

Please close read the following passage from Petrus Liu's *Stateless Subjects: Chinese Martial Arts Literature and Postcolonial History*. When you're done, answer the follow questions with a well-formulated argument which covers all the listed aspects below.

1. What do you make of Liu's statement about the "mutual interdependence" between stateless subjects? Explain your understanding of his notion of "ethical alterity" and the martial arts subject's "responsibilities to other human beings."
2. Do you agree, partially agree, or disagree with his general argument? As you answer the above two questions, draw on at least one textual example from a martial arts (武俠) novel or film.

The Chinese martial arts novel represents a radically different political philosophy of the state. In this aesthetic tradition, the state is neither the arbiter of justice nor the sphere of moral constraints that prevents civil society from destroying itself through its own rapacity. On the contrary, the martial arts novel invents scenes of stateless subjects to explain the constitutive sociality of the self. Its discourse of *Jianghu* (rivers and lakes) defines a public sphere unconnected to the sovereign power of the state, a sphere that is historically related to the idea of *minjian* (between the people) as opposed to the concept of *tianxia* (all under heaven) in Chinese philosophy. The martial arts novel presents the human subject as an ethical alterity, constituted by and dependent on its responsibilities to other human beings. It is through the recognition of this mutual interdependence, rather than the formal and positive laws of the state, that humanity manages to preserve itself despite rampant inequalities in privilege, rank, and status. As recounted by martial arts novels, the human subject is made and remade by forces that cannot be defined by positive laws of the state—rage, love, gender, morality, life and death. The formation of this stateless subject is incompatible with the liberal conception of an autonomous rights-bearing citizen.

Max Weber defined the state as the apparatus that monopolizes the legitimate use of violence. The Chinese martial arts novel shifts the arbiter of justice from the state to a special group of martial arts master idiomatically termed *xia*. This genre does not so much promote private use of violence as it opens up a nonstatist field of political

considerations. Chinese martial arts novels dramatize scenarios of moral dilemmas beyond the purview of the nation-state and without recourse to its guarantees. The Chinese martial arts novel, in other words, can be seen as a thought experiment on this question: If we lived in a world where the meaning of politics were not reduced to the ballot-box, revolutions, fiscal crises, wars, and other trappings of governmentality, what would it mean to be a person of public responsibility? The fact that modern Chinese cultures produced such a thought experiment deserves a historical analysis, and the emergence of stateless literature in twentieth-century China provides a powerfully concrete counterexample to the widely accepted thesis that China's response to foreign imperialism has always been the establishment of a strong modern nation-state.

