May L.-Y. Wong*

The statue of Bruce Lee in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum

A multimodal social semiotic study of Chinese nationalism and masculinity

https://doi.org/10.1515/css-2022-2083

Abstract: This article presents an analysis of the most recent statue of Bruce Lee displayed in the entrance to the Bruce Lee exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. The analysis primarily utilizes O'Toole's social semiotic framework as outlined in *The language of displayed art* (1994, 2011) in the tradition of systemic functional linguistics for analyzing the multimodality of sculpture, and provides insights into how the statue represents the kung fu legend Bruce Lee, who created the martial arts discipline of Jeet June Do. The article begins by first analyzing its sculptural features and then interprets these features against the sociocultural context of the city. The paper argues that the cultural background for the representation of Lee in the statue with its unique representational, modal, and compositional features testifies that meanings attributed to visual information in sculpture are to a large degree socially structured and culturally bound. It shows that the location of the statue and its features such as its gaze and torso can be better understood with reference to the political and cultural significance of Lee's legacies, thereby enhancing our understanding of the social semiotic nature of statues as a means of commemoration- and a significant part of our cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural heritage; Jeet Kune Do; martial arts/kung fu; multimodality; systemic functional linguistics

1 Introduction

Ever since the late twentieth century, when Bruce Lee pioneered the introduction of Chinese martial arts to Western audiences, countries across the globe have witnessed an unprecedented interest in Kung Fu. Lee was born in San Francisco

***Corresponding author: May L.-Y. Wong**, School of English, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China, E-mail: wlymay@gmail.com

in 1940, the child of Chinese Opera stars. The family returned to Hong Kong in 1941, where Lee grew up under Japanese occupation and then British colonialism. Sent back to the USA for schooling, Lee emerged as a Hollywood phenomenon in the short-lived television series *The Green Hornet*. Lee returned to Hong Kong in 1971, where he made a series of martial arts films, including *Fists of Fury* and *Game of Death*. He died in 1973 at the age of 32.[1] To commemorate Lee, the late martial artist and founder of the Jeet Kune Do (JKD) combat style,[2] six statues have been erected in different parts of the world.

The first statue of Bruce Lee was unveiled on November 26, 2005, in the Bosnian city of Mostar. The life-size 1.68-meter statue (designed by Ivan Fijolić) was erected as "a symbol of the fight against ethnic divisions" (*BBC News* 2005b) in the city that witnessed fierce fighting between rival ethnic factions (Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs).

A day after the unveiling of this statue of Lee, the second statue of the martial arts legend, which was created by Cao Chong'en, was put on display on the Tsim Sha Tsui promenade in Hong Kong to mark the 65th anniversary of his birth. As inscribed on the plinth of the two-meter-high statue, it honors Lee as "Chinese film's bright star of the century" (*BBC News* 2005b). The statue was funded by the city's Bruce Lee Club, who chose their favorite design out of a shortlist of three on the Internet, all featuring Lee's classic defensive pose and his signature weapon, the nunchaku.

Less than a decade later, four more statues were erected to honor the legacies of Bruce Lee, and as with the first two statues, they are made in bronze, depicting Lee in a fighting position and with a bare torso. At 18 m high, the third statue (also crafted by Cao Chong'en) is by far the largest in the world and, since 2010, has been located at the Bruce Lee Paradise theme park in Shunde, the ancestral hometown of Lee's family in the Guangdong province of China. One year later, Shunde donated a two-meter-high replica of the Shunde statue of Bruce Lee (making this the fourth statue of Lee) to the city council of Kogarah in New South Wales, Australia, to mark the one-year

1 For a comprehensive biographical account of Bruce Lee, see, among others, Lee (1978, 1989), Little (1996, 2000a), Miller (2010), Mochizuki (2006), and Thomas (1994).

2 While phrases such as "combat style" or "a style of martial arts" are used to refer to JKD in this study, Lee (1971: 24; cited in Bowman 2013: 67) stresses that JKD is by no means a "style" on the grounds that "there is no series of rules or classification of technique that constitutes a distinct 'Jeet Kune Do' method of fighting"; rather JKD requires that "through instinctive body feeling, each of us 'knows' our own most efficient and dynamic manner of achieving effective leverage, balance in motion, economical use of energy, etc." See Section 5.2 for a more elaborate description of JKD.

anniversary of its Friendship City Agreement (Moss 2015). The fifth statue, also two meters high, is located in Chinatown in Los Angeles. It was created by artist Zhong Zhiyuan in Guangdong, China, and transported to LA at the instigation of Lee's daughter, Shannon Lee (Fassbender 2021). It is the first such statue of Bruce Lee in the USA (Shyong 2013), despite his having been born there and the level of fame he achieved. The sixth and most recent is located in Hong Kong and stands at 3.5 meters high. It was designed by famous local sculptor Chu Tat-shing and depicts a powerful side-kicking image of Lee. Unlike the other Bruce Lee statues, it is located indoors as part of the Bruce Lee exhibition held in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum.

In this article, it is the giant sixth statue that is being analyzed. The statue is worth studying as it is one that is located in Lee's hometown, where he moved as a child and later developed his career, and it is the only Bruce Lee statue that is not located in the open but in an indoor installation at the entrance of the city's Heritage Museum. NB: this content is already in the following paragraph.

The analysis primarily utilizes O'Toole's (1994, 2011) framework for the "language" of sculptures. It begins by describing the features of the statue from a general analytical perspective, and then interprets these features by looking at the specific sociocultural context in which the statue can be understood more thoroughly in terms of Chinese nationalism and masculinity. In doing so, the article seeks to enhance our understanding of the social semiotic nature of statues as a means of commemoration and preservation of cultural heritage.

2 The data: the statue of Bruce Lee

As noted above, the statue under examination in this article is located in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, which had organized the largest Bruce Lee exhibition ever staged in the city, running for around seven years (20 July 2013–31 December 2020). After a revamp, it opened again in the second half of 2021 and is expected to run through to 2026. It was originally conceived to mark the 40th anniversary of Lee's untimely passing at 32, as part of the government's wider pledge to engage in heritage conservation in postcolonial Hong Kong (Lu 2009: 269).[3] The statue itself is situated on the landing of a straight stairway at the

3 See also the Heritage Museum's overview of the exhibition at https://www.heritagemuseum.gov.hk/en_US/web/hm/exhibitions/data/exid209.html (accessed 10 August 2022).

Figure 1: A close-up image of the statue of Bruce Lee at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (™ & © Bruce Lee Enterprises, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Designed and Produced by Chu Tak Shing).

entrance of the museum. It captures the image of Bruce Lee at the moment of a leg strike, a directed physical attack using the leg commonly employed in martial arts and combat sports. One can see that he is wearing a traditional Chinese martial arts uniform (without a top). Behind the statue are five different banners giving the name of the exhibition, *Bruce Lee: Kung Fu · Art · Life*, written in both Chinese and English. A close-up image of the statue is shown in Figure 1; an image giving a sense of its size in relation to viewers is shown in Figure 2; and an image showing the stairway leading to the statue is given in Figure 3.

3 A social semiotic perspective of sculptures: O'Toole's (1994, 2011) model

According to O'Toole, a social semiotic framework involves "both *what* a culture talks about and the means and style of expression it employs" (2011: 43, original emphasis). It does not therefore come as a surprise that O'Toole's approach to understanding the meanings of displayed art (paintings, sculpture, and architecture) relies heavily on the systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), which attaches equal weight to features of a

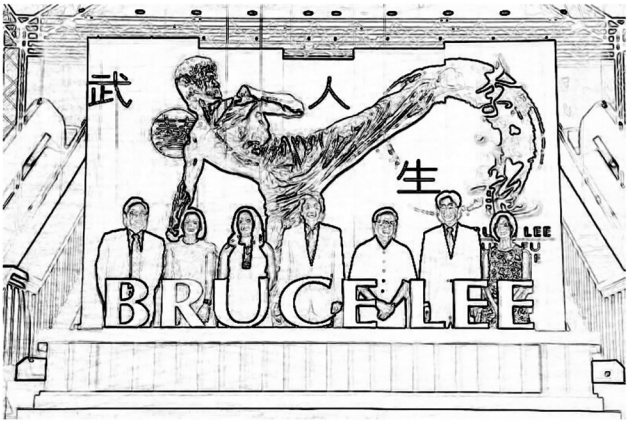

Figure 2: An image of the statue of Bruce Lee showing its size in relation to visitors.[4]

semiotic system (e.g. language, visual imagery, gestures, moving images, music, material artefacts) and to features of context in which these semiotic systems operate in isolation and in various combinations. The semiotic system of language, for example, posits that any communicative situation entails three main things: (i) *Field*: the nature of the communicative event, including the subject matter involved; (ii) *Tenor*: the relations of the participants in the communicative situation; and (iii) *Mode*: the medium through which the communication is accomplished, including speech, writing, and computer-mediated communication. These communicative features correspond to three metafunctions of the language system, namely the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function, respectively.

In applying the SFL concepts of meaning for analyzing the meanings construed by the semiotic resources of displayed art, O'Toole proposes a somewhat different terminology, although, functionally speaking, these "new" terms are more or less the same as the SFL ones. In O'Toole's model, the Representational (ideational) function deals with the construal of experience, including events, things, and circumstances; the Modal (interpersonal) function is mainly concerned with the enactment of social relations, including subjective attitudes, power, and status; and the Compositional (textual) function has to do with the way in which the semiotic resources are organized into a meaningful whole.

4 For copyright reasons the image is not reproduced here, but only represented as a diagram. The reader is invited to view it online at: https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201307/19/P201307190587_photo_1055983.htm (accessed 10 August 2022).

Figure 3: An image of the statue of Bruce Lee showing the stairway leading to it (™ & © Bruce Lee Enterprises, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Designed and Produced by Chu Tak Shing).

When analyzing sculptures, O'Toole argues that one has to ensure a certain degree of objectivity in their interpretation by "weighing various sets of objective factors, systemic choices, which have a universal validity for the art of sculpture" (2011: 44). There is no question that different choices of any semiotic system are made in different contexts of situation. In other words, those choices are in some way motivated by certain relevant details of the context in a meaning-making process. Hence, one has to gain access to an artwork's relevant context in order to make sense of the choices that have been made in its design. In this article, in interpreting the Bruce Lee statue and understanding the meanings it construes, the analysis first describes the choices that are made in relation to the semiotic resources of displayed art (see Section 4), and then moves on to interpret those choices by delving into the relevant sociocultural context in which the statue is most likely to be recognized as functioning in some way (see Section 5).

O'Toole's analytical framework for sculpture is presented in Table 1. It is worth noting that O'Toole introduces the concept of a rank scale, which can be conceived of as a kind of hierarchical order into which the constituent components of a material artifact are arranged for close scrutiny. In such an analysis, the starting point is always the Work, or the material object itself, which is composed of one or more Figures, which are composed of one or more Members. Moving

Table 1: O'Toole's framework for analyzing sculpture (2011: 34).

	Representational function	**Modal function**	**Compositional function**
WORK	*Process* (action/event/existence/relation)	*Scale* (to human)	*Volume* (relation to space)
	Theme (religious/magic/civic/political)	*Mass*	*Proportion* (relation to setting)
	Peripeteia (narrative turning point)	*Equilibrium*	*Independence*
		Palpability	*Openness/closure*
		"Address"	*Fixed/mobile*
		Modality	*Cohesion*
		Message	*Material*
FIGURE	*Participants* (agents/patients/existents)	*Scale*	*Relative position to gestalt*
	Body (anthropomorphic/zoomorphic/biomorphic/inorganic)	*Mass*	*Parallelism*
	Act	*Equilibrium*	*Static/dynamic*
	Movement/stasis	*Address*	*Fixed/mobile*
	Position	*Line*	*Rhythm*
		Solidity	*Material*
		Relation to light	
		Characterization	
		Expressiveness	
		Vitality	
MEMBER	*Basic physical forms* (parts of the body/objects/natural forms/machine parts/geometric forms)	*Fullness of realization* (detailed/stylized/attenuated/abstract)	*Texture*
	Drapery	*Raw/polished*	*Rhythmic relations*
		Stress factors	*Material qualities*

from Work to Member, the analysis in this article beings with the whole statue under examination, and then zooms in on the finest detail of its components in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the makeup of the whole statue.

4 Analyzing the Bruce Lee statue

4.1 Representational features

The statue at the entrance of the Heritage Museum presents a single figure. For this reason, my analysis of Work with that of Figure will be combined and an

analysis of features at the rank of Member will be presented where relevant. Following Bowcher and Liang (2014), at the rank of Work, the Representational features relate to the "Process," "Theme," and "Peripeteia" of the statue, and at the rank of Figure to "Participants," "Body," "Act," "Movement/Stasis," and "Position."

The Bruce Lee statue as a sculpture of a single figure presents a perfect example of what O'Toole calls "a construal of a representative act" (2011: 42). He is standing on his right foot with his left foot raised up high. This is a dynamic posture suggestive of combat and physical training. The way his body is depicted is life-like, or in other words, anthropomorphic.

Analysis at the level of Member involves looking at the parts of a sculptured figure. The pants and belt Lee wears are part of the classic Chinese martial arts uniform (usually with a sleeveless matching top), with the drapery clearly molded. The sculpture replicates the appearance of Bruce Lee in his Kung Fu films, where he is a hero fighting off villains (typically Caucasian people) in order to protect his fellow Chinese.

4.2 Modal features

Under the Modal function, several categories taken from O'Toole's model will be considered to examine how the Bruce Lee sculpture engages the viewers and the space.

Scale: The scale of sculptures is often judged in relation to that of the human body. The larger-than-life scale that can be seen in the Bruce Lee statue (see Figure 2) has a functional significance: as Bowcher and Liang put it, scaling up the size of a sculpture to make the subject look much bigger than an ordinary human being "not only gives physical strength but also a heroic essence to the subject" (2014: 13).

Mass: With regard to the center of gravity, with Lee standing on only one foot (his right foot), the statue has its gravity from the waist down, which is further balanced by the positioning of his lowered right arm. The statue is molded in bronze as its material and stabilized by the rectangular, granite plinth. Furthermore, the sculpture involves enormous interplay with space, as the whole body forms a 'Y' shape against the imaginary space created by the dimensions of the plinth.

Equilibrium: The statue is most definitely earthbound ("Chthonic"), with a very thin plinth in comparison with the size of the sculpture. It is located at the top of a stairway surrounded by ascending and descending escalators (see Figure 3). At the bottom of the stairway, there is a barrier to prevent visitors

from touching the sculpture ("Palpability"). Thus the statue is constructed so that viewers cannot directly engage with it or stand next to it. Not only are we not allowed to touch it, but the height of the statue also tends to suggest that the visitor is meant to view it from a distance – to contemplate it – rather than glancing at it "causally in passing" (O'Toole 2011: 40), as happens with the civic statue of Bruce Lee positioned on the promenade in Tsim Sha Tsui, one of the bustling districts in Hong Kong frequented by tourists from all over the world.

Address: Address in relation to sculptures is mainly concerned with the way the sculpture "addresses" the viewer with its Face, Stance, and Gaze and with its actual location. Looking slightly upwards and ahead into the distance, the figure does not make eye contact with the viewers and is thus set apart from the public. Meanwhile, the depiction characterizes Lee ("Characterization") as calm and sober due to the way in which his facial expression is sculpted, with lips tightly pressed together and a slight frown creasing the forehead above his eyes.

The stairway leading to the statue also enacts a type of "Address." Placing Lee at the highest step of the stairway signifies that the subject of the statue is metaphorically of a "higher," iconic status as a famed actor performing on the stage, and walking toward the stairway involves the visitor getting closer to pay their respects to their "idol" before entering the museum. This suggests a relatively intimate relation between this statue and the viewers.

Modality: With Lee represented in a very life-like manner (albeit larger than life in terms of scale), the status greatly resembles reality, and hence constitutes an authentic representation ("Authenticity").

At the rank of Member, the statue presents Lee in a detailed manner. Features including his hair lines, facial expression, torso, hands, arms, legs, and the pants he wears are clearly and finely shown, vividly allowing visitors to remember the numerous combat scenes in films starring Lee.

Expressiveness: The expression on the statue's face is almost one of calm contemplation. We say "almost" here because the very slight furrowing of the brow gives the face a somewhat serious expression. The seriousness is reinforced by the way his eyes look into the distance and the way his lips are tightly pressed together, as already noted.

Relation to lights: Slight beams of light projected from the two sets of overhead stage lights highlight the calm and seriousness of the statue's face and the elegance and control of the leg-strike pose. With the light, the veins on the figure's left arm up to his shoulder clearly stand out, signifying the power of physical strength.

Message: The message is thus both a declaration of respect for an individual, a famous actor, as represented by the statue, and a statement that this is

someone who is greater than the average person, a cultural icon who is worthy of respect, admiration, and reverence.

4.3 Compositional features

From the theoretical framework outlined above, the following four compositional features are directly relevant to the statue of Bruce Lee under analysis.

Volume in relation to space and *Proportion in relation to setting*: The statue is located at the museum entrance and was unveiled on 20 July 2013 as a commemoration of Bruce Lee's legacy exactly forty years after his death. The exhibition is hosted in a thematic gallery of the museum and is the largest of its kind compared with the city's other similar exhibitions on Bruce Lee in the past.

As noted above, the statue is located on the highest level of the steps of a stairway leading to it. Immediately behind the statue is a series of five vertical banners, carrying the verbal text (in both English and Chinese) of the name of the exhibition. The entire space occupied by these five banners is slightly larger than and away from that of the sculpture, serving as a backdrop for the statue. In other words, the statue is not dependent on anything ("Independence"). Its location on a platformed area of the entrance with the exhibition banners set a little further away at the back, and only one set of stairs leading to it, make the immediate area of the statue a relatively closed one ("Closeness").

Materials: This statue uses bronze for the body of Bruce Lee and granite for the plinth. Bronze has been one of the most widely used metallic materials for sculpture. According to O'Toole, "the hard, unyielding bronze shows every sign of the intense energy that went into their modeling," with the shiny surface "accentuating the highlights and furrows in the flesh" (1994: 62–63). This is particularly important for the statue commemorating Bruce Lee as a martial arts guru whose muscular body bears testament to strenuous physical training.

Parallelism & Rhythm: This sculpture has a rectangular plinth supporting a figure, which taken together form a largely symmetrical "Y" shape. There is thus a sense of parallelism and rhythmic repetition established in the length of the plinth and the horizontality of the statue itself. There is also a sense of rhythm established by the layering of the five banners behind the statue and the layering of the steps leading to the statue. The statue is thus the focal point of the grounds both in the sense that it rests on the highest level of the stairway vertically and represents the central point of the backdrop horizontally. The focus is reinforced by the stage lights being directed toward the center of the statue.

Cohesion: The cohesion of the statue comes mainly from its materials and connection with the setting. As Bowcher and Liang (2014: 16) note, bronze is generally regarded as construing a sense of tradition and timelessness, and granite a sense of strength and durability. There is thus a sense of cohesion established by the degree of durability of the materials used in this sculpture and its location as the focal point of the grounds and the cultural heritage of Bruce Lee in perpetuity. A spiritual cohesion is also established between the statue, the Heritage Museum, and Lee's hometown (Hong Kong), all of which are memorial places of Lee's legacy.

5 Sociocultural interpretation of the multimodal social semiotic analysis

In the following, I will show that the location of the statue and the features of the sculpture, such as its gaze and torso, can be better understood with reference to the sociopolitical and cultural significance of Lee's legacy, thereby enhancing our understanding of the social semiotic nature of statues as a means of commemoration.

5.1 The location

The location of the Bruce Lee statue under scrutiny has been carefully thought out. As noted earlier, Lee is a heroic figure and honored in several public monuments in different parts of the world. While these public statues are all located in massive squares and parks, the fact that the statue being analyzed is located in the entrance of the Heritage Museum allows the figure of Lee to be at the center of visitors' attention. As we have seen, modal features such as scale and relation to light and compositional features such as rhythmic relations and parallelism are used to cohere naturally with the environment as well as to highlight the characteristics of Bruce Lee as a salient figure worthy of our contemplation and reverence.

After years of trying unsuccessfully to turn Lee's city home into a museum, he is finally getting the retrospective exhibition that his gargantuan legacy deserves. Visitors to the museum are able to view his photos, film props, handwritten notes, and poetry, along with the 3.5 m bronze statue of the man himself at the entrance to the exhibition. Indeed, the exhibition can be viewed

as an important feature of the context that helps us to understand the statue in a more insightful way than viewing it in isolation.

As suggested in the title of the exhibition, the three elements – Kung Fu, art, and life – draw our attention to the significance of constructing the giant statue as a means of commemorating Lee's philosophy of life, his achievements, and his influences on martial arts and the art of film. In Little's (1999) *Artist of life*, he comments on how Bruce Lee was an intense man full of energy and enthusiasm for life and knowledge of Kung Fu, philosophy, psychology, poetry, JKD, acting, and, most importantly, self-improvement. In fact, the book title comes from a telling statement once spoken by Bruce Lee himself: "Basically, I have always been a martial artist by choice and actor by profession. But above all, I am hoping to actualize myself to be an artist of life along the away" (Little 1999: xiii). "Artist of life," in Little's (1999: xiii) definition, refers to a process of enriching oneself through the use of their continuous questioning and independent judgement, and seeking to fully actualize oneself as a total human being, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Lee's positive outlook on life is also evident in his poems as part of the memorabilia displayed in the museum exhibition. As illustrated in the following poem, Lee injects new life into a dying leaf by turning it into a bookmark.

> *The Falling Leaf*
> The wind is in high frolic with the rain.
> Outside the garden a little yellow leaf
> Clinging desperately to its mother branch.
> I pick up the leaf
> And put it in the book,
> Giving it a home. (Bruce Lee, cited in Little 1999: xiii)

Based on a selection of Lee's quotations as a result of his thoughts evolved and refined over the years about familiar and important aspects of life, Little (2000b) demonstrates how Lee's statements on life reflect his objection to blind obedience to external authority, awakening people to the problems inherent in conventional assumptions. Those aphorisms are a vital part of the cultural heritage of Lee, which not only has profound implications for the removal of artificial barriers to nationality, ethnicity, and class structure globally, but was the rationale behind the display of the first monument to Bruce Lee in Mostar, Bosnia mentioned at the beginning of this article. According to the organizers, the statue was to honor Lee as "the universal symbol of peace" (Avgita 2007: 221), serving as a "rebuke to the ongoing use of public spaces to glorify the country's competing nationalisms" (Zaitchik 2006). It is critical that Lee was neither Croatian, Serb, nor Muslim, and that his statue faced North, favoring neither East

nor West in the Bosnian city that had been divided and at war over differing identities. This suggests that Bruce Lee's stature as a popular cultural icon is international (Eschen 2006: 56). Historian Vijay Prashad (2001, 2003) also discusses the global significance of Lee for popularizing the practice of martial arts worldwide, "appealing not only to Chinese communities, as his primary audience, but also other minority communities in the West" (Teo 2009: 77). However, taking into consideration that his career and status all stemmed from the series of films that he made in Hong Kong, positioning his statue in the city's Heritage Museum seems to be a justifiable decision and particularly well-suited for stressing his cultural heritage across multiple continents with memorabilia sourced from abroad.

More broadly, positioning this statue of Lee (and another public statue depicting him) in the city of Hong Kong can remind visitors of his contribution and the heroic deeds achieved as a rebuke to the image of physically weak, innately subservient Chinese men once propagated in the West which was indicative of the early years of political situation of the colonized city under British rule. Kaminsky (1982) notes that Lee's films typically foreground the uniqueness of colonial Hong Kong and considers that these films typically express anti-imperialist sentiments by playing out fantasies that would "give the satisfaction of revenge and the opportunity to earn the respect of others who witness the performance of superman agility" (Kaminsky 1982: 138), serving as a way of redressing the problem of social injustice as well as helping to construct national identity among the Chinese audience and a sense of pride in their history.[5] Specifically, Shu (2003: 53) argues that Lee embodies "a kind of nationalism in his own physical presence"; as a symbol of indigenous virtue and strength, Lee symbolizes "a Chinese nationalism that was mixed with Confucian-based morality, filial piety, individual dignity, brotherhood and national honor" (Lu et al. 2014: 324). Indeed, as will be outlined in the next section, the Heritage Museum statue represents Lee as a promising individual full of Chinese masculinity and vision, which seems to reflect local ideological leanings toward Lee.

5 While Lee did not admit outright that he was "anticolonial," when he planned *The Way of the Dragon*, he told his mother, "Mom, I'm an Oriental person, therefore, I have to defeat all the whites in the film" (Thomas 1994: 146), giving us some hints about his attitudes toward Western imperialism. The origins of his anti-imperial thoughts may be traced back to his early frustrations of breaking into Hollywood. The studio executives blocked his attempts to develop his own television series after Lee played his part in *The Green Hornet*, so he returned to Hong Kong to launch his adult career in 1971. He later wrote in a Taiwanese newspaper in 1972, "I am a yellow-faced Chinese, I cannot possibly become an idol for Caucasians" (Little 1997: 128).

5.2 A single-figure representation

The single-figure representation in Lee's hometown and, along with this, the construction of a well-lit area with steps leading to the statue present Lee as almost godlike. This is supported by attitudes surrounding Bruce Lee at certain times and by certain groups of people throughout contemporary history (see, among others, Bowman 2010; Green and Svinth 2010).

The most striking Member feature of this single-figure representation is the sculpture of his fighting stance, which is somewhat different from the classic – defensive – fighting pose adopted by the other five statues of Lee. In this case, the figure's pose in conjunction with the strong muscular bodily features of the upper part of the body suggests two phases of the action, a Peripeteia in O'Toole's terms (2011: 42), that epitomizes both what has preceded – here, rigorous physical training and military discipline – and what follows – the moment of a powerful strike as a form of attack.

While the representation of Lee in the museum sculpture is rather unusual compared with the other five statues, kicking – together with punching, trapping, and ground fight – is one of the four ranges of combat in JKD, which was developed by Bruce Lee as a street-effective form of combat (Tucker 2011: 19). When Lee designed JKD in the late 1960s, he was the first martial artist to include elements of basic boxing principles from the West to create a highly innovative and syncretic form of Kung Fu, blending traditional martial arts modified from Wing Chun techniques with footwork timing and rhythm from Western boxing (Lee 1975).[6] JKD does not always promote using the fist because it can damage the hand,[7] and as a consequence fast kicks are widely considered as among the signature Kung Fu moves in all of Lee's films (Cheung 2003). Furthermore, in the JKD system, there is very little emphasis on self-defense; yet an individual getting involved in a street situation – just as Lee always did in his films – is expected to fight in the manner that favors the element of surprise to interrupt

6 The true science of the JKD system stresses both "simplicity" (Green and Svinth 2010: 207) and "spontaneity" (Bowman 2010: 188). Lee felt that traditional martial art forms were too static and rigid in their delivery and defied the flow of universal principle. He once put a miniature tombstone at the entrance of his school in Los Angeles Chinatown, inscribed with the message, "In memory of a once fluid man, crammed and distorted by the classical mess," symbolizing the stifling traditions and formalities of the past (Lee 1975: 17). By transcending styles and forms, Lee's JKD "utilizes all ways and means to serve its end" (Vaughn and Lee 1986: 86).

7 Lee (1971: 24; cited in Bowman 2013: 66) specifically points out that although in literal terms, "jeet" means 'to intercept or to stop,' "kune" is 'fist,' and "do" refers to the way or principle, "'Jeet Kune Do' is merely a convenient name. I am not interested [in] the term itself; I am interested in its effect of liberation when JKD is used as a mirror for self-examination."

the pattern of the attacker. As Tucker puts it, "JKD is a concept – an always evolving science," and at the nexus of JKD training, "[i]t incorporates intercepting the fist or attacking your opponent while they are attempting to attack you" (2011: 18). In other words, a quick and decisive victory hinges on an innovative form of martial arts that "could simultaneously intercept/interrupt an attack ('Jeet') and deliver a simultaneous hit of one's own ('Kuen')" (Bowman 2013: 67). For this reason, notwithstanding the slight oddity of being in a rather unusual combative pose, the Member feature of the proactive sidekick fighting pose deployed in Lee's sculpture at the museum appears to be more representative of his JKD than the defensive pose adopted in the other five statues.

Another salient Member feature of Lee's body is his naked torso, which has been adopted in all of the statues of him in Hong Kong and worldwide. Nitta argues that Lee's figure, particularly the bare torso, expresses a sense of ethnic masculinity, "an Asian version of morality, authority, and supremacy" (2010: 377). She observes that in contemporary cinema, socially vulnerable working-class male protagonists without any promising future (e.g. an unskilled paint-shop clerk, an underachieving high-school student, and a dancing dude) often adopt Lee as the ideal image of a powerful person free of confined, emasculated stereotype. In other words, Lee's topless torso has been repeatedly reproduced and represented as embodiment of a masculine status despite the potential lack of cultural and economic capital. For such characters, the strength of Lee's muscular bare torso legitimizes the possibility of terminating their disempowerment and providing them with a future hope for an improvement in conditions. As Žižek (2004: 78–79) notes, Lee's body functions as a generic narrative of struggle that transcends ethnic and cultural groups and translates into "a genuine working-class ideology of youngsters whose only means of success was the disciplinary training of their only possession, their bodies."

In particular, this very different masculine self-expression for Chinese men vis-à-vis their Caucasian counterparts represented through Lee's naked torso and his Kung Fu moves may have some bearing on the popularity of his films among the local Hong Kong inhabitants, who once suffered at the hands of Japanese and Western imperial oppressors (Chan 2000; Chiao 1981). In that sense, Lee's exposed torso in the sculpture appears to revive the cultural significance for the Chinese viewers of conflating their national identities with the image of the masculine body. Previous studies have thrown some light on Lee's body by establishing a connection between the body and masculine nationalist discourse (Li 2001; Lu et al. 2014; Tasker 1997). Tasker (1997: 318) accurately describes that in almost all his films Lee "ritualistically

removes his jacket" to show off his muscular arms and chest in a such way that "discourses of masculinity and nationhood are complexly bound up together in his star image." Indeed, the substantial visual impact of all the Lee statues is partly attributed to his impressive torso, which has been "theorized as offering a new model of masculinity" (Bowman 2013: 33). It is the revelation of Lee's bare torso that marks the assertion of a masculine national identity in his Kung Fu films and that "in many ways (re)produced a naïve form of masculine nationalist discourse radiating from his spectacular body" (Li 2001: 109). Hence, Lee's body embodies a form of "neo-wu masculinity" (Berry and Farquhar 2006: 202), i.e. a unique representation of the masculine body that is endowed with Chinese national identity against imperialism and colonization.

Yet another Member feature that depicts his significance as an inspiring figure is the sculpting of his gaze – not in a style that is strong and fierce as in the other five public statues in open areas, but in a way that is represented as looking ahead in the distance, seemingly with great vision and insight. The depiction of Lee in this gaze coupled with the commemorative exhibition held in a heritage museum, points to a very real and very keen understanding that through his vision, Lee, as a martial art expert, a film star, and a contemporary philosopher and visionary, has transformed the world of combative arts, the worlds of Asia's and America's cinema, and the personal worlds of countless individuals from all walks of life. Expressed through his gaze and his handwritten notes, which visitors are profoundly witness to in this exhibition, Lee's vision, as Little (2000b: xx) notes, is a vision of "a world of progress, a world free of suffering, and a world of enlightenment unflawed by ignorance, superstition, and corruption," offering a model of discipline, strength, and wisdom. Bowman (2013: 88; original emphasis) specifically states that Lee's words and writings have largely been derived from Taoism, Zen, and Buddhism, pointing to "a particular predilection for what might be called *ethical* truths couched in the form of injunctions: injunctions and imperatives to do with *how* to live, *how* to act, *how* to think, *how* to proceed, *how* to be", all of which can be encapsulated in Lee's most repeated aphorism "walk on" (Lee and Little 1997: 75). Lee's words to his son also revolve round this phrase: "I will teach him to walk on. Walk on and he will see a new view. […] Walk on and leave behind all things that would dam up the inlet, or clog the outlet, of experience" (Lee and Little 1997: 46), suggesting perhaps that the phrase "walk on" in Bruce Lee's philosophy and vision is synonymous with progressive self-betterment as opposed to passive acceptance of circumstances, docility, and inactivity.

6 Concluding remarks

This article has applied O'Toole's (1994, 2011) framework for the analysis of the most recent Bruce Lee statue and, based on the analytical findings, interpreted the features of the Lee statue within its sociocultural context. This analysis has shown the close relationship between semiotic meanings and the culture which engenders them in the case of Lee's sculpture. It has been demonstrated that the discourse of Chinese nationalism and masculinity is realized by the location of the statue and its multimodal features. Indeed, the cultural background for the representation of Lee in this work with its unique representational, modal, and compositional features has testified that meanings attributed to visual information in a sculpture are to a large degree socially structured and culturally bound. This study has confirmed (once more) that the SFL theoretical model is an extremely useful and very powerful analytical tool for exploration of the multifaceted semiotic meanings of an artistic work of displayed art for commemoration and preservation of cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements: The author gratefully acknowledges the Hong Kong Heritage Museum for their kind permission to publish photographs of the Bruce Lee statue and its surrounding spaces. I am indebted to Catherine Schwerin for her professional and helpful comments in the drafting of this manuscript. The usual disclaimer applies.

References

Avgita, Louisa. 2007. The Balkans does not exist. *Third Text* 21(2). 215–221.

BBC News. 2005a. Bosnia unveils Bruce Lee bronze. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4474316.stm (accessed 10 August 2022).

BBC News. 2005b. Hong Kong's honor for Bruce Lee. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4711947.stm (accessed 10 August 2022).

Berry, Chris & Mary Farquhar. 2006. *China on screen: Cinema and nation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bowcher, Wendy & Jennifer Yameng Liang. 2014. Representing Mao: A social-semiotic analysis of two statues on a Red Tour. *Visual Communication* 13(1). 3–30.

Bowman, Paul. 2010. *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-fantasy-fighting-philosophy*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

Bowman, Paul. 2013. *Beyond Bruce Lee: Chasing the dragon through film, philosophy, and popular culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chan, Jachinson. 2000. Bruce Lee's fictional models of masculinity. *Men and Masculinities* 2(4). 371–387.

Cheung, Melissa. 2003. Bruce Lee still kicks high. *CBS News*, July 18. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bruce-lee-still-kicks-high/ (accessed 10 August 2022).
Chiao, Hsiung-Ping. 1981. Bruce Lee: His influence on the evolution of the Kung Fu genre. *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 9(1). 30–42.
Eschen, Penny. 2006. Globalizing popular culture in the "American Century" and beyond. *OAH Magazine of History* 20(4). 56–63.
Fassbender, Tom. 2021. Bruce Lee statue. *Los Angeles Explorers Guild*. https://losangelesexplorersguild.com/2021/03/30/bruce-lee-statue/ (accessed 12 August 2022).
Green, Thomas & Joseph Svinth. 2010. *Martial arts of the world: An encyclopedia of history and innovation*, vol. 1: *Regions and individual arts*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
Halliday, Michael A. K. & Christian Matthiessen. 2004. *An introduction to functional grammar*, 3rd edn. London: Arnold.
Kaminsky, Stuart. 1982. Kung Fu as ghetto myth. In Michael Marsden & John Nachbar (eds.), *Movies as artifacts: Cultural critiques of popular film*, 137–145. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
Lee, Bruce. 1971. *Liberate yourself from classical karate*. Valencia, California: Black Belt Magazine.
Lee, Bruce & John Little. 1997. *Bruce Lee: Words of the dragon: Interviews, 1958–1973*. Boston: Tuttle.
Lee, Linda. 1975. *Tao of Jeet Kune Do by Bruce Lee*. Santa Clarita, CA: Ohara Publications.
Lee, Linda. 1978. *Bruce Lee: The man only I knew*. New York: Warner Books.
Lee, Linda. 1989. *The Bruce Lee story*. Santa Clarita, CA: Ohara Publications.
Li, Siu Leung. 2001. Kung Fu: Negotiating nationalism and modernity. In Dimitris Eleftheriotis & Gary Needham (eds.), *Asian cinemas: A reader and guide*, 100–125. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
Little, John. 1996. *The warrior within: The philosophies of Bruce Lee for better understanding of the world around you and achieving a rewarding life*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.
Little, John (ed.). 1997. *Words of the dragon: Interviews, 1958–1973*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing.
Little, John (ed.). 1999. *Bruce Lee: Artist of life*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing.
Little, John (ed.). 2000a. *Bruce Lee: The celebrated life of the golden dragon*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing.
Little, John (ed.). 2000b. *Striking thoughts: Bruce Lee's wisdom for daily living*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing.
Lu, Tracey. 2009. Heritage conservation in post-colonial Hong Kong. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 15(2–3). 258–272.
Lu, Zhouxiang, Qi Zhang & Fan Hong. 2014. Projecting the "Chineseness": Nationalism, identity and Chinese martial arts films. *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31(3). 320–335.
Miller, David. 2010. *The Tao of Bruce Lee: A martial arts memoir*. New York: Random House.
Mochizuki, Ken. 2006. *Be water, my friend: The early years of Bruce Lee*. New York: Lee & Low Books.
Moss, Daniel. 2015. Bruce Lee's last stand: Statues honor the kung fu star around the world. *South China Morning Post*. https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/film-tv/article/1884035/bruce-lees-last-stand-statues-kung-fu-star-around-world (accessed 10 August 2022).
Nitta, Keiko. 2010. An equivocal space for the protestant ethnic: US popular culture and martial arts fantasia. *Social Semiotics* 20(4). 377–392.
O'Toole, Michael. 1994. *The language of displayed art*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

O'Toole, Michael. 2011. *The language of displayed art*, 2nd edn. London and New York: Routledge.
Prashad, Vijay. 2001. *Everybody was Kung Fu fighting: Afro-Asian connections and the myth of cultural purity*. Boston: Beacon Press.
Prashad, Vijay. 2003. Bruce Lee and the anti-imperialism of Kung Fu: A polycultural adventure. *Positions* 11(1). 51–90.
Shu, Yuan. 2003. From Bruce Lee to Jacky Chan. *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 31(2). 50–59.
Shyong, Frank. 2013. Bruce Lee statue unveiled in L.A.'s Chinatown. *Los Angeles Times*. https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-xpm-2013-jun-16-la-me-ln-bruce-lee-statue-unveiled-in-las-chinatown-20130616-story.html (accessed 10 August 2022).
Tasker, Yvonne. 1997. Fists of Fury: Discourses of race and masculinity in the martial arts cinema. In Harry Stecopulos & Michael Uebel (eds.), *Race and the subject of masculinities*, 315–336. Durham: Duke University Press.
Teo, Stephen. 2009. *Chinese martial arts cinema: The wuxia tradition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Thomas, Bruce. 1994. *Bruce Lee: Fighting spirit: A biography*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
Tucker, Susan. 2011. Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do science: A cardio-intense workout for serious self-defense. *American Fitness* 29(1). 18–19.
Vaughn, John & Mike Lee. 1986. *The legendary Bruce Lee*. Burbank, CA: Black Belt Communications.
Zaitchik, Alexander. 2006. Mostar's little dragon: How Bruce Lee became a symbol of peace in the Balkans. *Reason Online*. https://reason.com/2006/04/01/mostars-little-dragon-2/ (accessed 10 August 2022).
Žižek, Slavoj. 2004. Afterword: The lesson of Rancière. In Jacques Rancière (ed.), *The politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible*, translated with an Introduction by Gabriel Rockhill, 69–79. London: Continuum.

Bionote

May L.-Y. Wong
School of English, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China
wlymay@gmail.com

May L.-Y. Wong (b. 1976) is Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of English, The University of Hong Kong. Her research focuses on social semiotics to explain the utility of multimodal resources in various discursive contexts which are of significance to local cultural values and heritage. She is also the author of the monograph, *Multimodal communication: A social semiotic approach to text and image in print and digital media*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2019.