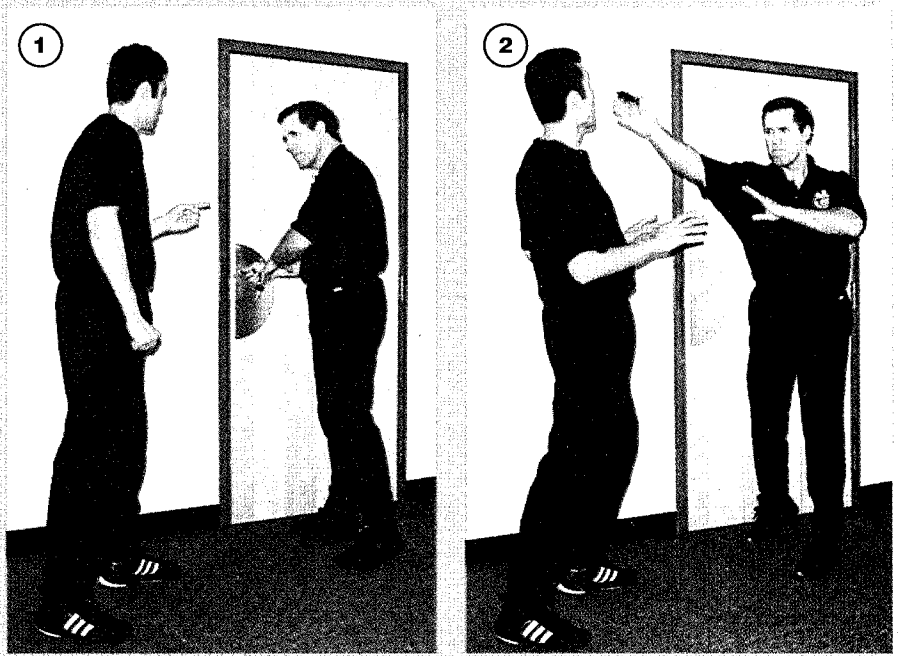


Order Out of Jeet Kune Do

It is often said that while Bruce Lee was alive, he and his art of *jeet kune do* were at least 10 years ahead of the times. In the 1960s and early '70s, Lee's theories on combat were considered by many to be of the highest level. It took most of the martial arts community a decade to understand his insightful writings. Now, more than 26 years after his death, we realize that some fighters eventually—and perhaps independently—arrived at similar conclusions without ever referring to Lee's work. The observation could be made, for example, that the winners of no-holds-barred fighting events are shedding an identification with the limitations of style as they reach a level that Lee may have originally envi-

In this sequence, the jeet kune do strategies approach—which incorporates eclectic JKD, JKD concepts and the original art—is used to respond to an attack. When Jerry Beasley (right) is accosted (1), he stops the other man's attack by flicking his keys at his eyes (2), then terminates the assault with a groin crush (3). Which art did Beasley use? Is there any art that could not fit into this sequence? JKD can be all arts yet is limited to no single art.



Academically trained in philosophy and sociology, I have over the years sought to understand JKD's philosophi-

cal puzzles as I observed the formation of group behaviors. Depending on whom you ask, JKD is described in various

sioned when he created jeet kune do.

One has to believe that if Lee had lived, he would take great pleasure in observing no-holds-barred (NHB) fighting events. He would also be equally amused by the various "faces" his art now wears. By all accounts, there are at least four clearly discernible groups that offer a slightly altered interpretation of jeet kune do (JKD), and each group seems to have its own agenda. That is not a bad thing; it simply gives testimony to the lasting importance of Lee's views on the martial arts.

Jeet kune do teaches that a martial artist should use whatever makeshift weapon is nearby. With umbrella in hand, Jerry Beasley (right) confronts his attacker (1). As soon as he detects a kick, Beasley negates it with an umbrella strike to the knee area (2). He then slams the implement into the attacker's face (3) and delivers a front kick to the abdomen (4). Readers hoping to see flowery techniques may be disappointed when they learn that in JKD, efficiency is anything that scores, the author says.

PHOTOS BY LARRY LEE CARTER AND IAN H.B. MARSHALL



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ways. I believe there is only one JKD, and it is so simple to understand that it is easily confused or mistaken for different arts or interpretations. For this reason, JKD can be said to wear four faces.

In this article, I will examine the philosophy of JKD and identify the four interpretations (faces) that both separate and identify it. My conclusions represent no single view and are not meant to oppose any other interpretation. For several years I have taught a class on JKD at Radford University (Radford, Virginia). The students—who are on their way to earning a degree in psychology, philosophy, science or some other field and who represent various martial arts—enjoy engaging in heated debates over the philosophical merits of Lee's classic text *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. Many of the ideas I will present in this article were bred in the classroom and tested on the mat, in the ring and on the street. When it comes to interpreting JKD, I have absorbed what was useful; now I give back what is uniquely my own.

To require dedication from students and, of course, to amuse those who could read between the lines, Lee often disguised simple meaning with philosophically meandering phrases. Forgive me if I, too, occasionally use Bruce Lee-inspired philosophical musings to illustrate that which is all too apparent. I am reminded of the Bruce Lee movie *Circle of Iron*. Toward the end of it, Cord, the seeker, opens the book of knowledge and begins to laugh. The knowledge he had so laboriously sought, he already knew. I hope some martial artists will read this article and, perhaps for the first time, experience the joy of discovering that which they may recognize as their

own. JKD is about discovering that which we already know in a manner that sets us free to understand the totality of our endeavors.

Liberation from the Known

To understand JKD, we must seek to comprehend the totality of combat. Without taking a position of contention, we must observe each path along the way. Enlightenment can be achieved only when we are free to see JKD. If we are burdened by preconceived limitations brought on by personal prejudice or peer pressure, then seeing JKD becomes—as Lee said—not unlike mistaking a finger pointing at the moon for heavenly glory.

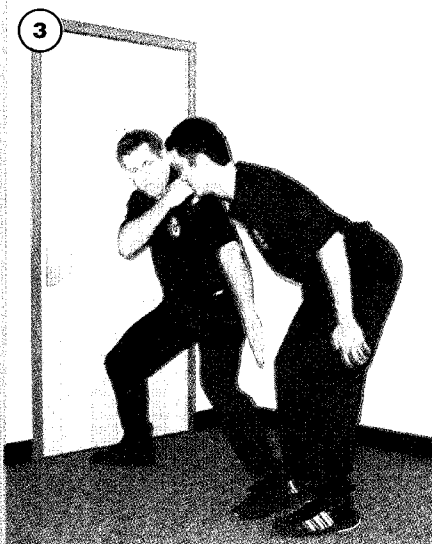
Let's suppose that three martial artists from different styles witness a fight.

Upon returning to their respective schools, the *taekwondo* expert tells his students about the excellent kicks. The judo expert explains to her class that grappling skills won the fight. And the boxer notes that upper-body strikes were among the most significant techniques of the fight. In general, we expect practitioners of different styles to demonstrate an individual preference for specific strategies and tactics.

Rather than letting us stay in our own comfort zone and dissect the fight into easy-to-understand arts or skills, JKD philosophy requires that we examine the big picture. JKD is not about style, but about results. The way we "see" the fight is a good indication of our limitations. In JKD, we often use the expression "using no way as way" to mean that we do not

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Martial artists who have not studied jeet kune do often identify it as a using-what-works or taking-the-best-from-all-arts system. To illustrate, Jerry Beasley (left) responds to an attack from behind (1) by immobilizing the aggressor's weapon (2) and following up with a simple counterstrike to the groin (3) and face (4). This sequence, which could represent the techniques of any martial art, shows how JKD functions independently of the practitioner's style.



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focus on the way the fight is to be won or the art that is used to prevail.

JKD was never completed. What Lee developed can be called a conceptual framework. A conceptual framework may be likened to a lens in a pair of eyeglasses. If the lens is red, the images we see will have a rosy tint. Lee's lenses—the way he visualized the martial arts—were composed of the concepts and values he accumulated and applied to his personal understanding of the fighting arts.

We know, for example, that Lee preferred arts that could justify "economy of motion." He stressed reality in training. We also know that he valued arts not for their cultural origins, but for their utility in the combat arena. To him, arts were of value only when they could be used in grappling, kicking, punching and trapping ranges. As a result of the various NHB fighting championships, I have often written that the classification of range may be more appropriately referred to as kickboxing, trapboxing and ground submissions.

Lee's conceptual framework varies considerably from the conceptual framework of a karate or taekwondo master, a kung fu champion or a grappling expert. Each person carries unique preferences, values and concepts that reflect his own interpretation of what he prefers in a martial art. Lee researched a variety of arts for the sole purpose of extracting any method or technique that could be adapted to his personal strategy for fighting. He may have practiced *wing chun* kung fu, but when it was reorganized and transformed through his conceptual framework, it no longer closely resembled *wing chun*.

Imagine going to a food store with a shopping list of the items needed to cook spaghetti. You quickly survey a number of canned goods, produce, pasta and other items and select only the ingredients needed for that recipe. The world of the martial arts became Lee's "shopping center." From his selection of arts, he coordinated a variety of skills into his personal JKD matrix: the techniques he could apply with authority at any fighting range. In the end, the skills he performed—his JKD—did not represent any of the arts he had originally studied. He was free of all arts; he was JKD, liberated from the known.

Obviously, few of us have the ability or desire to gain freedom from all arts. In fact, we often pride ourselves in our identification with one or more arts. We tend to accumulate knowledge rather than continually refine our thinking by chipping away the nonessentials. The quest for knowledge may indeed lead us to many paths, but how often do we find ourselves going in circles?

What is the way to JKD? We must let experience be our primary guide. We must involve ourselves in combat in its many forms. We must learn to kick with a master kicker, box with an accomplished boxer and go to the mat with a champion grappler. We must discover for ourselves what really works and what is only "style baggage."

Unlike in other systems, the student of JKD is best advised to study under several teachers. Each should be a master of his preferred fighting range. Good advice for acquiring skill in JKD is to seek not to specialize but to find our place at the particular moment to understand the totality. To express JKD, we must be able to draw from the totality of all we have learned or accomplished without preference.

To respond like an echo, we cannot be burdened by style. To use no way as way, our technique must be refined to a point by having no exact line. We simply "repose in the nothing," having no limitation as limitation. How do we accomplish these things? If we know nothing about the martial arts, we are already there. Yet we must train and advance. As we train, we follow the path toward JKD. The journey is longer for some than for others, and there are a few shortcuts. But to find the artless art—the art of the soul at peace, as Lee would call it—we must be prepared for a different way of thinking. We must empty our cup.

JKD is a destination that can be reached by many paths. It is at once clear to the eye, then it is void. It is like a mirage that is perfectly in view yet cannot be touched. Why? Because it is an experience of total freedom. When we become conscious that we are JKD, we lose our focus on the moment and return to the realities of self-imposed limitation. But it is always worth the effort.

One Art, Four Ways

JKD is freedom from all styles. As we become JKD, we must understand the meaning of formlessness and using no way as way. The goal of JKD is to float in totality. Rather than use a predetermined self-defense form, we must learn

to simply respond with economy of motion. JKD is a philosophy of attaining liberation from all systems of classical thought and, as such, leaves much room for interpretation.

Is JKD a style? Yes and no. From 1967 until 1973, Lee taught JKD sometimes as a style (1967-71) and sometimes as a way of surpassing styles. The first face of JKD can be called the "original art." People who follow this way view it as a style. The terms "original art" and *jun fan* are used to identify the goal of those who seek to discover and understand JKD as an identifiable art replete with specific skills, training routines and a close identification with the founder.

Because Lee died at age 32 without having designated a master or inheritor, we must use the word "interpretation" when we refer to various systems that are called JKD. When Lee was alive, JKD was variously referred to as "Bruce Lee's art," *jun fan* kickboxing, scientific street fighting and non-classical *gung fu*.

When I received my first black belt in 1971, I vividly remember that many people in the martial arts community referred to Lee's non-classical *gung fu* as full-contact kickboxing. Joe Lewis had introduced the American art of kickboxing in 1970, so that term was often applied to any art that used boxing gloves and karate kicks. In fact, the characteristic that best described JKD was that the practitioners engaged in full-contact sparring with protective equipment. The equipment included boxing headgear, a baseball umpire-style chest protector, boxing gloves or exposed-fingertip *kenpo* gloves, and baseball-style shin protectors with sneakers.

Lewis, who was the best fighter ever to train with Lee, introduced the JKD principles of economy of motion, weapon-first movement and the five ways of attack to martial arts tournaments as early as 1968. At about this same time, an interesting phenomenon took place: A new system called American karate was gaining a tremendous following. It used as its premier concept the JKD principle of using the best from all arts. Over the years, many martial artists who never actually practiced JKD began to feel comfortable using the term "jeet kune do" to identify any system that promotes the best from each style or advocates using what works.

A second interpretation of Lee's brainchild can be called "eclectic JKD." This view is perhaps the dominant interpretation worldwide. Eclectic-JKD groups

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have formed in Europe, Asia, South America and North America. Most practitioners are simply karate school members who incorporate the "using what works" terminology and utilize JKD practice methods such as contact sparring.

By recognizing eclectic JKD, our intention is not necessarily to give credence to that interpretation but simply to state that thousands of practitioners fall into that category. Most would consider those devotees to be on the fringe of the JKD community, but they constitute a major force in the practice of the Bruce Lee methodology.

A third group is formed by those who practice "JKD concepts." With its base of multicultural martial arts, it is perhaps the most popular interpretation. Following Lee's original research methods, JKD-concepts practitioners attempt to establish a common thread while linking several arts, depending on the functional range or fighting distance of the confrontation.

A fourth view, which can be called "JKD strategies," holds that the plan of action is of primary importance. JKD-strategies adherents blend the skills of the original art with continued research and development. Staying true to the theme of using no way as way, they refuse to be limited to any single art (including original JKD) or group of arts (as in the JKD-concepts method). They view JKD as a synergy, with the end result being greater than the sum of the parts. While several arts must be studied, no single art or way dictates the strategy to win.

Conclusions

Those are the four faces of JKD: the original art, eclectic JKD, JKD concepts and JKD strategies. Each interpretation appears different and, according to some proponents, should exist at the exclusion of all others. Still, in a way, each interpretation is related to the Bruce Lee legacy. Will all JKD practitioners eventually join together into a single group? Not likely. To be JKD is to be not bound by traditional rules or conventional styles.

It is important to understand that as soon as we deny the utility of one interpretation, we begin to establish rules and boundaries for our own expression of the art. Limitations negate the validity of JKD.

Certainly, it would simplify matters if we could just agree that jeet kune do refers to only the art taught and practiced by Bruce Lee between 1967 and 1973. Any other interpretation would have to be called "JKD plus"—or, as

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noted above, JKD strategies, JKD concepts or eclectic JKD. Lee, however, claimed he did not create a new art; rather, he established a method to free us from all arts. Thus, any attempt to say JKD is only this and never that would be, in his own words, incorrect.

It is important to understand that Lee initiated a concept—using no way as way—that has led to a number of new and valid ways of defining self-defense. True, JKD continues to experience growing pains as it seeks to identify a solitary expression from the multifaceted complexity that exists in the martial arts. And regardless of which face we currently see, JKD, once experienced, has the synergistic vitality to assist us in actualizing a genesis of new potential in the combat arena. ❧

About the author: Dr. Jerry Beasley is an eighth-degree certified JKD instructor, video artist, author and college professor who teaches the only university-level JKD program in the country. For more information, visit <http://www.aikia.net>.
