JIANGHU NOIR

THE URBAN CINEMA OF HONG KONG

DICKSON C. L. CHEUNG

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Introduction

Hong Kong Jianghu Noir – the Urban Cinema in the Anthropocene

The Twin Goals of This Book

Jianghu (江湖) has always been a rich concept that inspires alternative visions and challenges hegemonic discourses of how a collective of human beings can be understood. 'Jianghu film' is often used casually to refer to the genre, but sustained efforts to give it a clear definition are sparse. Coincidentally, a seemingly irrelevant phenomenon, noir or neo-noir film, is similarly the subject of much discussion without being precisely defined. This book has two goals: 'jianghu' and 'noir' will be given philosophically substantial definitions, and then they will be shown to converge as a new genre of 'jianghu noir' in Hong Kong. We are seeing more and more jianghu noir in the cinema because it is an artistic response, consciously or not, to the present state of capitalism against the looming backdrop of the Anthropocene, in which the earth is undergoing systematic harm by the dual threats of capitalism and governmentality. Different expressions of jianghu noir can also be found across different media and in cinemas beyond Hong Kong.

What Is Jianghu?

As a generic expression, *jianghu* is literally the 'rivers and lakes', 'nature' as opposed to 'humanity'. The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (莊子, 369–286 BC) uses jianghu in poetic imagery in *The Great and Most Honoured Master* (大宗師): 'When the springs are dried up, the fishes collect together on the land. Rather than that they should moisten one another there by the damp about them, and keep one another wet by their slime, it would be better for them to forget one another in the rivers and lakes [*jianghu* in Chinese]'.[1] On one level, it means

1. Donald Sturgeon, 'The Great and Most Honoured Master', *The Chinese Text Project*, 2006–2025, https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/great-and-most-honoured-master. The original quotation in Chinese: 泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相呴以溼，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。

that when we are too tangled up in daily drudgery and the battles of mundane everyday life, it would be liberating to just take a step back and look beyond our tunnel vision, and realize the insignificance of our daily toil. On another level, it suggests that our emotional entanglement in human relationships often makes us lose sight of our existence in the grander scale of the universe. We can transcend our physical limitations and earthly obsessions if only we can just 'forget' our mutual bondage.

In ancient China, especially during the period of the Three Kingdoms (AD 220–280), following the end of the Han dynasty, *jianghu* was often used to refer to the periphery of the different centres of power, where the *xiake* – the wandering warriors – performed their heroic deeds and achieved justice in a chaotic world.

Jianghu gained contemporary significance with the phenomenal success of the martial arts novels by Jin Yong (金庸, Louis Cha Leung-yung, 1924–2018), the most influential of which include *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (1957–1959), *The Return of the Condor Heroes* (1959–1961), and *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer* (1967–1969). It was not just because of the novels that the heroic deeds of the martial artist in a mythical ancient China have had a lasting impact on multiple generations in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Jin Yong's novels have been remade numerous times as big-budget prime-time TV series and films throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the heyday of Hong Kong's entertainment industry.

Beijing literary scholar Chen Pingyuan offers a definitive study on martial arts novels since the genre's inception. Jianghu is first and foremost defined geographically and politically, being 'far from the temple, not opposed to the temple', or beyond the reach of the emperor's whip.[2] People in jianghu are mainly *xiake* or *youxia*, the wandering martial arts heroes, or the 'unsuccessful literati and warriors': 'Jianghu is just a place where they can temporarily rest before they are promoted to officialdom [which is represented by the temple].'[3] Jianghu is in general a place for the marginalized down and outs, as Chen avers: 'Immensely successful people probably would not dream of *youxia*; only those who have walked along the hard road in life would have any depth of feeling towards the value of having *youxia* in the world.'[4]

People in jianghu orbit around three centres of powers without ever succumbing to any. The first centre is the court or the temple, which is the emperor's seat, the centre of governmentality. The second centre of power is *shanlin*, literally the 'forest' or the 'mountain'. *Shanlin* is for hermits who have no interest

2. Chen Pingyuan, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction* (Cambridge China Library, 2016), 160.
3. Chen, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, 160.
4. Chen, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, 171.

in power. According to *Rites of Zhou, Venom*, 'the great people who return to *Shanlin* only want to "not serve king or duke, but perfect their own affairs."'[5] Chen elaborates:

> When faced with cruel pressure from the ruler, *xiake* hide themselves in Jianghu and take obvious steps to protect themselves; quite different from the hermits of *Shanlin* who worked to develop their reputation. This is also the reason why *Shanlin* has a reputation for quiescence while Jianghu has a blood-soaked feel about it.[6]

The third centre of power that the people in jianghu orbit is *lulin*, the 'green woods' literally. *Lulin* represents the organized military group that has only one goal in mind: to overthrow the temple, the government.[7] *Xiake* may occasionally appear in *lulin* but they will always go back to jianghu: '*Xiake* "break the law with their fighting", they do not intend to overthrow the current political powers . . . [They intend to] oppose corrupt officials but not oppose the emperor, and to sweep away evil traitors but not sweep away the system.'[8]

Urban Jianghu Is the Multitude

Jianghu is not untranslatable. If Zhuangzi gave us the imagery and Jin Yong gave us the narratives, then Marxist scholars gave us the philosophical substance. Jianghu, especially when transposed to the contemporary urban cityscape, is best encapsulated in the Marxist notion of the 'multitude', emerging subjectivities that negotiate between 'the empire' of globalizing capitalism and national sovereignties. According to Paolo Virno, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the multitude is a new kind of human existence produced by the capitalist process of production and consumption that has gradually usurped power from existing sovereign states.[9] The multitude is both conditioned and enabled by capitalism. They are sufficiently empowered by capitalism to be a subversive force against capitalism itself. The multitude is defined as 'individuals, groups, and populations that . . . cannot be completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation – at every moment they overflow and shatter the bounds of measure'.[10] They are a plurality of 'productive, creative subjectivities of globalization' that

5. *Rites of Zhou* quoted in Chen, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, 165.
6. Chen, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, 166–67.
7. Chen, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, 169.
8. Chen, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, 168–69.
9. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Semiotext(e), 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000); *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin Books, 2005); *Assembly* (Heretical Thought, 2017).
10. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 397.

'work toward the liberation of living labour, creating constellations of powerful singularities'.[11]

More importantly, the multitude is an alternative to Thomas Hobbes's idea of 'the people', whose subjectivities are defined by national sovereignty. It was believed that, without such ideological domination, the people would be reduced to 'barbaric masses' in 'the state of nature'.[12] Hardt and Negri are indeed perceptive to note that the capitalist placeless, timeless, and decentred empire has been slowly sucking life out of the nation and its hold on its people. It is an undeniable tendency that people have been increasingly gravitating towards defining themselves with what they can afford to buy and to own.

Capitalism conditions but does not determine the multitude because they are also flâneurs who move and create their own connections with the city. The flânerie of the multitude liberates them momentarily from the trammels of the state and capitalism. Hardt and Negri draw from Charles Baudelaire's and Walter Benjamin's flânerie to define the multitude:

> The movements of the multitude designate new spaces, and its journeys establish new residences. Autonomous movement is what defines the place proper to the multitude. Increasingly less will passports or legal documents be able to regulate our movements across borders. A new geography is established by the multitude as the productive flows of bodies define new rivers and ports. The cities of the earth will become at once great deposits of cooperating humanity and locomotives for circulation, temporary residences and networks of the mass distribution of living humanity.
>
> Through circulation the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject. When we look closer at how this constitutive process of subjectivity operates, we can see that the new spaces are described by unusual topologies, by subterranean and uncontainable rhizomes—by geographical mythologies that mark the new paths of destiny.[13]

The French anthropologist Marc Augé has also captured the process of the multitude's subjectification in his conception of 'non-places' in 'supermodernity'. Augé sees the tug of war between the state's governmentality and capitalism to control the multitude. Supermodernity is defined by three figures of excess: the excesses of time, space, and ego. The proliferation of information technology and architectural technology governed by the dual power of sovereign state and capitalism results in:

11. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 60–61.
12. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive; or, The Citizen* (Greenwood Press, 1982); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
13. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 397.

> [the] overabundance of events, spatial overabundance, the individualization of references . . . [N]ever before have individual histories been so explicitly affected by collective history, but never before either have the reference points for collective identification been so unstable. The individual production of meaning is thus more necessary than ever.[14]

The excess of ego refers to obsessively egoistic individuals who are compelled to be unique because of free, decentralized access to information and knowledge on the internet. Such egoistic individuals are equivalent to the multitude, which 'is a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it'.[15] They roam the city to create meaning for themselves, but they soon find that such roaming is increasingly being determined, monitored, and policed by the burgeoning non-places, which produces the illusion of 'spatial overabundance'.

Noir Is Non-Places

If the Augéan excess of ego defined the multitude, the excess of space is the non-places that define noir – which would be an anthropological definition of jianghu noir – a battle between the multitude and the heavily surveilled cityscape. Geographer Michelle Huang Tsung-yi refers to this threat from non-places as 'the dual compression' of the minority-elite glamourous zone and the majority-disenfranchised public housing estates.[16] The monumentality of the central business district is possible only by 'compressing the living space of ordinary people'.[17] Such non-places are claustrophobic because they must necessarily be over-planned to maximize functionality, so that policing, monitoring, controlling, and conditioning would also be made more convenient. According to Augé, if the anthropological place is 'relational, historical, and concerned with identity', then non-place has no relation, no history, no identity.[18] Non-places are 'transit points, temporary abodes, luxurious or inhuman' such as hotels, airports, bus terminals, shopping malls, restaurants, highways, footbridges, subways, supermarkets, and department stores.[19] When compared to the anthropological places

14. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (Verso, 2008), 40, 109.
15. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 103.
16. Tsung-Yi Michelle Huang, *Walking Between Slums and Skyscrapers: Illusions of Open Space in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Shanghai* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 24.
17. Huang, *Walking Between Slums and Skyscrapers*, 28.
18. Certeau quoted in Augé, *Non-Places*, 42, 77.
19. Augé, *Non-Places*, 77.

that create 'the organically social', 'non-places create solitary contractuality'.[20] They are places that 'offer neither singular identity nor relation; only solitude and similitude'.[21] Everyone observes only one rule: 'to do as others do to be yourself'. Non-places are a measure to police, control, monitor, and condition behaviour, the contractuality inadvertently encourages a kind of public role playing, a kind of outward conformity in the public sphere, in such a way that individuals would only become more compulsively private and different from one another. Such an excess of ego, an overabundance of references to give meaning to the 'self' due to excessive information flow, creates the multitude.[22] Such oppressiveness in non-places gives us noir, and thus jianghu noir is the multitude's survival in non-places.

Many noir scholars also notice the abstraction of noir as the city-dweller's spatial connection with the city. Mark Gallagher has built a strong case to establish film noir as a genre that has no temporal or regional limitation.[23] Nick James points out that noir as a critical category could be as wide or as narrow as critics' vision because this label was originally given by French critics retroactively.[24] James Naremore has laid the foundation for a more constructive discussion of neo-noir in his seminal work *More Than Night*. He breaks away from the genre-or-mode deadlock and defines film noir as 'a discursive phenomenon uniting filmmakers, films and interested viewers'. Noir should be defined as 'a site for the articulation of a range of social, psychological and temporal tensions'.[25] In another seminal work, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, Edward Dimendberg introduces a very effective, paradigm-shifting 'spatial turn' in the discussion of noir. Using Los Angeles as an example, he argues convincingly that noir is a global *urban* phenomenon. The defining features of noir include 'nostalgia and longing for older urban forms combined with a fear of new alienating urban realities, . . . the loss of public space, the homogenization of everyday life, the intensification of surveillance, and the eradication of older neighborhoods by urban renewal and redevelopment projects'.[26] These critics have since raised the debate to another level: Noir should be understood as a phenomenon created by

20. Augé, *Non-Places*, 94. Contractuality is partly defined by its 'instructions of use' that can be 'prescriptive ("Take the right-hand lane"), prohibitive ("No smoking") or informative ("You are now entering the Beaujolais region")'. It is contractual in a sense that it provides 'the passive joy of identity loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing'.
21. Augé, *Non-Places*, 103.
22. Augé, *Non-Places*, 109.
23. Mark Gallagher, 'A Very Rough Guide to East Asian Film *Noir*', in *East Asian Film Noir: Transnational Encounters and Intercultural Dialogue*, ed. Chi-yun Shin and Mark Gallagher (I. B. Tauris, 2015), 1–18.
24. Quoted in Gallagher, 'A Very Rough Guide to East Asian Film *Noir*', 2.
25. James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (University of California Press, 2008), 225–29.
26. Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

modernity, an issue that is manifest in urban development and is further complicated by global capitalism and the onset of the Anthropocene.[27]

It is against this backdrop that discussion about neo-noir, such as 'East Asian noir', begins. The most significant point of departure can be traced to Joelle Collier in 2007. In addition to the generally recognized noir cinematography, Collier describes in detail the moral and psychological dimensions of 'traditional' American noir such as *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, and *Out of the Past*.[28] Characters are motivated by greed, lust, and fear in a world of corruption that evolves only according to the Darwinian law. 'Winner takes all', and everyone else must lose completely so that one person can win completely. There are no positive moral values like honour, love, or compassion.[29] Collier finds the same kind of universe in three Hong Kong films: Johnnie To's *Intruder* (1997) and *The Longest Nite* (1998) and a Japanese production directed by Hong Kong's Lee Chi-ngai, *Sleepless Town* (1998, also known as *Fuyajo*). However, they differ from traditional noir in two aspects: The femme fatale is overshadowed by a 'monstrous' patriarch, and the graphic violence often involves dismemberment to hide or change identity.[30] Kristof Van Den Troost also notes that an expressionist style, psychological abnormality, and a pessimistic worldview are some of the key elements of Hong Kong noir.[31] All these elements convey a prevailing sense of 'unheimlich' (uncanny) homelessness in the city.[32] The tiny cityscape of Hong Kong mutates so rapidly according to capitalist governmentality that what is supposed to be home often feels alien. Hong Kong noir registers the unheimlich homelessness that signifies the inability of the majority of the local population to access global wealth in 'the capital of freewheeling capital'.[33]

Manuel Castells calls such uncanniness 'structural schizophrenia' – an incompatibility between 'space of flows' and 'space of places'.[34] Julia Kristeva calls it 'the abject' because 'the multitude' is the 'singularity in the multiplicity' – a

27. Notable scholars of noir include Mark Bould, James Naremore, Edward Dimendberg, and Ginette Vincendeau, to name but a few. Recent notable publications include Andrew Spicer, *A Companion to Film Noir* (Wiley, 2013); Sue Short, *Darkness Calls: A Critical Investigation of Neo-Noir* (Springer International, 2019); Mark Bould, Kathrina Glitre, and Greg Tuck, eds., *Neo-Noir* (Wallflower, 2009). In particular, there was one published in 2017 about Hong Kong: Yau Ching-Mei Esther and Tony Williams, eds., *Hong Kong Neo-Noir* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017).
28. Joelle Collier, 'The *Noir* East – Hong Kong Filmmakers' Transmutation of a Hollywood Genre?', in *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema: No Film Is an Island*, ed. Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam (Routledge, 2007), 137–58, 138.
29. Collier, 'The Noir East', 139–40.
30. Collier, 'The Noir East', 148–53.
31. Kristof Van Den Troost, 'The Hong Kong Crime Film: Genre and Film Noir from the 1940s to the Present' (PhD diss., Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011), 59.
32. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (Penguin Books, 2003).
33. Rey Chow, 'King Kong in Hong Kong: Watching the "Handover" from the U.S.A.', *Social Text* no. 55 (Summer 1998): 105, JSTOR.
34. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 458–59.

kind of individuation of the masses that the state cannot comprehend. To the state, the multitude is thus the abject – something that 'disturbs identity, system, order, [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules'.[35] The multitude is thus often represented as crime – the abject that draws our attention to the 'fragility of the law [and order]'.[36]

Stabilizing the Multitude in Non-Places: Peter Sloterdijk's Foam Metaphor

Jianghu noir is thus a new film genre that reveals the jianghu multitude's survival strategies in a noir cityscape that is increasingly vertical, volumetric, and surveilled. The antagonism between the multitude and non-places could be more practically and realistically understood through Peter Sloterdijk's 'foam metaphor', as explained in his seminal work, the 'sphere trilogy' or 'spherology' – a fresh attempt to reconceive the ontology of the past in order to anticipate and prepare for the future in the Anthropocene.[37] Sloterdijk's foam metaphor explains why the volatile multitude would not descend into anarchy. By developing a split between the private persona and the public persona, the multitude can stabilize in a 'co-fragile' and a 'co-isolated' condition and cohabitate in the non-place surveillance machine.

In his spherology, Peter Sloterdijk breaks down 'ontology' using everyday language and practices of everyday life. Ontology comes from humanity's pursuit of a secure sense of self, against a universe that threatens one's survival. In conjuring such sense of protection against the 'outside', philosophers of history conceptualize 'security' in terms of 'immunology' – how one can be immune from harm from the outside. Sloterdijk divides such a quest in human history into three phases, the 'bubble', the 'globe', and the 'foam' – hence the sphere trilogy, or spherology. To immunize oneself against the potentially hostile environment, humanity's imagination takes them to visualize a world of spherical boundaries and how different spheres of beings connect or relate to each other.

The first phase, the bubble, begins in ancient Greece.[38] Philosophers ponder a metaphysical world where one can be guaranteed safety of the 'inside' when faced with an 'outside'. Aristotle's attempt is representative: There is 'cosmos' – an intricately structured and ordered inside *without* an outside. Christianity's

35. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 4.
36. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 4.
37. Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, vol. 1, *Bubbles: Microspherology* (Semiotext(e), 2011); *Spheres*, vol. 2, *Globes: Macrospherology* (Semiotext(e), 2014); *Spheres*, vol. 3, *Foams: Plural Spherology* (Semiotext(e), 2016).
38. Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*.

attempt is similar: The singular 'God' absorbs everything that is outside to secure the safety of the inside.

The second phase, the globe, begins with the imperial exploration and colonization of the globe.[39] The sense of security of the inside is achieved by occupying and claiming ownership of the outside. The imperial conquest of the world thus begins. This phase is characterized by an aggressive expansion of territory. The more 'virgin land' one can claim in competition with one's opponents, the more secure one would feel at the expense of the opponents.

The third phase, the foam, begins when the sun of the empire sets.[40] When every corner of the earth has already been 'discovered' or 'owned', humanity is driven to conjure the feeling of immunization elsewhere. This phase is first felt acutely during the gas attacks of trench warfare in World War I, which Sloterdijk calls the 'airquake'. To destroy one's enemy is to destroy their habitat – the air, the soil, the water, the elements that make life possible. On the battlefield, it also dawns on soldiers that this tactic will backfire – polluting the environment of one's enemy will also risk polluting one's own. All it takes is a slight change of wind direction, and one would be poisoned by one's own gas. Also, intense and diverse cultural exchanges and dialogues in the tech-aided process of globalization have shown that differences between cultures, peoples, or individuals would never be resolved. 'The end of grand theories' in the postmodern world also forbids the discussion of any universal theorization of the world or human nature outside the realm of science.

Sloterdijk thus evokes the metaphor of 'foam' to not only describe the world as it is but also prescribe a viable future for all humanity in the realms of ontology, psychology, and architecture. When faced with a world where resources are depleting and mutual understanding across cultures are impossible, the best policy for the continuance of life is to keep a right distance from each other.[41] Ontologically and psychologically, one must understand oneself as a self-contained unit unto oneself, surrounded by layers and layers of other units, whose transparency decreases with distance. It would be irrational to wilfully destroy oneself or others, because each unit's structural integrity relies on that of the others, even though one cannot see clearly into the others. In other words, each unit of being is a foam-cell in an interlocking structure of myriads of other foam cells that constitute the entire foam, which is all humanity.

The existential situation is amusingly likened to having Albert Einstein as one's neighbour: One may spend an entire life living in the same apartment block with the great scientist without knowing. And most importantly, living in his

39. Sloterdijk, *Globes*.
40. Sloterdijk, *Foams*.
41. The SARS outbreak in 2003 and COVID-19 in 2019 were excellent examples.

vicinity would not help one understand anything about 'relativity', nor would one need to for the sake of comfortable coexistence for all. Sloterdijk describes such a cozy ontological and architectural state as 'co-fragility' and 'co-isolation':

> In this aggregate [foam-like apartment block], each bubble [foam-cell] is a 'world', a place of sense, an intimate room that resonates or oscillates with its own (interior) animation/life. Each of these worlds is simultaneous and connected to all others, yet at once separated by a transparent and flexible boundary. The result is a system of co-fragility and co-isolation: a compact proximity between fragile entities and the necessary closure of each cell unto itself.[42]

Co-fragile and co-isolated foam presents new possibilities and imaginations of how a person feels at home and secure in congested urban verticality and volumetricity. More significantly, foam engages not only the intellect but also the viscera of the flesh-and-blood individual.

Foam is a very powerful solution to the volatility of the multitude. David Harvey warns that concepts such as the multitude are in essence anarchistic, and the problem with anarchists is their disdain for power. They instigate actions that would undermine power and work towards seizing power, but right at the moment of taking over, they step down. Harvey argues vehemently that this is a blatant contradiction.[43] The multitude's fundamental understanding of sovereignty – that one has absolute sovereignty over oneself – would also lead to what Walter Benjamin calls 'divine violence'. Such violence, according to Benjamin, is the ultimate exercise of one's absolute power over oneself.[44]

However, once the multitude has learned to conceive of their urban existence in terms of foams and be aware of their co-fragility and co-isolation, they do not disintegrate in anarchistic self-annihilation. The multitude prevents this by developing a split between the private persona and the public persona.

The Multitude's Psyche in Foam: The Private/Public Split

Urban foam-like architecture not only provides tight physical immunization from one's neighbour, but it also inspires the psychology of immunizing one's private persona against the public persona. Physically, this is plainly achieved

42. Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 255.
43. David Harvey, 'Listen, Anarchist!', *Reading Marx's Capital with David Harvey*, last modified 10 June 2015, http://davidharvey.org/2015/06/listen-anarchist-by-david-harvey/. Also cf. Saul Newman, 'Post-Anarchism: Between Politics and Anti-Politics', *Politica & trabalho*, no. 36 (2012): 103–15, ProQuest; Newman, 'The Horizon of Anarchy: Anarchism and Contemporary Radical Thought', *Theory & Event* 13, no. 2 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.0.0132; Newman, 'Anarchism, Poststructuralism and the Future of Radical Politics', *SubStance* 36, no. 2 (2007): 3–19, https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2007.0035.
44. Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence' (1913–1926), in *Towards the Critique of Violence*, ed. Brendan Moran and Carlo Salizani (Bloomsbury, 2015).

by locked grill gates and doors – the final frontier of one's private space against the infinite surveilled non-places that stretch beyond the threshold of one's apartment. Psychologically, the internet, as the Deleuzian rhizomatic networks of communication, enables the multitude to achieve a disembodied cyberspace existence, to alleviate the physical solitude the apartment lifestyle may create. The disembodied cyber-existence also empowers the multitude to be creative with their private persona(e), playing cat-and-mouse with the increasingly policed internet.

As explained above, in the hegemonic dominance of the Hobbesian understanding of 'people', sovereignty belongs to the state and one's identity and existential status can only be made sense of in relation to the state and the people.[45] The multitude – one having absolute sovereignty over one's self – has been shrunk to a dimension that is commonly known as 'private', as opposed to 'public'. Virno, in his seminal work *Grammar of Multitude*, offers this definition of 'private':

> 'Private' signifies not only something personal, not only something which concerns the inner life of this person or that; private signifies, above all, *deprived of*: deprived of a voice, deprived of a public presence. In liberal thought, the multitude survives as a private dimension.[46]

The multitude thus survives in our daily life as the private persona, achieving a distanced tension against the public persona. But the multitude without a state would not descend into dog-eat-dog barbarism that Hobbes fears. Virno stresses that a unity, a 'oneness', can still be sought among the multitude without the state:

> While one does not wish to sing out-of-tune melodies in the postmodern style ('multiplicity is good, unity is the disaster to beware of'), it is necessary, however, to recognize that the multitude does not clash with the One; rather, it redefines it. Even the many need a form of unity, of being a One. But here is the point: this unity is no longer the State; rather, it is language, intellect, the communal faculties of the human race. The One is no longer *a promise*, it is *a premise*.[47]

The internet and high-performance handheld devices have helped the multitude to achieve something close to such oneness. Hardt and Negri calls it the Deleuzian rhizome that enables flexible and temporary alliances to be formed by each unit/being of the multitude:

> The development of cellular telephony and portable computers, unmooring in an even more radical way the communicating points in the network, has intensified the process of deterritorialization. The original design of the Internet

45. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*.
46. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 24.
47. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 25.

> was intended to withstand military attack. Since it has no center and almost any portion can operate as an autonomous whole, the network can continue to function even when part of it has been destroyed. The same design element that ensures survival, the decentralization, is also what makes control of the network so difficult. Since no one point in the network is necessary for communication among others, it is difficult for it to regulate or prohibit their communication. This democratic model is what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizome, a nonhierarchical and noncentered network structure.[48]

Jianghu noir is thus a genre of the cybernetic jianghu multitude in the vertical and volumetric cityscape. Such ontology, psychology, and architecture are reflected in other projects, such as Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, Le Corbusier's designs of towers and podiums, Andy Warhol's aesthetic of space and movement, and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical spatial projection.[49] It even lends perspective to the overly bleak 'fortress city' by Mike Davis.[50] According to Francisco Klauser, an expert in the geography of surveillance, Sloterdijk's foam helps geographers reimagine urban security: 'For the single housekeeper, financial institution, spectator, or consumer, what matters above all is the security cell's promise of untroubled cooperation and co-isolation with one's own kind; the promise, thus, to find beneficial conditions for one's own co-isolated self-encapsulation.'[51] Jianghu noir are stories of such battles.

Yiqi (義氣): Bruno Latour's Cosmopolitics

Philosopher and cultural studies scholar Law Wing-sang defines *yiqi* in jianghu in this way:

> It is better understood as a survival strategy that, constituted contingently in human encounters, provides a basis for cooperation among men, particularly for those under disadvantageous circumstances where fairness and justice are absent or rare.[52]

Such brotherhood and sisterhood – flexible alliances among the multitude in jianghu – match exactly what Bruno Latour says about how the multitude relate to each other in Sloterdijk's foam, which Latour calls 'cosmopolitics'.

48. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 299.
49. Peter Sloterdijk, 'Talking to Myself about the Poetics of Space', *Harvard Design Magazine* 30 (2009), http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/30/talking-to-myself-about-the-poetics-of-space.
50. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Verso, 1990).
51. Francisco R Klauser, 'Splintering Spheres of Security: Peter Sloterdijk and the Contemporary Fortress City', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 337, https://doi.org/10.1068/d14608.
52. Law Wing-sang, 'Hong Kong Undercover: An Approach to "Collaborative Colonialism"', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9, no. 4 (2008): 530, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370802386412.

According to Marie-Eve Morin, Latour observes that 'conflicts arise not because of mere differences in perspective but because the world itself is not singular'.[53] Cosmopolitics is the tactic by which the yet-to-exist 'cosmopolis' may be actualized: 'Cosmopolitans may dream of the time when citizens of the world come to recognise that they all inhabit the same world, but cosmopolitics are up against a somewhat more daunting task: to see how this "same world" can be slowly composed.'[54] Morin calls cosmopolitics a 'world-forming praxis' that connects foam with action, quoting Latour:

> The questions are no longer: 'Are you going to disappear soon?' . . . An entirely new set of questions has now emerged: 'Can we cohabitate with you?' 'Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?' . . . And the new voice can only whisper: 'You have to cohabit even with those monsters, because don't indulge yourself in the naive belief that they will soon fade away.'[55]

In Sloterdijk's words, a foam world demands flexibility in human connections:

> For the individuals, multiple allegiances are the norm; the separate subcultures reproduce better in monothematic settings. 'Society', though it cannot feel it in a collecting center, is multi-micromanically constituted; it has no organ to perceive how many systems of delusions, how many catacomb cults, how many escapisms it harbors; it forms a half-blind aggregate of democratic occultisms.[56]

Yiqi is how gangsters' world building works in jianghu noir. It is Latour's cosmopolitics.

Jianghu Noir as a New Film Genre in Hong Kong

A very particular environment during the British colonial administration of Sir Murray MacLehose in the 1970s prepared for the emergence of jianghu noir as multitude-in-foam. MacLehose and his administration fostered in the population a kind of 'civic identity', which explains the weak ideological presence of the state in Hong Kong people's understanding of self. Balancing between London's pressure to introduce drastic reform in Hong Kong and the political turmoil in the Chinese mainland in the 1970s, MacLehose introduced 'a broader framework of changing state/society relations' that 'contextualize[s] various government

53. Marie-Eve Morin, 'Cohabitating in the Globalised World: Peter Sloterdijk's Global Foams and Bruno Latour's Cosmopolitics', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space* 27, no. 1 (February 2009): 70, https://doi.org/10.1068/d4908.
54. Latour quoted in Morin, 'Cohabitating in the Globalised World', 71.
55. Morin, 'Cohabitating in the Globalised World', 72.
56. Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 762.

initiatives'.[57] The introduction of 'civic pride' among the population in Hong Kong captures the spirit of this new framework of governance, which is in effect a Sloterdijkian 'bubble/foam' of immunity that can withstand and negotiate long term political changes in its neighbours, without itself becoming a threat to any sovereign state. In 1972, after the first year of his administration, MacLehose explained such 'civic pride' in these terms:

> One feature that strikes me as salient is that though Hong Kong is the home of over 4 million who have to a greater or lesser extent rejected China, a large proportion have not fully accepted Hong Kong. A new generation is growing up—55% of our population is under 25—and is demanding more from Government, often rightly. Like any other government, this one must govern by consent and must do so without the aid of the electoral system. If that consent is to be retained, not only must legitimate demands be satisfied, but the population must be convinced that such satisfaction is genuinely the objective of Government. The need is not only for administrative action producing physical results; there is also a need to secure the active confidence of the population. We cannot aim at national loyalty, but civic pride might be a useful substitute.
>
> This can be achieved only by corporate effort, and such a concept is new to Hong Kong where the tradition has been for people to do only more or less what they are told by Government and otherwise . . . to be as little bothered with corporate affairs as possible. I think that from now policy must aim to make both the elite and the masses feel, as they felt in 1967, that Hong Kong is an entity to which they belong, and the place they wish to live in.[58]

This civic pride lays the foundation for the growth of the multitude. Without an overbearing state that could have hammered in the idea of a 'people' as a function of national sovereignty, people in Hong Kong are encouraged to form temporary alliances with each other to reap the fruits of their labour in the open and free capitalist economy. Such multitude-in-foam is not only an existential condition in reality, but it also has generated the new film genre jianghu noir.

Jianghu Noir in the Work of Six Hong Kong Auteurs

In this book, the trajectory of the subtle growth of jianghu noir will be demonstrated in the works of six auteurs: John Woo, Johnnie To Kei-fung, Alan Mak Siu-fai, Felix Chong Man-keung, Wong Kar-wai, and Philip Yung Tsz-kwong. Chapter 1 reveals the birth of the multitude in the jianghu noir of *A Better Tomorrow* (1986). Jianghu noir is a push-and-pull between the disenfranchised

57. Ray Yep and Tai-Lok Lui, 'Revisiting the Golden Era of MacLehose and the Dynamics of Social Reforms', *China Information* 24, no. 3 (November 2010): 253, https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X10379360.
58. MacLehose quoted in Yep and Lui, 'Revisiting the Golden Era of MacLehose', 253.

Crossings: Asian Cinema and Media Culture

JIANGHU NOIR
THE URBAN CINEMA OF HONG KONG

'*Jianghu Noir* is an exciting addition to the scholarly work being undertaken around the Hong Kong crime film. Underpinned by a range of philosophical positions, Dickson C. L. Cheung manages that rare feat of bringing fresh perspectives to the idea of Hong Kong *noir* and *neo-noir*. This groundbreaking title should be actively sought out by anyone interested in crime films, contemporary Hong Kong, East Asian, and world cinemas.'

–**Andy Willis**, University of Salford

'*Jianghu Noir* is a remarkable reinvention of film *noir* and *neo-noir* studies. By bringing the concept of "jianghu" into dialogue with multitude and spherology, Dickson Cheung reimagines Hong Kong cinema as a space of volumetric connectivity and collective becoming. The book expands *noir*'s conceptual horizons and offers an original framework for understanding urbanity, cybernetic surveillance, and collective life in the Anthropocene.'

–**Winnie Yee**, The University of Hong Kong

'Jianghu noir' are stories of survival – a new film genre that celebrates jianghu heroes' fight against the power-infused noir cityscape. Jianghu, 'rivers and lakes' in Chinese, originally refers to the peripheral universe where ancient martial art heroes make a name for themselves. The term has since evolved and become a powerful concept.

In the cinema of Hong Kong, the modern jianghu is an urban maze where heroes living on the margins negotiate the overlording centres of power. Jianghu takes on a strong sense of noir when the urban landscape becomes a villain that ensnarls the marginalized heroes. In the films of jianghu noir, jianghu is defined by an individual's orbital distance from the centres of power, whereas noir is defined by surveillance-enhanced architecture.

Jianghu noir is manifest in the works of six auteurs – John Woo, Johnnie To Kei-fung, Felix Chong Man-keung, Alan Mak Siu-fai, Wong Kar-wai, and Philip Yung Tsz-kwong. Jianghu noir begins in Hong Kong, but it is not exclusive to Hong Kong; it is a universal filmic phenomenon that offers new survival strategies in urban space across different cultures.

Dickson C. L. Cheung's research interests include film and literature, adaptation and remakes, Hong Kong crime and gangster films, cyberpunk, and philosophy. He received his PhD from the University of Hong Kong. He teaches at various universities, offering courses on film and philosophy, world literature and cinema, adaptation and remakes, and the Hong Kong cinema.

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