

A comparison of
Ed Parker's American Kenpo
and
Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do



Black Belt Thesis
By
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Introduction

Within this thesis I will compare and contrast the fighting styles of Ed Parker's American Kenpo (EPAK) and Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do (JKD).

It would be nearly impossible to try and compare the entire system side by side, so I will limit the comparisons to ~~for~~ (4) main topics. The founders, stances and foot work, principals, and philosophy.

The Founders

Ed Parker

American born

First trained in a traditional martial art (Judo)

Adapted his style to meet needs of modern attacks and situations

Utilized the Hollywood to promote his martial art

Bruce Lee

American born

First trained in a traditional martial art (Wing Chun)

Adapted his style to himself, utilizing his natural gifts and abilities

Utilized the martial arts to promote a career in Hollywood

While both men had many similarities, their differences also made them who they were. They both grew up having to fight in real life situations which lead them to martial arts. Though they both made martial arts their career, Mr. Parker made Kenpo his life's work and Mr. Lee used it launch another career in movies.

Stances and Footwork

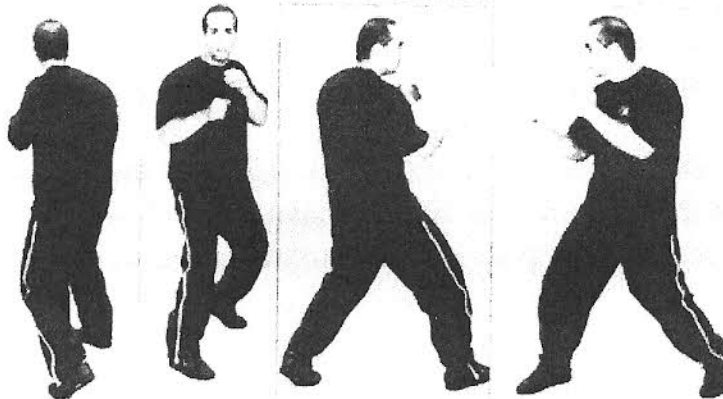
Stances EPAK

Neutral Bow



JKD

On Guard Stance



Basically the only real difference between these are that in the JKD On Guard stance, is that the back foot is raised for greater mobility. Although, EPAK does have a modified bow in which the back foot is raised and slightly pointing forward for mobility and speed as well.

Both styles use a heel / toe alignment for mobility in moving forwards and backwards without your own feet getting in the way of your movement. Weight distribution in both stances is also 50/50 between the front foot and the back foot.

The difference between the two stance is that with the JKD On Guard stance, both hands are held high and the elbows are the main defense for a body shot. With the EPAK Neutral Bow, usually the front hand is held high and the back hand is lower to protect the body and act as a check.

Footwork

EPAK

Drag Step Shuffle

Step Drag Shuffle

JKD

Advance Shuffle

Quick Advance

The Drag Step Shuffle and the Advance Shuffle are both described as starting from your fighting stance, your front foot slides forward then your back foot steps forward the equal amount of your first step, ending in the same stance as you started.

The Step Drag Shuffle and the Quick Advance are also described the same as well. Starting from your fighting stance, the front foot steps forward then your back foot drags up an equal amount ending in the same stance as you started.

EPAK does have more maneuvers to it, such as step through and crosses. However, JKD relies primarily on the shuffle to move forward, backwards, and sideways.

?
The EPAK
description is
the same for
both - the
step Drag.

Principals

EPAK and JKD share a lot of principals with each other and other martial arts. Similar principals include Economy of Motion, Centerlines, Facing, and Depth Zones or Gates.

Economy of Motion

Economy of motion refers to having no wasted movements in your techniques such as pulling back before a punch, turning your body before a front kick, or cocking your hand before a block.

Centerline

Centerline refers to the imaginary line running down the center of your body as a line ^{to} of attack due to the many targets that run along the centerline. Targets include the groin, sternum, throat, nose, and eyes.

Facing

Facing simply put is always maintaining eye contact with your attacker. It doesn't necessarily mean having to be face to face, it means using foot work to face your attacker from either his left, right, or back.

Depth Zones / Gates

Depth Zones and Gates are imaginary zones that measure the depth of attack on an opponent starting from his front hand to the heel of the rear foot. The difference between EPAK and JKD is that EPAK has seven (7) depth zones and JKD has four (4) gates.

Philosophy

My take on the EPAK philosophy is based of a statement that I heard from Larry Tatum. Mr. Tatum said while discussing Kenpo techniques that the techniques are not written in stone, they are rules of motion that can be used in any given situation. I would expand on that a little bit to explain that the techniques are tools that can be used in a given situation. By training using many different reactions to many different attacks, Kenpo gives you more tools in your toolbox to use against an attacker. By having different responses to similar attacks it also allows you to have experienced varied situations, it allows you to flow from one movement to another because you have “been there before”.

Bruce Lee’s philosophy has been widely known as “Use what works and throw the rest away”. Which basically means to experience different arts and techniques to find what you feels works for a situation and to discard what you feel is not useful.

Conclusion

While EPAK And JKD do have many physical similarities, the main difference come in the over all philosophy.

While Bruce Lee's philosophy was to find what works and discard what doesn't, Mr. Parker agreed that you should use what works. However, he differed with him about discarding techniques. His reason for this was that just because something doesn't work in one situation doesn't mean it won't work in another situation. If you throw away a technique because it didn't work in certain situation, you won't be able to use it in another.

I came across a quote and an analogy by Tom Bleecker that shows the difference between the two this way: "The major difference is that Kenpo is a system, while JKD clearly is not. With JKD, one brings everything they previously had to the table, and then adds to that the basics that JKD has at its foundation - then from that point one begins to sort it all out in accordance to the individual's strong and weak points."

"Kenpo also has this aspect. It's called tailoring. The difference is one must first learn the Kenpo system in order to have a "suit upon which to tailor." With JKD, you bring your own suit and add patchwork wherever cloth from your suit is missing, and then tailor."

I believe what makes American Kenpo better suited to a real life situation over Jeet Kune Do is the foundation of the techniques. By having a wealth of options and experience to different scenarios, as opposed trying to patch something together, the Kenpoist is more equip to handle a life or death encounter.

References

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Finally I would like to thank Mr. Norm Rolando. I have always had an interest and desire to learn martial arts ever since I was 13 years old, but because the way that most martial arts schools are run around here I was unable to. The program that he offers and the level of instruction that is offered is more than I ever could have gotten or expected when I first got the American Kenpo flyer back from my daughter's school back in 2003.

Salute,

Dave Strobel