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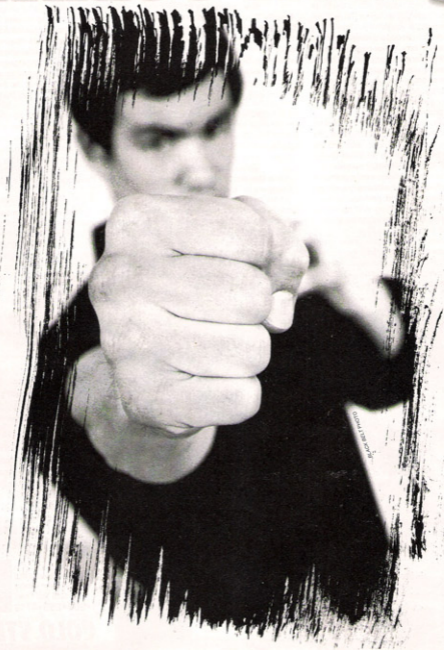
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What's Wrong



With a Martial Artist Creating His Own System?

In Defense of Eclectic Martial Arts by Dr. Frank E. Sanchez

There has been a lot of debate in the martial arts community in recent years about instructors who create and/or teach an eclectic system of self-defense. Traditionalists, it seems, believe it is improper for a martial artist to create his own style. Those who found and/or teach an eclectic system, on the other hand, tend to believe that one's martial arts lineage and roots are not as important as whether the art they teach is practical and effective. Isn't the bottom line whether or not a combat art will work in a real self-defense situation? And, given that

most martial arts were developed at a time when modern weapons such as baseball bats and guns did not exist, one has to seriously question whether such classical styles are completely effective today.

Traditional martial arts, almost without exception, developed as extensions of an existing self-defense system after some insightful practitioner noted deficiencies or areas that could be improved in some way. As access grew to other styles, martial artists began combining elements of two or more systems to create an art of their own. A good example of this is Tatsuo Shimabuku, who reportedly combined the best techniques from several Okinawan styles to form his *isshin-ryu* karate system. Jigoro Kano did likewise, borrowing the best and safest techniques from a variety of *jujutsu* styles to formulate *kodokan judo*.

Judo, in turn, has been altered slightly by other practitioners over the years, as new throws and grappling techniques were added to the art. Hybrid systems of judo began emerging, with names like "American judo" and "combat judo." And this metamorphosis was not limited to judo; other traditional martial arts were undergoing similar transformations.

It was only natural for martial artists to begin crossing over



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Jigoro Kano (left) was in fact an eclectic martial arts instructor after taking elements from traditional jujutsu and creating judo earlier this century.

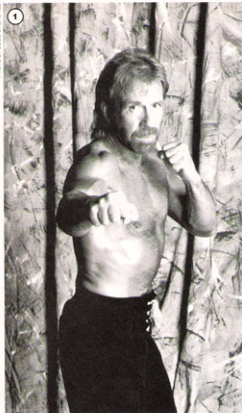
into other systems in an effort to fill in the holes left by their original style. Thus, new styles such as *hapkido*, *kajukenbo* and others were subsequently developed which combined elements from several existing arts.

The most famous of these eclectic systems was created by a young martial arts phenom by the name of Bruce Lee. His *jeet kune do*—the "way of the intercepting fist"—was the predecessor to numerous American hybrid arts which have been criticized by traditionalists as being unstructured, lacking proper roots, and therefore less efficient than their classical parent systems. Lee, however, proved these doubting

Thomasas wrong on all counts.

Why, then, is there still such an uproar in the martial arts community when someone combines elements of several styles and creates his own self-defense system?

The number one reason is egotism on the part of the traditionalists. They don't like to think that the style they have



Chuck Norris (1), Benny Urquidez (2), Wally Jay (3, left) and Remy Presas (4, right)—all members of the Black Belt Hall of Fame—have developed their own systems from existing traditional martial arts.

studied for years, which has its origin in ancient times, can possibly be improved on or be on a par with a new hybrid art. They therefore take a dim view of not only a new system, but its founder, who they often claim lacks the authority and background to create a martial art. This is especially true if the founder of the new style is of non-Asian descent. Because of common stereotypes, most people have a difficult time associating the creation of a new martial art with an Occidental. Yet, in most cases, eclectic arts are the creation of Occidentals who have combined elements of the styles they have learned into a single self-defense system.

This is not to say that everyone who creates an eclectic style is a credible instructor. Because there is no policing agency for the martial arts, virtually anyone can found his own system and call himself a master—and some do. But there are many talented martial artists—Chuck Norris (*chun kuk do*), Benny Urquidez (*ukidokan*), Remy Presas (*modern arnis*) and Wally Jay (small-circle jujutsu) are four examples—who have formulated eclectic offshoots of existing systems, and these individuals should not be discredited just because of a

few rotten apples.

The real test of an eclectic art is, of course, its effectiveness in a self-defense situation. When all is said and done, does the art stand up in an attack?

Second, does the style have longevity? Has it survived for several generations of practitioners, proving its worth?

And, finally, does the style's creator have the necessary experience and skill to develop and teach a well-rounded, effective system? Just because a martial artist was a talented fighter doesn't mean he will be a good instructor or will be able to create his own martial art. A new system should not be accepted solely on the reputation of the founder. Nor should a "90-day wonder" be taken seriously if he creates a system.

Traditionalists argue that theirs are the only valid martial arts because they have proven their effectiveness over many years. But eclectic arts, because they are generally composed of elements from traditional arts, also have a proven track record.

Many hybrid styles have surfaced and flourished because they meet a need in the martial arts community. Some practitioners have turned to eclectic systems because the latter may deal more effectively with the realities of modern combat and do not include *kata* (prearranged fighting patterns) practice, but instead focus on sparring and practical techniques for self-defense scenarios. Such hybrid arts also address defenses against modern-day weapons like the knife and wooden

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"As access grew to other styles, martial artists began combining elements of two or more systems to create an art of their own."



club, rather than devoting time to outdated classical weapons (swords, staves, spears, etc.) rarely seen on the street today. Eclectic styles have also discarded traditional martial arts uniforms in favor of more practical or expressive attire. Does that make them any less effective or valid?

The real value of an eclectic martial art lies in its simplicity. The techniques are, in most cases, direct and to the point. There are no "secret" or "hidden" movements, as is the case with some traditional arts. Hybrid systems instead rely on practical combat techniques taken from a variety of systems. Such styles are generally easier to learn and are less "mysterious" to the average individual than traditional arts from the Orient.

Eclectic stylists are highly versatile fighters due to the

diversity of their systems. They have the ability to adjust better than a traditional stylist to the ever-changing nature of combat. Whereas a traditionalist is often bound in a physical confrontation to the kata he has learned, the eclectic fighter can quickly adapt to each situation. He is, in a sense, the chameleon of the martial arts world, changing his "colors" to suit each new environment.

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In reality, the current trend toward eclectic arts is only a repeat of history, when the so-called "traditional" arts—judo, isshin-ryu, hapkido, goju-ryu, shito-ryu, etc.—were the "eclectic" systems of their day. Just as today's eclectic styles are the



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Bruce Lee (above) is probably the most famous martial artist to break from tradition and formulate his own system, known as jeet kune do.

traditional systems of tomorrow, so too will the creators of some hybrid arts be recognized as the Jigoro Kanos and Chojun Miyagis of the future.

About the author: Jacksonville, Florida-based Dr. Frank E. Sanchez is the executive director of the American Martial Arts Alliance International and developed san-jitsu, a hybrid martial art from Guam.