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# Utopian Science Fiction and Ethnic Future Imagination in Chinese Contemporary Science Fiction

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**Abstract:** Utopian science fiction, as a fusion of science fiction literature and utopian literature, integrates the construction of imagined interactions between people, technology, society, and the environment in future narratives. In doing so, it deepens the aesthetic value and social significance of science fiction literature. Chinese science fiction utopian future narratives use technological imagination to construct three models of expression. First, they re-examine the symbiotic patterns of technology, humanity, and time within the multiple dimensions of human subjectivity. Second, within the transformation of social structures, they reassess the subject and emotions, recognizing that the acceleration of social change has transformed human nostalgia into a series of rehearsals seeking future possibilities in the past. Third, within the dissolution of cultural politics, they reconsider space and the environment, reconstructing planetary existence through a model of deterritorialization. The imagined technological developments constitute the internal logic of Chinese science fiction utopian future narratives, suggesting that the future is an uncertain movement entangled with technology, time, space, and human nature. The confluence of technology, time, and humanity gives rise to people's expectations and yearnings for eternal life. However, these three modes of narrating the future also lead us to return to Earth as the central theme, highlighting the planetary nature and reflecting on the meaning of existence.

**Keywords:** utopian science fiction; technology; time; cultural community



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## 1. Introduction: Utopian Science Fiction and Its New Perspective

Utopian science fiction merges elements from both science fiction and utopian literature, intertwining imagined interactions between people, technology, society, and the environment in futuristic narratives. Utopias are considered a political aspect of science fiction. Fredric Jameson notes that the “utopia has always been a political issue, an unusual destiny for a literary form” (Jameson 2005, p. xi). Darko Suvin highlights two key aspects of a utopia: imagination and sociopolitical perfection. He defines “‘Utopian Thought’ as both idealistic and ideological” (Suvin 1979, p. 42). Offering his own definition, he claims that a “utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (Suvin 1979, p. 49). Suvin attributes cognitive estrangement as a defining feature of science fiction, though it remains within the realm of ideology. Mieville remarks that “these structuring levels of textual ideology at the level of SF -as -form include this surrender of cognition to authority” (Bould and Mieville 2009, p. 240). He refers to this ideology in science fiction as “the Suvinian -Freedmanite paradigm” (Bould and Mieville 2009, p. 240). This notion resonates with utopian theorist Moylan, who views utopian science fiction as highlighting both the negation and estranged anticipation of political value, emphasizing movement and horizon (Moylan 2021, p. 110). Moylan’s ideas further underscore the dual themes of utopian and dystopian elements within science fiction. Future narratives and alternative histories are central to utopian science fiction, suggesting an ideological function within the genre.

However, some scholars contest the focus on ideology in utopian science fiction. Chinese scholars Wang Feng and Chen Dan highlight aesthetic dimensions of utopian science fiction, expanding the categories of both utopian literature and science fiction. They argue that the political utopia is transformed into a textual revolution. Unlike traditional utopian literature, utopian science fiction features open, expansive worlds rather than isolated spaces, and inventors and creators replace explorers. The strength of utopian science fiction lies in its effective establishment of a mechanism for discovering “new strangeness” (Wang and Chen 2023, pp. 8–9). According to Wang Feng and Chen Dan, nearly every ambitious science fiction work creates a new world in which primary qualities undergo transformations, altering the entire world. Politics is just one element of this change, but other qualities such as time (e.g., time spans or time travel), history (e.g., rewriting history), speed (e.g., space travel), and space (e.g., alien exploration, alternate dimensions) are equally important. In my opinion, the utopia is a future narrative method, which refers to how texts reflect the way that the specific change in a quality will bring about a holistic transformation of the world and how individuals respond to this change and the culture and psychology they generate within this altered world constitute a meaningful thought experiment. In this sense, utopian science fiction is a representation of future narrative on cognitive estrangement, social structure, and ethnic emotion. In this way, Chinese science fiction exposes its turn from the political dimension to the aesthetical dimension. China Dream and the lyrical tradition of Chinese literature have a strong influence on its utopian science fiction as well.

## 2. One: Technology and Time in Future Imagination of Chinese Science Fiction

A significant theme is emerging in Chinese science fiction, evolving from the “China Dream” narrative to explorations of “symbiosis” within time–space conditions. This progression highlights the focus on technology and the concept of time in shaping future visions within these evolving narratives.

Roberts identifies two distinct paths in Western future narrative. The first is inspired by biblical prophecy, rooted in a purely religious framework. The second is a secular futurology, which he describes as “a form of conceptual voyage imaginaire, more temporal than spatial” (Roberts 2006, p. 58). According to Roberts, the concept of the future has evolved over the course of the history of Western literature: “One of the most important literary inventions of the seventeenth century is the tale of the future. It would not be until the twentieth century that ‘the future’ would become the default setting, as it were, for the SF tale; and most science fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was located in versions of its present day” (Roberts 2006, pp. 57–58). Parrinder further explains that the secular future narratives began in the mid-seventeenth century and gradually gained popularity. The genre truly took off with the success of Sir George Chesney’s *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), after which it became a recognized form of commercial fiction. Drawing on Aristotle’s distinction between poetry and history, Parrinder compares religious prophecies with literary narratives, highlighting the difference between fantasy and science fiction. He asserts that science fiction is fundamentally linked to the future, stating that it “relies on our hunger for foreknowledge and our need to contemplate shadows of the future as part of the process of self-discovery” (Parrinder 1995, pp. 16–17). This suggests that technology and progress play a pivotal role in shaping alternative histories and future imagination.

In Chinese science fiction, the future narrative represents a new theme that emerged from the process of modernization. This theme is closely connected to “China Dream”, a concept that began with Liang Qichao and his proposals for a “new novel”, “new people”, and “new state”. Wu Yan notes that the intrinsic connection between Liang Qichao and futurism is expressed in Liang’s novel *The Future of New China*, where Liang emphasizes that novels must confront and portray the future (Wu 2022). This dream embodies a vision of modern technology and democracy, aimed at transforming old China, which was under the control of world powers. Chinese literature, particular science fiction, began to focus on the future as part of the nation’s development in science and technology. Consequently,

the survival and empowerment of the nation, supported by scientific and technological advancements, form the central themes of future narrative in Chinese science fiction.

In Chinese science fiction's future narratives, two attitudes toward technology emerge. One is optimistic, promoting a harmonious integration of technology, time, and humanity. The other is more skeptical, questioning the impact of technology on time and human existence.

First, I will consider the establishment of an integrated system of technology, time, and humanity in the future.

Liu Cixin, one of the most famous science fiction writers, strongly advocates for the idea that technological advancement is essential to leading humanity toward higher civilization. He views humans, technology, and time as part of a symbiotic system. Without the development of science and technology, there is no future. This belief is clearly articulated in his *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy.

*The Three-Body Problem* trilogy depicts the conflict between Earth's civilization and the Trisolarans, a war fundamentally centered around technology. Once the Trisolarans block technological development on Earth, humanity is left with no option but to wait for its demise, as technology forms a crucial part of the symbiotic system involving time, technology, and humanity. Liu Cixin illustrates this through the temporal structure in the novel, such as the Crisis Era, the Deterrence Era, and the End of Time when the Trisolaran fleet reaches Earth. The narrative is structured in a "backward-looking" manner rather than progressing forward in the traditional sense. Yang Chen points out that *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy does not fit into the science fiction lineage of authors like Heinlein, Asimov, or Yoshiki Tanaka, who write "future histories". Instead, it embodies the "temporality" of "us", reflecting a historian's narrative that represents "us" through multiple narrative perspectives. The experiences of "us" are consciously recognized as "history", and through this recognition, the historical nature of "us" is emphasized once again (Yang 2017, p. 32). This narrative approach, focusing on the past, is a form of retrospective storytelling. Moreover, with his keen insight and foresight, Liu Cixin carefully traces the relationship between technology, time, and humanity, intricately crafting a future world where all three elements are deeply intertwined in *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy.

This notion of technological time is also explored by avant-garde science fiction writer Tan Gang. In the world of *Three Suns and Moons*, human technological development is restricted because any advancement would trigger catastrophe for humanity. As a result, time continually retraces from the future back to the past; the future ceases to exist. Instead, time alternates between pre-modernity and modernity, creating a return to the past from the future. Humanity has no future, only memories. According to the concept that "technology and civilization, as a whole, are the result of conscious or unconscious choices, intelligent actions, and human struggles", people, based on a grand algorithm, descend into a state of forsaking the sacred and rejecting wisdom. They become mere physical entities, implementing a system of knowledge control that prohibits any unauthorized pursuit of knowledge. In this scenario, humans lose all agency and autonomy, ultimately leading to the simultaneous downfall of both technology and humanity.

This perspective on technology and time reflects a new idea of the co-existence of technology, time, and humanity in the works of these writers. It represents both the power of modernity and a new symbiotic outlook. Technological advancement not only aids humanity and nations in defending against invasions and protecting the Earth, but it also shifts the traditional view of technology as an external tool toward a recognition of its co-existence with humanity, further emphasizing the importance of technology in human life. While Mumford moves beyond conventional, isolated studies of technology and the overemphasis on technological progress, he still views machines as "a product of human ingenuity and effort" (Mumford 1934, p. 6), and suggests that "the transvaluation of the machine is the next move, perhaps, toward its mastery" (Mumford 1934, p. 7). However, Bernard Stiegler re-examines the relationship between technology and time from a philosophical standpoint. He integrates technology into the core characteristics of humanity, asserting that technology is an intrinsic part of us, complementing and co-

constituting human evolution and development. In this view, the system of humans creating and using tools is itself a unified entity of time, implying a symbiotic relationship between humans, technology, and time—rather than technology being merely an external tool for human use. Joanna Page expands on this idea, arguing that Stiegler’s understanding of technological symbiosis “explores what it is that enables us to project ourselves into the future at all” (Page 2016, p. 104) and “moves beyond Marx’s materialistic, post-humanist understanding of technology” (Page 2016, p. 12), making technology a means for humans to understand themselves.

The integrated system of humanity, technology, and time reflects the enduring influence of Enlightenment scientific consciousness, contemporary myths of development, and technological utopian imagination in the evolution of Chinese science fiction. At the same time, contemporary Chinese science fiction is acutely aware of the dystopian consequences of technological progress. In *Death’s End*, Liu Cixin commemorates all of Earth’s civilizations in a monument on Pluto and digitizes them. As Song Mingwei describes, “Liu Cixin’s literary imagination transcends the concerns of contemporary literature with the times and the nation, as well as the utopia/dystopia dichotomy. He directly portrays the infinity of the universe” (Song 2020, p. 165). This can also be seen as Liu Cixin’s response to the technological age. In this vastness of the universe, the significance of humanity diminishes, and the uniqueness conferred by technological time dissolves, leaving only the eternal life of death.

Second, I will consider an exploration of the gap between technology, time, and humanity.

The future narrative in Chinese science fiction often expresses skepticism toward the symbiotic system of technology, time, and humanity. Within the linear, modern concept of time, there is a noticeable separation between external technological time and the internal, conscious time of the human subject. This gap is frequently illustrated in science fiction through the use of bodily technologies such as cryonics, enabling access to the future.

Husserl’s phenomenological perspective emphasizes that all human memory originates from sensory experience in the real world, with physical sensory perception confirming the existence of time. The central medium linking technology and time is the embodiment of humanity. Merleau-Ponty extends this by proposing that time is a relational existence: “time is neither a real process nor an actual succession that I could limit myself simply to recording. It is born out of my relation to things” (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 434). In the things themselves, future and past co-exist in a pre-existing and eternal way. “There can only be time if it is not fully deployed, if past, present, and future are not in the same sense. Time must not merely be, it must come about; time is never completely constituted” (Merleau-Ponty 2012, pp. 437–38). This leads us to realize that when we integrate time with our perception of reality, the separation between human perception and the technological world reveals a paradox within the modern concept of time. In *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy, Liu Cixin explores this separation by distinguishing humanity into two types—those who exist continuously in the flow of time, and those who remain intermittently in time’s flow, bypassing the ripples of time and technological bottleneck through cryonics. This segmentation of the future results in a dual perception of time: an objective world in which technology continues to advance, and a subjective world where the human perception of time becomes fragmented, as cognitive synchronization with technology is lost.

This narrative pattern was originally designed to address the contradiction between human bodily perception and technological time. In *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy, we see characters adopting cryonics to navigate through the conflict, choosing to sleep through crises. For instance, Luo Ji, a key strategist in Earth’s defense against the Trisolarans, hibernates for 185 years and wakes up to find that the humanity has become part of a larger cosmic entity, the Space Fleet, to confront ongoing crises. Similarly, Chen Xin, the protagonist, sword-bearer, and savior in *Death’s End*, repeatedly experiences Earth’s crises through cryonics. From the Crisis Era to the final Fortress Era, Cheng Xin remains only about thirty years old—time flows past her. In the end, she is able to travel to 17 billion years into the future, witnessing “one hundred and eighty-nine million years after the

formation of the low-speed black hole in the DX3906 galaxy, after 17 billion years since the birth of the universe, where a man and a woman embrace tightly". However, this timespan far exceeds human sensory and conscious perception.

The concept of "hibernation" and futuristic time travel both belong to the sensory and mental experiences generated when an individual enters a technological wonderland. These forms of hibernation do not conflict significantly with the existing world. The key lies in the strong self-awareness of these characters, which allows them to transcend the superficial effects of technology and focus on the core issues. This enables them to adhere to their principles and continue progressing within the flow of technological advancement. This aligns with Merleau-Ponty's assertion that time exists in the individual's perception, rendering concepts like past and future irrelevant. Humanity and time co-exist symbiotically. However, this breaks the symbiotic relationship between technology, time, and humanity. In fact, the "hibernation" of technology and time creates a rupture between the two. As a result, Cheng Xin cannot fully shoulder her heavy responsibilities or perceive the threat posed by the Trisolarians. Liu Cixin seems to use this struggle between humanity and technology as a strategy for dealing with time travel. In the vast "dark forest" of the cosmos, human nature appears powerless—yet we must accept this characteristic. Much like in *Death's End*, Cheng Xin and Guan Yifan exist in the small universe created by Yun Tianming. In the vastness of the Dark Universe, the cosmos itself becomes a tomb. However, Cheng Xin and Guan Yifan eventually choose to leave this small universe and transition into larger universes created by different civilizations. Life in the small universe becomes unsustainable, prompting a return to the larger universe, which represents a form of regression. This echoes Adam's choice in the Garden of Eden—the transition from the carefree Eden to the challenges of the real world. This also reflects Liu Cixin's affirmation of human free will, perhaps representing the pleasure and inspiration we derive from reading science fiction.

This approach seems to have become a collective utopian model in contemporary Chinese science fiction. In Wang Jinkang's *Seamen*, the protagonist hibernates for over 400 years, awakening in humanity's maritime. In Wang Nuonuo's *Improving Humanity*, hibernation technology is used to circumvent fatal diseases, with the protagonist's hibernation and resurrection serving as humanity's last hope for saving Earth. These stories reflect humanity's anticipation of future technology and its wariness of a homogenized future. They also express humanity's powerlessness in the face of technological time. On the one hand, humans cannot ignore technological time; on the other, they increasingly invest in the new outcomes technological time produces, ultimately becoming tools of their own destruction. The final consequence of hibernation and detachment from technological time is alienation and flight from the human world.

In the cognitive framework of utopian future technology in contemporary Chinese science fiction, both technology and time depend on humans as mediators. Without humanity, both technology and time lose their meaning. This is the fundamental standpoint and ultimate goal of discussions about technology and time. As Stiegler emphasizes, technology has become an inseparable part of humanity, complementing and completing human evolution and constituting the difference between humans and other living beings. Human perception, sensation, and emotion are transmitted through technology as part of human civilization, simultaneously opening up the source of human exploration while creating uncertainty and a sense of lost direction. The narrative style of hibernation externalizes this contradictory nature of technology—it is both detached from and inherent to humanity. Hibernation technology remains merely a tool for time travel, not the essence of humanity. This reflects the contradictory relationship between humanity and technological time in utopian futures. The future is both a physical journey enabled by hibernation technology and a struggle between the internal individual and the external world, like the collision and fusion of two different timelines and universes. This contradiction mirrors the technological concepts found in Chinese science fiction. Technology is both a part of time and humanity, as well as an externalized aspect of humanity, a tool (as emphasized by Marx) that leads to

human alienation. Thus, the future of technology is optimistic, as humanity will prevail and embody its subjective value. On the other hand, it is filled with pessimism, as the integral relationship between technology and humanity implies a crisis when technology reaches its limits.

This perspective also reflects the post-humanist stance in contemporary Chinese science fiction. Braidotti introduced the concept of post-human centrism, which suggests that even as humans undergo physical changes, they maintain a weak anthropocentrism that resists harsh dualism. In essence, contemporary Chinese science fiction, with its understanding of the interconnectedness of technology, time, and humanity, embraces a form of weak anthropocentrism. This post-humanist view holds that technology serves as humanity and is integral to human development. Within this interplay of connection and separation, this perspective is ultimately guided by human consciousness.

### 3. Two: Accelerated Society and Emotional Nostalgia

When examining the core literary structure of contemporary Chinese science fiction, we observe a firm emphasis on the relationship between technology, humanity, and time. However, this symbiosis also leads to hesitation and stagnation in human perception, introducing uncertainty into the technological human experience. Human beings can only grasp their physical bodies and sensory awareness, yet they remain the most transient element. Beyond sensory insight and functional response, emotion becomes a form of emotional politics with nostalgic tension in the future world.

#### 3.1. *Social Alienation of Technological Time: A Paradox of the Relationship between Technological Acceleration and Social Time*

We increasingly notice that events around us seem to be happening faster and faster, leading to a state of social acceleration. Rosa explains that the number of technical, social, and cultural innovations is increasing dramatically, which results in the “lifeworld” being dismantled at an ever-faster rate. “Fashions, lifestyles, product cycles, jobs, relationships, beliefs, and social practices become increasingly contingent and unstable in modernity” (Rosa and Scheuerman 2009, p. 5). Rosa argues that this acceleration is not only a formal parameter of cultural modernization, but also largely determines its content and direction. Therefore, modernization itself can be understood as a process of social acceleration (Rosa 2013, p. 281).

In the symbiotic system of technology, time, and humanity, technological and social acceleration disrupt the connection between external and internal time consciousness. The spirit of the inner self attempts to recover, while society undergoes alienation in the face of this accelerated change. Han Song, in his *Rails Trilogy* (*Subway, High-Speed Rail, and Orbits*), exposes this alienation of individuals in an accelerating society.

In the *Metro* trilogy, Han Song depicts the intersection of time, space, and individual alienation in a rapidly changing society. The protagonist, an office worker initially synchronized with the accelerating rail system, retires and withdraws from social time. This withdrawal allows him to reassess the changes in technological, social, and human time. As noted by Chen (2012, pp. 44–47), Han Song’s narrative approach is “looking back at the past from a futuristic perspective”, offering political satire and cryptic critiques of China’s modernization process, as well as the alienation caused by technology (Ren 2018, p. 142).

Modern railway transport in the story reflects the individual’s plight in accelerating time and space. Han Song vividly describes the subway: “It was like the painting of a large carnivorous creature coming from the center of the earth. . .the train, painted military green, emerged from the depths like the neck of a snake, followed by an disproportionately swollen body, swaying and coming to a halt”. This underground journey separates people from the real world, leading the protagonist to feel like an outsider observing the world through a thin veil. The dichotomy between the world above and the subway below symbolizes the unease and alienation caused by relentless modernization. In this state

of contemplation, the protagonist discovers that “these worlds are all conceived in an unspeakable mine”. Here, time has departed from conventional constraints.

In *Metro*, Xiao Wu, accompanied by Kaka, explores a missing train and the vanished people deep underground. In their search for a way out, they descend further and further, only to find themselves ascending to a peak in the underground world. This world resembles the Tower of Babel, where people climb higher only to reach the center of the Earth. Time and space in this world have become circular.

Thus, individuals and societies find themselves in a process of technological and social acceleration. Those who cannot keep pace are marginalized, relegated to resource-scarce wastelands that resemble dystopian futures. This creates a sense of tension and frustration, entrapping people in a nostalgic web from which they cannot escape. Nostalgic emotions and emotional politics emerge as a response.

### 3.2. Nostalgia as a Method for Humanity to Resist Accelerated Time

The acceleration of modern life, coupled with postmodernity, leads to a separation of body and mind. On the one hand, people question the future of technology; on the other, they turn their emotions towards the past, finding comfort in imagined communities and nostalgic worlds.

Nostalgia is a structure that contemporary Chinese science fiction often employs when imagining utopian futures. Although humanism has faced various criticisms, it remains the foundation for understanding the world. Stiegler believes that “knowledge cannot transcend time; it is not eternal or immortal because it is an experience of uncertainty, it is open, it is time. The time of knowledge is delayed time, so it is destined to be ‘real-time’” (Stiegler 2010, p. 76). In the face of disruptive technologies and future imaginaries, humanity ultimately returns to the body, perception, and traditions. This longing for past human life and the human world can be understood as “nostalgia”.

Boym describes nostalgia as “a feeling of loss and displacement, but also a romance with one’s own imagination. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship” (Boym 2010, p. 2). Nostalgia rebels against the modern concept of time, history, and progress. It aims to erase history, transforming it into a personal or collective myth and refusing to accept the irreversibility of time” (Boym 2010, p. 3). Nostalgia is a common feeling, but returning home divides us. Unchecked nostalgia can create confusion between a real and imagined home, potentially creating monsters. In science fiction, nostalgia bridges the past and the future, allowing for a re-examination of the past while using technological breakthroughs to imagine new futures. In *The Three-Body Problem*, *Red Ocean*, and *River of Time*, we see Chinese science fiction writers frequently invoking nostalgia when faced with the dilemmas of an accelerated society. This is particularly evident when they attempt to reset the past to find future paths.

In *The Three-Body Problem*, Liu Cixin re-examines Chinese history through *The Three-Body* game, using historical figures to explore insights into human civilization. This is, in itself, an act of nostalgia. Liu searches for technological traces in China’s long history, such as the *Yi Jing* of the Zhou dynasty and Mozi’s practical creations. Although these examples do not lead to technological breakthrough, they highlight the humanistic spirit that sustains future survival in a high-tech era. In this way, nostalgia becomes a method for facing the future.

Similarly, Liu Cixin’s *The Western Ocean* and Han Song’s *Red Ocean* reflect on China’s past, particularly Zheng He’s voyages, using them as a starting point for imagining the future. However, these narratives also reveal the constraints of modernity. Han Song’s *Red Ocean*, in particular, reflects on the cyclical return of China’s past and future. In the grand framework of the history of human civilization, humanity moves from the wild and carnage-filled red ocean to the establishment of a rational and orderly land civilization, and finally from the land back to the exploration of the ocean civilization. Wildness and barbarism always surround and become the background of humanity. Reflecting on human history is more like marking human exploration with cruelty and greed. Wang Jinkang’s

*River of Time* and Chen Qiufan's *Algorithm of Life* reset personal life experiences, allowing characters to explore their past, present, and future in search of a perfect life path. However, both stories reveal that past experiences rarely guide the future. Only sudden disruptions can lead to new futures.

The repeated reenactment of traditional Chinese history suggests that historical experience cannot easily break free from established patterns. Therefore, future narratives in Chinese utopian science fiction often question the reliability of history as a guide to the future. David Der-wei Wang, who introduces the lyrical tradition into Chinese modern literature, argues that modern Chinese writers, while deeply immersed in Western philosophical and aesthetic training, eventually turned back to seek inspiration from their own lyrical tradition. "I believe they found themselves at a modern temporal crossroads. Recognizing the limitations of both Western and Chinese resources for building China's present and future, they sought to return to the past, re-establishing threads of continuity as a way to engage in dialogue with modernity" (Wang 2010, p. 36). Wang's perspective also highlights how contemporary Chinese science fiction writers, while incorporating Western modern thought into their technological imagination, also actively draw on the lyrical resources of China's own tradition.

### 3.3. Trauma-Induced Nostalgia and Future Crises

Nostalgia also entails "return" and "pain". It involves the longing to return home and the pain of being unable to do so. This is exemplified in *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus's journey home symbolizes humanity's struggle between physical and psychological worlds. Barbara Cassin notes that nostalgia involves creating a home of the soul (Cassin 2016, p. 7). Nostalgia is therefore a mutual gaze between the past and the future, the dissolution and reconstruction of a spiritual homeland. Bauman re-examines Boym's modern nostalgia in the context of modern utopian politics, recognizing that the modern utopias that have emerged show certain "future-retro" tendencies, especially the revival of tribal models of community, the return to the original self, and the retreat from the "civilized order" that is important, non-negotiable, and necessary in current social science and popular opinion (Bauman 2018, p. 9). It is precisely this retrograde tendency that Bauman criticizes. He believes that the concept of an anti-utopia, the negation of the negation of the utopia, should be borrowed in order to recognize, absorb, and integrate the principles of contribution from real societies that negate utopias and strive to achieve coordination between security and freedom in order to gain ideological vitality. We also find the nostalgic emotional politics of science fiction utopias in this model.

The traumas of the past often obstruct future aspiration. In *The Three-Body Problem*, Ye Wenjie's despair for humanity leads her to hope for the end of human history by alien civilizations. Similarly, Evans's despair after witnessing a marine biological disaster leads him to long for the end of human-centered arrogance. These responses reflect the divide between those who hope for humanity's redemption and those who wish for its destruction. The alien civilizations have not yet arrived, but this future has already formed possible response patterns based on humanity's own past experiences. This is also recognized by Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future*, where he notes that the sense of the future possessed by science fiction as a new genre cannot carry a real imaginative representation of the future, but rather "alienates and reconstructs our own present experiences" (Jameson 2005, p. 286). In this way, the Three-Body Organization becomes a resistor and destroyer of human development, an obstacle for humanity in the face of the future world. Emotional politics stirs up human rebellion against the self and social forms. Humanity exposes itself in the cosmic dark forest and leads itself to destruction.

Faced with an accelerated society, whether in personal emotions or in social life, we always try to look back to the myths and history of the past to find a way out of existing dilemmas. Nostalgia places people and history on a flat plane of personal choice, where contingency becomes the core. However, once nostalgia is reintegrated into the social structure, we can clearly see that nostalgia, as a daydream, strives to break through the



existing stable social structure, highlighting dissatisfaction and resentment with reality in a mode of spiritual freedom, but ultimately, nostalgia roots people deeply in the soil of reality and returns them to reality.

#### 4. Three: Deterritorialization and New Cultural Forms

In addition to technological time and nostalgic emotions, contemporary Chinese science fiction's future narratives also highlight spatial imagination through deterritorialization and the construction of a new cultural consciousness.

Deterritorialization contrasts with specific, concrete spaces like place and location. A place is "a location with meaning," localized, and also has a sense of position (Agnew 1987). Places are rooted on the Earth's surface, serving as a way of understanding the world—not just a characteristic of things, but a means of thinking about the world (Cresswell 2004, p. 11). Deterritorialization, however, dissolves the specificity of place and the social and cultural cognition tied to it, creating discontinuities in the Anthropocene as a spatialized and inherited material phenomenon. In an increasingly interconnected world, deterritorialization has become a key concept to constructing frameworks for understanding the global flow of people, ideas, artifacts, and cultural practices. As Harrison and Sterling state, "the territorialization of the 'future' may never be reduced to a single space or practice, but rather oscillates between the multiplicity of times and potential worlds" (Harrison and Sterling 2020, p. 30). Virtual reality is becoming a spatial norm. Contemporary Chinese science fiction, therefore, presents two forms of deterritorialization: transcending the individual to enter a macro-planetary consciousness, or retreating from the macro-world to embrace a micro-existence. Yet, both perspectives emphasize human subjectivity.

On the one hand, contemporary Chinese science fiction breaks away from specific spatial locations, depicting humanity's exploration in the vast universe through space opera, completely detaching from spatial positioning. On the other hand, it introduces deterritorialization into the electronic world through the construction of virtual reality. "Space travel serves to alienate us from the familiar world, to examine Earth from an external (often ironic) perspective" (Seed 2011, p. 6). Science fiction thus alienates people from familiar places and locations, taking them beyond planetary boundaries or realistic perceptual limits. It simultaneously creates a rich virtual time-space and multidimensional experiences through new developments. Time and memory become modes of political management, and space exploration makes the Earth and its communities common symbols through deterritorialization.

The deterritorialization of contemporary Chinese utopian science fiction is reflected in both Liu Cixin's starry seas and space travel and the cyber world's virtual reality. In *The Dark Forest*, the space fleet led by Zhang Beihai escapes into the vast universe, freeing itself from the threats of the Dark Forest, but becoming space travelers who are both part of and distinct from Earth. In *City in the Well*, Liu Yang presents a complete deterritorialized dilemma within a microscopic electronic world. Zhang Liang, a delivery man, realizes through his adventures that the world he lives in is actually a virtual, electronic city. His home, once warm and simple, is revealed to be a game-like setup arranged and monitored by the system. He becomes a deity (human) within this microscopic world, creating the rules for the electronic city and leading its people to break through its virtual barriers and into a free world. Home, city, and homeland all become virtual and illusory, resembling a specimen of human civilization. Deterritorialization, therefore, is tied closely to cyber-technology and culture, constantly challenging human-centered concepts. Mike Crang, Phil Crang, and Jon May highlight this by noting that "the cyberpunk genre of science fiction describes a new geographical dimension generated by computer mediation, namely virtual geography" (Crang et al. 1999, p. 1). Virtual geography explores both virtual reality and real virtuality, operating parallel to "real-reality". The virtual is not merely a replica but a variational entity, shaped by socialization and politicization (Crang et al. 1999, p. 7). This also points to an understanding of cyberspace as a simultaneously virtual social space.

Tan Gang's *Reflections in the Yellow Sand* explores deterritorialization by integrating cosmic space, virtual, and fluid space. He constructs a mechanical Mogao Grotto, perfectly preserving all the caves and cultural artifacts of the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes. This mechanical structure, like a huge mechanical body carrying hundreds of caves, can move around the Earth and even travel to the moon aboard a spaceship. Tan Gang raises the question of whether culture and civilization, once territorialized, can achieve deterritorialization. Through human memory and perception, culture and civilization gain their true meaning. The Mogao Grottoes detach themselves from Dunhuang, yet by representing Dunhuang, the Silk Road, historical life, and Buddhist culture as a whole, they recreate the past, continually connecting history with present life and becoming a living culture. This materialized memory civilization even remedies the homesickness felt by earthlings on the moon.

These examples demonstrate how changes in the technological world have updated human survival goals and cultural forms. A new world that interacts between virtual and the real spaces, and resonates between large and small scales, has already arrived. Nostalgia, tradition, and culture are continuously being updated and reconstructed.

### 5. Conclusions: Toward a Cultural Community with a Shared Future for Humanity

Homi Bhabha believes that despite the rapid development of cyberculture, the concepts of community and communication constructed through the organic or biological metaphors of the internet, do not allow cyberspace to transcend the homogeneous imagined community of the nation-state (Bhabha 1999, p. viii). However, Bhabha also reminds us that while the cyber-community may not resemble a traditional "nationality," its deterritorialization leads us to believe it is far removed from the national politics, education systems, and scientific policies influenced by technological innovation. Nevertheless, Benedict Anderson's definition of the imagined community remains relevant. Bhabha's view underscores the political function of deterritorialization in the era of globalization. Although deterritorialization blurs the geographic origins and destinations of individuals and anchors human emotions in digitized and spatialized mobile cities and their civilizational memories, human subjectivity, with emotions and cognition, continues to construct a collective identity.

This collective identity is increasingly dissolving political boundaries, forming a planetary consciousness and fostering the understanding of a community with a shared future for humanity, centered around human beings. At the same time, while the technological integration continues to erode national boundaries, objects that carry cultural memories (including digital and virtual realities) are binding people more closely together. Thus, the process of dissolution and reconstruction spiral upwards in a contradictory superimposition, reinforcing planetary consciousness and enabling humanity to face the cosmic future with courage.

Future imagination does not follow a strictly linear path from past to present to future. Although the future narratives of Chinese science fiction continue to be rooted in the technological future—with both enthusiasm for technological innovation and caution toward its potential backlash—these narratives also acknowledge the cognitive gaps that may arise between human subjectivity and the technological world. They seek ways to bridge these gaps. Emotional politics, in this context, serves to further strengthen human emotional subjectivity, while re-examining the deterritorialized state of the future, especially within the realms of information and life technologies. The essence of humanity, along with the evolving meaning of space for humans, is being explored. The changing perception of space and a growing planetary consciousness are intensifying. However, regardless of how the world changes, humanity's rich emotions and subjective cognition remain the foundation of our pursuit of future development. A strong post-human centrism is evident here. If human free will is preserved, the technological future is promising. The concept of a "community with a shared future for humanity" becomes the symphony that unites the various voices of contemporary Chinese science fiction future narratives. This is

China's ultimate vision: to safeguard humanity's home by focusing on the well-being of all humanity, uniting everyone to face challenges together, sharing both honor and hardship, and building a future where we prosper together.

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