

Origins of Tang Soo Do, Taekwondo, Judo, and ROSS/Sambo

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Abstract

As member of the Millersville University Martial Arts Club for over two years, and President for one, I have been exposed to the awe-inspiring lifestyle that encourages those who practice various forms of martial arts. Part of my passion for the Martial Arts stems from the fact that most, if not all, of these art and combat forms originated from common people learning how to use their bodies, tools, and surroundings to defend themselves – meaning that anyone with enough drive and diligence can learn these techniques and better themselves. This even applies to average students looking for a unique workout or to learn self-defense. While the club offers many opportunities, I have chosen to focus on three Martial Art forms and one style of self-defense that the club teaches or exposes students to. These include Tang Soo Do, Taekwondo, Judo, and ROSS.

Taekwondo and Tang Soo Do

Tang Soo Do and Taekwondo are both Martial Art forms that originated in South Korea. As our instructors will share, while these two forms resemble each other, they are often very different. Lillian Shaw, green belt in Tang Soo Do states, “Tang Soo Do is meant to turn you into a tank, but Taekwondo teaches you how to take down a tank.” Highly defensive in nature, Tang Soo Do combats the offensive style of Taekwondo.

Tang Soo Do has a long and proud history. The name Tang Soo Do is modern and generic, but related to Soo Bahk Ki, an ancient form of Martial Arts from which Tang Soo Do originates. References to Soo Bahk Ki date back to the Korean Kokuryo Dynasty which reigned from 37 to 668 A.D.

A modern form of teaching Tang Soo Do, Soo Bahk Do, was founded by Hwang Kee in 1945. But it wasn’t until the 1960’s that “Korean Tang Soo Do incorporated as Korean Soo Bahk Do Association and registered with the Korean Government as the Korean traditional Martial Art” (Hwang, 1995).

Conversely, Taekwondo’s origins lie in a sea of ambiguity. Currently there are three theories as to the history and formation of Taekwondo, Traditionalism, New Traditionalism, and Revisionism. Since the Traditionalism theory is recognized by the Korea Taekwondo Association, Kukkiwon and the World Taekwondo Federation, we will focus on that version of history. The name “Taekwondo” was first coined in 1945

(Park & Kim, 2016), shortly before the Korean war in 1950. Although its origins make it a relatively young form of Martial Art, it claims to have history in other ancient styles. “Subak, rooted from the Three Kingdoms’ period to the early Joseon dynasty. In the mid-Joseon dynasty ... and in the late Joseon dynasty (1897–1910), it was changed to Taekkyeon” (Park & Kim, 2016). Unfortunately, Taekwondo was still a style of debate. Five schools, or Kwans, Mooduk Kwan, Jido Kwan, Changmu Kwan, Chungdo Kwan, and Songmu Kwan, are each credited with being the first schools to teach Taekwondo, but each school referred to their teachings by a different, unique name. Eventually, in 1955, the styles each united under the name Taekwondo. In 1980, Taekwondo was formally recognized by the International Olympic Committee and in 1988 it first premiered as an Olympic event (Institute), n.d.; Southwick, n.d.).

Judo

Judo, unlike Taekwondo and Tang Soo Do, originated in Japan. Founded by Jigoro Kano, Judo is thought to have been originally founded the year Kano opened his Judo dojo, called The Kodokan, in 1882. Kano developed the art form as a means of self-defense, but he also intended it to be a proactive sport, as well as combat feelings of anger, laziness, depression, or other negative frames of mind. Kano developed Judo based on older Jujutsu techniques, but modified and updated them to make them safer, less violent, and more competitive. As such, it became a highly grappling sport where opponents initiate throws and holds with their opponents (International Judo Federation, 2020).

Sambo and ROSS

Sambo, much like Judo, is also a competitive grappling sport. But where Judo

ends with a successful throw, Sambo continues, often with elements of ground-sparring. Sambo is a Russian acronym that translates as “Self-defense without weapons.” Originating in Russia around the time of the Bolshevik revolution, Sambo was founded by Viktor Spiridonov and Vasili Oschepkov, who were both scholars of foreign martial art techniques. They developed Sambo as a way to bring hand-to-hand combat to soldiers of the Red Army. However, Sambo remained an almost exclusively Russian sport until the rise in popularity of Mixed Martial Arts (Emelianenko, Arlovski, & Spiridonov, 2020).

The history of combat fighting in Russia does not begin or end with Sambo. Sambo at Millersville University is taught as one of four elements of ROSS (Russian: РОСС), short for Российская Отечественная Система Самозащиты. Translated, ROSS stands for The Russian Native System of Self-Defense. Founded by General Alexander Ivanovich Retuinskih in 1991, ROSS closely resembles another Russian Martial Art called Systema (Menard, 2001). Four elements of ROSS are taught at Millersville University: Hand-to-Hand combat, Sambo, Fisticuffs, and Weapons. In fact, instructor Scott Fabel, Professor of Russian at Millersville University, is also the Director and Head Trainer of the American Annex to the Russian Federation of Russian Martial Art and Combat Skills.

Conclusion

The Martial Arts serve as a very rich collective of techniques that anyone can learn and use as forms of self-defense. The Martial Arts Club has a favorite saying, “Every black belt starts as a white belt.” The club is proof of the fact that anyone with enough determination can truly become a martial artist

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