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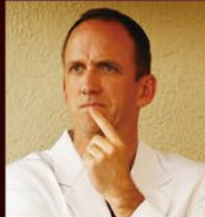
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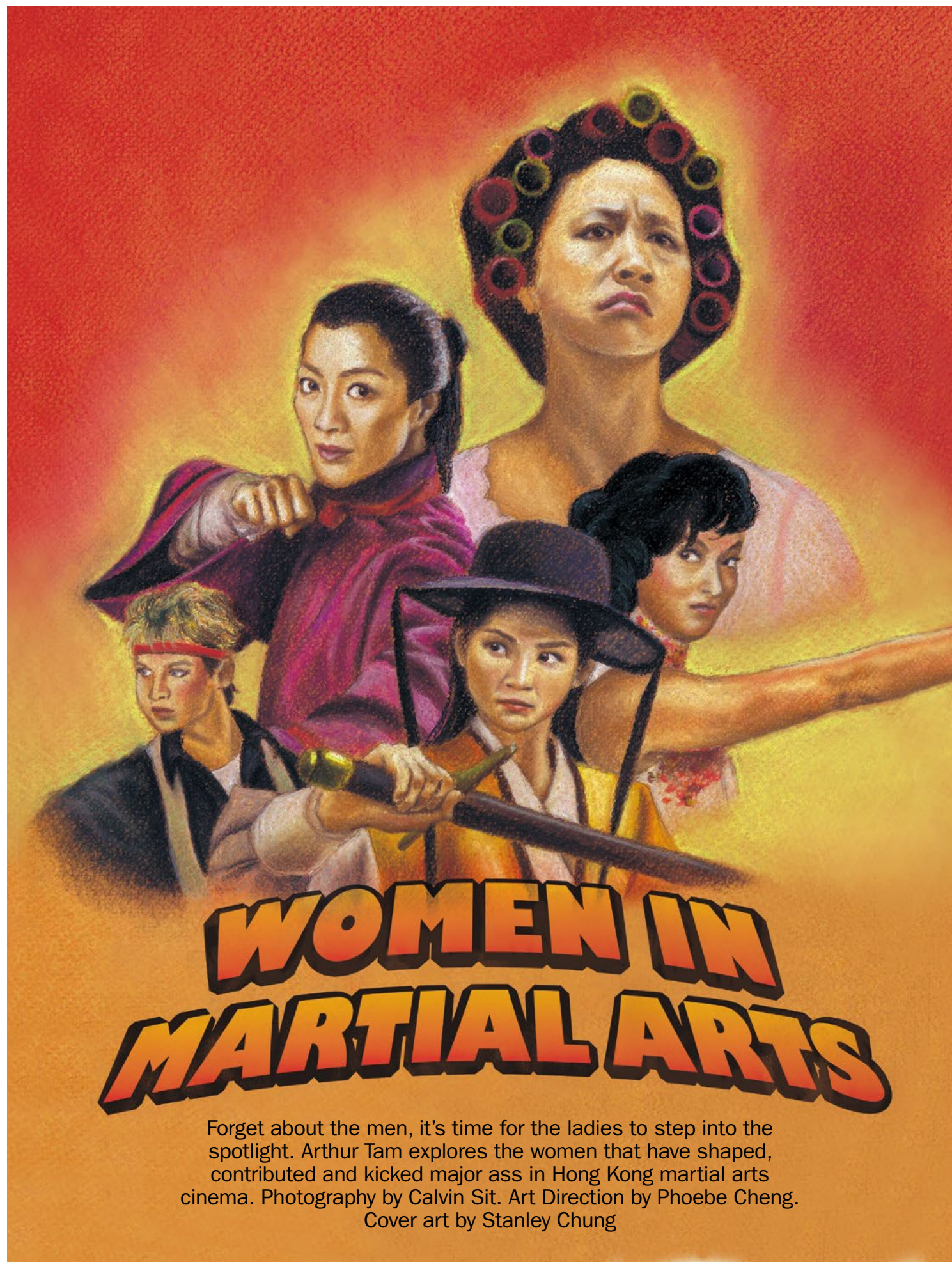
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# WOMEN IN MARTIAL ARTS

Forget about the men, it's time for the ladies to step into the spotlight. Arthur Tam explores the women that have shaped, contributed and kicked major ass in Hong Kong martial arts cinema. Photography by Calvin Sit. Art Direction by Phoebe Cheng. Cover art by Stanley Chung

No one would argue that Hong Kong, starting with the rise of Shaw Brothers, has dominated martial arts cinema for much of the last 50 years. Local film makers laid the foundation for many of the greatest action films ever made, giving rise to revered international action heroes like Jet Li, Donnie Yen, Jackie Chan and, of course, the greatest of the greatest, the dragon himself, Bruce Lee.

Yes, these are the men that we adore to this day, but we forget that to their yang there has always been a strong yin. The great women of Hong Kong martial arts cinema are often overlooked and overshadowed by their male counterparts. It's unfair and ludicrous

since much of the genre was shaped by female fighters like Cheng Pei-pei, Kara Hui, Michelle Yeoh, Angela Mao, Cynthia Rothrock and Yuen Qiu. In the 50s and 60s, female lead roles in wuxia and kung fu films were just as prevalent as male roles and the ladies threw it down with as much strength, speed and tenacity as the men did, if not more.

These days it's all about fighting to level the playing field and in the light of increasing girl power, what better way to celebrate than to acknowledge women in an industry that has been so essential to the popularity of Hong Kong pop culture. Snapped tendons, bruised eyes and broken bones – yup, they went through it all and more. It's time we all recognise.



I came to and asked, "Did we get the shot?" When they told me we did, I passed out again

## Cheng Pei-pei

鄭佩佩

### The queen of swords

"I'm always up for a fight," says 70-year-old martial arts legend Cheng Pei-pei with a smile. "It's exhilarating. I've always been an active person, so when I got a chance to act out fight scenes, I was happy to oblige. I'm actually a bit of a tom boy." However, at the concerned behest of her four children, Cheng has now hung up her sword. They don't want their mother to sustain any injuries. Yet, while we talk to Cheng we can still feel a magnetic, youthful vibrancy. Despite not taking on any more action roles, she's still busy charting the world and flying to different cities to film, nowadays mostly on the Mainland, taking on matriarchal roles.



I'm very proud, and competitive to a fault. I thought, 'if a man can do it, so can I'

Still no slouch, in 2014 she starred in the acclaimed indie film *Lilting* and was lauded for a performance as a grieving mother looking for closure. But the role most ingrained in moviegoers' minds is Cheng wielding two swords in her most iconic film, *Come Drink with Me*, when she was just 20-years-old and signed to the Shaw Brothers Studio. This was Cheng's first career peak and the ballet-trained actress proved a natural. Her precise sword techniques nabbed her the accolade 'the queen of swords'. "Swords are definitely my weapon of choice," states Cheng. "You can be more agile with it, unlike a staff. As I got older I would fight more with a staff, since it looked more appropriate for my age, but I found it be awfully cumbersome."

After *Come Drink with Me*, Cheng continued on a streak of popular lead roles in some 20 films over the following eight years. Her most notable films were *The Golden Swallow*, *The Flying Dagger*, *Brothers Five* and *The Shadow Whip*. Yes, she can crack a mighty whip as well. "Back then during the 50s and 60s," recalls Cheng, "many women played lead roles. It wasn't uncommon. Compared to the male actors, directors were overprotective of us. But, I didn't need any special treatment. I'm very proud, and competitive to a fault. I thought, 'if a man can do it, so can I.'" Cheng continues to tell us that things for female actresses didn't continue in this fashion though. "Around the time of



Ricky Hui [in the 70s], men started taking the lead and women became wallflowers. Audiences gravitated more towards the raw strength of a man."

Cheng's worst injury happened when she was doing a stunt jumping out of a second storey window. "The martial arts choreographer, [who was shorter than me,] didn't account for my height. So when I jumped out the window I clipped the window, kicked myself in the head and passed out as I hit the ground. I came to and asked, 'Did we get the shot?' When they told me we did, I passed out again."

She's a true professional in every sense of the word. "Not many things bother me," says Cheng, who fell into the business serendipitously. Her mother's friend had a daughter that was already training at the Shaw Brothers studio and she encouraged Cheng to be a trainee. Due to Cheng's dance background and fluency in Mandarin, she became a top pick and soon starred in her very first role, as Liu Qiuzi in *Lover's Rock*. "At that time," Cheng reminisces, "Mandarin films had higher budgets and tickets for Mandarin films cost more than for Cantonese films. This gave me an advantage."

After securing onscreen success, Cheng chose to follow her heart and moved to America to marry her husband and to lead a family life. She became absent from the scene for almost a decade while she settled down and raised her children. "The thing about Pei-Pei," says film historian Mike Leeder, "is the fact that she was so fiercely independent. She followed her own road, becoming a parent and juggling her career with roles in some of the key Hong Kong movies of the 60s, 70s and, later, 2000s!"

Cheng's career hit its second peak when she starred as the villainous Jade Fox in the Academy Award-winning film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Even at 54-years-old, Cheng was still fighting. "It's really not that hard if you have a strong dance foundation," she modestly claims. She continues, "All my children love Ang Lee, so I said to myself that no matter what, I was going to get that role."

And what a good decision that turned out to be, with another 35 films since then. "There isn't anything that I really want anymore at this stage," Cheng says, fully content. "I just want to help my children out in whatever way I can, so they can fulfill their own dreams." *Arthur Tam*



### Top 5 Films



1. *Come Drink with Me*



2. *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*



3. *Golden Swallow*



4. *Flirting Scholar*



5. *The Lady Hermit*

1925



**Chi Tsi-ang 錢似鶯**

The first heroine

**Our pick:** *Dreams of Women*

Chi Tsi-ang, also known as the first heroine, was hailed as the first female martial arts figure to break the glass ceiling in action movies. In 1909, at the time of her birth, a seer foretold that Chi would die an early death if she was raised as a girl. To avert this disaster, her parents created a real life Mulan, and dressed and raised Chi as a boy. She was accepted into the Chin Woo Athletic Association, where she received her martial arts training. In 1925, Chi was discovered by Zhang Puyi, a businessman starting a new film studio, the Langhua Film Company, in which Tsi-ang's father would invest as well. Zhang proposed that Chi become an actress and she starred in his new movie *The Dreams of Women*. In 1930, she wowed in the lead role in *Southern Heroine* and became famous for performing all her own stunts. She took a breather from acting when she married and had children. In 1952, her soon-to-be famous grandson, Sammo Hung, was born. Chi was awarded a lifetime achievement tribute in 1993 by the Hong Kong Film Awards. *Jill Kligler*

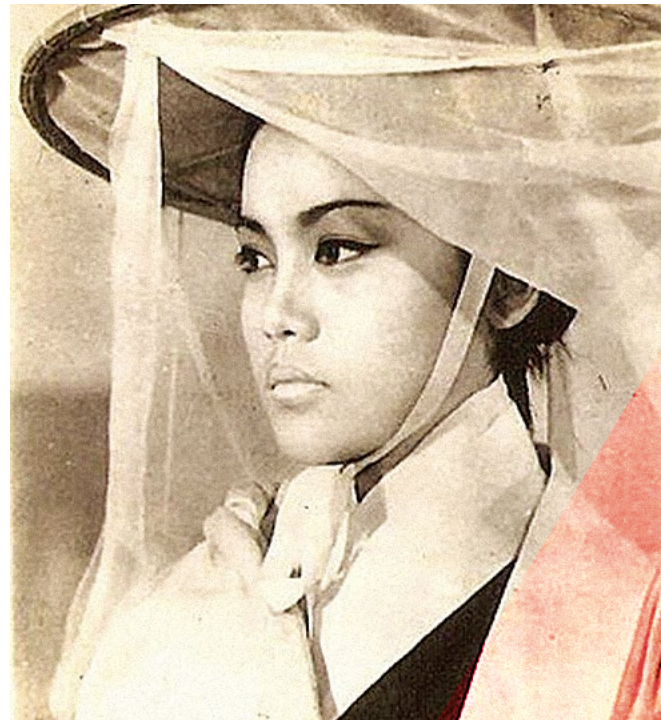
1967

**Polly Shang Kwan 上官靈鳳**

The phoenix maiden

**Our pick:** *A Heroic Fight*

Polly Shang Kwan joined the United Film Corporation in 1966 and spent substantial time training and gaining martial arts knowledge, acquiring a black belt in karate, judo and taekwondo. A 1960s actress of Cantonese origin, the biggest compliment paid to her was when critics said that Bruce Lee is the dragon, but Polly is the phoenix. With striking beauty and lethal brilliance, she became an instant celebrity in the legendary 1967 movie *Dragon Gate Inn* directed by King Hu, where she played the feisty sword-wielding daughter of a condemned army commander. Shang Kwan never shied away from taking comedic roles, however, being known for her good humor as well as her toughness. This didn't lessen her martial arts competence, but only added another achievement to her list of accomplishments as an actress. In the film *A Heroic Fight*, she played a thieving homeless child who is accepted into a martial arts family fighting against the triads. Critics were impressed with her performance and she was awarded best actress at the Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan. *Meera Toraskar*



1970



**Angela Mao 茅復靜**

Vortex vixen

**Our pick:** *Lady Whirlwind*

Angela Mao, dubbed 'Lady Whirlwind' for her famous role in the film of the same name and Mistress Deep Thurst by her fans, went from a songstress to a Hong Kong martial arts star who helped pave the way for future female action stars. Early in her childhood she trained in the Korean martial art form hapkido, which is characterised by pain-inducing joint locks, throwing techniques, along with the use of swords, canes and nunchucks. With her double kicks and powerful fists, Mao entered the movie industry in the 1970 film *Angry River*, directed by legendary action movie director Huang Feng. She gained international exposure in 1973 when she starred in *Enter the Dragon* with Bruce Lee, where she played his sister. She also acted alongside former James Bond George Lazenby in *A Queen's Ransom 2*. Her energetic dexterity is most evident in the 1976 flick *Dance of Death*, in which she takes centre stage as the heroine. In recognition of her athletic prowess Mao has been awarded with an honorary second degree black belt in hapkido. *MT*



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Folks that grow up on the streets are smarter



## Kara Hui 惠英紅

The menacing beauty

There's no other Hong Kong martial artist with as much street cred as Kara Hui Ying-hong. Hui basically grew up in the hood. Straight out of Compton? Naw, straight out of Wan Chai! "Humble beginnings? You are mistaken. I was a beggar," she states bluntly. "The lowest of the lowest class. When I was peddling trinkets in Wan Chai the only people I knew were pimps, prostitutes, bar girls and other beggars. That was my world." It was a world she wanted to get out of and acting and

martial arts provided the escape route that she needed.

Hui is by far one of the most candid and honest interviewees we've ever come across. This year marks her 40th anniversary in the film industry since her first leap into the martial arts world back in 1976 with her first film, *Challenge of the Master*. In five short years she vaulted to fame and in 1982 she received the best actress award at the inaugural Hong Kong Film Awards for her role as Cheng Tai-nan in the action comedy

*My Young Auntie*. Kara was and is still known for her incredible fighting skills, beauty and fierce acting abilities. Her glare is menacing, capable of loosening the bowels of even the strongest men. "She rose through the ranks at Shaw Brothers and proved she could hold her own alongside the likes of Gordon Li, Alexander Fu Sheng and Jackie Chan," remarks film historian Mike Leeder.

As we sit with Hui, she recalls how she made it in the business with a deliciously cocky grin. "I was just really that good.



Once you snap enough tendons because of something, you begin hating it

Sometimes I'd watch someone shoot a scene for an hour because of all the retakes and I would think to myself, "You've got to be kidding me, I can do this in 15 minutes". Folks that grow up on the streets are smarter."

She also credits her skills from the training she received back in the day at the now defunct Miramar Night Club, where she was tutored as a professional dancer and she also received weaponry instruction from Donnie Yen's mother, Mark Bo-sim. It would take most girls two years of training to be ready for the stage, but Hui only took nine months. "I learned quickly," she boasts. "And my training only enhanced my memory capabilities and gave me the increased ability to process movements faster. When I'm on set for a film, there might be 20 or so moves that I have to do. Once the director tells me what he wants, I can just do it. I don't need anyone to show me. I can just do it by listening to directions. Kung fu is easier than drinking a cup of tea."

It's here that we must disagree with her. There is nothing simple about the combination of attacks, moves and choreography she executes on camera. Her speed, grace and power are mesmerising and intimidating.

"You think, so? It's just a formula really," she says, gleaming with delight. "It's like the difference between fried rice, white rice and congee to me. You tell me what you want and I'll add my own personal touches and give it to you. I know the big moves, what combinations to put together and where to put in my personal touches. I'm that good. So good that back in the day I could play multiple roles in an action sequence. If someone



were injured or had an accident I would be their replacement. I would play their role, quickly do a costume change and then go back to my part."

Hui is built from tough stuff. She's endured 51 action films and has sustained serious injuries throughout her career, but never has that impeded her. "Once I broke my leg and was rushed to the hospital. They drained the blood from my bruise and then I went straight back to the studio to film. When we finished, that's when I went back to the hospital. Young action stars these days have it easy compared to what we went through." Hui also recalls being punched so many times she eventually threw up, but continued fighting. "No matter how dangerous the scene, I agreed to do it," says Hui. "I could take it because I was so poor. I've seen actors and actresses disappear after a few days of shooting a fight scene. If you could endure through two films back then, you could make it as an action star. But, if I could choose again, martial arts would be a hobby, not a career. Once you snap enough tendons because of something, you begin hating it."

Hui is a fighter in every sense of the word – spiritually, mentally and physically. She's fought all her life for everything she has. She succeeded in rising out of poverty and becoming one of the most badass women Hong Kong has ever produced. "It's true. I am one tough person." AT



### Top 5 Films



1. *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*



2. *My Young Auntie*



3. *Legendary Weapons of China*



4. *The Inspector Wears Skirts*



5. *Dragon*

1973 ◀



**Yuen Qiu 元秋**  
The roaring matriarch

🎬 **Our pick:** *Kung Fu Hustle*

With extensive training in Pekinese opera and martial arts tutelage from the great Yu Jim-yuen (who also taught Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Yuen Wah), Yuen Qiu began her career as one of the earliest female stuntwomen in the film industry. In 1974, Yuen nabbed a role in the James Bond film *The Man with the Golden Gun*, playing a Japanese karate kicking school girl who rescues 007. She continued with 13 other films and was on track to become as big as Jackie Chan until she decided to settle down and get married.

The film that marked her major comeback came almost 20 years later – Steven Chow's international hit, *Kung Fu Hustle*. Her role as the temperamental, chain smoothing, give-no-fucks landlady of Pig Sty Alley put her back into the limelight and her performance won her the best supporting actress award at the 42nd Golden Horse Film Awards. The scene where she unleashes the lion's roar while dressed in curlers and a pink nightgown will forever be etched in our minds. In fact, the role was so memorable that Ann Chiang, a politician in Hong Kong whose speaking manner has been likened to the character, was given 'Yuen Qiu' as her nickname. Since *Kung Fu Hustle*, Yuen Qiu has kept active, appearing in films and drama series in the Mainland and Hong Kong, such as the TVB drama *Wudang Rules*. The older Yuen gets, the more formidable looking she becomes. *Ambrose Li*

▶ 1974



**Sharon Yeung Pan-Pan 楊盼盼**  
Battle angel

🎬 **Our pick:** *The Story of Drunken Master*

Sharon Yeung Pan-Pan was born in 1958 in Taiwan and admitted to Fu Shing Peking Opera at the young age of four. As a teenager, Yeung began her career as a stuntwoman in 80s action movies in Hong Kong. Over time she learned the choy li fut and hung ga kuen martial art styles and became known for her dizzying kicks, fast footwork and strong stances. Yeung's most prominent roles were in the 1990s movies *Angel Enforcer*, *Angel Terminators* and *The Way of the Lady Boxers*. She became popular with action directors and played many anti-hero roles because of her no-nonsense look. She also starred in the TVB annual television series *TVB Qing*, in which she wowed audiences with her audacious stunts. Also in the 1990s, Yeung tried her hand at action directing and producing TV series and movies, becoming accomplished at both roles. She founded Brilliant Emperor Action Training Studio, also known as Hithut, in 2010 to train aspiring action stars (like Mandy Ho, also in this feature) and anyone interested in fight choreography. *MT*

▶ 1977



**Hsia Kwan-li 夏光莉**  
High kicking avenger

🎬 **Our pick:** *Women Avenger*

Born in Taiwan, Hsia Kwan-li was discovered by director Lee Tso-nam who kicked-started her acting career by starring her in her most memorable film, *The Woman Avenger*. Of all her martial arts moves displayed in films, kicking is her trademark due to her tall and lithe figure. Most of her acting highlights came in the late 70s and early 80s, appearing in notable films such as *The Invincible Kung Fu Legs*, *The Butterfly Murders* and *Zu Warriors from the Magic Mountain*. *JK*

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# Michelle Yeoh 楊紫瓊

Madam fury

The title of most well-known female martial arts action star would have to go to the pride of Malaysia, Michelle Yeoh. In 2013 she was awarded the title of Tan Sri - the second most senior federal title and an honorific used to denote recipients of the Panglima Setia Mahkota (The Most Esteemed Order of Loyalty to the Crown of Malaysia) federal award. It's unsurprising that Yeoh should receive such a high honour, having been a cinematic icon in Hong Kong cinema throughout the 1980s and 90s before gaining international acclaim as the motorcycle riding, show stopping Bond girl Wai Lin in *Tomorrow Never Dies* and as Yu Shi Lien, the resilient heroine of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

Our favourite memories of Yeoh, however, would have to be her *Yes, Madam* days from the 80s and early 90s, when she dressed in an all white *Miami Vice*-style outfit, stylishly pummeling bad guys, and as inspector Jessica Yang in *Police Story 3*. Playing opposite Jackie Chan, she she pulled off numerous death defying stunts (she does most of her own stunts) to save Chan's character on multiple occasions and upstage him. "She showed the world that a woman could be just as lethal and pull off just as much high impact action as any male counterpart," says HK film historian Mike Leeder. Yeoh has guts and she definitely made a few guys lose theirs' during bone crunching face-offs.

To say that Yeoh is just a martial arts actress would be limiting, though. She's a trained ballet dancer and

an all-around entertainer with an incredible range, as demonstrated in roles like Mameha in *Memoirs of a Geisha* and Aung San Suu Kyi in *The Lady*. But what's most captivating about Yeoh is how she can radiate elegance while smashing someone's head with a 2x4. A true deadly beauty. While promoting her new film, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon 2: Sword of Destiny*, we trade punches with the icon and discuss being a woman in martial arts.



**To be respected and appreciated as an action or martial artist is a privilege**

**How did it feel when you were asked to play your very first martial arts role?**

Thrilled! I had studied ballet and dance since young and was quite engaged with athletics. I felt I could put all my experiences to good use, so there was no hesitation at all. Only high expectations.

**Tell me about your experience with learning kung fu? Was it a grueling process or a piece of cake?**

I was very blessed, I joined the perfect gym, Eddie Maher in TST. There were many real action actors and stunt guys who trained there. So almost every day, I remember,



bright and early, I'd be there and stay till dinner time. It was a fun and productive training place for me. It was learning how to use speed and the projection of power while acting. I am very lucky to have been able to learn from the best stunt/action people. And I thank them for being so generous with their time and efforts.

**What was the worst experience you've ever had with a stunt?**

The one that had the worst impact, was the one in *The Stunt Women*. (aka *The Story of Ah Gam*) which was a homage to the stunt people. I played a stunt person and landed completely wrongly. I nosedived into the landing area and I folded and heard my back snap! I thought I broke my back or neck. Psychologically and physically, this injury took the longest to recover.

**Though you've taken roles outside of action films, people still remember you most for your fighting skills. How does that make you feel? Is it cool being known as a kickass actress or does it become a burden?**

To be respected and appreciated as an action or martial artist is a

privilege. I definitely don't feel it's a burden. I am lucky to have balance, to be able to take on both dramatic and action roles. The drama in action movies are equally important. The emotions drive the action.

**Male actors have always had it better than female ones. But I imagine in the martial arts genre there would be an even greater disparity. Would that be a correct assumption to make?**

The truth is that male actors have always dominated the martial arts world and old traditional views and values are of woman staying at home to take care of family [persist]. I would say we might need to work harder and try harder to succeed. There's no sacrifice if you're doing something you love or are passionate about.

**What does kung fu mean to you? Is it a way a life? A career? Or something more?**

It is a way of life. I only wish I have more time to learn and practice tai chi. Kung fu is more than a career for me. It's exercise, it's a lifestyle, it's a philosophy. *AT*



## Top 5 Films



1. *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*



2. *Tomorrow Never Dies*



3. *Yes, Madam*



4. *Reign of Assassians*



5. *Police Story 3*

1985



## Cynthia Rothrock

Blonde maiden of pain

**Our pick:** *China O'Brien*

A self-proclaimed 'queen of martial arts films', Cynthia Rothrock is one of the few – if not the only – Western female martial arts heroines to achieve stardom in the Hong Kong movie scene. At a time when Hollywood was looking for the next Bruce Lee, Rothrock did quite the opposite and decided to make the move from California to Hong Kong to star in martial arts films here.

Rothrock successfully made the transition from champion fighter to martial arts actress in her cinematic debut, *Yes, Madam*, opposite the internationally famed Michelle Yeoh, which went on to be a box office success. Rothrock's unforgiving and aggressive fighting style mesmerised audiences while her 'hyah' battle cries made their hairs stand on end. She held her own against big stars like Sammo Hung in *Shanghai Express*, but her biggest role to date is playing the lead in the *China O'Brien* franchise. Playing a disgraced policewoman seeking justice through her badass fighting skills, the movie eventually reached cult film status. Rothrock was such a popular fixture in the Hong Kong film industry that there weren't many fight movies during the 80s she didn't have a role in. Till this day, Rothrock is still training and teaching in California, still drop kicking goons. *Olivia Lai*

1987

## Cynthia Khan 楊麗青

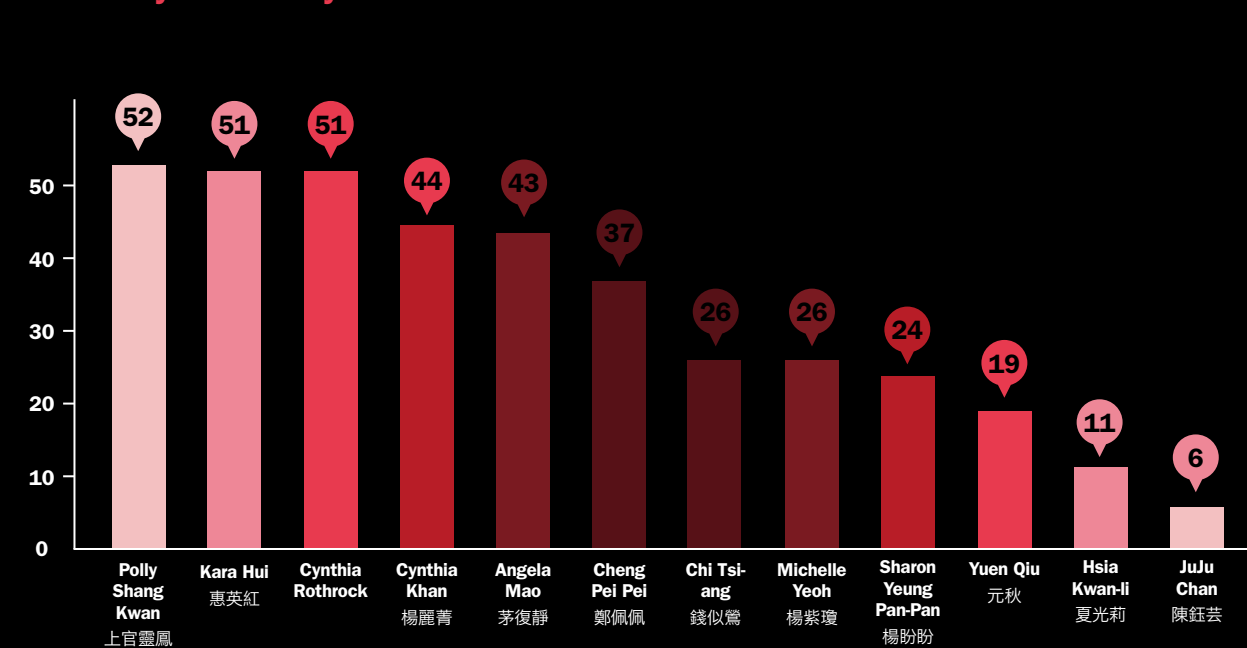
Action queen

**Our pick:** *In the Line of Duty 3*

Discovering her love for public performance at a young age, Cynthia Khan studied jazz and Chinese dance before learning taekwondo. Her notable martial arts skills are shown through her appearances in a number of movies and television series. She defies the social standards applied to women by displaying both power and strength in her roles, defeating male characters and showing remarkable endurance in fights. Her career kicked off in the 90s after her debut in *In the Line of Duty 3* where she first showed her fighting chops. However, her most known work came in the sequel, *In the Line of Duty 4*, directed by the revered Yuen Woo-ping and starring Donnie Yen. One of the most iconic images of any local female action star is of Khan wearing a wedding dress and firing an uzi in *Queen's High*. These days she works primarily as a yoga instructor, yet still acts in the occasional film, most recently *Super Player* (2010). *MT*

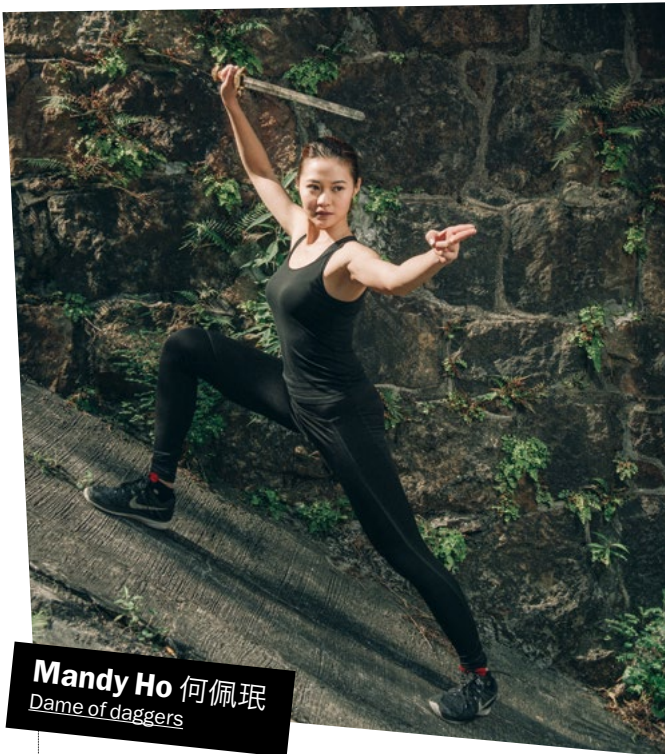


## How many times they've kicked ass on screen



## The fresh furies

These days it seems like there's a shortage of young blood to carry on the legacy of the female martial artists of yore. However, that doesn't mean there aren't any. Here are two of the brightest prospects that might just be up for the task and able to set new standards for women in martial arts



**Mandy Ho 何佩珉**  
Dame of daggers

When people look at me, they don't really see someone who would practice kung fu," says 21-year-old actress Mandy Ho. It's true, she has a cute face—big eyes, cherubic facial features—but don't let that fool you. Ho has been practicing the choy li fut style of kung fu since she was five. It's a martial arts form that combines northern and southern style techniques and it has been praised by Bruce Lee as the most effective system in fighting off a group of attackers. Just watch one of Ho's YouTube videos and you'll know she's legit.

Ho got her foot into the entertainment industry when she applied to be in TVB's reality competition show *Kung Fu Supernova* back in 2011. Out of 12 contestants Ho stood out and won because of her quick wit, creativity and impeccable moves. "I was the most experienced, so there was pressure to prove myself," she says. And she did. The show continued to the international round with competitors hailing from the US, Malaysia and China and Ho once again took the crown.

This shouldn't come as much of a shock, since she is accustomed to winning. At the 2011 International Traditional Kung Fu Forum she won the gold medal in Chinese boxing and at the Tuen Mun Martial Arts Forum, she secured the title for Chinese boxing and Chinese short weapons. Her specialty are short blades and daggers.

Now signed to TVB, Ho has taken up minor roles in dramas and has also become a stunt trainee—already having been set ablaze for a role. She also trains with veteran actress and martial artist Sharon Yeung Pan Pan and teaches private lessons at Yeung's Hithut Studio. "You can really tell what someone is like when you see them practice kung fu," Ho says. "You can see their character and their level of patience."

As if that wasn't enough, Ho is also a registered nurse. For us RPG geeks out there, we know how important it is to have an offensive character with healing capabilities.

Ho is now focused on her acting career and hopes to land bigger roles, but at her core, martial arts still takes priority. "There were a few turning points in my life that made me realise that kung fu is something I can't live without." AT

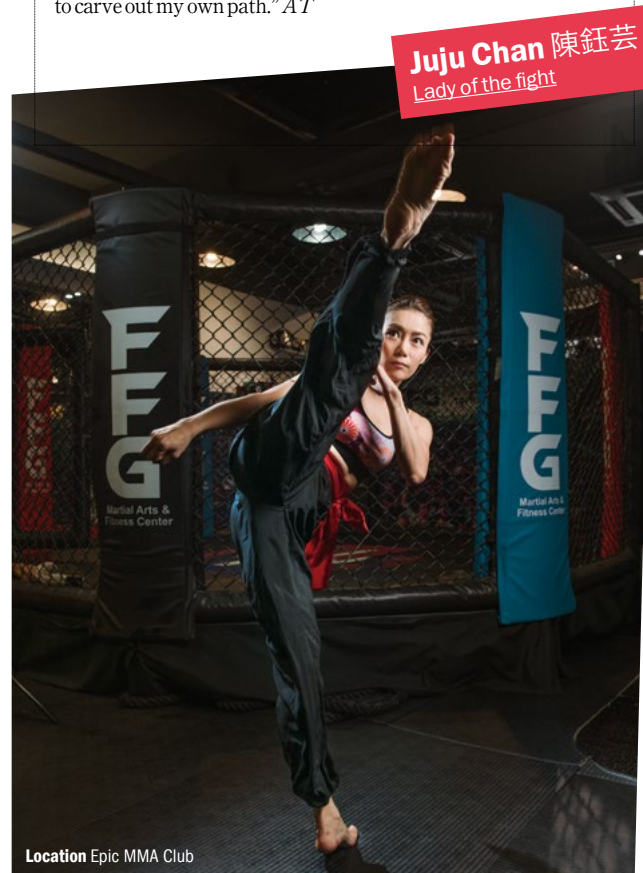
It's time to revive Hong Kong martial arts films, especially with girls," says martial arts champion and actress Juju Chan. Dubbed the 'female Bruce Lee', Chan seems destined to be the next big female action star, having just starred in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon 2* alongside Michelle Yeoh and Donnie Yen.

Her martial arts career began with judo when she was just a spritely 10-year-old. From there, she picked up hung kuen, taekwondo, Wing Chun and Thai kickboxing. Chan is no one trick pony. In 2013 she became a champion in the female black belt pattern category in the China Open Championship, a victory she followed up by winning the World Muay Thai Council's 2014 46kg Thai boxing championship. This girl has got some serious skills and it doesn't stop there. She's not just beauty and brawn, she's also quite the academic having received a computer science degree from the University of San Francisco and also a master's degree in film and TV from NYU.

"My parents really didn't want me to go into entertainment," says Chan. "But I want to explore different things before it's too late in case I have regrets 10 years later."

Ultimately, she wants to be known for having real fighting skills, not just as someone that can follow action choreography. "When I compete in taekwondo I chose the ITF (International Taekwondo Federation) route because it doesn't require pads like in WTF (World Taekwondo Federation)," declares Chan. "When you land a hit, you really land a hit. I don't like amateur fights. People sometimes think I'm really hardcore."

Having just signed to Sun Entertainment talent management company, we're likely to see much more of Chan very soon. "I don't want to do what people have already done," she says. "As an action actress you have to learn different styles of martial arts. That's what Bruce Lee did. He's my role model, but I'm also going to carve out my own path." AT



**Juju Chan 陳鈺芸**  
Lady of the fight

Location Epic MMA Club

## Fictional female fighters

From folklore to TV dramas, these ladies not only kick ass but challenge social norms. They are anything but basic according to Ambrose Li



**Fa Mulan (花木蘭)**  
With her story originating as far back as the fourth century AD, Fa Mulan is perhaps the most well-known heroine in Chinese folklore. She became internationally popular when Disney decided to tell her story in the 1998 film *Mulan*, but she first hit Hong Kong cinema in 1964 *Lady General Hua Mulan*. The empowering character defies Confucian societal conventions that order women to be obedient housewives. By disguising herself as a young man and enlisting herself in the military in place of her aged father, Fa demonstrates strength and bravery while breaking down gender barriers and definitions.

**Muk Gwai-ying (穆桂英)**  
Another prominent heroine from Chinese mythology, Muk Gwai-ying embodies quintessential Chinese virtues without being bound by convention. Most famously, she chose her own husband at a time of arranged marriages during the Northern Song Dynasty (11th-12th century). She fought valiantly as a general for her country and was celebrated for uniting female power by leading twelve widows in a fight against Khitan forces. Muk and her comrades won the battle and helped expand the Northern Song Empire, but at the cost of their own lives. Who needs a man? These ladies clearly don't.



**Siu Lung-niu (小龍女)**  
Siu Long-liu is a fictional character created by the famed wuxia (martial arts) novelist Ji Yong, and is known for her superior skill in fighting as well as her breathtaking beauty. In both the novel and the 1983 TVB series, *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, set in the Southern Song Dynasty (12th-13th century), Siu (played by Idy Chan) creates controversy by accepting the Ancient Tomb Sect's male disciple, Yang Guo, and eventually marrying him. Fearless and independent, Siu never cared what anyone thought.



**Lee Mok-sou (李莫愁)**  
Contrary to most of the upright and noble wushu characters, Lee Mok-sou is a protagonist who becomes a vicious killer following her lover's betrayal. In revenge, she murders his entire family—just some of the many people she put to death. She led her life in anger and regret, and died yearning for the one person she loved. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Like Siu Lung-niu above, the most famous portrayal of Lee was in *The Return of the Condor Heroes* by Lisa Lui.



**The Black Rose (黑玫瑰)**  
With her body hugging outfit and a black mask, The Black Rose is the first modern heroine in Hong Kong film history, with a lasting popularity that traces back to Chor Yuen's 1965 film of the same name, featuring iconic actress Chan Po-chu and Nam Hung. The film sold out for nine days consecutively and subsequently led to sequels and reboots of the titular character. By robbing the rich and giving to the poor, as well as equipping herself with an assortment of crime-fighting gadgets, think of her as HK's answer to Robin Hood and Batman. Leaving a black rose wherever she strikes, she was most recently portrayed by Kara Hui in *Incredible Mama*.

## Be like water

Want to become the next Wong Fei-hung or Bruce Lee? Féliks Cheang rounds up some of the best martial arts classes in town, so you can get started.



### Mindful Wing Chun

Wing Chun is the most recognisable martial art in Hong Kong thanks to Yip Man. At Mindful Wing Chun, besides physical toning, mindfulness and the internal art to maintain healthy state of mind is emphasised for overall wellness. Be the next Yip Man with both physical and mental fitness. 8/F, On Lan Centre, 11-15 On Lan St, Central, 6620 7050; [mindfulwingchun.com.hk](http://mindfulwingchun.com.hk).

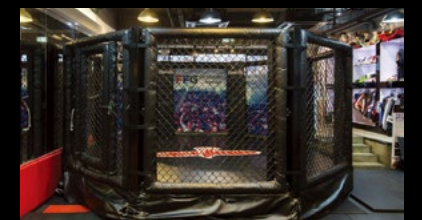
### Po Chi Lam Li Chan Wo Sports Association

Popularised by folk hero Wong Fei-hung, Hung Kuen has become a kung fu style synonymous

with our city. The class at Po Chi Lam Li Chan Wo would be one of the best in town, as Sifu Li Chan-wo is a disciple of Wong Fei-hung's wife and is instrumental in promoting Hung Kuen after she passed away. The association offers classes in different stances, basic movements and weaponry. Flat 3, 1/F, Tung Ho Bldg, 177-183 Shau Kei Wan Main St E, Shau Kei Wan, 2886 1903; [pochilam.org](http://pochilam.org).

### Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do

Jun fan jeet kune do (named after Lee's original name, 'Lee Jun-fan') is unequivocally the best place in town for JFD classes. The only licenced and recognised JKD organisation in Hong Kong, this institute was established by Lee's wife Linda, daughter Shannon and his disciples as a homage to his contribution to martial arts. And there is no other man that popularised kung fu around the globe than Bruce Lee. Rm 1005-1007, Winning Commercial Bldg, 46-48 Hillwood Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, 2422 0732; [jkd.com.hk](http://jkd.com.hk).



### Epic MMA Club

Don your Dri-Fit and get ready to show off your fists of fury at a training class for mixed martial arts (MMA). This fighting and martial art gym provides a variety of training, from Brazilian jiu-jitsu to Muay Thai. You can get in shape by punching and kicking or by lifting and metabolic conditioning. But what really sets Epic MMA apart are the trainers. They are highly qualified, and many of them are title-holders in their field, making the training super legit. You can also be trained by Juju Chan. 1/F, China Bldg, 29 Queen's Rd C, 2525 2833; [epicmma.com](http://epicmma.com).