



Helen Li Mei 李湄 (1929.9.1–1994.5.12)

Actress

A native of Jilin and with the original name Li Jingfang. Her father was a civil servant and her mother was a well-educated woman. Li spent her childhood in Hebei and later moved to Shanghai and Nanjing because of the war. While her primary and secondary education was in Chongqing, she enrolled and studied Political Science at the University of North China in Beijing after the war. Li came to Hong Kong in 1949 and had had many trades—a typist, a fashion designer and a lyricist. She changed her name into Li Qian in 1950 and worked as a screenwriter for Minsheng Film Company. Her first screenplay was *A World of Gold* (1953). She participated in the Miss Hong Kong Pageant in 1952 and further changed her name to Li Mei. She played the leading role for the first time in *Song of the Nightingale* (1954) and came into people's line of sight with *The Secret Life of Lady So Lee* (1953). Li made over ten films, mostly independent productions, in the next couple of years. She signed a contract with International Films Distributing Agency (the predecessor of Motion Picture and General Investment Co Ltd [MP & GI]) in December 1955 and took part in the Asian Film Festival with *Gloomy Sunday* (1956). Her acting talent was further proven in *For Better...For Worse* (1959), while her singing and dancing skills were showcased in *Calendar Girl* (1959) and *It's Always Spring* (1962). She even recorded for Pathé. She founded Beidou Film Company in 1956, producing and starring in films such as *Wild Fire* (1958), the first feature that director Chang Cheh made in Hong Kong.

Her last film with MP & GI was *The Imperial Lady* (1964). Li had always appeared to be coquettish and generous. A versatile actress, she had taken part in almost 50 films throughout her career, including *Golden City Pagoda* (1958) and *Red Turn the Flowers When Down Come the Shower* (1959), in which Li co-acted with her peers from the Philippines and Korea respectively. Her later works include *The Big Circus* (1964). Li got married, retired from the screen, and moved to the US in 1967. She died of cancer on 12 May 1994.