

Bruce Lee

The difference between having no form and having "no form"

Bruce Lee began his study of martial arts in Hong Kong in the 1960s, studying the *wing chun* school of *kung fu*, which emphasized rapid, accurately placed blows and a method of practice called "sticking hands" involving a stationary wooden post.

As he encountered opponents from other schools, however, he began to question the rigid adherence to "form" that he and other martial arts students had been taught. While the forms had a value in learning the spiritual and physical disciplines *kung fu* required, the forms also became barriers to true mastery. Bruce Lee began experimenting with his fighting style by incorporating elements of different schools. In doing so, he scandalized the traditionalists, who accused him of "having no form" that is, of failing to follow the discipline of any accepted form.

In describing his style, Bruce Lee made a clear distinction between "having no form" and "having *no form*." To have *no-form* was to transcend form from a position of mastery that enabled one to see when the rules could be-in fact, needed to be-broken. *No-form* was highly disciplined in its execution. In essence, to have *no-form* was to have access to all forms; to understand all forms at their most essential level and to see and be able to act on the connections among forms. On the other hand, "having no form" implied an undisciplined approach, an inability to master any form.

Lee discovered that he could not teach *no-form* directly to novices in the martial arts. A student first had to master the form of *karate*, *tae kwon do*, or some other school; only from a position of mastery could the student begin to experiment with abandoning the form. Gradually, his efforts to teach *no-form* resulted in a new "Bruce Lee School" of *kung fu*. Paradoxically, the search for *noform* had become another form.

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