



## **Not Dreaming and Other Techniques of the Body: Trains, Technology and Nation in Socialist print culture**

This paper examines filmic representations of trains in the PRC from 1949 to 1976, as a figure for modernization and the formation of a national body. Within these narratives, I examine how PRC cultural production focused on “citizen science,” how the train was used as a metaphor for the formation of a national body, how these works depicted the formation of a national body as a form of bodily discipline. In this context, I suggest that socialist realism may be considered a form of science fiction, and examine how socialist realism as a form was based on a vision of “viral” cultural circulation.

Chinese depictions of science during the “17 years” valorized amateur production and dissemination of scientific knowledge, and depictions of trains, railroads and the lives of their passengers were no exception. These narratives also focus on the construction of what I term “quotidian utopias” – utopian spaces carved out in the contemporary moment through a communal investment in mutual sacrifice. This space becomes a metaphor for industrial and social progress, represented by the broad swaths of working class proletarian passengers. Key among the laboring masses aboard the train are the train conductors, attendants, and rail workers. These workers are often depicted as learning new, Maussian “techniques of the body” in service of their duties maintaining the trains and the social welfare of the passengers. Often, contributing to the health of the train as nation is figured as necessitating the sacrifice of the individual – through losing sleep, or worse.

**Nathaniel Isaacson** (he, him, his) is an Associate Professor of Modern Chinese Literature in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at North Carolina State University. His research interests include the history of Chinese science and science fiction, Chinese cinema, cultural studies, and literary translation. Nathaniel has published articles in the *Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*, and journals including *Osiris* and *Science Fiction Studies*. He has also published translations of non-fiction, poetry and fiction in the translation journals *Renditions*, *Pathlight*, *Science Fiction Studies*, and *Chinese Literature Today*. His book, *Celestial Empire: the Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction* (2017), examines the emergence of sf in late Qing China. A number of recent translations of sf author Han Song were included in the volume *Exploring Dark Fiction #5: A Primer to Han Song* (2020). His current book project, *Moving the People: the Aesthetics of Mass Transit in Modern China*, examines narratives of development as a theme in modern Chinese literary and visual culture primarily through the figure of the train.