



## Runje SHAW 邵醉翁 (1896–1975.2.17)

### Producer, Executive Producer, Director, Screenwriter

With the original name Runje Shaw and the alias, Zuiweng, Shaw was a native of Zhenhai, Ningbo, Zhejiang and the eldest of the eight Shaw siblings. One of his wives was Chan Yoke-mui, a film star. Shaw had four sons. He graduated with a law degree in 1914 and began his legal career as a lawyer and legal consultant. He was also the owner of Huayou Egg Factory and had businesses in Tianjin and Ningbo. In 1922, together with Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, he rented a theatre in the French concession to feature *wenming xi* (civilised drama) and film screenings. In June 1925, Shaw and his younger brothers founded Unique Film Productions in Shanghai. He was the general manager and director; while Runde Shaw, his second younger brother was the accountant and scriptwriter; Runme Shaw, his third younger brother was in charge of distribution; and Run Run Shaw, his sixth younger brother, handled overseas distribution and cinematography. Unique's aim was 'uphold traditional morality and ethic, promote Chinese culture while avoiding westernisation'. Films of the line included *Repentance* (1925), *Lee Fee-fee the Heroine* (1925) and *Four Commandments* (1926). Shaw later embarked on a new track, adapting classic literature and folktales, and directed *The Lovers* (1926), *Meng Jiangnu* (1926) and *Monkey King Conquers the Leopard* (1926) himself. He recruited Butterfly Wu, a renowned actress at the time, to play leading roles, thus winning widespread popularity. Yet it also aroused disquiet of other film companies. Star Motion Pictures teamed up with Great China-Lily, China Sun, Youlian, Shanghai and Huaju to form Liuhe Film Company and rallied all cinemas to boycott Unique—the incident was widely known as the 'Liuhe Encirclement'. As a result, Shaw sent Runme, his third younger brother to Southeast Asia to set up a film distribution network for Unique. During this time, Unique also put out films in joint venture with Youth Film Company (and once changed its name to Unique Youth Film Productions).

Following the Battle of Shanghai on 28 January 1932, Shaw began deploying the major operations of the company to Hong Kong. In 1933, Unique made the first Cantonese sound film, *The White Gold Dragon*, in collaboration with famous Cantonese opera singer Sit Kok-sin. The film was a sensation at its release. Unique (HK) was officially established in 1934. However, its operations in Hong Kong triggered the jealousy of other film companies. On 29 June and 6 August 1936, there were mysterious conflagrations at Unique's studio, destroying all stock and copies in its vault. It was a great blow to Shaw and he handed over the management of the Hong Kong studio to his second younger brother, Runde in 1938. Shaw went back to live in Shanghai, where he passed away on 17 February 1975.