

# Human Beings and Technology: Identity Anxiety and Its Settlement——A Comparative Study of Frankenstein and the Song of Life

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**Abstract:** In today's world, science and technology shows a different picture in each new day with high-speed development. Now, human beings are going through a technological revolution influencing the whole world, various kinds of cutting-edge technologies springing out such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and robot-related technology. They are deeply influencing and changing people's life in every way. Currently, intelligent robots with extraordinary learning capacity have begun to assist even replace human in some fields and they sometimes show a better performance than human do. The narrowing distance between human beings and intelligent robots has evoked terrors in some people's mind: since that intelligent robots are able to play the role of mankind in some fields gradually, whether does that mean the distinction of human beings and robots is gradually becoming unclear and blurred? In this way, what makes human beings? And in the face of intelligent technology, where does human's future go? For those questions, many writers have touched them in their works and have also given their own understandings. This paper, by examining two novels, one Frankenstein by Mary Shelley and the other The Song of Life by Wang Jinkang, targets to examine the identity anxiety of human beings facing the appearance of new "life" forms for the advancement of science and technology. However, in this situation human beings are not lost in pessimism, and on the contrary they are constantly searching for the ways to get along with the science and technology.

**Keywords:** science and technology; identity anxiety; settlement

## 1. Introduction

In 2017, an intelligent robot named Sophia was endowed with the Saudi Arabia's citizenship, which was the first intelligent robot to have the citizenship like real human beings in the whole world. Her appearance is exactly the same as the mankind even she has the tiny hair like human do on her face. To a certain extent, it manifests the reducing differences between human beings and robots as well as enhancing recognition for intelligent robots from human. However, even though the whole world is celebrating the new chapter in human's history led by the advancement of science and technology, some people put their eyes on the other side of it. Some warnings are showing up constantly, such as The Uncanny Valley. Moreover, Stephen Hawking the most prominent physicist in our age once said: "Creating artificial intelligence would be the biggest invent in human history, unfortunately it might also be the last." All those warnings about the relationship between human and robots are actually concerned with the thoughts about human future. Whether one day in the future are humans destroyed by the intelligent creations made by human own and can they redefine the "human"?

This paper chooses two novels one from the western country and the other from China to show the universal identity anxiety of human, though living in different countries and times. Frankenstein is the earliest example of science fiction in modern times while The Song of Life is one of the representatives of Wang Jinkang, the most popular science fiction writers in China. Both of the novels center on a kind of new creation made by human but in the end their creators unexpectedly try to find some ways to destroy them. In this two novels, one of the elements pushing the changes in the relationship between the creator and the creation is protagonist's consideration about the threats of intelligent forms and human future. In this regard, a comparison between this two novels can well serve the purpose of this paper to dig into the identity anxiety of human in the face of intelligent forms.

## 2. Literature Review

Frankenstein is widely recognized as the first science fiction in modern times. Since its publication in 1818, it has attracted plenty of researches, although their perspective and approaches are constantly changing. In 1979, George Levin compiled a collection of the theses named *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelly's Novel*<sup>[1]</sup>. In 1988, Anne Mellor published her work *Mary Shelly, Her life, Her fiction, Her monsters*<sup>[2]</sup>. In 2002, Donald F. Glut published a collection covering related researches about Frankenstein's myth and film adaptation<sup>[3]</sup>. Those publications enhance the status of Mary Shelly and her work *Frankenstein* in literature world and give roughly comprehensive research perspectives about this novel, including comparative analysis, feminism, post-colonialism and ethics criticism.

In China, in the early years considering the national policy of "enhancing national strength by science and technology", researches about *Frankenstein* were not so common because the negative part of science and technology is primarily emphasized in this novel. However, in recent years, its research has enjoyed increasing popularity in China. From year 2000 up to now, there are more than 15 versions of its translation coming into the public and over 50 Master's theses focusing on the research of *Frankenstein*, including *Frankenstein and Romanticism*, *Frankenstein and Gothic literature*, *Frankenstein and Narration*, *Frankenstein and Feminism*, *Frankenstein and Orientalism* and so on.

As for the research for Wang Jinkang's *The Song of Life*, researches of this kind are rare owing to the fact that science fictions are outside the main body of Chinese literature and for a long time it has not attracted much attention of scholars in China<sup>[4]</sup>. Additionally, although Wang Jinkang is one of the most well-known science fiction writers in China, the short novel *The Song of Life* is only a small part of his work, thus not many researches of this kind are now available. Up to now, most of the researches focus on the writer himself and attempt to know his opinions about science and technology as well as their future development by analyzing his work as a whole. Other researches choose his other novels and sometimes the short novel *The Song of Life* is mentioned in those researches as the supporting material but is not common.

With the increasing popularity of feminist criticism, post-colonialism criticism and cultural criticism, the issue of identity is often mentioned. But when it comes to the human's identity anxiety under the background of high-speed development of technology, related researches are inadequate. Most of reflections on the advancement of science and technology are on the relationship of technology and human beings as well as humanity rather than the identity problem. Pan and Zeng (2012) pointed that the conflicts between above two parties must be solved by finding ways in humanity and in the future humanity must be elevated to a paramount status in technological development.

Therefore, researches about the two novels can be further on. This paper starts from human's identity anxiety and makes a comparative analysis on two fiction novels in the hope to bring new lens to the researches in this field.

## 3. Human's Identity Anxiety Encountering New "Life" Forms

Identity is a vital concept in western culture, to which is attached great importance by New Left, Feminism and Post-colonialism. Basically, it means that one's feeling or belongingness, as part of the self-conception and self-perception to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation and any kind of social group. When issues mentioned above are challenged by some factors, anxiety and loss may appear and individual or a certain group may get confused. Eventually "who am I" may be the question that they most often ask.

### 3.1. New "Life" Forms: Always Being the "Other" and Being Subordinate

The condition of being the "other" is the state of being different from and alien to the social identity of a person and to the identity of the "self". In more common cases, the term "other" describes the reductive action of labeling a person as someone who belongs to a subordinate social category defined as the Other<sup>[5]</sup>. In the chosen two novels, no matter the "creation" by *Frankenstein* or the intelligent robot Yuan Yuan is created for satisfying the needs and advantages of humankind, they can only be identified as a tool and are placed at the margins of society therefore the thoughts of them deserve no consideration at all.

*Frankenstein* was a great enthusiast for science who had strong interests for the secret of death and

life. For scientific research, he was able to steal the parts of the dead body and locked himself in his room for an unbearably long time without contacting with other people even his family members. Once he succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life, therefore, was capable of bestowing animation upon life matters, he resolved to make the being of a gigantic stature. "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs[4]." In this description, Frankenstein placed himself to the position of God who pretentiously admired the masterpiece of his own. However, when his work opened the eyes, everything changed. He turned to fear and hate and then rushed away and abandoned his creation. "But now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, the breathless horror and disgust filled my heart." Being poor and lonely, the creation hid here and there, trying to get accepted by human community, but ending up in everyone's fear and hostility. Without other ways, the creation chose to revenge, but still left a room to negotiate with Frankenstein, the creator. Frankenstein lied and broke the hope of his creation after he gave his promise to create another female one. In this regard, the creation continued his revenge, but more brutal.

Since the birth of the creation, the creation had been put into a subject position by Frankenstein. He created it at his will and then abandoned it roughly like a thing. He made his promise and then broke it even though he elevated his irresponsibility and unfaithfulness to the consideration of human's future, which cannot cover the fact that in Frankenstein's eyes, his creation was a thing, a thing at his hand to be controlled and amused and he had the power to determine the destiny of it.

In Wang Jinkang's *The Song of Life*, the intelligent robot Yuan Yuan was actually an experimental tool to know whether intelligent robot could have the ability to construct its own "self" if it lived in a normal and caring family like the majority of children in the world do. When Yuan Yuan was five years old, Professor Kong, Yuan Yuan's creator suddenly changed his attitude that he began to treat him with coldness and to spy on him because he found that his intelligence had been far higher than human beings. Even he closed his "living desire" and put a time bomb in his body. When "the song of life" had been deciphered by his son-in-law which could restart Yuan Yuan's "living desire", he smelled the real threats to the existence of humankind. He took the gun and decided to kill him.

It is not difficult to notice that in this two novels, creators tried hard to make a new "life" form for the purpose human's needs, for satisfying one's great ambition or vanity or for so-called scientific researches. Just like the God creates the human beings, with the progress of science and technology, human beings create their new people, playing the role of new God. Human thus take a perspective of God and treat their "people" as their subject, just things. They decide the birth of their creations, decide ways of raising them, abandoning or keeping, and decide whether to destroy them if they perceive any danger to their existence. Ironically, two creators both wanted their creations to be self-perceive, "bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" and "knowing whether intelligent robots can have their own consciousness", but in the end they denied their consciousness and feared their consciousness. They held the slogan of "protecting human race" and created or destroyed their creations without considering that what they created had been endowed with "life" and they had their own thoughts and choices instead being animated things to be manipulated. All in all, human beings are human-centered and things except for human are the other and are under the control of human.

### ***3.2. Resistance and Hatred: Identity Anxiety of Human Beings***

Since the appearance of Frankenstein's creation and the intelligent robot Yuan Yuan, what they experienced most were precaution, resistance and hatred from their creators. When the "monster" asked Frankenstein to create a female one for him so that he could get accompanied, Frankenstein said yes but in the end broke his promise for worrying about human's future. "Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the demon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror." When he was making the female one, he was afraid on thinking the multiply of the species of monster and their future relationship with the human. Once they grew to a position beyond human's strength of controlling, human can probably be replaced and the existence of human might be jeopardized.<sup>[6]</sup>

The same goes to Wang Jinkang's *The Song of Life*. Before the age of five, Yuan Yuan was embraced with love and caring from all family members. However, when his creator, Professor Kong discovered his far-greater-than human intelligence, his attitude was completely changed. He started to

keep an eye on him and deprived of his right to freely going out. But when the secret of “the song of life” that he had kept unknown for more than thirty years was revealed by his son-in-law, he knew it was the time to take actions. He took Yuan Yuan’s “living desire” away that Yuan Yuan would remain at his age of five and buried a time bomb in his body to destroy him if necessary.

When the two creators were aware that the existence of their creations would threaten the future of humankind, they chose to kill them. Being the other, creations for a long time in the view of their creators were just things that they could easily take control. Hardly could they think that one day their creations could get rid of their control even be stronger than them. But creations broke their fancy. The monster was so smart and strong and Yuan Yuan was superior to human in his intelligence, which was beyond imagination for humankind. According to Guo<sup>[7]</sup>, when one’s original state is changed, a kind of personal psychosocial conflict may appear that involves confusion about one’s social role and often a sense of loss of community to one’s personality. In this regard, a kind of anxiety would rise in their mind and they began to worry about the fate of human. If they one day take the role of human beings, they will be the new “human” and what at that time will human be in the future? Still human? At the beginning, the anxiety may appear as the form of hostility and hatred to the creations. When they feel the real threats and they cannot control their “things” any more, the question “where will we human go” ceaselessly shows up, they will finally resort to more extreme ways, destroying them or killing them.

#### **4. Ways to Get Along with Science and Technology**

As science and technology develops, the conflicts between human and technology increasingly occur. Many people keep considering where does this relationship end? Harmony or chaos? Peace or war? In fact, some famous people take a negative attitude towards the future development, like Bill Gates, Musk and Stephen Hawking. Musk even warns that artificial intelligence, the most brilliant and eye-catching fruit in recent scientific development, will be the biggest threat to human existence. However, in this two novels the attitude of both writer is relatively positive.

##### ***4.1. Evil or Not in Nature***

In two novels, the nature of the intelligent forms portrayed by two writers is nothing but evil.

After the birth, the monster was abandoned immediately by his creator. He was like a little baby, knowing nothing, but to live on his own, which however did not force him to despair. He still felt so happy and excited for little beauties in nature and felt awful for the hate from human to him. “The only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure”. Actually he was so pure and curious towards his surroundings. When he hid in the hovel, he would do some little things to help this family, like pitching up woods. Even after suffering hatred and detestation for several times, he still kept a kind and caring heart to rescue a little girl falling into the rapid stream. The broken promise became the last straw pushing him to the way of revenge.

In *The Song of Life*, Yuan Yuan was also a cute little boy like all the boys in his age though he was only an intelligent robot. He always wondered why he could not cry and why he had no tears. But when his grandmother died, he cried so hard. Additionally, after he was five he behaved so well to please his father because he realized that his father did not love him as he used to do. It was not until he knew the secret of “the song of life” that he found the reason of his father’s changes. His father was afraid that his growing intelligence would hurt the human society and he secretly took his “living desire” away so that he could only forever stay at the age of five and remain at the same intelligence. Knowing that he was only a tool of experiment and his creator attempted to constrain the growth of his “self”, he started to revolt to animate all his intelligent computer pals.

Two creations in this two novels are pure in nature like a piece of paper. Changes in their characteristics, to a larger extent are the results of human behaviors. Human shows averseness, detest, doubt and coldness. They create them but merely view them as a tool without endowing them any sign of respect.

##### ***4.2. The Harmony between Human and Intelligent Forms***

From above analysis, it seems that intelligent forms are actually potential threats. They one day may employ their stronger intelligence to hurt human. However, the reason behind their revenge should not be overlooked. Human cheat them first. Frankenstein created him and abandoned him, made his

promise and then broke it. Even though intelligent robot Yuan Yuan got the “self” as the experiment wanted, he was deprived of his “living desire”.

If humans’ detest, abhor and hatred can only lead to similar reactions even revenge on human, does that mean the opposite ways is worth trying? Respect, equality and care. The monster spared his whole life chasing caring and belongingness, what if he got what he wanted from his creators? What if the intelligent robot still lives in a caring family, is everything probably all right even though he has developed the “self” as well as intelligence higher than human’s.

## 5. Conclusion

In the coming decades, science and technology can only develop with too much faster speed that people nowadays cannot imagine. Artificial super intelligence may turn up in not-far future. In this regard, it is reasonable to believe that the problem and conflicts between human and intelligent “life” forms would one day break up. To a large extent, their conflicts can be attributed to human’s anxiety to their future? If one day, intelligent “life” forms threatens the existence of human, in that day what human are going to be? In chosen two novels, creations and their creators resort to vindictive approaches to force each other to the misery. However, it can be easily seen that the creations at the beginning are like a piece of white paper rather than a devil so chances are that human beings and technology can get along well with each other. Just like in *The Song of Life*, Yuan Yuan goes back to its original state with the care and consideration from his human sister. Humans cannot hope to create something intelligent and animating meanwhile attempt to erase their thoughts. Respect, caring and consideration may be the last and effective move that human beings can take in the face of the appearance of the era of intelligent “life”.

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