Roundtable: Can Chinese Science Fiction Transcend Binary Thinking?

Mia Chen Ma, Angela YT Chan, Yen Ooi, Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker and Regina Kanyu Wang

Mia Chen Ma: Hello everyone, welcome to our roundtable discussion on Chinese science fiction. Our discussion today will be driven by one central question: Does Chinese SF inspire us to transcend binary thinking—and how?

Amid the popularity of contemporary Chinese SF across the globe, there is still a lack of examination on the ambiguity and complexity of gender representation in Chinese SF. In the meantime, we can see how an increasing amount of SF stories, across cultures and languages, have addressed that there are more genders than two, and how gender exists in many forms—gender can be fluid. Under this context, there are so many questions that still remain unanswered by Chinese SF writers and researchers. For example, are the majority of Chinese SF works still producing gender stereotypes? In what ways have Chinese SF stories demonstrated their potential of writing resistance, generating a reconsideration of gender inequality? How do we understand the outcome of such resistance, does it inspire us to take actions in real-life context, or has it involuntarily produced even more binaries? With all these questions in mind, we want to ask if and how Chinese SF can join the global discussion in terms of post-binary gender.

We are hoping to bring awareness to the importance of rethinking how gender bias/diversity are presented in some well-known Chinese SF works, and also the importance of rediscovering the HERstory of Chinese SF, including stories from other marginalized genders in contemporary China. By doing so, we want to discuss how Chinese SF can transcend binary thinking and point to a more gender equal and sustainable future.

The first question we want to discuss is: **How exactly are gender roles depicted in contemporary Chinese SF?** For audiences who have not read many Chinese SF works, some of our panelists can give a few examples and share their thoughts on how genders have been presented in contemporary Chinese SF.

Yen Ooi: In thinking about gender roles depicted in contemporary Chinese SF, I'm going to generalize and categorize them into three different groups—this is also how I feel about fiction in general. First, there's a group of stories that when you read or when you consume them, you don't really think about the gender of the characters. I think these stories feel gender neutral and most of the time you could probably swap genders and no one cares while they're reading it. Then, there's another group which purposely challenges the norms of gender representation. And there's a third group which then re-emphasizes gender stereotypes. I've picked an example

for each and I've purposely picked female writers to promote more female writers and their writing. When we think about stories that feel gender neutral and don't pay much attention to what gender is, I suggest *The Strange Beasts of China* (*Yishouzhi* 异兽志, 2012) by Yan Ge (颜歌, b. 1984) which I recently read in English (translated by Jeremy Tiang, 2020). There are obviously spots where there are actions that are gender-specific, but in general, if you read the whole book, you can probably swap the gender roles of the characters and not feel too annoyed or bothered by it—the story would still stand. On the other hand, a book that really challenges gender norms or gender thinking is *An Excess Male* (2017) by Maggie Shen King. In her debut novel, Shen King places all of the people in the female gender role. She places the state or the government in the male patriarchy role, so the power lies with the state, and everyone else—the people—becomes feminized and is looked down upon. That's a very interesting story if you've not come across it yet. And in terms of stories that emphasize gender stereotypes, unfortunately there are still quite a lot of those out there at the moment. One that I will mention is *Vagabonds* (*Liulang cangqiong* 流浪苍穹, 2016)[1] by Hao Jingfang (郝景芳, b. 1984). Throughout the novel, there are a lot of problematic descriptions that really emphasize the female in the characters and it's really hard to ignore them when you're reading the story. She's a brilliant writer nonetheless. I think all these kinds of stories are good in bringing awareness to the reader in terms of challenging gender representation or being aware of how gender is represented in contemporary Chinese SF.

Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker: I agree with Yen that there are these three types of gender representations in Chinese SF literature. In my research, I pay a lot of attention to women's representation and female roles in contemporary Chinese SF. I have observed that in most of the works, women are still depicted in a stereotypical role even though in reality they receive higher education and are professionals. This is a point that I would like to discuss a little more as Yen has already given us some very good examples. In contemporary Chinese SF writings, there are three stereotypical female roles: first, we still find the woman as the male protagonist's love interest; second, as the prostitute, and third, as the mother. Interestingly, the mother's role is also prevalent in many works written by female authors.

There are a few stories in which female characters possess some kind of knowledge and thus enlighten the male protagonist. On the other hand, we also encounter male protagonists who are anti-heroes. For example, in "The City of Silence" (*Jijing zhi cheng* 寂静之城, 2005)[2] by Ma Boyong (马伯庸, b. 1980) and "Ether" (*Yitai* 以太, 2012) by Zhang Ran (张冉, b. 1981),[3] the male protagonists suffer from depression. In these two stories, it is the female character who leads them to their remedy. But overall, women play insignificant roles in most of the stories. This gender representation is connected to and reflects the patriarchal Chinese society that still constructs femininity as passive and reduces women to their reproductive functions. Since these gender norms are internalized by some female writers in China, it becomes problematic because their stories reinforce stereotypical gender roles. As Yen mentioned, Hao Jingfang's novel *Vagabonds* is a really good example of this issue. Works like hers also reveal the resurgence of Confucian values in twenty-first-century China. Nonetheless, there are some outstanding examples that portray

women as strong female protagonists that we are going to explore this a little more later on in our discussion. After all, it is among the young writers' generation that more and more female authors are gaining awareness of gender inequalities and touching upon them in their writings.

One last thing I would like to mention now is that the works of female Chinese SF writers tend to use the strategy of a "double-voiced discourse," a concept coined by Mikhail M. Bakhtin and adapted by feminist literary studies. It means that the stories written by women seem to comply with patriarchal power structures and traditional roles, but at the same time they articulate their dissent in the subtext. According to Elaine Showalter, "women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant" (201). In my opinion, this is the case with Hao Jingfang's writings. For example, in her novella *Folding Beijing* (*Beijing zhedie* 北京折叠, 2014)[4] men are the ones in charge of the future city, whereas the female protagonist works as a part-time assistant to the management of a bank and is married to a rich business man instead of being with her true love, a student, because she does not want to give up her luxurious lifestyle. In addition, there are the robot waitresses with short skirts and the sexist remarks of the male protagonist that reduce women to their appearances. These aspects can also be read as a critique of the patriarchal society.

Mia Chen Ma: This is a very interesting point. While reading *Folding Beijing*, I am also bothered by such a construction, possibly involuntarily, of the "ideal woman" in a much less obvious way than some other male writers like Liu Cixin. Yiyan is depicted as an "ideal woman" who is desired and admired by people from different social classes, and Lao Dao wants to raise his stepdaughter Tangtang to become another Yiyan, another ideal woman. To some extent, the story seems to imply that it is the obsession with ideal women that motivates the male characters Lao Dao and Qin Tian, to break space and time barriers, challenging the very strict system of social hierarchy. Such fantasy about the "ideal woman," representing gender inequality to the greatest extent, then strangely, becomes the hope of initiating resistance to social inequality in this story.

In comparison with such ideas of the "ideal woman," there are also narratives of a "mad woman," which can be traced way back to traditional Chinese literature. And in contemporary Chinese SF, there are also many examples of "mad woman": they exist in the forms of cyborgs, human-animal hybrids, etc. They often represent destructive power, and such power can be written in a very feminist way, with madness becoming resistance. However, it somehow feels that no matter what, women are so easily instrumentalized, regardless if they decide to stay calm and content or spiral into madness.

The depiction of female roles is generally meant to fulfill a specific purpose that often caters to the male gaze. It is worth noting that such problematic presentations of women can be traced not only in the works of male authors, but also of some women and non-binary authors as well—Hao Jingfang, for instance. This explains why it is so important that we pay more attention to the complexity and ambiguity that lie behind gender representation in Chinese SF. Not only does it facilitate misconceptions on gender, it also produces even more cultural stereotypes, navigating

toward a grotesquely unequal future. From this instance we want to ask the second question: **What should we do to possibly change the current situation? Can the science fictional mode be used to sensitively contend with the body as a site of conflicting powers to resituate agency and empowerment?**

Angela Chan: When we are thinking about what the body actually means, it is quite interesting to think of its finiteness. From birth to death, that whole cycle of drama and activity and processes is really interesting as a kind of span for us to start interrogating these ideas of power dynamics. A famous example of the body and rebirth is Wang Jinkang's (王晋康, b. 1948) short story "Reincarnated Giant" (*Zhuansheng de juren* 转生的巨人, 2005), which is about an extremely wealthy, aging man who fears death. He undergoes the most advanced technological procedure to have himself reincarnated as a baby, so that he is reborn with his mature, adult consciousness remaining intact. It allows him to continue with his business empire and stay on top of the legalities of his changed personhood. Throughout the story he extracts and exhausts numerous natural resources, such as the food of his own nation. Particularly disturbing is how this also includes human resources, namely the wet nurses that he feeds upon. This speaks to the gendered exploitation of labour, as well as the disposability of working bodies, with the story detailing how the wet nurses' contracts are calculated to effortlessly favour the neoliberal campaign of the elite. Eventually the protagonist grows into a baby that is as big as a mountain, and finally, he passes away from the unsupportable weight of his head. We can observe his strategy of physical manipulation of the body as a metaphor for unsustainable growth.

To give a rather different narrative of the body as a contested site of power, we can look to SF pieces in contemporary art. For me, with a background as an artist and curator, I think it is really exciting to see SF not just in the container of literature, but also as something expansive that has always flowed throughout artistic disciplines, and as a vehicle for different ways of thinking. I think about Lu Yang (陆扬, b. 1984), a media artist whose work reestablishes our perceptions that are beyond the binary, beyond gender. Exploring concepts like the meaning of existence and death through religion, like Buddhism, Lu Yang inquires what it means to have a body that you then perhaps materially exhaust, and in death you put it away while moving on to another type of vessel for your consciousness afterwards, which may be more immaterial. Throwing this together with neuroscience, psychology, technology, and hypercaptialist consumerism through pop sub-culture and animé motifs, a lot of the artworks are actually reinvented avatars of the artist: an androgynous person, without genitalia, usually naked, bald. This avatar moves through different types of gamified worlds, which is really thoughtful as well as fun. One video or game piece made back in 2013 is *Uterus Man*. With this superhero character you zoom into the biological structure of the body, like analysing the anatomy of the uterus. There is a lot of humour too. For example, this character uses a Sanitary Pad Skateboard to travel, there is a Pelvis Chariot Flying Mode in the game, and then attacks can be made with things like DNA Attacks, an Umbilical Cord Whip and even a Baby Beast Mode. I think this humour is very useful to play on the binary set of gender

norms, as it also makes it more appealing to conversative outlooks to start rethinking the body and our existence in more empowering liberations beyond the gender binary.

I will finish by introducing a game that is still a work in progress, with a preview called *Material World Knight—Game Film Ver1* (2020). The Material World Knight protagonist begins by being confused about their own body and what it means to exist in this very material world of saturated media driven by capitalist consumerism. They also question the biological self, where the elements of water, earth, fire, and wind are very finite, and their flows determine when you pass on. They go into an MRI machine and enter into another world where they attempt to seek a lot of answers to questions, such as "Confined by binary oppositions, can we see anything that's beyond our preconceptions of this world?". Beginning with these examples, I think it is really insightful to look at the representations of the body across SF in wider arts.

Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker: I also think that SF in general allows the writers to imagine futures or far-away planets where all genders are equal and I also see this in contemporary Chinese SF where the body is used as a trope. One striking example is "Nest of Insects" (*Chongchao* 虫巢, 2008)[5] by Chi Hui (迟卉, b. 1984). Unfortunately, there is no English translation yet, but I can quickly summarize the plot. On the planet Tantatula lives a peaceful matriarchal alien society until the harmony is disturbed by human colonizers. The Tanla species only gives birth to female children who plant and carry their humanoid tree male partners around in a flower pot. Through this metaphorical vision, the story partly solves the issue of women's reproductive responsibility. Interestingly, after adolescence the alien female and male bodies merge into one, and through metamorphosis they become a huge insect. This can be interpreted in various ways, but one reading is that gender should not matter since all human beings combine female and male qualities. After all, what is considered a female or male characteristic is constructed by society. The narrative further questions this social construction of gender and emphasizes that in the end we are all human beings. I think this is a really good message.

Another example is "Reflection" (*Daoying* 倒影, 2013)[6] by Gu Shi (顾适, b. 1985). The omniscient male protagonist has a split personality, in which the clairvoyant personality is female. Possessing the ability to see into the future, the female character is not only very powerful, but also crucial to the story. However, this powerful female can only exist in a male body. Similar to Chi Hui's "Nest of Insects," Gu Shi's story raises the question of what is male and what is female or if it is necessary at all to think in these categories. By imagining a male protagonist with a female personality inside, the story blurs gender boundaries and highlights that a man can very well be feminine. Thus, it transcends the heteronormative gender roles and representation—it constructs and deconstructs gender.

Mia Chen Ma: I think both Rike and Angela have offered some great examples about how Chinese SF works, like Chi Hui's "Nest of Insects," Gu Shi's "Reflection," and Lu Yang's artistic pieces, have addressed gender fluidity, with questioning how gender binary is completely

unnecessary and significantly preventing us from enriching the meaning of "body." It keeps producing and reproducing problematic interpretations of humanity.

I want to add that in the canon of Chinese literature, including SF, writers of different genders are being asked disparate questions when it comes to their depictions of bodily sufferings and struggles. For example, when male writers write about the suffering or transformation of the human body (usually women's bodies), it is often treated as a representation of the trauma of the society, or the traumatic past of the entire nation. And when women write about similar bodily struggles, it is often considered to be a reflection of and associated with their own personal experiences. There is an invisible discrimination that male authors write more about the society and the world, and take on more social responsibilities, whereas women writers are expected to write more about personal emotions and struggles. However, all writers, regardless of their gender identification, are actually writing about both themselves and the world. In the meantime, we should encourage more narratives from women and non-binary authors, using SF as a powerful site to initiate resistance and to clearly specify their own stance.

As Angela briefly mentioned, Lu Yang borrowed some Buddhist concepts to develop her artistic piece. In this instance, we want to address our next question: **Can the main philosophies and theories from ancient China, for example Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, be integrated into Chinese SF to imagine a more sustainable, gender-equal future?** Recently, many Chinese SF writers seem to resort to concepts and themes from ancient Chinese thoughts, to enrich the cultural profoundness of their narratives.

Regina Kanyu Wang: Influences of those ancient philosophies may not be so obvious, but instead, they have a subtle impact on Chinese culture and the daily life of Chinese people in general. We may draw from those philosophies consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes we can see Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist thoughts represented in some stories, but maybe the authors don't even think about that. Since the modernization of China, we don't really learn about those ancient philosophies in school as subjects. We do recite some of the classics, but not in a structural way at all. However, in our daily lives, we are still immersed a lot in various cultural branches influenced by those philosophies, for example Chinese medicine, Taiji (太极), Fengshui (风水) and more. They penetrate into our daily lives at such a deep level that we don't think much about them. My research interest focuses on gender and environment in Chinese SF, so here I want to focus on an important conceptual pair in ancient Chinese cosmology, *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳), which still have a huge influence in contemporary China. Dai Jinhua, who is a famous female Chinese scholar, said that female as a gender concept was constructed in China early in the twentieth century, introduced from the West during modernization; and in pre-modern China, we used *yin* and *yang* to refer to female and male, but this gender view differs a lot from the absolute gender dualism (32–33). They can represent many other conceptual pairs as well, such as darkness and light, non-living and living, river and mountain. And they are never dualistic or static, but always interdependent on and interchangeable with each other, seeking a neutral balance. In some of the Chinese SF stories, there is a tendency to show this balance, in the interaction and

interdependence of *yin* and *yang*. Those stories don't necessarily focus on gender, but they do showcase two forces interdependent on each other and seeking balance. For example, in both Nian Yu's (念语, b. 1996) "The Equilibrium Formula" (*Hengping gongshi* 衡平公式, 2018)[7] and Congyun "Mu Ming" Gu's (慕明, b.1988) "The Heart of Time" (Shijian zhi xin 时间之心, 2018),[8] both yet untranslated, there are two imagined symbiotic species living in an alien world, facing a challenge like global warming or catastrophic heat wave, which can be seen as a metaphor for climate change. Those two species have to collaborate with each other, seeking coexistence and survival in their world. I see that as a representation of seeking a balance between *yin* and *yang*.

Mia Chen Ma: There have been many confusions and even criticisms on the yin yang concept. For example, I have been asked before: "Isn't yin yang a binary itself?" But actually, it's not what Daoism refers to. James Miller's construction of "liquid ecology" might provide an apt explanation on how the yin and yang are embedded within each other, constituting liquid vitality (*qi* 气) (44). It stresses on the distribution of agency among various subjectivities, rather than separating one from another. In this instance, the circulation of liquid vitality among different entities and subjectivities constitute the core element of individuality rather than gender differences.

Echoing what Regina just said, I agree that Daoism can inspire both Chinese SF writers and SF researchers. Similar to ecofeminism, Daoism also treats nature as an important lens to look into the construction of gender and subjectivity. However, different from the ecofeminist approach, Miller clarifies that Daoism clearly specifies that the subjectivity of nature "dwell[s] within" the human body (34). And "the mode of transaction," which refers to the distribution of agency among all entities, generates creative power to achieve four important goals: transformation, alignment, prosperity, and simplicity (39–41). From this respect, Daoism conveys two important messages about gender that can often be found in Chinese SF as well: first, the uniqueness and individuality of every human being, regardless of gender, are celebrated and informed by the subjectivity of nature, and their further development depends on how the Dao is specifically constructed in each life; and second, all actions are generated by the transactional agency of Dao, which is context-specific and relies on the reactions from the various subjectivities of the world, not the gender difference. It is the circulation of liquid vitality, instead of the gender difference, that determines who we are and where we are heading. In this respect, Daoism unlocks the truly transformative power to transcend binary thinking, reshaping our understanding of the problematic discourse of gender differentiation and bias.

Yen Ooi: Yes, one of the important things about SF in terms of the Western concept in the Western genre is rationalism—to be rational in thinking, to be scientific in thinking. Rationalism in the West is very much binary, influenced by the development of Greek mythology (Hui 16–17): life/death, black/white, man/gods, etc. I think this is where we're going to get to see a lot more interesting writing coming out of Chinese SF, because Chinese SF is able to take from the non-binary of Daoism, of *yin* and *yang*, of all these kinds of ancient philosophies and thinking that can create new kinds of texts or new kinds of fiction that will generate thinking around multiplicity and diversity, while also emphasizing a balance on the ability to complement each other rather

than oppose or go against each other. I think that's a really important point in terms of ancient philosophies and thought. I also just want to quickly mention Confucianism, because it is an area that I've been researching in more detail recently. One of the really interesting things is if you take Confucius away from the inherent problems and politics of the period that he lived in—for example if you take away the issues of patriarchy and state control—what Confucius tries to teach is actually a very balanced way of thinking in terms of how humans interact with other humans and how humans interact with the world around us. It's about knowing your place in terms of your role—what your agency is, where you can influence positivity and affect that on the world. So, if we start to take everything word for word and just assume that everything that comes from the ancient times is patriarchal and is problematic and all that, we won't be able to move on. But the truth is, these philosophies and teachings have been in East Asian and Southeast Asian lives for the last three, four thousand years and they have developed themselves into a place that actually exists in modern society. So, I think there is a really good place for it in contemporary Chinese SF and that it will generate new and more positive stories coming out.

Mia Chen Ma: I think sometimes we also need to disassociate these ancient texts from their specific political and historical contexts. First and foremost, we should acknowledge that these texts might have once been produced and interpreted in a very politically driven way, but they are not entirely political and can be depoliticized. One of the most common conceptions of Confucianism is that it constitutes the dominating cultural infrastructure in China, playing a vital role in the attempt to promote a positive image of the country. We should note that such assumptions, although being partly true, easily overshadow what Confucianism may inspire us about other aspects of contemporary society, for instance, its interpretation of the sense of community and its impacts on ecology.

The re-examination of some ancient Chinese texts, including going back to our traditional cultural roots, also drives us to explore a variety of Chinese SF texts. For example, there have been many discussions about how to uncover the existence of HERstory in Chinese SF. Our next question will be: **Can the discovery/rediscovery of HERstory in Chinese SF facilitate the uprising of gender equality?**

Regina Kanyu Wang: Yes, recently I have been looking at the HERstory of Chinese SF. A few years ago, I contributed a piece on the brief history of Chinese SF, which was first translated for the Finnish fanzine *Spin* (February 2015). The English version was published in *Mithila Review* (2017) and then included in *Broken Stars* (2019, edited by Ken Liu). Later on, I found that the history was very much written in the narrative of a male dominant way. So, I composed another essay about the HERstory of Chinese SF. Actually, one of the earliest translators who brought SF into China, Xue Shaohui (薛绍徽, b. 1866–1911) was not only a female translator and intellectual, but also one of the early feminists in China. Together with her husband Chen Shoupeng (陈寿彭， b. 1855–?), Xue translated Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* into Chinese under the title *Bashiri huanyouji* (八十日环游记, 1900). In the late Qing dynasty (1840–1912), there were also examples of feminist SF, like Haitianduxiaozi's (海天独啸子, b. ?) novel *The Stone of Nüwa* (Nüwa Shi 女娲

石, 1904), in which the protagonists seek to create a female utopia and save the country, although the author seems to be a male.

Recently, there have been many exciting projects going on, including several anthologies dedicated to all-female and non-binary authors. For example, *The Way Spring Arrives and other Stories* (*Chuntian lailin de fangshi* 春天来临的方式, forthcoming 2022), co-edited by me and Yu Chen (于晨, b. 1982), is forthcoming next year with Tordotcom in English and Shanghai Literary and Arts Press in Chinese, in collaboration with Storycom (*Weixiang wenhua* 微像文化). In that anthology, we not only include all-female and non-binary authors, but also translators, essayists, editors, and artists, trying to provide a larger context of Chinese speculative fiction writing from those historically marginalized groups. Another project is called *Her* (*Ta* 她, 2021), only in Chinese now but also seeking to be published in English. It's edited by Cheng Jingbo (程婧波, b. 1983) and initiated by Ling Chen (凌晨, b. 1971), who are both established female SF writers. They focus on the thirty years of history or HERstory in Chinese SF and include representative Chinese women SF authors from the earliest ones who began to publish in around the 1980s till the very recent years. And one other project is edited by Chen Qiufan (陈楸帆, b. 1981), which is a four-volume book including a series of women authors' stories, named *Her Science Fiction* (*Ta kehuan* 她科幻, 2021). More and more projects in the same vein are in the planning stage, and at least one Chinese female SF anthology is being translated into Japanese via Future Affairs Administration (*Weilai shiwu guanliju* 未来事务管理局). All those different projects are suddenly emerging because now we are at the point when feminism is a heated topic in China, not only within the SF community, but also in the larger society. Also, I want to point out that someone may say "Okay, yeah, but there have never been all-male anthologies in Chinese SF," but the truth is that they used to publish anthologies featuring only male authors but were not marketed as all-male projects. Such books are still being published these days. It doesn't mean that it's wrong, just that we should pay more attention to gender balance. So, I see those book projects featuring all-female and nonbinary authors as a manifestation. This year, I have been very lucky to be supported by the Applied Imagination Fellowship Program at the Center of Science and Imagination of Arizona State University, in which I plan to do a series of interviews with female authors, editors, fans, and more from the Chinese SF community, to discuss with them ideas about gender, the future, and nature. This is also related to my PhD project as part of the CoFUTURES project at the University of Oslo. I want to feature more female faces for the international audience. I'm really looking forward to that!

Mia Chen Ma: It is so interesting when you mention how the male authors complain about the lack of anthologies of male authors, being completely unaware of their long-standing publishing privileges. This is further evidence of the importance and urgency of discussing gender issues in contemporary Chinese SF. **Our last question wants to address how Chinese SF possibly un/mis-gendered humans, as gender studies grows to utilise gender in wider theories**.

Angela Chan: I think about this question in terms of what is human in the first place as well. I look to an artist who I believe poses very interesting questions to ask right now on this issue we're

raising. Sin Wai Kin, formerly known as Victoria Sin, is a London-based multimedia artist using SF within their performances, as well as moving image films and writing. These works challenge what the normative processes of desire and identification and objectification do for us, when we rethink what binaries mean as we write our own narratives. I want to refer to what others have been talking about in terms of Taoist allegories, and I quote Sin that these "undo binaries that have to do with just being human. So, they're not only about gender, but also thinking about life, death, self and the other, dreaming and waking." Many of the characters that Sin fictions in their narratives, especially in their performances and video work, namely *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts* (2020–2021), are constantly evolving and Sin takes a lot of inspiration from Octavia E. Butler's notion of creating change by storytelling. Pointing out another of Sin's projects, *Dream Babes* (2016–present) they have been putting on workshops and SF reading groups, centering queer people of colour. I will read a sentence from the introduction: "The speculative imagination of *Dream Babes* has included drag as embodied speculative fiction, clubs as queer heterotopias, pornography as pedagogy, and queer collectivity as the means of survival." When we really think about what it means to have plural forms and narratives by a diverse range of voices in SF, this is what I really look to and feel empowered by. In *Dream Babes Zine 2.0* (2019), I interviewed Xia Jia (夏笳, b. 1984), who is a Chinese SF writer, and she talks with me about her writing processes. So I think about your question, Mia, in a way that reassesses that feminism—we need trans-feminism that is inclusive of all genders.

Thinking further about what types of justice we want to reach, beyond the human as well, when we think about a more cosmological sense, it's really fun! Another artist, Angela Su, who's a Hong Kong-based practitioner, works a lot with bacteria. Actually, before the COVID pandemic happened, she opened her show called *Cosmic Call* (2019), which looks at viruses and bodies changing. She imagines how external influences of bacteria are coming from extraterrestrial life forms. When we play with SF in this kind of way, we not only speculate what it's like inside our bodies but also outside them and beyond the planet as well. I think it's really interesting that we can bring in the bodily, environmental, and medical explorations to interact with our day to day in a more holistic way.

Yen Ooi: I think it's also important to add that the issues of gender and body that we talked about today aren't new to Chinese literature. The Chinese legend, The Butterfly Lovers, is a classic example that deals with all of that, and more. In a quick summary, it is a story about a woman who pretends to be a man in order to pursue an education. She falls in love with her roommate but isn't able to tell him. After they complete their course, she returns home to be betrothed, and when her roommate learns that she's actually a woman and realises that he is in love with her too, he is too late. He dies, heartbroken, and on her wedding day, she stops by his grave and jumps in to join him. After the chaos, right in the end, butterflies appear. This story that originated over 2,000 years ago and has seen version after version throughout the years, engages directly with all the points that we talked about today. And this can act as an important reminder to us that concepts of gender and bodily fluidity aren't new or modern.

Mia Chen Ma: I think like Angela just emphasized, and all our other speakers have also similarly touched upon, the gender issue is never just about gender differentiation or gender bias. It has always been associated with all the other marginalized groups within our society, being embedded within all the inequalities that are prevalent in every aspect of our contemporary life.

It is utterly important that we call for a more inclusive approach when analyzing gender issues, always probing into those invisible yet powerful underlying contexts. A broader approach will guide us to achieve gender equality, navigating toward a more sustainable future.

Notes

1. The novel was originally published in two parts: *Wandering Maerth* (*Liulang Maesi* 流浪玛厄斯, 2011) and *Return to Charon* (*Hui dao Karong* 回到卡戎, 2012). In 2016, it was republished in its entirety under the title *Wandering Under the Vault of Heaven* (*Liulang cangqiong* 流浪苍穹). Ken Liu's English translation titled *Vagabonds* appeared in 2020.
2. In May 2005, the short story was originally published in China's leading SF magazine *SF World* (*Kehuan shijie* 科幻世界). Ken Liu's English translation is included in his anthology *Invisible Planets* (2016).
3. In September 2012, the short story first appeared in *SF World*. In January 2015, the English translation by Carmen Yiling Yan and Ken Liu was published in *Clarkesworld Magazine* (http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/zhang_01_15/, accessed 16 Sept. 2021).
4. In December 2012, Hao Jingfang posted her novella online on the student's forum of Tsinghua University (*Shuimu Qinghua* 水木清华). In 2014, it was issued in two Chinese literature magazines, *The Literature Breeze Appreciates* (*Wenyi fengshang* 文艺风赏) and *Fiction Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报). Ken Liu's English translation was published in *Uncanny Magazine* in 2015 (http://uncannymagazine.com/article/folding-beijing-2/, accessed 16 Sept. 2021) and was reprinted in his anthology *Invisible Planets* in 2016.
5. In December 2008, the story was originally published in *SF World*; thus far, it is still to be translated into English.
6. In July 2013, the story was originally published in the magazine *Super Nice* (*Chaohaokan* 超好看). Ken Liu's English translation appeared in his anthology *Broken Stars* (2019) and was reprinted in December 2020 in *Future Science Fiction Digest*.
7. The story was originally published in Chinese in Nian Yu's individual collection *Lilian is Everywhere* (*Lilian wuchubuzai* 莉莉安无处不在, 2018) and translated into English by Ru-Ping Chen under another title, forthcoming in Yu, Chen, and Wang, Regina Kanyu editors. *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories*. Tordotcom, 2022.
8. The story was originally published in Chinese in *Time Non-Exist* (*Shijian bucunzai* 时间不存在, 2018), not available in English.

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