

The History of the Jang Bon

In English, a Jang or Chang Bong is called a staff. It is one of man's oldest weapons. Korean staffs can be divided into three categories.

- The Jang bong is the tallest staff, about 6' tall.
- The Joong bong is the middle sized staff, measuring from 3' – 4 1/2' tall.
- The Dan bong is the shortest staff, measuring about 1' in length.

Korean staff techniques are generally characterized by movements similar to those of a snake. An offensive movement is usually forward, while the defensive movement involves drawing back the weapon as if in a coiling manner. These techniques are controlled by the user's wrist actions. Students are taught the importance of control to strike wisely and with danger. A high level of Ki (internal energy) is used, including meditation, breath control, and concentration. The artist directs his own ki (energy) into the weapon.

The original Sado Mu Sool (Tribal Village Martial Arts) bong techniques mainly consisted of basic practical movements based on any given terrain and location. The techniques changed to fit the needs of a particular kingdom's martial artist. In the Koguryo Kingdom situated in the northern mountains of ancient Korea, techniques were developed based on the rugged terrain, jagged mountains and winding rivers. The mountains represented offense, while defense was found near the rivers that offered a speedy avenue of escape. The Kogouryo bong techniques were representative of the Koguryo's policies of quick, aggressive retaliation to the enemy's most vulnerable points. The mountain was used as its ally. These techniques required a hard strong stick.

The second kingdom, Sillia, developed a different method of staff techniques. It was influenced heavily by Chinese Martial Artists because of the extensive trade between Sillia and China, throughout its reign. The techniques were softer and more circular.

While Buddhism influenced all of Korea during the Three Kingdom era, the Sillia Kingdom benefited the most. The monks had a need for non-lethal self defense and therefore perfected defense and submission techniques using the bong. All sizes of bongs, including a walking cane became valuable weapons to the unarmed monks who routinely traveled the paths between monasteries and villages.

Prior to Silla's conquest over Koguryo and Paekje, Silla entered into a treaty with a small southern kingdom called Kaya. Kaya's king, Kim Su, Lo had the reputation of being one of the best staff fighters of that era. His techniques were so good that the entire kingdom was known for its excellent bong-wielders.

Paekje developed yet another method of staff expertise that involved simple straight forward force against force techniques. Think of the staff as merely an extension of one's arms, this is how the Paekje utilized the bong. They lacked creativity and intricate motion.

Bongs in ancient Korea were constructed from pak dahl, a special wood found only in the Sea Jae area of the Kyung Bok province. Oil was applied to strengthen and preserve the wood. It was steamed to allowing the oil to penetrate the wood and strengthen it so much that even a sharp sword could not cut it.

While the Korean long staff is used mostly as a single-ended weapon (holding one end, striking with the other), the Chinese used a double-ended version, applying upward and downward techniques. The few double-ended techniques seen in jang bong forms are horizontal, using the back and waist as pivot points.

Typical techniques include circular strikes, spearing thrusts or jabs, pushes, blocks, parries, traps, holds, pins, chokes, and throws. It is highly effective against multiple opponents. Common grips include overhand grip, over-under grip, swing grip, one-hand grip, and palm grip.

Today, most staffs are made of white oak, hickory, or other hardwoods that are resistant to denting. Staff techniques can be applied to common objects, such as a walking stick, piece of pipe, broom handle, closet rod, lumber, an oar, or even a pool cue.