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# Productive distortions: On the translated imaginaries and misplaced identities of the late Qing utopian novel

Lorenzo ANDOLFATTO

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- <sup>1</sup> The coordinates of modern Chinese literature have undergone a substantial rewriting. Whereas traditional scholarship used to locate the roots of the modern in the background of the New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動) and in the works of its iconic standard bearers, in recent years many scholars have started to question the modernist orthodoxy which was codified in the aftermath of the *xin hai* 辛亥 revolution by backdating the gestation of the Chinese literary “modernity” elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The late Qing period in particular has been re-evaluated as a formative stage in which different variations on the theme of the modern were experimented, endorsed or discarded.<sup>2</sup> One may argue, as David Wang does, that the subsequent canonisation of the May Fourth generation – that is, of Lu Xun’s 魯迅 *nahan* 吶喊 – should rather be considered the result of an uncomfortable gestation, a reaction against the vestiges of a cumbersome tradition whose encumbrance was exacerbated by the awkwardness of the early, hesitant attempts to deal with it: “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”.<sup>3</sup>
- <sup>2</sup> Too ambiguous to be canonised within the capital-T tradition, many of the novels written during the late Qing period were modern before any idea of “modernity” could be defined or recognised, and as such they characterise this “obsolete literary past” as one of the most interesting to study. While, admittedly, many of the novels written along the disintegrating fringes of the Manchu empire do not exactly shine for their aesthetic qualities (e.g., character development, plot definition, narrative architecture), we can recognise in the sheer quantity and variety of these texts a collective attempt to

represent, elaborate and reconnect the myriad fragments of a time that had gone out of joint. Such a task was of course unrealisable: a fragmented reality could only correspond to a fragmented representation of reality, and while the work of art, if bent into propaganda, may function as provisional social adhesive, its nature always remains a symptomatic one. The work of art reflects the fragmentation, it re-elaborates its contingent trauma within the pre-existing symbolic networks.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is exactly the inherent impossibility of such a task that should grant these textual rem(a)inders our attention.

- 3 In considering the literary production of the late Qing as the multifaceted symptom of a time gone out of joint, it does not surprise to observe during this period not only a proliferation of novels, but also of discourses around the novel, as if the question at stake were not only “how to represent the modern or the new”, but also “how to define and categorise the results of these new modalities of representations”. The discourse of genre, for instance, appears as one of the most striking aspects of the literary production of this period: labels proliferated like never before, as if the late Qing literati-turned-novelists were motivated by a Linnaean fervour to pin the coordinates of the literary discourse within a scientific framework. This aspect has been tackled by Nathaniel Isaacson in his pioneering work on the birth of science fiction 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); “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).<sup>5</sup>

- 4 Yet these categories, rather than providing a periodic table for the rationalisation literary landscape of the late Qing period, heighten the feeling of disorientation that seems to pervade this age. In retrospect, they reaffirm the volatility of an age riddled by “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”.<sup>6</sup> Among these different categories the utopian novel (*lixiang xiaoshuo* 理想小說 or *wutuobang xiaoshuo* 烏托邦小說) emerges as a particularly interesting one both from a chronological and a theoretical point of view.
- 5 The history of this genre is emblematic: the utopian novel of the late empire had indeed a very short life. It blossomed in the wake of Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 literary manifesto “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” 論小說與群治之關係 (On the relationship between the novel and the government of the people, 1902), it found a partial blueprint in his unfinished novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記, and it died off around 1910, with the publication of Lu Shi’e’s 陸士諤 *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 as its swan song.<sup>7</sup> This peculiar inflorescence of utopian texts can be considered in the terms of a “Literature of the Hundred Days”, thus echoing the *Wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法 episode of 1898. The short-lived

history of the genre, its misplaced and hesitant idealism, and the eventual failure on the part of its practitioners to establish a new, stable form of literary expression enclosed the form in a historical *cul del sac*. Furthermore, the gap which separates Liang Qichao's *xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 to Lu Xun's iconic *nahan* 呐喊, while chronologically negligible, is conceptually very wide, and as such it resembles in its scope the differences between the botched reforms of 1898 and the successful failure of the *xinhai* revolution.<sup>8</sup>

- 6 Nevertheless the utopian genre, by virtue of its ambitions to re-define society as a whole, offers a much more engaging conceptual challenge than the other genres mentioned by Isaacson. The stakes that the utopian narration poses are higher, and the discrepancies between the political project it implied and the reality against which it unfolded set this particular genre apart. In the case of *fin-de-siècle* China, the late Qing utopian novel represents indeed the epitome of its times.
- 7 Given its conceptual width, the *wutuobang xiaoshuo* may be seen as a Genettian “archi-genre”, that is to say an overarching narratological category that encompassed all the other varieties of the *xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 form, or the *new novel*. Borrowing once again Isaacson's terms, we could describe the utopian novel as a kind of narration that unfolds through strategies of Suvinian *Verfremdung* (alienation or estrangement) akin to those of the *science fiction genre*; it develops as a *tale of the marvellous* framed in *political terms* (utopia is the ideal goal of political action);<sup>9</sup> the main character's itinerary within the utopian landscape is described as an *adventure* into the unknown, often narrated in the form of a *traveller's diary* or that of a *philosophic dialogue* between the oblivious guest and the enlightened host; the utopian novel is also a *social novel* whose coordinates are developed to their ideological extremes; in this process, many aspects of the social discourse are engaged, such as the form of *government*, the role of *science* and technology, and the relationships (the *romances?*) between its characters. In this perspective, the utopian “archi-genre” develops as a hyperbolic locus of closure in which all these generic denominations are encompassed within an impossible (that is, *outopian*) literary project that counterposes to the fragmentation of the present a coherent, totalising world-view.<sup>10</sup>
- 8 Yet the coherence of this world-view is only superficial, and a closer look at the texts rather unveils the late Qing utopia as a schizophrenic form of narration in which the post-colonial future of colonised China is imagined by looking backward at the country's pre-colonial past through a modernist act of *zhengming* 正名 whose “names” are rectified with the aid of a Western dictionary. The corpus of utopian novels written between 1902 and 1910 provides an interesting instance of transtextuality, a cumulative example of the practices through which foreign texts were assimilated into local textual networks, and of how the idea of (literary) modernity, which was bound to the self-referentiality of discourses such as “the atavism of the nation and its telos of modernity”, rather stemmed from mechanisms of translation, contamination and superimposition which defy boundaries and prescribed routes.<sup>11</sup>
- 9 The utopian novel offers both an ideal synthesis of the Chinese reformist thought that developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as the ratification of its defeat, a recognition of the incapacity on the part of the intellectuals of the late Qing to translate their ideals into reality. It 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 given a symbolical, coherent representation in the utopian landscapes presented in the novels against the historical reality of their fragmentation.<sup>12</sup> 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 is a discourse of *ensembles* and organised categories) upon the chaotic *magma* of the contingencies of history.<sup>13</sup> Each text provides a different itinerary within a unique landscape, partaking in the construction of a shared social imaginary which is the mirror of the ideological subtext of history, and which is constituted by those fragments of the Real which are hypothesised, but not articulated, by the discourse of ideology.<sup>14</sup>

- 10 The utopian texts written in China between 1902 and 1910 unfold in a network of resemblances, reiterations and imbrications. The late Qing utopian landscape can be seen as an imaginary fresco whose creation was bound by the practical necessity of the *intonaco*, its completion deferred in the *giornata*. Fragments of this fresco are scattered among a wide variety of texts: the *kaipian* 开篇 of Zeng Pu's 曾樸 *Niehai hua* 孽海花 (Flowers in a Sea of Sins, 1904); Liu E's 劉鶚 allegories of national salvation in *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記 (The Travels of Lao Can, 1907); the landscapes depicted by Lu Shi'e in the novels *Xin Zhongguo* 新中國 and *Xin Shanghai* 新上海 (1910); the "electric world" of Xu Zhiyan's 許指嚴 *Dian shijie* 電世界 (1909); Wu Jianren's 吳趼人 Civilised Realm depicted in the novel *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 (whose early chapters appear in 1905); and Bihe Guan Zhuren's 碧荷館主人 reborn Chinese empire in the novel *Xin jiyuan* 新紀元 (1908). Even though each of these texts provides its own conceptual map, all these maps refer to the same territory, to the same imaginary space. This network of utopian representations emerged as a textual by-product of the ideological subtext of China's colonial (local, repressed, incipient, multiple, fragmented) modernity, against which the late Qing utopian discourse coalesced as a locus of negotiation of the ideological impasses that this condition of colonial submission entailed.
- 11 In considering the textual genesis of this genre, the utopian novel provides an interesting example of what Lydia Liu has termed as the "productive distortion" of those practices of transnational, transcultural and translingual contamination that characterised *fin-de-siècle* China's colonial modernity.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of this genre is linked to the remarkable number of foreign texts that began to circulate in China as epiphenomenon of the increasing foreign presence on Chinese soil. Among the hundreds of texts which were translated, rewritten and assimilated in this long process of cultural assimilation, was also the utopian novel *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, published in 1888 by American writer Edward Bellamy (1850-1898).<sup>16</sup> Bellamy's reveries of national renaissance and social proficiency resonated with the late Qing intelligentsia's needs for blueprints and directions to move towards the beacon of national modernity, and as such *Looking Backward* was quickly translated and rewritten for its new Chinese readership.
- 12 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; secondly, the rapidity of this acquisition was impressive, as the American edition of the novel (1888) and its Chinese translation (1891) are separated only by three years; finally, the degree of influence that this novel exerted in the developments of the early modernity of Chinese fiction is unprecedented and remarkable.
- 13 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. The text was serialized 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

operated in China under the direction of Young John Allen (1836–1907), and assisted by Liang Qichao himself between 1894 and 1898.<sup>17</sup> The same text was then re-published in book format (in a limited run of 2000 copies) by Richards two years after its initial serialization. In 1894 the novel was then re-published with the title *Bainian yijiao* 百年一覺, and between 1894 and 1904 the *Bainian yijiao* edition would then be reissued regularly both in volume format and on the pages of other journals such as *Zhongguo guanyin baihua bao* 中國官音白話報 (in 1898) and *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* 繡像小說 (in 1904).

14 The text that eventually made its way to the Chinese readers could hardly be considered a translation: *Huitou kan jiliu* was in fact a heavily altered adaptation of Bellamy's novel. While this fact was not at all unusual for the time (the *modus operandi* of the Chinese translators of the time was often one of adaptation and rewriting), the Chinese version of *Looking Backward* was almost unrecognisable.<sup>18</sup> As Liu Shusen 刘树森 remarks, *Huitou kan jiliu* differed from *Looking Backward* in many crucial aspects. Much shorter than its source material, the translated text was heavily butchered in order to domesticate Bellamy's novel to its new readership: the original 28 chapters of the American novel were rearranged into ten shorter sections, each one introduced by a four-character title; the narrative mode was changed, and the first-person voice of Julian West's main character was abandoned in favour of a more canonical third-person narrator;<sup>19</sup> the chapters were embellished with emphatic introductions and hype-provoking codas which were reminiscent of the Chinese storytelling tradition. Furthermore, the potential historicity of Bellamy's political project was neutralised, or at least overshadowed, by a new perspective of divine revelation which betrayed the ideological background of the translation's supervisors.<sup>20</sup>

15 Nevertheless the utopian chord was struck, and its pitch was recognised as familiar: "Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is the shadow of *Datong*", Kang Youwei 康有為 wrote.<sup>21</sup> Edward Bellamy's pastoral utopia, rooted in the rejection of the present, resonated with the traditional Confucian attitude of resistance against the present in favour of a continuous rectification of the past.<sup>22</sup> Either because of the radical process of rewriting and adaptation through which Bellamy's novel had undergone before reaching the Chinese public, or because of the humanist afflatus of its utopian claims, *Bainian yijiao* was perceived and read as – so to say – Confucian:

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，殆彷彿《禮運》大同之象焉。<sup>23</sup>

Freed by hierarchies, society becomes equal; once the rules are clear, all disparities are levelled. The family of Man expand as one 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*.

16 The utopian discourse, in its most elementary function of social and national mythopoesis, provided a frame of reference for the elaboration of the late Qing discourse 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 novel became a tool for dealing with the question of China's colonial impasse and transcending the apparent unreformability of reality within the conceptual space given by the *xiaoshuo* form. "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”, glossed the late Qing philosopher and calligrapher Sun Baoxuan 孫寶瑄 (1874–1924):<sup>24</sup> Bellamy’s utopia, and by extension the modern Chinese utopia that the American novel had contributed to trigger, maintained the appeal of a radical act of *zhengming*, a rectification of the names to wipe out the disgraces of recent history.

- 17 The imprint of *Looking Backward* surfaces in the texture of the Chinese utopian novels of the late Qing period in a network of resemblances. One of the most striking examples of this intertextual network is the allegory of the umbrellas, which can be found both in Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and in Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* (The New China). Caught by a rainstorm, Bellamy’s alter-ego Julian West is surprised by the discovery that nobody in the year 2000 uses umbrellas any more: the streets of the city are 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”. As usual, Julian West’s surprise is received by his utopian companions with patronising condescension:

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.<sup>25</sup>

- 18 The allegory of the collective umbrella is used by Bellamy to emphasize once more the fundamental idea at the core of his utopia: the demise of capitalism in favour of a nation-based, state-run collectivism of socialist overtones in which self interest (the individual umbrella) is superseded by the common good (the continuous waterproof covering). The same allegory resurfaces on the pages of Lu Shi’e’s *Xin Zhongguo* from 1910, in a passage which may very well be a homage to *Looking Backward*:

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，透光而不漏雨。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。<sup>26</sup>

When my female companion and I left the theater, it suddenly started to rain.

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

– Today is not like in the past, – she answered, – There is no need to bring around umbrellas any more when it rains.

– You don’t mind having to dry your clothes every time it rains?

– There’s no such thing, we have rain paths now. How can you get wet 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. The tiles 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 inside.

- 19 The Chinese utopian novel, its emergence at the apex of a time gone out of joint, and the modernist yet already-obsolete worldview that it brought forward, should be all understood within the complex framework of responses upon which the Chinese colonised subject negotiated its own position within the colonial dialectic. This process of negotiation was articulated through the circulation, translation and contamination of

texts, of which the utopian novels written during the last decade of the late Qing period represented a particular, emblematic variety. The genesis of this variety of texts can partially be reconstructed: Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was translated in Chinese under the supervision of Timothy Richard in 1891; Liang Qichao joined Richard's cabinet in 1894 as an assistant to the Baptist missionary; after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898 Liang Qichao flew to Japan and published his own literary manifesto, calling for a revolution in literature; he tried to apply his ideas in the unfinished novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* (The future of New China); inspired by Liang Qichao's *nahan*, Wu Jianren wrote the utopian novel *Xin shitou ji*, which was initially serialised in the newspaper *Nanfang Bao* 南方報 in 1905; in 1908 Wu Jianren's novel was re-issued in volume format by the *Gailiang xiaoshuo she* 改良小說社, the very same publishing house that, two years later, would then publish the first edition of Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*, which arches back to Bellamy's *Looking Backward* by tapping into the same rhetoric of national salvation.

20 As we have already remarked, the relation between the Chinese utopian novel of the late Qing period and its American counterpart provides us an example of those “translingual modes of representation in modern Chinese fiction” which highlight the “contradictory condition of Chinese modernity”.<sup>27</sup> But even more interesting is the fact that the phenomenon of “productive distortion” through which the negotiation of this contradictory condition is played out works in both ways: it does not only characterise the Chinese *fin-de-siècle* visions of utopia which were modelled after Bellamy's blueprint, but also the latter in itself. A closer look at the text of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and at the cultural turmoil generated by its publication, reveals that the seeds of this productive distortion are already ingrained at its core. If, on the one hand, the radical otherness of *Looking Backward*'s utopia was “productively distorted” and re-framed by the late Qing utopian novelists into the radical otherness of postcolonial China (hence the “new eras”, “new empires” and “new countries” depicted in the novels of the period), on the other hand the spectre of “China” was present already as a silent space of reference to Edward Bellamy's re-imagining of America.

21 “China” is mentioned only once in Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, yet its transient mention gestures at the possibility of an otherness, of a (utopian) alternative to the turmoil of the present. At the beginning of the novel's second chapter, Julian West agrees with a disheartened Mrs. Bartlett when the latter, reporting the words of her husband, remarks that:

[Mrs. Bartlett's husband] 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.”<sup>28</sup>

22 But the presence of the *Chinese Other* emerges even more clearly in the aftermath of *Looking Backward*'s publication. Whereas the translation of *Looking Backward* in China paved the way for a new wave of utopian novels, the publication of Bellamy's novel in the United States reinvigorated not only the literary production of the time, but also the political debate of the country. “Nationalist Clubs” were formed where “Bellamytes” would gather in order to discuss the feasibility of *Looking Backward*'s political project; at the same time, as politics took inspiration from literature, literature became the training ground for politics' most radical ideas.<sup>29</sup> Bellamy's idealism became a prolific source of inspiration for the American novelists of the time, and the utopian landscape sketched in *Looking Backward* was explored and expanded in a proliferation of new texts.<sup>30</sup>

- 23 Among the plethora of Bellamian tributes and emulations, Arthur Dudley Vinton's *Looking Further Backward* stands out as one of the most peculiar ones. A dystopian novel built around the always-reliable trope of the Yellow Peril, *Looking Further Backward* was published in 1890 as a critique of Bellamy's socialist penchant. Vinton's dystopian novel tells the story of the colonisation of the American country at the hands of the Chinese, which results in the eventual "Chinese-ification" of an American population already weakened and reduced to complete apathy by the adoption of Bellamy's nationalist agenda. Vinton's dystopian critique is built upon the ghost of the Chinese Other, which, quite interestingly, is constructed by the American author in the same way the Chinese utopian novelists of the late Qing imagined their utopian, national Self.
- 24 Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Vinton's *Looking Further Backward* may appear as unusual points of reference in order to understand the peculiarities of the strand of utopian thinking that developed in late-imperial China, yet this tangentiality is only apparent, and, on the contrary, it provides new and interesting perspectives from which to approach the question of Chinese modernity. Through the plain juxtaposition of these texts one can perceive what appears to be a shared political unconscious of overlapping utopian expectations and dystopian apprehensions. One may imagine, for example, that the Chinese invasion of the American soil narrated by Vinton in *Looking Further Backward* were undertaken by the renewed Chinese empire described in 1908 by Bihe Guan Zhuren in the novel *Xin Jiyuan*; that the new civilization extolled by the character of professor Won Lung Li in *Looking Further Backward* were actually that of the "Civilised Country" (文明國) depicted by Wu Jianren in the second half of *Xin Shitou ji*; or, conversely, that Liu Shi'e's description of Neo-Shanghai in the novel *Xin Zhongguo* were based on the blueprint of *Looking Backward*'s new Boston.
- 25 All these references, allusions and remainders seem to hint at the presence of an underlying conceptual network whose traits, although constantly reversed and distorted, are nevertheless shared. The foundations of this network are to be found in the ideological superstructure which was pushed forward by the relentless expansion of the industrialised West from its self-established centre towards its imagined peripheries. As Ricoeur remarks, "[i]deology's first function is its production of an inverted image", and "this function is achieved exactly by the notion of the nowhere [...] the ability to conceive of an empty place from which to look at ourselves".<sup>31</sup> In this perspective, the utopian texts produced at the end of the Qing empire, as well as the utopian and dystopian narrations from the late Victorian Era in America, can be seen as fragments of the inverted image of the colonial subtext, textual constructions built upon the "notion of the nowhere" that this subtext entails.
- 26 By juxtaposing these images we can turn the inherent deceptiveness of the word utopia as outopia/eutopia (no-place/good-place), which is both and neither American or Chinese, to our own advantage. By juxtaposing Bellamy and Liang Qichao, Vinton and Wu Jianren, we may be able in fact to understand what happens when this "empty place", freed by the Self, is occupied by the Other.
- 27 *Looking Further Backward* gives us a negative of the photography cumulatively created by the narrative utopias written in China between 1902 and 1910. Vinton's novel is told in the form of
- 28 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.<sup>32</sup>

- 29 Vinton's novel is set in the year 2012, when 70 percent of the American territory had been conquered by the Chinese Empire, and the Cooperative Commonwealth of the United States "had been re-created into a Chinese province".<sup>33</sup> *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 American, and the immediate present with the recent past".<sup>34</sup> The novel 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 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 eventually becomes what we may term as a "Yellow salvation" in which a new social and national stability is obtained through the irreversible imbrication of identities.
- 30 Vinton's book was published in 1890, three years after the appearance of its more notorious prequel, as a warning towards the risks of unconstrained utopian thinking: "A false guide is worse than no guide", Vinton remarks in the preface of the novel, and false guides were those "utopian schemes fraught with danger" which were offered as remedies to the evils of the present. Vinton is certainly not blind to the potential of utopian thinking, and in fact he gives credit to the sheer imaginative, exhortative power of Bellamy's novel, praising its "truthfulness" as a sentiment that would appeal "to every honest mind". Yet, in narrating the de-Americanisation, or Chinese-ification, of American life, Vinton is aware that the socio-geometrical perfection of the utopian allegory can be subverted with the same facility it is conceived.
- 31 *Looking Further Backward* is built upon narrative strategies of reversal, Suvinian alienation and distortion: 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, which is voiced by *Looking Further Backward's* intradiegetic narrator, professor Won Lung Li, whose "lectures to the American Barbarians" – a counter melody to Julian West's voice – make up the skeleton of Vinton's critique. As Hayot remarks, by incorporating the voice of the colonised 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".<sup>35</sup>
- 32 It is in the same negative space that the Chinese utopia, i.e., the utopia of the colonised, is negotiated. Both Bellamy's utopia and Vinton's dystopia can be described as discourses on the nature of society and the nation which are built upon the possibility of an otherness, that is to say the possibility to envision an alternative locus of convergence for those aspects of the ideological subtext which are not yet realised in history but are left in potency. This, in the end, was the appeal that the utopian genre exerted on the Chinese novelists of the late Qing period.<sup>36</sup> The Chinese utopian novel is the product of the "contradictory condition of Chinese modernity", an inverted image of the condition of colonial impasse of *fin-de-siècle* China which is presented as a blueprint for its solution.

After all, as Liang Qichao wrote, “If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction. [...] Why is this so? This is because fiction has a profound power over the way of man”.<sup>37</sup>

- 33 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 utopian discourse is erased and translated to a condition of undecidability. 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 authority. 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 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.
- 34 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 into the future in *Looking Backward*) is seen as a contemporary to the invaders’ ancestors, and he is thus welcomed as their equal, “entitled with the same respect” that the Americans Nationalists were not deemed worthy of.<sup>38</sup> 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”.<sup>39</sup> 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 equal to the coloniser) is realised in the dystopia of the coloniser, yet at the same time the latter is not revealed any more as a dystopia, but rather as a new utopia.
- 35 The play of reversal at the core of Vinton’s *Looking Further Backward* is developed subtly: the dystopia of 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 its Bellamian re-organisation. This sense of nostalgia transpires from Julian West’s remarks and in his gradual realisation of the American inadequacy 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 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”.<sup>40</sup>
- 36 The Chinese invasion acquires the allure of a necessary act of rectification, an American *zhengming* against the spontaneous implosion of the Bellamian Commonwealth. These vacillations of identity, as Hayot remarks, 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” prevents the narration to reach a definitive closure and reasserts its quality of ideological undecidability.<sup>41</sup> 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 last lecture to the "American Barbarians" reveals to the reader that the Chinese invasion is complete and its consequences irreversible. The Chinese province of North America has been completely colonised, and millions of Americans are being deported to their new mainland in 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".<sup>42</sup> In his final lecture, professor Won Lung Li in fact 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 to a minimum; with us to-day it is honored and given every chance to develop.<sup>43</sup> [emphasis added]

- 37 Won Lung Li's emphatic conclusion, although providing a satisfying ending to the dystopian anti-Nationalistic parabola of *Looking Further Backward*, is in fact a false closure, as it undermines the foundations of the novel. In the end, the re-Americanisation of America by Chinese intervention clashes against the dystopian, Yellow-perilist premises of national fragmentation upon which the novel was built in the first place.
- 38 We are indeed looking *further* backward: "The country in the rear [of Boston] had been recreated into a Chinese province" and "every foot of its progress was permanent", yet the utopian/dystopian nature of the new Chinese province of North America remains questionable, unsolved.<sup>44</sup> The Bellamian prophecy which recited "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!"<sup>45</sup> is in the end fulfilled, but its terms are displaced: "we", "us" and "our civilization" are not entirely *ours* any more, they have become the *woguo* 我國 and *taguo* 他國 of another *wenming* 文明.<sup>46</sup> 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 conversely into the unexpected utopia of its own Chinese-ification.
- 39 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 the "rejection of all representation as misrepresentation", and which also characterise the Chinese utopias of the late Qing empire.<sup>47</sup> This notion of "rejection" or deflection of all representation provides in fact a reasonable explanation for the adaptability of the Bellamian utopian model outside the American borders and within the Chinese ones in particular. 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 the historical process that lead to it. While Bellamy often indulges in the meticulous descriptions of all that is happening 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", etc.<sup>48</sup> As Auerbach remarks, these strategic ellipses poignantly summarise "Bellamy's inability to account for change", as well as the author's tendency "to dispense with historical agency altogether".<sup>49</sup> 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 narration, Bellamy portrays a nation that emerges from a time without history and that is located in a space without maps and 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 the 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 absence as much as what is actually, ostensibly represented in the text.<sup>50</sup>

- 40 The reader of *Looking Backward* could easily criticise Bellamy's work by referring to the same words that its protagonist Julian West uses to praise Berrian's "*Penthesilia*", that is to say the best selling romance of *Looking Backward*'s future Boston: "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
- 41 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,<sup>51</sup> 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 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 in which only the present is narrated: "Bellamy defines his romance almost entirely in terms of what it banishes".<sup>52</sup>
- 42 By getting rid of historical agency, Bellamy is not compelled to deal with history's main actor, society, whose practical absence through 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 to are the members of Dr. Leete's 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", radio preacher from the twentieth-century. 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 his belvedere on the top of the house.
- 43 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 – i.e., the spaces of historical agency – are left unrepresented, unseen: the communal dinner, where society is supposed to gather every day to eat and socialise, is actually divided into 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 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.<sup>53</sup> These narrative strategies of deferral, postponement and rejection of representation in the end characterise the utopian narration as one of constant displacement and *neutralization*, whose conceptual coordinates eschew any attempt of categorical closure on the part of the reader. Paradoxically, this particular trait of the utopian narration, its “open-endedness”, allows its model to be transplanted, adapted, translated and mistranslated outside its original, local frameworks of reference.

- 44 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.”<sup>55</sup> This is the same cognitive process that unfolds in Julian West’s mind when he gazes down at the city of Boston from the belvedere of Dr. Leete’s house:
- 45 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.<sup>56</sup>
- 46 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 colonizer and the colonized), which in the end stabilize themselves “into a neutral or neutralizing relationship”.<sup>57</sup> By focusing either on 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, that of a society without agents, located in a history without time.
- 47 From the belvedere on the roof of Dr. Leete’s house, Julian West’s eyes are able to encompass the marvellous buildings of new Boston, 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, and 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, Bellamy’s new Boston can be considered as the textual equivalent to Louis Daguerre’s daguerreotype *Boulevard du Temple* of 1838, which is considered 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 camera's mirror allowed Louis Daguerre to immortalise by chance, and only by chance, a single figure out of one of the most modern of modern cities: 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 (incidentally, no trace if left of the shoeshiner).

- 48 Looking backward to the main topic of this essay, 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 genre's "strategic emptiness". Resistant to any attempt of categorical closure, and reluctant towards any form of representation that would not result in a dialectic of neutralization, the "strategic emptiness" of the utopian model may have provided for the Chinese intelligentsia of the end of the century (and at the end of their own world) an optimal tool for the elaboration, or the exorcism, of the ideological impasses of a time gone out of joint.

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## NOTES

1. The paradigm for which the "birth" of modern Chinese literature coincides with the beginning of China's Republican Era is still the dominant one. The most recent instance of this approach can be found for instance in Yunte Huang's *The Big Red Book of Modern Chinese Literature*: published in February 2016, this anthology once again poses Lu Xun's *nahan* 呐喊 as the *terminus post quem* of China's literary modernity; see Yunte Huang (ed.), *The Big Red Book of Modern Chinese Literature*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.
2. 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: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997; Theodore Hutners, *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.
3. Wang, p. 20.
4. "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." Slavoj Žižek in Phillip E. Wegner, *Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. 32.
5. Nathaniel Isaacson, *Colonial Modernities and Chinese Science Fiction*, PhD dissertation, Los Angeles, University of California, 2011, p. 31.
6. Wang, p. 14.
7. I am not aware of any work from the early republican period that could be considered within the same category of the utopian novels written in China between 1902 and 1910.
8. The connection between the late Qing utopian novel and the *Wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法 is not entirely groundless: among the victims of Empress Cixi's 慈禧 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 launched his own *nahan* 呐喊 in 1902 on the pages of the journal *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說.

9. On the concept of *Verfremdung* in science fiction, see Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.

10. Whether the individual textual instances actually realise all the aspects that the genre implies is debatable, but it is not the point of this contribution.

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

12. See for example 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.

13. “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 be reconstituted (ideally) by a (finite or infinite) ensemblist composition of these organisations”; Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987, p. 343

14. We are moving along the theoretical lines given by German philosopher Karl Mannheim in his *Ideologie und Utopie*: if “ideologies are the situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed de facto in the realization of their projected contents”, the utopian mentality thus emerges in the attempt to cover the gap between the projection of ideals and the realisation of their content; see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 175 *passim*.

15. Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 103.

16. For what concerns the numbers of this massive process of assimilation-through-translation, see the work 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.

17. Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1959, p. 19; concerning the experience of Timothy Richard in China, see *Forty-five years in China: Reminiscences*, New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1916.

18. The names of Yan Fu 嚴復 and Lin Shu 林紓 come prominently to mind here. On the role of translation in the shaping of the late Qing cultural texture, and on the two most emblematic translators of the time, see for example Michael Gibbs Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture*, 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.

19. On the development of new modes of narration as a defining trait 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), 22 (2000), 67–84.

20. See 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, 1, 1999; and 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.

21. “美國人所著《百年一覺》書,是大同影子。” Kang Youwei 康有為, *Kang Nanhai xiansheng kou shuo* 康南海先生口說, Beijing 北京, Zhongshan daxue chubanshe 中山大學出版社, 1985, p. 31.

22. On Bellamy's political project, see Milton Cantor's "The Backward Looking Look of Bellamy's Socialism", in *Looking Backward, 1888-1888: Essays on Edward Bellamy*, ed. by Daphne Patai, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.
23. Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, *Tan Sitong quanji xiace 譚嗣同全集下冊*, Beijing 北京, Zhonghua shuju chuban 中华书局出版, 1981, p. 367.
24. "《百年一觉》所云:二千年后,地球之人,惟居官与作工者两种是也", Sun Baoxuan 孙宝瑄, *Wangshan Lu Riji 忘山庐日记*, quoted in Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xixuedongjian yu wan Qing shehui 西学东渐与晚清社会*, Shanghai 上海, Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1994, p. 412).
25. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 89.
26. Lu Shi'e 陆士谔, *Xin zhongguo 新中国*, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2010, p. 33.
27. Liu, p. 103.
28. Bellamy, p. 12.
29. 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, The Kent State University Press, 1976; Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.
30. See for example Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column*, Amos K. Fiske's *Beyond the Bourne*, Chauncey Thomas' *The Crystal Button*, Henry Olerich's *A Cityless and Countryless World*, William Dean Howells' *A Traveller from Altruria*, Albert A. Merrill's *The Great Awakening*, and Ludwig Geissler's *Looking Beyond*.
31. Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 15.
32. Arthur Dudley Vinton, *Looking Further Backward*, Albany, Albany Book Company, 1890, p. 9.
33. Vinton, p. 106.
34. Eric Hayot, "Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures", *Representations*, 99 (2007), p. 112.
35. Hayot, p. 107.
36. This aspect appears clearly, for example, in novels such as Wu Jianren's *Xin shitou ji* or Lu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*.
37. Liang Qichao 梁启超, "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.
38. Vinton, p. 143.
39. Vinton, p. 147.
40. Vinton, pp. 164-165.
41. Hayot, p. 107.
42. Vinton, p. 179.
43. Vinton, pp. 187-188.
44. Vinton, p. 186 and p. 58.
45. Vinton, p. 54.
46. These expressions appear 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 and the dystopian reality of *fin-de-siècle* China upon which the utopian fantasy is build; whereas "taquo" 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.
47. Jonathan Auerbach, "The Nation Organized": Utopian Impotence in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*", *American Literary History*, 1994, n. 6, p. 36.
48. Bellamy, p. 131.
49. Auerbach, p. 30.
50. 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.

51. Bellamy, p. 100.
  52. 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.
  53. Bellamy, pp. 90–91.
  54. See Louis Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present", *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1993, vol. 19, n. 3, pp. 397–420.
  55. Marin, p. 398.
  56. Bellamy, p. 22.
  57. Marin, pp. 400–404.
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## RÉSUMÉS

In recent times the coordinates of modern Chinese literature have undergone a substantial rewriting which lead to the reevaluation of the late Qing period as a prolific gestational stage for the development of the Chinese literary modernity. Among the different narrative forms and genres that were conceived, theorized and experimented between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the utopian novel (or wutuobang xiaoshuo) emerges as one of the most interesting ones. Promoted by Liang Qichao as the epitome of a new literary aesthetic, this genre is a product of those cultural practices of "productive distortion" which, according to Lydia Liu, characterise fin-de-siècle China's colonial modernity. A Genettian "archi-genre" whose narrative scope (ideally) encompasses all other forms of narration, the utopian novel of the late Qing period offers both an ideal synthesis of the Chinese reformist thought of the time, as well as a ratification of its failure. By focusing on the reception of this genre from the part of the Chinese literati of the time, and by proposing a comparative analysis of Liu Shi'e's *Xin Zhongguo*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Arthur D. Vinton's *Looking Further Backward* which takes into account the modalities of representation of the Other through which these texts (and the utopian novel in general) are built, the aim of the present contribution is to understand the late Qing utopian novel as a chief product of the ideological subconscious of China's colonial modernity, whose traits and development confirm us once again that a fragmented reality could only correspond to a fragmented representation of reality.