

FOUND IN TRANSLATION: "NEW PEOPLE" IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

BY JING JIANG — ASIA SHORTS BOOK SERIES

SUGGESTED COURSES:

- Chinese and Comparative Literature
- Modern China
- Global Science Fiction

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS:

- Translated modernity
- New fiction and renewal of the people
- Science fiction as positive cultural pedagogy
- The discourse of science and nation
- The art of creating humans vs. the art of programming hearts
- Science fiction and realism

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Ever since its eruption into the cultural scene in fin-de-siècle China, science fiction flourished only sporadically in a few periods of marked boom. What kind of societal-wide shift in interests or attitudes led to the booming of science fiction during each of those historical moments? Do they share anything in common? Explain.
2. What is "translated modernity"? Why is it a particularly relevant concept when it comes to Chinese science fiction? Explain.
3. Why were early Chinese writers of science fiction particularly fascinated with the trope of bioengineered humans? How does the evolution of such a fascination help us understand the increasing importance placed on thought reform and ideological correctness in Maoist China? Explain.
4. Science fiction seems to have suffered a kind of identity crisis from the beginning of its existence in China, torn between its desire to be knowledge texts ("science in literary clothing") on the one hand and its insistent claim to artistic license on the other. How did writers in Post-Mao China negotiate this built-in tension and make science fiction a vital part of the rethinking of socialist realism in the wake of the Cultural Revolution?
5. What do the few stories about posthumans – as lovers, wives, or parents – tell us about the cultural project to rehabilitate humanity itself in the wake of a failed revolution? What makes science fiction a particularly fitting vehicle for processing historical trauma, or wrestling with mounting challenges of our own time, such as environmental crisis?



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IN POSTSOCIALIST IMAGINATIONS

“Found in Translation locates Chinese science fiction on the map of world literature. A brilliant combination of theoretical inquiries and cultural analysis, it traces the genre’s origin and development throughout the twentieth century, offering definitive interpretations of its key motifs and movements, and bringing together well-informed discussions on translation and nation, science and literature, humanism and realism.”

– MINGWEI SONG, Wellesley College

“Jing Jiang’s Found in Translation is a welcome contribution to the fields of modern Chinese literature, translation, and science fiction studies, refuting popular assumptions of the genre’s cultural marginality. With science fiction—and its engagement with the discourse of science—situated at the nexus of popular culture, hard science, and high art, Jiang elucidates how SF writers, translators and critics engaged as active agents in the global circulation of scientific discourse. SF served as an intellectual map conceptualizing and helping plot the course for Chinese modernity, and intervening in the debate regarding the role of science and technology in the fate of humankind.”

– NATHANIEL ISAACSON, North Carolina State University

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