



STUDIES IN GLOBAL SCIENCE FICTION

Chinese Science Fiction

Concepts, Forms, and Histories

Edited by Mingwei Song
Nathaniel Isaacson · Hua Li



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Studies in Global Science Fiction

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Studies in Global Science Fiction (edited by Anindita Banerjee, Rachel Haywood Ferreira, and Mark Bould) is a brand-new and first-of-its-kind series that opens up a space for Science Fiction scholars across the globe, inviting fresh and cutting-edge studies of both non-Anglo-American and Anglo-American SF literature. Books in this series will put SF in conversation with postcolonial studies, critical race studies, comparative literature, transnational literary and cultural studies, among others, contributing to ongoing debates about the expanding global compass of the genre and the emergence of a more diverse, multinational, and multi-ethnic sense of SF's past, present, and future. Topics may include comparative studies of selected (trans)national traditions, SF of the African or Hispanic Diasporas, Indigenous SF, issues of translation and distribution of non-Anglophone SF, SF of the global south, SF and geographic/cultural borderlands, and how neglected traditions have developed in dialogue and disputation with the traditional SF canon.

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Introduction

Nathaniel Isaacson, Hua Li, and Mingwei Song

Even though the three of us have all published monographs on Chinese science fiction (hereafter sf) during recent years, each of our books addresses a specific time period and the corresponding concepts and forms of sf. A volume like this one can only be produced through collective efforts, by the editors as well as all the twelve contributors, with an aim toward presenting a relatively coherent, continuous, detailed discussion of the genre and its place in modern Chinese culture throughout its history from the early twentieth century to the twenty-first century. Such a claim certainly does not mean that this volume can be counted as an exhaustive and definitive research on the topic; what we can do is, at best, to provide a range of samples to outline the field—case studies that open windows to

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research and theoretical thinking concerning the concepts, forms, and histories of Chinese sf. As an introductory reader to those interested in the genre, this volume brings together the three keywords in the title of this book: concepts, forms, histories—in a way that they help readers find coordinates in a journey into the unknown. Needless to say, it goes beyond the scope of this book to provide encyclopedic interpretations to the concepts, forms, and histories of sf. What we have been doing in this volume is rather to intertwine inquiries to both theories and histories, questions about both concepts and forms, and reflections on genre—and, of course, gender. A synthetic method guides almost each of the case studies that make the twelve chapters of the volume. The volume does not aim to be exclusive, but rather border-crossing, with our visions of sf to be transgressive and nonbinary.

As a modern genre, science fiction has a long history in China, at least as long as that of most other modern print genres that began to be introduced into Chinese literature at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), such as political fiction and detective fiction. Compared with the realist fiction that has dominated the Chinese literary scene since the May Fourth era, science fiction has an even longer history. Like many other modern genres, science fiction was imported from abroad. Its world building represented an otherworldly imagination from its beginning as a translated genre, unfolding visions of modern worlds shaped by the flourishing of new technologies. A translated literary genre, early Chinese sf manifested the cultural hybridity resulting from a combination of translated modernity and self-conscious yearning for the rejuvenation of the Chinese tradition.

Despite such a promising beginning, the history of Chinese sf has never been continuous. It is full of gaps and interruptions caused by politics and changes in cultural paradigms. The discontinuity of sf should not be mistaken for insignificance, and even moments of perceived or real absence speak to important shifts in the cultural sphere. Following the first “golden age” of late Qing sf and the Republican Era, only a few short booms can be identified—the reemergence of sf as children’s literature in the 1950s–1960s under the socialist regime, the flourishing of more popular versions in Hong Kong during the Cold War, the comeback in Taiwan and mainland China during the late 1970s—none of which gained enough momentum to prevail and continue. This situation persisted until the rise of the new wave at the turn of the twenty-first century. The booms alternated with dormant periods lasting long enough for later writers to be

little influenced by their predecessors. Each time the genre was revived, the new generation of writers had to invent their own tradition, thus giving Chinese sf multiple points of origin. Each reinvention was influenced by a foreign source, such as the Japanese impact in the late Qing; Russian in the socialist period; Anglo-American in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the post-Mao mainland China; and the worldwide new wave as well as global sf during the Chinese new wave. Each generation had to find their own ways to integrate foreign influences into domestic variations of the genre's forms and conventions to represent new modes of political ethos, intellectual visions, and epistemological paradigms.

The rise of a new wave of sf has been a momentous literary phenomenon in contemporary China. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the genre has reemerged and gradually achieved wide popularity both domestically and globally. This has happened at a time when China is aiming at a new stage of national rejuvenation and mapping out various political, economic, and scientific projects to achieve a “Chinese dream.” Yet, for the country concurrently embracing technological renovations and sparing no effort to secure its status quo, the shape of things to come remains far from certain. Simultaneous with the recognition of contemporary Chinese sf as world literature has come the rise of Chinese sf studies. In this volume, we seek to inaugurate a second generation of Chinese sf criticism. Through diverse perspectives on the histories, forms, and conceptual experimentation of the genre, the authors featured herein demonstrate the historical significance and thematic breadth of a genre that was once marginal, if not invisible to literary history.

A central challenge to global sf studies is the definition of the genre itself. This is compounded by the various calques used to translate terms like “science” and “sf” over the course of China’s long twentieth century. The earliest translation we have for sf is *kexue xiaoshuo* (科学小说), which was replaced after the founding of the PRC by science-fantasy fiction *kexue huanxiang xiaoshuo* (科学幻想小说), a calque of the Russian *nauchnaya fantastika*. At the turn of the twentieth century, a number of other terms like *gezhi* (格致)—shorthand for neo-Confucian investigation of things and extension of knowledge—and *xixue* (西学), or “western knowledge,” were also used as loose translations for categories like science, natural philosophy, and Western thought in general. Ignoring the limitations of both “science” and “fiction” in understanding the relationship between systematic forms of knowledge and literary and visual culture diachronically and across national borders, the term “China” in this volume speaks to at least

three state formations—the Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, and the PRC; Chinese sf is a highly complex form.

That said, Chinese sf shares a number of important features, functions, and forms with the global tradition of sf. It often examines the relationship between humanity and technology and does so through speculative visions of the potential for both to evolve. One of its most readily recognized features is the presence of imagined technologies. Sf also often features the application of rational thought as a means of solving fictional challenges. In terms of function, sf offers an aesthetic, experiential examination of the implications of knowledge gained from systematic study of the world around us. Sf is intimately concerned with the implications of deep time: how the universe came to be and what it might yet become. Chinese sf, like its foreign counterparts, often manifests as a mass-produced genre, geared for mass consumption, while striving for deeper recognition by literary and scientific elites.

Narrative prose and cinema are two of its most common forms, but the attitudes and considerations of sf can manifest in all manner of media from propaganda posters to video games, to advertisements for space programs. Sf is narratively diffuse, and historically mutable, with no platonically ideal locus classicus, that it might better be understood as a means of organizing and interpreting texts. For this reason, Veronica Hollinger and others have argued in favor of understanding sf as a “mode” rather than a genre (Hollinger 139–142). Another way of articulating the expansiveness of sf is as a “selective tradition,” a body of work spanning multiple forms and “high” and “low” culture that are continuously disrupted, re-established, re-negotiated, or potentially preserved (Milner 36–40).

Identifying what differentiates Chinese sf from the global selective tradition risks setting works by Chinese authors aside as an exception to the Western “rule.” That said, as scholars of the history and cultural significance of Chinese literature in the global canon of world literature, it is important we appreciate what Chinese authors bring to the global selective tradition. We should also consider how the unique features and forms of Chinese sf might help us understand what has previously remained unseen in the global selective tradition. It is our hope that this volume will challenge readers to reconsider the contours of sf as a global genre. One feature of global sf particularly germane to the history of Chinese sf is the significance of colony and empire in shaping our imagination of global technoscientific development. Sf emerged in the era of European imperial expansion, and scholars like Patricia Kerslake (2007) and John Rieder

(2008) have pointed out the profound connections between sf and the imperial imagination. Chinese sf authors were keenly aware of the relationship between sf and empire as well (Isaacson 2017).

FROM THE LATE QING TO 1949

The advent of China's literary modernity is fairly universally recognized as taking place at the end of the nineteenth century, and 1895 is a deeply significant year. China's defeat in the Opium wars in the mid-nineteenth century awakened intellectuals and the ruling class to the need to modernize, but China's defeat at the hands of the expanding Japanese empire in the Sino-Japanese war dealt the finishing blow to Sinocentrism. *Ti-yong* (体用) discourse attempted to open the door to technological change while closing the door on social transformation by disentangling Chinese spiritual essence and western material use, while the *Yangwu* (洋务) or "foreign affairs" movement which insisted on the Chinese origins of western science and technological know-how both came to an end at the turn of the twentieth century. The period 1895–1915 saw an era of reform with an eye toward Weberian, rational modernity, and this movement prepared Chinese soil for the propagation of sf, both foreign transplants and native species. After 1895, Chinese intellectuals were in almost universal agreement that being modern, in all of its dimensions, would require modernizing fiction. A reconstituted nation required new fictions, and sf, oriented toward the world to come and ripe with explanations of technological achievements real and imagined, embodied the spirit of new fiction in a way few other genres could.

The earliest seeds of sf were planted through translation. Among the earliest and most significant of translated works was Edward Bellamy's utopian fiction, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888), translated by Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919). Richard's translation was published serially between 1891 and 1892, reprinted as a book in 1894 and 1898, and reprinted by the Commercial Press in 1913, among others (Wu Yan 2011, 266–274). Andrew Jones notes that Bellamy's work helped to establish a number of significant tropes for modern Chinese literature, among them the literary thematics of Darwinian evolution and the image of the "iron house" (Jones 39–40). One of the most frequently translated authors during the period was Jules Verne, whose works were translated into Chinese dozens of times over the early decades of the twentieth century, often based on Japanese translations. Other prominent

authors in translation included H.G. Wells, Camille Flammarion, and H. Rider Haggard. Works in translation were indeed so popular that some Chinese authors presented their original works as translations (Jiang 15).

These translated texts were nevertheless immediately and undeniably Chinese. Early renderings of sf into Chinese relied on familiar narrative structures, language, and tropes in a translingual practice of localization, adaptation, and acculturation. If a turn of the century author may have desired the cachet of masquerading as foreign, a contemporary reader could be forgiven for mistaking late Qing translations as original Chinese works. These works were soon followed by original works, which were simultaneously derivative of their western counterparts and undeniably Chinese in their semantic and syntactic content.

Following the sociopolitical shock of 1895, the next benchmark year in the history of both Chinese sf and China's "new novel" writ-large was 1902. Liang Qichao (梁启超 1873–1929), living in exile in Japan following the failed Hundred Days Reform of 1898, went on a literary spree, establishing three journals in as many years: *The China Discussion* (*Qingyi bao* 清议报, 1898); *New Citizen* (*Xinmin Congbao* 新民丛报, 1902); and *New Fiction* (*Xin xiaoshuo* 新小说, 1902). Liang established the journal *New Fiction* in large part as a venue for printing his unfinished novel chronicling a Chinese utopia sixty years in the future, *The Future of New China* (*Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中国未来记, 1902).

Liang's essay "On the Relationship between Fiction and Mass Governance" (*Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi* 论小说与群治之关系, 1902) called for a revolution in fiction and set the tone for fiction as a critical tool in China's quest for modernity. Fiction was not an entirely new technology, but it would henceforth be the tool par-excellence for renovating social structures and norms. An advertisement for *New Fiction* appearing in *New Citizen* is equally significant to the history of Chinese sf. The ad reading, "China's Only Literary Journal—*New Fiction*" ("Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxue bao Xin xiaoshuo" 中国唯一之文学报:新小说), promised a panoply of genres, among them science fiction, political fiction, social fiction, romance, detective fiction, and more. Other serial publications soon adopted Liang's new literary taxonomy. The label sf, while used with an arguably greater degree of regularity in China prior to its appearance as a genre category in the west, was nevertheless used inconsistently. Works labeled sf in one given issue of a periodical might be labeled ideal fiction, political fiction, or utopian fiction by the editorial

staff in another issue. In many respects, sf was understood as a subset of or little cousin to philosophical-political fiction (Jia 7–17).

New Citizen was also an important site for the publication of information on new scientific discoveries, or pseudoscientific discoveries as the case may be. Jia Liyuan's chapter in this volume details how Liang Qichao used *New Citizen* as a site for disseminating knowledge about mesmerism and hypnotism. A common feature of sf in China was the introduction of western science to audiences in news and popular science pieces, which was gradually sensationalized and eventually adapted into works of fiction, occasionally word for word. Reportage on radium, for example, journeyed from scientific fact in the popular science press to science fiction in Biheguan zhuren's *The New Era* (*Xin jiyuan* 新纪元, 1908), through exactly this process. We might refer to this as a motion from science fact to fictional science, and finally to science fiction. Lorenzo Andolfatto's chapter offers further consideration of the semantic breadth of "science" and "fiction" in the Late Qing.

For all its newness, late Qing sf drew creatively on its pre-modern literary roots. This included liberal use of Daoist and Buddhist cosmological and spiritual terms to make sense of new ideas about the age and nature of the universe. It also included borrowing tropes of knight-errantry from *wuxia* (武侠) fiction for new heroes and *chuanqi* (传奇) "stories of the strange" to create an atmosphere of uncanny novelty familiar to Chinese readers. Early Chinese sf also borrowed structure and narrative conventions from Ming-Qing *zhanghui xiaoshuo* (章回小说) chapter fiction, employing rhyming verse to introduce or summarize key aspects of the narrative.

Xu Nianci's (徐念慈 1875–1908) farcical sequel to a Japanese translation of a Baron Von Munchausen story, "New Tales of Mr. Braggadocio" ("Xin faluo xiansheng tan" 新法螺先生谭, 1904), features a narrator whose soul and body are split apart allowing him to explore the solar system and the center of the earth before perfecting the art of "brain electricity," allowing human beings to communicate telepathically and eliminating the need for most modern technology. *Tales of the Moon Colony* (*Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo* 月球殖民地小说, 1904), written by the "Old Fisherman of the Yellow River" (Huangjiang diaosou 黄江钓叟), was the first attempt at a sf novel published in Chinese and featured a group of explorers in a balloon visiting various allegorical territories that again reflect upon China's relationship to the colonial order. Wu Jianren (吴趼仁 1866–1910) re-imagined Jia Baoyu (贾宝玉) exploring semi-colonial China at the turn

of the twentieth century before visiting a Chinese utopia that has reversed the colonial order in *New Story of the Stone* (*Xin shitou ji* 新石头记, 1905). Lü Sheng's (旅生 b?) *Dream Records of a Madman* (*Chiren shuomeng ji* 痴人说梦记 1904) told the tale of three exiled intellectuals traveling the world before returning to China to establish a new utopian order. Haitian duxiaozi's (海天独啸子 b?) *The Stone of Goddess Nuwa* (*Nuwa shi* 女娲石, 1903) addressed the late Qing semi-colonial crisis from the perspective of an educated woman. Cai Yuanpei's (蔡元培 1868–1940) *New Year's Dream* (*Xinnian meng* 新年梦, 1904) is a utopian dream of a future where China is a major player in a world order inspired in part by Tan Sitong's (谭嗣同 1865–1898) “Great Unity” (“Datong” 大同). Novels like Biheguan zhuren's (碧荷官主人 b?) *The New Era Xin jiyuan* (1908) and Lu Shi'e's (陆士谔 1878–1944) *New Ramblings of the Rustic Elder* (*Xin yesou puyan* 新野搜曝言, 1909) both offered revanchist visions of China's conquest of Europe, and *New Ramblings* went on to consider the question of colonizing outer space.

A number of other works are listed in various contemporary, late Qing, and Republican-era bibliographies. Scholars continue to “unearth” them, but in many cases, these works were never completed, or we have little more than their descriptive titles to glean their contents. These include, *The Future Book League of New China* (*Weilai zhi Zhongguo tushu tongmenghui* 未来中国图书同盟会, 1906), *Journey to Utopia* (*Wutuobang youji* 乌托邦游记, 1906), *The Method of Restoring Life* (*Huisheng shu* 回生术, 1906), *Champion of the New Chinese Woman* (*Zhongguo xinnü hao* 中国新女豪, 1907), *Women's Rights* (*Nüzi quan* 女子权, 1907), Li Minzhai's *Flying Ship* (*Feiting* 飞艇, 1907), and Bao Tianxiao's *Future War in the Air* (*Kongzhong zhanzheng weilai ji* 空中战争未来记, 1908).

New takes on familiar vernacular novels also flourished. Titles included *New Flowers in the Mirror* (*Xin Jinghuayuan* 新镜花缘, 1907) by Xiaoran Yusheng (萧然郁生) and *New Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Xin sanguo zhi* 新三国志, 1909). More than any other text, Wu Cheng'en's classic *Journey to the West* (*Xi you ji* 西游记) was re-imagined in the late Qing through a flurry of adaptations. These included *Another Journey to the West* (*Ye shi xiyou ji* 也是西游记, Xi Mianzhou 奚冕周 and Lu Shi'e, 1909). In 1909, Li Xiaobai (李小白) and Chen Jinghan (陈景韩) published competing versions of *New Journey to the West* (*Xin xiyou ji* 新西游记). These westward journeys, often science-fictional in nature, exemplify how late Qing authors ruminated upon the relationship between China and western knowledge. Could science, natural philosophy, and other

“western learning” or *xixue* (西学) be compared to the Buddhist canon brought back to China by Tripitaka?

Wu Cheng'en's Ming Dynasty novel, *Journey to the West*, recounting of Buddhist monk Xuanzang's pilgrimage to Central Asia and India, accompanied by an entourage of magical disciples may not have had anything to do with sf as we know it today. But the heroes fly through the air, have magical weapons that change size and form, and the Monkey King Sun Wukong is turned two-dimensional, can change sizes, and even clone himself using his own hairs. All of this easily adapts itself to contemporary sf. The weapons and bodily transformations of Sun Wukong have become so thoroughly imbricated in the East Asian mediascape, it is hard to know where to start—from the *Dragon Ball* manga and anime series to fan-created sf adaptations and sequels, to the film *Super Monkey Returns* (Dong-Yeop Sin 2011), or Australia and New Zealand-produced Netflix series “New Legends of Monkey” (Gerard Johnstone 2018–2020). Sun Wukong is a hybrid, a shapeshifter, a transformer; an apt metaphor for the multifaceted nature of Chinese sf.

The Republican Period (1911–1949) in many ways saw a continuation of the above patterns for sf. A number of factors can be attributed to the new landscape of sf during this period. On the one hand, an increasingly commercial culture resulted in serious literary magazines turning toward the entertainment category of “mandarin ducks and butterflies” fiction. At the same time, scientific content was increasingly sublimated into other genres including popular science, and various genres aimed at juvenile audiences. Intellectuals like Chen Duxiu continued to pair rational inquiry with rational statecraft, as he advocated for China's transformation by Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy. Headed by Chen, another literary magazine of the new, *New Youth*, was at the center of the May Fourth movement, which replaced late Qing reform with outright iconoclasm. The magazine sought to use literature as a tool to transform society, admonishing young readers to “be scientific and eschew irrationality” (科学的而非想象的) (Chen Duxiu 5). The Science Society of China—a group of students studying in the US with money from the Boxer Indemnity—established the journal *Science* the same year and for the same cause. The word science (*kexue* 科学) was featured in the titles of more than 80 Republican-era journals. Translation still comprised a significant portion of the sf available to audiences. Ren Dongmei argues that if the Late Qing was the era of Jules Verne, the Republican period was the era of H.G. Wells, as multiple versions of his novels were translated into Chinese. Rather than seeing this

as a weakness, we should remain aware that Chinese audiences were reading foreign-language sf in translation long before Anglophone audiences were reading Chinese sf (Ren Dongmei 279–281).

What was labeled *kexue xiaoshuo* often took the form of dialogues or lectures on science with a fictional setting. These works were highly specialized at best and tedious at worst. Like their late Qing predecessors, there was no clear distinction between popular science and sf. Republican-era sf often sacrificed narrative style and plot for the sake of transmitting scientific knowledge, informing readers of processes like the production of vanishing cream and synthetic rubber (Ren Dongmei 281). Ren Dongmei argues that while these works may be aesthetically lacking, they were highly experimental. They shared with their late Qing predecessors a keen interest in popularizing science for the sake of national salvation. Like their late Qing predecessors, they also featured an admixture of vernacular and classical language, borrowed from various pre-modern poetic forms, or made translanguing puns about the periodic table. Other forms produced—science Q&A, science vignettes, and science novelties—should prompt us to reconsider what counts as sf in the global selective tradition.

While the plots of many more “pure” sf stories are familiar, their sense of crisis often increased in the face of mounting corruption, the chaos of the Warlord Era (1916–1928), and Japanese encroachment into Manchuria. The shipwrecked narrator of Bi Yihong’s (毕倚虹 1892–1926) “Shanghai of the Future” (“Weilai zhi shanghai”未来之上海, 1917) returns to the city after a hundred years stranded on an island to find that the city is highly technologically advanced, and while people live lives of great ease, the state is corrupt and incompetent. Jing Feng’s (劲风 b?) short story “China a Decade Hence” (“Shinian hou de Zhongguo”十年后的中国, 1923) imagines an invasion by the fictional nation of “Anada” in which the citizenry saves China from defeat despite a corrupt and incompetent government. Gu Junzheng’s “Nation Without Air” (“Wu kongqi guo”无空气国, 1926) explains how birds would not be able to fly, fires would not burn, and people would not be able to speak in a place that lacked air; this final point brings out the allegorical meaning of the story—people who physically cannot speak are the same as those with no freedom of speech. Lao She’s *City of Cats* (*Mao cheng ji* 猫城记, 1932) is a thinly veiled, deeply satirical allegory for political incompetence, factionalism, and social stagnation in Republican China set in a feline city on Mars. Gu Junzheng’s “Dream of Peace” (“Heping de meng”和平的梦, 1940) tells the story of an American spy’s discovery that the “Easternmost Nation” is

on the verge of hypnotizing the American public with false promises of peace. Sf publication fell off precipitously after the Rape of Nanjing, as China was brought into the Pacific War, leaving us only approximately a dozen works of sf between 1937 and 1945; about a third of these were written by Gu Junzheng.

FROM 1950 TO THE EARLY 1980S

With the founding of the PRC in October 1949, Chinese sf entered a new stage. In the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese sf actively responded to the central government's various policies, especially those on science and technology. For example, in 1956, the central government raised the rhetoric of marching toward science to confirm the role of science and technology in building a new socialist China. In 1957, Mao Zedong declared that Chinese youth resembles the morning sun and that the future belongs to young people. Equipping the younger generation with a basic knowledge of modern science and technology became a major part of the country's educational agenda. In 1963, Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) formulated the concept of the Four Modernizations, proclaiming: “We will achieve the modernization of industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology ... and build our country into a powerful socialist nation” (“Zhongguo gongchandang dashi ji 1963”). Responding to the government's various policies and talking points, Chinese sf functioned to some extent as a propaganda tool geared toward serving the new socialist order, promoting scientific thinking, and educating the next generation of Communist functionaries.

Under these new political circumstances, it was not surprising that sf had long been placed in the category of children's literature in the PRC. In the 1950s and 1960s, sf works were mainly written for juvenile readers and were published in children's magazines or by presses catering to juvenile readers in Shanghai and Beijing. Meanwhile, sf writers benefited from the label of children's literature because this label has provided sf writers with a relatively relaxed space in which to explore controversial and forward-looking ideas that would be difficult to articulate effectively in most genres of serious or realist literature. Chinese sf had also been a sub-branch of *kexue wenyi* (literature and art about science 科学文艺). Within the broad spectrum of *kexue wenyi*, with non-fiction narratives about science at one end and literature at the opposite end, science primers, science essays, science travelogues, and descriptions of scientific research are closer

to the pole of science; science stories, comedic dialogues about science, and science fairy tales are in the middle of the spectrum; and sf is closest to the pole of literature (Zheng, “Kexue wenyi zatan” 81).

Throughout most of the 1950s, the PRC was still at the honeymoon stage in its relations with Soviet Russia. Chinese sf came under the strong influence of Stalin Era Soviet popular fiction, particularly with respect to an optimism and interest in scientific progress, emphasis of scientific and technological minutiae, and the style of socialist realism. PRC translators and scholars introduced a substantial amount of Soviet Russian literature into China, including classics of socialist realism, treatises on literary theory, and various genres of popular literature such as science fiction and adventure novels. The term *kexue wenyi* was also borrowed from USSR writer Maxim Gorky’s (1868–1936) essay “On Theme” in which Gorky encouraged scientists to delve into the literature and urged fiction writers to explore the world of science. The popular science writer Mikhail Il’in (1896–1953) actually put Gorky’s advocacy into practice by writing numerous science primers and essays about science during the 1930s and 1950s. Many of Il’in’s works were translated into Chinese and exerted a profound influence upon many Chinese intellectuals and readers during the 1950s and 1960s. Konstantin E. Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935) and Alexander Belyaev (1884–1942) were the most influential Soviet Russian writers on scientific themes in Mao Era China. Tsiolkovsky’s writing about space travel and rocketry inspired many PRC writers to explore these topics in their own writings. Belyaev’s sf narratives about organ and body part transplants in *Professor Dowell’s Head* and *The Amphibian Man* (1928) likewise encouraged some PRC writers to take up this topic. In addition, Ivan Pavlov’s research on conditioned reflexes such as a dog salivating after hearing a bell ring also contributed to the emergence of Chinese sf narratives about biomedical experiments.

Under the strong influence of Soviet sf and responding to the central government’s policies on science and technologies, Chinese sf writers remained active from 1950 to 1965 and covered a wide range of themes in their works. These themes include space exploration, robots, organ transplantation, marine aquaculture, high-tech pastures, plant and animal breeding, and weather modification. The two earliest Chinese sf narratives published in the PRC were Zhang Ran’s (张然) *Dream Travel in the Solar System* (*Mengyou taiyang xi* 梦游太阳系, 1950) and Xue Dianhui’s (薛殿会 b. 1926) *Space Travel* (*Yuzhou liuxing* 宇宙旅行, 1951). Both narratives are about space exploration. In 1954, Zheng Wenguang (郑文光

1929–2003) published his first sf story “The Second Moon” (“Dierge yueliang” 第二个月亮) about a man-made satellite. In the following six years, Zheng continued to address the theme of space exploration in most of his narratives. Another active writer was Tong Enzheng (童恩正 1937–1997) who published his first two sf works in 1960, *Dense Fog over the Old Gorge* (*Guxia mimu* 古峡迷雾) and “A Guest from Fifty Thousand Years Ago” (“Wuwannian yiqian de keren” 五万年以前的客人). Both narratives combine his archeological knowledge with scientific speculation. Over the next couple of years, he also published on the themes of robots, computers, and biological electronic currents in such novellas as *Miracle of An Electric Brain* (*Dianzi danao de qiji* 电子大脑的奇迹, 1962), *A Missing Robot* (*Shizong de jiqiren* 失踪的机器人, 1962), and *The Lost Memories* (*shiqu de jiyi* 失去的记忆, 1962). Xiao Jianheng (萧建亨 b. 1930) wrote about organ transplantation, electronic technology, and robots in such narratives as *Fisherman’s Gramophone Records* (*Diaoyu aihaozhe de changpian* 钓鱼爱好者的唱片, 1960), *Buke’s Adventure* (*Buke de qiyu* 布克的奇遇, 1962), and *The Amazing Robotic Dog* (*Qiyi de jiqigou* 奇异的机器狗, 1965). Liu Xingshi (刘兴诗 b. 1931) was another dominant sf writer during this period. He wrote about weather modification and terraforming the Earth in such narratives as “An Underground Hydropower Station” (“Dixia shuidianzhan” 地下水电站, 1961), “Northern Clouds” (“Beifang de yun” 北方的云, 1962), “The Blue Train Under the Ocean” (“Lanse lieche” 蓝色列车, 1963), and “The Nomad City” (“Youmu cheng” 游牧城, 1964). Wang Guozhong (王国忠 ?-2010) also wrote about weather modification and land reclamation in order to benefit agricultural and industrial production in such narratives as “A Marine Fishery” (“Haiyang yuchang” 海洋渔场, 1961), “Dragon in the Bohai Sea” (“Bohai julong” 渤海巨龙, 1963), and “Reservoir in Air” (“Bankong zhong de shuiku” 半空中的水库, 1963). Chi Shuchang (迟书昌 1922–1997) wrote about genetic engineering and animal breeding in “Elephants Without Trunks” (“Gediao bizi de daxiang” 割掉鼻子的大象, 1956); marine aquaculture in “Whale Pasture” (“Dajing muchang” 大鲸牧场, 1961); and high-tech suspended animation in “Frozen Shrimps and Cryonics” (“Dongxia he dongren” 冻虾和冻人, 1963).

Several other writers during this period are also worth mentioning. Yu Zhi (于止, pen name of Ye Zhishan 叶至善, 1918–2006) wrote the first PRC narrative about cryonics in his famous short story “The Missing Brother” (“Shizong de gege,” 失踪的哥哥 1957). Ji Hong (稽鸿, 1920–2017) was a prolific writer and published stories on bionics and

electronic technologies used in daily life in “The Secrets of the Motorcycle” (“Motuoche de mimi” 摩托车的秘密, 1961), “Old Doctor’s Hat” (“Lao yisheng de maozi” 老医生的帽子, 1963), and “A Strange Hunter” (“Qiguai de lieren” 奇怪的猎人, 1963).

In addition to sf, other subgenres in *kexue wenyi*, such as science essays, science travelogues, comedic dialogues about science, and science animation had all functioned to popularize science and technology among children and young adults. For example, many science crosstalk performances promoted such quotidian hygienic practices as toothbrushing and hand-washing (Isaacson 139–57). Gu Junzheng published a collection of science essays entitled *Not Afraid of Headwinds* (*Bupa nifeng* 不怕逆风, 1962) to introduce basic physics to young adults. In addition, some science animation films such as *The Cuckoo Is Late* (*Buguniaio jiao chi le* 布谷鸟叫迟了, 1959), *The Little Inventor* (*Xiao faming jia* 小发明家, 1958), and *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* (*Xiao kedou zhao mama* 小蝌蚪找妈妈, 1960) conveyed clear scientific and technological messages through a narrative strategy of focused problem solving. These scientific themes are based on known science and existing technologies, with bits and pieces of factual knowledge interspersed throughout the films. During this period, sf writers and critics also wrote essays to engage in theoretical exploration of the genre. For example, Zheng Wenguang’s 1956 essay “On Science Fiction” is probably the first essay to discuss this genre in the PRC. In the essay, Zheng pointed out that science fiction should “reveal the power of modern science and technology, depict the glorious future of humankind, showcase the conquerors of nature, and single out scientists for praise with respect to the war between humankind and nature” (“Tantan kexue huanxiang xiaoshuo” 21).

Chinese sf remained dormant from 1966 to 1975. The year 1976 saw the publication of the first sf work since the Cultural Revolution—Ye Yonglie’s “Petroleum Protein” (“Shiyou danbai” 石油蛋白). The revival of sf writing was endorsed by the central government’s favorable policies on science and technology. Deng Xiaoping affirmed that science and technology were productive forces, and highly educated professionals such as intellectuals, scientists, and technicians would henceforth be considered part of the working class at the opening ceremony of the National Science Conference on March 18–21, 1978. In the same year, he revived the long-dormant policy of the Four Modernizations and announced his strategic decision to shift the Communist Party’s main focus from the Mao Era’s

emphasis on class struggle to the Reform and Opening Era's pursuit of modernization and economic prosperity.

With the arrival of this “springtime for science” (*kexue de chuntian*), many veteran sf writers such as Zheng Wenguang, Tong Enzheng, Liu Xingshi, and Xiao Jianheng returned to the field. Relatively young writers, such as Ye Yonglie (叶永烈 1940–2020) and Wei Yahua (魏雅华 b. 1949), joined them. Chinese sf experienced a flowering period from 1978 to 1983, which has commonly been characterized as the post-Mao cultural thaw. During this period, PRC sf was still a largely government-backed literature that helped to popularize and support various government policies, while meshing adroitly with governmental rhetoric about strengthening the state through science and technology. Meanwhile, it could be aptly characterized as blooming, contending, and boundary-breaking (Li 165–180). Chinese sf strove to overcome its former categorization as a mere subgenre of *kexue wenyi* or mere children's literature and to instead rise to the level of popular fiction and bona fide Chinese literature. The thematic concerns of many sf narratives resonated with contemporary works of PRC fiction in the categories of “scar literature,” “contemplative literature,” and “roots-seeking literature.” Some sf narratives assimilated elements from other popular genres such as love stories and detective fiction. Many sf works continued and expanded the sf motifs popular in the 1950s and 1960s, and such new subgenres as detective sf and tech-sf were created in the late 1970s and 1980s.

In this short introduction, we can only briefly mention a few representative writers from this period. Tong Enzheng's “Song of the Stalagmites” (“Shisun xing” 石笋行, 1982) and Liu Xingshi's *Columbus Who Came from the Americas* (*Meizhou lai de gelumbu* 美洲来的哥伦布, 1980) combine scientific extrapolations with archeological findings. In addition, Liu Xingshi's work is probably the first alternate history sf narrative in PRC. Xiao Jianheng's “Qiao the Younger Fell III” (“Qiao er huan bing ji” 乔二患病记, 1982) and Wei Yahua's “I've Decided to Divorce My Robot Wife” (“Wo jue ding yu jiqiren qizi lihun,” also known as “Wenrou xiang zhi meng” 温柔乡之梦, 1981) envision how robots will transform our personal lives and social interactions in the near future. Zheng Wenguang's *Descendants of Mars* (*Zhanshen de houyi* 战神的后裔, 1983) not only extolls the future terraforming of Mars but also reflects upon moral issues connected with the future colonization of space. In addition to his near-future sf classic *Xiao Lingtong Travels to the Future* (*Xiaolingtong manyou weilai* 小灵通漫游未来, 1978), Ye Yonglie single-handedly promoted

detective sf through his Jin Ming series (金明系列). In addition, some writers wrote short tech-sf stories that frequently celebrate increasing productivity in agriculture, manufacturing, and military technology in such stories as Wei Yahua's "The Tumult of the Flying Blanket" ("Feitan de fengbo" 飞毯的风波, 1979), Xu Jie's "The Architects on a Coral Island" ("Shanhu dao shang de jianzhushi" 珊瑚岛上的建筑师, 1978), and Jia You's "Growing a House" ("Zhong fangzi" 种房子, 1978).

Echoing the prolific sf writings, a lot of science popularization and sf magazines were launched at municipal, provincial, and national levels. Even mainstream literary magazines published sf works, and some newspapers have contained supplements to publish literature and art about science. Among them, the most renowned ones have been dubbed "the four magazines and one newspaper": *Science, Literature and Art* (*Kexue wenyi* 科学文艺, first quarterly then bimonthly, 1979–present) in Chengdu; *Age of Science* (*Kexue shidai* 科学时代, bimonthly, 1979–1984) in Harbin; *Wisdom Tree* (*Zhizhui shu* 智慧树, bimonthly, 1981–1985) in Tianjin; *Science Fiction Ocean* (*Kehuan Haiyang* 科幻海洋, anthology series, 1981–2001) in Beijing; and the newspaper *The Chinese Science Fiction Gazette* (*Zhongguo kehuan xiaoshuo bao* 中国科幻小说报, biweekly, 1981) in Harbin. These magazines and newspapers published not only speculative fiction but also popular science articles, interviews, reviews, and essays about the genre. Sf writers benefited economically from their creative writing through royalties or other remuneration paid by these magazines.

The various publication venues also became an important marketplace of ideas for sf writers and critics engaged in discussions and debates. For example, in 1979 the Supplement of the influential state media outlet *China Youth Daily* published a series of opinion pieces in the column "Modest Discussions of Popular Science Writing." These opinion pieces broached such topics as the nature of sf—literary or scientific; the faulty understanding and over-simplified presentation of scientific ideas in some sf works; and the need to make popular science writing more interesting and entertaining. Starting in 1979, Zheng Wenguang, Tong Enzheng, Ye Yonglie, and Xiao Jianheng also published essays about their experiences and ideas about sf writing in the newspaper *Guangming Daily*. In addition to writing critical essays, these writers also evaluated their peer's sf works by writing reviews and canonized some classic works by editing sf anthologies. Such writers and scholars as Ye Yonglie and Wu Dingbo started to research earlier and less well-known Chinese sf works in order to compile histories of Chinese sf.

During this period, a significant withering of influence from old Soviet Russian sf was accompanied by a rapidly burgeoning influence from Western sf. Besides reprinting classic sf narratives by famous Western authors such as Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, the works of more recent Western writers were also translated and introduced to Chinese readers, such as the works of Arthur C. Clarke, George Lucas, and Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and Robert Heinlein. Many Soviet Russian sf works were also translated into Chinese, such as A. Kazantsev's *Strong Times*, and Alexander Belyaev's novels *Glittering Man* and *Master of the World*. The works of Japanese writers such as Sakyo Komatsu and Takashi Ishikawa were also translated into Chinese (Wu, "Looking Backward" xxvi–xxviii). These foreign sf works introduced Chinese readers and writers to an unprecedentedly broad range of sf subject matter and techniques, thereby inspiring Chinese writers to experiment with a widening variety of subject matter and techniques.

Chinese sf fandom also emerged in the 1980s. In 1979, the first college-level PRC course on science fiction was taught by Philip Smith, a visiting professor from University of Pittsburgh, at Shanghai Foreign Language Institute. Shortly afterward in July 1980, fifteen faculty members from this university's English Department founded a local sf fandom club. In February 1981, a student fandom club was founded in the same university. During the 1980s, campus-based, region-specific, and nationwide sf fan clubs spread broadly throughout the PRC in such provinces as Sichuan, Guangdong, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning (Wu, "Fandom" 134–36). These clubs also published their own fanzines or newsletters. The first Chinese sf fanzine *Xingyun* (*Nebula* 星云) was published by an avid and dedicated reader named Yao Haijun in 1988. Several other fanzines were published in the mid-1990s, such as Beijing's *Cube Light Year* (*Lifang guangnian* 立方光年, 1995–1996), Tianjin's *Supernova* (*Chao xinxing* 超新星, 1996–1997), Zhengzhou's *Milky Way* (*Yinhe* 银河, 1996), and Chengdu's *Ladder to the Sky* (*Shang tianti* 上天梯, 1996). However, none of these fanzines lasted as long or exerted as much influence on sf circles as *Xingyun* (Zhang 37–40). PRC sf fanzines accelerated connections amongst sf writers, readers, researchers, editors, and publishers.

The first PRC sf award, the Galaxy Award, was established by the magazines *Science, Literature and Art* and the short-lived *Wisdom Tree* in 1986. All the works participating in the competition of the Galaxy Awards have been confined to those published in *Science, Literature and Art* (except in 1986). This practice reveals that the award has become an important

means for the genre magazine to build up its team of writers and establish its status and authority in the field.

PRC sf has prominently engaged in transmedia (*kua meiti* 跨媒体) storytelling since the late 1970s when sf expanded its media venues from the print forms of fiction, comics, and illustrated books to the electronic forms of radio and TV dramas, animation, and feature films. Here we shall provide an introductory review of PRC sf's various multimedia forms. The cartoonist Miao Yintang (缪印堂 1935–2017) published the science *manhua* “Keke Goes Hunting for Wolves” (“Keke dalang ji” 科科打狼记) in the popular science magazine *Knowledge Is Power* (*Zhishi jiushi liliang* 知识就是力量) in 1979. “Keke Goes Hunting for Wolves” consists of sequential panel comics and features a young protagonist named Keke who draws upon modern technological advances to more effectively hunt for wolves in mountainous regions.

Sf *lianbuanhua* (连环画) also became an increasingly common vehicle for Chinese sf due largely to their commercial success as entertainment fiction. A lot of sf narratives were adapted into *lianbuanhua* form. The key transitional work—both artistically and in terms of its unprecedented commercial success as a trade item—was Ye Yonglie's Jin Ming series. Some sf narratives were also adapted into radio plays, such as *Death Ray on a Coral Island* adapted from Tong Enzheng's prize-winning short story of the same name, *Xiao Lingtong Travels to the Future* adapted from Ye Yonglie's novel of the same name, and *A Green Cloned Horse* (*lüse kelong ma* 绿色克隆马, 1980) adapted from a short story by an anonymous author. Some sf narratives bypassed radio altogether and were instead adapted into TV dramas, such as Wu Boze's (1933–2005) novella *Invisible Man* (*Yin xing ren* 隐形人, 1979), Zhang Fengjiang's and Jia Wanchao's “The Last Cancer Patient” (“Zuihou yige aizheng huanzhe” 最后一个癌症患者, 1980), and Ye Yonglie's *The X-3 Case* (*X-3 an jian* X-3案件, 1980). Yet since televisions were still a rarity in most PRC homes during the early 1980s, TV dramas failed to achieve the popularity of radio dramas and sf films at that time. Starting in the late 1970s, more scientific animation films also came out. These animation films focused more on future possibilities, introducing the viewer to elements of science fiction and futurism, such as in *The Hens Move to a New Home* (*Muji banjia* 母鸡搬家, 1979), *Yuanyuan and the Robot* (*Yuanyuan he jiqi ren* 圆圆和机器人, 1980), and *Dingding Fights the Monkey King* (*Dingding zhan houwang* 丁丁战猴王, 1980). The 1980s also saw the release of two sf feature films. Zhang Hongmei adapted Tong Enzheng's famous short story as the

feature film *Death Ray on a Coral Island* in 1980. Another sf film *Shadow of a Ghost* (*Qianying* 潜影, 1981) came out in 1981. The film was adapted from the sf novella *A Ghost in the Imperial Palace* (*Wangfu guaiying* 王府怪影, 1981), which was co-authored by Ji Hongxu and Ji Sanmeng. More sf films were produced in the 1990s, such as PRC's first eco-sf film *The Ozone Layer Vanishes* (*Daqiceng xiaoshi* 大气层消失, 1990), the time-travel film *Magic Watch* (*Mo biao* 魔表, 1990), and two detective sf films, *Invisible PhD* (*Yinshen boshi* 隐身博士, 1991) and *Revived Warrior* (*Zaisheng yongshi* 再生勇士, 1995). These various adaptations enabled a continuous and serial consumption of sf across different forms of media. These multimedia practices increased the visibility of the genre, promoted the consumption of sf artifacts, and extended the genre to a much broader audience than it had ever previously enjoyed in China.

The favorable political climate for science fiction from the late 1970s to early 1980s was interrupted by the “Campaign to Eliminate Spiritual Pollution,” which was launched by the Communist Party with Deng Xiaoping’s speech at the Second Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee on October 11–12, 1983. This campaign of cultural suppression reached its climax in mid-November 1983, later fading into obscurity in Spring 1984. During the short-lived campaign, sf was denounced for spreading bourgeois ideology, and many sf writers temporarily stopped writing sf or left the field. PRC sf remained at a low ebb from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. The publication of sf works slowed to nearly a standstill, and the translation of foreign works of science fiction also fell sharply in comparison to some previous periods.

THE NEW WAVE: FROM THE LATE 1980S TO THE 2010S

The game-changing new wave was conceived in the 1980s, when futurology, cybernetics and informatics, quantum physics, chaos theory, new methods in scientific and humanistic research, and various experiments in literature and arts collectively challenged the monolithic ideological discourse with an emerging, diversified space for a multiplicative structure tolerant of different kinds of knowledge and ideas. The decade also saw China’s widening reform and a young generation’s struggle for democracy, which ended abruptly when the 1989 nationwide student protest came to a tragic conclusion in Tiananmen Square. Liu Cixin (刘慈欣 b. 1963) and Han Song (韩松 b. 1965) both started writing science fiction around the end of the 1980s, and their first stories and novels, such as Han