The Versatility of Ghostly Cyborgs: Generic Hybridity in Xia Jia's "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight"

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Background of the presentation

- PhD project: alienation (and estrangement) in contemporary Chinese science fiction

- Healey 25: "generic hybridity, the combination and reinterpretation of both Western science fiction subgenres and local Chinese genres, is one way of characterizing contemporary Chinese science fiction"
  - key constituent role of 20th century Chinese critical realism (Lu Xun et al.)

- today's case study: "A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight"

"A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight" (百鬼夜行街)

- by Xia Jia (b. 1984)

- original publication in *Science Fiction World* 科幻世界, 2010
  - English translation by Ken Liu (*Clarkesworld*, February 2012)

- summary
  - abandoned amusement park Ghost Street and its inhabitants (living boy Ning, female ghost Xiao Qian, warrior Yan Chixia)
  - revelation of Ning's (presumed) artificiality and his desire to leave
  - destruction of Ghost Street and Ning's self-sacrifice to save Xiao Qian

Loners, crowds, and bodies

- two critical realist elements with importance for SF (Healey)

- 1. loner and the crowd
  - Ning's ambivalent feelings about his home and its customs (cf. e.g. Lu Xun's "Hometown" 故乡, 1921), esp. during the parade
  - revelations about Ning's identity and (temporary) rejection of Ghost Street

- 2. allegorical use of the female body as "a vehicle for exploring national, political, and economic concerns" (Healey 14)
  - Xiao Qian selling her organs/soul
  - artificial body made from flammable materials; "authenticity" (as per Ni, para. 11), control mechanism, cost-cutting?
  - profit-seeking as a cause of (gendered) exploitation and alienation

19th-century illustration of a scene from "Nie Xiaoqian" (via Wikipedia)
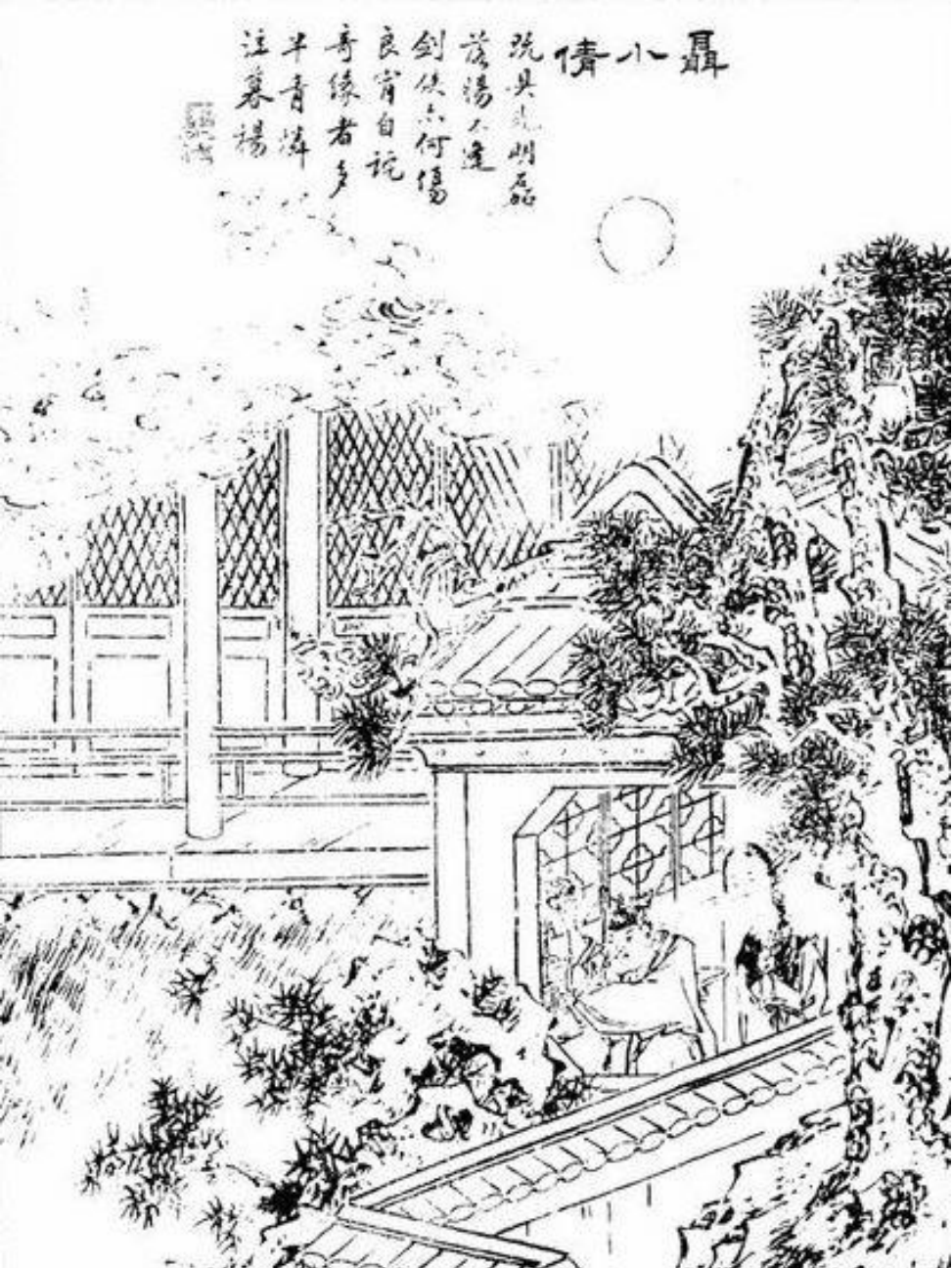
Strange ghost stories

- characters as references to Pu Songling's (1640–1715) marvel tale "Nie Xiaoqian" 聶小倩
  - echoes of Pu's social criticism in "A Hundred Ghosts" (Li 34; Ni, para. 11–12)

- → specific influence of *A Chinese Ghost Story* 倩女幽魂 (dir. Ching Siu-tung, 1987)
  - changes in the main characters (prefiguring Xia Jia's developments)
  - cult status among the "post-80" generation as an example of Chinese cinema before rampant commercialism

- hybridity of canonized high culture and unofficial/underground popular culture

Chambers and gardens, real and fake

Painting of *Dream of the Red Chamber's* Grandview Garden by Sun Wen (1818–1904) (via Wikipedia)

- direct allusion to *Dream of the Red Chamber* 红楼梦
  - "Pretending that the fake is real only makes the real seem fake."

- idyllic garden environment contrasted with declining fortunes

- the protagonist's (ultimately pointless) study of Chinese classics
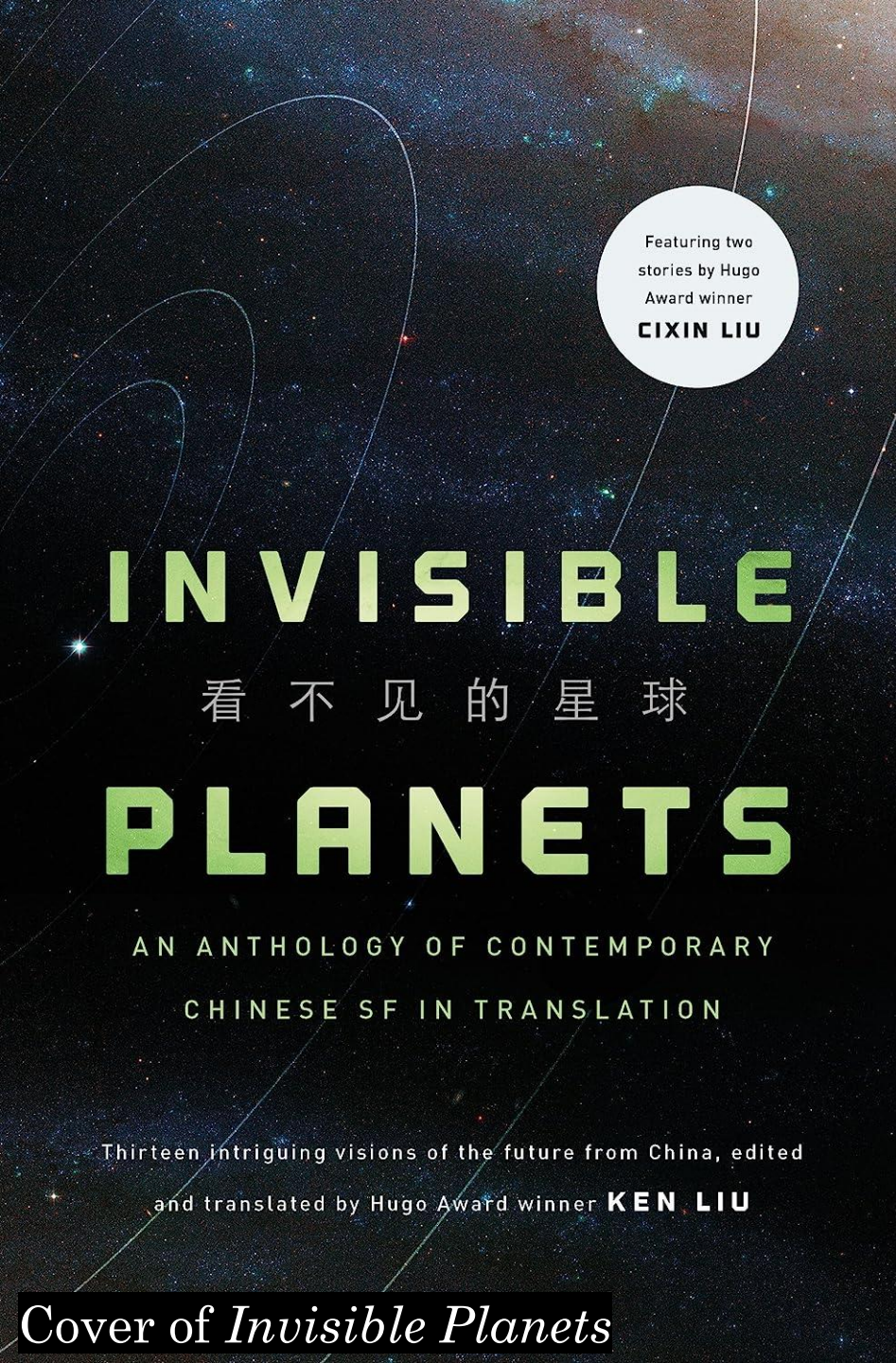
- thematization of "real" and "fake"

Cover of the graphic novel adaptation (first volume)

Ghostly cyborgs

- generic hybridity reinforced by cyborg hybridity; cf. Healey on Chen Qiufan's *Waste Tide* 荒潮 (2013)

- classic Western androids: *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982; *Westworld* (dir. Michael Crichton, 1973)

- influence of Neil Gaiman and Hayao Miyazaki
  - child among ghosts/spirits, rediscovery of identity
  - *The Graveyard Book* (2008): protagonist's adoption by the "dead" and education
  - *Spirited Away* (2001): abandoned amusement park, anxiety about traditional culture
  - departure from coming-of-age formula: Ning's arrested development and death

Audience, estrangement, and affordance

- international reception and general lack of familiarity with Chinese literature

- estrangement and familiarization (Spiegel)
  - what is made strange/familiar?
  - and for whom?

- the affordances of speculative fiction (Esko Suoranta) and of generic hybridity

Cover of *Invisible Planets*

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