

# Exploring the Purpose of Crossing and Pulling Hand in Taekwon-Do Defense Techniques

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## Summary

This thesis attempts to clarify the purpose of movements around Taekwon-Do defense techniques, particularly crossing and pulling hand. It examines the modern interpretation of Taekwon-Do in light of its Encyclopaedia and a master text of Shotokan Karate. The research found that the application of Taekwon-Do defense techniques in counter attack is justifiable if we look at its origin. In these scenarios, it is understood that the crossing can be used to grasp an opponent's attacking hand, while pulling hand it to break their balance. This idea is implicit in Choi's texts (1999, 2008), as he seemed to focus more on the application of scientific principles.

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## Introduction

Crossing hands in the intermediate position prior to a defense technique and pulling a hand to the hip at the execution of a technique with another hand, are basic movements in Taekwon-Do. Though they are practised commonly, not many of us would be able to answer the purpose and application of these movements. If one looks into Taekwon-Do Encyclopaedia by General Choi Hong Hi (1999, 2008), photos of intermediate positions for some defense techniques will be found but few references to the purpose and application (for detailed intermediate positions, see Gudsell, 2013). This may have led to various interpretations of these movements held by different practitioners.

I endeavored to consult with Grand Master Hector Marano, the Chair of International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) Technical and Instruction Committee. However, I failed to obtain a response. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to speak with Master McPhail, a member of ITF Technical and Instruction Committee. He stated that he had his own view for the purpose of crossing, and shared with me how other Grand Master would explain it. I took this as an indication that there is no interpretation of the movement specific to ITF, and that it is free for individuals to understand it in different ways.

Nevertheless, the aim of this thesis is to explore the true purpose and application of crossing and pulling hand that Choi intended. I will mainly discuss the purpose of the crossing, along with that of the pulling hand, as they are interrelated to each other. The thesis will first present a modern interpretation, which will be then examined and discussed in view of Choi's texts and Shotokan Karate.

## Modern Taekwon-Do Interpretation

One of the most prominent interpretations of crossing, or chamber position, in Taekwon-Do is by Anslow. He challenges the preconceived notion of hard block that would knock the opponent's limb away from the defender (2012). His main points are as follows:

1. Block is a Japanese translation of *uke*, which really means *to receive*;
2. Hand crossing, or chamber position, is a natural flinch response, which functions to *receive*, or to intercept an attack ; and,
3. If we attempt to employ the full motion of a block (i.e. see the attack coming, chamber, and then block), it takes too long and we would not be able to catch it.

Based on these points, he makes an assumption that “the application is not at the end of a block, but usually part way through it, with the final parts of a block as either follow through, a counter or a finishing technique” (p. 27). That is, a crossing could be a setup for the proceeding applications of the next movement. In this context, it would be possible for one to intercept an attack in a chamber position, then, the following blocking hand does the actual counter attack.

# Intention of General Choi

## “Defense itself carries out the attacking role”

What would Choi say about Anslow’s interpretation? In order to understand Choi’s intention, we need to delve into the details of defence techniques described in his Encyclopaedias (1999, 2008). Under *Defense Technique* section, he states, “In a literal sense, Taekwon-Do is exactly that: a self-defense. This is why students should concentrate on defense. The defense itself, however, carries out the attacking role at the same time. Thus the idea of defensive-offensive is well co-ordinated” (1999, p.191). Here, he clearly expresses that a defense technique can be used as an attack. That is, a block can be used to strike the opponent. This is an important point to note before looking at their applications.

## Scientific Principles

Choi incorporates scientific principles with his Taekwon-Do theory, which is evident in his texts. This section looks at crossing and pulling hand in relation to backward motion, reaction force and concentration.

### Backward Motion

Under *Training Secrets of Taekwon-Do* in his Condensed Encyclopedia, Choi states, “All movements must begin with a backward motion” (1999, p.42). In his 15 volume Encyclopedia, under *Common Principles in Hand Techniques* section, he adds the reason for backward motion as “to utilize the maximum velocity” (2008, p.10). We apply this principle in most of our techniques, by pulling our hands back away from the target in preparation for attack or defense. Concerning the crossing, my understanding of this passage is that the point at which both hands meet and cross each other is the most appropriate distance for each hand to gain maximum acceleration when they travel to their finishing positions. Therefore, it is rather a coincidence that they form a crossing position than an elaborate reason.

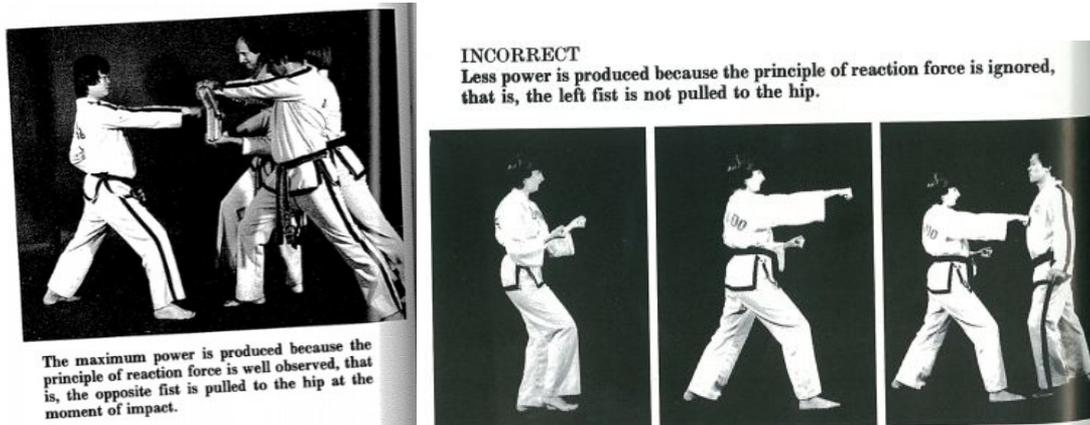
### Reaction Force

In his *Theory of Power*, Choi describes reaction force:

According to Newton’s Law, every force has an equal and opposite force... The two forces combined; his, which is large, and yours, which is small are quite impressive. Another reaction force is your own. A punch with the right fist is aided by pulling back the left fist to the hip (1999, p.49).

Here, Choi introduces two types of reaction force; one is using the force of an opponent, another is using the force of pulling hand. It is clear in his explanation that pulling hand is a demonstration of reaction force, in which pulling hand supports the other hand executing an offensive or defensive technique (Figure 1).

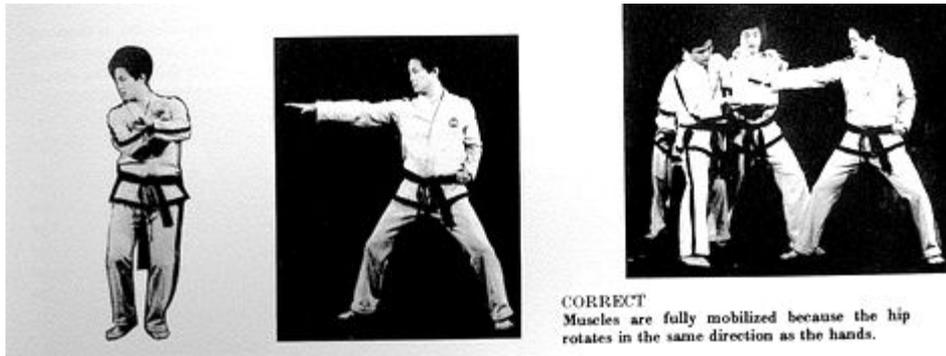
Figure 1. Applications of the principle of reaction force (Choi, 1999, p.50)



## Concentration

Another important element in Choi's *Theory of Power* is concentration: "It is very important that you should not unleash all your strength at the beginning but gradually, and particularly at the point of contact with your opponent's body..." (1999, p.52). The following photos show correct intermediate position for a knifehand strike (Figure 2). Note that the first example has the crossing at the opposite chest, thus, utilising the hip rotation and succeeds in breaking a board, while the second example shows an incorrect intermediate position.

Figure 2. Applications of the principle of concentration (Choi, 1999, p.53)

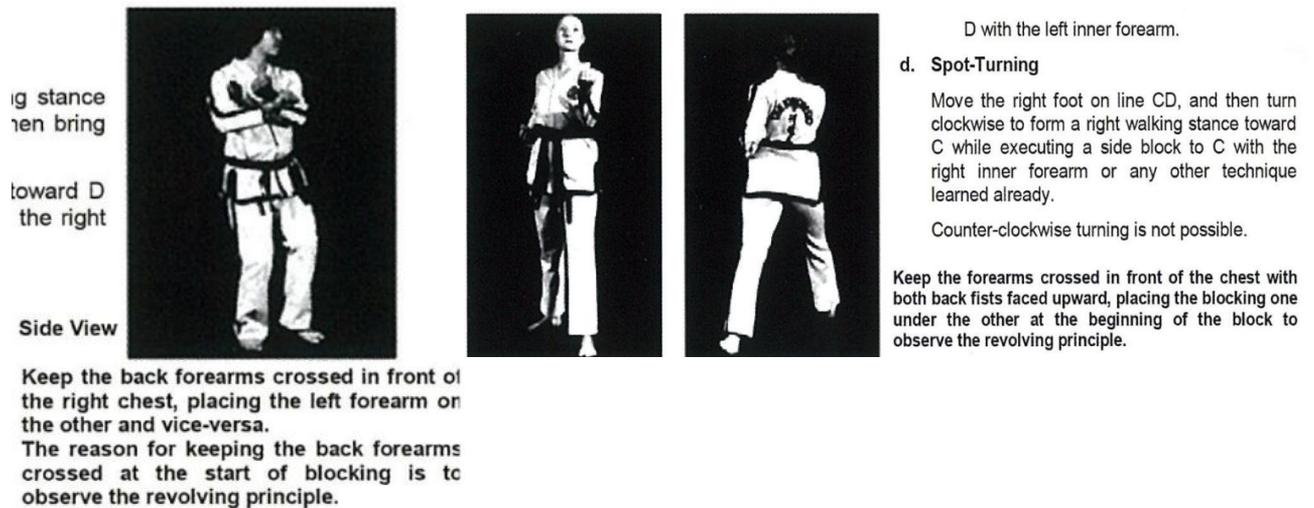


## Revolving Principle

“The revolving principle is a subsection of the concentration idea. Concentration, also known as summation of force, or the kinetic chain, is where the different parts of the body all work together to produce a movement” (Doogan, 2016a, p.61). Doogan explains that each segment moves once the preceding segment has already been in motion. When one is in motion, it creates a chain of events that affects the movement of neighboring joints and segments. If we take a Knifehand Strike for example, we rotate our hip first then the upper body, shoulder, elbow, and then forearm. Bigger muscles move first and then smaller muscles follow. Therefore, if we observe this principle and obtain the maximum force, it is necessary to revolve the forearm at the last moment.

This principle is mentioned in *Fundamental Exercises* section of Choi’s Condensed Encyclopaedia(1999). This is the only place I was able to find a direct reference to the purpose of hand crossing in Choi’s texts (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Applications of the revolving principle (Choi, 1999, p.418 & p.423)



It states, “The reason of keeping the back forearms crossed at the start of blocking is to observe the revolving principle” (Choi, 1999, p418). In other words, the crossing is for each hand to be placed in the most ideal position for them to revolve effectively towards the end of the motion. Choi does not explain further about this principle.

## Summary of Choi’s Thoughts

This section confirmed several points using documentary proof:

1. Defence techniques can be used for attack.
2. Backward motion - the point at which both hands meet and cross each other is the most appropriate distance for each hand to gain maximum acceleration when they travel to their finishing positions.
3. Reaction force - pulling hand is a demonstration of reaction force, in which pulling hand supports the other hand executing an offensive or defensive technique.
4. Concentration - the crossing is for each hand to be placed in the most ideal position for them to revolve effectively towards the end of the motion, followed by rotation of bigger muscles.

## Shotokan Karate

General Choi, the founder of Taekwon-Do, had practiced Shotokan Karate in Japan. Accordingly, Taekwon-Do techniques derived in quite large part from the martial arts (Gillis, 2008). Therefore, it is reasonable to look into their techniques in search for the true purpose and application of crossing and pulling hand, which were not fully described by Choi. Shotokan is founded by Master Gichin Funakoshi. His translated version of *Karate-Do Kyohan* (1973) will be used for reference.

## “Defensive act has the character of an attack itself”

Under *Basic Training* section, Funakoshi states:

In Karate, there is no advantage to be obtained in becoming the aggressor. It is important that one's first move be that of warding off an attack, even though in practice this defensive act will have the character of an attack in itself. This is a principle through assiduous practice of blocking techniques (1973, p.32).

This passage is an expression of the famous principle that “there is no first attack in Karate” (Funakoshi, 2013). He indicates that a defense technique can be practically used as an attack. This theoretical position largely resembles that of Choi's, who claimed, “The defense itself, however, carries out the attacking role at the same time” (1999, p.191).

## Pulling Hand

Pulling hand, or *Hiki-te* is categorised under block techniques in Karate:

### Pulling-in Block (Hiki-te)

This technique is a variation of the hooking block. In blocking the opponent's attacking fist, grasp the opponent's fist and attack while pulling him inward. His balance broken, the effectiveness of his attack is lost and that of counterattack enhanced. A pulling motion coupled with a twist is much more effective here than a straight pulling motion (Funakoshi, 1973, p.22).

Thus, pulling hand in Karate is a block technique and is used to pull the opponent to break his or her balance (Figure 4). In addition, the reference to the enhancement of counterattack can be taken as an application of reaction force, which is not fully detailed here.

Figure 4. Application of Pulling-in Block (Funakoshi, 1973, p.22)

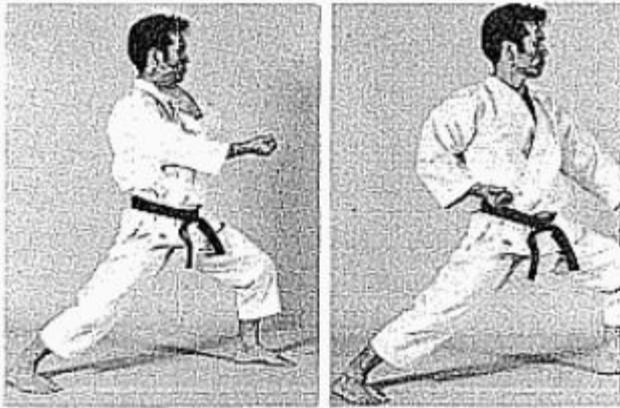


## Crossing

### *Gedan Barai* (Down Block)

It was interesting to find that crossing, a chambering of hands in intermediate position, is not as emphasised for many of the Karate defensive techniques compared with that of Taekwon-Do. Let us take a look at *Gedan Barai* (Down Block), which is equivalent to Low Forearm Block in Taekwon-Do (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Demonstration of Down Block (Funakoshi 1973, p.29)



As it can be seen, there is no distinctive crossing before the block is executed, but there is a backward motion in each hand. However, if we consider the trajectory of both hands, we would be able to observe a crossing movement as they travel to their finishing positions. We can also spot the hands are facing in the same direction as their final positions (i.e. there is no revolving). In comparison, Taekwon-Do intermediate positions seem to emphasise more on the actual crossing, and facing of hands is also important to fully observe the revolving principle (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Demonstration of intermediate position for Low Forearm Block (Choi 2008, p.189)



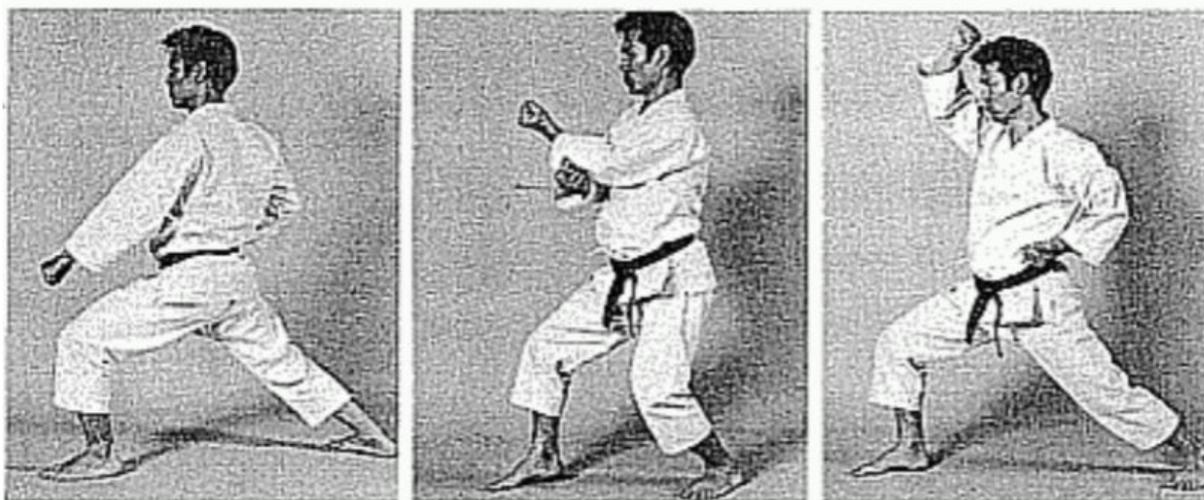
## Jōdan Age-uke (Upper Level Rising Block)

Let us now look at Jōdan Age-uke (Upper Level Rising Block), which is an equivalent of Forearm Rising Block in Taekwon-Do. In *Basic Training* section, Funakoshi states:

...the rising (blocking) arm and the withdrawing arm should cross each other in front of the face. This crossing motion is to be understood as the techniques of grasping the attacking arm of an opponent with the blocking hand from the preceding block, drawing it downward, and simultaneously attacking it from by raising one's other arm forcibly into the crossed position (1973, pp.31-32).

The technique is demonstrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Demonstration of Upper Level Rising Block (Funakoshi, 1973, p.31)



The description of this technique is quite significant as it reveals the purpose of the crossing motion, which is to grasp the opponent's arm with the pulling hand and attacking it from underneath with the other arm. Let us take a closer look at this in the application of the same technique in *Kata (Heian Shodan)*. It states,

...following a block by the left hand of the opponent's right fist attack, the point here is to grasp the opponent's right wrist with the left hand and, twisting the grasped wrist in an outward direction, to break the opponent's right elbow by bringing the right forearm up against it. However, the eight movement may also be used as a block against an upper level attack (Funakoshi, 1973, p.50).

In this passage, it is clearly stated that the blocking hand is used primarily to strike the opponent's elbow from underneath. It is also noteworthy that the application of this defense technique as a block is mentioned as if it was optional. Similar application can be also found in his 1926 book, in which he says withdrawing hand is to grab and pull the opponent's hand (Funakoshi, p.86).

## Summary of Funakoshi's Thoughts

In this section we have uncovered the following points:

1. A defense technique can be practically used as an attack.
2. Pulling hand - pulling hand in Karate is a block technique and is used to pull the opponent to break his or her balance.
3. Crossing - not as distinctive as Taekwon-Do intermediate positions, but it is clearly performed before Jōdan Age-uke (Forearm Rising Block in Taekwon-Do), which purpose is to grasp the opponent's arm with the withdrawing hand while the other hand strikes it.

## Modern Karate

How would modern Karateka interpret those points by Master Funakoshi? Croft (2006) demonstrates defence techniques as attacks in his Shotokan *Kata Bunkai* (application). For example, *Gedan Barai* (Down Block) is used to strike the opponent's chest (p.62), while Jōdan Age-uke (Upper Level Rising Block) strikes into the neck while another hand grabs and pulls in opponent's arm (pp. 71-72). Willoughby (2009), also from Shotokan school, takes the draw hand to grab and pull opponent off balance or pull him or her into counter-attack, as Funakoshi described. He takes it further though to claim that the crossing is a setup movement that could actually function as a block, while the blocking hand performs the counter. Enkamp (2012), who does not belong to any particular Karate school, claims that Karate blocks would not work if they are performed in a traditional manner. He also suggests them to be used as attack especially in self defence applications. Their views correspond to that of Anslow (2012), although the concept of flinch response remains unique to him.

## Discussion

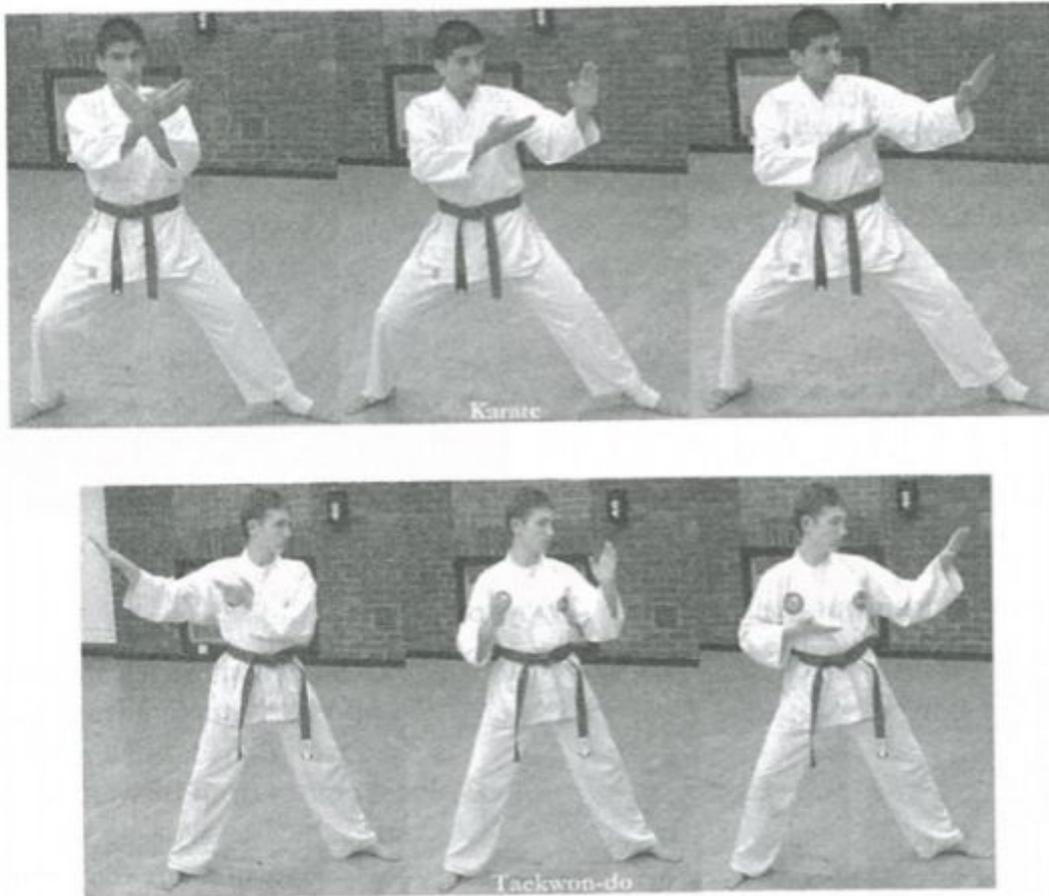
We have seen some similarities between Taekwon-Do and Shotokan Karate, especially the usage of defensive technique as attack. Should we take other concepts described in Karate (i.e. crossing as grasping and pulling hand as grabbing) to also apply in Taekwon-Do? Did General Choi had them in his mind but just did not express?

What was evident from the research was that Taekwon-Do has more focus on scientific principles. Anslow (2009) compares Taekwon-Do and Shotokan Karate techniques and suggests that more circular techniques were reintroduced in Taekwon-Do (p.37). That is, Taekwon-Do intermediate positions place hands further away from the target so they can travel wider area to obtain power, although this means sacrificing time.

Perhaps we can interpret that most Taekwon-Do intermediate positions are designed to gain power by applying scientific principles. In fact, chambering for most techniques were changed from Karate. For example, crossing in Knifehand Guarding Block was taken away

(Figure 8). We may understand this as a way to increase power by adding backward motion and revolving principle.

Figure 8. Comparison of intermediate positions for Knifehand Guarding Block (Anslow, 2009, p.38)



Whatever the interpretation is, it may be important to remember that blocks are also a training method. They are fundamental exercise designed to groove movement along a certain plane optimum to effect deflections or interceptions. They are generally magnifications of much smaller or subtler techniques. Real application of blocks is usually in a greatly abbreviated, or partial form; however, by magnifying a movement we can better appreciate its function.

## Conclusion

This thesis discussed the purpose of crossing and pulling hand in Taekwon-Do defensive techniques. It examined the modern interpretation of Taekwon-Do expressed by Anslow, who claims that crossing functions to intercept an attack. Encyclopaedias of Taekwon-Do and master text of Shotokan Karate were consulted and used for comparison. They both agreed that a defensive technique can be used for attack. Taekwon-Do however emphasises more on scientific principles, particularly backward motion, reaction force and concentration, which are the primary reason for crossing and pulling hand. On the other hand, Shotokan Karate employs crossing to grasp an attack, and pulling hand to break the balance of an opponent. These motions serve as a setup movement before a blocking hand

is used to strike opponent. Since Taekwon-Do was based on Shotokan Karate, Anslow's interpretation should be accepted. It is still a mystery whether General Choi had these applications in his mind.

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