

Historical Figures and Events

Each pattern of TaeKwon-do has a meaning. This meaning refers to a historical event or person in Korean history.

Chon-Ji



|Heaven lake

The name *Chonji* literally means ‘heavenly pond’. Heaven Lake, which lies on the border between China and North Korea, is the world’s highest Crater Lake and sits atop the volcanic Baekdu Mountain. From mid-October to mid-June it is covered with ice.

Dan-Gun

Dangun Wanggeom was the legendary founder of Gojoseon, the first kingdom of Korea, in present-day Liaoning, Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula. He is said to be the grandson of the god of heaven, and to have founded the kingdom in 2333 BCE. Although the term Dangun commonly refers to the founder, some believe it was a title used by all rulers of Gojoseon, and the Wanggeom was the proper name of the founder.

The Dangun legend

Dangun’s ancestry begins with his grandfather Hwanin, the ‘Lord of Heaven’. Hwanin had a son Hwanung who yearned to live on the earth among the valleys and the mountains. Hwanin permitted Hwanung and 3000 followers to descend onto Baekdu Mountain, where Hwanung found Sinsi ‘City of God’. Along with his ministers of clouds, rain and wind, he instituted laws and moral codes and taught humans various arts, medicine and agriculture. A tiger and a bear prayed to Hwanung that they may become human. Upon hearing their prayers, Hwanung gave them 20 cloves of garlic and a bundle of mugwort, ordering them to eat only this sacred food and remain out of the sunlight for 100 days. The tiger gave up after about twenty days and left the cave. However, the bear remained and was transformed into a woman. The bear-woman was grateful and made offerings to Hwanung. However, she lacked a husband and soon became sad. She prayed beneath a Shindansu tree to be blessed with a child. Hwanung, moved by her prayers, took her for his wife and soon she gave birth to a son, who was named Dangun Wanggeom.

Do-San



Ahn Chang-ho

Ahn Chang-ho, pen name Dosan, (November 9, 1878 – March 10, 1938) was a Korean independence activist and one of the early leaders of the Korean immigrant community in the United States. He established the Young Korean Association and was a key member in the founding of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai.

Many consider Ahn Chang-ho to be one of the key moral and philosophical leaders of Korea during the 20th century. In the turmoil immediately before and during the Japanese occupation of Korea, he called for the moral and spiritual renewal of the Korean people through education as one of the important components in their struggle for independence.

Won-Hyo

Wonhyo (617-686) was one of the leading thinkers, writers and commentators of the Korean Buddhist tradition. With his life spanning the end of the Three Kingdoms period and the beginning of the unified Silla, Wonhyo played a vital role in the reception and assimilation of the broad range of doctrinal Buddhist streams that flowed into the Korean peninsula at the time.

Wonhyo spent the earlier part of his career as a monk. In 661, he and a close friend, Uisang, were traveling to China where they hoped to study Buddhism further. Somewhere in the region of Baekju the pair were caught in a heavy downpour and forced to take shelter in what they believed to be an earthen sanctuary. During the night, Wonhyo was overcome with thirst, and reaching out grasped what he perceived to be a gourd, and drinking from it was refreshed with a draught of cool, refreshing water. Upon waking the next morning, however, the companions discovered much to their amazement that their shelter was in fact an ancient tomb littered with human skulls, and the vessel from which Wonhyo had drunk was in fact a human skull full of brackish water. Moved by the experience of believing a gruesome sight to be a comfortable haven, and skull of mildewy water a refreshing drink, Wonhyo was astonished at the power of the human mind to transform reality. After this ‘consciousness-only’ enlightenment experience, he left the priesthood and turned to the spreading of the Buddha dharma as a layman.

Yul-Gok

Yi I (December 26, 1536-1584) was one of the two most prominent Korean Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty, the other being his older contemporary, Yi Hwang. Yi I is often referred to by his pen name Yulgok ('Chestnut valley').

Yi I was born in Bukpyeong, in Gangwon Province. He was a child prodigy who knew Chinese script by the age of three and composed poems in Classical Chinese before he reached his seventh birthday. By the age of seven, he had finished his lessons in the Confucian Classics, and he passed the Civil Service literary examination at the age of 13.

At the age of 29, Yi I passed a higher Civil Service examination with full marks, and he started government service. His winning thesis, titled *Cheondochaek* was widely regarded as a literary masterpiece, displaying his knowledge of history and the Confucian philosophy of politics, and also reflecting his profound knowledge of Taoism.

Joong-Gun

Ahn Jung-geun was a Korean independence activist. He is best known for his assassination of the Japanese resident general of Korea, following the signing of the Eulsa Treaty.

Ahn Jeun-geun, having previously led Korean fighting forces against the Japanese, assassinated Ito Hirobumi on the railway platform in Harbin, Manchuria in 1909. After firing upon Hirobumi he is said to have yelled for Korean Independence and waved the Korean flag. Afterwards a Japanese colonial court sentenced him to death.

When Ahn Jeun-geun assassinated Ito Hirobumi news of the events in occupied Korea reached mainstream international media. People in many countries became aware of the situation there for the first time.



Ito Hirobumi

Toi-Gye



Yi Hwang

Yi Hwang (1501-1570) was one of the two most prominent Korean Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty. Yi Hwang is often referred to by his pen name Toegye ('Retreating Creek'). His courtesy name was Gyeongho.

Yi Hwang was born in Andong, North Gyeongsang Province, on November 25, 1501. He was a child prodigy. At the age of 6, he started to learn the Book of One Thousand letters from an old gentleman in his neighbourhood, and at 12 he learned the Analects of Confucius from his uncle. At the age of 19, he obtained the two-volume Seongni Taejeon, a great compendium of neo-Confucianism, and experienced a process of great awakening. He became devoted to Song thought.

He moved to Seoul when he was 23 years old to study at the National Academy, and passed the preliminary provincial Civil Service examination with top honours at the age of 33. He worked for the government throughout his life, moving through 29 different positions.

In 1559 he retired back to his home and lived there until his death. There he began to build the Dosan Seowan a private Confucian academy offering instruction in the classics and honouring the sages with regular memorial rites. Unfortunately he died in 1570 and never lived to see the opening of his academy, although his students continued to work after his death. Dosan Seowan opened in 1574, and remains in use to this day.

Hwa-Rang

The Hwarang were an elite group of male youths in Silla, an ancient Korean Kingdom that lasted until the 10th century. They were educational institutions as well as social clubs where members gathered for all aspects of study, originally for arts and culture steeped in Buddhism and Taoism. These groups developed into a more military organisation as the Silla court centralized political power and battled to unite the Three Kingdoms.

‘Hwarang’ is most often translated as ‘Flower Knights’ or ‘Flower Youths’. *Hwa* is the Sino-Korean (hanja) character for flower or the act of blooming. *Rang* means man, sometimes used as a suffix in Silla official titles.

With the consolidation and expansion of Silla and intensification of military rivalries among the Three Kingdoms in the 6th century, the Silla court took a more active interest in the Hwarang. The Hwarang groups were usually led by a youth of aristocratic standing, and the state appointed a high ranking official to oversee the organisation.

The Hwarang in the late 6th and 7th centuries trained in horsemanship, swordsmanship, javelin and stone throwing, polo and ladder-climbing. By the 7th century, the organisation had grown greatly in prestige and numbered several hundred bands.

Choong-Moo



Yi Sun-sin

Yi Sun-sin (April 28, 1545 – December 16, 1598) was a Korean naval leader noted for his victories against the Japanese navy during the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592-1598) during the Joseon Dynasty. He led the victories of the Commander of Combined Fleets of the Korean Naval fleet during Japan’s April 1592 invasion. Yi is also known for his innovation of the Turtle ships, the world first metal ship – early armored warships. He is reputed to have been one of the few admirals to have been victorious in every naval battle (at least 23) that he commanded. Yi was killed by a bullet in the battle of Noryang Point in December 1598.