

Nationalist Allegories in the Post-human Era

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Volume 22 Issue 4 (December 2020) Article 19**Siqi Zhang,****"Nationalist Allegories in the Post-human Era"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss4/19>>

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Abstract: As China's expansion of influence now takes up the spotlight of the world stage, Chinese science fiction, a relatively little known genre, reaches a global audience. In 2015, Liu Cixin received the Hugo Award for Best Novel for his trilogy *The Three-Body Problem*, as the first Asian science fiction writer to receive the Hugo Award. A year later, Hao Jingfang's *Folding Beijing* was awarded the 2016 Hugo Award for Best Novelette. The recent world-wide recognition of Chinese science fiction begins with English translation, U.S. publication and promotion. The *New York Times* cited *The Three-Body Problem* as having helped popularize Chinese science fiction internationally, crediting the quality of Ken Liu's English translation, as well as endorsements by George R. R. Martin, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and former U.S. president Barack Obama (Alter). In this review essay, I argue that recent Chinese science fiction boom represents both Chinese exceptionalism and universalist concerns for humanities now and future. In what follows, I first offer a brief outline of the two works, highlighting the alterations that occur in translations. Then I try to identify several salient features of these works by situating them within the global political and economic contexts of China rise (or threat), geopolitical conflicts, competition and rivalry in science and technology, particularly AI, 5G technology, especially the global rise of nationalism and populism. Finally, I suggest an allegorical reading of these two works (and other recent Chinese science fiction) as nationalist allegories.

Siqi ZHANG

Nationalist Allegories in the Post-human Era: *The Three-Body Problem* and "Folding Beijing"

Reviewed works:

Liu, Cixin. *The Three-Body Trilogy: The Three-Body Problem*. Translated by Ken Liu, Tor Books, 2014.

Liu, Cixin. *The Dark Forest*. Translated by Joel Martinsen, Tor Books, 2015.

Liu, Cixin. *Death's End*. Translated by Ken Liu, Tor Books, 2016.

Hao, Jingfang. "Folding Beijing." Translated by Ken Liu, *Uncanny: A Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, No.1, 2015, <https://uncannymagazine.com/article/folding-beijing-2/>.

As China's expansion of influence now takes up the spotlight of the world stage, Chinese science fiction, a relatively little-known genre, reaches a global audience. This new boom can be seen in a series of recent Chinese recipients of Hugo Awards, arguably the most prestigious international award for science fiction. In 2015, Liu Cixin received the Hugo Award for Best Novel for his trilogy *The Three-Body Problem*, as the first Asian science fiction writer to receive the Hugo Award. A year later, Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" was awarded the 2016 Hugo Award for Best Novelette. The translator of both Liu Cixin's and Hao Jingfang's works, Ken Liu, is himself an award-winning American writer, born in China. His short story "The Paper Menagerie" was the first work of fiction ever to sweep the Nebula, Hugo, and World Fantasy Awards, and other top awards for fantasy and science fiction in Japan, Spain, France, and many more. Recently, many science fiction works have appeared in China, creating a "New Wave" of Chinese science fiction (Song).

The recent world-wide recognition of Chinese science fiction begins with English translation, U.S. publication and promotion. This is almost always the case for non-English works of literature to become internationally known. *The New York Times* cited *The Three-Body Problem* as having helped popularize Chinese science fiction internationally, crediting the quality of Ken Liu's English translation, as well as endorsements by George R. R. Martin, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and former U.S. president Barack Obama (Alter). Obama described the book as "wildly imaginative, really interesting," having "immense" scope (Stubby). Many U.S. critics compare Liu Cixin to the best American science fiction writers such as Arthur Clarke: "in American science fiction... humanity's imagined future often looks a lot like America's past. For an American reader, one of the pleasures of reading Liu is that his stories draw on entirely different resources," such as the use of themes relating to Chinese history and politics (Poole). Given that China's global expansion and international renown of Chinese science fiction occur almost simultaneously, then one wonders what the global translation, dissemination, and reception of Chinese science fiction mean today: Is Chinese science fiction boom a part of the global trend in science fiction arising in the post-human era of artificial intelligence or AI, and explosion of robotic and digital technology? Or is it a latter-day version of Chinese exceptionalism, through depiction of Chinese history and politics, only camouflaged as universalist expressions of utopian or dystopian fantasies?

In this review essay, I argue that recent Chinese science fiction boom represents both Chinese exceptionalism and universalist concerns for humanities now and future. Perhaps more universalist aspects can be detected in Liu Cixin's trilogy: it covers wide-ranging issues of science, technology, morality, ethics, and universal laws (or the lack of it); and it cuts across time-space continuum in "wildly imaginative" ways. On the other hand, Hao Jingfang's short fiction is clearly an exceptional tale of Beijing, China's capital, in a captivating narrative that combines the most realistic depiction of everyday life, and the most uncanny events which are constantly folding, unfolding in three worlds of the city. While Liu Cixin's aspiration is probably to transcend human civilization and the "dark forest" of the universe, with a glimpse of hope for the unknown future, Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" is clearly a scathing critique of China's exceptional economic rise with mixed political, social and cultural consequences. In what follows, I first offer a brief outline of the two works, highlighting the alterations that occur in translations. Then I try to identify several salient features of these works by situating them within the global political and economic contexts of China rise (or threat), geopolitical conflicts, competition and rivalry in science and technology, particularly AI, 5G technology, and U.S.-China trade war with much larger impacts, and then the cultural contexts, especially the global rise of nationalism and populism, as well as the ongoing battle of Chinese exceptionalism vis-à-vis universalism. Finally, I suggest an allegorical reading of these two works (and other recent Chinese science fiction) as nationalist allegories, drawing on Fredric Jameson's controversial concept of the Third World literatures

(particularly Chinese literature) as staging "national allegories." Jameson's "national allegory" not only offers a powerful interpretive strategy to Liu Cixin's and Hao Jingfang's fiction, but also points to a possible understanding of the battle between universalism and Chinese exceptionalism that the two works under review epitomize.

The Three Body Problem Trilogy

The Three-Body Problem consists of three separate novels, 三体 (*The Three-Body Problem*), 黑暗森林 (*The Dark Forest*), and 死亡永生 (*Death's End*). They were published as a serial in Chinese magazine 科幻世界 (*the world of scientific fantasy*), in issues of 2007, 2008 and 2010. The book forms *The Three-Body Problem* and *The Dark Forest* were published in 2008, *Death's End* in 2010, all by a local press in Southwest China, Chongqing Publishing House. The English book versions were published by the best science fiction press in the U.S., Tor Books, under Macmillan Publishers group. Ken Liu translated *The Three-Body Problem* (2014) and *Death's End* (2016), and Joel Martinsen translated the second novel *The Dark Forest* (2015). The published Chinese versions underwent several alterations. The first Chinese magazine serial version begins with the story of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76), but in its Chinese book form, it was tucked (or *folded*) into the middle of the novel, purportedly in an attempt to water down the political sensitivity of historical reference to the Cultural Revolution, as its 40th anniversary (2006) was only two years away when the book was published in 2008. As the current Chinese state is keen on suppressing any remembrance and reflection of this catastrophic episode, reprinting the unaltered magazine serial in a book form is certainly a risk for the publishers, as the censorship for book is much harsher than magazine publishing. However, its English version moves the narrative of the Cultural Revolution back to the beginning. Such an alteration is not without good reason. Slavoj Žižek, for instance, compares the chaos of the Cultural Revolution to the disordered world of the Trisolaris, one of the evil forces of the novel (13). Thus the novel appears to English readers as a dystopian story of China, or a history as dystopia. Some critics complain that the complexity of Li Cixin's multi-linear narratives is reduced to such politicized, even "orientalist" dystopian account (Cao). What will a synopsis of such sprawling, labyrinthian narrative with constant crisscrosses of flash-forwards, backwards, and the present time look like? For a review essay, only a chronological plotline can be offered, and readers must read the books themselves to know their complexity.

At the beginning, Ye Wenjie as a young girl witnesses the Red Guards beating her father, a famous physicist, to death during the heydays of the Cultural Revolution. Traumatized and utterly disillusioned with humanity's cruelty, Ye Wenjie, having grown up as an astrophysicist, invites the aliens from the planet Trisolaris to invade the earth by responding to their signals. Afterwards, Ye Wenjie is recruited as the leader of the Earth-Trisolaris Organization (ETO), as a *fifth* column for Trisolaris. This conspiracy is discovered by Wang Miao, a nanotechnology professor, through the online game called "Three Body," to solve the dilemma faced by the Trisolarans. The Trisolarans send a message to all human beings to announce their intentions to invade and annihilate the earth. Wang Miao and his team desperately fight against the invasion but to no avail. The first sequel *The Three-Body Problem* ends.

In the second sequel, *The Dark Forest*, the Trisolaran invaders and humans engage in a wargame of survival. As the mastermind of the humans, Luo Ji (homonym of "logic") devises a strategy to deceive the Trisolarans by lies, allegories, and metaphors. In the meantime, Luo Ji discovers the law of the jungle as "cosmic sociology," or universe as the dark forest: "First: Survival is the primary need of civilization. Second: Civilization continuously grows and expands, but the total matter in the universe remains constant" (13). The universe does not have room for morality; it is a dark forest ruled mercilessly by the law of jungle. Luo Ji broadcasts the location of the Trisolaris to the universe, in which other civilizations will launch attack against the Trisolaris once its location is revealed, according to the law of the dark forest. By doing so, however, the earth also exposes its own location and thereby faces attack and subsequent extinction.

In the last sequel, *Death's End*, humans finally pay the price of lying and playing the game by the law of the dark forest: its own death. The universe is a bottomless abyss, filled with competing intelligent species fiercely engaged in space wars that keep eliminating the weaker ones. A higher intelligence delivers a thin sheet called "dual vector foil," which then mutates the space-time continuum and reduces the solar system from three to two dimensions, literally. Of course, as a science fiction narrative, "literally" is merely a figurative, imaginary construct. This horrific foil flattens out everything in the solar system, from molecules, plants, animals, humans, to planets, into an immense, utterly unimaginable and indescribable single flat piece. Of course, all is imagined and described by Liu Cixin's narrative. Amidst the abysmal darkness of the total destruction of the solar system, humanity's glimmer of hope is preserved by the two lovers, Yun Tianming and Cheng Xin, especially the latter, a kind-hearted, fragile

girl, who are bestowed the mission to save the earth. In a melodramatic, heart-breaking ending of the novel, Cheng Xin, having forever lost her beloved Yun Tianming, and failed her mission, runs away from the destruction of solar system to hide in a small "ecological system." In her hideout, she writes the stories of the humanity and earth for the next universe (or multiverse?) to discover. Compassion, love, and morality, the values that humankind holds so dear, return in the grand finale, embodied by Cheng Xin and her (fairy) tales, which Liu Cixin uses to rename the trilogy as "Remembrance of Earth's Past." Starting out as a dystopia story, the trilogy ends with certain utopian aspiration preserved by remembrance with an affectionate and romantic touch.

"Folding Beijing"

The novelette 北京折叠 "Folding Beijing" was first posted online in December 2012. It was later published in two Chinese magazines, 文艺风赏 (*Literary Style*), 小说月报 (*Fiction Monthly*) in 2014. In 2015, Ken Liu's translation was published the U.S. in *Uncanny Magazine*. Its author Hao Jingfang is the first Asian female writer to win Hugo Award. Hao Jingfang is an economics researcher at the China Development Research Foundation, a government think-tank in Beijing where she works on projects that explore challenges and solutions to migrant laborers' children's access to schools. The novelette strikes its readers more like a story of investigative journalism about the social injustice in China today than a science fiction fantasy. Quite a few critics in China question whether the work is a science fiction about futuristic life, or a simply a realist reportage of the social ills that plague China today (Nandu).

The English title Ken Liu chooses for his translation is "Folding Beijing." It sounds like a prelude to a drama about the city Beijing: the curtain is furling or folding, and the stage setting, i.e. the city Beijing, appears to the audience. In Chinese original version 北京折叠, which literally means "Beijing folds," however, the city folds itself, or tucks itself, and it encapsulates, collapses, and crumbles. The word 折叠 in Chinese and its English translation "fold" or "folding" connote in a chain of synonyms with rich figurative as well as literal meanings. *Folding Beijing* is a piece of short fiction, and its story line is not as complicated as *The Three Body Problem*. But it is certainly not a realistic story under the guise of science fiction fantasy. It folds or encapsulates stories about three different worlds in a narrative, told largely through the limited narrative point of view of Lao Dao, the protagonist/messenger/narrator, whose traversing among three separate, but overlapping or folding worlds in Beijing nevertheless affords him a sort of god-like omniscience, characteristic of the 19th century European realist novels or 20th century modern Chinese realist fiction.

Here is the synopsis of the novelette: In an unspecified time, the folding city Beijing is divided by three classes physically, sharing the same earth surface in each 48 hour cycle: The first governing class with 5 million population occupy the space for 24 hours from 6 am to 6 am, after which the earth's surface will be turned upside-down, to move the second and third class up. The second class has 25 million middle-class people, and will enjoy 16 hours from 6 am to 10 pm. Then, the building of the second class will fold and retract while the high buildings of the third class unfold and rise, which hosts 50 million lower class people, who can be awake for 8 hours till 6 am. When each class is turned down or folded, the residents there would be put into sleep. Travelling between classes is tightly controlled and violators would be put in jail.

The protagonist Lao Dao is a 48 year's old waste processing worker, one of the 50 million third class people, who toil daily with little hope for better living: "Lao Dao had lived in Third Space since birth. He understood very well the reality of his situation... He was a waste worker; he had processed trash for twenty-eight years, and would do so for the foreseeable future. He had not found the meaning of his existence or the ultimate refuge of cynicism; instead, he continued to hold onto the humble place assigned to him in life" (7).

The story unfolds by Lao Dao's acceptance of a mission to deliver the message for Qin Tian, a graduate student in the second class, to his young lover, Yi Yan, living in the first class. To make enough money for his adopted daughter Tangtang's kindergarten tuition, Lao Dao accepts this job. It's a highly risky job, as Lao Dao already trespasses the class line by first meeting Qin Tian in the second class, and then trying to cross the borders again to the first class. But the large sum of money is a big temptation that Lao Dao cannot resist. So he sneaks into the first class, utterly astonished by the beauty and lavishness of the environment there. Lao Dao meets Yi Yan and delivers the letter. Then he realizes that Yi Yan is actually married to a rich man of Lao Dao's age. Yi Yan offers Lao Dao more money to hide this fact from Qin Tian. On the way back from the first class, Lao Dao is captured, but rescued by Lao Ge, a security official who was born in the third class. Out of sympathy, Lao Ge releases Lao Dao.

Then at the banquet celebrating the "Folding City at Fifty," Lao Dao finds that the whole waste processing industry, the main economic pillar of the third world, can be easily replaced by technology—

and it is only kept in order to provide jobs for those third class people. The speaker at the banquet, who is the supreme leader of the city, is "an old man with silver hair." Lao Dao tries hard to understand the old man's high-sounding speech, extolling "green economy," "recycling economy," etc., but can barely make sense of it. Afterwards, Lao Ge explains to him that as technology advances, "it'll be cheaper to use machines than people." And "this kind of automation is absolutely necessary if you want to grow your economy—that was how we caught up to Europe and America.... [Then] the problem is: Now you've gotten the people off the land and out of the factories, what are you going to do with them?" (24). Lao Ge tells Lao Gao bluntly: "The best way is to reduce the time a certain portion of the population spends living, and then find ways to keep them busy. Do you get it? Right, shove them into the night" (24). In the end, Lao Gao, his left leg being injured when crawling over the borders, is shoved, warped, twisted, collapsed, and *folded* back to the third class. It's the people like Lao Gao that are being folded and shoved around, and, by the same token, anyone in Beijing, including the old man with silver hair, the supreme leader himself, is subject to the folding and crumbling machinery, allegorically called China. It's a dystopia story for the elderly, or *老/ao* ----Lao Gao 老高, Lao Ge 老葛, and Old Man, or Lao Ren 老人, as well as for the young Qins and Yis----Qin Tian 秦天, and Yi Yan 依言.

Dystopia of Universalism or Chinese Exceptionalism?

The two works by Liu Cixin and Hao Jingfang to some extent exemplify the clash of universalism and relativism/exceptionalism raging around the world today. As Liu Kang puts it, "as China has inevitably risen to a leading world power, the claims on its uniqueness and particularity from the universal values (or universalism) have been heatedly debated, now focusing on not so much how China can integrate itself into the existing world order, in the historical passage to modernity since the mid-19th century to the present, but rather on what Chinese values can add to, modify, expand, and eventually reshape the values, worldviews and ideologies that we have taken for granted for centuries" (4). Within the global political and economic contexts of China rise (or threat), the questions of values and ideologies loom large. Works of literature and arts, as well as media, TV, cinema and other cultural forms, are the main venues of values and ideologies. Science fiction, by virtue of its subject matters, often showcases the global competition in AI, 5G technology, and other frontiers of science and technology.

Graham Allison, a Harvard political scientist, is known for his theory of Thucydides' Trap that would probably trigger a war between the U.S. as the status quo hegemon and China as the challenger to the American hegemonic order. Allison warns that "Beijing is not just trying to master AI—it is succeeding." AI will have great transformative impact on commerce and national security, therefore it should be recognized as a matter of grave national concern for the U.S. AI is for the autocracy led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) an existential priority. Allison then emphasizes "the dangers of an unconstrained AI arms race between the two digital superpowers" (Allison). While no reference is made in *The Three Body Problem* and *Folding Beijing* on any geopolitical rivalry between the two digital superpowers, the consequences of technical advancements and competitions on earth and the universe in Liu Cixin's trilogy is surely presented as a universal dystopia. Luo Ji (logic)'s startling discovery of the cosmic sociology, or the law of the dark forest, is registered in a social Darwinist logic of the survival of the fittest, replicating Sartre's existentialist credo "hell is other people":

The universe is a dark forest. Every civilization is an armed hunter stalking through the trees like a ghost...The hunter has to be careful, because everywhere in the forest are stealthy hunters like him. If he finds other life—another hunter, an angel or a demon, a delicate infant or a tottering old man, a fairy or a demigod—there's only one thing he can do: open fire and eliminate them. In this forest, hell is other people. An eternal threat that any life that exposes its own existence will be swiftly wiped out. This is the picture of cosmic civilization. It's the explanation for the Fermi Paradox. (442)

If one connects Luo Ji's discovery of universal truth to the event at the very beginning of the trilogy when Ye Wenjie's father was beaten to death by the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution, then the truth somehow reveals its own locale and origin: China. Moreover, China's rising nationalism and exceptionalism in recent years capitalize on the sentiment of "hundred years of humiliation and revenge." Underlying this dominant narrative of China's passage to modernity is the social Darwinist logic of the survival of the fittest and the naked law of the jungle. At the advent of modernity, the glorious Middle Kingdom with five thousand years civilization was deeply humiliated and bullied by western imperialists, and it had to wait for decades till its savior, the Chinese Communist Party, to revenge itself. 落后就要挨打 "Being backward makes you vulnerable, to be beaten by the strong and powerful," so the Chinese state-sanctioned textbooks tell the 1.4 billion Chinese. However, its corollary, though implicit, is frightening: When you are no longer backward, does it mean time is ripe to flex your

muscles and beat up others? This presumed Chinese logic is doubtlessly the source of global uneasiness about China threat, real or imagined. Of course, the complex, multi-directional narrative threads of the *Three Body Problem* tend to obfuscate the historical locale of Luo Ji's truth. Instead, it presents itself as a universal dilemma that all humankind is predestined to face. However, as the Trisolarians, the humans, and all elements in the universe facing complete annihilation near the end of the trilogy, all may leave their traces in "the message in a bottle," and the "ecological sphere" as "the only things left in the mini-universe." Moreover, there are survivors. In the end, Cheng Xin and her friends take a spaceship to begin a journey to the unknown future of rebirth. One can hardly pinpoint such utopian and melodramatic ending to the recent hubbub of "China Dream" rhetoric trumpeted all over the world. Yet in the narrative the "dream" motif clearly occurs time and again, especially in the tender, sweet and delicate dreams of the young lovers Yun Tianming and Cheng Xin, who embody human civilization's hope of revival.

While readers may indeed be overwhelmed by Liu Cixin's elaborate narrative of the intricate power relationship of science, technology, ethnics, morality, and the law of the dark forest or cosmic sociology, in *Folding Beijing* the truth is more straightforward and explicit, and less scientific and techno-savvy. The promising and tranquilizing "ecological sphere" in which the angel-like heroine Cheng Xin dwells in Liu Cixin's *Death's End*, appears nowhere in the folding city of Beijing. Instead, the echoes of eco-humanism or post-humanism in the era of AI and robotics reverberate cynically in "Folding Beijing" in the rhetoric of "old man with silver hair," who eulogizes the great achievements of "green economy" and "recycling economy." The truth of the folding Beijing, of course, is as dreadful and devastating as the logic (or truth) of the dark forest. The third class Lao Daos in "Folding Beijing" may have no chance to think and act in the grandiose manner of Yun Tianmings and Luo Jis in *Three Body Problem*. Lao Dao and his likes in fact will never pose any challenge to the imaginary, cosmic hegemony of Trisolarians, or real adversary of the United States, in a scenario of Thucydides' Trap posited by Graham Allison. Nevertheless, the Lao Daos in folding Beijing are actually trapped, shoved, and folded in the same way as their likes around the globe, namely the underclasses, and subalterns living in fringes, cracks, and fissures of the world, at the slums, ghettos and apartheid, in folding cities of Washington D.C., New York City, Mexico City, or Mumbai, and so on and so forth.

Chinese Science Fiction as Nationalist Allegory

By a quick glance at what this review essay discusses, the two Chinese works contain complex story lines that cut cross time-space continuum, mix realistic depiction of China today with fantastic, uncanny narratives characteristic of the style of science fiction. Given the multi-linear narrative structures and a plethora of characters in the works who are mostly symbolic figures of certain types (scientists, political elites, manual laborers, etc.) rather than fully-developed, "round characters," it is difficult to present a coherent and consistent thematic reading. Jameson's notion of "national allegory," modified here as "nationalist allegory," may shed light on the polysemic structure of these narratives. The controversies around Jameson's famous notion of the Third World literature as national allegory focus primarily on "the Third World" and "national," drawing torrential assaults from American post-colonialist critics, who accuse Jameson's concept as "nothing more than a patronizing, theoretical orientalism" (Szeman). What is often glossed over is the proposition of "allegory," the most important theoretical premise for Jameson's whole formulation. Moreover, most U.S. critics simply ignore Jameson's meticulous analysis of the oeuvre of Lu Xun, modern China's literary giant, which is also foundational for Jameson's argument.

Jameson argues that "Third-world texts, even those dynamic—which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society." ("Third World" 69) His thesis is based on his readings of Lu Xun's short stories, "Madman's Dairy," "Medicine," and the "Preface to Call to Arms," where Lu Xun's axiomatic parable of "iron house" is presented. These texts are considered as Lu Xun's canonical parables and allegories of China's history, tradition, and modern existential predicaments. Jameson's interpretation is historically grounded, with a good deal of critical acumen concerning Lu Xun's modernist, and polysemic style. The first person narrator of "Madman's Diary" tells what he sees from his eerie perspective of someone who suffers hypochondria. His tales have a striking resemblance to a story in science fiction: reality is refracted, fantasized, and distorted. However, Jameson argues, "What is reconstructed, however, is a grisly and terrifying objective real world beneath the appearances of our own world: an unveiling or deconcealment of the nightmarish reality of things, a stripping away of our conventional illusions or rationalizations about daily life and existence" ("Third World" 71).

The stories of the *Three Body Problem* and "Folding Beijing" certainly contains a great deal of "nightmarish reality of things, a stripping away of our conventional illusions or rationalizations about daily life and existence". When one marvels at the astounding realistic details, and wonders about their implications in Liu Cixin's trilogy and Hao Jingfang's novelette, one may be well served by adopting a strategy that Jameson prescribes for reading Lu Xun:

this representational power of Lu Xun's text cannot be appreciated properly without some sense of what I have called its allegorical resonance. For it should be clear that the cannibalism literally apprehended by the sufferer in the attitudes and bearing of his family and neighbors is at one and the same time being attributed by Lu Xun himself to Chinese society as a whole: and if this attribution is to be called 'figural', it is indeed a figure more powerful and 'literal' than the 'literal' level of the text. ("Third World" 71).

As Xuenan Cao argues, the entire novel of *The Three Body Problem* "is driven by the interpretation of an allegory based on the communication between Yun Tianming, the only human who understands the future of Earth, and his beloved, a woman who is chosen to decipher his allegorical message" (Cao). The novel can perhaps be read as an allegory about allegory, or a meta-allegory: there is a realistic account of history of the Cultural Revolution, Ye Wenjie and her family tragedy; there is also a phantasmatic story of Luo Ji's fight against the Trisolarans in the dark forest; and finally, there is the allegory of Yun Tianming and Cheng Xin about transmitting and decoding the allegorical message about the future of the universe, humanity and civilizations. These are the "three body allegories" or three embodied allegories in *Three Body Problem*. On the other hand, the very act of constant folding, collapsing, and trapping in "Folding Beijing" or 北京折叠 (Beijing folds) is both literal and figural, allegorical (metaphoric) and realistic. Hao Jingfang's science fiction narrative is therefore a meta-narrative about the allegory of *folding*: her narrative keeps folding, unfolding, shoving, and collapsing the worlds of reality and fantasy. The three spaces for the first, second, and third classes are deeply divided, yet inextricably connected by her narratives.

But why allegory? Jameson again: "the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol" ("Third World" 73). And also: "For allegory is precisely the dominant mode of expression of a world in which things have been for whatever reason utterly sundered from meanings, from spirit, from genuine human existence" (*Marxism* 71). However, Jameson continues, "Allegory is the privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants" (*Marxism* 72). Unquestionably, both Liu Cixin's and Hao Jingfang's works are "profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream," which nonetheless show "the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants" ("Third World" 73). The continuity thus restored in *The Three Body Problem* and *Folding Beijing* turns out to be the narrative bodies themselves, not unlike Lu Xun's famed parable, trying to break up the suffocating but indestructible "iron house," that is, China proper, in a desperate endeavor that is nonetheless predestined to fail. The existential angst, however, did not prevent Lu Xun and his 20th century generation of Chinese intellectuals from their pursuit of meanings, aspirations, and genuine human existence. Now it's the turn for the Liu Cixins, and Hao Jingfangs. Their efforts are profoundly allegorical and political. Political for obvious reasons of building a modern China; allegorical because of the modern condition of existence in which allegory is "the dominant mode of expression."

Finally, the allegorical expressions of Chinese science fiction today is *nationalist*, rather than Jameson's vague prefix of "*national*." As Mingwei Song puts it, "the phenomenal success of Liu's trilogy, both domestically and internationally, also corresponds to the Chinese government's promotion of the 'Chinese dream.'" And "This new wave has been generally marked by a dystopian vision of China's future, ambiguous moral dilemmas, and a sophisticated representation of the power of technology or the technology of power. Its complexity also indicates in general the significance and dynamics of Chinese science fiction that reflects on the uncertainty and probabilities China confronts when entering a new world order." (Song) Nationalism and populism set the political and ideological context, or the epochal *Weltanschauung*, in which Liu Cixin, Hao Jingfang, and other Chinese science fiction writers (and probably all writers in China) live and write. No matter whether they write to endorse, or to refute nationalistic sentiments prevalent in China and the whole world today, they are self-conscious of their attitudes and stances toward nationalism and populism. As Jameson cautions us incisively, at this time of profound discontinuities, breaks and heterogeneities, the battle between universalism and Chinese exceptionalism (or American exceptionalism, or Russian exceptionalism, etc.) cannot but remain

inseparably entangled and sundered all at once. Allegorical writings of the Liu Cixins and Hao Jingfangs, as well as allegorical readings of their works may help disentangle these mind-boggling labyrinths or traps, be the Thucydides' Trap, Cosmic Sociology, Three Body problem, the Fermi Paradox, or constantly folding, unfolding, and collapsing cities and nations around the globe.

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