

# The Legend Lives On

A Generation Later, Bruce Lee's Legacy is Still Kicking

BY REX FENC

Picture the span of Asian American history as a play in several acts: an epic saga set against a backdrop of rich cultural resonance and decades of struggle and triumph. Its ensemble cast includes laborers, restaurateurs, artists, politicians and countless others from all backgrounds. Yet if one were asked to think of a single character whose impact on our story could not be rivaled, decades after he played his part and well after his time in the spotlight became the stuff of legend, many might still think of the same man.

Stage left. Enter the dragon.

Bruce Lee is the prototypical Asian American cultural icon and remains a source of both pride and consternation for Asian Americans like none other. His achievements in martial arts and Western cinema shaped both fields for decades, most notably introducing high-flying Hong Kong action films to the American moviegoer's palate.

While some lament that Lee's fists and signature whooping battle cries did much to pigeonhole Asian Americans into stereotypes, none can dispute that he was the first to break through the barriers in Hollywood and pave the way for many who followed him. As an Asian American leading man, Lee had no predecessor.

As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that now, almost 35 years to the day after his mysterious death at the age of 32, Lee's legacy has continued to thrive and inspire many Asian Americans. He was one of the first heroes and remains one of the greatest.

Decades after his death, Lee continues to make news. This month saw the unveiling of plans for a Seattle museum — the Bruce Lee Action Museum or BLAM — that would occupy a full city-block and cost \$50 million. (Lee lived in Seattle from 1959 to 1964.)

Plans for a Hong Kong museum dedicated to Lee are also in discussion, to complement the eight-foot-two-inch bronze statue that was erected on the city's harbor in 2005. Lee's two-story Hong Kong home was to be sold in July for as much as \$13 million to benefit victims of the Sichuan earthquake, but its philanthropist owner, responding to pleas from Lee's fans, decided instead to donate the property to the city so it can be turned into a museum.

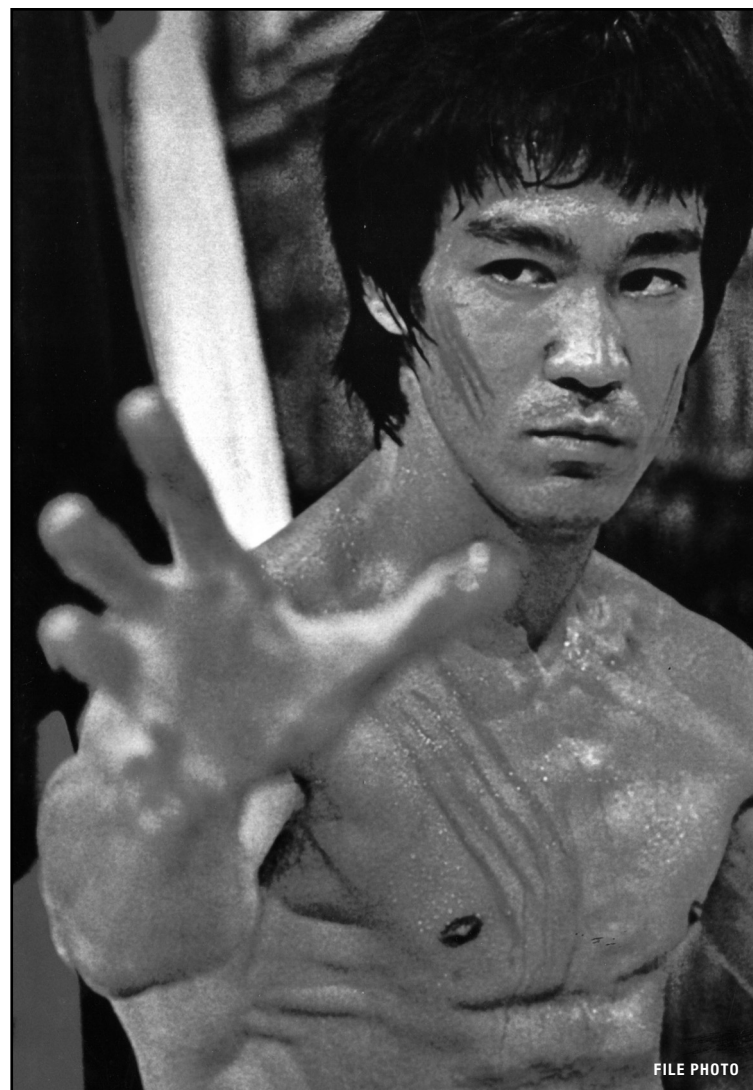
Lee endures as one of the most recognized Chinese people in history, and China has embraced the San Francisco-born actor as much as Chinese Americans. A Bruce Lee theme park with a memorial statue and hall is scheduled to open in his ancestral home of Shunde, China, in 2009. He is today celebrated in China as a symbol the nation's soci-

ety: China's national broadcaster is preparing a \$6.4 million, 40-part series on Lee to promote Chinese culture in advance of the Olympics.

Here in the United States, younger generations — even those born after his death — continue to embrace Lee as an icon. A group of students at the University of Washington in Seattle last year campaigned to have the campus memorialize Lee, who they say is perhaps, paradoxically, the school's most famous and at the same time least-known minority student. (Lee took classes at the University of

Washington in the 1960s but never graduated.)

University of Washington alumnus Jamil Suleman pioneered a class at the university called "Bruce Lee Dedication" upon learning that the martial arts legend had attended his alma mater.



FILE PHOTO

Bruce Lee's legend continues to endure because of his persona and fierce martial arts.

Washington in the 1960s but never graduated.)

University of Washington alumnus Jamil Suleman pioneered a class at the university called "Bruce Lee Dedication" upon learning that the martial arts legend had attended his alma mater.

"I was kind of shocked that I didn't know," Suleman said in an interview with *Seattle Weekly*, emphasizing that the point was not just to commission a statue but to use the university's nonrecognition of Lee as an example of ethnic insensitivities.

Director Justin Lin (*Better Luck Tomorrow*, *The Fast and The Furious: Tokyo Drift*) was also suffi-

ciently inspired by Lee to make the black comedy *Finishing the Game*, an official selection at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. Lin's film was based on the making of Lee's famously uncompleted final movie, *Game of Death*, which was cobbled together by the studio after Lee's demise using body doubles and stand-ins.

"*Enter the Dragon* comes out, it becomes an international hit, he becomes a superstar, and the studio is sitting there saying, 'Oh, we have 12 minutes of him fighting here,'" Lin said in a 2006 interview with

MTV. "Basically, they have this fake Bruce Lee walking around for 70 minutes, just so that they could use the 12 minutes of footage of the real Bruce Lee fighting."

*Finishing the Game* parodies the studio's bumbling efforts to complete the project using a cast of seemingly interchangeable Asian American men. The film offers a tongue-in-cheek critique of Hollywood's attitude toward Asian American actors by paying homage to one of the greatest.

"[Bruce Lee] transcends time and age," Lin told MTV. "It doesn't matter if you're a ten-year-old now or were in the '70s. He will always live on."

# APA Institute Builds Leadership Pipeline

BY STEFFI LAU

CUPERTINO, Calif. — The Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute (APALI) will hold its annual benefit dinner on August 7 at Dynasty Seafood Restaurant in Cupertino Square.

More than 300 people are expected to attend, including State Controller John Chiang and Majority Leader Alberto Torrico. Community leader Dr. Hsing Kung and the nonprofit advocacy group Asian Americans for Community Involvement will be honored, along with this year's graduating class of the Summer Youth Leadership Academy.

The organization, founded in 1997, is a leadership education institute devoted to civic education and creating a pipeline for underrepresented groups in public decision-making positions.

Many graduates have continued to put their skills to use, such as Vice Mayor of Mountain View Margaret Abe-Koga and Campbell City Councilmember Evan Low.

But Allan Liu, president of the Robert Chang Foundation, a third-year sponsor of the event, said the community still has a long way to go to close the representation gap.

"The amount of Asian American

leaders in office compared to the community is not proportional," Liu said, adding that APALI is capable of remedying this gap.

One of APALI's key activities is the Senior Fellows Program, a leadership, training and networking program serving public officials and American Leadership Forum fellows.

Launched in March 2006, the program currently has 50 Senior Fellows, including Randy Okamura. Okamura is an area manager for AT&T, which has supported APALI since 2002.

"I'd rather use the term 'support' because support comes in different forms, not just dollars," Okamura said. "We've had a relationship with APALI since its inception."

PG&E is another longtime sponsor. In the past, it has donated \$20,000, but this year it increased its donation to \$25,000 to support APALI's new environmental component.

"One of the things we found as a company that was so great about the organization was the number of people who go back to help the community," said PG&E government relations representative Papia Gambelin. "We found it important to have another partner in the community when educating about climate change and energy efficiency. We



COURTESY OF APALI

Lifelong leadership skills built upon friendship.