Intro: Songstresses & "swordsmen" (& swordswomen) refer to 2 Chinese-language popular culture forms, movie musicals & martial arts films, that have circulated transnationally & globally over the course of the 20th & into the 21st C.

I. Songstresses: Zhou Xuan (周璇, 1918-1957) & Grace Chang (Ge Lan 葛兰, b. 1933)

1. Chinese movie musicals depend on "performing women"/stars that can be divided into 4 types, 2 of which are represented by Zhou Xuan & Grace Chang


A). Zhou Xuan, star of Street Angel (Malu tianshi 马路天使, 1937)

1. Established archetype of the suffering, exploited "sing-song girl" ... famous songs (shown during talk): "Song of the four seasons" (Siji ge) & "Tianya genu" (Wandering songstress)

2. Other famous roles/films: "An All-Consuming Love" (Chang xiang si 长相思, 1947); "Song of a songstress" (Genu zhi ge 歌女之歌, 1948)

B). Grace Chang, star of "Mambo Girl" (Mambo nulang 曼波女郎, 1957) & "Wild, Wild Rose" (Ye meigui zhi lian 野玫瑰之恋, 1960)

1. Adapted from joint talk given with Prof. Roy Chan, "Chinese Popular Culture: Songstresses, Swordsmen & Socialist Heroes"

2. Entering these stars' names into a Youtube search will reveal lots of clips of their music and from some of their more famous films, though not all the clips will have subtitles.

3. This film is available with English subtitles & there is a great deal of scholarship (in English) on it. See Amazon.com or look for it through Worldcat.

4. Last I checked, both films were available in English-subtitled, all-region DVD versions from yesasia.com (not very expensive). May also be available through Worldcat. See Yeh & Ma for scholarship on & analyses of these films.
• Known as the "mambo girl" because this was her star vehicle & one of her most popular films/roles

• Clips shown during talk were from another of her most famous roles/films, "Wild, Wild Rose" in which she plays a role that has much in common with the sort of "sing-song girl" that Zhou Xuan is famous for, in a nightclub setting reminiscent of Republican (1911-1945) Shanghai nightclubs

II. Swordsmen/martial art heroes: Chinese heroes in popular film


A). Chow Yun-fat, star of many John Woo films ... The Killer (Diexue shuangxiong 喋⾎双雄, 1989) (one of John Woo's most famous Hong Kong "heroic bloodshed" action films) as transition film: the assassin meets the (Canto-/Cantonese pop) songstress

[B). Wong Fei-hung 黃飛鴻 (1847-1924): historical figure, healer & martial artist from Guangdong Province ... 20th C: popular hero in martial arts films

• Jet Li (Li Lianjie) as Wong Fei-hung in Tsui Hark's Once Upon a Time in China (1991-97) series

• Jackie Chan as Wong Fei-hung in Drunken Master (Zuiquan 醉拳, 1978) & Legend of Drunken Master (Drunken Master II/Zui quan er 醉拳 2, 1994/2000)


• Chow Yun-fat exhibiting different sort of Chinese masculinity ... Zhang Ziyi, Cheng Pei-pei & Michelle Yeoh as diverse types of female fighters, heroines ... gender politics

• Pan-Chinesenesse: stars from PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia

• [Relationship of CTHD with King Hu's Touch of Zen (Xianu 侠女, lit. "A Female Knight-Errant," 1970)]

5. Not covered in talk