



1964: Grandmaster Kim Soo often trained and practiced forms at In Wang Mountain - close to his home in Seoul, Korea.

"Sincerity in your Forms means concentrating your mind and ki on each technique."

Grandmaster Kim Soo

What is Form?

By Grandmaster Kim Soo, 10th. Dan & Founder, Chayon-Ryu Martial Arts

Written by Sabomnim Graeme Cox

One of the most important aspects of training in Chayon-Ryu is the emphasis on Forms. By First Dan Black belt level, students are required to know 25 Forms. This is possibly one of the most required by any Martial Art system. Why such emphasis on one part of martial art training?

The most obvious reason is the rich history of Chayon-Ryu. This Chayon-Ryu legacy comes from the system's original founder Grandmaster Yoon, Byung-In, whose family fled to China during the Japanese occupation of Korea. After many years of trying to prove his worthiness he was finally permitted to learn Chaun-Fa.

Grandmaster Yoon was the first Korean national to learn this Chinese art. Grandmaster Yoon later attended Nihon University in Tokyo, Japan, where he studied Shudokan karate under Okinawan Grandmaster Toyama, Kanken. After World War II, Grandmaster Yoon returned from Japan and started Kwonbop classes at the Seoul YMCA, where he taught Chuan-Fa and Shudokan karate as one program. My teachers, Grandmasters Lee, Nam-Suk; Park, Chul-Hee; and Hong, Jong-Pyo were original students of Grandmaster Yoon. In the early 1970s, I included the recently developed Palgue series and several advanced Taekwondo Forms with the traditional requirements. As a result, Chayon-Ryu incorporates the Forms of three different Martial Art systems from China, Okinawa, and Korea.

On a superficial level, Forms are simply a way of practicing the techniques you learned in class. It teaches you how to combine and move through a series of these techniques. The superficial benefits include improvements in physical health, flexibility, coordination, and self-defense skills. On this level, there are some valuable benefits. But if this was all Forms had to offer, why such emphasis. You could get these benefits from an aerobics class!

Just as martial art training is initiated for self-defense purposes, it is a superficial view if this is all you get from your training. This practical application is the way the art is expressed - because it is a physical art. However, a much deeper truth underlies the practical application of Martial Art training. Forms are a treasure island with pristine water and white sandy beaches, surely a spectacle to behold. But if you only look at it from the boat you will find no treasure. You need to row ashore and dig in the sand to find the real treasure. The deeper you dig, the greater the riches to be found. This is also the case with Forms.

Some of the deeper benefits include, self-confidence, commonsense, wisdom and knowledge, patience, serenity, and oneness with the universe. These mental and spiritual benefits only occur with many years of dedicated and sincere training.

The key is training with sincerity. You must give 100% every time you train. Simply going through the motions of the Forms is not enough. Simply memorizing the Forms is not enough. You must first memorize the Form, then practice many times to make it your own. I recommend a minimum of 300 times to begin to understand each Form. It may take 1,000 repetitions of the Form to truly call it your own. Keep a journal to track your count. Add to it whenever you get the chance. Better still; make time to add to it.

Sincerity in your Forms means concentrating your mind and ki on each technique. Not just on one or two of them, but all of them. Each technique is your own combat against an imaginary opponent. Each Form is combat against multiple enemies. If you put yourself in a combat situation every time you do a Form, the result of your training will be vastly different. You must be sincere if you are against an opponent (real or otherwise). If you are not sincere when you are against a real opponent you will surely fail.

Also of major importance is following the Basic Principles. Some Basic Principles are more important than others but you can't claim to have mastered the Form if you haven't focused on all of the Principles. It could be justified that body shifting and turning, balanced motion, rhythm and timing, and balance on abdomen are probably the most important Principles as far as the physical execution of the technique is concerned. However, spiritual benefits are greatest by concentrating on your imaginary opponent.

Understanding each movement is much more important than simply performing the technique. Each movement is worthless without a reason. Why are you doing the movement? What does it achieve? You won't know unless you use your imaginary opponent. This makes your movement sincere, your training spiritual. Spiritual training has nothing at all to do with religious beliefs. Spiritual training involves your mind, body, and soul. By combining these three components of your "self" you can defeat any enemy. It is in fact the only way you can. The enemy's intention is to harm you. Your training must reflect your determination and confidence in a street attack. You must practice for it every time you train. This gives you valuable "experience" if you are ever confronted. Train in the Dojang like you are in the street. That is, train seriously as if you were really being attacked. Deal with a street situation as if you are in the controlled safety of the dojang. This is not the ultimate purpose of Martial Art training, but it is how you must train.

Mental benefits of Form include an indomitable spirit. When you first learn a Form it seems so complicated. It seems long, the movements and sequences are difficult. You feel that each Form is harder than any you previously learned. After an initial learning phase you can begin memorizing the Form. Once you have memorized the Form it doesn't seem so daunting, not as difficult as when you were first taught. However, it is at this point that many students lose their way. They feel they know the Form, and only practice it superficially, just enough to know if asked to perform. This practice is simply repeating, not improving. Sometimes the quality of the Form actually decreases at this point, because the student is

more involved with knowing the Form as a whole rather than emphasizing each movement. However, this is the point when most learning should take place. This is when students need to truly analyze the purpose for each movement, and how and why it is executed. Your indomitable spirit comes from your mastery of what seemed so difficult when you first learned it.

What is Form? It is moving meditation and the way to enlightenment. This only comes through sincerity in your Form practice. With many repetitions you understand yourself through the movements. How can you possibly become complacent or bored with your Forms? There is always room for improvement, and better understanding of the Principles. Besides, there is no end to your training and learning. And there is always time to practice one more Form.