

My Chayon Ryu Understanding

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Chayon Ryu, "The Natural Way," martial arts was developed by Grandmaster Kim Soo over many decades of training and study. But in another sense, the development of Chayon Ryu started decades before our present-day grandmaster was born.

It began with the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. "Numerous Japanese came to Korea to farm and to fish its bountiful waters, while high taxes and fixed crop prices forced thousands of Korean farmers to move to Manchuria or relocate to Japan as laborers."¹ How is it that the tragedy of many became the stimulus for the origins of what today we call Chayon Ryu? Yoon Young-Hyun (grandfather to Yoon Byung-In) was not a farmer. He was a member of the noble class, but as he had been pushed out of his government position by the arrival of the Japanese, he also chose to take his family to Manchuria. In 1920 Yoon Byun-In was born; he grew up in Manchuria, and there he learned Chu'an Fa from a Mongolian master. As a young adult, Yoon Byung-In went to university in Japan to study colonial agriculture, where he met and studied with Kanken Toyama, the founder of Shudokan Karate. Much more has been written about the relationship between Yoon and Toyama, which I will not repeat here.²

At the end of WWII, Yoon Byung-In moved to Seoul, Korea, where he taught Chu'an Fa and Shudokan Karate at the YMCA in a unified curriculum called Kwon Beop. Although his chosen path as a martial arts instructor was cut short by the Korean War, three of his highest ranking students, Lee Nam-Sok, Hong Jong-Pyo and Park Chul-Hee, continued his legacy by teaching what they had learned from him, and it was from these three faithful men that our present-day Grandmaster, Kim Pyung-Soo, learned the roots and foundation of the Chayon Ryu system.

It is in the life of Grandmaster Kim Soo, that I once again see a great paradox of life. He has spoken openly to Darlene Vaughan Saunders³ about how difficult his childhood was, between disharmony in the household and the upheavals of the country during the Korean war; even being advanced in school because of good grades turned out to be a disadvantage, because suddenly his classmates were bigger than him and they would beat him up on a regular basis. He spoke about how this affected deeply his self-confidence, and that it was martial arts that saved his life. If he had had a more peaceful, tranquil life growing up, would we have Chayon Ryu as we know it today? We cannot know. What we do know is that, partially out of gratitude for what he received, Grandmaster Kim Soo dedicated the rest of his life to teaching the martial arts.

Several other events took place in the life of Grandmaster Kim Soo which influenced the shaping of Chayon Ryu into what it is today. While Grandmaster⁴ was enthusiastically learning as much as he could about a broad range of martial arts, including Judo and Hapkido, as preparation for teaching at an international level, the political forces in Korea were aspiring to narrow all martial arts in Korea into one standardized style that would be identified with the Korean nation: Taekwondo.

This is another event in history which at the same time baffles me and at the same time makes perfect sense on a human level. I see it like the earliest immigrants from Europe who came to America for religious freedom and then proceeded to set up their own governing bodies intolerant of any religion but their own. How could they have been expected to do anything

different? That was the only model of government they knew. Likewise Korea, after obtaining freedom from Japanese oppression, set up a government that still did not allow freedom of expression for the vast majority of people. Martial arts instructors who agreed to teach only Taekwondo were rewarded with well-paying positions, and all others were sidelined and marginalized.

Grandmaster Kim Soo realized that to continue teaching the legacy of Grandmaster Yoon Byung-In and to preserve the traditional forms of Chu'an Fa and Shudokan Karate, he would have to leave Korea. He could have gone anywhere in the world. He already had learned Russian, Spanish and English in addition to his native Korean. He chose to come to the USA, and for that decision, there are many people, including myself, who remain forever grateful.

The other event that created change to make Chayon Ryu what it is today occurred on a personal level; Grandmaster Kim Soo began to develop health problems after many years of training. The harder he trained, the worse his health became. As he puzzled over how people who led sedentary lives could have better health than him, he came to the realization that it was improper training that was causing the problem, and so he began to modify the way techniques were performed. He studied the natural body movements of human beings, and modified techniques to bring them into alignment with what is natural for the human body, such as swinging the arms in a natural, running movement when doing the front kick and a similar equal/opposite arm movement for the roundhouse kick. He started to move the entire body as one unit when body shifting, turn the supporting foot when kicking, and to focus on breathing through techniques. By making these changes, he was able to heal his body. Thus out of his severe pain, came improvements in training methods from which all practitioners of Chayon Ryu benefit today. This is what makes Chayon Ryu truly, "The Natural Way."

Forms came to emphasize balance, rhythm and timing instead of simply speed and power. When I first started studying Chayon Ryu, I knew only one way to practice forms—hard and fast. Now I know that there are three distinct ways to practice forms, depending on what result I am seeking.⁵ The combat way focuses on speed and power; however since we no longer have as our goal the honor of dying in battle for our monarch or emperor, it is healthier to practice in this way only occasionally. The regular way emphasizes balance, rhythm, timing and proper breathing. In this way, we learn to defeat not only external enemies, but also internal enemies such as depression, worry, stress, anger, etc. I had an insight about what this might look like one morning while practicing forms and feeling a huge level of ennui. I realized that my imaginary enemies didn't have to be people—they could be whatever negative emotion I was trying to overcome. So I punched and kicked and shouted my kihops at my own lassitude. The third way to practice forms is slowly, as in Tai Chi. Grandmaster created a form specifically for this purpose, Jang Su Hyung or Longevity Form, (formerly called Dahn Jon Ho Hub Il Jeol, or Breathing Form), but any of the forms can be practiced in this way. It is utilized when one is sick, and also makes a good cool down at the end of a hard workout.

Chayon Ryu preserves many ancient forms of the traditional martial arts—forms that are being lost in today's world. The ancient Chu'an Fa masters of China did not have the concept of sparring⁶; their art was deadly, and so they could not practice it on others. They used forms instead to practice their techniques at full power against imaginary enemies. As a student of Chayon Ryu, I consider myself to be a repository of these ancient forms, and I consider it my duty to pass it on to the next generation, so they will not be lost forever.

Lining the walls of the Chayon Ryu World Headquarters in Houston, Texas are dozens, perhaps hundreds of trophies. However, Grandmaster Kim Soo does not encourage participation in tournaments. Another paradox? Grandmaster relates that when he first came to the USA, he participated in many tournaments in order to make a name for himself, but he became disillusioned when he saw that often the best fighters did not win. Those who did win trophies would frequently develop an unhealthy pride, thinking they were the best, when often it was really because they knew the judges. He saw that the people organizing the tournaments were motivated by the money they could make, and the fighting itself was really just entertainment for the crowds who came to watch. In fact, Grandmaster says that we actually learn more when we lose, so that the real winners are not the ones who go home with trophies. Grandmaster does not forbid participating in tournaments and allows his students to do so if they desire, but he wants us to understand the limitations of tournament fighting.

Chayon Ryu is also known as a lifestyle martial arts. Students of all ages are accepted—you do not have to be in the prime of life to begin studying Chayon Ryu. Since changing the training methods for the goal of health and longevity, a Chayon Ryu practitioner can continue to practice for his or her entire life. There is really never a reason to stop training. Continuing to train in Chayon Ryu will help a person to live a longer, healthier life. Grandmaster is now over 75 years old and continues to train and teach regularly. Many of his students, likewise, have been training for more than 30-40 years and continue to do so.

And no matter how short or long one has been training, there is always more to learn. Grandmaster has said that after training for over 50 years, he is still learning. This is made possible by practicing meditation sincerely before each training session to empty the mind (“*Mu Nyom Mu Sang* – ‘Empty your mind, empty your thoughts’⁷”), which then allows room for new knowledge, new insights.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of practicing Chayon Ryu martial arts is something invisible to the average person—the internal change it brings about in its practitioner. Confidence, self-esteem, persistence and a clean conscience come as a result of sincere training. We wear our values on our uniforms; the system patch has a drawing of bamboo, representing honesty, humility, sincerity, purity and loyalty. It has Chinese characters Nam (enlightenment) and In (patience), both preceded by the character for mind, teaching us that these characteristics can be found inside of each of us⁸ (This has been especially important for me to learn, wanting to absorb the wisdom and knowledge of our Chayon Ryu masters, but living far away in South America.). The bottom-heavy silhouette of the school patch is a visual representation of the Korean saying, Chil Jeon Pal Kee, “seven times to battle, eight times ready.”^{8,9} Values are also instilled by reciting the Dojang Hun¹⁰ twice in every class. Even more importantly, these values are modeled by higher ranking students for the lower ranks to learn from. Respect for others, always striving to be better (even when we know we will never reach perfection), honesty, and a cheerful attitude are characteristics I see in all of the highest ranking students.

In summary, Chayon Ryu is a system, more than just its component parts of Taekwondo, Karate, Chu’an Fa, Hapkido and Judo; it is “beyond styles.”¹¹ It is a martial art, but it is also a philosophy for living, a way of approaching any conflict or difficulty in life, by following basic principles that can be applied to any situation. Chayon Ryu is also a manifestation of the life and spirit of a remarkable man. Without Grandmaster Kim Soo, there would be no Chayon Ryu. I can envision his spirit living on in the lives and the practice of Chayon Ryu students for generations to come.

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