



# OUR BRUCE LEE MOVIES LIST

Little-Known Trivia From Bruce Lee's Pictures

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by Dr. Craig D. Reid

## In the martial arts world,

no star shines more brightly than [Bruce Lee](#). Although he died in 1973, his legions of followers still hunger for more information about his life, his art and his philosophies. In a way, they're fortunate because Lee left behind five fantastic films for the world to enjoy.

In the past 40-plus years, during which Lee has ascended to the status of superstar, the martial arts world has dissected his motion pictures and his life. No doubt a large part of the public thinks it knows all there is to know about the films of the "Little Dragon." That's not necessarily the case.

The following are some little-known factoids and insights related to [Lee's films](#) and fight choreography. They may not make you a better fighter, but they're sure to entertain you while they bolster your knowledge of the industry's greatest legend.

### EARLY WORK

Although Lee was a child star in Cantonese cinema, his film career as we know it started in 1970, when a Shaw Brothers executive named Raymond Chow received \$1 million from a friend, left his job and started Golden Harvest. The startup's first release was *The Invincible Eight*. Directed by Lo Wei, it starred Nora Miao and Angela Mao Ying. Chow never used the money he'd received; instead, he returned it with interest. Then he offered a young martial artist named Bruce Lee a two-film contract for \$7,500 per movie — which dwarfed Run Run Shaw's \$2,000 per film — and the stage was set.

Lee's first film, *Fists of Fury*, was titled *King of the Boxers* before it was changed to [The Big Boss](#) for the Chinese market and *Fists of Glory* for other parts of the world. It marked Golden Harvest's fifth release. In Mandarin, its name was *Tang Shan Da Xiong*, which translates as *The Big Brother From Tang Mountain*. Its straightforward plot introduced a new brand of street-fighting heroism to Hong Kong cinema. Lee played a lad named Cheng, a new Chinese laborer at a Thai ice factory. Perplexed by the disappearance of his co-workers, he eventually discovers that the boss is using the factory as a front to smuggle heroine.

Boss Mi was portrayed by an acclaimed martial arts instructor — no one was credited as a "fight choreographer" until 1961 — named Han Ying Chieh. He's the man responsible for introducing the trampoline to Hong Kong kung fu filmmaking in 1961 in the Shaw Brothers release *The Touch*. Also of note: Han's new assistant was Beijing-opera student Lin Zhen Ying, known to many as the one-eyebrowed priest in the *Mr. Vampire* films and the female impersonator in the wing chun-based *The Prodigal Son*.

Lin was one of Lee's favorite fight choreographers, and Lee promised to bring him to Hollywood one day so they could work together. Soon thereafter, Lee passed away and Lin never got his chance in Tinseltown. It was a major disappointment, one that haunted Lin until his death several years ago.

It was Lin who introduced Lee to one of his opera brothers, Tung Wai. A top Hong Kong fight choreographer, Tung



recently worked on *Bulletproof Monk* and the live-action *Scooby-Doo* film, but fans will know him best as the lad Lee whacks on the head in [Enter the Dragon](#) when he's asked, "How did it feel to you?" after doing a side kick.

"Bruce was a big influence on me," Tung says in Mandarin Chinese. "Before him, kung fu films were formulaic, but he was very natural and charming. It's funny — you feel like he's overacting, but it was easy to accept. In the late 1970s, many tried to impersonate him, but none could catch his essence and especially his movements.

"Lin introduced me to Lee at a coffee shop in the Hong Kong Hotel. He had a beard and wore a denim shirt and blue jeans. He didn't seem special to me. Everyone says he can do two-finger push-ups, but we're [from the] opera school and can also do that. We weren't impressed. But then he stood up, put his hands three hand lengths in front of his body and, keeping his legs straight, did push-ups by slowly bending his arms until his nose touched his hands. We were all shocked.

"Films don't capture his speed. And his feet — man, they were something else!"

### POLITICALLY INCORRECT

In 1964 fledgling director King Hu — who later became one of Hong Kong's best-known directors with films like *Come Drink With Me* and *A Touch of Zen* — wrote, directed and starred in *Sons of the Good Earth*, a war drama set during the Sino-

Japanese conflict. Because of that period's sensitive political climate, the local version of the movie was severely edited and could be seen in its entirety only in Malaysia and Singapore.

It took the clout of Bruce Lee to overcome Hong Kong's fear of producing anti-Japanese films with his second effort, the \$200,000 *Chinese Connection*. Although initially titled *The School of Chivalry* and released in Asia as *Fist of Fury*, the English-speaking world came to know it as *Chinese Connection* because of a labeling mistake that occurred when the prints were about to be shipped overseas. The Mandarin title, *Ching Wu Men*, reflects the film's significance. Men means "door," and in martial arts circles, it represents a gate to knowledge. So *Ching Wu Men* means "Entry Into the Ching Wu Martial Arts School," referring to the facility created by Shanghai martial arts legend Huo Yulin, on whom the film is loosely based.

The story revolves around the quest for revenge undertaken by Huo's student, Chen Chen (Lee), after his master dies. Lee's character arrives late for the funeral and endures ridicule from a visiting Japanese entourage headed by an effeminate interpreter. In the motion picture, the audience is treated to one of Hong Kong cinema's most important battle scenes. Aficionados also will note that the wimpy interpreter is played by Wei Pin Au, who in real life was imprisoned for stabbing his wife 10 times in the chest.

Most fans know that the final stunt in which Susuki flies backward across the yard was performed by [Jackie Chan](#). But few know the fight that took place in the Japanese school had two major impacts on Hong Kong film. First, after Lee is surrounded by the *karateka*, he kicks eight different people with eight different kicks in one unedited, wide-angle shot. You can tell it's Lee performing the kicks, and it's a success only because of his incredible skill. The scene works flawlessly, causing Lee to implement the same game plan in the final mass-mayhem scene in *Enter the Dragon*.

Second, it was the first fight in which stuntman Corey Yuen appeared. One of Chan's Beijing-opera brothers, Yuen is a premier martial arts film director in Hong Kong. He action-directed *X-Men* and directed *The Transporter* and [Jet Li's Fong Sai Yuk](#). Trivia tidbit: Yuen Woo-ping got his job on *The Matrix* because Corey Yuen had turned it down.

In *Chinese Connection*, Yuen is one of the Japanese attackers dressed in a *hakama*. Incidentally, the *hakama* are worn backward in the film as one of many insults Lee aimed at the Japanese martial arts. (Others include the shot of Lee defiantly standing proud with a photo of *shotokan* karate founder Gichin Funakoshi in the background, as well as the numerous occasions in which samurai swords are placed upside down in their stands, symbolizing a loss of knowledge.)

"In that sequence, [Lee] actually hit me and loosened one of my teeth, but I wasn't the only one," Yuen says. "You can see me in there in a close-up. I was young and didn't understand the way of things. He would share with us the philosophy of life and explain the philosophy of striking. He was very pow-

erful. He was also thought-provoking when you worked [with him] and talked to him, and he let you know what martial arts was really all about. I'd learned opera, dance and weapons but not martial arts. He told us what that was. So after knowing Bruce, we went to study real martial arts. We saw him as a god."

## THE DRAGON

After the success of his first two films, Lee started his own production company, Concord Pictures. His first effort under that banner was *Return of the Dragon* (aka [Way of the Dragon](#)), in which he plays Tang Lung, a country bumpkin from Hong Kong sent to help his restaurant-owning uncle in Italy, where he winds up fighting the Mafia.

The famous coliseum fight scene between Lee and [Chuck Norris](#) was supposed to have taken place with Joe Lewis. However, Lee and Lewis had had a falling out. As it was, it marked



Norris' best film fight to date. Several years after Lee's death, Norris claimed that if Lee had let him do the choreography, it would've been even better.

Just as with *Chinese Connection*, *Return of the Dragon* was Lee's way of showing his disdain for the way his people were expected to be subservient to Western powers. Lee had problems with racism in Hollywood, and that was reflected in his cinematic fights, in which he strove to show that the little Asian man was capable of defeating the big powers. It's no wonder audiences cheered when Lee defeated the cruel Japanese, did in the proud Russian and disposed of the sneaky, quiet American (Norris). Strangely, none of the white bad guys bested in Lee's films were British characters.







## THE ULTIMATE GAME

Lee's next project was to be *Game of Death*, but when Warner Bros. offered him a \$550,000 budget for *Enter the Dragon*, filming was suspended — forever. In *Enter the Dragon*, Lee played a secret agent sent by the British to break up a suspected drug ring organized by the inscrutable Han, who uses martial arts tournaments to recruit bodyguards and lackeys.

One could argue that the film was politically correct 20 years before it was politically correct to be so. However, having an Asian, a Caucasian and an African-American as cooperating heroes was probably Warner Bros.' way of appeasing the demographics, and it served as a sign that it was still too early to cast an Asian as the lead.

Most martial artists agree that *Enter the Dragon* is a great film, but its fights are very Hollywood. It's hard to imagine what the producers were thinking when they had John Saxon, who obviously lacked advanced fighting skills, take on Bolo Yeung. The movie also had minor problems with its choreography — like when Lee's back is flexing for the camera as he tries to open the elevator doors in the dungeon sequence. He suddenly steps, turns around and is attacked by a handful of thugs. Talk about close-up! Not only can you not see what anyone is doing, but, with his last sweeping backfist, the bad guy also tumbles in the opposite direction.

## FINAL FIGHTS

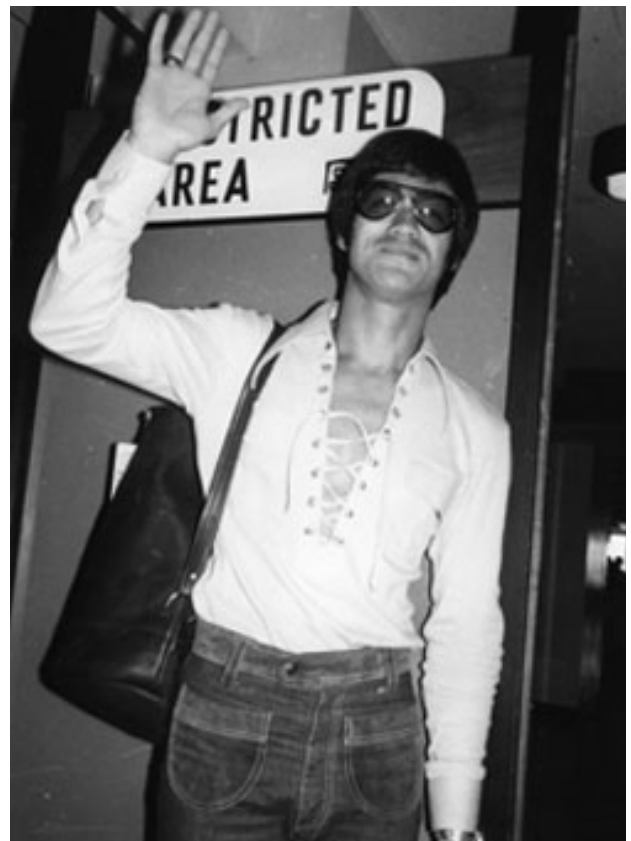
The 1978 release of *Game of Death* was less than thrilling, but the 25-minute "all Bruce" special edition shown on the AMC channel as part of a documentary about Lee and his final film was far different. The last half-hour of the production was all original footage of the *jeet kune do* founder taken while he scripted the film and engaged in quirky dialogue.

Lee obviously never intended for the lost footage to be part of the final cut of *Game of Death*. In the *nunchaku* sequence alone, mistakes are numerous and easily seen. Furthermore, some of the best posters for the production include photos in which Lee strikes Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in the face with a roundhouse kick and in which he executes a flying kick to his head. However, neither image appears in the film.

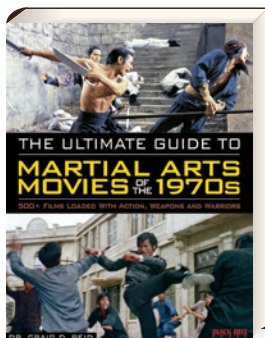
If you study that fight closely, you'll conclude it's a bit clumsy. Abdul-Jabbar's kicks waver like a noodle, his stances are rubbery and his fighting postures resemble those of an actor who has trained for three months.

Nevertheless, all five movies soar because of Lee's on-screen presence and charisma. Essentially a simple man who dreamed of using the martial arts to become a star, he succeeded in his goal of spreading the virtues of Chinese culture. In doing so, he left us with a wonderful film legacy, and for that, the martial arts world should be grateful. ✕

Dr. Craig D. Reid is the author of the beautiful and exhaustively researched martial arts movie book *The Ultimate Guide to Martial Arts Movies of the 1970s: 500+ Films Loaded With Action, Weapons and Warriors*. [BlackBeltMag.com](http://BlackBeltMag.com) also features several in-depth [reviews of Bruce Lee movies](#) by Reid.



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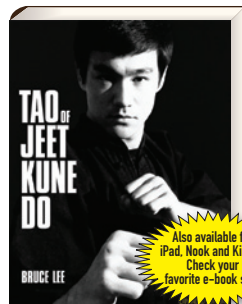


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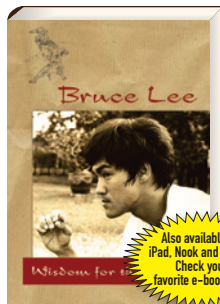
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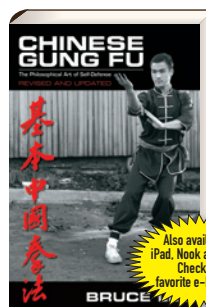
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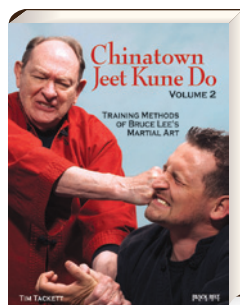
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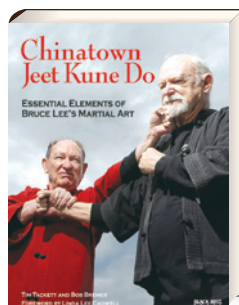


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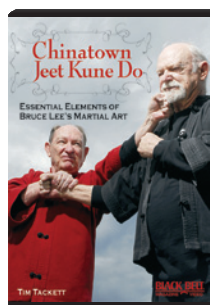


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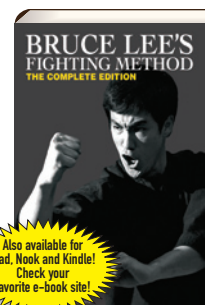


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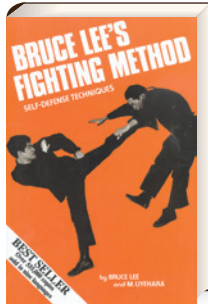
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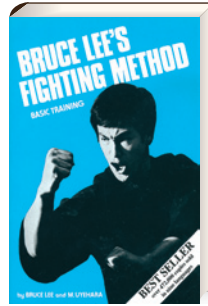
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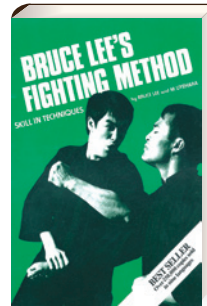
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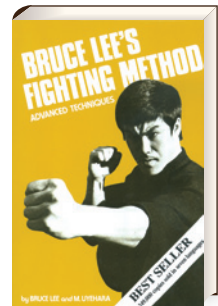
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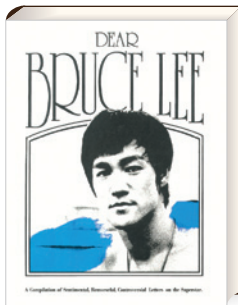
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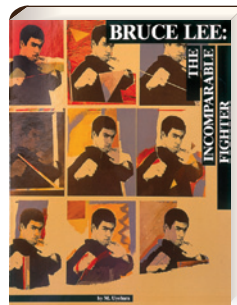
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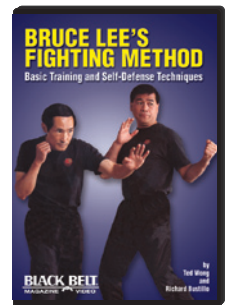
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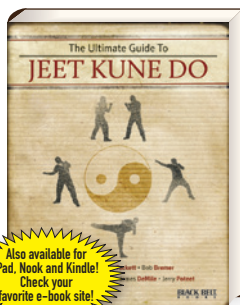


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