



Episode 293 – Choi Hong Hi | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey what's going on this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 293 and today, we're going to talk about a controversial figure in the martial arts. A man often considered the founder of taekwondo sometimes General Choi Hung Hi. Here in whistlekick we talk about figures from martial arts, we interview guests we talk about other subjects, ego how to get better at certain things we really try to cover it all and that's because this is part of my development as a martial artist. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm the founder of whistlekick we make sparring gear, we make apparel, we make kicking paddles, we make a bunch of other stuff, we're adding new stuff all the time. And the best place to find that stuff is at whistlekick.com. You can also find a lot of our stuff over at Amazon, for the same prices because we're trying to make it easy for you. Another thing that's easy for you is to head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com check out photos videos, all the stuff that we collect for the show notes for this episode, for all of the other episodes that give you more context, more value around the words that I am speaking into your ears right now. While you're over there you can set up for the newsletter, you can comment on episodes and of course you can always reach out to us via social media, we are @whistlekick and my email address, my personal email address Jeremy@whistlekick.com.

Whether you practice taekwondo or not it is impossible to ignore the contributions to the martial arts of Gen. Choi hung hi. One of the most significant figures in the world of taekwondo is General Choi Hung Hi. Choi is regarded by many as the founder of taekwondo and I say that with an attempt at quotes because it is not a fully accepted statement. He is most often referred to in this way by the International



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Taekwondo Federation the ITF and that was the organization founded by Choi himself in 1966. However, other organizations such as World Taekwondo or WT which up until recently was WTF world taekwondo Federation, no it's not the goofy acronym that can mean other things which is part of the reason that they changed it, they do not consider him the founder of taekwondo generally speaking because he was accused of spreading propaganda about himself during the 1950s. Still, Choi devoted his life to spreading the martial art taekwondo around the world regardless of your feelings on his motivations, he did do this. This is a well-documented fact Choi was born in Myong Chong County, North Korea on November 9, 1918. During that time his hometown was under Japanese rule and it was renamed megawa gun, konyo hokudo in the province of chosen at age 12 according to some reports anyway, he led a protest against the Japanese occupants at age 12, they got him expelled from school. He was then sent by his father to Han Il Dong to learn calligraphy as well as Chinese characters. His calligraphy teacher Han also happened to be a martial artist and a tae kyon master and he taught Choi the art of foot fighting. In 1937 Choi traveled to Japan to study English mathematics and karate. He learned karate from a karate instructor in Kyoto who is also well known in Korea. He met the famous Gichin Funakoshi, the founder Shotokan karate and learned from him. Just two years later to achieve the rank of first Dan or 1st° black belt which was soon followed by a second Dan while he was at the University of Tokyo. He also taught at a young men Christian Association in Tokyo, YMCA yes that's what YMCA stands for. Now just as an aside here, me personally I'm going little bit off script, if you've ever learn taekwondo forms or watched some of the taekwondo forms and thought they looked familiar as I have I suspect it's this early Shotokan influence that led to some of these similarities. Choi return to Korea in 1942, unwillingly he was drafted into the Japanese army, he rebelled by attempting to escape to join the Korean liberation Army but he failed, he was imprisoned in Pyongyang. Choi used this time of imprisonment to continue training martial arts, to maintain his physical and mental health. Just before he was going to be executed, the allies liberated Korea in August 1945 and he was freed. He joined the new South Korean Army in January 1946 where he was appointed a second Lieut. In 1949, he traveled to the United States for the first time as part of his duty Choi's promotions didn't stop until he became a Brig. Gen. In 1951. Then in 1954 he achieved the rank of Maj. Gen. He uses influence and authority as a military official to train taekwondo instructors for the entire South Korean army and were starting to see blending the overlap between his military pursuits and is martial arts pursuits truthfully whether your we are looking at the short history or your digging a little bit deeper as we have in the past, if you haven't read a killing art from Master Alex Gillis in episode 106, would suggest that you read that book go back listen that episode. I cannot understate the importance of the military aspects from Choi hung Hi in the development and spread of taekwondo.

According to San Dok Soong the Kwon Jang of chung do kwon, in the 1950s in the cofounder of taekwondo Choi "Lied and stated that he had 24 years' experience in martial arts practice and spread propaganda about himself" as a result song cancelled Choi's fourth Dan certificate and honorary Kwon Jang position. Having the knowledge of two martial arts tae kyon and karate, Choi developed a new martial art from these two and called it taekwondo which literally translates to foot fist art. He founded the Odo Kwon in 1953 together with Nam Te Hi to train the Korean army in the new martial art. After



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some time, he also decided to make it public and establish several Kwons or training holes Gyms especially in Seoul. In 1959 Choi became the first president of the Korea Taekwondo Association the KTA. In the early 1960s joy and taekwondo co-founder Nam Te Hi led the group of original masters of taekwondo that was formed by the Korea taekwon do Association. The goal of this group was to promote taekwondo not only in Korea but also in different parts of the world, the group traveled to at least 33 countries. Choi was also the first Korean General to have authority over foreign military troops from the United states. As the commanding general of the Republic of Korea Army in 1961. On March 22, 1966, Choi founded the international taekwon do Federation the ITF in Seoul South Korea. However, the South Korean government abandoned the ITF in 1972 is the opposed Choi's action to introduce taekwondo into North Korea. Just year later the South Korean government establish their own organization named world taekwon do Federation, now WT but with different guidelines and techniques. Again, an aside, if you've ever compared the forms from ITF and WT you'll see they are dramatically different and we could go into quite a bit on that right now but this isn't an episode on that this is an episode on. Choi was furious about this new organization and he exiled himself from South Korea moved to Canada. Choi continued to travel to different countries in the following years, then in 1979 Troy flew North Korea where the government supported him with his endeavors and promoting taekwon do all over the world. In 1985 Troy move the ITF headquarters to Vienna, Austria to reach more people. In the same year, his work encyclopedia of taekwondo consisting of 15 volumes, it is a massive was published. Choi continue to travel around the world in the 1980s and 1990s holding seminars and hosting competition. His last seminar was for the ITF International instructors course in April 2002. He died shortly after on June 15, 2002 from stomach cancer. Before he died, he returns to Pyongyang North Korea where his body remains today.

I don't generally talk about the days that we record these episodes because they are meant to be, I don't want to say timeless that sounds a little bit conceited but they're not meant to occur really in any space and time, want these episodes to be something you can reflect back on after years. You know were not planning to do another episode on general Choi at any point unless we come up with a bunch more information. Here I am recording this on Wednesday, May 2nd of 2018 and it feels topical because it was just two days ago, Monday morning, April 30th that another major figure in the foundation of taekwondo passed away, Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee. we didn't plan this the recording this episode was scheduled more than a week ago, we started the research for this couple weeks ago but there's something I think it's really important here. As you heard, if you've read or done any research on your own, if you've talked to anybody from the early days of taekwondo, you can't separate the political elements of taekwondo from the martial art. And that can be really difficult especially as a martial artist, especially someone who any doesn't like to bring politics into their lives and to read Mr. Gillis's book, A killing art, and to understand the history of taekwondo and some of the terrible things done in the name of spreading taekwondo, it can be really hard to handle. But when I think about taekwondo as a martial art when I think about the good that it has done the good that Gen. Choi, regardless of his motivations, accomplished that Grand Master Rhee accomplished, in part because of, in part despite of some of these other things that those of the early days of taekwondo were trying to do, there's a lot of good that



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came out of that. Taekwondo is, according to many reports, the broadest martial art trained globally. We watch the numbers as best we can there are of course not really official numbers but taekwondo as far as we can tell has more people training than any other single martial art. It's pretty impressive for something that's been around depending on how you look at it 50, 40, 60 years and whether or not Gen. Choi is the founder of taekwondo, he is at least in my mind a founder of taekwondo and he is at least responsible for taekwondo being what it is. I do not believe that taekwondo would be bigger had he not been involved, probably wouldn't have even been called taekwondo. And this goes back to an episode that we recorded recently about respect and when I look at the figure of Gen. Choi, I didn't know him of course so it's hard to say how I feel about him personally. My suspicion is that I would not have had a shareable amount of respect for him as a person, as a human being but as a martial artist, undoubtedly. I believe that most people do what they feel is right at the time and while I may disagree with many of his decisions, I do believe that the things he did he did for reasons that he believed in and I have respect for that. So, while this is an episode about Gen. Choi hung hi, the arguable questionable founder or at least one of the founders of taekwondo, it is also in a way an episode about the foundation of taekwondo because we're not going to be doing episodes I don't think about the other men there. I don't know that there's enough material that we can an entire episode. So, I want to kind of append here a bit of a thank you, a bit of a bow to the other men responsible for bringing taekwondo forward whether you train in taekwondo, whether you've watched it on television or not. Taekwondo has influenced you in your life in your martial arts even in a tiny bit I'll guarantee it.

That's all I've got for today. I would love to hear from you hear your feedback. I'd love to again put in a plug for episode 106 with Alex Gillis the author of A killing Art. No, I don't get any kind of kickback if you read or buy that book. Just great book whether your taekwondo martial artist or not. Check us out whistlekick.com, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Thanks for listening today, until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day.