

## HISTORY

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## A brief history of *kyoksul* in Poland

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### Abstract

Background. Historical and socio-cultural theoretical perspectives based on the General Theory of Fighting Arts were applied in this study. Appropriate conceptual language has thus been adopted for this investigation.

Problem. The aim of the study is to present a description – based on facts, a form of case study, and interpretation of events – relating to the development as well as the demise of *kyoksul* in Poland.

Method. The approach applied is based on a case study, a form of monographic method, with reference to several categories of sources (in particular, an interview with one of the pioneers and the lead author's personal notes from observations) and studies.

Results. *Kyoksul* was taught and cultivated in Poland from 1978 to 1988, both in the army and in sports clubs. The teachers working on the sport included GM Han Ho Un and a few other instructors. Most of the training groups folded in 1983.

Conclusions. The teaching of *kyoksul* was introduced in Poland and in other “people's democracy” countries as a result of cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. After North Korea withdrew its *kyoksul* instructors and initiated the promotion of *taekwon-do* ITF, the practice of the former was discontinued in Poland. It was only in Rzeszow that the *kyoksul* group continued operating until the late 1980s.

### Introduction

There are two justifications for the title of this article. Firstly, this is indeed only a short draft, and secondly this North Korean martial art, known as *kyoksul*, operated in Poland for only about a decade. Therefore the report describes facts related to this short period of time, presenting a case study and an interpretation based on the General Theory of Fighting Arts [Cynarski 2016; Cynarski 2017]. The adopted approach, based on a case study, is a form of monographic method, making reference to a few categories of sources (in particular interview with one of the pioneers and records from the first author's own observations) as well as studies [*cf.* Toporowicz 1996; Baxter, Jack 2008; Yin 2003].

We know very little about this episode related to *kyoksul* in Poland. In fact Baran and Hebda [1995: 3–4] wrote: “A number of hand-to-hand combat systems were developed for the needs of the army, police and security services. The best known include *kyok-*

*sul*, *sambo*, *hwarangdo*.” We do not know, however, on what grounds these authors identified the widespread popularity of *kyoksul*. At the time the only, relatively short, article about *kyoksul* in Poland was published in “Sportowiec” magazine. There was also a brief article in the weekly “Zolnierz Polski” [Kondratowicz 1987]. Additionally, there was also one manual published for the needs of the army, and presenting hand-to-hand combat based on *kyoksul* [Mazur, Bubiak, Michalowski 1982].

Compared to rather numerous studies focusing on the history and institutional development of other martial arts, the facts related to *kyoksul* have not previously been investigated in Poland. There have only been some brief comments related to this matter, as in the study examining combat systems [*cf.* Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2003: 170]. Furthermore, the fact that this North Korean martial art is fairly unknown in Europe is reflected in the lack of an entry for *kyoksul* in a comprehensive Lexicon of martial arts (1015 pages) [Lind 1996].

## What is *kyoksul*?

According to the German-language *MartialArtsWiki* the name 'kyoksul' can be translated from the Korean language as an attacking technique. It was developed by Master **Kim Il-Sung**, and its history began in 1926. On the other hand Janusz Gutkowski argues that the founder was **Hideo Nakamura** (1913–2013), a native of Pyongyang, and highly recognised by the Japanese Karate Association (owner of the 10<sup>th</sup> dan). Furthermore, Dr Krzysztof Kondratowicz believed that Master **Han Ho Un** was "one of the founders" of this martial art [Kondratowicz 1987]. Or is it likely that all three Masters (to a varied degree) contributed to the development of *kyoksul*, as a martial art and combat system? Jerzy Milkowski proposed the following definition of the term 'kyoksul' (*kyok-sul*, *kuk sool*): eclectic hand-to-hand combat system from North Korea, developed by **Suh In Hyuk** (1958). It comprises, *inter alia*, 10 "killing techniques", 10 "wounding techniques", techniques similar to those in *jujutsu* and techniques for using some traditional weapons, e.g. *nunchaku* [Milkowski 2008]. A German instructor Frank Pelny presents *kyoksul* (*gjogsul*) as a complete combat system. It contains techniques similar to *karate*, knife fighting [Pelny 2005: 137-183], self defence technical-tactical issues, and forms of sports competition for example [Pelny 2005: 294-299].

In order to establish the facts, let us briefly assess the credibility of these sources [cf. Toporowicz 1996: 127-128]. Individuals advocating the various styles are likely to mythologise their martial art. Their descriptions therefore tend to be mixed with promotional and advertising content, and also seek to identify ancient roots. Given this, the most reliable sources in this case are comments provided by some Polish military officers (J. Milkowski, K. Kondratowicz, E. Mazur) and contemporary practitioners involved in other martial arts (including J. Gutkowski and T. Piotrkowicz), as they are less prone to perpetuate legends. It is thus most likely that the style of *kyoksul* emerged in 1958. The remaining facts referred to here are confirmed by personal observations of the lead author.

Gutkowski [2018] offers the following characteristics of the *kyoksul* style: "Kyoksul is a variation of *karate*. The basic techniques correspond to those in *karate Shoto-kan*. The patterns (*kata*) [are however] quite different from those in *karate*. Each instructor taught his own patterns, rarely more than two. (...) The techniques which we practised comprised short combinations of 5–10 movements. Exercises comprising patterns with personal weapons, spades or knives were taught in the army. As a rule civilians trained in short combat or self-defence sequences without any weapons. Sparring fights [were conducted] with no equipment; strength of contact [was] determined before the fight." According to Kondratowicz [1987] the main difference between *kyoksul* and other

martial arts lay in the fact that the philosophy of martial arts was abandoned in favour of a more utilitarian approach allowing the use of anything that was helpful in combat, and only that. He believed that *kyoksul* was a combination of techniques typical in *karate* and *taekwondo* (distance fighting mainly with the use of legs) and for *jujutsu* and *judo* (joint locks and throwing, as well as rules of flexibility and effectiveness).

As reported by a practitioner from the Rzeszow group, *kyoksul* training also included combat in situations when one person fought against a number of opponents, i.e. real-life combat most commonly involving necessary self-defence. There are no restrictions imposed by the rules of combat sport.

## In Poland

The main master during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Han Ho Un** (10<sup>th</sup> dan) introduced this style of combat to the Warsaw Pact countries, particularly in Poland, from 1978. It was in 1978 during a students' Summer Camp in Wilkasy, that Master Kim provided training to, among others, Tomasz Piotrkowicz, a *karate Shoto-kan* instructor from Warsaw, and later a leader of *Gosoku-ryu karate* in Poland. In 1979-1980 a special training course was conducted for the army at the Engineering Military Academy in Wrocław. A course for instructors was held in Wrocław in 1985, by GM Han Ho Un. The 26 participants represented the Polish People's Army. On the other hand, the German Democratic Republic did not host a *kyoksul* training course until June – August 1988, in Lehnin bei Potsdam. Hence, this North Korean combat style found its way to the GDR 10 years later than Poland. Promotion of *kyoksul* in communist countries was connected with political cooperation among the Warsaw Pact members and partner countries.

Polish instructors operating in the 1980s included, most notably Henryk Ficek, Janusz Gutkowski and Bogdan Mazur. Henryk Ficek was awarded the 3<sup>rd</sup> dan by the Koreans, which was possibly the highest rank in Europe. He taught in Koszalin. Janusz Gutkowski, previously a *karate Kyokushin* instructor, acquired the rank of 1st dan. He taught courses in Warsaw. Finally, Bogdan Mazur was in charge of *kyoksul* training groups in Rzeszow (the local branch of the Society for the Promotion of Physical Culture, at Browarna Street), which was probably the longest-running operation in Poland. He himself trained in a green belt, and his older students in yellow and the younger ones in white belts. The group which made presentations in the Podkarpackie region comprised Jaroslaw Dzwierzynski, Zenon Pardel and Janusz Zielinski for example.

Janusz Gutkowski, currently the 8<sup>th</sup> dan in *taekwon-do* ITF (International Taekwon-Do Federation), suggests that *kyoksul* started in Poland in 1978-79. Dur-

ing this time training, held e.g. in Warsaw, Gdansk and Biala Podlaska, was conducted by *kyoksul* Master Han Ho Un (10 dan) and four other instructors working in Poland. After about 12 months the Master conducted an exam, as a result of which the first master ranks (1<sup>st</sup> dan) were awarded to: Henryk Ficek, Jacek Grochowski and Janusz Gutkowski. According to the latter, “The *kyoksul* training groups in Poland folded in early 1983”. As an explanation he lists four main reasons for this happening:

“a) no contact with any Korean *kyoksul* Master from 1980;

b) lack of training materials;

c) lack of organisation associating *kyoksul* clubs;

d) suggestion made by DPRK Embassy related to the transition to *taekwon-do* ITF, which would be linked to a guarantee for the arrival of instructors from Korea, and for membership of international organisations. This proposal was accepted by all the clubs; to my knowledge it was not rejected by anyone.”

However it is not true that *kyoksul* vanished from Poland in early 1983. On 27 May 1984 the author witnessed a large presentation made by the *kyoksul* group from Rzeszow, and hosted by the “Sokol” Culture Centre in Strzyzow (at the time in the “Odrodzenie” cinema). The training group still existed in 1987; the practitioners would still buy training clothes in military green. The leader of the group is remembered by Gutkowski in this way: “Bogdan Mazur had a club rank awarded by me (5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> *kup*). Unfortunately, no Korean instructor was available in Poland then, otherwise Bogdan might have obtained a higher rank”.

## Discussion

Why did *kyoksul* vanish from the Polish “landscape” of martial arts? This, most clearly, was an effect of the policy adopted by the North Korean government. Promotion of *kyoksul* as a martial art was discontinued in favour of the ITF version of *taekwon-do*. Perhaps this manifested a kind of competition with the WTF variety, promoted by South Korea as a modern combat sport. General Choi Hong Hi (the founder of *taekwon-do* and ITF) cooperated with the North Korean government, which is why perhaps the ITF *taekwon-do* was supported by institutions in that country. *Kyoksul* was still taught for some time in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, but only the military combat version.

It seems that with no support from national institutions and large organisations, a martial art which is not a combat sport is unlikely to survive in this highly competitive market. Other martial arts and organisations, even with relatively high level of institutional development, frequently experience decrease and regression (despite

long-time operation and traditions) [cf. Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2011; Sieber, Cynarski 2013; Sieber, Grzywacz 2015; Cynarski 2018; Cynarski 2019].

*Hwarangdo* was developed in the 1960s. It is still used in the U.S. Army and by others, and practised in many countries worldwide [cf. Lee 2005]. This shows that a product of the same Korean culture continues to be used in the army and outside. It is likely that the success and popularity of *hwarangdo* can be attributed to its immanent philosophy and rich axiology. Is it likely that teaching a martial art without its cultural context can survive after the period of its promotion?

Is the main reason for the downfall of a given “teaching curriculum” linked to the lack (death, disappearance, withdrawal) of the main leader, Master-teacher? Or could it be organisational and institutional immaturity [Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2011]? Members of the *kyoksul* group operating in Rzeszow complained about the fact that they had no possibility of making progress by acquiring higher technical ranks because their instructor did not have a master rank. A student needs to have clearly defined perspectives resulting from the training process.

This is only an introductory contribution to the related state of knowledge. The history of *kyoksul*, as well as problems associated with the growth or downfall of specific educational systems (in fighting arts) undoubtedly require further investigations.

## Conclusions

The teaching of *kyoksul* was introduced in Poland and in other “people’s democracy” countries as a result of their cooperation with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. After North Korea withdrew its *kyoksul* instructors and initiated the promotion of *taekwon-do* ITF, the practice of the former was discontinued in Poland. It was only in Rzeszow that the training group taught by Bogdan Mazur continued operations until the late 1980s.

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### Krótką historia kyoksul w Polsce

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuki walki, systemy *combat*, *kyoksul*, rozwój

#### Streszczenie

Perspektywa. Historyczne i społeczno-kulturowe perspektywy teoretyczne zostały zastosowane w tym studium w oparciu o *General Theory of Fighting Arts*. W związku z tym przyjęto odpowiedni język konceptualny.

Problem. Celem jest opis – faktografia, swego rodzaju studium przypadku, oraz interpretacja rozwoju i końca *kyoksul* w Polsce. Metoda. Metodą jest studium jednego przypadku, jako rodzaj metody monograficznej, z odniesieniem do kilku kategorii źródeł (jak zwłaszcza wywiad z jednym z pionierów i notatki własne z obserwacji) i opracowań.

Wyniki. *Kyoksul* było nauczane i uprawiane w Polsce w latach 1978–88, równoległe w wojsku i w klubach sportowych. Nauczał tu Mistrz Han Ho Un i kilku jeszcze instruktorów. Większość sekcji zaprzestała działalności w roku 1983.

Wnioski. Nauczanie *kyoksul* w Polsce i innych krajach „demokracji ludowej” było efektem współpracy tych państw z KRLD. Ponieważ Korea Północna wycofała swych instruktorów tego systemu a podjęła promocję *taekwon-do* ITF, *kyoksul* zakończyło swe funkcjonowanie w Polsce. Najdłużej, bo prawie do końca lat 1980, działała sekcja *kyoksul* w Rzeszowie.