

Martial Arts Tourism May Be the "Applicable Key" for the Northeast Asian Sub-region--The Case from Taekwondo

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Abstract: *Taekwondo, which began on the Korean peninsula, is an official event in the Olympic Games, and this traditional martial art has the same roots in North and South Korea. For the future, sub-regional sports tourism cooperation is a key part of the "solution" in Northeast Asia. As a microcosm of sports tourism, martial arts tourism is playing an active role in friendly diplomacy and sustainable economic development. The definition given at the 2015 Congress of the International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Science Society (IMACSSS) is cited here: martial arts tourism is a realization of travel and visitation directly related to martial arts research. This paper focuses on the North Korean side of the emerging martial arts tourism, taekwondo tourism, with the aim of exploring effective countermeasures for the peaceful resolution of the Korean Peninsula issue and providing a model for the pacification of diplomacy and the development of economic prosperity in Northeast Asia.*

Keywords: *Martial Arts Tourism, Korean Peninsula, Taekwondo Diplomacy, Sub-region*

1. Introduction

Most people would consider North Korea to be one of the most closed countries in the world. Nevertheless, travel to North Korea was not difficult for some countries before the new coronavirus pneumonia epidemic, and some 6,000 to 10,000 Western tourists still travel to North Korea each year. Chinese tourists can travel to Pyongyang by air from Beijing, Harbin, Shenyang, Dalian and Shanghai, and by special tourist trains from Beijing and Dandong.

The Korea International Taekwondo Tourism Corporation, one of several state-owned tourism organizations in the DPRK, operates a variety of general tourism businesses that focus on taekwondo practice. In the case of North Korea, taekwondo is one of the country's best-selling cultural assets, depending perhaps on the impression in the minds of many people around the world that the ITF taekwondo originated in North Korea.

2. Literature review

2.1 Martial Arts Tourism

The so-called "martial arts tourism" is considered as a special form of sports culture and tourism expression, and can be considered as a form of "cultural tourism" and "sports tourism". Martial arts tourism is a realization of trips and visits directly related to the study of martial arts. A distinctive feature of martial arts tourism is the association of the visitor and the main destination, with the martial art or its particular genre[1].

In the sociology of tourism and the sociology of sport and leisure, it is allowed to show together the relationships between tourists and to learn or practice through the lifestyle, fashion or value theories perceived by these tourists. In fact, martial tourism is studied on several levels, including also scientific and educational perspectives. A focus of the study of "martial tourism" is the process of self-knowledge and the way of self-realization, which is closely related to educational tourism and also indicates the need for individuals to have disposable income to pay for courses, tournaments, various organizational costs, training equipment and specialized courses. As a non-recreational tourism, the tourist's educational experience should acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge. Martial arts tourism is

largely a broad leisure activity that is also a tourism phenomenon motivated by understanding, learning, practicing, communicating and teaching martial arts as an opportunity to seek self-cultivation, which is different from sightseeing or experiential tourism[2].

2.2 Value of Martial Arts Tourism

With nearly 100 million martial arts practitioners worldwide studying hundreds of different martial arts systems, each with its own history, experiences and opportunities, martial arts tourism has an undeniable contribution to the development of tourism around the world. In Asia, martial arts offer unique tourism opportunities. China, Korea and Thailand have long promoted martial arts tourism, and Chinese Kung Fu, Taekwondo and Muay Thai are world-renowned. For countries with popular traditional martial arts (i.e., countries where martial arts originated), this is extremely important for their political and economic development and cultural preservation. Although martial arts tourism is only a niche form of cultural tourism activity, it has important political and economic functions. Its impact is not only economic, but may also affect a country on a geopolitical level. For this reason, I have reason to believe that Taekwondo, one of the most popular martial arts and combat sports in the world, has a unique appeal comparable to the "ping pong diplomacy" between China and the United States, and is a powerful opportunity to revitalize the martial arts tourism industry.

3. The origin and development of Taekwondo

3.1 Origin of Taekwondo

Taekwondo originated in the 1950s when Koreans with experience in the Japanese martial art of Matsudo-Kan karate returned from their studies. As with any cultural innovation, they succeeded in evolving a martial art form in practice. This evolution included both "traditional" and "sporting" aspects, and the "Taekwondo as tradition" part can be seen as an innovation in the military in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the "taekwondo as a sport" can be seen as a "type" with many names and symbols associated with Korean history; the "taekwondo as a sport" can be seen as the speed and competition rules based on modern competition established in the decades since the 1950s and 1960s.

About Taekwondo in Korea, "It is a national martial art based on the use of the feet and hands for various witty and flexible attacks and defenses." In the Korean Encyclopedia of National Culture, Korean Edo defines Taekwondo as "a self-defense martial art that uses the hands and feet as a full-body exercise to strengthen the body through physical and mental training and to protect the body through technical training. This shows that Korea and North Korea are similar in the definition of Taekwondo. The training process of Taekwondo includes "basic movements, frames, confrontation, self-defense and strength". The basic moves are the most basic moves in the game practice. "Fighting with an opponent one-on-one or one-on-two is used as an exercise method for confrontation, with commitment and freedom of confrontation.

Yoon Byung-in and Choi Hong-hee were the main figures who spread taekwondo to North Korea, but Yoon is not heavily mentioned. American taekwondo instructor Kim Byung-soo visited Pyongyang himself and searched for information related to Yoon on several occasions with a view to uncovering Yoon's fate[3]. Choi Hong-hee, a Republic of Korea Army martial artist born in Myongchon County, North Hamgyong Province, is the founder of taekwondo as claimed by the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF). General Choi Hong-hee has given Taekwondo a great deal of thought and culture of etiquette, including the Taekwondo pledge and the spirit of Taekwondo, which is "courtesy, justice, integrity, patience, self-restraint, and unyielding".

The Taekwondo pledge is to make the body healthy, to cultivate a noble personality, to cultivate strong physical strength, to always stand on the side of justice, to protect the weak, to improve ethics and morality, and to turn the world into a paradise of peace and happiness through the scientific practice of Taekwondo; to save people from the horror and sorrow of death, to make them live forever, to persist in practicing techniques, to cultivate spirituality, and to leave more excellent techniques and spiritual heritage to the future generations. To remind such poor people to transcend the desire for materialism and power, to defend the freedom and independence of Taekwondo, and never to be a person who gives up his principles or wavers for personal gain; to teach and learn from each other under the same method and regulations, regardless of gender or social status, transcending religious beliefs, nationalities and borders. The modern society, characterized by science and material omnipotence, imposes extreme egoism and dependence on superfluous civilizational apparatus, so that

young people in particular cannot predict tomorrow and are overwhelmed by the tide of fear and waste. In order to overcome this phenomenon, it is necessary to strengthen spiritual education that is necessary for a moral society, such as strict discipline, the spirit of self-reliance, mutual support, and dedication; to be guided by conscience, and to serve humanity by always being lenient to the weak and tough to the strong, and to cultivate a culture of respect for mentors by those who protect their descendants, and to eliminate bad behavior such as flattery, treachery, and treachery. Because the pledge contains more ideology, some scholars believe that Taekwondo borders on religion rather than a martial art in the strictest sense[4].

3.2 Taekwondo genre development: WTF and ITF

Taekwondo was named by General Choi Hong-hee on April 11, 1955. Since then, Taekwondo has evolved into several styles, the two largest of which are governed by the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) and the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF). The International Taekwondo Federation (ITF) distinguishes its uniforms by the black stripes on the side of the jacket from 1st to 3rd dan, the black stripes on the sides of the trouser legs for 4th dan and above, and the black stripes on the sleeves of the uniforms when the international instructor qualification is obtained. The rank and level can be distinguished by the Roman numerals I(I) to 9(IX) on the shoulder patch and belt of the uniform. There is an interval of eighteen months between the 1st and 2nd dan to take the test, two years between the 2nd and 3rd dan, and so on. Black belts under the age of thirteen are called "Pee-Wee", and after the age of thirteen, they automatically enter the rank. Unlike the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF), the collar of the robe is changed from white to black from the first dan onwards, and after the fifth dan, a robe with black stripes on the sleeves can be worn. The belt is embroidered with a horizontal strip of color to represent the rank, but some people embroider the rank directly on the belt, such as "5th Dan" instead of five horizontal stripes. The black belt is "Pin" before the age of fifteen, and can only be worn with a black belt and a red belt.

In 1980, the ITF introduced taekwondo to North Korea, and in September of that year, General Choi Hong-hee led an ITF demonstration team on a tour of North Korea, which included taekwondo practitioners from countries that fought against North Korea during the war. He did this to convey that people could make friends with their enemies through taekwondo. And a member of the socialist Yugoslavia at the time, together with General Choi Hong-hee, conveyed an implicit message to North Korean leader Kim Il-sung that taekwondo could be practiced effectively in a communist country. Because once North Korea embraced taekwondo, it became an important member of the ITF, similar to South Korea's support of the WTF. eventually, beginning in the early 1980s, both North and South Korea spread taekwondo around the world. North Korean ITF instructors were sent to communist, socialist and non-aligned countries around the world with which they had diplomatic relations, and the North Korean government was extremely supportive and helpful, both in terms of human and financial resources, at that moment of life and death for the ITF.

After the end of the Cold War, South Korea quickly established more relations with the newly democratic Eastern countries. Due to political factors, the WTF was able to freely engage with local taekwondo groups, allowing many to switch from the ITF style to the WTF style of taekwondo. This led to WTF style taekwondo becoming an official Olympic sport in 1994.

4. Taekwondo Tourism and Diplomacy

4.1 Taekwondo Tourism in North Korea

Most people would consider North Korea to be one of the most closed countries in the world. Prior to the new coronavirus pneumonia outbreak, travel to North Korea was not difficult for some countries, and some 6,000 to 10,000 Western tourists still visit the country each year. Chinese tourists can travel to Pyongyang by air from Beijing, Harbin, Shenyang, Dalian and Shanghai, and by special tourist trains from Beijing and Dandong. All tourism operations in the DPRK are organized by one of several state-owned tourism companies, mainly Korea International Travel Service, Korea International Sports Travel Service, Korea International Taekwondo Tours, and Korea International Youth Travel Service. Among them, Korea International Taekwondo Tours was established on November 15, Juche 101 (2012) in Choden 2-dong, Mangyongdae-gu, Pyongyang, and operates various forms of general tourism, mainly taekwondo training. The travel agency has foreign language guides such as English and Chinese and a variety of tour transportation.

ITF Taekwondo is associated with North Korea in the minds of many people in Korea and around the world. In the case of North Korea, it is one of the country's best-selling cultural assets. In 1985, the ITF headquarters was moved to the Austrian capital of Vienna. In 2002, the ITF underwent a major split and became three main organizations. For those who attend ITF classes and are affiliated with the ITF headquartered in Vienna, the pilgrimage to the Taekwondo Sanctuary and Taekwondo Palace (INF Taekwondo Education Center) in Pyongyang, North Korea is a spiritual journey. However, only INF practitioners with allegiance to the Vienna, Austria-based ITF travel to North Korea, as it is the only ITF organization with a branch in North Korea. Practitioners with allegiance to other ITFs will go elsewhere[5].

Since 1989, the DPRK has made various efforts to feature taekwondo, attracting a cumulative total of more than 30,000 people from approximately 180 countries to visit the country. 1992 and subsequent cycles have seen the DPRK host the ITF World Championships; bring the DPRK Taekwondo Demonstration Team to the United States in 2007 and 2011 in conjunction with Taekwondo Times Magazine; send the ITF Demonstration Team to the 2015 (Russia) and 2017 (South Korea) and 2017 (South Korea) and the WTF World Championships at the opening ceremony of the 2018 PyeongChon Winter Olympics.

To some extent, North Korea's negative international reputation may improve as it further develops martial arts tourism. Taekwondo has been used for soft diplomatic purposes by both South Korea and North Korea, and as a result has become a positive cultural asset for the two Koreas.

4.2 Korean Peninsula Efforts on Taekwondo Diplomacy

One of the top priorities for the reunification of the two Koreas is to communicate through taekwondo. Under the ceasefire status, which has not yet ended the war, the two Koreas are still engaged in an arms race. In this harsh reality, exchanges through taekwondo within the established rules can be seen as an opportunity and a starting point for reconciliation. Just like the Sino-American table tennis exchange in 1970, the Sydney Olympics in 2000 featured both South Korea and North Korea.

In August 2014, the WTF and ITF began a new era when they jointly signed a landmark agreement "with the full support of IOC President Thomas Bach." So far, only one aspect of the agreement has been implemented, the coexistence of WTF and ITF demonstration teams within the occasion.

The first such event was when the North Korean ITF demonstration team performed at the WTF World Taekwondo Championships in Russia (2015). The two teams performed together peacefully at the WTF World Taekwondo Championships, which attracted a lot of attention from the international media. They then performed during the WTF World Taekwondo Championships in Korea (2017) and toured Korea that year, where they were warmly received by many people. The slogan during the tour was "Peace is more valuable than victory," a clear message to Korea. At the time, the tour was seen by audiences around the world as aiming to improve diplomacy and peace between the two Koreas.

On June 24, 2017, South Korean President Moon Jae-in traveled to the remote South Korean city of Mogju to personally greet the North Korean delegation. President Moon Jae-in shook hands and talked with members of the North Korean demonstration team. He warmly greeted the North Korean athletes, demonstrating that his administration is largely open, supportive and willing to thaw relations with North Korea. Inter-Korean diplomacy, which had been stagnant since 2007, was suddenly revitalized through taekwondo. At that time, he invited North Korea to participate in the 2018 Winter Olympics, also known as the "Peace Olympics. At the meeting, two performances by North Korea's taekwondo demonstration team highlighted South Korea's welcome.

After a warm reception by South Korea for the North Korean taekwondo demonstration team, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong's special envoy attended the opening ceremony of the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics with a letter from Kim. Part of it, delivered to South Korean President Moon Jae-in, reads, "I hope that Pyongyang and Seoul will become closer in the hearts of South Koreans and bring reunification and prosperity in the near future." During his meeting with Kim, President Moon Jae-in emphasized the importance of resuming talks between North Korea and the United States. This in turn led to a historic summit between Moon and Kim Jong Un on April 27, 2018, where denuclearization and the signing of a formal peace treaty between the two Koreas were discussed.

While there are exchanges between North and South Korean taekwondo demonstration teams,

sports and martial arts exchanges remain inadequate. Admittedly, only a small percentage of martial arts are recognized. Therefore, it would be very meaningful to be able to expand mutual understanding and form a North-South consensus through the recognition of martial arts in the current taekwondo exchange.

5. Conclusion

A successful past has shown that North-South cooperation is possible. Significant to taekwondo diplomacy is that these tournaments are held under strict government control and encouragement, with the 2017 WTF World Taekwondo Championships held in Muju-gun, South Korea, and its destination, Korea Taekwondo Park, a taekwondo resort operated by the Taekwondo Promotion Foundation and supported by the South Korean Ministry of Sports, Culture and Tourism.

While taekwondo-based tourism and diplomacy cannot claim or bear the burden of peace on the Korean Peninsula alone, it has been a driving force in bringing the two Koreas together. It has become a usable key for the two Koreas to begin informal, non-governmental meetings and open the door for a meeting between the two Koreas and the United States. Perhaps more importantly for Northeast Asian governments, after more than a decade of distrust of North Korea, the widely known Taekwondo event opened up the idea of South Korea trying to build inter-Korean relations. Looking to the future, I hope that taekwondo tourism and diplomacy will bring the "key" to peace and opportunity on the Korean peninsula and "enhance the quality and effectiveness" of sub-regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

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