

# THE TRUTH ABOUT PYONG AHN HYUNGS

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### PYONG AHN HYUNG by John Hancock

Among the striking arts, such as Karate, Tae Kwon Do, or Tang Soo Do, the forms (hyung) are elaborate series of movement (technique) linked together which are performed solo, incorporating rhythm, points of focus and patterns of repetition. A form performed with a partner which may include grappling or throwing is most often classified as Il Soo Sik Dae Ryun (one step fighting) or Ho Shin Sool (Self Defense technique). The Pyong Ahn Hyung are a perfect example of a group of forms with great diversity . This series is the most common group of forms used world wide today. Hundreds of styles use a version of these forms .

If two hard style martial artist from differing schools are placed in seperate rooms and asked to perform any five intermediate forms they know, both will usually show you versions of at least three of the same Pyong Ahn forms. All the while, as great as their differences might be, each would be easily recognizable as a Pyong Ahn series form.

Tang Soo Do tradition has always held that Grandmaster Hwang Kee, founder of the Moo Duk Kwan, brought these forms to Korea from China where he had studied in his youth. Most Tang Soo Do Masters will tell you, “Hwang Kee bring Pyong Ahn Hyung back from China,” The Grandmaster’s son himself, Hwang Hyun Chul, Director of the United States Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation (Springfield, NJ), has stated, “My father bring the forms back from China.” As much as any of these masters may wish to convince you of this fact, they should not...because it is not true.

The Pyong Ahn forms are not Chinese...they’re Okinawan in origin. The fact that this is common knowledge to students of Japanese and Okinawan Karate had led to a good number of insults and more than one rumor that Hwang Kee had traveled to Japan or Okinawa and studied the forms. One myth even claim’s Hwang Kee spent a few months on Okinawa studying Shorin-ryu and Goju-ryu Karate. Another states that the Pyong Ahn series were created by both Hwang Kee and Funakoshi Ginchen (the founder of Shoto Kan Karate). The story goes ‘Funakoshi and Hwang traveled to China where they studied Chinese martial arts. Together, they created the Pyong Ahn forms. Each then returned to his respective country and began teaching his own version’. Stories such as this bring mild amusement in their most benign form, and do a great deal of damage to the credibility of Tang Soo Do masters at their worst.

A simple check of facts can quickly show how great a fallacy the story is. While Hwang Kee did travel to China, there is no evidence he and Funakoshi were traveling companions. This is easily denounced by the fact Funakoshi never traveled to China. He was an Okinawan who relocated to Japan where he lived out his life. Lastly, Hwang and Funakoshi were not contemporaries in the sense the story implies. Funakoshi was born in 1868. In 1927, he relocated to Japan where he remained until his death in 1957 (Funakoshi, 1975). Hwang Kee was born in 1914 just north of Seoul, Korea. In 1935, following completion of High School, Hwang traveled to China as part of his job, and remained until 1937 (Hwang, 1995).

If you do the math you will see that Funakoshi was 46 years old when Hwang was born. By the time Hwang left for China, Funakoshi was 67 years old, while Hwang was only 21. Unless the Japanese Empire regularly sent senior citizens into hostile occupied areas, it isn’t at all likely Hwang and

Funakoshi even ever shared the same train. Contemporaries...not! Nonetheless, some rumors have perpetuated that Hwang Kee studied from Funakoshi at the Shoto-Kan. However, no evidence has ever surfaced that Hwang and Funakoshi ever trained together, nor even ever met one another. Pyong Ahn is the Korean pronunciation for the Chinese characters associated with this series. The forms were first created in 1901 by Itosu Yasutsune, a Shorin-ryu Karate master on Okinawa.

The Okinawan dialect pronounces these characters 'Pin An'. The study of Karate was still a secret practice during Itosu's early life. Dojo (martial art schools) were no more than small groups of initiates who carried out their practice discretely and in private. The training was typically brutal and the curriculum focused on forms training and its application in prearranged sparring sequences .

Itosu himself was a school teacher and he recognized in Karate a method by which Okinawan youth could strengthen their bodies while building good characters. Itosu, however, did not believe that young people should be taught the secrets of Karate with its potentially fatal uses until they had successfully proven themselves. Therefore, he set out to create a style of Karate that could be easily instructed and learned. His brainchildren were the Pinan Kata which were created by combination of two older forms, Kushanku (Korean: Kong Sang Koon) and Chiang Nan (Korean: Jae Nam) (or, at least, that is the oral history) .

A total of five forms were created and introduced into the Okinawan public schools as instruction for children at the elementary school level. From 1905 to 1909, one form was introduced each year. Itosu, in time, would teach his art to another Okinawan, Funakoshi Ginchen, who eventually would prove to be a significant figure in the migration and modernization of Karate. Funakoshi was destined to travel to Japan and teach a version of the Pinan forms and to eventually rename them Heian.

Other former students of Itosu, such as Mabuni Kenwa (founder of Shito-ryu) , would also relocate to Japan and teach versions of the Pinan Kata. This series eventually would make its way into Korea through Koreans who studied in Japan, such as Lee Won Kuk (Chung Do Kwan), Choi Hong Hi (Oh Do Kwan), Yoon Byung In (Chang Moo Kwan), and Ho Byung Jik (Song Moo Kwan). In 1978, Hwang Kee published Tang Soo Do (Soo Bahk Do). On page 372 of this book, Hwang elaborates on the Pyong Ahn Hyung as follows:

**Originally, this form was called 'Jae Nam' Approximately 100 years ago an Okinawan Master, Mr. Idos, reorganized the Jae Nam form into a form closely resembling the present Pyong Ahn forms...**

In his latest book, The History of Moo Duk Kwan (1995), which is available through the United States Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation, Hwang Kee states on pages 15 and 16 that his knowledge and understanding of the majority of forms taught within Tang Soo Do, including the Pyong Ahn Hyung, came through reading and studying Japanese books on Okinawan Karate. Hwang discovered these books in the Library of the train station in Seoul where he worked in 1939 (Hwang, 1995).

We can only speculate as to which books these were, but it is known that Funakoshi and others published books on Karate as far back as 1922. While the above information was withheld for 50 years, the clue could always be found within the forms themselves. It has been known for many years that the Karate-Ka in Japan switched the order of the first two forms from their original. Hence, anyone who trains in a traditional Okinawan school have the original order, while those that trace lineage through a Japanese school have Pinan No. 2 as their version of Pinan No. 1, and vice versa. Tang Soo Do practitioners need to take note here as their order is the same as used by the Japanese

schools. In the late 1960's, Bruce Lee started a revolution in the martial arts community. Lee felt that forms had out-lived their usefulness as a training and teaching tool. A theme that has been occasionally echoed by a good number of recognized experts within this country. As so very few people questioned the meaning behind forms or examined the forms for meaning through historical context, it is easy to understand how Lee's premise appeared sound. Virtually no one had but a mere basic understanding of the forms, either historically or functionally.

A great majority of schools still teach only the most rudimentary explanation for the movements within these patterns. Some are just plain untrue and potentially dangerous to the user. Even Asian teachers often expound on applications of forms that simply are not logical or practical. We frequently assume that because a teacher is of Asian heritage he automatically knows deep secrets to the arts. Shiroma Shinpan (Shito-Ryu) "...often admitted to not knowing the technical functions of certain movements and hand forms in the Katas and would quite blankly state that Itosu (Shorin-ryu master and creator of the Pinan Kata) had not known the functions either, merely explaining that they were for 'show'" (Bishop, Okinawan Karate, 1989).

Most schools still utilize forms as a criteria for evaluating a students progress for rank. Forms are not simply static executions of individual techniques but compilations of inter-connected and related movements within acceptable standards of deviation. The execution against a living, breathing, moving and aggressive opponent requires variance and adaptation within parameters that still retain the overall pattern, giving the motions recognizable continuity, or form.

In the early part of the previous decade, an Okinawan Kempo master named Oyata Seiyu (Independence, MO) began to gain attention when word got out he was teaching nerve strikes. What was so intriguing was not just Oyata's skill, but that he was able to show how these strikes are hidden within the classical forms. Oyata went further to explain how all forms are more than simple combinations of blocks and strikes, but are also traps, joint locks and sequences of accupoint manipulations. George Dillman (Reading, PA) studied for a time with Oyata then conducted his own research that led him to go public in the late 1980's and early 1990's espousing his own interpretations of the classical forms.

When Master Itosu created the Pinan Kata in 1901, he essentially combined what was considered as two distinct martial art styles into a third and new style. In that day, Kara Te was composed of many styles, each represented by a Kata which was the art itself. Pinan was intended to be an encompassing art that could stand on its own merits. It was the art of 'peace and confidence'. Through its study you could attain this serene state of being. In 1994, Terence Dukes (aka Shifu Nagaboshi Tomio), a Buddhist monk and teacher states in his book, *The Bodhisattva Warriors*, that the forms are an outgrowth of ancient Buddhist doctrine concerning the Five Elements and their relationship to increasing accomplishment of psychological and spiritual evolutions.

Accordingly, the form was designed in five parts, each relating to an elemental level, which were studied over a 15 year period. "This series of Hsing (forms) seem to have been preserved in China for many years, but in the Tang Dynasty was renamed the Ping An (peaceful equanimity) Hsing." "A much later Ryukuan student of Chuan Fa (Kempo) named Itosu (Chinese: yi Tsu) mentions studying a set of Ping An Hsing under the Chinese esoteric monk, Li Tsun San (Japanese: Rij unsan) in the late 1800's" (Dukes,1994). In the book, *Okinawan Karate* (1989), historian Mark Bishop relates that Itosu received instruction in the Chiang Nan Kata from a Chinese master living on Okinawa. Bishop goes on to state Itosu "...remodeled and simplified this into five basic Kata, calling them Pinan because the Chinese Chiang Nan was too difficult to pronounce."

In *Karate-do History and Philosophy* (1986), Kakaya Takao stated that “...Channan is a Chinese word that would be used as the name of a town or the last name of a person.” Hwang (1978) asserts the form had its origin in the Jae Nam region. Jae Nam is written [Ld- ] in Korean and in Chinese. These characters translate to mean ‘south border’ or ‘southern frontier’.

This fits as the oral tradition states the Chiang Nan form is a southern style. However, there is another set of characters also associated with this form. These are which are pronounced Chian Nan (or Chiang Nan) or Kang Nam in Korean. These characters translate to mean ‘southern river’. In *Introduction to Shaolin Kung Fu* (1990) by Wong Kiew Kit (London), there is mention of one Chiang Nan a Buddhist monk of the famed Shaolin Temple. Wong states that this monk escaped from the temple following its destruction and live to be 90 years old, eventually passing on his knowledge of martial arts to the progenitors of Wong’s particular school of Shaolin Kung Fu (Wong, 1990).

Fukien Shaolin Temple was destroyed by the Manchu Army during China’s Ching Dynasty (1644-1911). The Fukien style became known as Nan Chuan or ‘Southern Boxing’ (Canzonieri, 1996). The culmination of the above information goes a long way in supporting Bishop’s statements about Itosu having studied at the hand of a Chinese master and what we have learned about the nebulous style, Chiang Nan. It also allows us to make an estimation of the form’s age.

If we can assume the Chiang Nan form existed in some fashion prior to the burning of the Fukien Shaolin Temple, we can then estimate the form to be at least 236 years old. The above information, however, only explains half of the history behind the Pyong Ahn hyung. Remember, the oral history states that the forms are a combination of Chiang Nan and Kong Sang Koon (Kushanku) forms. The Kong Sang Koon Hyung is named after the Chinese official who purportedly practiced this style and taught it to Itosu’s teacher, Bushi Matsumura. Literally, the words mean, “Imperial Governor General” .

While the form Kong Sang Koon is often attributed contribution to the Pyong Ahn Hyung, no where but the oral tradition is there mention of this. The fact may be that Kong Sang Koon, the person, may have been a practitioner of the Chiang Nan style and that in itself accounts for the similarities between our modern Pyong Ahn Hyung and the Kong Sang Koon Hyung. This style was most probably a familiar one to the temples of southern China. If Li Tsun San, Itosu’s reputed teacher, was indeed a monk, he himself may have been a student of the Venerable Chiang Nan; thus, Li Tsun San may have given credit to his teacher by naming the style after him.

Speculatively, this system may have indeed been based upon the Ping An Hsing Dukes mentions (that is if we allow that Dukes’ research is accurate and such forms existed). Chiang Nan (the monk) then could have been familiar with some variation of this ‘five element fist’, which he may have referred to as Ping An Hsing, that in turn might have been studied by Li Tsun San and eventually passed on to Itosu Yasutsune (dizzy yet?).

Therefore, it is reasonable that Itosu could have received instruction in the esoteric meanings of these forms. However, as with all things passed down through time and across cultures, the forms have been made subject to the speculations and interpretations of those who translate them for modern times. Itosu constructed his own interpretation in the Pinan Kata. His students (Funakoshi, Mabuni, etc.) added their own emphasis and carried these with them to Japan. Their students in turn took their own versions with them to Korea, Manchuria, China, Malaysia and everywhere else the Japanese

Empire reached. Yet, the forms remain and retain those qualities that make them readily recognizable to all students of the series.

Whether Pyong Ahn indeed is an evolution of a Chinese form with ties to the Shaolin style may never be definitively proven. However, it is apparent that Tang Soo Do owes its understanding of the forms to Japanese Karate-ka. Teaching the true history of the Pyong Ahn Hyung may be ethnically offensive to some Koreans. The same ethnic prejudice can be seen in the reluctance of some Japanese schools to teach the Okinawan and Chinese origins of the forms. Regardless of how much revisionist history is applied, the truth still remains. What is amazing is not how much we have uncovered about the Pyong Ahn Hyung, but that anything survived time to be re-discovered. Indeed, truth has significance and endurance.

