

# The Hidden Pressure Points of Tae Kwon Do

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## Introduction

The martial arts of Korea, Japan, and China have a long related history. One of the earliest roots of the Asian martial arts is the Asian healing art of Acupuncture. There is an old saying that states “the points that can heal are the points that can kill”. This old saying is true.

Some of those early martial artists were also acupuncturists. From their healing art, came the theory and knowledge to form sequences of strikes to the body, which were much more effective than an ordinary strikes, and which would result in serious injury or even death.

These techniques were kept secret and passed from Master to student. Instead of writing them down where

they could be stolen, the techniques were combined together into forms, or Poomse.

An observer of Poomse would only see basic blocks, punches, and kicks. In the hidden meaning, however, there were no pure blocks. Every hand and foot movement was intended as a pressure point strike.

This paper will briefly cover the theory behind using pressure points, and then use some examples from the Tae Kwon Do poomse Koryo.

## Theory

Acupuncturists base their study on the nervous system of the body. They have mapped out the nervous system into a series of significant points and grouped them into

**Table 1: The 12 Principle Meridians and their Characteristics**

Meridian			Energy Relations					Location		
Name	Abbr	Total Points	Element	Energy	Diurnal Cycle	Alarm Point	Assc Point	Top	Bottom	Chi Dir
Lung	L	11	metal	Yin	4 am	L-1	B-13	torso	finger 1	↓
Large Intestine	LI	20	metal	Yang	6 am	S-25	B-25	head	finger 2	↑
Stomach	S	45	earth	Yang	8 am	Co-12	B-21	head	toe 2	↓
Spleen	Sp	21	earth	Yin	10 am	Li-13	B-20	torso	toe 1	↑
Heart	H	9	fire	Yin	12 am	Co-14	B-15	torso	finger 5	↓
Small Intestine	SI	19	fire	Yang	2 pm	Co-4	B-27	head	finger 5	↑
Bladder	B	67	water	Yang	4 pm	Co-3	B-28	head	toe 5	↓
Kidney	K	27	water	Yin	6 pm	GB-25	B-23	torso	arch	↑
Pericardium	P	9	fire	Yin	8 pm	Co-17	B-14	torso	finger 3	↓
Triple Warmer	TW	23	fire	Yang	10 pm	Co-5	B-22	head	finger 4	↑
Gall Bladder	GB	44	wood	Yang	12 pm	GB-24	B-19	head	toe 4	↓
Liver	Li	14	wood	Yin	2 am	Li-14	B-18	torso	Toe 1	↑
Conception	Co	24	---	Yin	---	---	---	Chin	Pelvis	↑
Governor	Gv	28	---	Yang	--	--	--	Lip	Tail Bone	↑

meridians. To describe the effect these points have on the body and how they interact with each other, they have overlaid their philosophical systems of the five elements and Yin and Yang energy concepts. These are summarized in Table 1, "The 12 Principle Meridians and their Characteristics," on page 1.

There are five rules for attacking pressure points:

- Attack along the meridian
- Attack Yin and Yang
- Attack with the diurnal cycle
- Attack with the cycle of destruction
- Attack the special points.

There are twelve principle meridians, each of which are associated with an organ. These meridians repeat themselves on the left and right side of the body. Of these twelve, six extend to the arms and six extend to the legs. With two additional meridians traversing the center of the body, there are 361 unique points.<sup>1</sup> When counting left, center, and right sides separately, there are 670 total points.

Yin and Yang are intended to coexist in balance and harmony. The twelve meridians are grouped into 6 Yin/Yang pairs. The flow of "chi" energy is down one meridian and up the other. Attacks must be done with the correct *angle* and *direction* to stop the flow of chi energy. Healing or *energy restoration* would be done with a direction and angle opposite of the attack.

To demonstrate energy flow and direction, have your partner extend his arm and note how hard it is to push it down. Now brush your finger along the Lung meridian, against the energy flow, from his thumb up along the inside of his arm. His arm will be easier now to push down. Now brush your finger with the energy flow towards his thumb. His arm will again become strong.

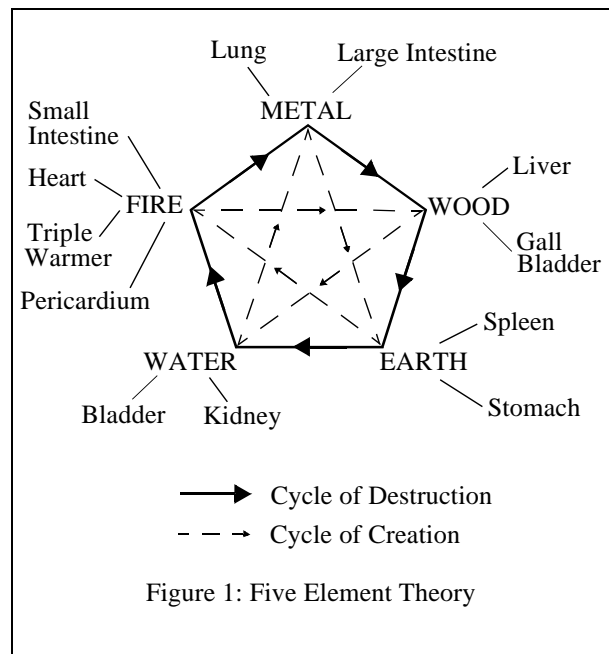
The body also has three general Yin/Yang regions: front/back, left/right, and top/bottom. That means that any pressure point techniques which cross these regions of the body use the Yin/Yang principle and will be more effective.

Chi energy flows through the body in a 24 hour diurnal cycle with one meridian always being the most active. Striking this meridian would be the most effective. A proper strike to a meridian not active at the time can cause a delayed effect later when that meridian is active. The diurnal sequence of meridians can also be used to determine strike sequences. For example, a strike to the

Large Intestine meridian would be used to increase the sensitivity of the Stomach meridian for the next strike.

Each of the twelve principle meridians are assigned an element. Each element is responsible for generating another element, thus forming a *cycle of creation*. Each element is also capable of destroying another element, thus forming a *cycle of destruction*. The cycle of destruction forms another basis for sequential striking. For example, hitting a metal meridian followed by a wood and earth meridian can cause a serious knockout. When followed with a water and fire meridian, death can occur.

Each meridian has one *alarm* point located on the front of the torso and one *associated* point located on the back of the torso on the Bladder meridian. Alarm points are usually sensitive to the touch when the corresponding organ has a problem. These points are used in the more serious pressure point techniques due to their more significant influence on the body.



### Training Rules

Pressure points are quite effective and are dangerous, so extreme caution must be taken when practicing them.

The effectiveness of hitting the correct *combination* of pressure points with the proper *angle* and *direction* within a short period of time is:

- one point will cause local pain
- two points will cause pain between the points
- three points can knock a person out with a 100% chance of revival

1. Some texts quote 365 points, but numerical summation of Table 1 yields 361

- four points can cause a knock out with only a 90% chance of revival.
- five points can kill someone with no chance of revival.

To avoid any training injuries, the following precautions should be observed:

- Do not strike points on people over 40, people with heart or other health problems, or people on legal or illegal drugs.
- Do not cross sides of the body. Work only on one arm on one side. Wait 20 minutes before moving to the leg.
- Use only light taps, not heavy strikes.
- Do not hit points unless you know the consequences for that point.
- Always train with a qualified instructor.

### Pressure Points in Koryo Poomse

To illustrate the use of this information, selected techniques from the Tae Kwon Do Poomse Koryo will be analyzed for their pressure point application. More than one explanation for a move may exist, and usually does, as these moves date back up to one thousand years ago.

*Move Ready:* Double Pushing Motion

*Attack:* Outside wrist grab

*Defense:* Twist your wrist inside and up, against their thumb, and knife hand strike, palm up, to the side of the neck at LI-18.

*Move 1:* Double Knife Hand Block

*Attack:* Right punch

*Defense:* Step to the side 45 degrees

- Your left hand strikes LI-6 (metal) or TW 6-8 (fire) on the upper forearm.
- Your right hand strikes down and hits near SI-17 (fire) and ST-3 (earth) where they cross at the back of the chin. Be careful, this can release the hinge of the jaw.
- This technique can be made more effective by hitting GB-20 (wood) at the base of the neck on the back on the right side. This gives fire-metal-wood-earth.
- The stomach meridian strike can cause a small “earthquake” in the body.

*Move 2:* Double Side Kick

*Attack:* Follow on from Move 1.

*Defense:* The metal meridian has already been activated in Move 1. The next attack should be to the

wood meridian (Li or GB)

- First kick is to GB-31 or GB-32 (wood) on the side of the upper leg. Kick towards the bone and slightly down at a 45 degree angle.
- Second kick is at the junction of Li-14 (wood), GB-24 (wood), and Sp-16 (Earth) on the front side of the chest near the edge of the rib cage. Strike in and at the core of the body at 45 degrees.
- This is Fire - Metal - Wood.

*Move 4:* Inside Block

*Attack:* Left Punch

*Defense:* Your left hand grabs the back of the wrist at the SI-6 (fire), TW-4 (fire) and LI-5 (metal) meridians. Pull back your left hand

- Your right arm strikes TW-11 (fire) above the elbow

### Conclusion

The principles and science of acupuncture have been incorporated in the martial arts since the beginning. Strikes to the body are done with the intention of stopping the flow of energy in the opponent’s body.

This information was recorded and hidden in Poomse. Knowing this fact is the first step in a long process of learning the true meaning of Poomse.

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### **About The Author**

John T. Chapman started his formal martial arts training in Shotokan Karate in 1978 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1979, John moved to Edmonton, Alberta, and began studying Tae Kwon Do. In 1982, John was President of the University of Alberta Tae Kwon Do Club, and lead a group of University students to Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea, on a one month cultural exchange and training camp.

In 1984, John received his first degree Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do and a B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering, moved to Northern California, and continued his Tae Kwon Do studies under Grand Master Woo Kon Kim. John is now the Head Instructor at the Menlo Park studio, the Referee Chairman for the annual Stanford University Tae Kwon Do Tournament, and is currently testing for his fifth degree Black Belt.

John received his third degree Black Belt in Hapkido from Grand Master Kim in 1994 and is currently documenting and writing a book on these Hapkido techniques, as well as formalizing a belt and chart system for Hapkido.

In other arts, John holds a green belt in Aiki Jiu-Jitsu, a Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu under Rickson Gracie, and is a member of the American Teachers Association of Martial Artists.