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Identity, Gender, Nation: A Comparative Study of the Science Fiction Writings of Han Song and Xia Jia

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RÉSUMÉ

La science-fiction chinoise contemporaine gagne une attention considérable de la part du milieu académique et du public ces dernières années. Ce mémoire se concentre sur deux écrivains de science-fiction chinoise représentatifs, Han Song 韩松 (1965–) et Xia Jia 夏笳 (1984–), et examine comment leurs œuvres reflètent de manière critique la société moderne (chinoise) à travers trois sujets : l'identité, le genre et la nation. Les textes analysés sont : « The Passengers and The Creator 乘客与创造者 » et « Beauty Hunting Guide 美女狩猎指南 » de Han Song, « Goodnight, Melancholy 晚安忧郁 » et « A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight 百鬼夜行街 » de Xia Jia. En s'appuyant sur les théories en matière de la subjectivité et du langage ainsi que sur les critiques posthumanistes, le premier chapitre montre que les écrits de Han Song et Xia Jia réfutent le point de vue métaphysique de la possession de soi et produisent une vision critique de la subjectivité humaniste (anthropocentrique). Basé sur la discussion de la politique d'identité dans le premier chapitre, la deuxième partie du mémoire porte sur les représentations de genre dans « Goodnight, Melancholy » et « Beauty Hunting Guide ». Ces deux textes révèlent la construction sociale du genre à travers une narration hautement spéculative. « Goodnight, Melancholy » intègre subtilement la critique de l'hétéronormativité dans l'histoire, et « Beauty Hunting Guide » critique la violence et la consommation interhumaine dans la société moderne (chinoise) d'une manière similaire au « A Madman's Diary 狂人日記 » de Lu Xun. En discutant les discours sur l'État-nation et le sinofuturisme, nous démontrons au troisième chapitre que les nouvelles de Han Song et Xia Jia illustrent pleinement l'ambivalence du concept de « Chineseness ». En un mot, ce mémoire aborde le pouvoir épistémologique des œuvres de Han Song et Xia Jia qui nous permet de reconceptualiser ce que nous comprenons comme « réalité ».

Mots-clés : science-fiction, Han Song, Xia Jia, politique d'identité, subjectivité, études de genre, études queers, nation, sinofuturisme, orientalisme.

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Chinese science fiction has gained considerable attention from academics and the public in recent years. This thesis focuses on two representative Chinese science fiction writers, Han Song 韩松 (1965–) and Xia Jia 夏笳 (1984–), and examines how their works critically reflect on modern (Chinese) society through three topics: identity, gender, and nation. The texts analyzed are: Han Song's "The Passengers and The Creator 乘客与创造者" and "Beauty Hunting Guide 美女狩猎指南," Xia Jia's "Goodnight, Melancholy 晚安忧郁" and "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight 百鬼夜行街." Relying on theories about subjectivity and language as well as posthumanist critics, I argue in the first chapter that Han Song and Xia Jia's writings refute the metaphysical view of self-possession and produce a critical vision of humanistic (anthropocentric) subjectivity. Based on the discussion of identity politics in Chapter One, the second chapter focuses on gender representations in "Goodnight, Melancholy" and "Beauty Hunting Guide." I contend that these two texts reveal the social construction of gender through highly speculative storytelling. "Goodnight, Melancholy" subtly integrates the criticism of heteronormativity into the story, while "Beauty Hunting Guide" critiques the violence and inter-human consumption in modern (Chinese) society in a way similar to Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary 狂人日記." By discussing discourses about nation-state and Sinofuturism, I demonstrate in Chapter Three that Han Song and Xia Jia's novels fully reveal the ambivalence of the concept of "Chineseness." In a word, this thesis addresses the epistemological power of Han Song and Xia Jia's works that allows us to reconceptualize what we understand as "reality."

Keywords: science fiction, Han Song, Xia Jia, identity politics, subjectivity, gender studies, queer studies, nation, Sinofuturism, Orientalism.

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INTRODUCTION

At some point, it seems that literature is often considered a kind of bourgeois pastime, a "fake" plaything that is detached from "real reality," and even a "lie." In the rudimentary and arbitrary judgment that "literature is fake and reality is real," the so-called "true reality" should have no fear of "fake fiction," but why are there always different degrees and forms of censorship and even suppression against literature (as well as arts in general) in all times? In my view, such a "true/false" dichotomy appears to be a description, but in fact it is a stipulation, in which a certain kind of power is contained - the power to distinguish and discriminate. The development of modern and contemporary Chinese science fiction can provide us with critical inspiration for exploring this issue.

In the shadow of Western colonial history, "fear of backwardness" and "desire for science and technology" have been important themes in Chinese science fiction for a long time. It seems natural that, in the 1950s and 1960s when China was still transitioning from an agrarian society to an industrial modern state and was in need of a large number of scientific and technological talents, science fiction was given the role of "scientific popularization 科普" to attract young people to scientific innovation. Then, during the Cultural Revolution (1956–1966), the genre of science fiction, like many other arts that did not meet the demands of authorities, basically disappeared in China. After the Chinese government started the market economy reform in the late 1970s and made noteworthy achievements, science fiction enjoyed a brief resurgence in a relatively eased political and social environment in which different ideologies have been intertwined with unprecedented speed and breadth. However, the attitude of Chinese authorities toward science fiction underwent a drastic shift in the 1980s; it was no longer regarded as a literary genre that

could benefit the scientific development of the country, but "spiritual pollution 精神污染" that carried political risks.[1] What is even more dramatic is that in the past ten years, this genre has gained widespread attention in China as some science fiction writers such as Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Han Song 韩松, Hao Jingfang 郝景芳 and Xia Jia 夏笳 have made their presence felt internationally; and with the support of the Chinese government, the World Science Fiction Conference (Worldcon) will finally come to Chengdu, China in 2023, almost a hundred years after the genre of science fiction was introduced to China. From this perspective, Chinese science fiction has never had continuity in its development because it has always been linked to the economic and political conditions and the operation of power in different eras.

How science fiction, as a speculative literary genre "whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment,"[2] and its fictive imagination can have the possibility to influence the actual social organization is the main general question that guides the reflection in this thesis. By examining and comparing four science fiction works of Han Song (1965–) and Xia Jia (1984–), I hope to demonstrate the importance of storytelling and literature, and to deconstruct different regulatory normativities that are hidden in the rhetoric of so-called "true reality," thus opening up more possibilities.

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[1] Gaffric Gwennaël, « La trilogie des Trois corps de Liu Cixin et le statut de la science-fiction en Chine contemporaine », *ReS Futurae,* 9 (2017), https://doi.org/10.4000/resf.940.

[2] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Edited by Gerry Canavan, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 7.

Han Song has been frequently regarded as a writer on a par with Liu Cixin. In many interviews, he mentioned that his childhood memory of the Cultural Revolution has influenced his thinking about life and the world, and that his science fiction writing is anchored in social realities. Xia Jia, as an award-winning emerging writer whose works are often considered feminist science fiction, pays special attention to topics such as gender, language, and identity. Their four representative works to be analyzed in this thesis - Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide 美女狩猎指南"[3] and "The Passengers and The Creators 乘客与创造者," Xia Jia's "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight 百鬼夜行街" and "Goodnight, Melancholy 晚安忧郁" - deconstruct boundaries of identity, gender and nation from different perspectives.

"Beauty Hunting Guide" represents a small island where live "beautiful women" created by advanced biotechnologies such as human cloning. These female clones are owned by an organization called the Beauty Hunting Club. The main job of this club, in addition to breeding cloned women, is to attract wealthy men to come to the island, which is completely isolated from the world, and help them hunt these cloned women. Male visitors to the island are equipped with a range of weapons and sexual enhancement drugs in order to successfully hunt cloned women and have wild sex with them. The main character, Xiaozhao 小昭, a man going through a "middle-aged masculinity crisis," goes hunting for women on this island with his two friends Yanjing 眼镜 and Pangzi 胖子, wishing to recover his "life as a man 作为男人的那样一种生命."[4] To his surprise, these female creatures have developed a series of systems for self-defence, and as his expedition

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[3] "美女狩猎指南" has not yet been published in English translation. The translations of the title and the passages cited in this thesis are my own translations, hence the original Chinese texts are also attached.

[4] 韩松, *宇宙墓碑* (上海：世纪出版集团 上海人民出版社, 2014), "美女狩猎指南," (一)厌倦, 电子书.

continues, he discovers that women on the island even have cultures and religions that are completely different from those of mainstream society, such as the giant statue of Guanyin 观音 that is not built by the club and whose origin cannot be explained. In the local culture of this island, love is not attached to sex, heterosexual coitus is just one of many choices, and the concept of male-female gender is insignificant in the communities. Xiaozhao attempts to satisfy the desires emanating from his "masculinity" through vaginal sex, masturbation and homosexual sex; however, despite these debauched sexual practices, he finds that masculinity as he understands does not seem to exist at all. In the end of his journey, under the intertwining of complex emotions such as jealousy, remorse, and inferiority, Xiaozhao kills Yanjing, who is having sex with a female clone who is "the best of the entire human race 整个人类中的极品."[5] Along with the collapse of his beliefs that he once thought were universal and unshakeable, in the fight with this female clone, Xiaozhao accidentally castrates himself. He then bits and swallows the female clone's reproductive organs. After losing his genitals, Xiaozhao feels a sense of relief and expects to reach a "genderless" state. Finally, he is brought back to mainstream society by the club.

"The Passengers and The Creator" tells a story taking place on a plane which travels forever in the night. The passengers live their entire lives on the plane, and they believe that a being known as "the Creator" created this cabin world and brought them into existence. People in the cabin do not have names and are identified by their seat numbers which serve as their code names, but each person's code name is not fixed because everybody should periodically change seats. The protagonist of the story lives in Economy Class, governed by people in Business Class and First Class. He cannot recall since when he lives in this cabin world, but he does not feel anything strange

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[5] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南," (三十一)英雄.

about such way of living. The protagonist's seemly peaceful life is shattered by the appearance of a character named "18H/25E/Something" (hereinafter referred to as "Something"), who leads the protagonist to think about a series of questions that he has never asked before such as "What else is beyond the cabin world?" "Why are we in this world?" Also, Something takes the protagonist to the Luggage Compartment and the Wheel Well that are actually also inhabited by some people, and then the protagonist learns that among different parts on this plane there are bribery, exploitation of labour, illegal trade and other interests chains that he did not know previously. As Something reveals to the protagonist other aspects of the plane, a romantic relationship begins to emerge between them (Something is also a male character). Later on, Something points out that the reason why he is approaching the protagonist is that the protagonist is the captain who is needed to lead the plane out of darkness. However, during their attempts to regain control of the cockpit and recall piloting skills, a coup breaks out in the cabin world. Something is executed, and the act or even the idea of exploring the world beyond the cabin is strictly forbidden. At the end of the story, seeing that there is little hope of retaking control of the plane, the protagonist and his colleagues take advantage of a fire incident to destabilize the cabin and jump out of the plane with parachutes prepared in advance. After landing, the protagonist finally sees the sun and the light, and soon meets a different group of humans he never saw before.

In Xia Jia's "Goodnight, Melancholy," there are two story lines that do not directly intersect with each other. The first story line "Lindy" is about a college student in a state of melancholy who, on the advice of a therapist, tries to accept her "negative self" and integrate into society by taking care of a robot doll that records her memories.[6] By interacting with this doll called Lindy, the

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[6] This story line is written in the first person and does not explicitly state the gender identity of the narrator. In my thesis, I use the gender pronouns "she/her/herself" to reduce ambiguities in reading the text.

protagonist finally "says goodbye" to her melancholy. The second story line "Alan" is adapted from the biography of mathematician Alan Turing. In Xia Jia's reimaging of Alan Turing's life, Alan invents a machine named Christopher that seems to be able to communicate with people. Due to his exclusion from mainstream society, Alan can only talk to this machine friend about his thoughts concerning artificial intelligence and the persecution he suffered because of his sexual orientation.

"A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" revolves around a character named "Ning 宁哥儿." Ning and two other characters named Xiao Qian 小倩 and Yan Chixia 燕赤霞 live together in Ghost Street which is an amusement park-like place for people to visit. Xiao Qian and Yan Chixia are artificial "ghosts" - they were human beings before their memories are implanted into their artificial "ghost" bodies, while according to Xiao Qian's words, Ning is a human orphan that she and Yan Chixia found by accident. One night, Ning overhears the conversation between Xiao Qian and Yan Chixia, and thus comes to know that he is actually not a natural-born human, but an artifact with a human body created by more advanced technologies. While Ning is wondering about his identity, many giant mechanical spiders suddenly appear and want to demolish Ghost Street which is in decline and has few visitors. In order to protect Ghost Street as well as the ghosts living there, Ning deliberately lets one mechanical spider attack him and eat his body. Since Ning's body is no different from a human's, the mechanical spiders think they have killed a human by mistake, which violates their operating guidelines, so that they have to end themselves and stop the demolition of Ghost Street.

The first chapter of this thesis, which serves as an introductory chapter to the next two, will focus on how these texts represent the formation of identity in the broad sense and the tension between subjectivity and social power. By analyzing "Goodnight, Melancholy" and "Beauty Hunting Guide," the second chapter will demonstrate how Xia Jia and Han Song reveal the social construction of gender; in addition to gender identity politics, I will also focus on the representation of cannibalism in Han Song's writing while comparing his work with Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary 狂人日記," and explore how this configuration poses a critical reflection on the violence and inter-human consumption of modern society. The third chapter focuses on debates regarding "Chineseness" in the development of Chinese science fiction in recent years, and considers the transnational contexts and the Chinese historical traditions under which these debates have taken place. Through readings of the texts of Han Song and Xia Jia, I argue that the concept of Chineseness is as ambivalent as heteronormative gender norms. In short, although Han Song and Xia Jia adopt different approaches and writing strategies, their works articulate an uncompromising critical attitude towards various disputable "mainstream" discourses and practices.

CHAPTER ONE – DECONSTRUCTING THE SELF

Since human minds do not have direct access to objective reality, reality can only manifest itself and be represented in an ideological way for humans. What we can perceive is not necessarily the full picture of reality but a system of human values. In this perspective, each individual forms part of a giant system under the directive of their "free will," interpellated and placed in a configured structural position by a tangible or imperceptible (ideological) apparatus. This chapter explores the deconstruction of the self in the four works of Han Song and Xia Jia comprising the corpus of the thesis. It also examines these texts' questioning of the interplay between the self and the Other, as well as their representations of the formation of identity, and subjectivity.

In the first part of this chapter, I argue that through representations of memory, narrative, language, and social norms, their texts fully demonstrate the tension between subjectivity and social power, reveal the dialectical relationship between the self and the Other, and question the legitimacy of self-possession which is the basis of various dominant ideologies in modern societies. Relying mainly on posthumanist critics, the second part of this chapter shows that by representing many humanlike or posthuman characters, these texts deconstruct the notion of "human" that underpins our definition of the self, produce a critical view of the humanist ethic and, to some extent, expose the humanist discourse's conceptual limits as well as its exclusivity and implicit violence. In a certain way, the self in Han Song and Xia Jia's writings is unknowable; this is not to say that these texts deny the subject's agency, but rather to show that there is an irreconcilable gap between the abstract concept of the self and its basis in reality.

Part I - Undoing the Presupposition of Self-possession

According to C. B. Macpherson's critique of possessive individualism, self-possession is one of the bases of contemporary politics. Such ideology claims individuals "owe nothing to society" and the ownership of oneself (body, skills, consciousness, etc.) is a "state of nature" that precedes society; so that it is legitimate for individuals to sell their free labour. In this sense, society consists of exchange relations among individuals, and individuals should take their own responsibilities in the market and in society.[7] However, before we assume that there is such a "self" and try to explore it, we must ask questions such as the following: How does the concept of the self come into being? Why do we keep trying to give an account of the self? And under what kind of conditions do we give that account? Han Song and Xia Jia's texts refute the metaphysical view of self-possession and suggest that "the self" is a complex process which results from the interplay of narrative, language, and social norms.

"Who Am I"

Synthesizing Hegel's and Nietzsche's theories, Judith Butler claims that, when we give an account of the self, we are always in a situation of a "scene of address," regardless of whether this object to be addressed is specific or abstract, tangible or intangible, implicit or explicit. That is, to think of the self, "the Other" is indispensable. When "I" tell "my story," the prerequisite is a scene

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[7] Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1967).

of address, namely, the existence of a "you" that does not necessarily have a physical entity asking "me" to tell a narrative. It is this "you" that establishes the scene of address and makes the emergence of the "I" possible. The notion of the self is not as closed and solipsistic as one might think, but rather, it is born in the relationship with the outside world, in the "between":

> One is compelled and comported outside oneself; one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a convention or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or an agent of one's own making.[8]

In this perspective, the self and the Other can only appear simultaneously, even though sometimes the Other is counterintuitive and not always visible or is intentionally ignored because the self does not want to see it. If the object of address disappears, or if the condition of address is lost in some way and the "you/Other" disappears, then the "I/self" is also lost. The representation of the lost self in Han Song and Xia Jia's works reveal this inevitable opacity in our understanding of ourselves. In their texts, the cause of the subjects' disorientation is the undefinable fundamental dependency between the self and the Other.

The process of healing depressive tendencies of the protagonist in "Goodnight, Melancholy" can be interpreted as an exploration of the coordinates between the self and the Other. In the fifth section of the story line Lindy, with some uneasiness, the protagonist decides to "believe" in herself and in Lindy which is a kind of incarnation of her subjectivity, while starting to build a self-narrative in the dialogue with Lindy.

> You've never met the therapist in person; in fact, you don't even know which city he lives in. The background projected on iWall is always the same room. When it's dark where you are, his place is filled with bright daylight. Always the

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[8] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 1st ed.), 28.

same. You've tried to guess what his life outside of work is like. Maybe he feels as helpless as you, and he doesn't even know where to go for help. Perhaps that is why he's always saying "we." We are trapped in the same predicament.

You think you're less like a living person but more like a machine, laid out on a workbench to be examined. The examiner is another machine, and you suspect that it needs to be examined more than you. Perhaps one machine cannot fix another.

You've bought some psychology books, but you don't believe that their theories can help you. You believe that the root of the problem is that each of us lives on a thin, smooth layer of illusions. These illusions are made up from "common sense," from repetitive daily linguistic acts and clichés, from imitating each other. On this iridescent film, we perform ourselves. Beneath the illusions are deep, bottomless seams, and only by forgetting their existence can we stride forward. When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you. You tremble, as though standing over a thin layer of ice. You feel your own weight, as well as the weight of the shadow under you.[9]

The "thin, smooth layer of illusions," "common sense," "repetitive daily linguistic acts and clichés" and "imitating" described in this passage can be interpreted as abstract symbols, linguistic signs, concepts, and norms that are necessary for the functioning of human society. In the Lacanian sense, these are the things that act in the Symbolic realm.[10] The "deep, bottomless seams" refer to the rupture between the signifier and the signified, and between abstraction and embodiment; while the "abyss" is a metaphor for the fear of not being able to see "meanings" in reality. The protagonist cannot sort out the relations between symbol and meaning, and thus cannot convince herself of the ultimate meaning of "I," "you," "we" and "they" that define herself and others, so later she chooses to "believe." Choosing to believe suggests that the perceived reality endowed with meanings by the symbolic system that the protagonist sees is not the only possibility, but she subjectively decides not to doubt any more while wishing to find peace in her struggles with abstract signs - it is the

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[9] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," trans. Ken Liu, *Clarkesworld*, issue 126, March 2012, Lindy (5) https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/xia_03_17/.

[10] Jacques Lacan, *Livre XVIII D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, le séminaire de Jacques Lacan* (Champ Freudien. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, n.d. 2007).

most workable choice she has. Besides the chaos and rupture of meanings seen through the protagonist's eyes, the scene of the conversation with Lindy shows more specifically such ambivalence. The treatment plan offered by the therapist is to have Lindy - a robot that records the protagonist's own voice and words - engage in a dialogue with the protagonist. This configuration directly represents the abstract construction of self-narrative: "I" need a story of myself to make a narrative self, so that "I" can be recognized by others as well as by abstract norms, and therefore become "acceptable" for oneself; this story is always addressed to an Other; this "Other" can be literally another person, while it can also be the "I." The dialogue between Lindy and the protagonist embodies this abstract pattern that often escapes from our consciousness. Lindy is a different being from the protagonist, a robot, a factual object, but it also symbolizes the protagonist herself because, on the one hand, Lindy can record, repeat and perform the protagonist's words and emotions and therefore she is part of the protagonist's subjectivity to some extent, while, on the other hand, the protagonist takes Lindy as herself. In this point of view, in the scene of address for constructing the protagonist's self-narrative, the Other is also the self; the self and the Other are counterintuitively fused together.

In "The Passengers and The Creator," Han Song's representation of the dependency of the self and the Other is more direct. The protagonist asks himself the question "who am I" in his mind, but at the same time he also "sees" the face of the character Something.

> Is the world outside really worth the venturing out into?
>
> But Something's face appears in the mirror. Actually, the face is a hovering instrument panel, inching its way out of a crevice in the autopilot relay.
>
> "Who are you?" Something inquires mournfully.

> "Who am I?" I respond in a firm voice to the blood-drenched face in the mirror, standing my ground. Pitiful as a fading mist, he disappears.[11]

Something inspires the protagonist throughout the story with the question "who are you?" Before meeting Something, like most people in the cabin world, the protagonist never thought about "who I am" because there was no object of address and no opportunity for him to build such a scene of address. However, when Something, who does not follow the mainstream norms of the cabin world, appears in the protagonist's life and establishes the scene of address for this question, the protagonist is interpellated and begins to ask himself this question and keeps exploring. Toward the end of the story, Something reappears in the form of phantom and asks the question "who are you," which directly points out that an "Other" like the character Something, whether it is alive or abiotic, imaginary or real, is necessary to pose the inquiry "who am I."

In addition, it is worth noting that in the works examined here, the importance of narration in shaping the self is emphasized. All the texts suggest that the narrative self which is created through language cannot fully represent the actual subject. Even though there is no way for the subject to expose his/her/their subjectivity without language, all attempts to fully narrate the self are doomed to failure because it is impossible and beyond the reach of language. The two protagonists in these novels keep changing their self-narratives in response to changes in their environment. These different self-narratives are quite different, but it cannot be said that they are "false" or that they do not represent the subjects at all. In these stories, the differences between these self-narratives are due to the fact that they emerged from different contexts, norms, and perspectives. This means that in such a scene of address, the self must appear in a way that can be recognized by the

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[11] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," trans. Nathaniel Isaacson, in *The Reincarnated Giant*, ed. Mingwei Song and Theodore Huters (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2018), 20. Evasive Action, E-book.

established narrative structures, and that such a narrative self, which can be perceived by others, thus cannot truly represent and manifest the whole subject.

Norms and Language

What, then, constitutes the narrative structure? In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler suggests that there is an aspect often neglected in the process of address: the contextual conditions that allow the address to be generated - that is to say, languages, conventions, sedimentation of norms that allow the self and the Other to be identified.

> Yet there is no "I" that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no "I" that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning.
>
> When the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed, when the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist.[12]

In Butler's analysis, the story of oneself is the story of the relationship between the subject and norms. Norms do not operate by any individual will, because norms emerge, transform, and persist according to a temporality that is not the same as the temporality of oneself. Whereas, when the subject is transformed into a narrative self, it must be recognized through these norms. Thus, when the subject negotiates with norms and rules in a living and reflective way and then appropriates and internalizes them, this self "is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its

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[12] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 7-8.

emergence." "The norms by which I recognize another or, indeed, myself are not mine alone."[13] In this sense, norms not only limit the possibility of the encounter with the Other, but the Other can just as well be a set of norms, codes, or in Michel Foucault's words – a given "regime of truth (*régime de la vérité*)."[14] Although this transformed self has "a constitutive loss in the process of recognition,"[15] one must self-constitute it in comparison and contrast with these things that exist before oneself. In turn, when we give an account of ourselves and explore the relationship between the self and social norms, our understandings of ourselves will inevitably be opaque. It is like looking at a half-black and half-white painting, it is impossible to say exactly whether half of the white paper has been painted black, or half of the black paper has been painted white. Self-narratives are always going through revision, and "I" cannot fully give an account of the environment of the emergence of "I."

The mismatch between norms and the subject is particularly represented in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" and "The Passengers and The Creator." While the protagonists appropriate abstract frameworks that they can apply and master, they perceive that these norms, which are closely linked to specific given historical/temporal conditions, precede and exceed their subjects.

In "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight," Ning is unable to create a story to institute a narrative self after having doubts about his human identity. When he asks himself and tries to narrate what/who he is, he finds that he has no intellectual structure to build a story. He knows he is not a

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[13] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 8, 24.

[14] Michel Foucault, "Le corps des condamnés," in *Surveiller et punir : naissance de la prison* (Paris : Gallimard, 2013), E-book.

[15] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 27-28.

human but also understands that he is not a "ghost" like Yan Chixia and Xiao Qian. When he thinks of Xiao Qian's words - "Ghost Street had been doing poorly. No tourists had been coming by for a while. That hasn't changed. Xiao Qian tells me that it's probably because people invented some other attraction, newer, fresher, and so they forgot about the old attractions"[16] - he realizes that the old framework of "human" and "ghost" cannot define himself and give him an identity. He is a brand-new invention, a "newer, fresher" toy. He needs to position himself in relation to norms that he did not know before. Similarly, in "The Passengers and The Creator," the protagonist's definition of himself also has to rely on outside references to proceed. At first, with a regularly changing seat code, he thought that he was one of the "three hundred and some people in the whole World" and carried out "the only meaningful thing in this bubble of a universe."[17] Despite his doubts about "who I am," he could not accurately depict this chaotic and confusing thinking. It is only when Something/25E tells him that he used to be the "captain" and explains the meaning of "captain" through a series of related words, that the protagonist's self-narrative is dramatically transformed in this new given scheme of things.

> "You've been looking for me all along? Who . . . am I?"
>
> I feel a sharp, wet shadow surge toward me, as if a hole were being drilled in the top of my fossil-like cranium, penetrating into my brain, whipping it around and stirring up something very old. In the mirror above the sink, I see my face has gone ashen. Tense and anxious, I lick my lips like a black bear, my hands pausing in the act of fastening my belt.
>
> 25E calmly utters the strange word "Captain."[18]

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[16] Xia Jia, "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight," trans. Ken Liu, *Clarkesworld*, issue 65 (February 2012), Awakening of Insects, the Third Solar Term, https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/xia_02_12/.

[17] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," 1. The Passenger Cabin, 4. 7X7.

[18] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," 13. The Captain.

Besides, the protagonist's narrations of the self all begin *in medias res*. For example, people in the cabin world cannot know the past, and they can only deduce their history through the archaeology of objects in the luggage; the protagonist's new self-narrative is also constructed through the "renaissance" of the lost culture in the Luggage Compartment. The construction of the protagonist's narrative selves is always an act of delimiting within a certain abstract framework, an act of shaping an intelligible history of the self with a certain compromise and recalcitrance. If the framework is lost, only doubts remain. These representations all illustrate that, before the emergence of these characters' self-narratives, there are numerous concepts, frames, and norms that these subjects must quote and internalize. It is through a series of frameworks that different memories are organized and represented in a certain way in the mind, and it is these external things that make the creating of the story of the self possible.

In addition, all these works pay close attention to language as an approach revealing how norms influence the construction of the self in an implicit way.

Foucault suggests that the question of "who am I?" should be read as "what can I become, given the contemporary order of being?"[19] In his view, the encounter between the self and the Other needs to be constructed through language, while norms are deeply embedded in language. In this perspective, as Butler says,

> […] there are norms that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by the structure of address in which it takes place.

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[19] Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses : une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris : Gallimard, 1990).

> I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer. In a sense, I submit to
> a norm of recognition when I offer recognition to you, which means that the "I"
> is not offering this recognition from its own private resources.[20]

On a similar note, the unconscious symbolism theory also argues that language is a mirror that indirectly shows people's subconscious; the multiply encoded nature of language makes it possible for the speaker to convey more information than the speaker is aware of when he/she/they speaks in a certain language.[21] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theorizing of metaphors resonates with this view as well. They assert that there is no language without metaphor, and that language as a system of signs always requires presuppositions that include surpluses.[22] That is to say, linguistic communication relies substantially on networks of relational differences among signifiers. Linguistic definitions and labels are a prerequisite for all linguistic behaviour and discussion, and without this commensurability prerequisite, much of our human communication would be impossible. In this perspective, language is the body's "Other Half" which does not belong to oneself. When someone expresses his/her/their "self-will" or explain "who I am," he/she/they must rely on a system of citations - language - whose existence precedes himself.

The setting of the character Ning in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" embodies exactly this view. Ning's identity is built within the narrative of language, and in an abstract sense his undefinable identity is dispossessed by language and the set of schemes behind it. Moreover, he is also in some way an object, "a toy" that is literally dispossessed by Xiao Qian, and it is language -

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[20] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 25, 39, 37.

[21] Nancy Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 70-73.

[22] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

the "story of his own" which Xiao Qian deliberately tells him to make him believe that he is human

- that makes this double dispossession feasible. In "The Passengers and The Creator," there is a

scene that illustrates nicely this feature of language as well.

> But how could it be this way?
>
> This time, there is new graffiti in the bathroom.
>
> —When will we stop flying?
>
> What does "fly" mean? It is without doubt quite special, since the 3D instructor never taught us this term. I stare blankly at it for a while, my heart feels as if someone had poured a cup of scalding coffee over it, and hot blood courses through my whole being. Suddenly, I feel that rare hardening sensation down between my legs.
>
> […]
>
> That's it, just one chuckle, as his gaze drifts toward the bizarre protuberance in my lap, and says, "You ever wondered what would happen if we flew faster?"
>
> "What do you mean?" I hasten to take my seat.
>
> "What if it's 7X7 that's moving, and not the bubble?"
>
> "Hush, please."
>
> Fear crawls up the length of my spinal cord, creeping like a snake into the dark, chaotic morass of my thalamus. Preposterous—what's flying? What's flying faster? Right now, I'm really hoping there will be another reorganization of our seating so I can get away from the frightening 18H; but I feel conflicted: I'd actually hate to leave 18H—I want to hear more of his novel cosmological theories.[23]

People who live in the cabin do not know what the concept of "fly(ing)" is, because if there is no

comparison with concepts of "non-fly(ing)" and related words, even though they have this word

and they are actually flying in a plane, what the signifier "fly" refer to cannot be grasped. In other

words, "fly" as a signifier has no meaning in itself, and it cannot fully represent an Aristotelian

sense of essence; language communication occurs through analogical constitution, and a single

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[23] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," 8. Cruising.

signifier can only be successfully communicated if it is placed in a network with which it is associated and linked to its presuppositions. The protagonists of these two stories perceive, to a greater or lesser extent, a rupture between the signified and the signifier, and whenever they focus on a seemingly isolated thing, they have to delve into the series of networks surrounding it. Hence, they not only question the emptiness behind signifiers, but also the norms, customs, and codes that frame them. These writings take advantage of this feature of language to reveal that when we speak of the self, this self is shaped by a set of surrounding norms. In this point of view, it is the language that discourses about the self rather than the self that discourses about language. Since there is such "chaos" behind the establishment of the self, "self-possession" is thus nonsensical.

Besides, one of the noteworthy characteristics of Han Song's representation of the emergence of the self is that he embodies this question with (Chinese) Buddhism. In his two works, Buddhism serves as an essential metaphor for questioning the construction of subjectivity. In "The Passengers and The Creator," from the protagonist's initial understanding of the cabin world as "the Creator's world" to his landing on the ground, his prayer is always "Amitabha 阿弥陀佛" - a sign that clearly points to Buddhism. Buddhist elements are also constantly present in "Beauty Hunting Guide." For example, the name of the island - Putuo 普陀 - is the same as a real mount which is situated in East China and which is famous for its Buddhist cultural heritage; when the protagonist is in a state of confusion, contemplating the relationship between humans and the universe and seemingly reversing his previous convictions, he always looks at the mysterious Guanyin 观音 statue on the island; after he returns to society from hunting and finds that his "male identity" seems to be a void, he notices again the necklace of Guanyin worn by the prostitute,

He notices that she is wearing a jade Guanyin on her chest. He thinks she made a mistake, because men are supposed to wear Guanyin while women should wear the Buddha. The whole world is a mess.

他注意到她胸前佩戴着一个玉观音。他想她搞错了，男戴观音女戴佛啊。这个世界整个地乱套了。[24]

As many scholars of posthumanism have noticed, Buddhist thinking suggests that "the 'self' is a story consciousness tells itself to block out the fear and panic that would ensue if human beings realized there is no essential self."[25] In both stories by Han Song, the emergence of a new "Other" and the imminent collapse of the old self-identities all cause fear and panic to the protagonists, while Buddhism, which provides a set of ideological "meanings" to explain the world, acts as a lifeline to save subjectivity from collapse when the protagonists are mentally fragile. Like the idea of stopping doubting and believing in yourself in Xia Jia's "Goodnight, Melancholy," these Buddhist elements in Han Song's stories also suggest that this is only an expedient way to face the absence of essence behind the concept of the self. In other words, the "chaos" behind "the self" is still there, but "I" choose not to see it.

Part II - How We Humans as Finite Beings Understand Ourselves?

Anything that enters the human brain through our sensory organs is processed, which means that what we perceive or sense is a subjective image projected by (what counts as) objective reality and that our observations of the world and of ourselves cannot transcend the limitations of our

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[24] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南," (三十三)免疫.

[25] Nancy Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 156.

mortal physical bodies. It is from this perspective that Han Song and Xia Jia examine furthermore the self and ponder how we are "human." Their texts suggest that humans' understanding of "truths" and of ourselves is a product of cultural constructs that rely on various cultural media, educational mechanisms, and default knowledge systems. That is to say, it can only represent what can be narrated but can do nothing about what is unspeakable, what has not been observed and what cannot be narrated.

Xia Jia: The Invisible Observer

In her discussion about the critical perspective offered by cybernetics to our understanding of human life, N. Katherine Hayles claims that the stability and the "authenticity" of the observing mind shouldn't be assumed. When the observer distinguishes a "system (in a general sense)," that system is not always stable nor authentic, because the observer often ignores that he/she/they is also a presupposed self-defining "system" whose boundaries are constructed by himself/herself/themselves.[26] That being said, the observer's perceptual system does not register reality, but rather, it constructs an adapted and transformed "reality" through multiple sensory modalities and neural interfaces. "There was no one-to-one correlation between perception and the world."[27] Similarly, Elizabeth A. Grosz argues that the mind-body split, which is common in Western traditions, is closely linked to modern philosophical thought, so that this tendency in

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[26] Nancy Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, Chapter Seven, 160-191.

[27] Nancy Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 135.

philosophy often neglects the fact that the subject itself has a corporal body.[28] In other terms, the background from which abstract concepts can be abstracted, narrated, and transformed into human experience is that there is an agent doing so - an "observer" with inevitable limits. To some extent, the position occupied by this observer in the face of objective reality determines what kind of and which part of reality will be represented. In this sense, concepts and definitions created by humans are meaningful only in the discursive and communicative fields. The understanding of the concept of human should thus be differentiated and grounded, because "the human needs to be assessed as materially embedded and embodied."[29]

In "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight," the character Ning is fully integrated with the question of "the observer." Ning is in some way an object of observation, while the observer is the reader of the novel. Like a thought experiment, this work invites readers to imagine a situation in which a being like Ning appears in front of us, and how we, as real living human beings, are able to judge whether he is alive and whether he should enjoy the right to human life. If humanlike/posthuman entities, objects or machines, like the character Ning, regard themselves as living organisms or even as humans, and if they can do everything human bodies can do and are also capable of conscious activity, can they be classified as humans? Obviously, we as observers, who can only judge from external evidence of behaviour, cannot make absolute assertions. As the ancient Chinese philosophers Zhuangzi 庄子 and Huizi 惠子 say,

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[28] Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Theories of Representation and Difference. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[29] Rosi Braidotti, "The Posthuman Condition," in *Posthuamn Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), E-book.

"You're not a fish—how do you know what fish enjoy? 子非鱼，焉知鱼之乐？"
"You're not me, so how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy? 子非我，安知我不知鱼之乐？"[30]

Any object outside the subject is in some way a black hole for the subject, that is, the subject can observe the black hole but cannot enter its "interior" to find out what it is. The speculative point here in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" is not to discuss whether there is such a being/creature like Ning, but to reveal that the definitions of human and human life which we have taken for granted still have blind spots and flaws. The unperceivable and the unspeakable of Ning's identity is a reminder for the inevitable limitations of such definitions. From this perspective, Ning's final scene of sacrificing himself to save Ghost Street can therefore be seen as resistance against the observer's gaze and the abstraction taken out of the context. The mechanical spiders cannot kill human beings, otherwise they will have to end themselves; and the criterion to differentiate humans or non-humans is "the flesh and blood." Despite possessing a flesh and blood body, Ning is not human. He takes advantage of the gray area of this flawed judgment criterion and defeats humans through the rules of humans, therefore indirectly proving the deficiency of this rule. The implication of the observer in the construction of the concept of human thus becomes explicit.

While exploring the same question, "Goodnight, Melancholy," on the other hand, implicitly criticizes the arrogance of anthropocentrism as well.

The problem with the Turing test was that the imitation game was conceived with deception as its only goal. If a man could successfully pass as a woman in this game, it did not mean that he truly understood how a woman thought. With enough motivation, we could train a computer to be a master liar. But was that really our goal?

[…]

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[30] 孙通海(译注), 方勇(译注), *庄子* (北京：中华书局, 2007), 秋水, 279-280.

A reporter from The Times called Turing to ask for his thoughts on this speech. Turing, in his habitual, uninhibited manner, said, "I do not think you can even draw the line about sonnets, though the comparison is perhaps a little bit unfair because a sonnet written by a machine will be better appreciated by another machine."

Turing always believed that there was no reason for machines to think the same way as humans, just as individual humans thought differently from each other. Some people were born blind; some could speak but could not read or write; some could not interpret the facial expressions of others; some spent their entire lives incapable of knowing what it meant to love another; but all of them deserved our respect and understanding. It was pointless to find fault with machines by starting with the premise that humans were supreme. It was more important to clarify, through the imitation game, how humans accomplished their complex cognitive tasks.[31]

In these passages, Xia Jia points out that, like Ning in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" who is helpless in the face of abstract concepts that define him, humans are also unable to give an accurate answer to the question "what is mind/consciousness/soul?" The need of a behaviourist observing approach for humans demonstrates the limitations of being an observer: "I" cannot be anything other than "myself," while the only sole reality "I" can determine is "myself," and that is why the self can only imagine the Other by taking itself and its own subjective experience as template, in which "I" find myself reflected in the Other. In addition, Xia Jia's interpretation of the Turing Test contains another layer of criticism: without figuring out the question of "what is mind/consciousness/soul?" the implicit anthropocentric ideology in humanism takes for granted that it (humanism) is the main criterion for judging whether there is "intelligence," "life," and so forth. However, this view contains a contradiction: on the one hand, the presupposition of such a statement is that "intelligence" and "life" are absolute objective things of which human beings are only one of many concrete manifestations; on the other hand, anthropocentrism proposes "human beings" as the only template, which contradicts what this view presupposes.

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[31] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Alan (3).

In brief, Xia Jia's stories raise a series of speculative critical queries by creating contrasts between human and non-human characters. For instance, is the person(s), who commands the mechanical spiders to destroy Ghost Street and who is more cold-blooded and unfeeling than the beings living in Ghost Street, "human" enough? Machines and algorithms seem to be able to make more "rational" decisions than humans, so how can humans still be human? These representations and the reflections they provoke enable us to see the decisive role of the perspective of the observer, which in turn destabilizes notions that we use to define ourselves. Since the concepts of human intelligence, human life and humanity are reconfigured, the human is transfigured into the posthuman and human identity as traditionally defined is deconstructed.

When Humans become "Unexpected Beasts"

"Humans" as a category, a kind of identity, how does it come into being and how do people possess such identity? The formation of human identity is one of the central questions that Han Song's texts seek to explore.

Rosi Braidotti argues that "[…] it (philosophy) (often) conventionally fell into a discursive pattern of dualistic oppositions that defined the human mostly by what it is not. Thus, with Descartes: not an animal, not extended and inert matter, not a pre-programmed machine. These binary oppositions provided definitions by negation […]"[32] In this perspective, self-recognition

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[32] Rosi Braidotti, "The Posthuman Condition," in *Posthuamn Knowledge.*

and self-identity can only be achieved through constant comparison and interaction with a point of reference, namely, the "not-self" or "the Other" which is indispensable for the construction of identity. To put it differently, the self (the perceiver) and the Other (the perceived) do not exist in isolation as absolutely separated entities but emerge through an analogical relation. The reason for the existence of different identities is that subjects are placed in different coordinates, being compared and influenced by each other, and these coordinates are the set of norms of behaviour or characteristics on which the individual is considered as a member of a certain group.

The world-building in "The Passengers and The Creator" clearly echoes this point of view. This story metaphorically represents (capitalist) economic production and consumption, political regime change, and ideological struggle in the modern world. Initially, the cabin society is divided into three hierarchical parts: First Class, Business Class and Economy Class, with First Class and Business Class possessing absolute ruling power. The main character's narration shows that people of the cabin world interpret the privileges enjoyed by the two dominant groups in terms of "customs." Different customs divide people and legitimize this, as if it is the natural order of things. When the protagonist goes to the Luggage Compartment and sees a completely different scene, he also uses "customs" to explain to himself why these people are in poor living conditions. However, at the same time, the novel's explicit descriptions of the disposal of the bodies of Economy Class passengers and the eating of human ribs soup point out that there is not much difference between these groups with different class identities. In the face of death, only the mortal body is left, and everything else is an attachment; in other words, identities are cultivated and acquired, and their construction depends on the ideological guidelines. "Customs" is thus a metaphor for the social rules and constructs that differentiate people. Besides, the novel ends with a direct depiction of a

coup against First Class, where the old "customs" are quickly overthrown, while new rulers begin

to establish new coordinates of identity to govern the cabin world.

> Passengers in Business Class "volunteer" to carry out the task of processing the new corpses, and a spoonful of the resulting soup is given out equally for the common enjoyment of the Business, First, and Economy Classes. It is to be like this from now on; no one has special privileges, and equality and fairness are the ultimate standards championed by Guohang.
>
> The jet packs are seized as contraband, and the boys hoist them up for display in the common area. These were the tools of subversion, and they had almost shaken the foundations of Boeing's legitimacy.[33]

This scene re-emphasizes the social nature of the construction of identity and suggests that, if one

is to speak of "First Class," one must refer to "Business Class" and "Economy Class" which are

contrasted with it; otherwise, the term "First Class" would be meaningless. An "otherness" in the

intellectual level is essential in order to consolidate a specific shaped identity.

Investigating into the same question, "Beauty Hunting Guide" represents particularly the

boundaries of "human identity," which are also in a state of flux and can also change or collapse at

any time. In this story, there are two groups set in opposition: male humans, and female clones who

are not considered to be human. The similarity and the ambiguity between humans and human

clones are the speculative point that generates reflections concerning how humans consume

"inferior-human" beings which are arbitrarily excluded and unrecognized.

At the beginning of the novel, the young girl in charge of introducing the club to the visitors

points out explicitly that the cloned women are almost biologically identical to natural-born

humans, and that the difference between them and humans is that they are not legally and socially

recognized as human beings. Like the android in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* these

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[33] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," 19. Change of Command.

cloned women are denied the status of living beings and humans, and they are improperly considered as non-humans. Han Song's imaginary human cloning in "Beauty Hunting Guide" brings out the importance of "the Other" in constructing the concept of "human." In a sense, without the concept of non-human beings as opposed to "humans," there would be no "humans" at all. The male tourists on the island identify themselves as genuine "humans"; nevertheless, paradoxically, the legitimacy of what human beings do has to be consolidated by thinking of the non-human clones. That is, the tourists must rely on the "difference," which is actually a judgment given by a system of significance/value that mediates the understanding of reality, between "humans" and "non-humans" to justify their hunting of women.

However, such a differentiation system based on disputable value judgments is unstable. Despite the oppressive division supported by a series of violence systems such as guns and drugs, the boundary between "humans" and "non-humans" has shifted on this small island, with non-humans and humans becoming increasingly similar and humans wanting to integrate into non-humans.

> Xiaozhao is still haunted by the way Yanjing looked like just now. What is an "unexpected beast"? Maybe it's a supernatural monster that changes its form over time.
>
> 小昭仍对眼镜刚才的扮相耿耿于怀。什么是"意料之外的野兽"呢？小昭想，恐怕是一种会随时间而变化形态的超自然怪物吧。
>
> […]
>
> It turns out that Yanjing is naked because of this. He wants to acquire the same status as those women, to become a resident of the island, or, to become a part of the island. He does not need the external support products.
>
> And Xiaozhao is fully armed, with Yanjing a comparison, Xiaozhao is like a ridiculous monster from an alien planet. Xiaozhao feels that from the beginning, he is at odds with the social and natural ecology of the island.

Yanjing looks at Xiaozhao and snickers, making Xiaozhao very inferior, and jealous of Yanjing.

Huh, he can't be as liberal as Yanjing.

"Hurry up and throw away those extra ornaments, it's too contrary to the principles of nature, women will not like it."

Yanjing exaggeratedly points at Xiaozhao's body, lecturing as if condescendingly.

"You can't do that, it's too dangerous!" Xiaozhao yells out in a complicated mood, despite acting resolute but actually very vulnerable inside.

"No, what I do is the safest. I will be the same as her, I will be the same as the island. She will no longer avoid me and dislike me!"

"You're crazy, this won't work, better put your protections on quickly!" When Xiaozhao says so, in fact, he is also conflicted in his heart. He feels that he is losing Yanjing."

原来眼镜是因为这个才赤裸起来的啊。他要取得与那些女人一样的身份，成为这岛上的一员居民，或者，成为这岛的一部分。他用不着那些外在的支撑品了。

而小昭全副武装，同眼镜一比，竟像个外星来的可笑怪物。小昭觉得，自己从一开始便与这岛上的人文和自然生态格格不入。

眼镜看着小昭，嗤嗤地笑起来，弄得小昭十分自卑，又对眼镜产生了嫉妒。

他是做不到像眼镜这样洒脱的啊。

"快点扔掉那些多余的饰物吧，太违背自然的原则了，女人会不喜欢的。"

眼镜夸张地指着小昭的身体，居高临下似的教训说。

"你不能这样，太危险了！"小昭心情复杂地大声嚷嚷，但自觉是色厉内荏。

"不，像我这样才是最安全的。我便与她一样了，我便与岛一样了。她不会再躲我避我嫌我了！"

"你疯了吧，这样不行，还是快些穿戴上吧！"这么说的时候，其实小昭心中也是矛盾着的。他觉得正在失去眼镜。[34]

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[34] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南," (二十五)胖子, (三十)抛弃一切.

In the novel, an important reason for such a shift is the unrecognizability of the Other. After Xiaozhao learns that the cloned women have also developed their own communities and cultures in the same way as mainstream society, the available codes and terms that he used to believe in the "regime of truth" about "humans" and "non-humans" cannot provide accurate frames of reference. Xiaozhao, who is mostly alone on this island, is completely separated from mainstream society and loses the conditions to consolidate his original identity through bodily practices and societal activities; by contrast, he participates in the rituals of different local communities accidentally. Gradually, Xiaozhao's former identity of "hunter" and "true (male) human" becomes fragile, and the abstract boundaries of humanizing and dehumanizing are thus alienated. This representation indicates that when the concept of human is removed from its central position, and when the contrast between humans and non-humans is deconstructed, we will discover the previously invisible boundaries that divide humans and non-humans (which can be animals, insects, plants, etc.) and define ourselves, and see the social status of these boundaries.

CHAPTER TWO – BOUNDARIES OF GENDER

In August 2021, Chinese state departments, including the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party, the National Radio and Television Administration and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, began a systematic campaign across the cultural, entertainment, and ideological spectrum. Many state-level official media have highlighted one of the key points of this campaign: "resolutely putting an end to abnormal aesthetics such as 娘炮 (girly/sissy boys)" and "resisting 耽美 (boys' love, often abbreviated as BL) and 耽改 (BL adaptations)."[35] This is yet another national-level governance campaign involving gender that has been launched by Chinese authorities in recent years. In addition to these explicit regulations, some relatively implicit trends emphasizing "masculinity" have become stronger in China as well. For example, Petrus Liu points out that one of the reasons why the movie *Wolf Warrior II* received such strong support from the state is that the jingoistic and masculinist representation in this film met the Chinese government's need for "policing of gender."[36] These examples all reaffirm Foucault's biopower theory: in modern society gender and sexuality are not entirely individual matters; they are deeply entangled with the shaping

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[35] "国家广播电视总局办公厅关于进一步加强文艺节目及其人员管理的通知," National Radio and Television Administration, accessed October 31, 2021, http://www.nrta.gov.cn/art/2021/9/2/art_113_57756.html.

See also: "中央宣传部印发通知，部署文娱领域综合治理工作," People's Daily, accessed October 31, 2021 http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0902/c1001-32215990.html.

[36] Petrus Liu, "Women and Children First—Jingoism, Ambivalence, and Crisis of Masculinity," in *"Wolf Warrior II:" The Rise of China and Gender/Sexuality Politics*, ed. Petrus Liu and Lisa Rofel (MCLC Resource Centre, 2018), http://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/liu-rofel/.

and governance of the community.[37] From the PRC's "anti-body, anti-flesh, anti-sexuality"[38] campaign in the early days of its foundation to the current gendered narrative of "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation 中华民族伟大复兴,"[39] it is clear that the shaping of national identity and subjectivity through biopolitical modes of governmentality has been an essential theme in modern China.

However, the functioning of the state apparatus is not entirely free from interrogation and contestation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, neoliberalism, socialism and other forms of ideology coexist in postsocialist China; in terms of the formation of gender identity in contemporary China, Bao Hongwei proposes to use the term "postsocialist metamorphosis" to describe this "simultaneous and yet contradictory process of becoming and unbecoming in terms of identity and politics." He argues that

> They (transformations of gender identity) are often impacted on, but not dictated by, neoliberal capitalism. After all, other modes of governmentality, including Confucian and socialist governmentalities, coexist and play important roles as well. These different modes of governmentality shape subjectivities, bodies and desires in China in significant ways. "Postsocialist metamorphosis" is thus a historical process, simultaneously and yet contradictorily producing and unmaking gendered, sexed and desiring subjects.
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> […]

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[37] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1, la volonté de savoir* (Paris : Gallimard, 2015).

[38] 查建英, "黃禍," *中國波普*, 李家真翻譯 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2017), 239-251.

[39] "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation 中华民族伟大复兴" generally refers to Xi Jinping's theory. See: 中共中央文献研究室编辑, *习近平关于实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦论述摘编* (北京：中央文献出版社, 2013).

> Metamorphosis is queer, insofar as it refuses a clear definition, a single trajectory
> and a definitive goal.[40]

In this sense, imaginations of gender in "Goodnight, Melancholy" and "Beauty Hunting Guide" are queer. These representations of gender contain some resistance to the biopolitical regulation of the state and reject any identitarian discourse. That is to say, they are not "Chinese raw materials" created according to a particular model or paradigm of queer theory, nor are they synonymous with homosexuality, nor do they seek to create another fixed identity; rather, they stand for the impossibility of reducing the complexity of gender and sexuality to rigid categories. The significance of these texts consists in exploring the possibilities of human sexuality, creativity, and fulfillment embedded in the mutually constitutive nature of speech and power, to unfold "non-normative" voices that have been assimilated, silenced and erased.

In the first part of this chapter, I argue that "Goodnight, Melancholy" subtly integrates the criticism of heteronormativity into the story by "imitating" the masculinist discourse of traditional science fiction. Through two story lines, Xia Jia represents public/violent and implicit/reticent oppressions upon sexual minorities in modern society and suggests that this tension between regulatory normativities and subjectivity is not limited to marginalized groups but is relevant to all. In the second part, I compare Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary"[41] and Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" in order to show that Han Song inherits the critical spirit of deconstructing reality in Lu Xun's works. Han Song not only sharply criticizes gender essentialism, but also explores the

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[40] Hongwei Bao, *Queer China: Lesbian and Gay Literature and Visual Culture Under Postsocialism*. (Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 5.

[41] Lu Hsun (Lu Xun), "A Madman's Diary," in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956), 8-21, https://www.bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/LuXun/SelectedWorksOfLuHsun-V1-1956.pdf.

deprivation of subjectivity by capitalism that is closely related to gender issues. Both works aim to deconstruct the rigid boundaries of gender while calling for diversity.

Part I - Xia Jia: The Unheard Voices

During an online conference at UCLA in May 2020, Xia Jia notes that when she first started her writing career in science fiction she felt somewhat powerless about her status as a female science fiction writer, saying she used to wonder why she was not a middle-aged male writer so that she could write in the same way as Liu Cixin.[42] Xia Jia's concerns are not necessarily about her competence of writing, but rather about the questionable criteria embedded in the othering label of "female science fiction writer." She expresses her conviction that male and female science fiction writers are not in a hierarchical lineage and that alternative voices should be heard. The reason why people generally think science fiction can only be written in a grand, masculinist, "rational" way is that other forms of science fiction have not been recognized. "Goodnight, Melancholy" is about representing this kind of silent (or silenced) voices while demonstrating Xia Jia's reflections on gender.

In *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Luce Irigaray argues that when a woman writer writes in a male-dominated environment, she often needs to compromise to a certain extent and imitate the "male discourse" if she wants others not to dismiss her words as incomprehensible or inconsequential nattering. [43] It is in this way that "Goodnight, Melancholy" critiques the

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[42] The recording of the conference can be found on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o58_IkpvioY.

[43] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974).

inequalities brought about by oppressive gender norms. That is, by breaking the connection between words and meanings in traditional masculinist science fiction language, and by combining the Turing Test - a thought experiment in the field of artificial intelligence which is traditionally male-dominated - with gender, Xia Jia's story invites readers to think about gender issues that have been more or less neglected by mainstream science fiction.

Melancholy, Reticence, Oppression

To understand the criticism of oppressive gender norms implied in this novel, we should start with the central theme of the story - melancholy.

In *In a Queer Time and Place*, Jack Halberstam points out that the development of modern (capitalist) society has set a time and space for everything, and that these different fault lines on gender, sexuality, adulthood, responsibility, race, social groups, etc. are given different meanings and are "naturalized" and "rationalized" with a tendency to homogenize. This management of time and space forms the normativity required by the function of modern state power that Foucault articulates.[44] For Halberstam, "queer" not only refers to the difference in gender, but also refers to different kinds of "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time." Halberstam suggests that ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, sex workers, the unemployed can all be called "queer subjects" because they are unable or unwilling to comply with reproductive normative scheduling of life. In other words, "the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep

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[44] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1, la volonté de savoir.*

and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned" and "the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family" are different from the normativity of time and space required for the operation of society.[45] In this sense, the narrator in the story line Lindy is also in a queer state; her tendency to be depressed is due to her inability to conform to social norms and expectations. The narrator's perspective - a perspective that cannot be coordinated with the mainstream - is fragmented, and the world she sees is therefore no longer as holistic and unified as claimed by other forces. For example, her perception of time illustrates this point.

> I held Lindy's hand tightly, exited the apartment, rode the elevator down. The tubes and iCart made life easier. To go from one end of the city to the other, to go directly from one high-rise to another, required less than twenty minutes. In contrast, to get out of my building and walk outside required far more effort.
>
> […]
>
> Very few people were in the park. On a weekday afternoon, only the very old and very young would be outside. If one compared the city to an efficient, speedy machine, then they lived in the nooks and crannies of the machine, measuring space with their feet rather than the speed of information.
>
> […]
>
> I had the abrupt feeling that the old woman, myself, and the girl belonged to three distinct worlds. One of those worlds was speeding toward me while the other was receding farther and farther away. But, from another perspective, I was the one slowly strolling toward that dark world from which no one ever returned.[46]

The narrator lives in a highly developed and mechanized society. Through the descriptions in these paragraphs, we can tell that this developed society has a set of implicit standards of time management. The words "On a weekday afternoon, only the very old and very young would be

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[45] Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 7, 9.

[46] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Lindy (1).

outside" and "they lived in the nooks and crannies of the machine, measuring space with their feet rather than the speed of information" indicate that the protagonist is clearly not a member of the mainstream of society that conforms to this time management order. That is why, while others are searching for and accomplishing meaningful objectives in the established framework and system, she asks "Meaning was not reducible to language. But if it couldn't be spoken about, how could it exist?"[47] and questions this rarely challenged time regulation. This incapacity to fit into the operating rhythm of society is the reason for her melancholy. However, even though melancholy is considered "bad" and that the narrator does want to get rid of it, she does not just passively accept this view and still doubts it to some extent. For instance, "Take the same half-eaten apple: some would be delighted upon seeing it, but others would be depressed. Those who often felt despondent and helpless had become accustomed to associating the remains of a whole apple with all other losses in life."[48] This despondent comment of the narrator is asking: Isn't the distinction between "good" and "bad" also an added value judgment? To put it another way, the narrator's perspective is just different from the mainstream; this difference is labelled as "bad," rather than as it really is. The metaphor used in the novel to describe depression also implies the same point: "I'm like a broken wind-up machine that has been stranded, with hope ever receding. I'm tired. I want it all to end."[49] In an industrialized society, people are treated as (or treat themselves as) machines or as part of a grand machine; if they refuse or fail to adapt to this schedule, they may be marginalized, abandoned, and forgotten. In this sense, treating the narrator's melancholy is equivalent to letting this perspective that is different from the mainstream disappear: the minority changes its own

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[47] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Lindy (1).

[48] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Lindy (1).

[49] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Lindy (6).

subjectivity and its perception of time and space, tries to integrate itself into the "majority" whose boundaries are ambiguous, thus "curing" the depressive tendency. The subjectivity of the narrator is confined in "the nooks and crannies of the machine" that the mainstream cannot or does not want to see; this state is described as pathological melancholy, which then paves the way for the subsequent treatment. The problem of melancholy arises because the subject's behaviour enters into a framework of interpretation; that is, melancholy becomes a problem because an established system of discourse endows the behaviour with a variety of meanings and value judgments. All this implies that melancholy is a disorder that does not comply with the reproductive order and needs to be rectified.

This character is not the only one who is imprisoned and required to change by external forces in "Goodnight, Melancholy." Alan, in the other story line, is also oppressed by predetermined social rules about gender and sexual orientation, and suffers from "unspeakable melancholy 不可言说的忧郁."[50] The common point of their respective situations is that they are both excluded by a kind of normative power; the mainstream does not want to see (not look at) them but must engage with them to defend itself and make them change.

To understand this complex tension, Liu Jen-peng, Amie Elizabeth Parry and Ding Naifei's proposition about "罔两问景方法论'Penumbrae Query Shadow' methodology" for studying the

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[50] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Alan (2).

living space of sexual minorities in Chinese-speaking regions provides useful insights.[51] The story

of "Penumbrae Query Shadow 罔两问景" comes from Zhuangzi's writing:

> 罔两问景曰："曩子行，今子止；曩子坐，今子起。何其无特操与？"
>
> 景曰："吾有待而然者邪？吾所待又有待而然者邪？吾待蛇蚹蜩翼邪？恶识所以然？恶识所以不然？"[52]
>
> The penumbra questioned the shadow. "Just now you were moving, now you've stopped. Just now you were sitting, now you're up. How is it you've no settled control?"
>
> The shadow answered, "Is it because there is something upon which I depend, or that what I depend on has something upon which it depends too? Am I dependent on a snake's sloughed skin or a locust's tossed away wings? How can I tell why I am as I am? How can I tell why I'm not as I'm not?"[53]
>
> […]
>
> 众罔两问于景曰："若向也俯而今也仰，向也括撮而今也被发，向也坐而今也起，向也行而今也止，何也？"
>
> 景曰："搜搜也，奚稍问也！予有而不知其所以。予，蜩甲也，蛇蜕也，似之而非也。火与日，吾屯也；阴与夜，吾代也。彼吾所以有待邪？而况乎以有待者乎！彼来则我与之来，彼往则我与之往，彼强阳则我与之强阳。强阳者，又何以有问乎！"[54]
>
> The penumbrae (once) asked the shadow, saying, "Formerly you were looking down, and now you are looking up; formerly you had your hair tied up, and now it is dishevelled; formerly you were sitting, and now you have risen up; formerly you were walking, and now you have stopped: how is all this?"
>
> The shadow said, "Venerable Sirs, how do you ask me about such small matters? These things all belong to me, but I do not know how they do so. I am (like) the shell of a cicada or the cast-off skin of a snake - like them, and yet not like them.

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[51] 劉人鵬，白瑞梅，丁乃非, *罔兩問景：酷兒閱讀攻略 Penumbrae Query Shadow: Queer Reading Tactics* (台灣：中央大學性/別研究室, 2007).

[52] 孙通海(译注), 方勇(译注), "齐物论," *庄子*, 42.

[53] Robert Eno' translation: "Zhuangzi: The Inner Chapters," Indiana University Bloomington, teaching materials, accessed October 30, 2021, https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23427/Zhuangzi-updated.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.

[54] 孙通海(译注), 方勇(译注), "寓言," *庄子*, 478.

With light and the sun I make my appearance; with darkness and the night I fade away. Am not I dependent on the substance from which I am thrown? And that substance is itself dependent on something else! When it comes, I come with it; when it goes, I go with it. When it comes under the influence of the strong Yang, I come under the same. Since we are both produced by that strong Yang, what occasion is there for you to question me?"[55]

In Zhuangzi's parable on "Penumbrae Query Shadow," the relationship between penumbrae, shadow and the substances upon which the shadow depends cannot be severed; as long as there is light, there is shadow, and the shadow can never get rid of penumbrae which are wedged in the gap between light and shadow. But at the same time, all the three are "dependent 有待"; that is, there must be prior conditions for their existences. Everything is dependent on each other or other substances, while the ultimate is unknowable. Moreover, the shared characteristic of Zhuangzi's two examples of "snake's sloughed skin 蛇蚹" and "locust's tossed away wings 蜩翼" is that both are nearly transparent, and they do not even necessarily have shadows; that is to say, the physical existence does not even always lead to the existence of shadow. Since the existence of all things in the world seems to be unknowable, the relations of subordination bound by attached meanings and values are not absolute, and no particular party has the absolute power and legitimacy to demand that the other party comply with certain norms. In "Goodnight, Melancholy" both the narrator in the story line Lindy and the character Alan clearly represent this view. The melancholic narrator sees the emptiness behind the symbols that have been given meanings and the rupture between signifier and existence; the meanings considered natural by the mainstream have no substance in her eyes. Similarly, in the face of anthropocentric machine intelligence theory, Alan states "there is no way to determine the truth. The mind, the pride of all humankind, is nothing but a

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[55] James Legge's translation: "Metaphorical Language," China Text Project, accessed October 30, 2021, https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/metaphorical-language?searchu=shadow&searchmode=showall#result.

foundationless mess"[56] and implies that considering humans as the absolute template is flawed, because, as I argued in the first chapter, the template itself - the notion of "human"- is also implicitly dependent on various kinds of existence that are subsumed under the category of the Other.

In Liu and Ding's reading of *Penumbrae Query Shadow*, they argue that an important significance of these passages, which is often missed in classical interpretations, is that the Penumbra questions the master-slave order that is taken for granted and raises an unexpected voice from a neglected area, a position that is almost invisible (the "shadow of shadows" at the junction between shadow and light, an existence that almost no one pays attention to). In other words, the voice of the Penumbra represents another possibility beyond the binary relationship; those who are not spoken about, identified, and recognized can actually make their voices heard.[57] In the words of Liu and Ding, these groups are oppressed by a force of "reticent poetics 含蓄诗学." In such environment, it is the disadvantaged parties who are made to pay for the "big picture" of "the majority" - the existing order of power and authority - in an unequal manner. Liu and Ding are not the only scholars to argue as such; the significance of this "reticent poetics" criticism is not limited to traditional Chinese society either. Many queer studies focusing on China point out that, unlike the violent homophobic history of the West, sexual minorities living in China are in a state where they are not subject to systematic violence but are unrecognized and "invisible"; because homophobia is premised on the recognition of the existence of homosexuality while treating homosexuality as a

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[56] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Alan (4).

[57] 劉人鵬, 白瑞梅, 丁乃非, *罔兩問景：酷兒閱讀攻略 Penumbrae Query Shadow: Queer Reading Tactics*, 39.

discursive taboo is a more subtle and effective form of discrimination and oppression.[58] Similarly, analyzing gender politics in Chinese socialist literature, Meng Yue claims that although gender politics in socialist China was also an absolute hierarchy, it was different from that in the West, which was mainly based on the opposition between the public and the private. It is "not a hierarchy of two independent layers but one built on the order of 'conscious' and 'unconscious'"; that is, "The lower layer is prevented from being questioned, known, or even seen, since it is not supposed to exist."[59] Historian Kang Wenqing also suggests that homosexuality has become a paradox in Chinese law because the law cannot regulate an object that "does not exist" due to the lack of official recognition.[60] In brief, this kind of political unconscious in the form of "reticent poetics" has always existed and developed in different ways in the Chinese-speaking world. Through two story lines, "Goodnight, Melancholy" skillfully represents both public/violent and implicit/reticent forms of oppression, and suggests that sexual minorities have experienced various types of suffering caused by it, but this oppression is not limited to them only. In other words, in an environment where diverse voices are not tolerated, any individual may become a minority and be included into "the Penumbra place."

The story line dealing with Alan is a critique of public/violent oppression. The representation of Alan's persecution on account of his sexual orientation is largely consistent with the actual life

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[58] See: Petrus Liu, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). See also: Hongwei Bao, *Queer China.*

[59] Yue Meng, "Female Images and National Myth," in *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 124.

[60] Wenqing Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China," In *China in and beyond the Headlines*, ed. Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen (Plymouth, UK: Rowan and Little-field, 2012).

story of Alan Turing. And in a tone of biographical commentary, the novel points out that it is not Turing who is wrong and guilty.

> Under interrogation, Turing admitted the sexual relationship between himself and Murray, and voluntarily wrote a five-page statement. The police were shocked by his candor and thought him an eccentric who "really believed he was doing the right thing."
>
> Turing believed that a royal commission was going to legalize homosexuality. This wasn't a wrong belief, except that it was ahead of his time.[61]

"Ahead of his time" means that it is a mismatch between the subject (Alan Turing) and the temporality of social norms, and such a state-of-being is internalized by institutions of power through interpellation (for instance, the police) and stigmatization, making the subject accountable and responsible for this discordance. In this case, the subject has to pay the very price for this "disorder" even if the subject itself does not recognize or even opposes the legitimacy of this ambiguous order. The conversation between Alan and the machine Christopher is actually a kind of self-talk - Alan wants his voice to be heard, but he is pressed into a position where he cannot be seen.

In the Lindy story line, the representation of implicit/reticent oppression is particularly emphasized. Similar to Alan's desire for recognition, the narrator's true thoughts are rarely seen by others and she also tries to make her own voice heard to the outside world. From details such as the noodle soup with tomato chunks and egg wisps as well as the new Disneyland in Lanzhou, we can infer that the narrator was raised in Chinese/Sinophone culture. Although she does not have a frontal conflict with the social order, she is almost constantly reminded that there is something in her that needs to be corrected. Under such a tendency, she also over-interprets others' words and then "self-criticizes" in order to conform to social expectations. For example, when the art class teacher states

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[61] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Alan (2).

his opinion about the narrator's drawing, she first habitually doubts herself and then chooses to keep her opinion to herself;[62] like a performance, she tries to modify her words and actions according to the expectations from the outside world. She feels the struggle of trying to act as expected, while others enjoy "warmth," "comfort," and "solidarity" in the same environment and cannot see or understand her struggle to fit into the same social space. When she comes into contact with the outside world, she has to be careful and attentive, adapting her words and actions to a series of implicit social rules, because this "reticent poetics" language cannot be handled by those resisting norms. At the same time, since the power of "reticent poetics" cannot completely dissolve these unprescribed subjects, these subjects are placed in a position of Penumbra where their voices cannot be heard, thus allowing the existing order to be preserved. The narrator is helpless in the face of the immense social system, and her questioning voice remains at the state of an internal monologue; she can only try to adjust herself, so as to integrate into the huge social machine that has arranged time and space. Besides, it is noteworthy that the narrator in this near-future story is unnamed, and unlike the story line of Alan which critiques explicitly the oppression of sexual minorities, there is not even a single word in this line that clarifies the narrator's gender identity. Xia Jia seems to intentionally generalize the narrator's image and avoid adding any label to this character as much as possible. We may understand this as an implication: there are many more places and voices that we cannot see or hear. As the subtle difference in the two passages of "Penumbrae Query Shadow" shows, "the penumbra questions the shadow 罔两问景" can also be "the penumbra**e** question the shadow 众罔两问景"[63] -

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[62] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Lindy (5).

[63] The difference between the two sentences lies in the character "众" which means mass or numerous. It is important to note that ancient Chinese thinkers wrote in a "literary language 文言文" that is very concise and different from the modern "vernacular 白话" writing style; therefore, the differences in each character should be taken into account when interpreting. This is also the reason why I cite these two passages of Zhuangzi about Penumbra, instead of only one.

those who are put into the Penumbra place are not actually minority, but are considered to be "insignificant minority." In this sense, all of us are the same, and even everyone is likely to step into or be driven to these "Penumbrae places." That is, each of us lives under social norms; this is not a choice but an inevitable fact. Those who can accept norms or successfully perform norms are certainly good, but as for those "Penumbra subjects" who resist rigid norms and thus cannot be seen, their existences and voices should not be silenced or ignored. In this sense, "Goodnight, Melancholy" also echoes Halberstam's point of view: the word "queer" is rooted in the experience of sexual minorities, but its significance and relevance are far greater than this.

Reconfiguring the Turing Test as a Gender Imitation Game

Since there are order and norms, it follows that there exists a boundary. In the words of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, there are always limits and inevitable failures in the citation of norms (mediated by language), so that the subject can only try to come infinitely close to conforming to the norms but cannot really reach the ideal state.[64] The story line of Lindy in "Goodnight, Melancholy" can be regarded as a speculation about the gap between such abstract boundary and the subject by representing the resistance and struggle of the subject in a first-person narrative way; while the story line Alan starts from the question of "what is beyond the boundary" and uses gender boundaries as a particular example to point out that beyond the boundary there is not a void, re-emphasizing the idea that the abstract language system created by and for humans has limits.

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[64] See: Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Collection Critique. Paris : Editions de minuit, 1974).

See also: Jacques Lacan, *Livre X L'angoisse, le séminaire de Jacques Lacan* (Champ Freudien. Paris : Éditions du Seuil, n.d. 2004).

He pointed out that it is impossible for anyone to judge whether another is "thinking" except by comparison of the other with the self. Thus, he proposed a set of experimental criteria based on the principle of imitation.

Imagine a sealed room in which are seated a man (A) and a woman (B). A third person, C, sits outside the room and asks questions of the two respondents in the room with the purpose of determining who is the woman. The responses come back in the form of typed words on a tape. If A and B both attempt to convince C that they are the woman, it is quite likely that C will guess wrong.

If we replace the man and the woman inside the room with a human (B) and a machine (A), and if after multiple rounds of questions, C is unable to distinguish which of A and B is the machine, does that mean that we must admit that A has the same intelligence as B?

Some have wondered whether the gender-imitation game is related to Turing's identity. Under the UK's laws at the time, homosexuality was criminalized as "gross indecency." Alan Turing had never disguised his sexual orientation, but he was not able to come out of the closet during his lifetime.

[…]

The problem with the Turing test was that the imitation game was conceived with deception as its only goal. If a man could successfully pass as a woman in this game, it did not mean that he truly understood how a woman thought. With enough motivation, we could train a computer to be a master liar. But was that really our goal?[65]

As I argued in Chapter One, the limitation of the Turing Test is that it is arbitrary to judge the "essence" of a thing through a behaviourist criterion; not only does it fail to answer the question "can machines think?" it also reveals a patriarchal anthropocentric arrogance and a desire for mastery of the observer. In the novel the critique of the gender norms that oppress Alan also has something in common with this. In this regard, we can draw on Butler's theories of gender performativity to analyze these two different imitation games - gender imitation and human intelligence imitation - and to understand why Xia Jia draws these two seemingly unrelated topics together.

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[65] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Alan (2), Alan (3).

Butler argues that the opposition between "biological sex" and "social gender" advocated by early feminists does not stand up to scrutiny. She holds that the so-called biological sex, like the social sex, is a social construction located in what Lacan calls the Symbolic realm.[66] That is, the approach of differentiating people into men and women according to their reproductive organs is also a social and cultural act; the body has its material basis, but the purported essentialist base of "biological gender" is also an acquired one, closely linked to the objectivist and even imperialist intention of subduing nature in modern Eurocentric sciences. Combining Derrida's anti-logocentric view of language with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Butler claims that what we call the self, gender identity and so on, is the result of repeatedly invoking social norms, which rely on mechanisms of power, in oneself. In other terms, the subject's internalization of social norms does not originate from the subject himself/herself/themselves; such an operation of norms is like an actor who is given a script and then "performs" the so-called self in a nearly unconscious way.[67] Certainly, the subject can also choose not to perform as required, but this would, like the narrator and the character Alan in "Goodnight, Melancholy," make the subject bear oppression, because on this "stage" each participant is both an actor and an audience and that the existence of resistance to norms, as in Alan Turing's case, is a threatening alternative to this stage which is built on ambiguous norms.

This is not to say, however, that the distinction between norms, citation/performance, and the subject is so clear-cut. In Butler's theory, these three are theoretically distinguishable, but in fact they are complementary and cannot be completely separated. The "performance" here is not as simple and mechanical as putting on a mask; it does not have a "backstage" for preparation or a "front-stage" for

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[66] Jacques Lacan, *Livre XVIII D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, le séminaire de Jacques Lacan.*

[67] See: Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Boca Raton Fla.: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004). See also: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

formal performance but starts from the very first moment of contact with society. According to scholars in the school of social construction of gender, people are socialized through inscribing and incorporating practices as early as infancy, even before the concept of the self is formed. For example, adults, in particular children's parents, may convince girls that they are more talkative and emotional, and make boys believe that they are more "rational" through conscious and unconscious cues; this positive feedback in gendered social education is a kind of incorporating practices. While (verbal) corrections that imply punishment, such as "boys don't play with Barbie dolls" and "girls should sit properly," are inscribing practices. In short, it is suggested that gender, as a social norm, "creates" the subject through such performance; the normative mainstream is actually acting out a set of norms that originate from the outside, and it is not the subject that speaks the language but the subject and the language that are mutually spoken; there is no eternal "essence" of gender. Those "minorities" who are excluded by norms can feel more directly the contradiction between the subject and the arbitrary normativity. The reason why the two imitation games in "Goodnight, Melancholy" seem to be able to function but actually cannot answer the questions, is that the principles they are based on are a kind of performative dogma. These norms do not defend the so-called essence or the embodiment of an essence; they are separated from its material basis from which they are abstracted.

In *Bodies That Matter,* Butler argues that the regulatory power of gender is not a simple fact or static state of the body, but a process by which regulatory norms tend to "materialize" the body and gender through the repeated invocation and recurrence of laws. But this so-called materialization is never really completed, and the universality that the abstract concept is supposed to represent is illusory.[68] For example, homosexuals in homophobic societies can imitate "men's words and deeds"

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[68] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Routledge Classics. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

or "women's words and deeds" and hide their "real selves" in the deep closet in order to survive, which means that the materialization and universalization of norms are actually silently resisted. In this sense, the imitation of gendered social norms has something in common with the speculation of "training the computer to be a master liar" depicted in "Goodnight, Melancholy": machines can also act according to human expectations and thus be perceived as having the ability to think, but "being perceived as being able to think" and "actually being able to think" are two different things. To put it another way, imitations succeed because the concrete norms they can manipulate are separated from the idealized abstract nature they want to achieve ("masculinity," "femininity," "human intelligence," etc.). The limit of the abstract discourse and its asserted universality is unveiled in the reversion back to the embodiment, because the physical reality of the embodiment cannot be abstracted and assimilated into discourse in its entirety by language. From this perspective, the Turing Test depicted in this novel also contains a layer of mockery: Alan Turing, who is well aware of gender performativity, seems to start from his own personal experience and then proposes an imitation game that does not really solve the question of "can machines think?", but the (heteronormative) world hails it as a classic. The Turing Test is thus interpreted as an implicit criticism of and resistance to rigid gender norms in Xia Jia's writing.

Moreover, another manifestation of gender as a social construction is that the legitimacy of gender norms rests on power; that is, the so-called preexisting laws of nature ironically need to rely on external forces to maintain their legitimacy. Butler argues that transgender groups, androgynous people who cannot be exactly categorized by biomedical sciences, women oppressed by patriarchy, homosexuals, etc. are threats to the laws and norms that seek to regulate the subject, because their

existence shakes the legitimacy of these heteronormative norms.[69] "Goodnight, Melancholy" firstly contrasts the persecution suffered by Alan Turing with his firm belief in his innocence, and at the same time draws an analogy between the story that Socrates was convicted for defending the truth and Turing's monologue "they think Turing is a criminal because Turing lies with men,"[70] which then indicates that: the intervention of state violence, the strength of the oppressive force against these people and the hidden fear behind it actually underscore the limits and fragility of these laws that need to be maintained by linguistic invoking traditions whose origins are difficult to identify. In other words, if these laws were really the manifestation of a certain eternal "truth" or "essence," then it certainly cannot be changed or even challenged. Gender norms do not necessarily have an essential physical substance, they are more of a discourse and rhetoric. When it is not clear what "masculinity" and "femininity" are, the only way to defend the norms associated with them is through the power of hegemony; and such a power often claims to "represent all" and "represent the truth," but, in reality, it assumes the voice of the oppressed.

Part II - From Lu Xun's "Humans Eating Humans" to Han Song's "Men Eating Women"

It is well known that in China, due to the different political circumstances, debates on gender politics in the public sphere, especially identitarian or anti-identitarian queer struggles, are more

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[69] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter*.

[70] Xia Jia, "Goodnight, Melancholy," Alan (2).

often displayed in the form of cultural production. Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" had been waiting for about ten years before it finally passed censorship and was released to the public.[71] The first half of this novel is realistic but interspersed with stream-of-consciousness-like passages from time to time and gradually the text takes on a magical-realist tone at the end, which would not be a smooth reading experience for readers. On the one hand, the text seems to be a cover for sheltering the author's thoughts; and on the other hand, it also creates a sense of alienation that subverts the notions of "reality" and "fantasy." Taking Han Song's best-known works as examples, scholars such as Song Mingwei succinctly point out the relation between Han Song's works, which constantly challenge mainstream aesthetic standards and comfort space, and Lu Xun's critical spirit.[72] This part of chapter compares Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" - a relatively less-known but highly inspiring novel - with Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" to illustrate the similarities in their approaches to deconstruct "reality." My purpose is not to examine the intertextuality of specific passages between Lu Xun's and Han Song's writings, but rather to show that although the two texts have different themes and are usually categorized in different literary genres, they both work in a similar way to deconstruct assumed normativities and represent perspectives that are hidden. The era of Lu Xun seems to be far away from us, but Han Song shows us that the spirit of questioning and criticism of the May Fourth Movement is still meaningful today. In "Beauty Hunting Guide," Han Song casts this critical eye on a theme that traditional science fiction rarely touches - gender. The protagonist Xiaozhao's journey to find "masculinity" on Putuo Island implies that what we perceive as the normativity, predictability and knowability of the world is in fact

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[71] More detailed information can be found in the book's preface and in some online forums for fans of Han Song. According to discussions in the fan forums, the text had already been circulated online before it was officially published.

[72] 宋明炜, "回到未来:五四与科幻 Back to the Future: "May 4th" and Science Fiction," *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature 现代中文学刊*, No.2, 2019, sum No.59: 117-119.

nothing more than a comforting self-delusion. Similar to Lu Xun's assertion that "virtue and morality eat humans 礼教吃人," through the representation of men eating women, Han Song's writing illustrates that interhuman consumption (cannibalism) still exists and once again becomes a "familiar thing."

Beyond the Heteronormative "Normal World"

Qian Liqun and other scholars' research findings show that in "A Madman's Diary" there is a metaphorical opposition between "the Other" and the "I (我/余)." The madman in the text is the distinguishing line of this opposition: by rebelling against the darkness of history and questioning traditions, the madman enters the "modern/present" alone and becomes an othered alien rejected by the people and environment that surround him. It is by setting up this opposition between the "world of the normal" and the "world of the madman" that this text acquires the depth and intensity of social and cultural criticism.[73] One of the significant differences between these two worlds is time. The narrative of the madman begins with the "now" of the "night," and because of the rejection of the madman by normal people during the day, the madman only has the freedom to think intensely when normal people close their eyes in sleep. The separation between day and night is in a way to hint at the fact that what the madman sees and thinks is invisible and incomprehensible to the mass. In this sense, the opposition between the world of the normal and

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[73] 吴义勤, 王金胜，"'吃人'叙事的历史变形记," 文艺研究，2014 年 4 期：14-22 页.

the world of the madman can be understood as a metaphor for the known and the unknown, the knowable and the unknowable, as well as the conscious and the unconscious.[74]

It is interesting that Han Song himself seems to be living two similarly separated lives. In addition to his title as a science fiction writer, one of the most frequently discussed aspects of Han Song's life by critics is that he also works for the official Chinese media Xinhua News Agency and supervises a department of over 300 people. During the day, Han Song's focus is on the work at Xinhua, while late at night, he writes speculative science fiction stories.[75] On his personal Weibo account, he started a countdown beginning with the number 2555 on October 7, 2015; and, from time to time, he posts various countdowns from his work at Xinhua. For example, at the end of the "Countdown to the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China," Han Song posted a weibo "A new countdown has started, we still have some time (新的倒计时开始了，我们还有一些时间)."[76]

Such a focus on time is fully reflected in Han Song's works. Similar to "A Madman's Diary," in "Beauty Hunting Guide" the protagonist Xiaozhao's reflections mostly take place at night when he is alone, and this segmentation of time also becomes a breakthrough for this character to step

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[74] 薛毅，钱理群，"《狂人日记》细读," 鲁迅研究月刊, 1994 年 11 期：13-21 页.

[75] 韩松，"韩松：科幻逼近真实的每天 12 个小时," 陈曦，张垚仟采访，现代快报，2019 年 5 月 21 日，http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2019/0521/c405057-31094578.html.See also: 韩松，"双面韩松," 罗婉采访，晶报，2017 年 12 月 4 日，http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2017/1204/c405057-29685137.html?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0.

[76] This reminds us of what Jack Halberstam and some more classic philosophers such as Kant say about time: the regulation of time in modern society is a kind of discipline for the subject. The "reverse time," such as countdown, is in a way an oppression: when people are in a state of countdown, they could have a psychological panic, which is a kind of spiritual rebellion against the gradual loss of their subjectivity; the subject gradually forgets itself in the countdown of time and becomes a part of some abstract or concrete grand system.

out of "the normal world." However, there are two major differences in the world buildings between "Beauty Hunting Guide" and "A Madman's Diary." The first one is that Lu Xun portrays a madman who awakens in a dark society, that is, "different persons (the once 'normal' madman '余' and the madman '我')" in the same environment, while what Han Song depicts is the same person in different environments. In Han Song's novel, it is the world and people around Xiaozhao that are "crazy" - everything that happens on Putuo Island is shaking his previous perceptions.

> The island lacks the sense of certainty that you get when you work elsewhere. In the past, money could buy that sense of certainty, but here, there needs to be something else besides money.
>
> 在这岛上缺少像在别的地方做事的那种把握感。那种把握感，以前用钱便可以买到，但在这里，除了钱以外，还需要有别的。[77]

Xiaozhao tries to abide by norms of "the normal world" but gradually becomes skeptical. He is caught between "normal mainstream society" and "the crazy world." By portraying such a character caught in the middle, Han Song makes it possible to contrast the two different worlds. The second difference is that the spatial segmentation in "Beauty Hunting Guide" is more focused than the time segmentation. Han Song uses a realistic approach to describe mainstream society where Xiaozhao lives in, implying that this is Xiaozhao's "reality" and a "normal world." The island where Xiaozhao is going to hunt the cloned women is a completely isolated place, and the cloned women on the island are also unaware of "the normal world," so that the norms of society where Xiaozhao comes from have no effect on this island. Han Song gradually reveals and critiques gender-related oppression through such a double fragmentation of time and space.

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[77] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（十一）交流经验.

First of all, the representation of these two opposing worlds in "Beauty Hunting Guide" serves to expose and criticize the tangible or intangible reification (in the Marxist sense) of women in patriarchal society.

Xiaozhao lives in a society full of material desires, and like everyone else, he pursues extreme pleasures in food, drink, and sex, but nihilism always seems to follow hedonism. The description of Xiaozhao's extravagant decadent and hedonistic lifestyle, especially the passages related to prostitution, suggests that this society is in a highly market-driven stage, very similar to the situation in the economically developed cities of southern and eastern China after the 1980s. Behind Xiaozhao's pursuit of the extreme material indulgence, there is actually a profound spiritual emptiness.

> It is said that men with a keen interest in women, after trying all the various ways that the actual world can offer, will develop a boredom that is inexplicable even to themselves. Once such a feeling arises, it becomes a cancer that develops into an unwarranted hatred of society and life in general.
>
> 据说，对女色有着浓厚兴趣的男人，在尝试遍了这现实世界能够提供的有限游戏方式之后，会产生连自己也莫名其妙的厌倦。而这样的感觉一旦产生，便会癌症一般地发展成为对整个社会和人生的无端憎恶。
>
> [...]
>
> Perhaps it is the cancerous development of unwarranted hatred for society and life as a whole that leads to the deep boredom even for beautiful women.
>
> 或许，正是癌症一般发展着的对整个社会和人生的无端憎恶，才导致了甚至对绝色美女都会有的深度厌倦吧。[78]

Xiaozhao gradually loses himself in the midst of material enjoyment and sensual stimulation, and develops a certain degree of doubt, which sets the stage for the dramatic change in his perspective on life later on. It is important to note that, despite the shift of his opinion at the end of the story,

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[78] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（一）厌倦.

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at the beginning Xiaozhao is a representative of patriarchal heteronormativity. In his eyes, or rather,

in this "normal society," women are othered and objectified.

> "Women are a special kind of beast that cannot be dealt with without such full armour." The beautiful female instructor said with a straight face.

> "女人是一种特别的野兽，不这样全副武装，是对付不了的。"美少女教官正色道。

> […]

> From both the dead and the instructor, he directly experienced the feeling of an "upright walking machine," or, more precisely, an "upright walking rib." This would explain why it is not men who are locked in glass cages. Everything that exists must be in accordance with the principles of evolution and creationism.

> 从死者和教官的身上，他都直接地体会到了"直立行走的机器"的感觉，或者，更确切来讲，是"直立行走的肋骨"吧。这样才能解释，为什么不是男人被关在玻璃笼子中。一切的存在都必须符合进化论和神创论的原则。

> […]

> This is a reminder to Xiaozhao that he is not dealing with a sexual commodity that can be bought with money in a nightclub.

> 这提醒着小昭，他面对的，可不是歌舞厅里用钱就可以随便买到的性商品。[79]

The word "clone" is emphasized at the beginning of the novel, but hardly appears in the rest of the

text, which the author seems to do intentionally. When mainstream society talks about women,

whether it refers to women in "normal society" or clones, women are always treated as non-human

beings in every word. It is not a coincidence that this series of words with religious overtones (rib),

capitalist neoliberal and developmentalist meanings (commodities, machines) are used to describe

women; the discursive categorization reflects the conscious perception. What is more, the initial

idea of the creation of Putuo Island also has a strong patriarchal dimension.

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[79] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南," （四）训练,（六）"肋骨,"（九）首次狩猎.

> The island is artificially divided into three dozen activity areas with wire fences, and each guest has his or her own specific partition. It is said that this is set up to avoid conflicts between guests because of competition for resources.

> 岛被用铁丝网人工分割成了三十几个活动区域，每个客人都有自己的特定分区。据介绍，这是为了避免客人之间因为争夺资源发生冲突而设置的。[80]

The setting of the island, as well as the plot of men crossing the wire fences to rob women in others' territories, can be interpreted as a metaphor for geopolitics - within the defined geographical boundaries, everything is a resource that can be consumed, and these resources include women. Such a logic of treating women as objects naturally clears the way for the ethical taboo of human cloning - since they are objects, there is nothing ethical and no human rights to speak of. This view expresses the idea that women are completely passive with no subjectivity and that women's bodies can be ordered, copied, or even erased. Before Xiaozhao's landing on the island, the irony of these representations is relatively subtle and implicit; however, after Xiaozhao's arrival, there is an immediate contrast and these seemingly neutral words in "normal society" become extremely ironic.

> Xiaozhao was shocked to realize once again that the women on this island were not the simple, superficial "sex machines" that he had initially imagined. In this mysterious realm, there is indeed an amazing diversity. But it is too difficult to truly recognize this in his mind.

> 小昭十分震惊，再次深深地体会到，这岛上的女人并不是他最初想像中的那种情绪简单、徒有其表的"做爱机器"。在这神秘的地界上，的确存在一种让人惊叹的多样性。但要从思想上真正认识到这一点，又太难了。

> […]

> Xiaozhao thought to himself, it seems that the women on this island were very different from each other as well as from one group to another. But what has led to this?

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[80] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（八）女人的气味.

小昭心想，看来这岛上的女人，个体之间以及群体之间都存在着比较大的差异。但是，是什么导致了这样的结果呢？[81]

These words can exactly show the problem: in "normal society" where Xiaozhao lives, people habitually presuppose or unconsciously believe that women have no subjectivity, so that the simplest basic fact that there are differences between individuals has a particular significance. In other words, "normal society" shapes a flattened image of women in an abstract sense through the power of patriarchy. "Woman" as a gendered othered signifier is stripped away from concrete reality, and this abstract label is deprived of embodiment, destroying every chance for women to be alive, real human beings.

Moreover, the reflection on gender in "Beauty Hunting Guide" does not adhere to an essentialist point of view. Han Song's interrogation and reflection go much further. Xiaozhao's subsequent journey on the island can be interpreted as an experience in which he gradually discovers multiple possibilities of sex, sexuality, and gender beyond heteronormativity. The diversity of sexual practices and understandings of gender on the island is another important contrast to the oppressive monotony in "normal society."

Firstly, the norms of sexual orientation and sexuality as well as heteronormativity that binds these aspects together in a single way in "normal society" are all disrupted on the island. While tourists from "the normal world" come to Putuo Island assuming that heterosexuality is still dominant, they find different expressions of sexuality such as the lesbian culture on the island.

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[81] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南," （十三）小昭的第二个女人，（十八）兴趣.

"I've been thinking," Xiaozhao said, "about that woman who told me yesterday that she didn't like men and was only interested in women. At that time, it really broke my heart."

"I should say it's the influence of the environment. You have to understand that they are living in an atmosphere without the opposite sex, which makes their sexual orientation change. You should be a little more understanding of them." Yanjing analyzed seriously, as if he knew everything.

"You're saying they're lesbian?" Xiaozhao thought of the life-and-death relationship between the young girl with the flower garland on her head and the young girl with the assault rifle.

"I'm sure that at least a good portion of them are."

"But then the guests should not be happy. Those who come here are rabid heterosexuals. Maybe the club didn't expect it beforehand."

"Or maybe it was expected and that's why the hunt was made more difficult by this. Some of the guests will find it more exciting."

"However, for male guests with strong heterosexual needs, like me, they may still be unhappy."

"That's just one side. More likely, what's prevalent on this island is actually bisexuality; however, the heterosexual urge that is in a woman's body exists as a recessive state and is covered up by the whine of gunfire before it is awakened. Before they can taste the delicious dish of men, those poor women will die. Therefore, women on this island usually see us all as robbers and beasts in helmets and armour, not as gentle lovers."

"我一直在想，"小昭说，"昨天那个女人对我说，她不喜欢男人，只对女人感兴趣。当时，真的让我伤透了心。"

"应该说还是环境的影响吧。你要明白，更多的时候，她们是生活在没有异性的氛围中，这使她们的性倾向出现了变化。你应该对她们多一分理解。"眼镜认真地分析着，仿佛他什么都懂得。

"你说她们是同性恋？"小昭想到了头戴花环的少女与身挎突击步枪的少女之间那种生死与共的关系。

"我敢肯定，至少有相当一部分是这样的。

"不过这样一来，客人该不高兴了。来这里的，都是狂热的异性恋者。可能俱乐部事先也没有料想到吧。"

"也可能是早就想到了，因此才通过这个增加了捕猎的难度。有的客人会觉得更刺激。"

"但是，对于有着强烈异性恋需求的男客人而言，比如我这样的人，可能还是会不高兴的哟。"

"那只是一方面。更可能，这岛上流行的其实是双性恋。不过，存在于女人身体里的异性恋冲动，在通常的情况下是作为隐性态存在的，在没有觉醒之前，便被枪弹的呼啸声掩盖了。那些可怜的女人，在还没有品尝到男人这道美味佳肴之前便一命呜呼了。因此，女人们按照常规，把我们都看成了穿戴着头盔和甲胄的强盗和野兽，而不是温文尔雅的情人。"[82]

The implication of this scene is that the reason why heteronormativity claims to be or is assumed to be the normal or the only correct "universal law" is because other voices cannot be heard or recognized due to suppression. Since the island is isolated from "the normal world" and women on the island do not live in Xiaozhao's environment, the power of heteronormativity norms is by no means strong and those possibilities that are concealed in "the normal world," such as homosexuality and bisexuality, can exist in their own right. On this island, Xiaozhao also awakes to his homosexual impulses that used to be in a "recessive state" as Yanjing explained.

> After a while, one of Yanjing's hands came up and poked underneath Xiaozhao's shirt, rubbing gently on his nipples. Xiaozhao let out a moan. Then, Yanjing's hand slowly moved to the lower part of the body (下体, which means penis). Xiaozhao trembled twice and did not refuse. After another while, Xiaozhao also began to touch Yanjing. They played with each other until they ejaculated.
>
> 过了一会儿，眼镜的一只手伸了过来，探入小昭的衣服下面，在他的乳头上轻柔地搓弄起来。小昭发出呻吟。随后，眼镜的手又慢慢移向了下体。小昭颤抖了两下，没有拒绝。又过了一阵，小昭的手也伸了过去。他们互相玩弄着，直到射精。
>
> […]
>
> Then he bent his legs and kneeled down and carefully pushed the barrel of the gun into that hole, all the way to his throat. The man coughed a few times because of the poke of the gun, but he was full of happiness, closing his mouth and biting down, sucking up with the last of his strength. As the man's mouth made mossy, wet and rhythmic sounds, Xiaozhao had an erection again.

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[82] 韩松，"美女狩猎指南，"（二十六）有关女人的看法.

然后，他曲腿跪下，小心地把枪管伸进那个洞里，一直抵到喉咙。那男人被枪头戳得咳了几声，却满脸幸福，合嘴咬紧，用最后的力气，大口吸吮起来。随着男人的嘴巴发出苔藓般湿滑而节奏分明的律动声，小昭的下体又坚硬了。

[…]

At first glance, Xiaozhao found the undressed Yanjing very sexy, making Xiaozhao even more aroused. He realized that he had actually never liked the terrorist look of Yanjing either. What he loved, was the current natural Yanjing.

He thought compassionately - this time, it's my turn to protect and rescue you, since we've been good friends for so many years.

第一眼，小昭觉得脱掉衣服的眼镜十分性感，令小昭更加亢奋。他才明白，自己其实也一直不喜欢眼镜那恐怖分子的模样。他所爱的，是现在的本色眼镜。

他怜惜地想，这回，轮到我来保护和救助你了，谁叫我们是这么多年的好朋友呢。

[…]

"In that case, what should we do then?" Xiaozhao peered uneasily at Yanjing's naked body.

"So, I'm going to try a real weapon this time, and that's not a gun or a knife." Yanjing smiled smugly and stroked the wobbling organ between his legs. Xiaozhao had seen this thing before, but for the first time he realized that it was superbly long and was the best-looking part of Yanjing's body. His heart swelled again.

"这样的话，那又该怎么办呢？"小昭不安地窥视着眼镜光溜溜的下身。

"所以，我这回要试一试真正的武器，那可不是枪和刀啊。"眼镜得意地笑着，抨了抨两腿之间晃荡不休的器官。小昭以前也见过眼镜的这玩意儿，但这回才头一次觉出，它长得超常的大，是眼镜身体上最好看的部分。他心头又一荡。[83]

Towards the end of the story, homosociality and homosexuality are blended together; or we can say that the distinction between homosociality and homosexuality is no longer important, because in the cultural environment of the island, sexuality is not the core of identity and communities on

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[83] 韩松，"美女狩猎指南，"（二十六）有关女人的看法,（二十九）洞,（三十）抛弃一切.

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the island are not defined by sexuality. That is to say, in this culture which is not guided by reproductive goals, sexuality is no longer tied to procreation, and concepts and norms associated with sexual orientation, which are considered important in "the normal world," are irrelevant here, so that all the meanings attached to sex and sexuality are removed.

When norms of sex and sexuality that heteronormativity assumes are deconstructed, then Xiaozhao's thinking naturally focuses on the binary concept of gender, and his questioning of gender dichotomy reaches its peak at the end of the story after his self-castration.

As mentioned previously, according to the theories of gender social constructionist scholars, biological and social gender systems of almost all societies are a set of arrangements in which the meaning of material matter, such as generative organs, is shaped by human social interventions, which in turn give rise to gender norms. In this point of view, the two signifiers "man" and "woman" do not represent a "natural law," but a social categorization. In "Beauty Hunting Guide," the culture on the isolated Putuo Island is an attempt to imagine a community that is not yet divided by the dichotomy of "man" and "woman." For instance, what the character Pangzi experiences is a typical example.

> "The girl said that she just arrived on the island yesterday and hasn't seen anyone like me before, and asked why I look different from her. She said she liked me very much. So I told her what a man is."
>
> "那女孩说，她是昨天才上岛的，以前还没有见过我这样的人呢，怎么跟她长得不一样咧。她说她很喜欢我。我便告诉她，什么是男人。"[84]

"So I told her what a man is" - this sentence directly points out that the gender concept of "man" needs to be "told," and it is not essentially innate. The implication here is that, subconsciously,

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[84] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（十一）交流经验.

people in "the normal world" know that the binary gender category is invented. On this island where gender is diverse and even the concept of gender does not matter, Xiaozhao seems to perceive that his presupposition that gender is binary is the reason why he struggles but could not solve his middle-life "masculinity crisis"; that is, if the dichotomy is eliminated, all problems will be solved.

> A surge of excitement, born from the foreknowledge of the great changes of times, rolled through Xiaozhao's chest. For a moment, Xiaozhao felt that he had transcended gender to become a unisex animal, and he could not help but feel smug.
>
> 一股由于预知到时代巨变而催生的激奋，滚荡在小昭的胸臆中。一刹那，小昭感到自己从性别上超越了男女，成为一种中性的动物，不禁自鸣得意起来。
>
> […]
>
> It was only then that Xiaozhao realized that "nothingness" is probably a better way to returning to the basics than "having-ness."
>
> 小昭这才明白，"无"，较之于"有"，大概更能让人返璞归真吧。[85]

In this stage, Xiaozhao perceives himself as a "unisex animal" instead of a "unisex human being," and this change in terminology from "human" to "animal" nicely indicates that the concept of "human" is demythologized on this island that is free from norms of "the normal world." Similar to the deconstruction of humans in "A Madman's Diary" - humans are nothing sacred and humans eat their own kind in order to survive just like other animals, in "Beauty Hunting Guide" humans are restored from a sacred position at the centre of the world to the original state - finite being with limits. In this process of "returning to the basics 返璞归真," norms of gender are also relegated to

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[85] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（二十八）银河,（三十二）阉割.

zero. In addition, the scene of Xiaozhao's self-castration at the end of the story contains a strong

contestation of gender essentialism.

> Xiaozhao's knife did not hit the woman, but cut off his own genitals.
>
> He was in so much pain and shame that he threw away the knife and covered his genitals with both hands. In the midst of this extreme pain and shame, Xiaozhao surprisingly felt an unexpected joy.
>
> 小昭一刀没有砍中女人，却割下了自己的生殖器。
>
> 他疼痛难忍，惭愧难当，扔掉刀，双手捂住下面。就在这极度的痛苦和羞怯中，小昭竟然感受到了一种意外的喜悦。
>
> […]
>
> Xiaozhao swallowed another large mouthful of beer and felt that the woman's organ that he had swallowed a month ago was using the power of alcohol to heal and grow again inside his body, forming a peaceful coexistence pattern with those of his man's organs. However, is this the concept of "real man" in women's eyes? Xiaozhao felt that he had truly become a unisex person.
>
> "也许正是这样吧，啊哈。"小昭又咽下一大口啤酒，感觉到，一个月前吞进肚子里的女人的器官，正借着酒力，在体内重新愈合并生长起来，与他那些男人的器官，形成了和平共处的格局。不过，这就是女人概念中的"真正的男人"吗？小昭觉得，自己真正地成为一名中性者了。[86]

After Xiaozhao castrates himself, the essentialist gender concepts of "man" or "woman," which

are based on reproductive organs, can no longer define his gender: (s)he no longer has a penis and

testicles, but (s)he also does not have an inborn vagina and uterus which are considered as natural

part of women by gender essentialism. That being said, the essentialist view of binary gender

presupposes that there are only two eternal polarities (male and female); the castrated Xiaozhao is

tantamount to forcing this binary opposition to move to the next stage - to create a third polarity

(non-male-non-female) that is believed not to exist. This contradiction discloses the absence of the

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[86] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（三十二）阉割,（三十三）免疫.

so-called essence of male-female dichotomy and exposes the rupture between matter and discourse, suggesting that gender norms in "normal society" should be reexamined.

As the story nears its end, the meaning of the island's landmark statue "Guanyin 观音," which appears from time to time in the text, gradually becomes clear. According to many Buddhist scholars, after Buddhism was introduced to China (in this case China mainly referring to the region of Central Plains 中原), Guanyin underwent a gender transformation from male to female;[87] and Guanyin was likewise a god transcending male and female gender in ancient Indian Buddhism, appearing sometimes as a male and sometimes as a female, with no specific gender identity.[88] In modern terms, the Chinese Buddhist Guanyin can be interpreted as a symbol of gender unity and is also a queer symbol to some extent. The small island overlooked by the giant Guanyin statue is queer as well, where all the possibilities that are rejected, excluded, denied by the exclusionary gender ideology of "the normal world" are reborn. It is nevertheless important to mention that the word queer here does not mean a specific preexisting group, but rather a continuous state of becoming that is not aimed at a normative objective. In brief, the small island that Han Song imagines rebels against the way "the normal world" defines gender and the behaviour of the subject by means of prior norms and attached meanings/values.

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[87] 朱子彦, "论观音变性与儒释文化的融合 The Denaturation of Buddhism Guanine and The Melting of Confucianism Cultures," 上海大学学报（社会科学版）*Journal of Shanghai University (Social Science)*, 2000 年 2 月第 7 卷第 1 期：24-29 页.

[88] 芮传明, "中原地区女相观音渊源浅探," *史林*，1993 年 1 期：14-18 页.

Children That Cannot Be Saved, Childhood That Cannot Come Back

In "A Madman's Diary," the central conflict between the world of the normal and the madman is cannibalism. The madman believes that people around him who are "full of benevolence and morality" want to eat him. Some scholars argue that this cannibalism should first be taken literally: morality and social norms attach meanings to the existence of humans, and when the concept of human is examined without the moral and ethical filters, human beings are not essentially different from any other animal.[89] Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" also expresses similar ideas. The scene in which Xiaozhao feasts on a woman can be interpreted as an implication to critique anthropocentric humanism's tendency to over-sanctify humans: humans' animal-like unconscious desire to eat human flesh has always been there. That is, Han Song and Lu Xun both use a similar critical approach to decentre the concepts of "human" as understood in their times, with Lu Xun's madman calling for a modern civilized human who "does not eat people" while Han Song's "real man" evolves into a posthuman.

Besides, the symbolic and metaphorical significance of cannibalism cannot be ignored either. The cannibalism in "A Madman's Diary" is a critique of the feudal morality, while the cannibalism in Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" begins with hunting and killing, which also implies a layer of social criticism. In my reasoning, this seemingly grotesque representation has two senses: firstly, it reveals the possible, even inevitable to a certain extent, conflicts and violence brought about by

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[89] 汤晨光，"是人吃人还是礼教吃人？——论鲁迅《狂人日记》的主题 Is it Man that Eats Man or Feudal Ethical Code that Eats Man?，"*湖南师范大学社会科学学报 Journal of Social Science of Hunan Normal University*，2004 年 1 月第 33 卷第 1 期：109-111 页.

the male-female gender dichotomy; secondly, it criticizes the exploitation and alienation of human beings by capitalism.

Irigaray pointedly argues that the history that we had understood in the past is actually a male-centred history, because all gender differences are reduced to the negative side of the male and women are relegated to the role of objects in this perspective in order to secure and maintain the male dominance. That is, this logic classifies things in terms of "A" and "not-A" modes, with the former possessing positive value while the latter being considered a mere dependency whose definition is based on "what A is not."[90] By following this logic in reverse, we see that the concept of masculinity cannot be separated from its negative side and it is based on deprivation and possession from the counterpart to some extent.

At the beginning of "Beauty Hunting Guide," the advertising slogan of the Beauty Hunting Club is well noteworthy - "A Game for Real Men, a Sport for Successful People 真男人的游戏，成功者的运动."[91] Why hunting? Why is hunting women defined as a success? Why is being a "real man" associated with hunting women and what is the logic behind it? In the previous chapter, I argue that the linguistic view expressed in Han Song's works is that the meaning given to a signifier can only be manifested in a constructed discourse network. The network that "Beauty Hunting Guide" explores is the one associated with the concept of "masculinity." I suggest that the representation of hunting women is meant to imply that the concepts of "male/masculinity" and "female/femininity" are in a the-other-the-self relation that Irigaray articulates; that is, the

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[90] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum De L'autre Femme.*

[91] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（二）俱乐部.

meanings of these two are based on an opposition and cannot be separated. To a certain extent, such rigid binary gender of male and female has the potential for conflict from the very beginning, because masculinity does not have an essence - it is not based on itself but on a counterpoint of femininity. Thus, when masculinity is reinforced to the extreme, this confrontation will also reach the extreme and may turn into conflict and violence at any time. In this sense, the hunting of women in "Beauty Hunting Guide" is a representation of this invisible opposition. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist Xiaozhao wants to become a "real man," but he needs the contrast of women to perceive the existence of his "male subjectivity"; on the Putuo Island, the more he wants to gain "the power of masculinity" in the act of hunting beautiful women, the more it shows the emptiness and weakness of masculinity. In turn, the meaning of masculinity collapses when the Other disappears, or, when Xiaozhao feels that such a binary opposition is no longer worthwhile. "Because of having witnessed the Milky Way, Xiaozhao's heart reached its greatest tolerance ever. 因为目睹了银河，小昭的心胸达到了有生以来最大的宽容。"[92] In this perspective, the scene of eating women and women's sexual organs at the end of the novel signifies a kind of trauma caused by the gender dichotomy: consuming the Other cannot resolve the disorder of Xiaozhao's old masculinity; thus he can only eat women especially women's sexual organs, as if femininity becomes part of his body after physically eating women inside, imagining that through such an absurd way he can dissolve the opposition between the male and the female, the self and the Other.

Moreover, it is worth noting that in "A Madman's Diary," "normal people" "eat" the madman with Confucian "virtue and morality," while in "Beauty Hunting Guide," after the binary gender

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[92] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（二十八）银河.

dichotomy creates the preconditions for objectifying women, men in mainstream society "eat" women on the island in a capitalist way.

The doctor, a short, slim man in his thirties, said with a drowsy face: "This work we are doing is nothing new, needless to say, compared to science fiction, or to realist literature. The history of the sale and manufacture of life begins with the period traditionally known as the Enlightenment. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such advanced ideas emerged in Western countries. They were represented by Galileo, Newton, Kepler, Descartes, and Locke, among others. They revolutionized the way we see nature and ourselves, and they contributed to the formation of the view that living things are nothing but complex machines. The most amazing product on earth, the human body, has not escaped this conceptual revolution. In short, more and more people are realizing that human beings are nothing more than machines that walk upright."

博士是一位消瘦的矮个子，三十多岁，带着一副昏睡般的表情说："我们所做的这份工作，不用说比科幻小说，就是比起现实主义文学来，也一点不新鲜。出售和制造生命的历史，始于传统上称为启蒙运动的那个时期，早至十六和十七世纪，西方国家就出现了这样的先进思想。代表人物有伽利略、牛顿、开普勒、笛卡尔和洛克等人。他们彻底改变了我们看待自然和看待自己的方式，他们促成了生物不过是复杂机器这样一种看法的形成。地球上最神奇的产物——人体，没有逃脱这场观念上的革命。简而言之，越来越多的人认识到，人不过是一种直立行走的机器。"

[…]

"Besides, the creatures created by our methods cannot be called human at all from a professional and technical standpoint. Moreover, we have received special permission from the government to exist as a pilot program and to contribute to the development of the local economy in the future."

"再说，按我们的法则制造出来的生物，从专业技术的立场上看，根本不能称作是人类。而且，我们也得到了政府的特批，是作为试点而存在着的，今后要为本地经济的发展作贡献的。"

[…]

In this era, the key is that money will be able to get everything right, and as long as it is something that exists it is reasonable. So once thinking in this way, Xiaozhao felt that everything is well understood.

在这个时代，关键是，有钱便什么都搞得掂，存在便是合理的。这么一想，小昭便觉得一切都好理解了。[93]

These three representative passages directly refer to the objectification of lives and human beings by industrial capitalism. Many Marxist scholars perceptively point out that capitalism imbues everything in the world with exchange value and that living beings, including humans, are thus projected as a component of production or reproduction in such a network of capitalist social relations, therefore causing reification. Under such an operation, anything that can be given or is allowed to be given exchange value can be bought and sold as a commodity. The men in the novel treat women on the island as sexual commodities because mainstream society (laws, ethics and morals) allows for an exchange value to be assigned to them.

> "These women, in fact, have no status in human society and are not protected by law. [...] To use an analogy, it's like eels kept in a pond with birth control pills."
> "这些女人，在人类社会中其实是没有任何地位的，不受法律的保护。[...]
> 打个比方，就像是用避孕药养在池塘里的鳝鱼一样。"[94]

Are eels kept in ponds and drugged not eels? The women confined on the island are also human, but they are given exchange value by mainstream society and are put into a giant organism composed of a series of economic, transformative activities that Marx's state apparatus theory describes. In such a giant system, the differences of women as human beings are obscured and even erased; only the identical exchangeability monopolized by money is left for men to consume.

Nonetheless, such a mechanism of possession of the body is not completely irresistible.

According to Marxist theory, the expansion and consolidation of capital's power require constant reproduction, which needs a set of social conditions of production in addition to raw

[93] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（五）参观.

[94] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（二）俱乐部.

materials, labour, machinery and technology; that is, capitalism requires a series of moral, intellectual and discursive conditions to shape a kind of suitable subjectivity for capital expansion and to maintain its legitimacy. In this regard, Scott Durham argues that, since capitalist production needs to be driven by consumption, capital expands desires of individuals by associating goods with certain power fantasies, thus creating a kind of subjectivity with a side of expansion and a side of shrinkage (after the subject realizes that those desires and fantasies are illusory).[95]

Xiaozhao is driven to the island by his desire of the expanding "masculinity" he has developed in mainstream society; however, on the island, not only are there no institutions that maintain the ideology of mainstream society, but women on the island also resist the violation of their bodies and subjectivity by male visitors; therefore, Xiaozhao eventually discovers that the masculinist subjectivity he previously thought essential and powerful is an illusion whose origin is unknown to him. Similarly, at the beginning of the story, Xiaozhao uses the ideology of mainstream society to justify his killing and raping, but after he learns about the culture of different communities on the island, the set of ideologies implanted in his mind is shaken. In other words, the existence of this isolated island makes Xiaozhao realize that his subjectivity is actually domesticated and prescribed by a series of "soft" ideologies such as consumerism and hedonism; in Foucault's words, he is controlled by a bodily order - his body is involved from the very beginning in a certain political and ideological sphere, containing a set of political, historical, and cultural contents that he cannot recognize in himself. In the environment of the island, which is free from mainstream norms, he recalls his unconscious urge to break away from this set of norms.

He couldn't help but recall how he met Pangzi.

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[95] Scott Durham, "P.k. Dick: From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism," *Science Fiction Studies* 15, no. 2 (1988): 173-186.

That was Xiaozhao's first year in the office. Once, walking in the hallway, Xiaozhao saw the fire alarm phone on the wall and suddenly had a strong urge - he took off the red plastic cover.

The sirens immediately sounded throughout the building. Xiaozhao was stunned and could not move in place.

[...]

Afterwards, Pangzi asked Xiaozhao why he did that. Xiaozhao replied that it was just because he thought the whole world was a house on fire with no place untouched. Pangzi said this was also his feeling.

他不禁回想起与胖子的相识经过。

那是小昭刚来单位的第一年。一次，走在楼道里，小昭看到墙上的火警电话，忽然产生了强烈的冲动。他手一痒，便把那红色的塑料玩意儿摘了下来。

警报声立时响彻整座大楼。小昭吓傻了，在原地动弹不得。

[...]

事后，胖子问小昭为什么要那样做。小昭回答说，只是觉得，这世界本身已无处不是火宅。胖子说，这也是他的感觉。[96]

"The whole world was a house on fire 这世界本身已无处不是火宅" undoubtedly echo the words in the Buddhist scripture *Lotus Sutra* 法华经 - "there is no peace in the three realms, it is like a house on fire 三界无安，犹如火宅." In *Lotus Sutra*, the term "house on fire 火宅" is used to describe the "three realms" where all living beings are reincarnated - the circle from which they suffer but cannot escape.[97] Han Song uses this term here to allude to the giant system that disciplines Xiaozhao. At the end of the story, Xiaozhao's urges to shed all his armour and "superfluous ornaments 多余的饰物" that "go against the principles of nature 违背自然的原则"

[96] 韩松，"美女狩猎指南，"（二十五）胖子.

[97] 释素闻，*法华经导读*，谈锡永主编（北京：中国书店，2007），101-110.

and to "become part of the island 成为这岛的一部分" [98] can be interpreted as his desire to be free from the control of the regulation of "the normal world." However, is it possible for Xiaozhao to leave "the normal world" and get out of the "house on fire"? The answer implied in the story is probably no.

There are two reasons why Xiaozhao cannot break away from "the normal world."

Like Lu Xun's madman who eventually chooses to be cured and become an official, Xiaozhao is a character who, although he realizes that he is in a "a house on fire," does not have the courage to fight against the system from the very beginning. Compared to the character Yanjing who is almost integrated into the island civilization, he still needs to live by "faith" and still represents "the normal world" to a certain extent, so his resistance is not thorough.

> "What is your faith?" He suddenly asked.
>
> "Faith?" The Japanese man froze.
>
> "It's that kind of thing, you must understand. Here." Xiaozhao pointed to the sky, then to the earth, and finally to himself.
>
> The Japanese man shook his head in great confusion. Xiaozhao was very ashamed and knew that he had said something wrong.
>
> "你的信念是什么呢？"他忽然问。
>
> "信念？"日本人愣住了。
>
> "就是那么一种东西，你一定明白。喏。"小昭指指天，又指指地，最后指指自己。"
>
> 日本人大惑不解地摇了摇头。小昭十分羞愧，自知失语。[99]

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[98] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（三十一）抛弃一切.

[99] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（二十九）洞.

What is more, there is a more profound reason for Xiaozhao's weakness, and it is also similar to the reason why Lu Xun's madman cannot save himself. Some scholars indicate that one of the most important significances of Lu Xun's representation of the madman lies in the fact that Lu Xun clearly recognizes the madman cannot be completely separated from traditions that the madman criticizes. The madman realizes that "I 我" is also an "I" with "four thousand years of man-eating history 有了四千年吃人履历的我" because "I" can only exist in such a spiritual and cultural network; whether the madman wants or not, he must bear the burden of the cannibalism history. Thus, the madman's madness puts him in great danger of expelling himself from his cultural caste, so that the madman's sobriety and resistance finally lose their value and even become frightening to the madman.[100] That is, without this spiritual network which provides a complete set of meanings, the "I" of the madman will cease to exist. By the same token, as argued in the previous chapter, Xiaozhao's "self" emerges from norms of "the normal world," so destroying those norms is in some way tantamount to destroying his "self"; although he has the urge to break through the shackles, he does not have the courage or even the possibility to take the step and become an "unexpected beast."

From this perspective, the final cry of "Save the children" in "A Madman's Diary" is not so much a cry of hope but a desperate lament of the madman. In the madman's society there are no children who have not eaten human beings, and the circle of cannibalism has to keep being repeated. Han Song also presents this despair in a more straightforward way in "Beauty Hunting Guide" - "forced confrontation 强迫的面对."

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[100] 宋剑华, "狂人的'病愈'与鲁迅的'绝望' The Madman's Cure and Luxun's Desperation," *学术月刊 Academic Monthly*, 2008 年 10 月第 40 卷 10 月号：99-105 页.

The next question is, did others grow up in the same way? Like Yanjing? That extremely disciplined and very purposeful visit, in retrospect, seemed like a kind of organized crime with a thrilling nature.

Why did the adults support and arrange such activities? Why was this all led by the school and not proposed by the parents? Such questions settled in Xiaozhao's mind for a long time.

It is this so-called "forced confrontation" that accompanies the boy into adolescence and builds up like an electric charge throughout his life, reaching a critical point of explosion one day.

And right now, isn't Xiaozhao also experiencing a "forced confrontation" created by Yanjing?

In fact, this experience of "forced confrontation" exists in every situation, even walking, eating and going to the toilet. However, if we look deeper, we can't say that there is no real voluntariness at all in this compulsion. Perhaps this is the reason behind the abnormal state of mind and lascivious behaviour when facing women, rather than the other way around.

接下来的问题是，别人是否也是这样长大的呢？比如眼镜？那种极富纪律性、目的性十分明确的参观，回想起来，好似一种带有惊险性质的有组织犯罪。

大人们为什么要支持并安排这样的活动呢？为什么这一切都是由学校牵头而不是由父母提议的呢？这样的疑问，久久地沉淀在小昭沉睡的心灵里。

正是这样一种所谓的"强迫的面对"，陪伴着男孩子进入了青春期，并电荷般地积聚在他的一生中，终有一天到达爆发的临界点。

而就在现在，小昭不也正经历着一场由眼镜制造的"强迫的面对"吗？

其实，这种"强迫的面对"的经历，存在于每一种境况下，连走路、吃饭和上厕所都须臾不离。不过深究起来，这强迫的里面，又不能说没有更真实的自愿性吧。也许，正是这个原因锻造出了面对女人时的异常心态和淫乱行为，而不是相反。[101]

There are two main meanings of "forced confrontation." Firstly, it means that the power of the

social mechanism is far greater than that of the individual, and thus the individual can hardly escape.

At the end of the story, Xiaozhao is taken back to "the normal world" by the hunting club, but he

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[101] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南，"（二十）子宫.

wants to stay on the island full of "unexpected beasts" who live outside mainstream norms; he is aware that the discourse of "real men" is an illusion, but he has no choice and must go back to continue to be such a "real man."

> He spasmodically got up from his seat and yelled at the pilot with a face full of tears, "Please fly back to the island, I don't want to land in the city!" But instead, he was smacked hard across the mouth.
>
> The female instructor rubbed her hands together and smiled warmly, "Is there any use in saying that? For this world, you fool have long been immune. Now, you're a real man."
>
> 他痉挛着从座位上站起身，满面是泪地对着驾驶员大吼："请飞回岛上去吧，我不要降落在城里！"但却被人狠狠抽了一个嘴巴。
>
> 女教官搓着手，温存地笑着说："这么说还有用吗？对于这个世界，你这笨蛋早已经免疫了。现在，你是真正的男人了。"[102]

The second meaning, on the other hand, again points to the question of the self and the other. As mentioned above, if we adopt a Butlerian perspective, the "I" can only be defined within social norms, which is the inescapable destiny of every individual; therefore, both Lu Xun's madman and Han Song's Xiaozhao are unconsciously possessed by the "cannibalistic" norms. Once social norms are implanted in the immanent body through performative repetition and then the "I" is formed, it is almost impossible for the subject to return to the initial state of the beginning. Lu Xun uses the metaphor "children" to refer to this initial state, while Han Song uses "childhood" to express the same idea.

> In every corner of China, there are overly mature children growing up. 在中国的每一寸土地上，都生长着过分成熟的小大人。
>
> […]

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[102] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南，"（三十三）免疫.

"Is the island carrying us back to our childhood?" "难道，是岛把我们载运回了童年？"

[…]

Xiaozhao went after him and saw that the naked man was exactly Yanjing. Yanjing was on his back, waving his arms repeatedly, snorting and laughing, his breasts rising and falling, his legs shifting. For a moment, Xiaozhao felt that Yanjing had gone crazy, or, degenerated into a child. 小昭追过去，见裸体男人正是眼镜。眼镜仰面向天，交叉反复地挥舞手臂，嗤嗤地笑个不停，胸部大起大伏，双腿移换不止。一瞬间，小昭感觉眼镜疯了，或者，退化成了一个儿童。[103]

"Childhood" thus signifies the time before the "forced confrontation" occurred. But sadly, Xiaozhao cannot go back to his childhood. The madman and Xiaozhao experience the same fear and desperation.

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[103] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（十九）眼镜,（二十九）洞,（三十）抛弃一切.

CHAPTER THREE – ON THE QUESTION OF "CHINESENESS"

Chinese science fiction writers are frequently asked this question: what is the Chineseness in Chinese science fiction? While some writers believe that science fiction carries the task of making the world aware of the complexity of contemporary China, others prefer to avoid answering such inquiry, and there are also some who consider the question of Chineseness to be of no importance at all. This shows that the signifier "Chinese/Chineseness/China" that we are accustomed to should not be taken for granted. In this chapter, I argue that the works of Han Song and Xia Jia fully demonstrate the ambivalence of the notion of Chineseness; their novels destabilize this concept, making it and its abstract boundaries porous and unsettling.

The first part of this chapter discusses why Chinese science fiction can be combined with the nationalistic and potentially imperialistic narrative of "Chinese nation 中华民族," why it can respond to the need of consolidating the Chinese national identity, and, how it can satisfy the wish of China, as a political and economic entity with a significant global influence, to enlarge its international presence; at the same time, through the topic of Chineseness, I emphasize again that science fiction also contains a subversive and deconstructive force. The reason why these two seemingly contradictory (political) effects can exist simultaneously in this genre is that Chineseness itself is a vague, limited, discursive construction - an imagined "essence" that does not necessarily exist. The second part of this chapter brings out the same point from another perspective: these texts also refute the essentialist gaze of Orientalism, Sinofuturism and other racial and colonial discourses on Chinese science fiction by appropriation; however, such resistance also has certain limits and it is also in an ambivalent position. To some extent, these texts

allow us to consider how literature has become a geopolitical asset in the modern era with the rise of the nation-state and how the speculative nature of literature has been overshadowed and covered with several layers of veils by this ambivalence.

Part I - For/Against a National Dream

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, in the development of modern Chinese science fiction, we can see a dramatic change in the (political) environment it faces: in the 1980s, science fiction was considered by the government as a potential threat to mainstream ideology; however, in the last decade, Beijing has decided to vigorously support the science fiction industry.[104] I suggest that one of the reasons for this shift is that, with the rapid growth of China's political and economic power since 2000, Chinese authorities are trying to establish a different world order from the existing one dominated by Western ideological output. Under this ambitious vision, it is important for Beijing to explore how China, in the face of the nation-state-based international competition, can create and maintain a stable and favourable internal and regional environment (the mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan) through various measures, i.e., strengthening internal cohesion through national narratives and other means.

One Nation, One Dream

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[104] See: "国家电影局、中国科协印发《关于促进科幻电影发展的若干意见》," the State Council of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 22, 2021, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-08/07/content_5533216.htm.

It is well known that the specific connotation of the concept of "Chinese nation 中华民族" has been constantly rewritten since the end of the nineteenth century, and the (hi)story of the Chinese nation also contains a multiplicity of oft-competing narratives. In his book *中國，從天下到民族國家 (China, From Tianxia to the Nation-State)*, Wang Ke argues that the "Chinese nation" was in fact a very strict and narrow concept around the 1911 Revolution (Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命), and it was basically equivalent to the Han nation. Chinese nationalism based on this concept actually began with discrimination against ethnic minorities such as the Manchus. After the political elites at that time learned the theories of state system, nationalism, and Herbert Spencer's social evolution from Japan, they revised the contrast of the notion of "Chinese nation" (which used to be ethnic minorities living in Qing/Chinese territories) to Western countries by using "national trauma" narratives and even hate education, for the reason of unifying all forces as much as possible to resist the plundering of the West. As a result, since "new enemies" appeared, the concept of "Chinese nation" gradually expanded to include all ethnic minorities in China.[105] In this perspective, the Chinese nation in the modern sense is from the very beginning a pragmatic creation, borrowing and modifying the concept of "nation-state" from the West. It is an "imagined community"[106] created in a relatively short period of time for specific political purposes. To a certain extent, "nation" in China becomes a means of ruling and managing populations,[107] which also explains why the interpretation of the notion of "nation" in China is remarkably different from other parts of the world (for example, Wang Ke points out that "nation" should be a political issue

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[105] 王珂, *中國，從天下到民族國家* (臺北：政大出版社, 2014).

[106] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

[107] L.K. Shin, "The 'National Question' and the Stories of Hong Kong," *Hong Kong Culture and Society in the New Millennium*, vol 4 (2017): 129-148, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3668-2_7.

related to democracy, but in China it has become an ethical/racial question because politics cannot be "arbitrarily" discussed in China).

The role of science fiction in shaping and consolidating the imagined community of the Chinese nation, especially in the new historical environment where Beijing wants to achieve the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation 中华民族伟大复兴," cannot be underestimated. It has been convincingly argued that as a genre responding to the ideological needs for expansion in European colonial history, science fiction has adopted a nationalistic and even imperialistic dimension since its inception. The exploration of nature and the conquest of resources in traditional science fiction (mostly represented by male explorers, engineers, soldiers, etc.) could provide a positive and promising imagination regarding the nation-state and the expansion of the empire to the general public. While this kind of science fiction contributed to hegemonic forces in the 18th and 19th centuries for countries that were expanding such as the British Empire, science fiction could indeed be used as a cultural and ideological tool for strengthening people's sense of national belonging and for encouraging them, especially young people, to join the mission of expansion.[108] In *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction*, David Der-wei Wang also suggests that one of the key reasons why Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty introduced science fiction[109] from Japan is the unique political nature of this genre. Science fiction is based on existing knowledge, but it can conceptually construct a new world(view). For intellectuals such as Liang Qichao who wanted to "save the country" in the late Qing period, this genre seemed to have

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[108] See: Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr, "Science Fiction and Empire," *Science Fiction Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003): 231–245, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4241171. See also: Nathaniel Isaacson, *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

[109] In Wang's book he uses a relatively more general word "science fantasy" to refer to science fiction and other similar genres.

the potential to shape a new "Chinese nation" or even, a new "Chinese empire." According to

Wang, such a political agenda is achieved through a "future perfect" narrative:

> In contrast to the seemingly irretrievable time scheme of the historical novel, science fantasy was a genre that could resurrect the past from its "pastness" and pre-empt the future in the perfect mode.
>
> […]
>
> The pretended ability to forecast the final state of history can only result in a projection of present culture onto the future, including its morality, its goals, and its fantasies, as if the future were forced to be one entity because our memory of the past is of just the one of many possible (alternatives/narratives/stories/versions) that have become actual.[110]

The "future perfect" narrative allows the author not to deal with what might happen in the future,

but to directly assume what has already happened in the future, and thus presupposes a single linear

time trajectory rather than one that contains multiple potential possibilities. To put it another way,

science fiction can reorganize and "objectify" the narratives of time by shaping a seemingly

objective future, which is actually a projection of the past and the present, therefore giving a

specific metaphysical meaning to a particular thing and binding the two in a unique way; without

further investigation, it is difficult for the recipient/the reader to discover that this "objectivity" is

in fact mediated and purposely established. In a way, this is also a kind of invisible regulation of

time, where the past and the future are interpreted and theorized in terms of different needs of the

present world, and in such logic, the recipient, who is in "the present," is heading towards a future

that has already been conceived - it is to go "back to the future."[111] Science fiction can therefore

influence or guide individuals' perceptions and behaviours in a subtle way like an ideology or a

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[110] David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 255-256, 302.

[111] "Back to the future" is also the expression Wang uses in his book.

religion. From the late Qing Dynasty to contemporary China, from "Salvation and Survival 救亡图存" to "the Chinese Dream 中国梦," despite the fact that central themes vary from era to era, this narrative mode has clearly been present in different kinds of nation-state stories at different times.[112]

Xia Jia's "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" is a typical example that can illustrate this potential political application of science fiction.

The three main characters in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" are all rewritten from the story "Nie Xiaoqian 聶小倩" in Pu Songling 蒲松齡's "Liao zhai zhi yi 聊齋誌異."[113] Created in the Qing Dynasty, the story of Nie Xiaoqian is one of the most famous Chinese stories about a human and a ghost falling in love. It has been adapted many times into long novels, movies, games and many other different forms of art, among which is the Hong Kong movie "A Chinese Ghost Story 倩女幽魂" (1987, director: Ching Siu-tung) starring Leslie Cheung and Joey Wong. Xia Jia also pays homage to this film which is well known in East Asia: for instance, the scene featuring Xiao Qian sitting in a palanquin and the role of the Old Ghost Tree in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" - elements that do not appear in Pu Songling's version - echo an iconic sequence in this Hong Kong film. This mythical story, which has been repeatedly quoted and rewritten in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and overseas Chinese-speaking regions, is a

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[112] For a discussion of how Chinese science fiction inherited the tradition of the late Qing and reached a certain degree of political consensus with official ideologies from 1949 to the early years of Reform and Opening up era, see: 张泰旗, 李广益, "'现代化'的憧憬与焦虑: '黄金时代'中国科幻想象的展开," *文艺理论与批评*, 2018 (06): 63-79.

[113] 蒲松龄, 于天池(注), 孙通海, 于天池等(译), *聊斋志异*, (中华经典名著全本全注全译丛书, 北京: 中华书局, 2015).

cultural heritage shared by Chinese-speaking people. Thus, from this point of view, it would not be unreasonable to attach a nationalistic-like label of "Greater China" to this story. Indeed, in "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight," the three protagonists are living in a self-sufficient world with its own rules of operation. In a sense, the representation of this Ghost Street can be said to symbolize the landscape of the (East Asian) agrarian culture that has been devalued and removed from the imaginations of the future in the last hundred years by the developmentalist industrial culture (that arose in the West), which is one of the theoretical summaries of history to which the modern concept of "Chinese nation" can be contrasted and from which it can then be abstracted. From this perspective, this near-future story contains a projection of a "past" that has been abstracted and even flattened by the prevailing narrative about the Chinese nation: it presupposes the way history has been interpreted as well as the legitimacy of the nationalistic discourse embedded in it without really investigating these interpretations, while also anticipating how "Chinese elements" will continue to be presented in a future society. In this sense, this futuristic and high-tech Ghost Street thus carries and perpetuates the imaginary of the Chinese nation. Moreover, following this way of reading, we can also find in the work a contrasting story line that seems to reinforce this national imaginary: the invasion and destruction of Ghost Street by the mechanical spiders. This dramatic conflict can be interpreted as a symbol of the collision and conflict between traditional Chinese agricultural culture and European industrial culture, and even as an allusion to the violent colonial history of Western powers in East Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries.[114] In addition, some critics have shown that "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" is filled with many seemingly "insignificant" details and that the narrative is generally slow-paced. This is

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[114] 汤黎, "民族性和国际化的共同观照: 中国当代科幻小说如何讲述 '中国故事,'" *西南民族大学学报（人文社会科学版）*, 2020 年第 3 期 : 185-191.

a narrative strategy that allows the text to carry more meanings and makes it possible to be combined with nationalistic imaginations. For example, the scene of Xiao Qian combing her hair is not relevant to the development of the plot, but it allows readers to perceive more deeply the intertextual relationship between this novel and Pu Songling's "Nie Xiaoqian."[115] In short, this narrative of the future works in the present - it is not really the future that this text is contemplating, but the present. Science fiction thus may be seen as an epistemological discourse that acts by moulding in our minds a set of (national) imaginaries about the past, the present and the future.

However, I want to make it clear that I do not think this work is as committed to imagining a "Chinese empire" or endorsing an exclusive/essentialist concept of nationhood as some late Qing science fiction. By analyzing the "future perfect" narrative mode of this text, I want to show that, like many other genres, whether we like it or not, science fiction contains an indoctrinating function which can be in the service of the nation-state, or more broadly, of a particular established identity. That is to say, the pragmatic view of science fiction as a mere instrument of power is misguided. As Andrew Milner explains, science fiction is both ideological (in a more or less pejorative sense) and critical. [116] Despite this possibility of serving a dominant system, the main value of contemporary Chinese science fiction lies in its speculative critical power that is manifested in divergent ways. "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" can be read from a nationalistic perspective, contributing to the ongoing construction of the mainstream social order, but we should not forget that, as mentioned in the previous two chapters, it also contains the power of deconstruction. What is more, Xia Jia defines the style of her works as "porridge science fiction 稀饭科幻" that is even

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[115] 叶立文, 吕兴, "离题叙述与中国经验——浅议更新代科幻小说," *澳港粤大湾区文学评论*, 2020 年第 1 期: 107-114.

[116] Andrew Milner, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, *Locating Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 136-177.

"softer" than "soft science fiction,"[117] which is not only a mockery pointing to her non-mainstream status, but also a challenge to the overly clear hierarchical boundaries of soft and hard science fictions within the (Chinese) community of science fiction - a genre that, ironically, is itself more or less marginalized in the literary world in China.

A Lonely Ambush Force[118]

The paradoxical and ambivalent position of science fiction is inseparable from the conditions of times in which contemporary Chinese science fiction is situated.[119] In 科幻文学论纲 *(Outline of Science Fiction Literature)*, Wu Yan points out that the development of science fiction in East Asia has always run counter to the mainstream discourse and mainstream literature. For example, after Japan became a major economic power in the world after World War II, works such as *Japan Sinks* poured cold water on the frenzied public opinion; at the stage when the People's Republic of China was newly founded, despite the nationwide poverty, science fiction responded to the call for a strong country and a strong army; in the 1980s, although ideological control was no longer as harsh as before in China, generally science fiction was still discouraged and had to retreat into the realm of children's literature. In Wu Yan's words, science fiction has a markedly marginal status;

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[117] Ken Liu, "Exploring the Frontier: A Conversation with Xia Jia," *Clarkesworld*, issue 100 (January 2015), https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/xia_interview/.

[118] The expression "a lonely ambush force 一支寂寞的伏兵" is widely used by many Chinese science fiction writers and researchers, such as Fei Chuan 飞氘 (known as Jia Liyuan 贾立元 as well) and Wang Yao 王瑶 (Xia Jia's true name), to describe the state of science fiction in the literary world in China.

[119] For a discussion about the relation between science fiction (in a broad sense) and the technological, economic, political and ideological development of society, see: J. P. Telotte, *Science Fiction Film* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001).

it is the domain where those groups who have survived oppression defend their rights and defend themselves.[120] The margins are marginal because they are set against a "mainstream." The tension between these two poles constitutes the spectral characteristic of contemporary Chinese science fiction, which also reflects the doubts and anxiety about China's modernization process that the mainstream has neglected: What is modernity? What makes us (a Chinese) people under such circumstances? Where and why do we continue on this modernization path?

The marginality of SF writers who are willing to stay in a corner and compete invisibly with the mainstream, and the attitude of not compromising with the dominant discourse system are evident in Han Song's writing. In Han Song's works, the night is more important than the day, and being alone is more intriguing than being in a group. The protagonists' lonely and dreamlike thinking at night is one of the most significant characteristics of "The Passengers and The Creator" and "Beauty Hunting Guide." The tension between Han Song's representation of thinking and dreaming alone at night and "the Chinese Dream" is particularly worthy of consideration.[121] "The Chinese Dream" is a political narrative strategy proposed by Chinese officials in 2012 that attempts to mobilize the active affects of individuals in society.[122] Although Han Song himself works for an official institution tasked with promoting this mainstream discourse, his science fiction implicitly

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[120] 吴岩, *科幻文学论纲*(重庆：重庆出版社, 2011). See also: 韩松, "当下中国科幻的现实焦虑," *南方文坛*, 2010(6), 28-30.

[121] It is important to note that Han Song has been concerned with the topic of "dream" well before the official discourse of the Chinese Dream. Han Song has an unpublished novel called "我的祖国不做梦 My Fatherland Does Not Dream," which contains many satirical references to contemporary Chinese politics. Some related analysis can be found in: Jia Liyuan, "Gloomy China: China's Image in Han Song's Science Fiction," trans. Joel Martinsen, *Science Fiction Studies* 40 (1, March 2013): 103-115. Loïc Aloisio, "Les mémoires hérétiques : Han Song face à la politique mémorielle chinoise ou la science-fiction comme littérature de témoignage" (PhD thesis, Université Aix-Marseille, 2020).

[122] Some of Chinese officials' interpretation of this concept can be found at: http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1206/c64387-19817490.html.

points out that while every individual has the biological activity of dreaming, the collectivity - an abstract concept - cannot dream; the collective dream is a metaphor, a shaped and manipulated imagination in a rhetorical sense. Although individuals unconsciously or are required to make efforts to realize this dream, this dream is not their own, but is given by a huge system whose boundaries they cannot clearly understand. As Han Song's other representative work *The Subway*[123] shows, those bound to this dream are like taking on a fast-moving subway and embarking on a journey whose destination is unknown, being exploited and unable to choose their own dreams.[124] Similarly, in "The Passengers and The Creator" and "Beauty Hunting Guide," when the protagonists face one cognitive shock after another, the metaphors and rhetoric such as "like a dream" and "sleepwalking" are not accidental, but are meant to expose ideological discourses. In other terms, the significance of these representations is to reveal that "the past," "the present" and "the future" that we can understand only exist in the form of narrative, which is a kind of imagination in a broad sense. The bright futures depicted by different ideologies, which include nationalism, are in this sense illusory "dreams" - just as the dreamer will wake up sooner or later, the ideology will evolve and be replaced as well. For example, the protagonist in "The Passengers and The Creator" experiences several times changes of the power order in the cabin world, and every change makes him feel "as if something inside me has awakened 似乎有某种东西在我的体内苏醒"[125] - his worldview is constantly overturned - and the new groups in power continue to try to build new identities and subjectivities through bodily practice. All this implies that it does

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[123] 韩松, *地铁*(上海：上海人民出版社, 2010).

[124] Mengtian Sun, "'ElectricalDragon' and 'Hollow Men': Counter-narratives of Modernity in Han Song's Subway," *Comparative Literature & World Literature: Special Issue on Chinese Fiction of Science and Technology*, vol 6, no.1 (2021): 82-106.

[125] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," 8. Cruising.

not matter if the old ways of explaining the world do not work anymore, because ideology is just a "dream" after all - a "dream" that is abstracted from the interpretation of physical reality, but not real reality itself. Reality in a certain sense is like a doll that can be dressed up arbitrarily, it cannot speak for itself but can only be represented.

It is worth noting that, like "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight," "The Passengers and The Creator" can also be interpreted in a way that conforms to mainstream conventions. Specifically, it can be used to epitomize the current official interpretation of China's "history of national humiliation" in the 18th and 19th centuries. At the end of the story, after landing, the protagonist sees "them" as "golden-haired, tin white-skinned" people with "some sort of metal sticks,"[126] which can be easily seen as a metaphor for the modern Chinese people "opening their eyes to the world 开眼看世界"[127] and starting encounters with Europeans (white people). Interpreted from this perspective, the enclosed and dark world of the cabin, where those in power constantly control people through obscurantist policies, appears to refer to the society governed by the late Qing Dynasty government, not to contemporary Chinese society. In this sense, this novel uses an allegorical narrative to retell and reinterpret a story that alludes to (selected) traumatic memories and collective experience that seem to belong to the dominant narrative of the "nation," thus completing a narration and critique of a particular perspective of history. This is perhaps why this work, constructed in a contemporary setting with such a strong sense of irony, was able to pass censorship. However, we should not forget that since the 1960s, China has also experienced other major historical turning points such as the Cultural Revolution, Reform and Opening Up, and the

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[126] Han Song, "The Passengers and The Creator," 24. Boeing.

[127] " 开 眼 看 世 界 " is an expression that Chinese officials use to describe this period http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0304/c49157-20664551.html; it is also widely cited in educational textbooks.

1989 event. These events, some of which Chinese authorities are not willing to mention too much, have also affected people living in China, bringing mental shocks like "waking up from a long dream." The allegorical meaning of "The Passengers and The Creator" can also be placed in the stark context of the present day in China. This is yet another example of the ambivalence of the notion of Chineseness. In the words of Song Mingwei: "The new wave has a dark and subversive side that speaks either to the 'invisible' dimensions of reality or simply the impossibility of representing a certain 'reality' dictated by the discourse of the national 'dream.'"[128] Science fiction in contemporary China is a haunting noise that seems to follow the mainstream dominant discourse on a parallel track, posing a critical view of what is considered to be a certain essence (of the "national dream"). It is a decentred and non-conventional expression of identity and manifestation of a kind of modernity that is in a state of metamorphosis.

Part II - "Barbarians" From the Future

The ambivalence of Chineseness is due in part to the limitations of language; Han Song and Xia Jia's novels show us that storytelling is a good way to overcome such limits and demonstrate the ambivalence. In this regard, we can continue to ask another question: in addition to the groups closely related to this concept (Chinese, Beijingers, Shandongese, Fujianese, Hongkongers, Taiwanese, etc.), are these stories also told to others? While these stories ponder the concept of

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[128] Mingwei Song, "Representations of the Invisible: Chinese Science Fiction in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*, ed. Carlos Rojas and Andrea Bachner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199383313.013.28.

Chineseness itself from "within China," they also interrogate the essentialist and Orientalist understandings of Chineseness by those who take it as an othering counterpoint "beyond China."

China in/and the World

In his theory of Orientalism, Edward Said argues that while Orientalism divides the Orient from the West in a colonial epistemological manner, it also shapes the Orient into a stereotyped template through an established unequal political and economic order of resource extraction and discursive formations, which in turn deepens misrepresentations and misinterpretations. Said insightfully indicates that the fatal flaw of Orientalism lies in the fact that in such a mode of perception there is an "observer" who is not present and who is intentionally or unintentionally ignored - as discussed in the previous chapters, what the observer perceives as reality is different from real reality. When Orientalists abstract an image of the Orient with an attitude of a self-proclaimed superior observer, the first urgent question is to reinforce boundaries between the observer and the observed, so that the existing system can be sustained.[129] One way to keep these boundaries intact is through "the denial of coevalness."[130] To be more precise, by ignoring the very realistic and very present interplay between the producer of knowledge (the observer) and their

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[129] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003). See also: Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993).

[130] See: Johannes Fabian and Matti Bunzl, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

See also: Gabriele de Seta, "Sinofuturism as Inverse Orientalism: China's Future and the Denial of Coevalness," *SFRA Review: Special Issue: Alternative Sinofuturisms (中华未来主义)*, vol. 50, no. 2-3 (September 2020), https://sfrareview.org/2020/09/04/50-2-a5deseta/.

subjects (the observed), a one-way anthropological evolutionary timeline, which is not easily perceptible, is created; the observed is thus labelled backward and barbaric, which thereby implies the observer's "civilizational primacy" and shapes the West as an "unshaped shaper of everything else."[131] As stated by many Chinese science fiction translators who play an essential role in introducing Chinese science fiction to an international readership, this question about Orientalism is particularly evident in the overseas dissemination of Chinese science fiction as a literary genre in which the time setting is particularly central.[132] More specifically, Chinese science fiction is confronted with the variant of (techno-)Orientalism: Sinofuturism.

While rhetorically talking about the future, Sinofuturism seems to have nothing to do with the present, and in the discourse of linear modernity, the future is always regarded as a synonym for "positive"; however, Sinofuturism actually shapes the perception of the world in the same way as Orientalism. In this discourse, the past in Orientalism is replaced with the future, which is a kind of "inverse Orientalism."[133] That is to say, time is again artificially divided: China - a fearful or exotic Other which reflects the fear that past colonial actions of the West will also happen to the West itself[134] - is from "the future," not the present, while "we (the West in most cases)" belong to

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[131] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[132] See: Loïc Aloisio and Gwennaël Gaffric, "A Discussion between Two French Translators of Chinese Science Fiction," *SFRA Review: Special Issue: Alternative Sinofuturisms（中华未来主义）*, vol. 50, no. 2-3 (September 2020), https://sfrareview.org/2020/09/04/50-2-a2loicgaffric/. See also: Nathaniel Isaacson, "Sino-American SF: Trans-National Participatory Culture and Translation," *SFRA Review*, vol. 51, no. 2 (April 2021), https://sfrareview.org/2021/04/20/sino-american-sf-trans-national-participatory-culture-and-translation/.

[133] Gabriele de Seta, "Sinofuturism as Inverse Orientalism: China's Future and the Denial of Coevalness."

[134] David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Niu, "Technologizing Orientalism," in *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, ed. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Niu (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 1–20.

"the present" and are the antithesis of "the future." Although such an othering imagination of the Orient is no longer based on racial discrimination and stigmatization, it uses the same technique to arouse opposition and isolation by creating unnecessary anxiety or fantasy. In such an imaginary, the future of China, or even of Asia, can only be dystopian, reproductive, and heteronormative (as the opposite of the West), and such a Western gaze deliberately or unintentionally ignores, obscures, and denies other possibilities for the future of China/Asia.[135] Han Song and Xia Jia, as well as many other Chinese science fiction writers, resist this Orientalist gaze through their works, refuting the tendency to homogenize, essentialize and solidify the imaginary of China's future and the concept of Chineseness. I argue that their works make "Chinese science fiction" and "Chineseness" undefinable, and that this undefinable fluidity represents the very simultaneity/coevalness and multiplicity of future possibilities.

As mentioned above, in Xia Jia's "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight," in terms of the core ideas of the story, many concrete cultural elements such as the night parade of ghosts 百鬼夜行, the twenty-four solar terms 二十四节气, Yaksha 夜叉, Asura 修罗 and thunder tribulation 雷劫 can be eliminated. They have no direct influence on the development of the storyline, not to mention that some of these elements labelled as Chinese actually carry the background of traditions in other regions such as India and Japan. Similarly, Buddhism appears frequently in Han Song's "The Passengers and The Creator" and "Beauty Hunting Guide," but again, Buddhism is not strictly speaking a "native" religion that originates in China. The point of using these elements with

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[135] Ari Heinrich, Howard Chiang, and Ta-wei Chi, "Toward a Queer Sinofuturism," *Screen Bodies: The Journal of Embodiment, Media Arts, and Technology*, Volume 5 (2020): Issue 2 (Dec 2020), 38-45.

different interpretative possibilities is to refute ethnocentrism and to emphasize that not all Chinese or all those considered essentially Chinese are representative of his/her/their "cultural origin." This is not to deny the indispensable role of tradition and history in forming subjectivity and identity, but to point out that such a supposedly unified ethno-national essence - Chineseness - is vacuous. Firstly, just as Buddhism has developed in diverse ways in different parts in Asia, so too have the notions of "China" and Chinese culture incorporated various traditions that originate in different regions and historical conditions; "pure Chineseness" only exists in imagination. Secondly, when we talk about "China," we in fact also presuppose in our minds a series of other signifiers such as "America," "France," etc., otherwise the word "China" would be meaningless. That is to say, Chineseness is a complex discursive result of global geopolitics, ideology convergence and cultural translation that must be placed in the context of a semantic relational network in order to be understood.

Queering the Orientalist Gaze

In the same way that gender and sexuality movements have seized the right to interpret the otherwise pejorative term "queer" and use it for self-deprecation and irony, the works discussed here also rely on the label of "Chineseness" to counter the Orientalist reading of Chinese science fiction, attempting to sever the connection between this signifier and the stereotype and showing that the reality which Chineseness attempts to represent is much more complex than linguistic abstractions can show. As summarized by Virginia L. Conn "Yet this Western label (of Sinofuturism) is one that Chinese authors and artists have appropriated and weaponized for their

own creative ends, without necessarily sharing unified goals,"[136] the object being stared at by Orientalism is not the flesh and blood body to be attacked or apprehensively wondered at, but an energetic one with agency.

A representative example is the representation of cannibalism in Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide."

Cannibalism, the colonial trope that was once used to stigmatize colonized peoples, becomes a vehicle for speculating about modernity in Han Song's writing. In this appropriation, we can also see the reference to Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary." It is argued that the idea of "cannibalistic peoples" originates from the anthropological rhetoric created by European colonizers in the 15th century to portray the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean as groups "that had to be educated and saved"; this comparison of "civilization and barbarism" had/has become a model for the West to imagine itself and other cultures of the world. Nevertheless, this colonial discourse undergoes a semantic change in Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary," and it is borrowed by Lu Xun as a tool for cultural criticism. In Lu Xun's era, the colonial intentions of the Western powers towards China were also obvious, but Lu Xun's cannibalism is obviously not for the sake of colonial expansion, but for awakening his compatriots, resisting aggression by foreign powers and "saving the country and the people."[137]

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[136] Virginia L. Conn, "Sinofuturism and Chinese Science Fiction: An Introduction to the Alternative Sinofuturisms (中华未来主义) Special Issue," *SFRA Review: Special Issue: Alternative Sinofuturisms (中华未来主义)*, vol. 50, no. 2-3 (September 2020), https://sfrareview.org/2020/09/04/50-2-a0conn/.

[137] 刘泰然, 陈雪, " '吃人'话语的建构与还原——从鲁迅的《狂人日记》到田耳的《掰月亮砸人》," *长江学术*, 2011·1, 17-23.

Cannibalism in Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" also carries criticism of contemporary Chinese society in a similar way as Lu Xun's appropriation of cannibalism. Besides critical reflections regarding gender that I showed in Chapter Two, broadly speaking, what this text speculates about is the question of linear modernity, especially the rapid development of modernity/modernization. Like the representation of human metamorphosis in Han Song's *The Subway*, cannibalism in this novel, in a larger sense, is a metaphor for the spiritual crisis that arises from the process of modernization. Firstly, through the protagonist's observations about the social development of this imaged Chinese society such as the cloning technology invented by a scientist educated in the US,[138] this text relentlessly reminds us of the fundamental contradiction in the discourse of "socialism with Chinese characteristics 中国特色社会主义" about modernity. On the one hand, what China seeks after 1978 is the modernization of science, technology and economics based on the model of Western developed countries (the modernization here does not refer to aesthetics), which also presupposes that modernization is linear; but on the other hand, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" borrows the form of the nation-state while at the same time emphasizing the "uniqueness of Chinese characteristics," ignoring (intentionally) that the concept of "Chinese characteristics" is contrasted with an Other. Such a gesture of attempting to get closer to the West while also trying to draw an essentialist line is therefore contradictory. Secondly, this linear developmentalist discourse presupposes that a positive, good, new thing will eventually replace or even destroy a negative, bad, old thing, which means that a "non-modernized China" is unwanted. However, in such a division between the future/"the good" and the past/"the bad," where are we who are in the "now"? Will we achieve the ideal modernized society, as outlined in this

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[138] 韩松, "美女狩猎指南,"（五）参观.

"dream"? Or will we create a horrible Leviathan? The imaged island in "Beauty Hunting Guide" is in some way a thought experiment about the future in which the development of technology does not bring prosperity and progress but confusion and turmoil. Throughout the text, the protagonist Xiaozhao keeps thinking about what the culture on the island, which is created by technologies that mainstream society does not yet have, means to the normal world. Cannibalism becomes a manifestation of schizophrenia and even mental breakdown in this splintering of time, space and identity. This tangled and contradictory attitude raises questions about techno-positivist and socialist-revolutionary "grand narratives" which have a huge market in contemporary China because of the long-cherished desire to "catch up with the West." The criticism of contemporary Chinese society in this work is thus evident.

In the novel expressions such as "working unit 单位" and "pilot 试点," which are widely used by Chinese officials today, are a clear indication that the fictional world of the island is a reflection and a representation of the future of China evolving from contemporary Chinese society. This setting is meant to imply that, modelled on the developed capitalist countries, the process of modernization that China initiated in the late 1970s has been carried out on the basis of preserving the ideology and political system of the socialist era, and therefore cannot be fully equated with modernity as defined or expected by the West. In this point of view, the practices taking place in China as well as the future these practices will bring about are not identical to any imaginings an external gaze that observes them may have. In Han Song's imagination of the future and technology, the act of cannibalism, which should only exist in the past in the concept of linear modernity, appears grotesquely in the future, which then satirizes a "schizogenic use of time"[139] in various

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[139] Johannes Fabian and Matti Bunzl, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object.*

colonial discourses. In this sense, Han Song combines the colonial rhetorical weapon of cannibalism with his own cultural heritage (i.e., Lu Xun's cultural criticism tradition), and at the same time, turns the spearhead of his critics to the subsequent contemporary variants of this rhetoric – that is, linear modernity, (capitalist) developmentalism and neoliberal universalism which are in the same vein as colonialism and Orientalism.

Meanwhile, it is important to acknowledge that this approach of resistance also has limitations. By invoking an Orientalist construction first, this text, despite its cosmopolitan perspective, does risk falling into the discursive traps of nationalism and cultural exceptionalism. In my view, the complex ambivalent situation in which this method of resistance is located precisely illustrates that nowadays we have to adopt certain identities in order to act in a performative manner in the (public) political arena.[140] In other words, the issue of Chineseness is not really important in itself, but because of the presence of the Orientalist gaze and the impact of hegemonic ideologies from colonialism and its variants, and because identity politics is one of the foundations of contemporary geopolitics, we sometimes have to temporarily endure this sort of assumption and perception, and then use a kind of political projection to decipher and reconstruct it from the inside; otherwise, the resistance would not be legible, and it would not be recognized and acknowledged. This ambivalence is deeply embedded in the notion of Chineseness.

To sum up, Xia Jia and Han Song's writings demonstrate that the future of China cannot be defined, reduced and categorized in a single way, because the concept of Chineseness is fluid,

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[140] The meaning of "performative" here is a reference to Butler's discussion of political performativity. See: Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

vibrant, complex, undefinable and has no ontological stability. This contradictory and complex attitude toward the ambiguous and politically charged concept of modernity, whether it is the "Western" one or the one "with Chinese characteristics," on the one hand refutes Sinofuturism's attempt to essentialize and format Chineseness, and on the other hand, it also reveals the confusion and critical reflections of contemporary Chinese science fiction writers about modernization. These works all explore topics such as the subject versus the dominant social order, history and memory, identity crisis, and so forth, but their entry points are not the same. They are full of elements associated with Chineseness but refuse to please any party, neither intending to cater to stereotypes of the Orient, nor aiming at creating trauma, antagonism and hatred. From this perspective, we cannot put these texts in a completely homogeneous category. Unfortunately, we have no choice; tagging them with the label of "Chinese" may be the best option we have. Such a label is created to serve the theorization, and we should not forget that it does not show the full picture of reality. The ambivalence of the concept of Chineseness, as well as the contradictions and limitations demonstrated by way of resistance to its essentialist understanding, are calling for new ways of theorizing and more diverse comprehensions of reality/realities associated with this signifier.

CONCLUSION: 假作真時真亦假 無為有處有還無 (TRUTH BECOMES FICTION WHEN THE FICTION IS TRUE, REAL BECOMES NOT-REAL WHERE THE UNREAL IS REAL)[141]

In the concluding section of this thesis, we may return to the question raised at the beginning: What is the importance of fiction to reality? The works of Han Song and Xia Jia inspire us to break down the question before answering such inquiry: What is fiction? What does the word "reality" refer to?

As I emphasize repeatedly in this thesis, "reality" and "reality as we (can) understand it" are two different things. The latter is "distorted" by our own physical limitations, by the limits of our time(s), and is intentionally processed in different historical contexts, that is, it is not "one table filled with dishes that remain untouched 一桌没人动过的菜."[142] In a sense, this "reality" is not objective; its objectivity is idealized, artificially assigned and constructed in a rhetorical sense. Identity, gender and nation are the three of many topics that allow us to see this aspect and various issues implied therein.

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[141] "假作真時真亦假 無為有處有還無" comes from *Dream of the Red Chamber 紅樓夢*. David Hawkes' English translation with minor modifications.

[142] The expression "one table filled with dishes that remain untouched 一桌没人动过的菜" comes from Liu Cixin's *Three Body Problem III: Death's End (三体 III：死神永生)*. Ken Liu's English translation.

By representing posthuman and non-human characters, the four novels examined in this thesis all suggest that the self is constructed and that to be constructed it is necessary to have a structure. These texts demonstrate the fact that the self is not as authoritative and independent as one might think; on the contrary, the self is to a certain extent substitutable because it must submit to a set of norms. When the subject tells his/her/their "own story," he/she/they is not the only author of the story, and it is norms that make the act of "telling oneself" possible and allow the story to be recognized. The "story of myself" can never fully capture the constitutive beginnings and the preconditions needed for the narrative, while "I" constantly reconstructs, modifies, and integrates the narrative and the organization of stories; therefore, "I" cannot explain exactly why "I" emerged and why "I" emerged in the way "I" did. Humans are finite beings, so that when we try to draw a picture of ourselves and of the world, we cannot transcend the limitations of our mortal physical bodies as well as our intellectual tools such as language.

If "the only sole reality" of ourselves is such, then discourses on gender that define our bodies and our subjectivities from the outside are even more so. Xia Jia's "Goodnight, Melancholy" and Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" further show us that rigid norms/boundaries always seem to be closely related to the exploitation of certain groups.

The "melancholy" in Xia Jia's story can be interpreted as an artistic expression of an anti-logocentric perspective. Both the narrator in the story line Lindy and the character Alan perceive to a certain extent the arbitrariness of social norms, but they must cope with and live in their communities "in a melancholic way." Their wishes to "say goodnight to melancholy" can thus be understood as an attempt to integrate into the mainstream arrangement about time, space and subjectivity. To be heard, queer subjects in this kind of oppressed and unrecognized Penumbrae state have to negotiate a balance between compromise and resistance; therefore, imitation becomes an

effective way to survive in this environment. What makes them do so is the public/violent and implicit/reticent oppression. While this hegemonic power maintains certain kinds of normativity, it also exposes the fragility of norms and the falseness of assumed universality. The feasibility of imitation rules and the existence of oppression both suggest that, in a certain sense, humans live by faulty discursive systems. Consistent with this theme, the storytelling of this work is also fragmented; it does not follow traditional narrative characteristics of science fiction and seems to mutate at any time. The two story lines in the novel and even each section can be read as independent stories, but they are not presented in a conventional way as a whole. Such a slightly confusing narrative mode is precisely a form of queering reading and writing. In other words, if one reads the novel with stereotypical expectations (such expectations can be "hard science fiction," "soft science fiction," "female science fiction," etc.), one will not necessarily be able to understand the ideas implied in the novel; but if it is interpreted from a queer perspective, as shown in the second chapter, the two seemingly discrete story lines can be logically connected. The strategy of two story lines thus enables the author to expand the critical horizon of this work - that is, to address the question of gender and sexuality, but also to explore other issues that are also related to disputable regulatory norms, such as anthropocentrism and posthumanity. Such queer narrative mode is precisely a manifestation of metamorphosis, allowing us to rethink what has now been conventionalized.

Han Song's "Beauty Hunting Guide" imagines possibilities beyond the heteronormative world through the fragmentation of time and space. By drawing parallels with the world-building in Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary," this text deconstructs presuppositions about sex, sexuality and gender of the "normal mainstream world" which alludes to contemporary Chinese society. The unconscious "cannibalism" depicted in Lu Xun's writing returns in a capitalist way a hundred years later, while Han Song uses a similar technique to expose it again and points out trenchantly that: "reality" shaped

by patriarchal heteronormative norms is a negation of women's subjectivity as well as an objectification and exploitation of women. In this sense, the main character Xiaozhao's self-castration is rejection of heteronormativity and an acceptance of his own queerness that is suppressed by such heteronormative "reality." The representations of castrated Xiaozhao and women communities on the island highlight the importance of embodiment, question decontextualized abstraction, resist and criticize the oppression brought about by this abstracted power. At the same time, however, Han Song also indicates that the desire to liberate oneself from the established "reality" is contradictory or even impossible. When the self emerges from established norms, the self can only be defined and have the value of existence in such a mediated interpretative system of reality. In the context of such a fractured opposition, it seems that there is no way to get out of this dilemma.

Gender is not an isolated individual matter but is closely related to social power that upholds norms. From this point of view, reflections about the discourse of nation(-state) in the works of Han Song and Xia Jia share the same goal with their criticism of gender: they all seek to use their science fiction storytelling to expose the interconnected rhetoric as well as discursive ambivalence of systems of power, and to reveal issues that we cannot or do not want to see. On the one hand, as Xia Jia's "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" and Han Song's "The Passengers and The Creator" show, science fiction has the potential to become a "national allegory"; it can create a narrative form that meets political needs and becomes a collaborator of power. But on the other hand, this genre which can function in a similar way like ideological preaching and religious philosophy, also has the possibility to subvert the established system and deconstruct things that are claimed to be "true," "correct" and "objective." This subversive power is one of the reasons for the intermittent development of science fiction in China, and why Chinese science fiction has been able to bring

new thinking about "Humans" and "liberation of humans" to China and the world at a time when decolonization is not yet complete in the global scale.

In *Les mots et les choses : une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Foucault says: "Man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (*l'homme s'effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable*)."[143] Foucault sees the concept of "human" as a product of a historical and temporal process. In his view, this fundamental concept for us to perceive reality is an intellectual result in a certain stage of history, and it will be replaced by the product of the next development of history and a new cognitive framework. From this perspective, "reality" that can be understood by us is the same as fiction - it needs to be completed and represented through narrative while relying on the abstract language system. The speculative characteristic of Han Song and Xia Jia's science fiction writings reminds us that the distance between what we understand as reality and fiction is much smaller than we might think. This is why storytelling is important. I do not try to convey a nihilistic view here; what I want to demonstrate is that any kind of "reality," "truth" or "objective" concept needs to be historically situated and critically comprehended. The works of Han Song and Xia Jia discussed in this thesis help us and urge us to reconceptualize ourselves and reconstruct the intellectual framework to know the world - in other words, we must look at heavens, beneath which all of us live as "Humans," with humility and reverence.

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[143] Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses : une archéologie des sciences humaines*, 330.

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