



Episode 50 – Jet Li | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey, there, everyone its episode 50 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to hear the best stories about the best martial artists, like todays subject, Jet Li.

I'm the founder here at whistlekick, but I'm better known as your host, Jeremy Lesniak. Whistlekick, in case you don't know, makes the world's best sparring gear and some great apparel and accessories, all for traditional martial artists. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of you returning fans.

If you're not familiar with our products, you can learn more about us at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). All of our past episodes, all the show notes and a whole lot more are at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com).

And while you're on our website, go ahead and sign up for our newsletter. We offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to hear about upcoming guests on the Monday shows.

But now let's talk about today's subject, Jet Li.

Fans of this show know that there are a few consistent answers when we ask our guests about their favorite martial arts actors. Jet Li is certainly one of those common responses. Anyone that has seen his movies knows that Jet Li brings a unique element to the films, lending a great deal of martial arts to the fight scenes. Whereas someone like Jackie Chan is beloved for his humor and creativity in his fight scenes, Jet Li is a fan favorite for the skill he displays in everything he does on screen.

Born Li Lian Jie in Beijing 1963, the man who had later become known as Jet Li started training at the Beijing wushu academy at the young age of 8. In fact, he wasn't there by choice. It was during a mandatory summer wushu class that he was discovered. Out of over 1000 kids only 20 were selected to continue their training. Of those 20, Li was the youngest.

By 11 he had won 5 national level gold medals and started competing in the adult division at 12. When he retired in his late teens he had 16 medals to his name, 15 of them gold. The 16th was silver. As you might expect from his success as an actor, he didn't participate in the sparring events it was the forms that he excelled at.

His martial arts training focused on Northern Shaolin styles and he spent a great deal of time training in several of them. His training time included a lot of experience with traditional Wushu weapons like the three sections staff the broadsword in the straight word and you can really see his comfort with those weapons when he's using them in his movies. In fact I would say that more so than just about any other martial arts actor that I can think of at the moment he has a great deal of weapons proficiency which is a sign of his deep and strong legitimate martial arts background. He started his first movie in 1979 Shao Lin Tzu which translates as Shaolin Temple. Experts actually claim that this was the movie that kicked off the 1980s kung Fu boom in China and he then moved to Hong Kong and became the biggest star of these films through the 1990s. It was from his movie roles that he actually got a screen name. A publicity



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company in the Philippines was doing some work for one of his movies and decided that his name was too hard to say so they just went ahead and put Jet Li on the posters and it happened to stick

He directed his only film in 1986 it was titled Born to Defend and you can find it on DVD for 399 or you can watch it on Netflix for free. Now I haven't had a chance to watch it yet but the acting does have the reputation for being terrible. In fact in true kung fu movie style it's actually just the action scenes the fight scenes that are what people enjoy about this movie but actually people say it's a pretty good movie and Jet Li not only directs it but stars in it so worth checking out.

His first Hollywood role was in lethal weapon four which was actually the most commercially successful of his films. His first starring role was just a little bit later in Romeo Must Die. It was Fist of Legend that received the most critical acclaim and that came out earlier than any of these others 1994. If you haven't seen it it's a remake of Bruce Lee's 1972 Fist of Fury movie. In 2010 Donnie Yen played Jet Li's character from Fist of Legend for a remake titled Legend of the Fist: The Return of Chen Zhen. While the original isn't available from streaming anywhere I can find the sequel is on Netflix and is been very well reviewed. I haven't seen it but it's on my short list.

Now Jet Li was originally slated to play Li Mu Bai in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon but he didn't want to do it because he had promised his wife he wouldn't work while she was pregnant. Imagine what that film would've been like with Jet Li and the leading male role not that Yun-fat Chow wasn't phenomenal in that role but Jet Li if you can't tell one of my favorite martial arts actors and it just would've brought even more energy to that role so I don't know I would've loved to have seen it that way personally.

He was also offer the role of Seraph in the second and third matrix movies and if you don't remember that character by name Seraph was the guard to the Oracle and he turned down that role because he felt it didn't need him that the movies were going to be too good already and I'm not making this up this is why he claims he turned down those movies that he didn't need to blend his name to the movie for what was a fairly small role.

Now one of my favorite jelly movies is The Forbidden Kingdom and that's mostly because the movie had two of my absolute favorite martial arts actors Jet Li and Jackie Chan and I just remember watching that movie in the theater and the suspense I felt through the whole thing waiting for the two of them to fight and just feeling like it took way too long but then when it finally happened how amazing it was and we've got that fight scene over in the show notes on the website.

Now when the film Hero came out in 2002 it was the highest grossing Chinese film of all time. It received critical success just blew the doors off of everybody when it first came out. Now far lesser known at the time Donnie Yen also has a role in this one and now that we've seen so much out of him it might be worth going back to watch it again knowing what he's capable of.

Jet Li is scheduled to be in the new XXX movie The Return of Xander Cage which stars Vin Diesel coming back to play the role he had in the first movie. Now whether or not this next piece proves out to be true



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we don't know but you'll notice that in any of the movies that Jet Li's done in the last two years or anything that he's saying he's going to be doing in the future you don't see any of those epic films those Wu xia style films or anything like that and that's because he says he's done all that he doesn't have anything else that he wants to do in that realm so he's going to be off doing other genres you know still doing action movies still doing dramatic roles but just not those sort of period pieces that he sort of came to prominence for doing.

Now according to Jet Li and I'm not quoting here all the advice he would ever offer can be found in three of his films in here he teaches that the suffering of a single person is always outweighed by the suffering of a nation. Unleashed teaches that violence is never the answer and fearless shows that everyone's greatest enemy is themselves.

If you've listened to our episode on the spiritual side of martial arts episode 45 you've heard my thoughts on the subject and Jet Li actually has some similar views and is really critical of modern Wushu. He feels that the competition and the precision have been so overly emphasized as to remove a great deal of the individuality and the art form from performing wushu forms. He puts tons of emphasis on that spiritual development that personal development that is a recurring theme through our shows. Maybe someday we can get Jet Li on to talk about it in person.

There are a lot of Jet Li movies out there for streaming on Netflix and Amazon and I urge you to check out some of the ones you may not have seen me revisit a few that you have I know that I will be as I was putting together the notes for this episode it reminded me at how many great films he's done and how many of them I really do treasure and the influence that they've had on my martial arts career. So head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) for the show notes with links to many of the movies we talked about today and we also got some of our favorite Jet Li fight scenes and photos in there for you to check out. One easy place to start from. If you want to start picking apart grabbing some more Jet Li movies to check out. If you want to be a guest on the show or you know someone that would be a great interview go ahead fill up the form on the website shoot that off to us and don't forget subscribe to the newsletter so you can stay up on all the stuff that were doing. If you like the show please subscribe help us out or go ahead download one of the apps the iOS app for iPad iPhone whatever you got or the Google play app for your android phone and if we could trouble you you know leave us a kind friendly review wherever you get your podcast help us out with that means a lot help spread the word on the show and if we do see your review if we read your review on the air go ahead contact us where to send you some free stuff. If you wanna follow us on social media we're on Facebook Twitter Pinterest and Instagram all with username whistlekick. Remember the great stuff we make here check it out [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) so thanks for listening to today's episode. These Thursday episodes have a lot of fun putting them together you know they're short but we like to save the long stuff for those Monday interviews so hopefully you're enjoying them. So until next time train hard smile and have a great day.