

Chinese Science Fiction in the Arabic World



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In recent years, Chinese science fiction authors have been internationally awarded many times. Among them, Chen Qiufan won the gold award for best novel in the fourth Nebula Award for Global Chinese Science Fiction for *The Waste Tide* in 2013, Liu Cixin's *The Three Body Problem*, was recognized by the Hugo Awards as Best Novel at the 73rd World Science Fiction Convention in 2015, which made the author the first Asian winner of this prize. In 2016, Hao Jingfang won the 74th Hugo Award for Best short story for *Folding Beijing*. During this time, the Chinese-American science-fiction novelist Ken Liu played an important part, for he translated Liu Cixin's "Three Body" trilogy and other works of Chen Qiufan as well as Hao Jingfang, etc. into English. These English translations of which he is in charge could be regarded as the first step of Chinese science fiction toward the international literary field and worldwide recognition.

The Chinese science fiction novel in the Arabic world

Take the currently most well-known Chinese science fiction work "Three Body" trilogy as an example. It has been translated into more than 20 languages including English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Turkish, etc., thereby accumulating readers from diverse regions. Nevertheless, this translation hasn't reached the Middle East and North Africa region, as none of the novels has been translated into Arabic yet. However, this does not mean that there are no readers of Chinese science fiction novels in the Arab world. First of all, due to the widespread bilingualism/multilingualism in the Arab world, Arab readers can read Chinese science fiction through English translation, French translation, or any other translation according to their language proficiency. Meanwhile, Arabic media's report on Chinese science fiction can be found amongst our references. In August 2016, the site of *al-Sin bi-l-'Arabī* (*China in Arabic*) reprinted from Xinhua News in Arabic the news that Hao Jingfang had won the Hugo Award. The electronic daily newspaper *Elaph* (*Īlāf*) published in 2019 an annual science fiction review in which was mentioned *Broken Stars*, an anthology of Chinese science fiction short stories selected and translated by Ken Liu, which also included three review articles on Chinese science fiction. Furthermore, the Arab International Tourism site published an article pinpointing that Chinese science fiction is going through a golden period. It introduced briefly Liu Cixin's "Three Body" Trilogy and Hao Jingfang's *Folding Beijing*. Then it attempts to explore contemporary Chinese society in order to illustrate China's dual attitude towards foreign countries (especially western countries and capitals) reflected by the characters in the novel when they encounter extraterrestrial creatures.

Moreover, the Arabic version of Xinhua News also promotes the circulation of Chinese science fiction in the Arab world by covering not only awards-winning news but also popularity

gained by this genre in other countries. For example, it reported in 2019 the success achieved by Chinese science fiction in Japan. In addition to news, it also published in Arabic a dialogue with Liu Cixin that allows Arab readers to deepen their understanding of Chinese science fiction and to not only understand the novels themselves but also to understand the author's implicit intentions.

Chinese science fiction film in the Arab world

Besides novels and short stories, films can be seen as another important way for the Arab world to know Chinese science fiction. *The Wandering Earth*, adapted from Liu Cixin's novel of the same name was screened in theaters around the world in 2019 and is now streaming on Netflix (availability on every Arab-speaking country Netflix is to be verified). Undoubtedly, this allowed the film to accumulate a certain number of audiences worldwide including Arab subscribers. Meanwhile, the phenomenal success made by the film attracted the attention of some Arab journalists who are based in China. On February 20th, 2019, al-Yawm al-Sābi' covered the film with an article entitled “`indamā takhdīm al-sīnamā l-siyāsa.” (“When cinema serves politics”), which argues that the film is different from the mainstream Western science fiction that usually advocates fleeing the earth in order to survive, while *The Wandering Earth* argues for saving the earth because it reflects Chinese patriotism and a unique Chinese sense of romance. Furthermore, the article also points out that the film embodies China's political ideals of protecting the one earth as well as the relationships with Russia and the United States. *Middle East Online* also reported on the film emphasizing the rapid development of Chinese science fiction films and its outstanding North American box office. Hānī Muhammad believes that the film is compatible with Hollywood sci-fi blockbusters and speaks highly of the shooting of the film and its post-production technology. In addition, the author also points out that the film embodies cooperation between China and Russia.

Chinese science fiction and Arab science fiction

Facing the success achieved by Chinese science fiction, the Arab-speaking journalists begins to review and reflect on their own science-fiction creation. For example, *Middle East Online* published in 2018 an article entitled “Al-Sīn wa-l-khayāl al-ilmī wa-'ayna l-'Arab?” (“China and science fiction, where are the Arabs?”) that pinpoints the status quo of the marginalization of Arab science fiction at the beginning, and interrogates when shall the Arab countries pay enough attention to sci-fi creation that can affect the development of science and technology and the difference that Chinese government's promotion has made in this process. Then the author takes China as an example to argue that the importance attached to science fiction by the Chinese government is of long vision decision and uses the “Three Body” trilogy as an example of success. In one word, the author hopes that Arab sci-fi can see Chinese sci-fi as a model and find its own path rapidly, so as to catch up with the increasing development of science and technology around the world.

Generally speaking, Chinese science fiction has had a certain influence in the Arab world, either with the help of novels translated into a third language or through pop culture movies adapted from the novels. At the same time, some Arab people make a positive evaluation of China's science fiction and affirm the achievements of China's science fiction on an international scale. Some of them believe that the Arab world should learn from China, encourage the creation of science fiction and provide authors with policy guidance and support. However, we must acknowledge the fact that no Chinese science fiction novels have been translated into Arabic. We look forward to the imminent publication of "Three Body" trilogy, of *Folding Beijing* and other novels' Arabic version, and hope sincerely that Chinese science fiction will find its Arab readership and become a new cultural bond for the Sino-Arab relations.

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