



## LI Ngaw 李我 (1922–2021.5.5)

### Author, Actor, Producer

Under the birth name Li Man-king, Li Ngaw was born in Guangzhou with ancestral roots in Xinhui, Guangdong province. He came to Hong Kong with his mother at a young age. He learned Cantonese opera and later studied at Wah Yan College while learning the craft of scriptwriting under director Tang Xiaodan. Having dropped out of school before the Japanese occupation, he formed an opera troupe and performed in his hometown. After the war, Li studied at Canton Christian College part-time. He joined Guangzhou's Radio Fengxing in 1946 and pioneered his well-received 'airwave novels', in which he improvised and voiced multiple characters of different genders and ages. His works, in which film companies strove to get film adaptations, were acclaimed for their plot twists, intriguing themes on family relationships, and their focus on the dark underbelly of modern society.

*Silent Dream*, the first film adapted from Li's airwave novels, began production in February 1949 and was released in the same year. This was immediately followed by the filming of *Flame of Lust*, another of Li's hit serial dramas. After being renamed as *Crime Doesn't Pay*, Part One and Two of the film were both released in 1949 and became smash hits in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. Li came to Hong Kong at the end of the year and started the radio drama *Black Heaven* at Rediffusion Television. The eponymous film adaptation was released in 1950. Being a star broadcaster, Li was invited to work at Radio Vila Verde in Macao. He later joined Commercial Radio Hong Kong when it commenced operation in 1959, and was responsible for both broadcasting and training. By the time he stepped away from broadcasting in 1976, Li had scripted more than 100 stories over the years, with around 40 of his popular works adapted into films, including *Bird on the Wing* (1950), *The Beautiful Ghost's Grievance* (1959), *Second Spring* (1960), and *Bitter Lotus* (Part One and Concluding Episode, 1960).

Li also participated in the production of films adapted from his work while also appearing onscreen. He starred in the key role of Kong Suet-ying, performing a play-within-a-play in *Plum Blossom in the Snow* (1951), which was self-financed by Li. In *The Noble Family* (1954), Li served as producer, librettist, and lead actor. Li also appeared in films such as *Broken Illusions of Gold* (1952) and *A Mother's Tears* (1955). He was also composer for *A Sad Tale of Rainbow Robes* (1951) and lyricist for *Drifting Swallow* (1951).

Li also formed film companies including Standard Film Co., which produced *Painstaking Lovers* (1964), the film adaptation of a radio drama by Siu Sheung, Li's wife. The film featured many radio stars and became the last film produced by Li. He was invited in 1981 to appear onscreen as a fortune teller in the sitcom *HK'81* by Television Broadcasts Limited. Li remained part of the cast with the series continuing until 1986. This led to Li's film comeback as part of the ensemble cast of *Mad Mad 83* (1983). He occasionally accepted interviews in his later years, and published a five-volume memoir from 2003 to 2013. In 2021, Li died of illness in Hong Kong.

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