



Taekwondo diplomacy: new possibilities for peace on the Korean Peninsula

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Authors' Contribution: A – Study Design, B – Data Collection, C – Statistical Analysis, D – Manuscript Preparation, E – Funds Collection

Abstract

Sports diplomacy has long been effective in bringing nations and cultures together. Sports diplomacy is a type of soft diplomacy: the more informal diplomatic engagements between non-government entities that sometimes operate with governmental support, but more often as a private exchange. Soft diplomacy has provided governments a place where greater understanding happens, which has in turn led to increased political cooperation. Taekwondo, the Korean martial art turned international Olympic sport, has been used for soft diplomatic purposes almost since its inception. Most recently, the Taekwondo demonstration teams from the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea) have been used as a tool to bridge the political gap between the two divided nations. The current research introduces a general framework of diplomacy and elucidates the soft diplomacy efforts made by ROK and DPRK Taekwondo organizations in order to provide a foundation for future research on Taekwondo diplomacy and peace negotiations.

Keywords: soft diplomacy, international relations, sports diplomacy, International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF), World Taekwondo (WT)

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Received: 18.08.2018; Accepted: 4.09.2018; Published online: 28.11.2018

Cite this article as: Johnson J, Vitale G. Taekwondo diplomacy: new possibilities for peace on the Korean Peninsula. *Physical Activity Review* 2018; 6: 237-250. doi: 10.16926/par.2018.06.28

INTRODUCTION

Since the times of ancient Greek city-states and kingdoms, sports have been used to bring different peoples together. Today's Olympic games have lost their ancient predecessor's religious purposes, and instead focus on uniting nations as equals through sport. Mirroring the social changes and global attitudes dominated by Western beliefs, the modern Olympic Games, both summer and winter, have changed dramatically since 1896 when Pierre de Coubertin brought together fourteen nations to compete under the peaceful philosophy of Olympism [1].

Taekwondo, the Korean martial art turned international Olympic sport, has long been used for diplomatic purposes by both the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea). For instance, the Korea International Corporation Agency (KOICA), the ROK's main agency for soft diplomacy, incorporates Taekwondo into nearly all of their outreach programs across the globe. Yet, it is the ROK's Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism (MCST) that oversees its sport diplomacy efforts. The MCST serves in part to facilitate sporting events between the ROK and other nations as well as establish "bilateral and multilateral relationships at the international level, particularly via taekwondo" [2]. The DPRK also regularly sends its Taekwondo demonstration team abroad for soft diplomacy purposes.

This qualitative study examines the two primary Taekwondo organizations, the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) and World Taekwondo (WT), and their efforts to promote Taekwondo and peace. By examining these organizations' efforts to promote the martial art and sport of Taekwondo historically, we shall provide an overview of the Taekwondo soft diplomacy efforts. This research hopes to spark further such peace efforts as well as to provide a foundation for future research on Taekwondo diplomacy and peace negotiations.

Note on terminology

The spelling *Taekwondo* is used throughout this paper to discuss the WT and ITF styles of the martial art and combat sport. WT practitioners prefer the spelling *Taekwondo*, while ITF practitioners hyphenate *Taekwon-Do* to join "the two physical parts of the art together, utilizing the dash (-) or hyphen to not only separate them from the non-physical mental aspects of the art, but to allow the 'Do' to stand off by itself" [3]. The hyphen also acts as a symbolic bridge that illustrates the diligent training and dedication to detail with the physical aspects leads practitioners to the realization of the Do, or the nonphysical aspects, of Taekwondo. To avoid confusion, the spelling *Taekwondo* is used to refer to both styles of Taekwondo, while *Taekwon-Do* is only used in the proper names of ITF organizations or their affiliates. Additionally, Korean names have been rendered in the individual's most preferred spellings, usually with the surname first in the Asian tradition followed by a comma and the given name(s); e.g., 'Choi, Hong Hi' is used rather than 'Hong-hi Choi.'

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative literature review was performed on the soft diplomacy efforts made by the ITF and WT. The findings were then cross-referenced with those organization's philosophical and technical training manuals as well as soft and sport diplomacy literature for contextualization.

TAEKWONDO HISTORY AND ITS ORGANIZING BODIES

Although originally founded in the ROK on March 22, 1966 [4], the ITF is the governing body that oversees the Taekwondo activities in the DPRK. It must be noted however that the ITF has now split into three organizations since its founder and first president (ROK) General Choi, Hong Hi (November 9, 1918 – June 15, 2002) passed in 2002.

Complicating the matters more is the fact that several other ITF pioneers have also established their own, albeit much smaller, organizations. Nevertheless, there are three ITFs all with legitimate claims to being the official ITF (the reasons for this division and their legitimacy fall outside of the

scope of this paper but are well publicized). The headquarters of one of these ITFs is located in Vienna, Austria and is maintained by DPRK officials. The current president of that ITF is Ri, Yong Son.

WT is the governing body for the style of Taekwondo performed in the Olympics. Olympic Taekwondo is the style of Taekwondo most widely practiced in the ROK, and, due to its Olympic status, much of the world. WT was founded on May 28, 1973 as the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) [4], but rebranded itself and changed its name in 2017 to better engage modern Taekwondo practitioners and fans [5]. The current WT president is Choue, Chungwon. WT is the international federation for Olympic Taekwondo competitions and “is a member of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) and International Paralympic Committee (IPC)” [6]; it is thus a member organization of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Currently, WT enjoys a strong relationship with the IOC (Figure 1). There are other Taekwondo governing bodies as well. The Kukkiwon is the de facto education headquarters for ROK (Olympic) Taekwondo, while the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA) is a member of the WT and overseas Taekwondo development within the ROK.

While the Kukkiwon and KTA have also conducted significant diplomatic activities in the past, WT is at the forefront of the ROK’s soft diplomatic activities. WT has indeed aligned its “policies and practices with those of the IOC” [7] to use sport as a diplomatic vehicle. Thus, it has engaged in numerous activities, such as establishing the Taekwondo Peace Corps (TPC) and Taekwondo Humanitarian Foundation (THF). The efforts made by the WT and the ITF have been used as a tool to bridge the political gap between the divided ROK and DPRK. As the international governing body for Olympic Taekwondo, WT focuses its diplomatic relations efforts primarily with Ri, Yong Son’s ITF, the organization representing Taekwondo in the DPRK.

Taekwondo international relations may be best highlighted in the final ITF pattern called Tong-Il Tul. Patterns, called *tul* or *poomsae* in Korean, are “sets of prearranged offensive and defensive movements to simulate interactions with imaginary opponents” [8] and contain the essential teachings of the martial art. All of the ITF patterns are named after important people, events, or concepts in Korean history and culture. For instance, the first pattern is named Chon-ji Tul or “the Heaven the Earth” [4], and is named after Lake Chonji, the location of the Korea’s origin myth. Finally, the highest pattern practiced by ITF students is Tong-il Tul, which means “unification” and “denotes the resolution of the unification of Korea which has been divided since 1945” [4].

Tong-il Tul is highly symbolic of contemporary Korean history with movements representing the division of Korea. For instance, the divided Korea is represented in the pattern’s first movement, a twin fist middle punch (punches executed with both hands simultaneously so the palms face downward) (Figure 2). Other movements signify the political division of the Korean Peninsula. Movement #2, for example, is a horizontal strike with twin knife hands (strikes executed to the side so that they cut the air horizontally), which denotes that the divided Korean Peninsula (Figure 3). Additionally, Movement #38 is a twin fist vertical punch (two punches executed with both hands so the palms face inward toward one another) performed with a forward stomping motion (Figure 4). This twin vertical punch represents the desire of the principle choreographer of the pattern, General Choi, Hong Hi, to break the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the 160-mile-long, 2.5-mile-wide buffer zone between the ROK and DPRK, while the stomping motion symbolizes his “anger and frustration at Korea’s division” along the 38th Parallel [10].

The two styles of Taekwondo are now practiced very differently. Although the different ITFs have retained most of the original patterns, practitioners of WT’s Olympic Taekwondo have adopted new patterns over the years; thus, they do not practice Tong-Il Tul. Furthermore, while most ITF practitioners focus their practice on self-cultivation (i.e., an Eastern martial art), WT practitioners focus on competition (i.e., a Western combat sport) [11]. Now distinct, the two Taekwondo styles nevertheless share a common origin that allows them to find a common ground in which to work together. That purpose, which can also be said to be the purpose of Taekwondo practice in general, is possibly best summarized by ITF pioneer Rhee Ki Ha (2012) as “the physical, spiritual and mental practise of human rights and human equality” [12], an idea which most likely stems from the final line of the ITF student oath that reads “I shall build a more peaceful world” [4]. Additionally, WT (2018) has vowed to “contribute to building a peaceful and better world through sports” in its first organizational objective [7].



Figure 1: Choue Chungwon, World Taekwondo President, and Thomas Bach, International Olympic Committee President, on June 30, 2017 at the 7th International Symposium for Taekwondo Studies in Muju, Republic of Korea. Photo courtesy of Joo, Yongchul



Figure 2: Tong-il Tul (pattern) Movement #1 symbolizes the divided Korean Peninsula.



Figure 3: Tong-il Tul (pattern) Movement #2 symbolizes that the Korean Peninsula has been divided for too long.



Figure 4: Tong-il Tul (pattern) Movement #38, executed with a stomp, represents General Choi, Hong Hi's frustration that Korea was divided along the 38th Parallel.

Photos from *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-do, Volume 15* [9].

DIPLOMACY DEFINITIONS

Before discussing the previous successes of and future possibilities for Taekwondo diplomacy, diplomacy must first be defined. Bull defines diplomacy as “the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means” [13]. Diplomacy can be discussed in two broader, more practical approaches; namely, the work and practice of conducting international relations.

Diplomacy work

The work of diplomacy is various and takes place on many social levels. For instance, it can be the:

1. Formal work conducted between nations to establish regular relations, such as establishing trade agreements and making treaties;
2. Dialogue and negotiation used by a state, organization, or individual to achieve its goals with other states, organizations, or individuals [14];
3. Skills required to conduct such dialogues and negotiations effectively; or
4. Practice of conducting the formal work of international relations through the establishment of alliances, signing of treaties, and other contracts “bilaterally or multilaterally, between states and sometimes international organizations” [15].

Diplomacy practice

While the fundamental skills needed to conduct diplomacy are vast, they include effective communication skills, cross-cultural management, flexibility, the ability to work on a team, analytical skills, negotiation skills, and autonomy [16]. More specifically, individuals engaging in the practice of diplomacy:

1. Perceive the needs and concerns of other parties,
2. Guide their counterparts toward mutually agreeable outcomes, and/or
3. Use tact to become aware of other people’s needs and norms to avoid and/or resolve disagreements or aggression.

Hard and soft diplomacy

There are two types of diplomacy. Hard diplomacy involves official government relations between two or more political subdivisions or countries. The other, soft diplomacy, is the more informal diplomatic engagements between non-government entities that sometimes operate with some government support, but more often as a private exchange between organizations or individuals. Soft diplomacy leads governments to a place where greater understanding happens, which facilitates increased political cooperation. As sports are not usually practiced by government organizations, but are instead supported by private organizations or individuals, most diplomatic practices made through sports would be categorized as soft diplomacy. History shows us that sports, music, the arts in general, and other cultural exchanges have had some impacts in bringing different peoples together.

SPORTS DIPLOMACY

International sports can be understood as a component of international politics [17] and are often used as a means to bring peoples together. On one hand, sports can be used for less altruistic purposes by governments. Politically speaking, athletes winning in a sporting event can be viewed as one country dominating another [17]. Possibly the most effective means of measuring dominance is by medal count [18]. Sports then become a type of war by synecdoche rather than proxy or outright hostility.

On the other hand, sports and the arts provide opportunities for different peoples to come together through shared activities. After all, the love of shared activities can and does transcend the many overt differences that people see when they look at others [19]. Once two peoples, who looked at themselves as different, take the time to engage in a shared activity that they both love [19], many of the obvious superficial differences fade. At some point, they realize that they also have more commonalities than differences. When these breakthroughs occur, opportunities to make more meaningful connections can take place.

Sports are most often used geopolitically to demonstrate on a world scale that a country, political bloc, or even ideology is superior to others [17,18]. Governments can also abstain from competitions held in states with opposing viewpoints. The US boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent Soviet boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, California (USA) are prime examples of this. However, smaller sporting events, such as the 1936 boxing match between American Joe Louis and German Max

Schmeling, can also be used to highlight the power of one political system over another. Sports diplomacy has been used to great success in the last century. Murray states: sports diplomacy is associated with governments employing sportspeople to amplify a diplomatic message, or with states using sporting events to enhance their image among global publics, to cool tensions in flagging diplomatic relationships, or simply to test the ground for a possible policy change [19].

These inexpensive [20,21], low risk, and popular cultural exchanges [22] break through government stalemates, yet allow people to implement contracts with foreigners or foreign governments for their mutual benefits by “promoting international understanding and friendship as well as dispelling stereotypes and prejudices” [19].

Most famous is perhaps the use of table tennis to thaw relations between the United States and People’s Republic of China (PRC). Prior to the Ping-pong Diplomacy era, the PRC remained isolated in the worlds of politics and sport [28]. Wanting to engage the United States, the Chinese table tennis team extended an invitation to the American team at the 1971 World Table Tennis Championship in Nagoya, Japan. Knowing the Chinese team would dominate the friendly competition, the slogan *Friendship First, Competition Second* (友谊第一, 比赛 第二; *youyi diyi, bisai di'er*) was coined to emphasize “hospitality over competition” [13, 24]. The success of the US team’s trip opened the door for US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and the President Richard Nixon to travel to China in 1971 [20,21,23]. This event brought about Sino-US rapprochement and eventually had a profound effect on Cold War diplomacy efforts [20]. It can be thus considered a blueprint for positive sports diplomacy.

The ROK has likewise used global sporting events “as public diplomacy acts” since the turn of the millennium [2]. Events like the 2002 World Cup in the ROK and Japan, the 2011 World Championships in Athletics in Daegu, the 2014 Incheon Asian Games, and the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang have “triggered more collaborations among governmental agencies, private organizations, and citizens” in the ROK and have fortified it as a middle power in global affairs [10]. In 2015, the ROK actively promoted exchanges of sport with the DPRK that included Taekwondo exchanges [20]. Then, in the summer of 2017, the DPRK’s Taekwondo demonstration team toured the ROK. This tour precipitated the DPRK’s Taekwondo demonstration just prior to the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in early 2018, an event which the ROK used to “initiate a dialogue with North Korea” [25]. These games were significant since “PyeongChang functions as a symbolic place for the promotion of peace [because it] borders North and South Korea and was also one of the areas contested by both countries during the Korean War” [25].

TAEKWONDO SOFT DIPLOMACY

Taekwondo’s introduction to modern Korean politics

Taekwondo has played a soft diplomatic role with some government support and sometimes tacit approval. Starting in 1959, Taekwondo began its overseas diplomatic outreach. General Choi, Hong-Hi (Figure 5) led a military Taekwondo demonstration team to South Vietnam and Taiwan. The team was comprised of members of all four branches of the ROK military: the army, where Taekwondo initially began; navy; marines; and air force. This historic trip marked the first time Taekwondo was performed outside of Korea. There was additional symbolic significance as the ROK, South Vietnam and Taiwan were all engaged in standoffs with their other halves; i.e., the DPRK, the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and PRC, respectfully.

This trip was made possible through the efforts of General Choi, Duk-Shin, the then-Korean Foreign Minister to Vietnam who played important early roles in supporting Taekwondo’s growth and global development. It also established Taekwondo as the first Korean export in a soft diplomacy effort to help raise foreign awareness about Korea. As is well-known, Korea suffered a long debilitating occupation by the Empire of Japan and a succeeding devastating civil war from 1950-1953. The country needed something to help improve its reputation as a progressive and vital nation, and Taekwondo provided one such answer.

Taekwondo would become what is now called the first *Korean Wave*, a term used to describe the spread of Korean culture and entertainment across the globe. This wave would create many

opportunities for people all over the world to come to understand more about Korea, its long history, and its culture. The 1959 Taekwondo tour would become very important as it encouraged General Choi, Hong-Hi to dispatch military Taekwondo instructors officially to Vietnam in 1962 and Taiwan in 1967. Also, in 1959, General Choi, Hong Hi became the first president of the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA).

In the meantime, the ROK again experienced political turbulence when a military coup took place on May 16, 1961. This eventually led to General Choi, Hong Hi being sent on a diplomatic mission to Malaysia as the first Korean Ambassador to that country. After he set up the first Korean Embassy in Malaysia, he used his calligraphy skills to hold a press event. One of the tactics he employed was writing Taekwondo using his artful hand in Chinese calligraphy. The press was intrigued by this new name, giving General Choi, Hong Hi the opportunity to explain that Taekwondo was a Korean martial art and thus garnering international interest in it. After newspaper accounts reported the event, a young Malaysian man phoned the embassy and General Choi, Hong Hi told him to come to the embassy. This Judo black belt became the first Malaysian student of Taekwondo with the Korean Embassy being the first Taekwondo *dojang* (martial arts practice hall). Within a couple of months, recently retired ROK Army Taekwondo instructors sent this Malaysian man to teach Taekwondo to the local civilian population, which eventually led to the Malaysian Taekwon-Do Association being formed in 1963 and the Singapore Taekwon-Do Association in 1964.

Later in 1965, the Vietnam Taekwon-Do Association was established as well (Figures 6-7). Over time, approximately 700 military Taekwondo instructors were deployed to Vietnam to teach the martial art. After the United States, the ROK had the second largest number of troops dispatched during the Vietnam War. It should also be noted that the first Koreans in Vietnam were the military Taekwondo instructors.

Also in 1965, General Choi, Hong Hi led the first Kukki (National) Taekwon-Do Goodwill Tour around the world, which was sponsored by the ROK government. On this international journey, General Choi, Hong-Hi would distribute his new English language Taekwondo book, which helped introduce Taekwondo further to the world. That tour visited Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. This trip was made possible with the support of General Park, Chung Hee's military government and the efforts of General Choi, Duk Shin, who was by then serving as the Korean Ambassador to West Germany.

General Choi, Hong Hi served as the ROK Ambassador for Malaysia from 1962 to 1965. In his absence, the KTA rebranded itself as the Korea Taesoodo Association, effectively changing the name of the art from Taekwondo to Taesoodo. After General (now Ambassador) Choi, Hong Hi's diplomatic assignment in Malaysia ended, he returned to Seoul and was reelected president of the Korea Taesoodo Association in 1965, a position he held for only one year. However, he was successful in convincing the Korea Taesoodo Association to readopt the Taekwondo name. He lacked the support for a second term and was consequently replaced by Ro, Byung-jik.

On March 22, 1966, General Choi established the ITF, the first international organization of any kind headquartered in Korea. The countries visited during the aforementioned 1965 Kukki Taekwon-Do Goodwill Tour would become the founding member nations of the ITF. The ITF, under General Choi, Hong Hi's leadership, became the driving force for the globalization of Taekwondo, which of course led to more foreigners learning about Korea and the Korean people.

The first ITF Demonstration Team performed throughout Southeast Asia in 1967 and 1968. In 1968, General Choi, Hong Hi led the second ITF Demonstration Team to Paris, France, the host city of the Conseil International du Sport Militaire (CISM, or the International Military Sports Council) symposium. Taekwondo was demonstrated there for what is called the Military Olympics. When General Choi returned home to Seoul, he was awarded the first Research Sports Award by the ROK government.



Figure 5: A young General Choi Hong Hi, first International Taekwon-Do Federation President with the Republic of Korea (South Korea) flag. This photograph was originally published in 1965 in his *Taekwon-Do - The Art of Self-Defence* [26], nearly two decades before he introduced Taekwondo to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea). Photo courtesy of www.historyoftaekwondo.com



Figure 6: A c1960s photo of General Choi Hong Hi in front of a map entitled "Taekwondo Distribution Chart." The wording on the flag reads "International Taekwondo Distribution Chart" and is the official International Taekwon-Do Federation flag (Figure 7). This picture depicts the Republic of Korea (South Korea) as the center of early Taekwondo international activity and indicates the far-reaching effects of Taekwondo soft diplomacy.

Photo courtesy of www.historyoftaekwondo.com.



Figure 7: International Taekwon-Do Federation flag indicates the organization's soft diplomacy intentions. According to J. C. Kim, who designed the emblem, the divided "S" line represents the yin-yang symbol in the ROK flag; "[t]he half circle at the top and the half circle at the bottom represents the North and South Poles with the intersecting lines representing the Longitude and Latitude markers;" the Korean characters on the left (태; Tae) and right (권; Kwon) represent the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, respectfully; the fist represents the Indian Ocean; and the two half circles on the right and left symbolize the Arctic and Antarctic Oceans. The center of the circle is blue (not shown) and the lettering around the outside edge of the circle symbolizes gears moving forward and working together [27].

Photo originally printed in Volume 1 of the *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do* [28], but courtesy of www.taekwondoitf.org.

In 1973, the third ITF Demonstration Team visited twenty-three countries. The tour was supported by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. The team performed in different parts of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, with five countries joining the ITF afterwards. On this tour, General Choi, Hong Hi met with several government officials. The ITF by this time had relocated from Seoul, Korea to Toronto, Canada. Thus, Taekwondo was being used to introduce and disseminate aspects of Korean culture around the world as a soft diplomacy tactic in the 1960s and 1970s (Figure 6).

Olympic Taekwondo's continued soft diplomacy

The Kukkiwon (a word meaning “national academy” when translated from Korean) is the educational headquarters for Olympic Taekwondo and is supervised by the International Sports Division of the ROK's Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. It was originally named the Taekwondo Central Dojang and was established as the Central Gymnasium of the KTA. The first Taekwondo World Championships in 1973 was held at the Kukkiwon. After the end of the championships, the WTF (now WT) was formed by the participating nations. In 1974, the Kukkiwon formed a demonstration team that has been performing continuously since then. Kim, Un Yong (March 19, 1931 – October 3, 2017), known widely as the father of Olympic Taekwondo (Figure 8), took the responsibility of global dissemination of Taekwondo by becoming the president of the KTA, the WTF, and the Kukkiwon at different times and sometimes simultaneously. The original aims of the Kukkiwon were:

1. “To develop Taekwondo techniques,”
2. To train Taekwondo practitioners to become “strong leaders,”
3. To improve the quality of instructions “inside and outside of Korea,”
4. To host national and international tournaments and events, and
5. To promote the health of all Koreans and promote the spirit of Taekwondo” [29].

Kim, Un Yong's overall vision was to make Taekwondo the national sport of Korea, then internationalize it, with the end goal of gaining Taekwondo official Olympic sport status. He did this in an amazingly short period of time. As Taekwondo raised its popularity through sports, especially with the connection to the Olympics, many more countries embraced it as a sport and martial art, which in turn led to a greater understanding of and even increased appreciation for Korea. Of course, greater awareness and understanding of a country is a vital part of its success, including aiding its trade interests. The Kukkiwon also invested many resources in dispatching their instructors abroad to teach, and this was especially true on the African continent.



Figure 8: Kim, Un Yong, the first president of the Korea Taekwondo Association, Kukkiwon, World Taekwondo Federation, and a former International Olympic Committee vice-president. Kim was instrumental to Taekwondo's global growth and is credited for earning Taekwondo's Olympic status *The ITF's continued soft diplomacy outside the ROK.*

The ITF meanwhile suffered from a lack of government support. The ROK had no diplomatic ties with any communist countries. The ITF style of Taekwondo was however seeping into the Communist Bloc by its instructors and other ITF members. General Choi, now a Canadian citizen in good standing, was also free to travel behind the Iron Curtain dividing Europe during the Cold War era. Therefore, he took the 5th ITF Demonstration Team to communist countries in 1978. This historic trip led to the formation of the All Europe Taekwon-Do Federation in 1979. It was thusly named as it included “all” of Europe: both the democratically-aligned West and the communist-aligned East. In November 1981, General Choi, Hong Hi and the ITF presented a unified DPRK and ROK Instructors Demonstration Team at the North and Overseas Korea Christian Leaders meeting in Vienna, Austria.

Communism furthers the dissemination of Taekwondo

The ITF was given a much-needed boost when it introduced Taekwondo to the DPRK. General Choi, Hong Hi led the 7th ITF Demonstration Team there in September 1980. On that tour, he included Taekwondo practitioners from countries that fought against the North during the Korean Civil War. He did this to send a message: that one can make friends with their enemies through Taekwondo. General Choi, Hong Hi also included a member from Yugoslavia, which was another communist country at the time. In doing so, a subliminal message may have been sent to Kim, Il-Sung, the DPRK leader at the time, that communist countries can practice Taekwondo effectively and well. Yugoslavia supported the trip due to their good relationship with the DPRK.

Once the DPRK accepted Taekwondo, it became a key member of the ITF, supporting it similarly to how the ROK supported the WTF. Eventually, DPRK ITF instructors would be dispatched around the world to the communist, socialist, and non-aligned countries with which they had diplomatic relations. Thus, from the early 1980s, both halves of Korea were spreading Taekwondo globally. Once the Soviet Union collapsed and the Iron Curtain came down effectively ending the Cold War, the ROK quickly established more relationships with the newly democratic Eastern Bloc countries. The WTF then could freely engage with the Taekwondo groups there, getting many to switch from ITF-style to WTF-style (Olympic) Taekwondo. This in turn led to Taekwondo being accepted as an official Olympic sport in 1994.

Other soft diplomacy tactics employed by the DPRK have included:

- Opening its doors to approximately 30,000 people from about 180 countries in 1989 in an event that featured Taekwon-Do,
- Hosting the ITF World Championships in 1992 and in other subsequent years,
- Working with *Tae Kwon Do Times* magazine to bring the DPRK Taekwondo Demonstration team to the United States in 2007 and 2011, and
- Sending the ITF demonstration team to the WTF World Championships in 2015 (Chelyabinsk, Russia) and 2017 (Taekwondowon; Muju, ROK) and most recently at the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games held in Pyeongcheon, ROK.

Taekwondo in the Olympics

The ITF continued to lead the spread of Taekwon-Do to the communist world. This was vitally important to receiving the IOC’s recognition of Taekwondo, since Olympic sports need to have a global appeal and worldwide following. Taekwondo did not stand a chance if half the world did not participate in the sport. In 1988, the ITF hosted the first Taekwondo world championships held in a communist country (Budapest, Hungary). The ROK at this time did not have any diplomatic relations with any communist country. Interestingly, the ROK established its first such relationship with Hungary in 1988 during the Seoul Olympic Games.

WT’s current soft diplomacy efforts

WT has now grown to 209 member nations, which outnumbers the 193 countries in the United Nations (UN) (there are two more non-member UN observer states as well: the Holy See and the State of Palestine). WT is closely behind Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the international governing body of football (soccer), in number of member nations. WT is now quickly becoming one of the premier international federations for Olympic sports, even winning an award as the top IOC International Federation in 2016. WT also conducts international relations efforts through

the THF and TPC. Yu et al. reference Cutler in stating that the TPC works to “to help enhance world peace and harmony, a deeper understanding of different cultures, and friendship around the world through taekwondo volunteer service” [30,31].

WT likewise created the THF to send Taekwondo instructors to refugee camps around the world. It should be noted, however, that the THF is not a WT subsidiary. The THF instead works separately to assist in the global effort to assist refugees. THF instructors have now spread Taekwondo, the Korean language, and Korean culture to thousands of displaced individuals, teaching them self-confidence and skills needed to succeed despite their nationless status through various means, including regular Taekwondo training and a collectible, didactic card game [32]. A more visible example of the THF’s success was when a delegation of refugees competed at the 2017 WT World Championships in Muju, Korea under one (refugee) banner.

Future Taekwondo Diplomatic Efforts on the Korean Peninsula

Few can deny that one of the most political hotspots the world faces today is on the divided Korean Peninsula. WT and the ITF started a formal process to work together with their landmark Protocol of Accord agreement that was signed in August 2014 [33] “with the full endorsement of IOC President Thomas Bach” [6]. To date, only one aspect of the accord has been implemented, which were the occasions when WT and ITF demonstration teams performed together. The first such event was when the DPRK ITF demonstration team performed at the WTF 2015 World Taekwondo Championships in Chelyabinsk, Russia. Later, they toured the ROK in 2017 (Figures 9 and 10) giving many warmly-received performances, culminating with demonstrations during the 2017 World Taekwondo Championships in Muju, ROK.

The slogan of the joint tour was “Peace is more precious than Triumph” (Figure 10), which immediately recalls the “Friendship First, Competition Second” slogan used by the Chinese in 1971. The 2017 slogan sent a clear message to the South Korean public and the global audience that the tour was intended to improve diplomacy and peace between the ROK and DPRK. Indeed, the two teams performed peacefully and respectfully together at the WT World Taekwondo Championships, which garnered a tremendous amount of international media attention.



Figure 9: Photo after the joint ROK and DPRK Taekwondo demonstration at the Kukkiwon during their 2017 tour of the ROK. This was the first time the DPRK Taekwondo team demonstrated at the Kukkiwon. The joint performance demonstrated the growing interest in communication and cooperation between the two countries. Notable persons in front row include Mr. Ri, Yong Son, President of ITF representing Taekwondo in the DPRK (7th from the left); Choue, Chungwon, WT President (8th from the left); and Oh, Hyun Deuk, Kukkiwon President (9th from the left). ROK: Republic of Korea (South Korea); DPRK: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea); WT: World Taekwondo; ITF: International Taekwon-Do Federation of Korea. Photo courtesy of www.historyoftaekwondo.com



Figure 10: Photo after one of the joint ROK and DPRK Taekwondo demonstration teams during their 2017 tour of the ROK. The banner resembles the slogan “Friendship First, Competition Second” used by the Chinese in 1971 to highlight that the tour was intended to improve diplomacy and peace between the ROK and DPRK. Notable persons in the back row include Ban, Ki-moon (former UN Secretary-General), Ri Yong Son, President of ITF representing Taekwondo in the DPRK, and Choue, Chungwon, WT President. UN: United Nations; ROK: Republic of Korea (South Korea); DPRK: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea); WT: World Taekwondo; ITF: International Taekwon-Do Federation. Photo courtesy of www.historyoftaekwondo.com

Additionally, ROK President Moon Jae-in traveled to remote Muju, ROK to welcome the DPRK team personally on June 24, 2017. President Moon shook hands and spoke with the DPRK demonstration team members directly. His enthusiastic greeting of DPRK athletes, pseudo-representatives of a country that the ROK is still technically at war with, revealed how far his government’s openness, support, and willingness to thaw relations with the DPRK went. ROK and DPRK diplomacy, which had been stagnate since 2007, was suddenly reinvigorated through Taekwondo. He also invited the DPRK to participate in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, which would become known as the “Peace Olympics.” Thus, the DPRK Taekwondo demonstration team’s two Muju performances underscore the fact that the ROK was welcoming the de facto DPRK representatives, much like how the Chinese ping-pong team acted as representatives of the PRC in 1971.

After the ROK’s warm reception of the DPRK Taekwondo demonstration team, special envoy Kim Yo-jong, the sister of DPRK leader Kim Jung-un, came to the opening ceremony of the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics baring a letter from her brother. Delivered to ROK President Moon, it read in part: “I hope Pyongyang and Seoul will become closer in the hearts of Koreans and will bring unification and prosperity in the near future” [34]. The letter was signed by ceremonial heads of state Kim, Yong-nam and Kim, Yo-jong. During his time with Kim, Yo-jong, President Moon stressed the importance of the DPRK resuming talks with the United States [35]. This in turn allowed for the historic April 27, 2018 summit between ROK President Moon and Kim, Jung-un in which denuclearization and the signing of a formal peace treaty between the ROK and DPRK were discussed. This summit has also opened the door for another event unprecedented in world history: the US President Donald Trump and DPRK Chairman Kim Jung-un summit in Singapore on June 12, 2018. The chain of events that led to the first time a US and DPRK leader met can thus leads back to the 2017 Taekwondo demonstration tour in the ROK.

The successful demonstrations illustrated that it is possible for the North and the South to work together. Significant to Taekwondo diplomacy is that the tours were conducted under heavy government control (i.e., support) and that the 2017 WT World Taekwondo Championships were held in Muju, ROK at the Taekwondowon, a Taekwondo resort area run by the Taekwondo Promotion Foundation and funded by the ROK Ministry of Sports, Culture, and Tourism.

While Taekwondo diplomacy cannot claim nor shoulder the burden for peace on the Korean Peninsula exclusively, it has been a driving force to bring the ROK and DPRK together. It has already been an impetus and a vehicle for the DPRK and ROK to begin informal, non-governmental meetings between the two countries as well as opening the doorway to meetings between the DPRK and the United States. Possibly more importantly for the respective governments, the well-publicized demonstrations opened the idea of ROK and DPRK relations in the ROK after over a decade of mistrust of the DPRK. Considering the disrespect and hostility of the war of words between DPRK Chairman Kim, Jong-un

and US President Donald Trump in early 2017, these meetings are exceptionally important to resolving an escalating conflict that could have worldwide disastrous results if war occurred.

CONCLUSION

This article introduces the broad scope of activities performed by the Taekwondo organizations located in the DPRK and ROK. ROK and DPRK Taekwondo practitioners now have a vehicle in which to conduct soft diplomacy. The soft diplomatic efforts, whether conducted by WT or the ITF, show the far-reaching influence of Taekwondo diplomacy. Most important to the world stage are the successes the two Taekwondo organizations have made toward peace between the ROK and DPRK through various joint demonstrations.

Future research on Taekwondo diplomacy should therefore focus on what allows the inherently violent martial art and combat sport of Taekwondo to bring individuals together. More detailed examinations of these organizations and their attempts to bring about peace are also required in order to understand the role Taekwondo has played in diplomatic efforts made on the divided Korean peninsula. Once ascertained, these studies could provide a roadmap to future sport diplomatic efforts made by the two Koreas and their relative Taekwondo organizations. This article therefore hopes to be one impetus for bringing peace to Korea.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the Keimyung University research grant of 20180269. Additionally, a previous version of this paper was presented on December 1, 2017 in Muju, Korea at the 1st International Conference for Taekwondo, which was held at the Taekwondowon (Taekwondo Park) and hosted by the International Association for Taekwondo Research (IATR).

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