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The Monkey King of Ta Sheng Men

Dan Inosanto's History of Jeet Kune Do, Part III

Sifu Joe Chu: The Other Side of Kung-Fu

George Dillman: Karate's Roving Ambassador

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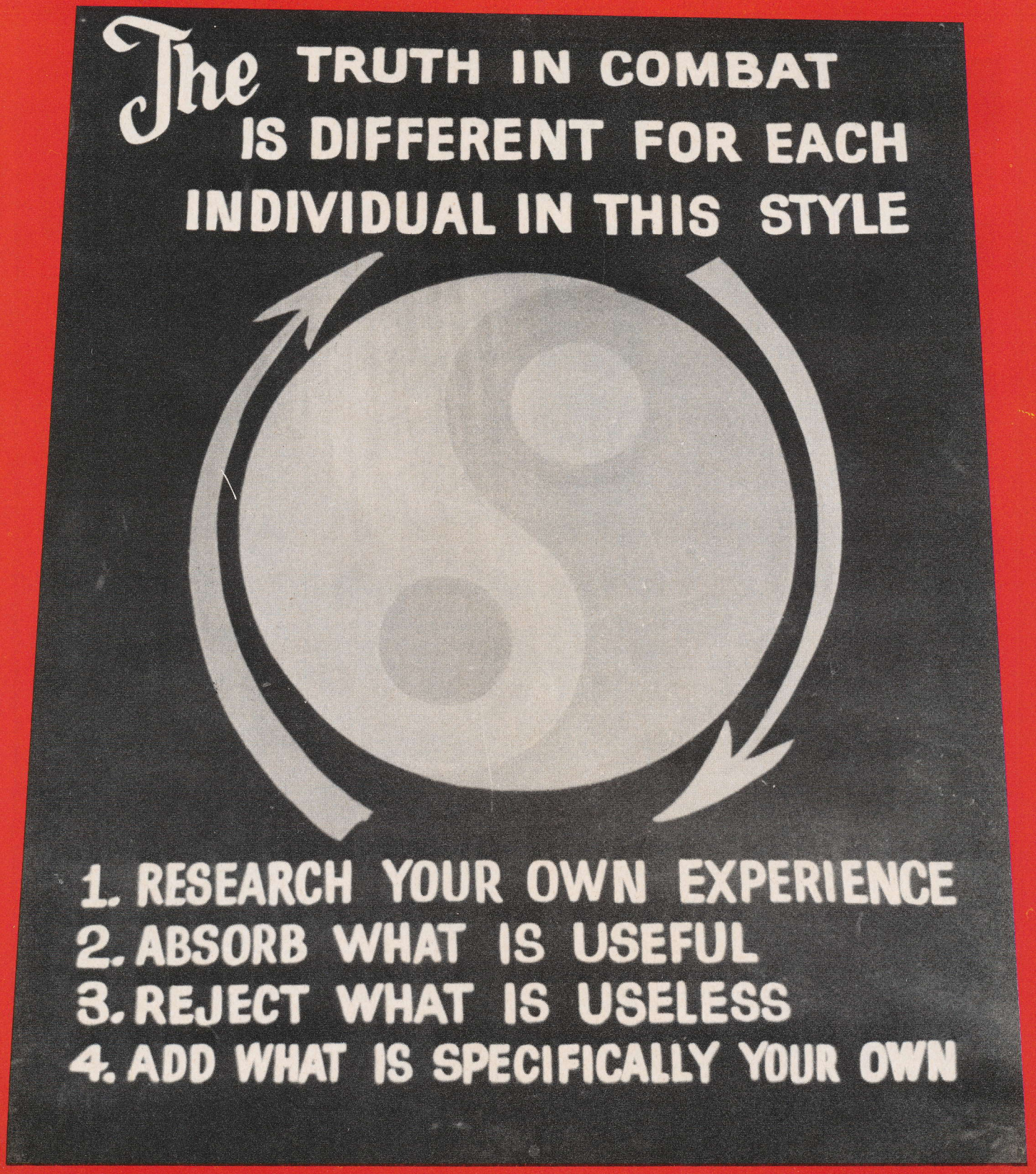
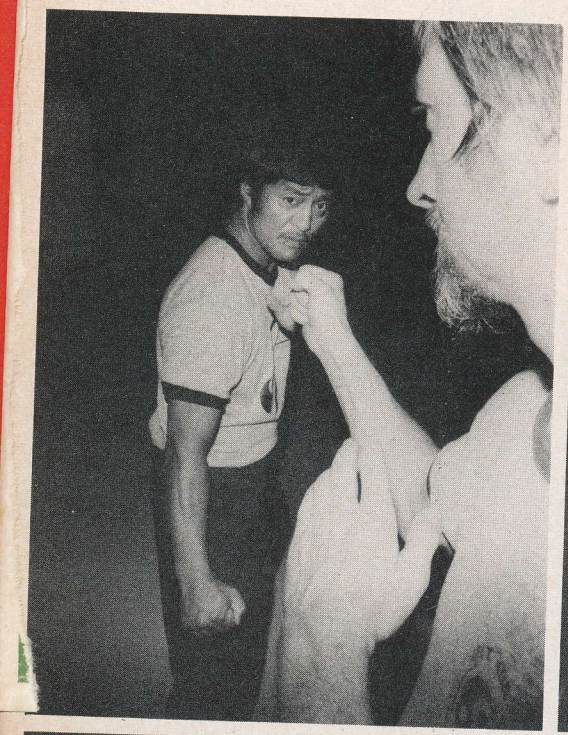
Dan Inosanto remembers the history of Jeet Kune Do, part III



The Way of JKD

"In organizing his art, he had all the right qualifications. Number one, he had to have been a boxer. He had to have had Wing Ch training to know the centerline. He had to have had a brother who was a fencer. He had to have been a streetfighter to know wh was functional. He had to have had friends who were in Northern style Gung-Fu to develop the legs. He had to have come to Americ in order to meet boxers and wrestlers – to reach yet another stage. He had to have had a personality like Bruce Lee to get ahead."

--Dan Inosan



Photos: George Foon

by alan sutton

AFFICIONADOS will no doubt remember a brief, lighthearted scene from *Way of the Dragon* (shown in the U.S. as *Return of the Dragon*) in which one of Tang Lung's (Lee) foils attempts to unnerve one of the heavies with an elaborate rigamarole somewhat akin to a *kata.* Unimpressed, the heavily-mustached bully lets this would-be terror have it right on the kisser. So much for the power of intimidation.

Besides the obvious comic relief, this footage is significant for two reasons. One, in it Lee (who in addition to starring in, scripted, directed and co-produced the film) cleverly depicts a basic premise of Jeet Kune Do: *simplicity,* as opposed to exteraneous – therefore useless – motion. Secondly – as a footnote – its relatively mild didacticism explains in part the motivation behind his pursuing a motion picture career with such preternatural obstinance as was characteristically Bruce Lee.

Dan Inosanto received an all-expense-paid trip to Hong Kong in 1972. At Lee's insistance, he was making his personal film debut as an enemy Escrima wizard in an upcoming feature prophetically titled *The Game of Death.* Today, he discloses just exactly what Lee hoped to get across to his audience. "In Hong Kong, this is what he told me,. . . for what it's worth: He said that through the movies he could give the public what *he* wanted. He could express what he felt was martial arts, which he felt was part of life. He said, 'Through the movies, I can do this. If I open a school – I cannot.' And each of the pictures was supposed to bring out a lesson.

"For instance – I don't even remember which picture *(Chinese Connection)* – but you see a guy grab him. Most styles would have taken three moves to get free. So in the movie, when the guy grabs him, Bruce just punches back and answers with simplicity. He also shows where the Judo grab is limited."

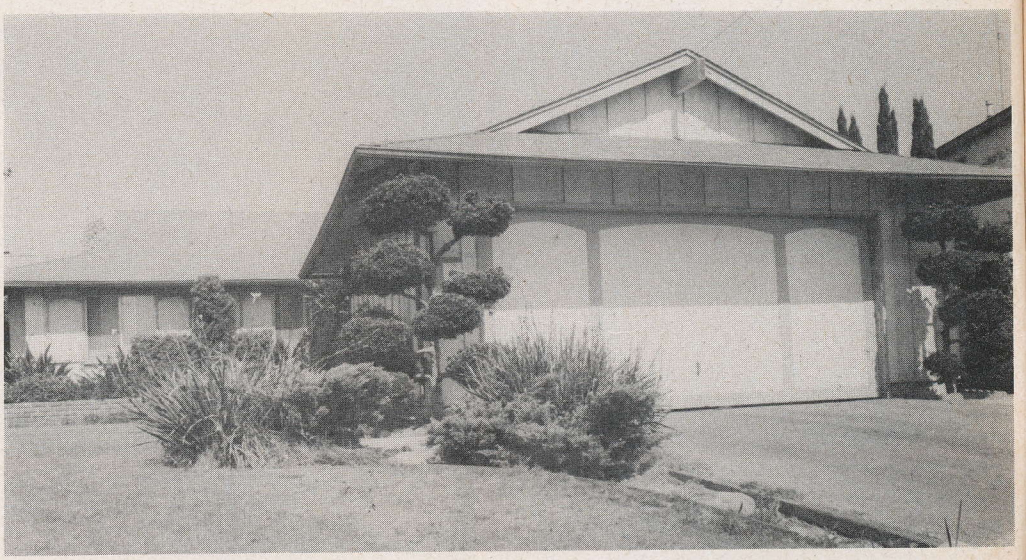
. . .

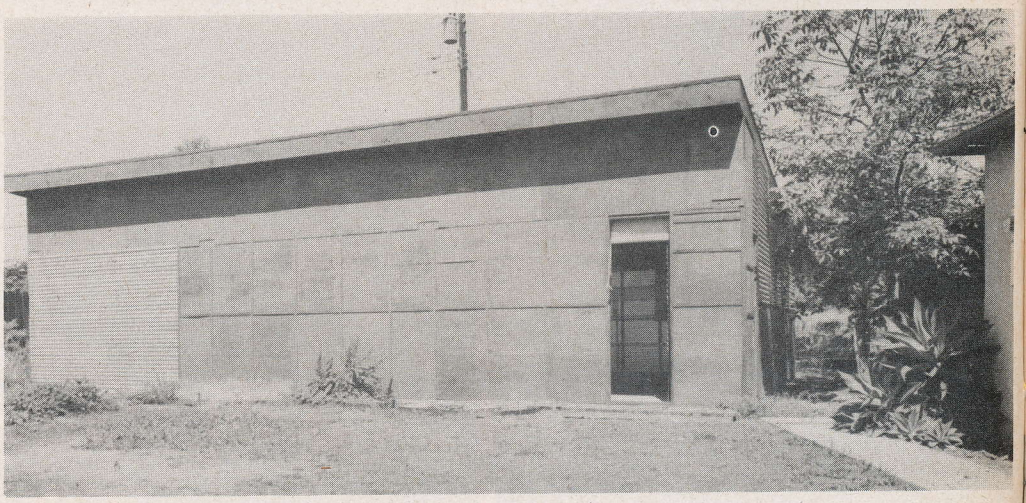
Thanks to the space age magic of motion pictures, Lee was able to have his cake and eat it too. "Jesus, where else can you get a job doing side-kicks, hook-kicks and spin-kicks," he once joked to Inosanto. Levity notwithstanding, his often misunderstood film career could not have broken at a more opportune moment.

The *Hornet* series was short-lived, surviving only a single season. With it went the much coveted and oft discussed Kato role, Lee's first real break. The interim had produced only a trickle of walk-ons and several well done – yet undistinguishing – technical advisory assignments. Parts calling for Orientals were few and far between; and the only thing that seemed to be on the upswing was the size of his family. It was now 1969, and the Lee s had a second child, a girl, which they named Shannon. To make ends meet, he could have gone on teaching Kung-Fu or went looking for a regular (ugh) nine-to-five; but his artistic sensabilities pre-empted either of these alternatives. Then just in the nick of time, like a G-rated movie, word came that re-runs of *The Green Hornet* had martial arts fans by the millions in Hong Kong clamoring for more – especially when they found that Kato was a homegrown product.

Knowing that Hong Kong production methods were primitive to say the least, Lee frantically began devouring every piece of literature he could get his hands on dealing with film making. This was his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and he wasn't going to leave anything to chance. He boned up on direction, lighting, camera techniques, editing and production – just in case – before leaving California in search of greener pastures. The ever-increasing demands all this put on the quantity most dear to him: time, coupled with insurmountable overcrowding problems, forced him to disband the now famous Chinatown school at the end of the year.

(Following the close of the 628 College Street location, at Lee's suggestion Inosanto gathered up fifteen of his most dedicated pupils and started holding regular workouts at his home – first in the garage, then in a homemade gym in the backyard – until moving to his present headquarters in March, 1974.)





When the Chinatown school was disbanded at the end of 1969, Inosanto's home located in Carson, California, became the 'mecca' for JKD enthusiasts (top). As a student project, members of Inosanto's 1970 class constructed a much needed gym in his rapidly shrinking backyard (above). Opposite: One of the many Bruce Lee designed training apparatus to be found in the homemade studio.

The beginning of the seventies saw Lee spending more and more time commuting between Hollywood and its counterpart to the East, Hong Kong. Offers began pouring in from numerous sources, and he was continually in transit – firming up commitments and scouting locations for future projects. By this time he only accepted private students, at *his* convenience. Always in demand, his fees skyrocketed accordingly, finally peaking at such never-before-heard of rates as $275 an hour; or, if traveling was required: $1,000 per week plus expenses. Nonetheless, he had a waiting list. Before embarking for good on his glamorous new profession abroad, he left to his head instructor and trusted confidant, Dan Inosanto, a "flexible" game plan for the perpetuation of Jeet Kune Do. "I had a lesson plan which he said was not to be rigid. He wanted me to incorporate my own innovations. Like he set up certain principles on speed, balance, weight distribution, etc. – that are true regardless of the method or style – but I had my choice as to what to cover each night," Inosanto recalls. Although he was unaware at the time, the future of Jeet Kune Do had just been placed squarely in his hands.

. . .

Action (not violence) was the name of the game in Lee's films, and the same held true for his art, Jeet Kune Do (hereafter referred to as JKD): *The Way of the Intercepting Fist.* Fast, powerful and above all – deceptive, JKD is the only non-classical form of Kung-Fu presently in existence. Non-classical, that is, only in terms of training: for Lee faithfully adhered to the timeless concepts embodied in Taoism, Zen, the *I-Ching* and *Yin* and *Yang* which form the basic foundation of Chinese Boxing – meanwhile chipping away at non-essentials and applying his own revolutionary theories on teaching and learning.

Like most creative geniuses, Lee was only concerned with What Is, not what could or should be. JKD *is.* Period. Spontaneous and explosively unpredictable, like a contemporary jazz solo, this lethiferous fighting art was designed to prepare the student for the uncertainties he was sure to encounter in actual combat. The analogy to the so-called "new jazz" or "free form jazz" obtains on yet another level. Proponents of this new and tradition shattering wave of musical expression: Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders, among others, were initially criticized for their apparent disregard for lyricism and structure. Later, when opponents finally caught on, their accolades flowed like cheap whiskey during Prohibition. Likewise, Lee was condemned as being merely a "streetfighter" and "brawler." Nonplused, he painstakingly outlined the difference between *having no form* and having "no form." The former denotes incompetence; the latter, *transcendence,* he replied to his detracters. He also liked to stress that JKD was really intended as a means of "self-discovery" or "enlightenment." In the liner notes to his album Tauhid, Sanders describes the process of self-realization: "I don't see the horn anymore," [he says.] "I'm trying to see myself. . . all of what I try to do in music, comes back to my conviction that if you have the discipline, you can do whatever you want to. You yourself are the key to the universe." An ardent and vocal admirer of musicians, Lee would certainly concur.

The most visable distinctions between JKD and all other existing modes of self-defense are the stance, the emphasis on "broken" rhythm and the absence of classic blocking techniques. Lee preferred a south-paw stance with right hand lead because he believed in putting the best foot forward. The left heel is raised slightly to enhance mobility – a must when one is confronted with a more powerful adversary. He paid particular attention to footwork – bobbing and weaving, feinting – so as to present an undetectable rhythm that would confuse the opponent, allowing a JKD practitioner to slip-in-between his cadence and deliver a telling blow. Traditional blocking tactics were discarded since he considered them the least efficient means of counter. JKD was meant to be organic, alive, not passive; each move of itself and offensively inclined.

. . .

As a more dynamic substitute for blocking, Lee perfected what is now referred to as the "trapping hands" stage. Trapping becomes more effective than blocking because there is less wastage of motion, and the opponent's hand is fully immobilized instead of deflected. Also, it affords the JKD man the luxury of "isolating the linebacker," so to speak, creating a favorable one-on-one situation. Its lineage is traceable to his original style, Wing Chun, whose practitioners sustain the theory that *attack is the best form of defense.* They reject the conventional one-two sequence of block then counter-attack in favor of simultaneous blocking and punching, *Pak Sau.*

Chi Sau or "sticky hands" practice is a form of sparring not unique to Wing Chun, where two opponents face off – forearms barely touching – and try to uproot the other while maintaining their own sense of balance. This exercise, in which Lee was a master, is performed over and over in order to perfect hand techniques already learned, toughen the forearms and hands and develop sensativity so that the practitioner reacts to an attacker's advance automatically, without thinking.

Incorporating *Chi Sau* and *Pak Sau* with *Bong Sau* (deflecting) and *Lap Sau* (warding-off, almost grabbing) – tempered, of course, by his extensive knowledge of body mechanics and motion – Lee came up with "trapping hands." Says Inosanto, "The trapping is definitely Wing Chun; but it's modified. *(Absorb what is useful; reject what is useless; add what is specifically your own,* was Lee's motto.) He said, 'I don't care where it comes from. If it is useable, it belongs to no one; it's yours.' That was Bruce. He'd see something, then take it one step further."

JKD *continued*

"At a certain range, at a certain time, one type of combat becomes superior," observes Inosanto.

It was Lee's habit to forever expound the advantages and disadvantages of the various combat styles – none were overlooked. He counseled his disciples not to think in terms of East vs. West, Chinese vs. Japanese, Okinawan vs. Korean, Karate vs. Judo, etc., for the purpose of determining which is better; but, rather, to examine each method individually, find its pluses and minuses, then inquire of themselves: "When will this work for me?" In other words, "If I have a grenade and a knife, and you ask which is superior, I'd reply: 'It depends.' Suppose the guy is 50 yards away: I'll heave the grenade. But if we're in a phone booth, I'd be better off with a shorter weapon," Inosanto illumes.

Another, perhaps more startling, consequence of Lee's life-long research into all forms of combat – from fisticuffs to fencing – was the discovery that – despite the myriad styles – there existed but a finite number of ways in which to initiate an attack. *Five* to be exact – all others being variations. He catalogued them as follows: ABC, attack by combination; ABD, attack by drawing; HIA, hand immobilization attack (or foot immobilization attack, FIA); PIA, progressive indirect attack; and SDA, single direct attack (or single angular attack, SAA).

The majority of self-defense systems boast one, maybe two, and rare in instances: three variations of attack. Two of the most versatile (surprise!) are Western inventions: boxing and fencing (from which Lee drew quite extensively in terms of rhythm and direction). Bruce included all five – bearing his personal stamp, – in JKD.

It's a tribute to his synoptic genius that Lee was so unerringly precise in mapping out the true nature of combat. Granted, *anyone* who devotes an entire lifetime to meticulously disecting each and every fighting art known to man, might conceivably unravel such subtle nuances as *progressive indirect attack.* But there is more to it than that. By far, his greatest oblation to those who looked to him for guidance was that he disclosed his revelations – withholding nothing – to them through intimate personal experiences, with poetic grace and intensity that inspired their own creative talents. For example, the following excerpt from a letter to Inosanto back in the early-sixties:

I hope that my thinking on the art will help you in your training, or in choosing what is beneficial and what is futile. Then use your common sense to see what is the real thing and what is merely lessons in routine dancing.

To me, Gung-Fu is so extraordinary because it is nothing at all special. Gung-Fu is simply the direct expression of one's feelings with the minimum lines and energy; every movement being so of itself, without the artificialities of which 99% of all Masters tend to complicate. Always remember that closer to the true way of Gung-Fu, the less wastage of expression there is. The art is the expression of the self. The more complicated and restrictive the method is, the less the opportunity for the expression of one's original sense of freedom. . . After all, how many ways are there to come in on an opponent without deviating from from the natural course?

As usual, he confirms that *simplicity* is the key; *complexity,* the lock, to self-discovery. Even something as obviously sophisticated as PIA, then, just boils down to this: distance (progressive) and timing (indirect).

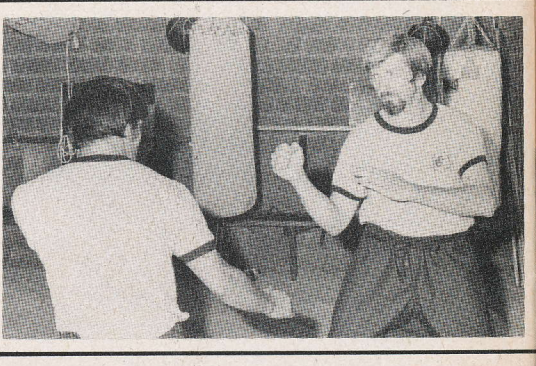
. . .

Divulging these five modes of attack is one thing, but what about their application? Like when somebody attacks a JKD man does he immediately retaliate with an ABC? Or should he, in fact, rely on SAA? Or maybe PIA? Or FIA?. . . Or STP, CIA, BBC?

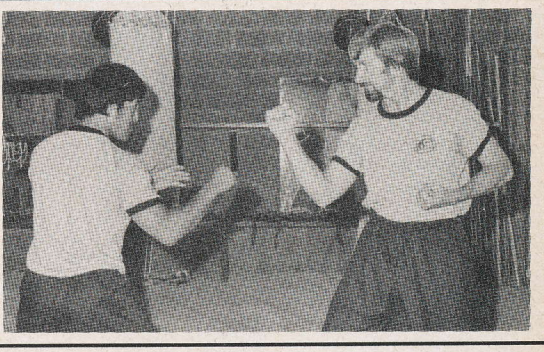
None of the above.

Because in the real world one never gets to choose the time and place, Lee felt that there should be no concrete rules as to what, when or how. Stuff like: "I'm gonna hit that fatal spot two inches below his left armpit!" just doesn't work. Everybody knows that. So the smart thing to do, he said to his followers, is to let your opponent decide for you which technique to apply. A JKD man reacts – instantly – doing what the situation dictates, fitting in with – not resisting – his opponent's energy. There may be certain "keys" he can recognize, but ultimately, when assaulted, his answer is: *Your technique is my technique.*

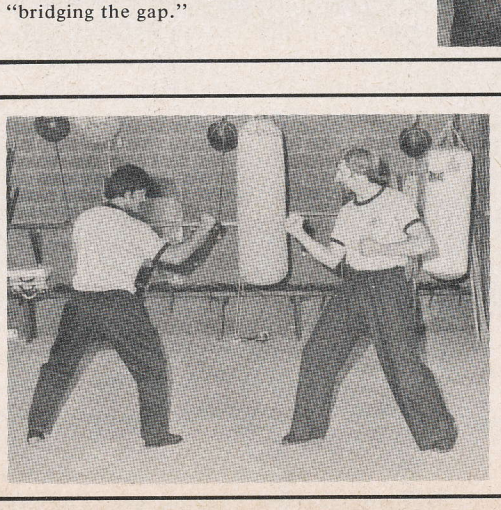
"It is true that the mental aspect of Gung-Fu is the desired end; however, in order to acheive this stage, technical skill has to come first." This quote, taken from the introduction to his first book: *Chinese Gung-Fu The Philosophical Art of Self-Defense,* pretty much sums

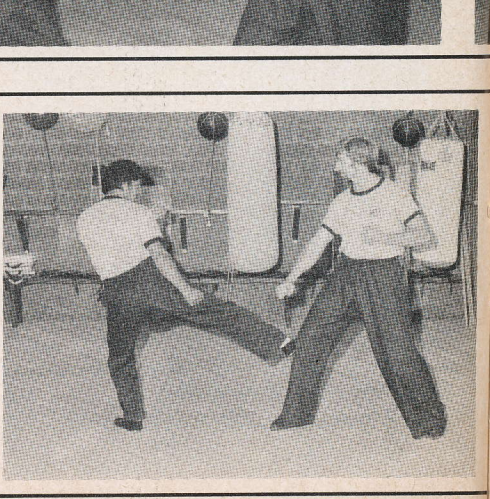


HIA



As Inosanto and Poteet demonstrate, "trapping hands" plays an integral role in the hand immobilization attack. By completely immobilizing an opponent's hand, the JKD practitioner effectively limits the techniques he may counter with. In conjunction with its counterpart, foot immobilization attack or FIA, HIA is used primarily as a means of "bridging the gap."





up Lee's ideas on learning. He believed that it was essentially a three-step process by which one passes from the purely *mechanical* or how-to-do stage, through the *technical* or when and where stage – finally arriving at the *emotional* or performing level. Furthermore, he took exception with those who tried to "teach swimming on dry land"—to revive one of his favorite analogies. He insisted that without delay, from the earliest beginnings, students should be taught to spar effectively, thus increasing their chances for survival on the street.

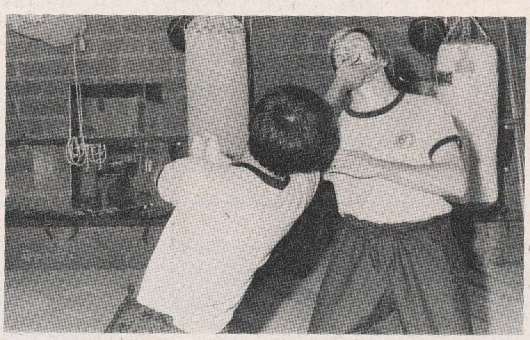
Before he can even touch his opponent, the JKD man knows that he must first overcome a more immediate foe: the distance between them. This procedure of traversing "no man's land," of transition and moving in for the kill, is known as "bridging the gap" in JKD terminology. Within a fraction of a second, the practitioner intuitively sizes-up his opponent -thereby establishing his "flight tendency" (a hypothetical aura defining the parameter of any technique he can muster) and adjusts his rhythm (coordination of feet and hands) accordingly – prior to penetrating his defenses by catching him at his "unprepared state of mind" (the exact instant he is withdrawing a strike or block or *thinking* about delivering same). Throughout this critical period there is no time for wasted movements. One slip, and the advantage is lost: his opponent is upon him, and strength inevitably becomes the deciding factor.

It follows, logically, that a portion of the JKD practice schedule is devoted to "awareness" training. Forever creative, Lee got a kick out of devising various exercises – more accurately, games – that would cultivate the lightening-quick reflexes necessary for performing the no nonsense JKD techniques. One such drill closely resembles the familiar shot of a hitter glancing down at his third base coach just before stepping up to the plate. Two students face each other, about five yards apart. The object is fo one to give the sign – a twitch, scratch blink, squirm, any movement, no matte how miniscule – and the other to ack nowledge it by clapping. This seemingly childish game in reality developes con centration and heightens one's speed o recognition. There are many similar drill that are amusing as well as instructive to be found in the JKD program.

During the actual hand-to-hand en counter, one is seldom fortunate enough to be presented with a primary targe right-off-the-bat. "Sometimes you have to attack a minor target," Inosanto re lates, "in order to get to a major one You have to inflict pain upon a minor tar get to reach a major." Invariably, the JKD student learns that a well-executed kick to the shins can be the password fo a knockout punch.

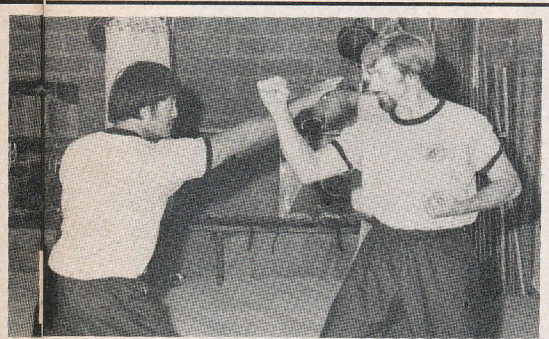
Which brings up the question of the relative importance of kicking and punch ing.

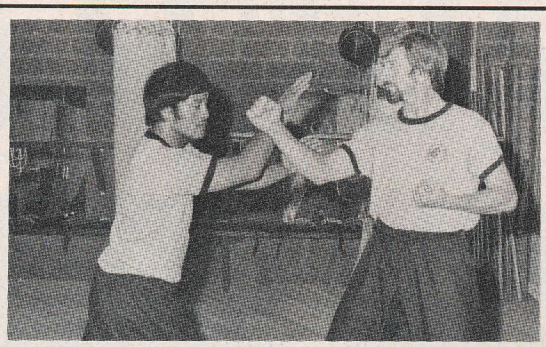
Some styles – notably Korean – rely

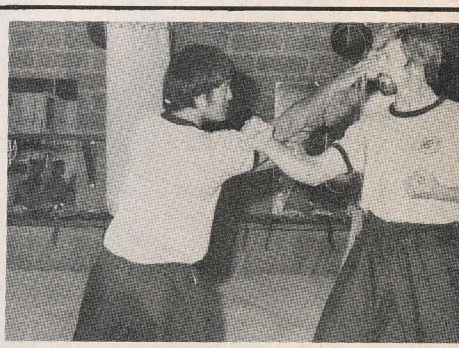


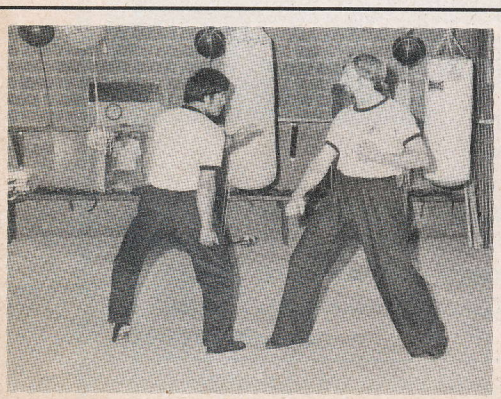
SAA

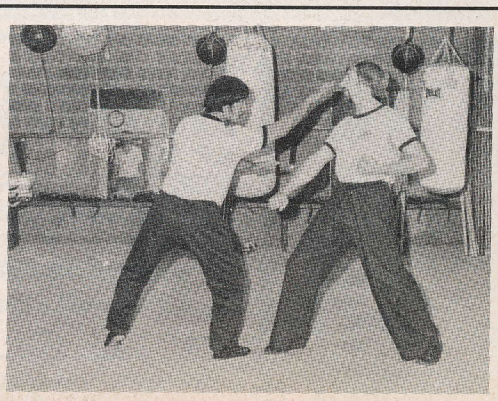
Single angular attack and its converse, single direct attack, SDA, represent the ultimate in JKD sophistication. To be effective, they require the utmost speed and finesse. There are actually two types of SAA: one with constant rhythm, another with broken rhythm. Which one to apply is determined, naturally, by one's opponent.











PIA

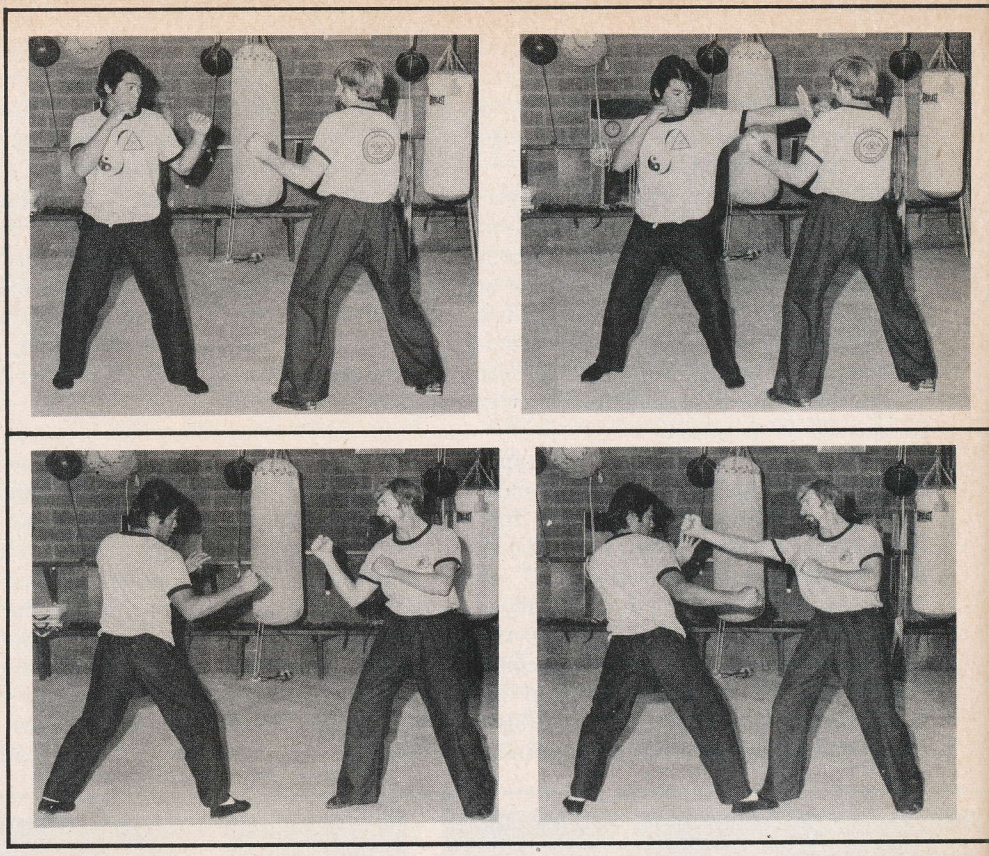
Distance and timing are key words in the progressive indirect attack. Although the main object might be a knockout punch to the face, the JKD practitioner knows that he must take an alternate route in order to arrive at his final destination. PIA usually combines with elements of HIA and FIA as an end result of "bridging the gap."

JKD *continued*

on kicking to a great extent, perhaps 60-70% of the time. On the other hand, a die-hard Shotokan man would rather punch-it-out. In Lee's opinion, Inosanto reveals, many instructors require their students to spend an inordinate number of hours practicing overly-stylized kicking techniques. He took a dim view of the raise-cock-deliver - with-the-toes-pointing -this-way-or-that-way school of thought. He also claimed them for not practicing against objects – bags, focusing mits, trees especially – instead of thin air. "The only criteria, he said, is that they be delivered from a single position. He never felt that the foot had to be horizontal like a lot of schools say. To kick, you have to have strength. Strength comes from running. The second thing you need is flexibility. That comes from stretching. Other than that, he said, 'If you want to kick – kick!' "

From a combative standpoint, Inosanto summarizes the JKD philosophy. "It works out that the hands are probably superior. The feet are used mainly as a bothering technique, to close the gap. Again, it will vary with the individual, depending on his speed and flexibility. But on the whole, I think that most JKD men are hand men. If I had to put a percentage on it, I'd say as much as 70% hands, 30% feet. . . maybe even more.

"I won't make any hard and fast statements, but, I feel that kicking is overplayed," he says. Then catching himself,



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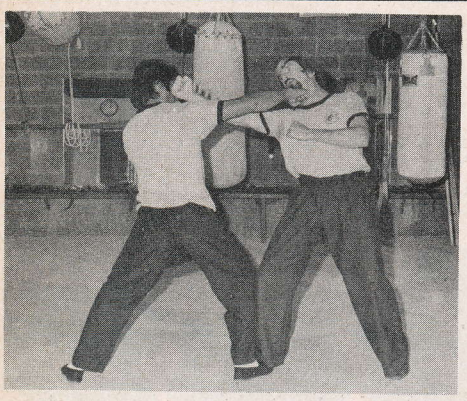
ABC

Former Bruce Lee students Richard Bustillo and Jerry Poteet practice an attack by combination. There are many variations of ABC employing the hands and feet singly or in combination. Relying primarily on footwork and a logical sequence of attack and counter, the JKD man most resembles a boxer when he applies ABC.



ABD

Attack by drawing is counter-fighting. The object is to lure the foe into position for a disabling strike.

"But the object is to be balanced. I believe that against an untrained man, it's better to kick because he's not used to it. Against a trained man, against a martial artist, I feel it's better to use hands."

Your technique is my technique.

. . .

For Bruce Lee, acting and martial arts were one in the same. He never separated his way of life from his vocation. They were two sides of the same coin: *Yin* and *Yang*, work and play, feeding his family and nurtering his soul. The similarity arises in that a martial artist, like an actor, has to discard his own personality, likes and dislikes, prejudices and so on — in order to concentrate on the task at hand. Whether it be creating a character or defeating an opponent, the mind must be cleared of all preconceived notions as to what should or should not be included. Ever wonder why in his films, Lee is always pictured as a humble, non-obtrusive individual; and then when the fighting begins, he resembles a screaming, ranting lunatic? " 'Dan,' he used to say, 'you've got to become another person. A fighter must be a madman, crazy.' "

Every picture tells a story.

This concludes the third in a series of articles on Dan Inosanto and his spiritual guide, Bruce Lee.

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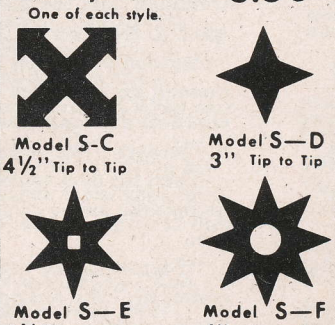

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