

Taekwon-Do : Sport, Art, Science or Philosophy?

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Both Taekwon-Do students and non-practitioners around the world have asked repetitively; what exactly is Taekwon-Do? Is it a martial art, a sport, an art form, a science or a philosophy? The founder of Taekwon-Do, General Choi Hong Hi, even goes as far as to say that it is almost a cult. In this essay I aim to examine each of the elements of Taekwon-Do and to result in a definition of my own, which successfully encompasses Taekwon-Do.

The literal translation of Taekwon-Do is such that it is broken down into three parts. 'Tae' meaning jumping or flying, to kick or smash with the foot, 'Kwon' means punch or destroy with the hand or fist and 'Do' is an art or way. This literal translation of 'Taekwon-Do' gives us a general idea of what Taekwon-Do consists of but not what it is. Even the name indicates that there is more than one idea associated with Taekwon-Do and more than one component involved.

Firstly, I think I can safely say that Taekwon-Do is a martial art as it is a form of unarmed combat that has been developed and designed primarily for self-defence and warfare with the majority of techniques intended to defend an attack or injure and disable an opponent. It can also be considered in this way due to its development based on a variety of other martial arts from Eastern Asia primarily the ancient Korean form of foot fighting, Taek Kyon, and the Japanese martial art of Karate.

General Choi Hong Hi's involvement in the military contributed to the growth and expansion of Taekwon-Do, which gives another reason for Taekwon-Do to be viewed as a martial art. As a child General Choi studied Taek Kyon and was later forced to join the Japanese army where he learnt Karate. However, these two martial arts formed only the basis of Taekwon-Do, General Choi formulated and systemised an entire range of techniques for every situation which he collated and named "Taekwon-Do"

A sport is defined as an activity involving movement of the body for enjoyment, competition or exercise. So, yes Taekwon-Do is also a sport in every sense as it definitely involves movement of the body and physical exercise. Enjoyment is inevitable. It is also possible for practitioners of Taekwon-Do to compete against other Taekwon-Do students or even students from other martial arts from all over the world in tournaments and competitions. Tournaments have several components such as destructions, sparring and patterns as well as team events. Students are always encouraged to enter these competitions to boost their self esteem and technical capability.

A science is the knowledge or study of natural or physical phenomena. If the human body is considered as a natural phenomenon, the way in which Taekwon-Do has been formulated to maximise use of muscles in the body to the advantage of the student, Taekwon-Do can also be considered as a science. Taekwon-Do is a specialised science of the body for the purpose of self-defence. It has a series of attributes, which when combined, make up the theory of power.

They are in effect the keys to the physical strength of the individual. According to the encyclopaedia each technique has been formulated in a mathematically precise way so that it adheres to each of the factors of the theory of power; speed, equilibrium, breath control, concentration, mass and reaction force.

An art is human skill applied practically to any branch of science or strategy. Since I have already decided that Taekwon-Do is a science, it must therefore also be an art form. An art form that aims to make the ultimate use of the body. Art can also be interpreted as something that is aesthetically pleasing to the senses. Taekwon-Do perhaps is not what a painter would call art but the smooth, fluid, powerful motion in which well trained Taekwon-Do students perform movements such as patterns is certainly pleasing to the eye of both those outside Taekwon-Do and those involved with it. In pattern competitions some of the components considered by the judges are characteristic beauty, rhythm and timing of the pattern being performed.

A philosophy is conduct of life. With Taekwon-Do comes a whole way of thinking. The ethics and morality involved with Taekwon-Do as portrayed by the tenets aim to make the world a better place by dealing with injustice and unfairness using Taekwon-Do as a platform. The philosophy of Taekwon-Do aims to allow the student to make him or herself a better person by developing the self esteem to view situations with a justified manner and act appropriately in response.

Taekwon-Do is a way of life for myself and many other students. Everything I learn in Taekwon-Do is carried through into everyday situations I encounter. The tenets we adhere to in Taekwon-Do introduce discipline, courtesy and self-control, which are carried into my school and social life. As I started Taekwon-Do at a very young age, my lifestyle would be dramatically different had I not received mental training and discipline in respect to the tenets. I respect my elders and seniors more than teenagers from outside Taekwon-Do and in turn I expect to be respected by juniors.

In conclusion, my definition of Taekwon-Do is as follows:

Taekwon-Do is a martial art that originated in Korea. Although it is a martial art, it has been designed to gain ultimate use of the human body, in both self-defence and competition. To harness the maximum power and technique in Taekwon-Do intensive mental training is used. This mental training includes strict discipline, the following of tenets and an oath that attempts to encourage students to take what they have and improve it to the best of their ability.

For students of Taekwon-Do, it becomes more than a martial art or a sport. It affects the way they move, the way they act and respond to others. It changes how they think about society and encourages them to better themselves and those around them. Taekwon-Do is more than individual parts brought together to form a superior method of self-defence. It is an art, a science and a philosophy, but these combined form something greater - a way of life.

References

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*
2. *Taekwon_Do Encyclopaedia; General Choi*
3. *Concise English Dictionary*

