

Belief in the Future

Ying Hong

The father of my bosom friend in the primary school years was an envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who shuttled back and forth in all parts of the world all the time. He was extremely busy since he didn't have festivals or holidays to take a rest. He was not tall in height and very thin, but I thought he was tall and mysterious at that time because we knew nothing about and could not reach those countries he often visited. It was the festival of the whole family of my friend and also my festival every time he came back from foreign countries. I heard a lot of interesting stories in the outside world from her father. As my bosom friend, I also got all kinds of small gadgets and beautifully wrapped chocolate he brought back from foreign lands. That was in Beijing in 1970s. Although we lived in a metropolis, the life was still confined and extremely simple. I still remember the first time I drank Coca-Cola. It was a small bottle brought back by the father of my bosom friend. We took a mouthful of it each one and I vomited instantly at that weird irritating taste and claimed that it "was just like the traditional Chinese concoction called 'Ten Drops'!" Once her father brought back a thick book on which were all smartly-dressed men and women and various dazzling cosmetics with just a few lines of foreign language. It was very different from the books I usually read. I was not so interested in those good-looking men and women as well as cosmetics; instead, what impressed me most was the paper of that book---white, glossy and thick---plus the clear and beautiful pictures. I stroked the paper gently for a long time with my fingers. Later on I got to know that it was the fashion magazine, which can be found everywhere now in China.

Recalling what happened in those years decades later, we would feel we were taken to another world by the time machine. With the reform and opening-up in 1980s, the fast growth of our economy and the progress in technology and the Internet worldwide, our curiosity for the external world has disappeared gradually. And still, the profession of the envoy for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have been cancelled long before. So nowadays we would often say "The world is flat".

For us, everything in reality has already become so dull now. Sometimes, I would remember that time when we lived a slow-paced life with a simple mind and in great want of materials. Since in the outside world there were so many unknown things and things we could not understand, we got so many aspirations and so much reverie out of curiosity for them. At that time, for me, a girl in her teen years, the real connection with the outside world was through that envoy, the father of my bosom friend in the primary school.

Of course, we still had books. From my adolescent years, I took a liking for reading and read all kinds of books I could access relying on my inclination.

At that time, I borrowed a book *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* written by the French writer Jules Verne, worn at the edge due to repeated reading. I finished reading it at one sitting. I can remember what really moved me was not the "hardcore science fiction", but the abundant and detailed description about the magic marine world in the book by which I, a girl who had never seen the seabed, got totally fascinated. They were like "All kinds of shells and mollusks are taking a walk on

the soft sandy bed, making the sea floor a garden; various jellyfishes are drifting above our heads like fresh flowers spread by the fairy maiden” After many years, I finally saw the beautiful sandy beach and magical seabed world for the first time in the Gold Coast of Australia written by Verne in 1870. It was that book that triggered my interest in science fiction and natural science.

In my whole adolescent period, it was literature and books that made me have closer contact with this world.

When I was young, I liked sitting on the open air by myself staring at the starry sky at night in summer days. At that time, the sky was clear and dotted by the stars. Sometimes, I would see the faint Milk Way and even catch the sight of meteors streaking across the sky when being lucky. The world of starry sky was mysterious to me, so I got a series of strange illusions about it and many questions that can be answered or not even today: Did I, my family, my classmates and teachers and my friends see the same starry sky? How about those living in other parts of the world and our ancestors thousands of years ago? Did they see the same starry sky as that I saw? How about our descendants thousands of years later? Will they see the same starry sky as that I saw?

As for the future, it is certainly a time concept, but it is a vocabulary is full of glamour and illusion at the same time. The pondering over and creation about the future has brought remarkable significance to the life of human beings.

The future is as opposed to the past and present. Though the scientist Einstein once said: "The difference among the past, present and the future only has the meaning of an illusion which is very dogged though." However, besides literature, doesn't our human world make progress incessantly depending on the strength having illusions about the future?

Now that the future is a concept of time, there is a concept of space to back it naturally. So, we would usually say the future world.

In April 1999, I went to Australia to visit the couple of Huang Miaozi and Yu Feng who were living temporarily here at that time. One day, they specially led us to the lighthouse of Byron Bay to watch the sunrise by taking a zigzag path. When I saw a golden sun slowly rising from the Pacific Ocean, I recalled I had once climbed up Mount Huangshan to watch the sunrise together with my classmates during the summer vacation at university. It was different time and space. I couldn't help asking me in my mind: was the sun I had seen from Mount Huangshan during my university life the same one as I saw from Byron Bay today? Still, can I see the same sun on the Mars in some day in the future?

Perhaps this is really the dream we can expect. I have read a lot of interesting books: Illusions about the universe, earth, mankind and technology in the future; and illusions about the country, society, city, countryside, school, literature, film and library in the future.....

It is said the mankind can be expected to master three kinds of energy: antimatter, origin of the universe and controllable nuclear fusion within one hundred years and each of them can change the human civilization by nature. In addition, we have the artificial intelligence which has become invincible in an ever-larger scope of areas.

Several years ago, I participated in a discussion about “the creation of science fiction writers in the era of artificial intelligence” held by original science fiction writers in China. There were really pessimistic views, but finally optimistic ones prevailed. They thought that the robots in the future won’t replace human writers no matter how well they write technically since literature needs emotions which only belong to mankind. Two years later, *Best Science Fiction Works of China for the Year of 2018* published by the People's Literature Publishing House included a work finished by artificial intelligence. It was certainly not a perfect work, but it had unique imagination with weird artistic conception created by phrases and plentiful emotions. When I read the manuscript, the editor-in-chief and executive editor didn’t tell me who was its author as usual. But my professional intuition told me that it was a work of unique temperament since some parts in it were not like the product of mankind. When my intuition was verified, to be frank, I got no pleasant surprise at all, but was kind of terrified instead.

Stephen Hawking warned many times that artificial intelligence may lead to the extinction of mankind: “The emergence of artificial intelligence is either the best thing or the most terrible thing for mankind”. No wonder Einstein said that “I never think about the future, because it is coming fast enough.”

So, our literature must encounter more challenges in the future. We Chinese writers need to get well prepared for this though we have already had such outstanding writers of science fiction and fantasy literature as Liu Cixin and Jiang Nan.

For China, a developing country with a large population, we are facing a lot of problems in our own development currently: the environment, resources, education and a population below the poverty line. Some hold extreme ideas and say the most expensive things in China one or two decades later might be air and land. Though it sounds sensational, it serves as an alert.

For us Chinese writers, we shall look to the future while paying close attention to the present concerns.

In his fantasy fiction *On the Future of New China* in 1902, Liang Qichao, a thinker and writer in modern China, used the poem of “I had a peaceful dream for no reason and saw the top of Kunlun Mountain suddenly” to express his expectation for the future of China and the confidence and aspiration for brightness. In the 21st century, how will Chinese writers write about our future?

Hold belief in the future!

There is a song called *Future will Be Better* created by Luo Dayou, a musician from Chinese Taiwan. I like the last sentences very much---“Singing with your passion, stretch out your hands, and I will embrace your dream and have your true face; let our smile be filled with pride of youth and say sincere prayers for our future”.

Literary classics through the ages can make us experience the strength of the true, the good and the beautiful; and they can travel through any time barrier to enable the progress of human civilization.

The world and life in the future must be more beautiful definitely!

相信未来 应红

小学时代的闺蜜，她的父亲是外交部信使，整日在世界各地来来去去，没有节假日，忙碌极了。闺蜜的父亲不高且瘦，但那时在我眼里他既高大且神秘，因为他往返穿梭的那些国度，都是我们一无所知也无法抵达的，每次他从国外回家的日子，就是她们全家的节日，也是我的节日。从她父亲那里，我听到了许许多多另外世界的奇闻趣事，我同闺蜜一样，也分享到他从异域带回的各种小玩意儿和包装纸很漂亮的巧克力糖果。那是七十年代的北京，我们虽然生活在大都市，但依旧闭塞且生活极其简单。我还记得喝的第一口可口可乐，就是闺蜜的父亲带回的小小一瓶，我们一人喝了一口，我当时就被那股奇怪刺激的味道呛得吐了出来，“简直就像中药十滴水！”有一次她父亲带回来一本厚厚大本的书，上面都是穿着漂亮衣服的男人女人，还有各种让人眼花缭乱的化妆品，没有几行外文字，与我平日里看的书差别很大。我对那些漂亮男女和化妆品并没有多少兴趣，记得非常清楚的倒是，那书的纸张真好，白皙、光亮，且厚，所有的图片都那么清晰好看。我用手小心翼翼地在那纸上摩挲了很久。后来才知道，那叫时尚杂志。现在中国早已随处可见。

几十年后，回想那个时代的事，真仿佛是被时光机器带到另一个世界。随着中国八十年代的改革开放，经济快速发展，随着世界科技和互联网技术的快速进步，我们对外面世界的好奇和神秘感早已渐渐消失，还有，外交部信使这个职业应该也早就不存在了。所以今天我们常常会这样说：世界是平的。

对今天的我们来说，现实的一切已经变得那么平淡无奇的当下，有时，我会怀想起那个时代，那个慢节奏的、单纯的、物质匮乏的、对周边的世界抱有那么多未知和不可知的，所以就会有那么多神秘好奇的渴望和遐想的年代。当时那个十几岁的我，和外面世界发生过的真实联系，只有通过那位信使，我小学时闺蜜的父亲。

当然，还有书籍。少年时起，我就有阅读的兴趣，凭兴趣读了各种能读到的书。

那时，我借到了一本法国作家儒勒·凡尔纳的《海底两万里》，一本已经被翻看得卷边破损的书，一口气读完，记得真正打动我的不是书中那些“硬科幻”部分，一个从未见过海底世界的女孩儿，完全被迷住的是书中对神奇海洋世界的细致丰富描写：“各种各样的贝壳、软体类动物散步在柔软的沙滩上，将海底装扮成花园一般，我们的头顶上方是各种各样的水母飘荡着，恰似仙女撒下的朵朵鲜花”……直到许多许多年后，我才第一次在澳大利亚的黄金海岸，真正见识到了凡尔纳在1870年就写出的美丽沙滩和神奇海底世界。也就是这本书，勾起了我对科幻文学和博物学的很大兴趣。

在我的整个少年时代，是文学和书籍勾连起我和这个世界更加丰富的联系。

少年时，喜欢在夏日的夜晚，一个人坐在空旷的野外，看天上的星空。那时的天空很清爽，满天的星斗布满一弯苍穹，有时还能看到一条淡淡的银河，运气好的时候甚至能看到流星划过天空的景象。这样一个星空的世界让年少的我感到既神秘又产生了各种奇奇怪怪的幻想，还有许多今天看来有解也无解的问题：我、我的家人、我的同学老师、我的朋友，我们看到的是同样的星空吗？生活在地球其他地方的人呢，我的千百年前的祖先呢，他们看到的星空与我看到的是同一个吗？还有千百年后的子孙呢，他们看到的星空与我看到的还会是同一个吗？

关于未来，它当然是一个时间概念，但它同时也是一个充满魅力、幻想力的词汇，对于未来的思考和创造带给了我们人类生命非凡的意义。

未来是相对于过去和现在而言的。虽然科学家爱因斯坦说过：“过去、现在和未来之间的分别只不过有一种幻觉的意义而已，尽管这幻觉很顽强。”但是，不止是文学，我们的人类世界，难道不是靠这种幻想未来的力量才获得生生不息的发展。

未来，既然是一个时间的概念，自然有空间概念的依托。所以，我们通常会说，未来世界。

1999年4月，我到澳大利亚看望当时客居此地的黄苗子郁风夫妇，有一天，他们专程带我们沿着蜿蜒的小径走上拜伦湾（Byron Bay）的灯塔处去看日出。当我看到一轮金色的太阳从太平洋上缓缓升起时，不知怎么，我想起了大学时代，有一次暑假和同学们爬上黄山看日出的情景。时空转换，天涯海角，我在心里不禁问：大学时代的我在黄山看到的太阳和今天在拜伦湾看到的太阳是同一个吗？还有，未来的某一天，我能在火星上看到同一个太阳吗？

这也许真的是可期的梦想。我阅读过许多有趣的书：幻想未来的宇宙、地球、人类、科技，幻想未来的国家、社会、都市、乡村、学校，还有文学、电影、图书馆……

据说，人类在百年内有望掌握反物质、宇宙本源和可控核聚变三种能量，每一种都会让人类的文明发生质变。还有，人工智能的社会影响话题，在越来越多的领域，人工智能已经无往不胜。

前几年，我参加过一次中国原创科幻作家有关“人工智能时代，科幻作家的创作”的讨论。其间确有悲观的观点，但最终，还是乐观胜利了。他们认为，将来的机器人无论在技术上写得再好，也无法取代人类作家，因为文学需要情感，这只有人类才会拥有。两年后，人民文学出版社出版的《2018中国最佳科幻作品》中，就收入了一篇由人工智能共同创作完成的作品，这当然不是一篇完美的作品，但它想象力独特，词语的意象诡谲，且情感丰沛。在看书稿时，像通常一样主编和责任编辑没有告诉我这篇作品的作者是何许人，但我的职业直觉告诉我，这是一篇气质独特的作品，这篇作品中的某些部分真有点不像“人”写的。可当我的直觉真的得到证实的那一刻，实话说，我绝无惊喜，而是有一种惶恐。

史蒂芬·霍金多次说，人工智能可能导致人类灭亡，“人工智能崛起要么是人类最好的事情，要么就是最糟糕的事情”。难怪爱因斯坦说过“我从不去想未来，因为它来得已经够快了。”

所以，面对未来，我们的文学肯定会有越来越多的挑战，我们中国的作家需要做好更多的准备，虽然在科幻和奇幻文学中我们已有刘慈欣、江南这样优秀的作家。

在当今中国，作为人口众多的发展中国家我们还依然面对许多自身发展中的问题：环境问题、资源问题、教育问题、贫困人口问题。有人极端的说，十年、二十年之后的中国最贵的东西可能是空气和土地了。虽然有些危言耸听，但也是忠告和警示。

对我们中国作家来说，在关注现实的同时，我们的眼光也需要看向未来。

中国近代思想家、文学家梁启超1902年在其幻想小说《新中国未来记》中，用“无端忽作太平梦，放眼昆仑绝顶来”这样的诗句，表达对中国未来的梦想期许，对美好的信心和向往。在二十一世纪的今天，我们中国的作家应该怎样书写我们的未来呢？

相信未来吧！

有一首叫《明天会更好》的歌，是中国台湾的一位音乐人罗大佑创作的，我很喜欢最后这几句：“唱出你的热情/伸出你双手/让我拥抱你的梦/让我拥有你真心的面孔/让我们的笑容/充满青春的骄傲/为明天献出虔诚的祈祷”。

古往今来的文学经典，可以使我们感受真、善、美的力量，可以穿越任何时代，支撑人类文明的进步。

未来的世界，未来的生命，应该也一定会变得更美好！