

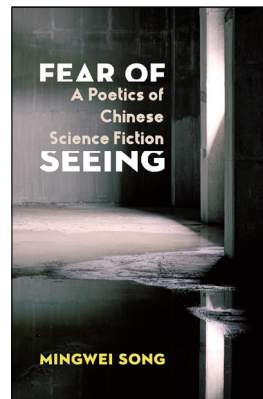
Confucianism and citizenship allows him to provide a nuanced view of the diversities and complexities inherent in both concepts. However, the book occasionally falls into convoluted formulations that might alienate general readers. In terms of content, Wang may need to further clarify how the “Confucian citizenship” model accounts for individual differences in socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This is particularly important given the pressure for identity homogeneity and ideological conformity in the Party-state’s citizen formation agenda. In addition, I think Wang should have further elaborated on the notion of “*tianxia* citizenship,” which seems to have significant conceptual promise but is only mentioned in passing (p. 36-7).

The Rise of Confucian Citizens in China is an insightful and provocative book that sheds light on the social transformations underway in China and the theoretical transformations underway in post-orientalist citizenship studies. Despite some dense academic language, it is a valuable resource for scholars and anyone interested in understanding the cultural-political landscape of contemporary China. “In addressing the relationship between China and the West,” Wang observes, “the critical issue is the handling of the connection between the local and global perspectives” (p. 83). I believe that this book delivers on this critical issue by meticulously balancing historical specificities with conceptual commensurabilities. In a global discursive environment fragmented by dualism and nativism, I highly recommend this book, not only because it contributes to bridging two foundational concepts in human political thinking, but also because it prompts reflection on the commonality of human aspirations and the diversity of human strivings.

References

ISIN, Engin F. 2012. “Citizenship after Orientalism.” In Engin F. ISIN, and Bryan S. TURNER (eds.), *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. 117-28.

GUO, Zhonghua. 2022. “Towards De-Westernism in Citizenship Studies: Implications from China.” *Citizenship Studies* 26(4-5): 480-90.



SONG, Mingwei. 2023.
Fear of Seeing: A Poetics of Chinese Science Fiction.
 New York: Columbia University Press.

I GWENNAËL GAFFRIC

is Assistant Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 6 Rue Professeur Rollet, 69008 Lyon, France (gwennaël.gaffric1@univ-lyon3.fr).

In recent years, Chinese science fiction has enjoyed a remarkable boom in political, editorial, media, and scientific circles. This craze is reflected in growing recognition within the literary and academic fields, along with an increase in academic books and articles. Among the monographs that stand out in this context, Pr. Mingwei Song’s *Fear of Seeing: A Poetics of Chinese Science Fiction* is probably the most significant and recommendable across all languages, thanks to its extensive range of themes, its historical erudition, and its conceptual creativity.

A professor at Wellesley College (USA), Mingwei Song is a specialist in Chinese literature and intellectual history. He is notably the author of a Chinese-language monograph on the new wave in Chinese science fiction (2020), and has recently coedited with Nathaniel Isaacson and Hua Li the collective book *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories* (2024).

Fear of Seeing is in part an anthology of Mingwei Song’s pioneering articles previously published independently. However, the author also offers new research avenues by drawing on recent works by new generations of Chinese authors. The title of the monograph openly draws inspiration from a 2002 short story by writer Han Song 韓松 titled “The Fear of Seeing” (*kan de kongju* 看的恐懼). In this story, Han Song tells of a baby born with ten eyes on its forehead. A scientist manages to connect the baby’s brain to a device that projects its visual perception onto a screen, revealing a misty grey mass rather than the familiar scene of the bedroom. The scientist concludes that the baby perceives the “true” appearance of the world, chaotic and shapeless, as opposed to the illusion perceived by “normal” people. Thus, Song chooses in his book to focus on the question of the representation of the visible and the invisible, and the anxiety it generates, in Chinese (and more largely Sinophone) science fiction literature. The author organises his reflection into nine chapters, two excursions (unfortunately too brief), and an epilogue, which is more personal but highly relevant.

The first chapter revisits what Song defines as the “new wave” of Chinese science fiction, which emerged in the late 1980s. He

places particular emphasis on Han Song's short story "The Tombs of the Universe" (*Yuzhou mubei* 宇宙墓碑, 1988) and on the novel *China 2185* (*Zhongguo 2185* 中國2185, 1989) by Liu Cixin 劉慈欣, never published in print form. Proponents of a "poetics of the invisible," or what Song calls "an illumination of the invisible," these two authors are discussed numerous times throughout the book.

The second chapter delves into the literary theories of the science fiction genre (particularly beyond China) and explores its connections with so-called realist literature, as well as its heterodox outgrowths, notably the hyperrealism (*chao zhenshi zhuyi* 超真實主義) of Chen Qiufan 陳楸帆, and the mythorealism (*shenmi xianshi zhuyi* 神秘現實主義) of Yan Lianke 閻連科. Song, for his part, proposes the idea of a "neo-baroque" aesthetics to understand the stylistic experiments of contemporary Chinese science fiction.

In his third chapter, the author poses the somewhat provocative question of whether "The Diary of a Madman" (*Kuangren riji* 狂人日記, 1918) by Lu Xun 魯迅 is a science fiction story. While the (positive) answer may struggle a bit to convince, the proposed development is primarily notable for the refreshing analysis it offers of this great classic of Chinese literature, which has already been studied many times, and for the way Song demonstrates how Lu Xun (the writer and intellectual, but also the translator and promoter of science) legitimately appears to be the father of Chinese SF.

The fourth chapter offers an interesting analysis of the "dark forest" concept imagined by Liu Cixin in his *Three-Body Problem* trilogy (*San ti* 三體, 2006-2010). Drawing on a study of Liu's Kantian sublime, Song shows how the author brilliantly manages to make "visible" the invisible and the formless, whether microscopic or macroscopic. The fifth chapter, devoted to the writer Han Song, mirrors the study of the "invisible" in Liu Cixin's works presented in the previous chapter. In contrast to Liu Cixin's cosmic sublime, Mingwei Song suggests that Han Song's works, which are more experimental both thematically and linguistically, offer a powerful "chthonic" aesthetics, drawing readers into the abyss of what Song defines as "the internal space of reality" (p. 199).

The sixth chapter examines how recent works of Chinese science fiction engage with the ideological spectrum of Maoism, as well as with the contemporary mythology of nationalism, and economic and technological development. Following on from the previous chapter, the seventh chapter proposes the term "Sinotopia" to show how, over a time span from the early twentieth century to the recent period, science fiction writers (from China, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan) offer alternative visions, sometimes fantastical, sometimes nightmarish, of their space-time of production. The eighth chapter, which particularly highlights the works of Chinese writer Chen Qiufan, explores what Song calls the "posthuman turn" in contemporary Sinophone science fiction, and how it differs from the aesthetics of writers from the previous generation.

The final chapter offers a study on the representation of gender in contemporary science fiction, particularly focusing on female writers such as Xia Jia 夏笳, Gu Shi 顧適, and Tang Fei 糖匪. In this chapter, Song also proposes a "non-binary" reading of Liu Cixin's famous trilogy: although not entirely persuasive, this intellectual exercise nonetheless proves to be bold and stimulating.

One might criticise the author for the downside of his strengths:

in attempting to consider a very broad corpus, consisting of numerous works and authors from different eras and locations, some stories are too briefly summarised for novices or are mentioned too quickly to be the subject of a more in-depth analysis. Nevertheless, the author's great erudition and impressive ability to offer complex and invigorating developments from simple reading intuitions are remarkable, a quality also found in the scholar David Der-wei Wang, to whom Song pays tribute in his book. Another aspect is particularly noteworthy: despite borrowing from a vast body of theory, Song doesn't just use literary works as pretexts to justify philosophical concepts, but places them at the heart of his analysis.

Mingwei Song's work is consequently a must-read for anyone interested in science fiction and wishing to understand the historical and contemporary dynamics of this genre in the Chinese-speaking world. The breadth of its corpus and the richness of the themes addressed also pave the way for many studies that will follow in its wake, even outside the Sinophone world.

References

SONG, Mingwei 宋明偉. 2020. 中國科幻新浪潮: 歷史, 詩學, 文本 (*Zhongguo kehuan xin langchao: Lishi, shixue, wenben*, The new wave in Chinese science fiction: History, poetics, text). Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.

SONG, Mingwei, Nathaniel ISAACSON, and Hua LI. 2024. *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.