



Bruce Lee's Life::

As humans we take part in so many different events and groups throughout our life. Sometimes we shape, mold and guide those events, and sometimes they shape us. As we take part in learning the principals and practices of Jeet Kune Do, it is very important to know how and why it started and who started it. In order to do that, we must know the founder and try to understand the type of individual he was and what he was trying to accomplish.

The martial arts are like a book - the words are influenced by the author, so you can't know exactly what you've read until you understand the type of author that wrote it. Jeet Kune Do is no different. If we don't understand the kind of man Bruce Lee was we could potentially miss how he perceived things and therefore what he was trying to impart on us. We would miss the point entirely!

So much has been written on the life of Bruce Lee. Unfortunately, much of it is incorrect, superstition, speculation, misunderstanding or blatant lies. Regardless, he has been hailed by a multitude of people throughout the world in numerous ways as one of the most inspirational and formative figures in human history. It's possible, they could be right.



Although Bruce Lee was certainly not perfect, he quickly rose to legendary status within his own time. I will try to walk you through the life events of Bruce Lee to give you some kind of picture about the man who formed the thinking and practices we now participate in and perhaps gain some insight into the art we practice now as a result.

Bruce Lee was actually born in the US, in San Francisco on 11/27/1940 in the Jackson St. hospital - Chinatown. He was born in the Chinese 'Year of the Dragon' according to the Chinese zodiac beliefs and the 'Hour of the Dragon.' This lends credibility to one hypothesis to the origin of his nickname as, 'Little Dragon.'

His Father, Lee Hoi Chuen, originally named him, 'Lee Jun Fan,' which means, "*Invigorate San Francisco.*" Lee Hoi Chuen was a famous Beijing Opera star and was in San Francisco at the time of Jun Fan's birth because he was a performer in a traveling Cantonese Opera Company, but was originally from Kowloon of Hong Kong. Jun Fan was nick-named "Bruce" by Dr. Mary Glover in the hospital and the name stuck. He was not called Bruce until later in life when he was enrolled in La Salle College in Hong Kong [a Chinese High School] when he was 12. I'm jumping ahead though...

Jun Fan went back to Kowloon with his parents when they moved back in 1941. It was this year, 1941, that Jun Fan began his acting career as an infant in a movie called *Golden Gate Girl*. He went on to act in 25 movies in his lifetime, the latter 5 of which he played the lead role in, and also in many US TV shows.

Perhaps one of his better-known roles of his early career was in *The Orphan* when he was 18.

During his childhood, Jun Fan found himself in several street fights. His father, taught Jun Fan Wu-Style Tai Chi Chuan as a way to teach him to defend himself, but could not take the lessons to a very advanced level and found Jun Fan needed more than Tai Chi. His father also happened to be friends with a Wing Chun Master known as Yip Man. Out of worry about Jun Fan's ability to defend himself, he asked Yip Man if he would teach Jun Fan, and soon thereafter began lessons in 1953. Jun fan moved again from La Salle College to another high school in Kowloon called, St. Francis Xavier's College. Bruce as he then became known, also joined the school boxing team there.



Bruce continued to grow and show his pursuit of excellence early on still acting in movies and became the Hong Kong "Crown Colony Cha-Cha Champion" in 1958.

1 year later, 1959, Bruce got himself into some trouble in a few street fights. They involved police and a triad gang member's son [some say this was the same person]. Bruce's father became worried for Bruce's safety and/or life, and sent Bruce back to the US to live with an old friend of his father's. All he had with him was \$100 in his pocket and upon arrival back in San Francisco, worked odd jobs in Chinese communities to survive.

Bruce then moved to Seattle to live in an apartment over a Chinese restaurant owned by Ruby Chow, another friend of his fathers. He worked as a waiter downstairs to earn his keep. While living there he enrolled in Edison Technical School to complete his high school diploma.

It was at this time Bruce started teaching Chinese Kung Fu in parks and peoples backyards. This income combined with his earnings from his work in Ruby's restaurant, allowed him to enroll in University of Washington ["U-Dub"] in Seattle. It was here that Bruce met Linda Emery in 1963 and they began to date.

It was also early fall 1963 that Bruce opened the Seattle based Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute, located at 4750 University Way. A year later in the summer of 1964 Bruce married Linda and moved to Oakland, opening a school there and, leaving Taky Kimura to teach at the Seattle School.

Bruce didn't know it yet, but this turned out to be a significant turning point in history for Bruce, for Jeet Kune Do, for martial arts in general, for freedom from prejudice and for how we live differently today! I know these are grand claims. Allow me to explain...



At the time, Bruce was teaching anyone who wanted to learn no matter what their race, or ethnic background, experience, etc. White/Black/Asian whatever! At

that time, and sadly still exists today, there was a secretive and exclusivity that surrounded the Chinese martial arts.



Rendering of the Boxers Rebellion in China

The reason for this traces back to previous events occurring in China. In the early 1900's, there was a Boxer Rebellion in China, in which the fighters were severely beaten by Western Forces. Understandably, the Boxer's desired the Westerners expelled from China. The Western Forces punished this rebellion and gave beatings to the Chinese Army. Therefore, the Chinese people became reluctant to teach Westerners their martial arts, or anything for that matter. So their goal was to keep their martial arts secret from other non-Chinese in an effort to gain and keep an advantage over other races and nationalities.

It should come as no surprise then, that after a short time of teaching non-Chinese students in Oakland, Bruce was challenged by a rival and leading Shaolin Kung Fu master from across the bay in San Francisco's Chinatown, named Wong Jack Man. Bruce had accumulated enemies that bitterly hated him for "betraying his people." They saw him as a traitor. This however, turned out to be a revolutionary and enormous leap forward for Bruce, the martial arts and for those who wanted freedom from hatred, racism and prejudice.

Prior to this event, during a martial arts expo, Bruce had publicly stated that he was able to defeat any martial artist in San Francisco. A bold claim! Wong Jack Man took him up on this. According to the challenge laid at Bruce's feet; if Bruce were to lose the challenge, he was either to close his school or put an end to his teaching to non-Chinese people.

Dan Inosanto brilliantly records the event as follows:

"Wong Jack Man had recently arrived from Hong Kong and was looking to establish a name for himself. Accompanied by some of his followers, Wong turned up at the Institute one day with a written challenge informing Bruce that if he lost the ensuing fight, he was to either close down the school or stop teaching Caucasians.

Apparently the challenge was an ultimatum from the San Francisco martial arts community. "I'm representing these people here," Wong admitted pointing to his followers. Bruce's reply was simply: "OK, then" – which had an unsettling effect on the intruders who figured Bruce would likely back down from a serious challenge by a skilled boxer like Wong.

Bruce then became incensed when Wong suggested that they simply spar lightly for a few minutes. "I'm not standing for any of that," he fumed. "You've come here with an ultimatum and a challenge, hoping to scare me off. You've made the challenge, so I'm making the rules. So far as I'm concerned, it's no-holds-barred. It's all out."

One of the few eyewitnesses to the scene that followed was Linda Lee, then eight months pregnant. She reports that “within minutes” Wong’s men were trying to stop the fight, as he was ignominiously running from Bruce. The farce ended as Bruce dragged his challenger to the ground and pounded him into submission.”

There is no visual record of the fight that ensued, but Bruce did claim to defeat Wong Jack Man on several occasions and claimed he had won the right to teach anyone he wanted to. Eyewitnesses claim the defeat happened decisively and in only a few short minutes. I wish I could have been there.

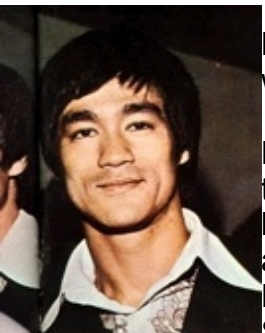


Wong Jackman

Aside from the grand racial equality implications of this fight, it was this event that led Bruce to come to some startling realizations, about the martial arts. He was frustrated by how long it took to defeat Wong Jack Man. He felt the fight was too much of a struggle, should have been much easier and should have lasted only seconds. Much in keeping with the founding philosophy of efficiency surrounding Tai Chi and Wing Chun, Bruce began to re-evaluate his fighting techniques. Dan Inosanto notes that, “...he began to dissect the fight and realized that his rather lackluster performance was due in large measure to his thick-headed adherence to a style [wing chun] which his opponent’s Law Horn Kuen techniques were impervious to. In addition, as Bruce confessed to the author [Inosanto] some years later, he was unusually winded near the end which proved to him that he was in less than perfect shape.”

At the time, this thinking and self analysis was revolutionary. This was the birth of what we have come to know as Jeet Kune Do. [see *philosophy of Jeet Kune Do*]

In August of 1964 Bruce was invited by Ed Parker [Founder of American Kenpo] to perform a demonstration at his First International Karate Championships. Bruce gladly accepted. Watching in the audience that day was the hair stylist for the TV Show *Batman*, who reported what he saw to the producer of the show, William Dozier, who just so happened to be looking for a actor to play a role in a TV series he was developing called *The Green Hornet*. When Dozier saw what Bruce was capable of, Bruce got the part and moved to Los Angeles in 1966 with his family [wife Linda, and newborn boy, Brandon].



Not surprisingly, he opened another school in Los Angeles upon his arrival there. From '67 to '71 Bruce played small parts in various films and TV series like *Marlowe* and *Longstreet*. He also gave private lessons to well known actors and celebrities at that time like Steve McQueen, James Garner, James Coburn, Roman Polanski, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, and Lee Marvin for \$250 an hour! Shannon Lee [daughter] was born during this time as well.

In 1970, 6 years after his fight with Wong Jack Man, Bruce injured his back while lifting weights, doing an exercise called 'good mornings' not while fighting anyone; much to the contrary of popular movies and folklore. While recuperating Bruce used the time to work on documenting his ideas, philosophy and training methods and refined them. He also publicly started using the name Jeet Kune Do for the first time. All of this work and thought came together in the form of a book eventually known as *The Tao Of Jeet Kune Do* which was not published until after he died.



Bruce traveled back to Hong Kong to arrange to have his mother moved to the states in '71. He found when he got there that he had become a legendary star due to the *Green Hornet* TV series. Ray Chow was owner of a movie production company in Hong Kong and sought Bruce out, offering \$100,000 for a contract to film a movie called *The Big Boss* [the US title was *Fists of Fury*] and Bruce took the deal. It was an overnight success worldwide [especially in China] and plunging Bruce into a thriving movie career.

He filmed two more movies for the Chinese movie production company. The first was called *Fists Of Fury* in China and known in the US as *The Chinese Connection*. The second was known as *The Way of The Dragon* in China and *Return of The Dragon* in the US. Confused?

Hollywood began to wake up. He was given the opportunity to work on two more films; this time with a bigger budget. They were *The Game of Death* and *Enter the Dragon*, the second of which he completed and has become known as Bruce's masterpiece. Unfortunately he did not finish *The Game of Death* before he passed. Bruce also came up with the idea for the TV show *Kung Fu*. The role was not given to him however due to his 'Asian appearance' proving that although Bruce did much to break through racial and ethnic prejudicial barriers, he hadn't conquered them all unfortunately. David Carradine [a white man] was chosen instead as the lead actor for the series. Sadly, they weren't ready for the liberation from racial differences and separation that Bruce was inviting them into.

On July 20, 1973, a month before *Enter the Dragon* hit the theatres, Bruce Lee died.

There has been much controversy surrounding the death of Bruce Lee and the reasons for it. Many people have put a lot of effort into trying to figure out how and why it happened. There are all kinds of theories.

None of it really matters. None of it will bring him back, and is not worth wasting anymore time trying to discern.

His wife Linda said, "I would rather remember how he lived!"

I agree. I believe it is more important to remember how he lived and celebrate his accomplishments and to emulate his life and thoughts with dignity, respect and honor.

Thank you Sifu!

