

kicks, or 'soft' techniques, such as off-balancing and throwing? Are you drawn to the gracefulness and esoteric nature of *t'ai chi* or are you interested in just learning the no-nonsense kicks and punches such as in Thai kickboxing? Are you interested primarily in self defense or do you want to compete? Does signing the dotted line on a contract, as many studios prefer, intimidate you, or would you rather just take it month to month?

The martial arts encompass a big field, and there's ongoing debate surrounding the history of many disciplines, but this run down is designed to help you hash it all out before you start going out and picking fights.

KUNG FU (GONG FU)

"Skill"

There are more than 1,000 styles of kung fu recognized. 'Style' refers to a particular school of martial practice, each with its own training methods, animal forms, techniques, and emphasis on attack and defense. According to some traditions, kung fu practitioners should not only study the forms, they must follow the *Tao*, or 'the way', to gain an understanding of philosophy and life. One who masters kung fu is considered foremost an artist, not a fighter.

There are many different theories of how

and when kung fu began. Some say it came about as early as the Chou dynasty (1111-255 B.C.). Others say it was derived from yoga and then refined by Shaolin monks some 1,500 years ago in the Hunan Province of China. For the monks, kung fu was a way to protect their freedom, avoid conflict and cultivate the mind, body and spirit in tandem. The Wing Chun kung fu system was created by a woman, Yim Wing Chun, during the Ching Dynasty, and was made famous in the West by Bruce Lee.

JEET KUNE DO

"The way of the intercepting fist"

Bruce Lee moved away from classical kung fu (labeling it "too flowery," "mysterious" and "abstract") and focused on creating his own comprehensive format, *jeet kune do*, that he never claimed was a new style, just a new way, integrating several disciplines. The foundation of *jeet kune do*—blocks, hand maneuvers and energy techniques—has its roots in Wing Chun. It also incorporates French fencing and American boxing. Before he died, Bruce Lee demanded all his three schools close down and no further study of the art be taught after six months. Despite his request, the World Jeet Kune Do Federation was later formed to provide some cohesion to "the style of no style."

T'AI CHI CH'UAN (TAIJIQUAN)

"Supreme Ultimate Style"

Also called Chinese boxing, the "national art of China" has become popular in its own right in the West, and is now regarded as a way to treat anxiety, improve health of geriatric patients, and lower blood pressure. It is often considered to be one of three "soft exercises," the other two being yoga and Pilates. Though it could be debated, many believe *t'ai chi* was developed in the 13th century by a Taoist monk by the name of Chang Sang Feng.

There are several different forms of *t'ai chi*. The four most common are Chen, Wu, Sun (a modern style), and Yang, which includes the forms millions of Chinese folks get up and do every morning as part of their fitness regime.

TAE KWON DO

"The art of kicking and punching"

Also called "super karate," *tae kwon do* is the world's most popular martial art, and there is no lack *tae kwon do* dojangs—of varying credibility—around Denver. One of the more 'physical' martial arts, *tae kwon do* became an Olympic sport in 1988.

But *tae kwon do* seems to be continually mired in controversy. In 1996, Chuck Norris became the first westerner to be awarded an eighth-degree black belt in *tae kwon do*. Out of 170 who received an eighth-degree black belt, he is the only one of non-Korean ethnicity to date. There are no female eighth-degree black belts. Additionally, of the 56 ninth-degree black belts in *tae kwon do*, all are male, of Korean ethnicity, reside in the United States and have a median age of 60 to 72. For this reason, some insiders are appealing to the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and even legislators to have *tae kwon do* barred from the USOC on the grounds of ethnocentrism and gender-based discrimination.

TAE-BO

Though many would hesitate to refer to Tae-Bo as a martial art, it is an amalgamation of *tae kwon do*, boxing and aerobics set to hip hop music. It is a high-intensity, cardiovascular, and (martial art purists would say) vapid exercise.

Tae-Bo was invented by Billy Blanks, who can now add "marketing genius" to his list of accomplishments which includes being a former karate and boxing champ and actor appearing in a number of B-movies. He opened his first Tae-Bo Studio in 1989 in Sherman Oaks, California. Tae-Bo has been taught in

