



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia



Scuola Dottorale di Ateneo
École Doctorale 3LA (Lettres, Langues, Linguistique et Arts)
IETT (Institut d'études transtextuelles et transculturelles)

Dottorato di ricerca
in Lingue e Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa Mediterranea
Ciclo XXVII
Anno di discussione 2015

PAPER WORLDS

THE CHINESE UTOPIAN NOVEL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1902–1910

SETTORE SCIENTIFICO DISCIPLINARE DI AFFERENZA: L-OR/21
Tesi di Dottorato di Lorenzo Andolfatto, matricola 825888

Coordinatore del Dottorato
Prof. Federico Squarcini

Tutore del Dottorando
Prof. Marco Ceresa

Co-tutore del Dottorando
Prof. Gregory B. Lee

PAPER WORLDS

*THE CHINESE UTOPIAN NOVEL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1902–1910*

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| INTRODUCTION: A PROPOSAL AND A TRANSLATION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: OF TEXTUAL TERRITORIES AND LITERARY CARTOGRAPHIES.... | 40 |
| CHAPTER 2: GESTURING TOWARDS UTOPIA..... | 78 |
| CHAPTER 3: A BELLAMIAN INTERPOLATION, OR “THOSE CHINAMEN KNEW WHAT THEY WERE ABOUT” | 120 |
| CHAPTER 4: THE STAGING OF THE UTOPIAN SPECTACLE..... | 149 |
| CHAPTER 5: THE CELEBRATION OF THE UTOPIAN SPECTACLE..... | 191 |
| CONCLUSIONS: ON BREAKING OUT OF BEATEN PATHS..... | 248 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 259 |

INTRODUCTION: A PROPOSAL AND A TRANSLATION

Au départ, l'art du puzzle semble un art bref, un art mince, tout entier contenu dans un maigre enseignement de la Gestalttheorie : l'objet visé – qu'il s'agisse d'un acte perceptif, d'un apprentissage, d'un système physiologique ou, dans le cas qui nous occupe, d'un puzzle de bois – n'est pas une somme d'éléments qu'il faudrait d'abord isoler et analyser, mais un ensemble, c'est-à-dire une forme, une structure : l'élément ne préexiste pas à l'ensemble, il n'est ni plus immédiat ni plus ancien, ce ne sont pas les éléments qui déterminent l'ensemble, mais l'ensemble qui détermine les éléments : la connaissance du tout et de ses lois, de l'ensemble et de sa structure, ne saurait être déduite de la connaissance séparée des parties qui le composent.

George Perec, *La Vie Mode d'Emploi*¹

1 “To begin with, the art of jigsaw puzzle seems of little substance, easily exhausted, wholly dealt with by a basic introduction to Gestalt: the perceived object – we may be dealing with a perceptual act, the acquisition of a skill, a physiological system, or, as in the present case, a wooden jigsaw puzzle – is not a sum of elements to be distinguished to be distinguished from each other and analysed discretely, but a pattern, that is to say a form, a structure: the element's existence does not precede the existence of the whole, it comes neither before or after it, for the parts do not determine the pattern, but the pattern determines the parts: knowledge of the pattern and of its laws, of the set and its structure, could not possibly be derived from discrete knowledge of the elements that compose it.” George Perec, *Life: a User's Manual*, translated by David Bellos, Boston, Godine, 1987, p. 189.

Proposal for a critical itinerary within the Chinese modern utopia

In collating together the different sections of this research, we have come to the realisation that its shape has gradually, and to some extent spontaneously, developed into the shape of its object of study, which is the representation of the Chinese utopia of modernity as it was imagined by the Chinese reformist intelligentsia at the edge of the Manchu empire through the literary form of the *xiaoshuo* 小說. As Phillip Wegner remarks in his articulate reflection on the spatial histories of modernity, “narrative utopias are more akin to traveler’s itineraries, or an architectural sketch, tracing an exploratory trajectory, a narrative line that, as it unfolds, quite literally engenders something new in the world”:² indeed the texts that we will try to tackle in the following pages unfold as itineraries, trajectories, landscape sketches and attempted cartographies of a space and a time which are simultaneously unexplored and familiar. These novels offer imaginative itineraries within figurative spaces that are interwoven with subtle and overt symbolism; they recount experiences of nostalgic defamiliarisation and alienating familiarity; they unfold as fragmented atlases whose coordinates often unravel into political blueprints that are manifesto-ed in between the dialogues of their characters. The many instances of utopian narration that flourished during the last years of the Qing empire seem to recount a unique experience, that of many imaginary travellers who set sail towards the same imaginary place: the conceptual island of utopia. Like different pieces of a puzzle, these texts concur to depict a unique image, they participate to the institution of a unique imaginary by developing along each other’s borders according to the same conceptual coordinates, as if each writer were elaborating a unique narrative thread, picking up the narration at the point where it had been left off by the other.

2 Phillip E. Wegner, *Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. xviii.

If to the eyes of the reader the late Qing novel enables reveries of national revanchism, post-colonial liberation and nostalgic rectification of the present according to the shape of the past, from the scientific perspective of the researcher these texts engender a literary genre, that is to say a system of texts to be understood not only as the cultural epiphenomena of a particular historical time, but also as a composite heuristic tool for its decoding. Thus, as the utopian novel provides its readers both a map and an itinerary for the imagination of the utopia of modernity as a locus of convergence for the anti-colonial fantasies of the colonised subject, likewise we would like to imagine our research both in the guise of a map for the understanding of this literary genre, and as an itinerary that can allow us to move critically within the literary landscape portrayed by these texts and let us arrive from there to the generic island of the late Qing utopian novel. If not truly innovative, such an itinerary certainly does not follow any beaten path, as for a long time this particular literary territory had been left at the margins of the study of Chinese literature, dismissed as the eccentric periphery of a Chinese literary modernity whose main locus was imagined and located somewhere else.

Focus of this research are a series of novels written between the year 1902 and the year 1910. These novels are bonded together by a series of recurring traits related to the imagination of the Chinese utopia of modernity, as well as by their implicit endorsement of a political project of reform. We may consider this particular inflorescence of utopian texts during the last decade of the Manchu rule in the terms of a “Literature of the Hundred Days”, echoing the *Wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法 episode of 1898.³ Even though it may

3 The Hundred Days Reform was a failed attempt on the part of the young Guangxu Emperor to reform the administration of the state with the support of the most progressive part of the Chinese intelligentsia of the time; this attempt was very short-lived, as it was brutally truncated by a *coup d'état* lead by Empress Cixi. While this act of restoration lead to the provisional re-consolidation of the structure of the court after the imprisonment of the emperor inside the Forbidden City (where he would later die under house arrests in 1908) and the execution of the main leaders of the reformist movement (the “Six Gentlemen” Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, Kang Guangren 康廣仁, Lin Xu 林旭, Yang Shenxiu 楊深秀, Yang Rui 楊銳 and Liu Guangdi 劉光第), on the long run Empress Cixi’s *coup d'état* would end up to exacerbate those forces that would eventually lead to the collapse of the court in 1911.

contradict to some extent the idea of genre that we are going to elaborate, or at least try to elaborate in the first chapter of this research, this label may be useful to provide us an overview of the narrative matter that we are going to dissect.

By suggesting such a connection, which is largely metaphoric, it is our intention to emphasise the most evident qualities of this narrative genre: the late Qing utopian novel can be seen as a “Literature of the Hundred Days” both because of its transient, short-lived appearance in the Chinese literary landscape of the late empire, and because of the eventual failure of its fragile ideals.⁴ The genre had indeed a very short life: it blossomed in the wake of Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 call to arms with his 1902 essay-cum-manifesto “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” 論小說與群治之關係 and his unfinished novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記, and it died off quickly after 1910 (year of the publication of Lu Shi’e’s 陸士諤 novel *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國), opening the ground for the radical iconoclasm of the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth literary revolution.⁵ Furthermore, by amplifying and projecting in an ideal somewhere else and sometime else the great expectations of the *fin-de-siècle* Chinese reformist intelligentsia, the late Qing utopian novel concurred in the construction of an imaginary which, already nipped in the bud behind the walls of the Forbidden City in 1898, was destined never to leave the fictional paper worlds where it emerged in the first place.⁶

4 The connection is not so preposterous as it may appear: among the “victims” of Empress Cixi’s iron hand was also Liang Qichao 梁啟超, who managed to flee his country and find shelter in Japan together with his mentor Kang Youwei 康有為. It is from Japan that Liang Qichao will launch his own *nahan* 吶喊 in 1902 with the publication of the magazine *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說.

5 We, at least, are not aware of any literature work from the early republican era that could be considered within the same category of the utopian novels written during the last years of the empire.

6 The expression “paper worlds”, which is used in the title of this work, is taken from the first chapter of Lu Shi’e’s novel *Xin Zhongguo*, although in this novel the expression is used in a different context. Here the character of Li Youqin 李友琴, who is the narrator’s utopian host in the new China of 1950, explains the protagonist that “At that time [at the beginning of the twentieth century] the foreign countries used to look down on China, even though its industries and its commerce were expanding, and the Chinese had re-appropriated their mines and railways. This was because we did not have any silver but we could rely only on state bonds, and for this reason they called China a paper world” (女士道: “這時候,吾國工業商務雖甚發達,鐵路礦務雖都收回,然而外國人尚瞧不起我們.為的是我們沒有現銀,通行的都是國

Even though we cannot but agree with Peter Zarrow in remarking how our tendency to overemphasise the year 1900 as some sort of historical threshold in the unfolding of Chinese history is in the end but a Western calendrical mannerism, and how the year 1900 in China was rather the 28th year of the reign of the Guangxu emperor in a 60-year cycle scheme, it is nevertheless tempting to locate the Chinese modern utopia in this “millenarian” perspective. This particular literary genre almost encourages the adoption of this perspective: set between the failure of the *Wuxu bianfa* experience and the anticlimactic aftermath of the *Xinhai* 辛亥 revolution of 1911 (which in turn will pave the way for a New Culture Movement marked by the paradigm-changing adoption of Marxist categories of historical analysis and self-analysis on the part of the Chinese intellectuals), the utopian genre emerges both as a discourse of expectations and as the synthesis of a failure, the conclusive recognition and dismissal of a set of ideas, of a course of actions.⁷ The late Qing utopian discourse, the literary genre in which this discourse is embodied and the texts that substantiate this genre occupy, on different levels of articulation, an intermediary position: the late Qing utopian discourse belongs to a decade of transition; its texts are neither “classic” nor “modern”; the genre that these texts create can be understood both as a literary by-product of its ideological subtext, a repository of its surplus of imagination and ideas, and as a primary constituent of this subtext.

As for the subtext to which we refer, this has been drafted, described, defined and approximated in a variety of ways: it is the subtext of the Chinese (semi)colonial modernity, which is local, multiple, contested. It has been explored through a variety of different lens: that of culture, of the nation, of the peripheral subalternity, of the mutual

債票, 所以叫我們中國是個紙世界”). Lu Shi'e 陆士谔, *Xin zhongguo* 新中国, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2010, p. 12.

7 The intellectual trajectory of Qiu Qubai may provide us an epitome of this polarisation, see for example Florent Villard, *Le Gramsci chinois: Qu Qiubai, penseur de la modernité culturelle*, Lyon, Tigre de papier, 2009.

intertwining of the coloniser and the colonised.⁸ In the end, it is the result of the Western colonial enterprise in China, and of the creation and expansion of the modern empire as an infrastructure for the sustenance of Western industrial capitalism at its mature stage within the space of (great) divergence it allowed.⁹ Seeds of the Chinese modern colonial subtext are thus to be found inside the chests of opium brought to China by the British East India Company from the Indian provinces of Bengal and Madras in order to compensate the disequilibrium of the trades between China and Europe; these seeds grew with the progressive affirmation of the Western presence in the Chinese continent, and the gradual coercion of China in a position of colonial subjugation through the systematic alternation of military and diplomatic leverage and the authority of unequal treaties signed in cities watched by warships.

While on the economic front the Chinese encounter with the West lead to a progressive weakening of the Chinese autocratic stance against the ever-growing pressure of the European nations, on a superstructural level it lead to a profound revaluation on the part of the Chinese intelligentsia of the way China understood and located itself in the world. This process of revaluation was gradual yet pervasive and systematic: it emerged as a “recognition of authority” of the West as a conglomerate of political entities that could not be framed within the traditional modalities of imagination, representation and institutionalisation of the Other (i.e., barbaric, inferior, subservient), and it progressively unfolded as a race towards the Westernisation of the country’s economic, military, political

8 We are referring here to Edward Said’s exposure of the essentialist gaze of the coloniser; to Homi Bhabha’s (dis)location of culture; to Gayatri Spivak’s space of difference of the subaltern; to Frantz Fanon’s colonial masks; to Tani Barlow’s notion of colonial modernity as a field of interactions rather than of confrontation; to Shmuel Eisenstadt’s notion of multiple modernities; to Albert Memmi’s reflections over the relation of mutual dependence between the coloniser and the colonised; to Prasenjit Duara’s considerations over the problematic status of the nation as the silent space of reference of modernity.

9 We are referring here to the notion of “great divergence” as it were re-elaborated by Kenneth Pomeranz in Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, in which the author emphasises the complementarity of the colonial periphery in the development of the European “exceptionalism”, which in turn exacerbates the “peripherality” of the periphery.

and social structures.

Even though the early stages of this process of reaction and adaptation were animated by a rekindled self-awareness on the part of the colonised subject in regard to the self-perceived peculiarity of its own “Chinese” cultural identity, this culturalist approach started quickly to vacillate. If in the early stages of this confrontation with the colonial West the Chinese literati were able to circumscribe and neutralise their country’s incapacity to respond as a purely instrumental question of technical and military prowess, the *ti-yong* 體用 perspective and conceptual safeguard to which this position was anchored soon became untenable.¹⁰ The defeat of the first Opium War and the signing of the treaty of Nanjing – the first of the unequal treaties – in 1842 marked a historical and symbolical change of pace: the recognition of the Western otherness gave way to a compulsive attempt of “self-strengthening”, whose eventual failure – punctuated by the compound débâcle of the second Opium War, the near-disaster of the Taiping Rebellion, and the wake of local insurgencies and rebellions that followed – revealed the central government’s incapacity to face the challenge of institutional reform, which in turn exacerbated the climate of political unrest. As the Chinese country lost once again its face by the hand of the Japanese over the control of Korea in 1895, the substantial conservatism of the early reformers finally gave way to the radical reformism of thinkers such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong, who saw in the complete Westernisation of the country’s institutional apparatus the only way out of the colonial impasse.

It is from this background that the late Qing utopian novel matures its traits. Chief product of a utilitarian and didascallic view of literature which was mainly fostered by the political idealism of Liang Qichao, who saw in the popularity of the *xiaoshuo* form a

¹⁰ This was the position of the Self-strengthening Movement (*Yangwu yundong* 洋務運動) and its champions Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), Zuo Zongtang 左宗堂 (1812–1885), Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) and Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909).

perfect tool for the renovation of the people's mentality, the utopian novel became in the view of its practitioners a way to imagine and construct a new China among (and from) the remnants of the old one. What makes this genre interesting is the fact that the utopian narration, despite its Pindaric flights of imagination, its implausible visions of the future and its *outopian* descriptions of perfect societies, paradoxically provides us one of the most *realistic* representations of the climate of national turmoil that characterised the late Qing period. The utopian locus in fact emerges as a space of convergence for all the contradictions and idiosyncrasies that characterised the Chinese approach to the question of colonial modernity during the last decades of the Manchu empire. The late Qing utopia unfolds as a schizophrenic narration in which the future of post-colonial China is imagined by looking backward at the country's pre-colonial past, through a Confucian rectification of the names as modernist act of *zhengming* 正名 implemented by the use of a Western dictionary. In this perspective, that is by looking at these novel as the results of a discrepancy between their authors' overt declarations of intentions and the content of their texts, the utopian genre should be considered a subtly yet profoundly realistic one, while the *prima facie* naivety of its bombastic claims, which is one the reasons this genre has been for a long time dismissed, should be set aside in favour of a better understanding of their implications.

In our critical itinerary we have decided to focus on four novels written between the 1902 and 1910: Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* (The Future of New China, 1902), Chen Tianhua's 陳天華 *Shizi hou* 獅子吼 (The Lion's Roar, 1905), Wu Jianren's 吳趸人 *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 (The New Story of the Stone, 1908), and Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* (The New China, 1910). Two of these novels – Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and Chen Tianhua's *Shizi hou* – are unfinished; Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* is a *zhongpian*

xiaoshuo 中篇小說 of 12 chapters; while Wu Jianren's "sequel" to Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 masterpiece, with its symmetrical architecture of 40 chapters, is the longest and the most articulate specimen of this selection.

Before delving further into the narrative matter of these texts, we have decided to integrate this introduction with a translation. With the exception of a few excerpts from Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*, these novels have never been translated into any European language.¹¹ Given the fragile status of the late Qing literary production within the received canons of modernity and tradition of Chinese literature, as well as the marginal position of the utopian novel in itself within this particular literary period, this fact is not at all surprising: only a fraction of the eclectic narrative material produced during the late Qing period has been studied in detail or translated. For this reason we have decided to integrate this introduction with the translation of the short story *Xinnian meng* 新年夢 (New Year's Dream) by Cai Yuanpei's 蔡元培. In many respects, Cai Yuanpei's short story represents a useful synthesis of the different traits that characterise the early modern Chinese utopian genre, both from a strictly narratological point of view and for what concerns the position of the text in relation to the author's oeuvre. The naive idealism, the political "premeditation", the imaginaries of post-colonial revanchism, the oneirical framework: these features are all recurring elements in the late Qing utopian novel, and they all surface, although in a rather condensed form, in Cai Yuanpei's short story. We thus believe that a preliminary reading of Cai Yuanpei's attempt at fiction-writing may provide a useful, first-hand starting point in the understanding of the late Qing utopian discourse for those

11 The magazine *Renditions* has recently dedicated an issue to the most recent development of Chinese science fiction, introducing the works of contemporary writers Liu Cixin 劉慈欣, Han Song 韓松 and Wang Jinkang 王晉康 with a selection of translations from the late Qing period that includes excerpts from Xu Nianci 徐念慈, Wu Jianren 吳趸人, Lu Xun 魯迅 and Xu Zhuodai 徐桌呆; see Song Mingwei 宋明煒 (ed.), *Renditions*, Spring and Autumn 2012, n. 77–78 (Chinese Science Fiction: Late Qing and the Contemporary).

who are not yet acquainted with the narrative material which we are going to dissect further on in this research.

New Year's Dream (Cai Yuanpei, 1904)¹²

“Greetings! Congratulations! It is the new year, a new world has come, what a truly joyful occasion! Cheers!” The man who is uttering these words is Chinese and his name is “Zhongguo Yimin”, a Chinese citizen.¹³ He jumped off his bed at six in the morning on the first day of the first month of the year Jiachen in order to greet his friends. Who knows how many times these words have been proffered on this particular day of the year, yet this time they are worth remembering, and there is a reason for that.

This man was the descendant of a wealthy family from the Jiangnan region, and since his childhood he had always been quite an eccentric person. Apart from his studies, he always had a keen interest for learning crafts, and soon the wood and metal craftwork that his country had to offer became an old thing for him; there was nothing he would not study, and once he put his mind on something, he would learn it immediately. When he turned sixteen years old, he appointed his father and his brothers to manage his inheritance and, with only some funds to cover his travel expenses, he left his family and ran to the trading ports to find a job and to learn English, French and German. After three years, he could pretty much speak the languages of these three countries. Because he was planning to travel abroad soon, he also studied a little of Western culture and technology. He was a man who loved equality and freedom, so he travelled first to the United States, and then he moved from there to France. Because Germany was the vanguard in the field of technology, he moved there too in order to enrol in a high-level technical school, while

12 This translation is based on the version of the text reprinted in Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, *Cai Yuanpei quanji* 蔡元培全集, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju chuban 中华书局出版, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 230–241. The original text was published on the last issue of the newspaper *Eshi jingwen* 俄事驚聞 in February 1904.

13 The name of the protagonist is Zhongguo Yimin 中國一民, which can be translated literally in “a Chinese citizen”. Again, this is an example of one of the many narrative strategies that characterise the late Qing utopian novel, namely the “blankness” of its protagonists, who are often presented as brilliant yet anonymous “everyman” for the reader to empathise with. In our translation, we have decided not to translate the name of Cai Yuanpei’s short story, yet at the same time we chose to keep it between brackets in order to convey (in the best way we could devise) the particularity of such a name.

studying philosophy on his own. At that time there were in Germany many populist parties from Russia, so he often spent time around them, and gradually learnt to speak Russian too.

After this young man graduated, he continued to travel to England, Italy, Switzerland as well as different other countries, and he gradually made his way to Russia in order to study the state of the Russian society. A keen observer, he moved towards Siberia, and from there he re-entered China passing from the Three Eastern Provinces. Travelling from North to South along the waterways, he examined all the places he passed through, until he arrived back at the port from where he had left at the beginning of his journey. By that time, he was already more than thirty years old, and he was a man who had worked all his life for the money that he spent on his studies and his travels. He never asked for money to anybody, nor did he waste his resources on superfluous things.

After having visited so many places and having studied for so many years, he arrived at the following conclusion:

The power of Man cannot yet overcome nature, and if a natural calamity were to come upon us, there would be no way to avoid it. Because the world is fragmented into many different countries, each one of these cares only to its own advantages. The power of Man is tied up and wasted in the squabbles between countries, and so no country can prevail upon the others, and if one country does not lose its land, it has to surrender its rights. Because a country is divided into many households, and each household cares only about its own advantages, the power of Man is fettered and wasted away. Nowadays even if a man comes from the most civilised place, his energy is wasted half on his country and half on his own household, let alone if he comes from a country not yet mature: how can we even talk about universalism then!? But let's consider first somebody whose country has not been established: such a man would be praised if he dedicated himself to the creation of the country. Today the Slavic people and the Chinese people do have households, but do not have a country. Among the Slavic people, the number of those who are dedicating themselves to the creation of their own country grows larger day by day; as for the Chinese, very few are concerned by this issue, nevertheless every day they call themselves

Chinese: indeed they are shameless! It would not be so difficult to build a new China, the only thing to do would be to confiscate all the energy that the people waste in their own yards [and deploy it at the service of the country], that would make it!

After he made up his mind in this way, he gathered some people to share his own point of view with. Some of these people agreed with him, but some others did not.

When he arrived at the port, he immediately came to know about the war between Japan and Russia over the Chinese territory, as many warnings were arriving every day. Yet despite the many signals of the war, it seemed that the people of the port were too busy to care about the warnings: some were busy collecting money, some were looking for people to hire, some others were celebrating sacrifices and ceremonies, and some others just spent their time drinking and eating.

“What keeps you so busy?” The young men asked these people.

“Today is Chuxi, New Year’s eve,” they all said, “and tomorrow is Yuandan, the first day of the new year, this is a really important holiday!”

“Bah!” He thought, “the earth rotates one time around the sun and it makes one year, but who could say when this whole thing started. We could pick one day at random from the 365 days of the year and make it Chuxi or Yuandan as well, what makes today so important? Besides, it seems that everybody is fussing over his or her own house, and that nobody even cares that others are fighting over our own land, these people care only about their family and that’s all! If one day these men were to make a step further and become fellow countrymen, and if as countrymen they became then citizens of the world, this would be a whole another situation, only then we could really have a new era!” But because the reality all around him was clashing with his thoughts, he felt uncomfortable and so, moaning in pain, he run at home to rest.

Suddenly a loud sound of bells broke the young man’s sleep. He woke up in a hurry

and headed outside following the source of that loud sound, until he arrived to a big assembly hall where different people kept flowing in. At the door of the hall, a man asked for his name and checked it on a book before letting him enter the building. Inside the assembly hall, the seats were arranged according to a geographical criterion, in correspondence with to the regions described by the basins of the Chinese rivers such as the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, the White River, and the Xijiang River; yet these areas were designated with simpler labels such as He-Dong, He-Xi, Jiang-Nan, Jiang-Bei, etc.¹⁴ Each section hosted hundreds if not thousands of people, and more kept pouring in.

The bell suddenly stopped ringing and a man stepped on a podium and addressed the crowd: “Gentlemen, we gathered here today because we all consider ourselves Chinese, but, I ask you, how can we call ourselves as such? In our minds of course there is a China, but right now we are not really building one, and I fear that we will not have a chance to do it any more! Let me give you an example: Russia and Japan are fighting over Manchuria, but in this regard we consider ourselves ‘neutral’ (this is a critique to the ‘neutrality’ of the Qing government towards the Russo-Japanese War); in the future, England and Germany will fight over some regions of the Yangtze River, but again we will consider ourselves ‘neutral’; then England will go to war against France and Japan for the control of Fujian and Guangdong, but yet again we will consider ourselves ‘neutral’. In the end, because of this ‘neutrality’, we will not have any more “material” to build our new country with. When that moment will come, then really we will not have any more hope! But if today we can manage to prevent the first occurrence of this ‘neutrality’, then there will not have a precedent for it; this declaration of neutrality does not represent the opinion of the public, but it is rather the decision of a bunch of fools who took it as if it reflected the opinion of

14 What Cai Yuanpei’s conciseness of style implies in this passage is that the traditional Chinese geographic nomenclature is here dismissed in favour of simpler (more rational, less regionally-connoted) set of coordinates.

the public.

“The world of today, quite obviously, cannot be considered as a one single country, but we have to remind ourselves that the ideas of the majority of people will always prevail over those of the minority. But nowadays the ideas of the few are taken as they were those of us, the majority. This situation is like that of a shop in which somebody who is pretending to be the owner has started to give away its goods and cashing the money by counterfeiting the receipts: everybody sees what is going on and they all know what the imposter is doing, but what can they do? We could send telegraphs, or write articles, but these measures would not be of any use. In situations like this one, we have to force the hand in order to chase away the imposter from the shop and make justice of the stolen money. If we cannot come to reason [with those who are taking advantage of China as the imposter took advantage of somebody else’s business], then we have to declare war. Fighting a war is not such a difficult endeavour, what we need are soldiers and enough provisions to maintain them; these things we already have, but we are not willing to bring them out. As for the reason we are not willing to do that, this is because we have many individuals who are decided to look after their own households, but that have no intention to look at our bigger house! Let’s imagine a house that is getting robbed by thieves: the thieves are taking away the house’s properties and all its money, but the children who live in it are oblivious of what is going on until the thieves do not come to steal their own toys. Then, and only then, they start to cry in order to have their toys back. These children do not realise that with the money that the thieves have stolen, they could buy many more toys, but now the money is gone and the family is starving to death, so what would be their use anyway? Those that nowadays care about their own and do not care about our country are exactly like these children. Today we have to get rid of the old ways and the old methods, we have to establish a new rule: one shall receive in proportion to his contributions; and if

one does not exert himself, he will not receive any benefit. We will call it the principle of retribution, as the basic idea is the same, and everybody will then contribute.”

At this point of the speech, some attendants brought out some booklets and distributed them to the participants of the meeting. The man on the podium continued to speak: “Gentlemen, all of us here have been chosen as the representatives of our homes to come here to discuss the question of the law, would you give your approval to the motion we are about to present?” At that point, Mr. “Zhongguo Yimin” realised that if indeed his home town took part in the process of selection of the representatives, at this point it clearly had to be him to represent them, so he picked up the booklet and had a look at it.

The document was divided into five sections:

(1) The first section presents a survey divided into two parts:

Concerning the Chinese land: the natural assets of the country, its climates, etc.; the resources of the surface; the resources obtainable from the ground and the waters; the materials and the resources that can be synthesised from the atmosphere.

Concerning the Chinese population: how many people are under the age of seven; how many are between the age of 7 and 16; how many are between 20 and 48 years old; how many are older than 48 years old (whereas the age should be counted after a person is born, one year for each revolution of the earth around the sun); how many people have already received an education, and how many have not; how many have an occupation and how many do not have one; how many are disabled, impaired, sick or mentally ill.

(2) The second section offers an assessment of the provinces and the districts of the country: first of all there is an assessment of the railways and the waterways; secondly, an assessment of the farming land, the rearing land, the schools, the factories, the kitchens and the laboratories, the communal spaces, the parks, the hospitals, the public dormitories, the spaces for the married couples, the nurseries and the retirement homes, the institutions for the education of the blind and the deaf, the working places for the disabled and the impaired, the warehouses and the shipyards, the libraries, the theatres, the statistics bureaus, the legislative halls, the print houses, the tribunals.

(3) The third section concerns the professions and the occupations of the citizens, and it is divided in two parts. The first part concerns the most common forms of occupations, those that involve the transformation of resources such as agriculture and the like, or those

that involve the movement of resources, such as mining, the transportation of goods, etc. Furthermore, for what concerns the liberal and the intellectual professions that involve the management of intellectual resources, there are for example the fields of education, publishing and entertainment. Then there are the more specialised disciplines such as medicine and jurisprudence.

(4) The fourth section describes the life cycle of a man: a child is brought up and nourished until the age of 7; education starts from the age of 7 and continues until the age of 20; the working age goes from the age of 20 to 48 years old; retirement comes at the age of 48 (although one may also maintain a part-time occupation in the field of education and the like).

(5) The fifth section concerns the everyday life of a man: in a day of 24 hours, a person is supposed to work for 8 hours; eat, drink and enjoy himself or herself for 8 hours; and sleep for the remaining 8 hours.

The document offered all sorts of information and suggestions about how to implement the new system that it described, it was all written down in the booklet. After all the participants had read the document once, the man on the podium spoke again:

“Gentlemen, you should have all read the document by now. If you have any concern, I urge you to express your views.”

A man stood up and started to talk: “This program is extremely good, but nowadays all the occupations that are undertaken by man are oriented to personal gain, therefore the only occupations and jobs that people are voluntarily going to do are the most hazardous and difficult ones, because in the end their personal gain will be much higher than the one obtained from other jobs. But if according to the new system the only thing that a man needs to do is to pick up an occupation while all profits are the same, who would not go for the easiest tasks then? In this way nobody would be willing to do the most difficult, the most critical and the most hazardous jobs, and I fear that thus the world would stop to advance.”

“It will not come to that,” the man on the podium answered, “if a job is not compatible with one person’s characteristic and temperament, it leads to laziness; if the

task is really befitting the worker's abilities, there is no way to turn him away from it. I will give you an example: the eyes are made to see, would it be possible to ask them not to see? The ears are made for hearing, would it be possible to force them not to hear? Breath benefits the lungs, thus the nose works for them; food benefits the stomach, thus the mouth works at its service. In our country we have these different kinds of workers, if we consider their value as organs and limbs of a body and manage not to misuse them, then there will not be any problem. For this reason, the fields of medicine and education are the most important of all, because they can provide us a detailed analysis of the body and the spirit of the people, both for what concerns the traits that they have inherited, and for what regards the habits that they have developed. If our country will be in need of some kind of job to be done, I am sure that it will never lack of suitable men willing to do it. As for the fields of industry and technology, in this regard the creation of machines and tools is the most important thing, as all those tasks that are usually considered dangerous could be performed by machines as well. As for the most difficult and demanding tasks, the conditions of the workers can be arranged accordingly, and if a particular job requires a great deal of effort, it will not be mandatory to do it for the full eight hours of the working day, thus in this way it should not come as an inconvenience." At these words, all the people in the hall started to clap their hands in approval.

Another man stood up to talk: "Indeed, the working conditions can be adjusted accordingly, but I am afraid there still will be resistance from the part of those who once were in charge of running things, or from those who were used to live off their properties: there is no way they will not stick to their old ways and try to obstruct these plans."

The man on the podium spoke again: "Certainly, but gentlemen, you must remember that you represent the collectivity, thus what you will approve will be the opinion of the collectivity. Nowadays, in the management of the affairs, the majority will

overcome the minority, and if somebody intends to obstruct the cause of the public for the sake of his own selfish interest, then he will be considered an enemy of the public. There is an old saying that expresses this idea well, ‘the cry of a family does not compare to the cry of a street’. We will only have to force our hand a little. Nowadays we can send telegrams everywhere: with your agreement, we could send communications to all the districts, set up administrative offices and courts, and implement the whole program once for all. But now, gentlemen, let us go back to the diplomatic issues at stake here, as there are some points I would like you to consider.” At this point, the attendants distributed another series of booklets. Their content was arranged in three articles:

(1) On the recovery of the Three Eastern Provinces: this is not really the case that the Chinese army cannot fight, but rather that our soldiers just have not realised yet that this is their own war, and they think of it only as a war in which they have been hired to fight in lieu of somebody else; therefore we should rather think of this as a case of “maintaining an army for one thousand days and deploying it for one”, and also remind that “the imperial court does not deploy an army with an empty stomach”. The provisions for the troops are very meagre, and the commanders want to dispose of them accordingly, so there is nothing really surprising in the army’s unwillingness to put their lives on the line. Furthermore, even if these commanders were to understand part of this problem, there would be still many others that would obstruct them. If today we get rid of these who are holding them back, then these commanders who are acting against their own conscience would also be replaced. After the Chinese army will have seen the Chinese law that has been newly established, they will understand that this land is simply under their responsibility, and they will take charge of their responsibilities as soldiers. Not only they will not have to worry any more about the lack of provisions, but they could also rest assured that they will not have to look after their families only by themselves as they had to do in the past [as society and the state are going to take care of them while the soldiers are at the front]. Therefore, what are we waiting? Furthermore, with the reform of the law, the horse thieves [of the northern regions] will come to terms with the authorities too, moreover the common people have also gathered their courage and formed local militia everywhere, answering to each other’s call in succession. Now our land forces are really able to push back the Russian army. For this reason we have to declare war to Russia immediately. Even though our navy can rely only on a few old vessels of no real use, the cadets that we

had sent to study in England now have returned, and if they are put in command they could capture some Russian merchant ships and provide the Japanese some support. On the one hand, we could send a diplomatic dispatch to Japan to negotiate an agreement, to offer them our help covering the expenses of their navy: because the Japanese economy is having a hard time, there is nothing they would not accept. In this way we could claim half of the successes of the Japanese navy. On the other hand, we could instruct the Chinese students who are studying in Russia to infiltrate the Russian populist parties all over the country and push them to overthrow their government. Attacking from these three sides, wouldn't we be able to take back Manchuria?

(2) On putting an end to the foreign spheres of influence: in this regard, the foreign countries rely primarily on the trains and the mines. With the reform of the state, the inhabitants of the country will not perceive any more difference between each others, but on the contrary they will become much more sensitive towards the presence of the foreign countries against "our country". Despite their foreign capitals, foreigners will not be able to hire any [Chinese] manpower. We will tell them that "The treaties that we signed in the past are a barbaric practice, and the public will not comply with them any more, no matter how much you will try." We will thus pay back our debt with great interest, and get rid of those treaties.

(3) On the reclamation of the foreign concessions: with the reform of the state, the only sector of the economy that will be affected by the change will be that of freight transport. This is because we will export only the surplus of our own country; a shade of the old trade relations will remain, as China will buy from the outside those things that it lacks. Nevertheless, these trades will be managed through the state, and no private will be allowed to do any trade with the foreigners. For what concerns the products that will be imported from the outside, every year a quota will be decided, and the foreign merchants will have no way to interfere with that. As for the Chinese people that now live in the concessions, if they will not intend to return to their home towns, they can join their Chinese compatriots [to live in the places where the concessions were] and live according to the new rules; they will just need to apply themselves and they won't need to worry about work or food. They will never wish to do again those menial jobs that they used to do at the service of the foreigners! Once the foreigners will have stopped to flood the country, the Chinese civilisation will improve too, and there will not be anything left to do here for their consuls. Furthermore, for what concerns the Chinese people abroad, with the exception of the students, the tourists and the diplomatic corps, either they will continue their stay abroad abiding to the new laws, or they will come back home. As for the Chinese envoys abroad, there won't be need for them any more. In the end, if after all these measures some foreign country will still decide to keep his representatives in a concession, then we will pay them some money and buy the concession back. From that moment on, with the exceptions of their tourists and their diplomats, the foreign countries will have to abide to our laws in order to be allowed to stay

here.

After the assembly had gone through these articles, one of the members stood up to talk: “Those foreigners, they talk the language of power, not the one of justice. They will counteract by appealing to the Russian laws, and that will be it. As for the other two points, the foreigners will still cling to the old treaties: if you say you do not intend to recognise the treaties any more, they just will not recognise us as a country, and they will take advantage of the situation to oppress us even more with their armies, what good can come out of this?”

The man on the podium took the floor again: “As for your first objection, we have already taken this possibility into consideration. If it will come down to a military confrontation, we have to remind ourselves that our love for this country is pure, while theirs does not even arrive halfway; if we talk about skill and expertise, we have many people who have completed their studies in the military academies of Germany and many others that have studied in the naval academies of Britain, whereas they rely on a bunch of henchmen who would not think twice to abandon their men behind. As for our weapons, with those we accumulated in the past and the new ones we have built, we will have enough of them. As for the warships, even though we do have men who would be able to build them, we do not have the time to do that. Going abroad to buy them on commission with the Russians fighting at our borders, this is not feasible. It is our intention to send our representatives to negotiate with the largest shipyards of each country, and to try to buy from them some of the warships – *Nisshin* and *Kasuga* cruisers like those of Japan – that they are already about to complete, by offering them the highest bid; in this way, the first thing that we are going to do when the war starts will be to sail these newly acquired ships back home. If this plan does not work out, we will have to do without the ships. It is going

to be a bit more vicious. In three months' time the submarines and the aeroplanes that we are building will be ready to be deployed; by the time their warships will be here, we will be able to take them by surprise with our underwater mines, and to hit them fiercely from above with our bombs; no matter how many warships they have, they will all be torn into pieces. Admittedly, this plan is too ruthless, because no one of their people will survive the attack. This strategy will be used only in times of emergency. Together with the navy, it is our intention to deploy our land forces as well in support each other during the attack, and if we will train our forces accordingly [to fight in coordination with the navy], the casualties will not be too many!"

When the man on the podium finished his speech, another man stood up to talk: "Indeed we have planned out all of our strategies, but there is another aspect that troubles me: these plans require a lot of money, but as for now we are still paying back the indemnities of war that we currently own; if we carry on these new plans and try to collect the necessary funds, wouldn't we be told that there is no money to spend? What if we won't be able to collect the required funds? If we have to maintain an army, acquire some new ships, and buy back the concessions, the cost of all of this is going to be in the order of the thousands of millions, could you please explain us whence do you intend to obtain this amount?"

The man on the podium spoke again: "The Chinese are not poor. Many people are just storing away a lot of money that they do not intend to put into use for the public. On the contrary, they pray on the collectivity to accumulate even more money. Thus the public cannot use that money, so it takes more from the poor, and in this way we appear even poorer. Nowadays our resources are storied away and we cannot count on them, but if we manage to extract them we could put them into good use: those people that now claim they are in charge, and those who are considered rich, they hide their money in their mansions,

they bury it in the ground, or they keep it in the banks abroad: if we add all this money up and we divide it evenly among our 400 million people, maybe we would not be able to match the 2854 dollars of income per person of the English, nor the 3282 dollar of the Americans, but still we would get quite close to the 552 dollars of the Russians, or the 239 dollars of the Japanese. Maybe we will not be able to reach the amount of 500 billion, but that of 100 billion for sure. With the current state of things, the country has no need for this money, so it could be employed completely to settle our diplomatic issues. Do you still fear it will not be enough?”

Once the assembly thought this over – the man quite clearly had a point – they all expressed their approval. The man thus nodded his head and left the stage. Another official took his place on the podium and announced that the discussion on the state affairs was over and that the meeting was adjourned. One by one, the representatives left the assembly hall.

And just like this, Mr. “Zhongguo Yimin” left the hall too. Oblivious of where he was, he proceeded to stroll aimlessly without really knowing where to go, until he eventually reached a big building whose sign revealed it to be the designated residence of the representatives of the country. The inside of the building was divided according to the same principle used for the seats in the assembly hall, and each district had its own spaces: a park, a canteen, the bedrooms, a library, a reading room and living room. These spaces were not dissimilar to those mentioned in one of the booklets given at the previous meeting. This was the place where every day the representatives of the country gathered to discuss about state affairs, and because this was after all their main occupation, the building provided also dedicated meeting rooms for that.

Outside these meeting rooms there were offices whence to send telegraphs to the different districts’ administrative bureaus: with these telegraphs, the new laws and

regulations could be transmitted everywhere without the need of intermediaries. Even the lower classes – who were accustomed to pain, envy and distrust [in regard to the habits of their former rulers] through those novels, songs and spectacles they used to enjoy – once they realised they had direct and clear access to their representatives, were utterly moved. At the beginning, a model village was built and its management was entrusted to the most receptive among them, for the others to see. In this way not a single person disapproved of the new system.

Among the rich and those who used to consider themselves in charge, there were some who, like fools, were determined to interfere with the reform process, and despite all the attempts to talk them back to reason, they never understood. Their positions were discussed and debated in the assembly, and eventually deemed as wrong. The charges were brought to court, and after the judges had confirmed their guilt, the convicts and their crimes were exposed to the public squares of all the country and were condemned at once to death by beating. The culprits were beaten to death, and their bodies were marked with writings that exposed their crimes and the punishments that they received. It was really like as if these people were struck by a divine thunder, as they say, but this was the thunder of the collectivity. These measures were implemented in their entirety by the tribunals. The judges had discussed the whole matter extensively, they had questioned its circumstances and debated the position of the assembly, but once the verdict was pronounced, the punishment was immediately applied. These events possessed at the same time a certain quality of divine inevitability, as if there was no way to prevent their course or to elude it. The first death occurred almost as a contingency, but after other two or three people followed the same path, the guilt of this clique of reactionaries appeared in its perfect clarity, as if they were standing in the middle of an empty room under the stare and the judgement of the many: their expression was of utter terror.

Against the enthusiasm of the law-abiding citizens, these reactionaries slowly surrendered. According to the estimates of the statistic bureaus from north to south, those who were sentenced to death were not more than two-hundred. Because among them there were many old and rich figures whom many people fawned upon, at the beginning many were standing on their side. Yet when the tribunals promulgated their sentences, these people soon realised that death for them was inevitable, so they quickly changed their minds and made amends, to the extent that in one year's time they became one and only with the new country. The time was ripe and the conditions ideal to settle all these issues for good, and eventually all the measures that had been ratified in the assembly were implemented successfully according to the will of their advocates.

To tell the truth, Mr. "Zhongguo Yimin" did not really stay in one place for the whole year, but he actually received all these news through the telegraph. This is because a few days after the meeting of the assembly, he was dispatched to Russia to deal with the matter of the Russian popular parties, while another representative stood in for him at the assembly. In Russia, everything proceeded as expected, in a few months' time the populist parties prevailed and Manchuria returned to the Chinese.

After Mr. "Zhongguo Yimin" came back from Russia, he returned to his home town to manage a factory that had been established there. At that time, there were still a few foreign countries which did not respond to China's renewed claims of authority over the foreign concessions and the foreign spheres of influence in the Chinese territory. For these foreign countries, China was like a paradise, a rich and plentiful land to exploit. They believed that this land was populated by some species of inferior animals that, like dogs and horses or cattle and sheep, if they were not wearing themselves out to carry on man's heavy work, they stood in line to be slaughtered. These animals knew only how to care for their own in a "you bite me I bite you" kind of way, and they would never be able to

oppose the strength of the foreigners. Among them there were some individuals who jumped at the occasion to put themselves in charge of the rest, and the other animals let them handle the rope that was leading them to the slaughterhouse, and the knife that was going to butcher them, following their orders: how could they not take advantage of such a situation?

But suddenly, and finally, these lower animals decided to get rid of the rope and destroy the knife that enslaved them, because they wanted to defend their own heavenly kingdom. When this happened, Russia rose up too, its popular parties broke free of their own rope and knife, they overcome their adversities and obtained their revenge. On their own will, they started to take care of their own affairs, but actually they had been collaborating with China behind closed doors all along: the two sides planned their actions in synchrony, and Russia was the first to recognise our new China. America, champion of civil rights, then recognised us too.

The other countries either were ruled by emperors of hereditary descent, or they were governed by some fragile, spoiled political party, and they could not tolerate this beautiful scenario. They believed that the Chinese were of the most dishonest, most untrustworthy and treacherous kind, and that even if you called them so, or you tortured and killed them, they would bow back in gratitude nevertheless. Furthermore, they were convinced that if they could manage to revenge the emperor, then they could put one of their own, like in the old ways. They looked at this attractive melon that China was, which they had been discussing to cut up and divide among themselves many times, and they thought that their occasion had finally come. Following the old belief for which an army could be strong only if it is commanded with an iron hand, persuaded that the new China did not have any military power to back up its claims of equality and its will to be a republic, they were sure that a strike would have definitely done the job. Therefore the

foreign nations all agreed upon a date to gather their military forces of land and sea in order to advance together against China: the naval forces moved towards Hong Kong, Xiamen, towards Dinghai or Shanghai, and towards Tianjin, Yantai and Port Arthur; the land forces moved from Korea, from India and from Vietnam; some countries advanced alone, while others formed coalitions of two or three nations. The different armies responded to each other's calls, their banners covered the sky, the masts of their ships grew like a forest on the sea. The enemy advanced with the same enthusiasm with which the He Zong Alliance attacked the state of Qin during the Warring States Period, or the Fifth Coalition attacked France in 1840: they intended to march on the Chinese soil and reduce it to dust. Yet true gold does not fear fire: who could have thought that the strong will of the Chinese would endure such a test?

It is safe to say that a defensive war is easier to fight than an offensive one, and the only concern from the part of the defender is to prevent the enemy to infiltrate its lines and to divulge its strategies. But the spirit of the Chinese of today was devoted to their own country, they did not need to look for strength in any other place, and they would not let anything tarnish that! The enemy tried in many ways to corrupt some spies, but they could not find any. They even tried to get their hands on some more detailed maps, but they could not obtain a single one. Of what were our plans, they could not get a clue. No matter how careful and sophisticated they were in planning their strategies, with enough money we could always manage to buy some high level spies and obtain detailed information about the movements of their troops and of their dispatches.

Because, on the one hand, of the difference of positions between the attackers and the defenders, and of the disparity between the level of patriotism of the two parts on the other, each battle fought on land saw no invader that was not rejected. As for the war at sea, the enemy probed the waters day and night with telescopes and electric beams, while

at the same time sending submarines under water for reconnaissance, yet apart from a few soldiers patrolling our forts, they could not detect anything else. Mislead, they would then felt confident enough to enter our harbours. It was at that moment that we attacked: the underwater torpedoes would hit them shortly after they'd met our artillery, and no ship was spared. Therefore, we just had to wait for our artillery to engage fire, and then this ruthless strategy would unfold. The spectacle was unbearable, yet at the same time inevitable in order to defend ourselves. Since the enemy could not rely on any informant, they would never know our plans. They would usually catch up with our strategy only after the fact, by tracking the time and the location of the explosions using the telescopes of the ships that were not engaged in battle. As for their strategies of response, even if they could find one, they would not be able to put them into practice in such a short time, but could only signal their damaged ships to avoid the missiles and leave.

The armies and the fleets of each single invading country were vanquished by the Chinese. The spheres of influence of the past were completely eliminated, and all the occupied territories were given back. In the end, China decided to close its ports, and the foreign countries, resigned to complying, decided to held a big conference in the city of Berlin in order to discuss of a method to break China's defences. "The love of the Chinese for their country is so strong that I fear there is no way to break it," they said, "it would be better for us to give up and talk reconciliation, we would still be able to negotiate some benefits." Thus through the mediation of Russia and America they came to terms with us.

Even though we had won the war, we had no intention of taking advantage of our position. Rather, when their armies dispersed, we took the chance to propose a truce. We demanded the institution of an international court, and the creation of an army from a world alliance of nations. As for the compositions of both the court and the army, they had to reflect the size of the population of each country involved. We requested that, with the

exception of the police forces, no country would maintain any national army, and if two countries were to be involved in some dispute, that would be a task for the international court to solve. If some were to oppose this system, that would be a task for the international army to solve, and if among the countries disputes were to arise between the citizens and their government, the matter would be discussed in court.

When the other countries heard of the Chinese proposal, they could not believe it true. Yet, pressured by Russia and America's strength, they did not to oppose it. Thus the treaty was signed and immediately put into practice. From that moment on, no wars occurred any more, and the people lived happy and peaceful, even though the happiness of the Chinese exceeded that of the other countries. If a country discovered a new invention or came up with a new source of profit, everybody would benefit from it, and all the drawbacks of the past, such as the economic disadvantages and the lack of people of talent, were gone. Civilisation thus reached its apex.

As for the customs and the lifestyle of this new civilisation, people would not use names any more to identify themselves, but numbers. There were no rulers or subjects any more, and the administration of the public interest became an orderly and logical practice, without any shifting of responsibilities or incomprehension. The young took care of the education of the young, and the old took care of the well-being of the old, while the sick could always benefit of the help of a doctor; there were no husbands and wives any more, because if two people agreed to live with each other, they could simply go to a court, formalise their union in a just and honourable way and then go live together; the uncivilised practices of prostitution and adultery were no more; laws against rape were soon promulgated, and the most serious cases were punished with death; idleness was sanctioned with reductions of food or with limitations of movement and the like. In the end these laws became obsolete too, as there were no criminals any more, so they were

abandoned, and the tribunals were closed.

The railways could now reach every corner of the country, and this made it possible to dispose of many words that used to express difference and separation like “me” and “you”, as well as of many adjectives that implied resentment or judgement; swearwords and curses died out even more spontaneously. With the development of the communications, the language became simpler too: a national language was adopted, as well as new set of characters that could transcribe both meaning and sound, and that could be learned quickly. This new language in which speaking and writing converged was adopted for the publication of new books and newspapers, and it was used to record the principles and the philosophy upon which the new country had been built, its best customs and traditions, so that these could be appreciated by everybody, regardless of their country, because the new language was easy to study and learn, and there was hardly anybody who did not study it. Language cultivates thought, and thoughts construct reality. This new system was first adopted in Russia, then in the United States, and after that it expanded in India, in Australia and in the continents of Europe, Africa and the rest of America: in less than sixty years this new method of communication had expanded to all the five continents.

All the countries convened in an international meeting and voted for the elimination of the national boundaries. The international tribunal – by that time reduced to an empty institution – was abolished, and the international army was dismantled too. Because men did not have any more reason to fight each others, they all joined in a common effort to overcome nature and to take control over its ever-changing conditions and to conquest the atmosphere. As humanity colonised the stars, its tenacious spirit found its place among them.

The date of this international meeting was not chosen by chance, it was the first day

of the first month of the year Jiachen, and our Chinese citizen “Zhongguo Yimin” was now more than 90 years old. On that day he could not contain his joy, as all his aspirations had come true. On his way to the conference, he stumbled upon a friend, but as he were to greet him, the sound of a bell suddenly woke him up. It was in a dream that he had met his friend, and the world he woke up was still a dark one. “Greetings! Congratulations!” He still wanted to shout, “It is the new year, and a new world has come!”

(July 27th, 1905)

Boundaries, contaminations and juxtapositions

Xinnian meng 新年夢 is the only work of fiction written by Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 in his otherwise prolific activity as a scholar, educator and reformer. Published in 1904 in the last issue of the newspaper *Eshi jingwen* 俄事驚聞 (which would then change its title in *Jingzhong ribao* 警鐘日報), this short story contains in their essence many of the philosophical and political leitmotifs which Cai Yuanpei would elaborate later in life. The story has a clear didactic purpose that often surfaces in the texture of the narration moulding the form of the *xiaoshuo* 小說 into that of a pamphlet, a speech or an essay written in an elegant and concise proto-*baihua* 白話. From this point of view, Cai Yuanpei's short story is very similar to Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 unfinished novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記: both these pieces of writing gravitate at the margins of their authors' scholarly and political interests, and they peculiarly stand out in all their fictional eccentricity from the copious activity of their respective authors as essayists, journalists and thinkers. While these observations may seem marginal to our discussion, on the contrary they confirm us once again the hybrid nature of the utopian text, its intermediate and mediatory position among discourses of different kinds: by fictionalising politics, the utopian novel overflows the borders of fiction.

On the level of the text as a narrative device, the strategies and the gimmicks deployed by Cai Yuanpei in the development of the story's plot are the same that we can find scattered in the novels that we are going to discuss in the following chapters: the protagonist of the story is the ideal incarnation of a Chinese citizen, he is both an "everyman" and a hero, the most passionate and committed patriot that his country has to offer; his uncompromising idealism is initially damped by his fellow countrymen and their

delusional oblivion, to which he does not participate because he had the possibility to travel, to see the world, to understand reality as it is outside the borders of his comfort zone; a provisional breakdown of the coordinates of plausibility (often in the frame of a dream, of an illusion, etc.) transports the hero from the dystopian obliviousness of his present to a utopian somewhere else; the Chinese utopia is described in the terms of a *datong* 大同 (Great unity), a *wenming shijie* 文明世界 (Civilised world), a *wenming guo* 文明國 (Civilised country) or a *xin guo* 新國 (New country), which stands in its perfection against the *jia wenming* 假文明 (False civilisation) of the *yeman guo* 野蠻國 (Barbaric countries) and the *taguo* 他國 (Other countries); the utopian locus emerges both in its alienating otherness as well as in its familiarity, and the character's experience in it is one of "de-defamiliarisation" from the distortions of his own past, rather than one of familiarisation with the utopian present; the Chinese utopia unfolds in its rational self-evidence, as if it were the natural materialisation of pure thought (which is in the end the thought of the reformist intelligentsia of the time); the historical background of the protagonist, which is the one of the novel's ideal reader, is completely reversed: the perceived conditions of colonial marginality and national belatedness are negated with the unfolding of the utopian imaginary, and in the end the Chinese cultural, national, imperial centrality is reasserted.

Even though ours is not a comparative study of the Chinese modern utopian genre in relation to its non-Chinese counterparts, we have also decided to include in our analysis, although briefly, a couple of texts that at a first glance may not appear related to the topic of this study: Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*, which was published in the United States in 1888, and its dystopian response/sequel *Looking Further Backward*, written by Arthur Dudley Vinton in 1891. While the flowering of the utopian

genre during the very last years of the Manchu empire may be largely attributed to Liang Qichao's efforts towards the creation of a new literature as an outlet for the popularisation of his and his peers' ideas of reform, the *xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 that Liang had in mind was modelled after a foreign cast. As Joseph Levenson remarks in his *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, among the many sources of Liang Qichao's polyhedric and cosmopolitan formation was also a fruitful collaboration with English missionary Timothy Richard, for whom Liang Qichao worked as a secretary between 1894 and 1898.¹⁵ This connection is for us important, because in the year 1891 Timothy Richard had managed to publish on the pages of his magazine *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (A Review of the Times) an abridged translation of Bellamy's influential masterpiece with the title of *Huitou kan jilue* 回頭看記略. Even though our genealogical claims cannot be substantiated in any other way than that of the textual comparison, it is our opinion that traces of the Bellamian utopian model surface subtly in Liang Qichao's unfinished novel, and emerge even more clearly in those texts that Liang's narrative enterprise spawned in the years thereafter, such as Wu Jianren's 吳趸人 *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 and Lu Shi'e's 陸士諤 *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國.

With the second chapter of this research – which we prefer to consider an “interpolation” – we tried to reconstruct the characteristics of the Bellamian model through its juxtaposition with the American dystopian novel *Looking Further Backward*. This novel was written by Arthur Dudley Vinton as critique of Bellamy's pseudo-socialist nationalism played around the imagination of an invasion of the United States by a renewed Chinese empire whose features are remarkably similar to those imagined around the same years by the Chinese writers. We believe that with the comparison of Vinton and Bellamy's novels

15 Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1959, p. 19.

through the lens of the Chinese “Otherness”, which emerges both as an overt and silent referent to the American (ou)topian imagination, it will be possible to obtain a broader and more articulate understanding of the nature of the utopian narration in itself, and of the way its traits surfaced within the Chinese literary tradition through the translingual circulation of different narrative models.

While the pertinence of the utopian genre may appear self-evident from the sheer juxtaposition of the “utopian” texts according to simple criteria of similarity and repetition, these criteria are nevertheless not sufficient to provide this genre a functional coherence within the ocean of texts produced during the late Qing period. As we will see with the first chapter of this study, this literary period is paradoxically characterised both by an overabundance of generic labels, and by the progressive loss of generic boundaries between the texts. Thus, in justifying our generic claims only by reasons of textual similarity, we would risk to bind our analytical perspective in the fetters of tautology, and to find ourselves locked in the logical impasse for which a utopian genre would exist as a sum of its texts only if there are utopian texts to account for this sum. On the contrary, our reliance to the generic label of utopia is functional to the understanding of these texts both as ideological by-products of a changing *Zeitgeist*, and as mediatory, heuristic tools for the measurement of this change. Furthermore, we will argue that the utopian genre, by virtue of its ambition to describe the whole of society instead of its particular components, may be understood as a Genettian “archi-genre”, that is to say an overarching epistemological category.

Our critical itinerary, which begins with a translation, a brief excursus overseas and a defence of the utopian genre, then unfolds as an itinerary of “approximation”: it is according to this particular idea or conceptual image (that of approximation), that we have decided to incorporate in our research the unfinished novels of Liang Qichao and Chen

Tianhua 陳天華. In the third chapter of this study we will rely on the critical frameworks elaborated by Georg Lukács, Darko Suvin, and Fredric Jameson in their theorisations of the historical novel and the science fiction genre in order to make sense of what remains of the two novels *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and *Shizi hou*. Here their condition of “incompleteness” (which is historical and contingent) will be disregarded as a flaw and rather welcomed as a defining trait and a useful instrument for the understanding of the conceptual “location” of the utopian construct, as well as of the nature of our movement (as readers and as interpreters) towards it. In our reading, the condition of “incompleteness” of these two texts is elevated from incidental contingency to inherent characteristic of the utopian construct. Instead of focusing on how the utopian imaginary is represented in these two fragmentary texts, in this chapter we will rather try to focus on how the dislocation of the utopian locus in an always unreachable chronological or geographical elsewhere may hint to the essentially unrepresentable nature of the utopian construct *per se*, and how this conundrum (i.e., the problem of representing the inherently unrepresentable) is bound to surface in the texture of these novels.

After a primary contextualisation of Liang Qichao’s fictional efforts in relation to his attempts to promote a reform of the literary medium as a political instrument in the mould of the Japanese novels of Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 and Tokutomi Sohō 德富蘇峰, we will try to understand the narrative works of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua as fictional attempts of approximation in which the fundamental unrepresentability of the utopian construct is mediated via textual strategies of displacement, deferral and postponement. In these texts the Chinese utopia is not represented but rather pointed and gestured at, imagined and alluded as an ideal somewhere-else whose lure (which the

elusive “lure of the modern”)¹⁶ is directly proportional to its distance and unreachability.

Elaborating on Guy Debord’s notion of society as a spectacle, in the fourth and in the fifth chapter of this study we will try to approach the abundant narrative material offered by Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* and Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* in the terms of a spectacle and a simulacrum. The utopian representation is recognised as, in the words of Louis Marin, the “simulacrum of a synthesis”: the utopian construction does not provide an ideal synthesis between reality and ideological projection, but rather the *illusion* of a synthesis. The utopian locus becomes a mediatory space of reference in which the unresolved aspects of the underlying ideological subtext and the chaos of the ebullient social *magma* are crystallised in the form of provisional *ensembles* within the utopian representation and in the form of the novel.¹⁷ Yet beneath the crystallisation of the ensemble still lies the magma, the indeterminateness and the chaoticity of the contrasting social forces. These elements are staged in reverse in the utopian spectacle, which thus becomes a figurative arrangement and a photographic negative of all those issues put forward yet left unresolved by the ideological discourse. Our fourth and fifth chapters unfold as two acts of a close reading of Lu Shi’e and Wu Jianren’s novels, whose end-of-history utopian landscapes of social perfection are examined as loci of accumulation of the unresolved issues of history. Even though in our analysis we will try to focus on both these two novels, it must be remarked that, whereas Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* provides us a textbook example of the utopian genre, Wu Jianren’s novel expands and stretches the boundaries of the form to such an extent that the text defies any attempt of formal and

16 We are referring here to Shumei Shi, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.

17 We are referring here to Cornelius Castoriadis’ concepts of “magma” and “ensembles”: “A magma is that from which one can extract (or in which one can construct) an indefinite number of ensemblist organizations but which can never reconstituted (ideally) by a (finite or infinite) ensemblist composition of these organisations”; Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford, Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 297; or Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987, p. 343.

conceptual closure. *Xin shitou ji*'s linguistic inventiveness, its re-elaboration of the lexicon of tradition as well as its ironic jabs against it, the sheer imaginative breadth of Wu Jianren's utopian cartography: all these elements confirm Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* as the most representative utopian novel of its times, and as one of the most interesting novels written in the late Qing period at all.

In the end, the late Qing utopian novel emerged as the prominent symptom of a time gone out joint, unfolding in the space of superimposition and contamination of those ideological categories and imaginative constructions that once were believed to be hermetically sealed and self-sufficient. Far from functioning as a Hegelian synthesis between irreconcilable instances such as those of tradition and modernity, of the self and the other, of centre and periphery, of the coloniser and the colonised, the utopian construction rather inaugurates a space of difference and possibility that opens up between the imaginary and the imagined, and that in the end attests through (and impresses on) the narrative text the ongoing process of negotiation that makes any society imaginary and any community imagined.

CHAPTER 1: OF TEXTUAL TERRITORIES AND LITERARY CARTOGRAPHIES

*After chanting a poem about beautiful hills and rivers,
the Spirit weeps,
For the Soul of Freedom in now rent asunder on the Central Plain.
The talented scholars gathered at the court,
The beauties in the gay quarters,
All were born in historic Soochow.
Inside a diplomatic carriage going westward,
Sorrows and grievances are suddenly felt,
deep in the secret mind love.
Drifting in a sinful sea,
The wrongs from the last incarnation are judged in the present.
The dragon-monster continue to fight on the highways at night,
Our men are drunk in the midst of a celestial feast.
All frightened and trembling, awaking from their dreams.
The army barracks are desolate,
The gates of the Phoenix Palace opened wide,
And all dexterity in negotiation is seen.
Another epoch is approaching,
The eyes of Heaven stare harshly at the Manchus,
And the people's mind turns once more to Han.
Summoned by the wind of the east,
The God of the Flower of Freedom will soon appear.*

Zeng Pu 曾朴, *Niehai hua* 孽海華¹

1 “江山吟罷精靈泣，中原自由魂斷！金殿才人，平康佳麗，問氣鐘情吳苑。軒西展，遽瞞著靈根，暗通瑤怨。孽海飄流，前生冤果此生判。群龍九窟宵戰，值鈞天爛醉，夢魂驚顛。虎神營荒，鸞儀殿辟，輸爾外交纖腕。大千公案，又天眼愁胡，人心思漢。自由花神，付東風拘管。” Zeng Pu 曾樸, *Niehai hua* 孽海華, Taipei, Taiwan guji 臺灣古籍, 2004, p. 1; translated by Refy de Crespigny and Liu Ts'un-yan in Tseng P'u, “Flowers in a Sea of Sin”, *Renditions*, Spring and Autumn 1982, n. 17–18, p. 137.

This research relies on an assumption that, although often implied in the study of the late Qing literary period and in the labelling of its trends and genres, has never been questioned in its actual consistency. This assumption regards the adoption of the utopian category as a set of generic boundaries to be deployed in order to delimit our field of research to the texts hereby taken into consideration. Even though such an assumption may appear obvious in the apparent immediacy of its claim – because we have a conglomerate of utopian novels, therefore a utopian genre has to exist – it poses a fundamental question that is nevertheless left unanswered: in a period of literary turmoil such as that of the “repressed” or “incipient modernities” of late Qing fiction, is it legitimate on our part to linger over the label of “utopian novel”? More importantly, is it in the end useful for our purposes of textual analysis? Considering the fact that the late Qing literary period was one of the most intense seasons of experimentation in the history of Chinese literature, and that in those years the form of the novel/*xiaoshuo* 小說 was explored to its exhaustion in a proliferation of genres, labels, categories and tendencies, any reasonable attempt of categorization becomes *de facto* a very precarious endeavour. Therefore, such a question has to be evaluated properly.

Yet the answer to our initial “utopian assumption” is an elusive one, as it is masked and hidden by the apparent abundance of raw data, whose sheer quantity may overwhelm and mislead (or discourage) the researcher. The amount of concrete evidence to support our generic claims over the utopian textual territory cannot in fact be dismissed, but it cannot be left unquestioned nevertheless. Furthermore, evidence can be also found among texts that may not pertain directly to the utopian category. In this regard, the *kaipian* 开篇 of the novel *Niehai hua* 孽海花 – whose lines open this particular chapter – provides us a remarkable example: the opening song of Zeng Pu’s 曾樸 *Flower in a Sea of Sins* (1904)

reveals in the esotericism of its verses the schizophrenic imprint of the Chinese modern utopian discourse, and the paradoxical nature of its mediatory position between instances of future-oriented escapism and nostalgic backward gazing.

Zeng Pu's *kaipian* may be considered the swan song of an epoch. The author's voice laments the decline of the Qing dynasty, a court cloistered behind walls of self-referential preservation and defended by disillusioned scholars who gather in its pavilions to drink away their helplessness, while the "Soul of Freedom is rent asunder on the Central Plain", the "beauties in the gay quarters" cannot hide any more their "sorrows and grievances" behind the floating immobility of their brocades, and the "imperial emissaries" are fleeing the capital – maybe disguised as peasants – heading westward where the course of the empire takes its way. A tone of impending catastrophe pervades the opening lines of Zeng Pu's novelization of the life of courtesan Sai Jinghua 賽金花, as if the historical momentum of the Manchu dynasty were finally coming to an end and its mandate of heaven had run its course. Another epoch is indeed approaching, but even though "the people's mind turns once more to Han", it is not Han the God of the Flower of Freedom, nor eastern is the wind of imperial *geming* 革命 that blows from the East: as the illustration on the cover of the Zhen Mei Shan 真美善 edition of the novel would later reveal – but we are already in 1928 – the "God of the Flower of Freedom" comes from the West, and it is represented by a black and white sketch of the American Statue of Liberty.

In the simple juxtaposition of a number of novels can be seen if not the borders of a utopian genre, at least a clear propensity on the part of many Chinese *fin-de-siècle* novelists towards utopian construction, an inclination to indulge in the imagination of a radical otherness whose traits of ideological stability and coherence are eulogised on the unstable background of present history and the radically shifting *Zeitgeist* of the Chinese

colonial modernity. Such novels would include those by Bihe Guan Zhuren 碧荷館主人, Chen Tianhua 陳天華, Chun Fan 春颿, Liang Qichao 梁啟超, Lu Shi'e 陸士諤, Wu Jianren 吳趸人, Xiaoran Yusheng 蕭然鬱生, Xu Zhiyan 許指巖, Li Ruzhen 李汝珍, Liu E 劉鶚 and Zeng Pu himself.

After all, the early excursions of Li Ruzhen in the fantastic countries of the *Nü'er guo* 女兒國, the *Junzi guo* 君子國 and the *Liangmian guo* 兩面國 in the pages of his eclectic masterpiece *Jing hua yuan* 鏡花緣 (Flowers in the Mirror, 1827) leans towards utopia. The impulse that urges Lao Can to dedicate his life to the salvation of his compatriots after the moment of illumination provoked by his allegorical dream of modern China as a sinking ship in Liu E's *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記 (The Travels of Lao Can, 1907) is utopian. Also utopian are the landscapes depicted by Lu Shi'e in the novels *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 and *Xin Shanghai* 新上海 (1910), as is the "electric world" of Xu Zhiyan's *Dian shijie* 電世界 (1909). Unequivocally utopian are Wu Jianren's Civilised Realm depicted in the novel *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 (whose early chapters appear in 1905) and Bihe Guan Zhuren's reborn Chinese empire in the novel *Xin jiyuan* 新紀元 (1908). Ultimately the politico-literary projects of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua, whose goal was to shape the boundaries of new China through their prefiguration within the limits of the novel, are utopian.

Moreover, the late Qing utopian landscape is foregrounded even more clearly with the juxtaposition and the mutual integration of these texts, as if they were different parts of a unique fresco whose creation was bound by the practical necessity of the *intonaco*, its completion deferred in the *giornata*, the day of work allowed for the drying of the plaster. In this sense, Lu Shi'e's new Shanghai could as well be located at the heart of Wu Jianren's

Civilised Country (文明國), whose ideal government is shaped according to the blueprint of Liang Qichao's novel-cum-treatise *Xin zhongguo weilai ji*.² In approaching the utopian fresco from a distance, the literary historian is taken aback by the vastness of the scenario in the same way the narrator and protagonist of Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* cannot restrain his awe when looking down from his flying car at the new city of Shanghai in the splendour of its perfect geometric grid:

隻見司機人把小盤兒隻一旋,那飛車漸漸的上騰.“蚩蚩蚩,蚩蚩蚩”,不一會,便升騰在空中了.下望塵寰,城市屋舍,歷歷都在轂下.馬路如帶,人物如豆,宛如瞧著一幅圖畫一般.我不覺樂極,笑對友琴道:“往常羨著神仙騰雲駕霧,今日,神仙竟做到手了.”³

As our driver turned the driving wheel, the flying car slowly started to rise with a slight “ch ch ch” noise; soon we were soaring in the sky. Looking down at the mortal world, I could see the houses and the buildings clearly making up the shape of the capital. The streets were like belts and the people like peas: it was like looking at a painting. It was inebriating, “I used to envy the immortals who could ply the cloud and the mist,” I told my travelling companion while laughing, “but now we have conquered them!”

These texts appear to integrate each other seamlessly, as if each author were writing and filling the parenthesis left open by his colleagues, contributing with his efforts to the creation of a shared hypertext from whose recurring *topoi* we can detect the persistence of a common utopian imaginary, a system of expectations which is imagined and built via strategies of representation and reversion from the raw material of the ideological subtext, an unconscious which “is not immediately present as such . . . but rather must be

2 As Karl S. Y. Kao remarks in his useful overview on the “Aspects of Derivation in Chinese Narrative” (in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, July 1985, vol. 7, n. 1-2, pp. 1-36), in the vast and refined network of references, allusions and remainders that is in the end the Chinese textual tradition at large, intertextuality is certainly not a particularly “revolutionary” trait to account for in these texts, yet in the fragmented, inconclusive and pleonastic literary landscape of the late Qing, this particular characteristic becomes essential in the individuation and “coagulation” of the utopian genre among the myriads texts produced at that time.

3 Lu Shi'e 陆士谔, *Xin zhongguo* 新中国, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2010, pp. 111-112.

reconstructed”.⁴

Unfortunately, despite this apparent abundance of data, the existence of the Chinese modern utopia cannot be accepted at its *prima facie* value, and in the same way the pertinence of the late Qing utopian imaginary cannot be inferred by the mere accumulation of the texts. This imaginary – which surfaces among the currents of the late Qing literary discourse as an archipelago of insular texts – has to be decoded from the overwhelming white noise of a literary landscape whose underlying historical stimuli were driving towards exhaustion. Animated by the repeated and repetitive discourse of reform, and determined to restore the value of *wen* 文 as an epistemological tool for the interpretation of the Real in a reality that had slipped out of control after the colonial encounter, the late Qing literati not only devoted their efforts to the exploration of all the possible conceptual combinations that the *xiaoshuo* 新小說 form (as it had been received from the autochthonous textual tradition) allowed, but they also indulged in its scientific, Darwinian categorisation.⁵

The question of the generic categorisation of the late Qing narrative material has already been tackled by Nathaniel Isaacson in his pioneering work on the emergence of the science fiction genre in China:

Within the broad formal category of *xiaoshuo*, a number of generic designations emerged during the late Qing, all of them bearing clear allegiance to the cause of popular education and national renewal. In an article published in *New Citizen* (新民叢報) Liang Qichao listed the following ten generic categories of novel: “historical” (歷史小說); “governmental” (政治小說); “philosophic-scientific” (哲理科學小說); “military” (軍事小說); “adventure” (冒險小說); “mystery” (探偵小說);

4 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 66.

5 On the concept of *wen* 文 (prose) as the conceptual background for the development of the notion of *wenxue* 文學, see Theodore Hutters, “From Writing to Literature: The Development of Late Qing Theories of Prose”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, June 1987, vol. 47, pp. 51–96.

“romance” (寫情小說); “stories of the strange” (語怪小說); “diaries” (札記體小說); and “tales of the marvelous” (傳奇體小說). . . . In the world of actual publication, other generic categories attached to titles in the contents of serial fiction like the *All Story Monthly* included “nihilist” (虛無黨小說); “utopian” (理想小說); “philosophical” (哲理小說); “social” (社會小說); “national” (國民小說); “comical” (滑稽小說); and “short stories” (短篇小說).⁶

Rather than providing a periodic table for the rationalisation of the late Qing narrative material, these categories exacerbate the feeling of disorientation that seem to pervade this particular literary period, and reaffirm the “volatility” of an age that vacillates between “contradictions such as quantity versus quality, elite ideal versus popular taste, classical language versus vernacular language, central versus marginal genre, foreign influence versus indigenous legacy, apocalyptic vision versus decadent desire, exposure versus masquerade, innovation versus convention, enlightenment versus entertainment”.⁷

It is true that, from a practical point of view, the peculiar proliferation of literary genres during the last years of the late Qing period reflected also the unprecedented developments of the printing industry, the development of a new and larger reading public, and the overall commodification of the late Qing cultural capital. In this context, the figure of the *wenren* 文人 as the esoteric custodian of a tradition in constant need of amendment, and as the moral technician of a society in need of guidance, gradually gave way to the figure of the intellectual as both a spokesperson for the people at large, but also as a manufacturer of cultural commodities. Within the coordinates of this new system of cultural production and consumption, the novel (in its countless generic variations, in its translated variety, in its many rewritings and *nijiu* 擬舊 reinterpretations) became one of

6 Nathaniel Isaacson, *Colonial Modernities and Chinese Science Fiction*, PhD dissertation, Los Angeles, University of California, 2011, p. 31.

7 David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 14.

the most exchanged currencies.⁸ Yet at the same time we can read in the multitude of texts produced during the late Qing period a collective attempt to represent, elaborate and reconnect the myriad fragments of a time that had gone out of joint, in the same way we can trace in this proliferation of the genres what we may consider as an underlying uneasiness which was the result of an increasing awareness of the fact that, despite the many attempts, a fragmented reality could only correspond to a fragmented representation of reality.

In the end, as Isaacson remarks, these classifications are not so useful *per se*, because many of the most important texts of the late Qing tradition are built in the margins of these conventions, in their continuous overlapping rather than in their zealous adherence. Thus our decision to rely on the utopian perspective for the understanding of the novels here under analysis derives exactly from these considerations regarding the question of genre and the pertinence of utopian novel: the utopian construction develops as a hyperbolic locus of closure in which all these generic denominations are encompassed in (or eradicated from) an impossible literary project that counterposes to the fragmentation of reality (and the fragmentation of the genres) a newly imagined, coherent and totalising perspective.

Yet despite the recent attention to the late Qing period as a peculiar season of cultural incubation for what concerns the ideological foundations of modern China, this particular propensity towards the utopian imagination, although often recognised as one of the many superficial symptoms of an eccentric tradition, has never been given much credit as a lens for the understanding of Chinese *fin-de-siècle* fiction and its role in the definition

8 On the developments of the printing industry during the years of the Qing empire, see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011; on the development of the *xin xiaoshuo* as a commodity, and of the late Qing novelist as its chief manufacturer, see Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, *Chen Pingyuan xiaoxhuo shilun ji* 陈平原小说史论集, Shijiazhuang, Hebei renmin chubanshe 河北人民出版社, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 654–679.

of the Chinese literary modernity.⁹ The perspective provided by such a lens may appear too distorted: indeed in many of these texts the political component is rarely veiled or mediated by the artistic endeavour, but it is rather presented to the reader as manifest (and manifested) truth, to the extent that the artistic qualities of these literary works are often left to succumb to the rhetorical smugness of the texts. At the same time, we have to agree that for what concern the narrative spectrum of Chinese literature in the late Qing period, every lens is a distorting lens: as David Wang has aptly noted, in this period every aspect of the form of the novel is elevated at synecdoche or metonymy of the form as a whole, while at the same time the whole is being constantly dismantled through contamination, mockery, and exhaustion.¹⁰

Despite its rhizomatic presence within the texture of the late Qing literary discourse, the Chinese modern utopian discourse is often left at the margins of the Chinese literary canon: too nostalgic to be recognised within the coordinates of the Chinese literary modernity and too abstruse to be located within the borders of tradition, the late Qing utopian discourse maintains an intermediary position between these categories by being neither “now” nor “then”, neither “self” nor “other”. In his analysis of Thomas More’s *Utopia* from *Utopiques: Jeux d’espace* (1973), Louis Marin emphasises the *entre-deux* quality of More’s masterpiece, its emergence at the margins of the Old and the New Worlds, which translates into the impossibility to provide the utopian text a univocal ideological collocation either in one or the other.¹¹ Indeed, it is exactly in the ambivalence

9 In recent years, the May Fourth orthodoxy regarding the modernity of Chinese fiction has been questioned and reconsidered in the light of its relation with the late Qing heritage, see for example Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova (ed.), *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980; David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*; Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2005; Patrick Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.

10 It is in these terms that David Wang frame the fragmentation of the form of the novel in the introduction to his *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*.

11 See Louis Marin, *Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1984.

and in the “in-betweenness” of the modern utopian construct that its relevance lies.¹² The “historical liminality” of the utopian text is projected on the level of figuration into the distant island or the distant future: if More’s Utopia is supposed to be (dis)located in the Atlantic Ocean and between Ceylon and Portugal, the Chinese modern utopia is either set in a dream and in the future (Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo*), in the future (such as in Bihe Guan Zhuren’s *Xin jiyuan*), or in a distant land of the present (such as in Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*). Yet, as Phillip Wegner remark,

when we attempt to translate the utopia back into the ideological enclosure of its immediate present . . . we discover blind spots, dislocations, erasures, and aporia. . . . These absences and slippages are crucial, for they signal the productive, critical neutralizations taking place in the narrative unfolding of the utopian figure.¹³

Translated back to its present (by its *fin-de-siècle* readers, by the May Fourth iconoclasts, by us) the late Qing utopian spectacle reveals both through what it includes and through what it leaves out the many idiosyncrasies of an epoch in radical transition, as well as the difficulty on the part of the Chinese intellectuals to come to term with it.

Disguised behind idyllic backgrounds and beautiful scenarios of social integrity, utopia is portrayed as a map or a description, but it is given as a set of prescriptions. In the utopian construction, the map overlaps the territory but it does not substitute the territory itself, to which it relates according to a series of conventions, reductions, simplifications, exaggerations and, in the end, misrepresentations. Dismissed by later commentators as the product of a failed attempt at modernity, the utopian discourse of the late Qing period becomes a peculiar framework of analysis for the understanding of the codependent nature

12 “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.” Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 2.

13 Phillip E. Wegner, *Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. 36.

of those conceptual categories that would be either unquestionably adopted (i.e., progress and modernity as defining traits of the modern nation) or univocally refused (i.e., the culturalist vestiges of an obsolete tradition) in later times. The *ambivalence* of the utopian construct crystallises in the utopian text the schizophrenia of a society that longs backward when it is made to move forward, and that looks forward while it is carefully retreating backward; it reveals through an impossible synthesis, which is the one put forward by the utopian representation, how “the modern time of progress and the anti-modern time of ‘tradition’ are twins who failed to recognise one another”, and that any attempt to detach and isolate one part from this dichotomy eventually reinforces its counterpart.¹⁴ Not entirely compliant with its own (“Chinese”) self, the late Qing utopian discourse is at the same time a discourse of uneasiness towards the (colonial) otherness, but in its precarious positioning lie both its epistemological potential and the reasons for its dismissal.

It is exemplary of the unstable condition of the late Qing utopian fiction the case of Douwe Fokkema’s recent comparative analysis of the Chinese utopian tradition in his *Perfect World: Utopian Fiction in China and the West*.¹⁵ In the comparison between the Western and the Chinese utopian traditions, Fokkema underlines both the universal traits and the local characteristics and cultural differences of the utopian construct. In doing so, he creates a set of coordinates that allow him to move freely yet with critical awareness through extended periods of time (from the Confucian ideal of *datong* 大同, through Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 Peach Blossom Spring of the poem *Taohua yuan ji* 桃花源記 and Kang Youwei’s 康有為 universalism, to the post-Mao dystopian satire of Wang Shuo 王朔) and distant geographies (from Renaissance Europe and Bellamy’s American Gilded Age to China, through Zamyatin’s socialist utopia). Yet despite the range of Fokkema’s

14 Bruno Latour in Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, p. 19.

15 See Douwe W. Fokkema, *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

analysis, his work is marked by certain lacunae that reconfirm the problematicity of the late Qing variety of utopia. While the author openly adopts the category of *wutuobang xiaoshuo* 烏托邦小說 (a label that is in itself very problematic), his research paradoxically glosses over that particular yet transient historical period in which both the *xiaoshuo* category acquires the shape for which we know it today, and its utopian variety (the *lixiang xiaoshuo* 理想小說 or *wutuobang xiaoshuo*) coalesces for the first time.¹⁶

Fokkema does not fail to pinpoint in the imaginary geography of the *taiping tianguo* 太平天國 as a reactionary symbol for the unimaginable paradigm shift that was taking place in semi-colonised China after the Western penetration, but he disappointingly elides a large part of the late Qing utopian production (in itself an unprecedented phenomenon) by focusing his attention only on Kang Youwei's *Datong shu* 大同書. Even though the importance of Kang's *magnus opus* in the crystallisation of the late Qing utopian imaginary of cultural and national revanchism is irrefutable, its role in the definition of the *xiaoshuo* form is questionable, if only for the simple reason that Kang's oeuvre was less a work of fiction than a philosophical treatise. It is not a coincidence in this sense that Fokkema's analysis skips directly from Kang Youwei's Great Unity to the May Fourth iconoclasm without spending much time on those novels in which Kang Youwei's ideals emerged in fictional form.¹⁷ This analytical framework is in the end an ideological vestige: it marks once again the problematicity of the utopian category in relation to the unique cultural coordinates of *fin-de-siècle* China, but also the persistence of the May Fourth univocal ideological imprint in the codification of the Chinese modernity.

The precarious condition of the modern utopian discourse within the received

16 For what regard the development of the *xiaoshuo* form, see for example Mingdong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006; and Theodore Hutters, "A New Way of Writing: The Possibilities for Literature in Late Qing China, 1895–1908", *Modern China*, 1988, July 1988, vol. 14, n. 3, pp. 243–276.

17 Fokkema, pp. 271–287.

canons of Chinese literature emerges also quite clearly through the conspicuous absence of any mention of the utopian genre in the early attempts of systematisation of the late Qing narrative material.¹⁸ In this perspective, it could be useful to focus briefly on some of the earliest assessments of the modern Chinese literary field, such as Hu Shi's 胡適 retrospective *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue* 五十年來中國之文學 (The literature of China in the last fifty years), originally published in the pages of the magazine *Shenbao* 申報 in 1923. As one of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement, Hu Shi quite understandably sees in the adoption of the vernacular (白話) the discriminating principle for the categorisation of the fifty years of Chinese literature that preceded the literary revolution of 1919. Two are the most interesting aspects of Hu Shi's critical stance: the first one is the fact that many of the authors that he mentions in his analysis are linked – although in variable degrees of proximity – to the late Qing modern utopian discourse; the second aspect concerns the terms in which Hu Shi describes (or does not describe) the contributions of the authors he discusses, such as Yan Fu 嚴復, Kang Youwei, Wu Jianren and Liang Qichao.

Even though many of the writers and the intellectuals mentioned in *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue* are praised to some extent by Hu Shi for their merits in the rejuvenation of the Chinese literary landscape, the May Fourth intellectual is adamant in circumscribing their contributions in the terms of a “reformist movement [anchored] within the boundaries of the Chinese classical prose” (古文範圍以內的革新運動), and as textual projects that lacked of a clear signficatory purpose (白話的採用, 仍舊是無意的, 隨便的,

18 For a useful account of the different ways modern Chinese literature has been studied, organised and canonised in manuals, almanacs and anthologies, see Nicoletta Pesaro, “Scrivere di narrativa: Osservazioni sull'impostazione metodologica di alcuni manuali di narrativa cinese moderna”, *Atti dell'XI Convegno dell'Associazione Italiana Studi Cinesi Roma*, Roma, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010, pp. 199–218.

并不是有意的).¹⁹ In doing so, Hu Shi proceeds to highlight how the modernist instances that can be found in the works of these authors, although important for raising the stakes of the Chinese intellectual debate over the questions of reform and revolution, were basically hindered by their own resistance to the new language, and the incapacity on the part of these authors to recognise and embrace the need for a “living literature” (活文學) written in vernacular to be accessible to the contemporary reader. As Zhou Gang remarks, the locus of the May Fourth utopian spirit lied in the *form* of the language and in the universality of the vernacular as a national language (國語), rather than in what was represented by the language (i.e., the utopian scenario *à la* Kang Youwei):

My purpose in the “constructive revolution in Chinese literature” is simply to suggest the creation of “a literature in the national language and a national language suitable for literature.” Our aim in the literary revolution is merely to create in China a literature in the national language. A national language maybe established only after we have produced a literature in the national language; and the national language may be considered a genuine national language only after we have established a national language suitable for literature . . .²⁰

In Hu Shi’s case, the utopian novel’s constructive potential is dismissed against the more impelling question of the revolution of the language (and not without reasons: how much help can be found in a blueprint written in an obscure language?). Yet the reasons behind this long-lasting dismissal of the late Qing utopian imagination may stem from a particular uneasiness on the part of the reformist and revolutionary factions towards the ideological

19 Hu Shi 胡適, *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue* 五十年來中國之文學 in Hu Shi 胡適, *Hu Shi wenji* 胡適文集, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 1998, vol. 3, pp. 201–202.

20 Hu Shi, “Jianshe de wenxue geming lun” 建設的文學革命論 (Toward a Constructive Theory of Literary Revolution) quoted in Gang Zhou, *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 p. 38. In the first chapter of his book, “The Language of Utopia”, Gang Zhou provides an interesting reflection over the question of the universality of language as the final (utopian) goal of Chinese modernist reformism, remarking how the transition from the reformism of the late Qing to the May Fourth iconoclasm can be understood in the terms of a transition from a conception of the Chinese language as an *instrument* of reform, to the language itself as the *object* of reform or revolution.

ambiguity of the utopian construct, that is to say towards a conceptual construction that was both nostalgic and progressive, that hunched forward from the present while longing backward from the future.

In the perspective of this critical uneasiness, the following, apparently marginal considerations over the etymology of the word “*wutuobang*” 烏托邦 may be illuminating: Hu Shi himself was among the first literati to incorporate the neologism “*wutuobang*” (utopia) in his own vocabulary after Yan Fu’s coinage of the new word in the translations of Thomas H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* from 1898, and in that of Adam Smith’s *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (國家富裕之性質與原因的探討) from 1902.²¹ Yet despite Hu Shi’s words of praise for the work of Yan Fu as a translator, and especially for the importance of *Tianyan lun* 天演論 in the catalysation of the late Qing intellectual debate, he does not mention at all Yan Fu’s peculiar inclination towards the utopian discourse. It should be recalled here that Yan Fu’s translations were rarely *only* translations, in fact they often were the product of a radical process of rewriting and adaptation, in which the original textual sources were dismantled and rebuilt in an elegant *wenyan* 文言 to serve the goal of China’s reform.²² In fact, it is maybe in his rendition of Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* that Yan Fu’s *modus traducendi* emerges most clearly, and it does so – distinctively enough – by pointing at utopia: among Yan Fu’s many interpolations of the Chinese version of Huxley’s classic is the addition of a section entitled exactly “*wutuobang*” that is not present in the original English edition, and in which the Chinese translator envisions the edification of an ideal society on a remote

21 On the origins of the word in Chinese, see Zhou Liyan 周黎燕, “Hewei wutuobang” 何谓乌托邦, *Xueshu luntan* 学术论坛, 2009, n. 5, pp. 143–46, although in this article Zhou Liyan appears to overlook that the world *wutuobang* appeared in Yan Fu’s *Tianyan lun* first, and not in his translation of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of the Nations*.

22 On the figure of Yan Fu, see Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power Yen Fu and the West*, Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964; on the “accessibility” of Yan Fu’s style, see the brief but useful contribution of Ko-wu Huang, “The Reception of Yan Fu in Twentieth Century China” in Cindy Yik-yi Chu, *China Reconstructs*, Lanham, University Press of America, 2003.

island.²³ Therefore, considering the amount of space that Hu Shi dedicates to the contributions of Yan Fu in the definition of the modern Chinese literary field, and given the symbolical importance of the *wutuobang* ideal in Yan Fu's literary praxis, Hu Shi's silence in this regard is meaningful.

It is true that Hu Shi's oversight of Yan Fu's utopian penchant could simply be considered as a minor flaw in the critical stance of an intellectual who was mainly concerned with the question of the *language* of literature (and not with the ideal goals of its representations), but this conclusion would be reductive in the light of this author's subsequent considerations regarding some other important figures in the imagination of the Chinese modernist utopia. If we take into account also his commentaries for what regard the works of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Wu Jianren, Hu Shi's reluctance to recognise in the late Qing literary discourse at least the presence of a utopian vein may in the end emerge as a symptom of the problematic nature of the late Qing utopian discourse *per se*. In discussing Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao's contributions to the reform debate of the late Qing period, Hu Shi prefers for example to focus on their important role as exponents of the *tongcheng* 桐城 school of prose together with other important figures such as Lin Shu 林紓 and Tan Sitong 譚嗣同. In emphasizing the role of Kang and Liang in the polarisation of the intellectual debate, Hu Shi nevertheless overlooks two of their major contributions to the literary field: Kang Youwei's *Datong shu*, and Liang Qichao *xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 manifesto advocating for a renovation in fiction. Whereas it is true that Kang's utopian treatise may occupy a hybrid position between fiction, *sanwen* 散文 and the philosophical treatise, the importance of Liang Qichao's literary project (and of its

23 On Yan Fu's 1897 adaptation of T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, see Huang Kewu 黃克武, "Hewei tianyan? Yan Fu Tianyan zhi xue de neihan yu yiyi" 何謂天演? 嚴復「天演之學」的內涵與意義, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊, 2014, n. 85, pp. 127–189.

unfinished novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 of 1902) is indisputable, its marginality in Hu Shi's assessment of the modern literary field is remarkable. While Hu Shi occasionally gives credit to writers such as Liu E and Wu Jianren for their attempts to move in the direction of a *xin xiaoshuo*, he does it without questioning his own perspective for which the late Qing literary discourse remains in the end a half-dead literature (半死文學), if not dead at all (死文學).²⁴ Once again, the potentiality of the utopian component in the re-imagination of the categories of the Chinese literature is dismissed: in the case of Wu Jianren in particular, Hu Shi prefers to focus on the *fengci* 諷刺 nature of works such as his *Ershi nian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀, *Henhai* 恨海, or *Jiuming qi yuan* 九命奇冤, but in doing so he does not mention one of Wu Jianren's most remarkable efforts, the utopian hybrid *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記.²⁵

Hu Shi's critical stance for what regards the importance of the late Qing literary production in the creation of the discourse of Chinese modernity appears to set the standard that will be followed by many other commentators in the years to come, and that – as we will see – will continue to echo in the background of even the most recent attempts of categorisation of this literary period. It does not surprise to find in Lu Xun's 魯迅

Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe 中国小说史略, for example, a similar scepticism in the author's

24 Hu Shi, *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue*, passim.

25 For what regards Wu Jianren's literary production, see Wang Guowei 王国维, *Wu Jianren xiaoshuo yanjiu* 吴趼人小说研究, Jinan: Qi Lu shushe 齐鲁书社, 2007; Wu Jianren's oeuvre proves to be a useful litmus test for our understanding of the consistency of the late Qing utopian discourse as a literary genre. Together with Li Baojia 李寶嘉, Liu E and Zeng Pu, Wu Jianren is often considered among the greatest novelists of the late Qing period, and indeed his novels represent some of the most noteworthy specimens of the pre-May Fourth Chinese literary modernity. It is our opinion that, among his many works, *Xin shitou ji* stands out as one of the most eclectic and interesting experimentations in the *xiaoshuo* form. As we will see in the fourth chapter of this research, Wu's *Xin shitou ji* can be considered a synthesis of the late Qing experimentalism in fiction, a narrative construction in which the historical novel is integrated with the satire and the social commentary of the *fengci xiaoshuo* 諷刺小說 to provide the foundations for a utopian architecture in which elements from the Chinese classical tradition are made to confront the challenges of colonial modernity. Yet despite the uniqueness of this novel, the peculiarity of its structure, and the (conceptual) extent of its utopian landscape, *Xin shitou ji* is often left at the margins of Wu Jianren's production in the same way the late Qing utopian imaginary lies at the margins of the modern Chinese literary canon.

approach towards the most recent developments of Chinese fiction. In his *Brief History of Chinese Literature* the works of Wu Jianren, Li Baojia 李寶嘉 and Liu E are roughly accommodated into the *qianze xiaoshuo* 譴責小說 category, a genre which is presented as the involute and blown-out parody of a *fengci xiaoshuo* that peaked and declined long before these last reiterations.²⁶ As David Wang remarks, when it comes to the assessment and the evaluation of the modernity of the late Qing from the point of view of the post-1919 *discourse* of modernity, the May Fourth iconoclasts are more orthodox than the most stubborn Confucianists in refusing to acknowledge any critical value to the late Qing attempts at the renovation of the literary field. By recognising in these texts only the “waste” of their “excessive tears and laughter, hyperbole, high-strung propaganda”, the champions of the New Literature Movement leave their critical flank open to a pernicious form of internalised ideological orientalism which, instead of unfettering them from the syndrome of inadequacy and dependency that is inscribed in the colonial discourse (what professor Wang defines as the “discourse of deficit”), actually forces the colonised intellectuals to internalise it.²⁷

It is by stepping back (and moving forward) from the May Fourth modernist orthodoxy that it becomes possible to recognise among the heterogeneous fragments of the late Qing literary landscape the shape of a utopian imaginary. This imaginary, although rooted in a dialectic of identity and difference whose referent is – as we will see – the fragmented *Zeitgeist* of the late empire and the condition of submission to which the colonised subject is chained by the coloniser, occasionally develops into a collective attempt to transcend the boundaries of this conceptual impasse in the direction of an

26 See Lu Xun 鲁迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中国小说史略, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1998, pp. 204–215.

27 David Wang, p. 14 *passim*; concerning the “syndrome of inadequacy and dependency” (a diagnosis we adopted from Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*) and the colonial discourse of deficit, these questions are tackled in chapter 4 and 5 through the analysis of Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*.

impossible synthesis between the Chinese self and the colonial other. We could say that it is only by breaking out of the epistemological categories of the May Fourth movement that it becomes possible to recognise and understand the late Qing utopian novel as an articulated (yet failed) attempt of epistemological break from a cultural system faced with its own imminent dissolution, rather than a simple literary automatism or a passive cultural reflex.

Certainly it would imply far too wide a simplification to imagine some sort of direct correlation between the ideological breakdown in the May Fourth aftermath and the eventual initial recognition of the boundaries of the Chinese modernist utopia. Yet it is appealing in this perspective to recognise and extrapolate from the pages of A Ying's 阿英 *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi* 晚清小說史 of 1937 a tentative blueprint of the late Qing utopian narrative imaginary. By focusing on a substantial selection of novels from the first decade of the twentieth century, A Ying recognises among the main traits of the late Qing literary discourse what we may define as a certain tendency towards a Hythlodæian (or should we say Braggadocian?) *shuo meng* 說夢 nonsense.²⁸ It is true that, by focusing mainly on the different ways in which the reality of historical China is elaborated and represented in these texts, A Ying is inclined to emphasise more the eminently social nature (社會性) of these novels rather than their capacity to project and reverse this reality in the negative image/imaginary of the utopian construction. Nevertheless, A Ying does not fail to recognise in many of the titles of the late Qing period a tendency to the ideal (理想), or at

28 See A Ying 阿英, *Wan Qing Xiaoshuo Shi* 晚清小說史, Beijing, Dongfang chubanshe 東方出版社, 1996; among the many novels taken into consideration by A Ying are such as Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, Lü Sheng's 旅生 *Chiren shuomeng ji* 痴人說夢記, Bihe Guan Zhuren's 碧荷館主人 *Huangjin shijie* 黃金世界, Chun Fan's 春飆 *Weilai shijie* 未來世界, Wu Jianren's *Lixian wansui* 立憲萬歲 and *Xin shitou ji*, and the anonymous *Xian zhi hun* 憲之魂.

We are referring here to the character of Mr. Braggadocio, modern Raphael Hythlodæus from the novel *Xin Faluo xiansheng tan* 新法螺先生譚 by Xu Nianci's 徐念慈 of 1905; see Shaoling Ma, "A Tale of New Mr. Braggadocio": Narrative Subjectivity and Brain Electricity in Late Qing Science Fiction", *Science Fiction Studies*, March 2013, vol. 40, n. 1, pp. 55–72.

least to the idealization of the instances of renovation brought forward by the more moderate intelligentsia of the period, and at the same time he remarks how – especially in the case of Liang Qichao’s *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* – the political orientation the author occasionally allows the novel to degenerate into a *bingfei xiaoshuo* 並非小說, or “not really a novel” but rather a political treatise disguised as a novel, whose underlying project is destined to failure because of its intermediary position within the ideological framework of colonised China (主張種族革命的人, 自然特着反對的態度, 就是那守舊的人, 一樣是不能同意的).²⁹

There will be no need to delve further into the question of the reception of the late Qing literary discourse, and of its utopian undercurrent, by the May Fourth intelligentsia and the generations that followed, as it is not our intention to reconstruct the genre’s genealogy (nor to justify its status) from the history of its criticism. After all, the critique made by A Ying regarding the pertinence of certain components of the *xin xiaoshuo* category were already quite clear to Liang Qichao himself, who in the introduction of his *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* warned his readers of the atypical features of some of the chapters of his novel: “They may resemble those of a novel but they are not, they may be read as chapters of an unofficial history but they are not, they may sound like a treatise but they are not a treatise; I do not know what kind of literary form they acquired, and when I look at them I cannot help laughing” (似說部非說部, 似稗史非稗史, 似論著非論著, 不知成何種文體, 自顧良自失笑).³⁰

Hu Shi, Lu Xun and A Ying’s considerations (or lack thereof) concerning the utopian traits or leaning of the late Qing literary discourse rather confirm us the necessity

29 A Ying, pp. 86–89

30 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中国未来记 in Wang Xiaolian 王孝廉 (ed.), *Wan Qing xiaoshuo daxi* 晚清小說大系, Taipei, Guangya chuban youxian gongsi 廣雅出版有限公司, 1984, vol. 16, p. 2.

to move behind the face value of the texts. If these texts were to be taken into account only by virtue of the occasional glimpses of ideal societies and post-colonial Chinese empires that they provide, they would also make up nothing more than an extemporaneous collection of bizarre vignettes: amusing as they could be, they would exhaust their critical potential in their short-lived exoticism. On the contrary, by calling into question the concept of utopia in the understanding of these texts, and by suggesting the possibility of the utopian genre as a viable tool for the understanding of the early modernity of Chinese literature, we are trying to move forward from the limited boundaries of utopia as *ou-topos* and *eu-topos* (in the fashion of Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 *Taohua yuan* 桃花源) and rather propose a definition of the utopian genre as a “ur-genre”, or a Genettian *archigenre*.³¹

Within the “anti-discursive” and “anti-generic” context of Chinese fiction, and especially so under the hyper-discursive and hyper-generic coordinates of the late Qing literary discourse, any attempt to circumscribe a particular genre in the terms of a particular set of rules and parameters in which for a text to fit will always fall short of the generic expectations this critical gesture gives rise to.³² Worse still, this would be a counterproductive endeavour, as it would force a categorical closure on a series of texts that emerged in the first place as tentative, experimental forms within the fluidity of the late twentieth century Chinese literary environment.

The borders of the modern Chinese utopia need to be extended further than the idyllic territories they describe (and prescribe) in order for them to encompass also what lies outside of them. In this way the “generic tool” will not deteriorate in yet another

31 “*Archi-* because [it] is supposed to overarch and include, ranked by degree of importance, a certain number of empirical genres that – whatever their amplitude longevity, or potential for recurrence – are apparently phenomena of culture and history; but still (or already) *-genre[s]*, because (as we have seen) their defining criteria always involve a thematic element that eludes purely formal or linguistic description”; Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, pp. 64–65.

32 On the “anti-discursive” and “anti-generic” nature of Chinese fiction, see Sheldon H. Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 51 *passim*.

tautologically self-referential category within the vast, overblown generic landscape of the late Qing, but it will rather develop as an inclusive perspective through which to make sense of all the other generic approaches. In our perspective the utopian novel becomes “utopian” not only because its pages host plentiful ornate depictions of utopian landscapes, perfect societies and enlightened governments, but also because this kind of novel possesses what we may term as a monadic quality: the utopian novel can be considered a literary monad in the sense that it reflects the complexity of world it is set to represent and to transcend, containing in itself the memes for the reconstruction of all the other narrative categories that have been posited for the understanding of this particular literary period.³³ Our approach to the question of genre, and regarding the pertinence of the utopian genre in particular, thus is synecdochical in principle: the utopian genre is given as a part of the late Qing literary discourse to stand for the whole, and standing as a whole it encompasses in the totality of the utopian representation the specificities of the different individual generic instances.

Our deployment of the utopian category is therefore played out on two discursive levels: on the level of the text’s content (i.e., in relation to what is actually described, told and shown according to the “classic” meaning of the utopian text), and on the level of the genre’s relation to the other genres. In this perspective, we are trying to expand the function of the genre as a critical construction that could

provide a conceptual framework for the mediation and (if not the

33 The word meme is used here in the sense defined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, i.e., “a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission. . . . Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passed it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain.” See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (revised edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 192.

“solution”) of intractable problems, a method for rendering such problems intelligible. The ideological status of genre, like that of all conceptual categories, lies in its explanatory and problem-“solving” capacities.³⁴

Thus if on the level of the content the utopian genre can provide a “conceptual framework” of topoi, motifs and themes that can be used to pinpoint the ideological knots that bind the text to the Real, with its “archigenic” function it can also provide a perspective through which to understand the way the same ideological knots are tackled via the other genres.

Because this research unfolds as an itinerary of approximation and reconstruction of the late Qing utopian ideal of modernity through the close reading of a selection of texts pertaining in a variable degree of proximity to the utopian genre, of the two generic perspectives here proposed it will be the first one to emerge more distinctly. While the perspective of the utopian genre as a late Qing “archigenre” will not be dismissed (and it will surface more clearly in our analysis of the late Qing utopia as a Debordian spectacle in chapters 4 and 5), we have to admit our concern in tackling such a vast conceptual horizon: to trace the rhizomatic network of relations between the utopian “archigenre” and the impressive number of texts and categories that flourished in the late Qing period would require an entirely distinct research project, as well as a much more extensive knowledge of the literary production of the period and of the developments of its genres, subgenres and varieties.

Nevertheless, and on a purely intuitive level, it is possible to grasp the value of the utopian genre as an overarching literary category and heuristic tool/framework by reconsidering briefly the many categories recollected by Isaacson around the science fiction genre: “philosophic-scientific”, “military”, “governmental”, “adventure”, “mystery”, “romance”, “stories of the strange”, “diaries”, “tales of the marvellous”,

³⁴ Michael McKeon cited in Wegner, p. 31.

“utopian”, “national”, “nihilist”, “social”, “philosophical”, “comical”. Each of these categories could be used to describe a particular aspect of the utopian archigenre.

Unfolding through strategies of *Verfremdung* (alienation and estrangement) akin to those of the *science fiction genre*, the utopian genre alludes at the *story of the strange* and the *marvellous*, while at the same time drawing a clear line of demarcation from it by circumscribing the utopian imaginary within the realm of logic, reason and plausibility (utopia is the ideal goal of political action); the main character’s itinerary within the utopian landscapes is described as an *adventure* into the unknown, often narrated in the form of a traveller’s *diary*; the utopian narration develops as a Socratic (i.e., *philosophic*) dialogue between the oblivious guest and the enlightened host; the utopian novel is also a *social novel* whose coordinates are developed to their (ideo)logical extremes; in this process, many aspects of the social discourse are engaged, such as the form of *government*, the role of *science* and *technology* in the utopian society, and the relationships (and *romances*?) between the individuals.

In the more eloquent words of John Rieder, “because genre is always determined by a distribution of resemblances and differences across a field of cultural production, to speak of a genre is always to speak of a system of genres”.³⁵ To this we may add that because the goal of the utopian construct is the imagination of society as a coherent whole, then the utopian text emerges in the accumulation and in the synthesis of these resemblances and differences. Therefore, if we postulate some sort of correspondence between the different aspects of the social discourse and the different genres of the literary practice, then we have to accept the validity of the utopian genre as an archigeneric conceptual framework.

Despite the critical potential of the vast imaginative space that the utopian text

35 John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2012, p. 38.

allows, our perspective on the concept of utopia is essentially negative. Ours is not a judgement of value concerning the aesthetic qualities of the utopian texts here under analysis, nor an appraisal of the actual capacity of these texts to perform and fulfil those rhetorical purposes that prompted this particular genre into existence in the first place.³⁶ Rather these aspects are subordinated to the position of the utopian construct in relation to the ideological subtext to which it belongs, and that the utopian writer is set to question via the utopian play of reversal. It is clear, at least in an intuitive way, that at the core of the modern Chinese literary utopia lies a structure of intentions, a *qianze* 譴責 element of critique which is not expressed via the grotesque representation of the Real according to parameters of verisimilitude and exasperated plausibility, but rather through its complete estrangement via the deployment of narrative strategies of reversal, inversion, defamiliarisation. In the utopian novel, reality is indeed “exposed” (and in this sense the late Qing utopian novel is very coherent with the literary spirit of the time) but this is not done by unmasking reality for what it actually is, but rather by suggesting how it should (or it could) be. Yet despite its ambitions of detachment, of revolution, the utopian construct is deeply anchored to its ideological subtext, in relation to which it is both a derivation and a complement. The utopian construct is a negative one in the sense that it

36 We are referring here to Liang Qichao’s utilitarian view on literature, for which “Fiction should seek to teach where the Six Classics have failed to teach, to convey lessons where the official histories have failed to convey” (故六經不能教,當以小說教之.正史不能人,當以小說人之.語錄不能論,當以小說論之); see Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Yi yin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” 譯印政治小說序, *Qingyibao* 清議報, 1898, n. 1, reprinted in *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集, Beijing: Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 1999, p. 172; translated by Gek Nai Cheng with the title “Foreword to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation” in Kirk Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996. As we will see in the third chapter of this work, the inflorescence of narrative utopias during the last decade of the Qing empire was an almost direct result of Liang’s call for a reform in literature through his attempts to promote a new form of politically-engaged *xiaoshuo* and a new literary aesthetic in which the quality of a literary work depended was proportional to its degree of engagement with reality. The ideas expressed by Liang Qichao in his “Foreword” of 1898 were certainly not the extemporaneous *boutade* of a young, eclectic idealist. On the contrary, they expose the red thread of Liang’s utilitarian take on literature, which will remain a stronghold of his intellectual persona throughout his life, unfolding in his manifesto of 1902 “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” 論小說與群治之關係 of 1902, as well as in his later writings such as the late essay “Gao xiaoshuo jia” 告小說家 from 1915.

develops in the negative space that opens up between what the discourse of ideology allows (promises, envisions) and what it actually realises.³⁷ It is in this space of difference, which is the difference upon which the utopian estrangement is played out, that the utopian discourse unfolds.

By considering the utopian discourse as, to some extent, a “by-product” of the ideological one, we are moving along the theoretical lines given by German philosopher Karl Mannheim in his *Ideologie und Utopie*, according to whom “ideologies are the situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed *de facto* in the realization of their projected contents”, and the utopian mentality thus emerges in the attempt to cover the gap between the projection of ideals and the realisation of their content.³⁸ This particular mediatory position of the utopian construct, which echoes the function of the literary genre as a conceptual framework for the mediation and the solution of otherwise intractable problems, characterises the utopian discourse both as an extremely progressive and extremely conservative one. That of utopia is a progressive discourse in the sense that it unfolds in the form of a narration of hopes, expectations and political reveries the potentiality of the ideological discourse to make sense of reality, especially in those aspects in which, for practical (i.e., historical) reasons said discourse falls short of the potential it entails; but the utopian discourse is at the same a conservative one in the sense that it circumscribes somewhere else and/or sometime else (that is, in utopia’s heterotopic and heterochronic geography) the *eutopian* aspects encoded in the ideological discourse, thus

37 Ideology and utopia develop in a similar way, as they are both negative or inverted images of something else: “It is interesting to see that the term is introduced in Marx by means of a metaphor borrowed from physical or physiological experience, the experience of the inverted image found in a camera or in the retina. From this metaphor of the inverted image, and from the physical experience behind the metaphor, we get the paradigm or model of distortion as reversal. This imagery, the paradigm of an inverted image of reality, is very important in situating our first concept of ideology. Ideology’s first function is its production of an inverted image”. If we agree with Ricoeur in recognising to ideology the production of inverted image our material experience, and if utopia is an inverted image of this inverted image, then the latter emerges as the most “reliable” representation of the Real; see Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 4 passim.

38 Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 175 passim.

asserting its *present* failure.

The ambivalence of the utopian discourse emerges regularly in the texture of the utopian novel in the form of a constant negotiation between revolution and restoration, whose opposite trajectories are reconciled in the impossibility of the utopian landscape. This impossibility points once again to Mannheim's conception of the utopian ordeal, and in particular to what Ricoeur has diagnosed as its "schizophrenic attitude". The utopian discourse, although presented as a discourse of potentiality (in the way it envisions the possibility of change), condenses at the same time all those "conceptions of existence which . . . can never be realized".³⁹ In this sense, the late Qing utopian novel becomes a quintessential literary embodiment of the pre-May Fourth modernity, of its anxieties of both modernisation and rectification, Westernisation and *guocui* 國粹-preservation. More importantly, the late Qing utopian text represents in the end the epitome of a failure, because it crystallises in the utopian representation the incapacity of the ideological categories (and their representatives, the intellectuals) to provide a workable solution for the "intractable problems" against which the literary genre emerged in the first place. In other words, in regard to the issues that are tackled in the utopian novel, the utopian construction becomes inadequate in the exact moment it appears (or it is ratified) as a text: as David Wang remarked, "new fiction decayed at the moment it arose; it was passé even before its newness was absorbed by the general public".⁴⁰

Nevertheless, we submit that it is exactly because of its quality as epitome of a failure that the utopian novel is worth taking into consideration as a useful hermeneutic tool in the analysis of the late Qing literary landscape. By crystallising its ideological background in the photographic negative of the utopian representation, the utopian novel performs a hermeneutic function, it maintains a clear punctuating quality which we may

³⁹ Mannheim, p. 176.

⁴⁰ Wang, p. 25.

not be able to recognise as clearly in the other literary genres of the time. The utopian representation provides us the snap-shot of an ideological framework in the instant of its fragmentation under the weight of the colonial encounter, or – borrowing the words of Freedman – it “construes fragmentary prefigurations of an unalienated future in the cultural artifacts of the past and the present”.⁴¹ If the idea of colonial modernity opens up to a kind of Zenonian paradox in which the (imagined) content of modernity is constantly deferred, and in which the colonised subject is lured by the coloniser into an unequal dichotomy built upon the *illusion* of the possibility of a movement of approximation from one part to the other, then the mediatory function of the *modern* utopia lies at least in its capacity to trace the *trajectory*, and to reconstruct the trace of this movement of perpetual deferral. Therefore, the utopian narration does not reveal how modernity *will be*, but rather how it *has been*, or how it has been conceived. In this sense, this kind of literature performs the function of a reminder: “late Qing literature is denigrated for other, subtle reasons: more than a *remainder* of an obsolete literary past, it is the *reminder* of what always lurks behind the façade of modern discourse”.⁴²

In our attempt to deploy the concept of utopia as primary hermeneutic tool for the understanding of the characteristics of the late Qing literary discourse in its utopian variety, the latter emerges in its chiefly historical dimension, to the extent that the utopian novel could be arguably understood as well as a *historical* novel whose object of representation is the perceived (imagined) end of history, rather than its past and present developments. Indeed, if we delve into the most recent attempts of theorisation of the historical novel, the terms in which this particular genre is described may sound familiar, even useful to our understanding of the utopian form: “the historical novel as a form is something which

41 Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2000, p. 64.

42 Wang, p. 20.

demands an unusual response from its audience: an active response, at the least, and a sense of *otherness* and *difference*” (emphasis added); its virtue lies in the fact that historical fiction “enforces on the reader a sense of historicised ‘difference’” and it unfolds “as mode which has an effect on the normative experience of the everyday and the contemporary world”. Both the historical novel and the utopian novel are textual elaborations of a narrative gesture of chronological deixis. The difference between the two forms lies in the direction at which the particular textual instance is pointing: “The historical [or utopian, we may add] novelist similarly explores the dissonance and displacement between *then* and now, making the past [or the future] recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar”.⁴³ Echoing the words of Lukács, we may say that these similarities reassert the intimate connection between category and history: the emergence of late Qing utopian novel at the end of the Manchu empire and at the height of the European colonial enterprise in China attests a recalibration of the Chinese discourse of history as a discourse built upon a dialectic of difference and identity which involves both change and continuity, rather than a discourse of self-referential, circular and cumulative legitimation.

The epistemological value of the utopian novel, the continuity of the utopian construct with the historical novel and the science fictional genre along the direction given by Lukács, as well as its reliance on alternating strategies of alienation and familiarisation within the framework of a dialectic of identity and difference, all these aspects have been explored extensively by many critics, and in particular by Jameson and Freedman. Yet even though much has been written regarding the coloniser’s science-fictional and utopian gaze along the Saidian perspective for which “the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other”, not much has been said – not

43 Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 4 passim.

at least for what concerns the late Qing period – about the utopian vision of the *colonised* gaze.⁴⁴ What is interesting to us is thus to understand how these aspects are declined in (and emerged from) the historical subtext of late imperial China, and how the late Qing utopian novel developed in response to the particular condition of (semi)colonial subjugation that marked the history of modern China.

Elaborating on Hardt and Negri's notion of Empire as the projected entelechy of the imperialist enterprise and ideal fulfilment of its great expectations, Csicsery-Ronay argues that "the utopian architext is closely linked to the model of Empire" and "as an imaginary political domain, Empire is related to Utopia".⁴⁵ In doing so, he postulates that the modalities of imperialistic expansion (that is, of geographic and economic expansion sustained by the legitimising apparatuses of ideology and technique) and of the consequent colonial construction open up to the theoretical possibility of a total and complete realisation of the imperial order, whose historical actualisations are but partial and incomplete instantiations. This is the "irresistible attraction to imperial order", the inebriating possibility of an overarching wholeness, a "comprehensive ideology, a finely distributed pragmatic myth of networked globally interlocked power" into whose spatial, temporal and conceptual boundlessness to encompass all the fragmented geographies and the fragmented histories of history. It is in this space of possibility that the utopian ideal unfolds, and it is its ideal geography that the map of utopia represents. In a similar way – we claim – the unfolding of the colonial enterprise in China, in its peculiar traits of partiality (China was never a full-fledged colony like India was, for example) and fragmentation (in the words of Sun Yat-sen, "China is not the colony of a nation but of all, and we are not the slaves of a country but of all. I think we ought to be called a 'hypo-

44 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1994, pp. 70–71.

45 Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., "Science Fiction and Empire", *Science Fiction Studies*, 2003, July 2003, vol. 30, n. 2, p. 232 and p. 237.

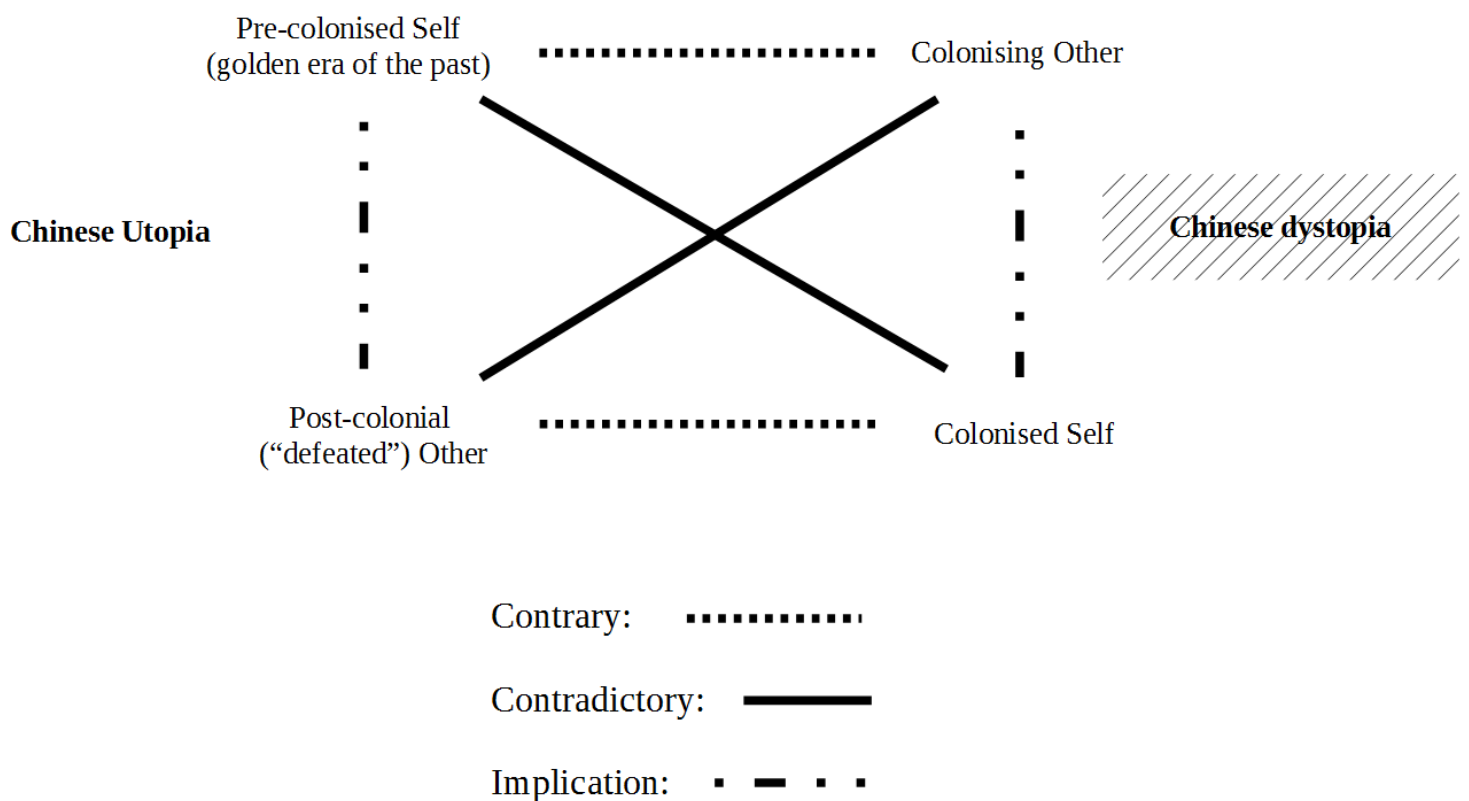
colony”⁴⁶) allowed the possibility for the emergence of the utopian space as a space of counter-imagination, that is the peculiar *jeux d’espace* of the colonised.

To understand this phenomenon of counter-imagination only in the terms of a reaction on the part of the colonised to the stimulus of the coloniser would be quite reductive: not only – as Edward Said has made it clear – the imagination of the coloniser and that of the colonised are mutually dependant and feed of each other’s symbols according to strategies of differentiation and identification, but the whole dialectic of identity and difference underlying the utopian construct is also internalised, investigated and in the end reflected upon (against) the self by the colonised subject.

At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, we might submit that while on the part of the coloniser the dialectic of difference and identity is resolved rather univocally and assertively by virtue of the colonising subject’s position of dominance in the underlying master-slave dichotomy of the colonial encounter (whose movement is first of all a centrifugal one), the question of the definition of the Self in relation to the Other is negotiated on the part of the colonised subject in a much more stratified manner. Whereas the colonising subject can assert its own identity tautologically and arbitrarily (“we are us because we are not them”) by virtue of its hegemonic position (which is ultimately material, economic, technical), a corollary of dichotomies stems instead from the periphery of the colonised. The identity of the colonised is negotiated through gestures of identification and demarcation both against the Other and against the Self: the colonised subject is forced first of all to come to terms with its pre-colonised Self (and its own colonised Other, the barbarian *yeman* 野蠻), and then to negotiate the result of this synthesis with the predominating Other within a relation of perpetual deferral and

46 Sun Yat-sen, *San-min chu-i: The Three Principles of the People*, Shanghai, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927.

approximation, as the distance of the colonised from the coloniser is proportional to the attempts by the former to erase it. The utopian narrative emerges thus as an attempt to break free from the circularity of this particular semiotic square of identity, and of the patterns of contradictions and implications upon which this square is built, by postulating an impossible third way out, a place that is not here nor there, in a time that is not now nor then.⁴⁷ Following Greimas' model, the semiotic square for the "generation" of the Chinese modern utopia would be like the following:



⁴⁷ We are referring here to Algirdas J. Greimas' semiotic square as it was introduced by the French-Lithuanian semiotician in his book *Semantique structurale* from 1966 (Algirdas J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale : recherche de méthode*, Paris, Larousse, 1966).

The plausibility of such a solution, that is of a utopian leap outside of the dialectics of history and of the “channels” of signification it engenders, is not here questioned. By referring to Mannheim’s conception of the utopian construct as an ideological by-product, our position in regard to this question is quite clear: while the utopian construct unfolds as the ratification of a failure (that is, the failure of ideology to realise its projected contents), its characteristics of both transcendence and mediation reassert the value of such a construct as a heuristic tool for the unravelling of its historical subtext. The emergence of a utopian imagination at the end of the Manchu dynasty attests an attempt of re-appropriation of the Chinese imaginary via the rejection and the overturning of the “imaginative geography” of the Western imperial enterprise. As we will see in the fourth chapter of this research, the utopian construct thus develops as a *mis-en-scène* of the “theatrical representations of centre and periphery” that were once prerogative of the centre but are now re-interpreted and re-authored by the periphery.⁴⁸ Overturned, dislocated, re-mapped and eventually (although often naïvely) re-appropriated, the Western discourse of modernity is staged and put under erasure through the utopian text.

It is useful here to emphasise once more the peculiar condition of “in-betweenness” of the utopian construct in relation to the Chinese discourse of colonial modernity.⁴⁹ By acknowledging the relevance of the late Qing utopian discourse in the definition of the shifting ideological framework of *fin-de-siècle* China, we are recognising it both as a by-product of this shifting, and as one of the symbolic *actant* in the ongoing process of negotiation of the modern Chinese identity: the late Qing utopian novel can be read both as the provisional result of this negotiation (thus according to its punctuating quality), and as the instrument through which the Chinese intellectuals could participate in the process of

48 Patricia Kerslake, *Science Fiction and Empire*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007, p. 18.

49 In using here the binomial of “colonial modernity” we are referring to Tani Barlow’s reflections concerning the “manically proliferating conditions of difference that operated under the conditions of semicolonialism.” See Barlow’s introduction to Tani Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997, p. 5.

negotiation itself.⁵⁰ This “actantial ambivalence” of the utopian text restates the condition of constant negotiation and the “ongoing reconstructions of multiple institutional and ideological patterns” that characterises the definition of the Chinese colonial modernity.⁵¹

As Eisenstadt remarks, this process of negotiation cannot be reduced and explained only in the terms of a mechanistic reaction to an external stimulus, but it should rather be understood as a complex process of adaptation which unravelled in a variety of different, not necessarily coherent responses, and whose results are multifaceted. While Eisenstadt recognises that “modernity emerges – or, more accurately, a range of possible modernities emerge – only when what had been seen as an unchanging cosmos ceases to be taken for granted”, he also reminds us that the “reaction” of modernity, once triggered, develops as a self-sustaining one.⁵² And while it may be functional for the centre to maintain the delusion of its own dialectical prevalence, it is rather at the margins and at the periphery that the locus of modernity is to be found, or at least reconstructed. The late Qing utopian discourse – both the object of this negotiation and its agent/actant, both backward and forward looking, both modern and obsolete – becomes the epitome of this locus, its most fitting metaphor and apt symbolic representation.

Therefore, in our attempt to understand the late Qing utopian imaginary in its protean actantial function within the Chinese discourse of colonial modernity, we cannot but remark the necessity to break free from the “Manicheanism rooted in the colonial

50 With the use of the term “actant”, a loan word from the lexicon of narratology and in particular from Greimas’ “actantial model” of semiotic analysis, it is our goal to stress once again the ambivalence and the ultimately mediatory position of the utopian construct. In the field of narratology, actants are those elements that allow the development of a story (pretty much in the same way in linguistic the actants of a verb are those complements that fulfil the action described by the verb), such as the hero, the helper, the object of the quest, the beneficiary, etc. What interests us here of the notion of “actant” is the fact that it often implies a binary opposition, if not an overlapping of functions: the figure of the hero is never conceived in itself but always in relation to its goal, in contrast with its nemesis (the anti-hero), or at the service of its beneficiary, and so on. In describing the function of the utopian construct as that of an actant in the process of negotiation of the Chinese colonial modernity, we intend to frame it both as the object or product of this negotiation *and* an active subject of this negotiation.

51 S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities”, *Daedalus*, 2000, January 2000, vol. 129, n. 1, p. 2.

52 James D. Faubian in Eisenstadt, p. 4.

construction of the European Self in relation to multifarious others” and to recognise the rhizomatic nature of the movements of “permeation” and “impingement” that mark the relation of the periphery towards the centre.⁵³ Yet, for the sake of clarity, it may be useful at the same to frame the reading of our texts within a set of given parameters whose derivation – we are aware – reflects this outdated Manichaean approach to the colonial question. Admitting in this regard our defeat, we submit that our reliance upon these terms is purely instrumental, and that on the contrary it may help us to draw attention to the problematic position of the late Qing utopian discourse within our received categories of analysis. The same problematic – i.e., the spontaneous tendency to approach the discourse of colonial modernity in the terms of a negotiation between fixed dichotomies – has been tackled also by Prasenjit Duara, whose perspective is here adopted, in his reflections over the function of the nation as a paramount category for the progression of history. Duara reminds us how the framework of nationalism, which became for the colonised subject the litmus test to measure its own value against the nations of the colonising West, implied (and still implies) the essentialist aporia of a split “between the atavism of the nation and its telos of modernity”, whose main result was a “fundamental discordance in the experience of time” within the presumed linearity of progress.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in his attempt to disentangle the discourses of History and modernity from the sterile boundaries of the nation and the normative precepts of nationalism, Duara recognises the importance of the nation as a “silent space of reference” for the development of these discourses.

Echoing Duara’s approach to the problematic position of the nation as the imaginary subject of capital-H history, we submit that the late Qing utopian discourse can also be understood as a narrative “space of reference”, which is given symbolical

53 Barlow, p. 5; as for the words “permeation” and “impingement”, these are deployed by Eisenstadt in his argument for the idea of “multiple modernities”.

54 Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 28.

representation in the utopian map, upon which different modalities of experience of history – and in particular the modes of culturalism and of nationalism – are negotiated.

Elaborating on Joseph Levenson's notion of culturalism as a mode of consciousness distinct from that of nationalism, Duara remarks how the formation of colonial modernity in China can be considered in terms of a transition from a culturalist mode of consciousness characterised by a "natural conviction of cultural superiority that sought no legitimation or defense outside the culture itself" to the hermetic boundaries of nationalism, that is to say of "a culture protected by the state" and encoded in the terms of a national, political, social essentialism.⁵⁵ Mirroring this shift (which is economic, institutional, ideological), the late Qing utopian discourse thus emerges as a transient, ephemeral mode of consciousness whose impossible synthesis is located through the narrative text in a utopian elsewhere. Thus the utopian locus unfolds in the convergence and neutralisation of these two different modes of consciousness: the colonised periphery is re-instituted as radiating centre; the endless linearity of modernity is bent back into the circularity and self-referentiality of the pre-colonial time; the porousness of the decomposing imperial boundaries (epitomised in the extra-territoriality of the foreign concessions) is sealed in the geometrical perfection of the utopian landscape; the stronghold of the autochthonous tradition is restored against the mere instrumentality of Western technique; the moral decay of *fin-de-siècle* China is negated by the virtuosity of the utopian social body.

In its chiefly spatially descriptive and cartographic nature, the utopian text becomes a particularly vivid example of those dynamics of "restructuration" through which the historical subtext is drawn into the narrative text, and there engaged, put under erasure, (re)textualised and reconstructed. In the words of Jameson, the utopian texts enables a

55 Duara, p. 56.

movement between the text and the Real that is circular and recursive, in such a way that the “non-narrative” and “nonrepresentational” condition of history is symbolically re-arranged in the utopian text.⁵⁶ Through the accumulation of the texts and the ratification of a utopian genre, the contingent trauma of the colonial project is thus absorbed into the symbolic network of the colonised, because

the crucial point here is the changed symbolic status of an event: when it erupts for the first time it is experienced as a contingent trauma, as an intrusion of a certain non-symbolized Real; only through repetition is this event recognized in its symbolic necessity – it finds its place in the symbolic network; it is realized in the symbolic order.⁵⁷

Looking backward from our position of interpreters, we can see in the accumulation of the utopian texts an increasingly systematic, collective attempt to make sense of the colonial trauma. In this perspective, we can consider the late Qing utopian genre as, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, a system of “cultural and social *imagination*” built upon narrative strategies of defamiliarisation, distortion and reversal through which the condition of colonial subalternity of *fin-de-siècle* China (in itself contingent, traumatic, non-narrative and nonrepresentational) is mirrored in the text and reduced to a provisional symbolic order. The coherence of this narrative system (which will result in its evidence upon detailed textual analysis) is given by the recurrence and reiteration of similar traits, that is to say the topoi of the utopian text in the variety of the late Qing narrative utopia. These topoi are in the end the result of the intersection of subtle modalities of representation and non-representation through which the dissolving social texture of late nineteenth century China is erased and rewritten, mirrored and reversed within the form of the novel/*xiaoshuo* in the narrative modality of the utopian text.

56 “History is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization.” Jameson, pp. 66–67.

57 Slavoj Žižek in Wegner, p. 32.

CHAPTER 2: GESTURING TOWARDS UTOPIA

The political function of the utopian genre . . . is to bring home, in local and determinate ways and with a fullness of concrete detail, our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself: and this, not owing to any individual failure of imagination but as the result of the systemic, cultural and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners.

Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*

**Inherent Incompleteness in Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and Chen
Tianhua's *Shizi hou***

In the fourth chapter of Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 (The future of new China), Liang's concise prose unexpectedly opens up to an English interpolation:

Such is the aspect of this shore –
' This, but living Greece no more!
...
Clime of the unforgotten brave!
Whose land, from plain to mountain-cave
Was Freedom's home, or Glory's grave —
Shrine of the mighty! Can it be
That this is all remains of thee?

These are lines from the *The Giaour*, a long poem written by Lord Byron in 1813, the first of his four popular Turkish tales. The interpolation is unexpected and alienating: while in the architecture of the novel it serves the purpose of characterising the protagonists of Liang Qichao's novel as romantic Byronian heroes devoted to the cause of the Chinese nation, the English poem was nevertheless unlikely to be understood by the majority of Liang's readers, and lost as well was the refined parallelism that the poem implied between Lord Byron's idealised Greece and Liang Qichao's idealised China. Lord Byron's tetrameters unfold like a foreign island of text among Liang Qichao's long-winded ruminations. Within the ocean of Chinese text, these English lines are glances of an elsewhere.

Confronted by Lord Byron's "finest Orientalism" and "Western sentimentalism", the *ideal* reader of Liang Qichao's novel is lead to think that the island of utopia lies where

the different strands of human imagination converge.¹ Lord Byron's Greece, less a geography than an invention, becomes the embodiment of the late Qing reformer's struggle, as well as his aesthetic goal as a novelist. This is the measure of Liang Qichao's opera and of his literary persona, the romantic idealism of a cast-away reformer who wrote of the future of new China from the shores of Japan, as Lord Byron sung of ancient Greece from those of England.² In this chapter we will try to move by approximation from Liang Qichao's aspirations of reform, through his manifestos for literary and political action, to his novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and the similar texts it inspired, in the attempt to get closer to the unapproachable utopian ideal of the late Qing novel.

Liang Qichao put literature at the service of his country, asking his fellow reader, "Brother, can you still consider today's China as a country that belongs to the Chinese?" (哥哥,你看現在中國還算得個中國人的中國嗎?).³ In doing so, he mobilised the writers of his generation to the cause of the nation, he urged a "lion's roar" from those intellectuals who invoked reform against the fragmentation of the imperial *Zeitgeist*. It is Huang Yibo 黃毅伯 (Liang Qichao's fictional alter-ego) the first one to answer the question: "I dream'd that Greece might still be free / For standing on the Persians' grave, / I could not deem myself a slave". Such, again, was the grandeur of Liang Qichao's literary project, the Byronian afflatus of his attempt at the reinvention of the nation via the reinvention of the novel. And, in the end, this was the spirit – chimeric, romantic, unrealisable – that animated the Chinese imagination of utopia at the end of the Manchu empire.

1 "Finest Orientalism" and "Western sentimentalism" were the terms used Lord Byron himself in his poem "Beppo" from 1818 to account for the success of his Turkish tales. See George Gordon Byron and Henry Lytton Bulwer, *The Complete Works of Lord Byron: Reprinted from the Last London Edition, Containing Besides the Notes and Illustrations by Moore [et AL.] Considerable Additions and Original Notes, with a Most Complete Index*, Paris, A. and W. Galignani, 1841, p. 311.

2 On the reception of Byron's poetry in China and on the influence of the Byronic hero among the Chinese modernist intellectuals, see Gregory B. Lee, "Other People's Heroes", *Gramma*, 2005, n. 13, pp. 115–129.

3 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 in Wang Xiaolian 王孝廉 (ed.), *Wan Qing xiaoshuo daxi* 晚清小說大系, Taipei, Guangya chuban youxian gongsi 廣雅出版有限公司, 1984, vol. 16, p. 19.

If we are to adhere to Darko Suvin's definition of utopia as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis," then deriving our definition of utopian novel accordingly, it would be quite a rhetorical stretch to consider Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and Chen Tianhua's 陳天華 *Shizi hou* 獅子吼 as utopian.⁴ These two novels, although initially conceived as utopian, offer but a fleeting glimpse of the Chinese world to be. Because these works were left unfinished by their authors, they remain as incomplete sketches, forgotten blueprints, literary remainders of a misplaced modernity. Yet if *significant* utopias are "thematically open" and they "reflect back upon the reader's 'topia'" in order to engage the reader, if they provide "a *method* rather than a *state*", if indeed "utopia operates by example, demonstration, deictically, . . . by gestures of pointing", and it provides a "wide-eyes glance from here to there, a 'travelling shot' moving from the author's everyday lookout to the wondrous panorama of a far off-land", then these two novels are quintessentially utopian.⁵

From this point of view, these novels' condition of incompleteness (which is historical, contingent) can be disregarded as a flaw and welcomed as a defining trait: as utopias are not meant to be reached, so utopian novels are not meant to be completed. This is the perspective here adopted in the analysis of Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and Chen Tianhua's *Shizi hou*: to consider as utopian not only those representations that are offered as such in a cornucopia of details, but also what is implied in the text, what has been left to loom in the distance and at the margins (for fate or choice) as a silent referent

4 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 37–51.

5 Suvin, pp. 37–51.

to the imperfection of the present.

In the prologue of his *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, Liang Qichao expounds the setting of his novel: it is the year 2513 after the birth of Confucius, and China is hosting the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the realisation of the reforms that transformed the “sick man of Asia” into a modern nation. We are therefore in the year 1962 of the Gregorian calendar, and ambassadors from all over the world have gathered in Shanghai to pay homage to the heir of the Yellow Emperor, bowing in respectful deference to the harbinger of *Datong* 大同. It is in this context that the reader is introduced to the character of Kong Juemin 孔覺民, who is described as a present-day Sima Qian 司馬遷 and a national hero who had a crucial role in the process of modernisation of the country. Almost seventy years old, Kong Juemin is a revered professor of history who is asked to give a lecture on the recent history of the Chinese nation in the occasion of its celebrations.

Starting from the second chapter of *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, the character of Kong Juemin will take the place of Liang Qichao’s omniscient narrator in recounting the history of the new Chinese nation to the readers, who in turn ideally become part of the audience of professor Kong’s fictional lecture. This is the narrative stratagem deployed by Liang Qichao: the plot of his novel is articulated on different diegetic and meta-diegetic layers, among which the writer, the reader and the characters’ positions overlap, contaminate and enmesh each other. This is a subtle narrative stratagem and strategy indeed, as it contains in embryo the sought-after “worldliness” and the “enmeshment” of Liang Qichao’s aesthetic approach to the form of the novel. By means of textual recursion, Liang anchors his novel to the “worldliness of the text”, that is the “circumstantial reality” that in Liang Qichao’s view forms the ground for a meaningful interpretation of the literary text which is oriented towards the utopia of a modern China.⁶

6 See Edward Said, “The Text, the World, the Critic”, *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, October 1975, vol. 8, n. 2, passim.

By introducing the character of Kong Juemin as an embedded narrator in his narration of reform, Liang Qichao manages to instil an interesting metafictional bend into his unfinished novel. We are referring here not only to the evident extradiegetic parallels that can be drawn between Kong the hero and Liang the author,⁷ but also to what we may term as the condition of textual hybridity that the apparently unassuming and certainly ironic metafictional allusions of Kong Juemin's opening remarks entail:

因橫濱新小說報社主人要將我這講義充他的篇幅,再三諄囑演成小說體裁,我若將這書做成龍門《史記》涑水《通鑑》一般,豈不令看小說報的人慚慚欲睡,不能終卷嗎?滿堂聽眾拍掌大笑。⁸

“The chief editor of *Xin Xiaoshuo* in Yokohama wants to publish my account in his magazine, and he keeps suggesting me to make it into a novel. If I were to write it in the manner of Sima Qian's *Records* or Sima Guang's *Mirror to Aid in Government*, how could I expect today's readers, who are accustomed to novels and magazines, to read it without falling asleep halfway through it?” A roar of laughter burst from the audience.

This passage is noteworthy, not only because it marks a shift in the narrative mode from the zero focalization of Liang Qichao's omniscient narrator to the metadiegetic level of Kong Juemin's pseudo-historical account, but also because with this shift Liang bypasses the hierarchy of focal embedding by gesturing towards the world behind the text. Whereas it is true that the fourth wall of the traditional *xiaoshuo* 小說 form has always been frail, as if perpetually on the point of being demolished by the mannerist, vestigial mimics of the oral storytelling tradition, in Liang Qichao's work this trait acquires quite another value. Because Liang Qichao's attitude towards the literary text has always been

7 In the novel's prologue we learn that Kong Juemin 孔覺民 “always provided for himself and his traveling expenses; he studied abroad in Japan, America, England, Germany and France; he joined the reformists and got arrested twice” (從小自備資斧,游學日本,美,英,德,法諸國.當維新時代,曾與民間各志士奔走國事,下獄兩次), and we know that Liang Qichao was writing these lines from Yokohama, where he had fled in 1898 in order to avoid arrest after his reformist zeal. Liang Qichao, *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, p. 2.

8 Liang Qichao, *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, p. 6.

one of continuous and seamless engagement with reality, these incursions of the real in the text and these “obsessive references to actuality” are never meaningless, as they become constitutive elements of the utopian text, “interiorized in the text’s very fabric in order to provide the stuff and raw material on which the textual operation must work”.⁹

The chief editor who is mentioned by the character Kong Juemin in the passage above is of course Liang Qichao himself, who in the year 1902 was stationed in Yokohama, where he had escaped in 1898 after the *débâcle* of the Hundred Days’ Reform, and from where, four years later, he started to publish his magazine *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說. This metafictional gimmick is a clever move on the part of Liang, as it manages both to locate the novel within the historical subtext of *fin-de-siècle* China and the (projected) history of the future presented in the novel, and to locate Liang Qichao’s position within these histories. As we will see, by gesturing from the world to the text as a theorist, and from the text to the world as a narrator, Liang manages to reassert those features of “enmeshment” and engagement that characterise the dialectic upon which the author builds his novel in the first place. Liang’s efforts at the redefinition of the form of the novel both as a theorist and as a novelist are to be considered within the same artistic and conceptual continuum. By introducing his *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* as a fictional historical account of “the history of China in the last 60 years, starting from the *renyin* year of the Guangxu reign [1902] to the next [1962]” (我們所最喜歡聽的, 叫做 “中國近六十年史”. 就從光緒二十八年壬寅講起, 講到今年壬寅),¹⁰ and by looking backward from the novel at his praxis as a literary theorist and as a novelist, Liang Qichao validates the historical value of his efforts and his role in the reform/*rectification* of the country.

The utopian discourse of the late Chinese empire is multi-layered, and its different

9 Fredric Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse”, *Diacritics*, Summer 1977, vol. 7, n. 2, p. 7.

10 Liang Qichao, *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, p. 2.

levels span from the imagined to the imaginary and the imaginable. Within the cultural history of China, Liang Qichao's *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* 政治小說 and the narrative penchant towards utopia that it promoted were the by-products of a much broader debate on the question of the Chinese modernity, whose constitutive terms were metaphorical *xuci* 虛詞, the empty signifiers of a social grammar that was coming into existence in the exact moment its existence was questioned. Zhang Zhidong's 張之洞 modern interpretation of the *ti-yong* 體用 dichotomy, although adopted as an initial parameter for China's modernisation as per his famous motto "*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*" 中學為體西學為用, engendered in fact a double bind: in order to circumscribe the boundaries of what is *yong* 用 and what is *xixue* 西學, a core (體) has to be defined and recognised to function as a stronghold of economic, political, social and cultural identity. Thus a tradition had to be *re-invented* and made to coalesce, recognised as Chinese and set as a stronghold against the elusiveness of a Western modernity that was conceptually ungraspable yet overwhelmingly present in the everyday social practice.¹¹ In the cultural debate of the late empire, Zhang's *ti* – the result of an ongoing process of self-essentialisation – became the skeleton upon which to anchor the discourse of reform. These dynamics of essentialisation, as well as the occidentalism/orientalism dichotomy they entailed, arguably represent anything new, but what interests us the most is not only the fact that the late Qing utopian discourse appears to acknowledge and to embody this process thoroughly and manifestly, but also that it encompasses also what we may term as the dialectical gestation of the Chinese *ti*:¹² with the utopian novel, the imaginative space of the *xiaoshuo* becomes a space of representation of the utopian ideal of a colonised empire, as well as of the cultural

11 "Revolutions and 'progressive movements' which break with the past, by definition, have their own relevant past", wrote Eric Hobsbawm in his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, and indeed the degree of radicalism of the Chinese reformist and self-strengthening movements of the late Qing seemed to be directly proportional to the reformers' awareness of their own past. See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

debate that lead to the need for utopia in itself.¹³

Liang Qichao's vision of the future of new China is incomplete, as his political novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* of 1902 – the author's only attempt at the form of the modern *xiaoshuo* – amounts only to a handful of chapters introduced by a magniloquent prologue about the author's position in regard to the role of literature in society (a prologue that we may ideally extend to the magazine *Xin xiaoshuo*'s opening essay “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzh zhi guanxi” 論小說與群治之關係). In this respect, Liang's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* is similar to Chen Tianhua's *Shizi hou* (The Lion's Roar). The latter was serialised during the year 1905 in the pages of the newspaper *Minbao* 民報 (The People's Daily). *Shizi hou* is a virulent *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* whose plot develops around the vicissitudes of a brigade of anti-Manchu revolutionaries and their efforts to reform the country through the overthrow of the Manchu rule. These were at least the intentions of its author, whose sudden departure – death by water as an act of protest against the mistreatment of the Chinese community by the Japanese – left us with what can be considered an extended prologue of eight chapters.

Many are the traits that are shared by these two novels: they are both experiments of political activism, in the sense that they were written not by novelists but rather by intellectuals who found in the form of the novel a vehicle for the propagation of their own ideas.¹⁴ Both these novels are integrated – and should ideally be read – within the continuum of the intellectual agenda of their authors; in fact the two *xiaoshuo* were

12 “We can see indistinct traces of ‘Occidentalism’ in the Christian inspiration of the Taiping Rebellion, positive Occidentalism in Kang Youwei's admiration for Western philosophy and political thought, and equally positive Occidentalism in Hu Shi's liberalism and Chen Duxiu's Marxism, as well as in the work of other intellectuals participating in the May Fourth Movement. There were also periods in modern Chinese history, such as the Cultural Revolution, when the West was demonized and Occidentalism, in the words of Chen Xiaomei, became ‘a discourse of oppression’.” Douwe W. Fokkema, *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

13 Utopia is in the end a pseudo-cartographic representation of what “*zhongxue wei ti*” 中學為體 actually entails.

14 As for instance Bihe guan zhuren 碧荷館主人, Xiaoran Yusheng 蕭然郁生, Lu Shi'e 陸士諤 and Wu Jianren 吳趸人 were.

serialized through two periodicals in which the two writers worked as editors. Furthermore, even though Chen Tianhua's political stance was much more radicalised than Liang's (who was not a revolutionary but rather a reformer in the manner of his teacher Kang Youwei 康有為), their opening chapters unfold in a conspicuously similar way, that is to say as articulated disquisitions over the destiny of the Chinese nation, the golden era of the pre-colonial past, and the necessity to restore it by picking up the arms (in a variable degree of figurativity). Ultimately, these novels are both unfinished, and although the reasons behind this common "condition of incompleteness" are incidental, this shared feature permits us to indulge in a useful reflection on the nature of the modern utopian endeavour, the possibility and the paradox of the variety of modernity it entails, the expectations projected by the Chinese intellectuals on literature and the novel, and the ambiguous position of the late Qing novel within the Chinese literary canon.¹⁵

Incompleteness appears to be a recurrent feature of the late Qing novel. As we have already mentioned above, incomplete is for example also Xiaoran Yusheng's 蕭然郁生 *Wutuobang youji* 烏托邦游記 (Travels in Utopia) of 1906. In the case of the late Qing utopian novel, the imagination of utopia is often left to the reader's task, as if utopia was often approached but never reached. Again, our interpretation gives way to a practical allegory: these novels *happen* to be incomplete due to a series of incidental circumstances, there was no authorial intention behind this basic fact. Yet this recurrence, or rather this coincidence, may emerge as meaningful in order to understand what were the circumstances that fostered this peculiar kind of narration-as-world-construction in such a crucial period of time. In considering the developments of the *xiaoshuo* as a legitimate

15 On the vicissitudes of Liang Qichao, see Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1959; on the trajectory of Liang Qichao's "historical" thinking, on the "geography" of the discourse in which it is inscribed, and on the critical movement between reform and revolution of late-imperial China's most important philosopher, see Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996.

form of *wen* 文 for the literati to practice and enjoy, and the emergence of the *zhengzhi xiaoshuo*/utopian novel at the end of the empire in particular, we can not but agree with Georg Lukács in remarking that “the problems of the novel form are here the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint”.¹⁶

The utopian discourse is a discourse of approximation. While the object of this discourse – the utopian construct¹⁷ – is representable in the sense that a picture of utopia can eventually be given, what lies and remains beyond representation – the *hors-texte*¹⁸ – is on the contrary the path that lead to it, the movement towards utopia, that is to say its cartography and its historiography. These aspects can only be hinted, pointed elusively, gestured towards in a space outside the narrative text. On the figurative level, this inherent vice is given away by the positioning of the utopian locus: chronologically, the locus of utopia is always dislocated in the distance of a mythical *pre*-historic past that is longed through the lens of nostalgia, or in that of a future beyond the calendar;¹⁹ whereas geographically, the utopian coordinates are always left unmapped (or rather unconnected) and its itineraries lost or shrouded in dream.²⁰ Therefore, if Wu Jianren’s 吳趼人 *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記, Lu Shi’e’s 陸士諤 *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國, and Bihe guan zhuren’s 碧荷館主

16 Theodore Hutters, “From Writing to Literature: The Development of Late Qing Theories of Prose”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1987, n. 47, pp. 51–96; Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, translated by Anna Bostock, Cambridge, MIT Press 1971, p. 17. On the developments of the notion of *xiaoshuo*, see Mingdong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006.

17 May it be the heterotopia of the faraway island, the heterochronia of the reformed country located in the future.

18 “What is repugnant to the ‘creators’ of an era.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. xvi.

19 It is around a question of calendars that, for example, the plot of Bihe guan zhuren’s 碧荷館主人 utopian novel *Xin Jiyuan* 新紀元 (The New Era) is built.

20 This is transversally true, with notable examples spanning from the biblical Garden of Eden to Aldous Huxley’s island of Pala, such as Plato’s Atlantis in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Iambulus’ *Heliopolis*, Thomas More’s island of Utopia, Tommaso Campanella’s *Civitas Solis*, Francis Bacon’s Bensalem in the *New Atlantis*, Jonathan Swift’s satirical travels, or again the Chinese mythology of the past embodied by the San Huang Wu Di 三皇五帝, mount Penglai 蓬萊 of the Eight Immortals, Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 *Taohua yuan ji* 桃花源記, and forward to Li Ruzhen’s 李汝珍 “*Nü’er guo*” 女兒國 and “*Junzi guo*” 君子國 in the novel *Jing hua yuan* 鏡花緣.

人 *Xin jiyuan* 新紀元 can be taken as utopian representations of the modern Chinese nation as it was conceived by the Chinese intelligentsia of the late empire, then Liang Qichao's narrative experiments have to be taken in consideration together with Chen Tianhua's incomplete *xiaoshuo* as attempts to represent the unrepresentable, the dialectical process that lead to the Peach Blossom Spring: the condition of incompleteness of these texts is in some way inherent to the novels, or at least coherent with what we may term as their *generic* intention.

Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* holds a special position among the many utopian texts written during the first decade of the twentieth century. Whereas these were often transient attempts at the utopian genre written by novelists who were not only well-versed in the craft of fiction but also well-accustomed to the new modalities of writing and printing that came with the flourishing of journals and magazines in late nineteenth century China (with Wu Jianren being the most prominent example), Liang Qichao's unfinished novel was the outcome of an ongoing political project of reform in which the medium of literature became ancillary to the political action according to the guidelines of a new utilitarian aesthetics.²¹ Liang Qichao's role in the development of this new genre was crucial, because in trying to re-elaborate the terms of the politico-philosophical discourse of reform within the form of the novel (and through the emulation to the new models obtained from the outside), he set the standard for a new understanding of the literary medium as a political instrument. Liang Qichao moved systematically towards a new form of fiction whose aesthetic depended on its functional value in the enlightenment of its audience. The opening lines of his manifesto "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi" 論小說與群治之關係 (On the relationship between fiction and the government of the people),

21 See Rudolf G. Wagner, *Joining the Global Public Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007.

published in 1902 in the first number of *Xin xiaoshuo*, are clear:

欲新一國之民，不可不先新一國之小說。故欲新道德，必新小說；欲新宗教，必新小說；欲新政治，必新小說；欲新風俗，必新小說；欲新學藝，必新小說；乃至欲新人心，欲新人格，必新小說。何以故？小說有不可思議之力支配人道故。²²

If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction. Therefore, to renovate morality, one must renovate fiction; to renovate religion, one must renovate fiction; to renovate politics, one must renovate fiction; to renovate social customs, one must renovate fiction; to renovate learning and arts, one must renovate fiction; and to renovate even the human mind and remould its character, one must renovate fiction. Why is this so? This is because fiction has a profound power over the way of man.²³

Whereas many of his contemporaries were trying to re-establish the study of *wen* as a safe haven against the disintegration of the present by turning once again towards the past, Liang Qichao moved unapologetically forward and outward, building the framework for a literature of the present modelled after the translated inputs from the West. In Liang Qichao's aesthetics the forms of the past are not entirely dismissed, but rather they are encompassed within a new dialectics. In referring to classics such as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The Water Margin*, the *Peach Blossom Fan*, and *A Rustic's Idle Talk* in order to address the question of the role of fiction in modern society, Liang Qichao's attitude is, if not schizophrenic, at least elusively dualistic. His call for a new novel and a new genre (the *xin xiaoshuo* and the *zhengzhi xiaoshuo*) was rather the call for a new understanding of fiction that could provide both a blueprint for the composition of new texts and the tools for a new interpretation of the old ones: "the genre-creating principle . . . here does not imply any change in mentality; rather, it forces the same mentality to turn towards a new

22 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi" 論小說與群治之關係 [1902], in Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集, Beijing, Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 1999, vol. 9, p. 884.

23 Translated by Gek Nai Cheng in Kirk A. Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 74–81.

aim which is essentially different from the old one”.²⁴

In this perspective, Liang Qichao’s recourse to Buddhist terms and ideas in his ruminations on the nature of fiction and the function of the novel in a modern society is not surprising but, on the contrary, coherent with the syncretistic attitude of him as a reformer under Kang Youwei’s guidance, and with his ongoing project of modern rectification of the names (*zhengming* 正名) at the service of reform. Fiction is praised by Liang by virtue of its transformative power, which in its different nuances is “capable of shaping the world as well as establishing and nurturing the various norms of society” (可以盧牟一世, 亭毒群倫).²⁵ In his essay/literary manifesto “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi”, the experience of reading is described by Liang Qichao as a potential practice of awakening in which the literary text functions as a medium for the achievement of a condition of “absolute knowledge” from one of “relative consciousness”, whereas both *zhi* 智 and *shi* 識 have been reassessed as *national* consciousness and *national* knowledge.

What is the most interesting aspect of Liang Qichao’s reflections over the inner workings of the literary artefact is the fact that, by deploying the figurative language of Buddhism, he manages to pinpoint a concept that will be codified in the study of literature only many years later with Bertold Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, the effect of estrangement or alienation. In pondering over fiction’s powers of *jin* 浸 (“immersion”) and *ci* 刺 (“stimulation”), Liang argues that the power of the novel does not lie in its capacity to anaesthetise the reader in the comfort of fiction, but rather to alienate him by instating a dialectic between the reader’s system of beliefs and the one introduced by the novel. Whereas the reader’s immersion in the work of art is a spontaneous act of participation (“over the course of a long period of time the world of the novel enters the mind of the

24 Lukács, p. 41.

25 Liang Qichao, “Lun xiaoshuo”, p. 884.

reader and takes root there like a seedling with a special quality” 久之而此小說之境界,遂入其靈台而據之,成為一特別之原質之種子), it also provokes (刺) and enables what we may define as a conscious movement of self-placing on the part of the reader in between the imagined (what Fredric Jameson refers to as the “Real”) and the imaginary, or the to-be-imagined: “Although immersion takes place without the reader’s awareness, the effect of stimulation is able to suddenly evoke in the reader strange feelings over which he has no control” (刺也者,能入於一剎那頃忽起異感而不能自制者也).²⁶

Liang Qichao’s “strange feelings” (異感) and his dialectics of immersion and stimulation provide a rudimentary formulation of the principle of “cognitive estrangement” which constitutes the “precondition for the constitution of fictionality” that Darko Suvin elevated at discerning principle for the definition of the science fiction genre as “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition”.²⁷ By paraphrasing Brecht, we could say that in Liang Qichao’s perspective the ideal *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* – a prying instrument for the reader’s political consciousness – does not allow the reader to lose himself completely within the text, nor its characters allow him to escape to any “splendid remoteness” presented in the narration. On the contrary, the reader is to be engaged, and his consequent feeling of estrangement ought to be made familiar. The reader becomes an active participant in the unravelling of the work of art, whose function is to observe, learn and apply what is offered by the author-as-narrator in the novel as a political project.²⁸

26 Liang Qichao, “Lun xiaoshuo”, p. 884.

27 Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000, p. 21.; Suvin, pp. 7–8.

28 “The performer’s self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely. i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and lent a splendid remoteness to the events. Yet the spectator’s empathy was not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being the observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on.” Bertolt Brecht, “Alienation effect in Chinese acting” in John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, London, Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 93.

Yet the appeal of the utopian narration lies also in the “splendid remoteness” of its setting: this quality is inherent to the utopian construct. Even though this aspect might not be immediately evident in the unfinished political novels of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua (where the utopian dimension is approached, approximated but never fully represented), it becomes clearer, for example, in the works of Wu Jianren, Lu Shi’e and Bihe Guan Zhuren. In these novels the distance – either chronological or geographical – of the utopian construct is at the same time stressed (the more we detail utopia, the more we distance ourselves from it) and left unquestioned, unquestionable (all logical and historical links are broken, utopia pertains to the dream). Hence the incompleteness, the impossible parabola of Liang’s literary and political project, whose realisation cannot be but partial and whose objectives are enmeshed in a history with no utopia, projected in a utopia with no history.

Our reference to the work of Darko Suvin on the nature of the science fiction genre is not coincidental, as the discourse of science fiction presents many analogies with that of the late Qing *zhengzhi* and *lixiang xiaoshuo* 理想小說. The political novel, the utopian novel and the science fiction novel belong to the same narrative spectrum, as different but analogous varieties within the broader palette of the early modernity of Chinese literature: these genres make their appearance during the same years; they are perceived as welcome inputs in a vivid yet paralysed local literary tradition; they partake in an overt (although quite naïve) didactic penchant; and in the end they can be considered as an early cul-de-sac of the Chinese literary modernity, in the sense that these kinds of novels barely survived the first waves of enthusiasm of the late Qing period, and quickly receded against the more realist instances of the May Fourth iconoclasm.

Science fiction literature in particular constituted a relevant percentage of the foreign literature that was translated in Chinese between the end of the nineteenth and the

beginning of twentieth century.²⁹ To capture the imagination of the Chinese public were in particular the powerful imaginaries and the unflinching positivism of Jules Verne.³⁰ It was Lu Xun 魯迅 *lui-même* among the first intellectuals to endorse the works of the French novelist around the years 1902 and 1903, with the translation of two of his *voyages extraordinaires* – *De la Terre à la Lune* (translated in Chinese as *Yuejie Lüxing* 月界旅行) and *Voyage au centre de la Terre*. Lu Xun’s preface to his translation of Jules Verne’s *De la Terre à la Lune* has a familiar tone, as it appears to unfold on the blueprint of Liang Qichao’s “Lun xiaoshuo” manifesto:

惟假小說之能力，被優孟之衣冠，則雖析理譚玄，亦能浸淫腦筋，不生厭倦。彼織兒俗子，《山海經》，《三國志》諸書，未嘗夢見，而亦能津津然識長股，奇肱之域，道周郎，葛亮之名者，實《鏡花緣》及《三國演義》之賜也。故掇取學理，去庄而諧，使讀者觸目會心，不勞思索，則必能於不知不覺間，獲一斑之智識，破遺傳之迷信，改良思想，補助文明，勢力之偉，有如此者！³¹

Only by borrowing the novel’s power and by disguising science’s mysteries in You Meng’s costume it will be possible to disseminate scientific knowledge in the minds of the people without strain. Ordinary people have fantasized since childhood about the strange lands and mythical creatures of the *Shan hai Jing* and the *Sanguo zhi*, they have learnt the names of Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang by reading the *Sanguo yanyi* and the *Jing hua yuan*. Therefore, by arranging science’s principles without gravitas and by letting the reader cultivate his or her interests without bothering him with obscure ruminations, it will be possible to make him or her cultivate his knowledge, improve his mind and culture,

29 For what regard the sheer numbers of this massive process of assimilation-through-translation, see the now classic works of A Ying 阿英 (*Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi* 晚清小说史 of 1937 and *Wan Qing xiaoshuo mu* 晚清小说目 of 1940), and the useful amendments of Tarumoto Teruo, “A Statistical Survey of Translated Fiction 1840–1920” in David Pollard, *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840–1918*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997.

30 For the a comprehensive catalogue of the texts that fostered the genesis of this literary genre in China, see the introduction of Wu Yan 吴岩 (ed.), *Jia Baoyu zuo qianshuijing: Zhongguo zaoqi kehuan yanjiu jingxuan* 贾宝玉坐潜水艇: 中国早期科幻研究精选, Fuzhou: Fujian shaonian ertong chubanshe 福建少年儿童出版社, 2006, pp. 1–6 and pp. 19–36; on the developments of the Verneian imaginary in late Qing China between Lu Xun’s translations Liang Qichao’s calls to arms and Wu Jianren’s emulations, see Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.

31 Lu Xun, “Yuejie Lüxing bianyan” 月界旅行辨言 in *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集, Beijing, Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, vol. 11, pp. 9–10.

and break away from his atavistic superstitions.

Scientific fiction (*kexue xiaoshuo* 科學小說) is praised by virtue of its revolutionary didactic, enlightening qualities, which persuaded a young Lu Xun to incorporate and “align” the new “scientificfictional” texts to the autochthonous literary tradition of *Sanguo zhi*, the *Sanguo yanyi* and the *Jing hua yuan*. Even though Lu Xun does not appear to indulge exceedingly into this perspective of literary didacticism, nor does he try to theorise a new utilitarian literary aesthetics as Liang Qichao was trying to do in the same year (1902) on the pages of *Xin xiaoshuo*, he nevertheless goes a long way to emphasise the practical virtues of this new kind of literature. It is persistent both in Lu Xun and Liang Qichao’s writings an overly-optimistic approach to the literary matter, as if – in the shadow of a *jitsugaku* 實學-oriented Confucianism – there were no solution of continuity between the real and the representation of the real. This is not surprising, as both Lu Xun and Liang Qichao were at the time writing from abroad, looking back at their homeland from the shores of Japan.³² Despite and *because of* the recent Chinese defeat after the First Sino-Japanese War, Meiji’s Japan represented for the Chinese reformist intelligentsia the most concrete case for the possibility of a West-oriented modernisation that would not automatically imply the loss of some sort of *guocui* 國粹, an irretrievable loss of national identity under the Western influence. It was indeed in Japan that Liang Qichao developed his concepts of *wenming kaihua* 文明開化 and *wenmingren* 文明人, writing under the “*yanshipilichun*” (inspiration) of intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) and Tokutomi Sohō 德富蘇峰 (1863–1957), and it was in fact

32 For what concerns the influence of Japan in Liang Qichao’s reformist agenda, see Joshua A. Fogel, *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao’s Introduction of Modern Western Civilization to China*, Berkeley, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, 2004.

from Japan that he launched his call for a new type of fiction.³³

Liang Qichao's exaggerated rhetoric of national redemption through literary reform is puzzling. In fact, an over-confident tone seems to pervade his writings and those of Lu Xun: their tone echoes somehow those trends of exasperated, dramatic exuberance that characterised the “cries” and the “expositions” of the many mistreated flowers and Cervantean heroes that populated the fiction of the late Qing period.³⁴ Be it a move of “simple strategic reversal of the traditional literati view of the harms lurking in fiction” or a sincere endorsement of the *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* as a modern incarnation of the traditional *wen*, to claim that “a newly published book could often influence and change the views and arguments of the whole nation” (往往每一書出,而全國之議論為之一變) was indeed a hazardous rhetorical strategy on the part of Liang Qichao.³⁵ This attitude reflected one of his major intellectual traits, that of an encyclopedic knowledge which, although at times superficial in its pretension to encompass with broad intellectual strokes entire countries, histories and systems of thoughts, was consistently put at the service of the discourse of national reform.³⁶

In this new utilitarian perspective, fiction was considered by Liang Qichao as an addendum to *xuexiao* 學校 (schools), *baozhi* 報紙 (newspapers) and *yanshuo* 演說

33 “Yanshipilichun” (Inspiration) was the title of an essay written by Liang Qichao after an article by Tokutomi Sohō published in 1888 on the magazine *Kokumin no tomo* 国民の友 by the title of “Insupireishon”, inspired in turn by the writings of Victor Hugo; see Hiroko Willcock, “Japanese Modernization and the Emergence of New Fiction in Early Twentieth Century China: A Study of Liang Qichao”, *Modern Asian Studies*, October 1995, vol. 29, n. 4, pp. 817–840.

34 With the introduction and the first chapter of his *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, David Wang offers a thorough account of the idiosyncrasies, the schizophrenic attitudes, the eccentricities of late Qing fiction; see David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 1–52.

35 Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, p. 111.

36 Liang Qichao 梁启超, “Yi yin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” 译引政治小说序 in *Liang Qichao quanji*, vol. 1, p. 172 [1898]; translated as “Foreword to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation” by Gek Nai Cheng in Denton, pp. 71–73.

(speeches), the “three tools for the diffusion of civilisation”.³⁷ “Chuanbo wenming sanliqi” 傳播文明三利器 was in fact the title of a brief article that Liang published in 1899, in which the author praised the merits of the political novel in the process of creation of a new national consciousness in Meiji Japan.³⁸ As Hiroko Willcock remarks, Liang Qichao “gave fiction a monumental power” and he did so by re-elaborating those ideas he apprehended in Japan into the thaumaturgic mantra of “*bi xin xiaoshuo*” 必新小說 (“One must renovate fiction”). Indeed, such a monumental set of expectations set the bar way higher than the power of a single man, and certainly higher than the capacities of Liang Qichao as a novelist, whose literary attempts, fostered and hindered at the same time by his polyhedric interests, marked an eccentric yet not so fortunate milestone in Liang’s intellectual path.

Our decision to approach the fiction of Liang Qichao, as well as his reflections on the nature of fiction, in the terms of a progressive movement towards the utopian ideal is based on a series of considerations over those authorial intentions and projections that Liang developed as a theoriser but never managed to accomplish as a novelist. The “condition of incompleteness” of Liang Qichao’s novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* maintains Liang’s discourse of fiction as an open one: his is an open critical and literary gesture toward the utopian ideal which is articulated in terms that are problematic.

First of all, the term *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* is problematic, and its problematicity stems from a concurrence of perspectives. From a strictly catalogical point of view, *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* are those novel in which:

37 Liang Qichao, “Chuanbo wenming sanliqi” 傳播文明三利器 [1899] in *Liang Qichao quanji*, II, p. 359.

38 In his essay, Liang refers to the figures of Suehiro Tetchō 末廣鐵腸, Fujita Meikaku 藤田鳴鶴, Yano Ryūkei 矢野龍溪, and in particular of Shiba Shirō 柴四郎, whose novel *Kajin no Kigū* 佳人の奇遇 (Strange Encounters with Beautiful Women) – translated by Liang in the year 1898 and serialized with the title *Jiaren qiyu* 佳人奇遇 on the pages of the journal *Qing yi bao* 清議報 in the year 1898 – served as a model for his *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*.

著書之人,皆一時之大政論家,寄托書中之人物,以寫自己之政見,固不得專以小說目之.而其浸潤於國民腦質.³⁹

The writers express their political views through characters in their stories and in this way, therefore, their views are well and deeply assimilated into the people of the nation.

What Liang is describing here is a novel *about* politics, that is to say a work of fiction whose structure, plot and characters are in all respects fictionalisations of those socio-political issues a Chinese intellectual was supposed to tackle *as a zhishi fenzi* 知識分子. This is what Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* was supposed to be according to its extant chapters, and this is what Liang was referring to when praising the works of the Japanese writers of the Meiji Restoration.⁴⁰ Yet to consider the *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* only a subcategory, or a political declination of the new Chinese novel as it was being re-elaborated by him in those years would not be sufficient to understand this particular category (and the critical position it entails) in all its complexity.

But according to Liang Qichao's perspective, every *xiaoshuo* is a *zhengzhi xiaoshuo*, in the sense that every form of literature that is worth reading ought to be political. If Liang Qichao moves inductively, although often through oversimplification, towards the definition of a *xin xiaoshuo* as *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* from the analysis of the works of his Japanese colleagues and their role in the successful modernization of Japan, the conclusions to which he arrives open the ground conversely for the possibility of deduction. In order to *work* meaningfully within the new coordinates imposed by a modernity that is as such precisely because of the discordance it entails, literature has to be political. Thus, in providing a political narration or representation, literature is, either

39 Liang Qichao, "Chuanbo wenming sanliqi", p. 359; the translation here used is based on the one provided by Hiroko Wilcock in her "Japanese Modernization and the Emergence of New Fiction in Early Twentieth Century China".

40 What is left of the *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* is in fact a long and articulated dialogue about the problems of modern China the necessity of reform held between two young intellectuals that are coming back to China by train along the Trans Siberian railway after a long period of study abroad in Europe.

overtly or implicitly, utopian.⁴¹ If Liang Qichao's *xin xiaoshuo* is a literature that "the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve", and if it is true that "[i]t is the transformation of actuality into utopia that constitutes the practical end of utopian critique and the ultimate object of utopian hope", then Liang's narrative efforts (as well as those he promoted) fall once again into the category of the utopian.⁴²

Yet, despite our conceptual fidgeting over these questions of classification, every category in the end falls short of its expectations. It is Liang Qichao himself to question the direction of his own writing right at the very beginning of the novel that had been conceived in the first place to validate his point:

此編今初成兩三回，一覆讀之，似說部非說部，似樞史非樞史，似論著非論著，不知成何種文體，自顧良自失笑。⁴³

In this issue of the journal, we are going to publish the first two or three chapters [of my novel]. In reading it over, it seems to be both fiction and not fiction, both anecdotal and not anecdotal, both treatise and not treatise; I don't actually know what sort of form it will acquire, and I can't help laughing at myself as a result.⁴⁴

As Theodore Hutters remarks, "the utopian side of this discourse lodged itself in a series of wildly optimistic pronouncements about the potential to bring about a brave new world", and wildly optimistic was indeed Liang Qichao's project for a historiography of the future.⁴⁵

41 Quite obviously, such a position leads to the old post-modern adagio and ideological double bind for which literature is political nevertheless: either consciously by taking a stance, or unconsciously (and naively) by pretending not to be political, detached from ideology. Liang Qichao's ruminations do not reach this extent though.

42 The first quotation is taken from Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent (eds.), *The Utopia Reader*, New York, New York University Press, p. 2; the second quotation is taken from Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2000, p. 69.

43 Liang Qichao, *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, p. 2.

44 For the translation of this single segment, we are relying here on Theodore Hutters' contribution in Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, p. 114.

45 Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, p. 116.

According to Liang Qichao's initial expectations, his movement towards utopia was supposed to unfold in three acts. As Liang explains in another editorial by the title of "Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxue bao *Xin xiaoshuo*" 中國唯一之文學報《新小說》(China's unique literary journal *Xin xiaoshuo*) published too in the first number of the journal *Xin xiaoshuo*, the novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* should have been the first instalment of a literary project articulated in different chapters. Even though this project withered away soon after the inauguration of the new journal, we can still obtain a glimpse of its scope and overall trajectory through a brief summary that Liang pitched in advance to his potential readers. *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* should have unfold in consonance with a second work of fiction by the title of *Jiu Zhongguo weilai ji* 舊中國未來記 (The future of old China), the dystopian chronicle of a Chinese country that turned its back on reform, while in the conclusions of the first panel of this triptych on the future of China we would have learnt that:

卒在中國京師開一萬國平和會議，中國宰相為議長，議定黃白兩種人權利平等，互相親睦種種條款。

In the end, a world peace conference is organised and held in the Chinese capital. The conference is presided by the prime minister of China, and here are established equal rights and clauses for a friendly coexistence between the yellow and the white people.

The future of *old* China was originally intended to be much bleaker, as in this second panel the country was unable to shake off the colonial yoke and in the end became a reservoir for cheap work and cannon fodder for the Western powers in a land ridden by riots and insurgencies:

惟敘述不變之中國，寫其將來之慘狀。各強國初時利用北京政府及各省大吏為傀儡，剝奪全國民權利無所不至，人民皆何外國一顰一笑，為

其奴隸猶不足以謀生。卒至暴動屢起。外國人藉口平亂，行瓜分政策；各國復互相紛爭，各驅中國人從事軍役，自斗以糜爛。⁴⁶

[The future of old China] only tells the story of an unreformed China and it describes the misery of its future. At first, all the other powerful nations treat the government of Beijing and the governors of each province as their puppets, stripping off the rights and the privileges of the people all over the country. The Chinese become slaves to each and every whim of the foreigners, unable to take care of their own life. Protests and riots eventually ensue. The foreign powers use the disorder as an excuse to proceed with the partition of China, they turn against each other and deploy the Chinese people as soldiers until all that's left it ruins.

While these two literary projects – these two versions of the future – stemmed from the same core idea and developed it into two different but symmetrical paths, the third instalment of Liang Qichao's fresco on the modernisation of the country – provisionally entitled *Xin taoyuan* 新桃源 – constituted quite a different endeavour altogether, and it could be considered rather like an addendum to the first two titles, that is a variation on the theme of the forgotten island as a locus of social virtuosity:

其結構設為二百年前，有中國一大族民，不堪虐政，相率航海，遁於一大荒島，孳衍發達，至今日而內地始有與之交通者。其制度一如歐美第一等文明國，且有其善而無其弊焉。其人又不忘祖國，卒助內地志士奏維新之偉業，將其法制一切移植於父母之邦。⁴⁷

The structure of this work revolves around a big community of Chinese people that sets sail across the ocean in order to flee tyranny two hundreds years before. They arrive in an uninhabited island, where they flourish and develop until the present, when they start to communicate again with the mainland. Their social organisation is similar to that of Europe and America, equally civilised but without their flaws. Nevertheless, these people do not forget their motherland, and eventually they come back to help the heroes of the mainland in order to foster the process of reform.

Indeed such a literary enterprise on the part of a single intellectual who had approached

46 Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxuebao Xin xiaoshuo" 中国唯一之文学报《新小说》 in Chen Pingyuan 陈平原 and Xia Xiaohong 夏晓虹 (eds.), *Ershi shiji zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* 二十世纪中国小说理论资料, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 1989, vol. 1, p. 43.

47 Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo weiyi zhi wenxuebao Xin xiaoshuo", p. 44.

novel-writing as practical *divertissement* amid his prolific activity as a scholar and a reformer may appear a bit far-fetched. Yet what we may erroneously perceive as a series of loosely connected endeavours over a wide range of directions (scholarly erudition, political activity, journalism, translation, literature) amounts to something more than the sum of its parts. Liang Qichao's attempts to revitalise the figure of Confucius as a reformer under the guidance of his mentor Kang Youwei; his ill-fated attempts at a systematic reform of the Chinese state under the reign of emperor Guangxu 光緒; the relentless publication of articles and essays, if not of magazines and journals; his contributions to the translation of foreign fiction in Chinese; his efforts to foster a new literary aesthetics around whose principles to gather the writers of his generations; and in the end his "failed achievements" at the form of the novel: all these aspects represented a coherent effort on the part of Liang Qichao towards the goal of national reform. While these efforts may have not achieved their prefixed results, they nevertheless laid down the foundations – or, alternatively, cleared the ground – for the new discourse of modernity (post-imperial, republican, revolutionary) that would develop with the May Fourth generation. Likewise, in the realm of fiction, Liang Qichao's attempts at the reinvention of the form of the novel/*xiaoshuo* opened the ground for a new kind of literature whose primary quality was not linked to its esoteric refinement but was rather proportional to the degree of engagement with reality that it maintained.

Although Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* remained *per se* unfinished and so did the literary project it entailed, the impact of this peculiar piece of writing was strong and it persisted as a familiar echo between the lines of those novels that appeared in the wake of Liang's call for a *xin xiaoshuo*. Echoes of Liang's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* persist in the premises of Chen Tianhua's future-oriented tale of origins *Shizi hou*, whose opening chapters resemble in their lengthy accounts of the maladies of the country and in the

passionate proclaims made by its fervent heroes the opening dialogues of Liang's protagonists. The fragments of Liang Qichao's literary project scattered in the Chinese literary environment at the turn of the century, its ideas developing in novels such as Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*, Xiaoran Yusheng's *Wutuobang youji*, Lü Sheng's 旅生 *Chiren shuomeng ji* 痴人說夢記, and in particular in Bihe Guan Zhuren's *Huangjin shijie* 黃金世界 (1907) and *Xin jiyuan* (1908), whose plots are built on the "abstracts" given by Liang for his *Xin* and *Jiu Zhongguo* as well as his *Xin taoyuan*.

The Chinese utopian discourse of the late Qing period was one of projected historiographies and imaginary geographies whose purpose was to offer a vivid and enticing shape to the convoluted abstractions of the *fin-de-siècle* reformist vanguard. This was a critical movement that grew out of an overlapping of different conceptual frameworks which spanned from the remnants of a tradition under constant re-evaluation to the recently acquired ideas of a Western tradition assimilated through translation and linguistic canonisation.⁴⁸ In this perspective, Liang Qichao's synopsis of Kang Youwei's musings over the topicality of *Li Yun* 禮運 as a useful framework for the interpretation of the current affairs of Chinese politics is illuminating:

此一段者,以今語釋之,則民治主義存焉(天下...與能),國際聯合主義存焉(講信修睦),兒童公育主義存焉(故人不...其子),老病保險主義存焉(使老有...有所養),共產主義存焉(貨惡...藏諸己),勞作神聖主義存焉(力惡...為己)⁴⁹

If [Kang's writings] are translated in modern terms, they contain the ideas of *democracy* ("a public and common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtues, and ability"), a *League of Nations*

48 The word "canonisation" is here particularly pertinent, as *classical* Chinese was indeed the preferred medium for the acquisition and appropriation of the cornerstones of Western thought. The figures of Lin Shu and Yan Fu – late empire translators par excellence – were chief examples of this tendency, for fiction and philosophy respectively; see Michael Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: The Making of an Icon in Modern China*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013 and Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*, Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964.

49 Liang Qichao, *Qingdai xueshu gailun* 清代学术概论 in *Liang Qichao quanji*, vol. 5, p. 3098.

(“their words were sincere and what they cultivated was harmony”), *public upbringing of children* (“men did not treat as children only their own sons”), *sickness and old-age insurance* (“a competent provision was secured for the aged...”), *communism* (“they accumulated articles of value...but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification”), and the *sanctity of labor* (“they labored...but not with a view of their own advantage”).⁵⁰

Even though it is not the purpose of this chapter to delve into Liang’s re-elaboration of Kang Youwei’s positions in regard to the relationship and the overlapping of the discourses of (local) tradition and (imported) modernity, this passage is worth mentioning because it exemplifies the peculiar attitude of cultural syncretism that characterised the Chinese intelligentsia of the late Qing. What is relevant to our discussion is that the same kind of conceptual overlapping can be seen in the fiction of the same period. For what regard the *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* as utopian fiction, we can observe this approach in the attempts from the part of the novelists to write *new* fiction while at the same time lingering over old sets of metaphors, figures and tropes.

Chen Tianhua’s opening allegory in the prologue of his *Shizi hou* provides an interesting example of this schizophrenic attitude of reticent reception on the part of the late Qing novelists. Whereas in Liang Qichao we can recognize a textual strategy of continuity in which the novel is anchored to the real through a series of markers which are inserted in the text in order to locate it within a precise set of cultural and historical coordinates, Chen Tianhua appears to adopt a different narrative stance altogether. His strategy may be considered one of distantiation or alienation in which the narrative substance is deflected, eluded, postponed through narrative devices or strategies of classical overtones. The prologue of Chen’s *Shizi hou* betrays a backward looking penchant which is revealed through the embedded allegory of a Peach blossom-like satirical fantasy:

50 We are relying here on Immanuel C. Y. Hsü’s translation in Liang Ch’i-ch’ao, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch’ing Period*, translated by Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 96.

四千五百年之前,有一混沌國,周圍有了七萬裡,人口四萬萬.他們的祖先,也曾轟轟烈烈做過來,四旁各國都稱他是天朝.隻有一件大大的不好處:自古傳下些什麼忠君邪說,不問本族外族,隻要屁股坐了金椅,遂尊他是皇帝.本族之中有想恢復的,他遂自己殺起自己來,全不要外族費力.所以這一偌大的文明種族,被那旁邊的小小野蠻種族侵制.⁵¹ 4500 years ago there was a country called Hundun Guo, whose territory extended for 70 thousand *li* and over 400 million people. The ancestors of this people used to be great and powerful, and all the nearby countries called this country the Celestial Empire. The country had but one flaw: since the ancient times its people always lived by a ludicrous notion of loyalty, so that they would consider their emperor whoever set his buttocks on the golden throne, regardless of their origin. And when there was somebody among them who wanted to restore the power, they would start to kill each others on their own, with little help from the others. It was in this way that a civilised people fell under the invasion of a small group of barbarians.

Chen Tianhua's opening allegory is all but subtle: it would be difficult not to read in Chen's remarks on the fate of the Hundun Guo 混沌國 (which translates literally into "the country of chaos") overt references to the Manchu (外族) overthrowing of the Ming dynasty (本族), a transition that is described in the heavily nationalistic terms of a descent into barbarism brought by a *yeman zhongzu* 野蠻種族 to an otherwise superior civilisation (文明種族). In Chen's allegorical reading of the Chinese empire's recent history, the Manchu conquest is seen as the first step of a progressive loss of national coherence, which eventually lead to the present-day colonial impasse under the Western yoke:

最末之一朝,就是混沌國東北方,一種野蠻人,人口隻有五百萬,倒殺了混沌人十分之九,佔領混沌國二百多年。末年又來了什麼蠶食國、鯨吞國、狐媚國,都比這種野蠻又強得遠,便把混沌國一塊一塊的割送他們。⁵²

The last [foreign] dynasty to rule over the Hundun Guo came from the northeast. They were a barbarian people whose population amounted

51 Chen Tianhua 陳天華, *Shizi hou* 獅子吼 in Wang Xiaolian 王孝廉 (ed.), *Wan Qing xiaoshuo daxi* 晚清小說大系, Taipei, Guangya chuban youxian gongsi 廣雅出版有限公司, 1984, vol. 22, p. 1.

52 Chen Tianhua, p. 2.

only to five millions, yet they managed to exterminate the inhabitants of the Hundun Guo and ruled over the country for 200 years. During the last years of their rule, other and more powerful countries – such as the Canshi Guo [the nibbling country], the Jingtun Guo [the swallowing country], the Humei Guo [the charming country] – joined in the butchering of the Hundun Guo.

Despite the lack of allegorical sophistication and the overt pugnacity of such an image, the opening pages of Chen Tianhua's *Shizi hou* may appear to the reader as somehow erratic. In the prologue of this novel, Chen in fact shifts between different narrative planes, masking the core of the narration behind multiple diegetic layers. The allegory of the Hundun Guo is in fact introduced by the narrator through the narrative device of the found manuscript:

有一日,小使拿了一封信函...是小子一個至好契友寫來的...據稱“前兩月入山樵採,有一座石屏,拔地獨立,高有數丈,忽然石破天驚,飛出一鐵函來”⁵³
“One day I received a letter . . . from a very close friend, which said: ‘Two months ago I was picking up firewood in the mountains, when I stumbled on a rock wall which raised towering in front of me, several meters high. A lightening struck it suddenly, and out of it came an iron casket’.”

Admittedly, this meta-diegetic incipit provides a reasonable solution for the introduction of the plot, as well as a practical, evident gimmick to convey the (required) distance of the utopian construct. Yet, despite the narrative intricacy that this double-jointed meta-diegetic opening implies by fragmenting the narration in at least three diegetic levels (the main text, the letter from a friend, the manuscript found in the casket described in the letter), this solution is soon abandoned. The focus of the narration shifts quickly back to the primary level of narration, as if the humble *xiaozi* 小子, who addressed the reader at the beginning of the chapter, regained control of a story on the point of drifting away. In fact, *Shizi hou*

53 Chen Tianhua, p. 1.

develops in the end as the account of a dream provoked by the allegory of the Hundun Guo, a dream in which the narrator – upset by the familiar fate of the Hundun Guo – falls asleep and dreams of national revivals triggered by foreign invasions.

Reluctance and overt proclivity seem in fact to be the two ends of the narrative spectrum of the late Qing Chinese political/utopian novel: either the text is anchored to reality by the continuous reminders of its enmeshment with the world, or the narration is eluded, delayed, dislocated into an ambiguous location away both from the reader and the author-as-narrator's positions. Although these different strategies can be seen as symptoms of the ongoing struggle for the definition of a new literary aesthetics, their result is that of a "school" which is torn between the familiar and the new and that emerges a conflicting attempt of distantiation from an outmoded tradition undertaken with the tools given by the same. Hence the reluctance to abandon the old formulas and the oblique reinterpretation of old motifs in new guises (the fictional storytelling context, the oneiric transitions, the narrative pretexts), the combative incursions against the reader's fourth wall: these were attempts on the part of the late Qing intelligentsia "to open a totalizing and mapping access to society as a whole" through the medium of literature.⁵⁴

What ties Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and Chen Tianhua's *Shizi hou* together is the common attempt by the two authors to approach the utopian matter both from a forward-looking and from a backward-looking – Bellamian – perspective *at the same time*. The utopian element is glimpsed through sporadic descriptions and transient allusions to futuristic cities as embodiment of postcolonial futures, but it is also projected as a logical consequence to the actions of the characters in the present. Liang Qichao and Chen Tianshua's *xiaoshuo* develop along the same line, but following two opposing vectors, one moving from the present to the future, and the other from the future back to

54 Fredric Jameson, "Introduction" in György Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1983, p. 7.

the present. What both these novel lack is a point of convergence between these two trajectories. What we claim is that this point may simply be unrepresentable, but only approachable through approximation.

This feature of unrepresentability that characterises the late Qing political novel *à la* Liang Qichao echoes in a way what Jacques Ellul defined as the problem of genealogies, the question of the “rootage in the past”, and of the unmeasurability of change and progress. Whereas Ellul developed these concepts in regard to the irreducible gaps between society and the technical system in postwar Europe, his framework of analysis can be applied as well to the question of modernity in late imperial China. Paraphrasing the French anarchist philosopher, we can in fact say that once conflict is accepted, once “the accumulation of past experiences” of a society which is “the result of slow evolutions” is not sufficient any more to provide its members the tools to understand the present. once “genealogies are not needed to reach the present stage”, so is accepted the postulating of utopia in the terms of a cognitive black-out, or a jump forward: “Good or bad, utopia is a response to the actual situation, though no one can tell us how we arrive at it”. Utopia thus becomes an ideal embodiment of those instances of change and progress that “are unmeasurable in the sense that they cannot be compared with anything else”.⁵⁵ The utopian text condenses what cannot be articulated through the ideological discourse, revealing both the latter’s potential as well as its limits, and it does so by allowing a cognitive black-out, a moment of particular suspension of disbelief that leads us to the utopian conceptual island, which (the late Qing Chinese utopia) can otherwise only be approximated and postponed.

In a fashion similar to that of Liang Qichao’s metafictional strategies of textual anchoring, the prologue of Chen Tianhua’s novel reveals an attempt on the part of the author to establish a dialectical relationship between the text and the real. But whereas the

⁵⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, pp. 14–19.

prologue of *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* reflects Liang's uncompromising intellectual straightforwardness and his inflexible belief in the necessary interdependence between the text and the real, Chen Tianhua's prologue to his *Shizi hou* moves towards the same goal in a much more elusive way. While Liang Qichao deals with the problem of the gap between the narration of the present and the narration of utopia via a clear and logical operation of textual embedding (so that the utopian element is encoded in the real and it is exposed through the text), Chen Tianhua appears initially reluctant to provide his readers the tools for the location of the utopian narration within their own experience. Chen's narrator is deceptive, as he keeps shifting between different diegetic levels through means of digressions, short-lived allegories, and oneirical allusions.

Like Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, Chen's *Shizi hou* is too a utopian narration built on the basis of a pseudo-historical account of the re-foundation of China, yet this account is framed in uncertainty. The reader of *Shizi hou* – unlike the reader of Liang Qichao, whose position is precisely located and logically framed – is left to wonder about his position in relation to the text. As we have remarked, “utopia is a *method* rather than a *state*, . . . it is a method camouflaging as a state”, and “any utopian novel is in principle an ongoing feedback dialogue with the reader”. In the end, Chen Tianhua's narrative strategy is indeed one of “camouflaging” in which the boundaries between the text and the real are blurred, the reader's expectations are disoriented and so engaged in a dramatic dialogue oriented towards the imagination of a new “Possible World”.⁵⁶

The plot of *Shizi hou* revolves around the idea of a Chinese national revival which is triggered by a foreign invasion of the country. Outraged by the government's incapacity to react against the Russian invasion of the northern provinces and the British acquisition of Shanghai, the Chinese people enacts a nation-wide rebellion against the invaders. This

⁵⁶ Darko Suvin, “Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as Key to Utopian Studies”, *Utopian Studies*, 1990, vol. 1, n. 2, pp. 74–75.

introduction is embedded within a oneiric framework:

又吟了數次,精神已倦,遂在椅上睡去了.忽見盟友華人夢,慌忙走進來說道:“俄羅斯重佔東三省,英國乘機派了長江總督”.⁵⁷

I cried several times [after reading the letter about the Hundun Guo] and my mind grew weary, so I sat on my chair and slept. Suddenly my friend Hua Renmeng rushed into my room: “The Russians have invaded the three northern provinces, and the British seized the opportunity to appoint their own viceroy in Shanghai”.

To the three diegetic levels implied by the meta-diegetic incipit we have discussed before, Chen Tianhua introduces a fourth one by alluding at the possibility of the dream: the narration appears to begin after our main protagonist falls asleep. The narrator – at this point of the story still uncharacterised – proceeds to describe the early fights between the local population of Shanghai and the foreign troops. Rushing to help his compatriots who are suffering defeat by the hand of the invader, he is pushed into a ditch near the Yangzi river, where he lies apparently dead. It is at this point in the prologue that the narration shifts tone once again:

及聞人聲漸遠,才敢爬上來.乃是一個深山,虎狼無數.小子比時魂飛天外,恰要走時,已被他們望見,飛奔前來.起頭小子還想用空手攔擋,不料已被抓倒在地,右臂上已被咬了一口,痛入骨髓,不覺長號一聲.⁵⁸

I did not dare to get out of the ditch until the noise around me died down. I found myself deep in the mountains, surrounded by wolves. I was frightened out of my mind. I wanted to run away, but the wolves had already seen me. I tried to fend them off with my bare hands, but they pinned me to the ground almost immediately. I felt a bite on my right arm, and as pain penetrated into my bones, I let out a scream.

Chen Tianhua moves back and forth between different narrative registers, alternating realistic representations to oneiric digressions with evident metaphorical innuendos about

57 Chen Tianhua, p. 2.

58 Chen Tianhua, p. 3.

the fate of the modern Chinese nation, which is metaphorically described as “a mighty lion asleep for many years, surrounded by ravaging wolves” (一隻大獅, 睡了多年, 因此虎狼橫行).

Chen Tianhua draws closer to the representation of his utopian vision by disorienting the reader through the consistent negation of any stable point of reference in the narration. Yet this strategy of disorientation is not direction-less, as it moves towards the representation of the Chinese late Qing utopia of a reformed empire of national renaissance. The metaphor of the sleeping lion surrounded by a pack of wolves exposes the Darwinist penchant of the chauvinistic attitude that characterised a large part of the reformist intelligentsia of the time. The Chinese lion, which suddenly mutates into an image of the Yellow Emperor as omen for the renaissance of a country that is “nibbled” (蠶食), “embezzled” (鯨吞), “lured” (狐媚) by the foreign wolves, performs a clear function of – for lack of a better definition – ideological positioning. This metaphor does not merely represent an “ornamental excrescence”, but it rather functions as a “specific cognitive organon” within the ideological architecture of the text.⁵⁹ The overlapping of the national iconography of the Yellow Emperor as “first ancestor of the Han” (漢人始祖, 軒轅黃帝是也) with a Darwinian metaphor of biological survival reflects the accumulation of notions and ideas that characterised the discourse of reform in China after the encounter with the West. The development of the attitude of self-strengthening towards a racially-oriented nationalism interpreted through the lens of quasi-transcendent socio-Darwinism as it had been extrapolated from Timothy H. Huxley’s “Heavenly Evolution” of Yan Fu’s 嚴復 *Tianyan lun* 天演論 frames the Chinese late Qing utopia as a locus of coherence and rectification, a point of impossible convergence where the dissonance of a world gone out

59 Darko Suvin, “On Metaphoricity and Narrativity in Fiction: The Chronotope as the ‘Differentia Generica’”, *SubStance*, 1986, vol. 14, n. 3, p. 51.

of joint is impossibly reconciled.^{60,61}

It is from within this dream of national recovery that the narrator is thus brought back to life: he is not any more into the “dream of a Chinese” where he had been catapulted by the incursion of the character “Hua Renmeng”, but he finds himself now awoken at the centre of a brand new world.⁶²

轉眼又不是山中,乃是一個極大的都會,街廣十丈,都是白石砌成,潔淨無塵.屋宇皆是七層,十二分的華美.街上的電車汽車,往來如織.半空中修著鐵橋,人在上面行走,火車底下又穿著地洞,也有火車行走.正是講不盡富貴繁華,說不盡奇麗巧妙.心中想道,這是什麼地方?恐怕倫敦,巴黎也沒有這樣.隨又到一個大會場,隻見旗子上大書“光復五十年紀念會”.⁶³

In the blink of an eye I was not in the mountains any more. Around me was a huge city with spotless streets paved in white stone, ten *zhang* wide. Among the overwhelmingly beautiful buildings, all of them seven-storey tall, trams and cars were moving back and forth in an orderly manner. Above the streets were many iron bridges on which people walked. Trains were moving in the underground. One could have gone on endlessly talking about the extraordinary beauty and wealth of this city. Where was I? – I asked myself – Neither London nor Paris were like this. Then I arrived at a big square, where I saw a banner that said, “Celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the recover of the land”.

This is the reader’s first glimpse into the utopian construct of Chen Tianhua’s novel: a city of extraordinary beauty which is celebrating the new-found glory of the nation after centuries of foreign oppression. What unfolds in front of the narrator is the spectacle of a nation celebrating itself through the staging of its own history. The narrator, walking in awe among the streets and the squares of the city, arrives at a stage upon which countless

60 “The creation of forms is the most profound confirmation of the existence of a dissonance”, Lukács.

61 On the developments of the discourse of race in modern China, see Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, London, Hurst & Company, 1992 and Frank Dikötter, *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and a Japan*, London: Hurst & Company, 1997; on the dichotomy of culturalism and nationalism, see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995 and James Townsend, “Chinese Nationalism”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 1992, pp. 97–130; on the Chinese rewriting of Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*, see Xiaosui Xiao, “China Encounters Darwinism: A Case of Intercultural Rhetoric”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 1995, n. 81, pp. 83–99.

62 Names are omens indeed.

63 Chen Tianhua, p. 3.

actors are re-enacting the recent history of the new country. The Chinese drama of national despair and recovery is sung along the melodies of familiar *cipai* 詞牌 tunes about the glory of the past (重開湯武之天, . . . 增四千年歷史光榮); the loss of national integrity under the Manchu rule (那滿政府二百年之威風, 五百萬之異類, 都歸何處去也?); the glorification of those heroes who “looked back again to the times of Yao and Shun, and returned the nation to the descendants of the Han” (收拾金甌還漢胤, 重瞻舜日堯天); and the final reawakening of the people and restoration of the Chinese nation (百計號呼, 喚醒群夢, 十年茹苦, 造就新邦).⁶⁴

As we will see in the fourth and in the fifth chapter of this research, the late Qing Chinese utopia is inclined to self-representation and self-celebration. It is often portrayed not in the act of *being* or *functioning as* a utopia, but rather in an act of self-reflection. The Chinese utopian society gazes constantly back at itself, re-assessing its qualities, its boundaries, its “tautological character”, as if lost in a “never-ending monologue of self-praise”. This is true for Liang’s *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*, where a world peace conference is staged to celebrate the beginning of the new Chinese era, as well as for the metafictional portraits of actors and stages in Chen Tianhua’s *Shizi hou*; but – as we will see – it is also true for Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*, where the protagonist Jia Baoyu moves between displays, parades and exhibition of national prowess, and for Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo*, whose final chapter is set in a theatre where the history of the nation is staged once again in celebration of the nation. The Chinese modern utopia is in the end a spectacle of the nation, and “the spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification”.⁶⁵ The representation (and the self-representation) of utopia is fragmented, it lies in between and across layers of extratextuality and metatextuality, two

64 Chen Tianhua, p. 5.

65 The fragments quoted in this paragraph are taken from theses 3, 13, and 24 of Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

narrative strategies which are deployed to cope with the impossibility to measure or to quantify the utopia of *modernity*, to deal with the inherent reluctance of the form to be framed univocally within the text.

The representation of utopia is recursive and retrospective: once posited, the political utopia looks backward at the present and encompasses it. Whereas Liang Qichao embeds the representation of new China through layers of textual recursion, Chen Tianhua opts for a strategy of evasion and elusion through which the (imagined) borders between the real and the text, between the reader's "topia" and the Chinese utopia, are blurred. This is the cognitive function of Chen Tianhua's constant shifting between narrative layers, his chronotopic variations, the constant feeling of uncertainty and unreliability that pervades the initial chapters of the novel. Similarly to Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo*, it is once again the utopian construct – the possibility for a Chinese national utopia in the future as the result of the political action in the present – that justifies in the end the architecture of the novel and gives the text its legitimation.

At the end of *Shizi hou*'s introductory chapter, Chen Tianhua's narrator reaches back to the present *from* the utopian locus: the perspective is inverted, the reader's gaze is not oriented forward any more, but it is now asked to look backward from the impossible position of the vanishing point of a teleological perspective. This reversal of perspectives is realised in the text by anchoring within the utopian chronotope of the future the reason for a narration in the present. After having wandered for a while in a state of awe among the white streets and the bright squares of the new Chinese nation, Chen's narrator walks into the country's national library, "The Library of the Republic" (共和國圖書館), where he finds two volumes: the first one is an "almanac of the republic", the second a chronological account of the recent history of the country. Here Chen Tianhua indulges in the vertigo of the list, providing his readers a description of the Chinese utopia through the raw

enumeration of data:

有一巨冊金字標題“共和國年鑒”，內稱：全國大小學堂三十余萬所，男女學生六千余萬。陸軍常備軍二百萬，預備兵及后備兵八百萬。海軍將校士卒，共一十二萬，軍艦總共七百余隻，又有水中潛航艇及空中戰艇數十隻。鐵路三十萬裡，電車鐵路十萬裡。郵政局四萬余所。輪船帆船二千萬噸。各項稅銀每年二十八萬萬圓，歲出亦相等。⁶⁶

There was a huge volume whose golden title read “Almanac of the Republic”. The volume provided an account of the country’s 300 thousand schools and universities with their 60 million students; its standing army of 2 million soldiers and 8 million reservists; its 120 thousand navy officers, its more than 700 vessels, and its dozens of submarines and aircraft; it gave an account of the country’s 300 thousand *li* of railways and 100 thousand *li* of electrified roadways; its 40 thousand post offices; the 20 million tons of its merchant fleet; its annual income of 28 hundred million *yuan*; its annual expenditures; and so forth.

The penchant for enumeration and accumulation appears to be another characteristic trait of these representations, as if the Chinese utopia were the result of a catalogical rectification of names and numbers. It is with this enumeration of data that the reader gets his last glimpse of Chen Tianhua’s vision of utopia: here, at the end of *Shizi hou*’s introductory chapter and among the beautiful volumes of the “Library of the Republic” that Chen Tianhua seals the oneirical infrastructure of the novel and shifts once and for all back to the present. Spotted by the guards of the library, the narrator manages to get hold of a beautiful volume wrapped in yellow silk, its cover sporting the fiery image of a roaring lion: these are the “Chronicles of the Guangfu Era” (光復紀事本末), the chronological history of the Chinese national revival. This is the “manuscript” of *Shizi hou*, the story of the lion’s roar. The point of view shifts back to the present, the vision of utopia shatters. The narrator/protagonist, mistaken for a thief, is arrested: “Somebody grabbed me from behind . . . ‘This is the end of my life!’ I cried scared to death. It was in that moment that I woke up, it was all but a dream” (那知背后忽有一人追趕出來 . . . 小子驚嚇欲死,

66 Chen Tianhua, p. 7.

大叫“吾命休矣!”醒來原來是南柯一夢). Yet when the boundaries of utopia are broken, the possibility of narration is given:

急向身邊去摸,那書依然尚在.仔細讀了幾遍,覺得有些味道.趁著閑時,便把此書用白話演出,中間情節,隻字不敢妄參.原書是篇中分章,章中分節,全是正史體載.今既改為演義,便變做章回體,以符小說定制.因原書封面上畫的是獅子,所以取名《獅子吼》.⁶⁷

I felt my side in a hurry, and the book was still there. I read it carefully a few times, realizing that it was an interesting read. In my spare time, I decided to render it in vernacular, without adding a single word of my own. The original volume, with its divisions in chapters and sections, is in all respects a historical record. As I wanted to give it the shape of a novel, I divided its content into the chapters of a novel. Because the cover of the original book portrayed a lion, I gave this novel the title of *Shizi hou*.

Chen Tianhua concludes the prologue with an exhortation to his readers to read the rest of the novel and, implicitly, to learn from the lesson of the lion's roar. While we may arguably recognise in this vocal exhortation the persistence of the vestiges of the storytelling tradition in the modern *xiaoshuo* form, this textual element also acquires a much cogent value in the wake of Liang Qichao's literary manifesto and Chen Tianhua's militant activism. The cries for attention, the phatic closures and the bombastic claims adopted from the storytelling mould, which remain but as mannerist flourishes in a literary tradition that outgrew its oral roots, become the means of expression of a proto-modernist call to arms years before Lu Xun's more fortunate *Nahan* 吶喊.

Admittedly, the most interesting parts of both Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and Chen Tianhua's *Shizi hou* are their prologues. These sections stand out as beautiful imaginative glances, narrative crystallisations of those instances of reform that constituted

67 Chen Tianhua p. 7.

the ground for political discussion during the later years of the Chinese empire.⁶⁸ From an artistic point of view, it is in these textual fragments that we can locate the literary vanguard of the era. Utopias are uncharted territories that beg to be explored, and whose exploration requires the formulation or the attuning of new critical instruments. As we will see more clearly with the analysis of Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* and Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*, in these novels the mapping of these territories is not only figurative, but also formal and conceptual. The representation of utopia does not fulfil its function in itself, in the imagination of idyllic elsewheres which unfold distant in time and space, but rather in providing new coordinates for the reader's orientation. In the case of late Qing fiction, utopia is also an experiment on the limits of the novel/*xiaoshuo* as a literary form, as well as a proving ground for the imaginary institution of society in a time when society needed to be imagined anew.

In fact – we might say – it is exactly because of the sheer imaginative power and the evocativeness of these prologues that both Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua's works seem to trail off in what is left of their few extant chapters. As we have seen, both these novels unfold according to a circular and (meta)diegetic structure in which the non-utopian present and the utopian future are encased one into the other, and whose consequentiality – at least in Liang Qichao's most optimistic assumptions – was supposed to provide a model for political action in the real, extra-diegetic, world. If this narrative strategy succeeds in capturing the reader's *benevolentia* by hinting both at the radical otherness of the utopian construct *and* at its arm's length proximity, these novels nevertheless fall short of the great expectations that they build up. These texts fall victim of what David Wang, elaborating on Clifford Geertz notion of *involution*, has identified as an involutory tendency towards

68 We use here the word “crystallization” with particular awareness, elaborating on Cornelius Castoriadis' metaphor of “magma” as “the imaginary or the unconscious”, the chaotic concurrence of social forces towards the imagination of society. Utopia is thus a fragile crystal, a moment of coherence, the solidification of magma once it surfaces to the earth, in the text. See Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Villepreux, Éditions du Soleil, 1975.

introversion, “a move that expands and curls in such a way as to turn inward upon itself”.⁶⁹ And indeed both Liang and Chen Tianhua’s narrative trajectories soon seem to collapse into a succession of overdrawn ruminations, tangential detours, redundant expositions and inconsequential bouts of poetic inspiration. This tendency can be observed both from the point of view of the content and the form of the novel: as the metafictional inventiveness of the early chapters is made to settle down into a more linear narrative, the poetic descriptions and the awe-inspiring glances give way to more predictable solutions. The characters reveal a peculiar lack of profundity: upright and incorruptible heroes of utmost integrity, they become but blank canvasses for those ideas of reform heralded by their authors, standing straight as ideological embodiments of manifesto-ed ideas, whose univocal voices do not betray any hint of human uncertainty. These traits are thus reflected in the plots of these novel, which develop rather predictably and predictably evaporate into incompleteness.

69 Wang, p. 31.

CHAPTER 3: A BELLAMIAN INTERPOLATION, OR “THOSE CHINAMEN KNEW WHAT THEY WERE ABOUT”

The war of England and France against the Celestial Empire was an historical fact of world-wide importance, not because of the military successes achieved – the most famous of which was the plunder and destruction of the Imperial summer palace at Peking – but because the allies cast down the walls through which 400,000,000 of inhabitants were hermetically closed in from the outside world. With the intention of opening China to the Europeans the globe has been thrown open to the Chinese.

Baron Alexander von Hubner as quoted in the pamphlet *Some Reasons for the Chinese Exclusion*, 1902¹

1 This quotation is taken from *Some Reasons for the Chinese Exclusion*, an anti-Chinese pamphlet published by the American Federation of Labor in defence of the “American manhood” against the phenomenon of “Asiatic coolieism”, whose appearance preceded the final ratification of the Chinese Exclusion Act (originally issued in 1882) that was to be decided by the U.S. Senate in the year 1902. While the pamphlet was published in Washington in 1902, the fragment here quoted belongs to a discourse given by Baron Alexander von Hubner, former Austrian ambassador to France and renown world traveller, at the Oriental Museum of Vienna in 1885 and reported by the Austrian press soon thereafter. Even though we have not been able to ascertain with certainty the source of the American translation that appears in the pamphlet of 1902, the same fragment can be found in the book *The Chinese at Home and Abroad* by Willard Brigham Farwell (1829–1903) of 1885, which we believe may have provided the primary source for the pamphleteers.

The utopian texts written in China between 1902 and 1910 unfold in a network of resemblances, reiterations, interactions and intersections. Even though each of the novels taken here into consideration can be read and understood according to its own internal coordinates and its own conceptual map, all these texts nevertheless gesture at the same territory, at the same conceptual space. In this perspective, each text thus provides a different itinerary within a unique landscape, a shared social imaginary which can be considered a mirror of the ideological subtext of history, and that is constituted by those fragments of the Real which are not or cannot be articulated by the discourse of ideology. The utopian discourse expands where the map of ideology recedes, it unfolds in the space of discrepancy that opens up from the superimposition of the *discourse* of the Real, which according to Castoriadis is a discourse of *provisional* ensembles and organised categories, upon the chaotic and irreducible magma of the social and historical contingencies.² The utopian discourse thus develop as another “ensemble”, a new re-arrangement of the mass of signifiers of the Real which, disentangled from the boundaries and the coordinates of the ideological discourse, are remapped and reoriented in the utopian one. But because the

2 In our deployment of the concepts of “magma” and “ensemble” we are referring to the seventh chapter of Castoriadis’ *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, “Social Imaginary Significations”. In doing so, it is our intention to see the utopian text as a kind of “ensemble”, that is a provisional re-organisation of the relations of signification that make up the “Real” (in Jameson’s terms) as a subtext (the subtext of history) upon which the narrative text (and so the utopian text) is built. Characteristic of the *outopian*, as we will try to show in with this research, is the quality of a photographic negative of a narration of reversals, inversion, mirroring.

“Let us try then, by means of an accumulation of contradictory metaphors, to give an intuitive description of what we mean by magma (the best intuitive support the reader can present to himself is to think of ‘all the significations of the English language’ or ‘all the representations of his life’). We have to think of a multiplicity which is not one in the received sense of the term but which we mark out as such, and which is not a multiplicity in the sense that we could actually or virtually enumerate what it ‘contains’ but in which we could mark out in each case terms which are not absolutely jumbled together. Or, we might think of an indefinite number of terms, which may possible change, assembled together by an optionally transitive pre-relation (referral); or of the holding-together of distinct-indistinct components of a manifold; or, again, of an indefinitely blurred bundle of conjunctive fabrics, made up of different cloths and yet homogeneous, everywhere studded with virtual and evanescent singularities. And we have to think of the operations of identity logic as simultaneous, multiple dissections which transform or actualize these virtual singularities, these components, these terms into distinct and definite elements, solidifying the pre-relation of referral into relation as such, organizing the holding-together, the being-in, the being-on, the being-proximate into a system of determined and determining relations (identity, difference, belonging, inclusion), differentiating what they distinguish in this way into ‘entities’ and ‘properties’, using this differentiation to constitute ‘sets’ and ‘classes’.” Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998, p. 344.

outopian space is a negative one, its symbolical representation provided by the utopian text is bound to be narrated through strategies of misrepresentation, reversal, deferral, postponement and hyperbole.

The texts taken into consideration in this study provide different angles, perspectives or trajectories for the exploration of the late Qing utopian imaginary, each one of them unfolding in the corners left unspoken or unrepresented by the other texts. Thus if in his *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 Wu Jianren 吳趸人 provides the reader a breath-taking bird's eye perspective of the Chinese utopian society at large, it will be in the novel *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 by Lu Shi'e's 陸士諤 that we will be able to find a description of the particularities of its capital, or again it will be in Bihe Guan Zhuren's 碧荷館主人 *Xin jiyuan* 新紀元 that we will read of its military power and its conquest of the West. Borrowing from the same ideological subtext, these texts unfold in analogous and complementary ways.

This network of utopian representations emerged in the first place as a textual “by-product” of the ideological subtext of China's colonial modernity, against which the late Qing utopian discourse coalesced as a locus of negotiation of the ideological impasses that the condition of colonial submission entailed. In many respects, the Chinese modern utopian novel can be considered a quintessential product of its time: even though this statement may sound obvious in its tautological emptiness (all phenomena are in the end products of their own times), what we mean by it is that both from a conceptual (“ideological”) point of view, and from the more concrete perspective of the “material”, textual genesis of these texts and of this genre, the utopian novel emerges as the epitome of a time gone out of joint and a phenomenon that could not have happened otherwise.

From a conceptual point of view, the utopian novel represents both an ideal

synthesis of the Chinese reformist thought that developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as a ratification of its defeat, a recognition in the form of the modern *xiaoshuo* 小說 of the incapacity on the part of the Chinese intellectuals of the late empire to translate their ideals into reality. Blossoming after the epochal failure of the Hundred Days' Reform, the utopian novel developed as a textual re-arrangement of those ideas of cultural and national renovation that circulated among the Chinese intelligentsia of the time, and which were thus given a symbolical, coherent representation in the utopian landscape against the historical reality of their fragmentation.

From the more practical point of view of the genre's textual genesis, the utopian novel can be considered as a perfect example of those practices of transnational, transcultural and translingual contamination that characterised the local and colonial modernity of *fin-de-siècle* China. These texts are the results of that particular "productive distortion", in the words of Lydia Liu, that derives from the negotiation, the contamination and the overlapping of different, heterogeneous influences.³ We are referring here in particular to the remarkable number of foreign texts that started to circulate among the Chinese public as an epiphenomenon of the increasing foreign presence on the Chinese soil. Among the hundreds of texts that were translated, rewritten and adapted in this long process of cultural acquisition was also the utopian novel *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, published in 1888 by the American writer Edward Bellamy (1850–1898). It is to this particular text – we claim – that we can ascribe, at least partially, the peculiar inflorescence

3 "When confronted with such instances of novelistic realism and imported stylistic forms of narration, one's first impulse is to see them as obvious examples of European influence or even cultural imperialism. But in a closer look. But at a closer look at what actually goes on within those Chinese texts, the linkages between modern Chinese literature and its European counterpart do not appear so self-evident. Nor does the idea of influence provide a sound explanation as to why certain imported modes of representation are preferred over others. In order to make sense of the complexities surrounding translingual modes of representation in modern Chinese fiction, I pursue a reading that takes the traces of a 'productive distortion' very seriously, that sees them as instances of parodic imitation that bear eloquent witness to the contradictory condition of Chinese modernity." Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 103.

of utopian texts that characterised the Chinese literary landscape at the turn of the century.

Naturally it is not our intention with this chapter to claim that the modern utopian novel flourished in China only after the colonial stimulus of a single (mis)translated text. On the contrary we believe that the genesis of such a literary genre in such a critical time should be understood within the complex framework of responses upon which the Chinese colonised subject negotiated its own position within the colonial dialectic. Yet, as we will see in the next pages, many are the clues (historical, textual) that could corroborate such a claim of textual and generic filiation. We could remark, for example, how the publishing house that printed Lu Shi'e's novel *Xin zhongguo* in 1910 was the same that in 1908 also published the novel *Xin shitouji*, and the author of the latter – Wu Jianren – started to write fiction under the encouragement of Liang Qichao 梁啟超, who in turn worked as secretary for Timothy Richard, the editor of the 1891 Chinese translation of Bellamy's masterpiece; we could also delve into the similarities of Edward Bellamy and Liang Qichao's approaches toward the form of the novel/*xiaoshuo* as an instrument for the implementation of political reform; or in the end we could simply point out the many similarities between Bellamy's utopian construction and the utopian imaginaries of our Chinese novelists.

It is because of this transcultural network of overlapping authors, texts and genres that we have decided to dedicate this particular chapter to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Scope of these pages is to locate in Bellamy's text, and in its Chinese rendition of 1891, some useful points of reference for our understanding of the late Qing utopian discourse of modernity, and of the codification of the Chinese utopian novel as a coherent literary genre within the chaotic magma of texts produced during the late Qing period. In this perspective, we will try to extrapolate and circumscribe some characteristic features of the utopian genre through a close reading of some portions of Bellamy's text. In doing so we will rely on a second, auxiliary text, that is to say the dystopian novel *Looking Further*

Backward by Arthur Dudley Vinton, whose “orientalist” plot of Chinese invasions and Yellow Peril scarecrows allows us to understand this eccentric juxtaposition of Chinese and American novels as an ideally integrated textual system of mutual imagination.

Looking Further Backward is a dystopian novel written by Arthur Dudley Vinton (1852–1906) in 1890 and presented as a critique built upon the good old trope of the Yellow-Peril menace against Edward Bellamy’s Nationalist ideology and to the pseudo-socialist penchant that this political position implied.⁴ In his dystopian sequel, Vinton evokes the ghost of the Chinese otherness, which, quite interestingly, is constructed by the American author in a very similar fashion (yet with diametrical connotation) to the way his coeval Chinese novelists were imagining their utopian self. The plot of *Looking Further Backward* revolves around the narration of a Chinese invasion of the United States which leads to the Chinese colonisation of the American country and the eventual “Chinese-ification” of an American population that years of Bellamian Nationalist management had weakened and reduced to complete apathy.

Understandably, Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and Vinton’s *Looking Further Backward* may appear as unusual starting points in relation to our attempt of comprehension of the late Qing utopian discourse. Given the geographical and chronological distance of Vinton and Bellamy’s novels from the narrative utopias analysed in the other chapters of this study, this interpolation may be misread as a tangential *non sequitur* within the general architecture of the research. Yet this tangentiality is only apparent, and it may on the contrary provide us a new and interesting perspective from which to consider our topic. In the simple juxtaposition of these texts, one can perceive what appears to be a shared political unconscious of overlapping utopian expectations and

⁴ For what concerns Bellamy’s political stance, see for example Milton Cantor’s “The Backward Looking Look of Bellamy’s Socialism”, in Daphne Patai (ed.), *Looking Backward, 1888–1888: Essays on Edward Bellamy*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp. 21–36.

dystopian apprehensions, as if, for example, the Chinese invasion of the American soil narrated by Vinton in his *Looking Further Backward* were undertaken by the renewed Chinese empire described in Bihe Guan Zhuren's *Xin Jiyuan*, or as if Lu Shi'e's descriptions of the new city of Shanghai in the novel *Xin Zhongguo* were based on the blueprint of *Looking Backward*'s new Boston.

Indeed all these references and counter-references, these allusions and these remainders hint to the presence of a common underlying ideological infrastructure, which we may recognise as the one pushed forward by the relentless expansion of the industrialised West from its self-established centre towards its imagined peripheries. Unfortunately, in order to substantiate properly these claims we would need to change the topic of this research altogether. With the juxtaposition of these images it is rather our intention to obtain an original perspective through which to look at the texts at the core of this research, and to turn the deceptiveness of the word “(o)utopia” (which is both/neither American and/nor Chinese) to our own advantage. As Ricoeur remarks, utopia is a locus built upon the “notion of the nowhere” and that is grounded on our “ability to conceive of an empty place from which to look at ourselves”. In the juxtaposition of the perspectives of Edward Bellamy and Liang Qichao we may be able to understand what happens when this “empty place” is not occupied by the Self but by the Other.⁵

To this extent, a debt has to be recognised to the work of Eric Hayot, as this chapter has roots in a series of observations over his comparative reading of the novels of Bellamy and Vinton in his insightful essay entitled “Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures”.⁶ In his essay, Hayot reflects on the question of the Chinese coolies as a disruptive force within the texture of the American society, and he applies this perspective in his practice of

5 Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 15.

6 See Eric Hayot, “Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures”, *Representations*, Summer 2007, vol. 99, n. 1, pp. 99–129.

deconstruction of Vinton's modalities of representation of the national self against the claims of Bellamy's pastoral socialism. Vinton and Bellamy's are in the end discourses of national imagination and contamination, they relate to each other through those strategies of reversal that we have already recognised as defining traits of the utopian novel. By focusing on what he terms as a "grammatical inversion" of the structure of the novel, Hayot shows us how Bellamy's utopian landscape of national re-affirmation is transformed by Vinton into the dystopia of America as an emasculated province at the margins of a resurrected Chinese empire. The questions of nationalism, colonialism and modernity are constantly negotiated between the two temporal ranges of *Backward* and *Further Backward*, and this process of negotiation emerges in the subtle discrepancies between the syntax and the plot of these texts, resurfacing in all its relevance when the two different narrative textures are superimposed.

Looking Backward 2000–1887 is considered by many "the single most influential narrative utopia of the nineteenth century". Published by Edward Bellamy in 1888, it quickly became "the most popular book at the turn of the century, printed in many millions of copies in the United States, translated into over twenty languages".⁷ Its influence both in the realm of literature and in that of politics was wide, profound and long-lasting, spawning countless imitations and responses and inspiring different political movements and manifestos.⁸ There is no point in summarising the book here too, but it may be useful for our discussion to try to describe Bellamy's vision of society through the photographic negative given by its critics. Quoting from Erich Fromm's foreword to Bellamy's novel:

A great deal of criticism has been directed against Bellamy's utopia. Not

7 Phillip E. Wegner, *Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. 62.

8 See Carl J. Guarneri, "An American Utopia and Its Global Audiences: Transnational Perspectives on Looking Backward", *Utopian Studies*, 2008, vol. 19, n. 2, pp. 147–187.

only, as would be natural, has it been criticized by those who are opposed to a socialist society, but it has also been censured by many whose sympathies are entirely with a society without private property in the means of production, and of mutual solidarity.⁹

Indeed, when Julian West, the protagonist of Bellamy's utopia, wakes up in the year 2000 from "one hundred and thirteen years, three months, and eleven days" of mesmerised sleep, he looks backward to his native city of Boston from a quasi-Marxist society with messianic overtones and a non-democratic bureaucracy at its vertex. Task of this bureaucracy is to manage the "industrial army", that is the backbone of this new society, in the organisation and the management of labour in the country. As equality is obtained through the uniform division of labour, every person earns a place within the new American society by fulfilling his or her chores in the industrial army, into which every person is trained accordingly since early age.

Edward Bellamy plays with ideas of socialist descent in the description of an equal society which is kept together by the principles of a *Religion of Solidarity*. The inhumanities of late nineteenth century industrial capitalism have been excised with the elimination of private property, the implementation of a bureaucratic, rational management of the means of production, and the organisation of society in an army-like hierarchy which maintains, at least on paper, all its members on the same level of wealth and dignity (although conceding a certain degree of movement along the ranks according to education, talent and skills).¹⁰ In these new United States, which are described as a Cooperative Commonwealth regulated by the guiding lines of the new social system of Nationalism, the "public spirit" has prevailed over the "excessive individualism" of the old society, to such an extent that "[o]nly a century has passed but many a millennium in the world's history

9 For this quotation, we are referring to the 1960 edition of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, published by the New American Library; see Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, New York, New American Library, 1960 [1888].

10 See Edward Bellamy, *The Religion of Solidarity*, Santa Barbara, Concorde Grove Press, 1984 [1874].

has seen changes less extraordinary”.¹¹

Bellamy, a humanist of noble intentions, developed his views on society against those problems which were arising far on the horizon of his privileged position as a wealthy member of the American middle-class, a self-professed alienated soul represented in the text by the character of Julian West, “a rich man living among the poor, an educated man among the uneducated, . . . living in isolation among a jealous and alien race”.¹² Bellamy saw in the concentration of capital (through the monopolies of the great business corporations of the time) the root to the problems that were afflicting his society and gradually dragging it back to what he believed was a primeval state of nature, “a prodigious couch which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road. The driver was hunger, and permitted no lagging”.¹³

The metaphor of the ever-running couch dragged by the masses and steered by the few, assailed by the poor who long for a seat on the top, and viciously defended by those who are in power, is a very poignant one. The influence of Bellamy’s novels, both within the American literary tradition and in the political life of the nation, was unprecedented: while the reformists all around the country started to gather around newly formed “Nationalist Clubs” or “Bellamy Clubs” to discuss the practical plausibility of Bellamy’s political project, the utopian landscape sketched in *Looking Backward* was being explored and expanded by writers such as Ignatius Donnelly, Amos K. Fiske, Chauncey Thomas, Henry Olerich, William Dean Howells, Albert A. Merrill, Ludwig Geissler, and in novels such as *Caesar’s Column*, *Beyond the Bourne*, *The Crystal Button*, *A Cityless and Countryless World*, *A Traveller from Altruria*, *The Great Awakening*, or *Looking Beyond*.¹⁴

11 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 23.

12 Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, p. 9.

13 Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, p. 6.

14 See Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886–1896: The Politics of Form*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 1984; Kenneth M. Roemer, *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings, 1888–1900*, Kent, Kent State University Press, 1976; Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.

What is relevant to our discussion about the late Qing modern utopian novel is the fact that Edward Bellamy's utopian masterpiece played an important role also in the development of the tropes, the motives and the imaginary of the "Chinese variety" of the utopian genre. Among the many languages into which Bellamy's idealism was translated at the end of the nineteenth century was also the Chinese one. The appearance of Bellamy's novel in *fin-de-siècle* China represents a peculiar event for at least three different reasons: first of all, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* can arguably be considered the first *contemporary* foreign novel to be translated into Chinese;¹⁵ secondly, the rapidity of this acquisition from the Chinese part is remarkable, as the American edition and the Chinese translation of the novel are separated by only three years; and finally, as we will see, the degree of influence that this novel exerted in the developments of the early modernity of Chinese fiction is remarkable.

The textual history of the Chinese translation of *Looking Backward* unfolds in three acts: Bellamy's novel made its first appearance in China with the title *Huitou kan jilue* 回頭看記略 in the year 1891, only three after its original publication in the United States. The text was serialised between December 1891 and April 1892 on the pages of the monthly publication *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (A Review of the Times) thanks to the efforts of Timothy Richard (1845–1919), a Welsh Baptist missionary who worked in China under the direction of Young John Allen (1836–1907), and for whom Liang Qichao himself worked as secretary between the years 1894 and 1898.¹⁶ The same text was then re-published in a self-standing edition by Richards two years after its initial serialisation, in a limited run of 2000 copies (a big part of which was intended to be distributed as gifts for

15 For the sake of clarity, what we mean by "contemporary" is that the Chinese rendition of Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was the first translation of a foreign text that was written in almost the same years in which its translated version made its appearance.

16 For an account of Richard's experience in China, see Timothy Richards, *Forty-five years in China: Reminiscences*, New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1916.

the bureaucrats and literati closer to his mission). In 1894 the novel was then reprinted again in volume format and published with the new title *Bainian yijiao* 百年一覺, to emphasise more the future-glancing, *Datong shu* 大同书-like nature of the book. In the following years, and particularly during the decade between 1894 and 1904, The *Bainian yijiao* edition of Bellamy's novel would be reissued regularly by Timothy Richard both in volume format and on the pages of many other literary magazines such as *Zhongguo guanyin baihua bao* 中國官音白話報 (in 1898) and *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* 繡像小說 (in 1904).¹⁷

The text that eventually made its way to the Chinese readers could hardly be considered a translation: *Huitou kan jilüe* was in fact a heavily altered adaptation of Bellamy's original text. While this fact *per se* was not at all unusual at the time, as the *modus operandi* of the late Qing translators was often one of adaptation and rewriting, the Chinese version of *Looking Backward* was almost unrecognisable from Bellamy's English novel.¹⁸ As Liu Shusen remarks, *Huitou kan jilüe* differed from *Looking Backward* in many crucial and structural aspects. The translated text was heavily butchered, its length was reduced to a fraction of the source material, and the original 28 chapters into which the English version was divided were rearranged into ten sections, each one introduced by a 4-character title. Moreover, in the Chinese version the narrative mode is changed, and the first-person voice of Julian West's main character is abandoned in favour of a more canonical yet anonymous third-person narrator, whose detachment can be inferred from the bland synopses that he provides to the Chinese reader at the beginning and at the end of

17 An interesting summary of the textual history of the Chinese translation of Bellamy's work can be found in Liu Shusen 刘树森, "Liti motai yu *Huitou kan jilüe*" 李提摩太与《回头看记略》, *Meiguo yanjiu* 美国研究, 1999, n. 1, pp. 122–138, and in Li Xiaoxiu, *Wan Qing fanyi yu minzu guojia xiangxiang: yi "xiangxiang de gonggong ti" lilun wei jichu* 晚清翻译与民族国家想象:以“想象的共同体”理论为基础 (Translation in Late Qing Era: Imagining a New Nation), PhD dissertation, Lyon, Université Jean Moulin (Lyon 3), 2013, pp. 141–159.

18 The names of Yan Fu 嚴复 and Lin Shu 林紓 come prominently to mind here again.

each section.¹⁹

We can see in this radical process of restructuration an attempt on the part of the Chinese translators to domesticate Edward Bellamy's text into more familiar modalities of narration. The chapters of the Chinese version of the novel are framed by an opening *captatio* of the reader's *benevolentia* (hence the 4-character titles) and they are embellished by emphatic, hype-provoking teasers which are reminiscent of the autochthonous storytelling tradition, and that sound somehow like "In this chapter I am going to tell you...", or "This chapter is finishes here, if you want to know how the story continues, you will have to wait for the next one". Moreover, the influence of Young John Allen and Timothy Richard's ideological backgrounds in the rendition of Bellamy's novel was more than evident: in the text of *Huitou kan jilüe*, the American author's utopian imaginary of progress and modernity was completely appropriated by the editors of the translation, who opted to negate the potential historicity of Bellamy's political project in favour of a transcendent perspective of divine revelation, *de facto* transforming Bellamy's novel in yet another instrument of colonial interference declined in the missionary variation.

Nevertheless, the utopian chord was struck, and its pitch was recognised as familiar: "Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is a shadow of the Great Unity" (美國人所著《百年一覺》書, 是大同影子), Kang Youwei 康有為 once claimed, and indeed Edward Bellamy's spontaneous rejection of the present resonated both with the traditional Confucian attitude of resistance against the present in favour of a continuous rectification of the past, as well as with the most belligerent factions of the late Qing reformist intelligentsia.²⁰ Either because of the radical process of rewriting and adaptation through

19 On the development of new modes of narration as a defining traits of modern Chinese fiction, see Alexander des Forges, "From Source Texts to 'Reality Observed': The Creation of the 'Author' in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Vernacular Fiction", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR), 2000, n. 22, pp. 67–84.

20 Kang Youwei 康有為, *Kang Nanhai xiansheng kou shuo* 康南海先生口說, Beijing, Zhongshan daxue chubanshe 中山大學出版社, 1985, p. 31.

which Bellamy's novel underwent before reaching the Chinese public, or because of the transcultural, humanist afflatus of its utopian claims, *Bainian yijiao* was not only perceived as akin to the Confucian tradition, but it was also appropriated as such. Edward Bellamy's translated novel surfaces for example in the 47th section of *Renxue* 仁學 (An Exposition of Benevolence), Tan Sitong's most famous and eccentric oeuvre. In this syncretistic, erudite treatise, Tan Sitong tries to elaborate a comprehensive vision of man and society through the amalgamation of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism within a rational framework and according to a scientific perspective oriented in the direction of a socio-political utopianism modelled after Kang Youwei's universalism. Tan Sitong's treatise is interwoven with quotations from the Confucian canon, the Daoist classics, as well as with abundant references to the Buddhist tradition. Among these many erudite allusions the Chinese title of Bellamy's novel surfaces too:²¹

君主廢，則貴賤平；公理明，則貧富均。千裡萬裡，一家一人，視其家，逆旅也；視其人，同胞也。父無所用其慈，子無所用其孝，兄弟忘其友恭，夫婦忘其倡隨。若西書中百年一覺者，殆仿佛《禮運》大同之象焉。²²
 Freed by any hierarchy, society becomes equal; once the rules are clear, all disparities are levelled. One family and one Man expand to the farthest extent. Hospitality is to be found in every home and every man is treated as a brother. Father and son are not constrained by the duties of benevolence or filial piety, brothers are not bound by the formalities of respect, nor wives and husbands are oppressed any more by the constraints of conjugal harmony. Let's consider for example the Western book *Bainian yijiao*: it is almost like the image of *Datong* portrayed in the *Book of Rites*.²³

21 For a comprehensive summary of Tan Sitong's 譚嗣同 *Renxue* 仁學 in relation to the author's intellectual trajectory and literary production, see the introduction of Chan Sin-wai (ed.), *An Exposition of Benevolence: The Jen-hsüeh of T'an Ssu-t'ung*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1984, pp. 1–34.

22 Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, *Renxue* 仁學 in *Tan Sitong quanji* 譚嗣同全集, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju chubanshan 中华书局出版, 1981, p. 367.

23 For the sake of clarity, we have decided to include here the full passage from which Tan Sitong's fragment is taken. The translation quoted in this particular footnote is taken from Chan Sin-wai's *An Exposition of Benevolence*, and it slightly differs from the one we offered in the main text. In the main text we decided to re-translate the section in which Bellamy's work is mentioned because in his translation Chan Sin-wai refrains to make explicit the connection between the expression “若西書中百年一覺者” and the title of *Looking Backward's* Chinese translation, which in a note he suggests may

The utopian discourse, in its most elementary function of social and national mythopoesis, provided a perfect point of reference for the elaboration of the late Qing narration of post-colonial revanchism. During the first decade of the twentieth century, and especially after the searing failure of the Hundred Days' Reform, the utopian discourse became an elegant instrument in the hands of the most progressive literati to elaborate the problematic of the colonial impasse and transcend through the form of the *xiaoshuo* 小說 the apparent unreformability of reality. As the late Qing philosopher and calligrapher Sun Baoxuan 孫寶瑄 (1874–1924) glossed, “As it is said in the text of *Bainian yijiao*, in the year 2000 the people of the world will be divided among those who administrate the state and those who work” (《百年一覺》所雲：二千年后，地球之人，惟居官與作工者兩種是也):²⁴ Bellamy's utopia, and by extension the modern Chinese utopia that the American novel had contributed to shape, maintained the appeal of a radical act of *zhengming* 正名, a rectification of the names to wipe out the disgraces of recent history. Even though – as we

instead be a reference to Washington Irving's character of Rip Van Winkle from the story *The Sketch Book* from 1819. *Renxue*'s passage unfolds as follows:

“The earth must be governed in such a way that there is only one world, but no states. Chuang Tzu says, ‘I have heard of leaving the world alone; I have never heard of governing it.’ ‘Governing’ implies that there are states; ‘leaving alone’ implies that there are no states. ‘Leaving alone’ (*tsai-yu*) is but a phonetic variant of ‘freedom’ (*tzu-yu*). How excellent are these words! To enable everybody to enjoy freedom, people would not have to belong to any state. If there were no states, there would not be any boundaries, wars, suspicion, jealousy, power-struggles, distinction between the self and the other, and equality would emerge. Even if the world exists, it would be as there were no world at all. When rulers are deposed, then there will be equality between the higher and the lower; when universal principles are followed, then there will be equality between the rich and the poor. For thousands and thousands, the entire world will be like one family, one man. Homes will be looked upon as guests houses, and people, as compatriots. There will be no need for fathers to apply their paternal love, and for sons to exercise their filial piety. Elder and younger brothers can forget about their friendly respect, and husbands and wives their mutual harmony. It would be like the man mentioned in a western story book, who wakes up after dreaming for a hundred years” (地球之治也，以有天下而無國也。莊曰：“聞在宥天下，不聞治天下。”治者，有國之義也；在宥者，無國之義也。□□□曰“在宥”，蓋“自由”之轉音。旨哉言乎！人人能自由，是必為無國之民。無國則畛域化，戰爭息，猜忌絕，權謀棄，彼我亡，平等出；且雖有天下，若無天下矣。君主廢，則貴賤平；公理明，則貧富均。千里萬里，一家一人，視其家，逆旅也；視其人，同胞也。父無所用其慈，子無所用其孝，兄弟忘其友恭，夫婦忘其倡隨。若西書中百年一覺者，殆彷彿《禮 運》大同之象焉)。 See Chan Sin-wai, pp. 215–216.

24 Sun Baoxuan 孫寶瑄, *Wangshan Lu Riji* 忘山廬日記, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1983, p. 97 (quoted in Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xixuedongjian yu wan Qing shehui* 西學東漸與晚清社會, Shanghai, Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1994, p. 412).

will see – this act of modern *zhengming* was animated by an ultimately schizophrenic enthusiasm which directed the reformist’s gaze both backward to the nostalgic ideal of a Confucian *Datong* and forward to the evasive beacon of modernity, a modern Chinese utopian imaginary started nevertheless to coalesce.

It is not our intention with this chapter to delve into Bellamy’s landscape *per se*, but rather we believe that by interpolating Bellamy’s imaginary with the Yellow Peril-like distortion of its dystopian sequel *Looking Further Backward* it will be possible to extrapolate from these texts some useful coordinates for the understanding of the late Qing utopian discourse. *Looking Further Backward* is a dystopian novel written by Arthur Dudley Vinton in 1890 as a critique of the socialist penchant that, according to its author, marked Bellamy’s utopia as a potentially dangerous endeavour for the future of the American nation. The plot of Vinton’s novel revolves around the history of the Chinese invasion of the United States, and it is told in the form of

a series of lectures delivered to the freshman class at Shawmut College, by professor Won Lung Li, successor of Prof. Julian West, Mandarin of the Second Rank of the Golden Dragon and Chief of the Historical Sections of the Colleges in the north-eastern division of the Chinese Province of North America.²⁵

Vinton’s dystopia is set in the year 2012, when more than 70 percent of the American territory has been conquered by the Chinese Empire and the Cooperative Commonwealth of the United States “had been re-created into a Chinese province”.²⁶

Looking Further Backward develops the utopian scenario sketched by Bellamy into what Eric Hayot has aptly described as the uneasy narration of “the mutual (and largely unconscious) imbrication of the colonizer with the colonized, the Chinese and the

25 Arthur Dudley Vinton, *Looking Further Backward*, Albany, Albany Book Company, 1890, p. 9.

26 Vinton, p. 106.

American, and the immediate present with the recent past”.²⁷ *Looking Further Backward* defies a stable position within the conceptual range that can be carved out of the eutopian/dystopian dichotomy, and in doing so it reveals how both the extremes of this dichotomy (which reflects as allegory the dichotomy of the Self and the Other) are mutually congenital and cannot develop univocally without laying forward the ground for the generation of their opposite. In telling the story of the Chinese invasion of the United States and the consequent subjugation of the American Barbarians under the new Chinese rule, *Looking Further Backward* illustrates this dialectical movement to the extent that these two extremes are made to converge into a paradoxical synthesis through which what is initially perceived and narrated as a Yellow Peril becomes a Yellow salvation, and a new social stability is obtained through the irreversible contamination of the identities of the colonised and of the coloniser.

Arthur D. Vinton’s book was published in 1890, three years after the appearance of its more notorious prequel, as a warning toward the risks of unconstrained utopian thinking: “A false guide is worse than no guide”, Vinton remarks in the preface of his dystopia, and false guides are those “utopian schemes fraught with danger” which are nevertheless offered as remedies to the evils of the present. Vinton is certainly not blind to the potential of the utopian thinking, and in fact he gives credit to the sheer imaginative, exhortative power of Bellamy’s novel, praising the “truthfulness” of the metaphor of the couch driven by hunger as a sentiment that would appeal “to every honest mind”. In fact, Vinton does not only recognise the allure of Bellamy’s project, but he also sympathises with some of the arguments that his rival raises, acknowledging that “the existence of great fortunes is a menace to the welfare of the State, and that (with a few honorable exceptions) their possessors are public enemies”.²⁸ Yet, in narrating what we may term as the “de-

²⁷ Hayot, p. 112.

²⁸ Vinton, pp. 5–6.

Americanisation” of the American body or, as Hayot puts it, “Chinese-ification of the American life”, Vinton is aware that the socio-geometrical perfection of the utopian allegory can be subverted with the same facility it is conceived.

Vinton’s *Looking Further Backward* is built upon narrative strategies of reversal and alienation: the *American* voice of Julian West, the original narrator and protagonist of *Looking Backward*, is re-framed and integrated within the discourse of the coloniser, that is to say *Looking Further Backward*’s intradiegetic narrator, professor Won Lung Li, whose “lectures to the American Barbarians”, which are staged as a commentary of Julian West’s journals (that is, the same fictional journals used by Bellamy as a narrative device to introduce his own utopia), make up the skeleton of Vinton’s critique. By incorporating Julian West’s voice as a metadiegetic level within the discourse of the coloniser, Vinton enables a “theory of futurity” in which his “dystopian take on the American present makes visible, if only in its negative space, a post racial, bicultural, and fully utopian future”.²⁹ It is in the same negative space – we claim – that the Chinese utopia, i.e., the utopia of the colonised, is negotiated.

The ghost of the Chinese radical otherness also lies undefined as a silent referent in Edward Bellamy’s imagination of America. Its mention, although fleeting and apparently marginal, evokes questions of social and national identity which are framed in the essentialist terms of a social Darwinism of Spencerian overtones. China is mentioned only once in Bellamy’s novel (precisely at the beginning of the second chapter of *Looking Backward*) yet its transient mention gestures at the possibility of an otherness, of a (utopian) alternative to the turmoil of the present. In discussing the sad state of things of his contemporary society, and right before falling into the mesmerising sleep that would transport him to the year 2000, Julian West agrees with a disheartened Mrs. Bartlett when

²⁹ Hayot, p. 107.

the latter, reporting the words of her husband, remarks that:

He did not know any place now where society could be called stable except Greenland, Patagonia, and the Chinese Empire. “Those Chinamen knew what they were about . . . when they refused to let in our western civilization. They knew what it would lead better than we did. They saw it was nothing but dynamite in disguise.”³⁰

The entire premise of Vinton’s yellow peril dystopia could be summarised in this single passage. Both Bellamy’s utopia and Vinton’s dystopia can be described as discourses on the nature of society and on the identity of the nation which are built upon the possibility of an otherness, that is the possibility to envision an alternative locus of convergence of those aspects of the ideological subtext which, although envisioned, are not realised in history but are left to the expectation. This – we claim – was the appeal that the utopian genre exerted on the novelists of *fin-de-siècle* China.³¹

What is although peculiar to Vinton’s novel is its cunning use of the mechanism of reversal through which the “automatic” utopian/dystopian dichotomy implied in the *outopian* discourse is erased and translated to a condition of undecidability. As we have remarked by appealing to Eric Hayot reflections’s on the nature of Vinton’s narration, *Looking Further Backward*’s dystopian take on the American future eventually unfolds in a fully *utopian* scenario. The *outopian* space imagined by Vinton defies any ideological closure by oscillating between extremes: the positive utopia of Edward Bellamy is turned into the dystopia of a Chinesified America whose history is told to the American Barbarians by a Chinese voice. Yet the more we are told about the Chinese invasion, the less we recognise it as an actual dystopia: “There was less change in the aspect of the city than I expected. There were fewer stragglers in the streets than usual”, remarks Vinton’s

30 Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, p. 12.

31 This aspect appears clearly, for example, in novels such as Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* or Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo*, which we will explore in detail in the fourth chapter of this study.

Julian West as he walks like a stranger in a strange land through a newly colonised Boston as an American ambassador to the Chinese invaders.

When Julian West is summoned by Captain Lee (head of the Chinese invasion of the United States) in order to discuss the conditions of the Chinese occupation of the American soil, he is welcomed as an equal and as the only *American* worth talking to. Because “the ancestors and the men of antiquity had been so long objects of veneration in the Celestial Empire”, Julian West (who, we should remind, is a man of the past who has been transplanted in the future) is seen as a contemporary to the invaders’ ancestors, and he is thus welcomed as their equal and “entitled with the same respect” that the Americans Nationalists were not deemed worthy of.³² The fully *utopian* future is revealed and envisaged in the meeting between Julian West and Captain Lee, who is “anxious to see an individual who represents the highest type of the civilization of two centuries”.³³ Julian West, the only *American* left in America, is recognised as equal by the Chinese invader: the fantasy of the colonised (that is, to be recognised as equal by the coloniser) is realised in the dystopia (Vinton’s text) of the coloniser, yet at the same time the latter is revealed as a new utopia.

The play of reversal at the core of Vinton’s *Looking Further Backward* is developed in two subtle strokes: the dystopia of a colonised America, which unfolds in overt juxtaposition with Bellamy’s nationalist utopia, is imbued with an unspoken sense of nostalgia for the American nation as it was before the Bellamian re-organisation. This sense of nostalgia transpires from Julian West’s remarks and in his gradual realisation of the American inadequateness to act and to respond coherently as a nation against the foreign invasion. While talking about the economic disadvantages generated by the Chinese invasion of the American soil, West deplores his compatriots’ incapability to

³² Vinton, p. 143.

³³ Vinton, p. 147.

economise, he pities their “lack of forethought”, their complete loss of coordinates and their regression to a nation of children: “In addition, for the first time in three generations, there came to them the demands of charity, which they met with the impulsive generosity of children who had just received pocket-money”.³⁴

The Chinese invasion acquires the allure of a necessary rectification, an American *zhengming* against the spontaneous implosion of the Bellamian Commonwealth. These vacillations of identity, as Hayot remarks once again, are cleverly conveyed by *Looking Further Backward*'s author via the constant alternation between two competing modes of narration, through which the “consistent reversals of the standard features of the Asiatic stereotypes” prevent the narration to reach a definitive closure and reasserts its quality of ideological undecidability.³⁵ The (tentative) closure of the novel's narrative trajectory is not in fact left to Julian West's voice, but to that of Won Lung Li, whose fourteenth and last lecture to the American Barbarians reveals to the readers that the Chinese invasion is almost complete and its consequences are irreversible. The (now Chinese) province of North America has been completely colonised by the Chinese, while millions of Americans have been deported to their new mainland, continental China: “If the United States was to be held by China, then the people of the United States must be willing subjects of China”.³⁶ In his final lecture, professor Won Lung Li addresses his students with a collective “we” and “us”:

Let *us* now, in closing, consider hastily the benefits which the invasion of the Chinese has brought to *us*. *We* are no longer a defenseless people. . . . Chinese frugality has replaced the wasteful lavishness that prevailed in private life under the Nationalistic government. . . . What was good in Nationalism *we* have retained. What was bad *we* have discarded and replaced by what is better. Under Nationalism, individualism was reduced

34 Vinton, pp. 164–165.

35 Hayot, p. 107.

36 Vinton, p. 179.

to a minimum; with *us* to-day it is honored and given every chance to develop. [emphasis added]³⁷

Won Lung Li's emphatic conclusion, although providing a satisfying ending to the dystopian anti-Nationalistic parabola of *Looking Further Backward*, represents in fact a false closure, as it undermines the declared ideological foundations of the novel. In the end, the re-Americanisation of America by Chinese intervention clashes against the dystopian, Yellow-perilist premises of national and identitarian fragmentation upon which the novel was built in the first place.

We are indeed looking *further* backward: "The country in the rear [of Boston and the East coast] had been recreated into a Chinese province" and "every foot of its progress was permanent", yet the utopian or dystopian nature of the new Chinese province of North America remains questionable, unsolved.³⁸ Bellamy's *utopian* prophecy, which once said

Let us hasten the rapidly-nearing day when intellect will also reject these survivals of a ruder age – a day wherein we will reach the culminating point of our civilization, where looking forward will be synonymous with looking backward!³⁹

is in the end fulfilled, but its terms are displaced: "we", "us" and "our civilisation" are not entirely *ours* any more, they have become the *woguo* 我國 and *taguo* 他國 of another *wenming* 文明.⁴⁰ Bellamy's utopian scheme is reversed into a dystopian scenario of national apathy, while Vinton's gloomy history of the de-Americanisation of America develops in turn into an unexpected utopia which brims with nostalgia.

37 Vinton, pp. 187–188.

38 Vinton, p. 186 and p. 58.

39 Vinton, p. 54.

40 These expressions appears frequently in the works of Lu Shi'e and Wu Jianren in particular in a complex "semiotic" square of connotations: "*woguo*" 我國 is both the Chinese utopia of the future which is represented in the text, and the dystopian reality of *fin-de-siècle* China upon which the utopian fantasy is build; whereas "*taguo*" 他國 is at the same time synecdoche both for the Western countries and their overwhelming presence, and, once again, for the "otherness" of the utopian construct.

In the end, Vinton's narration of displacement and undecidability points back to a structural feature of Bellamy's text, a feature that Jonathan Auerbach has suitably defined as a "rejection of all representation as misrepresentation". This notion of "rejection" or – we may add – deflection of all representation can provide a useful explanation for the adaptability of the Bellamian utopian model outside the American borders.⁴¹ Bellamy's narrative strategies of rejection and deflection can be epitomised in the reluctance on the part of Julian West to provide any "scientific" explanations regarding the nature of the new society he finds himself part of, as well as in regards to historical process that lead to it.

While Bellamy often indulges in the meticulous descriptions of all that is going on around the character of Julian West, every time the reader may be tempted to ask the narrator *how* utopia works, the narration evaporates into the vagueness of statements like "I shall not describe in detail what I saw that day".⁴² As Auerbach remarks, these strategical ellipses poignantly summarise "Bellamy's inability to account for change", as well as the author's tendency "to dispense with historical agency altogether".⁴³ Through the constant use of passive voice constructions and the frequent deployment of abstract and ultimately tautological terms at the most critical nodes of the novel, Bellamy portrays a nation that emerges from a time without history and that is located in a space without maps or coordinates. Even though Bellamy's rejection of all representations can be read, as Vincent Geoghegan further notes, as a straightforward strategy of "rejection of the past" along a dichotomy of overt discontinuity vs. underlying continuity between the Old and New World upon which not only Bellamy's but the whole utopian dialectic is based, the blank parentheses opened by this narrative strategy stand out in their (non)representation of

41 Jonathan Auerbach, "'The Nation Organized': Utopian Impotence in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*", *American Literary History*, 1994, n. 6, p. 36.

42 Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, p. 131.

43 Auerbach, p. 30.

absence as much as what is actually, explicitly represented in the text.⁴⁴

The reader of *Looking Backward* could easily criticise Bellamy's work with the same words that its protagonist Julian West uses to praise Berrian's "*Penthesilia*", that is utopian Boston's best selling romance: "At the first reading what most impressed me was not so much what was in the book as what was left out of it". While Edward Bellamy is here moving a critique to the historical romances of his own times by making Julian West praise the ability of the writers of the future to create literature without the need to draw

from the contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, coarseness and refinement, high and low, all motives drawn from social pride and ambition, the desire of being richer or the fear of being poorer, together with sordid anxieties of any sort for one's self or others,⁴⁵

he is pointing at the same time at his own novel's major weakness and strength, and, by extension, at the strength and weakness of the utopian narration *per se*: its substantial emptiness as well as the freedom that this emptiness implies and enables. We might as well paraphrase *Looking Backward*'s Julian West in saying that the walls of Bellamy's utopia are built with "bricks without straw", that they encase a society without people in a nation whose history is left untold and only the present is narrated: "Bellamy defines his romance almost entirely in terms of what it banishes".⁴⁶

By getting rid of historical agency, Bellamy is not compelled to deal with history's main actor, society, whose practical absence emerges in the main character's experience of the utopian space. Julian West's itinerary of utopian enlightenment is in fact extremely narrow and it is marked by a peculiar scarceness of voices, places and perspectives: the only new Bostonians he manages to meet and to talk with are the members of Dr. Leete

44 See Vincent Geoghegan, "The Utopian Past: Memory and History in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and William Morris's *News From Nowhere*", *Utopian Studies*, 1992, n. 3, pp. 75–90.

45 Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, p. 100.

46 Nicholas M. Williams, "The Limits of Spatialized Form: Visibility and Obscurity in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*", *Utopian Studies*, 1999, vol. 10, n. 2, p. 34.

family (a family he will soon join through an improbable turn of events), the vanishing figure of a waiter in a communal dining room, the mechanical-looking clerk of a store, and the disembodied voice of one Mr. Barton, a twentieth-century radio preacher. The utopian space of *Looking Backward* is described from perspectives that are either too wide or too narrow for the viewer to have a grasp of how society actually functions in the vast social space that extends between the sheer individuality of Julian West and the abstraction of the utopian society as a whole. Julian West experiences the new world either within the private enclosures of Dr. Leete's mansions (the studio, the dining room, the library), or from the bird's eye point of view of Dr. Leete's belvedere on the top of the house.

In the need of a pair of glasses, the reader is given either a microscope or a telescope. The spaces in between the two enclosures of the private room and the privileged belvedere, that is to say the spaces of historical agency, are left unrepresented, unseen: the communal dinner, where society is supposed to gather every day to eat and, well, socialise, is actually divided in many private dining rooms, each one reserved to a single family and catered by ghost-like, anonymous waiters; the space of the street, whose collective "waterproof covering" is gloriously elevated as a perfect metaphor for "the difference between the age of individualism and that of concert", is quickly dismissed as a space of transition, and the people who populate it are reduced to an impersonal stream of anonymity.⁴⁷ These narrative strategies of deferral, postponement and rejection of representation in the end characterise the utopian narration as one of constant displacement and *neutralisation*, whose conceptual coordinates eschew any attempt of categorical closure on the part of the reader. Paradoxically, this particular trait, utopia's "open-endedness, allows its model to be transplanted, adapted, translated and mistranslated outside its original, local frameworks of reference.

⁴⁷ Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, pp. 90–91.

Reflecting on the nature of the construct in relation to the architecture of the city of Chicago, and to his experience of observing the city from the bird's-eye view provided by the belvedere of the famous Sears Tower, Louis Marin arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the nature of the utopian endeavour.⁴⁸ From the top of “the highest tower in the world”, Marin remarks, the gaze of the viewer “collects” and “totalizes” the space of the city, “identifying himself with the tower’s master and metonymically with the master of the world”.⁴⁹ This is the same cognitive process that unfolds in Julian West mind when he gazes down at the city of Boston from the belvedere of Dr. Leete’s house:

At my feet lay a great city. Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings, for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger or smaller inclosures, stretched in every direction. Every quarter contained large open squares filled with trees, among which statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late afternoon sun. Public buildings of a colossal size and an architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side. Surely I had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before. Raising my eyes at last towards the horizon, I looked westward. That blue ribbon winding away to the sunset, was it not the sinuous Charles? I looked east; Boston harbor stretched before me within its headlands, not one of its green islets missing.⁵⁰

Yet, Marin also remarks, by engaging in the obvious, inevitable confrontation with the gaze of the *other*, that is the gaze of “the spectator’s eye pushed down in an uncertain site, in the shadow, at a distance from the *monstrum*”, “the dominating gaze in its imaginary mastery” generates a dialectic between the two imaginary stances of the dominated and the dominating (or between the coloniser and the colonised), which in the end stabilise themselves “into a neutral or neutralizing relationship”.⁵¹ In focusing either on

48 See Louis Marin, “Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present”, *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1993, vol. 19, n. 3, pp. 397–420.

49 Marin, p. 398.

50 Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, p. 22.

51 Marin, pp. 400–404.

the personal dimension of utopia (which corresponds to Marin's dominated locus of uncertainty) or on the abstractions of Dr. Leete's endless talks about the merits of the new society as it is observed from bird's-eye point of view of the belvedere (which is analogous to Marin's dominating gaze), Edward Bellamy develops his utopian project towards its own neutralisation, which is that of a society with no agents, located in a history without time.

From the belvedere on the roof of Dr. Leete's house, Julian West's eyes are able to encompass the marvellous buildings of the city, its beautiful trees, the statues and the fountains; his critical gaze indulges in the poetry of the small detail (the sun glistening on the statues in the late afternoon), bathes in the Stendhalean beauty of the river Charles flowing toward the horizon, or regards in awe the modernist sublime of the city harbour. Yet, despite such a majestic amplitude of breath and stroke, not a single human being is mentioned. In the end, we may say that Bellamy's new Boston represents a narrative equivalent to Louis Daguerre's famous daguerreotype "Boulevard du Temple" of 1838, which is believed to be the first photo ever to include a human in its frame. In this image, which is a wide-angle landscape photo of the city of Paris, the long exposure requested by the technique of the daguerreotype to fix the shadows in the silver of the mirror allowed Louis Daguerre to immortalise by chance, and only by chance, a single figure, the blurry silhouette of a gentleman who, waiting for his shoes to be polished at the corner of the road, managed to remain still long enough for the mirror of the camera to catch his ghost.

Looking Backward to the main topic of this research, we may entertain the idea that the sudden and unprecedented success of the utopian narration during the last decade of the Qing dynasty may in the end be attributed to the peculiar and subtle qualities that we have tried to expose with our observations over the novels of Edward Bellamy and Arthur Dudley Vinton. Resistant to any attempt of categorical closure, and reluctant toward any

form of representation that would not result in a dialectic of neutralisation, the “strategic emptiness” of the utopian model may have provided for the Chinese intelligentsia of the end of the century an optimal tool for the elaboration, or the exorcism, of the ideological impasses of a time gone out of joint.

CHAPTER 4: THE STAGING OF THE UTOPIAN SPECTACLE

Tout symbolisme s'édifie sur les ruines des édifices symboliques précédents, et utilise leurs matériaux – même si ce n'est que pour remplir les fondations des nouveaux temples, comme l'ont fait les Athéniens après les guerres médiques. Par ses connexions naturelles et historiques virtuellement illimitées, le signifiant dépasse toujours l'attachement rigide à un signifié précis et peut conduire à des lieux totalement inattendus.

Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*¹

1 “Every symbolism is built on the ruins of earlier symbolic edifices and uses their materials – even if it is only to fill the foundations of new temples, as the Athenians did after the Persian wars. By its virtually unlimited natural and historical connections, the signifier always goes beyond a strict attachment to a precise signified and can lead to completely unexpected realms.” Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987, p. 121.

Whereas it is true that the entire late Qing utopian project emerged as a figurative discourse at the service of reform in a historical period of cultural and intellectual unrest, the late Qing utopian discourse can also be deconstructed – rather, it ought to be – in retrospect as the locus of convergence of all the idiosyncrasies embedded in the problematic of colonial modernity. It is against and together with this problematic that the utopian discourse coalesces into existence in the first place. The Chinese late Qing utopian discourse partakes in a question of boundaries and definitions: within the “closed” space of the *xiaoshuo* form it provides a provisional answer to the imagined needs for self-definition of the colonised self against the expanding, invading (economic, social, cultural) boundaries of the colonial otherness.

As we have remarked in the second chapter of this study, the utopian novel of the late empire bears a clear utilitarian and didascallic imprint. Yet, even though indulging in this functional view of literature and adopting this utilitarian perspective as a unit of measurement for the understanding of the texts may provide an easy and immediate framework of reference for our analysis, such a critical perspective would be limited by the same conceptual dilemmas that hindered the late Qing utopian novel in the wake of Liang Qichao’s call-to-arms. Both as readers and researchers, we would be working under the assumption that the value of the literary work, and thus by extension of the modern Chinese utopia, were proportional to its degree of proximity to the ideal of reform, and to its capacity to fulfil its didactic, enlightening function. In doing so, not only would we be bound to proceed by approximation – moving via Zenonian, inherently-insufficient steps towards the (misguided) goal of a convergence between text, political praxis and the Real – but we would also limit our analysis within the sterile circularity of such an approach.

This convergence is impossible, as it is defined in its core by constant postponing and deixis. As Louis Marin remarks in *Utopiques : jeux d’espaces*, his analysis of Thomas

More's *Utopia*, the dialectic of the utopian construct does not result in a Hegelian mediation between reality and the utopian projection, or between what ideology realises and what it potentially entails but does not accomplish, but it rather results in what we may term as a dialectical closure, the “closure of a subject bounded in its own circularity, which is its own object”, where the object is exactly the utopian construct.² The latter in fact does not provide or enable a synthesis between the topos of the real and the utopian projection, but rather it enables the “simulacrum of a synthesis” which ultimately revolves around a “historical emptiness”. In this sense the utopian one is a dialectic of neutralisation, whose result is not a transcending synthesis but rather the neutrality of a “*ni l'un, ni l'autre*”.³

However, the “in-betweenness” of the utopian construct may provide the foundations for a better understanding of the relation between the text and its ideological substratum, or subtext. In fact, this characteristic of liminality or marginality of the utopian construct is given by the partial overlapping of the two discourses of ideology and of utopia, or again by the productive intertwining of subtext and text. Whereas the limits of the discourse of ideology call for the antithesis of the utopian ideal (“All movement in the historical world goes on in this way: Thought, which is the ideal counterpart of things as they really exist, develops itself as things ought to be. . . .”), when this ideal is “closed” in a concrete form – in our case, the *xiaoshuo* form – it brings to the surface the unresolved aspects of the underlying ideological structures.⁴ It crystallises the chaotic *magma* of the contrasting social forces in a temporary *ensemble*, or a provisional arrangement of symbols.⁵

Utopia overlaps with ideology, and it constitutes in a way an admittance of the

2 “La clôture d’un sujet fermé sur sa propre circularité, qui est à lui-même son objet.” Louis Marin, *Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1984.

3 “Neither one nor the other.” Marin, p. 9.

4 See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976.

5 See chapter 3, pp. 121–122.

latter's failure: "The representatives of a given order will label as utopian all conceptions of existence which from their point of view can in principle never be realized".⁶ The utopian narration thus becomes a figurative arrangement of all those issues left unresolved by the ideological discourse. Yet these issues are not resolved within the utopian text (although the text may hint at the direction of their solution), but rather staged in reverse, impressed in the stark contrast of a photographic negative.⁷ By considering it as a staging of the unresolved knots of ideology in the form of an allegory (the extended metaphor of perfect societies and idyllic landscapes portrayed in the utopian text), the utopian construct emerges also in its fragility. This figurative arrangement of ideas is indeed the "simulacrum of a synthesis" in the sense that it holds its coherence only at a superficial level: beneath the solidification of the surface still remains the chaos of the magma. This characteristic of "superficiality" of the utopian construct emerges in the texts through the presence of an absence, it is present *in absentia*. As we remarked both for what regards Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 narrative project, the links between the (dystopian) present and the utopian future, between the mapped and the unmapped, are erased and lost. Even though the narrator is lost in the "in-betweenness" of the utopian construct, the reader of the utopian text never gets to see the inner bearings of utopia, the mechanisms that make it function and the processes that lead to its realisation.

The utopian construct thus emerges as a fragile spectacle. What the utopian text offers in the first place is a *spectaculum*, in the sense that it provides the reader a *locus* to behold. In its most literal sense, the word *spectaculum* designates a space (hence the suffix *-locum*) where the action of looking (*spectare*, "to look") takes place.⁸ the *utopian*

6 Mannheim, pp. 176–177.

7 After all, if these issues *were* resolved through the utopian text, the latter would actually fulfil Liang Qichao's great expectations and become into a *bona fide* blueprint for political action.

8 See the entry "spettacolo" in Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani*, Roma, Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1907.

spectacle is a *locus* to behold, a figurative landscape which is crafted by the author in order to be regarded in awe by the reader-as-spectator from the distance of a bird's-eye point of view, as if it were a vivid map of projected expectations. Secondly, the utopian construct is a spectacle in the sense given by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*: it is an organisation of images which are detached from the historical (material) reality from which the text emerges. The utopian spectacle is indeed the object of a separation, "a world vision which has become objectified" (or "closed", as we have said) through the collection and organisation of images as symbols of a newly imagined system of social relations.⁹ The utopian construct does not emerge in a "politically unconscious" way, but on the contrary as an overly conscious attempt at the systematisation of all that is left unresolved, or that stands unresolvable, by the dominant ideology.

As we have remarked in the previous chapter, the overt ideological self-consciousness of the utopian enterprise was evident in Liang Qichao's narrative project, whose literary manifesto-*cum*-novel laid – despite its early demise – the foundations for the transient burst of utopian literature that characterised the following decade. Self-conscious in its inception, the utopian construct is self-reflective and self-celebratory in its unfolding. Nothing really *happens* in utopia, or rather everything happens in a condition of floating stasis, which is the social homoeostasis of a society established and displaced outside the course of history. The utopian text thus puts forward a spectacle which the reader enjoys through the point of view of the narrator as an incredulous witness, brought around in a state of constant stupor by his utopian host, who often stands out for his general flatness and phlegmatic demeanour against the former one's euphoria.

Whereas in the works of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua 陳天華 the utopian ideal is approached but never developed, so that Liang's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記

9 See theses 3, 4 and 5 of Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

and Chen's *Shizi hou* 獅子吼 remain to be read as discourses of approximations both practically (they are two unfinished novels) and conceptually, in the two novels at the centre of the last two chapters of this research the Chinese utopian ideal of the late Qing is developed in its entirety. Wu Jianren's 吳趸人 *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 (The New Story of the Stone) and Lu Shi'e's 陸士諤 *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 (The New China) are arguably among the most interesting novels written during the last years of the Qing empire, both within the generic bounds of the *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* 政治小說, and in regard to the novelistic production of the time. It is in these novels that the dream of a constitutional *datong* 大同 is unveiled, and that the plethora of expectations matured in the wake of the Chinese colonial impasse is projected in a hyperbolic accumulation of images of new world orders, social practices and renewed moralities played out in a background of beautiful cities, flying cars and amazing technology. Yet what makes the spectacle of the modern Chinese utopia an interesting one is not only its overt, explicit imaginary of economic, social and political modernity, but also the backlit resistance of the old categories among these new ones, that is a certain reluctance to embrace the novelty of the utopian construct which is backed up by the age-old adagio and schizophrenic conviction of the possibility to move forward by looking backward.

Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* and Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* are two interesting examples of the *lixiang* 理想/*wutuobang* 烏托邦/*zhengzhi xiaoshuo* form for different but equally compelling reasons. Whereas Wu Jianren's linguistic refinery, authorial control and sharp sense of irony make his *fin-de-siècle* sequel to Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 *Story of the Stone* one of the most articulated narrative specimen of its era, Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* – although published a few years later than Liang Qichao's attempts, Cai Yuanpei's dream and Wu Jianren's symmetric heterotopias – provides a clear evidence of the influence of

the Western utopian narrative models (in particular of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*) among the Chinese intelligentsia of the time, as well as of the growing recognition of the utopian genre as a viable form of literary expression.

The influence of Bellamy's *Looking Backward* on Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* is very clear and it emerges on different occasions within the Chinese text. A particular example may reveal the significance of this act of acquisition and emulation: among the many images and metaphors of social harmony deployed by Edward Bellamy in the narration of *Looking Backward* to illustrate the greatness of the year 2000, one of the most striking is the allegory of the umbrellas. Caught by a rainstorm on his way out for dinner, Bellamy's alter-ego Julian West is surprised to discover that nobody in new Boston uses umbrellas any more because the streets of the city are now protected from the rain by a "continuous waterproof covering [that] had been let down so as to inclose the sidewalk and turn it into a well lighted and perfectly dry corridor".¹⁰ As usual, Julian West's surprise is received with slight patronising condescension by his utopian companions:

The difference between the age of individualism and that of concert was well characterized by the fact that, in the nineteenth century, when it rained, the people of Boston put up three hundred thousand umbrellas over as many heads, and in the twentieth century they put up one umbrella over all the heads.¹¹

The allegory of the collective umbrella is used by Bellamy in order to emphasise once more the fundamental idea at the basis of the ideal renovation of the United States imagined in his book, the demise of capitalist individualism in favour of a nation-based, state-run collectivism of socialist overtones. The same idea is expressed also in Lu Shi'e's novel, in a passage that may very well be a free translation of Bellamy's text in dialogue

¹⁰ See also chapter 3, p. 144.

¹¹ Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 89.

form:

我與女士走出戲園,見天忽然下雨了.我道:“呀,我與你都沒有帶雨具怎麼呢?”女士道:“如今不比從前了,雨天行路,不必定帶雨具.”我問:“衣裳不怕被雨打濕麼?”女士道:“不妨,這會子有雨街的了.雨天隻要在雨街上走,怎會得打濕呢?”我問:“怎麼叫做雨街?”女士道:“雨街,就在店鋪的後背,上覆著琉璃瓦,通光而不漏雨.旁立木柱支撐著,晴閉雨開,專有人管理的.”我喜道:“路政改良到這樣,可算得無可復加的了.”於是,跟著女士,走到雨街上.果見通明透亮,地上潔淨無塵,沒點子水漬.¹²

When I left the theatre with my female companion, it suddenly started to rain.

“Oh, we did not bring umbrellas, what are we going to do?” I asked.

“Nowadays is not like in the past,” she answered, “There is no need to bring around rain gear when it rains.”

“You don’t mind having to dry your clothes every time after the rain?”

“There’s no such thing, we have rain paths now. How can you get wet by the rain if you use them?”

“What’s a rain path?”

“Rain paths, they run behind the shops, they are paths covered with transparent tiles so that the light can pass through but the rain does not leak in. They are sustained by wooden pillars, they are kept closed when it is sunny and opened when it rains. We have specialised people to take care of them.”

“The administration of the city really improved, we could say there’s nothing more to improve,” I said while walking along with her. The paths were perfectly clear, their surface was spotless and there was not a single drop of water.

Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* (also known as *Lixian sishi nian hou zhi Zhongguo* 立憲四十年後之中國) was published by the Shanghai gailiang xiaoshuo she 上海改良小說社 in 1910. Unlike the large majority of the utopian novels of the decade, Lu Shi’e’s work was never serialised prior to its publication in volume format. Even though in the brief history of the late-imperial *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* of the utopian variety Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* may be considered as one of the last specimens of the genre, we may argue that its appearance in volume format – that is, bypassing the ever-shifting market of the magazines, the

12 Lu Shi’e 陸士諤, *Xin zhongguo* 新中国, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2010, p. 33.

gazettes and the journals – may be read as a sign of the growing recognition that this new kind of literature gained among the culture-makers of the time, before its sudden disappearance in the wake of the *xinhai* revolution and the utopia of the constitutional republic, dissolving in a turmoil of new contrasting discourses.¹³

The “new China” described by Lu Shi’e resembles Edward Bellamy’s new Boston to the same degree the narration of the twelve-chapter novel *Xin Zhongguo* resembles in its pace the progression of *Looking Backward*: the Chinese utopia of modernity is set in an oneirical framework into which the narration unfolds and is closed (in *Looking Backward* Julian West is mesmerised and forgotten, he sleeps and dreams); the first-person narrator is accompanied by an old acquaintance to visit the city of Shanghai in the year 1951, which unfolds in front of him as the centre of a new Chinese renaissance (Julian West is welcomed by the Bartlett family, the descendants of Julian West’s fiancée in the past);¹⁴ during his stay, the narrator embraces the new reality he finds himself in, reawakening to the superiority of the new world against the degeneration of the past (after some initial reluctance and resistance to the new, Julian West eventually accepts the new ways and becomes part of the new American Commonwealth); in the end, the narrator is brought back to reality, where he longs with nostalgia and inspiration at projected future that is both lost and has yet to come (*Looking Backward* ends on a slightly more positive note, with Julian West “double” awakening back to the past, and then back again to the future).

The similarities between Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* are striking. They attest and reaffirm the important role that translation had in

13 The history of the utopian novel was a brief one indeed, it lasted less than a decade: it was inaugurated by Liang Qichao’s literary manifesto of 1902 and withered away within a decade from its inception.

14 The city of Shanghai is also at the centre of one of Lu Shi’e’s earlier novels, *Xin Shanghai* 新上海. Shanghai as the epitome of modernity is indeed a recurring topos both for the repressed modernities of the late empire, and the May Fourth modernists of the first republic.

the construction of that particular idea of modernity towards which a large part of the Chinese intellectuals of the time gravitated. If before 1910 the influence of Timothy Richards' translation of Bellamy's novel could only be conjectured via the surfacing of sporadic references and allusions among different essays, short stories and novels, with the appearance of Lu Shi'e's novel the genealogy and the ramifications of these texts become clearer, and they open the ground for a reading of the late Qing utopian imaginary as an integrated, coherent system of imagination and invention.

It may be argued that *Xin Zhongguo* exceeds in condescension, and that its author fails to engage the reader in an articulated *sous-rature* of the received ideas of political reform and post-colonial modernity by merely displaying them but leaving them unquestioned. The text of Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* is deictic and celebratory: other than pointing at how things should be, and sighing in despair at how all in the end is but a dream, the novel's protagonist is flattened against the author/narrator, performing the sole function of telling (in fact, "Lu Shi'e" is also the name of the main protagonist of the novel). The same cannot be said about Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*, whose main protagonist Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 (a character who is heavily connoted and symbolically poignant) actually performs a fundamental function in the definition of the conceptual coordinates upon which the utopian narration is nested.

Wu Jianren's utopian novel *Xin Shitou ji* presents on the other hand a much more complex scenario. Within the author's vast literary production, the importance of this novel is often overlooked. A prolific journalist and novelist, Wu Jianren is most remembered for works such as *Henhai* 恨海 and *Ershi nian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀, or for his eccentric "carnet of grievances" by the title of *Wu Jianren ku* 吳趼人哭.¹⁵

15 *Henhai* 恨海 has been translated into English by Patrick Hanan with the title of *Sea of Regret*, and recognized as one of the cardinal texts of the modern Chinese romantic canon by virtue of its re-elaboration of the notions of love, passion and marriage; see Wu Jianren, *Sea of Regret*, translated by Patrick Hanan, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

This is not surprising: whereas these latter works indulge in the exasperated macro-narration of cries and denounces of the Qing period, *Xin shitou ji* emerges on the contrary as a hybrid and absolutely peculiar work of literature whose unique stylistic features eschew any univocal attempt of categorisation. At first glance, it would be easy to discard Wu Jianren's novel as yet another remake of the classics: *fanxin xiaoshuo* 翻新小說 (“fiction that brings the new out of the old”), *jieti xiaoshuo* 借題小說 (“fiction that thematizes one thing by talking about another thing”) and *nijiu xiaoshuo* 擬舊小說 (“fiction that imitates the old”) were plentiful during the late Qing period. These types of novels drew from the abundant narrative material offered by classics in a plethora of sequels and variations, but many of them lacked the brilliance of the masterpieces they recalled.¹⁶ Indeed the Stone at the centre of this “new story of the Stone” is Jia Baoyu, the protagonist of Cao Xueqin's *Shitou ji* 石頭記 or *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, yet his deployment as a central figure in Wu Jianren's novel is not the result of lazy penmanship, but rather – we might say – a clever inside joke, a touch of subtle irony and an erudite banter in the form of a paradoxical presence from the past, whose distinctiveness enhances the narrative trajectory of the book.

What sets Wu Jianren's novel apart is the fact that the forty chapters of *Xin shitou ji* represent in a way a closure to the eccentricity of the late Qing literary experimentalism, developing to their exhaustion the imaginative possibilities offered by the contamination between the Chinese literary tradition and the discourse of late-imperial modernity. Wu Jianren takes up the challenge launched in 1895 by John Fryer for the Chinese novelists to tackle the issues of the present by reinterpreting the *qianze xiaoshuo* 譴責小說 form with

16 On the peculiar practice of *xushu* 續書 (the writing of sequels, adaptations and variations) in the development of Chinese fiction, see Martin W. Huang, *Snakes' Legs: Sequels, Continuations, Rewritings, and Chinese Fiction*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004.

elements of the classical tradition, but he does so through the lens of a finely-tuned irony.¹⁷ These elements concur to create a narrative architecture in which the great expectations of the late Qing intelligentsia are mocked into empty charades and mannerisms of Western derivation. This carnivalesque imaginary is then turned upside down halfway through the text and reversed into the utopian dream of a renewed Chinese empire of moral, economic and technological supremacy, not devoid nevertheless of a sceptical note which mitigates the celebratory tone of the utopian narration.¹⁸

As a narratively closed and ideologically closed system, the utopian representation cannot but perpetuate its own inception, preserve its own stasis, and celebrate its own celebration. These are necessary conditions for the utopian construct to be considered as such (i.e.: utopian) by us the readers and imaginary travellers who are stuck in the contingency of history. These traits are implied in the “syntactic closure” of the utopian construct and they are “formally unavoidable”, but – we agree with Suvin – it would fall among “the errors of the utopophopes” to insist on them to prove the fallacy of the utopian construct *per se*.¹⁹ What interests us is rather the way the “closure-ness” of the utopian construct emerges from the *texture* of the narration in the form of a spectacle. While, as we will see, the word “spectacle” is also used here in its most literal sense, what we mean by it is that these texts often put the narrator and the protagonist (and so, by extension, the reader) in the position of a *spectator* whose only purpose is to stand in a particular place and to watch utopia unfolding, happening or simply being. The only

17 In 1895, John Fryer – an English translator and entrepreneur based in Shanghai – launched a fiction contest in which he asked the Chinese novelists of the time to write about the issues of contemporary China (such as, among the others, foot-binding). While all the submission were lost and this peculiar literary “contest” was never brought to an end, it contributed nevertheless to provoke the emergence of a new, “modern” and socially-aware strand of fiction. See Patrick Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.

18 A clear Vernean influence transpires throughout the text: Jules Verne was one of the most popular European writers of the time, his works were among the most translated, published and read.

19 Darko Suvin, “Locus, Horizon. and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as Key to Utopian Studies”, *Utopian Studies*, 1990, vol. 1, n. 2, p. 76.

function of the protagonist is thus to provide a counterpart to the utopian antithesis, but within the framework of an uneven dialectic: “The fundamental dynamic of any Utopian politics will therefore always lie in the dialectic of Identity and Difference”, yet this Difference is the “radical difference” and the “radical otherness” of a utopian construct built on the “*systemic nature of the social totality*” (emphasis added).²⁰ The utopian experience is offered as a totalising one; it does not openly concede any space of confrontation, but only of compliance.

The spectacle of the late Qing utopia is constructed by a play of perspectives. Its architecture is coherent only if it is observed through the eyes of the host, the stranger whose itinerary within its borders is carefully orchestrated, and whose range of vision is limited to the perpetual present of a map without territory. Yet the illusion is fragile and the perspective lines are thrown off when the point of view is questioned. In the third chapter of Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo*, the first-person narrator and protagonist “Lu Shi’e” is brought to a theatre where a historical play is staged in celebration of the new Chinese present. A stage is set up at the centre of a majestic arena, surrounded on its four sides by countless seats arranged in five galleries of increasing height. It is the year 1950 (the 43rd year of the Xuantong 宣統 reign) and at the centre of the city of Shanghai a play is being staged to re-enact the foundation of the new Chinese country, which happened in that very same place 40 years before.

忽聽得鼓樂齊作，戲台上不知怎樣，四圍都垂下圍幕。那幕上，像電光影戲般，忽地現出四個大字，道：“請開國會”。²¹

Suddenly I heard a sound of drums playing all around, while – I don’t know how – curtains screens dropped on all sides of the stage. In a backdrop of electric lights and shadows, four big characters appeared: “*Qing kai guohui*” (petition for the establishment of the parliament).”

20 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London, Verso, 2005, p. xii.

21 Lu Shi’e, p. 27.

Lu Shi'e's fictional persona is rapt by the spectacle, he watches the stage in a state of awe while countless actors moves among plays of light, automated sets and curtains that portray in life-like similitude the mountains and the rivers, the buildings and the streets of the new Chinese empire. Lu Shi'e is literally "*momingqimiao*" 莫名其妙, as he stands speechless in front of the spectacle of utopia celebrating itself. How is it done? he asks to his companion, and it is in the evasiveness of the answer he is given that we can grasp and pinpoint the defining trait of the late Qing utopia: "This is a shadow play done with electric lights" (這就是電光影戲).²² Utopia is a modern (that is, allegorically "electrical") shadow play whose shapes are created in the backstage of history and projected on the screen given by the form of the novel.

In reading these novels, a sense of artificiality and *mise-en-scène* lingers on between the text and the reader, as if the utopian novel, with its careful arrangement (or *ensemble*) of images, did not provide the imaginative ground for the growth of social discourse that Liang Qichao encouraged, but rather found in the arrangement of images *itself* a sufficient reason for being: "The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence".²³ The utopian representation, constructed but not articulated, told but not shown, becomes in the end a figurative exorcism of the anxieties of colonial influence that the looming discourses of reform and modernity (the omnipresent, ubiquitous idea of *xin* 新, "new") brought forward.

The spectacular nature of the Chinese utopia is reasserted through these texts. In *Xin Zhongguo*'s eighth chapter we learn that the historical (dystopian) past of new China is

22 Lu Shi'e, p. 32.

23 Guy Debord, thesis 24 of *La société du spectacle*.

perpetually staged to the inhabitants of the new country according to the principle of “not forgetting the possibility of danger in a time of peace” (安不忘危, 泰不忘否). The cohesiveness of the utopian construct is maintained through its repetition, both outward (when the spectacle is projected to the narrator as the reader’s delegate), and inward, self-reflectively, by “staging the Chinese defeats, showing the fall and the disgrace of the Chinese men” (排演中國失敗事, 便是出中國人的丑, 坍中國人的台) so that the new Chinese citizens would not relapse carelessly on the strength and prosperity (富強) of the present, and let “laziness and arrogance take over their spirits” (人心一怠惰, 一驕傲).²⁴

Similar moments of self-reflection and self-celebration can be found also in Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*: quite early into his utopian journey, Jia Baoyu is brought by his guide Lao Shaonian 老少年 (Old Youth) to visit a naval academy. Here, after attending together with thousands and thousands of students a class about “the preservation of national integrity” (保全國粹) and what we may translate as “mutually-respectful patriotism” (合群愛國), he has the chance to observe the drilling of the academy’s fleet in the open sea. Again, the scene unfolds as it were a spectacle rather than an everyday military training. Wu Jianren grants his protagonist an overarching point of view, as if the entire nautical parade were conceived to impress the non-utopian host who is standing by the sea on a belvedere, watching in awe as the ships and the vessels move along intricate patterns:

寶玉和老少年都到廳前空地上站著觀看。隻見海面上波平如鏡, 一望無涯。岸邊眾學生, 已紛紛上了舢舨, 預備號令下來。忽聽得聲炮響, 旗杆上豎起一面令旗。那學生坐在舢舨上, 卻隻不動。寶玉心中暗想道: “他們怎麼不聽號令呢?” 誰知一轉眼間, 那海面上浮起無數的船

24 Lu Shi’e, p. 95.

來...²⁵

Baoyu and Lao Shaonian were standing on the terrace atop of the cliff, watching. The sea was boundless, its surface calm and smooth as glass. On the shore, many students had already boarded their sampans one after the other, and they were waiting for orders. The explosion of the cannons broke the silence, and a flag of command was lifted up the flagpole. The cadets were sitting on their boats, but none was moving. “Didn’t they hear the signal?” Baoyu wondered, when suddenly, in the blink of an eye, countless vessels started to emerge from the surface of the sea...

As the naval manoeuvres continue, Jia Baoyu’s voice acquires the tone of a commentary and of a eulogy. His point of view is enhanced by the use of extraordinary instruments such as sophisticated telescopes (測遠鏡) and water-penetrating lenses (透水鏡) that allow the protagonist to appreciate in its totality the unfolding of the utopian spectacle. Borrowing Lukács’ words, we may say that Jia Baoyu’s voyage is a “progression through the totality”, or an itinerary within the “completeness of the novel’s world” in which the subjectivity of the observer is once again flattened, overwhelmed by the impossible width of the frame.²⁶

The utopian society is thus instituted by the accumulation of images and through the alternation of scenes and commentaries that concur to create the totality of an exemplary world. As we will see, this totality – although repeatedly asserted – is built upon strategies of reversal: the Chinese colonised past is reversed in the decolonised future; the marginality of the Chinese geography is overturned in the central insularity of the utopian land. Yet these strategies are anchored in the here and now of the utopian novel’s ideal reader. This is the backdrop to which the utopian spectacle is bound, enmeshed, this is the “worldliness” of the utopian text. Disentanglement from it is not impossible, but it cannot be articulated: as we have seen with the works of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua in the

25 Wu Jianren 吴趸人, *Xin shitou ji* 新石头记, Nanchang, Jiangxi renmin chubanshe 江西人民出版社, 1988, p. 302.

26 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993, pp. 70–71.

second chapter of this study, any attempt to cover the distance between the dystopian (historical) and the utopian locus leads to an endless process of Zenonian approximations. The break has to be epistemological, the caesura has to be radical and the lost of coordinates complete. This is the function of the dream, the loss of the tracks and of the map which is common to many utopian representations. Both Wu Jianren and Lu Shi'e's utopian trajectories begin from this kind of fracture, yet whereas with Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* this fracture constitutes the starting point of the novel, in Wu's *Xin shitou ji* it happens in the middle of the narration, providing the reader a pivotal point from which to move both forward to the utopian spectacle and backward to the background of history.

The scenery of history

包妥當見寶玉翩翩年少,打量是個風流人物,便把上海的繁華富麗,有的沒的,說了一大套.慢慢的又說到風月場中去,說上海的姑娘,最有名氣的是“四大金剛”.寶玉笑道:“不過幾個粉頭,怎麼叫起他金剛呢?”包妥當道:“我也不懂,不過大家都是這麼叫,我也這麼叫罷了.這“四大金剛”之中,頭一個是林黛玉.”寶玉猛然聽了這話,猶如天雷擊頂一般,覺得耳邊轟的一聲,登時出了一身汗,呆呆的坐在那裡出神.²⁷

To Baotuo's eyes, Baoyu appeared as a dapper young man, a refined and cultured gentleman, so when it came to the amenities of the city of Shanghai, he talked a great deal about it. As they went on talking, the conversation gradually shifted towards the pleasure quarters of the city, about the flowers of Shanghai, and its renown “Four Heavenly Beauties”. Baoyu burst into a laugh: “It's nothing more than a few prostitutes, how can you call them heavenly beauties?”

“I don't know either,” Baotuo answered, “but everybody calls them that way, so I do it too. And at the top of this pantheon is one Lin Daiyu.” The name of Lin Daiyu struck Baoyu's head like a bolt from the blue. His whole body started to sweat as he sat there stunned and speechless.

It is certainly not an everyday occurrence, at least not in the sophisticated game of mirrors that is the Chinese literary tradition, to read of Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 – epitome of beauty and

27 Wu Jianren, p. 166.

virtue – as the queen of Shanghai’s brothels: the world of *Xin shitou ji* is by all means the result of a time gone out of joint. The initial chapters of Wu Jianren’s novel abound with this kind of surreal, carnivalesque vignettes, and in the architecture of the novel the ironic depictions of *fin-de-siècle* decadence contribute in equal measure as the peach blossoms of the utopian representation to the construction of the late Qing modernist utopia.

In both Cao Xueqin’s masterwork *Honglou meng* and Wu Jianren’s variation on the theme of the stone, the character of Jia Baoyu (“precious jade”) has a strong symbolical value. The image of the stone – the talking stone, the healing stone, the enlightening stone, the fertilising stone, etc. – draws from a vast mythological complex in which the stone performs a variety of functions linked to the supernatural.²⁸ Wu Jianren’s choice to deploy such an image in his take on the utopian form is subtle, as it incorporates the function of the stone as an epistemological instrument for the “discovery” and the unveiling of the Chinese modern utopia. Jia Baoyu is a liminal figure, he is both part of the world he lives in, and he is not: according to the lore, he is the personification of the only stone that was left aside by goddess Nü Wa 女媧 in the restoration of the vault of heaven; thrown down the side of mount Qinggeng 青埂, the stone acquires the shape of a man; by being left aside from the creation of the world, Jia Baoyu acquires the ability to observe it from the outside, he becomes the lens through which the narrator can tell the story.

In this sense, Jia Baoyu’s marginality gives him a central role in the novel *Xin shitou ji*. Two worlds are depicted in Wu Jianren’s oeuvre: the first half is composed by a series of vignettes about the decadence of late Qing China; whereas the second half depicts the trajectory of Jia Baoyu within the “boundaries of civilisation” (文明境界) in the Civilised Country (文明國) or Civilised World (文明世界). While in the text the

28 See Jing Wang, *The Story of Stone: Intertextuality, Ancient Chinese Stone Lore, and the Stone Symbolism in Dream of the Red Chamber, Water Margin, and The Journey to the West*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992.

comparison between the Civilised Country and historical China is never made explicit (nor we are explicitly told that the *Wenming guo* represents the China of the future), and it often appears that the inhabitants of the Civilised Country are happily oblivious of China's tribulations, the former gradually overlays on the surface of the latter as the blueprint for the future of the Chinese nation.

In regard to both these worlds, Jia Baoyu remains a foreign body: he is neither a part of the old world nor of the new one, and his journey through them is an alienating journey of discovery and adaptation. It is this quality that allows us, the readers, to understand the two halves of the book as part of the same spectacle, of the same representation: the modern Chinese utopia is built upon the fragments of old China, and the link between these two ensembles or arrangements of common symbols is a pivotal character taken from a tradition yet to be adulterated. While Jia Baoyu is not the only character transplanted by Wu Jianren from Cao Xueqin's *Dream* to modern China, he appears to be the only aware one. Early on in his journey, he is joined by his old servant Beiming 焙茗; together, they decide to travel to Shanghai 上海, Tianjin 天津 and Beijing 北京, and during their itinerary they encounter the characters of Xue Pan 薛蟠 and Lin Daiyu. The interactions between these four characters are structured as ironic and pathetic vignettes on the decadence of the Chinese civilisation against the colonial other, and built on the theme of the loss of orientation and the incapacity of the characters to adapt to the new without losing their integrity. Yet while Jia Baoyu's gaze is always able to see through the machinations of the social spectacle, the others are irredeemably lost.

In Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*, the coordinates of the utopian background are given unequivocally in the first chapter. Left at the end of *Honglou meng* with his head shaved and the intention to leave behind the sorrows of mundane existence, at the beginning of *Xin shitou ji* Jia Baoyu decides to abandon his ambitions of sanctity and to delve back into

the world. “Strangely enough, many years passed since he embraced asceticism, and the world underwent many changes, but to him it was like just a single day had passed” (說也奇怪, 從前他苦修時, 不知歷了幾世幾劫, 就如過了一日似的):²⁹ when Jia Baoyu reawakens among the ruins of what used to be his monastic cell, the world around him is unrecognisable. Confused and disoriented, he starts to wander in the middle of the night in search for people. Hours pass, the sun is rising low on the horizon, but no human is in sight. Finally, Jia Baoyu arrives at a small, old temple in the middle of the woods. Looking for a place to rest, he bumps into his servant Beiming who, not immediately recognising his master, reproaches him rudely: “Who’s this son-of-a-bitch with no eyes? Go kick your father instead!” (是那一個忘八羔子沒生眼睛的, 踢你爺一腳!). The comedic effect is powerful, as the disrespectful words of Beiming hint at a world that has been turned upside down: the Stone once again has been misplaced. Reconciled, the two characters walk into the old temple, where they stumble upon a Daoist priest who runs away terrified at the sight of what he thinks are two gods. While Baoyu and Beiming help themselves on the Daoist’s breakfast, they find a stack of books and newspapers on a nearby table:

拿了這張紙, 翻來覆去的看了又看, 也有可解的, 也有不可解的, 再翻回來, 猛看見第一行上, 是: 大清光緒二十六人口月口日, 即公歷一千九百零一年肱月口日, 禮拜日. 不覺吃了一大驚.³⁰

[Baoyu] picked up a newspaper and skimmed through it a few times. Some things he could understand, some others he could not, so he turned again to the top of the page and there he read: “...26th Year of the Guangxu Reign of the Great Qing...year 1901 of the Gregorian calendar, Sunday”.

Background of the modern Chinese utopia are thus the years of “the Chinese crisis in its acute stage”, or – as Lin Wenching put it in his newspaper articles from that time –

29 Wu Jianren, p. 153.

30 Wu Jianren, p. 156.

“the unhappy condition created by the political and cultural domination of an unprogressive and semi-barbarous race, the Manchus, over a progressive and civilised one, the proper Chinese”, as well as looming political and cultural domination of the European colonial enterprise in China.³¹ This is the early aftermath of the first Sino-Japanese War, of the Hundred Days Reform large-scale failure, of Empress Cixi’s iron-fist restoration, and of the Boxer Rebellion backlash: in a nutshell, this is the beginning of the down slope that would lead within a decade to the *xinhai* 辛亥 revolution of 1911 and the repudiation of the empire as a viable infrastructure for the government of modern China.

In his examination of the intermingling between technology and morality in Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* in the genesis of China’s imagination of the future at the turn of the 20th century, Wang Dun opens his discussion by aptly observing that “the discursive space of a future China is the relocation and retrofitting of China’s past”.³² In doing so, Wang reasserts the relevance of Northrop Frye’s notion for which “all visions of the future are rooted in the past, socially conditioned and historically placed” also for what concerns the Chinese late Qing utopian imagination.³³ The act of imagining the future is analogical in its nature, as it proceeds by analogy with what is in front of our eyes, both as a contingency (that is, by historical chance) and through that carefully-arranged accumulation of the past, which is what constitutes in the end the discourse of tradition.

The analogical nature of future-oriented imagination is overtly clear in Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*, in which the analogue and the target of the allegory (in this case, the past and the future) are juxtaposed with almost geometrical precision in the two halves of the novel, two journeys of discovery with similar trajectories but opposite direction. Frye’s

31 Wen-ch’ing Lin, *The Chinese Crisis from within*, London, Grant Richards, 1901, pp. vii–viii.

32 Dun Wang, “The Late Qing’s Other Utopias: China’s Science-Fictional Imagination, 1900-1910”, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, September 2008, vol. 34, n. 2, p. 38.

33 Northrop Frye in Wang, “The Late Qing’s Other Utopias”, p. 38; also in Northrop Frye *Creation and Recreation*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980, p. 15.

reflections come in useful once again for what regards our analysis of the utopian text as a spectacle played on the backstage of history: according to Frye, two main qualities pertain to the construction of utopia, “[i]n the first place, the behavior of society is described *ritually*,” and “in the second place, rituals are apparently irrational acts which become *rational* when their significance is exposed”.³⁴ A textbook manoeuvre of the utopian tale is the recourse to Socratic-like dialogues for the exposition of the utopian locus to the yet-unenlightened visitor: during this dialogue the utopian society – which is revealed in the perfection of its rituals – is made to make sense to the visitor against his initial incredulity, coercing him to recognise the unassailability of the new social organisation. This dynamic is clearly recognisable in many sections of the second part of *Xin shitou ji*, and especially in those that are built around the elaborate exchanges between Jia Baoyu and Lao Shaonian. A similar dynamic takes part in the first part of the novel too, but with different and equally interesting results.

In the first half of Wu Jianren’s utopian novel, this process of *rationalisation* works the other way round: Jia Baoyu’s itinerary of familiarisation with the new environment of *fin-de-siècle* China is represented by the author through a series of vignettes in which the social rituals are revealed not in their rationality, but rather in their *irrationality*. To be portrayed in this case are those rituals of colonial self-submission that came from the blind mimicry and selfless adoption of Western modes and ideas by those parts of the Chinese society that, by being more conscious of the ongoing change of paradigms, were also the more susceptible to it. “Slaves” and “slave’s slaves”, it is in this way that these figures are reproached by the narrator of Xiaoran Yusheng’s 蕭然籲生 *Wutuobang youji* 烏托邦游記, and indeed it is against these empty affectations which are the result of a mere substitution

34 Northrop Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias”, *Daedalus*, April 1965, vol. 94, n. 2, p. 324.

of a set of rituals with another that Wu Jianren anchors his text.³⁵

An interesting example of these processes of “unmasking” of the social rituals can be found quite early in the novel, at the end of its third chapter: Jia Baoyu and his servant Beiming had already embarked on the ship that will bring them to Shanghai; following a revealing and unsettling conversation with a stevedore named Baotuo about the qualities of the brothels of Shanghai, Jia Baoyu decides to have lunch on board; yet when he sits at the guests’ table, his expectations are thwarted:

坐下一看, 隻見擺著一個白瓷盤子, 盛了半盤湯, 一把銀白銅匙, 還有鬆糕似的東西. 前面一個白銅架子, 放著幾個玻璃瓶兒.³⁶

Baoyu sat at the table and glanced at the waiter, who was arranging in front of him a plate of white porcelain filled halfway with soup, a metal spoon, and a thing that resembled a cake. In front of him was a metal rack that contained several glass bottles.

The description of the Western-style meal takes up a considerable amount of space in the structure of the chapter. The entire scene is characterised by a pervading sense of ridicule and scepticism as the Western habits are described as imported rituals and they are exposed in their unfamiliarity and artificiality by the alienated point of view of Jia Baoyu. The *reductio ad absurdum* of the alien rituality of the Western meal is articulated throughout this passage by the narrator’s recurrence to a lexicon of wonder and surprise (with expressions such as *moming shen miao* 莫名甚妙, *qianguqiwen* 千古奇聞, *juede qiguai* 覺得奇怪, and *zhenshi qijue* 真是奇絕) for the description of the character’s experience.

Episodes such as the one we have just analysed are very frequent in the first half of Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*. Whereas in their apparent marginality they may be misread and overlooked as comic parenthesis whose sole purpose is to fill out an otherwise apparently

35 *Wutuobang youji* 烏托邦游記 is yet another unfinished utopian novel of the late Qing, it was initially serialised in the magazine *Yueyue xiaoshuo* 月月小說 (The All-Story Monthly) in 1906.

36 Wu Jianren, p. 167.

shallow plot, these episodes are built around a common motif of marked essentialist overtones. The narrative trajectory of Jia Baoyu is characterised by the gradual development of a sense of awareness against the foolishness implied in the uncritical adoption of foreign customs as a response to the loss of national integrity caused by the Chinese condition of semi-coloniality. Many of the figures that Jia Baoyu encounters in the first half of the novel are characterised, on the contrary, by what we may define as a critical unawareness that transforms them into hollowed-out paper figures which are stuck into a superficiality of mannerisms, styles and trends. Among these figures, for example, is the character of Xue Pan, *Honglou meng*'s notorious ne'er-do-well, who in Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* becomes the embodiment of this lack of critical awareness, and of this a-critical homogenisation to the changing *Zeitgeist*.

Pertinently enough, Xue Pan materialises in the Shanghai of 1901 after a heavy night of drinking with his pals. Despite the initial disorientation after waking up more than a century away from his own times, he quickly adapts to the new environment by moving to the city, where he quickly rebuilds his fame of good old idler while making a living as a pedlar. When Jia Baoyu meets him, the latter is already drunk, and he is having an argument with a waiter of the rest house where the two characters are both staying. Mildly surprised to find Jia Baoyu in Shanghai too, he quickly dismisses Baoyu's comprehensible astonishment in finding himself in the future, and he goes on blabbering about his brand new phonograph: "This is a Western product, I bought it from an imported goods store" (這是洋貨鋪子裡買來的,是西洋貨).³⁷ Xue Pan's proclivity both towards the siren calls of the West and, as we will see, the false promises of the impromptu nationalism of a gang of Boxer-like rebels will play a crucial role in the catalysation of the events that will force Jia Baoyu to leave once again the world behind and enter a new one. Xue Pan's defining traits

³⁷ Wu Jianren, p. 177.

– his good-willed gullibility and short-range self-interest – come to symbolise that characteristic of “unreliability” (靠不住) that Jia Baoyu criticises in most of the compatriots he meets during his journey, and that he despises as an unjustified patronising attitude from the part of the Western invaders towards the Chinese.

An interesting aspect of this section of Wu Jianren’s novel is the fact that the colonial “otherness”, against which many elements of the plot and the overall characterisation of their actors are constructed, is almost completely disembodied from the “other” and it is absorbed or incorporated in the “Chinese” self: the dystopian spectacle (which stands as necessary counterpart to the Chinese utopia) is Chinese and Chinese only, no figures from the imagined “West” appear in Wu Jianren’s novel. This “otherness” of the West, although always looming in the background of the imperial decay as the spectre of a military menace, is encoded in the rituals of everyday life, manifesting itself in the tragic ridiculousness of a population sedated by opium and Western liquors, and enchanted by the cheap exoticism of a phonograph, a clock, a box of matches: “Baotuo looked at Beiming, who was holding a box of Monkey brand matches. ‘These are just matches!’ Baotuo said laughing at him, ‘Have you ever seen them before?’” (包妥當一看, 原來是一匣猴牌洋火. 便笑對焙茗道: “這是洋火呀! 你沒見過麼”).³⁸

Similar episodes are recurrent throughout Wu Jianren’s novel: the exotic object, masked by an exotic language which in turn is both clumsily assimilated and alienated by the local phonetic, turns into a Suvinian *novum* (or, in this case, anti-*novum*) which, instead of providing a possibility, an epistemological tool to come to terms with the new reality through the mental experiment it is supposed to enable, on the contrary suffocates any dialectic and any attempt of mediation within the absurdity of a language without

38 Wu Jianren, p. 170.

referent.³⁹ In the ninth chapter of *Xin shitou ji*, we can find a vivid example of this dynamic, that is to say of the peculiar “dialectical bottleneck” produced by such processes of linguistic reduction that give way to cognitive numbness (if not, in this particular case, cognitive intoxication). A longer quotation is here necessary:

卻說寶玉聽說外國人買了內地的地皮,不覺吃驚道:“租界,租界,我隻當是租給他的,怎麼賣起來!更讓他買到租界以外呢?”薛蟠道:“我頭回販書的時候,到手的書,也胡亂翻兩張看.看見一部什麼書,內中說的中國地方,足足有二萬萬方裡,那裡就買得完.”寶玉道:“然而望后來的歲月是沒有窮盡的,今年許他買,明年也許他買,終有賣完之一日.”薛蟠大笑道:“你真是瞎耽心!等到賣完了的時候,就和你先前說的話,我們都化灰化煙許夕了,那裡到那千百年后的事?照你行樣耽心,隻怕不到兩年,頭發先白了呢.”說時恰好細崽送上湯來.薛蟠道:“吃罷,別耽心了.再這麼著,隻怕吃也吃不下呢!”一面又叫拿酒來,“皮酒,波得,拔蘭地,威士忌,香餅.寶兄弟,你吃什麼?”寶玉道:“我不懂.”⁴⁰

When Baoyu heard that some foreigner had managed to buy a parcel of Chinese land, he was shocked: “Concessions and settlements, I thought they were on lease only, how come they are being sold now? Are we going to let them buy land outside their limits as part of the bargain too?” “Once, when I just started to traffic in books,” Xue Pan answered, “I used to skim at random through those I could get hold of [before selling them]. There was this book about the Chinese land, it said that China has a territory of two hundred million square *li*. After all, all they bought was that one spot.”

“... even so,” Baoyu said, “if there we will not put any limit in the years to come, you let them buy something this year, you let them buy something the next year, and a day will come when everything will be sold out.”

Xue Pan burst into a big laugh: “You worry way too much! By the time everything will be sold out, as you just said, we will have already turned into ashes, so why bother about what’s gonna happen many years after we die? If you keep worrying the way you do, in two years from now your hair will be all white.” As they spoke, dinner was served.

39 “My axiomatic premise . . . is that SF [science fiction] is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional “novum” (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic”, “A novum of cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality”, “its novelty is ‘totalizing’ in the sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least of crucially important aspect thereof”, and “the essential tension . . . is one between the readers, representing a certain number of types of Man of our times, and the encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other introduced by the novum.” Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 63–64.

40 Wu Jianren, p. 199.

“Help yourself and do not worry any more,” Xue Pan continued, “if you go on like this I’m afraid you are not going to eat anything!” As he said so, he ordered more drinks, “Beer? A glass of Paul Beaudet? Brandy? Whiskey? Some bread? Brother, what do you want to eat?”
“I don’t understand,” Baoyu answered.

Such exchanges, anecdotal in their nature and apparently tangential to the development of the plot, reveal in Wu Jianren an uncommon awareness for what concerns the inner workings of the colonial contract and the inherently unbalanced, master-slave dialectic that this contract entails. Contrary to his companions, Jia Baoyu is aware of – in the words of Frantz Fanon – “the mass of illusions and misunderstandings” brought by the colonial condition.⁴¹ He realises that, by embracing the coloniser’s way, the Chinese is left with “no choice save between inferiority and dependence. The two solutions excepted, there is no salvation”.⁴² Jia Baoyu, the enlightening stone of supernatural, a-historical provenance, performs the function of a reminder: it is the coloniser who creates the colonised, and the nature of this relation is rooted *both* in the impossibility to close the gap between its two parts, and in the illusion that such a gap could be closed. On the contrary, the colonising subject imposes a structural and superstructural framework within which the colonised other remains as such to the same degree he attempts to escape his condition of submission. This faux-dialectic becomes the blueprint through which every discourse is encoded, played out, and eventually neutralised: if the idea of the nation is at stake, the Chinese are shown to be lost within their own internal Han vs. Manzu squabbles for legitimacy; if politics is at stake, the imperial court is revealed in its obsolescence against the efficiency of the modern European states; if economy is at stake, China becomes the marginal end of an otherwise integrated system of world exchanges; if technology is at

41 “Un ensemble d’illusions et de malentendus.” Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1971, p. 68; translated by Charles Lam Markmann in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 2008, p. 62.

42 “En effet, il laisse . . . le choix entre l’infériorité et la dépendance.” Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 75; translated in Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 69.

stake, the inferiority of the Chinese empire is perpetually reasserted through its military subjugation; and so on.

This mystification is pointed out by Jia Baoyu in another topical scene: once in Shanghai, the protagonist wants to visit the city's arsenal (製造局) to have a look at the latest technological progresses and to buy some foreign books in order to learn a foreign language. Waiting for the book department of the arsenal to process his order, Jia Baoyu decides to visit the place together with Beiming and Xue Pan. Here they walk among all sorts of machineries, watching over the processing of wood and metal and the production of rifles and naval mines. Jia Baoyu is mildly impressed: he resists the easy fascination of the technological novelty, but he rather points out the poor working condition of the arsenal's workers ("In order to make a living, they get to these conditions, and they keep doing it by their own choice. When I look at them, I feel pity toward them, but they also have my respect!").⁴³ His discontent is not born out of conceit, but rather out of concern:

寶玉道：“我也為這個納悶，這些法子，都是外國的，他卻肯來教咱們？什麼做槍咧，做炮咧，咱們做起槍炮來還打誰？有一天同他失了和，還不是拿還他們麼？這個...可以叫做“請君入瓮”...伯惠道：“那有這話。他們的制造層出不窮，今年造的東西比去年精，明年造的東西又比今年精了。譬如造洋槍，我們要造，請他教，造起的洋槍，能打一裡遠，他家裡造的，已經可以打一裡半了。等你學會造打一裡半的槍時，他家裡造的又可以打二裡了，他就教會你怕什麼？”⁴⁴

Baoyu: "I am puzzled too about this: these methods of production, they are all of foreign origin, yet the foreigners agree to teach them to us anyway? All these guns and cannons, once we have made them, against whom are we going to shoot them? If one day we part ways with the foreigners, isn't this going to turn against them? Aren't they setting up a trap for themselves...?"

Bohui: "Here's the thing. The foreigners open new arsenals every other day, and the things they manufacture this year are going to be more refined than those they made the year before, and those they will produce the next year will be even more refined than this one. Take for example

43 “他們為了做活，鬧成這樣兒，他們又肯這個樣兒去自食其力。我見了他們，既覺得可憐，又覺得可敬呢。” Wu Jianren, p. 211.

44 Wu Jianren, p. 214.

these guns: we want to produce Western guns, so we ask them to teach us how to do it, yet by the time we manage to produce a gun that can shoot at the distance of one *li*, they have already made one that can shoot one *li* and a half. Then you learn how to make one that can shoot one *li* and a half, and they have already made one that can shoot two *li*, and so on. What do they have to fear in teaching their methods to us?”

In these terms, the epistemological estrangement of the utopian construction becomes as necessary as it is, in the end, paradoxically unavoidable and unattainable. Fanon’s quotation of Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* becomes here more than pertinent:

– Qu’y pouvez-vous?
– Commencer!
– Commencer quoi?
– La seule chose au monde qui vaille la peine de commencer: la fin du monde, parbleu.⁴⁵

“What can you do about it?”
“Start something!”
“Start what?”
“The only thing in the world that’s worth the effort of starting: The end of the world, by God!”⁴⁶

In a world whose ideological coordinates have inbred into the shackles of colonial submission, and in which history has been shunted into the dead-end of a recursive, self-repeating dialectic, the end of the world emerges as the only way out. Therefore, if the contingencies of history (the resistance of the old infrastructures, the pressure of external forces) do not allow the world to end, literature becomes the outlet through which to make the world collapse and to imagine it anew: the form – the *xiaoshuo* – persists, but its domain becomes *lixiang* 理想, *wutuobang* 烏托邦.

The narrative trajectory of the first section of Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* somehow

45 Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 77.

46 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 71

seems both to anticipate and to be affected by the cognitive black-out that, halfway into the novel, displaces the narration from the background of historical China to its utopian counterpart. As the moment of transition approaches, the plot of the novel grows erratic and contradictory: whereas the majority of the most plot-defining actions of this first section of the novel seems to take place toward its conclusion, as if these were catalysed by the incoming “end” of one world and the beginning of another. In the last chapters of *Xin shitou ji*'s first half Jia Baoyu's main narrative line fades into the background and unfolds at the margins, surfacing only sporadically, *around* the vicissitudes of the other characters, rather than at the centre of the plot. We, the readers, are told that Baoyu, alarmed and fascinated by what he has seen from his reawakening at the beginning of the twentieth century, decides to interrupt (at least momentarily) his travels in order to study and to learn more about the new world he lives in. As Xue Pan leaves for Beijing in pursuit of some shady affairs and Beiming is ensnared by the mundanity of the city of Shanghai, Jia Baoyu withdraws from the public to learn English in the privacy of his own room and to update his knowledge.

Jia Baoyu's apparent retreat from the world is particularly meaningful, as it will be his mere contamination with its “Barbarian Realms” (野蠻境界) and its “Falsely Civilised States” (假文明國) that will eventually lead to his early demise and his translation into the “Borders of civilisation” (文明境界). In chapters 12, 13 and 14 of *Xin shitou ji* we are introduced to a series of transient, ill-spirited characters whose actions will precipitate the events that lead to the arrest of Jia Baoyu, his imprisonment upon charges of association with a Boxer-like sect of opium-addicted cult leaders and gullible followers, and in the end his sentence to death for attempted conspiracy.

When the character of Xue Pan arrives in Beijing after leaving Jia Baoyu to his

studies, he is quickly lured by his old acquaintance Wang Wei'er 王威兒, "a ruffian well-known in Beijing, who spends every day gambling and whoring around" (北京城裡的一個著名光棍, 平日吃嫖賭無所不為), into joining a sect of Boxers with the promise of unimaginable powers and a chance for personal redemption.⁴⁷ Once again, Wu Jianren's talent as a narrator emerges in his ability to convey the absurdity of the situation through the veil of solemnity that surrounds what are in the end just the secretive machinations of two fools:

王威兒道：“此刻天天將還沒有調齊，天兵天將一齊了，就要動手。此刻多少王爺，中堂，也在那裡預備呢。一聲齊全了。上頭便發下號令來。咱們就動手。”薛蟠道：“外國人的槍炮，利害得很呢，有什麼法子去抵當他？”王威兒哈哈大笑道：“要怕了他的槍炮，咱們也不干了。隻要到壇上拜過了祖師，拜過了師傅，憑他什麼槍炮，隻打咱們不動。薛蟠道：“了，放下來罷。”王威兒道：“我還沒有解法，他怎麼放得下。”...薛蟠愈覺得神奇，便巴不得就到壇上去看看。⁴⁸

Wang Wei'er: "At the moment we are still not all set up, but once our invincible army will be gathered, then we are going to take action. Many noblemen and secretaries are supporting us. One call-to-arm and we all will be ready, waiting for the orders to come. Then we will make our move."

Xue Pan: "But the foreigners have weapons, and they are quite dreadful, what methods do you have against them?"

Wang Wei'er burst into a big laugh: "We are not going to let them scare us with their guns. You'll only need to pray at the altar of the founder of our school, by doing so you'll acquire his skills: no matter what gun they use, they are not going to hurt us."

Xue Pan: "Deal, count me in then!"

Wang Wei'er: "I cannot let you in yet, it is up to him [the cult leader]."

... Xue Pan's enthusiasm was growing more and more, he could not wait to see the altar.

The dystopian/utopian trajectory upon which Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* is built may be read in the terms of a discourse of misguided appropriations. As we will see with the analysis of the second half of Wu Jianren's novel, the Chinese utopia can be understood in

47 Wu Jianren, p. 219.

48 Wu Jianren, p. 227.

the terms as an attempt to “reclaim” those ideological categories (science, moral, politics, etc.) that have been appropriated by the foreigners and deployed in colonised China to reassert its inadequacy. In a similar way, the Chinese *fin-de-siècle* dystopia is built upon the same concept, it emerges too as a narration of misguided appropriations. As Wang Dun remarks at the end of his essay on the late Qing utopias, we can find a chief example of this kind of misguided appropriation in the portrayal of the Boxer master whom Xue Pan is brought to visit by his pal Wang Wei’er:

王威兒道：“早呢，此刻師傅還沒有起來。起來了，還要吃福壽膏。”薛蟠道：“什麼福壽膏？”王威兒道：“福壽膏就同鴉片煙一般，不過鴉片煙是毛子帶來的，吃不得。“福壽膏”是咱們自己做的，吃了可以添福添壽，所以得了這個名兒。”⁴⁹

“It is still early, the master has not woken up yet,” Wang Wei’er told Xue Pan, “and after he wakes up, the master has to eat his ‘happiness and longevity paste’.”

“What is it?” Asked Xue Pan.

“The ‘happiness and longevity paste’ is like opium,” Wang answered, “but opium is brought by the foreigners, and you cannot eat it. This paste is produced by us, and when you eat it, it increases your happiness and longevity, that’s where its name comes from.”

In the words of Wang Dun, “opium was a (purely material) commodity dumped onto the Chinese by Westerners solely for the (very materialistic) purpose of making a profit for its sellers, and not at all for giving its Chinese users happiness or ‘enlightenment’”.⁵⁰ In Wu Jianren’s novel its appropriation by the anti-foreign Boxers is nominal and delusional, as it represents the result of a misguided act of *zhengming* 正名, or rectification: opium (鴉片) may very well be renamed “happiness and longevity paste” (福壽膏) yet its function remains the same, as the drug contributes to maintaining the Chinese in a dreadful state of lethargic self-delusion (“we are waiting for the orders to come”, “the

49 Wu Jianren, p. 230.

50 Dun Wang, p. 60.

bullets will do us no harm”). Worse still, the delusion has been completely internalised, as its vehicle – opium – does not come any more from the English ships sailing from India, but it is now “produced and consumed by the Chinese”.

With the arrival of Jia Baoyu and Beiming at the capital, the events precipitate: voices of imminent rebellions spread between Beijing and Tianjin as the Boxers start to patrol the streets of the capital. Beiming and Jia Baoyu, labelled as “*ermaozi*” (二毛子, Western sympathizers) by the rebels, manage to avoid public lynching thanks to the intervention of their friend and last-minute rebel Xue Pan, who urges them to stay hidden until the situation boils down. Predictably enough, the turmoil does not last long: the mobilisation of the foreign troops stationed in the two cities quickly restores the order while the Chinese authorities flee the capital and the population is left to its own devices.

The demise of the Boxers is anti-climatic and almost immediate, and its aftermath is hilarious: when Jia Baoyu and Beiming decide to leave their hiding place – a small hostel in which they meet and old man by the name of Old Zhang who schools them about the Taiping Rebellion – and venture outside, they discover that Wang Wei’er and his companions are now lining up along the streets, eager to welcome the foreign troops:

在地下跪著,衣領背后都插著一面小旗子,也有寫“大英順民的”,也有寫“大法順民”的“大美”,“大德”,“大日本”都有,底下無非著順民兩個字.各人手裡也有奉著一盤饅頭的,也有奉著熱騰騰肥雞,肥肉的.⁵¹

They were kneeling on the ground, each one wearing a sign around the neck with big characters that said “Obedient citizens of the British Empire”, or “Abject citizens of France”, or of the “Great United States”, or the “Glorious German Empire” and of “Glorious Japan”. Each one of them was holding a small tray, offering steamed bread and meat [to the passing soldiers].

In the framework of Wu Jianren’s novel, the figure of the revanchist Boxer becomes

51 Wu Jianren, p. 243.

epitome of the schizophrenic attitude of the colonised mind: he is both extremely chauvinist (his world vision is binary, his enemies are ranked according to their proximity to the invader: *yimaozi* 一毛子, *ermaozi* 二毛子, *sanmaozi* 三毛子), and extremely servile. It is not a coincidence that it is he who triggers the course of events that will lead to Jia Baoyu's retreat into the Civilised Realm. When Wang Wei'er, kneeling at the side of the street and begging the foreign soldiers to pardon him, catches a glimpse of Jia Baoyu who is jokingly pointing out to an English soldier (with whom he speaks in English) the tragicomic situation that followed the botched rebellion, the kneeling Boxer is suddenly resolved to kill him. In order to avoid being dragged into his madness ("This person is truly unpredictable, in the blink of an eye he developed murdering intentions [toward me]"; "Wang Wei'er was really evil and treacherous"), Jia Baoyu decides to leave the capital and to head back to Shanghai.⁵²

These misguided attempts of appropriation on the part of the colonised Chinese are not directed only outward, towards the coloniser's economic and cultural domains, but they are also directed inward, or rather self-ward. Within the encoded disparity of the colonial relation, the will to re-adapt one's own cultural capital and to overcome the constant "complex of dependency and inadequacy" of the colonised is as strong as the contrasting desire to deny it and replace it with that of the coloniser. In Wu Jianren's novel, both these directions – the first one toward a radical denial of the self, the second toward an intransigent denial of the other – are revealed in their fallacy. It is striking, in this perspective, the quick dismissal and the pitiless depiction of the Chinese "tradition" intended as a self-referential system whose authority is based on reverence and haziness: after leaving Beijing, Jia Baoyu heads back to Shanghai and then to Hankou and Wuchang. Here he is convinced by a young scholar to come to his school and audit a lesson of a

⁵² “這種人真是野性難馴,一轉眼間,便生了個殺人惡念”,“王威兒種人真是刁惡奸險。” Wu Jianren, p. 247.

revered Confucian master. Jia Baoyu, waiting for his friend Wu Bohui 吳伯惠 to take care of some personal business, gladly accepts the invitation. Once again, the comedic effect of the scene relies on Wu Jianren's story-telling skills in alternating solemnity and ridiculousness:

站在當中伸申腰,便大聲念了一句“大學之道”,又嘆了一口氣道:
“單是這‘大學之道’四個字,我們講一輩子也講他不完.我且就一個極粗淺易明的,說給諸生聽.這‘大學’,外之可以齊家治國平天下,內之可以修身正心誠意致知格物.”寶玉聽到這裡,忍不住幾乎要笑了出來.⁵³

Standing at the centre of the classroom, the master straightened himself up and read aloud the four characters of “*da xue zhi dao*”, then he took a deep breath and said: “We could dedicate all our lives to these four characters alone, and yet it would not be enough. For the moment, I will explain myself in simple and clear words for you to understand: ‘On the outside the Great Learning can regulate the family and rule the state, on the inside it can help us cultivate our character and understand the natural phenomena.’” At this point of the lecture, Baoyu had to stifle a laugh.

If no solution can be found in the uncritical adoption of foreign practices, neither can it come from practices of rejective introspection and involution such as the appeal to the traditional authority of the revered Confucian master. Whereas the former choice inevitably leads to the transformation of the colonised subject into a parody of the coloniser and of itself, the latter represents in the end a delusional act of refusal which, instead of acknowledging the necessity of an epistemological change, reasserts its own defeat (“I went to listen to a conference, who knew it would have turn out into a series of jokes”).⁵⁴ Regarding Wu Jianren's novel, this particular case of cultural schizophrenia is explored and exasperated in order to make manifest the necessity of a third way out, or of a solution that could cut transversally through the dilemma and overturn the coordinates it

53 Wu Jianren, p. 257.

54 “去聽演說呢,誰知演說不曾聽著,倒聽了好些笑話.” Wu Jianren, p. 257.

stems from, hence the utopian narration.⁵⁵

In this perspective, the pivotal function of Jia Baoyu's character emerges once again, both from a strictly narratological point of view (i.e., regarding the development of the plot) and from a conceptual one (i.e., regarding the justification and the articulation of the utopian construction from its non-utopian background). In the same way each of *Xin shitou ji*'s major characters embodies to some extent the schizophrenic syndrome of the colonised subject by manifesting one or more of its symptoms, so Jia Baoyu represents the "third way out", the possibility to escape the dilemma into which the colonised subject is forced.⁵⁶ Incidentally (but, according to this logic, not surprisingly) it will be exactly because of his own virtuous traits that Jia Baoyu will be forced to abandon historical China and to repair to its utopian projection.

Jia Baoyu's dismissal of his own tradition is not categorical, nor his scepticism towards all that comes from the West is born out of a re-discovered sense of national belonging. Rather, he dismisses the appeal to tradition as an ultimately ineffective way to deal with issues that stem from much more practical circumstances, and he approaches the Western novelties for what they ultimately are, that is to say the marginal corollary of a process of contamination whose implications are much more profound than the symptoms they manifest. In criticising the Confucian master's words, Jia Baoyu is not disregarding the importance of the Four Books, rather he laments the lack of any practical solution in the master's speech, his unwillingness to address the important question of the reform of

55 Needless to say, his schizophrenic syndrome, although often posited as a defining trait of post-modernism (by Fredric Jameson) and of the post-colonial mind ("the post-colonial schizophrenic suffers from a cultural conflict, it is his world which is divided into two and is pulled in contrary directions"), develops its symptoms not when the world is split, but when it starts to show the signs of its splitting; see Surya N. Pandey (ed.), *Writing in a Post-Colonial Space*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1999, p. 36.

56 As we have seen, schizophrenic is the character of Wang Wei'er; Xue Pan, weak-minded and gullible, is the slave who succumbs consciously to the master's will; Beiming, clueless and hopeless, is dazzled by modernity's will-o-the-wisp; the old Confucian master masks is delusional, and masks his denial behind the Classics.

the country, and in the end his complete unawareness of those disciplines, such as economics and finance, that could be actually useful to “regulate the family and rule the state”. Jia Baoyu is proficient in the study of the classics too, and as a matter of fact he proves this unquestionably by schooling one of the master’s students on the recurrence of the words “reform” (維新) and “conservatism” (守舊) in the Chinese philosophical canon, despite the young student’s claim that those concepts, originating from Japanese loans, were unworthy to take into consideration for the salvation of the country.

Ironically, it is this seemingly harmless display of erudition (which could be otherwise read as the definitive proof of Jia Baoyu’s “Chineseness”) and, in particular, the mention of the word “reform” (維新) to lead to the arrest and imprisonment of Jia Baoyu. Two days after his erudite disquisition with the argumentative student who invited Jia Baoyu to the master’s lesson, the Stone is arrested and imprisoned with vague accusations of criminal conspiracy after his unclear associations with rebels and the like. Jia Baoyu had been warned before: “You don’t understand”, his new acquaintance Wu Bohui told him, “reform in itself is a good thing, but to the two characters of the word *weixin* you have to add *dang*, the character for ‘party’” (你不知道, 維新本是一件好事, 但是維新兩個字之下, 加上一個黨字), “at the moment there are two parties, the reformists and the conservatives . . . and it is the reformists that the authorities despise the most” (此刻有了個新舊黨界 . . . 官場最恨的是新黨).⁵⁷ The reasons behind Jia Baoyu’s arrest are as arbitrary and coincidental, as arbitrary will be his liberation in the subsequent chapters: “The other day, didn’t you argue with some student about reforms and restoration? Well, I asked many people around, and apparently it was the master’s pupil the one that you have offended [and who had denounced you]” (你不和那學生駁論什麼維新守舊麼? . . . 我也

57 Wu Jianren, p. 254.

打聽了許多人,才打聽出來:那個學生,便是這位鹽督的得意門生).⁵⁸

The reason we think it is worthwhile to dwell upon such an apparently transient turn of the plot (Jia Baoyu's chapter in prison) is that through this particular chapter a new level of fabulation is encoded in the architecture of Wu Jianren's novel. With the arrest, the imprisonment and the liberation of Jia Baoyu, the tenor of the novel shifts significantly from the mainly *empirical* mode of narration that characterises the first half of the novel, to the more decidedly *fictional* mode that will characterise the second half.⁵⁹ Whereas it is true that the introduction of the character of Jia Baoyu at the beginning of the novel throws off the coordinates of the "real" upon which any empirical narration should be anchored, the first half of *Xin shitou ji* is nevertheless undeniably "realistic", as it unfolds ostensibly within the realm of possibilities allowed by the historical period in which the plot is set. In this section, it is only the eccentric character of Jia Baoyu that provokes our suspension of disbelief, not the events and the figures with which and whom he is involved. Jia Baoyu's experience is circumscribed within the realm of plausibility and it could happen, at least in theory, to any of the readers of Wu Jianren's novel.

The arrest of Jia Baoyu, although a seemingly inconsistent twist in the character's journey of discovery (as he will be freed a few pages later), marks nevertheless a contamination of the realistic dominant of the novel's first half with the *fictional* register that characterises the second. This shift is signalled in the text by an unprecedented recurrence of references to the semantic field of the dream and to that of the cognitive estrangement. Even though the entire structure of Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* could be practically summarised in terms of a radical substitution of the first section's *empiricism*

58 Wu Jianren, p. 264.

59 We are referring here to the distinction elaborated by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in their book *The Nature of Narration* (published in 1966), in which the authors posit the possibility of two anti-theoretical modes of narration: "the empirical, whose primary allegiance is to the real, and the *fictional*, whose primary allegiance is to the ideal"; see David Lodge, "The Novelist at the Crossroads", *Critical Quarterly*, 1969, vol. 11, n. 2, p. 105, and also Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

with the utopian *fictionality* of the second, this transition is not clear-cut, rather it stems and develops in the intermediary chapters of the novel. Here the reader's coordinates are undermined, and the borders between the old world and the new gradually fall apart. Scattered among these chapters are many textual signifiers that hint to the possibility of such a transition. Such are the terms through which Jia Baoyu's experience is presented to the reader: "[Imprisoned] JiaBaoyu felt that he was being carried away in a dream" (睡夢中覺得有人將自己抬動); "He did not know if he was dead or not" (到底不知自己是死了不是); "Dreaming, he felt his body was floating lightly, as if it were carried by the wind. His mind was lost in a dream when . . ." (睡夢之中, 仍覺得身子輕飄飄的, 隨風飄蕩, 正在夢魂顛倒了之際); "I felt like I was dreaming, and I still do not understand how did I get here" (我猶如做夢一般, 直到此刻還不明白); "As I think of here, I cannot but feel that I have lost my mind" (想到這裡, 不覺六神無主).⁶⁰

Sentenced to death without any possibility of appeal, Jia Baoyu spends more than ten days in prison, where he gets sick and gradually loses all hope. His liberation eventually comes from the intervention of Wu Bohui, who manages to get in touch with the old Confucian master and obtain from him an amnesty by appealing to his pride and vanity. Jia Baoyu's imprisonment plays a key role in the character's experience: disillusioned by the sad turn that his own world has taken, unable to "mend the heaven" (補天) and find his own place in it, Jia Baoyu decides to leave Wuchang, return back to Shanghai and head back from there to Mount Qinggeng, atop of which the Stone's human vicissitudes began in the first place. As the moment of transition to the utopian journey approaches, the plot swerves into the erratic: back in Shanghai, Jia Baoyu's receives a letter from his old pal Xue Pan, who claims he has managed to reach an idyllic village by the name of *Ziyou cun*

⁶⁰ These fragments are taken from chapters 19 and 20 of *Xin shitou ji*. In terms of word recurrence, this particular shift of the lexicon is meaningful, and impossible to overlook.

自由村 (“The village of freedom”): “This place is wonderful, and it really is free . . .

Brother, believe me, come visit this place, I am telling you the truth” (此處地方甚好, 真是自由自在 . . . 賢弟不妨來游一次, 方知吾言之不謬也).⁶¹

Intrigued by his friend’s peculiar letter, Jia Baoyu reveals once again his fleeting yet inquisitive disposition: he decides to postpone his retirement to Mount Qinggeng and he allows his willingness to explore and understand to overcome his recent disillusionment: “Recently I have been hearing a lot of people talking a big deal about this ‘freedom’, so now I want to see with my own eyes the freedom of this Village of Freedom” (因為我近來聽人家說的那自由有多少好處, 要去看看那自由村的自由).⁶² Ignoring his friend Wu Bohui’s persisting uneasiness concerning the whole unexpected enterprise, Jia Baoyu and Beiming set for their new journey and embark on a boat headed to the province of Shandong.

With Jia Baoyu’s decision to follow Xue Pan’s indications and head toward *Ziyou cun*, the novel’s first sections approaches its epilogue, which unfolds swiftly and not devoid of irony. On the way between the city of Yantai 煙台 and Jinan 濟南, the two heroes decide to pay homage to Confucius by visiting his birthplace in Qufu 曲阜. As the night is approaching and the place is still far, the two stop by a hostel along the road. During that night, and near the birthplace of the country’s founding father, Jia Baoyu and Beiming are robbed twice. As the two protagonists manage to escape from the hostel where the first of the two attempts of robbery takes place, the tone of the narration veers once more toward the fantastic register. The sky is dark and the dawn is yet to come when Jia Baoyu and Beiming are attacked again, this time on the road: a dart shot from the woods scares away Baoyu and Beiming’s horses, while torches light up all around; Beiming is

61 Wu Jianren, p. 272.

62 Wu Jianren, p. 274.

paralysed by fear and stands motionless beside Jia Baoyu as the latter is ready to fend the bandits off with the aid of a pistol he had bought for precaution in Shanghai before leaving for the journey. The scuffle ends quickly, the scene is surreal: the bandits are scared away not by the pistol, but rather by the figure of Beiming, which appears to have turned into the wooden statue of an immortal, “What!? Did we just shoot an arrow to a Bodhisattva?” (呀! 怎麼射了菩薩) Exclaims one of the bandits. Baoyu, equally confused but of readier wit, takes advantage of the situation: “You fools, you have shot a dart at my servant, what are you still looking at now?” (好狗才, 你射傷了我的家人, 還看什麼?) He shouts at the bandits. The outlaws are scared out of their wits and quickly run away back into the woods. The sky is getting clearer, dawn is approaching, but the horses are gone, and Jia Baoyu is standing beside what looks like a wooden statue of Beiming: “I never believed in ghosts or spirits and the like, but this oddity happened in front of my own eyes” (自己從來不信那妖狐鬼怪的, 此時卻被我親見這等怪事).⁶³

As the sun slowly rises in front of him, Jia Baoyu realises that he is lost. Having no choice but to leave the wooden statue of Beiming behind, he decides to walk forward: “Looking closely, he could see a light glowing in the distance, its rays were shining as countless good omens. There, where the light came from, one could make out the shape of an archway” (再細看時, 隻見遠遠的祥光萬道, 瑞氣千條. 那祥光瑞氣之中, 隱隱現出一座牌坊來).⁶⁴ The archway marks the borders of the “Civilised Realm”. From this gate, Jia Baoyu will leave behind the “Barbarian Realm” of *fin-de-siècle* China and the “Falsely Civilised States” – the European nations – that fostered its decline. It is in this way – with a progressive fragmentation of the plot’s realistic foundations and its sudden, oneirical interruption – that the first section of *Xin shitou ji* comes to an end. Thus the backdrop of

63 Wu Jianren, pp. 278–279.

64 Wu Jianren, pp. 278–279.

history is set and the shadow play of the modern utopian spectacle can begin.

CHAPTER 5: THE CELEBRATION OF THE UTOPIAN SPECTACLE

The conquering nations exported their machines and their organization through their armies. The vanquished peoples, in a state of mind compounded of admiration and fear, adopted the machines, which came to replace their gods. Not only were the machines the means their conquerors had used to subdue them, but the machines represented the possible means for liberation from these conquerors. In these colonies traffic in arms and in all the instruments of power began to flourish as a means of provoking insurrection. At first, rebellion was incoherent, but to the degree that these peoples became better organized and technicized, rebellion became a national affair.

Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*¹

¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, New York, Vintage Books, 1964, p. 116.

In the fifth and last chapter of this research we will try to delve further into the narrative matter of the novels of Wu Jianren 吳趸人 and Lu Shi'e 陸士諤. In doing so, we will try to deconstruct the late Qing utopian imaginary not from its historical and conceptual negatives – Edward Bellamy's imported blueprint, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and Chen Tianhua's 陳天華 discourses of approximation, *Xin shitou ji's* 新石頭記 satirical component – but from its actual, positive, overt representation in the text. In this perspective, Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* and Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 may be considered the two most interesting specimens of the late Qing utopian genre, as both the two texts deal extensively with the narrative representation of the reformist ideal at the core of the utopian imagination of the late empire, which is given a symbolical and allegorical arrangement in the text. Even though the two novels here under analysis build upon similar conceptual premises, the two texts differ vastly for what concerns the range of their imaginaries and the sheer imaginative power of their authors. Whereas Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* represents what we may consider as a textbook execution of the utopian formula in the form of a novel, Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* expands and stretches the boundaries of the *xiaoshuo* 小說 form to such an extent that his text defies any attempt of formal and conceptual closure.

In his representation of the future of new China, Lu Shi'e deploys effortlessly the tropes of the utopian genre. The *carnet de voyage*-like structure of the narration; the development of the plot as a journey of discovery and enlightenment; the Socratic-like tone of the dialogues between the guest and its guide; the overall (impossibly) nostalgic nuance of the narrator's voice; the oneiric framework of the set-up: all these elements concur to create a perfect specimen of the genre, a beautiful, yet somehow uninspired execution of the late Qing utopian spectacle. But *Xin Zhongguo's* seemingly flawless construction

results also in the novel's two-dimensionality. Whereas it is true that this novel provides a precious contribution to the imaginary institution/construction of the city of Shanghai as the perpetual epitome of China's modernism, the focus of the narration is univocal, as the narrator – an internal narrator, the eponymous character of Lu Shi'e – rarely abandons his perspective of disorientation and fascination, his child-like bedazzlement in front of the lights of the shadow play, nor he ever questions what is paraded in front of him.² Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* is in the end a façade whose architecture holds up only through a carefully arranged play of perspectives, it is a Potemkin village (city, country), whose visitor is forced to admire only through a narrow, orchestrated itinerary.

The same certainly cannot be said about Wu Jianren's eclectic *Xin shitou ji*. The novel's linguistic inventiveness; its formal peculiarity; the vitality of its characters; its re-elaboration of the lexicon of tradition as well as its ironic jabs against it; the sheer imaginative scope of its author's utopian cartography; the puzzling conclusion of Jia Baoyu's narrative trajectory: all these elements confirm Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* as the most representative novels of the utopian genre, if not one of the most interesting fictional works of the period. Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* is a novel-world whose value lies not in its *trompe-l'œil* qualities of deception, but rather in its capacity to throw off any perspective line that is applied to its landscape. In the development of this chapter, we will thus try to imagine Lu Shi'e's idealistic representation of the city of Shanghai as yet another region within the borders of Wu Jianren's map of the Chinese modern utopia.

As David Wang remarks in his essay on the “translated modernity” of the New

2 The idea of Shanghai as the urban epitome of Chinese modernity is a subtle one, as it is in equal measure a rather reasonable historical abstraction (Shanghai was at the frontier of the experience of the Chinese colonial modernity) and a fictional construction. Indeed it is difficult to argue against Leo Ou-fan Lee's beautiful portrayal of the city's golden era in Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999; but it is also difficult not to see behind it the persistence of what is in the end an elegant but imagined construction, an invention that resists even the most refined attempts at its deconstruction. One might say that Shanghai was “modern” only when the idea of “modernity” was yet to be encoded in the categories we have come to inherit today.

Story of the Stone, a key for the understanding of Wu Jianren's eclectic masterpiece can be found in the final chapter of the novel, even though this understanding is also bound to the recognition of the novel's irreducible reluctance to any type of conceptual closure: "The Stone's narrative of modernization has to be conveyed in a multilingual discourse, but once understood, the tale only more forcefully questions the legitimacy of those who are qualified to read it and translate it". With the acknowledgement of a "multilingual discourse" in the narrative of the modern Stone, Wang is addressing the absolute peculiarity of what he refers to as Wu Jianren's "final hermetic gesture": the novel's conclusion.³

In the final chapter of his novel, Wu Jianren hints back at Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 original *Story of the Stone* by framing his own story as a narrative of "translating" and "deciphering". In the final chapter of the *new* Story of the Stone, Wu Jianren mirrors Cao Xueqin's masterpiece by describing the "origin" of his own story as the accident of yet another misplaced stone. In many senses, this new story is indeed the result of a displacement. At the end of his utopian journey, before bidding Lao Shaonian 老少年 farewell and leaving the Civilised Realm forever, Jia Baoyu decides to give his faithful Virgil a token of his gratitude: his own jade pendant. As the main character leaves the scene, the jade pendant slips from Lao Shaonian's hands and it falls into a cavern on the slopes of the Miraculous Mountain (靈臺方寸山). When Lao Shaonian tries to recover the gift, he realises that Jia Baoyu's pendant has transformed into a stone slab, a stele whose inscription narrates the new story of the Stone, that is to say the text of the novel that the reader is enjoying.

With the incorporation of a meta-fictional level into the texture of the novel, Wu

3 David Der-wei Wang, "Translating Modernity" in David Pollard, *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840–1918*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997, pp. 326–327.

Jianren elegantly seals the structure of the text by evoking at the same time the *Dream's* play of contaminations between the real and the unreal, between truth and falsehood, yet *Xin shitou ji's* strategy of misdirection culminates elsewhere. In the novel's very last paragraph, the Chinese reader is faced, unexpectedly, with an English poem:

All Foreigners thou shalt worship;
Be always in sincere friendship.
This the way to get bread to eat and money to spend.
And upon this thy family's living will depend;
There's one thing nobody can guess:
Thy countrymen thou canst oppress.

譯文：

你崇拜所有的洋人，
老會顯出誠摯的神情。
這是獲得面包與金錢的妙法，
且一家人靠此為生。
隻是一件事沒能想到：
你的同胞無法容忍。⁴

As Juan Wang remarks, it would not be incorrect to gloss this English interpolation of the Chinese text as yet another “mocking [of] those who made a living through adherence to the New Learning” by the part of the author, but such a reading would be very reductive, as it would undercut the interesting implications that lie underneath the surface of this linguistic contamination.⁵ On the contrary, elaborating on David Wang's observations, we might say that the inclusion of such an estranging, alienating element at the end of the novel does not only represent a “final hermetic gesture”, but also a final *hermeneutic* gesture of both closure and aperture towards the reader.

The English short poem locks the reader of *Xin shitou ji* in a sort of double-bind: as

4 Wu Jianren 吴趼人, *Xin shitou ji* 新石头记, Nanchang, Jiangxi renmin chubanshe 江西人民出版社, 1988, pp. 408–409 (the English and the Chinese text are presented in Wu Jianren's novel in the same order they are quoted here).

5 Juan Wang, *Merry Laughter and Angry Curses: The Shanghai Tabloid Press, 1897–1911*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2012.

Lao Shaonian is reading the Stone's inscription, he learns that "only those noble men who deeply love their country are entitled to read the story of the Stone" (必要熱心血誠, 愛種愛國之君子... 方能走得到, 看得見), whereas "those fowl individuals who fawn toward their foreign masters will only be able to read this strange text [of the English poem]" (若是吃糞媚外的人... 也全然看不見那篇奇文).⁶ The novel's conclusion is indeed unsettling:

Few readers of Wu Jianren's time knew English. But for those who have heeded the mysterious poem's hermeneutic call and learned English, the poem is not a reward, but a warning; far for permitting entry into the mysteries of the Other World, knowledge of the West further enmires Chinese in the corruption of This World.⁷

With the final foreign interference of this "strange text" (奇文), Wu Jianren posits a paradoxical choice between languages, while at the same time admitting the necessity of what we may term as a multi-lingual, or translingual and thus "trans-liminal" awareness. By expressing his final warning in English, Wu Jianren is appealing not to the common reader – that is whom we may expect the Chinese intellectual to warn and to enlighten – but those whose "Chineseness" had been already compromised by the intrusion of a foreign language (may it be the English language, the language of technology, the language of reform: the poem here becomes a metonymy). It is to these unaware worshippers – the English-speaking Chinese literati who are being drawn toward their own idealised construction of "the West" – that Wu Jianren addresses his plea, his call for awareness.

By juxtaposing two different languages in a paradoxical, double-bind conundrum, Wu Jianren reasserts once again the necessary "in-betweenness" of the utopian text; the inherent fragility of the imaginary constructions that utopia enables; and in the end the

6 Wu Jianren, p. 408.

7 Wang, p. 327.

actual “utopian-ness” of any utopian project which is conceived and posited as an attempt to indulge in the delusion of a self-gazing restoration played out according to the terms of an imaginary *guocui* (國粹), or in a West-oriented reformism projected toward an equally imagined idea of post-colonial emancipation. It is only by acknowledging the unstable position and condition of the text and the utopian construction that it will be possible to avoid its dismissal as a mere Pindaric flight or a bitter compendium of the Chinese semi-colonial idiosyncrasies, and rather to recognise it as an attempt via the form of the novel to dismantle the vicious dialectic which support both those two misreadings.

Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* is a novel-world. Jia Baoyu’s progression through the utopian landscape of the Civilised Realm is a movement of assimilation within a conceptual system that encompasses all human experiences and contingencies. Whereas the first half of the novel is purposely presented as an erratic itinerary through *fin-de-siècle* China whose disjointed pace responds to the disorientation of a time gone out of joint, the second half of the novel emerges on the contrary in the perfection of its allegorical geometry and in the *ratio* of its experience.

As Jia Baoyu is wandering along a road called “Confucian Street” (孔道), which “he thinks it only means ‘main road’” (這“孔道”兩個字,大約就是“大路”的意思了), the hero is welcomed by the character of Lao Shaonian, a strong and fiery-looking person, whose first words of welcome give us the measure of the kind of “civilisation” heralded by the Civilised Realm: “Our borders are really vast, but as long as its visitors abide to its civil rules, no one will be rejected” (敝境甚是寬大,但能遵守文明規制的,來者不拒).⁸ Even though the utopia of the Civilised Realm is often referred to by its inhabitants in terms of demarcation, such as “our border” (敝境) or “the borders of civilisation” (文明境界), the impermeable model of the Western-oriented nation-state is rejected in favour of the

8 Wu Jianren, p. 280.

porousness of a “culturalist” identity that is “based on a common historical heritage and acceptance of shared beliefs”.⁹ It is true that Wu Jianren’s imaginary may be considered a conservative one, yet its aim is another, that is to overcome both the Western condescension towards the Chinese and the deranged, Boxer-like nationalism that developed against it by re-establishing and “re-mapping” the core values of a Chinese civilisation which is not any more seen as a monolithic accumulation of self-justifying precepts, but rather as the historical articulation of a set of humane, self-evident, universal values.

Jia Baoyu’s experience in the modern utopia transcends the character’s subjectivity. His gaze, assisted by Lao Shaonian’s guidance, soars to a bird’s eye perspective and it is incorporated in the new cartography of the Civilised Realm. The “civilisation” of the Civilised Realm stems from the apparently flawless overlapping of the territory with the map, and of the map with the language. Wu Jianren’s utopia is first of all that of a Confucian *datong* 大同 in which the language of tradition is rectified and rearranged (or “re-enssembled”, according to Castoriadis’ perspective) within the utopian geography.

Jia Baoyu is introduced to the new utopian cartography right from the beginning of his new journey of discovery. His itinerary is not left to coincidence, but it is rather charted in advance. In chapter 22 of the novel (the first chapter after the *translation* of the character to the Civilised Realm), the character of Lao Shaonian elucidates the coordinates within which Jia Baoyu’s journey will then unfold:

敝境共是二百萬區，每區一百方裡，分東西南北中五部。每部統轄四十萬區，每區用一個字作符識。從一至十萬，編成號數。那作符識的字，中央是“禮，樂，文，章”四十字；東方是“仁，義，禮，智”四個字；南方是“友，慈，恭，信”四個字；西方是“剛，強，勇，毅”四個字；北方

9 James Harrison in James Townsend, “Chinese Nationalism”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, January 1992, n. 27, p. 98.

是“忠,孝,廉,節”四個字.現在這裡,便是強字第一百區,我們省稱,隻叫“強一百”.¹⁰

Within our borders are two million districts, each one of them has an area of one hundred square *li*. The country is divided into five regions: the East, the West, the South, the North and the Centre. Each region is comprised of four hundred thousand districts, and each district is identified according to a particular sign and a number from one to one hundred thousand. The Central districts are divided into Li, Le, Wen and Zhang; The Eastern district are divided into Ren, Yi, Li and Zhi; in the South are the You, Ci, Gong and Xin districts; in the West the Gang, Qiang, Yong and Yi; and in the North are the Zhong, Xiao, Lian, and Jie districts. Here we are in the one hundredth district of the Qiang province, so we call this particular district “The one hundredth Qiang”.

This section could be translated in a different and much more eloquent way: “The North is governed by Order, Rituals, Music and *Wen*; the East is governed by Benevolence, Justice and Wisdom . . .”, and so on. The Chinese modern utopia is presented to the reader as first of all a *literal* re-arrangement of symbols, and its overall symbolism could not be more overt. To the Chinese reader, and even to the less cultivated one, each of the 19 characters used in the description of the utopian geography is strongly connoted.¹¹

Order, Ritual, Music, Filial Piety, Benevolence, Wisdom, Justice, Friendship, Kindness, Respect, Honesty, Firmness, Strength, Courage, Determination, Loyalty, Moral Integrity: each one of these signs circles around and arches back to the core concepts of a Confucian tradition which at the end of the century was perceived as a displaced or misplaced discourse that could no longer be applied to its own society. The Confucian ideal of *zhengming*, according to which at the basis of a virtuous society is the concordance of each name to its function and, in Castoriadis’ words, the coherence of the symbols to their signified representations, is restated and reasserted in the geography of the utopian territory, and applied in the workings of the new society: “When the Grand Course was pursued, a public and a common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents,

10 Wu Jianren, p. 285.

11 Even though each of the five regions has four “provinces”, the provinces’ names are only 19 (and not 20 as one may imagine) because the character “ritual” (禮) is used twice.

virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony”.¹²

Wu Jianren’s utopian construction is revealed in its ambiguity and “in-betweenness”, as it is both an “absolute invention”, in the sense that it is a “story [or a space] imagined in its entirety”, but also a “slippage, a displacement of meaning in which available symbols are invested with other significations than their ‘normal’ or canonical significations”. Indeed, as Castoriadis remarks, “We can never get outside of language, but our mobility within language is limitless and allows us to question everything, including language itself and our relation to it”.¹³ The Chinese modern utopian landscape portrayed by Wu Jianren is first of all a utopia of the language, in which the neologisms of modernity, which are linguistic by-products of the colonial encounter, are arranged and hierarchised (or “re-enssembled”) into a new map and a new territory.

Wu Jianren’s cartographic re-imagination of the Chinese utopia evokes within the imaginative space of the novel the efforts of late Qing scholars and geographers Wei Yuan 魏源 and Xu Jiyou 徐繼畬 in their attempts to reshape the Chinese traditional geographic imagination: from the perspective of the representation of the country’s “geographical identity”, Wu Jianren’s utopian map could be considered at the same level with geographic treatises such as Wei Yuan’s *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 (Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms) of 1843 and Xu Jiyou’s *Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛環志略 (A Short Account of the

12 Fragment taken from *The Book of Rites (Liji 禮記)*, translated by James Legge in Ch’u Chai and Winberg Chai (eds.), *Li Chi, Book of Rites: An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions*, New York, University Books, 1967; and also quoted in Dudley Tyng, “The Confucian Utopia”, *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, March 1934, vol. 54, n. 1, pp. 67–69.

13 “Nous parlons d’imaginaire lorsque nous voulons parler de quelque chose d’‘inventé’ – qu’il s’agisse d’une invention ‘absolue’ (‘une histoire imaginée de toutes pièces’), ou d’un glissement, d’un déplacement de sens, où des symboles déjà disponibles sont investis d’autres significations que leurs significations ‘normales’ ou canoniques”; “Nous ne pouvons jamais sortir du langage, mais notre mobilité dans le langage n’a pas de limites et nous permet de tout mettre en question, y compris même le langage et notre rapport à lui.” Cornelius Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, Villepreux, Éditions du Soleil, 1975, pp. 189–190. The English translation here quoted is taken from Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987, although some passages have been integrated and amended.

Maritime Circuit) of 1849.¹⁴ Yet despite *and* because of its self-evident rationality, Wu Jianren's map of the modern Chinese utopia is problematic. By re-assessing its Chinese "centre" (中), the author purposefully overturns the geography of marginality imposed by the European colonial enterprise in China by refusing to acknowledge its basic dichotomy of colonising centre vs. colonised periphery. Nevertheless, Wu Jianren's narration does not simply revolve around a gesture of revanchist reversal in which for example London or Paris are replaced by some Chinese modern metropolis (as it happens in Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* and *Xin Shanghai*, for example), nor is his utopian scenario made to unfold in that way. *Xin shitou ji*'s utopian map could be considered on the contrary an attempt at short-circuiting the dichotomy as such.

By setting a map before Jia Baoyu's itinerary, and so by hinting at the presence of a transcendent scheme behind the character's subjective experience, Wu Jianren is working at the "degree zero" of his utopian construction, he is performing an "originary operation" of institution of his utopia's "central imaginary". Scope of this operation on the part of the author is the institution of those fundamental rules and coordinates on whose background the "peripheral imaginary" of the character's subjective experience is played out.¹⁵ In doing so, Wu Jianren manages to avoid the pitfalls of restating an inherently biased dichotomy by positing a centre but also, and more importantly, by denying his map any centrifugal or centripetal perspective. What is interesting in Wu Jianren's re-definition of the colonial coordinates is the fact that his map is neither centralised nor decentralised: its centre is empty. Jia Baoyu's itinerary in the Civilised Realm is not a journey of approximation toward the ideal centre of a Chinese Amaurot that is presented as the radiating epicentre

14 On the figure of Wei Yuan 魏源, see Jane Kate Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China's Rediscovery of the Maritime World*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984; on the figure of Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲, see Fred W. Drake, *China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yü and his Geography of 1848*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975.

15 Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, pp. 193–197.

and epitome of a Chinese postcolonial future, but on the contrary the character's movement in the text is rather a circular one, a movement of assimilation that, although intercalated by the occasional colourful "utopistic" anecdote, is eventually direction-less and event-less.

The nature of Jia Baoyu's utopian itinerary confirms the substantial lack of orientation and hierarchy of *Xin shitou ji*'s cartography: his appearance at the Civilised Realm's borders is fortuitous and coincidental; his final separation from the guide Lao Shaonian is swift, almost careless; his experiences of the utopian society are insular as if they were separated acts, or scenes, of a spectacle; the anecdotes he partakes in could be happening in any of the thousand districts of the Realm; in one occasion the character finds himself in Africa, and in another one he is suddenly catapulted at the bottom of the ocean, twenty thousand leagues under the sea near the Arctic Circle. Even though these considerations for what regard the "political" intentions of the novel may seem far-fetched, it would be quite unreasonable to ignore the narrative architecture at which all these textual signals seem to hint.

In the same way the utopian map is presented as an act of cartographic *zhengming*, so the rejection of the colonial complexes of inferiority and dependence is reinforced throughout the novel also by a playful rearrangement of the characters' names. In Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* each name is a sign that evokes the ideological framework of the novel. Beside its obvious daoist blueprint, Lao Shaonian's own name ("Old Youth") echoes Liang Qichao's "Shaonian Zhongguo shuo" 少年中國說 (Ode to young China), one of his most famous essays in which the late Qing reformist philosopher draws from the image of Giuseppe Mazzini's "Young Italy" in order to reject the notion of China as a vestigial

empire of the past and celebrate its novelty as a nation.¹⁶ Wu Jianren's other references and allusions are often more overt: the scientist who is in charge of the weather of the Civilised Realm, which is kept in a state of perpetual Spring by the systematic use of weather balloons, is named Hua Xing 華興 ("Chinese prosperity"); Hua Zili 華自立 ("China stands on its own") is the name of his father, a scientist who helped the rulers of the Civilised Realm to establish the country; Liu Xuesheng 劉學笙 (a semi-homophone of *liuxuesheng* 留學生, "visiting student") is the name of another traveller who managed to enter the Civilised Realm while looking for *Ziyou cun* but who was rejected at its frontiers because of his corrupted moral nature.

Wu Jianren's linguistic play of allusions via the characters' names becomes evident when, in chapter 23, the reader is introduced to the rulers of the Civilised Realm. As we will see, Wu Jianren's new China is neither a republic, nor a constitutional monarchy. The Chinese utopian realm is rather presented as an enlightened autocracy that has matured into a functional Daoist anarchy whose stability rests upon the education of its people. In a country where the improvement of public education has refined its society to the point that each of its members has become acutely aware of his or her own function and responsibility toward the welfare of the community, the management of the governing institution is left spontaneously to those who have proven themselves to be the most suited for the task:

老少年道：“先生復姓東方，名強，表字文明。所生三子，一女，長子東方英，次子東方德，三子東方法，女名東方美。父子五人，俱有經天緯地之才，定國安邦之志。敝境日就太平繁盛，皆是此父子五人之功。”¹⁷

16 On Liang Qichao's "Young China", see Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 36–37, and Xiaobing Tang, "'Poetic Revolution,' Colonization and Form" in Rebecca E. Karl and Peter G. Zarrow, *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002.

17 Wu Jianren, p. 287.

“The name [of our ruler] is Dongfang Qiang,” Lao Shaonian told Jia Baoyu, “but he is also known as Dongfang Wenming. He has three sons and one daughter: the older is called Dongfang Ying, the second is Dongfang De, the youngest is Dongfang Fa, and his daughter’s name is Dongfang Mei. These five people had the ability to govern, and the brought peace to the country. If now we leave in peace and prosperity, it is because of their success.”

Names are omens, and *Xin shitou ji*’s names are omens of a Chinese nation on the verge of its coalescence. The nomenclature of the Civilised Realm’s ruling family’s genealogical tree blatantly reveals the rhetoric of reversal and rejection on which the architecture of Wu Jianren’s novel is grounded: the Civilised Realm was founded by Dongfang Wenming (東方文明), or “Eastern Civilisation”, which is also Dongfang Qiang (東方強), the “the Strength of the East”; ancillary to the “Eastern Civilisation” are the marginalised nations of America (東方美; “Eastern America” or “Beauty of the East”) and her three older siblings England (東方英; “Eastern England”), Germany (東方德; “Eastern Germany” or “Virtue of the East), and France (東方法, “Eastern France” or “The way of the East), that is to say those colonial powers that, by threatening the integrity of the Chinese empire in the first place, triggered its re-imagination and re-construction as a modern nation-state.

Linguistic reinvention, in the form of a *zhengming*-like rearrangement of the relations of signification through which the social imaginary is built, is a constitutive element in the construction of the late Qing utopia. In his analysis of “The Institution and the Symbolic”, Castoriadis reminds us how the constitution of a new symbolic order (that is, the symbolic order of a new society) is never free, but it is rather bound to “*ce qui se trouve déjà là*” (what is already there), and that this persistence of the old resists in the

texture of the new language despite the new symbolic order that the latter endorses.¹⁸ In the case of the late Qing narrative utopias, which are *fictional* institutions of new symbolic orders, the form of the novel allows the rearrangement of a language which is “already there” into the new symbolic order of an ideal society which is not.

Considering that in this study we are concerned with the imagination of the new China through the form of the *novel* as a quintessential product of linguistic invention, these reflections over the linguistic nature of the late Qing utopian discourse may appear redundant, yet they are not. These novels (and Wu Jianren’s masterpiece in particular) appear to be characterised by a peculiar attention to the *performative* function of language in the process of re-invention of the Real. This perspective allows us to diagnose many of the *textual* idiosyncrasies of the novels here under analysis not just as a series of inconsequential fragments of harmless reveries, but rather as symptoms of (and attempts at) a larger narrative whose material spills over the borders (the function) of the *xiaoshuo* form and the ideological and political project it entails.

As we will see, linguistic invention (especially in relation to the discourse of science and technology) plays a crucial role both in Lu Shi’e’s imagination of new China in *Xin Zhongguo*, and in Wu Jianren’s imaginary construction of the Civilised Country, as well his attempts to integrate the moral code that he re-elaborates from the Confucian tradition within the coordinates of the new utopian modernity. Yet on many other occasions the utopian imaginary is conveyed not only through the invention of new words or the rearrangement of the old ones, but also, and more interestingly, through their denial. In Lu Shi’e’s new China, for example, words such as “prostitute” and “brothel” are unheard of, and their mention by the oblivious utopian guest opens up to hilarious consequences:

18 “La révolution créait un nouveau langage, et avait des choses nouvelles à dire; mais les dirigeants voulaient dire avec des mots nouveaux des choses anciennes” (The revolution was creating a new language, and had new things to say; but the leaders wanted to say the same old things with new words). Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, p. 182.

我記得,這裡就是香粉弄,從前是著名的野雞窠,忽見巍樓高聳,大廈連雲,盡變了洋式房屋,一家子招牌上,大書“凌雲飛車公司”。我問:“這裡的野雞,都遷向何處去了?”詠棠不懂。友琴道:“你問的,可就是果前的野雞妓女不是?”我道:“正是。”友琴道:“現在世界,那裡還有甚野雞妓女...總之,妓女兩個字,在別國容或還有人談起,我們中國,就是談起,也沒人知道的了。”詠棠道:“友琴姊,你講的妓女不妓女,究竟是什麼件東西?...我聽了他的問,已經好笑,卻見友琴問他道:“你猜妓女是什麼件東西?”詠棠道:“要我猜麼?我曉得不是植物,定是建築物。”我忍不住,早笑彎了腰。¹⁹

I realised that we were now in Xiangfen Alley, a place most famous in the past for its brothels. Yet the tall and impressive building that used to be there had been turned into a Western-style edifice with a big signboard that said “Lingyun Flying Cars Company”.

“The prostitutes that used to be here,” I asked to Youqin, “Where did they move?”

Our friend Yongtang could not understand our conversation.

“Are you talking about prostitutes as in the prostitutes of the past?”

Youqin answered.

“Yes,” I said.

“Nowadays there are no prostitutes any more... the word ‘prostitute’ may be still used in other countries, but if you mention it in our China, nobody is going to understand you.”

“Dear Youqin,” Yongtang asked, “What is this ‘prostitute’ you are talking about?”

... Her question made me want to laugh. “Try to guess,” Youqin told her, “what thing do you think it is?”

“Do you want me to guess? Well, I know for sure it is not an animal, so it definitely has to be a building.”

As she said that, I doubled up with laughter.

A similar episode can also be found in chapter 26 of Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*, in which Jia Baoyu, astounded by the level of technological proficiency reached by the Civilised Realm, asks his guide Lao Shaonian if his compatriots are not afraid of the possibility that criminals and evildoers may take advantage as well of the technological marvels that had become a common component of the Civilised Realm’s everyday life:

寶玉問道:“飛車可稱迅速神奇之極,但隻是一層,倘使做賊的也坐了

19 Lu Shi’e 陆士谔, *Xin zhongguo* 新中国, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2010, p. 109.

飛車,從空而下,偷了東西,也騰空飛去,便怎樣踩緝呢?想來此處的捕役,一定又是另有什麼不可思議的神奇手段的了。”老少年道:“敝境的捕役,非沒有神奇的手段,便連捕役也沒有一個.不是足下提起,我竟忘了這個名目了.”寶玉道:“這又是什麼原故呢?”老少年道:

“敝境近五十年來,民康物阜,夜不閉戶,路不拾遺.早就裁免了兩件事:一件是取文明字典,把“盜賊”,“奸宄”,“偷竊”等刪去;一件是從京中刑部衙門起,及各區的刑政官,警察官,一齊刪除了,衙門都改了倉庫.²⁰

“The speed of these flying cars is really impressive,” said Jia Baoyu, “but what if a thief manages to use one to flee the authorities after a robbery? Come to think of it, I am sure that the police of this place must have who knows what kinds of incredible methods and techniques to deal with these situations.”

“Indeed they would, but the point is that within our borders we do not have any police. Now that you mention it, I realise I forgot to tell you about it.”

“And what is the reason for this?”

“In the last 50 years we have enjoyed a period of great prosperity, law and order prevailed, and the society became safe. So soon we decided to get rid of two things: firstly, we expunged from our civilised vocabulary words such as “thief”, “bandit” or “evildoer”; secondly, starting from the Ministry of Punishments in the capital, and then proceeding to all its offices and prisons in each of the districts, we have turned those places into warehouses.

Similar vignettes are recurrent both in Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* and Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*: the epistemological shift upon which the utopian construction is built is reasserted in these texts through the disorientation of the expectations and the displacement of the language, whose system of significations is questioned and rewritten in the utopian text. In a similar fashion, words such as “opium” (“Didn't the Chinese [from the past] know opium was a drug?”), “foot-binding” (“A useless form of mutilation, why people were willing to do that?”), or “concubine” (“I cannot believe that people were bought and sold by their own kind”) are erased from the utopian lexicon, and – as a consequence – the social practices to which these words (used to) refer are removed from the new social imaginary.²¹

²⁰ Wu Jianren, p. 307.

²¹ “莫非中國人當時沒有知道鴉片是毒的麼”；“無端的殘毀肢體,人家怎麼都情願”；“我一竟不信,以為同系人類,那裡有賣出買進的事。” Lu Shi'e, *Xin Zhongguo*, chapter 9 *passim*.

Many aspects of the late Qing intellectual debate over the question of China's modernity emerge translated, fictionalised, transcended in the form of the novel. This phenomenon is rather obvious in its essence – each novel is in the end a product of its own times, an arrangement of the ideological subtext of history – yet the degree of its occurrence is variable. The imaginative space of the novel allows a certain critical distance, a space of elaboration: while the “small-talk” nature of the *xiaoshuo* form may undermine the authority of its extradiegetic (i.e., political) statements, its “fictionality” allows the possibility for a closure, that is to say the arrangement of the political discourse in the “future perfect mood” of China's belated modernity.²² Nevertheless, the equilibrium between the fictionalisation of the political discourse and the politicisation of the narrative form is fragile, and the abuse of the space of the novel in function of its political component may distort the form into a propagandistic outlet, and, above all, it may affect the quality of the novel as a work of art. This is what happens for example in the novels of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua, whose “execution” is burdened by the prevalence of the political component over the artistic one.²³

Both Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* and Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* are by-products of the intellectual turmoil of late-imperial China, of its self-strengthening efforts, its tendencies of Westernisation, and of the Hundred Days' Reform disappointment. These two novels, similar in their conceptual structure, differ in the width of their scope and in the range of their respective imaginaries. If the new China represented in Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* may be read as a historical utopia in which the expectations of reform shared by a large part of

22 For what regards the concept of the “future perfect mood” mode of narration, see David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 173 passim.

23 This is also the reason for which in the second chapter of this study we decided to focus on the idea of “utopian approximation”, rather than on the plots of *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* and *Shizi hou*: whereas the premises of these works provide us a precious perspective for the interpretation of the utopian genre in itself, both Liang and Chen's novels soon degenerate into political manifestos and blueprints for the revolution to come. The novel can back up a manifesto and serve as its canvas, but it cannot become one without losing those elements that make it a product of art in the first place.

the Chinese intelligentsia at the turn of the twentieth century are “realised” within the boundaries of the novel, with Wu Jianren’s *Civilised Realm* the extent of author’s act of re-institution of the Chinese imaginary is much wider, and the blueprint of the Chinese nation (on which Lu Shi’e gives shape to his own new Shanghai) is transcended in a language of absolutes.

Even though Lu Shi’e’s new China of the year 1950 is presented as an ideal projection of the reformist expectations heralded at the turn of the century by figures such as Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, Kang Youwei 康有為 and Liang Qichao, Lu Shi’e’s utopian construction remains nevertheless anchored to its colonial ties, and its identity is negotiated in the text along the coordinates of the ever-present dichotomy of a *wuguo* 吾國 or *bi jing* 敝境 (“my country”, “our boundaries”) defined against the looming otherness of a *taguo* 他國, *bieguo* 別國 or *waiguo* 外國 (the “other country”, the “foreign country”), identified in the partial, incomplete civilisations of the foreign barbarian countries (半開化的野蠻國) and of an era yet to be enlightened (未開通的時代).²⁴

Lu Shi’e’s construction of utopia thus becomes a discourse of repossession and reassertion in which the “Chineseness” of the Chinese nation is restated in a plain reversal of the colonial relations. Lu Shi’e’s new China is a constitutional state (立憲國) “whose inhabitants, from rulers to citizens, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, are all subjected to the constitution” (全國的人, 上自君主, 下至小民, 無男無女, 無老無小, 無

24 Here Arthur D. Vinton’s contaminated, dystopian identities surface again in the “we”/*wu* 吾-*bi* 敝-*wo* 我 and “us”/*ta* 他-*bie* 別-*wai* 外 of Lu Shi’e’s novel. Recalling Vinton once again, “To Let *us* now, in closing, consider hastily the benefits which the invasion of the Chinese has brought to *us*. *We* are no longer a defenseless people. . . . Chinese frugality has replaced the wasteful lavishness that prevailed in private life under the Nationalistic government. . . . What was good in Nationalism we have retained. What was bad we have discarded and replaced by what is better. Under Nationalism, individualism was reduced to a minimum; with *us* to-day it is honored and given every chance to develop” (emphasis added). Arthur D. Vinton, *Looking Further Backward*, Albany, Albany Book Company, 1890, pp. 187–188.

貴無賤,沒一個不在憲法範圍之內).²⁵ The Chinese overcoming of colonial fetters is described in the terms of the necessary result of a natural progression along a Darwinian teleological perspective applied to society and the nation. This perspective reflects that particular ideological framework – a social Darwinism of Spencerian imprint – as it had been fostered in the late Qing intellectual debate by texts such as Yan Fu’s *Tianyan lun* 天演論, the Chinese translation of Thomas H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*:

我道：“這真是盛極了！文明到這般地步，再要進化，恐怕也不能夠了。”友琴道：“那裡說得定，進化兩個字，是沒有止境的。一路進化，一路進化得上。譬如前四十年，我國比了他國，他國是何等文明，我國那一樣及得上人家！誰料才過得四十年已經跑過人家前頭了... 假使在四十年前，說到了現在，中國要怎樣的富，怎樣地強，學術怎樣地昌明，實業怎樣地發達，不要說人家聽了不肯相信，就是自己，也要說自己是夢話呢！”²⁶

“This is really impressive!” I said, “And if civilisation has reached such a level of prosperity, I wonder if there is still room for evolution any more.”

“We can’t say that for sure,” Li Youqin answered, “because evolution has no limits. If there is space to evolve, then evolution will find its way. Think for example about the last forty years: in the confrontation with the foreign countries, we managed to overcome whatever civilisation they brought forward! Who could have thought back then that in forty years we would have surpassed them . . . and if forty years ago you had said that China would rise to such strength and wealth, that its science and technology would be so advanced, and its industry and commerce so flourishing, even you yourself – let alone another – would not have believed it, and would have thought it a dream!”

Even though the closing chapters of Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* explicitly postpone any kind of pseudo-historical closure by reasserting the never-ending nature of the evolutionary principle, and by prefiguring the possibility of a *shijie guo* 世界國 (“country-world”) as the eventual goal of this evolutionary trajectory, the celebratory exchanges between the character of Lu Shi’e and his utopian host seem to imply such a closure, and

²⁵ Lu Shi’e, p. 18.

²⁶ Lu Shi’e, p. 154.

inscribe in the successful reform of the Chinese empire, if not the end of history, at least the beginning of its last act.

From this point of view, Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* and Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* are very similar, as the two novels move along the same trajectory by drawing from a common conceptual well (which is the one given by more than 60 years of intellectual debate over the fate of modern China) and by developing its ideas to their exhaustion. Yet whereas Lu Shi'e's imaginative range is well-anchored within the boundaries of its ideological background, so that *Xin Zhongguo*'s modern utopia can be clearly recognised as a "by-product" of the ideological subtext, the same cannot be said in regard to Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*.²⁷ Even though we certainly cannot say of Wu Jianren's eclectic novel that it transcends the historical roots of its late-imperial repressed modernity, we can at least see on the part of the author an attempt to eschew its ties, and to construct his utopian vision upon narrative strategies of deferral and demarcation.

We have already observed how this critical movement of deferral and demarcation begins on the part of Wu Jianren with his initial refusal to set up the novel's utopian discourse within the ready categories of the late Qing reformism. These are rather bypassed in favour of a less historically-connoted, and more universally accepted core of ideas, concepts and images such as those that the author draws from the Confucian tradition.²⁸ In Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* these concepts are re-elaborated and redeployed as a new conceptual framework for the development of the modern Chinese utopia, in which they acquire the new symbolical shape of a map of orientation, and become as well the new

27 Regarding the question of utopia as a "by-product" of the ideological subtext of history, we are referring to Karl Mannheim perspective on the relation between utopia and ideology, and to Fredric Jameson notion of ideological subtext expounded in his *The Political Unconscious*; in this regard see chapter 1.

28 It is undeniable that concepts such as *ren* 仁, *xiao* 孝, *li* 禮 or *wen* 文, although linked to a thousand-year old philosophical and religious tradition which was perceived as *distinctively* "Chinese", represent at the same time a set of values, precepts, prescriptions and moral reminders of universal appeal, and that are less reliant on the contingencies of history than other ideas such as those of socio-national Darwinism, scientific and technological prowess, political reformism, etc.

heuristic and epistemological tools for its understanding, for the understanding of its new national modernity. This initial demarcation thus becomes the measure upon which Wu Jianren develops his utopian imaginary, to the point that its traits (its conceptual deferral and its resistance to the uncritical deployment of the tropes of colonial modernity) can be recognised in each of the novel's "layers" of representation.

Wu Jianren's peculiar critical stance can be seen for example in his musings over the political system of the Civilised Realm. Differently from what happens in Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*, in which the author appears to accept the development of constitutionalism as a necessary and sufficient condition for the institution of the Chinese modern utopia, Wu Jianren's reflection over which one is the perfect system of government for the best of all possible worlds is more articulated. Wu Jianren is reluctant to accept a definitive answer, but he rather tries to unveil the pitfalls that can result in the uncritical adoption of one system or the other. The dialogue that takes place between Jia Baoyu and his utopian host Lao Shaonian in chapter 26 of *Xin shitou ji* over the vices and the virtues of the different forms of government gives the reader an interesting example of the author's construction of his utopian imaginary:

老少年道：“世界上行的三個政體，是專制，立憲，共和。此刻紛紛爭論，有主張立憲的，有主張共和的，那專制是沒有人贊成的了，敝境卻偏是用了個專制政體。”²⁹

“There are three forms of government in the world,” said Lao Shaonian, “the autocracy, the constitutional state, and the republic. Each of these systems has been thoroughly discussed, and nowadays some advocate the constitution, some advocate the republic, but nobody seems to approve of an autocratic system. Contrary to the expectations, within our borders we have adopted a form of autocracy.”

Lao Shaonian's opening lines are unsettling: by recognising autocracy as a valid alternative to the two other options, Wu Jianren moves against a large part of the reformist

²⁹ Wu Jianren, pp. 307–308.

intelligentsia of his time, who had come to recognise in the unquestionable authority of the imperial court, in the centralism of its decisions and in its essentially conservative and despotic nature the main reasons for China's incapacity to react against the European powers.

共和是取野蠻的辦法. 其中分了無限的黨娑派, 互相衝突. 那政府是無主鬼一般, 隻看那黨派盛的, 便附和著他的意思去辦事. 有一天那黨派衰了, 政府的遲針也跟著改了. . . . 就是立憲政體, 也不免有黨派. 雖然立了上, 下議院, 然而那選舉權的限制, 隱隱的把一個族政體, 改了富家政體. 那百姓便鬧得富者愈富, 貧者愈貧. 所以又攪出一個均貧富黨出來, 又是什麼社會主義, 終非長久太平之局.³⁰

Republics lead to barbarism. Their political factions proliferate without limit, clashing against each other. As a consequence, the government has no clear guidance, and it is run by whatever party that happens to be in power. Then some day that faction grows weak, and the government changes allegiance. . . . As for a constitutional government, it cannot avoid fragmentation either: once a parliament is instituted and the right to vote ratified, it silently turns the national government into an aristocracy; the people thus starts to complain as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer; as a consequence a party shows up advocating for equality, then another starts to prattle about socialism, and before not to long any stability is lost.

At first glance, Wu Jianren's dismissal of the modern alternatives of political organization appears to be categorical and unconditional, yet it would be wrong to understand such a radical position only as a gesture of ideological revanchism. Certainly such an overt declaration of aversion polarises the author's political stance toward the more radicalised factions of late Qing reformism but, in light of the novel's scorching satire of its early chapters, Lao Shaonian's monologue rather reveals on the part of the author an attempt to resist the temptation to reduce and simplify *ad unum* the questions at stake in the re-imagination of the Chinese country, or to elevate the adoption of one or the other particular form of government as national panacea. By emphasizing the *functional* nature

30 Wu Jianren, p. 308.

of the debate over the best form of government, Wu Jianren's reflections seem to unfold along the lines of Zhang Zhidong's *ti-yong* 體用 dichotomy and anticipate the slogan "save the country through education" (教育救國) that the late Qing philosopher will popularise in later years.³¹

我們從前也以為專制政體不好,改了立憲政體.那敝境出了一位英雄,姓萬名慮,表字周詳,定了個強迫教育的法令.舉國一切政治,他隻偏重了教育一門;教育之中,卻又偏重了德育. . . . 萬先生經營了五十多年的教育,方才死了,他臨終說了八個字,是“德育普及,憲政可廢.”³²

At the beginning, we thought too that an autocratic government would be bad, so we adopted constitutionalism. Then one hero stood up, his name was Wan Lü, but he was also known as Wan Zhouyang. He made education compulsory by law. Of all the matters of state, he focused only on this one, making moral education his goal. . . . Wan Lü remained in charge of the education system for 50 years, and right before his death, he uttered these words: "When morality is widespread, the government can be dismissed".

Wu Jianren's ideal state is in the end the Confucian *datong* of an enlightened autocracy (文明專制) whose foundations are rooted in the education of its people according to the universal moral coordinates presented in the Chinese classics of the Confucian tradition, and whose leaders act according to the principle for which "they love what the people love, and hate what the people hate" (民之所好,好之,民之所惡,惡之).³³

Nevertheless, if there is a part of *Xin shitou ji* where the author's acumen falls short of the novel's overall brilliance, it may be in the weakness of Lao Shaonian's closing statements over the question of the government of the Civilised Realm. His conclusions are anticlimactic, and the character's *ab autoritate* recourse to a quotation from the Confucian

31 Ssu-yü Teng and John K. Fairbank, *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839–1923*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 164–165.

32 Wu Jianren, p. 308.

33 Wu Jianren, p. 308.

classic *Da xue* 大學 appears if not disingenuous, at least disappointing.³⁴ The dialogue exchange between Jia Baoyu and Lao Shaonian is surprisingly brief, despite the topic's politico-conceptual potential, as well as the passage's *narrative* potential as a pitch for a lengthy excursus on the subject.

Even though Wu Jianren's "selective" citation of the *Great Learning* may open up to some interesting considerations over the author's choice not to incorporate in the coordinates of the Civilised Realm some unwanted traits of the Chinese *ancien régime* (such as the paternalistic attitude of the *junzi* 君子 toward his subjects), this section of Wu Jianren's novel does not offer any closure to the topic it is set to tackle in the first place. The reader, as the researcher, is left here stranded with no answers to a question of crucial importance: *how* does the system work; *how* is society managed so that it can become and it can stay utopian. Whereas Lu Shi'e's answer is disappointing because of its lack of audacity (Liu "settles down" for the ready solution of a constitutional government), Wu Jianren's position on the other hand is frustrating because it falls short of its own bold critical assumptions, leaving unsubstantiated a crucial part of the novel's utopian imaginary.

This kind of lacuna is not surprising, on the contrary it is symptomatic of one of the defining traits of late Qing utopianism's constitutive dialectics. As we have already remarked, the fundamental dynamic of any utopian politics lies in the dialectic of identity and difference that it engages. In the case of the late Qing utopian discourse as a product of the colonial encounter, the imagination of the Chinese post-colonial utopia is negotiated through acts of identification and differentiation ("The fundamental dynamic of any

34 "In the *Book of Poetry*, it is said, 'How much to be rejoiced in are these princes, the parents of the people!' When a prince loves what the people love, and hates what the people hate, then is he what is called the parent of the people" (詩云: '樂只君子, 民之父母' . 民之所好好之, 民之所惡惡之, 此之謂民之父母), in Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai (eds.), *Li Chi, Book of Rites*.

Utopian politics will therefore always lie in the dialectic of Identity and Difference”)³⁵ played out on the background of “the ongoing drama of change and redemption for the Chinese nation”.³⁶

Parts of this drama are two mutually-dependent imaginary constructions, that of an unmovable “Chinese” (that is, culturalist, essentialist or essentialised) tradition, which is defined against the elusive, mutually constructed imaginary of Western modernity. But because the latter is ultimately – borrowing the words of Jacques Ellul –³⁷ a phenomenon that cannot be contested nor grasped because there is nothing analogous to it, the ensuing dialectic between the two parts is one of both mutual reinforcement and constant approximation whose closure is nevertheless impossible. Jia Baoyu’s experience at the Shanghai arsenal is in this sense enlightening: “By the time we manage to produce a gun that can shoot at the distance of one *li*, they have already made one that can shoot one *li* and a half” (造起的洋槍, 能打一裡遠, 他家裡造的, 已經可以打一裡半了).³⁸ Consequence of this impossible closure is the creation of what we may consider as an empty conceptual space, a lack of articulation within the dialectic of identity and difference through which the utopian construct is shaped. At the level of the *representation* of the modern Chinese utopia, that is to say at the level of the text, this emptiness is revealed – as we have already remarked – by the presence of an absence.

As we have seen, in the case of Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji*, a prominent absence is the one concerning the answer to the question of the political system of the Civilised Realm, a question that is rightfully posited by the character of Jia Baoyu in his function of

35 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London, Verso, 2005, p. xii.

36 Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895–1949*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 18.

37 “In fact, we cannot measure change and progress. They are unmeasurable in the sense that they cannot be compared with anything else. They are phenomena that we can neither contest nor grasp. There is nothing analogous to them. I said above that obviously everything changes, and yet fundamentally nothing has changed. What counts is the level on which we speak.” Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, p. 14.

38 Wu Jianren, p. 214.

external, unenlightened observer, but evasively answered by the utopian host Lao Shaonian. Yet many other sections of Lu Shi'e and Wu Jianren's works can be read in terms of what they leave out of their framing. Emptiness surrounds the position of utopia, which is dislocated either in time or in space (or both), and whose discovery is always shrouded in mystery; empty is our understanding of the economy of the utopian space, whose infrastructure is never shown, but only revealed via superficial descriptions of the social interactions it enables; empty is also the history of the utopian space, whose time is frozen in an event-less perfection which is asserted over and over through the mindless repetition of social practices; empty are thus the lives of its mindless characters, who seem to exist in the text only in order to assist the oblivious guest; and in the end, empty is the experience of the main protagonist, the utopian guest who moves through the utopian construction in a constant state of awe, but who eventually leaves him unaffected.³⁹

This particular perspective – i.e., the understanding of the late Qing utopian imaginary as the result of a strategic alternation between representation and absence of representation – allows us to make sense of one of the most interesting aspects of *Xin shitou ji*: the representation of technology and the narrativisation of the discourse of technique.⁴⁰ The discourse of technique played an important role in the late Qing

39 While we agree with Wegner in recognising that “Narrative utopias are more akin to traveler’s itineraries, or an architectural sketch, tracing an explanatory trajectory, a narrative line that, as it unfolds, quite literally engenders something new in the world”, what is actually engendered into the utopian text often emerges from what is left out of the traveler’s itinerary, rather than in what is portrayed in it. See Phillip E. Wegner, *Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. xviii.

40 For the definition of the concepts of *technique* (as a discourse) and *technology* (as the most evident, but not the only declination of this discourse), we are referring to the approach of French philosopher Jacques Ellul as it is articulated in his introduction to *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*: “The term technique, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, *technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity. Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past. . . . we shall be looking at technique in its sociological aspect; that is, we shall consider the effect of technique on social relationships, political structures, economic phenomena. Technique is not an isolated fact in society (as the term *technology* would lead us to believe) but is related to every factor in the life of modern man; it affects social facts as well as all others. Thus technique itself is a sociological phenomenon, and it is in this light that we shall study it.” Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

intellectual debate over China's belated modernity, if only because it represented for the intellectuals of the time one of the most obvious terrains on which to build their critique of China's backwardness and substantiate their instances of reform. After all, it was in the technological gap between the foreign invaders and the Manchu empire, reasserted over and over during the nineteenth century by the foreign military interventions on Chinese soil, that the Chinese initially recognised the roots of their condition of (semi)colonial submission and dependency upon the West. As Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) wrote in a letter to Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872) from 1863:

I have been aboard of the warships of British and French admirals, I saw that their cannons are ingenious and uniform, their ammunition is fine and cleverly made, their weapons are bright, and their troops have a martial appearance and are orderly. These things are actually superior to those of China.⁴¹

Even though further research would be needed here to substantiate the following claim, we could go so far as to say that it was probably because of the undeniable, explicit evidence of this gap that for a long time the Chinese intellectuals could “quarantine” their condition of colonial impasse within the limits of a question of technical prowess, and not interiorise it as one of ontological difference.

Yet we must remember that in these texts (and especially so for what regard the science fiction genre) the lexicon of technology is an empty one, as its signifiers, masked behind a veil of plausibility and verisimilitude, ultimately refer to phenomena and social practices (cars that fly, lenses that can scrutinise the moral nature of an individual, laser beams that can pulverise the enemy, weather-controlling machines) which radically differ from the reader's expectations and from the possibilities of realisation given China's

41 Teng and Fairbank, p. 69.

material lack of “technological” capacity. Even though the Suvinian *novum* (which is present in these texts as a *xin fa* 新法 or a *xin faming* 新發明) is shrouded in praise to the point that, paradoxically, the actual possibility of its absence within the new utopian coordinates is confuted as a *bona fide* impossibility, its appearance is that of a “*machina ex-machina*”. After all, who produces the *novum*, and how is it produced? The lack of a clear answer to these questions opens the door to the epistemological void of an Ellulean modernity which is constantly displaced and postponed, measured in its impossibility to be measured. “It is a new discovery of our country”, we are told briefly every time a character tries to pry the *novum* open, “it relies on electrical machinery” (這也是吾國新發明的 . . . 都靠著電機).⁴²

This particular emptiness is nevertheless functional to the role of the *novum* in the utopian and in the science-fictional text. In these genres the technological novelty performs a mediatory function between the reader’s reality and the historical otherness against which the reader is confronted. The *novum* partakes in the utopian dialectic of identity and difference by positing an “encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other” whose purpose is to disorientate the implied reader’s norms of reality and overturn his expectations; in doing so the technological *novum* is given in the text as “a mediating category whose explicative potency springs from its rare bridging of literary and extraliterary, fictional and empirical, formal and ideological domains, in brief from its unalienable historicity”.⁴³

In both Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* and Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* the frequent recurrence to a technological imaginary as means for the reiteration of the utopian locus’ exceptional nature thus responds to this particular function of the technological object. In

42 Lu Shi’e, p. 22.

43 Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 64.

these two texts the *xin qi* 新器, given in the form of a technological marvel, an extraordinary invention, an unusual device presented as a perfectly normal everyday object, is deployed consistently as a symbol of the utopia of post-colonial progress depicted in the Civilised Realm and in Lu Shi'e's new Chinese country.

The discourse of technique emerges in these texts in variable degrees of articulation: whereas on some critical junctures of the narration the representation of technique, of technological objects, acquires a crucial yet subtle function in the negotiation of the utopian imaginary, the technological novelty is also often deployed to a lesser degree as an easily recognizable token of progress and modernity. In the latter case, the technological novelty is given as a mere narrative flourishing in addition to the development of the novel's imaginary, that is, it constitutes only a marginal element in the framework of the narration. Wu Jianren and Lu Shi'e often appear to indulge in the possibilities allowed by Clarke's third law of prediction of the future, according to which "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic".⁴⁴ In this perspective, the entire *raison d'être* of the technological novelty lies in the amount of awe it can provoke in the reader's mind as a particular manifestation of the new imaginary. Here the *novum* is shown and praised, but its presence is left unquestioned, as if the technological object were a natural element of the utopian scenario. In these textual instances, the *novum* is deployed at the lowest degree of its mediatory function: the estrangement and the fascination it provokes are transient, and its disorienting potential and "explicative potency" are quickly neutralised within the fantastic component of the

44 This is probably the most known of Arthur C. Clarke's three laws regarding the technological imagination of the future (the first two laws state that "When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong" and that "The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible"). As for the third law, it was formulated by Arthur C. Clarke in the 1973 revised edition of his essay "Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination", published in Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, New York, Harper & Row, 1973.

utopian text.

In this sense, the modern technological object is not so different from Sun Wukong's 孫悟空 *Ruyi jingu bang* 如意金箍棒, the “As you will” or “Compliance Rod”. The “As you will” is a stick that can change shape and dimension at its owner's will, and it is the extraordinary weapon used by Sun Wukong in the classical novel *Xiyou ji* 西游記 (Journey to the West), Wu Cheng'en's 吳承恩 masterpiece. A magical object in a fantastic novel, the “As you will” is not problematic because it does not undermine the reader's expectations but rather confirms them in their epistemological coordinates. In this sense, the “As you will” is perfectly coherent in the architecture of Wu Cheng'en's fantastic imaginary. In a similar way, the technological object is coherent to the utopian text, and it functions in it as the magical object does in the fantastic one: the modern “Compliance Rod” may now have gears and valves, it may be activated by steam or electricity, but in its essence it is not different from the magical weapon of Sun Wukong.

Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* and Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* offer many examples of this particular modality of representation. A complete inventory will not be here necessary, as these textual elements have a limited symbolic value (which boils down to the reassertion of utopia's exceptionality via the representation of technology as magic), and they are all built on similar rhetorical schemes of estrangement and neutralisation. In the following passage, which is taken from the ninth chapter of *Xin Zhongguo* and that concerns the invention of the flying car, we can see how these dynamics of assimilation and neutralisation of the technological novelty surface in the fictional text, and how the emptiness of the technological discourse is masked by the fabulation of the *novum*:

友琴才道：“這是空行自由車，三年前發明的。”我問：“車可以空行麼？”友琴道：“空行本不是難事，不過從前的人學問不到巴，不能夠

戰勝空氣,所以把此事視作繁難.現在科學昌明,視空中不異平地” . . . 瞧來瞧去,再也瞧不出能夠飛行的緣故.動問友琴,友琴道:“我也隻曉得所當然.你要曉得所以然時,除非去問那創造飛車的人.” 我道:“創造飛車的人,住在那裡?我們不妨去訪訪他.” 友琴道:“到那裡去訪?這個人,現在外國游歷去了.” 我道:“乘車空行,何異登仙!”⁴⁵

“This is a flying machine, it was invented three years ago,” said Youqin.

“This machine can fly?” I inquired.

“It is not really such a complicated thing to build, but until three years ago our knowledge was not there yet. We could not defeat the atmosphere, and so we considered the whole matter as something out of our reach. But our scientific knowledge had developed, and now travelling in the air is not so different than travelling on the ground . . . ”

I looked closely at the machine, but I could not fathom what made the vehicle fly, so I asked Youqin about it. “I too only know how it is supposed to work,” she answered “but if you really want to understand the principles behind it, the only way to do it is to go talking to the person who invented the flying machine.”

“And where does this person live? We might as well take a machine and go find him.”

“You mean going to his place? Unfortunately this person is now abroad for the holidays.”

“Flying in the sky on a vehicle! How is it different from being like an immortal!?”

This passage provides us a narrative blueprint which is frequent among the late Qing utopian novel’s narrative strategies: even though it triggers in the utopian guest a reaction of surprise, the technological novelty is introduced by the utopian host as it were a platitude, hence the estrangement; the introduction of the novelty is often followed by an inquiry on the part of the utopian guest about the nature of the new object, which is either followed by the mild amusement of the utopian host over the guest’s obliviousness, or by vague explanations in which all questions are deflected and all answers are postponed: the gears of the machine remained veiled and their functioning is always deferred.

As the new invention, the new technique or the new object surfaces in the text, it is quickly and acritically assimilated within the utopian texture, so that the utopian imaginary can be expanded and made more desirable. Here is another similar fragment, taken from

45 Lu Shi’e, p. 108.

原來,浴室裡並沒什麼浴盆,浴巾一切浴身應用的器具.我問佐材:
“這就是浴室麼?”佐材點頭道:“正是.”我道:“沒有浴身器具,怎樣浴法?”佐材聽了,骨輪骨輪,兩隻眼不住地向我瞧看,好似異常驚訝的樣子.我見他這樣,心裡愈加疑惑,暗忖:“難道現在時光,浴身不用浴盆,浴巾的麼?”隻見佐材向我瞧了一固,就問我道:“先生浴身,難道還用著浴盆,浴巾的古法麼?那不累贅煞人!”我道:“新法浴身是怎樣的?沒有浴盆,水放在那裡?沒有浴巾,身上的汗污,用什麼東西來擦?”佐材道:“原來,先生還沒有曉得,現在時光,那個還願意拿水來洗澡,拿巾來擦身!”我詫異道:“浴身不用水,用什麼?”佐材道:“先生同我玩不成?我不信先生這樣開通一個人,連新法洗澡都不會知道!”我道:“簡直沒有知道.”佐材道:“現在洗澡都是用汽的,那用水洗澡,不行了已有十多年了.”我道:“用汽不用水?這汽,是不是就是蒸汽水?”佐材道:“不是蒸汽水,是汽.”...真是奇妙不可言!⁴⁶
In the bathroom there were no towels, nor a bathtub or any other appliance to take a bath, “Is this the bathroom?” I asked the attendant. “It is,” the attendant nodded.
“But how can I wash myself without any utensil?” I asked him. His eyes darted around but he could not look straight at my face, as if my question left him extremely baffled. Looking at him, I felt even more confused, “Can it be that people nowadays do not use bathtubs and towels any more?” I asked myself. The attendant looked at me and said “Sir, do you mean to tell me that you still wash yourself with basins and towels as in the old days? But that is extremely cumbersome!”
“But how do you do it nowadays? If you don’t have any bathtub, where does the water go? And with no towel, what do you use to wipe the water off your body?”
“Sir, you really do not know it? Who in their right mind would want to clean himself with water and then rub it off with a towel!”
I was astonished, “You do not use water? What do you use then?”
“Sir, you are not joking with me? I cannot believe that such a well-cultivated man like you does not know how to take a bath!”
“I sincerely do not know.”
“Nowadays to wash ourselves we use vapour, it is more than 10 years that people stopped using water to clean themselves.”
“You use vapour instead of water? But by vapour...do you mean steam?”
“No, not steam, vapour,” . . . This truly is an unbelievable marvel!

Yet despite the recurrence of these episodes, the discourse of technique is not only deployed as a convenient narrative gimmick used to enhance the extravagance of the

46 Lu Shi'e, p. 96.

utopian construction, but it also occasionally acquires a much subtler function. Both in Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* and Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*, the discourse of technology gradually emerges in its mediatory function within the process of imagination of the Chinese future, and it is deployed in the texts as a pivotal element in the narrative transition from the historical to the utopian dimension of the narration.

The mediatory function of technology, which represent metonymically the pervading and totalising advancement of the discourse of technique, is fictionalised in these texts in different ways and in different degrees of explicitness. Whereas in some occasions the mediatory function of the technological object can be inferred at the margins of the narration, in other crucial joints the *xin fa*, the *xin qi* and the *xin faming* become the central elements of the narration. In the first case, the critical function of the *novum* is inscribed in the typology and the characteristics of a given object, and in the practical function it performs in the economy of a particular scene in which it is but a marginal element; in the second case, the *xin fa* or *xin faming* is presented as an essential component for the existence of the utopian imaginary.

An interesting example of the first modality through which the mediatory function of the technological object is revealed in the fictional text can be found in the early utopian chapters of Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*, where the technological novelty *literally* becomes the lens through which Jia Baoyu experiences the utopian spectacle. As we have observed in the first section of this chapter, the utopian imaginary is, and it is presented as a spectacle in relation to which the utopian guest takes part as a privileged spectator, figuratively sitting where the perspective lines of the utopian architecture converge. The position of the narrator as a privileged observer of the utopian imaginary is often enhanced by what we may term as the paraphernalia of the latter, such as the technological object, the new invention.

The discourse of technology plays an important role in the construction of Jia Baoyu's experience in and of the utopian landscape. In the military demonstration that takes place between chapter 25 and chapter 26 of *Xin shitou ji*, warships and submarines parade by the hundreds along the coast of the Civilised Realm. Electrical cannons shoot beams to the sky from the bottom of the sea, turning the water and the air a glowing red, green and yellow. Jia Baoyu can enjoy the underwater show from the shore thanks to the aid of a "water-penetrating lens" (透水鏡); he manages to obtain an omni-comprehensive bird's eye perspective through the instruments offered by a totalising (technical) modernity that comes together exactly in order to be gazed and admired through "thousand-*li* telescopes" (千裡鏡), modern range-finders (測遠鏡) and sophisticated "enlightening lenses" (助明鏡). The display of futuristic machinery is redundant: ichthyomorphic submarines move freely under the water sustained by "electrical machinery" (電機); the submarines communicate with each other through *jiaoren tong* 叫人鍾 that transmit wireless messages (無線電話) in the bottom of a sea illuminated by electric lights (電燈); each ship and submarine is equipped with futuristic weapons such as "silent electric cannons" (無聲電炮) that can shoot "multicoloured lasers" (五色電光). These objects represent "the spade that Dongfang Wenming used to dig the mountains, the axe and the chisel he used to regulate the rivers" (內中有東方文明當日創造的開山斧鑿, 治河鋤鍤): as these are the words that Jia Baoyu reads while visiting a "technology park" (工藝院) dedicated to the figure of Dongfang Wenming, founder of the Civilised Realm as metonymy for the Chinese Civilisation of the East.⁴⁷ The Civilised Realm as metaphor of the Chinese utopia of modernity has been fictionally founded through technique, it is a product of modernity and a product of technique.

47 Wu Jianren, chapter 28 passim.

We can find a confirmation of the particular importance of the discourse of technique and of the representation of technology in the institution of the utopian imaginary of progress and modernity in the fact that, both in Liu Shi'e and Wu Jianren's novels, the conceptual borders between utopia and dystopia are negotiated through the intervention of the technological *novum*. Here the technological novelty (新器), the extraordinary invention (新發明), or the revolutionary *modus operandi* (新法) become the instruments that allow the transition from one part to the other, that is, from the "Falsely Civilised States" to the Civilised Realm, from the coordinates of barbarism to those of civilisation, from the Other to the Self. Here the Suvinian *novum* emerges in its most articulated form, revealing its mediatory function in the pivotal position it acquires in the development of the two novels' plots.

The elevation of the technological object's mediatory function to defining principle of the utopian ideal may evoke Jacques Ellul's reflections over the totalising nature of the technical phenomenon ("Technique cannot be otherwise than totalitarian").⁴⁸ What emerges from these texts is rather an attempt to incorporate and appropriate the discourse of technology within the utopian one. Technology is not only pursued *in itself* as the symbol of progress and modernity (in this case its pursuit would be endless, and its results would always fall short of the expectations) but it is also reshaped into an instrument subservient to the realisation of the utopian imaginary: the discourse of technique, which in the late Qing intellectual debate had become one of the main grounds for China's self-inflicted sense of inadequacy, is staged and reversed in the form of the novel and appropriated within the utopian discourse.

The idea of the technological novelty deployed as a mediating instrument in the negotiation of the utopian locus is present in both *Xin Zhongguo* and *Xin shitou ji*, although

⁴⁸ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, p. 125 passim; Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, New York, The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980, p. 169 passim.

it is explored by the two authors in two different ways. In Wu Jianren's novel the character of Jia Baoyu is "accepted" into the Civilised Realm after being analysed in a "Human Nature Inspection Room" (驗性質房) by a machine that is capable not only to see through the body of a subject, but also to expose his moral character (測驗質鏡):

杯茶罷,老少年又讓寶玉另到一間房裡去坐.這房裡與客座又不相同,雖然四壁粉垩潔淨,卻是一無陳設,隻當中擺了幾把椅子.坐了一會,忽然旁邊一扇小門開處,走出一個人來,卻是個蒼髯老者,對老少年道:“這位貴客性質晶瑩,不過腸胃間有點不淨.這是飲食上未加考求之過,住上幾天就好了.”⁴⁹

After they finished to drink, Lao Shaonian brought Jia Baoyu to sit in another room. This room was different from the previous one: the walls were of spotless white chalk, but there was no furniture inside beside a few chairs arranged in the middle. Jia Baoyu sat there for a while, when suddenly an old person with a dark beard came in from another small door that opened on the side. "The nature of our guest is pure and transparent," he told Lao Shaonian, "but there is something unclear inside him. I think the fault is of the drink you had before, to which you did not give much consideration, but after a couple of days here he should be just fine."

Without being aware of it, Jia Baoyu is "processed" into a machine that, operated by a doctor of the Civilised Realm, establishes the character's degree of compatibility with the new utopian environment. We have remarked on more than one occasion how, because of the epistemological fracture between history and utopia, the utopian imaginary is displaced both in time and space and its borders are often non-represented or deferred outside the picture. In Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji*, the only occasion in which the borders of the Civilised Realm are actually represented or narrated is through the medium of technology as a mirror lens of the human nature.

The transition through the machine is mandatory, as we are told that the machine is located in what we may mistranslate as "the first toll-house for entering the Realm" (入

49 Wu Jianren, p. 281.

境第一旅館):

凡境外初來之人,皆由我招接到這裡,陪到驗性質房,醫生在隔房用測驗質鏡驗過.倘是性質文明的.便招留在此;若驗得性質帶點野蠻,便要送他到改良性質所去,等醫生把他性質改良了,再行招待.內中也有野蠻透頂,不能改良的,便仍送他到境外去.⁵⁰

All the people that come from the outside pass by here, where our doctors analyse them with the aid of the Human Nature Inspection Lens inside the Human Nature Inspection Room. If their nature is civilised, then they are welcome to stay; but if the lens finds traces of barbarity in them, then they are brought to the Ameliorating Room, where a doctor will refine their nature. If they prove impossible to refine because their nature is permeated with barbarity, then they are brought back outside our borders.

The *topos* of technology as an ancillary instrument for the observation (and the “utopian” validation) of human nature is reiterated through Wu Jianren’s text in various occasions.

The image of the lens in particular becomes a recurrent trope in what we may term as the (literal) “focusing” of the utopian imaginary: in the twenty-fourth chapter of *Xin shitou ji*,

Jia Baoyu is brought to visit one of the few remaining hospitals of the Civilised Realm.

Here he learns that sicknesses and infirmities have been almost eradicated from the

country, whose social body is monitored and preserved through the use of “osteoscopic

lenses” (驗骨鏡), “sinew-scoping lenses” (驗髓鏡), “hematoscopic lenses” (驗血鏡),

“tendoscopic lenses” (驗筋鏡) and “organoscopic lenses” (驗臟鏡):

這些鏡子都是東方德和華自立兩位竭瘁精力,創造出來的.此刻還在那裡研究兩種新器:一種是“驗氣鏡”,專察驗通身呼吸之氣的;一種是量聰明尺與及灌入聰明的法子.將來這個新法出現了,就可望合境沒有笨人了.⁵¹

These lenses are the result of the efforts of scientists Dongfang De [Eastern virtue] and Hua Zili [China standing on its own feet], who invented them. Now these scientists are working on two other

50 Wu Jianren, p. 281.

51 Wu Jianren, p. 295.

instruments: the first one is a lens for the analysis of *qi*; the second is a method to measure and increase intelligence. When they will finalise this new method, the country will be free of obtuse people.

To the improvement of the human body corresponds the improvement of the human character and the human nature. The discourses of science and technology overlap with the discourse of morality in the process of definition of the utopian society. Resulting from this overlapping is a contamination of imaginaries in which the moral dimension becomes quantifiable, whereas scientific progress and technological proficiency become measure and function of the coherence and the integrity of the national utopia. In Wu Jianren's novel the conception of science as a "modern" *kexue* 科學 of European imprint and rationalist, positivist and utilitarian connotations takes the place of the received imaginary of science as *gezhi* 格致, that is as a practice of personal cultivation through the observation of the natural phenomena.⁵²

This biopolitical perspective of clinical-social morality which is introduced in the central chapters of Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* is reiterated also by Lu Shi'e's in the imagination of new China's faux-historiography: in these two texts this particular aspect emerges in similar ways, that is to say as a constitutive function of the utopian and science-fictional imaginary of *fin-de-siècle* China. Whereas in Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* the Suvinian *novum*, declined in the form of the "lens" and in its function of "inspection" or "diagnosis", becomes the tool for the negotiation of the physical and metaphorical borders

52 For what concerns the evolution of the concept of "science" in China, the transition from *gezhi* 格致 to *kexue* 科學, and the penchant to *scientism* (i.e., an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of natural science applied to all areas of investigation, such as in philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities) of the early approaches to scientific investigation on the part of the Chinese reformists and philosophers, see Wang Hui, "The Fate of 'Mr. Science' in China: The Concept of Science and its Application in Modern Chinese Thought", *positions*, 1995, vol. 3, n. 1, pp. 1–68. On the history of modern science in China see and also Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Modern Science in China*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008; or Benjamin A. Elman, "The Problem of Modern Science in China in the last 300 Years: From Ming-Qing to Qian Mu", in *Jinian Qian Mu xiansheng shishi shi zhou nian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 紀念錢穆先生逝世十週年國際學術研討會論文集, Taipei, Taiwan daxue Zhongguo wenxue xi 臺灣大學中國文學系, pp. 479–528.

of utopia (the “Human Nature Inspection Room” is located at the borders of the Civilised Realm to filter out its incoming visitors), in Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* the *xin faming* or *xin fa* becomes founding principle and *condicio sine qua non* of the post-colonial Chinese utopia.

In the fourth chapter of *Xin Zhongguo*, Lu Shi’e’s fictional alter-ego is invited to visit a university. Here the protagonist is told that one of the main reasons behind China’s unprecedented development was the popularisation of higher education and the implementation of its curricula with the study of modern disciplines such as engineering, finance and medicine. Lu Shi’e is certainly not sceptical when confronted with the majestic display of knowledge of the new Chinese country, but he is still perplexed at how such a relatively simple course of action (after all, the modernisation of academic curricula was already going on in pre-utopian China) could generate such a huge impact on the new Chinese society to such an extent that almost every Chinese is now educated to the highest degree:

我問：“貴校怎麼能夠這樣的發達？”監督道：“就是這一年，醫科專院裡一個姓蘇的學生，發明了兩種驚人的學問，把全世界轟動起來。敝校靠著他的大名，也就帶好了。”我忙問：“這位蘇君，叫甚名字？”監督聽了，向我打量了會子，瞧他的神情很是怪異，似詫我這樣的偉人還會連名氏都不知道是的。半晌，才對我道：“這位蘇君，真是吾國空前的大豪杰，他的大名兒，就叫漢民。”我又問：“蘇漢民先生發明的是那兩種學問？”監督道：“一種是醫心藥，一種是催醒術。”⁵³

“How could your schools develop to such a degree?” I asked to the dean of the institution.

“This happened because in that year [in the first year of the utopian calendar] a student of our academy of medicine by the name of Su made two extraordinary discoveries that shocked the whole world. Our institution is named after him and we pay to him great respect.”

“What is the name of this gentleman?” I asked. When the dean heard my question, he looked at me for a while, as if he could not believe in his spirit that I did not know the name of such an important person.

“This gentleman,” he answered after a brief pause, “is considered a hero

53 Lu Shi’e, p. 49.

in this country, and his glorious name is Su Hanmin.”

“And what are the two discoveries that Mr. Su made?”

“The first one is a medicine, the second is a technique to wake up the people.”

Thus Lu Shi'e is introduced to the quasi-mythical figure of doctor and scientist Su Hanmin 蘇漢民, national hero and “saviour” (蘇) of the Chinese people (漢民). It is to his inventions and his discoveries that Lu Shi'e the author ascribes the reason for the Chinese national renaissance and the emergence of the Chinese utopia in the year 1950, that is the 43rd year of the Xuantong 宣統 Reign.

In Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo* the Suvinian *novum* performs once again a function of negotiation of the borders of the utopian construct.⁵⁴ The *novum* surfaces in the texture of the novel in the form of a pseudo-scientific neologism whose implied cognitive “black-out”, which is played out on the impossibility from the part of the reader to “fulfil” the expected relation of signification between signifier and signified, demarcates the distance between the utopian imaginary and the Real, thus dislocating utopia from reality. In the case of Lu Shi'e's new China, national redeeming devices are Su Hanmin's “medicine for the cure of the mind/heart” (醫心藥) and his “technique to stimulate awakening” (催醒術):

我道：“這‘醫心藥’果然奇妙。但不知效驗究竟如何？”監督道：“效驗怎麼沒有！當時，歐美日本人都稱吾國為病夫國。陸君，你道吾國人，患的都是什麼病？”我道：“敢是心病麼？”監督道：“一點子不錯。當時，中國人，患的都是心病。所以做出來的東西，顛顛倒倒，往往被人家笑話。蘇漢民研究了好幾年，才研究出這樣醫心藥來。自從醫心藥發行以後，國勢民風，頃刻轉變過來，這就是醫心藥的實效。...那催醒術，是專治沉睡不醒病的。”⁵⁵

“Such a medicine indeed appears to be an extraordinary product, but I still do not understand what results it is supposed to accomplish.”

“What results, you say!? Before these two discoveries, America, Europe

54 In the case of *Xin Zhongguo*'s utopia, the borders are chronological: as we will see, the Suvinian *novum* marks here a pivotal moment or a shift in the pseudo-history of the Chinese future.

55 Lu Shi'e, pp. 49–50.

and Japan looked at our country as it were a sick country. Mister Lu, of what kind of ailment do you think our country used to suffer?”
 “Was it maybe a disease of the heart, of the spirit?”
 “Exactly. At that time the heart of the Chinese people was in turmoil: in managing our own affairs, we were chaotic, disorganised and confused, to the point of being ridiculed by the others. But after many years of research, Su Hanmin managed to concoct a medicine to cure this kind of disease. . . . As for what concerns the “technique to stimulate awakening”, this technique has been devised in order to awake those who fell in a deep state of unconsciousness.”

The condition of colonial submission is internalised, embodied and described in these text as a disease that affects the body of the nation, whose integrity and coherence can be recovered through the “medicine”: the scientific “technique” emerges as the product of a superimposition of different discourses, and it is elected as symbol of national salvation.⁵⁶ Science and technology overlap with the country’s moral compass in order to become *yong* 用 for the salvation and the recovery of the national *ti* 體 and *guocui* 國粹 that is revealed as the core of a national essentialism played along the lines of a *wuguo* 吾國/*Zhongguo* 中國/*Hanmin* 漢民.

The metaphor of China’s “deep state of unconsciousness” or “coma” introduced by Lu Shi’e in the fourth chapter of his *Xin Zhongguo* may remind us of another notorious allegory, that is to say the one of Lu Xun’s 魯迅 “iron house” (鐵房) presented in the introduction of his collection of short stories *Nahan* 吶喊. Yet whereas Lu Xun’s “iron house” is inescapable and unreformable, in the late Qing utopian novel the question of national salvation is still presented in the terms of a *shou yao shi* 受藥室, a “healing room” or a “room for the administration of the cure”.⁵⁷ Despite the failure of the most recent

56 For what concerns the idea of China as the “sick man of Asia”, see Yan Jianfu 顏健富 “‘Bingti Zhongguo’ de shiju yinyu yu zhiliao cuijian: lun wan qing xiaoshuo de shenti/guoti xiangxiang” “病體中國”的時局隱喻與治療淬鍊: 論晚清小說的身體/國體想像, *Taida wenshi zhexue bao* 臺大文史哲學報, November 2013, n. 79, pp. 83–118.

57 Wu Jianren, chapter 24 passim.

attempts of reform, the reluctance on the part of the court to recognise its own inadequacy, and the backward-looking and delusional gaze of its intelligentsia, the late Qing utopian imaginary attests the shared belief of the possibility to improve, to build upon the foundations of the past the shape of the future.⁵⁸

In our attempt to bring our critical itinerary within the late Qing utopian imaginary to a conclusion, we find ourselves at an impasse, as if we were dragged too, like the readers of these novels, into the event-less and “in-between” horizon of utopia. As we have seen, the utopian imaginary develops along the “borders” of different contrasting discourses, acquiring its *outopian* quality in their paradoxical superimposition; it expands in the “in-between” spaces that these discourses allow, unfolding as an impossible synthesis or, in the words of Louis Marin, in the “simulacrum of a synthesis”. Such a “simulacrum” surfaces in the utopian text in the form of the allegory of the *voyage extraordinaire* in the utopian scenery. This allegory defies any attempt to locate it outside of its own coordinates, it unfolds in its own circularity and “closed-ness”, in the “closure of a subject bounded in its own circularity, which is its own object”.⁵⁹ This allegorical *voyage extraordinaire* takes the form of a spectacle: it makes sense only when observed from the carefully-orchestrated perspective of the protagonist/narrator, upon whose gaze the whole utopian scene is constructed. Yet when this point of view is questioned – that is, when we as researchers try to “look behind” the seductive *trompe-l’œil* of the utopian scenography, the latter falls into pieces, revealing its two-dimensionality, the “shadow play

58 Incidentally, we may remark here how the imaginaries of science, morality, “sickness” and national recovery overlap also both in Lu Xun’s narrative imaginary, and (consequently) in the fabrication the *vulgata* of the figure of Lu Xun as the harbinger of the May Fourth Revolution, who renounced to study medicine in order to change (heal) the spirit of the Chinese people through the art of literature. From the introduction of *Nahan* 呐喊: “I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and it doesn’t really matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement.” Lu Xun, *Complete Stories of Lu Xun*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981, p. vii.

59 Louis Marin, *Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1984, p. 9 *passim*.

of electric lights”.

Presented as a chronotope located at the end of history and beyond the borders of our ideological cartography of expectations, utopia-as-*outopos* becomes utopia-as-*eutopos* in its attempt to reverse the historical dialectic between the colonised and the coloniser in favour of the former. This dialectical reversal is projected at the end of history and beyond any (metaphorical and figurative) cartographic attempt, in a locus where the utopian narration develops towards a stasis, which is the supposedly virtuous paralysis and actual dialectical stagnation of an imagined society developed towards its complete realisation: “Such a developed [form of] government is really something that has never been heard before!” The character of Lu Shi’e remarks towards the end of *Xin Zhongguo*, “I thought that only in the books one could find such a great society in which law and order prevail, yet now there really is such a scenery!” (這真是千古未有的盛治了!我隻在書上頭瞧見什麼“路不拾遺”,“夜不閉戶”,不道現在,真有這景象).⁶⁰

The precarious condition of the utopian construct, which lies in a conceptual space that is “*ni l’un, ni l’autre*”, familiar and unfamiliar, self and other as well as not-self and not-other, emerges prominently in the concluding chapters of both *Xin shitou ji* and *Xin Zhongguo*. As the utopian trajectory comes to an end, the composite and paradoxical nature of the utopian narration become more evident, its overlapping discursive traits appear to grow if not incompatible, more and more exasperated. Even though the “degree” of suspension of disbelief required by the utopian narration to the reader is higher than that of the usual realistic novel because it is proportional to the degree of the cognitive estrangement required to yank the reader out of his/her ideological comfort zone, towards the end of the plot both *Xin Zhongguo* and *Xin shitou ji* seem to “degenerate” further into the fantastic. The “improbable plausibility” of the utopian narration, which would

⁶⁰ Lu Shi’e, p. 127.

otherwise guarantee the utopian text its revolutionary appeal, falls apart as the narrator indulges in utopian vignettes that grow progressively more hyperbolic. If the utopian narration “functioned” as an *ensemble* of overlapping contrasting discourses by providing a provisional equilibrium and a degree of plausibility that maintained the fantasy of the utopian text in the realm of the possibilities of the reader (which could then extrapolate from it the blueprint for political action), when this equilibrium is broken, the utopian text is revealed in its almost farcical implausibility. In this sense the utopian text does not represent any more a better, implemented version of the real, but a painful caricature, a parody. With the “carnivalisation” of the utopian project, the latter loses its already fragile critical potential, resembling at times a narration of

carnavalesque dummies representing in a more or less *harmless* form the old, receding world. At times these are merely *ridiculous* monsters, and at other times they symbolize the *obsolete* character of that old world, its futility, *absurdity*, stupidity, ridiculous pomposity, and so forth. [emphasis added] ⁶¹

Certainly it would be implausible to consider these texts as unfolding utopian *parodies* of the discourses (those of post-colonial modernity, of tradition, of science and technology, of nationalism, etc.) upon which they are constructed. Rather, in their attempt to provide a formal and conceptual closure to the narration, both Lu Shi’e and Wu Jianren develop the utopian imaginary to their extremes, but at the risk of implausibility. Even though such a claim may sound inconsequential with the idea of utopia that we have been building in the previous chapters of this research – after all, the whole utopian allegory works in a highly fantastic register already – still, in some sections of these texts the narration somehow trespasses the “borders” of its generic expectations.

61 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 394.

The concluding chapters of *Xin Zhongguo* and *Xin shitou ji* provide some interesting examples of this tendency. These are fragments scattered among the texts, as if they were sudden slippages of signification outside the boundaries of the discourses presented in the allegorical modality of the utopian narration. The discourse of science and technique emerges once again as one of the most interesting cases: in Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*, for example, the trope of the miraculous cure or medicine is reiterated as an instrument for the (literal) elimination of evil from the social body:

戎一道：“漢民先生，現在又新發明了一種藥，現在方在試驗。這一種藥一出，世界上刑律恐怕就要大大改動了。”我問：“醫藥與刑律，又有什麼相關？”戎一道：“一個人好好的，總不肯輕易犯罪。那犯罪的，總是為萌了惡念才做出來。現在蘇先生發明的藥，就是專治那惡念的。”我道：“惡念怎麼能夠用藥治呢？”漢民聽了，便道：“人萌惡念，總因肚裡頭惡根性沒有除掉，這藥就是專行攻打那惡根性的。服過此藥，惡根性便從大便裡一瀉而出。”⁶²

“Mister Su Hanmin has also created a new medicine,” Zhou Rongyi said, “he is testing it at the moment. Once this medicine will be made public, there are probably going to be huge changes in the world for what concerns criminal law.”

“What do these two things – the medicine and the law – have in common?” I asked.

“If a person is good, difficulty he or she would commit a crime lightly. In committing a crime, the crime first stems from an evil intention, and then is perpetrated. The medicine that Mister Su Hanmin has discovered can be used to treat this evil intention.

“But how can a drug treat evil intentions?”

Su Hanmin was listening to the conversation, so he decided to answer:

“When a person develops evil intentions, it means that his or her evil nature has not been eliminated. This medicine attacks the evil nature which is present inside of a person. Once this person ingests the drug, the evil nature gets excreted.”

Whereas in the previous chapters of this novel the Suvinian *novum* worked as a metonymy for the reinforcement of the ideal of scientific and technological modernisation as a means for the improvement of society (hence the overt metaphors of Su Hanmin's

62 Lu Shi'e, p. 128.

“medicine for the cure of the heart/mind” and his “technique for the awakening of the people”), here Lu Shi’e’s appears to overindulge in this trope, with the result of a rather crass, overt metaphor of evil intentions and bodily functions. Furthermore, the scientific *novum* is presented and explained once again through circular tautologies – evil behaviour comes from evil intention, and it can be cured by science because science can cure it – which in the end reassert the two-dimensionality of the utopian imaginary.

Yet, despite Lu Shi’e’s occasional digressions, the utopian novel’s borders of “plausibility” are broken in other and subtler ways. At the end of both *Xin Zhongguo* and *Xin shitouji* we learn for example that the utopian inhabitants are, in the end, immortal:

“我與君,不是四十年沒有見面了麼?”友琴道:“不錯,四十年不見面了.”我道:“君當時隻有二十多歲的人,隔上四十年,不是已經六十多歲了麼?”友琴道:“不錯,我已經六十多歲了.”我道:“這樣,我便有個疑團解釋不出.你是六十多歲的人,怎麼容貌依然如舊,一點子沒再老態,瞧著仍是二十多歲的人?請問,你有甚駐顏丹,卻老術,延年方,可否告訴告訴我?”⁶³

“Youqin,” I asked her, “you and I did not see each other for forty years, is that right?”

“Correct,” she answered, “we did not see each other for forty years.”

“Then if at that time you were in your twenties, and 40 years have passed, should you be more than sixty years old now?”

“Indeed, I am already more than 60 years old.”

“But if it is so, there is something I cannot figure out then. If you are sixty years old, how come you look as you were before? It seems that you did not age one bit, and that you are still in your twenties. Pardon me if I ask, but do you use any elixir to preserve your youth, or practice nay technique to prevent your ageing? If it is so, can you tell me about it?”

Once again, the questions asked by the non-utopian character are left unanswered as the narration moves on to new vignettes and other new exotic aspects of the utopian construction. Yet the theme of the topic of immortality, and by extension of the body-less, incorporeal (ideal and ideal only) nature of the utopian construct, resurfaces in the last

63 Lu Shi’e, p. 146.

chapters of *Xin shitou ji*, where it reveals by contrast what we may consider as a “doubling back” of the macro-discourses of progress and modernity, which are made to arch and fold back to the always-relying discourse of capital-T tradition:

[宝玉]和东方德谈谈医理,又问问有什么新发明.东方德道:“...此刻我要研究两个法子...我想人生最不幸的是死,然而人人都逃不了一死.打算研究出一个不死之法来.人生最受累的是食,无论何等重大事,非吃饱了不能辨.这吃饭又狠耽搁时候,每吃一顿饭,总要一刻时候.一天祇算吃两顿,一年积算起来,单是吃饭的工夫,就占了九十个时辰,要耽搁了多少事?所以又打算研究一个不食之法.”宝玉道:“不食不死,岂非成了仙么?”东方德道:“我就因为相传那个道家服气长生之法,起初以为是个理想,寓言,及看看古人载籍,又似不尽诞妄,所以才发念研究.但是古人纵有此法,也不过是一人心得,秘不肯传.我是打算研究得了,普及众人的.”老少年道:“只管不死,不要有人满之患么?”东方德道:“只怕能得着了不死之法之后,便不生子了.”⁶⁴

Baoyu was talking with Dongfang De about medicine, and he was asking him questions about his new discoveries.

“At the moment it is my intention to work on two techniques,” Dongfang De answered, “man’s greatest misfortune is death, nobody can escape it. Thus I intend with my research to discover a method to avoid death. Moreover, man’s hardest toil is food: regardless of the matter, a person cannot do anything if he or she has not eaten enough. As for the act of eating, it requires time, and every time we eat, eating always takes some amount of time. If we consider to meals a day, and we add them up in a year, the task of eating requires a total of 180 hours of time, and how many things are delayed because of this? Therefore I intend to invent a way to get rid of the need to eat.”

“No food and no death,” said Jia Baoyu, “wouldn’t it be like to become an immortal?”

I used to think that those stories about the Daoist practices of long life were just fables, ideals and metaphors, and when I read their accounts in the old books, it seemed to me they were exaggerating and making things up, therefore I started to do research on that. But those methods of the past, they were the result of individual experiences and efforts, and so they were secrets that could not be passed on. I intend to study those methods and divulge them to the masses.”

“But if people will not die any more,” Lao Shaonian interrupted him,

“Wouldn’t we be facing the risk of overpopulation?”

“Well I think that after we will have discovered a way to avoid death, we will not reproduce any more.”

64 Wu Jianren, pp. 397–398.

The discourse of late Qing technical utopianism is developed to its extremes, as it enables the creation/imagination of a body-less, immutable and ideal society. The utopian society emerges as an arrangement of ideas rather than a system of practices, its inhabitants are represented as an ensemble of anthropomorphic metaphors rather than of human characters. The separation of the utopian spectacle is achieved and perfected:⁶⁵ the utopian text is ultimately detached from its original political imprint and it is excised from the great expectations that contributed to bring the genre into existence in the first place, and the ideal society it represents is completely detached from the historical subtext from which it develops by narrative mechanisms of alienation, reversal, misrepresentation, omission.

Once again, the utopian construct is revealed in its ambivalence: the utopian narration, as a sub-category of science fiction focused on the representation of society as whole, partakes in science fiction's critical potential by relying on the same strategies of productive alienation or, in the words of Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "provocation" or "unsettling" of the reader's expectations, yet once these narrative strategies are deployed in the text, their result is problematic. If, on the one hand, the late Qing utopian novel maintains its critical potential by envisioning in the form of an allegory the yet to be unfolded potential of the reader's ideological subtext, on the other hand it evades the "intractable problems" of the historical present (against which the literary genre emerged in the first place) by degenerating in an accumulation of images, ideals and abstractions that not only grows unfamiliar and alienating to the reader's expectations, but simply detached and alienated, "un-enmeshed" and "un-wordly".⁶⁶

As society tends to arrange itself in the form of a spectacle, that is a system of mystification whose purpose is its own justification (which is the justification of the

65 "La séparation achevée." Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

66 We are referring to our initial considerations over the "worldiness" and the "enmeshment" of the utopian text in the perspective of Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua (see chapter 1).

current modes and relations of production), so the utopian construct – a spectacle within a spectacle, an attempt to reinvent society as a whole within the text – unfolds in a similar manner by arranging itself in a self-celebrative and self-referential system of images. Adapting Debord's nineteenth thesis on the society of the spectacle to the utopian ideal, we might say that the utopian text inherits all the weaknesses of the philosophical project which undertook in the first place (i.e., the ideological subtext of *fin-de-siècle* China); furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought (i.e., the Western-oriented obsession with the discourses of reform, progress, science and technique). Yet such a spectacle does not realise philosophy, it philosophises reality, while concrete life of everyone is degraded into a speculative universe.⁶⁷

In this perspective, the conclusions of both *Xin Zhongguo* and *Xin shitou ji* can be read as almost necessary and inevitable developments of the narrative trajectories staged by Lu Shi'e and Wu Jianren. As these trajectories were inaugurated through strategies of diegetic dislocation oriented towards an unreliable narration (the narrator loses his way; he is lost in a dream; etc.), in a similar way they are concluded. At the end of his experience in the new Chinese country, the character of Lu Shi'e is invited to take part in an international meeting: all the nations of the earth have convened to Shanghai in order to celebrate the institution of *datong* and the beginning of a new era of global prosperity. As the protagonist is entering the Chinese parliament to be present at such an important historical juncture, he

⁶⁷ “Le spectacle est l'héritier de toute la faiblesse du projet philosophique occidental qui fut une compréhension de l'activité, dominée par les catégories du voir ; aussi bien qu'il se fonde sur l'incessant déploiement de la rationalité technique précise qui est issue de cette pensée. Il ne réalise pas la philosophie, il philosophise la réalité. C'est la vie concrète de tous qui s'est dégradée en univers spéculatif” (The spectacle inherits all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of seeing; furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a speculative universe) and “Là où le monde réel se change en simples images, les simples images deviennent des êtres réels, et les motivations efficaces d'un comportement hypnotique” (Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior). Debord, theses 19 and 18.

is yanked back to reality:

走至門口,被門限兒一絆,拍躑一交,就此跌醒.見身子依舊睡在榻上,一個女人站在榻前,卻正是好友李友琴君.才知方才的,乃是一場春夢.今年依舊是宣統二年正月初一,國會依舊沒有開.因問女士:“你來了幾時?”女士道:“才來呢!”我遂把夢裡頭事,細細告知了女士.女士笑道:“這是你痴心夢想久了,所以才做這奇夢.”我道:“休說是夢,到那時真有這景象也未可知.”女士道:“我與你都在青年,瞧下去自會知道的.”我道:“我把這夢記載出來,以為異日之憑証.”女士就瞧著我,一句句的寫,寫至上燈時候,方才完畢.⁶⁸

As I passed through the entrance, I stumbled and tripped over the doorstep. In that moment I woke up. I realised that my body was lying on the bed as before, there was a woman was standing near it, she was my good friend Li Youqin. It was in that moment that I realised that everything was but a dream. It was still the first day of the second year of the Xuantong Reign, and, as before, no parliament has been opened yet. “When did you arrive?” I asked my friend

“I just arrived!” She answered, so I started to explain her in detail the dream that I just had.

“You have been fantasising about these things for a long time,” she said laughing, “so now you are dreaming about them too.”

“Do not say it is a dream, there may come a time when this prospect could become reality.”

“You and I are young, we will have to wait and see.”

“I am going to write this dream down, some day in the future it will be proof of the days gone by.” And as my friend stayed there watching me, I wrote this dream down phrase by phrase until it was time to turn on the lights, and only now I have finished.

A similar solution is given in the last chapter of *Xin shitou ji*, although, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, Wu Jianren’s narrative closure is much more articulate and meaningful. While Lu Shi’e’s oneiric closure represents a rather predictable manoeuvre on the part of the author to disengage and disentangle from the impasse of a utopian narration that has grown “un-enmeshed” from the world and become too involved only in itself, Wu Jianren’s oneiric closure hints at the inherent failure of the utopian narration as a form that is not here nor there and that, while it is presented as a narration of all that is latent, potential and realisable in the ideological text it stems from, rather unfolds

68 Lu Shi’e, p. 157.

as the epitome of all that remains unattained and unrealised.

At the end of Wu Jianren's novel the character of Jia Baoyu intends to go back to the Village of Freedom to visit the home where the founder of the country Dongfang Wenming was born. As the protagonist goes to bed to rest before the travel and falls asleep, he is suddenly awakened up by a courier who brings him a letter from his old friend Wu Bohui. The latter urges Jia Baoyu to go back to Shanghai: the times are changing and the Chinese country is in turmoil. Jia Baoyu thus decides to return back to Shanghai to see with his own eyes what is happening. As he arrives in Shanghai, the city and the country have changed completely. He is told by Wu Bohui that after the American government had ratified the Chinese Exclusion Act (it is thus the year 1902) the Chinese population started to boycott the American products and pressure the imperial court to reform the government and adopt a constitution.

果然立憲的功效,非常神速,不到幾時,中國就全國改觀了.此刻的上海,你道還是從前的上海麼?大不相同了.治外法權也收回來了,上海城也拆了,城裡及南市都開了商場,一直通到製造局旁邊.吳淞的商場也熱鬧起來了,浦東開了會場,此刻正在那裡開萬國博覽大會.我請你來,第一件是為這個.這萬國博覽大會,是極難遇著的,不可不看看.第二件是看萬國和平會.此刻和平會被各國公議到中國來辦,舉中國皇帝做會長.⁶⁹

As expected, the adoption of the constitution was very effective, things started to move very fast, and in a very short time the country changed its face completely. Don't you think that the Shanghai of today is not any more the city it used to be the past? It is completely different now. The concessions have been taken back to us; a market place has been opened in the southern part of the city, right near the arsenals. The Wusong river is lively with activities, and in the Pudong area there is an assembly hall where, at this exact moment, an international conference is being held. I urge you to come and see it, first of all it is an international event that you cannot miss, and secondly, it is a world peace conference. All the nations in the world have agreed to come to China to talk about world peace, and our Chinese Emperor is presiding it...

69 Wu Jianren, pp. 404–405.

As Jia Baoyu and Wu Bohi move along the Wusong river on a steamboat directed towards the assembly hall where the leaders of the world are convening, Jia Baoyu is overwhelmed by the changes that the city of Shanghai has undergone. Yet as the new city unfolds as the protagonist's gaze advances, the narration appears to fall apart, as if the coordinates of time and space started to vacillate. Jia Baoyu is swallowed by the unfamiliar modernity of the new city of Shanghai, disoriented by the vertigo of its progress:

看看兩岸,全是高大房屋,煙囪如林,不覺自言自語道:“這是那裡呢?向來沒有到過。”忽聽得伯惠在背後道:“這裡是揚子江呀!”寶玉回頭問道:“長江兩面,那裡有許多房屋?”伯惠道:“你還不知道呢?此刻從吳淞起,一直到漢口,兩岸全是中國廠家,接連不斷的了。”一轉眼間,船已到了漢口.不知怎樣,那身子卻又在火車上面.那火車走的風馳電掣一般,兩旁桑林,茶林,稻田,麥田都好像往後飛馳.眾人紛紛下車,寶玉也下了車.⁷⁰

Tall, big buildings rose all along the banks of the river, their chimneys were like a forest. Jia Baoyu was lost in his thoughts, “Where are we?” He mumbled, “I have never been here.”

“This is the Yangtze river of course!” Wu Bohui answered, his voice coming from Jia Baoyu's back.

Jia Baoyu turned his head towards him, “But since when there are so many buildings along the Yangtze river?” He asked.

“Don't you know? Nowadays, from the mouth of the Wusong to Hankou, there are but factories running uninterrupted all along the banks.”

In the blink of an eye the boat had arrived to Hankou, and the two somehow found themselves on a train. The train moved at a lightning speed, speeding along the trees, the tea fields and the rice farms in a blur. When the other people started to leave the train, Jia Baoyu left it too.

In the last chapter of *Xin shitou ji*, Wu Jianren too resorts to the trope of the dream of a *datong*-like scenario of world peace in which the Chinese nation occupies (once again) a central position (the world peace conference is held in Shanghai, the Chinese emperor presides over it, all the foreign nations have convened from the periphery to the Chinese centre to pay their homage). Yet in Wu Jianren's novel the deployment of the trope does not fall back in the predictable dichotomy of a dystopian “here” set against the utopian

70 Wu Jianren, p. 404.

“there”, but it rather results in the superimposition of the two extremes and in the dislocation of the character (thus of the reader) neither “here” nor “there”. *Xin shitou ji*'s conclusion reasserts the “in-betweenness” of the utopian construct, its problematic position in relation to its ideological subtext. Such a result is obtained by Wu Jianren in two narrative moves:

看那房子門口時,鑿了“萬國和平會”五個字,都用飛金鋪了,映著日光,十分耀目.寶玉便踱了進去,隻見裡面設了一個大會場,中國,外國的人坐滿場上,也不知有多少人.坐了半天,還是寂寂無聲.忽聽得一陣鈴向,耳邊有人悄悄的說道:“主席的上台了,這便是中國皇帝.”寶玉回頭一看,正是伯惠和他說話.正要答時,忽聽得一陣鼓掌之聲如雷震耳.忙向台上看時,講席上站著的卻是東方文明,演說道:“今日萬國和平會開會之第一日,蒙各國公舉朕為會長.各國或皇帝親臨或派大員代表,都在此蒞會.”⁷¹

“Five characters were carved on the arch of the door [that lead to the assembly hall], they said “Global peace conference” and they were coated in vivid gold, bright and dazzling like the sun. Jia Baoyu entered the hall and walked around the place. Inside the building was huge assembly hall where who knows how many people, Chinese and foreigners, were sitting. Some time passed, and everything was still quiet, when suddenly a sound of bells broke the silence, “The chair of the conference,” a low voice said, “that’s the Chinese emperor.” Jia Baoyu turned his head towards the voice, it was Wu Bohui who was speaking to him. As he was to answer, a deafening burst of applause filled the air. Jia Baoyu hurried to have a look at the podium, but there he saw none other than Dongfang Wenming, who took the floor: “Today is the first day of our international peace conference, and I have been elected by the representatives of all the country involved to act as its president. Each country is here represented either by its ruler, or by its delegates, and all are present here...”

With the sudden appearance of the character of Dongfang Wenming as almost literal embodiment of the Chinese civilisation outside the Civilised Realm and in the once-dystopian, “historical” present of the narration, the two narrative levels and dialectical layers of utopia and dystopia are transcended in what appears to be an optimistic resolution of the plot, as well as of the rhetorical purpose of the novel. Yet this resolution is apparent:

71 Wu Jianren, p. 405.

故自此次开会之后,当消灭强权主义,实行和平主义。”合场上下一齐鼓掌,宝玉鼓掌不已,又要顿足.谁知一顿足,却脚踏了空,一落千丈,两眼登时昏黑,吓的一身冷汗.勉强睁开双眼看时,原来还睡在东方文明家里客房里面的床上,竟是一场大梦.⁷²

“... from this moment on,” the Chinese emperor continued, “we will get rid of any form of authoritarianism, and we will adopt pacifism instead.” The whole audience started to clap altogether in approval, and Jia Baoyu was clapping too, enthusiastic, stamping his foot on the floor. Yet his foot did not hit the floor but only air, and his mood crashed at once as he realised that he was in a dark room, covered in cold sweat. As he forced himself to open his eyes, Jia Baoyu realised that he was still lying on a bed in a room of Dongfang Wenming’s house [where he had been invited during his visit of the Civilised Realm], it was all but a dream.

Wu Jianren’s oneiric closure evokes the conclusion of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, as in both these texts the trope of the dream is reversed, and the utopian locus is not revealed as the object of a dream imagined elsewhere, but rather becomes the place from where to look (or dream) backward, thus allowing an inversion of the fictional coordinates of the novel. Utopia becomes “reality”, and the “reality” of the narrator turns into a dream. But if on a superficial level this narrative gimmick can be read as a naive idealistic gesture on the part of the narrator so that utopia is brought to “reality” and the reformist ideal is realised (at least) in the text, thus providing the narration an uplifting conclusion, we believe that in the case of Wu Jianren’s *Xin shitou ji* such an oneiric reversal should be read otherwise.

The Stone is once again left aside from the creation of the world: he lives an unfamiliar, alienating experience both in the present of *fin-de-siècle* China, whence he longs for a utopian elsewhere, and in the Civilised Realm, a place that the character ultimately abandons twice, both by fleeing to the renewed city of Shanghai in a dream, and also by leaving Lao Shaonian behind at the end. Jia Baoyu, as an embodiment of China’s

72 Wu Jianren, p. 406.

pre-colonial past, cannot find his place in the modern world: the modern world cannot be fitted and adjusted into the old one without disrupting its core (體) or essence (國粹). In this perspective, the late Qing utopian novel does not provide any ideological synthesis, nor does it enable or “work out” any virtuous integration of the contrasting discourses from which it is moulded and shaped. Rather it emerges as a locus of contrast in which all that is traumatic and unresolved in the present is made to surface within the borders of fiction through a complex play of (misleading) metaphors and allegories, of misrepresentations, of exaggerations, of omissions, negations and inversions. The utopian text emerges thus as the epitome, if not of a failure (which is the failure of the “traditional” system of cultural coordinates to elaborate and absorb the trauma of modernity), of a historical impasse, of a moment of transition, of revolution.

CONCLUSIONS: ON BREAKING OUT OF BEATEN PATHS

But those Chinese writers and thinkers who have understood the futility of the discourse-bound mentality of saving the nation, reinventing the nation, developing the nation, of negotiating modernity, of squaring the circle are few, as indeed are their counterparts the products of the other modern and modernizing societies.

So much needs to be forgotten in the striving for cultural modernity, just as so much must be forgotten in assuming the mantle of post-modern post-culture. So much history, so many histories, so much geography, so many geographies so much archaeology of many one-time disciplines.

Gregory B. Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness*¹

Technical invasion does not involve the simple addition of new values to old ones. It does not put new wine into old bottles; it does not introduce new content into old forms. The old bottles are all being broken.

A civilization which is collapsing cannot be re-created abstractly.

Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*²

1 Gregory B. Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2003, p. 8.

2 Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, New York, Vintage Books, 1964, pp. 122–124.

Often during the course of this research we have been asked if the Chinese utopias portrayed in the novels here taken into account resemble to any degree what “China” is now. Most of the time this question is asked jokingly, masked behind a layer of disheartened irony. At first glance the answer to such a question appears to be evident: of course not. If contemporary China (or at least its largest institutional representation) were to be measured upon the utopian spectrum, it would probably lean more towards the dystopian side of it, rather than towards the *eutopian* one. Yet this question is less shallow than it sounds, and if we stop to consider the implications behind its naive simplicity and apparent obliviousness, we would realise that it cannot be dismissed so easily. In fact, such a question does not only allude to the intertwining relationship between the utopian ideal, the ideological subtext of the Real, and the position of the reader between these two discourses, but it also taps into a broader problematic regarding the way we – as researchers – locate the late Qing utopian discourse within the long, ongoing process of imagination and decryption of the modern Chinese identity. Whether reality resembles utopia or not, the form of the utopian novel can be employed – both actively (by looking forward from the text to the real) and passively (by looking backward from reality to the text) – as an epistemological instrument for the understanding of recent history and the present.

In the introduction of this research we have tried to make the case for a reading of our critical analysis in the terms of an itinerary, a different exploratory route within the narrative coordinates given by these novels that could account not only for the utopian landscape thereby presented and celebrated, but also for the reasons this landscape was imagined, instituted and presented as such (i.e., utopian). Yet while we are still convinced of the overall validity of this approach in the sense that it has allowed us to break out of the expected perspectives and the expected gaze of the utopian construction, and to collocate

the late Qing utopian discourse within the wider set of coordinates of China's colonial (local, repressed, incipient, multiple, fragmented) modernity, still we find ourselves wondering: to exactly what degree have we broken out of these expected paths? To what degree have we been able to dismantle our object of study, rather than to be ensnared in its enchanting narration? Was our scrutinising gaze disentangled and "dis-aligned" enough to permit any critical space at all, to escape the "closed discursive dilemma", the "obsessive narrative of national salvation" that seems to define more than anything else the boundaries of the modern Chinese utopia?³ And in the end, have we indulged too, although from the distance of our position of researchers, in the "obsession with China" that monopolised the attention of the modern novelists and intellectuals of the late Manchu empire?⁴

The discursive models that we have deployed as points of reference for the development of this study – the discourse of the nation as silent referent of history, of Western imperialism, of the colonial trauma, of the Orientalist essentialism, of the repressed modernities – allowed us to extend the borders of the Chinese modern utopia beyond those given by the allegory of the text, and to reveal their degree of imbrication with the ideological subtext of history. Yet, even though these borders are explored in their imbricated intricacy, even though they are analysed, exposed and redefined in the attempt to define the status of the late Qing utopian discourse within the broader historical narrative of late nineteenth and early twentieth century China, they still remain as such, that is as conceptual *limits* and *boundaries*. Despite their theoretical refinement, these

3 Lee, p. 8.

4 "There has been no modern Chinese writer consumed with the passion of Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, of Conrad or Mann, to probe the illness of modern civilization. But at the same time every important Chinese writer is obsessed with China and spares no pains to depict its squalor and corruption. It would seem that he is equally concerned with spiritual sickness, but whereas every modern writer of England, America, France, and Germany (and the rule also applies to a few exceptional writers of Soviet Russia) automatically identifies the sick state of his country with the state of man in the modern world, the Chinese writer sees the conditions of China as peculiarly Chinese and not applicable elsewhere. He shares with the modern Western writer a vision of disgust and despair, but since his vision does not extend beyond China, at the same time he leaves the door open for hope." C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, third edition, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 536.

discursive models may in the end fall short of giving a thorough account for the complexity of the phenomenon.

The recent editorial history of Lu Shi'e's 陸士諤 utopian novel *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 provides a useful example of the “enmeshment” and the imbrication of the utopian text with the world, as well as of the never-ending nature of the project of modernity.⁵ On the occasion of the Shanghai Universal Exposition of 2010 Lu Shi'e's novel has reappeared on the Chinese bookshelves after a long period of sporadic low-key editions and very little critical attention. The sudden reappearance of Lu Shi'e's novel is a reminder of the importance to consider these texts not only as outdated visions of modernity, but also as lively and productive “cultural genes” (or memes) of the “grand narrative” of China's modernity. The composite imaginaries that concur to create this grand narrative fulfil and overflow the ideal borders of the nation and of the empire, they follow and break out of the ramifications of economy and technique, and in doing so they leave behind as sediment the traces of the modernist aesthetic project.

With the Shanghai World Expo of 2010, the late Qing utopian imaginary of science, progress and national modernity suddenly resurfaced again amid the Chinese social texture, when more than 190 foreign countries gathered along the banks of the Huangpu river to participate in a Babylonian/*Datong* 大同- like accumulation of pavilions, expositions and self-celebratory spectacles under the aegis of the Chinese government. To celebrate this occasion, Lu Shi'e's novel *Xin Zhongguo* was brought back to life (that is, to the market) in an array of beautiful, new editions.⁶ Among the different new volumes that blossomed during that year, the version published by the Beijing Jiuzhou Chubanshe 北京

5 “Texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly.” Edward Said, “The Text, the World, the Critic”, *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, October 1975, vol. 8, n. 2, p. 4.

6 To our knowledge, the text has been reprinted in at least four new editions, three of which are reported in our bibliography.

九州出版社 stands out in particular, as it represents a peculiar point of convergence of contrasting imaginaries, as well as an overt attempt of re-staging and rewriting of the past in celebration of the present. As the vivid, brash red gloss of the book cover reminds its readers, Lu Shi'e's novel is presented as "a most remarkable book, a precise and accurate prediction of the Shanghai Universal Exposition" (一部准确预言在上海召开世博会的曠世奇書), and it ought to be read as a tribute to the facts of the present, because "the dream of one hundred years ago has become reality one hundred years later" (一百年前一個夢, 一百年後變現實).⁷

While this sudden incursion of the late Qing utopian imaginary of modernity amid the pavilions of the Shanghai World Expo may simply be considered as yet another of the myriad facets and components of contemporary China's all-encompassing rhetoric of "supertraditional supermodernity", it also reasserts once again the peculiar nature of the political project put forward through the allegory of the *fin-de-siècle* utopian text. This is the project of a modernity that, once posited as a possibility, it gradually unfolds as a totalising and inescapable discourse. What is initially embraced as a practical instrument (用) to be learnt through emulation and applied to the national body (體), develops into what we have defined as a self-sustaining and pervasive process. If we look back at the history of the Chinese modern "nationalist" and reformist thought, we can trace a progression from what we may term as the early *self-preserving*/Self-Strengthening tendencies of national renovation played around the adoption of Western technique, to a full-fledged "abandonment" (for lack of a better term) of the national self.

In the field of modern Chinese intellectual history, this trajectory is often described

⁷ See the front cover of Lu Shi'e 陆士谔, *Xin Zhongguo* 新中国, Beijing, Jiuzhou chubanshe 九州出版社, 2010; Lu Shi'e's more attentive readers may be left to wonder to what degree the "dream of one hundred years ago" has actually become reality, and, conversely, what this dream actually entailed in the first place if it has been realised in the country that hosted the expo of 2010.

as one of radicalization, in which the initial instances of moderate reform give way to the extremes of the May Fourth movement and the socialist re-imagination of the country that would stem from it. Yet, following Jacques Ellul's considerations over the totalising nature of the technical phenomenon ("Technique cannot be otherwise than totalitarian"), we submit that this perceived progression or movement of radicalization is in itself a narration, a mystification. This narration was conceived to cope with the totalising, invasive and ever-expanding nature of the idea of modernity that was brought forward by the imperialist enterprise through the vehicle of colonialism and the supporting "platform" of the nation-state.

The late Qing utopian novel plays a relevant part in this narration of ideas. Flourishing in the wake of the symbolically-poignant failure of the Hundred Days' Reform, it developed upon the fragments of the betrayed expectations of the Chinese intelligentsia by ratifying and transfiguring in the form of the novel and through the allegory of the utopian narration the perceived failure of China's response to the West. Yet in ratifying this perceived failure, the late Qing utopian novel rather hints at the "uncountainability" of the project of modernity, that is to say at the pervasiveness of the idea of an economic and technical modernity that cannot be contained by the conceptual frameworks (or discourses) by which it is enshrouded.

Thus the *outopian* nature of the late Qing utopian novel emerges: by projecting the ideals of reforms in the extended metaphor of the utopian narration and by giving them a figurative shape in an accumulation of images of social proficiency and national coherence, the utopian text provides borders, limits, boundaries to an idea that, once given, cannot be enclosed, limited, restrained. The utopian text is not utopian simply by virtue of what it overtly represents – that is the utopian island, the Civilised Realm, the renewed Chinese empire, the plots of discovery, the imaginaries of science and technology – but

rather because of the impossible, unrealisable hypothesis it entertains: that the project of modernity can be contained or quarantined within a set of preconceived boundaries. As Gregory Lee remarks, the locus of Chineseness is a non-place:⁸ in the case of the late Qing utopian novel, the non-place of Chinese modernity is declined in the *outopian* place, that is the place of a paradox.

Hence the schizophrenic imprint of the utopian text, its alienating familiarity and its familiar alienation, its impossible, two-faced gaze which longs forward to an imagined modernity while looking (further) backward to a pre-modern, unadulterated, “traditional” essence. The late Qing utopian novel emerges as conflictual locus of convergence of imaginaries, an *ensemble* of symbols that provisionally crystallises in the utopian narration the chaotic *magma* of a society in transition. These traits surface in the utopian text when we pay attention to the strategies of representation and the narrative gimmicks upon which the utopian landscape is presented. The utopian text reveals the schizophrenic imprint of its project through a constant play of reversal, misrepresentation, emphasis, omission, re-adaptation and dislocation, relying in equal measure both on what is overtly given in the text, and on what is left out of it. The utopian construct is developed in the texts through the presence of an absence. This play of presences and absences characterises many aspects of the utopian narration: the relation of dislocation of the utopian locus with its historical subtext; the description of the utopian landscape and of the society that is supposed to populate it; the experience of the protagonists through it. The utopian landscape thus emerges as a Potemkin village whose coherence holds together through the careful orchestration of the perspective from which its buildings and its streets are observed, but when this perspective is questioned, the seductive *trompe-l’œil* of the utopian scenography falls into pieces and it is eventually revealed for what it really is, “shadow

8 Lee, p. 8 passim.

play of electric lights”.

In the five chapters of this study we have tried to break out of the elusive perspective of the utopian construction. In doing so, we have moved both deductively from the concept of utopia as a set of generic boundaries for the definition of our object of research (i.e., the individual textual instances), and inductively, by reconstructing the generic category of the utopian novel from the fragments of the texts of the individual textual instances. In the first chapter, we have tried to extrapolate the genre of the utopian novel from the ocean of texts produced during the late Qing period. Elaborating on the ideal scope of the utopian narration, whose purpose is the portrayal of society as a whole, we have proposed to consider the late Qing *lixiang* 理想 or *wutuobang xiaoshuo* 烏托邦小說 as a Genettian “archi-genre”, that is to say an overarching narratological and epistemological category to encompass the different declinations of the *xiaoshuo* 小說 form that blossomed at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the second chapter we have focused on the two unfinished novels *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國記未來 and *Shizi hou* 獅子吼 by Liang Qichao and Chen Tianhua 陳天華, paying attention in particular to Liang Qichao’s narrative experiment in relation to the author’s agenda of literary reform and his attempt to develop a new utilitarian aesthetics to define the role of art and literature in society. Even though the two novels here taken into consideration are both unfinished works as well as relatively marginal endeavours in the intellectual history of their authors, we have decided to turn this condition of “incompleteness” (which is historical and contingent) in our favour and deploy it as a useful instrument for the understanding of the conceptual “location” of the utopian construct and for the definition of our movement (as readers and as interpreters) towards it. In this perspective, the condition of “incompleteness” of these two texts is thus elevated

from incidental contingency to inherent characteristic of the utopian construct, emphasising once more its “in-between” condition and its nature of “simulacrum of a synthesis” between reality, the ideological subtext and the expectations that the latter produces.

By focusing on Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and Arthur Dudley Vinton’s *Looking Further Backward*, the third chapter may be considered as an interpolation within the general architecture of this study. In reconstructing the textual genesis of the Chinese translation of Bellamy’s utopian novel, and by trying to deconstruct *Looking Backward*’s model of utopia through the Yellow-peril distortion given by Vinton’s dystopian sequel, we have tried to highlight the dichotomic nature of the utopian construction, whose idea of the representation of the Self through the demarcation from the Other may have been translated, adopted and emulated from the part of the Chinese *fin-de-siècle* novelists and intellectuals with the circulation of Bellamy’s text on Chinese soil.

With the fourth and the fifth chapters of this study, we have tried to apply the conceptual framework previously elaborated to the close reading of two of the most interesting specimens of the Chinese utopian genre: Wu Jianren’s 吳趸人 *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 and Lu Shi’e’s 陸譯士 *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國. In these two novels the utopian spectacle (a notion borrowed from Guy Debord’s *La société du spectacle*) is celebrated in all its purported magnificence. Yet behind the celebration of the utopian spectacle we can see at work the dynamics of accumulation, overlapping and intertwining of different discourses, the sublimation of the limits of the ideological subtext into the language of absolutes of the utopian representation. Through the analysis of the plots, the characters, the narrative structures, the diegetic modalities and the lexicon of these novels, we have tried to take apart the utopian “shadow play of electric lights” and to explore the mechanisms that allow it to ensnare us.

Even though many are the aspects of the novels, and of the literary genre taken here into consideration, that would deserve further attention, we believe that this work may contribute to lay the groundwork for the study of one of the most interesting aspects of the late Qing literary production, as well as for the understanding of this literary period *per se*. By focusing on a selection of texts otherwise often neglected in the study of modern Chinese literature, we have moved towards the reassessment of the Chinese literary canon of modernity in the attempt to bring to the centre what had been left unproductively at the margins for too long a time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A Ying 阿英, *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi* 晚清小说史, Beijing, Dongfang chubanshe 东方出版社, 1996 [1937].
- ANDERSON Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 2006.
- ANGENOT Marc, “The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction (Le Paradigme absent, éléments d’une sémiotique de la SF)”, *Science Fiction Studies*, March 1979, vol. 6, n. 1, pp. 9–19.
- AUERBACH Jonathan, “‘The Nation Organized’: Utopian Impotence in Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*”, *American Literary History*, Spring 1994, vol. 6, n. 1, pp. 24–47.
- BAKHTIN Mikhail M., *Rabelais and his World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965].
- BALASOPOULOS Antonis, “‘Suffer a Sea Change’: Spatial Crisis, Maritime Modernity, and the Politics of Utopia”, *Cultural Critique*, Spring 2006, n. 63, pp. 122–156.
- BARLOW Tani E., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997.
- BAUDRILLARD Jean, *The Mirror of Production*, translated by Mark Poster, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1975.
- , *Utopia Deferred: Writings for Utopie (1967–1978)*, translated by Stuart Kendall, New York, Semiotex(e), 2006.
- BAUMAN Zygmunt, *Society under Siege*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002.
- BELLAMY Edward, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

- , *The Religion of Solidarity*, Santa Barbara, Concorde Grove Press, 1984.
- BHABHA Homi K. (ed.), *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 2004.
- , *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge, 1990.
- BI Heguan zhuren 碧荷馆主人, *Xin jiyuan* 新纪元, Guilin, Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe 广西师范大学出版社, 2008.
- BOURDIEU Pierre, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, translated by Susan Emanuel, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996.
- BOYM Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001.
- BOZZETTO Roger, “Peut-on parler de fantastique dans la littérature chinoise?”, *Cahiers du Cerli*, 2005, n. 7–8, pp. 235–234.
- BUESCH Thomas A., “The Literary Genre as Symbolic Form”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Summer 1973, vol. 31, n. 4, pp. 525–530.
- BUTTON Peter, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*, Leiden, Brill, 2009.
- BYRON George Gordon and Henry Lytton BULWER, *The Complete Works of Lord Byron: Reprinted from the Last London Edition. Containing Besides the Notes and Illustrations by Moore [et Al.] Considerable Additions and Original Notes, with a Most Complete Index*, Paris, A. and W. Galignani, 1841.
- CAI Yuanpei 元培蔡, *Cai Yuanpei quanji* 蔡元培全集, vol. 1, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju chuban 中华书局出版, 1984.
- CAMILLE Michael et al., “Rethinking the Canon”, *The Art Bulletin*, June 1996, vol. 78, n. 2, pp. 198–217.
- CANTOR Milton, “The Backward Look of Bellamy’s Socialism” in PATAI Daphne (ed.), *Looking Backward, 1888–1888: Essays on Edward Bellamy*, Amherst, University

- of Massachusetts Press, 1988.
- CASCARDI Anthony J., “Totality and the Novel”, Summer 1992, *New Literary History*, vol. 23, n. 3, pp. 607–627.
- CASTORIADIS Cornelius, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, Villepreux, Éditions du Soleil, 1975.
- . *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford, Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- . *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, translated by Kathleen Blamey, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998.
- CHAI Ch’u and Winberg CHAI (eds.), *Li Chi, Book of Rites: An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions*, translated by James Legge, New York, University Books, 1967.
- CHAN Sin-wai (ed.), *An Exposition of Benevolence: The Jen-hsüeh of T’an Ssu-t’ung*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1984.
- CHANG Hao, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning 1890–1911*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987.
- CHEN Lingchei Letty, “Reading Between Chinese Modernism and Modernity: A Methodological Reflection”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, December 2002, vol. 24, pp. 175–188.
- CHEN Pingyuan 陈平原, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi* 二十世纪中国小说史, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 1989.
- , *Chen Pingyuan xiaoshuo shilun ji* 陈平原小说史论集, vol. 1, Shijiazhuang, Hebei renmin chubanshe 河北人民出版社, 1997.
- . *Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuanbian* 中国小说叙事模式的转变, Shanghai, Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1988.

- CHEN Pingyuan 陈平原 and XIA Shaohong 夏晓虹, *Ershi shiji zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* 二十世纪中国小说理论资料, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 1989.
- CHEN Tianhua 陳天華, *Shizi hou* 獅子吼 in Wang Xiaolian 王孝廉 (ed.), *Wan Qing xiaoshuo daxi* 晚清小說大系, vol. 22, Taipei, Guangya chuban youxian gongsi 廣雅出版有限公司, 1984 [1905].
- CHEN Xinliang 陈新良, “Woguo jindai kexue xiaoshuo fanyi jianlun” 我国近代科学小说翻译简论, *Shaoguan xueyuan xuebao* 韶关学院学报, July 2007, vol. 28, n. 7, pp. 102–105.
- CLAEYS Gregory and Lyman Tower SARGENT (eds.), *The Utopia Reader*, New York, New York University Press, 1999.
- CLARKE Arthur C., *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, New York, Harper & Row, 1973.
- CSICSERY-RONAY Istvan Jr., “Science Fiction and Empire”, *Science Fiction Studies*, July 2003, vol. 30, n. 2, pp. 231–245.
- DARROBERS Roger, “Du confucianisme réformé à l’utopie universelle”, *Études chinoises*, Spring and Autumn 2000, vol. 19, n. 1–2, pp. 15–66.
- DAWKINS Richard, *The Selfish Gene* (revised edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989.
- DE BARY William Theodore et al. (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.
- DEBORD Guy, *La société du spectacle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992 [1967].
- DE GROOT Jerome, *The Historical Novel*, London, Routledge, 2009.
- DELEUZE Gilles and Félix GUATTARI, *L’anti-Oedipe : capitalisme et schizophrénie*,

- Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1972.
- , *Mille plateaux*, Paris, Éditions de minuit, 1980.
- DENTON Kirk A. (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996.
- DES FORGES Alexander, “From Source Texts to ‘Reality Observed’: The Creation of the ‘Author’ in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Vernacular Fiction”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, December 2000, vol. 22, pp. 67–84.
- DIKÖTTER Frank, *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, London, Hurst & Company, 1997.
- , *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, London, Hurst & Company, 1992.
- DOLEZELOVA-VELINGEROVA Milena (ed.), *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- DRAKE Fred W., *China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yü and his Geography of 1848*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975.
- DUARA Prasenjit, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- , “The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China”, *History and Theory*, October 1998, vol. 37, n. 3, pp. 287–308.
- EISENSTADT Shmuel N., “Multiple Modernities”, *Daedalus*, January 2000, vol. 129, n. 1, pp. 1–29.
- ELLUL Jacques, *Le bluff technologique*, Paris, Fayard/Pluriel, 2012 [1988].
- , *The Technological Bluff*, Grand Rapids, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990.
- , *The Technological Society*, translated by Robert K. Merton, New York, Vintage Books, 1964.

- , *The Technological System*, translated by Joachim Neugroschel, New York, The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980.
- ELMAN Benjamin A., *A Cultural History of Modern Science in China*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008.
- , *On their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005.
- , “The Problem of Modern Science in China in the last 300 Years: From Ming-Qing to Qian Mu”, in *Jinian Qian Mu xiansheng shishi shi zhou nian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 紀念錢穆先生逝世十週年國際學術研討會論文集, Taipei, Taiwan daxue Zhongguo wenxue xi 臺灣大學中國文學系, January 2001, pp. 479–528.
- EPSTEIN Maram, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.
- FAN Shouyi, “Translation of English Fiction and Drama in Modern China: Social Context, Literary Trends, and Impact”, *Meta : journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators’ Journal*, March 1999, vol. 44, n. 1, pp. 154–177.
- FANON Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 2008.
- , *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1971.
- FOGEL Joshua A., *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao’s Introduction of Modern Western Civilization to China*, Berkeley, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2004.
- FOKKEMA Douwe W., *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011.
- FORBES Allyn B., “The Literary Quest for Utopia, 1880–1900”, *Social Forces*, December

- 1927, vol. 6, n. 2, pp. 179–189.
- FOWLER Alastair, “Genre and the Literary Canon”, *New Literary History*, Autumn 1979, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 97–119.
- FREEDMAN Carl, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2000.
- FRYE Northrop, *Creation and Recreation*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- , “Varieties of Literary Utopias”, *Daedalus*, April 1965, vol. 94, n. 2, pp. 323–347.
- FUNG Edmund S. K., *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- GELLNER Ernest, *Culture, Identity, and Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- , *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1983.
- GENETTE Gérard, *The Architext: An Introduction*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.
- GEOGHEGAN Vincent, “The Utopian Past: Memory and History in Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and William Morris’s *News From Nowhere*”, 1992, *Utopian Studies*, vol. 3, n. 2, pp. 75–90.
- GIMPEL Denise, *Lost Voices of Modernity: A Chinese Popular Fiction Magazine in Context*, Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2001.
- GOOSSAERT Vincent, “1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, May 2006, vol. 65, n. 2, pp. 307–335.
- GREGORY Derek, “Interventions in the Historical Geography of Modernity: Social Theory, Spatiality and the Politics of Representation”, *Geografiska Annaler (Series B, Human Geography)*, 1991, vol. 73, n. 1, pp. 17–44.

- GREIMAS Algirdas J., *Sémantique structurale : recherche de méthode*, Paris, Larousse, 1966.
- GU Mingdong, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A non-Western Narrative System*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006.
- GUARNERI Carl J., “An American Utopia and Its Global Audiences: Transnational Perspectives on *Looking Backward*”, *Utopian Studies*, 2008, vol. 19, n. 2, pp. 147–187.
- GUO Shaoyu 紹虞郭, *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1984.
- HABERMAS Jürgen, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985.
- HANAN Patrick, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.
- , *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981.
- HAYOT Eric, “Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures”, *Representations*, Summer 2007, vol. 99, n. 1, pp. 99–129.
- HILL Michael G., *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- HIRSCH Eric D., *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967.
- HOBSBAWM Eric J. and Terence RANGER (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- HOWLAND Douglas, *Borders of Chinese Civilization: Geography and History at Empire's End*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1996.
- HSIA C. T., *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (third edition), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999 [1971].

- HU Shi 胡適, *Hu Shi wenji* 胡适文集, vol. 3, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 1998.
- HUANG Kewu 黃克武, “Hewei tianyan? Yan Fu ‘Tianyan zhi xue’ de neihan yu yiyi” 何謂天演? 嚴復「天演之學」的內涵與意義, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊, 2014, n. 85, pp. 127–189.
- HUANG Ko-wu, “The Reception of Yan Fu in Twentieth Century China” in CHU Cindy Yik-yi and Ricardo K. S. MAK (eds.), *China reconstructs*, Lanham, University Press of America, 2003.
- HUANG Martin W., *Snakes’ Legs: Sequels, Continuations, Rewritings, and Chinese Fiction*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004.
- HUBBLE Nick, “Historical Psychology, Utopian Dreams and Other Fool’s Errands”, *Modernist Cultures*, 2008, vol. 3, n. 2, pp. 192–207.
- HUTCHINSON Steven, “Mapping Utopias”, *Modern Philology*, November 1987, vol. 85, n. 2, pp. 170–185.
- HUTERS Theodore, “A New Way of Writing: The Possibilities for Literature in Late Qing China, 1895-1908”, *Modern China*, July 1988, vol. 14, n. 3, pp. 243–276.
- , *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2005.
- , “From Writing to Literature: The Development of Late Qing Theories of Prose”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, June 1987, vol. 47, n. 1, pp. 51–96.
- ISAACSON Nathaniel, “Colonial Modernities and Chinese Science Fiction”, PhD dissertation, Berkeley, University of California, 2011.
- , “Science Fiction for the Nation: Tales of the Moon Colony and the Birth of Modern Chinese Fiction”, *Science Fiction Studies*, March 2013, vol. 40, n. 1, pp. 33–54.

- JAMESON Fredric, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London, Verso, 2005.
- , “Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse”, Summer 1977, *Diacritics*, vol. 7, n. 2, pp. 2–21.
- , “Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future? (Progrès contre Utopie, ou : Pouvons-nous imaginer l’avenir)”, *Science Fiction Studies*, July 1982, vol. 9, n. 2, pp. 147–158.
- , *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, London, Routledge, 2002.
- , “The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber”, *New German Critique*, Winter 1973, n. 1, pp. 52–89.
- JIANG Qian, “Translation and the Development of Science Fiction in Twentieth-Century China”, *Science Fiction Studies*, March 2013, vol. 40, n. 1, pp. 116–132.
- JIAO Yang 焦飏, “Cong ‘fanyi shiyong xuanze lun’ kan Yan Fu *Tianyan lun* de fanyi” 从“翻译适应选择论”看严复《天演论》的翻译, *Chengdu jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 成都教育学院学报, December 2006, vol. 20, n. 12, pp. 157–160.
- JONES Andrew F., *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.
- KANG Youwei, *Ta T’ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K’ang Yu-Wei*, translated by Laurence G. Thompson, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1958.
- KANG Youwei 康有为, *Datong shu* 大同书, Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe 辽宁人民出版社, 1994 [c1935].
- , *Kang nanhai xiansheng kou shuo* 康南海先生口说, Beijing, Zhongshan daxue chubanshe 中山大学出版社, 1985.

- KAO Karl S. Y., “Aspects of Derivation in Chinese Narrative”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, July 1985, vol. 7, n. 1–2, pp. 1–36.
- KARL Rebecca E. and Peter G. ZARROW, *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002.
- KNAPP Mark, “Chinese Culturalism: The Underlying Factor” in Brian GOODMAN, *Navigating the Great Divergence, Emory Endeavors in History*, vol. 3, Atlanta, Emory University Press, 2010, pp. 94–103.
- KERSLAKE Patricia, *Science Fiction and Empire*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007.
- KRAMNICK Jonathan B., “The Making of the English Canon”, *PMLA*, October 1997, vol. 112, n. 5, pp. 1087–1101.
- KUMAR Krishan, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.
- KUO Ya-pei, “‘The Emperor and the People in One Body’: The Worship of Confucius and Ritual Planning in the Xinzheng Reforms, 1902-1911”, *Modern China*, March 2009, vol. 35, n. 2, pp. 123–154.
- LAKOFF George, *Metaphors We Live by*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- LASEK Elizabeth, “Imperialism in China: A Methodological Critique”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, January-February 1983, vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 50–64.
- LAUGHLIN Charles A. (ed.), *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- LAUTER Paul, “History and the Canon”, *Social Text*, Autumn 1985, n. 12, pp. 94–101.
- LEE Gregory B., *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

- , “Other People’s Heroes”, *Gramma*, 2005, n. 13, pp. 115–129
- , *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and Its Others*, London, Hurst, 1996.
- LEE Leo Ou-fan, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- LEONARD Jane K., *Wei Yuan and China’s Rediscovery of the Maritime World*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984.
- LEVENSON Joseph R., *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, vols. 1–3, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968.
- , *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and the Mind of Modern China*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1959.
- LIANG Ch’i-ch’ao, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch’ing Period*, translated by Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959.
- LIANG Qichao 梁启超, *Liang Qichao quanji 梁启超全集*, Beijing, Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 1999.
- , *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji 新中國未來記* in Wang Xiaolian 王孝廉 (ed.), *Wan Qing xiaoshuo daxi 晚清小說大系*, vol. 16, Taipei, Guangya chuban youxian gongsi 廣雅出版有限公司, 1984 [1902].
- LI Chien-nung, *The Political History of China, 1840–1928*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1956.
- LI Guangyi, *Peace under Heaven: The (Re)Making of an Ideal World Order in Chinese Utopianism (1902–1911)*, PhD dissertation, Berkeley, University of California, 2013.
- LI Guangyi 李广益, “Zhongguo gudai wutuobang xulun” 中国古代乌托邦叙论,

- Zhongzhou daxue xuebao* 中州大学学报, July 2011, vol. 28, n. 3, pp. 79–92.
- LI Ping 李萍, “Sibinsai yu Hexuli zhi jian: *Tianyan lun zhong de Yan Fu*” 斯宾塞与赫胥黎之间:《天演论》中的严复, *Jiangxi shehui kexue* 江西社会科学 n. 9, 2013, pp. 216–220.
- LI Xiaoxiu, *Wan Qing fanyi yu minzu guojia xiangxiang: yi”xiangxiang de gonggong ti” lilun wei jichu* 晚清翻译与民族国家想象:以“想象的共同体”理论为基础 (Tranlation in Late Qing Era: Imagining a New Nation), PhD dissertation, Lyon, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 2013.
- LI Xiping 李希平, “Taohuayuan yu wutuobang” 桃花源与乌托邦, *Chongqing daxue waiguoyu xueyuan kaoshi zhoukan* 重庆大学外国语学院考试周刊, 2010, n. 50.
- LI Ziwen 李子文, “Lun Kang Youwei de datong sixiang” 论康有为的大同思想, *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊, October 2001, n. 4, pp. 29–36.
- LIN Tiandou 林天斗 and ZHANG Zimou 张自谋 (eds.), *Huigu gongyuan 2000–1887 nian* 回顾公元 2000–1887 年, Beijing, Shangwu yinshuguan chuban 商务印书馆出版, 1984.
- LIN Wen-ch’ing, *The Chinese Crisis from Within*, London, Grant Richards, 1901.
- LIU Lydia H., *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China, 1900–1937*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995.
- LIU Shusen 刘树森, “Li Timotai yu Huitou kan jilüe: zhongyi meiguo xiaoshuo de qiyan wen” 李提摩太与《回头看记略》:中译美国小说的起源文, *Meiguo yanjiu* 美国研究, 1999, n. 1, pp. 122–138.
- LIU Siyuan. “Paris and the Quest for a National Stage in Meiji Japan and Late-Qing China”, *Asian Theatre Journal*, April 2009, vol. 26, n. 1, pp. 54–77.

- LODGE David, “The Novelist at the Crossroads”, *Critical Quarterly*, 1969, vol. 11, n. 2, pp. 105–132.
- LONG Huiping 龙慧萍, “Cong ‘Tazhe’ dao wutuobang” 从“他者”到乌托邦, *Xiangtan daxue xuebao* 湘潭大学学报, July 2010, vol. 34, n. 4, pp. 102–107.
- LOUIE Kam (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- LU Sheldon H., *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994.
- , “The Fictional Discourse of Pien-wen: The Relation of Chinese Fiction to Historiography”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, July 1987, vol. 9, n. 1-2, pp. 49–70.
- , “Waking to Modernity: The Classical Tale in Late-Qing China”, *New Literary History*, October 2003, vol. 34, n. 4, pp. 745–760.
- LU Shi’e 陆士谔, *Xin Zhongguo* 新中国, Beijing, Jiuzhou chubanshe 九州出版社, 2010 [1910].
- , *Xin zhongguo* 新中国, Shanghai, Dongfang chuban zhongxin 东方出版中心, 2010 [1910].
- , *Xin zhongguo* 新中国, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2010 [1910].
- LU Xun, *Complete Stories of Lu Xun*, edited and translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981.
- LU Xun 鲁迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中国小说史略, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2001 [1924].
- LUAN Weiping 栾伟平, “*Xiaoshuo lin duiyu Yueyue xiaoshuo ji Wu Jianren xiaoshuo*

- guan de zhengming he huying” 《小说林》对于《月月小说》及吴趼人小说观的争鸣和呼应, *Jinan daxue xuebao* 济南大学学报, 2011, vol. 21, n. 6, pp. 18–24.
- LUKÁCS György, *The Historical Novel*, translated by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1983.
- , *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, translated by Anna Bostock, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993.
- LUO Xiaojing 罗晓静, “Lixiang ‘guomin’ de ‘xiandai wutuobang’: Wan Qing ‘wutuobang’ xiaoshuo xin lun” 理想“国民”的“现代乌托邦”:晚清“乌托邦”小说新论, *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 江苏社会科学, 2011, n. 1, pp. 175–181.
- MA Shaoling, “‘A Tale of New Mr. Braggadocio’: Narrative Subjectivity and Brain Electricity in Late Qing Science Fiction”, *Science Fiction Studies*, March 2013, vol. 40, n. 1, pp. 55–72.
- MAIR Victor H. (ed.), *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001.
- MANNHEIM Karl, *Ideologia e utopia*, translated by Andrea Santucci, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999.
- , *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976.
- MARIN Louis, “Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present”, *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1993, vol. 19, n. 3, pp. 397–420.
- , *Utopiques : Jeux d’espaces*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1984.
- MCCLUNG William A., “Dialectics of Literary Cities”, *Journal of Architectural Education*, Spring 1988, vol. 41, n. 3, pp. 33–37.
- MEMMI Albert, *Portrait du colonisé précédé de portrait du colonisateur*, Paris, Gallimard,

2002 [1973].

MEYER John W. and Ronald L. JEPPEPERSON, “The ‘Actors’ of Modern Society: The Cultural Construction of Social Agency”, *Sociological Theory*, March 2000, vol. 18, n. 1, pp. 100–120.

MEYER William B., “Edward Bellamy and the Weather of Utopia”, *Geographical Review*, January 2004, vol. 94, n. 1, pp. 43–54.

MITCHELL Peter M., “The Limits of Reformism: Wei Yüan’s Reaction to Western Intrusion”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 1972, vol. 6, n. 2, pp. 175–204.

MITCHELL Timothy (ed.), *Questions of Modernity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

MULLIN John R., “Edward Bellamy’s Ambivalence: Can Utopia Be Urban?”, *Utopian Studies*, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 51–65.

NORBU Dawa, *Culture and the politics of Third World nationalism*, London, Routledge, 1992.

OAKES Tim, “China’s Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing ‘Chineseness’”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, August 2000, vol. 59, n. 3, pp. 667–692.

OAKES Timothy, “Place and the Paradox of Modernity”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, September 1997, vol. 87, n. 3, pp. 509–531.

OUYANG Jian 欧阳健, *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi* 晚清小说史, Hangzhou, Zhejiang guji chubanshe 浙江古籍出版社, 1997.

PAN Yanhui 潘艳慧, “Xianghou kan de wutuobang: lun wanqing zuojia de shijian xiangxiang” 向后看的乌托邦:论晚清作家的时间想象, *Guizhou shifan daxue xuebao* 贵州师范大学学报, 2004, n. 6, pp. 79–83,

- PANDEY Surya N. (ed.), *Writing in a Post-Colonial Space*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1999.
- PAVEL Thomas, “Literary Genres as Norms and Good Habits”, *New Literary History*, Spring 2003, vol. 34, n. 2, pp. 201–210.
- PEREC Georges, *Life: A User’s Manual*, translated by David Bellos, Boston, Godine, 1987.
- PESARO Nicoletta, “Scrivere di narrativa: osservazioni sull’impostazione metodologica di alcuni manuali di narrativa cinese moderna”, *Atti dell’XI Convegno dell’Associazione Italiana Studi Cinesi Roma*, Roma, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010, pp. 199–218.
- PFAELZER Jean, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886–1896: The Politics of Form*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 1984.
- PIANIGIANI Ottorino, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani*, Roma, Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1907.
- POLLARD David, *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840-1918*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997.
- POMERANZ Kenneth, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.
- POMERANTZ-ZHANG Linda, *Wu Tingfang (1842–1922): Reform and Modernization in Modern Chinese History*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1992.
- REED Christopher A., *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011.
- RICOEUR Paul, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, edited by George H. Taylor, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986.

- , *The Rule of Metaphor*, translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, London, Routledge, 2003.
- RIEDER John, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2012.
- , “On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History”, *Science Fiction Studies*, July 2010, vol. 37, n. 2, pp. 191–209.
- ROEMER Kenneth M., *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings, 1888–1900*, Kent, Kent State University Press, 1976.
- RÜSEN Jörn, Michael FEHR and Thomas RIEGER (eds.), *Thinking Utopia: Steps into Other Worlds*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2005.
- SABATTINI Mario and Paolo SANTANGELO, *Storia della Cina*, Bari, Laterza, 2005.
- SADLER Elizabeth, “One Book’s Influence: Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*”, *The New England Quarterly*, December 1944, vol. 17, n. 4, pp. 530–545.
- SAID Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1994.
- , *Literature and Society*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- , *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979.
- , “The Text, the World, the Critic”, *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, October 1975, vol. 8, n. 2, pp. 1–23.
- SAMARANI Guido, *La Cina del Novecento*, Torino, Einaudi, 2014.
- SANDISON Alan, *The Wheel of Empire: A Study of the Imperial Idea in Some Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Fiction*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1967.
- SANDISON Alan and Robert DINGLEY (ed.), *Histories of the Future: Studies in Fact, Fantasy and Science Fiction*, New York, Palgrave, 2000.
- SARGENT Lyman T., “A Note on the Other Side of Human Nature in the Utopian Novel”,

- Political Theory*, February 1975, vol. 3, n. 1, pp. 88–97.
- , “Authority & Utopia: Utopianism in Political Thought”, *Polity*, Summer 1982, vol. 14, n. 4, pp. 565–584.
- , “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”, *Utopian Studies*, 1994, vol. 5, n. 1, pp. 1–37.
- , *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.
- SCHAEFFER Jean-Marie, *Qu’est-ce qu’un genre littéraire?*, Paris, Éditions du Soleil, 1989.
- SCHNAIBERG Allan, “Measuring Modernism: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations”, *American Journal of Sociology*, November 1970, vol. 76, n. 3, pp. 399–425.
- SCHOLES Robert, James PHELAN and Robert KELLOGG, *The Nature of Narrative*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- SCHWARTZ Benjamin I., *In Search of Wealth and Power Yen Fu and the West*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964.
- SHEPHARD Robert, “Utopia, Utopia’s Neighbors, Utopia, and Europe”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Winter 1995, vol. 26, n. 4, pp. 843–856.
- SHI Shumei, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.
- SHI Xiuyong 史修永, “Xiandai wutuobang jingshen: shilun Liang Qichao fanyi yu chuangzuo de zhengzhi xiaoshuo”, 现代乌托邦精神: 试论梁启超翻译与创作的政治小说, *Taiyuan ligong daxue xuebao* 太原理工大学学报, June 2006, vol. 24, n. 2, pp. 12–15.

- SONG Mingwei 宋明煒 (ed.), *Renditions*, Spring and Autumn 2012, n. 77–78 (Chinese Science Fiction: Late Qing and the Contemporary).
- SPENCE Jonathan D., *The Search for Modern China*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.
- SPIVAK Gayatri C., *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- STEINBERG Michael P., “The Politics and Aesthetics of Operatic Modernism”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Spring 2006, vol. 36, n. 4 (Opera and Society: Part II), pp. 629–648.
- SUN Baoxuan 孙宝瑄, *Wangshan lu riji* 忘山庐日记, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1983.
- SUN Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, Shanghai, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927.
- , *The Three Principles of the People*, China Cultural Service, 1981.
- SUN Yimin 孙轶旻, “Wan Qing xin xiaoshuo renwu mingming chutan” 晚清新小说人物命名初探, *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 上海师范学报(社会科学版), July 2002, vol. 31, n. 4, pp. 108–113.
- SUVIN Darko, “Locus, Horizon. and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as Key to Utopian Studies”, *Utopian Studies*, 1990, vol. 1, n. 2, pp. 69–83.
- , *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: on the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.
- , “Modes of Political Drama”, *The Massachusetts Review*, July 1972, vol. 13, n. 3, pp. 309–324.
- , “Narrative Logic, Ideological Domination. and the Range of Science Fiction: A

- Hypothesis with a Historical Test (Logique narrative, domine idéologique et l'éventail de la S-F: hypothèse et épreuve historique)", *Science Fiction Studies*, March 1982, vol. 9, n. 1, pp. 1–25.
- , "On Metaphoricity and Narrativity in Fiction: The Chronotope as the 'Differentia Generica'," *SubStance*, 1986, vol. 14, n. 3, pp. 51–67.
- TAN Sitong 谭嗣同, *Tan Sitong quanji* (xiace) 谭嗣同全集下册, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju chuban 中华书局出版, 1981.
- TANG Hongfeng 唐宏峰, "Wan Qing xiaoshuo zhong de wutuoban" 晚清小说中的乌托邦之旅", *Shanghai wenhua* 上海文化, 2011, n. 6, pp. 40–48.
- TANG Keqin 汤克勤, "Lun zhuanxing shiye xia wan Qing liuxuesheng xiaoshuojia he wan Qing xiaoshuo zhong de liuxuesheng xingxiang" 论转型视野下晚清留学生小说家和晚清小说中的留学生形象, *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究, 2011, n. 3, pp. 52–59.
- TANG Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2000.
- , *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996.
- , "Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman', and a Chinese Modernism", *PMLA*, October 1992, vol. 107, n. 5, pp. 1222–1234.
- TENG Ssu-yü and John K. FAIRBANK, *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839–1923*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979.
- TIAN Ruohong 若虹田, "Lu Shi'e nianpu (1878-1944)" 陆士谔年谱, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小说研究, 2002, n. 03, pp. 119–138.
- , *Lu Shi'e xiaoshuo kaolun* 陆士谔小说考论, PhD dissertation, Shanghai, Huadong

- shifan daxue 华东师范大学, 2003.
- TOWNSEND James, “Chinese Nationalism”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, January 1992, n. 27, pp. 97–130.
- TYNG Dudley, “The Confucian Utopia”, *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* March 1934, vol. 54, n. 1, pp. 67–69.
- VILLARD Florent, *Le Gramsci chinois : Qu Qiubai, penseur de la modernité culturelle*, Lyon, Tigre de papier, 2009.
- VINTON Arthur D., *Looking Further Backward*, Albany, Albany Book Company, 1890.
- WAGNER Rudolf G., *Joining the Global Public Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007.
- WANG David D., *Fin-de-siècle splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997.
- , “How Modern was Early Modern Chinese Literature? On the Origins of ‘Jindai wenxue’”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, December 2008, n. 30, pp. 145–165.
- WANG Dewei 王德威, *Xiangxiang Zhongguo de fangfa: lishi, xiaoshuo, xushi 想像中国的方法: 历史, 小说, 叙事*, Beijing, Shenghuo dushu xinzhishi san lian shudian 生活读书新知三联书店, 1998.
- WANG Dun, “The Late Qing’s Other Utopias: China’s Science-Fictional Imagination, 1900-1910”, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, September 2008, vol. 34, n. 2, pp. 37–61.
- WANG Guowei 国伟王, *Wu Jianren xiaoshuo yanjiu 吴趼人小说研究*, Jinan, Qi Lu shushe 齐鲁书社, 2007.

- WANG Hui, “The Fate of ‘Mr. Science’ in China: The Concept of Science and its Application in Modern Chinese Thought”, *positions*, 1995, vol. 3, n. 1, pp. 1–68.
- WANG Jing, *The Story of Stone: Intertextuality, Ancient Chinese Stone Lore, and the Stone Symbolism in Dream of the Red Chamber, Water Margin and The Journey to the West*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992.
- WANG Juan, *Merry Laughter and Angry Curses: The Shanghai Tabloid Press, 1897–1911*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2012.
- WANG Kefei and FAN Shouyi, “Translation in China: A Motivating Force”, *Meta : journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators’ Journal*, March 1999, vol. 44, n. 1, pp. 7–26.
- WANG Litao 王利涛, “Wanqing zhengzhi xiaoshuo xiandaixing” 晚清政治小说的现代性, *Chongqing jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 重庆教育学院学报, September 2005, vol. 19, n. 5, pp. 55–58.
- WANG Ning, “Confronting Western Influence: Rethinking Chinese Literature of the New Period”, *New Literary History*, October 1993, vol. 24, n. 4, pp. 905–926.
- , “Rethinking Modern Chinese Literature in a Global Context”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, March 2008, vol. 69, n. 1, pp. 1–11.
- WANG Xiaogang 王晓岗, “Chaoyue gudai wutuobang: wanqing zhengzhi xiaoshuo lun” 超越古典乌托邦: 晚清政治小说新论, *Huabei dianli daxue xuebao* 华北电力大学学报, February 2011, n. 1, pp. 93–97.
- , “Lun wan Qing kehuan xiaoshuo de fuhe xiangxiang” 论晚清科幻小说的复合想象, *Dongbei shida xuebao* 东北师大学报, 2011, vol. 5, pp. 137–139.
- WANG Yunxi 王運熙 and QIAN Yisheng 顧易生 (eds.), *Zhongguo wenxue piping tongshi: Qingdai juan* 中國文學批評通史: 清代卷, Shanghai, Shanghai guji

- chubanshe, 1996.
- WANG Zuoyue, “Saving China Through Science: The Science Society of China, Scientific Nationalism, and Civil Society in Republican China”, *Osiris*, 2002, vol. 17 (Science and Civil Society), pp. 291–322.
- WEGNER Phillip E., *Utopia, the Nation. and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002.
- WEISSBERG Liliane, “Utopian Visions: Bloch, Lukács, Pontoppidan”, *The German Quarterly*, Spring 1994, vol. 67, n. 2, pp. 197–210.
- WILLCOCK Hiroko, “Japanese Modernization and the Emergence of New Fiction in Early Twentieth Century China: A Study of Liang Qichao”, *Modern Asian Studies*, October 1995, vol. 29, n. 4, pp. 817–840.
- WILLETT John (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, London, Hill and Wang, 1977.
- WILLIAMS Nicholas M., “The Limits of Spatialized Form: Visibility and Obscurity in Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*”, *Utopian Studies*, 1999, vol. 10, n. 2, pp. 25–39.
- WILSON Jackson R., “Experience and Utopia: The Making of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*”, *Journal of American Studies*, April 1977, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 45–60.
- WONG Young-Tsu 汪榮祖, “The Search for Material Civilization: Kang Youwei’s Journey to the West” 康有為的西方物質文明之旅, *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies*, June 2008, vol. 5, n. 1, pp. 33–59.
- WRIGHT David, “The Translation of Modern Western Science in Nineteenth-Century, 1840-1895”, December 1998, *Isis*, vol. 89, n. 4, pp. 653–673.
- WU Jianren, *Sea of Regret*, translated by Patrick Hanan, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

- WU Jianren 吴趼人, *Xin shitou ji* 新石头记, Nanchang, Jiangxi renmin chubanshe 江西人民出版社, 1988 [1908].
- , *Xin shitou ji* 新石头记 in *Shibo menghuan sanbudian* 世博梦幻三部曲, Shanghai, Dongfang chuban zhongxin 东方出版中心, 2010 [1908].
- WU Yan 吴岩 (ed.), *Jia Baoyu zuo qianshuiting: Zhongguo zaoqi kehuan yanjiu jingxuan* 贾宝玉坐潜水艇: 中国早期科幻研究精选, Fuzhou: Fujian shaonian ertong chubanshe 福建少年儿童出版社, 2006.
- WU Zequan 吴泽泉, “Wan Qing fanyi xiaoshuo chuanguo qingkuang kaozheng” 晚清翻
新小说创作情况考证, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu jikan* 中国文学研究辑刊, 2009,
n. 2, pp. 288–310.
- XIAO Gongquan 萧公权 (ed.), *Jindai Zhongguo yu xin shijie: Kang Youwei bianfa yu datong sixiang yanjiu* 近代中国与新世界: 康有为变法与大同思想研究, Nanjing, Jiangsu renmin chubanshe 江苏人民出版社, 1997.
- XIAO Xiaosui, “China encounters Darwinism: A Case of Intercultural Rhetoric”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, February 1995, vol. 81, n. 1, pp. 83–99.
- XIONG Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xixuedongjian yu wan qing shehui* 西学东渐与晚清社会, Shanghai, Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1994.
- YAN Fu 严复, *Tiyan lun* 天演论, Beijing, Shangwu yinshu chubanshe 商务印书馆, 1981 [1898].
- YAN Jianfu 颜健富, “Guanglan diqiu, faxian diqiu” 广览地球, 发现中国, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中国文哲研究集刊, September 2012, n. 11, pp. 1–44.
- , “‘Bingtǐ Zhongguo’ de shíjū yīnyǔ yǔ zhīliáo cuījiàn: lùn wǎn qīng xiǎoshuō de shēntǐ/guóti xiangxiang” “病體中國”的時局隱喻與治療淬鍊: 論晚清小說的身

- 體/國體想像, *Taida wenshi zhexue bao* 臺大文史哲學報, November 2013, n. 79, pp. 83–118.
- YANG Winston L.Y. and Curtis P. ADKINS (eds.), *Critical Essays on Chinese Fiction*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1980.
- YU Runqi 于潤琦, *Qingmo chumin xiaoshuo shu xi: kexue juan* 清末民初小說書系:科學卷, Beijing, Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe 中國文聯出版公司, 1997.
- ZARROW Peter, *China in War and Revolution. 1895–1949*, London, Routledge, 2005.
- ZENG Pu 曾樸, *Niehai hua* 孽海花, Taipei, Taiwan guji 臺灣古籍, 2004 [1904].
- ZHANG Quanzhi 張全之, “Wenxue zhong de ‘weilai’: lun wan Qing xiaoshuo zhong de wutuobang xushi” 文學中的“未來”:論晚清小說中的烏托邦敘事, *Dongyue luncong* 東岳論叢, January 2005, vol. 26, n. 1, pp. 126–130.
- ZHANG Xiantao, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Press: The Influence of the Protestant Missionary Press in Late Qing China*, London, Routledge, 2007.
- ZHANG Yingjin, *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998.
- ZHANG Yong 張勇 and CAI Lesu 蔡樂蘇 (eds.), *Zhongguo sixiang shi can ziliao ji: wan Qing zhi minguo juan* 中國思想史參資料集:晚清至民國卷, Beijing, Qinghua daxue chubanshe 清華大學出版社, 2005.
- ZHAO Lianchang 趙連昌 and DAI Jiguang 戴激光, “Qing mo zhengzhi xiaoshuo zhong minzu guojia xiangxiang de mishi” 清末政治小說中民族國家想象的迷失, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究, 2006, n. 4, pp. 225–232.
- ZHOU Gang, *Placing the modern Chinese vernacular in transnational literature*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

- ZHOU Leshi 周乐诗, “Xin xiaoshuo zhong zhong xin nüxing xingxiang de yiyi” 新小说中新女性形象的意义, *Funü yanjiu luncong* 妇女研究论丛, 2009, n. 6, pp. 56–63.
- ZHOU Liyan 周黎燕, “Lun Kang Youwei datong wutuobang de xiandai yiyi” 论康有为大同乌托邦的现代意义, *Shenyang shifan daxue xuebao* 沈阳师范大学学报, 2006, vol. 30, n. 6, pp. 135–139.
- , “Hewei wutuobang” 何谓乌托邦, *Xueshu lutan* 学术论坛, 2009, n. 5, pp. 143–146.