



HOU Yao 侯曜 (circa 1903–1942)

Director, Screenwriter

Born around 1903, Hou Yao was a native of Panyu, Guangdong. He was admitted to Nanjing Normal School in 1921 majoring in Education. The following year, he joined the Literary Association, a famous literary organisation in the Republican era. While at college, Hou wrote a number of stage plays, many of which were co-written with his future wife and dramaturg Pu Shunqing. His *A Reviving Rose* and *The World Against Her* were popular school plays during that time. After graduation from university in 1924, Hou entered Great Wall Film Company as screenwriting officer, where he also co-directed with Li Zeyuan its founding work, *The World Against Her*. He went on to collaborate with Mei Xuechou on *Cupid's Puppets* (1925), and helmed all by himself *The Hypocrite* (1926). In 1926, Hou published *Movie Script Writing* and signed with China Sun Motion Picture Co. Ltd in Shanghai, completing seven titles during his three-year tenure, including his self-starring *A Poet from the Sea* (1927), *A Reviving Rose* (co-directed and adapted from his own signature play, 1927), *Way Down West* (1927) (that has survived to this day) and the big-budget production *Mulan Joins the Army* (1928). He left China Sun in 1928. The next year he joined the Chinese Youth Party in Shenyang, during which he published anti-Japanese articles under a pseudonym. After the Mukden Incident in 1931, he left for Tianjin and later directed *Grief* for United Photoplay Service Limited (Beijing) in 1932.

In 1933, Hou moved to Hong Kong to oversee the actor training programme at Zhenye Company established by Lo Ken (aka Lo Gun). Starting from the following year, his novels were serialised in *The Kung Sheung Daily News* and *The Kung Sheung Evening News*, among them included *Storm over Pacific* and *The Desert Flower* on which he based his Cantonese films. Later in 1937, he secured enough funds for adapting his novel *The Desert Flower* into a film of the same name. He then co-founded the Wenhua Production Company with his kindred spirits, where he brought his own novels onto the screen, such as *Moon over Pearl River* (1937), *The Ideal Fiancée* (1938), and *Fortress of Flesh and Blood* (1938).

Hou also directed *Storm over Pacific* (1938) for Unique Film Productions, again adapted from his own novel. *Fortress of Flesh and Blood* and *Storm over Pacific*, both being politically charged national defence films against Japanese invasion, were rediscovered after being thought to be lost for years. In 1938, Hou directed for Nanyang Film Company *The Purple Cup*, a folk legend story adapted from 'wooden-fish books'. The following year, he started co-directing with Wan Hoi-ling, his longtime screenwriter in Hong Kong, other folklore dramas. They were primarily inspired by the 'wooden-fish' genre. Among them, *The Chinese Tarzan* (1940) was an adventure film inspired by the heroic character. In 1940, Hou and Wan were hired by Shaw Brothers Ltd to direct a total of eight Malay films in Singapore, including *Pearl*, *Full Moon over Malaya* (1941), and *Three Lovers* (1946). After Singapore fell under Japanese Occupation on 15 February 1942, war resistance suspects were captured over the territory; Hou was arrested and killed by the Japanese troops during the Great Inspection.