondo is an on-going dispute, and it is important to look into it to understand the full picture.

### Debated History of Taekwondo

The popular narrative states that taekwondo has existed in Korea more than 2000 years, starting from as early as from the Three Kingdoms period (trad. 57BCE-668CE). Yet some recent studies argue that taekwondo was most likely developed from the Japanese karate.

Especially, Moenig and Kim note in their work “The Invention of Taekwondo Tradition, 1945-1972: When Mythology Becomes ‘History’” the disparities that appear between the portrayal of taekwondo history by the taekwondo establishments, such as WTF or KTA, and few recent publications (132). Korean studies often aim to support the “official” view that claims taekwondo to have roots in the old tribal times before the Three Kingdoms period. Such an example is set by the Kukkiwon in the book *Taekwondo Textbook*, “[i]t is believed that this was exactly the true grounding of today’s Taekwondo, whose name has descended from ‘subak’, ‘taekkyon’, ‘takkyon’ and so on”<sup>27</sup> (20, 26). Furthermore, the book sees *subak* (수박) as an old form of taekwondo that was practiced by **hwarang** (화랑), who were young elite soldiers in Silla (신라), one of the Three Kingdoms (*Taekwondo Textbook* 21-23, 26).

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<sup>27</sup> The two latter seem to be simply variations of *taekkyeon*, which will be introduced in the following parts of this thesis.

Another example of a study that challenges the popular history narrative is offered by Jeong Deok Ahn et al. in their article “The Historical and Cultural Identity of Taekwondo as a Traditional Korean Martial Art.” They discuss the history and cultural identity of taekwondo by introducing four perspectives on the origins of taekwondo: **Choi-centric theory**, **kwan-centric theory**, **karate inflow theory**, and **the successive traditional martial arts theory**. As the name suggest, the Choi-centric theory claims that Choi Hong Hi created taekwondo alone, and it is mainly supported by Choi himself and the ITF. The opposite perspective to this is the theory that five mainstay gymnasiums (schools), or *kwans*, originated taekwondo under the elite who learned martial arts in Japan and China. Related to the *kwan*-centric theory, the theory of karate inflow focuses on the fact that the *kwans* leaders all learned karate in Japan before opening gymnasiums in Korea. The last mentioned theory, however, argues that the taekwondo was formed in succession to traditional Korean martial arts such as *subak* and *taekkyeon* (택견 ‘taekgyeon’)<sup>28</sup>. (Ahn et al. 1719-1726) Their conclusion is that modern taekwondo a recreation that has been affected together by Choi Hong Hi, karate, *kwans*, and traditional Korean martial arts. Moreover, it is a martial art enjoyed by people across the world, and yet by the focus in foot techniques it can be distinguished from other martial arts in Japan and China. (Ahn et al. 1727-1730)

On the other hand, Steven Capener takes part in the discourse by looking into Korean nationalism and its relations to taekwondo in his article “The Making of a Modern Myth: Inventing a Tradition for Taekwondo.” He also points out Moenig et al.’s work “Evidence of Taekwondo’s Roots in Karate: An Analysis of the Technical Content of Early Taekwondo Literature” in which they demonstrate, how the taekwondo myth was created by comparing the instructional photographs from the first generation of Korean taekwondo texts with the earlier Japanese texts. Capener continues to discuss the question why the myth was created instead of focusing on the question, how it was created. (Capener 69)

These few articles represent the recent studies that challenge the so-called “official” history of taekwondo, which still remains as the popular narrative<sup>29</sup>. Personally, I find it more rational to believe that taekwondo was developed from the Japanese karate. This opinion is purely based on the fact that most of the taekwondo teachers had background in karate. It is possible that

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<sup>28</sup> Majority of the sources refer to the name in this romanized form, and it is listed also on UNESCO in this form.

<sup>29</sup> For example, recently I heard one taekwondo instructor, who is one of the first *taekwondoins* in Finland explaining new students that taekwondo is an extremely old tradition dating way back in history, and that there are old scripts which demonstrate similar techniques.

some of the techniques were adopted from *taekkyeon*, and moreover it seems that Korea truly has history in martial arts. Thus, to me it is more likely that various forms contributed to one another, developing new forms of martial art. Nevertheless, the focus of this research is the question, if Korean culture is present in the Finnish taekwondo classes and taekwondo has motivated the *taekwondoins* to learn more about it. Hence, for the purpose of this study, it is more relevant to focus on present and the era when taekwondo was first officially recognized as a sport on an international level and the teaching became more unified.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that there are more approaches including pedagogical and medical approaches for example. As a matter of fact, Kukkiwon's guidelines introduce nine categories for taekwondo theories: spirit (spiritual philosophy, propriety norms, meditation), fields of science (sports physiology, psychology, dynamics, etc), history, theories of techniques, competition rules, pedagogy, vital points and corporal sections related to taekwondo, management of gymnasiums, and first aid measures (*Taekwondo Textbook* 67, 68). The theoretical instructions are seen as an important part of taekwondo education. Likely for this reason the textbook includes scientific approaches that instructors should be aware of, and not only focus on the physical training: “[t]heoretical instructions help deepen trainees’ scientific comprehension of techniques, physical strength, practice methods, matters of attention, etc., and make the trainees upgrade their abilities of voluntary and correct training” (*Taekwondo Textbook* 67).

Despite the history dispute I have introduced above, taekwondo's current globally known form is evidently from Korea. As introduced in the sections above, taekwondo was internationalized around the 1960s. However, it did not reach Finland until 1979, which will be discussed after I have introduced the background of the Finnish sport association system.

### **Finnish Sport Associations and Adoption of Martial Arts in Finland**

Whenever I discuss about the issue of sports as a hobby with my international friends, I find myself explaining how the sport associations<sup>30</sup>, or sports clubs, are organized in Finland.

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<sup>30</sup> There are no proper translations to the Finnish term “urheiluseura”, in which ‘urheilu’ refers to sports. Especially the word ‘seura’ is problematic since it can be translated either as ‘association’ or ‘organization’. Sports club on the other hand might awake a wrong kind of image of how the system works in Finland; Hence, I find it more logical to use the word ‘association’.



Instead of academies and hired teachers or instructors, we have associations that consist of instructors who volunteer to teach the sports to other members of the association. For this reason the membership fees are often annual payments, and they are usually cheaper than academies, because the money is used to cover only the rents for the gym, common equipment, and so on. In short the membership payment is purely used to cover any expenses that are caused by running the association. The academies do exist, but the volunteer-based associations are still extremely common, especially outside the capital city area and its close surroundings in Finland.

The beginning of the modern association system can be tracked to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1830, a man of Swedish origin called Gustav Mauritz Pauli, received a permission from the Russian Emperor to establish a public gymnastics department (in Fin. *voimistelulaitos*) (Heikkinen 69). He had arrived in 1829 to Finland from Stockholm to fill the vacancy in the Finnish Guards' Rifle Battalion; however, his plans were to offer sports education for undergraduates (in Fin. 'ylioppilas')<sup>31</sup> as well. However, he was transferred to St. Petersburg in 1831, where he experienced more success than ever in Sweden or Finland, but later in 1839 he died due to an illness. (Heikkinen 69-71)

In 1830 the professors of the University of Helsinki saw no need for an academic institution to provide gymnastic classes for their students. However, in 1831 a fencing teacher of the University of Helsinki, Joachim Otta, requested for a permission to revive Pauli's gymnastics classes. He would commit himself to teach for free those undergraduates who wished to attend, particularly the ones who would pursue for the military career. In 1832 Otta arranged his first gymnastics class in Helsinki. The new attraction did not separate the students based on their studies nor age, and the gymnastics secured its place in the habitual life of the students – even though the popularity dropped soon. (Heikkinen 71-72)

Basically, this started the motion in the Finnish communities towards organizing themselves for the sake of health benefits from exercising. First associations that organized sports club kind of activities to their members appeared in the 1850-1870s, and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century these associations started gaining more popularity and were endorsed by the Finnish

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<sup>31</sup> In Finland by graduating from the upper secondary school – often also referred to as high school – you receive the title of "ylioppilas" and the qualification to apply to undergraduate degree programs. Therefore, I believe Heikkinen has chosen to refer to the undergraduate students as *ylioppilas*.

literati (Laine, “Urheilu” 108-117) This phenomenon was unique on the international level as these sports associations were often organized as a sub-section of varying movements and organizations – such as YMCA for example. Therefore, the early sport associations were connected to the ideologies of the host organizations. Furthermore, the competitions gained popularity as the sports activities became more organized, which on the other hand took away the attraction to ideology-based associations. (Laine, “Urheilu” 117-121; Hentilä 134-136)

Hence, the change of the century offered opportunities to focus on pure sports, and the power struggle between competitive sports and ideology based sports lasted several years. The latter one lost to the attraction of competitive sports, which allowed the future developments and the associations became even more organized under unions, or more often called as federations, managing these associations and their activities. (Laine, “Urheilu” 121-131; Hentilä 134-150) The most important and well-known federation was the *Suomen Voimistelu- ja Urheiluliitto* (SVUL, in Eng. ‘Finnish Gymnastics and Athletics Federation’) that was established in 1906 as a central organization to manage competitive and amateur sports in Finland (Laine, “Urheilu” 121).

These early associations confronted a conflict after the First World War (WWI) and the declaration of Independence on December 6<sup>th</sup> in 1917: Civil war erupted in January 1918, between the Red and the White<sup>32</sup> (Hentilä 150-151; “Civil War”). Reds represented the labor class of Finland, and Whites were mostly members of the upper class but also the middle class. The debate on which side was right still goes on to this day, and for long time Red and White allegiances were sorted into their own separate camps. (“Civil War”) “Youth associations, sport clubs and even retail shops catered to either one or the other” (“Civil War”). After the civil war, the majority in SVUL represented those who wanted to punish the Red, and as a result all the associations that had taken part to the uprising and also the associations, who’s at least half of the members were convicted of involvement in the rebellion, were expelled from the federation (Hentilä 152-153).

Consequently, the SVUL was divided into two opposing sentiments; openly political – leftist – sports federation for those who represent the laborers in Finland, *Työväen Urheiluliitto*

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<sup>32</sup> Reds (the Finnish Socialist Workers’ Republic) consisted of communist revolutionaries. Whites on the other hand represented the political right and their aim was to stop the communist Reds from taking the power over Finland.

(TUL)<sup>33</sup>, was established in 1919. Later more divisions followed, as there were internal conflicts between the Swedish and Finnish speaking members<sup>34</sup>. (Laine “Järjestöelämän oppivuodet” 167) Furthermore, starting from the early 1920s the government arranged a budget to support the associations that had proven to improve the public health, discipline and order, and also promoted Finland on the international level. This naturally caused competition among the major federations and encouraged for better performance eventually resulting in cooperation between the competing federation – such as SVUL and TUL for example – by the 1930s (Laine, “Järjestövallan oppivuodet” 170-172)

The WWII had interrupted the sport associations’ activities, but soon after the peace new members came pouring. Moreover, new associations were continuously established across the country – even in the country side of Finland that had not been as active before. (Vasara, “Sinisen” 329-332) Changes in the society, relationship with the government, and growing amount of members caused conflicts among the major national federations (Vasara “Sinisen”; “Miljoonan”) However, the associations kept growing in size, and also new associations emerged as the variety of sports grew (Vasara, “Miljoonan” 393-395). Furthermore, the core unit for the Finnish people to rely on, when it comes to exercising and sports, is still the sport associations (Vasara “Miljoonan” 402).

The modern sport system in Finland is based on three sectors: public, volunteer, and private – volunteer associations being the most significant one. While on the public sector “the Ministry of Education and Culture guides and coordinates sport policy, legislation and financing, including sports facility construction” (Rikala), the volunteer associations are predominantly responsible for the national and local level sport services. The physical activities are implemented by either a professional or volunteer instructors. The associations, however, tend to be dependent on the support of the public sector – especially financially. On the contrary, the private sector also offers sport service, but the fee is based on the market price. (Rikala)

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<sup>33</sup> I was not able to find an official translation, and it is not necessary to my study. Hence, I decided to leave it untranslated.

<sup>34</sup> There are two official languages in Finland: Swedish and Finnish. Majority speaks Finnish as their native language, but due to the time under the Swedish governance – that ended in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – especially the upper class consisted of groups that spoke Swedish as their native language.

In short the volunteer based associations offer sport activities taught by volunteered instructors. According to my personal experiences with my own hobbies, the instructors are often members of the association, and they do not have to pay the membership fee as compensation, or they receive a discount. They qualify either based on their capability through training, or they might have a degree in for example physical education. Especially in sports like taekwondo and other martial arts, the mentor-based teaching and learning is essential, and so to teach one is required to have earlier background with the sports.

For the reference on martial art history in Finland, I read a Master's thesis *Molskille vai tatamille? –tutkielma kamppailulajien harrastamisen kehityksestä Suomessa 1960-luvulta nykypäivään [On the Moleskin or Tatami?: A Research on the Developments of Learning Combat Sports in Finland from the 1960s to Present]* by Sami Sarpakunnas from 2009. His focus is on analyzing how the practice of martial arts has changed utilizing statistical data and media discourse.

Although Sarpakunnas seems to have misunderstood some concepts in his work<sup>35</sup> – such as the differences between martial art schools – I believe it offers enough knowledge on the history aspect and changes in the popularity. Furthermore, due to the process of searching materials for this part of study I have come to agree with Sarpakunnas: There are sports specific manuals and written historical introductions, but barely anyone has looked into the history of the martial arts in Finland as one entity (13).

In his research Sarpakunnas has focused on nine different sports: wrestling, boxing, judo, karate, jujutsu, taekwondo, aikido, muay thai, and kick-boxing (Sarpakunnas 36-54). Other forms are practiced, such as Korean origin hapkido, but I believe the nine he introduces are likely the most well-known and popular in Finland. The modern wrestling, boxing and even judo arrived to Finland around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sarpakunnas 38-40, 45); however, it was not until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that judo started being practiced commonly (45). The rest were introduced to the Finnish around the 1960-80s (Sarpakunnas 47, 50-54).

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<sup>35</sup> Sarpakunnas claims in his introduction that taekwondo consists only of varying hand and kicking techniques (5). However, as explained before, taekwondo includes self-defense methods as well, which include throwing techniques similar to judo or jujutsu. Several other issues I disagree with were found, but I believe the thesis is sufficient enough to introduce the summarized history of martial arts without going into further details.

Based on the media discourse of these decades to the 2000s, Sarpakunnas concludes that the majority of those who wish to learn martial arts are attracted to the self-defense practice, and many are surprised by the sport like training (92). This especially seems to fit to the new *taekwondoins* in Finland: according to my personal experience, many beginners quit during the beginners' course or right after the first belt rank promotion test. On the other hand it seems that the meditational and spiritual aspect joins to the picture after long period of training, which also differentiated martial arts from the older forms of sports in Finland (Sarpakunnas 93). I will continue this discussion in regards to Finnish *taekwondoins* by analyzing the interviews in chapters 4 and 5. I find it important to ask the students, what motivates them to learn taekwondo, as it is bound to connect with the behavior in the classes.

As discussed above, when it comes to the history of combat sports and martial arts in Finland, it is actually rather new phenomenon. In 1979 taekwondo was brought to Finland by Master Hwang Dae Jin (Hintsanen 58; "Suurmestari"; Lee). Master Hwang's long career in taekwondo and his efforts to maintain the relations between South Korea and Finland have been acknowledged, also on international levels. He has been granted several honorary awards - cross of merit of the Order of the Lion of Finland in 2001 and cross of merit of the Order of the White Rose of Finland in 2012 being probably the greatest achievements. ("Suurmestari"; Hintsanen 59)

In order to gain international experiences Master Hwang traveled to Europe, and in 1979 he arrived to Helsinki. The first taekwondo association was established in Klaukkala in 1980; the Finnish were interested in the new exotic form of martial art, and by the 1980s two associations were established in Helsinki and Lahti. Soon after, the Finnish Taekwondo Federation (FTF, in Fin. *Suomen Taekwondoliitto*) was founded in 1981 to promote and manage taekwondo associations. ("Suurmestari"; Hintsanen 58-59)

However, due to disagreements in regards to strategies lead to dissolving the supervising board, and five of the 27 associations left FTF in 1987. Master Hwang also left and established a new organization known as the Finnish Taekwondo Union (FTU, in Fin. *Suomen Taekwondo Unioni*), which focused more on traditional taekwondo than competitive taekwondo. Furthermore, there were disperses between Master Hwang and his students concerning the economic issues; Master Hwang earned his living by teaching taekwondo, while the Finnish taught that in Finland teaching of sports should be based on volunteering.

However, the attitudes changed in the following years, and professional teaching of sports was not seen in a negative light anymore. Meanwhile, the FTF's supervising board underwent through changes and reorganizing steps, and it has maintained its post as the major taekwondo federation in Finland<sup>36</sup>. (Hintsanen 59-60)

Hwang is known as the “Grandmaster” (in Fin. *suurmestari*) among the majority of the Finnish *taekwondoins*<sup>37</sup>. He still actively visits the associations he has been involved with, and he continues teaching taekwondo in Helsinki despite being in his late 70s. Many people call the taekwondo he teaches “old-school taekwondo”. I am still unsure, what they actually mean by it, but I am sure it partly is linked to his background and the Korean values related to his career. Furthermore, according to the website of the Finnish Taekwondo Federation, other Korean taekwondo masters from *Jido Kwan* who have had influence in Finland include Park Jong Man (박종만 Bak Jong Man) and Mun Dong Kun<sup>38</sup> (“Jido Kwan”). So it seems possible that many of the Finnish taekwondo associations have been influenced by this particular taekwondo style. Hence, it will be interesting to see, how the discipline and etiquette are maintained in different taekwondo associations in Finland.

This has been a short introduction to taekwondo, its modern history, and the history in Finland. In the following chapter I will introduce few key concepts that will be relevant for my analysis later in chapter 4.

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<sup>36</sup> Now FTU is a member of FTF.

<sup>37</sup> For example both the Finnish Taekwondo Federation and the Finnish Taekwondo Union refer to him as the grandmaster on their webpages.

<sup>38</sup> I was not able to find the original Korean name; hence, the same romanized version is used as in the original text.

### 3 CULTURAL ASPECTS OF TAEKWONDO: NATIONALISM, “INVENTED TRADITION”, *HALLYU* & CULTURAL FLOW

Having learned more about the history of taekwondo, I became interested in its nationalistic side. On the other hand, the history narrative offers an opportunity to discuss a concept of an “invented tradition”, which is often related to nationalism. In addition to this, since we are discussing the matter of culture and its dissemination, the discourse on cultural flow cannot be excluded. Especially, in the 2010s Korean pop music and beauty products have become well-known across the world. Furthermore as discussed in the previous chapter, taekwondo had to be changed in order to be admitted its status as an official Olympic Game. These are only few examples, and the discussion will be continued in later sections. Anyhow, let us start with the introduction to Korean nationalism.

#### **Nationalism and Invented Tradition**

“Nationalism is an ideology that emphasizes loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation or nation-state and holds that such obligations outweigh other individual or group interests” (Kohn). This quote summarizes the essence of what is typically referred to as nationalism: devotion to one’s nation, and sense of solidarity with those who represent the same nation. It is said to be a modern ideology, or movement, that emerged as early as in the 17<sup>th</sup> Europe – John Milton and John Locke being probably the most famous intellectuals to express their thoughts on the issue at the time. (Ok 57-61)

Korean nationalism anyhow deepened in the 1860s as a response to western liberal ideas and western liberal imperialism. Later in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the anti-Japanese sentiment reflected similar national consciousness to protest the Japanese expansionism. A significant nationalist movement in the history of Korea was the March First Movement in 1919; the first day of March was chosen as the day of public announcement of an independence proclamation. The proclamation was signed by well-known men such as intellectuals, businessmen and religious leaders. Originally a peaceful movement, which was not intended to become an uprising, turned violent as the Japanese military police fired on the

protestors and called for extra forces to control the demonstration. Almost 2,000 Koreans were killed or wounded and nearly 20,000 were arrested, while the number of dead and wounded for the Japanese officials was less than 200 including 29 civilians of Japanese origin. (Ok 61-67)

The movement was a failure, and the Japanese replaced their military rule by adopting “cultural rule policy”. The main goal of this policy was to speed up the process of transforming the Koreans into Japanese subjects – basically this was executed by popularizing the Japanese language. (Ok 67-69)

Furthermore, the rapid development of capitalism in Japan during the WWI caused a serious shortage of food in Japan in 1918-19, so it became highly depended on Korean agriculture. Especially after the onset of WWII and the so-called second Sino-Japanese war in 1937, Japan became determined to secure its base on the Korean peninsula, which offered a direct access to Manchuria. In order to attach Korea fully to the Japanese Empire, the Korean culture was harshly oppressed by forcing the practice of Japanese customs and adoption of Japanese culture. This included the adoption of Japanese names, forbidding the use of Korean language in schools, and the Korean newspapers were abolished. This period has become known as “Dark Age” (암흑기 ‘amheukgi’) lasting until the end of WWII and the independence. (Ok 67-69)

These events during the Japanese Occupation contributed to the Korean nationalism and deepened the already existing anti-Japanese sentiment that exists even to this day. Some scholars suggest that the Korean national identity was nearly crushed by the Japanese oppression. To fight back and preserve it during the colonial period was through sports as “influential segments of Korean society launched physical education programs in Western modern schools and athletics meeting for communities” (Ok 201). At the time the majority of the physical instructors were former army officers, who were naturally nationalistically oriented, and their attitudes were strongly reflected in their instruction. They inspired the public with patriotism through athletic meetings, which likely contributed to the development of strong sense of solidarity among Koreans. (Ok 201)



Sports served in promoting a Korean spirit of independence during the Japanese Occupation and the necessity for solidarity in the post-colonial era (Ok 341). Furthermore, as explained in chapter 1, especially the Park Chung Hee's regime utilized sports as a vehicle to promote patriotism and to boost national identity. Moreover, the president Park endorsed taekwondo so much that it was named as the "national sport" in the early 1970s. Hence, I agree with Gwang Ok's conclusions in his work *The Transformation of Modern Korean Sport: Imperialism, Nationalism, Globalization* as he suggest that modern sport in Korea has been closely linked to Korean national identity (Ok 356). Therefore, it is important to bear this concept in one's mind, when discussing about taekwondo in the context of culture.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the earlier sections of this chapter, Steve Capener discusses the role of Korean nationalism in "inventing traditions" "to 'portray the privileged position of the *minjok*'" (64). This phenomenon of "inventing traditions", introduced in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger's work *The Invention of Tradition*, is typically regarded as a process to develop further nationalism and to create narratives to support the legitimacy of the tradition. Hobsbawm suggests that "traditions" "are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (1). In short, an "invented tradition" can be understood as a set of practices that have by repetition established legitimate status and continuity with the past:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (Hobsbawm 1).

Hobsbawm stresses the importance of the differences between "tradition", "custom", and "convention". While traditions are invariant, customs on the other hand are flexible to the requirements set by the society. (Hobsbawm 1,2) To demonstrate the same idea a bit differently: "'Custom' is what judges do; 'tradition' [...] is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices surrounding their substantial action" (Hobsbawm 1,2). Another distinction must be made between tradition and convention or routine. Evidently, "social practices that need to be carried out repeatedly will tend, for convenience and efficiency, to develop a set of such conventions and routines, which may be de facto or de

jure formalized for the purposes of imparting the practice to new practitioners” (Hobsbawm 3). Furthermore, Hobsbawm introduces three overlapping categories to explain reasons and motivations for invention: “a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior” (9).

It is important to keep in mind that “Korea’s sensitive political relationship with Japan, which is tied to historical and territorial disputes, nationalistic sentiments, and national pride, makes it almost impossible for the Korean taekwondo community to change the narrative and finally acknowledge taekwondo’s roots in Japanese karate” (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 157, 158). The popular “official” narrative has contributed to Korea’s nationalism and the image, hence boosting the significance of the myth to the taekwondo community. Furthermore, it has been repeated over and over again by the key figures of taekwondo. As Hobsbawm and Ranger explain, when repeated enough, the ritual becomes a tradition, and the story becomes a history. Likely the lack of written history of martial arts in Korea has likely contributed to the adoption of the myth.

In the relationship between Korea and Japan, the invention process included removing elements of history that did not correspond with this purpose (Capener 64). Capener argues that in the case of taekwondo this invention of tradition involved manipulation of origin and development narratives or following his words, “the creation of certain orthodoxies through repetition of useful narratives while repressing or censoring contradictory ones” (65). Furthermore, Capener points out the case from the 1990s that reflects the public response to those, who did not follow the “official” popularized narrative:

[F]ormer Korea University philosophy professor, Kim Yong Ok, published a book entitled *Taekwondo cheolhak-ui guseong wollli* (Principles Governing the Structure of Taekwondo Philosophy). The book provides not only a well-elucidated account of taekwondo’s importation from Japan, but also presents a very sophisticated analysis of the process itself. KBS reported the pending publication of the book on its prime time news and Kim Yong Ok’s claim of Japanese origins for Korea’s *traditional* martial art. Rather than engage Kim’s assertions, he was censored. Kim was removed at the last minute as the keynote

speaker of an academic symposium being hosted by the Korea Taekwondo Association and attended by most of the scholars who were writing on taekwondo at the time (and his paper was taken out of the proceedings). This particular incident was related to taekwondo history, but it also characterizes a pervasive, ideologically driven, anti-intellectual nationalism that exists in a surprisingly large segment of Korean society (65-66).

After learning more about the disputes regarding to the history of taekwondo, the theory of “invention of tradition” seems fit for this research. A great example of applying the theory to taekwondo is set by Moenig and Kim in their article “The Invention of Taekwondo Tradition, 1945-1972: When Mythology Becomes ‘History’” in which they trace down the origins of the popular narrative of taekwondo history. According to them the popular narratives of long Korean roots such as *hwarang*, elite soldiers of Silla dynasty, lack concrete evidence, and have rather been reinvented by Korean scholars after the liberation from Japan’s occupation (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 135-140). Especially the concept of *hwarang spirit* resembles the Japanese concept of *bushidō* (‘the way of the warrior’). The imperial *bushidō* virtues such as militarism and loyalty and self-sacrifice to the emperor and nation were naturally adopted in this nationalistic *hwarang* ideology. (Moenig & Kim, “The Invention” 140-144) Moenig and Kim suggest that this *hwarang spirit* can be seen as “the product of Korean nationalism, inspired by romantic Japanese *samurai* legends, and the nationalistic *bushidō* doctrine” (“The Invention” 144).

Above I have introduced the concept of invented traditions that is closely tied to the nationalism. Moreover, ever since the Japanese Occupation, Koreans seem to have connected sports with patriotism due to the physical educators, who had background in the military. During the time this served for strengthening the national identity, and fighting back to the Japanese attempts to transform Koreans into Japanese subjects. On the other hand, the Koreans were influenced by the Western cultures and adopted innovations that later helped South Korea to gain its current status on the world market. Across the world Samsung or LG products are rather popular, and nowadays Korean popular music has made it to the top charts in Western countries. Alongside these exports taekwondo is also counted as a vehicle to spread Korean culture. Next section will look into this matter more closely.

## Cultural Flow and *Hallyu*

When it comes to East Asia, probably the most well-known form of **cultural flow** has been the **Chinese tribute system** which allowed China to maintain its supremacy over its neighboring countries including Korea. Within this system the kingdoms who wished to be favored by China – to ensure trade or protection from China for example – sent emissaries and tributary gifts as a sign of respect (Marks and Freeman 1). This bond of Chinese influence was not broken until the interference of other major foreign powers in Korean peninsula, such as the USA and Russia; this eventually led to the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894 (Eckert et al. 210-222).

The influence of Chinese culture is undeniable in South Korea, and the flow has lasted centuries. In the Three Kingdoms period (trad. ~60BCE – 668CE)<sup>39</sup> – despite the continuous conflict between the Three Kingdoms and China – the Korean kingdoms adopted Chinese culture as in form of the legal system and other institutions, Buddhist and Confucian ideologies, and written language (Eckert et al. 30-31). Especially, the Buddhist monks played the pioneering form in bringing elements of Chinese culture, such as poetry and music, to Korea as they represented the majority of those who traveled to China to study during the Three Kingdoms period (Eckert et al 38-39).

The nature of Korea's relationship with China changed after the Silla unification and the emergence of a new kingdom Balhae (발해). Silla had reached for an alliance with Chinese Tang dynasty (trad. 618-907) to attack Baekje and Goguryeo; Tang's intention was to conquer Silla as well, but Silla was able to resist the Tang aggression and as a result unified the old Three Kingdoms. However, Silla unification did not include the entire territory of Goguryeo, and the refugee emigres from Goguryeo established Balhae to the region of the Yalu and Tumen rivers. Both kingdoms were to start economic exchange within the framework of Tang's tributary system. However, the relationship was not only limited to trade, and cultural borrowing contributed to the development of the Korean culture. (Cumings 34-37; Eckert et al. 42-46) Especially, Buddhism and Confucianism both are visible in the Korean culture: the

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<sup>39</sup> In Kor. 삼국시대, 'samguksidae'. It refers to three kingdoms of the time in Korean peninsula: Baekje (백제), Goguryeo (고구려), and Silla (신라).

social hierarchy is based on Confucian thought while many national holidays often come from the Buddhist tradition, for example.

Nevertheless, as the tributary system proves, cultural flow is not a modern phenomenon, and cultural borrowing has spread the innovations across nations. Furthermore, modern technologies and globalization has made the dissemination of trends faster than ever before; South Korea offers an interesting example of exporting cultural products.

It is important to remember that Korean popular culture has been recognized as an influential cultural industry – both on global and local levels. The sudden rise of Korean popular cultural industry and its dissemination in the neighboring countries since the early 1990's is often referred to as **Korean wave**, or *hallyu* (Kor. 한류), especially by the Korean scholars (Kim 154; Jin 3,4).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Jin Dal Yong defines *hallyu 2.0*, which he explains to be the **New Korean Wave** originating in the major variances in the phenomenon around 2008. He highlights the differences due to changes in the cultural forms exported, technological developments, fan bases, and government cultural policies. (4-5)

On the other hand, in the article “Past, Present and Future of *Hallyu* (Korean Wave)” Kim Bok-rae defines four versions of *hallyu*: the original phenomenon, *hallyu 1.0*, started with the exportation of Korean TV-dramas in the late 1990s, *hallyu 2.0* extended the phenomenon to Korean pop-music in the mid-2000s, while *hallyu 3.0* includes Korean culture as well (157-158). The last one's aim is to expand the dissemination of traditional Korean culture, and Kim suggests that *hallyu 4.0* has “the potential to be developed into a ‘K-style’ that is closely related to the right of publicity” (158). Since the early 2010 *hallyu* has included all the genres of Korean culture (Kim 158). Especially, for this reason *hallyu* is an important concept, when discussing about the international side of taekwondo and its role to Korean nationalism.

The connection between *hallyu* and taekwondo is brought up in an article “Hallyu as Sports Diplomacy and Prestige Building” by J.N. Porteux and Kyong Jun Choi. They discuss the role of taekwondo in the process of re-inventing modern Korea after the colonial period. Furthermore, Porteux and Choi suggest that although “the creation and spread of [taekwondo]

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<sup>40</sup> For more detailed description of *hallyu* and its origins, I recommend reading the article “Past, Present and Future of *Hallyu* (Korean Wave)” from Kim Bok-rae and the first chapter of Jin Dal Yong's book *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*.

falls more in line with the state-building category, rather than the soft-power generating umbrella” its role in improving South Korea’s international visibility and prestige cannot not be denied (84).

### Taekwondo as an “Invented Tradition” and a Vehicle to Spread Korean Culture

For centuries Korea was under China’s influence due to the tributary system. This was followed by the competition of Russia and Japan to gain influence of the strategically located Korean peninsula. In the end the Japanese occupied Korea, and after the war foreign powers were practicing influence over the Korea. The Korean War divided the country, and it took decades for the new Koreas to recover from the turmoil and Korean nationalism helped to strengthen the national identity.

A great example of a nationalistic view on taekwondo’s history is displayed in the book *Guide to Korean Cultural Heritage* that was published by Korean Overseas Information Service originally in 1995<sup>41</sup>. In this book different Korean traditions are introduced one of them being taekwondo. It is interesting, how firmly the book claims taekwondo to be extremely old tradition: “The evidence of taekwondo’s existence as a systemized defense operation using the body’s instinctive reflexes can be traced back to ceremonial games that were performed during religious events in the era of the ancient tribal states” (*Korean Cultural Heritage* 93). This statement is followed by a claim that taekwondo’s older name is *taekkyeon*; furthermore, that saying that “[d]uring the Three Kingdoms period, *taekkyeon* became a required military art” (*Korean Cultural Heritage* 93-94). However, as explained in the sections above, there is no clear evidence to prove the connections to the Three Kingdoms period or even to *taekkyeon*. The ritualistic dancing like movements of *taekkyeon*<sup>42</sup> seem to have very little in common with the disciplined strong and swift movements of taekwondo. Moreover, it is rather absurd to say that *taekkyeon* is an older name for taekwondo, as it still exists as a martial art form alongside taekwondo.

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<sup>41</sup> There is revised edition from 2003 as well.

<sup>42</sup> A short example of taekgyeon can be found in the introduction video on UNESCO’s YouTube channel. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/taekkyeon-a-traditional-korean-martial-art-00452>, Accessed 11 Dec 2018.

In addition to this, Kukkiwon's *Taekwondo Textbook* offers following guidelines for the class curricula: "In an actual practice, the trainees are ordered, in a formation, to salute to the national flag, exchange salutations between the instructor and trainees, offer a silent prayer to the honored and calm down for preparation of training" (54). As discussed in the previous parts, the need to enhance the cultural origins for the sake of self-strengthening is one reason to "invent a tradition", according to Hobsbawm. The guidelines of Kukkiwon suggest that every taekwondo gym should have the national flag, which should be saluted in every practice. One point of view is that this practice aims to strengthen the Korean origins of taekwondo. This indeed reflects the postwar South Korea, where the remaining anti-Japanese sentiment was so strong that, for example, the founding *kwans* preferred to use names which did not directly refer the Japanese karate.

Additionally, nowadays South Korea seems to invest on exporting its culture to other countries. Especially, after first appearance of hallyu, South Korean government has undeniably tried to boost the exportation of Korean cultural products – including taekwondo. Moreover, *hallyu* in itself can be seen as a manifestation of nationalistic attempts to improve the impression of Korea as a major Eastern power – competing with China and Japan. In the previous section, I introduced Porteux and Choi's view on the connection between taekwondo and *hallyu*. Taekwondo's contribution to South Korea's image is also acknowledged by Moenig and Kim: "Taekwondo [...] may have arguably, contributed more to Korea's universal, cultural recognition and image than any other single item or event" ("The Invention" 131). Becoming an official Olympic Game and therefore international success have only strengthened taekwondo's status.

However, despite this invented tradition being tied to Korean roots, the globalization and cultural flow has been a two way flow in the case of taekwondo as well. To be acknowledged by the Olympic Committee, taekwondo had to go through some changes; even today taekwondo is under constant change to maintain its status as an official Olympic game. Mostly the changes involve competition rules and equipment, but naturally these changes do affect the sports as well. For example, the earlier changes affected the techniques preferred in the matches, which affected the sparring methods. This is one reason, why cultural flow is a relevant concept to my study; however, my intention is to focus on the local changes rather than the changes on international level.

## 4 KOREAN CULTURE IN FINNISH TAEKWONDO CLASSES

To unravel my thoughts on the observations and discoveries from the field, I have divided the analysis in two sections. In this first part, I will try to describe the spectator's point of view: What can you experience and analyze as an "outsider"? Not all the participants of this project were familiar with the Korean culture or history, because of which issues such as colors of the *taegeuk* symbol and behavior patterns did not come up in the interviews and general conversations on the field. Hence, this chapter will focus more on the observations based on the field diary rather than the interview.

On the contrary to the role of an "outsider", the second part on the other hand will introduce the experiences and thoughts of Finnish *taekwondoins* and taekwondo instructors. It especially focuses on how they view Korean culture to assess, if taekwondo has encouraged people to learn more about Korea and its culture outside the taekwondo classes.

Without further ado, in this chapter the aim is to offer a picture of what aspects of Korean culture are visible, and audible, to any observant. In other words, it looks further into which Korean traditions are repeated among taekwondo practitioners. The discoveries are explained in further detail to answer why they are relevant to Korean culture. Let us start with the most visible aspect: colors.

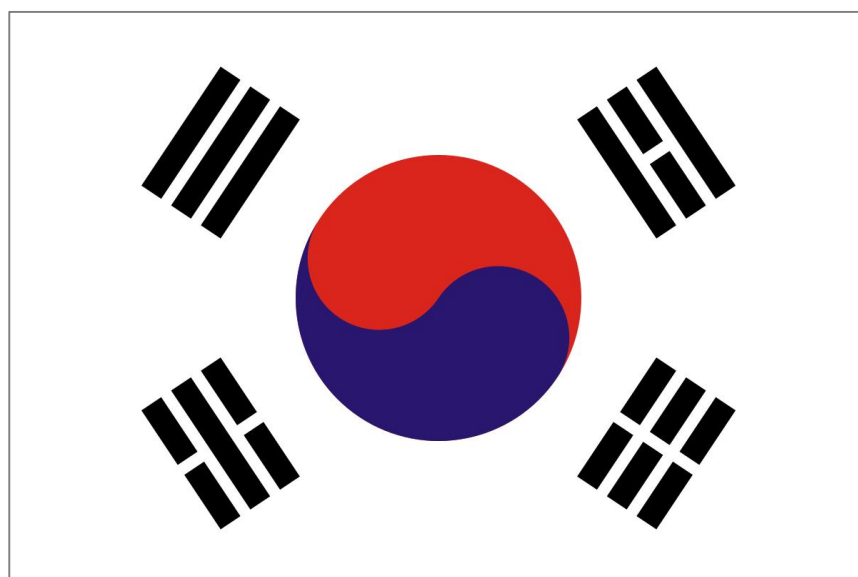
### ***Doboks, Gear and Tatami – Colors of the National Flag of the Republic of Korea***

*As I step in the school gym I see people who have already changed into their white training suits waiting for the class to start. The belt colors range reminds me of rainbow, while the floor is covered with red and blue mat pieces in form of similar to wrestling ring. The edges of the training area are circled with training bags, most of them being the color black, red or blue. The arriving instructor carries bunch of training gear such as target pads for the class – also in black, red and blue color. With the command to gather from the instructor, all the people present run into several rows based on their belt color – the formation eventually takes the shape of a square. Another command and these white suited people bow to the instructor, who also greets his students with a bow. The class is ready to start.*



When one enters to a taekwondo gym, one of the first things the attention gets drawn into is the white training suits – sometimes also called by their Korean name *dobok* (도복). First, after the WWII taekwondo uniforms were similar to those used in karate in Japan; however in the 1980s it was modified to into a uniform featuring a closed jacket with a v-shaped collar (Moenig 50).

The next is the gear used for the training that most of the times comes in black, red, blue and white too. As someone who has trained taekwondo several years by now, I first did not see the connection, but the same colors are present in the national flag of the Republic of Korea.



*The national flag of the Republic of Korea*

The flag of the Republic of Korea (ROK) – also known as *Taegeukgi* (태극기) – underwent a process of designing and standardization starting from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually, after establishing ROK in August 1948, a year later the National Flag Construction Guidelines were announced. In the 2000s a number of regulations were implemented. (“The National Flag”) In its current form the flag “consists of a white background, a red and blue circle in the center, and four black trigrams” (“The National Flag”).

The white background represents brightness, purity, and peace, qualities that are highly valued by the people. The taegeuk, which has long been a commonly

used motif, denotes the harmony between the negative cosmic forces (yin : blue portion) and the positive cosmic forces (yang : red portion), depicting the truth of nature that all things are created and evolve through the interaction of yin and yang. The four black trigrams are specific representations of the movement and harmony of these forces. In detail, the geon symbolizes the sky, the gon the earth, the gam water, and the ri fire. Together, they create harmony around the taegeuk mark. (“The National Flag”)

Based on the explanation above, quoted from the website of the South Korean Ministry of the Interior and Safety, the symbolism is highly associated with harmony and peace. Yet, it does not comment the color choices for the *taegeuk* symbol itself. Furthermore, the descriptions for the symbolism in regards to the *taegeuk* symbol seem to focus on the elements rather than colors. In the modern times the color blue, red and yellow represent the heaven, earth, and humankind in the *taegeuk* symbol. However, the original reason to choose these particular colors would require further research. Searching from the Internet for previous studies or databanks resulted in barely any valid information. Nevertheless, even in Finland the dominating colors in taekwondo gyms are white, black, red and blue – and those colors undeniably also found in the national flag of ROK. Especially the latter two are important and familiar to the *taekwondoins*, which is reflected in the following anecdote, for example:

*After a set of various abdominal muscles exercises, one of the two instructors says: “Well that was today’s umm...” She immediately is cut by a young green belt girl saying “Torture.” “Yes,” the instructor laughs, and tells everyone to have a small break. While sipping from my water bottle, I hear the other instructor talking with some of the teenagers. “My dream job would be stacking red and blue cans to shelves,” I hear him saying. He continues to explain that one shelf would be for red cans and one for blue cans, and he would be so glad to do it all day long since it would not require any thinking – just doing the job.*

The two colors – red and blue – are not relevant to taekwondo only, but the gear often comes in these two colors. The guards to protect chest and stomach are red on the other side and blue on the other, which represent the red and blue corners typical for several martial arts including boxing and wrestling. In fact, this could offer one reason to choose these two colors to use in his joke, because he is in charge of coaching the members of the association who compete. Furthermore, as I have discussed in the earlier parts, taekwondo has become internationally

known as competitive sport. Therefore, the red and blue possibly have become extremely familiar colors visible in gyms and training gear, as the focus has transferred to sparring.

Anyhow, there seems to be no mutual understanding about the history of red/blue corners that are not unique only to taekwondo, because of which it is difficult to discuss the symbolism of the colors any further. Tracing back the origins of this tradition would require its own research. On the other hand, these colors seem to have been used generally in sports during the time taekwondo started evolving into a combat sport. Thus, there is a possibility that colors were adopted from the other dominant combat sports at the time.

Although, the dominant colors with taekwondo gear may not have been completely originated from the Korean culture, they are features important to modern Korean culture. For example the *tricolor taegeuk* is often seen in decorations and accessories such as hand fans in the souvenir shops, but also in various events and traditional outfits<sup>43</sup> or even on the logos of national organizations. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the *taegeuk* is sometimes visible in taekwondo gyms: Scrolling through various pictures of taekwondo gyms suggest that often there is the national flag of Korea hanged on the wall. Also this custom is mentioned in the *Taekwondo Textbook*: “Upon entering the gymnasium, a trainee must first bow toward the national flag, and then salute his superiors in the order of the head of gymnasium, instructor and other superiors according to the ranking of Dan or Kup grades”<sup>44</sup> (71).

However, in the Finnish context majority of the taekwondo associations are only renting the space for training. Often times the cities, towns and municipalities rent public school gyms and such spaces for different associations to use after school hours; therefore, changing the interior design is typically not possible. Because of this, the gear and even the tatami must be transferable and put together whenever needed, and taken away again once the class ends. Thus, in many taekwondo associations in Finland, the visible items are typically *doboks* and training gear. Items such as the national flag of ROK are rare. Only at *Taekwondo One* have I personally seen the flag on the wall. During my interviews, I heard from Sofia that the first association she was a member of, also had the flag.

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<sup>43</sup> Korean shamans for example typically wear outfits with colors red, blue and yellow.

<sup>44</sup> *Kup* is another romanization form for *Geup* (급).

Nevertheless, as explained above, many associations have to rely on transferable gear and tatami pieces since the training spaces are often used by others as well. Due to this, the gyms rarely have material references to South Korea, items such as the flag or any decoration items. On the other hand, certain pieces of equipment are often used whether they are owned by the association for common use or *taekwondo* personal training gear. *Dobok* is typically white and some types have a black collar<sup>45</sup>, the chest guard is red and blue on the other side, and the tatami pieces often come also in red and blue.

Assessing, whether the dominance of the certain colors in the gear has been a consciously supported by KTA and WTF or not, would require further research. Although in the English edition of *Taekwondo Textbook* from 2004 it is referred that a taekwondo gym has the national flag of ROK in the Finnish context it is a rare item to see. Therefore, looking only into material cultural references would not be sufficient enough. This actually brings us to the next visual aspect one can notice upon entering a taekwondo gym – customs and rituals – which will be looked further into in the next section.

### **Bowing to Show Respect**

*More and more people gather to the school gym hallway to wait for the yoga class to finish. Everyone is catching up with one another. “How is your exam week going on?” someone asks from the girls in the upper secondary school<sup>46</sup>, while the other is telling about her stressful day at work. Suddenly the door opens, and we let everyone in the yoga class to get out before going in. One by one we go in bowing on the door step before entering. Once it is time to start, the instructor of the day calls everyone’s attention by saying: “Baro. Charyeot. Gyeongnye.” The gym becomes silent, everyone first takes the attention stand facing the instructor hands on their sides, and then with ‘gyeongnye’ command bows to the instructor.*

*Taekwondo Textbook* includes similar instructions in the part the book discusses about taekwondo spirit. I have been taught this spirit to be the motivation and excitement to learn and try one’s best while training. However, the *Taekwondo Textbook* extends it to correct

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<sup>45</sup> There used to be regulations, by which rank bearers the black collar *doboks* could be worn. According to my understanding *doboks* are available also in black, but at least in Finland only the black belts are allowed to wear them. Other colors are possible, and often they are regulated by age and/or gender.

<sup>46</sup> In Finland secondary school is from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

behavior, politeness, and even to self-care and hygiene: “A trainee should try to become a model of other trainees in observance of Taekwondo norms of propriety” (72). This is interesting because the instructions seem rather common codes of conduct when it comes to socializing. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate which is part of Korean culture based and which is common to most cultures. Due to this fact, I have decided to focus only on the customs and norms that are typical to Korean culture based on my personal experiences with Korean people both in Finland and in South Korea during my exchange year in Seoul.

As described in the start of this section, bowing upon entering is highly essential part of the proper etiquette at taekwondo gyms – not only as in theory but in practice too. This is also relevant to all the associations I worked with. Only the beginners and children were the ones to not bow sometimes, but majority seems to catch this habit quickly. I had an opportunity to observe an intensive beginners’ course organized by *Taekwondo One*, and there the instructor would guide and remind of all the customs related to class etiquette. Here is one example from my field diary: “A man who was attending the last time arrives late to the class. He joins the others [for the warm up on session], but later [the instructor]<sup>47</sup> reminds everyone that if you are late you should greet your instructor with a bow.” By the end of the beginner’s course bowing seemed to have become an obvious custom whenever they entered the gym.

Additionally, my previous taekwondo instructors have taught me that whenever one offers or receives anything, for example a target pad, one must bow to the other person. This especially is relevant to Korean and other Asian cultures. Furthermore, the action always happens with two hands unless the hierarchical status allows you to leave the other hand; for example an acquaintance a lot older than you can leave the other hand.

Furthermore, during the interviews, Master Hwang returned many times to the importance of Korean culture and bowing as a way to show respect to one’s elders. I have attended classes taught by him few times even before this project, and noticed that his teaching methods include highlighting the good code of conduct. In between the exercises he not only explains the techniques and the reasons to learn them, but also talks about Korean culture and related customs like bowing. Looking into his history, it seems that *Jido-Kwan* school in South Korea was known for its emphasis on proper behavior and etiquette.

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<sup>47</sup> Here the word ‘instructor’ is used instead of the actual name of the person for the privacy protection.

When I was asking about, how would Jarkko describe a taekwondo class from start to finish to explain what kinds of commands are used in taekwondo all the time, he mentions “respect” (in Fin. ‘kunnioitus’) in association with bowing:

- Jarkko: And umm... *Charyeot* of course and *gyeongnye*, we always bow-
- Me: Yeah
- Jarkko: Or when we practice technique, then, we of course bow without any commands after we have been demonstrated and start to do [ourselves]-
- Me: Yeah.
- Jarkko: The courtesy, it sure is there. And respect.
- Me: Yeah.
- Jarkko: Both towards the instructor and also the partner with whom you are practicing the technique.
- ...
- Me: How can you, well, during a class- here for example show respect towards others?
- Jarkko: Well. Simply by that, when you start to do-, when you start to practice self-defense [technique], then you do, bow, practice, and when the technique ends you bow, a new technique, before starting you bow, if the partners you do- bow, and start practicing. So there really are plenty of bows, and ummm... well, that surely comes-, it comes more naturally with these self-defense things, and-
- Me: Yeah.
- Jarkko: And and in the one step sparring, and-
- Me: Mmm
- Jarkko: umm- sparring techniques, then also these things appear.
- ...
- Jarkko: Also when sparring, then you also bow-
- Me: Yeah.
- Jarkko: Before you start sparring. Often you also fist bump with your opponent so that...
- Me: Yeah. Mmm

Jarkko:        So that- so that we are sparring in good spirit to measure the skills,  
                    and not to defeat the other one.

This discussion highlights, how in Jarkko's home association bowing is a common custom and that it is seen as a mean to show respect towards one's instructor and training partners. In a way, it is a way to greet the other person, but also it can act as a clear mark in between techniques telling that you are either ready to start or have already finished the technique. Similarly, fist bumping, or sometimes even shaking hands, before the sparring match starts is a way to show respect and sportsmanship towards the opponent. This however, seems to be more universal custom in competition; for example, in ice hockey tournaments the players shake hands with the members of the opposing team and thank for the good game afterwards.

As Jarkko describes, often the instructor tells to bow before the start of the exercise and at the end of the exercise. Or if not, then it sometimes is conducted anyway when training with a partner. However, this also varies across the taekwondo associations. Attending the classes at *Taekwondo Two* and *Taekwondo Three*, I noticed that bowing is more dependable on the instructors commands compared to *Taekwondo One* and my personal experiences. Therefore, bowing when entering the training space and when told so by the instructor seemed universal to all the associations.

In the above, I have discussed bowing as one of the most common Korean culture related customs that have been adopted in Finnish taekwondo associations. The following section continues the discussion about audible aspects of Korean culture, especially focusing on tradition of *kihap* and Korean language used in the class.

### ***Kihap or Yelling and Korean Language to Remind Us of the Korean Origins***

*Everyone is running in a circle to warm up the body for today's exercises. "Dwiro dora!" Master Hwang commands and everyone changes the direction of running first quickly crouching and touching the floor – yelling "kyaa". "Louder! Loud kihap!" and then he commands to change the direction again: The room fills with a loud roar from the students. Next Master explains to quickly lift your knees when he gives the signal, a clap. The next signal is for crouching and touching the floor. Various exercises follow similarly, and also the*

*direction of running changes couple times in between. Every time Master's command is responded by loud yells. Each round the sounds of breathing become heavier and soon Master tells the exercise is over: "Baro. Charyeot. Gyeongnae."*

What often surprises those, who have not learned taekwondo themselves, is the yelling or *kihap* (기합). This term can be translated as 'a shout of concentration' – especially in the context of military – and it can be written in hanja as '氣合'. The first character, 氣, refers to energy and vitality while the second character, 合, carries the meaning of 'to combine' or 'to unite'. So the word *kihap* can be interpreted as a mean to unite or showcase everyone's energy. On the other hand, the word seems to carry a negative connotation as 'discipline' or even 'punishment'. However, *kihap* in taekwondo's context can be understood as a way to show respect to one's master or instructor and that you are a disciplined student.

Among the three associations I visited, the use of *kihap* seemed not only vary from association to association but also from the instructor to instructor. The smallest association, *Taekwondo Two*, had typically around five people attending and the atmosphere was the most relaxed; I felt like we were just a group of friends having a workout together for the most parts of the class. On the contrary to this, *Taekwondo One* has instructors that have learned taekwondo under Master Hwang, who has been described to value Korean traditions and etiquette. Having attended his classes personally, I know that forgetting *kihap* will result in extra rounds of exercises till he is happy with the level of *kihap* – or a lecture about correct behavior in the class. Moreover, the older generation of Master Hwang's students seems to value his teachings and try to continue his legacy by copying similar patterns to their teaching routines.

*Taekwondo Three* does not have direct relations to Master Hwang according to my understanding, but the head instructors value the traditions while also trying to create a modern space for the younger taekwondo students; Hence, *kihap* seemed not as present as at *Taekwondo One*. Furthermore, one of the interviewees teaches at *Taekwondo Three*, but they have originally started learning taekwondo in another association. According to her description, the original home association was strict about the correct behavior during the class, and followed all the related traditions. Therefore, they feel that they also value similar structure and level of discipline in the classes she teaches.



*It is the second class for the beginners who joined our association last week. The class is divided to beginners, lower belts, and higher belts. Despite trying to focus on my own exercises, I cannot help hearing the instructor to remind the beginners again and again to yell as they practice the basic techniques. Meanwhile, we higher practice kicking on targets in small groups. Majority yells loudly with each kick – whether it hits the target or not.*

One aspect that I noticed during my time on the field was that yelling seems really foreign to Finnish people, and it takes time for them to become accustomed with the tradition. As someone relatively new to taekwondo, Laura mentioned that at first yelling seemed a bit odd, but in less than a year she has started to embrace it: “If you think about a regular person in a regular daily life... When do you get a chance to yell out loud?” She continues to describe it as a refreshing and freeing element during the practice. Similar attitude was expressed by Taina, who said it is wonderful that you are allowed to yell to all your heart’s content.

*Yelling as a respond to the commands is common where I train. Same tendency has been displayed at the classes of Taekwondo One. This might be due to the fact some the teacher/instructors of both associations are the so-called first generation students in Finland. They were the ones to learn under the grandmaster, and still to this day they repeat his teachings. Meanwhile at the classes of Taekwondo Two and Taekwondo Three I have found myself to be the only one to yell many times. The instructors have approved and even sometimes told the students copy me, but the students on the other hand have found my behavior odd – some have even looked surprised.*

Having observed several classes throughout the spring, the occasions when to yell have slight variation. While other instructors require *kihap* to every command or action, the others do not pay any particular attention to it. The most common commands to respond with *kihap* seem to be *sijak* and *gyodae*. *Sijak* (시작) is a command to start, while *gyodae* (교대) on the other hand tells to switch legs. Speaking of commands, similarly to the use of *kihap* during the classes, the amount of Korean commands and technique names varied a lot too. Simply searching taekwondo related pictures and videos on Instagram using the hashtag ‘taekwondo’, results in content involved with Korean language. During this project, I have been following Instagram feed tagged with the word ‘taekwondo’, and in the videos I have noticed that some of the

instructors use Korean language a lot – for example Korean native numbers up to 10 or even higher – and some prefer to use Korean as little as they can.

In Finland, some instructors prefer not to use the Korean terms at all, if possible, and rather depend on Finnish translations of the technique names and commands. However, certain Korean commands, such as greeting commands *charyeot* and *gyeongnye*, are always used throughout the class. This has already been reflected in the example on the sections above. One explanation could be that these types of words, including *kihap*, either do not translate well into Finnish language or simply sound unnatural in the Finnish context. For example, *gyeongnye* translates as ‘salute’ in English, but in this context it refers to saluting by bowing. Therefore, translating it into a single command in Finnish language seems irrelevant. On the other hand, the other explanation could be the fact that Master Hwang<sup>48</sup> and other Korean masters who came to Europe to teach taekwondo were not necessarily familiar with the local language. Hence, they likely taught using the words of English they knew and rest was in Korean till they were able to master the local language.

Some techniques have been translated into Finnish language: *apchagi* (앞차기) – *etupotku* (in Eng. ‘front kick’), *dwichagi* (뒤차기) – *takapotku* (‘back kick’), *yeopchagi* (옆차기) – *sivupotku* (‘side kick’ or ‘side piercing kick’) and so on. They are easy to translate as the original Korean name is rather descriptive, often being a combination of a word for direction or level of height and a word describing the action. For example, above the techniques are different kicks (*chagi*), where the prefix indicates the direction of the kick.

Probably the most typical pattern to instruct the class – excluding the basic greetings – seems to be mixing the both languages. Furthermore, often the Korean language is combined with the Finnish language in a rather natural way. The commands sound like a one sentence, although typically it is first said in Korean and then repeated in Finnish right away. On the other hand, sometimes with the basic commands such as *sijak*, the command might be first said in Finnish and then in Korean. For example: “Aloitetaan (in Eng. ‘Let us start’), sijak!”

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<sup>48</sup> During the interview with Master Hwang, he used English when telling the story of how he started teaching taekwondo in Finland. He has lived in Finland for around 40 years now, and speaks Finnish, but these memories seemed easier for him to tell in the language he used at the time.

Especially, in the case of not so commonly used Korean commands, repeating the Korean command again in Finnish might be required as the students typically do not understand Korean language. For example, the command *iroso* (일어서, in Eng. ‘stand up’) does not seem common in Finnish taekwondo classes: In fact it is a command I have not heard anywhere else except once at *Taekwondo Three’s* class. Hence, I was surprised to hear the word. Furthermore, it seemed that it is not commonly used there either, as the trainees reacted only after the instructor told us in Finnish to stand up. Similar confusion often happens also with the beginners as they are not used to any of the commands yet so even the most basic words need to be explained and reminded what they mean.

In addition to this, some instructors mix the Korean words with Finnish words. For example, often when an instructor wants everyone to do the standing lunge stretch, he or she might ask to take an extended *apkubi* (앞굽이, in Eng. ‘front stance’) stance as the stretching stance is similar to this taekwondo technique.

Furthermore, the technique names might also be abbreviated into a simpler format or even nicknamed for the sake of easier pronunciation. Personally, I am used to referring *dollyo chagi* (돌려 차기, in Eng. ‘roundhouse kick’) as *dollari*, which is similar to Finnish word meaning ‘dollar’ in English language. However, these abbreviations are not universal to all Finnish taekwondo associations – rather they are local and whether they are used partly depends on the instructor. Nevertheless, I have noticed that the pronunciations of the words and the context, where they are used, tend to vary according to the person saying them. Therefore, due to the differences in pronunciation learning and remembering the terms in Korean might be difficult. Furthermore, adding the Finnish translations causes variance as well, which can be confusing, for the beginners especially.

This chapter has looked into the visual and audible aspects that people familiar with Korean culture can notice even if they do not know taekwondo well. The next chapter will look deeper into the social structure and how the *taekwondoins* themselves view this particular martial art form.

## 5 TAEKWONDO – KOREAN SPORT AS A HOBBY

While the previous chapter focused on visible and audible features of Korean culture in the Finnish taekwondo associations, in this chapter, the thoughts and ideas of the interviewees will be expressed. The interviews focused on the motivation of the interviewees to start taekwondo in the first place and what is their perception on taekwondo and Korean culture. The reason to include this to the discourse is to discuss if the Finnish *taekwondoins* associate all the features mentioned in the chapter above with Korean culture.

Firstly, I try to explain, how taekwondo is being taught in Finland and how the belt rank system affects the relations within the taekwondo community. Furthermore, one of the main topics turned out to be what differentiates taekwondo from other martial art forms culturally. Thus, the second section will focus on Finnish *taekwondoins* perspectives on Korean culture in taekwondo classes. I also shortly introduce, if Korean culture interests the Finnish *taekwondoins*.

### Finnish Equality versus Korean Social Hierarchy

*My presence at the field was often notified, but no one was offended by it, and it seems some thought I was simply training to become an instructor myself or I was an instructor. I reckon this assumption was based on my rank level for which it is not unusual to instruct classes.*

The fact that some of the participants in the taekwondo classes I visited simply thought I was there to learn to become an instructor was unexpected. On the other hand, for someone with the same rank it is not unusual to start teaching taekwondo to the lower ranks. The discussions with the interviewees about the belt ranks led up to discussion about hierarchy and authority. In Finland, the ranks before the first Dan black belt are typically referred as “colored belts”, which can further be divided into “lower colored belts” and “upper colored” belts. The first rank, indicated by white belt, one will be granted upon starting taekwondo training is the 10<sup>th</sup> *Geup* (꺆). The next rank is 9<sup>th</sup> *Geup*, and it can be achieved completing a belt rank promotion

test. Following to this, the higher the rank is the lower the Geup number is. The last before the first Dan is the first Geup.

*At Taekwondo Three, for example, one can volunteer to assist in the class instruction after reaching the 6th Geup, often indicated by green belt. My 4<sup>th</sup> Geup belt is even higher compared to it, and thus the assumption of me being an instructor in training indicates a level of hierarchy based on the belt ranks. In Korean culture one's social status affects the way they socialize with others. Age, position at the workplace, institution or any similar context, personal relationship with the other person sets the guidelines, how one can address the other person, level of politeness in speech, and even actions such as bowing to show respect. This applies to taekwondo gyms also, which was reflected in the answers I received from the email interviews:*

*According to most of the Korean respondents, the atmosphere is active and positive, but during the class everyone is serious and the atmosphere is strict. This is also reflected in the relations between the teachers and students, as they might be close as friends outside the class, but during the class the teachers seem scary. It is like a father-child relationship.*

Yet, in Finland such hierarchy barely exists. Addressing your teacher or even superior by the first name is relatively usual, and speaking style is often informal. Formal speech typically is used in customer service situations or formal speeches, for example at graduation ceremonies. Of course, with the elderly the formal and polite speech is often used, if the occasion requires it: With familiar people formal speech is dropped rather quickly. However, during the interview with Jaana highlighted the gap between the so-called traditional "old school" taekwondo associations and modern associations in Finland. Here is an example of how Jaana recalls her experiences in an association that she described as very traditional and true to the disciplined style:

Jaana: At first it was like that there was the adult, and I was the child back then.

Me: Mmm

Jaana: So for me it was the adult-child authority, and also on top of that the adult was a black belt so it added to that-

- Me: Mmm
- Jaana: Authority. So back then, if there was umm any- any other teacher than the head teacher, then everything was fine.
- Me: Mmm
- Jaana: You were free to like play around and be noisy-<sup>49</sup>
- Me: Mmm
- Jaana: But when umm the head teacher arrived, you had to like be so... like be so well- actually like a perfect version of yourself. Then again, like when you grow up, and umm I have been to the training camp- ... to the open training camps and to other, umm, the national team camps and... Then the coach- hmm athlete relationship is a bit different. So of course the coach is the authority in it, and like controls you in certain ways, for example diet and things like-
- Me: Mmm
- Jaana: Like suggests, but it is more like he/she<sup>50</sup> is like a... a friend offering guidance or like that it is not as big of an autho- like...
- Me: Like he/she isn't the teacher anymore?
- Jaana: No more. The relationship is like closer even. He/she just like gives more advice and things like that.

Her reflection displays a strict contrast between the levels of authority the different ranks and people carry. This reminds me of the answer from the Korean respondents I received, as they described their relationship to the instructors, masters, and *kwan* leaders: The head teacher is the highest authority within the gym. However, Jaana also mentions the less strict atmosphere with the other teachers, which is more close to my personal experiences with different taekwondo teachers. It is okay to be playful at the gym as long as you actually also train, and give others the chance to focus on their training.

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<sup>49</sup> In Finnish she actually says that "It was okay to tease and play intensively around." However, to convey the same message in more fluent and natural English, I decided to change the words a little bit, because in this context it all is about fooling around instead of being disciplined.

<sup>50</sup> In Finnish pronoun 'hän', indicating a 3<sup>rd</sup> persona, is genderless; therefore, I cannot know if she is talking about a man or a woman in this anecdote.

Also, with the Finnish interviewees we discussed the mentor style approach to taekwondo teaching. Typically the higher belts guide the lower belts, but especially the higher the rank rises the more two-way flow the mentoring is. As a lower belt it is okay to criticize or question the technique of a higher belt, if you notice there is room for improvement. While this reflects the equality and mutual respect to one another, it also shows the attitude those who have trained taekwondo for years. Especially, the black belts see taekwondo as a lifestyle, where there is always something new to learn or to polish in one's technique. This response came from both the Finnish and the Korean respondents.

Anyway, because of this flexible social hierarchy in Finland, different ranks are rarely distinguished nor highlighted if not necessary. However, what the belt ranks do indicate is the skill level and knowledge, according to all the interviewees. Hence, the higher ranks are respected, and the authority is based on the acknowledgement of the skillset they have achieved by training a longer period of time.

In addition to these, Master Hwang brought up during the interview the cultural differences in socializing he has noticed during his years in Finland. In Korea, it is a common custom to regularly arrange gatherings, for example dinner parties, with one's peers at the university, colleagues at work or even club members. According to Master Hwang, in Korea it is common to for example invite people such as one's taekwondo masters to birthday parties or dinner parties every once in a while. Upon coming to Finland, he has noticed that this is not definitely part of Finnish culture. After work gatherings do exist, and occasions such as pre-Christmas parties are important to Finnish socializing culture. However, inviting superiors, teachers or people such as taekwondo masters to private parties is rare – unless you have a closer non-professional relationship with them.

Thus, I suggest that because of the different social structures, the relations within taekwondo community partly follow the belt rank based hierarchy but also tend to be more fluid. This might explain the variations among the associations, and also why some taekwondo related traditions are more common while the others are disappearing. The instructors choose, how to teach, and to how they claim their authority over the class. They often seem to follow the patterns of their own masters, but especially the younger generation seems more and more prone to be flexible and less strict.

Moreover, younger instructors seem to focus on the athletic side of taekwondo, and their teaching is influenced by developments in physiology and sports education. Especially, *Taekwondo One* and *Taekwondo Three*, with more members in the associations, tend to be influenced by those members who are physiotherapists or professional sports educators, for example. In fact this opens the discussion about how the Finnish *taekwondoins* view taekwondo and associate it with the Korean culture. Therefore, the next section will look further into the issue of whether taekwondo is experienced as a Korean tradition or a sport in Finland.

### **A Korean Tradition in the Finnish Context**

*It is the first class for the beginners today. The head instructor had decided that a demonstration would offer a great opportunity for the new students to see what taekwondo is about. As he explains to the beginners what taekwondo is, the others prepare the tatami. "Taekwondo is centuries old tradition, first practiced by hwarang soldiers in Korea," I hear the instructor to start his speech.*

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, there is no common understanding about the history of taekwondo. However, the Korean sources often support the idea of taekwondo being old tradition dating even back to the unified Silla dynasty or the Three Kingdoms period. On the other hand, based on my discussions within my home association and with *taekwondoins* from other associations, many are not familiar with the history of taekwondo or they have the impression of taekwondo as a Korean tradition and so assume it to be at least couple centuries old. On the other hand, half of my Finnish interviewees were aware of the connections to the Japanese karate. Furthermore, many feel that the history is a topic not discussed in the taekwondo classes – rather the focus is on exercising and learning new techniques. Thus, some are not familiar with any of the history narratives within the Finnish taekwondo community.

Therefore, I became even more interested in, how Finnish people see taekwondo. Is it a Korean tradition? Or perhaps it is simply a sport and a hobby to exercise regularly for the health benefits? I was also interested hearing stories from Koreans, who have learned taekwondo to understand a bit better possible differences between the two cultures. Hence, I



gathered few questions that were sent to Korean university students majoring in taekwondo. This already highlights the difference between Finnish and Korean taekwondo circles. In Finland, studying and specializing in a specific sport is not possible, while in Korea taekwondo is a possible major at university level.

Furthermore, becoming a professional athlete in Finland is uncommon. Only few sports offer a possibility to earn a living with it, for example ice hockey, but majority of these athletes plays abroad. With less popular sports, especially martial arts, training and competing on international level is rare, and typically these athletes do have their jobs while being an athlete is secondary to that career. (Palojärvi) Those who work professionally with sports are typically personal trainers and sports educators, and because of this they have more general knowledge on sports and physiology.

Therefore, those who train taekwondo in Finland typically are not professional athletes. Moreover, those who teach taekwondo are regular people with their daily jobs volunteering to teach the skills they have learned so far. Likely because of this, the instructors have a greater influence within the association, and they affect the focus of the class curricula based on their skills, knowledge and interest. Naturally, this causes variation within the association, but also on the national level as well. For example, Mika told that his decision to start taekwondo was carefully thought through – he preferred the dynamic sparring style of taekwondo over the other martial art forms. Now he is the head instructor in his taekwondo association, and teaches taekwondo as his profession. His interest towards sparring and taekwondo competitions is reflected in his teaching, and the association has ranked high on the national level in the competitions within the past couple years.

Actually, he and his wife Paula together founded the *Taekwondo Three* in 2014, hoping to create a space for anyone to come learn taekwondo. The association offers a rather versatile set of classes, some of which are aimed for younger children and families, and some even for those with learning or physical disabilities. They want to make sure that everyone has fun at the training; therefore, there is a level of flexibility applied to ensure everyone is able to attend. Despite to modern take to the training, certain traditions are valued:

- Paula: I mean that-, that we do clearly have those certain things, forms and hmm-
- Me: Vocabulary?
- Paula: Vocabulary and so on. First of all the vocabulary is really good because-, because no matter which sport you do, I think it is an homage to the sport and its roots.

Additionally, both Mika and Paula reminisced during the interview the times, when they first started learning taekwondo. According to them, it is important that taekwondo is now approached from the sports educational perspective for the sake of safer training and taking physiological individualities into consideration. In the earlier days of taekwondo in Finland, the training focused more on repetition, the warm-up routines were monotonous, and the training was fast pace, the exercises were often explained only once because of which following the class was difficult. This description sounded similar to my experiences attending Master Hwang's classes, which are often considered as the form of old school taekwondo in Finland.

*One of the differences between the so-called 'old-school taekwondo' and 'modern taekwondo' might be demonstrated in the technique combinations. Still to this day there are differences with the older generation. For example with a hand technique followed by a kick the generation that was taught by the Grandmaster Hwang tends to leave their hands as they were after performing the hand technique during the kick while nowadays we are taught to pull our hands to combat stance. Few exemptions are made if the combination requires it, but otherwise hands are pulled back to defend the upper body. Even I have learned this way when I first started learning taekwondo in the mid-2000s.*

I tried to ask about from the interviewees if they know old school taekwondo and how does it differ from the modern taekwondo. The question appeared to be more difficult to answer than I had expected. The slightly changed forms and practices in the competitions, also discussed by for example by Udo Moenig in his publications, seem the most obvious difference. The old school taekwondo was also described as more traditional and disciplined, but describing what actually makes it more traditional was impossible to answer.

However, there are differences among the associations, and some associations seem more focused on maintaining certain traditions as part of the class, while some concentrate more on the exercising. For example, Jaana has a background in training with the instructors that value the disciplined side of taekwondo, and she described the association as a really traditional taekwondo association. She mentioned several examples of disciplinary actions during the interviews, including that when standing in form “if your hands were anywhere else except behind your back, then there likely were consequences.” These consequences typically were pushups or some other physically demanding exercises. Majority of the “traditions” she mentioned during the interview were related to correct behavior, discipline and disciplinary actions.

On the other hand, when I asked, if the interviewees have learned anything about Korean culture or language, majority felt unfamiliar with Korea. Only Jaana seemed familiar with Korean culture, as she became interested to it through her friends who like Korean pop music. Others associated the gym etiquette and customs related with martial arts generally. Korean language is familiar to them only as in the names of techniques, and learning Korean has not been a priority. Although learning more about Korean culture did not seem important to the interviewees, especially for those, who have a black belt traveling to Korea and training there is on their bucket list. In this sense, Kukkiwon seems to be the Mecca of taekwondo community, to quote Mika who brought up this metaphor.

Even though exercising methods and class etiquette are different to regular sport classes in Finland, the interviewees associated all the aspects discussed in the previous chapter with martial arts generally – excluding the language. Everyone I have discussed with, sees that taekwondo in Finland is not same to the taekwondo in Korea. For example Mika expressed that importing taekwondo required flexibility: “It would have never settled here, if it had not been turned into a Finnish version. That is an unavoidable process. The same thing-, I mean it happens to every sport imported to the country.” In other words, taekwondo has changed to attract the Finnish people, who are unfamiliar with the Korean traditions and customs. For example, the Korean style hierarchy does not fit well the Finnish social structures, since in Finland the rankings are not important part of socializing patterns and behavior towards one another.

This chapter concludes the observations from the field. As discussed above, certain traditions are important and associated with taekwondo but not necessarily with Korea. Overall, however, the interviewees seemed to value these traditions such as bowing to greet or Korean commands, but at the same time felt that many Finnish people consider it more as a sport than a tradition. Anyhow, these findings will be assessed further in detail in the following chapter.

## 6 DISCUSSION

Korean culture seems unfamiliar to majority of the Finnish people. Only in recent years, have Korean products such as K-pop or cosmetics started to gain solid footing among the Finnish consumers<sup>51</sup>. Yet, although more and more people are interested in the products imported to Finland, I doubt the majority of the people have gained the interest to know more about the Korean culture itself. At least within the Finnish taekwondo community, although some people became interested in Korean language and culture after starting taekwondo, majority seems to simply enjoy training martial arts and having fun doing it.

Considering the fact of how Korean masters are still looked up to in taekwondo community and the Korean masters that had influence in Finland when taekwondo was first introduced to the Finnish, one might expect to find clear connection to Korean culture. Yet, already based on my personal experiences, I was skeptical about taekwondo working as a vessel to inspire Finnish people to learn more about Korea. Repeating the previous paragraph, Korean beauty products and music has only in past few years slowly gained attraction, which is reflected in relatively small amount of these products on Finnish market. On the other hand, the growing interest towards Korea thanks to them might start motivating the Finnish *taekwondoins* to learn more about it, or more people might become interested in learning taekwondo because of their interest towards Korea.

One of my assumptions before heading to the field was that the Finnish *taekwondoins* are not familiar with the history of taekwondo, or they have heard the “official” history supported by Kukkiwon. But against my expectations some of the interviewees had learned about the history to some extent, and were aware of the connections to the Japanese karate. On the contrary those participants on the field, who had not learned about the history, majority had an impression of taekwondo being at least centuries old tradition. This reflects that the repetition of history narrative supporting the idea of taekwondo’s Korean origins has been continued in Finland to some extent: Many of the *taekwondoins* I had a chance to chat with felt that the history is rarely being brought up as a topic during the classes.

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<sup>51</sup> There have been people interested in Korea before too, but only in past couple years have the Korean products started appearing on the shelves in stores, and K-pop songs have made it to the radio playlists.

However, not only is the history of taekwondo controversial, but furthermore my experiences on the field illustrated differences on a local level. As discussed in the chapters 4 and 5, there are variations among the associations, there seems to be a tendency to focus more on the sport side of taekwondo. This correlates with Udo Moenig's suggestions that taekwondo has transformed from "martial art" to "martial sport". Furthermore, the newer and younger instructors seem more eager to adopt new methods of training, which can partly result in disappearing traditions and support the sport educational approach to training.

Yet, maintained traditions to be dependent on the instructor's personal background and interests. Generally, keeping the certain features is seen as a way to show respect to taekwondo's origins. This shows that it is still seen as a martial art form with a set of traditions. Due to circumstances and preference the focus of the instructor affects to the way they are applied to the taekwondo class. On the other hand, certain features seem common to the majority of the Finnish taekwondo associations, and the repetition of these traditions, or customs to be exact, often is considered as a way to pay homage to the origins as demonstrated in chapter 5.

While certain Korean features are strongly kept as part of the class etiquette, some have started to vanish from the taekwondo scene. Among the associations I visited these included bowing, form, and *kihap* or 'shouting' as it often is referred to in English. Especially bowing before one enters to the training space seems to be common across all the associations. However, bowing to the Korean flag has almost completely disappeared and certain practices such as the greeting in the form following the commands from the person standing in the right upper corner. Furthermore, especially *Taekwondo Two* demonstrated barely any use of *kihap* in their classes, and also in *Taekwondo Three* *kihap* was not used as much as in *Taekwondo One*, where most of the commands require a yell as a response.

The use of Korean language during the class on the other hand varied from instructor to instructor, but especially those training to achieve their next Dan, have to know the original technique names in Korean and the basic commands. I would argue that one of the reasons to prefer Finnish terms over the original Korean ones could be, because people find it more difficult to remember the correct terms in a foreign language. In a way, it is common sense: Naturally, it is easier to remember the technique names in a language you understand as the term itself might explain the nature of the technique. However, majority of the Finnish

students do not speak nor read Korean due to which the Korean terms can appear difficult to memorize. This would explain, why majority of the *taekwondoins* I was able to converse with did not feel that they could say they know Korean language.

Symbolism of the Finnish taekwondo gyms – mainly the colors of the gear used and *dobok* – can remind one of the *taegeuk* and so the national flag of the ROK. Of course, the class etiquette is linked to Korean culture as well, but many Finnish *taekwondoins* see it as a common practice across all East Asian martial art forms. On the other hand, in Finland even with three different associations rather significant differences occurred, because of which assessing the continuation of the Korean, or martial art, traditions seems secondary to the Finnish *taekwondoins*. Practices such as *kihap* during training can reflect the military past and patriotic past of taekwondo.

Moreover, having the flag and other materialistic references to Korea within the Finnish gyms is rare probably due to the Finnish Sports Association system. In Finland sports rarely is a profession to anyone, unless you are a personal trainer, physiotherapist, or a professional sports educator for example. Therefore, majority of the people are typically exercising in their free time for their own individual reasons, often to enjoy themselves and to stay fit. Furthermore, the associations are run by volunteers, and there the classes are taught by the members of the associations. Unlike in other countries, martial arts and any other sports are rarely taught in sports academies.

To summarize everything above, in Finnish taekwondo community taekwondo is often considered more as a sport than a martial art form. Although traditions are considered important, they also associate many customs with martial arts in general. Moreover, Korean culture appears relevantly foreign to people, and issues such as history of taekwondo for example rarely are discussed. Therefore, taekwondo in Finland demonstrates rather low level of inflow of Korean culture. On the contrary, it seems to have been adapted to the Finnish sports association system, and the customs maintained are considered to show respect to origins of the sport, which is seen to apply to all sports practiced in Finland.

Nevertheless, these findings are based on observations at few associations. For deeper analysis on much longer periods on the field would be required, and also working with larger field. Moreover, my personal drawbacks were the issue of time management, as I was not able

to fully commit to the field work because of my part time job, and perhaps my earlier experience with taekwondo. Having learned taekwondo helped me to understand the perspective of the participants, but on the other hand observing from the outsider's or researcher's point of view proved to be more challenging than expected. In addition to this, personal experience of training in Korea or being able to conduct similar field work there, would have provided possibilities to compare Korean taekwondo and Finnish taekwondo. Even though I did interview Korean *taekwondoins* via email, the data was not sufficient enough and therefore, it has not been utilized in this research as much as I had hoped.

Yet, considering the original research questions, the research does offer answers to those. Regretfully, the theoretical framework and concepts were not as compatible with the data. The concept of "invention of tradition" appears to be more relevant to the study of history in this case. Moreover, the cultural flow from Korea is relatively new to Finland and *hallyu* indeed is a concept mostly supported by Korean researchers, and the impact of this so-called *Korean Wave*, and even Korean nationalism, is difficult to assess. Indeed, these concepts apply to taekwondo when taking the cultural perspective. Because it seems that most of the Finnish *taekwondoins* enjoy it just as a hobby, the cultural flow has been rather small.

On the other hand, since the concepts are difficult to apply in the Finnish context, it highlights the fact that taekwondo has not encouraged people to learn more about Korea or the language. Furthermore, the issues such as history and cultural origins are not a subject often touched upon. Majority of the *taekwondoins* seem to consider it to be martial art form originating in Korea, but otherwise the interest is often in learning and polishing the techniques or improving one's sparring skills. Therefore, this case study is sufficient enough to assess that taekwondo so far has not disseminated Korean culture significantly in Finland, but certain customs and traditions have been kept as part of the class curricula and gym etiquette.



## 7 CONCLUSIONS

In this research, I have tried to look into, how Korean culture is maintained as part of Finnish taekwondo classes, especially focusing on the question: What Korean cultural features are displayed in Finnish taekwondo classes? Furthermore, the aim was also to find out, if taekwondo inspires people to learn more about Korean culture and language. This interest was partly based on an assumption that taekwondo is a tradition with its own class etiquette and customs. After long consideration, ethnography seemed to offer relevant tools to approach the topic, and three different taekwondo associations from the Southern Finland were selected as the field. The field work itself included both observing and participating in taekwondo classes. In addition to this, I interviewed Master Hwang who originally brought taekwondo to Finland and also Finnish *taekwondoins*.

Majority of the gym etiquette on the other hand is often associated with the martial arts in general, which in fact raised discussion about, how can we differentiate the common martial art culture from taekwondo culture and so Korean culture. Many of the martial arts have background in Asian, especially East Asian region, which explains the similar gym etiquettes and customs. The use of Korean language is considered as a representation of Korean culture, but many of the participants on the field did not feel confident enough to say they know Korean language. Furthermore, many had not tried to learn Korean language any further than the technique names and commands used in the class.

Nevertheless, the use of Korean language is considered to be important and part of taekwondo culture. It reminds of the Korean roots of the sport, and therefore is a way to show respect to the founders of it. As explained in the paragraph above, other customs and traditions often are regarded as common features to all martial arts or even sports. All the classes I observed, however, did include customs such as bowing to greet the gym leader, instructor and other members, and on the other hand the color scene of the gym equipment has similar colors with the national flag of the ROK. But the colors are tricky to assess, since blue and red corners are rather common to all combat sports and not unique to taekwondo alone. Furthermore, karate and judo training suits are similar to the *dobok* used in taekwondo classes, because of which the meaning of typically white training suit is also a completely another case to study. In

addition to this, the Finnish taekwondo gyms are often rented spaces used by different associations and clubs; therefore, equipment is transferable and decorating the gym for taekwondo use is typically not possible.

Although, according to my Finnish interviewees and casual discussions on the field, some *taekwondoins* have gained interest towards Korea and started learning Korean, majority seems to simply enjoy it as a form of sport. Jaana is one example of a person who has started learning Korean; however, she already had experiences living in East Asia and her friends were interested in Korean pop culture, which therefore also motivated her. Based on the conversations, it seems that those who do become interest towards Korean culture are typically in their teens or early 20s. The older *taekwondoins* are typically already in the working life, they possibly have their own families, other hobbies or are otherwise engaged to various obligatory and non-obligatory activities off-work. Therefore even if they were slightly interested in Korea, but investing their free time to learn about it is not the top priority. This is reflected in the fact that many hope to have a chance to travel to Korea some day in the future, if they have not visited yet.

In other words, it is difficult to discuss, how much Korean culture is spread through taekwondo as some features seem common to all martial arts. Taekwondo is a good example of a martial art form that has been radically developed to attract new practitioners across the world, as described by Udo Moenig in his various taekwondo related publications. Similarly, the Finnish taekwondo seems to have been adapted to the Finnish sport association system. Certain parts of the taekwondo and Korean culture are still commonly maintained across the associations, but even with only three associations in this case demonstrated differences in regards to the amount of Korean language used in the classes, *kihap* or ‘yelling’, and even bowing.

The differences on global level could follow similar variation, or they could be even greater. Therefore, further research is needed in the future, in order to gain better understanding on cultural innovations and soft powers, and how they work in athletic world. At least this case study suggests that in Finland it seems that taekwondo is considered as both sport and martial art but not as a gateway to learning more about Korean culture.

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Because I am writing a Master's thesis on taekwondo culture in Finland, I am curious about how the taekwondo culture is in Korea. In the thesis I will compare these two cultures, for which I ask you to discuss about your own experiences.

[핀란드의 태권도 문화에 대한 석사논문을 쓰고 있기 때문에 한국에서 태권도 문화는 어떠한 지 궁금합니다. 논문에서 이 두 문화를 비교하기 위해서는 자기 경험에 대하여 이야기 하시기를 바랍니다.]

1. How long have you been learning taekwondo? And what is your rank?  
[얼마 동안 태권도를 배우셨습니까? 그리고 몇 급이십니까?]
2. Please, explain what taekwondo is and its history.  
[태권도가 무엇이고 태권도의 역사를 짧게 설명해 주세요.]
3. How are the taekwondo classes in Korea? Please, describe a regular class from start to finish.  
[한국에서는 태권도 수업은 어떻게 됩니까? 정기적인 수업이 어떻게 시작부터 끝까지 진행되는 지 설명해 주세요.]
4. Moreover, please explain in more detail the etiquette and manners in an actual class. (Teacher/master-to-student relation, student-to-student relation, commands and so on)  
[또한, 적절한 수업 예절을 좀 더 자세히 설명해 주세요. (교수/사범님과 제자의 관계, 제자와 제자의 관계, 명령어 등)]
5. How is the atmosphere typically in the gym? Furthermore, what do you think about the relations with the other taekwondo students and teachers/masters? (For example, are you close like family/friends?)  
[보통 도장의 분위기는 어떻게 됩니까? 그리고 동료 제자들과 교수/사범님과 관계는 어떻다고 생각하십니까? (예를 들어, 가족/친구처럼 친하십니까?)]
6. What was the reason to start learning taekwondo?  
[태권도를 배우게 된 이유는 무엇입니까?]
7. If you still are learning taekwondo, what keeps you motivated to continue?  
[아직도 배우고 있으시면 계속 배우도록 동기를 부여하는 것은 무엇입니까?]
8. If you are not currently training but have tried before, what motivated you to keep learning taekwondo? Also what was your reason to quit?

[지금은 태권도를 배우지 않지만 배워본 적 있으시다면 배우고 계셨을 때에는 계속 하게 만든 동기가 무엇이었습니까? 그리고 그만 두게 한 이유가 무엇이었습니까?]

9. If you have anything else to say about taekwondo culture, please, write here.

[더 태권도 문화에 대하여 이야기하고 싶은 말이 있으시면 써 주세요.]