

BRUCE LEE

LETTERS OF THE DRAGON

CORRESPONDENCE, 1958-1973

collected & composed by

madhuronda

1959

A Letter to an Unknown Friend⁴

April 29, 1959

The first friend I met after boarding the ship, turned out to be an Indian person. We had a nice time chatting. He asked me to teach him Cha-cha. After speaking for a while, he bumped into one of his friends, so I ended up alone by myself. So I returned to a room.

In this room I met with an elderly gentleman, Mr. Lok. Mr. Lok is a frequent traveler on these boats and he offered some pointers which I appreciated. I also met my school friend's older brother, Mr. Chang. We basically did everything together (we went in and out, activities, and so on, together). This person studies choy lay fut boxing⁵ and has a definite interest and admiration for Wing Chun.⁶ We even came to agree to sight-see together in Japan.



Bruce Lee poses for a picture with his father, Lee Hoi Chuen (left), in Hong Kong.

When you go to the bar for drinks, even Coca-Cola costs money. To me, I'd rather drink faucet water. The funniest of all, is when I went to shower; I didn't know that I could adjust the cold and hot water, so I only turned on the hot and it got hotter and hotter as I was showering until I couldn't take it any more. Then I turned it all the way to the cold water until I got frozen. Later on, when I went to the room, someone instructed me—then I understood that there was a “middle” setting! After I got in bed, I felt my whole bed swaying—very uncomfortable. I hope it won't make me sea-sick.

Right now it is 11:30 PM. I think I'd better sleep early, because tomorrow's breakfast is at 8:30 AM.

Monday, May 4, 1959

“Open the door and you see the mountain”⁷

The problem with the above statement is that if you try to be too direct, things don't turn out properly and it always backfires. The mouth says “yes,” but the heart says “no.”

Today is Monday the 4th. As the boat arrived to the shore, Peter⁸ came to receive me. Thanks to him, he took me on the train from Osaka directly to Tokyo for sightseeing.

Tokyo is really an extremely beautiful city. It's as pretty as any Western country. I've never seen so much automobile traffic, it's non-stop, pedestrians pushing and shoving, and the city is full of excitement.

The very colorful neon lights are constantly flickering and changing, showing plenty of images. Compared to Hong Kong, Hong Kong falls way behind!

After meeting with Peter's friends, they invited me to eat Japanese style chicken and rice—the taste is fabulous. Later on, I exchanged my Hong Kong dollars and bought a pair of shoes (very low price), three thick terry-cloth shirts and some scenic photos. Later on, they took me to listen to a music lounge. After listening to the music, we took the train back to the boat at approximately 10:30 PM.

Today is Tuesday, May 5th. I believe Peter has already gone back to Hong

1963

To Linda¹⁹

Oct. 20, 1963

To the sweetest girl, from the man who appreciates her.

Linda,

To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion, to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich; to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to bear all cheerfully, do all bravely, await occasions, hurry never.

In other words, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common.

Bruce

Notes

1. It is uncertain to whom Bruce Lee addressed this letter as all that remains is his first draft. However, given that he was in Saint Francis Xavier High School when it was written, and upon checking his daytime diary for November 30, 1958, we find the following entry—"Now I try to find out my career—whether as a doctor or another? If as a doctor I must study hard"—it is safe to assume that this letter was penned during this period of his life.

2. *Lee Shiu Loong* (or *Lee Shiu Lung*) literally translates as "Lee Little Dragon" (the surname always comes first in Chinese). This was the "stage name" given to Bruce when he first appeared in Hong Kong films. Bruce's birth name was Lee Jun Fan, and in his early school years he was called Lee Yuen Kam. At home with his family, Bruce's nickname was Sai Fon, literally "Little Phoenix." The English name Bruce was given to him by a nurse when he was born, but he did not use this name until after the age of twelve, when he attended a school where English was spoken.

3. Bruce Lee attended Saint Francis Xavier High School in Hong Kong during 1958, one year before he set out on his return to America.

4. Bruce Lee began to write this letter to a friend in Hong Kong to tell him of his experiences on the boat that was taking him to America for the first time since he was born there on November 27, 1940, some

1964

To Taky Kimura^{1*}

Process in Learning Gung Fu

★ Self-cultivation

The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained too. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.

Wishing to cultivate oneself, one first rectifies his heart (mind).

Wishing to rectify his heart, one seeks to be sincere in his thoughts.

Wishing to be sincere in his thoughts, one first extends to the utmost of his knowledge—such extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things.

Remark: It cannot be when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered.

A rectified mind is a mind immune to emotional influences—free from fear, anger, sorrow, anxiety, and even fond attachment—when the mind is not present, we look and do not see; we hear and do not understand; we eat and do not know the taste of what we eat.

Not allowing outside things to entangle this mind; in other words, outward changes do not move the mind. Its function lies in suppression of the senses, and on reduction of desire.

A gung fu man rests therein, and because he rests, he is at peace. Because he is at peace, he is quiet. One who is at peace and is quiet, no sorrow or harm can enter; therefore his inner power remains whole and his spirit intact.

—The nature of water is that if nothing is mixed with it, it remains clear;

To Linda

Posted from Kowloon, Hong Kong, on February 27, 1965, at 4:00 PM

Feb. 26, 1965

Linda,

Eight more days and I'll be in Seattle. Man, sometimes I wish I'd never made this trip.

I think I've lost weight; how much I've lost I'm not sure, but I can tell from the smallness of my face—you know me, it's always in the face.

Yes, I believe you should exercise more often in the future; right now, just take care of your health. According to your letters, Brandon boy must be pretty fat—I mean the way he eats.

Wait for the future trip to come—we'll buy the whole [of] Hong Kong. Be prepared for it. I know you'll enjoy this honeymoon trip.

I have a purse for your mother and if financial situation allows I might be able to pick up more stuffs for her. I'll try but you know the U.S. Customs, not to mention money problems. I'll use my judgment.

Today I'll go to the hair-dresser with your measurement plus hair. I hope to pick up a wig for you. They are not too expensive—considering it is real human hair. It runs around H.K. \$350 to \$450—around half the price of what they charge in U.S.

I have to wrap up some books for shipment now. Take very good care of yourself—see you in around a week.

Love,

Bruce

To Linda

Posted from Kowloon, Hong Kong, on February 27, 1965, at 4:00 PM

February 26, 1965

Posted from Kowloon, Hong Kong, on March 3, 1965, at noon

March 3, 1965

Linda,

Received your letter of Feb. 27

Strangely enough, March 6 happens to be also Saturday here in Hong Kong (I've just checked the U.S. calendar—it's also Saturday). At any rate, as far as I know, and it is written down on my plane ticket, that I'll leave on the 6th of March and arrive in San Francisco also on the same date, the 6th of March at nine something PM at night.

Immediately an hour later I'll then take Western Airlines and fly to Seattle, arriving at 10:07 PM. The flight number is 624y. This is the correct information up to date; however, I will call you long distance when I arrive at SF airport.

Too bad the color pictures didn't turn out—we'll have to find a better camera for Brandon boy.

It's the third today, three more days of [waiting before] my departure. I can't wait to be home again. I have a lot of things to talk to you [about].

I hope this letter will arrive on time—which I doubt very much. At any rate, I'll send it and we'll see. I'll call you at SF airport to be sure.

This afternoon I'm going to have tea with a producer, Mr. Tse, the husband of Auntie Mary. After that I'll be going to Mrs. Tso's house. I've been to her house every day since my arrival in Hong Kong.

Well, like I said, I've a lot to tell you and discuss with you.

Till then, my dearest wife.

With love from,

“China James Bond”

To Taky Kimura

Posted from Kowloon, Hong Kong, on May 10, 1965

1966

To George Lee

March 31, 1966

Dear George,

Just a letter to see how my favorite student is coming along—I'm sorry that I couldn't teach you as we planned because there is a slight change in the 20th Century Fox deal. Probably James Lee has told you about it; at any rate, "The Green Hornet" is going to be on the air this coming September.



Postcard, ca. 1966, showing Van Williams and Bruce Lee in and out of costume for their roles as the Green Hornet and Kato.

At present I'm taking acting lessons from [the] very well known Jeff Corey, the best drama coach here in Hollywood.

I'll be giving private lessons before the series starts. The prospective students are so far Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, James Garner, Don Gordon, and Vic Damone. The fee will be around \$25 an hour.

Understand that you are going to start with James again. It's nice [to hear this] and you should stick with it and go as often as you can. Keep asking questions and follow what I've told you that night.

I'm developing fully The 5 Ways of Attacking and even James doesn't know it. Next time when I see you I hope I'll have time to show you and teach you because George, you've got what it takes and your attitude certainly deserves the best.

"The Green Hornet" will start shooting at the end of May and I'll be busy like hell but the first chance I have, I'd like to take a trip to Oakland and we should go out to dinner.

Take care my friend and drop me a line when you have time. By the way, unless you know him well, do not give my address to [any of] the students.

Thanks,

Bruce

To Fred Sato²⁶

April 9, 1966

Dear Fred,

It might be a surprise but instead of writing you from Hong Kong, I am writing from Los Angeles. You see, "Batman" is such a hit (though I kind of think it silly) that "The Green Hornet" is sold without a pilot and script! In other words, the series will definitely be out this coming season, which is this coming September.

At present 20th Century Fox is sending me to drama school—the drama coach is Jeff Corey, the best here in Hollywood—at \$70 an hour (if I were to pay, I'll tell them I've got it!*). The lessons (three times a week) [are] doing me a lot of good and [are making me] more fluid with not-acting acting—a most difficult way to achieve unnatural naturalness. At any rate, we are to start shooting on the 23rd of May.

I'll be playing Kato (doesn't sound like a Chinaman, does it), the right hand man of the Green Hornet. Instead of carrying all kinds of weapons, this

1967

To George Lee

Tuesday, January 31, 1967

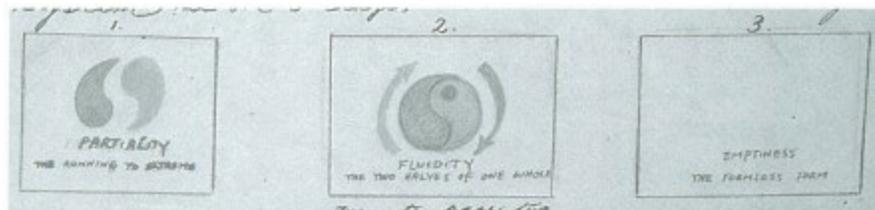
George,

I've been shooting "Batman" these [past] few days and [have been] busy like hell. I believe I should be able to find time to show your boy and his friends around the studio this coming Friday.

The Oklahoma appearance was great and I'm asked back for another one in Georgia.

That sign you made has created quite a hit—everyone admires your talent. If you have time, I'd like to make two requests for some stuffs that you can make for me. They are gadgets to put my system across.

First, I [would] like three signs for hanging, like pictures on a wall—slightly smaller than the sign you made for me. Here are the plans & ideas—this project by the way is to illustrate the thought behind my system—the 3 Stages.



Explanation for the Three Signs

(same black shining background as the sign you made)

First Sign

Here all we need is one red half and one gold half of the Yin Yang symbol. HOWEVER no dot is needed on either half; in other word, it is just plain red

To Taky Kimura⁸

Taky,

I've just rushed the tai kik wall chart form to you. Enclosed in the parcel was a Chinese jacket.

As I've mentioned, I've just got back from Oakland and James Lee is going to send you a lop sao apparatus with built-in resistance.

First and foremost, I like to impress a most important rule of teaching in your mind, and that is the economy of form. Follow this rule and you will NEVER feel like you have to ADD more and more so-called "sizzling" techniques to keep our students interested.

In order to explain "Economy of Form," I'll take a technique to illustrate the theory. Later on, this idea can be applied to any technique. Together with the idea of "The Three Stages Of A Technique" [1. synchronization of self, 2. synchronization with opponent, 3. under fighting condition] this program of teaching not only provides an endless routine of instruction, but a most efficient lesson plan that will bring results to ALL students. I've tested them here in LA and disregard how LITTLE we show each time, the students' interest is kept up because they have to eliminate the extra motions involved, and they feel great doing it. All right, back to the idea of "ECONOMY OF FORM."

To illustrate the idea, I'll take the pak sao (slapping hand)— basically, "ECONOMY OF MOTION" means ALL motions start from the by-jong position; secondly, HANDS ARE TO MOVE FIRST IF IT IS A HAND TECHNIQUE [FOOT FOLLOWS], FEET FIRST IF IT IS A FOOT TECHNIQUE.

So, emphasize the above "Two Truths" by practicing pak sao first in the touching hand manner—in other words, students in baijong position touching each other's hand—though in real combat, one will never start by touching hand, however, this touching hand position will ensure correct form in the beginning stage—economy of form, that is.

Each student must attack [in unison] FROM THE BAIJONG without any wasted motion. Now this has been an overlooked basic theory of utmost importance. If any student does his pak sao [or any technique for that matter]

1969

To William Cheung

Posted from Los Angeles on January 4, 1969

William,

I was looking over my old mail and found most of the letters you wrote me. The latest one, or the latest one that I found, has this address so I write this letter in hopes that even if you moved, somehow or another, this will reach you.

It has been nearly ten years now since I've been in the States and when I sit down some evening lost in my recollection of my memories, you are among one of those that often pop up. I sincerely hope you and your family are enjoying the best of everything.

I've lost faith in the Chinese classical arts... because basically all styles are products of land swimming... My line of training is more toward efficient street fighting with everything goes, wearing head gear, gloves, chest guard, shin/knee guards, etc.

During the last ten years, Chinese martial art has always been a major part of my activity, though I am now in a new field, the field of acting. My achievement in the martial art is most satisfying and the word "Chinese" has come a long way in the circle of martial art due to the fact that all three of the U.S. karate free-style champs are studying under me.¹¹

William, I've lost faith in the Chinese classical arts—though I still call mine Chinese—because basically all styles are products of land swimming, even the Wing Chun school. So my line of training is more toward efficient street fighting with everything goes, wearing head gear, gloves, chest guard, shin/knee guards, etc. For the past five years now I've been training the

1970

To Wong Shun-Leung²²

January 11, 1970

Dear Shun-leung,

It has been a long time since I last wrote to you. How are you? Alan Shaw's letter from Canada asks me to lend you my 8mm film. I am sorry about that. It is because I have lost it when I moved my home. That film is already very old and I seldom use it, so I have lost it. I am sorry for it.

Now I have bought a house in Bel-Air. It is about half an acre. There are many trees. It has the taste of a range. It is located on a hill top near Beverly Hills. Moreover, besides my son Brandon, I have had a daughter, Shannon, who is seven months old. Have you re-married? Please send my regards to your sisters.

Recently, I have organized a film production company. I have also written a story "The Silent Flute." James Coburn and I will act in it. Stirling Silliphant is the screen play writer. He is a famous screen play writer (*In the Heat of the Night*). We plan to make the first martial arts film in Hollywood. The prospect is good. About six months from now, the filming work will begin. All who participate in this film are my students. In the future, Steve McQueen may also work together with me. I am very excited about this plan.

As to martial art, I still practice daily. I teach my students and friends twice a week. It doesn't matter if they are Western boxers, tae kwon do practitioners or wrestlers, I will teach them as long as they are friendly and will not get uptight.

Since I started to practice realistically in 1966 (protectors, gloves, etc.) I feel that I had many prejudices before, and they are wrong. So I changed the name of the gist of my study to jeet kune do. Jeet kune do is only a name. The

To William Cheung

February 18, 1970

Dear William,

It is indeed a surprise to hear from you. Sorry to hear about your job in [the] Bureau of Census & Statistics; hope you have better luck in your next job. I'm sure you will land the most appropriate and gratifying job before long.

Regarding your friend "Sunny Ho"—I'm afraid without proper papers (which are necessary for employment) he would not go long. Plus the fact that Boston is thousands of miles away from here. I am in no power to help.

I guess you didn't know that two years ago I closed my three schools and concentrated on my film involvement and self-improvement. You learn a lot during teaching; however, seeing is not enough, you must do; knowing is not enough, you must apply. So here I'm back to enjoying my training and do some private lessons occasionally.

By the way, I'm doing a film *The Silent Flute* for Warner Bro. this fall in India. The picture is based on martial art and will be released in '72. You should enjoy it. I wrote the original story. The screenplay is a joint effort, headed by Stirling Silliphant (*In the Heat of the Night*), a most able screen writer here in Hollywood.

In closing, let me once more offer my best wishes and may the journey ahead be a most harmonious one for you.

Warm regards,

Bruce

To Linda²⁴

Posted from Gstaad, Switzerland, on February 20, 1970

Linda,

This letter would have gone to you much, much sooner. You see, I took some U.S. air-letters with me and wrote you while I was in Geneva. Of course, to

End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @

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