

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: EAST

WEST
21

比较文学：东方与西方

Department of Comparative Literature
Institute of Comparative Literature
Sichuan University, China



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Recognition, Dissemination and Acceptance of “Cyborg” in China

—A Brief Survey Beginning from *The Matrix* ^[1]

Zemei YU

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中文摘要：科技的发展加深了技术对人身体的介入程度，形成新的人类存在形式：人机混合体“赛博格”。电影《黑客帝国》是对赛博格成功的视觉呈现，是商业文化的宠儿，但国内赛博格概念在传播过程中所起的作用微乎其微，让位于真实世界中的赛博格事件，这反映了国人对科技进步的期许与拥戴。国内期刊上的赛博格话语揭示了国内对赛博格概念的认知、传播和接受状况，表明文化产品意义的生成具有选择性，话语的生产具有历史语境性。

Since the 1970s, science and technology have been increasingly invading human body, the physical body, the inner cells, and even brain, the thinking body of man. This creates the possibility of a new human species: cyborg. “Cyborg”, as a blend word, comes from “cybernetic organism”, referring to a hybrid of machine and organism. This can be traced back to 1948 when Norbert Wiener, a US mathematician and logician, introduced the concept of interaction between human and machine. In 1960, two NASA scientists, Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, combined “organism” with “cybernetics” to highlight the mixture of steel and human body, a unity with two contradictory elements. Their initiative is to help human survive in the outer space with empowered machines. In 1971, the publication of *As Man Becomes Machine: The Evolution of the Cyborg*, a popular science reading by David Rorvik, sped up the dissemination of the concept “cyborg”, which finally developed into a term with various new connotations,

becoming a hot issue in contemporary culture and thus attracting attention from the academia. In 1991, the feminism theorist Donna Haraway published her famous “A Cyborg Manifesto”, announcing that “cyborg” is not only “a creature of fiction”, but also “a creature of social reality”.^[2] This formally marked the theoretical actualization of cyborg as a human type, and will “directly and indirectly help to modify our everyday common-sense understandings of how bodies work.”^[3]

I. “Cyborg” in *The Matrix*

“Cyborg”, as a new form of human being, is the result of technology’s invasion into human body, and thus the ultimate stage of human’s efforts to transform the human body. Now, “cyborg” has been not only a topic for the academia, but also an inspiration for artists like film makers. *The Matrix*, a typical cyborg film released in 1999, made a big office-box success. It even evolved into a rare cultural phenomenon, attracting both ordinary audiences and academia. Even the proud French academia who had not before cared to study Hollywood films launched a seminar to explore the philosophy in this film.^[4] As a classic science fiction film, *The Matrix* has its settings in the high-tech near future, and the characters in it are all cyborgs who look like ordinary human beings, but with extraordinary abilities beyond normal human beings. With the sockets located on the back of their head, they, or more accurately their mind, can enter the cyberspace, leaving their body behind. When some ability is needed, they can just conveniently upload that ability’s information to the brain and then they own that ability.

This is where a cyborg differentiates itself from normal human beings. They have gone beyond the human-machine line marking the current stage of human being in the traditional sense, reaching the stage of “post-human”, as some scholars have named. In this future, “notions of a human nature determined by a ‘physical essence’ of the human begin to lose credibility and, consequently, many behavioral pattern defined by sexual difference become irrelevant”.^[5] Thus cyborg as a special body form has become a semiotic existence and grew into a cultural phenomenon, causing heated debates among researchers who focus on such topics as whether cyborgs have soul or not, whether they can live and whether they have freedom and the right of self-determination. All these questions reflect worries about meanings of human existence everlasting in scientific revolutions.^[6]

So how the image of cyborg presented in *The Matrix* is represented in Chinese Academia and pop culture? In order to answer this question and further explore how

the concept of cyborg is recognized, disseminated and accepted in China, 170 articles published since 1975, by means of the key words of *Heike Digu* (*The Matrix*) and Chinese versions related with “cyborg”, were collected from the *China National Knowledge Infrastructure*, the China knowledge resource integrated database. This practice was inspired by the Foucaultian concept of “discourse”. The similar speeches about the same topic in different texts, different social institutions, social controls, and social fields make an “episteme”, or a subject matter. A discourse, by means of creating subject matters, defines and produces various objects of our knowledge. It dominates the way a topic is articulated and questioned, influences the norms to put thoughts into practice and regulate people’s behaviors, and at the same time constructs the way to talk about the same topic. Similarly, the cyborg texts collected from the CNKI make a topic, and thus an episteme, reflecting the recognition, transmission and acceptance of “cyborg” in China.

II. Chinese Translation of “Cyborg”

There are several different Chinese versions for the term “cyborg”: *dianziren*, *shenghuaren*, *saiboge*, *saiboren*. Among them, *dianziren* is the one used most frequently, while *Shenghuaren* is the least. *Saiboren* is more often seen on the websites. *Saiboge* is rather an academic option, with an exception in the title of a 2006 Korean film *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* (*Saiboge zhilian*), though *dianziren* is also an alternative choice for another Chinese name (*dianziren ye wusuowei*) of this film. The popular choice of *dianziren* indicates that in the Chinese discourse, “easy to understand” is the leading principle in choosing a foreign term.

In the Chinese context, Cyborg as a term appeared first in 1975 as *dianziren* from an article titled “Will *Dianziren* Revolt?” in the 4th issue of the *Journal of Tianjin Normal University*. This paper was to criticize the threatening speeches about the independence of man-controlling cyborgs proposed by the “imperialist” US and former Soviet Union. It was an essay intoned with class war, exactly characteristic of that particular period in modern China, though 25 years later, *dianziren* oppositely received the honor of being a dream highly appreciated by Chinese people. This seems to exemplify Foucault’s theory that social institutions are always playing a crucial role in discourse.

A second paper about cyborg appeared until 1994. It is a translation (from English) of a preface to a picture album about an exhibition about posthuman. In this essay, invasion of technology into human body is expounded.^[7]

Since 2000, the same year when the science fiction film *The Matrix* was introduced into China on the big screen, articles about cyborg emerged in various journals or magazines. It was first presumed that there should be a causal relationship between the two events, namely the release of the film in China triggered the debates about cyborg. But further research shows that it was not the case at all.

III. Central Subject Matter: Real “Cyborgs”

In the emerging discussions about cyborg, what is the position of the film *The Matrix* so much favored in the entertainment culture?

Strangely enough, in the “cyborg” texts collected from the CNKI, *The Matrix* is mentioned only twice in 2 journals. One is in the article “Believe it or not: chips implanted in body to transmit information”^[8]: the cyborg in real life Kevin Warwick said, “I never consider *The Matrix* as a science fiction film, but one representing future in advance. I see from it how human beings will look like before 2050. What is described in it is just the world you and me will live in.” A photo of Neo, the handsome hero in the film is added to that article. Another mentioning of this popular movie is in an article entitled “Robot Bird and *Dianziren*”.^[9] Under the poster of the motion picture is a script: “In *The Matrix*, human brains are implanted with chips and human beings become slaves controlled by the Matrix the computer system.”

In fact, the two papers referring to the film offered very little information about cyborg. The first one just hints at the coming of a cyborg era, while the second focuses on the possibility of human’s being controlled by machines after becoming cyborgs. What’s more, quite few other cyborg films are mentioned in the collected articles, except *The Terminator*, and *The X-ray File*.

That is to say, in this debate about cyborg, science fiction films are not the central subject at all. In terms of cultural products, there exists a selective mechanism in producing its meanings. Although *The Matrix* typically displays the concept of cyborg, it does not play the crucial role in the discourse to disseminate this concept. What attracts people most, especially in the academia, is its philosophical thinking about reality and virtuality, a response to the fast development of the computer network deconstructing and reshaping the traditional society. But, its commercial and entertainment values, together with its contribution to the development of film special effects and film concepts seem to have drawn much more attention from

people. And all these are enframèd in the trajectory of fashion writing and reading controlled by capital and media. The discourse about “cyborg” is of little commercial value, and thus is marginalized in this craze for *The Matrix*, thus appearing mainly on those ordinary readings, like those for middles school students.

Then what is the focus of this discussion? It is “the cyborg in the real life”. With the development of technology, some people have already tried to connect man directly with scientific products, resulting in cyborgs in real life, though not as fantastic as those in the science fiction films. These cyborgs fall into three types.

The first type is those who make learning and communication easier with the help of the e-products. The representative is Steve Mann, a Canadian professor of engineering from Toronto University. He equipped his right eye with a complicated glass computer and observed the outside world through this system, as well as interacting with the Internet. He believed that by means of this equipment, a more powerful and independent person can protect his/her privacy better. In his opinion, cyborg can help him resist machine and system. “Computer helps me recognize things around me more thoroughly in greater details,” he said, “and it changes my perception and consciousness. I have a total different view of the outside world. Things totally unbelievable before now become truly credible.”^[10] This is cyborg in the broader sense, since technology is still outside the human body. Some discussions about this event even mark those who use high-tech products as cyborgs.^[11]

The second type includes those who bear information chips under their skin. In this case, technology has invaded human body. Through the scanner connected to the computer, information in these chips could be transmitted into computer for checking. This is particularly used for certain patients in emergency: the hospital can know their medical situation right away and choose proper therapies just by reading records stored in the chips. Children also benefit from this technology which tells their positions, and when kidnapped, they can be easily positioned. A famous example is the Jacob family in Florida, US. They volunteered to implant in their arms chips which can help doctors examine their body and make health evaluation.^[12] This is actually passive cyborg, with the chip as an independent implant to offer information. We can see also here people’s trust in science and technology, information in chips being safe and credible.

The third type refers to those who manipulate things through implants in the body. The most famous representative is Kevin Warwick, a British professor of cybernetics at the University of Reading, the No. 1 center of attraction in the cyborg

discussions. Inspired by science fiction films, he started in 1998 the experiment to implant chips into his arms and to switch on/off lights and doors of the lab building by means of sensor in the chips. In 2002, he went further to connect his neural system with the chips and the Internet, so that he could have “empathy” with his wife similarly wired to the network: when he rounded up his palms and his wife did the same at the same time. He could move the wheelchair connected to the computer, and even control through his “thought” the movement of another mechanic hand 1000 miles away but connected to the Internet. He thus became the first cyborg in the real life. He declared that this experiment was to explore ways to help cure the paralyzed, blind, and deaf who might be able to “stand up”, to “see” and to “hear” with such a technology. He had a bigger ambition to experiment the connection of his brain nerves with machine. He once visited China and was warmly welcomed. He delivered a speech about his experiences of being a cyborg in Shanghai and the Sina chatting room.^[13]

IV. Dissemination and Acceptance of Real Cyborgs

The above cyborgs in real life, though not as fantastic and powerful as those in the science fiction films, have made a discourse field, showing people one possibility of high-tech future. At the same time, they also help people see the double edges of science and technology: benefiting while controlling humans.

But how cyborg, as a technological event, became familiar with Chinese people? And what are their responses to such a science possibility?

From the articles collected, it can be observed that reports about this event are mainly on scientific magazines or journals for students, including *PC Shopper*, *Grand Garden of Science*, *Computers and Network*, *Pop Hardware*, *China Awards for Science and Technology*, *Friend of Science Amateurs*, *Rural Electrification*, *World Outlook*, *Teenagers Digest*, *Teenagers*, *Pupils' Guide*, etc. In these writings, cyborg is always considered as a science miracle. Both the positive and negative effects of cyborg are duely mentioned, but the focus is more on the positive effects, such as better living standard and learning efficiency, etc. This is particularly obvious in journals for students. Editors and writers of these magazines tend to attract readers' attention more to the beautiful side of science and technology, leading the young people to imagine a future with cyborgs. This might be out of the common aim of these scientific magazines, as well as the need of the nation, to enlighten children in terms of science and technology.

We can see this more clearly from readers' science fiction "writings" about cyborg. One titled "The Horrible Cyborg" tells a story about a group of children defeating a failure scientific nerd who committed crimes by using computers.^[14] Another journal invited young readers to imagine, basing on the stories of professor Kevin Warwick, what would happen if he/she was implanted with chips.^[15] Half a year later, some young contributors' articles were published describing a cyborgian future easy, convenient, and beautiful, in which chips can be used to recognize criminals, or become walking libraries, or help with medical treatments or mind-travelling in the universe.^[16] Still another short story named "I am a Cyborg" relates a science romance. A young man who received a medical experimentation of chip implanting fell in love with a blind girl. At the end of the story, when implying that the girl was just the soul mate he wanted, he said, "Who knows? Science might help us to decide."^[17] Here human even allows science to determine his fate.

That seems how far went the responses to cyborg in the Chinese popular culture. In general, it can be said that people tend to accept and expect this cyborgian future, though the negative side of it is also revealed in the reports about cyborg. The academia is comparatively more interested in the negative effects of cyborg. As a scientific event and a new human form, cyborg is also a sign with certain cultural significance: the challenge to the traditional concept of "being human" and the corresponding worries about human future. When discussing cyborg, the scholars always use such concepts as "post-human", "post-body" to declare the ending of traditional concepts about "human". This has been the typical and core content of the debate about cyborg in the Chinese academia. Chinese scholars, like their western counterparts, are exploring the human-human relationship, human-machine relationship, and subject(ivity), as well as critique of science and technology.

The cyborg discourse in popular culture in China shows that the formation of a cultural concept involves a long process, and in dissemination and acceptance of a cultural product, there exists a selective mechanism in the production of its meaning. However, all the events and information about cyborg make a discourse in Foucault's sense or method to talk about or represent this topic in particular periods. They will then produce knowledges about "cyborg", entering the Chinese traditional culture which will become enriched with the development of science and technology in this country.

Notes:

- [1] Project No.CQDXWL-2013-045 supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities.
- [2] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 149.
- [3] Mike Featherstone, "Body Modification: An Introduction", in *Body Modification*, Mike Featherstone, ed., (London: Sage Publications, 2000) 2.
- [4] See "Product Description" of the book *Jacked in The Matrix*, http://product.dangdang.com/8768032.html#ddclick?act=click&pos=8768032_6_0_p&cat=01.00.00.00.00&key=%BA%DA%BF%CD%B5%DB%B9%FA&qinfo=&pinfo=7_1_72&minfo=&ninfo=&custid=&permid=20140708152544819108130802310734555&ref=http%3A%2F%2Fsearch.dangdang.com%2F%3Fkey%3D%E9%BB%91%E5%AE%A2%E5%B8%9D%E5%9B%BD&rcount=&type=&t=1405169948000, retrieved on July 12, 2014.
- [5] Veronica Hollinger, "Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism", in *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction*, Larry McCaffery, ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 210.
- [6] Cao Jianbo, Cao Xiangrong, "Review of Post-modernism Theories", in *Posthuman Culture* (Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2004) 5.
- [7] Jefferey Datch, translated by Xu Mingqing. "Posthuman", *World Art*, 1994; 3:12-16.
- [8] See *Pop Hardwares*, 2003; 1:150.
- [9] See *World for Middle School Students*, 2007; 6:49.
- [10] Anonymous, "World in the Eyes of 'Cyborgs'", *Grand Garden of Science*, 2004; 3:13.
- [11] Xue Feng, "On the Relationship Between 'Cyborgs' and Ecological Crisis", *Journal of Anhui Vocational & Technical College*, 2006; 1:33-35.
- [12] Anonymous, "Shall We Be Cyborgs?", *Teenagers Digest*, 2002; 6:68-71.
- [13] See Qi Yun, " 'Cyborgs': Believe it or Not", *Pop Hardware*, 2003; 1: 150; Sister Le Le, "Do You Want to Be a Cyborg?", *Open Class Magazines* (for Pupils), 2002; 12:48.
- [14] See Qiao Tong, *Teenager Literature* (for Pupils), 2003; Z2:83-86.
- [15] See *Little Copernicus-Fun Science*, 2004; 1.
- [16] See *Little Copernicus-Fun Science*, 2004; 7:34-35.
- [17] Xu Ming, "I am a Cyborg", *Health Review*, 2001; 4:23.

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Representation and Authenticity of Testimonial Literature: Geoffrey Hartman on Holocaust Studies

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中文摘要: 本文集中关注 20 世纪 80 年代后当代美国学者杰弗里·哈特曼的批评主旨。作者指出,哈特曼更多地关注文学批评的社会功能,他在主张赋予审美以其应有的尊严的同时,也反对文学研究对社会学的过度忽视。因此,他以大屠杀研究为突破口,将维护艺术自身形式要素特征和杜绝艺术麻木不仁的防御姿态结合起来,选择了证词录像作为再现大屠杀历史的方式。作为一种文学叙事,证词录像既克服了实证主义史学家所称的客观真实,又克服了现代媒体文化带来的思维和精神惰性,以艺术的真实和想象唤起大众对外在世界的强烈感受,从而实现了其独特的述行功能。

I . Introduction

Before the 1970s, Geoffrey Hartman has been a distinguished scholar on literary issues of romanticism, deconstruction and creative criticism, a “classical Hartman”^[1] as Harper Beckham has addressed him. After that, however, the Holocaust comes to be a major concern in his research partly because of his Jewish identity. He engages himself with organizing and preparing the Holocaust Video Archive Program while thinking over such issues as authenticity, representation, public memory, which are closely related to modern media culture. In 1979, he became a member on The Holocaust Survivor Film Project started by a professor at Yale University, and from 1981 on, he set out to establish with great enthusiasm the influential Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale University by making videos of the Holocaust survivors and witnesses in the United States, Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Yugoslavia, Israel, Latvia, Slovenia, Argentina and other