



**Name in English:** Bruce Lee  
**Name in Chinese:** 李小龙 [李小龍]  
**Name in Pinyin:** Lǐ Xiǎolóng  
**Gender:** Male  
**Birth Year:** 1940-1973  
**Birth Place:** San Francisco, California  
**Philanthropy:** Y

**Profession (s):** Actor, martial artist, philosopher, instructor

**Education:** B.A., Philosophy, 1963, University of Washington

**Award(s):** 1958, Boxing Champion; 1997, #100 top movie star, Empire Magazine's Top 100 Movie Stars of All Time; 1999, named one of the 100 most important people of the century, Time Magazine.

**Contribution(s):** Bruce Lee was an American icon who popularized the martial arts film genre and sparked a continuing interest in Asian martial arts and Asian cultures in general across the world. He wrote several books on the philosophy of martial arts and founded the Jeet Kune Do style of martial arts. To this day, Bruce Lee is seen as the most influential martial artist of all time by many people.

Bruce Lee was born in San Francisco in November 1940 while his parent's Cantonese opera troupe was performing there. He was a quarter German through his maternal grandfather. His family returned to Hong Kong when he was three months old and they lived under Japanese occupation during World War II. As a child and teenager he appeared in twenty Hong Kong films. He returned to the US in 1959 at the age of 18 and after a brief stay in San Francisco left to complete his high school education in Seattle while working at Ruby Chow's restaurant as a waiter. After completing high school he went to study at the University of Washington in Seattle. While there he began teaching martial arts to interested students including his future wife. His impressive martial arts demonstration at the 1964 Long Beach Karate Tournament was seen by Jay Sebring, a Hollywood hairstylist who brought the this outstanding young man to the attention of a friend, producer Bill Dozier, who'd formerly produced the "Batman" TV series. Dozier brought Lee onto his new television series, "The Green Hornet" as the sidekick, Kato. By the end of the show's first and only season, Lee was receiving more fan mail than the ostensible star, Van Williams. After guest appearances on several shows, Lee pitched his own series in 1971 called, "The Warrior" to Warner Brothers about the adventures of a Chinese martial artist in the Old West. His idea was turned down because a Chinese leading man was seen as too risky for Hollywood. After Lee had returned to Hong Kong in 1971 in frustration, David Carradine, a white man, ended up starring in what became the hit 1972 TV series, "Kung Fu" about a Chinese martial artist in the Old West. Warner Brothers has always denied any connection between Bruce Lee's proposal and "Kung Fu" the TV series.

Bruce Lee's lingering popularity as Kato in Hong Kong led to his first leading film role in, *The Big Boss* (1971), which catapulted him into stardom. The film broke box office records throughout Hong Kong and Asia. His next two films, *Fist of Fury* (1972) and *Way of the Dragon* (1972) had even bigger success. The excitement and money made in Asia finally convinced Warner Bros to co-produce *Enter the Dragon* in 1973. Bruce Lee died of a cerebral edema shortly before the film was released, but the film made him a star in the United States and all over the world. His Hong Kong films were re-released in America to equal success.

Bruce Lee was not simply a movie star, he broke the barriers of American stereotypes of the Chinese, which classified them as weak and docile. He proved that a Chinese man could be a lead actor in a popular American film and imbed himself firmly in American popular culture. Time Magazine named him one of the 100 most important people of the 20th century. His influence also extended to the film and sports stars that he taught in his Los Angeles martial arts school such as Steve McQueen, James Coburn, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the Los Angeles Lakers basketball star that played such a memorable role fighting Lee in *Game of Death*, the badly cobbled together film released in 1978 that Lee only managed to shoot a few scenes for in 1972 before he shelved it to make *Enter the Dragon* and subsequently died. He also trained with Chuck Norris who began his rise to film fame as a villain that Lee defeated in the Roman Coliseum in *Way of the Dragon*, and Joe Lewis, the first professional American karate champion.

**Philanthropy:** In 1967, Bruce Lee appeared on the United Cerebral Palsy Telethon to help raise money for victims of the disease. In 1972, he appeared with his son, Brandon, on the Hong Kong TVB Operation Relief telethon to raise funds to aid victims of a typhoon in Hong Kong for which he made a donation of Hong Kong \$10,000.

**External Links:** Jeff Yang, Dina Gan, Terry Hong. Eastern Standard Time: A Guide to Asian Influence on American Culture from Astro Boy to Zen Buddhism, Mariner Books, 1997

<http://www.bruceleefoundation.com/index.cfm?pid=10384>

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