

Kung fu and its effect on asia

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



Living in the early 21st century, humanity is experiencing the rise of Asia lead by China. Recently, China seems to be the most developing nation in the world and has become a new economic power. However, the world has noticed about China for a long time before this rise because of the Kung-Fu exposure in Hollywood movies. It can be said the inclusion of martial arts in Hollywood movies has a great impact on Western society in many ways and thanks to this prominent practice, the image of Asia and Asian somehow has been changed so far in the Western perception.

First of all, Chinese martial arts are also known as Kung fu or Wushu, there are a number of traditional fighting styles that have developed over the centuries in China. According to Li (2001), Chinese martial arts film first appeared in Hong Kong since 1970s and this kind of movies was so successful. Li (2001) also said that under the colonial condition, the national pride and the image of strong China were reflected by the male kung fu body as an empowering fighting and self-defensive skill.

Besides, Li (2001) also explained the reason that kung fu films can exist is the formulation of arbitrary generic conventions and the design of plot to create kung fu fight scenes. Through these movies, Chinese people can fight back bullet when they are outgun (in Once upon a time in China film) or counter firearms easily (in The Way of the Dragon movie). However, Kung fu was not world-wide known until 1972 by Bruce Lee. Bruce Lee's The way of the Dragon or Return of the Dragon was the first Chinese martial arts movie in Hollywood.

In my opinion. Bruce Lee played an important role in the inclusion of martial arts in Hollywood movie as he created a whole new type of hero in cinemas.

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After I read Li (2001)'s " Kung Fu: Negotiating nationalism and modernity", I understand that Bruce Lee's characters were completely different from others. People can see Rambo (acted by Sylvester Stallone) and Terminator (acted by Arnold Schwarzenegger)-two classical action images in Hollywood are muscular and empowered by modern weapons and hi tech.

Bruce Lee's appearance is far from that, Lee's power comes from hand-to-hand combat skills of Kung Fu and he often fight against imperialism and colonization. Yip (2011) takes an example of Lee's film, in *Fist of Fury*, the film stars Lee as an apprentice who fight for the honor of Chinese people and take revenge for his master. Moreover, he fights through a lot of battles including a number of Japanese, a sensei, a Russian wrestler and a katana expert. In all of Lee's films, the idea of subjecting the body to the limit combining with exercises and national strengthening are considered as a way to be strong. It is clear that these films are not for entertaining but they are the messages Lee wants to tell to the world like his quotation in *Fist of Fury*: " Chinese are not sick men". As a result, martial arts movies have a great impact on Western society. Up until now, martial film genre becomes so popular in the West, especially *The " Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"* won four Oscars in 2001 and earned 208 million US dollars globally (Xinhua 2005).

Furthermore, I find out that Zhen (2000) and Beale (2000) share a same view about why Kung fu film is reasonably hot as ' audiences love these films because it gives them something overblown action movies don't give them' and ' Among all the film genres invented and reinvented in this century in different parts of the world, the martial arts film, with its foregrounded body

language and spectacular visual choreography, is one of the few genres whose popularity is the most far reaching'.

Besides, Bruce Lee's legacy is also inspiration for the next generation's actors such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Chuck Norris, Steven Seagal and Jean-Claude Van Damme, each with unique martial arts type. Since Bruce Lee first introduced Kung Fu to Western people, it has been an era of martial arts movie with hundreds of blockbusters. I also agree with Beale (2000) that ' As the success of " The Matrix" and " Charlie's Angels" shows, martial arts now have become a part of mainstream filmmaking' and ' audiences love these films because it gives them something overblown action movies don't give them'.

In other word, Kung Fu movies now is one of the most attractive and important genre of arts. In addition, the effect of the inclusion of Chinese martial arts movies is not only on the filmmaking industry but also other aspects in the West. Due to the boom in number of Kung Fu or martial arts films, Western people are getting used to Kung Fu and then, a lot of Western people study this fighting style. As a result, people may absorb the Chinese philosophy through learning Kung Fu.

For example, based on my experience in watching these movies, by studying Kung Fu, inner peace can be achieved by practicing martial arts and use it to protect themselves or the weaker. In my opinion, Chinese martial arts in general and Kung Fu films specifically have changed the image of Asia and Asian in the West. Because China is the biggest nation in Asia so people tend to look at China then, perceive the rest kind of the same. First of all, the way Bruce Lee used Chinese fighting style in his movies is also nationalism.

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Back to the time Bruce Lee first introduced Kung Fu-a part of Chinese history (or Wushu) to the world, at that time Hong Kong was British-colonized so these films were made to ' negotiate the complex and conflicting experience of colonial modernity and post coloniality' (Li, 2001). The films It can be said that Kung Fu films was a sense of self-orientalism as ' invoked and manipulated to create a sense of difference in postcolonial power dynamics: an ideological maneuvering' (Yan, 2009).

Although China was undeveloped and colonized at that time, it shows that China is more than a colonized country and it has thousands of history years. Furthermore, in the 1970s, most of the Asia countries were still colonized or at war so thanks to these films, it makes Western people know that Asia countries had freedom and glory once and somehow the way Western countries such as The U. S, Britian and France dominated was wrong. The world should know that Asia before being colonized has been free and it has a long history not only some colonized countries so it is reasonable that these Western countries should return their freedom.

Second of all, the problem is that in most Hollywood movies, Asian appear to be weak and easy to get hurt for example Watchmen (2009), some superhuman from the U. S took part in Vietnam War and they killed Vietnamese people brutally while the same situation in Rambo-First Blood (1982). However, martial arts films seem to be a good answer for that bias. In my opinion, it makes sense that dominated countries should fight back. Chinese people and Asians in general appear to be tough.

We always fight back whenever we get hurt and we also prove Bruce Lee's quotation ' Chinese are not sick men' but in this circumstance it can be

understood as 'Asians are not sick men'. The next thing is 'all of today's Asian martial arts—like Karate, Kung-Fu, Judo, or Aikido—were developed to embody and apply philosophical ideas' (Priest and Young, 2010) so introducing martial arts into movies can be a good way to present Asia's philosophy. According to Priest and Young (2010) Karate, Kung Fu, Aikido and Judo- the most famous martial arts in Asia seem to be all based on Confucianism, and Buddhism.

Basically, the main point of Asian martial arts is to build up body or to prevent from illnesses. According to Li (2001), Huo Yuanjia, a legendary Chinese kung fu master, shared the same idea since he said 'I hope that you'll make the most of your skills and spread them to turn sick men into heroes'. In addition, inner peace is what people study martial arts seek for so they try to avoid the pressure of normal victory or loss, which is quite similar to Buddhism's idea. Similarly, Cox (1999) said Kung Fu is about remaining the tai chi - a yin-yang balance in terms of stylized aggression and inward control.

All Karate, Kung-Fu, Judo, or Aikido are called as defensive skills not fighting ones and all martial arts masters teach their apprentice always help the weaker as well. Additionally, practicing this art requires both physics strength and mind. It means that everyone should practice it frequently and be innovative as martial arts are not limited by skills, combos or styles. It can be said that all Kung Fu movies always try to express the philosophy of martial arts to everybody. As a result, by watching Asian action movies, Western people can feel the noble term of martial arts in general.

Before watching these movies, people can stereotype Asians people such as Japanese Nazi, dominated ones, being unprotected or easy to get hurt. In my opinion, Chinese martial arts films may be a “ leap of faith” because it can change the old perception of Western society. These things give the West a better view about our people then; people from the West can realize that Asian love peace but it doesn't mean they are easy to get hurt. Moreover, Asian can be seen as brave, noble, generous and innovative people.

Especially, heroism in martial arts movie is highly appreciated and heroes in those movies are often naive form of male nationalists such as a student, a waiter and even a farmer. Hence, it leads to a feeling from Western people that everyone in Asia know how to fight as well as everyone can be hero. Thanks to Kung Fu movies, the image of China also gets more attractive. In most of Chinese movies, a lot of beautiful sightseeing and historical structures such as The Great Wall and the Forbidden City are filmed so the West can feel that China is a very beautiful and charming country.

As a result, it is likely that more and more tourists want to visit China and Asia and receive warm hospitality as well then; the Asia's economy can have a lot benefits due to the development of tourism. However, Chinese martial arts movies also have an issue to Asians in general. Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Donnie Yen, Chow Yun Fat and Lee Byung Hun are all famous actors in the world but they are all action genre stars. Surprisingly, very few Asians who are not kung fu or action actors/actresses are famous widely in the world. In another word, it means hat it seems to be hard for Asians be successful in Hollywood without taking the actingcareeras Bruce Lee did. Moreover, kung fu-action movies are getting more and more popular so many Asians have

the chance to be famous in Hollywood. However, in my opinion, if the situation continues, Western people will keep the perception that the people from Asians just know Kung fu and show people how to fight on the screen and Asians don't have any other talents. It may have a negative impact on Asia in the future as everyone expects Asians to know Kung Fu and it is the only thing people see in Asians.

In my opinion, China particularly and Asia in general have to do something to change that situation. Nowadays, with the lead of China and India, the world is experiencing the rise of Asia; many Asia countries now become the new economic power such as South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore (Gregory D, 2009). The Asia's image now seems to be the new economic power in the Western society but I think it is still not enough. We can shape the image of dynamic and powerful Asia and Asians based on not only movies industry but also tourism, culture, history, economy and politics.

In conclusion, the appearance of Chinese martial arts Hollywood movies started by Bruce Lee (Lee Jun-fan) has some impacts on the Western society since the 1970s. It created a revolution of a new era: The Kung Fu Action movies and it lead the ways of acting styles for a generation of actors like Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Chuck Norris, Steven Seagal and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Moreover, Kung Fu and Asian philosophy are expanding quickly in Western society, for example Wushu and Jeet Kun Do a. k. The Way of the Intercepting Fist (found by Bruce Lee) become very popular in Western countries. Basically, the prominent of Chinese martial arts movies somehow changes the image of Asia and Asian in the West massively. Due to the colony of the West in the pass, Asia and Asians seemed to be weak and

unprotected but these films reflect a part of long history of Asia and express the independence, nationalism and freedom of Asia nations as well. In addition, by understanding martial arts and Asian philosophy, the West can see that Asians are brave, noble, generous and innovative.

Likewise, that type of movie tends to introduce the image of a beautiful China as well as Asia in general so that it attracts more and more people to visit Asia. Nevertheless, these action movies nowadays somehow make the people all over the world think all Asians must know Kung Fu and Asians don't have any other talents. After doing this essay, I realize that a small practice such as soft-nationalism, the inclusion of martial arts in Hollywood movies, Asian pop culture, Asian food, acupuncture practice from each nation can have a lot benefits to a country and the whole continent in terms of economy, politic and image, etc.

I think that Vietnam particularly and other countries in Asia should have a practice, or a product, or an ideology so that we can put our nationalism, philosophy and messages to the West to show them that the Asia is no longer colonized countries but it now are free, innovative and dynamic. ?

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