



LEGEND OF THE MOUNTAIN

A film by King Hu

1979 / Taiwan and Hong Kong / 184 min. / In Mandarin with English subtitles

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Synopsis

A travelling scholar, intent on translating a Buddhist sutra, loses his way in the mountains. Time and space collapse around him as he continues his journey, encountering ghostly visitations amid a haunting fantasia of color, light and landscape.

King Hu rose to prominence in the 1960s and 70s as a superb director of wuxia, a subgenre of samurai film dealing with swords, sorcery and chivalrous heroes. *Legend of the Mountain* comes from the director's later period, when his artistry, specifically his landscape compositions, was at the height of its powers. The film's astonishing nature shots, shot on location in the Korean countryside, are reminiscent of Terrence Malick, while the reflective blend of myth and history is all Hu's own.

About the Restoration

The complete version of *Legend of the Mountain* has been restored in 4K from a first generation, vintage inter-positive and from the sound negative preserved at the Taiwan Film Institute.

The original camera negative, re-edited into a shorter theatrical version, was not assessed as the best source because it was completely damaged by mold, and the coiled film strips of some reels were sticky and glued together due to the decay of the support film base. The camera negative and some cuts from the negative were digitized in 4K for preservation purposes.

The digital restoration sessions were aimed at removing halos and molds (especially at the beginning and end of each reel), transparent scratches at the sides and center of the image, splices and warping of the first frames of each shot. Due to the lack of a reliable reference print for grading, it was replaced by some videos provided by the Taiwan Film Institute.

The restoration work was carried out at L'Immagine Ritrovata in Bologna in 2016.

About Wuxia

“The wuxia movie is to the cinema of the Chinese diaspora what the Western is to the United States or the samurai film to Japan—a repository of myths and cultural memory, steeped in ritual. A total art that embraces music, dance, and literature along with combat skills, the typical wuxia narrative unfolds against an ever-changing historical and political backdrop, a social-realist grounding for works otherwise attached to legend and lore. Since the earliest days of Chinese moviemaking the wuxia genre has been a fertile playground for filmmakers’ experimentation.”

- Aliza Ma, Metrograph

About the Filmmaker

Born in Beijing on June 3, 1932, King Hu moved to Hong Kong at the age of 18 and started his career as an illustrator. In 1958, he joined Shaw Brothers as an actor, screenwriter, and assistant director. In 1966, Hu released his first wuxia film, *Come Drink with Me*, marking his characteristic style influenced by Peking opera. He later travelled to Taiwan and directed some of his best-known films in his career, including the 1967 box-office hit *Dragon Inn* and his ultimate masterpiece, *A Touch of Zen* (1971). The film garnered the Technical Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975, propelling Hu onto the international stage. Hu spent the last decade of his life in Los Angeles. In 1997, he died in Taipei of complications from an angioplasty.

Director's Statement

“*Legend of the Mountain* is the love story of a human and a ghost. It's a Song Dynasty short story. It tells about a struggle that occurs in the ghostly realm, in another world. The ghosts' main objective is to be reincarnated as a human. But being a ghost has its convenient aspects – for example, you can work magic! It's strange; why do they always want to become human? Humans are born to suffer. You could say this raises a question. The movie was more than three hours long in its original version. The film critic Derek Elley watched a videotape of the film and decided that it should be shown at both the London and the Edinburgh film festivals. Later on, when I told him that I might shorten it, they wrote me a long letter saying I mustn't cut it. As for the full version of *Legend of the Mountain* being shown at the London Film Festival, let's ignore whether the reviews were good or bad; at least they got to see the whole leopard and not just the spots!”

– King Hu, 1979

King Hu Filmography

- 1964 玉堂春 *The Story of Sue San*
- 1965 大地兒女 *Sons of Good Earth*
- 1966 大醉俠 *Come Drink with Me*
- 1967 龍門客棧 *Dragon Inn*
- 1970 喜怒哀樂之怒 *Four Moods* (segment “Anger”)
- 1971 俠女 *A Touch of Zen*
- 1973 迎春閣之風波 *The Fate of Lee Khan*
- 1975 忠烈圖 *The Valiant Ones*
- 1979 空山靈雨 *Raining in the Mountain*
- 1979 山中傳奇 *Legend of the Mountain*
- 1981 終身大事 *The Juvenizer*
- 1983 天下第一 *All the King's Men*
- 1983 大輪迴 *The Wheel of Life* (first segment)
- 1990 笑傲江湖 *The Swordsman*
- 1992 畫皮之陰陽法王 *Painted Skin*

Awards and Festivals

- 1979 London Film Festival
- 1979 Edinburgh International Film Festival
- 1979 Sydney Film Festival
- 1979 Toronto Film Festival
- 1979 Golden Horse Awards:
 - Best Feature Film (Runner-Up), Best Director, Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Film Score, Best Sound Recording
- 1980 Film Fest Gent
- 1980 Thessaloniki International Film Festival
- 1980 Wellington Film Festival
- 2016 Venice Film Festival: Venice Classics (4K restoration)
- 2016 To Save and Project, MoMA (4K restoration)

CREDITS

Executive Producers:

King HU
WONG Cheuk-hon

Director:

King HU

Script Writer:

CHUNG Ling

Director of Photography:

Henry CHAN

Editor:

King HU

SIU Nam

Production Designer:

King HU

Music:

WU Ta-chiang

Action Choreographer:

NG Ming-choi

SHIH Chun

Ho Yunqing

HSU Feng

Melody

Sylvia CHANG

Cloud

TUNG Lin

Tsui

Rainbow HSU

Madame Wang

TIEN Feng

Old Chang

CHEN Hui-lou

Taoist priest

NG Ming-choi

Lama

SUN Yueh

General Han