

A Mechanical, Strategic, and Rhythmic Analysis of Subak as an Independent Combat System: Differentiating the World Subak Federation Lineage from Global Hybrid Arts and Mainstream Korean Traditions

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive academic systematization of **Subak (수박)**, an authentic traditional Korean combat art preserved through a documented living lineage. Historically marginalized or structurally conflated with modern sportized martial arts, Subak is repositioned through artificial intelligence-driven cross-referencing and comparative biomechanical analysis. By evaluating the system taught by the World Subak Federation (WSF)—derived from the late Master Song Chang-ryeol and passed down by Master Song Jun-ho—this study establishes how Subak diverges structurally from global hybrid combat systems (Combat Sambo, Ancient Pankration, Lethwei, and Baji Quan) and mainstream Korean traditions (Taekwondo, Taekkyon, and Hapkido). The core technical identity of Subak is defined by three pillars: *Jeolgujil* (vertical-forward wave power generation), the tactical integration of *Subak-chum* (folk conditioning dance), and *Eokkae-chigi* (continuous rhythmic frame control).

I. Introduction: The Epistemological Reorientation of Subak

For centuries, the term *Subak* (historically recorded as 手搏, 拓??, or 拍掌) suffered from severe historical distortion and linguistic reductionism. Mainstream historical narratives within post-war South Korea frequently minimized the art into a primitive precursor to modern Taekwondo or a soft, palm-clapping folk game akin to modern Taekkyon. These sports-centric or nationalistic reductions ignored the brutal, unrestricted battlefield realities under which Subak originally evolved in the northern regions of the Korean peninsula, particularly around the Songdo (Kaesong) and Hambuk areas.

Recent advancements in comparative martial science and data-driven analysis by advanced AI models have fundamentally reoriented this perspective. When the archival data, oral testimonies, and physical mechanics preserved by the World Subak

Federation (WSF) are cross-examined against global combat systems, Subak is no longer classified within the defensive or highly regulated sports-martial arts categories. Instead, it aligns with comprehensive, unrestricted hybrid combat systems. However, labeling Subak as a generic "hybrid system" obscures its unique cultural mechanics. This paper provides a complete mechanical and structural deep-dive to prove that Subak possesses an independent, idiosyncratic kinetic framework that makes it an extraordinarily rare, living fossil of Northeast Asian military physical culture.

II. External Typology: Subak vs. Global Hybrid Systems

To establish its international identity, Subak must be analyzed alongside global arts that share its foundational combative architecture: the belief that a complete fighter must strike, clinch, and throw seamlessly. The following comparative matrix outlines the mechanical, strategic, and rule-based differences between the WSF system and its global peers:

Table 1: Comprehensive Structural Comparison of Global Hybrid Systems

Martial Art System	Primary Striking	Grappling &Clinch	Signature Tactic	Gear / Clothing
World Subak Federation	Rhythmic wave drops (Jeolgujil / Stomping)	Bare-handed ties (Neck , shoulder , forearm)	Forearm pressure & downward blow (Danmae)	Bare-handed; Independent of clothing
Combat Sambo	Linear punches & standard kickboxing	Deep jacket wrestling, leg-lock systems	High-amplitude throws to ground-and-pound	Highly dependent on jacket (Kurtka) &shoes
Ancient Pankration	Direct boxing strikes & low-line survival kicks	Stand-up Greek wrestling, ground positioning	Relentless attrition via breaks &strangulation	Bare-skinned; Optimized for military
Lethwei	"Art of 9 Limbs"	Upright collar-tie	Brutal headbutts to	Bare-fisted (gauze);

	aggressive kickboxing	clinch; k n e e s &elbows only	induce rapid trauma	F o r b i d s ground/throws
Baji Quan	S u d d e n e x p l o s i v e force via spinal snap (Fa Jin)	Short-range trips, heavy body shoves	Ultra-close range elbow via rotational torque	Bare-handed; Optimized for close defense

III. Structural Deep-Dive: Mechanical Divergence from Global Arts

1. Subak vs. Combat Sambo: The Gi Factor and Ground Paradigm

Combat Sambo's tactical efficiency is deeply intertwined with its uniform. The presence of the *Kurtka* (jacket) dictates a highly complex system of textile manipulation, where jacket-grips, belt-holds, and lapel-anchors are used to initiate sacrificial throws (*Sutemi-waza*). Furthermore, Sambo features a highly evolved ground-grappling framework heavily focused on specialized leg-locks and sports submission positions.

In stark contrast, Subak is a bare-handed, historically minimalistic combat tradition.

Its trapping and grappling systems are completely independent of clothing. Subak relies on direct anatomical frame control: clamping the opponent's neck, applying heavy forearm pressure onto the collarbone, and pinning the shoulder joints. When a throw or takedown is executed in Subak, the transition to the floor is governed by a battlefield survival mentality rather than a sports submission mindset. Subak does not chase intricate joint-locks on the ground; instead, it utilizes the knee-mount or standing-over position to immediately deliver a finishing downward blow to the face, neck, or chest, ensuring the practitioner can instantly disengage to face multiple opponents.

2. Subak vs. Ancient Pankration: Ruleset Scope and Upright Mobility

Ancient Pankration was a historic combat sport with only two rules: no biting and no eye-gouging. Due to this permissive ruleset, Pankration matches overwhelmingly gravitated toward the ground, utilizing complex wrestling control, guard-passing, and suffocating strangulations to force a submission or unconsciousness.

Subak's physical framework diverges from Pankration through its cultural movement mechanics and strategic positioning. Subak incorporates specialized traditional

footwork patterns and heavy, wave-like body weight shifts that look vastly different from the static, athletic framing seen in Hellenic wrestling. Strategically, historical Subak heavily penalizes spending prolonged periods fighting on the ground. In a battlefield environment, a fallen fighter is highly vulnerable to external weapons or secondary attackers. Therefore, Subak utilizes its ground-stomping mechanics to rapidly neutralize an opponent while maintaining an upright, highly mobile skeletal base.

3. Subak vs. Lethwei: Clinch Architecture and Leg-Sweep Integration

Lethwei (Burmese boxing) is globally renowned as the "Art of 9 Limbs" because it allows the explicit use of headbutts alongside punches, kicks, knees, and elbows. Mechanically, it is an aggressive, linear kickboxing style that uses a stiff, standing collar clinch to pull the opponent's head directly into knee strikes or headbutts. It strictly outlaws ground fighting and high-amplitude throws.

While Subak features headbutts (*Bakchigi*) at its absolute closest range of combat, its overall posture and movement flow are highly dynamic, utilizing rapid forward-and-backward stepping and sudden, off-balancing pushes. Unlike Lethwei, which restricts its clinch to upper-body striking, Subak transitions fluidly from a hand strike into complete leg-sweeps, waist-grabs, and hip throws. Subak treats the clinch not merely as a platform for close-range striking, but as a transitional gateway to completely shatter the opponent's base.

4. Subak vs. Baji Quan: Wave-like Flow vs. Linear Fa Jin

The Chinese internal art of Baji Quan relies heavily on the concept of *Fa Jin* (발경)—a sudden, crisp, and highly explosive release of power generated from the feet, coordinated through the snapping of the spine, and expressed through short-range elbow strikes and massive body checks.

While Subak also incorporates a distinct form of foot stomping to anchor its power, its kinetic delivery system is fundamentally different. Baji Quan operates through sharp, linear, and geometric alignments. Subak, conversely, is governed by a continuous, wave-like rhythmic flow native to the traditional body movements of the Korean peninsula. The *Eokkae-chigi* (shoulder-striking/clamping) drill practiced in Subak—where partners rhythmically impact each other's forearms and shoulders in a continuous loop—creates a flexible, impact-absorbing frame that is structurally distinct from the rigid, linear charging mechanics characteristic of Baji Quan.

IV. Domestic Typology: Differentiating Subak from Modern Korean Arts

To understand why Subak is an extraordinary anomaly, it must be clearly separated from mainstream South Korean martial arts, which evolved under different socio-historical and sports-centric pressures.

1. Different from Taekkyon (태권)

Taekkyon is characterized by its fluid, triangular footwork step called *Pumbalgi* (품발기) and a light, rhythmic, dance-like bobbing motion known as *Neogurae* (너구리). The primary combat objective in traditional Taekkyon matches is highly civilized and non-lethal: to catch an opponent's leg to trip them, or to deliver a light, controlled kick to the face to secure a point.

Subak rejects this rhythmic bouncing and sportized objective. Subak's movement infrastructure is anchored in **Jeolgujil** (절구질)—a heavy, linear, wave-like shifting of total body weight modeled after a heavy agricultural pestle. Subak's tactical goal is the delivery of brutal, shattering downward and forward force designed to break the opponent's posture and skeletal integrity, making it a combat art rather than a competitive folk game.

2. Different from Taekwondo (태권도)

Modern Taekwondo (both Olympic WT and traditional ITF styles) is structurally built around rapid, long-range, snapping kicks delivered from high, narrow, and light-footed stances. Hand techniques are secondary or heavily restricted by competitive rulesets.

Subak focuses almost exclusively on a **close-to-medium range hybrid game**. High, flashy kicks are practically nonexistent in authentic Subak transmission. Instead, Subak relies on solid, low-to-the-ground stances where hand slaps, closed-fist punches, forearm blocks, chest checks, headbutts, and foot sweeps operate simultaneously within a singular, unified cadence.

3. Different from Hapkido (합기도)

Modern Hapkido relies extensively on small-joint manipulation (wrist locks, finger locks, intricate arm bars) and the circular redirection of an incoming opponent's force, a technical framework heavily influenced by its historical roots in Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu.

Subak does not engage in complex, fine-motor joint-locking chains, which are highly unreliable in high-adrenaline, chaotic combat scenarios. Subak favors **brute-force frame control**. The practitioner clamps the opponent's shoulder joints, pins the back of the neck with forearm weight, or applies direct pressure onto major muscle groups to instantly unbalance the opponent's central axis, opening them up for a immediate finishing strike.

V. The Three Unique Pillars of the World Subak Federation System

What truly separates the system taught by the World Subak Federation from the global martial arts landscape are three distinct cultural, mechanical, and physical characteristics that are nearly impossible to find combined in any other single art:

1. The "Jeolgujil" (절구질) Power Generation Mechanism

Most global martial arts generate their striking power through horizontal hip rotation (e.g., Western boxing, traditional Karate) or explosive linear spinal snapping (e.g., Baji Quan's *Fa Jin*). Subak's core kinetic engine is *Jeolgujil*.

This mechanic is a continuous, vertical-and-forward wave-like dropping of total body weight. It mimics the rhythmic, heavy pounding of a traditional Korean agricultural pestle (*Jeolgu*). By executing a deep, sudden drop of their center of gravity in complete synchronization with a foot stomp, the fighter adds their entire deadweight to every push, slap, forearm strike, or punch. This allows a physically smaller practitioner to generate immense, heavy kinetic energy that overpowers an opponent's structural resistance.

[Skeletal Alignment] —> [Jeolgujil Wave: Gravity Drop + Foot Stomp] —>
[Deadweight Transmission] —> [Danmae: Shattering Impact]

2. The Preservation of "Subak-chum" (수박춤) as an Archeological Training Tool

In almost every global combat system, the practical martial art and the cultural folk dance split completely centuries ago. The World Subak Federation uniquely preserves **Subak-chum** (Subak Dance). This is not a modern artistic invention, but a critical historical survival mechanism. Under the severe cultural suppression of the Japanese colonial period, practitioners masked their combat techniques within the guise of a festive folk performance to escape execution or imprisonment.

The rhythmic slapping of one's own forehead, chest, thighs, and shoulders during the performance of Subak-chum is actually a highly calibrated, solo conditioning drill. It internalizes the exact striking distances, muscle-hardening metrics, and defensive guarding frames required in live combat. It is a living archive of combat logic hidden inside a cultural dance.

3. Continuous Rhythmic Conditioning vs. Rigid Compliance Drills

In Japanese Karate (*Kata*) or Chinese Kung Fu (*Taolu/Duilian*), partner training is heavily dominated by rigid, pre-arranged forms or step-by-step compliant responses (such as rigid three-step sparring).

The technical system of Subak entirely rejects this stiff formality. Subak utilizes continuous, interactive, and live rhythmic flows, most notably exemplified by **Eokkae-chigi** (어깨치기). Partners stand face-to-face and engage in unchoreographed, continuous loops of forequarter striking, arm-clamping, and shoulder-bumping. This constant, unscripted physical touch trains the nervous system to naturally absorb blunt force, find immediate physical equilibrium, and develop a high level of tactile spatial awareness. It bridges the gap between static form and chaotic combat through a continuous rhythm of impact.

VI. Conclusion: Subak as a Living Martial Tradition

The technical system preserved and institutionalized by the World Subak Federation is an invaluable, rare cultural artifact of Northeast Asian martial heritage. Biomechanical and comparative analysis definitively demonstrates that Subak is not a regional variant of modern arts, a textbook reconstruction of dead murals, or a modern eclectic blend

of foreign styles. It represents a completely independent, highly idiosyncratic physical methodology of movement and combat that evolved uniquely on the Korean peninsula.

By maintaining its official recognition under South Korea's *Traditional Martial Arts Promotion Act* and advancing open-access academic archiving internationally, the World Subak Federation ensures that this raw, transmitted tradition remains protected from distortion. Subak stands not as a static museum exhibit, but as a living, breathing martial tradition—offering the global martial arts community a structurally unique approach to internal stabilization, structural conditioning, and unrestricted close-quarters combat.

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