

The ALL-NEW NAPMA for 2005!

Martial Arts

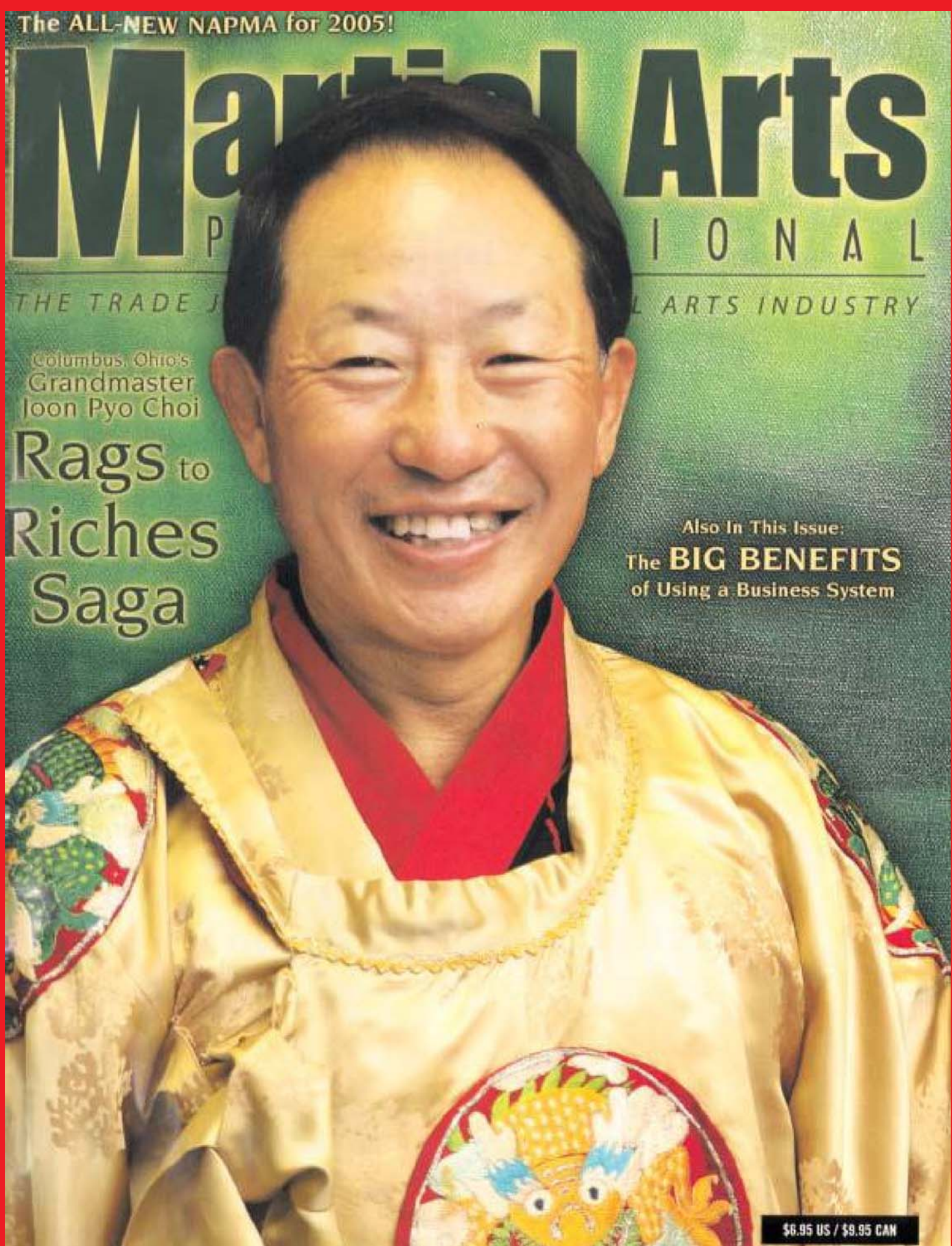
P R O F E S S I O N A L

THE TRADE JOURNAL OF THE MARTIAL ARTS INDUSTRY

Columbus, Ohio's
Grandmaster
Joon Pyo Choi

Rags to Riches Saga

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Managing our martial arts schools day after day can slowly erode our drive and enthusiasm. But, implementing the right business systems can help you run your business rather than the business running you. Our expert shows you how.

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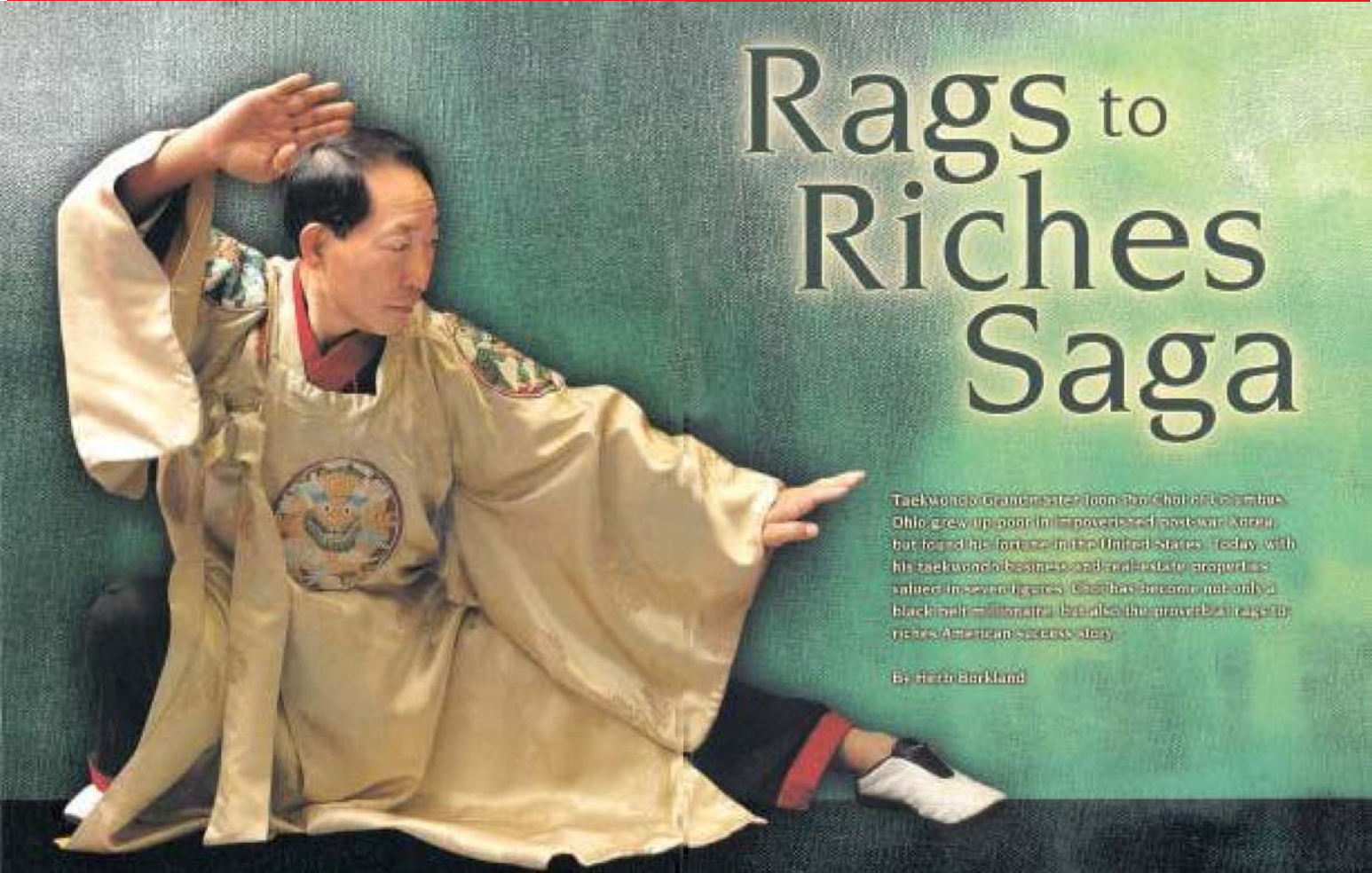
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The Pre-Emptive Strike — Part 1

The principle of the Pre-Emptive Strike is based on the concept of predicting or anticipating the pending attack and responding to that attack by seizing the initiative.

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A man in a white Taekwondo uniform is captured in a dynamic pose against a green wall. He is leaning back, with his right arm raised and hand flat against the wall, and his left arm extended forward. He is wearing a white gi with a circular emblem on the chest and black pants with a red stripe. The background is a textured green wall.

Rags to Riches Saga

Taekwondo grandmaster John Cho of Columbus, Ohio, grew up poor in impoverished postwar Korea, but found his fortune in the United States. Today, with his taekwondo business and real estate properties valued in seven figures, Cho has become not only a black belt millionaire, but also the proverbial rags-to-riches American success story.

By Herb Barkland

We know this story best of all. Once upon a time in the United States, in the

Cold War-haunted years between the end of World War II and the last helicopter out of Saigon, Eastern-born immigrant masters began breaking an age-old Asian custom by commercializing martial arts for us Westerners. 50 years later, among all of the extraordinary tales which they tell about this seminal generation of young martial heroes, the life and career of Columbus, Ohio's Grandmaster Joon Pyo Choi (pronounced, *Choy*) stands out as exemplary, even inspirational.

Choi will tell you, "when one cannot avoid a fight." Choi as a boy grew up kicking and punching his way out from under the war-shattered rubble.

Driven from their home in the North, Choi's family ended up living on a small South Korean island reserved for refugees. On this island of the dispossessed, a street-gang culture, which wartime chaos had spawned all over Korea, now intensified for Choi into a daily life of fists-and-feet fighting simply to survive.

Now, flash forward half-a-century. Today, Choi's Oriental Martial Arts College has taught more than 25,000 students; and the 9th-degree grandmaster has

more than an American black belt millionaire. The one-time warchild has grown into a wise man of peace, an internationally respected martial arts innovator who remains a strict traditionalist, and one who counts among his friends and associates some of our industry's greatest figures.

The Struggle for Self-Improvement

What has happened in the years between surviving the hell of wartime Korea and Joon Choi's present-day eminence is a textbook case history of human willpower bent on achieving excellence. His successes attest to his belief in those qualities and

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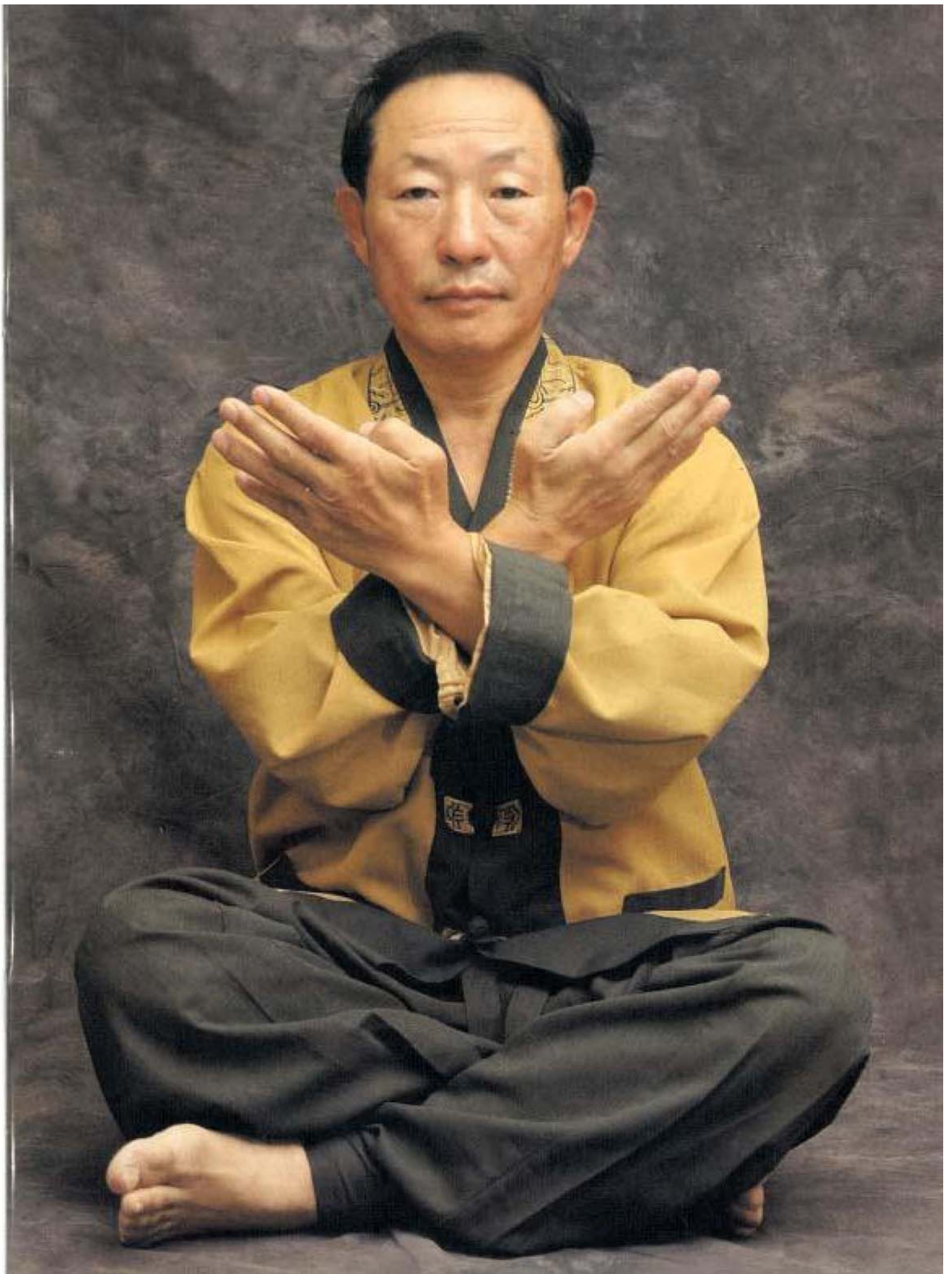
fearful thing was the ring of the telephone. I'd grab it and say, 'Twenty-five dollars per month. You come,' and hang up."

From 1950 to 1953, the Korean War was waged in which American armed forces engaged Communists in a bloody and protracted "police action" that sundered the formerly unified "Hermit Kingdom" into North and South. "There are times,"

reportedly produced more national and international taekwondo champions than any other instructor in the United States. Although the aggregate of his business and properties are valued in seven figures, Joon Choi has become much

circumstances that nourish the struggle for self-improvement.

Choi's family was able to move off the island to Pusan, where he entered elementary school while his father went on to a new job in Seoul. Choi began his study of pre-



“Despite his broken English, Choi was armed with a college degree in business administration and his business success was admirable. **By 1978—just seven years after his arrival in the U.S.—he owned five schools.**”

sport “fighting” taekwondo under the instruction of Grandmaster Byung Ick Ro, founder of the Song Moo Kwan system.

From the start of his training, Choi excelled, due to a combination of natural talent, pure application and a remorseless street culture always waiting for

him outside the dojang door. By the time he had turned 17, Choi was traveling, training and already teaching, caught up between living one life in Pusan and another in Seoul. Although he had put in years of absorbing other combat arts—hapkido, judo, kung-fu/tai chi, kumdo—by 1963, Choi was

reportedly a black belt instructor at a school of his own in a national park in Seoul.

After one particularly vicious street fight, Choi decided to undertake a serious study of traditional Asian medicine. And the only pathway to that goal was college. So he applied to the Pusan



Su-San University, to study traditional Asian medicine. From 1965 to 1971, Choi attended Song Hak Acupuncture School, and also studied business administration. He also began to explore the Asian philosophies that came to be major influences in his life.

In college, Choi was trying to fill out and enhance a martial arts-centered life. "I was living like a monk, doing seven-thousand kicks a day," he says. He could swat butterflies and dragonflies out of the air. Throw an apple up in the air, around Joon Choi, and it came down applesauce.

Paralleling Choi's own emerging maturity, taekwondo, too, was growing and coming into its own, especially after all members of the Korean military were ordered to learn it. "I taught the military, and never charged, but I saw that going into business was the way to help my passion," Choi says. "I was deeply involved in meditation then, and I gained self-awareness. This led to my decision to devote my life to teaching martial arts."

Coming to America

In April of 1971, Choi accepted the invitation of a tang soo do instructor friend to come to America and teach in Madison, Indiana.

"I got Madison, Indiana confused with Madison, Wisconsin," Choi explains, "so I expected something larger. [But] there was nothing there—[just] a cornfield. The main industry was the state mental hospital. My friend had less than five active students, but he had put down a six-month rental on the town hall, where he was teaching. Then he moved to Tennessee, and I had to teach and live at the school.

"I came with twenty-five dol-

lars in my pocket, and was unable to speak a word of English," Choi adds. "The most fearful thing was the ring of the telephone," he laughs. "I stared at it like an opponent who might beat me up. Then I'd grab it and say, 'Twenty-five dollars per month. You come,' and hang up."

In six months, Joon Choi had paid off the rental contract on that Indiana school, acquired a temporary visa, and moved to Gallatin, Tennessee, population 15,000. Here, his marketing efforts became a little more streamlined. As a Catholic, he understood churches, so he went there to do demos. He'd start by playing Korean folk music, then displayed his taekwondo—to gasps of amazement.

The result was that the local citizenry clamored for Choi to open up a school there. Within six months, friendly people had helped the young master to get his green card.

Of those classes in Tennessee, Choi says, "I spoke a little better English, but there I was, lecturing on Zen Buddhism, when I couldn't say, 'hamburger and milk.'"

In small-town '70s America, largely unexposed to martial arts, Choi created a sensation. His velocity of motion and body-size-to-power ratio was a revelation to southerners whose ideas about physical movement came from sports and farming. So those were halcyon days for Choi. While establishing himself in Gallatin, he had

an encounter with what he calls "a local fist"—a perfect martial arts story, down to the punch line when the local fist/challenger begs to become a student of the unscathed young master.



Despite his broken English, Choi was armed with a college degree in business administration and his business success was admirable. By 1978—just seven years after his arrival in the U.S.—he owned five schools. After a two-year stint as U.S. National Team Coach, Choi was named 1979 U.S. National Coach of The Year. In 1988, for the Seoul Olympics, he coached Team USA's men to silver medals, and his women brought home Olympic gold.

What Becomes of Old Martial Arts Instructors?

Choi says, "At all the tournaments, I was meeting the great masters I had always heard about. I met [tang soo do luminary] Ki Whang Kim in 1976. In 1978, he told me about having business problems. He was my hero, my idol, so I went to visit his school."



According to Choi, the "visit" to Master Kim's Silver Spring, Maryland-based school lasted a solid year. Choi discovered Kim's school had no business plan whatever, and so, as any ardent traditionalist would wish to do for his hero and idol, the young businessman moved into Kim's basement, and started revamping things from top to bottom.

If Joon Choi's reaction was classic and traditional, so, unfortunately, was Kim's school. Choi took on a business stumbling along without any promotional campaign or ads, no internal marketing plan and no billing system. Kim's black belt students paid no fees for continuing instruction.

Choi says he changed all that. According to him, Master Kim's business began growing, and a commercial culture was put in place which would continue to work for two more decades.

After his year's sojourn in Silver Spring, Choi returned to Columbus, Ohio, where he was now located. His labor of love for his idol had been very successful, yet it left Choi thoughtful. Ki Whang Kim was over 60 years old at that time and had spent his life teaching. What would he have done if his school had gone under? His only asset, aside from

Social Security, was his house. For the first time in his life, Choi looked far enough ahead to ask a troubling question: What becomes of old martial arts instructors?

"My teacher back home, many teachers I knew, had no money, no following, [and] were all in [financial] trouble," Choi says. "Then it hit me. Wow, I'm *in trouble*, too! How can I create assets? How to teach old teachers, so they can keep their dignity and pride?"

What assets did Choi already possess? The assets of a martial arts teacher are his students—who go on to become his instructors as well as the community's doctors, lawyers, professors and businessmen. So Choi turned to his instructors and students, and, by the 1980s, had formed a limited partnership under the then-favorable tax codes of the Reagan era. Of the eight members of the partnership, one was a real estate director, another a lawyer, there was a CPA, a construction company owner, and so on. They purchased land, and put up a 20,000-square-foot building, half of which became Choi's new school, and the other half, leaseable space.

In 1986, Choi's world headquarters cost one-million dollars to build, and was followed three years later by the third of his properties, a 15,000 square-foot commercial location whose non-taekwondo half is currently rented by Blockbuster.

"The three properties have doubled in value," Choi itemizes. "I'm paying most of them off."

Accolades

Over the years, what has been going on in these three locations covers not only teaching tae-

kwondo, but also every facet of the contemporary international martial arts business.

In 1992, Choi became the founder and president of the World United Martial Arts Alliance (WUMA), an international governing body for sanctioning martial arts championships as well as a goodwill trade-association boutique. WUMA provides training and certification for tournament competitors and officials, business-management courses, membership discount insurance rates, seminars, uniforms and patches, a newsletter, etc.

Choi's Kimoodo Holistic Health Center in Reynoldsburg, Ohio is, in one sense, the most personal and most ambitious of all Joon Choi's current ventures. Since creating

and marketing Kimoodo, Choi has made spreading better health a paying proposition, by synthesizing and systematizing basic elements of classic Asia wellness techniques—but only after reportedly first using these techniques to cure himself of a potentially career-ending spinal vertebrae injury that knocked him over one morning when he tried to tie his shoelaces.

As Master Choi has become more involved in the civic and business life of the Columbus, Ohio area, the value placed on his services is reflected by the responsibilities and honors that have been bestowed on him. In the last decade alone, among other things, Choi was a president of Asian American Commerce

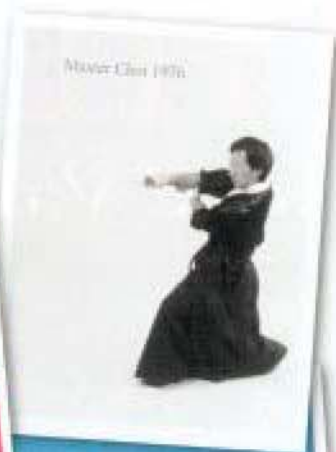
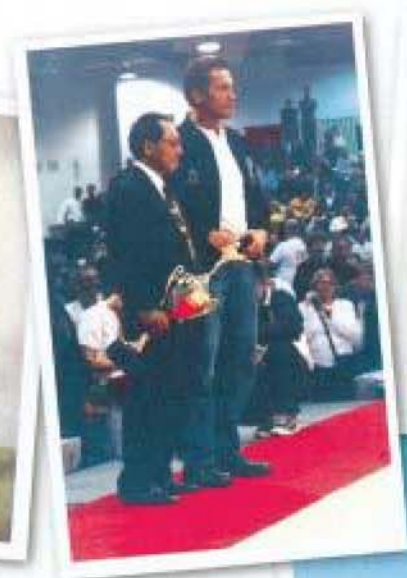
Group, and served on the Advisory Council for Peace Unification of Korea, at the pleasure of the president of Korea. He also serves on the board of directors for United Way. In 2001, he received a Civil Rights Leadership Award from the Civil Rights Commission and the Governor of Ohio.

What does the future hold? One of Choi's ongoing projects is to get government accreditation for a martial arts college, where students could study all aspects of the martial arts: mental, physical, spiritual and philosophic. Not merely a four-year university, either, but "a temple where masters and students could stay indefinitely, to cultivate their minds and bodies whenever they needed."





Joan Choi's iconic career not only sums up our wild and wooly past, but also aims straight ahead, off into the profound and limitless future of mankind's oldest unbroken chain of learning. ♦



Herb Borkland is a veteran black belt and martial arts writer living in Columbia, Maryland.

Meet Master Joon Choi at the World Conference

Master Joon P. Choi will conduct a seminar on the art of Kimoodo at the 2005 Martial Arts SuperShow and World Conference on April 29-May 1, 2005 at The Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Kimoodo, as taught by Master Choi, is healing energy merged in the dynamics of martial arts. According to Choi, Kimoodo has its roots in ancient Asian martial arts integrated within Oriental healing arts, an aspect of which has been used in Asia for more than 5,000 years to maintain a healthy mind and body and rejuvenate injury or illness.

Kimoodo is designed to help the practitioner's mind, body, spirit and emotions work together harmoniously to overcome injuries, illnesses and hardships in life. Through exercise regimens, meditative breathing techniques and positive mind-conversion training, Kimoodo will open the channels to bring oneself into a harmonious balance, which can bring peace and happiness.

