

Hosinsul from the Finnish perspective

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Theory of self-defense and examples of taekwondo hand techniques against grasping

Henri Nordenswan, 6th dan
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1 Introduction

In the age of 14, I interested in Asian martial arts because I wanted to develop both my mental and physical strength. The boom of martial arts was just emerging in Finland and there were four Asian martial arts to choose of in my hometown Lahti: judo, jujutsu, karate, and Taekwondo. I had already tried judo in my childhood and found karate with its strong stances being too rigid and stiff for me. When I then saw a Taekwondo demonstration held by Master Dae Jin Hwang, I decided to start Taekwondo in 1984.

During the 1980-90's the competition for popularity between various martial art styles was fierce. People were excited of movie stars like Bruce Lee, Chuck Norris, and Jean-Claude van Damme, and were interested in acquiring themselves the miraculous fighting skills seen in the movie screen. On those days, many people started Taekwondo for self-defense purposes. Accordingly, for me as an assistant instructor in my club, it was a time to start pondering how to use Taekwondo techniques in real life self-defense situations. This aspect became me even more important when I started the studies in the Law School of Helsinki University in 1991 and was studying what kind of consequences one may encounter in legal proceeding if an attacker is severely injured because of too violent techniques used by the defender in a self-defense situation.

Today, the growing interest for practical Taekwondo is emerging again and Taekwondo is thus looking for its roots as a true martial art. I'm really glad of this development. Like Dr. Lee, Chang Hoo puts it: "The essence of Taekwondo lies in its practicality of subduing an opponent. Without practicality, there can be no martial arts."¹

The understanding of the historical background of Taekwondo has improved over time and discussions of its origins are very controversial and disputed.² When I started Taekwondo in 1984, the general narrative was that Taekwondo has descended from the ancient "subak" and "taekkyon". This historical line took its end point "when taekkyondo master Song Duk-Ki presented a martial art demonstration before the Korean president Syngman Rhee, thus clearly distinguishing Taekwondo from the Japanese karate introduced by Japanese ruler during the World War II"³. This narrative was still dominant when I attended the Foreign Instructor Course in Kukkiwon in 2005, even though I did also learn that "there is no doubt, that the three main East Asian countries of Korea, China and Japan all had their own indigenous martial arts, it's also quite likely that they shared much of their martial arts culture among them"⁴.

¹ Bulletin 2, p. 24

² "In regard to Korean martial arts, historical discussions are always very controversial and disputed. However, this study argues that taekwondo is not older than about sixty years, when it gradually started to distinguish from Japanese karate; other modern Korean martial arts were also mostly introduced from Japan or newly created during the second half of the 20th century (Capener, 1995; Madis, 2003; Moenig, 2015, pp. 35-45)". Moenig et al. write p. 48

³ Textbook 2005, p. 37-49.

⁴ ICT, p. 7

According to modern research it's undeniable that "there are no historical connections of any of the ancient Korean martial arts to any of the modern Korean martial arts"⁵. It looks evident, that Taekwondo's technics were strongly influenced by Chinese martial artforms practiced in Manchuria and Karate.⁶ This looks to be true also in my own taekwondo-line, as my Master Ko Tai Jeong is a descendant from Mooduk-kwan, "which was established by Hwang Kee by combining Gwonbeop, which he learned in Manchuria, traditional foot techniques that he learned and practiced by himself, and Karate"⁷. When discussing of the martial art nature of karate, it must be noted that when karate was introduced in Japan by Gichin Funakoshi in 1922, its nature was soon changed to less "martial" and the knowledge of real combat applications behind basic technics started to disappear. According to Funakoshi "the karate in Japan was a long way of karate he learned as a child in Okinawa".⁸

Since the post-war times, the development of Taekwondo as a complete martial art system has been rapid and the difference to its karate-roots has become obvious, especially when comparing the competition styles in sparring. According to Olympics.com, "Taekwondo is very dynamic and involves more kicking, spinning, and jumping, as hands are only used as a backup. In karate, hands rule, as the legs remain mainly grounded and kicks are only used as a backup".⁹

In any case, when we discuss using Taekwondo as a self-defense method, it's reasonable to note that kicks are not always best tools for defense. Kicks look violent and one may cause unnecessary injuries to the opponent due to power kicks. Accordingly, it's important to examine different ways we can use Taekwondo hand techniques for real-life defense. In Karate, "Bunkai symbolizes the whole process of breaking down the movements of a kata to understand how the techniques can be applied in self-defense"¹⁰. As well in Taekwondo, learning of poomsae is not only for competition or belt promotion, but to understand "how our body reacts to different circumstances. This is why movements in the poomsaes must be applicable to the real situations".¹¹

This thesis is written for the Kukkiwon 7th dan promotion test. I will first define and discuss of the content of self-defense in Finnish perspective, break down the concept of Hosinsul, and make some acknowledgements of how to use various elements of Taekwondo for protecting yourself. My focus is not to try to explain how poomsae applications can be used for self-defense. Instead, I will introduce some Taekwondo basic hand movements that I find practical and that can be safely used when an attacker is grasping the defender.

2 Definition of Hosinsul

The Korean word Hosinsul is usually translated as self-defense meaning literally protecting one's body with techniques (ho = protect, shin = body, sul = technique). Hosinsul could also be described as teaching methods of how to use Taekwondo techniques to avoid an attack before it has

⁵ Moenig et al., p. 51

⁶ Textbook 1, p. 052-053

⁷ Textbook 1, p. 055

⁸ Clark, p. 4

⁹ Olympics.com

¹⁰ Enkamp

¹¹ KTA, p. 36

happened, or to protect one's body from a hit, kick or grasp by an attacker and making the attacker harmless.

In Taekwondo terminology Hosinsul has been classified as a part of Special Kyorugi¹². In Taekwondo Textbook 2022 Hosinsul is presented as a type of sparring, "pre-arranged sparring being a training method that allows Taekwondo practitioner to anticipate various violent attack situations and respond accordingly using Taekwondo techniques"¹³. According to the Textbook, "Sparring means real use of the skills"¹⁴. In this sense Taekwondo self-defense techniques include steps and movements to avoid an attack; blocks and movements to protect the body from a hit; and punches, strikes, kicks, and grasps to make the opponent harmless.

According to old saying the best self-defense is to avoid violent confrontational situations totally. Thus, describing Hosinsul only as technical self-defense of one's body is far too narrow definition of how to use Taekwondo skills in one's protection. To extend the understanding of Hosinsul we should also include the phases before one will face a threatening situation and then consider the possible consequences after using Taekwondo techniques against an attacker. From this point of view, I would define Hosinsul as *self-protection that includes the technical self-defense skills*. I share Hosinsul in two main parts:

- *Self-protection* meaning thinking and acting in a way to avoid dangerous people and violent situations.
- *Self-defense* meaning actions performed to defend oneself against a violent attack.

Having this definition in mind, I can separate the following phases in Hosinsul:

	Phases of Hosinsul	Target in teaching
1	Understanding the theory	Students understand the broad content of Hosinsul in theory and the legal perspective of using defensive force in their normal living environment.
2	Avoiding confrontations	This phase includes teaching students how avoid any confrontation before encountering it.
3	Creating self confidence	Students will learn methods how to strengthen their self-confidence, how to stay calm or how not to provoke or to be provoked. Students understand that Taekwondo techniques will only work if one's mind is empty and calm and not aroused by a confronting situation.
4	Building up mental awareness	Students understand how to read an opponent, his movements, clothing, environment, weather conditions, space, etc.
5	Learning defensive techniques	Teaching students how to use Taekwondo techniques and skills to protect your body.
6	Considering after protection	Students learn what they should do after the situation. For instance, collecting evidence, taking photographs,

¹² ICT, p. 128

¹³ Textbook 4, p. 012

¹⁴ Textbook 2, p. 067

		gathering witnesses, or how to deal with an insurance company, police and medical personnel.
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The idea that a fighter must not only master the skills and techniques, but also master his mind and the environment, was brilliantly wrapped by famous Sun Tzu:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”¹⁵

In addition to above aspects of self-protection, some authors include in self-defense also methods of protect your body when there is no confrontation at all. E.g., sleeping well, healthy nutrition, avoiding injuries. This so-called holistic self-defense is intended to increase personal safety, happiness, and physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. The issue is not in the scope of this thesis.

3 Legal perspective

In public discussion you face the question whether Taekwondo techniques are effective or even suitable for self-defense purposes? This question arises mainly since our best tools to incapacitate an attacker are powerful kicks and punches. We must ask whether it's okay to kick for self-defense and possible cause the opponent a severe injury? When pondering this question, it must be examined how the local legislation regulates self-defense. What you can do to protect yourself is not the same in Finland and in USA.

In Finland, the “right of self-defense” (“Hätävarjelu” in Finnish) is described in the 4§ of the Penal Code of Finland as follows: “An act that is necessary to defend against an ongoing or imminent unlawful attack is lawful as self-defense, unless the act manifestly exceeds what in an overall assessment is to be deemed justifiable, taking into account the nature and strength of the attack, the identity of the defender and the attacker and the other circumstances”¹⁶. What does this mean in real life situations?

3.1 Ongoing or imminent attack

Ongoing or imminent attack means a threat that is occurring right now. You cannot make violent defensive acts before the attacker has committed an act that is really threatening to harm you. Thus, the timing of a defensive act is crucial. It's complicated. In self-defense situations a split of a second may make a difference whether you survive or not. But to be legally on the safe side, you can't act too early.

In Taekwondo, our strongest skills are the kicks and the dynamic moving we are used to practice in kyorugi. However, in many situations the kicks are not best tools for self-defense in front of law. The kicks are most suitable in long range situations where the distance between the opponents is so long that the opponent is not able to punch or grasp you. Accordingly, if the opponent is not

¹⁵ Sun Tzu, 3:31-32

¹⁶ Penal Code 4§ Chapter 4 – Grounds for exemption from liability

able to punch you due to distance, is the threat occurring right now? From this point of view, it might be difficult to justify a defensive kick before the opponent is inside the punching range.

3.2 Unless the act manifestly exceeds what is to be deemed justifiable.

A self-defense act should be effective enough to stop the attack but at the same time you can't use techniques that are more violent than is necessary. For example, in Finland you can't shoot a person who is trying to punch you even if the attacker is unlawfully intruded on your home or property. This is very different in comparison to USA, where the "castle doctrine" in many states gives a person the right to use lethal force to defend his home and not retreat. When considering suitable taekwondo techniques for self-defense in Finland, you might choose to use less violent ones instead of kicks.

3.3 Considering the nature and strength of the attack, the identity of the defender and the attacker and the other circumstances.

This means that in self-defense situations we must also consider not only the method of an attack, but also compare the attacker's person with the person of a defender. A small and physically weaker woman may use more force or use more violent defensive techniques against a 190cm tall and 95kg man than a male who is about the same size. Further, it may not be appropriate to use very violent techniques when the attacker is strongly drunk because a person in such stage is may not able to control his movements or attack very accurately. Every situation is different. This means, that a defender must carefully consider what methods and techniques he or she can use for his / her protection to survive in possible judicial proceeding where the conflict, the participants, and circumstances are evaluated afterwards.

Before acting for self-defense, one should consider the following:

- What facts the defender knows about the attacker, his intentions, and circumstances?
- How would an objective person evaluate the situation and the threat when knowing the facts?
- What an average normal person would do to protect himself?

4 Avoiding confrontations

The first steps in Hosinsul are to understand possible threats and what kind of decisions and measures you should do beforehand to protect yourself of encountering any self-defense situation. I could make an endless list of aspects to consider but here are some examples:

- Do not walk alone during the nighttime.
- Pay attention where you are and where you go, take a safer route if possible.
- Do not make yourself a possible victim with provoking clothing or behavior.
- See and listen to what's happening around you.
- Be aware of your surroundings and especially spaces where you must go alone, e.g., big parking lots or garage, or where there are drunken people, e.g. night clubs and bars.
- A drunken person is an easy victim.
- Using headphones or watching your phone make it difficult you to observe a possible threat.

- If possible, use such shoes and clothes, that make it easier to run or to move if you have to fight.

5 Creating self-confidence

A person facing a threat or danger is under big stress. It's well-known what kind of effects stress has to our body and mind. The breathing and heart rate will become faster, and muscle becomes more stiff degrading our motor skills. The growing level of adrenaline in our body also affects our vision and hearing by lowering our ability to observe what is going on around us. We also lose some of our cognitive abilities. We focus only on the danger in front of us.¹⁷

The more familiar we are with a threatening situation, the lower the stress is. Therefore, it's important to create us confidence to face various attacks. A person with good self-confidence has a better chance to survive. Taekwondo training in general is good for creating self-confidence. When you make physically hard exercises, you do not only train your body but also your mind. Long training sessions increase your endurance and stamina and make you feel confident that you can survive the same kind of physical resistance in real life. In Taekwondo Textbook the ability of spirit-execution is expressed with psychological factors: "do not hesitate, do not halt, and do not get stuck."¹⁸

The technical training is important part of strengthening our mind. We can use participation in poomsae or kyorugi tournament as an example. If you are going to your first ever tournament your performance may be lower than you expect because you don't have any experience of how your skills are working for real. In next tournaments it will be easier as you know what kind of skills are needed for a better performance, you have been training those techniques, and you are mentally prepared to use them. It's very same with the self-defense training. The more we practice the techniques, the more confident we are if we should use those skills in real life. Another reason to work hard with self-defense techniques is that it's the only way to learn to know what techniques are suitable and usable in real-life confrontations. Training with different kind of partners and various attack scenarios in diverse circumstances make us to trust our skills and techniques.

An important part of controlling the stress is to control the negative reactions in our body. A part of our Taekwondo training is exercising the way of breathing. With right kind of breathing, we can reduce our stress not only in fighting situations but also in mentally stressful situations, like in work life. The idea of right breathing is to reduce the heart and respiratory rate and therefore help to find an optimal level of arousal. The ideal heart rate for good performance is between 115 and 145 beats per minute. At this range, complex motor skills, visual, and cognitive reaction speed are at their best. The reduction in the heart rate allows our mind to become more relaxed and controlled and we are then better able to protect ourselves.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Miller, p 57-

¹⁸ Textbook 4, p. 009

¹⁹ Tactical Arts Academy

6 Building up mental awareness

Avoiding conflicts is the best self-defense. However, when one is face-to-face with an attacker, one must be ready to react rapidly and with awareness. In my opinion, it's crucial to teach the students the importance of being aware and practice the skills to observe the self-defense situation from various angles.

What is awareness? Situational awareness is usually defined as “the ability to be aware of and understand one's surroundings, including people, objects, events, and the environment, aiming to predict the actions of others”. According to FBI, there are three factors, that influence the threat level in self-defense situations:

“Human factor

The human dynamic involves the mental, physical, and emotional status of the defender and the attacker. Each individual's level of intoxication, maturity, and stress tolerance, as well as situational attitude, must be taken into consideration.

Environmental factor

This aspect includes familiarity with and condition of the immediate physical environment, including materials and equipment, as well as scope of jurisdiction and control of the surroundings. Spatial and positional dynamics that can affect stress levels also require attention.

Situational factor

Stress levels associated with circumstances, such as time, an event's life-threatening potential, and availability and accuracy of information, must be regarded. Human and environmental issues directly affect this factor.”²⁰

Having a realistic understanding of your self-defense skills is extremely important. As Miller argues, “real-life assaults happen closer, faster, more suddenly, and with more power than most people believe”.²¹ How can we then build up the awareness to our students regarding these factors?

6.1 Human factor

One must practice self-defense techniques with different kind of partners. First, this means trying your techniques with an opponent who is taller or heavier than you. When training with a physically overpowering person, you notice very fast what tactics and techniques are of real use. We must also practice with a partner, that is more fast or skillful than ourselves. Further, it's important to simulate scenarios where the opponent is under influence of alcohol or drugs.

6.2 Environmental factor

Our strength as Taekwondo experts is the dynamic way of moving that we practice in each kyorugi training. On the other hand, this strength turns to weakness, when we must encounter an attack in an environment where the space is restricted and our moving is thus limited. To be aware of the environmental factor we must put our self-defense techniques and tactics under test in various

²⁰ FBI

²¹ Miller, p. 55-57

environments. For example, I can put the defender in a corner or his back against a wall. We can train in a staircase, in a concourse or simulate an attack in small room like a washroom in a night club, bar or inside a tram or metro.

Another aspect being aware of our environment is to take notice of furniture that may restrict our movement, or maybe we can use furniture or other obstacles to help us to plan our escape routes or to force the opponent to move in a disadvantageous position. We must also consider various objects in our environment that may be used as defensive tools against the attacker. For instance, an umbrella may be used as baton, or a tray can work as a protective shield.

6.3 Situational factor

I've described above the importance of self-confidence in threatening encounters. Here I must again underline the control of the stress level. If you have practiced controlling your stress, you can stay calm and can thus be better aware of the environment and the opponent. Competing in Taekwondo tournament is excellent way to practice controlling your mind. When you are alone in poomsae stage, the best presentation is possible only when you are in total control of your mind. It's the same in the last rounds of a kyorugi tournament where a player is physically exhausted, and he's must still be able to fight to win. The competitor must forget the pain, exhaustion, and desperation to win. This is possible with empty mind²².

In Taekwondo self-defense training the situational factor can be practiced by creating circumstances where the student must test his skills under big stress. I can make physically very hard training and start self-defense practice when the students are totally exhausted. Or I can put the students to encounter self-defense situation by surprise so that they couldn't prepare at all. I can also make distraction during the training by making noise or bringing disturbing objects or elements to the training environment. Having for instance a barking dog close by is very disturbing and will make focusing on your opponent difficult.

Rory Miller argues that being hit or kicked by a serious attacker in real-life is very different to the safe sparring in competition or in special sparring in dojang. "Even good fighters often freeze for a second because the attack doesn't feel like training."²³ Safe training of not-freezing is very difficult, but you should at least try it. "The key is to trigger the state of freezing so that you can recognize it. If you use only one method to trigger the state, you will start to adapt to the training method, not to the state."²⁴

7 Levels of force

I've discussed above what the Finnish Penal Code states about the right of self-defense. The powerful kicks are our strength in Taekwondo, and we also practice many punching techniques. Even when used as defensive techniques, both kicks and punches look very violent, and it's for an outside observer of the situation easy to interpret the kicks and punches as attacks afterwards. This is a very critical point, and therefore we must always be able to control and use the right kind

²² In Millers opinion "*Mushin* is very useful. *Mushin* is the concept that your body will do what it needs to do with the conscious mind turned off". Miller p. 58

²³ Miller, p. 57

²⁴ Miller, p. 69

of force when in self-defense situation. In my training program the students are learning to use three different levels of force.

7.1 Releasing Force

Learning to use the releasing force is maybe the most important. This means that the defender doesn't try to hold or hurt the opponent and use mainly blocking techniques and moving for his defense. If the attacker grasps the defender or is holding him, I teach the students to use only so much force as is needed to release oneself from the situation. Taekwondo basic hand techniques can be used very effectively to break away from an attacker's grasp, and in my opinion this kind of use of Taekwondo blocks (makgi) and hits (chiki) gives us much deeper understanding of those techniques.

In traditional karate there are plenty of secret or hidden ways to use basic hand techniques (Bunkai), and some karate teachers are still teaching them. When the original Okinawan karate started to change to more formal form in Japan and the sport-karate started to be the mainframe of training, a lot of information of how to use hand techniques in real fight was disappeared. The background of Taekwondo is in karate and Taekwondo started to become a special Korean martial art only after the second world war. Thus, it's no wonder that using of our hand techniques are not that often taught to be used in bunkai-style. The modern Taekwondo is "a combat sport, which combines the values of an ancient Asian heritage with the values of a global elite sport"²⁵. Even if Taekwondo is now developing into a cultural industry beyond martial arts and sport, we should not totally forget the origin behind our hand techniques.

7.2 Holding Force

Using of holding force is the second level of force the students are taught for self-defense. According to its name, the holding force means that the defender has the skill to hold the attacker for calming down him or for waiting as long as needed for the other people to come for help.

As Taekwondo is not hapkido or jujutsu, there used to be no holding technics in the selection of our basic technics. Accordingly, we don't focus very much on holding force. As some people train Taekwondo also for self-defense purposes, it's necessary to teach those students some techniques that can be used to safely control the attacker if necessary. I'm glad to notice that there are now examples of holding techniques in the latest Textbook²⁶

7.3 Destructive Force

The destructive force is the third and last level we are discussing here. When the situation really is life threatening or the defender is physically much weaker than the attacker, the destructive force may be used. However, in these situations you can use only so much force that is absolutely necessary to stop the attacker to violate the defender. Use of the destructive force means that your intension is to cause a severe injury to the opponent.

When considering the Taekwondo techniques usable for destructive effect, we are not short of them. Destructive techniques include all punches (jirugi), hits (chiki) and kicks (chagi). Also, almost all blocks (makgi) can be used to for destructive purposes. For instance, momtongmakgi can be

²⁵ WT

²⁶ See Textbook 4 Chapter 3

used for breaking the opponent's arm or for causing serious pain by hitting the opponent to the ears. We must nevertheless notice that unlike law enforcement officers, Taekwondo practitioners are not legally entitled to use the same kind of destructive force the police can use. For instance, for civilians it's not allowed to carry a baton or pepper spray in Finland, not even for self-defense purposes.

8 Movements and positioning

It's a well-known principle that the best self-defense is to run away as long as it's possible. When withdrawal or escape is not a choice, one has various alternatives regarding his positioning and tactical moving. One of the great advantages a Taekwondoin has in fighting, is our skills in dynamic moving. Compared to many other traditional martial arts, for instance karate, a Taekwondo practitioner has learned to make rapid steps back and forth, change sides, and make all kind of bluffing moves to confuse the opponent, and then attack fast like a lightning to win a point in kyorugi. Whenever possible, one should use this advantage also in self-defense situations.

Another important principle we learn in kyorugi is to keep the center of the space. In self-defense situations it means that you must avoid staying in corners and try to move in the center of a room instead of being right next to a wall where the moving opportunities are more restricted. It should be kept in mind also that "one of the most common and artificial aspects of modern martial arts training is that self-defense drills are practiced at an optimum distance where the attacker must take at least a half step to contact."²⁷ Unlike training situations, on many real-life occasions there are not enough space or distance for kyorugi-like steps or bluffing moves. That's why choosing right angles is very important. The basic rule is to try to use 45 degrees angle whenever possible. When you make the block and/or move in 45 degrees angle, you are not straight in front of the attack and the block doesn't need so much force as the attacking move can be directed diagonally away from the target.

It's also crucial to train positioning so that the defender can secure his position on a weak side of the attacker. Usually this means moving to the outside of the attacker's punching or grasping hand. When the defender is outside, it's much more difficult for the attacker continue his attack as his first arm is between the opponents. Whenever possible, the best is if the defender can move so that he ends up to the backside of the opponent.

How to exercise moving and positioning for self-defense? On the old days one-step-sparring (hanbon kyorugi) or three-step-sparring were used for describing possible defense actions. In my opinion, one-step-sparring and three-step-sparring are suitable for training accuracy, reaction, distance etc. but they don't really serve well for real-life defense scenarios. Instead, the best way to exercise angles, steps and using hand technics is to play like you were in real life situation on the street, in a bar or maybe inside a metro etc. There are no real attackers who are coming to you with an apkubi!

It's a pleasure to notice that there are many pages of self-defense sparring in 2022 edition of the Taekwondo Textbook. "The original form of sparring was similar to a practical fight where the use of hands and legs was freely allowed. Simultaneously, this self-defense sparring technique has also

²⁷ Miller, p. 55

progressed in line with the flow of modern martial arts, which have been evolving by combining the strengths of each form of martial arts.”²⁸ For Taekwondo to be interesting choice to the people looking for self-defense skills it’s necessary that modern taekwondo also offers tools that are practical in real life. Or on the words of Kukkiwon President Lee, Dong Sup: “It’s not just about mastering forms for rank and degree certification. It’s necessary to learn and master techniques that can be used in real situations.”²⁹

9 Examples for defending a grasp

As one starts training Taekwondo, he or she will learn numerous basic hand techniques, blocks, punches and strikes. On the basic level, a block is just a block, and strike is just a strike. For instance, a momtongmakgi is an inward middle section block.

On the more advanced level the students start to understand that a defense can also be used as an offense, a block can be performed as a strike or punch. A simple example is to use a momtongmakgi for hitting the opponent with your arm or with the hammer-fist (mejumeok). Furthermore, there are numerous explanations how blocks in Taekwondo poomsae serve as practical applications. For example, in Taeguk 5 Jang one may use a combination of momtongmakgo momtongmakgi to break the opponent’s elbow³⁰. Or the areamakgi can be used as a strike to the groin.³¹ Even if not all combinations in Poomsaes are not realistic, the effective use of biomechanics we learn with Poomsae can be extremely functional in real life.³²

When a student achieves the expert level, I teach them to understand that a basic block can be used as a biomechanical tool to break away from an attacker’s grasp. Some of my inspiration comes from Rick Clark, who has presented 75 different ways of using down blocks.³³ In this section, I will present few practical examples of using taekwondo hand techniques to break away from a grasp. Note also that it might be necessary to make an “atemi” before performing the defensive technique.

²⁸ Textbook 4, p. 012

²⁹ Bulletin 3, “Combat Taekwondo – A Path Back to Practicality”, p. 27

³⁰ KTA, p. 176

³¹ Clark, p. 61

³² Miller, p. 115

³³ See Clark

9.1 The opponent grasps your inner wrist

Attack: The opponent grasps your inner right wrist.

Note: Your situation is not very vulnerable as the opponents are in closed position. However, you must be aware of not losing your balance if the attacker tries to pull you.



Defense: Make a hansonnal bakkatmakgi rotating your hand outside the grasping hand and step in 45 degrees angle to the outside of the grasping arm at the same time. Grasp the opponent's wrist with your right hand and strike the with a left momtongmakgi the opponent's arm right above the elbow.

You may continue the defense action with various ways: E.g strike with a right mejumeok bakkatchigi to the ear, strike with a right mok sonnal anchigi to the neck, strike a deung jumeok anchigi to the neck and continue wrapping the opponent's neck with a triangle choke.

Depending on the situation you can also break the opponent's elbow with the first strike of a momtongmakgi, or you can take the opponent down by press joint lock (nulleokkeogi)³⁴.



³⁴ See also Textbook 2, p. 211

9.2 The opponent grasps your outer wrist

Attack: The opponent grasps your outer right wrist.

Note: This is a dangerous situation because you are in a vulnerable position where the opponent may try to punch you with his right hand.



Defense: Be aware of the attacker's right-hand punch and be ready to block it with a left eolgul bakkatmakgi or palkkumchi ollyeochigi.



Use the araemakgi in reverse order: First push your hand outward to mislead the opponent, and then pull your hand very fast to your left shoulder line by taking a small step backwards with your left leg to make more distance to the opponent.

Continue right away with and right mejumeok bakkatchigi or deungjumeok bakkatchigi to the face of the opponent. Another option is to strike with hansonnal bakkatchigi to the neck.

With the distance it's difficult to the opponent to punch effectively with his right hand.

You may continue by moving backwards away from the grasping distance, or e.g., strike the opponent with a left batangson anchigi to the ear or left or right eolgul palkkumuchi dollyeochigi to the temple. It's also easy to proceed with a take down.



9.3 The opponent grasps your collar

Attack: The opponent grasps your collar with his left hand.

Note: This is a dangerous situation because you are in a vulnerable position where the opponent may try to punch you with his right hand.



Defense: Be aware of the attacker's right-hand punch and be ready to block it with a left eolgul bakkatmakgi or palkkumchi ollyeochigi. Make a right hand batangson nulleomakgi to bend the opponent's grasping arm.

Continue with a left ageumson apchigi. Pressing the opponent's grasping arm to your chest, grasp the opponent's throat with your left hand and put him out of balance pushing him diagonally back and downwards.

Depending on your position you may use your left leg to make the take-down easier. Another option is to strike with a batangson teokchigi and bend the opponent's head back and downwards when performing the take-down.



9.4 The opponent grasps your collar with two hands

Attack: The opponent grasps your collar with his both hands.

Note: This is a quite safe situation because the opponent is not ready to punch. However, you must be aware of the opponent's possible headbutt.



Defense: Grasp the opponents left arm from below to prevent him go backwards, or you may use a left batangson nulleomakgi for the same purpose as described in 9.3 above.



Then strike with a right kupinsonmok ollyeoteokchigi to the chin of the opponent.

Follow with pressing a two finger (hook mound sesonkkeut jireugi) to the suprasternal fossa (Tiantu).



You may continue with a take-down using your right batangson teokchigi by bending the opponent's head backwards. An effective option is to use a spread hand to grasp the opponent's face thus making the situation him very uncomfortable.

9.5 The opponent grasps your upraised wrists with two hands

Attack: You have raised your hands to the basic defense posture. The opponent grasps your both wrists.

Note: Your situation is not very vulnerable as the opponent can't use neither of his hands to punch you. Just be aware of possible front or low kicks.



Defense: Break the opponent's grasp with a gawimakgi, the left arm doing the araemakgi and right doing the anpalmok bakkanmakgi.

Tip: With reference to Taegeuk 7 Jang you may make two gawimakgi to mislead your opponent of your intention.

Step to 45 degrees angle to the outside of the opponent and make simultaneously a left hansonalmakgi by rotating your arm counterclockwise under the left arm of the opponent.



Grasp the opponent's left wrist with your left hand and push. Make simultaneously your right wrist free of the opponent's grasp with an anpalmokmakgi and proceed with nulleokkeogi by pressing the opponent down his elbow joint firmly locked.

10 Afterwork

When the defensive action is over you may escape to prevent additional attacks, especially if you find that the attacker's mindset is still aggressive. If this is not the case and the attacker is calmed down or maybe controlled by other persons, you may do some actions to secure your status in a possible future investigation. You may take a photo of the assailant, gather the phone numbers of the observers, or you can even interview them and save the statements in your phone. If you are injured, it's important to visit a hospital as soon as possible for documenting the injuries by the medical personnel. You might make a report by the police also, especially if the attack was severe of its nature. Contacting your insurance company is advisable in case of an injury or if your garment were torn.

11 Summary

The understanding of the historical background and true nature of Taekwondo has changed over the years. Even if the public image of modern Taekwondo is strongly characterized as Olympic combat sport or as artistic presentation of technical performance in poomsae competition, the essence of Taekwondo are the techniques and skills one can use to defend oneself in a real life.

In the 2022 edition of the Taekwondo Textbook, Kukkiwon has made excellent work emphasizing the self-defense aspect of sparring as one of the key skills in modern Taekwondo. "In Taekwondo, the term sparring means a training system that enables people to practically defend themselves or subdue the opponent in dangerous situations using Taekwondo techniques".³⁵ In the 4th part of the Textbook there are many good examples and pre-arranged training methods for using Taekwondo techniques for self-defense.

In this thesis, I have presented some practical ways to use Taekwondo basic hand techniques when the opponent is grasping you. However, self-defense is not only techniques, but also much more. For protecting yourself you must understand the legal environment you are living in, and you must have the complete knowledge of various aspects of protective measures and skills applicable before any physical defense action has taken place. I have described these aspects from a point of view of a person living in Finland.

For the end it's necessary to emphasize, that even if Taekwondo skills can be used for self-defense, "a desirable Taekwondo practitioner must be courteous and know how to control themselves, how to avoid dangerous situations, and not to use Taekwondo power recklessly".³⁶ A skilled Taekwondo practitioner lives in harmony with his surroundings being still able to defend himself bare-handed effectively.

³⁵ Textbook 4, p. 004

³⁶ Textbook 1, p. 124

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