

What Does the Future Hold for the Traditional Martial Art of Tang Soo Do in the U.K.?

(Observations by one of the world's leading Tang Soo Do Grandmasters during a recent visit to the U.K.)

Grandmaster Andy Ah Po (Dan Bon #10187) of Sacramento, California USA is one of only five individuals who actually tested and was subsequently promoted to the rank of 8th Dan by the late Great Grandmaster Hwang Kee, founder of the Tang Soo Do (Soo Bahk Do) Moo Duk Kwan a traditional Korean martial arts system. Kwan Jang Nim Ah Po (who is the founder of the Tang Soo Do Martial Way Association, Inc.) was given the honour of being the late Great Grandmaster and Mrs. Hwang Kee's personal escort during the early 1970's and served in that capacity for nearly 30 years.

He personally witnessed 48 years of continued Tang Soo Do evolution as a direct student of the late Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee and has studied martial arts for over 60 years. In September, 2007 Kwan Jang Nim Ah Po travelled to the U.K. for the first time at the invitation of the British Tang Soo Do Federation (www.midlandsfmac.com) to conduct clinics and seminars for member organizations of the currently 2000 strong Tang Soo Do Union an organization that was recently established in Great Britain (www.tangsoodounion.com).

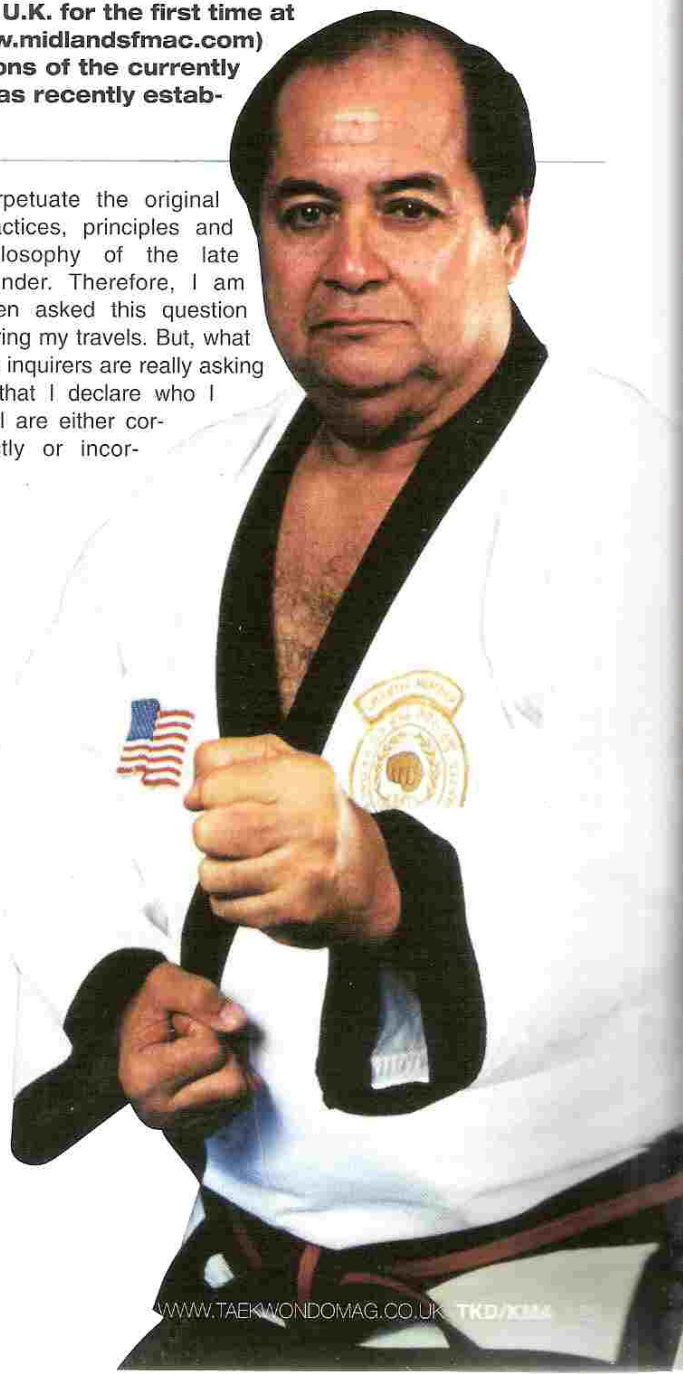
TKD-KMA: Sir welcome to the UK, we hope that your visit has been both enjoyable and productive. During your first visit to the UK you have already met and taught clinics and seminars to the members of eleven different Tang Soo Do organizations who are currently affiliated with the Tang Soo Do Union. Being fortunate enough to have attended all three clinics I have noted on more than one occasion that you have asked participants the following question, 'Who is currently practicing and teaching Tang Soo Do properly?' Can I ask why you have asked that question and what your own response to that question is?

Prior to my visit to the U.K. I was made aware of the fact that currently there are not just one or two but rather several Tang Soo Do organizations currently functioning in the U.K. I was also advised that not all of these organizations may be teaching exactly the same Tang Soo Do curriculum and that there was admittedly a notable difference in the overall physical performance of Tang Soo Do practitioners in the U.K. vs. the U.S. I was also told that the overall physical performance of American Tang Soo Do practitioners appeared to be somewhat more refined and may include more curriculum than may be currently taught in England, and that there was a concern by those who invited me that I may be disappointed and possibly critical of what I would observe during my visit.

What my hosts were not aware of is the fact that I have actually grown accustomed to observing such differences amongst Tang Soo Do practitioners not only during my travels around the world but also in different parts of the U.S. Furthermore, I never criticize or make negative comments about what I observe because this is truly not my style or normal approach and I also understand how this came to be.

However, because almost everyone is aware of the fact that I was a direct student of the late Great Grandmaster Hwang Kee (the founder of Tang Soo Do) from the early 1970's until just before his passing, they are curious to know who I believe are actually teaching Tang Soo Do correctly and thus continuing to

perpetuate the original practices, principles and philosophy of the late founder. Therefore, I am often asked this question during my travels. But, what the inquirers are really asking is that I declare who I feel are either correctly or incor-





rectly practicing and teaching Tang Soo Do because they are often looking for validation for what they are doing.

During my visit in the U.K., I posed this question at each of the clinics that I conducted because I wanted everyone in attendance to hear my response to this question which is, 'I believe that all current Tang Soo Do Grandmasters and organizations are actually teaching Tang Soo Do correctly and are also continuing to perpetuate the original practices, principles and concepts and philosophy of Tang Soo Do as were developed by the late Kwan Jang Nim (founder) Hwang Kee. Therefore, no one Grandmaster or Tang Soo Do organization is better than the other'.

TKD-KMA: With all due respect Sir, if this is truly your response then I am compelled to ask you a follow up question which is, 'if what you say is true, then why do obvious differences exist between what is being taught by the various Tang Soo Do Grandmasters and their organizations as are reflected by their current curriculum and also by the physical performance of their students?'

Based on my personal experience and knowledge, my response to this question is, 'These differences are the result of and directly related to when the head of a current Tang Soo Do organization or school either 1) left the Moo Duk Kwan; 2) ceased being exposed to; or, 3) stopped receiving direct instruction from the late Great Grandmaster Hwang Kee while he was still living.'

TKD-KMA: 'Sir could you elaborate further on what you mean and attempt to describe the development of Tang Soo Do under the guidance of Great Grandmaster Hwang Kee in relation to significant technical developments and their relative time periods and how this may have directly impacted the practice and study of Tang Soo Do in the U.K. and elsewhere?'

I would be more than happy to, 'Although Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee first introduced Tang Soo Do in 1945, he actually never stopped developing and refining his martial art, which under his tutelage, was under constant refinement and evolution until the time of his passing in 2002. As a result of this, Tang Soo Do Grandmasters or Master Instructors who may have left the Moo Duk Kwan anywhere during this time period are actually

teaching Tang Soo Do as they knew and understood it when they were either active members of the Moo Duk Kwan or direct students of Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee. Consequently, their current curriculum and instruction does not necessarily reflect all of the additional curriculum, enhancements, or refinements that were added by the late Great Grandmaster after they left or up to the time of his passing..

The point of view and opinions that I am expressing in this article are not intended to be disrespectful towards any of the current Tang Soo Do Grandmasters or Master Instructors who fit the profile described above. However, the fact is that when they left the Moo Duk Kwan, they primarily continued teaching the Tang Soo Do that they knew and which they had been exposed to during that specific period of time.

To illustrate my point, I will use the Soo Bahk Do curriculum as an excellent example of more complex curriculum that was actually developed by Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee as early as the 1950's and 60's but which was not introduced into the system until the mid 1980's. This curriculum not only added Soo Bahk Ki techniques into the system, but also unique training principles and philosophical concepts, as well as the Chi Gong training elements that are reflected by both the Chill Sung, Yuk Ro

Hyong and also Moo Pal Dan Khun exercises.

I do not mean to imply or even suggest that those of us who had the privilege of being exposed to the entire curriculum developed by the late Great Grandmaster (up until the time of his passing) are any better or more knowledgeable than any of the current Tang Soo Do Grandmasters or Master Instructors who were not. But the fact remains that we were exposed to this curriculum and they were not. And, there is so much more to the study of this particular curriculum than simply learning the Soo Bahk Do Hyong (forms) and the techniques that they are comprised of.

However, even if their current curriculum does not reflect everything that he introduced into the system during his lifetime, what they are currently teaching must also be considered to be Tang Soo Do and therefore is correct, credible and valuable. The fact remains that they are all teaching Tang Soo Do.'

TKD-KMA: Sir, based on your observations during this visit, 'What do you believe the future holds for the

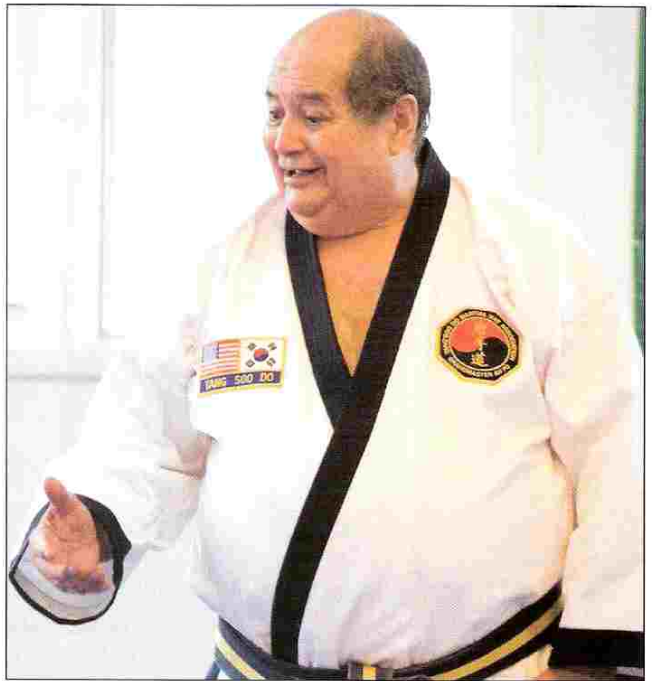
"In Tang Soo Do we are taught that 'character development' is one of the most significant aspects of our training"

martial art of Tang Soo Do in the U.K. and what role do you see the numerous Tang Soo Do organizations in Great Britain playing to ensure its continued development and growth?

'Frankly, I was very pleased and impressed by the overall performance and conduct of the Tang Soo Do Master Instructors, Dans and students that I had the privilege of meeting and working with during my visit to the U.K. Their physical performance, dedication and obvious commitment were at a very high level. Overall, if you were to ask me to compare the physical performance of Tang Soo Do practitioners in the U.K. to those that I have been able to observe worldwide I would say that they are currently close to being at par with those that I would rate in the top 25%.

However, since many of them have not had access to the entire curriculum that Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee developed during his lifetime; it will take about five years before they will be able to fully integrate all of it into their training regimen. In Tang Soo Do we are taught that 'character development' is one of the most significant aspects of our training. Based on what I observed, I believe that the future of Tang Soo Do in the U.K. is definitely in good hands mainly because everyone that I met demonstrated the type of character that is indicative of proper Tang Soo Do training. In my experience, I have learned that techniques can always be corrected and improved upon, but it is difficult to change one's attitude or character if it is already flawed.

However, more positive interaction is needed between the leaders of the various Tang Soo



Do organizations (Kwans) that currently exist in the U.K. to ensure that Tang Soo Do can continue to flourish and grow in a positive fashion and to create opportunities that would enable them to share their unique abilities, expertise, and knowledge with each other and to further develop and promote the martial art of Tang Soo Do at the highest level possible. To do this, it is important for them to learn to put their differences aside and to come together on issues that they can agree upon.'

TKD-KMA: Sir, I have one final question, 'What are your current goals as they relate to the future of Tang Soo Do and how are those goals reflected in the operation of your own Tang Soo Do Martial Way Association?'

'The Tang Soo Do Martial Way Association of which I am the founder, is a martial arts organization that is dedicated to preserving and promoting the original techniques, principles, and philosophy of the martial art known as Tang Soo Do, as developed by its late founder, Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee of Seoul, Korea.

My personal goal is simply to spend my remaining years to ensure that the association accomplishes this mission statement by making myself totally accessible to any and all serious Tang Soo Do practitioners and organizations who may feel that I can assist them in their quest to follow the path (Tang Soo Do) that was bequeathed to us by its late founder, Kwan Jang Nim Hwang Kee. In order to facilitate this, they are not required to either join my association or to be under my authority. In other words, 'Have Do Bok (uniform) will travel'. Tang Soo!

TKD-KMA: John Dove: 'Kwan Jang Nim Ah Po, thank you for your time, candour and enthusiasm and for sharing your views and knowledge with us here in the U.K. We hope that you will consider visiting us again in the future.'

