

COREA SWORD

PRESERVING AN ANCIENT CRAFT

By Sabumnim Guy Edward Larke

What comes to mind when you think of a traditional craft or skill? Ceramics, weaving, calligraphy, paper making, blacksmithing, and painting come to mind readily. You can see exhibitions and displays of such things throughout the year in most towns, cities, and even countries. Sadly most people have a very narrow vision of what constitutes a “skill” or an “art.”

When one mentions the sword maker, the first things that spring into people’s minds are badly done martial arts movies, online games and fantasy novels. These artisans are seen as the unattractive necessary evils of the plots of these mediums.

There are no films depicting the sacrifice of the sword maker and the components he must bend to his will. The best you get is a 30-second montage. The relationship between the maker and user in media seems to be a parasitic one at best. Warriors became upper-class citizens or folk heroes whereas smiths stayed in their shops without even a nod. Beowulf, Theseus, and Arthur are legendary heroes, but you never hear about the souls who put their heart, blood, sweat and tears into fashioning their implements of justice.

Is it any surprise that during Japan’s many invasions of Korea that sword making masters were among the many artisans the Japanese brought back to Japan? As a result Japan’s artistic culture blossomed, while the Joseon Dynasty’s artistic and martial culture plummeted (not that many people noticed). With the Joseon’s tendency favoring scholarly and financial pursuits it may not have been seen as a big loss. From even the Three Kingdoms Era, the small kingdom of Gaya had refined its iron metallurgy to such a high quality that it sent its knowledge to China and Japan. In fact, one of Gaya’s swords was presented as a gift to one of the Mongolian Khans during that era.

Perhaps the Japanese katana owes a lot to Korean sword





makers. Who knows? One thing is for certain, the two cultures influenced each other heavily whether either side wants to admit it or not. At one point, during the Im-jin-wae-ran War(1592-1598) in the Joseon Period, Korean swords went from straight, double-edged thrusting blades to curved, single-edged cutting implements.

From the old days, Korean people were referred to as Dong-ee-jok, especially by the Chinese. This meant a tribe good at archery. For centuries, Korean soldiers focused on the bow more than swordplay. However, a leader usually had a sword at his waist and rallied his troops with it. Also, those who did train in swordplay trained their body and mind as they readied themselves for battle.

Later the Japanese developed their own sword making skills to a much higher level. At that time, the Joseon Dynasty was eschewing the sword in favor of the pen. Many have tried to rediscover Korea's unique weapon forging legacy to become frustrated in the end. No one thought those skills and processes were worth documenting. Even now, Japanese and Chinese texts have to be researched to rediscover Korean skills.

One of these questing masters was Master

Hee-Wahn Moon. He and his wife Yun-Hee Rah founded a unique company, Go-re-yuh Do-Gum (Corea Sword), selling elegant and aesthetic steel swords for sword masters and collectors. Master Moon, a Kumdo expert, wanted to combine the best methods of both his nation and Japan to make the ultimate sword. This led him and his wife on a quest to find a sword maker who could use both modern and traditional forging techniques. They



found renowned expert Seung-Ho Lee. With him they built a factory where every blade is done with love and care. No mass production employed here. Together, the three are trying to revive and internationalize this long lost art. There are a number of Korean documentaries on these amazing men and Master Moon's son, Joon-Ki Moon, who is apprenticed under a Japanese sword master.

Master Moon has a beautiful showroom which he operates with his wife and a private dojang in the center of Daejeon city in South Korea. He is very proud of his collection of Korean, Japanese, Chinese and European weapons. Their company however specializes in yuek-guk-do (six-angled blade) used in the cutting of bamboo and the sam-guk-do (three-angled blade) used in the cutting of straw targets. He is trying to open a branch in America to compete internationally. Hopefully this will also revive Korean pride in a long scoffed at art. **TD**

Anyone outside Korea interested in these swords can contact Chief Master Robert J. Ott at www.certainvictory.com or Guy Edward Larke at kisa_do_muye@yahoo.ca.

TO SEE A VIDEO ON THE SWORDS
MADE BY COREA SWORD,
VISIT WWW.TAEKWONDOTIMES.COM.

