



# THE DISCIPLE

A N I N T E R N A L J O U R N E Y



JAVIER KATSUMA ARAO TOYOHARA

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Bruce Lee's Water metaphor inspired this novel. The credits for the same are due to Bruce Lee LLC (Limited Liability Company), a global marketing and media company that exclusively manages the global brand, IP, life rights, and likeness of the iconic Martial Artist, Humanitarian, Global Film & Entertainment Star, and Philosopher, Bruce Lee.

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## About the Author



Javier Katsuma Arao Toyohara 新尾豊原勝馬 is a copywriter who always finds a way to enjoy scripting anything, from administrative documents, technical specifications, database programs, and even stories like “The Disciple” that you are about to read. As a technical writer, he has an article, “A Calendar Class” in the Visual dBASE Web Magazine, and a paper, “CRUD functions generator tool” presented at the Postgres Conference Webinar Series.

Javier practices Taichi whenever possible and views and reads Bruce Lee’s content related to his philosophic point of view of martial arts.

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# Contents



<i>Foreword</i> .....	12
<i>Preface</i> .....	14
1. <i>What do you want?</i> .....	17
2. <i>Niu's motives</i> .....	22
3. <i>Farewell</i> .....	27
4. <i>Journey fare</i> .....	30
5. <i>The journey begins</i> .....	33
6. <i>Water</i> .....	37
7. <i>Water's properties &amp; behavior</i> .....	40
8. <i>Water's smoothness answer</i> .....	43
9. <i>The aspirant disciple</i> .....	45
10. <i>First day as a disciple</i> .....	48
11. <i>Back to the basics</i> .....	52
12. <i>Learning the art of a river guide</i> .....	54
13. <i>Learning how to compete</i> .....	56
14. <i>Learning to breathe</i> .....	60
15. <i>Samantha's visit</i> .....	64
16. <i>Niu's evaluation</i> .....	68
17. <i>Still interested in water</i> .....	71

18. <i>The crossroad</i> .....	76
19. <i>Returning home</i> .....	78
20. <i>Tong Long's story</i> .....	81
21. <i>Renewal of a journey</i> .....	87

# Foreword



Javier is a writer who always looks for ways to enjoy any documentation assignment: Notes, memos, technical specifications of any artifact, database programs, love letters to his friends' couples, and even stories like *The Disciple*, which you are about to read. *The Disciple* is a tribute to Bruce Lee, particularly to his Manifesto "Be Water," which transcends physical training or combat situations by motivating the martial arts practitioner (or any occupation) to develop a flexible mental state, adaptable to any circumstance or field of competence; whether martial, professional, commercial, business or ordinary life. The story in your hands is a novelized interpretation of the metaphor "Be water."

Since I have known Javier, he has always been interested in the sacred master-disciple relationship. From my experience with my teachers, I told Javier that a student regularly looks for teachers to acquire the knowledge or technical skills necessary to succeed in the work environment. The masters of the old school, those interested in spreading knowledge and experiences for individual and group well-being, choose their disciples to keep traditions alive and continue with the noble task of continuously improving the living conditions of others. Genuine teachers help or guide by vocation, without boasting of their trade, simply by nature, and preach by example; the wise do not require words or speeches to teach the way. *The Disciple* is a tribute to teachers with vocation and disciples by conviction.

I hope The Disciple shares the values of the noble labor of teachers or tutors. We have much to recognize them and much more to support them in continuing their noble profession. For the martial arts practitioner, The Disciple will surely share an interpretation of Bruce Lee's dissertation "Be Water" to consider it a model of the development of martial skills and a pattern of behavior. For the community in general, water's physical and functional properties contain a whole compendium of teachings that Bruce Lee gives us in his multi-cited metaphor of "Be water."

I am confident that The Disciple will contribute to and appreciate the responsibility and commitment of the roles of Master and Disciple in any activity, profession, or trade. Likewise, Bruce Lee's introspection about the nature and functionality of water deserves to promote the value it can bring to our lives: "Aspire to be like water: soft but resistant, flexible, shapeless, without appearance, to adapt to any circumstance. Be constant and persevering to mold the hardest rocks. Act unintentionally, without favoring or harming anyone."

Carlos Cordero Blancas

Aikido México Aiki Calli

Sixth Dan Aikido

# Preface



At 18, a youngster named Li Xiao Long (小龍 Little Dragon) won two championships in physical proficiency. The first award came from an intercollegiate boxing tournament. Li Xiao Long also obtained another distinction in a chachacha dance contest at the famous Crown Colony of Hong Kong. Both awards positively impacted Li Xiao Long's spirit, as he realized he possessed the appropriate skills and strength of mind to achieve whatever he wanted.

Amazingly, boxing and chachacha were not Li Xiao Long's favorite activities. He preferred practicing a Kung Fu style called Wing Chun, characterized by exhausting workouts employing attack and defense techniques coexisting in remarkable harmony. It is hard to differentiate when a defensive or attacking strategy occurs because the Wing Chun practitioner seamlessly attacks while defending or defends while attacking.

According to the traditional practice of Wing Chun, Li Xiao Long complemented his martial arts training with the study of Taoism. Notably, the young dragon didn't have the slightest interest in excelling in academia. Because of his apathy towards school, it is exceptional that the young dragon could analyze and synthesize Tao's principles in a relatively few years.

At the age of 20, Li Xiao Long, better known as Bruce Lee or Lee Jun Fan, had the opportunity to pursue an academic

career and chose Philosophy because of his preference for Taoism. As a college trainee, Bruce studied other schools of thought, broadening his perspectives (including martial ones) and enriching his knowledge of human nature and himself.

Simultaneously studying the philosophical aspects of the Western world and fighting techniques from other cultures, Bruce Lee did not neglect the arduous training of Kung Fu.

Bruce began building an eminently eclectic martial training system that integrated different techniques. The experience of developing a system gave Bruce an honest way of expression, plus an endless path of self-knowledge and self-improvement.

Supported by a unique charisma and virtuosity in martial arts, Bruce Lee had many followers, who eventually became his students. He usually shared with them various philosophical precepts, among which stood out: “Be water.” From the perspective of Taoism, it is noteworthy that this allegory symbolizes the ideal state of human beings, as it promotes full integration with nature.

Being a loyal follower of Taoism, Bruce Lee promoted the aspiration “be water” to the extent of implementing a highly flexible, adaptable martial system with an open architecture, integrating any effective fighting technique regardless of the origin. Bruce’s skill reached extraordinary technical levels, which revealed new dimensions to martial expression, which motivated thousands of supporters to adopt the aim of emulating water as their own—from early 1960 until today.

Due to years of tremendous work with talent, Bruce Lee became a celebrity in martial arts and cinematography. Those



achievements emerged from a solid philosophical framework that always stamped his personality in every activity he performed. Bruce surpassed the speculative level as a philosopher because he practiced its precepts with utmost care and devotion. Therefore, his philosophical heritage is worth analyzing.

One of his philosophical legacy themes, the water metaphor, motivated the present story, “The Disciple,” to honor Bruce’s memory.

# 1

## What do you want?



**S**eattle, WA, 1974.

Dr. Jerome Moore, the headmaster of the Laboratory of Advanced Studies of Water, is trying to persuade Dr. Niu Kwan to continue working at the laboratory.

Dr. Kwan announced his resignation; however, Dr. Moore ignored it because he thought it would be easy to change Niu's mind.

"Niu, this place is your home! I've always considered you the all-time prodigy of this institute. Consequently, I've granted you every scholarship available to support your academic career," Dr. Moore said.

Niu felt embarrassed because Dr. Moore was receiving his resignation as a rejection or lack of appreciation for his funding.

Dr. Moore observed his best student and continued in an attempt to persuade him.

"Niu, despite your young age, you have accomplished everything an academic man can ask for. You have a Ph.D. in

## **The disciple**

biology, a prominent job as a professor at the university, and many papers published in prestigious science magazines. This laboratory needs you!” Dr. Moore implored.

Niu recalled his sleepless nights and countless efforts to succeed in a highly competitive academic world. He had finally obtained many professional achievements but wasn’t proud of them. Thus, he bowed his head as a signal of modesty.

“We have much work ahead; our research in conservative techniques of purified water is a guarantee to receive grants from many sponsors. Your participation is essential!” Dr. Moore said.

Niu remained calm because he had a different aspiration. The decision to leave the applied science pathway behind was always present. And the time to depart had come.

Upset by his best student’s impassive reaction, Dr. Moore breathed sincerely and started evoking Niu’s early development to regain his attention.

“Niu, 15 years ago, you came along with your father, asking for an opportunity to work as the cleaning boy,” Dr. Moore noted with nostalgia. “Since the first day in this lab, you have studied with dedication and developed the skills needed to scale every position of this institute; nowadays, you are the only person who knows every operational procedure. For that reason, you are a serious contender to manage it. With your unique spirit and diligence, you will make history in a few years,” Dr. Moore said.

Niu considered Dr. Moore’s words but remained unmoved.

Dr. Moore didn’t see any gesture of approval on Niu’s face, so he delivered the last card.

## What do you want?

“Niu, you have my word. This research center will be in your hands six months after my retirement. You won’t suffer financial problems because the leader companies of purified water are willing to keep you on.”

Dr. Niu Kwan remained emotionless; Dr. Moore began to feel annoyed.

“Niu, you are an honorable man. I want the truth!”

Surprised, the young scientist opened his eyes and waited for the uncomfortable question. Dr. Moore’s face turned red; he made a significant effort to contain his anger.

“I’m perfectly aware you are a qualified resource. I’ve heard that our competitors want you. Which lab hired you?” Dr. Moore asked with anger.

“Nobody,” Niu replied.

“Are you going to build your lab?” Dr. Moore guessed.

“No, doctor, I won’t,” Niu answered.

Dr. Moore felt relieved to know that Niu was not betraying him. However, he was curious about Niu’s departure.

“So, why are you departing if you’re not leaving for financial reasons? You have everything to be successful here!”

Samantha Murray, the headmaster’s youngest assistant, entered the office, handed a cup of coffee to Dr. Moore, and then offered a cup of green tea to the young scientist with a tender look.

When Samantha left the office, Dr. Moore commented, “Ah! I forgot! My assistant and my female students love you;

## The disciple

even my daughter confessed to me that she is mad about you. They all want to be your bride! What do you want? What are you looking for?" The director screamed to make Niu react, then felt embarrassed. "Please forgive me, Niu."

"Doctor, you don't need to apologize because you are right! I do not know what I am looking for. That's why I'm leaving for mainland China to look for answers. Also, I have a personal issue to deal with," Niu said.

"Is that issue too personal to share?" he asked with concern.

"I have no problem telling you the truth; you have been my advisor for years, and I am grateful for your kind help. I want to go to China and live there for some years to learn about my ancestors' land. I also need to pursue a deep quest. I want to find out my mission in life," Niu replied, his eyes bright.

"Why don't you take a sabbatical? If that period is not enough, use two or three years. I'll wait for you to return!" The headmaster offered with a light of hope.

"I don't want to make a promise; the truth is that I do not know if I will return in one year or eight years. When I know, you will be the first to know."

Dr. Moore stopped insisting because there was no space to negotiate.

"Do you know something, Niu? I always thought you were a science nerd; you worked hard and with conviction. Your enthusiasm is contagious. You may have noticed that you are a model to follow for my students. It is impressive; I thought I knew you well!" Dr. Moore exclaimed.

## What do you want?

“Don’t worry, Doctor, I don’t know myself either; that’s the reason for my voyage to China.” The young scientist smiled.

“Okay, Niu, I’m sure you will complete your quest, and whatever decision you assume, good luck!” the director said.

Niu seized the moment to return the keys of his former office.

“You will find new research projects in the safe deposit box to develop more effective and low-cost techniques to preserve purified water; I hope you find them useful.”

Dr. Moore didn’t expect that gesture from Niu.

Niu grabbed Dr. Moore’s hand with affection.

“I appreciate your patience and support over these 15 years. Thank you, Doctor. May Buddha bless you,” Niu said with gratitude.

Ultimately moved, Dr. Moore asked with sorrow, “When did you prepare the documentation?”

“After I submitted my resignation,” Niu replied.

Dr. Moore was embarrassed because he had judged Niu unfairly.

“Please forgive me. I doubted your loyalty to the lab. Nowadays, the competition between labs is devastating. Everyone wants to win at any cost. I must thank you. You are a man with integrity,” Dr. Moore said.

## 2

### Niu's motives



**D**r. Moore embraced Niu at the office door. Samantha saw the scene and inferred the imminent departure of the young scientist.

Niu approached Samantha's desk to say goodbye.

"Can I have lunch with you?" she asked.

"Sure, Samantha. See you at noon."

Samantha and Niu had lunch in the lab's garden.

"Niu, Dr. Moore has confirmed your departure. He is depressed because he can't comprehend your reasons for forsaking a promising academic career." Samantha's sympathy encouraged Niu to talk.

"Kwan, my Kung Fu master, told me the following story: Once upon a time, a singular monk lived on a high mountain. He had a reputation for choosing his students with the utmost care and scrutiny. The Master silently interviewed the candidates; he invited the newcomer to sit at a table with a jar and two teacups. With extreme courtesy, the venerable Master served

## Niu's motives

tea in a cup until it filled up but continued even though the infusion spilled out of the receptacle.”

“Most of the candidates perceived this as odd, and for that reason, the aspirants viewed the master as insane and left the interview immediately.”

“The teacher did that on purpose,” Samantha commented with intrigue.

“Can you figure out why?” Niu asked.

“I believe candidates saw the tea waste as an abnormal attitude,” Samantha answered.

“You mentioned something fundamental: waste. Why the tea spill?” Niu asked again.

“The teacup was complete with no space for more liquid,” Samantha said.

“That is the corollary of that story!” Niu exclaimed.

“Pardon me, but I do not understand,” Samantha said.

“Those who have satiated their appetite do not need to look for food. Those who think they know everything do not have the spirit of learning,” Niu said. “Continuing with the story, a wealthy fellow visited the monk on a certain day. The aspirant sat through the tea ceremony; after perceiving how the teacup was spilling, he asked permission to interrupt the interview with the request to resume it in the following days”

“Days later, the candidate appeared stripped of his rich clothes because, in the previous days, he had given away his wealth to follow the teacher. The venerable Master accepted the applicant immediately as his disciple because it gave the



## **The disciple**

proper interpretation of the tea spilling over the cup,” Niu explained.

“Does it mean you must give up what you have to start over?”

“Yes, indeed, Samantha. Whoever owns or expects nothing can aspire to everything,” Niu said in conclusion.

“So, you are leaving behind your academic career to start over?” Samantha asked, with intrigue. “I always thought you were born to be a scientist. I thought you enjoyed your assignments at the lab. Everyone commented that you were leaving because our competitors hired you. I am delighted you did not betray the lab.” Samantha remained silent for a while. “If you won’t continue your science career, which pathway are you seeking?”

“I’m going to mainland China to visit a Kung Fu master named Tong Long,” Niu said.

“Are you going to practice Kung Fu?” Samantha asked in disbelief.

“Yes, indeed.”

“I don’t get it, Niu. I consider you a man who likes to face intellectual challenges. I don’t see how Kung Fu fits in your life.”

The young scientist looked into Samantha’s eyes. “Kung Fu training promotes the development of physical strength, but the scope extends far beyond the martial arena. Kung Fu means any activity that demands energy, patience, and time to master. An accomplishment or skill cultivated through long and hard work is Kung Fu. The martial angle of Kung Fu is

## Niu's motives

also known as Wushu and involves hard physical exercises involving animal mimicry or training methods inspired by Chinese philosophies.” The young Doctor took a sip of his tea and continued.

“There are many styles: those focusing on chi (bioelectricity) manipulation are recognized as internal, while others concentrating on improving muscles and cardiovascular fitness are called external. Traditional Chinese martial arts practice relies on meditation, calligraphy, and special breathing techniques to complement the art. In either style of Wushu, the practitioner follows the pathway of spiritual perfection.”

“How long have you practiced?” Samantha asked.

“I’ve been preparing myself for 15 years,” the professor answered.

“What belt are you?” Samantha asked with interest.

“The traditional practice of Wushu doesn’t include a ranking system to assign grades of expertise to its practitioners. In Wushu, students start as beginners; no matter how long they train, they will always consider themselves novices,” the young scientist explained.

“It seems like there is no development. How do they measure it? If there is no advance, what is their goal?” Samantha Inquired.

“To overcome the lack of external recognition, the practitioners of Wushu track their progress in terms of the internal benefits they receive, for instance, health, emotional stability, and vitality. That means the baseline of their development is their performance. Therefore, their goal is to rise above themselves,” Niu replied.

## **The disciple**

“It seems like infinite growth, but do you have specific expectations about certain areas you want to develop?” Samantha asked.

“I would like to learn breathing techniques to optimize my blood circulation and, therefore, my health,” Niu said.

“That is very interesting; you indeed have a long way to go!” Samantha affirmed.

“I will try, Samantha,” the young scientist said quietly.

# 3

## Farewell



**N**iu finished his last day at the Kung Fu school. He vigorously practiced warm-up exercises under his Master and adopted father, Ning Kwan.

That night's training session was extraordinary; the Master invited his student to recreate his first day of practice 15 years ago.

Like the first training day, Master Kwan performed the praying mantis form in slow motion and instructed his students to copy every stance.

Master Kwan corrected every detail of Niu's stances and transitions with patience.

After practicing the praying mantis for an hour, Niu adopted the horse stance for another hour of sweating and panting.

Before concluding the session, the Master invited his student to spar for the last time. Kwan showed enormous vitality, and Niu followed the practice with the same enthusiasm.

## The disciple

At the end of the training, Master Kwan lit incense and invited the young scientist to meditate.

During the meditation process, Niu's mind traveled back. It recovered many episodes from his childhood, adolescence, and adulthood until the day he saw his name as an author of an article published in a science magazine.

Once the incense was burned, Master Kwan terminated the session with the closing protocol and invited Niu to drink tea. Niu prepared the jasmine infusion and served a cup to his Master, who accepted it with reverence.

“Did you talk with your director?” Master Kwan asked with interest.

“Yes, I did, Father,” Niu responded.

“I suppose it was tough for Dr. Moore to understand why a rich man would leave behind a material fortune to start a deep search for internal wealth,” Master Kwan remarked.

Niu's face confirmed his insight.

“Don't forget, son, find Jin Zhang. That guide is the only one who can lead you to Tong Long's realm. Please do not mention my name or comment to him that you are my son; even better, use a different last name, or don't use it to avoid any misunderstanding. If the river guide perceives in you a patient and trustful attitude, he will drive you to your destination without a problem.”

Niu acknowledged his father's instructions and bowed his head in acknowledgment.

“If you ever have the luck to meet Master Tong Long, don't tell him we are family; maybe someday he might ask

## Farewell

about your origin. Always remember that you are starting a new journey to your inner self. As long as you keep your mind empty, you will have fewer obstacles to deal with to reach your destination. Hence, it might be helpful to leave any emotional attachments behind. It will be healthy for you to distance yourself from me; you must prepare to learn from the beginning. Return to your original state. Empty your mind of any knowledge about the stances and techniques you learned in these 15 years; if you don't, it will complicate your development."

"Thank you, Father, it will be challenging, but I will try my best to follow your advice. It's time to say goodbye." Niu sighed.

"Yes, indeed, it's time for you to leave! And to live!"

Master Kwan called his wife and daughter to say farewell to Niu.

## 4

# Journey fare



**L**ijiang River, Mainland China, 1974.

Niu has dressed austerely, carrying camping equipment on his back. He looks tired, but with a flame of hopefulness in his sight, he asks for Jin Zhang in every boat on the north pier of the Lijiang River.

A half-hour later, Niu finally located the ship, corresponding to his earlier details. A mature man with a humble aspect appeared with his back straight.

Niu approached the riverman.

“Good morning; my name is Niu. Are you Mr. Jin Zhang?”

The riverman confirmed with a bow.

Niu’s face lit up with relief, and he asked the guide, “Could it be possible for you to lead me to Tong Long’s territory?”

With no expressions on his face, the guide explored the figure of the young scientist.

“Where are you going?” Zhang inquired.

## Journey fare

“Tong Long’s land,” the scientist confirmed.

“Are you a tourist?” The river guide inquired.

“Not exactly. I’m looking for an interview with Master Tong Long.”

“It will take eight suns to travel without comforts over many miles of the Lijiang; you might get dizzy and sick. Also, there is a high possibility of unexpected dangers. We might face unfriendly alligators and hungry jaguars. This trip is not a tour. Do you agree with the terms and conditions of the expedition?”

“I accept the travel conditions; nonetheless, I need to know if my funds are enough to cover the transportation fee. Can you please indicate the fare?” Niu requested.

“We will agree with a fair fee if you find what you are looking for, and you can forget about my service if you don’t. But you must wait because I have scheduled trips for the next two weeks. Some other river guides can drive you there if you are in a hurry. I can introduce you to them if you want,” Zhang replied.

Niu was anxious to meet Tong Long but recalled Kwan’s advice and responded respectfully.

“I will wait for my turn if you allow me to.”

The river guide replied: “All right, I will see you at 3 a.m. in two weeks.”

Niu didn’t have anywhere to go or enough funds to spend, so he looked for an open space to live in for the next two weeks. He chose a hill nearby to view the Lijiang’s north pier.



## **The disciple**

The young scientist used the two-week interval to relax and prepare for the new journey. He attempted to clear his mind. In the first two days of isolation, Niu inevitably recalled his early days at the university and reviewed every detail of his existence as a student and scientist with critical eyes. He felt proud of his academic accomplishments because they demanded much study and dedication. Still, he had to admit that it never meant anything to him. For that reason, Niu tormented his soul, asking himself continuously: what is my mission in life?

As days passed, Niu relaxed a bit; he thought that the crisis was a natural outcome of the purifying process he was going through. On his last day in isolation, he slept to recover from the emotional exhaustion from the previous days.

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In "The Disciple" Doctor Niu Kwan leaves a successful career in science and water technologies and travels to China to seek the tutelage of Tong Long, a notable Kung Fu Master.

Following his father's advice, Niu looks for Zhang Jin, a river guide who knows Tong Long's territory. During the trip, Niu discovers Zhang's hidden talents in martial arts and understanding of water. At the end of the trip, Niu gives up his quest for Tong Long and considers Zhang to become his mentor.

Under Zhang's guidance, Niu assimilates advance Kung Fu techniques based on water behavior. Eight years later, a familiar face resurfaces.

Samantha visits Li Jian, the place where Niu is being trained. Their connection deepens on the last night of her stay, transcending the physical world. Samantha returns to Seattle, and Niu experiences a sense of loss. Then, Zhang reveals his connection to the late Tong Long.

Niu returns to Seattle to propose to Samantha, but she's gone. Two decades later, Niu welcomes a young man who resembles himself; he realizes that history is repeating itself.

"The Disciple" is a fascinating tale of self-discovery, love, and martial arts. Will Niu find the answers he seeks, and will he be reunited with Samantha?