



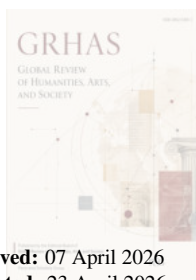
De-Westernizing Science Fiction Studies and Centering Chinese Visions: A Review of *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories*

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Abstract

This book review examines *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories*, edited by Song Mingwei, Nathaniel Isaacson, and Li Hua. Rejecting Western-centric interpretations of Chinese science fiction as a derivative form, the volume presents it as a distinct cultural production rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy and shaped by China's modernization, thereby contributing to global conversations on technological progress, ecology, and posthumanism. Organized into three major sections, the book brings together literary criticism, film studies, and critical theory to explore Chinese science fiction's historical origins, cross-media development, and contemporary philosophical concerns. The collection's greatest strength lies in its effort to de-westernize science fiction studies and foreground Chinese perspectives. Although the volume has certain limitations, it remains a well-researched and significant contribution that encourages a more inclusive understanding of non-Western science fiction. By synthesizing historical, cultural, and media-based approaches, it offers an important framework for rethinking the global contours of Chinese science fiction and the role of non-Western traditions in shaping the genre's future.

Keywords: Chinese Science Fiction; Media Intersection; Posthumanism; Ecocriticism; Cultural Modernization

Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories, edited by Mingwei Song, Nathaniel Isaacson, and Li Hua, offers a comprehensive examination of Chinese science fiction from its early twentieth-century origins to the present day. The collection explores the genre's cultural, historical, and aesthetic significance, showing how it reflects China's rapid modernization and the political and social transformations that have shaped modern China. In doing so, the volume adopts a multidimensional approach, drawing on literary criticism, popular culture studies, film studies, and media theory. Its contributors engage with a range of intellectual frameworks, including postcolonialism, ecocriticism, gender studies, and posthumanism.

The collection's core argument rests on a historically and culturally grounded framework that rejects linear, Western-derived narratives of science fiction's development. Instead, it traces Chinese science fiction as a dynamic form that continually negotiates between local intellectual traditions—such as Confucianism, Daoism, and late Qing reformist thought—and global currents, including modernism, postcolonialism, and posthumanism. A central premise of the volume is that Chinese

science fiction is not merely a passive reflection of modernization, but rather a critical cultural medium through which the contradictions and possibilities of technological progress, national identity, and ecological change can be explored. In this respect, the volume argues that Chinese science fiction offers perspectives that challenge dominant Western assumptions about the genre's themes and purposes.

The collection is divided into three primary sections: "Contesting Science and Fiction," which examines the genre's historical and ideological foundations; "Negotiating Media and Genre," which explores the intersections of literature, cinema, and digital media; and "Beyond the Anthropocene and Utopia," which addresses the philosophical and ecological concerns that shape much contemporary Chinese science fiction.

The editors' introduction effectively sets the stage by offering a detailed account of the historical, cultural, and political background of Chinese science fiction, supplemented by a useful timeline. They show how Chinese science fiction emerged as a distinct literary form rooted in both traditional Chinese thought and the rapid modernization



of twentieth-century China. Importantly, the editors emphasize that Chinese science fiction should not be understood merely as an offshoot of Western traditions. Rather, it has made its own distinctive contributions to global debates on national identity, technological change, and shifting geopolitical power.

The first section, “Contesting Science and Fiction,” investigates the historical and ideological conditions that shaped the emergence of Chinese science fiction. Lorenzo Andolfatto’s essay examines Kang Youwei’s *Book of the Heavens* and argues that it played a significant role in the development of early modern Chinese science fiction by combining traditional philosophical thought with new scientific ideas. Liyuan Jia’s essay turns to the late Qing period, exploring how literature from this era imagined intelligent humanoid machines and linking these representations to broader intellectual debates about bodily and mental transformation. Another essay by Guangyi L. analyzes late Qing visions of global order, particularly how science and technology were understood as crucial instruments for shaping China’s future under conditions of imperial pressure. Virginia L. Conn’s essay addresses the challenges involved in translating “Chinese” science fiction into other languages, emphasizing how cultural and linguistic differences affect its adaptation and reception in global contexts. Taken together, these essays demonstrate that early Chinese science fiction emerged from a complex interaction between local traditions and global intellectual currents.

The second section, “Negotiating Media and Genre,” shifts attention to the role of different media in shaping the evolution of Chinese science fiction. It pays particular attention to the ways in which the genre interacted with early Chinese media during the late Qing and Republican periods. Qiong Yang examines how science fiction writers in these periods used the genre to respond to the social, political, and technological upheavals of their time. Melissa A. Hosek investigates the role of Chinese cinema, showing how filmmakers during the Mao and Deng eras used science fiction to project utopian futures while also addressing ecological concerns. Hua Li focuses on Chinese cyber novels and the tension they negotiate between humanism and technological advancement. Heather Inwood, in turn, explores online Chinese science fiction and shows how digital media has generated new spatial and narrative possibilities, complicating distinctions between real and imagined worlds. This section highlights the diverse and evolving ways in which Chinese science fiction has been shaped by different media platforms, reflecting China’s changing relationship with technology, global culture, and its own historical narrative.

The third section, “Beyond the Anthropocene and Utopia,” addresses the philosophical and ecological concerns that have become increasingly central to contemporary Chinese science fiction. This section focuses on themes such as the Anthropocene, posthumanism, and utopian imagination through the works of several prominent authors. Jannis Jizhou Chen examines Han Song’s *Hospital Trilogy*, using it to show how science fiction represents social collapse through the metaphor of illness. Chen argues that the trilogy presents a world in environmental and social crisis and underscores the fragility of human civilization in the face of ecological catastrophe. Gwennaël Gaffric’s essay centers on Liu Cixin and his notion of a “cosmic pastoral,” in which humanity’s relationship to the universe is reimagined from a less anthropocentric perspective. Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker investigates post-1980s Chinese science fiction writers and analyzes how their works address body transformation and the politics of posthumanity. Finally, Mingwei Song’s essay turns to Taiwanese science fiction, exploring its engagement with concepts such as the “neo-baroque” and posthumanism, and presenting a future in which the boundaries between humans and machines become increasingly unstable.

The collection’s greatest strength lies in its effort to de-westernize science fiction studies and foreground Chinese perspectives. It challenges Western universalism in science fiction historiography and helps open the field to a more pluralistic understanding of global science

fiction. At the same time, it presents Chinese science fiction as both a culturally specific tradition and a meaningful contributor to international debates, thereby resisting the familiar binary between the “local” and the “global” that has long shaped area studies. Another major strength of the volume is its interdisciplinary range. It successfully synthesizes literary criticism, film studies, media theory, cultural studies, philosophy, and translation studies into a coherent framework for the study of non-Western science fiction.

The collection does, however, have some limitations. Most notably, the connections among some of its themes are not always fully developed. While the volume addresses issues such as gender, ecocriticism, and posthumanism, the coherence among these concerns sometimes remains implicit rather than clearly articulated. As a result, readers may occasionally find the volume more rich and expansive than conceptually integrated. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish its broader scholarly value.

Overall, *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories* provides a thorough and multifaceted exploration of Chinese science fiction and demonstrates how the genre reflects the historical, cultural, and intellectual forces that have shaped modern China. More importantly, it shows that Chinese science fiction is not only a response to China’s changing social realities, but also a significant voice in wider debates about technological development, ecological crisis, and the future of humanity. By bringing together a wide range of themes and media forms, the collection offers valuable insights into the relationship between science fiction and Chinese culture. It will be of particular interest to scholars of science fiction, Chinese literary and cultural studies, media studies, and popular culture.

Author Contribution

Junyue Xue was the sole author responsible for the conceptualization, analysis, drafting, and revision of this book review.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This article is a book review and did not involve human participants, medical, clinical, or animal experimentation. The research was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards for humanities and cultural research.

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Competing Interest Declaration

The author declares no financial or personal competing interests in relation to the work reported in this manuscript.

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