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# A RESPONSE TO AN 'ALIEN INVASION': THE RISE OF CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

LOÏC ALOISIO
(Aix-Marseille University)

## *1. Historical Context*

During the late Qing era, Chinese culture was confronted in a brutal way by belligerent Western nations, some of which were technologically far more advanced than expected. During this period, China was the home of many conflicts and collided with Western and Japanese powers that politically and financially weakened the imperial power. China, which at that time considered itself the center of the world and 'the Empire under the sky, surrounded by barbarians', was in for a rude awakening. The numerous humiliations it suffered and the distress caused by domestic disturbances, in addition to foreign invasions, were the factors which triggered the several political, cultural and literary reforms that took place in the country thereafter. This is discussed in depth by Isaacson who states: "In China, the crisis of consciousness was compounded by a pervasive understanding that internal cultural failings were as much to blame for the inability to resist semi-colonial subjugation as foreign aggression was".[1] The corruption and weakness of the Qing government attracted the wrath of the people but also criticism from the intelligentsia.[2] The military and economic invasion by the Eight-Nation Alliance[3] was also accompanied by a massive intrusion of foreign currents of thought. Western science, which first revealed itself by the thunder of guns, rattled China as well when it was introduced to Chinese elites through the several translations that flooded the country at that time. The Opium War and foreign domination awakened the late Qing empire with a startling jolt, with Isaacson stating how "[i]n the wake of this series of foreign and domestic political failures, the Chinese intellectual framework seemed suddenly inadequate and incompatible with modern global politics. Weakened confidence in traditional philosophy indicated a necessity to grasp both the practice and spirit of science, which had enabled Western advances".[4] There was an instant transformation to

[1] Isaacson 2017, p. 6.
[2] Lu Xun 2010, p. 243.
[3] Namely Italy, United States of America, France, Austro-Hungary, Japan, Germany, Britain and Russia.
[4] Isaacson 2017, p. 9.

Western learning which was at first criticized. This was a means to strengthen the nation that was progressively accepted by both the imperial court and a large part of the intellectuals.

Thus, driven by the strong desire to survive and strengthen the country, the salvation of the nation through science became one of the dominant ideological trends of this period. Since then, the existential crisis that came along with the hope of national strengthening reinforced the "eastward spread of Western learning."[5] Translations and importations of scientific textbooks and journals, as well as the introduction of new knowledge through various newspapers, marked the beginning of science popularisation in China. The scientific novels that appeared at that period gave to the Chinese a literary form that enabled them to express both their fears and hopes for the future of their great country.

## *2. The Influence of Translations*

Chinese authors were first confronted with science fiction through Chinese translations of Western and Japanese works. It is fair to say that during the period marked by the flourishing of journals offering serial novels, translations had a much stronger impact in promoting and supporting this literary genre in China than the original Chinese creations. Chen Pingyuan 陳平原 (1954-) nevertheless claimed that translations of Western science fiction works represented only one of the methods that stimulated the creation of Chinese science fiction, and not the central one. According to him, the importation of Western knowledge through periodicals that was carried out at that time, and more specifically those that popularised Western science, had a greater influence on the acquisition of knowledge, the growth of scientific interest and the development of the imagination of Chinese authors.[6] These two visions are perfectly defensible, because it is true that translations of Western science fiction works and the importation of new Western knowledge both had an enormous impact and significantly influenced and transformed China at that time.

### *a. Translations of Western Scientific Works*

The importation of Western currents of thought and social and political theories had a strong influence on China, especially after the first Opium War (1839-42). This was seen when some Chinese intellectuals realised that the civilisation and system that underlies advanced Western technology were far more important than technology itself. That is why technology, in the hands of writers, became a way to realise their ideals and to promote them as they desired. The introduction of

[5] *Xixue dongjian* 西學東漸 designates the historical process where Western science and currents of thought were spread over China during the late Qing period.
[6] Chen Pingyuan 2006, p. 138.

Western utopian thinking and the theory of evolution generated considerable interest among Chinese novelists. Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921) in particular translated *Evolution and Ethics* by the famous English scientist Thomas Huxley, giving it the title *Tianyan lun* 天演論 (On Evolution of Nature). Yan introduced (for the very first time in China) the theory of evolution by Charles Darwin, while applying the concept of natural selection to human society, which made him a pioneer of social Darwinism in China. He carried on with the translations of major works,[7] including *The Study of Sociology* by Herbert Spencer, *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith, *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill and *De l'esprit des lois* (On the Spirit of the Laws) by Montesquieu, while including his own comments. Yan Fu also published various essays in the journal *Zhibao* 直報: "Lun shibian zhi ji" 論世變之亟 (On the Speed of World Change), "Yuanqiang" 原強 (On the Origin of Strength) and "Jiuwang juelun" 救亡決論 (On Our Salvation). He claimed that "[t]he basis of [China's] prosperity and power lied in science"[8] and that if the Chinese wanted to save the country from certain death, they must look abroad:

> 而欲通知外國事，則捨西學洋文不可，捨格致亦不可。蓋非西學洋文，則無以為耳目，而捨格致之事，將僅得其皮毛，眢井瞽人，其無救於亡也審矣。
> If we want to know everything about the foreign countries, then it is impossible to leave behind Western science and writings, nor natural sciences. In that respect, if there was no Western science or writings, there would be nothing to provide us with eyes and ears; if we abandoned the attitude of scientific observation, we would learn almost nothing. A dry well and blind people cannot save [China] from death, there is no doubt.[9]

He always considered science an essential process that allowed the achievement of "[p]romoting people's power, developing people's knowledge and renewing people's moral"[10]. He gave these recommendations in "Yuanqiang" and they became one of the root causes of the institutional developments of the Reform Party. The introduction of the theory of evolution generated a great interest among the novelists. Their traditional ways of thinking were shaken to the core and were becoming non-cyclical, stretching endlessly in a linear way.[11] Indeed, the Chinese had been using the sexagenary cycle (*ganzhi* 干支) for centuries. This is a numbering system of units of time that is based on the combination of two sets of signs: the ten "heavenly stems" (*tiangan* 天干) and the twelve "earthly branches" (*dizhi* 地支); which allow for sixty different combinations. This numbering

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[7] Cheng 2002, p. 620.
[8] Translations from Chinese into English are mine unless otherwise stated.
[9] *Jiuwang juelun*, https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/救亡決論
[10] 一曰鼓民力，二曰開民智，三曰新民德。 (*Yuanqiang*, https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hant/原強 )
[11] Cheng 2002, p. 626.

system is mostly used for years, but can also be used for months, days or hours. When this system is used to distinguish years, it leads to a cycle of sixty years that, once finished, starts over and over again. The new vision of time was linear and led them to imagine how the world could be in one or even several centuries later. Isaacson states how "[t]he problem of social Darwinism was apprehended not as a theoretical conundrum but as a very real threat to the continued existence of the nation-state. The dialectic opposition of the West as modern, scientific, and civilized and the East as traditional, unscientific, and uncivilized gave rise to a world in which the Orient became the fruit of Western conquest".[12] Such an influence can be seen in a passage from the novel *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan* 新法螺先生譚 (New Tales of Mr. Braggadocio) by Donghai Juewo 東海覺我, which is the pen name of Xu Nianci 徐念慈 (1875-1905). In particular, the influence is present in a passage where the main character, at the end of his celestial journey, realises that "[e]verything can evolve without limit".[13] This influence can also be seen in chapter eight of the novel *Xin jiyuan* 新紀元 (The New Era) by Biheguan Zhuren 碧荷官主人 in which it is written:

> 話說此時系黃白兩種民族因生存競爭之問題上開戰。[. . . ] 雖然紅種、黑種、棕色種三樣人尚未絕於世界，然衰耗已甚，不能自立，僅為列強之奴隸。
> The war started due to existential struggles between white and yellow people. […] Although red, black and brown people have not disappeared, by their extreme weakness, they cannot be independent and can only be used as slaves for leading powers.[14]

This concept's origin appears to lie in racial theories of social Darwinism.[15] Furthermore, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) wrote the following in June 1897:

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[12] Isaacson 2017, p. 93.
[13] *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan*, p. 16.
[14] *Xin jiyuan*, p. 482.
[15] Scientific racism, also known as racialism, tries to explain the backwardness of non-Western populations with morphological and genetic differentiation, and thus classifies the different human "races" according to those observations. This theory therefore justified wars of conquest, colonialism and social inequalities by the concept of natural selection applied in human society by Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism. These observations, besides the colour of the skin, are based on a variety of pseudo-scientific discipline-specific measurement procedures, such as craniometry, cephalometry, anthropometry or phrenology. The measurement of the cranial angle or of the forehead inclination therefore became the criteria used in the West for the differentiation of the different "races" and to determine the level of intelligence of each of them (Reynaud-Paligot 2006, p. 22). Among the several taxonomies that emerged based on those observations, the one that is mentioned by Liang Qichao is close to one mentioned by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) and his five "races". However, similar categories and hierarchies can be seen in Edmond-Jean-Joseph Langlebert's (1820-?) *Manuel d'histoire naturelle* (Natural History Textbook), except for the "brown" category. These categories and hierarchy are as follows: the "White or Caucasian" at the top, followed by the "Yellow or Mongolic" in second, the "Black or African" in third and finally the "Red or American" at the lower end of the racial scale (Langlebert 1875, pp. 133-134).

> 彼夫印度之不昌，限於種也。凡黑色、紅色、棕色之種人，其血管中之微生物，與其腦之角度，皆視白人相去懸絕，惟黃之與白，殆不甚遠，故白人所能為之事，黃人無不能者。
> The unprosperity of India is a racial issue. The microorganisms in the veins of average Black, Red and Brown people, along with their brain slope angle, show great differences from White people. Only those of Yellow people approximate them. That is why Yellow people can do everything White people do.[16]

At that time, the knowledge of different modern, natural Western sciences was completely introduced in China. In 1896, Liang Qichao even indexed the various fields of natural sciences in his *Xixue shumubiao* 西學書目表 (Catalogue of Western Sciences Works), namely physics, acoustics, optics, mechanics, astronomy, geology, physiology, study of fauna and flora, medicine, and finally, cartography.[17] Liang Qichao also wished to establish many institutes of translation in order to translate Western works that dealt with natural and social sciences, since he thought that "[i]f [the great emperors of the History of China] were still around today, they would regard translation as the first way to strengthen the nation".[18] The Opium War seems to mark a turning point for the translation of foreign works. Indeed, whereas previously applied sciences were emphasised, particularly for the military industry, an increase in the translation of fundamental Western sciences was remarkable after the War.

The importation of all this new knowledge deeply disrupted the Chinese world, particularly the introduction of Darwinism that resonated with Chinese society in those very troubled times, and as Isaacson explains, "[t]he perception that the law of survival of the fittest applied to societies and nations hung over late Qing intellectual life like a sword of Damocles".[19] Apart from its presence in Western scientific works, mentions of it can be found in translated literature introduced in China at that time. Among the "potential vectors of the Darwinian system"[20] that we come across in most of the translated works and, consequently, in Chinese scientific novels, we find "the natural selection and its features (struggle for life, survival of the fittest)", the concept of "evolution-progress", as well as "contingency".[21] As we are going to see further on, the translated Western literature played a fairly significant role in the spreading of scientific knowledge and various ideas of reform and progress in late Qing China.

## *b. Translations of Western Fiction*

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[16] *Lun Zhongguo zhi jiang qiang*, http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-worldlook-892998-1.shtml
[17] *Xixue shumubiao xulie*, p. 123.
[18] 苟其處今日之天下，則必以譯書為強國第一義。 (*Lun yishu*, p. 66)
[19] Isaacson 2017, p. 50.
[20] Clermont 2011, p. 56.
[21] Clermont 2011, p. 56.

Late Qing Chinese science fiction takes root in translations of Western and Japanese fiction, most of which are the product of indirect translations from a "relay language", usually Japanese or English. As Guo Yanli 郭延禮 (1937-) pointed out:

> 日本學者尊本照雄教授等人編有《清末民初小說目录》，他所收 1840-1919 年的翻譯小說約 2567 種（包括一部分短篇小說），這說明近代翻譯小說數量是極可觀的。翻譯小說涉及的國家雖然很多，但主要譯作是歐洲國家的作品。據初步統計，在這 2567 種翻譯小說中，可以查明國籍的有 1748 種，占全部翻譯小說的 70%左右。在查明國籍的 1748 種翻譯小說中，以英國小說（包括美國）最多，有 1071 種，占 61%；依次為法國小說 331 種，占 18.9%；俄國小說 133 種，占 7.6%；日本小說 103 種，占 6%；德國小說 34 種，占 2%弱；其他國家的小說 76 種，占 4%。這樣，英、美、法、俄、日、德六個國家的小說，就占了近代翻譯小說總數的 95%以上。
>
> In *The Catalogue of Fiction Published During the Late Qing and the Early Republican Periods* edited by Japanese scholar Pr. Teruo Tarumoto, he gathered about 2567 translations from 1840 to 1919 (including short stories). This illustrates that the number of translated fictions in Modern China is extremely significant. Although translated fiction concerned a lot of countries, the main translations are from European works. According to preliminary statistics, among these 2567 translated fictions, the country of origin of 1748 of them can be ascertained, which represent around 70% of all the translated fictions. Among these 1748 translated fictions with ascertained origin, fictions in English (including American ones) are the most numerous, with 1071 translations, which represent 61%. Then come, in proper order, French fictions, with 331 translations, which represent 18.9%; Russian fictions with 133 translations, which represent 7.6%; Japanese fictions with 103 translations, which represent 6%; German fictions with 34 translations, which represent less than 2%. The 76 translations from other countries represent 4%. Thus, the fictions from these six countries, namely Great Britain, America, France, Russia, Japan and Germany, represent more than 95% of the number of translated fictions in Modern China.[22]

At that time, the number of Chinese students going to Japan to study increased from day to day. The Land of the Rising Sun was indeed regarded as the only country in Asia to have succeeded in putting itself on the track towards modernisation. Many Chinese intellectuals based their model of an ideal society on the Japanese Meiji era (1868-1912) in particular, and it was during their stay that they came across numerous Western literary and philosophical works.[23] As Jiang puts it, "[j]ust as the spread of Western learning in the Late Qing era led to the ideological transformation of its writers, SF translations initiated the start of SF creation in China".[24]

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[22] Guo Yanli 1997, pp. 112-113.
[23] Gernet 2006, p. 67.
[24] Qiang Jiang 2013, p. 118.

Since "SF was understood as one of a number of genres that, through the literary form of the new novel, could help to espouse lasting social change",[25] a veritable craze for this literary genre developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular through translations of authors such as Jules Verne. Verne's eleven novels were published and republished many times, including *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours* (Around the World in Eighty Days), which has been his most retranslated novel[26] according to the Japanese sinologist Teruo Tarumoto 樽本照雄 (1948-). The submarines described in the novel *Xin Shitou ji* 新石頭記 (The New Story of the Stone) by Wu Jianren 吳趼人 (1866-1910) were probably influenced by the novel *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea) by Verne, since their shape is compared with that of a whale:

> 叫左右架起透水鏡，同看獵艇形式。只見那獵艇做的純然是一個鯨款式，鬣翅鱗甲俱全，兩個眼睛內射出光來，卻是兩盞電燈。
> He commanded his subordinates to set up the submarine vision telescope, so that they could together examine the shape of the fighter craft. They only saw that this fighter craft was shaped like a whale, with dorsal fins, pectoral fins, scales and a shell. Light was emitted from both eyes, which were in fact two electric lamps.[27]

Even the writing of the novel *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan* was influenced by Bao Tianxiao's 包天笑 (1876-1973) translation of the novel *The Wonderful Travels of Baron Münchhausen* by Gottfried August Bürger.[28] Another remarkable influence is the novel *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* by Edward Bellamy, which inspired Liang Qichao's novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 (The Future of New China), published in 1902 in the journal *Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說.[29]

All these translations had a direct impact on the fictional creation of the proponents of a new novel.[30] As Chen explains, "China lacked these wonderful guides toward knowledge, that is why it was necessary to first go through translations to initiate the spirits. Then, Chinese writers observed the situation of the society of that time, analysed the surrounding tendency, got up and took their

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[25] Isaacson 2017, p. 31.
[26] Teruo Tarumoto 2002.
[27] *Xin shitou ji*, p. 160.
[28] Ma Shaoling 2013, p. 55.
[29] Chen Pingyuan 1997, pp. 293-294.
[30] The "new novel" discussed here refers to the "literary revolution" promoted by Liang Qichao that is mentioned in his famous article "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi de guanxi" 論小說與群治之關係 (On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People): "If today we want to improve the governance of the masses, we have to start from the revolution of the literary world! If we want a new people, we have to start with a new novel!" [故今日欲改良群治，必自小說界革命始！欲新民，必自新小說始！] (*Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi*, https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/論小說與群治之關係 ).

brushes and inkwells in order to continue down this path".[31] Traditional Chinese fictional writings felt a shock by these new narrative devices, as well as "the late Qing intellectual 'atmosphere of crisis and utopian hope'"[32] led to the creation of new fictional genres[33] and the reconsideration of traditional fictional writing and themes. As explained by Andolfatto, "[a]s eastward the course of Empire took its way by means of economic, technological, and military coercion, the trauma of semi/hypo-colonisation was re-elaborated through literature, and one of the many by-products of this process of elaboration was 'scientific fiction.'".[34]

While translators like Liang Qichao and Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) regarded their works as "textbooks" for popular education and scientific awakenings, the most significant outcome of their translations was the birth of a new literary form in China: the scientific novel or *kexue xiaoshuo* 科學小說. Liang Qichao can indeed be considered the first Chinese scholar who concentrated his attention on scientific novels. According to him, these novels that he called "philosophical and scientific novels" in "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi" 論小說與群治之關係 (On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People) published in 1902, had to "use fiction to expose philosophy and natural sciences".[35] So, these novels should be able to propagate scientific theories and deep philosophical thoughts.

Lu Xun, another great Chinese man of letters, who translated Jules Verne's *De la Terre à la Lune*, wrote in its foreword that scientific novels should have "science as warp and human feelings as weft." According to him, they could "improve thinking and assist civilisation." That is why he claimed that "in order to guide Chinese people toward progress, we must start from scientific novels".[36] As Florence Xiangyun Zhang pointed out, "translating Verne, is to show the fascinating aspect of science, the wonderful future promised by scientific and technical progress, as well as to call to the creation of a scientific literature, in order to water the science desert; this is the dream of the translators of the 1900s".[37] Unlike Liang Qichao who wished that scientific novels could contain metaphysical content, Lu Xun rather hoped that science could be spread among people in their everyday life.

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[31] Chen Pingyuan 1989, p. 323.
[32] Isaacson 2017, p. 32.
[33] In "Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxue bao Xin Xiaoshuo" 中國唯一之文學報《新小說》 (*Xin Xiaoshuo*, the only Chinese literary magazine), which was published in 1902 in the *Xinmin Congbao* 新民叢報 (New Citizen), issue fourteen, Liang Qichao precisely identified the fictional genres. This includes "historical novels", "political novels", "philosophical and scientific novels", "military novels", "adventures novels", "investigation novels", "sentimental novels", "uncanny novels", "diary form novels" and "legendary form novels" (*Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxue bao Xin Xiaoshuo*, pp. 41-46).
[34] Andolfatto 2017, p. 18.
[35] *Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxue bao Xin Xiaoshuo*, p. 45.
[36] *Yuejie lüxing bianyan*, p. 3.
[37] Zhang 2016, p. 284.

Zhang points out how "[t]heir motive and enthusiasm are obvious: at this time of inventions and scientific discoveries in the Occident, Chinese intellectuals deeply believe that humanity's future relies on science".[38] Numerous discussions have been held on these novels' role in Chinese society. Most of them rallied around the two approaches cited above, to finally foster Lu Xun's approach, which makes scientific novels a tool to promote and spread Western knowledge.

Thus, we find that the wish to establish a new era where science could be hegemonic was already expressed by theorists in the early twentieth century. The promotion of scientific novels had only been made from a scientific view that regarded fiction as a vehicle, rather than from a literary one.

## *3. Political and Nationalist Content of Scientific Novels*

Considering that during the late Qing period China was subject to important troubles and political changes, the science fiction literature of this time mirrors the real historical perspectives, and describes the feeling of an existential crisis felt by the Chinese. Thus, it allows us to understand the social psychology, as well as the *Zeitgeist* of this unusual historical period. As Michael Berry pointed out, "during the first half of the twentieth century, as threats of colonialism, imperialist aggression, warlordism, civil war, and natural disasters plagued China, many of the narratives focusing on historical trauma highlighted the drive to create and cement a new modern conception of the 'Chinese nation'".[39]

Isaacson points out how "[i]n the context of the colonial threat, a profound pessimism emerged about China's fate as a nation, and this pessimism permeates discourses on science and works of SF from this period".[40] Thus, the study of the themes raised by late Qing scientific novels clearly highlights a prevalence of some specific themes. Besides the call for the "salvation of the country through science" which became the tenet of the entire period, the awakening of national consciousness, the prospect of political reforms, the beginning of feminist thought, as well as the criticism of superstitions of the past were also highly visible. These works expose the two main particularities of this period: the first one is the curiosity about science and the boundless admiration for it; the second one is the great hope that Western knowledge may contribute to the country's prosperity and power. These scientific novels provide us a real-time testimony and denunciation of foreign invasions, indeed "SF mediated via the language of fiction the traumatic experience of radical otherness that the encounter with the colonizing 'West' brought forward".[41] We can also identify a warning to their contemporaries about the death of the nation and the extinction of their "race." One of the great

[38] Zhang 2016, p. 280.
[39] Berry 2008, p. 5.
[40] Isaacson 2017, p. 1.
[41] Andolfatto 2017, p. 20.

obsessions of the intellectuals at that time was indeed the survival of the "Yellow race." Ethnic wars that aim to "reinforce the country and preserve the race" were consequently very common in these novels, and can be seen in *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo* 月球殖民地小說 (Tales of the Moon Colony) by Huangjiang Diaosou 荒江釣叟, where "Darwinian time and the pseudo-Darwinian vision of the 'survival of the fittest' are central themes".[42] The theme of "survival of the fittest" is expressed through one of the main characters' thoughts while he is imagining lunar landscape:

> 世界之大，真正是無奇不有。可嘆人生在地球上面，竟同那蟻旋磨上，蠶縛繭中，一樣的束縛。[…] 單照這小小月球看起，已文明到這般田地，倘若過了幾年，到我們地球上開起殖民的地方，只怕這紅、黃、黑、白、棕的五大種，另要遭一番的大劫了。月球尚且這樣，若是金、木、水、火、土的五星和那些天王星、海王星，到處都有人物，到處的文明種類，強似我們千倍萬倍，甚至加到無算的倍數，漸漸的又和我們交通，這便怎處？
> In this world of grandiosity, it is true that all fantastic phenomena are conceivable. It is sad that humans live at the earth's surface, like this ant that is turning around the sharpener, hobbled like a silkworm in its cocoon. […] When we look up at this teeny tiny Moon, a civilisation has already arrived on this piece of land. If in a few years, this civilisation come to our Earth, I am afraid that the five great races of Red, Yellow, Black, White and Brown will experience a great disaster. The same is true for the Moon: if the five planets that are Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars and Saturn, along with Uranus and Neptune, are all populated; if these civilisations that come from everywhere are one thousand to ten thousand times, or even infinitely more advanced than ours, and if they gradually establish contact with us, what will happen in the end?[43]

Isaacson mentions how "[t]he novel shares with its contemporaries a sense that China faced an unprecedented crisis, and a pervasive lack of solutions".[44] The combination of perceived oppression and the feeling of powerlessness in the face of this crisis situation made these novels the bearers of hope, with many hoping for a technological development that would enable China to compete with foreign powers. While they acclaimed the technological victory of future China, writers made the conquest of White civilisation a sort of political ideal. This can be seen in an excerpt of *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan*, when Mr. Braggadocio is hoping to be able to awaken:

> 余祖國十八省，大好河山最早文明之國民，以為得余為之導火，必有能醒其迷夢，拂拭睡眼，奮起直追，別構成一真文明世界，以之愧歐美人，而使黃種執其牛耳。
> The eighteen provinces of my fatherland, the first civilised people of this wonderful country. I think I can guide them with my radiance and will be necessarily able to

[42] Isaacson 2017, p. 104.
[43] *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo*, p. 415.
[44] Isaacson 2017, p. 105.

> awaken them from their illusions, to wipe their drowsy eyes, to straighten them so they can advance even more steeply and create another civilised world, in order to ashame the West and make the Yellow race a sovereign race.[45]

In addition to abhorring foreign invasions, revolutionaries who were enthusiastic due to their high aspirations already understood that late Qing political authority was deeply plagued by corruption. Corruption was present to the point that the government willingly became a slave to Western powers, and was the source of the calamities that had befallen China and was leading it to its loss – due to its betrayal to the nation. Thus, only a radical destruction of the political power could give China the opportunity to regenerate itself. In that respect, numerous calls for reforms took shape in the novels at that time, in particular the ones advocating a "constitutional monarchy" as a new ideal form of government.

Novelists also tackled the problem of women at that time, in particular concerning the practice of footbinding[46] and the question of education women received. Writers hoped to promote a better education for women, in order to make them more independent so as to contribute to the national economy. Regarding the issue of education women received at that time, novelists thought that it was only by improving it that the country could be saved; therefore, the rise of education for women became an urgent task.[47] However, as we explained above, the issue of woman's place in society was not only prompted by ethical concerns, but was also supposed to serve the prosperity and the revival of the nation. Indeed, according to the novelists, who were all men, the women who were the victims of traditional practices had become a burden to the development of the country.

Through these scientific novels, we become aware of all the efforts made by intellectuals to ensure China a bright future. The reason why they used scientific novels to expose their vision of China's future is because, in that period of unparalleled upheaval and abrupt changes, narrating the background of society was just not enough anymore – they also needed to express a political ideal and to imagine the fate of the nation. Indeed, as Liang Qichao rightly pointed out, "the situation [at that time] was declining and was not enough to constitute a predominant component of an entire book".[48] The novelists had to therefore depict China as already evolved and reformed, in order to turn degradation into triumph.

Since the main leitmotif of both the translation and creation of scientific novels during the late Qing period was precisely to introduce, spread and popularise scientific knowledge, as well as to pass on political messages to the masses through the popular form of the novel, an important educational mission was

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[45] *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan*, p. 5.
[46] E.g. *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo*, pp. 313-314.
[47] E.g. *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo*, p. 237.
[48] 景况易涉頹喪，不足以提挈全書也。 (*Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo shiliao: Xin Xiaoshuo biannian*, http://www.ilf.cn/Mate/36293_3.html )

given to them. Hence, when new matters, whether scientific or political, appeared in scientific novels, explanations of these new principles immediately followed in order to provide readers with corresponding scientific knowledge and political concepts. We can see that these "didactic segments"[49] are divided into different kinds of explanations. They can range from a simple explanatory paragraph to several pages developing the *novums* and scientific and political concepts and theories that are introduced by the novel.

The first kind, which is the most widespread one, is the one provided by characters of the novel themselves. It is indeed very common to see a character, usually an inventor or a guide, taking on the role of a teacher and instilling in the reader's mind numerous scientific knowledge and political messages through his comments. This usually takes the form of a "questions and answers game." As soon as the question is asked, the most comprehensive answer is provided through a "pedagogical scene".[50] We can see such an example in *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan*, where a character, in a long, pseudo-scientific demonstration, proves that all of society's ills are caused by the fact that most people are addicted to drugs (an allusion to opium) and destroying all ambitions and innovative capacities.[51] We can also read a solid example in *Wuotuobang youji* 烏托邦遊記 (Journey to Utopia) by Xiaoran Yusheng 蕭然鬱生, where the main character, in order to justify his wish to travel to Utopia, describes the Chinese society in which he lives through political and social criticism, in which all the author's bitterness emerges:

> 方丈，這也不是我一人的錯處，無奈舉世矇矇，都是甘心做奴隸的，都是甘心做奴隸的奴隸，教我一個人怎樣振興，況且我國里從前的志士，也是滿口的維新立憲，其實哪裡有點宗旨，哪裡及得歐西各國的大志士，大熱血家，前僕後起的，改良政府，爭回百姓的自由。我祖國的志士，看他從前做百姓的時候，何嘗不口口聲聲的罵政府腐敗，官場腐敗；又何嘗不口口聲聲說，我若一朝得意，要如何改良政府，如何整頓官場，及至一日皇帝叫他做了官了，他可把從前的話忘記了個乾淨，並且是同變了個人一般，所作所為，比著他從前所罵的政府官場還要腐敗十倍。志士尚且如此，其餘的人可想而知，所以我看了這個樣子，從此心灰意懶，愈加棄了祖國，求我一個人自己的嗜好。這次決意要到烏托邦去遊覽，但不知去法，尚求方丈指點。
>
> Abbot, I am not the only one to blame, there is nothing I can do in this world where everyone consents to become a slave, to be a slave who consents to become a slave. Tell me how I can rebuild the country by myself. In addition, concerning the former intellectuals of this country who had noble aspirations and sworn only by the "constitutional reform", how can we actually see their guideline? How can they match the Western great men with noble aspirations who are great enthusiasts who followed one another to improve the government and to regain people's liberty? When they were still part of the people, my compatriots with great aspirations were not shy in constantly criticising government and bureaucracy for their corruption. They also never hesitated

[49] Saint-Gelais 1999, p. 143.
[50] Saint-Gelais 1999, p. 159.
[51] *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan*, pp. 9-10.

> to keep repeating how, once they will succeed, they will improve the government and rectify bureaucracy. Until the day comes when the emperor appoints them to a mandarin position, then they can totally forget everything they said before and, like they became another person, act ten times more corrupted than the ones they criticised until then. If this is true for people with noble aspirations, it is easy to imagine how it is for others. That is why, seeing this, I'm demoralised and desert my homeland to seek my own pleasure. This time, I am determined to travel to Utopia, but I ignore how to go there and need guidance from you, Abbot.[52]

The second kind of explanation is very common and can be seen with digressions by the narrator himself along the text. Indeed, it is very often that, in scientific novels, the narrator interferes in the text in order to insert his own opinion into the novel or to expose and explain scientific principles.[53]

Apart from the novels' themes, we can also see pretty obvious political and nationalist meanings in several characters' names. Indeed, numerous characters have a name with hidden dual meanings, whether it be from the literal meaning of the sinograms or by playing on the homophony between them and other sinograms. The purpose of all this is to reflect the author's message, such as in *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo* with characters named Jia Xiyi 賈西依 (which is the homophone of "false Western medicine" 假西醫), Liu Bowen 劉伯溫 (which refers to Chinese military strategist and statesman Liu Bowen (1311-75), who helped Emperor Hongwu to overthrow the Yuan Dynasty and to found the Ming Dynasty) and Long Bida 龍必大 (which can be translated as "the Dragon has to grow"). In *Xin Shitou ji*, we can also see professors Dong Fangfa 東方法 ("Method of the East"), Duo Yishi 多藝士 ("Mister Multi-arts") and Hua Zili 華自立 ("Independent China"), as well as the character Dong Fangde 東方德 ("Moral of the East") who invented a new military technique which doesn't kill but instead enables consistent victory. In *Dian shijie* 電世界 (The Electric World), the main character's name is Huang Zhenqiu 黃震球, which can be translated as "the Yellows rattle the Earth." Last but not least, in *Xin jiyuan*, the character Huang Zhisheng 黃之盛, has a name that can be translated as "Flourishing Yellow."

So, we can see that the authors clearly put an emphasis on the patriotism that drives these characters. Aside from their names, their personalities also perfectly reflect this intent. Through our reading, we can clearly see three kinds of stock characters of scientists coming up. First of all, there are political leaders who are also erudite elites who master Western science, which represent the political ideal fantasised by the authors. This is the case for Huang Zhenqiu in *Dian shijie*, for example. The second one is a member of a scientific organisation, such as the three professors in *Xin Shitou ji* aforementioned, who cooperate in developing an electrical cannon that far outweighs the competition. Last but not least, the

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[52] *Wutuobang youji*, pp. 76-77.
[53] E.g. *Dian shijie*, p. 431; *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan*, p. 8 and p. 13.

scientist who is entirely independent from any political authority and who is sometimes even a revolutionary. We can see such characters in *Nüwa shi* 女媧石 (The Nüwa Stone),[54] in which the main female character is a revolutionary who studied abroad. Besides these scientists, numerous novels depict travelers who travel all around the world, driven by their patriotic fervour. They therefore encounter new societies and inventions that are enigmatic as well as inspirational to them.

## *Conclusion*

To conclude, it seems that the introduction of foreign ideas, cultural trends and material culture, as well as the subjection of China to European powers and the threat of mass annihilation provoked by the European colonialist expansion are central to the development of the genre in China and echo in the themes it arises. Indeed, as Michael Berry pointed out, "[t]wentieth-century China represents a time and a place marred by the unrelenting vicissitudes of history and the repeated trauma of violence. Struggling to redefine its position in the world after the harrowing Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century and a devastating defeat at the hands of Japan during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95".[55] That is why novelists and proponents of a new novel promoted scientific novels from a purely utilitarian point of view. Liang Qichao gave support to the translation and writing of scientific novels from a politician's point of view rather than that of a man of letters. Numerous progressive intellectuals at that time had the same opinion, and found in scientific novels a convenient and efficient way to spread political ideas and Western scientific knowledge to Chinese people. This literary genre was given the role of a beacon guiding the people through this period of troubles, enabling the spread of scientific knowledge, as well as awakening the people in order to reinforce the country.

Consequently, fictional expression at that time revealed strong political overtones, through its themes and its ideology, and is reflected in characters' personalities, depicted as patriots who are seeking the nation's salvation. However, Chinese science fiction seems to be as much concerned with the indigenous traditions of its own country as it is with foreign invasions. Indeed, as Lorenzo Andolfatto pointed out, "the estrangement of the Chinese colonized subject was twofold: it was directed toward the raw, unsymbolized otherness of a foreign cultural agglomerate (the 'West') that was forcefully making its way into China's boundaries, but also toward the deficiencies of its own epistemological apparatus (that is, the discourse of tradition), now obsolete.".[56] That is why, through its

[54] Two chapters of this novel have been translated into French by Florine Leplâtre and are accessible online: see Florine Leplâtre 2017.
[55] Berry 2008, p. 1.
[56] Andolfatto 2017, p. 20.

literary themes, we can see that scientific novels aimed to educate and teach new scientific knowledge, but also tried to eradicate troubles caused by tradition and superstitions of yesteryear that were passed on to future generations.

Thus, we could say that science fiction literature in China was an "aftermath of trauma" that followed the confrontation between China and Western powers. As we saw above, this "clash of civilisations" totally upset China, whether it be from a political, social, cultural, economic, epistemological or cosmological point of view, or from its vision of time (from cyclical to linear) and space (from the Middle Kingdom to a submissive country in a globalised world). Following the trauma left by foreign invasions, the introduction of Western science, Darwinian theory of evolution and social Darwinism, science fiction was therefore promoted through a modernised movement launched at this period.

This literary genre has therefore provided Chinese people, who were living in this historical context of existential crisis, with a literary form that enabled them to express their own feelings and anxiousness, and to believe in sunlight when water was falling from the sky.

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