



WAN Laiming 萬籟鳴 (1900.1.18–1997.10.7)

Animation Director, Set Designer, Art Director

Born Wan Jiazong in Nanjing, Jiangsu, Wan Laiming and his twin brother Wan Guchan are known as the founders of Chinese animation films. Wan started painting at a young age without formal training, and moved to Shanghai in 1919 to work for the art department of The Commercial Press. He later joined his three younger brothers in the motion picture department, actively researching and experimenting with animation techniques. At the invitation of Mei Xuechou, the Wan brothers joined Great Wall Film Company where they produced China's first animated short, *Uproar in the Studio* (1926). The brothers subsequently made animation films for other companies such as Great China-Lily Film Company, United Photoplay Service (aka Lianhua Film Company) and Mingxing Film Company. In 1940, Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company established the animation department and invited Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan to join, they completed *The Princess with the Iron Fan* (1941)—China's first animated feature film—in the following year.

Wan came to Hong Kong in 1949 and joined the art department of Great Wall Pictures Corporation, where he specialised in set production. He also contributed illustrations and comic strips to *The Great Wall Pictorial*, the company's film magazine. Wan was the art director for *The Peerless Beauty* (1953), *Modern 'Red Chamber Dream'* (1952) and *When You Were Not With Me* (1958), also serving as costume designer for the latter two films. At the invitation of Yuen Yang-an, general manager of Great Wall Pictures Corporation, he started to produce the second animated feature film *The Bee and the Locust*. Unfortunately the production was halted due to insufficient resources. In 1954, he returned to Shanghai, joining the art department of Shanghai Film Studio (later restructured as Shanghai Animation Film Studio) to continue his animation career. Wan's magnum opus, *The Monkey King: Uproar in Heaven* (First & Second Parts, 1961 & 1964)—based on the classical novel *Journey to the West*—is lauded as a landmark animation film in Chinese cinema.

Wan passed away in 1997. His gravestone in Shanghai is adorned with a carving of the Monkey King to commemorate his contribution to the animation industry.