Liu Cixin's Wandering Path to Apocalyptic Transcendence:

Chinese SF and the Three Poles of Modern Chinese Cultural Production

An honors thesis for the Department of German, Russian, and Asian Languages & Literatures

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Tufts University, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The first and most basic component of why I chose to write about this topic is that I am personally interested in the subject of science fiction (hereafter generally abbreviated SF). American and Western SF were among the cornerstones of my childhood. My father is an American science fiction poet, Lee Ballentine (b. 1954), and my mother and father each fostered my interest in literature, and especially SF.[1] As a child, I read dozens of Victor Appleton's (a pseudonym used by a series of pulp SF writers in the 1940s through the 1970s) second series of *Tom Swift* books. The series depicts the life of a young American inventor, his family, and their exciting adventures that revolve around new scientific discoveries and inventions.[2] As a teenager and young adult, I read and enjoyed works of SF written by Isaac Asimov, Harry Turtledove, Margaret Atwood, Dan Simmons, Joe Haldeman, Vernor Vinge, Ray Bradbury, Neal Stephenson, and many others. Popular SF television shows and films like *Firefly* and *Battlestar Galactica* also raised my interest in the genre.

My personal interest in SF has always been based on SF's relationship with politics. SF is a uniquely political genre—it relates to the current state of world affairs, particularly issues of rapidly-advancing technology and social change. Specifically, SF pertains directly to modernization and its attendant social, economic, and political changes in a unique way. This brings SF one step closer to discussions of history and political change, and I believe that this relationship with the process of modernization nominates SF for scholarly examination. Contemporary Chinese SF author Fei Dao (b. 1983) said in a 2013 interview, "I think that the key theme of Chinese science fiction, no matter how it develops, is how this ancient country and

[1] "Lee Ballentine - Summary Bibliography," Internet Speculative Fiction Database, accessed April 29, 2014, http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?10656.
[2] Gary Westfahl, *Science Fiction, Children's Literature, and Popular Culture: Coming of Age in Fantasyland* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), 38.

its people are moving in the direction of the future."[3] I agree with this appraisal, and I believe that examining SF can yield insight into how a culture conceives of its present and its future at a particular moment in time.

I chose to write a thesis centered on Chinese SF because, in this era of China's widely-recognized rising economic and political importance in the world, I believe that examining Chinese SF can provide valuable insight into China's modernization process, how China views itself in a changing world context, and how Chinese culture has changed over time in the face of massive changes in its economic and social structures. This thesis will explore the connections between Chinese SF and modernization, history, and politics and the works of individual Chinese SF writers.

In China, SF has gained unprecedented popularity in the last ten years, and, in the last two years, this trend has attracted media attention inside and outside of China. A 2013 newspaper article in *Global Times* describes the rise of China's most famous three contemporary SF writers, sometimes called the "Three Generals" of SF.[4] Sales of *Santi* or *Three Body*, a trilogy of SF novels by Liu Cixin (b. 1963), the best known of the 'Generals,' have reached "at least 400,000 copies," and this number probably vastly understates Liu's readership, many of whom read online.[5] In 2010, the Chinese government established national awards for SF writing under the name *Xingyun* or "Nebula," evoking the award with the same name for American SF.[6] In the last four years, American science fiction website io9.com, has published a number of articles related to Chinese SF, with particular emphasis on Liu Cixin's novels and stories. The first

[3] Alec Ash, "Science Fiction in China: A Conversation with Fei Dao," Los Angeles Review of Books, May 1, 2013, http://tumblr.lareviewofbooks.org/post/49379142505/science-fiction-in-china-a-conversation-with-fei.
[4] "The 3 Generals of Chinese Sci-Fi," *The World of Chinese*, December 30, 2012, http://www.theworldofchinese.com/2012/12/the-3-generals-of-chinese-sci-fi/.
[5] Jingjing Xuyang, "Sci-Fi Made in China," Global Times, January 7, 2013, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/754261.shtml.
[6] Yang Fang, "Awards for Chinese-Language Science Fictions Announced," Gov.cn, August 9, 2010, http://www.gov.cn/english/2010-08/09/content_1674007.htm.

English translation of the first book of the *Three Body* trilogy will be published by Tor, America's best known SF publisher, in November 2014 and represents the first translation of a Chinese SF novel into English.[7] Some of Liu's SF short stories and novellas have already been translated into English and released online by Beijing Guomi Digital Technology Ltd., a small, international internet publishing company that has released a number of translations of Chinese SF and adventure and suspense stories.[8]

In recent years, coinciding with its rise in popular consciousness in China and the English-speaking world, Chinese SF has attracted increased attention from scholars writing in English.[9] In 2013, *Science Fiction Studies*, the main scholarly journal for examinations of SF, published an issue devoted to Chinese SF, edited by Prof. Wu Yan (b. 1962), a Professor at Beijing Normal University who teaches and writes about Chinese SF and SF in general (and a SF author). This issue examined the history, development, and significance of Chinese SF. Prof. Song Mingwei of Wellesley College has also written extensively on the subject in recent years and is featured in the special edition of *Science Fiction Studies*.

Finally, I pursued this thesis because I enjoyed reading Liu Cixin's short stories for their imaginative portrayals of modern life, visions of the future, and evocations of feeling simultaneously exalted and helpless in the face of monumental challenges. This led me to explore other works of Chinese SF, and to examine the relationship between Chinese SF and the other types of Chinese literature I learned about in Chinese literature and culture classes at Tufts University taught by Prof. Xueping Zhong. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Zhong for her

[7] "Tor Books to Release The Three-Body Problem, the First Chinese Science Fiction Novel Translated Into English," Tor Books, July 23, 2013, http://www.tor.com/blogs/2013/07/tor-books-three-body-trilogy.
[8] Odo, "Interview with Verbena C.W., Editor of Liu Cixin in English," Sense of Wonder, May 10, 2012, http://sentidodelamaravilla.blogspot.com/2012/05/interview-with-verbena-cw-editor-of-liu.html.
[9] Kunze Rui, "Fantasizing Science: Science Fiction in the People's Republic of China (PRC): 1955-85," *International Consortium for Research in the Humanities*, accessed April 29, 2014, http://www.ikgf.uni-erlangen.de/research/research-projects/modernity-and-prognostication/fantasizing-science.shtml.

mentorship throughout my college career, having advised me since my sophomore year, and particularly for her advising and extensive guidance and discussions during my thesis writing process throughout the 2013-2014 school year. I am also indebted to Prof. Susan Napier for her help revising my thesis and agreeing to serve as my second reader.

What is Science Fiction (SF)?

Readers of SF are generally familiar with the concept of SF as a specific 'genre' among others, as expressed in its segregation away from other groups of texts in commercial contexts; for example, its location in one part of a physical store or a special section on e-commerce websites. Film theorist Robert Stam (b. 1941) articulates basic questions regarding the concept of genre by asking:

> Are genres really 'out there' in the world, or are they merely the constructions of analysts? Is there a finite taxonomy of genres or are they in principle infinite? Are genres timeless Platonic essences or ephemeral, time-bound entities? Are genres culture- bound or transcultural?[10]

The general consensus within genre theory is that genre is more a matter of "family resemblance" than a definition, and genre theorists focus on the lineage of genres as the offspring of previous genres' intermixing, changes in genre over time, and other considerations.[11] Therefore, the study and construction of a genre is necessarily subjective to some extent. Genre is in many ways a shared social reality born out of consensus, and there is wide consensus that a grouping of cultural products constitutes SF. Two major theorists of SF take different approaches to delineate the borders and definition of this grouping.

In order to examine a category such as "Chinese SF," it is necessary to examine definitions of the term 'science fiction." Two important theorists of a distinct genre of texts that

[10] Daniel Chandler, An Introduction to Genre Theory (Ceredigion: Aberystwyth University, 2000), http://www.aber.ac.uk/~mcswww/Documents/intgenre/chandler_genre_theory.pdf.
[11] Chandler, 2-4.

can be called SF are English author Brian Aldiss (b. 1925) and Croatian-Canadian academic Darko Suvin (b. 1930). While other theorists and writers have contributed significantly to the debate over how to define SF, Suvin and Aldiss are primary avatars of competing schools: one that emphasizes a literary tradition (Aldiss) and one that defines SF based on aspects of the work's content that differentiate works of SF from others based on specific strategies employed by the author (Suvin).

Brian Aldiss is an English SF author and theoretician whose 1973 book *Billion Year Spree* attempted to apply taxonomy to and historicize SF. Aldiss' analysis insists on SF as a literary lineage descending from a group of Anglo-American writers who published seminal works in a particular time and place. Aldiss locates the earliest of SF in the works of early and mid-19th century English writers confronted with the gathering reality of the Industrial Revolution's effects on that country and the world. These writers developed an approach (some would term it a genre) that featured "Gothic" or narratives set in "dream world[s]" characterized by dark and foreboding events and topics, as well as a certain style of presentation.[12]

These Gothic novels culminated in English novelist Mary Shelley's (1797-1851) novel *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. Aldiss describes this novel as seminal for the development of SF, a genre which is defined as, "the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould."[13] Although this may seem to be a quite broad approach based on a text's theme, it is reinforced by an explicit connection to a particular lineage of Anglo-American authors and texts, beginning with Gothic novels and continuing to the "millennial date of 1926" when Aldiss truly inaugurates the birth of SF as a

[12] Brian Wilson Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 8.
[13] Ibid.

genre.[14] 1926 is significant because it marks the founding of *Amazing Stories* magazine by American writer and inventor Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967). While not immediately financially successful, *Amazing Stories* and similar magazines that sprung up subsequently caught on in popular culture, and from the late 1920s through the 1950s, dozens of American (and a few European) writers made their livings by submitting stories to these publications. Aldiss locates the birth of SF as genre in *Amazing Stories* and the tangle of authors, tropes, thematic concerns, and other elements of 'family resemblance' that constitute the genre of SF.

In contrast to Aldiss' lineage approach, Yugoslavia-born Canadian theorist and academic Darko Suvin's writings focus on the content of a text. Suvin's theoretical definition revolves around two concepts. First, he refers to SF as "a literature of cognitive estrangement."[15] The term takes its roots from the works of German dramatist Bertold Brecht (1898-1956) who proposed a *Verfremdungseffekt* or "estrangement effect" as a central purpose and technique of all fiction.[16] This in turn may have taken its roots from the Russian Formalist literary critic Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky (1893-1984) and the concept of *priyom ostraneniya* or "making strange," which Shklovsky originated in the mid-1920s.[17] According to Brecht and Shklovsky, fiction de-familiarizes daily experience and re-introduces the audience to aspects of their lives in a way designed to make them appear unfamiliar and bizarre. As a committed Marxist, Brecht specifically advocated that dramatists make their audience feel the strangeness of everyday life

[14] Aldiss, 10.
[15] Darko Suvin, "Radical Rhapsody and Romantic Recoil in the Age of Anticipation: A Chapter in the History of SF," *Science Fiction Studies* 1, no. 4 (October 1, 1974): 255–69, 256.
[16] Douglas Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (JHU Press, 2008), 174.
[17] Ibid., 79.

in order to awaken them to the 'fact' that they were passive participants in a monstrous capitalist system that enslaved them.[18]

Darko Suvin proposes an inverted form of this estrangement effect as the primary characteristic of SF, and what separates SF from dramas (or comedies, tragedies, or any other number of other genres) set in seemingly futuristic or fantastic conditions. According to Suvin, the hallmark of SF is "cognitive estrangement" characterized by the "factual reporting of fictions" and presenting a reality quite different from what the reader/audience is used to in a way intended to evoke feelings of familiarity.[19] Thus, SF comments on the world's current conditions, evaluates the direction that human beings and their institutions are heading, and makes implicit criticisms and judgments about political, economic, and cultural realities.

According to Suvin's analysis, another important element that characterizes SF is the concept of the "*novum*" or a new invention, born from technology.[20] Like Aldiss' requirement that SF spring from science, Suvin emphasizes the role that something new and unfamiliar, but based on the realistic progression of technology, plays in defining SF. This latter part—realistic progression of technology—is crucial because it separates SF from fantasy, two genres that have historically been compared to one another, paired together, and often conflated. In Suvin's analysis, the *novum* must be "totalizing," in that the text's cognitive estrangement effect flows from the description of the *novum* and the *novum* must provide the primary impetus for the work's plot.[21] Furthermore, the *novum* must be connected or plausibly connectable to the actual progress of mankind's material science. Finally, while the *novum* must be new, its effects on the

[18] Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118.
[19] Darko Suvin, "Estrangement and Cognition," in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, by James E. Gunn and Matthew Candelaria (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 23–35, 25.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

other components of the work (human beings, politics, economics, culture, etc.) must be logically consistent with what we know about these actors and institutions and therefore the "cognitive logic humanity has cumulatively acquired in its culture from the beginnings to the present day."[22] This aspect is important because it lends credence to SF's political message; the only thing that separates the SF writer's imagined world from our own is the emergence of foreseeable technological *novum*. In other words, this allows SF to make a claim of authenticity and realism that cannot be matched by fantasy or other genres of fiction; it combines the authoritative claim of non-fiction with fiction's freedom (though limited) to invent and imagine.

The combination of Suvin's two concepts—that SF should be organized around a totalizing *novum* that may actually come into being and its effects should be consistent with what we know about humanity, and that it portrays these changes in a way that leads to readers' cognitive estrangement—articulate SF's integral relationship to politics and its inherently critical nature. Texts from other genres may or may not convey political messages. Cultural products are both a product of their authors and the era in which they were created. SF is inherently political; it almost always makes some kind of statement on the current state of affairs, the path of technological advancement and human history, and human society and culture.

Both Aldiss and Suvin are Western writers who write for a Western audience and operated generally within a primarily Western literary context (America, Europe, and the former Soviet Union) that is not directly focused on Chinese and other types of non-Western SF. Even Suvin's more broadly-based examination of SF does not pay much attention to the subject of non-Western SF. Therefore, while their insights and analysis (particularly Suvin's) prove a useful starting point for examining Chinese SF, they cannot be considered completely

[22] Darko Suvin, "On What Is and Is Not an SF Narration," *Science Fiction Studies* 5, no. 14 (March 1978), http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/14/suvin14art.htm.

authoritative in this context. Suvin's concepts of the totalizing *novum*, cognitive estrangement, and consistency with cognitive logic provide a starting place to demarcate Chinese SF from Chinese non-SF. However, based on an analysis of Chinese SF of the last century, a major feature that differentiates Chinese SF from other genres is the *pervasive presence* of science in the narrative.

In this context, 'science' refers not only to the general sense of positivist, empiricist observation and description of the natural world, but to the general category of 'the scientific.' This includes scientists, scientific concepts, scientific language and jargon, and the physical artifacts associated with science, from microscopes to spaceships, and from obscure and precise units of measurement to the names of planets and stars. It also includes frequent use of scientists as main characters, the exploitation of scientific concepts (not just as *nova*, but also as plot points), and the use of the jargon of scientific instruction and language. As this thesis will discuss and explore, Chinese SF from its inception has taken on the role of a popularizer and instructive tool regarding science, and the works of Chinese SF discussed in this thesis almost uniformly adopt a science education role, although with varying degrees of authority and focus.

Two frequently articulated dichotomies within SF are the 'utopia/dystopia' and 'hard/soft' divisions. Utopia takes its name from Thomas More's (1478-1535) book *Utopia*, published in 1516, that depicts an ideal polity. Dystopia takes the opposite approach, describing a nightmarish future or alternate reality. Darko Suvin isolates More's *Utopia* as the seminal work of early SF, because it adopts cognitive estrangement to lead readers to question the current state of empirical reality. The polity described in *Utopia* abolishes private property and adopts many other departures from the political, cultural, and historical realities of the England of Thomas More's time. American literary theorist Frederic Jameson (b. 1934) has noted that utopias implicitly

articulate this kind of critique by noting the deficiencies and possible remedies to the ills of a particular historical situation. Jameson writes that utopia "returns upon our present to play a diagnostic and a critical-substantive role…[and]…utopian circularity becomes both a political vision and programme, and a critical and diagnostic instrument."[23] Dystopian SF takes the opposite approach—depicting a materially, culturally, or spiritually worse possible reality usually set in the future—in order to criticize aspects of current realities. Dystopian SF may lack the kind of positive agenda for economic, political, philosophical, or other types of changes that utopian SF frequently contains. This thesis will discuss the issue of utopias and dystopias, but this division is not central to this work's examination of Chinese SF. Many works of Chinese SF discussed in this thesis contains both utopian and dystopian elements, and articulate critiques using utopian and dystopian strategies.

Another distinction sometimes articulated within SF is the division of 'hard' and 'soft' SF which refers to the rigorousness of the author's inclusion of 'realistic' technologies based on actual scientific principles and trends.[24] 'Hard' SF purports to be more scientifically rigorous, and explain to the audience the factual, scientific basis for its *novum*, as well as the resulting changes in the SF's speculative reality. 'Soft' SF is considered to be less 'scientific' in that it pays less attention to connecting its *novum* to extant and accepted scientific principles and discoveries, or does not attempt to explain the scientific basis for its vision of the future as completely as hard SF. In the context of the Chinese SF discussed in this thesis, this division is

[23] Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review*, II, no. 25 (February 2004): 35–54.
[24] The term "hard science fiction" originated with a 1957 article by American SF critic and reviewer P. Schyler Miller in *Astounding* magazine ("Hard SF" 2013).

almost irrelevant, although the fact that some of China's contemporary SF writers are often lauded as writers of 'hard SF' will be discussed in a later section.[25]

Stories that mentions science or scientific concepts written in China in the last century do not necessarily qualify as SF and the questions "What is this story's totalizing novum?" and "Is this story consistent with cognitive logic?" are helpful in demarcating SF from non-SF in the Chinese context. However, the pervasive presence of science in their narratives must be taken as another road to categorization of a work as Chinese SF. This presence takes many forms, but generally appears through the presence of scientists and researchers as main characters, scientific discoveries as major plot devices and impetus for action, scientific concepts, and scientific language. As we will see, Chinese SF has historically been linked purposefully and directly with popularizing science to the Chinese people, particularly young people, by its authors and various cultural and political institutions (notably the Party and state). This historical relationship manifests itself in Chinese SF to this day.

SF and China's Revolutionary Modernization Movements

As briefly mentioned earlier, studying Chinese SF has particular value for two interrelated reasons. First, SF has a unique political character and relationship to technological advancement and modernization. Second, Chinese history since 1900 has been characterized by a series of revolutionary modernization movements. Each of these movements has created and been reflected in cultural products, including Chinese SF. Both of these relationships will be explained in this section, but first, the concepts of both SF and China's revolutionary modernization must be briefly defined. These definitions will explain SF's political character and

[25] "Liu Cixin," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, August 11, 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/liu_cixin.

role as a reflection of beliefs about modernization and the future as well as the unique role that cultural production has played during China's century (or more) of revolutionary modernization.

Over the last century, China has undergone a huge shift in its political, economic, and cultural position relative to Western nations and Japan, and this change has unfolded in a series of dramatic revolutionary cultural, political, and economic movements. To dramatically oversimplify history, the China of the early 20th century was devastatingly poor, frequently politically disunited, technologically unsophisticated, culturally conservative, and subjected to the semi-colonial and colonial ambitions of Western nations and Japan. Today, China is politically united (with the exception of the Taiwan issue) and the world's second-largest economy with considerable technological sophistication. Chinese culture has changed dramatically over time, from a constrained cultural sphere in the socialist era towards a globalized cultural market where Chinese and foreign cultural products compete for entertainment and market share.

The nation's trajectory has been anything but smooth—China suffered decades of internal disorder in the early 20th century after the era of "warlords" and the decentralization of political authority after the Revolution of 1911. Decades of civil conflict between rival political ideologies and structures followed, accompanied by outright foreign invasion from Japan in the 1930s and 1940s. Even after much of the country unified in 1949 under the People's Republic of China, internal political turbulence and poor relations with the US-led non-communist world from 1949 until the early 1970s slowed economic growth and reduced cultural exchange with the rest of the world. The era of China's dramatic economic growth and decisive opening to foreign cultural influences began only in the late 1970s. This development also represented a near-total rupture of the preexisting political and economic order of the country; the "Reform" era was just

as culturally and economically revolutionary in many ways as the 1940s and 1950s. However, it is indisputable that, over the last century, China's stature on the world stage has grown dramatically, and China stands in in a markedly different and more central, modern, and powerful position in 2014 as it did in 1900.

Here we understand the condition of being 'modern' or existing in 'modernity' in the same way that historian Marshall Berman (1940-2013) articulates in his 1983 book *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. For Berman, "modernity" is a shared experience or mode of being that first arose in Europe in the 1500s and has spread globally.[26] It is characterized by a dual nature: on the one hand it empowers, liberates, and elevates and enhances the individual human being's power to transform his or her own living conditions through economic, social, and political change.[27] On the other hand, it erodes and destroys traditional cultures, social relations, and practices and introduces elements of uncertainly, fear, and alienation into the human experience.

SF comments directly on both the current cultural-political-economic situation and the foreseen, predicted, or feared course of future events by their nature. In China, the overriding concern of almost every major movement of the last century has been to overthrow the past and current state of affairs (revolution) and pursue a vision of the future with perceived benefits (modernization). SF has served as a potent tool for China's revolutionary modernizers to mobilize the Chinese people and articulate political and social ideologies and critiques. As we will see, Chinese SF, from its inception, has been used for these purposes.

This major change has taken the form of a series of political, economic, and cultural revolutions and movements, each linked to, fueled by, and deliberately promoting a cultural

[26] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Verso, 1983), 91-93.
[27] Berman writes, "The second great bourgeois achievement has been to liberate the human capacity and drive for development: for permanent upheaval and renewal in every mode of personal and social life. This drive, Marx shows, is embedded in the everyday working and needs of the bourgeois economy" in terms of competition and the pressure to innovate and create new markets and products (Berman 1983, 94).

movement. Each of these movements pursued a multitude of different and often contradictory goals and employed different strategies to achieve them over time. They pursued modernization in the sense described by Berman and showed a desire to criticize and overthrow the previous order (revolution) instead of guiding its development. These include late 19th century reformers, the May Fourth Movement, early socialist and left-wing writers based in Yan'an in the 1930s and 1940s, the socialist period (1949-1978), and the 1980s early Reform Era. Today, China's official discourse at the elite political level retains a focus on material improvement characterized as modernization in addition to cultural and even spiritual renewal and change.

Each of these movements was aimed at modernization and included a revolutionary material/cultural program that sought to change the political and economic status of the Chinese people and transform Chinese culture. Specifically, these movements sought to throw off and delegitimize much of the previous cultural edifice in order to introduce and construct a new cultural, political, and economic order. For China's revolutionary modernizers, economic and political transformation was impossible without simultaneously changing the people's culture.

While the Chinese state's ideology in the socialist period was anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois, it was not anti-modern. Some have argued that China's socialist period represented a straightforward revolt against modernity and resembled a return to China's imperial past because it constructed a powerful state apparatus and placed considerable power in the hands of a single leader (Mao Zedong). Furthermore, Mao Zedong Thought explicitly rejected market capitalism, one of the driving forces of modernization, and targeted groups and institutions associated with modernization such as intellectuals, scientists, universities, and private business.

Historian Arif Dirlik (b. 1940) argues that the controversy over whether the state embraced modernization or anti-modernization during China's socialist period reveals a struggle

over the definition of the terms modernity and modernization. Those that label Mao Zedong Thought and its articulation of Marxism 'anti-modern' equate modernization with market capitalism. Dirlik argues that Mao Zedong Thought represented a search for the positive results of modernization—prosperity, human freedom, and emancipation—without the negative aspects of market capitalism. Although the socialist era brought massive human and economic disasters to China and killed tens of millions of Chinese people, particularly in the Great Leap Forward (1957-1961) famine, driven by political considerations, the goals of Mao Zedong Thought were not anti-modern. Dirlik argues that the ideology of Mao Zedong and the Chinese state in the socialist period was "irretrievably modern" and explicitly pursued an "alternative modernity" distinct from the prevailing Western-led capitalist modernity, but with many of the same core characteristics.[28] Its criticism and dismantling of China's traditional culture (particularly in the Cultural Revolution) and drive to increase women's participation in the national economy and social life are other signs of its modernizing impulse.

The Three Poles of Modern Chinese Cultural Production

A complete categorization of all Chinese cultural production since 1900 would be beyond the scope of this examination of Chinese SF. However, I believe that it is possible to describe three 'poles' (in the magnetic sense) that Chinese cultural products and movements have moved between in the last century. Each of these poles has a particular character that shows its allegiance to particular time frames as well as specific political-economic projects. Chinese SF has also moved between these poles, pulled and pushed by the same socio-political-economic forces and developments. The relationship between Chinese literature, Chinese SF, and these three poles can help uncover essential aspects of Chinese SF context, and locate individual works and SF authors in historical and political context to better understand their significance.

[28] Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 114-116.

Therefore, each of these 'poles' is at once a general category and an ideal of literature that is connected to an era in which it emerged and became dominant. Each pole has survived the era of its emergence and dominance, and even the most contemporary works—such as Liu Cixin's SF short fiction—exhibits variable allegiances to and influences from other poles. By delineating these three poles, I will trace the links between Chinese history, Chinese cultural products, and Chinese SF in order to reveal the underlying relationship between Chinese SF and China's cultural self-conception, relationship with modernity and modernization, and empirical socio-political-economic realities, and ideology.

Each of these three poles has several commonalities. First, all three were germinated by cultural products imported and translated into China's cultural sphere from Japan and the West, which grew as distinct forms and categories as they blended with Chinese traditional cultural products and ideologies. Second, all three were made possible by and promote the dominant political-economic projects of their time. Third, each of these poles is simultaneously the antithesis of its predecessor in vital aspects and contiguous with preexisting cultural poles in other aspects. True to their order of emergence, each pole simultaneously validates and nullifies its predecessor, and gives rise to its following pole.

In order of their chronological of appearance in modern Chinese literature, these are the didactic pole, the anti-didactic pole, and the post-socialist pole. The didactic pole arose and became dominant before the 1978 Reform era, the anti-didactic emerged in the 1978-1992 period, and the post-socialist pole has become prominent in the last twenty years of intense marketization and globalization in China after 1992. Each of these poles drew heavy influences from Western and other non-Chinese literatures and traditions. While each pole arose in and became associated with a particular era, each continues to survive today in Chinese literature. In

order to trace the historical development of each of these three poles, this paper will delineate the historical conditions and logic of their emergence and their relationship to Chinese SF. [29]

This thesis will examine each of the three poles of modern Chinese cultural production, and determine how Chinese SF adapted to and followed changes in Chinese cultural products over time. It will examine Chinese SF's emergence at the turn of the 20th century, its strong affiliation with the didactic pole, its move towards the anti-didactic pole in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and its adaptation to the postsocialist conditions prevailing in China since the early 1990s. It will then examine a series of Chinese SF short stories translated into English and published in 1989 by Wu Dingbo and Patrick D. Murphy and utilize examples of the shift from didacticism to the anti-didactic avant-garde. It will examine the SF short stories published in 2010 by Liu Cixin, one of China's most prominent SF writers of the last decade. Then, it will describe Liu Cixin's SF short fiction in relation to the three poles of modern Chinese cultural production, and draw conclusions about Chinese SF's prospects for the future and the evolution of Chinese SF over time.

[29] The three pole concept parallels but also supplants a traditional modernity—modernism—postmodernism analysis of Chinese culture. As noted by Zhang Xudong, Yang Xiaobin, Wang Ning and many other critics and commentators, the question of what constitutes Chinese modernism, and the question of postmodernism's nature and existence or arrival in China has been exhaustively studied and remains contested. I believe that it makes more sense to locate Chinese cultural production in relation to three poles that are specific to Chinese culture and history than engage in the debate over these terms' precise definitions and their arrival or validity in China.

THE DIDACTIC POLE

The primary thrust of Chinese literature from roughly 1900 through the mid-1980s was to illuminate, popularize, and in some cases, suggest a solution to China's perceived ills of the time. Although authors during this period adopted many different strategies and advocated many different political, social, and economic agendas, the intent behind these works and the pose that their authors adopted is didactic. Works of the didactic pole share two features. First, their authors *intend* to educate their reader about and convince them of the necessity and legitimacy of certain cultural-political-economic changes and reforms, and therefore to effect positive change in China's material conditions. Second, their authors adopt a didactic *pose* that assumes an authoritative and trustworthy position in relation to the reader. The intent and pose of the didactic pole are its defining characteristics; literature in other eras and of other poles retains a distinct agenda or message, but not these features.

Literary theorist Yang Xiaobin (b. 1963) describes the mindset of authors in China's didactic tradition thusly,

> The intellectual thus must voice the most urgent need of his nation at the time and identify his own subject with the grand historical, national Subject. An imaginary superior, omniscient subject became the ultimate impetus for the writer-as-intellectual to play a role that would convey messages of great historical consequence.[30]

Although the content of the didactic messages articulated by intellectuals and writers during the late Qing , May Fourth, socialist, and early Reform period were very different, their intent and pose link these periods together under the rubric of the didactic pole. The concept of a didactic component in cultural production is not unique to China or to 20th century Chinese literature. However, Chinese didactic writers of the 20th century borrowed and were influenced

[30] Xiaobin Yang, *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 4.

heavily by Western works, both in their content (promoting Western ideas and innovations) and their form (realism of various kinds, including Soviet socialist realism). Furthermore, the first eight decades of the 20th century in China saw the rise of didactic cultural production specifically aimed at modernization (as opposed to moralism or the correct way of life) to a position of hegemonic power. This distinguishes the didactic pole of modern Chinese cultural production from previous eras and other cultural contexts.

As we have discussed while examining Darko Suvin's theories of SF, SF is in some ways an inherently didactic genre because of its political nature. By combining the *novum* and cognitive estrangement, SF inevitably articulates a commentary on a speculative future, the present, and past that is always critical and frequently didactic. It is easy to comprehend the didacticism of a utopian work of SF. Its implicit message is that society should follow the economic, cultural, and/or political example set forth in the utopia. Dystopian SF makes implicit didactic comment on the present and future (by showing harmful or troubling trends with their roots in the present reality), and therefore articulates a more limited didactic message.

By attacking aspects of the present or likely future, even the bleakest dystopia suggests the need for change in a nation's (or humanity's) current course. By examining perils of a particular *novum*, the dystopian SF author suggests that certain uses of technology or technological advancements should not be allowed. Likewise, by displacing some aspect of modern life to another arena (cognitive estrangement) that readers find abhorrent in an imagined future, the author can lead readers to question aspects of their own economic, political, and cultural conditions. This effect has been particularly pronounced in the context of Chinese SF, which has, since its inception, been linked to revolutionary modernization movements and larger didactic cultural movements and forces.

Didactic Chinese SF in the Late Qing and May Fourth Eras

This section will cover the emergence and rise to dominance of the didactic pole of modern Chinese cultural production before 1978, and specifically illustrate how its formation influenced and provided the initial foundation for Chinese SF.

Scholars point to early works of Chinese literature, some from the first millennium AD, that contain themes that bear resemblance to the SF tradition such as voyages to other planets and fantastical new inventions.[31] A theorist in the mold of Darko Suvin would suggest that these works more closely resemble fantasy than SF because their experimentation and imagination is divorced from the actual progression of technology in the time that they were written. For the purposes of this thesis, their lack of scientific presence in terms of character, language, or conceptual focus disqualifies them from intensive examination.

Beginning in the early 1900s, Chinese writers used narratives of all kinds and persuasive opinion and non-fiction essays to criticize Chinese traditional culture, raise awareness of China's problems, and pursue modernization to 'save the nation' from internal stagnation and foreign aggression. Chinese translations of Western SF and the first steps toward Chinese SF appeared during this period, and the combination of SF's inherently political and didactic nature and China's political/cultural context have contributed to a lasting legacy of didactic Chinese SF. May Fourth intellectual leaders such as Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), Hu Shi (1891-1962), and Lu Xun (1881-1936) focused on tearing down what they saw as the negative aspects of traditional Chinese culture. They wrote short stories, plays, and essays for journals such as *New Youth* or *Xin Qingnian* (a literary journal founded by Chen Duxiu in 1915) in order to critique traditional Chinese values and promulgate new ones taken from the West's Enlightenment such as the

[31] In the preface to Wu and Murphy's book, Wu notes two stories from Zhang Zhou's *Chaoye Qianzi*, written in the 7th century AD, that appear to depict artificial human life or robots, among others (Wu and Murphy 1989, xii).

pursuit of empirical science and democracy. Important developments of the May Fourth period include the use of vernacular Chinese or *baihua* in literature including short stories, poems, and persuasive essays, many of which criticized Chinese tradition and advocated economic, social, and political change.[32]

Liang Qichao (1873-1929), in some ways the father of the didactic tradition in China, specifically called for "literature of philosophy and science" or *zheli kexue xiaoshuo* in a 1902 essay promoting his journal *New Fiction* and claimed that its purpose should be to "use the advantage of fiction to invent philosophy and to promote science."[33] The full scope of Liang's career is beyond the scope of this thesis, but his stature as one of China's most prolific cultural commentators and political activists lends credence to the concept of SF's potential to further modernization in China.[34]

After Liang's 1902 essay, the shortened term *kexue xiaoshuo* soon came to be used to describe Chinese translations of Western SF such as Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, which were often translations of Japanese translations of the original.[35] Liang and other late Qing modernizers wanted this type of literature to legitimize, popularize, and deepen its readers' understanding of and interest in science, and, therefore, aid in the modernization and revitalization of the nation. In the words of Lu Xun, who translated several works by Jules Verne into Chinese in the early 1900s, "Science fiction has tremendous power that helps destroy long-

[32] Edward X. Gu, "Who Was Mr Democracy? The May Fourth Discourse of Populist Democracy and the Radicalization of Chinese Intellectuals (1915-1922)," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (July 1, 2001): 589–621.
[33] Yiting Ethan Zheng, *Selling Modernity: A Study of "All-Story Monthly" ("Yueyue Xiaoshuo") in the Late Qing Context* (ProQuest, 2008), 127.
[34] As one of the first and most prominent member of the Chinese cultural elite to promote modernization and reform, Liang's writings gained a large following during his lifetime and even more attention after his death. Born to a relatively humble Chinese farming family, Liang ascended to political power as a child prodigy (passing the first level of examination at age 11), and became the protégé of another famous modernizer and scholar, Kang Youwei (1858-1927). Liang's ensuing career included writings on how to reform Chinese culture, becoming politically involved in China's unsuccessful 1898 Hundred Days' Reform and fleeting involved, and, later, advising several of China's post-1911 warlord politicians in political matters.
[35] Ibid., 127.

lasting superstition, reform thought, and support civilization…The lack of science fiction is surely one factor in Chinese peoples' ignorance and lack of knowledge…to help Chinese people make progress, we must begin with introducing science fiction."[36] This statement explicitly links the project of translating and writing SF with modernization and reforming Chinese culture through literature, demonstrating the explicitly didactic nature of Chinese SF translation in the early 20th century.

Chinese SF scholar Song Mingwei isolates the "debut" of Chinese SF in Liang Qichao's 1902 work *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* or *The Future of New China*.[37] In this unfinished piece, Liang describes a version of China in 1962 that has become a world power. Song writes,

> In a grandiose opening chapter narrated in the future perfect tense, Liang informs readers that, by the year 1962, China *will have* dominated the world as a superpower, the Chinese Emperor *will have* become the head of the World Peace Congress, and the Confucian virtues *will have* inspired the transformation of the world into a harmonious unity.[38]

However, Liang never published the section of the novel that explains *how* this huge transformation would have occurred, and the work does not contain enough scientific presence, let alone a discernable *novum* outside of the mere fact of a powerful China, to qualify as the first work of Chinese SF in the sense understood by Suvin. Nevertheless, the imagination of this piece shows how late Qing modernizers conceived of the immense possibility for modernization to transform the reality of China's weakness and bring about material changes.

Others point to a piece of fiction written under a pseudonym and published in 1904 called "Tales of Moon Colonization" or *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo* as the first piece of SF written in

[36] Zheng, 129-130.
[37] Han Song, "Chinese Science Fiction: A Response to Modernization," Science Fiction Studies 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 15–21, doi:10.5621/sciefictstud.40.1.0015, 15.
[38] Mingwei Song, "Variations on Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 86–102, doi:10.5621/sciefictstud.40.1.0086, 89.

Chinese.[39] This story describes a Chinese fugitive (Long Menghua) on a picaresque journey across continents in a flying machine accompanied by a Japanese scientist (Otaro) and Otaro's Chinese fiancée. The three adventurers travel across the world and, eventually, to the moon, while searching for Long's missing wife and child.[40] The work remains unfinished after 35 chapters and the identity of its author is unknown. This work represents a significant attempt at reproducing scientifically-focused adventure tales by Western writers such as Jules Verne. However, it represents a harbinger rather than an example of the politically-focused, cogent, and scientifically-oriented Chinese SF of the rest of the 20th century.

During the May Fourth era of the 1920s, works of many different types of writing (including political thought, science, medicine, and literature) were translated into Chinese and became widely read and discussed in intellectual circles. Chinese translations of foreign SF included works by Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, and "seven novels by Shunro Oshikawa, *Undersea Battleship, Airship, New Arena, The World a Thousand Years Later* [and others]..."[41] Shunrō Oshikwawa (1876-1914) was a Japanese SF novelist in the mold of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, who wrote novels examining the effects (particularly the military uses) of new technology, such as the submarine.[42]

Perhaps the most notable work of what is commonly referred to as home-grown Chinese SF of the pre-1949 period is Lao She's (1899-1966) novel *Cat Country*, published in 1932. The novel constructs an elaborate political allegory that depicts Mars inhabited by cat-people whose political, economic, and cultural situation mirrors early 20th century China; they are politically

[39] Patrick Dennis Murphy and Dingbo Wu, *Science Fiction from China*, (Praeger, 1989), xv.
[40] Zheng, 127.
[41] Prominent translators of Western SF into Chinese in the period included Lu Xun, Liang Qichao, Bao Tianxio, Rue Yi, Xiu Yu, Wu Woyao, and Pi Fasheng (Wu and Murphy 1989, xiv).
[42] "Oshikawa Shunrō," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/oshikawa_shunro.

disunited, poor, and held back by a conservative culture. In the novel, Chinese visitor from a future visits Mars and witnesses the cat people's tribulations and struggles, before returning to a prosperous, free, and powerful China.[43] Although the *novum* present in this story is not totalizing, the story strives to induce cognitive estrangement in its readers and lead them to question their current reality—political disunity, poverty, and impotence in the face of Japan's early 20th century colonialism. It presents a clear didactic message aimed at tradition, political disunity, and refusal to adopt technology.

Didactic SF in the Socialist Period

Chinese SF of the socialist period, such as Zheng Wenguang's 1954 short stories "From the Earth to Mars" and 1957 "Builders of Mars" promote and lionize the socialist nation and extoll the power of the Chinese people to match and surpass other nations in terms of technology.[44] However, the intellectuals and political/cultural authorities of the time generally did not trust SF to convey dominant revolutionary themes. Zheng's 1955 article entitled "Discussing the Science Fiction Novel" or *Tantan Kehuan Xiaoshuo* laid out a specific didactic purpose for Chinese SF: raising awareness and interest in science which could be used for revolutionary and nationalistic ends.[45] This philosophy was widely embraced became a major component of the Chinese SF tradition. In the 1949-1957 period, dozens of works by 'safe' (not explicitly pro-capitalist) non-Chinese SF writers such as Jules Verne and works of Soviet SF were published, translated, and popularized in China explicitly for the purpose of promoting science among Chinese youth.[46] These stories were published in youth magazines such as the

[43] Lisa Raphals, "Alterity and Alien Contact in Lao She's Martian Dystopia, Cat Country," *Science Fiction Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 73–85, doi:10.5621/sciefictstud.40.1.0073.
[44] Zheng, 130.
[45] "Zheng Wenguang," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, August 7, 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/zheng_wenguang
[46] Wu and Murphy, xx.

Juvenile Press, Chinese Youth Press, and High School Student journals, and SF writers accepted into the Chinese Writers' Association "all belonged to the subgroup of children's literature."[47] This also marked the emergence of a new phrase referring to Chinese SF—*kexue huanxiang xiaoshuo*—or "science fantasy literature" that emphasized the genre's potential for youth-focused science education. More information and research on the nature and formation of Soviet SF, which were then transfused into the Chinese context via translation and political-ideological partnership is this period is available from Anindita Banerjee's 2012 book *We Modern People: Science Fiction and the Making of Russian Modernity*. Banerjee's research argues that the Soviet Union began using SF to encourage and develop intellectual and political debates in a more rigorous way in mid-1890s, much earlier than in the West, and, this thesis will show, China.[48]

Zheng is sometimes referred to as the "father" of Chinese SF, because of his role before 1978.[49] Born to Chinese parents in Vietnam in 1929, Zheng returned to China soon after 1949 to work at the Beijing Astronomical Observatory as a researcher.[50] He began writing soon after, introducing scientific themes into his stories. "From the Earth to Mars" and its 1957 sequel promoted and lionized socialism, nationalism, and deliberately included scientific information geared towards young readers. After having his SF publishing career cut short in the early 1960s by the falling-out between China and the USSR that ended the first period of Chinese SF, Zheng was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and sent to work on a farm in rural Guangdong province until the mid-1970s.[51] After the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping and other Reform-minded leaders, Zheng began publishing again with a 1979 novel *Forward Sagittarius* or

[47] Wu and Muphy, xix.
[48] Bannerjee quotes an 1894 Russian editorial, saying, "A new kind of writing called *nauchnaia fantastika*, scientific fantasy, is playing a not inconsequential role in this process [of defining modern reality]. It is not in the imagination where bold theories are first born? Along with the news of the latest scientific and technological developments, therefore, our magazine will continue to present [this type of literature]," (Banerjee 2013).
[49] "Zheng Wenguang."
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

Feixiang Renmazuo and other SF short stories, including the 1980 story, "The Mirror Image of the Earth," which will be discussed in detail in a later section.

Socialist-era SF had its roots and larger context in the immense material modernization of China's economy kick started by Soviet technical advisors and aid provided between 1949 and 1960. The 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance between China and the Soviet Union included loans and the dispatch of thousands of Soviet technical advisors to help set up a Soviet-style centrally-planned economy focused on heavy industry in China.[52] However, SF came under criticism and fell out of fashion as the Sino-Soviet relationship soured amid the Great Leap Forward and some early Chinese SF authors, including Zheng Wenguang, came under scrutiny and criticism, beginning in the late 1950s.

During the most intense upsurge of revolutionary sentiment in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), SF was attacked and suppressed and its few prominent authors were frequently jailed, exiled far from their homes, and persecuted. The didacticism of radical ultra-leftist thought had constricted to the point of nearly becoming a cultural singularity. The cultural sphere soon became constrained to little more than the "eight model operas" and attendant works of approved cultural production that adhered to the dictum of the "combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism," sometimes abbreviated as '2RR'.[53] 2RR doctrine insisted that the purpose of art was to serve the specific political/economic/social project espoused by the Party and led by Mao Zedong. It recommended specific formulations of characters meant to exhibit heroic or villainous characteristics so that their interplay would educate and indoctrinate the reader in 'correct' political thinking.

[52] "China: Reconstruction and Consolidation, 1949-52," *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, 2014, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/111803/China/71844/Reconstruction-and-consolidation-1949-52?anchor=ref590754.

[53] Lan Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong University Press, 1998), 16-19.

In Yang Lan's 1998 book, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution,* the author outlines the change in China's literary production (specifically novels) during the Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1976. In the period, a number of factors contributed to a dramatic shrinking of the officially-sanctioned cultural sphere in terms of output and acceptable topics and styles. Due to widespread fear and persecution of intellectuals and writers (even those who had formerly been on the good side of the state) economic calamity, and the closing of journals, publishing houses, and other sources of cultural production, few new novels were published over the course of the decade. The new revolutionary authorities in charge of the state, led by Mao Zedong, promoted and popularized novels that articulated the political message of the Cultural Revolution. This included criticism against bureaucrats, Rightists, and foreign elements and the struggle and eventual triumph of members of politically-correct classes, such as ordinary workers, soldiers, and peasants. This uncertain and tumultuous cultural environment affected SF in China. Wu Dingbo and Patrick D. Murphy's treatment of Chinese SF in 1989 found that there was no Chinese SF published in the years spanning 1966 to 1976.[54]

Didactic "Reform Literature"

After Deng Xiaoping's 1978 accession to power, the Chinese Communist Party and state moved to de-politicize and de-revolutionize daily life and modernize the Chinese economy using technology, de-collectivization, privatization, foreign investment, and other measures under the rubric of "Reform." While specifically 2RR-based cultural products fell out of favor, the didactic mode of cultural production survived in the form of "Reform literature" (*gaige wenxue)* that sought to legitimize and educate the people about the advantages of Deng's reforms.[55] This type of didactic message was useful to build legitimacy for the transformation of China's economic

[54] Wu and Murphy, xx ; Ibid., 168.
[55] Yang, *The Chinese Postmodern*, 20.

structure and institution of political reforms that reversed many of the socialist period's anti-bourgeois policies. Authors of Reform literature retained the purpose and pose of their predecessors, but used it to advance a post-revolutionary (some would say anti-revolutionary) ideology.

Post-1978 didactic writers hollowed out the form of the 2RR and the "eight model operas" to serve the new message coming from the Party and state: technical modernization and marketization will improve the people's living conditions. In the typical 1979 reform literature story "Manager Qiao Assumes Office," by Jiang Zilong[56] (b. 1941) the typical 2RR storyline (heroic common people combat menacing bureaucrats) is reversed, but the form remains the same. In the story, a member of the techno-bureaucratic elite (Manager Qiao) returns to take charge of a factory after facing criticism in the Cultural Revolution. After battling against anti-modern forces and introducing needed and beneficial reforms, Qiao prevails and increases production, bringing his community and, by extension, the grand historical subject (China) forward into the future.[57] This story is representative of a class of writing published after 1978 that enlisted the didactic mode of cultural production to enhance, legitimize, and popularize the reforms instituted by the Chinese state under Deng Xiaoping. This type of literature is reflected in SF through early stories written soon after the beginning of the reform era. These stories reflect the influence of 2RR through their use of omniscient narrators that provide diegetic or didactic instruction to the reader, clear definitions of heroic and villainous characters, and clearly promote a specific ideological project. An example of this type of Chinese SF will be examined in the next section.

[56] "Jiang Zilong's Fiction," *China Culture Information Network*, accessed April 29, 2014, http://english.ccnt.com.cn/?catog=literature&file=030225&ads=service_001.
[57] Yang Xiaobin, *The Chinese Postmodern*, 21-22; Rudolf G. Wagner, *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose* (Harvard University Asia Center, 1992), 379-383.

As Chinese SF bloomed after 1978 and resumed its previous project: popularizing science, it adopted many characteristics of "Reform literature" and stayed anchored to the didactic pole of cultural production. Because it is in many ways a product of the didactic pole's era of dominance, and, due to the inherent didactic elements in all SF previously discussed, Chinese SF has never been able to fully break away from and rupture its didactic roots in Chinese literature. With that being said, Chinese SF was not immune from the wider drift away from the didactic pole that developed after 1978. The next section of this thesis will chart how Chinese SF moved away from the didactic pole as part of the anti-didactic backlash of the 1980s along with other kinds of Chinese literature and cultural production. The exact form of this motion was different for Chinese SF than it was for non-SF, and the key differences further elucidate both the nature of SF and its development in the Chinese context.

CHINESE SF'S MOVE TOWARDS THE ANTI-DIDACTIC POLE

During the 1980s, Chinese writers of all kinds articulated and cemented the political-ideological framework of the Reforms through various literary movements and intellectual debates, sometimes called the "Great Cultural Discussion" or "Cultural Fever."[58] This period gave rise to the anti-didactic pole of Chinese literary production, which stands totally in opposition to the didactic. Where the didactic pole sought to articulate narratives aimed at 'saving the nation,' the anti-didactic articulates the individual experience and denies grand history. This impulse, taken to its extreme, resulted in denial of even the individual as a construct and tool of grand history.

As the 1980s unfolded, SF joined a wider trend that moved away from the didactic pole towards and the creation and popularization of an anti-didactic pole of modern Chinese cultural production. Works of the anti-didactic pole sought to dismantle the Chinese revolution. They first pursued this goal by articulating the individual identity of those who had lived through the socialist era. This manifested itself in a series of 'literatures' by groups that had been victimized and disrupted in the socialist era, notably 'Rightist' intellectuals, bureaucratic elites, and young people who had been 'sent down' to live in the countryside in the Cultural Revolution.

As the trend continued, new forms of literature sought to undermine the concept of the individual and the entire discourse of the revolution and the concept of progress. SF of the late 1970s and 1980s translated into English by Patrick D. Murphy and Wu Dingbo in their 1989 book *Science Fiction from China* show SF's versions of "scar" and "root-seeking" literature and, eventually, aspects of the Chinese avant-garde. By examining short SF stories printed in this compilation, we can trace how SF mirrors the wider movement in Chinese literature from the

[58] Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Duke University Press, 1997), 35.

didactic towards the anti-didactic. However, SF's inherently political nature and the legacy of its didactic role in Chinese literature (promoting science to young people) complicate and arrest this movement. Even though Chinese SF moves from 2RR-style didacticism towards the anti-didactic avant-garde in terms of its didactic purpose, narration, and treatment of themes such as sexuality/romance and violence, it cannot abandon its grounding in the didactic project of scientific popularization. Chinese SF generally retains a more *explicitly* political character than other "literatures" of the period. While the personal turn in Chinese fiction had a political message—the repudiation of the Chinese revolution and socialist period—it took on the appearance of an individual narrative and working out of personal experience. Chinese SF maintained a more didactic approach (perhaps because of its continued mission of scientific education), rendering its political message closer to the surface.

In this period of simultaneous "utopian vision" and "emergent crisis" (according to theorist Wang Jing, b.1950), contending schools of thought emerged and battled in the field of politics, economics, and culture, with a multitude of theorists, cliques, journals, and scholarly projects all laying claim to the correct path for China's supposedly bright future in the era of Reforms.[59] Many writers of these schools were influenced by the widespread availability and popularity of translated works by non-Chinese authors. In literature, this tendency manifested itself as a series of experimental movements utilizing techniques pioneered by Western literary modernists of the early 1900s to reflect on their individual experiences and repudiate the official myths and histories of the socialist era, including the "misty poetry," "educated youth literature," "scar literature," and "root-seeking literature."[60] This culminated in the late-1980s emergence of

[59] Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (University of California Press, 1996), 1.
[60] Zicheng Hong, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 292-297.

an "avant-garde" literature exemplified by Yu Hua (b. 1960) and Ge Fei (b.1964). The avant-garde sought not just to repudiate and falsify official myths and histories, but to subvert and dismantle the entire language and discourse of official history and human experience. In Ge Fei's 1986 story "Remembering Mr. Wu You," a nameless and identity-less narrator relates the persecution and unjust execution of the eponymous character by the village leader, who also rapes and murders Wu You's girlfriend, Apricot.[61] The story is told in pitiless and callous terms, and the narrative's temporal and moral frameworks are equally distorted.

Chinese SF roared to life after 1976 and grew tremendously between 1976 and 1989 (despite political criticism of leading SF authors in 1983, which will be discussed later). This development had two primary causes. First, many of the political constraints on literature and publishing of the previous decades, and particularly the extreme strictures of the Cultural Revolution, were lifted. Second, SF's emphasis on technology fit easily with elite discourse of the time—that employing technology would bring about large positive changes in China's national life under the rubric of the "Four Modernizations."[62] Therefore, the early SF of the Reform era tends to replicate the didactic pose of socialist-era literature, but it uses these tools to advance a pro-Reform, pro-technology, and nationalist agenda. Some of the earliest and best-known SF of the post-1978 period resembles in some ways earlier works of revolutionary SF in terms of its narration. The primary example of this kind of Chinese SF that this paper will examine is "Death Ray on a Coral Island" by Tong Enzheng (1935-1997).

[61] Jing Wang, *China's Avant-Garde Fiction: An Anthology* (Duke University Press, 1998), 15.
[62] The "Four Modernizations" or technological advancement in agriculture, industry, technology and defense were first articulated by Chinese statesman Zhou Enlai in 1961 (but were not enacted) and became a key platform of Deng Xiaoping's Reform Era after 1978. The Four Modernizations were key areas where applying science and technology would strengthen and enrich the Chinese nation and people.

"Death Ray on a Coral Island:" A Study in Didactic 'Reform' SF

Tong Enzheng attained prominence as an archaeologist in the early 1960s and primarily worked to uncover historical sites in Tibet and Southwestern China.[63] After being politically persecuted in the Cultural Revolution, Tong taught in the History Department at Sichuan University from 1979 to 1989, writing and publishing academic articles, short stories, screenplays, and essays, including several works of SF. He also visited and taught abroad, including in the United States during the 1980s.[64] Eventually, he became involved in the Tiananmen Square democracy movement and was forced to stay in the US after 1989.

In the 1978 story "Death Ray on a Coral Island," a young, patriotic overseas Chinese pilot named Chen Tianhong returns the plans for powerful scientific discoveries to China after a mysterious attack on his scientist mentor. After his plane is brought down by a mysterious phenomenon at sea, the pilot discovers another scientist (Hu Mingli, also named Dr. Matthew) working on a powerful "death ray" or laser, which the scientist imagines will have only peaceful applications. It soon becomes clear that the scientist is in fact being manipulated by foreign interests (heavily implied to be Soviet) to develop a weapon. The nefarious pseudo-Soviets betray the kind-hearted, peaceful scientist and attempt to steal the laser technology. The narrator and scientist heroically resist and the scientist is mortally wounded. After a series of escapades, Chen and Dr. Matthew defeat the Soviet intruders (although Dr. Matthew dies in the process) and prevents the technology from falling into enemy hands.

"Death Ray on a Coral Island" reproduces the form of the socialist didactic tradition of China's socialist literature. Its didactic message affirms the power of technology and science to serve the nation and articulates a political message about the need for patriotic Chinese people to

[63] "Biography of Enzheng Tong," *Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies*, accessed March 26, 2014, http://www.wesleyan.edu/mansfield/about/biography.html.
[64] Ibid.

protect the nation from nefarious foreign enemies. This story is emblematic of a number of Chinese SF stories from the late 1970s and early 1980s because of its didactic form, subject material, and nationalist messages. Therefore, while this paper will touch on the works of Wang Xiaoda (b. 1939) and Ye Yonglie (b. 1940) as similar in style and tone to "Death Ray", it will treat "Death Ray" as representative of the early Reform era's didactic SF. [65]

The didactic content of "Death Ray" is unmistakable from its first lines. In the first paragraph of the story, the narrator names himself, gives his identity (the missing pilot from a recent plane crash), and directly instructs the reader that the story he is about to relate will "fill you with anger and indignation, and also provide you food for much thought."[66] This style of narration continues, and the supposed first-person narrator soon reveals deep knowledge of other characters' backgrounds and motivations, and frequently lectures other characters (and through them the reader). When confronted by Dr. Matthew's unthinking pacifism, Chen retorts,

> We should make a concrete analysis of wars. There are just wars and unjust wars. Moreover, to complete eliminate war requires that we use the means of revolutionary war, and first of all change the inequalities in society. To hate war without analyzing it is not the way to solve the problem.[67]

This response is typical of the didactic tone of the story's dialogue. Both the narrator and the character of Chen Tianhong embark on long passages that speak authoritatively and at length about various political and scientific topics, as well as plot elements.

The story has clear heroes (Chen, Dr. Matthew, his loyal Malay assistant, Amang, and the main characters' mentor, Professor Zhao) who are patriotic, scientifically-adept, brave, and loyal. It also has clear villains (Dr. Matthew's supposed friend, Brian, Dr. Matthew's back-stabbing

[65] Ye Yonglie," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, October 24, 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/ye_yonglie ; "Wang Xiaoda," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, August 12, 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/wang_xiaoda.
[66] Wu and Murphy, 97.
[67] Wu and Murphy, 109.

assistant, Joseph Luo, and members of the pseudo-Soviet ASC military). Representatives of good and evil struggle against one another, and morally-upright characters sacrifice themselves to defeat evil. The loyal servant Amang witnesses Dr. Matthew's betrayal and bravely attacks the superior ASC military forces and the evil Bryan, only to be restrained.[68] Dr. Matthew uses his dying moments to obliterate the ASC ship with his advanced laser, thus preventing the laser technology from falling into their hands. The story ends with Chen leaving the island, resolving to himself: "Seething with hatred and yet full of confidence, I sped the small boat towards the land of my fathers [China], ready to face a new life of struggle."[69]

"Death Ray's" treatment of violence will be discussed in detail in comparison to later works of Chinese SF in a following section. Although the story depicts many violent acts, it does so in a bloodless manner that advances the storyline without dwelling on the moments of violence. Professor Zhao and Dr. Matthew sacrifice themselves to prevent their technology from falling into evil hands, and their deaths are described in bloodless and unemotional terms. These acts of violence advance the plot and the didactic message of the story. Although they evoke some emotion in the primary hero, Chen Tianhong, they evoke little in the reader, except excitement and interest in the story's conclusion. Additionally, the narrative does not feature any explicit mention of romance, let alone sexuality, between any of its characters, all of whom are male.

Chinese SF's 'Scar Literature': "Mirror Image" of the Revolution

The SF corollary of the scar literature, sent-down youth literature, introspection literature by former "Rightists" and other literary movements meditating on the disasters that befell China during the Cultural Revolution reveals itself in a story by Zheng Wenguang entitled "The Mirror

[68] Wu and Murphy, 120.
[69] Wu and Murphy, 122.

Image of the Earth" and published in 1980. Written by the previously-mentioned author who pioneered didactic socialist Chinese SF in the 1950s, "Mirror Image" criticizes the violence of the socialist period and questions the notions of progress and the myth of China's 'feudal' pre-1949 period and a liberated socialist utopia thereafter. "Mirror Image" attacks the foundational myths and tenets of the Chinese revolution and socialist state and includes clear allusions and political messages implied and alluded to in the text. This mirrors the wider "scar" literature that intentionally set out to dismantle and derogate the effects of the Chinese revolution. One theorist describes "scar literature" as, "extraordinary and intriguing stories [that] reveal the cruelty and ignorance of the Cultural Revolution."[70] "Mirror Image" shares this goal, but does so in an elaborate allegory with implied messages and viewed from a neutral, as opposed to overtly didactic, third person narrator. The narrator in "Mirror" does not engage in the interior views and extensive backstory that "Death Ray," does, and therefore portrays the SF narrative in a more naturalistic and less diegetic way.

In "Mirror Image," Chinese space explorers visit a planet named Uiqid (the reverse of *diqiu* or "Earth" in Chinese) where everything has the opposite or complementary color scheme of the Earth. The explorers find a repository of cinematic scenes from Chinese history in a cave on the seemingly-abandoned planet. They view historical scenes, including two cataclysms in quick succession. Both scenes are described vividly, similarly, and in succession to draw a clear parallel between the two events. The first is the "burning…of O Fang…Palace" and slaughter of innocent civilians by barbarian invaders during the Qin Dynasty. Another is a more recent scene

[70] Kaixuan Jing, "Contemporary Chinese Fiction: Politics and Romance," *Macalester International* 18 (2007): 76–99, 77.

of violence and horror set during the Cultural Revolution, with clear parallels drawn between the two.[71]

In the first scene shown to the astronauts, "[warriors] were raising glittering swords at frightened women in imperial dress. Blood flowed like a gushing fountain," before flames engulf the scene.[72] The next scene depicts the Cultural Revolution thusly, "young people with red armbands… waving booklets with red covers, standing there in regular columns and waving booklets with red covers in the same direction towards a remote figure."[73] Suddenly, "a second group of teenagers flung themselves upon the first…. daggers and swords glistened in the air, bricks were thrown at random" and human figures fell.[74] In particular, "Blood oozed from the forehead of a young boy; his face was twitching, and he was staring at the astronauts with lusterless eyes."[75] One of the astronauts abruptly faints after recognizing the face of the dead youth; it is the astronaut's own brother, who was actually killed during the Cultural Revolution. The scene is disturbing, bloody, and violent in its own right.

This impressionistic, intimate, and graphic description of violence is not found in "Death Ray." Although "Death Ray," depicts more violent acts (the murder of several scientists and an entire naval vessel being incinerated by a laser), these events are not graphically described. Dr. Matthew's death is written as his "head fall[ing] suddenly onto his chest" before the narrator Chen mournfully reminds the reader, "I had witnessed the deaths of two scientists in the space of a fortnight."[76] The narrator views the enemy ship's incineration from a distance and describes it as merely a fiery explosion, without dwelling on the experience of the hundreds of sailors and

[71] Wu and Murphy, 129.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 122.

crew. These acts serve only to advance the story and establish the heroism and ultimate victory of the main character over the forces of evil. This differentiated treatment of violence will be revisited later in this thesis in relation to another SF story from China.

After musing about how these video-recordings of real events are being shown to them and why, the astronauts arrive at the answer: the Uiqidians are an advanced civilization that has monitored earth for thousands of years and are they deliberately showing filmed and recorded scenes from Chinese history to the Chinese astronauts. After this interlude, the explorers encounter one of the planet's inhabitants or its avatar—a shining ball of light—which then shows them the scene of the Uiqidians boarding a spacecraft and fleeing the planet before the astronauts' arrival, evidently because they feared the savage nature of human beings. The explorers engage in a dialogue among themselves in which they glumly conclude that, compared to the advanced alien civilization, humanity as a whole (and particularly Chinese people, given the focus on China of the story) are "barbarians" and that the aliens' fear is probably justified.[77]

Instead of the didactic tone telling the reader of the profound anger and reflection that the narrative will engender adopted by "Death Ray" and other stories from the late 1970s, Zheng's story is calmly narrated from a third party point of view that resorts to direct instruction less frequently. Instead of the didactic opening of "Death Ray," Zheng's narrator instructs the reader both of his identity and that the following story will provoke thought and debate, "Mirror Image" opens with the same statement that, "The planet appeared yellow in the distance, as if it were a lemon drifting in a space of dark purple velvet."[78]

Explanations and characterizations in the story are generally either coached as dialogue between the astronauts or are extremely brief and related to background or appearance. For

[77] Wu and Murphy, 132.
[78] Ibid., 126.

instance, in the opening paragraphs, one astronaut is introduced simply as "the young biophysicist Linwu Sheng, captain of [the astronaut's vessel]" with little other information divulged about him.[79] The issue of the planet's name begins with one astronaut asking another, "Hey Cui, do you know why it's called Uiquid?" This is much more naturalistic than descriptions and narration in "Death Ray" where the narrator (still ostensibly the pilot Chen Tianhong but taking the role of an all-knowing authority) engages in passages of exposition describing characters' entire life stories, inner thoughts, motivations, and significance that continue for paragraphs. One such passage from "Death Ray" reads:

> Dr. Matthew was originally born into a Chinese family which had taken up residence in Japan. When he was in primary school, he had a teacher who had been disabled as a result of fighting in the Second World War. The entire family of this teacher had died in the atomic bomb attack…. After graduation from high school, Dr. Matthew moved to ASC to study crystallophysics, and showed great ability in his research on lasers. After graduation, he was immediately invited to join a research organization….[80]

In "Mirror Image," most common instances of the narrator showing instead of telling or using characters to engage the reader come when discussing scientific matters (although these are frequently discussed in dialogue as well). These include astronaut's noting to each other than Uiqid is so named because its color scheme is exactly complementary to Earth's. The narrator describes the Uiqidian environment in terms of its color and composition, and notes certain scientific aspects of the trip, such as the height of mountains and speed of the astronaut's advanced transportation craft.

Most of "Mirror Image's" political message is either implied (juxtaposing an ancient cataclysm with the Cultural Revolution, naming the astronauts' ship *Hundred Flowers*[81]) or

[79] Wu and Murphy, 126.
[80] Ibid., 106.
[81] This refers to when Chinese authorities asked intellectuals to provide critiques of their rule in 1956, using a phrase borrowed from a poem, "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom; Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" (*baihua*

discussed by the characters with the reader as an implied audience to be convinced. When it becomes clear that, due to their extensive observations of human behavior over thousands of years, the Uiqidians fled their home planet because they feared humans, the astronauts engage in a sort of multilateral Socratic dialogue, questioning one another and proposing answers. One astronaut asks, "living beings on different planets should have friendly exchanges, shouldn't they?" and another retorts, "They don't live in the same state of civilization as we do…So, to them, we're still barbarians. Why should they be friendly and believe the savages? They would naturally think we might attack them at any moment…."[82] When the first asks what an advanced civilization would fear from technologically-inferior humans, a colleague notes that, in Earth's history, "all advanced civilizations did not necessarily triumph. Genghis Khan was a perfect case in point."[83] While these discussions still have a clear didactic message, their style is much different from those in "Death Ray." Instead of engaging in long diatribes or speeches, these comments are presented in a relatively conversational and naturalistic manner, with characters arguing, cutting each other off, and interjecting into the flowing dialogue.

Unlike "Death Ray" and similar stories, "Mirror Image," does clearly engage in direct didactic messaging and conveys skepticism towards and an effort to dismantle of the myths of the socialist era (particularly its radical expression in the Cultural Revolution) and an enduring commitment to popularizing scientific knowledge. As a whole, "Mirror Image" does not exhibit

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qifang, baijia zhengming). The large response was highly critical and highlighted official corruption and mismanagement. The Party/state turned against these intellectuals (some believe the whole episode to have been a ruse to goad them into revealing themselves) and labeled many 'Rightists' who were later persecuted, imprisoned, and even killed in the lead up to the Great Leap Forward (1957-1961) which itself brought huge economic problems and starvation that killed millions. Presumably Zheng intends to both allude to this historical episode as another example of the revolution's cruelty and human cost of the socialist era, and to imply that space travel and technological sophistication are the fruits of truly liberalizing the intellectual sphere. The name suggests that a Chinese mission to another planet is the natural result of truly adopting the principles of openness and tolerance behind the phrase.

[82] Wu and Murphy, 132.

[83] Ibid.

aspects of the avant-garde assault on narrative, character, linear time, or other attributes of conventional storytelling. The story proceeds linearly from Uiqid's discovery, to the astronaut's visit, to their witnessing of historical scenes and the implications of the Uiqidians' flight. Its calm, third person narrator does not engage in didactic instruction, and rarely intrudes into the astronauts' interior thoughts. In the very end of the story, the narrator presents the reader with a short, cryptic, and somewhat open-ended philosophical proposition phrased as a question: "No matter how hard human beings try to probe the universe, they cannot convey all of its wonders, as they are so multicolored, inexhaustible, and mysterious. Is this not true?"[84] This ending represents one instance of the author directly asking the reader a philosophical question, but it allows for considerably more ambiguity in the reader's response than the ending patriotic declaration in "Death Ray." This represents a significant reduction in the didactic straightjacket the author seeks to impose on the reader. While Zheng pursues a political agenda, he does not adopt the same authoritative, didactic pose as previous authors of both SF and non-SF Chinese literature.

Constructing the Individual in Chinese SF: "Conjugal Happiness"

Up to this point we have seen Chinese SF elements use the formal characteristics of 2RR and socialist realism to advance science, modernization, and nationalism ("Death Ray") and to deconstruct the Chinese revolution and socialist era ("Mirror Image") while still extolling science. There are also elements in Chinese SF that mirror the personal turn in Chinese literature of the late 1970s and 1980s. These works abandon the omniscient, authoritative, third-person or extremely potent first-person narrator and instead adopt a first-person narrator whose personal idiosyncrasies and flaws further the story's ultimately didactic or critical purpose. In Murphy and

[84] Wu and Murphy, 133.

Wu's collection, the story that provides an analogue to the personal style of didacticism is a 1981 novella "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus" by Wei Yahua (b. 1949).

Wei Yahua is a journalist and commentator who, particularly in the last several decades, has focused on producing non-fiction analysis of the Chinese stock market.[85] In 1981, he published a short story (in two parts) satirizing and commenting on several aspects of Chinese society at the time by inventing a future where Chinese men, with encouragement from the government and the Universal Robot Company, purchase robot wives to be totally subservient to their will. The story takes the form of a diary or confession of a robot purchaser, and in fact begins with a section titled "The End" where the narrator (initially unnamed and only known as "I") tells the reader that he has "resolved to divorce my robot wife!" with no explanation. Afterward, the story quickly transitions to an account of the unnamed narrator's process of purchasing his robot wife and early days of their marriage.

Unlike the authoritative narrator of "Death Ray," the narrator and main character of "Conjugal Happiness" is profoundly unreliable and, in fact, grows to be outright detestable to the reader while continuously protesting his good intentions and innocence. The discrepancy between the narrator's self-conception and the reader's impression creates profound skepticism between the reader and narrator which extends to other characters in the story, and generally undermines the didactic authority of the author in relation to the audience. This undermining imbues the story with a unspoken message that intertwines with some of the story's articulated messages (in Lili's last speech in particular) urging the reader to conduct critical examination of all aspects of life, including political power structures, technology, and interpersonal relations.

[85] "Wei Yahua," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, August 12, 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/wei_yahua ; Yahua Wei, "Wei Yahua (魏雅华) 中金博客_中金在线," Blog, accessed April 29, 2014, http://blog.cnfol.com/weiyahua.

While the narrator in "Death Ray" essentially acts as a glove for an omniscient, honest, and authoritative third person narrator, the main character in "Conjugal Happiness" is a deeply flawed individual whose view of his own actions strongly contradicts that of the reader. The main character of "Conjugal Happiness" is a young scientific researcher who lives in a future China where "population laws" allow only one child from each family to marry "a natural human being."[86] Therefore, the others are issued a robotic spouse from the Universal Robot Company in collaboration with the government. These robot spouses are totally subservient to their natural human spouses (robot husbands are not discussed—only wives). The narrator visits the "supermarket" where tens of thousands of attractive, subservient robots await his selection. The Universal Robot Company's salesperson cheerfully explains the different aspects of the robot wives to the narrator noting their beauty, obedience, availability in many different shapes, ethnic groups, and variations. The robots' lack of autonomy is extreme: they are programmed to be capable only of loving their 'husband' and to die along with their spouse. The salesman explains in a lengthy monologue to the narrator that includes the phrase, "You'll be her monarch, her god. She'll be ever obedient and ever faithful to you. Like your hands and feet, she'll always be at your disposal."[87]

The salesman explains that the robots are sterile by design not just because of technological barriers, but because this allows human women to tolerate their existence, otherwise "human girls would have felt too ashamed to show their faces."[88] In some ways, the human-robot relationship resembles the type of male-female relationships that were supposed to have been eliminated and overthrown by the Chinese revolution. Robots, like the supposed traditional ideal woman, are perfectly obedient, faithful, and, according to the salesman, will

[86] Wu and Murphy, 9.
[87] Ibid., 12.
[88] Ibid., 13.

"bravely defend their chastity from assault."[89] Under the conditions of technological sophistication, state intervention (population laws), and commercialism that supposedly have followed the Reform era, the social relationships that were supposed to have been eliminated by the Chinese revolution and socialist era are reemerging. This represents a subtle critique of the Reforms from a 'left' perspective, or at least a perspective suspicious of the economic side of the Reform era.

The narrator chooses his robot wife, named Lili, and her subservient nature brings about the downfall (personal and professional) of the narrator and causes his character to decay and become monstrous. Throughout most of this transformation, the narrator continues to believe himself to be in love with Lili, and his actions only seem monstrous to the reader, whose faith in the narrator's credibility consistently erodes as the narrative unfolds. Lili's unconditional obedience leads the narrator to mistreat her in gratuitous and sadistic ways—forcing her to imitate a cat for his amusement, lick dirty dishes clean, and act as his personal servant (cooking, cleaning, washing, shaving, and performing other tasks. The narrator also physically abuses and torments Lili for accidental mistakes and transgressions such as cutting the narrator while shaving him, and knocking over a glass. The narrator justifies his actions as tests of Lili's obedience that make him progressively more devoted to her, but in reality they provoke him to more extreme tests and abuse, and they ultimately erode the narrator's character when dealing with other people.

The narrator admits that, due to his marriage, "I myself changed a lot. I could no longer keep my temper…The more I saw Lili as lovely, the more I perceived others as disgusting. The nearer I drew to Lili, the farther I kept from others."[90] This trend leads him to quarrel with a

[89] Wu and Murphy, 14.
[90] Ibid., 18.

police officer, his boss at the research institute, and eventually leads to devastating professional disgrace. Specifically, the narrator demands that Lili keep serving him alcohol until, in an alcoholic blur, he burns priceless and irreplaceable research notes on a new, advanced power source. This defeat and disgrace jolts the narrator into realizing the fundamentally toxic nature of his 'relationship' (it if can be so called) with Lili and resolves to divorce her, recalling the story's initial lines. However, instead of true understanding, the narrator's 'realization' takes the form of *blaming* Lili, or rather Lili's programmed nature, for his disgrace, while, of course, it was also due to his own twisted and sadistic behavior. Therefore, even in the a moment of supposed clarity and understanding, the narrator shows his essentially flawed nature: he gives lip service to his own fault but fundamentally blames the disaster on Lili, who he has ceaselessly abused and humiliated.[91]

The story then takes a different turn, abandoning the journal/reflection format and beginning with a transcript of the divorce trial featuring the words of "Plaintiff" (the previous narrator), Lili's divorce lawyer ("Lawyer"), the Judge, and Lili herself. Much of this section is occupied by Lili's lawyer absolutely excoriating the Plaintiff in devastating and polemical terms, arguing that the disaster was in fact the Plaintiff's fault and Lili was entirely innocent. When the Lawyer veers into criticizing the Plaintiff's character, Lili interrupts him to tearfully apologize, and begs the Plaintiff to take her back, pleading, "Oh, it's all my fault, dear husband. I admit it. I'll mend my ways. …Please forgive me, punish me in whatever way you like. But don't desert me."[92] The Plaintiff/narrator relents, and withdraws his petition for divorce, returning to the previous pseudo-diary form of narration.

[91] Wu and Murphy, 25-26.
[92] Ibid., 29.

In the next section of the story (which is too long for a thorough examination here), the narrator receives a letter from an authoritative doctor/scientist (Cheng Zhe) who, because he witnessed the publicized divorce proceedings, urges the narrator to modify Lili's diet in order to overcome her programming binding her to him in quasi-slavery. The narrator, eager to break the bonds of his marriage, complies, adjusting the levels of "micro-elements" in Lili's diet to conduct and "experiment" and raise her level of cognition to free her mind.[93] Furthermore, he provides her with a library of tracts of literature, "such as Heidegger, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hegel, Feuerbach, Aristotle, Mendelssohn, and Moleschott" on politics, philosophy, metaphysics, natural science, and many other topics.[94]

The combination of science and (Western) learning provokes a dramatic revolution in Lili's consciousness, and she finally rises up against the narrator's tyranny. In the story's closing pages, she delivers a stirring speech arguing that "Eastern-style love," which her creation was supposed to satisfy, is linked to agricultural economies and is "feudalistic in a sense, although feudalism has long been rejected," while "Western-style love" is "modern" and "open-styled."[95] When asked to choose between them, Lili says she cannot choose between them but she does not love the narrator in any sense. The court grants Lili a divorce (over the objection of a representative of the Universal Robot Company), and the narrator is consoled by the scientist, who appears to deliver a didactic monologue about the nature of marriage, the progression of human thinking through different stages, and the importance of freedom and democracy in human life.

The most salient features of "Conjugal Happiness" in its relationship to the poles of modern Chinese cultural production are its limited didactic nature, narration, the role of science,

[93] Wu and Murphy, 32.
[94] Ibid., 33.
[95] Ibid., 47.

and its treatment of sexuality and romance. As in "Mirror Image," Wei's story coaches its didactic elements as dialogue or the internal thoughts of characters, instead of embarking on speeches by a third-person narrator as in "Death Ray." Unlike "Mirror Image," the didactic sections (couched as the salesperson's dialogue, Lawyer's speech, the scientists' letter, and Lili's courtroom remarks) are long and developed. However, even these sections present more individual perspectives; they represent contradictory viewpoints and involve elements of theoretical debate and competing theories of human relations and society. They are not in any sense a return to the Culture Revolution's over-prescribed 2RR didacticism; instead they serve to express a number of different, individual perspectives that evolve over time with dramatic character changes in the narrative, particularly those of the narrator and Lili. Even though the reader may sympathize more with some speakers than others, there are still alternatives and changes in the story's message, and the story does not make many explicit didactic recommendations. Instead, it articulates a number of critiques and explores scientific concepts and theoretical/political issues in a relatively open-ended way.

The unreliable nature of the individual narrator in "Conjugal Happiness" is particularly notable because it fosters skepticism and criticism of nearly all the characters' words and actions. In contrast to the authoritative, trustworthy first-person narrators of "Death Ray" and "Mysterious Wave," and the even more authoritative third-person omniscient narrators of Ye Yonglie's SF stories and "Mirror Image," there is a gaping discrepancy between the "Conjugal Happiness" narrator's self-conception and perceptions and the reality that the reader perceives through the narrative.

This skepticism extends to Lili for much of the story—her programming leads her to defend the narrator's monstrous actions. Even the generally-positive character of the Lawyer is

clearly interested in seducing Lili away from the narrator, therefore leaving him somewhat tainted by self-interest. Even the narrator's supposed moments of self-realization are in fact deeply flawed and misguided; he continues to blame Lili and her programming instead of himself for his misfortune. This tendency towards criticism erodes at the didactic pose at the heart of the didactic pole of Chinese cultural products and modern Chinese literature; if narrators can no longer be trusted, how can the reader derive the correct critical/didactic message from literature?

Many commentators, including Zhang Xudong, have noted the similarities between the unreliable narrators, stream-of-consciousness narration, and other techniques used by both SF and other fiction of the period with the modernist literature of the West. These techniques bring the question into the mind of the reader: if meaning is so closely tied to the pathologies of the individual and multiple individuals can contradict one another and dramatically evolve over the course of a single narrative, then how can the we derive credible 'meaning' from the story or indeed from our own existence?

In Zhang's 1997 book *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, he notes that the "intense borrowing of cultural and symbolic capital" in the 1980s was "instrumental" in "rapidly constituting a discursive space" for what he calls "Chinese modernism" and which this thesis identifies as the anti-didactic pole.[96] Zhang continues to describe how 1980s Chinese literature is uniquely conditioned by Chinese history and aimed at "heroically assaulting the official mainstream."[97] In the cultural sphere, the 'mainstream' of the 1980s was didacticism, and Chinese writers of the 1980s mounted an assault on it from many different directions. However, it is important to note that while works of the anti-didactic pole attacked didacticism, they still

[96] Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, 21.
[97] Ibid., 20.

retained a message and purpose to their work. Therefore, we can say that the anti-didacts were still *critical*—their works contained a message and critique of mainstream didacticism—but they did not overtly suggest or advocate a specific alternative.

Despite this instability of narration and the crisis of multiple characters' credibility there are still discernable messages and themes in "Conjugal Happiness." First, the basic nature of the human-robot relationship depicted in its first portion is undeniably toxic, regardless of the narrator's moral deficiencies. Lili's evolution from a subservient victim begging her husband to keep abusing her into an educated, independent, and outspoken figure is a positive development, and the story advocates human liberation and education (particularly reading many Western texts and engaging in theoretical debates). One of Lili's later statements before the court includes the phrase: "It is you [Cheng Zhe] who opened my eyes to the vastness of space and time, made me aware of the great world and helped establish the bonds of old ideology and set up new coordinates of space and time in my mind."[98] Therefore, although the story may criticize aspects of the Reform era (continued state intrusion into personal lives such as the 1979 one child policy, the rise of commercialism, and the reemergence of 'feudal' relationships in the context of marketization and technological change), it also validates some of its theoretical underpinnings (applying Western knowledge and criticism of traditional Chinese culture and increasing personal freedom).

Although Lili's trajectory over the course of the story is clearly intended to be perceived positively, and is propelled by both scientific experimentation and theoretical study of Western texts, the overarching message of the transformation is not entirely clear. Instead of promoting a specific scientific or theoretical perspective, Wei emphasizes the broad categories of science and skepticism, and, through these abstract categories, liberation. There is no economic dimension to

[98] Wu and Murphy, 46.

the message beyond a limited critique of commercialism. This kind of didacticism is remarkably different from its antecedents in 2RR and even "reform literature." Instead of promoting an economic/political/cultural ideology, it argues for the potency of science/technology and the importance of skepticism and liberation as abstract concepts. Furthermore, although it valorizes the emancipation of the individual (falling in line with Reform literature, which remained didactic), it also presents a panoply of viewpoints, some of which are manifestly incorrect and immoral. This complexity detracts from a straightforward articulation of Reform ideology, and leads to a mixed result.

"Boundless Love:" SF's Leap into the Avant-Garde

The story in Murphy and Wu's collection that shows the greatest influence of avant-garde anti-didacticism is its final and most contemporary (to the book's publishing) story, "Boundless Love," (1987) by Jiang Yunsheng (b. 1944). Jiang is an author, translator, and long-time professor of literature who graduated from Fudan University in 1967 and taught Chinese literature at a number of Chinese universities.[99] Jiang's story is notable for its treatment of romance and sexuality, a topic not widely discussed in Chinese SF up until this point.

In didactic SF, romance is alluded to as a tangential plotline. For example in Wang Xiaoda's extremely didactic 1979 story "The Mysterious Wave," the heroic narrator is smitten by the beautiful (described in completely non-sexual terms) daughter of a scientist. Once the main action has concluded and he returns home, he admits to the reader that he has begun to "correspond" with her via letter, but does not describe the content of his letters or feelings further because "these are personal matters."[100] In "Conjugal Happiness," sex between the narrator and his subservient robot wife Lili is only indirectly alluded to in innuendo from the robot salesman,

[99] "Jiang Yunsheng," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction,* August 11, 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/jiang_yunsheng.
[100] Wu and Murphy, 95.

frequent discussion of the robot's sensual beauty, and euphemism such as the narrator saying, "I sank into degradation in my conjugal happiness."[101] There are no explicit depictions or descriptions of how the completely unequal power relationship between the narrator and Lili manifests itself in their sexual lives. In following years and new SF stories, this convention would be broken and romance and sexuality became part of narrative fabric.

The 1983 "Anti-Spiritual Pollution" campaign severely hampered the development of Chinese SF. After an October 1983 speech by Deng Xiaoping attacking these tendencies in popular culture and intellectual discourse, "leftist" and conservative Party and state figures criticized intellectuals and a few Party elites perceived to be supportive of these ideas.[102] Although the campaign was short-lived and wide-ranging, some of its proponents singled out SF for particular scrutiny and criticism. Zheng Wenguang, who had by this time suffered a stroke, was summoned in person to a session where he was criticized by government officials. Ye Yonglie was publicly attacked for "propagating quack science" along with Tong Enzheng and others.[103] This rhetorical attack effectively ended the publishing careers of many of the older generation of SF writers. *Science Fiction World*, a Chengdu-based, government-funded literary journal and publisher founded in 1978 and the main outlet for China's SF in the period, was cut off from government support in 1984. However, the journal continued as a commercial entity and, after 1991, began to play a crucial role in Chinese SF. The short-lived Spiritual Pollution campaign dealt a clear blow to Chinese SF, but it certainly did not succeed in eradicating the genre or stemming the tide of the shift towards the anti-didactic pole.

[101] Wu and Murphy, 19.
[102] Shu-Shin Wang, "The Rise and Fall of the Campaign against Spiritual Pollution in the People's Republic of China," *Asian Affairs* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 47–62, 48-51.
[103] Mikael Huss, "Hesitant Journey to the West: SF's Changing Fortunes in Mainland China," *Science Fiction Studies* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 92–104, doi:10.2307/4240850.

This story's narration immediately places it outside either the "Death Ray" category or even the moderated, humanistic "Mirror Image." It is written in third-person stream of consciousness style slowly reveals scraps of information about the narrator, through whose perspective we witness the entire narrative. The beginning paragraph skips across time, fleeing from the current time to reminisce briefly about the narrator's childhood, passingly mentions his career in "space transportation" without giving any more details.[104] Without reproducing long passages, it is difficult to convey the scattered style of presentation and skipping between time periods and subjects. However, within a few pages, the narrative skips between slowly introducing information about aspects of the yet-unnamed narrator's career, sexual attraction to a (possibly alien) woman named Shema, continued feelings for his faithful wife Mai, and intense sorrow at the news of her death.

In "Boundless Love," a space transporter who is attracted to a possibly extraterrestrial woman named Shema with golden skin finds out that his wife, Mai, has died unexpectedly on Earth. We learn the narrator's name only when his employer informs him of Mai's death—Wang Kang. An imagined stream-of-consciousness dialogue between Wang Kang and his now-dead wife ensues where she tells him that she will be cloned and therefore can return to him, albeit without memories of their love. The clone version of Mai and Wang Kang reunite, but Mai's lack of memory tortures Wang Kang. Eventually, they fall back in love in a scene that includes boating on a lake and reciting a poem by Song Dynasty poet Li Qingzhao (1084-1151). When Wang Kang and his reincarnated wife are tasked with delivering seedlings of "Chinese plum and mottled bamboo"[105] to a far-off space outpost and their craft is damaged to the point that it can

[104] Wu and Murphy, 157.
[105] Ibid., 164.

only support one person for the trip, Mai sacrifices herself though suicide, although Wang Kang tries to stop her.

While certainly not reaching the subversive and explicit level of Yu Hua and Ge Fei's short fiction, not to mention their violence, portrayal of sexuality, and distortions of other conventions such as linear storytelling, "Boundless Love" goes the furthest of all the stories in Murphy and Wu's anthology in doing so. In previously-examined SF stories, even when male-female romantic/sexual relationships are discussed (no other kind of relationships are mentioned), they are couched in buttoned-down, asexual terms. Explicit mention of sexuality in cultural products was suppressed in traditional culture and the socialist era (although for much different reasons). Wang Kang's daydreams that feature a golden-skinned perhaps-alien Shema dancing while clad in revealing "G-string" underwear and discussion of the sexual "organ" behind the G-String in would be extremely out of place in the previous didactic type of SF.[106]

Likewise, "Boundless Love" employs a stream of consciousness style of third-person narration focused on the interior world of the main character (Wang Kang) that disjointedly skips from one topic to another. It rapidly shifts between thoughts and topics such as Mai's good qualities and steady love, details of the narrator's profession and upbringing, and fantasizing about Shema. These literary techniques show a much more interior view of the narrator than in any previous story, depicting his vacillations, fantasies, and emotional turbulence. This interior view does not establish a distinctive personality for the narrator; instead, it actually obliterates the possibility of a coherent identity and personality. Wang Kang's disjointed, shifting mind and rapidly changing feelings make his character unstable to the point of collapse. Although the narration is technically undertaken from a third-person perspective, it occasionally dives into the narrator's head and gives a direct image and sensory experience of loss and confusion. For

[106] Wu and Murphy, 158.

instance, upon learning of his wife's death, Wang Kang hallucinates a conversation with her spirit:

> *I'm going first, Kang.* Where are you going? *To meet you!* Am I not home now*? I'm going first*. No, you won't go first, Mai. *Why?* You're too timid to go to hell alone. *You're disgusting, Kang!* Tell me the truth, Mai. Do you love me?..[107]

This continues for some time, revealing scraps of information about Wang Kang and Mai's troubled and somewhat contradictory relationship. These interludes are not however completely disorienting and devoid of didactic or scientific-instructional materials. The evolving relationship between Wang Kang and the clone version of Mai that replaces his dead wife explores the nature of sexuality and romance by examining ingredients for true love. When a woman is not able to bear children, can sex and love have the same significance as before? Because the clone Mai is barren, Wang Kang initially rejects her as unviable and remarks internally, "I just want a baby delivered from a womb."[108] Mai apparently shares this apprehension, or at least Wang Kang thinks she does, saying "[clone Mai] felt inferior and pained because she was unable to reproduce…."[109] Wang Kang overcomes this obstacle later in the narrative, saying, "I, unlike my ancestors, did not take reproduction as the sole justified reason for sex" and instead adopts the original Mai's dictum that sex is a "kind of materialization of emotional communication."[110] This evolution parallels and becomes an allegory for the social trend in China towards acceptance of the discussion of sexuality and legitimacy of sexuality as part of marriage, as opposed to only the means of reproduction.

[107] Wu and Murphy, 159.
[108] Ibid., 160.
[109] Ibid., 163.
[110] Ibid., 159.

At first, Wang Kang rejects the clone, referring to her internally as "it" and remarking, "I need a Mai with a navel," whereas the clone lacks one.[111] The scene shifts to Wang Kang waking up in the middle of the night to a quietly sobbing clone Mai and struggles to summon the emotional connection necessary to comfort her. The two depart on a second honeymoon to their shared childhood home in order to rekindle their romance, which the amnesiac clone Mai instinctively feels for him despite his initial inability to return her love. Re-enacting moments from their first honeymoon—making love, boating on a lake, reciting poetry, viewing nature—succeed in somewhat reawakening a version of their previous relationship. However, moments that remind the couple of Mai's lack of memories and discontinuity with their original relationship dampen their mood and render both of them "embarrassed."[112] While the two apparently form a degree of love that enables the final dramatic scene where each tries to sacrifice themselves for the other, However, Wang Kang's continued sexual daydreams about Shema and lingering doubts about his love for the clone version of Mai undermine the certainty of this didactic message.

Although violent events occur in other SF short stories, and some of the early didactic stories concern overtly military and violent themes, the quality and portrayal of violence, first in the brief passage describing the Cultural Revolution in "Mirror Image" and then in Mai's death scene in "Boundless Love" is much different. In "Death Ray," violence is part of the heroic arc of the story. Dr. Matthew dies to prevent his research from being weaponized, and the resulting explosion of the island that destroys his equipment and kills the nefarious Russians is described in bloodless terms from a distance. In "Mysterious Wave," where the plot features a violent kidnapping, the hijacking spy points a pistol at the main characters and banters with them before

[111] Wu and Murphy, 160.
[112] Ibid., 162.

being struck unconscious, and not killed. All of this is described in relatively non-threatening, bloodless terms.

In the latter two stories, violence, blood, weapons, and death are described in matter-of-fact terms that evoke pathos, pity, and sadness. In "Boundless Love" the clone version of Mai (who the narrator has once again fallen in love with) points a pistol at her own head, preparing to kill herself and save Wang Kang. His last-ditch effort to tackle her and violently "smash her fingers" to retrieve the gun is foiled when she unexpectedly swallows poison. Afterward, her "eyes rolled upwards" and she dies professing her love for Wang Kang.[113] While certainly not in the same league as the brutal rape and murder of Apricot, and then unjust execution of her lover in Ge Fei's "Remembering Mr. Wu You," this scene of violence between lovers is designed to evoke emotion and tragedy, not simply to advance an exciting adventure story.

Examining the works of Chinese SF published and translated into English by Patrick Murphy and Wu Dingbo in 1989 shows how Chinese SF mirrored the larger literary trend from the legacy of early twentieth century and socialist era didacticism towards the anti-didactic pole. This motion enlists and is expressed by changes in their narration, purpose, and their treatment of subjects such as violence and romance/sexuality. While the anti-didactic pole rejected and sought to annihilate the historical legacy and discourse of the didactic pole and the socialist era in general, its manifestation in Chinese SF retained a clear critical edge, which is itself a form of didacticism. This demonstrates both the inherently didactic nature of SF, and the link between didacticism and SF in the Chinese context. Unlike other forms of cultural production, Chinese SF was born wholly in the era of the didactic pole's emergence, and its evolution over the course of the 1980s demonstrates the enduring nature of Chinese SF's didactic edge.

[113] Wu and Murphy, 164.

Furthermore, the SF of this era also retained a degree of its specific mission first articulated by Liang Qichao and Lu Xun and later adopted to a degree in the socialist era: popularizing science and technology. Both because of SF's roots and long history of science popularization, this aspect of Chinese SF remained in the shift from didacticism to the anti-didactic throughout the 1980s. The hopeful period of the early Reforms, when the Chinese people and state agreed to pursue the "Four Modernizations" in order to renovate, enrich, and strengthen the nation, but pursued a de-politicized, anti-didactic cultural sphere, soon gave way to a much different economic, social, and cultural landscape.

Part of this transition was due to China's late-1980s economic problems (inflation being primary among them), and the political upheaval leading up to and following the June 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident. In its aftermath, the United States led many Western nations in boycotting China, further creating economic problems, and many Chinese political leaders from the "leftist" or conservative camp staged a brief resurgence and erected barriers to further marketization and globalization in China. However, this period proved illusory in the face of the unfolding collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s and the dramatic re-orientation of the global order towards a capitalist, and culturally, militarily, and economically dominant United States. In response to these developments, Deng Xiaoping led the Chinese Party/state apparatus to dramatically embrace liberalization, marketization, and globalization after his 1992 "Southern Tour" and transfer of power to Jiang Zemin (b. 1926) and other leaders dedicated to bringing the market to China. The next section will explore the effects of this marketization and globalization on China's cultural sphere since 1992, and the interactions between this wave of change and Chinese SF.

THE POSTSOCIALIST POLE

While the 1989 Tiananmen Incident and the ensuing flight of some prominent intellectuals from China certainly had a large number of material and cultural effects, many of the profound changes to China have come instead from the rapid marketization, globalization, and economic growth in China since the state's 1992 decision to promote the market, open to foreign investment, and integrate into the Western-dominated global system as a post-revolutionary state. This decision was undertaken in the context of the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union's collapse and the economic, ideological, and military dominance of the United States as the leader of a West united under the Washington Consensus of free-market capitalism. China's entrance into the global capitalist economy both as a producer and a consumer of global goods provides a backdrop to cultural production in this era, and the popularity of Western material and cultural products transformed many previous aspects of Chinese life.

The groundwork for China's 1992 leap into marketization had been laid in the previous decade. In a 2013 study of state ideology and policy during the 1980s, Kalpana Misra writes of China's marketization and internationalization in the 1980s,"Within a decade…[China] had been transformed by the emergence of special economic zones, rural markets, private enterprises, stock exchanges, and Sino-foreign joint ventures."[114] "Consumerism and profit making" were legitimized in both policy and cultural discourse during the 1980s, but this did not become the organizing principle of society until after 1992.[115] Although the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident and its international fallout temporarily empowered anti-Reform elements in the state leadership, by the 1992 14th Party Congress, it became clear that "drastic reversal of reforms [were] no longer considered a desirable or feasible option even among so-called hard-liners within the

[114] Kalpana Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng's China* (Routledge, 2013), 1.
[115] Ibid.

[Party] leadership."[116] These policies provided a foundation for dramatic moves after 1992 that included massive expansions of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) where joint foreign-Chinese ventures produced goods for export, a huge influx in foreign cultural products, predominantly from the West, Japan, and Korea, and the introduction of the market into aspects of modern Chinese cultural production.

After 1992, cultural production shifted from being the purview of political or cultural elites pursuing their own projects and visions for an audience, and towards professional writers and publishing houses seeking profits in the Chinese and international markets for cultural products. The addition of material incentives and disincentives into the cultural sphere has had massive effects on cultural production in China. As a result of these material changes, Chinese cultural products have begun exhibiting characteristics linked by Frederic Jameson to the rise of a globalized late capitalism in the late 20th century that are known as postmodernism.

In order to localize and properly historicize this concept in Chinese literature, and sidestep the voluminous and deeply contentious debate over the 'Chinese postmodern,' which peaked in the early 2000s, I have chosen to name the third pole of modern Chinese cultural production of the last century the 'postsocialist.' This reflects the fact that the dominant narrative that the Chinese people and state lost faith in and began to simultaneously unravel, annihilate, and become nostalgic for was not Western-style high modernism but rather Chinese socialism. Because Chinese socialism has its own distinctive cultural meaning and context, it makes sense to make this semantic and theoretical distinction.

As in the West and many other countries, a marketized popular culture has arisen in China in the last two decades. This market is driven by profit motives and imbued with the possibility of wealth and fame for artists and writers that was previously unthinkable and

[116] Misra, 2.

impossible in China. Instead of a multitude of small journals and semi-professional authors as in the 1980s, Chinese SF landscape is dominated by one publication, *Science Fiction World*, with a large paying readership, and several superstar professional authors whose novels, novellas, and short stories dominate the market, including Liu Cixin and Han Song (b. 1965).

At the same time that amassing wealth and the market became important mechanisms of promulgation and motivations for Chinese cultural producers, there has been a dramatic increase in the presence and consumption of Western cultural (and material) products in China. Even in the 1980s, Western material products such as televisions and Western-style clothing were still relatively rare and primarily the realm of the well-connected. Since 1992, China has seen an explosion in the availability of Western products among a broad spectrum of Chinese society, and indeed has become both one of the most dynamic and advanced products for new products such as automobiles, smart-phones, and luxury goods, and China has become central to the globalized production chain of many of the world's goods, including high technology items.

In many ways, the postsocialist pole incorporated many elements of the anti-didactic pole. While nostalgia and public homage to aspects of the socialist era of policy, economic organization, and culture have arisen in some circles, there have been no serious efforts to revive truly socialist policies or the discourse and culture of mass mobilization and cultural control of the 1949-1976 era. As Zhang Xudong puts it in an analysis of the 1990s in China,

> While paying lip service to the socialist legacies of [the socialist era] the government is busy disengaging from society and the everyday life it inherited from Mao's China. … [It] is already the consensus of among the ruling technocratic elite that the socialist (let alone Maoist) moral-ideological framework will have to be dismantled …[to introduce the] free market, efficiency, competitiveness, and so on…[117]

[117] Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2008), 30.

Today, while the Chinese government exercises more direct control over its media and cultural sphere than many Western countries, the primary driver of Chinese literary and cultural production is the commercial market. A 2011 report found that China's publishing entities earned total revenues of more than $230 billion, more than $18 billion in profit, and digital publishing revenue grew over 30% year over year in 2011.[118] While China's print publishing continues to grow in absolute size, digital products have displaced its primary position as a revenue source in China's media industry:

> In the print and digital media sectors, two years of over thirty-percent growth propelled digital publishing and media (which includes digital versions of print media, cell phone media, advertising, streaming audio and games) into the first-place position in terms of revenue, value added and net profit.[119]

While this represents a success for the marketization and commercialization of the Chinese cultural sphere, it does not capture the qualitative changes in China's cultural production over the last several decades. Book publishing in general has become a platform for mass-market Chinese cultural products and popular non-Chinese literature such as *Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings*, Japanese manga and anime, and South Korean television dramas. This change can be conceptualized as the market's multidimensional inundation of the Chinese cultural sphere.

The Multidimensional Postsocialist Wave

The effects of the postsocialist pole constituted by the market can be pictured as a multi-dimensional wave that has washed away and eroded the influence of both previous poles of modern Chinese cultural production. The different dimensions of this wave include video mediums displacing literature from its privileged position as a medium for political messages,

[118] *The Chinese Publishing Industry 2011 Overview* (Paper Republic, April 18, 2013), http://media.paper-republic.org/files/13/04/ChinaPublishing2011.pdf, 2.
[119] Ibid.

new forms of commercialized Chinese cultural products competing with older forms, and foreign cultural products competing with those of Chinese origin.

Privatization and marketization has also meant that the primary driver for publishing houses, magazines, and indeed, writers and artists themselves has become profit and popularity in the market. This has had a number of effects, the first being a dramatic reduction and near elimination of the vestiges of not just the didactic pole's influence, but a reduction of the anti-didactic pole's emphasis on individual experience and empowerment. Zhang Xudong explains this change by writing, "For a more mature postrevolutionary society, for the era of the individual lifestyle preferred by the market, this subjectivity [of Misty Poetry and other 1980s literary movements such as root-seeking and educated youth literature] became a liability."[120] In other words, articulations of personal belief and experience in 'misty poetry,' 'educated youth literature,' 'scar literature,' and other literary forms became unpalatable and unmarketable.

Forms that did not appeal to the market were unlikely to survive very long in an era of cultural production driven by profit. The formal and structural experimentation and horrific violence of avant-garde anti-didacticism likewise became liabilities in a cultural market driven by the tastes and preferences of more than one billion Chinese consumers instead of a relatively small intelligentsia. In general, unappealing and difficult forms in both literature and visual mediums have been marginalized and attenuated by market forces in the past two decades.

For example, many writers who began their careers in the avant-garde, including Ge Fei and Yu Hua, turned their subsequent writing careers to more typical, linear storytelling, and narratives that more easily met the tastes and preferences of the market. In the same vein, commentators have noted a similar shift in the work of the 'Fifth Generation' of Chinese filmmakers. These filmmakers emerged from the Cultural Revolution making experimental films

[120] Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, 135.

that questioned and denied the significance of the Chinese revolution and socialist era.[121] Over time, members of this small group including Zhang Yimou (b. 1951) embraced more flashy, simplified, and visually-palatable styles and gained national and international acclaim. Their contemporaries who did not embrace more palatable styles and approaches fell back into obscurity, or at least into a smaller niche in 'art house' films that draw limited critical acclaim but do not gain the same popularity or wide audience. The sometimes-labeled "Sixth Generation" of Chinese film makers are a latter-day manifestation of this trend, and their films do not see wide circulation beyond small fan circles and a niche international audience.[122]

Finally, since the early 1990s, China has been inundated with cultural products from foreign countries that have embedded themselves in the daily lives of the vast majority of people in way previously unknown in Chinese history. The presence of non-Chinese cultural products in China is of course not new; both the didactic and anti-didactic poles of cultural production were heavily influenced by translations and experience of non-Chinese texts. However, beginning in the early 1990s, Western (especially Japanese and Korean) cultural products became ubiquitous in China at all levels of society. The rise of foreign cultural products alongside domestic Chinese cultural products and popularity of American, Japanese, Hong Kong, and Korean television shows and films demonstrates this trend. In recent years, many of these have become widely available at little or no cost online, further cementing their hegemonic position as part of China's cultural mainstream.

In many ways, postsocialism represents the realization of the goal of China's anti-didactic avant-garde. These writers sought to dismantle the very discourse of socialism, which

[121] Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen, *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 145-148.
[122] Ye Tan and Yimou Zhang, "From the Fifth to the Sixth Generation: An Interview with Zhang Yimou," *Film Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (December 1, 1999): 2–13, doi:10.2307/1213716.

provided the basis for Chinese modernity in the 20th century. This discourse consisted of the Chinese revolution, the collectivity of the Chinese people, the individual who could be empowered or disempowered, and a reasoned use of violence to pursue revolutionary and politically-correct ends. The Chinese avant-garde of the mid- and late-1980s attacked and questioned the possibility and legitimacy of all of these. After 1992, the multidimensional wave of the market inundated China's cultural sphere, and finally destroyed the legitimacy and possibility of the didactic pole, and, with it, the anti-didactic reaction. Therefore, the postsocialist pole generally sidesteps both the tendency to write for a national subject or to instruct the reader in correct morality or politics, as well as assertions of the individual or assaults on the discourse of the Chinese didactic tradition. Instead, it offers marketized entertainment leavened with characteristics shared with postmodernism as the product of the market.

Yang Xiaobin terms the postsocialist the "Post-Mao-Deng" and writes of the event that it, "shattered subjective integrity in every way, for the Maoist omnipotence of human power, which promised a prosperous future, met with a disastrous outcome that invalidated its original conception.[and]…deprived the nation of its faith in the historical truth and the ethical good.[123] Another scholar, Roderick MacFarquhar, argues that, "The Cultural Revolution was so great a disaster that it provoked an even more profound cultural revolution, precisely the one that Mao intended to forestall."[124] By this, MacFarquhar suggests that the Cultural Revolution put an end to the formal pursuit of socialism in China, and ushered in the era of adopting salient characteristics of capitalism such as private enterprise, investment, and marketization. It did this not by institution a totally new government or political model—the Party remained in power

[123] Yang, *The Chinese Postmodern*, 230.
[124] Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

under a new leader—but rather because it delegitimized socialism in the eyes of the Chinese people and drove them to accept the alternative paradigm of Deng's Reforms when it came.

The end of the Cultural Revolution did not mark the end of utopian thinking or the pursuit of historical truth in China. Many have noted the Reform era's promises of utopian change through technology, economic growth, Western learning, and individuality. However, the late 1980s turn to the avant-garde began a slide towards the questioning the individual alongside the revolution and other grand historical narratives. Initially begun as part of the anti-didactic attack in the revolution, this trend saw its full fruition in the postsocialist pole of cultural production. Works of the postsocialist pole sidestep serious discussion of the individual in relation to society, as the market's drive for palatable commodities pulls all cultural products towards entertainment and bland narratives. Postsocialist cultural products dredge up images and texts from history and the present and de-contextualizes them in a way designed to evoke interest without seriously engaging in either historical or political/ideological argument.

It is clear that questioning the possibility, desirability, and existence of the Reform era's "progress" has become more and more common in China, even as aspects of the Reform such as the market, privatization of industry, pursuit of science and technology, and openness to other cultures in terms of study, have taken hold. As China's economy has grown, and so have social problems such as income inequality, environmental degradation, unemployment, and cultural change dividing generations and social groups, many have noted an absence of a single organizing principle or ideology holding Chinese society together except that of profit-seeking through the market.

Attributes of the Postsocialist Pole's Works

Like postmodernism, postsocialism defies easy description. The theoretical examination of postmodern cultural products by Frederic Jameson, as well as more specific theories pertaining to Chinese postsocialist culture by Yang Xiaobin, Zhang Xudong, and others can help unravel and select significant threads and aspects of postsocialist cultural products. Jameson's theories derive particular salience from their direct confrontation of the market's effects on cultural production and literature, but also because of his specific focus on and immense influence on the study of Chinese culture inside and outside China. Perhaps because of his Marxist orientation, Jameson was one of the first American contemporary literary theorists to be translated into Chinese and invited to visit and lecture in China in the mid-1980s.[125]

Jameson describes postmodern (postsocialist in the Chinese context) culture as the culture of globalized market capitalism. Jameson's conception of the postmodern transcends literature and art and extends to architecture, video mediums, and many other trends in language and culture in general. Jameson writes in his 1991 book *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* that "esthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production" and cultural products (as aesthetic goods) are now subject to the same market forces governing other goods. There are several key attributes of this relationship that illustrate how postsocialist culture contributes to the continued institution of the market in China and continues the process of de-revolutionizing Chinese culture that are relevant to observed changes in Chinese SF since the early 1990s.

Postsocialist culture mines Chinese history for styles of dress, historical situations, imagery, and characters to be resurrected, re-hashed, stylized, and combined, although without making any historical arguments or judgments. This resembles what Frederic Jameson called the

[125] Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*, 139-41.

rise of "pastiche" and the death of "parody."[126] For Jameson, parody has a strong satirical element, and therefore retains the strong capacity to make critical claims about the objects of parody. On the other hand, pastiche represents merely an empty recollection and exploitation of past fashions, idioms, languages, and imagery for entertainment without any coherent message or agenda.[127] By ranging throughout time, Chinese postsocialist cultural products commoditize Chinese history and package it for mass consumption by transforming it into a palatable, attractive product nearly bereft of substantial political or economic *critiques*, not to mention didactic programs. This strips postsocialist culture of much of its power to make strong and powerful claims about Chinese history, and, by extension, the present and future.

These characteristics are not politically driven or manufactured by the Party-state apparatus (although the government plays a significant role in China's cultural sphere and places limits on political expressions). Instead, these trends have become popularized by the market's demand for them. Members of the Chinese population with buying power and connectedness to media, the Internet, and other cultural products power the engine of China's postsocialist mining of history, and conversion of Chinese history into commodities.

To take up one example of this postsocialist commodification, books evoking Mao Zedong (memoirs of his bodyguards, etc.) became bestsellers in the 1990s, and historic sites along the route of the Long March have been converted into for-profit tourist destinations.[128] Commercialized nostalgia for the socialist past is one form of postsocialist historical commodification; instead of pursuing political change or even directly evoking discontent with

[126] Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (Verso, 1998), 5.
[127] Jameson writes, "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic," (Jameson 1998, 5).
[128] Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*, 146.

China's current reality, Mao 'nostalgia' (among many born after Mao's death) does not articulate a message with potential for action. Instead of calling for change in the moment or future, it evokes a hopeless pursuit of an imagined past. This nostalgia extends beyond literature into photographs, clothing, and music, and includes many restaurants, cafes, and tourist destinations near places of historical significance during the socialist period.[129] This type of nostalgia takes on an extremely ironic element; its constituent parts exist within the market economy and actually attempt to turn a profit for privatized gains, the very antithesis of the political/cultural/economic edifice that their visits purportedly feel nostalgia for.

Instead of the didactic pole's articulation of a course of action, ideological framework, and specific cultural ideology, or the anti-didactic pole's specific deconstruction of the Chinese revolution and Mao Zedong Thought and embrace of critiques of the individual and notions of history, the postsocialist pole of cultural production does not generally deal direct blows to empirical reality. Even when works of the postsocialist pole *intend* to lambaste or criticize China's (or the world's) empirical order, they are pulled towards doing so obliquely instead of directly, invoking pastiche and reference instead of parody or representation, and the intense crowding of possible critiques and paucity of remedies for these deficiencies leads to an incoherent message. This incoherence is sometimes intentional and represents the major message of postsocialist works; today's world lacks legitimate grand history and grand remedies. Dystopia has replaced utopia.

Of course, this absence of critical potential tends to reinforce the *status quo*, which in China's case, means the Party/state apparatus and integration with a global market economy coupled with limited privatization, wealth accumulation, and state-managed economic

[129] "Businesses Feed off Growing Nostalgia for Mao Zedong," *South China Morning Post*, December 22, 2013, http://www.scmp.com/business/china-business/article/1387890/businesses-feed-growing-nostalgia-mao-zedong.

development. Zhang Xudong, as a critic of the Chinese state and current political, economic, and cultural discourse and reality from somewhat of a 'left' perspective, points out this aspect of Chinese cultural products since the early 1990s in a number of his recent works, including the 2008 book *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*. In this volume, Zhang writes of Mo Yan (b. 1955), who began his literary career as a pioneer of the "root seeking" anti-didactic literature, and a key figure in the general transition from the anti-didactic to the postsocialist pole. Mo Yan's 1992 book *Republic of Wine* exemplifies the postsocialist pole's 'pull' on China's cultural production, and, particularly on Chinese literature. Zhang argues,

> [Mo Yan's] evasiveness and aloofness on the sociopolitical level are only matched by his intensity, radicality, and boldness at the formal and allegorical level…[Mo Yan's writings are], for an age without sociohistorical framing and moral-political constitution, a privileged if not destined symbolic dwelling for all the eradicated, homeless, and roaming experiences, images, memories, and specters in the Chinese 1990s.[130]

The constraints of this thesis do not permit a full examination of Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*, but Zhang argues that the book subverts and deconstructs a traditional detective story (a staple in Chinese as well as Western literature), and delivers a bewildering, horrifying, and, eventually, surreal narrative of corruption and cannibalism. Interspersed between this 'main' narrative is a series of correspondences between a fictional version of the real author, Mo Yan, and a fictional aspiring writer, Li Yidou. Li's stories range from pastiche/parody of different kinds of Chinese cultural production, ranging from Lu Xun's short fiction to socialist era revolutionary rhetoric, to works of the 1980s avant-garde.[131] Li's stories help to advance and enrich the main narrative (Li is supposedly a resident of the region where the investigation is taking place, and his stories and correspondence contain narrative information). However, these stories blind and overwhelm the reader with the combination and recollection of cultural artifacts,

[130] Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*, 241.
[131] Ibid., 243-249.

experiences, and historical feelings without making a coherent argument about their validity or even their proper context.

Postsocialist cultural products, and, as this thesis will demonstrate, postsocialist Chinese SF, deal glancing blows to both history and current empirical realities in China and the world. In conditions of marketization, the pressure to draw more customers, viewers, and readers shapes postsocialist cultural products. Collective loss of faith in grand history and skepticism towards the individual (inherited from the anti-didactic avant-garde) makes either didactic instruction or anti-didactic critique of the revolution and promotion of the individual impossible. Instead, the postsocialist creates images that evoke the past, create irony, elevate pastiche, and commoditize even the contradictions within contemporary society (as well as the past) to gain audience and generate profit.

SF after 1992: Science Fiction World

In some ways, the history of SF in China after 1992 is the history of *Science Fiction World* (SFW) magazine, or *Kehuan Shijie*. Founded in Chengdu in 1979 under the name *Science Literature* as a government-funded literary journal and publisher, SFW was cut off from government support in 1984.[132] The journal continued as an independent commercial entity, often publishing action, adventure, and mystery stories in addition to SF throughout the 1980s to continue publication. In 1991, the magazine began to regain popularity and changed its name to *Science Fiction World* to refocus on SF. Although the magazine's commercial fortunes have changed over time, by the end of the 1990s, it boasted close to 500,000 paying subscribers, or the largest circulation for a SF publication in the world.[133] This number has been eroded since 2000

[132] "China's Science Fiction World," accessed April 11, 2014, http://www.concatenation.org/articles/science_fiction_world_2010.html.
[133] "Kehuan Shijie," *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, October 1, 2012, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/kehuan_shijie.

to roughly 130,000 as of 2010 by increasing Internet use and management issues, but SFW remains the most significant player in China's SF publishing (online and in print) industry.[134]

From the 1990s to today, SFW has released SF short stories in its magazine and published full length books, including many translations of Western SF classics and recent novels, and has hosted several large conferences (notably in 1997 and 2007) for Chinese and Western SF writers, fans, and academics interested in the subject. SFW continues to publish works of Western, Japanese, and global SF in translation, and brings noted SF authors to China for its events and conferences. With the increased adoption of the Internet in China and increasing piracy and direct publication of stories online, coupled with administrative controversies within the organization, this number has fallen.[135] The careers of many of China's postsocialist Chinese SF writers such as Wang Jingkang (b. 1948), Han Song, and Liu Cixin have been intimately tied to SFW's rise and, during a leadership crisis at the company in 2010, many of these writers signed a petition voicing their concern and lack of confidence in the organization's leader, who had been appointed by Sichuan province's Party-controlled organization of scientists.[136]

A wider examination of Chinese SF of the past twenty years would spend more time discussion Han Song, Wang Jingkang, and other younger, contemporary Chinese SF writers such as Fei Dao. Writing in 2005, Jeffrey C. Kinkley examined four Chinese SF novels of the early 1990s, including in a chapter entitled, "Modernity and Apocalypse in Chinese Novels from the End of the Twentieth Century." Kinkley finds that the four novels shared several attributes,

[134] Ibid.
[135] The appointment of an organization's leader by local political authorities in commonplace in China, and does not constitute a notable stake takeover or co-option; the concerns voiced by editors and writers in the President's leadership had to do with his managerial ability and relationship with staff. ("Controversial Chief of Sci-Fi Magazine Suspended" 2010)
[136] Ibid.

including "incongruity," "system collapse [that] is conceived both in ancient terms…and in patently modern ones," and dark visions of Chinese society bedeviled by moral and physical decay.[137] In a similar vein, Han Song's major work, the 2012 novel (originally published in 2000) *Huoxing zhaoyao Meiguo* or 'Red Star Over America' invents an incongruous, reversed future where China dominates the world as a superpower as America enters a steep economic and political decline, taking on many qualities of 19th century China, including a policy of attempted isolation from the world.[138] These shared qualities lead me to treat Liu Cixin as representative enough to serve as a major topic for examination and discussion in upcoming sections.

[137] Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Modernity and Apocalypse in Chinese Novels from the End of the Twentieth Century," in *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*, ed. Charles A. Laughlin, 1st ed (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 101–20, 102.
[138] Liyuan Jia, "Gloomy China: China's Image in Han Song's Science Fiction," trans. Joel Martinsen, *Science Fiction Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 103–15, doi:10.5621/sciefictstud.40.1.0103, 7-9.

LIU CIXIN AND POSTOCIALIST CHINESE SF

Born in 1963 in Shanxi province, Liu Cixin trained and continues to work as an engineer at a power plant near his home in Taiyuan. In an interview with *Science Fiction Studies* in 2013, Liu wrote that his inspiration for writing SF came from reading the novel *2001: A Space Odyssey* by English SF author Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008) as a young adult.[139] Liu began his writing career by submitting stories to magazines, including SFW, and gained a following in the late 1990s. Due to the popularity of Liu's writings, his long career, the availability of some of his works translated into English, and the thematic similarities drawn by critics between him and other major Chinese SF writers, this thesis will examine his work and treat it as representative of Chinese SF of the past two decades.

The first and most salient characteristic of Liu Cixin's writing is the omnipresence of science in his stories. This scientific presence manifests itself through characters (researchers, geologists, astronauts, and other scientific figures), plot points, physical artifacts, and scientific language. The latter dimension is particularly notable; each of Liu's stories contains a litany of scientific concepts and phrasings, from the effects of mass, gravity, units of measurement, calculations, radioactivity, the names and hallmark ideas of famous scientists. Science appears even in language that does not describe a technology or scientific object. For example, in the story, "Mountain," a ship's captain points towards the horizon, where "the ocean's horizon had begun to bend, curving upward like a sine wave."[140] This is pure metaphor; sine waves do not appear in the rest of the story. Instead, it shows the pervasive intrusion and saturation of science as a concept throughout the story, and it is representative of Liu's other stories as well.

[139] Cixin Liu, "Beyond Narcissism: What Science Fiction Can Offer Literature," trans. Holger Nahm and Gabriel Ascher, *Science Fiction Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 22–32, 24.
[140] Cixin Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, trans. Holger Nahm, (Beijing Guomi Digital Technology Co., Ltd., 2012), loc. 1203-1204.

In other stories, the scientific presence is the focus and main driver of the plot and frequently constitutes a Suvin-esque totalizing *novum*. In "Sun of China," the invention of a special reflective material leads to the construction of a space station designed that uses its giant mirrored surface to manipulate the earth's weather. This enables a humble migrant worker Ah Quan to ascend, one step at a time, from a member of China's "floating population" to become humanity's first interstellar explorer (using the repurposed space station as a solar sail). In "The Longest Fall," a tunnel drilled through the earth as part of a massive geoengineering project—the "Antarctic Doorstep" provides the main plot device, motivation for the story's activities, and even setting. In several other stories, extraterrestrial contact is the *novum* that sets the story in motion, although Darko Suvin might have dismissed this as beyond the "cognitive logic" of humanity and therefore a transgression into the realm of "science fantasy" rather than SF. [141]

Liu Cixin's stories create cognitive estrangement (in the sense described by Suvin) by presenting totalizing *novum* based on extrapolations of existing technology and making critical comment on the world's empirical realities. Liu uses apocalyptic scenarios and the consequent (in the speculative reality) breakdown of conventional morality and material civilization to induce cognitive estrangement in his readers and make them question the robustness and centrality of human civilization, and the legitimacy and permanence of conventional morality. However, Liu's connection to the postsocialist pole of cultural production, the market's pull towards commoditizing nostalgia for the past, and use of contemporary issues as props and backgrounds rather than the central locus of the narrative's cognitive estrangement attenuates the strength of this critical message.

[141] Suvin derides "science fantasy" or narratives whose scientific elements are outside the realm of the possible as being inferior to true SF, which can make authoritative critiques about society (Pukallus and Suvin 1991).

The market's pull does not go unchallenged. This section will examine Liu Cixin's self-professed agenda and theory of his writing in relation to the 11 short stories translated into English in the 2010 anthology *Wandering Earth.* Liu's agenda is not didactic; Liu seeks to re-orient humanity's self-conception in relation to the universe. Liu draws upon 'science,' which has retained much of its validity in a postsocialist Chinese context where faith in the grand historical narratives of tradition, democracy, and socialism have all been eroded and cast away. This allows Liu's Cixin's stories to advance his agenda of re-orientation and transcendence. The following section will examine Liu's agenda, the tools he uses to advance it in his writing (apocalyptic transcendence through frequent reversals), and the relation of Liu's writing to the three poles of Chinese cultural production articulated in this thesis.

Liu Cixin's Quest to 'Transcend' Narcissism through Apocalyptic Discourse

In a 2013 interview printed in *Science Fiction Studies,* Liu articulates his personal vision of SF and literature in general:

> [L]iterature has always given me the impression of indulging an intense anthropocentric narcissism. Of course, within a four-light-year radius we are the only intelligent life form (we are sure of that, at least at the moment), which grants humanity some cause for narcissism. Even so, some people want to experience more than this. They do not want their minds to be limited solely to this cosmic speck of dust and so are doing all they can to transcend this narcissism. In the field of literature, the most conscious effort in this regard is being made in the field of science fiction.[142]

Liu describes his SF as an attempt to "transcend" humanity's "narcissism" by enabling his readers to grasp the "beauty" of the universe and scientific principles such as the Big Bang theory of cosmological origin and the vastness of space.[143] This effort is complicated because, according to Liu, "all aspects of the world as viewed by science not only exceed anything we [as

[142] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 22.
[143] Ibid., 23.

human beings] have imagined, but also exceed anything we are capable of imagining."[144] Liu relates how, over the course of his career, his strategy for advancing this agenda has changed from pure world building and narratives that featuring non-human characters and scientific concepts, to a more socially-focused SF, spurred by commercial success and the tastes of his fans and readers. This focus retains the stance of an inhuman, morally-void outside observer. Liu concludes with a series of questions:

> [C]an an extroverted form of literature that reflects the relationship of humanity to the natural universe not exist next to a more introspective and closeted literature? Can literature not be used to reach beyond humanity?[145]

On its face, Liu's agenda appears to be a variation of the didactic pole's determination to renovate Chinese culture in order to transform its material reality. Instead, Liu seeks to shift humanity's self-conception away from 'narcissism' by evoking a scientific view of human nature and humanity's cosmic situation. Liu's stories connect this necessity to looming apocalyptic events that jolt humanity out of our contemporary 'anthropocentric' understanding and immerse humanity in a battle for survival that is only sometimes survivable.

As previously noted, portrayals of apocalyptic events are characteristic of post-1990s Chinese fiction and SF by a number of authors, including Han Song and Wang Jingkang, Liu Cixin's fellow 'Generals.' In fact, one clear trend that the postmodern West and postsocialist China share is the general transition from utopia to dystopia, and the popularity of apocalyptic narratives (with the end of civilization being an ultimate form of dystopia) and discourses that feature the actual or potential destruction of the modern world as recognized by the reader. Frederic Jameson points out this trend as a symptom of the dominance of the market in the 2005 book *Archaeologies of the Future* and refers to it as part of the "impact of late capitalism"

[144] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 22.
[145] Ibid., 31.

wherein money replaces all other values and brings all ideologies to an end except for the hidden "hegemonic ideology" of capitalism, which is camouflaged as a natural and inescapable facet of reality.[146] Therefore, the end of explicitly utopian visions and the rise of dystopia and forms of dystopia where dystopia's usual critical message is blunted and obscured, as it in in Liu Cixin's SF short stories, are both a reflection and accelerant to late capitalism's ascendance.

Coupled with the discourse of apocalyptic events, Liu Cixin's short fiction and his writings available in English regarding them also feature an element of transcendence. This transcendence takes various forms, including frequent injunctions for humanity to physically leave earth to explore other planets, galaxies, and even other universes. It also takes on a moral dimension when humanity must abandon its pressing moral issues of today in order to make progress. In Liu Cixin's imagined worlds, terrible acts of injustice and dreadful disasters rapidly transform into triumphs. Instead of urging a particular solution to a Chinese (or human) problem, or attempting to locate that specific problem's source, Liu's short fiction advocates a focus on the huge expanse of physical space, time, and possibilities for action on an epic scale. Refocusing on these larger issues yields moral transformation, and, in many cases, the transubstantiation of defeat into victory and humiliation into triumph, or at least, into the seeds of hope for an unknown future.

The method that Liu's stories generally use to advance his transcendent agenda is some sort of actual or impending apocalyptic event that threatens the viability of human life and civilization. This thesis draws a distinction between an 'apocalyptic' event and 'the apocalypse' because the latter implies a morally-charged, millenarian end point. In contrast, the events that materially and morally threaten and destroy the Earth and humanity in Liu Cixin's short stories

[146] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso, 2005), 229-232.

represent the impetus or beginning for dramatic action and transcendence, not just a conclusion or resolution to human civilization.

Almost every one of Liu Cixin's short stories featured in the *Wandering Earth* anthology include a measure of apocalyptic destruction, and often feature the destruction or near-destruction of human society or the Earth itself. In several stories, the Earth itself is nearly physically destroyed and the continuance of human civilization is therefore thrown into doubt. This type of apocalyptic narrative provides an impetus for a re-centering of human concerns and morality, which lays the groundwork for a type of transcendence in moral and materials terms. The next section of this thesis will examine two of the anthology's major works in their entirety to elucidate this and other salient characteristics.

Apocalyptic Transcendence in "The Wandering Earth" and "The Longest Fall"

In "The Wandering Earth," scientists discover that the Earth will be incinerated by a giant solar explosion in three centuries. The world's governments unite to create giant "Earth Engines" and use them to slowly take the Earth out of its orbit and send it careening into space to escape the catastrophe and establish a new home in orbit around another star in a 2,500 year journey. The journey, however, destroys the Earth and human civilization, one step at a time. Humanity endures alternating blazing heat and extreme cold as the Earth's orbit becomes more elliptical, giant waves inundate the Earth's cities and the heat of the Earth Engines make surface living impossible. The journey through space wreaks further material destruction on Earth as endless night falls, the atmosphere freezes, and constant asteroid impacts devastate the planet.

This material destruction of Earth mirrors the destruction of the narrator's personal world, as well as the slow death of societal order and morality. The narrator's father and mother each die in disasters related to the journey. His mother is incinerated along with much of an

underground city due to seismic instability caused by Earth Engines. His father is killed bravely defending the Earth from asteroids in the service of the military, leaving the narrator with a posthumous medal commemorating his father's years of service. Social cohesion, at first reinforced by humanity's shared danger and the monumental task laid out for them, breaks down under this strain. Two rival "factions" reminiscent of factions and cliques in China's Cultural Revolution— the Earth Faction and the Spaceship Faction—develop and their conflict escalates from schoolyard fights to an outright civil war by the story's end. This war, like the Cultural Revolution, engenders moral collapse and cruelty, and, in particular, features young people enacting violence on government officials.

The Earth Faction is the name given to the 'Unity Government' presiding over the earth's migration, which is based in China. At first, many believe that humanity should instead build huge spaceships to go out in search of new planets, leading to the creation of the Spaceship Faction. Over time, the general population ceases to believe the Earth Faction and the Unity Government's warnings of Earth danger. The exhausted and demoralized population (including the narrator eventually) believes that the Unity Government has played a giant "hoax" on humanity for their own purposes.[147] This results in a worldwide civil war, which the rebels eventually win. The victory, however, is not portrayed as a great moral victory or triumph. The narrator dispassionately describes the civil war's attendant moral disorder:

> I saw a small girl pick up a large chunk of ice. Exerting all the strength her small body could muster, she furiously smashed it against the body of an old government official, the unbridled rage in her eyes seeming to burn straight through her visor.[148]

[147] Cixin Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, trans. Holger Nahm (Beijing Guomi Digital Technology Co., Ltd., 2012), loc. 861.
[148] Ibid., loc. 937-939.

This scene shows not only a horrible act of violence vividly described (the Earth has cooled to negative 150 degrees, so smashing the old man's visor leads to a painful death), but also a violation of Chinese culture's traditional age-based moral order. A young girl kills an old man and representative of the state, creating a disruption of the normal moral-political order. The war also brings about the end of the narrator's marriage when his wife (Kayoko) joins the rebels, the narrator follows in his father's footsteps to join the military. The moral decay created by Earth's apocalyptic state is demonstrated even in this seeming act of patriotism. The narrator assures the audience that, "It was not that I had great faith in the Unity Government, but my family had served in the military for three generations and they had sown the seeds of loyalty deep in my heart."[149] The narrator hears of his wife's death (she joins the rebel militia and dies in combat) soon after and spirals into alcoholism and depression.

This war witnesses rival factions fighting over political power and resorting to the creation of disorder and the rupture of the traditional moral/political order as exemplified by the young girl's act of violence. Similarly, this scene of the young murdering the old holds overtones of an allegory for the Reform period, which was launched in order to replace an old order notable for having embarked on ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful mega-projects embarked on during the Great Leap Forward. However, as a piece of Liu Cixin's SF short fiction, attempting to locate the story's 'message' and yields inconclusive and ambivalent results.

After the rebels' victory, the disgraced leaders of the Earth Faction and Unity Government are corralled together, and, while being jeered and cursed by a crowd, subjected to mass execution. The crowd (including the narrator) watches as the rebels remove the Earth Faction's preservation suit batteries, leaving them to painfully freeze and die. The narrator

[149] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 875-877.

reminisces to himself on the damage wrought by the Earth Faction and internally begs for forgiveness from the Sun,

> Oh, my Sun, mother of life, father of all things; what could be more steady than you? What could be more eternal than you? We are so tiny, carbon-based bacteria, below the contempt of even dust, crowded on a pebble that revolves around you. We dared to prophesize your doom; how incredibly stupid we were![150]

Only moments after the last member of the Earth Faction's death, the sun (now a far off pinprick of light) explodes into brilliance; the explosion that the Earth Faction foresaw has finally arrived, showing the dead Earth Faction's posthumous glory. In an instant, the moral judgments of the story are reversed dramatically. In the middle of joyously executing the villainous traitors to Earth and the bountiful Sun and taking first steps towards rectifying their horrible mistakes, the rebels are proved dramatically wrong. The now-dead, frozen corpses of the Earth Faction are instantaneously redeemed in the eyes of the narrator; their frozen frames "stood firm in this sudden splendid sunlight; 5,000 dignified statues."[151] This moment also contains a serious note of irony: the Sun's explosion (which would have incinerated the Earth if not for the epic journey) is described as "The Sun's light and warmth bless[ing] the Earth one last time."[152]

In "The Longest Fall," a mega-project called the "Antarctic Doorstep," (a tunnel bored through the Earth from northern China to Antarctica which was supposed to enable China to prevail in the gigantic scramble for the melting continent's natural resources between the "great powers") leads to catastrophe.[153] In an industrial accident, thousands of engineers are trapped underground and consumed by magma, and, in a second disaster, a lost bolt falls into the tunnel and collides with one of its super-fast trains at the combined speed of "ten miles per second."[154]

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[150] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 959-961.
[151] Ibid., loc. 979-980.
[152] Ibid., loc. 975.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid., loc. 9653.

The resulting explosion vaporizes the train, killing thousands, and leaves their remains yo-yoing back and forth through the Earth's core for weeks.

The entire Antarctic Doorstep project is eventually termed a catastrophe because of one simple fact; it is "uneconomical."[155] Its original purpose was to enable China to compete for the resources of the Antarctic, but its huge cost cannot justify the investment.[156] The venture goes bankrupt, depriving millions of their life savings and driving ordinary people into penury. In the end, "the investment black hole that this tunnel had become pushed our country to the brink of total economic collapse and …we still struggle with the after-effects of this catastrophe."[157]

Therefore, the Doorstep, which was supposed to enable the continuation of China's rise to resume its "great power" status, brings about the country's temporary downfall. This material disaster also engenders moral collapse. The story is narrated by Shen Huabei, the father of Shen Yuan, the mastermind of the Antarctic Doorstep. Huabei falls ill with leukemia when his son is just a child and is cryogenically frozen, leaving his wife to raise his scientifically-curious son. When Huabei is awoken decades later, he finds himself assaulted and taken captive by a group of strangers, each of whom has been harmed by his son's invention. This leads to disturbing scenes portraying a feeble man being assaulted by strangers in hospital while plaintively pleading for an explanation. The story's third person narrator pitilessly recounts the assault:

> Huabei collapsed on the floor, only to be kicked in the gut by a young woman of the group. The sharp point of her shoe's toe dug into his intestines, sending shooting pains through his abdomen and leaving him writhing on the cold hospital floor in agonizing contortions.[158]

Again, Liu portays a series of moral reversals and the overthrow of authority structures. An adult authority figure is kicked in the stomach by a young woman after being rendered

[155] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 4033.
[156] Ibid., loc. 9711
[157] Ibid., loc. 9732.
[158] Ibid., loc. 9117-9119.

helpless. Huabei recognizes a member of the attackers as one of his close friends' son, now in his seventies and filled with rage (Deng Yang). The other three are strangers: a woman orphaned by the Lost Bolt disaster, a man driven insane by the loss of his savings, and a man orphaned by the Core Breach Disaster. The moral status of the group is called into question in the story. Huabei himself questions their intent to take vengeance on him for the crimes of his son that he has not even witnessed, asking his attackers "Has the future regressed to the feudal ideas of hereditary determinism?"[159][160] The attackers claim the moral high ground; they are punishing Shen Huabei not directly because of Shen Yuan's crimes, but because Huabei's scientific work inspired his son and made the construction of the Doorstep possible. This has a basis in fact: Huabei invented the super-dense material later used to build the tunnel, and his successful career inspired Shen Yuan. However, the moral orientation of Huabei's attacker remains deeply suspect. The reader is led to sympathize with their loss and suffering, but their brutal treatment of Huabei erodes their moral legitimacy.

Led by Deng Yang, the attackers kidnap Huabei, dress him in a "thermal suit," takes him to the disused Doorstep, and hurls him over the edge to fall through the Earth's core and to the other side, accelerating halfway and decelerating through the other half. As Haubei falls, they take turns explaining their actions and aspects of the Doorstep's construction over a radio link. Huabei falls through the Earth's core, and is rescued at the other end of the tunnel by the authorities, who were alerted by the nurse at the cryo-sleep center. This respite proves illusory. The police decide the present is simply too dangerous for Shen Yuan's father to live freely, and they exile him back into cryo-sleep as a 'temporal emigrant' as part of a government program to

[159] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 9291-929.
[160] This references the ancient Chinese practice of punishing families for the actions of one of their members, as well as the labeling of whole families in political terms via 'class background' during parts of the socialist era, particularly the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.

"ease the burden the population places on the environment."[161] Instead of protesting his innocence, Huabei welcomes this change, confidently predicting that,

> The Great Wall and the Great Pyramids of Giza were a complete loss as well; the former failed to prevent the invasions of the rider people from the North and the latter never did resurrect the mummified pharaoh within. In the long run, that turned out to be utterly immaterial. Now all we see them as are eternal monuments to the human spirit![162]

The authorities stand, bemused, as the weakened scientist calls the Doorstep the "Great Wall of the Earth's Core" and welcomes his banishment into cryo-sleep.[163] The story resumes with Huabei waking up an additional fifty years in the future, only to find that his son's (and to a degree his own) legacy has been dramatically vindicated, although not for the reason he predicted. Instead of simply demonstrating the strength of the human spirit, the Doorstep has become the basis for humanity's life-saving and door-opening migration into outer space. An inhabitant of the future explains that, due to extreme environmental degradation, humanity was faced with extinction because further industrial development on Earth would destroy the environment. Dismantling human industry would also lead to the end of civilization. The abandoned Doorstep was converted into a giant electromagnetic rail gun capable of launching huge quantities of equipment into space at very little cost. Huabei's "tour guide" explains the significance and splendor of this "great migration" in which "humanity met the call of its destiny" to become a space-faring civilization and finally transcend the limits of Earth.[164]

This series of reversals in both moral and material terms in "The Longest Fall" shows the typical moral topology of Liu Cixin's stories. The narrator's son created a series of terrible disasters, but the avengers of these wrongs persecute an undeserving target. Huabei's confidence

[161] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 9837.
[162] Ibid., loc. 9850-9853.
[163] Ibid., loc. 9850-9853.
[164] Ibid., loc. 9993.

that the Doorstep's value as a testament to humanity's desire for greatness appears out of step with the immense fallout from the disastrous mega-projects. Huabei dramatically predicts that his son's legacy would be vindicated in front of a crowd of bemused onlookers, and is proved right, but not for the reasons that he articulated. The story's end reflects the biggest reversal of all; humanity (and particularly China) has transformed defeat into triumph and used technology to avoid extinction and attain grandeur. These reversals make it difficult to simplify the story's prescription, other than a reverence for science's power for both good and evil, and the impossibility of making coherent predictions and moral judgments in the realm of technology.

Examples of Apocalyptic Transcendence in Liu Cixin's Other Short Stories

Liu's stories do not promote nihilism or the abandonment of all conventional moral standards, not just on the level of civilizations, but on the individual human level as well. Instead, they recommend a reorientation of moral gravity beyond quotidian concerns, and a shift to issues of cosmic scale and importance. In the course of this re-orientation, even the most unspeakable immoral acts can be vindicated, if not actually justified. In Liu's worlds, morality only rarely enters the narrative.

Perhaps the greatest instance of moral reversal and the irrelevance of traditional morality appears in the story, "The Wages of Humanity." The story's protagonist, an assassin named Mr. Smoothbore after the custom-made smooth bore pistol he uses to "cool" or "process" the "work" or, in other words, kill human beings.[165] Of all the stories in the anthology, "Wages," is one of the few with first-person narration, which forces the reader to identify more directly with the main character, and the narration delves most deeply into the characters' personal history. The story's protagonist, Mr. Smoothbore is, at best, an anti-hero and perhaps an outright villain (if the terms are even applicable to Liu Cixin's work). He chillingly asks the rich client who hires

[165] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 4622.

him for what he believes is a standard procedure killing, whether she prefers "rapid" or "delayed" cooling, by which he means does she want an extended, agonizing death (which could be videotaped) or an immediate one for her target.[166] The widespread use of sinister euphemisms in this story heighten, rather than ameliorate, the horror of Mr. Smoothbore's profession. One example stands out as Mr. Smoothbore explains the purpose of "delayed" cooling:

> A fair amount of clients require that the work, prior to cooling, be made aware of why and by whom they were marked for processing. We are the ones who tell the work these things. As we do so, we must transcend ourselves and become the client. We must aim to communicate the client's final message to the work in a consummate and dignified manner, allowing the work to feel the greatest possible level of shock and torment before cooling. This is the beauty and romanticism of the [close range killing] specialty: The absolute terror in the eyes of the work before cooling. It is the greatest sanctification we can possibly derive from our labors.[167]

The scenes of violence that form Mr. Smoothbore's characterization in the early part of the story recall the avant-garde tradition of Ge Fei's "Remembering Mr. Wu You," in which horrific violence portrayed in pitiless yet gruesome terms that intensify its traumatic affect. Mr. Smoothbore murders his mentor by shooting him in the stomach and watching him slowly and agonizingly suffer and die for more than an hour, then plays a competitive game of Russian roulette to win the sexual attention of another assassin. After pulling the trigger on his revolver five times with no compunctions, Mr. Smoothbore hands the gun to his opponent. The opponent knowingly kills himself in a shower of blood. In another macabre gambling scene, one assassin bets his legs against another whose implement is a flexible saw, Mr. Crosscut. The following scene ensues:

> Crosscut had stood, unfolded his saw and taken both of Mr. Half-Brick's legs off at the knees. The strange symphony of sounds of the saw cutting through tendons and parting bone rang clearly in Mr. Smoothbore's ears since that day. Back then, the Honored Brother Crosscut had stood on Mr. Half-Brick's neck to trap the

[166] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 4634.
[167] Ibid., loc. 4625-4627.

> shrieks of agony in his throat, leaving only the rhythmic sound of the saw being pulled back and forth across flesh and through bone. It played a lively tune across the innards of the knee, changing its timbre and tone as it opened the depths of bone and cartilage. Snow-white bone-ends were splashed with scarlet blood to the sound of music, conjuring an abstract image of exquisite beauty.[168]

In this story, violence is portrayed as completely commonplace and it is mixed with the language of exultation and bliss, imbuing the narration with a message of moral confusion and ambivalence. In Liu's image of the future, violence becomes intermingled with music and beauty, inverting and destabilizing conventional our conventional moral conceptions and associations.

These violent scenes do not prepare the reader for the true moral obscenity of the story. A consortium of China's richest industrialists hired Mr. Smoothbore to kill a selection of the country's absolutely poorest people, three vagrants living in parks and landfills. The sheer absurdity of this interlude does not escape Mr. Smoothbore, but he attempts to remain true to his assassin's professional ethos: "The gun does not care at whom it is aimed."[169]

In a dramatic reversal, it becomes clear that the plutocrats are acting in what they believe to be humanity's best interests with this seemingly absurd and amoral action. One of humanity's 'Sibling' civilizations mentioned in "Taking Care of Gods," has arrived on Earth, and is preparing to colonize the planet, confine humanity to Australia, and deliver a minimum standard of income and subsistence to every human being, predicated on a scientific survey of Earth's income level. In response, rich countries, the UN, and the aforementioned plutocrats are feverishly emptying their wealth out across the world, driving dump trucks full of cash into slums and pursuing other projects to raise humanity's subsistence level before the survey begins. However, some of the world's poorest people are refusing the money, preferring for various

[168] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 4388-4390.
[169] Ibid., loc. 4571.

reasons to continue in poverty. Therefore, the rich have decided to eliminate them in order to save humanity. Mr. Smoothbore performs his cooling, secure in the knowledge that he is serving humanity and fulfilling his professional ethos. In the process, he accepts a 'contract' on the consortium of rich clients from one of the poor people he kills in exchange for a painting. In this way, Mr. Smoothbore becomes both the enactor and avenger of moral obscenity, and sticks to his amoral ethos of 'professionalism.'

In the story's end, this effort proves futile; the aliens have long ago performed the survey and determined that Earth's subsistence level of income is extremely low. The background story of how and why this alien civilization has arrived to colonize Earth also touches on issues of income inequality, capitalism, and private property, as well as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and human augmentation with technology, and lies beyond the scope of this thesis. This story showcases both the moral reversals and general amoral ethos of much of Liu Cixin's work—Mr. Smoothbore survives by embracing the cold professional maxim of the assassins.

Occasionally, Liu's characters directly express their author's overall agenda. For example, this dynamic appears as the sardonic, jovial ambassador of a malevolent alien invasion in "Devourer," (Fangs) responds to the Secretary-General of the UN's pleas to spare humanity because of its long history. The UN prepares a compilation of humanity's ancient history and cultural achievements and presents it to Fangs at an archaeological site chosen to demonstrate humanity's age in order to convince the Devourer civilization not to destroy humanity. Fangs dismisses this line of reasoning in two parts. First, he embarks on a long explanation of how an even older civilization just as culturally advanced as humanity (that of a group of ants) made its way through thousands of years to establish a city complex with hundreds of millions of individuals. This complex lay above the archaeological site that the humans dug up, destroying

the ant civilization. Fangs concludes, "We still have a very long time to get along and very many things to talk about, but let us not speak of morals. In the universe, such considerations are meaningless."[170]

Sexuality and Romance in Liu Cixin's Short Fiction

Unsurprisingly, stories whose author states that his goal is to 'transcend' humanity contain relatively few romantic or sexual relationships between human beings. In "The Wandering Earth," the institution of romance and marriage essentially dissolves in the face of impending doom for the Earth. In the narrator's words, "This all-consuming focus gradually changed the essence of human psychology and spirituality. Love and all its foibles became mere distractions, just like a quick swig of a drink was for a gambler who cannot take his eyes off the spinning wheel."[171]

The narrator's father takes a break from marriage to his mother in order to live with the narrator's elementary school teacher, Ms. Xing. The narrator's mother does not care about this hiatus, and, when he returns in two months, they continue their marriage with no ill effects. Later in the story, the narrator's wife similarly chooses to leave him to join the rebels and wage civil war against the Unity Government. He does not attempt to stop her leaving. The narrator is devastated by news of her death, one of the few expressions of love or personal loss in Liu's short stories, but this drives him not into action, but to despair and intoxication.

This stands in sharp contrast to "Conjugal Happiness," where Lili's character arc ranges from total mental and physical subjugation to the monstrous actions of the narrator, to authority and independence as she delivers an address on the difference between Eastern and Western style love, before saying that, regardless of which one is superior, she chooses to exercise choice for

[170] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 6908-6909.
[171] Ibid., loc. 402-403.

herself in leaving the narrator. Although "Conjugal Happiness" is influenced by the anti-didactic pole through its style of unreliable and fragmented narration, and lack of a direct and coherent positive program, it advances a strong critical message and legitimizes individualism and the application of science and Western ideas. In Liu's stories, apocalyptic events corrode humanity's conventional morality and little behind to replace them. Liu's focus is not on advancing individual human freedom or emancipation, but rather a re-orientation of humanity's focus onto cosmic issues.

In "With Her Eyes," a sentimental attachment forms between a male and female character, but this action provides little more than a vehicle to tell the story of an expedition to explore the Earth's core that goes awry, trapping a female explorer inside a craft in the middle of the earth forever. Liu Cixin explicitly denigrates this story as being part of his brief period of "forced compromise" with the market.[172] Even in this story, the nature of the narrator's attachment to the female researcher primarily revolves around the technology they use to connect, and the primary focus of the story is the accident that led to the female researcher being trapped at the Earth's core indefinitely with little hope of escape.

In sum, love appears in Liu Cixin's short fiction generally as an aspect of human behavior that falls victim to the apocalyptic transcendence and reversals of their narratives. Sexuality generally does not appear at all, or if it does, only incidentally (such as Mr. Smoothbore's implied dalliance with another assassin).

[172] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 23.

LIU CIXIN AND THE THREE POLES OF MODERN CHINESE CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Before examining the effects of the postsocialist era and multidimensional wave on Chinese SF, as exemplified by Liu Cixin's short stories, it is necessary to review its relationship with the other two poles in order to articulate the important shifts and differences that differentiate Liu's work from that of his antecedents. This section of the thesis will first examine Liu Cixin's short fiction's relationship to the first two poles of Chinese cultural production, the didactic and anti-didactic. It will then examine its relationship with the postsocialist pole articulated in a previous section.

Liu's fiction is not didactic in the sense of the literary and cultural edifice constructed in the 1900-1978 period. First, it does not share the intent of works of the didactic pole; it does not promote a specific political or economic ideology. Instead, its agenda is cultural, if not philosophical, and has general technological rather than specific political and economic aspects. Liu's agenda is purely philosophical, while earlier didactic revolutionary modernization movements discussed earlier in this thesis advocated specific ideological, political, and economic systems (democracy, socialism, or Western science and theory) to China in order to modernize the country and increase its power and vitality. In contrast, Liu Cixin has no specific prescriptions for China's or the world's material ills.

Furthermore, even the idea of material and moral transcendence—the only real 'end state' of Liu Cixin's short stories examined here—is not treated as an unqualified good or laudable goal. Ensuring humanity's survival and spread (the material part of Liu's transcendence) requires the upending of conventional morality and huge suffering and destruction. In the words the Devourers' spokesman, Fangs, "What is civilization? Civilization is devouring, ceaselessly

eating, endlessly expanding; everything else comes second."[173] In this speech, Fangs states that all civilizations, including the Devourers and humanity, depend on voracious consumption of resources and ruthless competition. While this presents a veiled critique of capitalism (via the metaphor of consumption of whole planets and subjugation of entire species), it does not advance an alternative. Fangs is correct. Humanity has no choice but to acquiesce to the superior power of the Devourer civilization. Fangs eloquently refutes the question of whether or not this fundamental competition and consumption can be changed and a civilization can survive without devouring others: "If one's survival is based on the subjugation and consumption of others and if that should be the universe's iron law of life and civilization, then whoever first rejects it in favor of introspection will certainly perish."[174]

The story ends on a simultaneously bleak and hopeful note. After fighting and being defeated, most of humanity becomes chattel for the Devourer. Humans are domesticated aboard the planet-sized Devourer ship and live in bliss until "age sixty," when they are slaughtered for meat. A few human soldiers who refuse voluntarily end their lives so that their corpses can provide the fuel for life on Earth (which has nearly been eradicated by the Devourers' mining techniques and consumption) may one day rise again.

This is far from a utopian vision. In several stories, the path to ensuring human happiness is the *destruction* of the remnants of humanity (The Micro-Age) or the subjugation just discussed. This ambiguity and lack of positive prescription introduce a strong element of doubt into Liu's critiques of modern society, and further distance his work away from the didactic pole of Chinese cultural production.

[173] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 7452.
[174] Ibid., loc. 7454-7459.

While Liu Cixin's narrators generally take a more authoritative and active role in diegetic storytelling than works of the anti-didactic pole (which often emphasized personal perspective, even in SF), they do not adopt the same *pose* as the didactic pole's works. The certainty of the narrative's moral judgments is undermined by the aforementioned moral and material reversals and general lack of distinction between heroic or villainous characters.

In Liu Cixin's stories, the main characters (who are often scientists or advanced extraterrestrials) lack the kind of implicit authority and credibility present in the voice of Chen Tianhong in "Death Ray". Often, scientists turn out to be wrong, and unexplainable and unforeseen events occur frequently. Although the scientific method and scientific inquiry further human (and alien in some stories) understanding of the universe, massive mistakes in technology occur frequently, showcased in the dramatic initial failure of the Antarctic Doorstep. On a moral level, scientist characters are rarely purely heroic figures such as Dr. Matthew. The main character and geologist in the story "Mountain" coolly admits that, in a climbing accident that left four of his close friends and girlfriend hanging from the same rope, he cut the rope not only to save himself but because, "I [didn't] want to die; there [was] still another mountain to climb."[175] The scientist Shen Huabei in "The Longest Fall," is not a very heroic character. Even his prescient prediction that the Doorstep will someday be hailed as a triumph of the human spirit is half-wrong. The Doorstep is eventually hailed as a success, but because humanity finds a use for it more than a century after it is built and has wreaked massive destruction.

Similar to human scientist characters, the alien civilizations that impart scientific knowledge and demonstrate technological sophistication in Liu Cixin's stories are almost always either actively malevolent or morally neutral. In "Devourer" and "Wages of Humanity," and "Taking Care of Gods," alien civilization either invade or threaten to invade the Earth and place

[175] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 1282-1283.

human civilization's continuation in danger. In "Taking Care of Gods," aliens actually arrive to burden humanity with providing for them, creating social and economic chaos. In "Mountain," an alien craft arrives, engages in a conversation with the geological engineer Feng Fan about the nature of the universe and its scientific history, then departs. Out of all of them, only the Girl from Eridanus is a generally positive character, and she spends most of "Devourer" unsuccessfully trying to help humanity fight off the Devourer in order to avenge her own planet, which was destroyed despite its technological and scientific acumen *because* their planet had no wars, competition, or struggle for resources and survival.[176] Each of these shows how other civilizations, like humanity, are morally compromised.

In Liu's stories, characters are not the only morally-ambivalent feature. Situations almost never have a clear-cut or lasting moral polarity. More than anything, frequent changes in the story's moral universe create a sense of chaotic uncertainty with regard to the narrator and main characters. This creates a different kind of crisis of faith than in "Conjugal Happiness," where the reader comes to despise and distrust the narrator and suspect other characters of acting in their self-interest or due to faulty programming. In contrast, Liu's third-party, omniscient narrators and first person narrators are trustworthy, but their impressions are unreliable because they are caught by surprise in unfolding events and cannot discern the true dimensions of their situations.

It is hard to isolate any kind of one-dimensional message or even a rubric for morality in Liu Cixin's short fiction. Liu Cixin's stories contain many references, homages, and digressions that glancingly mention social, political, and economic realities of the world and contemporary China. Several stories put these social, political, and economic realities closer to their narrative

[176] The Eridanians are another civilization, much more advanced than humanity or the Devourer, but the Devourer destroyed them, because, as Fangs explains, "Life on their world had evolved symbiotically, free of natural selection and of the struggle for survival. They did not even know what war was." (Liu 2012, loc. 7135-7136).

centers. However, instead of promoting a specific ideology to remedy these ills (as the didactic pole did) or delegitimizing the systems and discourses associated with them (as the anti-didactic did), Liu's work takes an approach more suited to the postsocialist pole. Issues of incredible importance to contemporary China such as income inequality, the collapse of revolutionary class solidarity, the rural/urban divide, anxiety over eroding moral standards, and many others are treated in Liu's stories as a jumping off point or background for a larger narrative. Liu's stories acknowledge these issues, and sometimes even portray them in a truly shocking list, but eventually he backgrounds them in favor of a discourse of humanity's transcendence of Earth. In Liu Cixin's moral universe, acts of brutality and moral obscenity, along with the pressing social issues of today, dissolve into moral incoherence as the situation, time, and world changes rapidly change around them.

The scientific presence in Liu's fiction is at times delivered naturalistically. However, the complexity and scale of the speculative realities that Liu creates and terms "macro-detail"[177] make a degree of exposition from a position of authority necessary.[178] In many cases, the story's main character is a scientist (or a scientifically-advanced extraterrestrial) engaged in an dialogue with colleagues explaining the evolution of a certain civilization or advanced technology. Combined with the complexity of Liu's stories, this can lead to passages of instructive exposition in a somewhat didactic and seemingly-authoritative tone. For instance, the second half of "Mountain" consists of an extended question-and-answer dialogue between a geological engineer and an advanced alien intelligence. The alien explains how his civilization came to understand

[177] Through its macro-details, science fiction allows authors to sweep across time and space, crossing billions of years and tens of billions of light-years with a simple stroke of the pen, leaving the world and the history described in mainstream literature to appear as nothing more than a tiny grain of dust, hardly worth mentioning. (Liu 2013, 25).
[178] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 24.

the unique nature of their home planet, paralleling the development of science on earth. One representative example of the exchange reads:

> We are a mechanical life form. Our muscles and bones are made of metals; our brains are like highly integrated chips, and electricity and magnetism are our blood. We ate the radioactive rocks of our world's core and they provided us with the energy we needed to survive. We were not created, but evolved naturally from the extremely simple single-celled mechanical life forms when – by pure chance – the radioactive energies formed P-N junctions in the rocks.[179]

In "Wandering Earth," the narrator (one of the few rare first-person narrators in the collection) explains to the reader the predicament his ancestors found themselves in in precise, authoritative detail:

> Three centuries ago, astrophysicists discovered that the fusion of hydrogen to helium inside the Sun had abruptly accelerated. In response, they launched more than 10,000 probes straight into the Sun. Ultimately they managed to establish a precise mathematical model describing the celestial body.[180]

While these expositions may superficially resemble the didactic passages from "Death Ray" and other examples didactic Chinese cultural production, Liu's work does not retain either the intent or the pose of the didactic pole. As previously discussed, Liu intends to decenter human consciousness from earthy affairs and raise awareness of scientific principles and the "show Earth and humanity from the vantage point of the entire universe."[181] Liu uses some of the strategies of the didactic pole (the pole in which Chinese SF took shape, and has always held a degree of allegiance to), such as the long scientific exposition and conversation in order to pursue this goal. However, the use of this strategy does not resurrect the entire didactic edifice.[182] The moral reversals and ambiguity that surround Liu's characters and the course of his narratives, as well as his commodification and glancing treatment of both history and current issues such as

[179] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 1493-1495.
[180] Ibid., loc. 188-191.
[181] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 26.

environmental problems and income inequality undermine any possibility for his articulation of a positive program or true didactic moral or political message.

Liu Cixin's Anti-Didactic Foundation

As the previous section discussed, Liu Cixin's SF short stories embrace omniscient third-person and a few authoritative first-person narrators. Liu's self-professed drive to eliminate the 'narcissism' of mainstream literary culture using the tools of SF such as world-building, the embrace of science, and cognitive estrangement all further the pursuit of this limited agenda. This agenda is limited by the lack of a coherent political/economic program attached to Liu's short fiction, except perhaps for the embrace of advanced technology (although the results of technology are frequently disastrous in Liu's imagined worlds).

The general principles that provide a foundation for Liu's philosophy of SF are highly reminiscent of the anti-didactic and even avant-garde movements in Chinese literature. The element of repeated moral and material reversals in Liu's writing evokes an immense skepticism for the 'grand narrative' and grand history as described by Yang Xiaobin. Instead of applying science to further China's national greatness or even humanity's advancement, Liu's stories depict apocalyptic destruction wrought by a series of programmers who, for petty personal reasons, enhance a computer virus to the point of destroying an entire city and killing all of its inhabitants in "Curse 5.0."[183] Liu's embrace of such destruction is reminiscent of the avant-garde, who frequently questioned human agency and portrayed people as the distorted victims of their surrounding and one another. While the avant-garde often took a highly individual viewpoint on these narratives, Liu generally provides a more universal and remote view, but with similar

[183] In the story, a slighted computer science student writes a computer virus to harass the object of her unreturned affection. A series of programmers build on this code base for their own similarly petty reasons to create a computer virus that utilizes the smart and Internet-connected futuristic infrastructure of a particular city to kill all of its inhabitants. In the story's end, a disgruntled government employee modifies the virus to attack every city in every country in the world.

elements. In some sense, Liu's drive to move beyond humanity in literature is an elevation of the avant-garde's impulse towards the destruction of agency to another, even higher level. On this level, Liu seeks to dismantle the humanity's anthropocentric, humanistic conception of our relationship with nature and the universe. Liu writes of humanity that, from his perspective based on his concept of science, "we become nothing more than irrelevant bacteria on a grain of sand in a remote corner of the universe."[184]

Liu Cixin questions the discourse of the socialist era in Chinese history, which was a particular target of early anti-didactic writers and, later, the Chinese avant-garde. By portraying the reoccurrence of aspects of the socialist era and revolution in the future, Liu de-historicizes them and strips away a vital element of the Chinese revolution's mystique and power: its unique nature as a historical event. Staging a Cultural Revolution-style fight between 'factions' first in the schoolyard and then in wider society implies that such events are not unique in the Chinese or human experience. Likewise, the massive scale, ambition, and seeming faulty science and economic rationale behind the Antarctic Doorstep recalls negative aspects of the Great Leap Forward and implies that China and the world has not seen the last of such mistakes.

Although the narrator in Liu's stories (9 of 11 stories have a third-person omniscient narrator) is generally authoritative and not subject to suspicion about its veracity, Liu rarely uses the narrator to explicitly state a 'message' of any kind, let alone a message to buttress a specific ideology. Instead, these sections articulate a general discourse of the power and grandeur of technology, and the miniscule and fragile nature of human beings, human civilization, and even the Earth in the face of the vastness of the universe. One important aspect of this style is the narrator's and character's relationship with a fixed morality. Unlike works of the didactic pole such as "Death Ray," there are no discernable heroes or villains in Liu's writing. Characters'

[184] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 27.

actions are subject to dramatic reappraisals and reversals in the eyes of the reader and other characters, leading to a moral instability that nearly erases the validity of the entire concept in the universe articulated by Liu Cixin's short stories.

The Postsocialist Pole's Magnetism

However, like the developed avant-garde that shaded into postsocialism in the early 1990s, Liu's evocations of these events more closely resemble a mining of Chinese history and culture for references, moments, and raw materials to build reader engagement than a serious historical examination. In the postsocialist era, the legitimacy of the socialist period does not need to be attacked; it has already elapsed. Instead, moments from the socialist era provide fertile ground for reference and commodification. This practice does not just extend backwards into the past. Controversial issues in the present also provide raw material for this kind of commodification. These commoditized references may sometimes shade into cognitive estrangement, but Liu's treatment of them shies away from making powerful critical claims.

At times, Liu's references to contemporary issues (such as the abolition of the *hukou* or household registration) extend toward cognitive estrangement. According to Suvin's conception of the term, cognitive estrangement is the inverse of traditional de-familiarization; it presents the unfamiliar and speculative as familiar. In this way, it leads the reader to question the underpinnings of her familiar reality and imagine their extrapolation into the future or abandonment. An example of cognitive estrangement appears in "Sun of China," when Ah Quan, a member of China's internal migrant population since youth, asks a real estate agent whether or not he buy property in Beijing because he lacks the right *hukou*, or household registration that binds an individual to a particular place unless they receive an official change in residence. Those who migrate internally in China without *hukou* are denied social services such as access to

health care, education, and officially-sanctioned housing, creating difficulties for China's internal migrant or "floating" population of roughly 211 million (as of 2009).[185] In the story, the agent mistakes Ah Quan's honest question for a joke, saying "The hukou system of binding you to your registered home was abolished two years ago. And who is to say who is a Beijinger? Doesn't where you live make you a Beijinger?"[186] This remark suggests that, in the story's fictional universe, *hukou* has been abolished, while, in reality, it remains very salient.

The agent's suggestion brings about cognitive estrangement in the reader because it imagines a world where one's residence is not tied to *hukou*. However, the effect of this cognitive estrangement is attenuated by its lack of context. There is no explanation as to how or why the system has changed, and, after this moment, the issue of *hukou* does not appear. Ah Quan does not buy property because he cannot afford it due to sky high prices (reflecting another pressing social issue, though not in cognitive estrangement terms). This treatment of contemporary social issues is commonplace in Liu's writing, and examples of cognitive estrangement with regard to issues such as population control, environmental pollution, and income inequality. Instead, these issues are mainly simply present in the narrative as part of the background to the process of apocalyptic transcendence. Liu does not advocate a particular remedy or solution to these problems, only evoking them briefly before segueing to another step in his quest to shift readers' perspectives.

An example of this evocation appears in several of stories, including "Taking Care of Gods." In the story, the "Gods" (an alien race with extremely advanced technology who seeded earth and guided human evolution in order to build up a species to lean on in their civilizational old age and decline) visit Earth in order to realize long-held plans to use Earth as a retirement

[185] Li Tao, Francis K. W. Wong, and Eddie C. M. Hui, "Residential Satisfaction of Migrant Workers in China: A Case Study of Shenzhen," *Habitat International* 42 (April 2014): 193–202, doi:10.1016/j.habitatint.2013.12.006.
[186] Liu, *The Wandering Earth*, loc. 3541-3542.

home. The burdens that these two billion Gods (who appear to be aged humans and have few usable resources or technologies that they can actually) place on the majority of the Earth's population plays out in one Chinese family, where the arrival of their God brings preexisting societal and social tensions to a boil. This domestic drama provides a narrative mechanism to symbolize the chaos wrought by the God throughout China and the world, and the story's omniscient third person narrator frequently 'cuts' to describe developments in the worldwide drama unfolding in response to the Gods' visit.

This story clearly refers to China's emerging demographic crisis and the burden that caring for the elderly already places and will continue to place on Chinese society. However, it does not recommend a clear course of action; after being mistreated, the Gods choose to leave Earth and continue their journey through the solar system despite knowing that they will likely die out on their journey. The Gods' departure is morally neutral; they do not blame humanity for rejecting them, and advise humanity that they should colonize other planets and be careful of humanity's 'sibling' civilizations who have grown more advanced than humanity and pose a serious threat to humanity's survival.

In the interview with *Science Fiction Studies,* Liu Cixin divides his work into early, middle, and recent phases and explains how his own rising popularity and the tastes of his readers, as reflected through the market, have shaped his approach to SF. In his early writings of the late 1990s, Liu explains that he fully embraced the strategy of eliminating anthropocentric narcissism by writing stories that featured no human characters at all and pursued world-building and other strategies to evoke the vastness of the universe and insignificance of humanity, or in Liu's terminology, "pure science fiction". Liu writes,

> I have always recognized that science fiction is a form of popular literature, so my own ideas about the genre must be balanced to a certain extent with the tastes of

> my readers. Even as I was writing the above-mentioned works in the manner of pure science fiction, I was already working hard to adapt my style and in the process produced the two short novels …[which were]… nothing more than a forced compromise with the dictates of the market….[187]

Liu continues, saying that, as his own popularity grew in the early 2000s, "human society began to enter my sf [science fiction] worlds, and what was once a forced compromise became something I did of my own accord…. I became more interested in writing stories that depict humanity's relationship with the natural world."[188] Liu counts the first book of the *Santi* trilogy and "The Wandering Earth" in this group of his stories. This trend continues in Liu's third stage, "depicting the effects of extreme situations on human behavior and social systems."[189] These latter two categories, which arguably include (in terms of time frame and content) most of the stories included in the 2010 anthology, reflect the market's preference for the human-focused (or at least humanity-focused) narratives that Liu originally resisted writing and set out to transcend.

The ubiquity of the market and incentive structure for authors under postsocialist, marketized conditions in China in terms of both income and popularity and renown have pushed Liu's narratives in the direction of a more human focus. This thesis argues that the frequent mention and exploitation of historical moments and contemporary issues in Liu's stories also partially stem from the market's desire for commoditized, decontextualized experience. Liu continues to struggle against the market's influence and dictates, and his interview calls for more scholarly examination of Chinese SF, and SF in general to help resist marketization's effects by providing another benchmark and incentive structure (academic attention versus commercial success) for SF authors to safeguard what he sees as SF's unique potential to transcend humanity's 'narcissism.'

[187] Liu, "Beyond Narcissism," 23.
[188] Ibid., 26.
[189] Ibid., 30.

In a 2014 Chinese language interview with *Science Fiction World*, Liu further developed the theme of the market's effects on the production of Chinese SF. In response to the question, "How is the livelihood situation of SF writers in China?" Liu responded that the question was a "false proposition," because almost all Chinese SF writers hold another job (including Liu himself, who continues to work as a power plant engineer). However, according to Liu, this situation is improving and some SF writers now can earn a living from writing and film adaptations of SF and, due to increasing acceptance of SF's validity as a way of conceptualizing real technological and social change, SF writers can perform consulting work in creative industries and even for the government.[190]

Increasing demand for SF in the national media marketplace may heighten the existing impulse towards commodification, widen SF's appeal to new audience, and elevate the prestige and status of its authors. In turn, this may increase the postsocialist pole's pull on writers such as Liu Cixin to incorporate more commoditized historical images into their texts and focus more on humanistic storylines to satisfy readers' desires. It may also bend SF writers to the will of the governmental and corporate interests that are increasingly interested (according to Liu's interview) to turning to SF writers for consulting work. On the other hand, the elevation of SF to an academic discipline may combat both of these trends and allow SF writers to pursue more purely philosophical agendas.

[190] " 科幻作家的生存问题，本身是个伪命题。我们的生存都不是靠写作，大家都有工作.但要说到赚钱，确实没那么多。这种状况也在改变之中，也有部分科幻作品开始赚钱了，取得不错的收益，包括出版、影视改编的收益，现在还出现了一种新的收益模式：随着社会对科幻的思维方式越来越认同，作家有机会像西方社会那样，进入国家重点部门、创意企业做咨询工作，这一点恐怕别的类型文学作者享受不到 (Liu 2013)." "The problem of SF writers' livelihood is a false proposition. Our income does not depend on writing, everyone has another job. Regarding earning money [from writing], there is not very much. This type of situation is changing, and there are some SF works that have started earning money, and obtain a good income, including from print publishing and film adaptations. Currently there is a new model: as society accepts science fiction more, [SF] writers can enter important national departments and perform consulting work in creative enterprises, as they do in the West. This option is probably not available to writers of other genres." (Translation mine.)

Apocalyptic Transcendence as Postsocialist Revolutionary Modernization

As previously discussed in this thesis, revolutionary modernization refers to a repeated tendency in Chinese cultural production to articulate theories of combined revolution (destruction of the previous *status quo*) and modernization (material and moral improvement). Liu Cixin's apocalyptic transcendence can be seen as a postsocialist form of revolutionary modernization, or revolutionary modernization under postsocialist conditions. In the postsocialist environment, a didactic theory and coherent political/moral project of modernization is incoherent. There can be no new 'May Fourth' today because the major ideas of Western society have long since been introduced to China in different ways and have been demythologized by historical experience. Likewise, at least where postsocialist cultural products are concerned, there is no real possibility for a new revolution under the inescapable market.

Liu Cixin's apocalyptic transcendence retains the *form*, but not the content, of revolutionary modernization. It portrays the destruction of the old material and moral order (revolution), and offers hope for a vision of possible future where humanity can transcend its previous spatial, moral, and technological bounds to achieve a promising future. Although the immediate results of this transcendence more closely resembles dystopia (material and moral collapse) than a utopia, Liu Cixin's stories often end on a note of ill-defined hope for a potential-laden future of expansion beyond humanity's current powers of imagination. Examples include the devastated yet still intact Earth and surviving humans traveling through the void on a millennia-long journey in "The Wandering Earth," the Gods' boarding their ships to explore the universe, heedless of their certain death, in "Taking Care of Gods," and the existence of micro-humans capable of carrying on the best of humanity's legacy in "The Micro Age," and many more. This note of hope helps to complicate the otherwise bleak future that awaits humanity and,

indeed, extraterrestrials, after the process of apocalyptic transcendence has abated. However, the future remains unknown, and any hope that remains is faint and uncertain.

Conclusion

This thesis has reviewed the history of Chinese SF from roughly 1900 until the present day, with particular attention on the late 1980s and contemporary SF short stories by Liu Cixin. After discussing different definitions and theoretical concepts relating to SF, it examined the relationship between SF and three 'poles' of modern Chinese cultural production: the didactic, anti-didactic, and postsocialist. SF was born contemporaneously with and aligned to the didactic pole, and this influence has persisted over time, particularly when it comes to the authority and power of 'the scientific.' Chinese SF also has retained its affiliation with China's successive movements aimed at revolutionary modernization, which have often promulgated didactic cultural movements that legitimized the movement's specific economic, political, and cultural agenda. Since the beginning of the Reform era in 1978, Chinese SF has been pulled and transformed by the influence of turn towards the anti-didactic and postsocialist poles.

This thesis examined the course of Chinese SF's journey from didactic 'reform literature' SF in the late 1970s to avant-garde style SF by the late 1980s as reflected in stories anthologized and translated by Wu Dingbo and Patrick D. Murphy in 1989. It singled out issues of sexuality/romance and violence in order to interpret the critical agendas of SF authors of the period, along with their shift from a didactic intent and pose towards a more anti-didactic mode. This anti-didactic mode included stylistic changes (such as the introduction of unreliable narrators and other varieties of formal experimentation) and substantive changes (such as the absence of defined positive programs and a general weakening of Chinese SF's critical potential).

Since at least 1992, Chinese SF has been affected by the multidimensional postsocialist wave that has inundated and transformed Chinese cultural production and consumption. The postsocialist wave has been powered by the formation of a market for cultural products in China that pits Chinese against Western products, electronic media against print publishing, and literature against video and other mediums. Competition for market share and profitability has led to commodification and the ubiquity of palatable forms and content with reduced critical power. However, postsocialist cultural products often retain many of the same assumptions and characteristics of the anti-didactic; they de-historicize and de-legitimize the Chinese revolution and dis-empower individual human beings as agents of change or liberation.

This postsocialist influence is highly visible in Liu Cixin's short stories, first published between 2000 and 2010, which are available in English the 2010 anthology *The Wandering Earth*. This thesis examined the underlying structures and themes of Liu Cixin's work and the author's quest to re-orient his readers' understanding of humanity's place in the universe to transcend 'narcissism.' The key strategy that Liu employs to achieve this goal is his portrayal of apocalyptic transcendence, particularly in the short stories, "The Wandering Earth," and "The Longest Fall."

In the next section, this thesis examined how Liu Cixin's work relates to the three poles of modern Chinese cultural production. It examines Liu Cixin's philosophy of literature, and his belief that the influence of the market has driven him to neglect world-building and focus on portrayals of a society's changing self-conception under apocalyptic and other extreme conditions, often viewed through the microcosm of human characters. Liu's extensive commodification of historical images and pressing contemporary concerns and his use of frequent moral reversals fit in with the postsocialist pole.

The rising popularity of Chinese SF in China and throughout the world, (heralded by the upcoming release of the first Chinese SF to be translated into English, the first volume of Liu's *Santi* trilogy) may intensify the tendencies towards commodification and moral and material ambivalence in Chinese SF. The interplay between this ambivalence and Chinese SF's strong affinity with the longstanding project of science popularization and identification with a degree of didactic and critical messaging may provide future theorists with new avenues for inquiry.

As for answering some of the questions laid out in this thesis' introduction, this examination has examined the changing role of Chinese SF over time. This role has 'wandered' from bolstering revolutionary modernization movements alongside other didactic forms of literature from the late Qing reformers through the Reform era, to following the shift in Chinese culture to the anti-didactic and postsocialist. Chinese SF's didactic certainty and positive political/cultural program, witnessed as recently as 1981 with Wei Yahua's story "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus," and its promulgation of individual choice and liberty, has largely disappeared. Even this program represents a significant weakening from the nationalist themes and articulation of science's potential to empower nations present in Tong Enzheng's 1978 story "Death Ray on a Coral Island."

While Liu Cixin's long passages explaining the scientific basis for new technologies and civilizational changes may resemble Chinese SF's didactic heritage, this thesis has demonstrated the fundamentally postsocialist nature of Liu's writing. The moral and material uncertainty expressed through constant reversals and apocalyptic transcendence in Liu Cixin's work may be representative of China's lack of certainty in the present era. China and the world face a future filled with looming environmental catastrophes and political and economic turmoil. In the same way that 20th century Chinese SF (particularly before 1949) expressed concern over China's

technological and economic poverty and political disunity, the popularity of Liu Cixin's short stories reflects a profound anxiety in China around a myriad of issues ranging from environmental challenges to a changing cultural values. However, while 20th century Chinese SF linked itself to political, economic, and cultural movements that pursued a positive program, Liu Cixin's does not. As a firmly postsocialist version of revolutionary modernization, Liu's writing does not suggest much beyond a re-orientation of humanity's self-image, and the pursuit of technology. Furthermore, the vision of the future created by such a philosophical re-orientation or 'transcendence,' and the effects of advanced technology on humans and humanity imagined by Liu Cixin are far from definitive or optimistic.

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Appendix A: Comparison of Liu Cixin's Short Stories Published in *The Wandering Earth* (2010)

Title	**Narration**	**Main Character**	**Major Secondary Characters with Science Background**	**Apocalyptic Discourse**	**Transcending Earth**
The Wandering Earth	First person	Unnamed Chinese narrator	Narrator's father is asteroid protection pilot; wife amateur astronomer	Earth must escape solar explosion, so engines move it to new solar system with disastrous effects	Earth moves from solar system
Mountain	Third person omniscient	Feng Fan, Geological engineer	Numerous alien scientists		Aliens instruct humanity on true nature of universe, voyaging and exploratory spirit
Of Ants and Dinosaurs	Third person omniscient	Ants, dinosaurs	Chief Scientist of the Ant Coalition, Professor Joyah	Ants destroy dinosaur civilization, Earth is subsequently devastated by antimatter "dead hand" devices	
Sun of China	Third person omniscient	Ah Quan, migrant worker/interstellar explorer	Lu Hai, Nano-Materials Scientist		Ah Quan convinces superiors to let him and his crew become the first interstellar explorers
The Wages of Humanity	Third person omniscient	Mr. Smoothbore, assassin	Many other assassins with their own specialties	Impending alien invasion will soon dispossess humanity	
Curse 5.0	Third person omniscient	Computer Virus	Fictionalized version of Liu Cixin (however, he does not really have much expertise beyond basic coding	Computer virus completely destroys city, then moves on to world	

			ability)		
The Micro Age	Third person omniscient	The Forerunner, Space Explorer	Micro-humans relate the story of their creation, can now produce ships capable of interplanetary travel	Earth destroyed by solar explosion, humanity wiped out	Micro-humans building space ships to expand civilization into space
Devourer	Third person omniscient	"The Captain" a space pilot	The Girl from Eridanus, an alien with extensive scientific knowledge	Alien invaders strip earth of all resources, end humanity	
Taking Care of Gods	Third person omniscient	Normal human family (Qiusheng, Yulian, etc.)	"Gods" are proficient in alien technology	Story's end warns of Earth's 'siblings' bent on war	
With Her Eyes	First person	Space Explorer	Female researcher lost in earth's core on exploration mission		
The Longest Fall	Third person omniscient	Shen Huabei, nuclear weapons eradication inspector	Zhao Wenjia (geological engineer) son, and several acquaintances, are all scientists	Tunnel drilled through earth's core brings massive destruction	Humanity recovers from disaster, uses tunnel through earth to move into space and transcend Earth