

Signwave, what it means to me

Signwave is generally understood well in NZ amongst my senior colleagues. I have found though after researching online so much negative comment written on the ITF signwave. And from what I can see it's by other martial art practitioners or other styles of Taekwon-Do who either do not understand it, or refuse to understand it.

There is some opinion that the General simply introduced signwave to separate TKD from the other arts of the time, mainly Karate. These online opinions in dubious forums are from people quoting secondhand information from pseudo-masters who have left the fold to practice their own styles and set their own agendas, so the sources are unreliable in my opinion. And as General Choi has passed we can't ask him and those that did ask that I know of didn't receive an answer to explain it to their satisfaction.

Apart from what I have been taught by my seniors there is also scientific research quoted on the physics of the signwave. I couldn't find the source of the quote so can't add it here. I'm also not going to delve into the physics of the whole signwave argument too much. That's been done to death already by far greater practitioners than me. I will say though that signwave is very important as it increases the speed of the technique and helps to settle the student into their stance. It provides balance and clarity of technique.

Signwave is incorporated everywhere in TKD, perhaps less so in sparring although it is there in a small way. Probably not the best place for it though! There is lots of it in self-defense, specifically dropping the body to lower the center of gravity to enable a lock, throw, hold or release.

So here's my own take on signwave, and it's two fold but related.

Firstly for me, it fractionally slows the middle part of my technique helping to add balance and deliver the speed part of the technique, which is the power, the action part. The last 2 centimeters of your punch is where all the damage is done etc. I find the rising in the middle helps me to concentrate and 'collect' the technique, ready to deliver it.

Secondly, and more importantly to me, it's simply beautiful. Each Tul is named after a specific place in the case of Chong Ji, or person as in Dan Gun, or persons as in Hwa Rang, or even an ideal such as Juche. I have been to many of the places that relate to the Tuls. I have stepped aboard the Kobukson, visited Yoo Sin's tomb and been to the cave with the carving of Kum Kang Yuksa (There are two of them on opposite sides, mirror images). And it was all surreal.

The older I get and the more I teach, the more I understand that for me to perform a pattern properly, and I don't mean technically correct or to competition standard which I certainly haven't achieved yet; but to perform it properly you have to engage with those watching on an emotional level and convey the meaning of the pattern through its movements to your audience.

And to do this you don't have to get it perfect, you just have to impart some of yourself. Some of your own quirks maybe. And signwave is a huge part of this for me. Of course the audience needs to know the pattern meaning. If they don't, then establishing a connection is harder, but possibly much more rewarding!

No performed pattern is perfect. Because once you perform the perfect pattern you can stop training. A martial artist strives for perfection, even though knowing they will never achieve it. To me signwave allows me to pause between each technique, gather my thoughts and deliver the technique as perfect as I can.

When I observe others performing the moves I know so well, I'm watching for the expression of the movement. Yes I see the errors, the incorrect angles, heights, stances etc. These can all be improved. But I like to watch the overall expression of the pattern. Did it move me emotionally, did the student form that bond. It's like watching a moving work of art sometimes. Although sometimes the art can look more like a brick than a thing of beauty. But I guess we all have to find the beauty in it ourselves. It all depends on the performer. Sometimes you have to go through a lot of bricks.

Signwave for me just makes it beautiful as well as being essential. I sometimes don't see the practitioner at all, I just sit back and watch the expression of the art.