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A Space for Resistance and Reinvention: Chinese Science Fiction and its Fandom

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A Space for Resistance and Reinvention:

Chinese Science Fiction and its Fandom

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in East Asian Studies

by

Shuwen Yang

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Space for Resistance and Reinvention:

Chinese Science Fiction and its Fandom

by

Shuwen Yang

Master of Arts in East Asian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Michael Berry, Chair

Taking *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy as an example, this thesis gives a chronological review of the development of the Chinese science fiction fandom, and close-reading of the original work and selected fan productions. Through positioning colonial inferiority, state censorship, and gender bias in the frame of fandom, this thesis argues that Chinese science fiction and its fandom together form a space for fans' reimagination, reinvention and resistance that yields alternative historiographies of China.

The thesis of Shuwen Yang is approved.

Ursula Heise

Jasmine Trice

Michael Berry, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

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Introduction

Why the Three-Body Problem? Objects and Methods

Remembrance of Earth's Past, more commonly referred to as the "Three-Body Problem Trilogy" in China, has gained popularity ever since the publication of its first volume, *The Three-Body Problem* (2006). The following two volumes, *The Dark Forest* and *Death's End* were published in 2008 and 2010, respectively. Depicting a centuries-long war between humans and aliens, namely the Trisolarans, Liu Cixin locates concepts such as humanity and morality in a far-away future and questions what these concepts might mean at a moment when humankind faces other civilizations in an apocalypse at galactic scale. After the first volume was translated into English in 2014 and won the 2015 Hugo Award, the trilogy became internationally renowned; Yan Feng argued that it "single-handedly lifted Chinese science fiction to a world-class level" (这个人单枪匹马，把中国科幻文学提升到了世界级的水平) (Yan *Xinmin Weekly Magazine*), marking the "revival," or "(re-)emergence" of Chinese science fiction in the 21st century. Other Chinese science fiction writers, such as Wang Jinkang, Han Song, and the new generation born in the 1980s, such as Xia Jia, Hao Jingfang, and Chen Qiufan, also became widely known with their works translated into different languages, and they together constitute a "Chinese Science Fiction New Wave'' named and studied by Song Mingwei in his Chinese monograph *The New Wave in Chinese Science Fiction* 中国科幻新浪潮：历史・诗学・文本.

Accompanying this New Wave is the increasing number of Chinese science fiction fans and the countless fan works they produce stemming from the original works, mainly the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy. The trilogy is commonly considered the work of Chinese science fiction

"most widely known outside the fan circle" (最出圈), as it gains attention from, and is promoted to a broader audience than science fiction fans. A famous anecdote says that Barack Obama once wrote an email to Liu Cixin after reading *Dark Forest* (Gao Shi Ren), asking what happens next. Another example is Lei Jun, the CEO of Xiaomi Corporation, who in an interview compares the "Dark Forest" with the "Business world," arguing that the Dark Forest theories are applicable strategies in the IT industry (Lei). "Dimensional Reduction" has also become a commonly used terminology in the IT industry, under the title of which several books got published, analyzing classic business cases. What's more, the first message sent by the trisolaran listener at Post 1379, namely the triple "Do Not Reply!" turned into the Internet meme, "thrice to emphasize." Similar to what cultural studies scholar Constance Penley notices regarding Star Trek fandom, in China, an astonishingly complex popular discourse about civic, social, moral, and political issues is filtered through the idiom and ideas from the trilogy. Aside from its domestic reception, the trilogy has also gone viral all over the world. By the end of 2020, it was translated into 25 languages and had sold at least 1.5 million copies outside China. A decade after the publication of the trilogy, in 2021, Netflix announced its plan to adapt it as a TV series. It is also the first novel in translation to win the Hugo Award, making Liu the first Asian author to win the prize for best novel.

Critics and researchers have been attempting to answer the question why *The Three-Body Trilogy* has become globally popular. The story of the trilogy, and the traits of the text itself, such as plot, character, and its exuberant imagination and creativity, certainly contribute to its phenomenal reception. Starting from the Cultural Revolution, the first volume portrays the protagonist Ye Wenjie's total despair in human beings, which leads her to reply to the Trisolarans and establish ETO, Earth-Trisolaris Organization, whose members treat Trisolarans

as Lord and believe only with Its power can human civilization be transformed into a brand-new and perfect one. However, split happens in the organization, a rebel group called "Adventists" has the real goal of "destruction of all humankind," because the human race is an evil species and must be punished (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.21). Suffering from the inclement living environment, Trisolarans aim to take over the earth and corporate with "Adventists," which starts the war. In the following two volumes, the trajectory of the war is portrayed in detail. The second volume depicts the tension between human and Trisolarans, centering around "Wallfacer" plan. Since the Trisolarans have transparent thoughts, Wallfacers are selected to develop grand strategies against Trisolarans known only to themselves, and the establishment of "cosmic sociology" and "Dark Forest Theory" is the solution to pause the war between the two civilizations and leads to Deterrence Era. The third volume portrays the forthcoming destruction of the whole galaxy in Post-Deterrence Era, and whether human beings can escape from the collapse.

Apart from the massively ambitious scope of the story, and its mind-blowing concepts and imaginations, one unique phenomenon surrounding the trilogy is the countless fan productions stemming from the trilogy that have appeared on almost all the online social platforms in China. The fandom of the trilogy should not be treated as an isolated, accidental case, but ought to be examined in the larger context of both development of fandom, and impact of cultural change in contemporary China. This thesis situates the The Three-Body Problem Fandom in the thread of Constance Penley's study on Star Trek Fandom back in the 1990s, and Henry Jenkins's study on "convergence culture" in the 21st century. In the study of American science fiction fandom, Penley argues how the *Star Trek* TV show has been borrowed by both NASA to reinforce its public standing, and female slash writers who rewrite the storyline, insert

their own voice and make their own story. In contemporary moment, Jenkins studies the convergence of old and new media, through which the fans work as collective intelligence to democratize the original works and form a participatory culture, which further complicates the forms of fandom and fan diction. Following Jenkins's idea, in discussing the context of fandom of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义), Tian Xiaofei compares the changes brought about by the Internet and new media forms in contemporary moment to the Tang-Song transition in Chinese history, where "new social and cultural structures, new forms of information dissemination, and new ideologies and concepts" emerged (266). Similarly, the technology of the Internet is playing a crucial part in re-shaping the Chinese literary and cultural landscape, where science fiction stands out for both its literary and technological features, thus closely related to the web culture in China. Chinese science fiction fandom is manipulated by both the government and grassroots people in a media convergence age, which complicates various narratives surrounding Chinese science fiction and indicate how fan-produced content can be complex sites of community and resistance to nationalist narratives, while sometimes also amenable to it.

Three sets of power relationships are intertwined in the trilogy and its fandom, namely authors and fans against state censorship, the once colonized against colonial inferiority, and female fans against gender bias, which together make it a conflictive and important field for study. Through teasing out these power relationships in both the original work and the translations and fan productions, one can see how Chinese science fiction fandom is characterized by diversity and multiplicity, complications and contradictions, conservatisms and progressiveness, functioning as a prism that refracts immense cultural changes. In a nutshell, Chinese science fiction should not just be read as a literary genre, but as a form of participatory culture.

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While fan fiction has been studied structurally and systematically in Anglo-American research, in the field of Chinese Studies, research to date has generally focused on Chinese online literature as a whole body of texts; for example, Hockx's work on Chinese Internet Literature focuses on "what Chinese Internet Literature is, how it challenges literary conventions and hierarchies, and how it operates within the specific context of the PRC's publishing system" (44). In fan fiction studies, Tian's article on *Romances of the Three Kingdoms* explores the Three Kingdoms fan productions, specifically slash literature, while also touching upon other forms such as music videos (viddings). However, only until very recently in 2021 did several panels discuss science fiction fandom, the study of which is still an ongoing process. This paper aims to fill the gap of Chinese science fiction fandom studies, introducing what Chinese science fiction fandom is, and how the lens of fandom can provide us with different perspectives to examine not only the science fiction industry, but also governance in contemporary China, and more broadly, modern Chinese history. I argue that Chinese science fiction and its fandom together form a space for resistance, reimagination, and reinvention that yields alternative historiographies of China.

Most of the fan productions are works based on *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy. While fans of the trilogy or Liu Cixin's other works cannot wholly represent general fans of (Chinese) science fiction, this thesis chooses the trilogy and its fandom as a typical example and aims to delineate an overview of the original work, the domestic fan productions, and international reception. The fans studied in this paper specifically refer to the people who love the trilogy and create fan works, while posts and discussions by general Internet users are also included and studied. The paper mainly does close literary and visual reading, but also uses sociological and ethnographic approaches to explore the larger significance of this new literary, cultural, and

social phenomenon. Because a large number of the sources come from the Internet, and many websites vary each time one clicks in, all the URLs are saved in pdf format.

The first chapter gives an overview of the different contents and forms of fan productions stemming from the trilogy, and the different platforms these works get posted on, providing a detailed analysis of the context of *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy. As Busse and Hellekson point out, "fan fiction is defined as much by its context as its content; its specificity is as much a function of its engagement with the source text as the way stories are disseminated and the communities that surround these fannish engagements" (intro.). The first chapter analyzes these questions. The following three chapters each give a thematic analysis of the original work and the fan productions, focusing on trauma and memory, colonial relations, and gender issues. The three sets of power structures show a conflicting phenomenon of resistance and nationalist celebration. As stated in the two conflicting metaphors in the abstract, "lonely hidden army" and "secret weapon in China's soft power arsenal," the resistance of fan communities is sometimes national, namely against state power and patriarchal; and sometimes international, falling in behind official state discourse when it comes to demonstrating Chinese power, which is against China's self-image as an underdog in the international geopolitics dominated by Europe and North America. The three chapters hope to show that rather than contradictory, the phenomenon results from the different directions of trauma, internal and external ones.

On Key Terms

As Busse and Hellekson have pointed out, the field of fandom studies is itself still a "work in progress" (intro.). Similar to the fan fiction it studies, even the concept "fandom" is itself not completely cohesive. Key terms in this thesis, such as canon/original work,

derivative/archive, digital cultural memory/ alternative historiography, and the events happening online in China such as resistance and democratization, all deserve a systematic re-examination. In this section, I hope to define the terms I use in the thesis and clarify the connotations behind the concepts.

In fandom studies, it has become a convention to use "canon" to refer to the original work, based on which fans produce their own elaborations. In the analysis of the differences between "pop culture canon" and "literary canon," Liebler and Chaney emphasize that the "canon" many fan communities refer to is connected explicitly to the storyline and character consistency (Liebler and Chaney). In addition, using the word "canon" in Fandom Studies shows how fans are faithful and devoted to the original work; in other words, the affective investment into these works is a process of canonization that makes the original work classic. However, I use "original work" in my thesis as I argue that, while the Chinese fans do also canonize the trilogy, the concept might be conflated with the process of canonizing Chinese science fiction from marginalized to propaganda, which not only involves fans, but also and especially the participation of the state. Using "original work" refers just to the propriety of the story created by the author.

Using "fan productions" instead of "fan fiction" is another adjustment in the Chinese context. In the West, where Sherlock Holmes fandom is considered as the one of the earliest modern fandoms and science fiction fandom began as early as 1930s, fiction was the main form of fan productions and it was until 1970s, it became possible to meet fans who have only watched film and TV works without reading the fiction. Differently, science fiction fan productions in China constitute a large number of different genres bursting in the same decade on the Internet. Thus, I refer to them as "fan productions." Apart from the fan productions, on the

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Internet, there are a large number of posts, forums, and streams of discussions that are not creative works but also provide important information, and thus are part of the texts that my analysis focuses on. I allude to what De Kosnik describes as a "rogue archive." The word "archive" in De Kosnik's definition has multiple valences. The actual digital archives refer to websites one can visit, such as the Internet Archive, Biblio, Project Gutenberg, and Open Library, while "the metaphorical archives are the ones opened up by each media text put into circulation, archives that audience members enter into, plunder for usable material, and then augment and expand when they deposit their transformations and variations back into the archive of the source" (De Kosnik 6). In Page's words, Internet users' narratives on social media enrich the narrative dimensions of stories (329). De Kosnik asserts that "memory has fallen into the hands of rogue" (1), arguing that the Internet has allowed users to own cultural memories that were once the domain of the state. Similarly in the Chinese Context, as Guobin Yang argues, "the most unorthodox, imaginative, and subversive ideas can be found in Chinese cyberspace. Authority of all kinds is subject to doubt and ridicule. Ordinary people engage in a broad range of political action and find a new sense of self, community, and empowerment. All this forms a sharp contrast to the official newspapers and television channels, where power and authority continue to be narrated in drab tones and visualized in pompous images, so as to be worshipped" (2). Thus, I refer to all the information online as a metaphorical rogue archive to convey the connotation of ownership of memory.

The term "alternative historiography," in Chinese Studies, is used by David Wang to discuss the relationship between history and fiction. Wang quotes Feng Menglong's (冯梦龙 1574 -1646) argument on fiction and history, that "fiction began to rise when the tradition of historiography showed signs of decline," which Wang interprets as "history was incomplete and

imperfect from its very genesis, and fiction was already created to be its supplement, if not its replacement. Thus, history and fiction have always already been implicated in each other's existence" (23). In other words, fiction, against the orthodoxy of history (史統 shitong), provides the possibility for alternative historiography. By contrast, "alternative history" is a specific subgenre of speculative fiction, where the story is told in a retrospective "what if" form. In these stories, one or more historical events occur and are resolved differently than they were in real life; crucial events in human history, and their outcomes are staged as diverging from the historical record. I choose to use "alternative historiography" as both the continuation of Feng's argument on how fiction and storytelling are powerful to complement history, and the expansion of "alternative history" under the science fiction genre, arguing that not only history but also historiography can have a "what if" form. Instead of "memory," using "alternative historiography" emphasizes the documentation process in contrast to the official modern Chinese history.

Chapter 1: The Development of The Three-Body Problem Fandom: An Overview

In 1988, Yao Haijun, a young worker at Timberland in Yichun City, Heilongjiang Province, wrote a letter to *Science Fiction World* to suggest creating a science fiction fan club. This idea was strongly supported by the chief editor at that time, Yang Xiao. After the proposal was posted on *Science Fiction World*, Yao Haijun received letters and donations from all over the country. With all the support, Yao printed the first issue of *Nebula*, which later became the official journal of the Chinese Science Fiction Fan Association (中国科幻爱好者协会会刊). Starting with the letter, Yao Haijun himself experienced several changes, from a worker to the

founder of *Nebula* to the deputy chief editor of *Science Fiction World*. The story of Yao and

Chinese science fiction fans corroborates Xia Jia's observation in discussing science fiction

fandom that these "minorities" tend to have astonishing passion, cohesion, and productivity (Xia

People's Daily). Although in the 1980s, the number of science fiction fans was still limited, and

the communication between them was not as convenient as in the Internet Age, fans have always

been an integral part of the development of Chinese science fiction, forming a base for its future

revival.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Liu Cixin also noted that the writing of Chinese

science fiction was no longer just a creative process by the author alone. Liu's first published

work, *The Whale's Song*, started as a serialization in the magazine *Science Fiction World* in

1999, and has attracted a group of fans since then. In an interview conducted in March 2010, Liu

pointed out that the fans' influence is one of the reasons that prompted him to start writing *The

Three-Body Problem*. "My last short story was 'Mountain' published in *Science Fiction World* in

January 2006. At that time, many fans sent me letters saying, 'how great it would be if you could

write something longer, like a novel'" (Tencent News). Since then, Liu has shifted his attention

from short stories to novels. "Because of this," the interview concludes, "the grand trilogy

Remembrance of Earth's Past came into being," which emphasizes the fans' influence on the

author's writing plan (Tencent News).

Another issue Liu keeps bringing up in the interview is the marginalization of science

fiction in China, and the limitations it brings to the process of writing. "Writing the *Three-Body*

trilogy is just like writing an American drama show, whether there will be a next season depends

largely on the market's reaction" (Tencent News). At the time of the interview, *The Dark Forest*

had been published for two years, and "the sales number has reached the tens of thousands"

(Tencent News). Liu was thus able to devote himself to the writing of *Death's End*, which was published several months later in November 2010, and has gone viral in the following years. Liu's words reflect the fact that before the trilogy's publication, Chinese science fiction fandom, although already existed, was only a relatively small circle as neither Liu himself nor the publisher was sure about the market's reaction to the trilogy. The trilogy is itself a turning point, together with the increasing accessibility of the Internet and the appearance of different social media platforms, leads to the formation of "the Three-Body Problem Fandom," and later a science fiction industry full of controversial issues such as Intellectual Properties, investments, and adaptations.

As can be seen in the interview, the readers' reception has to some extent influenced the creation and publication of Liu's science fiction works. How Liu started to write the trilogy, and how the trilogy became such a phenomenon today, demonstrates the importance of studying Chinese science fiction fandom. This chapter gives a chronological overview of the formation of the *Three-Body Problem* fandom, and the changing platforms where it takes place. Although Chinese science fiction fans existed long before the Internet age, this chapter mainly focuses on the Internet platforms, as the trilogy was published in an era when the World Wide Web became more and more accessible. When the first volume was published in 2006, only 10.5% of the population in China were Internet users. In 2011, after the publication of the trilogy's final volume, the percentage reached 38.3% (Datacommons). The shifts in the formation of fandom were influenced by the development of the Internet and the changes of media.

Discussions, communities, and fan productions have emerged on different online platforms sporadically, but can be briefly periodized into three stages. The three stages include the early stage (2000-2010) of Baidu Tieba and SMTH BBS, when mainly male intellectuals

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discussed the content of the trilogy and wrote fan fiction that is commonly considered "hard science fiction." During this stage, one of the communities worth studying is the "Three-Body Problem Bar," an online community where fans established a "civilization," about which they wrote detailed historiography later. Issues such as copyright, censorship, even "democracy" that are central in fan discussion today already appeared during this early stage. In addition to the two platforms, the inclusion of the Qidian Zhongwen Website in the first section intends to cast light on how fans' perception shapes, or at least enriches the definition of science fiction. During the second stage (2011-present), fan productions spread to new media forms, especially on Bilibili and Weibo, marking a shift from a small fan circle focusing on fan fiction to wider circulation on mass media, which paved the way for the future commercial filming of the trilogy. From this stage onward, fan productions should not be taken just as derivative works, but understood as themselves open to appropriation and reworking by the media industries. The period from 2015 to the present, which partially overlaps with the second stage is, saw a burst of female-composed slash literature and comics. During the first two stages, the majority of fans were male, and the focus was mainly on the science and technology perspective of the trilogy. It was only in about 2015, after the establishment of Lofter, that there started to be more female fans who posted their fan productions onto the platform, and a slash culture emerged from then on.

Section 1: The Early Stage of Fandom (2000- 2010)

SMTH BBS and The Three-Body X

The first published fan fiction of the trilogy, named *Three-Body X: The Redemption of Time* (2011), was first serialized on Shuimu Tsinghua (SMTH) BBS and "Liu Cixin Bar" in Baidu Tieba starting on December 5th, 2010. The author, Bao Shu, finished Liu Cixin's trilogy

in seventeen days (Bao *Science Fiction World*). *Three-Body X* later went viral and caught the attention of Yao Haijun*,* at that time the editor of *Science Fiction World*, who contributed a lot to its publication. It is worth noting that this fan fiction was posted online right after the publication of *Death's End*, which makes it one of the earliest fan fictions of the trilogy and the only one to be published. Bao Shu's choice of posting the novel on Shuimu Tsinghua (SMTH) BBS and "Liu Cixin Bar" in Baidu Tieba itself already gives a clue to trace where the earliest fandom takes shape, and what these platforms and their users look like.

Shuimu Tsinghua BBS (commonly abbreviated as SMTH BBS) is the first and one of the most popular bulletin board system sites at Chinese universities and was launched in 1995. It originated at Tsinghua University, one of the top universities in China renowned primarily for its prominence in science and engineering research fields. The slogan of BBS has been "the community of intellectuals originating from Tsinghua University, where people living in ivory towers can connect to real society." The same year that BBS was launched, a science fiction discussion section was established, becoming the earliest online forum for Chinese Internet users to discuss science fiction. In the late 1990s, the number of people who had access to the World Wide Web was limited, and therefore the number of registered users at SMTH BBS only reached around several dozen by the end of 1995. In 1996, the number rose to three digits (Wikipedia). BBS experienced several revisions and shutdowns during the early years because of political issues. One big event is that, on March 16, 2005, access to SMTH BBS was restricted to on-campus IPs, but in early 2006 SMTH BBS reopened to IPs from outside Tsinghua University, available to those who would confirm their identity using a valid email account (Wikipedia). However, a large number of its discussion groups are still under tight control, refusing visits from the outside world. Thus, access to it was rather restrained. From 1995 to 2005, the

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percentage of Internet users rose from 0.005% to 8.523% of the total population, a rather low level (*The World Bank*).

With no detailed information available of BBS in its early years other than its slogan, its restrictions to user IPs and the statistics of Internet users in China, it is commonly agreed that the early users of BBS were mainly young students or teachers from the top universities in China, or other highly educated people with access to the Internet and valid email accounts. In short, the typical users were young college students or intellectuals who had the greatest access to new media technologies and had mastered the skills to fully participate in these new knowledge cultures. Bao Shu, a student from Peking University during the composition of his fan fiction, fits this type. Although detailed user identities are not available, the traits of the platform to some extent illustrate the identities of the earliest science fiction fans on the Internet in China.

While the original website is no longer accessible, the content of *Three-Body X* and the popularity it gained tells us more about its audience. The first half of *Three-Body X* narrates, from Yun Tianming's perspective, how the Trisolarans study Yun Tianming's brain and learn strategies from him to fight against Earth during and after the Deterrence Era. The second half gradually reveals the history of the Universe, depicting how the universe "once had ten dimensions" and gradually collapses to the "one-dimensional state," which follows the Lao Tzu's philosophy of "Tao begat one; One begat two; Two begat three; Three begat all things," and 九九歸一 "everything goes into one", which is an example of how Chinese science fiction incorporates traditional Chinese culture. Rather tactfully, Yun Tianming attempts to recuperate the ten-dimensional status, namely the "Edenic Age." In the original work, Yun Tianming's brain is sent to the Trisolarans for inter-civilization communication, but how the Trisolarans capture Yun's brain and what happens after is omitted. Also, at the end of third volume, the

universe could only return to normal after all the substances in small universes are returned to the large universe, but the character Cheng Xin leaves five kilograms of Ecosphere in Universe 647, which leaves an open ending on whether the universe will recover to normal. Thus, fan fiction serves as a detailed complement to the original work; as Penley's points out, "some fans feel compelled to flesh out the sketchy contours of science and technology in the canon, they have mostly been men" (117). Indeed, in the new version of SMTH BBS today, the posts in its science fiction section still focus on details about the theories and concepts in the trilogy, indicating its users' long-lasting interest in the scientific and technological perspective of these works.

However, it is worth noting that, as Bao Shu says in his postscript, one of his intentions is also to compensate for Yun Tianming's unfulfilled love for Cheng Xin (Bao *Science Fiction World*). The compensation is shown by the fact that in *Three-Body X*, all women are naked. In the first part, the only listener of Yun Tianming's experience is AA, who in the original work is the assistant of Cheng Xin and meets Yun on DX3906, and later lives a happy life with him. The fan fiction is faithful to the original work as Yun Tianming and AA are the only human beings left on DX3906, but throughout the story, AA is erotically portrayed as a "naked" and "beautiful white body." Because Yun Tianming is emotionally unstable when recounting his sufferings in the Trisolar world, AA has sexual intercourse several times with him to express her love for him and calm him down. Sophon, the manager of Universe 647, also appears naked when Yun Tianming first meets her, because as the owner of the universe, Yun does not "set her to wear clothes" (Bao, *San Ti X*). The readers of the work also focus much on sex; according to Bao Shu's postscript, although his original intention of using the "X" in the title was to refer to "uncertain and infinite possibilities," "since everyone says it is related to sex… Well, all right" (Bao, "Postscript"). Indeed, some male readers even consider it as an enjoyable pornographic

work. The popularity of *Threebody X* and its male fantasies might, to some extent, indicate the gender ratio of its readers, and how in 2011, science fiction, its fan fiction, and the fan platforms were male-dominated.

Liu Cixin himself is also an active user of SMTH BBS, interacting a lot with fans and answering their questions on the platform. While Liu Cixin has agreed to the publication of *Three-Body X*, he does not hold a positive attitude toward fan fiction. Liu argues that fan fiction negatively influences the original author. For example, according to Liu, the most significant plot line that is unfinished is Yun Tianming's story, about which he plans to write another novel, but "the road is blocked so I cannot go further" (Guo *Nanfang Daily*). Although he allows the publication of fan fiction, Liu also raises concerns about the copyright issues but does not go further into the question. The tension between the author of the canon and the fan writer, and the issue of copyright emerged very early in this stage, but was not systematically dealt with.

Baidu Tieba (San Ti Bar)

Baidu Tieba, established on December 3, 2003, is one of the most used Chinese communication platforms during the early 21ˢᵗ century. Users may search for a topic of interest forum known as a "bar." "Liu Cixin Bar" is a community where fans of Liu Cixin gathered even before the trilogy was published. While the establishing time of "Liu Cixin Bar" cannot be traced accurately as Tieba does not allow the function, the earliest post is dated April 2004 and invites the readers to share their general impressions and thoughts on Liu's science fiction works. Liu has appealed to a number of fans since he published his works in the magazine, and these fans

formed the earliest group of trilogy fans. Under the "Digest section" of the Liu Cixin Bar, half of the posts are under the section on Liu Cixin and his works, while the other three sections are on fan productions, the front line of science, and general discussion on science fiction. The 754 digest posts in these three sections show the users' inventiveness, their passion for science fiction, and other discoveries in science and technology.

In contrast to SMTH BBS and the "Liu Cixin Bar," which are rather loose communities where fans gather and discuss related topics and Liu's works generally, "The Three-Body Problem (in Chinese *San Ti*) Bar" has a more complicated history (Tieba). According to fans, they established a "civilization" in the bar and wrote a detailed historiography about its development. One of the famous pieces is called *Ti Xiao Tongjian*, imitating *Zizhi Tongjian (Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government)*, a pioneering reference work in Chinese historiography from 1084 AD, which was composed during the Song dynasty in the form of a chronicle recording Chinese history from 403 BC to 959 AD. The table of contents of *Ti Xiao Tongjian* is still available, but the full text on Tieba is deleted. Parts of the texts are preserved by fans in an Android app titled *Tixiao Tongjian.* Below is part of the table of contents of *Ti Xiao Tongjian*.

三、政治史

    （一）、　体校时代

    （二）、　圣战

    （三）、　中世纪

    （四）、　第一共和国（田园时代）

    （五）、　番外篇：三体吧远征军

    （六）、　第一共和国（三权分立）

    （七）、　第二共和国（图腾改革）

    （八）、　番外篇：自爆自吧

    （九）、　第三共和国

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Chapter 5	References

Fig. 1. A screenshot of part of the table of contents of *Tixiao Tongjian*, with my English translation attached.

Several other posts also document the history of the "San Ti Bar" from 2006 to 2012 and are preserved in "San Ti Bar." One of them starts with "Ancient War," an event that happened during the establishment of "San Ti Bar." The cause of the "Ancient War" might sound a little bit absurd, as the Chinese characters meaning "Three-Body Problem" 三体, are also the abbreviation of "Beijing No. 3 Athletic School;" thus the "San Ti Bar" was initially established by the athletic school students. In June 2006, the fans of Liu Cixin came to the "San Ti Bar" and started a quarrel with the students because the fans wanted to use the bar title. The "war" gradually intensified and was even raised to a national issue, with its core debate question being "Which benefits China more? Science and technology, or athletics?" (Tieba). Despite its "nonsensical" immediate cause, the war, to some extent, demonstrates how Tieba provides Internet users a possible debating space. More interestingly, the argument that "science and technology" can "benefit China" more defines "science fiction" from the perspective of the fans. In fans' perception, science fiction is a genre that promotes science and technology across the nation and enhances China's military power, a view that even "foretells" that science fiction is the secret weapon in China's (soft) power arsenal.

After the four-month "ancient war," the original Manager of the San Ti Bar stepped down. The new manager, Dulander 杜兰德尔, deleted all the "ancient war" posts, and established the rules of the "San Ti Bar." "Congratulations! Science Fiction has conquered the San Ti Bar" is the post that still remains in 2021 and bears witness to the "historic moment." One of the legacies of the war is that the abbreviation for the athletic school, "Ti Xiao 体校," was kept and became the title of a later historiography, but also a way to circumvent censorship on literature bars that happened in June 2016. The author of *Ti Xiao Tongjian* highly praised the development of the bar. In the preface, he writes, "because the majority of its users are highly-

educated, the bar has a tradition of 'always discussing rationally instead of getting into catfights.' It has its bar charter, electoral system, and the form of the management team is also based on separation of power." "The bar is the first bar ever in Baidu Tieba that retains its democratic system after the user number reaches ten thousand, which is very similar to the Western democratic system." *The History of the San Ti Bar* provides detailed documents of and comments on past bar managers, praising or criticizing their management. *Ti Xiao Tongjian* also emphasizes the tradition of the bar having "no fear of power." To conclude from these materials, the bar has almost established a democratic civilization that fans take pride in.

Languages and terms from the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy are constantly referred to in the "historical writing." Apart from some of the managers' irresponsibility, censorship also negatively influenced the Bar. Several important events, for example, the one in June 2016 when all the literature bars were censored on Tieba, was also documented in *The History of the San Ti Bar* as a "chaotic time (乱纪元)," a term from the trilogy. Also in this period, a large number of posts were deleted and users stopped posting, so the bar is referred to as the "Storyless world (无故事王国)," which is also a quotation from the trilogy, emphasizing the importance of individual storytelling in this democratic system. When there are struggles or revolts in the bar because the users are not satisfied with the bar management, it is recorded as "the gluten sea is back (饕餮海回来了)," in order to portray the chaos, but also to demonstrate the power of the fans' protest in the bar. Borrowing language from the trilogy, the fans encode their information, imitating the character Yun Tianming, who has to deliver messages to the Earth under surveillance from the Trisolarans. The original work provides a highly metaphorical language that allows users to talk about politics and democracy. Experiences in science fiction work are "lived" vividly in fan

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communities in real life. Fans' passionate documentation also provides an alternative history of the censorship events that were not publicly recorded online, and becomes the shared memory of the trilogy fans.

The QiDian (Starting point) Chinese Online Literature Website

QiDian Chinese net is a literature website founded in 2003. The website was initially established for the "Chinese Magic Fantasy Union" but later also famous for its other genres such as martial arts, military and war stories, and science fiction. Another famous fan fiction, 三体之后银河纪元传说 (*The Three-Body Problem: A Tale of the Post Milky-Way Era*), was firstly serialized on QiDian Chinese from January 2015 to March 2015 (San Feng Weibo), but was not finished because the author's account was blocked because of online censorship. There is no whole text available today, but according to a summary of the plot (Reinforce Zhihu), the author imagines the development of the starship civilization, which in the original work is only shortly introduced when Zhang Beihai chooses to fly to the planet NH558J2 and thinks that "the new human civilization would forever voyage on a starship" (Liu, *Dark Forest*). The unfinished novel spends a large portion on the technology tree, string theory, and quantum mechanics. Therefore, the readers consider it to be "hard science fiction," which is similar to *Three-Body X: The Redemption of Time* (2011).

Although the platform is a literature website, and it is hard to trace interactive communities and a whole picture of fandom on it, I still include it because the characteristics of the website can give us some clues about the audience's definition of the genre. Many of the trilogy fan fictions posted on this website combine features of both science fiction and traditional

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Chinese fantasy, posing questions for the definition of the genre in a Chinese context. In the analysis of "Cultivation through C (programming language)" (C 语言修仙), a famous piece that combines Cultivation Novel (修仙小说), where the protagonist cultivate himself through Taoism, and science fiction, The combination can be compared with late Qing translation strategies, when science and technology were introduced to China through building a corresponding relationship between Western scientific terminologies and language in traditional Chinese fantasy. For example, "chemistry 化学" is translated as "jinshi 金石," the process of turning stone into gold. The website and the tradition of Chinese online literature can be an example of how Chinese fantasy inspires the science fiction genre and how fan fiction actively influences the mainstream understanding of what science fiction is.

Summary

While I argue that this period ends in 2010, there continue to be fan works created on these platforms and other literature sites. In "A List of Works Derived from the Three-Body Problem Trilogy," San Feng summarizes 41 works, ranging from novels to songs, games, cosplays, and even theme restaurants. Among them there are several unfinished fan fictions and word games posted on Tieba even after 2015. Nonetheless, the periodization makes sense because of the apparent shifts in the medium in the following years, but each website, although more or less experiencing decline in usage in the change of medium, still sustains its activity and discussions on science fiction.

To summarize, fan fiction and fan communities concerning Liu Cixin and his trilogy already came into shape in "Liu Cixin Bar" when the writing of the second and third volumes was still in progress. At that time, the discussions of the original work were limited to

intellectuals and Liu Cixin's long-time fans that he had already attracted through his previous works. After the publication of the trilogy, fans were mainly active on SMTH BBS and Baidu Tieba, with the majority of users of SMTH BBS being intellectuals in science and technology, while the users on Tieba were more diverse. Issues such as democracy, the resistance against censorship, etc., already emerged during the early stage of fandom. The Qidian Chinese Literature Website illustrates the importance of discussing science fiction in relation to fantasy in a Chinese context. The review of the early trilogy fandom points to a fan persona of a male-dominated group with their focus mainly on "hard-science fiction." The fandom also opens up a space for discussions about politics and resistance and the definition of the genre.

Section 2: The Shift to Video Platforms (2010-2021)

"Fans have always been early adopters of new media technologies; their fascination with fictional universes often inspires new forms of cultural production. Fans are the most active segment of the media audience, one that refuses to simply accept what they are given, but rather insists on the right to become full participants. None of this is new. What has shifted is the visibility of fan culture. The Web provides a powerful new distribution channel for amateur cultural production" (Jenkins 131). Jenkins' observations also apply to the Chinese context. While the trilogy fandom discussed in the first section was only a celebration by limited numbers of people, changes in media have made the fan culture more visible. When discussing the "unexpected" popularity of the trilogy, Xia Jia also emphasizes its circulation through mass media and the World Wide Web. The trilogy was recommended by a large number of Weibo KOLs and have generated a series of fan productions such as original theme songs, music videos,

cosplay, fan comics, and fan groups that name themselves "ETO," all of which mainly circulate on Weibo (Xia).

To add to Xia's summary of trilogy fandom, Bilibili should also be included in the discussion as the theme songs and music videos she mentions mainly originated here. In this section, I analyze Bilibili and Weibo, the two platforms that have hosted numerous fan productions, arguing that it is the grassroots convergence of the canon that pushes the commercialization of the Three-Body trilogy forward. A strong fan-backed drive indeed paves the way for the Three-Body trilogy to become a transmedia franchise. Two points will be tackled in this section, namely how the current moment of media change is reaffirming the right of everyday people to contribute to their culture actively; and how the concept of "fan works" as "derivative work" should be challenged and redefined.

Bilibili: "When Piracy Becomes Promotion."

Before diving into the platform, it should be noted that Chinese fan fiction is generally influenced by several different cultural traditions, not only the Western science fiction fandom tradition (such as Star Trek fandom), but also Japanese fan fiction subculture. One evidence of the Japanese influence is that the Chinese character and definition of "fan fiction," "同人," comes from Japanese "どうじん 同人." In her discussion of Three Kingdom fandom, Wang also highlights that "the more direct influence on Chinese Internet fan fiction came from Japanese fan fiction subculture" (quoted in Tian 227).

The Japanese influences do explain why it is Bilibili that cultivates such a variety of trilogy fan productions, as well as why the earliest fan productions of the trilogy in new media mainly take certain forms. Launched in January 2010, Bilibili was originally a video website

themed around ACG (animation, comic, and games), renowned as a platform for "two-dimensional space" lovers (二次元爱好者). In 2021, it has become one of the largest video sharing platforms where Uploaders (up 主) can upload their original or derivative works, with an average of 223.3 million monthly active users in the first quarter of 2021 (Statista). For the purpose of user expansion, the website has gradually become a comprehensive platform where there are different sections of topics of interest, including science and technology, military, fashion and beauty, music, dance, etc. Despite all these shifts and expansion it experienced, the forms of posted works mainly keep the conventions from the ACG subculture. The earliest fan productions of the trilogy are fan-made "character songs," "vidding music videos," and animation.

One of the representative fan productions on Bilibili is *My Three-Body* (2014), made by Shen You Ba Fang (神游八方) and his team. It follows the patterns of ACG culture, using Minecraft as the method to create an animated world to narrate the story of the first volume. The whole crew functions as a virtual community, and after the first episode, more and more fans volunteer to join the team of Shen You Ba Fang, contributing their professional skills. Shen You Ba Fang talks about his intention to create the work, "as a fan of the trilogy, a lot of people ask me 'what is *The Three-Body Problem*?' I just want to let them know what it is" (Qiu Sohu News). It is another example of how the fan community works as a collective intelligence with inventiveness and determination.

Other fan productions posted on Bilibili include music videos written and edited for specific characters from the trilogy, which draw out aspects of the characters' emotional lives or otherwise get inside their heads. There are also many explanatory videos of the trilogy, where

uploaders summarize the plot into 10-min videos so that the viewers can be quickly familiarized with the content of the books. These types of videos are causing great debate as the copyright issue is hard to deal with, but at the same time, these works are rather effective promotion strategies, and some of them are high-quality works. For example, a video called "Reading the *Three-Body* Trilogy in 84 minutes" uploaded by Wen Yue Xiao Qiang (文曰小强), got 111,280,000 views in total. With the off-screen narration summarizing the plot, the video uses excerpts from different films and TV shows to visualize the content of the narration. Viewers highly praised the video as "the actual first San Ti movie," at the same time criticizing the failed attempt of commercial filming of the trilogy.

The general intentions of these fan productions can be summarized as an affective investment, such as the passion for promoting the work, or to emotionally compensate for certain characters. At the same time, one key event behind this burst of fan productions on Bilibili is the failed attempt at the visualization of the trilogy. A 2019 news report titled "The visualization of the Three-Body trilogy in 10 years: Why is it so hard?" traces the long, failed journey of the trilogy's film adaptation. The first attempt at an adaptation started as early as 2009, when the CEO of YooZoo Interactive reached out to Liu Cixin to discuss the copyright of the first volume. In 2013, after the reorganization of the company, YooZoo Interactive gained the copyright of the novel and officially launched the film adaptation. However, after the two-month shooting, the project failed with the resignation of the producer, while there was no clear explanation about what would happen next. Unconfirmed news says it was because of the censorship issue, while other sources say that because there is no tradition of science fiction filmmaking in the Chinese-language film industry, the special effects could reach a certain standard, and since the

production team "refuse[d] to contact Hollywood special effects team," the project just fell apart (Tang Sohu News).

It was against this background that the fan-made visual adaptation of the trilogy became popular. In contrast to the meandering and failed visualization process, the first season of *My Three-Body* was released in 2014. In 2015, *Waterdrop*, a tribute to the book *Dark Forest* that portrays one of the traumatic events, the Doomsday Battle, was released and gained several international awards in the following years. A comment went viral that "Fandom overrides the Official/ Commercial Productions" (同人逼死官方), mocking the failure of the commercial attempts.

When discussing companies' attitudes toward fan productions of a certain work, Jenkins categorizes them into "prohibitionist" and "collaborationist." In the existing cases of science fiction, the corporations in China have to collaborate with, or are even strongly dependent on the fans to help with the commercialization of the trilogy. After the success of *My Three-Body* season 1 in 2014, it attracted capital and brought more investments. The second and third seasons of *My Three-Body* were invested in by the San Ti Universe company, while the fan crew has also become a part of the corporation. In June 2019, Bilibili, together with "San Ti Universe" and YHKT Entertainment, launched the *Three-Body Problem* animation project. It can be argued that the fan-made animation series actually helped Bilibili establish its reputation and culture on animation adaptation, as it is a recognized platform to cultivate already successful fan animation. In this sense, the term "derivative" should be challenged as in such a context, fan works can no longer be understood as simply derivative of mainstream materials but must be understood as themselves open to appropriation and reworking by the media industries.

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Last but not least, fan productions on Bilibili also provide examples to look into the

gender ratios of the trilogy fans on this platform. The gender ratio of the users of the whole

platform is 57: 42 male/ female (Bilibili), but varies in different sections. According to Huo Shao

Yun (火烧云), a database of Bilibili, the active fans of the Uploader "Shen You Ba Fang" are

82:17 male/ female, indicating that males' interest in the trilogy remained relatively high on

Bilibili in this period.

Fig. 2. The gender ratio among fans of Shen You Ba Fang. Huo Shao Yun 火烧云 statistics.

Weibo, Virtual Communities, and Roleplay

At a similar time as the rise of Bilibili, Weibo was also becoming influential in China,

and a large number of trilogy fans started to gather on it. This section takes a fan group called

"The Three-Body Problem Weibo Group (三体微博汇)" as an example to show how the

commercialization of the trilogy attracted fans, and how the fans started to form their own

culture against the background of the failed film adaptation.

On October 13, 2014, after the launch of the *Three-Body Problem* film project, the

representative of YooZoo, the company in charge of the adaptation, established an account called

"Three-Body Problem Film" and actively interacted with Weibo fans, inviting users to suggest

possible casting, a singer of the theme song, and design logos for the series. On December 26,

2014, a Wechat group was established so that the producer of the Three-Body film could talk to

fans face-to-face and ask their opinions on the adaptation of the work. On May 4, 2015, the

weibo fan group was established, the group limit of which was 500 people; on 11 June 2015,

there were 496 fans in the group. Until today, August 3, 2021, 393 people remain in the group

(statistics from my Weibo account).

Fig. 3. The first day the film account was put into use, it interacted with fans and asked them about their casting ideas.

As Weibo also allows the posts and reposts of different types of fan productions, many fan productions are simultaneously posted on Bilibili and Weibo. However, the feature that allows Weibo users to interact with each other under both real or fake identities also cultivates a series of unique phenomena, especially cosplay. Early in 2011, a Weibo account named "San Ti-Ye Wenjie" appeared online, imitating the character Ye Wenjie through quoting her lines and imitating her tones to talk to Weibo users. "San Ti- Ye Wenjie" is also an active user in the Weibo Fan Group." Following her "lead," a number of people changed their nicknames to characters from the trilogy. I was in charge of two Weibo accounts in the fan group, "San Ti-Cheng Xin" and "ETO-Hong Kong." Until today, the account I once used as "ETO-Hong Kong" still has several fans with an "ETO-" prefix.
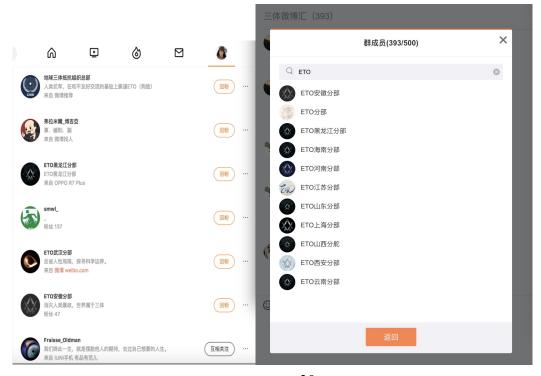

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Fig. 4. A list of "ETO-" plus "City Name" users.

The online role-play provides a sense of belonging to a virtual community for the fans of the marginalized science fiction genre and allows them to live a second life in the science fiction world. Users with a prefix relate to each other through adopted personas and avatars, tending to view one another as extrapolations of these highly performative roles. Most of the interactions are in "quoting-style" or "dialogue-style." Facing COVID-19 in 2020, "San Ti- Ye Wenjie" still talked the way the character talks. In a post she quoted, "in nature, nothing exists alone. -- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*," the book that Bai Mulin gives to Ye Wenjie. Several users interacted with "San Ti- Ye Wenjie," one asking, "Leader, what should we do?" Ye replies, "prepare the vaccinations." The second user complains about the difficulty of conducting biodemography research, and Ye encourages him/her by saying, "Comrade, we should be fearless when doing research."

Fig. 5. Ye Wenjie's interactions with Weibo users.

The voices of these fans are indeed widely heard, and can also be seen as both affective investments and promotion strategies. In a book titled *I am Liu Cixin*, a collection of interviews and essays on Liu, the preface is a letter to him written by "核弹女孩" (the young woman holding the nuclear bomb) expressing her love for Liu and his works. In her self-introduction, she writes, "I am the young woman holding the nuclear bomb. I appeared on pages 189-212 in *The Three-Body Problem* published in January 2008. Unfortunately, shortly after my appearance, I was killed by Da Shi. This walk-on character in the book is my ID on Weibo, as well as a part of my life" (Hedan Nvhai 1). She then introduces the other users, including "San Ti-Ye Wenjie," "San Ti-Cheng Xin," "Listening Post 1379," even "ant on the tomb" and "Luo Ji's bulletin." Fans

capture the tiny details in the story, role-playing them, speaking in their tones, "reproducing tears and joys in reality, but also composing new plots and expressing their thoughts," the nuclear-bomb girl says; "all of this stems from our small wish: to keep your characters alive. Because you said that science fiction is a way of life" (Hedan Nvhai 1).

While the two platforms are disparate, fan communities emerge on them for the same reason, namely expectations for, and later the disappointment about the film adaptation of the trilogy. In 2016, the Weibo group members were among the earliest people to know that the film might not be released. Since then, the group members have started to discuss what they can create together. One typical form discussed is the Radio drama, and several group members volunteered to join. Although the video drama was in the end made by Santi Universe corporation, the discussions, or more broadly, the formation of the fan communities on Bilibili and Weibo indicates, or even leads to, the high involvement of fans in the commercialization of the trilogy from the very beginning. In other words, science fiction fans have started to "own" the trilogy from a rather early moment.

Section 3: A Recent Burst of Female-written/ drawn Slash Literature and Fan Comics

A literature platform left out in the discussion of the first stage is Jinjiang Literature City, which, like Baidu Tieba, was also established in 2003. The website is famous for romance novels written by females, as stated in its own slogan "the largest Chinese-language women's literature website in the world." The earliest fan fiction on this website can be dated back to March 2012, around one year later than *The Three-Body X*. The piece, titled "Three-Body Problem Fan Storiette," is not a complete story but consists of short, scattered pieces on how the characters in the trilogy can be paired. The author imagines that after the "dimensional collapse," the earth's

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civilization is preserved, and the genes of the dead people are kept and cloned in the far future so that all the characters can live in the same time and be paired. The couples include Shi Qiang and Luo Ji, Zhang Beihai and Dongfang Yanxu, etc. It has gained an average of 4874 hits per chapter. Apart from this earliest piece, there are around 30 other pieces of fan fiction of the trilogy on Jinjiang Literature City posted between 2012 and 2021, with around five hundred hits per piece. Compared to the numerous posts in "Liu Cixin Bar," "San Ti Bar," and SMTH BBS, which reach dozens of thousands, it can be seen that the major users of Jinjiang do not belong to the fan group of the trilogy. To conclude again, the earliest forms of science fiction fan fiction of the trilogy were not slash literature written by females, but Baoshu and other fans' fiction, commonly considered hard science fiction, containing a male fantasy.

Lofter was established in 2011, with its initial marketing positioning it as a community for "artistic" people, namely the ones interested in photography, drawing, fashion, and so on. In 2016, Lofter officially launched its "fan fiction trending list," categorized into place-based sections, including domestic, Europe and America, Japanese, and other regions.

Fig. 6. "Fan Fiction Trending List" on Lofter under different categories.

The trending hashtags are generated by algorithm, calculated through four indicators: the number of subscribers, the number of articles published, the number of views, and the amount of interaction (the sum of recommendations, likes, comments, and reposts). As demonstrated in the three images, none of the cps are BG (boy and girl), but all BL (Boys' Love). The trending list proves that Lofter had become the dominant place where female writers post their slash literature of certain fiction or films, in which the straight male characters are rewritten to have homosexual relationships. The list also attracted more and more fans to come to the platform. Until today, it is still the most significant fan fiction group specifically for slash literature, opening up a space for the slash subculture. The trilogy also has its hashtags on Lofter. Under the hashtag "The Three-Body Problem," there are 13262 pieces with 29,050,000 views of the hashtag in total. The establishment of the platform and the emergence of slash literature might indeed reciprocally enhance each other, as there is no clear evidence about which one appears first. The female fans'

participation might have started even earlier but only become visible after the platform is established.

Summary

The overview of the development of fandom attempts to briefly picture what the science fiction fandom looks like from as early as the 80s, to the internet age, especially after the trilogy's publication. During this process, issues such as the conflict between authors and fans, fandom's function as a place for democracy, the shift from marginalized culture to mass circulation, and gender issues, all become important topics nowadays. It is fair to say that fandom is indispensable to the development of Chinese science fiction, from the first volume of *Nebula*, to the cooperation between the San Ti Universe Corporation and fan communities. Chinese science fiction fandom started when there was no established science fiction industry, thus instead of "poaching" the original media text in a subversive position, what Chinese science fiction fans do is to create their works, and pave the way for the industry's future development. In this sense, science fiction has been owned by the grassroots from the very beginning.

Under the term "grassroots" are the variety of fan groups that all have their own foci and agendas, and their works have been noticed both domestically and globally. The following sections aim to explore the different groups of The Three-Body trilogy fans. Science fiction has long been considered as a genre that is "Western" and "male-dominated," but I argue that it is intrinsically embedded with binary oppositions such as East and West as well as between genders. In the framework of fandom and in the Chinese context, another layer added to these oppositions is the tension between state censorship, the science fiction work itself, and the fan

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community. The following chapters deal with three significant themes in Chinese science fiction and its fandom, namely memory and historical trauma, slash literature, and colonialism.

Chapter 2: Political Trauma and Historical Memory

While the trilogy is an epic work that leads the readers to ponder the sublime universe, the starting point of the story is a traumatic event in modern Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution. In the first volume, the protagonist Ye Wenjie gradually loses her faith in humanity after experiencing a series of traumatic events during the Cultural Revolution and decides to reply to the message from the Trisolaran, inviting a more advanced civilization to save the Earth, which triggers the centuries-long war between humans and aliens. Apart from the beginning of the story, traumatic events also serve as important turning points throughout the trilogy, and the fan works adapted from it also tend to choose trauma as a point of departure.

Although discussion of the Cultural Revolution is not totally silenced in China, it is certainly an event that needs to be circumvented and the representation of which requires strategy. As Jing Tsu notes, "for decades, Chinese writers have navigated a political and social landscape that has been far more complex than most outsiders can imagine" (*Financial Times*). While there are several genres such as "scar literature (伤痕文学)" and "search-for-roots literature (寻根文学)" that emerged after the Cultural Revolution and reflected on and expressed a negative attitude toward this traumatic period, "love and faith remained the major themes of these works" (Liu 24). Its practitioners were typically not opposed to Communism, but on the contrary, retained faith in the ability of the Party to rectify past tragedies and "embraced love as a key to solving social problems" (Liu 24).

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Science fiction, as a long-ignored genre in China, hardly engaged with reality over decades. It is not until recent years that Liu's trilogy, together with Wang Jinkang's Antlife (《蚁生》 Yisheng), became the two notable science fiction works that respond to political events in a rather critical way. Different from the other genres briefly discussed above, science fiction constructs a highly unrealistic story world and might indeed more accurately "approach reality (逼真)" in a metaphorical or allegorical way. In this chapter, the first section focuses on the original work and offers a narratological analysis of the representation of traumatic events in the book. Science fiction lends itself to alternative imaginings and parallel universes, providing more possibilities to represent and examine trauma or traumatic events and the reasons hidden behind them. The section also argues how science fiction in China is itself a genre embedded with trauma. The second section of this chapter focuses on the amendments made in the English translation of the trilogy, which, together with the fan archives of the original serialized version of the trilogy, serves to recover and preserve a trauma that is lost in the published Chinese version. The third section discusses the fan production, namely *My Three-Body* made with Minecraft, arguing how the new media technology allows immersion in the representation of trauma and complicates the responses towards it.

Section 1: Original Work

In the trilogy, the word "trauma (创伤)" appears four times, referring to the aftermath of two actual traumatic events, the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and two fictional events, the "Doomsday battle" (Year 205, Crisis Era), and the internecine warfare of the "Starship Earth's Battle of Darkness" (Year 205, Crisis Era). I argue

that the latter two are metaphors for, or allegories of, the two actual ones, respectively, and it is the metaphor that opens up the space for detailed description and analysis. The four traumatic events can be categorized as centripetal and centrifugal ones, and direct the victims' actions in different ways. I also show that the whole trilogy is constantly revisiting trauma in a way that almost transfigures it into a "founding myth," making the trilogy a narrative scar that builds up around historical trauma.

There are two different Chinese versions of the first volume, the serialized version in *Science Fiction World* magazine and the officially published version. The English version aligns more closely with the serialized version but with some variations, especially adjustments concerning two issues: Liu's problematic view of women (gender) and the recovery of some sensitive content that cannot be published in Chinese. I use all three versions for analysis and comparison because they are all authorized by Liu Cixin and have achieved popularity in both the Chinese-language and English-language worlds, and because this thesis focuses not just on text but also on its domestic and global reception.

Historical Trauma

The Cultural Revolution is perhaps the most controversial traumatic event in the trilogy. Its sensitive quality causes the chapters to be arranged differently in each version of *The Three-Body Problem*, and each has a different effect in representing the Cultural Revolution. In the original serialized version of *The Three-Body Problem* in *Science Fiction World*, the story starts with "The Madness Years" when Ye Wenjie witnesses the death of her father in the struggle

session. However, in the officially published Chinese version, the beginning is amended to "The Frontier of Science." Even today, there are still fans on the Internet posting the original version and discussing the differences. While some suggest that not putting the year 1967 at the beginning indicates a failure to articulate trauma, I argue that the text's shifts between past and present, and the recurrent returns to the Cultural Revolution period, should not only be treated as a passive strategy to avoid censorship. Instead, they show how trauma is an ongoing process that permeates throughout history rather than serving just as a starting point. In this sense, a practical solution to avoid censorship perhaps more accurately represents trauma and the affect it causes.

In the official Chinese version, the first three chapters on the Cultural Revolution are inserted into "The Universe Flickers," dividing the chapter into two. Thus, in the published Chinese version, readers first encounter Ye not in the accounts of her experience during the Cultural Revolution, but through Wang Miao's eyes, seeing her as a mother who has just lost her daughter and spends much time taking care of neighbors' children. In this version, the focalization is consistent throughout the first volume; it is Wang Miao's perspective that the readers can keep identifying with. After the first encounter, the text uses a flashback technique, shifting to Wang visiting Ye's student Sha Ruishan to ask about unusual patterns in the universe's background radiation, when he heard Sha's account of Ye's experience during the Cultural Revolution. Only until the first offline meeting of ETO, the Earth-Trisolaris Organization that treat Trisolaris as the Lord who can transform human beings into a brand-new, perfect human civilization, that readers find out the commander of ETO is Ye. A huge contrast between her first appearance and her real identity is revealed. Memories are intertwined in the writing, and the revelation of the striking contrast leads the readers to question what kind of hatred leads Ye to her choice of destroying or replacing humanity, emphasizing the traumatic

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impact of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath—exemplified by Ye's total despair of humanity.

Apart from the structure, the language depicting trauma is also rather unique in the trilogy, foregrounding the question of representability that has been widely discussed in Holocaust studies. Trauma, as Hirsch argues, can never be an "event" but "even before being transmitted, is already utterly bound up with the realm of representation" or, more precisely, "the crisis of representation" (15). How science fiction might uniquely represent trauma is demonstrated in the trilogy: when trauma emerges, it is technology that carries a political meaning and serves as a textual strategy. For example, Sophon, the highly intelligent, proton-sized, eleven-dimensional supercomputer, can be considered as a metaphor of internal trauma, namely censorship and omniscient surveillance. The goals of Sophons are to get information about human beings and halt scientific progress on earth. However, similarly as in the reality, surveillance cannot monitor human minds, thus through Yun Tianming's fairy tales with scientific information embedded, Liu Cixin demonstrates the importance of another form of "science fiction," and the possibility to articulate undiscussable topics through fictional narrative. The political meaning of Sophon, its surveillance, and the ways to fight against it in the trilogy, can all be paralleled with what the trilogy and its fans are accomplishing, as discussed in the first chapter, both authors and fans have started to use science fiction as a method to document history and criticize the nation.

Another technological metaphor is in the first mention of the Cultural Revolution, where the chaotic battles on the street are depicted, ironically, as a highly ordered set of CPUs:

这样的热点遍布整座城市，像无数并行运算的 CPU，将"文化大革命"联为一个整体。

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Battles like this one raged across Beijing like a multitude of CPUs working in

parallel, their combined output, the Cultural Revolution (Liu The Three-Body

Problem ch.1).

The metaphor seeks to capture the loss of humanity, in that human battles become the

cold, emotionless components of a machine, while at the same time it shows how science and

technology are politicized. Similarly, when Ye's father, the physicist Ye Zhetai's memory of his

father-in-law encountering Einstein, the conversation uses scientific terminology as a metaphor

for their harsh reality: "in China, any idea that dared to take flight would only crash back to the

ground. The gravity of reality is too strong" (Liu *The Three-Body Problem* ch.1). Science and

technology enable a new language to discuss the social reality. During the struggle session

against Ye Zhetai, names of physical laws and constants are changed, and theoretical physics is

again and again challenged, manipulated, and politicized. Furthermore, the interstellar clash also

becomes noticeable with Yang Dong's last words, "physics has never existed, and will never

exist" (Liu *The Three-Body Problem* ch.4), together with the death of a group of scientists. The

beginning of traumatic events is constantly marked by the instability of science, which indicates

a loss of rationality.

Throughout the text, Liu recurrently emphasizes the importance of a scientific and

rational gaze and where this gaze leads Ye. When eight years of story time has passed after Ye

sends the signal to the sun through the Red Coast, the secret foundation that is established to

explore aliens, the Chinese text for the first time uses the word "trauma" to describe what Ye has

experienced (in the English version, "创伤 trauma" is translated as "wounds.") In contrast to

other people who have suffered and whose trauma can be healed by time, the text indicates that Ye has the "rational gaze" and the mental habits of a scientist that do not allow her to forget. She starts to examine "the most fundamental and secret aspects of human nature" and how bloody humanity has been throughout history (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.23). Starting from this point, the traumatic events Ye witnesses are not only her father's death but more generally what human beings have done to each other, and to the earth. Through the genre conventions of science fiction, it becomes possible to extend the scale of trauma to the level of other species and the whole environment. After Ye joins the Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Corps, she witnesses the madness of deforestation and identifies her feelings with the wounds of the trees: "Ye gently caressed the freshly exposed cross-section of the felled trunk. She did this often, as though such surfaces were giant wounds, as though she could feel the tree's pain" (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.2). She then acquires the real-life book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, a book about excessive pesticide use that is often credited with jump-starting the American environmental movement, which again links the science fiction narrative to reality. Liu here explores humanity's destructive impacts not just on a national scale, but expands his critique through an environmental narrative in which human beings are only one part of nature and harm other species. In addition, controlling the environment might also be considered as a form of being despotic and self-arrogant, which is another metaphor for the "Madness Years." The trauma turns out to be the final straw that leads Ye to seek help from the Trisolarans, which not only metaphorically criticizes the Chinese government during the Cultural Revolution, but also invokes an environmental approach.

In *A History of Pain*, Berry uses the terms "centrifugal" and "centripetal" to categorize the traumatic events that happened in China throughout the 20th century. The centripetal events,

namely colonial trauma caused by outsiders such as the West and invasion by Japan, led China to question the modern conception of a "Chinese nation" (5). The Cultural Revolution, however, is one of the centrifugal events that is self-inflicted, and, together with the later 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident and Hong Kong take-over, leads to the appearance of a series of traumatic narratives "introduced from within, generated in the center, and projected outward into a new series of global dreams…sometimes, nightmares" (6). Similarly, in Liu's science fiction trilogy, when Ye realizes the failure of humanity on Earth, the remaining alternative is to project a new vision at the universal level. Ironically, the way of reaching this new vision is through "aiming a super powerful radio beam at the red sun": as the text itself points out, there is a clear political symbolism in such an experiment (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.22) because the sun is widely used as a metaphor for Chairman Mao.

The red sun is perhaps the only concrete "thing" that is "aimed at" for all the chaos presented in the book. Symbolically, it represents the party that caused the chaos of the Cultural Revolution; technically, it is a method to communicate with space and indeed starts the interstellar clash. Despite the "red sun" bearing the responsibility for the traumatic Cultural Revolution, as the title of chapter 27 (26 in the English version) indicates, "no one repents." Facing trauma, characters can be both victims and perpetrators. None of the four old Red Guards who have beaten Ye's father to death apologizes, as they have also physically suffered and one of them has died during the Cultural Revolution. Ye herself is also the murderer who kills Lei Zhicheng and Yang Weining in the Red Coast, in order to achieve her own goal of seeking help from the Trisolarans. Bai Mulin, the environmentalist journalist who hopes to remonstrate against the deforestation in the Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Corps, frames Ye to have written the letter and makes her to bear the punishment. Evans, who invents "Pan-Species

Communism" and devotes himself to the equality of all the species on the earth, finally betrays the organization. Both the text itself and its construction of characters can be treated as a product, a reflection in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the result of which is total disbelief in human nature conveyed in the novel. It is a portrayal and critique of, but also a repetition of and constant return to, trauma.

Fictional Trauma

The trilogy's name, *Remembrance of Earth's Past*, which actually plays on Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in its English translation, already indicates a complicated relationship between past, present, and future which the science fiction genre often deals with, as well as a blurred boundary between "history" and "memory." In the third volume, *Death's End*, Liu applies a form of historical writing to document what has happened in the previous two volumes. Excerpts from *A Past Outside of Time*, a book-within-the-book by Cheng Xin, are written in the present tense and are inserted in fragments between the chapters, serving not only as a complement to or explanation of the plot, but also to question the concept of time, as well as the nature of Liu's own writing:

> I suppose this ought to be called history; but since all I can rely on is my memory, it lacks the rigor of history. It's not even accurate to call it the past, for the events related in these pages didn't occur in the past, aren't taking place now, and will not happen in the future. I don't want to record the details. Only a frame, for a

history or an account of the past. The details that have been preserved are already

abundant. Sealed in floating bottles, they will hopefully reach the new universe

and endure there (Liu, *Death's End*).

Liu creates a sense of self-reflexivity by embedding this fictional book into the trilogy. It

is literally "outside of time" because when writing the book, Cheng Xin has entered the little

universe, Universe 647. It also functions figuratively, as it metaphorically indicates how Liu's

trilogy itself, or even generally the science fiction genre, functions in a universe and a timeline

separate from our reality as a form of alternative historiography. It leads us to ponder the

relationship between science fiction and the past, present, and future of our reality. This form of

writing allows a narrative distance or, in other words, a distant reflection on trauma.

How would one represent and reflect on traumatic events "outside of time?" "Trauma" is

discussed twice in *A Past Outside of Time*, although translated to "pain" and "humanity's

greatest wound" in English. The two fictional traumatic events, the "Doomsday Battle" and the

"Battle of Darkness" right after, are repetitions of the Korean war (war between civilizations)

and the Cultural Revolution (an internecine war) between human beings on a galactic scale. As

Zhang Beihai points out,

From the Common Era to the end of the Crisis Era, humanity looked at the stars

with hope. But the first few steps they took toward the stars resulted in failure and

pain. The tragic Doomsday Battle revealed the extent of humanity's fragility in

the cosmos, and the internecine warfare of the Battle of Darkness has injured the

human spirit in equal measure. Later events, such as the judgment of Bronze Age

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and the hijacking of Gravity by Blue Space, resulting in the universal broadcast, all deepened these wounds and elevated the pain to the level of philosophy. (Liu, *Death's End*)

The development of the entire plot of Liu's trilogy stems from humans' traumatic experiences, ranging from domestic, internecine trauma to conflict between humans and aliens. Though lifted to a cosmic level, humanity's future choices largely depend on past traumatic experiences. The narrative is multi-layered of both Cheng Xin's reflection on Earth's past in the trilogy, namely documenting and criticizing Earth's traumatic past and its negative influences, and Liu's own reflection on China's past. In all traumatic events depicted, what dominates are recurrent motifs of disbelief, betrayal, and inferiority, all of which can be identified in China's long history of pain during the 20th century. As Wang asserts, "PRC fiction has long included a sub-tradition in which the narrative moves along thanks to conspiracy, espionage, betrayal, internal subversion, and of course treason" (70). In the trilogy, domestic trauma is extended to a universal level and the scale of all humanity, and the state is criticized in a metaphorical way. Science fiction provides a space for reflections on our real histories and traumas, and leads us to question whether the reality we see is true. It might be appropriate to end this section with another excerpt from the trilogy, where the text questions the visibility or invisibility of reality. After playing the highly abstract virtual-reality game, Wang Miao, as well as the readers, slowly realizes that it indeed reflects a real-world situation:

Wang took off the V-suit. After his mind had calmed down a bit, he again had the thought that Three Body was deliberately pretending to be merely illusory, while

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in fact possessing some deep reality. The real world in front of him, on the other

hand, had begun to seem like the superficially complex, but in truth rather simple,

Along the River During the Qingming Festival [a famous painting] (Liu, *The*

Three-Body Problem ch.11).

Section 2: Translation

As noted in the previous section, the Chinese serialized version, officially published

Chinese version, and English version differ from each other. While the latter two versions are

easily accessible, the serialization, mainly circulated in a magazine, is hard to find for readers

who had not become fans at that time. On the Internet, photos or screenshots of deleted content

are occasionally circulated on Tieba, Zhihu, and other social media platforms where discussions

about the serialized version take place. I argue that these posts belong to *The Three-Body*

Problem trilogy digital archive and are actions of taking control of digital cultural memory.

Mbembe argues that Internet fan fiction archives confer the status of their contents: "The status

is, first of all, the foundational status of existence, of a person or a culture having existed […] It

then acquires the status of proof, a proof that a life truly existed, that something actually

happened […] The final destination of the archive is therefore always situated […] in the story

that it makes possible" (Mbembe 20-21, qtd. in De Kosnik 16). In this section, I argue that, by

considering the archive here as the content circulated on the Internet by the fan community,

together with the amendments made in the English translation, the fan posts and the global

reception of the trilogy can certainly be regarded both as alternative historiography and a

resistance.

Narrative Structure

To continue the discussion on the narrative structure of the two Chinese versions in the

first section, an anecdote behind the English translation also suggests the importance of not only

studying the narrative structure of the first volume, but also the process of adjusting it. Ken Liu,

who translated *The Three-Body Problem* based on the published Chinese version, discovered that

"the narrative structure didn't make sense," as it bounces between present-day China and the

Cultural Revolution. Ken Liu thus "pinpointed what he felt was the story's natural beginning: the

scenes of political violence and oppression during the Cultural Revolution, a traumatic moment

that triggers the interstellar clash that follows" (Alter). Liu Cixin agreed with the change and said

"that is how I wanted it originally" as recalled by Ken Liu. In this report, Alter quotes the

conversation between Ken Liu and Liu Cixin, stating that it is the Chinese publisher who worried

about censorship and suggested putting the sensitive year into the middle of the narrative to

avoid trouble. The English version of this *New York Times* report says that Liu "reluctantly

agreed to the change (caused by censorship), but felt the novel was diminished. 'The Cultural

Revolution appears because it's essential to the plot,' Liu Cixin told [Ken Liu] during a Skype

interview through an interpreter. 'The protagonist needs to have total despair in humanity'"

(Alter). However, the Chinese version of the *New York Times* feature story omits Liu Cixin's

response. Interestingly, the difference between the Chinese and English versions of the *New York*

Times report itself adds another layer of censorship and the necessity of translation as a space for preservation.

Several points about this anecdote are worth noting. That the translator felt the necessity, and even naturalness, to put "The Year 1967" at the very beginning of the narrative in order to "make sense" might indicate a transnational expectation about where the story stems from, as well as an expectation for what such a Chinese science fiction story should do. Indeed, both the narrative orders have their own effects, as I discussed in the first section of this chapter. Setting the year 1967 at the beginning can be seen as an articulated resistance and criticism, while the non-linear narrative also portrays the effects of trauma "permeating" the narrative.

Nonetheless, Ken Liu's thoughts align more with the serialization, thus the structure and many expunged passages from that version are recovered in the English translation. The process of translation is not just faithful to the original text but includes many interventions, which I argue is a way to preserve the narration of trauma and provides a space for alternative historiography. This function of translation is more obvious when recovering deleted passages in the Chinese version. In a Zhihu (Chinese version of Quora) question on "how to comment on the English translation of *The Three-Body Problem*," fans posted photos and screenshots and compared them with the English version. The potential of digital technologies to democratize cultural memory can be seen in this case.

Deletion of Content

In the English version, apart from the adjustment to the order of chapters, several passages left out in the Chinese edition are recuperated. For example, the detailed depiction of the death of a young woman is deleted in the Chinese version. Although the plot is not affected much, leaving out the plain description of death and trauma, namely a dead body, is a way of silencing the people and the history.

红色联合的战士们欢呼起来，几个人冲到楼下，掀开四．二八的旗帜，抬起下面纤小的遗体，做为一个战利品炫耀地举了一段，然后将她高高地扔向大院的铁门，铁门上带尖的金属栅条大部分在武斗初期就被抽走当梭标了，剩下的两条正好挂住了她，那一瞬间，生命似乎又回到了那个柔软的躯体。红色联合的红卫兵们退后一段距离，将那个挂在高处的躯体当靶子练习射击，密集的子弹对她来说已柔和如雨，不再带来任何感觉，她那春藤般的手臂不时轻挥一下，仿佛拂去落在身上的雨滴，直到那颗年轻的头颅被打掉了一半，仅剩的一只美丽的眼睛仍然凝视着一九六七年的蓝天，目光中没有痛苦，只有凝固的激情和渴望 (A te la si cong bu song jian 阿特拉斯从不耸肩 Zhihu) 。

The Red Union warriors shouted in joy. A few rushed to the foot of the building, tore away the battle banner of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade, and seized the slender, lifeless body. They raised their trophy overhead and flaunted it for a while before tossing it toward the top of the metal gate of the compound. Most of the gate's metal bars, capped with sharp tips, had been pulled down at the

beginning of the factional civil wars to be used as spears, but two still remained. As their sharp tips caught the girl, life seemed to return momentarily to her body. The Red Guards backed up some distance and began to use the impaled body for target practice. For her, the dense storm of bullets was now no different from a gentle rain, as she could no longer feel anything. From time to time, her vine-like arms jerked across her body softly, as though she were flicking off drops of rain. And then half of her young head was blown away, and only a single, beautiful eye remained to stare at the blue sky of 1967. There was no pain in that gaze, only solidified devotion and yearning (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.1).

A more direct portrayal of violence is retained in the English version. The Chinese version comes from fans' archives of the serialization version and is hard to find publicly. Both translation and fans' archives become another form of historical documentation. Translation itself constitutes a space for resistance. Under the Zhihu question (the Chinese version of Quora) on "how to comment on the English translation of *The Three-Body Problem*," the "Answerer (答主)" who answers the question on the comparison between the Chinese and English version posted on Zhihu, the Chinese version of Quora, posted several passages that were originally printed in *Science Fiction World* in 2006. At the end of his post, he says, "now I am gratified to see that the English version includes these passages, and the story begins with the Cultural Revolution" (A te la si cong bu song jian 阿特拉斯从不耸肩 Zhihu).

Section 3: Fan Productions: "Laboring Bodies, Writing Pain"

The phrase "laboring bodies, writing pain" derives from Paola Iovene's analysis on *Rhapsody of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (1958), commonly considered the first science fiction film made in China. Divided into three time periods, the film portrays the 1291 construction of Ming Tombs Reservoir, during the Ming dynasty ; its 1958 renovation in the Great Leap Forward, namely the present moment when the film is made ; and 1978, as the film asks audiences to imagine "twenty years from now" and depicts a utopian future. Iovene gives a detailed analysis of how the film begins with a portrayal of the people's misery in the Ming dynasty, with a panning shot of the hilly landscape of Changping district in 1291: "A high angle shot shows corvée laborers grudgingly shoveling under the whip of mounted guards at the time of the Yuan dynasty. The scene extends deep into the distance with the laborers almost merging into the earth-filled landscape" (Iovene 23). The scene emphasizes how slave-like labor in the old society was painful and life-threatening and builds a stark contrast with socialist labor scenes, which are shot with a low-angle camera and the smiles on the workers' faces in close-ups, while "the labor performed is essentially the same as that performed under the oppressive regimes of the past" (23). In addition to the film language, Iovene also focuses on the production process. The writing of the drama itself proceeded at Great Leap Forward pace, which invites "parallels between the labor depicted in the play and the fatigue that the playwright must have experienced in composing it in record time" (24). The "writing one page, rehearsing one page" ("*xie yi ye, pai yi ye*") conveys the pressure of socialist mobilization (24).

Fig. 7. 1291, The laborers are working for the empire. Screenshot from *Rhapsody of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (1958).

Fig. 8. Laborers in 1958 singing songs while working. Screenshot from *Rhapsody of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (1958).

Fig. 9. In the future of 1978, the visitors are holding a tablet computer. Laborers disappear in the future. Screenshot from *Rhapsody of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (1958).

Beginning with *Rhapsody of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (1958), which will be referenced later, helps to expound my argument on the visual repetition of such scenes throughout the history of Chinese science fiction visual works and how reality also has a certain kind of science fiction quality. Returning to contemporary moments, this section focuses on the animation *My Three-Body* (2014) made by fans using Minecraft, a game engine that allows users to build their own world through arranging blocks. As mentioned briefly in the first chapter, in 2014, a user called Shen You Ba Fang uploaded to the Bilibili platform the first episode of *My Three-Body*, which was made amateurly by himself. At the end of the episode, he apologized for the low-quality work and asked people who were interested in the project to contact and join him. Very soon a team formed and attracted more fans, gradually improved the quality of the work, and in the end received investments from commercial corporations, paving a way for future seasons, as well as the animations that Bilibili plans to produce.

To examine how the fans represent trauma in the trilogy, and the relationship between trauma, technology, and labor, I focus on both the content and the form of this series, mainly the first season, which was completely created by fans without any intervention from corporations or the government. I argue that the fans form a knowledge community and work as a collective intelligence in order to faithfully visualize the original work. The fan production, together with the English translation discussed in the previous section, makes possible alternative histories of the Cultural Revolution and a space for viewers to actively react. What further makes these productions valuable is the medium of Minecraft and the possibilities of self-expression and immersion it evokes, as the game designer and theorist Bartle argues, "self-expression is another way to promote immersion" (611). I also argue that while the early episodes are often considered clumsy works, the camera angle and movement, point of view, and other techniques should be analyzed as film language because they also have the quality of a film, or even a documentary. Although the aesthetic of the Minecraft world is non-realist, the process of game-like creation, as well as the filming technique of the work, provides both the crew and the viewers with an experience of immersion into the story and, more specifically, into trauma.

The animation, faithful to the original serialized version of the trilogy, chooses the year 1967 as its beginning. To portray the scene of the struggle where Ye Wenjie witnesses the death of her father, the camera uses a high angle and pans to show the whole playground, a film technique that situates the subject in a passive, vulnerable position but also shows massive mobilization. Without any editing, the camera zooms in to film the people on the stage, namely Ye Zhetai and the Red Guards who are denouncing him. The background sound is extracted from video clips of Chairman Mao receiving the Red Guards for the second time (August 31, 1966) and of Chairman Mao and Vice-Chairman Lin meeting with the General Staff Department,

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General Logistics Department, Air Force, and Second Artillery revolutionary fighters (1968). As Landay argues, sound has the potential to bridge the gaps in experiencing embodiment caused by disconnections between the perceived body in physical, representational, and imagined contexts. While one knows the scene is shot by clicking the mouse in order to "zoom" or "pan," the shakiness of the imagined camera and the sound clips from reality create the sense of a hand-held camera, endowing the scene with a documentary quality.

In addition to film language, the medium further complicates fan production, as Minecraft is itself an audience-led production. To convey the documentary quality, I argue that instead of just watching a fictional animation, what the crew members and audiences do is, to quote Landay, "not just observe the cartoon, we become it" (130) and document it. Previous research on Minecraft makes a common observation on its world-building function as a crucial feature and how the elements in the game are transformed into an imaginary world in which people can have transformational experiences (Landay 133). In *The Language of New Media*, Manovich argues that "the logic of a computer can be expected to have a significant influence on the traditional cultural logic of media" (63-64). Based on this, Morgan and Mungan further argue that the act of translating from a physical to a virtual medium is not just derivative but, instead, a process that defines meaning. In the case of *My Three-Body* and Minecraft, I argue that the cube world is indeed itself a worldview, proving the substantiveness of *The Three-Body Problem* world instead of just imitating or representing it. The creation and viewing of *My Three-Body,* therefore, is a process of exploring an already constructed world with the movement of the mouse.

While Landay argues that in many Minecraft productions, storytelling takes a secondary role to world-building, I suggest world-building is essential to storytelling in the case of the

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restoration of *The Three-Body Problem*. For example, the scene of Cultural Revolution, metaphorically represented as "the combined output of a multitude of CPUs working in parallel" in Liu's work, is constructed as an existing world, where "CPU" is no longer a metaphor but what the Cultural Revolution actually looks like. History, in this way, speaks in the language of science fiction. The Cultural Revolution scene highlights how the fan production is faithful to the original work both in the narrative and the visual sense, again proving the power of science fiction to represent trauma. Interpreting the scene as a repetition of the Ming Tombs Reservoir scene, one sees the similarity of the application of high camera angles to portray the surveillance, the vulnerability of the masses, and how the human body has been transformed into dots.

Fig. 10. *My Three-Body* (2014), Season 1, Episode 1, begins with the scene of a struggle session in 1967.

Another scene, the human-wave computer, is both a repetition of the Cultural Revolution scene and further complicates the relationship between trauma, surveillance, labor, and technology. In the original work, the scene happens when Wang Miao is playing the *Three-Body* game. In order to solve the problem of Trisolar Syzygy and calculate how long the Stable Era lasts, the character Von Neumann (named after the computer scientist John von Neumann) comes to China, asking Emperor Qin for 30 million people to form a computer and do math.
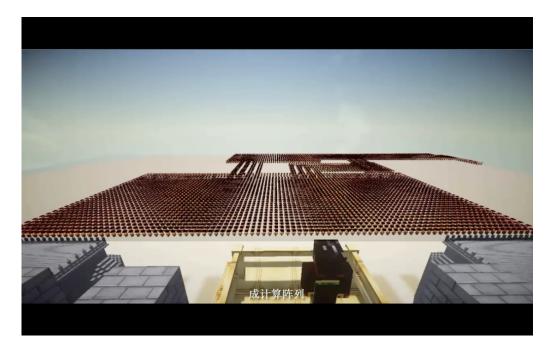

Figure 11. "We'll do mathematics using human-wave tactics." *My Three-Body*, Shen You Ba Fang team.

The scene is restored visually similar to the Cultural Revolution scene, where 30 million "people," or dots, are arranged in order and follow the leader's command. The scene is complicated as both its content and the process of fans restoring the scene through Minecraft depict a way in which China engages in and even masters technology, thus showing the power of the nation and its people. In the trilogy, only in China can Von Neumann assemble enough

people to do the calculation, and in reality, only in China can fans gather and faithfully and creatively restore the original work. Thus, it is a scene that evokes national pride. However, the power of technology is realized by mechanizing the human body, much like in the scene of the 1921 Ming Tombs Reservoir with the high camera angle resulting in the people filmed to have no facial expression. It is more evidence of how only technology can faithfully restore the original work, as in the Minecraft world, mass people are portrayed and can only be portrayed in the form of dots, a literal visualization of the CPU metaphor or, as said in the classic line by Da Shi, "You are all bugs" (where the human bodies, similar to bugs, are all diminished into dots). What complicates the representation is that the visual representation adopted in the human-wave computer as repetition turns the traumatic moments into a strategy to build national pride.

Interestingly, many science fiction fans find it rather natural to connect Liu's human-wave computer with the 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony, where 2,008 drummers played bronze *fou* (缶) drums in the countdown and were also visually transformed into cubes. In an article discussing these classic moments in the opening ceremony, an official account called "Non-existing SF," the sub-account of the Chinese science fiction promotion brand "Future Affairs Administration," praises the countdown for having the aesthetic of Liu Cixin's human-wave computer. The scene at the opening ceremony certainly evokes national pride; as Larson argues, "the Beijing Olympics provides us with a remarkable opportunity to view a display of something imagined as representing the nation on an indisputably global stage" (333). The ceremony was divided into two major parts, the historical and the contemporary, with the intention of integrating ancient aesthetics with new technology, while "refusing to use the semiotic signs that are familiar to the West" (5). These Western semiotic signs turn out to be

individual autonomy, authenticity, and individuality, which are rejected in favor of communality

and cooperation, as well as making Chinese culture and aesthetics more accessible to the world.

In analyzing the opening ceremony, Lovell traces a conflicted national identity that boasts of an

old and glorious civilization along with a contemporary world culture inferior to others (qtd. in

Larson 334). This is also a moment where trauma, technology, surveillance, mass mobilization,

and national pride are intertwined.

Fig. 12. Countdown toward Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony.

Fig. 13. Precisely 2,008 drummers beat the traditional *fou* drums at the Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony.

One sees how scenes of surveillance, mass mobilization, and the human body as labor become scenes representing Chinese technological power. The four scenes of the 1291 Ming dynasty, the Cultural Revolution struggle session , the human-wave computer, and the Olympic opening ceremony are visual repetitions rather than visual differentiations. Furthermore, the consistency behind each scene is not only the visually transformed human body but also later its disappearance. Drawing a parallel between the *Rhapsody of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (1958) and *My Three-Body* (2014), the production of *My Three-Body* is at the beginning similar to the production process of *Rhapsody*, at a high pace of "writing one page, filming one page," except the fans are self-mobilized by their emotional investments in the original work. However, after the corporation Three-Body Problem Universe invested in the animation, the fan labor, although it was the foundation of the trilogy's market success, was gradually dismissed. Recently, the user

Shen You Ba Fang posted on Weibo that he will quit his job at Three-Body Problem Universe and might not be able to participate in the production of *My Three-Body* season 4. In the 1978 future of Ming Tombs Reservoir, human labor disappears, and the scene portrays what a utopian future looks like, with only the visitors' appreciation. The reality seems to be a repetition of the dismissed human labor, in this case, driven out by corporations and the state because of dissent. Whether alternative historiography will be maintained in the future *My Three-Body* seasons remains a question to be seen.

As seen in the example of *My Three-Body* (2014), a seemingly conflicting resistance and national celebration co-exist in the fan productions. Next chapter focusing on the colonial trauma and the epistemological understanding of "science," which explains for the different directions of resistance.

Chapter 3: Postcolonial Trauma and Technological Gap

Section 1: The Elevation of Chinese Science fiction Fandom

If the "fiction" part of science fiction can provide a space for resistance against the state, the "science" part of the genre might explain for the nationalist celebration. In the eyes of many Chinese science fiction fans and even the state, although sensitive content such as Cultural Revolution is included, the trilogy represents the power of China in the field related to science and technology, and proves it to the world. After being translated into 25 languages, the trilogy has been highly praised by official media such as Chinawriters (中国作家网) and Xinhua (新华网) for bringing to the world a work of science fiction that only the Chinese could write.

Jingming Yan, the vice president of the China Writer Association, emphasizes the genre's significance by saying that "science fiction has become a crucial part of Chinese literature and plays an important role in the promotion and globalization of Chinese literature" (Chen *Guangming Daily*). In other words, China has appropriated science fiction and has made it part of the soft-power arsenal. Yan further emphasizes its function of promoting the scientific spirit and the passion for science exploration, encouraging people to explore the secrets of the universe and future humanity. Yan's comments echo the very long document publicizing the outcomes of the CCP sixth plenum, which states that cultural production should "be healthy in content, represent the interests of the masses, and support China's international soft power" (qtd. in Hockx intro.).

That science fiction is conducive to empowering the country is commonly recognized by not only the state, but also by fans. The question "what makes Chinese science fiction Chinese?" has been constantly brought up by Chinese science fiction writers and scholars, but has not yet been addressed in fandom studies. Indeed, the Chinese science fiction fan community considers itself more prestigious than other fan groups, because its members not only regard themselves as experts on the "Chineseness" of science fiction, but also assert that the genre itself, together with its fans' passion, is beneficial for the country. This self-image can be seen in the San Ti Bar discussion between science fiction fans and athletic students that I discussed in the first chapter as well as the tendency to combine science fiction and ancient Chinese myth as a way of invigorating both traditional culture and the popularization of science and technology, for example on the Qidian Chinese Online Literature Website and the Jinjiang Literature Website.

Taking President Xi's talk "Tell a Good China Story" as the point of departure, Wang analyzes the relationship between fiction, storytelling, historicity, and nation-building in China.

In the case of Chinese science fiction, I would add that science and technology further complicate the relationship, as questions such as "what makes Chinese science fiction Chinese?," "who owns Science Fiction?," and the "technological gap" as a form of colonial trauma legacy all indicate a colonial power relationship between the East and West. It is this power structure that leads to the fan works' obsession with technology as well as the urge to represent Chinese power through science fiction. As a result, nationalist pride is evoked and overrides colonial inferiority. This chapter discusses science fiction, fandom, and nation-building, situating Chinese science fiction on the global stage to examine its intertwined colonial inferiority and national celebration.

Section 2: Original Work: Colonial Inferiority and Technological Gap

Science and technology, rather than being "neutral," have long been manipulated, whether in practice or rhetoric, to assert and resist hegemonic claims, articulate political visions, and naturalize existing power structures in society. While the previous chapter focus on the internal power structures in China, science and technology have also been indelibly linked to projects of colonization and decolonization. The Chinese epistemological understanding of "science" is itself imported and constructed from foreign languages. In the late 19th century, "science" was commonly referred to as "格致 ge zhi," meaning to investigate things and extend knowledge to the utmost, which is a term appropriated from the Confucian classic *Da Xue* (大学 Great Learning). In 1903, Yan Fu borrowed the word "科学 (science)" from Japanese to substitute for "ge zhi." Wang argues that this replacement implies a recognition of science as an individual and modern discipline that traditional Chinese language is insufficient to comprehend (Wang *China Science Daily*).

The introduction of science into China is accompanied by intellectual anxiety and national crisis, as modern Chinese history begins with Western invasions and wars. Against this background, policies to promote science and technology have never stopped. The earliest attempt can be traced to a 1841 book called *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, the first significant Chinese work on the West and one of China's initial responses to the Anglo-Chinese First Opium War (1839–1842). The author, Wei Yuan, famously argued that the Chinese should "learn from the foreigners (directly translated as barbarians) to defeat them." After the Second Opium War (1856-1860), Feng Guifen proposed "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application" (qtd. in Pohl 57). During the 1919 New Cultural Revolution, Chen Duxiu promoted the need for "Mr. De (Democracy) and Mr. Sai (Science)." In 1958, Mao Zedong, in *Sixty Points On Working Methods (A Draft)*, proposed that "we must start a technological revolution so that we may overtake Britain in fifteen or more years" (Mao Marxist.org). In 1995, Jiang Zeming proposed a "Strategy of Invigorating China Through Science and Education," a continuation of the policies from early 20th century. Behind these slogans lies an anxiety and sense of inferiority caused by the technological gap, namely the gap between the strength in the fields of science, technology and military power between the West and China, which the Chinese could hardly get rid of.

The emergence of Chinese science fiction in the late Qing period took place against the background of colonial trauma. *Tales of the Moon Colony*, published serially in the fiction magazine *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* between 1904 and 1905, is commonly considered the first native Chinese science fiction. The theme of this novel is a clear outcome of the colonial history that China has experienced. According to Isaacson,

[w]hile the text depicts a world in which Asian scientists and explorers successfully vie with their European counterparts for hegemony over their common Southeast Asian others, the novel ultimately foretells a universal order marked by concentric circles of colonial domination—Asia over Southeast Asia, Europe over Asia, the moon over planet Earth, outer planets over the moon, etc. Colonial incursion is a leitmotif, and while technological superiority is justification for similar domination, there will always be other extraterrestrial groups who can use their own superior civilization as justification for similar domination (108).

Another novel, *The New Story of the Stone*, serialized from 1905 onward, also adapts the common time travel structure of science fiction to portray Jia Baoyu visiting the future, who then experiences the anxiety that China's science and technology are too backward. These early Chinese science fiction texts share similar motifs of fear, anxiety, and national crisis caused by the Western invasion that persist in the genre until the present day and are reflected in both the original trilogy and fan productions.

In the trilogy, one of the reasons for the human's seemingly doomed future is the vast technological gap between humans and Trisolarans around which the narrative revolves. The Sophons sent by the Trisolarans are able not only to monitor the earth, but also to block the development of science. What's more, the text constructs a cruel food chain through Luo Ji's "Dark Forest Theory," where the only way to forestall the alien invasion is to threaten to seek out other, more dangerous forces capable of destroying even Trisolarans. In *Death's End*, it becomes clear that there are civilizations in other galaxies that are far more powerful and technologically

advanced than the Trisolarans. This plot confirms Isaacson's reading conclusion that "there will always be other extraterrestrial groups who can use their own superior civilization as justification for similar domination" (108). The fear of technologically advanced aliens and the logic of colonial power structures are embedded in the Chinese understanding of science and science fiction.

One plot point where the technological gap precipitates a crucial turn in the trilogy occurs when Zhang Beihai betrays the *Starship Earth*, as he believes the battle is doomed to fail. In the conversation after he has hijacked the *Natural Selection*, he justifies his choice with the "technological gap" and memories of the Korean war.

章北海："尊敬的司令官，我比您更有资格谈论那支军队，因为我家祖孙三代都在其中服役。我的爷爷曾在朝鲜战场用手榴弹攻击美军的'潘兴'坦克，手榴弹砸到坦克上滑下来爆炸，目标毫发未损，爷爷在被坦克上的机枪击中后，又被履带轧断双腿，在病榻上度过了后半生，但比起同时被轧成肉酱的两名战友来，他还算幸运……正是这支军队的历程，使我们对战争中与敌人的技术差距刻骨铭心。你们所知道的荣耀是从历史记载中看到的，我们的创伤是父辈和祖辈的鲜血凝成的，比起你们，我们更知道战争是怎么回事。"

ZHANG BEIHAI: My dear commander, I'm more qualified than you to speak of that army. Three generations of my family served in it. During the Korean War, my grandfather attacked a Pershing tank armed with a grenade. The grenade hit

the tank and slid off before exploding. The target was barely scratched, but my grandfather was hit by machine-gun fire from the tank, had both legs broken under its treads, and spent the rest of his life an invalid. But compared to two of his comrades, who were crushed to a pulp, he was lucky.… It's that army's history that so clearly taught us the significance of a technological gap during wartime. The glory you know is what you've read in the history books, but our trauma was cemented by the blood of our fathers and grandfathers. We know more than you do what war means (Liu, *Dark Forest*).

In this conversation, Zhang, as a member of the "post-generation," inherited trauma from previous generations who have experienced it. He criticizes the historical writings for always glorifying trauma, while arguing that only "we" who have experienced it or vicariously experienced it as a post-generation can truly speak about it, in an example of how the trilogy speaks out against official historical narratives. It is also worth emphasizing that, while Zhang does recognize the "blood" and other physical wounds, he sees the national trauma as originating not from the war itself, but from the "technological gap" that prevents an army from winning wars. The text indicates a hierarchy of traumas, where technological backwardness outweighs the other forms. In the story, it turns out that Zhang is right about the outcome of the gap between the human and the Trisolarans. In the Doomsday Battle, a probe sent by the Trisolarans destroys each and every warship in the Earth's army, which can also be seen as a fictional repetition of the Korean War. In this sense, it is fair to say that colonial inferiority has been haunting Chinese science fiction from the late Qing period to the contemporary moment.

Waterdrop (2015) and Aestheticized Colonial Trauma

In 2015, *Waterdrop*, a tribute to the book *The Dark Forest* that portrays one of the traumatic events, the Doomsday Battle, was released and gained several international awards in the following years. The director Wang Ren is was a student majoring in Architecture when making the film. Taking *Waterdrop* (2015) as an example, this section argues that the technological gap is also a crucial component of fan works. However, fans tend to give high priority to technology rather than colonial inferiority. Colonial trauma itself, while being the center of the narrative, is hardly a topic of fans' discussion; instead, it is the obsession with technologies that leads to the pride that dominates the fan group. The film *Waterdrop* (2015) is considered by science fiction fans a historical step for Chinese science fiction, proving that China has the ability to make science fiction films. It evokes a nationalist celebration that overrides the postcolonial sense of technological inferiority.

The Doomsday Battle is the first confrontation between Earth and the Trisolarans. Earth sends a group of people to examine a small, waterdrop-shaped probe Trisolaran, but they only realize too late that the probe can also function as an inexhaustible bullet weapon that can accurately attack and destroy every warship in "Starship Earth" army. Rather than directly depicting the annihilation, the film portrays the process of Waterdrop approaching the Earth. While this work chooses (colonial) trauma from the original trilogy as a starting point, its

relationship with and attitudes toward trauma remain blurred, mainly demonstrated in its "aestheticization" of trauma and the fans' and general audience's reception. As I will argue, a less sympathetic reading would insist that the film simply omits any engagement with trauma and instead simplistically celebrates and glorifies technology. However, this ambiguous attitude and even the glorification of technology are precisely the result of centripetal trauma.

In this film, there is hardly any plot or narrated story, but only one long take throughout the whole film, as the camera keeps zooming out to illustrate all the structures of substances on the earth, which emphasize the high technology of the probe that can freely observe everything. The images in the film are highly abstract, commonly read as various structures of things perceived from a macroscopic to a microscopic level, showing that there are infinite details on Earth that people can observe forever. For example, the film starts with dots arranged in order (Fig. 14.), which can be interpreted as the "Starship Earth" army. It then shifts to depict the warship and its screw (Fig. 15. and Fig. 16.) to build a contrast of the range of the size of things that the probe can see. The film's visual objects range from the army to the microstructure of carbon nanotube. While it is largely believed to portray Earth's beauty and advanced technology, it is not until the voiceover comments on the smoothness and purity of the surface of the waterdrop that we realize that the film is tracking the reflection of Earth on the surface of a waterdrop. In this sense, if the technological gap described by Zhang Beihai between the U.S. and China during the Korean war is just as wide as that between a "Pershing tank" and a "grenade," the gap between the Earth and Trisolar is far beyond description here, that the waterdrop can observe anything on the earth. It is a rather paradoxical way of representing

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trauma, as the gap between two civilizations and the severity of the trauma can only be

represented through the perfection of the images. The effect is thus achieved by giving priority to

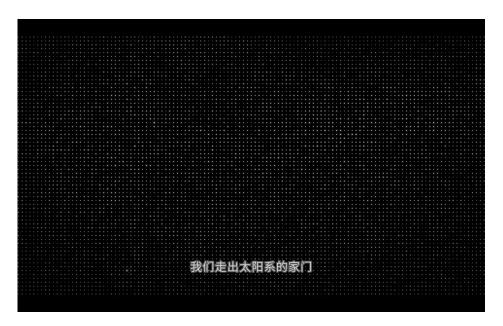technology rather than narrative.

Fig. 14. The reflection of the "Starship Earth" army on the Droplet. *Waterdrop*. Wang Ren.
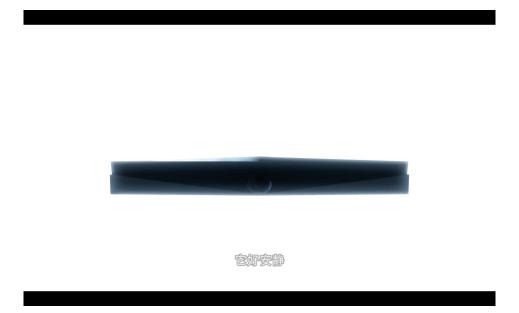

Fig. 15. The visualization of one of the warships in the army. *Waterdrop*. Wang Ren.

Fig. 16. The screw on the warship. *Waterdrop*. Wang Ren.

In contrast to the images, the voiceover and sound effects of the film tend toward realism: many of them are drawn from reality, while fictional ones take the form of news reports. They give the film a documentary-like quality as an accurate, authentic representation of Earth reflected on the waterdrop. The voiceover at the beginning is the spoken greeting in English by U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim recorded on the Voyager Golden Records, carried by both Voyager 1 and 2 and launched in 1977. The other voiceover includes extracts from a recorded seminar called "Life Beyond Earth and the Mind of Man" in 1975, and another seminar held by the BBC shortly after *A Brief History of* Time (1988) was published, titled "God, The Universe and Everything" with the scientists Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking as well as the science fiction novelist Arthur C. Clarke. These sources all demonstrate humans' endeavor to do scientific research and explore alien civilizations. Together with images of structures of

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substances in the background of the doomed battle, the films show both the beauty and the futility of human efforts, posing questions about interstellar communication as well as universal morality.

However, hardly any fan interpretation of *Waterdrop* treats it as a representation of trauma or notices its traumatic implications. The film has been a huge success on a global scale, as it has been nominated for and won several international film awards, including Best Science fiction Short winner at the *Hollywood International Moving Pictures Film Festival* 2015 and several nominations at the *Los Angeles Independent Film Festival* 2015. It has received 7574 short comments and been rated 8.7 on Douban, the largest platform in China for people to rate and review books, films and music. Fans highly praise the short film, saying that "Fandom overrides the Official Works (同人逼死官方)" (Douban user Di Deng You Min), and "perhaps there is still hope for Chinese Science Fiction" (Douban user Shi Jian Zhi Zang). Apart from simple praise, discussions mainly focus on filming technique. To summarize, domestic critics on this film mainly focus on the difficulties of its production and techniques, as well as how it signifies that Chinese science fiction film has stepped onto the world stage. Its release has been accompanied mainly by the fans' pride in technology empowering China. The fear and horror of encountering the other, a frequent motif in Chinese science fiction, is simplified into pride in the genre's revival.

Netflix

Discussions about the trilogy's film adaptations started as early as 2013, when the company Youzu Interactive acquired the copyright and launched the adaptation of the first volume. As I discussed in Chapter One, some sources attribute the failure of the project to the lack of science fiction film-making experience, particularly the creation of special effects, in the Chinese-language film industry; in addition, the production team allegedly refused to collaborate with a Hollywood special-effects team (Tang Sohu News). While the sources of this information were not identified in the news reports, an anti-Hollywood sentiment emerged and gained popularity in the fan community, which already indicates national pride in the ownership of the trilogy and the idea that only a Chinese film crew could properly adapt it. When news that the trilogy would be adapted by Netflix appeared online, fans therefore pessimistically assumed that it would be another American science fiction for American audience. While there is currently no more detailed information about the progress of the film and its casting, the recent film *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021) is also an example of the definition of an "American" or a "Chinese" story, and a major project of comparative film studies will be the exploration of both the "'Hollywoodization' of Chinese cinema" and "how the Chinese film industry and the impact of Chinese genres, actors, and talent is simultaneously transforming Hollywood" (Berry 171).

Chapter 4: Misogyny and Female Resistance

As analyzed in the previous two chapters, most members of the *Three-Body Problem* fan communities, such as the ones on SMTH BBS and Baidu Tieba, as well as the film crew of the *My Three-Body* animation series, are male. Their discussions and fan productions mainly focus

on science and technology, which corroborates that science fiction, even with its fandom, has historically been a male preserve. While the previous two chapters read Chinese science fiction as a national literature category, this chapter challenges science fiction as a traditionally masculine field.

This chapter focuses on the gender issues in the trilogy, its English translation, and slash literature. The first section argues that although the original work demonstrates an awareness of gender equality and the male gaze, misogyny is still embedded in the text, hidden behind the construction of characters, plot, and the conflict between "humanity" and "rationality," "human nature" and "bestial nature.'' The second section shifts to discuss the English translation, which includes a large number of revisions, including changing pronouns, deleting the depictions of women's appearances, and re-writing the paragraphs that contain gender discrimination. It also suggests that translation can be a process that reversely influences the domestic reception of the original work. The final section of this chapter focuses on slash literature and fan comics. Chinese slash literature can be seen as a product of influences from several literary traditions, including pre-modern Chinese literature, Japanese Yaoi literature and manga, and western slash literature. Thus, it is an ambivalent product that is both a conservative continuation of the past, but also a break from and resistance against the tradition. Through examining these productions, the final section argues that while it is to some extent conservative, slash literature still challenges gender norms and inserts female voices back into science fiction narrative.

Section 1: Original Work

As shown in the most recent statistics, as of December 2019, only 6% of scholars of the Chinese Academy of Sciences were female (CASAD). Compared to reality, it should be recognized that the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy portrays a better world in terms of gender equality, giving a large portion of its narrative to diverse female characters. For example, Ye Wenjie and Cheng Xin, protagonists of the first and third volumes, are both female scientists. In the second volume, the Secretary General of the UN, Say, is also female. In the depiction of Cheng Xin, the text indeed shows its awareness of the "male gaze," and the obstacles that women encounter in their careers. For example, when Cheng Xin first attended the PIA conference, Liu writes,

这些航天界的技术精英当然不指望从一个技术助理那里听到什么有价值的东西，但他们大多是男人，至少在这个过程中，可以毫无顾忌地欣赏她了。程心尽量使自己的穿着庄重低调，但并没有降低她的吸引力。

 Of course, these elite experts didn't expect a mere technical aide to have any brilliant ideas, but they were mostly men, and they thought that by giving her a chance to talk, they would have a perfect excuse to appreciate her physical attributes. Cheng Xin had always made an effort to dress conservatively, but this sort of harassment was something she had to deal with constantly (but does not make her less attractive) (Liu, *Death's End*).

The English translation of the passage is faithful to the source text, except the last sentence, which includes the original content of the Chinese version in parentheses. It is only in

the English version that the "harassment" is straightforwardly revealed. Nonetheless, both the Chinese and English texts depict a working environment that is hostile to women, and it seems that the only way for Cheng Xin to escape this gaze is through her outstanding ability that surpasses all her male coworkers' skills. After Cheng raises the proposal of "en-route propulsion" (Staircase Program), "the men now move their gazes away from Cheng Xin's body" (120 Liu). This passage makes an assumption that women have to do much better than men to be recognized, ironically, by men. One reality projected into the story world is that, under systematic discrimination of women, the depiction of individual extraordinary women does not make up for their institutional absence and the obstacles they face. The gender-stereotypical view is still constantly presented in the original work in two ways: female characters are depicted mainly as flat characters and as "emotional" and "irrational," while the male characters tend to be portrayed as skeptical and critical.

One of the most controversial characters is Zhuang Yan, the female protagonist of the second volume. In *Dark Forest*, Luo Ji is portrayed as a libertine at the beginning, described by one of his sex partners as an "asshole that always sees society as trash" (Liu, *Dark Forest*). He shirks the responsibility as Wallfacer and holds a pessimistic view about the future of the world: "the sun and the universe will die one day, so why should humanity believe that it ought to be immortal? Listen, this world is paranoid. Fighting a hopeless war is a fool's errand" (Liu, *Dark Forest*). The image of Zhuang Yan is at the beginning the imagination created by Luo during his novel-writing process, and later found by Da Shi according to his description. In other words, she is a literal outcome of the male gaze and men's fantasy about women. In her relationship with Luo Ji, she herself is almost "muted" and only plays the role that fits Luo Ji's imagination. She is utilized by the PDC to urge Luo to fulfill his mission as the Wallfacer, as well as by the text to

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push the plot forward, as her purity changes Luo's attitude. Her look of innocence, purity and even ignorance are repeatedly emphasized; for example, she constantly "tilts(ed) her head to look at" Luo and ask questions in a child-like way (Liu, *Dark Forest*). The disappearance of Zhuang Yan becomes a turning point for Luo Ji, only after which he starts to ponder love and commitment. The goal of rescuing Zhuang and their child later becomes his motivation to explore the Dark Forest theory. The image of Zhuang Yan is a reinforcement of the concept of *"virtuous mothers and good wifes"* (贤妻良母), while her relationship with Luo Ji falls into the typical mode of chivalry – the vulnerable woman needing to be saved by a man. The author arbitrarily links women with traits of purity and humanity in order to portray Luo Ji's transformation, which shows a tendency toward essentialism and the portrayal of women as flat characters.

Compared to Zhuang Yan, "the young woman holding the nuclear bomb" is a rather minor character in the trilogy, whose appearance occupies only a dozen pages in the 302-page Chinese version of the first volume. Despite her brief appearance, she is liked by a lot of fans in China. As discussed in the first chapter, on the Weibo platform, there are fans using "the young woman holding the nuclear bomb" as their handle. Artists also create a lot of drawings of her. The uniqueness of the character might come from her portrayal as a warrior, holding the bomb to prevent Ye Wenjie from being attacked by the police, and twisting the neck of Pan Han, the ETO traitor. She shows the beauty, strength and tact of a woman. In the end, Da Shi manages to subdue her, and she dies in a tragic way.

"站住。"核弹女孩向大史抛了个媚眼警告道，右手拇指紧按在起爆开关上，指甲油在电筒光中闪亮着。"悠着点儿丫头，有件事儿你肯定想知

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道。"大史站在距女孩七八米远处，从衣袋中掏出一个信封，"你母亲找到

了。"女孩儿神采飞扬的眼睛立刻黯淡了下来，但这时，这双眼睛真的通向

她的心灵。

……

大史咧嘴一笑，"我他妈的怎么知道，瞎猜的，这样的女孩子，多半没见过

妈。我干这行二十多年，就学会了看人。"

"Stop," the young woman warned Da Shi, staring at him intently (winking at Da Shi to warn him). Her right thumb was poised over the detonator. Her face was no longer smiling in the flashlight beams (Her nail polish was shining in the flashlight beams). "Calm down," Da Shi said, standing about seven or eight meters from her. He took an envelope from his pocket. "I have some information you'll definitely want to know. Your mother has been found. "The young woman's feverish eyes dimmed. At that moment her eyes were truly windows to her soul.

… …

Da Shi grinned. "Fucked if I know. Just a guess. A girl like that most likely has mother issues. After doing this for more than twenty years, I'm pretty good at reading people" (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch. 24).

Again, the gendered elements of the description are omitted in the English version. At the plot level, this skilled female assassin is only utilized to set off the image of Da Shi, who is

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"pretty good at reading people," while as the guard of Ye Wenjie, it is almost unprofessional for her to have an "emotional" moment. The trilogy includes many moments when the author moves the plot forward by emphasizing the "emotional" and "irrational" characteristics of women. Although the nuclear bomb girl is a minor character, her description reveals precisely this tendency.

Both the young woman holding the nuclear bomb and Zhuang Yan are characters that function as foils to the male characters. Their vulnerability is portrayed in contrast to the characteristics and responsibilities of males, such as Da Shi's tact and Luo Ji's responsibility to protect all human beings. Furthermore, the essentialist depiction of women as emotional is most obvious in the case of Cheng Xin, which poses questions on the antithetical relationship between "humanity" and "rationality," and their relations to gender.

Cheng Xin is the protagonist of the third volume, *Death's End*, and also one of the most controversial characters in the trilogy. In the story, she has several opportunities to save human civilization but fails each time. Chosen as the Swordholder, she does not have enough deterrent force. She bravely brings Yun Tianming's stories back to Earth, but forces Wade to give up the research on curvature propulsion, which turns out to be the only way for humans to escape extinction. At the end of the trilogy, Cheng's action of leaving the 5-kilogram ecological sphere in Universe 647 might also cause the great universe to fail to collapse. The text indicates that it is her motherhood and love for humans, and the choice of humanity that led to such results. As Guan Yifan says, "humanity chose you, which meant they chose to treat life and everything else with love, even if they had to pay a great price" (Liu, *Death's End*).

Cheng's love is portrayed as a mother's love for the world as her child, and she is repeatedly described as a kind of Saint Mary. It becomes the reason why humanity chooses her,

but also why she always fails to actually be the saver. A contrast between men as "bloodthirsty and savage" and women as "beautiful" is built by the text.

"看，她是圣母玛丽亚，她真的是！"年轻母亲对人群喊道，然后转向程心，热泪盈眶地双手合十，"美丽善良的圣母，保护这个世界吧，不要让那些野蛮的嗜血的男人毁掉这美好的一切。"

"Look, she's like Saint Mary, the mother of Jesus!" the young mother called out to the crowd. She turned back to Cheng Xin and put her hands together. Tears flowed from her eyes. "Oh, beautiful, kind Madonna, protect this world! Do not let those bloodthirsty and savage men destroy all the beauty here."

她看清了自己对这个新世界的感情的实质：母性。……但母性和责任不一样，前者是本能，无法摆脱。

She understood for the first time her own feelings toward this new world: maternal instinct. ……　But, no, maternal instinct was not subject to rationalization; she could not escape it (Liu, *Death's End*).

In the last ten minutes of the Deterrence Era Cheng's subconscious is described as follows:

在程心的潜意识中，她是一个守护者，不是毁灭者；她是一个女人，不是战士。她将用自己的一生守护两个世界的平衡，让来自三体的科技使地球越来

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越强大，让来自地球的文化使三体越来越文明，直到有一天，一个声音对她说：放下红色开关，到地面上来吧，世界不再需要黑暗森林威慑，不再需要执剑人了。

In Cheng Xin's subconscious, she was a protector, not a destroyer; she was a woman, not a warrior. She was willing to use the rest of her life to maintain the balance between the two worlds, until the Earth grew stronger and stronger with Trisolaran science, until Trisolaris grew more and more civilized with Earth culture, until one day, a voice told her: Put down that red switch and return to the surface. The world no longer needs dark forest deterrence, no longer needs a Swordholder (Liu, *Death's End*).

The parallel structure of oppositions, namely "protector/ destroyer" and "women/ warrior" is another case of how gender stereotypes are hardwired into the language of the trilogy. Terms such as "motherhood" and "Saint Mary" emphasize Chen's maternal instinct, turning her a rather mono-dimensional character her central role in the narrative: her character never really develops, but is dominated by the "nature" of her gender. It is her instinctual love for humans that does not allow her to sacrifice a group of people in order to save the entire civilization, which is constructed in the story as completely antithetical to "rationality." What's more, this characteristic is not personal, but attributed to all "women" and "femininity," as emphasized in the depiction of "a world dedicated to femininity."

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"你想什么呀，我可是地地道道的女人耶！哼，你们那时的男人有什么好？粗鲁野蛮肮脏，像是没有充分进化的物种，你会适应这个美好时代的。"

这时，一个问题突然冒上脑际。这样一个柔软的女性世界，威慑？！

"No, no!" AA laughed. "I really am a woman, and I don't like you that way. But, honestly, I can't see what's attractive about the men of your era. Rude, savage, dirty—it's like they hadn't fully evolved. You'll adjust to and enjoy this age of beauty."

A thought popped into her mind. A world dedicated to femininity... But what does that mean for deterrence? (Liu, *Death's End*).

In Liu's depiction, masculinity is dirty and savage, but the plot proves that without masculinity, deterrence cannot be established, and there is no way for the human beings to survive. Liu's intention is clearer in Wade's words: "if we lose our human nature, we lose much, but if we lose our bestial nature, we lose everything" (Liu, *Death's End*). What is problematic is that he is building an arbitrary relationship between human nature and motherhood, and bestial nature linked to masculinity. It is how the gender norms are embedded and reinforced in the trilogy.

Cheng Xin's portrayal also caused quite a stir online. An Internet buzzword called "Saint Mary Bitch" indeed originates from the online discussion about Cheng Xin (iFeng News). In the trilogy, Cheng is always referred to as "Saint Mary," which becomes a negative word and is always put together with "bitch," directly translated as "Saint Mary Bitch 圣母婊". It refers to

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people who are "seemingly kind" and "blindly loving everyone" but ignore the objective facts and, in the end, do harm to others. The term is another case of stigmatizing the gender of female, although not an intentional outcome of the trilogy.

Section 2: Feminist Translation

The examples in the previous section highlight the many revisions concerning gender issues in the English translation, which will be systematically discussed in this section: specifically, feminist translation strategies and knowledge production and the reverse influence of translation on the domestic reception of the trilogy. The translation of the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy has generated heated discussions in China starting from SMTH BBS. In 2015, Liu Cixin, under the handle "nzg (lcx)," replied to a post questioning if the translator of *Dark Forest* is "reliable." Liu writes, "all the gender discriminations are expurgated. Using 'purity' or 'angelic' too much, saying that the General Secretary of the UN is 'a beautiful woman,' or the fact that the four Wallfacers are all male, are all gender discrimination." He adds, "however, I didn't change (the gender of the Wallfacers), I said, what about the fact that U.S. presidents are all male? Well, they say there is going to be a female president soon" (nzg [lcx] SMTH BBS). As the trilogy became popular, a growing awareness of feminism also appeared online in China. The trilogy's content as well as Liu's interview and posts about the English translation gave rise to a debate about misogyny. In many fans' discussions of feminism in the trilogy, the post starts with how the "English translation" triggered them to reflect on Liu's original work. Several academic journals have also examined the translation problem. At the same time, considerable pressure emerged to examine gender discrimination in daily language on the Chinese Internet. While the correlation between the English translation and feminists' general discussions about language

remains to be further explored, it can be said that the simultaneity of these events illustrates the

power of translation in feminist knowledge production.

发信人: nzg (lcx), 信区: SF
标　题: Re: 话说，翻译第二部的那外国哥们靠谱吗？
发信站: 水木社区 (Sun Apr 19 01:55:26 2015), 站内

另: 刚完成对《三体》第二部的英文版的修改，与第一部相比修改比较多，去掉了全部与《球状闪电》有关的部分，其中一个面壁者的战略完全变了。另外，TOR的编辑是个女权主义者，且极其认真仔细，这儿那儿都有性别歧视，像purity和angelic类词用多了也是性别歧视，要限制其使用数量，说联合国秘书长是美女是性别歧视，四个面壁者都是男的是性别歧视（不过这个没改，我说那几十届美国总统还都是男的呢？可人家说马上就有女的了），这些修改对我和joel来说工作量都很大，很累人，但总算完成了。

【 在 nzg 的大作中提到: 】
: 很靠谱，Joel Martinsen中文十分好，普通话说的比我标准，且工作认真，十分敬业，《黑暗森林》英文版的修改多达一千多处。
: 此人的惟一缺点是：请他吃饭只去素菜馆。
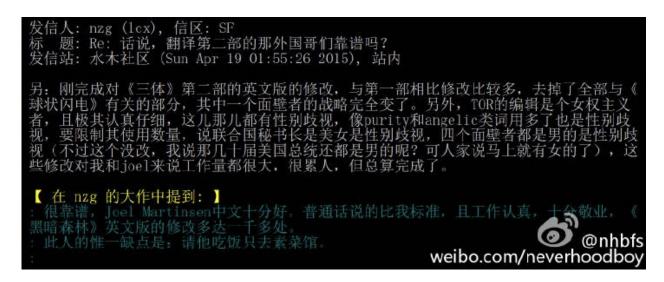:

@nhbfs
weibo.com/neverhoodboy

Fig. 17. Liu Cixin's reply to the readers on SMTH BBS in 2015, about the translation of the

second volume, "we deleted all the gender discriminations."

According to Castro and Ergun, "translation has historically played in the making of the

feminist transnational; and furthermore, to re-envisioning the future of the transnational as a

polyphonic space where translation (as a feminist praxis) is embraced as a tool and model of

cross-border dialogue, resistance, solidarity, and activism in pursuit of justice and equality for

all" (1). Through examining passages from the Chinese and English versions, I argue that the

two translators of the trilogy, Ken Liu and Joel Martinsen, adopt a feminist translation method,

specifically "hijacking." The fans' debate has shown how the feminist translation can produce a

transnational influence, as well as feminist knowledge production. Detailed examples are

changing the pronouns, omitting gendered depictions, and rewriting several paragraphs.

Example 1. Changing the pronouns.

> 对于普通的女性，也许时间能够渐渐愈合这些创伤，毕竟，"文革"中有她这样遭遇的女性太多了，比起她们中的很多人，她算是幸运的。但叶文洁是一位科学女性，她拒绝忘却，而且是用理性的目光直视那些伤害了她的疯狂和偏执。

> For most people (women), perhaps time would have gradually healed these wounds. After all, during the Cultural Revolution, many people (women) suffered fates similar to hers, and compared to many of them, Ye was relatively fortunate. But Ye (is a woman that) had the mental habits of a scientist, and she refused to forget. Rather, she looked with a rational gaze on the madness and hatred that had harmed her (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.23).

In the English translation, the words in parentheses are left out or replaced, while in the original version, Liu puts an emphasis on Ye Wenjie's female identity, which builds a contrast between "female" and "rational" and builds a logic that Ye, in contrast to other women, can take a rational gaze at trauma because she is a woman who "had the mental habits of a scientist." The arbitrary relationship between "irrational" and "female" is left out in the English version.

Example 2. Deleted gendered depictions

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会场安静下来，联合国秘书长萨伊正在走上主席台，她是继阿基诺夫人、阿罗约之后，菲律宾贡献给世界的第三个美女政治家，也是在这个职位上危机前后跨越两个时代的一位。只是如果晚些投票，她肯定不会当选，当人类面临三体危机之际，她的亚洲淑女形象显然不具有世界所期望的力量感。

The hall grew quiet as Secretary General Say walked to the podium. (After Cory Aquino and GMA, she is another beautiful female politician that the Philippines has contributed to the world). The administration of this Filipino politician had straddled the pre- and post-crisis eras. If the vote had come just a little bit later, she never would have been elected, because a refined Asian lady didn't project the sense of power the world was looking for in the face of the Trisolar Crisis (Liu, *Death's End*).

In the Chinese version, "beautiful female" serves as the modifier of "politician," and to use the sentence structure of "the nation (Philippines)" "contributes" "her" "to the world," is objectifying the female character. The sentence is completely left out in the English version.

Example 3. Rewriting in a neutral way,

"你应该知道她的，"主任说，用手划了一大圈，"这个投资二百亿的加速器建成后，第一次运行的可能就是验证她提出的一个超弦模型。要说在论资

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排辈的理论研究圈子，本来轮不到她的，可那些老家伙不敢先来，怕丢人，

就让她捡了个便宜。"

"什么？杨冬是……女的？！"

"You should know her," the director said, waving his hand around in a large circle. "The first experiment on this twenty-billion-yuan accelerator will probably be to test her superstring model. Now, seniority matters in theoretical physics, and normally, she wouldn't have been senior enough to get the first shot. But those older academics didn't dare to show up first, afraid that they might fail and lose face, so that's why she got the chance. (It's a good bargain!)"

"What? Yang Dong is … a woman?" (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.4).

The "good bargain" in Chinese is negative, meaning one is paying a low price to get the thing that he/she does not deserve. Thus, here it is substituted with a neutral term, "got the chance."

The translation process points to the embedded gender discrimination in the Chinese language and daily expressions, which leads readers to reflect on the original work. Following Liu Cixin's post on SMTH BBS, several posts started to appear on different online social platforms, focusing on the gender issues in the original work. On a platform called Zhihu (the Chinese version of Quora), many users raise questions like "Are there gender discriminations in the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy?" with one of the questions gaining 219 replies. Some of the answers are quoting from a thesis written by Lang, titled "On the Translator's Feminist Translation Strategies in *The Three-Body Problem*," inviting Internet users to reflect on the issue.

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In "Douban Gossip Group" (豆瓣鹅组), in a post titled "Do you think there is gender discrimination in the depiction of females in *The Three-Body Problem* Trilogy?," a majority of the 725 replies argue that there are gender stereotypes and discriminations that "Liu Cixin himself is not even aware of" and are taken for granted by the public in daily language habits. English translation is also constantly referred to in the discussion on Douban, in another Douban post, a user named "Sakoii" asks, "If the foreigners can change the content of our book, why can't we ourselves be feminist?"

The question emerges on how different forms of texts and discourses migrate and contribute to local and transnational processes of producing feminist knowledge and practices. Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) on various social media platforms are emphasizing the importance of awareness of gender discrimination in daily communication and of re-configuring the language in a more neutral way. Examples from different languages, such as "Professor" and "Professorin" in German also become cases for users to analyze. The *Three-Body* fandom is a place where such discussions also emerge and become a part of Chinese feminist discussions, exemplified in the Douban discussions. The fact that the phenomenon of debates around translation and a general wave of reflection on the daily language simultaneously happen might be the case where feminist translation becomes the transnational feminism knowledge production. A resistance against gender discrimination is realized through the feminist translation strategies.

Section 3: Fan Productions

      Internet fan fiction archives are also valuable as objects of study because they are archives of women's digital culture and queer digital culture. This section introduces and analyzes works by two Lofter users, "Su Yuan Yi Che" (referred to as "Su" later in the chapter) and "-Fromage-." Through a close reading of selected works, this section argues that while the female fans still to some extent fall into the stereotypes and create conservative fan works where gender issues are concerned, these works nevertheless express an agency that actively puts women back into the science fiction narrative.

      Su's works are posted both on Jinjiang Literature City and Lofter by herself; her "Shi/ Luo folder" on Lofter includes 46 pieces of fan fiction, with 70,840,000 views in total. -Fromage- is a famous painter drawing fan comic of Shi/Luo. Among the twenty most viewed posts on Lofter under the "Three-Body Problem" Tag, four are painted by Fromage. Fromage also has her own "Shi/Luo Folder," which contains 19 pieces of drawings that have to date attracted 164,560,000 views in total. Because of her popularity on Lofter, Fromage was selected as one of the painters for the *Three-Body Problem* painting album (Future Affairs Administration), which is another example of how fans centrally participate in the trilogy's commercial transformation into a transmedia franchise.

      The two authors maintain a close relationship with each other online. Some of their works are dedicated to each other, and one of Su's prefaces indicates that they came to know each other through Lofter because of the interest in the same slash couple. They make suggestions on each other's' works and support each other during the creative process. The authors on Lofter, most of whom self-identify as straight women, tend to communicate and interact in a sexualized way, such as referring to someone as "the writer I have a crush on," "my

wife," or writing or drawing works for each other and attach love poems. Female intimacy is established and enhanced in the fan community. While authors' real identities are unknown, it should be acknowledged, based on the interactions, that fandom might provide a place for queer female intimacy, compensating not only for the lack of emotion and intimacy in the science fiction world, but also in reality.

Women's fan fictions based on the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy are numerous but not well explored. The fan-produced texts demonstrate influences from Japan, the Western science fiction tradition, as well as the pre-modern Chinese literary tradition. While some of the works are still subject to gender stereotypes, they can nonetheless be interpreted as a resistance to gender discrimination in the trilogy and in the real world.

Fig. 18. A painting of all the female characters in the trilogy by Fromage.

One of Fromage's most famous works is a painting of almost all the female characters in the trilogy, which got 9536 likes. "Almost" because, as some fans point out, the author leaves out

Helena, the female figure who appears at the beginning of *Death's End*, claiming to have the power of magic. Fromage explains that she has included all the female characters that are related to the plot of the story, thus "the young woman holding the nuclear bomb" is also included. Some might argue that the work still seems to represent female figures in a moderately idealized way, as they still fall into the traditional definition of "beautiful" women, namely tall, thin, and with long hair. Many comments also focus on the appearances of these characters. However, the picture directly points to the fact that in such a grand work, the number of female characters is rather small. Selecting out all the female characters to paint shows the artist's emphasis on female agency. Many comments also praise the artist for drawing specifically the female characters and praise the beauty of the scene when female characters gather and even bond with each other.

Fromage's other works mainly focus on exploring the slash relationship between Da Shi and Luo Ji, but also possible female homosexual relationships, such as between Cheng Xin and Sophone. As argued by Heammnn in her analysis of Japanese "media mix" and BL in *doujinshi*, the female gaze has created its own overtly homoerotic readings and interpretations that creatively subvert phallocentrism implicit in many mainstream narratives. The fan works on Lofter, to a large extent influenced by Japanese manga culture, function similarly. It is not common to see such gender relationships on Chinese official media, and works like this also risk being reported and deleted online. Although authors of such slash works do not often explicitly express their intention of creating such work, and it might be just for fun, the existence of these works still provides a space for gender minorities.

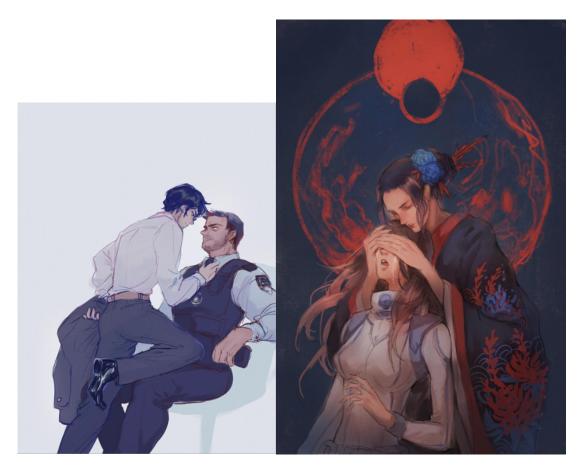Fig. 19. Painting by -Fromage-, titled "Socialist Brotherhood."

Fig. 20. Fromage's other fan productions.

Apart from the influence of Japanese manga, the crucial role that traditional Chinese literature plays in slash literature should not be ignored. One of Fromage's paintings is a picture for "Su Yuan Yi Che" as a birthday present. The caption is a line from the poem *Che Yao Yao Pian* (After Parting), written by a male poet, Fan Chengda (1126-1193 AD), in the Song dynasty: "May I be the star, and you be the moon, casting our light on each other every night (愿我如星君如月，夜夜流光相皎洁)." The painting and full poem are attached below.

Fig. 21. The Birthday Greeting Picture that Fromage draws for Su Yuan Yi Che, with Fan Chengda's poem as caption.

《车遥遥篇》范成大

车遥遥，马憧憧。

君游东山东复东，安得奋飞逐西风。

愿我如星君如月，夜夜流光相皎洁。

月暂晦，星常明。

留明待月复，三五共盈盈。

The carriage travels far away, the shadow of the horse sways on the ground. You

are going to the Tai mountain in the East, then going further East, following the

autumn wind.

May I be the star, and you be the moon, casting our light on each other every

night.

The moon is waning, the star always shining.

When the full moon comes back, we will be together once more (my trans.).

The poem expresses the implied author's longing for "you" after parting. There are three

common ways to interpret this poem. First, the poem might be about Fan Chengda missing his

male friend, which is interpreted in a literal way as Fan himself is male, and it is less likely that a

female will travel farther and farther away by horse instead of staying in the Inner Chamber. The

second possibility is that, although the author Fan Chengda is male, this poem is written in a

female voice, expressing her yearning for her husband/ lover who is leaving. Thirdly, some

interpreters argue that Fan is expressing his political ideals to be appreciated by the Emperor, as

he might have been neglected at the time when the poem was written. The ambiguity of the

gender of "I" and "you" in the poem points to a Chinese literary tradition that is crucial in the

writing of Chinese slash literature, namely gendered voices. According to Fong, "the Chinese

lyrical tradition has a history of female-voiced songs that are often anonymous and have folk or

popular origins. Examples can be found in the Book of Songs and yüeh-fu ballads of the Han…

These lyrical female voices are fresh and direct in expressing emotion; they are often sensual

when they sing of their love and desire" (110-111). *Che Yao Yao Pian* belongs to the yüeh-fu style and follows the lyrical tradition.

Slash literature invites us to read more deeply in the Chinese tradition and bring what we find there to bear on contemporary media, especially the tradition of male writers adopting the female voice to express not only their emotion, but also their political will. In reading the *Fu* 賦 (Rapsody) genre, Paul Rouzer argues that the position of the minister is often feminized, and points to the rhetoric "in the demarcation of power relationships: male/female, emperor/ courtier" (Rouzer 39). In *Slashing Three Kingdoms*, Tian Xiaofei also emphasizes the influence of a particular interpretive paradigm in the Chinese literary tradition, "the reading of political allegory into depictions of sexual relationships" (231). She argues that slash literature takes such metaphorical language literally in order to depict homosexual relationship between the male characters.

> Its (slash on Chinese Web) continuity with the tradition, and, more importantly, its departure from the "fair lady" tradition should be given further attention. In premodern writings, political and sexual readings of a text often co-exist; one does not necessarily supplant the other. The language of desire, either for one's lover or for one's lord, is common to them. The lover's discourse possesses a profound ambiguity; it can be political and sexual at the same time. Such discursive ambiguity provides fan authors with a wonderful verbal repertoire, but the authors notably strip the discourse of its ambiguity by treating desire as literal, not metaphorical (Tian 233).

Similar to the slash literature of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy also emphasizes strategies, politics, and brotherhood. Indeed, in the *Dark Forest*, when talking about transparent thoughts, the Trisolarans directly alluded to *Three Kingdoms*, saying that "you have a book on your bookshelf called *A Story of Three Kingdoms*," to which Evans replies, "indeed, that book lays out the highest levels of human schemes and strategy" (Liu, *Dark Forest*). In the trilogy, the Wallfacers, the Staircase Program, and Yun Tianming's fairy tales all focus on "schemes and strategy." Thus, one can argue that the slash writings based on the *Three-Body Problem* trilogy similarly replace politics with private emotions. But the question emerges whether this replacement demonstrates the resilience of a male-dominant genre or whether it re-emphasizes the stereotypical view that female authors focus more on "emotions." I argue that, in the male-authored traditional texts, women are represented only through the feminized position of a minister or a grieving woman in the Inner Chamber yearning for her husband, and the latter was often used to express male political desires, which falls back to the political intention in the first way of representation. Borrowing Fan Chengda's poem as the caption of the fan comics of Luo Ji/ Shi Qiang is still a revisiting of traditional Chinese literature by the slashers, but putting Luo Ji in a feminized position, or taking Fan Chengda's words to literally express the emotions between males can be seen as resistance by female authors.

Similar to the slash literature of *Three Kingdoms*, some of Su Yuan Yi Che's slash works are also heavily influenced by traditional Chinese literature. While these works might not be as straightforward as paintings in representing sexual relationships, they express the emotions between the characters in a more subtle way. Many pieces by Su, such as "Plains and Mountains," "God," and "The sinking of a leaver's heart in the season of fall," all focus on Luo's

loneliness during or after the Deterrence Era. The first short story portrays the re-encounter of Luo Ji and Shi Qiang after the Deterrence Era, while the latter two are set at the time when Luo is leaving Shi for the Swordholder position, depicting their sadness when parting. In these works, traditional literature is alluded to again. For example, the title of the third piece is quoted from Tang Duo Ling (Lyrics to a Sugary Chant) by Wu Wenying (1200- 1260AD), written in the Song dynasty. It can be seen as another example of how traditional male-authored texts are appropriated for the homosexual relationship.

In her most famous piece, "Plains and Mountains," Su sets the story at the time when Luo Ji finishes his duty as the Swordholder. Soon after Luo leaves the position, Cheng Xin fails to maintain the deterrence. As a result, Luo Ji has to go into exile to escape from the Trisolarans' search. During the years of deterrence, Luo Ji is lonely and has no chance to talk to others, so he loses the ability to speak and only appears in the story as a muted figure. Da Shi serves as his guard, protecting and taking care of him. During their exile, Da Shi notices that Luo Ji has been practicing to speak, and he reads from the shape of Luo's mouth that Luo is practicing to say his name, "Da Shi." In the end, they come to the place where Luo Ji first confronted the Trisolarans.

史强感慨道：“这平原与群山，几百年来一点儿都没变，像你一样。”

……

更早的时候，他也曾带着幻想中的人儿在此地游玩。而现在，镜花水月的、梦境般的她早已远去，他也老了，只有史强的后背依然宽厚，可以为他挡下所有的危险，也可以稳稳地承载着他的重量。罗辑心潮激荡，他把自己的脑

袋凑近史强的耳朵，强烈的冲动促使着他张开嘴，说出那个他一直渴望说出、练习了很久、但从未成功过的名字。

"大史。"

......

罗辑停顿了几秒，然后以同样轻微而陌生的声音说出了自己从未练习过的第二句话。那是他此刻的心声。"像你一样。"(Su Yuan Yi Che).

Shi Qiang says, "the plains and mountains, they haven't changed in hundreds of years, just like you."

......

Earlier, he also brought the one in his imagination to here. But now the lady is already long gone, and he is old. Only the back of Shi Qiang is still strong enough to prevent him from all the dangers, and can steadily bear him. With mixed feelings, Luo presses his mouth to Shi's ear, a strong impulse urges him to open his mouth and say the name that he is so eager to say, for which he has been practicing for so long but never succeeded.

"Da Shi."

......

Luo Ji paused for a while, and then said the second line that he never practiced. This is what he is thinking from the bottom of his heart. "Just like you" (my trans.).

The passages emphasize the passive position and vulnerability of Luo Ji. Firstly, he is silenced almost throughout the entire story, similar to the female's passive position in the literary tradition. Also, the metaphor of the landscape of "plains and mountains" is another example of influences from traditional Chinese literary tradition. A detailed example is *The Goddess* (Shen nü Fu 神女賦), where the poet Song Yu narrates King Xiang of Chu's (楚襄王) encounter with the goddess in a dream. As Rouzer points out, after Song Yu's description of the dream, "he engages in a description not of the goddess and her charms but of the land itself, whose attractions are under the ruler's sway" (59). The landscape is a representation of the body of a goddess that is subjugated by the ruler's mastery, which Rouzer reads as sexual intercourse.

It is also worth noting that the relationship of the Shi Qiang/Luo Ji couple is rather similar to the relationship between Luo Ji and Zhuang Yan in the original work, especially from the perspective of the agency of making one's voice. In the fan fiction, Luo Ji is completely muted, and his vulnerability puts him in a passive position where he needs to be protected by Da Shi. This configuration repeats (in a subversive gender position) the relationship in the trilogy, where Zhuang Yan is the passive one. The female authors, intentionally or not, subversively apply an elite, male literary tradition to their works that depict homosexual relationships. This is when the Internet becomes a "rogue archive" (De Kosnik) where subcultures such as queer or slash literature are preserved, with the traditional literature and culture subverted.

Conclusion

To summarize, in this thesis I focus on three sets of relationships: first, between state censorship and the documentation of trauma; second, between genders, specifically women

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authors' and artists' resistance against male dominance in the production, characters and plots of science fiction; third, between the East and the West over the characteristics and ownership of the science fiction genre in text and film. While the story worlds and the metaphorical language of science fiction can provide a space for disempowered groups to make their voices heard, will science fiction lose its critical power because of its popularity and manipulation by the Chinese state? If, as I have demonstrated, science fiction has the power to make visible structures such as trauma, censorship and minorities that remain invisible in public discourse, what remains invisible when Chinese science fiction becomes visible?

The Three-Body Problem trilogy is a crucial set of texts for answering such questions, relying as it does on metaphors and allegories centered on modern Chinese history and contemporary issues, as well as on an epic-scale narrative and, by now, on an international readership. The fan community's participation and interaction with the trilogy further enriches the original work, as it is reimagined by average readers to fight against state censorship, by women writers to contest a male-dominated genre, and by the nation China as a tool to demonstrate its technological and cultural power to the world. Liu Cixin's trilogy is a starting point inviting further studies of other Chinese science fiction writers and their works, including the audience's reaction. There are a large number of questions that are merely touched upon in the thesis and remain to be explored. For example, the connection between Liu's work in particular and Chinese science fiction in general is worth discussing: To what extent do other Chinese authors link humanity's future so explicitly to Chinese history, and how are readers (creatively) responding to their works? It is also worth expanding the research on other literary traditions, such as pre-modern Chinese literature, especially myths and fantasy, in their influence on science fiction fan fiction or online literature. Japanese culture should also be further

explored, specifically from the perspective of history of science, as a large number of early scientific terminologies were introduced to China through translation from Japanese in a process that shaped scientific knowledge of science in China and influences science fiction to this day.

Chinese science fiction is a literary genre, a media franchise, and a participatory culture. Everyone who reads it can situate themselves in it and expand their horizons. To quote *The Three-Body Problem*, "in my line of work, it's all about putting together many apparently unconnected things. When you piece them together the right way, you get the truth" (Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* ch.10).

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