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NATIONAL ALLEGORY IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION:
CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION AND ITS CULTURAL POLITICS SINCE THE 1990s

1. Introduction

In the summer of 2012, I was on a panel on Chinese science fiction at Chicon 7. One of the attendees asked me and the other Chinese writers a tough question: “What makes Chinese science fiction Chinese?” I have been thinking about the answer to this question since then. In this paper, I would like to provide some clues, or a framework of reference, by giving an overview of Chinese science fiction since the 1990s as well as offering some analysis of its specific contexts.

2. Fears and hopes in the era of globalization: a summary

The question about Chinese science fiction is not easy to answer, and everyone will have a different response. It is true, however, that for the last century or so, “Chinese science fiction” has occupied a rather unique place in the culture and literature of modern China.

The science fiction literary genre, flourishing in modernized regions, reflects human fears and hopes springing from the chaotic energies of economic and social changes within the context of capitalist expansion. Science fiction’s creative inspirations - massive machinery, new modes of transportation, global travel, and exploration of space - are the results of processes of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization, which have roots in modern capitalism. However, when science fiction stories were first introduced, via translation, to China at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were mostly treated as fantasies and dreams of modernity, a material that could be woven into the construction of a “China Dream”. “China Dream” here refers to reconstructing the Chinese people’s dream in order to promote the revival and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the modern era. In

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1 Chicon 7 was the Seventieth World Science Fiction Convention, held in Chicago from 30 August to 3 September 2012.
other words, the Chinese had to wake up from their 5000-year old dream of being an ancient civilization, and start to dream of becoming a democratic, independent and prosperous modern nation state.

As a result, the first works of science fiction in Chinese were seen, in the words of the famous writer Lu Xun (1903), as literary tools for “improving thinking and assisting culture (改良思想，补助文明)”. On the one hand, these early works, as myths of science, enlightenment, and development based on imitating “the West” / “the world” / “modernity”, attempted to bridge the gap between reality and dream. On the other hand, the limitations of their historical context endowed them with deeply Chinese characteristics that only emphasized the depth of the chasm between dream and reality.

The end of the Cold War, and the accelerating integration of China into global capitalism in the 1990s, led to a process of dramatic transformations in politics, economics, social structure, culture, and everyday life. The ultimate demand at the time was the application of market principles to all aspects of social life, and this was especially visible in the shock and destruction visited upon traditions by economic rationality. This led, in Habermas’ (1987, p. 355) own words, to the rationalization and colonization of the lifeworld by the instrumental rationality of the market-forces. In the context of the present paper, the colonized lifeworld includes both the old ways of life in rural China, and the previous equality-oriented socialist ideology. Thus, as China experienced its great transformation, science fiction moved away from future dreams about modernization to approach a far more complex social reality.

In Europe and America, science fiction derives its creative energy and source material from Western historical experiences of political and economic modernization, and, through highly allegorical forms, it transforms the fears and hopes of humanity for its own fate into dreams and nightmares. After deriving a variety of settings, images, cultural codes and narrative tropes from Western science fiction, Chinese science fiction writers have gradually constructed a cultural field and symbolic space of their own. This space is provided with a certain degree of autonomy from mainstream literature and other popular literary genres, such as swordsman stories, romantic stories, Japanese ACG (or anime, comics and games), fantasy novels, etc. Thus, some classical science fiction themes, such as the struggle between humans and androids, or the adoption of the “new human being” in place of the “old human being”, have become representative of the colonization of the lifeworld by instrumental rationality.

According to Fredric Jameson (1981, p. 17), narrative conceived in certain cultural

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1 In Habermas’s social theory, the lifeworld (German: Lebenswelt) is more or less the “background” environment of competences, practices, and attitudes representable in terms of one's cognitive horizon, the lived realm of informal, culturally-grounded understandings and mutual accommodations. Rationalization and colonization of the lifeworld by the instrumental rationality of bureaucracies and market-forces is a primary concern of Habermas's two-volume Theory of Communicative Action.
structures can be regarded as “a socially symbolic act” which collectively reflects political unconsciousness. In this sense, Chinese science fiction in the era of post-revolution, dating from the 1990s to the present, can be read as a national allegory in the age of globalization.

During this period, a group of up-and-coming writers called “Cenozoic Era” (新生代) have become the leading force of Chinese science fiction. This group can be roughly divided into three subgroups.

The first subgroup is a flock of “the post-1970s generation”, i.e. young writers living and working in big cities, who express their quest and confusion by portraying a “superfluous man” in a modern (or postmodern) dystopia.

The second subgroup consists of three older male engineers from third-tier cities, namely He Xi, Liu Cixin and Wang Jinkang (何夕, 刘慈欣, 王晋康). Their work is defined as “core SF” (核心科幻). This subgroup has developed literary standards and narrative modes for newcomers to follow.

The third subgroup has a representative named Han Song (韩松), a journalist working at the Overseas Department of Xinhua News Agency, whose dark imagery is haunted by the ruptures and chaos of China’s reality and history. Critics generally view his work as pervaded with political irony and far from leisure reading.

Liu, Wang and Han are regarded as “the three generals” of Chinese science fiction (Echo 2012).

The so-called “core science fiction” was first defined by Wang Jinkang (2011), who states: “Most of the natural-science-oriented novels by Wang Jinkang, Liu Cixin and He Xi can be ranked as the core science fiction, while Han Song’s humanity-oriented work is largely non-core”. Wang Jinkang points out that “core science fiction” has three elementary characteristics: aesthetic features deriving from scientific systems; stories totally imbued with a scientific spirit or scientific rationality; and certain topical aspects, such as a long historical span, and the major role played by humankind as a whole rather than by individuals.

Overall, Chinese science fiction writers are faced with a particular historical condition. On the one hand, the failure of Communism as an alternative for overcoming the crises of capitalism means that the crises of capitalist culture, accompanied by the process of globalization, are manifest in the daily lives of the Chinese people. On the other hand, China, after a series of traumas caused by economic reforms, and after paying a heavy price for development, has managed to take off economically and resurge globally. The simultaneous presence of crisis and prosperity results in a range of attitudes toward humankind’s future among writers: pessimists believe that we are powerless against irresistible natural laws; the hopeful maintain that human ingenuity will ultimately triumph; and others view history as a loop (an “eternal recurrence”), and resort to ironic observations on the absurdities of post-modern life.

Chinese people once believed that science, technology, and the courage to dream would
propel them forward to catch up with the developed nations of the West. However, now that Western science fiction and other cultural products are filled with imaginative visions of humanity’s gloomy destiny, Chinese science fiction writers and readers can no longer treat the question “where are we going?” as a solved dilemma.

The context outlined above opens new perspectives on some of the problems created by modernity in contemporary China.

3. An analysis: world, hero and race

In Chinese science fiction works since the 1990s, a pair of keywords manifest themselves frequently: evolution and choice. In a number of texts, due to the pressure of evolution, humans or other sentient races are reluctantly forced to make cruel choices. In the name of “the struggle for existence”, capitalist market laws are represented as unarguably “natural laws”, or the only rules of the entire game. This means that such laws have to be obeyed by all species and races, including humans, androids, cyborgs, aliens, and any other intelligent beings. It seems that the higher the level one species develops (or evolves) to, the more aggressively it behaves.

In the following sections of the present essay (3.1 to 3.4), I intend to provide some analysis of these works by illustrating one example in detail - a story by Liu Weijia (1998) entitled “The small town below the high tower” (刘维佳, 《高塔下的小镇》). I will first describe its plot, and subsequently elaborate on three significant topics: world image, hero image, and race image.

3.1. Summary of “The small town below the high tower”

The very beginning of “The small town below the high tower” introduces us to an idyllic beautiful town. A magical high tower stands upright in its center, firing death rays to shoot down all the living beings overstepping its boundaries. Outside this town, different races and tribes struggle against one another constantly. Although some of them cast greedy eyes on this peaceful town, they finally fail to invade it, and they leave corpses alongside the boundaries.

The narrator, a young peasant grown up in the town, named Catalpa (阿梓), has been enjoying his uneventful life. However, his childhood sweetheart, Crystal (水晶), yearns to know the outside world, and stays in the only town library day and night.

She tells Catalpa her terrible discovery: their ancestors built this tower to create an ideal utopia three hundred years before, but since then the town stopped its developpping, and finally became “a useless pebble abandoned by the evolutionary world”, a place with no
hope.

Finally, Crystal makes up her mind to leave the town and chase her dream outside, while Catalpa stops inside the boundaries with hesitation and agony.

3.2. The two worlds

In Crystal’s words, the small town is depressing because it “has no history”:

“In the past 300 years, life here has hardly changed. The caravans have been bringing us more and more kinds of commodities, but we only have grains to exchange. Our town has no history, since every year copies the past one. People endure birth and death like insects, but have nothing left - no stories, no names, no faces. Quickly and thoroughly they become forgotten [...]. The population here has reached a standstill long time ago. Everything is so peaceful and harmonious. What is most curious is that no one deviates from their simple folkways to indulge in sensual desires” (Liu Weijia 1998, p. 12).

Meanwhile, a gang of radical youths in the town admires the outside world, where “big civilizations swallow up small ones. Some of them will monopolize or carve up the whole world. Only the strong can make a history, while the weak will at best serve as their paving stones”. Agitated by the will to power, they become dissatisfied with the easy life of the town, and hunger for “joining the rank of the strong, or even overriding them” (Liu Weijia 1998, p. 12).

Concerning the inside and outside worlds kept apart by the tower, we need an historical study to unearth the complexity of this spatial structure.

On the surface layer, this story seems to be a universal allegory of human civilization, constructed by a series of classical binary oppositions: stagnation and evolution, agriculture and civilization, pre-modern and modern.

However, under the surface, we can see the second layer, that is related to concepts expressed by Liang Qichao (1989) in his masterpiece The new historiography (《新史学》), published around the turn of the last century. Liang pointed out the difference between “race with history” (历史的人种) and “race without history” (非历史的人种). He viewed history as a narration of the evolution of ethics propelled by competition. Since China had unified the whole empire and lost her competitiveness in peace, she was finally expelled from the historical stage by Western powers. “The small town below the high tower” would seem to express precisely this allegorical meaning.

The third layer has to do with changes that took place in the 1980s, when the hegemony of Mao’s revolutionary discourse was undermined by admiration for “the Western modern world”. This contradiction reappeared and became prevalent in the popular media in terms
of “blue maritime civilization” versus “yellow continental civilization”, namely the
democratic and open Western countries versus closed and ossified China. The target of, and
desire for “integration into the world” (与世界接轨) forced the Chinese people to fill in
the ideological blanks by embracing the logic of global capitalism heart and soul, and by
turning to the discourse of social Darwinism. This ideological change is reflected in the
above-quoted assertion in the story that “only the strong can make a history, while the
weak will at best serve as their paving stones”.

Finally, on the fourth layer, we can refer to Liu Weijia’s painful thoughts. As an
educated “post-1970s” young-man struggling for life in a fringe city, watching and
experiencing various hardships during the great transformation of China, he infuses his
confusion and anxiety into science fiction writing.

In this sense, Liu Weijia’s portrayal of the two worlds represents a particularly
prototypical spatial structure in Chinese science fiction: a fragile human world, in which
peaceful people dwell poetically, suffering the shock of a menacing gigantic inhuman
world. Since the historical sequel of events required by evolution (or development)
determines the hierarchy of diverse civilizations, “the underdeveloped” will sooner or later
be invaded and exterminated by “the developed”.

This process was described in the nineteenth century in The communist manifesto:

“It [the bourgeoisie] compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois
mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst,
i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image […].
Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and
semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of
bourgeois, the East on the West” (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 18).

The dilemma of “evolution” and “choice” has further versions. Let us see Liu Cixin’s
variant.

In 2007, Liu Cixin, one of the most notable science fiction writers, had an influential
argument with Jiang Xiaoyuan, a science history professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University,
when Liu proposed the same dilemma in another way: “subsistence or humanity?” He
meant: confronting a crisis facing all of humankind, should we dispose of humanity in
order to survive like animals, or should we stick to humanity until final extinction? Liu
admitted: “Since I began writing science fiction, this question has been lingering in my
mind for a long time. Which choice is more reasonable?” (Wang Yan 2007).

In Three-body II: Dark forest (《三体 II: 黑暗森林》), the second part of the Three-body
trilogy, Liu (2008, pp. 441-449) imagines a cosmic sociological theory called “dark forest
theory”, namely a Hobbesian brutal world where “all against all” is the rule. In this
situation, human beings, who jumped into that dark forest involuntarily, are forced to make
a series of cruel decisions, while tough heroes proclaim their slogan: “Lose humanity, lose a lot; lose animality, lose all!” (Liu Cixin 2010, p. 382).

3.3. The hero’s duty

As mentioned above, the definition and prominence of core science fiction induce numerous debates among the Chinese science fiction community. However, in some sense, the criteria of core science fiction substantially depend not so much on the “science spirit” as on the hero’s ethos and his attitude to humanity’s destiny.

In order to illuminate this difference, we can make a comparison between the two main characters in “The small town below the high tower”. Crystal believes her personal worth and meaning of life is determined by the destination of human history. She describes this sublime mission as follows:

“If we shirk our duty to the evolution of mankind, the evolutionary force would be weakened and the process towards our desperately longed for destination would be delayed. We can’t turn a blind eye on that. That’s our mission! Evolution is the mission of life! Succumbing to fear so as to avoid duty is shameful! Too Shameful!” (Liu Weijia 1998, p. 19).

By contrast, Catalpa, although deeply touched by Crystal’s enthusiasm, is too afraid of “the burden of evolution” to follow her steps. He realizes that Crystal and he are two different kinds of people: “She is an innate romantic idealist while I am only a buttoned-down peasant. [...] She pursues the glory which I recognize as daydream”.

The difference between these young people can be interpreted as a reflection of one of the most typical symptoms of post-revolutionary youths, that is “personal meaninglessness”, as Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 9) expounds it: “the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer becomes a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity. [...] ‘Existential isolation’ is not so much a separation of individuals from others as a separation from the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence”. Catalpa’s adoration of Crystal can be regarded as an inner thirst for a self-transcendent and meaningful life. However, what he lacks is identification of the individual with historical totality. In other words, he cannot consider himself to be a mediator of the ultimate happiness of human beings as Crystal does.

Generally speaking, in core science fiction stories, heroes dramatically show a sense of duty to the collective destiny that propels them to search for the truth, they provide thorough explanations for the big picture, they give imagined solutions, and they build fortifications to protect humanity.
A simplified analogy can be drawn as follows. If He Xi intended to write a story based on similar world settings, then his isolated hero, always named “He Xi”, would ferret out the conspiracy of certain corrupt scientists, who would cheat ignorant town people for political reasons. Then, in order to rescue his fellow villagers, He Xi would beat down all the evil scientists.

Liu Cixin’s hero would call on other enterprising youths to leave the town, explore the world, build spaceships and sail far away, in brief achieve the great dream and the inner dignity of humanity.

In a story by Wang Jinkang, there would be a couple of eccentric scientists. One of them would try to keep the secret of the tower, so as to preserve its fragile idyllic beauty. The other one would recognize that evolution is the Mandate of Heaven. To perform his duty, he would destroy the tower and force the townspeople to go out and struggle for their future in that brutal world.

In the “post-1970s” young writers’ works, heroes are always wandering with confusion and uncertainty about the collective destiny as well as their individual moral duty, like Catalpa who hesitates at the boundaries of the town.

By contrast, historical totality reappears in core science fiction works and provides heroes with positive motivations. He Xi fears that technology may release lust and greed, so the noble hero must fight careerists in order to guard the gates of Hell. Liu Cixin has faith in the development of technology and civilization, thus the hero should guide his fellow citizens to “march on, by fair means or foul”. Wang Jinkang believes “humankind as a whole has no free will”, and, even though a hero might be able to foresee the future, humanity will still “follow the way designed by the Creator irreversibly, no matter to Heaven or to Hell”.

However, the common area that all core science fiction writers emphasize is faith, which ensures that heroes take their responsibilities for the overall progress of human history.

In this respect, the concept of “science spirit” substantively refers to an insight into historical totality, which is the cornerstone for the hero’s faith and actions. In a postmodern world characterized by the collapsing myth of man, Chinese core science fiction writers have reconstructed a narrative space where lonely heroes trudge along step by step to their destinations, that might be distant, but are not out of reach.

However, in Han Song’s work, heroes mostly feel trapped in a distorted space-time structure. One chapter entitled “The controlled loop” (《受控环》), from his novel Red ocean (《红色海洋》), depicts an undersea “oceanic Kingdom”, which eerily turns into a “robotic Kingdom”, and then, like a pendulum going first forth and then back, turns back to its original state. All subjects of the Kingdom lose their memories as soon as this change happens. The only one who keeps his memory, a “cybernetician” coming from the outside world, tells the oceanic King: “You people revolve, but never evolve with time. […]"
Deflation and inflation, war and peace, monarchy and liberation, organism or mechanism, coming and going, all of these cannot save you. Both time and civilization become stale water swirling in a quagmire”. Instead of finding any solution, the cybernetician himself is arrested and jailed. He is set free after the extinction of whole Kingdom many centuries later.

Similar to Nietzsche, Hang Song considers the evolution of civilization as an “eternal recurrence”. In his perspective of the future, humanity marches on enterprisingly in a delusion of development, but actually descends along a downward spiral.

The story ends with a weird scene. The cybernetician and the last robot look at each other like phantoms among the ruins of the collapsed Kingdom: “‘Can we still make humans?’, one of them asked. ‘Or robots?’, another one said, ‘let’s make a bet’” (Han 2004, pp. 280-281).

3.4. The racial and national imagery

In 1998, Liu Weijia commented on the history and current situation of China with some of his friends at a class party. Comparing the world to a wild jungle, a battlefield red in tooth and claw, in which China has been involved reluctantly, Liu put forward the following hypothesis: “If China had had a choice, then there might have been an alternative history”. Here is a question worthy to probe into: why was China, in Liu’s imagery, used to being “outside the world”, and how did it subsequently become “involved reluctantly” in the jungle-world? How can China and the world be represented respectively as the idyllic small town and the brutal battlefield?

In a paper on secular civic nationalism in post-Mao China, Xudong Zhang (1998) indicates that this kind of nationalism is based on a collective experience emerging from the domestic market and everyday culture created by the modern economy. The free flow of labor, goods, and capital, alongside the boom in information and cultural signs and images in the 1990s, have enabled Chinese consumers to encounter “a world of difference, often delineated in terms of nation-state borders”. He goes on to say:

“As modern transportation and communication reach the majority of Chinese, a modern, secular notion of the nation becomes possible for the first time in a land where it has historically been the political state, not the ‘natural’ socioeconomic relationships of a community, that gives form and voice to the nation”.

During this process, the urban proto-middle class, as a realm of social existence decidedly outside the cultural hegemony of the state, strives to express itself through resistance to the practice of secular nationalism by advanced nation-states in the West. In
the era of globalization, this new image of the nation serves as a tool for identity politics, which significantly both differ from the traditional ethnocentric view of China, and from the traumatic experience formed in modern China’s long revolution in the age of colonialism and imperialism. Then Zhang concludes:

“In short, the nineteenth-century European industrialization and social mobility described by Gellner now resonate in China at the end of the twentieth century. In the capitalist global system, postrevolutionary China may find its situation similar to that of Gellner’s imagined Ruritania. Surrounded by the modern, dynamic Empire of Megalomania, the local, agrarian, and dialect-ridden Ruritanians find the will not only to modernize - that is, to join the ‘universal high culture’ of industrialization - but also to form a nation” (Zhang 1998, p. 113).

The imagined situation of Ruritania versus Megalomania, as a metaphorical prototype of the emergence of nationalism created by Ernest Gellner (1983, p. 61), also resonates with Liu Weijia’s small town isolated from the brutal world, and Liu Cixin’s ignorant humankind encompassed by the dark forest. Liu Cixin names this portrayal of imagined communities as “the image of race” (种族形象), which he believes should play a main role in science fiction instead of individuals.

However, these graphic images, an unsophisticated and undeveloped situation on the one hand, and on the other a long cultural tradition and strong national pride, show not so much humanity’s universal condition as China’s self-portrait in globalization. In this sense, the impact of the capitalist market transmogrifies into the dramatic conflicts between the two worlds: one is an encompassing and destructive inhuman world, while the other is an encompassed and innocent human world. Moreover, this contradiction can be transformed along a chain of metonyms: survival and morality, technology and humanity, development and tradition, modernization and localization.

In Wang Jinkang’s (2006) “Where are we going” (《我们向何处去》), the Polynesian island nation of Tuvalu, a real name that exists on the world map, was almost totally submerged in 2058 because of global warming and sea level rising. The entire population of more than ten thousand had to be evacuated to the Australian outback. The narrator is a twelve-year-old Tuvaluan boy who grew up in Australia and has never seen the sea. His grandfather, the former Tuvalu’s Minister for the Environment, has been staying on the islands on his own for twenty-eight years to guard the homeland and ancestral spirit “Mana”. When the islands eventually become completely uninhabitable, the boy follows his parents and a group of journalists to evacuate the stubborn old man. They are shocked to find the old man living a savage life and having totally forgotten how to speak English. Meanwhile, educated in an English speaking school, the boy can no longer understand his grandfather’s Tuvaluan language, which makes the elder angry. He even condemns his
grandson for “forgetting his Tuvaluan language and becoming not Tuvaluan anymore!” The embarrassed boy promises to study the “ancestors’ language” harder, learning from grandfather from now on. Then, they finally persuade the old man to get aboard the helicopter and leave their homeland forever.

The narrowing islands enclosed by rising tides, and the stubborn old man guarding his disappearing Mana, show us an allegoric space full of dramatic tension. The cold waves - both a symptom and a symbolic image of globalization - have been inexorably swallowing the cultural tradition and spiritual homeland of the Tuvaluan, and have forced them to become a diaspora.

This is an example of how, not the ecological crisis caused by globalization, but capitalist global expansion itself has been bringing devastating effect on the Third World. From the Tuvaluan boy’s point of view: “The industrialized countries commit the sin of greenhouse effect, but we Tuvaluan have to suffer. The white man’s God is so unjust!”

This theme also corresponds to the eponymous question, coming from a painting by French artist Paul Gauguin, “Where do we come from? Where are we? Where are we going?” However, the pronoun “we” explicitly stands for a national viewpoint rather than a Western-centric one from “the white man’s God”. These questions are repeated again in the last sentences, quoted from a sad Tuvaluan song: “Since we are lazy and greedy, / Losing our Great Deities’ favor. / Deities take back our land and Mana, / Now who are we? Where are we going?”

4. Conclusion: the post-revolutionary national allegory

Alain Badiou (2008, pp. 41-42) describes today’s global crisis with a cautionary voice:

“In many respects we are closer today to the questions of the 19th century than to the revolutionary history of the 20th. A wide variety of 19th-century phenomena are reappearing: vast zones of poverty, widening inequalities, politics dissolved into the ‘service of wealth’, the nihilism of large sections of the young, the servility of much of the intelligentsia; the cramped, besieged experimentalism of a few groups seeking ways to express the communist hypothesis […] Which is no doubt why, as in the 19th century, it is not the victory of the hypothesis which is at stake today, but the conditions of its existence”.

In this sense, the great transformation in today’s China (from Socialism to savage Capitalism, from idyllic isolation to wild chaos) has induced a variety of nineteenth-century phenomena as well as postmodern conditions, such as polarization of wealth, unbalanced regional development, environmental pollution, the food safety issue and the information overload. All of these provide science fiction writers with inspiration
and impulsion to infuse dreams, fancies and nightmares about modernity with Chinese people’s fears and hopes in the great transformation.

As Fredric Jameson (1986, p. 69) expounds:

“Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society”.

We can define Chinese science fiction texts as a post-revolutionary national allegory in a similar way. Thus, even seemingly apolitical texts, or texts overtly concerned with the destiny of the whole of humankind in a cosmopolitan sense, necessarily project a dimension of cultural politics: the private individual, imagined communities and the destiny of humanity are always entangled with a variety of capitalist symptoms in the era of globalization.

Contemporary Chinese science fiction writers form a community full of internal differences. These differences manifest themselves in age, region of origin, professional background, social class, ideology, cultural identity, aesthetics, and other areas. However, by carefully reading and parsing their work, I can still find aspects of commonality among them (myself included). Our stories are written primarily for a Chinese audience. The problems we care about and ponder are the problems we all face, all of us sharing this plot of land. These problems, in turn, are connected in several complicated ways with the collective fate of all of humanity. In reading Western science fiction, Chinese readers discover the fears and hopes of Man, the modern Prometheus, for his destiny, which is also his own creation. Perhaps Western readers can also read Chinese science fiction and experience an alternative Chinese modernity, and be inspired to imagine an alternative future. It is its very historical situation, in my opinion, that makes Chinese science fiction “Chinese”.

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