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Chow Yun-Fat: Hong Kong Delon and Cult Film Icon

This paper is interested in the cultural specificity – spatial and temporal – of cult appreciation. Cult followings assume their identity through difference – classifiable only through audience response, rather than *auteur* intent. A film or film star (for example), can only be considered cult retrospectively, labeled as such upon reception and *in opposition to* the mainstream. As such, they are marked by their presence in time and space.

Although one of the most enduringly popular stars of Hong Kong cinema, Chow Yun-Fat remains a minor figure for Western mainstream audiences. Chow's alliance with director John Woo from 1986 to 1992 cemented his mainstream popularity in Asia and it was this collaboration that ignited Chow's small but fervent following in the West, as he became exemplar of Woo's Romantic vision.

This paper investigates the 'cult of cool' associated with Chow Yun-Fat, couched within a Western context. Largely crafted by Woo's *auteurist* vision, Chow's suave on-screen image owes much to Alain Delon's stylized portrayal of Jef Costello in *Le Samourai* (1969). Adopting *The Killer* (1989) as its primary frame of reference, the paper demonstrates Woo's appropriation of Western cinema to expound a complex aesthetic and political representation of his leading man. It explores the ways in which generic and stylistic modes of film are transformed and complicated by specific cultural interpretations and tracks the integration of Western aesthetics into an identifiably Hong Kong context which, in *The Killer*, operates to establish the familiarity and exoticism that engender a Western cult appreciation of Chow Yun-Fat.