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## Feminist Cyborg Writing and the Imagining of Asia



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One of the distinctive features of contemporary science fiction is its articulation of the image of Asia. From William Gibson's Chiba City<sup>1</sup> in *Neuromancer* to Marge Piercy's Yakamura-Stichen Multi<sup>2</sup> in *He, She and It* and Maureen F. McHugh's Nanjing<sup>3</sup> in *China Mountain Zhang*, Asia has been persistently portrayed as an inevitable ingredient in the making of humanity's future. The issue of race, in other words, is very much rooted in the genre.<sup>4</sup> If it is not wrong to say that Gibson's "intricate Orientalist flourishes" (Latham, 1993: 266) nevertheless exemplifies gender/racial blindness,<sup>5</sup> in feminist cyborg writing, a parallel development of cyberpunk (Harper, 1995: 400) that "utilize[s] the metaphor of the cyborg rather than that of cyberspace" (Wolmark, 1994: 127), one seems to see utopian potential. This so-called feminist cyborg writing is often able to imbue problems of identity and subjectivity with gender/racial consciousness.<sup>6</sup> While Gibson's cyberpunk often articulates white males as its heroes and upholds the values of that specific group, feminist cyborg writing tends to construct multiple, fragmented, and partial identities, and its protagonists are diversified in terms of their gender/racial orientation. However, the gender/racial crossing as manifested in feminist cyborg writing may, in the last analysis, remain superficial. "Asia as Other" continues to be the dominant image. This paper is an attempt to see how Asia is being conceptualized in feminist cyborg writing. On the one hand, we will analyze the strategies that feminist cyborg writing adopts in shattering gender/racial bias. On the other hand, we will also pinpoint the blind spots and dilemmas that those strategies may

entail. Before that, however, some notes on the development of cyberpunk may be appropriate to facilitate further discussion.

## I.

It was in the mid-1980s that cyberpunk made its debut in the science-fiction sphere. According to Scott Bukatman, cyberpunk owes much to two predecessors: so-called “hard” science fiction and New Wave (1993: 138). The term “cyberpunk” was first coined by Bruce Bethke in his short story “Cyberpunk”, published in the journal *Amazing Science Fiction Stories* in November 1983. Furthermore, on 30 December 1984, Gardner Dozois had an article in the *Washington Post* which designated a group of “hot new writers” as “cyberpunks”.<sup>7</sup> William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner, Pat Cadigan<sup>8</sup> and Greg Bear are the writers commonly associated with the cyberpunk movement. In fact, the term itself readily exemplifies the concern of the movement. “Cyber-” is linked to “cybernetics”,<sup>9</sup> which points to the intimate relationship between humans and the computer in recent decades. “Punk”,<sup>10</sup> moreover, has affinity with marginal culture or even counterculture and pinpoints a subversive or oppositional spirit. The degree to which cyberpunk was readily acclaimed by critics and general readers may be ascertained by the fact that Gibson’s classic *Neuromancer* was honored with three awards – the Hugo, the Nebula, and the Philip K. Dick Awards – in 1984, the year of its publication. Cyberpunk, moreover, has “shown remarkable resilience” (*apud* Murphy / Vint, 2010: xii). Proclaimed dead by numerous critics in the last decade of the twentieth century, it has in fact undergone “sea change into a more generalized cultural formation” (*ibidem*). Terms such as “postcolonial cyberpunk”, “third-wave cyberpunk” and “post-Movement cyberpunk” (*idem*, xii-xiii) testify to the genre’s ongoing significance. Veronica Hollinger also points out that, if the movement of cyberpunk is over by now, its tropes and its “impact on fictional representations of the (post)human subject” remain persistent in contemporary cyberfiction (Hollinger, 2010: 191). Cyberpunk writers are mostly male and from Texas; they are the first generation of science fiction writers to really grow up in a science-fiction world (Sterling, 1991: 344). For them, satellites, computers, video games, and diverse advanced technologies are no longer things that are remote; heavy metal, punk rock, drugs – whatever there are in pop culture – are also among their most intimates experiences (McCaffery, 1991: 12). Cyberpunk is often

regarded as capturing the very spirit of postmodernity. It is in a way a response to the techno-culture of the 1980s, and a comment on the postmodern condition: the predominance of transnational corporations, the blurring of traditional boundaries, the disappearance of historicity and sense of depth. In fact, critics tend to regard cyberpunk as one important aspect of postmodernism: its oppositional stance and subversion of hierarchies – the unsettling of binary structures such as elite/popular, public/private, history/fiction, science/art – are highlighted and regarded as exemplifying postmodern queries over conventions and authorities (Sterling, 1991: 344-348; McCaffery, 1991: 12-14; Bukatman, 1993: 6). Sterling's remark on the radical redefinition of humanity brought about by cyberpunk is typical:

Certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry – techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of self. (Sterling, 1991: 346)

This radical departure from traditional conceptions of body and mind is one prominent feature of cyberpunk,<sup>11</sup> and in fact one of its most fascinating aspects. Moreover, cyberpunk is adept at pinpointing latent tendencies in late capitalist societies. It often portrays a world swayed by transnational corporations and dominated by computer technologies and genetic engineering. In a world which sees the total destruction of its eco-system and the prevalence of dirt, sickness, and devastation, transnational corporations are often the one and only superpower to control the world. This tendency toward the apocalyptic is certainly dystopian, and in this light cyberpunk may be regarded as a contemporary variation of the dystopian genre. The heroes of cyberpunk, moreover, are frequently “information pirates” hired by these transnational corporations. They are the so-called “console cowboys” of the cyberspace, whose supreme objective is to retrieve valuable information and to procure profit from it. For them, money, not justice, is what matters.

Despite the positive assessment of cyberpunk mentioned above, there are nevertheless critics who tend to question the revolutionary gesture and oppositional stance of cyberpunk. Karen Cadora, for example, feels that the politics of cyberpunk is “anything but revolutionary” (1995: 357). Peter Fitting also sees cyberpunk as merely manifesting “technodazzle”, and indicates that whatever rebellious stance there may be in cyberpunk has

already been “emptied of any oppositional content” (1991: 297). Similarly, Claire Sponsler is of the opinion that cyberpunk is “powerless to sustain the socio-political radicalism and representational innovation its champions claim for it” (1995: 47). Furthermore, there are critics bent on criticizing so-called “gender blindness” (Wolmark, 1997: 140) on the part of cyberpunk, pinpointing the lack of any gender awareness in its all-male world. Some critics even go on to say that cyberpunk is characterized by escapism (Wolmark, 1997: 152-153; Hollinger, 1991: 213; Sponsler, 1995: 54). James Hynes’s assessment of Gibson is quite typical. For him, Gibson’s keynote is “a shrug”: “Dystopia is already here, say the cyberpunks, and we might as well get used to it” (*apud* Fitting, 1991: 313, note 8). Perhaps Darko Suvin can best represent the ambiguous attitude that critics adopt toward cyberpunk. Suvin regards cyberpunk as a marketable commodity, which has nothing whatsoever to do with radical political strategies. He even asks, “[I]s cyberpunk the diagnostician of or the parasite on a disease?” (1991: 364).

Feminist cyborg writing, therefore, arises as an alternative to the political nonchalance of cyberpunk. As feminist Fabulation,<sup>12</sup> feminist cyborg writing is a type of feminist speculative fiction<sup>13</sup> which “employ[s] SF’s potential to ‘defamiliarize’ the known toward some overtly polemical ends” (Rosinsky, 1982: 105). Women writers have resorted to cyborg writing for the purpose of “explor[ing] a plethora of differing relations available to the Subject and its Other” (Harper, 1995: 407) in the high-tech world of postmodernity. What is fascinating, moreover, is the articulation of the image of Asia as a way to assert gender/racial crossing. Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* (1991) and Maureen F. McHugh’s *China Mountain Zhang* (1992) are among the most noted examples. The following section is an exploration of the gender/racial breakthrough they have attempted to achieve.

## II.

The gender/racial politics of feminist cyborg writing owe much to the cyborgian politics upheld by Donna Haraway. In her 1985 essay “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”, Haraway advocates the advent of cyborgs as spelling the death of every kind of dualism and harbingering boundary breakdown. “[H]ailed as a benchmark in feminist thought” (Dery, 1996: 242), “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” argues for the recognition of “three crucial boundary breakdowns” (*idem*, 293) in the late twentieth century due to the development in

science and technology.<sup>14</sup> For Haraway, contemporary techno-culture invites rethinking along the axes of technology and the body.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the challenge that the myth of the cyborg poses to any “belief in ‘essential’ unity” (*idem*, 295) serves the purpose of “confront[ing] effectively the dominations of ‘race,’ ‘gender,’ ‘sexuality,’ and ‘class’” (297). This so-called “cyborgian sensibility” (Harper, 1995: 400), demonstrating the permeability of borders and the destabilization of the human subject,<sup>16</sup> proves to be of lasting influence on feminist cyborg writing. One noticeable example may be Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It*, which claims to have been inspired by Haraway’s essay (Booker, 1994: 343). Indeed, as Cadora argues, feminist writers “have gone far in demonstrating what a cyborg, a multiply-positioned subject, might look like”. Feminist cyborg writing is populated by people who “live on the margins of race” (*idem*, 370, 368). Take *He, She and It*, for example. Its woman warrior, Nili, seems to provide an ideal avenue for exploring the gender/racial encoding of the text. It is through her that the theme of “cultural blurring” becomes manifest (cf. Fitting, 1991: 313, note 9).

Nili is literally a cyborg. She is half-human, half-machine. Her entire body has been technologically enhanced to serve various ends. Moreover, she comes from Safed, Israel, that part of the world which has traditionally been an other for the western world and which has “lethal levels of radiation and plague” (1991: 198) and therefore becomes uninhabitable. Yet what is more remarkable about her is the fact that she and her race have transformed their native place into a women’s utopia:

We are a joint community of the descendants of Israel and Palestinian women who survived. We each keep our religion, observe each other’s holidays and fast days. We have no men. We clone and engineer genes. After birth we undergo additional alteration. We have created ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our land. Soon we will begin rebuilding Yerushalaim. (*ibidem*)

Contrary to the rest of the world, which is mostly devastated by every kind of disaster (with Tikva as the happy exception), Nili’s community is a utopia characterized by two distinct features: it is separatist and matriarchal. Its gender discourse is even more radical when we learn that Nili is in fact the lover of Riva – the protagonist Shira’s mother. In this feminist rewriting of cyberpunk, then, one seems to see utopian potential. The gender/racial breakthrough as manifested here seems to indicate that utopia does lie in this direction.

Malkah – Shira’s grandmother – is another interesting case in point. Toward the end of the novel, there is the description of her traveling to Israel with Nili to undergo a rejuvenating process: “I’m an old house about to be remolded. New eyes, a new heart, that’s what I need, to feed and keep up with my hungry brain” (*idem*, 417). Malkah further characterizes this trip as a spiritual quest: “traveling toward the hidden light I pray will soon be shining into me, a fountain of light into which I can plunge myself” (*idem*, 419). Malkah’s travel, then, is a repudiation of the deteriorating West and an exaltation of Oriental values. Her quest for Oriental wisdom is a gesture dismantling the hegemony of the West. What is more, gender/racial issues are alike intermingled here, in that Malkah also longs to be the resident of a women’s utopia: “I go to teach and to learn from women who will lift me up, wash me as if for burial and then give me renewed strength, rededicated life and the light I crave” (*idem*, 419).

If in *He, She and It* one can detect various instances of the conflation of gender and race, in another feminist cyborg writing – Maureen F. McHugh’s *China Mountain Zhang* – this trend is even more conspicuous. This book, a first novel, won general acclaim. As Gerald Jonas, in his book review written for the *New York Times*, indicates, “A first novel this good gives every reader a chance to share in the pleasure of discovery; to my mind, Ms. McHugh’s achievement recalls the best works of Samuel R. Delany and Kim Stanley Robinson, without being in the least derivative” (1992: 22). Another review even qualifies McHugh as “one of the decade’s best science fiction writers” (“New in Paperback”, 1997: par. 8). *China Mountain Zhang* depicts a future socialist world where China has become a supreme power and the United States has been relegated to a subsidiary position. The book is of special interest for its conflation of gender and race. In terms of both his gender and racial status, the protagonist Zhang<sup>17</sup> himself is the very epitome of boundary crossing. Zhang, an American-born Chinese of the twenty-second century, is also half Latino and gay. As pure Chinese blood enjoys privilege and heterosexuality is regarded as the norm in that future world, Zhang, conscious of his double estrangement, tries very hard to conceal his real identity.

After serving as a technician for many years in the U.S. and other regions including the Arctic Circle, Zhang eventually has an opportunity to pursue further study in China. He becomes a famous engineer specializing in so-called Daoist engineering, and his advice is

sought in every part of the human community, including settlers on Mars. Indeed, China has become a utopia and everything Chinese – be it education, philosophy, religion, technology, or even the countenance itself – is the very embodiment of perfection. Zhang’s reaction when he first visits China is typical of a utopian traveler:

The wonders multiply, maddening and exhausting. (McHugh, 1992: 214)

I live in an apartment so beautiful I am certain I will never live in anything like it again. (*idem*, 215)

To Zhang China is the very epitome of human achievement, an embodiment of wonder he can never detect in the United States. In fact the very beginning of the book already unravels the attempt at reversal of hierarchy and the drive at boundary breakdown. The opening section of the first chapter, entitled “Zhang”, introduces a melodrama in which issues of East/West and heterosexuality/homosexuality are made to converge. The story goes that Zhang’s boss, Foreman Qian, a Chinese emigrant in the U.S., is so fascinated by Zhang’s “pure” Chinese appearance, Chinese surname, and ability to speak Mandarin, that he would like his daughter to marry Zhang. Zhang, however, shatters whatever utopian aspiration Qian may have harbored because in fact he is gay and “a mongrel” (*idem*, 4). He looks Chinese simply because his parents have spent a lot of money to have him undergo a “genetic makeup” (*idem*, 2). Significantly, Zhang’s eventual courage to assert his own sexual/racial identity – “I tell myself, it doesn’t matter anyway” (*idem*, 268) – is therefore a testimony to the cyborgian sensibility prevalent in the book, since his status as a mongrel challenges the time-honored belief in gender/racial stereotypes and his genetically-altered body invites reconsideration of the posthuman condition in contemporary techno-culture.

The fascination that *China Mountain Zhang* manifests with regard to the Chinese language may also be a gesture at overthrowing the hegemony of the West. The book is characterized by the prevalence of Chinese romanization and Chinese syntax. The following examples may suffice to demonstrate this:

“I often ask you, what you do with your life, you pretty good boy,” Foreman Qian says. “We each and each respect, *dui budui?*”

“*Dui*,” I say. Right.

“Here, you tech engineer, job so-so.”

“*Bu-cuo*,” I answer, Not bad. (*idem*, 3)

My temples are shaved back and my bangs fall like a horse's forelock. *Very how can*, as they say. (*idem*, 237)

In these passages, what is manifest is the attempt at boundary crossing. The juxtaposition of English and *Pinyin* Chinese<sup>18</sup> and the employment of Chinese syntax<sup>19</sup> may both be efforts at eliminating hierarchies. And yet, from another perspective, one may wonder whether this is merely a manifestation of exoticism – an Orientalist touch that is mystifying but not at all functional in the lifting of gaps. Given the fact that throughout the book there are numerous examples of mistranslation,<sup>20</sup> one may rightly suspect that the boundary crossing that the book attempts to achieve may be superficial.

In fact, the cyborgian politics upheld by feminist cyborg writing is controversial in itself. The subversive potential of the cyborg has been called into question by various critics. Harper's discussion of feminist cyborgs comes out with the assertion that they "are still undeniably the dream-child of a positivist, rationalist American technology built by middle-class men of the previous two centuries" (1995: 405). Abby Wilkerson contends that Haraway's cyborg myth "evades the very issues of race and sexuality which it seems to be addressing", and that her cyborgian imagery in many cases "reinscribes the very norms she wishes to critique" (1997: 164-165). In terms of the destabilization of gender/racial norms, Balsamo is skeptical of the cyborg's potential (1996: 146-150), and Viviane Casimir regards the cyborg as a "problematic signifier" in that "it is the product of a new Cartesian metaphysics" (1997: 278). Convinced that cyborgian utopia is more apparent than real, Sharona Ben-Tov concludes that "[u]topia does not lie in that direction" (1995: 144). In the following discussion, then, we will attempt to unravel the blind spots of feminist cyborg writing in terms of its gender/racial discourse, to see how, in its conceptualization of Asia, stereotypical and dualistic thinking still looms large.

### III.

In the future depicted by cyberpunk, according to Fitting, "there has been an increasing blurring of Western and Eastern cultures and commodities, with a special focus on the burgeoning high-tech economies of Japan and the Pacific Rim" (1991: 300). Wolmark also refers to the prevalence of "transnational corporate capitalism" (Wolmark,

1997: 145) in the genre. Japan in *He, She and It* and China in *China Mountain Zhang* are two prominent examples, in which, however, the illusion of boundary crossing cannot efface the deep-seated conceptualization of Asia as Other. In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said has pointed out that “[t]he Orient is (...) one of (...) Europe’s (...) deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1978: 1). The Orient is “almost a European invention”, “help[ing] to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (*idem*, 1-2).<sup>21</sup> Exploring the imagining of Asia in feminist cyborg writing, we eventually confront two sets of conflicting images: “Asia as a threatening other” and “Asia as a feminized other”. The two may be contradictory, and yet together they help pinpoint the fact that feminist cyborg writing still reinscribes gender/racial stereotypes despite its apparent effort at dismantling them.

*He, She and It*, to begin with, helps reiterate stereotypical and dualistic ideology by depicting the conflict between Yakamura-Stichen Multi [Y-S] and Tikva as that between the East and the West. Y-S as a transnational corporation may carry the implication of cultural blurring, and indeed the hyphenation of the Japanese “Yakamura” and the English “Stichen” seems to suggest racial crossing. However, in many ways the Multi rather signifies a threatening other that has to be suppressed. The confrontation between Y-S and Tikva, for example, is a life-and-death struggle which claims many lives and eventually shatters Yod the cyborg and his creator, Avram the scientist. The story again and again presents Y-S as a menacing other – “I want your answer by nine a.m. next Tuesday, three October. Otherwise we will launch our attack” (Piercy, 1991: 393). Y-S and Tikva are diametrically opposed to each other and there is no possibility of communication. Toward the end the decline of Y-S, moreover, signifies the vanquishing of the East and the rise of the West. It would seem that the invocation of Japan is simply impotent in upholding the spirit of cultural crossing.

The conflict between Y-S and Tikva, furthermore, is a confrontation between patriarchy and matriarchy. Y-S, with its “male dominance” (*idem*, 4), exercises “patriarchal laws” (*idem*, 10) which make Shira feel that she is “too physical here, too loud, too female, too Jewish, too dark, too exuberant, too emotional” (*idem*, 5). Tikva, by contrast, is a free town which allows for the advocacy of matriarchy. Shira’s family has been a typical case:

Her grandmother had raised her, as was the custom with women of her family. Malkah told her that when a woman had a baby, it was of her line. Men came, men went, but she should remember that her first baby belonged to her mother and to her but never to the father. (...) Of her Malkah expected much. She was the daughter of the line. (*idem*, 38)

This assertion of women's lineage immediately contrasts sharply with Y-S, which confiscates Shira's right as a mother and awards her son Ari's custody to her ex-husband. Shira eventually has to resort to violence to get her son back. There is simply no way to minimize polarity between the two parties. Dualistic ideology is what reigns.

In the case of *China Mountain Zhang*, Foreman Qian's daughter San-xiang is an interesting case for scrutinizing the imagining of Asia in the text. San-xiang can be envisioned as a cyborg in that she has undergone extensive cosmetic surgery to be transformed from an extremely ugly girl to an exceptional beauty. The sexual politics here, however, are quite suspect because the story is the epitome of gender stereotyping. San-xiang's enthusiasm over her new life ahead is a case in point:

I don't want to be the old San-xiang any more. Poor, ugly San-xiang who had no jaw and little squinty eyes and who looked like she was congenitally stupid. This is it, my chance. I'm going to change my life. I'm going to look for a new job, have new friends, be a new person. (...) Practice, so when I change jobs, I'll be accustomed to my new face, and no one will ever suspect that I once looked ugly and stupid. I put on new clothes, I have a new haircut to match the shape of my new face. (...) The world is new. (McHugh, 1992: 237)

Here one may wonder whether San-xiang can really take up the subversive role that Haraway envisions for her cyborg. It seems rather that San-xiang merely embodies patriarchal designation of women and repeats the stereotypical image of women. In fact San-xiang is strikingly similar to Gildina 547-921-45-822-KBJ, a girl from a dystopian future depicted in Piercy's 1976 *Woman on the Edge of Time*, a feminist utopian novel where meditation on the relationship between technology and the female body, a recurring motif of feminist cyborg writing, can already be detected. Gildina's technologically altered body, the very embodiment of femininity, serves as the plaything of man. To survive in her intensely patriarchal / hierarchical and almost cannibalistic world, Gildina always has to resort to various kinds of plastic surgery to keep herself in perfect shape so that men would love her and give her sustenance. The following description of her "artificial" body may serve as an apt example:

She popped off the bed and stood facing Connie, quivering with anger. They were about the same height and weight, although the woman was younger and her body seemed a cartoon of femininity, with a tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts that stuck out like the brassieres Connie herself had worn in the fifties – but the woman was not wearing a brassiere. Her stomach was flat but her hips and buttocks were oversized and audaciously curved. She looks as if she could hardly walk for the extravagance of her breasts and buttocks, her thighs that collided as she shuffled a few steps. (*idem*, 287-288)

Gildina is thus a cyborg, too. Gildina as a cyborg, however, merely perpetuates the patriarchal definition of women and does not carry any transgressive potential.

The romance of San-xiang and Bobby the “*waiguoren*” [foreigner] (*idem*, 241) is also illuminating when examined from a gender/racial perspective. Bobby is enthralled by San-xiang, the very embodiment of China, a feminized other. If Bobby represents the West, then San-xiang is the East that is ancient, mysterious, and unattainable. Their first encounter is full of Orientalist flavor and yet also unravels a tremendous gap between the two beyond any hope of bridging:

“What’s your name?”  
“Qian San-xiang,” I say.  
“San-xiang,” he says, “that’s a pretty name. What’s it mean?”  
“It means ‘Three Fragrances.’”  
“My name’s Bobby.” He shrugs. “Unfortunately, it doesn’t mean anything.” (*idem*, 241)

In the subsequent story, Bobby/West’s wooing of San-xiang/East turns out to be an attempt on the part of Bobby/West to impose his own values onto San-xiang/East. The effort to dominate the other culminates in a scene in Bobby’s apartment where Bobby forces San-xiang and sexually abuses her. The scenario aptly highlights a world that is very much dualistic and patriarchal. In this world, the world of feminist cyborg writing, it seems indeed that gender/racial crossing remains only superficial.

This article is an attempt at scrutinizing the gender/racial discourse in feminist cyborg writing. Examining Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* and Maureen F. McHugh’s *China Mountain Zhang* as target texts, we have discovered that there are blind spots in the discourse and that, despite the supposed goal of feminist cyborg writing, the imagining of Asia fails to articulate gender/racial crossing. Given their limitations, the two texts nevertheless are important signposts indicating significant concerns of contemporary feminist science fiction.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chiba City, a Japanese city near Tokyo, is described by Gibson in *Neuromancer* as full of "cutting edge" black clinics specializing in "implants, nerve-splicing, and microbionics" (1984: 4, 6), from which the protagonist Case hopes to find remedy for the damage his nervous system has suffered.

<sup>2</sup> One of the 23 corporate enclaves in the post-holocaust world of Piercy's *He, She and It*. The Multi, where the protagonist Shira works, is hierarchical, patriarchal and, moreover, racially biased.

<sup>3</sup> A city in China where the protagonist, Zhang, of McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang* goes to study in a university.

<sup>4</sup> Several critical works have attempted to address the issue of race in science fiction. For example, Patricia Melzer (2006), discusses the racial politics of Octavia E. Butler, one of the few black feminist science fiction writers publishing in English; Jeffrey Allen Tucker (2004) discusses another black science fiction writer, Samuel R. Delany; a 2004 special section of *FEMSPEC*, edited by Batya Weinbaum, was dedicated

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to the issue of race in Octavia E. Butler. However, these studies are mainly concerned with the representation of the black. It seems that Asia has somewhat been overlooked. It is not until very recently that the rapport between postcolonial perspectives and science fiction is more comprehensively addressed. See, for example, the “Introduction” to *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (Hoagland / Sarwal, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For the criticism of Gibson see especially Karen Cadora (1995) and Nicola Nixon (1992). Gibson’s *Neuromancer* is often regarded as the template of cyberpunk, as can be seen in the title of Rob Latham’s review article “Cyberpunk=Gibson=*Neuromancer*” (1993), or Claire Sponsler’s observation that “William Gibson’s work (...) has been hailed (and rightly so) as putting cyberpunk on the map” (1995: 47). Both critics, however, are very critical of cyberpunk. Latham comments: “the movement, as a literary practice and a cultural ideology, gets forced into a straitjacket – a flashy one, true, patterned with intricate Orientalist flourishes, but confining nonetheless” (1993: 266). Sponsler is no less critical: “If cyberpunk has finally arrived, then it has come in crucial ways DOA – dead on arrival – powerless to sustain the socio-political radicalism and representational innovation its champions claim for it” (1995: 47).

<sup>6</sup> Several critics have attempted to explore the complicity between patriarchal and colonialist discourse. In a section entitled “The Relevance of Feminism to the Orientalist Debate” in *Orientalism and Religion* (1999: 112), Richard King, for example, argues that stereotypical representations of the Westerner / the Indian tend to revolve along the axis of rational males / irrational females. Silvia Nagy-Zekmi (2003) analyzes the construction of the postcolonial female subject and explores the representation of both colonial and patriarchal oppression. The relevance of Nagy-Zekmi’s investigation to mine lies in her effort to “counter the images of the so-called Third World women that appear in the world media, or in Hollywood where women from India, the Arab world or Latin America are often represented with exaggerated exoticism” (2003: 171-172). My critique of McHugh’s representation of the Chinese girl San-xiang in the third section of this paper also partly falls on the “exaggerated exoticism”.

<sup>7</sup> For detail please refer to “Cyberpunk Timeline” in the online *The Cyberpunk Project*, <<http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/timeline.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> Cadigan is “the sole woman in the cyberpunk canon” who, however, “never fully engages with feminist concerns” (Cadora, 1995: 358).

<sup>9</sup> “Cybernetics” is “the theoretical study of communication and control processes in biological, mechanical, and electronic systems, especially the comparison of these processes in biological and artificial systems” (“Cybernetics”, 2006). According to Dani Cavallaro in *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture*, “The roots of cyberpunk are not, of course, purely literary. The ‘cyber’ in cyberpunk refers to science and, in particular, to the revolutionary redefinition of the relationship between humans and machines brought about by the science of cybernetics” (2000: 12).

<sup>10</sup> As Andrew M. Butler explains in *Cyberpunk*, “The punk is referring to the low life, the working or lower middle-class characters, the have-nots, who populate such fiction. Rather than rocket scientists and beautiful daughters, cyberpunk features drug dealers, drug users, musicians, skateboarders as characters, as well as various hackers” (2000: 15). Cavallaro observes, “The coupling of cybernetics and punk may well seem an unholy marriage, given certain popular tendencies to associate the former with control, order and logic and the latter with anarchy, chaos and unrest. However, that pairing should not come as a total surprise, for what writers like Gibson needed – in order to represent a paradoxical culture riven by conflict and contradiction – was precisely a figure that could bring together apparently incompatible aspects of contemporary life” (2000: 19).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the following comments by Kevin McCarron: “The body, for cyberpunk writers, is an ‘accident’, unconnected to the pure substance of mind. They are fascinated by ‘enhancement’; throughout their novels the human body becomes less organic and more artificial, increasingly machine-like” (1995: 262).

<sup>12</sup> As Marleen S. Barr explains in her *Feminist Fabulation: Space / Postmodern Fiction*, the term “feminist fabulation” is “an umbrella term” that includes both “feminist speculative fiction and feminist mainstream works”. Barr goes on to define “feminist fabulation” as “feminist fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way” (1992: 10).

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<sup>13</sup> According to Marleen S. Barr in her *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*, feminist speculative fiction includes “feminist utopias, science fiction, fantasy, and sword and sorcery” (1987: xxi, note 1).

<sup>14</sup> They are: the boundary between human and animal; the boundary between animal-human (organism) and machine; the boundary between physical and non-physical (Haraway, 1985: 293-294).

<sup>15</sup> As Dery explains, “Technology calls into question time-honored ideas about the body. We live in an age of engineered monsters, when the human form seems increasingly indeterminate – reducible to replaceable parts” (1996: 231). The “traditional perceptions of the body and the self are [also] under attack by contemporary feminist theory. (...) Since the early eighties, academic inquiries into the extent to which our knowledge of the body is culturally produced, rather than naturally determined, have proliferated” (*idem*, 236-237).

<sup>16</sup> The human subject, instead of the traditional perception of it as an organic whole, is envisioned as “immersed in a vast and inescapably complex technological space” (Rutsky, 1999: 14).

<sup>17</sup> Zhang’s full name is Zhang Zhong Shan. He is named after the Chinese national father Sun Yat-sen, who is also known as “Zhong Shan”. This name literally means “Middle Mountain” or “China Mountain”.

<sup>18</sup> There are several systems of Chinese romanization currently in use. The one employed here, exemplified by the italicized terms, is also called *Pinyin* Chinese, which is the system devised by the PRC. “*dui budui?*” means ‘is that right?’; “*how can*” means “good looking”.

<sup>19</sup> Foreman Qian’s remarks largely follow Chinese syntax, an instance of so-called Pidgin English. For example, “We each and each respect” is the literal translation of *Pinyin* Chinese “*women bici zunzhong*” (“We respect each other”).

<sup>20</sup> Here are two kinds of examples:

A. Semantic errors:

1. “Finally she sighs. ‘*Bukeqi, tongzhi,*’ she says. I am sorry citizen.” (*idem*, 63)

Here “*Bukeqi*” should have been “*Duibuqi*” (“I am sorry”).

2. “‘*Ta ma-da,*’ I say, Your mother. ‘Just get dressed and come down to the coffee bar.’” (*idem*, 162).

Here “*Ta ma-da*” is a swearword, and should not have been translated as “Your mother”.

B. Grammatical errors:

1. “I catalogue my complaints for the nurse who frowns and tells me that I am not in the system. ‘*Ni gang lai-le ma?*’”

I went to a special secondary school where we spoke nothing but Mandarin, I can dream in Mandarin, so how come my fever be-fogged brain has to translate laboriously to recognize, ‘You just got here?’” (*idem*, 129)

Here “*Ni gang lai-le ma?*” is meant to be equivalent to “You just got here?” However, the use of “*le*” in “*lai-le*” is grammatically wrong and “*le*” should have been deleted. “*Ni gang lai-le ma?*” should have been “*Ni gang lai ma?*”

2. “My fellow passengers are business travelers – men dressed as I am in black suits with red shirts, the uniform of the *bailing jieceng de*, the white-collar class” (*idem*, 210).

Here the “*de*” in “*bailing jieceng de*” should have been deleted, as “*de*” here indicates the possessive case, and thus is grammatically incongruous.

<sup>21</sup> Resorting to Gramsci’s idea of hegemony, Said contends that “Orientalism depends for its strategy on (...) *positional* superiority”, upholding “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (1978: 7). Moreover, in the postmodern world, as Said observes, “there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. (...) So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’” (*idem*, 26). According to R. L. Rutsky, this designation of “non-Western” cultures may have much to do with the technological. He observes: “[C]ultures or discourse (...) that perceive the world in terms other than those of rational, scientific knowledge and technological control are necessarily characterized as antimodern, irrational, often even as ‘primitive’” (1999: 3). However, as he further observes, in “representations of technological life” such as Gibson’s cyberpunk, there is often the “return of the magical or the spiritual”, which “involve[s] a return of those racial and gender differences repressed by the patriarchal, Eurocentric conception of the modern human subject” (*idem*, 18, 19). My stance in this section is nevertheless less

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utopian. Given the effort to accentuate gender and race, stereotypical and dualistic thinking still looms large.