



LEE Yuen-man 李願聞 (1912.7.24–1997)

Production Manager, Librettist, Screenwriter

A native of Xinhui County, Guangdong Province, Lee had an early grounding in Chinese literature probably because he was born into a family of scholars. At the same time, he was gifted in music and writing. He could play various instruments for Cantonese opera when he was 13 years of age, and by 16, he had begun to write songs for opera. He became the co-ordinator of the music group of the Guangzhou Sports Association at 18. Later, he lectured at the Chinese Music Study Section of the Guangdong National Education Institute. Lee was also a singer and he not only performed for the provincial radio station but also made guest appearances on stage.

Lee's filmmaking career actually began in 1933 when he was employed by the Asia Studio, based in Guangzhou, as a musician for the first sound movie produced in Guangzhou, *Iron Horse, Faithful Fowl*. In 1949, he was employed by the Yongye Film Production Company in Hong Kong to work as a producer. Among his productions were *End of the Day* (1949), *Dark Paradise* (1950), *Red Rose, the Songstress* (1952).

Lee was most active in the 1950s. He composed the music and soundtrack for *Soul of the Jade Pear* (1953) and followed up with soundtracks for such films as *My Kingdom for a Husband* (Part 1 & 2, 1957-58), *Swallows Come Home* (1958) and *The 12 Hairpins and the 12 Balustrades* (1964). In the course of his career, Lee has worked for the major studios including Shaw Brothers, MP & GI, The Union and Kong Ngee and Ti Seng. He wrote his first screenplay in 1956, entitled *The Precious Lotus Lamp*—an opera film which became so popular that it revitalised the genre and started a new production trend.

Lee's best-known scripts or librettos from 1956 to 1968 include *The Romantic Monk* (1956), *Return on a Snowy Night* (1957), *Rescue at the West River* (1960), *Little Prime Minister* (Part 1 & 2, 1961-62), and *The Magic Cup* (Part 1 & 2, 1961). Most of his scripts were adapted from Cantonese operas. His last screenwriting credit was for *The Imperial Warrant* (1968). Lee made an exit from the film industry after serving as associate producer on *Laugh in the Sleeve* (1975).

In 1965, Lee switched to pursue a new and flourishing career in the recording business, establishing the company Fung Hang Record Limited. The company produced records of traditional music, operatic excerpts as well as pop songs.

Lee retired from all activities in 1973. He passed away in 1997.
