Conflicting Times
Erik Mo Welin

Conflicting Times

Multiple Temporalities in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction
Abstract


This dissertation explores the intersection of temporality and politics in contemporary Chinese science fiction. Building on previous research on Chinese science fiction, science fiction studies, as well as narrative theory and historical theory, the investigation focuses on eight key texts written by the writers Han Song, Liu Cixin, and Baoshu. Mainly approaching the texts through the conceptual and analytical tools of multiple temporalities and temporal orders, the investigation discusses how these texts reconfigure time and narrate conflicts between different temporalities, as well as how these temporal antagonisms take on a political significance in the context of post-89 China.

Whereas discussions on temporality since 1989 has often been framed in terms of a crisis of historical consciousness and a diminishing future-horizon, which François Hartog has defined as an age of “presentism,” Chinese official discourse has continued to be dominated by a teleological and highly future-oriented conception of time. Approaching science fiction as a temporal genre this study explores how Chinese science fiction has reconfigured temporality in the post-89 period, and challenged the hegemonic teleological temporal order associated with the politics of nation-building.

The analysis begins by analyzing how the texts narrate variations of non-progressive temporalities, including a cyclical temporal order of recurrence and a presentist temporal order, that conflict with the teleological temporal order. In the following chapter, the study focuses on how the most successful Chinese science fiction novel, The Three Body Problem Trilogy, narrates a conflict between an apocalyptic temporal order and the teleological temporal order represented by the discourse of “The End of History.” The next two chapters focuses on how alternate histories introduce a contingent temporal order that disrupt teleological time, and how the existential time of the protagonists relate to various temporalities in the texts.

More broadly, the investigation suggests that contemporary Chinese science fiction can be read as an expression of multiple temporalities in the post-89 context, which challenges and disrupts hegemonic discourses, and reveal these texts as ideological battlegrounds for multiple conceptions of time and timeframes.

Keywords: Science fiction, Chinese literature, Temporality, Time travel, Alternate history, Apocalypse, Chronopolitics

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URN urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-501805 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-501805)
In memory of my father
## Abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>SF</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<td>CR</td>
<td>The Cultural Revolution</td>
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Finally, this work is finished. In the words of Mike Scott: “it’s been a long way to the light.” Many are the people who have contributed to my work with this project over the years, and here is where I would like to express my gratitude to those who helped and supported me throughout this exciting but often difficult journey.

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¹ This term is almost untranslatable. But one could do worse than to translate the term as “predestined relationship”.
immensely stimulating graduate seminar at Harvard during my stay at Wellesley in 2022. Thanks also to Baoshu, who generously shared his manuscripts with me, and provided me with valuable information regarding the publication history of his stories.

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And finally, to Wang Rui, for her love, support and for always believing in me.

True genesis is (keeping our fingers crossed) not at the beginning, but at the end.²

Uppsala, June 2023

² More will be said about this phrase in this chapter 6.
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Note on characters, translation, and transliteration

All translations from the primary sources are my own unless otherwise indicated. As for Chinese characters, I have used both jianti 简体 (simplified) and fanti 繁体 (traditional), in accordance with the script used in the original texts, alternatively the script that would have been employed in the historical context discussed. I use Hanyu pinyin for transliteration of all words, except for cases where there are other established conventional transliterations available. In cases where English translations of Chinese book titles are available, I have used the existing translation unless otherwise indicated.
1. Introduction

I wonder, in the palaces in the heavens,  
What year is this night?  
Su Shi³

The world rolls on,  
Time presses.  
Mao Zedong, 1963⁴

In her book on Western science fiction and temporality, *Postmodern Science Fiction and the Temporal Imagination*, Elana Gomel writes: “As the dream of progress is being buried deeper and deeper in the rubble of World War II, the Holocaust, the collapse of Communism and 9/11, time becomes an enemy.”⁵ Gomel's study is one of numerous attempts to make sense of the temporal confusion in the “Western” temporal imagination in recent decades. Variously discussed in terms of “posthistory”/“the end of history,” or “the postmodern” (which, as some theorists have argued, emphasizes the “spatial” rather than the temporal dimension)⁶ temporality appears to have become increasingly difficult to grasp.⁷ Historian François Hartog argues that 1989 marks the end of a “regime of historicity” in which a modern regime of historicity generally oriented towards the future gives way to a “presentism,” “the sense that only the present exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now.”⁸ Arguing along similar lines, while

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⁷ For a summary on this discussion, including conceptualizations of “posthistory” and the “postmodern”, see Ursula K. Heise, *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism*, vol. 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11-74.
also making note of increasing centrality of discourses of collective memory in Western societies, Aleida Assmann registers what she calls a continental shift in the structure of Western temporality, in which “the future has lost much of its luminosity, the past has more and more invaded our consciousness.” Despite their inherent differences, what all these diagnoses have in common is a sense of temporal flux and confusion and, perhaps most significantly, a diminished future horizon.

What should we make of China in relation to this discussion? 1989 certainly shares the symbolic significance in the Chinese context, marking the year of the crackdown on the student demonstrations in Beijing, which also appeared to mark the diminishing of at least a certain kind of future, as the violent repression caused “the collapse of idealism and optimism as well as a pervasive disillusionment with communism – or, in general, a political utopianism instituted by the state.” Cultural theorists have also pointed to the 1990s as a crucial turning point in Chinese politics and culture, above all characterized by “pluralization,” which entailed a more multifaceted cultural landscape containing more diverse temporal discourses, not the least represented by the entertainment industry, which often served to disrupt “national space and time created by the official media.” Yet as recently as in 2021, at the centennial of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, the chairman of the CCP and the president of China Xi Jinping, could speak with confidence when he encouraged the Chinese people to “put conscious effort into learning from history to create a bright future,” while reminding a population of 1.4 billion people that “the 100-year-long history of the Party, and the more than 70-year-long history of the People’s Republic of China all provide ample evidence that without the Communist Party of China, there would be no new China.” In China, it seemed, “the future” had not lost its luminosity just yet, and contrary to what Francis Fukuyama had predicted, the student demonstrations at Tiananmen, which were unfolding at the very moment when Fukuyama was drafting his influential article in the Spring of 1989, had not inevitably led to the pressure political change and a move towards liberal democracy.

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12 Sun, “Media Events or Media Stories?: Time, Space and Chinese (Trans)nationalism,” 26.
As it happens, 1989 does not only mark a watershed in Chinese and World history, but also happens to be the year the literary scholar Mingwei Song has pointed to as the backdrop of the emergence of what he called “The New Wave” of Chinese science fiction literature. Beginning as “a fairly marginal phenomenon” in the 1990s, contemporary Chinese science fiction has by the time of writing grown into one of the most significant literary phenomena in contemporary Chinese culture. As should perhaps already be clear, I do not consider the emergence of this body of texts at the time of this temporal flux as a mere coincidence. Building on a large body of scholarship on Western science fiction, where this genre’s close relationship to time and conceptions of historicity is well-established, I argue in the following chapters that the emergence of science fiction in post-89 China can be discussed in relationship to the presence of multiple temporalities and timeframes that emerged in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown and the cultural and political transformations that occurred subsequently during the 1990s. However, in contrast to the Western context, where the temporal shift occurs in relationship to a certain crisis of the future, the continental shift in the Chinese context has not occurred in the context of a significantly diminished future horizon. Throughout the post-89 period, in fact, despite a significant temporal flux beneath official discourse, China has remained dominated by a teleological temporal order, and teleological time (i.e., “the future”) has remained central to the project of nation building and the political regime to legitimize its power.

The remaining dominance of such a teleological temporal order and the inextricable relationship between the nation and “the future” shifts the focus away from discussions of “postmodernity” and “modernity” and more towards the politics of time, or chronopolitics; namely, the way that time and history

18 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination; Gary Westfahl, George Edgar Slusser, and David Leiby, Worlds Enough and Time: Explorations of Time in Science Fiction and Fantasy, Contributions to the study of science fiction and fantasy, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002). See also “Future History” in Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).
19 The continuous presence of such a teleological temporal order distinguishes China not only from the “Western” context but also from post-Soviet Russia, which some theorists have diagnosed as being caught in a kind of “time out of time”, more closely defined as “a rupture in the ordinary temporality that entirely dispenses with the teleological horizon of politics.” See Sergei Prozorov, “Russian Postcommunism and the End of History,” Studies in East European Thought 60, no. 3 (2008): 207. See also Kevin M.F. Platt, “Commemorating the End of History: Timelessness and Power in Contemporary Russia,” in Power and Time: Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History, ed. Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).
20 For discussions about the regime’s reliance on teleological time, see Yanjie Wang, “Heterogeneous Time and Space: Han Shaogong’s Rethinking of Chinese Modernity,” Kronsoscope: Journal for the Study of Time 15, no. 1 (2015), and McGrath, Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age, conclusion.
is shaped by political actors, as well as how such temporalities might be challenged in narrative, disrupting hegemonic temporal orders or narrating alternate temporal perspectives marginalized by hegemonic “futures.” As the Chinese legal scholar and policy think-tank Jiang Shigong 蒋世功 put it in a recent, much debated essay: “Historical time is absolutely not the natural time of Newtonian physics but is instead political time as created by people, and even the way we periodize history is a product of politics.”21 Indeed, just as Jiang’s remark suggests, the political control of time has been high on the agenda for the Chinese Communist Party ever since founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. This is evident from, for instance, the politically motivated disposal of the five official time-zones that had existed during the previous Nationalist-regime and the subsequent establishment of one single time-zone for the whole of China, despite a more than two hour difference between Beijing and the Western border region of Xinjiang.22 Above all, the regime has relied on the configuration of linear and teleological narratives to consolidate its power and boost its legitimacy, in which, as Séagh Kehoe pointed out, “time represents a powerful political resource that reduces heterogeneous temporal experiences to a single, shared trajectory of unilinear progress in order to consolidate order and control.”23 Hence, in the following study I suggest that the Chinese political regime is administrating a particular politics of time which can be conceptualized in the concept of homogenous, teleological time, and which I refer to as the teleological temporal order. Although this temporal order has remained dominant in the post-89 period, it has been challenged by other temporalities, which the emergence of “The New Wave” of science fiction can be regarded as the narrative expression of.

For the reasons delineated above, the “New Wave” of science fiction tends to become highly political through its engagement with temporality. On the one hand, with the flourishing alternate temporalities in the post-89 context – and particularly with the emergence of the internet in the 2000s – complete control over all temporal discourse no longer seemed possible,24 and science

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24 For a discussion on how entertainment media and tabloid press served to disrupt temporal discourse and official conceptions of “national time” in the 1990s, see Wanning Sun, "Media
fiction and other fantastic literatures became one way of exploring other temporal possibilities through narrative. Arguably, when the utopian telos of Communism could no longer maintain complete hegemony, fiction could explore other temporal possibilities, including locating a more ideal existence in the past of the Chinese pre-modern eras instead of the future — which was often the case in these stories. More relevant to the present investigation, the authors of “The New Wave” of science fiction, such as Han Song 韩松 (1965-), and Liu Cixin 刘慈欣 (1963-), who are both included in this study, also began exploring other possible temporalities through their — often disturbing — visions of the future. Publishing in emerging science fiction magazines such as Kehuan shijie 科幻世界 (Science fiction world), they experimented with a broader temporal scope than had been the case of genre during the Maoist years or during the brief flourishing of science fiction during the 1980s, imagining a multiplicity of futures not necessarily in line with the teleology of official discourse. Importantly, the marginal status of science fiction in the literary field as a form of “children’s literature,” combined with diversification of the media landscape and the development of the internet, together helped turning science fiction into a genre where alternate discourses of temporality could flourish. At the same time, however, these new temporal possibilities represented in narrative always risked clashing with the still hegemonic temporal order. Notably, the state responded to the narrative challenge of chuanyue by banning Time-Travel from TV in 2011, pointing to the political nature of such non-teleological temporalities.

1.1 Aim of the study

This study explores how Chinese science fiction has reconfigured temporality in the post-89 period. The aim is to discuss how these Chinese science fiction texts narrate temporal antagonisms in the post-89 context, with the emergence of multiple temporalities in discourse that clash in narrative, and which tend to disrupt the hegemonic teleological temporal order associated with nation-building. Hence, the study is also an exploration of how these texts become political through their engagement with temporality, which means that the it can be regarded as an investigation into the chronopolitics post-89 Chinese science fiction. Notably, these texts do not merely passively “reflect” the temporal flux of post-89 China, but they are directly engaged in the reconfiguration of temporality and producing new temporal frameworks as well. In this


26 Xu, “Traveling through Time and Searching for Utopia: Utopian Imaginaries in Internet Time-Travel Fiction,” 128-29.
way, these texts attempt to fill a gap in the post-89 period created by emergent cracks in the chronopolitical landscape.

In the present chapter I will define my main narrative concepts and discuss the politics of time in China in more detail. In chapter 2, I will give a brief history and overview of science fiction in China and discuss how the genre has related to discourses of temporality throughout the twentieth century. In chapter 3, I focus on four texts that introduce variations on non-progressive temporalities which conflict with and disrupt the dominant teleological temporal order in different ways. In Chapter 4 I move on to a discussion of how the most successful and influential Chinese science fiction text, The Three Body Problem Trilogy, configures an apocalyptic temporal order, which clashes with a liberal interpretation of teleological time, and which constructs a politics of crisis which has been appropriated in Chinese political discourse in recent years. In chapter 5, I discuss how variations of time travel and alternate history disrupt and challenge the teleological order, and configures contingent timescapes in strong tension with linear, teleological time. Finally, in chapter 6, I engage in a closer discussion of the relationship between the individual subject and the temporal orders present in the texts, and I investigate how existential temporalities remain unsynchronized with historical temporalities and temporal orders. Throughout I argue that the texts, by (re)configuring temporal experience, attempt to fill a temporal gap in post-89 China, and are an expression a pluralization of both collective and private temporalities in a context where the political regime, nonetheless, keep attempting to enforce hegemonic control over temporal discourse through the imposition of a teleological temporal order strongly associated with the project of nation-building. The temporal tension that these texts express and the strong political and ideological implications in the post-89 context has made me approach the texts through the conceptual tools of temporal regimes and temporal orders, which set the frames for the genre’s chronopolitics. Following this, my central research question can be formulated as:

*How do these science fiction texts illuminate and reconfigure the chronopolitical landscape of post-89 China by narrating conflicts between different temporalities?*

### 1.2 Scope

Chinese science fiction has developed rapidly in the last three decades, hence there is an ever-increasing body of texts. To limit the scope of the study, I have chosen texts that were originally published during a time-period between 2000-2013. In terms of science fiction, this was a time-period when Chinese science fiction was flourishing but mostly before it had attracted mainstream attention. In terms of Chinese politics, the time-period roughly corresponds to the period reaching up to the Xi Jinping-era (2012-present), which by many
commentators has been framed as introducing a new era in Chinese politics and history.\textsuperscript{27} The timeframe of this study hence corresponds to a time-period where Chinese political discourse was characterized by more plurality and diversification than in the present era of Xi Jinping, which has been characterized by increasing political control.\textsuperscript{28} Importantly, however, although all the texts were originally published in the period between 2000-2013, their discursive reach might be closer to the present, such as in the case of Liu Cixin’s \textit{The Three Body Problem Trilogy}, which has been appropriated in political discourse in the Xi-era. Since my interest in this study has been how science fiction engages with temporality, I began by identifying types of texts that deal primarily with time, temporality and history. Hence, I identified the three overlapping sub-genres of future history, alternate history, and time travel as primary selection criteria. Second, to narrow down the scope of the investigation further, I limited the scope to three writers, whom I deemed to be particularly relevant because of their interest in time and temporality: Han Song 韩松 (1965–), Liu Cixin 刘慈欣 (1963–), and Baoshu 宝树 (1980–). Han Song and Liu Cixin are two of the biggest names in contemporary Chinese science fiction, both born in the 1960s and had their breakthrough as science fiction writers in the 1990s. Baoshu belongs to a younger generation of writers born in the 1980s that began to make a mark in Chinese science fiction in the 2000s and 2010s. Needless to say, there are other influential writers available, such as Chen Qiufan 陈楸帆 (1981–), one of the most influential writers of the 1980s generation, and Wang Jinkang 王晋康 (1948–), whom is often grouped with Liu Cixin and Han Song as the “Big Three” of Chinese science fiction.\textsuperscript{29} However, neither Wang nor Chen shows the same consistent interest in temporality as the three selected writers. Wang’s stories tend to be set in the present or near present and focus on science and technology, and Chen’s stories are often set in the near-present typical of the sub-genre “cyberpunk” which his work is often associated with. Finally, the three writers were selected because their personal backgrounds also provide a potentially interesting contrast which serves to colour their take on temporality and the politics of time. Han Song is a

\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, the Xi-era is often called \textit{Xin shidai} 新时代 (The New Era) in official Chinese discourse. For a legitimization of the use of “the new era” from a scholar and think tank closely tied to the regime, see Jiang Shigong 蒋世功, Ownby, and Cheek “Jiang Shigong, ‘Philosophy and History’.” For an analysis of the chronopolitical significance of the use of the term, see Hugo Jones, “Forging the ‘New Era’: The Temporal Politics of Xi Jinping,” \textit{The Diplomat} (1 October 2022), https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/forging-the-new-era-the-temporal-politics-of-xi-jinping/.


journalist employed at Xinhua 新华 (China’s Central News Agency), Liu Cixin is an engineer, and Baoshu was a philosophy major while attending university.30

Both Han Song and Liu Cixin can also be seen as politically significant writers, but for different reasons. Han Song has often credited with writing “intensely political” and subversive stories.31 Liu Cixin, on the other hand, has become politically controversial for other reasons in recent years. In an interview in the New Yorker in June 2019, Liu was asked by the interviewer Jiayang Fan what he thought about the ongoing repression of the Uyghur ethnic minority in Xinjiang in Western China. Liu replied: “Would you rather that they be hacking away at bodies at train stations and schools in terrorist attacks? If anything, the government is helping their economy and trying to lift them out of poverty.”32 When asked about “individual liberty and freedom of governance,” he argued that “If China were to transform into a democracy, it would be hell on earth.”33 This claim also sparked a controversy regarding a planned adaptation of the trilogy in the form of a Netflix TV-series, raising calls among some US-senators to stop the production.34 Although I certainly subscribe to the notion that one should separate the author from his work, Liu’s skepticism towards liberal values expressed in the above statement is not unrelated to his most significant work, The Three Body Problem Trilogy, and the relationship between temporality and politics in the trilogy, as will be shown in chapter 4. Baoshu has been less controversial and has sometimes denied any political intention with his work;35 however, as will be evident from the following analyses, some of his most compelling stories still traverses sensitive (chono)-political terrain. Nonetheless, it is important to (re)-emphasize that my aim is not to reconstruct any authorial intention, but to investigate how the texts configure temporalities that have political implications in a particular discursive context.

30 These three writers are exclusively male. There are multiple female writers in the Chinese SF-field, such as Xia Jia (1984-) and Hao Jingfang (1984-). Neither of these writers, however, share the same consistent interest in temporality, and have written little that could be categorized within the sub-genres that I have selected. For an introduction to the three writers’ personal backgrounds, see Ken Liu, Broken Stars: Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction in Translation (London: Head of Zeus, 2019).
In total, I selected eight key texts from the three writers. This includes *Santi sanbu qu* 三体三部曲 (The Three Body Problem Trilogy) by Liu Cixin (which I treat as one text), originally published between 2006–2010, also known as *Diqiu wangshi* 地球往事 (Remembrance of Earth’s Past). \(^{36}\) I also include the full-length novels *Huoxing zhaoyao Meiguo* 火星照耀美国 (Mars Over America) and *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 (Red Ocean) by Han Song originally published in 2000 and 2004 respectively. \(^{37}\) By Baoshu I have included the full-length novel *Shijian zhi xu* 时问之墟 (Ruins of Time), published in 2013, and the longer short story “Dashidai” 大时代 (The Great Era). The latter story was originally published in the online magazine *Xinhuan jie* 新幻界 (New Magic World) in 2012 \(^{38}\) and was first published in print in English translation as “What has passed shall in kinder light appear” in the anthology *Broken Stars* in 2019. The version used in the analysis is the English translation, but I have also consulted the original manuscript. \(^{39}\)

In addition to these longer texts, I have also included three shorter texts as examples of the alternate history form. The first one is Liu Cixin’s “Xiyang” 西洋 (Western Ocean), which was published in print in 2002. \(^{40}\) I also Baoshu’s

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36 The first part of *The Three Body Problem Trilogy*, *Santi 三体* (The Three Body Problem) was originally serialized in Kehuan shijie in 2006, and was published in book form shortly after that, followed by the sequels *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 (Dark Forest, 2008) and *Sishen yongsheng* 死神永生 (Death’s End, 2010). See Duan et al., “Jiang Zhongguo kehuan cong ‘Zazhi shidai’ dairu ‘changhai shou shidai’” 将中国科幻从杂志时代带入畅销书时代 [Bringing Chinese science fiction out of the ‘magazine age’ into the ‘bestselling-book age’].

37 *Huoxing zhaoyao Meiguo* 火星照耀美国 (Mars Over America) was originally published in 2000, and published in later editions in 2012 and 2018. *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 (Red Ocean) was originally published in 2004 and later in a more recent edition in 2018. In both cases I have relied on the 2018 editions in my analyses. Parts of *Red Ocean* has also been published as separate short stories. For a detailed account of the novel’s composition, see Han Song 韩松, “Chuban houji: zhengzhong de hai 正宗的海 [Postscript of the first edition: the true ocean],” in *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 (Red ocean) (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu fenghuang wenyi chubanshe 江苏凤凰文艺出版社 [Jiangsu phoneix press], 2018).

38 Baoshu 宝树, personal communication, January 30, 2023.

39 The original manuscript in the form of a Microsoft Word-file has been accessed with the author’s permission.

40 Hua Li dates the composition of “Western ocean” to 1998, and notes that the story has circulated on the internet since then. See Hua Li, “A Cautionary View of Rhetoric about China’s Imagined Future in Liu Cixin’s Alternate History ‘The Western Ocean’,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 10, no. 2 (2016): 200. The date I refer to here is the first print publication since I have been unable to procure the exact circumstances of the story’s online publication. Baoshu dates a print publication of the story to 2002, when the story was published in the collection “2001 niandu Zhongguo zuijia kehuan xiaoshuo ji” 2001 年度中国最佳科幻小说集 [Best Chinese science fiction stories of 2001] published by *Sichuan renmin chubanshe* 四川人民出版社. See Baoshu 宝树 (Li Jun 李俊), “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: dangdai Zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti” 异域, 故乡与谜官: 当代中国科幻的历史主体 [Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science fiction], in *Zhongguo kehuan wenxue zai chufa* 中国科幻文学再出发 [Chinese science fiction: A new beginning], ed. Li Guangyi 李广益 (Chongqing 重庆: Chongqing daxue chubanshe 重庆大学出版社 [Chongqing university press], 2016), 151.
“Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan”一起去南湖船 (Watching the boat at South Lake together), which has only been published online in the magazine Xinhuangjie 新幻界 (New Magic World) in 2011, and Han Song’s “Shanghai yujiu sanba de jiyi”上海一九三八的记忆 (Shanghai 1938 – a memory) , which was originally published online in 2006 and later published in print in the anthology Kehuan zhong de Zhongguo lishi 科幻中的中国历史 (The Chinese history in science fiction) in 2017. Whereas “Western Ocean” has been analyzed in detail before by Hua Li, the other two stories have not received much attention from scholarship at the time of writing.

The motivation for including both full-length novel and short stories, moreover, is twofold. First and foremost, the novel-short story distinction is originally a Western distinction and is much less distinct in Chinese literary tradition, where both are referred to as xiaoshuo 小说 (novels/fiction), as novels are referred to as changpian xiaoshuo 长篇小说 (longer-fiction) and short stories as duanpian xiaoshuo 短篇小说 (shorter-fiction). Another argument not to exclude short stories in the study is the significance of the shorter form in Chinese science fiction. The main publishing platforms for these writers (more significant than print books) has been science fiction magazines, online BBS-forums and in some cases social media platforms, where short fiction rather than full-length novels has been the norm – thereby raising the significance of this shorter form.

41 Baoshu 宝树, “Zhongguo lishi kehuan xiaoshuo yaomu” 中国历史科幻小说要木
[Essential Chinese historical science fiction stories] 402. The original manuscript in the form of a Word-file has been accessed with the author’s permission. At the time of writing, the text is also available online at Douban.com. See “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan一起去南湖船 [Watching the Boat at South Lake Together],” 2019, accessed 16 May, 2023, https://www.douban.com/group/topic/147334550/?_i=3612170-qOyJQx,4247470GIAfDBQ.
42 The information that the story was first published on the author’s social media platform has been retrieved from Baoshu 宝树, “Zhongguo lishi kehuan xiaoshuo yaomu” 中国历史科幻小说要木 [Essential Chinese historical science fiction stories] 403. The publication year has been retrieved from Baoshu 宝树, “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: dangdai Zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti 异域,故乡与谜官: 当代中国科幻的历史主体 [Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science Fiction], 147. I have relied on the print version in this study.
44 However, a revised version of the chapter in the present dissertation authored by me was published previously in Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research. See Erik Mo Welin, “Time Travel, Alternate History, and Chronopolitics in the ‘The New Wave’ of Chinese Science Fiction,” *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* 9, no. 2 (2022).
45 Astrid Møller-Olsen, “Seven Senses of the City: Urban Spacetime and Sensory Memory in Contemporary Sinophone Fiction” (PhD Lund University, 2019), 58.
In terms of translations, all translations are my own unless stated otherwise. In the case of “The Great Era” I have relied on the existing English translation, since I considered it a better choice to rely on a print source than an unpublished manuscript or online text (when available). However, I have consulted the original manuscript with the author’s permission and sometimes highlighted original terms in Chinese when deemed relevant.  

1.3 Previous Research

In a critical article in the academic journal *Science Fiction Studies* from 2000, Mikael Huss noted that Chinese science fiction at the time at that time could be regarded as “still a fairly marginal phenomenon” and the author hence concluded that “Practically all the criticism I refer to in this essay is out of print or nearly impossible to find.”  

Indeed, apart from David Der-wei Wang’s classic study on Late Qing fiction, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing fiction, 1849-1911*, which included a discussion on science fiction from that period as well as a few examples from the post-89 period, little had been written in English on the topic. However, after having long been neglected in scholarship, the situation has now completely changed as scholarship on Chinese science fiction has increased rapidly in the recent decade, and there is now an ever-growing body of research. In 2012, Mingwei Song (who was the first scholar to my knowledge who published in English on what he called “The New Wave” of science fiction) edited a special issue on Chinese science fiction in the literary journal *Renditions* and published several articles on the topic in English language journals. Subsequently, in the recent decade, several monographs in English have already been published on Chinese science fiction, including Nathaniel Isaacson’s *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction* (2017), Cara Healey’s doctoral dissertation *Genre Transgressions and (Trans)Nationalism in Chinese Science Fiction* (2017), William Peyton’s doctoral dissertation *Foreign Literary Influence*
on Liu Cixin’s Diqui Wangshi (2019) and more recently Hua Li’s and Jing Jiang’s full-length book studies Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw (2021) and Found in Translation: "New People" in Twentieth-Century Chinese Science Fiction (2021), and there is also a forthcoming monograph by Mingwei Song (2022).51 In Chinese, Wu Yan’s pioneering work preceded the boom of scholarship in the West52, and in recent years there has been a growing number of scholarly anthologies, were Zhongguo kehua wenxue zai chufa 百年中国科幻文学再出发 (Chinese Science Fiction: A New Beginning) and the magisterial Bainian Zhongguo kehuan xiaoshuo jingpin shangxi 百年中国科幻小说精品赏析 (A hundred years of Chinese science fiction: selection and analyses) edited by Yao Yixian 姚义贤 and Wang Weying 王卫英 particularly deserves mentioning.53

In terms of relevance to my own research, Wu Yan and Wu Dingbo’s pioneering work has been particularly useful in tracing the history of the genre in China.54 Nathaniel Isaacson’s monograph focusing on the emergence of the genre in the Late Qing has also provided me with useful insight into the early history of the genre and the conditions of its emergence, and the thorough and detailed anthology in five volumes edited by Yao Yixian and Wang Weiyang has also provided an excellent overview of the development of genre since its introduction into China in the late Qing up to the present day. In terms of understanding the genre in the contemporary context, Mingwei Song’s work has been of central importance to my own research. Song has noted how contemporary science fiction, consisting of authors such as Han Song, Liu Cixin and Wang Jinkang, are responding to various utopian motifs inherent in

Chinese political and literary culture, including the “China’s Rise, the myth of development, and the posthuman vision.”\(^{55}\) Song also noted how the emergence of the New Wave can be understood in the light of post-89 political and cultural developments, more specifically “the collapse of idealism and optimism as well as a pervasive disillusionment with communism – or, in general, a political utopianism instituted by the state.”\(^{56}\)

In terms of research on how the genre specifically relates to time, history, and temporality in the contemporary context there is less research available. Nonetheless, a few shorter texts and articles deserve specific mentioning. William Peyton’s doctoral thesis includes a discussion on the concept of historicism in Liu Cixin’s *The Three Body Problem Trilogy*, in which he noted the author’s debt to historical fiction and to Tolstoy.\(^{57}\) Several articles have also been written in Chinese and English that discuss history and notions of history in Chinese science fiction. Yang Chen 杨晨 has noted the significance of the apocalyptic temporality in *The Three Body Problem trilogy* in the article “’Lishi’ yu ‘mori’: Liu Cixin ‘Santi’ de xushi moshi’ ‘历史’与‘末日’：刘慈欣《三体》的叙述模式 (‘History’ and ‘apocalypse’: the narrative form of Liu Cixin’s ‘The Three Body Problem’), which has significance for my discussion of the trilogy.\(^{58}\) Most notably, Baoshu (Li Jun) has provided an indispensable overview of science fiction with historical themes in Chinese science fiction since the Maoist period, in the article entitled “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: Dangdai zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti” 异域,故乡与谜官 (Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science fiction) published in the anthology *Zhongguo kehuan wenxue zai chufa* 中国科幻文学再出发 (Chinese Science Fiction: A New Beginning) edited by Li Guangyi 李广益 (Chongqing 重庆: Chongqing daxue chubanshe 重庆大学出版社 [Chongqing university press], 2016).\(^{59}\) Importantly, Li Jun noted the absence of science fiction with historical themes in the Maoist-period and the re-emergence of science fiction dealing explicitly with temporality in the 1990s context.\(^{60}\) Wang Yao’s article “Evolution or Samsara? Spatio-Temporal Myth in Han Song’s Science Fiction” noted the presence of cyclical

\(^{55}\) Song, “Variations on Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction,” 87.


\(^{57}\) Peyton, “Foreign Literary Influence on Liu Cixin’s Diqui Wangshi,” 157-204.

\(^{58}\) Yang Chen 杨晨, “’Lishi’ yu ‘mori’: Liu Cixin ‘Sant’ de xushi moshi’ ‘历史’与‘末日’：刘慈欣《三体》的叙述模式 (‘History’ and ‘apocalypse’: the narrative form of Liu Cixin’s ‘The Three Body Problem’),” *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 [Art research], no. 2 (2017).


\(^{60}\) Baoshu 宝树, “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: dangdai zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti” 异域,故乡与谜官 (Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science Fiction).
temporalities in several texts by Han Song. In terms of research on temporality in Western science fiction, these will be discussed more in the section “Theoretical considerations,” but I might specifically mention Elana Gomel’s remarkable book-length study Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination (2010) which has been particularly instructive in how science fiction can reconfigure temporal experience in general. Nevertheless, this dissertation is the first monograph and in-depth study in English specifically focusing on temporality in Chinese contemporary science fiction, and also the first to focus on the political and ideological implications of these temporalities in the larger context of post-89 political discourse.

1.4 Theoretical considerations

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I will conceptualize and develop the main theoretical concepts and my methodological approach. In brief, this consists of defining the central concept of temporal orders and the related concept of chronopolitics and define these in the Chinese context. I will also provide a theoretical foundation for the significance of narrative in the configuration of temporal experience. Considering the interdisciplinary implications of my study’s aim to discuss how science fiction narrates temporal antagonisms in the post-89 sociopolitical context, my theoretical approach, by necessity, draws on concepts from multiple research fields, including science fiction studies, narrative theory, and historical theory. My methodology, which mainly consists of narrative analysis, will be defined in the last part of this section.

1.4.1 Multiple times and temporal orders

This investigation approaches these science fiction narratives within a discussion of multiple temporalities, and more specifically, in terms of the concepts of temporal orders and regimes. These are concepts that have recently gained traction in historical theory and social sciences to describe various ways that temporalities are conceptualized, homogenized, and controlled across time and space. The concept of “temporal regimes,” which by now can be regarded as an established concept in historical theory and the social sciences, was originally popularized in historical theory by French historian Francois Hartog. In his book Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, Hartog defined what he called “regimes of historicity” as different ways of connecting

62 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination.
past, present and future in different historical and social contexts. Hartog traced a development in European history from a pre-modern regime, where the present is built on models of the past, to a modern regime defined by a rejection of the past in favor of a future-oriented, largely teleological conception of time, and finally making a case for a recent shift from the modern future-oriented regime into a present state of “presentism.” In the present age of presentism, both the future and past has yielded to an “omnipresent present,” and where Hartog perceived 1989 as a crucial turning point in World history. More recently, other theorists, including Helge Jordheim as well as Dan Edelstein Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley, have revised and developed Hartog’s concept by defining temporal regimes as an expression of multiple, often competing temporalities in a seemingly homogenous “present.” In these theorists’ conceptualization, the seeming unity of a singular or objective “historical time” or a “regime of historicity” had always been a mere artificial construction configured by the “synchronizing” practices and hegemonic discourses of history, obscuring the fact that collective temporal experience has always been heterogenous and multiple.

In my own conceptualization I define a temporal order, as “a way of linking together past, present, and future.” A temporal order, in other words, is an underlying temporal pattern which circulate in discourse, and which determines how to think about time, and above all, the stories we tell about time. In addition, I follow Helge Jordheim and Dan Edelstein et al in defining temporal orders as an expression of multiple temporalities. Hence, rather than a singular historical time we are dealing with multiple collective temporalities, or multiple historical times, that exist synchronically and are sometimes mutually contradictory or ideologically opposed. Rather than conceiving of one temporal order as replacing another temporal order in a simple diachronic succession, completely replacing former temporal orders, as Hartog’s argument

63 Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, 16-18.
64 See Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time.
65 Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, 8.
68 Jordheim writes: “Gleichzeitigkeit, or synchronicity, is never a given, but always a product of work, of a complex set of linguistic, conceptual, and technological practices of synchronization, which are found in every culture and at every time, but which have become especially dominant in that period of Western history that we often call modernity. Jordheim, "Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization," 505-06.
69 Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, xv.
71 Jordheim, “Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization.”
indicates, what we see is better conceptualized as multiple, overlapping temporal orders, often competing for supremacy in a particular cultural and political context.\textsuperscript{72}

Moreover, considering that “those who govern or want to govern advance characteristic ideas of how society should reproduce itself through time”\textsuperscript{73} this conceptualization of multiple temporalities and temporal orders is closely related to politics. Indeed, as Edelstein et al. points out, all political regimes enforce their own view of time to pursue continuity while having to manage and manipulate a complex web of intersecting temporalities.\textsuperscript{74} As Kevin M. F Platt noted, modern political regimes in particular have had a strong tendency to “impose hegemonic reorderings of temporality, or at least to dominate the field of competition between alternate temporalities,” in order to boost their own legitimacy.\textsuperscript{75} Political power, therefore, can be said to be “both generated and maintained through the management and manipulation of a dense field of conflicting temporalities.”\textsuperscript{76} In this context, Hartog’s “modern regime of historicity” can be defined as a particularly influential and hegemonic politics of time mainly associated with the construction of the modern nation-state,\textsuperscript{77} which tended to obscure the fact that time is always heterogenous and multiple. In this way, a conceptualization of multiple times and multiple “temporal orders” shifts the focus of this investigation away from merely “agentless processes of change”\textsuperscript{78} and more towards the concept of chronopolitics, which helps to illuminate temporality as a heterogenous and (politically) contested phenomenon in the seemingly homogenous “present.”

\textbf{1.4.1.1 Five temporal orders in post-89 China}

To unify the discussion, I identify five overarching temporal orders that are present in these texts. The first and most important one is the linear, \textit{teleological temporal order}, which has dominated Chinese historical and political discourse throughout the modern period. This temporal order constructs a linear timescape, a path with a progression from an origin, or new beginning,

\textsuperscript{74} Edelstein, Geroulanos, and Wheatley, “Chronocenosis: An Introduction fo Power and Time,” 8.
\textsuperscript{75} Platt, “Commemorating the End of History: Timelessness and Power in Contemporary Russia,” 401.
\textsuperscript{76} Edelstein, Geroulanos, and Wheatley, “Chronocenosis: An Introduction fo Power and Time,” 8.
\textsuperscript{77} Assmann, “Transformations of the Modern Time Regime,” 54-55.
towards a telos in the future. The teleological temporal order is highly future-oriented, as the present is determined by the future rather than the past. The fact that this teleological temporal order is unilinear, with a single telos, makes it into a highly deterministic form of time; in other words, time becomes determined by whoever decides what the telos is, and implicitly, how one will reach the telos. Considering the close relationship between science fiction and linear time, all texts in this study contain this temporal order to one degree or the other; at the same time, this also allows the texts to problematize and disrupt this temporal order through the introduction of other temporal orders. A central element of the teleological temporal order is the establishment of the telos. The telos provides a temporal structure that is goal-oriented, it provides an otherwise contingent journey into an unknown future with the promise of certainty. In addition, the teleological temporal order configures a temporality that is founded on a “myth of origin,” or better “the fiction of a new beginning” (i.e., the inauguration of a new time). The “fiction of a new beginning” distinguishes the teleological temporal order from more past-oriented temporal orders, such as past-oriented, often cyclical temporal orders before the modern era, which located their origins in an eternal past rather than in a new beginning. Taken together, the teleological temporal order configures a highly determined timescape, relying on a causal relationship between the beginning and telos is constructed: the new beginning inaugurate a “new time” whose complete significance will be fulfilled in the future as one approaches the telos. Importantly, although the teleological temporal order has been chiefly associated with Marxism in the Chinese context, the teleological temporal order, in fact, is not restricted to this ideology alone and is compatible with multiple ideologies. I will further historicize and contextualize this temporal order in chapter 2.

The second temporal order I have identified is a cyclical temporal order of recurrence, which is past-oriented, and which tends to see time as a cyclical process of repetition, where time does form a path or a line but a circle. Such a conception of time is deeply embedded in Chinese culture and pre-modern politics, and it was never completely eradicated in modern times. The third is a contingent temporal order, where time branches out into multiple timelines, constructing a network of times. The contingent temporal order, in contrast to time as a cycle, is not something that can be traced back into Chinese history and culture but rather something that has likely developed more recently out of counterfactual history and developments in particle physics. Considering

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79 Qingxin Lin, *Brushing History Against the Grain: Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction (1986-1999)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2005), 63.
80 I adopt this difference between “origin” and “new beginning” from Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint?: On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, 109.
81 The idea of contingency in the Chinese intellectual context is a fascinating topic in itself and something that deserves to be further studied. I have not been able to ascertain at what point the uncertainty principle or multiple worlds theory made its way into Chinese discourses, although
that, as Elana Gomel suggests, “contingency is central to the way we understand our own life-choices,”\textsuperscript{82} it is also highly likely that contingency has developed in parallel with the increasing number of individual life-choices under capitalism; since individual choice, arguably, leads to speculations on potential life-trajectories and, as a consequence, stimulates counterfactual thinking. Fourthly, I have identified an apocalyptic temporal order, which shares the linearity with the teleological temporal order but instead of moving towards a telos, history moves towards catastrophe. Apocalyptic time shares some characteristics with teleological time, including the somewhat contradictory combination of determinism (in the sense of a known ending) and a limited but nonetheless indispensable room for agency and free-will; as Elana Gomel describes it: “apocalypse specifies the beginning and the ending of history but leaves some room for contingent action in the middle.”\textsuperscript{83} This makes apocalypse into a politically disruptive way of conceptualizing time, since it can justify a politics of crisis and of radical measures. Finally, I have also noted the temporal order of presentism in the texts. In the temporal order of presentism, which I have already mentioned in the previous discussion, temporal experience is characterized by “the sense that only the present exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now.”\textsuperscript{84} Presentism as a temporal order can be explained in a transnational context of consumerism and the rise of new media, both which tends to undermine a horizon of futurity in favor of a fragmented but dominant, seemingly eternal present.\textsuperscript{85} However, in contrast to Hartog, I define presentism as merely one out of many temporal orders in these texts. More broadly speaking (as the present study indicates) presentism has certainly not become hegemonic in contemporary China, as opposed to Hartog’s diagnosis, which is more focused on the European context. Importantly, however, the texts are not limited to these forms of temporalities.\textsuperscript{86} As complex and often multi-layered narratives, in their reconfiguration of temporal experience, the texts are also expressions of other forms of time. In the next section, I will

\textsuperscript{82} Gomel, \textit{Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination}, 83.
\textsuperscript{83} Gomel, \textit{Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination}, 18.
\textsuperscript{84} Hartog and Brown, \textit{Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time}, xv.
\textsuperscript{85} Hartog and Brown, \textit{Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time}, 113.
\textsuperscript{86} Notably, I have not discussed forms of what is often referred to as deep time. Liu Cixin’s \textit{Death’s End}, for instance, would reward a closer look at the variations of deep time that occur towards the end of the novel. It is certainly possible to argue that the dazzling temporalities of deep time towards the end of the trilogy changes the temporal perspectives and antagonisms in the novel in ways that I have not discussed in my analyses. For an accessible discussion on the concept of deep time, its discovery and cultural significance, see Stephen Jay Gould, \textit{Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle : Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time}, Jerusalem-Harvard lectures, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1-8.
move on to discuss narrative theory and the significance of narrative in the configuration of temporality.

1.4.2 Time and Narrative

Although temporality might find expression in a wide variety of forms and practices, one of the most important ways is through narrative. In his seminal work *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur argues that “between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity. To put it in another way, time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”  

In other words, considering the central role of narrative in the configuration of temporality, one of the most (or perhaps the most) central elements to maintain or impose a particular temporal order is through narrative. Of central importance for the imposition of a particular temporal order are **historical metanarratives** imposed through the hegemonic discourse of history. A historical metanarrative often contains a temporal order with a particular temporal logic, in the present context most characteristically a teleological temporal order which encourages people to “move forward” and accept rapid social transformations based on the promise of the telos in the

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87 In other words, Ricoeur argues that narrative mediates between the time of the world, or cosmic time, and phenomenological time. Hence, although we measure time with calendars and clocks, or might even try to explain the nature of physical time through science, narrative is a necessary condition that configures and structures our temporal experience as human beings. For these reasons, experiencing time as an abstract sequence of “nows” is not enough to make time into human time for Ricoeur; neither is a strictly Heideggerian approach, which limits the investigation of temporality to the phenomenological experience of individual Daseins; instead, Ricoeur builds on Heidegger's concept of “within-time-ness”, and adds narrative as an essential component of being in time as an individual as well as social being. Following this, historical and fictional narratives alike share a common referent for Ricoeur: they both, ultimately, refer to human experiences of temporality. For a useful summary of Ricoeur's narrative theory, see Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” *Critical inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980). For a more ambitious exposition of his theory, see the three volume work Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For an excellent summary of Ricoeur's theory from a secondary source showing how Ricoeur builds on the thinking of Kant and Heidegger, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Philosophical Antecedents to Ricoeur's Time and Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London, US: Taylor & Francis Group, 1992). See also Gomel, *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination*, 4-8.

88 Post-structuralist criticism refuses to give any ontological preference to history over fiction, defining history as merely a discourse among other discourses. See Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” in *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). This is also a central claim in the work of Paul Ricoeur, who sees both history and fiction (or narrative in general) as sharing the same ultimate referent in human temporality, configuring a shared social time which a mere analysis of Heideggerian, individual *Daseins* is unable to accomplish.
future. But a historical metanarrative might also contain a past-oriented, cyclical temporal order, which encourages people not to worry because all change will return to normalcy, which was the case in China before modern times. Historical metanarratives, however, can in most cases not remain entirely hegemonic, and they are challenged by other narratives, sometimes referred to as counter-narratives, containing other temporal orders.

Historical metanarratives configure a shared time that we might refer to as historical time. As noted, hegemonic discourses of history have tended apply metanarratives to synchronize temporality into a singular “historical time”; in the Chinese context most often configuring a national teleological time. However, following Jordheim and Edelstein et al., such singular historical obscures underlying, often conflicting multiple historical temporalities. Nevertheless, we can define historical time as temporalities that are configured by metanarratives attempting to historicize human collectives. Such metanarratives of historical time, figuring in everything from historiography to the pseudohistory found in science fiction texts, almost always contain a temporal order, but might also contain more than one such temporal order, and might implicitly or explicitly narrate tensions between different temporal orders. In the following analyses I also distinguish historical time from existential time. As Fredric Jameson has observed: “…at some point discussions of temporality always bifurcate into the two paths of existential experience (in which questions of memory seem to predominate) and of historical time, with its urgent interrogations of the future.”

Existential time, is, as Jameson notes, often related to memory, but it can also be expressed in the form of personal hopes, anticipations, and expectations on the (personal) future. Existential time may be made available to the reader in narrative through focalization, as the narrative is

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91 To be clear, my argument is not that narrative merely “represents” or even “configure” a temporal order. According to Ricoeur, each narrative is to a certain extent unique, a new way of “reckon[ing] with time”; it is not simply an “expression” of a temporal model (i.e. order). For these reasons, narrative can be considered potentially limitless in how it configures time, and cannot be reduced to the unambiguous expression of a pre-existing temporal order. Be that as it may, we can read narrative as containing certain temporal orders that circulate in culture and discourse, and that to a large extent, determine the way they narrate time. Following this, the narratives do not “configure” a temporal order; rather, narratives configure temporality, but the configured temporality is often determined by various temporal orders which are present outside the specific narratives on the level of discourse. However, we should always leave a door open for the possibility of narrative to generate completely new ways of “reckoning with time”, including configuring new temporal orders. See Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 1, 62-73.
filtered through the inner life of a certain character. As we shall see, the distinction between historical time and existential time is significant in science fiction since these, texts, rather than focusing on one dimension or the other, instead often operates both within a historical dimension and within the existential dimension, which reveals a tension between the two dimensions. Time travel and other narrative devices in science fiction sometimes allow characters to travel through the dimension of historical time and even experience different temporal orders. Importantly, existential time is also political, since perfect synchrony between these dimensions is almost never present; in fact, Maier also noted how authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century “resisted private, individual time.”

1.4.2.1 Story, discourse and causality
Much narrative theory distinguishes between narrative discourse and story, whereas the latter refers to the order of events told in narrative and the former to how these events are configured in the narrative. Hence, through configurations of narrative order narrative can shape experiences of temporality in multiple ways, such as through analepsis (narrative jump to an earlier event in the story) and prolepsis (skipping ahead to a later event in the story). The relationship can also be formulated as a continuous interaction between the diachronic level (level of story) and the extradiegetic level (level of discourse). A related element in narrative that is significant in this context is the concept of causality. Seymour Chatman argues that a simple sequence of events in not enough to make something into a narrative, and that a causal link is also necessary. This is what Chatman defines as the inherent “chrono-logic” of narrative. Whether the linear progression that the distinction between narrative discourse and story and the related concept of the “chrono-logic” implies can be regarded as essential to all narrative is, it should be noted, far from certain. Be that as it may, configuration of narrative discourse and story and the “chrono-logic” are certainly central to the teleological temporal order, whose narratives depend on constructing a causal link between events, most

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95 In Russian formalism, the same concepts are referred to as fabula and sjuzhet. For a useful summary of the different concepts and discussions, see Jonathan D. Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 169-87.


97 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 54.

98 Seymour Benjamin Chatman, Coming to Terms: the Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 9.
significantly certain “axial moments”— founding moments or “new beginnings”— such as the founding of the Communist Party or the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and the present, which ultimately leads to (i.e. causes) the (be it defined or undefined) telos in the future.\(^{100}\) Considering that science fiction operates in historical time through engagement with historical metanarratives, the texts can manipulate and experiment with narrative order in ways that disrupt such a temporal logic.

1.4.2.2 Non-linear configuration and multiple temporalities in narrative
The above distinction between story and discourse and emphasis on causality seems to imply an element linearity in all narrative. However, it is important not to constrain narratives into a too rigid framework of merely a beginning, middle and end. A too constrained reading of texts limiting temporality to merely the interplay between the two levels of story and discourse might risk losing sight of temporalities in narratives that do not always fit into these categories.\(^{101}\) Apart from the structuralist concepts of story and discourse, hence, narrative analysis should also attempt to register narrative configurations that reconfigure temporality in other ways. Most importantly, temporality in novelistic discourse is more appropriately to be regarded as dialogic. By regarding novelistic discourse as essentially dialogic, the narrative theorist Mikhail Bakhtin meant that the novel, rather than being a homogenous unified utterance by a single unified authorial voice, is more often comprised of a multiplicity of voices often representing different ideological forces in the socio-ideological context of the novel’s composition.\(^{102}\) A novel, in other words, is

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99 I borrow the concept of the “axial moment” from Ricoeur, who writes: “The axial moment— from which the other characteristics of chronicle time are derived— is not just an instant in general, nor is it a present moment, even though it does encompass both these things. It is, as Beneviste says, ‘such an important event that it is taken as giving rise to a new course of events’”. Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 3, 108.


101 For example, Andrew H. Plaks noted about traditional Chinese narrative, such as Dream of the Red Chamber and The Water Margins, that an over-reliance on concepts emphasizing the progression from a beginning to a middle towards an end might give the false impression of a lack of temporal movement in such narratives. For Plaks, these novels were not to be viewed lack of temporal development but rather as the narrative expression of a “totalisation of temporal flux that dispenses with a clear sense of direction and hence creates the impression of motionlessness.” See Andrew H. Plaks, “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative,” in Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays, ed. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1977), 337.

102 M. M. Bakhtin and Michael Holquist, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422. As Ge Liangyan has shown, the dialogic nature of novelistic discourse remains valid even for the quite distinct form of novelistic discourse in
more often less the imposition of a single temporal order and more a narrative expression of multiple, competing temporalities. Although a metanarrative containing a hegemonic temporal order might be present, it is often challenged by other conflicting temporalities within the same narrative. This allows us to explore novelistic narrative not as a unitary imposition of a single, unilinear time and instead approach them as ideological battlegrounds for conflicting temporalities and temporal orders. Notably, one important way of registering multiple temporalities in narrative and how narrative configure time in non-(uni)linear ways, is to pay attention to the relationship between time and space. Such an emphasis, which Bakhtin formulated in the concept of the chronotope, can also allow us to explore how narratives configure time beyond merely the story and discourse distinction.

To sum up the theoretical considerations: we have the level of temporal orders, the underlying patterns which through political and social practices, most importantly narratives, determines the temporal orientation of societies. Beneath the level of temporal orders, we have historical metanarratives, which help mediate between abstract time and human time, and which are often containers of these temporal orders. Historical metanarratives configure a shared time that I refer to as historical time. However, as I have already noted, one theoretical assumption in this dissertation is that there is no such thing as a singular “historical time”, and that history is better conceptualized within a theory of multiple historical times, as human experiences of time are always characterized by a multiplicity of collective (and individual) timeframes. To configure a conception of a singular "historical time" has been the function of the hegemonic discourse(s) of history and its synchronizing practices, often by

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103 Notably, Bakhtin partly found inspiration to his theory from Einsteinian relativity. For these reasons, Bakhtin’s conceptualization also points to the plurality of times, as opposed to a notion of absolute Newtonian time. For a discussion, see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 368. See also Møller-Olsen, “Seven Senses of the City: Urban Spacetime and Sensory Memory in Contemporary Sinophone Fiction,” 38-39.

104 In the chronotope, as Bakhtin puts it, “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.” See Bakhtin and Holquist, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, 84. Notably, as Morson and Emerson points out in their discussion, Bakhtin used the concept of chronotope in at least two ways: as a generic concept that defines the way time and space relates in a whole genre, and in the minor sense of “chronotopic motifs”. In this minor sense, the chronotope does not define a whole genre but instead takes the form of a recurring motif with a certain “stylistic aura” that contains a certain experience of time, and which might sometimes be traced to a particular genre. Morson and Emerson, Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics, 374-75. In my analyses, I employ the concept of the chronotope in this second sense. Such chronotopes are potentially infinite, but some more common ones include the “chronotope of the road”, and “the chronotope of the threshold”, the “chronotope of the castle”. The chronotope of the castle, for example, was for Bakhtin closely connected to the Gothic novel. See Bakhtin and Holquist, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, 243-49.
employing national metanarratives and the teleological temporal order, constructing a national teleological time, where the historical subject of the nation is imagined as moving forward towards a predestined telos. Beneath the level of such metanarratives and conceptualizations of historical times, we have narratives of existential time, which refers to the seemingly infinite individual variations of temporal experience by individual subjects. Narrative in the form of novelistic discourse can be defined as dialogic, meaning that it often contains competing and sometimes contradictory ideologies and temporalities. Moreover, narrative is characterized by the interaction between story and narrative discourse and by spatiotemporal relationships which can be conceptualized in the chronotope. In the following section, I will move on to discuss the concept of science fiction and how this genre relates to time and temporality.

1.4.3 Science fiction and time

Many studies have emphasized the close relationship between science fiction and concepts of temporality, historicity, and historiography. In particular, science fiction is closely connected to progress and conceptions of linear time. Indeed, as Gary Westfahl suggests, although “science fiction is sometimes regarded as a literature primarily focused on space travel… one can argue that time travel is actually its principal fascination, and that the genre first emerged in response to a growing interest in the future more than a growing interest in outer space.” As Darko Suvin noted in his foundational study *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: on the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, SF relies on the imagination of “the new” in the form of the emergence of what he conceptualized as a “novum,” which can be defined as “the historical innovation or novelty in an sf text from which the most important distinctions between the world of the tale from the world of the reader stem.” The novum, in other words, tends to presuppose a linear conception of history where the future can be imagined as radically different from the present (and the past), and where a distinction is made between the different horizons of the past, present and the future. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay observes:


The novum – in fact, the very concept of newness – necessarily implies some teleology. To recognize something as being new (as opposed, say, to a miracle or a religious epiphany) already requires a full-scale model of historical time, involving pasts, presents, and futures.109

Such a connection to radical change and linear development links science fiction to the kind of temporalization, or acceleration of history that was conceptualized by Reinhard Koselleck,110 a link between new conceptions of historical time with its emerging future horizons and SF which was, in fact, already noted by Suvin.111 However, the novum as a conceptual category does in fact not necessarily evoke a telos but might just as well serve to emphasise the radical contingency of history, as a novum might cause history to develop into unpredictable directions at any moment.112

Nonetheless, despite its close relationship to linear time, science fiction is certainly not limited to merely recapitulating the temporal logics of progress. In fact, by positioning itself close to or within hegemonic historical discourses, science fiction texts might also probe and question such hegemonic temporal logic, which has already been noted in, for instance, studies on Afrofuturism.113 Moreover, considering the dialogic of novelistic narrative discourse noted by Bakthin, science fiction texts often contain multiple and sometimes ideologically contradictory temporal orders. Elana Gomel, for instance, in her book-length study on temporality in Western science fiction, pointed to the presence of at least two other significant temporal orders present in her corpus of texts (what she calls *timeshapes*): contingency and apocalypse.114 Her discussions on both these concepts are relevant to my own study, as both forms temporality also appear in my own analyses in various ways. For example, such as the concept of contingency, which she relates to the alternate

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109 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 55.
110 Koselleck observed a radical change in the temporal perspectives on history in the three hundred years spanning 1500-1800. For Koselleck this shift was characterized by an increased separation between the “space of experience” and “horizon and expectation”, and the future was detached from the imminent apocalyptic future presented by scripture and the Church and gradually became an open field for political prognosis. See Reinhart Koselleck and Keith Tribe, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, New ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). See also Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
111 Suvin conceptualizes such accelerated development within his own ideological framework of Marxism, more specifically as “temporal extrapolation inherent in life based on a capitalist economy, with its salaries, profits, and progressive ideals always expected in a future clock-time.” Suvin and Canavan, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, 73.
112 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 57.
113 For an in-depth discussion on Afrofuturism and how this movement can and has questioned the temporal logics of progress, as well as for an example of how an Afrofuturist writer have employed such narrative strategies in practice, see Kodwo Eshun, “Further Considerations on Afrofuturism,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003); Jennifer Terry, “Time Lapse and Time Capsules: The Chronopolitics of Octavia E. Butler's Fiction,” *Women's Studies: Octavia Butler, Pt. II* 48, no. 1 (2019).
history/counterfactual form and which I have applied in my analysis of the alternate histories in chapter 5.

1.4.3.1 Sub-genres: future history, alternate history, and time travel

However, importantly, not all science fiction is about time. Therefore, I have identified three overlapping sub-genres that deal more explicitly with temporality, time and historicity: future history, alternate history, and time travel. The form of the future history has been defined by Andy Sawyer as “stories in which the processes of historical change are as important as the character’s stories themselves,”¹¹⁵ and it remains a central component of the genre.¹¹⁶ Importantly, considering the significance of “the future” for the future history, the form can be regarded as inextricably connected to linear conceptions of time. Through future history, “sf represents futures that are imaginatively continuous with the audience’s present, not cut off by an ‘absolute gap’ between ages.”¹¹⁷ In other words, the future history positions itself in a historical metanarrative which is linearly connected to the implied readers present. In this way, the future history usually supposes an element of linear progression from past, to present to the future. The form of the alternate history (or counterfactuals), in contrast, is a form that “concerns itself with history turning out differently than we know to be the case.”¹¹⁸ As Elana Gomel notes alternate history narrates a contingent temporality, “which presupposes the endless malleability of history, the radical distinction between the future and the past, and the unlimited human agency to effect change.”¹¹⁹ Rather than a unilinear, teleological temporality, the contingent temporality of the alternate history tends to narrate a multidirectional temporality, which is in direct opposition to the unilinear (highly deterministic) teleological temporal order. Moreover, in addition to contingent, alternate histories are also genetic, in the sense that they tend to gravitate towards the genesis of history,¹²⁰ often depart from a “moment of divergence,” and explore an alternate historical trajectory that stems from this historical event.¹²¹ As a narrative form, the interaction between extradiegetic and diegetic levels is extra significant in the alternate history, since the narrative reconfigures a pre-existing metanarrative which both the implied reader and the narrator (and implied author) are familiar with. The reader hence is provided with a “double perspective” which allows historical time to branch out into two (or more) divergent timelines, and where the

¹¹⁶ For the significance of the future history to the SF-genre, see Csicsery-Ronay, The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction, 76-110.
¹¹⁷ Csicsery-Ronay, The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction, 83.
¹¹⁹ Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 17.
¹²¹ Duncan, “Alternate History.”
implied author and characters belong to different timelines. Future history and in particular alternate history are often combined with time travel. Elana Gomel noted that time travel assumed temporal determinism and time travel is therefore closely related to highly deterministic and teleological conceptions of time, as it tends to freeze time into a rigid, unilinear timescape with pre-determined endings and beginnings. However, the presence of time travel in the alternate history should not be seen as a theoretical contradiction but merely as example of the dialogic nature of the texts, which often contain multiple temporal orders, and which allow characters to travel in time and experience and relate to different temporal orders.

Importantly, these categories of sub-genres overlap and are not absolute categories, and some texts in the study do not entirely correspond to any of these sub-genres. What all selected texts have in common is their relevance to my investigation into temporality and chronopolitics. In chapter 2, I will contextualize and historize Chinese science fiction to discuss how the emergence of the so-called “New Wave” of science fiction coincides with a complex web of temporal experience in Post-89 China.

1.4.4 Methodological approaches

In my narrative analyses, which has been my main methodological approach in this investigation, I have analyzed how various temporal orders are narrated in the texts. The focus has been to identify which temporal orders that are present in the narrative and how these temporalities clash in narrative, how they are constructed on the level of narrative, and sometimes reconfigured or deconstructed.

First and foremost, I have analyzed how these texts construct or reconfigure metanarratives of historical time, metanarratives which contain one (or more) temporal orders. For example, all alternate histories engage with historical metanarratives that already contain the teleological temporal order associated with the nation, and I have analyzed how such texts narrate a tension between the teleological temporal order and the contingent temporal order that the alternate history introduces. In this context, narrators and how they construct historical metanarratives in the texts are of significance. In this context I have sometimes used the term future-historical narrator, which I regard as a common narrative element in the sub-genre future history. The future historical narrator I define as a narrator whose time of narration is in the future and who possesses enough historical knowledge that this narrator can configure a historical metanarrative of the events in the story. The future-historical narrator can thus often attempt to impose a particular temporal order on the narrative,

122 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 24-25. See also Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 100.
123 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 17.
but the narrator is seldom entirely hegemonic, since temporal orders might also be present in the form of other narrative elements in the texts. Moreover, even the same narrator can configure different narratives containing opposing or conflicting temporal orders.

The second element I have analyzed is how the texts configure narrative order. Applying the distinction between story and narrative discourse I have noted how the texts jump back and forth in time, what Genette calls analepsis and prolepsis. As already noted, science fiction texts in the form of future histories, alternate histories, and time travel allow for configurations of narrative order not merely to problematize an individual experience of time, but also on level of historical metanarratives. Hence, configurations of narrative order on the level of metanarratives can challenge or deconstruct a particular temporal order or illuminate conflicts between existing orders. For example, I have analyzed how the reversal of narrative order in a national metanarrative deconstructs the teleological temporal order in “The Great Era.” Notably, I also refer to “the plot” but I do not employ this term as an analytical concept but merely as a practical way of summarizing the content of the novels for readers unfamiliar with my primary material.

The third element I have analyzed is spatiotemporal configuration. Here, I have paid attention to how the texts, apart from the presence of temporal orders, also configure particular chronotopes. Such chronotopes can sometimes narrativize an experience of time that is line with a dominant temporal order, such as the chronotope of “Starship Earth” in The Three Body Problem Trilogy. However, chronotopes might also serve to represent an experience of time distinct from any temporal order. The chronotope of the road in Mars Over America, for instance, narrates a multidirectional temporality which serves to alienate the individual subject from any of the dominant temporal orders; the chronotope of the "Red Ocean" in Red Ocean, likewise, narrates a unique temporality seemingly distinct from any of the other temporalities or temporal orders present in the texts. Such chronotopes hence often serve to complicate temporal experience further, beyond the logic of any temporal order.

The fourth element I have focused on in the following narrative analyses are the characters and protagonists. In this context, I employ the term focalization to describe how narrators can describe an experience of time from the point of view of various characters. Often, characters can embody conflicting temporal orders, as they represent an approach to time in line with a particular temporal order in the texts. As noted, many of these texts include time travel, which allow characters to travel through time and hence experience different kinds of temporal orders, which serves to increase the tension between different temporalities. Importantly, focalization can often also go beyond a mere representation of a temporal order and express a more independent form of subjectivity. In this context, I have also analyzed how the existential time of the protagonists relate to historical time and the various temporal orders in the texts.
A fifth narrative element I have sometimes analyzed are motifs and novums. Motifs can often have ideological implications that represent a temporal order, or a conflict between two temporal orders. For instance, there is the motif of revolution in Mars Over America, which I read as a representation of the tension between a past-oriented, cyclical temporal order and a teleological temporal order. In a similar way, novums can sometimes be regarded as a kind literalization of a temporal order. In the same novel, for example, the time travel device called lingzhan 灵杖 (The Spectre) can be seen as a literalization of the teleological temporal order.

Finally, in my investigation, I have also gone beyond a mere narrative analysis and investigated how the temporal orders present in the texts relate to different discourses, and what ideological and political implications these temporal orders might have. For example, I discuss how the apocalyptic temporal order of the Three Body Problem Trilogy has been appropriated in political discourse on the Chinese internet. In chapter 4 which focuses on alternate history and contingency, I discuss how the characters relate to the two temporal orders present in the text (teleological and contingent respectively) can be explained to related official discourses as well as discourses of nostalgia in the post-89 context.

1.5 Outline of the study
After having defined my key-theoretical concepts and my methodology, I will dedicate chapter 2 to provide the reader with sufficient background and contextual understanding both in terms of the politics of time in China in the twentieth century and the history of science fiction. I will also provide brief discussions on how the genre has related to discourses of temporality throughout the twentieth century. In chapter 3, we begin the analysis. Chapter 3 focuses how non-progressive temporalities conflict with and disrupt the teleological temporal order in four different texts, reconfiguring the relationship to weilai 未来 (the future) as normally conceived in the teleological temporal order. Chapter 4 discusses how Liu Cixin's The Three Body Problem Trilogy reconfigures temporality and introduces an apocalyptic temporal order, which clashes with a liberal interpretation of teleological time, and which constructs a politics of crisis which has been appropriated in Chinese political discourse in recent years. In chapter 5, I explore how the narrative form of the alternate history disrupts the teleological temporal order by introducing a multilinear, contingent temporal order with multiple pasts and futures. Finally, in chapter 6, I engage in a closer discussion of the fraught relationship between the individual subject and historical time present in the texts, and relate my discussion to the increased presence of individual temporalities in post-89 culture and discourse.
2. Politics of Time and Science Fiction in China in the Twentieth Century

The aim of this second chapter is twofold. The first aim is to provide the reader with a necessary historical background and context in terms of the politics of time in twentieth century China. Most importantly, I discuss the development and significance of the teleological temporal order in twentieth century Chinese history and politics. As I will discuss in more detail below, this teleological conception of time emerged as a consequence of a shift in the structure of Chinese temporality during what is often called the Late Qing period (ca.1849–1911), when dominant cyclical conceptions of time were largely replaced by linear perspectives. The teleological temporal order, although it was never the only collective temporality present in the twentieth century, would remain hegemonic throughout the twentieth century. Nonetheless, since I consider 1989 as a key turning point in Chinese history and politics, I also discuss how this temporal order has been challenged by a multiplicity of temporalities in discourse in the post-89 period. The second aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with a brief historical background of the science fiction genre in China since its emergence during the Late Qing-period and to discuss the relationship between science fiction and discourses of temporality in China throughout the different stages in the genre’s development. More specifically, I will discuss how science fiction can be related to linear time and the emergence of weilai 未來 (the future) as a significant temporal concept, but also how the emergence of multiple temporalities in discourse in the post-89 period is reflected in the emergence of the so-called “New Wave” of Chinese science fiction.

2.1 Politics of time in China in the twentieth century: Origins of the teleological temporal order

Before the Late Qing period, Chinese temporality had been characterized by cyclical and past-oriented conceptions of time. As Jeffrey Kinkley points out, Chinese people “for millenia looked for cycles in nature, the ascendancy of yin and yang, successions of reigning dynasties, families, Buddhist kalpas,
Daoist eons, and the rise and fall of prosperity.”124 Most significantly, a past-oriented, cyclical temporal order was for much of Chinese pre-modern history enforced through the political practice of writing dynastic histories.125 By being officially sanctioned by the present dynasty in the form of dynastic histories, such a temporal order was highly political in nature, and “served the political goal of confirming the legitimate succession of the new regime.”126 These dynastic cycles were overwhelmingly imbued with “the sense that time is degenerative; the present is perforce inferior to the ancient past”;127 in other words, the historians of China had no conception of progress and were constantly looking backwards to the ancient past for political models of the near future. In general, Luke S. Kwong argues, apart from legitimizing the political present regime, the cyclical notion of history “offered a spiritual-conceptual escape from the paralyzing effect of the ‘horror of history’ by promising the periodic restoration of life to normality.”128 For these reasons, as Wang Fansen has noted, history had been completely uninterested in the future before the late Qing, and predicting the future had been left to traditional forms of divination.129 The same disinterest in the future can be attributed to the realm of fiction, in which – as David Der-wei Wang pointed out – this temporal logic tended to be replicated by rooting any fictional verisimilitude in the historical past.130

However, during the Late Qing period (1849–1911) there occurred a re-structuring of temporality in China from such past-oriented, often cyclical temporalities to dominantly linear conceptions of time, which served to a shift the focus away from the ideal of the past to the widening horizon of the future.

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125 The practice of writing dynastic histories was formed with Ban Gu’s history of the Han-dynasty *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han), and later became institutionalized during the Tang-dynasty. Michael Puett points out that “Many of the characteristics of historiography that would ultimately come to be associated with China – a cyclical vision of history, based politically in the dynastic cycle, with a moral interpretation of the political actors involved in the cycle – were standardized at this point.” Michael Puett, “Classical Chinese Historical Thought,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 43. The relative homogeneity of the dynastic cycle since the Tang seems to justify a definition of a singular cyclical temporal order relatively continuous over time, although I certainly do not rule out that a closer comparison between different periods might reveal important differences.
127 Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China*; Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China*, xix.
128 Kwong, “The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China c.1860-1911,” 160.
130 Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, 301.
In *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, German historian Reinhardt Koselleck has traced a shift in European concepts of history during the three centuries between 1500 and 1800.¹³¹ For Koselleck this shift was characterized by an increased separation between the “space of experience” and “horizon and expectation,” and the future was detached from the imminent apocalyptic future presented by scripture and the Church and gradually became an open field for political prognosis.¹³² A similar shift occurred in the Late Qing period in China, during which dominantly cyclical temporal perspectives were replaced by linearly oriented perspectives, a process which gradually acquired momentum throughout the nineteenth century.¹³³ One of the most important causes of the shift, according to Luke S.K. Kwong, seems to have above all been an increasing sense that the present moment and the various crises that it entailed was truly unprecedented; therefore, one could no longer approach the problems of the present by modelling the present on the ideals of the past.¹³⁴ The author traces this sense of historical unprecedentedness through the use of so-called “block-time expressions to refer to the emergent trends or patterns that had formed over ‘the past thirty years’ (sanshinian lai) or ‘sixty years’ (liushinian lai)” and points out that “almost inexplicably, events in recent memory had begun to stack up or accumulate, gathering momentum in a forward thrust toward the future.”¹³⁵

Following this shift, Chinese historians and intellectuals could no longer look backwards to find guidance for the present, but instead became more and more oriented towards “the future” (weilai 未來), and several attempts to reimagine history as progressive and future-oriented were made during the Late Qing. The theory of the three ages (san shi 三世) developed by Kang Youwei 康有為, for example, imagined the future as unfolding through three

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¹³² Koselleck and Tribe, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, 679-731. Koselleck shows how the temporal shift, and the emerging importance of the future can be perceived in shifts in meanings of various concepts. The emergence of various “isms” carried within them a temporal structure that pointed toward the future. As Ivo Spira has shown, a similar process occurred in China during the Late Qing, as various forms of “zhuyi” 主義 projected different ideals onto the newly “discovered” future. Ivo Spira, *A Conceptual History of Chinese -isms: The Modernization of Ideological Discourse, 1895-1925* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-45. See also Wang Fansen 王汎森, “Zhuyi shidai de lai lin: Zhongguo jindai sixiang shi de yi ge guanjian fazhan” 主義時代的來臨：中國近代思想史的一個關鍵發展 [Advent of the ‘the age of -isms’: a key development in Chinese modern intellectual history], *Dongya guanlian shi jikan* 東亞觀念史集刊 [Journal of East Asian conceptual history], no. 4 (2013). For an illuminating comparison between the Chinese case and the European contexts, see Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich*, 10-12.
¹³³ For an illuminating comparison between the Chinese case and the European contexts, see Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich*, 10-12.
¹³⁴ Kwong, “The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China c.1860-1911,” 172-73.
¹³⁵ Kwong, “The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China c.1860-1911,” 172-73.
ages, namely luanshi 乱世 (age of disruption), xiaokang 小康 (age of minor prosperity), and datong 大同 (age of Great Prosperity/Great Unity) which – according to Kang – Confucius had foreseen.\textsuperscript{136} Kang’s disciple Liang Qichao 梁啟超, likewise, rejected the cyclic and non-progressive dynastic histories,\textsuperscript{137} and re-imagined history as linear and progressive developing through evolutionary stages in his groundbreaking historical treatise Xin shixue 新史學 (New Historiography).\textsuperscript{138} Notably, a significant discursive influence during this period was Social Darwinism introduced by Yan Fu’s 嚴復 highly influential Tianyanlun 天演論, a translation of T.H Huxley’s Evolution and Ethics, which was a strong influence on Liang Qichao’s philosophy of history.\textsuperscript{139} Hence, during this period “progress” was often synonymous with jinhua 進化 (evolution).\textsuperscript{140} Nevertheless, such interest in Darwinism, as in the case of Liang Qichao, tended to be founded less on the understanding of time and history as an evolutionary, contingent process (as the process of evolution is understood in evolutionary theory)\textsuperscript{141} and more as a way of understanding the supposed “laws” of history to predict the future.\textsuperscript{142} In other words, jinhua 進化 in this context should be understood less as a temporal concept and more as a discourse that attempted to explain China’s position in World history in the context of a emerging linear conceptions of history that tended to be imagined in teleological terms.

Although such a shift to linear notions of time does not necessarily entail merely teleological conceptions of history, Chinese politics tended to be dominated by teleological conceptions of time throughout the twentieth century. Such teleological concepts of history are what I conceptualize in terms of a hegemonic teleological temporal order.\textsuperscript{143} The intellectuals of the May Fourth Period, for instance, despite their inherent differences in political views,

\textsuperscript{137} Wang Fansen 王汎森, “Zhongguo jindai xianshi zhong de ‘weilai’” 中国近代思想中的‘未来’ [‘The future’ in Chinese modern thought], 66.
\textsuperscript{138} Zarrow, “Old Myth into New History: The Building Blocks of Liang Qichao’s ‘New History’.
\textsuperscript{139} Hao Chang, Liang Ch‘i-ch‘ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907, Harvard East Asian series, 64, (Cambridge, Mass, 1971), 64.
\textsuperscript{140} James Reeve Pusey, Lu Xun and Evolution (SUNY Series in Philosophy and Biology) (State University of New York Press, 1998), 71.
\textsuperscript{142} Wang Fansen 王汎森, “Zhongguo jindai xianshi zhong de ‘weilai’” 中国近代思想中的‘未来’ [‘The future’ in Chinese modern thought], 66.
\textsuperscript{143} The teleological temporal order, as Jordheim also notes, can be regarded as near-synonymous with “Progress”. See Jordheim, “Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization,” 500.
nevertheless tended to subscribe to a progressive and often teleological view of history; in fact, most of these writers and intellectuals “did not just promote a progressive notion of time; it presented that notion as an indisputable truth, designating other perceptions as false, feudalistic and backward.” The most influential and consequential expression of such a teleological temporal order, however, was no doubt the Marxist discourse of history which dominated Chinese political life after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. Maoist political discourse was overwhelmingly teleologically oriented, since it “sees history as obeying a preconceived motive that propels society from the lower stages of feudalism and capitalism to the higher stages of socialism and communism.” As both Ban Wang and Wang Yanjie points out, the teleological conception of time was politically enforced on the Chinese populace through chronopolitical campaigns such as “The Great Leap Forward” (da yuejin 大跃进) where China was supposed to “surpass England within fifteen years and to catch up with America within twenty years.” Although there were many political changes implemented after Mao’s death in 1976 following the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, the teleological temporal order remained largely intact in official discourse, this time reformulated in terms of modernization and development rather than the socialist utopianism of Maoism and the Great Leap Forward. In other words, throughout Chinese twentieth century, Chinese political leaders and intellectuals have employed the teleological temporal order formulated in different discourses and narratives to reach their own political ends by claiming to have grasped the one and only weilai 未来 (the future).

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144 Wang, “Heterogeneous Time and Space: Han Shaogong’s Rethinking of Chinese Modernity,” 28. As Wang notes, he poet and May 4th intellectual Guo Moruo 郭沫若 can be regarded as representative of this view of history and time, as he wrote: “History is evolutionary. All things in the universe are evolving. Human society is progressing. No one can deny this reality. History is like an irreversible arrow pointing toward one destination. Nothing is outside of this plot.” Quoted in Wang, “Heterogeneous Time and Space: Han Shaogong’s Rethinking of Chinese Modernity,” 28.


148 Also discussed by Wang Fansen 王汎森, “Zhongguo jindai sixiang zhong de ‘welai’ 中国近代思想中的‘未来’ [‘The future’ in Chinese modern thought], 70.
2.1.1 Synchronization and simultaneity

This temporal order of teleological time was throughout the twentieth century also accompanied by processes of synchronization and the establishment of simultaneity.\textsuperscript{149} In his classic study on the conditions of the emergence of nationalism, \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism}, Benedict Anderson pointed to the importance of discourses of temporality to the establishment of the nation as an “imagined community” and as a historical subject.\textsuperscript{150} More specifically, Anderson noted how cultural developments and new technology such as the prominence of the newspaper under print capitalism and the emergence of the novel all contributed to a sense new sense of “simultaneity,” where people who never actually met each other still had a sense of living in the time.\textsuperscript{151} For Anderson, this new sense of simultaneity replaced a previous form “simultaneity-along-time” associated with the religious communities of the past, where the past and the future tended to merge into an “instantaneous present” through “prefiguring” and “fulfilment.”\textsuperscript{152} Whereas Anderson's conception of such pre-modern conceptions of temporality are perhaps overly schematic, the significance of his concept of a new form of “cross-time” simultaneity, which in his words was “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar”\textsuperscript{153} can hardly be overstated. As Anderson puts it:

An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd [sic] fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.\textsuperscript{154}

The construction of the nation as an imagined community could then be seen as founded on this sense of simultaneity, as the nation now could be “conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”\textsuperscript{155} “The process of synchronization can thus be regarded as a central element of the nation-building project. This process of synchronization, apart from the influence of innovations such as the newspaper and the rise of the novel, was also implemented by the introduction of the concept of national history (replacing

\textsuperscript{149} I borrow the concept of processes of synchronization from Jordheim, “Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization.”
\textsuperscript{151} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism}, 9-36.
the previous dynastic form) which further established “China” as a historical subject.\footnote{Prasenjit Duara, “The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture,” in Cambridge companions to culture, ed. Kam Louie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47.} As a result of the intermingling of linear time with the emerging imagined community of the nation, history tended from this time on to be written in the form of national histories in China, which replaced the dynastic form that had been the standard in premodern China.\footnote{Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). In this important work, historian Prasenjit Duara traces the marrying of linear, teleological time with the imagined community of the Nation in modern China} The national community of “China” was narrativized in this new mode of history, which tended to obscure multiplicities of timeframes and the fact that historicity is recorded in “many different narrative and non-narrative modes.”\footnote{Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China, 19.} Subsequently, this process of synchronization was intensified after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, where a significant change was the establishment of one single time-zone for the whole of China. As Séagh Kehoe points out, “The new Communist state quickly dispensed with the five official time zones that had existed under the Nationalist government and introduced ‘Beijing time’ as the new standardized time regime, a political move designed to assert power and enhance control.”\footnote{Kehoe, “Regimes of Temporality: China, Tibet and the Politics of Time in the Post-2008 Era,” 1135. See also Hassid and Watson, "State of Mind: Power, Time Zones and Symbolic State Centralization," 180-82.} Indeed, as Kehoe also noted, the fact that a nation of the size of China to this day maintains a single time-zone speaks to the importance of synchronization and simultaneity, and in general, discourses of temporality, to national unity and the maintenance of political power in the PRC.\footnote{Kehoe, “Regimes of Temporality: China, Tibet and the Politics of Time in the Post-2008 Era,” 1135.} In brief, politics of time in the twentieth century in China was generally characterized by processes of synchronization and the establishment of simultaneity, which accompanied the nation building project and the imposition of the teleological temporal order.

2.1.2 The individual and time

Related to the process of synchronization and teleological time and the establishment of simultaneity is the relationship between individual and historical time. Charles S Maier noted that the authoritarian regimes in Europe during the twentieth century “resisted private, individual time” and that they tended to demand a complete temporal commitment from individual subjects.\footnote{Maier, “The Politics of Time: Changing Paradigms of Collective Time and Private Time in the Modern era,” 165.} This was also true of the political regime’s approach to time during the Maoist period, as the regime implemented policies to synchronize individual time
completely with the collective enterprise of the revolution. As Har Ye Kan has shown, the Maoist period during the 1950s and 1960s was characterized by the cultivation of a particular “time-consciousness” where time should be completely dedicated to the revolutionary enterprise. During this period, hence, private temporalities were supposed to be sacrificed for the collective. As Har puts it: “The real value of time was derived from one’s passionate dedication to the radical enterprise, such that workers were supposed to disregard their physical toils and the exhausting passage of time for the greater good of the People’s Republic.”162 This type of sacrifice of individual temporalities for collective ones can also be observed in some of the orthodox fiction of this era, often referred to as “revolutionary romanticism combined with revolutionary realism”,163 which helped to reorient private presents to the collective future. Most notably, in the most famous novel from this era, Qingchun zhi ge 青春之歌 (Song of Youth), as critics have noted, the narrative mobilizes private temporalities and canalizes them into the collective enterprise.164 In the novel, the romantic motif and its private dreams and desires is sublimated into the love of the Revolution (as Ban Wang argues) in “a process of rechanneling one’s desire, impulse and affection into politically acceptable outlets” and which, ultimately, “shows how crucial it is to get involved in history and how one can, in process, transform oneself into the ‘subject of history.’”165 This process of synchronizing and subsuming private temporalities with the collective was perhaps best described by Chinese historian Qian Liqun 錢理群, who in a talk at Chiao Tung University in 2009 addressed his students in the audience in the following way: “Our generation has a flesh-and-blood relationship with history, these historical campaigns directly influenced our lives, our bodies, our emotions, and our spirits. Our ‘little selves’ (xiaowo) and the historical ‘big self’ (dawo) were all tangled together—this is something that sets us apart from the students I teach and from those present here today.”166 The process of synchronizing the individual subject with the (supposedly) singular collective temporality of “historical time,” to use Qian’s terminology, was to allow the “little selves” to be entirely consumed by the “big self” which was always in the process of becoming by always


163 “Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism: Song of Youth,” 237.

164 See Wang, “Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism: Song of Youth.”

165 Wang, “Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism: Song of Youth,” 241.

approaching the telos. However, as is implied by Qian’s remark the relationship between the collective and private temporalities has significantly changed in the post-89 context, which will be discussed more in detail below.

2.1.3 Post-89 context: pluralization, multiple times and multiple teleologies

In the post-89 context, the politics of time in China has become more complex. In particular, the post-89 cultural and political landscape has, in cultural theorist Jason McGrath’s view, been characterized by “pluralization” (duoyuanhua 多元化).

Such a concept of pluralization can conveniently be reframed for our present purposes in the pluralization of temporality in general discourse. The emergence of this multiplicity of temporalities in discourse in the 1990s can be explained by a variety of cultural and political factors. Although Mao died in 1976, it was not until the crackdown on Tiananmen Square in 1989 that the legitimacy of state-sponsored socialist utopianism was more widely questioned.

Following Deng Xiaoping’s “Southern Tour” in 1992, the economic reforms initiated in the 1980s were more widely and thoroughly implemented across all strata of society, which McGrath points to as a major turning point. In particular, the emergence of entertainment media contributed to the emergence of private temporalities in discourse, “thus fragmenting and dispersing the national space and time created by the official media.”

These changes also opened for wider political and ideological debates from the 1990s which continued throughout the 2000s. The emergence of the internet, importantly, allowed for more spaces of publication and circulation of texts. In such a “post-socialist” context, the CCP could no longer completely dominate the field of temporal discourse.

However, the temporal landscape in post-89 Chinese discourse has not been simple case of unrestrained pluralization. This can to a significant degree

170 Sun, “Media Events or Media Stories?: Time, Space and Chinese (Trans)nationalism,” 26.
172 For an overview of the ideological debates inside China during this period, see Cheek et al., Voices from the Chinese Century: Public Intellectual Debate from Contemporary China.
174 Post-socialism is the term McGrath employs to describe a transition from state socialism to a market society. To McGrath, this transition is characterized by the processes of shichanghua 市场化 (marketization), duoyuanhua 多元化 (pluralization), gerenhua 个人化 (individualization), and fenhua 分化 (division, differentiation, disaggregation) (ch 1). In my analyses I stick to the more neutral term “post-89”. See McGrath, Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age, ch 1.
be explained in relation to politics. In fact, the CCP continued to enforce its hegemonic temporal order of linear teleological time, which remained essential to its legitimacy, and continued to police temporal discourses through an immense propaganda apparatus. This distinguishes China from post-communist Russia, where, as some critics have argued, "postcommunism may indeed be viewed as a paradoxical 'time out of time', a rupture in the ordinary temporality that entirely dispenses with the teleological horizon of politics," and where the regime “not only refused to impose order on time but also has actively fostered an uncontrolled and disordered multiplicity of temporalities—one that has yielded particular advantage for the maintenance of power" In the Chinese context, the regime has instead kept imposing teleological time in the form of narratives of national modernization, which “assume[] unshakable authority and subsumes all rhythms of the society into one uniform pace and tempo.” At the 18th National Congress in 2012, for instance, president Hu Jintao encouraged the Chinese people to "forge ahead with tenacity and resolve" and ensured his audience that China lead by the CCP would [. . .] complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects when the Communist Party of China celebrates its centenary and turn China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious when the People’s Republic of China marks its centennial. In other words, also in the post-89 context, as Kehoe notes, temporality in the form of teleological narratives still “represents a powerful political resource that reduces heterogeneous temporal experiences to a single, shared trajectory of unilinear progress in order to consolidate order and control.” The official narrative of Chinese modern history and the history of the CCP have been laid out in a political document from 1981, which remains a central and unquestionable version of history. More recently, propaganda films like Jian guo

176 Prozorov, “Russian Postcommunism and the End of History,” 207.
Notably, however, even while reinforcing such a temporal order of teleological time, the regime had to navigate a more complex political and ideological landscape. Following the crackdown on Tiananmen and the introduction of a market society, the future of communism was no longer the only telos available. Instead, as several critics have noted, the regime had to navigate a more complex temporal landscape characterized by the presence a multiplicity of teleologies, including “a transition to a market economy and consumer paradise, a transition to a civil society and democracy, or indeed, officially, still a transition to socialism of some vague nature.”

Perhaps most notably, there was the “End of History”-narrative which has been highly influential in post-89 Chinese discourse. This narrative built on Francis Fukuyama’s famous argument that liberalism had emerged victorious in the battle between ideologies and that China would eventually develop into a constitutional, liberal democratic state. Following such an ambiguity, as both Kevin Latham and Jason McGrath argued, the regime has relied on a “rhetoric of transition,” which was characterized by an intended ideological vagueness of precisely what the telos was. Indeed, the telos of “communism” was replaced in much official discourse with other discursive markers, most notably the concepts of xiaokang (moderate prosperity) and datong (Great Prosperity/Great Unity), derived from Chinese traditional historical and political thinking. Importantly, such alterations in discourse should not be mistaken for a change in the temporal logic underneath the discourse (i.e. the temporal order) which remained highly teleological.

184 Wang and Huters, China’s New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition, 46-77. For Fukuyama’s original argument, see Fukuyama, “The End of History?.”
187 Smith, “Datong and Xiaokang,” 65. As previously noted, these concepts were also used by Kang Youwei in his political thinking.
2.2 Chinese science fiction and temporality

The genre that this study focuses on is science fiction. When this genre emerged as a publishing category and separate genre in China in the Late Qing period it was originally referred to as *kexue xiaoshuo* 科學小說 (science novels). Today however the genre is generally referred to *kexue huanxiang xiaoshuo* 科學幻想小說 (science fantasy novels), almost exclusively in its abbreviated form *kehuan* 科幻 (science fantasy). Although as Song notes, the development of science fiction in China has “never been continuous,” and science fiction has often tended to overlap with other related genres, it still makes sense to discuss science fiction as a separate genre in this context for two main reasons: science fiction as a literature of progress and the emergence of “the new” (linking it to conceptions of linear time and the teleological temporal order) and science fiction as a literary discourse separate from dominant literary discourses mainly associated with orthodox realism.

Beginning with the New Culture Movement in the 1920s and 1930s, realism has enjoyed incomparable prestige in the Chinese literary field. For the May Fourth’s generation, realism represented “a new literature, by altering the very worldview of its readers, would, they hoped, pave the way for a complete transformation of Chinese society.” From the founding of the PRC, realism became the orthodox fiction in the form of “revolutionary realism,” which was

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189 According to Jia Liyuan, the term *kehuan xiaoshuo* began to be employed to denote the genre during the Republican period. See Jia Liyuan 贾立元, *'Xiandai' yu 'weizhi': Wangqing kehuan xiaoshuo yanjiu* 现代与未知晚晴科幻小说研究 [The Modern and The Unknown: Studies in Late Qing Science Fiction] (Beijing 北京: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社 [Beijing university press], 2021), 15. However, considering the few examples of SF from this period, it seems reasonable to assume that the term did not denote a separate publishing category until after 1949.
191 This can be said of the genre in both a Western and Chinese context. For example, in a recent cultural history of the genre, Roger Luckhurst argued strongly against overly formal definitions of sf, pointing out that “the genre has always been a mixed, hybrid, bastard form, in a process of constant change.” See Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 243. In the Chinese context, Isaacson notes how during the late Qing, “there was considerable overlap between this [kexue xiaoshuo] and other genres, especially fantasies, travel narratives, and futuristic utopias.” See Isaacson, *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction*, 7. During the Maoist period, science fiction was part of *kexue wenyi* and tended to overlap with several genres, including popular scientific writing. In the contemporary period, Cara Healey has argued that science fiction can be understood in terms of “generic hybridity” mixing genre characteristics of global SF with local motifs and genres. See Healey, “Genre Transgressions and (Trans)Nationalism in Chinese Science Fiction.”
192 As I have argued in the previous chapter.
inextricably connected to the project of nation-building.\textsuperscript{194} Worth noting is how this form of realism represented temporality; in fact, the realism of this period was not supposed to represent reality, but rather as reality was \textit{becoming}, as one was approaching the Communist telos; hence “Temporaly also reigns supreme in the modern Chinese historical fiction, particularly in fictions of revolutionary history, which are invariably oriented towards the future, toward a Utopia.”\textsuperscript{195} In this conception, reality was no longer seen as reality in terms of present social realities, instead reality is the historical process itself, where “history as obeying a preconceived motive that propels society from the lower stages of feudalism and capitalism to the higher stages of socialism and communism.”\textsuperscript{196} As noted previously, the synchronizing practices of the Maoist era demanded a complete temporal commitment from the individual subject, and revolutionary realism as exemplified by the previously mentioned \textit{Song of Youth} can be seen as being part of this synchronizing process. The temporal logic of this form of realist fiction was not widely questioned until the appearance of what has been called the “New Historical Novels” of the 1980s and 1990s, which has been studied in the detail by Qingxin Lin and Jeffrey Kinkley.\textsuperscript{197} Hence, partly due to the apotheosis of realism in Chinese twentieth-century literary history, science fiction remained on the margins both of the literary field and in literary histories until quite recently, when scholars began paying serious attention to the genre.

For these reasons, particularly in the post-89 period, which is the focus of this dissertation, it is possible to view science fiction as a partly separate literary discourse producing alternate discourses of temporality and counter-narratives that conflict with and problematize hegemonic discourses.\textsuperscript{198} Following this, I will in the following section provide the reader with a brief but necessary overview and history of the genre in China from the early twentieth century to the present day. In addition to such a general overview, I will also discuss how the genre has related to discourses of temporality in China throughout these different periods. In particular, I will discuss how the genre in its various manifestations in different periods has related to the dominant teleological temporal order.

\textsuperscript{194} Wang, “Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism: Song of Youth.”
\textsuperscript{195} Lin, \textit{Brushing History Against the Grain: Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction (1986-1999)}
\textsuperscript{196} Wang, “Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism: Song of Youth,” 240.
\textsuperscript{197} Kinkley, \textit{Visions of Dystopia in China\textquoteright s New Historical Novels}; Lin, \textit{Brushing History Against the Grain: Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction (1986-1999)}
\textsuperscript{198} Related to the production of alternate discourses is the importance of the internet in the construction of such discourse. Chinese readers are just as likely to have encountered many of the texts analyzed in this dissertation online as in print, and several of the texts remain unpublished in print in mainland China. This has implications for our discussion of science fiction producing counter-discourses of temporality in tension with the hegemonic discourses.
2.2.1 The emergence of science fiction during the Late Qing-period

Science fiction first emerged in China during the first decade of the twentieth century during the Late Qing-period. Science fiction first reached Chinese readers in the form of translations of foreign works, and subsequently a significant number of Chinese science fiction novels began being published in China. One of the more noteworthy titles include 閃電異鄉 (Tales of the Moon Colony), published in the fiction periodical 繡像小說 (Portrait fiction) between 1904–1905, which Nathaniel Isaacson identifies as the first Chinese novel labelled as science fiction. The novel tells the story of the Chinese character Long Menghua's encounter with a Japanese inventor and their travels around the world in the latter's air balloon, and the eventual encounter with an extraterrestrial civilization from the moon. Other notable works from this period included 新紀元 (The New Era, 1906), which imagined a future powerful China waging a war with Western nations and 新石頭記 (The New Story of the Stone, 1905), in which the character Jia Baoyu from the classic novel 紅樓夢 (Story of the Stone) travels through time into modern day Shanghai and eventually visits a technological utopia.

As Hua Li noted, Chinese science fiction has always been “closely related to politics,” and this is true also of the genre’s emergence in the Late Qing-period, as science fiction was tied to the project of reimagining China as a revitalized, modern nation in a time of political and cultural crisis. Most famously, the soon to be central figure of modern Chinese literature 魯迅 (1881–1936) was an early proponent of the genre in this context. In the foreword of his translation of Jules Verne’s From the Earth to the Moon 魯迅 endorsed science fiction and encouraged further translation of the

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The high regard for science fiction among some Chinese writers and intellectuals during this period, as Nathaniel Isaacson notes, can be explained in part by two factors, namely the emerging discourse of Western science and the rise of the novel. During the Late Qing, there occurred an epistemological shift where Western scientific discourse, or *kexue* 科學, gradually replaced other pre-modern discourses and cosmologies. At the same time, the novel (*xiaoshuo* 小說) had begun to replace poetry as the dominant genre in Chinese literary culture, and had been promoted by prominent intellectuals like Liang Qichao 梁啟超 as the most efficient literary form to enlighten the Chinese populace. For these reasons, as Isaacson points out, the genre of science fiction – or *kexue xiaoshuo* – encapsulates two of the most significant shifts in Chinese literary and cultural sphere during the early twentieth century, and must have seen as almost emblematic of modernity to many intellectuals at the time.

Apart from the discourse of science and the rising importance of the novel, the emergence of science fiction in China during the Late Qing period is also inextricably related to new conceptions of time that were becoming prominent in China during this period. More specifically, the emergence of the genre is closely related to the shift from a dominantly past-oriented, cyclical conception of time to linear time, and the emergence of the related temporal concept of *weilai* 未來 (the future). Several central science fiction texts of this period can serve as examples of how the genre was engaged in reconfiguring Chinese temporality at this time. “Tales of the Moon Colony,” for example, is a particularly illustrative example of science fiction reflecting the emergence of linear time in China, as well as the growing importance of the future. While de-centering China spatially and abandoning the traditional Sinocentric worldview, the novel also discarded the traditional cyclical view, instead imagining nations as being positioned along a linear timeline where some were portrayed as backwards and others as advanced.

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Nathaniel Isaacson has noted in their respective readings of the novel, the novel also registers a shift in traditional ways of denoting time to modern clock-time.\(^{213}\)

Liang Qichao’s *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 (The Future of New China, 1902) is another important text in terms of this shift in temporal orientation in the historical thinking and fiction in the Late Qing. The novel imagines China as a major world power 60 years into the future and opens with the scholar Kong Hongdao giving a speech at the Shanghai Exposition to celebrate China’s successful reforms.\(^{214}\) The novel reflects the temporal shift not merely in how it projected China along linear time into a utopian future, but also how the novel denoted historical time. In his reading of the novel, Jia Liyuan notes that Liang discarded the traditional historiographical way using the year of the dynasty from its founding as a measurement of historical time, and positioned China’s history along a linear line with the birth of Confucius as the origin of history, noting the that narrative takes place “2513 years after the birth of Confucius.”\(^{215}\) Notably, in his reading of the novel, David Der-wei Wang puts particular emphasis on the temporal scheme of the novel.\(^{216}\) Wang notes the fact that the novel was never finished with the result that the middle part needed to bridge the utopian future and the present of the Late Qing is missing.\(^{217}\) Wang argues that although there might have been several reasons for Liang not being able to complete the novel, its lack of completion can be

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\(^{213}\) Ren Dongmei lists some ways of denoting time in traditional Chinese fiction, such as *dàn* 旦 (dawn), *chen* 晨 (morning), *hun* 昏 (dusk), all which are different and less precise ways of denoting time than modern clock-time. In *Tales of moon colony*, in contrast, as Isaacson writes, “[t]he characters pay close attention to their daily schedule, noting the hour they sleep, the hour they wake up, the time they plan to arrive in a given place, or the hour they will reconvene to depart from another place. The duration that it takes to complete a given task – flying from island to another, for example – is also noted in number of hours.” Ren Dongmei 任冬梅, “*Zhongguo keshu zuichu xingji lüxing mengxiang: lun Huangjiang Diaosou de ‘yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo’ jiqi shikong guan* [The first dream of interstellar travel in Chinese science fiction: On Huangjiang Diaosou’s ‘Tales of the moon colony’ and its spatiotemporal view] 43-44; Isaacson, *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction*, 103.

\(^{214}\) Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, 303.


\(^{216}\) Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, 302.

\(^{217}\) Wang writes: “We know its beginning and ending all at once, but not the middle part that would have bridged the beginning and the ending. What is missing is the progressive narrative as well as the historical time to make the future accessible and intelligible.” (emphasis in original) Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, 304.
understood in Liang’s inability to resolve certain temporal contradictions in the composition of the novel. More specifically, Wang notes that the narrative’s temporal structure the novel ultimately “harbors a basic hostility towards the unfolding of time,” which seals the future in a single teleological presence while completely curtailing other temporal possibilities. In his evocative reading Wang even speculates that the novel be regarded as foreshadowing the temporal scheme of the Communist project and its hegemonic future. In other words, Liang’s unfinished novel can be regarded as a representation in fiction of the emergence of a teleological temporal order in China, which eventually would find its most influential expression in the Marxist discourse of history. In brief, the emergence of science fiction in China during the late Qing reflected a shift from a hegemonic past-oriented, cyclical temporal order of recurrence to dominantly linear conceptions of time, where “the future” (weilai 未来) replaced the past as the dominant temporal orientation.

2.2.2 Chinese science fiction 1949–1989

After a period of flourishing of science fiction during the first decade of the twentieth century, SF as a separate narrative genre almost completely disappeared from the literary scene in China during the following decades, as realism rose to prominence as the dominant literary genre during the New Culture Movement. However, science fiction resurfaced as a separate genre after the founding of the People’s Republic in the 1949. During the period between the 1950s until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, science fiction was regarded as part of the broader category of kexue wenyi 科学文艺 (scientific art) adopted from the Soviet Union, which also included multiple forms of popular science writing, and justified its existence in the literary field through its supposed function to teach children science. Science fiction can be regarded as a minor presence in the Chinese literary field during this period, with only around sixty texts produced between the years 1950–1965, and were written exclusively in the shorter format of the

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218 Wang, Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911, 305.
219 Wang, Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911, 305-06.
220 Wang, Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911, 305-06.
221 Isaacson, Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction, 146.
222 There were a few exceptions. Lao She 老舍 published Maocheng ji 貓城記 [Cat County] in 1933, a dystopian science fiction novel and satire about 1930s China, where a man crashes on the moon and gets to know the native “cat people.” Another exception was Gu Yunzheng 顧雲正 who published a collection of stories entitled Heiping de meng 和平的夢 [A dream of peace] in 1940. For summaries and a discussion of these works, see Wu, “Looking Backward: An Introduction to Chinese Science Fiction,” xvi-xvii.
223 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 10-11.
duanpian xiaoshuo (短篇小说). One significant writer of SF whom began his career during this period was Zheng Wenguang (1929–2003), who published his first story in 1954 “Cong diqiu dao huoxing” 从地球到火星 (From Earth To Mars), and ”Huoxing jianshe zhe” 火星建设者 (The builders of Mars) which was published in 1957.226 Another notable writer was Ye Zhishan, whose ”Shizong de gege” 失踪的哥哥 (The lost elder brother) – serialized and published in 1957 – was awarded second place in China’s Second Juvenile Literary and Artistic Creation Awards.227 Unsurprisingly, during this period SF was closely connected to the project of socialism and was regarded as a tool in the creation of “the new socialist man” through the dissemination of modern science and technology;228 for example, as Wu Yan noted, Zheng Wenguang attempted in his works from this period to imbue young readers with faith in socialist modernization and faith in reaching the telos of communism.229

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) disrupted all aspects of cultural life in China and completely put all science fiction publication on pause.230 Following Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 and end of the Cultural Revolution, however, there was a brief but significant boom of science fiction which has been examined in detail by Wu Dingbo and more recently Hua Li.231 As both Li and

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228 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 10.


230 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 10.

Wu shows, SF during this period (which Li refers to as the Post-Mao Thaw) broke new ground in several ways. First and foremost, the genre gained significantly in status and influence compared to the Maoist years. A major turning point for the genre, as both Li and Wu point out, was the unprecedented success of Tong Enzheng’s 童恩正 story “Shanhudao shang de siguang” 珊瑚岛上的死光 (Death Ray on a Coral Island), which was the first SF story to be published in the mainstream literary magazine Renmin wenxue 人民文学 (People’s literature) in 1978 and also won the price for best short story the same year. The immense success of the children’s book Xiao lingtong manyou weilai 小灵通漫游未来 (Little smarty travels to the future), about a child visiting a utopia of “Future city” (weilai shi 未来市) can also be said to be significant, since it was printed in to total of 3 million copies. Apart from increased status and influence, the genre also broke new ground during this period by attempting to break free from the purpose of teaching science, and by tackling social issues such as gender norms. For example, Wei Yahua’s “Wenrou zhixiang de meng” 温柔之乡的梦 (Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus), tackled issues of gender by depicting the fate of a man purchasing a robot wife. Other significant texts from the period included Zheng Wenguang’s Fei xiang ren ma zuo 飞向人马座 (Flying towards Sagittarius, 1978) and later Zhanshen de hou yi 战神的后裔 (Descendant of Mars, 1983), particularly the latter which Hua Li credits with significant breakthroughs in terms of literary merit. However, the boom of the genre during the Post-Mao Thaw came to abrupt end as it became a target in the campaign against “spiritual pollution” initially launched by Deng Xiaoping in October 1983, and which “expanded swiftly into an attack by hardline apparatchiks in the Party against a broad range of cultural phenomena and social forces.” Science fiction was severely criticized on several grounds, such as for advocating pseudo-science and for being anti-socialist. Following this, SF yet again mostly disappeared from the cultural and literary scene and did not re-appear as a significant literary phenomenon again until the 1990s.

232 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw.
233 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 13; Wu, “Looking Backward: An Introduction to Chinese Science Fiction,” xxi.
236 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 33.
237 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 14.
239 Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 15.
2.2.3 Science fiction and temporality: 1949–1989

The almost total hegemony of the teleological temporal order in the form of the Marxist discourse of history also had significant implications for the genre’s relationship to temporality during the period. In an important article, Baoshu (Li Jun) has noted that from 1949 until the 1990s, there was a significant absence of science fiction dealing with historical difference in China. Variations of the sub-genres of time travel, future history and alternate history appear to have been either largely underrepresented or entirely absent. Indeed, some of the most significant stories of from the period can give an indication of how the genre related to time at this stage in its development. In Zheng Wenguang’s “The builders of Mars”, for example, although the story is set in “the future” of the 21st century, there is almost nothing that distinguishes Mars of the 21st century with the present of the twentieth, and the story lacks any narrative depicting the historical developments of Earth and China. Moreover, whereas time travel did occur in science fiction both during the Maoist period and in the Post-Mao Thaw, such narratives tended to register little or no difference between the different temporal settings that the stories were set in. For example, in one of the few examples of a variation of time travel from the Maoist period entitled “Shizong de gege” 失踪的哥哥 (The lost elder brother), a variation of time travel is present. In the narrative, a long-lost brother is found frozen in a cold storage bin and is brought back to life, the story stretches from 1960–1975, but there is no noticeable historical difference between 1960 and 1970. Instead, the story focuses on the science and plausibility of bringing the brother back to life. Significantly, even though science fiction during the Post Mao Thaw, as already noted, broke new ground in engaging with social issues and concerns, an absence of a broader temporal scope and historical difference in science fiction mostly continued in the science fiction published in this period. With a few exceptions, including Zheng Wenguang’s The Descendants of Mars which included time travel from the future year of 2083 back to the present of the twentieth century, SF during

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243 For a discussion on the time travel aspect of this novel, see Li, Chinese Science Fiction During the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw, 44-53. See also Baoshu 宝树, “Yiyu, guxiang yu
In other words, as Baoshu points out, despite the futuristic aspect of socialism and Maoist society, “the future” (weilai 未来), in the sense of imagining significant historical difference was in fact neglected in SF of the period. Although one reason that SF tended to focus on technology and near-future settings might have been its supposed educational purpose, the author also points to the hegemonic presence of Marxist discourse of history as another important reason, considering that narrative devices such as time travel risks disrupting the historical “laws” of the hegemonic discourse. For this reason, the author continues, “any substantial change from ‘the present’ to ‘the future’ in terms of political system or value orientation were not possible to be considered or imagined.”

2.2.4 Post-89 science fiction and pluralization

After having been targeted in the campaign against spiritual pollution in 1983, it was not until the 1990s that science fiction would emerge yet again as a significant presence in the Chinese literary scene. Mingwei Song has noted the emergence of a “New Wave” of Chinese science fiction since the 1990s until the present. Arguably, this New Wave of Chinese science fiction is unprecedented in its diversity, complexity, and longevity, having flourished from the 1990s all the way up to the present. This more recent boom of SF
began in the 1990s as the number of periodicals began to reach wide circulation and attracting a large readership. The most important periodical was *Kehuan shijie* 科幻世界 (Science fiction world), which in 2000 was reported to have sold 361,000 copies. Through publication in such science fiction magazines and on the internet, a number of authors rose to prominence in the science fiction community in the 1990s and early 2000s, where the most important ones were Liu Cixin 刘慈欣 (1963–), Han Song 韩松 (1965–) and Wang Jinkang 王晋康 (1948–). In particular, the advent of the internet contributed greatly to the flowering of a science fiction community in the 2000s with a vast number of digital platforms where authors and fans could interact and publish their works. In the 2000s and early 2010s, a younger generation of writers also emerged, widening the scope and diversity of the genre, including Baoshu 宝树 (1980–), Chen Qiufan 陈秋帆 (1981–), Hao Jingfang 郝景芳 (1984–), Xia Jia 夏佳 (1984–), Chi Hui 迟卉 and Zhang Ran 张冉 (1981–), among others. Needless to say, a major breaking point in Chinese science fiction was the success of Liu Cixin’s novel *Santi* 三体 (The Three Body Problem), originally serialized in *Science Fiction World* in 2006 and later published in print book-form in 2008. Together with the sequels *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 (The Dark Forest) and *Sishen yongsheng* 死神永生 (Death’s End) published in 2008 and 2010 the trilogy became a bestseller in China and helped Chinese science fiction gain widespread national attention. Subsequently, when the translated version of *The Three Body Problem* won the prestigious American Hugo Award for Best Science Fiction Novel in 2015, Chinese science fiction also began to gain international attention, and *The Dark Forest* was published in English in 2015 followed by *Death’s End* in 2016. English language readers were introduced to more Chinese science fiction through the two anthologies edited and translated by Ken Liu entitled *Invisible Planets* (2016) and *Broken Stars* (2019), and several translations of full-length

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251 For presentations of these writers and their significance, see Ken Liu, *Invisible Planets: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction in Translation* (New York: Tor, 2016).


novels have also been published, including *Waste Tide* (2019) by Chen Qiufan and *Vagabonds* (2020) by Hao Jingfang.\textsuperscript{255}

2.2.5 (Re-)Emergence of sub-genres: future history, alternate history, time travel

A major difference in the “New Wave” of Chinese science fiction of the 1990s and 2000s and the science fiction of the period between 1949-1989 an increasing focus on time and temporality, and a significant presence of sub-genres dealing explicitly with time.\textsuperscript{256} As already noted, whereas the science fiction from the founding of the PRC and throughout the 1980s had been mostly bereft of science fiction with a larger historical scope, the 1990s included science fiction and related genres that experimented more widely with temporality, including future histories, time travel fiction, apocalyptic fiction, and alternate histories. For example, Baoshu notes how the science fiction writer Liu Xingshi 刘兴诗 published several time-travel stories, including “Wuzhongshan chuanqi” 雾中山传奇 (Legend of Wuzhong mountain, 1996) in which the protagonist travelled back in time to the Tang-dynasty.\textsuperscript{257} Such texts foreshadowed the emergence of the time travel genre known as *chuanyue*, which usually features a time-travel plot where a contemporary character travels back in time to pre-modern China.\textsuperscript{258} The *chuanyue* sub-genre, often containing plots that included romance between contemporary characters and characters from the past, has been one of the most popular forms of fiction on the Chinese internet.\textsuperscript{259} In science fiction magazines, moreover, science fiction writers Liu Cixin 刘慈欣 and Han Song 韩松 began writing science fiction engaging more deeply with temporality and history. Han Song’s breakthrough novella, for instance, “Yuzhou mubei” 宇宙墓碑 (Tombs of the Universe, 1991), was set far in the future in which humanity had long since conquered space, yet the presence of mysterious “tombs” spread out throughout the Universe pervaded this future temporality with a deep sense of pastness.\textsuperscript{260} Liu Cixin also


\textsuperscript{256} Baoshu 宝树, “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: dangdai Zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti” 异域，故乡与谜官: 当代中国科幻的历史主体 [Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science fiction]."

\textsuperscript{257} Baoshu 宝树, “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: dangdai Zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti” 异域，故乡与谜官: 当代中国科幻的历史主体 [Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science fiction], 140.

\textsuperscript{258} Carlos Rojas, "Queering Time: Disjunctive Temporalities in Modern China," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 10, no. 1: 1.

\textsuperscript{259} Rojas, “Queering Time: Disjunctive Temporalities in Modern China,” 1.

\textsuperscript{260} Han Song 韩松, “Yuzhou mubei” 宇宙墓碑 [Tombs of the Universe],” in *Lengzhan yu xinshi* 冷战与信使 [Cold war and the messenger] (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu fenghuang wenyi chubanshe 江苏凤凰文艺出版社 [Jiangsu phoenix press], 2018).
began writing about futures that were not necessarily in line with the hegemonic teleological temporal order. In “Liulang diqiu” 流浪地球 (The Wandering Earth, 2000), he wrote about a dystopic, apocalyptic future where humanity is forced to leave the Solar System due to a dying sun, and in “Diqiu dapao” 地球大炮 (Cannonball) a time travel plot explored a future of environmental degradation.\textsuperscript{261} Such a significant presence of science fiction experimenting with a wider temporal scope seemed to reflect a temporal flux in discourse in the context of Chinese post-89 society.

In the next chapter, I will commence the analysis of my selected texts, beginning with analyzing several non-progressive temporalities and temporal orders that clash with the linear, teleological temporal order associated with the project of nation-building.

\textsuperscript{261} These stories can be found translated in the collection Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{The Wandering Earth} (London: Head of Zeus, 2017).
3. Cyclical and non-progressive temporalities

As Wang Fansen noted, few concepts have been as important as “the future” (weilai 未来) as a historical and political concept during the twentieth century in China. As the future emerged as the dominant temporal horizon, it was combined with the teleological temporal order as political actors claimed to have grasped the one and only future. However, in the post-89 period, this dominance of “the future” of the teleological temporal order is challenged by other temporal orders. This chapter aims at exploring how science fiction in the post-89 context has challenged the teleological temporal order associated with the nation by narrating variations on non-progressive temporalities in conflict with such a temporal order. Indeed, as already discussed in the previous chapter, “the future” was not always the dominant temporal horizon in China or elsewhere. Before the Late Qing-period, for example, China had been dominated by cyclical temporalities. Although the twentieth century was characterized by the imposition of unilinear, teleological temporal order, and the political regime of the CCP depends on such a conception of time to legitimize its power, the eradication of cyclical temporalities, as Kwong noted, was never complete. In the following, I will explore how such a cyclical, past oriented temporal order, in fact, resurfaces in science fiction in the post-89 period, and clashes with linear, teleological time. In addition to such a temporal order, I also explore how a temporal order of presentism associated with a global consumer society and new media problematizes temporal experience, as well as how a narrative experiment with a regressive temporality allows for a re-evaluation of progress and the deconstruction of the “chronologic” of the teleological temporal order.

3.1 Teleological and cyclical temporal orders in Mars Over America

Was the revolution the beginning of something new or simply the repetition of the past? Is history linear or cyclical? Can the future be predicted? Huoxing

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262 Wang Fansen 王汎森, “Zhongguo jindai sixiang zhong de ‘welai’” 中国近代思想中的‘未来’ [‘The future’ in Chinese modern thought].
263 Kwong, “The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China c.1860-1911.”


*zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 (*Mars Over America*), originally published in 2000, asks pertinent questions about temporality in the post-89 context and provides an ideal point of departure for an investigation into ongoing temporal antagonisms and chronopolitics in contemporary Chinese science fiction. While constructing a metanarrative employing the form of the “future history,” which builds on the concept of “the future” and the closely related tel- eological temporal order, the novel nonetheless introduces multiple temporalities which conflicts with and disrupts teleological time. In the following, I will read the novel as narrating a tension between mainly two different temporal orders: a teleological, future-oriented temporal order and a cyclical, past-oriented temporal order.

### 3.1.1 Plot summary

*Mars Over America* is set in the future world of 2066 where China has over- taken America as the dominant hegemonic world power and America has de- clined. The plot focuses on sixteen-year-old Tang Long 唐龙 who travels to America to take part in an international go-competition together with the rest of the Chinese national team. Shortly after arriving in America, however, a natural disaster occurs (whose precise nature remains unclear), which creates a crisis and disconnects Tang Long and his compatriots from the seemingly omnipresent AI-system which controls and guides all Chinese people’s lives. During the crisis, Tang Long loses sight of his compatriots and ends up travelling around America and befriending various people and characters along the way, including a group of youths of Asian descent who travels around America searching for a mysterious technological device called “The Spectre” (*lingzhang* 灵杖), with which one is rumored to able to predict the future. He also befriends the character Newman, a boy in his own age with a myster- ious, genetically engineered “tail” containing the collective memory of America, who accompanies Tang Long for some time during his travels. As his travels continue, America descends more and more into chaos and a civil war between the North and South eventually breaks out, into which Tang Long partakes in as a member of the northern forces, where he gets to know a Mao Zedong-like, American revolutionary figure named Shan Mu. At the end of the novel the war ends and Tang Long returns to China together with a young Asian American young woman, and the novel ends with scenes of how Chi- nese people seem to be celebrating the mysterious appearance of a “Land of

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sublime happiness” (fudi 福地), which implies that extraterrestrials are about to arrive on Earth and inaugurate a new world order.266

3.1.2 The metanarrative and the teleological temporal order
To begin with, Mars Over America initially narrates an overarching narrative which is characterized by the temporal logic of the teleological temporal order. In this metanarrative that the novel configures, historical time has developed linearly and teleologically from the stage of the “information society” (xinxi shehui 信息社会) into the so-called “Dream Society” (menghuan shehui 梦幻社会), in which all of China and most of the world’s population are under the control of an omnipresent Artificial Intelligence System called Amanduo.267 Following China’s rise, in this metanarrative, hence the world has seemingly kept developing along a linear, progressive path: “…for a long time during the twenty-first century, everything was peaceful and harmonious, everything proceeded like a clock.”268 In general, “though America declined, and Japan was submerged beneath the sea” the world has nonetheless kept progressing linearly into a prosperous future; indeed, “trade and economy in the whole world – and in the whole Solar System – continued to prosper because of China’s Rise.”269 As noted by both Mingwei Song and Lyu Guanzhao in their previous analyses of the novel and its utopian motifs,270 China by this point in the future has in fact been transformed into a kind of Utopia, which further consolidates the presence of the teleological temporal order in the novel. China can hence be seen as the realization of the telos of the teleological temporal order, and the utopian nature of Chinese society is described in some detail. As the protagonist points out when his companions ask him about life in China: “A person should learn eight languages before the age of sixteen. In our gardens there are virtual shops. For shopping or eating all you need to do is have the thought in your head there will be robots bringing it to you.”271 In this utopian China, they also “implement weather and emotion control,” and “scientists have developed all kinds of games to satisfy everyone’s desires”.272 China is also associated with “the future” in the novel, and it is repeated pointed out that “only Chinese people has a future.”273 In this way, the novel is framed within a metanarrative of the “Dream Society” where China,

266 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America] (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu fenghuang wenyi chubanshe 江苏凤凰文艺出版社 [Jiangsu phoenix publishing], 2018).
267 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 193.
268 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 10.
269 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 10.
271 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 235.
272 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 235.
273 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 145.
although it is allowed very little narrative time in the novel, represents the realization of the telos.

3.1.2 The future and the motif of prediction

In addition to the metanarrative that the future history constructs, the linear, teleological temporal order is represented by a novum, the so-called lingzhang (The Spectre), and the related motif of prediction. This device plays a central role in the novel since several characters attempt to locate the device to know the future. More specifically, the lingzhang is a kind of time travel device with which one is supposedly able to receive information from the future.

The meaning of this was not just an [technological] innovation. More so, it suggested a revolution in physics, philosophy, theology, military science, geopolitical studies. It transcended all uncertainty as well as the unknowable historical gap [between present and future].

274 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo [Mars over America], 140.

275 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo [Mars over America], 123.

276 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo [Mars over America], 140.

277 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo [Mars over America], 225.

In other words, through the device – supposedly developed by the CIA a few decades before the narrated time of the year 2066 – “the future” becomes determined and knowable. Hence, the device literalizes the future-oriented, linear temporal order; in fact, it can “predict the future with great accuracy,” and with possession of the device “one would no longer have to fear future disasters.” The lingzhang, as the quoted passage also suggests, has important political implications. As the narrator concludes: “Whoever could see the future would control the world. America was to rely on this to advance towards rejuvenation (zouxiang fuxing 走向复兴), and yet again become the hegemon of the world.”

278 The political importance of the device, and in extension, weilai 未来, or “the future,” is also emphasized in how a conflict breaks out between different factions on American soil, including group of Africans from an organization called “Rejuvenate Africa” (fuxing feizhou 复兴非洲) whom are all fighting over control of the lingzhang. By this point, through a prolepsis into the “present” of the time of the narration sixty years into the future, the narrator points out that, “sixty years later, every time I remember this part of the past, it makes think of an amusing but [also] rather dull speculation, which says that this battle was an indication of the struggle of two great
continents over the supremacy over the world of the future.” In other words, the lingzhang both literalizes the presence of the teleological order, and also points to how “the future” is also a political concept. Wang Fansen questioned whether the future could really be regarded as singular or was better conceptualized in terms of multiple futures, and the presence of the lingzhang in the novel seems to foreshadow the presence of such multiple futures.

3.1.3 Memory and traces of the past

Although the novel initially introduces a metanarrative containing a future-oriented teleological temporal order, the novel soon complicates this metanarrative by introducing other temporalities. One of the most significant forms of temporalities that affects Tang Long are traces of the past in the present, which gradually serves to shift the focus in the novel from the future to the past, and is therefore related to the introduction of a cyclic, past-oriented temporal order. In America, Tang Long encounters traces of the past in the form of ancient buildings, historical documents, paintings, and historic sites. In fact, in the novel America is most strongly associated with the past (“America has no future, only past”), and travelling through the landscape of American cities such as Boston as well as historic sites such as Gettysburg, the protagonist Tang Long is confronted with remnants and traces of the past. For instance, walking along the streets of Boston, he notices how some “dark”, “ancient buildings” with “bright signs on their roofs denoting which time they were built, and what great function they had had in history” (emphasis added). Here, the emphasis on the pastness of the buildings indicates how the temporal dimension of the buildings are what startles Tang Long. Moreover, heonders whether some of the unidentified mysterious creatures, which he had encountered the night before in the city, were in fact “ghosts” living in these ancient buildings, and muses that these creatures seem to have been emerged directly from “the depths of time.” Eventually, Tang Long learns from a companion that there had been a massacre at this location around 300 years ago, and he is perplexed, since, as he points out, “in China, I had never heard of any massacre.” This perplexity shows how the past temporalities disrupt the

278 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 225.
280 Possibly, one can read the presence of the lingzhang in light of the discussion of a “rhetoric of transition” and multiple teleologies noted in chapter 2.
281 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 263.
282 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 264.
283 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 162.
284 Referring to a factual incident, the so-called Boston massacre which occurred in Boston in 1770.
285 Han Song, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 163.
protagonist’s sense of time, and by implication, the temporal logic of the teleological temporal order of the metanarrative which the novel is initially framed in.

Past temporalities are also represented by the character Newman and his genetically engineered “tail” (weiba 尾巴). Newman notes how his father implanted American history into this “tail” and the genetically engineered tail may be used to implant historical memory into people’s minds through connecting the tail to their heads. Tang Long befriends Newman on the road and they travel around the United States as Newman disseminates American history and culture to the American people. Newman is the one who tells Tang Long that “America has no future, only past” and he denounces the lingzhang as a scam that was implemented by the American government; in his view, rumors of the existence of such a device was merely a way for American politicians to divert the people’s attention and to encourage everyone “to have faith in the future.” Newman’s tail can hence be seen as existing in tension with the lingzhang, the former representing the future and the latter the past. Hence, the presence of these past temporalities imply that the teleological temporal order and its future horizon is no longer hegemonic in the novel. The gradual shift from a singular focus on the future to the past is also noted by the narrator-protagonist himself:

As I gradually matured, I learned yet another truth from the Americans. Compared with innovation, it is easier to establish oneself in an unassailable position through conservatism. Because the old has [been proven] to be efficient from experience. This also turned the usual way of looking at America on its head. This nation, in fact, had survived until today by relying on a conservative path.

这是在我日渐成熟的过程中，从美国人那里学到了又一个真理：在大多数情况下，守旧比起创新，更能使人立于不败之地。因为旧的才是经过经验而有效的。这也颠覆了人们对美国习惯性看法。这个国家其实是靠走保守路线才存续到今天的。

In other words, the novel to a certain extent seems to suggest, as one of the African youths that Tang Long and his companions confront points out: “Things from millions of years ago still has not past – what’s more, it [the past] decides the future.”

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286 Han Song, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 262-63.
287 Han Song, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 263.
288 Han Song, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 263.
289 Han Song, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 346.
290 Han Song, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 230.
3.1.4 Cyclical history

These past temporalities are also related to the presence of a past-oriented, cyclical temporal order in the novel. As noted in chapter 2, cyclical notions of time and history had dominated Chinese discourse and politics before the modern period, and most significantly, past-oriented cyclical temporal orders had been imposed by the hegemonic discourses of represented by the dynastic histories.291 Notably, in the latter part of the novel, the narrator attempts to impose a such cyclical understanding of history on the previously mostly linear, metanarrative, and concludes that the lack of Chinese dynastic (cyclical) histories in America’s history leaves them at a disadvantage to understand their own historical situation. More specifically, the narrator points out how in America, the country’s “dynastic history” (wangchao de lishi 王朝的历史) was “too brief,” and that the “poor” Americans could only look for answers in their 300 hundred year long history.292 Instead of a linear understanding he suggests that a cyclical notion of history, along the lines of the traditional Chinese dynastic histories, is more appropriate, and points out that “in any case, they would have to walk the same path we had walked, experience what had experienced. All similar processes, at the end of the day, would have to be repeated.”293 There are also other references to such cyclical historical thinking in the novel. At one point the protagonist Tang Long and the revolutionary Shan Mu runs into an older Chinese man, who points out to Shan Mu and Tang Long that “History repeats itself. It moves in circles” and further notes that fen jiu bi he 分久必合 (An empire long divided, must unite), a quote from the opening lines of Sanguo yanyi 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), one of the most well-known expressions of cyclical historical thinking in Chinese culture.294 To further argue the continuous presence of this cyclical order in the novel, one can also detect it as already present in the otherwise linear application of the future-history form. In fact, whereas the narrated time in the novel, which is set in the future of 2066, seems to indicate an unambiguous leap into the future of a linear teleological time, the time gap between the implied reader’s present and the narrated time of the novel comes very close to corresponding to a huajia 花甲 (cycle of sixty years) in the Chinese traditional calendar, in which time would “begin again” in a new cycle.295 In this way, a

291 On-cho Ng and Edward Q. Wang, Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China, 1 ed.(Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), xi. See also Clark, Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich, 11-12.
292 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 451.
293 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 451.
294 For the original Chinese text, see Chinese Text Project, Sanguo yanyi 三國演義 [Romance of the three kingdoms], ch 1. Accessed 7 June 2023, https://ctext.org/sanguo-yanyi/ens.
cyclical temporal order associated with the Chinese traditional past is present in the narrative, in tension with the linear, teleological temporal order.

3.1.5 The motif of revolution

In the novel, the tension between the linear teleological order and the past-oriented cyclical order is also present in the form of the motif of revolution. As Assman noted, although the concept of “revolution” originally referred to “cyclical revolutions of the stars within the cosmic order,” the meaning of the word in the modern sense shifted to refer to a linear phenomenon whose “goal is to force an irreversible break with the existing order and establishing an inevitable new beginning.”

The word for revolution in modern Chinese is *geming* 革命 and it has a similar meanings and connotations in the context of China’s modern history in the sense of a complete break with the past and the inauguration of an entirely new future.

In the novel, this concept of revolution plays a significant role in narrating the tension between the teleological temporal order and the past-oriented, cyclical temporal order. While the civil war that breaks out in the novel bears a strong resemblance to the American Civil War between the North and South, the motif of Revolution, and the attempt at “making things new”, also bears a resemblance to China’s own revolutionary history in the twentieth century. In fact, as Mingwei Song notes in a discussion of the text, the title of the novel, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国, literally “Fire Star Over America”, is an intertextual reference to one of the earliest and most famous accounts of the Chinese revolutionary communist movement: Edgar Snow’s *Red Star Over China* (1937).

And indeed, in the plot of the novel, a revolution also eventually takes place. As Tang Long and his companion Newman pass through the historical town of Gettysburg, they become first-hand witnesses to a coup-d’état, during which the current president is executed, replaced with a new one. Notably, much in line with the concept of revolution as discussed above, the new regime’s aim is to create a complete temporal break with the past to construct a brand-new future for America. Hence, these revolutionaries explain to the crowd that:

“The man we are presenting to you is a ‘new man’ who can represent America’s future.”

Another old man said: “He will lead America towards rejuvenation and create a brand new civilization.”

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Yet another old man said: “Let us break completely with the past without bringing any baggage.”

“我们推出的，是能代表美国未来的新人。”

又一老人说: “他将带领美国走向复兴，创造崭新的文明。”

再一老人说: “让我们与过去一刀两断吧，不背任何包袱。” 299

In this passage, the revolutionary vision is expressed quite explicitly in equally revolutionary language and metaphors of “newness”: the president is a “new man” who is to represent “Americas future” and the revolution is meant to “break completely with the past,” while not “bringing any baggage”. Although this takes place in America, the connection with China’s modern history can be seen from the word xinren 新人 (new man) bearing a close resemblance to Liang Qichao’s concept of the xinmin 新民 (the new citizen); as well in the use of the phrase zouxiang fuxing 走向复兴 (lead towards rejuvenation) both which are well-known concepts in Chinese political and historical discourse.300

In general, the attempt to break completely with the past can be related to the project of the New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century as well as the Cultural politics of the People’s Republic. In any case, the irony is of course that the young president or “new man” is “stammering” and is controlled by the “old men” that present him before the crowd, which clearly suggests that the supposed revolutionary, “new regime” might not be so new after all. Indeed, as the narrator also points out later on: “The policies that the new government implemented maintained traces of the old culture, old system, and old method. Even though it was claimed it was all new, with no connection at all to the past.”301 In this way, the motif of revolution in the novel, the attempt to break with the past and create a new beginning, can be seen to represent another narrative element which points to the tension between the teleological and cyclical temporal orders.

3.1.6 The character Shan Mu

The tension between a future-oriented teleological temporal order and a past-oriented cyclical order is not only embodied by the motif of revolution but also personified in the character Shan Mu 山姆, whose name is a play on the

299 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 302.
301 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 327.
transliteration for Shanmu dashu 山姆大叔, the term for “Uncle Sam” in Chinese. Considering the intertextual references to Edward Snow’s famous book Red Star Over China earlier mentioned, Shan Mu is almost certainly inspired by Mao Zedong, and he also embodies Mao’s inherent seeming contradictions of a full-blown revolutionary inaugurating a “new time,” but who nonetheless is highly influenced by the past.\(^{302}\) Indeed, Shan Mu is neither a complete subscriber to the teleological, linear temporal order in the novel nor merely the cyclical and past-oriented temporal order. Rather, he personifies an attempt reconciled the two temporal orders, or to “connect the past and the future” (lianjie guoqu yu weilai 连接过去与未来).\(^{303}\) Shan Mu is a revolutionary who is obsessed with transforming America, and he attempts to locate the lingzhang to become a master of the future. Indeed, he points out how “whoever acquires the lingzhang will control America’s future.”\(^{304}\) At the same time, he repeatedly engages in conversations with Tang Long about Chinese ancient history while attempting to make sense of the present, to the point where Tang Long himself is perplexed: “I didn’t understand too well. What could this story from the second century BCE have to do with a war in the twenty-first century?”\(^{305}\) In fact, Shan Mu even claims to have located a reason for America’s demise in the way that the nation relates to its past. He points out that China’s long history with its “mythical” nature has an eternal value, in contrast to American history which lacks a genuine myth of origin, and only amounts to what he defines as xinwen 新闻 (news).\(^{306}\) In contrast to the proximity in time and detailed chronicle of events – and therefore easily question-able American history, Chinese history is, in Shan Mu’s view, “Enveloped and mysterious, vivid and evocative, like [the legendary figures] The Yellow Emperor, Yan Di, Nüwa, Shen Nong,” for these reasons, Shan Mu concludes, “When using [such historical myths] people will stop in their tracks. They [the myths] will never become obsolete (guoshi 过时), their power will remain forever and they will have the answers forever.”\(^{307}\) Notably, Shan Mu’s differentiation between Chinese and American history, in this context, corresponds to Assman’s discussion of the difference between a mythical origin, which in the author’s view were characteristic of past oriented temporal orders of the pre-modern era, and a modern “beginning,” which for Assman is characteristic.

\(^{302}\) Such contradictions are often observed in Mao’s own use of the traditional Chinese script, despite the renewal of the script initiated during the time he was in power, as well as in his poetry written in the traditional 词 form rather than in the modern “new poetry” of the New Culture movement. For a discussion, see C. P. Fitzgerald, “Mao and the Chinese Cultural Tradition.” Il Politico 42, no. 3 (1977).

\(^{303}\) Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 399.

\(^{304}\) Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 411.

\(^{305}\) Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 370.

\(^{306}\) Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 464.

\(^{307}\) Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 464.
of a teleological temporal order.\textsuperscript{308} Quoting Edward Said, she points out that whereas “origins are defined as ‘divine, mythical and privileged,’ beginnings, on the contrary, are defined as ‘secular, humanly produced, and ceaselessly re-examined.’\textsuperscript{309} Indeed, the recursive timescape of a cyclical temporal order seems to imply the presence of certain eternal truths, and eternal origins, in contrast to the temporal logic of newness of the teleological temporal order. Shan Mu’s fascination and commitment to the idea of a mythical origin, combined with his commitment to “the future” and locating the lingzhang again points to his embodiment of two conflicting temporal orders.

Notably, Shan Mu’s embodiment of these two conflicting temporal orders, and occupying position of ambiguity between “the past” and “the future,” is literalized towards the end of the novel. Here, Tang Long visits Shan Mu’s grave as the great revolutionary has passed away. At first, Tang Long notices that Shan Mu’s grave is lacking any dates denoting his birth and death. This bewilders Tang Long since it “seemed to imply that he [Shan Mu] had lived in a world without time.”\textsuperscript{310} For a moment, in other words, Shan Mu’s temporal existence appears to have been erased from representation, as his own tombstone is lacking temporal signification. However, after some searching Tang Long finds a timetable on the side of the tomb where the whole process of the construction of Shan Mu’s artificial language of Aikemaian is documented. Tang Long concludes that “time was rediscovered, but in in a place where it shouldn’t be discovered. This made one shudder to the bones, and also provided a strong sense of self-mocking hallucination.”\textsuperscript{311} This lack of clarity in the linguistic representation of Shan Mu’s life and position in history points to his character’s ambiguous temporal significance. Did Shan Mu belong to the “old” or “new” America? Was he a representative of the past, oriented, cyclical temporal order, or the teleological, future-oriented order? In fact, it is possible to argue that the “world without time” that the lack of linguistic representation conveys to Tang Long can be seen to literalize the aporia that is created in attempting to bridge the gap between past and future, or alternatively, to reconcile a past, oriented temporal order with a teleological, future-oriented temporal order. This again points to Shan Mu’s inherent contradictions of being both a revolutionary and a staunch believer in the significance of the past in dealing with the present. Indeed, on the inscription on his

\textsuperscript{308} Assman discusses what she calls “the modern time regime”, which for her includes several characteristics. Nevertheless, the main element of this modern time regime for Assman is the notion of Progress, which can be regarded as synonymous with a teleological temporal order by in the sense of a notion of time and history where one moves towards a predestined telos. For a summary of her arguments and a discussion of the main characteristics of Assman’s “modern time regime”, see Assmann, "Transformations of the Modern Time Regime."

\textsuperscript{309} Assmann, Is Time out of Joint?: On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime, 109.

\textsuperscript{310} Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 473.

\textsuperscript{311} Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 473.
tomb it is written that Shan Mu, in fact, “passed away while attempting to connect the past and the future.”

3.2 Anti-history: Disjunctive linear time and cyclical temporal order in Red Ocean

Han Song's *Hongse haiyang* (Red Ocean) is one of the most critically acclaimed science fiction novels in contemporary Chinese science fiction, yet it is also one of the most neglected. Originally published in 2004, it was hailed by the influential critic Wu Yan 吴岩 as the greatest Chinese science fiction novel ever written, however, the novel was soon overshadowed by the unprecedented success of *The Three Body Problem*, published shortly after in 2006. Part of the reason the novel has been much neglected by critics is probably the novel's complex experiments with narrative order and fragmented narrative structure. Although the novel's composition began as loosely connected stories, and some chapters of the novel were published as independent short stories in *Kehuan shijie* 科幻世界 (Science Fiction World) in 2001, the novel can and indeed should be read as a single narrative. In fact, the novel’s intermittent composition can even be seen as adding to the overall effect of the novel and the multiple temporalities that the novel configures. In my reading of the novel, I will discuss how the novel constructs highly disjunctive temporalities which disrupts the teleological temporal order, and configures cyclical temporalities which clash with linear time. Borrowing from discussions related to the French novelistic tradition of the “anti-novel,”

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312 Han Song 韩松, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 472. Notably, this lack of linguistic representation of Shan Mu mirrors Fredric Jameson’s discussion of “the founder” of various Utopias. As Jameson argues, the figure of “the founder” in many utopian narratives often personifies the aporia of the imagining the temporal break that Utopia, or the creation of a “new” social system entails. In other words, if Utopia is seen as the emergence of a new temporal order, which breaks with the old temporal order, what do we make of the founder, whom necessarily must belong to both? Jameson argues that the difficulty of reconciling the continuous presence of the founder with the temporal break, is one of the reasons why the figure of the founder has usually disappeared into the annals of the past in many Utopias. In *Mars Over America*, in contrast, “the founder” in the shape of the character Shan Mu is instead used to personify the aporia of such a temporal break, and the inherent conflict between the two temporal orders in the narrative. See Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions*, 86.


314 For a description of how the novel was conceived and composed, see Han Song 韩松, “Chuban houji: zhengzhong de hai 初版后记: 正宗的海 [Postscript of the first edition: the true ocean],” in *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 [Red ocean] (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu fenghuang wenyi chubanshe 江苏凤凰文艺出版社 [Jiangsu phoneix press], 2018).

which consciously violated the linear temporal logic of the European novel, I suggest that *Red Ocean* can be read as a kind of “anti-history,” since the text much like the French counterpart (consciously) disrupts the linear, temporal logic of the teleological temporal order dominating Chinese official historiography. In my final discussion, I will relate my findings to previous research by Mingwei Song and discuss whether this highly disruptive temporality can be read as a kind of “invisible” temporality (of the disruptive Chinese twentieth century) hidden beneath the highly regulated official temporal discourse.

### 3.2.1 Plot summary

The novel is divided into four loosely connected parts. Part 1 is initially set in a distant future where a post-human species called the “Water-humans” live in the “Red Ocean,” struggling to survive the harsh conditions of the inhospitable environment and tribal conflicts. The plot centers on the protagonist Haixing 海星 who leaves his own habitat and begins exploring other parts of the ocean, eventually sharing his journey with a tribe that is searching for the mysterious “Ocean City” that according to legend is hidden somewhere in the ocean. Part 2 is also set in a distant future in the ocean, but a future that is closer to the implied reader’s present. This part narrates the experiences of several different societies in the ocean and the fates of the protagonists in these societies. Part 3 is set in a near future but most of the plot no longer unfolds in the ocean but on land, where a war between the yellow and white races is imminent. The yellow race, represented by the Japanese, are preparing to relocate themselves to the ocean to escape extinction from the “white race” (*huaiter ren* 怀特人), the latter which has already relocated to space. Like the second part, Part 3 has no central protagonist but focuses on different protagonists in different sections. Finally, Part 4 is mostly set in the Chinese pre-modern past. The main protagonist in this final part of the novel is a scribe named Lin Guan who serves under the famous fifteenth century admiral Zheng He 鄭和. In the narrative, instead of returning to China as in the historical metanarrative Zheng He sails beyond the Cape of Good Hope and eventually ends up in Europe. Although Zheng He and his fleet stays in Europe for many years, they eventually are set on returning. The journey home, however, ends in disaster, and only one young Portuguese man named Vasco da Gama survives.

### 3.2.2 Disjunctive linear time and narrative order

To begin with, *Red Ocean* disrupts linear time through configuration of narrative order in the configuration of the overarching metanarrative of historical time. As already noted in previous discussions, the linear, teleological temporal order dominating Chinese historiography depends on the configuration
of a beginning and a telos, a temporal scheme in which “the nation appears as
the newly realized, sovereign subject of History embodying a moral and po-

tical force that has overcome dynasties, aristocracies, and ruling priests and

mandarins.”316 In the future history of Red Ocean this temporal scheme is dis-
rupted by configuring a significant discrepancy between the narrative dis-

course and the historical events, or story, that is recounted in the text. In the

novel, an underlying story, or historical metanarrative, is possible to construe:
in a near-future time, an apocalyptic war breaks out between the yellow and

white races, and the yellow race is forces to retreat into the ocean. Subse-

quently, partly through genetical engineering, a post-human species called

“Water-humans” evolve and construct various societies in the ocean. Eventu-

ally, however, the rumors begin spreading about how the ocean is about to be

“closed” (guanbi 关闭), as the ocean is about to be facing a final, fatal disas-

ter.317 Nonetheless, this overarching narrative is not ordered in a linear way.

Instead, the novel “begins” in the distant future in part 1, entitled “Our pre-

sent” (Women de xianzai 我们的现在), as an autodiegetic narrator I (wo 我)
narrates the fate of the water-humans living in the Red Ocean (p. 3-216). Part

2, entitled “Our past” (women de guoqu 我们的过去), narrates events that

occur either after part 1 or, alternatively, before part 1 (p. 219-315). In fact,

the relationship between part 1 and part 2 in terms of chronology on the level

of story is not entirely clear, and Wu Yan reads part 2 as occurring before part

1 on the level of story.318 Nevertheless, I agree with Huang Can that part 2

occurs after part 1 on the level of the story,319 considering that part 2 begins

with the sentence “long after the world at the bottom of the sea had col-
lapsed…”, which seems to place the following events after part 1 on the time-

line of the metanarrative.320 Part 3, “The past of our past” (Women de guoqu

de guoqu 我们的过去的过去) is set in the near-future, where the yellow and

white races are preparing for a war which eventually forces part of people of

the yellow race to retreat into the sea (p. 319-450). Finally, the novel ends with

part 4, entitled “Our future” (Women de weilai 我们的未来) which is, of

course, not actually set in the future but instead in what resembles the Chinese

historical past. Here, the novel connects the text’s future history with a na-
tional metanarrative, by allowing the novel to end in a historical metanarrative

of the Chinese admiral Zheng He’s naval expeditions in the late 15th century


316 Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China, 4.
317 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean] (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu fenghuang

wenyi chubanshe 江苏凤凰文艺出版社 [Jiangsu Phoneix Publishing], 2018), 96.
318 Wu Yan 吴岩, “Tuijian xu 推荐序” [Recommendation and preface], 8.
319 Huang Can 黄灿, ”Mingdingzhe de beiliang: Han Song de kehuan shijie 命定者的悲凉: 韩

松的科幻世界 [Sorrows of a determined fate: The science fictional world of Han Song],” in

Bainian Zhongguo kehuan xiaoshuo jingpin shangyi 百年中国科幻小说精品赏析 [Hundred

years of Chinese science fiction – selection and analyses], ed. Yao Yixian 姚义贤 and Wang

Weiying 王卫英 (Beijing 北京: Kexue puji chubanshe 科学普及出版社 [Popular science

press], 2017), 758.
320 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 219.
In other words, in terms of narrative discourse, the novel ends in the “beginning” on the level of story, which is the overarching, disjunctive metanarrative. In this way, this highly disruptive narrative structure, which as Huang also noted cannot be considered “neither linear nor simply a reversed retracing [of events],” disrupts the supposed linear structure of the future history, in the sense of narrating “a future” linearly connected to “a present” (which is linearly connected to “a past”). Instead, “the future” seems to have become “the past”, and “the past” has been transformed into “the future”, and the connection between the two – although still present – severely disrupted. In order to examine this relationship in more detail, as well as the various temporalities in the novel, we need to delve deeper into the various embedded narratives in the text in the next section.

3.2.3 Heterogeneous time and embedded narratives

The novel does not merely disrupt the teleological temporal order through rearrangement of narrative order in the metanarrative, but also by introducing multiple temporalities in the multiple embedded narratives in the novel. In fact, the embedded narratives in the different sections of the novel narrate different kinds of temporalities that further disrupts the (supposed) unilinear flow from past to present to the future in the dimension of historical time. The first part “Women de xianzai 我们的现在 (Our present) can be said to be set in a defunct, post-apocalyptic, linear time. This section, although it does maintain traces of linearity in the sense of how the protagonist attempts to create a “civilization” (wenming 文明), the characters are nonetheless stuck in a non-progressive, disjunctive, post-apocalyptic temporality. As one of the characters point out when the protagonist asks him about the future “The future? What is ‘the future’?” (Jianglai? Shenme jiao jianglai 将来？什么叫将来?) The second part of the novel, “Women de guoqu de guo qu 我们的过去的过去 (The past of our past), furthermore, is even further from any conception of unilinear flow of time. Although they are clearly positioned within the larger metanarrative, the embedded narratives entitled “Yi er de Haiyang” 一二的海洋 (The first and second Ocean) “Chengbao” 城堡 [The Castle], “Hailu mingmie jian 海陆明灭间 (Between brightness and darkness on sea and

321 The “ending” on the level of story, in the sense of the final recounted event in the metanarrative seems to occur in part 2 (p. 315). Here, a narrative leap one million years into the future, narrates a visit from outer space to an Earth that seems to already be entirely covered by the Red Ocean.

322 Huang Can 黄灿, “Mingdingzhe de beiliang: Han Song de kehuan shijie 命定者的悲凉: 韩松的科幻世界 [Sorrows of a determined fate: The science fictional world of Han Song], 757.

323 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 71.

324 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 245-53.
land), 325 “Shoukong huan” 受控环 (The control circuit), 326 and “Haidi de tai-kong yingxiong” 海底的太空英雄 (The space heroes of the sea) 327 unfold with no clear indication of which of the narratives occur before or after the other on the level of story. Hence, rather than a simple linear progression, the embedded narratives are better seen as unfolding in parallel. In other words, these various embedded narratives of different societies in the Ocean narrates multiple temporalities across space and time that defy any simple progression between past, present and future. The rejection of the unilinear flow of time as conceived in narratives governed by the teleological temporal order, in these embedded narratives in Part 2 is also clear from how this part rejects any unifying origin or beginning. In the opening of this part of the novel, Shenhua zhushen 神话诸神 (Gods and Myths) the novel narrates three different diverging origin stories, without revealing which is the “true” origin. 328 In her analysis of the temporality in a number of Han Shaogong’s novels and stories, Wang Yanjie wrote that, while reading the texts, “One is pressed to ask: to which direction does the story lead—to return, to go, to come? Where is the destination—the city, the countryside, neither? Which action precedes which?” 329 In a similar way that Han Shaogong’s novels in Wang’s reading rejected and disrupted teleological time, Red Ocean in these embedded narratives narrates heterogenous temporalities, with no unifying origin, or beginning, in contrast to the teleological temporal order.

3.2.4 Cyllical temporal order

Much like Mars Over America, Red Ocean also introduces a cyclical temporal order which conflicts with and disrupts the teleological temporal order. This cyclical temporal order is present both on the level of the metanarrative and in the embedded narratives. A cyclical temporal order is, first and foremost, frequently imposed by the future-historical narrator(s) on the level of the metanarrative. In Part 1, for instance, the autodiegetic narrator laments that “in fact, in my story, this Ocean, which lacks any new meaning, has already born and died, died and been reborn innumerable times, and I can only live briefly in one of these incarnations.” 330 This remark points to the presence of a cyclical notion of historical time, or more specifically, a cyclical temporal order of recurrence. Indeed, the narrator points out how “in this way, I write my story. It has not yet begun, yet has already reached its end.” 331 The word

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325 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 254-74.
326 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 275-91.
327 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 292-315.
328 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 219-20.
330 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 131.
331 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 73.
*lunhui* 轮回 (samsara; recurrence) occurs repeatedly to describe this sense of return and non-progressive sense of time: “What I nonetheless didn’t understand was, this cyclical recurrence (*lunhui* 轮回) from prosperity to decline, was this the nature of all processes?”  

Perhaps most significantly, however, is the narrative order of the novel, which not only disrupts any linear, progression from past to future, but also serves to narrate a strong presence of a cyclical temporal order. Notably, the novel ends in “the past” rather than in “the future,” which reconfigures the metanarrative into forming an apparent cyclic pattern, which supports the cyclic temporal order that is present in the novel. As noted earlier, the last part “Our future” is set in the Chinese historical past and tells of the final voyage of the great 15th century navigator Zheng He 郑和, who made several long-distance sea voyages in the 15th century, reaching as far as the African East Coast. Significantly, the story and the whole novel ends with the description of the sole survivor of Zheng He’s voyage being Vasco Da Gama, the navigator who was first to sail around the Cape of Good Hope.

Hence, rather than exploring a new historical timeline, the final section of the novel seems to anchor a Chinese past in what may be read as a cyclic return to the already determined future, a future that has already been narrated in the previous parts of the novel, which partly serves to seal the narrative in a cyclic pattern.

Apart from a presence on the level of metanarrative, the cyclical temporal order that the novel contains is often also present in the various embedded narratives in the novel. The most salient example of the presence of the cyclical temporal order and how it also clashes with linear teleological time can be found in the chapter entitled “The control circuit” (Shou kong huan 受控环) in part 2.  

In this chapter, a “cybernetist” (kongzhilun zhunjia 控制论专家), arrives from a country from another part of the ocean and claims to that he has come to “save” the country with a type of science that he refers to as “cybernetics” (kongzhilun 控制论).  

Soon, the cybernetist notices that the country he has arrived in is caught up in an endless cyclical repetition of revolutions and returns to the original state, as the country keeps going back forth between two different states of humans and machines governing the country. All the inhabitants including the country’s leader Haiyang wang 海洋王 (King of the Ocean) are transformed back and forth between “humans” and “machines” without remembering their past lives in the other form. The cybernetist is intrigued but also set on “saving”...

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332 Han Song 韩松, *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 83.  
333 Han Song 韩松, *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 545.  
334 This section has also been published separately as a short story and been analyzed as such by Wang Yao. See Wang, “Evolution or Samsara? Spatio-Temporal Myth in Han Song’s Science Fiction,” 25.  
335 Han Song 韩松, *Hongse haiyang* 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 276.
(zhengjiu 拯救) the country. He points out to the King of the Ocean that he has noted that the country and the people in it “change with time, but does not evolve with time” (sui shijian er bianhua, que buneng sui shijian er jinhua 随时间而变化，却不能随时间而进化). Rather than linear development or progression, temporality in this country is characterized by the constant cyclical flux between “Retraction and expansion, war and peace, autocracy and freedom, body-state and machine-state”; hence, “[t]ime and civilization have become a pool of putrid water revolving in mud.” The control theorist believes that he has found the reason for this non-progressive and cyclical temporality in the country in the programming of the machines. Therefore, he intervenes with the process by re-programming the machines, implanting a “one-directional, logical time-concept,” which breaks the circuit by stopping “the sudden stagnation or reversion of events.” Instead of a cyclical temporality of recurrence, time in the country will now linearly move towards an “end-point” and, hence, “forever leave the cycle behind, and rush towards freedom” (emphasis added). In other words, the cybernetist attempts to impose a linear, teleological temporal order where time is no longer conceived of as a cycle but as linear and teleological, in this case moving steadily towards the telos of “freedom” (ziyou 自由). Although initially the control theorist believes he has “saved” the country, he discovers it in ruins as all the inhabitants have died out when he returns many years later; he therefore concludes that breaking with the cyclical temporal order appears to have been the reason for the country’s demise, since this had “taken away their essence.” In brief, much like Mars Over America, temporality in Red Ocean is characterized by the strong presence of a cyclical, past-oriented temporal order associated with the dynastic cycles of the Chinese pre-modern past, which clashes with and often disrupts the linear teleological temporal order.

3.2.5 The “Red Ocean” as a chronotope

Red Ocean disrupts the supposed unilinear flow of time of the hegemonic teleological temporal order through disruption of narrative order, and the disruption of beginnings and endings. It also introduced a cyclical, past-oriented temporal order, which clashed with the linear temporal order in the embedded narratives. Another salient way that the novel configures temporality is the application of the chronotope of the “Red Ocean,” which operates as a significant narrative element in much of the novel. Importantly, the application of the spatiotemporal category of water in the conception of this chronotope is

336 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 276.
337 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 286.
338 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 288.
339 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 289.
340 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 289.
341 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 290.
no mere coincidence, as it can be related to certain particularities in the Chinese language. As Su Yi-Wen notes, although all languages use spatial metaphors to express temporal experience, one of the particularities of Chinese expressions of time is the use of spatial metaphors of water to express the passing of time.\(^{342}\) Noting the presence of this conceptual metaphor in different registers of the language including daily discourse and traditional literature, the author specifically points to expressions such as sishui nianhua 似水年華 (fleeting years are like the flow of water), wangshi ru chaoshui 往事如潮水 (past events are like tides) and also points to examples from popular culture, such as the popular song entitled shijian hai 时间海 (The ocean of time).\(^{343}\)

In *Red Ocean*, Han Song makes use of this relationship between the spatial category of water and the representation of time in Chinese culture to further complicate temporal experience in the novel. In the novel, spatial category of the “Red Ocean” (*hongse haiyang 红色海洋*) narrates an experience of time different linear experiences of time, but also distinguishes itself from the cyclical temporal order of recurrence, and hence can be said to take on chronotropic significance. In fact, whereas the spatial metaphor of a river, for instance, implies a “flow” of time that moves in a linear fashion from past, to present, to future, the ocean, which extends into all directions at once with no clear beginning or end, often seems to imply a different experience of time in the novel, with no clear beginning or end, and with no direction or progression from past, to present to future. In part 2 of the novel, “Our past”, the narrative describes a utopian society hidden deep in the ocean. Here, experience in the ocean is described as “broad and generous, in a primeval, innocent state, both vast and limitless, and containing. It was empty but yet substantial, and there was nowhere it did not begin, nowhere it did not end” (emphasis added).\(^{344}\) Although this at first glance is a description of space, it also takes on temporal significance, since it is precisely the appearance of other temporalities from out of the ocean which disrupts this state of tranquility.\(^{345}\) Hence, in the chronotope of the “Red Ocean”, instead of a river of time (or an arrow of time), temporality in the novel is frequently referred to as “streams” or “undercurrents” (*anliu 暗流*) that sometimes appear in the ocean. These temporalities are clearly not enough to construct coherent narratives or to create a sense of past, present and future, but only to disrupt the sense of time for the protagonists: “the stream, which emerged out of time, surged yet again” and hence “past and future were once again mixed up (*jiaohun 攪浑*) with each other.”\(^{346}\) Instead of an arrow or river or time, or for that matter a recurring cycle, time

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\(^{344}\) Han Song 韩松, *Hongse haiyang 红色海洋* [Red ocean], 292.

\(^{345}\) Which will also be further discussed in chapter 6.

\(^{346}\) Han Song 韩松, *Hongse haiyang 红色海洋* [Red ocean], 109.
becomes merely a “muddy stream” (zhuoliu 淤流).\textsuperscript{347} The spatial dimension of the ocean as being “below” the world on land can also be regarded as having temporal implications, as if the characters are being pushed or “pressed” down by time into the ocean. As the narrator points out: “But the muddy stream that could push time never came back again. There was only the Red Ocean, \textit{which as if in a tomb kept pressuring him down, down, down…}”\textsuperscript{348} What these spatial metaphors imply is that the chronotope of the “Red Ocean” configures a temporal experience which seems to be unable to be entirely explained in neither linear nor cyclical terms. This increases the sense of heterogenous time in the novel earlier noted in the analysis of the embedded narratives.

It is also notable that is the chronotope of the red ocean which prevents the future-historical narrator, the autodiegetic I (\textit{wo} 我) who is also the protagonist Haixing, from being able to construct a linear, developmental narrative in the first part of the novel. As he points out while attempting to narrate the historical experience of the “red ocean”: “Since there is no way of sensing the going and passing of time [in the Red Ocean], my story loses its purpose and power to evolve”.\textsuperscript{349} In the ocean, due to the lack of the “passing of time by observing the stars” (\textit{douzhuan xingyi 斗转星移}) the “usual sense of the swift passage of time in the universe” is unknown, hence, the narrator laments: “when there is no way of proceeding with the narration, one can only nag about past days – which might also be the future.”\textsuperscript{350} The chronotope of the “Red Ocean” is condensed into a single metaphor in part 4 of the novel, where the historical personage Li Daoyuan 郦道元 encounters a mysterious tiny pool of water while visiting a hermit living in exclusion in the mountains. This “spirit,” which is in fact the whole “Red Ocean” now transformed into merely a pool of water misplaced in the Chinese past, tells Li Daoyuan of its origin. It explains that “its ancestors had been the same as human beings and lived on land. But later there had occurred a World War and ecologic system on land had collapsed, and the whole Earth prepared to transform itself into a form that could live forever in water, and took refuge in the sea.”\textsuperscript{351} Subsequently, the “spirit” tells Li Daoyuan, it was forced to attempt to leave that world to “migrate to another, unknown space”; however, this attempt had failed, it had been “unable to reach its destination” and instead “thrown into this world.”\textsuperscript{352} Now, this pool of water “had already forgotten what time and dynasty it came from. It even didn’t know if it came from the past or the future.”\textsuperscript{353} It had now

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{347} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 253.
\item\textsuperscript{348} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 253.
\item\textsuperscript{349} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 131.
\item\textsuperscript{350} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 131.
\item\textsuperscript{351} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 458.
\item\textsuperscript{352} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 458.
\item\textsuperscript{353} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang 红色海洋} [Red ocean], 457-58.
\end{footnotes}
been reduced to merely a tiny pool of “dead water” (sishui 死水).\textsuperscript{354} This pool of “dead water” temporally displaced in Chinese past, not knowing if it had come from the past or from the future and “unable to reach its destination,” can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the historical experience of the people trapped in the “red ocean.” In sum, the novel makes use of the relationship between water and time inherent in the Chinese language to configure a chronotope of the “red ocean,” that defies both linear progression from past, present to future, but neither can be explained through cyclical understandings of time and history. Instead, the chronotope creates temporal displacement for the individual subject. This will be discussed more in detail in chapter 6.

3.2.6 Chronopolitical significance: Anti-history and “invisible” temporalities

What is the significance of the highly disruptive temporalities found in \textit{Red Ocean}? As I noted in the introduction to this section, \textit{Red Ocean} must first and foremost be read as a total negation of Chinese official historiography and disruption of the teleological temporal order that underlies it. In this way, \textit{Red Ocean} can be read as a kind of “anti-history,” in a similar way that the French “anti-novel” rejected the temporal logic of the European novel.\textsuperscript{355} Through its future history form and narration of the historical experience of the people of the Red Ocean, the novel relates to the teleological temporal order and Chinese historiography. However, in \textit{Red Ocean}, instead of a narrative in the mode of the teleological temporal order, in which the “sovereign subject of History embodying a moral and political force that has overcome dynasties, aristocracies, and ruling priests and mandarins” and ultimately corresponds to “a collective historical subject poised to realize its destiny in a modern future,”\textsuperscript{356} the novel presents the reader with multiple and disruptive temporalities, often unfolding in parallel, including the powerful presence of a cyclical temporal order associated with the pre-modern past. Perhaps most strikingly, there is the chronotope of the “Red Ocean,” which configures time into a non-linear entity without a distinct sense of past, present or future, beginning or end. Sociologist Guo Yuhua has in her work documenting the oral history of Chinese peasant life and rural reform during the Mao-era attempted to describe what she calls the “shadow of communist civilization” which in part

\textsuperscript{354} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Hongse haiyang} 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 457. Possibly an allusion to Wen Yiduo’s famous poem with the same title.

\textsuperscript{355} Kermode gives the example of Alain Robbe-Grillet, to describe such an anti-novel: “And so we have a novel in which the reader will find none of the gratification to be had from sham temporality, sham causality, falsely certain description, clear story. The new novel ‘repeats itself, bisects itself, modifies itself, contradicts itself, without even accumulating enough bulk to constitute a past—and thus a ‘story’, in the traditional sense of the word.’” See Kermode, \textit{The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue}, 19.

\textsuperscript{356} Duara, \textit{Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China}, 4.
refers to the repressed histories of these peasants and the discrepancy between such oral history and official historiography. Song Mingwei has pointed to what he regards as the “invisible” aspects of science fiction, where he refers to representations of experiences Chinese social life in science fiction that otherwise remain invisible in the context of hegemonic discourses. This notion of invisibility is suggestive when applied to the case of Red Ocean and its representations of temporality. Could the “anti-history” of Red Ocean and the experience of the people caught in its mysterious grasp be read as the narrative expression of the repressed, highly disjunctive temporalities of the violent Chinese twentieth century, underneath the hegemonic temporal order enforced by official historiography? Indeed, while watching the documentary films of Wang Bing, for instance, documenting the anti-rightist campaigns of the 1950s, one is struck by the immense discrepancy in temporal narration between this (oral) collective history and official history, which seems to suggest a striking temporal and cognitive dissonance between lived experience and official narration. In either case, the novel rejects official historiographical discourse and teleological time. China, the novel clearly suggests, has never progressed from the pre-modern past into a “modern future” through acts of “revolution” or “liberation.” Instead, in the world of the Red Ocean, there is no clear distinction between past and future, tradition, and modernity, and ultimately, “Time and civilization have become a pool of putrid water revolving in mud.”

3.3 Everyday cyclicality and presentism in Ruins of Time

In the previous two novels, I explored how a past-oriented temporal order and other non-progressive temporalities conflicted with and disrupted the teleological temporal order. In Baoshu’s Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 (Ruins of Time), published in print in 2013, I will explore how another form of non-progressive temporal order clashes with and disrupts the teleological time of the nation. This temporal order, I define as presentism and was originally coined by French historian Francois Hartog in his groundbreaking work Regimes of

359 Dead Souls (Part 1), directed by Wang Bing (2018), MUBI. The fact that Red Ocean remains comparatively neglected, despite the increased visibility of Chinese science fiction in general, adds yet another layer to such a notion of “invisibility.”
360 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 288.
Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time. Presentism can in contrast to the dynastic cycles and past-oriented temporal order that constituted a significant presence in the previous two novels not be traced back to the Chinese pre-modern past, but seeps into national space through global media and networks, and grows out of the logic of consumerist culture. As I will demonstrate in the reading, such a temporal order is therefore more related to cultural and political developments in post-89 culture in terms of consumerism and new media, and points to yet other temporalities that clash with the teleological time of the nation in post-89 China, complicating the temporal landscape.

3.3.1 Plot summary

*Ruins of Time* centers on the main protagonist Han Fang 韩方, an undergraduate student at a university in Beijing. In the novel, the world is caught in a time-loop where the same day is repeated over and over again, which ushers in a new era called *Xukong ji* 虚空纪 (The Empty Era). Initially, the time-loop is greeted with enthusiasm at the campus. However, as students realize that they can take out their grudges on each other with no future consequences, this initial positive response is followed by a chaotic situation at the campus, where violence breaks out between students and various factions at the university and also nearby universities and colleges. Subsequently, the protagonist falls into a coma and wakes up further into the “future,” where a utopian society has been created at the campus based on a newly founded religion called *Shijian jiao* 时间教 (Time-religion) led by the public-intellectual-turned-religious leader Ma Baorui 马宝瑞. Through the influence of the Time-religion, which is transnational and is being disseminated across Earth, the initial violence has seized, and people are now living in peaceful harmony with each other. This religious califate is opposed by a small group of scientifically minded people who believe in science and rationality. Towards the middle of the novel, the narrative takes yet another turn, as Han Fang is taken to the middle of the Taklamhalan desert, where he enters a mysterious space where all the worlds’ souls are interconnected with each other. Ultimately, Han Fang is again put into a coma and wakes up 6000 years into the future. At this point, his classmates and teachers are still stuck in the university campus, still living the same day repeatedly, but have already forgotten Han Fang and even their initial identities. The final part of the novel takes place mostly in the “timeless” space, where normal temporal and spatial dimensions have been suspended, and a kind of cosmic battle takes place between the protagonist and the mysterious founder of the Time-religion Edward, whom by this point has developed close to superhuman powers.

362 My reading of the novel will mostly focus on the first part of the novel, which I find most relevant and illuminating for my own research aims. However, I also address this peculiar
3.3.2 Metanarrative of everyday cyclicality and presentism

The non-progressive, everyday cyclicality in *Ruins of Time* can be read in a transnational context of Francois Hartog’s notion of presentism. Hartog defined presentism as “the sense that only the present exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now.” For Hartog, presentism suggests that the link between the past, present and future has been weakened: whereas the past is no longer relevant for the present, neither is the future, whose horizon has become diminished and replaced by an “omnipresent present.” *Ruins of Time*, hence, can be read as a literalization of such a sense of presentism, where a single day is literally repeated into a seeming eternity, and where both the past and the future have seized to exist as the link between the two temporal dimensions has been broken off. The characters in the novel are stuck in a temporal state lacking a future horizon and are doomed to relive the same day repeatedly. Indeed, the time-loop inaugurates a “a world without a tomorrow, an era without a history.” This new “era” ushered in by the introduction of the time-loop is referred to as “The Empty Era” (*Xukong ji* 虚空纪). In fact, the everyday cyclicality is engraved into the calendar of the Empty Era, whose temporal progression is no longer recorded in years but only in days. In addition, the metanarrative of the novel is framed in which “day” in the Empty Era that the narrative takes place in: “Day 237,” “Day 1,” “Day 831,” implying that even the future-historical narrator of the novel is unable to transcend the everlasting “present” of the Empty Era. Hence, the narrator can only point out that “just like any other day, the 238 day was very ordinary with no difference whatsoever.”

The fact that the characters are now caught in such a “treadmill of an unending now” makes the main character reflect on the implicit link between the past and present. During a visit to the university library, browsing through an old copy of a collection of Shakespeare’s poems, the protagonist Han Fang muses on the supposed connection between the past as represented by the old collection and his own present:

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narrative turn in the middle of the novel, trying to understand this shift in relation to my own research aims and questions.

365 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time] (Wuhan 武汉: Changjiang wényì chūbānshè 长江文艺出版社 Changjiang culture publishing), 2013, 61.
366 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time], 174.
367 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time], 10.
368 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time], 26.
369 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time], 192.
370 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time], 192.
371 Baoshu 宝树, *Shijian zhì xū 时间之墟* [Ruins of time], 24.
The tenth year of the Republican period, that would be the year of…1921. The May Fourth Period. How did they live during those times? Were they full of revolutionary fervor or graceful ‘Republican-flavor’? Han Fang thought to himself and suddenly had strange notion: could it be that the people of every era were all stuck in an empty era of their own, with no one being able to escape, and that the continuous link between each era was only imaginary… (emphasis added)

民国十年，那就是……1921 年，五四运动时期，他们那时候是如何生活的呢？是充满革命的激情还是优雅的民国范儿？韩方遐想者，忽然有一个奇怪的念头，说不定每个时代的人们都被困在自己的虚空纪里，谁也无法离开，在各个时代之间延续的时间线，或许只是幻想……

Han Fang’s remarks in the above quote directly question the implicit link between the past and the present. The protagonist – despite an initial interest in understanding the past’s relevance to his own present – begins to consider whether perhaps “the continuous link between each era was only imaginary,” and that in fact, “the people of every era were all stuck in an empty era of their own, with no one being able to escape” (emphasis added). For these reasons, he concludes: “why should we think about future concerns? What is right in front of us [i.e the present] (yantian de 眼前的) is what life is all about.”

The observation bears some resemblance to the view of the past expressed in Jean Paul Sartre’s novel Nausea, about a historian who ultimately abandons his task and questions the past’s existence and its link to the present, a novel which Hartog also reads as a “presentist tale”. Indeed, Han Fang notes philosophically – now with an explicit reference to existentialism – that the characters caught in the everlasting present of the Empty Era are like “The Happy Sisyphus,” who can do nothing but to “appreciate the everchanging beauty of every moment”, while “enduring hardship.”

The presentism that the novel narrates can also be linked to non-progressive temporalities in discourse, which is evident from an episode in the novel which unfolds in the city of Detroit in the United States. In this part of the novel, the narrative tells of two Japanese characters who have come to the United States to do business and ended up in Detroit for a few days. Initially distressed of having to spend time in the “ghost city” (guicheng 鬼城) of Detroit, the characters soon change their minds on the prospect of spending the “Empty Era” trapped in this city. They note that the city already before the advent of the Empty Era seemed to lack all development and hope for the future:

372 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 136.
373 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 291.
374 Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, 111.
If there was a city on this planet that was more suited for the Empty Era, it was Detroit. This formerly great city, now lifeless and stagnant and already close to bankruptcy, seemed to have already experienced a few decades of a time-loop. Each day had been a repetition of the day before in a spiritless manner without any hope, and without any future to talk about whatsoever. (emphasis added)

如果这个星球上有一座大城市最适合虚空纪的生活，那就是底特律。这座曾经伟大，但早已濒临破产而死气沉沉的城市，似乎早就预演了几十年的时间循环，每一天都死气活气，毫无希望地重复前一天，但没有任何未来可言。376

In other words, the characters conclude that Detroit’s seeming lack of development and tangible future-horizon meant that the city had already experienced a temporality akin to the Empty Era. For these reasons, the two Japanese characters conclude that although there had been “disturbances and riots in other places” in other places in the world since the advent of the Empty Era, this was unlikely to occur in Detroit, which had already experienced a long period of “social instability” due to its lack of development.377 The city of Detroit, whose lack of development and stagnation received much attention in China,378 particularly after the city filed for bankruptcy in July 2013,379 here figures as a harbinger of the presentist era of the “Empty Era” within the context of the narrative. In other words, we can say that Detroit’s supposed lack of progressive time and diminished future-horizon functions as a microcosm of the Empty Era in the narrative. This indicates that other “times” seep into national space through discourse contained through transnational global networks, disturbing the hegemonic teleological time of the nation, in this case in the form of the non-progressive, temporal order of presentism. Notably, Detroit is also one of the few spaces outside of the University Campus that the narrative unfolds in. The significance of the spatial aspect of the novel, will be discussed more in detail below.

3.3.3 The university campus as a chronotope

The presentism of the narrative, furthermore, is related to the university campus as a spatial category, which functions as a chronotope in the narrative.

376 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 119.
377 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 119.
378 A brief search at the database China Core Newspapers can give an indication of how much Detroit’s stagnation, decline and bankruptcy (pochan 破产) received. In 2013 alone, there are 38 articles referring to the bankruptcy or decline of Detroit in the title. See for instance Zhao Haijian 赵海建, “Bitelü, yi zuo chengshi shuailuo de jingshi [Detroit, the warning of a city in decline], Guangzhou ribao 广州日报 [Guangzhou Daily], March 18 2013.
That the novel has a close relationship to the space of the university is clear from the fact that most of the novel, particularly the first part, which is almost exclusively set on campus, unfolds in this space. The author in his postscript to the novel also notes how the idea of the novel was conceived during the time he was studying for his undergraduate degree,\textsuperscript{380} and since all the characters – most of whom are either students or teachers - return to the place where they were in the morning of the day started after the time-loop, the main characters of the novel are seldom or never able to leave the space of the campus. The close relationship between the campus and temporality in the novel seems to suggest that the university campus already has a different kind of temporality than the rest of society. In other words, just like the city of Detroit, the university campus, as a chronotope, is already “presentist” to a significant extent. As the novel opens, the narrative – focalizing through the protagonist Han Fang – points to the particular temporality that the university campus seems to induce:

In this revealing passage, we see the peculiar temporality that the university campus seems to induce. There is the conflict between the repetitive, non-progressive everyday cyclicity and the linear time of the rest of society. Indeed, the emphasis on the “habit” of doing “morning exercise”, the everyday routines of having class in the morning, the “late-night chats” and snoring of dormmates, all seem to emphasize the repetitiveness of an everyday

\textsuperscript{380} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 411.

\textsuperscript{381} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 10-11. Suspension points in original.
cyclicality. At the same time, he notes how during middle school he had the “final examination” which “pushed him to progress” but that he was “at loss” after entering university; he is only “muddling along” (de guo qie guo 得过且过), unable to find a “life-goal” and have the determination to stick to it. In other words, although linear time is still present in the form of finding a “life-goal” (hence realigning his own temporality with the linear regime of society at large) he feels himself caught a non-progressive temporality of everyday cyclicality. Indeed, a sense of repetition is undoubtedly already present in traversing the same space of the university campus every day. As Han Fang walks through the campus, he suddenly reminisces: “as they sat down on the stone, shoulder to shoulder, Han Fang suddenly remembered once when they had just entered the university, how he and a couple of class-mates “had come to the lake and sat just like this on this stone” (emphasis added). That the university campus does indeed have a temporality that is somewhat different from the rest of society is not just evident from the above narrative analysis but is also explicitly pointed to the in the novel. Significantly, as the time-loop occurs for the second time, the narrative makes clear that the response of the students at the university is different from the rest of society, and the atmosphere at the campus is then described in the following terms:

After seven o’clock, there was yet again great commotion at the campus. Yet it was different from the day before, with more sense of revelry. Since things had developed to this stage, people could let go of their psychological burdens. What’s more, compared to the serious and dismal [response] of the great masses in society, university students find it easier to let go of worries of the future, and immerse themselves in the present” (emphasis added).

Clearly, the reason that the students are more able to “immerse themselves in the present” is that the students at the university, as above demonstrated, are already caught in a similar kind of presentist temporality of everyday cyclicality which in the novel, has been imposed on the whole of society. In other words, university life is, in fact, already presentist to a significant degree. Significantly, the university campus, and the focus temporality that the campus induces, is related to the peculiar precedent of Cultural Revolution, which will be discussed more in detail below.

382 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 23.
383 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 65.
3.3.4 Consumerism

In his discussion of the temporal order of presentism, Hartog suggested that it is closely related to consumerism, including tourism,\(^{384}\) and in the context of the novel as well, presentism can be related both to consumerism which serve to shift the focus from the future to the more immediate present. Although at one point characters in the novel discuss the possibility of whether the time-loop indicates “the end of consumer society” considering that all products and all money returns to their original state after 20 hours;\(^{385}\) the truth is that the “omnipresent present” of the narrative shifts the focus away from any notion of a future, whose horizon has diminished, to the instant gratification in present that is characteristic of consumerism. Such a consumerist society can sometimes be represented as potentially utopian, as after the initial disruption that followed the advent of the time-loop is replaced by the new transnational califate of the “Time religion”, and the leader Ma Baorui extols the new era as a kind of ideal society, where “people can consume any kind of products,” as well as “browse rich resources from the internet,” and “travel to any corner of the Earth to visit friends and relatives for tourism.”\(^{386}\) Hartog noted how “[t]ourism is also a powerful agent of presentism: the world is on one’s doorstep in a fraction of a second and in three dimensions”;\(^{387}\) and in Ruins of Time, characters do in fact travel quite freely to other countries within the bounds of the 20-hour time loop.\(^{388}\) This consumerist aspect of the narrative and the consumer’s tendency to focus on the present rather than the future (or past) is neatly captured in the following passage, focalized through a minor character, the university student Xing Nuo:

> Now after her initial fear had settled her days went by quite comfortably. Every day she could go to the small shops and take with her a big piece of chocolate, pickled plums and pickled, pepper chicken-feet. She could watch Japanese and Korean TV-shows, drooling at hot guys while eating anything and everything, without having to worry about growing fat. This was way better than worrying about her studies, exams, and work as she had done in the past. As regarding the future of the world and its destruction or revival, was not something that an ordinary girl like her could worry about – so why think too much about it? (emphasis added)

如今，在最初的恐慌稍微安定下来之后，她的日子过得挺舒服。每天她都可以去小店里抱回一大堆巧克力，话梅和泡椒凤爪，一边看日韩偶像剧，对着帅哥流口水，一遍胡吃海塞，也不用怕发胖，比每天操心学习

\(^{384}\) Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, 113.

\(^{385}\) Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 68.

\(^{386}\) Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 287.

\(^{387}\) Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, 113.

\(^{388}\) Specific tourist destinations that are mentioned in the narrative include South East Asia and Japan. Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 224.
In this passage, Xing Nuo has withdrawn into her own private space in the university campus, and lives a consumerist life entirely focused on the present. The narrator describes how Xing Nuo has retreated completely into a consumerist now. Instead of caring about “the future of the world and its destruction or revival,” she is immersed in a consumerist present of the enjoyment of various food-products and the leisure of easy access to the entertainment industry.

3.3.5 “Timeless time” and new media

In terms of the rise of new media, the relationship to the presentist temporal order in the narrative to such social developments are less obvious, but they can be seen in how the narrative develops a form of “timeless time” that Manuel Castell’s viewed as an essential component of the “network society,” and which I here read as a sub-category of the broader category of the category of the temporal order of presentism. Indeed, the significance of the internet in contemporary university life in China is well-known, as well as the importance of the internet in the development of the science fiction genre in the contemporary context already noted in chapter 2, and Ruins of Time repeatedly points to the importance of the internet in the Empty Era. In fact, whereas almost other media, including print newspapers and magazines as well as television cannot remain functional, the internet remains present. As one of the characters remarks: “Newspaper and TV-news were of course done for [. . .] if we had entered the Empty Era in an era without the internet, there would have been no way of receiving information.” As was already quoted above, the religious leader Ma Baorui also pointed to how the people of the Empty Era, caught within the bounds of the university campus, were not only “free to consume any kind of products,” but also completely free to “browse rich resources from the internet” (emphasis added).

It is partly in this context of the increasing significance of the internet that I read the narrative development of the second part of the novel. Whereas the narrative focuses mostly on narrating the everyday cyclicity of the time-loop in the first part of the novel, the main tendency in the second part of the novel

389 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 间之墟 [Ruins of time], 80.
390 Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age - Economy, Society and Culture (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2009), xl-xli. Castells writes of his concept of timeless time: “The clock time of the industrial age is being gradually replaced by what I conceptualized as timeless time: the kind of time that occurs when in a given context, such as the network society, there is systemic perturbation in the sequential order of the social practices performed in this context.”
392 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 间之墟 [Ruins of time], 129.
393 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 间之墟 [Ruins of time], 287.
is to more and more shift from such dominantly temporal narration to instead focus the narrative on representing a kind of timeless, potentially utopian space. Although this part of the novel is clothed in a mixture of Hegelian and Buddhist imagery and language, I suggest that this narrative development, rather than being read as a return to some pre-modern or religious temporality associated with “eastern” religion such as Hinduism, is better understood as yet another expression of presentism: namely the narrative representation of the “timeless time” of the network society. As Han Fang is led into this space after being guided out into the desert, Han Fang suddenly finds himself in the mysterious space, where the “dragon-fly” like consciousnesses “one after another rapidly passed by.” The fragmented experience of temporality in the space is expressed in the following passage, where the protagonist simultaneously experiences memories and sensations of the inter-connected consciousnesses from all over global space, with no linear progression or link between past, present and future:

A Chinese woman in a rural village missing her husband working in Shanghai. These years during the Empty Era they had difficulty seeing each other. She hopes to see him tomorrow.

At the break of dawn, a group of Afghan holy warriors, still firing their rifles, standing bold upright in the cold wind, engaging in the final struggle against the invasion of Time religion.

Kilimanjaro at dusk, a group of mountain climbers from Japan are struggling upwards, aiming to reach the top before the time-jump occurs.

Although the quoted passage is characterized by simultaneity, it is clearly a different kind of simultaneity than the kind conceptualized by Anderson, as discussed in chapter 2. The narrative shifts from different geographical

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394 The multiple worlds that are discovered beyond the surface reality in this seemingly timeless space are described in terms of the Buddhist concept of daqianshijie 大千世界 (boundless universe). Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 360. The Hegelian vision of these worlds “evolving” (jinhua 进化) is described at Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 370.

395 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 332.

396 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 322.
locations over global, rather than national space, and it is no longer accompanied by sense of linear temporality moving forward through time. Rather than constructing a sense of a “solid community moving up in history,” as Anderson conceptualized it, experience of time can be regarded fragmented, non-progressive, and disruptive; indeed, it all “happened in an instant, but this was already enough to get a glimpse of consciousness and memories differing in a thousand different ways.” As noted, this temporality is no longer national but clearly transnational, and it is notable that the nation as a political entity gradually loses its political significance in the Empty Era. Such undermining of the nation can be seen in several plot developments in the novel. The characters, as mentioned, travel freely over national borders. The non-progressive temporality of Empty Era, moreover, is immediately conceived of as a threat to the nation; in fact, shortly after the first time-loop occurs, which takes place the day after the national day, “the national leaders gave a speech on television, issuing the whole nation to enter a state of emergency.” Some of the characters also begin speculating whether “the nation as a political organization” still has any meaning in the Empty Era, pointing to the European Union as an early manifestation of the weakening significance of the nation-state. In other words, in the place of simultaneity-across-space, with an imagined community of the nation moving “steadily” through linear time, the experience of time in the novel can be seen to be a narrative expression of the fragmented “timeless time” of global networks, which disrupts linear “national time” while keeping the characters trapped in the non-progressive temporality of the presentist temporal order.

3.3.6 Cultural revolution and non-progressive time

Notably, this presentist temporal order of everyday cyclicity and a lack of progressive, historical temporal dimension, as well as its link to the university campus, is not only connected to a transnational presentism but also connected to national Chinese political discourse, or more specifically, the Cultural Revolution and its relationship to temporality. In fact, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) – which to a large degree took place at university campuses with students playing a leading role in the atrocities – figures as a precedent in Ruins of Time, which points to certain similarities between presentism and the temporality of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, the kind of “empty,” non-progressive historical temporality that the Empty Era represents finds a historical precedent in the Cultural Revolution is directly pointed to in the novel, and the plot developments are partly modelled on the violent disruptive events that followed as the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966 and the following years.

397 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 322.
398 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 39-40.
399 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 224
Notably, the imposition of the non-progressive temporality and disruption of the linear time of the nation initially results in a dystopic scenario at the university campus, not unlike the violent disruptions on campuses during the CR, where students begin taking out their grudges on each other and ultimately violence between different factions at the campus and near-by campuses breaks out.\textsuperscript{400} As the time-loop occurs for the second time, there is again “great commotion” at the university campus, where students are responding to the second time-jump with a celebratory, carnivalesque atmosphere, one of the professors points out how he had experienced something similar before, “that was in June 1966, when the whole nation was in commotion because all classes were cancelled.”\textsuperscript{401} As social order begin to deteriorate after the Empty Era has been continuing for some time, resulting in great violence and war between various tribal factions at the university one of the characters again point out how the Empty Era in fact was not at all – as is initially suggested by Han Fang – “historically unprecedented,” and that in fact “a couple of decades ago we have a readily available example.”\textsuperscript{402} He further points out how “during those ten years, people’s violent tendencies were liberated, students stopped going to class, the workers stopped going to work, they took to the streets and reveled, and social order crumbled within a couple of weeks.”\textsuperscript{403} Indeed, the main character Han Fang notes how he is forced to carry an armband, “feeling has if [he] was a member of the Red Guards.”\textsuperscript{404} That this precedent is related to temporality and the temporality of the Empty Era, and supposedly, the Cultural Revolution, is evident from the remark quoted earlier: students respond with a sense of “revelry” since in contrast to the rest of society, “university students find it easier to let go of worries of the future, and immerse themselves in the present.”\textsuperscript{405} Again, the particular temporality of the university campus, with its focus on the present, appears more synchronized with the presentist temporality of the Empty Era, and in extension, (and perhaps more surprisingly) the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, perhaps the Cultural Revolution, whose focus on the present and its violent disregard for planned futures\textsuperscript{406} can be read as a variation of presentism? In any case, the Cultural Revolution often figures in Chinese historical discourse as a “gap” in time, often skipped

\textsuperscript{400} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 64-121.
\textsuperscript{401} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 66.
\textsuperscript{402} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 90.
\textsuperscript{403} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 90.
\textsuperscript{404} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 95.
\textsuperscript{405} Baoshu 宝树, \textit{Shijian zhi xu} 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 65.
over by textbooks and known in everyday discourse as “ten lost years,” referring to a sense that CR created a gap in the lives of the people who experienced it. In brief, these references to the Cultural Revolution, indicates the continuous relevance of Mao’s Cultural Revolution on discourses of temporality, and points to its peculiar relationship to temporality as a form of existing “gap” in time, which here seems to impose itself once again on the linear, teleological time of the nation.

3.3.7 Lack of narrative development

Before concluding our discussion of Ruins of Time, we might want to further dwell on the significant turn of the narrative around the middle of novel. Here, as I previously noted, the novel shifts from the narration of the time-loop into focusing on narrating a kind of “timeless time” which I read as yet another expression of presentism, or more specifically, the narrative expression of a fragmented temporality characteristic of new media and the internet. Yet there are also other possible reasons for that the novel does not allow the temporal experiment of the time-loop to continue to develop, and we might want to ask ourselves again why the time-loop seizes to be the main narrative focus in this latter part. In an influential essay, Fredric Jameson has argued that the function of SF is to historicize the present. Whether this is true of all SF is doubtful, but it can certainly be said to be true of the future-historical form that Ruins of Time employs. However, what is striking about the future-historical narrative of the novel is the difficulty it appears to have with narrating, or historicizing, the experience of presentism. In the following example, the future-historical narrator attempts to describe some kind narrative development in the realm of historical time through the configuration of the metanarrative:

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407 See for instance the following textbook, where the cultural revolution is skipped over completely Zhongguo lishi changshi (Zhongying duizhao) 中国了历史常识 (中英对照) [Common knowledge about Chinese history (Bilingual edition)], ed. Liu Zepeng 刘泽彭 (Beijing 北京: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 高等教育出版社 [Higher Education Press], 2006).


409 Also taking our cue from Jameson who noted that, in narrative analysis, often “what is most important is not what is said, but what cannot be said, what does not register on the narrative apparatus.” Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions, xii.

410 Jameson writes: “I would argue, however, that the most characteristic SF does not seriously attempt to imagine the "real" future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come.” Fredric Jameson, “Progress Versus Utopia, Or, Can We Imagine the Future,” in Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions (London: Verso, 2005), 288.
That was what happened on Day 2471. From then on, time kept flowing in a changeless cycle. Carrying all people on Earth, all souls. Day by day, year by year. History surged like a tidal wave, time then and now left no ripples, and one age after another passed. The world met with new crises, entered a new course, a new age began, and then it all became past.

In the quoted passage, the future-historical narrator attempts to historicize the present. However, it is full of garbled metaphors and contradictions, which seems to point to the difficulty of combining presentist narrative content with the narrative form of the novel. In the passage, time “flows” – seemingly to indicate linearity – yet it does so in a “changeless cycle”; time is a “changeless cycle,” yet history “surged like a tidal wave.” Even though time is stuck in “The Empty Era,” “one age after another passed.” In some ways, this passage seems to indicate that the narrative has difficulty sustaining the temporal experiment with the presentism of everyday cyclicality in the long run. In his own discussion, Hartog had already noted what he perceived as a difficulty of historicizing the “omnipresent present” of presentism; more specifically, he noted how in the era of presentism, “the production of historical time seems to be suspended. Perhaps this is what generates today’s sense of a permanent, elusive, and almost immobile present, which nevertheless attempts to create its own historical time.”412 The quoted passage, significantly enough, seems to mirror Hartog’s observation of an “immobile” and “elusive” present which attempts to, but does not entirely succeed in, generating a stable sense of historical time. Following this, the narrative retreat into the “timeless of time” of the mysterious space in the middle of the novel might simply be because of narrative necessity.413

411 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 325.
413 Apart from such narrative necessity, yet another reason is also possible. I noted earlier that the novel seldom ventures outside of the university campus in the novel – and when it does – it almost exclusively takes place on international locations, such as Detroit and other places. Chinese national space is to a large extent conspicuously absent in the novel. A second reason for the narrative turn of the novel could thus be that the chronopolitical problem of allowing the temporal experiment and its presentist narrative to spread out into national space, outside of the partly separate “timezone,” or chronotope, of the university campus.
3.4 Going backwards: progress and existentialism in
*The Great Era*

Like *Ruins of Time*, Baoshu’s other story “Da shidai” 大时代 (The Great Era) also experiments with non-progressive temporalities in relationship to the future and the teleological temporal order. Originally published online in 2012, and later published in print in English translation in 2019, the story’s experiments with narrative order by allowing time to unfold backwards. Although such stories of time going backwards are by no means new in science fiction and speculative fiction in general, where one of the most famous examples are perhaps Martin Amis novel *Time’s Arrow* (1991), this narrative experiment takes on new significance in the context of a hegemonic teleological temporal order in post-89 China. Published amid a chronopolitical discussion in Chinese politics about the meaning of progress and of going “backwards” and “forward,” the story disrupts the foundational teleological temporal order by playing with sequence, beginnings, endings, and narrativity. In the following, I will discuss how this narrative strategy disrupts this teleological temporal order, and questions the inherent value and meaning of progress and teleological time.

3.4.1 Plot summary

The plot of the story centers on the protagonist Baosheng who is born in the year 2012. After his birth, the narrative begins to go backwards in historical time, from the Beijing Olympics all the way back to the Sino-Japanese War. Baosheng meets Qiqi, the love of his life, already as a child and they witness the splendid opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics together. He is separated from Qiqi multiple times as the narrative develops. After the Tiananmen massacre Baosheng thinks Qiqi has been killed in the massacre and he marries another woman named Shen Qian. During a research trip to the United States, however, he discovers that Qiqi has been alive all the time and escaped to the United States after Tiananmen. Baosheng and Qiqi are briefly reunited during his stay in the United States, and he plans to get a divorce from his wife. While back in China, however, his wife destroys his passport, and he is unable to return to the United States. Shortly thereafter, the Cultural Revolution breaks out and Baosheng and Qiqi are unable to reunite or communicate. During the Cultural Revolution, Baosheng’s son is killed in in a war between different

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415 In my analysis I have quoted the available English translation entitled “What has passed shall in kinder light appear.” When referring to the text I will stick to my own more literal translation of the title. I have also read and consulted the original Chinese manuscript with permission of the author, and I have highlighted key concepts in the original Chinese when deemed relevant.
student factions, and his wife Shen Qian dies of cancer. During the period “after” the Cultural Revolution (which corresponds to the 1950s in the national metanarrative), Baosheng rises to some prominence in the cultural bureaucracy of the PRC after having published a few science fiction novels before the Cultural Revolution erupted. Subsequently, he runs into the existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre during a French diplomatic mission to China, and the two engage in a conversation about history and progress. Subsequently, war breaks out first between Taiwan and the PRC and later due to Japanese invasion. Baosheng escapes to the countryside and while there he runs into an American woman who has come to China together with Qiqi. However, the American woman tells Baosheng that Qiqi passed away, but gives him her final words. The story then ends with an implication of how, after his life has ended, Baosheng returns to the beginning and “origin” of his and Qiqi’s lives to begin anew.

3.4.2 Regressive teleological time and deconstruction of the “chrono-logic”

As the description of the plot above should already have indicated, the narrative narrates a reversed variation of the teleological time of the nation. Instead of moving from the past and forward towards a supposed telos, the narrative unfolds in the opposite direction away from the telos, back into an inferior time of the past. China’s glorious “present” (or near present), which in this case can be regarded as the telos in the story of the well-known national metanarrative, is represented by the Beijing Olympics. The narrative discourse in “The Great Era” almost immediately narrates the opening ceremony of the Olympics, which is Baosheng’s “earliest memory”, and is depicted as the height of China’s prosperity and splendor. As the narrator-protagonist watches the fireworks of the opening ceremony, he gaps that “one after another, they appeared in the night sky, as if some giant were walking above us. I was amazed.”417 As the narrative unfolds back into the Cultural Revolution, the sense of time being degenerative is profound, and the narrative discourse allows the characters to regress away from the telos in the national metanarrative. Hence, the narrator laments: “Later, I kept hoping that China would host the Olympics again, but it never happened. After I became a father, I told my son about that night, and he refused to believe that China had once been so prosperous.”418 In other words, instead of a linear progression from an inferior past into a superior future, the reader is faced with an equally linear, reversed

sequence of historical events, with the effect of configuring a degenerative temporality.\footnote{Notably, this configuration of regressive teleological time and reversal of the narrative chronologic in the story can also be related to a chronopolitical discussion in Chinese politics around the time of the story's composition. The author himself noted in the postscript to the English translation of the story that it was inspired by the speculations about whether a “prominent figure” in Chinese politics would revive the Cultural Revolution. This “prominent figure” is almost certainly Bo Xilai. Bo was a major figure in Chinese politics in the 2000s and early 2010s who rose to prominence as major of Chongqing in the late 2000 and early 2010s, later to be targeted in the anti-corruption campaign that followed Xi Jinping’s rise to power within the CCP. During his time in Chongqing, Bo’s campaigns of “singing red” were seen by many as a return of Maoist ideology and legacy. In March 2012, Premier Wen Jiabao directly criticized Bo’s Chongqing leadership for attempting to revive the Cultural Revolution. More to the point, Bo’s policies were castigated for “going backwards.” In fact, Bo himself was reported to have commented on the issue by remarking: “in the eyes of some people, ‘going forward’ means learning from the West, while inheriting and promoting the CCP’s fine traditions are regarded as being ‘leftist,’ going ‘backward.’ These remarks are truly odd and strange.” See Yuezhi Zhao, “The Struggle for Socialism in China: The Bo Xilai Saga and Beyond,” \textit{Monthly Review} 64, no. 5 (2012), 11-12. See also Willy Lam, “The Maoist Revival and the Conservative Turn in Chinese Politics,” \textit{China Perspectives} no. 2 (2012).}

Rather than simply a narration of a regressive temporality, however, the significance of “The Great Era” is how this regressive temporality that the story configures relates to narrativity. More specifically, what is at stake in the story is the concept of casualty and its central relationship to narrativity. Seymour Chatman has pointed to the inherent “chrono-logic” (of what he regarded all narrative) and our tendency to construct casual relationships between various events in the story in time.\footnote{Seymour Benjamin Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film} (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 44. Chatman, \textit{Coming to Terms: the Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film}, 9.} Importantly, the teleological temporal order, and the variations and manifestations of national metanarratives that works to impose such a temporal order, depends on such chrono-logic to configure narratives of cause and effect, constructing a narrative discourse with casual links between events, and building a (causal) relationship between a beginning and a telos. This configuration of historical narratives is what Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur both refer to as “emplotment” of historical narratives.\footnote{Hayden V. White, \textit{Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe}, Fortieth-anniversary ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 21-22; Hayden V. White, “The Historical Text as a Literary Artefact,” in \textit{The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism}, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1465; Paul Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in \textit{On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation}, ed. David Wood (London, US: Taylor & Francis Group, 1992).} By allowing a national metanarrative, with a well-known “story” of historical events, unfold backwards “The Great Era” is able to expose the process of emplotment: the mental processes of the construction of cause and effect between otherwise only sequentially related events. Hence, in Baoshu’s text, the events within the metanarrative, and its narrator faces the challenge of configuring a reliable causal link between events whose sequence has been
turned on its head. Economic reforms in 1980s become the cause of the Cultural Revolution (instead of the other way around): since, the reforms had “created the false appearance of prosperity in the economy” which had “hollowed out China’s industrial infrastructure,” and caused an increased “gap between wealthy and poor,” which caused “anger at the government.”

Likewise, strains between Taiwan and China become the cause rather than the effect of the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists. Whether these configurations are plausible is perhaps less important than the way that they expose the emplotment of the narrative, and by extension, the very same narrative that the text has reconfigured.

Adding to this exposition of the chronologic of the teleological narrative is how the text plays with the emplotment of “progress” repeatedly in the text. Although there is no doubt that the narrative has plunged the characters into degenerative dimension of historical time, several "backwards" developments are playfully emplotted as "progress." For example, “regression” to the Maoist era is indeed described as a kind of progress: a “golden age,” when people “a new five-year plan of full-scale development” made people yet again “hope for a better future.”

Another such playful example of emplotment is when, in the early 2000s, the air-quality in Beijing is improving, making the narrator-protagonist referring to this development as a kind of “progress” in the midst of all regression. As the narrator exclaims: “There was one benefit to all this ‘progress’: the sky over Beijing became clear and blue. I remembered that, when I was little, every day was filled with smog and it was difficult to breathe.”

Likewise, as the protagonist’s father lies dying in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, despairing over how much China (and the world) has changed for the worse since his youth, the protagonist points out that, “to be fair there were some advances in technology. The next year, the Americans managed to land on the moon with the Apollo mission – an unprecedented achievement – and the Stars and Stripes flew on lunar soil, shocking the world.”

In brief, by reversing the cause and effect in the well-known metanarrative, the necessary process of emplotment within the national metanarrative is foregrounded in the story.

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424 Baoshu 宝树, “What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear,” 207. This emplotment of the return of Maoism as a kind of “progress” can be seen as an implicit reference to New Maoists and also the earlier mentioned Bo Xilai, for who a return to the Maoist legacy might be better described as “progress”. See also Baoshu’s story “Gulao diqiu zhi ge 古老地球之歌 [Songs of ancient Earth],” in *Gulao diqiu zhi ge 古老地球之歌 [Songs of ancient Earth]* (Beijing 北京: Xinxing chubanshe 新星出版社 [New star press], 2012) also available in its translated form as “Songs of Ancient Earth,” in *The Reincarnated Giant: An Anthology of Twenty-First-Century Science Fiction* ed. Mingwei Song and Theodore Huters (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).
3.4.3 Existentialism and progress

This undermining of the temporal logic of the teleological temporal order is further unfolded through the introduction of an existentialist philosophy of history. This notion of history is represented by the presence of the existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre in the narrative. Indeed, the central importance of Sartre and existentialism for the narrative is also emphasized by the fact that the narrator-protagonist had studied Sartre as a graduate student in the 1980s (that is “before” he runs into him in the 1950s). Existentialism is also further underlined by the narrator’s repeated lament that history – instead of the promise of a telos – now offers him and his fellow Chinese only *xuwu* (nothingness). Hence, the narrator-protagonist cries out to Sartre during their conversation: “Socialism is our life. This form of life has turned me and many others into existentialists.” Yet the narrator-protagonist finds it hard to let go of a teleological notion of historical time. He points out to Sartre that “if the existence of the world has meaning, the world must advance”; otherwise, he laments, “what is the point of generation struggling after generation?”

Jean Paul Sartre’s character, however, responds by questioning the temporal logic that underlies Baosheng’s assumption. The philosopher uses a story from the classical philosophical text *Zhuangzi* to point to make his point. More specifically, he points to a parable about monkeys that are first infuriated by the prospect of being given three nuts in the morning and four at night, and then placated by adjusting the sequence to four nuts in the morning and three at night. He asks Baosheng if he believes such monkeys are “foolish” and Baosheng says yes, since “Zhuangzi’s monkey is a byword for foolishness among the Chinese.” Sartre asks Baosheng whether humanity, in its quest for progress, is really that different from the monkey(s) in the story, and asks

431 Baoshu 宝树, “What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear,” 204-05. The narrative (both in the original Chinese and in the translation) refers to the monkeys in the *Zhuangzi* in the singular “the monkey,” which appears to be an error, since the original Chinese clearly refers to *monkeys* in plural. For the original Chinese, see The Chinese Text Project, *Zhuangzi*, “Qiwu lun” 齊物論 [The adjustment of controversies], section 6. Burton Watson translates this passage in the *Zhuangzi* in the following way: “But to wear out your brain trying to make things into one without realizing they are all the same – this is called “three in the morning”. When the monkey trainer was handling out acorns, he said, ‘You get three in the morning and four at night’. This made all the monkeys furious. ‘Well then,’ he said, you get four in the morning and three at night.’ The monkeys were all delighted.”
the narrator-protagonist rhetorically: “Are we in pursuit of some ‘correct’ order of history? If you switch happiness and misfortune around in time, will everything appear ‘normal’ to you? If evil exists in history, does it disappear merely by switching the order of events around?” Hence, the philosopher concludes that it does not matter which direction historical time takes, since “existence precedes essence because its very existence is steeped in nothingness,” therefore, “the world is absurd regardless of the order of events within it.” He points out that there could perhaps indeed be a different universe where “time picked another direction” and where “humanity would progress from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy.” However, as Sartre points out, this universe would “not be any better,” since at the end of the day, “joy belongs to those who are born in times of joy” and suffering belongs to those born in times of suffering. In this way, Sartre’s character has undermined the teleological temporal order by exposing its temporal logic. Sartre has made clear that the “meaning” that the narrator-protagonist is referring to is not something that is inherent in the sequence – or “order” – of events themselves.

Sartre’s claim in the context of the narrative can be understood in the light of his own philosophy of history as presented in *Being and Nothingness.* Put simply, For Sartre, the past is not something that exist as mere sequence of events or “facts” but is rather something that is continually constructed, both for individuals and collectives, in relation to current “projects,” whose force, ultimately, is coming not from the past but from the future. Hence, for Sartre, “the order” of the past is not determined by a pre-existing sequence of factual events but instead consist of “layers of pastness is organized by the unity of my project.” “Who shall decide”, Sartre continues, “whether that mystic crisis in my fifteenth year ‘was’ a pure accident of puberty or, on the contrary, the first sign of a future conversion? I myself, according to whether I shall decide-at twenty years of age, at thirty years-to be converted.” For these reasons, Sartre argues, “the order of my choices of the future is going to determine an order of my past, and *this order will contain nothing of the chronological* (emphasis added). Seen in this light, “progress” loses its objective legitimacy and instead becomes another “project”:

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441 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 499.
If within a fundamental perspective which we do not yet have to determine, one of my principal projects is to progress—i.e., to be always at any cost a little further advanced along a certain path than I was yesterday or an hour earlier, this progressive project involves in relation to my past a series of “uprootings.”442

Sartre does not mention the function of narrative in his discussion. But in the context of the present text, Sartre’s example and his own philosophy of history serves to further undermine the teleological temporal order. More specifically, Sartre’s examples suggests that progress is not something inherent in the mere sequence of events themselves but is in fact constructed by the “chrono-logic” of the teleological narrative. Interestingly, this deconstruction of teleological temporal order does not replace the hegemonic temporal order with any other temporal order. What remains is instead only xuwu 虚无 (nothingness). The concept of “nothingness” and existentialism and its significance will be further discussed in chapter 5, where the relationship between the individual subject and various temporal orders will be discussed in detail.

3.5 Conclusion

Whereas post-89 China has remained dominated by a teleological temporal order and the configuration of a “national time” where the concept of weilai 未來 (the future) remains central, these texts are testament to a more complex and multilayered temporal landscape. Both Mars Over America and Red Ocean indicate that the teleological temporal order, and the related temporally charged concepts of “revolution” (geming 革命) and “liberation” (jiefang 解放), remains shadowed by a past, oriented cyclical temporal order, often represented by a premodern temporal concept of lunhui 轮回 (samsara) which rejects any redemption through time and where time is caught in never-ending cycles of historical repetitions. Han Song’s two novels seems to suggest that, as Luke S.K Kwong also argued, that the break with the past-oriented cyclical time was never as complete as has often been assumed.443 This aligns the present study’s results with previous studies on the New Historical Novels which in the readings by Qingxin Lin and Jeffrey Kinkley share this tendency to narrate cyclical temporalities negating the temporal logic of progress.444 Furthermore, even more disruptive temporal categories, such as the mysterious but immensely evocative chronotope of the “Red Ocean,” points to even more disruptive temporalities present in post-89 China that are perhaps impossible

442 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 503.
443 Kwong, “The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China c.1860-1911,” 185.
444 Kinkley, Visions of Dystopia in China’s New Historical Novels; Lin, Brushing History Against the Grain: Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction (1986-1999)
to contain in any notion of a “temporal order.” *Ruins of Time*, in contrast, narrates how “the future” of teleological time instead is challenged by a temporal order of presentism that seeps into national space through global flows and networks, in this case through the conduit of the university campus, itself its own timezone – or chronotope – with a different kind of temporality from the time of the nation. The presentism of *Ruins of Time* can be seen as a result of China’s immersion into global capitalism and the emergence of a consumerist society and is testament to the increased difficulty of the regime to maintain hegemony of temporal discourse through the officially sanctioned temporal order of teleological time. As the crumbling of the imagined community of the nation in the novel perhaps is testament to – presentism clearly will not do if the political regime is to maintain its legitimacy in post-89 China. Finally, Baoshu’s story *The Great Era* inserted a temporality of regressive teleological time into a national, supposedly progressive and teleological, metanarrative. This narrative experiment allowed the story to deconstruct the teleological temporal order, without replacing it with any other temporal order. The significance of this vacancy – or *xu wu* 虛無 “nothingness” – from the point of view of the individual subject represented by the protagonist, will be further discussed in chapter 6.
4. Clash of Temporal Orders and Apocalyptic Time in Liu Cixin’s

_The Three Body Problem Trilogy_

Liu Cixin’s _Santi sanbu qu_ 三体三部曲 (The Three Body Problem Trilogy), also known as _Diqui wangshi_ 地球往事 (Remembrance of Earth’s Past), is China’s most successful science fiction novel of all time and one of the most internationally successful Chinese novels ever. The trilogy became a bestseller in China and later also an international bestseller with millions of copies sold worldwide, after having been awarded the prestigious Hugo-award for best novel in 2015. Although the novel has been the target of much scholarly scrutiny, less attention has been paid to how the trilogy deals with time and temporality. Significantly, the trilogy has also become politically controversial for its ideological content and has been read as supporting authoritarianism, and as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, a closer investigation into the temporalities in the narrative provides an important key to understanding the politics of the trilogy.

In an influential essay, Chinese leftist intellectual Wang Hui traces the central importance of Francis Fukuyama's notion of “The End of History” in


Chinese intellectual debates after the crackdown on Tiananmen in 1989. Fu-kuyama, who published his article almost at the same time as the demonstrations were unfolding in Tiananmen during the Spring and Summer of 1989, had proclaimed the victory of Western liberal democracy over other ideologies and predicted that non-democratic states, including China, would inevitably take the same path towards liberal reform. In his essay, Wang criticizes this teleological thinking as limiting the understanding of the historical significance of the 1989 movement. For the present purposes, Wang's astute analysis illuminates the fact that the teleological narrative of “The End of History” has tended to obscure the presence of other temporal possibilities latent in Chinese discourse.

In the following chapter, I will argue that The Three Body Problem Trilogy reconfigures temporal experience in the post-89 context by first undermining a linear, teleological temporal order in the form of the Marxist discourse of history. The trilogy then narrates a conflict between the teleological temporal order, this time represented by the discourse of “The End of History,” and an apocalyptic temporal order, the latter which justifies a politics of crisis and a rejection of values associated with liberal democracy, such as pluralism, equality, and individual rights. Moreover, I also discuss how the apocalyptic temporal order in the novel and the politics of crisis it espouses strikes a chord in Chinese political discourse as represented by an online political group called the gongye dang (Industrial Party), which has appropriated the novel as support for a rejection of liberal values.

4.1 Plot summary

The plot of the first part in the trilogy Santi (The Three Body Problem, henceforth TTBP) begins with focusing on the scientist Wang Miao who gets drawn into an investigation of an organization called “the frontiers of science” (kexue bianjie 科学边界). Wang Miao learns of recent discoveries in physics which have stirred the scientific world, causing several scientists to fall into depression or committing suicide. Soon Wang Miao also gets drawn into a mysterious computer game which uses VR-technology to simulate the

449 Fukuyama does indeed use the word “inevitably” while discussing China’s prospect of liberal reforms. See Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” 11-12.
450 More specifically, Wang criticizes the tendency to understand the significance of the 1989 movement as merely “unidirectional” and writes that: “As far as I am concerned, once this single understanding becomes the world’s predominant narrative, once it becomes ironclad proof of the superiority of the present system, once protest becomes merely praise for that system, then it’s true meaning, its critical potential, and its historical significance will all be lost.” Wang, “The 1989 Social Movement and the Historical Roots of China’s Neoliberalism,” 65.
history and scientific progress of a civilization called “Three Body” (Santi 三体). After investigating the scientist Yang Dong’s suicide, Wang Miao gets in contact with Yang Dong’s mother Ye Wenjie 叶文杰 who is a retired professor of physics. From Ye, Wang Miao learns about her experience during the Cultural Revolution, during which she witnessed her father being publicly criticized and killed by the Red Guards. Ye eventually ends up on the secret military base “Red Coast” (Hongan jidi 红岸基地) which has the purpose to investigate the possibility of extraterrestrial civilizations. Having lost all hope in humanity, Ye is able to establish communication with an extraterrestrial civilization and reveal Earth’s location in the universe. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, society returns to a state of more stability and Ye is allowed to leave the Red Coast Base. She meets with her mother (who betrayed her father during the CR) and the Red Guards that were involved in killing her father, but neither her mother nor the Red Guards takes on any responsibility for or express regret about their actions, which deepens Ye’s disillusionment with humanity. She befriends the American environmentalist Evans and together they found the Earth Trisolarian Organization (ETO) which will work to facilitate the Trisolarian coming invasion of Earth. Towards the end of the novel, Ye is arrested and ETO’s information on the extraterrestrial civilization is procured by the authorities during an international and cooperative military operation in the Panama Canal.451

In Heian senlin 黑暗森林 (Dark Forest, henceforth DF), the narrative is initially set in the near future, which focuses on how humanity is preparing for the so-called “Doomsday Battle” (mori zhanyi 末日战役) predicted to occur 400 years into the future. Several of the main characters, however, including the individualistic Luo Ji 逻辑 and heroic naval officer Zhang Beihai 章北海 travel into the future using the technology of “hibernation” (dongmian 冬眠). They eventually wake up in a seemingly advanced high-tech utopia around 200 years into the future, where the initial angst of the “crisis era” of the near present has been replaced by swagging confidence in humanity's capacity to meet the challenge of the Trisolarians. After being awakened from hibernation, Zhang Beihai is made commander of the spaceship Natural Selection. Zhang has concealed his true intentions and is secretly a defeatist who is entirely convinced that humanity has overestimated its own capacity to defeat the enemy, and he defects right before the Doomsday Battle, escaping with Natural Selection and its crew into outer space. Soon thereafter, the whole space fleet of humanity is annihilated by a single Trisolarian droplet, demonstrating the total technological superiority of the alien civilization. Luo Ji, however, manages to save humanity from total destruction by figuring out the Dark Forest-logic of the universe: by threatening to reveal Earth's location

451 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem] (Chongqing 重庆: Chongqing chubanshe 重庆出版社 [Chongqing publishing], 2008).
in the Universe, Earth would risk destruction at any time by superior civilizations, which would render the planet useless to Trisolaris.\footnote{452} In \textit{Sishen yongsheng} 死神永生 (Death’s End, henceforth \textit{DE}) the narrative mostly focuses on the protagonist Cheng Xin 程心 who initially works for a UN-branch called PIA (Planet Intelligence Agency) under the leadership of the ruthless but capable Thomas Wade. Cheng Xin is sent to the future as a “contact person” and travels to several different “eras” through hibernation. The first era she wakes up in is the “Deterrence Era” (weishe jiyuan 威慑纪元), in which humanity has built a system that can reveal Earth’s and Trisolaris location in the Dark Forest Universe instantly, based on Luo Ji’s application of the laws of Cosmic Sociology in \textit{DF}. Using this system of deterrence, humanity and Trisolaris live in a state of equilibrium reminiscent of the Cold War-era, where a so-called “Swordholder” Jiuo . After Cheng Xin takes over and immediately fails as the new Swordholder, the system breaks down, and Trisolaris is yet again set to invade Earth. After Trisolaris has been destroyed and Earth’s location revealed, however, the invasion is yet again aborted. Cheng Xin later hibernates again and wakes up in the “Bunker Era” (vanti jiyuan 掩体纪元). In this part of the narrative, she stops the fellow hibernator Thomas Wade and the scientific elites he is associated with from developing Lightspeed Spaceflight, which many perceive as the last hope of humanity to survive the imminent apocalypse. Eventually, a variation of the apocalypse does arrive in the form of a sublime vision of the whole Solar System being transformed into a two-dimensional space, obliterating all three-dimensional life.\footnote{453}

\section*{4.2 From national metanarrative to global metanarrative in \textit{The Three Body Problem}}

In \textit{The Three Body Problem}, a teleological temporal order represented by a national metanarrative and a Marxist discourse of history is initially reconfigured and undermined. That the novel is initially set within the framework of a linear, teleological temporal order is evident from how the text is set within a national metanarrative. The novel allows the narrative to unfold, first and foremost, with a unilinear structure of two temporal layers: “the present” (which is the present or the near future of the implied reader’s present), and “the past”, which corresponds to a period in the national metanarrative which spans the

\footnote{452} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Heian senlin} 黑暗森林 [The dark forest] (Chongqing 重庆: Chongqing chubanshe 重庆出版社 [Chongqing publishing], 2008).

\footnote{453} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Sishen yongsheng} 死神永生[Death’s end] (Chongqing 重庆: Chongqing chubanshe 重庆出版社 [Chongqing publishing], 2010). I have adopted the translated terms “Swordholder,” “Deterrence Era” and “Bunker Era” from Ken Liu’s translation of \textit{Sishen yongsheng}. See Liu, \textit{Death’s End}.}

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period from the 1960s until the 1980s. Whereas the English language edition of the novel begins in the “past” and then jumps into the “present”, and subsequently fills in the gaps of the story through the use of repeated analepsis, the Chinese language printed book-edition begins in the present and introduces the “past” temporal layer first further into chapter 7, also through repeated analepsis, after the introduction of one of the main characters Ye Wendie. Both narrative configurations allow the past to flow into the present in a linear way that is associated with variations of the historical novel, but the first structure arguably increases the impact of the past on the present by allowing it to open the entire novel. Moreover, that the national metanarrative and the retrospective structure that supports it can be regarded as representing the linear, teleological Marxist notion of time is explicitly made clear in the decisive chapter “The Madness Years” (Fengkuang niandai 狂狂年代). As noted, this chapter was moved to chapter 7 in the printed Chinese edition, but it becomes the opening chapter of the novel in the English edition. In this important chapter, which opens with a violent campaign during the Cultural Revolution, certain theories of physics are denounced because they do not correspond to the Marxist understanding of history and time. The physicist Ye Zhetai is “publicly criticized” (pidou 批斗) for teaching the theory of relativity, since it proposes a “static model of the universe” (jingtai yuzhou moxing 静态宇宙模型), that “the universe is limited”, in other words is lacking a telos or ultimate goal, which is therefore “anti-dialectical” (fanbian zhengfa 反辨证法) and a form of “reactionary idealism” (fandong weixin zhuyi 反动唯心主义). Indeed, when Ye Zhetai makes clear that, according to the Big Bang Theory, time began with the Big Bang, and that before this point of “singularity” (qidian 奇点), there was “nothing”, the Red Guards are provoked to the absolute limit, criticizing this statement for being “reactionary in the extreme” (fandong touding 反动头顶). In other words, this decisive chapter has already begun to undermine teleological time through the introduction of certain ideas of physics that do not correspond to the teleological temporal order as represented by the Marxist discourse of history.

455 The author has said that this was the original intention, but that the Chinese publisher changed the order of the chapters due to the political sensitivity of allowing the novel open during the Cultural Revolution. See Alter, “How Chinese Sci-Fi Conquered America.”
456 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 61.
457 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 64.
4.3 Ye Wenjie

This undermining of the teleological temporal order only continues throughout the retrospective episodes in “the past” of the Cultural Revolution and Ye Wenjie’s experiences, which alienate her from society and, most importantly, teleological time. For instance, while visiting the Red Guards guilty of the death of her father after the end of the Cultural Revolution (in a chapter entitled (Wu ren houhui 无人忏悔), one of the former Red Guards refers to the film Feng 枫 (Maple, 1980), a movie adaption of Zheng Yi’s work of scar literature. When asked by a child whether the dead Red Guards where “martyrs” or “enemies,” the older character answers both in the negative and concludes that they are simply “history” (lishi 历史), an off-hand statement which refuses to add any value judgement to the past and to history. Hence the Red Guards (who themselves has suffered greatly during the CR) do not see any reason to repent, which aggravates Ye Wenjie’s disillusionment with humanity – and by extension – history. Ye’s experiences ultimately causes her to lose faith in the teleological temporal order, and this is most clearly expressed in the following key paragraph, when she is watching the sky at night as she is exiled in the Red Coast Base during the Cultural Revolution:

This night Ye Wenjie was working the night shift. This was the loneliest time. In the silence of midnight, the universe lay bare its vast desolation to anyone who listened. What Ye Wenjie disliked the most was to watch the curve that slowly moved on the monitor. Those were the jolting waves that the Red Coast Base received from the universe. Meaningless noise. Ye Wenjie felt as if this infinite curve was an abstraction of the universe, one side connecting an infinite past, another connecting an infinite future, and between there were only lifeless and pattern less ups and downs. Each wave crest, high or low, were like small sand grains unequal in size, the whole curve was like all sand grains which were aligned to form a desert. Desolate and lonesome, and so long that one could not endure it. You could follow along it back or forward forever, but you would never find your final settling place (emphasis added).

这天叶文杰值夜班，这是最孤寂的时刻，在静静的午夜，宇宙向它的聆听者展示着广漠的荒凉。叶文杰最不愿意看的，就是显示器缓缓移动的那一条曲线，那是红岸接受到的宇宙颠簸的波形，无意义的噪声。叶文杰感到这一条无限长的曲线就是宇宙的抽象，一头连着无限的过去，另一头连着无限的未来，中间只有无规律无生命的随机起伏，一个个高低错落的波峰就像一粒粒大小不等的沙子，整条曲线就像是所有沙粒排成行形成的一堆沙漠，荒凉寂寞，长的更令人无法忍受。你可以沿着它向前向后走无限远，但永远找不到归宿。460

458 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 227.
459 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 227.
In this passage, one can discern the conspicuous absence of the utopian telos, focalized through Ye Wenjie. Instead, there is only an “infinite curve,” in which “one side connect[s] an infinite past, another connect[s] an infinite future”; moreover, in between there are no historical laws or patterns, as a Marxist teleological and deterministic philosophy of history would have it, but only “lifeless undulations with no patterns.” Historical time has become a “desolate and lonesome desert,” which one could follow “forever” in either direction but would never find a “final settling place” (guisu 归宿). In this way, through engagement and reconfiguration of a national metanarrative the novel has undermined the linear, teleological temporal order, as represented by the Marxist discourse of history. History no longer offers any promise of redemption.

4.4 Trisolarian temporality in The Three Body Problem

Whereas Ye Wenjie’s experiences in the past undermines the temporal order represented by a Marxist discourse of history, teleological time is further undermined by the introduction of an alien temporality in the near-present. In terms of narrative time this temporality unfolds in parallel with the linear, retrospective structure of “the present” and “the past” and it serves to disrupt the teleological temporal order and any sense of a homogenous flow of time. As noted, in terms of narrative time this alien temporality unfolds in parallel with the more conventional temporalities of the present and past, jumping between them as the narrative unfolds. In this way, the supposedly homogenous historical temporality of the teleological temporal order initially introduced through the national metanarrative is further undermined. Significantly, this alien temporality is accessed through an online simulation through the use of the VR-Game “Three Body” and is only later revealed to be a simulation of the historical temporality on Trisolaris. Wang Miao is here confronted with a radically other temporality. Due to the mutual existence of three suns within it, the Solar System in the world of Trisolaris becomes highly unstable and unpredictable. For example, when Wang Miao points out that it will “warmer when the sun comes out” he is mocked by other players in the game as trying to be a “great prophet” (weida de xianzhi 伟大的先知), after several of these seemingly “normal” attempts to predict the movement of the sun he is rebuked with the point that “this is a chaotic era”.

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461 The fact that Wang Miao is introduced to the alien temporality through the internet further points to the importance of the internet in producing alternative discourses of temporality.  
462 Based on the known problem of the three-body problem in physics (mechanics), which refers to the problem of calculating position and velocity for three bodies within a system. For an accessible introduction to this problem, see Richard Montgomery, “The Three-Body Problem,” Scientific American (1 August 2019).  
463 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 40.
concludes that “the sun in this world moved without any rules of patterns whatsoever. After several consecutive long, cold nights, an extremely hot day might appear, or the other way around.” Nonetheless, although temporality is highly contingent in the Santi-world due to the irregularity of the sun(s), it is notable that the temporality does appear to have a pattern that somewhat resembles historical cycles in Chinese traditional historiography. These are called the “stable era” (heng jiyuan 恒纪元), and the “chaotic era” (luan jiyuan 乱纪元). In the “stable eras” people live and prosper whereas in the “chaotic eras” historical time is entirely paused and the people of the Santi-world are forced to “de-hydrate”, a type of hibernation of the Santi-world:

Civilization can only develop during relatively long, and warmer stable eras. Most of the time, people collectively de-hydrate and store themselves away. When a relatively long stable era arrives, they will again collectively re-hydrate and engage in production and construction.

The connection to traditional Chinese historiography is reinforced by the fact that a large portion of the characters, or players, in the Santi-world bear the names of Chinese historical figures, such as Zhou Wen Wang, Qinshihuang and the philosopher Mozi, and the attempts of proto-scientific theories of explaining the movements of the sun is reminiscent of traditional Chinese scientific and historical thinking. For example, while trying to predict the movement of the sun, (and thereby the development of historical time) the character Zhou Wen Wang points out that “The sun is not a God. The sun is Yang, the night is Yin. The world moves within the balance of Yin and Yang.” Nevertheless, the historical cycles of the Santi-world is arguably different from Chinese traditional historiography in the sense that there is a clear case of progress, at least scientific progress, as each time Wang Miao returns to the Santi-world the theories of the world are more and more sophisticated, the particular period is loosely modelled on a later period in Chinese or World history, and every time the game ends message to the players indicates to what “level” (cengci 层次) the civilization has “evolved” (jinhua 进化) before it was “destroyed” (huimie 毁灭). Most importantly, however, is how the other temporality serves to undermine any sense of homogenous time. As noted, in terms of narrative time this alien temporality unfolds in parallel with the more

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464 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 41.
466 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 42.
467 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 44.
468 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 48.
conventional temporalities of the present and past, jumping between them as the narrative unfolds, which unsettles Wang Miao’s (and the reader’s) sense of time. In this way, *TTBP* disturbs an otherwise unilinear homogenous historical temporality with introducing a second temporality in another space, further undermining the teleological temporal order.

4.5 The protagonist Wang Miao

Much like the experiences of Ye Wenjie served to undermine linear teleological time in the context of the temporal layer of “the past” of the Cultural Revolution, the temporal experience of the character Wang Miao, who the narrative focalizes through in the temporal layer of the near present, serves to undermine any idea of teleological time. Above all, his experience of time is first and foremost characterized by uncertainty. The notion of the “Three Body Problem” in physics and the experiments that the scientist Ding Yi tells Wang Miao, all contribute to a sense of temporal uncertainty for the protagonist. Already in the first chapter set in “the present” (Chapter 4 in the English edition and the first chapter of the novel in the Chinese edition) Wang Miao is confronted by the commander Chang Weisi who asks him whether he has experienced any “great changes” in his life, a change that “completely changed your life”, which in his eyes “changed the world overnight.”

When Wang Miao replies that he has not, the commander says that there are so many “unpredictable factors in the world” and that Wang Miao’s life has had no such change is merely an “accident” (*ouran* 偶然); indeed he continues on to claim that “the whole history of humanity is an accident” and that the fact that the world has been “really lucky that there has been no great change from the Stone Age until the present”. The sense of uncertainty is further emphasized in the following chapter, “A Game of Pool” (*Taiqiu* 台球), where the physicist Ding Yi implies that certain experiments in physics using particle accelerators have gone in an unexpected direction, which indicates that “the laws of physics are not invariant across time and space”, which in turn suggests that “physics also does not exist.”

This attack on Newtonian time greatly unsettles Wang Miao, as he also finds out that it appears to have pushed the physicist Yang Dong to commit suicide. The sense of uncertainty only becomes more apparent, and in the next chapter, Wang Miao feels something has altered:

Today Wang Miao felt different. He was good at the steady and dignified style of classic photography, but today it very difficult to find the sense of certainty needed to create such compositions. He felt as if the whole city, which was just

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waking up in the first rays of the morning sun, was built on quicksand. Its stability was illusory.

Today, Wang Miao’s sense of uncertainty is emphasized through the spatial metaphor of “quicksand” and by pointing out that the “stability” of the city in front of him is “illusory” (xuhuan de 虚幻). Focalizing through Wang Miao, the sense of uncertainty is again emphasized by the reference to the well-known philosophical parable (in reality usually attributed to Bertrand Russel), where a number of turkeys at a farm are able to fallaciously induce a number of “great laws of the universe” based on the repeated observations that “every day at eleven AM, food will arrive,” but then one day Thanksgiving arrives and the turkeys are slaughtered instead. Notably, Wang Miao continues to struggle to regain his sense of composure; hence, “without knowing it [he] cycled to the to the foot of the China Central Television-building,” and “stopped and sat next to the road, and attempted to regain a sense of stability by gazing at the A-shaped building.” This reference to China state television links Wang Miao’s experience of uncertainty to politics, as if the political signifier of CCTV can regain his lost sense of temporal certainty. Indeed, after contemplating Russel’s parable, “Wang Miao felt as if the road beneath him began moving like quicksand, and the A-shaped building seemed to begin to shake,” which forces Wang Miao to “quickly retract his gaze.” Also, worth nothing is that the sense of temporal uncertainty that Wang Miao experiences only increases in the Chinese print edition of the novel, which opens in the temporal layer of the near present without first introducing the temporal layer set in the national metanarrative and the Cultural Revolution. In the Chinese edition, which as already noted opens directly in the temporal layer of the near present, the narration creates a sense that Wang Miao is floating in an uncertain temporality without a clear future nor a discernible past. Hence, rather than saying that Wang Miao’s temporal experience is not synchronized with a temporal order, it is probably more accurate to say that it is the absence of a palpable temporal order that upsets Wang Miao’s own sense of time. This sense of temporal uncertainty and lack of both a clearly defined past and future, and instead floating in an empty present, can be seen in the example of the following passage:

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472 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 19.
473 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 20.
474 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 19.
475 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 20.
Wang Miao squeezed into the car and left the planetarium. He drove through the city aimlessly. Just before dawn the road was empty. But he did not dare to drive too fast. It was as if he drove too fast, the countdown would also go faster. When a ray of morning light appeared in the East, he stopped the car by the side of the road. After leaving the car he walked just as aimlessly as before. His mind was empty, there was only the countdown against the dark red background of cosmic radiation. It was as if he had turned into simple timer, a bell that tolled for who knows who (emphasis added).

In the quoted passage, Wang Miao seems to be lacking both a past and a distinct future. Although a mysterious “countdown” has begun to appear before his eyes, which foreshadows the apocalyptic temporality that will be central in the two following parts of the trilogy, at this point, Wang Miao is above all lacking direction, as the narrative has undermined the past and future horizons; hence he “drove through the city aimlessly,” as “his mind was empty” and he has “turned into a simple timer, a bell that tolled for who knows who.” In this way, Wang Miao’s state of mind in this passage can potentially be seen as an expression of the lack of a temporal order that can convincingly define the past and the future for the protagonist after the hegemonic discourse of Marxism has been undermined in the narrative. Wang Miao instead floats in an empty present, leaving the narrative in a sort of temporal limbo without a stable past or future. The temporal order that will fill this gap will be discussed in the next section.

4.6 The apocalyptic temporal order

Following such undermining of the teleological temporal order as represented by the Marxist discourse of history, another form of temporality is introduced in DF, which can be regarded as the dominant temporal order in the two following parts of trilogy. This is what I define as an apocalyptic temporal order. In fact, this form of temporality is already hinted at in TTBP, as the novel introduces apocalyptic imagery and language. At first, the advent of the Trisolarian invasion which Ye Wenjie invites upon humanity to regain her faith in the future is briefly imagined as a possible utopian transformation, expressed in hope of Ye and some of her “comrades” (tongzhi 同志) in the Earth Trisolaris Organization (ETO) that the arrival of the extraterrestrials can “transform” (gaizao 改造) human civilization by eradicating the “evil” side of...

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476 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem], 93.
human nature. This use of Maoist vocabulary is directly related to the utopia of the Marxist, teleological model. However, these initial flirtations with utopia are soon replaced by apocalyptic imagery and language. For instance, as Ye Wenjie visits the site of the Red Coast Base in the “present” at the very end of the novel, she refers to the sunset as if the sun “melted” and that it was the “sunset of humanity.” The alien temporality of the virtual Santi-game, furthermore, although not exactly an apocalyptic temporality since the “destruction” of each civilization is never a threat to the end of time, and that the civilization keeps developing in the form of historical spirals, nevertheless introduces the language of apocalypse in the sense of “destruction” (huimie 毁灭).

The notion of apocalypse, of time running out, is also foreshadowed through the appearance of the “countdown” (daoji shi 倒计时) early on in the novel as Wang Miao in the “present” witnesses a countdown as numbers appear in front of his eyes for no apparent reason. As he tries to figure out the nature of the countdown, he begins to ponder over the question whether “every great disaster of the past, including two great world wars, could they all be at the end of an eerie countdown?... perhaps it was [an indication of] the complete destruction of the whole world?”. Wang Miao flirts with the possibility of apocalypse since, “in this perverted Universe, this could be a liberation for us all.” The word “doomsday” (mori 末日), seems to appear for the first time as expressed by the character Evans, who tells Ye Wenjie about his experience with an environmental disaster while working for his father’s oil company, again using the image of the “sunset”: “As I watched the sun set in the West over the black beach, I felt as if it was the end of the world (mori 末日).”

The apocalyptic temporality becomes more present in DF as it develops into the central temporal order in the novel. As the this second party of the trilogy begins, the whole world is preparing for what has already been named “The doomsday battle” (mori zhanyi 末日战役), which is estimated to take place 400 years into the future. In the novel’s metanarrative, this era is called “crisis era” (weiji jiyuan 危机纪元) and for the purpose of preparing for the Doomsday Battle, the United Nations has created the UN Planetary Defense Council in order to globally orchestrate the preparations. In addition, the government in Beijing has announced that the present is in a “state of war” (zhanzheng shiqi 战争时期) which has put people “in a panic”. Perhaps particularly among the officers in Earth’s space fleet, whom the narrative focuses on early on in DF, the apocalyptic mentality is prevalent. For example, the

477 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem]. 238.
481 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem]. 93.
482 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Santi 三体 [The three body problem]. 231.
483 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest]. 12.
484 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest]. 28-29.
military commander Zhang Beihai points out to his colleague Wu Min that the latter is “envious of that last generation” of Earth’s space fleet, since they can “fight to the end in their youth, and be buried together with the fleet in outer space.” When the commander Chang Weisi witnesses the first member of the space-fleet sent to the future, he notes how these individuals “had a chance to witness the final outcome of humanity”, and further ponders to himself that: “Today was his fifty-fourth birthday, in this desolate winter wind, he saw simultaneously his own end and the end of humanity.” The apocalyptic temporal order is no doubt supported by the Social Darwinian notion of “Cosmic sociology” (yuzhou shehuixue 宇宙社会学) which is revealed by the character Ye Wenjie already in the opening of the novel. Cosmic Sociology consists of the two axioms “Survival is the first need of civilization” (shengcun shi wenmming de diyi xuyao 生存是文明的第一需要) and “Civilizations constantly increase and expand, but the total energy of the universe remains constant.” Due to this Darwinian notion of Cosmic sociology, civilizations have no choice but to eradicate other civilizations as soon as possible, and apocalypse is therefore always imminent in the “dark forest”-universe.

4.7 World time and determinism

Importantly, this apocalyptic temporal order is enforced by the temporal configuration of “world time”, or the construction of global simultaneity, where the new metanarrative is hence provided with a new coherent, historical subject of “humanity” (renlei 人类) moving through time towards apocalypse. In fact, the construction of this world time becomes the focus of the first part of DF, which now focuses on the construction of such a sense of simultaneity after temporal experience has been disrupted in TTBP. Hence, whereas the narrative structure of TTBP was set in the national metanarrative and jumped between a near-present and a past, the first part of DF allows the narrative to unfold not by repeated analepsis/prolepsis but by jumping between different geographical locations in (global) space. In this way, the novel constructs a sense of global simultaneity, of what we can call “world time.” In other words, whereas the TTBP jumps between the two temporalities of “the past” and the “present,” connecting the present to the national past as well as connecting

485 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 53.
486 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 233.
487 The similarity of Cosmic Sociology to Social Darwinism was noted by Song, “After 1989: The New Wave of Chinese Science Fiction,” 11.
488 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 5.
489 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 446.
490 This construction of a historical subject of “humanity” was also noted by Yang Chen 杨宸, “‘Lishi’ yu ‘mori’: Liu Cixin ‘Sant’ de xushi moshi ‘History’与‘末日’: 刘慈欣《三体》的叙述模式 ‘History’ and ‘apocalypse’: the narrative style of Liu Cixin’s The Three Body Problem, 35.
this national past to a yet to be told future history of humanity, *DF* initially focuses on establishing a sense of a shared global present. As humanity faces the Trisolarian crisis, the narrative skips between various geographical spaces on a global scale, including Beijing, New York, NASA, Tokyo, and so on, as the characters are disseminated around these various places in the world. This narrative order and unfolding of the narrative discourse across global space configures a sense of world time as humanity moves simultaneously forward toward the future. The temporal connection of simultaneity, apart from mere narrative configuration, is also at times explicitly pointed to. For instance, as the Chinese character Luo Ji is taken onboard a plane flying towards a yet unknown location, but which will turn out to be New York, the narrator points out how, “at the time when Luo Ji was flying over the coast [leaving the country for America], 10 000 meters beneath him Wu Yue and Zhang Beihai were once again looking at the Tang [cruise battle ship] which was under construction” (emphasis added).491 Yang also noted, due to this “world time” the novel is able to construct a sense of an imagined community of “humanity” (renlei 人类), a single, unitary collective moving forward in time towards one, unitary apocalypse.492 In this way, by constructing a sense of “world-time” and a shared “historical time” of humanity, the novel has through such synchronizing narrative practices homogenized temporal experience to a large degree, making the apocalyptic temporal order hegemonic.

In addition, the apocalyptic temporal order sets a fixed temporal scope of 400 years into the future, which imubes the narrative with a high degree of determinism while allowing certain individuals to control and influence the future. This timescape rewards a future-oriented politics. The character Zhang Beihai travels through this rigidly fixed timescape of “the future” through hibernation and is able to influence the course of history. The determining factor of the apocalypse makes it possible, for instance, for Zhang Beihai to “think ahead,” as his commander points out that “what I appreciate most about you is that you think ahead in your work” (changyuan de sikao 长远的思考)).493 Indeed, this determining factor of the apocalypse, and the need to do “political work” (zhenggong 政工) in order to create a firm belief in the ultimate victory of mankind in the Doomsday Battle, is what warrants Zheng’s proposal to travel into the future in order to “reinforce the future” (zengyuan weilai 增援未来).494 Zhang manages to convince his superiors that the “biggest spiritual challenge lies in the future,” since the “Space protection system will exhaust

491 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* [The dark forest], 52. The original Chinese reads: “当逻辑所乘的飞机越海岸时，在一万米的下方，吴岳和章北海再次注视着降噪中的“唐”号。”
493 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* [The dark forest], 170.
494 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* [The dark forest], 170.
an extreme number of resources that might cause the quality of life for humanity to regress a century. In this way, *Dark Forest* constructs a temporal order characterized by an apocalyptic temporality and a linear time with a fixed temporal scope of 400 years, which allows individuals like Zhang Beihai to influence and “control” the future.

### 4.8 Teleological time and the liberal utopia

As noted, Wang Hui pointed to the powerful influence of the “End of History”-narrative on post-89 discourse in China. This narrative also finds its way into the *Three Body Problem Trilogy*. In fact, in *DF*, the teleological temporal order, which was rejected in *TTBP* as represented by the Marxist discourse of history, makes a comeback in the form of this End of History-narrative, which clashes with the apocalyptic temporal order. The teleological temporal order can be said to be represented by a seemingly utopian society 200 years into the future, into which characters from the crisis era travels to through the time travel-technology of “hibernation” (*dongmian* 冬眠). The 200 years that has elapsed since the beginning of the “crisis era” has allowed for the emergence of a kind of liberal utopia, which can be seen as representing a liberal *telos*. The liberal nature of the utopia of the “new era” (*xin shidai* 新时代) is clear from its embracing of the liberal, humanitarian values of “equality” (*pingdeng* 平等) and “respect and tolerance of all races, civilizations, and life,” all which is confirmed in the “constitution” (*xianfa* 宪法) as well as “by law” (*falü* 法律). The utopian nature of this society can be seen through how humanity has made what initially appears as immense technological progress since the beginning of the novel and has built an impressive Space Fleet. Moreover, that the former apocalyptic temporality has been transformed into utopian telos at this point is clear from developments in the narrative, and how the former, apocalyptic “Doomsday Battle” is now imagined as a kind of utopian hope of including the alien civilization into the liberal utopia. In fact, as the Trisolarians approach, an attempt to extend the values of equality and tolerance onto the Trisolarian civilization is made by politics and people in the new era, and a new plan to allow for the Trisolarians to live in the Solar System and live in harmony with human society called “The sunshine plan” (*yangguang jihua* 阳光计划) is drafted by the United Nations and gets support from a large majority of the population. As the future-historical

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495 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 223.
496 Wang and Huters, *China’s New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, 46-77. For Fukuyama’s original argument, see Fukuyama, “The End of History?”
497 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 279.
498 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 358.
499 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 357-58.
narrator points out: ”what made people excited was the reality in front of them, but the bright future that had already began to take embryonic shape: Would the technology of the Trisolarian civilization and the power of humanity unite, and make the Solar System into a paradise of their dreams (menghuan tiantang 梦幻天堂)?” (emphasis added). In brief, the former apocalyptic temporal order, at this point, has been challenged by a teleological temporal order represented by the liberal utopia and its “End of History”-vision.

4.9 Politics of time in the two eras

The difference between the two temporal orders is not present only in their relationship to the future and whether they evoke a telos or apocalypse, but also how they relate to the present. In the beginning of the crisis era, the individual present risked being sacrificed for the collective future, making the character Luo Ji complain that he refuses to have children because they would have to “build ship factories – spaceship factories – work themselves to death each day, and then line up for the collective canteen.” In contrast, the politics of time in the liberal utopia of the “new era” is more focused on the present, which can be summed up in the slogan emblematic of the era: “Make time for the use of civilization; do not give civilization away for the use of time” (gei suiyue yi wenming, er bu shi gei wenming yi suiyue 给岁月以文明，而不是给文明以岁月). In other words, although the temporal order in temporal layer 2 is still future-oriented, as it orients itself towards the telos, the present has emerged as a more significant temporal dimension in relation to the future in the liberal utopia. This historical change in how to relate to the present in relation to the future has been brought about by the great humanitarian disaster called “The Great Ravine” (Da digu 大低谷), which occurred during the gap in the historical metanarrative during which Luo Ji and the other main characters were in hibernation. This great disaster, which was a consequence of the overhauling of resources when humanity prepared itself for the Doomsday Battle, caused a large part of the human population to die due to environmental degradation and starvation. Following this, humanity decided that it was no longer worth it to sacrifice the (individual) present for the (collective) future. As one of the characters in this new era points out:

Think about it: which is more important – the child about to die of starvation in your arms, or the continuation of human civilization? Perhaps now you will

500 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 373.
501 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 41.
502 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 309.
503 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 332. I have adopted the translated term from Joel Martinsen’s translation of the novel. See Liu, The Dark Forest.
504 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 332-34.
say that the latter is more important. But if you were there at that time, you
would not think like that. No matter what the future will be like, the present
and near present is what is most important (emphasis added).

你们想想，怀里快饿死的孩子和延续人类文明，哪个重要？你们现在也
许会说后者重要，但把你放到那时就不会那么想了，不管未来如何，当
前的日子才是最重要的。505

The quoted passage points to the shift in focus from merely the future to an
increased importance of the present. Significantly, the man points out that this
kind of thinking was at first regarded as “heretic” and examples of typical
“thinking of traitors of humanity” (renjian sixiang 人奸思想); nevertheless,
“more and more people changed their thinking, they all began to doubt
whether it was really worth it to sacrifice so much, even if it was for the victory
of the Doomsday Battle.” 506 Hence, an “economist”507 is able to describe this
new notion of time by pointing out that “actually, now you don’t really need
to think about that many things [. . .] you only need to think about how you
can live well in the days to come”.508 Indeed, this new notion of collective time
seems to suit the character Luo Ji who always preferred to “seek happiness in
the present” (jishi xingle 及时行乐),509 and who was already unaccustomed to
life in the early days of the crisis era where collective life was entirely focused
on preparing for the apocalyptic Doomsday Battle.510 Hence, in the new era,
although time is conceived as teleological, and future-oriented, it also remains
relatively focused on the present as compared to the apocalyptic time of the
common era. This corresponds to Charles Maier’s notion of the politics of
time in the liberal era in the European context. Whereas liberal politics of time
in such a context, according to Maier, was always future-oriented, it was none-
theless also the case that the “doctrines of liberal political economy [. . .] sug-
gested that an individual's time was his fundamental property. Time endowed
everyone with a minimal asset that he could bring to the market.”511 This indi-
cates the possibility of subtle differences between different variations of the
teleological temporal order, as the present appears to emerge as a more signif-
icant temporal concept in the liberal utopia. In any case, the increased focus
on the individual present in the liberal utopia can most likely be traced to the
increased presence of private temporalities in discourse in post-89 China fol-
lowing the introduction of a market economy. The relationship between

505 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 334.
506 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 334.
507 Which suggests that the politics of time in the new era is related to the emergence of a cap-
italist economy.
508 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 335-36.
509 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 315.
510 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 41.
511 Maier, “The Politics of Time: Changing Paradigms of Collective Time and Private Time in
the Modern era,” 157.
individual, or subjective, experiences of time and collective temporalities will be further discussed in chapter 6.

4.10 Temporal layers and temporalization of spatial difference

In a previous section we already discussed how the novel worked to configure a “world time” of global simultaneity, through which novel managed to construct a historical subject of “humanity” moving along linear time, which also served to minimize spatial difference. In this way, the apocalyptic temporal order and its “world time” helped to configure not only a seemingly homogenous “historical time,” but also to construct a strikingly cosmopolitan vision, as Yang Chen also pointed out in his analysis of the trilogy.\(^{512}\) However, what is not being noted by Yang in his analysis is that the trilogy’s seemingly cosmopolitan vision is undermined by the fact that spatial differences are temporalized in the novel, and represented by the two temporal layers, or eras, respectively. In this way, both geographical, spatial difference and multiple temporalities in the form of conflicting temporal orders are in fact preserved in the novel, despite the seeming homogeneity of “historical time” and apparent cosmopolitanism in the novel.

To begin with, as the two different “eras” intersect through time travel by characters from the temporal layer 1, the novel shifts to narrating temporal difference. This shift from spatial to temporal difference – and the difference between the two temporal layers - can be seen in the change of the meaning of the term “fellow townsman” (laoxiang 老乡) from denoting a spatial difference to a temporal one:

In this era, the word “fellow townsman” had shifted in meaning from geographical to temporal. Not all hibernators could use this term of address with each other, only people who had entered hibernation in a close proximity in time could be counted as “fellow townsmen.” To meet after having crossed such long stretches of time added one layer of intimacy to the temporal ‘fellow townsman’ as compared to the geographical “fellow townsman.”

在这个时代, 老乡这个词的含义由地理变成时间, 并不是所有的冬眠者都能相互用这个称呼, 只有在相近的时间进入冬眠的人才算老乡。在跨越漫长岁月之后相聚, 时间老乡之间比以前的地理老乡更亲密了一层。\(^{513}\)

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\(^{512}\) Yang Chen 杨宸, “‘Lishi’ yu ‘mori’: Liu Cixin ‘Sant’ de xushi moshi’ ‘历史’与‘末日’: 刘慈欣《三体》的叙述模式 [‘History’ and ‘apocalypse’: the narrative style of Liu Cixin’s The Three Body Problem], 34-35.

\(^{513}\) Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 426.
The shift in meaning of the spatial term “fellow townsman” in the quoted passage neatly points to how the novel changes the narration from spatial to temporal difference. That the previously spatial term of “fellow townsman” shifts to a temporal difference also indicates that perceived spatial differences have not been removed from the narrative through the construction of the historical subject of “humanity”. Indeed, such temporalization of spatial difference can also be observed in the following passage, as Luo Ji waked up from hibernation in the “new era”:

Luo Ji was conquered by their [the people of the new era] gaze. He knew that the gaze of ordinary people was the best reflection of the level of civilization of a place or era. He had once before seen a group of photographs from the last days of the Qing-dynasty taken by a European photographer. The deepest impression [they left on him] was the dull look in the eyes of the people on the photographs. The only thing one could see in the eyes of those people – no matter if they were government officials or ordinary people – was apathy and stupidity, with not a trace of vitality. Now, when the people of this new era looked into Luo Ji’s eyes, perhaps they had the same feeling.

In the above passage, focalized through Luo Ji, the narrative makes use of spatial comparison between Qing-dynasty China and Europe during the same historical period, to what in the novel has become a completely temporalized difference. The quoted passage makes clear that there is a significant difference between the two eras. In addition, the “new era” is clearly perceived as much more “advanced” than the previous one; indeed, Luo Ji is “conquered” by the “gaze” of the people of the new era, which was “the best reflection of the level of civilization of a place or era (emphasis added).” The analogy has in other words established a dichotomy between one “advanced” and one “backward” temporal layer. And indeed, the part of the novel unfolding in temporal layer 1 narrating the experience of Zhang Beihai and the other naval officers is to a large degree characterized by a sense of belatedness. Their ship, for instance, is described as looking ”not merely old, but even having an ancient weariness,” making the construction seem as “not as construction, but more like archeology.” In addition, the characters are troubled by being far from the “frontlines” in temporal terms, since the decisive “Doomsday Battle” is projected to be 400 years into the future; indeed, it is partly this sense of

514 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 279.
being “behind” on the timeline which motivates Zhang Beihai to travel into the future in the first place.

The previously passage already referred to an essentially spatial difference between Qing-dynasty China and Europe during the same period, and there are many indications that perceived spatial differences between China and “The West” are in fact temporalized in the novel and projected onto the two different temporal layers respectively. In other words, temporal layer 1 is associated with China, and temporal layer 2 is associated with “The West”, or more broadly, westernized globalization. For example, in DF, the narrative about Zhang Beihai in the common era is often associated with China and Chineseness, and Zhang’s old naval ship, for instance, is called “The Tang” (referring to China’s most illustrious dynasty). The Qing-dynasty, which by the way is often perceived as notoriously “backward” in terms of linear conceptions of World history, was already employed in the quoted passage above, and in conversations with his superiors Zhang makes several other references to the Qing by referring to the defeat of the Qing-navy by the Japanese forces in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. In terms of the new era, although never explicitly linked to any Western nation per se, the link to Western liberal democracy is clear from the fact that, as already noted, the new society has embraced liberal, humanitarian values of “equality” (pingdeng 平等) and “respect and tolerance of all races, civilizations, and life,” all which is confirmed in the “constitution” (xianfa 宪法) as well as “by law” (falü 法律). This shows how the novel positions these two layers of time on a linear timeline where the second layer of “the new era” is (initially) considered more advanced and therefore superior to the “common era,” suggesting that the association of temporal layer 1 with China and the temporal layer 2 with “The West” can be related to a certain discourse of backwardness.

4.11 Clash of temporal orders

After having established such a contrast between the two temporal layers, the central tension in DF can be regarded as the conflict between the apocalyptic and teleological temporal orders associated with temporal layer 1 and temporal layer 2 respectively. Such a conflict unfolds as characters travel from

516 The Battle of Weihaiwei, the final battle of the war in which the Chinese were forced to surrender, is referenced twice in the novel, both times by Zhang Beihai. Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 221:325.
517 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 358.
518 Or to put this in terms of modernization theory, a notion of “belated modernity.” For a summary of this discussion, see Irmy Schweiger, “Beyond Chineseness: De-Nationalising and De-Sinicising Modern Chinese Literature,” in *In World Literatures: Exploring the Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Exchange*, ed. Stefan Helgesson et al. (Stockholm: Open Access Publishing in European Networks, 2022), 45-47.
one temporal layer to the next, from the beginning of the crisis era to the liberal utopia. The hibernators who travel through time (not unlike migrants who travel in space from China to the “The West”) are a kind of “temporal migrants” and they find it hard to adapt to the life in the new era. As one of the hibernators points out: “Many aspects of society today have changed much since two centuries ago and are very difficult for us to quickly adapt to, such as politics, the economy, culture, lifestyle and the relationships between the sexes.” The migrants are skeptical of the liberal values of the new era; indeed, they strongly oppose the so-called “Sunshine plan” (yangguang jihua 阳光计划) and the liberal telos imposed by the temporal order in temporal layer 2. Indeed, during a speech by a “member of parliament” (yiyuan 议员), attempting to convince them of the value of the Sunshine Plan and the legitimacy of the telos, the temporal migrants respond by “vehemently opposing” the speech (qianglie fantan 强烈的反弹) and by throwing tomatoes on the representative.

Most significantly, the teleological temporal order and its liberal telos is opposed by one of the main characters Zhang Beihai, who is himself a temporal immigrant from layer 1. As Zhang defects with the spaceship Natural Selection right before the Doomsday Battle, he criticizes his commander and the people of temporal layer 2 and its temporal order, instead espousing the apocalyptic temporal order of layer 1. He points out that the people of the new era in layer 2 have been “blinded by last glow before sunset of low technology” and because they have been “peacefully enjoying the warm bed of modern civilization” they are not prepared for the “final battle which will decide the fate of humanity which soon will arrive” (jijiang daolai de jueding renlei mingyun de zhongji juezhan 即将到来的决定人类命运的终极决战, emphasis added). Zhang supports his claim by referring to the so-called “future historians” (weilai shixuepai 未来史学派). The future historians, according to Zhang, were a group of “deep thinking scholars” that included “scientists, politicians, and military strategists” from the beginning of the crisis era in temporal layer 1, who Zhang claims have been able to predict the future. Although his commander points out that their theories since long have been falsified, Zhang Beihai continues to support the validity of their views, claiming that they had successfully foreseen several historical developments during the 200 years that elapsed during Zhang’s time in hibernation, and that they had ultimately foreseen “the complete defeat and extinction of humanity in

519 See also Liu Cixin’s short story Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Shijian yimin” 时间移民 [Temporal migration], in Shijian yimin 时 间 移 民 [Temporal migration] (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu fenghuang wenyi chubanshe 江苏粉凤凰文艺出版社 [Jiangsu phoneix publishing], 2014). The story is about a group of people who decide to migrate into the future in the hope of a better life.
520 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 320.
521 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 358.
522 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 354.
523 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 354.
the Doomsday Battle.” In other words, based on the “science” of the future historians, Zhang supports the apocalyptic view, which enhances the tension between the two temporal orders represented by temporal layer one and temporal layer two respectively.

Zhang Beihai is also one of the founders of “Starship Earth” (Xinghang diqiu 星航地球) which narrative also introduces in further opposition to the teleological temporal order and its liberal utopia. This is a new civilization founded by the crew on Natural Selection and four other surviving spaceships, which for a while seems like it is all what will be left of human civilization. Although a spatial category, Starship Earth takes on temporal significance as a chronotope, as the closed, limited space of the spaceships surrounded by infinite, empty and inhospitable outer space suggests a kind of experience of time in stark contrast to the liberal society on Earth. In fact, Starship Earth is “a microcosm (suoying 缩影) of the universe” and it can indeed be regarded as a chronotope that encapsulates the apocalyptic temporal order. In this chronotope, as in the apocalyptic temporal order, time offers little hope of redemption, only the constant threat of apocalyptic destruction. Initially, Starship Earth is briefly imagined as a kind of post-apocalyptic renewal were a utopian society can be created for the select few who survived the Doomsday Battle, where the crew is briefly “immersed in the excitement of the creation of the [new] world,” and is regarded as “a second Eden” (er ge yidian yuan 二个伊甸园) and “the second origin of human civilization” (renlei wenming de er ge qiyuan 人类文明的第二个起源地).

However, Starship Earth is nonetheless governed by the Social Darwinian “laws” of the Dark forest-universe, and such flirtations with a utopian revival are quickly replaced by apocalypse. Always the man with foresight, the apocalyptic sense of time is already hinted at by Zhang Beihai as the new civilization is founded, and the new attitudes to time that the journey through space implies. Starship Earth will travel through space for 2000 years before reaching their first destination, which forces the crew to change their relationship to the future. As the narrator points out: “2000 years, this harsh number made reality and the future become clear (emphasis added).” The future-oriented nature of this chronotope is also emphasized as the past is rejected. In fact, Starship Earth is doomed to continue forward, it “cannot go back” and “nostalgia” is pointed out as one of
their chief enemies: “at present, the greatest enemy undoubtedly was the N-issue, denoting nostalgia.”\textsuperscript{531} Yet the destination, or telos if read as a temporal category, is non-existent, since the distant star they have set as their destination is merely a “transfer,” and that “no one knew where the next destination would be, and knew even less when Starship Earth would be able to find a suitable home (jiayuan 家园) in which they would be able survive.” \textsuperscript{532} Much like in the apocalyptic temporal order in temporal layer one the chronotope of Starship Earth serves to eliminate alternative temporal perspectives and homogenize time and helps to establish political control. Hence, when Zhang Beihai first addresses the five other commanders of the ships he employs “comrades” (tongzhi 同志), and points out that he uses “this ancient term of address since all of us, from this day forth, must have the same aspiration” (bixu yongyou tong yi ge zhixiang 必须拥有同一个志向, emphasis added). In terms of time, “must have the same aspiration” – or more literally translated: “aspire in the same direction” – means a highly determined, planned future, of which Starship Earth is well suited. Moreover, “comrade,” of course, is a reference to Maoist discourse, (also used by Ye Wenjie in TTBP), which is in direct opposition to liberal discourse. This points to the similarities between the apocalyptic temporal order and the Maoist interpretation of the teleological temporal order: although the apocalyptic temporal order rejects any notion of a telos, it shares the Maoist rejection of temporal pluralism, its deterministic timescape suited for planning, as well as its future-orientation. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Starship Earth is suspicious of democracy. At the first “citizens congress” (quanti gongmin dahui 全体公民大会),\textsuperscript{533} instead of establishing “the first true democracy in human history” (renlei lishi shang di yi ge zhenzheng de minzhu shehui 人类历史上第一个真正的民主社会),\textsuperscript{534} Zhang Beihai rejects this form of government, because:

Starship Earth is travelling through the harsh environment of outer space. Disasters that could threaten the existence of the whole world [of Starship Earth] can come at any moment. Human history during the Trisolarian crisis has already proven that while facing this sort of disaster, the kind of humanitarian society you are envisioning is particularly fragile. Particularly when our world needs to sacrifice a part to save the whole (emphasis added).

星航地球航行在严酷的太空中，威胁整个世界的灾难随时都可能发生。人类社会在三体危机的历史中已经证明，在这样的灾难面前，尤其是当我们世界需要牺牲部分来保存整体的时候，你们所设想的那种人文社会是十分脆弱的。\textsuperscript{535}

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\textsuperscript{531} The Chinese text refers to the English term, “nostalgia.” Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 407.
\textsuperscript{532} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 403.
\textsuperscript{533} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 403.
\textsuperscript{534} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 405.
\textsuperscript{535} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 405.
In this passage, we see how the apocalyptic sense of time induces the rejection of democracy. Because of the fact that “disasters that could threaten the existence of the whole world can come at any moment” a democratic, “humanitarian” society – and the teleological temporal order represented by the “End of History”-utopia in temporal layer 2 – is rejected by Zhang Beihai, and Starship Earth, for the time being, maintains a military political structure with the various commanders of the ships comprising a committee.536 Starship Earth and its apocalyptic chronotope has, in other words, rejected liberal values. The authoritarian politics that the apocalyptic temporal order and the related chronotope of the Starship Earth enforces is put quite plainly after the trial of the returning spaceship Bronze Age, one of the ships that was part of Starship Earth but returns to Earth after the apocalypse has been temporally avoided. The claim by one of the crew members, which later becomes a famous dictum, concludes that “when humanity really wanders into space, totalitarianism only needs five minutes” (dang renlei zhenzheng liuluo taikong shi, jiquan zhizhuxiao wufen zhong 当人类真正流落太空时, 集权只需要五分钟).537

4.12 The individual and history and the elect elite

Another important theme in the trilogy is the individual and history. Here, I want to discuss what significance the individual and history has for the chonopolitics of the trilogy. William Peyton in his doctoral dissertation on the trilogy noted that Liu Cixin was influenced by Tolstoy’s philosophy of history.538 Although the author makes a good argument for Tolstoy’s influence on Liu in general, I disagree with his conclusions on how Tolstoy’s philosophy of history relates to The Three Body Problem Trilogy. Peyton seems to imply that Tolstoy’s notion of the relationship between the individual and history are largely equivalent with how the same relationship is constituted in the trilogy.539 However, if Tolstoy’s philosophy of history is to be understood as that the individual’s influence on history is an illusion, the role of the individual in history in the trilogy is different, even diametrically opposed, from Tolstoy’s.540 In fact, the trilogy celebrates heroic individuals like Zhang Beihai,

536 The temporary political structure is described at Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Hetian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 406. 537 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 85. 538 Peyton, “Foreign Literary Influence on Liu Cixin’s Diqui Wangshi,” 157-204. 539 Peyton, “Foreign Literary Influence on Liu Cixin’s Diqui Wangshi,” 157-58. 540 Tolstoy writes: “At the basis of all the modern historians from Gibbon to Buckle, despite their seeming disagreement and the apparent novelty of their outlooks, lie those two old, unavoidable assumptions. In the first place the historian describes the activity off individuals who in his opinion have directed humanity (one historian considers only monarchs, generals, and ministers as being such men, while another includes also orators, learned men, reformers, philosophers and poets). Secondly, it is assumed that the goal toward which humanity is being led is known to the historians: to one of them this goal is the greatness of the Roman, Spanish,
whom through their own foresight and iron-will changes the course of history.\textsuperscript{541} Zhang Beihai is the man who, by actively throwing himself into the future by means of time travel, “has changed the course of history twice”;\textsuperscript{542} indeed, he is regarded as a “great man, a creator of history” (\textit{chuangzao lishi de weiren} 创造历史的伟人).\textsuperscript{543} His assassination of several significant individuals involved in the research and development of spaceflight technology successfully changed the trajectory of research to focus on “radiation propulsion,” which later is “evaluated” by historians as the “correct direction” for research.\textsuperscript{544}

Zhang Beihai can be said to belong to an elite of militarists and scientists who has a particularly strong influence on the course of history in the trilogy. Elana Gomel also noted how the apocalyptic imagination tends to grant agency to an elect few who are “being separated from the damned in preparation for the always-postponed Second Coming”;\textsuperscript{545} in the case of The Three Body Problem Trilogy, the elect few is an elite of forward-looking individuals composed of scientists and ruthless militarists, who are granted agency because of the apocalyptic temporal order and its politics of perpetual crisis.\textsuperscript{546} This elite of heroic individuals is, apart from Zhang Beihai, perhaps best represented by Wade, memorably described as “this bastard, demon, murderer, man of savage ambition, political gangster, and technological madman.”\textsuperscript{547} Much like Zhang Beihai, Wade does not nostalgically dwell on the past or hold on to the present. Instead, he is characterized by a forward-looking approach to time, best summed up in his motto: “Advance, advance, whatever it takes, advance” (\textit{qianjin qianjin, bu ze shouduan de qianjin} 前进前进，不放弃).


\textsuperscript{542} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Heian senlin} 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 419.

\textsuperscript{543} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Heian senlin} 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 413.

\textsuperscript{544} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Heian senlin} 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 407.

\textsuperscript{545} Gomel, \textit{Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination}, 123.

\textsuperscript{546} Although it could be argued that there are also examples of more ordinary individuals capable of influencing history, where Cheng Xin is the most salient example. In a moving passage towards the end of the novel Cheng Xin denies that she (in contrast to like Zhang Beihai) is any “creator of history” and merely an “ordinary person,” but it is notable that she is the person who makes the conscious decision to end the research of Lightspeed Spaceflight, thereby influencing the course of history. See Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Sishen yongsheng} 死神永生 [Death’s end], 509. In any case, the fact that individuals may influence the course of history and not simply the “laboring masses”, as in the Marxist philosophy of history, could be one of the reasons for the trilogy’s immense success and its appeal to readers.

\textsuperscript{547} Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, \textit{Sishen yongsheng} 死神永生 [Death’s end], 344.
Wade is also the chief architect of the development of Lightspeed Spaceflight, perhaps the most potent argument for the need of a scientific elite in the novel. Being one out three possible “plans” (jihua 计划) that is developed by humanity trying to survive the imminent apocalypse, the development of the technology is pursued by Wade and a scientific elite in the semi-independent “Halo City” during the “Bunker Era”.

The forces that opposed Lightspeed Spaceflight was mostly emanating from the public and the political world, and the supporters mostly came from the scientific world. In the hearts of scientists longing for Lightspeed Spaceflight, Halo City became a sacred place, and attracted a large number of excellent scholars. Even scientists in the Federation openly or secretly had a large amount of cooperation with the Halo Group, this made the Halo Group have a leading position in basic research (emphasis added).

As can be seen in the above quote, whereas Lightspeed Spaceflight tends to be opposed by “the public and political world” the supporters of Lightspeed Spaceflight, apart from the ruthless and forward-looking Wade, all belong to an elite of scientists and scholars. That this technology was the only true hope of surviving the apocalypse is later also “confirmed” by Luo Ji when the apocalypse seems to have finally arrived in the form the total annihilation of all three dimensional life in the Solar System; hence, Luo Ji’s gaze “was like the fires of the last judgement” (zuihou shenpan de huogui 最后审判日的火柜) as he informs Cheng Xin that her decision had caused humanity to lose their only “true hope of survival.”

Indeed, it is not until Cheng Xin orders Wade to curtail the research on Lightspeed Spaceflight, that the future-horizon is completely eradicated for Wade and his cohort: “Something darkened in their eyes, something had been extinguished. Forever extinguished.” This is the death of the future, and hence, “time crumbled and pressed on his [Wade’s] body, he seemed exhausted and lacking in strength”. In brief, the apocalyptic temporal order and its politics of crisis grants agency to an elect Elite of scientists and militarists who are empowered to act in order to avoid imminent catastrophe.

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548 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 49.
549 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 375.
550 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 451.
551 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 382.
552 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 382.
553 Although one can also argue that are examples of more ordinary individuals who influence history, where the most prominent example is Cheng Xin. Although Cheng Xin herself, towards the end of the trilogy, rejects having had any influence on history, it is notable that she is the
4.13 The chronopolitics in *The Three Body Problem Trilogy* and political discourse

As we have seen *The Three Body Problem Trilogy* imposes a hegemonic apocalyptic temporal order which justifies an elitist and authoritarian politics. Elana Gomel also noted the political explosiveness of the apocalyptic temporality,\(^{554}\) a tendency that can also be observed in relation to *The Three Body Problem Trilogy*, as the trilogy has recently been drawn into ideological battles both in China and elsewhere. Most notably, the novel has been appropriated by a political group on the Chinese internet called “The Industrial Party” (*gongye dang* 工业党).\(^{555}\) As Lu Nanfeng 卢楠峰 and Wu Jing 吴静 noted,\(^{556}\) the Industrial Party is a group strongly associated with “internet-nationalism” (*wangluo minzu zhuyi* 网络民族主义) which emerged on the internet on forums and BBS beginning around 2004 and 2005 and has since gained momentum in 21\(^{st}\) century in China.\(^{557}\) In particular, the website “The Observer” (*Guancha wang* 观察网) has played a key-role in disseminating the ideas of the *gongye dang*.\(^{558}\) By the end of the last decade, the group had gained enough influence for the journal *Dongfang xuekan* 东方学刊 (Journal of Eastern Studies) to devote a special issue on the topic in 2019.\(^{559}\)

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\(^{554}\) Gomel, *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination*, 123.


\(^{556}\) The available academic literature on the relatively recent phenomenon on the Industrial Party is sparse and I mostly rely on Lu and Wu’s article in my analysis. For the record, both authors are connected to the Peking University Institute of New Media and Communications 北大新闻与传播学院, which according to David Ownby is known to have a more favorable view towards the Industrial Party. Ownby also notes that their article is relatively positive and can be viewed as a kind of “advocacy” of the Industrial Party. Nevertheless, the article is the most scholarly and useful discussion available on the Industrial Party. For Ownby’s translation and introduction to the article, see David Ownby, “Lu Nanfeng and Wu Jing on the Industrial Party: Introduction and Translation by David Ownby,” David Ownby ed. *Reading the China Dream*, https://www.readingthechinadream.com/lu-nanfeng-and-wu-jing-on-the-industrial-party.html.


\(^{559}\) “Gongyedang’ de wenhua zijue” ‘工业党的文化自觉’ [Cultural awareness of the ‘Industrial party’], special issue, *Dongfang xuekan* 东方学刊 [Journal of eastern studies], no. 2 (2019).
Considering that the Industrial Party (contrary to what the English term suggests) is not an actual political party but merely a “loosely affiliated online opinion group” it is not that easy to define, but Lu and Wu pointed to several unifying characteristics, including heavy emphasis on nationalism combined with a focus on industrial and technological development. In addition, the authors noted that the group affirms some of the revolutionary narrative and discursive language of Maoism, but rejects other aspects of this narrative, such as emphasis on individual and social reform. Importantly, this group strongly rejects the universal values and humanism associated with the “culture fever” of the 1980s, referring to people with such political views pejoratively as the qinghuai dang 情怀党 (The idealist/emotional Party). As might be expected, the group has been criticized by liberals for emphasizing the collective over individual rights as well as for rejecting any cultural or political pluralism and non-progressive ideologies.

Most significantly for the present discussion, the Industrial Party appears to cultivate a relationship to temporality that shares certain characteristics with

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561 Lu, “Lishi zhuanzhe zhong de hongda xushi: ‘Gongyedang’ wangluo sichao de zhengzhi fenxi 历史转折中的宏大叙事：‘工业党’网络思潮的政治分析 [Grand narrative at history’s turning point: A political analysis of the internet ideology of China’s ‘Industrial party’], 51. On his blog Reading the China Dream, while introducing the same article that I have quoted here, David Ownby writes: “The ‘Industrial Party 工业党’ discussed in the text translated here is not a ‘party’ per se; the word for party in Chinese—党 dang—can refer to a political party or a faction or any group with which people identify. The term is often pejorative, and I don’t know if the Industrial Party has reappropriated the term in an ironic gesture. In any event, the Industrial Party refers to a loosely affiliated online opinion group that argues that industrialization is the key to social development, and should take priority over politics or other kinds of economic growth, such as financial capitalism or platform capitalism.” See Ownby, “Lu Nanfeng and Wu Jing on the Industrial Party.”
564 Yu Liang 余亮, “Gongyedang yishi, yizhong bei hushi de renwen jingshen” 工业党意识, 一种被忽视的人文精神 [Consciousness of the ‘Industrial Party’: An overlooked type of humanism], Dongfang xuekan 东方学刊 [Dongfang Journal], no. 2 (2019): 20. Notably, Yu Liang notes how the group not only been criticized by liberal but also by the traditional left for only emphasizing “production” (shengchan 生产) and ignoring “relations of production” (shengchan guanxi 生产关系).
565 Lu, “Lishi zhuanzhe zhong de hongda xushi: ‘Gongyedang’ wangluo sichao de zhengzhi fenxi 历史转折中的宏大叙事：‘工业党’网络思潮的政治分析 [Grand narrative at history’s turning point: A political analysis of the internet ideology of China’s ‘Industrial party’], 59. Lu writes that The Industrial Party rejects all “pluralistic discussion about the future society and...all non-progressive or non-modern notions, such as religious faith, cultural conservatism, environmentalism.”
The Three Body Problem Trilogy. The former editor of “The Observer” Yu Liang,\(^{566}\) can serve to illustrate this mentality. While rebuking criticism about claims that the Industrial Party does not take individual rights and happiness into consideration, Yu Liang responded to critics by emphasizing the underlying “mentality” (yishi 意识) of the group, which he perceived a central key to understanding the gongye dang.\(^{567}\) As he puts it:

> The mistake of this kind of criticism is not only that it believes the Industrial Party does not care about individual happiness [... ] but also that they do not realize that behind the thinking of the Industrial Party there is a kind of crisis-consciousness. It reminds people that one should not forget that a matter of life and death crisis can still arrive (emphasis added).

Such a “crisis-consciousness” is strikingly similar to the apocalyptic temporality that previous analysis identified in The Three Body Problem Trilogy, and proponents of the Industrial Party have also singled out the trilogy as representative of the group. Yu Liang, for example, employed the novel in his advocacy of the Industrial Party. He argued that “The Three Body Problem is a rare example that can serve as a metaphor for the spirit of the Industrial Party”, and even quoted directly from the novel to point to how humanity is constantly under the threat of destruction.\(^{570}\) Indeed, the crisis-consciousness of the Industrial Party is much

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\(^{567}\) Yu Liang 余亮, “Gongyedang yishi, yizhong bei hushi de renwen jingshen” 工业党意识，一种被忽视的人文精神 [Consciousness of the ‘Industrial Party’: An overlooked type of humanism], 27.

\(^{568}\) Yu Liang 余亮, “Gongyedang yishi, yizhong bei hushi de renwen jingshen” 工业党意识，一种被忽视的人文精神 [Consciousness of the ‘Industrial Party’: An overlooked type of humanism], 27.


\(^{570}\) Yu Liang quotes from Death’s End, and the Trisolarian character Zhizi: “I don’t know from when humanity has been harboring an illusion, that survival is something that can be taken for granted” (bu zhi shenme shihou kaishi, renlei you le yi zhong huanjue, yiwei shengcun shi chengle tuo shou ke de de dongxi 不知什么时候开始, 人类有一种幻觉, 以为生存成了唾手可得的东西). See Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 170.
compatible with the temporality in the trilogy, since the trilogy reconfigures temporality into being dominated by a hegemonic apocalyptic temporal order, where pluralism and liberal values must be rejected to deal with the imminent threat of apocalyptic destruction. This seems to indicate that the novel has been part of reconfiguring collective temporal experience in China in a post-89 context.

Following the novel’s international success, critique in the international community has also become more and more significant.\(^{571}\) The novel’s rejection of liberal values has been seen as a justification of the authoritarianism that has prevailed in China in the Xi Jinping-era, particularly following the author’s own controversial comments about the ongoing repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang already noted in the introduction.\(^{572}\) Other critics have been skeptical in assigning any particular ideological or political character to what might be regarded as a highly complex multilayered work.\(^{573}\) Regardless of what one thinks of such ideological readings in general, it is striking that, in terms of chronopolitics, the novel seems to foreshadow the rejection of liberal values associated with the rise of Xi Jinping much based on a particular temporal order of apocalypticism and politics of crisis. As I have demonstrated in my reading of the novel, it is notable that temporal layer 1 and its apocalyptic temporal order is associated with China and Chineseness, whereas the temporal order of layer 2 and its liberal utopia, is of course also easily associated with “The West.” Hence, rather than an “End of History”, where the world – as Francis Fukuyama envisioned it – ultimately and “inevitably” embraces liberal values and constitutional democracy, we see a kind of apocalyptic revenge of the (initially) “backward” temporal immigrants in the trilogy. Far from adopting the more “advanced” liberal values of temporal layer two, the temporal immigrants and the scientific elite represented by Zhang and Wade not only rejects such values and its temporal order but are also ultimately much better equipped to deal with the doomsday threat and the alien invasion in the novel.

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571 The novel has also been criticized for its supposed authoritarian tendencies within China. See Jiefangzhe Moleier 解放者 莫雷尔, “‘Santi’: weiquan zhuyi de yihan” 《三体》: 威权主义倾向的遗憾 [The regretful presence of authoritarianist tendencies in ‘The three body problem’]. See also Chen Qi 陈颀, “Wenming chongtu yu wenhua zijue: ‘Santi’ de kehuan yu xianshi” 文明冲突与文化自觉:《三体》的科幻与现实 [Clash of civilizations and cultural consciousness: Science fiction and reality in ‘The three body problem’], 5.

572 For example, the political scientist John Keane quoted from the novel while warning about the rise of authoritarianism, what he defines as “New Despotism.” See Keane, The New Despotism, 11.

4.14 Conclusion

In my reading of *The Three Body Problem Trilogy*, I have demonstrated how the trilogy reconfigures temporal experience in the post-89 context. The trilogy initially undermines the linear teleological temporal order as represented by the Marxist discourse of history. It subsequently configures an apocalyptic temporal order where the threat of imminent destruction serves to justify a “state of emergency” and authoritarian politics and narrates a clash between this apocalyptic temporal order and the teleological temporal order, this time represented by the discourse of “The End of History.” As I have argued, rather than embracing the liberal telos of constitutional democracy, the apocalyptic temporal order ends up as the strongest temporal presence in the world of the novel, which ultimately legitimizes a crisis-oriented, anti-liberal politics. The fact that the trilogy has been appropriated in political discourse by the *gongye dang*, even to the point of considering it their representative text, speaks to the power of this temporal vision in the chronopolitical landscape in contemporary China. It is also notable that the clash between the liberal temporal order and the apocalyptic temporal order and the rejection of the former occurring in *Dark Forest* foreshadows the seemingly complete rejection of the liberal telos which has been a trademark of the “New Era” (*xin shidai* 新时代) which has been associated with Xi’s presidency. In other words, although the discourse under Xi certainly differs from the apocalyptic temporal order in that it maintains its reliance on teleological time, they both share a strong future-orientation and a rejection of the liberal telos. The apocalyptic temporal order in *The Three Body Problem Trilogy* could hence be seen as not entirely incompatible with the temporal logic of official discourse.

However, even though the novel constructs a compelling temporal vision and a temporal order that finds resonance in political discourse, the novel cannot be said to subsume all temporalities to one single homogenous rhythm and tempo. In particular, the novel narrates a certain resistance towards this political construction of time through the individual subjectivities of some of the main characters, which I will discuss more in detail in chapter 6, where we will discuss the relationship between existential temporalities and collective temporalities in the different texts.

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574 For an illuminating discussion on the concept of the *xin shidai* 新时代 (The New Era) and its chronopolitical implications, see Jones, “Forging the ‘New Era’: The Temporal Politics of Xi Jinping.”
5. The Garden of Forking Paths: Alternate History and Contingency

*I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths.*

Jose Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*

*There are many forked roads in human life.*

Wu Jingzi, *The Scholars*

Alternate history, defined by Karen Hellekson as “that branch of nonrealistic literature that concerns itself with history turning out differently than we know to be the case,” is a fairly common form in Western science fiction, having produced classics such as Philip K Dicks, *The Man in the High Castle*, which imagined what history would have been like if the Nazi's won the Second World War, and *Bring the Jubilee* which imagined history's trajectory if the Southern Confederacy had won the American civil war. However, in contrast to the relative abundance of alternate histories in the Western context, examples of alternate history in Chinese science fiction and literature, as David Der-wei Wang noted, are very rare. In the Late Qing, as discussed in chapter 2, Chinese science fiction abounded with futurisitic fiction, but neither David Der-wei Wang’s study on Late Qing SF nor Nathaniel Isaacson’s recent monograph mention any alternate history in the late Qing. Likewise, nor

575 This chapter has previously been published in revised form in *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*. See Mo Welin, “Time Travel, Alternate History, and Chronopolitics in the ‘The New Wave’ of Chinese Science Fiction.”
580 Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911;* Isaacson, *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction.*
does the scholarship surveyed in this study note any presence of alternate histories in the science fiction during the Maoist period nor the short boom of science fiction during the period 1978-1983. In other words, it was not until after 1989 with the emergence of the “New Wave” in the 1990s and 2000s that this form became a noticeable presence Chinese science fiction. In this contemporary period, perhaps the most notable example of an alternate history is Chen Guanzhong’s 建丰二年: 新中國無史 (The Second Year of Jianfeng’s Reign) published in Hong Kong in 2015, which imagines an alternate timeline where the Nationalists rather than the Communists prevailed in the Chinese civil war (1945-1949). In post-89 science fiction from the Mainland, which is the focus of this present study, a small but notable amount of alternate histories in the short story form began to appear in the 2000s, where the three texts that will be analyzed in this chapter are the perhaps the most notable examples. These texts, however, remain on the margins of Chinese literary discourse. Liu Cixin’s “Xiyang” 西洋 (Western Ocean) although it has circulated widely online throughout the studied period, did not appear in a print collection of Liu Cixin’s work until 2014, and the story has received little attention from both critics and the author himself. Han Song’s “Yijiu sanba jiyi Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八上海记忆 (Shanghai 1938 - a memory) was originally published on the author’s social media platform in 2006 and did not appear in print until 2017. Baoshu’s “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 (Watching the boat at South Lake Together) has never appeared in print and has only been published in the online magazine Xinhuang jie 新幻界 (New Magic World) in 2011.

The fact that alternate histories are rare in Chinese fiction is most likely closely related to the notion of contingency, which tends to conflict with a teleological temporal order. Contingency, which I conceptualize as the contingent temporal order is perhaps best described in Jose Luis Borges story “The Garden of Forking Paths,” where time is imagined as “an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times [. . .] In most of those times, we do not exist; in some, you exist but I do not; in others, I do and you do not; in others still, we both do.” Such a contingent

581 Chen Guanzhong 建豐二年: 新中國無史 (The second year of Jianfeng’s reign: An alternate history of new China) (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2015). This full-length novel has never been published in the PRC.
582 For a survey of some of the most notable variations on alternate histories in this body of texts, see Baoshu 宝树, “Yiyu, guxiang yu miguan: dangdai Zhongguo kehuan de lishi zhuti” 异域, 故乡与谜官: 当代中国科幻的历史主体 [Foreign lands, homecomings and mazes: The historical theme in contemporary Chinese science Fiction].
584 See note 42.
585 See note 41.
586 Borges, Collected Fictions, 306.
temporal order, which is closely connected to the alternate history as a literary form, “presupposes the endless malleability of history, the radical distinction between the future and the past, and the unlimited human agency to effect change.”587 In contrast to the unilinear temporality of the teleological temporal order, in other words, the contingent temporal order of the alternate history tends to narrate a multidirectional temporality, without a pre-determined goal or telos. This makes the contingent temporal order and the alternate history into a potentially politically radical form in the presence of a hegemonic teleological temporal order.588 Moreover, in addition to narrate a contingent temporality, alternate histories are also genetic, in the sense that they tend to gravitate towards the genesis of history,589 often depart from a “moment of divergence,” and explore an alternate historical trajectory that stems from this origin.590

Alternate history is often combined with time travel. Gomel noted how time travel assumed temporal determinism, in the sense that the future and the past are both already necessarily determined for anyone to travel to neither.591 However, as already noted in the introduction, the simultaneous presence of time travel, which is compatible with the determinism of the teleological temporal order, and alternate history, which narrates contingency, should not be regarded as contradictory but merely as an expression of the dialogic nature of the texts, and the presence of multiple temporalities within the same narrative. Following this, time travel as a narrative strategy is also significant in the sense that it reveals how an individual subject relates to these conflicting temporal orders. As noted, during the post-89 period, the private sphere and individual temporalities have re-emerged in the Chinese cultural sphere. Considering that “contingency is central to the way we understand our own life-choices,”592 I am also interested in exploring not merely collective temporalities in these texts, but also how the individual subject in the post-89 context, relates to these temporalities.

Following this, this chapter will engage in close readings of three texts that can all be regarded as variations on the alternate history. These texts reconfigure temporal experience by allowing historical time to branch into multiple timelines. Moreover, they accomplish this through focusing on reconfiguring particular historical narratives that the political regime employs in discourse.

587 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 17.
588 The historian Niall Ferguson pointed to the political radical nature of contingency when he noted that the purpose of the counterfactual history was to “recapture the chaotic nature of experience and see that there are no certain outcomes,” an approach to history that is "anti-determinist and anti-Marxist." See William H. Honan, “Historians Warming To Games Of 'What If',” New York Times (1923-) (New York, N.Y.), January 7, 1998, Proquest Historical Newspapers.
590 Duncan, "Alternate History."
591 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 17.
592 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 83.
to enforce the temporal order of linear, teleological time. In the following, I will begin by analyzing Liu Cixin’s alternate history “Xiyang” 西洋 (Western Ocean) and discuss how the text narrates a tension between a linear, teleological temporal order and contingency by reconfiguring a narrative of the maritime explorations of the Ming-dynasty explorer Zheng He. Subsequently, I will analyze Baoshu’s alternate history and time travel story “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 (Watching the boat at South Lake together), and discuss how this text introduces a similar conflict between linear, teleological time and contingency by reconfiguring the narrative of the founding of the Communist Party in Jiaxing outside of Shanghai in 1921. Finally, I will analyze Han Song’s variation on the alternate history, “Shanghai yijiu sanba de jiyi” 上海一九三八的记忆 (Shanghai 1938 – a Memory), and I will discuss how the text further problematizes the tension between a linear, teleological temporal order and a contingent temporality. I will illustrate how these three texts reconfigure temporal experience by narrating a tension between the hegemonic linear, teleological temporal order and a contingent temporal order.

5.1 Alternate history and the Zheng He-narrative in “Western Ocean”

Liu Cixin’s “Western Ocean,” possibly the first example of an alternate history in contemporary Chinese science fiction, is the first story to be analyzed in this section. The story reconfigures a narrative of the eminent Chinese admiral Zheng He 鄭和 who made seven long-distance sea-voyages to South East Asia and the Indian Ocean between the years of 1405 and 1433, a narrative of maritime exploration which has gained more and more traction in Chinese discourse in the post-89 era. Possibly the most conspicuous use of Zheng He in political discourse has been during the Xi Jinping-era (2012-present), in the context of the so-called “Belt and Road Initiative” (Yi dai yi lu 一带一路) and the New Silk Road. However, already in the early 2000s, political discourse began evoking Zheng He in context of the discourse of “peaceful development” as well China’s “peaceful rise.” The most significant watershed appears to have been at the sexcentenary of Zheng He maritime expeditions in 2005, when several exhibitions and activities were organized across the country and Zheng He was evoked in multiple editorials,

including the *People’s Daily.* However, Zheng He was in fact evoked in political diplomacy and official discourse at least as early as 2003. In other words, the increased significance of Zheng He in the context of China’s Rise and “peaceful development,” was probably in the air at the time of the composition of “Western Ocean” in 1998. The appeal to the past in the form of Zheng He's voyages in such discourse should not be understood as a cyclical return, although political nostalgia might certainly play some part in the evocation of such narratives. Such narratives, remains highly linear and teleological with their future-orientation and emphasis on development, which indicates that they are better understood as yet another progenitor of the teleological temporal order of the nation. The White Paper (*baipishu* 白皮书), issued by China’s State Council Information Office in 2005 for example, included Zheng He’s narrative in a greater teleological narrative of national glory while proclaiming that “It is an inevitable choice based on China’s historical and cultural tradition that China persists *unswervingly in taking the road of peaceful development*” (emphasis added). In such discourse, the narrative of Zheng He, can perhaps best be regarded as kind of prelude to the “new beginning” that is inaugurated with the birth of the CCP in 1921 and the Communist revolution in 1949.

5.1.1 Plot summary

In “Western Ocean”, China has become the global hegemon and controls the North American continent, called “The New Mainland” (*Xīn dalu* 新大陆), and has been controlling Northern Ireland as a colony for over a hundred years. China has become a global empire, whereas Europe has turned into a poor and provincial backwater. The plot of the story centers around a middle-aged and newly divorced Chinese diplomat in the year 1997 who is leaving his post in the Chinese colony of Northern Ireland to take up a new post at the

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597 Holmes, “Zheng He Goes Traveling—Again.”
599 As is also suggested by Hua Li in her article on the story, see Li, “A Cautionary View of Rhetoric about China’s Imagined Future in Liu Cixin’s Alternate History ‘The Western Ocean’, 192.
600 For a discussion on political nostalgia in the use of the Zheng He-narrative, see Benabdallah, “Spanning Thousands of Miles and Years: Political Nostalgia and China's Revival of the Silk Road.”
601 The State Council Information Office, *White Paper on China's Peaceful Development Road*, 22 December 2005, http://za.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zt/pd/200512/t20051222_7638101.htm That such narrative use remains teleological can be also in the following quote from the same paper: “Looking back upon history, basing itself on the present reality and looking forward to the future, China will *unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development*, making great efforts to achieve a peaceful, open, cooperative and harmonious development” (emphasis added).
United Nations in New York. After a brief visit to Paris, the diplomat and his very nationalistic son arrive in New York. After a disagreement with his son during a street-demonstration organized by an independence movement that wants to liberate themselves from “The Old Mainland” of China, and where the son and diplomat have opposing views, the diplomat befriends a young European female street-artist named Amy. Amy and the diplomat discuss Chinese and European art and visit the “National Palace Museum” (Gugong bowu yuan 故宫博物院) together. Finally, they leave the museum and arrive at New York Harbor to see the statue of Zheng He (which has replaced the Statue of Liberty) where they are finally reunited with the Diplomat’s son.

5.1.2 Teleological time and contingency in “Western Ocean”

“Western Ocean,” to begin with, immediately challenges a unilinear teleological temporal order by allowing the known narrative of Zheng He’s expedition to branch into an alternate timeline. This “point of divergence” is pointed at the very beginning of the narrative by pointing to the year 1420, as Zheng He decides to sail around the Cape of Good Hope instead of returning to China. Hence, it is immediately clear that the text is narrating an alternate timeline than what the implied reader would expect from the national metanarrative. Subsequently, the narration immediately makes a temporal leap into the year 1997. 1997 was the year that the colony of Hong Kong was returned to China, and it is hence clear to the implied reader that as a result of Zheng He’s decision to keep sailing westward, the roles of colonizer and colonized has been reversed. The temporal gap between Zheng He’s decision to keep sailing westward, and the return of the colony of Northern Ireland in 1997, is further filled out by a visit to the memorial of the “Battle of Paris” (Bali zhanyi 巴黎战役) in the French capital by the diplomat protagonist and his young son. As they visit the memorial, the nationalistic son recounts a narrative in which Zheng He’s fleet engaged in a battle with a united European army after having reached the European continent, and subsequently defeated the European forces. The episode which takes place in New York, which in the story is part of the “New Mainland,” further consolidates the alternate timeline and emphasizes how the Chinese Empire has replaced the British Empire as the

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602 The fact that the city is called “New York” 纽约 is not in line with the temporal logics of the alternate history and is probably a mistake by the author.
603 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], in Kehuan zhong de Zhongguo lishi 科幻中的中国历史 [The Chinese history in science fiction], ed. Bao Shu 宝树 (Beijing 北京: Sanlian shudian 三联书店 [Sanlian bookstore], 2017).
604 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 334.
605 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 334-37.
greatest Empire on Earth. Finally, a visit to a museum fill more of the temporal gap: where the Diplomat and the young British woman looks at the Chinese space shuttle which was first with reaching the moon. In this way, the story has constructed an alternate history with an alternate timeline from the national metanarrative in discourse which undermines (national) teleological time. The tension between the teleological and the contingent temporal order is present in the interplay between the diachronic and extradiachronic levels, where the implied reader would be familiar with the linear, teleological narrative in historical discourse, while at the same reading an alternate timeline in the story.

Such tension between the temporal orders is also present on the diegetic level as represented by the characters. The character of the nationalistic young son, for example, can be seen as representing official discourse and its version of national teleological time. The son is the one who insists on visiting the monument of Zheng He which commemorates the Battle of Paris, where the nationalistic son insists on recounting the victory to the diplomat; as the narrator-protagonist puts it, “standing on the pedestal of the memorial [of the Battle of Paris] he began to recite the primary school history textbook.” In contrast, the contingent temporal order is represented by the Diplomat and the young girl Amy who both refer to counterfactual possibilities in the story, which serves to further undermine unilinear, teleological time. For example, as the story comes near its end, Amy muses on the counterfactual possibility of Zheng He deciding to return to China, as in factual history, instead of discovering Europe:

Think about it! If Zheng He had followed the original plan that year [1420] and had not sailed further than the coast of Somalia, and then returned back [to China], what would have happened after that? Perhaps a European’s armada would have been the first to sail around the Cape of Good Hope. What’s more, perhaps a European’s armada would have been first to discover America!

想想，假如郑和当年按照最初的计划，最远只航行到苏玛利亚岸就返回，后来会什么样子？也许是一个欧洲人的船队后来首先绕过了好望角，更说不定，另一支欧洲人的航对还发现了美洲呢!

This is a clear reference back to the metanarrative in official discourse that the implied reader would be very familiar with. Amy’s counterfactual observation re-emphasizes that the narrative(s) has split unilinear teleological time and introduced a contingent temporal order, which exists in tension with the

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606 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 337. See also Li, “A Cautionary View of Rhetoric about China’s Imagined Future in Liu Cixin’s Alternate History ‘The Western Ocean’”, 194.
607 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 342-44.
608 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 334.
609 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 347.
teleological order and indeed undermines it. In fact, a similar counterfactual discussion also unfolds while the diplomat and Amy surveys the National Palace Museum. Discussing the collapse of the Ming-Dynasty in the New Mainland, Amy points out: “Do you mean that if there was no New Mainland, China would still be ruled a feudal dynasty?” The diplomat replies: “Haha! I am not sure about that. But at least the Ming Dynasty would not have been the last dynasty.” In brief, the narrative constructs an alternate timeline from a metanarrative in historical discourse, and a tension between a contingent temporal order and the teleological temporal order of the nation is narrated, the former which is also emphasized by the characters in the story and their counterfactual speculations.

5.1.3 The individual subject

The story also foreshadows the relationship between the individual subject and the two temporal orders present in the text. Notably, the diplomat, whom the narrative focalizes through, is newly divorced and disillusionsed with the future. Indeed, as he is about the leave Northern Ireland, he muses on the past, pointing out how “this is the place a I had spent the first half of my life. Within one hour, we would take all hour belongings and leave. But I could not bring with me my childhood, my youth, or my dreams. They would forever remain on this silent and misty piece of land.” Notably, his own existential recollection is directly contrasted with the supposed forward momentum of historical time, as the ceremony of the repatriation of Northern Ireland to Britain is recounted: “the clock just struck midnight, and at this time, we were already foreigners in this land.” The narrator-protagonist’s decision to leave Northern Ireland, moreover, is not motivated by any forward momentum; even though his surface explanation to be transferred to New York was better for his “future career” (qiantu 前途) but rather to “quickly get as far away as possible from my ex-wife, whom I had lived with for 16 years and recently divorced.” In short, the diplomat’s dimension of existential time is a representation of what one might call a mid-life crisis, with no real excitement or expectations about the future, and with a bitter-sweet, melancholic gaze back toward the past. Rather than synchronized with the time of the nation, he is highly troubled by national time, particularly as it is represented by his nationalistic young son. He clearly does share his son’s excitement about the narrative of how Zheng He conquered Europe. Instead, he is merely “annoyed” (bunai fan de 不耐烦的) with his son’s nationalistic fervor and his linear narrative of conquest, and notes with considerable vexation: “I already know what

610 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, "Xiyang" 西洋 [Western ocean], 342.
611 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 333.
612 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 333.
613 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 333.
happens afterwards, and all about what happened before too” (Yihou wo dou zhidao, yiqian de ye dou zhidao 以后我都知道，以前的也都知道) and tells his son that he will leave him by the monument on his unless he stops narrating the conquest of Paris and comes with him.614 In brief, the existential time of the narrator-protagonist’s serves to further undermine the teleological time of the nation in the narrative, by narrating a conflict between the existential time of the protagonist and the time of the nation, as represented by the diplomat’s son.

The narrator-protagonist’s relationship to historical time is renegotiated during the visit to the National Palace Museum (Gugong bowuyuan 故宫博物院) in the “Forbidden City” in New York. On the one hand, as already demonstrated, this episode serves to further emphasize a contingent temporal order, as the diplomat and Amy discuss the counterfactual possibilities of history, which also enhances the interaction between the diegetic and extradiegetic levels. Hence, the diplomat’s own relationship to historical time seems to be renegotiated by subscribing to a contingent temporality, as the counterfactual possibility of Zheng He not discovering Europe and America opens new possibilities in history for both the diplomat and the young woman. On the other hand, the visit at the museum, which together with the discussion that ensues between the diplomat and Amy present a counternarrative to the nationalistic narrative that the son represents, narrates a time of universal scientific progress, and the diplomat’s experience paradoxically also serves to impose a universal historical temporality of progress. In other words, the temporality of the son’s national history, and its association with monuments and military triumph is replaced by a narrative of scientific progress. While surveying the museum, the diplomat and the young British woman stop at a display of several classical European texts, including The Iliad, The Odyssey, and The Divine Comedy, the narrator points out:

Look. He [Zheng He] read your books and learned many things he didn’t know. He had the magnetic compass, but not the accurate European clocks necessary for long sea journeys. He had ships that were three times the size your largest ships at the time, but not the skills needed to design accurate sea-maps . . . In particular, the Ming of that time were behind Europe in basic science. For instance, in geography Chinese still believed that the sky was round, and earth was flat. If it wasn’t for your science – or let’s say if there was no fusion of Eastern and Western culture – Zheng He would not have continued sailing Westward, and America would not have been ours.

614 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 334-36.
或者说没有东西方文化的融合，郑和不会接着向西航行，我们也不会得到美洲。615

In this passage, by emphasizing the cultural interaction between China and Europe as a key factor in China’s prosperity and success, the narrator-protagonist presents a counternarrative to the national teleological time as represented by his son. Within the bounds of the museum, we are no longer experiencing the time of the nation and its monuments (as represented by the son) but the time of, first and foremost, scientific progress. In this counternarrative, rather than based on the heroic feats of the Chinese nation, Zheng He’s success depended on “the fusion of Eastern and Western culture.” Significantly, this counternarrative, on the one hand, emphasizes contingency, which is line with the alternate history form, as the conquest of Europe by China – or vice versa – was not the inevitable triumph of a superior culture or nation, but the contingent result of Zheng He’s choice to sail around the Cape of Good Hope. On the other hand, by maintaining a time of scientific progress within the reconfigured narrative, as represented by the visit to the museum, the narrative reinforces a seemingly universal temporality of progress. Hence, the narrative seems to have undone its own contingency. It introduces an alternate timeline and contingent temporal order, only to reject contingency in favor of a temporality of universal progress. Whether it was Zheng He or Vasco Da Gama who was the first to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, the time that remains is the time of scientific progress that the diplomat experiences in the museum. In other words, what becomes contingent is less teleological time itself, and more the “national” part of the teleological time. Hence, the result is not so much a deconstruction of a teleological temporal order as an attempt to depoliticize teleological time. In her reading of the story, Hua Li argued that the story could be read as a political commentary on the official narrative of China’s “peaceful rise.”616 Following our own reading of the temporal logic of the story, we might therefore conclude that Liu Cixin’s story functions as a counternarrative to the politicization of the narrative of Zheng He’s voyages in Chinese political discourse around the turn of the century, which undermines political attempts to include the narrative of Zheng He’s voyages into the teleological time of the nation. The text challenges such attempts by constructing an alternate history and pointing to an element of contingency in historical time; in other words, the supposed “inevitability” of China’s “peaceful rise” is deconstructed in the text. Nonetheless, the reconfigured narrative maintains scientific progress, whose telos remains present both on the diabolic and extradiegetic level, which limits the narrative to a de-politization, or de-

615 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, “Xiyang” 西洋 [Western ocean], 343. Suspension points in original.
616 Li, “A Cautionary View of Rhetoric about China’s Imagined Future in Liu Cixin’s Alternate History ‘The Western Ocean’”, 186.
nationalization of teleological time, rather than becoming a thorough exploration of the (possibly disturbing) implications of a contingent temporal order.  

5.2 Alternate history and the revolutionary narrative in “Watching the Boat at South Lake Together”

In “Western Ocean,” the contingent temporal order was introduced into the historical narrative of Zheng He’s maritime expeditions. In this section, I will discuss how the contingent temporal order is introduced into another narrative that is perhaps even more significant in Chinese political discourse and the configuration of a teleological time of the nation. This is the narrative of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. The chronopolitical significance of such a founding narrative can hardly be overstated, and it is frequently evoked in discourse. The narrative plays a central role in the central historical and political document entitled “Guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi” 关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议 (Resolution regarding a certain number of historical issues in the history of the Party since the founding of the People’s Republic), in which the Founding of the Communist Party in 1921, and the historical developments during the People’s Republic under the leadership of the CCP were teleologically framed in the deterministic language such as “correct” (zhengque 正确) and “necessary” (birande 必然的). The significance of this founding narrative can also be seen in other cultural developments in the post-89 context. Notably, the publication of the Baoshu’s story roughly coincides with the premiere of the Chinese propaganda film Jian dang wei ye 建党伟业 (Beginning of the Great Revival, 2011). The film was co-directed by Huang Jianxin and Han Sanping (chairman of the China Film Group) and employed a plethora of famous Chinese

617 This reluctance to let go of the telos of scientific progress could perhaps be explained in terms of the authorial subject, since the author is known as a writer of “hard SF,” whom might have a hard time imagining a world without scientific progress. On a broader level, however, it is notable the firm grasp teleology has on conceptions of science in general. Stephen Jay Gould writes: “Whiggish history [i.e teleological notions of progress] has a particularly tenacious hold in science for an obvious reason – its consonance with the cardinal legend of science. This myth holds that science differs fundamentally from all other intellectual activity in its primary search to discover and record the facts of nature. These facts, when gathered and refined in sufficient number, lead by a sort of brute-force inductivism to grand theories that unify and explain the natural world. Science, therefore, is the ultimate tale of progress – and the motor of advance is empirical discovery.” Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*, 5.

618 “Guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi” 关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议 (Resolution regarding a certain number of historical issues in the history of the Party since the founding of the People’s Republic), *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 [People’s daily], 1 July 1981, http://rmrb.egreenapple.com.resources.asiaportal.info/index2.html.

actors to tell the story of the founding of the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{620} Sebastian Veg notes that the film, together with the earlier feature \textit{Jian guo da ye} (Founding of a Republic) (2009), “are significant in that they mark a new will within the party state: far from toning down or sublimating the great milestones in the history of the Party, it firmly in-tends to transform them into cultural and commercial icons around which to structure a national narrative that is based on a repackaged ideology.”\textsuperscript{621} In other words, these films can be regarded as an act of propaganda on account of the CCP for purposes of maintaining its control over discourses of temporality in China, and which attempts to consolidate the link between the history of the CCP and teleological time of the nation by depicting the glorious rise of the CCP as a necessary historical outcome.

5.2.1 Plot summary

In the short story “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” (Watching the boat at South Lake Together) the protagonist named Lu Ming travels from the year 2051 back to the year 1921 to witness the first national congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which supposedly concluded on a boat in Jiaxing outside of Shanghai.\textsuperscript{622} The protagonist has gotten the opportunity for the trip as a student scholarship and is one of the few time travelers who has chosen this founding moment of the CCP due to his deep interest in history. During the trip he unexpectedly runs into another time traveler: a young woman named Xiaoyou who has come to witness the event from the year 2081. The two time-travelers befriend each other, and Lu Ming, who is much more well-read in history that Xiaoyou, begins telling her about the various historical personages on the boat. However, it is eventually revealed the person that Lu Ming refers to as the great founder of the Republic is not Mao Zedong as would be expected by the implied reader but instead the less known Communist leader Zhang Guotao 张国焘.\textsuperscript{623} Zhang, it turns out, is the founder of the “Socialist Republic of China” (\textit{Zhonghua shehui gongheguo} 中华社会共

and on Lu Ming’s timeline. It is revealed, in other words, that Lu Ming is coming from a different timeline with an alternate history, whereas Xiaoyou comes from the implied readers timeline where Mao remains the founder of New China. After learning that the two time-travelers are coming from different timelines, Lu Ming is initially greatly distressed but eventually learns to accept the presence of multiple timelines. The story ends with a budding romance between the two time-travelers, before they are sent back to their own time.624

5.2.2 Teleological time and “the beginning”

As noted, the alternate history gravitates towards the genesis of history, and the text utilizes this to challenge the temporal order by exposing and subverting the relationship between telos and “the new beginning” in this temporal structure. Qingxin Lin has pointed to the relationship between origin and telos in the imposition of teleological time in twentieth century China. As the author points out, in the Marxist discourse of history, “the construction of the myth of origin and the myth of telos is essential. A lofty origin justifies the beauty of the telos and a beautiful telos, in turn, justifies the loftiness of the origin.”625 This relationship between telos and origin is not merely found in the Marxist discourse of history, however, but is better conceived as the temporal logic within the teleological temporal order. Importantly, moreover, as discussed in the introduction, I prefer to refer to such an origin as a “new beginning” to distinguish this temporal logic of cyclical temporal orders of recurrence. In this way, a dialectic between “the beginning” and the telos is constructed: the new beginning inaugurates a “new time” whose complete significance will be fulfilled in the future as one approaches the telos.

“Watching the Boat at South Lake Together” also positions itself in this teleological structure. In the narrative, as described above, Lu Ming travels back in time to witness the founding of the Communist Party in Jiaxing outside of Shanghai in 1921. That the narrative of the CCP and the teleological time of the nation overlaps in the text is evident from the fact that the narrative makes clear that the protagonist has returned not only to the founding of the CCP but also to the beginning of “modern China.” The time of this historical event is a time when the “ancient dynasty had already been completely shattered by modernity” and when “the iron heel of great powers constantly treads on this ancient Eastern nation,” and China is plagued by famine, warlords, and disunity.626 It is also a time when “all kinds of new ideas and political

624 Baoshu 宝树, Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], Microsoft Word File.
626 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 1.
campaigns were coming from the West,” which serves to “provide this ancient nation new hope” (zhege jingli cangsang de guguo dailai xin de xiwang 这个经历沧桑的古国带来新的希望). The application of the adjective xin 新 (new) is here important, since it emphasizes the “newness” of the teleological time that is about to be inaugurated by historical event. To finally connect the origin of the CCP with the origin of modern China, the narrator points out “this little lake was the birth-place of [new] hope” (zhe pian hu shui, jiu shi xiwang de danshengdi 这片湖水, 就是希望的诞生地 (emphasis added). That the narrator here points to the event of the founding of the CCP as the “birth-place of [new] hope” clearly suggests that this is not merely the birth-place of the CCP, but also the “new beginning” within the teleological temporal order. In sum, by allowing the protagonist to return to “the beginning” of national teleological time as conceived in the revolutionary narrative in official discourse, the story positions itself firmly within the teleological time of the nation.

5.2.3 Contingency and deconstruction of “the beginning”

Following this, however, other temporalities are introduced which conflicts with national time and its teleological temporal order. As noted, the narrator-protagonist Lu Ming runs into another time-traveler who is later revealed to be coming from a different timeline with an alternate history. In particular, their narratives diverge on one fundamental detail: they realize that the historical personage which the narrator refers to as “you-know-who” (nage ren 那个人) and “that great man and founder of our Republic” is not the same person: on Xiayou’s timeline, the great man refers to Mao Zedong just as on the implied readers timeline, whereas ironically, the narrator protagonist turns out to be coming from an alternate timeline where the less known Communist personage Zhang Guotao became the founder of New China. After comparing narratives, the narrative reveals that on Lu Ming’s timeline Mao Zedong was killed by local militia in 1927, whereas Zhang Guotao rose to power instead.

To explain the phenomenon, the narrator builds on the “many worlds hypothesis” in quantum physics to conclude that “because of the uncertainty of

627 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 1.
628 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 1.
629 Another way this story becomes political that I do not discuss here is how it plays with narrativity and manipulation of metanarratives. For a discussion, see my article Mo Welin, “Time Travel, Alternate History, and Chronopolitics in the ‘The New Wave’ of Chinese Science Fiction.”
630 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 2.
631 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 11-14.
quantum particles, one the occurrence of one event could produce many different results, and all possible results would form its own universe.” In other words, history branches out into two – and potentially innumerable – timelines, introducing a contingent temporality that is expressed by the protagonist with a quote from the classical novel *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (The Scholars): “No matter North or South, there are many forked roads in human life (rensheng nanbei duo qilu 人生南北多歧路).” This notion of contingency changes Lu Ming’s perspective on the historical event. Lu Ming realizes that even though the founders of the Communist Party are right before their eyes, “they [the founders of the CCP] could have not been here” (emphasis added). In other words, the sacred “new beginning” in the scheme of the configuration of teleological time dissolves. In terms of the newly introduced contingent temporality, time is now a “never ending network of branches” (wuqiong wujin de wangluo zhiman 无穷无尽的网络枝蔓) with “an unlimited number of directions and points of divergence to choose from.” For these reasons, “there was actually no such thing as a fixed fate” and that in fact, for these individuals, “there was still an infinite number of possibilities to choose from. The future was open for them.” Hence, Lu Ming also sees a “tragic element” in the Communist leaders’ commitment to teleological time:

Like I did before, they believed that there was only one future of the world, only one truth, one direction. They believed that had grasped the direction which history was taking, that society evolves along a single line, passing through tens of millions of years, from one stage to another, and finally – and inevitably – reaching Communism.

This last quoted passage neatly captures the tension between the teleological temporal order and the contingent temporal order in text. Whereas the

632 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 14.
633 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 13. The quote is from a poem in the novel. For the original text, see Chinese Text Project, *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 [The scholars], chapter 1, accessed June 7 2023, https://ctext.org/rulin-waishi/zhs.
634 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 15.
635 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 17.
636 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 17.
637 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 17.
contingent temporal order has been introduced into the narrative and changed Lu Ming’s own perspective on the historical event, the Communist leaders themselves are still convinced that “there was only one future of the world,” and that society would “inevitably” move towards the predetermined telos of “communism.” In this way, the story narrates a conflict between a contingent temporal order and the teleological temporal order associated with nation-building, here represented by the foundational narrative of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.

5.2.4 The individual subject
Following the narrative’s introduction of another temporal order, the narrative also re-negotiates the individual subject’s relationship to these temporalities. In fact, Lu Ming is initially a staunch subscriber to the revolutionary narrative and the teleological temporal order. The protagonist’s attachment to the teleological time of the nation is, first and foremost, visible from how excited he is about being able go back to the founding of the CCP and the origin of teleological time. Lu Ming describes himself as a “hobby-historian” (lishi aihaozhe 历史爱好者) who takes great pleasure in spotting the different historical figures on the boat.638 He is the only student granted the time-travel grant who has chosen this event to travel to, and his excitement for returning to “the beginning” of teleological time is explicitly pointed to as he exclaims how “history would be changed by them, would be changed by what happened on this boat. And history had proven them right, I thought with great excitement” (emphasis added).639 Even more significantly, Lu Ming’s attachment to teleological time is also evident from the fact that as soon it is revealed that there is not just one history, but innumerable histories, as the multidirectional temporality of the contingent temporal order is introduced, his interest in history, initially, completely evaporates. He feels that his profound interest in history has become “utterly meaningless” (haowu yiyi 毫无意义) in the context of the plurality of historical times, because “from the point of view of the universe, there was no such thing as a single History.”640 Suddenly, all “sacred grand narratives” (shensheng de hongda de xushi 神圣的宏大的叙事) are no longer part of a greater plan but merely “products of accident” (ouran 偶然).641 As a result, a disillusioned Lu Ming concludes that “what we call

638 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 3.
639 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 5.
640 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 14.
641 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 14.
history does not exist." Instead, time and history are nothing but “rootless change, from nothingness to nothingness.” In other words, as the teleological temporal order is challenged by the contingent temporal order, history dissolves into nothingness for the narrator-protagonist. Significantly, he uses the word “rootless” (wuge 无根) which again points to the dialectic between the telos and the “new beginning” in the construction of teleological time, and in this case, the individual subject’s own psychological need to return to this beginning. The attachment of the protagonist to the revolutionary narrative points to the “abiding allure” that the narrative and its version of teleological time, as Geremie Barmé noted, still exercises on contemporary China.

Nonetheless, Lu Ming is eventually transformed from a staunch subscriber to the teleological temporal order to someone who embraces contingency. In fact, after the young woman argues that the plurality of historical times that a contingent temporal order imply does not extinguish all meaning, Lu Ming changes his mind. As he puts it, “happiness is still happiness, suffering is suffering, and choices are still choices.” Lu Ming starts considering whether the reason he could not accept the existence of more than one history perhaps had less to do with the pursuit of truth and more to do with “masculine desire for power,” since by “possessing history, we could possess time, and in turn possess the future.” In this way, the narrator-protagonist’s initially quite innocent interest in history as a “hobby historian” and desire to go back to the “the beginning” of modern Chinese history is linked with darker motives of “possessing” history and explicitly linked to masculine desire. And indeed, it is notable that much of the narrative is filled with Lu Ming lecturing the much less historically knowledgeable woman about the various historical personages on the boat, seemingly deriving great pleasure from “possessing” the narrative. As the narrative develops into a budding romance between the two time-traveler and ends in a climactic embrace seconds before they are being sent back to their own times, it could be argued that Lu Ming’s supposed masculine desire to “possess” history is transferred from history to a romantic interest in the young woman.

The significance in the motif of romance in re-negotiating Lu Ming’s relationship to historical time can be linked to developments in culture and politics in post-89 China. In a thought-provoking essay on the most famous novel of

642 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 15.
643 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 15.
644 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 15.
645 Barme, “Red Allure and the Crimson Blindfold,” 40.
646 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 15.
647 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” 一起去看南湖船 [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 16.

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In the Maoist era, *Qingchun zhi ge* (Song of Youth), the literary scholar Ban Wang notes that the romantic motif and its private dreams and desires in the novel is sublimated into the love of the revolution. As the author argues, the novel engages the reader in “a process of rechanneling one’s desire, impulse and affection into politically acceptable outlets” and which ultimately “shows how crucial it is to get involved in history and how one can, in the process, transform oneself into the ‘subject of history’”. In Baoshu’s text, we see how this process is reversed as Lu Ming’s initial commitment to the revolutionary narrative and its notion of teleological time is rechanneled back onto private dreams and desires, thereby liberating the individual subject from “the burden of history”. This corresponds to McGrath’s observation that “after the merging of the public and private spheres under the totalising ideology of communism” the post-socialist context has witnessed a return of private subjectivity in cultural representation and “the rise of romantic love to, in a sense, replace the political in popular cultural representations”. To put it in another way, the narrative’s emphasis on individual romance can also be an expression of an abandonment of the historical dimension altogether in favor of the existential dimension, where individual romance trumps historical feats and triumphs. Indeed, it is notable that Xiaoyou does not at all share Lu Ming’s interest in history to begin with and has only travelled back in time to the origin of the CCP for the purpose of studying for an upcoming exam. Such a focus on existential temporalities and shift from history to romance risks diminishing the political subversiveness of the narrative. Nonetheless, the story remains chronopolitically significant in that it reveals the complex relationship between individual subjectivity and national teleological time in the post-89 context, characterized by both tension and allure.

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651 This narrative tendency can potentially be viewed in the light of discussions about the so-called *xinrenlei* 新人类 (new humans), referring to a younger generation of Chinese who, as Mingwei Song puts it, “enjoy a life full of pleasure and happiness but who have completely lost historical consciousness.” See Song, "After 1989: The New Wave of Chinese Science Fiction," 13.
652 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 4. Notably, Xiaoyou points out that she would rather have returned to the Qing-dynasty to meet up with “Fourteenth elder brother,” probably a reference to the popular time-travel drama *Bu bu jing xin* 步步惊心 (Scarlet Heart) (2011), where a female protagonist returns to the Qing-dynasty and gets involved in romance in the Qing-court, a common motif in *chuanyue*-fiction. See also Rojas, “Queering Time: Disjunctive Temporalities in Modern China.”
5.3 Alternate history and nostalgia in “Shanghai 1938 – a memory”

Whereas Baoshu’s alternate history positioned itself within the narrative of the founding of the CCP, Han Song allows his variation of the alternate history, entitled “Shanghai 1938 – a memory,” to unfold in Shanghai during the turbulent historical period of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). As the cultural critic Dai Jinhua has noted, Shanghai occupies a particular place in the timescape of contemporary China and is a key signifier in what she identifies as a cultural shift from the north to the south in representation in Chinese culture in the 1990s. In the last section of this chapter, I engage in a close reading of Han Song’s story and discuss how these cultural meanings of the spatiotemporal category of Shanghai problematizes the contingent temporal order and the disintegration of national teleological time, and how such problematization of contingency and teleology can be related to issues of nationalism and nostalgia.

5.3.1 Plot summary

The story focuses on an unnamed student and narrator who frequents a shop that sells video-discs (yingdie 影碟) in Shanghai. The student is acquainted with the shop owner who introduces him to a mysterious “time-disc” (shiguang die 时光碟) with which one can turn back time and begin again on another timeline. The disc was invented by an ex-physicist turned businessman with the original purpose of saving China, who eventually began selling the disc for profit after having the disc rejected by the nationalist government. The disc is purchased by individuals from all walks of life to abandon the present timeline and begin again, as well as whole nations that want to begin anew on another timeline. The student himself refrains from using the disc, and instead makes a living by selling it to friends, family, and acquaintances. After the end of the war, the student finally uses the disc, but notices no difference and decides that the disc is a fraud. However, the narrative ends with two alternate endings, in two final chapter entitled “World A” and “World B” respectively, both that differ from the historical metanarrative. The in first ending, China has been defeated by the Japanese in the war, and the protagonist is on his way to America to fight the war on the Japanese side. In the second ending, China was victorious in the war, and the narrator-protagonist is on his way to the United States to study as an exchange student.

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654 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] in Kehuan zhong de Zhongguo lishi 科幻中的中国历史 [The Chinese history in science fiction], ed. 宝树 (Beijing 北京: Sanlian shudian 三联书店 [Sanlian bookstore], 2017).
5.3.2 The time-disc and contingency

In the story contingency is introduced into the narrative through the mysterious time-disc. As the shop owner explains the function of the time-disc, she points out how the time-disc is “not an ordinary video-disc, it was a disc that could make time flow backwards, as well as make time start all over again.” Applying the disc to a projector, the shop-owner shows the narrator how the disc works by displaying the flow of the Suzhou-river on a screen where “every time, the newly formed paths of the river where different, the scenery at the banks of the river changing, new worlds were born and paraded before my eyes one after another.” This metaphor of the “river of time,” normally suggesting a unilinear flow of time from past to future, is illustrative of how the time-disc splits time into a multidirectional temporality.

However, despite seemingly providing a way out from the dire historical situation, contingency is not depicted as liberating in the story and is instead associated with uncertainty and instability. The application of the time-disc is not a guarantee of finding oneself in a more auspicious dimension of historical time. Rather, it is only “an opportunity” (jihui 机会); furthermore, it compared to the act of “throwing a die,” it all depends on “luck” (yunqi 运气). Possibly, one will find oneself in an even worse “period of disruption” (luanshi 乱世). The contingent idea of time – of “throwing a die” – is further consolidated through linking it to the motif of gambling. The inventor of the time-disc is a “gambler” (dutu 赌徒), and is repeatedly referred to as “that mysterious gambler”; to consolidate the link between contingency and gambling, it is revealed that he gambles away his fortunes (made on selling the time-disc) in various Casinos in Macao and Las Vegas. In other words, much like the motif of romance made contingency a liberating idea in Baoshu’s story, the motif of gambling makes contingency more threatening in Han Song’s narrative.

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655 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 350.
656 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 350.
657 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 351.
658 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 356.
659 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 355.
660 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 351.
661 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 355, 58.
662 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 363.
In fact, rather than taking a chance on another timeline, the narrator clings to the original timeline until approaching the end of the narrative. His choice of doing so, furthermore, is clearly rooted in an aversion for contingency and an attachment to the teleological time of the nation. As he himself puts it,

I was still stubbornly hoping that the place where I would meet Xiaoping again someday – in life or in death – would be of this world. In the only possible future. Not in innumerable, intangible pasts. I also believed that the war would end one day, and that we Chinese people could survive, following an already fixed path ahead, and out of the ruins begin life anew (emphasis added).

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In the quoted passage, see how the protagonist clings to teleological time. He refuses to embrace the “innumerable intangible pasts” implied but contingency, and instead wants to reunite with his lover “in the only possible future,” while hoping that China can follow an “already fixed path ahead,” emphasizing his commitment to national teleological time. To further consolidate his determination to stick to the timeline, he has a vision of a future, prosperous Shanghai. He points out how, “On the eastern side of the Huangpu River, there appeared what seemed like a mirage,” where he sees “tall, tower-like buildings that did not really exist, reaching for the sky”; these buildings “seemed like ancient fortresses haunted by ghosts, but yet they overflowed with colors while beautifully reflecting the moonlight. They were magnificent and dazzling to the eye.”664 Baffled by the vision, he asks himself: “Could this be China after its destruction?”665 Needless to say, the implied reader knows that this, in fact, is the future of China; it is quite clearly contemporary Shanghai intruding into the narrative, and the vision of its splendor serves to consolidate the narrator’s temporal commitment to the linear, teleological time of the nation, despite the chance to “begin anew” on another timeline. Hence, the narrator-protagonist concludes “no matter what, the people with time-discs left too early. After all, even though it was at death’s door, the nation was still struggling – and could perhaps even survive for another 5000 years, just in one stretch.”666

663 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 352.
664 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 363-64.
665 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 364.
666 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 364.
5.3.3 Nationalism, nostalgia and teleological time

The protagonist's commitment to the timeline and national teleological time can be understood in relation to discourses of nationalism and nostalgia. McGrath pointed to how it had become almost a cliché to regard Shanghai's the Bund as a place where China's past and future meet, and, the spatiotemporal category of Shanghai certainly plays a significant role in the dialectic between past(s) and future(s) which can be seen in the above quoted passage.\(^{667}\) By setting the story in pre-revolutionary Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese War, the story evokes national trauma and the legacy of colonialism. In fact, the shop-owner tells the protagonist that the time-disc was originally invented to “save China” but was rejected by the nationalist government.\(^{668}\) The time-disc is sold to “nations with no hope for the future,” considering that “the distance between them and the first-rate countries was just growing bigger and bigger, and these countries had absolutely no way of catching up.”\(^{669}\) In this context, abandoning the timeline also means abandoning a particular narrative of national trauma and, more importantly, subsequent “liberation.”\(^{670}\) In fact, at one point the narrator-protagonist even muses on what it would be like if all Chinese people employed the time-disc and disappeared from the timeline except for himself and the shop-owner.\(^{671}\)

Perhaps even more significant than such allusions to national trauma is the sense of nostalgia that the story evokes. The setting imbues the story with a kind of nostalgic gaze that cultural critic Dai Jinhua identified as an emerging cultural tendency in China around the 1990s, and where Shanghai plays a central role.\(^{672}\) Dai writes that Shanghai, “provides a somewhat infectiously decadent, but alluring, background and setting”; hence, through nostalgic imaginings, the city becomes “a cultural springboard that allows us to leap unscathed across cultural experiences and to express new freedom.”\(^{673}\) Indeed, Han Song’s short story is replete with a sense of nostalgia for the “old Shanghai” (\(\text{Lao Shanghai 老上海}\)). The famous 1930s singer Zhou Xuan’s \(\text{Si ji ge 四季歌}\) (Song of the four seasons) is played and there are multiple references to well-known films of this period, including \(\text{Mulan congjun 木兰从军 (Mulan Joins the Army)}\) and \(\text{Luanshi fengguang 乱世风光 (Heroes in the Turbulent}\)


\(^{668}\) Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 361.

\(^{669}\) Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 359.

\(^{670}\) The war of resistance against Japan was referred to as a “war of national liberation” by the CCP. See Tetsuya Kataoka, “Communist Power in a War of National Liberation: The Case of China,” \textit{World Politics} 24, no. 3 (1972).

\(^{671}\) Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi”一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 358.


Dai noted how nostalgia is not a re-creation of the past as it was, but rather a selective reminiscence from the perspective of the present. In Han Song’s story, the nostalgic vibe is also enhanced by the fact that the historical narrative is not entirely reliable. In fact, as the title suggests, it is merely “a memory” (jiyi 记忆), and the story also contains multiple anachronisms: the latter film, for instance, was not released until 1941, and the presence of a shop selling “video-discs” can, of course, not be regarded as a natural part of a 1938 Shanghai-temporality, but clearly belongs more to the Shanghai of the 1990s or 2000s when the story was written. The protagonist’s vision of a future, prosperous Shanghai reminiscent of a contemporary Shanghai further enhances this entanglement of past and present and the importance of the spatial category of Shanghai in the protagonist’s commitment to linear, teleological time. To further argue the point of the importance of nostalgia for the “old Shanghai” in the story, the shop owner even points to some individuals who returned to the timeline after having used the time-disc to begin anew on other timelines. She muses that even though their reappearance on the timelines could have been unintentional, she also speculates that “perhaps they regretted [choosing to use the time-disc]?” and that they had in fact returned because they were “nostalgic” (liulian 留恋) “about the glorious Shanghai of the past?” In this way, Han Song cleverly constructs a narrative that undermines the linear, teleological time of the nation by introducing a contingent temporal order while at the same time problematizing the very same deconstruction of national teleological time and the idea of contingency and multiple timelines. In other words, the narrative suggests that for the individual subject – by allowing the narrative to unfold in pre-revolutionary Shanghai and alluding to national humiliation and nostalgia for the Shanghai of the past – the teleological time of the nation might not be so easy to give up after all.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how Chinese science fiction reconfigures temporality and narrates ongoing temporal antagonisms in the post-89 context. Through analyzing three alternate histories, I have discussed how the hegemonic teleological order is challenged by a contingent temporal order, which allows the unilinear timescape of the teleological temporal order, here represented by well-known metanarratives, to branch out into multiple timelines. These texts imply that although a linear teleological order keeps being

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676 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 - a memory] 354.
enforced by the political regime in the post-89 context through linear, national historical narratives, counter-narratives are present which reconfigure collective temporal experience in radically other, even directly opposed ways, where historical teleology is replaced by contingency. Since contingency and by extension the alternate history “is central to how we understand our own life choices”, these texts also foreground the individual subject’s relationship to these temporal orders. It is also in this latter respect that the texts differ the most: both in “Western Ocean” and “Watching the boat at South Lake together”, the introduction of contingency is experienced as a liberation by the individual subject; in “Shanghai 1938 – a memory”, in contrast, the introduction of contingency in the form of the ”time-disc” is not experienced as liberating. The reasons for this difference, I suggest, might be twofold. On the one hand, considering that as Gomel suggested, “some people are inclined to revel in contingency and some – fear it” and, hence, whether one “revels” in contingency or not might be due to personal preference. The absence of a predetermined goal might be experienced as a liberation for some individual subjectivities whereas others might feel threatened and perceive such a life, as the protagonist in Han Song’s story does, as a continuous “gamble.” A possible second reason, however, I would argue is related to which type of narratives and discourses that the stories relate to. “Watching the boat at South Lake together” relates directly to a narrative that remains central to official discourse, and whose power keeps being mobilized in rhetoric and propaganda in the post-89-context, the propaganda feature Jian dang wei ye 建党伟业 (Beginning of the Great Revival), as noted, being the prime example. The sense of this narrative and its underlying temporal order of teleological time as being imposed from above probably contributes to the sense of being liberated from the burden of this notion of time, which in this context can perhaps be regarded as “the burden” of (teleological) historical time. Han Song’s story, in contrast, allowed the story to unfold in a narrative related to national trauma and the chronopolitically more ambiguous spatiotemporal setting of pre-revolutionary Shanghai. Although discourses of nationalism are certainly also mobilized in propaganda, the sense of national trauma appears to strike closer to heart in Han Song’s story. Even more significantly, the intermingling of such a discourse of trauma with nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Shanghai appeared to make it even more difficult for the protagonist to abandon the timeline and the teleological time of the nation.

Regardless of such reasons, these alternate histories foreground the relationship between private and collective temporalities, as the individual subject is forced to make moral choices and temporal commitments in the respective

677 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 83.
678 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 83.
texts. Such a presence prompts us to return to some of the earlier texts in the next and final chapter, to discuss how existential temporalities of individual subjects further complicates the temporal representation in our texts.
6. No Enemy but Time? The Individual Subject and Temporal Orders

The days and months are passing away, the years do not wait for us.
Confucius

The innocent and the beautiful
have no enemy but time.
William Butler Yeats

In a talk at Chiao Tung University in 2009, the historian Qian Liqun 錢理群 noted: “Our generation has a flesh-and-blood relationship with history, these historical campaigns directly influenced our lives, our bodies, our emotions, and our spirits. Our ‘little selves’ (xiaowo) and the historical ‘big self’ (dawo) were all tangled together—this is something that sets us apart from the students I teach and from those present here today.” 682 Indeed, in the context of twentieth century China, the individual subject has undoubtedly had a particularly complex relationship to history and collective temporalities enforced by the political regime of the CCP. As already discussed in chapter 2, the Maoist period in particular was characterized by the cultivation of a particular “time-consciousness” where time should be completely dedicated to the revolutionary enterprise, and where official discourse served to reorient private temporalities to collective ones in order to ensure complete temporal commitment from individual subjects.

In the post-89 period, however, cultural and political changes in the 1990s brought about an increased focus on private temporalities in discourse. As was also discussed in chapter 2, this period has above all been characterized by the phenomenon referred to as duoyuanhua 多元化 (pluralization) 683 where the emerging entertainment media contributed to a more fragmented and

682 Qian, “Mao Zedong and his Era (2012),” 181.
pluralized discourse. The emergence of a market society, furthermore, also led to an increased amount of individual life choices for individuals. As the liberal intellectual Liu Qing pointed out, “the commercialization of the mass media [...] provides increasingly more diversified possibilities and resources for personal choices of ways of life and values that underline those choices.”

In his study on the cultural life of post-socialist China, Jason McGrath also noted that “the domestic and individual pleasures of personal life” had become a major presence in the post-89 period, signifying a new cultural logic in which “visions of desire and fulfillment have become highly individualized.”

We can here reframe McGrath’s observation in terms of temporality: the post-89 period was a time when private, individual temporalities – which had been repressed during the Maoist era, re-emerged in cultural representation and discourse. McGrath also notes that one of the most significant literary trends of the 1990s, exemplified in the so-called “New Realist” writers, signified a move away from master narratives (and collective temporalities) to focus on individual experience, where “individual experience became the key-reference upon which writers based their descriptions of reality.”

In other words, the New Realist writers exemplified a move towards focusing on existential rather than historical temporalities in narrative.

In this context, these science fiction narratives have a special significance since a science fiction text tends to operate both within a collective, or “historical,” dimension, and within an existential dimension. In the previous chapter, we already noted how the alternate history tended to foreshadow the relationship between existential and historical temporalities. And indeed, as noted in the introduction, Fredric Jameson has pointed to the tendency in science fiction to narrate the tension between historical time and existential time. He notes, for example, how the narrative element of reincarnation allows the characters in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Years of Rice and Salt* to experience a great variety of historical contexts. In this way, science fiction can reveal much about how individual subjects might relate to conceptions of historical time, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, the temporal orders that

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688 Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions*, 7. As he points out: “Thus, the extended life spans of Kim Stanley Robinson’s Mars colonists allow them to coincide more tangibly with long-term historical evolutions, while the device of reincarnation, in his alternate history *Years of Rice and Salt*, affords the possibility of re-entering the stream of history and development over and over again.”
these variations historical time might contain. Furthermore, Jameson also observed that it is “precisely in Utopia that these two dimensions are seamlessly reunited and that existential time is taken up into a historical time which is paradoxically also the end of time, the end of history.” We can reformulate this as regarding utopia as a place where existential time and historical time are synchronized. Following this, the purpose of this last chapter is to explore in more detail how individual subjectivities in these texts relate to and conflict with the historical temporalities in these narratives, more specifically the various temporal orders and chronotopes that have been identified in the previous chapters, and investigate whether there is any possibility of synchronizing existential and historical temporalities in the various narratives.

6.1 The Three Body Problem Trilogy: Luo Ji and Cheng Xin

To begin with, in The Three Body Problem Trilogy, despite the fact that as I demonstrated earlier that the novel imposes a hegemonic apocalyptic temporality, it is significant that the individual subject, as represented through some of the main protagonists, remains resistant to this temporal order. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the trilogy contains a dominant apocalyptic temporal order where humanity moves towards apocalypse and the individual present must be sacrificed for the collective future. However, although the two novels construct a metanarrative of humanity developing along a unilinear timeline, subsuming most other temporalities into a seemingly homogenous “historical time” oriented towards apocalypse, the existential time of the two protagonists Luo Ji and Cheng Xin, in fact, remains resistant the dominant temporal order. In contrast to the other main character, the military commander Zhang Beihai, who represents a heroic archetype and who does not hesitate to commit to the apocalyptic temporality, and whose inner life we know little, if anything about, Luo Ji and Cheng Xin represent more fully developed subjectivities. As we shall see, this development has much to do with the dimension of existential time, which is not synchronized with the apocalyptic temporality which the novels impose on the narrative. Indeed, although the whole world is engaged in the “state of war” early on in DF, Luo Ji already from the beginning of the novel refuses to make the temporal commitments that the rest of the narrative asks of him. What is at stake is clearly his own dimension of existential time. As Luo Ji’s character is first introduced early in DF, he describes the “present age” of the Trisolarian crisis (i.e. “historical time” dictated by the apocalyptic temporal order) as “tedious” (乏味) and explains to his casual lover that he does not want to have children, because these children will

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689 Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions, 7.
all have to sacrifice their own lives (i.e. time) to the collective; he points out with deep irony and scorn: “Do you know what kind of life their descendants are going to have to live? Build ship factories – spaceship factories – work themselves to death each day, and then line up for the collective canteen.”

Notably, the term jiti shitang 集体食堂 (collective canteen) would make the implied reader to think immediately of the collective canteens of the Maoist era. In other words, Luo Ji is highly resistant to sacrificing his own existential time for a collective future in the same way as it was sacrificed during the Maoist era. Luo Ji is greatly surprised and distressed to learn that he has been selected as one of four “Wallfacers” that are bestowed with the mission of saving humanity from the Trisolarians, and this narrative development is of course also an ironic twist since the novel has already established Luo Ji’s individualistic character. In fact, Luo Ji puts his own individualistic philosophy quite plainly to the Secretary General of the United Nations as she tries to convince him to commit himself to the cause of saving humanity: “I cannot really see ‘the whole of humanity,’ I can only see separate individuals,” and points out that “I am only one person, an ordinary person, who cannot assume the responsibility for saving the whole of humanity. I just want to live my own life.”

As a Wallfacer, Luo Ji is granted unlimited resources at his disposal with no questions asked; however, instead of embarking on making a plan for the redemption humanity, he uses his resources to historical time altogether and retreat into his personal, secluded utopia – a luxurious mansion completely isolated from the outside world:

Now, in a period of increasing anxiety, Luo Ji became the most laid-back man in the world. He strolled beside the lake, took a boat in the lake, and took the mushrooms he had picked and the fish he had caught to the chef to cook delicious dishes. He browsed through the ample collection of books in the library in a leisurely way, and when he was tired he went out to play golf with the guards [. . .] Often, he would sit on bench by the lake, looking at the reflection of the snowy mountain in the water, thinking about nothing or everything, and a day would pass unknowingly (emphasis added).

In the passage above, Luo Ji has escaped the “historical time” of the dominant apocalyptic temporal order in the crisis era; indeed, “in a period of increased anxiety”, Luo Ji has become “the most laid-back man in the world.” In this

690 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 41.
691 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 187.
692 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 126.
blissful state, he can “stroll beside the lake”, and “in a leisurely way” browse through books and engage in other activities, while time passes “unknowingly.”

However, the narrative works against Luo Ji, and his own individualistic utopian existence is doomed to disintegrate. In a passage around the middle of *DF*, while visiting the Louvre, it seems as if the apocalyptic temporal order imposes itself on existential time, where Luo Ji has a vision of himself and Zhuang Yan dying together in an apocalyptic vision. Here, as the two lovers have just been admiring the Mona Lisa, Luo Ji stares into Zhuang Yan’s eyes and suddenly “felt like he was standing at the peak of a great precipice and the young woman’s eyes was the vast abyss below.” The narrative continues:

Mona Lisa began to be transformed, the wall began to be transformed too, like melting ice. The Louvre collapsed. As bricks fell down, they turned into burning magma. The magma pierced through their bodies, which unexpectedly felt cool and refreshing. They fell together with the Louvre, together with the melted European continent towards the center of the Earth. As they passed through the center, the Earth began exploding around them [. . .] the stars trembled and performed beautiful music, the sea of stars thickened like a surging tide, and the universe was shrinking and collapsing on itself around them . . . finally, everything was annihilated in the light of love, which was the genesis of everything.

Arguably, this apocalyptic vision that Luo Ji experiences signals the death of his untenable individualistic utopia. The passage is particularly striking since this vision seems so completely out of synch with what precedes it. It is as if Luo Ji’s dream existence and escape from the apocalyptic temporal order has already been allowed to continue for too long, with little hope of narrative development, and therefore implodes on itself. Indeed, shortly thereafter, Zhuang Yan and their child hibernates into the future with the message: “My love, we are waiting for you at doomsday.”

This description of Luo Ji’s seclusion and the use of the motif of escaping the collective temporality bears some resemblance to the blissful, secluded inhabitants of *The Peach Blossom Spring* who recounts to the visiting fisherman that they “had never heard of the Han, let alone the Wei and the Chin.” For a translation of this text, see Qian Tao, “The Peach Blossom Spring,” in *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 161. Second suspension points in original.

Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, *Heian senlin* 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 183.
by removing his lover and child from his own present and placing them in the apocalyptic future—has forced Luo Ji to ultimately commit to the apocalyptic temporality. Hence, it is possible to argue that the narrative functions to domesticate the individualistic Luo Ji to become a “responsible” character by committing to historical time and the apocalyptic temporal order (but not without, as I hope to have demonstrated, significant resistance). Indeed, it is significant that Luo Ji eventually develops into a similar form of heroic archetype that Zhang Beihai represents, after he saves humanity from the apocalypse by figuring out the “laws” of the Dark Forest-universe.696 In Death’s End, Luo Ji is no longer one of the main protagonists and the narrative no longer focalizes through him and instead shifts to Cheng Xin.

Much like Luo Ji until the end of DF, existential time of the main protagonist in the third part of the novel, Cheng Xin, is also not synchronized with the apocalyptic temporal order. Significantly, whereas the heroic archetypes of Zhang Beihai and later Wade can be seen to represent a forward-looking, apocalyptically oriented temporality, and Luo Ji chooses to focus on the present, Cheng Xin’s dimension of existential time is past-oriented, which exists in tension with the dominant apocalyptic, forward-oriented temporal order. Cheng Xin’s dimension of existential time conflicts with a historical time of an increasingly accelerating rhythm dictated by the apocalyptic temporal order, which problematizes this temporal order. To begin with, Cheng Xin travelling into the future is not a personal choice (as is the case with Zhang Beihai) but is commanded to travel there by her superiors, as she is originally sent to the future to be a “contact person” for the so-called Staircase program.697 Cheng Xin’s travels into the future creates a strong contrast between the accelerating development of the collective temporality of human history in the novel and her own dimension of existential time.698 Significantly, Cheng Xin’s experience of being thrown into the future also corresponds to the reader’s experience, in terms of narrative temporality, by the presence of “gaps” in the metanarrative of the novel, as Cheng Xin repeatedly hibernates and wakes up in various future “eras,” constantly having to adjust to new historical contexts. Cheng Xin’s existential time is out of synch with the momentum of historical time that the temporal order induces and hence is never able to adopt to the new eras; in fact, her subjectivity is constantly past-oriented, often returning to the “common era” from which she came, which of course corresponds to the implied reader’s present. Indeed, as the narrator points out, “after

696 Luo Ji figures out the logic of the “Dark Forest”-universe in the last part of The Dark Forest. See Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Heian senlin 黑暗森林 [The dark forest], 433-455. In Death’s End, Luo Ji has turned into a “heroic” character and the first “Swordholder” responsible for protecting humanity from Trisolaris by supervising the by the already established deterrence system, and if necessary, to reveal Earth’s position in the universe.

697 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 75.

698 Including biological time, as Cheng Xin realizes she is only 33 years old after having travelled several hundred years into the future, having aged merely four years since the beginning of the narrative. See Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 377.
awakening from hibernation for the first time during the Broadcast Era, Cheng Xin was never able to assimilate into the new era. She felt as if she was an outsider in terms of time” (shijian de wailai zhe 时间的外来者).

It is not until she awakens in the Bunker Era – an era that closely resembles the common era, which gives her “a sense of ordinariness, of time flowing backwards” (shiguang daoliu de pingfan gan 时光倒流的平凡感) – that she can finally have the "sense of coming home." The narrative of the Bunker Era is steeped in nostalgia for her own past, which is, again, the implied reader’s present and recent past. Rather than travelling on some high-technological form of transport, Cheng Xin rides the public bus which has been reinstated as a kind of public transport, and “Cheng Xin thought about the last time she took a public bus. Even in the common era, she had already stopped taking such cramped buses.”

She eavesdrops on the passengers on the bus discussing topics which evoke a strong sense of ordinariness and everydayness in the implied reader, such as the prices of heating, income of the elderly, and the steaming (qingzheng 清蒸) of seafood. At one point Cheng Xin even imagines that her own mother and father are waiting for her in one of the houses in the Bunker World.

In brief, her own subjectivity is past-orient; in fact, “her soul was stubbornly living in the past” (ta de jingshen guzhe de shenghuo 她的精神固执的生活在过去). Reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s Angelus Novus Cheng Xin is thrown into the future with her back turned towards it, looking at back at the past, “while the pile of debris before [her] grows skyward.” In fact, Cheng Xin’s reluctant travels through time suggests a certain critique of the future-oriented, apocalyptic temporal order in the novel, and shows that certain subjectivities might not be able to adjust to the momentum of the accelerating collective temporality of human history which the novel narrates. Hence, even though much of the novel favors characters that are in synch with the apocalyptic temporal order, and the plot can be said to condemn Cheng Xin for her “mistakes” of failing to save humanity from the apocalypse, Cheng Xin’s subjectivity invites much identification with the implied reader and complicates the novel’s relationship to the apocalyptic temporal order which dominates much of the trilogy.

Related to the Cheng Xin and the discussion of the individual subject and the dimension of existential time in the novel is the issue is the narrative voice in Death’s End. A minor but significant shift in the form appears in Death’s

699 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 354.
700 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 350.
701 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 354.
702 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 351.
703 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 352.
704 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 354.
705 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生 [Death’s end], 298.
End as compared to the otherwise formally quite similar Dark Forest. Dark Forest makes use of the future-historical narrator already introduced in TTBP, allowing this historical extradiegetic narrator make frequent intrusions into the narrative, synchronizing the developments in the plot into a coherent metanarrative. Death’s End, likewise, employs the future-historical narrator to produce a coherent metanarrative, however, significantly, the narrator of the pseudo-history which opens the whole novel “A past outside of time” is apparently less “objective” than in DF, since it is – in fact – at least partly the character Cheng Xin who is the author of this history, bestowing the anonymous extradiegetic narrator of Dark Forest with a human subjectivity. In the opening chapter of the novel, she refers to herself as “the author” (bizhe 笔者) – and this author is later revealed to be the main character of the novel: Cheng Xin. That the narrator is Cheng Xin is confirmed towards the end of the novel, where it is noted that “Cheng Xin began to write her memoirs, to document the history which she knew. She called it ‘A past outside of time’.”707 Indeed, the narrator in the very first excerpt which opens the novel points out “I suppose this ought to be called history, but since all this author can rely on is memory, it lacks the rigor of history,” suggesting that this “history” is less objective and relies on subjective memory rather than simply “objective” historical knowledge, as was implied by the extradiegetic future-historical narrator in the previous novel.708 These excerpts from “A past outside of time” are spread out throughout the novel recounting various developments in human history. However, one should be careful to entirely equate the narrator of all these excerpts with Cheng Xin, since as Yang noted, the narrative voice in these excerpts still remain highly “objective” rather than simply recounting personal recollection or memories, and the narrator also addresses Cheng Xin in the third person.709 In addition, the future-historical narrator also frequently intrudes into rest of the narrative that is not part of the pseudo-history of “A Past Outside of Time”, a future-historical narrator no less authoritative than the one in DF.710 This creates an interesting “split” of the narrative voice of the metanarrative of “A past outside of time” as well as the rest of the rest of the metanarrative of humanity in Death’s End – it a voice that seems to consist of two voices blending into each other: both an “objective” view from nowhere and a subjective account of the past, based on Cheng Xin’s own memory. It might be worth pondering the question of why this subjectivity intrude into an otherwise “objective” account of the past? Suffice it to say that this split of the narrative voice embodies the irreconcilable conflict that arises from the construction of a metanarrative imposing a hegemonic, potentially

707 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 503.
708 Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 1.
709 Yang Chen 杨宸, “‘Lishi’ yu ‘mori’: Liu Cixin ‘Sant’ de xushi moshi ‘历史’与‘末日’: 刘慈欣《三体》的叙述模式 [‘History’ and ‘apocalypse’: the narrative style of Liu Cixin’s The Three Body Problem], 32.
710 See, for instance, Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, Sishen yongsheng 死神永生[Death’s end], 225-29.
homogenous temporality of the apocalyptic temporal order, and the need to preserve individual subjectivity and existential time, here figuring in the form of “memory”. In other words, the split in the narrative voice possibly represents the need to homogenize time and construct a totality, which Jameson has suggested as the function of the SF-genre.\(^71\) At the same time, however, Cheng Xin’s presence as part of the narrative voice of the future-historical narrator serves as a reminder of the individual subjectivities that in the post-89 context, at least as the present investigation suggests, might resist such a construction of totality.

6.2 Existential time in *Red Ocean* and *Mars Over America*

In *Red Ocean*, the temporal experience is most of all characterized by temporal displacement for the individual subject. This is much related to the presence of the chronotope of the “Red Ocean” (*hongse haiyang* 红色海洋). That it is the chronotope of the ocean and the experience of time, and not merely the spatial category itself, which is the source of displacement, is clear from the fact that the absence of time in the ocean is potentially utopian in the novel. In other words, as long as the “Red Ocean” is merely a *topos*, but not a *chronotope*, it is utopian; once temporality enters, it becomes dystopian. This is evident from the description of a utopian society around the middle of the novel in the part entitled “Our past”, a society seemingly long lost in time is described in detail:

In those times, the sea was suitable for human life. The Sea was tranquil and still, silent and clear. It was deep and towering high, seemingly in harmony with human nature. In those times, there were no nations, and there was no King of the Ocean. The only thing there was were the prophets. This conformed to the nature of the Ocean. Because the Ocean was continuous and smooth, unlike the rough and rugged terrain on land, whose dangerous, uneven topography had brought about danger and injustice in the human world. But this was no longer the case in this water world where nothing was neither gained nor lost. The Ocean was broad and generous, in a primeval, innocent state, both vast and limitless, and containing. It was empty yet substantial, and there was nowhere it did not begin, nowhere it did not end. This made the people’s hearts and minds remain in a primordial state of anarchic generosity, without isolation.

\(^{71}\) Jameson argues that SF is able to construct such a totality by imagining the present as history, more specifically, "in the form of some future world's remote past, as if posthumous and as though collectively remembered.” Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions*, 288.
那时候，海是适宜人生之海。海澹而静，漠而清，渊渊巍巍，似是合乎人的本性的。那时候，是没有国家的，也没有海洋王，有的只是先知。这也与海的本性相符。因为，海是连续的，均匀的，不若大陆的崎岖坎坷。地势的凶险不平曾导致了人间的凶险不平，但这益之而不加益，损而不加损的水世界中不复存在。而海又是宽厚的，混沌的，已然浩瀚，兼蓄包藏，空虚而充实，无处不终结，无处不开始。这使人的胸也宽厚混沌并没阻隔起来。\footnote{Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 292.}

This description, which mimics the style of wenyuan 文言 (literary Chinese), contains clear similarities to utopian passages in traditional Chinese literature, particularly the Daodejing describing the “small country with few inhabitants” (xiaoguo guamin 小國寡民),\footnote{See Chinese Text Project, Daodejing 道德經, ch 80, https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/ens?filter=476357.} is clearly utopian in how it describes the inhabitants living in seeming perfect harmony with their surroundings. However, what is important for the present purposes is that this society is depicted as being essentially timeless, and it is precisely the intrusion of other temporalities into this utopia that is the cause of its undoing. Such intrusion of temporalities is represented by a discovery of an ancient ruin in the ocean and the presence of a mysterious “cylinder” (yuantong 圓筒) in which one can get a glimpse of the movement of the heaven outside of the ocean.\footnote{Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 296.} Two young people of this utopia travel outside of their usual habitat and discover these ruins of an ancient city, which begins to disrupt the temporal stasis of their harmonious existence. In fact, as soon as the people of the utopia has discovered the existence of the ruin and this other world, the “prophets” (xianzhi 先知) of their society points to temporal uncertainty, by concluding that following the discovery of the ancient ruin and the cylinder “the world will become unstable” (Tianxia jiang bu anding le 天下将不安定了) due to the discovery.\footnote{Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 297.} Likewise, one of the characters has a premonition that “his already perfectly planned life” was about to change.\footnote{Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 294.} Following the intrusion of these temporalities social change begins to take place as the utopia disintegrates and the “prophets” are all murdered and replaced by “philosophers” (zhexue jia 哲学家) and “scientists” (kexue jia 科学家). These new types of thinkers explain the unfamiliar notion of “time”:

> Time is something that is mixed and become one with our destiny. In the Sea of non-action\footnote{Referring to the Daoist concept of wuwei 無為, or "non-action".} where one knows neither life nor death, time did not exist at all before. But look, now it has finally come into being. Once time has come into being will come to represent a kind of loss. Time is very far away, yet well within our reach. It cannot be seen or touched. It is within the ocean, yet outside
of the ocean. All the glittering in the world in the cylinder, every change, all represent different times. This is the outmoded and corrupted past, the ungraspable present, and the mysterious fate of the future.

The quoted passage makes clear that time becomes an alienating presence for the characters and individual subjects in the Red Ocean. Time is something that “did not exist at all before” but that which “once… [it] has come into being will come to represent a kind of loss.” In other words, as soon as time makes its entrance and the Red Ocean is transformed into a chronotope, it becomes impossible to reach synchrony between existential and historical time. Although both a cyclical and linear temporal order are present, perhaps the most salient temporal presence is the chronotope of the “red ocean”, causing the individual subject remains forever temporally displaced in the novel.

In Mars Over America, the relationship between existential and historical temporalities differs from Red Ocean, as the existential time of the protagonist remains in tension with some temporal orders, whereas seemingly achieving more synchrony with other historical temporalities. The protagonist's life in China, notably, is above all characterized by temporal stasis, in which, as the narrator point out, “fate is arranged by the state” (mingyun dou shi guojia anpai hao de 命运都是有国家安排好的). Ostensibly, as such a society a utopia, which can be regarded as the realization of the telos in the teleological temporal order. However, the narrative makes clear that it is not utopian in the sense of existential time being synchronized with historical time. Instead, it is in America that the protagonist's subjective experience of time is more synchronized with historical temporalities. However, whereas both a past-oriented, cyclical temporal order and teleological temporal order are present, as discussed in chapter 3, the largely positive and transformative experience of the individual subject cannot be explained in relation to these temporal orders. Instead, building on the form of the bildungsroman (a formal characteristic already noted by Mingwei Song in his discussion of the novel), the transformative experience of the protagonist in the novel is better approached in relation to the chronotope of the road. The road is a chronotope where “the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one

718 Han Song 韩松, Hongse haiyang 红色海洋 [Red ocean], 302.
719 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaojiao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 38.
720 As Lyu Guangzhao also noted in his analysis of the novel. See Guangzhao, “Demise of the False Utopia: China's Post-socialist Transition in Han Song's Red Star Over America.”
721 Song, “Variations on Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction,” 89.
another in distinctive ways.”\textsuperscript{722} The chronotope of the road shares the forward momentum of linear, teleological time, but lacks the determinist unilinear aspect, as the road branches out into different directions without any predestined telos or goal in mind.\textsuperscript{723} In the novel, the chronotope of the road is of great significance, as Tang Long travels around America, having numerous meetings and encounters as “any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another.”\textsuperscript{724} The chronotope of the road is arguably one characterized by change and flux, and this is why it is so well suited for the bildungsroman, and in extension, the existential time of the protagonist Tang Long, through whose perspective the narrative is told. As Tang Long and his companion Newman leaves on their trip across America, they decide to take the “old-style highway” (\textit{jiushi de gaosu gonglu} 旧时的高速公路) left from the “prosperous years” of American past instead of the more modern “automatic road” (\textit{zidong gonglu} 自动公路); indeed, as they “depart westward” they gradually heard the prelude of the arrival of a new era” from the “sounds of the busy steps of the people.”\textsuperscript{725} Their numerous encounters along the road clearly changes the temporal perspective of the protagonist, he runs into “men and women whom had broken themselves off from the shackles of the Dream Society” and whose free-wheeling attitude makes Tang Long feel they “represented a thread of light for the future,” which made the “days to come was no longer only dark and fearful” because “disasters are simultaneous with new opportunities” (\textit{zainan tong shi yiweizhe jiyu} 灾难同时意味着机遇).\textsuperscript{726} Later on in their travels, they encounter a hermit living in the midst of a mountain, which makes Tang Long ruminate on whether time passes differently in the mountains compared to the outside world, since “a day in the mountains equals a thousand years in the world” (\textit{shan zhong fang yi ri, shi shang yi qian nian} 山中方一日, 世上已千年).\textsuperscript{727} The temporal flux and interweaving of various peoples through encounters and the chronotope of the road continues, which ultimately makes Tang Long conclude that “Every moment moving and roaming constantly deep in the river of change, so that we can’t even recognize the person we were just a second ago.”\textsuperscript{728} Hence, we might conclude that the protagonist’s existential time is more synchronized with temporal dynamism of the chronotope of the road rather than the static experience in the “utopian” China, which can be read as a critique of the

\textsuperscript{722} Bakhtin and Holquist, \textit{The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays}, 243.
\textsuperscript{723} The chronotope of the road thus shares some characteristics with the contingent temporal order discussed in chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{724} Bakhtin and Holquist, \textit{The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays}, 243.
\textsuperscript{725} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo} 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 256.
\textsuperscript{726} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo} 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 265.
\textsuperscript{727} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo} 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 274.
\textsuperscript{728} Han Song 韩松, \textit{Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo} 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 288.
teleological order that is associated with China and the “Dream Society” in the novel.729

As already noted, the chronotope of the road is closely connected to the dimension of existential time in the novel and the motif of “youth,” or qingchun 青春. The chronotope of the road allows the young protagonist an experience of time that is more synchronized with his own dimension of existential time and youthful exuberance. The motif of youth is emphasized from the beginning of the novel, as the reader learn that the novel is told from the perspective of an autodiegetic narrator recounting his youth, beginning the novel with the sentence: “That year, I was sixteen and preparing to travel to America.”730 In fact, the chronotope of the road and the high intensity of historical change that is depicted in the novel (the disruptive disastrous event in the beginning of the novel and the subsequent civil war) is, in fact, mirrored by the intense psychological changes that Tang Long is experiencing as he grows into maturity. One of the first indications of intense psychological change in the novel is when Tang Long points out how “life was growing as an earthworm inside [of him],” and that he “was about to be transformed” and that he would “no longer be the same Tang Long as before”; hence. he “felt as is if he his whole person did no longer exist.”731 This experience on the road and the exuberance of youth can sometimes be experienced as almost utopian. At one point, as Tang Long and his companions are fighting other factions of young kids from Africa around Boston:

The long and dark tunnel made some of the kids have a sense of being born out of their mothers’ womb once again. It was a moment of pain, passivity and immense longing. We were about to meet up with a history belonging to us, with no control over whether it was good or bad. We were dressed in military uniforms, but it was still as if we were naked like babies. The cold around us entered our bones, and inside we were on fire. It was as if time stopped – waiting for the lamentation that follows the creation of heaven and earth – [as if it was all] about to explode (emphasis added).

长长而隐晦的隧道使一些孩子感到，仿佛经历着又一次从母体中的出生。那是痛苦，被动而充满渴盼的时刻，却就要迎来属于自己的历史，是好是坏，无法选择。我们身着战斗服，却像婴儿裸体一样。四周寒彻浸骨，内心一片火热。时间好像凝固了，在等待开天辟地的一声啼哭后，才要开始大爆炸。732

729 Notably, my reading of the novel as a critique of the “utopian” China through the application of Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope is shared by Lyu Guanzhao in his reading of the novel, although he refers to the “adventure chronotope” rather than the chronorope of the road. See Lyu Guanzhao, “Demise of the False Utopia: China's Post-socialist Transition in Han Song's Red Star Over America,” 105.
730 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 3.
731 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 63.
732 Han Song 韩松, Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 228.
This passage emphasises the sense of a new beginning that “youth” entails. The tunnel is likened to a “womb”, and time has “stopped” as if following “the creation of heaven and Earth.” This is clearly a liberating experience: the adolescents are all “on fire” and are about to meet up a history “belonging to them”. In other words, existential time and historical time, which in this case is represented by the chronotope of the road, can be regarded as synchronised in this passage. This also seems to suggest that the static experience of time in China, where the protagonist's “fate is arranged by the state”, is incompatible with the more volatile temporalities of youth. Instead, America and the chronotope of the road – at least in terms of temporal experience - becomes a kind of utopia for the young protagonist.

However, this utopia of youth is curtailed by the presence of the auto-diegetic narrator himself and the temporal layer present though the time narration. Through such prolepses into the future, the novel hints of the arrival of a “Land of Sublime Happiness” (*fudi 福地*). Although the exact nature of this *fudi* is never revealed, it exists in stark contrast to the exuberant youthful temporal experience in the narrated time in America. The narrator notes very early on in the novel that “Sixty years later, the world has already been transformed into a Land of Sublime Happiness. I lie in my shell, writing this story in Aikemanian, I might be the only person left in the world who can write fluently in this language. All other experts have either abandoned it or already been turned into skeletons.” This description existential alienation, which remains continuously present in the other temporal layer, haunts the exuberant experience of Tang Long's youthful days in America. This notion is made all the more frightening by the fact that the narrator hints that the whole concept of “youth” is anachronistic for the time of narration: “In the twentieth century, this was called “youth” (*qingchun qi* 青春期).” The utopian of experience of the protagonist’s youthful days in America, in other words, appears to be forever lost in time.

### 6.3 Presentism, consumerism, and temporal displacement in Ruins of Time

A temporal order that at least some subjectivities seem to be synchronized with is the presentism *Ruins of Time*, which is experienced as a liberation for several of the characters. In the previous discussion of the novel in chapter 3, I noted the presence of the young student Xing Nuo who retreated into a

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733 Han Song 韩松, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 38.
734 Aikemanian is the artificial language created by Shan Mu as part of his revolutionary enterprise, and which Tang Long picks up during his stay in the general’s division.
735 Han Song 韩松, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 5.
736 Han Song 韩松, *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo* 火星照耀美国 [Mars over America], 359.
private space of consumption, seemingly perfectly happy with being liberated from an oppressive future filled with the prospect of exams and other obligations. The most notable example of such a synchronized character, however, who also represents a much more developed subjectivity, is probably the teacher Tao Ying whom the narrative occasionally focalizes through. It is significant that Tao Ying’s own personal life, and thereby her own existential time, appears to be already lacking a distinguishable future-horizon. In fact, by the time that the time-loop first occurs, Tao Ying has already given up on her future and begun to immerse herself completely in the present:

And then the next day, on October 11, she forced herself to go teach a class in the morning. She also texted her husband, but without receiving any response. In the afternoon, the assistant head of department came to look for her, and tactfully told her that she might be laid off because her publications in the recent years were not up to standard, and due to some other messy reasons. She left room absent-mindedly. Without having regained her strength, she received another text message from her husband saying that he would be out of town for business and gone for a couple of days. In the evening she went to a bar and let her herself go completely, got a room with a guy and reveled all night... And then she woke up yet again, and she had returned again to the sofa in her office. That was the day that the Empty Era began.

The passage describes Tao Ying's own state of mind the day the time-loop first occurs, and makes it clear to the reader that Tao Ying has already begun giving up on her own personal future. In fact, her personal and professional lives are characterized by a failing marriage and a superior who threatens to fire her for a lack of performance. Instead of focusing on the future, therefore, she goes to a bar and “let[s] herself go completely,” immersing herself in the present, and wakes up on the sofa in her office, which also happens to be the first day of the “Empty Era.” In other words, Tao Ying’s own existential time here seems to be synchronized with the presentism of the Empty Era. Hartog noted how presentism coincides with the state of unemployed, who “takes one day at a time, without being able to plan ahead, inhabiting a time which has no future” and it seems like Tao Ying can be categorized as belonging to such a group of people, for whom presentism is not necessarily experienced as entirely dystopian; in fact, Tao Ying even considers the Empty Era and its

737 Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时之后墟 [Ruins of time], 353.
738 Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, 113.
lack of a future-horizon a “release” (jiètuo 解脱) from her “failed life” (shībài de renshēng 失败的人生).\footnote{Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 353.} However, it is not only the “failure” Tao Ying or the indulgent Xing Nuo who at least temporarily consider the temporal order a liberation. Han Fang also praises the new era as a “completely new world [...] everyone can do whatever they want”; hence, he continues, “the world will unite [into a utopia]” (shìjié jiāng huì dàtóng 世界将会大同).\footnote{Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 221.} Han Fang and his classmates cheer to this new world of the Empty Era which for them now – despite the twenty hour time loop and lack of future horizon – nevertheless will present an ”unlimited number of new opportunities.”\footnote{Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 225.} Hartog observed that presentism can be experienced either as “emancipation or enclosure,” and it is notable that presentism can briefly be regarded as utopian in the context of the novel.\footnote{Hartog and Brown, Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time, xviii.} Considering the dominance of weilai 未来 (the future) in Chinese historical and political discourse, and rise of commercial society in the post-89 context, it is perhaps not surprising that the release from such a concept is initially experienced as liberating for the subjects in Ruins of Time, who can immerse themselves completely in the present pleasures of consumerist society.

Nonetheless, the novel seems to suggest that the individual subject cannot remain synchronized with such a presentist temporal order in the long run. This becomes clear from an episode later in the novel in which the protagonist Han Fang wakes up on the campus 6000 years into “the future,” and is confronted with classmates and friends who have already forgotten their own identities and have completely lost the ability to distinguish between past and present. Most significantly, the individual subject has here completely lost its ability to map its position in time and space, and the Empty Era now appears more like a dystopia than a utopia. Indeed, Tao Ying, who initially thought of the Empty Era as a liberation from an oppressive future, now considers it a “nightmare” (ēmēng 噩梦), which had even caused her to forget her own identity.\footnote{Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 353.} Only by locating her own old home and retracing her own memories, she finally regains a sense of stability and composure. She rediscovers her own past, and through her past her own self, which she now considers “precious” (baoguì 宝贵); in fact, in her own diaries left from her own adolescence she rediscovers a sense of identity: “That was herself. Her Common-era self, which was so much more precious than the last 6000 years.”\footnote{Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 353.} From this moment on, she repeats the day and year in the calendar of the Empty Era in order to map her own place in time.\footnote{Baoshu 宝树, Shijian zhi xu 时间之墟 [Ruins of time], 341.} In other words, some conception of linear time and progression from past, present, to future here appears to be a requisite...
to establishing a stable identity, both collectively and individually, and presentism appears no longer utopian but dystopian. Here I am reminded of Fredric Jameson’s observations of experiences of temporality in the contemporary period (what Jameson refers to as “late capitalism”), which for Jameson corresponds to a fragmented and ultimately unsatisfying experience where “the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its protensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience.”

The text seems at this point to agree with Jameson; although presentism, as Hartog also noted, can be to some people experienced as a liberation from the tyranny of the future, it nevertheless tends to result in a fragmented and disoriented individual subject that is unable to organize its temporal experience in a meaningful way.

6.4 Contingency and the individual subject

In Chapter 5, we already discussed the significance of the emergence of individual and private temporalities for the contingent temporal order, which fore-shadowed individual life-choices and potential life-trajectories, and which tended to spread onto the dimension of historical time in historical metanarratives. Elana Gomel had noted that “some people are inclined to revel in contingency and some – fear it” and I noted how the individual subject in the two different stories of “Watching the Boat as South Lake Together” and “Shanghai 1938 – a memory” reacted differently to the temporal order: the first celebrated the multiplicity of times whereas the second feared it. In these two stories, the presence of multiple timelines and the capacity to travel in time can be regarded as the utopian hope of reuniting the dimensions of historical and existential time. “Watching the boat at South Lake together” can in this regard be seen as partly utopian, since it allows the protagonist to travel back in time and pursue a private romance with a woman from another timeline. At the same time, however, the weight that the story puts on the motif of romance, as noted, seems to suggest a shift away from collective to private temporalities altogether, in this way reversing the narrative logic of The Song of Youth which had sublimated romance into the love of the revolution. Indeed, rather than being active participants in history the two characters are only outside witnesses to the unfolding of the historical event and are hence able to pursue their romance outside of historical time, as they embrace at the end of the story.

Likewise, in Han Song’s “Shanghai 1938 – a memory” the mysterious “time-disc” can be seen to represent the utopian hope of reuniting the two dimensions. However, the story complicates the relationship between the

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746 Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural logic of Late Capitalism, 25.
747 Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 83.
individual subject and the contingent temporal order further. In Han Song’s story, the contingent temporal order, in fact, does more to increase temporal displacement. In the story, the protagonist is caught in the dire historical situation of the Sino-Japanese War. In addition, he has lost touch with his disappeared lover XiaoPing. Using the time-disc hence represents the hope of both being reunited with XiaoPing and for China to embark on a better historical trajectory. At the end of the story, the protagonist does indeed make use of the time-disc and the story briefly narrates a scene where the historical and existential dimensions are reunited:

Then, the water in the water began to flow backwards. The scenery changed. I returned to the past. At that time China still had a semblance of dignity. On exactly that radiant and peaceful afternoon, I, an elegant young man, as well as a graceful young woman, passed through the flowery shrubs by the river like two butterflies, chasing the eternal shadow of time. Everything was just that way it was that time, nothing had changed one bit.

然后，河水开始回溯。景象变了。我回到了从前，那时的中国还有者名义上的尊严。就在那个明媚而和平的下午，我，一位翩翩少年，以及，一名婀娜的少女，蝴蝶斑穿行在水边的花丛中，追踪者光阴的永恒之影。一切正是那时的情景，一切都没有变。748

In the quoted passage, the existential time of the individual subject and historical time are almost entirely synchronized. The protagonist is reunited with his lost lover, on “a radiant and peaceful afternoon”; likewise, he has returned to an era when China still “had a semblance of dignity.” However, as is evocatively implied by the phrase of how the two lovers were “chasing the eternal shadow of time,” this utopian state does not last, and the protagonist soon returns to seemingly the same time and place as before he used the time-disc, ultimately concluding that ”fate is predetermined” (mingyun shi zhuding de 命运是注定的).749 The ending of the narrative with two alternate endings not merely splits historical time in two in the form of two separate metanarratives with two different historical outcomes, it also splits the individual subject into two separate entities unaware of each other’s existence, and where his two splintered selves are both convinced that, in each separate timeline, that China’s fate had been “engraved into a quark-particle about four billion years ago.”750 Hence, rather than reveling in contingency, the protagonist succumbs to a kind of fatalism, as he concludes: “I cannot determine my past nor discern

748 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 365.
749 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory].
750 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八年上海记 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 366;68.
my future. My memory then becomes a leaf floating on the torrent of time.”

In brief, contingency and multiple timelines, although they might imply a hope that existential and historical time may be reunited, they might also result in a splintered subject which in the case of Han Song’s protagonist chooses to cling to a notion of fatalism.

6.5 Towards an open future: “The Great Era” and existentialism

Perhaps a fitting place to end this discussion on the configurations and relationships between historical and existential temporalities is Baoshu’s “The Great Era.” In chapter 3 I already discussed how the story deconstructed the teleological temporal order. By allowing the story to unfold backwards into the well-known national metanarrative of the Chinese twentieth century, and by reversing cause and effect the text was able to expose the “emplotment” of teleological narratives present in official discourse. Finally, through the introduction of an existentialist philosophy of history, the chronologic of the teleological temporal order was further deconstructed. In the following, I will discuss how the concept of “nothingness” (xu wu 虚无) which follows such a deconstruction becomes a potential source of freedom for the individual subject.

As noted, the story is set entirely within a teleological national metanarrative which unfolds backwards. Hence, the inherent determinism of this narrative is foregrounded, as the whole narrative is imbued with a sense of being swept away by history from the point of view of the individual subject. As the narrator-protagonist himself points out: “Yet the process wasn’t something that could be controlled by anyone or any authority. No one could control history. We were all simply parts of a great vortex that was greater than any individual.”

As the protagonist regresses deeper and deeper into the abyss of a turbulent modern Chinese history, unable to escape the degenerative dimension of historical time, the narrator-protagonist finds it difficult to let go of the teleological temporal order; as he points out: “if the existence of the world has meaning, the world must advance.” Indeed, otherwise, as he continues to lament: “what is the point of generation struggling after generation?”

When historical time has regressed back into the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the narrator-protagonist can only despair: “perhaps this was all a game played on us by time. And what was time? What was there except for nothingness? What came before us was nothingness, what came after us was

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751 Han Song 韩松, “Yijiu sanba nian Shanghai jiyi” 一九三八年上海记忆 [Shanghai 1938 – a memory] 364.
nothingness too.” In a word, the “nothingness” (虚无 xuwu) that the narrator-protagonist here refers to can be seen as the absence of the telos: progress can no longer be a source of meaning for the individual subject.

The significance of the deconstruction of the teleological temporal order through existentialism and the related concept of “nothingness” is revealed towards the end of the narrative. At the end of the story, the narrative in “The Great Era” makes a leap back into the “beginning” of the narrative, a beginning which is in fact “the end” of the well-known metanarrative. Towards the end of the short story, after Baosheng has learned that his lost love Qiqi has already passed away on the road somewhere in China, Baosheng finds an old photograph with him and Qiqi. Looking at the photograph, Baosheng remembers a conversation with Qiqi’s friend Anna who delivered Qiqi’s ashes after she passed away to Baosheng. In this conversation, Anna mentions that Qiqi was “delirious” in the moments before she died, but that she said that she would “return to the past you two [Qiqi and Baosheng] shared, the place where she met you for the first time, and wait for you.”

In the conversation, Baosheng muses that “maybe all of us will return there someday [. . .] To the origin of the universe, of life, of time… To the time before the world began. Perhaps we can choose another direction and live another life.” Indeed, as the story wraps up, Baosheng appears to reunite with Qiqi to “go back together” to the “beginning” of the narrative: “We returned to the origin of our lives, turned into babies, into foetuses. In the deepest abyss of the world, the beginning of a new consciousness stirred, ready to choose new worlds, new possibilities…”

This lyrical return takes on another level of meaning in the context of the deconstruction of the teleological temporal order and Sartre’s existentialism. The Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch might have something else entirely in mind when he wrote that “true genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end.”

But the phrase is illustrative in this context. Namely that in the presence of a hegemonic teleological temporal order, any new “beginning” risks being incorporated into a telos of the future, curtailing the open-ended nature of futurity into a pre-determined end, by being locked into the same temporal logic. Rather than being burdened by the teleological temporal order, which otherwise extends into the future, determining the characters into a non-open future, the deconstruction of the temporal order and Sartre’s existentialism leaves the dimension of historical time, and the horizon of futurity, entirely open. For these reasons, in this context, xuwu 虚无, or “nothingness”, should not be understood as an expression of the meaningless of existence but instead becomes a source of freedom, and the lyrical return to “the end” becomes a

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genuine, and radical, “beginning”, or a “true genesis.” Indeed, as the narrative concludes, the narrator points out: “But tomorrow the sun would rise in the west again, bathing the world in a kinder light.”\textsuperscript{759} In other words, Sartrean existentialism cannot liberate the individual subject from the horrors of the Chinese twentieth century, but the story does seem to suggest that at the very least the individual subject might not need to be determined by it in the future. This also seems to be in line with the author’s own way of describing the story. In the postscript to the English translation, he points out how the story should not be read as “a political manifesto” but that “if one must attribute a political message to it, it is simply this: I hope that all the historical tragedies our nation has experienced will not repeat in the future.”\textsuperscript{760}

6.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how Chinese science fiction has reconfigured temporality in the post-89 context. In this chapter I have investigated how the existential temporalities of individual subjectivities in the text relates to the various temporal orders and chronotopes in the texts. My analysis has indicated that time mostly becomes an enemy for the individual subjects in these narratives. The observations point to temporal antagonisms between existential and historical temporalities in the post-89 context. For Jameson, a Marxist critic, the eclipse of private subjectivity is not necessarily dystopian,\textsuperscript{761} but in these texts there are a general tendency of resistance on the level of existential time against hegemonic temporal orders, such as the apocalyptic temporal order in the \textit{Three Body Problem Trilogy} or the teleological temporal order associated with the nation. Possibly, such resistance can be viewed in light of that much of the Chinese twentieth century was characterized by the imposition of the teleological temporal order associated with the nation-building project. Utopia was to be located solely in time in the form of a future \textit{telos}. In this context, \textit{The Three Body Problem Trilogy}, by far the most influential of all post-89 science fiction texts, is of particular significance. On the one hand, the text seems to correspond to a need among some political groups in contemporary China to configure a homogenous temporal order in the post-89 context following the loss of hegemony of the ideology of Maoism. In the presence of such a hegemonic temporal order, a pluralized present can yet again be sacrificed for a singular collective future. Such a political need is best represented by the \textit{Gongye dang} 工业党 (Industrial Party) that I discussed in chapter 4. On the other hand, due to the resistance of the individual

\textsuperscript{759}Baoshu 宝树, “What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear,” 221.
\textsuperscript{760} Baoshu 宝树, “What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear,” 222.
\textsuperscript{761} Jameson, \textit{Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions}, 7.
subjectivities represented by Luo Ji and Cheng Xin, the fictional narrative of the *Three Body Problem Trilogy* also suggests that such an apocalyptic temporal order cannot subsume all other conflicting temporalities entirely in the post-89 context, which indicates the powerful presence of individual, private time. This seems to partly confirm cultural theorist Jason McGrath’s earlier observations that the post-89 period has witnessed the rise of private experience (i.e. temporality) to replace earlier totalizing metanarratives in cultural representation.\(^762\)

7. Conclusion

This study has investigated how temporality is being reconfigured in science fiction in post-89 China. More specifically, I analyzed how multiple temporal orders clash in narrative in these science fiction texts, pointing to the presence of multiple temporalities beneath the hegemonic teleological temporal order associated with the project of nation-building. In my analysis, I identified four temporal orders that conflict with the hegemonic teleological temporal order: a cyclical, past-oriented temporal order of recurrence, an apocalyptic temporal order, a contingent temporal order where time branches into multiple timelines, and presentism. I also noted the presence of other temporalities and chrono-topes that conflicted with and disrupted the teleological temporal order.

Chinese science fiction has grown into one of the most important literary phenomena in twenty-first century Chinese literature and has recently been the target of much attention. This study has filled an important gap in the growing literature on the subject by approaching several key texts through focusing on the previously neglected aspect of temporality. The study’s focus on temporality has revealed post-89 science fiction not only as a subversive force but also as a genre deeply concerned with time. Partly as a result of this focus on temporality, the study has included close readings of several texts that have received little or no previous scholarly attention in English, such as the three highly subversive alternate histories and previously neglected future histories Red Ocean and Ruins of Time. In addition, by approaching the texts through the more nuanced theoretical framework of multiple times and temporal orders, the study has been able to reveal a more complex and multifaceted temporal landscape in post-89 China, in which multiple temporalities jostle for supremacy.

In Han Song’s future histories, I detected the presence of a cyclical, past-oriented temporal order which tended to clash with teleological time. Han Song's Red Ocean registered a strong presence of such a temporal order. On a broader level, the novel’s cyclical temporal order and non-progressive temporalities, which disrupted the unilinear flow of time and conceptions of beginnings and endings, can be read as a negation of the future-oriented, teleological temporal order present in historiography and discourse. The significance of this highly remarkable and disturbing novel, of which this investigation is the first in-depth reading in English, will probably grow over time. In Liu Cixin's The Three Body Problem Trilogy, the most influential and successful
work of Chinese science fiction, I detected a clash between a teleological temporal order and an apocalyptic temporal order, in which the trilogy can be seen as replacing a utopian telos with the threat of apocalyptic destruction. In this context, the teleological temporal order should be read not merely as a rejection of the Marxist telos of communism, but more importantly, a rejection of the telos of the "End of History" associated with Francis Fukuyama. In Baoshu's *Ruins of Time*, in contrast, I detected a presentist temporal order, and I linked such a presentism to social developments such as the emergence of consumerism and new media. In Baoshu's "The Great Era," I analyzed how the narrative deconstructed the temporal logic (or the "chrono-logic") of the teleological temporal order and introduced an existentialist notion of history. Although such existentialism can also be related to an increased focus on the present, I read this narrative in a more positive light in the context of potential liberation from an oppressive teleology. By deconstructing the teleological temporal order and introducing existentialism, the text ends in an open-ended way allowing for the emergence of a multiplicity of timeframes. Related to such a liberation from a sometimes-oppressive teleology, is also the strong presence of existential temporalities observed in the texts, which remained out of synch with many of the temporal orders present. This confirms observations made in other studies of the increased presence of private temporalities in post-89 discourse, which can be linked to the emergence of a market society in the 1990s.

Related to the emergence of the emergence of private temporalities in post-89 discourse is the phenomena of the alternate history, a form that has only received scant attention in previous discussions on Chinese science fiction. Given that the alternate history is "central to how we understand our life-choices," the stronger presence of this form during the post-89 period is probably related to the increased number of individual choices under capitalism. Counterfactual reasoning might have limited political significance when applied merely on the individual level, but when such reasoning finds its way into historical metanarratives, as they have in the texts analyzed in this study, they become political dynamite. Indeed, whereas the alternate history, as Niall Ferguson remarked, aims to "recapture the chaotic nature of existence and show that there are no certain outcomes", official discourse continues to frame temporal discourse in terms of the "necessary" and the "inevitable",

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765 Gomel, *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination*, 83.
dictated by the logic of the teleological temporal order. Given the subversive nature of such an idea, where the absolute certainty of the telos is replaced by a “never-ending network of branches,” it is perhaps not surprising that these texts remain at the margins of Chinese literary discourse, and that the alternate history form remains relatively rare in Chinese science fiction.

A text that deserves separate concluding remarks in the discussion is perhaps *The Three Body Problem Trilogy*. The most influential text in Chinese contemporary science fiction, it also provides the most compelling, yet also the most controversial temporal vision. Although the text disrupts the teleological temporal order (in the novel initially represented by the Marxist discourse of history), it replaces such a temporal order with a new, hegemonic apocalyptic temporal order, the latter which, as noted, ultimately is less a rejection of the Marxist discourse of history and more a rejection of the discourse of “The End of History.” In other words, the trilogy does not as much reject the teleological time of the nation as it rejects the notion that China – and the rest of the world – will move steadily towards the end of history and “inevitably” develop into democratic, liberal states. Considering that the trilogy was published between 2006 and 2010, the novel can be said to foreshadow the rejection of this End of History-vision in Chinese politics which later took political shape in the authoritarian turn under Xi Jinping, which indicates that the trilogy is an expression of ongoing temporal antagonisms and re-arranging of Chinese hegemonic temporalities in the post-89 context. Although the trilogy is certainly not synchronized with the hegemonic teleological temporal order of the nation, which remains focused on the telos of “the future,” the apocalyptic temporal order justifies a politics of crisis that shares the same authoritarian tendencies that have become well-known under Xi. In other words, it is possible that the regime, in the Xi-era, if not cultivates than perhaps tolerates an apocalyptic temporal order of the type that is configured in the trilogy.

The study also sheds new light on discussions on science fiction and temporality in a global context, which has tended to be framed in discussions of a crisis of historical consciousness and a diminishing future-horizon. Indeed, several studies on Western narrative and science fiction have emphasized a disruption of conventional ways of conceiving time in recent decades, where a breakdown of the future-horizon is often pointed out as one of the chief characteristics. Veronica Hollinger, for instance, described science fiction since the 1980s in terms of a “breakdown in conventional ways of experiencing historical time, frequently figured as the collapse of the distance between

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767 Baoshu 宝树, “Yiqi qu kan nanhu chuan” [Watching the boat at the South Lake Together], 17.
the present and the future into a kind of future-present." For Elana Gomel, however, such a breakdown and emergence of temporal multiplicity in science fiction and other narratives should not be conceived of as the expression of merely a crisis of historical consciousness and rather as the end of the hegemony a certain way of conceptualizing time and history associated with unilinear teleology and the project of the Enlightenment. Hence, for Gomel, the science fiction narratives in her study heralded a potential liberation “from the tyranny of the ‘chrono-logical’. Although Gomel does not discuss it, the end of the hegemony of such a notion of time – experienced either as liberation or temporal malaise – is undoubtedly also connected to a weakening hegemony of the nation state and politics of nation-building.

In the Chinese context, as this study has indicated, this diminishing of “the future” (weilai 從) as represented by unilinear teleology and emergence of a multiplicity of times can be partly, but only partly, corroborated. On the one hand, the study has shown a great multiplicity of temporalities that challenge and disrupt the hegemonic future-oriented time of the nation. Two previously much neglected novels can be particularly emphasized in this context: the future histories Ruins of Time and Red Ocean by Baoshu and Han Song respectively. Ruins of Time is significant in that it points to how a transnational presentist temporal order seeps into the national space and disrupts the “national time” mostly associated with the future, allowing the future-horizon to break down into a never-ending and “omnipresent” present. The disruptive presentist temporality in the novel hence suggests that China cannot remain entirely isolated from the supposed ongoing breakdown of the future-horizon that critics have pointed to the in the Western context, and points to the complex chronopolitical landscape that the political regime must navigate if they continue to enforce a future-oriented teleological temporal order, as presentism risks conflicting with teleology and linear conceptions of time. Red Ocean, in contrast, can be read as a complete negation of the teleological temporal order, narrating a disjunctive “historical time” where beginnings are turned into endings, “the past” has become “the future,” and where characters are caught in the temporally disruptive chronotope of the “Red Ocean” in which time offers no redemption. The non-progressive, disruptive temporalities in Red Ocean, however, are less the testament of transnational influence and instead more likely related to the disruptive experiences of the violent Chinese twentieth century, and discrepancies between hegemonic discourse of history and lived experience, and I suggested that the temporal experience in the novel can possibly be read as the narrative expression of such “invisible” temporalities.


Gomel, Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination, 2.
At the same time, however, this study has also detected a remaining and powerful presence of the teleological time of the nation. Even texts such as the alternate histories, which tend to strongly disrupt the teleological temporal order, are conversely also testament its powerful presence, as they are unable to entirely escape its reach, and in the case of Han Song’s “Shanghai 1938 - a memory”, the protagonist even chooses to stick to the teleological temporal order of the nation during a time of crisis, despite a chance to begin anew on another timeline. Indeed, it is notable that the teleological time of the nation still holds a significant sway in discourse. In 2021, at the centennial of the founding of the CCP and 10 years after the publication of Baoshu’s alternate history “Watching the boat at South Lake together”, the chairman of the CCP and the president of China Xi Jinping, could speak with confidence when he encouraged the Chinese people to “put conscious effort into learning from history to create a bright future,” while reminding a population of 1.4 billion people that “the 100-year-long history of the Party, and the more than 70-year-long history of the People’s Republic of China all provide ample evidence that without the Communist Party of China, there would be no new China.”

Such a strong presence of a teleological temporal order associated with nation-building seems to justify the present study’s focus on *chronopolitics*, and indicates that any study framed merely in terms of “agentless processes of change” risks obscuring the fact that, as Helge Jordheim puts it, “time is also a question of power, the power to control movements, to decide about beginnings and endings, to set the pace, to give the rhythm.” Moreover, that these science fiction texts should be a narrative expression of a crisis of the future also needs another caveat. Liu Cixin's *The Three Body Problem Trilogy*, although it subverts the teleological temporal order (both as represented by Maoism and by Fukuyama), cannot be said to result in a breakdown of the future-horizon. On the contrary, its apocalyptic temporal order can be regarded as a revitalization of the future for the post-89 era, which can partly explain why it has been picked up in political discourse by the right-wing group of the Industrial Party.

However, this study cannot be regarded as a complete picture of temporality and politics in Chinese science fiction. In terms of science fiction there are many writers, in particular younger writers, that could have been illuminating to investigate. The timeframe of the study (2000-2013) and the limiting scope of three major writers necessarily excluded many writers of the younger generation, which begs the question of how these writers engage with temporality and the relationship between time and politics. Although this study has included material published on the internet, it has not included other media, most notably film and television. Significantly, time travel has been an important

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771 Xi, Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China, 6.
772 Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich*, 10.
element in both film and television in China in the recent two decades.\textsuperscript{774} Although such material is necessarily less explicitly political, the ideological and political implications of the popularity of such shows remains an important aspect to be investigated, in particular in relationship to both national and global resurgences of nostalgia noted by theorists such as Svetlana Boym, Zygmunt Bauman, and Dai Jinhua.\textsuperscript{775} The scope of the study also did not include any texts from Chinese speaking regions outside of the PRC, most notably Taiwan, or from Hong Kong, and close readings of texts produced in such more marginalized areas could help to shed light on how multiple temporalities complicate the chronopolitical landscape in the Sinophone world in general. A further limitation of the study is that it did not engage in any discussion on concepts of deep time and temporalities associated with the Anthropocene, which could also be a fruitful direction for further research. In terms of the broader context of time, culture, and politics in China, this study can only be regarded as a minor contribution, and I would welcome more in-depth investigations of temporality, particularly in relation to concepts like acceleration (noted as central to the modern experiences of time by theorists like Koselleck, Assman and Rosa),\textsuperscript{776} multiple temporalities, and the previously noted concept of nostalgia.

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