

American Science Fiction Studies in China: Retrospect and Prospect¹

◎ Dong YE

Hunan Normal University

Abstract: The study of American science fiction in China has travelled a long and winding path over the past three decades. Relative papers and dissertations have been increasing with an academic boom of research programs. By analyzing the statistics and representative works on American science fiction in China, it is revealed that the research output has been flourishing in the 21st century in terms of its research quantity and quality, though there is still much to be improved in its depth, breadth, and standardization. It is suggested that in the research of science fiction as a form of world literature, broader vision and deeper insight should be explored in such aspects as comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and comparative studies.

Keywords: science fiction, American SF studies, foreign literature research

CLC: I712 **Document Code:** A **Article ID:** 2096-4374(2024)02-0130-13

DOI: 10.53397/hunnu.jflc.202402011

From 18–22 October, 2023, the 81st World Science Fiction Convention (WSFC) was held in Chengdu, the first time for both the city and for China. Indeed, it was only the second time it has been held in Asia. It is safe to say that this event has become a milestone in the history of China's science fiction (SF) development, along with the impact caused by Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* (2006), which would go on to win the Hugo Award in 2015. Actually, SF literature was for a long time classified as children's literature in China, or as a form of popular science, and its literariness and literary value were not fully recognized until the early 1980s when there was a heated debate among Chinese SF writers and fans over the "scientific value" and the "literary or artistic value" of SF. Fortunately, scholars have realized the importance of SF as modern literary genre, especially since the 1990s, and turned their eyes to the United States for more references. By analyzing the statistics from a prominent academic database together with further research made up of academic articles, monographs, and books on American SF studies we can draw a general picture of the development of American SF studies in China, as well as the achievements and shortcomings of the present situation, and thus propose ideas for future study in this field.

A Retrospective of American Science Fiction Studies in China

SF elements can be traced back to ancient fantasy literature, as far back as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in approximately 2000 BC. At the same time, literary classics, including Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1642), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), are usually labeled as precursors of SF literature. But SF in a modern sense, as a sub-genre, is generally believed to originate in 1818 with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, while Jules Verne's *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* (1864), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) were also important works in the field of SF. It was coming into its own at the dawn of the 20th century amid the Second Industrial Revolution. In 1926, Hugo Gernsback founded *Amazing Stories*, the first American magazine dedicated exclusively to the emerging genre of SF. In that first issue, he defined the kind of fiction as the "Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision" (3). Since then, the United States has gradually become the hub of the SF world. According to James Gunn, "American SF is the base line against which all the other fantastic literatures in languages other than English must be measured. That is because science fiction, as informed readers recognize it today, began in New York City in 1926" (127).

Interestingly and whether-or-not coincidentally, it is believed that the very first American modern fiction translated into Chinese was Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), a utopian SF novel. It was translated, in an abridged version, by the British missionary Timothy Richard, with the goal of introducing Chinese intellectuals to an idealized Western model of social development. The story was first serialized in *Wan Guo Gong Bao* (万国公报 [*The Globe Magazine*]) in 1891–1892, and later published in book form in 1894. The publication of *Looking Backward* marked the first advent of Western SF in late Qing China, and the year 1891 was thus regarded as the debut of the SF literary genre for the Chinese. From the late 19th to the 20th century, American SF studies in China underwent a gradual process of change from introduction and translation to academic research in a professional sense. As Wu Dingbo, one of the leading SF scholars in China, observes, "Chinese readers first came into contact with SF not through original creation but through Chinese translations of Western stories. The dissemination of Western SF in China played a very important role in the emergence and development of its Chinese counterpart" (260). Another pioneering SF translator and scholar, Guo Jianzhong, maintains that SF "did not exist in China until 1900, when the first Chinese translations of Western SF stories and novels began to appear" (qtd. in Jiang, "Translation" 116). The SF translation foregoers aimed to provide enlightenment when introducing this novel genre to common Chinese readers, and famous intellectuals like Lu Xun and Liang Qichao² emphasized the importance of science fiction as a tool to help the country prosper; thus they also initiated the beginning of SF studies in China. For example, Lu Xun, the Chinese literary master, in his preface to his own translation (月界旅行 [*Yuejie Lvxing*], 1903) of Jules Verne's *De la terre à la lune, trajet direct en 97 heures 20 minutes* (*From the Earth to the Moon in Ninety-seven Hours and Twenty Minutes*, 1865) from the Japanese (九十七時二十分間 月世界旅行, translated by Inoue Tsutomu, 1886), claimed that "if we wish to fill the gap of today's translations and lead the Chinese people

toward progress, we must begin with science fiction” (qtd. in Lundberg 36–37). Lu Xun also made comments on the characteristics and functions of SF, “considering it a good combination of scientific knowledge and human feelings” (Jiang, *Fantasy* 52), which could be regarded as the first complete piece of writing on SF theory and its translation in the late Qing Dynasty. It is worth mentioning that during the onset of the 20th century, science fiction from the West played the role of teaching advanced science as well as democracy in China, as literature is expected to serve the role of fulfilling social responsibilities. According to Lunberg, “Liang Qichao wanted to effect changes in the political system by means of political fiction, while Lu Xun wanted to effect changes in the scientific and educational level by means of science fiction” (37). Many Western SF works were translated and introduced into China from then on, even while there was very little research work done on SF studies. Following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, China went through a series of dramatic social and political changes which affected the genre of SF tremendously. For many years after 1949, Chinese SF writers, translators and scholars focused on SF works in Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. American SF works were then long neglected, until the last twenty years of the 20th century.

SF studies in China experienced a rough road, from almost nothing to occasional sparkles of several research papers, mostly introducing the literary genre or commenting on literary masters, like Isaac Asimov, and their works. There was a short period of an SF boom in China after 1976, and in the early 1980s, it became a bone of contention in China. Writers, scientists, scholars, and SF fans from all walks of life were arguing about some core questions, like the definitions of SF, and the “scientificity” or “literariness” of the genre, among others. Interestingly, as early as 1981, Asimov joined this discussion by expressing his ideas on the scientific and fantastic faces of SF in an interview with a Chinese science delegation (Rao and Zhao). In 1982, Chinese American writer Dong Dingshan in an article on the American publishing industry, stated that “In the United States, SF is not regarded as real literature. [...] Generally speaking, literary and critical circles do not attach attention to SF magazines” (55). The following years in the 1980s witnessed the decline of Chinese SF writing, but American SF study never stopped during that period. By searching “American science fiction” in “Subject” (subject = “science fiction” or title = “science fiction” in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), a comprehensive Chinese academic database, we find that there are about ten articles on American SF studies. Apart from introductory parts to American SF in some research papers on foreign SF, most are case studies of influential American SF writers such as Isaac Asimov, Edgar Allan Poe, Ray Bradbury, and Kurt Vonnegut, among whom Asimov has received the most attention. Guo Jianzhong’s “Asimov’s *Foundation* Trilogy” was one of the landmark long essays in 1982 and undertook a thorough discussion of Asimov’s works. Guo makes a detailed analysis of the trilogy’s structure, writing process, artistic features, and critical responses, stating that Asimov’s philosophical reflections on society make the trilogy a realist masterpiece of SF (Guo 56). Thus, he points out the realistic tradition in Asimov’s writing, as well as the history of SF writing, which is significant for later researchers on SF realism writing on the literariness, functions and social responsibility of SF works. As for studies on American SF more generally, Chen Jue’s article of 1981 on Western SF classification in *Dushu* uses Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, Tom Godwin, Richard Matheson, Gene Wolfe, and Theodore Sturgeon’s

works to clarify the features of symbolism, black humor, romanticism, impressionism, and realism of SF, making it the very first article on the different types and characteristics of American SF. On the debate in Chinese academic circles over the characteristics of SF, whether it belongs to children's literature or popular science, this article clearly states that SF is a world literature; it does not equate SF with popular science or children's literature, but an independent type of literature with its unique content and literary form (Chen Jue 109). What is also worth mentioning is "From Gernsback to Campbell: A History of American Science Fiction Worthy of Reference" (Zhou and Yu) in *Foreign Literatures* could be regarded as the first academic journal article on the magazine era of American SF and its significance in the development of the literary genre. It indicates that American SF works gradually received more and more attention in China, though American SF studies were still in their initial stages and Chinese scholars were beginning their journeys into the historical investigations and case studies of the American SF world.

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed a gradual revival of foreign literature studies including American SF studies, as the United States had become the center of the SF world and the now mature genre experienced much growth and transformation. A survey of American SF studies in China would help better understand its spread, influence, and relationship to the country, as well as contribute to the study of SF as a world literature and offer a Chinese perspective in this field.

The Development of American Science Fiction Studies Since 1990

Based on the data from CNKI, one of China's biggest academic databases, we can obtain an overall picture of American SF studies in China from different perspectives. We searched CNKI for keywords such as "American science fiction," "science fiction studies," "American science fiction novels," among others, then selected works from 1990 to 2024. By skimming through the titles, keywords, and abstracts, about 310 papers were sifted out. The following graph (Figure 1) shows the trend of the number of articles on American SF literature by Chinese scholars from 1990 to the present.³

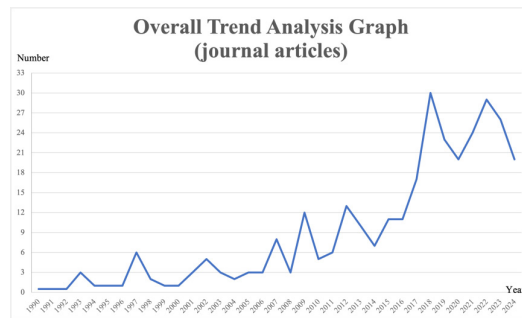


Figure 1: Overall Trend Analysis Graph (Journal Articles)

According to the overall trend, China's research on American SF literature has shown, in general, an incremental upward trend. In the 1990s, there were no more than ten articles published

each year; while, in the 21st century, the number of articles published each year on the study of American SF gradually reached double digits.

By further analyzing this graph, there have been two peaks in China's research on American SF literature, in 2018 (30 articles) and 2023 (29 articles). In relation to the events that took place at the time, in 2015, Liu Cixin won the 73rd Hugo Award for Best Novel for *The Three-Body Problem*; and in 2016, another Chinese author, Hao Jingfang, won the 74th Hugo Award for Best Novelette for *Folding Beijing*. It can be safely inferred that the successive winning of the highest international awards in the field of SF literature by Chinese writers in 2015 and 2016 has, to a certain extent, ignited the enthusiasm of domestic scholars for the study of SF novels, and at the same time encouraged them to set their sights on the excellent and classic SF works from abroad. Liu Cixin then won the Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel in 2017 for *Death's End*. Also, around 2020, the copyright holder of *The Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy (of which *The Three-Body Problem* is the first) reached an agreement with Netflix, the world's largest paid streaming platform, to jointly develop and produce an English-language series of episodes of the trilogy. The author of the original work, Liu Cixin and the English translator of the book, Ken Liu, participated in the project, which culminated in the release of *3 Body Problem* on Netflix in 2024. In terms of other research focuses, the "meta-universe" and "AI technology," coupled with the rapid development of Internet and science technology in recent years, have become research hotspots and are also widely used in various fields, which further stimulates the research enthusiasm of Chinese scholars in SF.

Analyses on the keyword co-occurrence and centrality of American SF studies in China since 1990 were also carried out (see Figure 2).

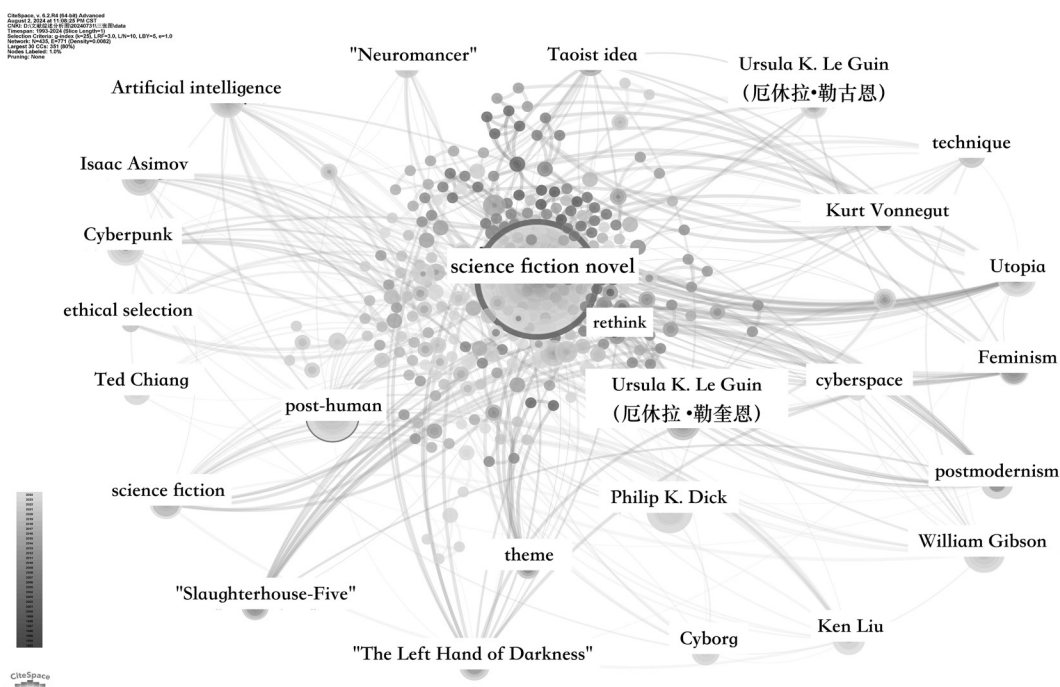


Figure 2: Keyword Co-occurrence and Centrality of American SF Studies in China since 1990

According to the keyword co-occurrence network diagram, besides general studies on SF novels, the domestic research on American SF literature has mainly centered on representative writers such as Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin,⁴ William Gibson, Kurt Vonnegut, and Philip K. Dick. Meanwhile, Chinese American SF writers Ken Liu and Ted Chiang have also been the focus of research in this period. As for SF novels, Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* attracted great interest from scholars in China.

Chart 1 Keyword Frequency and Centrality of American SF studies in China

Number	Keyword	Frequency	Centrality
1	Science fiction novel	133	0.88
2	Post-human	23	0.14
3	Utopia	15	0.08
4	Science fiction	12	0.06
5	Isaac Asimov	11	0.06
6	Artificial intelligence	10	0.04
7	William Gibson	17	0.03
8	Feminism	8	0.03
9	Cyberpunk	11	0.02
10	Postmodernism	9	0.01

Meanwhile, according to the frequency and centrality table of keywords, the term “science fiction novel” appeared 133 times in the selected articles with a centrality of 0.88, which is the keyword with the highest centrality, indicating that in the study of American SF, “science fiction novel” has always been a central issue. The terms “utopia” appear 15 times, “post-human” 23 times, and “artificial intelligence” 10 times respectively, revealing the focuses of SF research. The word “feminism” appears eight times, which shows that since the 21st century, the interest of Chinese scholars has shifted to feminist SF works as well, since gender issues have also been a key concern of scholars in literary research.

Telling evidence that SF studies have entered the literary research mainstream is its frequent appearance on The National Social Science Fund project list. This top-rank fund in China's social sciences selects and sponsors a number of research projects among many applications every year, which could reflect the trend in academic circles. Its database finds that SF study programs began to win grants after 2000. Statistics show that there are thirty-nine projects on “science fiction” in general, among which six are projects on American SF; three go with the title of Western or British and American SF; one is a comparative study of Chinese and American SF development mechanics; and one is on the narrative of American SF TV series. The gradual increase in numbers shows more Chinese scholars of foreign literature have directed their interest to American SF in the past ten years.

Chart 2 American SF Studies Projects Sponsored by the National Social Fund of China

Research focus	American SF Studies Projects Sponsored by the National Social Science Fund of China	Year
American science fiction literature	Modern and Contemporary American Science Fiction Studies	2011
	Studies of Posthumanism in American Cyberpunk Science Fiction Novels	2017
	Studies of Humanistic Thought in American Posthuman Science Fiction Novels	2017
	Studies of “Chinese Imagination” in Contemporary American Science Fiction	2022
	Studies of “Chinese-American Futurism” in Chinese American Science Fiction	2023
	Viral Narrative Studies in Contemporary American Science Fiction	2023
Western/British and American science fiction studies	Studies of the Scientific and Technological Ethics in British and American Science Fiction Novels	2013
	Studies of Western Science Fiction in the 21st Century	2018
	Studies of the “The Material Turn” in British and American Posthumanist Science Fiction Poetics	2023
Comparison between Chinese and American science fiction	Comparative Study of the Development Mechanism of Science Fiction Novels in China and the United States	2011
American science fiction TV series	Narrative Studies of American Science Fiction TV Series in the 21st Century	2018

Since 1990, historical and comprehensive studies of American SF have been on the rise. In 1993, Chen Xu’s “A Brief Comment on American Science Fiction” was one of the earliest articles on the history and development of American SF, charting its progress from Poe to the Golden Ages and the New Wave through to the 20th century. Later he expanded the article and reprinted it in *Foreign Literatures*, one of China’s high-level periodicals on foreign literature study. By analyzing the representative SF writers’ literary values and artistic features, Chen points out that “no one can deny the fact that SF, as an important part in contemporary literature, has entered the mainstream literature and become part of serious literature” (Chen Xu 35). Scholars have also paid attention to the subsections within SF, and there are many articles on American feminist SF, cyberpunk SF, and so on. Hu Jinsheng initiated American feminist SF study in China in 1996, and more scholars afterwards published articles on the relationship between feminism and SF, as well as on feminist SF writers such as Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, and others. Then in 2007, Ou Xiangying from Sichuan University, in her doctoral dissertation *A Study of Contemporary Feminist Utopias in Western Countries*, aimed at expounding the “feminist SF renaissance” or a “mini-boom of feminist utopias” in the Western SF world. Writing mainly on American feminist SF writers and writings, she puts SF in the tradition of utopian literature, and points out that feminist SF is in essence feminist utopia, and that “combined with utopianism, SF has evolved into a kind of political criticism [...]” (Ou 6). Later, in 2010, she published it and it became the first Chinese monograph on feminist SF. Likewise, Fang Fan’s *American Postmodern Science Fiction* (2012) puts cyberpunk (including steampunk and post-cyberpunk, if we are to list some sub-genres) SF in the postmodern context; it uses William Gibson’s *Sprawl Trilogy*, Pat Cadigan’s human-machine intersection, Paul Di Filippo’s *Steampunk World*, and Neal Stephenson’s *Metaverse Space* as cases to illustrate the postmodernity of SF. By simplifying feminist SF into the category of utopian literature, and cyberpunk SF into postmodern literature, these books focus on the most striking features of the sub-

genres of SF and offer illuminating ideas in the analyses. They may, to some extent, blur and ignore the boundaries and relationships of literary genres, though they are still rather significant and their research served as a breakthrough in the field of American SF studies in China. Unfortunately, there is still too little comprehensive study on American SF as an overall literary genre, not to mention studies on its history, development, transformation, classification, and comparison.

Instead, the majority of recent studies has always been on individual writers and case studies of SF novels. It is noticeable that apart from the representative writers in each typical epoch in American SF history, such as Asimov for the Golden Age, Le Guin and Dick for the New Wave, and Gibson for the Cyberpunk era, other writers receive relatively little attention, compared with the large number of Chinese translations of American SF.⁵ Another problem is that the present research is inadequate in its complexity and breadth. Take the study of Le Guin as an example. There are about 27 journal articles and 24 master's and doctoral dissertations on this American SF master, of which more than two thirds are on *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, and her fantasy series *Earthsea*. It has been more than 20 years since the first article on her appeared in 2002 in the CNKI database. Many of her works including the Hugo-winning *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, the unique anthropological SF works like *Always Coming Home*, or later works in the *Earthsea* series like *The Other Wind*, not to mention her famous novelette "The Matter of Seggri," which could be seen as a subversive story of the writer's feminist ideas and should be significant in analyzing the development of her literary thought, reveal new aspects on American SF and feminism as well.

Fortunately, these accomplishments gradually won the genre entry into the halls of the academe, which will in turn contribute to more achievements. The growth of American SF study in China also goes hand in hand with Chinese SF writing, translation, and research. In June 1989, the SF Research Center of Hangzhou University was established under the leadership of Professor Guo Jianzhong, with the purpose of translating and introducing foreign SF works, and promoting creative SF writing, translation and studies. It was the first recorded SF studies center in a university in China. In 1991, Professor Wu Yan initiated an SF course at Beijing Normal University, marking the beginning of SF teaching in the university and a new era of domestic SF teaching and academic research. In 2002, SF Study first became an independent MA program; before then it had been under the title of children's literature. In 2015, the program was upgraded and began to recruit doctoral candidates. Wu Yan's project, "Theory and Discipline: Construction of SF Literature," received a grant from the National Social Science Fund in 2004, becoming the first project on SF study sponsored by the National Fund. In May of 2004, a symposium on "Science Fiction and Postmodernity" was held in Beijing Normal University, with famous scholars like Wang Fengzhen of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Wang Jianyuan of the Chinese University of Hong Kong invited to give keynote speeches. Over the years, Wu's team has grown into a leading power in SF studies in China. It is noteworthy to mention that during this period, the team published a series of books on SF, including translations of classical Western SF theory, such as *Asimov on Science Fiction* (2011) and *Criticism and Construction of Science Literature* (2011), a collection of theoretical papers by Robert Scholes, Fredric Jameson, and Arthur B. Evans.

Other changes appear in American literary histories and anthologies written and edited by

Chinese academics. American SF writers Asimov, Heinlein, and Burroughs had to wait until the turn of the 21st century to find their places in *Twentieth Century American Literature* (2000) by Professor Yang Renjing of Xiamen University, one of the top American literary scholars in China. In 2002, *Literary History of the United States* (Vol. 4), one of the most influential American literary textbooks edited by Wang Shouren of Nanjing University, also included a discussion of SF in the chapter, “Contemporary Popular Literature.” Professor Huang Lushan of Shanghai University, a pioneering scholar in the field of SF studies, published a *History of American Popular Fiction* (2003), in which for the first time American SF was given so much concern and research that it received detailed discussion in separate chapters on “Interplanetary Science Fiction,” “Hard Science Fiction,” “New-Wave Science Fiction,” and “Cyberpunk Science Fiction”—all divided into different historical stages. These events marked the entry of SF into mainstream foreign literature studies in China.

Prospects of American Science Fiction Studies in China

As it achieved this increasing popularity, American SF study in China rose in critical favor. It still has a long way to rise, however; compared with other literary research fields or SF studies in other countries, American SF study in China is still far behind. Chinese academia needs more effort to develop original theories, perspectives, and methodologies to SF study instead of just following suit. Therefore, there remains much to do to improve the field of SF research in China. Based on the above analysis of the accomplishments and inadequacies in this field, I would put forward the following as prospects for further discussion and in-depth research.

First, stick to the classicization of SF. American SF has remained the center of the SF world since the 20th century. This depends not only on the profound tradition of American SF literature, but also on the national power of the United States in this scientific age of innovation. The influential Hugo and Nebula Awards have their home there. Therefore, according to Brian Aldiss, “Science fiction is [...] now largely—in emphasis and in fact—an American art form, coinciding with a time of great technological evolution and with the rise of the USA to super-power status” (13). The study of SF classicization cannot be separated from the study of American SF literature. The American brand “is shifting as more writers from the mainstream pick up science-fiction tropes and as more writers from science fiction venture into the mainstream, often to considerable acclaim” (Gunn 129). Moreover, SF in the modern sense has undergone more than 200 years of development since its birth in Europe, and has been marginalized, and then gradually fit into a theoretical system that belongs to this genre. Both Darko Suvin’s famous assertion of SF as “the literature of cognitive estrangement” (4), and Aldiss’s positioning of SF as the “search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe [...] in a confused state of knowledge [...]” (25), have ignited more readers, fans, editors, and reviewers—as well as academics—to probe into the nature of SF, and thus try to reestablish or reconstruct its position in literature. Through more thorough studies on the classical writers and works in American SF history, as well as on less noticed but important ones, we can obtain a clearer picture of the tradition and characteristics of American SF, its relationship with the

tradition of serious literature, and its uniqueness compared with other countries, which would also help to promote the construction of a theoretical system of Chinese SF study.

Second, broaden the thematic studies in American SF. Compared with other genres, SF has the most insight into human destiny and future community, especially as scientific and technological development and future imagination have become the common vision of mankind. The cosmopolitanism of SF is more prominent than other types of literature. Therefore, community concepts and post-humanism are still prominent topics of SF study. SF is a natural home for discussions of ethics. One of the main concerns of SF is “ultimate issues”, such as the fate of humanity, the fate of universe, the ideal society, etc. This is an apt description of the genre, for it provides a chance to do things “in the laboratory” with (theoretically) no harm to the real world (Pavlac). Therefore, scientific ethics, technological ethics, social ethics, and literary ethics are all good areas of inquiry. Besides that, linguistics and narrative study of SF were also hotspots at the 2023 WSFC, and there will be much to be explored on fairy-tale language in SF, artificial intelligence writing, future language in SF creation, along with disaster narratives, disease narratives, plague narratives, war narratives, cyborg narratives, etc., in classical and contemporary SF writing.

Third, subgenres or certain types of American SF offer multiple choices. Feminist SF is a very unique and important part in the history of American SF literature. Although SF has always been endowed with male characteristics, its relationship with women began in *Frankenstein* and flourished during the New Wave Age of American SF and postmodernism in and after the mid-20th century. More female or feminist SF writers besides Ursula K. Le Guin, such as Octavia Butler, James Tiptree Jr., Anne McCaffrey, Connie Willis, and C. J. Cherryh, to name a few among the Hugo or Nebula winners, deserve more attention from Chinese academics in SF study. Cyberpunk culture is another interesting topic. Yu Zemei's *A Study of Cyberpunk Science Fiction Culture* (2022) brings insights into the cyber-realm by focusing on the 1980s cyberpunk fiction and the postmodernist characteristics and manifestations. The author admits in the preface that she does not give much attention to the cyberpunk culture outside the literary text (Yu i); she does, though, delve into the variety of SF punks and explore their meaning. Besides these diverse and new emerging types of SF works, labeled as punk, from cyberpunk, steampunk, solarpunk, silk punk, biopunk, and so on, there is more room to explore punk as a cultural phenomenon, a subcategory, an abuse or overgeneralization of a cultural concept, as well as the intersection of punk culture in other fields such as music, art, design, and in the fashion industry. Also, such SF types as alternate histories, parallel universes, and Anthropocene fiction have not yet received much critical focus, although the SF fandom shows more interest in these types than academics in China.

Fourth, cross-disciplinary studies of American SF would be promising. SF is the most innovative and active genre in literature and is proliferating globally across media. Its images, ideas, and techniques are now commonly found outside of traditional venues, while writers who identify strongly with the genre nonetheless draw increasingly on other genres, inside and outside the literary sphere. Publication, especially the magazine industry, has always been the strongest force for the growth of SF; fan communities are much larger and more passionate than any other

readers' community. The annual WSFC is a get-together, known to its devotees as Worldcon, one of the few literary functions of any kind where fans and professionals—authors, artists, editors—meet on an equal footing. In this way, the interdisciplinary study of SF and communication may offer more topics for study. Likewise, motion pictures too help to enlarge the science-fiction family. With the popularity of film, radio, and television since the early 20th century, SF film and television found its way into the entertainment industry, which is in sharp contrast to the marginal position of SF literature in mainstream literature. American SF has expanded the scope and concept of traditional literature. The rapid development of the information age has made people realize that imagination must keep up with technological innovation, and scientific development feeds back into literary creation. Over the years, the SF community has found new members through a variety of print and electronic media. During the 1940s, millions of boys flexed their imaginations as they pored over comic books that graphically depicted the fantastic adventures of supermen. During the late 1950s and 1960s, when many of the magazines that published fiction began to die off as a result of television's competition for advertisers' dollars, new forms of SF dissemination began to control the SF world (Walters). Although SF film and television studies started very early in China and have achieved a lot, more work needs to be done on the interrelationship of SF as a literary form and its broader sense. Other interdisciplinary study aroused by SF may include the SF industry, as SF literature has always been closely related to image (painting), video (film and television), audio (radio drama), props, and IP design. With cross-texts, cross-media communication of SF related subjects such as SF design has also taken shape and injected new vitality to this both-old-and-new art form.

Fifth, the comparative study and relationship between American SF and Chinese SF, and Chinese literature and Chinese culture should be focused on. Chinese-American SF writers have aroused much attention in the past few years, and there are articles on Ted Chiang and Ken Liu, the latter winning more fame as the English translator of *The Three-Body Problem*. Liu's translations have reshaped the global science-fiction landscape, which has long been dominated by American and British authors. Over the past decade, he has translated five novels and more than 50 works of short fiction by dozens of Chinese authors, many of whom he has discovered and championed himself. Compared with study on his translations, his own SF writing has been ignored, especially his coining of "silkpunk." He defined it as a technology aesthetic and a literary approach by juxtaposing East Asian elements such as bamboo, silk, and paper with new expressions in technical languages, as shown in his Dandelion Dynasty series and *Good Hunting* (2012), a WSFA Small Press Award-winning short story. Ted Chiang is another famous Chinese American SF author who last year was named one of *Time's* 100 most influential people in AI, and this year given "the PEN/Malamud Award for excellence in the art of the short story." It is interesting to note that there have been about 16 dissertations on him and a dozen or so journal articles, not including those papers on *Arrival*, the 2017 Academy Award winner, and a film adaptation of his 1998 short story "Story of Your Life," which also won the 2000 Nebula Awards for Best Novella. These achievements of Chinese American SF authors also led to people's interest in the Chinese elements of American SF. As Chart 2 above shows, there are two projects with keywords such as "Chinese imagination" and "Chinese-American Futurism," but there are

not high-quality papers worth mentioning. Another topic in this field is the influence of Chinese SF on American SF, with Liu Cixin as the typical example. When the English translation of *The Three-Body Problem* was published in 2014 and won the Hugo Award in 2015, it was hailed as a groundbreaking work of speculative fiction and made Liu world famous. Publishers around the world chased after translation rights, which eventually sold in 26 languages, including Turkish and Estonian. The book and its two sequels went on to sell nearly nine million copies worldwide (Alter 33). The success of *The Three-Body Problem* not only turned Liu Cixin into a global literary star, it opened a new gate to American SF study in China. Besides adding diversity to the world literature, we are expecting more research on the interrelationship and mutual inspirations between Chinese and American SF to provide a more panoramic view to realize SF, either American SF or Chinese SF, and the genre's future version as a global literature.

American SF study in China has undergone a long and zigzagging path from when it first began to boom at the turn of the present century. Over the past few decades, it has been a growing area of interest and it continues to thrive, with a diverse range of perspectives and interests shaping the exploration of this fascinating genre within the Chinese academic and cultural landscape. Although SF had been marginalized in both the United States and China for a long time, it has found its own place in literature and has a wide outreach. As Ihab Hassan declared 50 years ago, "Science fiction can be philosophically naïve, morally simple, aesthetically willed or crude. Yet, at its best, it seems to touch a nerve of the collective dream, to release some fantasy locked within our machine. At its best, it can enlarge the realm of human possibilities" (87). Science fiction has grown into its maturity over the past hundred years, and has been nourished with vitality mostly by the cultural fertility of the United States. What will "emerge from the melting pot of tradition and speculation and imagination" (Gunn 129), and what will SF bring to literature inside and out, especially in this ever-changing era of continuing globalization? There is much to do for the growing number of literary scholars keeping an eye on this realm and all of its possibilities.

Notes

1. Grant: Social Science Funds of Hunan Province, "On the Influence of Chinese Culture to Modern and Contemporary American Science Fiction" (No. 22JD017).
2. Liang Qichao's "A Record of New China's Future" (新中国未来记 ["Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji"], an unfinished piece of fiction is believed to be the first published Chinese SF work, as it was published in 1902 in *Xin Xiaoshuo* (新小说 [New Fiction]), one of the most influential Late Qing fiction magazines. Meanwhile, many scholars held that the earliest Chinese SF story is "The Moon Colony" (月球殖民地 ["Yuequ Zhimindi"]), written by Huangjiang Diaosou (荒江钓叟, penname of an anonymous author, which means "Old Fisherman by a Deserted River"), serialized in *Xiuxiang Xiaoshuo* (绣像小说 [Illustrated Fiction]), also unfinished with thirty five chapters.
3. Thanks go to Tong Xin and Wang Haiyan for their help with the search work and graph drawing.
4. Ursula K. Le Guin is mentioned twice in Figure 2, because the writer's name has two widely used Chinese translations, which are given in parentheses accordingly in the figure.

5. This article is mainly on American SF studies in China, and the CNKI statistics in the figures and charts exclude articles and dissertations on Chinese translation and translation studies of American SF.

Works Cited

- Aldiss, Brian, and David Wingrove. *Trillion Years Spree: The History of Science Fiction*. Atheneum, 1986.
- Alter, Alexandra. "How Chinese Sci-fi Conquered America." *The Sunday Magazine*, 8 Dec. 2019, p. 33.
- Chen, Jue. 当代西方科幻小说流派拾零 ["On Contemporary Western Science Fiction Types"]. 读书 [*Dushu*], no. 7, 1981, pp. 104–109.
- Chen, Xu. 试论美国科幻小说的产生和发展 ["On the Production and Development of American Science Fiction"]. 国外文学 [*Foreign Literatures*], no. 2, 2002, pp. 35–42.
- Dong, Dingshan. 美国出版界情况 ["A Review of the Publishing Industry in the United States"]. 中国出版 [*China Publishing Journal*], no. 10, 1982, pp. 51–56.
- Geensback, Hugo. "A New Sort of Magazine." *Amazing Stories*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1926, p. 3.
- Gunn, James. "Science Fiction around the World." *World Literature Today*, May–June 2010, pp. 127–129.
- Guo, Jianzhong. 论阿西莫夫的《基地三部曲》 ["On Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy*"]. 杭州大学学报 [*Journal of Hangzhou University*], vol. 12, no. 2, 1982, pp. 50–57.
- Hassan, Ihab. *Contemporary American Literature*. Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1973.
- Jiang, Qian. "Translation and the Development of Science Fiction in Twentieth-Century China." *Science Fiction Studies*, Special Issue on Chinese Science Fiction, vol. 40, no. 1, (March) 2013, pp. 116–132.
- . *Fantasy and Reality: A Cultural Study of Science-Fiction Translation in Twentieth-Century China*. Fudan UP, 2010.
- Lundberg, Lennart. *Lu Xun as a Translator*. Orientaliska Studier of Stockholm University, 1990.
- Ou, Xiangying. 西方当代女权主义乌托邦小说研究 [*A Study of Contemporary Feminist Utopias in Western Countries*]. Sichuan UP, 2010.
- Pavlac, Ross. "Some Thoughts on Ethics and Science Fiction." *The Ethical Spectacle*, March 1996, www.spectacle.org/396/scifi/pavlac.html.
- Rao, Zhonghua, and Zhao Zhi. 和阿西莫夫谈科幻 ["An Interview with Asimov on Science Fiction"]. 光明日报 [*Guangming Daily*], 29 May 1981.
- Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. Yale UP, 1979.
- Walters, Ray. "The Science-Fiction Boom: A Shared Passion for 'What if...?'" *New York Times*, 5 Feb. 1984, www.nytimes.com/1984/02/05/books/the-science-fiction-boom-a-shared-passion-for-what-if.html.
- Wu, Dingbo. "Chinese Science Fiction." *Handbooks of Chinese Popular Culture*, edited by Dingbo Wu and Patrick D. Murphy, Greenwood Press, 1994, pp. 257–277.
- Yu, Zemei. 赛博朋克科幻文化研究 [*A Study of Cyberpunk Science Fiction Culture*]. China Science Publishing and Media, 2020.
- Zhou, Jiajun, and Xiaoli Yu. 从根司巴克到坎贝尔——美国科幻小说发展中值得借鉴的一段历史 ["From Gernsback to Campbell: A History of American Science Fiction Worthy of Reference"]. 国外文学 [*Foreign Literatures*], no. 1, 1984, pp. 88–94.