

## Document Citation

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## SHAN-CHUNG CH'UAN-CH'I (Legend of the Mountain)

Script: Chung Ling. Direction: Hu Chin-ch'üan (King Hu). Photography (colour, scope): Ch'en Chün-chieh. Music: Wu Ta-chiang. Editing and Art Direction: King Hu. Players: Hsü Feng, Chang Ai-chia, Shih Chün, Tung Lin, T'ien Feng, Wu Ming-ts'ai, Hsü Ts'ai-hung, Ch'en Hui-lou, Sun Yüeh, Wu Chia-hsiang. Produced by King Hu for Prosperity Film Co. 186 mins. Mandarin dialogue

There is a formal perfection and utter self-assurance about *Legend of the Mountain* which is quite new to Hu's work, as if the ambitious pathbreaker of *A Touch of Zen* and *The Fate of Lee Khan* had finally reached secure ground. This partly stems from the fact that *Legend* is not geared to a succession of martial arts displays (combat only takes place near the end, as a resolution of the pent-up tension); instead, Hu is free to explore at leisure his underlying interest - the mystical world of Buddhist and Taoist philosophy - through the simple story of a young scholar's attraction to two wandering female spirits, each bent upon gaining redemption by being included in the Tantric sutra

he has been commissioned to copy. The script, by Hu's wife Chung Ling, is based on an Eleventh-century Sung Dynasty short story and sets the action in a remote no-man's-land on China's western frontier. Hu's opening evocation of locale, as the young scholar (Shih Chün) makes his way through the mist-laden, sylvan landscape to his destination, forms a seductive introduction to the mystical plane on which much of the story functions: the film, indeed, is saturated with the flowing Taoist imagery of nature in harmony, whether celebrating the scholar's wedding to "Melody" (Hsü Feng), or the contrasting imagery evoked by the flute-playing of her and "Cloud" (Chang Ai-chia). Hu's ability to maintain this hypnotic atmosphere - of time out of joint, of spiritual suspension - bears tribute as much to the experience of his repertory cast as to the expertise of his production team (especially cameraman Ch'en Chün-chieh). Shih Chün in a familiar role as the bemused scholar, Hsü Feng most effective as the deceptively deadly Melody, Chang Ai-chia (in her first Hu role) providing a perfect counterbalance with her compassionate Cloud, and Wu Ming-ts'ai larding the drama with comic relief.

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