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A JOURNEY ACROSS RIVERS AND LAKES: A LOOK AT THE *JIANGHU* IN CHINESE CULTURE AND LITERATURE

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Summary || This paper sets out to explore the possibility as well as the impossibility of representing a seemingly untranslatable term: *jianghu* (江湖), which literally means “rivers and lakes” in the Chinese language. The paper discusses how the term evolves almost like an organic entity of its own, stretching from Chinese literature, cinema to the everyday use of the term as slangs and idioms. By looking at how the term is translated from one language to another, from an ancient context to a (post)modern context, and further away from one generation to another, this paper attempts to study the process of adaptation and translation beyond a linguistic scope, but towards a broader field of literary, cultural and film studies. The paper also examines how the process of translating, adapting and imagining *jianghu* can be deemed a manifestation of the Derridian concept of “supplementarity”.

Keywords || *Jianghu* | Chinese Literature | Translation | Adaptation | Imagination | Supplementarity.

“When I pronounce the word *Future*,
the first syllable already belongs to the past.
When I pronounce the word *Silence*,
I destroy it.
When I pronounce the word *Nothing*,
I make something no nonbeing can behold.”

Three Oddest Words, Wislawa Szymborska

0. Introduction

Literally meaning “rivers and lakes”, *jianghu* (江湖) is an unsettling concept/expression/sensation/text in Chinese language and culture open for a myriad of interpretations. Although *jianghu* does not retain any actual being, exact location or fixed meaning in reality, it is often represented as the fantastical world of Chinese martial arts, the criminal realm of triad societies, an anarchic condition beyond the reach of government, the mythical world “out there” and so on in Chinese culture, literature and cinema. When *jianghu* is creatively and varyingly manifested in poems, folktales, novels, songs, paintings, animations, films, television series, comics, theatrical performances, etcetera across the generations, the term almost evolves as if it is an organic entity of its own, stretching from Chinese literature, cinema to the everyday use of the term as slangs and idioms. Intriguingly, however ambiguous, arbitrary and unstable as it is in its meanings, the notion of *jianghu* is still commonly used and understood by Chinese-speaking communities such as China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan throughout the generations. From this point, this paper sets out to explore the possibility as well as the impossibility of representing a seemingly untranslatable term: *jianghu*. By looking at how the term is translated from one language to another, from an ancient context to a (post)modern context, and further from one generation to another, the following attempts to study the process of adaptation and translation of *jianghu* beyond a linguistic scope, and towards a broader field of literary, cultural and film studies.

1. Chinese Classical Texts: *Jianghu* in a Glimpse

The term *jianghu* appeared in Chinese classical literary texts more than two thousand years ago. Dating back to the Warring States Period of ancient China around the 4th century B.C., Zhuangzi (莊子), an influential ancient Chinese philosopher famous for his Taoist teaching and thinking, uses the term *jianghu* to contemplate on the being of human existence in a chapter titled “The Great and Most Honoured Master” (大宗師), which is collected under one of his works called *Inner Chapters* (內篇). Zhuangzi writes: “泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相响以濕，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。”

Burton Watson, an experienced translator of Chinese literature, provides the following English translation:

When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit—but it would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes (1968: 80).

This literal translation of the original passage takes the term *jianghu* by its surface meaning as a denotation to “rivers and lakes”. According to Watson’s interpretation, *jianghu* becomes a habitat of the fish earlier mentioned in the paragraph. Yet, if we take the Taoist philosophy into consideration, the term *jianghu* is actually connoted to a richer level of meaning. When the drying fish on land can be regarded as Zhuangzi’s metaphor for our own way of being in the material world, *jianghu* is actually referred to both the corporeal world our bodies are adhered to and the mental realm in which contemplation can take place. Therefore, by juxtaposing the passage abovementioned with Zhuangzi’s motto for existence in his Taoist philosophy: “to forget each other in *jianghu*” (相忘於江湖) can indeed be understood as a way to look for enjoyment in life, so as to attain a state of *xiao yao* (逍遙, carefree) as much as one can. Possessing a strong historical linkage to Chinese culture, literature and philosophy, the term *jianghu* thus bears a much deeper implication than just the literal meaning “rivers and lakes” alone.

2. Chinese Ancient Poetry: Manifestations of *Jianghu* in Multiples

Moving from Chinese classical text to ancient poetry, the use of the term *jianghu* becomes more dynamic and versatile. Poets including but not limited to Wang Changling (王昌齡, 698-757), Gao Shi (高適, 707-765), Du Fu (杜甫, 712-770) and Du Mu (杜牧, 803-852) all utilize the image of *jianghu* in their own different ways¹. The variety and diversity realized in the usage of the term *jianghu* in their poems proves that *jianghu* is not and cannot be confined to any settled and fixed connotation.

Du Fu, who is well received as a prolific poet and was famously honoured as “the saint of poetry” (詩聖) in Chinese literature, applies the image of *jianghu* recurrently in his works and, more importantly, his use of the term is always different and can always be understood differently. In particular, *jianghu* does not only denote a locale, but it also acts as an embodiment of emotions and affects. In short, *jianghu* becomes a way to assist the expression of emotion and inner feelings. To name but just a few: in “At Sky’s-End Thinking of Li Po” (天末懷李白), the image of *jianghu* is associated with Du Fu’s longing to see

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1 | Many other ancient poets such as Li Longji (李隆基, 685-762), Li Shangyin (李商隱, 813-858), Lu Guimeng (陸龜蒙, ?-881), Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹, 989-1052), Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅, 1045-1105) and Lu You (陸游, 1125-1209) all contribute to the usage of the term *jianghu* in their works. Modern Chinese poets like Yu Guangzhong (余光中, 1928-) also incorporates the image of *jianghu* into his poems, in which some of them are adapted into Taiwanese folk song. The application of the term *jianghu* in contemporary literature will be discussed in a later part of this article.

Li Po, a then-deceased poet: “鴻雁幾時到，江湖秋水多” and David Hinton translates it as “[w]ill geese ever arrive, now autumn/ Waters swamp rivers and lakes there? (1989: 43)”; in “Dreaming of Li Po” (夢李白), the term is linked to Du Fu’s deep remembrance of a time past: “江湖多風波，舟楫恐失墜” and the two translations published are namely “[t]he way is rough with billows and winds groan,/ The boat may possibly be overthrown (Wu, 1985: 116)” and “the/ Hard Roads, the storms on lakes,/ One man against the elements in/ A single, tiny boat (Alley, 2001: 78-79)”; in “Reply to a Letter from Meng Shih-Erh” (憑孟倉曹將書覓土婁舊莊), it becomes Du Fu’s intense yearning to be free from the official authority: “十載江湖客，茫茫遲暮心” and it is translated as “[t]en years/ A guest of lakes and rivers—boundless,/ My heart of lingering dusk grows boundless (Hinton, 1989: 94)”; in “A Servant Boy Comes” (豎子至), the imaginary *jianghu* is correlated to the poet’s anticipation of a carefree life: “欲寄江湖客，提攜日月長” and a translation gives “[a] guest of rivers and lakes, I linger over/ Days and months themselves forever in each taste (Hinton, 1989: 88)”; whereas in “Opposite a Post-Station, the Boat/ Moonlit Beside a Monastery” (舟月對驛近寺), Du Fu transfigures his contemplation of the natural landscape to his own existential condition of being a guest of rivers and lakes in nature: “皓首江湖客，鉤簾獨未眠” which is translated as “[h]air white, a guest of lakes and rivers,/ I tie blinds open and sit alone, sleepless (Hinton, 1989: 106)”.

As it is delineated from the above, each occurrence of the term *jianghu* actually opens up a whole new realm of understanding the term. *This jianghu* mentioned is never quite the same as *that jianghu* portrayed in another poem, in another text and in another context. Not only that the term *jianghu* never bears a single and unifying meaning, but the atmosphere, the emotion and the weight provoked by the term also differ from one context to another. At times, *jianghu* is understood by its exploration of cosmic vastness and infinity and the sense of abstraction it itself provokes. At times, *jianghu* conveys a sense of freedom, liberty and mobility, as it is sometimes deemed an escapist thought to get away from politics, power struggle, official authority, and the material world. At times, *jianghu* is correlated to different kinds of longing and desire, including but not limited to the pursuit of individual freedom, the love of nature, and the yearning for a carefree life. At other times, *jianghu* can also be perceived as a site of contestations where memory, remembrance, reminiscence, desire, emotion, affect and everything in between all come to mix and stir with one another.

3. The Untranslatable *Jianghu*

When it is almost impossible to forge a full comprehension and

an eloquent articulation of *jianghu* even in its original context, the translation of the term into other languages out of the Chinese context is indeed equally complicated and problematic by nature. By taking a look at the English translation of Du Fu's poems abovementioned, one can actually see that the term *jianghu* is very often undertranslated, as it is being marginally restricted to its superficial meaning only. For instance, *jianghu* is translated directly into "rivers and lakes", which is what David Hinton does in "At Sky's-End Thinking of Li Po (1989: 43)", "A Servant Boy Comes (1989: 88)", "Reply to a Letter from Meng Shih-Erh (1989: 94)", and "Opposite a Post-Station, the Boat/ Moonlit Beside a Monastery (1989: 106)". Another common practice is to omit the term entirely and this can be seen in Rewi Alley's translation in "Dreaming of Li Bai (2001: 78-79)" and Wu Juntao's translation of the same poem (1985: 116, 118).

After all, it is intrinsically difficult (or even impossible) to find an exact right word to substitute for the term *jianghu*. In addition to that, the undertranslation and the understudy of the term *jianghu* have already hinted on the nonrepresentational and the untranslatable nature of *jianghu*². Here the "untranslatability" of *jianghu* actually points to Eugene A. Nida's distinctive discussion on translation and equivalence (1969). A translated work should not and might not be equivalent to the original work, as "dynamic equivalence" is prioritized over "formal correspondence" – the principle of "dynamic equivalence" is to make translation relevant to the receptors and the (cultural, linguistic, political) context they are situated in, so as to achieve the purpose of communication effectively; this is different from "formal correspondence" which emphasizes the accuracy and the correctness of the information translated, but does not take into account the response and the degree of comprehension of the receptor of the translated work (Nida, 1969: 22-28). The different approaches conducted by the translators in their various translations of *jianghu* actually echo with their different inclinations towards the principle of "dynamic equivalence" and that of "formal correspondence". Translation and equivalence can thereby be understood as two sides of a spectrum, which are always in a continuum of dynamics and counteracting forces with one another. In this way, the untranslatability of *jianghu* can also be read as a form as well as a result of this very struggle between the two sides and the two corresponding principles.

However, this marks not an end but a beginning of the study of *jianghu*, as it is through the untranslatability of *jianghu* that we are able to come close to a certain way of deciphering *jianghu* – *jianghu* can never be fully apprehended inasmuch as it always resists definition, essentialization and conclusion; at the same time, the irreducible and the nonrepresentational nature of *jianghu* allows the term to evolve and to disseminate across different texts, contexts and intertexts.

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2 | Other examples such as "kung fu" (功夫), "dim sum" (點心) and "cheongsam" (長衫) also bear the untranslatable nature of the Chinese language. Critical terms such as *fenggu* (風骨, wind and bone) and *fengliu* (風流, windflow grace) that are commonly used in Chinese literary criticism also shed light to the understudy of the undertranslated *jianghu*.

Just like how Rewi Alley introduces a series of descriptions about natural landscape to replace the original term *jianghu* (2001: 78-79) and how Wu Juntao evades the term *jianghu* by adding his own words like “journey” and “way” into his translations (1985: 116, 118), the untranslatability of *jianghu* actually invites a wide variety of adaptation and interpretation of the term. Therefore, the untranslatable nature of *jianghu* not only induces possibility, productivity and creativity, but it also breeds further dissemination of the term across different texts, media, languages and generations. Intriguingly, the tug of war between the translatability and the untranslatability of *jianghu* not only spells out the ambiguity and the contradictory nature of the term, but it also suggests that *jianghu* is a continuous continuum where its interpretations and its representations intertwine to spark out other meanings and other manifestations of the term in infinitude. The evolution of *jianghu* can then be examined as an on-going cycle of adaptation, interpretation, and representation as infinite variations of translation in all forms.

4. *Jianghu* in Evolution: *Jianghu* Dwellers and the *Wuxia* Genre

One might have noticed that the term *jianghu ke* (江湖客, literally meaning “a guest of *jianghu*”, or simply “a guest of rivers and lakes”) is actually frequently mentioned in the aforementioned poems of Du Fu. To a certain extent, *jianghu ke* shapes the preliminary formation of *jianghu* dweller who stands as an important figure and witness situated in the recontextualization and the subsequent popularization of *jianghu* in the (post)modern context of the *wuxia* (武俠) genre.

Wuxia is a compound word which means Chinese martial arts (*wu*, 武) and Chinese traditional knight-errantry (*xia*, 俠). The *wuxia* genre can then be defined by the implication and the manifestation of *wuxia* brought about by its theme and content: in general, the genre constitutes a specific form of narrative that is mainly based on different imaginary happenings in the fictional realm of *jianghu* and the personae who drift upon the space *jianghu* are deemed the *jianghu* dwellers. *Wuxia xiaoshuo* (*wuxia* novel, 武俠小說) and *wuxia pian* (*wuxia* film, 武俠片) are two immediate manifestations of this particular genre in the 20th century³. In recent years, the *wuxia* genre is also expanding to comics, animations, video games, theatrical works and so on. In short, *jianghu* and the *wuxia* genre are defined by and through one another: the notion of *jianghu* is embedded in different texts of the *wuxia* genre, whereas the *wuxia* genre needs *jianghu* as a context for its narrative to take place. Thanks to the “big three” *wuxia* novelists Jin Yong⁴ (金庸, aka Louis Cha), Liang Yusheng⁵ (梁羽生) and Gu Long⁶ (古龍) and the pioneering directors

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3 | The very first *wuxia* film ever made in history is actually an adaptation of a *wuxia* novel called *Jiang Hu Qi Xia Chuan* (江湖奇俠傳, the legend of the extraordinary knight-errants in *jianghu*) written by Ping Jiang Bu Xiao Sheng (平江不肖生, 1889-1957) at the turn of the 20th century. In 1928, director Zhang Shichuan (張石川) adapts the novel into the first *wuxia* film in history under the title *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (火燒紅蓮寺) (Dun, 2004: 21-23; Liu, 1979, 33-39; Lin, 1981: 12).

4 | Jin Yong (金庸, 1924-) is also known as Louis Cha (查良鏞). Based in Hong Kong, he is one of the most influential *wuxia* novelists who write in modern Chinese language. From 1955 to 1972, Jin Yong composes more than 14 *wuxia* novels and most of them are being adapted into films, television dramas, comics and video games even until nowadays. *The Book and the Sword* (書劍恩仇錄), *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (射雕英雄傳) and *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer* (笑傲江湖) are some of his widely known masterpieces. Jin Yong's works contribute a great deal as a form of mass entertainment in the popular culture shared by different Chinese-speaking communities.

5 | Liang Yusheng (梁羽生, 1926-2009) is the pen name of Chen Wentong (陳文統). Based in the mainland China, he starts his writing career in the 1950s and writes more than 30 *wuxia* novels throughout his life. Quite a number of his novels such as *Romance of the White Haired Maiden* (白髮魔女傳), *Lofty Waters Verdant Bow* (雲海玉弓緣) and *Seven Swords of Mount Heaven* (七劍下天山) are made into films and television series. Like Jin Yong, Liang also has a tendency to incorporate Chinese history, culture and philosophical thoughts into his works.

of the Chinese *wuxia* cinema like Zhang Che (張徹) and King Hu⁷ (胡金銓), the notion of *jianghu* is made popular by its manifestations in *wuxia* novels and *wuxia* cinema in the 20th century when novels and films as such become the main form of entertainment of the mass public, especially under the influence of industrialization and urbanization in the Chinese-speaking world.

Inherited from all other previous manifestations of *jianghu*, the term does not only act as a physical locale to which the narrative of the *wuxia* genre is adhered, but it is also a space to project and reflect different abstract and ungraspable emotions and affects from the perspective of both the *jianghu* dweller and the urban dweller (i.e. the reader-producer of such texts). For instance, when the notion of *jianghu* is connoted to a form of hope and an anticipation of choice in the fictional realm, the manifestation of *jianghu* as such becomes an outlet to vent out frustration, disappointment and anxiety in reality. In this way, *jianghu* is a text, a force and a site of resistance (physically, linguistically, philosophically and even psychologically) that oppose all kinds of totalizing forces, ideological thoughts and institutionalizing power imposed by the authority, the hegemony, the hierarchy, and even by the language system itself. *Jianghu*, *jianghu dwellers* and the *wuxia* genre therefore form an intertextual relationship with one another, as a way to breed more texts and meanings.

Even until nowadays, *wuxia* films are still flourishing in the stage of world cinema. For instance, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000), which has achieved unexpected success in the box office worldwide and among the international film festival circuits, certainly helps to boost the popularity of *wuxia* films outside the Chinese-speaking communities. In the years that follow, large-scale productions including Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2003) and Chen Kaige's *The Promise* (2005) are subsequently made with high budgets and an assemble of an international cast, in an attempt to attract the attention of a worldwide audience and open up a market of the *wuxia* genre in the Western world. What's more, Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* trilogy (2003, 2004) merges and recycles elements from different genres including but not limited to Chinese *wuxia* films and Japanese samurai films together. Antti-Jussi Annala in a Finnish-Chinese film collaboration called *Jade Warrior* (2006) combines a Chinese *wuxia* story with Finnish mythology. John Stevenson and Mark Osborne's *Kung Fu Panda 1 & 2* (2008, 2011) produced by DreamWorks Animation also plays with different archetypes found in Chinese *wuxia* films. Rob Minkoff's *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008) also attempts to reproduce the *wuxia* genre in a Hollywood production. In spite of the varying qualities and reception of the films abovementioned, the trend implies the significant intertextual linkage between *jianghu*, the *wuxia* genre and their different manifestations. This also shows that the global

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6 | Gu Long (古龍, 1937-1985), also known as Xiong Yaohua (熊耀華), is a well-known Taiwanese *wuxia* novelist who is famous for creating *wuxia* series like *Little Li Flying Dagger* (小李飛刀) and *The Legendary Twins* (絕代雙驕) and inventing *wuxia* characters like Chu Liuxiang (楚留香) and Lu Xiaofeng (陸小鳳). Like his counterparts Liang Yusheng and Jin Yong, Gu Long's *wuxia* novels are repeatedly adapted into films, television series, comics, video games and so on.

7 | Both Zhang Che (張徹, 1923-2002) and King Hu (胡金銓, 1932-1997) are well received as two most accomplished and pioneering directors of *wuxia* films of the 20th century. Based in Hong Kong, both of them are very active in the 1960s and 1970s and their works have influenced the development of *wuxia* film a great deal ever since then. Zhang Che's notable works include *Golden Swallow* (1968) and the *One-armed Swordsman* trilogy (1967, 1969 and 1971); whereas King Hu's works like *A Touch of Zen* (1969) and *Dragon Gate Inn* (1966) are also critically acclaimed. Even until nowadays, works by Zhang Che and King Hu are still being readapted and remade into new productions from time to time.

popularization of the *wuxia* genre and the varying representation of *jianghu* actually go hand in hand together to enable the evolution of *jianghu* across different texts, media, languages and generations.

5. Towards the Postmodern Context: *Jianghu* as a Human Condition

Towards the (post)modern context, the notion of *jianghu* crosses the textual border into our everyday life, as *jianghu* is recontextualized into the realm of Triad society under the urban scenario. The legacy can actually be traced back to the formation of *Tiandihui* (The Heaven and Earth Society, 天地會) which is an anti-Manchurian secret society emerged in China at the turn of the Qing Dynasty in the 18th century. Back then, the term *jianghu* is often embedded in the language of the secret society, that it is often utilized as a catch-phrase in different kinds of jargon, ritual practice and even secret code shared by the members of society. A coded verse titled “Roundelay on the Ten Fingers” (論十指詩) of *Tiandihui* is one of the many examples: the depiction of *jianghu* goes in one line: “江湖四海興”, which means “all within the rivers, lakes and four seas prosper (Gustave, 2001: 229-230)”. In this way, *jianghu* is indeed portrayed as a secretive space shadowing the formation of secret society as such and making it possible for the activities of this antigovernment society to take place.

After the imperial history of China ends with the fall of the Qing Dynasty in the early 20th century, the remnants of the secret anti-Qing society were gradually transformed into the Triad society that continues to prevail in the modern days. This indeed explains why the Triad society functions so similarly as *Tiandihui* in terms of its structure, its ritual, its coded language and so on even until nowadays⁸. Not only is *jianghu* adapted into the urban context and is recontextualized into the Triad society as one can see in many Chinese gangster films, the term is also incorporated in the common usage of some everyday slangs and idioms. For instance, the Chinese idiom “人在江湖 身不由己”, which means in *jianghu* one cannot decide for his/her own, is often employed to contemplate the frustration and the entanglement one has to face in an unresolved situation. To a certain extent, applying this idiom under the urban context is in fact a parallelization of *jianghu* with our everyday world. In this sense, *jianghu* in the (post)modern context is actually transgressing from the textual, the historical and the linguistic discourses to the philosophical and the psychological levels where *jianghu* becomes a site of contemplation and reflection to our human condition at large amidst the sense of indeterminacy brought about by the constant evolution of its meaning and its usage.

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8 | Further reference on the historical and the traditional linkages between *Tiandihui* and the modern Triad society influencing various Chinese-speaking communities can be found in W.P. Morgan (1960), Dian H. Murray (1994), David Ownby (1996), Martin Booth (1999), Kingsley Bolton and Christopher Hutton (2000), and Benjamin T.M. Liu (2001).

6. Conclusion: *Jianghu* and the Derridian Supplementarity

To borrow from John Minford, an experienced English translator noted for his translation of two of Jin Yong's *wuxia* novels namely *The Deer and the Cauldron* (鹿鼎記) and *The Book and The Sword* (書劍恩仇錄), *wuxia* novels actually

[...] provide Chinese readers with a celebration of Chinese culture, of Chineseness, a fictional experience which is in some aspects more "Chinese" than any of the available Chinese realities. They create a powerful sense of euphoria. A Chinese banquet (1997: 30).

Adding to this is of course the notion of *jianghu* as well⁹. By contemplating on his own experience in the translation of *wuxia* novels, Minford actually identifies not the difficulty, but the impossibility of adapting the notion of *jianghu* to the English context (1997: 34). Along the line, Barry Asker also points out that translated works as such can never be up to standard for literary criticism, as there are too many unsettling parts in the English translation and the irregularities of style also hinder the (non-Chinese) readers from understanding the entire picture. Asker thereby concludes that "it is [...] not because Chinese culture is so alien as to be inaccessible. It is because the quality of the English text is flawed (1997: 162)". The following remarks by Stephen Owen might as well assert that the study of *jianghu* as a journey across and beyond "rivers and lakes" is closely related to our understanding of Chinese culture, literature, cinema and even identity as a whole. At the same time, it also points to the important fact that the scope of study should be broadened by taking Chinese culture, history, tradition and philosophy into consideration, instead of being solely constrained by the Western literary tradition and methodology:

In the Western tradition there has always been a tension between the desire for precise definition on the one hand, and on the other hand, a desire for "resonance" in literary terms (their application to various frames of reference, which inevitably works against precise definition). In the Chinese tradition only "resonance" was a value (1992: 5).

What is more, the notion of *jianghu* and its different manifestations can be taken as a cross-generational, cross-disciplinary and cross-media translation on a macro level — translation hereby not only refers to the literal translation of word, but also more complicated forms of that of image, experience, emotion, culture and so forth— this thus contributes to a higher level of our understanding that the multiplicity and the instability embodied in the notion of *jianghu* actually correspond to a simultaneous enactment of cultural translation (continuity) as well as translational blockage (rupture). On the one hand, the study of *jianghu* comes to challenge the very basic

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9 | Further reference can be found in an article written by Laurence K.P. Wong, in which he gives a thorough literary criticism of John Minford's translation of the first two chapters of Jin Yong's *The Deer and The Cauldron* (1997: 105-124).

notion (or even existence) of meaning, essence and even Chinese-ness *per se* in the tug-of-war between translation and equivalence; on the other hand, the priority of “dynamic equivalence” over “formal correspondence” (Nida, 1969: 13) calls for our attention towards the responsive acts of emotions, interpretations and creative inputs of all readers of *jianghu* across time and space. The importance of expressiveness, transmissibility and comprehensibility of a translation (in “dynamic equivalence”) underpins the purpose of communication with the readers, the need of translation to resonate the readers’ linguistic, cultural, political contexts and others, and, most of all, the significance of the role of the readers and the reader-response act in the reinterpretation, readaption and recreation of more (new) texts and meanings. Vis-à-vis the many different translations, manifestations and readings of *jianghu* produced, Stefano Arduini’s discussion on the similarity and the difference in translation also sheds light to our understanding of *jianghu* in form of word, image, experience, everyday life, Chinese-ness, cultural imaginary and so on. Arduini puts forward his insightful observation of how human-beings understand through their reliance and dependence on building up analogy and similarity between things (Arduini, 2004: 10-14). The constructed structure of such act actually exposes its very constructive nature itself—our way of understanding, organization and representation is actually predetermined by our instinctive inclination of categorization, branching out and forming relationship. From here as a point of departure, Arduini actually urges us to reconsider the creation of “disciplines” and to rethink the definition of “disciplines” and “interdisciplines” – “interdisciplines” always depends on the classification of “disciplines”, in order to be defined and conceived (2004: 8-9). When the seemingly subversive act of border-crossing is actually highly dependable on the conventional construction of the border, to read *jianghu* is about both the possibility and the impossibility of reading; to translate *jianghu* is about both the translatability and the untranslatability of *jianghu*; to understand, to represent and to make sense of *jianghu* is all about “making” and linking relationships in an interlocking network of similarity, difference and beyond.

After all, when *jianghu* is always in a state of indeterminacy, the multiplicity embraced by both the deconstructive and the interpretive approach of studying *jianghu* indeed comes close to the Derridian concept of “supplementarity”. According to Jacques Derrida, “supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process (1998: 281)”; by the nature of supplementarity, things become “the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign (1998: 281)” in a never-ending process of further signification. When the ultimate meaning of *jianghu* is forever deferred, *jianghu* is always about something more: it is more than a representation, more than a philosophical concept, more than a mentality and more than any theoretical framework. When *jianghu*

resists singularity and homogeneity, it celebrates hybridity, ambiguity and heterogeneity. *Jianghu* is therefore always a supplement of its many other manifestations in the fields of literature, film and culture across time and space.

To conclude, *jianghu* is a site of contestation, dissemination and communication: on the one hand, the cultural specificity embodied by the notion of *jianghu* in Chinese culture and literature allows different Chinese-speaking communities to be linked together by sharing their mutual understanding towards the term as a common language (both linguistically and mentally). Intriguingly, this is also how the transnational imagination of *jianghu* actually comes to foster actual bonding by among different Chinese-speaking communities, by establishing a common language, a collective imagery and an imagined connection called *jianghu*: this coincides with Benedict Anderson's notion on the creation of an "imagined community" through public participation in the imagination of a common identity (2001); on the other hand, the impossibility of forging a single reading of *jianghu* hints on the possibility of opening up infinitely many interpretations and representations of the term – the paradoxical pair of specificity and generality embodied in the notion of *jianghu* thus opens up the horizon of the term being both a form of cultural consumption as well as an ever-ongoing form of cultural production.

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