

中国  画报

A Window to the Nation A Welcome to the World

# CHINA PICTORIAL

Vol. 892 February-March 2023

## Chinese Science Fiction Guide to the Galaxy

国内零售价: 20元

USA \$10.20 UK £6.40

Australia \$18.20 Europe €10.40

Canada \$15.60 Turkey TL20.00

ISSN 0009-4420



邮发代号: 2-903 CN11-1429/Z





# BOAO FORUM FOR ASIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE **2023**

**AN UNCERTAIN WORLD:**  
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The background of the image is a breathtaking landscape. In the foreground, a traditional Chinese building with a dark tiled roof and red pillars is nestled among lush green trees. A winding path leads towards the building. In the middle ground, a large, forested mountain rises, partially shrouded in a thick layer of white mist. The mist flows down the slopes and fills the valleys between the mountains. In the background, more mountain ranges are visible, their peaks softened by a light blue haze under a clear sky. The overall atmosphere is serene and majestic.

# 左权

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**Administrative Agency:** 主管单位: 中国外文出版发行事业局  
China International Communications Group (中国国际传播集团)

**Publisher:** China Pictorial Publications 主办、出版单位: 人民文学出版社

**Address:** 社址:  
33 Chegongzhuang Xilu 北京市海淀区车公庄西路33号  
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**Telephone of the Distribution Department:** 订刊电话:  
86-10-68412660 86-10-68412660

**Legal Adviser:** Yue Cheng 法律顾问: 岳成

**Printing:** Toppan Leefung Changcheng 印刷: 北京利丰雅高长城  
Printing (Beijing) Co., Ltd. 印刷有限公司

#### Overseas Distribution:

China International Book Trading Corporation (Guojiao Shudian),

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu,

P.O. Box 399, Beijing 100044, China

**Telephone:** 86-10-68413849

**Fax:** 86-10-68412166

China Book Trading (Canada) Inc.

**Telephone:** 1-416-497-8096

出版日期 每月1日

国内零售价: 20元

国内刊号: CN11-1429/Z

国际刊号: ISSN0009-4420

京海工商广字第0121号

In China, subscriptions are available at any post office.

Subscription and distribution agency in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan:

Hong Kong Peace Book Company, Ltd.

17/F, Paramount Building, 12 Ka Yip Street, Chai Wan, Hong Kong

Visit China Pictorial on the Internet:

[www.china-pictorial.com.cn](http://www.china-pictorial.com.cn)

China Pictorial is an official media partner of the Boao Forum

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China unveiled its “No. 1 central document” for 2023 on February 13, outlining nine tasks to comprehensively promote rural vitalization this year. At a February 14 news conference in Beijing, Tang Renjian, director of the Office of the Central Rural Work Leading Group and minister of agriculture and rural affairs, explained that the key messages from the nine-section document are “securing bottom lines, bolstering vitalization and reinforcing support.” Tang added that the key tasks for agricultural officials include safeguarding national food security and preventing farmers that had been lifted from poverty from falling back.

As the first policy statement released by China’s central authorities each year, the document is seen as an indicator of policy priorities.



A farmer in Daoxian County of Yongzhou City, central China’s Hunan Province, February 18, 2023. (Photo by Jiang Keqing/Xinhua)





Chinese tourists visit the Grand Palace in Bangkok, Thailand, February 7, 2023. (Photo by Wang Teng/Xinhua)

China's outbound tourism market, which has been near dormant for the past three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, saw a strong rebound during this year's Spring Festival holiday as the country optimized its epidemic prevention and entry policies in early January.

The global tourism industry would get a strong boost as China, one of the world's largest outbound tourism markets before the pandemic, resumed outbound group tours on February 6, said industry experts. Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, said that China's outbound tourism is expected to see robust recovery this year and foster prosperity in the country's tourism industry, adding that the tourism boom during the Spring Festival holiday was a good start for full recovery of the industry.





A performance of the play *Beneath the Red Banner* at Beijing People's Art Theater, January 18, 2023. (Photo by Li Chunguang)

During this year's Spring Festival holiday, Beijing People's Art Theater staged the two classic plays *Beneath the Red Banner* and *Tea House*, welcoming packed houses of more than 900 seats for the first time since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Across the country, live cultural activities, hardly seen in many places for over three years due to the pandemic, attracted millions of people seeking the nostalgia of the buzzing atmosphere. According to the official data, over 470 million visitors participated in around 110,000 public cultural events including lantern shows, relic exhibitions, and traditional opera performances nationwide during the Spring Festival holiday.



Wu Yibing became the first Chinese mainland player to lift an ATP Tour trophy after winning the Dallas Open. The win continued Wu's inexorable foray into the top echelon of the sport, realizing a decades-long dream of Chinese men's tennis players to match the impressive success of Chinese women in the sport.

China's new-generation tennis aces are eyeing more major breakthroughs after making their presence felt on the world stage over a year of progress in 2022. Emerging through deep runs at Grand Slam tournaments that fueled rapid climbs in world rankings, a group of youngsters has carried Chinese tennis into a new era with historic performances over the past season.



China's tennis ace Wu Yibing poses with his trophy during the awards ceremony of the ATP Dallas Open in the United States, February 12, 2023. (Photo from VCG)



# A Fantastic Reality

Text by Ling Chen

**Chinese sci-fi writers should uphold the ideas of “finding common ground while setting aside differences” and “maintaining harmony in diversity” and seek to capture common values of humanity in their works.**



The author, a celebrated sci-fi writer and playwright, is a member of the China Science Writers Association and the Beijing Writers Association. She has won the Galaxy Awards, China's top sci-fi honor, several times.

I once wrote a sci-fi novel titled *404: Dragon in the Sky*. It depicts a series of incidents after a dragon is spotted in the sky on the eve of the Qingming Festival. After the novel was first published in the magazine *Science Fiction World*, I received a letter from a reader who argued that a novel about a dragon shouldn't be categorized as sci-fi. Indeed, dragons are mythical creatures from Chinese legends and have nothing to do with sci-fi. However, a sci-fi writer's job is precisely to break through mindsets like this. A desire to explore the boundaries of sci-fi and self-cognition fuels my persistent passion and curiosity for writing sci-fi. In that novel, I presented a physical explanation on the emergence of Chinese dragons, created a cat character that was transplanted with an

alien's mind, and depicted astronauts aboard China's space station enjoying spicy hotpot... I will throw anything into my sci-fi stories because the sci-fi way of thinking has dominated my behavior and become the driving force in my life. It keeps me intimately familiar with scientific and technological advances as well as their influence on social life; It also inspires me to look forward to an innovation-oriented future and observe the present from a macro point of view.

Under my pen, science fiction is neither romantic stories on the cloud nor thrilling adventures, but a reflection on reality from a futuristic perspective.

The dragon depicted in the novel *404: Dragon in the Sky* reflects some phenomena in mass communication and online public opinions: The importance of





A giant bronze mask unearthed from the Sanxingdui Ruins, dating back 3,000 to 5,000 years, provides inspiration for sci-fi illustrators. (Photo from VCG)

science is weakened by excessive participation in public discourse. The truth is arbitrarily hidden amid the struggle for discourse power.

Thus, my sci-fi creations often merges fantasy with reality—a style I have long pursued. For instance, my short story *Platinum Ring* focuses on future marriage relations with the population of males much larger than that of females. Although it depicts a projection of tomorrow, I adopted realistic language to narrate the details of daily life. I hoped to foster emotional empathy with the characters in the readers of today through familiar aspects of life. I wanted the short story to read like a piece of news published in newspapers of the future—I read it by accident and chose to present it to readers. *Distinguished Guest* is about a janitor working in space



*Dive into Guiyang*, a collection of 10 sci-fi works by Ling Chen, most of which won China's Galaxy Awards.

who receives an invitation letter from the CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Perhaps that will become reality for the gala in 24 years. *Wind Ranger* tells stories of wind turbine maintenance workers and is like a hymn for laborers. Such works mirror reality and represent my conscious inclination towards sci-fi realism.

Chinese science fiction should tell stories of Chinese people, reflect on Chinese philosophies, and depict how Chinese culture and morality respond to emergencies in the future. The sci-fi blockbuster *The Wandering Earth II* that recently hit cinemas tells such a story: In the face of imminent crises and existential threats that push mankind to the brink of extinction, China supports a plan to move Earth away from its current solar system. This reflects





Pumpkins, Chinese roses and other plants grown in space are on display at the China Science Fiction Convention in Beijing, October 2, 2021. (Photo from VCG)

*China's vision of building "a community with a shared future for humanity" just mirrors such long-standing ideas. Chinese sci-fi writers should also probe such ideas and pursue the common values of humanity in their works.*


the innate affection Chinese people have for their motherland.

Chinese culture is inclusive and has long upheld the ideas of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" and "maintaining harmony in diversity." China's vision of building "a community with a shared future for humanity" just mirrors such long-standing ideas. Chinese sci-fi writers should also probe such

ideas and pursue the common values of humanity in their works.

Of course, sci-fi novels can showcase fine traditional Chinese culture in ways traditional literature cannot. The genre is based on scientific and technological progress and can only develop with the growing influence of

science and technology on human society. Essentially, science fiction reflects on the relationship between mankind and science. Over the past decade, China has witnessed rapid development of science and technology. Sci-fi writers' imaginations often lag behind the research of scientists and engineers. Moreover, fantastic research findings are becoming reality at breakneck speed. This requires sci-fi writers not only to understand the advancements in science and technology but also to keep up with the latest trends. Sci-fi writers must sprint past scientific and technological advances to envision the future human world.

The world is far from perfect, but I believe it will improve greatly in the future. My mission is to tell stories about the future world to the readers of today. 

## Nurturing Imagination of Tomorrow



The best movies are usually based on strong source material. Many pioneering sci-fi stories from China debuted in the monthly magazine *Science Fiction World*. Revered as the “stronghold of Chinese science fiction,” the magazine has introduced countless groundbreaking works since its launch in 1979. For more than four decades, *Science Fiction World* has documented the remarkable journey of Chinese sci-fi community, nurturing and spreading the seeds of the wildest imaginations. In 2000, it first published *The Wandering Earth* and the author Liu Cixin was awarded the Grand Prize of that year’s Galaxy Awards, China’s most prestigious award in sci-fi literature. That story has evolved into two cinematic blockbusters so far.

*Science Fiction World*  
February 2023

## Gen Z’s Digital Landscape

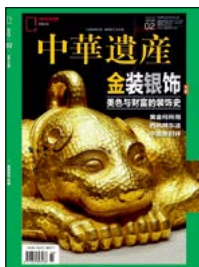


We live in an era recorded by short videos. According to the China Internet Network Information Center, Chinese online short video users had reached 962 million by June 2022, with short video apps rising to the second most-used following only instant messaging apps. The boom has made tens of millions of ordinary people seen and known online.

Growing up alongside short video media in the digital age, Gen Z has leveraged the internet to obtain an extravagant volume of information at unprecedented speed. They are eager to actualize their ideas and express their own voices. Each short video created represents a mosaic tile in the landscape of modern China.

*New Weekly*  
January 2023

## Gold and Silver Ornaments



China processed gold and silver later than West Asia, but its uninterrupted history has left an indelible mark in the world history of gold and silver crafts. Relics include jewelry ornaments that once sparkled on a person’s neck or ears and vessels that held outrageously expensive delicacies. People wore gold to avoid bad luck and erase sins and gifted it to break into the upper crust. The glittering glory and immense powers of precious metals continue to inspire obsession and enchantment. These are more than ornamental wares. Their history also reflects social development and adaptation of foreign things to fit Chinese needs.

*Chinese Heritage*  
February 2023

## Tang Women’s Dress




Women’s dresses and makeups in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) were incredibly elegant and elaborate. “Clouds compose her robe, and flowers make her face,” mused Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai (701-762) in a poem. “Caressed by a vernal breeze like morning dew fresh to taste.” The diversity and sophistication of Tang clothing, especially woman’s dresses and makeups, harkens to the inclusiveness and openness of the unified empire at its height with a highly developed economy and society, thriving culture and art, and active external exchange.

*National Humanity History*  
January 15, 2023







# **Chinese Science Fiction** Past, Present, and Future

Text by Mingwei Song

**Chinese science fiction has been characterized not by cautious optimism but rather by cautious revelations focusing on the rich possibilities of alternative visions of our world.**

Science fiction frequently ventures deep into the universe. This photo taken by Chinese astronaut Nie Haisheng in 2021 shows a view of the Pacific Ocean from China's space station Tiangong on its Earth orbit. (Photo courtesy of China Manned Space Engineering Office)





Science fiction has a long history in China, at least as long as other modern genres introduced to Chinese literature at the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), such as political fiction and detective stories. Compared to the realistic fiction that has dominated the Chinese literary scene since the May Fourth Movement, an intellectual revolution and sociopolitical reform movement in China in the early 20th century, however, science fiction has a considerably longer history.

### Promising Beginnings

Chinese science fiction can be traced to the very turn of the 20th century, when Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a leading reformer, called for

a revolution of fiction in 1902 and named science fiction a major new genre to promote.

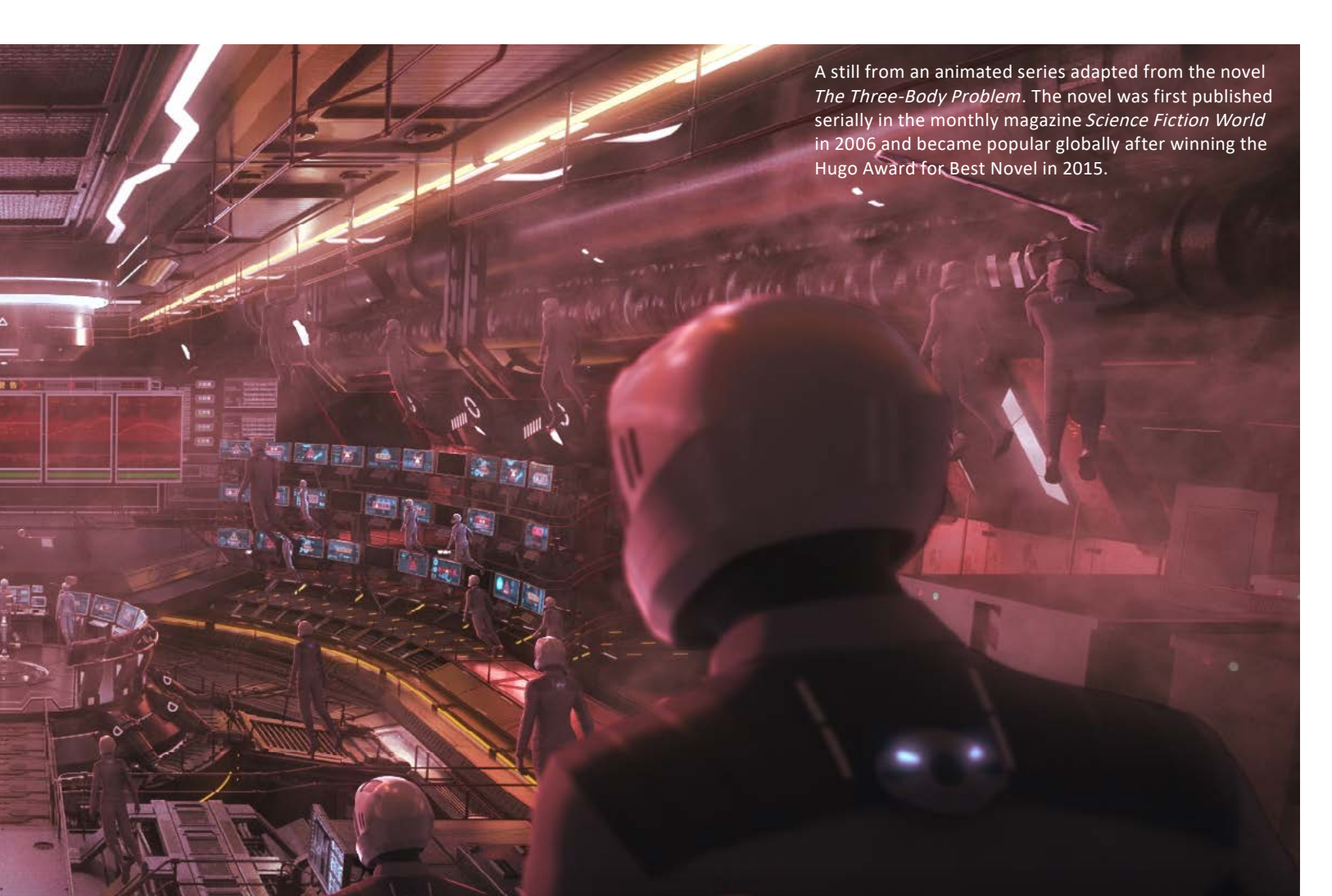
Known then as *kexue xiaoshuo* (literally “science fiction”), it became one of the most popular fiction genres of the late Qing Dynasty. Thanks to the efforts of Liang Qichao and his contemporaries such as Wu Jianren and Xu Nianci, the genre emerged largely in the form of utopian narratives that projected political desires for China’s reform to produce an idealized, technologically advanced world—as exemplified by the wondrous Civilized Realm portrayed in Wu’s *New Story of the Stone* (1908).

Early Chinese sci-fi works manifested a cultural hybridity resulting from a fusion of translated modernity and self-conscious yearning for the rejuvenation of

Chinese tradition. Most sci-fi works by late Qing writers were clearly heavily influenced by Western authors, especially Jules Verne, whose works were widely translated. The scientific “nova” in the foreground of Verne’s narratives made a major “point of difference” that was recapitulated by Chinese authors in their depictions of brave new worlds in a Chinese context.

For example, in *New Story of the Stone*, Jia Baoyu’s submarine adventure and airborne safari were both clearly modeled after similar images in Verne’s novels. But at the same time, the Civilized Realm visited by Jia Baoyu appears as a utopian version of a revitalized Confucian world, with all its inventions grounded in Chinese tradition and the merits of a political system rooted in





A still from an animated series adapted from the novel *The Three-Body Problem*. The novel was first published serially in the monthly magazine *Science Fiction World* in 2006 and became popular globally after winning the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2015.

#### Confucianism

Despite a promising beginning, however, the successes of Chinese science fiction have been sporadic. Only three short booms can be identified: the last decade of the Qing Dynasty, the first four years of China's early reform era (1978-1982), and the turn of the 21st century. These booms alternated with dormant periods so long that each time the genre was revived, writers had to invent a new unique tradition, creating multiple points of origin for Chinese science fiction.

#### A Marginalized Literary Phenomenon

Early science fiction lost momentum when mainstream modern Chinese literature was conceptualized almost



Liu Cixin (first left), most known for his novels *The Three-Body Problem* and *The Wandering Earth*, has won the Hugo Award, the highest honor in sci-fi literature. (Photo from VCG)

completely as realist after the May Fourth Movement. The rise of a truth-claiming literary realism pioneered by Lu Xun (1881-1936)

eventually marginalized science fiction out of the literary canon of the Republic of China period (1912-1949).





A still from a TV series adapted from Liu Cixin's "Three-Body" trilogy. So far, the trilogy has been adapted to different media including film, animation, TV, and drama, arousing heated discussions about the original novels.

However, the literary discourse promoted by Lu Xun, who personally translated Jules Verne, starkly contrasted the later period's realism epitomized by Mao Dun's epic novels that aspired to uncover a deeper truth beneath the surface reality. Lu Xun's truth-claiming discourse was a subversion of conventional, normative perceptions which caused contention with the mainstream epistemological paradigm perhaps due to his early education in science and science fiction, which he saw as a rebellion against institutional suffocation.

In the Postwar Era, outside the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong writer Ni Kuang (1935-2022) wrote nearly 150 sci-fi novels and stories, all centered on adventurous superhero Wei Sili. Ni's stories began to capture

readers' attention in the early 1960s, and eventually Wei Sili became an established figure in Hong Kong pop culture.

Recently, scholars "unearthed" some obscure sci-fi stories and novels from Singapore and China's Hong Kong and Taiwan published as entertainment from the 1950s to the 1970s. But the newly reemerged works did not affect the overall structure of literature during the period, in which science fiction was relegated as a marginalized phenomenon.

## Engagement with Social Criticism

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, science fiction was reinstated as a subgenre of children's literature by the late 1950s due to inspiration from the Soviet literary system. The genre's Chinese name was changed to *kexue huanxiang xiaoshuo* (literally "science fantasy fiction"), a translation of the Russian equivalent.

By this time, writers in Taiwan also began re-invigorating the genre by incorporating dystopian



visions and social criticism into fictional worlds to reflect an array of unconventional themes such as historical trauma and the ethical consequences of scientific and technological innovation. The most famous sci-fi writer from Taiwan, S. K. Chang, became a familiar name to Chinese mainland readers in the early 1980s after the release of his novella *Biography of a Superman* (1968).

Influence from Taiwan was flanked by sudden exposure to American pop culture after China's reform and opening up began in the late 1970s. Hollywood influence could already be felt in Tong Enzheng's widely acclaimed story *Death Ray on a Coral Island* (1978), which featured prominent American sci-fi movie tropes such as laser weapons, mad scientists, mysterious islands, apocalyptic events, and transnational conspiracies. Such features were eventually converted back into cinematic images when a film based on Tong's story was produced in 1980 and generated even wider interest in science fiction in China.

Some sci-fi writers who gained recognition in the 1950s were primarily scientists more than authors. Leading writers of the genre during the period including Zheng Wenguang, Tong Enzheng, and Ye Yonglie introduced serious engagement with social criticism which lifted science fiction from a subgenre of children's literature in the socialist literary system to a sophisticated form that enabled both reflections on China's recent past and visions of hope for change.

century, the rise of a new wave of science fiction has been a momentous literary phenomenon in contemporary China. The genre has reemerged and gradually achieved wide popularity both domestically and globally. The development coincided with China's plans to achieve a new stage of national rejuvenation and the mapping of various political, economic, and scientific projects to achieve the Chinese Dream.

Unexpectedly, Chinese science fiction has simultaneously reached a golden age while generating its own subversive elements. Subversive worldviews, epistemology, and poetics have accumulated into a new trend which eventually made clear that its most radical front could be dubbed a "new wave."

"New wave" as a specific term underscores contemporary Chinese science fiction's cutting-edge literary experimentation and avant-garde traits in aesthetics and politics in the same sense that the term implies in the Anglo-American science fiction tradition. But in the Chinese context, it serves as

more than a reconfiguration of genre conventions. The insurgent meaning of this term, as it has been interpreted in cinematic studies according to its French etymology "nouvelle vague," can project a cultural earthquake capable of shattering mainstream paradigms of contemporary Chinese literature. The entirety of the new trend of science fiction can be categorized as an emerging new wave compared to the rest of Chinese literature.

Essentially, I would describe the new wave as an audacious experiment with novelty that entangles quantum poetics with a baroque infinity. The new wave has risen with curiosity for the unknown, uncertain, and unpredictable, a gesture of transgression across the borders between the familiar and the nonexistent and an act of dreaming about the alternative and beyond.

I contend that at its most radical, the new wave has been thriving on an avant-garde cultural spirit that questions



A poster for the sci-fi film *Interstellar*, co-produced by companies from Britain and the United States, is known as one of the most outstanding works of British director Christopher Nolan. The film was first released on the Chinese mainland on November 12, 2014, and exerted a profound impact on the Chinese sci-fi community.

## Rise of a New Wave

Since the turn of the 21st





Canadian sci-fi novelist Robert Sawyer (third left) and his Chinese counterpart Han Song (second left) engage in a discussion on “The Trends of International Science Fiction” at the China Science Fiction Convention 2017 in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province. (Photo from VCG)

commonly accepted ideas and observed rules regarding morals, ideologies, and knowledge about the self or the world, humans, and the universe.

The new wave is generating new modes of literary discourse that estrange things taken for granted, open eyes to insurgent knowledge and subversive images, and evoke an array of real or unreal sensations ranging from chthonic to sublime, from uncanny to spectacular, from inebriate to exuberant, from transcendental to apocalyptic, and from human to posthuman.

The harbinger of a larger epistemological shift, the new wave is breaking up the binary correspondence between reality and representation. When looking both outward and inward, the new wave inspires unorthodox non-binary forms such as cyborg, chimera, heterotopia, singularity, hyper-dimensionality, multiverse,

sympoiesis, and metaverse, transgressing the border between reality and representation, dismantling exclusive identities and dichotomies across many categories such as gender, class, race, hierarchy, and ideology, and recasting the human self as the posthuman other so that “I” can be an invisible “monster” residing in a non-binary universe that shines with neo-baroque splendor, illuminating infinite possibilities without settling on a certain reality.

In 2010, Liu Cixin published the last volume of his “Three-Body” trilogy: *Death’s End*. It quickly became a national bestseller in China. Han Song published *Subway* (2010), one of his most notable and darkest novels, around the same time.

Extensive Chinese media coverage of science fiction began at the end of 2010. Academic journals solicited research articles

and reviews of Wang Jinkang, Liu Cixin, Han Song, Chen Qiufan, and other Chinese sci-fi writers. The rapid rise created challenges both for the genre and larger literary field. It raised questions about science fiction’s “definition” as a genre and on whether its strength came from its uniqueness, its stereotypes, or its distance from the mainstream. Stakeholders wonder whether the genre has arrived at a pivotal point in a new cultural phase in which science fiction came to represent a newness far more prevailing and significant than the genre itself, considering how much new scientific visions and technologies have been changing daily life through artificial intelligence, big data, mobile internet, and the metaverse—as if we were are now living in a sci-fi novel.

Marketed as China’s national bestseller when *Wall Street Journal* made the sensational announcement that a Chinese sci-fi “invasion” had reached the United States, *The Three-Body Problem* crossed national borders smoothly to achieve unrivaled international sales among all translations of Chinese literature only weeks after its release in the United States. Translator Ken Liu fine-tuned Liu Cixin’s novels with a smooth combination of the original Chinese text’s dynamism and the stylish accuracy and neatness of American science fiction. Tor Books released the English version of *The Three-Body Problem* (translated by Ken Liu) to critical acclaim in November 2014, followed by its sequel *The Dark Forest* (translated by Joel Martinsen) in August 2015, and the final volume of the trilogy






A sci-fi light show and an immersive sci-fi drama inaugurate the 2021 China Science Fiction Convention at Shougang Park in Beijing, September 28, 2021. (Photo from VCG)

*Death's End* (translated by Ken Liu) in August 2016.

Liu's novels received endorsements from American writers and celebrities ranging from the Utopian novelist Kim Stanley Robinson to popular fantasy author George R.R. Martin as well as from former President Barack Obama and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. The "Three-Body" universe eventually remapped global science fiction through editions in over a dozen languages. In 2015, Liu Cixin became the first non-English author to win the Hugo Award for Best Novel. Translations of his works also won Spain's Premios Ignotus Award as a non-Spanish writer and Germany's Kurd Laßwitz

Award as a non-German writer.

The world images offered by Chinese sci-fi writers are not necessarily better than the real world, but they seek to shed light on realms of "invisibility" to illuminate the deeper truisms beneath the glossy, shiny surface of reality, pointing at the hideous side of the splendid vision of the universe and the unsettling, unnamable darker dimensions in the physics and psychology of our world. If they are wiser than the world they speak to, the "wisdom" that Chinese science fiction offers the world is not cautious optimism but rather cautious revelations focusing on the rich possibilities of alternative

visions of our world. During the first two decades of the 21st century, Chinese science fiction entered an unprecedented new epoch of experimentation and success representing new hope for change, curiosity about the larger world, and the promise of more wonders. The genre has nudged China to the center stage of world literature. 

The author is chair of Chinese Literature at Wellesley College in the United States, specializing in modern Chinese literature and intellectual history, science fiction, youth culture, posthuman theory, and neo-baroque aesthetics.



# A Thinker's Guide to the Galaxy

Text by Li Zhuoxi

**As Chinese science fiction started thriving like weeds in the spring, Wang Jinkang catapulted himself to sci-fi legend status by capturing the Galaxy Awards for six consecutive years.**

**C**hina's sci-fi community has reached a consensus: By the turn of the 21st century, Chinese science fiction was enjoying a renewed golden age.

Renowned sci-fi writer Wang Jinkang successfully led Chinese sci-fi literature to maturity during the period. In 2019, he was granted the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 30th Galaxy Awards, the highest honor for sci-fi writers in China. Over the years, Wang has won

Wang Jinkang, an eminent Chinese sci-fi writer who won the lifetime achievement award from both the Galaxy Awards and the Chinese Nebula Awards. (Photo courtesy of Wang Jinkang)



the Galaxy Awards 18 times in different categories. “He is a milestone of Chinese science fiction, marking the advent of an era of tremendous changes,” remarked the jury statement during his Lifetime Achievement Award presentation in 2019. “He uses his pen to depict the magnificent landscape of Chinese science fiction.”

### Symbolic Debut

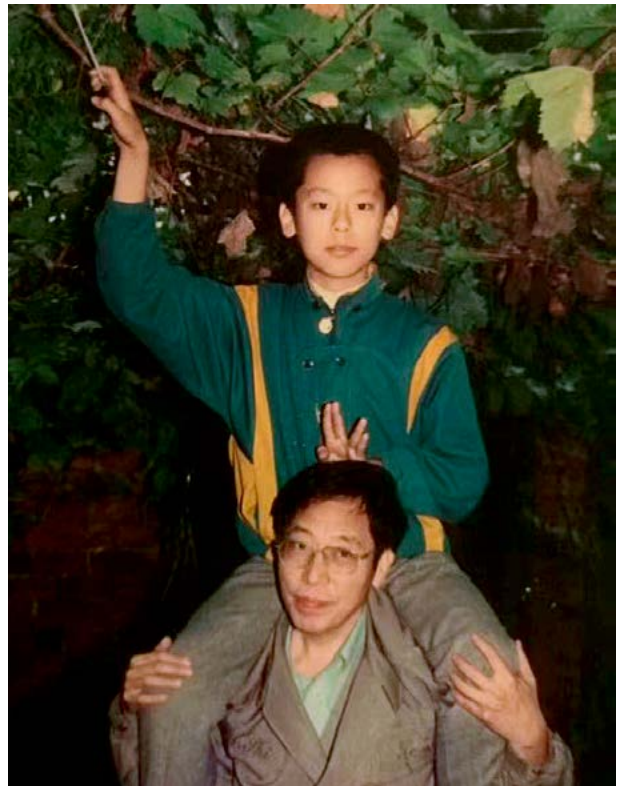
The emergence of Wang Jinkang as a sci-fi writer was by accident, but also a milestone event.

The motivation behind Wang’s sci-fi novel creation is interesting: Just like J.K. Rowling who started telling bedtime stories to her daughter before authoring the Harry Potter series, Wang also started by telling stories to his son.

However, satisfying his son’s curiosity was merely the spark for his writing career, and the fuel was love for science accumulating since childhood.

Wang was born in 1948 in a small town called Zhenping in Nanyang City, Henan Province. When he was a child, he learned from a popular science book that the seven colors of the rainbow derive from the impact of electromagnetic waves with different frequencies. “It felt like the colorful fairytale world in my heart suddenly collapsed and was replaced by a world of dry physics laws and numbers,” he recalled. “However, the latter fascinated me immediately with simple

Wang Jinkang with his son. Wang started his sci-fi career by telling stories to his son. (Photo courtesy of Wang Jinkang)



but inclusive beauty. From that moment on, I became a devout believer in science for life.” The experience also inspired a dream of becoming a theoretical physicist.

However, life didn’t go as expected. Wang didn’t become a physicist, and his first job had nothing to do with scientific research. After graduating from college in 1983, he was hired as an engineer at a petroleum machinery factory in his hometown. When he published his first novel in 1993, Wang was leading a heavy-duty truck research project at Nanyang Second Petroleum Machinery Factory.

That year, Wang’s 10-year-old son asked him for a bedtime story

every night. After using up all the stories he knew from books, Wang began to create original stories. His son showed enormous interest in a particular sci-fi story he told, so Wang wrote it down to author a short story.

The internet wasn’t around yet in those days. Wang had no idea where to send the story after finishing it. One day, he spotted a copy of the magazine *Science Fiction World* at a roadside newsstand. However, he didn’t have enough money to buy the magazine, so he wrote down the publisher’s address on a piece of paper and then mailed the manuscript to its editorial department.

That short story ended up as Wang’s first sci-fi novel, *The*



*Return of Adam*, which won First Prize at the Galaxy Awards in 1993. That year, Wang was 45 years old.

*The Return of Adam* is a short story with less than 10,000 words. The plot unfolds as such: Astronaut Adam Wang returns from a 202-year-long space mission to find Earth dominated by “neo-homo sapiens” with intelligent chips transplanted in their brains. Adam agrees to undergo a surgery to implant a chip in his brain because he believes the only way he will be able to overthrow the neo-homo sapiens is to obtain higher intelligence. Subsequently, however, he realizes it was an inevitable trend that “apes were replaced by human beings, and human beings were replaced by neo-home sapiens.” His desire to return to the past is like “the last old ape in the world refusing to use fire,” and he eventually realizes that all of his efforts are in vain.

Such a tragic, dystopian sensibility was retained in his subsequent works. Years later, Han Song, another leading Chinese sci-fi figure, called the emergence of Wang Jinkang a milestone in the country’s sci-fi history in an article, dubbing the publication of *The Return of Adam* a watershed moment that heralded the return of Chinese science fiction. It opened the floodgates to a new generation of Chinese sci-fi writers that took the stage one after another, reversing the decline of Chinese science fiction since 1983.

## Lone Ranger in Sci-Fi

Back in the mid-1950s, Chinese science fiction witnessed a boom after the “March for Science” movement was launched. However, the genre fell into a decline after science fiction was criticized as “pseudoscience” in 1983. Consequently, many sci-fi journals were suspended, and Chinese science fiction fell into a dark age. “I didn’t realize how tough that time was for science fiction in China,” revealed Wang, “but I did feel lonely as a sci-fi writer.”

In 1995, Wang ventured to the Karamay Oilfield in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region to experiment with some new products alongside four colleagues. Unfortunately, some key components of their equipment broke, and replacements would take a dozen

days to arrive. Their work was suspended. While his colleagues killed the time by playing mahjong, Wang drafted *The Song of Life*, one of his representative sci-fi masterpieces, on an exercise book in a room smelling like oil to the clack of mahjong pieces hitting a table in the heart of the Karamay Desert.

Similarly to his debut novel *The Return of Adam*, *The Song of Life* discusses the philosophical question about how mankind should deal with a new species that has replaced them to dominate the world. The protagonist in *The Return of Adam* chooses to embrace the trend and accept mankind’s fate of being replaced. In *The Song of Life*, however, the protagonist chooses to kill the robots that gain consciousness to buy some time for the survival of human

Wang Jinkang waves to sci-fi fans from the red carpet of the 5th Chinese Nebula Awards in Beijing, November 2, 2014. (Photo from Xinhua)



beings—even if it is inevitable that mankind will eventually be weeded out.

*The Song of Life* won the Special Prize at the 1995 Galaxy Awards. Yao Haijun, editor-in-chief of *Science Fiction World*, commented that the success of the novel was its ability to “introduce philosophy into science fiction while preserving the latter’s core values and making us see with delight and surprise the growing foundation of Chinese science fiction.”

As Chinese science fiction started thriving like weeds in the spring, Wang Jinkang catapulted himself to sci-fi legend status by capturing the Galaxy Awards for six consecutive years.

In 1999, Wang voluntarily bowed out of competition for the Galaxy Awards in hopes that “the sci-fi awards would encourage more young sci-fi writers.” That year, Liu Cixin, the author of the famous “Three-Body” trilogy, took First Prize at the Galaxy Awards for his novel *With Her Eyes*. That year’s Galaxy Awards also witnessed the emergence of other writers who later became important figures in China’s sci-fi circle.

Chinese science fiction has since entered another golden age.

## Seeing the Future through History

Wang Jinkang credited his ability to “see the future” to his tendency to look back upon the past.

Born in 1948, Wang endured



A poster for the sci-fi short film *Double Helix*, adapted from Wang Jinkang’s novel *The Song of Life* that won the Special Prize at the 1995 Galaxy Awards. The short film was honored as the Best Live Action Short Film at the 24th Shanghai International Film Festival. (Photo from Douban)



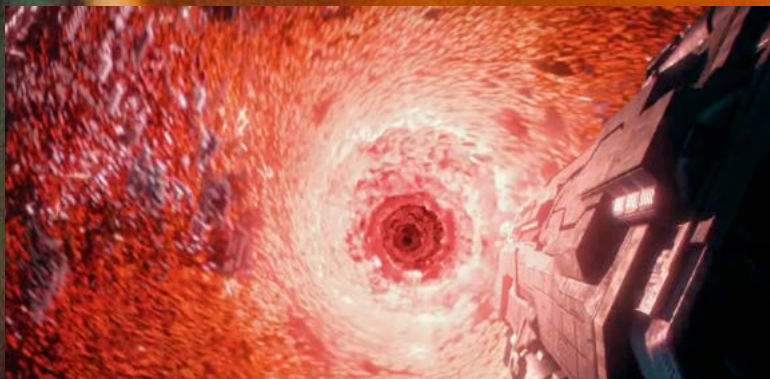
many turbulent periods. He injected his profound, sincere understanding of life into his works. His novels are characterized by a calm, lonely writing style, deep and inspiring thoughts, and tense dramatic conflict. A combination of naturalism and humanism, most of his works feature an astonishingly tragic end.

Science fiction depicts futuristic worlds and serves as a “laboratory” from a cosmic perspective. The most common experiments conducted in the “laboratory” are all about imagination and interpretations of human doomsday, but different writers may deploy different methods and procedures. Essentially, Wang Jinkang’s “Life” trilogy—*Crystal Egg of the Universe*, *Exodus from Our Mother Universe*, and *Heaven as Father, Earth as Mother*—is about testing humanity. The trilogy depicts how human beings struggle to survive across various galaxies amid fear and despair caused by the collapse of intelligence as the universe suddenly expands.

Wang has argued that throughout the development of mankind, humanities such as religion, philosophy, and

A still from the sci-fi short film *Go With Her*, adapted from Wang Jinkang’s novel *Mother*. The short film was ranked among the finalists for the Fantasporto 2023, a prestigious fantasy and science fiction film festival in Portugal. (Photo from Douban)






A still from the sci-fi short film *Restart*, adapted from Wang Jinkang's novel *The Burial Place in Lagrange*. (Photo from Douban)

aesthetics have always advanced in tandem with sciences. Both humanities and sciences are invaluable fruits of human civilization, which help humans realize their insignificance in the vast universe and are capable of guiding, monitoring, and controlling mankind's behaviors when doomsday comes. Only in this way can human beings shine a light of rationality and

wisdom on mankind's existential struggles.

In a 1997 novel, Wang envisioned a scene in which artificial intelligence beats the greatest human chess player. That became reality 20 years later when AI-based AlphaGo defeated the world's top Go player Ke Jie. "History shows that all things will definitely witness a giant leap forward after lengthy

linear development," he said. "We cannot predict a world experiencing such a giant leap with linear laws. Today's world is on the eve of such a giant leap, and no one knows what will happen tomorrow. What sci-fi writers do is to portray the possibilities of the future as much as possible. Perhaps one of the possibilities they imagine will come to pass." 



A still from the sci-fi short film *Restart*, adapted from Wang Jinkang's novel *The Burial Place in Lagrange*. (Photo from Douban)



# Ten Most Influential Chinese Sci-Fi Works

Edited by Li Zhuoxi

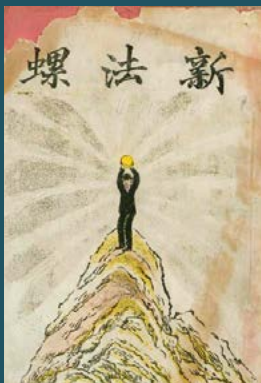
## *Lunar Colony* by Huangjiang Diaosou, published in 1904



The work is considered by many to be the first Chinese sci-fi novel.

The novel grafts the classical Chinese novel style with a sci-fi core, breaking from the ancient Chinese folk fantasy about the Moon Palace and Goddess Chang'e, so it is no exaggeration to call it the beginning of Chinese sci-fi novel.

## *New Adventure of Mr. Faluo* by Xu Nianci, published in 1905



The work is known as the first complete Chinese sci-fi short story.

The word "Faluo" was taken from the Japanese word for "fable." The novel centers around the adventures of protagonist Mr. Faluo whose body is separated by a "cosmic wind." His soul flies to Mercury and Venus while his body falls into the center of Earth.

## *A Tale of Cat City* by Lao She, published in 1932



The work is known as the first modern Chinese sci-fi novel to be translated into foreign languages.

The story's protagonist takes a plane to explore Mars, where he meets the "cat man" and ventures to the capital city of the cat country.

Like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, *A Tale of Cat City* is more like a satirical fable. The novel was translated into English, Japanese, and French and distributed abroad.

## *From Earth to Mars* by Zheng Wenguang, published in 1954



The work is known as the first widely influential sci-fi novel since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Publication of the novel ignited a boom in Chinese science fiction, and even a rise in Mars observation around Beijing, where people lined up at the ancient observatory at Jianguomen to look for the planet.

## *Mars' Constructors* by Zheng Wenguang, published in 1957



The work is known as China's first sci-fi novel to win an international award.

The novel follows Chinese builders constructing cities on Mars to make a second home for mankind.

The novel won the Moscow World Youth Festival Science Fiction Award in 1957. Later, Zheng Wenguang expanded the novel into a longer story and renamed it *Descendants of the God of War*.

***Little Smarty Travels in the Future*  
by Ye Yonglie, published in 1978**



With a total print run of 3 million copies, this book set a Guinness record for Chinese science fiction at the time.

From the perspective of reporter Little Smarty, the work imagines the many potential achievements of future cities in terms of science and technology. Author Ye Yonglie was the first Chinese member of the World Science Fiction Association. In 1982, he became one of eight directors of the association.

***Death Ray on the Coral Island*  
by Tong Enzheng, published in 1978**



The work is known as the first Chinese sci-fi novel to be adapted into a movie. The novel tells the story of a Chinese scientist living overseas who is dedicated to serving the motherland. To escape international underworld forces conspiring to steal his research, he endures hardships and dangers to take his work back to the motherland.

Two years after official publication of the novel, an eponymous film was produced. The film was China's first sci-fi movie in the broadest sense.

***The Song of Life* by Wang Jinkang, published in 1995**



This novel won the special prize at the 7th Galaxy Awards, the top award for sci-fi works in China, in 1995. In 2021, a film adaptation of the novel won Best Short Film at the 48th Film Fest Ghent in Belgium.

Author Wang Jinkang introduced the concept of "physics-based science fiction" and injected philosophical ideas into science fiction.

***Exorcism* by Han Song, published in 2017**



This book was titled "Best Novel" and "Best Sci-Fi Film Creative Award" at the 8th Chinese Nebula Awards in 2017. *Exorcism* is the second volume of Han Song's "Hospital" trilogy. Critics theorized that Han invented the concept of "medical punk" by seeing the universe as an enormous hospital, creating a new subgenre of world science fiction and broadening the definition of science fiction.

***The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin, published in 2006**



The work is a milestone in Chinese science fiction literary history.

The "Three-Body" trilogy depicts a life-and-death struggle between human civilization and the three-body civilization culminating in the rise and fall of the two civilizations. In 2015, the first novel of the "Three-Body" trilogy won the 73rd Hugo Award for Best Novel. The Hugo Award is the highest international award in sci-fi literature. A work from an Asian country had never won the prize before since its inception in 1953.



# Wedding Science and Art

Text by Cui Yuanhao and Wang Yuanzhuo

Photos courtesy of the crew of *The Wandering Earth II*

When science, the presentation of facts, weds fictional filmmaking, the art of humanism, their child is a real and fascinating future society.

Five years ago, none of us could have imagined our names in movie credits or the encouragement from the many people who recognize our contributions therein. Science and art were long believed to stand at opposite sides of a spectrum like parallels with no intersection. But we shattered that stereotype when the team of scientific advisors affiliated with *The Wandering Earth II* invited us to join them. The sci-fi blockbuster prequel was released on the Chinese mainland on January 22, 2023, with its box office revenue exceeding 3.8 billion yuan (about US\$550 million) nationwide by February 19, ranking among the top 10 in the Chinese mainland's history.

## Imagined Future

We embarked on a two-year journey of “realizing sci-fi



Crew members of *The Wandering Earth II* attend a premiere for an audience of scientists.

dreams” after accepting the invitation. Throughout cinema history, scientific consultants have been frequently involved in Hollywood movie making. But *The Wandering Earth II* established the first large-scale scientific advisory team for filmmaking on the Chinese mainland. What is the point of scientific advisors for a

movie? What is their role in the filmmaking process? What are the boundaries of science in a sci-fi movie? The whole crew managed to blaze a path through the darkness despite various setbacks, and our achievements were eventually recognized by fans with tolerance and love. After the film was completed, a premiere for an audience of





scientists was held. When we noticed increasing interest in scientific details from people ranging from scientists to kindergarteners, we were surprised to realize that we might have succeeded in creating an imagined future.

Over the past two-plus years, we were responsible for proposing, presenting, and

actualizing core concepts such as artificial intelligence (AI) and digital life in the film. We found that the filmmaking process did provide much larger and unrestrained room for imagination than scientific research, and open, free imagination and reasoning are exactly the most creative and interesting parts of science. The science-based free explorations found more expression in the reasoning of the future world, ranging from concepts such as “digital life” and “moon base” to details like “waterproof spray” and “sixty-hour day.”

When science, the presentation of facts, weds fictional filmmaking, the art of humanism, their child is a real and fascinating future society.

### Roles of Scientific Advisors

The success of a movie largely depends on emotional resonance. For a sci-fi movie, the aim is to create a credible and consistent future world as the emotional base to enrich the worldview. Before the preparations, our crew conducted a large-scale survey and decided to present the film in a “future documentary” style to showcase reality in terms of science, drama, and visual arts. After discussions, we reached consensus that pursuit of details was an important indicator of excellent work and that authenticity demanded a worldview rich in details and reflective of current reality.



### The “Earth Engine”

**Readiness Level in Reality:** ★

**Core Difficulty:** Nuclear Fusion of Heavy Elements

**Likelihood of Realization:** Bleak

**Relevant Sectors:** Energy, Machinery and Automation



### Strong Artificial Intelligence

**Readiness Level in Reality:** ★★★

**Core Difficulties:** General Artificial Intelligence and Consciousness

**Likelihood of Realization:**

Theoretically Possible

**Relevant Sector:** Information Technology





## Space Elevator

### Readiness Level in Reality:

★★★★★

**Core Difficulty:** Lightweight Materials with Ultra-high Strength

### Likelihood of Realization:

Theoretically Possible

**Relevant Sectors:** Aviation, Astronautics and Materials Science

Hence, one of our working principles was to ensure the crew was aware of as many scientific facts and logics as possible when depicting science-oriented fantasy to improve the sense of authenticity of the film.

Scientific review is another core job. After many rounds of communication with the crew, we found that the film itself had its own artistic laws. For commercial purposes, the crew tended to strike a balance between science and art and make some trade-offs. For example, time illusion was created through editing, and visual spectacles emphasized through comparison in the film.

We believed that the scientific bottom line is to ensure that within the three-hour run, the audience does not get yanked out of the future world depicted in the film by an out-of-place line, scene, or prop. We were particularly cautious about scientific details that were likely to arouse more attention and repeatedly looked at elements that run through the main plot of the movie.

Also, the crew expected



## Quantum Computers

### Readiness Level in Reality:

★★★★★★

**Core Difficulty:** Quantum Computing

**Likelihood of Realization:** Possible

**Relevant Sectors:** Quantum Science and Information Technology

scientific consultants to help rationalize the plot and sci-fi elements since literary and art practitioners have limited access to cutting-edge technologies which could be crucial for imaginative purposes. For example, the “550 series” intelligent quantum computer, the concept of “digital life,” the remote sensing operation of automated multipurpose military robots, and the “Earth Engine” depicted in the movie were inspired by existing quantum computers, metaverses and brain-computer interfaces,



## Brain-Computer Interfaces

### Readiness Level in Reality:

★★★★★★

**Core Difficulty:** Analysis of Electroencephalography

**Likelihood of Realization:** Possible

**Relevant Sectors:** Biology, Medicine and Information Technology



### Robotic Exoskeletons

**Readiness Level in Reality:**

★★★★★★★

**Core Difficulty:** Intention Recognition

**Likelihood of Realization:**

Highly Possible

**Relevant Sectors:** Artificial Intelligence, Information Technology and Robotics



### Earth-Moon-Earth Communication

**Readiness Level in Reality:**

★★★★★★★

**Core Difficulty:** Tracking and Data Relay Satellite System

**Likelihood of Realization:** Highly Possible


**Relevant Sectors:** Aerospace and Communications

somatosensory robots, and the “artificial sun,” respectively. According to the crew, the contribution of scientific consultants to the narrative, presentation, and credibility of events in the film was much greater than anything they did for the preset scientific bottom line.

The early work of scientific consultants involved plots and worldviews while most of their responsibility at later stages revolved around providing advice related to scientific presentation. For the movie, suggestions were offered on details like key props such as the “digital

life cards” (onto which human consciousness and memory are uploaded to achieve immortality), code running on scientists’ computers, formulas written in a room, and even the actors’ performances. These enriching details contributed to the movie’s sci-fi sense.

It’s generally agreed that science is noble for revealing laws, and art is gorgeous for expressing feelings. When a

splendid story is shared according to the laws of the world, depictions rise from fantastic to real. A sci-fi movie can arouse passion for and reflection on real science. 

The authors served as the AI scientific advisors for *The Wandering Earth II*.



# Golden Days of Chinese Science Fiction

Text by Gong Haiying

Photos courtesy of the crew of *The Wandering Earth II*

Thanks to China's technological advancements and growing national strength, perhaps the best era of Chinese sci-fi films has arrived.

“While the first of the *Wandering Earth* series ushered in a magnificent journey for Chinese sci-fi films, the second one represented its arrival on the international stage,” declared Liu Cixin, author of the original novel *The Wandering Earth*, after watching *The Wandering Earth II*, which hit cinemas on January 22 this year.

After its release in North America as well as countries



A poster for *The Wandering Earth II*. The much-anticipated sci-fi blockbuster displays an impressive visual effect upgrade over its predecessor.



To improve the depth of the film, the crew of *The Wandering Earth II* worked hard on every detail. Pictured is the film's director Guo Fan testing a newly upgraded robotic arm.

such as Britain and Ireland, *The Wandering Earth II* performed well at the box office based on strong word of mouth. As of February 18, the film was rated 8.0 on Internet Movie Database (IMDb). On Rotten Tomatoes, an American film review compilation website, 80 percent of reviews of the movie were positive, and the audience rating had reached 97 percent.

When the box office of *The Wandering Earth II* reached 3.7 billion yuan (about US\$528 million) by February 14, it brought the total earnings of films directed

by Guo Fan past 10 billion yuan (about US\$1.4 billion).

### **Spirit of Chinese Science Fiction**

*The Wandering Earth's* release during Spring Festival made 2019 considered the "first year of Chinese sci-fi film." Following the concept of "wandering with Earth" from the original work, the film veers away from the basic plot of building "Noah's Ark" and humans abandoning Earth and exploring and migrating to other planets like past sci-fi disaster films. Nor does this

film create a superhero. Instead, it depicts a number of rescue teams totally composed of 1.5 million people from different countries, reflecting the Chinese-style heroism of "a community with a shared future for mankind." It pioneers the genre by constructing a sci-fi world with a core of traditional Chinese culture.

*The Wandering Earth II*, released four years later, further enriched the spirit of Chinese-style science fiction. Laid out as a prequel to *The Wandering Earth*, the second installment tells the



story of mankind's choice and final implementation of the "Wandering Earth Project" proposed by the Chinese government to avert a doomsday disaster.

"While *The Wandering Earth* is more of an outward exploration of humans taking off alongside Earth, I wanted to dig the story of *The Wandering Earth II* in the inner direction," noted Guo Fan, director of both films. The inward development of *The Wandering Earth II* results in richer images of characters and more delicate feelings of humans. It maintains the storyline of major character Liu Peiqiang (played by Wu Jing) in the first film, who leaves the opportunity to survive to his son Liu Qi and his father-in-law Han Zi'ang in the face of the disaster, a subtle and delicate tale of a Chinese

astronaut selflessly sacrificing himself for the greater good. *The Wandering Earth II* also added two storylines represented by Chinese scientist Tu Hengyu (played by Andy Lau) and the Chinese representative to the United Earth Government (UEG) Zhou Zhezhi (played by Li Xuejian). The former introduces the concept of "digital life," exploring the ethical relationship among people, digital people, and artificial intelligence, which increases the depth and futuristic sense of the film. The latter reflects the Chinese courage to take on responsibility in the face of crisis.

Famous Chinese musician Liu Huan composed theme songs for both *Wandering Earth* films. While the song "Take the Earth to Wander" from four years ago

expressed the deep Chinese love for Earth, the more recent "I'm Here" celebrated the deepest family bond of human beings. "I am here, I have always been here, and I am guarding that moment you are in front of me..." Through the adaptation of the last sentence of Liu Cixin's original work, the musician blended China's traditional idea of integration of family and motherland with the Chinese people's values and thirst for family affection since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, which ended up as one of the most touching moments in the film.

### Documentary of the Future

After watching *The Wandering Earth*, Liu Cixin told Guo Fan that the ideal appearance of science fiction in his mind should be like a documentary of future



Stills from *The Wandering Earth II*. Depiction of the bonds between Chinese scientist Tu Hengyu and his daughter Tu Yaya and between Chinese astronaut Liu Peiqiang and his wife Han Duoduo in the film is moving.



机身长达8米，主要负责监控、侦查、勘测，并可携带武器进行战斗支援。

A kind of armed drones named Predator in the film *The Wandering Earth II* can take off and land vertically, fly very fast, and attack in groups like wasps.

history, so as to make it more meaningful. “When shooting the second film, we tried to produce a ‘documentary of the future,’ which was an important goal this time,” Guo Fan said.


To make the details of the film as authentic and rich as a documentary, Guo invited more than 20 scientists from institutions including the Chinese Academy of Sciences to serve as advisors for film production. Many cutting-edge technologies depicted in *The Wandering Earth II* are based on real developments. And the more imaginative scenes were carefully arranged one by one. Viewers were shocked by a space elevator stretching hundreds of kilometers from Earth to space and a giant space station falling from the sky with a massive ocean splash.

Moreover, the film introduced fundamental changes in art settings and props production. The impressive planetary propellers in the previous film were optimized in all aspects

with amazing details and a more magnificent appearance. The improved spacesuit designed and produced by the prop team appeared more realistic. Combined, such details create a vivid and credible world for a sci-fi narrative.

Guo Fan suggested that realization of imagination in

the film is closely related to the country’s real economy and industry. He noted that many of the transformable engineering machines used by the UEG in *The Wandering Earth II* were made by Xuzhou Construction Machinery Group, a leading Chinese producer of construction machinery. “In addition to heavy machinery, we also excel at producing delicate and precise electronic devices,” said Guo.

As a sci-fi fan as well as a film director, Guo Fan knows how unique sci-fi films are and believes they can only be as strong as the country supporting them. “China’s technological advancements and growing national strength have given us more confidence to shoot sci-fi films,” he said. “The best days of Chinese sci-fi films are likely right around the corner.” 



A still from *The Wandering Earth II*. In the film, the Gabon Experimental Base of the United Earth Government jointly founded by countries around the world is located in the African country’s capital city of Libreville.



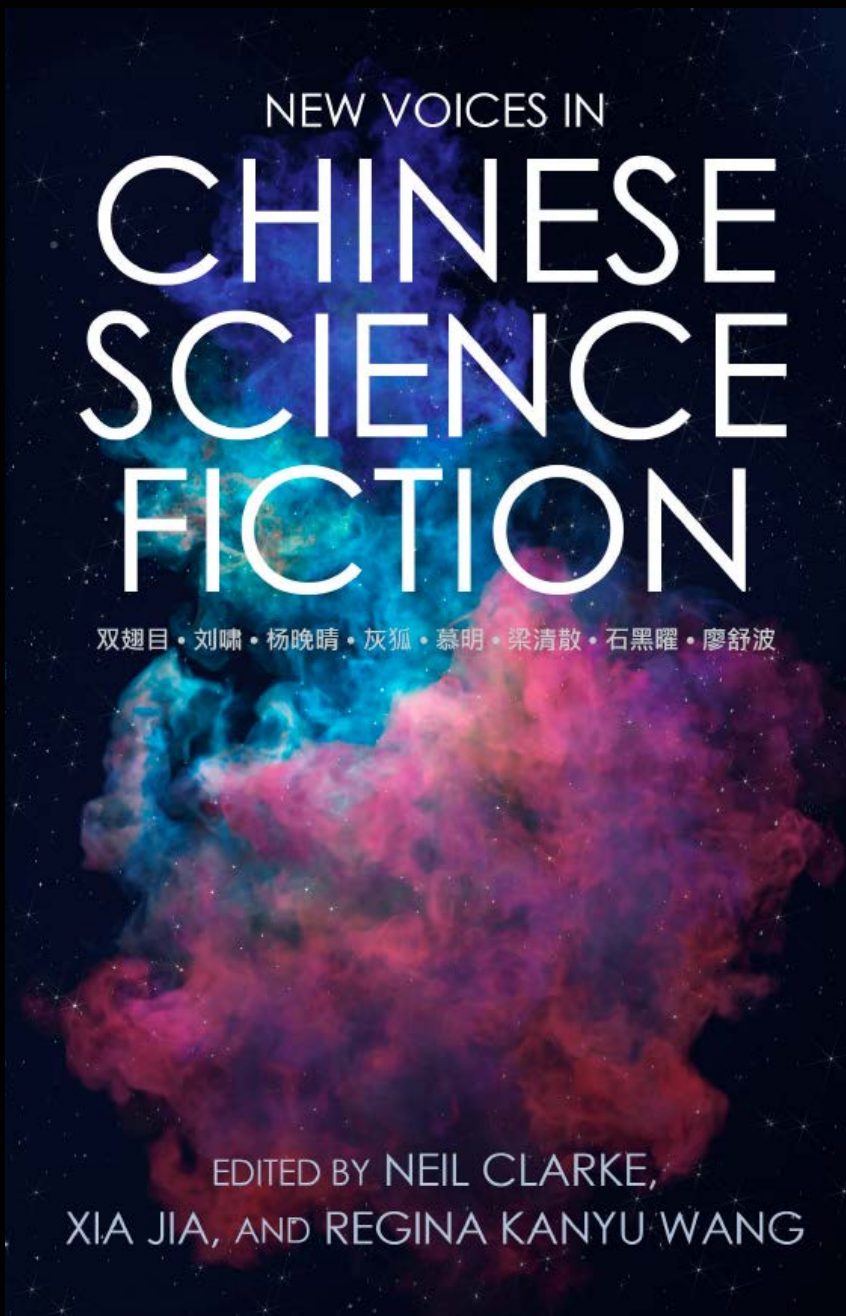
# Together for a Sci-Fi-Inspired Future

Text by Liu Chang

**More avenues for communication help break the English-language monopoly and foster a global sci-fi community more able to foresee the future.**

**D**ing! An email dropped into Neil Clarke's inbox on a seemingly normal day in April 2014. It was an out-of-the-blue invitation from Storycom International Culture Communication Co., Ltd., a Chinese story commercialization agency focusing on the sci-fi genre, to partner on the Chinese Science Fiction Translation Project. It "seemed too good to be true" to the award-winning editor-in-chief of the New Jersey-based *Clarkesworld*, a monthly sci-fi and fantasy magazine

The cover of *New Voices in Chinese Science Fiction* (2022), an anthology featuring previously untranslated Chinese sci-fi writers. (Photo courtesy of Neil Clarke)



*“Science fiction is international in scope, but its works are often unavailable to readers because of language barriers or the costs involved in transcending them. In the past 11 years I’ve been publishing science fiction works from China, I’ve had the privilege of working with and publishing stories by both of my co-editors, as well as dozens of other authors. Anthologies and projects like this one are an editor’s joy. We’ve been given the opportunity to shine a light on eight Chinese authors that have not been previously published (at that time) in English. Authors you should know about. New voices, or at least new to you.”*

—Neil Clarke's epilogue for *New Voices in Chinese Science Fiction*

launched in October 2006.

Although foreign sci-fi works began to be translated into Chinese as early as 1900 starting with Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* (translated by Chen Shoupeng and Xue Shaohui), Chinese sci-fi literature wasn’t translated into other languages until decades later.

*Clarkesworld* began engaging with Chinese sci-fi publication in 2011 when Ken Liu, a Chinese-American sci-fi writer, editor, translator, and Hugo Award winner, submitted an English translation of Chen Qiufan’s *The Fish of Lijiang*, which became the first Chinese sci-fi novel published in *Clarkesworld*. Liu’s second translation followed just a year later—Xia Jia’s *A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight*.

“*Clarkesworld* has always tried to cast a wide net in its search for sci-fi stories from other parts of the world since different

perspectives make the genre stronger,” said Clarke, explaining how their efforts attracted interest from Storycom to jointly lift the sci-fi genre to the next level. Under the Shimmer Program, one of its nonprofit projects, Storycom supports translation of Chinese science fiction into other languages.

## Cross-Border Partnership

“Why isn’t there a Chinese sci-fi story this month?” smirked Clarke, mimicking reader feedback. “Are you still working with Storycom? Please tell me you haven’t stopped doing this!” If a translation took too long, the magazine’s readers would submit “complaints,” evidencing the popularity of the initiative.

*Clarkesworld* signed an agreement with Storycom in September 2014 to add a translated Chinese sci-fi story to each issue of the magazine. Subsequently, it launched the kickstarter campaign to raise funds for the inaugural year of the Chinese Science Fiction Translation Project: three stories in the first six months—the ramp-up period—and another six stories in the following six months. The kickstarter campaign finally received US\$12,835 from 473 people, exceeding the goal of raising



A portrait of Neil Clarke with the backdrop of covers of *Clarkesworld*, a Hugo Award-winning sci-fi magazine. (Photo courtesy of Neil Clarke)





A screenshot of the 2014 kickstarter campaign to raise funds for the Chinese Science Fiction Translation Project.

US\$7,500-12,500. It financed the necessary head start to make the project self-sustaining through subscriptions and other monetization methods such as advertising, ebooks, anthologies, and Patreon.

Storycom has arranged an all-star team of Chinese sci-fi professionals led by Liu Cixin, winner of the 2015 Hugo Award for *The Three-Body Problem*, and Yao Haijun, editor-in-chief of *Science Fiction World*, a Chinese sci-fi monthly founded in 1979. Every month since 2015, they recommend a list of stories that might work well for *Clarke'sworld*, and then Clarke selects one and works with the author and translator to prepare the story for publication. Every story appears in all editions of *Clarke'sworld* including its free online edition, podcast (audio fiction), ebook and digital subscriptions, print issues, and annual anthologies. In 2017, *Touchable Unreality*, the first Chinese-English bilingual anthology of contemporary

Chinese sci-fi works, was published by China Machine Press as a phased summary of the partnership between *Clarke'sworld* and Storycom. The compendium incorporated nine works including *Security Check* by Han Song, *Preserve Her Memory* by Bao Shu, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* by Xia Jia, and *Yuan Yuan's Bubbles* by Liu Cixin.

It should be noted that unlike his competitors who tend to publish foreign works together, Clarke prefers a sandwich model as a more effective way to indicate that translations are as good as anything else they print. "When a magazine does a special issue themed on works of the same origin, it sometimes comes across like lowering the bar, implying those normally are not part of this community but this time the stage will be shared for a little bit," he explained. "But mixing up stories by authors from a wide variety of countries is pretty much a

standard practice for us—it's part of our identity to be welcome to everybody in the world."

After publishing translations in *Clarke'sworld* for over five years, Clarke and his team launched Clarke'sworld Books in 2019, a new dedicated taskforce aiming to publish quality sci-fi translations with special emphasis on short stories in collections, anthologies, and standalone novellas. "Magazines tend to have a more general purpose while imprints are more theme-oriented with a different marketing focus," Clarke said, explaining his logic of building on previous successes.

*A Summer Beyond Your Reach: Stories by Xia Jia* (2021), the debut work of Clarke'sworld Books and the first crowd-funded Chinese-to-English sci-fi book, was published in August 2021 thanks to joint efforts with Storycom. *New Voices in Chinese Science Fiction* followed soon thereafter. Published in July 2022, the anthology featured previously untranslated sci-fi writers from China. Highlights included *My Family and Other Evolving Animals* by Shuang Chimu, *The Bridge* by Liu Xiao, and *Tombstone* by Yang Wanqing.

## Universal Charm

"What makes Chinese science fiction Chinese?" That's the million-dollar question arising from the global boom of Chinese sci-fi works and one Clarke has been asked countless times, to which he retorts "there's no

answer to that.”

As per Clarke, one initial goal of the cooperation project with Storycom was to “make translation normal.” “Most of our readers tend to see a translated Chinese sci-fi work just as another story in our magazine,” he said. “They generally just show affection by mentioning the author’s name rather than anything about translation.” Also, Clarke is aware that their collection of translated Chinese sci-fi works offers readers only a “thin slice” of the whole sci-fi landscape in China. “Science fiction is like a big umbrella covering a very wide range. We’ve published a lot of different Chinese authors but are still only scratching the surface.”

Emily Xueni Jin, an academic researcher and translator of Chinese science fiction, echoed Clarke’s opinion. In *The Questionable “Chinese-ness” of Chinese Sci-Fi*, she suggested

that Chinese science fiction be a wealth of possibility rather than a label. Perhaps the Chinese sci-fi label could be good marketing, but it limits a genre that should be limitless.

Some Chinese writers are veering away from the sci-fi pigeonhole by actively returning to Chinese traditions such as the classics and mythology and re-imagining them in a modern scenario, a strategy exemplified by *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories* (2022), a collection of Chinese sci-fi and fantasy works from a visionary team of female and nonbinary creators. Others create around personal experiences to minimize the need to highlight any Chinese-ness explicitly. *Tongtong’s Summer* by Xia Jia, included in the anthology *A Summer Beyond Your Reach: Stories by Xia Jia*, for example, is a sweet story about a young girl spending the summer with her ailing grandfather and a helper

robot through virtual reality.

“While every author has his or her own cultural and literary influences, we appear to share very similar hopes, dreams and fears,” Clarke said. “Sure, characters and settings may have different names, but at hearts, the stories transcend.”

The 81st World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) will be held in Chengdu, southwestern China’s Sichuan Province, from October 18 to 22 this year. Clarke proclaimed that “there needs to be a Worldcon in China” after his visit to attend the Fourth China International Science Fiction Conference in November 2017. The visit was inspiring, and he returned home thinking “it’s a young and energetic community that has much to offer.” In 2016, China’s State Council announced a four-year plan to promote scientific literacy among its citizens including explicit instructions to increase the production of sci-fi works. Chinese sci-fi writers have been encouraged to inspire teenagers with quality works.

“I do think it will be very good timing for American sci-fi fans to go to the 81st Worldcon,” Clarke beamed. “They can witness how China has engaged a younger community, touch the contagious enthusiasm, and maybe learn something to re-engage in America.”

“Communication will help break the pedestal of the English language market and contribute to a more global sci-fi community to inspire the future,” he added. 47



A booth is set up at the 2022 Worldcon in Chicago of the United States to showcase Chengdu Worldcon 2023 preparations and the Chinese city’s history and culture. (Photo courtesy of Chengdu Science Fiction Society)



# A Sci-Fi Odyssey

Text by Li Zhuoxi

## The FAA aspires to foster a golden age for Chinese science fiction.

The year 2014 was a special year for Chinese sci-fi fans. That year, China's bid to host the 2016 World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) failed. "It often takes years for a new city to make the long-term plans necessary to win," said Ji Shaoting, founder of the Future Affairs Administration (FAA), who was involved in the bidding process, quoting the co-chair of the Worldcon giving the team a pep talk. "Keep trying and you could get it in 15 years."

So Ji didn't expect the day to come so soon: Chengdu, capital of southwestern China's Sichuan Province, will host the 81st Worldcon in 2023.

### Career Change

Ji's sci-fi passion was kindled by the book *Around the World in Eighty Days* she discovered at the age of nine. Childhood indulgence into the sci-fi world

shaped the way she thinks as well as the way she observes the world today.

However, she never intended to make her passion a profession.

In 2006, Ji graduated from university and became a journalist. A year later, she had the opportunity to report on the International SF/Fantasy Conference in Chengdu, which was organized by the magazine *Science Fiction World*.

At the conference, Ji met Ji Shisan, who was pursuing a Ph.D. degree in biology at Fudan University in Shanghai, and the two became fast friends due to shared ideals and interest. Ji Shisan came to Beijing in 2008 and later established the Songshuhui-Association of Science Communicators and Guokr.com, focusing on popular science for the general public. Ji Shaoting was among the co-founders of both platforms.

"China's sci-fi market was not as rosy as today back in 2013," said Ji Shaoting. "The Chinese Nebula Awards organized by the World Chinese Science Fiction Association was subsidized by the remuneration of top Chinese sci-fi writers Liu Cixin and Han



The poster for the 3rd Another Planet Science-Fiction Convention in 2021. (Photo courtesy of Ji Shaoting)

Song for years.” After discussions with Ji Shisan, Ji Shaoting founded the FAA under Guokr.com to contribute what she could. From there, she stood ready to delve deep into the sci-fi industry.

Ji Shaoting explained that the FAA is dedicated to causing the butterfly effect: changing the future of mankind through small decisions and actions today. The FAA aspires to “create a golden age for Chinese science fiction.”

## Fresh Young Blood

The great golden age of sci-fi history usually refers to the period from the 1940s to the 1970s when popular sci-fi magazines garnered considerable readership among young people in the United States. In Ji’s view, a golden age emerges when stellar sci-fi writers and works bloom.

China lacks sci-fi writers today.

The “Non-Exist” sci-fi anthology series published by the Future Affairs Administration. (Photo courtesy of Ji Shaoting)



Ji Shaoting, founder and CEO of the Future Affairs Administration. Her childhood exposure to sci-fi novels shaped the way she thinks as well as the way she observes the world today. (Photo by Qiao Zhenqi/China Pictorial)

Ji felt obliged to do something. In 2016, the FAA began to operate independently with focus on building a complete sci-fi industry chain. Ji resigned from her news job and plunged full-time into the sci-fi cause.

One of the fundamental missions of the FAA is to build an enabling and thriving environment for sci-fi authors.

To make that happen, the FAA launched a sci-fi writing club. People from all walks of life including students, doctors, and amateur writers have joined. Gradually, the trainees will inject fresh blood into Chinese science





The 3rd Another Planet Science-Fiction Convention hosted by the Future Affairs Administration in Beijing, May 25-26, 2019. As an extension of the Asia-Pacific Science Fiction Convention (APSFcon), it is an influential sci-fi gathering. (Photo courtesy of Ji Shaoting)

fiction. For mature writers, the FAA serves as an agent and more.

Nestled deep in the mountains in southwestern China's Guizhou Province is the world's largest single-aperture radio telescope, China's Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Telescope (FAST). When the last of 4,450 panels was hoisted and fitted into the radio telescope dubbed the "Sky Eye," Liu Cixin, Han Song, and Ji Shaoting were all on-hand to witness the accomplishment. The opportunity was provided by the FAA and the telescope builder, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, as part of the FAA's



An illustration from acclaimed author Liu Cixin's first sci-fi picture book *The Fire Keeper*, illustrated by BUTU. The book was exhibited at the 75th World Science Fiction Convention in Finland in 2017. The Future Affairs Administration and Sandman Studios will join hands to produce a virtual reality animation based on the story depicted in the book. (Photo from Douban)





The Future Affairs Administration's 2021 sci-fi master workshop allowed sci-fi writers to visit the Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization under the Chinese Academy of Sciences and exchange views with space workers there. This is a group photo of workshop participants. (Photo courtesy of Ji Shaoting)

sci-fi master workshop.

The workshop enables Chinese and foreign sci-fi creators to see cutting-edge technology and learn about the latest developments in China. Ji Shaoting suggested that their imaginations can reach further when they have seen the edge of the country's innovative strength, which makes the experiences highly significant. "You could only predict the future with a better knowledge of today's world," she said. "Chinese science fiction is a microcosm of the country's overall development in science and technology."


## Trailblazer in Sci-Fi Business

The FAA has also been exploring how to present sci-fi works in more innovative and connected ways. Its operations are not limited to books and writing. The sci-fi brand has formulated more popular business models like sci-fi-inspired movies, TV series, and video games. "Science fiction is an experimental field in which different industries mix and connect," noted Ji Shaoting.

After completing its A+ round financing, the FAA's valuation exceeds US\$14.5

million. Now the first highly-valued sci-fi brand in China, the FAA seeks to expand the perception and definition of "science fiction" in society to impact business patterns in other industries. "Some existing industrial chains aren't yet connected to science fiction. The FAA might be the bridge they need."

"The future can hit you like heavy rain before you can reach for your umbrella," said Liu Cixin.

As a matter of fact, the future has arrived. 



# Fanning the Sci-Fi Flames

Text by Liu Chang

Fandom has become one of the most intrinsically crucial components of Chinese science fiction.

Rumble, rumble, rumble... When James Bacon finishes his shift conducting trains at London Paddington Railway Station, his brain really starts to gain steam. Then leisure time? Yes-and-no. Bacon plans to devote time to editing *Journey Planet*, the Hugo Award Best Fanzine of 2015, and he feels “privileged to be able to edit it as a hobby.”

Two special bilingual issues of *Journey Planet*, published

The cover of No.68 issue of *Journey Planet*, from *Ocean in the Sky* by Shardsden. (Photo courtesy of Regina Kanyu Wang)





respectively in December 2022 and January 2023, were dedicated to “Chinese Science Fiction and Space.” More than 20 articles and interviews covered China’s science, science fiction, space exploration and fandom. Other editors working alongside Bacon included Christopher J. Garcia, Regina Kanyu Wang, Arthur Liu, and Yen Ooi.

“We produced a ‘Russia Space’ themed bilingual issue in 2021, which was quite popular,” said Bacon. “Then we realized that considering how much interesting sci-fi and creativity was coming out of China, an issue dedicated to China’s sci-fi and space exploration was long overdue!”

## Labor of Love

The kaleidoscope of topics in the two special bilingual issues included hidden treasures of Chinese sci-fi, reviews of sci-fi comics such as *Split Earth* by Joey Yu, Zephyr Zheng, and Monica Ding, and interviews with a sci-fi entrepreneur and visual artists. Contributors ranged from the former editor-in-chief of *Science Fiction World* (a monthly Chinese sci-fi magazine founded in 1979), senior scholars working on major programs funded by the National Natural Social Science Foundation of China, and Hugo Award-winning writers to college freshmen, young translators who just started their careers, and astronauts and artists who love science fiction. It surveyed the fan ecology outside organizing committees of sci-fi conventions

The development of Chinese sci-fi fanzines



The cover of No.20 issue of *Nebula*, China's first sci-fi fanzine. (Photo courtesy of Regina Kanyu Wang)



Source: No.70 issue of *Journey Planet*, published in January 2023





James Bacon (right) shares a cheerful moment with Regina Kanyu Wang, co-editor of the two special bilingual issues of *Journey Planet* dedicated to "Chinese Science Fiction and Space," at 2017 SMOFcon in Boston of the United States. It's an annual event that focuses on the organization of sci-fi conventions. (Photo courtesy of James Bacon)

and professional institutions.

One highlight was an article on the brief history of Chinese sci-fi fanzines. The development of Chinese sci-fi fanzines is a phenomenon structured in six distinct waves spanning more than three decades and 169 titles.

The first domestic sci-fi fanzine was *Nebula*, created by Yao Haijun in 1988, which published a total of 39 issues. It was the torchbearer for the first wave, which ran from 1994 until 1996. The second wave, lasting from 1998 to 2000, coincided with the heyday of *Science Fiction World*, which encouraged fans nationwide to embark on their own editorial endeavors. The ubiquity of the internet by 2006 contributed to the third wave, with most fanzines edited by netzines via online forums, such

as *Imaginary Flight*, produced by FLYINE. In April 2009, Sanfeng, as editor-in-chief, initiated the fantasy literature magazine *New Realms of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, heralding the beginning of the fourth wave. The fantasy literature e-journal *Buzhou*, which premiered on May 8, 2014, primarily featured prestigious contributors. Publications of this kind eventually led to the fifth wave, which celebrated famous authors. On June 6, 2019, Sanfeng launched the online sci-fi periodical *Nebula Science Fiction Reviews* as a WeChat public channel, which published a total of 21 issues with the help of volunteers. This and similar publications led to the sixth wave, which is primed for further development.

"This article inspired me to

figure out the history of sci-fi fanzines in my motherland of Ireland," Bacon beamed. "A partnership with a Chinese fanzine at some stage in the future would also be amazing."

The article also closed with a heartfelt recommendation: the Jiulong Project, a not-for-profit program devoted to digitalizing sci-fi fanzines named after Xu Jiulong, a late collector. It seeks to serve as "a historical publication archive for Chinese sci-fi, striving to preserve as many old fanzines electronically as possible to pay homage to a man who edited one issue of the fanzine *Ladder Towards Sky* in 1995."

Contrasting professionally-edited sci-fi magazines, *Journey Planet* embraces a thematic approach welcoming fans to submit original material on a subject to connect people with different interests.

"There was no distinction between fans and professionals." Ben Yalow, an American computer scientist and a programmer long affiliated with the City University of New York and sci-fi fandom, was quoted talking about the early days of the sci-fi community in the Editorials. "Writers also volunteered at sci-fi conventions, and they would welcome new fans to the community, who might later become writers as well."

"That's the kind of atmosphere I have long envisioned," said co-editor Regina Kanyu Wang. "I think we have achieved that, at least in this issue."



## Shining Fandom of Chinese Sci-Fi


Alongside fanzines, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, animation, and other forms of media are also shining parts of Chinese sci-fi fandom.

For instance, *The Three-Body Problem in Minecraft* displays a Three-Body Universe created by fans for the fans. After Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* (first published in 2006) received the Hugo Award in 2015, Chinese sci-fi rose from a niche crowd to the mainstream. An animated series named *The Three-Body Problem in Minecraft* emerged out of nowhere in 2014. It was impressive artistically, and all members of its production team were fans of the original novel. They understood the allure of the original work and strived to present its hallmark features and iconic scenes. The foolishness and arrogance of mankind, the galactic battle of wits, and the vastness of the universe were all faithfully recreated in the animated series.

Through animation, the creators also established a Three-Body fandom that fostered creation of more fan music, character songs, and fan fiction. Gradual experimentation enabled the industry to test how hard-core science fiction could be adapted. Creators also helped the general public learn the value and potential of original content from the Three-Body Universe.

And Storycom International Culture Communication Co., Ltd., the first professional story

commercialization agency in China established in 2013, has introduced fan funds such as the Shimmer Program Mutual-Communication Fund and the World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) Attending Fund to support exchange between Chinese and international fandoms. This year, the 81st Worldcon will be held from October 18 to 22 in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, marking its debut in China. As someone who worked very hard to bring the Worldcon to Ireland in 2019 for the first time, Bacon is excited for sci-fi fans in China.

"The fans in China are fabulous people," he said. "I hope friendships will be formed, new aspects learned, and new works discovered there." 



A still of *The Three-Body Problem in Minecraft* (2014), an animated series displaying a Three-Body Universe created by fans for the fans.



A parent explains the astronaut model to her child in the sci-fi hall of a public library in Wuhou District, Chengdu City, February 16, 2022. (Photo from IC)





# Blooming Chinese Science Fiction

Text by Yen Ooi  
Photos courtesy of Yen Ooi

The diversity of Chinese sci-fi stories is astounding today, covering topics such as technology, space, philosophy, politics, and much more.

The cover of *Sinopticon: A Celebration of Chinese Science Fiction* (2021), an anthology of 13 short stories edited and translated by Xueting Christine Ni. It showcases the depth and breadth of Chinese sci-fi literature.

**M**y journey into Chinese science fiction began around the year 2012. I didn't have any expectations, and a lack of ability to read Chinese made the task a bit more difficult, but I did find some interesting stories to start. The first I found were Charles Yu's *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe*, Han Song's *The Wheel of Samsara*, and Zhao Haihong's *Exuviation*.

Reading the stories gave me an immediate feeling of familiarity. I didn't understand why at the time, and I credited the sensation to my love for science fiction. But I later learned that it was something else—something cultural.

In the years that followed, it was no surprise that I found more Chinese sci-fi works in English to read, especially after 2015 when Liu Cixin won the Hugo Award for *The Three-Body Problem*. Now, nearly 10 years later, I have a list of Chinese sci-fi books to read, which is too long to ever possibly finish.


The diversity of Chinese sci-fi stories is astounding today. Topics range from technology to space, philosophy, politics, relationships, ecology, and much more.

Chinese “Fantastika,” stories including science fiction, fantasy, fantastic horror, and their various subgenres, dates to ancient times, but modern Chinese science fiction is comparatively quite a young genre that only started advancing in the 1980s. This genre injects the Western version of science fiction with Chinese cultural elements, resulting in a duality of Chineseness and sci-fi qualities. Because of this, Chinese sci-fi writers have to navigate both worlds with their own baggage. This duality is something that Chinese diaspora writers have had to constantly manage as well: how to embed their personal cultural experiences into stories driven by market expectations. And in Chinese science

fiction, this experience is now shared with writers in China.

Thus, Chinese science fiction has become a platform able to accommodate both writers in China and Chinese diaspora writers internationally. The most interesting facet of researching Chinese science fiction has been the comparability of our journeys, in which we, Chinese sci-fi writers—both in China and abroad, have only found stability and creative flow in the recent decades as the progress of information technology hit all of us at similar speeds. In China, the development of science fiction resumed in earnest in the late 1980s. For those of us outside of China, whether we're the first or umpteenth generation, recognition and development of ethnically-charged creative production only happened in the last few decades.

This terrain that all Chinese sci-fi writers have to navigate is muddy, due to cultural imbalance in global literature and media literacy. As Lexi Pandell wrote in her review of *The Three-Body Problem* for *Wired Magazine*, “Educated Chinese readers are expected not only to know about all the Chinese references—history, language, culture, all this stuff—but to be well-versed in Western references as well. A Chinese reader can decode an American work with far greater facility than an American reader can decode a Chinese work, on average.”

This mud, however, is nourishing a beautiful bloom of stories that are constantly changing, growing, and revitalizing. Recently, a wonderful collection—*Sinopticon: A Celebration of Chinese Science Fiction*—emerged to remind us of this. The array of stories it presents opens up sci-fi worlds that are not only culturally beautiful, but also demand attention and appreciation. 



The original illustration of water lily created by Sinjin Li for Yen Ooi's book *Rén: The Ancient Chinese Art of Finding Peace and Fulfilment* (2022).



The author is a writer and researcher whose works explore East and Southeast Asian culture, identity, and values, with focus on the development of Chinese science fiction by diaspora writers and writers from Chinese-speaking nations.



Poster for the Chinese animated fantasy *Big Fish & Begonia*. Wang Nuonuo's sci-fi short story *The Way Spring Arrives* was inspired by the film, which narrates a 16-year-old fairy traveling to the human world in the form of a dolphin to meet a human boy. (Photo from Douban)

# Fantastical Exploration of Cultural Roots

Edited by Wang Shuya

Chinese sci-fi writers integrate imagination with the land under their feet to find the inspiration, aesthetics, and cultural building blocks for their creations.



These days, many are obsessed with the blossoms and vitality of spring, but few ponder the reasons it arrives. A sci-fi short story contemplated what it would be like if spring had to be brought back: To adjust Earth's axis after gear in Earth's core breaks, humans venture into the North Sea on the back of a "giant

fish." Many people transform into "giant fish" to accomplish the great mission. Their warm hearts and selfless love continue to bring spring back to the world every year.

Such wild and beautiful fantasy originates from Chinese traditional myths and legends and was integrated into science fiction by writers featured in



The Chinese version of *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories*, compiled by Storycom and published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House in January 2022.



A delicate layer of white snow creates a stunning view of West Lake in Hangzhou, eastern China's Zhejiang Province. (Photo from VCG)





The English version of *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories* edited by Yu Chen and Regina Kanyu Wang, published by Tordotcom on March 8, 2022.

the anthology *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories*, supported by a team of female and nonbinary creators.

The book highlights creative utilization of classic and traditional Chinese fantasy sources in sci-fi and fantasy novels and brave exploration and expansion of sci-fi literature. The word “spring” in the book name can be understood as “coming hope,” representing diverse and dynamic creation forms. The collection includes both sci-fi and fantasy works to offer new perspectives to break the boundaries between science fiction and fantasy and generate discussion on the concept of

“pan-fantasy.”

The stories in the book not only feature traditional and classical Chinese literary elements from ancient to modern times but also are injected with extremely romantic sci-fi imagination on the microcosm.

Inspired by *Viewing the Snow Scene from the Mid-Lake Pavilion*, a representative work of prose by Zhang Dai, a writer and historian from the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the story *Restaurant at the End of Universe: Tai-Chi Mashed Taro* by Wu Shuang follows the time travel adventures of Zhang Dai who meets new friends in

A still from the 2016 fantasy film *Big Fish & Begonia*, which attracted audience with its unique Eastern charm. Chinese sci-fi writers are also exploring how traditional culture and aesthetics can be combined with sci-fi stories. (Photo from Douban)





The short story *The Way Spring Arrives* features Gou Mang, the God of Spring, who is in charge of the germination and growth of trees in Chinese folk mythology. (Photo from Douban)

the universe.

By contrasting the vastness of the universe and the smallness of the pavilion as well as the cutting-edge technology of the quantum food box and traditional Chinese scenery of the snowy lake in a white haze, the story not only vividly presents traditional Chinese culture and aesthetics, but also creates a new style of sci-fi


perspectives and methods.

Many works in the book found inspiration for fantasy from places other than classical culture. *The Stars We Raised* by Xiu Xinyu tells the story of a boy longing for love and companionship. *A Brief History of Beinakan Disasters as Told in a Sinitic Language* by Nian Yu is a magnificent epic about the evolution of species and the rise and

fall of civilizations on a cosmic scale. *Blackbird* by Shen Dachen focuses on aging and people's self-esteem.

Chinese scholar Wang Furen considers ancient Chinese mythology so full of vitality that it has inspired writers to develop a new trend of a sci-fi genre featuring traditional Chinese cultural elements influenced by science and modern literature. The book offers not only beautiful fantasy stories, but also deep reflections on reality, a strong sense of culture and humanistic care, and detailed visions of the future world.

Analyzing the different perspectives of female and male writers in science fiction has been another emerging trend. Female writers often pay more attention to subtle and soft topics. Instead of a future world constructed by hard sci-fi themes such as advanced technology, artificial intelligence, space exploration and colonization, doomsday, and the ecological crisis, they often choose to explore the inner world of humans including how people face themselves and their culture, how new technology can be developed with love, and how emotions can be relieved.

The book may have pinpointed a new way of thinking for today's sci-fi and fantasy writers. Many are integrating imagination with the land under their feet to find the inspiration, aesthetics, and cultural building blocks for their works. 



# Warm Cups of Peking Opera

Text by Quan Jingyi  
Photos by Dong Fang

**“I expect to open a door for the public to become intimate with Peking Opera and help people see how the traditional art has grown into a lifestyle that influences today’s people in a gentle way.”**

In a lane called Zhuzhong Hutong, just west of Beijing’s Bell and Drum Towers, is a Peking Opera-themed café named “Mood in Rouge.” The spacious and bright coffee shop is decorated with masks, headdresses, and other elements of Peking Opera, imbuing the space with a strong Eastern flavor alongside furnishings and ornaments such as potted plants, bird cages, and fishbowls.

The manager of the café, Liu Zhen, was born in 1990. He began to study traditional Chinese opera at an early age and graduated from the Peking Opera Department of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre

Arts. He was formerly employed full-time as a Peking Opera actor and directed large-scale Peking Opera performances. In recent years, he has mainly focused on promoting Peking Opera culture and education. The café is the latest attempt by Liu and his team to promote Peking Opera culture.

## Window to Peking Opera

“Many young people like coffee these days,” Liu said. “Whether they’re doing social media or chatting with friends, they seem to always end up in a coffee shop.” He expected that combining Peking Opera with coffee could attract more young





Manager of the "Mood in Rouge" coffee shop Liu Zhen (left) practices Peking Opera outside the café with his disciple Liu Anshi.





Mood in Rouge is a Peking Opera-themed café located in Zhuzhong Hutong, just west of Beijing's Bell and Drum Towers. The traditional Chinese lion dance headdress outside the café impresses customers before they enter.



Merging Peking Opera with coffee has helped popularize the traditional opera among young people.

To optimize his offerings, Liu Zhen often conducts taste testing of different formula variations. Here, Liu serves exquisite snacks to customers.

people to the traditional art.

The name, “Mood in Rouge,” was inspired by a famous tune from Peking Opera. Liu Zhen recognizes that the most complex human emotions such as love, longing, and happiness are probed in the opera arts, which is why the shows resonate with spectators. He seeks to transfer such emotions depicted in Peking Opera into tastes on the tongue. According to Liu, the café’s flagship drink is called “The Last Song at Gaixia,” a special cocktail that enables drinkers to hear the roaring of ancient Chinese general Xiang Yu (232-202 B.C.), also the king of Western Chu. “The wine’s carambola fruit aftertaste is reminiscent of the hero’s pity for his concubine,” he added.

Other popular offerings were inspired by Lin Chong’s sorrow in the classic play *Fleeing at Night* and the love story depicted in *Over the Wall*. Lin Chong is a hero in the classical novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* while *Over the Wall* is based on an ancient play that was popular in China for about 300 years.

To develop satisfactory offerings, Liu Zhen and his team

often make dozens of trials with different formula variations. He wants the café’s theme to become more than a material facade and serve as a genuine manifestation of the inclusive and diverse artistic charm of Peking Opera.

The café also holds small-scale Peking Opera lectures and impromptu performances, during which customers can learn about the traditional art while drinking coffee. After enjoying Peking Opera, they can’t help but discuss it with each other. “We all know that Peking Opera is a national cultural treasure of China,” he said. “I expect to open a door for

the public to become intimate with Peking Opera and help people see how the traditional art has grown into a lifestyle that influences today’s people in a gentle way.”

### Hub of Traditional Culture

Due to the popularity of the commercial area surrounding the Bell and Drum Towers and the word-of-mouth spread of the coffee shop’s reputation, more and more people have been finding Mood in Rouge and experiencing the beauty of Peking Opera.







Elements of Peking Opera such as facial masks, and headdresses, as well as potted plants, bird cages and fishbowls, imbue the café with a strong Eastern flavor.



Drinks served include coffee, tea, and afternoon wine.



Elements of Peking Opera can be found everywhere in the café.



It welcomed a student returning from overseas who desired to listen to Peking Opera, a family of three from a southern city that planned an immersive Peking Opera trip, and a full-time photographer who often looks for inspiration in the elements of the traditional art. Now Liu Zhen has become friends with many customers, who often visit to exchange experiences with him, give him rare products related to Peking Opera, and help

decorate the store. “We have met many friends who like this café, and they are the ones who keep us going.” Liu believes that the amazing connection between people is the greatest support for his entrepreneurship.

On his way out of the café, a young boy from Dunhuang, Gansu Province, once asked Liu Zhen if he could lecture on the Dunhuang murals there. Liu agreed. The café was packed on the day of the lecture. Liu knew

then that the boy frequently shared Dunhuang information online and had many followers. Since then, the coffee shop has hosted various cultural salons on topics including the aesthetics of Buddhist sculpture in Qingzhou, which attracted fans from all walks of life. “I’m so happy we have been able to gather aficionados of Peking Opera and traditional Chinese culture to communicate with each other in this nook,” Liu declared. ☞



The café often organizes Peking Opera-themed activities to help people learn more about traditional Chinese culture.



# Wisdom and Light of Traditional Chinese Medicine

Text by Wang Shuya

Photos courtesy of the National Museum of China

**Traditional Chinese medicine benefits the whole world while constantly enriching itself by learning from other civilizations.**

Details of *Neijing Tu* (Chart of the Inner Warp) housed in the National Museum of China.

The history of the Chinese nation features an epic struggle against diseases. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has emerged and developed over thousands of years to gradually form a distinct and unique outlook on life, health, and disease prevention and control characterized by the profound philosophical thinking of the Chinese people.

To celebrate TCM culture, the “Light of Wisdom: Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture Exhibition” recently kicked off at the National Museum of China.

The exhibition features more than 500 cultural relics covering jade wares, ceramics, bone and metal objects, ancient books, calligraphic works, paintings, revolutionary relics, and more, supplemented by more than 200 medicinal materials.

Divided into five sections, the exhibition adopts various perspectives of TCM such as its history, prevention and treatment concepts, medical classics, medicinal herbs, diagnosis and treatment instruments. In addition, the exhibition provided insights into prospects and international cooperation in this field through numerous digital images and interactive items that covered the long history and unique concepts of the TCM cultural system.

The first section, “The Key to Civilization,” analyzes TCM as a key to open the treasure trove of Chinese civilization. In the exhibition hall, many classic books and exhibits tell various stories about TCM development and interpret ideas of “treatment based on syndrome differentiation,” “harmony between man and nature,” and “balance of *yin*

and *yang*,” advocated by TCM culture.

The realistic traditional Chinese painting *Neijing Tu* (*Chart of the Inner Warp*) from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), illustrating Taoist “inner landscape” of the human body, aligns with the ideas of TCM. The outline of the diagram roughly depicts a sitting person practicing meditation. Inside the body, a small world with various landscapes such as hills, rivers, fields and cattle was portrayed, reflecting the idea of “harmony between man and nature.”

The section “The Way of Health Preservation” shows how ancient Chinese attached great importance to health and used various strategies to maintain physical and mental health. The ink-and-wash painting *Lu Yu Brewing Tea* by Zhao Yuan from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) vividly presents a scene of Lu Yu, the Saint of Tea, brewing tea leisurely in mountains and waters. In his *Classic of Tea*, Lu Yu likened tea to ginseng in terms of nutrition and proposed drinking tea to promote self-cultivation based on its function for health preservation.

Many gathered in front of a silk scroll

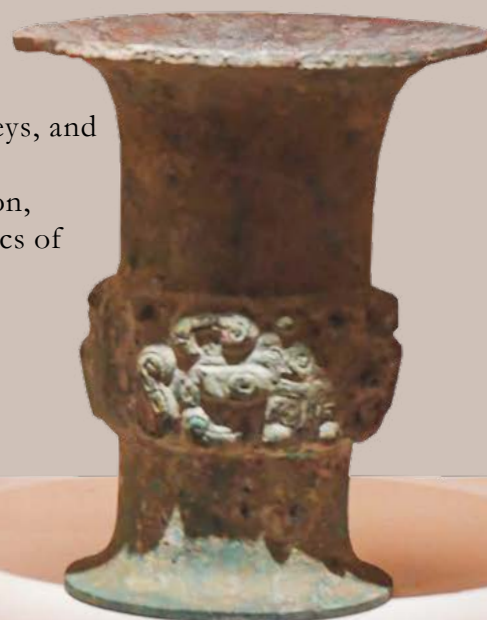


Herbal medicines displayed at the exhibition. China is home to some 5,000 species of medicinal plants, making it one of the countries with the richest herbal medicine resources in the world. The country boasts a long history of discovering, utilizing, and cultivating medicinal plants.

excavated from the Mawangdui tombs of the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) in Changsha, central China’s Hunan Province, which is the earliest known illustrated physical fitness instructions based on the movements of animals including birds, bears, and monkeys. Some visitors couldn’t resist imitating the movements depicted on the silk scroll. Based on the illustration, Hua Tuo, a famous physician and surgeon in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 A.D.), created the Five-Animal Exercises according to the gestures of tigers, deer, bears, monkeys, and birds.

The third section, “The Secret Classics of

A bronze *zun* (ritual wine vessel) of Marquis Cai in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), housed in the National Museum of China.



*Xian* tea (left) and a dark-red enameled pottery teapot handcrafted by Shao Daheng in 1829, housed in the National Museum of China.







A bronze acupuncture figure made in 1443 during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) imitating the original of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), housed in the National Museum of China. The life-size bronze figurine has meridians and acupuncture points on the surface. It was used to test students' proficiency in acupuncture skills.

Linglan," combs the history of categorization of TCM. Divisions in this field began in the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 B.C.) according to the book *The Rites of Zhou* and took shape in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in terms of different targeted body parts and methods. From the Yuan Dynasty to Emperor Longqing's reign of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the royal hospital gradually opened 13 departments including pediatrics, internal medicine, and orthopedics. The fragmentation marked an important leap in the development of TCM. This section of the exhibition features many ancient classics related

A green jade pot with patterns symbolizing "longevity and prosperity" from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), housed in the National Museum of China.



Tongrentang's medicinal herbs displayed in the exhibition hall. Founded in 1669, Tongrentang in Beijing is a well-known and time-honored brand in traditional Chinese medicine industry.



A replica of a human skull dating back to the Majiayao culture (about 3200-2000 B.C.) in the Neolithic Age. The hole in the skull testifies to a craniotomy at least 4,000 years ago.

to TCM including many precious rare books and manuscripts.

The most striking item in this exhibition area is a bronze acupuncture figure made in the Ming Dynasty, part of the museum's collection. It is a replica of bronze figures produced during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) that were life-sized with hollow chests and abdomens. The surface was cast with *jing* and *luo*, regarded as a network of passages through which energy circulates and the acupuncture points are distributed. Such a bronze figure was used to train medical students' proficiency in acupuncture technology in ancient






This exhibition is supported by digital image presentations and interactive projects. They were deployed to optimize the spotlight on the profound culture and unique ideas of traditional Chinese medicine.

times. To use it, a layer of wax was applied on the surface and water was injected into the body. If it was pricked accurately, the water would leak out.

Diagnostic and therapeutic instruments as well as pharmaceutical tools are indispensable parts of the TCM system. The fourth part of the exhibition, “The Instruments and Medicines of TCM,” displays a variety of herbal medicine cutters, mortars, and stoves, as well as ancient pharmaceutical methods that once relied on manual processing. It also demonstrates methods of practicing medicine in the streets.

Originating on the land of China, TCM has gradually spread around the world while continuously absorbing the achievements of other civilizations to be enriched. The last part, “Inheritance and Innovation,” shows how TCM was already spreading to neighboring countries and exerted a significant impact during the Qin (221-207 B.C.) and Han dynasties. China’s smallpox vaccination techniques, for example, spread throughout the world in the Ming and Qing dynasties. An ancient book titled *New Book of Vaccination*

describes how Chinese people fought smallpox in the past. *The Compendium of Materia Medica*, which is considered the most important and influential text in the TCM community, has been translated into many languages and distributed worldwide. Charles Darwin called it “the encyclopedia of ancient China.”

In the center of the exhibition hall is the “medal counter” of Tu Youyou, a famous Chinese pharmacist and laureate of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Her discovery of artemisinin greatly reduced the incidence and mortality rates of malaria around the world. “Chinese medicine and pharmacology are a great treasure-house,” she said in her acceptance speech at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden on December 7, 2015. “We should explore them and elevate them to a higher level. Artemisinin was explored using this resource. From our research experience in discovering artemisinin, we learned the strengths of both Chinese and Western medicine. There is great potential for future advances if these strengths can be fully integrated.” 



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