

A woman's epic odyssey portraying fantasy

Wang Xincan and Xu Wei

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” was the biggest victor at this year’s Academy Awards ceremony, winning an impressive seven awards. Among the highlights of the evening was Chinese-Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh’s momentous Best Actress win, marking the first time an Asian woman has achieved this historic milestone.

However, the rise of Asian actresses did not happen overnight. Today’s success is built upon the persistent efforts by generations of trailblazers, such as Anna May Wong, Lisa Lu, Joan Chen and Lucy Alexis Liu.

Lisa Lu, or Lu Yan in Chinese,

has led a legendary life. She, affectionately known as the “Light of China,” made history as the first actress from the Chinese mainland to break into Hollywood, and became the first Chinese member of the actors branch at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Her numerous classic screen roles have touched the hearts of countless cinemagoers and inspired generations of aspiring actors, while shining the spotlight on the rich Chinese culture and heritage.

Lu offered her heartfelt congratulations to her friend Yeoh, acknowledging the significance of Yeoh’s Oscar win as the result of years of hard work and dedication. Lu expressed her belief that the win would inspire more Asian

women to rise to the challenge and make their marks in the world of cinema.

Despite the age of 96, Lu, whose impressive career spans decades, continues to be active in her field with great passion. She recently attended the premiere of her latest film “In Pursuit of Light” in Los Angeles.

Throughout our conversation, the legendary actress remained graceful, modest and friendly. When talking about her childhood in Shanghai, her eyes sparkled with deep emotion.

“I always have a strong attachment to this city,” Lu said. “I still remember the Bund, Yuyuan Garden, the Grand Cinema, and its delicious food. I miss my old friends in Shanghai and hope to visit them soon.”

Lu closely follows Shanghai’s development and takes great pride in the city’s rapid growth in technology and filmmaking.

“As an actress, I hope to contribute my own power to the cinema there,” she said.

Lu’s life has also followed an epic journey, which all began in Shanghai, a city that embraces diversity and creativity. No wonder that wherever she goes, Lu always proclaims proudly: “Ala (I am) Shanghainese.”

Deep love of Chinese opera

Born in Beijing and growing up in Shanghai, Lu was the daughter of famous businessman Lu Jialai and well-known Peking Opera artist Li Guifen, who was dubbed the Queen of Opera.

Influenced by the artistic atmosphere of her family since childhood, Lu formed a deep understanding and knowledge of Chinese culture. During the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1931-1945), Lu and her mother stayed with family friends Mei Lanfang and his

wife Fu Zhifang.

Mei, a Peking Opera master, refused to perform for the Japanese invaders and spent most of his time at home. During this period, he took the initiative to teach Lu the vocal and performing skills of Kunqu and Peking operas.

In addition, Lu’s mother was also a strict teacher, helping her perfect her performance techniques and build a solid foundation for her art. Lu’s passion for performing arts led her to participate in drama performances at Huizhong High School and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, as well as working at the Grand Cinema as a Miss Earphone, a simultaneous translator for English-language movies.

In 1947, Lu and her mother moved to the United States, and she began a new chapter in her life. Despite leaving her hometown, the deep imprint of her Chinese cultural roots and her love for Shanghai remained throughout her brilliant career in film and theater.

From Shanghai to Hollywood

When Lu first arrived in the US, she switched roles as a librarian, newspaper reporter and broadcaster to support her family, and it wasn’t until 1957 that her US acting career took off.

She landed her first starring role in Hollywood in “The Mountain Road,” a 1960 war film directed by Daniel Mann.

As a native Chinese, she also tried her best to change Westerners’ early stereotypes about Chinese people through her dedication and talents.

American writer Henry Miller described Lu as a combination of “beauty, glamor, opulence and majesty.” Former US President Ronald Reagan called her the “China pearl” of Hollywood.

Her impressive screen performances stunned Hollywood



A poster for “The Mountain Road.” In the 1960 war film, Lisa Lu landed her first starring role in Hollywood.

with many facets of the charms of Chinese people, adding new opportunities for the Chinese actors who followed in her footsteps.

Lu’s career took a new turn in the late 1960s when she starred in “The Arch,” “14 Amazons” and “The Empress Dowager,” earning two Golden Horse Awards for Best Actress and one for Best Supporting Actress. These firmly established her in the film industry. Since then, she has continued her prolific cross-cultural acting career, appearing in American and Chinese films, TV series and stage plays.

A career uniting East and West

“I was impressed by Mei’s patriotism and his principles of personhood,” Lu recalled, speaking of the Peking Opera master she studied with when young. “He often said that if a person comes to your home and you perceive that he is in need, don’t wait for him to ask for help, go and help him.”

Because of this, Lu is always humble and courteous, and she treats people with sincerity.



Lisa Lu is widely known for her efforts in cinema, theater and cultural exchanges.