

## What is Jeet Kune Do

*by Linda Lee*

"What is Jeet kune do?" With these words, Bruce began his profound article entitled, "Liberate Yourself From Classical Karate" in the September 1971 issue of Black Belt magazine. Twenty-three years after his death it seems appropriate to ask this question once again.

For a number of years, I had heard murmuring that there was controversy and confusion in the world of Jeet kune do. Bruce's senior instructor in Seattle, Wash., Taky Kimura, had talked to me numerous times about needing to do something to ensure that Bruce's art of Jeet kune do would not be lost after all of his first-generation students had departed the scene.

### **Distressing Signals**

On Bruce's gravestone, it reads "Founder of Jeet Kune Do." I had earnestly hoped that someday his grandchildren would read that and know what a remarkable creative genius their grandfather was. I was distressed to read and hear about the polarity in points of view regarding what the name Jeet kune do means. Bruce said, "If people say Jeet kune do is different from 'this' or from 'that,' then let the name of Jeet kune do be wiped out for that is what it is, just a name. Please don't fuss over it." I have given this expression great consideration and sometimes thought, yes, let it be wiped out-Bruce would be happier about that than having the name applied to: a restricted set of skills merely imitative of his combative moves; simply a theoretical approach to the study of martial arts; an eclectic jumble of any fighting techniques and philosophical dogma that is convenient; or some combination of these three. Obviously then, Jeet kune do could mean anything or nothing.

Perhaps the name Jeet kune do should have been wiped out long ago, but now, 23 years after Bruce's death, the name is too widely associated with Bruce Lee's way of martial arts to simply vanish like a star on a cloudy night. It is time once again to point a finger at the moon and see if it can let the light of the Jeet kune do star shine through. Keep in mind, however, as Bruce said, "The usefulness of the finger is in pointing away from itself to the light which illumines finger and all." To examine the heavenly beauty, it seemed right and proper that the people who were Bruce's personal friends and students should gather to explore the meaning and direction of Jeet kune

do. On Jan. 10-11, 1996 in Seattle, Wash., a group of 13 of Bruce's original students, including the assistant instructors of his schools, Taky Kimura and Dan Inosanto, three second-generation students, our daughter, Shannon, and myself met. During the meetings a number of momentous decisions were made which were significant to the perpetuation of Bruce Lee's martial art.

### **Original vs. Concepts**

Our discussion first turned to popular opinion expressed in the press. At that time debate raged widely about two seemingly divergent points of view that labeled Jeet kune do either "original" or "conceptual". One group accused the other of being stuck in time, merely imitating Bruce's moves and ignoring his dictate to grow and adapt to changing times and circumstances. The other side asserted that the conceptual school consisted of simply a theoretical approach relying on research development and change for the sake of change that would lead to the eventual disappearance of the fundamental roots of Jeet kune do. It did not take us long to realize that, like the yin and the yang, there were elements of each within the other; for example, Bruce's original teachings contain within them the concept of independent inquiry:

"Learning is definitely not mere imitation, nor is it the ability to accumulate and regurgitate fixed knowledge. Learning is a constant process of discovery, a process without end. In JKD we begin not by accumulation but by discovering the cause of our ignorance, a discovery that involves a shedding process." Clearly there exists a "non-fixed" body of technical and philosophical knowledge which was studied and taught by Bruce Lee, and clearly the essential element of Jeet kune do that it is not a thing, rather it is an individual process of evolving to the greatest height of self-actualization. Therefore, it was concluded that there is no real difference between the two schools of thought and that the labels original and concepts were non-descriptive and should be eliminated.

The problem remained, however, that the name Jeet kune do implied different things to different people. We endeavored to find some clarification. The group discussed the fact that there are many schools around the world that purport to teach something called Jeet kune do whose instructors have little or no qualifications in the art. Using the name Jeet kune do or some version of it has become so common that it has led to great confusion among the public, especially those seeking legitimate instruction.

Therefore, it was decided that from this day forward, to distinguish the body of technical and philosophical knowledge studied and taught by Bruce Lee from any other version of "Jeet kune do," the name JUN FAN JEET KUNE DO should be adopted as the name of Bruce's true art.

### **Jun Fan Reborn**

The reason the name Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do was chosen is significant and bears explanation. Jun Fan was Bruce's Chinese first or given name. The meaning of Jun Fan in literal translation is "to arouse and shake the foreign countries." This Bruce accomplished by shining the bright light of his beautiful Chinese culture on the peoples of all nations. Secondly, when Bruce opened his first formal school in Seattle he called it the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute, thus it is of historical importance. Taky Kimura has always taught under the name Jun Fan Gung Fu because that was the name Bruce used when he lived in Seattle. Dan Inosanto has also taught elements of Bruce's curriculum incorporating Jun Fan, therefore for all these reasons the Jun Fan name was retained.

Shannon suggested the name JUN FAN JEET KUNE DO and it was approved by everyone present. It is important to note that there is no slash between Jun Fan and Jeet kune do because the development of Bruce's art was a continuous and indivisible process. After lengthy discussion the group which met in Seattle decided that Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do should apply for status as a nonprofit corporation and thereby the name could be protected and recognized for the benefit of future generations. In our deliberations, we recalled Bruce's own words from the 1971 article:

"It is conceivable that a long time ago a certain martial artist discovered some partial truth. During his lifetime, the man resisted the temptation to organize this partial truth...After his death his students took 'his' hypotheses, 'his' postulates, 'his' inclinations, and 'his' method and turned them into law...What originated as one man's intuition of some sort of personal fluidity has been transformed into solidified, fixed knowledge...In so doing, the well-meaning, loyal followers have not only made this knowledge a holy shrine, but also a tomb in which they have buried the founder's wisdom."

Certainly we wanted to avoid interrupting the flow toward personal liberation by casting in stone rigid sets of prescribed routines or patterns of thinking that the creation of an organization could imply. But there are

different types of organizations: one type sets itself up as an authority, establishing fixed belief patterns intended to perpetuate the organization. This can be likened to what Bruce said about styles: "A style should never be considered gospel truth, the laws and principles of which can never be violated. Man, the living, creating individual, is always more important than any established style."

### **Freed from Bondage**

Bruce was very clear that he had not created a "style," but rather that his goal was to free his students from bondage to styles, patterns and doctrines. In good conscience, we could not undertake to create an organization that would stifle the growth of its individual members. Instead, we decided that Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do would be an organization of the second type, that is, one established for the purpose of promoting understanding through providing the means for those seeking information about the art of Bruce Lee. These means will take the form of educational materials such as books, articles, audio and videotapes, seminars and individual instruction. In deciding to form an organization, we struggled with the same considerations that were presented when I allowed selections of Bruce's notes to be compiled and published as *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. When Bruce was in the process of recording his notes, which he tentatively entitled, "Commentaries on the Martial Way", he wavered on whether to publish it. He was leaning toward not making his notes public because he did not want his way to be taken as the gospel truth with patterns that would be endlessly imitated and laws that could never be violated. Some years after Bruce died, I searched my soul and decided that the knowledge contained in Bruce's notes was far too valuable to be locked away forever.

There is a legend about Buddha that when he preached his message on the extinguishing of selfishness and hatred through the conquest of the ego, the devil appeared to him and said, "You have penetrated through to the secret of life, but if you preach this truth to others they will not understand you." Buddha replied, "There will be some who will understand." That was my hope in publishing *The Tao*, and that is my hope now in the formation of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do.

## Let the Argument Begin

There is a tendency among those who adhere to partial truths about Jeet kune do to use The Tao like a bible, that is, to start from a conclusion and then find a passage to justify it. Jeet kune do is described by some as merely a theoretical approach to the study of martial arts. They recite passages written by Bruce where he talks about "formlessness, assuming all forms, fitting in with all styles, using all ways, being bound by none, efficiency is anything that scores," etc., to bolster their argument. Alternatively, there are those who call Jeet kune do a curriculum containing only a limited number of techniques that stopped evolving with Bruce's death because he did not have time to complete his investigations. As is often the case, there is a bit of truth in each assertion.

However. If either of these assertions were all that Jeet kune do is, then Bruce could not have written thousands of pages to describe essential combative principles and techniques, philosophical precepts that integrate physical training with mental cultivation, a sound scientific basis, and spiritual awareness that transcends the art of combat into a way of life. It bothers me when Bruce's art is referred to as simply a bunch of elements drawn from various sources-an eclectic mixes. And yet I can see how that perception persists and has some validity-again, a partial truth. Bruce did investigate all types of combative arts, Western, Eastern, ancient and modern; he did incorporate principles and techniques from boxing, fencing, judo, wing chun, to name but a few. What I object to is the implication that this process lacked originality because it was just a composite of other arts. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jeet kune do is based on certain principles that Bruce found to be universal to all human beings with two arms and two legs. For a technique to become part of Bruce's personal expression it had to fit the parameters of the fundamental principles. This process was given profound deliberation and was accomplished with artistic finesse and creative genius. It is this set of basic technical, scientific and philosophical principles-the foundation of Bruce's art-that the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do Nucleus seeks to preserve-nothing, more, nothing less. Ideally every person who understands the basic principles of Jeet kune do should end up expressing himself uniquely, that is, he will research his own experience, absorbing that which is useful and rejecting the unsuitable, and contributing his own specific interpretation. When individuals reach the stage of artlessness, or the height of simplicity,

then truly they will have found their own expression of Jeet kune do, different from anyone else. But one cannot reach that pinnacle without having assembled the building blocks.

It is a given that if Bruce were here today, Jeet kune do would be vastly different. But to try to predict in what direction he may have taken it is truly an impossible task. Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do does not presume to say what he would have chosen to explore. Pete Jacob's, a Nucleus member, put it this way: "To say this is JKD or that is JKD would be impossible unless Bruce were here to say it. Everything else is interpretation. If you write a book and show techniques, you will have defeated all Bruce stood for. If you give only his philosophy, everyone will interpret it differently. To explain what he did at the time he did it and to leave room for change and personal adaptation is the only thing that might work."

### **One Man, One Vote**

The group of charter members who met in Seattle chose the name Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do Nucleus to describe this core group. The name Nucleus was chosen because it is a term Bruce often used in describing the "totality" of combat or the "circle of no circumference." Bruce wrote that the totality consisted of sticking to the nucleus; liberation from the nucleus; and returning to the original freedom." The Nucleus, unlike a martial arts school where rank is necessary, is not arranged in a hierarchical order; each person has an equal vote as to activities that are undertaken. The Nucleus feels that each of its members has his own experiences, remembrances and interpretations of their time with Bruce, "a piece of the puzzle," so to speak, and an equal desire to see Bruce's work preserved. It is acknowledged that some individuals spent more and some less time with Bruce, however all insights are invaluable.

**The goals of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do unanimously approved by all members of the Nucleus present at our inaugural meeting in Seattle are as follows:**

- \* To preserve and perpetuate the art of Jun Fan Jeet kune do and to foster respect for its Bruce Jun Fan Lee.*
- \* To disseminate information to the martial arts community and the public about the art of*

*Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do based upon Bruce Lee's written notes and records and the personal experiences of his students and friends.*

*\* To serve as a living repository of all the various aspects of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do including physical/technical training, historical foundation, scientific basis and philosophical/mental/spiritual learning.*

*\* To maintain high standards of quality with regard to the dissemination of information concerning the art and its founder.*

*\* To establish a Code of Ethics calling for mutual respect between Nucleus members and for instructors and practitioners of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do.*

*\* To give recognition to legitimate instructors and practitioners of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do.*

To summarize, Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do sees itself as an educational body whose main function is to disseminate information. To borrow Bruce's words, the Nucleus does not seek anyone's approval nor does it seek to influence anyone toward a certain pattern of thinking. We will be more than satisfied if an individual searching for knowledge about Bruce Lee's art "begins to investigate everything for himself and ceases to uncritically accept prescribed formulas."

### **Dan Inosanto's Departure**

The Nucleus serves as the Board of Directors of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do. It is not a closed group and new members will be added. Since the formation of the group we have lost one member and added another. Shortly after attending the January meeting, Dan Inosanto, Bruce's assistant instructor at the L.A. Chinatown School, resigned from the Nucleus, deciding that he could best fulfill his promise and obligation to Bruce in his own way as he has for more than 20 years. He wished the Nucleus the best of luck, saying he shared the common goal of protecting and preserving Bruce's art and hoped for an end to the unfortunate political controversies that have surfaced in recent years.

There was some misunderstanding when Dan left the group, which I feel has been blown out of proportion and deserves clarification. It concerns a matter of semantics. When Dan resigned, he asked for emeritus status. This term means "retired from active duty," and since Dan was actually part of the

Nucleus for a very short time, emeritus would not have been the appropriate term to use; in fact, "emeritus" would not have applied to anyone since the Nucleus had just been founded. Later, Dan requested "Advisor" status, indicating to me and Taky Kimura that he would willingly share his knowledge of Bruce's art with the Nucleus in its efforts to draw together essential elements. Recognizing Dan Inosanto's many years of experience in studying and teaching Bruce's way of martial art, the Nucleus wanted to welcome him as an advisor but that designation has been assigned to Taky Kimura and Allen Joe, who are active members of the Nucleus.

In seeking to show Dan the respect he deserves as Sifu of many Nucleus members both before and after Bruce's death, he was asked to accept the title of Resource Consultant. We felt that "consultant" sounded professional and would offer the independence he desired. Dan, however, chose not to fulfill that role at this time, and so declined the invitation. Dan Inosanto is held in high esteem by his former students for his tremendous skills as a martial artist and his knowledge of Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do, and he will always be welcome to take an active or consulting role in the Nucleus' goal of unifying Bruce's work. Dan is an integral part of the Jeet kune do family of Bruce Lee, the door remains open to him.

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