

■ The World Literature of Bruce Lee by Way of Cross-Cultural Adaptations and Translations*

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Abstract

As part of the aura of a renowned cultural icon from the twentieth century, Bruce Lee's on-screen martial arts prowess and chiseled physique stand out to most fans of cinema across the globe. In recent years, however, rising interest in his role as a thinker introducing the philosophical wisdom of the East to Western audiences and readers has been supplementing his image as a film star. The persona of Bruce Lee has not been the creation of Lee himself, shaped in his lifetime, but rather a process of continuous reconstruction carried out by critics, media, and posthumous publications. This ongoing discourse has contributed to the accumulation of the necessary momentum for the resurgence in circulation of Lee's filmic and TV works around the world. Scholars have taken note and started paying closer attention to the philosophical and pedagogical value of Lee's body of works. Under worldwide circulation, Lee's adaptation and translation of Asian philosophical teachings into highly accessible audiovisual media have become influential, exhibiting an impact no less astounding than the Asian originals and becoming works of independent stature themselves. The endless copies,

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* This essay is a revision and expansion of a paper originally presented at the *International Conference on Cross-Cultural Studies: Intercultural Adaptation, Globalization, and Risk* held at Fu Jen Catholic University in 2017. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions that have helped strengthen my arguments. Any remaining deficiencies in this paper are solely my responsibility.

(Received 11 May 2021; Accepted 26 July 2022)

clones, manipulation, proliferation, transmutation, and sharing of his works on digital platforms have further enhanced the dissemination and reception of Lee's expressed philosophy and helped carry his writings and audiovisual presentations into the domain of world literature.

Keywords: translation, adaptation, circulation, Internet meme, world literature

Introduction

Bruce Lee is a cultural icon and one of the most prominent figures of the twentieth century. In the nearly fifty years since his passing, his fame has not diminished, nor has the world's fascination with his intriguing persona. Images of his chiseled physique adorn T-shirts and magazine spreads, and Bruce Lee classics still play in some theaters. You can even buy his posters or figurines from hawkers at almost any of Hong Kong's ubiquitous street markets. Lee has also inspired generations of imitators, all aspiring to be the next martial arts phenomenon. To this end, avatars further exploit the iconic martial artist's image, appearing in video games, advertisements, and even contemporary films, such as a controversial re-presentation in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. Wayne Wong observes that Lee's authentic and combative fighting prowess on screen distinguishes him from previous traditional Chinese kung fu actors, such as Tak-hing Kwan, who plays a leading role in a series of Fei-hung Wong films. Lee pioneered a new type of cinematic fighting style called "*shizhan* (實戰; combativity)" ("Synthesizing *Zhenshi*" 72). The *shizhan* approach to action films calls for fight scenes to be "simple yet effective" and demands the meeting of the three standards of "*kuai* (speed), *hen* (brutality), and *zhun* (precision)" (84). We can see that almost all action films after Lee have been influenced by Lee's *shizhan* fight choreography. As Paul Bowman notes, Lee's success with *Enter the Dragon* in 1973 transformed all fight and action design in the entire movie industry (*Beyond Bruce Lee* 14). Rachel Roth also remarks that Marvel's MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) film, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021), taps into the Lee aura.

Lee's physique or imagery has not only been repeatedly utilized with abandon for entertainment content, commercial products, and mass media promotion, but also been interpreted and manipulated in countless ways in a variety of different realms. For instance, Timon Singh reports that Lee's statue symbolizing peace and unity can be seen in the ethnically divided Bosnian City of Mostar, where its citizens revere harmony and mutual trust after years of brutal urban warfare between Croats and Bosniaks. It has also been reported by Erin Hale that Lee's legacy brought inspiration to Hong Kong's 2019 street protesters, who applied the guiding principles rooted in his signature "be water" fighting philosophy to their activism. He has also been portrayed as a global symbol of anti-imperialism and anti-hegemony when he returns successive blows against a roomful of Japanese karate practitioners in fierce fisticuffs set during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in the film *Fist of Fury*. In the film he appropriates "a post-colonial anger worldwide" as a way to render anti-colonial justice not only

for the “global Chinese diaspora” but also for “erstwhile colonial populations, the displaced, and the dispossessed” (Mackintosh 1486-87). By the time *Enter the Dragon* was smuggled into Eastern Europe in the 1980s, Lee had already been turned into “a symbol of resistance to Communism” (Polly 479). Back in his hometown of Hong Kong, Lee’s heroic on-screen image upended stereotypes of Asians promoted by the West and brought honor and pride to Chinese audiences. That is why when Lee’s superb physique looks out from the mirror in *The Way of the Dragon* and *Enter the Dragon*, “it sees not Narcissus but the Chinese masses looking back” and “it mirrors the aspirations of Hong Kong people” as well as “reflects their psychological mind-set and behavior” (Teo 120). In all, Lee’s impact has gone beyond the celluloid realm to reach the domains of culture and philosophy and continues to extend meaning across differing contexts.

Lee “single-handedly changed the way in which Asian Americans were viewed in the United States” (Miller 154) while also making tremendous cultural inroads by “introducing more Westerners to Asian culture and philosophy than anyone else in history” (149). Through the audiovisual intermediary, Lee was able to adapt and translate the Asian cultural elements to the West and become a cross-cultural adaptor and translator par excellence. However, Lee’s cross-cultural adaptation or translation is neither self-explanatory nor free from the criticism of self-orientalizing. It has been Lee’s posthumous publications, critics, and media that serve to position him as a thinker and philosopher and provide a great deal of needed explication for Lee’s thinking. Bruce Lee cinematic clones or Bruceploitation films, along with online videos curated or made by fans, as well as advertisements, have also expanded his influence and reception, and in turn, made him accessible to more readers and enthusiasts of his philosophy. With the rapid advancements in Internet technology over recent decades, Lee’s philosophical ideas have been widely circulated online to global audiences, bringing his films and audiovisual works into the arena of world literature.

This essay proceeds by firstly providing the theoretical accounts of the definition of adaptation and its relation to the theory of translation. Lee’s films and other audiovisual works are adaptations and translations of some essential excerpts of Asian philosophical canons to the West, and as such contribute to the reinvigoration of concepts from those works into the new audiovisual medium. Moreover, given that Lee’s aura and fame have gained tremendous influence worldwide, his works have achieved massive popularity of considerable standing on a par with the originals and as a result risen to the stature of world literature themselves. The definition of world literature and how adaptation and translation can facilitate the cinematic works in their move to the status of

world literature are also discussed in this section. How is it that Lee managed to accumulate such powerful cultural capital and transform himself into an influential cultural icon? In response to this question, an explication of the historical and cultural background contributing to Lee's wide reception in the world has been offered. The body of Bruceploitation films, advertisements, and online audiovisual materials in the digital world has added momentum to the frenzied circulation of Lee's imagery and philosophical thoughts on online platforms, disseminating his philosophical ideas worldwide and rendering them ubiquitous. Examples of Lee's role as a cross-cultural adaptor and translator, along with an explanation of how his audiovisual works have ascended to the domain of world literature, have also been provided as a means to further elucidate the phenomenon of his global presence and reception. Taken together, this essay proves the value of Lee's audiovisual works for the dissemination of Asian philosophical thinking and offers a strong case for the recognition of Lee's works as world literature.

Adaptation, Translation, and World Literature

Filmic adaptations are the means by which source texts get transformed into the audiovisual form by way of significant changes "in locale, epoch, casting, genre, perspective, performance modes, or production process" (Stam, "Revisionist Adaptation" 239). To adapt is to change, to transform, and even to recreate the original; thus, a filmic adaptation translates a text from its original verbal medium into the audiovisual and, as such, is destined to be something different from the original. Through filmic adaptations, the word-centric medium of a novel, for example, will be repositioned into a multi-track audiovisual outlet whereby the original text will not only be resuscitated but also invigorated with "theatrical performance, music, sound effects, and moving photographic images" (Stam, "Beyond Fidelity" 56). Having had its expressive content augmented via the audiovisual medium, a film adaptation "has not lesser, but rather greater resources for expression than the novel" (59). In the case of Bruce Lee adapting specific Asian philosophical and literary texts into a cinematic medium, his efforts enlarge the scope of those philosophical works through an enrichment that gives them new expression and greater reception in the world. For instance, Wayne Wong in his sagacious discussion of two of Lee's films and one documentary, i.e., *Fist of Fury*, *The Way of the Dragon*, and *Bruce Lee: A Warrior's Journey*, argues that "Lee's action aesthetic is best theorized by the concept of *wuyi* (武意), or *martial ideation*" which Lee adopted from the

Taoist idea of “the synthesis of action and stasis in tranquility,” or the concept of “*wu* (無)” (“Nothingness” 363). In *Fist of Fury*, after escaping from an armbar the Russian strongman Petrov does on Lee, Lee shuffles back and performs circular illusory hand movements as an expression of *wuyi* or a negotiation of action and stasis, which disorients Petrov and occasions an anxious and disordered response on his part. Lee remains calm and applies semi-circular hand parries to deflect Petrov’s punches. He not only moves circularly to reposition himself to the appropriate angle to counter Petrov but also constantly changes his technique with a fluid *wuyi* instinct (*Fist of Fury* 1:30:52-31:55). As Wayne Wong says, this Taoist concept denotes “a state of constant change refusing to be fixed into a single pattern” (“Nothingness” 371). Lee’s fight with the martial artist Chuck Norris in *The Way of the Dragon* demonstrates his transformation from “passive to active, from defensive to offensive” (373) by utilizing the circular footwork, or the principle of *wuyi* that makes him able to constantly change position, rhythm, and angle for the effective intercepts of his opponent’s actions. By adapting Taoist thought into cinematic performance, Lee not only expresses traditional Chinese wisdom through modern celluloid technology but also embodies in praxis Taoist thinking with his fights against opponents in his films. In the process, he incarnates Taoist philosophy in his physical performance.

In addition to visually conveying Asian philosophies via virtuoso on-screen performance, Lee is also an adept and eloquent philosopher-cum-martial artist who often verbally borrows and translates Asian philosophical excerpts into an audiovisual medium. For instance, while lecturing a young Shaolin disciple on the lesson of pointing a finger at the moon in the opening scene of *Enter the Dragon*, Lee advises this young man not to focus his attention on the finger or he would end up missing the glory of the moon (*Enter the Dragon* 00:08:02-17). This explication by Lee references the famous Buddhist riddle one can find in the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*, which speaks that a foolish man would mistakenly take the finger as the bright moon and miss the ineffable reality that the moon represents (Shi 96). However, it is very unlikely that Lee read this Buddhist text himself but likely relied on D. T. Suzuki’s essays on Zen Buddhism to grasp this pearl of Buddhist wisdom. Most of the Buddhist concepts incorporated by Lee in his posthumously published book, *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, reference Suzuki’s commentaries on Zen Buddhism (Thomas 339). This demonstrates the complex process of the cross-cultural translation whereby a Buddhist source text had been mediated to a large extent by the Japanese scholar’s interpretation and then read and reinterpreted by Lee in his filmic work. This practice of translation via an intermediary agent will produce an interpretation different from the

original; moreover, a different choice of interpretation or translation depends on the interpreter's ideology, position, and subjectivity, and thus any attempt to produce an unadulterated representation of the original is of no avail. Construed as such, cross-cultural translation will always invite further translation and interpretation even when a source text is absent, entailing an endless interpretive process typified by "continua of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity" (Benjamin 325). Lee's understanding of the Buddhist wisdom in the scene mentioned above is a verbal translation or a further interpretation and transformation of Suzuki's understanding of this Buddhist adage; undoubtedly, it is also an adaptation that vividly conveys the Buddhist aphorism in a cinematic scene, teaching kung fu, enhanced by inspirational discourse. In this sense, Bruce Lee reveals himself as both a cross-cultural translator and adaptor.

Interestingly, "adaptations are often compared to translations" (Hutcheon 16). To translate interlingually is to rewrite a text from one language to another, so a translation is the practice of difference and is never identical with the original. It is also an apt description of adaptation: "Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation" (16). André Lefevere's idea of refraction as a practice of translation rightly manifests the transmutational nature of both the concepts of translation and adaptation. The term refraction refers to "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" (Lefevere 4). Lefevere's remark on translation as refraction, as per Millicent Marcus, connects both translation and adaptation, "justifying the kinds of accommodations that refractors must make to the evolving ideological and aesthetic demands of the publics whom they address" (qtd. in Marcus 22). In truth, as Pei-yun Chen points out, scholars in both translation studies and adaptation studies, such as Robert Stam, Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders, Patrick Cattrysse, and Lawrence Venuti, all recognize the link between the two disciplines and often borrow methodologies, concepts, and terminologies across disciplines. However, Chen also reminds us of the tension that exists between translation and adaptation, for the former specializes in the verbal medium whereas the latter emphasizes visual media; that is, each medium has its own materials of expression and cannot be reduced into an undifferentiated *tertium comparationis*. What Chen tries to foreground here is the idea that "we cannot see and read at the same time" (50). She further highlights the conflict between translation and adaptation and argues that "it is impossible to accommodate all visual images into the verbal medium" and "it is also impossible to express the verbal descriptions fully through the visual medium" (51). Having said this, Bruce Lee's films and audiovisual materials provide us with an opportunity to

reexamine the possibility of convergence or, in Chen's words, "to deepen and truly complicate the connection of the two disciplines" (48).

In her essay on how Bruce Lee contributes to the gladiator archetype in the audiovisual popular culture in the West, Lindsay Steenberg examines and comments astutely on Lee's persona and the features of his performances in the film *Enter the Dragon* and TV series *Longstreet*, and suggests that Lee's films and TV appearances be read as texts (349). Interestingly, these texts in Lee's media appearances contain certain teachings intended by Lee as lessons for his audience. As Meaghan Morris remarks, we should not overlook that "Lee is first and foremost an iconic film teacher" who "used film as a pedagogical medium" (178). One example Morris shows us is that Bruce Lee's spirit returns as a muse of martial arts to inspire Jason Stillwell, the son of a karate instructor beaten by thugs, to become a skillful fighter in the film *No Retreat, No Surrender* (1985). "Jason is an emblematic consumer of Lee's media pedagogy," says Morris (178). Jason learns how to be fluid and spontaneous, relying on instinct and immediate yet effortless reaction. In fact, the lessons received by Jason have their origins in those Lee first teaches to the blind insurance investigator in *Longstreet*; these lessons are also reiterated in the prelude to *Enter the Dragon*, where he teaches a young student of Shaolin temple to be reflexive and spontaneous in his kicking technique. In this sense, Lee's on-screen persona as a teacher has been continuously recycled and re-manipulated on celluloid.

Morris, it should be noted, does not probe further into the philosophical sources of Lee's teachings in his films, TV, and other audiovisual media. Nevertheless, by viewing Lee's films and his audiovisual appearances as texts, a deeper dive can be taken into the philosophical teachings intended to be conveyed in these media. In this way, readings of Lee's works for textual analysis will not be restricted to his philosophical lessons conveyed through verbal or written expression only but expanded to include his visual and physical on-screen performances as well. Such a reading will also better reveal the depth of conceptual entanglement involved between the two disciplines of adaptation and translation. This, however, does not mean that the existing differences between visual and verbal expressions in both disciplines should be simply cast aside; instead, differences should be affirmed and sensitivity enhanced so as to be better able to see and read the visual texts contained in Lee's works. By taking both the visual and verbal resources as sources for textual clues, the recognition of Asian literary and philosophical allusions and concepts introduced to the world audience by Lee in his body of works will be greatly enhanced.

Can Lee's adaptation and translation of Asian philosophies into his audiovisual works be reasonably included in the collective body of world

literature? David Damrosch asserts that a work becomes world literature through a double process: “first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin” (*What Is World Literature* 6).

Concerning the first requirement, Lee’s frequent adaptation and translation of Asian literary and philosophical teachings into actions and utterances in his films and TV appearances cause his works to function as literary texts in themselves. The recent body of research on Lee also testifies to the expression in his films of a syncretic belief system rooted in Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Kyle Barrowman, in his analysis of the thematic study of perfectionism in both the Eastern and Western traditions, proves that the perfectionist ethos also exists in the Confucianism which Lee references and inserts into his own idiosyncratic philosophy in the TV series *Longstreet*. As aforementioned, Wayne Wong has pointed out that Lee’s actions in his films epitomize the Taoist notion of tranquility from both action and stasis, embodying fluidity of the circular movement of *yin* and *yang*, the signature Taoist thought (“Nothingness”). The Buddhist metaphor of pointing a finger at the moon in *Enter the Dragon* has also been among the favored philosophical ideas promoted by Lee. His cinematic interventions have facilitated the broad circulation of his works throughout the world at large, with most audiences across the globe getting their first taste of Asian philosophies from Lee’s films as opposed to the original texts in the Asian literary and philosophical canons. A testament to the impact of Lee’s works is their effect on Bruce Thomas, an Englishman and a biographer of Lee’s life, who because of them became a keen admirer of Lee and took on the project of writing a Bruce Lee biography (Thomas x). The underlying basis of the entire biographical project is Thomas’s predilection for showing the “essential Bruce Lee” who has gone beyond “entertainment and excitement” and feels obliged to “‘educate’ his audience” (x). This goes to show just how much Lee’s influence transcends his cinematic performance into the realms of culture and philosophy. Owing in part to Thomas’s and many other contributors’ efforts, Lee’s audiovisual works have come to be watched and read as literary and philosophical works with tremendous impact upon audiences worldwide.

When it comes to the second process of a work being recognized as world literature through its circulation beyond its own cultural origins, translation or filmic adaptation undeniably plays a crucial role. These processes help extend the reach of a work to a much broader reading public. As Damrosch stipulates: “A defining feature of world literature, then, is that it consists of works that thrive in translation” (“Frames” 95). As discussed, translation and adaptation share some common features that together can boost the circulation of a literary work

across space and time to readers of different cultural backgrounds. Translation and adaptation have the potential to culturally cross-pollinate a work, taking on the role of an indispensable catalyst for transmitting a work beyond linguistic boundaries and giving it a new lease on life in a new language and audiovisual environment. Bruce Lee's celluloid works undertake operations of both adapting and translating Asian philosophical ideas into the multi-track filmic medium, propelling not only the circulation of these philosophical ideas but also his own interpretations of them to a wider and more global audience. For instance, in a scene of *Enter the Dragon*, when Lee is on a boat with a group of martial artists who are heading to an island for competition, a man approaches him and incites him to fight. When asked by this person what style he specializes in, Lee answers: "You can call it the art of fighting without fighting." When this man pressures Lee to showcase some of his skills, Lee responds by suggesting that they could fight on a nearby island, thereby tricking this aggressor into stepping down into a small rowboat. Lee then unties the boat and shoves it out to sea with the man in it alone. Thus, Lee wins, as he claimed he would, without even fighting (*Enter the Dragon* 00:32:26-33:50). But what, in fact, is the source of this concept? It is none other than Lee's ingenious incorporation of one of Sun Tzu's strategies. In "The Offensive Strategy," the third chapter of *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu writes: "To fight and win one hundred battles is not the prime excellence; prime excellence consists of subduing the enemy without fighting" (40). Of course, Lee does not merely translate Sun Tzu's idea verbally into English; he adapts Sun Tzu's idea into cinematic performance, augmenting it with an entertaining plot comprised of vivid action, witty conversation, and a sardonic denouement. Worthy of special note is how Lee turns Sun Tzu into a cool and mystic Asian martial artist in his portrayal. Due to Lee's cultural impact, his adage of fighting without fighting has almost surpassed that of Sun Tzu's original and taken on the status of an independent literary work in itself. As a result of this, Brian Freer, the publisher and columnist for the *Health Journal*, writes an article on Lee's idea of "fighting without fighting" without even reference to Sun Tzu as the original source. This manifests the extent to which Lee's adaptation of Sun Tzu's idea into film has ingrained itself into the collective mind of global audiences and becomes a text of world literature in its own right.

Lee's body of cross-cultural translations and adaptations is not without controversy, however, as his renditions consist of a mixture of adaptation, cross-cultural hybridization, blending, and synthesizing of previous writers. In this way, the Asian culture presented via Lee's mediation contains little more than a fraction of what is expressed in the original content. As Bowman observes on the act of translation between cultures, "all translations from one context

to another ought to be regarded as *mistranslations*, or at best partial and biased and incomplete translations” and “all encounters are in some sense asymptotic” (*Deconstructing Martial Arts* 101-02). Indeed, the dilution of meaning from the original is the destined result of the act of translation. As Martin Kern says, translation often trends toward a leveling of the meaning of a text as “it invariably has to operate at some level of superficiality, and it may trivialize a great text” (349). Nevertheless, despite the inevitable thinning of meaning of the source text, translation “also frees a work for new associations that can engender previously unsuspected possibilities of meaning” (Franke 139). Therefore, when a work is translated or adapted, it will be interpreted in many ways with manifold meanings and possibilities. This hermeneutic dynamism gives a work unlimited potential to lift itself from its original cultural moorings for a reinterpretation into the varied and unforeseen perspectives of different cultural contexts. This is part of Damrosch’s definition: “World literature is writing that gains in translation” (*What Is World Literature* 288); similarly, Stam also stipulates that a filmic adaptation can “selectively take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform” a nexus of information supplied by the source text, thus making the source text flourish in adaptation (*World Literature* 82). In this sense, Lee’s cross-cultural translations and adaptations are not at all futile but represent some of the best testimony to the complex interaction, transmission, and expansion of East-West cross-cultural contact. What Lee has done is to adapt Asian canonical works, though admittedly in bits and pieces, into the audiovisual form of cinema. By doing so, he dissociates the original structuring of these works for the audience and presents them in cinematic form for a wholly new experience. With the assistance of his massive popularity and global impact, his interpretive translations and adaptations of works from the Asian literary and philosophical canons have been transformed into their own body of literature and circulated with wider reception amongst audiences worldwide. Lee’s imagery and thoughts have accordingly been disseminated, copied, manipulated, and widely received in the digital era. In all, these Lee-induced works have contributed to the immense promulgation of his thoughts and philosophy, bringing his works into the sphere of world literature.

Bruce Lee’s Global Reception and Impact

The momentum behind Lee’s global reception has been attributed not only to Lee’s efforts alone but to certain significant historical and cultural developments that helped pave the way for Lee’s widespread reception in the

West and then throughout the entire world. Indeed, in the wake of the post-war era, the Beat movement in the 1950s, the subsequent Hippie phenomenon of the 1960s, and the New Age movement of the 1970s all had at their core a desire for cultural and spiritual escape from established systems in the West and in their search for enlightenment turned to Eastern thinking and philosophy (Clarke 98). This anti-institutional mentality was symptomatic of the yearning of new generations to break free from the shackles and constraints of a miserable post-war malignancy that had led to their disenchantment with traditional values and incredulity toward the existing establishment, so much so that it liberated their imagination to fantasize about a cultural entity of the Other as an ideal, owing to its complete dissimilarity to their existing value systems. This was the primary reason for the wide popularity and reception of Asian ideas and practices, such as Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Taoism, and Tantric Yoga in the West at the time, and these ideas provided “a powerful tool for the re-evaluation of, and ready-made alternatives to, Western values and lifestyles” (Clarke 104). The prevailing countercultural thinking also paved the way for Lee’s entry as an agent of the cultural Other, an Asian wise man who preached a mystic Asian philosophy in the public square and performed a repertoire of dynamic and yet exotic kung fu moves on the screen. Lee’s powerful yet dance-like fighting skills and quick-witted philosophizing, for instance, also supplied his role with “an aesthetic beauty and a philosophical depth that were lacking in most of the Old West’s gunfighters” (Bolelli 155). Lee’s image can be considered the product of this new construct, a socially and geographically distant Other that managed to charm and seduce the West. Though Lee may have been at risk of producing an exotic self-orientalizing image, this new formulation made him surprisingly more receptive to Western audiences while also contributing to a broader circulation of his thoughts and wisdom among readers and audiences around the world.

When Lee’s Hollywood film project, *The Silent Flute*, which he had co-written with movie star James Coburn and screenwriter Stirling Silliphant, came up short, he retreated to Hong Kong where he collaborated with Golden Harvest in the making of some films to help pay his bills (Polly 301-05). Serendipitously, the 1960s happened to be the time when the Hong Kong film industry attempted its breakthrough into the Western market, producing about three hundred kung fu films for global consumption (Hunt 3). This historical movement provided the returning Lee, who was already known in the West, with an advantage for portraying the lead in three HK-made films, namely *Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury*, and *The Way of the Dragon*. These roles, for their part, supplied the necessary momentum to propel him into the lead in the ensuing HK-Hollywood

collaborative cinematic production, *Enter the Dragon*, a blockbuster that rocketed Lee to immediate worldwide fame. This did not prevent him from displaying postcolonial sentiments in his cinematic presence. In *Fist of Fury* he stands up for the disenfranchised when he defeats a roomful of Japanese occupiers in a reaction against the “semi-colonial subjugation of China” (Teo 115), and then forces two of the disgraced occupiers to eat a piece of paper bearing the four Chinese calligraphic characters “*dong ya bing fu*” (東亞病夫) or “Sick Man of East Asia” in English. His anti-colonial anger is further vented when he vehemently kicks down a “No Dogs and Chinese” sign at the front gate of a park (115). His postcolonial attitude gets further expression in his fight against the Russian villain of *Fist of Fury*, which “elevates the theme of anti-Japanese imperialism to a more general level where the structure of imperialism as such can be visually decoded” (Kato 74). By implication, Lee has transformed himself into a postcolonial advocate for the oppressed everywhere, and his fights against other foreign villains, such as a group of Italian gangsters and two American karate fighters in *The Way of the Dragon*, give voice to the grievances of the global subaltern and their traumatic memories of postcolonial oppression. This observation is also in line with Min-hua Wu’s study on Lee’s role as an outstanding exponent for not only the suppressed Chinese people but also “all those who belong to the marginal” (19). The kung fu craze of the 1970s also enhanced the popularity and influence of Lee, expanding the impact and grandeur of his presence. As Bill Brown points out, since the release of the TV series *Kung Fu* (Bruce Lee lost out to David Carradine in playing the lead role), followed with the mushrooming of martial arts films that had circulated in the US, Europe, and the rest of the world, “kung fu became an inextricable part of American culture and of global culture” (31).

Regrettably, Lee never got to personally witness his rise to global stardom. On July 20 in 1973 just before the American release of *Enter the Dragon*, he unexpectedly passed away. Fortunately for the world, Lee’s fame did not come to an end with his sudden demise; instead, “Lee’s premature death certainly expedited his elevation to myth” (Hunt 76) and “was always part of his ‘aura’” (97). Lee has since been revered as a mythic and mystical figure with a charismatic presence able to convey to audiences the sense of his charm and esotericism. As a result, we have seen Lee’s imagery cloned and exploited in film, music video, advertising, and even the publishing that have served to reproduce him and sustain his continuous presence and influence.

Present-day Internet technology and social media outlets have made Lee into an almost ubiquitous presence online and turned him into an Internet meme, which is a unit of popular culture “circulated, imitated, and transformed

by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process” (Shifman 367). For example, anyone who surfs the Internet searching for Lee’s famous one-inch punch demonstration will encounter the proliferation and transmutation of this technique across many Internet platforms such as YouTube. This broad-based appeal and familiarity is perhaps the reason for the wide circulation and “transpos[ition] into different contexts” of an advertisement of Bruce Lee playing table tennis, made using computer-generated imagery for the cell phone company Nokia (Bowman, “Game” 334). But this was not the only CG-Lee ever produced. An advertisement made by Johnnie Walker in China also exploits Lee’s image and utilizes his famous “be water” philosophy to sell the brand’s booze. However, according to Alexander Abad-Santos from *The Atlantic*, this advertisement has rubbed some of Lee’s fans the wrong way owing to the fact that Lee was a known teetotaler. Nevertheless, the present writer argues that this advertisement has helped permeate the Internet with Lee’s wisdom, contributed to the wide circulation of his lexicon worldwide, and gone viral.

In fact, prior to the aforementioned advertisement, Lee had already employed this water metaphor in the American TV series *Longstreet* (1971-72), where he plays the role of a self-defense instructor and teaches his fighting techniques to a blind insurance investigator portrayed by James Franciscus. Lee also repeated this water metaphor in TV interviews, conversations with friends and students, and even his personal notes. Through the circulation and retelling of this water metaphor via digital media, along with the dissemination of this axiom by way of fans, followers, countless clones, commercial advertisements, and even published books during Lee’s posthumous era, this signature water metaphor has been widely circulated around the world, thus turning this adage into a near platitude shared by audiences and readers across the planet, which also inspired the aforementioned flash mob-style maneuvers adopted by Hong Kong street protestors in 2019.

Furthermore, the publishing industries and the academic world in recent years have also generated enough momentum to catapult Lee into the status of a cultural and philosophical icon. Lee’s widow, Linda Lee Cadwell, for instance, worked with Gilbert Johnson and compiled a collection of Lee’s random notes that was then published posthumously as the *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, a treatise of Lee’s philosophy, fighting psychology, and martial arts understanding that has become a best-seller in martial arts communities worldwide. It has to be noted that Lee’s *Tao of Jeet Kune Do* is an important book that repositions him more as a philosopher as opposed to a film star and accomplished fighter. Ever since *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, publications on Lee have

all incorporated the introduction and discussion of Lee's philosophy into their texts. For instance, Lee's biographer, John Little, who was appointed by the Bruce Lee Foundation set up to perpetuate Lee's legacy, examined Lee's drafts, notes, and collection of more than 2,000 densely annotated books on combative arts and Eastern and Western philosophies, and published them in a series of books on Lee's martial arts, life, mind, and philosophy.¹ Moreover, Lee's other biographers, such as Bruce Thomas and Matthew Polly, have also contributed to the global dissemination of Lee's thinking, teachings, and philosophy, going beyond the perfunctory introduction of his life, mind, and martial arts concepts. The latest publication to revere Lee's thoughts is Shannon Lee's *Be Water, My Friend: The Teachings of Bruce Lee*, in which Lee's daughter extrapolates the meaning of his aphorisms and turns them into inspirational self-help thoughts for daily living. Furthermore, as a leading researcher of Bruce Lee studies in academic circles, Bowman actively examines Lee's cultural and philosophical impact on the entire world and convenes international conferences on Lee's martial arts, philosophy, and sociocultural as well as media impacts, having founded a completely new field of martial arts studies with a specialized academic journal dedicated to its promotion.² In a postcolonial vein, as mentioned above, Min-hua Wu's research from Taiwan examines Lee's impact on the transformation of typical Western representations of Chinese culture as well as the effect of an anti-racial and anti-colonial impulse conveyed through Lee's film *The Way of the Dragon* and how this has served to vent the psychological exasperation felt by the globally oppressed suffering from the trauma of past and present colonization and oppression. In one article, Po-hsiu Lin, Sheng-chi Wu, and Peng Guo present Lee's personal life, psychology, and social practice in a discourse that utilizes the theory of nomadology championed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a way to explore Lee's cross-cultural tension and oscillation between the Eastern and the Western cultures against contemporaneous backdrops of sociocultural, historical, and geopolitical contextualizations. Thus, the critics, biographers, relatives, associates, and researchers of Lee all have contributed to disseminating his philosophical thoughts across various fields that continue to add to the influence of and fuel a desire for his works in not only the realm of film but also those of culture, literature, and philosophy.

Lee's influence in media, popular culture, and philosophy has become

¹ As a director, producer, and prolific writer, John Little has edited and written eleven books on Lee.

² Paul Bowman is a professor of cultural studies based at Cardiff University, UK. He has been organizing international conferences on martial arts studies and has published books and journal papers on Lee.

supreme, and his philosophical writings have as a result been disseminated worldwide along with the continuously increasing body of publications in circulation written about those writings and their author. They have all contributed to popularizing the body of Lee's literary and philosophical texts in the Western world. Following this line of reasoning, Lee has become a cross-cultural facilitator arising from his active role in introducing Asian culture to the West, giving old ideas new context, and then promoting them in a new cultural realm. However, given the profound impact attributed to Lee's exertions, his filmic works and on-screen teachings have reached global audiences with greater speed and ease than those of the original texts from which they were derived, thereby transforming his audiovisual works into classics in their own right. Lee's adaptation of Asian philosophical concepts into the medium of celluloid has not been unlike a form of "palimpsest" in which

an original work may exist only as a trace or as an unseen foundation, including not only certain manuscripts that have different material layers buried beneath new surfaces (and more metaphorically layered texts), but also architectural sites adapted for different buildings over the centuries. (Corrigan 26)

Simply put, Lee's audiovisual works have stood out as independent works and accumulated the necessary momentum to propel them into the realm of world literature, where they continue to inspire people on a global scale and provide different contextual meanings to people across the planet.

Lee's Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Translation and World Literature

In the process of elucidating Lee's role as a cross-cultural adaptor and translator, this section provides more examples attesting to the efficacy of Lee's works for granting wider exposure to his major literary and philosophical ideas and ultimately bringing them into the realm of world literature.

At the very beginning of *Enter the Dragon*, Lee appears in a graduation-like ceremony in Shaolin Temple, where he competes against another kung fu fighter played by the Hong Kong actor and stuntman Sammo Hung. Of course, Lee wins and what follows after this physical test is a conversation with his teacher. The master asks Lee a few questions to ascertain how much Lee has learned in his training:

Master: What is the highest technique you hope to achieve?

Lee: To have no technique.

Master: Very good. What are your thoughts when facing an opponent?

Lee: There is no opponent.

Master: Why is that?

Lee: Because the word "I" does not exist.

Master: So, continue.

Lee: . . . A good martial artist does not become tense, but ready. Not thinking yet not dreaming, ready for whatever may come. When the opponent expands, I contract; when he contracts, I expand; and when there is an opportunity, I do not hit, it hits all by itself. (*Enter the Dragon* 00:03:00-58)

The idea of the non-existence of self or *kong* (空), i.e., emptiness, and spontaneous reaction to any coming stimulus that Lee has a penchant for has its origins in Buddhist thought. As Little tells us, Lee used to tell his students a story about the reception of a university professor by a Buddhist teacher. The professor had come to learn about Buddhism but was neither humble nor open-minded in his inquiries. When the teacher served tea to the learned man, he poured the cup full and kept on pouring as the cup flowed over. The visiting professor interrupted and asked why the teacher did this. The teacher answered: "Like this cup, you are full of your own opinions and speculations. If you do not first empty your cup, how can you taste my cup of tea?" (Little 19). To empty one's cup is to allow one to refill it. Therefore, the emptiness of the cup has transformative energy derived from a fertile emptiness brought about by emptying one's cup "so that it may be filled" and, equally speaking, one has to "become devoid to gain totality" (Lee, *Tao of Jeet Kune Do* 14). The word emptiness in Chinese is *kong* (空), which can also be thought of as voidness. However, voidness does not equate to absence or nothingness but rather denotes a creative, ungraspable, and ever-flowing nature of things. As Lee states:

Voidness is that which stands right in the middle between this and that. The void is all-inclusive; having no opposite, there is nothing which it excludes or opposes. . . . It is living void, because all forms come out of it, and whoever realizes the void is filled with life and power and the love of all things. (*Striking Thoughts* 23)

A further elaboration of this concept is Lee's comparison of voidness to the idea of "no-mindedness" specified by Alan Watts. He quotes Watts as saying that no-mindedness is "a state of wholeness in which the mind functions freely and easily, without the sensation of a second mind or ego standing over it with a club" (*Bruce Lee* 47-48). The idea of *wu-hsin*, or no-mindedness, as Lee puts it, "is not a blank mind that shuts out all thoughts and emotions; nor is it simply calmness and quietness of mind" (*Tao of Gung Fu* 123). Lee's emphasis on the discarding of technique or "using no way as way" (*Jeet Kune Do* 298) or on the idea that the best form is "no form" (*Bruce Lee* 165) and "learning gained is learning lost" (*Jeet Kune Do* 341) means that once mastered, the techniques of an art must be forgotten so that the practitioner, empty of techniques, will be detached from the

fixity of movement and able to execute any one technique spontaneously without the constraint of conscious thought. It also means that the mind of a martial artist, unconstrained by attachments and free of contaminants, can be deployed as a mirror that receives but does not keep what comes to it. In such a state, reaction to any incoming stimuli can be accomplished with lightning speed and rapid reflexes almost intuitively.

Immediately after this conversation with his *Enter the Dragon* Master, the protagonist Lee instructs a young disciple called Lau on the delivery of a kick. Seeing that Lau is extremely tense and lacking all sense of feel for his kicking motion, Lee sternly commands him to repeat the drill. After some time, when Lau has finally gotten the technique, Lee asks him: "How did it feel to you?" When Lau requests more time to think about the feeling, Lee reprimands him with a slap to the head and exclaims: "Don't think! Feel! It is like a finger pointing a way to the moon. Don't concentrate on the finger, or you will miss all that heavenly glory" (*Enter the Dragon* 00:06:50-08:13). This lesson, as previously discussed, teaches the Buddhist wisdom of following the direction of the finger to look at the moon. If one focuses on the finger pointing to the moon instead of following its direction, the finger will be mistaken for the moon and both sight of the finger and the moon will be obscured. In addition to the aforesaid *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* where this metaphor appears, one can also find this metaphor in another renowned Buddhist text, the *Sūraṅgama Sūtra*, in which Buddha tells his disciple Ānanda that:

You still listen to the Dharma with your clinging mind to which the Dharma has been confined. Thus, the Dharma is always beyond your grasp. It is like a person pointing the finger at the moon to guide another person to see the moon. If that person only looks at the finger and mistakes it for the moon, he loses not only sight of the finger but also the moon. (Lai and Yang 47)

The metaphor implies that those who only look at the fingers but ignore the glory of the moon can never understand the truth, unchangeable and immaterial, that lies above the phenomenal world. It, of course, does not mean that the essence of the Buddhist teachings does not exist nor contain any tangible wisdom. On the contrary, the Buddhist teachings serve as the means yet not the ultimate purpose for the followers to understand the nature of Dharma. Equally speaking, Lee's application of this metaphor in his film shows that martial arts techniques are only the methods for the practitioners to understand the true spirit of combative arts and they have to get across the constraints of these physical forms to gain the genuinely intuitive self-expression.

In the final fight scene of *The Way of the Dragon*, Lee's opponent, played by the renowned American martial artist and actor Chuck Norris, twice defeats

him in the early stages of their epic match. Lee's initial failures to counter his opponent's aggression have been caused by a lack of flexibility and adaptability in his combat skills, which becomes unmistakably evident to audiences once he finally starts to change rhythm, speed, and technique as a way to adapt to the situation and bring about his eventual victory in the bout (*Way of the Dragon* 1:24:20-34:10). Lee's adaptation to his opponent's style has its origin in Taoist philosophy, from which he has learned the concept of making quick adjustments in his own style to suit circumstances by adopting the overarching principle of having no fixed form so as to fit into all forms. The previously discussed water metaphor aptly illustrates the philosophical source behind this fight scene. To reference Laozi, Lee says:

Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless. Like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You pour water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You put water into a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or creep or drip—or crash! Be water, my friend. (*Tao of Gung Fu* 138)

As noted by Hong-yi Wu, in chapters 43 and 78 of *Tao Te Ching*, Laozi points out that “the softest thing in the world overrides the hardest of all things” (227) and “nothing in the world is as soft as water, and yet for wearing away the hard and the strong there is nothing that can beat it” (366). Water is the softest and most pliable of things so it can fit into any container, just as an excellent martial artist can adapt himself to different conditions and in so doing deal with any of the variants in an opponent's attack.

Lee also presents the idea of flexibility overcoming rigidity in his fight with the Filipino Kali/Eskrima master, played by Dan Inosanto, in his last film *Game of Death*. In this fight scene, Lee wields a flexible bamboo rod against Inosanto's double sticks. Inosanto's style is fixed, predictable, and confined in a rigid pattern; by contrast, Lee sprints, shouts, moves around, pauses, and then dashes and whips his bamboo in broken rhythms that defeat the efforts of Inosanto to catch up with Lee's speed and action (*Game of Death* 1:18:10-19:08). Lee not only embodies the Taoist water philosophy of the softest element beating the hardest but also the wisdom of using unorganized and spontaneous techniques to demolish those that are fixed and predictable. As Lee artfully comments on his invented fighting style of Jeet Kune Do, also known as JKD, “Jeet Kune Do favors formlessness so that it can assume all forms” and “since it has no style, Jeet Kune Do fits in with all styles” (*Tao of Jeet Kune Do* 24). Thus, one should “be in harmony with, and not in opposition to, the strength and force of the opposition” or “do nothing that is not natural or spontaneous” (*Tao of Gung Fu* 119).

To act and respond to any attack with instinct and fast reflexes is the predominant principle upheld by Lee in his films. This is evident each time

when Lee turns the negative condition to his advantage and subdues his opponent, changing rhythm and speed as he flows, circulates, and responds with pure instinct. In this way, his attacks become simple and direct, and yet utterly devastating to his opponents. This is represented with gusto in his fights, for instance, with the Russian antagonist Petrov in *Fist of Fury*, with the two American Karate fighters in *The Way of the Dragon*, and with a group of assailants in the dungeon scene in *Enter the Dragon*, as well as the final fight scenes with three martial artists in a pagoda in *Game of Death*. Lee displays a powerful fighting spirit, or what Wayne Wong brilliantly describes as *wuyi* in his essay (“Nothingness” 363). Lee employs a constant flow of energy from ever-shifting footwork that serves to generate great power and lightning speed in all his hand-leg moves, carried out with intuitive reaction. Lee correlates his body to the ground beneath his feet, using the natural tension to enhance his intuitive responses. As reported by Lap Wong, JKD master Pat-wah Ko, also known as Sifu Patrick Ko, says, “the source of the power generation system in JKD comes from one’s feet” and “one can transfer the power from the ground to his fists if he can utilize the reaction force from the ground” (qtd. in L. Wong 215). Therefore, the fundamental essence behind the fluidity and natural reflexes of Lee’s physical movements lies in his comprehensive understanding of the body’s mechanics; that is, moving or bouncing along the ground generates power and increases the force of his counter strikes. Lee feels strongly enough about the importance of the principle of power coming from the ground to remind his readers: “Remember to take up power from the ground through your legs, waist and back” and “[p]ush off from the ground” (*Tao of Jeet Kune Do* 95).

The generation of power from the ground is not only a physiological mechanism but also a philosophical concept which Lee reiterates in his teachings. On the *Pierre Berton Show*, Lee participated in a 1971 interview where he explained that a human being should maintain the combination of both “natural instinct and control” in a harmonious state. This refers neither to a state of “pure naturalness” nor “pure unnaturalness” on its own; but instead, “the ideal is unnatural naturalness or natural unnaturalness” (“Bruce Lee Interview” 00:06:00-40). Here Lee references the idea of *yin-yang* in Taoism. In chapter 42 of *Tao Te Ching*, as recorded by Hong-yi Wu, Laozi speaks about the principle that “all things carry the force of *yin* and embrace the force of *yang*” (222). It means that *yin* and *yang* represent two contradictory yet complementary forces; together, they constitute the whole complete energy of a human being. Therefore, applying *yang*-techniques such as bouncing, constant moving, and circling around is not sufficient on its own to cause Lee to respond intuitively. That is, when one bounces or pushes off from the ground, he has to come back down to

the ground at which point the force is negated. Thus, one must also release the fighting spirit in order to not only transfer and direct the power generated from the ground into an expression of physical force, but also maintain continuous movement so as to keep the energy flowing up from the ground through the body and back to the ground in circularity. In chapter 25 of *Tao Te Ching*, as noted by Hong-yi Wu, Laozi states that “humans must follow the rules of the earth which should also follow the rules of heaven; heaven should follow the rules of the *Tao* which should follow the rules of nature” (141). By implication, the concept of naturalness denotes that a martial artist must orient himself with the earth, relating his body to the ground beneath his feet, in order to fully comprehend his position under the heaven. In this way, he will then come to know himself in the world where he dwells, following the natural course provided to him by the world and acting accordingly in a natural manner. His body weight is distributed evenly across his feet and he captures the reflected and magnified power by moving and pushing his feet against the ground. The constant flow of energy comes from his comprehensive understanding of the relationship between heaven and earth that makes up the world in which he is situated. *Tao* is reached when the natural and unfettered state of mind translates the power from the ground into the hands and legs and then redirects this force back to the ground and up again into the body and over again in an incessant flow of circularity. Lee’s on-screen performances and the interview in the *Pierre Berton Show* provide the best adaptation and translation of this Taoist principle.

Lee’s fighting spirit is also encapsulated in his JKD logo that states: “Using no way as way; having no limitation as limitation” (Little 183). As Lee stipulates:

[W]e must recognize the incontrovertible fact that regardless of their many colorful origins (by a wise, mysterious monk, by a special messenger in a dream, in a holy revelation, etc.) styles are created by men. A style should never be considered gospel truth, the laws and principles of which can never be violated. Man, the living, creating individual, is always more important than any established style. (“Liberate Yourself” 25)

Lee’s witty and aphoristic rhetoric is mainly inspired by the Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose ideas “reinforced Lee’s instinctive rejection of universal truths and traditions in favor of individual ones” (Polly 203). Lee also “read all the works of Krishnamurti” when he was forced to rest in bed for three months with the severe back injury he suffered in 1970 (269-71). That is perhaps the reason why Lee frequently references Krishnamurti’s ideas in his writings. Lee’s emphasis on the free spirit that is unbounded by any style or system is well explicated in the section of “Organized Despair” in *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*.

He succinctly puts it: “One can function freely and totally if he is ‘beyond system.’ The man who is really serious, with the urge to find out what truth is, has no style at all. He lives only in what is” (17). In the book *Freedom from the Known*, the Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti enthrallingly relates how truth cannot be found through any religious belief or dogma and argues: “The man who is really serious, with the urge to find out what truth is, what love is, has no concept at all. He lives only in *what is*” (56). Lee apparently appropriates Krishnamurti’s words and replaces the word “concept” with “style” without attributing this to Krishnamurti’s work. As noted by Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti also states in his speech in 1929: “Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect” (278). Lee adopts this too, saying: “Truth has no path. Truth is living and, therefore, changing” (*Tao of Jeet Kune Do* 18). We may reasonably assume that Lee’s disbelief in the fixed style or form in the combat arts led him to study Krishnamurti, whose emphasis on self-reliance and disdain for any presupposed route toward the truth greatly inspired Lee. Lee writes that “all types of knowledge ultimately mean self-knowledge” (*Bruce Lee* 224), which is in line with Krishnamurti’s idea that “[t]o comprehend the whole we must first understand ourselves,” and “[t]he root of understanding lies in oneself,” as well as “without the understanding of oneself, there is no comprehension of the world” (“Tenth Talk” 241). That is perhaps why Lee writes that if you blindly follow the traditional and classical pattern, “you are understanding the routine, the tradition, the shadow” but “you are not understanding yourself” (*Tao of Jeet Kune Do* 17). This idea of a free and unrestrained spirit undoubtedly had lasting charm to Lee and gave him the natural and instinctive sensibility to respond to stimuli with spontaneity. Lee successfully adopted this spirit and incorporated it into his action choreography in film fight scenes, making him a cross-cultural translator/adaptor.

Confucianism, the third school in Chinese syncretic thought (Buddhism and Taoism having already been discussed), also plays a role in inspiring Lee in various aspects of his thinking and performance. As reported by Little, when once asked in a TV interview to elaborate on his feelings regarding racial issues, Lee says:

Although others may disagree, to me, racial barriers do not exist in reality. If I say that “everyone under the sun is a member of a universal family,” you may think that I am bluffing and being idealistic. But if anyone still believes in racial differences, I think he is being too backward and narrow in his perspective. Perhaps he still does not understand man’s equality and love. (qtd. in Little 88)

Lee's advocacy for a cosmopolitan view of seeing everyone as a global citizen in the world can be traced back to concepts elucidated in the *Liyun* (禮運) chapter of the Confucian canonical *Liji* (禮記) or *The Book of Rites*. As Meng-ou Wang notes, this chapter states that a sage can see everyone under the sky to be one family (*shengren naiyi tianxia wei yijia* 聖人耐以天下為一家) and pay close attention to each member's feelings, duties, and rights, as well as the effect of calamity or fortune upon them (375). Lee lends further credence to this concept during his interview on the 1971 *Pierre Berton Show* when he responds rather forcefully to the host's inquiries as to which cultural identity, whether Chinese or a North American, he feels he belongs to:

You know what I want to think of myself? As a human being. Because, I mean, I don't want to sound like "as Confucius says," but under the sky, under the heavens, man, there is but one family. It just so happens that people are different. ("Bruce Lee Interview" 00:23:54-24:12)

This pluralist vision of Lee's was all the more poignant, coming from a time when racist or jingoistic views were so much more prevalent in the world. Lee's use of seemingly radical, anarchic, and anti-institutional approaches can, nevertheless, be seen as coping strategies applied by him in his tireless efforts to debunk long-established stereotypes and prejudices against Eastern culture and its representations in the West. The interview on the *Pierre Berton Show* continues to circulate online, perpetuating Lee's cosmopolitan vision of inclusiveness and caring for all human beings. Little also shares comments made by one of Lee's students, the above-mentioned actor and martial artist Dan Inosanto, that further support this view of Lee as a cross-cultural translator and communicator: "He felt very strongly that if he could get people to appreciate something in the Chinese culture, then they would appreciate something in other cultures as well" (qtd. in Little 13). Inosanto also observes that Lee had a feeling that "he was doing his small part in establishing something toward world peace" (qtd. in Little 13). This may have had Lee sounding like a traditional Confucian sage, but given the historical and cultural background at that time, it also provides a glimpse of his daring in the pursuit of a mission to translate the beauty of Asian culture to the West, and his efforts to engage in a dialogic exchange with the West's established system of thought.

All in all, Lee incorporates significant elements of Asian cultural and philosophical thinking into his films and TV appearances. The body of Lee-induced media materials circulating in the post-Lee era also continues the dissemination of Lee's philosophical ideas on the Internet. If Lee's works in the media of film and television are construed as "hypotexts," that is, the prototypical texts that are able to inspire the creation of other subtexts or "a series of hypertextual spin-

offs” in other works or film adaptations (Stam, *World Literature* 67), then we can also infer that the Lee-induced films, the repeated citations of his philosophical words, and the recycling of his iconic image in various media contexts, as well as his posthumous publications, and the Bruceploitation works, copies, and manipulations of his imagery across various digital platforms, can be viewed as various “spin-offs” that continue a legacy of influence inspired by his original works. Taken together, they serve to increase the impact and value of Lee hypotexts and stimulate an endless reincarnation of these texts into diverse cultural domains, thus empowering their ascendancy to the sanctum of world literature.

Conclusion

This paper begins with a brief overview of Lee’s cinematic action choreography that has transcended the boundaries of culture, philosophy, and society over the past decades. Lee’s incorporation and interpretation of some Asian literary and philosophical works in his films and media appearances have functioned as cross-cultural adaptations or translations serving to revitalize the Asian originals into new audio-visual platforms, and in turn, propelling Lee’s body of diverse media works into the realm of world literature. A theoretical discussion of the definition of adaptation and its relation to translation theory has provided the underpinnings for an exploration into the way in which adaptation and translation can propel works onto the world stage and empower them to achieve the wide level of circulation and reception necessary for consideration as world literature. Lee’s overwhelming reception in the West has fueled the momentum behind the circulation of his works. A growing interest in the West of the 1950s to 1970s for Eastern culture, though mostly fantasized and even fetishized, also aided his reception as a powerful Asian man possessed with an impressive physical presence and esoteric mental philosophy that turned him into an on-screen sensation and singled out his translation of Asian culture from other cultural translators. All of this has contributed to his successful re-imagining of a new Asian man. The meteoric reception of his image, which has been repeatedly used and manipulated in mass media over the years, has added considerably to the accumulation of Lee’s cultural capital and media influence, making him one of the most widely recognized cultural icons in the world. It has also reignited people’s interest in his life, films, and thoughts. Accordingly, more critics, commentators, and biographers have invested their time in analyzing and writing about Lee’s films, martial artistry, and philosophy, thus bringing about a massive resurgence in the number of publications on Lee. Lee’s image and thinking

have, likewise, been continuously reshaped by these Lee-contributors. Lee's timeless fame has also triggered international hype for his filmic works and the seemingly unlimited demand for rare footage of Lee on YouTube. All this has provided the momentum behind the ascendancy of Lee's celluloid and digital works to a scale of global viewership and audience reception worthy of acclaim as popular world literature.

In sum, this paper provides theoretical arguments with some textual evidence to illustrate Lee's facilitatory role in East-West cross-cultural translation and to attest to his filmic works as world literature. The concept of world literature as applied here also offers a refreshing way for viewing and greater freedom for seeing the complicated cross-cultural encounters that play out between cultures across diverse forms of media. In this sense, it foregrounds Lee as a cross-cultural agent through his portrayals of canonized works and authors in the medium of film. The analysis in this paper has also laid a foundation for the rediscovery of other yet to be recognized creations by some other influential icons of culture and film through a reading of their works as potential world literature.

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跨文化改編與翻譯的李小龍世界文學

摘要

作為一位二十世紀知名且具魅力的文化偶像，李小龍在螢幕上展現的出色武藝及健壯體格深受世界各地觀眾的注目。然而近年，除了李氏作為一位電影明星的形象外，越來越多人對他將東方哲思介紹至西方的思想家角色感到有興趣。而李氏的個人形象並非由他自身在其時代自行創造與形塑，而是由批評家、媒體、及李氏死後的出版刊物所不斷建構而成。這些言談提供了李氏的影視作品於世界再度流通的所需動能。學者們注意到此點，並開始對李氏作品的哲學及寓意價值投以深度關注。伴隨全球流通之力，李氏透過高度傳播的影視媒介所改編與翻譯的亞洲哲學思想也因此深具影響力，造成的衝擊並不亞於這些哲思的原著，也因此自身成為了獨立的文本。不斷於數位平台模仿、複製、挪用、增衍、變異、及分享，更加促使李氏個人哲思的傳播與接受，並將其著述及影視作品推向世界文學之林。

關鍵字：翻譯、改編、流通、網路迷因、世界文學

