



## THE MEANING OF TAE GEUK

**TAE GEUK** (literally *Tae* - 'largeness' and *Geuk* - 'eternity') is the name given to the red and blue circle on the Korean flag ([Taegukki](#)). *Tae Geuk* represents the unity of opposites that composes the cosmos. Its characteristics are often described as pacifism, unity, creative spirit, future spirit, eternity, and *Um* and *Yang* (*Yin* and *Yang* in Chinese). *Um* (earth, female - the blue lower half of the circle) and *Yang* (heaven, male - the red upper half) are themselves opposites in delicate balance. Remember that each is dependent upon the other: without ugliness there is no beauty; without night there is no day; without cold there is no hot; without winter there is no summer. By maintaining the balance and harmony of these opposing forces, characteristics and elements in everyday life, we experience the *Do* (or *Tao* in Chinese) that is at the heart of our chosen martial art: Taekwondo.

There are eight *Tae Geuk Poomse*, or forms (perhaps better known under their Japanese name of *Kata*), and each is represented by a different *Gwe*, or theory (which explains the derivation of the term *Palgwe*, meaning eight theories, which was the name for the original Taekwondo poomse). In addition to its *Gwe*, every poomse also has an associated Chinese trigram drawn from the *I Ching* (the Chinese Book of Changes). In the trigrams, the straight lines represent *Yang*, or male, and the broken lines represent *Um*, or female.



### **TAE GEUK #1 - IL JANG: KEON/Heaven**

The first *Tae Geuk* poomse is the Heaven/Universe form. The associated trigram represents *Yang*, or male/positive energy. The concept behind the form is that of the universe giving birth to the cycle of life. The Taekwondoist starts his or her journey as a White Belt, and the first part of the journey - the end of the first cycle - comes with the attainment of a Black Belt. As the *Tao* reminds us, with an end comes a new beginning. Just as night becomes day, the Taekwondoist begins anew as a Black Belt. Thus does the life cycle of the martial artist reflect the cycle of life itself.



### **TAE GEUK #2 - E JANG: TAE/Strength of Mind**

The underlying concept of *Tae* is external gentleness belying internal strength, often characterised by the maxim of the iron fist in the velvet glove. As our confidence and power increase, we paradoxically become more calm, gentle and reasonable. Strength of mind lies behind the core [Taekwondo tenet](#) of indomitable spirit.



### **TAE GEUK #3 - SAM JANG: RI/Fire**

*Ri*, the symbol for the third *Tae Geuk* form, means fire, sun and light. Literally, the sun contains immense energy, and of course intensity - one of the key components of Taekwondo practice. Metaphorically, fire represents the passion of a martial artist at this advanced beginner stage. There are block/punch and block/kick combinations that require bursts of energy and coordination as defense becomes counter-attack



### **TAE GEUK #4 - SA JANG: JIN/Thunder**

The fourth poomse is represented by thunder, which is one of the most powerful forces of nature. This form is a major step forward for the Taekwondoist, as he/she moves from beginner to intermediate status, and it must be performed with grace and power. Because the techniques are now much more technically challenging, mastery of *Tae Geuk Sa Jang* demands both courage and perseverance from the practitioner.



### **TAE GEUK #5 - O JANG: SEON/Wind**

The wind form encapsulates one of the most important concepts for the advancing martial artist. Wind can be a gentle breeze which caresses everything it touches, yet as it grows in intensity it gains power and destructive force. If it reaches hurricane force it destroys everything in its path. The true martial artist understands that it is necessary to harness this paradoxical strength and weakness: the stronger and more powerful we become through our Taekwondo training, the more peaceful and calm we should become. This is the essence of the *Tao* - the Way.



### **TAE GEUK #6 - YUK JANG: KAM/Water**

Water, which quietly carves out canyons and mountains, reflects the concept of a flexible mind and a flexible body. Like anything in nature, we must remain flexible if we are to survive. Water teaches us that explosive force and power is not the only way, and by now you should understand the importance of seeking the path of least resistance. The power of water mirrors one of Taekwondo's core values: indomitable spirit. Water can be still, clear, calm and reflective, and as we train we seek these characteristics for our minds. Yet water also retains ultimate flexibility and flowing power, and these are characteristics we seek for our bodies.



### **TAE GEUK #7 - CHIL JANG: KAN/Mountain**

Mountains are the most majestic expressions of our natural environment, and they clearly represent permanence, wisdom, strength, spirit, stability and solidity. Once again, we are faced with a paradox, for *Tae Geuk Chil Jang* requires the demonstration of all these characteristics - particularly stability - in the long, low and powerful forward stances, and even in the graceful but seemingly weak and unstable cross stance and tiger stance. *Chil Jang* is a difficult form which requires mental and physical effort and determination.



## **TAE GEUK #8 - PAL JANG: KON/Earth**

*Kon* means earth, and the associated trigram (three broken lines) is *um/yin*. Earth provides us with birth, and sustains us in life, and all lives must return to where they begin - earth. Yet the circle of life also provides renewal and rebirth. Thus our status as colored belts begins with *Yang*, and ends with *Yin*, only for us to be reborn as Black Belts - a new morning, a new day, a new season, a new challenge. Upon finishing our basic training we face new challenges and are beginners once more, evolving from strong, proud and dignified Gups into humble, honest and eager Dans.

In performing Tae Geuk Pal Jang we must demonstrate everything that we have learned to date: twisting, turning power; controlled breathing; relaxed internal energy; strong, confident kihaps; fluid movement; bodily control; balance and coordination. Pal Jang should be grand and dramatic.

## **POOMSE KORYO**

Koryo, officially the first black belt form, is now required of Danbo students when they test for black belt. Koryo, the name of the dynasty (AD 918-1392) born of the successful wars in which the Hwa Rang of Silla ultimately unified the three kingdoms into one nation, is also the derivation of the English word Korea. Poomse Koryo is a celebration of the courage and fortitude of the early Korean people, who defeated the rampaging Mongolian army which otherwise swept across most of Asia. The line of direction of Poomse Koryo draws the character for *Sa*, meaning scholar.

## **POOMSE KEUMGANG**

Keumgang means 'too strong to be broken', or 'diamond'. The movements of Poomse Keumgang are intended to be as beautiful as the Keumgang-san (the name of a North Korean mountain range) and as strong as Keumgang-seok (diamond). The line of direction of Poomse Keumgang draws the Chinese character for 'mountain.'

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF POOMSE?**

According to Grand Master Sang H. Kim, "the keys in practicing Tae Geuk poomse are in managing the internal and external energy properly, and timing - performing with adequate breath, speed and power control. Special attention must be given to the transitional techniques, by shifting the centre of gravity perpendicular to the ground, in order not to lose bodily balance. Each technique must be performed with complete focus and dynamic energy.

The overall purpose of Poomse is to control the breathing, to be synchronized with actions, and to maintain the center of gravity and balance while executing techniques requiring great speed.

Practice forms with intensity and focus as if defending against multiple attackers. Practicing forms helps develop and improve focus and concentration, proper technique, balance, speed, power, creativity, and artistic expression."

## THAT CHAMIONSHIP FORM

Reproduced from *Taekwondo: The State of the Art* by Master Sung Chul Whang and Master Jun Chul Whang, published by Broadway Books, New York.

*[Note: although this is targetted at students who compete in tournaments, it contains advice that is vital for anyone who practices Taekwondo forms - Master Pruter]*

The following information outlines the most common problem areas in forms. If you master the following criteria, you will have a championship form.

- Practice appropriate ring etiquette.
- Turn your head first before changing directions in your form.
- Break or change speed from movement to movement.
- Start and end in the same spot and perform within the boundaries of the ring.
- Yell loudly at the appropriate moment to demonstrate your confidence and exploit the power of the technique.
- When performing hand techniques, use both hands. For example, during lower blocks, one arm is blocking while the other arm is chambering to the side. These are called simultaneous hand movements.
- Maintain tight fists when punching or blocking.
- Tuck thumbs when performing knife hand attacks or blocks.
- When in a front stance, keep the heel of the back foot down and your back straight.
- Do not take any extra steps when throwing kicks. Many times form practitioners take a small step with the front leg before executing a back leg kick.
- Don't forget to breathe! Exhale when throwing a technique.
- Stay focused and practice hard!

