



## Li Han-hsiang 李翰祥 (1926.4.18–1996.12.17)

### Director, Screenwriter

Li was born in Jinxi, Fengtian (now Liaoning). He moved to Beiping (now Beijing) with his family in 1932. In 1946, he enrolled at National Beiping Art College and studied painting under the renowned painter Xu Beihong. He came to Hong Kong in 1947 and worked as a bit player, set painter, voice actor and assistant director. In 1953, Li came into people's line of sight as he helped Yan Jun shoot *Singing under the Moon* as an assistant director. Upon completion of his directorial debut, *Blood in Snow* (1956), he joined Shaws. Li then directed a series of *huangmei diao* films such as *Diao Charn* (1958), *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959) and *The Love Eterne* (1963) for Shaw & Sons Ltd and Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Ltd, which won him Best Director at the Asian Film Festival and inaugurated a craze of *huangmei diao* titles. He was further awarded Best Director at the 2nd Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan with *The Love Eterne*. His period features such as *Yang Kwei-Fei, the Magnificent Concubine* (1962) and *Empress Wu Tse-tien* (1963) were also excellent works of the genre. Li's other prominent works for Shaws included *The Enchanting Shadow* (1960) and *Back Door* (1960); he bagged Best Director with the latter at the 7th Asian Film Festival. In 1963, with the support of Cathay Organisation, Li travelled to Taiwan to set up Grand Motion Picture Company and made the period epics, *Seven Fairies* (1964) and *Hsi Shih: The Beauty of Beauties* (1965). He later focused on the *wenyi* genre and shot *The Winter* (1969). Up until Grand Motion Picture closed down in 1969, Li had produced 20-plus sophisticated works and trained up a number of talents, contributing to the development of Taiwan film industry. He also scripted and directed *The Story of Ti-Ying* (1971) for China Motion Picture Studio during his time in Taiwan, and won Best Screenplay at the 9th Golden Horse Awards with the film.

He returned to Hong Kong in 1971 and founded New Grand Films, for which he made *The Legends of Cheating* (1971), *Cheating in Panorama* (1972) and *Cheat to Cheat* (1973). Not only did they set the trend of films about cheating, the 'omnibus' format of them greatly impacted the scene of the 1970s cinema. *The Warlord* (1972), Li's first feature after returning to Shaws in 1972, came in second at the box office the same year. He also discovered the then television star Michael Hui. Li continued to direct for Shaws, making a number of soft-core erotica such as *Legends of Lust* (1972), *The Happiest Moment* (1973) and *Moods of Love* (1977). Meanwhile, he completed two big-budget period productions, *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976). Li also shot *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1977), which featured Brigitte Lin's cross-dressed performance; and *Tiger Killer* (1982), which offered a different take on the amorous Pan Jinlian. In 1982, Li left Shaws and went to the Mainland to shoot *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* (1983) and *Reign Behind a Curtain* (1983) on location. Since then he had stayed in the Mainland to make films. Li died of a heart attack on 17 December 1996 in Beijing, during the shooting of the TV drama *Burning of the Efang Palace*. He was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 34th Golden Horse Awards the following year.