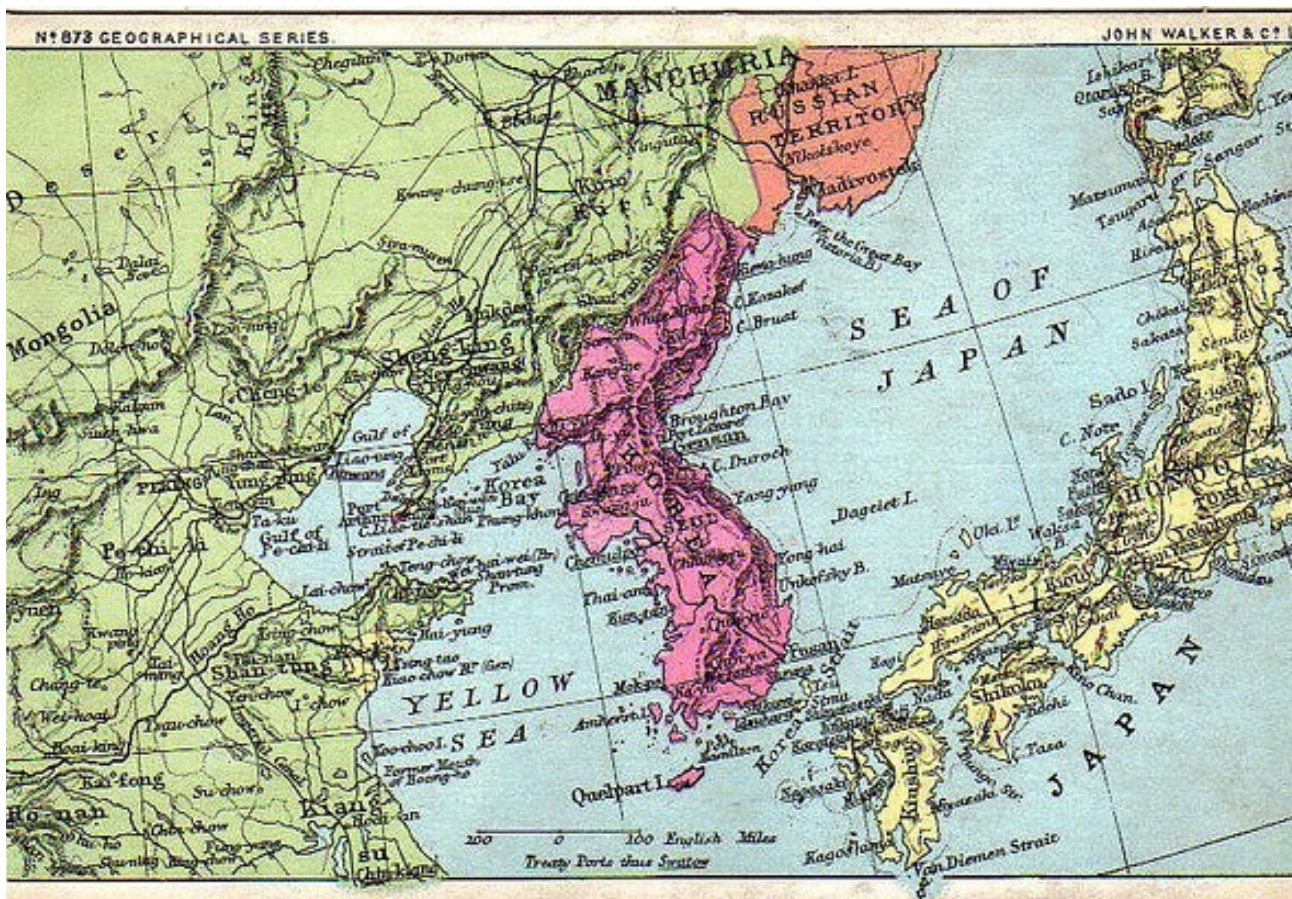


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I think it would be fair to say no one ever started Taekwon-Do to learn about history. However, it soon becomes apparent to the beginner that there is a lot more to our Art than just kicking and punching; Taekwon-Do is a combination of the physical, moral, spiritual, and the historical woven into a holistic tapestry focussed around Korean culture and values. For me, pattern histories took on a new meaning at blue belt level when I thought about the actions of Ahn Joong-Gun, a 20th century Korean independence fighter who sacrificed his life while trying to remove the yoke of Japanese oppression from his homeland. This elevated the pattern history beyond rote learning, leaving me to wonder about the incredible courage of a man who deliberately chose a course of action knowing that would lead to his death. Consequently; the focus of this essay is the four Chang-Hon patterns that relate to the twentieth century Japanese occupation of Korea: Do-San (7th gup), Joong-Gun (4th gup), Eui-Am (2nd dan), and Sam-il (3rd dan).



East Asia (circa 1900): China, Korea, Japan, Manchuria, & Russia.

To understand the context of the above pattern histories, it is necessary to have a brief overview of the late nineteenth century geo-political situation in East Asia. Global colonisation by major western powers was in full swing and Japan who had been predominantly isolationist until the Meiji Restoration in the 1860's, now looked to pursue her own territorial ambitions. It wasn't long before Japanese attention focused on Korea. Japan had long felt threatened by the proximity of the Korean Peninsula, which they viewed as a buffer between themselves and nearby China; a vast ancient wealthy empire that dominated the region. As a result, the Imperial Government decided that control of the

peninsula was a strategic necessity. Over the next few decades ever increasing friction between China and Japan over Korean interests triggered the First Sino (Chinese) - Japanese War of 1895, with the latter emerging victorious. This opened the way for the realisation of Japanese territorial ambitions within Korea. At the beginning of the twentieth century similar friction between Japan and Russia triggered another war, and when the Russians were defeated, Japan was left as the dominant regional military power. Subsequently unfettered by foreign competition Japan coerced Korea into signing a treaty that made it a Japanese Protectorate in 1905, thereby gaining significant control of the beleaguered nation. In 1910 Japan forced Korea into signing the Japan - Korea Annexation Treaty, thus ending any hope of independent sovereignty. Now Japanese hegemony over Korea was complete and it was time for the exploitation of this resource. Not for the first time in their history were Koreans preparing to resist the Japanese.

Forebodings of this impending storm became apparent during the 1894 Dong-Hak Peasants Revolt. Originally sparked by widespread distrust in an endemically corrupt system, Koreans rose up seeking fairer local governance and a stop to the foreign merchants who were underselling local suppliers. The revolt was quashed in 1895 when the Japanese usurped the existing Korean

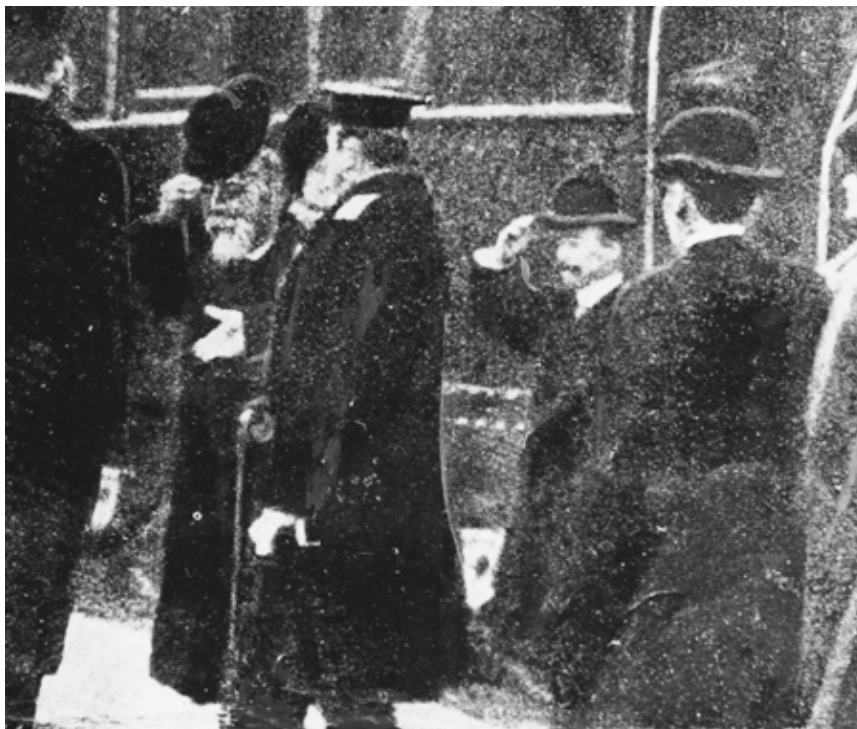
Government, replaced it with a pro-Japanese one, and then utilised their military commanders to lead government troops against the primitively armed Dong-Hak. Suffering a crushing loss the Dong-Hak melted away into an underground resistance movement. This is where the four Chang Hon pattern histories enter this narrative. Son Byong Hi (Eui-Am) had served as a field commander under the Dong-Hak leader Choe Si-Hyeong during the revolt. In 1895 Choe was captured and executed leaving Eui-Am as leader. Faced with ever increasing Japanese efforts to assimilate Korean society into their own culture, Eui-Am attempted to preserve the traditional way of life and improve living conditions by less confrontational methods. Continually stymied by ongoing Japanese persecution of the Dong-Hak due to its association with the revolt, in 1905 he changed the name from Dong-Hak (literally: Oriental Culture) to Chondo Kyo (Heavenly Way Religion) in an effort to legitimise it as a non-threatening indigenous religion. A tireless patriot, Eui-Am worked at improving the lot of Koreans during the dark days of the Japanese occupation. In 1905 Eui-Am's moment on the world stage was yet to come; he would truly emerge as a national leader on March 1st 1919, the day that entered Korean history as 'Sam-il'.



Son Byong-Hi or Eui-Am (1861 – 1922).

At the turn of the twentieth century, Hiro-Bumi Ito was one of the leading political figures in Japan. In November 1905 he travelled to Korea to force a weakened Government into accepting the Protectorate Treaty. Intimidated by the overwhelming Japanese military presence on the streets of Seoul, the Korean Foreign Minister Pak Che-Sun was left with little choice and signed away his country's autonomy thereby legitimatising the foreign

occupation. Shortly afterwards Ito was appointed first Japanese Governor General of Korea. Under his direction land and resources were shamelessly exploited by the puppet Government and efforts to colonise Korea began in earnest. However, he was not to have it all his own way, the same spirit of nationalistic pride that glowed white hot within the Dong-Hak also existed within other Korean patriots who believed in a more direct approach. Ahn Joong-Gun was just such a man. Around 1907 Ahn was the leader of a small group of Korean guerrillas harassing Japanese troops along the border of Korea and Manchuria with minor success; however larger events were about to overtake him. In September 1909 the Japanese gave the Korean territory of Kand to the Chinese. To Ahn, carving up his beloved homeland was the proverbial 'straw that broke the camel's back'. Incensed, Ahn plotted to kill the man he believed responsible: Hiro-Bumi Ito. Knowing Ito's movements in advance he planned his revenge. On a cold October morning in Harbin Manchuria, Ahn assassinated Ito as he stepped onto a railway platform from a train. There was no escape for Ahn; captured almost immediately, he endured some five months of barbaric torture before being executed at Lui-Shung prison on the 26th of March 1910. Ahn who was just 32 years old, knowingly and willingly laid down his life for his country. Despite Ahn becoming one of Korea's greatest patriots overnight, gunning down Ito only served to increase Japanese antagonism towards his fellow countrymen.



Hiro-Bumi Ito: minutes before his assassination by Ahn Joong-Gun. Harbin Railway Station, Manchuria. 26th October 1909.

At about the same time Ahn Chang-Ho (Do-San) was taking a less confrontational but no less determined approach to the occupation of his homeland. As a Christian, Do-San believed that actively hating his fellow men even if they were Japanese was not for him. His path was to enlighten others through the acquisition of knowledge. Emigrating at a young age to the United States, Do-San was instrumental in improving the welfare of his fellow Korean immigrants. However, the ramifications of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty proved too much to ignore. Returning to Korea in 1907, Do-San set about establishing an underground group called the 'Shimin-Hoe' (New Peoples' Association) with the aim of

gaining independence through the promotion of Korean education, business and culture. It wasn't long before the Shimin-Hoe attracted many patriotic Koreans to its cause, and inevitably came to Japanese attention. In 1911 Do-San again left Korea, eventually returning to the United States where he continued his efforts to promote Korean independence. In 1919 he travelled to Shanghai to set up a provisional Korean Government in exile. There, in conjunction with other key Koreans, Do-San co-authored the Democratic Constitution of Korean Independence. In the following years he travelled internationally spreading his vision for Korea, until eventually detained by the Japanese in 1927. Released shortly afterwards Do-San was now firmly within Japanese sights. Arrested in 1932 he was imprisoned for four years. Arrested again in 1937, Do-San was by now a sick man who was no longer deemed a threat. He was subsequently released and died shortly afterwards. Do-San's legacy was the preservation of Korean culture through education, and the quest for self autonomy in the face of determined Japanese opposition. Perhaps Do-San's own words reflect his unbreakable spirit best, when during an interrogation his captors demanded he cease his subversive ways, Do-San replied:

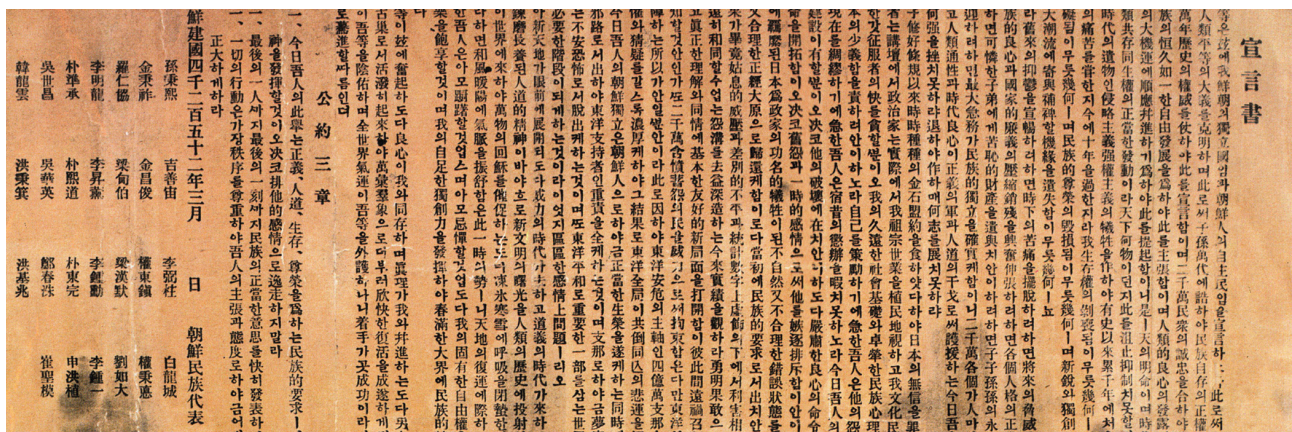
"No, I cannot. When I eat, I eat for Korean independence. When I sleep, I sleep for Korean independence. This will not change as long as I live ... I don't want to see Japan perish. Rather I want to see Japan become a good nation. Infringing upon Korea, your neighbour will never prove profitable to you".



Ahn Chang-Ho or Do-San (1876 - 1938) on the right, just released from prison, shadowed by Japanese Police Officer partially obscured over his left shoulder. Circa 1937.

In 1919 the Korean Independence Movement had an opportunity to highlight their nation's plight at the post World War One Paris Peace Conference. This would ensure maximum exposure of Korean grievances to the world's most influential nations. Unfortunately due to external political pressure the delegation was blocked from attending. However, echoing out of this forum were the words of the American President Woodrow Wilson, proposing the creation of a League of Nations that would "guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of all nations". Inspired by Wilson's vision, the Korean government in exile drafted the Democratic Constitution of Korean Independence - a document that enshrined their dream of national self autonomy. The declaration was spurred by frustration over international apathy at Korea's situation, coupled with the feeling that their national identity had slipped away when the last Korean Emperor of the Joseon (also known as Yi, or Lee) Dynasty died in January 1919. Aggravating this further was the underlying suspicion of Japanese involvement in the Emperor's death. Motivated by these factors, the 33 leaders of the Korean independence movement headed by Eui-Am decided to announce to an

expectant public the contents of the declaration. Consequently, at 2.00pm on March 1st 1919, the Constitution was read out to gathering crowds in various locations around Korea. In Seoul a copy was signed and sent to the Japanese Governor General by the patriots. The response was predictable: Japanese police and military reacted violently, opening fire into the crowded mass causing many casualties. In the resulting demonstrations around the country approximately 7500 Koreans were killed and 17,000 wounded. Because the majority of the 33 were religious leaders over four hundred churches were set on fire in retaliation, and in one truly barbaric incident the Japanese locked the congregation inside before burning the building to the ground. Then the round up and imprisonment of some 47,000 so called dissidents, including Eui-Am, commenced. While in prison Eui-Am became severely ill and was eventually released to die at home in 1922. Also caught in the Japanese net was Cho Man-Sik (Ko-Dang). Ko-Dang was known for actively pushing education, economic self sufficiency and his public condemnation of the Imperial Government's mandate forcing Koreans to change their surname to a Japanese equivalent. Ko-Dang was later released unscathed and subsequently featured in North Korean post war politics briefly. (The pattern Ko-Dang was removed from the Chang-Hon syllabus in the mid 1980's and replaced with Juche). It is important to note that the Korean uprising was a passive show of resistance only, the Japanese reaction was not.



The 1919 Korean Declaration of Independence: "We herewith proclaim the independence of Korea and the liberty of the Korean people. This we proclaim to all the nations of the world in witness of human equality ... We hereby rise up! Conscience is on our side, and truth marches with us".

The protests on March 1st 1919, which became known as Sam-il (literally: third month first day) did not generate any hoped for international reaction, the deafening silence that followed only served to remind Koreans that they were totally alone in their struggle for independence. For the Japanese however, it now seem they had a free hand on the Korean Peninsula. As World War Two exploded Japanese exploitation increased with Koreans press-ganged as forced labour, drafted into the Japanese Army (this was the fate of a young Choi Hong Hi) and women coerced into Japanese military brothels. This was paralleled with increasing efforts to subjugate the indigenous culture. The aim was to wring every possible resource out of Korea. The yoke of oppression was finally lifted in August 1945 when the Japanese were defeated by the Allies. Unfortunately even today the world remains largely ignorant of Japanese atrocities in Korea, while similar Japanese actions in Manchuria such as the Nanking massacre of 1937, attracted widespread international condemnation at the time and led to a war crimes prosecution in 1946.

So in retrospect; what do these pattern histories tell us as practitioners of the Art? Firstly, it provides us with a snap shot of the harrowing circumstances that Korea experienced under Japanese rule. History has shown that in such times individuals rise to the occasion and show their incredible leadership potential, such as Britain's iconic Winston Churchill in World War Two. Korea's sons: Ahn Chang-Ho (Do-San), Ahn Joong-Gun, and Son Byong-Hi (Eui-Am) showed unyielding resilience spearheading their Nation's struggle for independence in the face of crushing Japanese opposition. It could be argued that it cost Do-San and Eui-Am dearly, with the appalling prison conditions and subsequent mistreatment contributing to their early deaths. These men showed the true meaning of courage, determination and indomitable spirit: unyielding in their personal convictions whatever the cost. Ahn Joong-Gun suffered several months of unimaginable torture before being sent to the gallows. Ahn's devotion to his homeland never wavered; just before his execution he wrote that his beloved Korea had "the best rivers and mountains" in the world. Sam-il illustrates the shining light of human hope that eternally burns within, even during our darkest hours. Collectively they are an inspiration to us. Looking at this from a wider perspective; when General Choi Hong Hi, the founder of Taekwon-Do, matched the twenty four patterns of our Art with key figures and events in Korean history it effectively removed them from the shadow of obscurity and exposed them to a world wide audience, thereby keeping their legacy and significance alive. So how can we be a part of this? It's simple really, for as the General said "each movement in a pattern must express the personality and spiritual character of the person it is named after". So I challenge you - the next time you are about to perform one of these patterns, pause for just a brief second and reflect on the incredible history behind the movements.

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Illustrations.

#1 Map: China, Japan, & Korea circa 1900, Flickr. Website: <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/385409680586333574/>

#2 Image: Son Byong-Hi (Eui-Am). Wikipedia contributors, "Son Byong-hi," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Website: https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Son_Byong-hi&oldid=1072898591

#3 Image: Harbin Railway Station, Manchuria. Photograph of Japanese Governor General Hiro-Bumi Ito moments before his assassination. Korea Times. Website: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2015/03/317_176195.html

#4 Image: Ahn-Chang Ho. Title: Dosan Ahn Chang Ho released from prison. Date: Circa 1937, Collection: Los Angeles Public Library Photo. Los Angeles Public Library, Calisphere. Website: <https://calisphere.org/item/9c146d29de154c0cc9bbac1d32cd2519/>

#5: Image: The Korean Declaration of Independence. Wikisource contributors, "Proclamation of Korean Independence," Wikisource. Website: https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Proclamation_of_Korean_Independence&oldid=11526292