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Masculinizing *Jianghu* Spaces in the Past and Present: Homosociality, Nationalism and Chineseness

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Abstract

*jianghu* (rivers and lakes) refers to the imagined spatial arena in Chinese literature and culture that is parallel to, or sometimes in a tangential relationship with, mainstream society. Inhabited by merchants, craftsmen, beggars and vagabonds, and later bandits, outlaws and gangsters, the *jianghu* space constitutes an interesting “field” (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s term) that produces alternative subjectivities in traditional Chinese culture. In most representations, *jianghu* is primarily a homosocial world of men, which honors masculine moral codes. By tracing changes of *jianghu* spaces over time, this paper attempts to set the spatial politics of masculinity in Chinese culture in a historical context. It unravels its dynamic interrelations with the tropes of class and nation, from the hosting of outlaws in the traditional masterpiece *Shuihu zhuan* (Water margin) to the resurgence of *jianghu* images and imaginaries as a symbol of Chineseness in post-socialist film and television. It argues that the widely referenced relationship between civil (*wen*) and martial (*wu*) values in imperial China describes only gentry-class masculinities. By contrast, *jianghu* spaces lie at the margins of society and so invite an alternative conceptualization of lower-class masculinities. In contemporary China, *jianghu* has come to symbolize a new mode of Chinese masculinity in the global age. It can refer not only to fictional spaces in the martial arts genre, but also to social spaces that cement the “Chinese-style” relationships and networks needed for success in the reform market.

Keywords

masculinity – space – homosocial bond – Chineseness – nationalism – television – *jianghu* – *Shuihu zhuan*
Introduction

In contemporary gender studies, masculinity is increasingly viewed as a spatially defined dialogue rather than a static entity, and nonphysical spaces such as utopian or fictional spaces are considered able to "reconfigure gender, and masculinity in particular, by providing the possibility to reimagine masculinity without some of its current constraints." The age-old jianghu 江湖 (rivers and lakes) spaces in Chinese culture, which are intertwined with the discourse of masculinity, serve as an interesting case study in this regard. Jianghu refers to the imagined spatial arena in Chinese literature and culture that is parallel to, or sometimes in a tangential relationship with, mainstream society. Inhabited by merchants, craftsmen, beggars and vagabonds, and later bandits, outlaws and gangsters, the jianghu space constitutes an interesting "field," to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term, that produces alternative subjectivities in traditional Chinese culture. In most representations, jianghu is primarily a homosocial world of men, which honors masculine moral codes. The imaginary, however, has taken on new spatial connotations in recent years and become an icon of nationalism and Chineseness in the global era. It symbolizes a new mode of Chinese masculinity in the global age and can refer not only to the fictional spaces in the martial arts genre but also to the social spaces cementing the "Chinese-style" relationships and networks needed for success in the reform market. By delving into the reconfiguration of jianghu spaces over time, the paper represents an attempt to historicize the spatial politics of masculinity in Chinese culture and to unravel its dynamic interrelations with the tropes of class and nation.

Jianghu as Class-based Spaces

The term jianghu originates from the geographical imagination of water as something dangerous and remote. As Hanchao Lu observes, "the Chinese, inhabitants of an essentially continental nation, were inclined to take 'water”

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(rivers and lakes’ surely belong to that category) as a symbolically alternative world to the more familiar and conventional earth-bound one.” In the Chinese classics, jianghu rhetoric makes its first known appearance in the Daoist text Zhuang Zi 諸子, in which the term appears twice: in the chapters entitled “Xiaoyao you” 遊遙遊 (Wandering where you will) and “Da zongshi” 大宗師 (The great master). In the latter chapter, Zhuang Zi, while elaborating upon his naturalist thinking on normativity, famously juxtaposes fish stranded on land with the open and vigorous space of rivers and lakes:

When the springs dry out, the fish are found stranded on the earth. They keep each other damp with their own moisture, and wet each other with their slime. But it would be better if they could just forget about each other in rivers and lakes.

The imagery of natural spaces soon acquired the symbolic connotation of unrestrained freedom and, by extension, exile and retreat in ancient Chinese writings. An oft-cited example is the story of Fan Li 范蠡 (536-448 BCE), the shrewd prime minister of the Yue 越 Kingdom, in Shi ji 史記 (Record of the historian). Legend has it that after defeating the powerful Wu 吳 Kingdom, Fan – fearing that he might have outlived his usefulness for the king, and thus face danger if he remained at court – “took a flat-bottomed boat and floated along the rivers and lakes” (nai cheng bianzhou fu yu jianghu 乃乘扁舟浮於江湖) to retreat from politics and live in seclusion. Although some scholars believe that the “rivers and lakes” mentioned in the story refer specifically to the Yangtze River and the various lakes in the Taihu 太湖 region, by the time of the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), “rivers and lakes” had collectively become a more general, abstract spatial referent, as well as an established signifier of an out-of-power position and/or uncooperative attitude toward the authorities. For example, the dichotomous opposition of miao tang 廟堂 (the imperial court) and jianghu appears repeatedly in the literature, as expressed in the famous line penned by Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) scholar-official Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052): “When serving in high offices at court, he will be

5 Sima Qian 司馬遷, Shi ji 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 129:3257.
6 Chen Pingyuan, Qiangu wenren xiake meng, 136.
concerned for the people; if living on distant rivers and lakes, he will be concerned for his sovereign." (ju miaotang zhi gao, ze you qi min; chu jianghu zhi yuan, ze you qi jun 前廊堂之高，则憂其民；處江湖之遠，則憂其君。) Toward the end of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), a group of poets - most of them petty officials and scholars who had failed the civil service examination - became known as the Jianghu shipai 江湖詩派 (Jianghu school of poetry), a name derived from the title of a collection of their works, Jianghu ji 江湖集 (Rivers and lakes collection). These poets, who included Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187-1269), Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155-1221), and Dai Fugu 戴復古 (fl. 1198), distinguished themselves by the remarkably eremitic style of their work, thus lending the term jianghu a sense of distance and remoteness, or, in the words of Stephen Ching-ku Chan, a world "out there."

Some historians argue that, in terms of class, there are essentially two layers of meaning in the constructed spaces of jianghu, i.e. jianghu for the gentry class, shi 士, and jianghu for vagrants or those on the bottom rung of society. The former constitutes an idealized, unworldly arena that exists in the minds of scholar-officials, in most cases a temporary retreat from a political career but sometimes even a performative detour on the path to pursuing such a career. The latter, in contrast, developed over time into something of an underground world at the margins of society, a space outside government control. By the time Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳 (Water margin) appeared in printed format in the mid-sixteenth century, jianghu had primarily come to mean an "unorthodox, adventurous, and somewhat mystical world."

By the late imperial and early Republican periods, the jianghu spaces in urban and rural areas had come to be inhabited by vagrants of all sorts, including itinerant entertainers, quacks, windlers, and charlatans, hoboes, and "knights-errant." These people, "who live[d] by their wits, skill, and sometimes, brutality," could be found wandering in busy markets and transport hubs such as wharfs. Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu, jianghu can be understood as a "field" that is constructed by its various nomos, including taboos, jargon (variously known as heihua 黑話, qiekou 切口, and chundian 春典), and codes of behavior, with such masculine moral codes as en 恩 (grace, favor), yi 義

7 Fan Zhongan 范仲淹 (989-1052), "Yueyang lou ji" 岳陽樓記, in Fan Wenzheng gong ji 范文正公集 (reprint; Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1965), juan 7.
9 Wang Xuetai, Shuihu jianghu, 12-25.
10 Lu, Street Criels, 13.
(righteousness), and chou 仇 (vengeance, revenge) constituting its members' major form of social capital. As the popular saying goes, "in the jianghu, you are not your own master." Rather, members are manipulated by the rules and codes that prevail in those spaces.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to trace how this transition of meaning evolved, it is important to note that the aforementioned two layers of spaces are not parallel but rather dynamically interconnected. On the one hand, our major source of information about the jianghu society is through historical and literary representations, which, as many scholars have pointed out, to a large extent reflect literati's fantasies and projections of desire. On the other hand, the discursive jianghu in literature had also impacted on the jianghu in reality, especially in terms of the forming of subjectivities. Therefore, it is fair to argue that jianghu as class-based spaces was a product of negotiation between gentry-class imagination and lower-class realities of life at the margins of society. This negotiation is exemplified by Shuihu zhuan, a masterpiece in classical Chinese literature and the first literary work to offer a full depiction of this spatial arena. The novel canonizes the jianghu ethos through stories of the outlaw heroes who gathered on Mount Liang and in its nearby marshes (in today's Shandong province) during the Northern Song dynasty. It also profoundly illustrates the gender implications of different spaces in this hidden world.

**Jianghu as a Homosocial Society**

The past two decades have witnessed burgeoning interest in the study of Chinese masculinities, echoing both feminist-informed awareness of gendered men and postcolonial attention to non-Western gender cultures. A growing body of work is addressing various aspects of Chinese masculinities in an attempt to construct a model of masculinity that differs from the dominant Western model. The overarching wen 文 / wu 武 dyad summarized by Kam


Louie has become perhaps the most influential conceptualization of the construction of ideal masculinity in traditional Chinese culture. Louie argues that although both wen (cultural attainment) and wu (martial valor) were traditionally regarded as essential masculine qualities in Chinese culture, during most periods of Chinese history wen took priority over wu in official discourse, consequently giving rise to the feminine type of ideal man unique to Chinese/East Asian cultures.14 Although the wen/wu paradigm without question offers a fruitful perspective for interpreting masculinities in non-Western contexts, it is confined primarily to the elite culture of the gentry class because wen and wu alike constitute attainments achievable only through education, and hence entail various forms of capital. Understanding the very different model of masculinity for the non-elite classes requires close examination of jianghu spaces, both real and fictional. Compared with wen/wu, the masculinity in jianghu spaces is predominantly defined through homosocial morality. For one thing, in these spaces which are inhabited almost exclusively by male adventurers and rebels, one would expect “homosocial bonding to reach the state of a very high art.”15 For another, the power mechanism of the resulting society was largely built on the code of brotherhood and mutual recognition/admiration of manhood. This seemingly, or at least self-claimed, egalitarian world of brotherhood, however, was hierarchical in nature and bound up with the interests of the gang members within the jianghu spaces concerned. In addition to the shanzhai (mountain fortress) that serves as the stronghold of the rebel gang in Shuihu zhuan, the novel also depicts men and the bonds between men in an array of spaces at the margins of society, such as those constituted by carts and boats, fishing villages, taverns and inns, gambling houses, brothels, and entertainment sites.

The world of Shuihu zhuan is a classic example of brotherhood and “male homosocial desire” in jianghu spaces.16 The shanzhai is first of all constructed as an idealized utopian locality of egalitarianism and fraternity, the spirit of which is driven home by the following passage in Chapter 71 of the book, which eulogizes the romantic space established by the naming of the fortress’s Hall of Loyalty.

14 Louie, Theorising Chinese Masculinity.
Throughout the domain there may be various names but there is just one family. In the universe their nature as celestial stars is revealed; among human society their heroic quality is displayed. Drawn from far and wide, they have always been close for they are of one mind, to live and die together is their only wish. Though faces and language differ, as do north and south and east and west, they are all alike in feeling and spirit, constant in loyalty, truth, faith and righteousness. They include the descendants of emperors, representatives of the rich and famous, adherents of all three religions and all the philosophies, but also hunters and fishermen, butchers and public executioners, and all call each other brother, making no distinction between noble and base-born. Some are closely related, as husbands and wives, uncles and nephews, while others are servants following their masters, yet all are united in the fight against injustice, all sit down together to eat and drink, not asking whether they are close or distant relatives. Spiritual or coarse, rustic or refined, there is no mutual suspicion between them, but all live together in friendship. Each has his special skill, whether with tongue and pen or sword and spear, whether in direct attack or the use of stealth: it is truly a case of each according to his ability. ... Within these hundred leagues live one hundred and eight heroes. Once upon a time their fame spread far and wide among the rivers and lakes, just as in olden days sound used to carry from the bell towers. Now they know their order of precedence among the stars, each joined to another like the beads of a rosary.

八方共域，異姓一家。天地顚覆之精，人境合傑靈之美。千里面朝夕相見，一寸心死生可同。相貌語言，南北東西雖各別；心情肝膽，忠誠信義並無差。其人則有帝子神孫，富豪將吏，並三教九流，乃至獵戶漁人，屠兒剉子，都一般兒哥弟稱呼，不分賢賤；且又有同胞手足，捉對夫妻，與叔侄郎舅，以及跟隨主僕，爭鬪冤仇，皆一樣的酒筵歡樂，無問親疏。或精靈，或粗鹵，或村樸，或風流，何嘗相礙，果然認性同居；或筆舌，或刀槍，或奔馳，或偽詐，各有偏長，真是隨才器使。...地方四五百里，英雄一百八人。昔時常說江湖上聞名，似古樓鐘聲聲傳播；今日始知星辰列姓，如念珠子個個連串。17

17 Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 and Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, Shuihu quan zhu 水滸全傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), 881–2. The English version used in this article is as translated, with modifications, by John and Alex Dent-Young in their six-part translation of The Marshes of Mount Liang (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994–2002).
However, the romantic and egalitarian nature of the brotherhood is but an illusion, even in the novel. The relationship among the gang members inevitably becomes hierarchical as the stronghold expands and the establishment of law and order ensues.\(^\text{18}\) In addition, as I have argued elsewhere, several “pairs” can be identified among the book’s heroes, such as Yang Xiong 楊雄 and Shi Xiu 石秀 and Lu Junyi 盧俊義 and Yan Qing 燕青, as well as Song Jiang 宋江 and Li Kui 李逵, who have something of a love-hate relationship. Interestingly, the relationship in each of these pairs is between a yang陽 (older, with a more privileged class background) and a yin陰 (younger, of a lower social standing) party, which is in line with the Confucianized yin/yang hierarchy. The well-known Confucian principle of cong yi er zhong 從一而終 (with one person all the way to the end), a moral code prescribed for women, has also been applied to male-male relationships, as illustrated by Song Jiang’s killing of Li Kui on the former’s deathbed.\(^\text{19}\)

**Jianghu** is an imagined yet institutionalized community in *Shuihu zhuàn*. It prescribes a whole set of brotherhood-centered moral and behavioral codes cherished as sacrosanct by the *jianghu* members. Masculinity is characterized by anxiety over the judgements made by other men in the “rivers and lakes.” In other words, men need to prove themselves to one another instead of to women. News travels amazingly fast in this imagined community, with the men therein feeling most anxious about their respectability in the eyes of their peers. A recurrent fear is “becoming a laughing-stock among the heroes in the rivers and lakes” *(chi jianghu shang haohanmen xiaohua吃江湖上好漢們笑話)*,\(^\text{20}\) a phrase that appears numerous times in the novel. For instance, in Chapter 11, Wang Lun 王倫, the selfish chief of Mount Liang, refuses to allow Lin Chong 林沖 to join the gang for fear that Lin, a superb fighter, will threaten his position. He remains firm no matter how hard his subordinates try to persuade him, until Song Wan 宋萬 reminds him that continued refusal will “make us look mean-spirited and lead to us being despised [literally “laughed at”] by the brethren of the rivers and lakes.” *(jiande women wu yiqi, shi jianghu shang haohan jianxiao見得我們無義氣，使江湖上好漢見笑。)*\(^\text{21}\) Only then does Wang relent and agree to give Lin a chance. Such behavior as indulgence in sex and betrayal of one’s brothers is particularly likely to attract the contempt of this male community. Conversely, men who are generous to their brothers and indifferent to female charms are venerated as leaders. In fact, the

primary capital that leaders such as Chao Gai 晁蓋, Song Jiang, and Chai Jin 蔡進 possess—and wield to obtain power—is their reputation in the *jianghu*. Also known as “Opportunite Rain,” Song Jiang never turns away the (male) heroes who come to him for help. He generously provides them with food and lodging, tirelessly keeps them company, and gives them traveling expenses when they leave. At the same time, women and sex are “things of no great importance for him” (*yu nüse shang bu shifan yuojin* 於女色上不十分要緊). In Chapter 32, Song tries to persuade “Stumpy Tiger,” a bandit leader based at Mount Qingfeng 清風 and a notorious womanizer, to release a female captive, asserting that “in the gallant fraternity, anyone who wastes his marrow is a joke” (*danfan haohan, fan le ‘liu gusui’ san ge zi de, haosheng reren chixiao* 但凡好漢，犯了‘溜骨髄’三個字的，好生惹人恥笑。). Here, Song is referring to a widely accepted belief in traditional Chinese medicine and gender culture, which holds that sperm is produced by men’s “kidney-essence” and, if effectively retained, may be converted to marrow in the spine, eventually nourishing the brain. Sex with women, if not for the purpose of reproduction, wastes a man’s marrow to the detriment of both his health and manhood.

In this regard, unlike Sedgewick’s concept of male homosocial desire, which is based primarily on hatred or fear of homosexuality, with women used as a medium of, or pretext for same-sex desire, the male-male bonds in the *jianghu* world are built on the absence—or even hatred—of women. It seems that fraternity itself is sufficient to justify and even sublimate male bonding, obviating any need to resort to “traffic” in women. As many scholars have pointed out, the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy came to China only with the pursuit of Western modernity, which explains the remarkable absence of homophobic discourse in pre-modern Chinese gender culture. *Shuihu zhuan* is notorious for its misogynistic portrayal of women, particularly those who pull men away from their loyalty to other men. Women are positioned as a dangerous Other in the homosocial space, and the novel features graphic descriptions of the sadistic murder of adulterous women.

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25 Sedgewick maintains that “our own society is brutally homophobic,” which has resulted in the homosexual being repressed into the homosocial (*Between Men*, 3). Borrowing René Girard’s earlier conception of the “erotic triangle,” Sedgewick is particularly interested in literary depictions of two male rivals who bond “homosocially” through competition for a shared female object of desire.
In addition to the outlaw fortress in *Shuihu zhuan*, other important sites in the construction of the *jianghu* space are the *jiudian* 酒店 (taverns or inns) where many of the novel’s events take place. Taverns/inns are where the *haohan* 好漢 meet, fight, and befriend one another,27 and they function as a major information and travel hub in the *jianghu* world. As drinking wine is presented as a vital marker of *haohan* manhood, *jiudian* are natural sites for a display of masculinity and the cementing of homosocial bonds. In Chapter 3, Lu Da 魯達, a gallant army officer, meets Shi Jin 史進 by accident in a teahouse, and, noticing that the latter is “of strong build and manly aspect” (*changda kuiwu, xiang tiao haohan*長大魁梧，像條好漢), invites him to share a drink. They then meet Lu’s friend Li Zhong 李忠, a seller of quack medicines, on the street, and the three proceed happily to a tavern to drink together:

After several twists and turns, they came to a famous establishment known as Pan’s, next to the bridge by the town hall; it was advertised by a pole before the door bearing a banner which fluttered in the breeze and had the look of a really good tavern, like in the poem:

Seen through the mist of the inn flag flutters,  
The peace of morning fills the air;  
Here is a boost for the strong man’s courage,  
Here is relief for the beauty’s care.  
Beyond where the willow trails its branches,  
Beside an apricot the flag-pole slants.  
When a man’s ambition fails, what signal pleasure  
To enter this realm of the tipsy trance!

三個人轉彎抹角，來到州橋之下一個潘家有名的酒店。門前挑出望竿，掛著酒旆，漾在空中飄蕩。怎見得好座酒肆，有詩為證：  
風拂煙籠錦欹揚，太平時節日初長。  
能添壯士英雄膽，善解佳人愁悶腸。  
三尺曉垂楊柳外，一竿斜插杏花旁。  
男兒未遂平生志，且樂高歌入醉郷。28

Taverns, as all-male public spaces, are masculinized in the novel and function as *sine qua non* for fraternal networks of gendered power in the *jianghu*. They

provide a place for men to socialize, as well as to fight for justice and rival one another in martial valor. In the aforementioned story, Lu Da and his friends, while drinking, overhear ill-fated singer Jin Cuilian 金翠蓮 crying over her plight. Jin and her father are being bullied by Butcher Zheng, a local tyrant who throws his weight around and forces the pair to perform in the tavern to pay off a non-existent debt. Although his two friends remain somewhat indifferent to Jin’s story, Lu is full of righteous indignation and cannot wait to offer his help. After discovering that he has only five taels of silver with him, he asks Shi and Li to lend him money. Shi immediately takes out ten taels of silver and says, “There is no need to repay, for a trifle like this.” By contrast, Li fishes around in his pocket and ultimately offers only two taels. Lu does not even try to hide his contempt, sneering that Li is “not a straightforward man” (ye shi ge bu shuangli de ren 也是個不爽利的人). He then hands fifteen taels to Jin’s father to cover their traveling expenses. He tosses Li back his two taels of silver, and the three men continue drinking. Respectability in the jianghu space is measured by the scale of certain masculine traits, of which generosity and chivalry are pre-eminent. Interestingly, jiudian also play host to many of the novel’s fateful events. For instance, the day after their night of drinking Lu Da accidentally kills Butcher Zheng while fighting with him to obtain justice for Jin. Consequently, he has to flee from Weizhou 渭州, becoming a monk and, eventually, an outlaw. In another story, warrior monk Wu Song 武松 slays a tiger with his bare hands after consuming eighteen bowls of wine at a small wine shop at the foot of a mountain, thereby becoming a renowned hero. In Chapter 10, as if to reward the masculine merits he displays through drinking, Lin Chong is saved from a deadly plot against him when he takes shelter in an old temple after drinking wine bought from a wine shop.

Several types of jiudian are depicted in Shuihu zhuan, including high-end taverns in the capital and other large towns, such as the aforementioned tavern where the three friends drink, some offering performances by “singsong girls” and courtesans, small rudimentary inns and wine shops in villages and remote areas, and taverns that function as secret liaison offices and reception houses for outlaws, such as the famous tavern operated by Zhu Gui 朱貴 at the foot of Mount Liang. One type that merits particular mention is the so-called cannibal inn (heidian 黑店), whose notorious owners turn their customers into human buns after incapacitating them with poisoned wine. When Wu Song is served drugged wine at a cannibal inn in Shizipo 十字坡, he recalls a piece of

29 Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, Shuihu quan zhuan, Chapter 3, 38.
30 Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, Shuihu quan zhuan, Chapter 23.
31 Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, Shuihu quan zhuan, Chapter 10.
doggerel circulated in the jianghu: “[T]o the great tree at Shizipo what traveler dares to venture? There the fat ones are chopped up for pies, the thin ones go to the bottom of the river” (dashu Shizipo, keren shui gan nali guo? fei de qie zuo mantou xian, shou de que ba qu tianhe 大樹十字坡，客人誰敢那裏過？肥的切做饅頭餡，瘦的卻把去填河). He then pretends to drink, and subsequently subdues the owner, Sister Sun, otherwise known as “the Ogress.” In this incident, knowledge and membership of the jianghu world are crucial to Wu’s survival. When Sun’s husband, Gardener Zhang Qing 張青 returns to the inn, he recognizes Wu as the renowned tiger-killer of the jianghu and apologizes to him, and the three become good friends in the end. In Zhang’s eyes, hideous as the practices of he and his wife are, there are three kinds of travelers whom they would never victimize: wandering monks, singers who wander the rivers and lakes, and convicts and escorted prisoners. In other words, although a lawless space, the jianghu is exclusive and boasts its own rules and principles that uphold fame and fairness as paramount values.\(^{32}\)

**Jianghu as A Historical Heterotopia**

In the modern era, the concept jianghu has been imaginatively reconfigured and transformed by dint of the sweeping popularity of martial arts fiction (wuxia xiaoshuo 武俠小說), fantasy novels since the late Qing-early Republican period featuring the adventures of the martial arts heroes, as well as the films, television programs, and other forms of entertainment arising from the genre.\(^{33}\) As a highly commercialized genre, wuxia gives voice to readers’ desires, fantasies, and tastes.\(^{34}\) Although many of the first generation of wuxia writers were either members of the jianghu world themselves, or very familiar with the life of people at the margins of society, the “new school” of wuxia fiction, represented by such professional writers as Jin Yong 金庸(1924-2018), also known as Louis Cha, and Liang Yusheng 梁羽生 (1924-2009, aka Chen Wentong

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\(^{32}\) Shi Na'an and Luo Guanzhong, Shuihu quan zhu, Chapter 27.

\(^{33}\) See Chen Pingyuan, Qiangyu wenren xiake meng; Zheng Zhengheng 鄭政恆, ed., Jin Yong: Cong Xianggang dao shijie 金庸：從香港到世界 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2016); and Liu Shaoming 劉紹銘 and Chen Yongming 陳永明, eds., Wuxia xiaoshuo lunjuan 武俠小說論卷 (Hong Kong: Minghe she, 1998).

\(^{34}\) According to Li Yijian, “popular consciousness (pingmin yishi 平民意識)” and “commoditizing tendencies (shangpinhuaxiang 商品化傾向)” are two obvious characteristics of twentieth-century Chinese wuxia literature. See Li Yijian, “Rewriting” Jin Yong’s Novels into the Canon: A Consideration of Jin Yong’s Novels as Serialized Fiction,” in Ann Huss and Jianmei Liu, eds., The Jin Yong Phenomenon: Chinese Martial Arts Fiction and Modern Chinese Literary History, (New York: Cambria Press, 2007), 73–95, see page 76.
MASCULINIZING JIANGHU SPACES IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

Features a purely imagined and ahistorical jianghu space. Their works have been interpreted as allegories referring to a host of political issues, including rising Chinese nationalism and the emergence of a Hong Kong identity before the territory's handover to mainland China. In others words, the jianghu fantasy is prone to “fictionalize the past to meet the real.” Embodying negotiations between popular and elite culture, the male characters in these fictional texts more often than not display ideals of masculinity that exhibit the discernable influence of Confucian gender ideology, such as the doctrine that “in obscurity, men will maintain their own integrity; in times of success, they will make perfect the whole empire” (qiong ze dushan qi shen, da ze jianji tianxia 窮則獨善其身，達則兼濟天下). The jianghu is therefore represented by secluded, otherworldly spaces that are detached and distant from political activities. As Lin Gang林岡 points out, the remoteness of locality constitutes an indispensable element of wuxia:

Places such as deserts, mountains, cliffs, shoals, forests, remote inns, ancient Buddhist and Daoist temples, and so on, all constitute geographical icons in this fictional world, while villainous monks, killers, licentious thieves, swordsmen and women, martial arts masters, and so on and so forth are characters in this fictional world. As for what happens in this world, it is nothing but robbery, womanizing, murderer hunting, vengeance, the search for secret martial-arts books, the practice of the techniques and enlightenment of the Dao. All the three dimensions are integral to the world of jianghu in wuxia fictions.


37 This saying, which is often cited by male characters in wuxia novels, originates from the Confucian classic Mengzi 孟子. The original wording is qiong ze dushan qi shen, da ze jianji tianxia 窮則獨善其身，達則兼濟天下. See He Zuokang, trans., Mengzi (Beijing: Sinolingua, 1999), 420.
In these novels, and the films adapted from them, the *jianghu* "is invoked as a place with a strong sense of ahistorical, mythical time, in which worldly *enyuan* 恩怨 (love-hate relationships) are bound to return in repeated cycles of terror and retribution." Such space is reminiscent of the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia, which – in brief – refers to spaces outside everyday life, merges different times and space, and displays the anxiety about space inherent in late capitalism. *Wuxia* fabricates a new form of history through border-crossing and gender-crossing narratives. A well-known example is the story of Dongfang bubai 東方不敗, a villainous character in Jin Yong's *Xiao ao jianghu* 笑傲江湖 (The smiling, proud wanderer) who obtains the highest level of martial arts attainment after undergoing self-castration and thus cultivating an androgynous body. His case is widely discussed in the context of gender politics, transsexuality, and queer theory.

*Wuxia* cinema kicked off in the early 1970s with the adaptation of many of these martial arts novels by Hong Kong filmmakers, and today constitutes an important global filmic subgenre. David Desser dubs the series of transnational Chinese-language films that have appeared in recent decades a "new-style martial arts saga" for the new millennium, with Ang Lee's *Wohu cangleong* 臥虎藏龍 (Crouching tiger, hidden dragon; 2000) and Zhang Yimou's *Yingxiong* 英雄 (Hero; 2012) being the most telling examples. These films may be regarded as quasi-*wuxia* narratives because, although based on none of the canonized *wuxia* fiction, they consistently feature characteristics of the heterotopic space, with forests, deserts, and mountains providing the most common settings for their narratives. Furthermore, as the films target a global audience, they construct a *jianghu* world that is "foreign to Chinese eyes," a

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42 Huss and Liu, "Introduction," i.
world that is inhabited by odd-looking adventurers who display outlandish martial arts techniques. In this sense, the jianghu represents negotiation between globalization and the imagination of ahistorical Chineseness, and, as Shih Shu-mei points out, "allow[s] for noncentrist and nonstandardized articularions of 'Chineseness' against China-centrism."  

There have been a number of studies on jianghu construction in wuxia films and the gender politics associated with it, and in what follows, I focus on the reconfiguration of jianghu spaces in TV dramas series, a genre of popular culture that plays an even more prominent role in cultural governance in today's China, but, compared with film, has been largely understudied. I will, in particular, offer readings of masculinities in two popular dramas in recent years, i.e. Dagu gun (The dog-beating staff; 2013) and Zhongguo shiguanchi 中國式關係 (The Chinese-style relationship; 2016).

**Jianghu as a Signifier of Nationalism and Chineseness**

With intertextual reference to motifs and images in martial arts fiction, the seventy-episode *Dagou gun* is one of the highest-rated dramas in the category of Kang Riju 抗日劇 (Anti-Japanese drama), a term referring to shoddily produced and highly formalized mainland TV dramas set during the Anti-Japanese War (1931-1945). In the drama, the male protagonist Dai Tianli 戴天理 (*Tianli* 天理 literally meaning, "heavenly principles") becomes the leader of a beggars' sect known as *ganzi bang* 桿子幫 by accident, and later, when facing the Japanese aggression, turns the sect into an anti-Japanese guerrilla and fights for the nation heroically. Both the beggars' sect and the dog-beating staff – the chieftain’s totem – are imaginaries borrowed from martial arts novels such as Jin Yong's *Shediao yingxiong zhuang* 射鵰英雄傳

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(The legend of the condor heroes) and its sequel *Shendiao xialü* 神鶴俠侶 (The return of the condor heroes). The drama demonstrates how images and imaginaries of what is perceived to be “traditional Chinese culture” have been appropriated and manipulated to serve the ideological pedagogy of the state.

The beggar’s sect is a fictional underground organization, formed by beggars and vagrants at the margins of cities, that appears in a number of wuxia novels and even films such as *Wu zhuangyuan Su qier* 武狀元蘇乞兒 (King of beggars; 1992). The wooden sticks in the hands of beggars are both a membership emblem of the sect and a weapon, and thus in Jin Yong’s novels the sect is named as *ganzi bang* (literally, “the sect of sticks”), a name that has been appropriated by the TV drama under discussion. Also inspired by Jin’s novels, the sect in the drama meet in a deserted old temple, where the chief sits on a platform facing the assembly, a spatial layout resembling the Hall of Loyalty in *Shuihu zhuan* and reflecting the strict hierarchal structure of the jianguo organization. As guard dogs and stray dogs are the No. 1 nuisance for beggars, the chief of the gang carries a secret weapon, the dog-beating staff, to protect and unite the beggars. The staff thus functions as a symbol of the leader’s authority and therefore has been fought over by various forces in the jianguo as well as the Japanese invaders. It happens that Dai is given the dog-beating staff, without knowing its value, by the dying chief when the two are fighting the Eight-Power Alliance invaders. When he returns to his hometown, he is discovered by the sect as the carrier of the staff and is kidnapped to the temple. After certain rituals are performed, he becomes, against his will, the *da ganzi* 大桿子 (the number one stick) of the band.

What makes the drama different from the martial arts novels, however, is the conspicuous attempt to coopt the jianguo imaginaries into state ideology. The dog-beating staff in this drama carries an inscription of the motto “protect the family, guard the nation and enrich the country” (*baojia, weiguo, xingbang* 保家・衛國・興邦), which cannot be found in Jin’s novels. When Dai discovers this, he, a man of patriotic spirit, decides to accept the position of the chieftain so he can carry forward and further develop the patriotic tradition of the sect. He revises the original slogan of the gang and adds *qintue gyou, hanjian gyou* 侵略狗、漢奸狗 (invader dogs and traitor dogs), on top of “fenggou, egou” 瘋狗、惡狗 (mad and vicious dogs), as the targets of punishment to be meted out by the dog-beating staff. When the Japanese army occupies their hometown, he and another bandit chieftain organize an anti-Japanese guerrilla to fight the Japanese invasion and his son joins the Communist Party toward the end of the series. The sublimation of the beggars’ gang grants the jianguo space a state-sanctioned nationalist meaning. Hence, the mysterious dog-beating
staff in the commercial *wuxia* space has been assigned symbolism in line with the so-called true "Chinese spirit," an ideology prescribed by the state.

Masculinity in the drama is constructed in light of nationalist sentiments. In line with the *haohan* manhood, Dai and his sworn brothers in the homosocial space of the *gangzi bang* are described as real men who embody the chivalrous morality, illustrated by such keywords as *xuexing* 血性 (courage, uprightness), *xinyi* 信義 (keeping faith) and *qingyi* 情義 (loyalty, brotherhood). However, patriotic politics defines the highest moral good. As Dai's given name indicates, a man who betrays his nation is *tianli nanrong* 天理難容 (will not be forgiven by Providence). In contrast to Dai's patriotic heroism are the unworthy men in the drama — the "dogs" that deserve to be beaten. Dai's neighbor and childhood friend, Na Tulu 那圖魯, is physically strong and well versed in martial arts. However, when threatened by the Japanese, he turns out to be a coward and ends up in disgrace. He descends to *hanjian* status during the war and, like other morally weak men in the drama, is eventually punished as a "dog." By contrast, Dai's rival in love, and later, ally, a man with the nickname "Old Second Aunt" (*Lao er shen* 老二嬸), is effeminate in appearance, talking and moving about in a womanish manner. But he is determined and valiant when facing the Japanese and dies a heroic death on the battlefield.47 Through these characters we can see that masculinity is primarily defined by moral power and loyalty to the nation (*minzu dayi* 民族大義), though imprints of the traditional *jianghu* values such as brotherhood and a sense of justice can still be recognized in these quasi-*wuxia* TV dramas.

Another type of *jianghu* space constructed in contemporary film and TV is *jianghu* in the business world. They are spaces where men build and cement brotherhood and loyalty among themselves, but this time in order to form networks that are important for business success. John Osburg argues that the early days of China's market reforms created a morally gray, socially marginalized space that resonated with the *jianghu* world and, consequently, "*jianghu* mythology and ideology offered an alternative framework for generating self-worth and formulating durable, binding relationships outside the traditional kinship system."48 Contemporary China has witnessed a proliferation of *jianghu* forms and ideologies among virtually all social classes. However, instead of rivers and lakes, *jianghu* is now envisioned primarily as the interior space of karaoke clubs, saunas, nightclubs, foot massage parlors, and high-end restaurants and teahouses. Here, I focus on the male protagonist in a recent TV

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drama series Zhongguo shi guanxi, to illustrate the construction of masculinity in this new jianghu space. The drama by no means belongs to the jianghu genre, but serves as a good example of how jianghu culture has resurged in today's China, especially in the business sphere, and how it is used to construct a new notion of Chineseness.

The title of the drama echoes that of another recent hit drama Zhongguo shi luhn 中國式離婚 (A Chinese-style divorce; 2004), which itself seemed to imitate the title of the celebrated film Divorce Italian Style. This passion for identifying things of “Chinese style” bespeaks a growing self-confidence/anxiety for Chineseness in a global era and a desire to renegotiate China's place in the world. The 36-episode drama highlights the contrast between the “Chinese style” of socializing and doing business and the perceived hai gui 海归 (overseas returnee) style. National pride and confidence are entangled with the “crisis of masculinity” faced by the middle-aged entrepreneurial protagonist. At the beginning of the series, Ma Guoliang 马国樑, a man in his mid-fourties, is Deputy Head of the City Planning Institute, a government department charged with approving and monitoring property development projects. In the course of his work, he meets an American-educated female architect named Jiang Yinan 江一楠, whose design for a proposed apartment complex for the elderly is submitted for his approval. The two experience a number of conflicts and misunderstandings due to differences in their cultural assumptions and mindsets. Shortly after their first encounter, Ma undergoes unprecedented crises in both his personal and professional life: his wife of twenty years leaves him to marry his subordinate and long-time friend Shen Yun 沈運. Shen is also Ma's rival for promotion to head of the institute, a position that Ma longs for. Owing to Shen's betrayal, however, Ma loses out. Aggravated at the turn of events, Ma quits his job and, with the help of Jiang and a young man named Guan Qiang 關強, sets up his own construction company. The trio undergoes various trials before finally achieving success. During the process, our hero wins Jiang's heart through his honesty, warm-heartedness, wisdom, and spirit of self-sacrifice and the pair finally embarks on a “Chinese-style” relationship.

At the story's heart lies the deep-seated fear of cuckoldry within the domestic space. The humiliation of losing his wife to his best friend mars Ma's masculinity, resulting in career failure. The humiliation is particularly great because Ma actually witnesses a secret tryst between his wife and Shen upon returning home from the office (in episode 2), and is exacerbated by his snobbish mother-in-law's enmity and support for the divorce. What happens to Ma is evidence that “[m]en with economic and political power become sexually potent,
whereas men who have lost such power feel emasculated by the market reforms in today’s China. Predictably, it is his entrepreneurial success in the metaphorical jianghu space that eventually revalidates Ma’s masculinity. As an added bonus, he obtains a woman far superior to his previous one, and even overcomes his ex-mother-in-law’s hostility.

Guanxi 關係, a keyword in the series title, refers to both the networks of influence that are needed for business success in China, and the romantic relationship that develops between the two protagonists. A word with profound ties to jianghu culture, guanxi has become widely known in the West and even absorbed into the English language. It is often negatively associated with the corrupt business culture of mainland China. In Zhongguo shi guanxi, however, rather than an indicator of corruption and/or nepotism, guanxi is presented positively as a unique characteristic of Chinese culture. In cultural relativist terms, guanxi is interpreted in the drama as the necessary interpersonal ties that nourish trust and respect between individuals, and is thus linked with the power of masculinity. Ma's success is attributed to his skillful mastery of the art of guanxi and his familiarity with the rules of doing business in China. For instance, in episode 12, Ma and Jiang eagerly solicit an investment from an uncouth tycoon called Brother Hao 豪, a member of the nouveau riche with an obvious jianghu background. Brother Hao insists that the decision must be approved by his company’s board of directors, which turns out to consist exclusively of Hao’s immediate family members and relatives. The board meeting is held in a foot massage parlor, a locale known for its popularity among the Chinese nouveau riche. Jiang feels deeply insulted by having to give her presentation to a group of inattentive boors enjoying a foot massage, whereas Ma patiently socializes with them, allowing him to notice subtle tensions among the family members at the mahjong table, tensions he then makes skillful use of to attain his goal.

The usefulness of guanxi is compared with the perceived “Western” style of doing business in dichotomous fashion. At the beginning of the series, Jiang is invited to a banquet to introduce her project, but instead finds herself repeatedly urged to drink by Ma and the other men at the table. Disappointed, Ma takes her refusal to drink as a lack of sincerity:

Jiang: I’ve said only sixty words since I entered this room two hours ago.
Ma: You’ve been in this room for two hours but only drank one sip of wine. I have failed to do my job.

Jiang: I'm sorry, but I'm here to present my proposal, not to eat and drink. Ma: In fact, eating and drinking show your sincerity [about cooperating] ... it's all about etiquette (episode 1).

This imagined cultural conflict between the Chinese and American ways of thinking actually begins when the two meet for the first time on a flight back from the States. Ma answers his cell phone before the plane has come to a complete stop, and Jiang, who happens to be sitting next to him, becomes so angry that she grabs the phone and switches it off. A quarrel ensues. Ma insists that disobeying the rule was not such a big deal as the plane had already landed and criticizes Jiang for being an inflexible fussbudget. Leaving the airport in Beijing, both are soon caught in a major traffic jam. Jiang demands that her taxi driver adhere strictly to the traffic rules and, as a result, is late for an important meal organized by the property developer. After a series of similar setbacks, Jiang gradually realizes the importance of guanxi and begins to change her “Westernized” mindset, as shown in her remarks near the series end:

I was very frustrated when I returned to China and met with failure in whatever I did. You said it was because I knew nothing about Chinese-style guanxi. Then I began to ponder what guanxi is ... Now I understand that guanxi not only exists in business and official circles; it also permeates humanity. It is linked to the moral principles and emotions that have lasted for thousands of years in Chinese culture. Only by understanding this can you become invincible in China (episode 36).

This justification of guanxi in a cultural relativist manner echoes the advocacy of the “four confidences” (“confidence in our chosen path, confidence in our political system, confidence in our guiding theories, and confidence in our culture”) by Chinese President Xi Jinping 習近平 in recent speeches. Of the four, Xi highlights cultural confidence in particular as “a more fundamental, a broader, a more profound type of confidence.”51 Thus, enhancing China’s soft power and “the power of speech” (huayu quan 話語權) in the world has become a priority in the government’s cultural policies in recent years, and television is the predominant site for constructing and promoting such state-sanctioned confidence in China’s national culture and identity. Zhongguo

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shi guanxi serves as a good example in this regard. The series depicts the paradoxical interplay between confidence and anxiety through the lens of masculinity. Ma's masculinity is regained and validated not only through "self-entrepreneurization" in the context of neoliberal market reforms but also through his possession of Chinese wisdom as a form of cultural capital, which is demonstrated through his shrewdness in debt collection (episodes 11-12) and resourcefulness in thwarting Shen Yun's scheme to frame Jiang and undermine her elderly housing project (episodes 34-36). In addition, in doing business he often resorts to homosocial relationships and jianghu wisdom, which has become a symbol of Chineseness in nationalist fashion.

Also testament to Ma's masculinity is his sexual power, which is again exhibited in the "Chinese" manner, that is, through his ability to restrain his sexual desire. In depicting the protagonist's virtues as a true man, the drama resorts to two recurring – and clichéd – motifs of Chinese TV drama, namely, the man who is loved and admired by more than one woman, and the man who controls himself and refrains from sex even with women living under the same roof. Zhongguo shi guanxi, as some audience members have summarized it, focuses on the stories of Ma and the three women in his life, namely, his faithless ex-wife, his business partner and eventual paramour Jiang, and a young admirer named Huo Yaoyao. Huo is a good-looking model in her early twenties with a university degree in accounting. She comes from a poor rural family and is heavily burdened economically by the need to support her father and brother at home. When she is working as a waitress in a bar, Ma protects her from harassment by Brother Hao's son and his gang. Falling in love with Ma, she declares that she has no home to return to and asks Ma to take her in. Once Huo has moved into Ma's apartment, she refuses to leave. Although Ma admits to finding Huo beautiful and clearly harbors sexual desire for her, he refrains from a sexual relationship with her throughout the series despite her attempts to arouse him sexually. In the end, Huo joins the company as an accountant and loyally treats Ma as a big brother. This plotline is reminiscent of the construction of jianghu masculinity in Shuihu zhuan as the refusal and repudiation of female sexuality.

In this regard, a foil to Ma's authentic masculinity is Jiang's ex-husband He Junxian, who is meant to exemplify overseas Chinese men or Hong Kong or Taiwanese men. He, who is also an architect, is a partner of Jiang's business in the United States. He looks like a gentleman and behaves in a refined and civil manner, sending flowers to Jiang and kissing her in public, but is in fact cruel and hypocritical. He abuses Jiang's trust and has an affair with her assistant, a young mainland girl. When the affair is discovered, He shows his true colors and threatens to sue Jiang for ownership of her designs.
However, this highly educated *haigui* man ultimately turns out to be a coward and is defeated by Ma. Through the contrast between "Chinese-style" mainland men and overseas/Westernized Chinese men, the drama egregiously reinforces a China-centered discourse, a significant tendency when compared with the *jianghu* in the transnational wuxia films discussed in the previous section, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

**Conclusion**

Focusing on spatiality and its relations with gendered articulations of class and nation in culture, the paper traces the changes of *jianghu* space over time. However, rather than an exhaustive survey of the evolution of the *jianghu*
imaginary in Chinese literature and culture, which cannot possibly be con-
ducted within the spatial limitations of an article, this paper pinpoints some
important and interesting texts and images that significantly reveal the chang-
ing cultural politics of masculinity in this spatial context.

jianghu was originally a geographical arena. It came to denote remote and
marginal spaces through literati imagination and gave rise to a norm of moral
odes and ideology by dint of literary representations of an all-male, lawless
society. The jianghu spaces – real and imaginary, material and metaphorical –
and their connotations have undergone significant transformations over time,
giving voice to a host of desires and fantasies in different periods. However,
throughout history, jianghu has been intertwined with class construction and
negotiation. In the fictional world of Shuihu zhuan, jianghu ethos constitutes a?key element of masculinity in an (imagined) outlaws’ society, characterized by
the cult of brotherhood and homosocial bonding among men, which renders
it markedly different from the wen/wu ideals of elite culture. In middle-class
consumerist wuxia novels and films of the modern era, jianghu spaces are con-
structed and consumed as an ahistorical fantasy and heterotopia that trans-
scends the borders of history and gender. However, in the contemporary
context of the nationalist reinvention of Chineseness, of which Chinese mas-
culinity is a salient example, the jianghu has been significantly reconfigured
and politicized. It has not only been appropriated by the state to serve its po-
itical agenda but also taken on new spatial connotations, with reference to
social spaces that are linked with upper-class entrepreneurial masculinity. In
this sense, popular representation has witnessed the transformation of the
jianghu from the marginal male order of the past to the masculinist discourse
of Chineseness, which is increasingly becoming a mainstream discourse in to-
day’s China.

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