

the centuries but merely one example, albeit the one that most often comes to mind for most people. The monastery's martial arts high tide rose in the mid-16th century, relatively late in Chinese history, but its legendary fame, primarily from that period, continues to the present due to a combination of factors too involved to relate in this short critique.

The martial arts were a dominant form of physical culture practiced to varying degrees over the centuries by individuals and groups among nearly all segments of Chinese society, including those in the Buddhist monastic community. Professor Shahar's translation helps us put the pieces of this mosaic together.

Notes

¹ Cheng Zongyou (Chongdou) (程宗猷 (冲斗)).

² Cheng Chongdou (1975). *Shaolin Gun-fa Tujie*. Taipei: Hualian Press, p. 3.

³ "Later I met Guang'an, one of the best experts (少林棍法圖解).

居多後有廣按師者乃法門中高足 among the monks in this technique."

⁴ *Famen* (Buddhist, monk) (法門).



Mastering the Basics of Hap Ki Do

By the World Chun Ki Do Association
Santa Fe, NM: World
Chun Ki Do Association
2003, set of two instructional DVDs
Directed by Choi Han-Young

Available from:

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Hapkido is a Korean martial art that has gained increasing attention in the last decades. Its origin can be traced back to Korean born Choi Yong-Sul who trained

in Japan under the tutelage of Daito-ryu Aikijujutsu Takeda Sokaku (who was also aikido founder's Uyeshiba Morihei's main teacher) starting as a boy around 1912 until mid-1940s. Choi returned to his native land upon its liberation at the end of WWII. He taught his art, which throughout the decade changed names from Yawara to Yu Sul and to Yu Kwon Sul. At some point his most notable students (specially Ji Han-Jae) combined Choi's intricate Japanese joint locking, throwing and pressure point techniques with Korean Taek Kyon kicking maneuvers, breathing exercises and weapon techniques (mainly sword, staff, rope and cane). Around 1965 this combination came to be known as Hapkido (the way of coordinated or harmonious energy). Hapkido gained fame as a very practical martial arts system, specially suitable for security personnel, combining lethal strikes to sensitive areas, fast kicks, and a myriad of techniques—from finger twisting to joint dislocations—that might be described as a sort of "mean, short frame" Korean version of aikido.

Choi and many of his students adopted the Hapkido name, which came to include different varieties corresponding to its various evolutionary phases. Today, Hapkido is a generic name to identify the program and style used by Ji Han-Jae, Suh Bok-Sub, Kim Moo-Hong, Myung Jae-Nam and Myung Kwang-Sik in the 1960s. Three branches sprouted from this which were somehow different than "Classical Hapkido": (1) The softer style developed in Korea by Myung Jae-Nam, with wide motions and more oriented toward healing, aesthetic qualities, and spiritual goals with strong connection to Japanese aikido (this branch is sometimes known as Hankido); (2) a more athletic and acrobatic style, that has taken famed and painful joint-locks and added sudden projections along with gravity-defying, jump-spin kicks, and break-falls that have given rise to competitions organized by the Korea Hapkido Federation; and (3) some Western variations which include either a simplified curricula for the general public, in-

corporating some taekwondo elements, or the eclectic approach, self-defense oriented and including techniques from other martial arts—typically Brazilian Jujutsu—but excluding certain original Hapkido elements (eg., jump kicks, throws, sword training).

Grandmaster Choi Han-Young's World Chun Ki Do Association presents a set of two instructional DVDs called "Mastering the Basics of Hap Ki Do." A more suitable title would be "The Teaching Program of the World Chun Ki Do Association." The DVDs have numerous weak spots, and only one obvious strength: when Mr. Choi himself performs the some of the self-defense techniques. One may wonder why two young black belts were put side-by-side to show the same (basic!) techniques, only to make the many technical differences between them evident to the viewer. While showing basic strikes in the riding stance they place the non-striking arm differently; they put different emphasis on hip/waist motion; and there are other details that create confusion about which one really shows the technical standards of the Chun Ki Do (the "way of heavenly energy") school. That impression is increased when another black belt joins them in the execution of blocking techniques while moving forward in front stance. This leads to a couple of questions, and the first is whether hard blocks borrowed from taekwondo deserve a place in Hapkido. If the answer is "yes", it is likely that certain modifications to hard style blocking might be desirable. In any case, what is shown in the video—basic taekwondo defenses with some additional open hand deflections—is of very poor technical quality: the stances are wide and long without balance or power; there is no coordination with stepping in the execution of the arm motions; and each of the three performers does things very differently.

The chapter showing falling techniques is correct. The progression for learning the techniques is useful, but the lack of audio instruction to explain basic falling concepts are a production

flaw, since the viewer is not introduced to the very basic notion that falling motions are intended to avoid direct collision of certain body parts (head, spine, hips and knees) with the ground by absorbing the impact with meaty and extended soft areas (palm/forearm, buttocks/side thigh), or by avoiding the collision through a specially designed circular roll.

Then Disk 1 continues with three thrusting punch attacks (three step sparring, typical of karate and taekwondo). The reaction is in all cases three retrieving inward forearm blocks that end with a series of dangerous-looking strikes (throat, low abdomen, head butt, etc.) or throws. Three-step sparring is a highly ritualized practice that has been abandoned in many karate and taekwondo schools, since it involves very little realism in the attack—it is admitted that not even Shotokan stylists attack with the fist on the same side as the stepping foot—and the only use for such practice is the development for strong legs to launch attacks from low stances, the ability to retreat fast, and the development of an alert, fierce and reactive attitude to launch a definitive counter-attack. None of these features are present in the video, maybe because this is Hapkido. But then, in a context with no true stylized, low stances or direct and sharp counterstrikes, this exercise makes little sense. Even in harder styles, it fosters an exceedingly linear path, which is bad since a direct retreat is never a good option against a raging attacker. The attacks shown in the video are uncommitted; the rhythm is very poor; and the attacker artificially freezes his action to allow the counterattacks.

Two forms (“Chun Ki Poomse”) are shown in this disk. Forms do not exist in Classical Hapkido, and their introduction to certain styles—the most famous being Myung Kwang-Sik’s—some decades ago lit a debate in the Hapkido community. But in any event, martial art forms are meant to reflect the system’s technical principles. This is not the case here. The two forms shown are

rough, asymmetrical collections of elementary hard blocks, strikes, and kicks performed at a lower than standard level that could be confused with bad taekwondo if a single low, Chinese-looking, open hand technique had not been included in these forms. Although Grandmaster Choi’s background is Classical Hapkido, the material in the DVDs includes some alien techniques which embody the same danger that decades ago threatened Hapkido as a system before that danger was overcome by the Korea Hapkido Association in the 1960s. Its multiple techniques (kicking, striking, throwing, joint-locking and weapons) made Hapkido look as if it were a catch-all martial art without true personality. Why would badly performed elements taken from poorly learned taekwondo be introduced into an instructional Hapkido DVD set? Why weren’t the banner principles of *Hwa* (harmony), *Yu* (water) and *Won* (circle) mentioned? They are the foundation upon which all Hapkido techniques are built.

The better parts of the DVD set include certain basic kicks – performed with some grace but lacking power; self-defense against handshakes—typical Hapkido material that should have been shown with precise indication of the areas on which pressure should be exerted to make the locks work; the cover kicking counterattacks—although the attacks were devoid of finesse and conviction, the responses showed multiple ways of kicking the attacker’s lower leading leg, or angling to reach higher targets with the foot, true to Hapkido tradition.

The most interesting parts of the set, the sword form, and Grandmaster Choi’s techniques, start in the second half of the second DVD. The sword art (Kom sul) is presented through a form that shows motions similar to those found in other Korean styles (Kuk Sool Won, Han Mu Do). My knowledge of swordplay is limited, and I can only recognize that the balance, grace and technique looked convincing, yet were less vigorous than other performances I have witnessed. Again, some insight

into the mechanics and application of the techniques shown and the origin of the form would have been more helpful than the lengthy repetition of segments of the form.

Finally, Grandmaster Choi Han-Young. The techniques he demonstrates are included as “bonus” from archival footage, yet I cannot imagine any reason for purchasing this DVD set other than watching Mr. Choi perform self-defense techniques. He goes through the typical situations addressed in Hapkido—handshake, clothing grabs, wrist grabs, double grabs, etc.—with ease and knowledge of what he is doing. It is obvious he has performed them thousands of times. No explanations, no zoom-in captions showing details of the pressure points. In fact, the difference between him and the students who demonstrate the techniques in Disk 1 is so great, it is hard to understand why didn’t Mr. Choi demonstrate all the material from the beginning. I know that in Hapkido defenses, strikes, and kicks are considered very physical material, suitable for training the young but not worthy of a Master’s attention. Hapkido is traditionally taught through painful application of the techniques as a senior performs them on the novice, and there isn’t much explanation. Worthwhile students should be able to overcome obstacles and learn. Mr. Choi seems to have followed this path of few words. The problem is that such an attitude does not work with an instructional DVD set, where everything demonstrated is expected to be top quality, regardless on how elementary or advanced it may be. Throughout the DVDs, it becomes obvious that the set was prepared by Mr. Choi’s students in a goodwill effort to organize the material of their association. The production is not professional; the editing minimal, and the people chosen to perform are not expert at what they do. There is better instructional material available on the market for those interested in Hapkido.

