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# Taekwon-Do Evolution: How Taekwon-Do has changed over the decades

by Matt Gibb - 4th degree  
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## Introduction

Despite being a relatively modern martial art, Taekwon-Do (TKD) has changed noticeably over the years, since it was founded in 1955 up until today. From the dobok to the patterns, to the introduction of sine wave, what we know today as TKD is very different from the art taught and practised in the early years.

The title of this article is perhaps slightly grandiose. As I haven't been training since the 1950s or 1960s (I started in 1994), I cannot comment from experience on how much the art has changed over the decades. This article, therefore, won't cover all differences between then and now, such as the way we train or the evolution of sine wave and the way the patterns and various techniques are actually performed. Instead, it looks more at technical detail and terminology.

Using a copy of General Choi Hong Hi's first book on Taekwon-Do [1], published in 1965 (note that this pre-dates his Taekwon-Do Encyclopaedia [2], which was first published in 1985), and comparing the content of this book to what I know today through 15 years of TKD, I hope to give a fair description and summary of how General Choi Hong Hi and the pioneers of TKD developed this martial art over the past half century.



## Attacking and Blocking Tools

In the 1965 book, these are known as "Striking and Blocking Points".

The following three tables list all attacking and blocking tools (Hand/Arm, Foot/Leg, and Other) mentioned in the modern TKD Encyclopaedia, and compare them to those listed in the 1965 book.

Many tools have changed little (perhaps in name only) or not at all. The only major change appears to be the Thumb-Knuckle Fist. The way this tool is formed has changed, and the intended targets are different also.

Of course, we can't say for certain that the 1965 book contained everything. Perhaps some tools were omitted, either deliberately or accidentally. Perhaps there wasn't room to list all tools, and only those deemed most important were included. Or perhaps the tables below really do show how TKD has expanded in the past 40 years. I cannot say for sure. These tables do, though, at the very least contain some history of our martial art.

## Hand Parts

Part	Changes
Forefist	This tool hasn't changed, and was described as the "life" of TKD in the 1965 book.
Back Fist	This tool hasn't changed.
Side Fist	Originally called the Hammer Fist.
Under Fist	Originally called the Flat Fist.
Knuckle Fist: Fore-Knuckle Fist Middle-Knuckle Fist Thumb-Knuckle Fist	<p>The only difference is how the Thumb-Knuckle Fist is formed and the targets for which it is used to attack. Described in the 1965 book, the hand is open, with the thumb bent into the centre of the palm. The target was the jaw. Today, the fist is closed, with the thumb pushed against the forefinger. The targets are the chin, philtrum, temple and solar plexus.</p> <div data-bbox="1018 633 1377 902" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1018 902 1292 931" data-label="Caption"> <p>Original Thumb-Knuckle Fist</p> </div>
Knifehand	This tool hasn't changed.
Reverse Knifehand	This tool hasn't changed.
Fingertips:  Flat Fingertip Straight Fingertip Upset Fingertip Forefinger Double Fingertip Thumb Angle Fingertip	<p>The fingertips are described as the Spear Finger in the 1965 book. Only four were described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flat Spear Finger</li> <li>Straight Spear Finger</li> <li>-</li> <li>Single Spear Finger</li> <li>Double Spear Finger</li> <li>-</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="1035 1160 1278 1464" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1035 1464 1230 1494" data-label="Caption"> <p>Single Spear Finger</p> </div>
Arc Hand	This tool hasn't changed.
Elbow	This tool hasn't changed.
Forearm: Outer Forearm Inner Forearm Back Forearm Under Forearm	The only change since 1965 is the introduction of Under Forearm.
Palm	This was originally called the Palm Fist.
Finger Pincers	This tool hasn't changed.
Back hand	This tool hasn't changed.

<b>Part</b>	<b>Changes</b>
Palm Heel	This tool hasn't changed.
Bow Wrist	This tool hasn't changed.
Bear hand	This tool hasn't changed.
Base of Knifehand	This tool hasn't changed.
Thumb Ridge	This tool hasn't changed.
Long Fist	Not in the 1965 book
Open Fist	Not in the 1965 book
Back Hand	Not in the 1965 book
Press Finger	Not in the 1965 book
Finger Belly	Not in the 1965 book

### **Foot Parts**

As demonstrated in the table below, many foot parts were not mentioned in the 1965 book.

<b>Part</b>	<b>Changes</b>	<b>Part</b>	<b>Changes</b>
Footsword	This tool hasn't changed	Side Sole	Not in the 1965 book
Ball of the foot	Originally called the Front Sole	Outer Ankle Joint	Not in the 1965 book
Back Sole	This tool hasn't changed	Inner Ankle Joint	Not in the 1965 book
Knee	This tool hasn't changed	Tibia	Not in the 1965 book
Back Heel	Originally called simply the Heel.	Inner Tibia	Not in the 1965 book
Instep	This tool hasn't changed	Outer Tibia	Not in the 1965 book
Toes	This tool hasn't changed	Back Tibia	Not in the 1965 book
Side Instep	Not in the 1965 book	Shin	Not in the 1965 book
Reverse Footsword	Not in the 1965 book	Toe Edge	Not in the 1965 book

## Other Parts

Part	Changes
Head: Forehead Occiput	These parts haven't changed
Shoulder	This part hasn't changed

## Stances

Most of the stances we know in Taekwon-Do today were around in 1965, although some had different names and some were performed slightly differently. Two stances we know today, however, are not in the 1965 book. These are Vertical Stance and Bending Stance. As with the attacking and blocking tools, we can't be certain why these two stances were not in the 1965 book, but by cross-referencing with the patterns, I think we can form a conclusion.

The first time we encounter Bending Stance in the patterns is a Right Bending Ready Stance Type A at move number 7 in Won-Hyo. In the 1965 book, this move is described without the term Bending Stance:

- "Bring right foot to left foot and then bring left fist on right fist while pulling left foot to right knee joint".

We also find a similar description for Bending Ready Stance Type B at move number 9 in Ko-Dang:

- "Raise right knee turning the face to 'C' while executing middle section wedging block with both outer forearms".

The first time we encounter Vertical Stance is move 7 in Hwa-Rang. Again, this move was originally explained without Vertical Stance:

- "Execute downward strike to A with right knifehand while standing up pulling right foot slightly toward left foot".

And thus our conclusion: it would appear that these stances hadn't yet been developed as full stances in their own right.






Bending Ready Stance  
Type B

The other major noticeable difference is the way the stances are measured. Today, we use shoulder widths, but in 1965 it appears that the stances were measured in feet (not the body parts at the bottom of the legs, but the imperial measurement of 12 inches). My interpretation of this is that the use of shoulder widths is to make the stance measurements relative to the size of the performer; however, this use is not perfect, since a tall and thin person with narrow shoulders would have a relatively shorter stance than a much shorter person with the same shoulder width.

We can also see in the 1965 book a slight difference in the term 'Low Stance'. Today, it exclusively means a long Walking Stance; but, in 1965, it could mean either a long Walking Stance or a long L Stance.

The following table compares the stances from 1965 with those today.

Modern Stances	1965 Stances
Parallel Stance	Parallel Stance
Close Stance	Close Stance
Outer Open Stance	Outer Open Stance
Inner Open Stance	Inner Open Stance
Walking Stance	<p>Forward Stance            Described as 3-feet long and one shoulder width apart.            From the pictures, it appears that the front knee is slightly further forward over the heel than is practiced today.</p> 
L Stance	<p>Back Stance            Described as 2 1/2 feet long</p> 
X Stance	X Stance
One-Leg Stance	<p>One-Leg Stance            The other foot is touching the knee of the standing leg.</p>
Sitting Stance	Riding Stance
Fixed Stance	<p>Fixed Stance            Described as 3-feet long</p>
Diagonal Stance	Diagonal Stance
Crouched Stance	Crouched Stance

Modern Stances	1965 Stances
Low Stance	<p data-bbox="497 235 1005 380">Low Stance There are two variations, which are longer versions of the Forward (Walking) and Back (L) Stances.</p>  <p data-bbox="1074 654 1264 676">Back Low Stance</p>
Rear-Foot Stance	<p data-bbox="497 710 869 779">Rear-Foot Stance Half a shoulder width long</p>
Vertical Stance	<p data-bbox="497 810 1428 996">Not explicitly in the 1965 book, although it is still done in the patterns, but without the description of 'Vertical Stance'. For instance, move 7 in Hwa Rang is described as a knifehand downward strike "...while standing up pulling the right foot slightly toward the left foot".</p>
Bending Stance	<p data-bbox="497 1028 1428 1214">Not explicitly in the 1965 book, although it is still done in the patterns, but without the description of 'Bending Ready Stance'. For instance, move 7 in Won Hyo is described as "Bring right foot to left foot and then bring left fist on right fist while pulling left foot to right knee joint".</p>

## Tenets

In the 1965 book, only four tenets are given: Modesty, Perseverance, Self Control and Indomitable Spirit. Three are still in the Tenets as we know them today, but Modesty has disappeared and been replaced by Courtesy and Integrity.

Are the two tenets of Courtesy and Integrity equivalent to the single tenet of Modesty? Perhaps. I suppose one could interpret examples of courteous behaviour as being modest, and vice versa. The same applies to Integrity, but perhaps more-so; for example, an instructor or student who acts without modesty by bragging about his achievements could be lacking integrity, especially if his bragging contains exaggeration, say.

But, I don't know; I'm not an expert. In my opinion, the two new tenets are not entirely equivalent to the single tenet of Modesty. If they were, then why replace it?

## Patterns

Perhaps one of the most significant changes in TKD has been the patterns. The 1965 book contained 20 patterns. In the modern ITF, we have 24 patterns, and only 19 of the 24 are in the original book.

The patterns Eui Am, Yon Gae, Moon Moo, and So San were not in the 1965 book, as they had not yet been created. According to Grandmaster CK Choi's book [3], they were created in the following year (1966) and completed the Ch'ang Hon inventory of 24 patterns.

There was, however, one more change to the patterns. This happened in the 1980s, with the replacement of Ko Dang by Juche.

The patterns we practise today were (and still are) known as the "Ch'ang Hon" patterns. Ch'ang Hon was Choi Hong Hi's pen name; it means "Blue Cottage".

As well as the 20 Ch'ang Hon patterns, there were, in addition, a further nine patterns of Japanese origin. They are known as the Sho-Rin and Sho-Rei schools. According to the 1965 book, the Sho-Rin school is characterised by light and speedy movements. The Sho-Rei school, however, requires slow and forceful movements for the purpose of muscle development.

The Sho-Rin patterns are called Hei-An, Bat-Sai, Kouh-Shang-Kouh, En-Bi, and Ro-Hai.

The Sho-Rei patterns are called Tet-Ki, Han-Getsu, Jit-Te, and Ji-On.



Tet-Ki

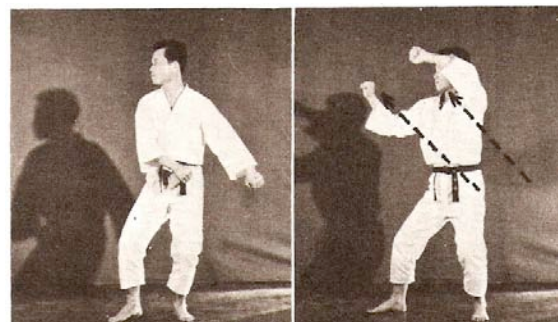
It is also interesting to note that the Ch'ang Hon patterns are not in the same order as they are in today. Indeed, there seems to be nothing linking any pattern to a particular grade or rank.

Studying the moves listed for each of the 20 Ch'ang Hon patterns in the 1965 book, we discover some differences from how the patterns are performed today. Some differences are small, being perhaps fast motion instead of continuous, or perhaps a forearm used instead of a knifehand. Others appear to be differences in terminology only. There are, however, some major differences. This is especially true in Tong-Il. The differences are described below (and you will also see the original listed order of the patterns).

Chon Ji - no change.

Dan Gun - Movements 13 and 14 (Low block, Rising Block) are described as fast motion. Today, we perform them in continuous motion.

Do San - movement number 7 today consists of a twisting release from Flat Fingertip Thrust, followed by a pivot into Walking Stance Backfist High Side Strike. The 1965 book does not mention the twisting release.



Back Stance, Twin Forearm Block

Won Hyo - no change (except for the description of what we now call Bending Ready Stance).

Yul Gok - in movements 16-17 and 19-20, the Middle-section Palm Hooking Blocks that we perform today were originally *High-section Knifehand* Hooking Blocks. Also, they were connected to the punch not in connecting motion, but in fast motion.

Joong Gun - movements 15 and 18 (release after the Backfist High Side Strike) were described as "Releasing Motion" (today they are not described using this term) and this appears to be terminology only. Movements 14-15 and 17-18 are today performed separately (normal motion), but originally they were performed in fast motion. Instead, it is movements 15-16 and 18-19 that are today in fast motion.

Toi Gye - movements 7-8 (X-fist Pressing Block, Twin-fist Vertical Punch) are today performed in continuous motion, but were originally performed in fast motion. Movements 10-11 (Obverse Punch, Reverse Punch) are today performed separately (normal motion), but were originally performed in fast motion.

Hwa Rang - the second and third movements are today performed separately (normal motion), but were originally Type to enter text performed in fast motion. Movement 5 is today an Upward Punch, but originally this movement was described as a Middle-section Outer Forearm Block.

Choong Moo - no change.



Choong Moo, move no. 2

Kwang Gae - movement 12 (Right Knifehand Low Front Block, striking left palm, in Close Stance) is today performed in normal motion, but was originally performed in slow motion.

Po Eun - movements 5 and 23 are today Angle Punches, but originally were Turning Punches. It would appear that 'Angle Punch' had not been devised in 1965 (the difference between Angle and Turning Punch being small anyway). Movements 6-12 and 24-30 are today joined in continuous motion. This famous sequence was originally done in *fast* motion, and it applied to movements 3-11 and 21-29, which start with the Pressing Kick and end with the second Elbow Back Thrust, but do not include the Horizontal Punch.



Po Eun, move no. 2

Gye Baek - movements 5 and 6 (the Rising Block and Low Block in continuous motion) were originally done in fast motion. Movements 37 and 38 (Reverse Knifehand Low Guarding Block followed by Knifehand Low Guarding Block) are today performed in continuous motion, but were originally separate (i.e. normal motion).

Yoo Sin - movements 4-5, 6-7, 10-11, 14-15, 16-19, 20-21 and 25-26 are today performed in continuous motion, but were originally done in fast motion. Movements 45 and 48 are Angle Punches, but were not described as such in the 1965 book. Instead, they were described as bringing the fist in front of the opposite chest.

Choong Jang - movement 28 (Right Back Elbow Thrust) is today performed in slow motion, but originally was performed in normal motion. It was also not described as a



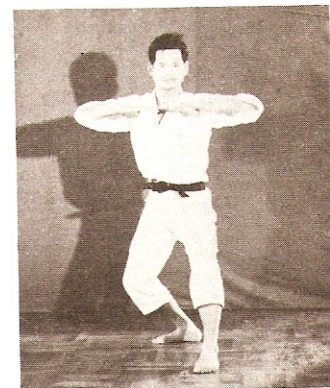
'Back Elbow Thrust', but as "...bringing both fists to right hip". Movements 50 and 52 are today performed as Open Fist High Punches, but were originally Middle-section Palm Pushing Blocks.

Ul Ji - movements 2-3 (X-fist Pressing Block, X-knifehand Rising Block) are today joined with continuous motion, but originally this was fast motion. Movement 10 (Close Stance, Twin Side Elbow Thrust) is today performed in normal motion, but was originally done in slow motion. Also, movement 10 was described simply as "...bringing both fists to the hips". Movement 11 is today performed as fast motion, but originally it was normal motion. Movement 17 (Mid Air Kick) was originally described as a Flying Side Kick. Of course, Mid Air Kick is simply a side kick performed while spinning in the air.

Sam Il - instead of movement 4 being a Middle-section Twisting Kick, it was originally a Low Front Snap Kick. Movements 6 and 9 are today wedging blocks performed with the Reverse Knifehand. Originally, they were performed with the Inner Forearm. Movement 16 (Sweeping Kick) was originally described as "Tackling Kick". Movements 30-31 (Outer Forearm Front Block followed by High Punch) are today performed in a continuous motion, but were originally in fast motion.

Ko Dang - no longer in the ITF patterns.

Choi Yong - movements 37 and 44 are today Reverse Hooking Kicks, but originally were Reverse Turning Kicks; although a Reverse Hooking Kick is, of course, simply a type of Reverse Turning Kick. Choi Yong has 46 movements today, but originally it had only 45, with the Sliding Fixed Stance Middle Punch (today's 46th movement) not present.



Tong Il, move no. 11

Se Jong - no change.

Tong Il - the sheer number of differences in the final pattern requires me to present them in a table (see below).

Movement number	Today	1965
2	Right Walking Stance, Twin Knifehand Horizontal Strike	<u>Left</u> Walking Stance, with both knifehands extended horizontally to the sides (terminology).
3	Right Rear Foot Stance, Left Outer Forearm Middle Inward Block	Left L-stance, Right Inner Forearm Middle Block.
4	Left Walking Stance, Right Palm Low Inward Block with left fist in front of right shoulder	Slip right foot into Right Walking Stance, Left Inner Forearm Middle Block
1-4	Only movements 1 and 2 are performed in slow motion today	Movements 1-4 were all performed in slow motion.
7	Stamping Motion, Right L-stance, Left Backhand High Outward Strike	Right L-stance, Right Outer Forearm High Block and Left Outer Forearm Low Block

<b>Movement number</b>	<b>Today</b>	<b>1965</b>
8	Right Inward Vertical Kick	Right Crescent Kick
9	As 7, but opposite side	As 7, but opposite side
10	As 8, but opposite side	As 8, but opposite side
11	Twin Palm Horizontal Strike	Both Reverse Knifehands horizontally in front of chest (terminology)
16	Right Downward Kick	Left Front Snap Kick
17	Left L-stance, Right Backfist Downward Strike	Right L-stance, Left Backfist Downward Strike
18	As 16, but opposite side	As 16, but opposite side
19	As 17, but opposite side	As 17, but opposite side
24-26	Normal Motion	All three movements were performed in slow motion
30	Right Angle Fingertip High Thrust	Right Fist Crescent Punch
34	As 30, but opposite side	As 30, but opposite side
35	Right Reverse Knifehand Low Guarding Block	Right Reverse Knifehand Low Block (possibly terminology)
36	As 35, but opposite side	As 35, but opposite side
46	High Back Kick	Middle Back Kick
51 and 53	Normal Motion	Both movement were performed in slow motion
54	Right High Side Piercing Kick, then Close Stance with Twin Side Elbow Back Thrust	Right Walking Stance, Right Outer Forearm Rising Block
55	Sitting Stance, Left Middle Side Punch	Left Walking Stance, Left Outer Forearm Rising Block

## System of Rank

It is interesting to note that while there are nine black belt degrees in the 1965 description of TKD ranks, there are only eight colour belt grades, and the belt colours associated with each grade were different from today:

- White belt - 8th to 7th grade;
- Blue belt - 6th to 5th grade;
- Brown belt: 4th to 1st grade;
- Black belt: 1st to 9th degree.

## Competition

One area of Taekwon-Do in which changes are much more readily traceable is competition. Even in the last few years, we have seen the ITF introduce changes to the way sparring matches are scored, and the rules governing power test.

It is doubtful that the competition rules described in the 1965 book were complete; there was probably a fuller set of rules used. The rules listed in the modern TKD encyclopaedia, for instance, are not complete or entirely coherent with today's rules in 2009. But, the rules as they were in 1965 are certainly very different from what we practise today. This topic could warrant a separate article examining the evolution of TKD competition, and so I shall just present a small paragraph on the sparring point scoring system from 1965:

Two points were awarded in sparring for a Decisive Blow (when an attack using the correct attacking tool is stopped just before reaching the vital spot), an Absolute Block (when an accurate block is made that breaks the opponent's balance and uses the correct blocking tool), and a Laudable Technique (this is not defined).

One point was awarded for a Complete Blow (less focus on the target than in a Decisive Blow, because the opponent's balance is broken from constant attack or if the opponent moves into the attack), an Effective Block (a block is made using an incorrect tool, or if dodging is utilised), and a Commendable Attitude (not defined, and one wonders how this could be possibly scored anyway).

## The Founder's Birthday

Today, we recognise General Choi's birthday as 9th November 1918. In the 1965 book, it is stated that he was born on 22nd December 1918. The reason for this disparity is due the difference between the old Korean calendar and the Western Gregorian calendar. General Choi chose to celebrate his birthday on November 9th, although December 22nd is his actual birthday according to the Western calendar.



Major-General Choi Hong Hi  
The Founder of Taekwon-Do

## Summary

In 1965, TKD was only ten years old and its Karate roots were, no doubt, far more obvious than they are today. It is not surprising then that we find that terminology has changed over the decades. And, over time, new techniques and tools are bound to be discovered or created.

What is most surprising (to me, at least) is the differences in many of the moves in the patterns. Some have completely changed. Just look at movement 54 in Tong-II! Does it perhaps show that the patterns can still change and aren't set in stone? Or was it that some of the original moves were deemed too easy? We may never know.

I believe that, even though General Choi is no longer alive, TKD can still grow and develop, and it will be interesting to see what Taekwon-Do looks like in another 40 or 50 years.

## References

The following three books were used and referenced (using square brackets) in this article.

1. *Taekwon-Do: The Art of Self-Defence*; Choi Hong Hi; Second edition 1968 (First edition 1965); Daeha Publication Company.
2. *Taekwon-Do; (Condensed Encyclopaedia)*; Gen Choi Hong Hi; Fourth edition 1995 (First edition 1988); International Taekwon-Do Federation.
3. *The Korean Martial Art of Tae Kwon Do & Early History*; Grandmaster Choi Chang Keun; 2007; (see also [www.taekwondopioneers.com](http://www.taekwondopioneers.com)).