



Nancy CHAN 陳雲裳 (1916–2016.6.30)

Actress

A native of Taishan, Guangdong, Chan was born in Hong Kong with the original name Chan Man-keung. As a child, she moved back to Guangzhou with her family and attended the Teacher's College for Women in Guangzhou. She eventually studied under Yik Kim-chuen and trained in Kunqu, Peking and Cantonese opera. Her stage name Chen Yunshang was given by her mentor, taken from Li Bai's poetic prose: 'Clouds remind us her raiment, as flowers do her appearance'. Later, Chan signed on as an actress in the acting corps of Guangzhou Film Company. She performed in *The Crushed Gusu Terrace* (1936), and came to Hong Kong in June 1936, to present *A Rosy Dream of the Tang Dynasty Court* at the Central Theatre. By invitation of director So Yee, Chan returned to Hong Kong for her breakout performance in *New Youth* that same year. Afterwards, she remained in Hong Kong to pursue new opportunities.

With her beauty and genuine acting talents, Chan became an icon of Cantonese cinema before the war. She starred in numerous large-scale productions such as *Pei-wah's Wives* (1937), *Pei-wah's Twelve Wives*, *The Three Thousand Girl Stars*, *The Spendthrift* and *Stage Romance* (all from 1938). Chan co-starred with eminent Cantonese opera master Ma Si-tsang in *Vagabond Prince* (1939), as well as participated in a number of anti-Japanese war films during the war, such as *The Patriot*, *The Honor of Patriots* (both 1937). Chan was critically acclaimed for her performance in *A War at Bow Shan* (1938), helmed by migrant filmmaker Situ Huimin from the Mainland. She perfectly embodied the heroic female patriot in *Fortress of Flesh and Blood* (1938), a resistance film directed by Hou Yao; she also starred in *The Woman General* (1939) directed and written by Mak Siu-ha, an agitprop film which encourages women to join the war effort. She was equally eloquent at capturing the simplicity and innocence of a country girl in *Miss Flapper* (1938).

In 1938, Chan was invited to Shanghai by Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company's director Zhang Shankun, to star in *Hua Mu Lan* (1939). Chan forged the ideal national heroine in the film, which was a phenomenal hit and screened in Shanghai cinemas for over three months. The runaway success elevated Chan to national stardom. She stayed on in Shanghai to cement her success, and only occasionally returned to Hong Kong for film projects. Such as when she co-starred with the prominent Cantonese opera performer Sit Kok-sin in *Merry Empress* (1940). During her time in Shanghai, she played in around 20 Mandarin films including *The Imperial Maid Fei Zhen'e* (1939), *Qin Liangyu* and *Su Wu Herds Sheep* (both 1940). *The Angel* (1939) could be described as a customised showcase for Chan to demonstrate her singing and dancing talents in a gorgeous setting. From 1939, she was crowned the 'Film Queen of China' three years in a row, and her career was at its pinnacle. After filming *Changing Hearts* (1943), she married Dr Hans Tang and withdrew from the film industry to settle in Hong Kong. In 1952, in order to thank her patron Zhang Shankun who saw talent in her, Chan returned to star in Hsin Hwa's productions of *The Goddess and the Devil*, *Sweet Memories* and *Her Secret Past*, before formally retiring from films. She passed away in Hong Kong on 30 June 2016.
