

# The relation between Confucianism & Neo-Confucianism, Korea and Taekwon-Do

Thesis for promotion to 8th degree  
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## 1. Introduction and acknowledgements

Seven years have passed since my promotion to Master. Seven years, it seems to be a long time when at the start of it, but these seven years have passed quickly. Seven years of practising and preparing for this next grading. Seven years in which a lot has happened, both on personal and on Taekwon-Do level as on global level.

When thinking about a theme for this thesis, there were a lot of possibilities. So why writing about Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism and the relation to Korea and Taekwon-Do?

I wanted to explore why we do some of the things that are very obvious to us, as Taekwon-Do practitioners, but seems a bit odd to others. I wanted to know if indeed we can relate to ancient actions and uses, or if General Choi Hong Hi invented some things. I wanted to know if General Choi involuntary slipped these uses into our Taekwon-Do community, because he grew up with these ideas.

Not being religious myself, but interested in why some people rely on religion and interested in philosophies, I wanted to explore if Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are philosophies or religions, and what the differences are with other religions/philosophies like Buddhism or Taoism.

Being at the eve of a promotion is one of those moments to be grateful and to thank some persons. I was reading the acknowledgements in the thesis I wrote for my promotion to 7th degree and I came to the conclusion it would not really be different to what I feel now. I would thank my family and my first instructor, my fellow- and/or assistant-instructors at my club Ge-Baek and some persons that were and are important to me. So I decided to skip it. The risk of forgetting people is an extra reason. However, I would like to make an exception.

I would like to thank the Executive Committee and the Board of ITF, for the last couple of years we were able to work together, and especially GrandMaster Paul Weiler who gave me the opportunity being part of this team.

And for sure I want and have to thank GrandMaster Frank Vanberghen, my husband, friend, partner (-in-crime), buddie, psychologist, confidential counsellor, wailing wall and much more for the last 26 years, for always standing at my side, giving me the time and opportunity to do the things I want to do, being comprehensive, pushing me forward, but pushing me backwards too from time to time (although I only see the reasons after a while of reflecting). Thank you for always being there!



*Confucius*

## 2. Confucianism

### a. Definitions

In literature Confucianism is described as (definitions):

- Confucianism: 'the doctrine of Confucius'.
- Confucianism: 'a Chinese ethical and philosophical system, following the ideas of Confucius'.
- Confucianism: 'an Asian religion'.
- Confucianism: 'a Chinese philosophy, also sometimes described as a religion, based on the ideas of Confucius in which the virtue of human beings is the main key, with values such as social connections, loyalty and respect'.

### b. Confucianism, religion or philosophy?

Confucianism is an old oriental ethical and philosophical system. It's based on the ideas and doctrine of Confucius (551-479 BC), also known as Master Kong (Kong Fuzi) (see chapter 3).

Confucianism had a big influence on the culture and history of several countries in Eastern Asia, specifically China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan.

Confucianism is considered by most people to be a philosophy, not a religion, although there's no complete consensus. If we define a religion as the worship of a supreme being, then Confucianism is not a religion. Confucianism is not taking into consideration the human soul, the human nature or the afterlife.

If on the contrary religion is being considered as a system with a personal view of humanity and its place in the universe, then Confucianism, as well as Buddhism and Taoism, can be seen as a religion.

It acted for a long time as 'the official ideology', therefore it had a big influence on the population of especially China.

### c. The basics of Confucianism

The doctrine of Confucius is based on the 'Chinese Classics' books full of philosophical ideas, rituals, poems, music and history, representing the spiritual and cultural heritage of the 'holy wise men' of the Chinese history.

A primary purpose of Confucianism was to create an ethical justification for the traditional Chinese family system and the worshipping of the ancestors.

Confucius' teachings are regulated, patriarchal, and often very strict. For Confucius it was important to restore the cultural heritage of earlier generations. Traditions were strongly idealized. Confucius wanted to restore the norms and values, but often he gave an own interpretation to traditional opinions.

For Confucius, good manners and social behaviour were very important. In Confucianism, the great thoughts and abstract considerations are cast in a symbolic form acceptable to many, transformed into etiquette, ceremony and rite, tradition and good morals.

The social harmony is completely patriarchal. This can be seen in the worshipping of the ancestors, where specifically male ancestors are worshipped and sacrifices have to be done by/through the (eldest) son.

The doctrine of Confucius was largely aimed at strengthening the binding forces between people. According to the scholar, this was necessary because there was a political anarchy as a result of the dissolution of sacred-feudal authority relations. The sage believed that the bond between people could be strengthened with the help of ceremonies and rites.

#### **d. The core principles of Confucianism**

##### **The Golden Rule**

The Golden Rule of Confucianism: *'What you do not want for yourself, do not wish for someone else'*.

##### **The six virtues**

Confucianism knows six virtues. By cultivating these virtues, one can become a 'junzi' or superior person. Everyone is supposed to behave according to these virtues, regardless of the class or social status to which he/she belongs .

In the Chinese language, the six virtues are known as Ren, Xiao, Yi, Li, Chung and Shu.

- **Ren (Humanity):** the virtue that is related to the interaction between persons. The Golden Rule is playing a fundamental role in this. In Confucianism it's important, when taking a decision, to take into account each and every person that could be influenced by that decision. Mutual respect is very important when taking any decision.
- **Xiao (Childlike Obedience):** this virtue is about love, loyalty and the care a child owes to its parents. This virtue is considered to be the backbone of Confucianism. By sticking to this principle, someone is taking decisions based on humanity, humble and dignified instead of in an egoistic way. It's an important virtue, as it shows a way of love with respect to the parents, even if someone needs to sacrifice himself.
- **Yi (Justice):** in Confucianism justice is not acting out of self-interest if this is not in the interest of others. It means that a person acts for the greater good, e.g. for the family, for society, for the country. A righteous person considers someone else's interest as his/her own interest.
- **Li (Decency):** in Confucianism decency is 'acting the right way at the right moment'. By approaching others in a decent and courteous way, by not acting hastily, by thinking before speaking, it's possible to prevent conflicts and to achieve a harmonious understanding. This virtue is important amongst family members as well as in between countries.
- **Chung (Loyalty):** in Confucianism loyalty is important in the sense of being prepared to sacrifice yourself for your country as well as being loyal to your family and friends. In a broader sense loyalty can also be seen as being at the service of society, or having a job that helps this society. Loyalty is a virtue both in times of war as in peacetime, in each and every situation and every aspect of life.

- **Shu (Mutuality)**: this virtue can be described best as a form of mutual respect. Confucianism sees people less as separate individuals, but rather as individuals engaged in a complex web of relationships. In every relationship each person needs to fulfill his/her role: children have to obey their parents, but parents need to raise their children with love. Citizens have to be loyal to their country and obey to the laws, while the government needs to protect its citizens, and guarantee them stability and justice.

The ideas of Confucius are being used to create positive qualities such as honesty, integrity, kindness, tolerance, courtesy, politeness, respect for the elderly, decency, loyalty, sense of duty and justice.

### **The five interrelationships (Wulun)**

- father-son (and mother-daughter)
- king-subject (or emperor-citizens)
- elder brother-younger brother
- husband-wife
- friend-friend

The ones with a subordinate position have the duty to obey the superior ones.

On the other hand, the superiors have the mutual duty to care and support and for the guidance of their subordinates.

However, criticizing upwards is permitted. It is even the duty as a citizen.

The power of the father is absolute. Obedience of the children to the father is absolute, a lack of obedience is unnatural and not according to the Dao, the way.

Parental love is beyond doubt and just as brotherly love not only a virtue, but a duty.

The relation king-subject is derived from the relationship between father and son. The king or emperor is father and mother to all of his citizens. In an ideal and liveable society the king/emperor has a central role, guiding his people. It's the moral duty and the highest calling of all citizens to serve the king.

The worlds of husband and wife have to be kept separate, especially in families with standing. In the patriarchal system the division of roles between men and women are obvious.

## **e. The terms Dao and De in Confucianism**

### **Dao**

The meaning of 'Dao' (a Chinese word, Do in Korean language) in Confucianism is 'the right and recognized way of moral righteousness and moral conduct'. The way has the highest value when there is a good governance. The common people should strive to live according to the tradition of the ancestors.

For Confucius the correct way of governance was important. For him, the correct behaviour was important, and therefore 'Dao' was/is crucial.

## **De**

For later Confucianists, 'De' became more important than 'Dao'. 'De' means virtue. A country had to be ruled by a wise man with a decent personality, someone that would take care of good governance, according to the correct way. In this it was important to stick to the rules for good behaviour, relationships and rituals.

## **f. The stadia of Confucianism**

The Confucian tradition is usually divided into three stages:

- The formative period with influential figures prior to the Qin era: Confucius himself, Mencius and Xunzi, sometimes including Confucianism under the later Han dynasty.
- Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties, sometimes also in the Qing dynasty.
- Nowadays Confucianism.

### 3. Confucius

Confucius (551-479 BC) is seen as the founder of Confucianism, although he didn't have the intention to establish a new philosophy, religion or ideology. Confucius didn't claim to be a prophet bringing something new. Confucius was a man looking for true virtue.

Confucius is known as a Chinese sage, the oldest known sage and a man whose life story is woven into many legends. He is an example for all teachers, a 'Wanshishibiao'.

Confucius is sometimes considered, in western countries, as agnostic, since he refused to speak out about human nature and focused on ethical issues in the relationship between people rather than between man and a supreme being. However, it is not that he dismissed religion or the existence of a god or other supernatural beings as non-existent.

But according to Confucius the life on earth was already difficult enough without interfering with heavenly affairs.

Confucius is the latinized version of Kong or Kung Fuzi or Master Kung. It is said that the Italian jesuit Matteo Ricci, who translated the book Lunyu (see further), introduced the name Confucius in Europe.

Confucius was born as Kong or Kung Qiu in 551 BC near to the city Qufu, in the province Shandong in China. He was born in an old noble family, but the family was impoverished. It is said his pedigree goes back to the royal family of the Shang dynasty.

The family were landowners in the state of Song. However the grandfather of Confucius was forced to flee to Loe (or Lu) due to political reasons.

The father of Confucius deceased when he was two years old. At that moment he was put under protection, or under guardianship, of a master or teacher. Because of this he was able to learn and evolve in archery, charioteering, writing, history, music and ceremonies, later known as 'the six arts'. Confucius decided in later years that these six arts were indispensable for his followers.

Confucius worked at the court of Loe (Lu) as administrator and tax collector, until the death of his master.

Between the years 492 and 483 BC he travelled, accompanied by some of his followers.

Afterwards he moved back to Loe (Lu), where he established a school where he could teach his followers and disciples. From this school grew the Confucian school, which would become very important in China's search for solutions to political-social problems.

In the book 'Lunyu' (Conversations of Confucius) 499 statements of the sage are bundled. The work also contains anecdotes and dialogues of Confucius with his disciples. The book became one of the most important and most influential works in Chinese history.

Some of the statements in the book:

- “All people are the same, it's just their customs that differ”.
- “Those who are afraid of nothing are surprised by the danger”.
- “Only the wisest and the most stupid persons never change their minds”.
- “A person has two ears and one mouth to listen twice as much as to talk”.

Confucius died in 479 BC. His birthday is celebrated each year on the 27th day of the 8th month of the Chinese calendar.

## 4. Neo-Confucianism

Two other philosophical systems with a lot of influence in Eastern Asia were Buddhism and Taoism. The neoconfucian school that was established later, during the Tang and the Song dynasty, combined Confucianism with Taoism and Buddhism.

In Korea and Japan it was adopted as official ideology. The Korean Chosun dynasty is sometimes considered to be an example of a neoconfucian state.

Neo-Confucianism is considered to be a reaction on the dominant role of Buddhism in the Chinese society in those days.

Neo-Confucianism was influenced by Confucianism and originated with the Confucian scholars Han Lu and Li Ao of the Song dynasty. It was an attempt to create a more rationalist and secular form of Confucianism by rejecting superstitious and mystical elements of Taoism and Buddhism, that had influenced Confucianism after the Han dynasty. Although neo-confucianists were critical of both other philosophies, both did influence it and the Neo-Confucianism borrowed terms and concepts of the other doctrines.

However, neo-confucianists used metaphysics as a guide for developing a rationalist ethical philosophy. A lot of neo-confucianists even rejected the Buddhist and Taoist ideas.

With its origins in the Song dynasty, Neo-Confucianism developed in the Tang dynasty. One of the most important exponents of the doctrine was Zhu Xi (1130-1200). His teachings were very influential.

Countries that were very much influenced by Neo-Confucianism were Vietnam, Japan and Korea.

### a. Philosophy

Neo-Confucianism is a social and ethical philosophy using metaphysical ideas as its framework. It can be characterized as humanistic and rationalistic, with the belief that universe could be understood through human reason and that it is up to humanity to create a harmonious relationship between universe and the individual.

This rationalism is in contrast to the mysticism of the previously dominant Buddhism.

Neo-confucianists believe that reality and universe can be understood by human beings. Buddhism and Taoism asserted that existence came out of non-existence and that it will return to that point, while Neo-Confucianism regards reality as a gradual realization of 'the Great Ultimate', they chose to follow 'reason'.

### b. Schools

Neo-Confucianism is a heterogeneous philosophical tradition, generally categorized into different schools:

#### Cheng-Zhu school

The school of Zhu Xi, who believed that the 'Dao' (Tao, Way) of Tian (Heaven) is expressed in the principle of Li, but sheated in the matter or Qi. Li is pure and almost perfect, but with the addition of Qi emotions and conflicts arise. Human nature is basically good, but not pure unless action is taken

to purify it. The imperative is to purify one's Li. However, in contrast to Buddhism and Taoism neo-confucianists did not believe in an external world unconnected with the world of material, so the idea of reincarnation and the idea of karma are rejected.

### **Lu-Wang school**

Wang Yangming, probably the second most influential neo-confucianist, came to another conclusion: 'Li' is in all things, and 'Li' is in one's heart-mind. So there is no better place to seek than within oneself. The preferred way to do so is through jingzuo, a practise that resembles Zen meditation. Wang developed the idea of innate knowing, arguing that every person knows the difference between good and evil as from birth on. This knowledge is intuitive and not rational.

In the 1920's Neo-Confucianism or New Confucianism started developing and absorbed the Western learning to seek a way to modernize the Chinese culture based on the traditional Confucianism. It promoted the world culture of industrial civilization rather than the traditional personal senses.

## 5. Confucianism & Neo-confucianism in Korea

### a. Korean Confucianism's evolution throughout history

#### The three kingdoms's Confucianism

In **Koguryo** (371-384) Buddhism was adopted, but at the same time a Confucian university was created. King **Kwang-gae Toh Hwang** left, as a legacy, a document in Chinese characters showing Confucian influence in leadership and ethics in his dynasty.

In **Baekje** (Paekche) Confucianism played an active cultural role.

In **Silla** Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism were slower to penetrate. However, after they were, they spread quite rapidly. One famous example of the free exchange of thoughts is the **Hwarang** or youth flowers, an organization of Silla that prepared elites for the highest state responsibilities. Under influence of Confucianism loyalty to the country became important, and it was an important issue for the elite of Hwarang.

#### Koryo's Confucianism

The development of Confucian ideas in the Koryo period can be divided into 2 periods, one from 918 to 1046, corresponding to the work of Chu Sung-no and Chu Chung (known as the Korean Confucius), the second one from 1047 to 1259 which directly prepared the reception of neo-Confucian ideas in Korea.

Confucian ideas gave rise to a new dynamism, a royal academy was created at the end of the 14th century, with great figures like e.g. Yi Saek and **Chong Mong-chu**.

### b. Neo-Confucianism

Buddhism was important in the peninsula of Korea until the 14th century. It fell into disrepair as from 1392 on because of the choice of the emperor for Confucianism.

Neo-Confucianism was introduced in Korea during the Koryo dynasty by An Hyang. During the Yuan era An had visited China. In 1286 he read a book of Zhu Xi. He was so moved by it that he transcribed it and took it with him back to Korea. It greatly inspired Korean intellectuals at the time and many, especially from the middle class, disillusioned with the excesses of organized religion, specifically Buddhism, embraced the newly introduced philosophy.

Neo-Confucianism was established as the state ideology in the Chosun (Joseon) dynasty after the fall of Koryo, in 1392. The Yuan occupation of the Korean peninsula introduced the school of Cheng Zhu to Korea.

As Neo-Confucianism encouraged education a number of neo-Confucian schools (seowon and hyangyo) were founded throughout the country, producing many scholars including Jo Gwang-jo (1482-1520), **Yi Hwang (pen name Toi-gye, 1501-1570)** and **Yi I (pen name Yul-gok, 1536-1584)**. In the early 16th century Jo attempted to transform the Chosun into an ideal neo-Confucian society, with a series of radical reforms for which he was executed in 1520. Despite this Neo-Confucianism

soon played an even bigger role in the Chosun dynasty and soon neo-Confucian scholars began to develop new theories. The most prominent of these new theorists were Yi Hwang and Yi I.

In the first period of the 15th century, which was one of the most creative in various fields like literature and science, due to king **Sejong** (1418-1450), a lot of good things happened. King Sejong surrounded himself with capable advisers and intellectuals and there were many accomplishments in astronomy, medicine and technology. The king also introduced the new alphabet, the **Hangul**, allowing all of his citizens to be educated. In this period there was a rise of major philosophers like **Yi Hwang** and **Yi I**. Both scholars knew and appreciated each other, they met in 1558 and exchanged letters afterward.

The last part of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century were plagued by an epidemic and by political rivalry. At that time, Neo-Confucianism became very dogmatic in a relatively short time. It prevented much needed socio-economic changes and development, and it led to internal divisions and criticism of many new theories regardless of their popular appeal.

During the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592-1598) many Korean neo-Confucian books and scholars were taken to Japan, where they influenced Japanese scholars and affected the development of Japanese neo-Confucianism.



Yi Hwang



Yi I

### c. Today's situation

A way of assessing Korean Confucianism is also looking at its legacy, which remains a source of inspiration, for example for the academies (sowon), the scientific research centers or the Confucian inspired poems and paintings.

Buddhism is still very present in Korea through its temples and sculptures, while Confucian places remind us of the crucial role Confucianism played in Korean education and political affairs.

Many early printed books of Confucian classics have been preserved. Another source of studying the past Korean Confucianism is art. The most significant paintings related to the beginning of the Chosun dynasty go back to the 15th and 16th century.

Korean Confucianism was not connected by theories, but by techniques and sciences. Under king Sejong many sciences developed, not only for the pure knowledge, but for the well-fare of people.

Today the legacy of Confucianism (Korean Confucianism, a form of Confucianism that emerged and developed in Korea) remains a fundamental part of the Korean society, shaping the moral system, the way of life, social relations between young and old, the culture and it is the basis for much of the legal system.

The Korean identity grew in the Chosun dynasty, the longest existing 'Confucian' dynasty (Neo-Confucianism), with an enormous expansion of Korean culture. The legacy of the Chosun period can be seen in nowadays Korea: from the traditional tea ceremonies until the architecture. In Chosun the foundation was made for nowadays Korean society, from the local provincial governments and social classes (e.g. the yangban, a group of people that were elevated to the nobility and that became the later governmental officials) to the language and the foundation of Hanyang as capital of the country, known today as Seoul.

#### **d. Korean Confucianism and women's rights**

Traditionally women in Korea were given the role of housewife due to Confucian gender roles. Women were not allowed to work outside the house. This only started to change recently and by 2001 the women's participation in the work field was at 49,7% compared to 34,4% in the 1960's.

Equal opportunity legislation was only introduced in 1987.

In 2000 the Department of Gender Equality allowed women to participate in making policy.

Even though things are changing, it has not fully changed the roles when at home. Working women are still expected to be the primary domestic worker in the family.

Major companies in Korea only began to change their hiring practises recently. Samsung e.g. was one of the first major companies to do so. They removed gender discrimination in recruitment in 1997 and by 2012 had hired 56,000 female employees. However, most of these women were low-level workers. Samsung's newest goal is increasing the percentage of female top executives from 2 to 10% over the next years and to pay and treat men and women equally.

Still today in Korea women are being discriminated, especially in work environments.

## 6. Confucianism & Neo-Confucianism in Taekwon-Do

Taekwon-Do was created in **Korea**. It was founded by **General Choi Hong Hi**, who was born and raised in Korea, in a Korean family, who worked and lived in the country, who was involved in the Korean society. So it's normal Taekwon-Do has been influenced by the norms and values of the country and its cultural, philosophical, ethical and moral heritage. This is the case for all martial arts. Karate and aikido e.g. are influenced by Japanese customs, Kungfu is determined by the Chinese culture, and Taekwon-Do is a Korean martial art. This is a normal thing.

Of course, some basics are common for Asian martial arts, as some customs are the same for several of the countries, while for other things the basis is common, but each and every martial art was under the influence of its founder and his nationality.

Above this General Choi Hong Hi was proud to be Korean, proud of the Korean heritage. He served in the army, a specific place where patriotism is cultivated. He was involved in the battle against Japanese domination in Korea and he created Taekwon-Do as a Korean martial art as reaction on the domination of Japanese forms. Although a 'citizen of the world' who made no distinction between people, the Korean history was very important to him. We can notice this e.g. in the patterns (tuls), with each and every one of the forms wearing the name of an important person, group or ideology in Korean history.

So, if Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, Korean Confucianism, where and are important in Korea and for Koreans, when it's intertwined in the culture of the country, it's normal these doctrines or parts of the customs are integrated in Taekwon-Do.

### a. Student Oath of Taekwon-Do

The student oath of Taekwon-Do is known to all students of the martial art, and recited before each class:

- I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do.
- I shall respect the instructor and seniors.
- I shall never misuse Taekwon-Do.
- I shall be a champion of freedom and justice.
- I shall build a more peaceful world.

I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do: see further.

I shall respect the instructor and senior: not only is respect an important issue in Confucianism (respect for the elderly, mutual respect etc.), this sentence also frames within the important five interrelationships. We read: 'The ones with a subordinate position have the duty to obey the superiour ones. On the other hand, the superiors have the mutual duty to care and support and for the guidance of their subordinates' and 'The power of the father is absolute. Obedience of the children to the father is absolute, a lack of obedience is unnatural and not according to the 'Dao', the way. Parental love is beyond doubt and just as brotherly love not only a virtue, but a duty'.

I shall be a champion of freedom and justice and I shall build a more peaceful world: Confucius' idea was that we can build a better world through humanity (and the Golden Rule) and human relationships.

When taking a closer look at the six virtues, we can notice they all play a role in the Student's Oath.

### **b. Tenets of Taekwon-Do**

The tenets of Taekwon-Do are:

- Courtesy
- Integrity
- Perseverance
- Self-control
- Indomitable spirit

Each of these tenets are important for Taekwon-Do students. It applies to all Taekwon-Do practitioners, not only in the dojang, but at every moment in daily life.

When we go back to the principles of Confucianism, we read e.g. the following: 'The ideas of Confucius are being used to create positive qualities such as honesty, integrity, kindness, tolerance, courtesy, politeness, respect for the elderly, decency, loyalty, sense of duty and justice'.

For Confucius it was important to have good relationships between humans, to have good manners, to behave well, to have a good moral standard. By cultivating the six virtues, one can become a jungzi or superior person.

In fact in Taekwon-Do we aim the same by behaving according to the tenets:

- **Courtesy:** 'it can be said that courtesy is an unwritten regulation prescribed by ancient teachers of philosophy as a means to enlighten human beings while maintaining a harmonious society. It can further be seen as an ultimate criterion required of a mortal. Taekwon-Do students should attempt to practice the following elements of courtesy to build up their noble character and to conduct the training in an orderly manner as well. To promote the spirit of mutual concessions. To be ashamed of one's vices, contempting those of others. To be polite to one another. To encourage the sense of justice and humanity. To distinguish instructor from student, senior from junior, and elder from younger. To behave oneself according to etiquette. To respect others' possessions. To handle matters with fairness and sincerity. To refrain from giving or accepting a gift when in doubt'.
- **Integrity:** 'one must be able to define right and wrong and have a conscience, if wrong, to feel guilt'.
- **Perseverance:** 'there is an old Oriental saying, "Patience leads to virtue or merit, One can make a peaceful home by being patient for 100 times." Certainly happiness and prosperity are most likely brought to the patient person. To achieve something, whether it is a higher degree or the perfection of a technique, one must set his goal, then constantly persevere. Robert Bruce learned his lesson of perseverance from the persistent efforts of a lowly spider. It was this perseverance and tenacity that finally enabled him to free Scotland in the fourteenth century. One of the most important secrets in becoming a leader of Taekwon-Do

is to overcome every difficulty by perseverance. Confucius said, "One who is impatient in trivial matters can seldom achieve success in matters of great importance".

- **Self-control:** 'an inability to live and work within one's capability or sphere is also a lack of self-control'.
- **Indomitable spirit:** 'a serious student of Taekwon-Do will at all times be modest and honest. If confronted with injustice, he will deal with the belligerent without any fear or hesitation at all, with indomitable spirit, regardless of whosoever and however many the number may be. Confucius declared, "It is an act of cowardice to fail to speak out against injustice." As history has proven, those who have pursued their dreams earnestly and strenuously with indomitable spirit have never failed to achieve their goals'.

### c. Philosophy of Taekwon-Do and Moral Culture (General Choi Hong Hi)

In the Encyclopedia of ITF Taekwon-Do General Choi Hong Hi mentioned the loss of morality in society in recent years. For him, the solution to this problem is the development of moral civilization, the proper mental state of a human being as the lord of creation.

High moral standards were important to Confucius, while in Neo-Confucianism we notice the importance of human beings being their own 'lord of creation', responsible for the world and human relationships, independently of any supreme being.

The utmost purpose of Taekwon-Do is to eliminate fighting by discouraging the stronger's oppression of the weaker with a power that must be based on humanity, justice, morality, wisdom and faith, thus helping to build a better and more peaceful world.

Here we can find the six virtues of Confucianism.

It was General Choi Hong Hi's wish that all students of Taekwon-Do would become guardians of justice who would challenge social disunity and cultivate the human spirit to the highest level attainable.

His guidelines:

- Be willing to go where the going may be tough and do the things that are worth doing even though they are difficult.
- Be gentle to the weak and tough to the strong.
- Be content with what you have in money and position but never in skills.
- Always finish what you begin, be it large or small.
- Be a willing teacher to anyone regardless of religion, race or ideology.
- Never yield to repression or threat in the pursuit of a noble cause.
- Teach attitude and skill with action rather than words.
- Always be yourself even though your circumstances may change.
- Be the eternal teacher who teaches with the body when young, with words when old, and by moral precept even after death.

In these guidelines we can see notes of the Golden Rule, the six virtues and the principles of Confucianism. We can also notice the influence of Neo-Confucianism, with the key note it is up to humans to create a more peaceful world.

General Choi Hong Hi wrote: “Often left for the senior ranks, and those adult in years, Moral Culture is a concept whereby a person strives to be the best they can be, not just in skill but in character. The broad connotations and various possible interpretations of the moral culture are often very difficult for the western mind to grasp because this is an aspect of Oriental Philosophy which pervades the lives of Oriental people. In a word, it is the endeavor and process of becoming an exemplary person such as Confucius. To become such a person, one has to first find himself and acquire a moral character which is respected by all. This can only be achieved through constant practice of mental discipline. Thus, if the times call for it, the mentally disciplined man can contribute to the building of an ideal society through wise counsel to the government and, even after death, through his everlasting examples. Confucius said, “to promote the sense of morality one must treat others with faithfulness and sincerity based on righteousness, and to eliminate completely vicious thinking”.”

Further in the book, we can find the sentence: “Everyone of us, as a social being, desires to live in a free and peaceful society. At the same time, it is our obligation to build such a society for the people. I have quoted various words of wisdom of ancient saints and philosophers for creating an ideal society in the hope that students of Taekwon-Do use them as a guide to cultivating their moral culture”.

In this sentence is included the idea of Confucius that a human being should be at the service of society.

Throughout the books of General Choi Hong Hi, we notice he was having the wish that all Taekwon-Do students would work to build a better world and better relationships between human beings. A high moral standard was important to him, just as it was to Confucius. In the books of General Choi Hong Hi, words as humanity, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, virtue etc. are mentioned many times, all of these terms that are important in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. On many occasions, Confucius is being quoted (together with other scholars like Mencius and Lao-Tzu).

## **Do**

General Choi Hong Hi wrote Taekwon-Do to emphasize the importance of Do, Taekwon-Do being a **‘Way of Life’**. The literal and superficial translation of Taekwon-Do is ‘the art of kicking and punching’. In Korean language, ‘Do’ implies the philosophical approach to a way of life, a pathway to achieve enlightenment. Taekwon-Do practitioners intend to improve themselves physically, mentally and spiritually.

We can refer to ‘Dao’, ‘The Way’, the Chinese translation of ‘Do’, which in Confucianism is ‘the right and recognized way of moral righteousness and moral conduct’.

## **d. Customs in Taekwon-Do, tradition, rituals, values, ceremonies and examples**

In Taekwon-Do we have some customs derived from the Korean traditions, with their roots in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, e.g. the bowing to others as an example of showing respect, the way of giving a hand to others with both hands etc.

Etiquette, good manners, a good behaviour are important, as it was to Confucius. The hierarchic system or belt system and the obedience towards seniors is based on the patriarchal system based on the ideas of Confucianism, such as the fact mutual respect is important.

General Choi Hong Hi was inspired by the traditions of Korea, and by persons in its history that were also important in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. As he writes in the Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do: ‘The philosophy of Taekwon-Do is based on the ethical, moral, and spiritual standards by which

men can live together in harmony, and its art patterns are inspired by the ideals and exploits of great men from Korean history. Korea's famous military and civil leaders who in nearly five thousand years of Korean history have never invaded their neighbor yet who fought bravely and made great self-sacrifices to defend their homeland against invading enemies. I also include the names of patriots who willingly gave up their lives to regain Korea's freedom and independence from the Japanese occupation' and 'each Tul (pattern) of Taekwon-Do expresses the thoughts and the actions of these great men, so the students of Taekwon-Do must reflect the true intentions of those whose name each Tul bears. Therefore, under no circumstances should Taekwon-Do be used for any commercial or political purpose whatsoever'.

**Looking at the names of the patterns (tuls), we can include some names of persons and groups that were important for Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, like e.g. the Korean scholars Yi Hwang and Yi I, Toi-gye and Yul-gok, both pioneers in Neo-Confucianism, King Sejong who introduced the Hangeul and made sure Neo-Confucianism could spread amongst his citizens, or King Kwang-gae Toh Hwang who left a document in which it was clear Koguryo was under the influence of Confucianism. Also Chong Mong-chu (Po-eun) was known as scholar with Confucian ideas. With the introduction of Confucianism in Silla the elite of Hwarang developed.**

## 7. Credentials

- <https://nl.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Confucianisme&oldid=61072224>
- <https://nl.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Confucianisme&oldid=60728181>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Neo-Confucianism&oldid=1095586187>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Korean\\_Confucianism&oldid=1094255770](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Korean_Confucianism&oldid=1094255770)
- [http://www.spiritueel-woordenboek.nl/woordenboek/C/confucianisme\\_485](http://www.spiritueel-woordenboek.nl/woordenboek/C/confucianisme_485)
- [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Koran\\_Confucianism&oldid=1010974](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Koran_Confucianism&oldid=1010974)
- <https://wijsheidsweb.nl/redactionele-paginas/element-water/confucianisme/enkele-grondbegrippen-van-het-confucianisme>
- <https://wijsheidsweb.nl/wijsheid/neo-confucianisme-inleiding>
- <https://www.woorden.org/woord/confucianisme>
- <https://www.mijnwoordenboek.nl/puzzelwoordenboek/Confucianisme/1>
- [https://www.spiritueel-woordenboek.nl/woordenboek/C/confucianisme\\_485/](https://www.spiritueel-woordenboek.nl/woordenboek/C/confucianisme_485/)
- <https://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/taoïsme>
- <https://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/hwangap>
- [https://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/boeddhisme\\_in\\_korea](https://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/boeddhisme_in_korea)
- Encyclopedia of ITF Taekwon-Do, General Choi Hong Hi
- Moral Guide Book, General Choi Hong Hi
- Dit is Korea (How to live Korean), Soo Kim, 2020, Uitgeverij Terra

## Curriculum Vitae

As is the case for every dan grading, a curriculum vitae is included in the documents send to the ITF office. I included my CV in this thesis, in the following pages. However, a curriculum vitae is only a list of achievements, short, without any feelings or emotions, not telling anything about how these achievements, functions, medals or grades influenced or changed the life of the person behind the list. How and why did someone start to practise, why did this person made certain choices? These things are much more interesting to read than the simple list with bullet points.

I was always interested in martial arts, but at the time in my hometown there were only 2 clubs: judo and karate. I didn't like judo, and for some reason I never took the step to go to the karate club. Maybe already then I felt, intuitively, this was not 'my way'. So I practised a lot of sports, such as handball, badminton, horse driving, windsurfing, running and so on, while at school I participated at tournaments including volleyball, swimming and cross country. I liked and still like all of these sports, but they were only hobbies. The moment I started Taekwon-Do, I understood the word 'passion'.

I was 17 and in my last year at high school, with main subjects Latin-sciences-mathematics. It was January when I saw a poster of a Taekwon-Do club, Ge-Baek, starting at the sports hall of my school in my hometown Lokeren. The club was existing for 1,5 year and had to switch to another location. I went to see a class and was impressed seeing about 20 students performing sayu chirugi all together, and practising twymio nopi chagi. The next class – January 26th 1994 – I joined.... And I never quit. It was the moment I felt the difference between liking/loving to do something, or being passionate about something.

About 6 months later I already was a green belt (and let it be clear, I would not recommend anyone to be promoted so fast, but at the time the instructor decided everything) and I assisted my instructor. Still 2 months later I had become secretary of the club, and I conducted classes on my own, as my instructor was working in shifts. Mid 1996, during an open championship in Scotland, Frank Vanberghen, at that time 4th degree and President of ITF-Belgium – and pioneer – told me I had to do grading first degree by the end of that year. And again, when a higher degree talked, we just obeyed.....

My instructor was not able to help me.... so above the 3 classes a week in Ge-Baek and my studies at university (veterinary medicine), I started to join the classes in the dojang of Frank Vanberghen in Ghent. I practised a lot on my own, had to study alone and was lucky I could borrow the 15 volumes of the Encyclopedia. Meanwhile I started to compete in both patterns and sparring, combining this with being either coach or referee, and I joined each and every event, seminar, course in Belgium and the neighbouring countries. It was obvious my instructor had transfered me the love and passion for Taekwon-Do and things like discipline and respect, but it was also obvious I missed a lot of basics, so I needed to work hard.....

In December 1996 I was promoted to 1st degree, in January 1997 my instructor told me he was quitting the club. Either this was the end of it, or I could take over. I was 20, I had just become a black belt, I was studying at university, I was competing and had just received the news I was in the national selection for the World Championships in Saint-Petersburg. Was I able to manage all of this?

I could just walk away and join the club in Ghent permanently. But could I leave the other students? Most of them would have to quit Taekwon-Do. So in January 1997 I became head instructor (and at the time the only instructor) of Ge-Baek, also responsible for all of the administration. At the General Assembly of the federation at the end of the year I was also elected into the Disciplinary Committee.

And so things were somewhat busy. I was only studying and being involved in Taekwon-Do in a lot of different aspects of it.

At the World Championships that year a spark flew over between Frank Vanberghen and myself and in January 1998 we became a couple. September 25th we got married, and so above all of the other things we also had to manage a household.

By then I decided to change studies. At university classes lasted until 7PM, which I skipped sometimes to be able to conduct the classes at the dojang. Exams took 3 months, which was a problem when in full preparation for European and World Championships. I switched to college, to pharmaceutical and biotechnological techniques, where exams were crammed into a shorter span of time and classes finished at 5PM. The studies were quite similar to veterinary medicine, although human based.

Two years later I graduated and started my first job immediately, in a laboratory: chemical and microbiological tests on nutrition, for the government, the national food agency and food suppliers. Some months later, January 2001, due to circumstances I stood for election for the position of President of ITF-Belgium. My husband was forced to quit in that function, and again my sense of responsibility came forward. I didn't want his hard and long work, as pioneer of the federation, to be in vain. The General Assembly gave me the trust, as they are doing now for the last 23 years.

Again I was thrown to the lions.... And I was still combining a lot of things, keeping a lot of balls in the air. In 2001 I won my first (bronze) medal at a European Championship, in sparring -52kg, a year later the same colour in pattern 3rd degree. By then I had won titles in 7 Belgian Championships, in different disciplines, and quite some medals on championships in Belgium and on open tournaments abroad. I had 20 days of holidays at work....

It was time to stop competing, although this was a hard decision as I liked it a lot. But I had to take my responsibility as President, and I had to be there for my students at Ge-Baek, as the club had grown from 20 to 120 students. I was still the only instructor.

And ITF-Belgium needed a second International Instructor and International Examiner, and at the time the combination with being a competitor was not possible.

And so the focus went from being a competitor to being a President, an instructor, but without losing the focus of being a student. I stopped competing, but I never quit practising myself. Being in dobok, training hard and sweating while doing what I love most, that's priceless.

As we needed to be present at EC's and WC's anyway, and since I was already a referee (combining being a corner and center referee as well as JP) since 1998, I became umpire at tournaments: I started at the European Championships 2003 as jury member and corner referee, I was center referee at the junior World Championships 2004 for the first time... as many things before, it was not really my ambition, it came by coincidence... someone told the TUC I was able to do so.... It was the next best thing after competing myself, feeling the tension of the competitors in the ring. I loved it, and stayed

being a center referee at each and every championship until the World Championships in 2015 and the European Championships 2018.

In 2003 I was promoted to 4th degree, from that day on I drove around the country to take kup gradings, and I became part of the dan grading committee in Belgium.

I resigned from my job to start as Taekwon-Do instructor, and did this for 3 years. I had a lot of work and the club was growing tremendously, but it was impossible to make a living out of it. In Belgium, only in football and cycling money can be earned in sports. Luckily my husband had a good job. My husband, following his own path in Taekwon-Do and ITF.... A lot of times our both paths were converging, on other occasions we had separate paths to follow within ITF. We always understood, and still understand, what the other person needs to do, and why, and we never doubt but give each other the possibility to do so. Meanwhile we're married for 26 years, a lifetime, and I'm still very grateful for the possibilities and opportunities he gave me, and for the understanding, as our time together is very rare.

Besides that, I'm grateful for the sacrifices he did by being pioneer of ITF-Belgium as I'm well aware that without him, I would never have known or practised Taekwon-Do. The day he became GrandMaster Frank Vanberghen, in 2018, was also to me one of the most precious moments I witnessed in Taekwon-Do.

In 2007 I found a new job, as marketing assistant in a biotech company. I was glad having 30 days of holidays, as it was a German multinational. We were dealing with the Benelux (Belgium, Luxemburg, The Netherlands). I received the job due to my scientific background and the fact I spoke 3 languages. Meanwhile we moved from Gavere to Lokeren, as the drive to the dojang 3 or 4 times a week, late at night, were killing me.

In 2011 the company moved to The Netherlands, so I had to look for a new employer. I did exams to start at the hospital in my hometown, where I did several interesting jobs, until I ended up at the communication department in 2015. And yes... 42 holiday days.... Enough to have a little bit of holidays with my husband besides the many travels for Taekwon-Do.

Life went by, with promotions (abroad, as I never wanted my husband to promote me), classes, organisations, functions....

I was able to form a team of instructors around me in Ge-Baek, persons I trust, persons I love, persons that have the same passion for Taekwon-Do. It made things somewhat easier.

The love for competition was still there, so in 2014 and 2016 I participated at the World Cups in Brighton and Budapest, in pattern, sparring and special techniques.

In December 2017 I was promoted to Master 7th degree.

And then GrandMaster Paul Weiler asked me to stand up for elections for the ITF Board, in 2019 in Inzell. Being elected, and the 4 years of this term, were quite interesting and instructive, even with and during the pandemic. Four years later he asked me to stand up again, but as Vice-President. It was 2023.

I switched from job, being a financial and logistical consultant in the police force. I'm still combining being a student, instructor, referee with a lot of functions on national and international level and organising activities. The pandemic made clear I can not miss all of these different things, even

though it's hard sometimes, and I don't see my husband and my family as often as I would like to, or I'm missing out a lot of activities outside of Taekwon-Do and I'm not the best friend in the world, or I would like to spent some holidays with my husband.

And now, 2024..... 7 years passed by.... And I'm about to present myself for promotion to 8th degree. Exciting timles again.

### **Summary**

Born 4<sup>th</sup> March 1976, Lokeren, Belgium

Married with GrandMaster Frank Vanberghen since 25<sup>th</sup> September 1998.

### **Studies**

- High school: Latin-Sciences-Mathematics. Graduated 1994
- University of Ghent: Veterinary Medicine
- College Sint-Lieven in Ghent: Bachelor Farmaceutical and Biotechnological Techniques. Graduated 2000

### **Work**

- Lab technican Labo ECCA NV, chemical and microbiological tests on nutrition (2000-2004)
- Taekwon-Do instructor (2004-2007)
- Marketing assistant Miltenyi Biotec (2007-2011)
- Several positions, e.g. on the communication department, hospital AZ Lokeren (2001-2023)
- Financial and logistical consultant policy department Lokeren (since 2023)

### **Positions**

- Vice-President ITF, elected in September 2023
- Chair of the AETF Women Committee, appointed in January 2022
- Board member ITF 2019-2023
- President ITF-Belgium, elected the first time in January 2001
- President ITF-Flanders, elected the first time in January 2003
- Vice-president ITF-Flanders 2001-2002
- Member of the PR Committee VTB (joined committee ITF & WTF in Flanders) June 1999-December 2001
- Member of the Disciplinary Committee ITF-Flanders 1997-1999
- Secretary Taekwon-Do school Ge-Baek Lokeren since January 1995

### **Instructor**

- Assistant-instructor 1996-1997
- Instructor in own gym, Ge-Baek Lokeren, since January 1998
- Teaching license 15000 since July 2004
- Recognised Instructor ('Trainer B') by Flemish Sports Ministry
- Conducted seminars on national and international (Romania, Czech Republic, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Ireland, Iran ...) level and assisted the instructor several times during seminars on national/international level

### **Black Belt Gradings**

- I degree, 22 December 1996, Frank Vanberghen (V degree)
- II degree, 20 December 1998, Frank Vanberghen (VI degree)
- III degree, 17 December 2000, Frank Vanberghen (VI degree)
- IV degree, 29 June 2003, Master Brendan O'Toole (VII degree), International Instructor N° 1170, Thesis: 'The Positive Influence of Taekwon-Do on Children and Youngsters'
- V degree, 2 March 2007, Master Brendan O'Toole (VII degree)
- VI degree, 17 December 2011, Master Raul Sanchez (VIII degree)
- VII degree, 10 December 2017, GrandMaster Lan Ung Kim and GrandMaster Rolf Becking (IX degree), Thesis: 'Women in ITF'

### **Competitions**

- Member of the national team 1997-2002
- European Championships 2001, Czech Republic, bronze sparring female -52kg
- European Championships 2002, Spain, bronze tul female III degree
  
- World Cup 2012, England, gold sparring female -55kg, gold female special techniques, bronze female tul IV-VI degree in the category advanced senior
- World Cup 2016, Hungary, gold sparring female -55kg, silver female tul IV-VI degree, silver female special techniques in the category advanced senior & best female competitor
- Belgian Champion : sparring 6 times, team tul 1 time
- Several medals tul & sparring on national and international championships 1995-2002

### **Participation International Instructor Courses**

- Seminar General Choi Hong Hi, March 2001, Budapest-Hungary
- First IIC, February 2003, Cologne-Germany
- IIC, October 2004, Brussels-Belgium
- IIC, October 2007, Brussels-Belgium
- IIC, May 2009, Miesbach-Germany
- IIC, November 2010, Utrecht-The Netherlands
- IIC, January 2013, Tralee-Ireland
- IIC, November 2013, Oostende-Belgium
- IIC, May 2014, Dublin-Ireland
- IIC, November 2016, Paris-France
- IIC, May 2018, Dublin-Ireland
- IIC, February 2022, Dublin-Ireland
- IIC, November 2023, Vienna-Austria

### **Other official ITF courses**

- Participated at IKC, IAC, IDC, IHC, IUC

### **Organization of events**

- 8<sup>th</sup> IIC, October 2004, Brussels
- 28<sup>th</sup> IIC, October 2007, Brussels

- 88<sup>th</sup> IIC, November 2013, Oostende
- 21<sup>st</sup> IKC, May 2016, Lokeren
- The organization of several seminars, national and open championships, courses, seminars with foreign instructors etc. within ITF-Belgium

### **Umpire**

- Umpire A900 since June 2003
- Umpire B567, December 2000
- ITF Hall of Fame, June 2007 (Quebec City, Canada) Best Umpire
- AETF Umpire Course, Cologne-Germany, October 2002
- ITF Umpire Course, Limerick-Ireland, June 2012
- National umpire courses, first one in 1996
- Umpire on national level since 1997
- Umpire on international level since 2002
- Umpire on European Championships 2003-2018 , on World Championships 2004-2015

### **Students on official competitions**

- Students of Ge-Baek have been selected for the national team since 2001. Medals on World Championships : 1 silver, 4 bronze. Medals on European Championships : 2 gold, 2 silver, 5 bronze

### **Representation of ITF**

- Represented ITF at the Tafisa Congress Meetings since 2022