

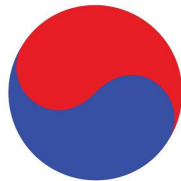
About Chon-Ji

Heaven and earth

Many cultures have stories of creation that involve concepts of heaven and earth (consider the Maori legend of Ranginui and Papatuanuku). In Korea, the concepts are “chon” (heaven) and “ji” (earth). As Chon-Ji represents the beginning of the world, so Chon-Ji tul is the first of the 24 patterns in the Chang-Hon set performed in International Taekwon-Do. (Chang-Hon is the pseudonym of General Choi Hong Hi, the late founder of Taekwon-Do.)

In the Orient, heaven and earth are entwined with the Chinese concepts of yin and yang (“eum-yang” in Korean). Yin-yang is the principle that the universe comprises interacting, complementary opposites (female and male, soft and hard, passive and active). Neither is superior, and harmony exists when both are balanced. Yin is feminine, dark, passive, old, winter, earth; yang is masculine, light, active, young, summer, heaven.

In Korea, yang (heaven) is represented in red, and eum (earth) in blue (drawn together in the taegeuk). These are the colours worn by competitors in Taekwon-Do competition.



*Korean taegeuk,
of eum-yang.*



General Choi at Lake Chon-Ji. Photograph courtesy of Grand Master George Vitale.

Lake Chon-Ji

“Chon-Ji” is also the name of “Heaven Lake”. It is in the caldera of the tallest mountain in the Korean peninsula, Mt Baekdu (2,749m), on the border between North Korea and China. The caldera was formed following an eruption of Mt Baekdu around 946 CE. The “Millennium eruption”, as it is known, is one of the three largest known historical eruptions (another is the eruption that created Lake Taupo in 180 CE).

Mount Baekdu and Lake Chon-Ji are significant because they are considered the birthplace of the Korean people (hence, the beginning of Korean history). This is where the holy founder of Korea, Dan-Gun, established the first Korean kingdom, Gojoseon, in 2333 BCE.

Interpretation

There are many theories interpreting elements of Chon-Ji tul. It is difficult to tell which were considered when the pattern was created (between 1962 and 1964), and which were suggested later.

Some suggest that the four directions represent the four seasons or the four compass points. This is possible, because seasons and cardinal directions are elements of Taoist philosophy, and Taoism influenced Korean culture. (It is unlikely that they represent the four classical

elements of earth, air, fire and water, because these come from pre-Socratic Greek philosophy. In the Chinese Wu Xing, there were five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water.)

Some consider that the first part of the pattern represents the earth and the second the heaven. The first part comprises strong, earthed walking stances and low blocks, while the second comprises lighter L-stances and inner forearm middle blocks. It seems more likely, however, that the pattern begins with heaven followed by earth. Not only is that the order of the pattern name, but author Stuart Anslow makes an argument based on the Taoist trigrams; the forearm low blocks point downwards from heaven, and the inner forearm middle blocks point upwards from earth.



Korean samtaegeuk with the eight Taoist trigrams.

Others argue that Chon-Ji actually contains three parts for Chonjiin, as the Korean samtaegeuk does, for heaven (red), earth (blue) and humanity (yellow). The Taoist bagua ("eight symbols", in Korean "palgwae") contains eight trigrams. The argument suggests that the first eight movements represent the heaven, the second eight the earth, and the final three represent humanity (and the number of bars in a trigram). This seems unlikely, because the pattern history states that Chon-Ji "means literally 'the Heaven the Earth'" and "consists of two similar parts". Interestingly, vowels in the Korean alphabet are comprised of symbols representing heaven (•), earth (–), and humanity (|).



Some suggest that the 19 movements of Chon-Ji tul represent the 10 gup (coloured belt grades) and 9 dan (black belt degrees) in International Taekwon-Do. This interpretation must have been added later, because General Choi's the book 'Taekwon-Do' (published in 1965) included Chon-Ji tul, but only contained eight gup and nine dan.

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