



## SZETO On 司徒安 (1927.5.25–2021.8.23)

### Screenwriter

A native of Xingning, Guangdong with the original name of Tsang Kwan, Szeto On was born in Guangzhou and moved to Hong Kong in 1949. After embarking in business without success in his early years, he followed his elder brother Tsang Cho-lam to visit the film set occasionally, and thus was invited by entertainment reporters to write film reviews. Subsequently, he was introduced by film practitioners to become a screenwriter, and made his debut with *It's Fun Getting Together* (1954). Since then, he was known as an active member in the field under the pen name 'Szeto On', which was inspired by a doctor's signboard he spotted on street. He later worked at Tai Seng Film Company's publicity department as a copywriter. Soon after, he started to work as a part-time screenwriter, and became a full-time freelancer by 1960.

Szeto On's screenplays spanned a wide variety of genres with the majority being martial arts films. For example, he collaborated with director Ling Wan on film series including *Ingenious Sword* (Part I & II, 1962), *The Miraculous Sword and the Magic Flute* (Part I & II, 1965), and later films including *Three Heroines* (Part I & II, 1968), *The Dragon Fortress* (1968), and *The Young Swordsman Lung Kim-fei* series launched during 1964 to 1968. Starting in 1968, he served as screenwriter for the *Wong Fei-hung* film series including *Wong Fei-hung: The Incredible Success in Canton* (1968), *Wong Fei-hung in Sulphur Valley* (1969) and *The Magnificent Kick* (1980). For the *wenyi* genre, Szeto On penned the script for films by director Chor Yuen including *Lover in Disguise* (1965), *The Violet Girl* (1966), and *The Man from Interpol* (1967). Other drama films included *Tragedy on the Hill of the Waiting Wife* (1955), *Little Twin Actresses* (1962), *The Rebellion* (1966), and *Golden Gull* (1967). Comedies he wrote including *King of Swindlers* (1970) and *The Adventurous Air-Steward* (1974) were well-received as well. In the mid-1960s, at the peak of youth films, Szeto On was able to adapt to the trend and wrote films including *The Precious Mirror* (1967), *The Great Singer* (1968), *Modern School Life* (1970), and *The Young Girl Dares Not Homeward* (1970). With the decline of Cantonese films, Szeto On was the sole remaining screenwriter for Cantonese films. He eventually joined Commercial Radio Hong Kong and wrote radio dramas for two years. With the rise of kung fu films, he returned to the film industry as screenwriter again and also worked on projects for film companies in Taiwan.

Starting in 1976, Szeto On wrote screenplays for Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited. His debut was *The Tea House* (1974) by director Kuei Chih-hung, an outstanding work steeped in realism. The duo also collaborated on *Big Brother Cheng* (1975) and *Killer Constable* (1980). He also participated in writing *The Criminals* (Part I-V, 1976-77). His works with other companies included *Warriors Two* (1978) and *Second Class Resident* (1981); besides, he wrote scripts for television dramas for Rediffusion Hong Kong and other direct-to-video programmes. Szeto On's career as a screenwriter spanned four decades. His later works included *Killer Angels* (1989), *Erotic Ghost Story* (1990) and *Thunder Run* (co-written with Hsia Ha, 1991). He was both prolific and highly efficient with around 1,000 scripts under his belt; among which 700 to 800 had been produced and demonstrated great commercial appeal. In 1994, Szeto On received the Professional Achievement Award at the 13th Hong Kong Film Awards. He passed away in Hong Kong on 23 August 2021.