

# A Study on the teaching methods and values of Chinese taekwondo masters

## Authors' Contribution:

- A Study Design
- B Data Collection
- C Statistical Analysis
- D Manuscript Preparation
- E Funds Collection

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## Abstract

### Background and Study Aim:

In light of the increasing number of taekwondo students in China, in almost thirty years since the martial art was first introduced in the country, this study discusses whether taekwondo's intrinsic value as a martial art, along with its physical training, are being adequately taught by Chinese taekwondo masters. This study aims to gather knowledge about the personality traits that Chinese taekwondo masters display when teaching taekwondo.

### Materials and Methods:

The research was conducted by interviewing five masters who have managed a taekwondo school in China for more than five years.

### Results:

First, Chinese taekwondo instructors attribute more importance to formal greetings than to the personal development of their students, believing that the teaching of taekwondo principles and values begins by 'taking a deep bow'. Second, the study revealed that each master adopts a different teaching method, and that the teaching of personal values often depends on factors such as the master's behaviour, praise given, and explicit teaching. Third, the study established that the role of the master acquires more importance when teaching the philosophical principles and values of taekwondo as a martial art, rather than the practical and technical skills of taekwondo.

### Conclusions:

Teaching taekwondo principles should be included and worked on in depth when training new instructors. By sharing the principles amongst Korean and Chinese masters, an appropriate environment to train in taekwondo could be established, and trainees could correctly train and learn the principles of taekwondo philosophy, regardless of where the school is located.

### Key words:

courtesy • leadership • martial arts • self-confidence • self-development • sociality • wushu

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Author has declared that no competing interest exists

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**Taekwondo Master** – a taekwondo master must acquire at least four taekwondo degrees, and also receive prescribed training at Kukkiwon.

**Martial arts** – *plural noun* any of various systems of combat and self-defence, e.g. judo or karate, developed especially in Japan and Korea and now usually practised as a sport [18].

**Wushu** – *noun* Chinese martial arts considered collectively [18].

**Technique** – *noun* a way of performing an action [18].

## INTRODUCTION

After Korea and China established formal diplomatic ties on August 24, 1992 [1], Taekwondo was introduced in China on October 7 of the same year, with the founding of the Chinese Taekwondo Association, granted by the Central Office and the General Administration of Sport in China.

The history of taekwondo in China does not begin with the year the association was founded, but rather in 1994, when the International Olympics Committee made taekwondo a full Olympic sport for the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney [2]. The Chinese government chose taekwondo as its main sport under the rule of the 'state-sponsored sport system' and began to fully support it.

The purpose of the state-sponsored sport system was to promote China's image in the world and raise its international status by achieving positive results in international games and excelling in elite sports. The Chinese government turned taekwondo into an elite sport by limiting its state funding and ensuring that only a handful of people could become taekwondo instructors [3, 4]. In addition, in 2001, taekwondo was recognized as an official sport in the largest sporting event in China, the National Sports Festival. The practice of the martial art was disseminated across the country under the support of the Chinese government.

In China, taekwondo's popularity began to rapidly increase when athletes started scoring better results in competitions around the world, including in the Olympics. In particular, the Beijing Olympic Games provided an occasion for China to prominently establish itself as an invincible competitor in this martial art [5]. As a result of the stellar participation of Chinese taekwondo athletes in international tournaments, taekwondo soon became a national and popular trend, resulting in a significant rise in the number of schools and aspiring students taking part in this martial art. This occurred in a relatively small timeframe of thirty years, because the government supported and fostered taekwondo on the basic principle of the state-sponsored sport system. Countless taekwondo schools were opened in many cities and rural areas around the country, to the great enthusiasm of children, teenagers, and university students.

Recently, the martial art started being taught in physical education classes in schools and universities. Ok Beck [6] reported that there are more than twenty-thousand taekwondo schools

across the country, and more than ten million taekwondo trainees, increasing at a rate of 20% per year. Additionally, of all the instructors managing the schools, 80% have not acquired a national accreditation certificate to teach legally. Ok Beck [6] points out that not only is taekwondo succumbing to the weight of its own popularity, with an excessive amount of schools opening, but also that low level students are promoting themselves as instructors, while boxing, judo, and other martial arts instructors, whose knowledge and technique is completely unrelated to taekwondo, are deciding to wear a taekwondo uniform and teach it anyway [6].

The first generation of Chinese taekwondo masters were predominantly former taekwondo competitors or Korean instructors who were invited to the country by the Chinese Taekwondo Association and taekwondo instructors [6]. Back then, when taekwondo was widespread and there were only a few trainees, it was common to recruit athletes from other disciplines to focus on taekwondo and turn it into an elite sport competing in international games. Furthermore, taekwondo is not being taught correctly as a martial art, but solely as the acquisition of technical skills. Supposedly, taekwondo instructors should educate their students to acquire the character-building skills and the core values of martial arts such as courtesy, sociality, self-confidence, self-development, and leadership. However, since taekwondo was introduced in China, it has undoubtedly been taught incorrectly since what instructors taught were merely skills practice, and not the aforementioned character-building skills and core values of martial arts [5].

According to one study, because the government introduced taekwondo in China with the aim of winning international competitions and Olympic medals, a few of the current instructors had been former taekwondo competitors and wushu masters, who later turned to taekwondo [7]. The author stresses that instructors must not only follow an elite physical training scheme, but must also include the mental and spiritual values in their teachings, as well as create programs suitable for various age groups.

While the number of taekwondo students is rapidly increasing, alongside China's increasing achievements in international competitions, it is also necessary to evaluate if taekwondo is being taught correctly, and if the intrinsic values of the martial art are being passed on.

In order to understand the importance of teaching taekwondo's values and philosophy, the impact of China's one-child policy, which restricted child-birth from 1980 to 2015, should be considered. The one-child policy determined that a family's only child became the centre of attention and love, growing up pampered and indulged. The only-child developed what is known as the 'Little Emperor Syndrome' (the word "Little Emperor" refers to a child born since the 1980s after the Chinese government implemented a one-child policy set up in 1979).

Other researchers report that an only-child often grows up self-centred, selfish, and lacking empathy because they are the sole receivers of a family's investments [8]. Consequently, children join society as adults with weakened social and moral norms and negative or deviant social behaviour. Additionally, parents tend to satisfy their child's demands as much as they can and try to cover up or solve problems rather than punishing them for misbehaviour.

One study points out that the teaching of the philosophy of martial arts in Chinese taekwondo schools should be valued, especially since mental training and core values are being sacrificed to teach techniques [9]. Masters should help students recognize the importance of philosophy in martial arts, which is the essence of taekwondo. They should also focus on the development of an individual's morals and principles, which is fundamental for the children of one-child families in Chinese society.

Nowadays, it is common for young children to train in taekwondo. When taekwondo students first join a taekwondo school with a white belt, the leader's guidance, instruction type, and teaching method inevitably influence the skill acquisition, attitude, and personality. It is understood that students are enormously affected by both the master's attitude and the values the master teaches.

Taekwondo has managed to grow and expand extensively in China despite its short history. On the other hand, taekwondo training, which, as with every martial art, includes the training of the mind, has not yet reached an adequate standard. At the moment, many schools in China have turned taekwondo into a regular subject because of the spiritual values it teaches as a martial art. These values include courtesy, loyalty, and morality [10]. Therefore, it is necessary to examine what kind of spiritual and moral values are being

taught by Chinese taekwondo masters, how such values are being taught, and how much importance they are being given.

Because of taekwondo's popularity and an increasing focus on the performance and technical aspects of the sport, this study discusses how taekwondo is being taught in taekwondo schools and how much importance masters give to the teaching of core values. Therefore, this study aims is the knowledge about the personality traits that Chinese taekwondo masters display when teaching taekwondo.

The main goals are to answer the following questions:

- First, what are the principles of taekwondo that Chinese taekwondo masters recognize they should teach?
- Second, what methods are used to teach such values?
- Third, what values and ethics of teaching taekwondo are supported by Chinese taekwondo masters?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study conducted in-depth interviews using semi-structured open-ended questions to examine the values and principles that Chinese taekwondo instructors believe in.

### Participants

The participants of this study were five instructors who have been in charge of taekwondo schools in China for more than five years. Table 1 summarizes the personal data of the participants. However, specific history and personal information of research participants was not included, in order to maintain the participants' anonymity.

### Survey tool

This study used in-depth interviews, which are a widely recognized qualitative research technique. Qualitative research methods are apt for understanding human experience and phenomena, and they derive deep meaning from indirect experiences.

In-depth interviews were conducted with semi-structured questions and recorded with the verbal consent of the participants. The researchers visited the participants to ensure that the interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. After

**Table 1.** Personal information of participants (ordinal variable: teaching experience).

Category	Teaching experience	Age	Gender	Area
AAA	11 years	41	Male	Shanghai
BBB	8 years	35	Male	Wuxi, Jiangsu
CCC	7 years	34	Male	Wuxi, Jiangsu
DDD	6 years	32	Male	Changzhou, Jiangsu
EEE	5 years	30	Male	Jinan, Shandong

informing the participants in advance of the purpose and intention of the study, the interview was conducted in the form of a dialogue carried out with the consent of the participants. Table 2 summarizes the questionnaire of the in-depth interviews.

### Data analysis

The researchers collected data through in-depth interviews and conducted an inductive analysis based on the interview details. To prevent the researcher's subjectivity influencing the outcome of the study, a methodological triangulation was applied through continuous consultations with experts. These experts included one taekwondo professor, one Chinese taekwondo doctor, and one Korean taekwondo doctor.

The results of the research are summarized in the following topics: First, how Chinese taekwondo instructors regard the teaching of spiritual and moral values. Second, the instructor's teaching methods. Third, the value instructors attribute to teaching taekwondo.

### Research ethics

For the ethical research of this study, the researchers proceeded as follows: first, they explained the purpose and procedures of the study before conducting the in-depth interview, and verbally verified that the participants understood the purpose and intention of the study; second, the personal information of the participants was made anonymous; third, it was established that the collected

data were to be used for no purpose other than research; fourth, the researchers consulted with the group of experts a second time, to ensure that the authenticity of the information provided in the interview had been preserved. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Gachon University.

## RESULTS

### How instructors regard the teaching of personal and moral values

BBB: Parents are very fond of seeing their children perform greetings in taekwondo schools. To bow in greeting is to respect a moral principle, and no place other than a taekwondo studio can teach a child to bow. Children are taught to say hello to the instructor, but they are not taught to nod. However, greetings in taekwondo schools are important because they require a deep bow to be made. Taekwondo thus teaches and emphasizes greetings and etiquette.

AAA: When I was taught taekwondo, I was told to only focus on exercising and competing, not learning taekwondo's principles and values. Nowadays, parents that sign their children up to taekwondo classes think taekwondo teaches students to be polite. In reality, I teach nothing other than exercise, as that was how I was educated. I haven't really thought about teaching the philosophy of taekwondo.

**Table 2.** In-depth interview questionnaire.

Category	Questions
1	What do you think is the most important aspect of teaching taekwondo?
2	What are the personal values and principles that should be taught in taekwondo?
3	Why are Chinese people trying to learn taekwondo?
4	What do students want to gain through taekwondo training?
5	What do you think about teaching taekwondo personal values and principles?

CCC: I think taekwondo skills are more important than its principles. In fact, I don't think that strong personal development determines strong taekwondo skills. I don't know much because I was not really taught the philosophical principles of taekwondo.

The response above of AAA, who competed as a taekwondo athlete when taekwondo was made famous by the Chinese government, clearly demonstrates that during that time, taekwondo only emphasized the practical aspects of training. Although he recognizes the importance of teaching taekwondo philosophy, he does not teach it himself. On the other hand, CCC neither recognizes the importance of core values, nor teaches them,

DDD: My master was Korean and placed an enormous importance on teaching values and principles. Because of his teachings, I also think that teaching the core values of taekwondo is the most important aspect of the learning process. Parents want to raise their children well because they can only have one child. I understand how the minds of children work, and always emphasize the importance of mutual respect, compromise, and consideration.

It is evident that research participant DDD recognizes the importance and necessity of teaching taekwondo's core values because he was taught by a Korean master.

EEE: There are also etiquettes in Chinese wushu, but they are different from taekwondo. The greeting in wushu is 'bào quán lǐ', which is not bow from the waist, but the right hand makes a fist, and the left palm touches it. This greeting means "I will not use force against you," whereas in taekwondo one must bow down from the waist to express a sense of respect for the partner and adults present. Also, in wushu people perform these gestures only at the beginning and the end, showing no other form of respects to the training partner. Taekwondo, however, emphasizes students to be polite to their partners during the entire training and to carry on this form of respect in their day-to-day lives, which many people consider strange but a sign of being polite and educated. I think this is important too.

According to some research, wushu etiquette is put into practice only at the beginning and end of training, and hand gestures are regarded as simple

movements [11]. On the other hand, the instructor recognized 'taking a deep bow' as the most important greeting of taekwondo's core principles. He mentioned that taekwondo emphasizes ethics and morality, manners, and courtesy, and, as a martial art enhances one's discipline, which sets the premise supporting the interview with EEE.

### The instructor's teaching methods

EEE: I always tell students to wear the uniform because, that way, the mind is set on starting to exercise from the moment the uniform is worn. Fortunately, the children also like to wear taekwondo uniforms because they are beautiful. I believe that wearing taekwondo uniforms and greeting each other is the first step in teaching the core values.

In relation to EEE's emphasis on the importance of wearing the uniform at the beginning of training, research reveals that all practitioners should wear a uniform and belt to practice courtesy, one of the principle's that is most valued in all martial arts, including taekwondo [12]. By teaching that respectfulness means to respect one's opponent as well as keep one's own dignity, the act of wearing a uniform to start exercising can be considered the beginning of instructing the core principles and values.

BBB: At school, the instructor demonstrates a movement, and the kids follow it. I think that seeing and learning is the fastest way to practice. Students are aware that they must maintain their discipline outside of school, but it is hard to put in practice. At least, I teach them to practice discipline as much as possible at school. At first, they felt awkward to bow down, but after a while, you can see them naturally bowing down even to the parents of their friends. Parents are very satisfied with that. I also teach principles of respect that must be applied between seniors and juniors, and how to not give up. Even though it is hard to exercise, I constantly praise my students so that they feel a sense of satisfaction once they've completed it. This pays off, as in the training session that follow, I see they endure and practice harder, even if they are struggling.

BBB affirms that the behaviour of the instructor himself is more effective in teaching principles and philosophy to children than plain words. His teaching method allows students to learn by directly seeing and feeling the movements, and his praise is a constant source of motivation for students.

BBB: When students finish exercising, I tell them to first offer water to the youngest of the group. Once, I was touched when I watched the older students keep the order of the queue and hand their water over to the juniors. I feel that my role as a teacher is extremely important, especially when students learn and practice etiquette and discipline through taekwondo. Also, I give each trainee a sticker each time they do something worthy of praise, such as work hard, clean the house, or rub the shoulders of their parents, which is regarded as the most satisfying activity favourite amongst students and parents. A small gift is then given to the child who has collected the most stickers.

Research participant BBB determined a behavioural change in his trainees through repetition education and a potential educational effect was obtained by repeatedly exposing the students to the leader's practice. This explicit form of teaching and unintended potential education determines a change in the behaviour of the students and in the relationship with the instructor, as well as improved relations between senior and junior students, leading to a better understanding of the principles and personal values of taekwondo [13]. A method that instructor BBB used to maintain discipline was to reward a students' behaviour with stickers.

DDD: My master often spoke about the dynamics behind human relationships and often told me to put myself in someone else's shoes, such as thinking about what my partner would have felt because of something I said. I was young at the time, but I learned much from my master besides exercise. I think I became able to fully to understand others in the relationships the master had with people. Although I am currently teaching core principles and values, as it's important children receive such instruction, I am not as good as my master. However, in instances of misunderstandings or fights, which may arise while exercising, I always advise them to take the time to think of how the other is feeling before the situation gets worse. I think it has a better educational value to give time rather than try and solve a fight on the spot.

According to one source, the combination of an instructor's personality, leadership, and teaching methods exerts a great influence on the trainees' personality and attitude [14]. The instructor DDD considers time an important element to empathetically tackle difficulties or problems that

arise in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it is clear he places an emphasis on teaching taekwondo philosophy, in addition to physical training. In this regard, it is considered that the teaching of values and principles is truly complete when it has an impact not only inside taekwondo schools, but also in day-to-day life [15].

AAA: I warn the students about using swear words or adopting offensive behaviour, as this will not be tolerated. Because of this, trainees keep themselves in check at school.

CCC: I used to think taekwondo philosophy was not important, although I knew how to greet correctly when I taught taekwondo. Good manners are only maintained between the instructor and the trainee, without caring about applying it anywhere else. Actually, I just concentrate on the exercises since it is more important to win a medal in competitions.

Even though an individual's personality is influenced by inherent or genetic factors, external environments and learning can exercise an even greater influence and personality change depending on certain educational and environmental conditions. Therefore, the role of the taekwondo instructor is important. However, since the research participants AAA and CCC, who received taekwondo training in their formative years, were not taught the principles and values of taekwondo, they do not recognize their importance to this day.

Because masters in China do not receive instructions on how to teach taekwondo personal values, they just follow what their masters have taught them or focus on bowing their head as a form of greeting. This occurs in line with the difficulties experienced by taekwondo masters in Korea, due to the absence of methods to teach the philosophy and principles of the martial art. As no manual exists on how to teach personal values and philosophy, the result is that masters understand and teach the core principles of taekwondo differently [15].

### **The value of teaching taekwondo among Chinese taekwondo masters**

EEE: I believe that taekwondo's greatest strength is that physical training and psychological development are trained at the same time. I think that taekwondo is a martial art that places weight on mental attitude as well as

physical activity. There are not many forms of martial art where one word from a master can completely affect a trainee. I think that is a special attraction of taekwondo.

BBB: Acquiring skills in taekwondo training is fundamental. But a technique that does not care about others is not taekwondo. In the past when I was taught taekwondo, I was asked how many medals I had won as a taekwondo athlete. Nowadays, people tend to think I am a polite person. As the educational aspect of taekwondo's philosophy and core values become more prominent, I feel that the way people think is changing little by little. I also like trainees to acquire skills quickly, but it is most rewarding for me to witness a change in the personality of students while I'm teaching taekwondo.

AAA: I think taekwondo is a martial art in which both the winner and loser can be applauded/congratulated. Whenever I see that the winner shows respect to the loser in a taekwondo competition or on TV, I feel a sense of pleasure that I cannot experience in any other martial arts or sports.

DDD: I think taekwondo is a martial art in which a student learns defence before attack. If you understand and care about others, you don't have to attack first. I think taekwondo is the only martial art that teaches one to protect one's body and help others. I think that taekwondo's greatest attraction is the philosophy, that understands and cares about others, rather than the physical training and exercises.

When looking at the values Chinese taekwondo masters believe in, it can be said that the principles of taekwondo, and the role of the masters in teaching them, are considered more important than the practical aspects of taekwondo.

## DISCUSSION

Taekwondo is loved by people all over the world because of its positive effects on the mind. It helps develop a sense of trust, sociality, self-confidence, and courtesy which, when combined with practical physical training, contribute to the formation of an individual's personality [16].

The importance in the education of taekwondo cannot be stressed enough, especially regarding the growth and development of children who are

physically weak and mentally immature. A fascinating aspect of taekwondo is its ability to prepare a human being for society. It teaches people how to follow orders and rules, respect the instructor, and adopt an attitude of courtesy. It also presents challenging physical activities that develop patience, a sense of accomplishment, modesty, and self-discipline.

Taekwondo is acknowledged as a martial art that develops the body, mind and social skills of young people and adults, and is loved and respected around the world. Taekwondo masters should educate their students in a way that develops the students' character and personality, so that they can learn to think and correctly translate thoughts into action. These mental instructions are regarded as the teaching of taekwondo's core values [17].

By spreading knowledge about the philosophy of martial arts, taekwondo emphasizes the development of the spirit, self-discovery, and enlightenment through constant physical training. Additionally, taekwondo places an emphasis on courtesy – which teaches students how to understand the opponent – as well as on modesty and on the positive effects of the training process. Therefore, it is fundamental that taekwondo be taught in specialized schools so that its core principles are also put into effect through action [15].

Considering the rise in a materialistic way of life, and contrary to the prosperity and advantages brought by the advancement of science, the moral principles that should be intrinsic in the nature of human beings are lost. As a result, such values have acquired even more importance as violence in schools, bullying, and crimes against children have been on the rise. The so called 'promotion effect' of taekwondo studios, which promises to promote character development through taekwondo training, stimulated the demands of consumers. This type of publicity serves as a reminder of the image of taekwondo as a character-building activity and that learning taekwondo helps acquire strong core principles [15].

Without doubt, an understanding of moral values and principles has become one of the most important processes in the art of learning taekwondo. However, since there are no books or materials related to this, taekwondo's principles and philosophy vary according to a master's teaching method, guidance, and system of beliefs.

While an awareness of the importance of teaching taekwondo's core values is shared not only by Korean but also by Chinese masters, the teaching methods and manuals are certainly not the same. Therefore, the teaching of taekwondo's principles should be included and worked on in depth when training new instructors. By sharing the principles amongst Korean and Chinese masters, an appropriate environment to train in taekwondo could be established, and trainees could correctly train and learn the principles of taekwondo philosophy, regardless of where the school is located.

## CONCLUSION

First, masters believe that the core of taekwondo philosophy lies in 'taking a deep bow', which means that they attribute more importance to greetings than to the internal development of

their students. Second, it was found that each leader was teaching differently, although teaching methods depended on the master's behaviour, praising students, and explicit repetitive teaching. Third, the study established the importance of the role of masters and that the principles of taekwondo, rather than the practical aspects, are considered more valuable in the journey of teaching taekwondo.

## HIGHLIGHTS

Teaching taekwondo principles should be included and worked on in depth when training new instructors. By sharing the principles amongst Korean and Chinese masters, an appropriate environment to train in taekwondo could be established, and trainees could correctly train and learn the principles of taekwondo philosophy, regardless of where the school is located.

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