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Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, Volume 38, Number 3, 2017, pp. 92-120
(Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



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Claiming Bruce Lee's Sex

Memoirs of the Wholesome Wife, Memories of the Salubrious Mistress

CELINE PARREÑAS SHIMIZU

The book cover of *Bruce Lee: The Man Only I Knew* (1975) features him bare-chested on the right with big, black, bushy hair topping a dark handsome face, lips pursed together and eyes intent with confident purpose. Bruce Lee, a man known for his small, slight stature and perilous strength, appears large as he leans into the frame, extending his fist toward us. We can clearly see the rippling texture of his torso and chiseled, muscled arms. The flexing of his body reveals adherence to a disciplined physical regimen and affirms his reputation of brute strength made famous by his one-inch punch. Below his medium-shot image and to the left, a very large close-up of the book's author Linda Lee's dewy and blushing face appears. She has a short, blonde, no-nonsense hairdo, coral lipstick on full half-smiling lips, and blue eye-shadowed lids; her long lashes emphasize the wideness of her eyes as she looks up at her husband's figure with adoration. The foregrounding of her image as a wholesome white woman is juxtaposed against his iconic visage as the most celebrated Asian male in global popular culture. His smaller image renders the book's premise in visual terms: we will hear about him through her intimate perspective from inside a celebrated interracial marriage. From the title of the book and its byline, "By his wife Linda Lee," the marital connection between writer and subject appears as its central conceit. The dedication to their children, "that they might know the rich legacy which is theirs alone," shows how the book's author takes specific ownership of Bruce Lee. This possession further extends with the subtitle: "the man only I knew." Published two years after his death at the age of thirty-two, Linda Lee's book promises to reveal the man behind the star as a husband and father devoted to domesticity.

To envelop Bruce Lee in the domesticity of family counters the descriptions of him as hypermasculine but asexual. That is, Bruce Lee's sexuality is understood as macho in narcissistic, nationalist, and ascetic terms by scholars and critics.¹ So Linda Lee's claiming for her husband the role of American hero, in

terms of an upright and proper heteronormative and hegemonic manhood, certainly contrasts with the legacy of the Oriental coolie and Fu Manchu as outlined well in the work of Robert G. Lee. Rendering Bruce Lee as the ideal husband provides a different sexuality for Asian men, whose subjectivities are usually anxious, insecure, and disprized in US representations of marital and romantic capital. In terms of Asian North American men lacking masculine virility and sexual power in representation, scholars Jachinson W. Chan, David Eng, Richard Fung, Hoang Tan Nguyen, Mimi Thi Nguyen, Viet Nguyen, and Eng Beng Lim have called for feminist and queer readings of Asian manhoods so as not to fall into the trap of romanticizing Asian masculinity.² Indeed, what is so striking in Bruce Lee's appeal and what is so understudied in his image is his sexuality, which Linda Lee definitively binds within the normative bounds of heterosexuality, marriage and fatherhood.

This wifely and motherly claim is significant because of Bruce Lee's purported mistress, the Hong Kong B-movie star Betty Ting Pei, who stars as herself in a controversial film about his life. Released just three years after his death, the film *Bruce Lee and I* (1976) is a fictionalized account of its subtitle: "His Last Days, His Last Nights."³ The film, directed by Mar Lo, famously includes explicit sex scenes and bacchanalian drug consumption of both pills and pot, in the narrative context of an all-consuming, frenzied, and torrid love affair. The Chinese theatrical poster for the film, released in the United States in 1979 as *I Love You, Bruce Lee*, features a full-figured Bruce Lee kicking his leg high as his upper body bends down almost horizontally. In contradistinction, to the right of this powerful pose, another image shows him relaxed. Bare-chested and in profile, he leans in to kiss a half-dressed Betty Ting Pei. She sits with her legs in front of her, barely covered by her gauzy lavender nightgown, which falls off her shoulders to reveal her arms and upper torso. Her body moves toward him as her eyes close with desire. Unlike his face on the left, which expresses an energetic release as he kicks, on the right he faces her with his eyes in a calm, peaceful way. He looks determined and purposeful, however, in how he plants both arms on her shoulders, intent on kissing her. This image shows not only his recognizable celebrity persona but a clear sensuality that contradicts his purported lack of sexuality in the movies.⁴ Moreover, it is particularly shocking because it asserts an intimate romantic and sexual relationship between a married man and the woman in whose bed he was found dead.

The movie's provocative promotion as "The True Story of Bruce Lee's Last Days and Nights by the Woman Who Was There," provides a titillating premise. Through an explicit presentation of their intimate entanglements, the production exploits her proximity to him at the time of his death and Bruce Lee's

stardom. The film aggressively situates his sexuality within a chronicle of an intensely crazed sexual love. From courtship to consummation to unfulfilled dreams and promises, both Linda Lee's verbal confessions and, in effect, Betty Ting Pei's visual enactments present a privileged form of knowing Bruce Lee through the intimate disclosures of sex, love, romance, and mutual desire. Their testimonies, in Lee's book and the film starring Pei, show how the two women narrate different gendered and sexual identities and experiences in relation to Bruce Lee.

Indeed, at the time of Bruce Lee's death in Betty Ting Pei's apartment, a celebrity sex scandal ensued. The bereaved wife Linda Lee responded by revealing Bruce's attachments as a father and husband. That is, through her memoir, she reins him in to the family fold and consolidates his legacy as belonging to her and her children. Linda Lee claims intimate knowledge as Bruce Lee's wife to emphasize his character as a good, proper husband and father. She takes him back from the public's possession in a way that hierarchizes sexual relations but also repositions his legacy within the proper bounds of marriage. In highlighting interracial marriage through the unusual terrain of a validated racialized manhood, Linda Lee's normalizing move celebrates what is otherwise, in the history of miscegenation, disprized.⁵ Similarly, Betty Ting Pei's depiction of Bruce Lee as a man in love with her, and unable to control his libidinal passions for her as a hypersexual woman, celebrates their illicit love as formed through the bonds of shared ethnicity, claims for locality, class struggle, and the desire for public recognition. Thus one is a socially sanctioned interracial marriage that reels him into national American domesticity, and the other is a transgressive same-ethnicity one that ultimately pulls Lee toward Asian transnationalism.

So while both women broaden Bruce Lee's legacy to include a man who cares for his wife and children beyond himself, and a man unhinged by his ardor and desire for someone with whom he has racial allegiance and sexual compatibility, they assert racial and sexual identity conservatively (through a man) at a time of rapidly changing gender roles for women. They assent to fixed ideas of manhood at both ends of the spectrum: good faithful husband, and passionate philanderer. Both the good husband and the bad macho valorize normative identity and romanticize virility, showing us the limits of what we can know through sex. Sexual and romantic relations with these women, and their subsequent testimonies, do not reveal Bruce Lee's hidden subjectivity, but ultimately work together to present a limited frame of manhood for the most legendary of Asian American male figures in the movies. What we come to know are investments in certain discourses of gendered sexuality by his wife and mistress.

In his seminar “Technologies of the Self” Michel Foucault discusses his commitment to understanding technologies of power (“domination”).⁶ He also pursues technologies of the self (agency, in the ability of individuals to “transform themselves in order to attain . . . happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection”).⁷ He calls “the encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self . . . governmentality.”⁸ To study governmentality, or the self in relation to domination, is to address how people understand themselves in relation to others in the world, including the structures and institutions that we fashion in order to organize and understand our encounters. He points to how any understanding of the self, at whatever site and structure of knowledge, engages in “truth games.”⁹ In effect, he does not believe in any true subjectivity outside their discursive context.

The context of the memoir written by Linda Lee and the movie produced by Betty Ting Pei is the 1970s, an era of heightened transgressiveness wherein sexuality and pornography were more visible to the mainstream, and cultural taboos about sexuality met challenge. Emergent at this time are new polyamorous sexual practices and new relational formations outside of marriage. In the case of Linda Lee, the recently legalized occurrence of interracial marriage is transformed to the mundane where their coupling represents the normal, sweet American household. And the scandal of Bruce Lee’s affair with Betty Ting Pei is rendered in the movie as the unthreatening coming together of like-minded individuals with so much commonality. These two women offer up two different personas of Bruce Lee, in tension with each other, so as to defend and reclaim their subjectivities. They both actualize themselves by mobilizing powerful discourses of sexualized manhood. As such, governmentality is at work in terms of showing female agency in the face of existing categories of identity. So the very fact of their self-assertions through cultural production manifests the modes of expression available to them. Yet they use the sexuality of a man to vindicate themselves as wife and mistress, ultimately positioning themselves within gendered constraints.

Indeed, a privileged site of truth telling in human relations is sexuality—and its many structures, including marriage, romance, love, and desire. They are sites for mining knowledge about oneself as well as others. But what kind of knowledge? For Foucault, sexuality involves facets of knowing, including the renunciation of the self, which ultimately results in the confession of acts and wrestling with the intense investments of cultural meaning or “prohibitions.”¹⁰ That is, the knowledge we generate through sexuality is not necessarily straightforward; to find within the context of what is considered taboo under “strict rules of secrecy, decency, and modesty . . . of hiding what one does and of deciphering who one is,”¹¹ makes for a pressured relation to its expres-

sion. How one acts in the face of desire, love, and sex occurs in the context of the histories of our subjectivities. Particular mechanisms work on our bodies and subjectivities. That is, the construction of the wholesome wife and the salubrious mistress indeed informs the interpretation of Linda Lee and Betty Ting Pei's claims to Bruce Lee's sexuality. To organize Bruce Lee's sexuality according to these two poles of good husband and passionate adulterer limits what he himself actually presents in his work: a more unknowable sexuality that others frequently attempt to pin down.

In terms of his sexual representation, critics do attribute to Bruce Lee a monk-like asceticism or an Eastern nationalism, such as in his physicality that confesses repression. Indeed, his body clearly results from a disciplined training regimen that reveals Bruce Lee to be like an Oriental mystic, a major trope of Jane Iwamura's evaluation of Western representations of Asians. When Lee typically represents the Asian American embodiment of East and West, Iwamura argues that his figure helps to alleviate anxieties about the East's difference (sexual or otherwise).¹² However, Lee's body arrests the difficulty in translating its meaning. For example, the genre of kung fu in Hong Kong and Chinese cinema requires the trope of asceticism—where he must decline pleasure and indulgence. Yet when other critics argue that Bruce Lee's martial arts prowess represents gendered success and sexual failure, as Chinese American playwright Frank Chin does in the documentary *The Slanted Screen* (2006), then he is also monk-like in his asceticism, the way he deprives himself of the pleasures of sex as a result of Western domination rather than Eastern self-fashioning. For Foucault, the link between asceticism and truth deserves exploration. If one withholds pleasure and other such pursuits from the self, "what must one know about oneself in order to be willing to renounce anything?"¹³ This question is part of his larger project that interrogates the relationship between sex and knowledge in terms of the pressures of what he calls "social morality that seeks the rules for acceptable behavior in relations with others."¹⁴ While Foucault writes in reference to early Christianity, his framework applies to illuminate the scene of the wife and the mistress of the first transnational Asian American star who reached global stardom in the 1960s and 1970s.

These are two very different women, and they present competing versions of what each needs to be annihilated in Bruce Lee's legacy: the part of husband or the part of illegitimate lover. The bereaved wife, a white woman whose choice to marry a man of color is initially disapproved by her family, uses memoir to center her perspective as the rightful bearer of his history. It is an attempt to reframe his rumored infidelity and instead emphasize his loyalty to the principles of marriage and family. The supposedly grieving mistress,

a woman whose stature as a starlet is insecure, starring in the film about his sexual and other bodily pleasures, resuscitates his body in the realm of sexual pleasure. Further, it can be seen as an attempt to capitalize on and validate her stardom. Yet it also presents an alternative narrative of erotica and legibility that does not exist if we go by Linda Lee's account alone. Essentially, the film *Betty Ting Pei* produced attempts to introduce the man not as an ascetic but as a hedonist. Beyond representations of the certainty of his indulgences in bodily and other pleasures, Betty Ting Pei also depicts his willful pursuit of meaningful relations of intimacy outside the structures of marriage and fatherhood. What is revealed in the contest between the collections of intimate personal observations and memories is ultimately not the secrets of Bruce Lee as a sexual being. Instead, we see the limits of expectations placed upon him by women located at different standpoints. In the two different accounts of Bruce Lee's life, the women expose the different pressures they confront as well as the varied expectations of his Eastern and Western audiences, different film industry practices, and structures of sexuality.

CHRONICLES OF INTERRACIAL LOVE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE:

LINDA LEE'S BRUCE LEE

Bruce Lee's death catapulted Linda Lee from a behind-the-scenes companion to a widow who wanted to set the record straight and tell the story of their partnership in her own words. By recounting conversations and everyday interactions with Bruce Lee, Linda Lee reveals the intimate details of the man behind the magnitude of his popular and cultural impact. She does so in ways that romanticize his hegemonic manhood of color and her white womanhood in the context of an interracial marriage that was not commonly accepted in Eastern or Western society. As such, her memoir details how she rebels in terms of her unusual choice in marriage partner but resorts to conventional practice in insisting upon his fidelity. This seemingly contradictory position of a rebel reflects the enormous changes in gender roles at the time, showing Linda Lee as very much a part of her generation's wrestling with what was considered appropriate sexual and gendered practice for women.

In his classic essay "The Third Sex" Robert G. Lee has pointed to how white female sexuality has become crucial to the act of defining the otherness of Asian American men and women.¹⁵ Linda Lee's memoir ultimately privileges her status as wife in narrating her husband's life, and the narrative's reliability depends upon her status as an upstanding white woman. She takes us from Lee's first struggles as an Asian American immigrant to his negotiations with global stardom. To this day she emphasizes how his Asian-ness did not en-

tirely define him.¹⁶ In terms of the racial discourse of their love, race appears embedded in larger historical contexts, and then dissolves in favor of a story of compatibility based on individual personalities, and then reappears in the challenges of the interracial marriage as an extremely important aspect of their bond. She unwittingly describes a relationship of disparity in terms of gender, in the form of the care work she provides to sustain their life. In this way, we see how male gender privilege trumps white racial privilege in their relationship. These disclosures show how race and gender need to be interrogated in order to understand how social forces intervene in private relations and how lovers engage them differently, even in their togetherness. She discusses race, ultimately, to argue for overcoming its difference within her interracial marriage as a model for American life.

The biography was received favorably and reprinted three times in 1975. While it is no longer available, the book became the basis of the popular movie *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (1993). Its argument for his fidelity and her framing of his legacy as a proper husband thus persists. In Linda Lee's account, she shows how race organized their lives from the beginning of their courtship until his death in Hong Kong, where they were living at the time because he could not get work as easily in the United States. While Linda Lee does not disclose how she defied the idea of Asian and Asian American men as disprized in society at the time of their courtship, her attraction for Bruce Lee arises nonetheless. It is his individuality that she notices. She describes his sexuality and physical intensity as the "sheer animal magnetism" that informs his presence on screen: "I suppose the first thing I noticed about Bruce was the immense command he had of his body; the amazing reflexes that seemed more feline than human; the ability to perform astonishing feats of strength such as doing push-ups on ONE FINGER!"¹⁷ Bruce Lee's physicality warrants this description, but her animalistic word choice is significant. To describe a powerful man as cat-like suggests he is powerful, strong, and smooth. But this description also racializes him via an Asian-cat association that suggests sneakiness and inscrutability, like the buck-toothed and underhanded Siamese cats in the Disney film *Lady and the Tramp* (1955). Feline scrupulousness can also define the Asian martial artist, whose Oriental technique suggests a kind of trickery that alters the implicit protocols of fighting. So rather than a repellent Fu Man Chu or grotesque Charlie Chan, what may seem like a pleasing and attractive characterization is an eroticization of his racial otherness that also shapes his gender and sex.

In a testament to how individual practices collide with group identity, Linda Lee often had to field questions about the similarity of Bruce Lee's on- and off-screen personas. Her responses indicate that he was conscious of his

racial experience and membership in a group that was interpellated in a specific way. For example, she writes, “something about him . . . was very magnetic . . . of course it is the same magnetism, the same strength of personality which draws the screen audiences to Bruce. But the characters Bruce played were essentially different from his own personality.”¹⁸ Indeed, this “magnetism” was palpable in his physical encounters in crowds and in the money that began pouring in from his lucrative movies.

“As the craze for kung fu movies swept the world,” Linda Lee states, “Bruce found himself the hottest property in show business, a greater box office star than Steve McQueen,”¹⁹ in terms of the magnitude of the offers he received and the global reach of his fandom. Steve McQueen was not only a student of Bruce Lee’s but also one of the biggest heartthrobs and manly movie stars of the time. To exceed him in popularity is to establish Bruce Lee’s stature not only as a heroic lead but also as a standard-bearer for male beauty. From Linda Lee’s proximity and her attendant awareness of the significance of his differentiated manhood, she highlights how striking his popularity was in the face of a delimiting legacy of racial borders that seemed so cemented in Hollywood. Indeed, Bruce Lee is Chinese and Chinese American, and he emphasizes this ethnic and national background as part of his character in a way that took advantage of his difference. At the very least, he does not disavow his social differences.²⁰ Linda Lee describes how Bruce Lee utilized all his background and experiences—his training and ongoing work as a child actor in Hong Kong cinema (making over twenty films by age eighteen); his early teaching of martial arts as they soared to popularity; as well as his individual charismatic and joking persona, defined by his intelligence and good looks—which were all traits not usually associated with racial others in Hollywood, especially Asian men. In acting as steward of her husband’s legacy, Linda Lee brings her own background as a fellow martial artist and as one who supported her husband’s aspirations by reading lines with him or practicing with him. In this way the memoir catalogs her wifely role in supporting and enabling his success.

In terms of their intimate engagements with group and individual identities, we see that as their marriage progressed, both Linda and Bruce transformed in terms of their own cultural identities. While Linda Lee came to learn how to cook and love Chinese food, and to regard the Chinese in the twentieth-century United States as “subjects of merciless pogroms,” Bruce came to teach martial arts to non-Chinese, a practice frowned upon by the Chinese American martial arts community.²¹ Together they developed an awareness of racial difference as part of their interracial togetherness. As Linda became more comfortable in Hong Kong, Bruce became more untrusting of people who threw money and all kinds of opportunities his way. Within

these scenes, the discourse of race in her writing reveals an ongoing wrestling with the meanings of their difference. For example, in terms of race and gender, Linda Lee recalls an appearance in Fresno, California, where Bruce Lee encountered energetic fans who wanted to devour him: "Sixty percent of the fans were young boys but a surprising proportion were young girls. His piercing dark eyes and handsome features, totally lacking impassivity or inscrutability popularly associated with Chinese by some Americans, was something as fresh and novel in their young lives as kung fu itself, I feel."²² She demonstrates an awareness of the particular racialization of the Chinese in "some" of the public imaginary and the way he defied that image. However, it is important to note that she presents her husband as exceptional to that group racialization, rather than describing the falsity of such attributions. At the same time, her attribution of individual power captures an American portrait of her husband: exceptional, transcendent.

Foucault tells us that there is never a moment when we are outside power relations, but "there are always possibilities of changing the situation."²³ It is true that Linda Lee tells their love story in ways that cannot be exempted from the normative discourses of race and gender, but she also teaches us about his individual experiences in contemporary culture. In describing her impressions of him before they got together, she says, "I often saw him walking around these halls, always with a girlfriend. I'm told that since he was fifteen, Bruce had never had any trouble dating girls."²⁴ Here, Linda Lee offers a challenge to the idea of Asian and Asian American men as unable to compete for female attention. Bruce Lee's specific sexuality—what she calls "cockiness," or self-confidence and assurance—captures her attention immediately. In her narration of their love story, he also fulfills traditionally masculine roles as one who "immediately came to my rescue" when she needed saving.²⁵ He is the magnetic, strong, and handsome man who charms women, but from a position of racial difference that Linda Lee idealizes.

Linda Lee depicts their ethnic differences as the basis for an exchange of ideas and a transformation of identities that were central to their coupling. Their interracial coming together does not escape structural inequalities of race, but they nonetheless remain malleable inside the marriage. As Linda Lee notes,

Today when I reflect on our courtship, I believe that it was our very differences in race, culture, upbringing, tradition and customs that were largely instrumental in bringing us even closer together . . . indeed I believe that interracial problems can exist in a marriage only if a person sets out to make them so. Bruce and I, on the contrary, found that the

differences merely served to enrich us; each of us gaining new insights from the other.²⁶

Despite the acknowledgment of race, this romantic version of their differences ends with what reads as a simplistic recommendation for how to live harmoniously. In a project that illustrates their coupling as socially ideal, Linda Lee privileges the power of the individual within the interracial relationship to define oneself against the structures that dictate the meanings of difference.

From one who lives among and within difference, Linda Lee notices more than Bruce Lee's race in a way that does not disavow its presence. Yet a narrative of transcendence persists. Lee specifically cites a conflict with her mother, for example, who first protested their pairing, arguing that any serious relationship threatened her daughter's career goals. After Bruce's death, however, Linda's mom admits to prejudice in an interview with the *Seattle Times*: "I was a bit leery of mixed marriage."²⁷ Here, Linda feels she must hide her relationship with Bruce until their pending wedding. Her mother refuses to attend at first, in a story that ends with Bruce ultimately "winning over" his mother-in-law with a form of intergenerational flattery. Linda Lee says her mother could not resist him, especially "when he used to gaze admiringly and tell her, 'You know, mom, you've got the greatest legs of any woman your age I've ever seen!'"²⁸ However, Linda remembers herself as generously understanding her mother's racist apprehension and forgives her. In this very particular story of their interracial encounter, we can see Bruce using his charm to win his mother-in-law over and making his own circumstances, rather than accepting others' terms. In this representation Bruce both exceeds and refutes his racial role.

This racially romantic version of events also illustrates the difficulty of acknowledging racial prejudice in one's own family. Interestingly, Bruce Lee was born to a biracial Chinese and German mother and his family supposedly wholeheartedly welcomed Linda as his wife. Thus racial difference remains acknowledged in their relationship but in ways that emphasize their transcendence by individual personality and charm. Their attitude toward racial difference as a couple and the way he employed his difference to defy popular conceptions of Asian American men, according to her account, are presented as practices worth emulating, offering mixed marriage as a quintessentially American formation. Historian Peggy Pascoe argues that anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting interracial sex and marriage from the 1660s to the 1960s "provided a roadmap of American legal conceptions of race."²⁹ In this context, Linda Lee's claim for the sanctity of her marriage is very political in disputing how respectability was repeatedly rejected for interracial couples. Indeed, this perspective

certainly cannot be discounted as an important assertion, considering the illegality of miscegenation in several states at the time of their marriage.

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE: THE WIFELY OWNERSHIP OF
BRUCE LEE'S LEGACY

Having shown how Linda Lee portrays the possibility of interracial love and marital union in the domestic US context at a time of great social upheaval, I now move toward a gender analysis to show how Linda Lee situates Bruce Lee's true identity in the enclave of family. That is, she ultimately reclaims Bruce through a phallogocentric discourse. Traditional gender roles organized their marriage and family structure in ways that Linda Lee painstakingly describes. From the position of stay-at-home wife, Linda Lee ultimately argues that family life saved Bruce Lee from the pressures of work and fame. He felt the severity of his career demands in both physical and emotional ways that are particular to his stature and location: in the grueling conditions of life in Hong Kong, where people challenged him to fight on the streets; the long work hours leading to lack of sleep; and the way his work "depended on a fragile foundation: his continued physical fitness."³⁰ In this collection of statements Linda Lee emphasizes the extreme and extraordinary demands of his profession, which led to a particular dependence on her and to which she responded heartily.

The emphasis on the power of the individual and his particularity becomes even more prominent in Linda Lee's telling of the couple's travels into the madness of global stardom. Linda Lee's memoir describes an ordinary love that kept the couple together in an exceptional life they did not expect to live: "Probably it just never occurred to [many people at the time] that a Chinese could become a hero in a white man's world."³¹ In their life together she says he offered an understanding of love as "friendship caught on fire . . . in the beginning a flame, very pretty, often hot and fierce but still only light and flickering. As love grows older, our hearts mature and our love become as coals, deep-burning and unquenchable."³² Linda Lee's definition of marriage celebrates the personal and private image that was not on display, versus the public image of his films, so much so that she excuses his shortcomings in terms of gender codes and even frames them as exceptional. She says:

He was a spontaneous person. He did not believe in having his life and actions circumscribed by conventions, those foisted on populations by shrewd commercial interests. For instance, he ignored such occasions as St. Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, events nurtured by businessmen

who see such days as opportunities to sell gifts, flowers, cards and so on. He sometimes forgot my birthday—though he was generally good about our wedding anniversary. But he made up for it all by the sheer spontaneity of his behavior. When he arrived home, he frequently brought flowers, or candies—or perhaps an expensive dress.³³

Here, Linda Lee lauds Bruce Lee's inability to participate in conventional days devoted to women—in celebration of their service to men while performing traditional women's roles—as part of his particularity. While she gives him devotion as a normatively good wife and mother, he ignores the days celebrated in popular culture to recognize such care work. Yet she describes a marriage filled with more spontaneous and frequent rewards that have more meaning than what she considers token recognition on a single assigned day. She reminds us that it is difficult to measure love and devotion across the particularities of couples and the individuals who compose them. She excuses his tendency “sometimes” to forget her birthday and affirms how he was “generally good” about remembering their anniversary. She waits in the wings for his affirmation, speaking from the position of a conventional wife.

While she mainly uses this position to justify her singular and legitimate ownership of his legacy, she also asserts herself as an active participant in the creation of his legacy. The Hollywood film producer of *Enter the Dragon*, Fred Weintraub, according to Linda Lee, confirmed her role as Bruce Lee's closest confidant:

I found in my own opinion that [Bruce] was terribly lonely, and except for Linda he trusted nobody in this world. Linda was the only one he would talk to, or trust, or have confidence in; she was wife, mother, mistress, lover, everything . . . he would never talk to anyone else. If he didn't want to talk to somebody, he made Linda talk to them. If he were angry, he made Linda call them up and say “I'm angry.”³⁴

Here we garner that such celebrity is experienced in solitude and in private, and her role as wife was significant in both of those realms. Linda Lee provides this information to validate her argument: that she is the proper guardian of his legacy for their family. She asserts that his identity—his true self—was inaccessible to others: “You were always one step away from meeting Bruce Lee, the real Bruce Lee. The only time you saw the real man I think, was when you saw him playing with his kids. Everything would change then; everything would be different.”³⁵ She argues that his participation in the family as husband and father—where he was most himself—was a role that others could not witness. For Linda Lee, the real Bruce was a private family man, and

thus she is the only one who really knows him. This assertion is indeed how she reframes his legacy within the confines of marriage. It is how she subtitled the book.

Thus Linda Lee demonstrates that emotional intimacy is the cradle of this sacred identity. It occurs between the couple even if their relation is steeped in gender and/or racial inequality. It is their mutual love and devotion that sustains their routine, their daily interactions, and her singular access to him as his wife. She provides evidence of her unique and privileged position in how she takes care of practical matters every day as part of her care work, especially when he could not be home or had to work all the time. She participated actively in the care of the children, as a springboard of ideas, and a solid supporter of his dreams, which she presents as hers too, in what is their shared life. He came home, played with the children, and made her feel confident in his love for her alone. Their marriage can be read as a kind of racialized patriarchy at the site of interracial intimacy, where the white woman performs gendered care work for the man of color. The memoir uses heteronormative formations to make legible her singular status as owner of his legacy and the sole authority on his masculinity, which requires accentuation in the face of the sex scandal that his death sparked. That is, the desire to promote an ascetic and heteronormative Bruce Lee both on screen and off also presents a normative ethnic American man and a devoted white wife.

RESITUATING THE SCANDAL OF CELEBRITY SEX: BETTY TING PEI'S PASSIONATE LOVER

Bruce Lee's death was surrounded by gossip regarding his sexual activities. When Bruce Lee died not in the home of his producer Raymond Chow, as first detailed, but in the bedroom of his co-star Betty Ting Pei, the public and the media quickly fueled a celebrity sex scandal, speculating on his relationships with women outside his marriage. In 1975 Betty Ting Pei produced and starred in the movie, "Bruce Lee's Last Days, and Last Nights," feeding the rampant desire in popular culture to know how Bruce Lee died in her bed. Against the life beyond the screen presented by his wife, the film *Bruce Lee I Love You* presents a very different version of him, depicting previously unseen filmic representations of his virile passion for sex and other indulgent, manly pleasures. The film is largely perceived as notorious, defamatory, and part of a long line of exploitation films featuring Bruce Lee look-alikes who fail to capture his power. Unique about this film, however, is the biographical aspect on the part of the leading actress Betty Ting Pei, who plays herself in scenes considered pornographic.

The film begins with Betty Ting Pei on the beach. Covered from head to toe, she looks out at the sea with sadness, as a melancholy song expresses the wish that he “rest in peace and be happy forever.” This tribute soon segues to a long and indulgent sex scene that supposedly occurs moments before Bruce Lee’s death. The film then shows the mass condemnation of Betty Ting Pei, who has to endure condescension by women in supermarkets and violent innuendo by men on the streets. Like Linda Lee, she too is a gender rebel—but in another realm outside normative marriage, in espousing the free love doctrine popular at the time. Moreover, she is transnationally situated in asserting her claims to Bruce Lee in terms of co-ethnic compatibility. In this way hers is a kind of global feminist intervention. Yet she is also conventional in her rebellion for relying on a heroic man to save her from the cursed status as a fallen woman. As she tells her story of woe and misfortune, including her bad luck in meeting Bruce Lee too late, she frames the Lee marriage as a stumbling block in the frenzy of their extramarital love affair. Their same-ethnicity Asian love and romance is the ideal formation that his marriage to Linda Lee supposedly prevents.

Betty Ting Pei suggests that unlike with Linda Lee, who is a white woman, she and Bruce share a certain strength of character from having overcome similar adversities and discouragements, which in Bruce’s case Linda Lee helped him navigate and survive. In the film Bruce Lee tells Betty Ting Pei that it is his wife’s unflagging faith and devotion that allowed him to overcome adversity as a low-wage worker, a struggling artist, and a businessman. Although Bruce Lee’s family was transnational and well-to-do in their travels as a theatrical family, the narrative of exceptionalism comes up here as part of his media persona. But despite this help, which occurred in the past, it is Betty and Bruce’s shared experience of suffering that bonds them together today, in a way that is relevant to him as he establishes his stardom in Hong Kong.

Peppered with intimate detail, Betty Ting Pei’s film makes the argument that she shares ownership of Bruce Lee’s legacy because he not only had sex with her, but he held strong feelings of devotion, if not love, for her. She makes this assertion by also recognizing his wife as a part of his life and as an impediment in her rightful yet unfortunately timed togetherness with Bruce. While Linda never appears in the movie, her status of marital ownership of Bruce becomes a source of pain for both Betty and Bruce. His ultimate lack of availability drives Betty away from him to other pursuits: gambling and men. Both are represented as driving Bruce crazy in ways that affect his work. For example, he leaves his shoots in order to seek her company. Finally, he demands that they hire her as a leading actress in his next film. It is dramatically presented in *Bruce Lee I Love You* that it is on the night her co-starring role is to

be announced that he dies. In effect, his death prevents his announcing their partnership.

The film establishes their sexual relationship in their first shared scene, where we witness their desire for each other and his comfort with her. Early in the movie he drives to her house in Hong Kong and enters with a smirk. He moves with his iconic attitude and confidence—and his signature glasses. When she opens the door, wearing a glamorous gown, a made-up face and coiffed hair, he expresses his pleasure by grunting. It is a direct contrast to his film *Way of the Dragon*, which shows Bruce Lee acting like an innocent and incompetent when faced with a woman in her apartment. He is clearly a different man here, confident and at home. While he showers, Betty prepares their orange and pink bed; pours a glass of water for him and places it on the bedside table; and sprays the bed with perfume. She then straightens the sheets and readies them for a frisky disheveling. Her sheer nightgown offers tantalizing glimpses of her body. She moves confidently in anticipation of their sexual encounter. When he returns to the room, he gets on top of her, drinks, and takes pills from the bedside. As he touches and kisses her naked body, we can see his presumed adoration of her. He caresses her nipples and then pauses to smoke. She groans and gyrates in bed, sometimes with him, sometimes on her own. Multiple times the camera cuts to him popping pills and taking drags from a joint. The lovemaking ends and Betty takes a shower.

As she dries off, she calls out, “Bring me my bra, Bruce!” When he does not respond, she rushes to find his body splayed out and his head hanging off the side of the bed. She calls his business partner, the head of Golden Harvest, and soon ambulances arrive. The scene concludes with his partner telling the press that Bruce Lee died in his own home with his wife. This lie becomes the basis for why this film is shocking. It directly exposes the lie to acknowledge that he died in the post-coital throes of intense passion with his mistress, whom he was about to reveal as his co-star. It is an intimate relationship about to be made public through his death.

Like Linda and Bruce’s relationship, which occurs as interracial marriages rise, Betty and Bruce’s relationship is also a product of their time: the rise of kung fu movies and porn in Hong Kong as well as the changing roles available to women. Betty Ting Pei discloses their intimacy by representing three facets of their relationship: their intense and heated libidinal connection through sex and physical pleasure; their emotional bonding and recognition based on their shared individual and group identities; and their public life, which depicts him as her publicly acknowledged lover who is driven mad by her disappearances, sex work, and gambling. In effect, Bruce and Betty’s relationship presents a thriving alternative to the confines of marriage.

When the film depicts the intensity of Bruce Lee and Betty Ting Pei's romance in the mutual recognition and passion they feel for each other as lovers, it comments on the constricting structures of morality that their relationship faces. For example, they meet when he saves her from being beaten up by a film producer who tricked her into signing a contract to make porn, which she then refuses to do. When she asks if she can go with Bruce, he says he cannot bring a woman home, and instead tosses her a bunch of money so that she can find a safe haven and begin anew. She uses the money to make herself over into a high-class escort. They meet again when Bruce is holding court in a bar and is flanked by dozens of fans seeking his autograph. She approaches him and tosses a stack of money on his table to pay him back for saving her. This captures his attention and he chases her out of the club, through the streets in his yellow sports car, and into her home where they recall their meeting and the distances she has traveled from a destitute woman beaten on the street to one with a glamorous life. They become friends.

The film presents the development of their love based on a friendship. As such, Betty Ting Pei's narrative actually illustrates Linda Lee's description of love as a friendship that burns fiercely. They share their personal stories with each other and recognize their similarities as strong and resilient people who have struggled to free themselves from both class and other constraints in Hong Kong. She is subjugated into sex work and he flees to escape gang life. Moreover, this is aggravated by racial discrimination in his life and gendered sexualization in hers. Betty Ting Pei tells him how unlucky she is in terms of her gendered experiences. As a woman, she finds directors and producers see her beauty in sexual terms. As Betty states, "When they see my body, they did not take me for an actress. But a porn actress." This statement generates raucous laughter from him, and she calls him names like "little rascal," though he prefers "thug." She discloses then that it is more precise to call him a hero, as he is on screen, not only for many but for her as well. Based on how they are subjugated in Hong Kong culture, they bond, and his role as a virile hero matters to her as well, albeit differently from how it affects Linda Lee.

Soon, Betty Ting Pei also calls him a great lover. Bruce Lee is represented in this regard as grateful, and flattered, as well as amused. He takes her to his exercise studio, which includes a massive custom-sized waterbed and many exercise machines. He compares her misfortune and says that he was as a driver, a restaurant worker, and a gas station attendant in the United States. But ultimately, through hard work and determination as well as the devotion, support, and faith of his wife, he found success. She contrasts this philosophy with hers, which is centered on fate and luck. Not only was she unlucky for not achieving success outside of sex work as an escort and porn actress/B-

movie stardom; she was unlucky for meeting him too late as the one she is destined to love. This exchange occurs as he exercises in her languid and elegant presence. As their discussions intensify, she moves away and fully discloses her regard for him, as the one she can admire if not for his wife. The film is interspersed with such scenes of long conversations, public outings, before they finally have sex.

They then make no attempt to hide their friendship from the Hong Kong public. In a prologue to the scene in which they finally consummate their sexual relationship, they sit silently in a club they frequent, listening as the lounge singer laments, “Why didn’t we meet when you were single? You come in to my life and then you leave like the rivers running east.” This sets the viewer up for the next scene, where they cross the line from friendship to infidelity. It is a difficult crossing that is enabled by passion. At Betty’s hotel suite, he asks to “see” her body. This exposure soon reveals their mutual desire. After a passionate kiss, she pulls away and tells him not to forget his wife and two kids. He responds, “They are lovely,” and says goodbye. When he leaves, a drunken white Westerner enters her suite, sending Bruce into a jealous rage—not only because he sees how desirable she is to others, but also because he generally resents foreigners’ condescension toward Chinese people. This scene of masculine conflict with a white man and the sexualization of Betty lead directly to their first sexual encounter.

In sum, in this movie Betty Ting Pei depicts their relationship as built on individual compatibility and their shared experience belonging to a marginalized group within the locality of Hong Kong. Attending to the narrative presented raises questions about how Bruce Lee is constructed in differing arenas and audiences in the West and East. In Pei’s version, she and Bruce both ascend from poverty, and while he struggles against gendered racialization, she endures gendered sexualization. This forms a bond and makes a match in how Bruce deems this worth devotion and address. Moreover, he wishes to help her and finds her alluring as if frenzied by Betty’s love and attention. When he cuts his shooting days short to rush off to see her, the producers worry and express their confusion about what he sees in her. Despite others’ lack of understanding, the film uses their intimate interactions to tell us about why they are compatible. It is their shared class struggle and racialization through sex and gender that they face in Hong Kong together.

Furthermore, the movie presents how a powerful physical attraction fuels their desire as so unsettling that they become irresponsible in their own lives. She gambles obscene amounts of money, which leads to a huge debt, and he becomes unreliable at work. When thugs beat her up because she cannot honor a wager, she flees to his studio. There he saves her from the violence she

certainly faces, but she still runs away from him. He finds her at the beach, where he slaps her face and commands her not to betray him. Their intense confrontation, where they acknowledge each other as a source of their agitation, leads to their deepening attachment. He offers her the leading actress role in his new film, and they resume their love affair, which threatens to become more public. Indeed, on the same night that she signs a contract at a party thrown in Betty and Bruce's honor, he dies—so this moment is presented as an injustice for Betty Ting Pei. For her, his promises are ultimately unfulfilled. And on the verge of making their relationship visible on screen, his death prevents its emergence even if Hong Kong supposedly knows about their publicly flaunted relationship. Presumably the film community witnessed the impact of their passionate love affair in his performance. And his attachment to her was expressed in public in ways that seemed largely unknown in the West. Ultimately Betty Ting Pei signals Bruce's need for ethnoracial sameness and liberated loving in a transnational context. Similar to Linda Lee, she primarily wants to reclaim Bruce through a phallogocentric discourse, which ultimately limits the impact and the scope of their decidedly feminist interventions.

WHAT THE COMPETING VERSIONS REVEAL: SEX AND KNOWLEDGE

Linda Lee's account of Bruce Lee's sexuality differs from the one Betty Ting Pei offers, especially in terms of infidelity. Unlike Betty Ting Pei's assertion that her private life with Bruce will now come into public knowledge, Linda Lee recounts that during his life she did have to engage questions about his sexuality within his movies but not so much outside of them. Linda Lee recalls:

I was asked the inevitable question: "How did I feel when I saw my husband on screen in the arms of another woman?" I could only answer, "It's difficult to feel romantic when you know you are in front of a camera and under the blaze of powerful lights. It's only part of his job as an actor." Then I remembered a moment when we had sat in the dark watching *The Big Boss* (his first movie as an action star) unfold and the scene comes up where Bruce is brought face to face with a naked prostitute; Bruce had leaned across to me and whispered, "part of the fringe benefits."³⁶

While the last line may be a joke, an admission, or a reassurance to his wife of his disregard for such possibilities, Linda Lee presents the scene as evidence of Bruce Lee's candid attitude. He alleviates whatever discomfort she may have in watching him with another woman by making her laugh. Again he uses humor to reassure and comfort her, even if she may not have needed it. In this way, she presents their alignment in the midst of his stardom.

During the time of the interview mentioned, she had the respectability accorded by their legal union and public recognition and had regard as a mother. Yet Linda Lee describes her attitude in light of later interrogations regarding his sexual life in a resigned manner, as if throwing up her hands in frustration: “All I can honestly say is that if he were [engaged in sexual relations with other women], I knew nothing about it. All I know is that he made me very happy; he was a good husband and a good father.”³⁷ The use of the word “honestly” seems to suggest that readers might find this statement untruthful. It certainly reads as defensive. She operates against the tide of rampant rumors about what she did and did not know regarding her husband’s activities. In response, she entrenches us in the world of her family life, where despite his schedule she feels his presence as her husband and the father of her children every day. In this way Linda Lee’s discussion of Bruce Lee’s sexuality reveals a will not to know.

In confronting the gossip about Bruce’s possible extramarital activities, Linda Lee acknowledges how he must have experienced as much temptation as opportunity. She seems to respond to accusations of naïveté regarding the sexual possibilities available for a man of her husband’s stature. She confronts the challenge head on, with accounts of her own attraction and sexual regard for him as part of their bond. She asserts ownership of him as husband and lover in the following recollection:

Certainly, I have to admit that the temptation must have been there for him. He was extremely attractive to look at; and he was blessed with enormous sex appeal. He traveled a lot—he was away from home for long periods on location and so on. But none of it matters to me—and if he were alive today, my attitude would be exactly as it is now. Women, I know pursued him. I am not talking now of the usual silly letters all male superstars tend to receive. He dismissed that sort of letters or phone calls pretty peremptorily. . . . If he were traveling somewhere and he was pursued by a female he generally mentioned it to me—“my goodness, this woman, she wouldn’t leave me alone”; it was as straightforward and natural as that.³⁸

In this rendering Linda counters the reports of his possible transgressions by confirming that she and Bruce discussed them. Her use of the word “generally” also seems to indicate that he may not always have reported the incidents when he received women’s attention, though when he did inform her, it was of his irritation with other women who pursued him. However, her story deploys a gender hierarchy of bad and good women. He seems to dismiss the women as ultimately unattractive to him. So they are unlike her, to whom he

feels strongly connected. Linda Lee highlights her position as a good woman through her ability to claim ownership of her husband in her de facto position as wife. She writes that she “never felt any pangs of jealousy” when other women flirted with him. “*I get to take him home. . . . I don’t suppose I ever let myself think too much about it really; we were too busy living our lives worrying and thinking about Bruce’s career and that kind of thing.*”³⁹ In emphasizing her role in his career, she expresses her utmost confidence in her claim to him as his partner. And in doing so, she attempts to lay to rest, two years after her husband’s death, any challenges to the solidity of their marriage by asserting the power of her partnership and his proper role as husband and father. Through detailed conversations that indicate their closeness and her absolute confidence in his fidelity, she showed how they lived with these pressures surrounding them and remained bonded in a shared life that was intensely public. She depicts the fans as wanting to imbibe and partake in his stardom as a sex symbol—and for whom he was not available.

Toward the memoir’s conclusion, however, Linda Lee describes a revealing conversation that ultimately challenges the solidity of Bruce Lee’s fidelity. It describes a marital contest that could have transpired had he lived long enough. In the following quote their conversation confronts the gossip surrounding his sexuality in a somewhat indirect and more generalized manner, and notably we see a different attitude about it on her part:

During our nine-year marriage, we did discuss this whole question of the attitude of men and women to fidelity. Bruce did say that if he ever he had an affair with another woman, it would be something that happened spontaneously. . . . And if it happened, he added, it would never be more than a one time thing. . . . He added, “if that ever happens and if you ever find out about it, I want you to know that it has absolutely no importance at all.” And he was very sweet and considerate when he said that and told me how important I was to him, how important his children were to him. He made me feel I was his special treasure. Infidelity, he suggested, had no real bearing on a marriage. . . . I remember saying, Oh yeah? Men are like that, he said. *Hmmmm? I have no idea—nor do I care—whether Bruce had been unfaithful when we had this conversation.* It was so obvious to me that he really cared about me and about the children that a matter of that nature simply never worried me. I remember once where in the case of a couple we knew the man had gone off to live with his mistress and the wife had just hung around forlornly for years. . . . I told him if that ever happened between us, I’m gone like a flash. He looked surprised for my voice was firm and emphatic. “Would

you,” he asked, a little nonplussed. “You’re darned right, I would,” I said, and he knew I meant it.⁴⁰

The confession of unfinished business for Linda and Bruce Lee captures not just the complexity of their marriage but the impossibility of knowing the other, even within the most intimate of bonds. In other words, sexuality does not bring us to certain knowledge after all. If their marital entanglement leads to a not knowing, the memoir works as the projection of an image of the loved one as possession; their desires are disciplined into an institutional relation that is capturable, identifiable, and knowable. And that prize is unavailable to others. The private realm is thus made exclusive and exalted.

In the italicized portion of the quote we read a different tone than her previous declarations about the possibility of his extramarital activity. It seems to operate as an addendum to the earlier line where she says she has no previous knowledge, that she felt loved by him and so did the children—so much so that the gossip took her by surprise. It was an interruption to her understanding of her own family. In the conversation quoted, however, Linda describes Bruce’s male justification of adulterous sex, which she perceives as flawed reasoning. She makes clear, playing along in the hypothetical nature of the discussion, saying if that ever happened, she would leave the marriage. He remains ever charismatic and she ever pragmatic. With clarity she identifies the heart of the matter: if the extramarital sex happened, she did not know, and if it were to happen, she would leave. Because she privileges the heteronormative and hierarchical family as a site of sustenance and support in the life of celebrity and fame, it cannot be and was not marred by infidelity—even if it meant nothing. To be clear, she denies the significance of infidelity through the family narrative.

In terms of sexual discourse, however, the conversation about infidelity hierarchizes the different forms of sexual experience available to Bruce Lee. It reclaims Bruce from the public and fan culture by prizing heteronormativity and marriage. It renders the heterosexual and monogamous formation of marriage as protection from those who want to possess him. Linda Lee continues to emphasize Bruce Lee as property for her and her children alone when rendering the marriage as factually intact:

I would often say to him that perhaps it would have been a lot easier for him to achieve his goals if he had not had the responsibility of me and the children. I remember him saying no matter what, no matter how bad the times are or how bad they become I want you to know the most important thing in my life is to have you and the children around me and I knew he meant it.⁴¹

Here Linda quotes Bruce about his family's value and how he treasures his role as father and husband. Interestingly, the conscious use of certainty in interpreting each other—"I knew he meant it" (the children are most important); "he knew I meant it" (the threat to leave)—reveals a possible uncertainty in the marriage. Here, in her suggestion that it would be "easier" without the burden of "me and the children," she seems to criticize the gendered role she plays elsewhere without discontent. In this form it becomes a kind of gentle reminder of her work in the family, of her value as well as the children. It is a strategy within a marriage where gender and celebrity can supersede other considerations.

Even if Bruce Lee entertained the possibility or did participate in sexual relations with others outside his marriage, a hierarchy of value is placed on these acts. They are not the sacred heterosexual married couple who are able to navigate hierarchies of gender and race. According to Linda Lee, the marital relation for Bruce Lee means everything, while other sexual relationships, if they occurred, would mean nothing. For Linda, while casual sex is lesser than the bond of the family, she still would not stand for it. At the time of his death, she confesses, she did not know if he had had an affair. She admits contributing to the scandal in the following event, which occurred "on the day after Bruce's death":

We both sensed that the headlines would be larger and more dramatic if the press could link Bruce's name with Betty's. But I really didn't care then and I don't care now—it didn't seem to me all that important, one way or another. I was more preoccupied with thoughts of my children at the time. Raymond did not specifically say that Bruce died at home, but he implied that he had. When the press found out the truth, it seemed Raymond had been lying, why? The wildest theories and rumors flew in all directions.⁴²

The public and the private collide dramatically in this description. To protect the family and avoid scandal, it seemed better to divert the public from the truth of his dying in Betty Ting Pei's house. Later, it was explained that Raymond Chow and Betty Ting Pei met with Bruce Lee there to discuss the film they were working on. Linda Lee prioritizes her motherly duties in the end of the description—so that unlike Betty Ting Pei, she is a noble mother and wife, and in her view of the interview with Betty and Raymond, the other woman was simply a co-worker. Later she mentions seeing Betty Ping Tei and that she "talked to her and satisfied myself as to what happened" regarding his death and what he had taken, referring to the drug Equagesic.⁴³

To Linda Lee, most important is the large life that she and Bruce lived to-

gether as husband and wife. She argues that they did right by each other in terms of their responsibility of forming a strong bond in marriage.

On the whole I believe we each did what was required of us in relation to the other. We played our separate roles as best we could and perhaps usurped each other by surpassing expectations we had never felt justified in entertaining for as Bruce often quoted: I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations and you're not in this world to live up to mine. Although I always had total confidence in him even I in the end found that he had more than lived up to my most secret hopes.⁴⁴

Not only do they provide each other fulfillment in marriage in the way they recognized and understood each other; they also create a bond of accountable relations toward the other: to do right by the one you choose to love. Therefore, the book argues that their relationship does not simply read as a conventional relation. Her caretaking of the children and his long-distance fathering make her an informed and dutiful housewife rather than a duped and naïve woman. The memoir's moments of intimacy work to locate Bruce Lee squarely as a racialized male celebrity exuding an undeniable heteronormative masculinity. We see that the normalcy of heterosexual interracial marriage is itself evidence of his achieving a manhood based on fulfilling his responsibility to her and his family.

Linda Lee confronts in her memoir the sexualized circumstances of Bruce Lee's death. She concludes the last chapter as if talking to a friend, with full intimate disclosure: "There is not a great deal more to tell; we are now back to where we began, with the death of my husband." The sharing of her loss and her grief concludes with the message that sex and its speculation are unimportant to the feelings many share for the hero we are "reluctant to accept" as dead. "The only thing of importance is that Bruce is gone and will not return. He lives on in our memories and through his films. Please remember him for his genius, his art and the magic he brought to every one of us. I appeal to all of you to please let him rest in peace and do not disturb his soul."⁴⁵ Thus, into the scandal of celebrity sex she inserts his role as husband and father, representing Bruce Lee as the man only she knew. Betty Ting Pei begins her story with the admonition for Bruce to rest in peace, even as she calls up a version of him that is so different from the legacy his wife carves from her particular relationship to him.

A MEDITATION ON SEX, DEATH, AND GRIEF

In the aftermath of Bruce Lee's shocking death, Linda Lee and Betty Ting Pei offer competing depictions of Bruce Lee. Both offer potential interventions in

the way he is framed: Linda Lee claims the respectability of marriage denied interracial couples in the United States, and Betty Ting Pei emphasizes Bruce's ethnoracial sameness in a transnational context. In describing his death Linda Lee says she felt Bruce Lee's strength transfer to her so that she could stand up to protect and defend her family. She does so by saying that while she shares the reader's grief, Bruce Lee belongs ultimately to her and the children. As a grieving wife and mother, she has a life-saving claim. As my close readings and larger contextual scaffoldings indicate, however, one cannot fully know the other, even in intimate relations. Sex does not provide us with knowledge but perhaps a lack of knowledge instead. Whether he did participate in extramarital relations, she does not know. Thus we see that she cannot fully possess him. Linda Lee did witness, through her sustained proximity to him, the magnificent achievement of Bruce Lee—racialized man as celebrated man, an unprecedented hero and sex symbol. For Linda Lee to emphasize Bruce Lee's role as a husband and father—one who is most himself with his kids and eternally worried about supporting his family—is to challenge the media's representations of him as a philanderer who would partake in the spoils of his superstardom. Today she also presents their love as something that cannot be shared, which is again very different from Betty Ting Pei's full disclosure. At a recent San Francisco Giants' tribute to Bruce Lee, who was born in San Francisco, an audience member asked Linda Lee Caldwell to reveal something we do not know about Bruce Lee. She said she would not, for some things are hers alone.

In her memoir Linda Lee claims an interracial love story so as to access the heteronormal denied such couplings in anti-miscegenation history. She focuses on how a member of a disprized group, Asian American men, was able to achieve this normalcy and within the context of his extraordinary stardom. The extramarital affairs can then be written off as hearsay, gossip, and ultimately not important. She does not paint the picture the media tried to reveal: the super macho, super sexy, super celebrity philanderer who could not help but cheat because it is part of the dream of male stardom. So whether he did cheat or not, and despite the opportunities, Linda Lee makes clear that his true manhood was defined by the responsibility that he fulfilled as part of their individual contract. In her depiction he achieves two seemingly impossible things for an Asian American man: a good, proper manhood as devoted husband and father and celebrity sex-symbol status as a global super star. We cannot know for sure, but the possibility remains that Bruce and Linda Lee maintained a strong marriage and loving family in the face of a massive stardom that finally consumed his body and his life. This story is the one she tells, and it stands as an important intervention.

The competing narratives emerging from the sex scandal that enshrouds

Bruce Lee's death present the potential to redefine the legacy of his manhood. But both versions utilize phallocentrist discourse. In Betty Ting Pei's we see Bruce Lee's legacy as one that would revisit the scene of celebrity sex, apologize for what she claims he most certainly did, and perhaps even encourage Asian American men to go out and do whatever they want sexually, demonstrating the super potency of the always-perilous Asian American phallus, as I discuss in my book *Straitjacket Sexualities*.⁴⁶ Linda Lee's version similarly privileges a patriarchal manhood, suggesting that as long as you bring your wife flowers, tell her sex does not matter, be nice to the kids, and publicly exclaim that she is the reason you are a star, then extramarital affairs don't deserve acknowledgment. Both versions of Bruce Lee's sexuality treat women in a derivative and secondary way even as a hierarchy persists in their stature. On the one hand, Linda Lee's narrative stands as a legitimate version as told by the good white wife. On the other, Betty Ting Pei's remains as an illicit and looked-down-upon version that is told from the position of Asian female hypersexuality. And in the United States, Linda Lee's version reigns (as supported by the success of the 1993 film *Dragon*, based on her memoir), while Betty Ting Pei's is a largely unknown voice of the bad and improper Asian mistress.

In their respective works both Betty Ting Pei and Linda Lee expose an extended view of the intimate: emotional, sexual, and physical aspects of Bruce Lee's relationships. Due to their different social and racialized positions, they offer two different perspectives. Linda Lee reclaims him from the public in a way that hierarchizes sexual relations and privileges normative family formations so as to reposition his legacy, especially for her children. Her story normalizes him as a quintessential American husband and father who happened to be Asian, in a way that claims respectability for an interracial couple. Alternately, Betty Ting Pei lauds Bruce Lee's celebrity macho and unbridled libido. Her story normalizes not so much his identity as an Asian man but the relationship that occurs outside the bounds of the American marriage into the sphere of the transnational. Even though it was transgressive, as communicated by the racy sex depicted and the context of adultery, it was ultimately a love story between two people with similar traits who belong together.

Finally, both women ultimately posit a knowable sexuality. So while both open the legacy of Bruce Lee to include the husband who cares for his wife and children beyond the self, and the lover who enjoys his own beauty as well as his sexual appeal, his identity is fixed, knowable, and certain. The demand for both the good husband and the macho philanderer valorizes normative gender and sexual identities for them, too. This ultimately limits the impact and scope of their interventions. To hierarchize sexuality in terms of its conquering prowess, its patriarchal formation in the good benevolent husband or

its orgasmic expression, at the expense of its many manifestations and parts, is to limit our understanding not only of sexuality but of race and other categories of social experience. In the end, sex and its representation reveal more about the map of socially sanctioned structures that govern our desires and their expression than about racial and gendered success and visibility and who may own and claim that legacy.

In closing, I read these as works of grief and sexuality together, in how these two women trace the shifts in their own sexualities after Bruce Lee's death. As a grieving mother myself, mourning the unexpected death of my youngest son Lakas, my own loss recognizes their making sense of life in the aftermath of sudden death. I understand the ferocity Linda Lee whips up to protect her husband's legacy from all who will claim him. And I understand the little death that Betty Ting Pei reenacts in order to bring back Bruce Lee to her bed. There is a deep physicality of loss, the attachment and sensual connection between parent and child, the companionship and sexual connection between woman and lover. A force of sweetness is missing. What resonates for me so strongly in these women's voices is a deep tie between death and life. The co-existence of death and life of which they are now aware, and how creativity in the memoir and in the film champions the struggle to continue and to remember. They each attempt to reach Bruce Lee and to make sense of their own lives without his physical presence, which they yearn and wish for. A robust life in a muscular and powerful body no longer here but still felt, especially in the creative act of remembering oneself in the act of claiming him as hers.

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NOTES

The bulk of this essay was completed while in residence as a Senior Faculty Fellow at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. I thank Jerry Miller, Shelley Lee, Stephen Sohn, Juliana Chang, and Juno Parreñas for reading earlier drafts and providing critique. Rhacel Parreñas generously offered me sisterly support that helped me launch this project. I appreciate the audiences at Bryn Mawr Tri-College Symposium for their responses. Thanks to Hoang Nguyen, Bakirathi Mani, and Jerry Miller for inviting me to present there. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Frontiers*. I appreciate my son Bayan's help with two word choices. I am excited to write alongside him and my husband Dan. Creativity will sustain us and save us. I dedicate this work to my mother-in-law Judy Shimizu (1940–2013) and to my son Lakas Shimizu (2005–2013) with love.

1. See Kwai-Cheung Lo, "Muscles and Subjectivity: A Short History of the Masculine Body in Hong Kong Popular Culture," in *Stars: The Film Reader*, ed. Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy (New York: Routledge, 2004); Tony Rayns, "Bruce Lee: Narcissism and Nationalism," in *A Study of Hong Kong Martial Arts Film*, ed. Lan Shing-hon (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Urban Council, 1980); Paul Bowman, *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fantasy-Fighting-Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); and Hoang Tan Nguyen, *A View from the Bottom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

2. See Jachinson Chan, *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee* (London: Routledge, 2001); David Eng, *Racial Castration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis," in *How Do I Look?* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991); Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Bruce Lee I Love You: Discourses of Race and Masculinity in the Queer Superstardom of JJ Chinois," in Mimi Thi Nguyen and Linh Nguyen Tu, *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Viet Nguyen, "The Remasculinization of Chinese America: Race, Violence, and the Novel," *American Literary History* 12, nos. 1–2 (2000): 130–57; Tan Hoang Nguyen, *A View from the Bottom*; Eng Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

3. The official title of the film in Chinese is *Bruce Lee and I* or *Li Xiao Long yu wo*. Yet it is also advertised in a Japanese theatrical poster as *Bruce Lee I Love You*, and for its US release it had the alternate title *Bruce Lee: His Last Days, His Last Nights*. So these titles reflect different translations in at least three different contexts.

4. See Frank Chin in Jeff Adachi, *The Slanted Screen*, DVD (San Francisco: Asian American Media Mafia, 2006).

5. See Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: The Making of Race in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

6. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 225.
7. Foucault, "Technologies," 225.
8. Foucault, "Technologies," 225.
9. Foucault, "Technologies," 224.
10. Foucault, "Technologies," 224.
11. Foucault, "Technologies," 223.
12. Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
13. Foucault, "Technologies," 224.
14. Foucault, "Technologies," 228.
15. Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).
16. Ryan Leong, "SF Giants Pay Tribute to Bruce Lee," September 10, 2012, <http://www.asianweek.com/2012/09/10/sf-giants-pay-tribute-to-bruce-lee/>.
17. Linda Lee, *Bruce Lee: The Man Only I Knew* (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1975), 173, 18–19.
18. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 20.
19. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 13.
20. Kwai-Cheung Lo argues well, however, that Bruce Lee's body was foreign and alien to Hong Kong in terms of the locality he references in the films as well as his characterizations as foreigner coming into various scenes. See "Muscles and Subjectivity: A Short History of the Masculine Body in Hong Kong Popular Culture," in *Stars: The Film Reader*, ed. Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 119.
21. Lo, "Muscles and Subjectivity," 69.
22. Lo, "Muscles and Subjectivity," 95.
23. Foucault, "Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 167.
24. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 21.
25. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 29.
26. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 29–30.
27. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 31.
28. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 31–32.
29. Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in 20th Century America," in *What Comes Naturally*, 49–50.
30. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 13–14.
31. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 134.
32. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 29.
33. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 166–67.

34. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 190.
35. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 190–91.
36. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 147.
37. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 162.
38. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 162.
39. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 162, my emphasis.
40. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 163–64, my emphasis.
41. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 164.
42. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 201.
43. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 205.
44. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 165–66, my emphasis.
45. Lee, *Bruce Lee*, 205.
46. Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *Straitjacket Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).