

# JIANGHU, IS THERE ANYBODY THERE?

## 江湖，還有人嗎？

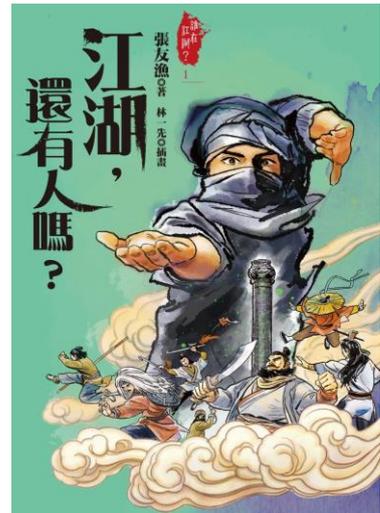
- \* Winner of the 2020 TiBE Book Prize
- \* Winner of the 2020 Golden Tripod Award
- \* Winner of the 2020 White Raven Award

*As an orphan who has grown up in a cobbler's house, all Tsu Hsiao-Pi really wants to do is lead an ordinary life, but his best friend dreams of someday becoming a warrior. However, given that they live in a tiny village where all the warriors have disappeared, how are they going to find their own wuxia world to be a part of?*

The martial arts tournaments at NiuTou Village used to draw vast numbers of warriors who traveled there from far and wide to compete, but it lost them all thirty years ago when the large iron pillar engraved with the names of various heroes disappeared. Now with the warriors gone, is there anyone left who's willing to take up the mantle and fight for what's right?

For two thirteen-year-olds who grew up in NiuTou Village, they've spent their entire lives hearing stories about that world. While the adventurous Kang Liang dreams of finding a way back there and becoming a warrior, orphan Tsu Hsiao-Pi just wants to stay with his master and toil away repairing shoes.

Then, one day an infamous fugitive appears and ruthlessly declares that for the wuxia world to return, the chief constable of the village has to die. What follows is a steady stream of strangers coming to NiuTou Village who possess a myriad of physical and mental skills, but what kind of chaos will they create as they try to reclaim the old world? And what does it all hold for Tsu Hsiao-Pi and Kang Liang?



**Category:** Middle Grade

**Publisher:** Yuan-Liou

**Date:** 9/2022

**Rights contact:**

booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw

**Pages:** 288

**Length:** 110,000 characters  
(approx. 71,500 words in English)

**Age:** 10+

**Material:** English sample

**Volume:** 2

Combining fantasy elements and coming-of-age themes which have long been Chang Yeou-Yu's specialty, *Jianghu, Is There Anybody There?* marks the first time that the veteran children's author has used wuxia as a backdrop and is an exciting new novel deep-rooted in a distinctive style that blends wuxia and fantasy.

## Chang Yeou-Yu 張友漁

Originally from Yuli Township in Hualien, Chang Yeou-Yu has been a professional children's author for over twenty years. She has published more than forty books, including *The Senior, My Classmate Is a Bear, How Are You Today, Princess?, Child of Saigon, My Dad the Hoodlum*, and *The Little Chef Yuma* series.

# JIANGHU, IS THERE ANYBODY THERE?

By Chang Yeou-Yu

Translated by Helen Wang

## Chapter 1: NiuTou Village and the Ancient Road

“Jianghu, is there anybody there?”

The boy’s cry echoed round the Twenty One Peaks, scaring a few birds from the trees.

Two teenagers in turbans stood on the highest rock in the rocky part of the forest. The stockier of the pair, in a gray turban, cupped his hands around his mouth, and shouted into the distance again: “Jianghu, is there anyone there?”

The smaller boy jumped down from the rock, and pulled a basket of firewood onto his back. He looked up at the other boy and said, “Come on, Kang Liang, we should go home!”

“Tsu Hsiao-Pi, we could leave NiuTou Village and go and see the Eastern City for ourselves,” said the stockier boy, “what do you think? There must be a jianghu there.”

“But I like NiuTou Village, I like spending time with Master Tsu.” Hsiao-Pi adjusted his red turban as he spoke.

“Jianghu, are you there? Is anyone there?” Kang Liang roared again from the rock. A grasshopper leapt up from the grass and landed next to Hsiao-Pi’s foot. Hsiao-Pi watched it with interest. “Well, there’s definitely an animal jianghu here, with frogs, flies, crickets and chickens. This grasshopper’s jianghu is so lively!”

Kang Liang jumped down from the rock, and bent down to look at the grasshopper. “Hsiao-Pi, you forgot about us! We’re here too. Humans are also part of the grasshoppers’ jianghu. They eat our corn, and we send them off to the Western Skies. Better to be in the grasshopper’s jianghu than no jianghu at all, right?”

Kang Liang reached out to grab the grasshopper, but it was too fast, and its sickle leg slashed his hand.

“Wow! That grasshopper’s fast, it’s really something, a jianghu master!” Kang Liang shook out his hand and peered closely at the grasshopper. It was the color of dry grass. He reached out again, ready to grab it. This time he could see what happened: as soon as his hand went near the grasshopper, its back leg shot up, and he could see the row of spikes that had scratched his hand a few moments earlier. This time, Kang Liang whipped his hand back.

“So this is your weapon? Wait till you see mine!” Kang Liang took off his shoes and prepared his counter attack. As he raised his shoes high in the air, he heard a man’s voice coming

from behind the stone: "You're so loud they can hear you in LeiEr Town." A middle-aged man with a slightly bulging belly walked out from behind another rock.

Kang Liang and Hsiao-Pi pulled themselves up straight, and looked at him. They'd never seen this man before. In his bright blue robe, with his long hair tied up in a small bun on top of his head, he looked the very image of a scholar.

The man looked at Kang Liang and asked, "Just now, why did you say there's no one in the jianghu any more?"

"The village's jianghu has disappeared." Kang Liang pointed to NiuTou Village as he put his shoes back on: "There used to be one, but then it disappeared, and now only the grasshoppers have a jianghu."

"You're mistaken," said the man. The jianghu has always been there. Why else would it be on people's lips all day long?" He continued, "It's like... the water tank is still a water tank, even when there's no water in it. The jianghu is always there."

The man looked up at the sky, and as though thinking aloud, said, "It looks like it's going to rain. Then there'll be water in the water tank again."

Kang Liang and Hsiao-Pi both looked up at almost exactly the same time. The sky was so blue! There wasn't a cloud in sight, so where was that rain going to come from?

"May I ask where you have come from, Sir? And where you are going?" Hsiao-Pi had never seen this man before. Most of the traders who passed through NiuTou Village were in a hurry and didn't have time to wander in the forest and enjoy the scenery.

"Not to worry, we'll meet again soon." As soon as he'd finished speaking, the man turned around and walked off into the forest. He'd only taken a few steps before he suddenly stopped, and glanced back at the two teenagers: "What you just said, about the grasshopper's jianghu, hmm, interesting. I like that, the grasshopper's jianghu. Haha, very interesting!"

The two teenagers watched as the man disappeared into the forest.

An eagle was circling the Thirteen Peaks, observing everything that moved. It glanced at the two boys, walking towards the village with baskets on their backs. But they weren't what it was looking for. The eagle had its eye on NiuTou Village, which, as its name implied, was the shape of a bull's head, with a large pond on its right horn, and a flock of ducks on the pond. The eagle circled in the air, looking for an opportunity. It had almost caught one – it had swooped down just as a duck was taking flight, but an old man sitting nearby had thrown something at the eagle and hit its wing, and it had had to drop the duck. He was sitting by the pond again. Today wasn't a good day.

Mr. Liu, the duck-farmer, was sitting on a deckchair by the lake, leisurely drinking tea, looking at the mountains and the people who passed by.

He enjoyed watching people coming and going.

NiuTou Village was at the foot of the Thirteen Peaks.

An ancient road connecting TaYi Town, NiuTou Village and LeiEr Town formed a trade route, which many people relied on for their living – small businesses and small traders – buying everyday items for others, running errands and delivering letters, making dozens of trips a year.

The Twenty One Peaks was a mountain range that stretched from TaYi Town to NiuTou Village and LeiEr Town, with the last peak rising from Mirror Lake in the outskirts of LeiEr Town. On the other side of the lake was ZhaoYao Mountain. If you took a boat across the lake, then walked round ZhaoYao Mountain, and through a forest, you'd come to the bustling Eastern City. From there it was three day's walk east to the capital where the Emperor lived.

Who was the Emperor now?

No one knew! NiuTou Village was just a small mountain town beyond the Emperor's control.

It didn't matter who the Emperor was, life just went on, didn't it?

If you were going from LeiEr to TaYi, you have to pass through NiuTou Village on the way. Once you'd reached TaYi, if you continued walking for another half day, you'd come to the Western City, which was almost as big as the Eastern City.

NiuTou Village nestles quietly in the mountains by the Laklak River, and over the course of several dynasties, has remained much the same, with no major development or decline. Whether you're coming from TaYi or LeiEr you have to pass through NiuTou Village, and you can only do so on foot. You can bring a mule or a donkey to carry your goods, but if you tried to ride a horse on the ancient road, you'd get your head smashed in.

Originally, people had just wanted to make a road, and had carved one out of the cliff. On one side of the road was the mountain wall, on the other was the sheer drop down to the rapids of the Laklak River that rushed past on its way to the Mirror Lake at LeiEr. The surface of the road was bumpy and uneven, with low odd-shaped rocks that had been left because they were too hard to cut through, so you had to watch your feet all the time and walk carefully. Trees growing out of the mountain side fought for space, their branches stretching horizontally over the road. The whole road was like that, bumpy and uneven underfoot, another natural stone wall shooting straight up to the sky, another branch sticking out over the road. The sky was so vast in those parts that as soon as you looked up, you could see a flawless blue sky, though the sun shone so brightly it hurt the eyes. Yet, on the road it was dark and damp, with the sun out of sight.

This ancient road carved out of the rock was the only direct route to TaYi or LeiEr. It was hard work walking on this road, and it was painful on the legs. People were always complaining: If only the road was a little wider! If only you could ride on horseback it would be so much faster! But, the strength to carve this road out of the rock had been exhausted hundreds of years earlier, and nowadays no one had time to carve into the rock any more, everyone was too busy!

And that's why the ancient road has remained unchanged for a thousand years.

NiuTou Village resembled a bull's head, with its horns curling towards the jagged mountain range, and the village houses densely packed on the ox's face. Beyond the ox's lower jaw was a big steep slope, down to a large sheer cliff, and at the bottom of the valley was the Laklak River.

NiuTou Village had more character than TaYi and LeiEr. It was small, and could not expand into a town even it wanted to because there was no more land on which to build houses. But there were twenty inns in the village, the same number as in TaYi and LeiEr combined. That's

a lot of inns for such a small place, but NiuTou Village needed them. Those long distance journeys meant traders heading for TaYi or LeiEr had to stay overnight in NiuTou Village. To walk from TaYi Town to NiuTou Village took a whole day. If you set out at dawn, you'd arrive at NiuTou Village when the sun was slipping down the mountains. You had to walk all the next day as well to reach LeiEr, and then get a boat to the Eastern City.

What kind of business needed two days of hard walking?

Where there are roads, villages and people, there will be business. There were porters, because the people of these two towns and one village needed others to run errands for them, and buy goods for them. The porters went back and forth all year round in order to sustain their families. There were people who sold medicine, and flour, and all kinds of materials, all of whom depended on the ancient road to make a living. Over time, people stopped thinking of themselves as passers-through, as they had friends everywhere in NiuTou Village. They stayed the night, ate a meal, drank wine, chatted, and made new friends.

Besides its well-developed guesthouse industry, NiuTou Village had another thriving industry. As it took a day to walk on ancient road from TaYi to NiuTou Village, and another day to complete your journey, it's not surprising people wore out their shoes.

There were three shoe repair shops in NiuTou Village. Two of them - CleverHands Shoe Repairs and SuperResistant Shoe Repairs were located on the bull's eyes, which were conspicuous positions at the entrance/exit to the village. But neither of them could match the reputation of Old Tsu's Shoe Repairs. [Lao means old. Tsu is a surname, but it also means tough. So you could think of the shop name as Tough Old Shoe Repairs]. Old Tsu's shop was on the bull's jawline on a road called Hanging Cliff Road, because when you walked to the end of the road there was a hanging cliff.

On Hanging Cliff Road there was a shoe repair shop, two inns, a shop selling baozi (steamed buns) and a barber's shop.

Hanging Cliff Road wasn't a main street, so you might wonder if a shoe repair shop could do well there?

It certainly could! Because Old Tsu was a veteran shoe repairer. The owners of the other two shops had previously been his apprentices. The elder one, Tien Kuei, had opened the CleverHands shop, and the younger one Ai Chi had opened the SuperResistant shop. Out of respect for Old Tsu they had not stolen his customers, and sometimes even passed business to him. Old Tsu had not only taught them his skills, he had also taught them how to behave.

How often had they heard the words that hung on Old Tsu's lips: "If you want to earn money, stitch a good pair of shoes for someone. If you want peace of mind, don't be greedy. If you want to sleep at night, don't say bad things about people."

Old Tsu's full name was Tsu Ta-Chuang [Tsu means coarse, Ta-Chuang means big and strong] which was the exact opposite of his physical appearance. He was dark-skinned and thin, and had kept a beard the length of a finger joint for years. He'd lost all his hair, not that any of the men in NiuTou Village cared if they were bald or not, because they covered their head all year round with either a turban or a fur hat, and the only thing they cared about was whether their

turban looked good and whether they had style. Wearing a turban had been a tradition in NiuTou Village for who knows how many generations. Young and old, the men kept their hair short or shaved it off, and wore a turban, replacing it with a fur hat when it snowed in winter. The turban was such a special accessory that you could be in the remotest corner of the world and people would know at a glance that you were from NiuTou Village.

What about the women of NiuTou? They tied a headscarf around their waists, which was not so different to the men wearing a turban, and some women tied their hair up with a headscarf.

“Your village is so weird. You have perfectly good hair, why do you go and shave it all off?”

“We think hair looks ugly. And it gets in the way,” every man in NiuTou answered the same way.

“What do you mean, it gets in the way? Hair just grows quietly. What does it get in the way of?”

“Long hair smells when you sweat. And it’s such a nuisance having to wash it and trim it. And it’s a pain when you sleep: it pulls on your scalp when you try to turn over. You feel all refreshed when it’s shaved off.” Every man in NiuTou answered the same way.

Old Tsu took off his black turban, scratched an itch on his scalp, and when he felt comfortable, he put his turban back on again.

After he had completely handed over the shoe repairing work to Hsiao-Pi, Old Tsu liked to sit by the door, smoking his tobacco pipe, hanging around, commenting on the shoes and gait of everyone who went in or out of the Mak family guesthouse directly opposite his shop. The guesthouse was built on higher ground, and you had to walk up ten stone steps before you could see the hall inside.

“The way this one walks is very natural. You see that one, he walks with his feet pointing outwards, away from his body, like a big duck. The way people walk is set when they are little and have just learned to walk. After they have learned to stand, they have to practice until they can walk. At that age you can’t teach them to walk; they have to learn it themselves. Some people move with an effortless elegance, like a jade tree in the wind, and others walk with their feet pointing inwards or outwards, waddling like pigeons and ducks. Not that you can blame them! It’s destiny!”

“Most girls walk nicely! I’ve never seen a girl who walks like a duck,” said Hsiao-Pi.

It’s sad that the girls’ mothers force them to learn how to walk again.

Old Tsu watched as Hsiao-Pi sat at the work counter concentrating on the shoes he was mending. He was working on a pair that had big holes worn through in the soles, and gaping fronts where the stitching had burst around the toes. The customer had come into the shop with vines holding the toe parts together. He’d carefully removed the load from his shoulders, taken off his shoes, and with an apologetic look on his face, handed them to Hsiao-Pi. “Young man, I’m sorry to bring them in this condition.”

Hsiao-Pi accepted them with a smile. “Master Chen, would tomorrow morning be ok?” When there are a lot of shoes waiting to be repaired, a shoemaker will work late at night to catch up, so that customers can collect them the next day before starting their journey.

“Young man, I’ll sit here and wait. Take your time. These shoes are in a terrible state, will you be able to repair them?”

“Yes, I can repair them,” said Hsiao-Pi, as he got up from his seat. He poured some water for Master Chen, and went straight back to his workbench. He would have to work fast.

Anyone who could afford it would buy new shoes and walk in comfort. The road was long, and whether they were going east-west or west-east, they’d be walking all day. When you have a good pair of shoes and good scenery all the way, walking is a pleasure, it doesn’t feel like work. Some people’s shoes were worn to shreds, but they held on to them, because they couldn’t afford to buy new ones, and had to make do and mend. Most of the people on the ancient road were porters, carrying other people, and earning just enough to feed the family. Buying shoes was an expense they couldn’t afford, so they’ll make their shoes last as long as they can! When they have them repaired, they could get another six months out of them.

Hsiao-Pi wore a long leather apron that covered his thigh, and sat behind the solid log table, on which he cut leather. To the right was a shelf, from which hung a round leather bag, with pockets of various sizes, in which he kept a variety of cobbler’s tools: an awl, brush, mallet, knife for cutting leather and scissors. Behind the shelf was a cupboard, where he kept various skins and hides: calfskin, sheepskin and so on.

Hsiao-Pi enjoyed sitting there, working in what had been Old Tsu’s seat. His own seat had been in a corner, with piles of straw and bulrushes. The first thing he’d learned as an apprentice was how to make straw shoes. But Old Tsu had gone back to making straw shoes, because that was something he could still do now that he couldn’t see so well any more. Old Tsu used to say that he makes straw shoes with his eyes closed. Old Tsu wore his own home-made straw shoes all year round, he said the most comfortable shoes were those that let the toes breathe, that straw shoes were cheap, and you could replace them the moment they got smelly.

Old Tsu sat with his legs crossed, right leg over left, leisurely drinking tea. His eyesight was not what it used to be, it was too blurry to mend shoes any more, so he had handed the shop to Hsiao-Pi over a year ago. He was happy to hang around the shop all day, or go to drink tea and chat with Old Iron at the blacksmiths. He’d even had a go at striking iron to keep up the strength in his arms, and you didn’t need good eyesight to do that. Anyway, he liked to have ten pairs of straw shoes hanging on the wall. The moment it slipped below ten, he would make a new pair to hang up! And if they sold a few pairs, then he’d make a few new pairs to replace them. Having ten pairs on the wall was neat and tidy, and made him feel good.

Hsiao-Pi was thirteen now. A small, thin boy, he was quick-thinking, good with his hands and hard working. Thirteen years earlier, Old Tsu’s apprentice Ai Chi was opening the shop early one morning and found a bamboo basket by the door. Inside the basket was a brightly colored cloth wrapped around a little baby, with a little pink face. It was quietly twirling its hands as though it was perfectly happy. Sixteen-year-old Ai Chi stared blankly at the baby for a long time, before rushing into Old Tsu’s bedroom, shouting, “There’s a baby, there’s a baby... I’ve got to open up... only there’s a baby by the door.”

Old Tsu and Ai Chi stood by the door, looking down at the baby. It wasn't crying or making a fuss. Old Tsu looked up and glanced all around, to see if there was anyone hiding in the shadows watching whether the child would be taken or not, but it was still dark.

"Whoever left the baby in our doorway, clearly wants us to bring it up! So that's what we'll do! And when it grows up it can be an apprentice." Old Tsu picked up the baby and brought it inside.

Old Tsu made a little bamboo bed, added four little wheels, and rolled it back and forth with his foot, rocking the baby while he repaired shoes. When Hsiao-Pi had grown up, Old Tsu kept that little bamboo bed in his bedroom.

Next door to the shoe repair shop was the Kang family's baozi shop. They had a brand new baby, called Kang Liang, and the mother agreed to breastfeed Hsiao-Pi as well. After a few days, Old Tsu had someone bring an ewe from LeiEr, and put Ai Chi in charge of milking it. So Hsiao-Pi grew up drinking sheep's milk.

Old Tsu had Hsiao-Pi call him Master, rather than Dad, because he knew that one day his real parents would turn up at the door, and want him to call them Mum and Dad. And when that day came, he could treat the boy as an apprentice who's finished training and is setting out into the big wide world. That way, it would not be so painful to let him go.

Tsu Hsiao-Pi was Tsu's most pleasing apprentice. The boy truly loved mending shoes, he was never lazy, and was willing to do anything. When the Kangs needed a hand in the baozi shop, he'd leap up, go next door and help carry a few sacks of flour. Tien Kuei and Ai Chi were at the shop for three years and nine months, and when their apprenticeship was completed, they quickly set up their own businesses. By the time he was seven, Hsiao-Pi could stitch together a pair of cloth shoes. He was thirteen now, and had mastered all the skills, and he couldn't be an apprentice forever! Old Tsu couldn't hold him back. He couldn't stop him from going out into the world just because he'd raised him himself! It was time to let him do his own thing.