Interactions between Science Fiction and Mainstream Literary Criticism

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Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, science fiction in China has been flourishing. In terms of quantity or quality, the entire situation has far exceeded expectations for Chinese science fiction in the last century. On the one hand, the brilliant achievements of Chinese science fiction over the last few decades are something to be celebrated. On the other hand, we must also see that there are still many problems behind this newfound prosperity. As a science fiction researcher, I would like to talk about the linkage between writing and Chinese science fiction studies from the perspective of science fiction research. There are three primary reasons why contemporary Chinese science fiction has been marginalized in the literary world for so long: first of all are the historical reasons. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the beginning of the period of "reform and opening up" (1978), science fiction had always been classified as children's popular science literature, and was incorporated into the category of scientific literature and art. Except for a few critics who have talked about the topic from a macro level, until recently science fiction rarely entered the realm of contemporary literary criticism and research. The second reason for its historical marginalization is the question of literature type. Science fiction has a unique core of science and technology--both the concept of science and technology and the aesthetics of technology. This makes many critics, who are used to excluding science and technology from literature, feel very strange and alienated. The third is for reasons of the writer. Most Chinese science fiction writers are non-professional writers who focus on science fiction as a hobby. They do not need to rely on literary writing to earn a living and gain the recognition of the society or the mainstream literary circle, but rather focus on the evaluation of their colleagues within their circle. Therefore, they do not care whether they can maintain a good working relationship with mainstream literary critics.

At present, science and technology has penetrated all aspects of daily human life. As the only literary genre with the relationship between science, technology, and the human at the core of its thinking, science fiction shall play an increasingly more important role in the literary world. Although the rise of science fiction has received the attention of mainstream literary criticism, many science fiction writers have only now begun to realize the importance of literary criticism and actively work to establish contact with critics, based on the current level of interaction and research situation, it is far from adequate. Specifically, there are three reasons for this: first of all, few science fiction writers receive much attention from the critics, and thus the acceptance of new literary trends lags behind. Liu Cixin is still the focus of most researchers’ attention. Although some early famous writers (such as Han Song, Wang Jinkang, and He Xi) have also begun to receive attention, there is still a lack of rigorous scholarship. Such new writers as Xie Yunning, Shuangchimu, Suo Hefu, Liu Yang and so on have only been on the literary scene for a short
time receiving little attention from the critics. Secondly, there is a serious lack of critical theory, and the vision of that which exists is not broad enough. Existing science fiction criticism mostly conducts textual interpretations using Darko Suvin’s science fiction cognitive defamiliarization aesthetics and Fredric Jameson’s utopian politics based on the capitalist postmodern culture, and many of them remain at the level of traditional humanism. Of course, these theories are of great value to science fiction research, but they can’t fully meet the needs of a science fiction genre that follows the development of science and technology and whose thinking continues to move forward. Thirdly, the interaction between mainstream literary criticism and science fiction needs to be further strengthened. In recent years, mainstream literary critics have paid greater attention to the creation of science fiction, but most of them focus on research conferences and paper publishing, and their interaction with the writers, themselves, is insignificant. The question of how mainstream literary criticism can change its existing approach in order to look at science fiction from a new perspective utilizing the integration of science and humanity, and how science fiction writers can strengthen their own narrative skills and the depth and breadth of their thinking in order to tell good science fiction stories, are both issues that require more positive interactions (such as holding works seminars, dialogue lectures, etc.) between writers and critics.

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