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Masters of Arts (Literary Studies)

Style and Stardom: The Iconicity of Jay Chou

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Notes on Names and Romanization

This paper uses English translated names for the titles of the music albums, songs and films. The names of the music albums, songs and films are listed in their original Chinese characters in Appendix A.

An Asian man in a simple t-shirt and blue jeans leaping into air with a guitar – this picture of a twenty-four year old Taiwanese, Jay Chou, graced the cover of the March 2003 issue of *Time* magazine. Chou’s meteoric rise to stardom in less than three years earned him the title of “New King of Asian Pop”. Eight years later, Chou is still the reigning star in the Chinese entertainment industry. He is the most popular Chinese singer in East Asia and other Chinese communities all over the world. He has received accolades for being a singer, musician, song-writer, producer, actor and even director. His overwhelming popularity is not confined to the music industry as he has crossed over to the film industry and acted in seven national and international movies.

Looking at his impressive achievements, one cannot help but ask, “Why is Chou so successful?” This paper aims to investigate the factors which propel Chou to stardom and establish him as the most iconic star in East Asia. This paper is organised in four parts. Firstly, the relationship between Chou’s star image and his charisma is examined. The paper proceeds to analyse his distinctive “Chou Style” music and focuses on his “China Wind” evolution. In this paper, the term “Chou Style” is used to describe Chou’s unique brand of music which consists of an innovative hybrid of musical styles. Next, the commodification of Chou’s stardom is explored through a study of his product endorsements and music concerts. The last section investigates Chou’s crossover from music to film through an analysis of his significant films. Finally, this paper concludes by looking at the impact of Chou’s success on East Asia’s

entertainment industry.

In this paper, the terms “star” and “stardom” are used as assembling expressions that encompass different modifications like celebrity, idol, personality and pop star. Chou not only embodies the metaphoric quality of a shining star, but his fame in the music industry has spread over to the film industry. Using tools of semiotics, contextual and historical analysis, Richard Dyer provides a framework to examine film stars as images, signs and a social phenomenon which can be used to analyse Chou’s stardom¹. However, in the era of globalization and confluence of new media, stars emerge from not only film but other entertainment industries as well; hence Dyer’s discussion of film stars has to be expanded when applied to the analysis of Chou’s star image². David Marshall’s discussion of the celebrity figure is useful as he expands Dyer’s ideas and analyses three types of celebrity, namely the film, television and music celebrity³.

As a result of the diverse ways in which fame can be attributed to a person, other terms like celebrity, idol and pop star are commonly used to describe a famous personality. However, the terms like “star” and “celebrity” are used in different contexts. The term “star” is most commonly used in film studies to denote a dialectic between on/off-screen presence and a dialogue between the performing presence and the “private” life of the star (Ellis 1989). On the other hand, the term “celebrity” has a more contradictory and often less prestigious lineage (Holmes and Redmond 3). The common use of the term

“celebrity” indicates how the media contexts of fame are now less specific, with individual celebrities rarely restricted to a single media form (Holmes and Redmond 11).

Looking at Chou’s unprecedented stardom, he is definitely not another celebrity. A star is a celebrity but a celebrity is not necessarily a star. Even though the critics have provided useful ways to analyse stardom, Chou’s immense popularity challenges some of the limitations in the prevalent theories. While terms like “star” and “stardom” are used in this paper, it is important to note that the concepts of star and stardom have to be reformulated in order to examine Chou’s impact on popular culture in East Asia.

Chou’s Star Image: Charisma and a Hybrid of “Cool” and “Diao”

Many would agree that Chou’s physical attributes do not attract much attention in East Asia’s entertainment industry which is saturated with heartthrobs like Andy Lau in Hong Kong to the “pretty-boys” in popular Korean groups like Super Junior. In the 2003 *Times* magazine article, Kate Drake questions, “How did a kid with an overbite, aquiline nose and receding chin displace the Nicholases and Andys and Jackys to become Asia's hottest pop star?” (Drake). In his first few music albums, Chou was usually depicted as a low-key singer who typically hid his face under his baseball caps or hooded sweatshirt⁴. As he releases more music albums, his low-profile image slowly evolves into a

glamorous star image⁵.

How do we define Chou's star image? According to Dyer, the star's "image" is made up of screen roles and obviously stage-planned public appearances, and also of images of the manufacture of that "image" and of the real person who is the site or occasion of it (*Heavenly Bodies* 7). Each element is complex and contradictory and the star is all of it taken together, hence star images are always extensive, multimedia and intertextual (Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* 7).

Dyer's discussion of a film star's image can be applied to Chou as his star image is a confluence of images which are projected by his music, music performances, music videos, film performances and the dynamics between his authentic personality and his marketed, public persona.

What is the magic behind Chou's appealing star image? Dyer explains that, in the Weberian sense, the star exhibits charismatic authority⁶. Max Weber states that charisma is "a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least superficially exceptional qualities"⁷ (329).

Based on Weber's and Dyer's discussion of charisma, I posit that Chou's star image is closely linked to his charisma which establishes his exceptional position in society. Chou's charisma is anchored on his cultural representation of "cool". In an interview on the film *Green Hornet*, the term "cool" was used repeatedly to describe Chou. On Chou, Seth Rogen said, "It was immediately clear that he was super cool. He's really charismatic, he's handsome, he has

that cool hair” (Nasson). The repeated emphasis on Chou’s “cool” factor shows how his charismatic star image is built on how he epitomises “coolness”.

What do we mean by the term “cool”? The linguistic history of the word “cool” has been extensively discussed by Richard Moore. Moore traces the origins of the word “cool” from African-American origins to the common usage in contemporary culture. The word “cool” embodies core features of emotional control, detachment, knowingness, and deviance from the mainstream (Moore 79). Moore also examines the usage of “cool” in an international context, especially Asia. Starting in the 1990s, young urban Chinese in the People’s Republic of China began using the word “ku” as a Mandarin rendering of the English slang term “cool” (Moore 82). While the meanings of “cool” appear to be shifting as different aspects of international youth culture surface in Asia, the notion of “cool” is mainly associated with the definition of individualism.

Chou’s association with the elements of “cool” and individualism is embodied in his favourite word “diao”. “Diao” is a Taiwanese slang which is usually translated as “cool” or “outrageous”. It literally means the penis. In the online urban dictionary⁸, if one enters Chou’s name in the search engine, the search results indicate that “Jay Chou” is synonymous with the meaning of “diao”. Chou’s famous catchphrase is “chao diao” which means super “diao” or super “cool”. In the 2003 *Time* magazine article, Chou emphasises that “diao” is his personal philosophy:

“It means that whatever you do, you don’t try to follow others...It’s like, the

ability to shock. The way I think of shocking people is to do things that people don't expect in my music, in my performances. Like during my first Taipei show last year, I was performing *Dragon Fist* and I took off on a harness and flew out over the audience. That was diao.” (Drake)

As seen from Chou's explanation, his interpretation of “diao” is closely related to the ability to challenge the norm. Chou uses this term so frequently that “diao” has become representative of his star image. Chou's impact on popular culture is clearly demonstrated by how he has transformed a native Taiwanese slang “diao” into his own philosophy.

Chou's charisma is a hybrid of “cool” and “diao” as he represents the individualistic spirit associated with “cool” and the non-conformity aspect in “diao”. Anthony Fung goes beyond the “cool” and “diao” aspects and explains that Chou displays a complex and paradoxical image⁹ for the “GenY” generation¹⁰ (“Western Style, Chinese Pop” 73). Chou represents qualities related to “cool” and “diao” like “youth defiance, insolence and non-compliance”, but his popular songs trigger “the audience's emotions in a celebration of Chinese tradition and values, including conscientiousness, tolerance and reservedness”¹¹ (“Western Style, Chinese Pop” 73). Besides projecting fashionable and “modern” qualities like “cool” and “diao”, Chou reflects “traditional”, positive values like filial piety which are treasured by the Chinese. Chou is known to be a filial son and he plays tribute to his mother by naming his fourth music album after her, *Ye Hui Mei*. Moreover, some of

Chou's songs promote traditional family values and stress the importance of familial ties and respect for elderly in songs like *Grandfather's Tea*, *Grandmother* and *Listen to your Mother*. Hence, Chou's star image is a hybrid of "modern" and "traditional" qualities based on his representation of contemporary notions like "cool", "diao" and traditional aspects of Chinese values.

The hybridity of Chou's star image plays a crucial role in his success as he represents a new model of stardom in East Asia. The concept of hybridity has been defined differently in social sciences and cultural studies, especially in post-colonial theories. Homi Bhabha discusses the concept of hybridity and states that "the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation (*The Third Space* 211). Even though Bhabha's works characterise the mechanisms of the colonial psychic economy, similar structures of hybridity are also found in contemporary culture (Huddart 124). Chou combines "modern" and "traditional" elements to create a "new and unrecognisable" star image. His stardom is unprecedented as no other stars have generated similar impact in East Asia's entertainment industry. Thus, the concept of hybridity is applicable to Chou as he has altered the landscape of East Asia's music industry with his hybrid star image and distinctive "Chou Style" music. The hybrid nature of his "Chou Style" music and its impact will be discussed in the next section.

Chou's Music: "Chou Style" and the "China Wind" Evolution

Chou could be viewed as an auteur-like music star because he exercises considerable control over his music career. Shuker applies the auteur theory to analyse the similarities between an auteur and a music star¹². Like an auteur, Chou exercises great autonomy in his creative and productive processes¹³ as the producer and songwriter for all eleven music albums¹⁴. Chou yields great the artistic freedom to influence the Chinese music industry with his "Chou Style" brand of music.

Taipei Times described archetypal "Chou Style" as "Taiwan's favourite song blends pop, rap, blues and a smorgasbord of esthetic elements of world music" (qtd. "Jay Chou: Musical Style"). Through constant differentiation and innovation, Chou creates a hybrid of musical styles and this hybridity is an integral part of his "Chou Style". Mercedes M. Dujunco discusses some ways hybridity can manifest in popular music:

[T]he juxtaposition and mixing of different musical styles; performance in a language or with instruments other than the ones typically associated with the style of music performed; performance by or with a singer or musician not typically associated with the style of music performed... (Dujunco 27)

Chou mixes different musical styles in his signature "China Wind" songs. He is known as the "Father of China Wind" as he started the "China Wind" music trend with the song *Lady* which is a hybrid of hip hop, rhythm and blues (R&B),

rap and Chinese poetic language. As in all musical styles or genres, it is challenging to define clearly what “China Wind” music constitutes. It can be defined musically by its juxtaposition of classical Chinese melody and instruments with global popular styles, particularly rhythm and blues (R&B) and hip hop (Chow and Kloet 60). It can also be defined lyrically by its mobilization of “traditional” Chinese culture elements such as legends, classics and language in contemporary contexts (Chow and Kloet 60). Chou’s “China Wind” songs are unique as he fuses the West and East musical styles to create a new type of music which has gained immense popularity.

In the West, especially America, rap and hip-hop music is a style encompassing clothing, dances, music, and lifestyles and, quite often, such tastes reflect different classes of people (Fung, *Global Capital* 97). Rap functions as a social commentary and protest due to its origins as a black cultural expression that prioritises black voices from the margins of America (Connell and Gibson 111). The poverty, violence and drug-taking that are reflected by the rough language forms in hip-hop are intrinsically anti-hegemonic and appeal to people in Western society (Fung, *Global Capital* 97). In Asia youth culture, hip-hop style is apolitical and non-antisocial; it takes the form of hip-hop clothing, music, and lifestyle but is not a protest against politics and society (Fung, *Global Capital* 97). Chou depoliticises and localises the Western musical influences by merging them with traditional Chinese classical music and Chinese lyrics. Chou’s ability to repackage Western

musical forms with Chinese culture influences is a dominant characteristic of his “Chou Style”.

Some critics questioned Chou’s credibility as a musician because Vincent Fang writes most of the poetic verses for Chou’s “China Wind” songs. However, Straw observes, “typically we evaluate a musical recording or concert as the output of a single individual or group” (200). It is important to note that Chou is the performer and the hybrid elements in his music are performative to reflect his star performance. Moreover, Chou composes most of tunes for the “China Wind” songs as his background in classical music allows him to manipulate tunes. Most of his “China Wind” songs are written in the pentatonic scale, the basis for melodic construction in traditional Chinese music, as opposed to the common seven-note, diatonic scale. Chou’s manipulation of different musical scales facilitates the fusion of Eastern oriental and Western contemporary sounds. The “China Wind” music is a distinctive characteristic of his style and he has made a commitment to sustain his “China Wind” style and include one “China Wind” song in all his music albums. This shows his commitment to repeat his “Chou Style” performance in his music and reinforce his authenticity.

In his “China Wind” songs, Chou revitalises Chinese classical melody and traditional elements by combining them with popular Western musical styles like hip hop, rap and even R&B. In an upbeat “China Wind” song, *Nunchucks*, Chou mixes Chinese martial arts theme and Chinese classical instruments like

traditional Chinese two-stringed fiddle (erhu) with rap and electric guitar to create a hybrid of Western and Eastern influences. Similarly, in a “China Wind” ballad, *East Wind Breaks*, he fuses R&B tune with traditional Chinese two-stringed fiddle (erhu) and lute (pipa) to generate a new type of love songs. Bhabha’s discussion of hybridity can be applied to Chou’s “China Wind” songs:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with “newness” that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause of aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. (*The Location of Culture* 7)

Chou’s creation of the “China Wind” music genre can be viewed as an “insurgent act of cultural translation” as he renews the traditional Chinese classical music from the past with the present form of popular Western musical styles. He makes traditional Chinese classical music more “modern” with his infusion of contemporary musical styles in his “China Wind” songs.

The hybridity in Chou’s music can be seen more clearly in a visual manner in his “China Wind” music videos. Music videos usually function as “promotional devices”, encouraging record sales and chart action (Shuker 164). For Chou, his music videos form an extension of his creative outputs as he directs many of his music videos¹⁵. The first music video he directed is *Hair like Snow* which is a “China Wind” ballad with R&B tune mixed with Chinese

traditional music instruments like the Chinese lute (pipa) and hammered dulcimer (yangqin). The music video features a diversity of imaginaries conventionally coded as traditionally Chinese such the ancient Chinese inn setting and the traditional Chinese costumes. The distinctive feature of this music video is the juxtaposition of the love story which occurred in the past and the contemporary love story in the modern setting. Since the success of the *Hair like Snow* music video¹⁶, the contrast of past and present love stories becomes a staple in Chou's "China Wind" ballads¹⁷. The hybrid of traditional and modern images in his "China Wind" music videos showcases the hybrid nature of the "China Wind" songs. Chou's "China Wind" music videos and songs have developed a new genre of music in the Chinese popular music industry.

Chou's "China Wind" songs have generated more interest in Chinese culture and language. Taiwan president, Ma Ying-jeou, praised the influences of Taiwanese music artists like Chou for promoting interest in the traditional Chinese character set: "Academics from the mainland said many young people now read traditional Chinese because they listen to Jay Chou's songs so much that they just learn it like that" ("Taiwan's President"). Furthermore, Chou's impact in the society can be observed by how some schools have used his songs as teaching materials in Chinese lessons¹⁸. The society's reactions to Chou's songs show that his hybrid style of music has changed people's perceptions of "Chineseness". By linking the Western popular musical styles to

Chinese culture, Chou has made the Chinese language and “Chineseness” more fashionable. In addition, Chou’s “cool” star image combined with the lyricism of his “China Wind” songs has made “Chineseness” more “cool”.

Chou’s respect for his Chinese roots is also highlighted when he modifies Chinese cultural themes in his “China Wind” songs. Chou’s “China Wind” songs are credited with the attempt of reinserting and reasserting sanctioned sinocentric versions of culture and history for a younger generation (Chow and Kloet 61). In Chou’s rap number, *Compendium of Materia Medica*, the title of the song alludes to a Chinese medical classic dating from the Ming Dynasty. In this song, Chou promotes Chinese nationalistic feelings by praising the hard work of the Chinese ancestors and criticising the native Chinese’s patronising attitudes towards their own Chinese culture¹⁹. Hence, some of Chou’s “China Wind” songs perform a societal function by promoting Chinese culture.

Dyer explains that stars are a social phenomenon as they fulfil social and cultural functions (*Stars* 6). To a certain extent, Chou is a social phenomenon as his stardom has altered the characteristics of Chinese popular music with his “China Wind” songs. The “China Wind” songs create an evolution in Chinese popular music as it is no longer monopolised by romantic love songs, but is now moved by an irreducibly dense current of Chinese culture (Chow and Kloet 60). Chou constructs an unprecedented form of Chinese popular music by dissolving the Western musical styles into traditional Chinese classical musical forms. As Fung has highlighted, Chou’s success lies in his

capacity to sublimate himself into an icon of “Chineseness” while maintaining his popular and commercial façade (“Western Style, Chinese Pop” 73).

Moving back to the discussion on hybridity in Chou’s music, I propose that the Chou’s hybrid style of music generates this “in-between” or what Bhabha calls the “third space”:

Hybridity to me is the “third space” that enables other positions to emerge.

This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (*The Third Space* 211)

The hybridity in Chou’s music facilitates the emergence of a “third space” which allows him to create his “Chou Style” music. Taylor emphasises that styles in popular music change quickly and the “third spaces in this realm of the popular are moments of continual (re)invention” (151). Similar to Taylor’s idea, I propose that Chou has created a “third space” in Chinese popular music industry which lies beyond the boundaries of “traditional” and “modern” forms of music and resides in a liminal region marked by constant reinvention of musical styles. Chou’s music inhabits this space due to the hybridity and fluidity of his songs. The “China Wind” style is not the only music genre with hybrid elements in Chou’s music repertoire; Chou experiments with a wide spectrum of musical styles. He mixes bossa nova²⁰ with R&B in *Rosemary* and meshes American-based ragtime²¹ melody with rap in *Sailors Afraid of Water*. Chou does not recreate the original musical genres like Chinese

classical music or authentic bossa nova music, but he fuses different forms of music and invents “new structures of authority” in the music industry by making the hybrid products his own.

Veteran Taiwanese singer, Frankie Kao, declared that with the appearance of Chou, Chinese popular music could be divided into two halves – everything that came before belonged to the classical era, and everything that followed had entered uncharted terrain (Ma). Indeed, Chou has altered the Chinese popular music scene with the elements of hybridity in his “Chou Style” music.

Chou’s Stardom: Commodification in Product Endorsements and Music Concerts

As discussed above, the quintessential “Chou Style” music plays a significant role in propelling Chou to massive stardom. Chou’s stardom facilitates a commodification of his star image. This commodification process is evident in his product endorsements and concerts. Chou’s stardom is commoditised into two forms of capital. Firstly, the star possesses cultural capital because he represents individual creativity and artistic practice (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 189). Secondly, the star’s economic capital is generated as he emerges as the economic centre of any production (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 189).

The impact of Chou’s star image can be analysed with reference to his status as the “King of endorsements”. Stars represent a unique commodity

form as both a labour process and a product and the audience's identification with a particular star is a significant marketing device (Shuker 70). Marshall highlights the importance of "loyalty" which the consumers devote to their favourite star (*Celebrity and Power* 194). Each time Chou moves into marketing new products, he utilises his economic capital to sell his star image as a kind of brand loyalty to the advertising company. The evolution of many consumer products depends on the power relation among producers, the quest of self-definition and social status among consumers, and the floating cultural representation of "cool" (Maguire and Zukin 180). The products associated with Chou usually reflect a certain degree of individuality and "coolness" which attract consumers. This is evident in Chou's role as the spokesperson and image consultant for Meters/bonwe, a China fashion brand. The advertising slogan for the brand is "Meters/bonwe – taking an unusual route" and young people are attracted by the individualistic and "cool" style echoed by the brand's association with Chou's star image.

Other than endorsing a clothing line, Chou collaborated with Asus to promote the Asus N series (N43SL) Jay Chou Special Edition²². Asus focused on Chou's star image and his passion for music to create a unique design inspired by Chou's love of music and martial arts. The laptop is marketed as the gateway to access the "complete Jay Chou music experience" as it features the pioneering "SonicMaster" technology which ensures the best audio quality for listening to Chou's selection of pre-loaded songs. The

combination of modern “J-style” text-wrapping with a classical Chinese blue and white porcelain²³ finish infuses the notebook with strong and diverse Asian aesthetics. From the detailed attention paid to the hybrid of East and West cultural designs to the emphasis on Chou’s music, the laptop is a strategically devised product which showcases the hybrid style associated with Chou. This integration of Chou’s cultural and economic capital is exemplified in most products which are marketed in similar ways to promote Chou’s star image as a commodity.

Similarly, Chou’s concerts have become a form of commodity as the concert tickets are exclusive passes to Chou’s interactive music performances. Tickets to Chou’s concerts are precious commodities as they are frequently sold out²⁴. In line with his “diao” philosophy, Chou continually challenges the boundaries of his concert formats and invents ways to distinguish his music concert from other artistes. From Chou’s first concert tour *The One* 2001 to *Incomparable* 2004 to *Jay Chou World Tour* 2007 and finally *The Era World Tour* 2011, his concerts have become progressively more spectacular. Chou’s recent *The Era World Tour* marks ten years of his music career and it is a \$15-million-world tour that showcases special effects like 3D technology and LED lighting, high budget video productions, elaborate stage designs and extravagant props and costumes (Lee). The concerts provide a platform for him to showcase the hybrid elements of his songs. Usually, his stage performances of his “China Wind” songs are extremely spectacular. In *The*

One 2001 concert performance of the fast-paced “China Wind” song, *Dragon Fist*, Chou wore a flamboyant red Chinese robe while he rap and danced in a hip-hop style. The hybridity of his music has become a series of performative act which constitute a main attraction in his concerts.

The concert format provides a platform for Chou to “perform” his star image and “authenticity” as the live and spectacular performances showcase his “coolness”. Marshall views the music concert as one of the principal ways popular music has established its authenticity (*Celebrity and Power* 193).

During the concert, the audience forms the ultimate moment of connection with Chou and his music as they participate in the ritualised concert setting and sing-along sessions. Music concerts are complex cultural phenomena which involve a mix of music and economics, ritual and pleasure, for both performers and their audience (Shuker 53). Hence, Chou’s music concerts are more than a form of commodity which possesses only economic capital, their popularity demonstrate how Chou’s star image is consumed as a form of culture.

Chou’s hybrid star image and music have been commoditized. In his product endorsements, Chou’s representation of hybridity is highlighted as a marketing strategy. In his music concerts, the hybridity of Chou’s music is transformed into spectacular performative acts to attract the concert-goers. Taylor explains that “[h]ybridity has become a marketing term, a way of identifying, commodifying, and selling what on the surface is a new form of difference, but one that reproduces old prejudices and hegemonies” (143). The

marketing of the hybrid qualities of Chou's stardom is a process of commodifying a "new form of difference" as product endorsements and concerts are normal components in any music star's portfolio. However, the qualities of hybridity associated with Chou have been interpreted as something new and transformed into commodities.

Chou's Stardom: Crossover from Music to Film

The dynamics between Chou's star image and music facilitates the development of Chou's stardom based on a hybrid model of Chou as both a music and film star. Chou's stardom facilitates his crossover from music to film and his bankability as a star vehicle propels his film career. In this section, Chou's progression from a music to a film star is examined through an analysis of how his appearances in his prominent films contribute to his star image.

Before we examine the films Chou has acted in, it is essential to analyse Aubrey Lam Oi-Wah's local low-budget independent film *Hidden Track* (2003). The Chinese title of the film is simply translated as "Searching for Jay Chou". The premise of the film is predicated on Pu Pu's search for Chou's hidden track which is rumoured to be in one of his albums. Even though Chou does not participate in the film, his star image forms the essence of the film. The absence of Chou's physical presence is substituted by the presence of his music. The theme song's *Hidden Track* is not just a motif in the film as Chou's singing voice acts like an authorial narration. Chou's cameo at the end of the

film functions like the plot's climax as the audience finally sees the "star" on screen. His short appearance appears to be part of the marketing strategy to satisfy his fans who watched the film as his name is in the film's title. The representation of Chou's star qualities in the form of his music is juxtaposed with the absence of his physical involvement. This interplay of Chou's presence and absence in the film demonstrates the pervasive impact of Chou's star power on the film industry.

Chou's first film *Initial D* (2005) is an adaptation of a Japanese comic series. Chou, acting as Takumi who is a tofu-delivery man as well as a skilled touge racer, has been criticised for his limited or lack of acting skills²⁵. The phenomenon of music stars with limited acting abilities is discussed by Kay Dickinson who argues that some famous singers with limited acting capabilities have been well used in films because their star personas helpfully overlap with their film roles (189). Dickinson's point can be applied to Chou as his performance in *Initial D* is an extension of his star persona. Takumi, a "cool" man of few words, resembles Chou's "cool" star persona as Chou is usually reticent when speaking to the media. Many critics feel that Chou is just being his "cool" self in the film and it is not considered "acting". However, for many fans, Chou's expressionless face is considered "cool" and mysterious because he conceals his emotions. Moreover, the thrilling racing scenes contribute to the "diao" aspect of Chou's star image. The film appears to an extended music video of Chou's songs as the theme song by Chou, *All the way North*, is played

in the film. Chou's limited acting capabilities do not affect the reception of the film as the film reinforces his star image on big screen.

When internationally acclaimed auteur, Zhang Yimou cast Chou in the *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), Zhang's choice seemed like a calculated publicity stunt used to promote the film. Despite Chou's limited acting talent, he was given a major role to act beside world-renowned stars like Chow Yun-Fat and Gong-Li. This film marks a transformation of Chou's star persona from a singer to an actor as Chou's acting skills were showcased extensively. This film adds on to Chou's star image as it establishes him as both a music and film star. Even though Chou's films are not considered critical successes, Chou received praise from Zhang who admired his directing efforts in the *Hair like Snow* music video and said that Chou has the potential to surpass him in the future. Zhang's comment on Chou's directing skills can be applied to Chou's directorial debut, *Secret* (2007), where Chou is the main actor, scriptwriter, producer and director. The protagonist, Ye Xianglun, is almost a mirror image of Chou as he is a talented pianist who exudes "coolness" like Chou. Chou's strategy of performing his star image and showcasing his music is a success as *Secret* won the "Outstanding Taiwanese Film of the Year" Award at the 44th Golden Horse Awards. This film reinforces Chou's star image as not just a musician and actor, but also a director.

Next, Chou ventures into Hollywood in *The Green Hornet* (2010). Chou's role, Kato, is Bruce Lee's first role in Hollywood. Lee, a Chinese martial arts

icon in the 1960s, is popular in the East as he represents Chinese pride and honour by being one of the first Chinese stars to succeed in Hollywood. Lee's Kato is a martial arts expert like Chou's Kato. Chou reinvents Kato to fit his "cool" star image and his "updated" Kato displays music talent and plays a piano. While the film was not a critical success, Chou's "cool" portrayal of Kato introduced Chou to Hollywood and he was nominated in 2011 MTV Movie Awards for "Best Breakout Star"²⁶. Furthermore, Chou's "China Wind" song, *Nunchunks*, is played at the end of the film. The song can be considered a tribute to Lee as nunchunks is a Chinese martial arts weapon which is used by Lee in his films. It seems that Chou is hinting that he aims to be the next "Bruce Lee"; not a martial arts expert but a talented musician who will impact the West's film and music industry. Chou's strategic selection of his signature "China Wind" song for his Hollywood debut reveals his desire to introduce his hybrid style of music to the West. This film showcases the hybridity of Chou's star image as it is a fusion between the West, Hollywood, and East which is represented by Chou's portrayal of Kato, Chinese martial arts and Chou's "China Wind" song. The mixing of West and East elements in the film suggests that Chou is utilising the hybrid nature of his star image to cross boundaries and move from the East Asia's entertainment industry to Hollywood.

Chou has expressed his wish to engrave the Chinese word "diao" on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in the future²⁷. While Chou's foray into Hollywood is established by *The Green Hornet*, Chou remains relatively unknown to most

American audience and media. Even though Chou had international concert tours in America, the fans who attended the concerts were predominant Chinese or Asian American. It is difficult for a Chinese singer to break into the West music industry due to language barriers and cultural differences. Lyrics is central to the practice of popular music, hence popular music's texts comprise not just of sounds but of musical sounds in conjunction with words, images, and movement (Shepherd 171). Therefore, it is challenging for Chinese music to appeal to global audience who do not understand the Chinese language. While Chou's strategy of harnessing of East and West, and traditional and modern is popular in the East, it remains to be seen if the same "formula" will appeal to the West.

Conclusion: Chou's Impact

Why is Chou so successful? To answer this question, this paper has examined Chou's stardom with reference to the relationships between his star image and his wide range of music and films. Chou's success is significant as it demonstrates how the concept of hybridity operates in Chinese popular culture. It is useful to go back to Bhabha's explanation of the hybridity:

But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they

are prior only in the sense of being anterior. (*The Third Space* 211)

Chou's hybrid style of music cannot be considered original as it bears traces of other musical styles. Paradoxically, Chou's hybrid music is consumed as something "authentic" and people regard his music as original because he is the first prominent star to make the hybrid style of music mainstream. This illustrates that it is possible for a hybridised product to develop its independent identity that is not dictated by the elements which originally constitute the hybrid. Hence, Chou's hybrid style of music is viewed as an original product and considered to be ground-breaking in Chinese popular music scene even though Chou integrates other musical influences in his music.

Since most people view Chou's hybrid style of music as a new and authentic musical style, Chou has effectively created a "formula" for producing popular Chinese songs. His unique style of music has been imitated by other artistes as they hope to repeat his success²⁸. In particular, Chou's "China Wind" evolution is so impactful that some popular singers like David Tao²⁹ and Leehom Wang³⁰ have attempted to create their versions of "China Wind" songs. However, they are unable to replicate Chou's success as their "China Wind" inspired songs are inevitably compared to Chou's pioneering brand of "China Wind" music. Chou has altered the landscape of Chinese popular music with his "Chou Style" as his hybrid style of music has become a "formula" for success which other artistes are trying to apply to their own music. Under Chou's influence, hybridity has become a "formula" for generating new types of

music in the popular music industry. If other artistes aim to achieve Chou's level of stardom, they may have to create another new "formula" to replace Chou's existing "formula".

Finally, after analysing Chou's impact on East Asia, it is essential to relook at Chou's massive stardom. Dyer ends his book *Stars* by stressing that we should not forget our responses to stars by rushing to analyse them (*Stars* 185). When Dyer sees Marilyn Monroe, he catches his breath (*Stars* 184). Similarly, when people hear Chou's music, they often find themselves singing or moving with the interesting hybrid of sounds. Chou is indeed a super star who has impacted East Asia with his iconic style and stardom. Chou's success in East Asia marks a new chapter in Chinese music and film industry. After more than a decade, Chou is still the "King of Asian Pop", and this is, in Chou's words, "diao".

Notes

1 Dyer's seminal work *Stars* focuses on the relationship between stardom, star images and discourses of individualism. He continues his discussion and analyses specific star figures to understand their social significance in *Heavenly Bodies*.

2 Like Dyer, most critics are unable to break away from the idea that cinema provides the platform for stardom as emphasized by Christine Gledhill, "while other entertainment industries may manufacture stars, cinema still provides the ultimate confirmation of stardom" (xiii).

3 Marshall analyses how three entertainment forms construct different predominant channels through which affective power is housed in the public individual (*Celebrity and Power*, 185-99). The film celebrity is organized around distance and a relatively controlled text. The television celebrity is constructed around a conception of familiarity. The popular music celebrity represents variations on the themes of authenticity and communality with the audience.

4 In Chou's first music album, *Jay* (2000), he wears a simple t-shirt. In his second music album, *Fantasy* (2001), he hides his face in a hooded sweatshirt.

5 From Chou's third music album, *The Eight Dimensions* (2003), onwards, his star image becomes more glamorized as he is presented in an increasingly stylized manner. For example, in his ninth music album, *Capricorn* (2010), he is portrayed as a magnificent dragon-rider warrior as well as a flamboyant magician. In his tenth music album, *The Era* (2011), he turns into a mysterious vampire in a gothic setting. Hence, his highly stylized and versatile star image has contributed to his glamour.

6 Dyer discusses Weber's theories and their relevance to the star phenomenon, as, in a suitably modified form, the notion of charisma does combine concepts of social function with an understanding of ideology (*Stars*, 34). Dyer admits that there are certain problems about transferring the notion of charisma from political to film theory. However, he explains there is clearly some correspondence between political and star charisma, in particular, the question of how or why a given person comes to have "charisma" attributed to her or him (Dyer, *Stars* 34).

7 Weber is interested in accounting for how political order is legitimated and suggests three alternatives: tradition, bureaucracy and charisma.

8 The online urban dictionary is defined to be a veritable cornucopia of streetwise lingo, posted and defined by its readers. The search results of "Jay Chou" provides the following definition of a noun: A "Jay Chou" is someone whom is cool, musically inclined - can play many instruments (piano, cello etc), cute, talented, great body -slurp-, 175cm, 60kg, owns 9 antique cars, worth billions, is rich, has millions of fans worldwide and millions of girls dying to meet him. "Jay Chou." *Urban Dictionary*. n.d. Web. 30 Aug 2011.

<<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Jay%20Chou>>.

9 Moskowitz discusses Chou's complex and paradoxical image differently. He focuses on Chou's complex portrayal of masculinities. In Chou's role in the film, *Curse of the Golden Flower*, he is a hypermasculine martial artist. Yet many of his songs are sung in a soft, tearful voice that demonstrates a relative ease in switching to macho to gentle roles (Moskowitz 100).

10 The definitions of "GenY" generation vary. Some social researchers and statisticians say it covers people born between 1980 and 1994, while others define it as 1978 to 1994 and others look at it from 1982 to 1995 (Shoebridge). Chou, born in 1979, is a member of the "GenY" generation. Fung defines "GenY" generation as a group who consumes cultural products, brand names, and current styles to highlight their unique identity yet continues to need approval from society, parents, and teachers ("Western Style, Chinese Pop" 72).

11 Fung points out that some songs like *Second Class of Year Three* and *Bullfight* represent youth defiance, insolence and non-compliance ("Western Style, Chinese Pop" 72). However, some songs like *In the Name of Father*, shows that the cool generation knows that their stubbornness and refusal to abide by rules or traditions will naturally result in their rejection and hence their loneliness ("Western Style, Chinese Pop" 72). Moreover, songs like *Snail*

demonstrate positive values like conscientiousness, tolerance and reservedness ("Western Style, Chinese Pop" 75).

12 The auteur theory is historically linked to literary studies and most importantly, films, where it has been applied to an individual's "significant" body of works with creativity and aesthetic value (Shuker 68). The notion of auteurship is applicable to popular music as the musicians work within an industrial system and individual performers are primarily responsible for their recorded products (Shuker 69). Auteurship has been attributed primarily to individual performers and particularly singer songwriters like Michael Jackson and The Beatles who work within the commercial medium and institutions of popular music and utilise the medium to express their own unique visions (Shuker 69).

13 Like an auteur, Chou has produced a substantial body of works and has invented new ways of reinterpreting popular music styles. Successful musicians often set up their recording studios to facilitate their creative and productive processes and reorganise the flows of capital in the pop music industry to suit their particular objectives (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 195). Similarly, Chou sets up the JVR Music Ltd Company in 2007. JVR Music Ltd is a company owned by Chou, Vincent Fang and Yang Jun Rong. JVR stands for "just very romantic" and it represents that JVR is not a normal recording company but it focuses on the "romantic" factor because it respects the creativity of the singers and song writers. "About JVR." *JVR Music*. n.d. Web. Accessed 31 Aug 2011.

<<http://www.jvrmusic.com/about/about-JVR.asp>>

14 The eleven albums are: *Jay* (2000), *Fantasy* (2001), *The Eight Dimensions* (2002), *Ye Hui Mei* (2003), *Common Orange Jasmine* (2004), *November's Chopin* (2005), *Still Fantasy* (2006), *On The Run* (2007), *Capricorn* (2008), *The Era* (2010) and *Exclamation* (2011). Each album has sold as least two to three hundred millions copies in Asia. The highest record is the *Still Fantasy* album which sold at a record high of three hundred and sixty millions copies in 2006 (Nanfang Daily).

15 This trend of directing music videos started from the *November's Chopin* (2005) album. Ever since, Chou has directed at least half of the songs in all his subsequent albums.

16 This juxtaposition of past and present narratives combined with the infusion of oriental-style mise-en-scene earns Chou the "Best Music Video" award in the "People's Choice TVBS Chinese Gold Chart Media 2006 Award" ceremony.

17 The music videos which feature the juxtaposition of past and present love stories are: *Blue and White Porcelain* and *It Rains All Night*.

18 Refer to <http://barb.sznews.com/html/2007-12/10/content_4606.htm>. Some of Chou's songs are used in as teaching materials in some schools. For example, songs like *Hair like Snow* and *Blue and White Porcelain* were used in test questions in some schools.

19 This interpretation is derived from these lines in the song lyrics: "If Master Hua Tuo were reborn, he would cure your favour-carrying attitude toward foreigners/ let foreigner nation learn the Chinese language/ stir up our nationalistic consciousness".

20 Bossa nova originates from Brazil in the late 1950s. It is characterized by its breathy, minimalist vocalisms, arty chord changes and sly, shuffling beat (Castro xi).

21 Ragtime is a uniquely American, syncopated musical phenomenon which has been a strong presence in musical composition, entertainment, and scholarship in the early 1900s ("History of Ragtime").

22 More information about the N43SL Jay Chou Special Edition laptop is available in the Asus website. "N43SL Jay Chou Special Edition" *ASUSTeK Computer Inc.* n.d. Web. Accessed 6 Sept 2011.

<http://www.asus.com/Notebooks/Multimedia_Entertainment/N43SL_Jay_Chou_Special_Edition/#overview>

23 This is a reference to Chou's "China Wind" song, *Blue and White Porcelain*.

24 In 2010, Chou's *The Era World Tour 2011* concert tickets for two performances in Taipei Arena sold out in less than one day.

25 Taiwanese film critic, Lan Tzu-Wei, states that Chou's facial expression is always the same regardless of whether he is delivering tofu or racing competitively (Lan). Despite much criticism, Chou won "Best New Performer" award in

the 25th Hong Kong Film Awards and the 2005 Taiwan's Golden Horse Award.

26 Even though Chou did not win the award, the organisers praised him for his smooth transition from a musical prodigy to blockbuster film star and his fresh take on the iconic role of Kato "Best Breakout Star." *MTV Movie Awards*. 2011. n.d. Web. 30 Oct 2011. <<http://www.mtv.com/ontv/movieawards/2011/best-breakout-star/>>

27 Wang, Yu hui. "Jay Chou's album sales tops in Asia." *United Daily News*. 7 Feb 2010. Web. 14 Sept 2011. <<http://www.jvrmusic.com/news/news-read.asp?id=1824>

28 Chou expresses his awareness of people copying his style in the song, *Popular Imitation*.

29 Tao used R&B in some songs in his album *David Tao* in 1997. Some critics believed that Tao is the first Taiwanese singer to infuse other musical styles like R&B in Chinese popular music. Even though there are some similarities between Chou and Tao, Tao's success is not comparable to Chou's.

30 Wang has created a "Chinked-out" style of music which resembles Chou's "China Wind" style. However, Wang's "Chinked-out" style can be said to have developed later than Chou's "China Wind" music as his albums *Shangri-La* (2004) and *Heroes of Earth* (2005) were released after Chou's "China Wind" style was established. Moreover, Wang has never reached Chou's level of popularity.

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Appendix A

Title of Music Albums

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| <i>Jay</i> (2000) | 杰伦专辑 |
| <i>Fantasy</i> (2001) | 范特西 |
| <i>The Eight Dimensions</i> (2002) | 八度空间 |
| <i>Ye Hui Mei</i> (2003) | 叶惠妹 |
| <i>Common Orange Jasmine</i> (2004) | 七里香 |
| <i>November's Chopin</i> (2005) | 十一月的萧邦 |
| <i>Still Fantasy</i> (2006) | 依然范特西 |
| <i>On The Run</i> (2007) | 我很忙 |
| <i>Capricorn</i> (2008) | 魔杰座 |
| <i>The Era</i> (2010) | 跨时代 |
| <i>Exclamation</i> (2011) | 惊叹号 |

Song Titles

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| <i>All the way North</i> | 一路向北 |
| <i>Blue and White Porcelain</i> | 青花瓷 |
| <i>Bullfight</i> | 斗牛 |
| <i>Chrysanthemum Terrace</i> | 菊花台 |
| <i>Compendium of Materia Medica</i> | 本草纲目 |
| <i>Dragon Fist</i> | 龙拳 |
| <i>East Wind Break</i> | 东风破 |
| <i>Grandfather's Tea</i> | 爷爷泡的茶 |
| <i>Grandmother</i> | 外婆 |
| <i>Hair like Snow</i> | 发如雪 |
| <i>Hidden Track</i> | 轨迹 |
| <i>In the Name of Father</i> | 以父之名 |
| <i>It Rains All Night</i> | 雨下一整晚 |
| <i>Lady</i> | 娘子 |
| <i>Listen to your Mother</i> | 听妈妈的话 |
| <i>Nunchunks</i> | 双节棍 |
| <i>Red Imitation</i> | 红模仿 |
| <i>Sailor Afraid of Water</i> | 水手怕水 |
| <i>Second Class of Year Three</i> | 三年二班 |
| <i>Snail</i> | 蜗牛 |

Film Titles

Hidden Track (2003)

寻找周杰伦

Initial D (2005)

头文字 D

Curse of the Golden Flower (2006)

满城尽带黄金甲

The Secret (2007)

不能说的秘密

Green Hornet (2010)

青蜂侠