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Taekwondo as an Academic Field of Study for Non-Koreans: An Unconventional and Extreme Form of Martial Arts Tourism

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Abstract: Many Korean universities grant undergraduate and graduate school degrees in part on coursework, theses, and dissertations that explore Taekwondo through various academic lenses in Taekwondo Studies programs, yet only a few individuals have traveled to the Korean Peninsula to study Taekwondo academically. Traveling internationally to earn a university degree in a martial art can be considered extreme martial arts tourism. This multidisciplinary study explores the motivations of non-Koreans who have studied Taekwondo academically in Korea as well as their aspirations after graduation. The study utilized a combination of autoethnographic techniques and interviews with individuals who have given up years of their lives, thousands of dollars, their home cultures, languages, and food, and their families to travel to a foreign university in order to study Taekwondo. Twelve participants were identified that met the selection criteria, but eight responded to the interview requests. The nine participants, including the author, came from a wide assortment of backgrounds, but all shared a passion for Taekwondo; now, most participants (n = 5) have jobs within the Taekwondo industry, including two professors in separate Departments of Taekwondo. This study's findings elucidate why non-Koreans study Taekwondo academically and thereby offer suggestions on how to improve this educational market.

Keywords: university education; Physical Education; autoethnographic study; Kukkiwon; International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF)

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1. Introduction

Tourism, the largest service industry in the world, and its related industries are shaped by tourists and their behaviors [1]. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO) has outlined 14 different types of tourism [2], but these should be seen as umbrella terms. Tourism is a somewhat nebulous term, since the purpose of a traveler's trip can be multifold. For instance, the WTO defines cultural tourism as "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination" [2]. Cultural tourists seek "distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions" [2]. When individuals travel to participate in a sport that is uniquely identified within a culture, sports tourism occurs simultaneously with cultural tourism. The WTO defines sports tourism as "a type of tourism activity which refers to the travel experience of the tourist who either observes as a spectator or actively participates in a sporting event generally involving commercial and non-commercial activities of a competitive nature" [2].

Individuals who travel for martial arts purposes could be seeking cultural education, competition, and enjoyment concurrently. The Korean martial art of Taekwondo is an Olympic sport as well as a unique aspect of Korean culture, so individuals who travel to Korea for Taekwondo purposes are usually engaging in both cultural and sport

tourism [3,4]. Martial artists travel also to further their education, practice, and/or engage in competition in their chosen martial art/combat sport [5]. Martial arts tourism, a tourism category not identified by the WTO but by tourism scholars, has emerged from these individuals' desire to learn their arts more deeply. Martial art tourism, which often leads practitioners to travel intercontinentally, is a costly and time-consuming endeavor. Enabled with a disposable income, martial artists are capable of participating in several types of activities when traveling. They travel domestically and internationally to compete in tournaments, teach or participate in educational seminars, learn from high-ranking masters, engage in cultural activities from the same culture that produced their art, or any number of personal reasons [6]. Martial arts academicians also travel to study their martial arts scientifically and participate in academic conferences [7–9]. Cynarski defined non-entertainment tourism, another category the WTO has yet to designate, as traveling to acquire new knowledge and skills [10]. Martial arts tourism, for example that which is performed for the Korean martial art/combat sport of Taekwondo, typically falls within this distinction [5].

Taekwondo originated in the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) and was spread to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea) in the 1980s by a former ROK Army general named Choi, Hong Hi [11]. The two Koreas practice Taekwondo differently, so much so that the styles of ROK and DPRK Taekwondo could be considered two activities with the same name, not unlike American football and European football (i.e., soccer). The International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) promotes self-cultivation through martial arts practice, while the Kukkiwon, the educational headquarters for ROK Taekwondo (or Kukki (National) Taekwondo) is more combat sport focused [11,12]. Kukki Taekwondo international competitions are the domain of World Taekwondo (WT; formerly the World Taekwondo Federation or WTF), which is the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) international federation (IF) for Taekwondo. On the other hand, the ITF has splintered into numerous organizations, at least three of which identify themselves as the "legitimate" ITF. One of these ITFs is headquartered in Vienna, Austria and staffed by DPRK citizens; it is this organization that oversees Taekwondo in the DPRK [11]. Both Taekwondo styles are practiced in hundreds of countries, but it is the ROK's Kukki Taekwondo that is most popular globally due in part to it becoming a full Olympic sport in the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games [13]. The ROK and the DPRK governments have also long-used Taekwondo as a form of cultural diplomacy [11,14].

Since its inception, Taekwondo martial arts tourists have traveled to the ROK for tournaments such as the 1st World Taekwondo Championship in 1973, monthly and quarterly Taekwondo dan (black belt level) examinations at the Kukkiwon, and specialized courses at the Kukkiwon and Taekwondowon (Taekwondo Park) in Muju, ROK, and Korean universities. The ROK has been a target destination for martial art tourists for decades, and the longer a person studies Taekwondo the more likely they are to travel to its country of origin [15] to seek a Korean "authentic experience" [4]. Academic studies are another purpose for martial arts to travel [16], and only a few individuals have traveled to the Korean Peninsula to study Taekwondo academically.

Although somewhat out of this research's scope, an overview of Taekwondo education offered in Korean universities is needed to elucidate this uncommon academic pursuit. Taekwondo became an academic field in 1982 [17], and there were "nearly 61 universities and colleges offering a degree in taekwondo in Korea" by 2009 [17]. Kwak and Cho categorized the history of academic Taekwondo studies into five periods: the Beginning Period (1982–1996), the Developing Period (1996–1999), the Growth Period (2000–2005), the Maturation Period (2006–2010), and the Transition Period (2011–present) [18]. In doing so, they illustrated an evolution of Taekwondo education at the tertiary level. By 2016, there were eighteen 4-year universities, eight 2- or 3-year colleges, one cyber university, and seven graduate schools offering Taekwondo degree programs [18]. There are currently eighteen 4-year universities, six 2- or 3-year colleges, and two cyber universities offering undergraduate academic degrees in Taekwondo [19], indicating that these programs have

been sustainable until now. Most of these institutions have a specific department that specializes in Taekwondo-specific education, but all offer Taekwondo majors, i.e., sports education that emphasizes or specializes in Taekwondo. Some institutions have unique approaches that combine Taekwondo education with another field of study. For instance, Shinhan University's degree path focuses on Taekwondo education, Hanam University's has a Department of Taekwondo and Security that provides private security education combined with Taekwondo, and Kosin University imbues students with the knowledge of how to proselytize Christianity through Taekwondo. Of particular note are the cyber universities, since they do not offer practical (i.e., physical) courses in their curriculum. The universities' entrance requirements vary widely, but only a handful of Korean universities have graduate schools of Taekwondo. Instead, graduate students choose a particular research field with an academic advisor who specializes in it, as students do in any other graduate school program, and then focus their theses or dissertations on Taekwondo.

Kwak claimed ROK Taekwondo departments are in a crisis due to lowered admission standards [20], and there may be a mismatch between these programs and the Taekwondo industry [21]. In another study, Park and You found that 22 ROK university Taekwondo departments provided kinesiology-focused courses and criticized these programs for not preparing students enough for careers in the Taekwondo industry [22], an allegation Ahn collaborated [17]. Nevertheless, most of their undergraduate programs (sans the cyber universities) focus heavily on practical courses in order to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the physical practices of the martial art/combat sport. The theoretical perspectives explored in Taekwondo programs provide education on how to develop elite athletes, global leadership, and professional instructors [21].

Non-Koreans who travel to study Taekwondo academically are committing enormous amounts of time and financial resources, not to mention the fact they are undertaking the hardships of living away from their accustomed ways of life. Studying Taekwondo academically could then be seen as extreme martial arts tourism, a niche form of tourism previously undefined in the literature. Extreme martial arts tourism is then defined herein as when cultural, education, and sports tourism are combined with studying a martial art in its country of origin for an extended period of time. Extreme martial arts tourism is not as inherently dangerous as extreme tourism, in which the dangerous activities undertaken in those trips are the defining characteristic of extreme in the latter term. Rather, the amount of time, money, and passion required to leave one's country, family, culture, language, and all other ways of life in order to study a martial art in its home country for several years can be considered "extreme" within the martial arts tourism lens. Nonetheless, there remains an aspect of danger in extreme martial arts tourism, since tourists engaging in extreme martial arts tourism are training in a martial art/combat sport with some of the best athletes and fighters in world.

Few studies have been conducted inside of Korea on non-Korean students in university Taekwondo programs [23–25]. In the international literature, one study was identified on Taekwondo degree programs in Korea [26], but this study was reviewed in the proceedings of a 2009 academic conference and was unpublished elsewhere. No researcher has used a tourism lens when examining non-Koreans studying Taekwondo academically in the ROK. Ahn and An, for instance, interviewed five foreign students enrolled in a ROK university Taekwondo program [23]. They concluded in part that "Foreign students that are from a distant country and have entered the Taekwondo Department in South Korea to specialize in Taekwondo are potential talents that will make huge contributions to the nation's Taekwondo diplomacy" [23]. However, there are few career options for Korean graduates of ROK university Taekwondo departments [22], and graduates often require assistance from their professors to enter the Taekwondo industry [27]. These results raise numerous questions, such as if non-Korean graduates of Taekwondo academic programs are employable, what are their motivations for coming so far and for so long to study Taekwondo, and how can Korean universities benefit from this niche student demo-

graphic. All of this indicates a need for research on non-Koreans who study Taekwondo academically abroad.

This study thusly aims to understand non-Korean martial artists' motivations who travel to the ROK to study Taekwondo academically as well as their aspirations after graduation. It utilizes a combination of autoethnographic data and interviews with individuals who have spent many years of their lives and thousands of dollars as well as left their home cultures, languages, food, and families to travel to a foreign university in order to study Taekwondo. The conclusions of this study are expected to serve Korean universities by offering suggestions on how to improve this education market.

1.1. Romanization Note

The Korean word 태권도 (*t'aegwŏndo*) has numerous Romanizations but has been rendered as *Taekwondo* for simplicity with the only exception being in organizational names. Other Korean terms are presented in the McCune–Reischauer Romanization system, but proper Korean names are presented in the author's preferred English spellings with surname first in the Asian tradition.

1.2. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest, since no funding was received during this study.

2. Materials and Methods

The current study's research design consisted of a focused literature review, a questionnaire, autoethnographic data collection, and expert interviews with non-Korean nationals who either graduated from or are currently completing a degree in a ROK university's Department of Taekwondo. The low sample number, lack of previous research, and the author meeting the selection criteria of this study necessitated the incorporation of autoethnographic data. The participants' unique nature (i.e., non-Koreans studying a Korean martial art in the ROK) and the lack of previous research on the topic warranted a wider scope of data collection that only semi-structured interviews could provide. The method adopted permitted data collected to be triangulated to ensure reliability. The five categories of analysis were entrance requirements, language skills, motivations, aspirations, and unexpected pertinent findings.

2.1. Literature Review

To identify the existing literature on non-Korean students in ROK university Taekwondo departments, a focused literature review was performed. Internet keyword searches were performed in Google Scholar and the ROK academic databases RISS (Research Information Sharing Service) and KISS (Koreanstudies Information Service System). Searches consisted of the keywords "foreign students", "Taekwondo departments", and "Taekwondo studies" in both English and Korean. Google Studies searches on "Taekwondo studies" and "Taekwondo academics" in English were also performed. Academic articles, theses, dissertations, websites, and periodical articles were identified and used in the analysis of the interview and autoethnographic data.

2.2. Participants

The selection criteria for interview participants were set at: the participant (1) could not be a ROK or DPRK citizen (ethnic Koreans that did not have a Korean nationality could participate but none were identified), and (2) had graduated or was currently studying Taekwondo academically in a Department of Taekwondo at a ROK or DPRK university. The convenience sampling method was used to identify potential interviewees from the author's professional contacts. Snowball sampling was then used to identify other potential participants.

In the end, 12 individuals (including the author) were identified as fitting the selection criteria. These individuals were initially contacted via email and/or personally. Of these individuals, 11 had studied in the ROK and one had studied in the DRPK. A total of 8 participants responded to the interview request.

Numerous non-Koreans were identified as potential candidates for this study who had researched Taekwondo for their master's theses or PhD dissertations. However, the vast majority of these individuals were excluded from this study, because they had not enrolled in their universities' Taekwondo departments and/or did not study Taekwondo academically within the ROK or DPRK. The selection criteria were originally set to include martial arts tourists who had pursued academic degrees in the ROK and/or DPRK. As such, one individual was identified who earned a PhD in Taekwondo Studies from a DPRK university, but that individual did not respond to the interview request. The absence of that individual reduced this study's scope to only individuals who attended ROK universities.

2.3. Questionnaire and Interviews

In order to understand participants' motivation for studying Taekwondo academically in the ROK and their aspirations after graduation, a questionnaire with five open-ended questions was created. The five interview questions were intended to elicit information on foreign students' motivations for studying Taekwondo academically and their aspirations for their post-graduation lives. The first two questions were intended to provide background information. Question 3 targeted interviewees' motivations, and questions 4 and 5 focused on their post-graduation aspirations. The questions were:

1. Why did you come to Korea initially?
2. What did you study as an undergraduate?
3. Why did you begin to study Taekwondo academically?
4. What did you hope to achieve by earning a degree in Taekwondo Studies?
5. What benefits do you see your degree providing you now that you have graduated?

Semi-structured interviews allow for open responses and freedom of expression, which enriches and diversifies the data collected in qualitative studies [28,29]. Interviews were conducted either in-person (n = 2) or via the computer application Zoom (n = 6). All participants agreed to be interviewed and recorded, and they signed a consent form. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in writing and prior to the interviews.

Participants were provided the questionnaire prior to the interview in order to be familiar with the participant material and collect their thoughts. Interviews were held from 12 November 2020 through 22 December 2020 and lasted between 15 and 60 min. The semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions, and participants were permitted to discuss or highlight ideas when they wished.

2.4. Autoethnographic Data

Qualitative in nature, autoethnographic studies connect researchers' personal experiences to wider issues through self-reflection [30]. In order to connect personal experiences "emotionally, intellectually, morally, and esthetically" to a particular academic topic in order to discuss "something meaningful about the world", these studies possess "multiple layers of consciousness" [31]. While it is true that autoethnographic research cannot claim "a detached or neutral position of authority" [31], it does "connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" [32], in order to reveal new and deeper understandings of what is being studied. Lewis also notes that ethnographic studies are one way to preserve the intangible kinetic knowledge contained with a martial art [33].

The author also met the selection criteria, which permitted an autoethnographic research design. Hence, he incorporated his autoethnographic data to enhance and confirm the concepts and experiences revealed during the interviews with other non-Korean Taekwondo academicians. To maintain consistency, the author's data are presented below in

the same format as the questionnaire and interviews performed with other non-Koreans interviewed for this study.

2.5. Data Analysis

The focused literature review was conducted in order to determine previous topics of research on non-Koreans who studied Taekwondo academically. Following the questionnaire, the author then provided his autoethnographic data. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to interpret this study's results. The transcriptions were reviewed, and repeated codes (themes) were identified between the interviewees' statements. These were then classified into five categories: entrance requirements, language skills, motivations, aspirations, and unexpected pertinent findings. Martial arts tourism was the theoretical lens used to analyze the data. The trustworthiness (i.e., "reliability" for qualitative research) of the study was ascertained by the repetitive content of the participants' statements [34]. Problems with analysis were minimized through various interventions, such as one-to-one interviews and the aforementioned codification of themes [35]. Although it is possible that unconscious bias occurred in the analysis of the transcripts, it was believed that a free-flowing discussion with the interviewees helped prevent bias by facilitating an honest and open accounting of their experiences in which trends could emerge, whereas forcing responses into predetermined categories might harm the integrity of the study.

3. Results

3.1. Demographics and Taekwondo Requirements

Table 1 shows participants' demographic data. As in other Taekwondo research [36], participants' Taekwondo rank, training time, and Taekwondo style were also identified as potential variables that could influence their motivation for studying in the ROK (e.g., Taekwondo style). In addition to the expected demographic data, such as age and nationality, participants' dan and years of Taekwondo practice were included to indicate their expertise in evaluating their education (Table 1). Since some of the participants could be easily recognizable to those familiar with Taekwondo Studies, their nationalities are not presented in Table 1 to maintain their anonymity. Participants were nonetheless from Algeria, Germany, India, Italy, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States. The author's autoethnographic data are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographic data.

	Age	Gender	TKD Academic Degree Earned	Began Academic Study in ROK	TKD Rank at Enrollment (dan)	Present Primary TKD Style	TKD Practice (Years)
Participant 1	30	F	PhD *	2017	Kukki: 3rd	Kukki	15
Participant 2	42	M	PhD	2006	ITF: 5th	ITF	25
Participant 3	25	M	Bachelor's *	2018	Kukki: 2nd	Kukki	7
Participant 4	43	M	Master's	2008	Kukki: 2nd	Kukki	30
Participant 5	57	M	Master's and PhD	Master's: 2005 PhD: 2008	Kukki: 5th	Kukki	41
Participant 6	36	M	Bachelor's	2009	ITF: 4th	Kukki	29
			Master's	2012			
			PhD *	2014			
Participant 7	40	M	Bachelor's	2009	Kukki: 2nd	Kukki	36
			Master's	2011			

Table 1. *Cont.*

	Age	Gender	TKD Academic Degree Earned	Began Academic Study in ROK	TKD Rank at Enrollment (dan)	Present Primary TKD Style	TKD Practice (Years)
Participant 8	49	M	Master's PhD	2004 2010	Kukki: 3rd	Kukki	27
Author's data	46	M	PhD	2014	Kukki: 4th ITF: 6th	ITF	37

TKD: Taekwondo; ROK; Republic of Korea (South Korea); ITF: International Taekwon-Do Federation; Kukki: Kukkiwon; dan: black belt level; * Currently enrolled in a Taekwondo academic program (i.e., degree unfinished).

In order to determine if any commonalities existed in the participants' educational backgrounds, interviewees provided their education histories. Table 2 lists all participants, including the author's autoethnographic data, and their degrees earned outside of Korea. All participants earned a university degree prior to attending a ROK university except Participant 6, who earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from one ROK university and is currently all but dissertation (ABD) there. Participant 6 was required to double major in Korean Language and Culture in order to enter his ROK university's Department of Taekwondo. He subsequently earned undergraduate degrees from that institution and then continued to earn a master's degree from its Graduate School of Taekwondo (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants' university degrees earned prior to arrival in the ROK (Republic of Korea).

	Participant	Degree
Participant 1	Pharmaceutical Science	Bachelor's Master's
Participant 2	Business Communication	Bachelor's
	Graphic Design	Bachelor's
	English Literature	Honours
	Creative Writing	Master's
Participant 3	Bachelors of Computer Science (BCA)	Bachelor's
Participant 4	Business Management	Bachelor's
Participant 5	Asian Studies	Bachelor's
	Philosophy Literature	Bachelor's (minor)
Participant 6	Korean Language and Culture	Bachelor's (ROK)
Participant 7	Sports Science	Bachelor's
Participant 8	Psychology	Bachelor's
	Computer Engineering	Bachelor's
Author's data	English Language and Literature	Bachelor's
	Education: TESOL	Master's

ROK: Republic of Korea (South Korea); ABD (all but dissertation); TESOL: Teaching English to Students of Other Languages.

3.2. Autoethnographic Data

The author's autoethnographic data are presented below according to the five interview questions. Unlike the unstructured interviews, where participants were allowed to give tangential evidence and bring up new topics, the data presented in this section only pertain to the predetermined interview questions.

3.2.1. Author's Response to "Why Did You Come to Korea Initially?"

I arrived in the ROK on 2 February 1999. I expatriated myself for a number of reasons, and if I am honest, the primary one was to live a life worth living. After traveling to 56 countries, many of which I have visited multiple times, and doing things no other non-Korean martial artist in the ROK has done, I believe I have more than accomplished that goal. The second reason to leave my home country and all of its comforts was to understand Taekwondo better. By the time of my first arrival in Korea I had practiced Taekwondo for more than a decade, but I wanted to know and experience more.

3.2.2. Author's Response to "What Did You Study as an Undergraduate?"

With an undergraduate degree in English Literature and Language as well as a native speaker of English, it was easy for me to get a job teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in a ROK high school. I found that I loved the job and life abroad, and I soon vowed to live in the ROK for at least two years (I am now in my third decade). Within the ESL skill-based curriculum, I adapted Taekwondo pedagogy to help students find confidence within themselves as well as develop their language skills. My real academic life began when I decided to move from a high school position to a university setting. This necessitated a master's degree, so I earned a MS in Education with a concentration in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL) from an American university.

3.2.3. Author's Response to "Why Did You Begin to Study Taekwondo Academically?"

After completing my Master of Science in Education (MSEd), I began a second master's degree in Teaching (Secondary Education English), but after the encouragement of a friend, I decided to earn a PhD in Taekwondo Studies rather than return to America to complete the 14-week, unpaid practicum needed to finish that degree.

3.2.4. Author's Response to "What Did You Hope to Achieve by Earning a Degree in Taekwondo Studies?"

I primarily wanted the PhD to help open doors to a tenure-track professorship in or outside of Korea, which was more financially lucrative than what I could have earned teaching ESL in the ROK or United States. I believed that a degree in Taekwondo from a Korean university would help me stand out from other applicants.

Another factor in my decision to study Taekwondo academically, rather than English language teaching or English Literature, was that I had numerous questions regarding my Taekwondo practice. After more than a quarter century of practice I was questioning why I had not attained enlightenment or some deep cosmological understanding of the universe, an expectation I had after reading numerous Taekwondo books and magazine articles, not to mention watching dozens (maybe hundreds?) of martial arts movies in order to understand the highest levels of Taekwondo practice. I questioned if I had somehow failed in my Taekwondo practice, if Taekwondo failed me, or if I was asking all of the wrong questions. I knew that I could either spend 10 to 15 years of my life gradually studying and answering these questions, or I could intensely do it for two years or so and earn a degree out of it.

A third reason I wanted to study Taekwondo academically was the "cool factor". As one ITF grandmaster, who also holds a PhD, told me many years ago, there will always be Taekwondo instructors, dojang (martial arts school) owners, masters, and grandmasters, but how many doctors of Taekwondo do you actually hear about? Also, I loved the fact that a graduate degree from a Taekwondo department, either a master's or PhD, was an entirely new way to define a master of that martial art.

3.2.5. Author's Response to "What Benefits Do You See Your Degree Providing You Now That You Have Graduated?"

In 2018, I was hired by Keimyung University as an assistant professor in its Department of Taekwondo in 2018 in part due to my degree from a Taekwondo department. My

research foci now include Taekwondo diplomacy, the intersection of Taekwondo philosophy, pedagogy, peace studies, and international relations, and martial arts tourism, which has brought me some international recognition in these fields. I was able to reap many other benefits from my PhD. For instance, I have organized Taekwondo academic conferences with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president as a keynote speaker and organized conferences around the world, including one at Stanford University that legitimized the study of Taekwondo academically [9,37]. I am also the vice president of the International Academic Conference for Taekwondo (iACT), which promotes Taekwondo Studies as well as provides scholarships for university students studying Taekwondo academically. In addition, I was able to introduce the ITF curriculum into a Kukki Taekwondo university, which helped advance my personal and professional goals of using Taekwondo as a form of soft diplomacy and to expand the ITF curriculum to a population largely ignorant of the historical importance that the organization has had on Taekwondo. My pride in what I have accomplished in these aspects of my career is most certainly a benefit for me.

During the course of my PhD, I answered most of the questions I had about my Taekwondo practice. I did not feel that my PhD coursework gave me the answers to those questions. Rather, I was asking, and still am asking, very different questions than my professors and Korean Taekwondo researchers. This may be due to the fact that I am a non-Korean, an ITF practitioner, and/or that I come from a martial art background where self-cultivation has higher priority over competition. Nonetheless, with my questions answered, I now practice Taekwondo more systematically and with greater confidence in my knowledge of the art, which are huge benefits for me personally.

3.3. Entrance Requirements

Participants entered their Taekwondo academic programs from 2004 to 2019. The purpose of inquiring when they began their academic studies was to identify any trends in the recruitment or entrance requirements. No changes in education requirements aside from language requirements were identified, possibly because there are little to no advertisements and English websites targeting foreigners. Like any other university program, applicants needed a minimum amount of education to enter a desired program (a high school diploma for a Taekwondo undergraduate program, any undergraduate degree to enter a master's program, and any master's degree to enter a PhD program). No participant stated they required prerequisites in sports science or physical education to enter their Taekwondo programs.

Of particular note, however, is the differences in the various departments' Korean language requirements participants. The Korean language proficiency requirement is possibly the most important to potential Taekwondo Studies candidates, because it is rather difficult to meet while not in Korea. Only Participants 1, 3, and 6 were required to have a high level of Korean proficiency. However, Participant 6 attended the same university that Participants 2, 4, 8, and I studied in, and that university has removed their Korean proficiency requirement since Participant 6 began his undergraduate studies.

Participants' Korean language proficiency requirements have differed over the years. While obvious, it must be stated that non-Korean students in the ROK should possess some Korean language skills to learn in the language of instruction. According to Participant 6, his Taekwondo department was initially reluctant to accept non-Korean candidates without proof of Korean language ability. The universities that Participants 1, 3, 6, and 7 studied at all required proof of Korean proficiency. It should be noted that these four participants attended different universities, and all entered their programs at different times, which contextualizes these variating language requirements. Nevertheless, the university degree attained did not impact the participant's language requirement: Participant 1 is currently earning a PhD, and Participant 3 is currently earning a bachelor's degree, yet, both participants needed proof of Korean proficiency. On the other hand, Participants 2, 4, 6, and 8 studied at the same university, but only Participant 6 was required to prove Korean

language proficiency before entering his undergraduate program (as above, he would later pursue his graduate studies at the same university). Despite lectures being given in Korean, Participants 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 stated they were allowed to do their coursework in English, because the professors communicate well in the lingua franca. Participants 2 and 8 specifically mentioned that their PhD academic advisors were fluent in English, which permitted them to navigate their university's processes and requirements, and I must profess the same. Participants 2, 4, 8, and I were not required to speak or write in Korean during their academic studies. Likewise, Participant 7, who studied at a different university, was expected to have some proficiency in Korean, but was allowed to do his coursework in English. Participants 2, 4, 8, and I were allowed to also do our coursework in English, because, as Participant 8 stated, (1) our academic advisor spoke English well enough to guide us so "any of the problems around language would initially be worked around", and (2) "ideally [we] would gain a better working knowledge" of Korean and be able to communicate in it as time passed.

Despite some participants' lack of Korean linguistic skills, all interviewees claimed to learn something from their coursework and/or relationship with their professors. While studying, the participants would visit their professors for additional help in understanding their participants (Participants 2, 3, 4, 8, and myself), research topics discussed in class in their native languages (all participants, but especially 2 and myself), and drew upon previous education to understand individual coursework (Participants 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and myself).

3.4. Motivations to Study Taekwondo Academically

All participants stated that they wanted to study Taekwondo academically because of their passion for the martial art/combat sport. Many of them, in particular Participants 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, as well as myself, expressed a desire to have a deeper understanding of the culture from which their beloved activity came. Participant 1 captured this sentiment rather well:

> *. . . Taekwondo was the sport of Korea, and it would be really great chance if I came here and did my PhD. So, it would be a good opportunity to learn more since it's their sport. So, where can I find a better source for my knowledge?*

In an almost poetic tone, Participant 6 also stated:

> *I have been in contact with Taekwondo starting from the age of seven. I felt very, very deeply impact by this martial art. And practicing Taekwondo more and more in the years changed my life, my way of thinking, seeing things, changed my character. . . . And, yeah, so basically, I dreamed about going to Korea since I was a teenager. When I finished my study in high school, I work for a couple of years to raise some money to pay for my flight ticket and have some saving in order to over the first months. . . . My expectation was to know much in deep about Taekwondo. And also, I felt that when I was in Italy the culture I had inside the dojang [martial arts school] was different from outside. I wanted to feel this culture 360-degree and really taste the water splash into this culture and feeling Taekwondo . . . learn more about that. My dream was to become a respected master. So, this how I get into touch with Taekwondo and my decision to go to Korea.*

Out of the 7 interviewees who had graduated (myself included), 5 wanted and now have jobs in the Taekwondo industry with 2 becoming professors in ROK universities. Participant 4 provided further proof that non-Koreans with Taekwondo degrees can enter the Taekwondo industry:

> *. . . this particular degree helped me, I knew that this was going to help me somewhere in my job, in my permanent position in [the career position] where I am today. So, then when the interview was first conducted, this degree helped me, because they asked me that we had heard that you are the only person who had done a master's from Korea. So, this also weighted my credentials when I attended the interview for the job.*

Likewise, Participant 2 was able to secure his university position by earning a PhD, but he teaches in a department unrelated to Physical Education or Taekwondo. Two of the

three non-graduates, Participants 1 and 3, did express a desire to obtain a job related to Taekwondo, and Participant 6, who already has an undergraduate and master's degree in Taekwondo, is employed by a Taekwondo governing body.

While some participants earned their graduate-level degrees to keep their university positions, Participants 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and I stated an additional reason for studying Taekwondo academically was to address personal and/or philosophical questions about our Taekwondo practice. Interestingly, none of the participants stated their coursework addressed these questions with the exceptions of Participant 4, who was interested in Taekwondo biomechanics and received that education in his master's program, and Participant 8, who claimed only a couple of courses answered his questions in this regard:

> *My master's degree in the Social Psychology class and there was maybe one other class that kind of touched a little bit on what I was trying to learn, I think. But, I kinda found my own knowledge and information in pursuit of that. . . . during the PhD, there was one of the classes that kinda addressed a little bit of what my interests are, not what I was specially studying, but like the philosophy and sort of the esoteric aspects of the martial arts were kinda more what I was more going for.*

To this point, Participant 2 added:

> *When I started martial arts I wasn't a Christian, but I became a Christian later. And, at that time it conflicted with my Christian beliefs, which are pacifist, which conflicts with my practice of a combative activity. And, I had some serious issues and I almost quit martial arts. And, I resolved it later theologically. But then I wanted to go tackle this problem philosophically, and that's what I did to my dissertation. So, I achieved the kind of a personal issue the resolution of a person, so it wasn't so much an academic or professional problem although I think I hopefully contributed that.*

3.5. Aspirations

Interviewees stated either a desire to gain better employment opportunities or to satisfy their personal questions regarding their Taekwondo practice as their post-graduation goals. Participants 6, 7, and 8 stated that any advanced university degree would be beneficial to a career. Most participants who completed their degrees (Participants 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and I) stated their educations have assisted them in meeting their professional goals, and for all but one interviewee this meant entering or retaining their position in the Taekwondo industry. Participant 2 and 5 needed a PhD to ensure their current employment. Participant 2 teaches in a non-Taekwondo related department at a ROK university, and Participant 5 wished to maintain his current university position. Both retained their respective positions since completing their doctorate degrees.

The majority of participants (n = 6) who had earned a degree from a Taekwondo department and who were now working in the Taekwondo industry, either for a Taekwondo governing body (n = 2) or as a Taekwondo educator (n = 4), claimed their degrees were instrumental in obtaining or keeping their positions after graduation. Each interviewee stated they wished to have a career in the Taekwondo industry except Participant 2, who was primarily motivated (as above) by his personal philosophical questions about Taekwondo.

3.6. Unexpected Pertinent Findings

Due to the nature of the semi-scripted interviews, some unexpected findings were discovered and then codified. These findings could be significant to the recruitment of future foreign students to Korean Taekwondo departments, so they are provided here. For example, ROK Korean universities have done a poor job of advertising studying Taekwondo academically to non-Koreans. Indeed, the universities offering Taekwondo-focused curricula are not easily found through targeted internet searches. Outside of four articles written for Taekwondo periodicals [38–41] there is little information available other than university websites about Taekwondo Studies in the ROK. Thus, none of the participants with the exception of Participant 2 knew of the possibility of studying

Taekwondo academically prior to coming to Korea. Interestingly, Participant 2 learned about the possibility of studying Taekwondo academically through a book published in the ROK [42].

Another unexpected finding was the interviewees' varied educational backgrounds. While martial artists are sometimes stereotyped as aggressive, non-thinking brutes, the interviewees proved to be exactly the opposite. All participants had a university degree from their home nations with the exception of Participant 6, who earned his undergraduate in a ROK Taekwondo Studies program. It was anticipated that a majority of the participants had studied Physical Education or Asian Studies due to their lifelong passion for Taekwondo, but only two of the participants had degrees in these fields. Most participants actually had degrees in social science fields, including areas as unexpected as Pharmaceutical Science (n = 1), Computer Science (n = 2), and English (n = 2) (Table 2).

Yet another unexpected result of this study was the high number of ITF practitioners (n = 3, or 30% of the participants including myself) who have earned university degrees from ROK Kukki Taekwondo departments. Kukki Taekwondo academics have long dominated the discussion on Taekwondo Studies, and there are fundamental differences between the Kukki and ITF styles [11,14], so it was expected that the vast majority of participants would be Kukki Taekwondo practitioners. Nevertheless, Participants 2, 6, and I have ITF Taekwondo backgrounds. Of the three ITF practitioners interviewed for this study, Participant 2 and I practice ITF Taekwondo solely, while Participant 6 earned a 4th dan in the style but now focuses entirely on Kukki Taekwondo. (As shown in Table 1, I have learned Kukki Taekwondo extensively, but I no longer practice it.) This result was unexpected, since ROK university Taekwondo departments focus overwhelmingly on Kukki Taekwondo instruction and research. The only known exceptions to a Kukki Taekwondo focused curriculum were found in Keimyung University (Daegu, ROK), which has incorporated ITF Taekwondo courses since I began working there in 2018, and Kookmin University, which is claiming to be the first ROK university to have an ITF curriculum, but it will not begin its ITF education until 2021 [43]. Furthermore, Kookmin University's ITF curriculum is not a degree path or Taekwondo department, but rather a continuing education, non-degree program intended for Korean Taekwondo practitioners. I, conversely, have incorporated ITF theory and practice into my undergraduate courses at Keimyung University's Department of Taekwondo and have had several non-Korean students enroll in them.

The final unexpected finding of this study concerns the quality of education received. Participants 5 and 7 felt the quality of Taekwondo academic programs was poorer in quality compared to what they would receive in their home countries. Most of the participants nevertheless stated they could not find the same type of education (i.e., a Taekwondo-focused curriculum) outside of the ROK. On the other hand, Participant 5 felt the programs were only worth the effort for Koreans wishing to advertise their Taekwondo schools and desiring recognition in the Taekwondo community. Contrary to his opinion, Participant 7 felt the content he studied for his Taekwondo academic courses was comparable to his Sports Science coursework in his home country. Although he claimed his education in Europe was "theoretically stronger" than what he received in the ROK, Participant 7 stated his Taekwondo studies' content was valuable and applicable to his educational goals. For him, this was highly beneficial:

> *Korea is, for the bachelor's, it was very heavy on the practical side. Which is fine, because if you're going to teach Taekwondo, you need to know the practices, you need to understand that you need to feel it in your body, right? These are things that cannot be completely taught in theory.*

Participant 7 stated his Sports Science education in the ROK permitted him "to get more of an individual athlete perspective" as opposed to the team sports literature used in his home European country. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that the education he received in his master's program enabled him to earn a full-time Taekwondo teaching and coaching position in his home country where he utilizes daily the education he gained in his Taek-

wondo Studies program. After becoming a professor of Taekwondo, I likewise learned my Taekwondo doctoral degree was a factor in beating out the other candidates.

4. Discussion

As for the interviewees' motivations (interview question 3), it was expected that the interviewees would have a passion for Taekwondo, and that their love of Taekwondo drove them to study it academically. Participant 5's answer to question 3 was contrary to that expectation. He stated the reason why he studied in a Taekwondo program was because his employer wanted him to have a degree in Taekwondo (he wanted to enter an Asian Studies PhD program instead). Although Participant 5 had over three decades of Taekwondo experience when he began his post-graduate Taekwondo studies degree, he was unique in this sense, because he stated his degree was unhelpful to his career outside of earning a tenure-track position. Participant 2 concurred with this idea, but he had held his present English Literature teaching position long before beginning his PhD program. These findings are unique to these participants and did not correlate with the other studies on foreign Taekwondo majors [24,44].

In regard to interview questions 4 and 5 (i.e., post-graduation aspirations), the fact that most participants have positions related to Taekwondo speaks to the value of a Taekwondo Studies degree for non-Koreans. This is true even in the case of Participants 2, 5, and 8 who claim their Taekwondo academic degrees assisted them in maintaining or gaining their current positions, which are not in a Taekwondo field. Therefore, it is likely that Participants 1 and 3, who are now enrolled in undergraduate and post-graduate programs, respectively, will gain employment in the Taekwondo field after their graduation if they wish such a career. These results indicate that a degree from a Taekwondo department would benefit anyone interested in a professional Taekwondo career and especially those interested in teaching Taekwondo academically, as a coach, or in a Taekwondo organization.

Concerning the interviewees' post-graduation aspirations, the present research's findings contradict previous studies [17,21,22] that found Taekwondo graduates struggled to find employment in the Taekwondo industry. Participant 5's comment that Taekwondo departments are "phony" seems to support previous research that found they do little to prepare students for the Taekwondo industry [17,22]. On the other hand, Participant 7, who found his Taekwondo programs on par with his European education, supports Park and You's finding that a degree in Taekwondo is worthwhile [22]. While those studies' research populations consisted of Korean students and did not consider the distinctive roles that non-Koreans could and currently do play within the Taekwondo industry, the current study's results suggest that non-Koreans with a degree in Taekwondo may have a better likelihood of entering the Taekwondo industry than their Korean counterparts.

Some participants touched upon whether their Taekwondo academic studies addressed their personal queries about their Taekwondo practice. For those who spoke on this topic, all stated their degree programs allowed them to answer their questions in their dissertations or gave them the research tools to find the answers for themselves. These findings are unique to this study and do not corroborate any previous studies on foreign Taekwondo majors [24,44].

Ko and Lee found that Taekwondo practice encouraged foreign students in Taekwondo to learn the Korean language [24]. As of 2020, this is a moot point for Taekwondo majors, because the ROK government has required all foreign university students to have passed the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) level 3 exam (i.e., to have intermediate Korean proficiency) in order to study in the ROK. Participant 3, on the other hand, claimed that his Taekwondo program, not the university or the national government, is now requiring all international students to pass a TOPIK level 6 exam (a high advanced proficiency level). Requiring students to study Korean full time for a minimum of two years may dissuade future non-Koreans to enter Korean universities. ROK universities and Taekwondo programs should encourage Korean language skills, since Participants 5, 6, 7,

and 8 all stated that Korean proficiency improved their ability to integrate within the ROK Taekwondo communities and facilitated their careers.

This study's findings concur with those that Ahn and An proposed [23]. They concluded Taekwondo departments should assist non-Korean students in four ways: (1) provide Korean language and culture education "on an ongoing basis", (2) assign teaching assistants to the non-Korean speaking students to facilitate a "smooth life and adjustment" to ROK higher education, (3) provide students with information on "the current state of career and employment options related to Taekwondo", and 4) encourage students to participate in as many Taekwondo-related events as possible [23]. In regard to the first suggestion, the Korean government now requires all foreign university applicants to have an intermediate level TOPIK score; thus, non-Korean students will have some language ability prior to starting their university programs. Ahn and An's second recommendation, to assign a teaching assistant, is nevertheless excellent, since non-Korean students will most likely encounter culture shock in the university even if they are familiar with the language and culture [23]. To this point, Participants 2, 7, and 8 discussed international students who entered Taekwondo programs but dropped out due to the difficulties of adjusting to another culture. In regard to the third proposal, information on employment possibilities can be disseminated if the universities partner with WT, a suggestion that Participant 6 made. Finally, their fourth suggestion is somewhat obvious, especially in the Taekwondo departments' practical-based undergraduate coursework. From my perspective, the tournaments and events, especially the martial arts demonstrations and television work I participated in, taught me much more about the inner workings of Korean culture than sitting in my graduate school's lecture halls.

While all of the participants had prior Taekwondo experience before traveling to the ROK, none came initially to study Taekwondo academically. For nearly all participants, it was only after coming to the ROK did they learn of the possibility to study Taekwondo academically. Furthermore, all but Participant 2 and I came initially to practice Taekwondo specifically. As ITF practitioners, we traveled to learn more about Korean culture, since ITF dojangs were non-existent in the ROK when we arrived. Participants' motivation to study Taekwondo academically therefore began only after they arrived in the ROK. Indeed, traveling to experience a martial art's culture of origin is a primary purpose for martial arts tourism, but what is unique to the participants of this study is the long period of time and the depth of study undertaken, which help define this type of travel as extreme martial arts tourism. Even if Taekwondo programs were plentiful outside of the ROK, participants' primary motivation to study Taekwondo academically (i.e., learn the Korean culture and gain deeper insights into the martial art/combat sport that it would provide) would be lost. Therefore, while the quality of education in ROK Taekwondo programs is debatable, the experience does offer passionate Taekwondo practitioners, regardless of organizational affiliation, a different type of martial arts tourism unavailable elsewhere.

Like this study's other participants, Participant 2 and I came to the ROK in part to experience Korean culture, a desire spurred by our Taekwondo and martial arts practice. The various ideas and viewpoints that ITF students could interject into these programs would most likely stimulate the overall growth and development of the program. This would be undoubtedly true if ITF practitioners, who come from a more self-cultivation mindset rather than one focused on competition [11,12], would be actively brought into the ROK university Taekwondo student population.

ITF practitioners are clearly also interested in studying Taekwondo academically in the ROK, but there are no ITF-specific programs available for them. The ROK is the true home of ITF Taekwondo (it is often misbranded as North Korean Taekwondo) [11,14] and is a foreigner-friendly nation [5,16]. The DPRK universities did at one point offer academic degrees, but there are substantial financial, political, and ethical issues with traveling to and studying inside the DPRK [5,16]. Therefore, non-Korean ITF practitioners have little recourse but to study in Kukki Taekwondo curriculums in the ROK. Indeed, Participant

2 stated that the opportunity to study Taekwondo academically in the ROK was why he chose a Taekwondo PhD program over his other academic interests.

The interviews revealed that a high percentage of non-Korean Taekwondo graduates enter the Taekwondo industry. This stands in contrast to the 19% of Korean graduates who, as of 2009, entered the Taekwondo industry after graduating [17]. Of course, the disproportion between the number of non-Korean (n = 5) and Korean students (n = 144) [17] of that 2009 finding and the current study, respectively, as well as the more than a decade between the two findings, must be contextualized when interpreting these data. Nonetheless, the large percentage of non-Koreans finding work in the Taekwondo industry indicates that a Taekwondo university diploma may be advantageous to their Taekwondo careers. Since the majority of undergraduate programs focus on physical training, graduate and post-graduate degrees in Taekwondo Studies may be more beneficial to Taekwondo practitioners wishing to become international administrators, professors, and coaches (i.e., leadership roles). Undergraduate degree holders from Taekwondo departments might then be best suited to teach at the grassroots level. Park and Lim also called for an increase in undergraduate theoretical courses [27], which may facilitate students learning more about organizational career opportunities. To this point, in my current professorship role I teach courses such as Taekwondo Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution and Taekwondo International Relations, which provide students with insights into how Taekwondo organizations operate and how they can contribute to a global society. Thus, I provide my undergraduate students with knowledge of alternatives to a competition career.

5. Conclusions

This was the first international study on Taekwondo university programs since 2009 [26], and the first research to incorporate autoethnographic data in the study design. This study is novel, because it is the largest of its kind (the nine respondents, including the author, was nearly double the size of a similar previous Korean study [23]). It is furthermore the first such study to investigate non-Korean Taekwondo programs within a tourism lens. Finally, this research contributes to tourism literature by coining the term extreme martial arts tourism, a type of cultural, education, sports, and martial arts tourism that is exemplified when an individual leaves their home to study a martial art in its country of origin for an extended period of time. Innumerable conclusions can be inferred from the interviewees' various ideas, attitudes, and perspectives. The following conclusions were ascertained by considering how the data collected could assist ROK universities in sustaining and growing their number of non-Korean Taekwondo majors.

If a trend of requiring high Korean proficiency to study Taekwondo in ROK universities develops, such as what Participants 3 and 6 encountered, this may be detrimental to the sustainability of Taekwondo programs' international recruitment numbers. If ROK universities market their Taekwondo academic programs to non-Korean students, those institutions could profit financially and thereby ensure their sustainability. Korean universities could also benefit academically from the global mindsets of their international students.

A joint effort between the Korean universities, the ROK Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and the Korea Tourism Organization to promote these programs, as suggested by Participant 6, is a possible solution for recruiting non-Korean Taekwondo majors. By working together, Korean universities could increase their enrollment, while the ROK government organizations could further improve interest in the nation, something for which the government has long used Taekwondo [14]. If Korean universities improved their promotion efforts of Taekwondo degree programs to non-Koreans, they could attract more international students and thereby become more sustainable.

A strong suggestion for ROK universities is to open ITF-focused programs to entice ITF practitioners to travel and study there. To avoid the initial financial burden and to test the interest in an ITF curriculum, ROK universities could offer certificate programs during the summer and winter semesters, something Manning proffered [26] when Stefanek suggested a needs analysis process for US university Taekwondo academic study programs [45]. After

a few years and when knowledge of the programs' existence becomes more widespread, a degree path could be offered for non-Korean ITF practitioners and Koreans who are interested in learning more about that style of Taekwondo. It goes without saying that the more inclusive the ROK Taekwondo programs of ITF practitioners are, the more sustainable their programs will be.

Limitations and Future Research

While limitations to this study include the small sample size and lack of quantitative data, the primary limitation is the correlations made between martial artist tourism and the participants of this research. In addition to expanding the study population in future studies on non-Korean Taekwondo majors, we must question if we can be classified as tourists when we reside in Korea for years at a time. This study categorized the participants as extreme martial art tourists, since we meet the aforementioned criteria of a martial arts tourist, but the length of travel and general cost is "extreme" within the martial arts tourism lens. Consequently, the definition of extreme martial arts tourism should be expanded and/or clarified in future studies.

A research gap exists between the personal accounts of the interviewees and the universities in this study. The present research focused on the perspectives of non-Korean students, but it did not consider those of the universities or their departments or professors. Future studies should therefore examine the opinions of professors in ROK Taekwondo departments on the merits and demerits of non-Korean enrollees in their degree programs.

Finally, future researchers should also investigate the motivations of martial arts tourists who travel to practice martial arts/combat sports other than Taekwondo in the ROK (e.g., Hapkido, Taekkyeon, or Haedong Kumdo). There are thus a large number of directions that future researchers may undertake, including investigations on why Taekwondo majors have not become more popular in Western universities and how to facilitate non-Korean students entering the Taekwondo industry post-graduation.

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