

# BRUCE LEE'S MARTIAL LEGACIES

KYLE BARROWMAN AND PAUL BOWMAN

Bruce Lee died in July 1973, just days before the release of *Enter the Dragon*, the film that would catapult him to global fame. After 45 years of enduring fame, the Martial Arts Studies Research Network paused to reflect on his media and martial legacies in its fourth annual conference, titled 'Bruce Lee's Cultural Legacies', which was held at Cardiff University, UK, on 11-12 July 2018.

This conference sought to explore and assess the impacts, effects and consequences of the images and ideas of and around Bruce Lee's films, TV programmes, writings, teachings and practices. The focus of the conference was not solely on his films and writings in isolation, but rather on their *impact* in such contexts as martial arts, popular culture, physical culture, philosophy, filmmaking, fight choreography, and so on.

For this special issue of *Martial Arts Studies*, we sought to present a selection of the works that focused in particular on Bruce Lee's martial legacies, as well as some broader ruminations on the potential significance of Bruce Lee in a variety of academic and popular contexts. The first article in this special issue, titled 'Bruce Lee and the Perfection of Martial Arts (Studies): An Exercise in Alterdisciplinarity', features an investigation conducted by Kyle Barrowman into the philosophical legacy of Bruce Lee's epochal essay 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate'. Whereas scholars have historically focused on Lee's inheritance of Eastern philosophy, Barrowman brings to light much of what has been missed as a result of this narrow focus in relation to Lee's affinities with Western philosophical traditions. In particular, Barrowman takes the baton from the late Stanley Cavell, who identified in the history of Western philosophy a tradition of perfectionism, and argues that Lee's philosophical enterprise vis-à-vis jeet kune do is resoundingly

## DOI

10.18573/mas.81

## KEYWORDS

Bruce Lee, martial arts, martial arts studies

## CITATION

Barrowman, Kyle and Bowman, Paul. 2019. 'Editorial: Bruce Lee's Martial Legacies'. *Martial Arts Studies* 8, 1-4. doi.org/10.18573/mas.81

perfectionist. Furthermore, Barrowman strives to demonstrate the probative value of perfectionist philosophy not merely in the realm of martial arts, but also in the realm of martial arts studies, arguing against some of the prevailing tendencies in academic scholarship generally and martial arts studies scholarship specifically. Ultimately, Barrowman implores the many practitioner-scholars in martial arts studies to take to heart Lee's perfectionist lessons both in their training and in their scholarship.

In the next article, titled 'Fighting Over Bruce Lee', Paul Bowman provides a critical response to Barrowman's call to the martial arts studies community. Playing the matador to Barrowman's bull, Bowman looks to evade the force of Barrowman's charges and resituate the conversations to be had – about Bruce Lee, martial arts, and martial arts studies – on decidedly non-perfectionist ground. Contrary to Barrowman's position on the need to fundamentally alter academic scholarship generally and martial arts studies scholarship specifically, Bowman rearticulates the major premises that have long informed work in cultural studies and his work on Bruce Lee in an effort to showcase the enduring productivity of poststructuralist-informed scholarship. In the process, Bowman takes up the issues both implicit and explicit in Barrowman's contribution and offers his own take on the current status of martial arts studies, the potential future developments that we should – and should not – encourage as a field, and the value of continuing to study the many legacies of Bruce Lee in the contexts of martial arts, philosophy, and even politics.

Switching gears, the third contribution to this special issue, titled 'From the Dragon to the Beast: The Martial Monk and Virtual Ninja as Actual Martial Artists', is an edited selection of a chapter from Chris Goto-Jones' provocative entry in the Martial Arts Studies Book Series, *The Virtual Ninja Manifesto* (2016), in which he discusses the Badiouian 'event' status of Bruce Lee's emergence as a popular culture icon alongside the similarly 'evental' gaming moment known as the 'Beast Event'. By virtue of an insightful trek through gaming history, Goto-Jones elucidates the martial components involved in the playing of martial arts video games, or MAVs. Focusing in particular on the 57-second gameplay sequence in the final round of the first match of the semi-final of the *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* (1999) competition at the Evolution World Championships 2004 in Pomona, California, in which Umehara Daigo staged a spectacular comeback victory and cemented his gaming legacy, Goto-Jones highlights the ways – culturally, ideologically, ethically, combatively – that the 'Beast Event' and the 'Bruce Lee Event', while participating in a transnational discursive space that features the martial arts (as practice, representation, simulation, simulacrum, and fantasy), seem also to represent markers in a sequential (or at least an episodic) cultural narrative about the significance and meaning of the martial arts in contemporary societies.

Taking a historical turn, in his article entitled 'Bruce Lee and the Invention of Jeet Kune Do: The Theory of Martial Creation', George Jennings explores the sociopolitical, psychological and physical prerequisites to creating a martial art. Using Bruce Lee's creation of jeet kune do as his primary case study, Jennings identifies the key components in Lee's creation of jeet kune do – chief among which is the

fact that creativity in martial arts is almost invariably linked to moments of crisis – and looks for the same components in the creative efforts of other iconoclasts before and after Lee. Going from Bruce Lee and his creation of jeet kune do back to Edward W. Barton-Wright's creation of bartitsu and up to Marisela Ugalde's creation of xilam, Jennings highlights the specific ways in which all three of these founders took personal and social crises as stimulus for creativity. Combining his historical analyses with insights from sociology and philosophy, Jennings offers a unique conception of creativity in martial arts as well as a new lens through which to view Lee and his art of jeet kune do.

Finally, in his article entitled 'Timing in Bruce Lee's Writings as Inspiration for Listening Musically to Hand Combat and Martial Arts Performance', Colin P. McGuire takes a musical trek through the combat philosophy outlined in Lee's *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. In an effort to understand more thoroughly Lee's thoughts on rhythm and timing, and in particular to more coherently elucidate Lee's key combative concept of broken rhythm, McGuire eschews text-based methodologies and endeavours to *listen to* rather than 'read' Lee's work. In the process, McGuire aims to clarify/correct some of Lee's musical terminology so as to better grasp the rhythmic components of jeet kune do and martial arts more broadly; additionally, McGuire challenges Lee's dismissal of forms training on musical grounds and demonstrates, with reference to fieldwork conducted at a Chinese-Canadian kung fu club, the potential combative utility in training percussion-driven choreographed forms, which has been overlooked by many martial arts scholars and practitioners, including Lee himself.

In addition to our feature articles, this issue of *Martial Arts Studies* also contains a conference report and a book review. In their review of the 'Bruce Lee's Cultural Legacies' conference, Xiujie Ma and Zizheng Yu offer their perspectives on all of the presentations delivered at the conference. From conference organizers Paul Bowman and Kyle Barrowman, to keynotes Matthew Polly and Li Siu Leung, to martial arts studies regulars Luke White and Wayne Wong, to martial arts studies newcomers Glen Mimura, Eric Pellerin and many more, Ma and Yu provide insightful remarks on the presenters and the ideas that they presented as well as encouraging thoughts on the future of martial arts studies and the enduring interest in the many legacies of Bruce Lee.

Alex Channon, meanwhile, offers an astute analysis of Janet O'Shea's recently published book, *Risk, Failure, Play: What Dance Reveals about Martial Arts Training* (Oxford University Press, 2019). Not only does Channon explicate the main concepts and arguments utilized and promulgated by O'Shea, he also identifies the productive avenues opened up by O'Shea's work, applies pressure to some of her formulations, and offers provocations to the wider martial arts studies community pertaining to some of the bigger issues at play throughout O'Shea's text. Ultimately, Channon argues, *Risk, Failure, Play* offers a compelling discussion of the social value of combat sports and makes an important contribution to the ever-growing field of martial arts studies, and he encourages scholars to take up the many subjects touched on by O'Shea and continue down the paths opened up and travelled by O'Shea in her text.

Though inspired by and largely revolving around Bruce Lee and his many (equally celebrated and contested) legacies, it is fitting that this special issue ends with an eye towards the future of martial arts studies. For, even as our feature contributors look back through history to the time in which Lee lived, the work that he made during his life, and the evolution of his martial arts practice throughout his life, each article finds in the legacies of Bruce Lee ideas, issues, and practices still worth thinking about – whether for the first time or from a new angle. If this issue is a testament to the vibrant scholarship currently being conducted in martial arts studies, it is equally a testament to the lasting influence of Bruce Lee on all martial arts discourses, be it as a provocateur or a muse, inspiration or challenge, ideal or cautionary tale. While there is, of course, far more that can – and should – be said about Bruce Lee in the context of martial arts studies, we hope that this issue provides scholars and practitioners alike with insightful and innovative ways of approaching the pasts and futures of both Bruce Lee and martial arts studies.

## ABOUT THE JOURNAL

**Martial Arts Studies** is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Cardiff University Press  
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

**Martial Arts Studies** is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.  
[cardiffuniversitypress.org](http://cardiffuniversitypress.org)

### Journal DOI

10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

### Issue DOI

10.18573/mas.i8

*Accepted for publication 30 June 2019*

**Martial Arts Studies**

Journal design by Hugh Griffiths

**MARTIALARTSSTUDIES.ORG**

**TWITTER.COM/MASTUDIES**

# MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

## EDITORS

Paul Bowman  
Benjamin N. Judkins

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Kyle Barrowman  
Qays Stetkevych

To discuss publication or to submit  
a paper please contact:

[martial.arts.studies@gmail.com](mailto:martial.arts.studies@gmail.com)

## EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch *University of York*  
Stephen Chan *SOAS*  
Greg Downey *Macquarie University*  
D.S. Farrer *University of Guam*  
Adam Frank *University of Central Arkansas*  
Thomas A. Green *Texas A&M University*  
T. J. Hinrichs *Cornell University*  
Leon Hunt *Brunel University London*  
Felipe P. Jocano Jr *University of the Philippines*  
Gina Marchetti *Hong Kong University*  
Meaghan Morris *The University of Sydney*  
Daniel Mroz *University of Ottawa*  
Meir Shahaar *Tel Aviv University*  
Dale Spencer *Carleton University*  
Douglas Wile *Alverno College*  
Phillip Zarrilli *Exeter University, Emeritus*