

Brief History of Tae Kwon Do

The first evidence of Taekwondo was found about 2000 years ago in Korean history. A mural painting found in 1935 on the walls of royal tombs, showed figures practicing what looked like martial arts techniques. These tombs were believed to have built for Koguryo kings sometime between 3 to 427 A.D. The Koguryo dynasty was between 37BC – 668.

Tae Kwon Do had many different early forms, such as Bakhi, Kwonbak and Taesoo. Subak (empty handed fighting) dominated the main stream from about 600 A.D. to about 1400 which then evolved into Taekkyeon in the late 1300's, Taekkyeon dominated Korean martial arts until Japan invaded Korea in 1909.

It is believed that the warriors from the Silla Dynasty (57 BC-668 AD) learned Subak from the neighboring Goguryeo armies when they appealed for their help against invading Japanese pirates. Practicing Subak became part of the training for Silla's Hwarang (originated in the Silla Dynasty in about 600 A.D. and became the driving force for unification of the three kingdoms of Korea), and this contributed to the spread of Subak on the Korean peninsula.

Buddhist monks, who added more spiritual aspects to the art, often instructed the Hwarang. Their greatest contribution to the development of Korean martial arts is probably adding a spiritual dimension to the training practices, something that Korean martial arts lacked before.

From 1909 to 1945 Korean lost its culture and martial arts to Japanese, traditional Korean martial arts such as Taekkyeon or Subak were banned during this time. In 1945 Korea was liberated as the Japanese were defeated and the martial arts masters of Korea wanted to eliminate all Japanese influence. This began the discussions on how to return to the traditional Taekyon martial arts and how to unite the various martial arts styles into one single style and national sport.

The name Taekwondo (Tae Kwon Do) was chosen in April 1955 by the nine Kwans, the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA) was formed in 1959/1961 to facilitate the unification. The International Taekwondo Federation (ITF) was founded in 1966 and followed by World Taekwondo federation (WTF) in 1973.

Since 2000, Tae Kwon Do and Judo have been the only two Asian martial arts to be included in the Olympic Games. In 2009 it was estimated that Tae Kwon Do was practised in 123 countries, with over 30 million practitioners and 3 million individuals with black belts.