

A Preliminary Study in Impacts of Soviet & Russian Science Fictions on Creations of Chinese Science Fiction Writers

Zhang Yufei

Shanghai Foreign Language School, Shanghai, China

ABSTRACT. Soviet science fictions in the 1950s were main sources of Chinese science fictions translated. Not only works of well-known famous Soviet masters including Alexei Nikolayevich Tolstoy, Alexander Romanovich Beliaev and Ivan Antonovich Yefremov were published but also theoretical works like *On Soviet Science Fiction Readings* were published in China were translated, throwing profound impacts on Chinese science fictions. The Paper attempts to restore Soviet Russian science fictions to their own historical culture and historical background on the base of exploration, collection and collation of historical documents, and put such documents into overall development of Chinese science fictions for research, with the hope of exploring the impacts of Soviet and Russian science fictions on creation groups of Chinese science fiction writers by analyzing such important period in the history of Chinese and Russian science fictions.

KEYWORDS: Soviet-russian science fictions; Chinese science fiction works; Sino-soviet cultural relations

1. Primary Study in Introduction to Soviet & Russian Science Fictions

1.1 Science Fiction Prototypes in Early Utopian Fictions

Sino-Russian cultural exchanges started at the end of the 17th century. The “Chinese Fashion” rose in the 18th Century was an important beginning of Sino-Russian cultural exchanges. Tsar Peter I officially delegated an Orthodox Mission to China in 1715 upon the consent of Emperor Kangxi because of special geographical relation between China and Russia. In 1808, Nikita Yakovlevich Bichurin (Никита Яковлевич Бичурин), the “Founder of Russian Sinology” arrived in Beijing. He worked hard to learn Chinese and Manchu, collected and translated Chinese cultural classics during his stay in China. He wrote nearly a hundred articles and works for ancient Chinese historical and contemporary society (Qing Dynasty) as well as the history and geography of Chinese frontiers after returning to his country, paving the way for future generations of Russian sinologists. Subsequently, abundant Chinese literary works from Europe were translated and published in Russia and distributed in large quantities. The trades between the two countries after the conclusion of *Treaty of Kiakhta* in the sixth year of Yongzheng Reign further stimulated Russian interests in Chinese goods and artworks. Tsar Peter I and “Enlightened Monarch” Catherine II, two Russian emperors, who were deeply influenced by “Chinese Fashion” in the West, showed special preference in Chinese culture, promoting the formation of “Chinese Style” in Russia in the 18th century.

1.2 Sino-Russian Exchanges “Learning from Soviet Russia” under the Soviet Regime
On November 6, 1917, the cruiser “Aurora” berthing on the riverside of Neva River was ordered to fire a signal to attack the Winter Palace. At 10:00 in the morning, November 7, Vladimir Ilich Lenin drafted the *Statement to Russian Citizens* and announced to the world that the Soviet had been in power. The October Revolution and the establishment of the Soviets gave Russian mass a reason to expect a better future. The masses believed that a new world would be around the corner in the near future with the approach of the new era, and everything was possible. When it came to creative fantasies, the writers enthusiastically engaged in the creations of scientific literatures under the background of enthusiastic era.

On July 25, 1919, Galahan, The People's Deputy Commissioner of the Soviet Russia concluded the first declaration to China, announcing abrogating unequal treaties between Tsarist Government and China and abandoning all the rights of Tsarist Government to invade China. The victory of the October Revolution enabled Chinese people to expect new hope, emerging the tendency of “learning from soviet Russia”.

Sino-Russian exchanges started with new culture as the content after the October Revolution. In September

1920, Qu Qiubai visited and interviewed in Russia as a special correspondent for *Morning Post*, a paper press founded in Beijing. *LA JEUNESSE*, the magazine edited by Liang Qichao, opened up the column on “Russian Studies” debuted in Vol. 8 No. 1 (September 1920). In October 1921, a special issue of “Russian Studies” was issued in *The Short Story Magazine*.

In August 1920, Mao Zedong, He Shuheng, et al., initiated the organization titled with “Russian Research Society” in Hunan, proposing “The Purpose of Studying Everything in Russia” and actively advocated the work-study program in Russia. Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Deng Xiaoping studied in Moscow from 1921 to 1925.

However, the translations of Russian literatures started late in China, and the most frequently translated works were translated into classical Chinese based on Japanese and English. In 1920, Qu Qiubai edited and published *The Collection of Russian Masters' Short Stories*. From the beginning of the late Qing Dynasty to the May 4th Movement in 1919, and over 80 works of dozens of well-known Russian writers including Pushkin, Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov, Van Sergeevich Turgenev, Lev Tolstoy, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, Maxim Gorky, Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin and Antlev were translated.

1.2 Red Science Fictions in “Passion Era” under the Sino Soviet Union

The founding of New China and the establishment of Sino-Soviet Union Alliance consolidated the development of Sino-Soviet Union friendship. On October 5, 1949, the Federation of Sino-Soviet Union Friendship Association (SSUFA) was established. In December 1949, Mao Zedong personally visited the Soviet Union and concluded a new Sino-Soviet Union treaty. On February 14, 1950, China and the Soviet Union concluded the *Treaty for Sino-Soviet Union Alliance Friendship Alliance and Mutual Assistance*.

SSUFA published over 40 supplements of *Soviet Studies* in the *People's Daily* before and after its establishment, and founded *Sino-Soviet Friendship Association Newsletter*. On November 6, 1949, the association journal named after Sino-Soviet Union Friendship (SSUF) was officially launched, and the autograph of Mao Zedong was published in the inaugural issue of SSUF: “I hope the friendship between the two peoples of the Soviet Union and China will greatly develop and consolidate.”

The exchange and cooperation in translation and publication aspect was also one of important fields of cultural exchanges between the Soviet Union and China. The number of Soviet books translated and published in China after the founding of New China increased sharply with the development of China's publishing industry. There had been 5183 translated and published Soviet books since the founding of New China in 1953. The proportion of Soviet books in all foreign books translated in China increased on year-by-year basis. The period for translations of Soviet science fictions mainly ranged from 1956 to 1960. The number of Soviet science fictions translated during the period approximately hit 50 or 60 books according to incomplete statistics. Compared to other types of literatures, this number seemed to be too many, but it was more than two-thirds of the total amount of science fictions translated in China then.

1.3 Influences of Science Fictions on China Before and after “Rebirth Era” of the Soviet Union

Scientific studies were hard to be practiced with severely harsh period of Soviet politics in the 1970s, the scientists with different political views, including leaders in some fields, were fired, exiled or imprisoned. Works of Mikhail Bulgakov and Yevgeny Ivanovich Zamiatin were banned from publication. In December 1991, the Soviet Union was disintegrated into 15 countries. Russia inherited most of the territory and economic strength of the Soviet Union, whereas the science fiction failed to be recovered till a long time after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The writers didn't access to Western science fictions when they created science fictions prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Western thoughts often penetrated into the iron curtain. While quite a few Soviet science fiction works like *Umannost Andromedy*, which have been translated into English and published successfully. Modern Russian science fictions are natural heritages of science fictions in the era of the Soviet Union. Since Moscow and St. Petersburg are the centers of Russian cultural publishing, Russian is still the dominant language of Russia.

2. Preliminary Study in Soviet-Russian Culture in Chinese Science Fictions

2.1 Scientific Enlightenments in Early Scientific Fiction Works

According to current records, the first science fiction introduced into China was *A Sleep of 70 Years*, the short story of Washington Irving published in the *ShenBao* on May 28, 1872.

The *Undersea Travel* published an advertising in *Xinmin Journal* on October 2, 1902, was labeled as “Science Fiction”: The book, the work of a great French scientist, is featured with marvelous structure, distant and profound expectation, being worthy of rare masterpiece. The unique submarine world described is extraordinary, outstanding, dazzling and miraculous”.

The Journal New Novels started to be published soon. In addition to two science fiction novels named after *The Future of New China* and *The Diary of End of the World* written by Liang Qichao, another science fiction translation was the *Undersea Travel* mentioned in the advertising of *Xinmin Journal*. The picture on the first page of the title page of the *New Novels* was Russian novelist Tolstoy, reflecting the emphasis of Chinese literati on Russian literature then.

The *Undersea Travel* officially marked the commencement of the translation of “science fictions”. Since then, many important newspapers and magazines in the late Qing Dynasty including *Novel with Embroidered Portrait*, *Merging New Novels*, *The Short Story Magazine*, etc were published with translated scientific novels, important writers including Chen Lengxue, Wu Jianren, Liang Qichao, Lu Xun, Bao Tianxiao, Zhou Guikong and Xu Nianci also participated in the translation of scientific fictions. The creation of Chinese science fictions gradually took shape under the influence of the translation of science fictions.

2.2 Late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China: Exploration on Original Generation of Science Fiction Writers

To trace the starting point of Chinese science fictions, Ye Yonglie, a well-known Chinese science fiction writer, made a research on abundant science fictions created in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, and finally concluded that *The Moon Colony Novel* written by Huangjiang Diaosou in 1904 was the first original science fiction in China.

The science and democracy were personified as Mr. Sai and Mr. De (“Mr. Sai” denoted the Science, “Mr. De” represented the “Democracy”) during the period of the May 4th Movement. Science fictions soon were involved in this new trend of thoughts. Mao Dun firstly compiled science fiction like *Hatched Egg in 300 Years*. Shen Congwen imitated *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and wrote *Alice's Travel to China*. The *Cat Country*, a work of Lao She, was also written in the period. The feature of these works was that they ridiculed current situation by virtue of science fictions without throwing great significance for the literary creation of science itself. Afterwards, the science fictions were gradually marginalized and ignored in the context of Chinese Civil War and Anti-Japanese War.



Under the Arctic Author: Gu Junzheng Shanghai: Culture & Life Publishing House Image Source: www.kongfz.com

At the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War, Gu Junzheng, a popular science writer, insisted on creating *Under the Arctic*, the first collection of science fiction in the history of Chinese science fictions. It is worth mentioning that the famous writer Xu Dishan published his last novel *Bottom Gill for Iron Fish* during the Anti-Japanese

Published by Francis Academic Press, UK

War in February 1940 in the *Gale*.

2.3 The First Trend of Science Fictions in the 1950s: the Rise of Science Fiction Writers in China and Soviet Russia

China issued the call to “March to Science” after the founding of the People's Republic of China. In 1956, China formulated *Prospective Long-term 1956-1967 Plan for Development of Science and Technology*, making the science fictions spring up with enthusiasm for science and literatures. The science fictions in the Soviet Union in the 1950s became main sources of science fiction translation in China. Such science fictions into “science fictions” in Russian language НАУЧНАЯ ФАНТАСТИКА were translated as the “scientific fiction” previously used.

As an integral part of nationally led cultural development then, the translation and introduction of Soviet science fictions were not only numerous but also systematic. Not only the works of well-known writers including Alexei Nikolayevich Tolstoy, Alexander Romanovich Beliaev, Ivan Antonovich Yefremov and other famous scholars were published but also theoretical works including *On Soviet Science Fiction Readings* were translated, delivering profound impact on the creation of Chinese science fiction. The enlightenment reading materials of several generations of science fiction writers like Ye Yonglie and Liu Cixin, are all Soviet science fictions.

In 1950, Zhang Ran published *Sleepwalking in Solar System*, a science fairy tale which was regarded as the symbol of the science fiction in New China. Factually, the term “Science Fiction” was used as early as in the report of Herbert George Wells in *ShenBao* in 1946. It was the first time that the science fiction appeared as a kind of scientifically fantasy novel. The debut of the science fiction as the literature genre was found in *The Missing of Engineers* in the novel by Soviet writer Sabarin in the magazine *Middle School Students*, which was translated and published by Fu Qike in August 1948. This novel was considered to be earliest one with the mark of science fiction in the history of discovery.

2.4 Restart of Science Fiction Creation in 1980s: Relevancy of New Generation of Science Fiction Writers in the Soviet Russia

Science fictions in China rose again in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. The calls of Party Central Committee, “March to Science” and “Dual-Hundred Policy” thrived the science, literatures and arts. The ultra leftist trend of thought violently hit the science and literary fronts in the middle of the 1960s. Firstly, the slogan with “Emphasis on Thirteen Years Records of Socialist Revolution and Construction” was used to rule out the science fiction creation; then, the culture in the Cultural Revolution was withered, and science fictions were also completely inhibited and strangled.

It was called the “Spring of Science Fictions” during the period from 1979 to 1982. The first generation of science fiction writers came back. The young writers represented by Ye Yonglie emerged, and they jointly achieved golden age in historically true sense of Chinese science fictions. The science fictions like *Literatures and Arts for Teenagers*, *Children's Era*, *Science Pictorials*, etc. were published in regular magazines, a large number of specialized science fiction magazines represented by *Science Literature*, “Four Journals and One Newspaper” after 1979 (*Science Literature*, *Wisdom Tree*, *Science Fiction Ocean*, *Science Times*, *Science Fiction Newspaper*) and *Science Fiction World*, *Science Literature Series*, etc. were founded successively. More than 300 works were published in 1981. In 1978, *The Dead Light on Coral Island*, the work of Tong Enzheng, was published in *The People's Literature*, being the first time that science fiction was published in top-level literary journal in China.

In addition to the publication of original works of Chinese science fiction writers, journals also vigorously translated and introduced foreign excellent science fiction novels, and latest developments in the field of world science fiction creation were continued to be concerned. The translators of science fictions shifted from poets and writers in the past to foreign language graduates during the period. The trend during the period was inclined to translate western science fictions compared to main translations of Soviet science fictions in the 1950s, especially the classic works of the “Golden Age” in the United States began to be introduced. Chinese readers got access to *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and similar works then.

The number of science fiction works yearly from July 1979 to July 1980 was far greater than the sum of 30 years after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Various forms of science fiction sprang up in an endless stream.

In 1980, Qian Xuesen, a highly respected scientist, said, “Some popular science papers and popular science fictions, in my opinion, are founded with some problems for thoughts and scientific contents now”. He firmly opposed that science fiction was classified into the “Literature” rather than the “Science”. By 1983, the criticism on the “science fiction” gradually merged with the “Elimination of Spiritual Contamination”, and the tone of criticism was gradually severe. Consequently, the translation and creation of science fiction suffered from different degrees of attacks, and the development fell into silence again.

3. Research on Traces of Soviet and Chinese Science Fiction Works

3.1 Analysis on Popular Science Function of Soviet and Chinese Science Fiction Works

One of popular science popularization works in the Soviet Union was the general scientific literary works represented by Mikhail Il'in, whose works were introduced to China as early as in the 1930s.

Mikhail Il'in, a former Soviet science writer, was the original author of Russian popular science work *Hundred Thousand Why*. Mikhail Il'in began to create scientific literature and art works since 1927. *No-night Day* of Mikhail Il'in was published in 1927. Afterwards, Mikhail Il'in worked out *The Sun on the Table* (*Солнце на столе*) (1927), *What Time Is It Now* (*Который час*) (1927), *Black and White* (*Черным по белому*) (1928), *Hundred Thousand Why* (*Сто тысяч почему*) (1929), and other dozens of popular science literature works. The translated Chinese versions of Mikhail Il'in was *The Story of Five-Year Plan* translated by Wu Langxi from New Life Bookstore.

The outstanding feature of science fiction theories in the Soviet Union was that science literatures and arts were regarded as artistic extensions of scientific production instead of complete artistic creations. In *On Scientific Literature and Art Books and Corresponding Natures* of Mikhail Il'in, he pointed out that the purpose of science and literature was to serve life. He thought that the most ideal scientific literature and art creators have both the statuses of scientists and writers, and he appealed more scientists to devote themselves to the field of literature and use artistic forms to promote scientific knowledge

Gu Junzheng had been focusing on the development of popular science books for over 40 years since 1934. He published *More Confused While Thinking* (1935), *The Wonder for Science* (1941) and *Electronic Girl* (1941). In 1939, Gu Junzheng and Mr. Sophie co-founded the science magazine named after *Science Interest*. Later, the scientific sketches developed by him were also published in the *Weekly*, *New Culture*, *Science Public* and other magazines over and over again, and such works were synthesized into *From Atomic Era to Oceanic Era* and published. The rise of “Scientific Sketch” also drove Gu Junzheng to start the creation of science fictions. The novels of Gu Junzheng marked the highest achievement of science fiction then by virtue of his rich experience, Gu Junzheng had created four science fictions since 1939, i.e. *The Dream of Peace*, *The Plague in London*, *Under the Arctic* and *Sexual Change*, establishing his position in the science fiction circle. Gu Junzheng still devoted himself to publishing natural science books of teenagers insisted on writing some scientific sketches after the liberation.,

For the creation of the science fiction in the form of science popularization, China was largely influenced by the former Soviet Union especially in the 1950s and 1960s, the golden age of Sino Soviet relations and cultural ties between the two countries were increasingly closer. The science fiction works mainly focused on the science popularization, and the sciences and technologies were introduced to readers in a popular way during that period.

3.2 Science and Technology Worship in Soviet and Chinese Science Fiction Works

Isaac Asimov, a Russian American science fiction writer, once said: “Science fiction writers are trying to depict computers, rockets and nuclear weapons while working hard on realism, and they are exactly the same as the computers, rockets and nuclear weapons appearing within 10 years. Consequently, the real life in the 1950s and 1960s was strikingly in line with the scene depicted in Campbell-style science fiction in 1940s.” As he said, many researchers constantly tried to achieve those forward-looking designs in the science fictions.

As early as 50 years ago, Isaac Asimov raised the idea of the smart house that Bill Gates lives in now. The technology of satellite communication was put into practice in twenty years after Arthur Charles Clarke, a famous British science fiction writer, raised the concept of satellite communication. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth and 22nd anniversary of the death of Konstantin Eduardovich, a Russian science fiction writer, his prediction finally came true, and the first man-made earth satellite was launched into the space. Four years later, Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin, a Soviet citizen, realized the first space flight of the mankind. On March

18, 1965, Alexei Arkhipovich Leonov, a Soviet cosmonaut, accepted the mission to enter the vast space in the “Ascending No. 2” spacecraft, and walked out of the capsule for 24 minutes, becoming the first person on the earth to walk in the space.

Han Song, a well-known science fiction writer, once wrote an article introducing that the most influential one was the science fiction work *Roam of Elfin to the Future* of Ye Yonglie. He thought that one of characteristics of the fiction was that technology dominated everything. On February 5, 2019, the movie *Wandering the Earth*, adapted from the novel with identical name written by Cixin Liu in 2007, was released in mainland China, telling the story that the sun was going to be destroyed, and the earth tried its best to build a planetary engine to drive the earth out of the solar system and find a new homeland. The cool gray hue in the picture seemed to bring us back to the heavy industry period in the Soviet Union, and the words “Hard Science Fiction” which had been silent for years were back to the visions of the masses.

3.3 Social Reflection in Anti-Utopian Works of Russia and China

During the reign of Stalin, a group of Russian intellectuals created anti-utopian works with the rights endowed to them by their own knowledge and writing to awaken the masses. They tried to fight against national utopian spirit with their real soul. Yevgeny Ivanovich Zamiatin and Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov were the representatives.

Yevgeny Ivanovich Zamiatin (Евгений Иванович Замятин, February 1, 1884-March 10, 1937), a Soviet writer in the silver age, was a shipbuilding engineer graduating from the Faculty of Shipbuilding, Peter the Great Saint-Petersburg Polytechnic University. In 1920, he completed his masterpiece *We*.

We, as originator of anti-utopian novels, reflected on the relations between human beings and the whole society in the post-industrial society. In 1932, the British writer Aldous Leonard Huxley published *Brave New World*, demonstrating the strangling of industrialization and machines on human natures; in 1949, George Orwell published *1984*, depicting a suffocating totalitarian society. The three novels threw close concerns to the issues like individual and freedom, and contained the elements of political and national fables. They are called the “Anti-utopian Trilogy” in the literary world in the 20th Century.

Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov (1891-1940), another important writer in the “Silver Age”, was regarded as the pioneer of magic realism. The master with ill-fated and suffering life, created numerous works, of which *Master & Margarita*, full of absurdity and fantasy, was the best. Bulgakov published the short stories *Evil Egg* and *Heart of a Dog* in 1925 for science fiction.

In China, Lao She, a well-known writer, wrote *Cat Country*, the only science fiction in his life, in the face of “Military and Diplomatic Failure” of China after the September 18th Incident. This anti-utopian fiction was serially published in *Modern*, a magazine from 1932 to 1933. In August 1933, *Cat Country* was published by Modern Bookstore.

At the beginning of this controversial work, Lao She was quite satisfied. However, he frankly reviewed and reflected on himself in *How Did I Write Cat Country* in two years later, and admitted that *Cat Country* was a failure. Different from the cold reception of *Cat Country* in China, the book was deeply concerned and welcomed in the Western world. *Cat Country* was translated into five languages and eight versions during such two decades from the 1960s to 1980s. The translation of James Du was deemed as the earliest one.

Compared to utopian works, anti-utopian works presented miserable place full of ugliness. The society was full of uncontrollable maladies even seemingly peaceful, like the class contradiction, resources shortage, crime and persecution. In anti-utopian society described in the works, the material civilization overflowed and was superior to the spiritual civilization, the spiritual dependence was controlled by the material, and the human spirit failed to have real freedom in the highly developed technical society. However, publication and comments of such works with obvious critical consciousness in both China and Russia would cause numerous disputes.

4. Conclusions

The success of the October Revolution contributed to frequent exchanges between China and Russia in terms of contents of new culture throughout the history. As early as 1934, Chen Wangdao, a famed educator, set up a column of “Science Essay” in the semimonthly *Taibai* magazine to write science popularization due to the influences of popular science writers from Soviet Union like Mikhail Il'in then. In the early days of the founding of The People's Republic of China, abundant Soviet science fictions were translated and published. The positive role of Soviet science fiction in China promoted the emergence of a number of Chinese native science fiction

writers and works to a certain extent then. The blooming generation of science fiction writers including Zheng Wenguang, Tong Enzheng, Xiao Jianheng, Liu Shixing, Chi Shuchang, Ye Zhishan have deep professional backgrounds and good literary literacy similar to main Soviet science fiction writers after the founding of New China.

Soviet Russian science fiction works opened a door for new science fictions in New China. China spawned a group of science fiction writers including science fiction researchers like Ye Yonglie and Wu Yan and a group of reserve science fiction forces like Cixin Liu and Han Song after active creations of bloom generation of science fiction writers, laying the foundation for bright future of China's science fiction base.

It is certainly that the door of Chinese science fictions started from the introduction of Soviet and Russian science fictions. Soviet science fictions themselves are of unique vitality. Although there is significant gap between the spread of Soviet science fiction in China at current stage and prosperity period, it is to understand important role of Soviet science fictions in the development of Chinese science fiction no matter how the history changes. Presently, the creation of Chinese science fiction is to refer to creation characteristics of foreign works, combine with the characteristics of China and Chinese nation, adapt to the development level of the times and science and technology, vigorously develop the creation of science fiction works, and present good science fiction works to Chinese readers while introducing western mainstream science popularization works.

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