Posthumanism in Han Song's Science Fiction: The Conflict and Negotiation between Individual and the System

Yan Dong

University of Arizona

ABSTRACT
This paper examines the posthuman in Han Song's science fiction. It argues that 'posthuman' here not merely refers to physically transformed human beings, but signifies also a group of people unable to demonstrate the attribute of individuality. Based on a study of Han Song's *Ditie* (Subway) (2010), *Gaotie* (High-speed Railway) (2012), and *Hongse haiyang* (Red Ocean) (2004), this paper demonstrates how Han Song conjoins humanism, the nation-state, and scientism to consider the posthuman era as an inevitable civilizational stage.
KEY WORDS: Chinese science fiction, Han Song, posthuman, individuality, posthumanism

Han Song (b. 1965) is in contemporary China both a journalist at the Xinhua News Agency and a science fiction writer. A prolific writer, he creates heterotopias wherein characters struggle to seek out truth concerning their living milieu, in the process of which they transform into posthumans.[1] In this article, I firstly clarify what posthuman means in Han Song's writing. In doing so, I argue that Han Song posits individual free will as a core value defining what it means to be human. 'Posthuman' refers here, not merely to physically transformed human beings, but more importantly to a group of people unable to demonstrate attribute of individuality. An important question arises concerning causal factors contributing to the loss of individuality. Based on a careful reading of *Ditie* (Subway) written in 2010, *Gaotie* (High-speed Railway) written in 2012, and an earlier novel published in 2004, *Hongse haiyang*

---

1. David Der-wei Wang uses the notion of Foucauldian "heterotopia" to characterize some contemporary Chinese science fiction, including Han Song's *Ditie* and *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo: 2066 nian zhi xixing manji*. See David Der-wei Wang. "Lu Xun, Han Song, and the Unfinished Literary Revolution: 'Xuanxiang' and 'Shensi,'" *Exploration and Free View*, no. 5, 2019, pp. 48-51.

(Red Ocean). I suggest that the nation-state operates in conjunction with scientism to bring on the posthuman era as an inevitable civilizational stage.

Posthuman Emerges with A Blurred Face

Although *Ditie* and *Gaotie* are not Han Song's first exploration into posthumanism, these two works feature characteristics consistent throughout his entire body of writing on the subject. In order to explore exactly which attributes define generally what it is to be human, as opposed to posthuman, I first introduce a section from *Ditie*, showing how the attribute of individuality figures in this story. *Ditie* has five chapters, with each chapter constituting an independent story. These five stories loosely revolve around the notion of a 'subway.' In the third story "*Fuhao* (Symbols)", the protagonist Xiao Wu comes to a place under the earth where there are two parallel rivers. This is reminiscent of China's two biggest rivers—the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. Therefore, we can speculate that Han Song alludes to a future Chinese landscape. At the river, Xiao Wu encounters the descendants of missing passengers mentioned in former stories. Having evolved for years, they can still be discerned as humans in shape, but they have grown butterfly-like wings and slippery lizard-like bellies. Their heads are disproportionately small, and their faces are so blurred that Xiao Wu cannot differentiate one from the other. Each of them has an apparatus hanging beside their head, as well as a barcode inscribed on their buttocks or legs. They all work in a mine labeled 'Corporation C.' The story reads:

> They don't have a leader, but they work in such a good order that they are just like one person with many doppelgangers. They wave new shovels with their tiny arms on the end of wings, moving vigorously and in a neat rhythm. Their passion and persistence make one wonder that they have never done a job as meaningful as this one, and they are making up for the past" (*Ditie* 183).[2]

On the other side, Xiao Wu also takes notice of some water beasts with "red hair, green eyes and white skin" (*Ditie* 187). Unlike the descendants of passengers, these beings of the "alien race" have distinct

2. Translations of Han Song's science fictions are provided by the author of this paper unless otherwise noted.

appearances, amongst whom Xiao Wu recognizes the faces of Socrates, Homer, Euclid, Shakespeare, Newton, Freud, Einstein, Rousseau, and Washington. They are working together in the fog of a red mist to salvage a bursting dam. When descendants of those passengers launch an attack on them, they fight back bravely, refocusing then immediately on the mission of repairing the dam. The narrator laments upon this scene:

> The water beasts are just some spiritual sustenance portrayed for consolation. They do not really live in this subterrain world. Their descendants have built their own utopia in a much broader space. That beautiful new world is beyond the imagination of the descendants of passengers underground. They can never go there (*Ditie* 186).

Fredric Jameson uses the concept of 'national allegory' to characterize Third-World literature, arguing that these literary works should be read as allegories that critique national sociopolitical reality (Jameson 70). The idea of national allegory can be applied to this episode, as well. Here Han Song juxtaposes Chinese descendants with the embodiments of another ethnic group, thereby sharply pointing out that Chinese descendants have lost an attribute that the latter possess. This missing attribute could be said to represent individuality. Unlike water beasts who make their own choices, doing their utmost to use their own bodies to stop the crumbling dam, these butterfly-lizard creatures ignore danger, choosing instead to attack the water beasts. This shows an obvious lack of empathy, merely obeying orders sent from the hanging apparatuses. We observe a machine-like quality to clearly demonstrates a lack of individuality. Moreover, Han Song's criticism of their loss of individuality is also manifested in his depiction of their appearance. While the water beasts bear distinct visages of Homer, Euclid, Shakespeare, Newton, Freud, Einstein, Rousseau, and Washington; the faces of butterfly-lizard creatures are blurred. Facial features are one of the most basic characteristics by which we identify a human being. By depicting humans with blurred faces, Han Song expresses his criticism of the loss of individuality. These descriptions, detailing blurred faces, small heads, apparatuses, fancy but redundant wings, and slippery bellies suggests

an image of posthumans who are docile, hardworking, and obsequious, but have no individual will of their own. Therefore, I argue that, for Han Song, the loss of individuality is at the core of becoming posthuman.

This loss of individuality can be contextualized by a discussion of how individuality originates and develops in China. In Europe, the concept of humanism was first developed in the Enlightenment as a movement to liberate individuals from the spiritual control of the church. Since Immanuel Kant, humanism has developed into a systematic theory in which man is placed at the center of the world and characterized by his autonomy. Individual thought and action are his own, no longer determined by agencies outside of him. In modern Chinese history, humanism has arisen twice, once in the late Qing and New Culture Movement, and secondly during the period between 1978 and 1983. In the New Culture Movement, individuality/individualism was an integral part of humanism. In 1915, Chen Duxiu started the journal *Qingnian zazhi* (Youth Magazine) in Shanghai, retitled as *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) from the second issue onwards. This journal was not only a battlefront for propagandizing Chinese vernacular language, but also a platform for introducing and promoting humanism. In 1918, Xin Qingnian brought out a special issue on Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, wherein *Nora* (also titled *A Doll's House*) and *Public Enemy* were translated and discussed. Hu Shi authored the article "*Yibusheng zhuyi* (Ibsenism)" for the issue, in which he came up with the idea of *gexing* (individuality). Placing tradition and individuality in opposition to one another, Hu Shi called upon individuality to revolt against the repression, especially women, of Chinese people as experienced in feudal patriarchal society. For him, promoting individuality was a prerequisite for tearing down a corrupted old society and building a promising modern nation-state. In that year, Zhou Zuoren also published "*Ren de wenxue* (A Human Literature)" in the same journal. By 'human literature,' he was referring to literature that records or studies personal and social problems from a humanist perspective. Zhou Zuoren argued that *rendaozhuyi* (humanism) is primarily *gerenzhuyi* (individualism) because communities consist of individuals. If one wishes to improve one's community, he or she has first to love him or

herself by liberating one's individual self from the shackles of tradition.

In 1917, Qian Xuantong invited Lu Xun to join *Xin Qingnian*. In 1918, Lu Xun published his vernacular short story "*Kuangren riji* (The Diary of a Madman)" in *Xin Qingnian*. The main body of the story is written in the form of a diary and follows the perspective of a madman. The diary records how the madman discovers that people around him, including his elder brother, are cannibals who have already eaten many individuals. They are now plotting to eat him as well. At first glance, the diary appears to reveal the persecution delusions of a madman suffering from paranoia, as suggested by the narrator in his preface to the diary. However, if we follow Fredric Jameson's insight into national allegory and read this text as a critique of a traditional Chinese culture which kills and eats individuals, we may suggest that Lu Xun shared common ground with Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren, and other May Fourth intellectuals. This is reminiscent of what Jaroslav Prusek has said:

> There can be no question that subjectivism and individualism, joined with pessimism and a feeling for the tragedy of life, along with an inclination to revolt and even the tendency to self-destruction, are the most characteristic qualities of Chinese literature from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 to the outbreak of war with Japan" (Prusek 3).

However, it is worth noting that, from the very beginning, development of humanism in China has been entangled with and subordinated to the discourse of nation-state. As showcased in Hu Shi's article "Ibsenism" and Zhou Zuoren's "A Human Literature," mainstream intellectuals in the early twentieth century endorsed individualism because they believed that the awakened individual with his/her own free will was able to cast off tradition, developing a symbiotic relationship with the nation-state in the process of modernization. Like many other new ideologies, humanism and individualism were introduced to China as a means of national salvation. Only Lu Xun stood out with his unique emphasis on the singularity of individualism,[3] and pessimism about the prospects of individualism. Despite

3. Lee Ou-fan argues that Lu Xun's "*Kuangren riji*" is informed by Nietzsche. Before writing this short story, Lu Xun had translated the preface of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Leo Ou-Fan Lee, *Voices from The Iron House*: *A Study of Lu Xun* (Studies in Chinese Literature and Society). Indiana UP, 1987, p. 61.

this, his works were still regarded by his peers and future generations as a part of national salvation. Lydia Liu has pointed out that, in this context, individualism finds itself complicit in one way or another with nationalism, as shown by articles in journals like Eastern Miscellany, Renaissance, and New Youth (Liu 91). In other words, Chinese intellectuals never really got a chance to develop humanism and individualism without taking the nation-state into account.

If we consider that the subordination of humanism and individualism to the discourse of nation-state in the early twentieth century was a response to an emerging national crisis in China, it is evident this subordination failed to abate after even half a century. By the 1980s, humanism had become an unfamiliar concept to most Chinese people. According to Hui Wang:

> In the years before 1980, there were no Western humanities courses (…) They criticized from every angle the abstract concept of the human being as well as humanity as advocated by eighteenth-century European humanism, thus undermining the theoretical basis of anthropology" (Wang and Peng 7) .

Nevertheless, the topic of humanism re-emerged from 1979 onwards. According to Shiping Hua, more than 500 articles on this subject were published during the period from 1979 to 1983 (Hua 3). This was a direct result of in intellectuals' collective reflection upon the past decade of far-leftism.

Among them, Wang Ruoshui wrote a series of papers calling for a Marxist humanism. Based on Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of *1844*, Wang Ruoshui argued that it is wrong to categorize humanism as an exclusively bourgeoisie value. Given that Marx takes the fulfilment of people's interests as the goal of communism, humanism should be a significant part of Marx's theory. Meanwhile, he also pointed out that the sacrifice of the imminent interest of a people for the state, even for the so-called 'ultimate interest of the people' would nevertheless lead to 'alienation.' For Wang Ruoshui, the term 'alienation' refers to the social phenomena of official corruption which is counterproductive to the interests of people. However, Wang's humanist stand, identified as a misunderstanding of orthodox historical materialism, was criticized by Hu Qiaomu, another high-ranking Marxist official in China. Wang Ruoshui was then purged from the party during the Anti-Spiritual

Pollution Campaign in 1983. Regarding this short prosperity of humanism, Shiping Hua comments, "The message is clear: although the party did make mistakes, overall it has managed well; the people cannot ask too much at present, especially in terms of liberty. They must continue to entrust their lives to the party, viewing it in a separate way. Wang wanted happiness for the people, especially freedom, now" (Hua 103)! Given the fact that Han Song began to publish his science fiction in the late 1980s, a time not too far away from the revival of humanism, it is reasonable to speculate that he attributes the loss of individuality primarily to this situation calling for subordination.

Meanwhile, I contend that the loss of individuality results not only from subordination of humanism to the discourse of the nation-state but can also be examined from the perspective of scientism. To be clear, scientism is not simply the advocation of science. Rather, it is a view that places too much value on science, taking science to be a panacea to all problems concerning both nature and human society. According to Shiping Hua, scientism implies that:

> 1) Science is unified; 2) There are no limits to science; 3) Science has been enormously successful at prediction, explanation, and control; 4) The methods of science confer objectivity on scientific results; and 5) Science has been beneficial for human beings (Hua 15).

Throughout the modern history of China, humanism and scientism have been in a competitive relationship. Humanism and Western science are both seen as coming to the salvation of the nation-state. However, even though humanism has left one or two glorious pages in history, Western science has dominated humanism for most of the twentieth century. Scientism emerged earlier than humanism in China. In the 1840s, modern science was primarily advocated by Chinese intellectuals as a solution to both domestic trouble and foreign invasion. Wei Yuan put forward the famous slogan "learning from foreign countries to compete with foreign countries." By and large, Western learning refers to Western science and technology. In 1861, after the failure of the second Opium War, reformists pushed the Qing government to develop a top-down movement, which was later called the 'Westernization Movement' or 'Self-strengthening Movement.' In the three decades of the movement, its most important achievement

was the build-up of the Beiyang Navy, the first modern Chinese navy equipped with modern warships, crews, and new military knowledge.

I define the 'Westernization Movement' as the germ of scientism in China because the Qing emperor Guangxu and reformists at the time took Western science to be the most efficient instrument capable of eradicating all problems both within and without. This scientism soon showed its weakness. The Beiyang Navy built by the Qing government was heavily damaged in just one battle over the Yellow Sea (1894) and destroyed in the second year. People realized that science cannot solve all Chinese problems. In the following decades, even though science was still endorsed by Chinese intellectuals, it was no longer taken as the sole method of saving the nation. As an alternative, humanism and individualism were introduced, because they found that scientism overlooked the role that individuals can play in saving the nation-state. For instance, Chen Duxiu's juxtaposition of democracy and science as two main forces for reforming China into a modern nation-state in the New Culture Movement proves just this point.

However, after the brief period of the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement, scientism has remained closely linked with nationalism, constituting mainstream discourse. From the latter half of the twentieth century, scientism has appeared more in the form of evolutionary thinking and technological determinism, advocating that society is constantly progressing forward, and that productivity supported by science is the driving force behind the nation's continuous advancement. The concept of evolution was first introduced by Yan Fu in *Tianyan lun* (On Evolution), published in 1897 as a translation and exegesis of T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*. As a disciple of Herbert Spencer, Yan Fu interpreted Huxley's lectures from the perspective of Spencerian studies, which extended the application of Darwin's evolutionary theory from the field of biology to the sphere of social science, developing a narrative of what scholars would later call 'social Darwinism.' In this way, it imbued China's modernization with reason, given that the Chinese feudal system and traditional culture were both thought of as 'uncivilized' compared to their Western counterpart. A. F. Jones remarks, "human history

is figured in terms of natural history, and individuals as much as nations are assumed to move along a continuum from the 'savage' to the 'civilized'" (29).

Evolutionary thinking has been continuously employed by the Chinese government as drawing strength from Marxism. Hu Qiaomu, who we mentioned above as a Chinese high official in both Mao and post-Mao eras, was the main compiler of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. He called for a Marxist historical materialism, marking civilization as a progress developed from the primitive stage to slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and finally to communism, motivated by a dialectic of production and superstructure. (Hu 2) Actually, as argued by Shiping Hua, Hu's interpretation is opposite to some of the remarks made by Karl Marx himself, who once claimed that there is no general historical-philosophical theory (Hua 57). Nevertheless, Hu's Marxist historical materialism prepared a theoretic framework for later national policy of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) government. Within this theoretical framework, Su Shaozhi further divides the progress from socialism to communism into three stages, including 1) the success of the proletarian revolution; 2) underdeveloped or incomplete socialism; and 3) communism (Hua 72). Moreover, Su emphasized the importance of productive forces; meanwhile, he downplayed relations of production, paving the theoretical way for the PRC government to develop the Socialist Market Economy. Su Shaozhi's stage theory and technological determinism were finally adopted by the PRC government, becoming an integral part of the theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Under the dominant discourse of scientism, humanism has been left with no ground to stand on. Issues concerning human individuals, who embody the relations of production, can only take a back seat in the face of government-advocated scientism.

To summarize, for Han Song, the posthuman signifies a group of individuals who lose the attribute of individuality. This can be attributed to a conspiracy contrived by the nation-state in conjunction with scientism. In the following text, I will provide an analysis of how Han Song portrays a series of representative characters in demonstrating the loss of individual agency within the discourses of nation-state and scientism, leading ultimately to an emergence of various posthuman landscapes.

The Discourse of the Nation-State as the Primary Intensity

Some scholars have pointed out the impact of Lu Xun on Han Song's writing. For example, Liyuan Jia argues that Han Song succeeds Lu Xun in criticizing national characters (Jia and Martinsen 107). Mingwei Song also demonstrates that Lu Xun's realism is succeeded by science fiction writers in the new era, and that his call for awakening Chinese people gets responses from Han Song ("Representations of the Invisible" 551, "Does Science Fiction Dream of a Chinese New Wave?" XII). Inspired by these studies, I contend that Han Song carries on the tradition of Lu Xun by the way of bringing forth Lu Xun's viewpoint on the singularity of individualism, as well as on the problematic coexistence of individualism and nationalism. Specifically, Han shares with Lu Xun a pessimistic attitude towards individualism in China wherein the nation-state is always prioritized over individuals. Moreover, Han Song's discussion on the loss of individuality is also a reflection of China's socio-political reality. The recent rise and fall of humanism also further prompts his reflection in the context of an emerging humanism, leading him to re-evaluate the discourse of the nation-state. Therefore, I argue that for Han Song the loss of individuality is primarily attributed to the discourse of the nation-state that dominated throughout the twentieth century. In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate this point with an analysis on *Ditie* and *Gaotie*.

Being published respectively in 2010 and 2012, *Ditie* and *Gaotie* can be seen as mirror images of each other, writing about both the underground and on-the-ground means of transportation. For Han Song, the history of Chinese common people making compromises to the will of others can be traced back to the 'sleepwalking era.' In the first story in *Ditie*, "*Moban* (Last Train)," the protagonist Lao Wang takes the last subway train home as he usually does. He unexpectedly witnesses a bizarre scene wherein a whole train of passengers is put into bottles filled with green liquid, then taken by little green men into the subway depths. This reminds him of the 'sleepwalking era' when young men hit big nails into other's heads. By the 'sleepwalking era,' Han Song makes an intertextual reference to one of his earlier works "*Wo de zuguo bu zuomeng* (My Homeland Does Not

Dream),” in which he depicts a spectacle wherein Chinese people sleepwalk to work every night to accomplish the national goal of economic growth and to realize Chinese modernization. Given that consciousness is a key attribute of being an individual, sleepwalking may be interpreted as a state in which one's individuality has given way to the will of the nation-state.

In “*Moban*,” the ‘sleepwalking era’ also alludes to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, when young red guards fanatically tortured and murdered ‘Rightists’ in response to the call of central authorities. By ‘sleepwalking,’ Han Song means that Chinese people perform actions according to the will of the nation-state, losing their own consciousness, reason, and individuality. Lao Wang remembers how shocked he was during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. However, as his friend mentions later, wasn’t Lao Wang one of those red guards? He has already ceded control to authority since the ‘sleepwalking era,’ then further stifling his own individuality for decades by conforming to regulations. This continues until he becomes an expert in completing official forms. In the subway accident, therefore, he is less frustrated from the accident itself than from a feeling of being discarded by an emerging authority—he is exempted from being transformed in that accident. The story ends with Lao Wang’s death—as to his satisfaction he is also poured into a bottle. Han Song writes, “The liquid where Lao Wang is soaked is extremely mellow, shining like the sea and full of vitality. Lao Wang looks satisfied, like a fetus, sleeping peacefully in the womb. That’s his primitive form. It seems that Lao Wang has been dead for many years.” Then Lao Wang’s superior makes a comment, “He (Lao Wang) fulfilled his last task (*mo ban renwu*) successfully. He must have gone all the way to heaven” (*Ditie* 54). Without a doubt, it must be a heaven where individual will is not required. Lao Wang and other ‘sleepwalkers’ portray a generation in allegorical form, depicting how they have long embraced the system. They would be perplexed and restless if they were to lose the shelter of the system, as they have long lost the ability to think.

In the story “*Jingbian* (Shocking Transformation),” Han Song turns to the experience of Chinese young men. As a normal urban worker, Zhou Xing takes the crowded subway to work. Then, when an accident happens, he

wants to crawl outside but follows the instruction of a policeman, prudently staying in the carriage. With nowhere to escape and nothing to do, he fulfils his desire to engage in sexual intercourse with a female passenger. Eventually, he pins his hope on science to escape from the subway, but fails. Yao Wang describes Han Song's heterotopias as an advanced version of Lu Xun's 'Iron House,' in which "People are not only not asleep, but restlessly join a never-ending stream of motion, ever resistant to the current state of affairs, questioning authority, applying science and rationalism to old questions, creating new plans, standing ready to march forward" (Yao and Isaacson 27). In light of her study, I contend that compared with sleepwalkers, Zhou Xing represents a generation who wish to escape when trapped within the suffocating, isolated carriages of the high-speed subway, which serves a symbol of the nation-state. They cannot find a way out, however, due to their economic condition, sexual desire, trust in police, and faith in science, aligning their thoughts and actions with the discourse of nation-state. It appears on the surface that they are 'awake' and make choices according to their own will. However, they are are forced, disciplined, and seduced to accept options provided by different agencies of the nation-state. The human individual has nowhere to escape in this milieu. Isn't Xiao Ji, the only one who dares to crawl out of the carriage, reverted to the starting point? Ultimately, only those who discard their individual will to transform into the posthuman, becoming ants, insects, fish, trees, and grass, are shown at the end of the story to have survived the milieu.

As counterparts to the stories "*Moban*" and "*Jingbian*," the first two chapters of *Gaotie*, "*Dongche* (Electric Multiple Unit)" and "*Chanfang* (Delivery Room)" also tell of the compliance of individuals to the collective will, but in a subtler way. *Gaotie* tells the adventurous journey of the protagonist Zhou Yuan on a high-speed train. After an accident happens, Zhou Yuan tries to discern the cause of the accident. Going through all the carriages, he encounters different people, including train staff and passengers, from whom he hears different explanations about the train's situation. Everyone has their own interpretation of their living milieu, against which

they calculate their activities. Nevertheless, at the end of the story, Zhou Yuan and all other male passengers are arranged by the conductor to mate with females. They are informed that making babies becomes the most important thing, because it will sustain the continuing running and expansion of the train system. In this way, regardless of his previous endeavor of discerning systemic problems, Zhou Yuan joins in the carnival of collective sexual intercourse.

In November of 2011, just a few months before the publication of *Gaotie*, the Chinese national policy on family planning, allowing since 1982 for only one child per couple, was amended into a policy allowing for two children by parents who were both single children. Since this first amendment, China's family planning policy has again shifted, allowing for more children to maintain a 'demographic dividend.' A more recent policy published on August 2021 stipulated that one couple could have up to three children. If we take the high-speed train as a metaphor for China, we see Han Song implying in the story's last scene that, in the face of multiple social problems of Chinese modernization, the PRC government's ultimate solution is, astonishingly, to encourage people to have more babies. In this milieu, individuals wishing to seek out solutions are now informed by central authorities to become reproductive instruments of the state. The control of birth rates serves as a political tool for modern nation-states. Michel Foucault refers to this governmental control of birth, death, production, and illness as 'biopolitics,' which unlike juridical and disciplinary means of control, is no longer based on the individual but on the population ("Society Must Be Defended" 239-264). The dramatic ending of "*Dongche*" sees Zhou Yuan dismissing all concerns as he joins in the sexual carnival. This alludes to the dilemma faced by young Chinese men today, wherein the relationship between individual and nation-state is reconfigured by biopolitics. These young men find themselves forced to become a population statistic, unable to maintain their identity as an individual.

Let us look now at how Han Song depicts another character named Wu Weilai in "*Chanfang*." Wu's secretary tells Zhou Yuan that, "In fact, he (Wu Weilai) is not a person at all, but a condensate of more than one billion people. How can I say this? There is a nation in him." (*Gaotie* 159)

Then she further explains that, like an integrated circuit, billions of Chinese people's brains are integrated into one brain, thereby giving birth to such a superman. Here is the dialogue between Zhou Yuan and Wu's secretary:

> Have thousands of men and women who can cry and laugh, have distinct personalities and independent ideas disappeared?" Zhou Yuan feels his body suddenly in a panic, like a shell that has been emptied.
>
> Yes, those people have disappeared." The girl said coldly, "It's nothing. You may not know that when a nation evolves to its last stage, like a star or the universe it will compress inward and become something with only one face, despite the thousands, tens of thousands and hundreds of millions of people it may have. Individuality will no longer exist (…) It is an intuitive subtle consciousness that transcends the individual, a real consensus and a Super-consciousness" (*Gaotie* 160-161).

Thanks to technology, the Foucauldian concept of population can be embodied in a physical man, whether we call him a superman or a posthuman. Here, Wu Weilai as an integrated intelligence is not exactly a model for other people to imitate or to identify with. Rather, Wu Weilai embodies the normative standard resulting from collecting and analyzing population data. Foucault refers to this as the technique of normalization.[4] There are many occasions in which Han Song's characters find they are nothing but copies of human beings who died long ago, functioning in the present as mere experiments conducted by someone in a higher-level universe.[5] This indicates a feeling of absurdity caused by the distance between recognizing oneself as an embodied individual who can make one's own choices and unfolding oneself as a disembodied datum of some experiment, being a fragment of a totality known as the social body. Here, as totality itself, Wu Weilai becomes quite important. He safeguards and promises future security and prosperity

---

4. Michel Foucault shows the distinction between discipline and security as two different government techniques in the third lecture of "Security, Territory, Population." While disciplinary normativity consists in positioning a model, and trying to get people to conform to the model, security normalization occurs through calculation, analysis, and reflection of factors related to the population. By obtaining normatives based on these factors and having a hold on them, it becomes possible to exert an effect on the population. Here, rather than saying Wu Weilai is a model, it is more accurate to say Han Song depicts him into the data itself, the new technique of governance. See Michel Foucault. "Security, Territory, Population," 55-86.
5. The situations are described in *Ditie*, *Gaotie* and the *Yiyuan* trilogy.

for the nation-state. The question remains, however, whether there will ever be a bright future that realized by normalization. If there is, what will it be like? When Han Song adds the family name 'Wu,' a character which shares the same pronunciation as the Chinese character for 'nothingness' to his first name "Weilai" (future), he seems to be quite pessimistic about the answers to these questions. By using this name, Han Song subtly suggests that the nation has no future. At the end of "*Chanfang*," Zhou Yuan hesitantly puts on one of Wu Weilai's yellow overcoats embroidered with dragons. In a metaphorical way, he ends his search, giving himself up to 'the norm,' transforming into a disembodied superman/posthuman.

From Lao Wang to Zhou Xing, from Zhou Yuan to Wu Weilai, Han Song presents a series of figures who succumb to the will of their peers, to the authoritative system of the subway/high-speed railway, and to the nation-state. He uses the letter 'S,' which means "submit, sustain, survive, succumb" (*Ditie* 94) to summarize attributes of the posthuman, and the letter 'C' symbolizes "control, containment, calculation, encirclement," all of which are imperatives of the system (*Ditie* 128). The posthuman emerges exactly when 'S' matches up with 'C,' "forming the double helix structure that brings about the evolution of lives, preparing ground for space, the earth, and the ocean" (*Ditie* 128). Han Song clearly demonstrates that the posthuman refers to individuals who act in accordance with authoritative will, or even worse, to those who have come to embody abstract data, without even the ability to laugh or cry. They are flattened and disembodied figures.

Shoukonghuan: Scientism Paving the Way to the Posthuman Era

In this section, I will follow Han Song's exploration of China's uniqueness, delving into another reason as to why humanism cannot thrive in the context of this uniqueness. By reading his works, I believe this can be examined from the perspective of scientism. In Han Song's science fiction, I discern three interrelated types of scientism, including 1) scientism stimulated by national salvation, which transforms into traumatic memory; 2) the employment of technological determinism by the Chinese government;

and 3) evolutionary thinking developed from national-salvation and continuously endorsed by national policies in both the Mao and post-Mao eras. In the following text, I will showcase how scientism manifests itself, leading to both a disappearance of human individuality and an emergence of the posthuman, through an analysis of Han Song's *Hongse haiyang*.

Hongse haiyang has four chapters, including "*Women de xianzai*" (Our Present), "*Women de guoqu* (Our Past)," "*Guoqu de guoqu* (The Past of Our Past)," and "*Women de weilai* (Our Future)." In the first two chapters, stories are all set in an underwater world inhabited by posthumans. It is not until the third chapter "*Guoqu de guoqu*" that Han Song divulges the reason why terrestrial human beings have been replaced with underwater posthuman beings. Here I see Han Song portraying scientism as the representation of trauma. All these stories begin with the invasion of a race called 'the White.' Knowing that the land will undoubtedly be occupied by the enemy, governments of Eastern countries plan to relocate their entire nations underneath the ocean's surface to preserve their civilization-states. They place their hope in science. Specifically, they use bioscience to create posthuman beings, using marine exploration technologies to develop the vast expanse of the ocean deep. Consequently, the ecological environment of the ocean is badly destroyed. The proliferation of red algae on the ocean surface transforms the blue ocean into a red one. It is not the only occasion in which Han Song imagines such a war between the East and the West. In his later *Yiyuan* trilogy, the war is depicted as even more traumatic. It is said that Dr. Wangu, playing a key role in constructing the modern hospital system, believes that World War II has not yet concluded. He therefore resorts to medical science as a new weapon, taking the hospital as his new battlefield. Based on the rationale of taking science and technology as the only means of saving the nation-state, Han Song creates one grotesque posthuman world after another.

While the grand plan of relocating the nation to the ocean unfolds, individuals who should be protected by the state using science are, however, sacrificed in several ways. For example, in "*Shuixi ren* (Aquatic Man)"—a short story in chapter "*Guoqu de guoqu*," we learn how a Japanese national

science institution has successfully bred an aquatic man who can breathe underwater. When the aquatic man is still a child, he is carefully taken care of by scientists. It is said that the aquatic man will inherit the national culture and transfer it to the next generation after their terrestrial country is destroyed in the war. However, when the aquatic man grows up, he defies expectations by not showing any interest in aquatic women. Instead, he falls in love with human women. Consequently, the aquatic man is branded as a defective product. He is cast aside in favor of creating new aquatic men with extraordinarily little self-will. In the story, Han Song writes in great detail about the naughtiness of aquatic man in his childhood and the delicate loves of his puberty, emphasizing human emotions and free-will in the aquatic man regardless of his posthuman physical characteristics. In the aquatic man, Han Song seems to suggest that a man who shoulders the task of rebuilding his nation-state should have a soul. Given that the government only wants individuals who meet their expectations, it appears naive and impractical to imagine a symbiotic utopia serving individuals through the development of science. In this situation, individual free-will is not appreciated. In the end, conflicts between individuals and the nation-state reach a climax as the old aquatic man is completely forgotten about, left to languish in a dirty water box placed in an old deserted institutional building. On the other hand, new generations of will-less aquatic men are taken as emblems of the nation-state, crowded around by government officials and scientists as they are escorted into the new city of the ocean deep.

Scientism posits science as the only way to save the nation-state, to the exclusion of all other means. This point is manifested clearly in "*Baitian lanyun* (White Sky, Blue Cloud)" of the same chapter. Han Song tells how the conflict between people in the town of Anming and the Korean government results in a humanist catastrophe. The government tries to persuade the townsmen to join in the project of building a city under the sea, hoping that Anming will constitute Korea as a multi-cultural nation-state. However, people of the town refuse the proposal because they want to preserve the town's specialty, which is characterized by the supernatural phenomenon of a white sky with blue clouds. They try to keep their status quo by standing outside of the war between

the 'White' and the Eastern countries. The daughter of the town chief takes a hot air balloon to fly to the 'Whites' who are said to have immigrated to the moon, trying to persuade them to keep away from Anming, and to preserve the special natural spectacle of white sky with blue clouds. In other words, rather than following the national plan of entering the sea and saving their town by virtue of modern science, they choose their own way. Han Song narrates this with a sense of melancholy as the girl fails in her mission, because she operates too primitive of a vehicle. The key issue, however, is that even before the war is waged, the town is destroyed by a great flood caused by the Korean government. The people of Anming township, with all their romanticism, are wiped out to make way for the nation-state. In each of these scenarios, the initial intention of these of Eastern governments is to use science and technology to defend their nations and protect their people. However, due to the traumatic memory of being invaded by Western powers in the second World War, they over-rely on science and technology, developing a scientism that neglects the importance of individual human beings, abandoning humanism, even destroying the environment essential for human survival. As a result, their countries are transformed into grotesque and terrifying posthuman worlds such as we see in the red ocean of *Hongse haiyang*, while once-human beings are either sacrificed for their nation-states or replaced by posthumans.

Han Song not only criticizes scientism as traumatic memory, but also criticizes technological determinism as a drawback to practical Chinese political and economic policies. In the phasal development policy of Socialist Market Economics, which gives primary importance to productive forces, he observes an adoration of scientism to the point of disregard for humanism, creating potentially negative consequences. In the novelette "*Women de xianzai*," Han Song tells a story about how human descendants in a distant future struggle to start a new civilization in the red ocean after the original human civilization has discontinued for an extended period. Haixing, protagonist of the story, is characterized as having the exceptional ability to recall memories. Unlike other people, he is curious about the concepts of the future and the past. When Haixing becomes a tribal leader, Chiying, a live relic

of the ancient civilization, helps him recall the memory of human civilization which is buried deep in his brain. Haixing recalls all the achievements made by past civilizations, including mansions and cities on land, arts, and manufacturing, as well as the genetic modification technology that gave birth to their aquatic men and women. Chiying then says that "the real meaning of civilization is eating people" (*Hongse haiyang* 146). Haixing realizes that if he wants to develop a civilization, he must develop productive forces, even though this requires the sacrifice of individuals. However, when Han Song concretizes the notions of 'developing productive forces' and 'sacrificing individuals,' he imagines a shocking scene. The industry Haixing relies on is one where women are constantly giving birth in factories, allowing men to avoid hunting and to instead consume children produced in the factories. The rapid development of production leads to the rapid growth and expansion of his tribe, forming the embryonic stage of a new oceanic civilization.

Through the idea of 'eating people,' Han Song's criticism resonates with Lu Xun's "*Kuangren riji*" in its critique of tradition. However, in "*Women de xianzai*," 'tradition' indicates technological determinism of a previous terrestrial civilization. From Han Song's perspective, disregard for humanity in technological determinism is undoubtedly a new way of cannibalism, devouring not only individuals but also the future of a civilization. At first glance, Haixing is not like Lu Xun, who puts himself in a dilemma without moving forward to a bright future. Rather than staying where he is, Haixing chooses to move forward. If we follow Gilles Deleuze to see how "culture is training and selection" (Deleuze 245), Haixing becomes an 'active man' in line with the process of civilization. However, the new civilization is nothing but a repeat of the old one, motivated by the feeling of lack, filled by scientism, and probably ending in alienation. In the story, although Haixing successfully starts a new civilization, it is soon questioned by those who sympathize with mothers losing their children. His rule is criticized and challenged even by his own son, which is where we find Han Song telling us that a civilization which focuses on productive force without paying attention to humanist values won't last long.

So, what is the ultimate outcome of the oceanic civilizations developed

with scientism as their guiding principle? Of the earlier underwater cities of aquatic men and the later kingdom of Haixing? Have they evolved into better and more advanced civilizations? Implying that these civilizations were and will be replaced by posthuman worlds in a state of decay, Han Song gives scientism its fatal blow, casting doubt on the assertion that civilization will continue to progress indefinitely. He argues in his stories that the trajectory of civilization's development resembles more of a circular pattern than a linear, progressive one. I find "*Shoukonghuan* (Control Cycle)," a short story in *Hongse haiyang*, to serve as a good explanation of this circular model. In the story, a cybernetic specialist comes to the Kingdom of the Ocean to clarify its operating mechanism. The kingdom runs in a cyclically transformative manner. After a period of expansion, people begin to transform into robots. Then when the kingdom of robots develops to its height, it enters a period of contraction when people change back to the status of human being. Two sorts of transformation happen repeatedly, forming a continuous cycle.

While this short story is circular, the entire narrative of *Hongse haiyang* is also circular in structure, rather than linear. *Hongse haiyang* has four chapters: "*Women de xianzai* (Our Present)," "*Women de guoqu* (Our Past)," "*Guoqu de guoqu* (The Past of the Past)," and "*Women de weilai* (Our Future)." However, in the chapter named "*Women de xianzai*," narrative events are not actually set in the present, but in a distant future. Similarly, in the chapters "*Women de guoqu*" and "*Women de weilai*," events described do not pertain to the past or future. "*Women de guoqu*" may happen after the first chapter; stories in "*Guoqu de guoqu*" by and large in a near future; and, finally, stories in "*Women de weilai*" are set in the Chinese feudal period. Regarding this intentional anachronism, Wu Yan suggests in the preface to *Hongse haiyang* that the drifting of the signified from the signifier intends to encourage multivariate decoding (*Hongse haiyang* 9). I suggest that if the title refers the setting of the story, Han Song deconstructs the meaning of the terms of 'past,' 'present,' and 'future' by calling off their mutual relations which formerly served to define them.

Rather than a teleological movement of civilization developing through time, we see repeated ups and downs of civilization. New civilizations are

not necessarily more advanced than preceding ones, re-starting again and again in the ocean deep. When the war that destroys Eastern civilization concludes, people of different races resume communication. Chen Sheng (1529-1612) in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) encounters people coming from the parallel temporal-space of modern China. Eventually the red ocean, cradle of posthuman civilization, appears in the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534), when Li Daoyuan (466-527), one of China's most famous geographers of the feudal period, witnesses its accidental death. These narrative hints suggest that civilization starts from the point where it collapses, and collapses at the point where it begins. In this way, teleological narrative gives way to circular narrative, in which the role of scientism is no longer considered a motive of civilizational evolution, being rather identified as a fatal mechanism leading to posthumanism at every civilizational turning point. In a sense, the entire book is an elaboration and interpretation of the fable "*Shoukonghuan*." If we juxtapose the two and read them intertextually, we can see that Han Song intends a critique throughout this narrative approach.

In "*Shoukonghuan*," having experienced many transformations, the cybernetic specialist finally takes out a *shoukonghuan* (controlling ring) from the brain of the robot king. This ring serves as a key that has triggered all these switches. What is the *shoukonghuan*? In this story it is a memory chip that controls the subject by imposing a pre-set memory. One's natural memory is paralyzed by the implanted memory chip. That is why Han Song repeatedly mentions that they suffer in one way or another from amnesia. The human king of the ocean tells the cyberneticist to enjoy pleasure in the moment, saying, "Let's forget everything, forget the mundane world, forget the food you're eating, and them (the mermaids), going then into a sweet dream" (*Hongse haiyang* 277). Regarding the robot kingdom, the story reads, "Robots were tools made by those terrestrial humans who first went down to the sea to work in the underwater city. In theory, the human king of the ocean was their master, but now everything is in disorder, everyone has lost his memory, and even the jailer can't wittingly realize the fact that he is controlled" (*Hongse haiyang* 280). Having lost the interest and capability of forming their own memories,

it is the artificial memory pre-set by *shoukonghuan* that guides them to follow a transformative track. Here these questions are at the core: Who sets up the *shoukonghuan*, thereafter depriving individuals of individual memory? Can we take out the *shoukonghuan*, resuming subjectivity and individuality?

In her study, Yao Wang takes "*Shoukonghuan*" as testimony of Han Song's critique of evolutionary thinking developed in Chinese modernization (Yao and Isaacson 24). Mingwei Song also uses Han Song's *Ditie* to exemplify the myth of development as an important motif of contemporary Chinese science fiction, saying:

> The advanced subway system, high-speed rail, and the maglev have all become celebrated symbols of China's pursuit of non-stop economic development. In Han Song's novel, the myth of high-speed development is incarnated as a train that endlessly travels Beijing's subway circuit" ("Variations on Utopia" 94).

In the light of their study, I contend that although we cannot find a physical object like the *shoukonghuan* in *Hongse Haiyang*, as showcased by the stories we have discussed, the *shoukonghuan* manifests itself in the form of memory recalled by governments of Eastern countries, as the trauma of relying solely on science to defend their civilizations, and is recollected by Hai Xing, a development model that places productivity as its top priority. Ultimately, it is also a memory of belief in science, an insistence that a civilization can evolve eternally in a linear, progressive way. Through the image of *shoukonghuan*, Han Song ascribes the loss of individuality to scientism, arguing that human civilization can only repeatedly move towards posthumanism under the continuous influence of scientism.

Addressing the question as to who placed the *shoukonghuan* in the brain of the posthuman king, Han Song insinuates that it can only be human beings who once lived and believed in an unlimited power of science to bring about evolution. In a sense, the *shoukonghuan* is a metaphorical way of saying how deeply these ideologies are ingrained in the human mind. So, what would happen if we got rid of it? Han Song is quite pessimistic about this. As demonstrated, after the *shoukonghuan* is taken out of the king's brain, all people die, and civilization collapses. The cybernetic specialist

decides to create a new world together with the only surviving robot. When the unity of Adam and Eve are replaced with that of a human cybernetic specialist and robot, this suggests that the boundary between the human and the posthuman has been removed from the onset of of a new civilization.

Conclusion

In this study, I discuss how posthumanism emerges in Han Song's works while also exploring the intensities that bring about his posthuman landscape. Although his posthumanism is characterized by blurred faces, we discover great detail in the portrayal of these posthuman figures as compared to the renderings of normal human beings. This is due to experiences embedded in the material particularities of Chinese social-political reality, which are rich in psychological energy, no doubt a reflection of the writer's own emotion and inquiry. Therefore, while Han Song prioritizes human beings over the posthuman, I wish to point out that his textual embodiment of the posthuman allows us to reconsider a transcendental concept of the liberal human. From the 'sleepwalking era' to nowadays, Han Song's diverse images of the posthuman expose us to some interesting realities. For example, as common Chinese people choose or are forced to conform to their living milieu, there is no such thing as a universal self-will clearly distinguished from will of others. There is no self-will which is not affected by one's living milieu. In this sense, becoming posthuman is not a process of losing individuality, but a way to recognize each face by placing him or her into a historical, cultural, and material specificity by which to discuss his or her relationship to the collective.

Works Cited

Deleuze, Gilles. "The Three Aspects of Culture." *The Deleuze Reader*, edited by Constantin V. Boundas, Columbia U P, 1993.

Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended." *Lectures at the Collège de France*: *1975-1976*. Picador, 2003.

———. "Security, Territory, Population." *Lectures at the Collège De France: 1977 – 1978*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Han Song. *Hongse haiyang* (Red Ocean). Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing, LTD, 2018.

———. *Ditie* (Subway). Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2010.

———. *Gaotie* (High-Speed Railway). New Star Press, 2012.

———. "*Wo de zuguo bu zuomen*g (My Homeland Does not Dream)." journals.openedition.org/ideo/471?file=1, Accessed 5 April 2022.

———. *Huoxing zhaoyao meiguo: 2066 nian zhi xixing manji* (Mars Over America: Random Sketches on a Journey to the West in 2066). Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2012.

———. 2013. "*Shijian lvxing zhong de wutuobang yu fan wutuobang* (Utopia and Dystopia in Time Travel)." *Comparative Literature in China*,vol. 4, no. 93, pp. 133-41.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. 1st edition, University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Hua, Shiping. *Scientism and Humanism: Two Cultures in Post-Mao China* (1978-1989). State U of New York P, 1995.

Hui Wang, and Edward Peng. "Humanism as the Theme of Chinese Modernity." *Collections Thematiques*, vol.5, 2019. doi. org/10.7202/1064992ar

Isaacson, Nathaniel. "Han Song." *Chinese Literature Today*, vol. 7 no. 1, 2018, pp. 4-5.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, vol.15. 1986, pp. 65-88.

Jia Liyuan, and Joel Martinsen. "Gloomy China: China's Image in Han Song's Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 40 no. 1, 2013, pp. 103-15.

Jones, Andrew F. *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*. Harvard U P, 2011.

Lee Leo Ou-Fan. *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun* (Studies in Chinese Literature and Society). Indiana University Press, 1987.

Li Guangyi and Nathaniel Isaacson. "Eerie Parables and Prophecies: An Analysis of Han Song's Science Fiction." *Chinese Literature Today*, vol. 7 no. 1, 2018, pp. 28-32.

Liu, Lydia H. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937*. Stanford University Press, 1995.

Nayar, Pramod K. *Posthumanism*. Polity Press, 2014.

Prusek, Jaroslav. *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Leo Ou-fan Lee. Indiana University Press, 1980.

Song, Mingwei. "Variations on Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2013, pp. 86-102.

———. "After 1989: The New Wave of Chinese Science Fiction." *China Perspectives*, no. 1, 2015, pp. 7-13.

———. "Representations of the Invisible: Chinese Science Fiction in the Twenty-First Century." *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Carlos Rojas and Andrea Bachner. Oxford UP, 2016.

———. "Does Science Fiction Dream of a Chinese New Wave?" *The Reincarnated Giant: An Anthology of Twenty-First-Century Chinese Science Fiction*, edited by Mingwei Song and Theodore Huters. Columbia UP, 2018, pp. XI-XXI.

Wang, David Der-wei. "Lu Xun, Han Song, and the Unfinished Literary Revolution: '*Xuanxiang*' and '*Shensi*'." *Exploration and Free View*, vol.5, 2019, pp. 48-51.

Wang, Qin. *Configurations of the Individual in Modern Chinese Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Yao Wang, and Nathaniel Isaacson. "Evolution or Samsara? Spatio-Temporal Myth in Han Song's Science Fiction." *Chinese Literature Today*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, pp. 23-27.