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H A P

Can One Art Function in all Four Ranges?

by Robert W. Young

Most martial artists now realize that all fighting takes place in specific ranges, which are commonly designated as kicking, punching, trapping and grappling range. Many have also learned that proficiency in only one range does not guarantee success in a street fight because real confrontations can flow from one range to another in the blink of an eye. Therefore, in this decade of martial arts multiculturalism, students often look to other styles for supplemental skills which their primary art may not teach. For example, a boxer may decide to study *savate* for kicking, *wing chun* kung fu for trapping and judo for grappling.

Yet hundreds of thousands of martial artists around the world see no need to search outside their own art for these varied techniques. Practitioners of the Korean style of self-defense known as *hapkido* claim to be privileged to study an art famed for its powerful kicks, varied hand strikes, effective trapping-range techniques and versa-



Practitioners of the Korean art of hapkido claim it includes techniques which function in kicking, punching, trapping and grappling range. These techniques are often combined: A trapping movement can lead to a joint lock, which, in turn, can lead to a throw.

tile joint locks and throws. In this article, *Karate / Kung Fu Illustrated*—with help from Chong S. Kim, an original student of hapkido-founder Choi Yong-sool who has taught the art for more than 37 years, and Stephen Petermann and Jeffrey D. Harris, branch instructors in the Jang Mu Hapkiko Association—examines the issue at hand: Does hapkido effectively cover all four ranges of combat?

K I D O



Kicking Range

Perhaps more than any other country's arts, those of Korea come well-equipped for fighting in kicking range. Hapkido is no exception. Yet its leg techniques differ from those of many other arts because of the tremendous power imparted by pivoting the supporting foot and following through with the leg motion.

"In hapkido, the goal is to deliver as much impact as you can," says Petermann, who has practiced the art for 22 years. "If you don't add those last few inches with the pivot of the foot, you're holding something back. So you pivot on all your kicks; that gives you the ability to get six inches [of reach] the person didn't think you had and to move your energy farther toward him."

Hapkido divides kicking range according to distance, and certain kicks fit into each category. "How do you kick an opponent when you're face to face?" Petermann asks. "Let's say you want to get out of a situation and retreat, but you feel you need to defend yourself while you're doing it. You can turn and do a scooping back kick or inside kick, even face to face. If you're going to grapple with him, you might still use a heel kick to hit him on the tailbone or thigh while retreating. Just because you're face to face doesn't mean you have to grapple; you can still kick."

Harris, who has studied hapkido



Jeffrey Harris (right) and Mark Chemeleski square off (1). As Harris punches, Chemeleski blocks with an inside kick (2), then retracts the leg (3) and side-kicks Harris in the neck (4). He then puts his foot down, pivots and delivers a turning back kick (5).

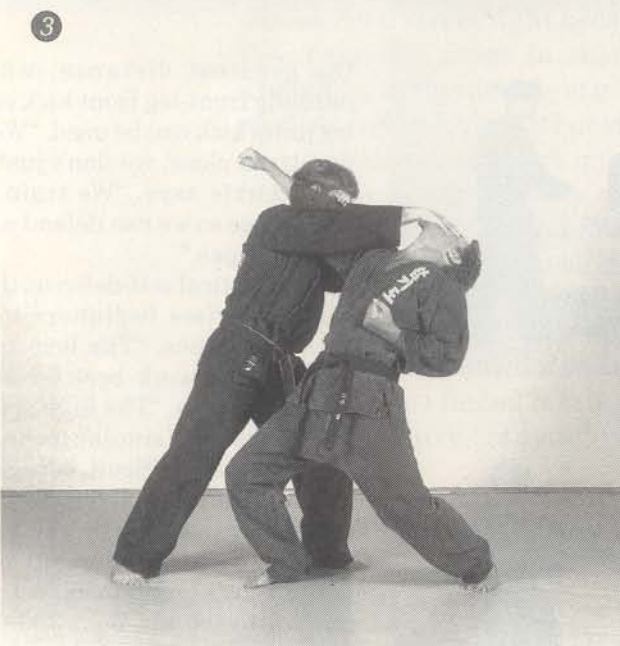
for 17 years, identifies several ranges within the art's concept of kicking range: very close, where knees are used; medium distance, where a front-leg front kick will work; greater distance, where you can use a rear-leg front kick; and

the greatest distance, where a jumping front-leg front kick or rear-leg jump kick can be used. "We don't just train close; we don't just train far," Harris says. "We train in all the ranges so we can defend against those ranges."

For practical self-defense, though, Harris advises beginners to stick with the basics. "The low- to mid-range kicks work best for self-defense," he says. "The high spinning heel kicks and [similar techniques] are extremely difficult, especially in a fighting situation, but they're not impractical because you're also dealing with the element of surprise. Who's going to expect you to jump into the air, do a 360-degree spinning heel kick and land it?"

"The high, middle and low kicks are very important because they give you better choices, better opportunity," Petermann adds. "When you're fighting a particular stylist and he defends middle- or high-body very well, you can kick him low. In styles where they tend to squat more and place more weight on the front leg, obviously a sweeping kick will not work. But because of that disadvantage, a high kick can be more successful because he can't get out of range quickly enough."

Low-line hapkido attacks can knock a leg out from under you or even tear flesh and break bones, Harris claims. "We have kicks to the



Harris (left) faces Chemeleski (1). As he punches, Harris moves to the outside (2), then attacks Chemeleski's eyes and face with his open hand (3).

knee, shin, ankle and feet; sweep kicks to the back of the leg; stomping kicks; kicks in which you grate the blade of your foot down the front of your attacker's shin and end with a stomp on his foot and a twist at the bottom for good measure," he says. "There are also hooking kicks to the back of the leg, blade kicks to the shin and muscle-tearing kicks."

Not surprisingly, some Korean arts have been criticized for having too many specialized kicks that might never get used in real life. Outsiders are sometimes left wondering why more practical leg techniques are not emphasized. "First, younger students have to accom-

plish the basics—the front kick, inside kick, outside kick, side kick and roundhouse kick," Petermann says. "If they don't accomplish those, the rest of it is wasted. Once they have, they go on to other kicks [according] to whatever level they're capable of. But the basics have to be good. For beginners, having a kick for every possible situation becomes overload—they don't really need it."

Yet Petermann, an instructor for nearly 18 years, acknowledges the usefulness of such varied kicking practice. "How often are you going to use a jump two-man front kick?" he asks. "Probably not very often, but you need to train your body to accomplish these things so your

basic kicks become even better. Certainly we have some very esoteric kicks, such as the toe-in-the-throat kick. That's one of my personal favorites, but would it be my first choice in a fight? Absolutely not. Is it one you're ever going to use? Gosh, I don't know. But it's still a useful technique, and it improves your overall understanding of what you're capable of."

Punching Range

Once inside kicking range, where hand techniques usually take over, hapkido practitioners are quite capable of continuing to defend themselves. Yet when they speak of punching-range techniques, they don't mean boxing-style punches. "Most of the punching we do is straight karate-style punching; beyond that is open-hand strikes," Petermann says. "A jab is something that is difficult to deal with, but because a boxer isn't trying to put you away with his jab, there's the opportunity to get around it and hit him. Most people know how to jab when they come in; we don't have to train them. But they don't know how to deliver a very powerful punch, stab or palm strike when somebody is right up close to them."

In addition to the ordinary straight punch, hapkido students learn both closed- and open-fist strikes for varying distances. "When you're in close and try to punch somebody, that's not the best time" Petermann says. "For the

most damage, you want him out at the extreme range of your arm. But you have to be able to deal with him up close, so you're going to change that straight punch into a palm strike or stab."

In hapkido, the goal is to make students move away from technique-oriented striking—throwing an uppercut and aiming for the floating-rib area—and toward target-oriented striking—wanting to attack a certain pressure point and determining that a precise knuckle strike will best accomplish that. In other words, an exact target is identified before a technique is chosen. Petermann explains: "If you fight somebody and you just want to punch him, you shouldn't think in those terms. In self-defense, you should think, 'I'm going to hit this point, not this area.'"

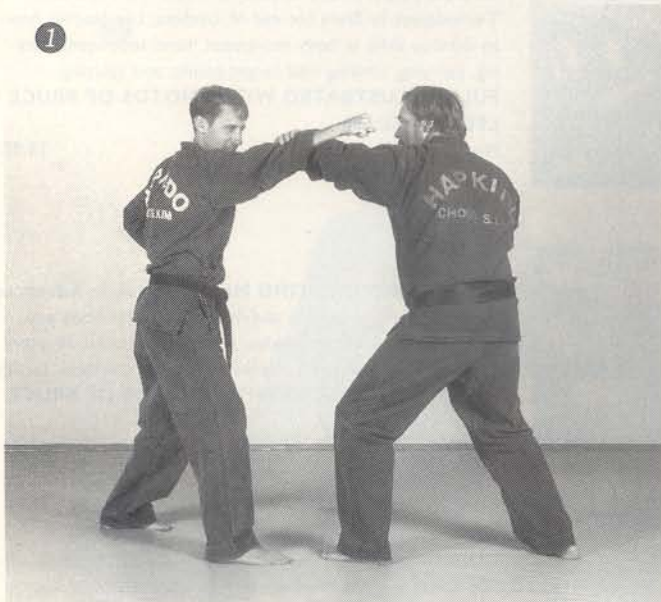
"Pressure points are very important when using your

hands, especially when your opponent is more powerful than you," Harris adds. "You can't overpower him with strength, but you can create severe weakness in his body by using the various pressure points." There are half a dozen good ones all over the body that function well for the average person, he says.

But not all hapkido hand strikes target a pressure point, Petermann says. "We hand-strike for a particular target—not necessarily a pressure point, but certainly a weak spot," he says.

Another important strategy of hapkido hand strikes is disguising what you are doing, Petermann continues. "Very rarely do you see [other arts] put proper attention on looking at the person's eyes, making your face not say, 'Here it comes; get ready for it.' Also, looking into a person's eyes tends to make him look into yours; that allows you to sneak your hand up and hit

1



2



3



Stephen Petermann (right) blocks Chemeleski's punch and traps his arm (1). Petermann then pulls him forward and strikes his jaw (2), which spins his body in midair (3).

him with something unexpected."

Whenever hand strikes are discussed, an issue pops up: Should you opt for open-hand strikes to prevent injury to your knuckles and wrist, or choose closed-hand strikes, which can inflict more pain on your attacker but which may damage your own body? Hapkido promotes the view that the art should include all techniques and the student should choose what works best for a particular target in a particular situation.

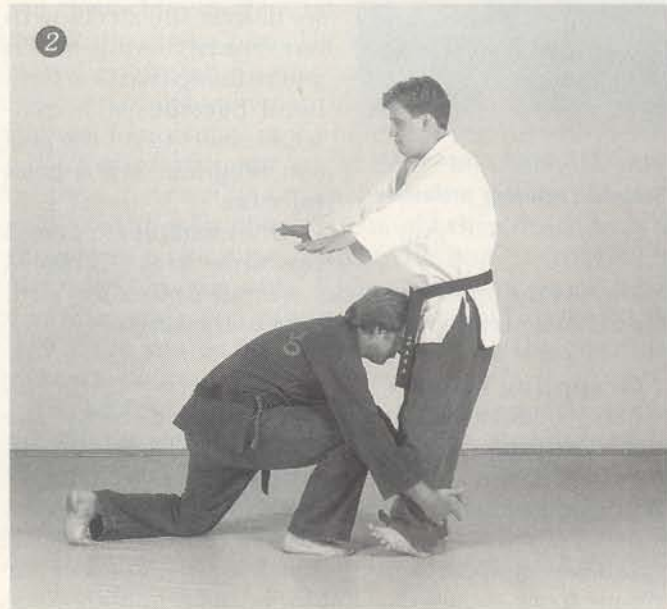
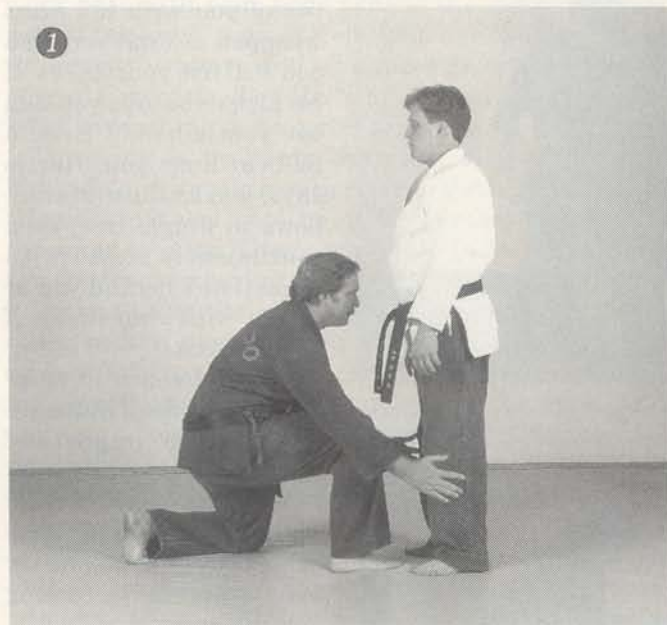
"Everybody knows that, if you palm-strike, you'll never hurt your hand," Petermann says. "But if the target is the bone over the eye and you want to make him bleed so he can't see what you're doing, are you going to use a palm strike? You may, but you won't accomplish what you want. So you have to use a knuckle strike. Yes, it might hurt you to get that, but if you don't, you may lose."

On the street, you must be prepared to exploit any opportunity to stop your attacker, even if it means risking injury to yourself, Harris says. "As Master Kim is fond of saying, 'You don't always have a chance to get to what you'd like, so when you get a chance, you take it.'"

Trapping Range

Move a little closer to your opponent and you enter trapping range, where attacking arms get deflected and immobilized, and knees, elbows and head butts cut loose. Hapkido teaches a variety of hand techniques for trapping range, Harris says. "When your opponent

Hapkido stylists aim their head butts at various parts of an opponent's body. Here, Petermann (left) dives headfirst into the groin of Chris Goble (1-2).



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grabs you, you trap him with his own arms as you move in to twist and throw. We cover that extensively."

Petermann describes hapkido's simple trapping philosophy: "It's OK to just trap his hands so he can't smack you, but it's better to get them out of the way so you can smack him. One of my favorite techniques is to trap the guy's arms, then kick him in the face with an outside crescent kick."

Traditional hapkido knife defense falls into this range because the attacker's knife-wielding arm often gets trapped before the weapon is taken away or directed back toward him. "The general way is to con-

trained knife-fighters never attack in the simple, linear fashion often depicted in class. Yet Petermann defends hapkido's knife-defense techniques: "If you put yourself in a situation where you face someone trained in how to use a knife, you are in the wrong situation. Defense is certainly much more difficult. But in a typical situation where the person is out of control, where he is really not a knife-user but just picked up what happened to be handy, how good is he going to be with it?" He claims hapkido techniques directed against such impromptu opponents form a good foundation for self-defense.

Hapkido's trapping-range arsenal also includes numerous elbow and knee strikes. "They are some of the most deadly tools because they can be used very close," Harris says. "If your opponent is right on top of you with his arms wrapped around you, you can still use your knees. If he picks you up, you can use your elbows." Even if he bear-hugs you, Harris says, you can use your elbows to wiggle free, then continuously strike with them if he's behind you or thrust with your knees if he's in front.

In self-defense in trapping range, head butts are much more important than most people think, Petermann says. "When we head-strike a person's head, body or joints, we try to have his energy coming directly toward us while we deliver the strike with our energy. And, when you're doing twists, a forehead becomes a worthwhile object to get the person hopping. It's a good fulcrum."

"One example is against the side kick," Harris

adds. "As the opponent kicks, we enter, block the kick, trap it and strike with the head to the thigh."



To enter grappling range, Petermann blocks Chemeleski's punch (1), then closes the gap and hooks his shoulder (2). Stepping to the outside, Petermann applies pressure to the shoulder (3) until his opponent goes down (4).

trol the limb with the weapon using a trapping technique, joint manipulation or pressure-point strike," Harris says.

"As far as weapons are concerned, when you're fighting somebody, concentrate on the thing that can do the most damage but be aware of the others," Petermann says. "Once you get your hands on the weapon-bearing arm, you're not going to let go of it. You're going to damage it."

Many martial artists criticize traditional knife defense as too unrealistic for street use. They claim

Grappling Range

Many would argue that hapkido functions best at the closest distance of all—grappling range. There, throws, chokes and joint locks become the dominant techniques. With thousands of twists and throws, hapkido seems well-prepared to deal with close-up confrontations. "If you have an opportunity to block a punch or kick, or simply touch somebody, joint locks and grappling come

into play," Petermann says. "That and the kicking part of hapkido make a perfect balance."

"Usually, when we grab someone, we take him to the ground and finish him, so he is unable to rise again," Harris says. "Whether we finish with a strike or controlling technique with a twist, or throw him and let the fall finish him, we always take our opponent to the ground; he's never left standing."

Not all hapkido's myriad grappling techniques work for all people, Petermann admits, but in a fight, immediate selection of an alternate can save the day. "There are pressure points on the body which some people are not affected by at all," he says. "One of the black belts here has none of the pressure points on his body that we would like to use, but if you grab his hair, he falls like a baby."

"For the average person, being exposed to hapkido's [more than 3,600] techniques and picking the ones that work best with your body type is the most practical way of training," says Harris, who has taught the art for nearly 15 years and was recently selected to appear in *Best of the Best III*. "But an instructor needs to know everything to keep the art going."

Throwing is probably the most difficult part of hapkido's grappling repertoire, Petermann says. "However, if you get the other person off-balance, throwing is easy. That's why judo tournaments are sometimes very boring: Both guys know throwing and know not to let the other guy get under them. If the other person doesn't know that, you have a better opportunity to throw. You can create that moment of imbalance, maybe by hitting him in the eyes. And anytime a person gives you a great deal of his power—really throws that John Wayne-haymaker or that full-extension, face-high side kick—he's asking you to use a throw."

"Throwing is effective because the ground does most of the work for you," Harris says. "Gravity can work wonders. If somebody attacks you with a kick or a punch, you throw him, and he takes you to court, you didn't physically strike him. He kicked and punched, you moved, and he fell. The ground is definitely your friend."

A big part of hapkido involves combining techniques from all four ranges in a single, flowing encounter. An advanced practitioner might throw a kick on his way in, then distract his opponent with a powerful hand strike to the solar plexus. He might then finish with a throw and a standing armbar. "It's part of creating a diversion," Harris says. "Going one place to create a diversion while you go to your real target: striking the legs while you go for the eyes, striking the groin as you go for a wrist lock, or vice versa."

The entire range of hapkido's techniques makes the art what it is, Harris says. "No one facet is dominant over another. The strikes, twists and throws make it effective. Not always will a twist work well; not always will a throw work well; not always will a strike work well. But in any situation, one of those three will work well."

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