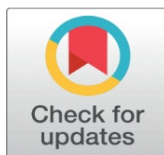


UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSNATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Chinese science fiction, a subset of the fastest-growing global science fiction, has been largely overlooked by mainstream literature in China. Despite facing socio-political and economic turmoil, it has slowly made a mark in contemporary literature. As society changes, science and technology advance, and the shadow of history remains, new generations of Chinese science fiction writers have successfully triggered its development. Currently, the number of Chinese sci-fi writings has increased rapidly, and some great paradigms are even included in textbooks. However, the emergence of globalization has played a significant role in popularizing Chinese science fiction overseas. Science fiction films and television works that focus on Chinese themes and show Chinese imagination and culture are increasingly recognized, injecting new ideas into China's science fiction industry. Chinese science fiction has always had a transnational nature due to the global presence of overseas Chinese literati and the growing country's stature. A lot has been talked and researched on the development of Chinese science fiction within China, however little has been talked regarding the genre's potential to become a global phenomenon. Through this paper the researcher has tried to examine the inherent potential of Chinese science fiction as transnational cultural tool for becoming a key contributor to global science fiction.

Keywords: Chinese Science Fiction, Sci-Fi Literature, Transnational Tool, Chinese Characteristics, Global Phenomenon

1. INTRODUCTION

History of Science fiction literature in China is not very long. It has always been under the shadow of the mainstream literature. It was basically not taken seriously and considered to be merely a un factor for Children. But advancement in Science-tech in present times has helped the genre shrug off the past image. Considering this fact, Hou (2019) has rightly mentioned "Whether you like science fiction or not, the social reality we are facing is becoming more and more like science fiction." (Hou, 2019, p1). As for origin of Science Fiction as an important literary domain globally is concerned, science fiction researchers usually cautiously adopt a juxtaposition discussion method, that is, listing historical perspectives without drawing conclusions. It has traces dating back to industrial revolution era and 'Mary Shelley' is learnt to be the mother of Science Fiction (1797-1851) (Zhāng, 2020, pp. 2-4).

The development of modern natural science has enabled human beings to gain deeper and deeper insight into the secrets of the material world and master the laws of nature. This has also provided humans with the possibility to use scientific knowledge accumulated over thousands of years to more effectively utilize, control, and transform the natural world. This is the basis for science fiction novels. If in the past, people could only express their vision for the future through myths and folklore, today, people can dream about tomorrow based on the solid foundation of modern scientific achievements. Science fiction is a literary style that describes how humans will fight against nature in the future (Gao, 2017, p1).

Science fiction has a tradition of describing space exploration. Jules Verne once used a travel story full of technological elements to take his protagonist to the moon. After 1949, contemporary Chinese science fiction writers had a strong interest in technology and the universe, and created a large number of works describing space exploration. Describing about the mystery associated with Chinese science fiction, Wang has said:

Chinese science fiction has remained largely mysterious to the outside world until recently. In 2015, Liu Cixin (刘慈欣) won the first Hugo Award for Asia with his novel *The Three-Body Problem* (《三体》) and in August 2016, Hao Jingfang (郝景芳) won the second with her novelette *Folding Beijing* (《北京折叠》) — both translated by Ken Liu, a Hugo-winning Chinese-American author. (Wang, 2016)

This paper tries to analyze the development of Chinese science fiction as a different, unique but still a futuristic genre and further investigate the transnational impact and cultural exchange between China and outside world duly facilitated by Chinese science fiction.

Owing to generation and enforcements of its own unique ideologies as well circumstantially led policies, China by and large has been aloof in its exchanges with outside world specially in its Cultural exchanges however post semi-colonial era, China has been gradual opening its main doors towards outside world however despite concerted efforts made by the Chinese government, the dissemination of Chinese culture outside has not been very successful. There is no second thought about the fact that “Chinese science fiction (sci-fi) has attracted increasing global attention and may be an important cultural tool to express a Chinese narrative abroad” (Junker, 2019, p24). Little has been published on Chinese sci-fi as a global product; much of the previous study on the subject has been on Chinese sci-fi as a domestic literary product that has been consumed inside China (Junker, 2019, p24). The researcher attempts to investigate how Chinese science fiction literature functions as a global cultural instrument in this work.

This paper therefore commence the methodology of research by initiating the process by first peeping into the period of evolution and development of Chinese Sci-Fi literature that dates back to late Qing dynastic era further leaping gradually to relatively mature form in the present times duly covering the major periods covering the evolution of themes and narratives of this genre, Transnational nature of science fiction literature, its cultural amalgamation and role in promoting global dialogue. The paper further takes into account the case studies of representative Chinese science fiction work along with the comparative analysis with international counterparts finally digging into the opportunities and challenges encountered in cross cultural transformation thereby concluding the overall impact of Chinese Sci-Fi literature on the global front.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

Literature expresses events, facts, perceptions, and theories in an environment and is subject to changes in the environment. Literature is an environmental product that grows in a civilized environment. It evolves with the development of its conditions and is completely affected by the scientific, material, and Impact of economic and technological development. In the 19th century, science and technology developed first in Europe. Literature and modern science and technology were intertwined, and a new generation appeared in the world. A new type of literary creation emerged which is known as science fiction literature. As per the common belief "Mary Shelley" was the first writer to incorporate science fiction themes into the writing of novels. Her horror novel *Frankenstein* was published in 1818 CE, which marks the beginning of Science Fiction Literature.

It is believed that the May Fourth Movement reflected the introduction of scientific thought in the PRC, while Liu Cixin's novel *The Three-Body Problem* triggered 'science fiction craze' in recent years. 'Science fiction' as a genre is closely

integrated with Chinese novels about gods, demons and monsters. We have learned about the enlightenment of the May 4th Movement, which is the aspect of the May 4th Movement that 'investigates things to achieve knowledge', while science fiction literature is the other side of the May 4th Movement that 'investigates things to achieve illusion'.

Chinese science fiction literature has experienced a long development process. From its early budding stage to its resurgence in the early 21st century, to its contemporary prosperity, Chinese science fiction literature has gradually matured, presenting diverse styles and themes.

Early Development

The early development of science fiction literature in China may be traced from the beginning of the 20th century. Science fiction as we know it now originated in China during the late Qing era. Chinese thinkers such as Lu Xun and Liang Qichao emphasized on the role of science fiction in promoting national prosperity. The first foreign science fiction in China was Jules Verne's *Round the World in Eighty Days*, which was translated into Chinese for the first time in 1900 by Chen Shoupeng and Xue Shaohui (Wang, 2016, para 6). Jules Verne's *from the Earth to the Moon* and *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*, which were first published in Chinese in 1903 and 1906, respectively, are two examples of science fiction books that Lu Xun, perhaps the most famous author in modern Chinese literature, translated into Chinese (Liu, n.d., sec 24; Wang, 2016, sec 1). Since, Lu Xun having limited knowledge of French, he translated the novels using Inoue Tsutomu's Japanese version. The first Chinese science fiction novel, *Colony of the Moon* (《月球殖民地》), was written by Huangjiang Diaosou (荒江钓叟, penname of an unnamed author, which means the "Old Fisherman by a Deserted River") and serialized in a newspaper called *Illustrated Fiction* (《绣像小说》) in 1905 (Wang, 2016, sec 1).

Recovery in the early 21st Century

In 21st century, with the fast-paced development of China's economy and the implementation of its opening-up policy, Chinese science fiction literature has ushered in a revival. During this period, Chinese science fiction writers achieved significant improvements in both quantity and creative quality. In 2015 and 2016, the influence of Chinese science fiction expanded rapidly, and the number and themes of creations continued to increase. The works of new generation writers such as Han Song, Wang Jinkang and others show rich imagination and strong critical spirit, making Chinese science fiction literature gradually mature.

Contemporary Prosperity

Entering the contemporary era, Chinese science fiction literature has ushered in unprecedented prosperity. With the continuous advancement in science and technology, people are paying more and more attention to the future and science and technology, providing a broad space for the development of Chinese science fiction literature. On the basis of inheriting tradition, contemporary Chinese science fiction writers continue to explore new expression techniques and themes, so that Chinese science fiction literature presents diverse styles and characteristics (Wú, 2013).

Themes & Narratives of Chinese Science fiction

First cultural theme of Chinese Sci-Fi literature is saving the country. Since the first science fiction novel *Moon Colony Novel*, saving the country had become an accompanying content of Chinese science fiction literature. A typical work is *China Ten Years Later* created by Qingfeng in 1923. The protagonist in the novel invented a WWW light. Under the guidance of this light, China defeated corruption and also defeated the world's powers. Until the 1990s, this national-saving feature gradually faded and was gradually replaced by the issue of searching for the position of the Chinese and the Chinese nation in a state of globalization.

Yearning for rationality is the second cultural theme. It believes that the Chinese people's cultural background and lifestyle lack rationality and need to be updated. The late famous writer Zheng Wenguang proposed, "The so-called science fiction creation is to create in a scientific way" (1982). Science has a powerful ability to understand the world. Lu Xun also proposed that science fiction literature can "lead the Chinese people to move forward" (1902). Science in science fiction novels is not actually scientific education, but a synonym for guiding rationality. This is just one example drawn from the many cultural themes found in science fiction literature. But even from the perspective of these two themes, the main issue in Chinese science fiction literature is indeed an issue related to modernization. If modernization is seen as a process of gradual growth of modernity, then it itself is a problem of modernity.

Transnational Nature of Chinese Science fiction

Science fiction has had a complex history in China, influenced by political and cultural factors. Western culture is future focused. It values debate, change, science, individualism, creativity. All these things are useful for science fiction writing. However Chinese culture is past focused. It values tradition, societal stability, mysticism, agreeableness, collective thinking, continuity of the present to the past. These Things are not so useful for science fiction. In the past, Chinese science fiction was shaped by government censorship and control, which limited the exploration of certain futuristic themes. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in science fiction in China, with a new generation of writers and filmmakers exploring the genre. Chinese science fiction is increasingly gaining international recognition, and the genre is becoming more prominent in Chinese culture. Chinese Science Fiction always had scope of going global.

Globalization and the market economy were two key elements that contributed to the explosion of Chinese science fiction writing on the worldwide market in the early 1990s. A freer literary creation emerged as a result of the rivalry that arose as China's economy transitioned from a planned to a market economy (Vielsäcker, 2017). Also, the mass media helped to create a pop culture and market Chinese culture, which helped the genre overcome its bad reputation from the 1983 so-called Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign. Online literature played a crucial role in promoting the transnational context of Chinese Science Fiction Literature.

Role of Chinese Science fiction as Cross-Cultural Tool

Vielsäcker in his article "Understanding the Dynamics of China Through Science Fiction" states that:

Although first exchanges with readers and writers from outside China already took place in the 1980s, globalization brought completely new opportunities of international communication. The internet became a central platform for Chinese writers. Many of them initially published online, where they enjoyed great popularity among the young. In 1991, China's major genre magazine Science Fiction World (Kehuan Shijie) hosted the annual conference of the World Science Fiction Association in Chengdu. Numerous international authors were also invited to the Beijing International Science Fiction Convention in 1997. Conferences like these marked the opening of the Chinese science fiction community to the rest of the world. (Vielsäcker, 2017, sec3)

Three international conventions have taken place in China in the history of Chinese science fiction: the 2007 International Science Fiction & Fiction Convention, the 1997 Beijing International Conference on Science Fiction, and the yearly World Science Fiction Conference in 1991. Science Fiction World's then-president, Yang Xiao, attended the annual World Science Fiction conference in San Marino in 1989 and was granted the honor of hosting it in Chengdu, China in 1991 (Wang, n.d., sec24). Yang did not speak English well and had never dealt with overseas experts earlier. Despite of having both, internal and international challenges, Yang combining with others, done well to overcome them. The conference was widely supported by the government and proved to be a huge success. (Wang, 2016). The Hugo-winning magazine *Clarkesworld* started a Chinese Science Fiction translation project in 2015 supported by Storycom, a Chinese company dedicated to turning science fiction stories into movies/comic/games (Wang, 2016, para 2). Today English-language magazines such as *Clarkesworld* and *Lightspeed* are regularly offering translated Chinese science fiction short stories to the global readership (Sòng and Wāng, 2022, section 2; Wang, 2016, para 1).

3. CONCLUSION

Chinese Science Fiction literature is the latest and fastest developing trend of Science Fiction literary genre in contemporary literary period having Chinese characteristics with its traces deeply rooted into the Chinese soil. Although its beginning dates back to late Qing dynasty period but the real boom of Chinese Science Fiction literature happened only after 1989 when Liu Cixin (刘慈欣) the most accomplished author of Chinese Science Fiction wrote *China 2185* (中国2185). However most notable change taking place in this genre was initiated through Chinese sci-fi translation process in 2014, when Liu Cixin written *The Three-Body Problem* was translated by Ken Liu into English. The translation attracted international attention and helped other Chinese sci-fi writers become well-known outside of China. The globalization of Chinese sci-fi has been facilitated by the mediascape and the technoscape. Alongside the globalization, development of internet era and cross-cultural communication has pushed the spread of Chinese Science Fiction all across the globe. Chinese government pro-Sci-fi policies and increasing interest of young writers as well as readers in science and

technology field has remarkably changed the prospects of Chinese Sci-fi literature (Shenoy, 2019, para 8; Song, 2015, p7). There's a long way to go as far as realising the potential of becoming a transnational tool is concerned, yet a for Chinese Sci-fi literature a good beginning has been made. It may be said that, coming years would certainly be fruitful for Sci-fi fiction in China.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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