
RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Chinese-Style Science Fiction” and Its Pursuit of Chineseness in a Global Context

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“Chinese-style Science Fiction (SF)” is conceived as a category of Chinese science fiction with a distinct cultural identity derived from the incorporation of Chinese cultural elements. This article discusses Chinese-style SF and its impact on the global reception of Chinese SF by analysing two online SF magazines: the American magazine *Clarkesworld* and the Chinese digital platform *Bu cunzai* 不存在. Analysis of *Clarkesworld* interviews and essays suggests that Chinese-style SF identifies as an estranging Other to normative Western SF, which limits its value to cultural estrangement and exoticism. *Non-Exist*’s editorials consider the literary mission of Chinese-style SF as refining the quality of Chinese SF with the innate merits of traditional culture. This cultural essentialist understanding homogenizes the effect of traditional culture and individual authors’ diverse usage of Chinese cultural elements. Next, it considers the Chinese-style SF published in *Clarkesworld*, and *Non-Exist*’s workshop in Danzhai 丹寨 that invited international SF writers to create stories inspired by Danzhai’s ethnic culture. The stories in *Clarkesworld* demonstrate that Chinese-style SF’s attempts to integrate Chinese tradition with scientific imagination only further accentuates the underlying presupposition of the dichotomous relationship between the two. Stories produced at the *Non-Exist* workshop prove that “tradition” is a contemporary and artificial reinvention that conforms to Orientalist perceptions and represents generalized cultural mindsets. I conclude that Chinese SF cannot rely on Chinese-style SF’s constructed otherness to establish its unique identity, since “Chinese style” ultimately conforms to homogeneity.

“中國風格科幻”是一類包含中國文化元素的中國科幻。中國風格科幻將自身定位為西方主流科幻的“他者”，希望通過傳統文化元素來獲得不同於西方科幻的獨特文化屬性，但如此不僅使這一文類的價值和吸引力依賴於其東方的異域風情，也將中國傳統文化視為西方科學和現代性的他者。本文認為中國科幻無法通過異化自身來謀求獨特和獨立的國際地位，因其文化他者的定義仍依附於西方主流之上。

Keywords: Chinese-style science fiction, science fiction magazines, traditional culture, self-Orientalism, nativization, scientific modernity

關鍵詞： 中國風格科幻，科幻雜誌，傳統文化，自我東方主義，科學現代性

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The Concept of Chinese-Style Science Fiction

In 1991, the fifth issue of *Kehuan shijie* 科幻世界 (*Science Fiction World*) published an essay by Taiwanese scholar Lü Yingzhong 呂應鐘 titled *Chuangzao Zhongguo fengge kehuan xiaoshuo* 創造中國風格科幻小說 (Creating a Chinese-Style Science Fiction), which calls for Chinese writers to contribute to the promotion of Chinese Science Fiction (hereafter SF) on the global stage by crafting SF with a “Chinese style” (*Zhongguo fengge* 中國風格), one which would avoid derivative mimicry of Western SF. This “Chinese style” would be achieved by blending elements of Chinese culture and tradition with SF narratives, but should simultaneously “take into consideration what Western readers are accustomed to” 考慮西方讀者的習性, in order to be influential within the international SF community, to quote Lü (1991, 31). The “Chinese-style science fiction” he proposed was dubbed “SF with national characteristics” (*minzuhua kehuan* 民族化科幻) by scholars such as Zhan Ling 詹玲 and Wang Yao 王瑤.¹ According to Zhan Ling, the “national characteristics” – namely characteristics extracted from Chinese culture – adopted by this type of SF largely intend to serve two purposes. First, by recasting classical Chinese literature in scientific terms and reconstruing historical and mythical events as scientific endeavours, these stories concoct a genesis of Chinese scientific imagination that is not subordinate to the Western scientific tradition, and rather native to Chinese culture (Zhan 2017, 72). Secondly, the appeal of distinctive Chinese cultural features would not only set “SF with national characteristics” favourably apart from Western SF, but even give it a chance to stand on equal footing with Western SF (Ibid., 74). Lü Yingzhong’s appeal to the Chinese SF community and Zhan Ling’s analysis demonstrate that the cultural mission of “Chinese-style SF” and the literary effect of “national characteristics” have been conceptualized in acute awareness of, and in response to, its Western counterpart. Whether it is to win over Western readers through the novelty of Chinese culture, or contrive a Chinese scientific tradition to rival the Western one, or to lift Chinese SF from what Chinese scholars perceive as a subordinate position to Western SF, the category of Chinese-style SF is ultimately defined as much by its relation to the West as by its incorporation of traditional Chinese culture.

Given the objective attributed to “Chinese-style SF” to establish a distinctively Chinese literary style and tradition in differentiation from Western SF, questions about the defining characteristics and the “Chineseness” of Chinese SF are becoming especially pertinent in the context of Chinese SF’s increased global exposure. Riding the waves of Liu Cixin’s 劉慈欣 international success, translation projects for Chinese SF have proliferated, with notable examples including *Invisible Planets* (2016) and *Broken Stars* (2019) edited by Ken Liu, *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories* (2022) edited by Yu Chen 於晨 and Regina Kanyu

¹ Wang’s *nom de plume* is Xia Jia 夏茄, and she frequently publishes in *Clarkesworld*.

Wang 王侃瑜, *Sinopticon: A Celebration of Chinese Science Fiction* (2021) edited by Xue-ting Christine Ni, and *Clarkesworld's* collaboration with the Chinese publishing company Storycom (*Weixiang wenhua* 微像文化) to translate and publish Chinese stories on a regular basis. As Chinese SF seeks to define its own identity on the world stage and determine its main contributions to SF worldwide, “Chinese-style SF” has been proffered as a seemingly obvious candidate to argue for a unique character of Chinese SF that represents a valuable addition to the prevailing Western SF tradition. For exponents of Chinese-style SF, the perception of SF as an overwhelmingly and fundamentally Western literary genre necessitates the inclusion of cultural components that are exclusively and unmistakably Chinese in SF stories, so as to equip them to take on literary qualities that are far removed from those of Western SF. To quote Zhan Ling:

For Chinese writers, of all the literary genres science fiction could be said to be the genres most marked by its otherness. This is not only because it is a literary genre imported from the West with a completely different flavour to traditional Chinese novels, but also because the subject matter it describes – from science and technology to the scientific spirit – are all from the West.

在所有的文學類型中，科幻小說對中國作家來說，可以算是最具有他者性的類型之一。不僅因為它是一種舶自西方的文學類型，有著與中國傳統小說截然不同的趣味，還因為它所描繪的內容，從科學技術到科學精神，也都是西方的。(Zhan 2017, 71)

Consequently, traditional Chinese culture – which precedes Western modernity and is unacquainted with Western science – is not only intended to bestow upon Chinese SF a literary complexion that is categorically distinct from that of Western SF, but to nativize and sinicize a literary genre regarded as thoroughly Western.

Chinese-style SF’s effort to establish a Chinese difference from Western SF could also be seen as an enactment of the current Chinese state policy of foregrounding traditional culture and cultural heritage to expand the nation’s soft power, often through highlighting the cultural roots of Chinese cultural exports, as well as to formulate a Chinese vision of modernity buttressed by traditional values as an alternative to the Western one. As an article from the state news outlet *China Daily* claims, “traditional culture is a prerequisite for promoting Chinese-style modernization” with “distinctive Chinese characteristics [...] related to China’s long history and culture” (Lau 2023). This neo-traditional narrative of cultural nationalism, in Arif Dirlik’s words, can be viewed as “an articulation of native culture (and an indigenous subjectivity) against Euro-American cultural hegemony” (Dirlik 1996, 113). Chinese-style SF not only takes it upon itself to challenge the hegemonic tradition of Western SF, but shares with the wider discourse of neo-traditionalism an essentialist view of Chinese culture. In a report on the Chinese State Council website about Xi Jinping’s visit to the Longmen 龍門 Grottoes, the cultural heritage site is described as “treasures that embody the essence of Chinese culture”

that should be valued as “essential to the nation’s identity” (“Xi Story” 2025). As traditional culture is declared to be the essence of Chinese national identity, its inclusion in Chinese-style SF seeks to confer an essential Chineseness upon the genre.

To investigate the production and international dissemination of Chinese-style SF, I will examine two online SF magazines: the American magazine *Clarkesworld*, which has been publishing Chinese stories regularly since 2015 in partnership with Storycom; and the Chinese digital platform *Non-Exist* (*Bu cunzai* 不存在), which publishes both Chinese and international SF and is run by the technological and cultural brand Future Affairs Administration (Weilai shiwu guanliju 未來事務管理局, founded in 2013). I will first compare interviews and essays related to Chinese-style SF in *Clarkesworld* with editorials and interviews in *Non-Exist*. Then I will analyse short stories from the two magazines that belong to the category of “Chinese-style SF”, and see whether they conform to the expectations and evaluations of Chinese-style SF from the non-fictional texts considered previously. I argue that “Chinese-style SF” is a reductive category that tethers Chinese SF’s value to cultural estrangement and exoticism, and relies on essentialized views of Chinese culture and the dichotomy of Chinese SF and Western SF, and that of traditional culture and scientific modernity, to define its identity. Chinese-style SF aims to establish difference from the predominant Western SF tradition, but succumbs to homogeneity by disregarding diversity and particularity – it does not consider individual differences among writers who utilize Chinese cultural elements, and falls short of representing the reality and nuance of the culture it endorses due to self-Orientalism.

Chinese-Style SF as an Exoticized and Reductive Other

Interviews and essays in *Clarkesworld* and editorials in *Non-Exist* concerning Chinese SF are preoccupied with exploring the relationship between Chinese cultural and social elements and SF as a traditionally and predominantly Western genre. However, these elements in Chinese SF are attributed different functions in *Clarkesworld* and *Non-Exist* on account of the different readerships to which they cater. With English-speaking readers in mind, contributors to *Clarkesworld* ponder the salient characteristics of Chinese SF to make it more graspable for a Western audience, and highlight the Chinese cultural perspective that brings a fresh and estranging reading experience. While *Non-Exist* faces a Chinese readership, its editors are concerned with the nativization (*bentu hua* 本土化) of SF in China, which refers to the transplantation of SF narratives and styles of Western origin into a Chinese cultural milieu. The nativized settings supposedly render the stories more palatable for Chinese readers, while facilitating the authors’ depiction of rich and concrete details rooted in a familiar cultural environment.

Similar to the perception of Chinese culture in the context of *Clarkesworld*, the nativized ingredients in *Non-Exist's* Chinese stories are viewed through a self-Orientalist lens in the sense that they are attributed an exotic otherness when evaluated against the norm of Western SF. This exoticized otherness is in turn often identified by proponents of Chinese-style SF as the novum of the stories, which is supposed to leave an alienating impression on Western readers by putting a novel spin on tropes and ideas derivative of Western SF. However, it is questionable whether such an Orientalist and essentialist conception of the effect of traditional culture could adequately fulfil the function of the Suvinian novum. Suvin gives novum the dual meaning of "novelty" and "innovation" (Suvin 1979, 63), the latter stipulating that the novum cannot simply reflect the normative environment, but should innovatively cause dynamic transformations to the norm of reality. While an Orientalist expression of Chinese culture might be novel for Western readers, it is hardly innovative, since it reproduces the existing and age-old West-centric approach to the East. Suvin sees the novum's role as hegemonic in the sense that "it determines the whole narrative logic" of the story (Ibid., 70), yet as I will discuss later, it is scientific cognition rather than Orientalist exotica that sustains the narrative logic of Chinese-style SF, even when the latter is supposedly the genre's distinguishing feature.

Some questions that are raised in *Clarkesworld* interviews regarding Chinese SF touch upon: the distinguishing traits of Chinese SF; the social and political significance of a particular piece of work; the authors' personal literary relationship with Chinese culture, both traditional and modern. This concern with the distinct characteristics of Chinese SF and how they have been moulded by Chinese culture and social reality is concomitant with a concerted effort on Chinese authors and scholars' part to promote the unique cultural identity of Chinese SF to international readers. However, this has led to Chinese SF being framed as an exotic Other, and its value being bound to the cultural estrangement it brings for foreign readers and the extent to which it differs from the normative Western SF. Lorenzo Andolfatto criticizes the "complicit feedback between Orientalist and Self-Orientalist discourses" that "inscribe 'Chineseness' as the defining trait of contemporary Chinese language sf, prescribing it in what is to be written, read, and circulated as Chinese sf" (Andolfatto 2022, 83). I would like to add that this complicit feedback loop not only prescribes "Chineseness" as the reigning trait of Chinese SF, but produces an implicit consensus that the exoticism and alterity of Chinese SF are the main draw for Western readers, which in turn affects how Chinese SF is discussed and which works are granted visibility. Furthermore, the "Chineseness" that purportedly grants Chinese SF its distinctive character is shown to be ill-defined and indeterminate in *Clarkesworld's* essays and interviews.

In Ken Liu's *Clarkesworld* essay "Gathered in Translation," Liu argues that literal translations of Chinese idioms "can defamiliarize and reinvigorate both the source image and the target language to give the reader a sense of fruitful strangeness that adds to the experience of reading" (Liu 2013). The estranging effect produced by literal translations enriches the global scientific and science-fictional language of English. However, when the defamiliarizing

effect of Chinese cultural markers is treated as the primary criteria for selecting Chinese stories for a Western readership, there arises the risk of Chinese SF being appreciated more for its “Chineseness” than for the science-fictional storytelling per se. In the *Clarkesworld* interview with Chinese SF writer Kanyu Wang and editor Yu Chen, both interviewees consider what Zhan Ling dubs “national characteristics” to be a major selling point of Chinese SF translated for a Western audience. This is suggested by the selection of stories that prominently feature Chinese culture in their co-edited *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories*, an anthology of Chinese SF. When asked about their selection criteria, Yu Chen replied that besides finding good stories, “the other most important criterion was the Asian background. We gave up some wonderful stories that were clearly influenced by Hollywood films, and instead we chose more stories that retell myths and legends in order to show our long history and diverse cultures” (Sorg 2022). Yu Chen’s answer indicates that what is presented as “Chinese SF” is a curated canon that prioritizes the Chinese roots.

The editors’ prioritization of the presence of culture markers such as ancient history and myths conforms to fixed and entrenched Western expectations for Chinese literature. To quote Xueting Christine Ni in her *Clarkesworld* interview: “there were certain limited perspectives through which the media and Anglophone publishers were willing to see China. If the book wasn’t about the hardships of recent Chinese history or the majesty of ancient wonders, they just weren’t that interested” (Sorg 2021). Bonnie S. McDougall similarly notes that while premodern classics and books that are critical of China do well in the Western market, contemporary Chinese fiction does not sell (McDougall 2014, 56–57). Western readers’ indifference to stories about contemporary Chinese society results from a predilection for an imagination of “pure Chineseness” that rejects the “complex and unfocused” “amalgam of cultures” of contemporary China, and from a willingness to revert again and again to “tried and true stereotypes” of Chinese literature (Eoyang 2013). Chinese-style SF is playing right into this perennial inclination on Western readers’ part towards consuming what is conventionally considered to be essentially Chinese.

Wang Xueming 王雪明 divides the Chinese stories in *Clarkesworld* into two categories: “universal culture” (*pushi wenhua* 普世文化) SF and SF with “Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese* 中國特色). According to Wang, “universal culture” SF transcends ethnic and national boundaries and possesses universal applicability and relatability; it would be difficult to identify the Chinese origin of these stories without prior knowledge. In contrast, SF with “Chinese characteristics” either conveys a considerable amount of Chinese cultural information or reflects Chinese social reality and the national condition, “giving the stories a strong flavour of the exotic East” 使作品帶有濃郁的東方異域色彩 (Wang 2020, 94). Wang believes that Chinese SF’s distinction from Western SF rests on the stories’ settings being culturally and socially conspicuously Chinese. Were it not so, Chinese SF would be indistinguishable from Western SF, since, according to Wang, Chinese SF utilizes the same subject matter as Western SF due to the latter’s long-term influence (Ibid., 94). This self-Orientalising view that the originality of Chinese SF lies wholly in its “Chinese characteristics”

does a disservice to the creative potential of Chinese SF, while limiting the ambit of what Chinese SF could stand for. Although there are explorations of Chinese SF’s defining traits and distinct identity from the writers, editors, and translators of *Clarkesworld*, such explorations are marked by scepticism and indeterminacy. In a *Clarkesworld* interview, Xia Jia proposes “the Chinese view” as the novum that Chinese SF offers to world SF, which is “a new way of looking at things” alternative to the Eurocentric worldview that “brings about [...] estrangement for Western readers” (Leeuwenhart 2020). However, Xia Jia fails to elaborate on the precise nature of the “Chinese view.”

In another interview, Xia Jia points out that “traditional culture” is a contrived notion of shifting significance, and denies the interviewer’s suggestion that the Chinese traditional material in her works are an unvarying cultural source that “retain their essence in the face of technological and social change.” When asked about her relationship with traditional culture, Xia replies:

Honestly, to answer this question you must reconsider “what is traditional Chinese culture” first. Since China has been experiencing great transformations in the process of modernization – “all that is solid melts into air” – one can hardly say such cultural attachment is a natural feeling or a historical construction. [...] Traditions are always changing over time. It is we, the present generation living on the frontier between tradition and modernity, present and future, who struggle for our self-affirmation, not some “tradition” that retains its own self-evident essence (Liu 2015a).

Xia sees traditional culture as a shifting and fluid concept, its definition contingent on the social transformations and spiritual needs of the era. The “Chineseness” of Chinese SF is likewise a construct in service of a distinct identity for Chinese SF in global cultural communication.

In his interview with *Clarkesworld*, Han Song 韓松 similarly highlights the “uniquely East Asian perspective” of his novel *Yiyuan* 醫院 (Hospital) against the Western outlook of “traditional science fiction.” However, Han fails to elucidate the uniqueness of the “East Asian perspective,” and contradicts himself by adding that the problems raised by his novel “are the same issues faced by English-speaking readers” (Sorg 2023). Despite the centrality of concepts such as “Chinese view” and “Chinese perspective” in fabricating a cultural identity for Chinese SF, these very concepts prove to be illusive in definition and unamenable to reductive generalizations.

While Chinese authors speaking to *Clarkesworld*’s international readership are concerned with finding Chinese SF’s place in the world, the editors of *Non-Exist* aim to bring SF, a genre of Western origin, closer to Chinese readers. On the one hand, Chinese elements in “Chinese-style SF” help nativize SF; on the other hand, the uniform rhetoric in *Non-Exist* editorials claiming that the cultural excellence of Chinese elements improves Chinese SF overlooks individual authors’ diverse intentions and inclinations in utilising Chinese culture

in their works. Since May 2022, *Non-Exist* began publishing a series of editorials titled “Bianjiliao xiezuo” 編輯聊寫作 (The Editors Chat about Writing) that feature commentaries on fiction and dialogues between the editors and writers. A phrase that is frequently promoted in these editorials is *bentu hua*, which means “nativization.” The editorials repeatedly emphasize the role of nativized settings in creating cultural connection and emotional resonance with readers and bridging the gap between fiction and the readers’ real-life experiences.

One example of *bentu hua* given by the editors is the short story “Bianjie de jintou” 邊界的盡頭 (Border’s End, 16 May 2022 issue of *Non-Exist*; Fanqie Dun Fanqie 2022), which draws upon Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach Trilogy* and “preserves the stylistic characteristics of New Weird fiction² – chaos, mystification, and nameless terror” 保持新怪譚小說混沌、迷離與未知恐怖的風格特色, to quote the editor Zhong Yun 鐘雲 (Zhong et al. 2022). The editor also praises the story’s nativization, as it incorporates native elements and everyday scenes familiar to Chinese readers into its New Weird style. “Bianjie de jintou” is believed to have successfully combined a subgenre of Anglophone SF with a nativized environment that helps acclimatize Chinese readers to the speculative elements of the story.

In the fourth editorial, editor Yu Lei used the example of Li Peng’s 李鵬 story “Dutu beilun” 賭徒悖論 (The Gambler’s Paradox, 16 June 2022 issue of *Non-Exist*; Li 2022) to illustrate how nativized settings are conducive to compelling storytelling and detailed worldbuilding by virtue of the authors’ familiarity with such settings. The story was originally set in Las Vegas with Western characters, but the author changed the setting and characters to Chinese ones upon the editor’s request. The editor found that the Chinese setting of the revised version enabled Li to craft the story with more detailed depictions and fluent narration, as well as greater relevance to social reality (Yu 2022).

Aside from their nativizing function, *Non-Exist* editors also conceive of Chinese elements as an elevating force that, by its inherent merit and sophistication, could improve the quality of Chinese SF and establish its unique stature among the international SF community. The editors’ opinion is by no means singular. In his article on Chinese SF’s contribution to China’s soft power, journalist Li Yongjie 李永杰 writes:

To improve the quality of Chinese sci-fi works, some scholars suggested that an in-depth study on ancient fiction tales should be carried out to add some national spice to the genre, which will not only attract readers at home and abroad but also help spread fine Chinese culture (Li 2015).

² New Weird fiction is a subgenre of speculative fiction that emerged in the 1990s. It combines science fiction and fantasy yet subverts clichés of traditional fantasy, and uses supernatural and transgressive horror for style and effect.

Similar views are expressed in the fifteenth editorial that cites “Chang’an xiake xing” 長安俠客行 (Martial Hero’s Journey in Chang’an, published in three parts in *Non-Exist* on 31 August–2 September 2022; Li 2022a, b, c), a story blending Chinese historical fantasy with cyberpunk dystopia,³ as an exemplar of “adding national spice to SF.” The editorial praises the story for substituting abstruse technical terms of computer programming with concepts from Chinese history and myth, which nativizes the story and links it to major contemporary social issues, in addition to helping it avoid Western cyberpunk clichés (Zhong 2022). For Chinese editors who perceive Western genre tropes as the normative and the conventional, Chinese culture is thus treated as a refreshing Other that could rejuvenate trite Western SF narratives.

The *Non-Exist* editors’ advocacy of the formula of “SF plus Chinese culture” homogenizes and generalizes the role of Chinese culture in SF, as they unanimously believe that traditional cultural elements in Chinese SF serve to improve the quality of stories with their innate cultural sophistication and endow the stories with a distinctive cultural identity. In this way, the conception of “Chinese-style SF” fails to take into account different authors’ diverse views and usage of Chinese culture in SF.

In the thirty-fifth editorial, editor Sun Wei 孫薇 uses the Silkpunk aesthetic invented by Ken Liu⁴ as an example of combining Chinese cultural background with SF (Zhong et al. 2023). However, Ken Liu himself is against such reductive and inaccurate characterizations of Silkpunk as SF plus Chinese culture. He begins his essay “What Is ‘Silkpunk’?” with the dictum: “No, it’s not ‘Asian-flavored steampunk.’ No, it’s not ‘Asian-influenced fantasy.’ No, it’s not ... It’s a very specific technology and literary aesthetic.” Liu explains that Silkpunk is a language of technology, the vocabulary of which “relies on materials of historical importance to the people of East Asia and the Pacific islands.” As an eclectic literary approach, Silkpunk “mixes and matches elements from diverse global literary traditions that I feel at home in.” Ken Liu rejects oversimplified misconceptions of Silkpunk that lose sight of its specific, personal, and innovative nature. Chinese cultural elements are used not to accentuate the “Chineseness” of the stories, but to be combined with other elements in creative ways to devise “artifacts that are new expressions in the technical language” (Liu, n.d.).

The sixtieth editorial features an interview between editor Zhong Yun and SF writer Lin Shuo 林燦. The editor prefaces their discussion with the argument that the optimal method for creating “a SF that uniquely possesses native Chinese characteristics” 獨具中國本土特

³ Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction that typically depicts rebellions by individuals against dystopic societies set in high-tech futures.

⁴ “Silkpunk” is a term coined by Chinese American science fiction author Ken Liu to describe the technology and literary aesthetic of his *Dandelion Dynasty* series. Silkpunk entails using materials of historical importance to Chinese and other East Asian cultures to construct a language of technology; it is an alternative vision of technological development based on the historical material culture and philosophies of East Asian societies.

色的科幻作品 is to draw from classical Chinese literature and Chinese myths and history. However, Lin Shuo has different ideas of the effect of traditional culture in SF. Unlike the editor, who considers it refreshing and inventive to mix SF with traditional culture, Lin Shuo thinks that retellings of historical events and folklores have been popularized by social media, and are therefore easily perceived as overdone and trite. The editor promotes Chinese-style SF based on the assumption that traditional Chinese culture has an inherent prestige which it can lend to SF stories, in contrast with Lin Shuo who believes that traditional culture's narrative value is neither innately good nor bad, but depends on specific authorial choices (Zhong 2023).

Lin Shuo also notes the opinion expressed by some Chinese fans of hard SF that stories written in the framework of myths and traditional culture should be instead considered as pseudo-SF, or even as fantasy masquerading as SF. Mingwei Song defines hard SF as:

[...] a sub-branch of SF normally based on solid scientific foundations and coherent scientific discourse. The term “hard SF” has become popular among Chinese SF communities since the turn of the new century, and such works have an elite status, superior to popular sci-fi writings and films and the so-called “soft SF” that is regarded as veiled social criticism (Song 2023, 126–127).

The popularity and eminence of hard SF go hand in hand with a scientistic attitude that sees the essence of SF as hard science – which can only be diluted by humanistic elements – and asserts the sciences' superiority over the humanities. This idolization of hard SF, as Mingwei Song warns, has the potential to create a cult of technocracy (Ibid., 129). This scientistic favouritism toward hard science spawned the dichotomy of hard SF and soft SF, and by extension, between hard SF and Chinese-style SF. The two opposing literary tendencies reflect the paradoxical role of “Chinese characteristics” in SF, to quote Wang Yao:

[...] paradoxically, Chinese SF writers often construct a binary opposition between “gods-and-monsters fiction” and “hard science fiction” and extol the latter as the “core” or as an advanced stage on the evolutionary ladder, meanwhile showing uneasiness and unwillingness to “always feel inferior and play second fiddle to Western SF writers.” As a result, “national characteristics” has become a kind of paradoxical complex – on the one hand, it seems to be a shortcut for Chinese SF writers to catch up with the West; on the other hand, this route seems to go against that mysterious “scientific spirit.”

[...]矛盾的是，中國科幻作家們往往一邊在「神怪小說」與「硬科幻小說」之間建構出二元對立，並將後者奉為「核心」，或者進化圖譜上的高級階段，於此同時，卻又流露出對於「自卑地永遠跟在西方科幻作家後面」的不安和不甘。於是乎，「民族特色」變成了某種悖論式的情節——一方面，它似乎是

中國科幻作家趕超西方的一條捷徑，另一方面，這一路線又似乎與那神秘的「科學精神」背道而馳。(Wang 2016, 121)

This dichotomous view of science and traditional culture engenders the ambivalent and paradoxical reception of "national characteristics" in Chinese SF: its non-scientific nature is seen to compromise SF, yet its extraneous novelty is believed to burnish it. Seen in this light, the legitimacy of Chinese-style SF derives not so much from an intrinsic essence of Chinese culture as from a need to rival Western SF via an assertion of Chinese difference.

Chinese hard SF fans' exaltation of scientism has its precedent in the "institutional and formal constraints" (Jiang 2021, 52) placed on Chinese SF in the 1970s and 1980s that reduced SF's purpose to science popularization, and stipulated "scientific facts or extrapolations from them" as the strict basis for any fantasy elements in Chinese SF (Wagner 1985, 21). The "Campaign to Eliminate Spiritual Pollution" in the 1980s doubled down on this stance, condemning major Chinese SF authors of the day, such as Ye Yonglie 葉永烈 and Zheng Wenguang 鄭文光, for creating "pseudo-SF" that prioritized literary imagination over scientific veracity. Chinese SF's historical role, bound to scientific extrapolations and predictions, stands in stark contrast to Chinese-style SF's more recent flaunting of fantastical imaginings of myths and legends, and proves that the defining character and representative trait of Chinese SF is constantly undergoing historical transformation and renegotiation, as well as that traditional culture has not always been seen as an integral component that confers an essential Chineseness on the genre.

Traditional Culture and Scientific Modernity in Chinese-Style SF

Non-Exist's effort to build a bridge between Chinese culture and the international SF community is exemplified by their 2018 writers' workshop that invited fifteen SF authors from China, the US, Canada, and Australia to Danzhai Wanda Village (Danzhai Wanda xiaozhen) 丹寨萬達小鎮, a tourism village built by the Wanda Group as part of its poverty alleviation programme in Danzhai County, the Miao and Dong Ethnic Autonomous Area in Guizhou Province. The main attraction of the tourism village was its ethnic Miao culture, as a report published in *Non-Exist* states: "we hope SF writers will have more inspiration when surrounded by primitive customs, traditions and ancient legends, and create stories based on traditional Chinese culture" 希望科幻作家在原始風土人情、民俗、古老傳說的包圍下，能有更多的靈感，創作出基於中國傳統文化的故事 (Su 2018). While Miao culture is uncritically viewed as part of "traditional Chinese culture," it is assigned a position far removed from mainstream Han culture and Chinese modernity as an uncivilized and exotic

Other, which is attested here by the description of Miao traditions as “primitive.” This indicates the prevailing perception in Chinese society of Miao culture as un-modern and marginalized, which enables Miao products to be presented as exotic cultural commodities to both Chinese and foreign tourists. Grace Yan and Carla Almeida Santos note that “the ‘primitive’ character of ethnic minorities has been interpreted as a critical and ‘authentic’ component of traditional Chinese culture,” and that “compared to the representation of Han people, whose images are associated with both tradition and modernity, Chinese ethnic minorities are significantly confined to the expression of the past” (Yan 2009, 308–309). Xiaoping Wu observes that Miao culture is subjected to exoticization and museumification, which can be seen in Guizhou’s ethnic tourism campaigns that advertize the province as “‘the last virgin land,’ ‘mysterious land’ with ‘diversity and color’” (Wu 2000, 8). It is this image of an ancient and exotic ethnic culture untouched by modernity that the *Non-Exist* workshop promoted to SF authors, intending for it to serve as a novum and a fresh source of creative inspiration.

With its directive to writers to create SF inspired by Miao culture, the *Non-Exist* workshop endorsed Chinese-style SF’s pursuit of a distinct cultural identity independent from the Western tradition. In Yan and Santos’ words, the workshop practices self-Orientalism to reinvent an “ancient, historical, and unchanging” image of Miao culture, which is a strategy “useful in creating a *unique* and *different* identity” in a global culture “firmly entrenched in an overarching framework of Euro-American conceptions of the world” (Yan 2009, 298–299). The workshop also sees itself as part of a larger effort to explore the motif of Chinese-style SF:

What exactly does Chinese-style SF want to express? These SF short stories from Danzhai might be able to provide a sort of answer to this question – even though it’s difficult to put into words and at times just some kind of jumbled feeling, it always makes you feel that “this story could only happen in China.”

中式科幻，到底想表達的是什麼？這些來自丹寨的科幻短篇，或許能為這個問題提供一種答案——它雖然難以言喻，有時甚至只是一種混沌的感受，但總歸會讓你覺得「這個故事只能發生在中國」。 (Li 2021)

The admission that the ethos of Chinese-style SF is “difficult to put into words” and even “just some kind of jumbled feeling” is concerning, and robs “Chinese-style” of any concrete meaning. The report’s claim that Chinese-style SF invites the feeling that “this story could only happen in China” implies an essentialist understanding of the category: whether coming from Chinese or Anglophone writers, Chinese-style SF is defined by a singular essence of Chineseness that sets it apart from SF inspired by other cultures. However, this claim does not stand up to scrutiny, as the Miao culture in stories produced at the workshop sometimes does not represent cultural mentalities that are specifically and exclusively Chinese, but broadly and abstractly human.

Contrary to the proclaimed nature and purpose of the workshop, I will argue that the stories produced in Danzhai do not always treat “traditional Chinese culture” as a static wellspring of cultural essence from which to draw as the workshop intended, but is more revealing of the ongoing processes of the artificial construction of a self-exoticizing cultural brand, and of the reinvention of ethnic culture which allows its integration into an urbanized and globalized China. Neither do these stories present Danzhai as an Other endowed with unique significance derived from the cultural peculiarities specific to its ethnic traditions, and which serves as the novum of the story; instead, Miao culture is either universalized into a part of humanity’s common cultural heritage facing the true Other of extraterrestrial civilizations, or generalized into antiquated cultural mentalities that contrast with contemporary issues and technological futures.

“Monster” by Naomi Kritzer (published in *Non-Exist* on 19 October 2020, also published in *Clarkesworld* in January 2020) points out the staged and artificial nature of the cultural spectacle in Danzhai. The story follows an American biologist travelling to Miao County at the behest of FBI to track down her friend who conducts illegal genetic editing experiments on humans. Danzhai serves as an exotic backdrop described with a disenchanted air:

Danzhai Wanda Tourist Village is possibly the strangest place I’ve ever been. Everything around me looks quaint and old, but in fact it was built from scratch just a few years ago to showcase local ethnic cultures and attract tourists to the area. Local people are employed to wear traditional costumes, walk the street playing traditional instruments, make and sell traditional crafts. [...] Many of the women in traditional clothing are wearing silver hats with delicately formed butterflies on the top and a jingly fringe right above their eyes. [...] I wonder if the metal jewelry is heavy, if the clothing is uncomfortable, how much is prescribed, and how much is left up to them.

Danzhai is portrayed as artificial and contemporary, disconnected from the original lifestyle of the local people, and dictated by a prescribed conception of how Miao culture should be displayed to foreign eyes. The experience of counterfeit artificiality necessitates the story’s focus on the production of a “quaint and old” cultural pageantry rather than Miao culture per se.

The fictional representation of Danzhai in “Monster” embodies what Wang Yao calls “a regional cultural spectacle in the age of globalization, and a product of homogeneity given the semblance of difference and diversity through cultural commercialization” 一種全球化時代的地方性文化奇觀，一種以差異和多元之名而被賦予文化商品屬性的同質 (Wang 2016, 122). Danzhai is homogenous in the sense that, since it is designed with Han Chinese and foreign tourists in mind and built to attract external investment, the purpose of its existence is to connect with the great homogeneity that is the world of modernity, urbanization, and globalization. To reach a global audience, Danzhai caters to the Western gaze

through self-objectification and self-exoticization, and in doing so willingly submits to Western cultural hegemony; to quote Henderson et al., such tourist attractions are “stage managed and dictated by preconceptions of what audiences wanted to see, linked to commercial objectives” (2009, 536). As a product of homogeneity and cultural hegemony, Danzhai cannot serve as the novum, and inspires not wonder, but disenchantment.

“Mayor for Today” by Fran Wilde (20 October 2020 issue of *Non-Exist*; Wilde 2020) is a science-fictional take on Danzhai’s real-life policy of recruiting mayors from around the world, rotating on a weekly basis, to generate publicity for the tourism village. The protagonist is assigned the job of mayor-for-a-day at Danzhai on an employment app, but arrives to find that an extraterrestrial creature refuses to resign from the mayoral position. Wilde’s story gives the mayor job a fantastical twist and a satirical edge by making the mayor who refuses to resign a self-aggrandising alien with the appearance of “a large blue shrimp with a bird’s beak;” the alien promises to generate “more prosperity and gigs for everyone” and “bring interstellar interest to your tiny planet,” yet is clueless about its job and is only concerned about making a name for itself in interstellar diplomacy. The story satirizes the ceremonial fanfare of the mayor job that eclipses any real experience of ethnic culture, and exposes the publicity effect of the mayor role as false and hollow: “it was the place and its people that made the history, not the ceremonial trappings” (Wilde 2020). “Mayor for Today” is critical of Danzhai’s international self-promotion: in its ambition to reach a global audience (and in the story, an interstellar one), “the place and its people” that are essential to the local culture are overshadowed; just as Danzhai’s cultural heritage is co-opted by the alien mayor for political aspirations in the story, Danzhai’s Miao culture is co-opted by local authorities and tourism agencies for regional economic development in reality.

“Monster” and “Mayor for Today” are concerned not with the specificities of Miao culture per se, but with the social and economic mechanisms that orchestrate the artificial construction of Danzhai’s cultural profile. Other stories from the workshop such as, “Tool Use by the Humans of Miaozhai County” and “Rule of Three,” fail to portray Miao culture with nuance by succumbing to Orientalist stereotypes. “Tool Use by the Humans of Miaozhai County” by Derek Künsken (published in *Non-Exist* in three parts on 10, 11, and 12 May 2023; Künsken 2023a, b, c) follows the life of Lian Mee, a Miao woman who is a victim of sexual harassment, and who develops AI systems that help create a safer and fairer working environment for women. As a tribute to her Miao roots, the logo of Lian Mee’s company heavily features Miao cultural symbols such as indigo Miao batik, Miao embroidery, buffalo horns, and Miao silver ornaments. However, these symbols, commonly used to promote ethnic tourism, are mere tokens of Lian Mee’s heritage without becoming integral part of the narrative that documents Lian Mee’s ventures in changing society with AI technologies. In a story that offers a detailed extrapolation of future AI and explores complex social issues, its representation of Miao culture is manifestly flimsy and reductive, conforming to an Orientalist imagination of ethnic culture being ancient, timeless, and mythical.

Lawrence M. Schoen's "Rule of Three" (published in *Non-Exist* in three parts on 24, 25, 26 May 2023; Schoen 2023) is also susceptible to Orientalism in its portrayal of the practice of Miao batik. An alien spaceship descends in a backward village of Miao County, and the protagonist (an American man who is half Miao) comes to the village to investigate. The alien introduces him to the "rule of three," which means any product that passes through more than three individuals in the process of production and transmission is considered "dark" and "unlife." The alien criticizes human technology and industrial production that bind and manipulate nature instead of encouraging its self-expression, which makes the naturalistic way of life in Miao County appears admirable in contrast. Miao batik is described as an ancient craft that, unchanging, is passed down from generation to generation unaffected by industrial progress. The perception of Miao craft as changeless and timeless exposes the culturalist essentialism that undergirds such depictions. To quote Arif Dirlik, culturalist essentialism substitutes "a cultural essence that defies time for culture as lived experience that is subject to temporal production and reproduction" (Dirlik 1996, 97), and "emerges from a desocialized and dehistoricized conceptualization of culture" (Ibid., 98). "Rule of Three" overlooks the social realities of the Miao community's lived experience – which, as Danzhai itself attests, is intertwined with China's modernization and globalization process – and instead uses Miao culture to represent a generalized and essentialized cultural mentality that contrasts with global capitalism. Furthermore, instead of serving as the exotic novum of the story, Miao culture blurs into humanity's common cultural heritage in the face of the alien visitor, and thus represents the ordinary and the familiar against the true novum of the story – extraterrestrial intelligence.

Non-Exist workshop aims to establish a different cultural perspective against the normative Western worldview. However, stories from the workshop call into question the effectiveness of the self-orientalising reinvention of tradition in creating a unique cultural identity. The artificiality of Danzhai's cultural tourism and its conformity to the hegemony of global capitalism, as well as Miao culture's narrative role of representing a generalized cultural mentality, indicate that "Chinese-style" is more likely to merge into homogeneity than contribute to diversity and originality in SF storytelling.

Western authors from the *Non-Exist* workshop can be divided into two categories based on their awareness of and engagement with the workshop's Orientalist undertone: those who fell for the Orientalist reductionism, and those who saw through the fabricated and performative nature of Danzhai village. Comparably, the Chinese SF community could be divided into those who are fully invested in the essentialist approach of Chinese-style SF, and those who are wary of and seek to sidestep its self-orientalism. The Chinese authors whose *Clarkesworld* publications I will discuss below belong to the latter category.

Clarkesworld's publications of Chinese SF are wide-ranging in terms of subject matter, and Chinese-style SF counts for only a minor proportion of what it publishes, albeit receiving considerable attention in the non-fictional essays and interviews. In the previously discussed

Clarkesworld interview with Xia Jia, Xia rejects the observation that traditional Chinese culture is an invariable essence that defies change. Congyun “Mu Ming” 慕明 Gu, who frequently references classical Chinese literature in her works and has published two stories in *Clarkesworld*, said in an interview that she uses Chinese history and myths to explore certain concepts, not to impart her stories with a superficial “ambience of Chinese antiquity” (*gufeng* 古風; Cheng 2022). It makes sense that since culturalist essentialism is espoused to create unique cultural identities that accommodate Western images of the Orient, Chinese SF authors who originally write with a domestic readership in mind find no use for it in catering to an international audience or furnishing their works with a “Chineseness.” Therefore, Chinese writers who adopt elements of traditional culture in their works are more interested in either creating cohesion or exploring the tension between tradition and modern science and technology.

In *Science for the Empire*, Hiromi Mizuno identifies a tension between Western science and Japanese traditional culture. When science was introduced into Japan, the “legitimacy and authority” it gained “on account of its supposed universality” threatens to invalidate the cultural narrative that forms Japan’s national identity:

Universally verifiable and applicable, modern scientific knowledge made local cultural logics irrelevant. For non-Western nations whose modern national identities were constructed around local cultural logics and mythologies, incorporating modern science into those logics and mythologies posed a problem, even a threat (Mizuno 2009, 2).

China faces the same problem in the process of courting modernization. On the one hand, it emulates the West in order to achieve scientific and technological advancement; on the other hand, it rejects ideological alignment with the West and strives to formulate a modern national culture that rests on “local cultural logics and mythologies” to rival Western cultural hegemony. To challenge a Eurocentric understanding of modernization that sees Westernization “as the pre-condition for accomplishing modernity” (Yan and Santos 2009, 295), the Chinese state resorts to a cultural nationalism that emphasizes the continuity between Chinese modernity and traditional culture to craft an alternative vision of modernization. To quote *China Daily*, “the continuity of Chinese civilization fundamentally determines that the Chinese nation must follow its own path” (Lau 2023). However, this cultural nationalism that boasts of “China’s magnificent traditional culture” (Ibid.) is essentially self-Orientalist, and is therefore ultimately subjugated to the “Western understanding and authority” (Yan and Santos 2009, 296) from which Orientalism originated. To quote Dirlik:

Nationalism, once it has emerged, tends to project itself over both space and time; homogenizing all differences across the territory occupied by the nation, and projecting itself back in time to some mythical origin to erase the different temporalities of the past, so that all history becomes a history of national emergence.

[...] In this metonymic reductionism, nationalism shares much with the culturalist procedures of orientalism, now at the scale of the nation (Dirlik 1996, 106).

From this perspective, the nationalistic pride in China's cultural heritage, which spatiotemporally reduces Chinese culture to an Orientalist stereotype, may not be the most effective way to forge an alternative modernity as it essentially follows a West-centric worldview and is little more than a rehash of the "Western Orientalist knowledge" that has been "internalized and self-inscribed by the East" (Yan and Santos 2009, 298).

These conundrums that modern China faces and the rationale behind the so-called "modernization with Chinese characteristics" are perfectly replicated in the production and promotion of Chinese-style SF. Chinese-style SF's identity formation also relies on a self-Orientalist Chineseness tied to traditional culture, and similarly stresses the convergence of and cohesion between historical past and modern science to bridge the rupture between the traditional and the modern. As Wang Yao observes, since Chinese culture is typically associated with history, tradition, and localism, while SF reminds people of modern technology, Western culture, and the universality of globalization, the juxtaposition of SF tropes and traditional Chinese culture in Chinese SF creates a kind of tension (Wang 2016, 119). This perceived tension and rupture between Chinese traditions and modern scientific cognition is fundamentally Eurocentric, since it implies that Chinese culture does not possess the potential to modernize itself without guidance from the universal culture of Western modernity. However, Chinese-style SF's attempt to erase such tension and unite the traditional and the modern may be ineffectual, as its self-characterization, by its inherently self-Orientalist logic, only reinforces the Eurocentric dichotomy of the ancient Orient and the modern Occident. Similar to the rhetoric propagating "modernization with Chinese characteristics," Chinese-style SF cannot compellingly stand against Western hegemony using its Orientalist conceptions that are essentially Western. To quote Dirlik, "self-essentialization may serve the cause of mobilization against 'Western' domination; but in the very process it also consolidates 'Western' ideological hegemony by internalizing the historical assumptions of orientalism" (Dirlik 1996, 114).

The discontinuity between tradition and modernity in Chinese-style SF is embodied by the protagonist of Liang Qingsan's 梁清散 "The Possibly Brief Life of Guang Hansheng" (May 2022 issue of *Clarkesworld*; Liang 2022). The modern-day narrator discovers in the library archives a serialized SF written by an obscure writer called Guang Hansheng, who was active during the late Qing dynasty. Guang is portrayed as "an awkward, cantankerous savant possessed of scientific insight transcending his epoch, but unable to communicate it effectively" (Liang 2022). Guang has no way to advance his career as the imperial exam system of the Qing Dynasty has been abolished, and society cannot appreciate his talent since his scientific knowledge is ahead of his time. Caught in the fissure between old dynastic China and the new scientific system imported from the West, Guang symbolizes the uneasy and disjointed relationship between tradition and modernity as China struggled to free itself from antiquated

traditions to embrace Western science and modern values. Tradition is portrayed as an impediment to China's progress; in Dirlik's words, "a surplus of history [...] defines the state of 'premodern' non-European societies," and "it is the burden of the past in one form or another that marks a society as traditional, which impedes its ascent to modernity" (Dirlik 1996, 100). Dirlik points out the Eurocentric nature of this understanding of modernity – the view that China needs to unload the burden of tradition to catch up to the West provides no alternative to development except the European one.

Jason Cong Lin explains the ambivalent perception of tradition and its relationship to modernity from a historical standpoint:

Unlike North America and Europe where modernity has been seriously challenged, many Asian nation-states still consider modernity a desirable goal that can advance and strengthen their nation. Their colonial and humiliating history has led them to experience complex feelings towards their traditional culture (e.g. pride and shame) and western culture (e.g. fear and worship), and this motivated them to emphasise inheriting and modernising traditional culture for catching up and exceeding their western counterparts (Lin 2024, 85).

Chen Qiufan's 陳秋帆 "The Ancestral Temple in a Box" (January 2020 issue of *Clarkesworld*, also published in 10 April 2023 issue of *Non-Exist*; Chen 2020) confronts these complex feelings of "pride and shame" towards tradition. The protagonist comes from a clan in southeast China famed for handmade gold-lacquered wood carving, a skill passed down through generations and cherished by the clan. However, the protagonist believes that the "ossified traditions" prevents his family "from embracing the bold technological inventions of the new world." The story voices an anxiety that tradition needs to be reinvented to fit into the future and avoid elimination: "nowadays, humans are colonizing space; 3-D printing is everywhere. Why do people still care for gold-lacquered wood carving?" (Chen 2020) In this sense, integrating tradition into modernity has an undertone of social Darwinism – as "history develops along a linear scale" (Yan and Santos 2009, 298), so tradition needs to evolve to reach the higher plain of modernity and converge with it to justify its value.

Zhang Ran's 張冉 "The Snow of Jinyang" (June 2016 issue of *Clarkesworld*; Zhang 2016) recounts the misadventures of a time traveller who, due to his broken time machine, is stuck in the city of Jinyang 晉陽 under siege in tenth-century China. The novum of the story are technological gadgets recreated by the time traveller using tools available at the historical period he travels to, giving rise to an assortment of curious devices that meld ancient crafts with modern technological concepts. At first glance, Zhang Ran's story seems similar to the type of Chinese-style SF that, in Zhan Ling's words, "is intended to prove that scientific spirit already existed in ancient China" 意在證明中國古代就有了科學精神 by grafting modern scientific ideas and inventions onto an ancient Chinese setting (Zhan 2017, 72). Yet Zhang's story does not set out to write scientific spirit into Chinese history. Science did not

and could not germinate in the social context of tenth-century China, where the time traveler’s inventions are frowned upon by Confucian scholars as “disgusting ostentation” distracting from the dire political situation and vanish without a trace in subsequent history (Zhang 2016). In an interview, Zhang Ran dubbed his story “historical SF” (*lishi kehuang* 歷史科幻), and suggests that historical SF should be aware of the realistic limitations of what ancient Chinese inventors could produce without scientific knowledge, since “in ancient China, science didn’t in fact exist, and there was only the culture of artisans” 在中國古代，科學其實是不存在的，只有工匠文化 (Zhang 2022). Zhang Ran’s historical SF is based on the premise that traditional Chinese culture is marked by a lack of scientific thinking.

Congyun “Muming” Gu’s “The Serpentine Band” (August 2021 issue of *Clarkesworld*; Gu 2021) tells the story of a Ming-dynasty intellectual who builds a garden to open a portal to a higher dimensional universe, and reinterprets traditional Chinese philosophy and myths in scientific terms. The Yin-Yang Taiji symbol is associated with the topological properties of mobius strip and klein bottle, and Daoist philosophy is reframed as rules of higher dimensional space. Gu states in an interview that what underlies many of her stories is a re-examination of motifs from tradition, myths, and classical literature to “unearth their modernity” 發掘其現代性 (Cheng 2022). What Gu means by “unearthing modernity” is explained in another interview:

[...] I feel that from these texts that seem to be diametrically opposed to the contemporary, the future, and to science and technology, we can find something that doesn’t change along with changes to time, culture, or forms of expression. In other words, we can unearth modernity from classical texts.

[...] 我覺得從這些看似和當代、未來、科技截然相反的文字中，可以發現一些不隨時間、文化和表現形式的變化而變化的東西，或者說，可以從古典文本中發掘出現代性。(Yuan 2023).

Gu establishes a dichotomy of traditional culture and modernity and equates modernity with the constancy and universality of scientific rules. Therefore, in Mizuno’s words, modernity acquires “legitimacy and authority” on account of “the supposed universality” of science, and Gu does not so much discover the intersection of tradition and modernity as subject tradition to the appraisal of modern scientific values – Ming-dynasty garden planning in Gu’s story is idle and pointless labour unless it follows certain scientific principles that allow it to connect with parallel universes. As Zhan Ling argues, although Chinese-style SF draws from non-Western cultural roots, its narrative still operates within the Western cognitive framework of scientific progress (Zhan 2017, 73).

Although the examples of Chinese SF examined above fail to manifest the harmony and coherence between tradition and modernity that advocates of Chinese-style SF pursue, the conflicts and convergences between historical traditions and futuristic technologies in these

works do produce diverse, personalized, and nuanced interpretations of the narrative significance and purposes of Chinese culture in SF, which transcends the fixed aesthetics and homogenous literary intention of Chinese-style SF. Ken Liu sees Chinese traditions as integral to his invention of “new expressions in the technical language” (Liu, n.d.); Congyun “Muming” Gu notes her penchant for staging the encounter between tradition and futurism to explore the idea of “confluence” (Cheng 2022); Chen Qiufan protested against the internal homogeneity of contemporary Chinese culture by attempting to write a SF story in his native Teochew 潮州 topolect, which has been falling out of use due to the takeover of Mandarin (Liu 2015b). Some other Chinese-style SF published in *Clarkesworld* use myths to critique modernity, thereby overturning the Orientalist hierarchy where Chinese tradition’s supposed backwardness makes it lesser than Western modernity. Xia Jia’s surrealist “Spring Festival: Happiness, Anger, Love, Sorrow, Joy” (September 2014 issue of *Clarkesworld*; Xia 2014) tells the story of a contemporary Chinese citizen ascending to heaven like immortals in ancient myths to escape from the ever-present and invasive state surveillance technologies. A story by Chen Qiufan titled “Balin” (April 2016 issue of *Clarkesworld*; Chen 2016) portrays a humanoid creature inspired by the mythical beast *paoxiao* 狢鴞, who is studied as a test subject in a scientific experiment but renders the experiment pointless, as technology is unable to gauge the creature’s profound empathy and resonance with the entire universe. These highly individualized usages of Chinese cultural elements in SF stories engender a decentralized corpus of Chinese SF that is free from the colonial logic of self-Orientalism and the linear evolutionary narrative of Eurocentric modernity, offering another possibility of a diversified and non-essentialized Chinese-style SF.

Conclusion

Chinese-style SF is defined by its self-othering in the sense that it identifies as an estranging Other to normative Western SF. In this way, Chinese-style SF tethers its self-characterization to the dominant and normative Western tradition. Therefore, if Chinese SF is to establish a unique self-identity that is not dependent on the Western norm and which takes into account the variety and plurality of Chinese SF as a whole, it cannot rely on a constructed difference from the West that is derived from exoticized perception of Chinese culture, and which overlooks the specific and diverse reality of Chinese SF. As I have demonstrated with the cases of Ken Liu, Zhang Ran, Congyun “Muming” Gu and other SF authors, the distinctive character of their stories stems from their own particular and individualized conception of the relationship between technology and culture, and not from a uniform self-orientalizing practice of applying traditional culture to SF narratives. If Chinese culture is to contribute to the formation of otherness in SF stories, it should be used to serve the authors’ specific visions, instead of being regarded as a fixed formula to be followed. In the same vein, while

Chinese SF is often at a loss to define its own "Chineseness" that distinguishes it from SF from other parts of the world, perhaps a collective identity of Chineseness would organically emerge around influential Chinese SF works true to their authors' diverse visions, and a deliberate effort to fabricate an overarching "Chinese style" based on the Orientalist binary of the Chinese and the Western would not be necessary.

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