

# World building in Word of Honor

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by Kalany, last edited 25 February 2025.

## Magic levels

This story is somewhere around the high end of wuxia magic, I think; it's not really approaching xianxia like *The Untamed*. Magic definitely is real, but it's mostly useful for small personal things, like jump-gliding over the treetops, heating your wine, and of course martial arts. Think *The Princess Bride* levels of magic.

The level of power correlates pretty well to the non-Neo humans of *The Matrix*, or the average Jedi if you take out the precognitive parts.

## The map

As with many such stories, this one mostly handwaves geography and travel times, though not as much as MXTX does. In general, Jin is in the north roughly where Qishan is in *The Untamed*; the Central Plains are east of it. Our story takes place south of that, almost entirely along the banks of the Yangtze River; this area is called Yue in the story, which is a term for Generic Southern China.

What's notable about this area is that it's sort of the Wild West of China in many fantasy shows: a place that is *legally* part of China and where the Emperor does have some control, but that is *de facto* run by the Jianghu and the martial arts sects.

## The Jianghu

This is a term for the world of martial artists. This is not quite the same as the cultivation world in *The Untamed*, but not entirely unlike it either.

There is a general trope in Chinese historical dramas where the Jianghu is a sort of opt-in PVP mode for life that is moderately outside the political control of the Emperor. People in the Jianghu can fight *each other* and kill each other subject to the rules of the Jianghu, without getting in trouble with the law. There are rules for conduct in the Jianghu, but they're enforced by other Jianghu martial artists coming to kill you if you break them.

However, at the same time, people of the Jianghu are also citizens of China with all the political and legal stuff that implies, and may have important roles in both spheres. We will see multiple people in this story who are involved in both "secular" (for lack of a better term) politics and Jianghu politics.

It's a little bit like the American idea of separation between church and state, if priests ran around with swords killing each other.

Generally the trope is that the Emperor lets the Jianghu do whatever the hell it wants as long as it isn't bothering people too much. However, he's still the 800lb gorilla in the room—a martial arts sect might have a few hundred people, but the Emperor can muster a few *hundred thousand* troops. If a sect pisses him off enough, he *will* eventually win just by sheer numbers.