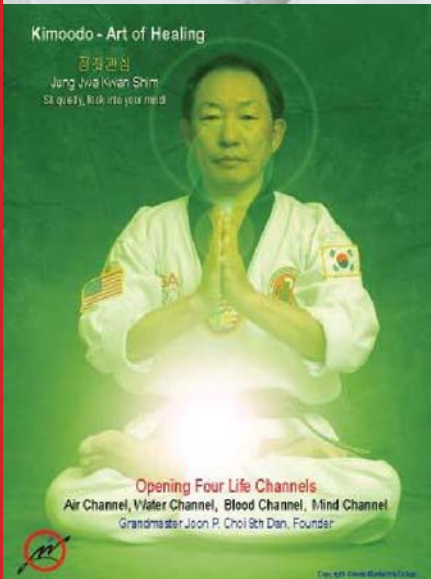


TAEKWONDO

Renaissance Master
Joon P. Choi

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*To: Chuck Stepan
with Respect
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JOON PYO RENAISSANCE

The year was 1945, and the armies of the world were hurtling themselves across continents. The Nazi and Japanese empires were fighting out their last desperate gasps. World events were moving fast...much too fast to notice the birth of Joon Pyo Choi in the mountains of North Korea. Born amidst the howling November winds that streaked down the north-south mountain ranges and chilled Heung Nam City, the child had to be rugged to survive the frigid Korean winter. A few years later brother Young Pyo joined the family and the two youngsters blossomed in the peaceful years following World War II.

In 1956, a few years after the brutal Korean War, Joon Pyo, eleven, began martial art training in Tae Kwon Do with his uncle, a black belt. The family believed this to be a positive step for their young son because Pyo was small for his age and shy. Fortunately his smallness and shyness combined to build in him a strong determination and persistence that stood Joon Pyo in good stead when the family later moved to Seoul. There the future master entered the Song Moo Kwan School of Martial Arts under its grandmaster and founder, Byung Jik Ro.

Renaissance Man Beginnings

The year was 1963 when Joon Pyo Choi first became a martial art instructor for the Korean Boy Scouts in the capital city. It was the beginning of the only profession Joon Pyo Choi longed for even though he entered Pusan Fisheries National College in 1965 as a business major. The college had no Tae Kwon Do club; a problem Joon Pyo soon solved. He became the head instructor at the college's new club. At this time he also entered the Song Hak Institute of Oriental Medicine to study acupuncture and accupressure, earning his certification as an acupuncture specialist.

To provide some balance in his life, Joon Pyo began to study an ancient Korean musical instrument, Ga Ya Geum, Dae Geum, and in 1967 he won second place in the National Collegiate Traditional Musical Instrument contest. He was well on his way to

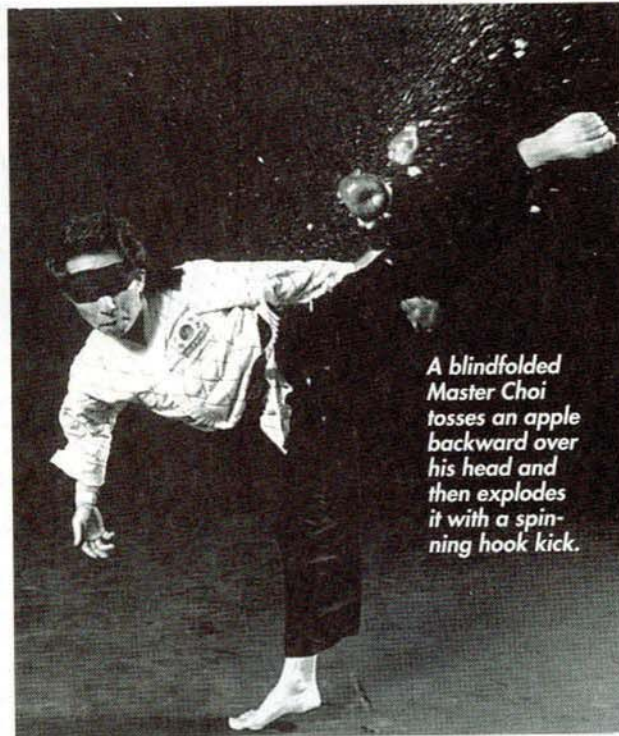
becoming the Renaissance man he is today.

During these years he took to the countryside whenever possible, visiting different martial arts schools and learning about various religions. He was always fascinated with the comparison of the various arts, religions and philosophies.

Life began to move faster for the young man after college. He entered the Korean Navy and there he began his career as a martial arts competitor, capturing regional and national championships in 1967 in his weight classification. During this time he became the instructor of the Korean Navy ROTC, and earned numerous awards for outstanding leadership and athletics.

Invitation to America

Then it was 1971 and the martial arts rage was flourishing in America. Joon Pyo had a big decision to make about his future. He had received an invitation from a place halfway around the world, the Martial Arts Academy of Madison, Indiana, USA, where they needed a master instructor. He decided to accept the offer and to continue his search for his true self as the complete martial artist in America. So, in that same year, he landed in America with one suitcase holding two Tae Kwon Do uniforms, \$25 in cash, and his beloved Korean instrument. The job went well, but when his contract expired he decided to move



A blindfolded Master Choi tosses an apple backward over his head and then explodes it with a spinning hook kick.

on and see more of this huge country. His next stop was Gallatin, Tennessee, where he opened his first school, The Oriental Martial Arts College. One year later, still searching, he moved northward to bustling Columbus, Ohio, where he opened the Oriental

CHOI: MASTER

"Where Choi sits
grass never grows."
Ancient Korean maxim
By Charles A. Stepan



Martial Arts College. After a time, he decided this was where he would put down his new roots.

In the years that followed it was always onward and upward as the school flourished and Master Choi's personal recognition soared. It was his outstanding demonstrations that brought him the admiration of his fellow martial artists and the applause of the general public. There are few martial arts events in the United States that have not seen one of his famous

Right: Grandmaster Choi consistently gets on the floor with his students to lead them, teach them, and guide them with up-close hands on techniques. Below: Grandmaster Choi is flanked by Master Hyung Chul Kim, left, and Ho B. Kim. Both masters train with the Grandmaster though they are heads of their own schools.



Left: Younger brother Young Pyo Choi (dark top, white pants) shares some of his weaponry skills with students at the Ohio Martial Arts College.

venerable Smithsonian Institute.

Besides becoming a master of Tae Kwon Do, Joon Pyo Choi has mastered Karate, Kung-fu, and weaponry. Young Pyo Choi, his younger brother who has his own Martial Arts College in

Indianapolis, Indiana, is also a recognized Kung-fu and weapon expert. In their joint demonstrations, Young Pyo demonstrates his Kung-fu and knowledge of weapons, such as the bo staff,

and Chinese broadsword.

Grandmaster Choi's credentials as a teacher are not only impressive, they are mind boggling. Somehow, some way, this diminutive master has found the secret to turning out national and international champions.

demonstrations. It is rare for him to not receive a standing ovation. He has been the recipient of countless "Best Demonstration" awards from such prestigious events as the Canadian Open, the All American Open at Madison Square Garden, as well as from the

JOON PYO CHOI: RENAISSANCE MASTER

He has produced more of them than any other master instructor in the United States. In one year alone, 1988, five of his students qualified for the Olympic Team Trials in Colorado Springs. That same year, three of them won gold medals at the USTU National Championships. Master Choi has served as head coach for five international games for the United States Tae Kwon Do team. In the Third World Championships held in Chicago, he coached the U. S. team to a third place finish from among the 62 nations entered. In 1978 he was appointed National Chairman of the AAU Tae Kwon Do Tournament Committee and Chairman of the Ohio AAU Tae Kwon Do Association. In 1979 he was selected as Coach of the Year by the AAU. That same year, he founded the United Martial Arts Federation and became its first president. In Columbus, Ohio, his tournament, The Battle of Columbus, has grown to the largest in Ohio as well as one of the largest in the Eastern United States.

What's his magic? I believe it's a hands on, on the floor teaching technique.

In talking with Master Choi and watching him operate, it is apparent that the martial arts are his whole life and that he has given much study to their perfection and the perfection of his own life through the arts. Besides the masters in his own Ohio Martial Arts College, this man is able to bring to Columbus other master instructors from across the country; people such as Master Moo Yong Kang of San Diego, Ho B. Kim of Chicago, and Hyung Chul Kim of Toronto, Canada, who continue to train with Grandmaster Choi even though they are masters within their own schools.

Two things stood out in my observation of Grandmaster Choi: First, he has a frank openness to other styles which he believes has widened his horizons, his understanding of himself and of our universe. He feels this has opened his thinking and he firmly

believes that all martial arts must recognize the worth and virtue of other styles and abandon the pretense that theirs is "the only way." Furthermore, he has knowledge and proficiency in so many various aspects of different arts, martial and otherwise. He is at true Renaissance man.

As a martial arts writer, I do have one major complaint with this master--he moves too fast. He covers so much ground it's impossible to keep up with him. His philosophy in the making of a "Master" would in itself fill a magazine. He has traveled world-wide, walked the Great Wall of China, visited the Shaolin

Temple, demonstrated there and dedicated a memorial at the temple site. All his life he has dissected his beloved art of Song Moo Kwan, studied, pieced together took apart again and examined, experimented and tried to find new and better ways. Always placing loyalty and reliability first, he has developed a method of teaching that he has gleaned and refined



Above: The Grandmaster continues to perfect his own techniques as he improves the skills of his students. Right: Attention to the smallest details of a technique, such as finger placement, is a hallmark of Grandmaster Choi's instruction.



Left: Grandmaster Choi teaches the use of Ohang Bong (Korean short stick) to Master James Cahn, a Cleveland attorney. Senior Belt Master Ron Kennedy of Cincinnati watches the lesson. Below: A warrior is a focal point in the meditation room at The Ohio Martial Arts College.



from all of the martial arts that he calls Moo Gong. Moo Gong, also, would require another whole magazine, or perhaps a book, to present.

Pursuit of Excellence

As to the personal philosophy of this great martial artist, let me quote his own words:

"In my life, in the process of training to become a good martial artist, I have made lots of mistakes. At times I may have hurt others without intention. I apologize to all of them with all my humbleness and sincerity. I am doing my best to reach the

last stage of the martial arts and I wish to build a good system that provides an opportunity for others to grow in the martial arts. I want to provide a training place where students can discipline their minds and bodies to find truth in the martial arts and their personal lives. My training place or temple is a place where they can rest their souls and bodies and die with the dignity of a master of the martial arts as well as a contented human being."

What more can one say?