

Jeet Kune Do Investigated

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THE CONTINUING ALLURE OF JEET KUNE DO - BY CHRIS KENT

What is the allure that draws people to JKD? Is it the cult of celebrity that has been built around Bruce Lee since his untimely passing in 1973? For some people that might be the answer. They want to do JKD because that's what Bruce Lee did it and he was just so damn cool. And if they do it then they will be cool too. Others might have found their inspiration in Bruce Lee's original vision (late 1960's) of creating what he described in letters to his friends as 'the ultimate martial art', or his later belief (early 1970's) in doing away with the idea of styles and systems entirely and his non-restrictive approach to martial art training. Some martial artists are drawn to it because their approach to training is to move from art to art like the person at a buffet table who samples bits of



many different things. They simply want to taste JKD to see if they like it or not, or to add it (or pieces of it) to the food already on their plate. And finally, some might be attracted by Bruce Lee's philosophical credo of personal liberation, both in martial arts and life.

However, for many people I believe the allure is that they see Jeet Kune Do as one of the top brands of martial arts in the

world. Yes, that's right, you read correctly, I said 'brand'. In the world of martial arts, Jeet Kune Do is now a 'brand'. Whether you like the term or not makes no difference. Today Jeet Kune Do is recognized as a brand of martial art in the same way such as Tai Chi Chuan, Tae Kwon Do, and Hapkido are recognized as established brands of martial art. For those who may be unaware of the fact, on March 27, 1981, Jun Fan Gung Fu/Jeet Kune Do was inducted into the Kuo Shu Federation of the Republic of China, making it a legitimate and recognized martial art such as Tai Chi Chuan, etc. It is a recognized ART, not a STYLE. The term style is inadequate because just as there are various styles and sub-systems within arts such as Tai Chi, Karate, and Jiu Jitsu, there exists within JKD various factions which take different approaches to the teaching and dissemination of the art.

What exactly is a 'brand'? Different people use the same word to mean entirely different things. The first and most frequently used definition of 'brand' is 'the name given to a product or service from a specific source'. Used in this sense, 'brand' is similar to the current meaning of the word 'trademark'. Examples of this include FedEx, Coca Cola, Nike, Sony, etc.

The second definition of the word 'brand' relates more to the perception of distinctive



products and services than their name - something David Ogilvy, the man hailed as 'The Father of Modern Advertising' described as, "The intangible sum of a product's attributes." According to Marty Neumeier, a noted author of several books dealing with branding including *The Brand Gap* and *The Brand Flip*, a brand is not a name, a logo, an identity, or a product, but rather "A person's gut feeling about a product, service, or organization. Brands are defined



by individuals, not companies, markets, or organizations. It's not what you say it is, it's what they say it is." So basically a brand is what people think of when they hear a brand name (such as Jeet Kune Do). It's everything the public thinks it knows about the name brand offering—both factual (e.g. It was developed by Bruce Lee), and emotional (e.g. It's cool or dope). A brand name may exist objectively; people can see it. But a brand exists only in someone's mind and heart. This is the definition I am referring to with regards to JKD.

Neumeier goes on to say that, "People are drawn to a brand because they are inspired by what the brand stands for. The brand embodies an entire value set that they



believe in... Customers don't simply buy brands, they join brands. The question they ask themselves is, 'If I select this product, what does that make me?' This is because customers are not focused on products, but meaning. They choose products to build their identities."

Apple is a brand, Harley Davidson is a brand, and Nike is a brand. They're not simply a 'brand name', but a brand that people who have a certain mental attitude or who live a certain lifestyle (or who would like to) are drawn to. As I mentioned in a previous blog, there are people walking around these days with the Harley Davidson or the Apple logo tattooed on their body. The same goes for the Bruce Lee's JKD emblem - and some of these people don't even train in the art.

So yes, JKD is martial art brand. And it is still perceived as one of the top brands, not just in the US but around the world. It is a brand those who have a certain mental attitude and/or philosophical bent are drawn to. What sort of people are those who

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are drawn towards JKD?

I think that for the most part they are creative, free-thinking people who don't need or aren't interested in normal trappings associated with many traditional martial arts such as uniforms and colored belts or sashes. Some of them are fighters who are more interested in the combative side of the art. Some are more interested in learning skills they can use if necessary to defend themselves or loved ones should the need arise. And others are interested in developing their self-confidence and/or self-esteem or looking for a philosophy they can use in their approach to life and living. For each of these individuals JKD embodies an entire value set that they believe in, or would like to believe



in. What are those core values?

Personal Liberation (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) - People believe JKD can help them cultivate tools and develop the skills they can use to liberate themselves from anything that might hold them back or limit them in any way, be it as a martial artist or a human being. JKD consists of not only a martial component which has physical discipline and various combative actions as its nucleus, but also a philosophical foundation that underpins the art.

Totality - JKD is and has always been about the search for martial truth and discovering the roots underlying efficient human movement in combat. Non-fragmented and non-partial; JKD views martial art as a unitary 'whole' as opposed to various separated segments (such as only striking or only grappling) and encompasses all the various elements and facets of unarmed combat (striking, grappling, etc.) JKD is not about creating a 'melting pot' or a 'mosaic' of different styles, but rather with doing away

with the idea of styles entirely. One of Bruce Lee's oft-quoted comments is,

"If you understand motion, you don't need style."

Freedom - JKD is about total and complete freedom. In his personal notes Bruce Lee defined martial as 'an unrestricted athletic expression of an individual soul'. JKD, at its core, believes the individual is more important than any style or system. The most fundamental principle of JKD is that, as a living and creative individual, a martial artist should not be bound by a prescribed set of rules or techniques, and should be free to explore and expand, and have the freedom to experiment and innovate various techniques and body movements to discover their own potential and find out what works best for themselves individually - to find your own way rather than relying on someone else's. In combat a JKD practitioner is free to use technique or dispense with it as they see fit and according to the dictates of a particular situation - they're not locked in or



bound to using only one way or only certain techniques.

I believe that JKD occupies a very special place in the martial art world. It ignited a martial art revolution, the ramifications which are still being felt today (the rise of mixed martial arts, modern, scientific training methods, cross-training in several



different martial disciplines, etc.)

Will the allure of JKD continue? To be perfectly honest, I don't know. The martial art audience changes as time goes on. Their desires and demands change and may be very different than those who preceded them. The martial arts world is a totally different place from where it was during Bruce Lee's lifetime. Even the last decade has seen a lot of change. And JKD's place in it is totally different than it was when it first burst onto the martial art scene. But what I do know is that the core values, the things JKD stood for and aspired to, remain constant. Those things have never changed, nor should they.

That is why I feel it is vitally important that those involved in the perpetuation of JKD need to invest in and care for the art and

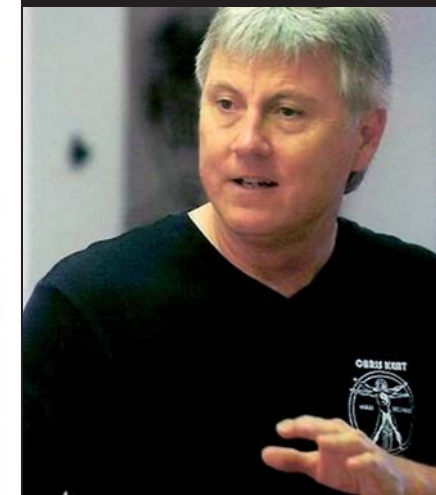


philosophy. They have a responsibility to make sure that JKD maintains its relevance and vitality in the martial art world. They need to make sure it maintains a clear sense of identity and purpose that doesn't become blurred or completely obscured. And they need to make it an essential part of their



mission as teachers to transfer or impart the DNA and culture of JKD to others. Everything they do should promote the core values and shine a light on the spirit of the art that is there, that has always been there. If this is done, I believe Jeet Kune Do will retain its position as one of the top martial art brands in the world, and countless more people will continue to be drawn to it. ■ **CHRIS KENT**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...



CHRIS KENT

Chris Kent is widely acknowledged as one of the world's foremost authorities on Bruce Lee's martial art known as Jeet Kune Do and has gained international recognition for his knowledge and leadership in perpetuating the art, training methods, and philosophy developed by Lee.

He has authored 3 of the highest rated books on Jeet Kune Do: *The Encyclopaedia of Jeet Kune Do*, *Jeet Kune Do - The Textbook*, and *Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing*. In addition, he has written for numerous martial art publications both nationally and internationally including *Inside Kung Fu*, *Black Belt*, *Martial Art Masters*, *Budo International*, *Combat and Martial Arts Illustrated*. Chris is married with a daughter and lives in Boise, Idaho, U.S.A.

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