

On the Representation of Chinese and Western Literary Traditions and Intellectual-Cultural Trends in Late Qing Fiction

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Abstract

This paper explores how the writers of the late Qing dynasty manipulated Chinese and Western literary traditions and intellectual-cultural trends to construct various kinds of imaginary utopias. On the one hand, different writers employed words or notions such as “peach colony” (桃源), “fairyland” (仙鄉) and “Datong” (Great Unity, 大同) as a way of carrying forward the Chinese literary traditions; and on the other hand, images such as “New China” (新中國), “truly civilized world” (文明境界), “utopia” (烏托邦) and “New Era” (新紀元) were created to reflect the influx of Western ideological trends such as freedom, democracy, civilization and science. The process of inheriting Chinese traditional literary trends and accepting and integrating new Western intellectual-cultural ones was not simply a matter of direct linear influence, but instead entailed a generational struggle by younger writers (後輩) competing with and trying to improve upon the works of their elders (前輩). This paper focuses on several writing practices by which late Qing dynasty authors sought to interweave Chinese and Western thought, specifically: “new editions” (新編), “translating and editing” (譯編) and “transforming and editing” (轉編). By such means, different writers constructed imaginary ideal realms intended to shed light on the real world crisis which China was experiencing at the time, by appropriating, misinterpreting and transforming both Chinese and Western literary traditions and intellectual-cultural trends to provide a platform for reform.

Keywords

late Qing, fiction, fairyland, Great Unity, future

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Introduction

When the decline of the late Qing dynasty is represented in fiction, it seems like a desperate tune presaging China's total collapse. But although the literary authors of that time criticized the status quo with a strong sense of mission and patriotism, it should not be overlooked that despite the social vicissitudes which they were enduring, there were still people who, under various circumstances and with varying motivations, voiced sounds of hope. To specify, missionaries, politicians, writers and editors, aiming to preach, to urge national salvation or to promote literary development, all made earnest efforts to let others hear their hopeful message. This involved missionary activities, speeches and policy-making, literature movements, and papers published in magazines and newspapers, which also issued literary awards.¹ The authors of late Qing fiction took a counterfactual and often fantastical approach, focusing on distinctive narrative perspectives such as futuristic worlds, dreamlands and mysterious remote islands, thereby establishing a "New China" situated in the center of their imagined worlds. For instance, *The Future of New China* (新中國未來記) by Liang Qichao (1828-1905) portrays establishing a future new China; a peach colony is constructed in *A Story to Lift Shame* (洗恥記) by Lengqingnvshi; a remote fairy island is sketched in *Idiotic Nonsense* (癡人說夢記) by Lv Sheng; *The Prediction of A Disastrous Accident* (瓜分慘禍預言記) written by Xuanyuan Zhengyi presents readers with the image of a Republic of China; *The New Story of the Stone* (新石頭記) by Wu Yanren depicts a truly civilized world; and *Icebergs and a Sea of Snow* (冰山雪海) by Li Boyuan describes a "Datong" (大同, Great Unity) world.

These writers of the late Qing dynasty constructed narratives of hope, even while, in reality, China was in deep crisis. They created images of "New China," "Democracy Village" (民權村), "Republic" (共和國), a "truly civilized world" and a "New Era," all of which bore clear traces of the literature and intellectual-cultural trends of the West (泰西). However, these novels also simultaneously followed the existing Chinese literary traditions and thus contained many established codes and symbols to represent ideals such as "fairyland" (仙鄉), "Mount Penglai" (蓬萊) and "peach colony" (桃源). This blending of perspectives was hardly surprising,

¹ Wang Xiaoming (2000), p.25.

as a wide variety of Chinese and Western ideological trends were interacting and conflicting with each other at this time, as the world became a conceptually more complex place. The idea of “utopia” is especially relevant here, and there are many examples from different types of literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where Chinese traditional concepts are used to explain this concept. For instance, in Wilhelm Lobscheid’s *English and Chinese Dictionary* (英華字典) (1866), the term “Utopia” was translated by using the sentence “a land of outrageous happiness and abundance as well as a kingdom of peace similar to Penglai” (幻樂之地, 豐樂之地, 安樂國, 蓬萊), thus employing a reference which was more familiar to Chinese readers. Later, Yan Fu, Liang Qichao, and Ma Junwu also used traditional terms such as “Avatamsaka World” (華嚴界), “the country of Huaxu” (華胥) and “Elysium” (極樂世界) to interpret “Utopia.” This late Qing dynasty trend of using Chinese traditional concepts to account for foreign words and phrases resulted in “Utopia,” a Western idea, developing a more intricate field of meaning after mingling with concepts intrinsic to Chinese culture.²

This paper discusses this process in detail, focusing on the way in which writers of the late Qing dynasty dealt with Chinese and Western literary traditions and intellectual-cultural trends: a number of specific fictional texts produced at that time will be analyzed. Various works describing an ideal state or utopia have been chosen as examples, with a focus on the issue of how these writers selected, resisted, refined and blended Chinese and Western literary traditions and intellectual-cultural trends, within the context of their particular period, presenting a hopeful vision to set against China’s ongoing crisis. In his discussion of the relationship between Chinese and Western fiction, Chen Pingyuan points out that the literature of the late Qing dynasty allowed readers to move beyond the prevailing historical framework to “accept” Western fiction: “It was Chinese readers who took the initiative. It is not that foreign novelists were trying to promote their works in China. Instead, open-minded Chinese people chose to accept works from various types of foreign fiction according to their own taste.” Chen terms this process “creative misunderstanding” (創造

² For more discussion of different explanations of “utopia” in the late Qing dynasty, see Guan’s “A Novel *Utopia*: On Travelling Concepts, Narrative Organization and a Reflection on the History of Literature” (小說「烏托邦」: 概念旅行, 敘事展演與文學史反思). Guan (2014), pp.137- 69.

性的誤解).³

In this paper the broad term “editorial translation” is used to characterize this process, and several types of approach are investigated: “new editions,” “translating and editing,” and “transforming and editing.” This paper aims to construct a solid theoretical foundation for discussing these phenomena, in order to show how the writers of the late Qing dynasty dealt with the Chinese and Western literary environments as well as the wider cultural trends. A detailed explanation of these terms and concepts will first be provided, and then some specific examples will be used to explore how various types of Chinese and Western literary traditions and cultural trends were represented and misrepresented in late Qing fiction through the construction of imaginary utopian spaces.

The Framework of “Editorial Translation”: “New Edition,” “Translating and Editing,” and “Transforming and Editing”

Both the literary traditions and Western intellectual-cultural trends are essentially dynamic, with multiple and complex layers of content. Thus, the writers involved with the concept of the “New Novel” (新小說), such as Liang Qichao, Wu Yanren, Li Boyuan, Lu Shi’e and Xu Zhiyan, all had a comprehensive knowledge of indigenous Chinese culture and were widely read in the Chinese classics and poetry. They were heavily influenced by Chinese culture, and not so critical of traditional ideas as scholars later became after the May 4th Movement of 1919. On the other hand, they were also open to Western culture, and often advocated Western civilization, politics and other innovations in their writing. Their writing process was therefore naturally eclectic, accepting literary traditions and cultural trends from both China and the West. They did not, however, blindly accept everything they encountered, but applied a process of selection, analysis, transformation, and resolution of conflicts. In order to examine this issue of acceptance, the framework of “editorial translation” will be analyzed through the concepts of “new edition” (新編), “translating and editing” (譯

³ See Chen (2005).

編) and “transforming and editing”(轉編). This will provide an insight into the way in which various different writers established their own “utopian” visions.

Firstly, the term “new edition” is derived from Lu Xun’s *Old Stories Retold* (故事新編), a collection of eight short stories written between 1922 and 1935. Lu based these stories on myths, legends, fables and historic facts, but he also embellished them using his own creativity.⁴ Writers in the late Qing dynasty tended to continue or reconstruct the narrative of old stories and legends, and as a result, such new editions are always a sequel (續書) to or continuation of the original works. Most of these newly edited books retained the original titles but added as a prefix the Chinese character for “new” (新): examples include *New Tale of the Water Margin* (新水滸), *New Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (新三國), *New Journey to the West* (新西遊記), *New Story of the Stone* (新石頭記) and *New Chitchat of an Old Fellow in the Sun* (新野叟曝言). When it comes to the topic of utopia, the focus of the present paper, writers employed many traditional literary ideas such as fairyland in the form of Mount Penglai or Kunlun Mountain (崑崙), with associated immortals (仙人) and alchemists (方士). Writers had no intention of retelling the previous stories but were appropriating the legends and myths from the context of previous stories, thereby reconstructing a new narrative perspective. This entailed a negotiation between competing ideas from past and present, old and new, traditional and modern, and myth and reality.

The old and new texts of stories themed on the fairyland of Penglai, the immortals and Chinese alchemists had various differences, though they largely overlapped, and these alterations opened them up to reinterpretation. Certain adjustments were made in the process, reflecting the psychological understanding of the authors as they tried to update and improve the original works. Thus, Lu Shi’e’s *New Chitchat of an Old Fellow in the Sun*, published in 1909 by Shanghai Reform Fiction Publishing House, criticized Xia Jingqu’s original for focusing on enlightening people rather than teaching them how to become prosperous (只講教民之道, 不談富民之方). “Xia’s book reads like empty talk which pays no attention to reality (大言炎炎, 終不脫書生), I thus provide a new edition to correct his mistakes and add the previously unspoken message, thereby transforming it into a

4 See “Preface to Old Stories Retold” (故事新編·序言) in Lu Xun (1998), p.342.

political book with no imperfections.”⁵ Rather than considering the political circumstances of the time when *Chitchat of an Old Fellow in the Sun* was written, Lu’s criticism was based on the situation during the late Qing dynasty, and so he was establishing his own views through fighting against his predecessors. When the old-fashioned traditional ideas about enlightenment would not suffice to save the country, Lu Shi’e’s new edition supplied fictional characters endowed with knowledge which enabled more people to become rich and to think intelligently about the future of China.

Secondly, the term “translating and editing,” is employed in this paper to highlight how writers in the late Qing dynasty established their own vision of utopia through translating foreign novel. In 1897, Kang Youwei stated in *Annotated Bibliography of Japanese Books* (日本書目志) that “it is necessary to translate foreign fiction, among which novels from the Far West are quite popular.”⁶ Both *Announcing Our Policy of Printing a Fiction Supplement* (本館附印說部緣起) written by Yan Fu and Xia Zengyou, and Liang Qichao’s *The Foreword to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation* (譯印政治小說序) embodied political expectations as a function of literature, demonstrating the importance of translated fiction to the construction of national identities at that time. It was a common practice during the late Qing dynasty for translators to reorganize sentence structures, to rename characters, and to alter plots, even deleting some elements. This was actually therefore “translating and editing” rather than simply “translation.” The way in which translators modified, added or deleted the material of the source texts depended on their personal preferences and also their foreign language proficiency. For example, Lin Shu used to rely on his friends to give him an oral account of foreign works, which he then transcribed into classical Chinese. When Liang Qichao translated *Two Years’ Vacation*, originally by the French novelist Jules Verne into *Fifteen Little Heroes* (十五小豪傑), his published version was affected by space constraints: “the translated version by Morita Shiken consists of 15 chapters but I have doubled the number of chapters for serialization in the newspaper.”⁷

In other cases, such editorial translation was a response to the situation of the writers in the late Qing dynasty. Take the Chinese translation of

5 See Lu Shi’e (1909), pp.1-3.

6 See Kang (1976b), p.735.

7 See Verne (1902), p.8.

Looking Backward (回頭看記畧) for example, which was the most influential utopian novel at the end of the nineteenth century. The translator points out in the preface that “translating a book nowadays cannot convey everything, and I have chosen to only translate the main content.”⁸ Such a statement is indicative of the fact that translation activities were constrained by politics, and that the selection of texts for translation was influenced by the translator’s own social and political consciousness (an issue that will be discussed in more detail later on). These utopian novels disrupted the nostalgic Chinese traditional mindset, loosening up a cultural inertia going back to ancient times, and allowed more focus to be placed on the future. This translation or recreation of utopian novels thus led to a wider shift emerging in outlook and values.

Thirdly, the term “transforming and editing” refers to the practice of shifting between literary categories, which is primarily concerned with how the narrative of a novel is connected with ideological, sociological and philosophical discourses, such as the theory of evolution, civil rights, socialism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Books such as *Elements of International Law* by Henry Wheaton (1785-1848), *Novum Organum* by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), *Evolution and Ethics* by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), *The Social Contract* by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith (1723-1790) contained new knowledge in the domains of political science, biology, economics, science and law, which revealed new horizons for late Qing fiction. In consequence, the narrative process of novels was often compromised by the need to account for such new knowledge, as implicit in their context or dialogue. For instance, when commenting on his own *Future of New China*, Liang Qichao remarked that “Its style seemingly resembles that of a novel, historical writing, or argumentative essay but it is not what it looks like. I cannot help laughing at myself for the unfamiliar style of my writing. It involves content about laws, regulations, speeches and essays, which are piled up and inevitably boring.”⁹

This stylistic formulation of “... resembles ... but is not ...” was quite common in late Qing fiction, demonstrating how different writers transformed and edited many statements of knowledge, assembling new

⁸ See Richard (1891), p.15.

⁹ Yin (1902), p.2.

worldviews from novels, history books, laws, regulations and speeches. Importantly, during this process, the writers made substantial changes to the original works. Take the “Datong” doctrine for example, as discussed by the historian Fan Wenlan, who characterizes Kang Youwei’s “Datong” as a synthesis of many elements: the Gongyang School’s three stages of human history (公羊家三世說), Xiaokang (moderate affluence) and Datong as mentioned in the *Book of Rites* (禮運篇小康大同說), the kindness and equality promoted by Buddhism (佛教慈祥平等說), the “Rights of Man” proposed by Jean Jacques Rousseau (盧梭天賦人權說), Jesus’s teaching about fraternity, equality and liberty (耶穌教博愛平等自由說), and various other European socialist doctrines. From all these elements Kang Youwei imagined a Datong world, as a great world community of unity.¹⁰ Subsequently, when other writers of the late Qing dynasty adopted a similar technique of “transforming and editing” to illustrate “Datong” in the narrative of their novels, the complicated interplay of myth and fact made another round of changes inevitable.

These three phenomena, “new edition,” “translating and editing” and “transforming and editing” actually offer abundant scope for discussion, though many commentators have in the past tended to be rather critical of such practices. Thus, Liu Tingji commented in *Zaiyuan Potpourri* (在園雜誌) that the practice of providing new editions to previous works was merely intended to make a profit: “Having noticed the popularity of the books of their predecessors, they adopted the same names, selected some elements and made some alterations, which later became a common practice. This has resulted in some unworthy imitations of great works.”¹¹ Liang Qichao was also sharply self-critical: “New ideas are being rapidly introduced. However, there is a lack of organization and selection in my own work. Neither is there a distinctive focus, emphasis and perspective. I seem to be mistakenly upholding the principle “the more, the better”.¹² Such criticisms can be readily understood in the context of this paper: “a common practice,” “unworthy imitations of great works,” “a lack of selection” and “no distinctive focus, emphasis and perspective”; all of these remarks clearly reflect the fact that the writers selected, manipulated, converted and distorted both Chinese and Western resources before

¹⁰ Fan (1962), p.309.

¹¹ See Liu Tingji (1971), p.20.

¹² Liang (1998), p.96.

establishing a more definite value system specific to the late Qing dynasty.

By applying the theoretical perspective of “misreading” (誤讀), the true significance of these phenomena can be seen more clearly. According to Harold Bloom, the influence of literary history lies not in maintaining continuity with earlier writers, but in the process of misreading, misunderstanding, correcting and transforming these predecessors. It is not about the predecessors teaching or dictating to the younger generation, nor about the younger generation imitating or learning or inheriting from the predecessors; in fact, “misreading” actually represents the conflict between the generations. Thus, Bloom believes that the history of poetry is a struggle between the younger poets and the old masters. For example, William Blake (1757-1827) rewrote John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and thus established his fame as a poet of genius. The feeling that one is not as capable as one’s predecessors has a destructive power: “The anxiety of influence is so terrible because it is both a kind of separation anxiety and the beginning of a compulsion neurosis, or fear of a death that is a personified superego.”¹³ The writer must overcome this anxiety and fight against the predecessors, so the text becomes “a psychic battlefield upon which authentic forces struggle for the only victory worth winning, the divinating triumph over oblivion.”¹⁴

Seen from this perspective, the practices of the authors of late Qing fiction, in producing new editions, in translating and editing, and in transforming and editing, involves much more than learning or imitating foreign ideas or carrying forward existing literary traditions. In fact, these practices indicate a process of conflict between the late Qing writers and their predecessors, which can be regarded as the misreading, misunderstanding and correction of the older generation by the younger. In the light of this understanding, some questions then arise: What kinds of Chinese and Western utopian resources were selected and appropriated by late Qing writers? And what kinds were excluded? What were the ramifications of this struggle between the younger and older generations? Thus, rather than saying that the late Qing novelists were influenced by Chinese and Western literary traditions and cultural trends, it would be more accurate and appropriate to conclude that they were recreating their own visions of

¹³ See Bloom (1973), p.58.

¹⁴ See Bloom (1976), p.2.

utopia in their novels through a process of misreading these resources.

A “New Edition” of “Fairyland”: Outward Exploration and Expansion

Over time, literary traditions developed into specific literary codes and symbols, which were internalized by the writers of subsequent generations. These then influenced and restricted their worldviews and aesthetic preferences, becoming a normative force of literary development. The late Qing dynasty was an era of rapid change, however, and this normative force was constantly challenged until, after many rounds of deformation, integration and recreation, a new set of literary codes and symbols came into being. To illustrate this process, this section will focus on the theme of fairyland, exploring how writers integrated the traditional theme of fairyland into the narrative of their novels, but also altered the story to reflect the contemporary demands of the late Qing dynasty.

Fairyland has been a recurrent theme in the development of Chinese literature, though it has also undergone continual evolution. A Japanese scholar, Ogawa Tamaki, has conducted an in-depth analysis of the relevant literary codes and symbols based on eight types of motif in fairyland stories: mountains or seas, getting through an ominous cave, legendary elixirs and foodstuffs, encountering and marrying a beautiful girl, receiving magical powers or gifts from the immortals, missing one’s hometown, the unnaturally rapid passage of time in fairyland, and being unable to return to one’s original place.¹⁵ When the writers of the late Qing dynasty made use of the tradition of fairyland, however, they were pursuing a new system of values, which extended beyond these traditional elements. The paper “Heroes in Utopia” (烏託邦之豪傑), published by Bei’an, the pen name of Zhao Zhiqian, and serialized in *Bianqun Newspaper* (砵群叢報) from 1909 to 1910, nicely illustrates these changes.

Zhao referenced the Western concept of “utopia” but also adopted the codes and symbols of fairyland peculiar to Chinese literature. These two strands interpenetrate and compete with each other in his writings, resulting in a tension. As the editor of *Bianqun Newspaper*, Zhao published

¹⁵ Ogawa (1974), pp.34-5.

several prefaces, essays and works of fiction which were characterized by a distinctive social consciousness. In the first issue of his newspaper he writes:

The story titled *Chinese Farmers* (中國耨者傳) is intended to promote agricultural development and progress, while in the other story, *Heroes in Utopia*, people are encouraged to use their own wealth for the public welfare ... Whatever is good should be deemed a good role model, while whatever is bad should function as a warning. Furthermore, the social development of a country should learn from both the good and the bad.¹⁶

Since Zhao was trying to promote social reform by writing fiction, his use of the literary traditions had inevitably to be reevaluated to suit the needs of this agenda. In *Heroes in Utopia*, based on the literary tradition of fairyland, Zhao's fictional character arrives at a deserted foreign island where he discovers an uninhabited Forbidden City, on the walls of which is carved an inscription referring to the Qin dynasty:

Xu Fu (徐福) was commissioned by the Emperor Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇) to lead an expedition crewed by three thousand virgin boys and girls to find the elixir of life. They travelled a long way and came to a place with flat plains and wide swamps, where there were three holy mountains, namely, Penglai (蓬萊), Fangzhang (方丈) and Yingzhou (瀛洲).¹⁷

Thus, Zhao's narrative of fairyland is based on ancient records in which Xu is an alchemist:

Xu appealed to the emperor, mentioning the existence of three holy mountains inhabited by the immortals, namely Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou. The Emperor was advised to practice fasting, accompanied by virgin boys and girls. Xu was sent out to lead a seafaring expedition with thousands of virgin boys and girls, to look for the immortals.¹⁸

The Xu in the ancient records was an alchemist with mysterious supernat-

¹⁶ Bei'an (1909a), pp.9-10.

¹⁷ Bei'an (1909b), p.35.

¹⁸ See Si (1993), p.121. Wang Xiaolian has discussed the changes made to the theme of the alchemist who entered fairyland. See Wang Xiaolian (1982), p.50.

ural abilities, who functioned as a kind of shaman. Being able to communicate with both Heaven and Earth, Xu was responsible for managing the spirits, and for worship, agriculture, music and medicine. Thus, he was capable of reaching the fairy mountains which were inaccessible to any ordinary person. The writers of the late Qing dynasty, however, wanted to present their readers with contemporary fictional characters who could save their country from crisis, rather with such supernatural alchemists. Hence, in Zhao's fiction, it was heroes and knights who sought to serve the public interests by traveling to the fairy mountains beyond the sea and searching for the elixir. In Zhao's reinterpretation, the codes and symbols of fairyland embodied his own values and the demands of his time. He rejected the traditional fairyland system of values, which emphasized longevity and supernatural abilities, and instead deliberately presented his readers with a stark contrast: the different attitudes of the heroes and knights of the late Qing dynasty when they reached the deserted island compared with that of Xu Fu. Thus, Xu left the island because of his superstitious fears, whereas the heroes and knights overcame their superstitious beliefs by using science. They developed mines and cleared wasteland for farming, providing an abundance of minerals, jade, fruit trees, cows, sheep and elk.

Such a comparison demonstrates how Zhao reconstructed the prevailing system of values, replacing superstition, eternal life and magical elixirs with science, exploration and development. The utopia thus constructed was intended as an exemplar for society. The analysis of Zhang Huijuan in *Paradisiacal Myths and Utopia* (樂園神話與烏托邦), shows that Zhao's new fairyland is no longer the traditional self-sufficient and closed paradise, but is instead a utopia rooted in the secular world with all its varied possibilities. In effect, it is an ideal microcosm which epitomizes China. Thus, the heroes actions in the microcosm are intended to benefit the whole world rather than just themselves. Their essential characteristics include a drive toward outward expansion and exploration, as well as their earnest efforts to build an earthly paradise. They also display a quality of foresight which is very different from the traditional idea of a "peach colony" with its nostalgic focus on the past. As a result, a space of civilization-only-more-so (Harold Bloom's terminology) was constructed, with people actively engaged in social development.¹⁹

¹⁹ Zhang (1986), pp.80-1; p.89.

Other writers of the late Qing dynasty implemented their own misreadings of the notion of fairyland, further infusing the traditional fairyland paradigm with a vision of outward expansion and exploration. *Idiotic Nonsense* by Lv Sheng, serialized in *Tapestry Portrait Novel* (繡像小說) between 1904 and 1906, uses contrasting narratives to highlight the different perspectives on fairyland of two generations. Although Lv Sheng's identity is unknown, his critical view of the court and his demand for reform is obvious throughout the work. At the beginning of the novel, an individual from the elder generation, Jia Shouzhuo (賈守拙), dreams of a fairy island, and the dream scene is obviously derived from the legend of Emperor Qin, already alluded to. Xu Fu volunteers to lead three thousand virgin boys and girls on an expedition to search for the fairy island. After ten years without any news of them, it transpires that Xu Fu has become the owner of the island, and is now immortal after eating magical grass. Meanwhile, all the virgin boys and girls are now the people of the island, plowing the land to grow crops. They have no need pay any rent for using the land, which traditionally took the form of a share of the rice harvest. There is also no crime nor any need for lawsuits, and certainly no bureaucratic bullying. Thus Jia Shouzhuo's dream portrays a rural idyll very similar to the traditional vision of fairyland. Jia Shouzhuo tells his dream to his son Jia Xi'xian (賈希仙), who, several years later, leads a group of like-minded people to search for the fairy island, and after many twists and turns, they finally find it.

This seems to represent the son, as a representative of the younger generation, succeeding his father, but within this metaphor there is a selection and recombination of ethical values. The fairy island which Jia Xi'xian creates is called Zhenxian Town (鎮仙城, literally: suppressing the immortals) with the clear message of overcoming the superstitious beliefs of the elder generation. Through opening up the land and implementing plans to transform culture, education, politics, and to introduce science and technology, the original fairy island with its traditional ideals of longevity and freedom from exorbitant taxes becomes the civilized and progressive community of Zhenxian Town. Further deviations from the theme of fairyland made in *Idiotic Nonsense* include coastal land reclamation, grain production, circulation of coins, opening schools, policemen guarding the city with guns, separation of powers (legislative, executive and judicial), ironworks, cotton mills and factories. Zhenxian Town is not a self-sufficient and closed system but instead a space of civilization-only-more-so. The

novel ends with a dream of the new China of the future to be founded upon science and technology: “The moment the vehicle is set in motion, everything is spinning round so fast ... one street is not enough and there is another one crossing over the cars. It is wonderfully busy and bustling!”²⁰ The introduction of technological civilization to the fairy island in the novel was clearly designed to represent an ideal paradigm of civilization and progress which the intellectuals of the late Qing dynasty eagerly anticipated.

At the same time that *Tapestry Portrait Novel* was publishing *Idiotic Nonsense*, it also serialized another work, the novella *Tales of the Moon Colony* (月球殖民地小說) written by Huangjiang Diaosou (荒江釣叟, literally: a fisherman beside a quiet river). This bears some resemblance to the works of Jules Verne, such as *Around the World in 80 Days* (八十天環遊地球), *All around the Moon* (環繞月球) and *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (氣球上的五星期). The novella’s reference to balloon flights and its imaginative depiction of living on the Moon make it an early prototype of Chinese science fiction. The protagonists of the novella are a couple, Long Menghua and Madame Feng, whose boat capsizes when fleeing into exile from the oppression of the imperial court. They become separated in the water, and Madame Feng drifts until she is rescued by pirates in international waters. Unwilling, however, to surrender to their threats, she jumps once more into the sea. A similar theme is found in several other works of late Qing fiction, including *Golden World* (黃金世界), *Idiotic Nonsense*, *Heroes in Utopia* and *Icebergs and a Sea of Snow*: a Chinese person, unconscious or dead, drifts slowly in international waters while the waves lash their body. This is obviously a metaphor for the collective unconsciousness of the nation, indicating the bumpy progress of China in modern history. In *Tales of the Moon Colony*, Madame Feng survives, drifting to a black cave called Fengfei Cliff (鳳飛崖) where she is rescued by an old man named Dun Xuan (遁軒老人). Here the author follows literary tradition with a plot structure similar to the usual scene for a Chinese fairyland. The sky is clear, the sea is calm, and a small boat drifts along the shore. An old man, wearing a large bamboo hat and dressed in robes, sits in the bow, attentively reading a book. His long beard reaches his belly and he has very prominent eyebrows. There is a stove burning incense in front of him, a plucked

²⁰ Lv (1906), p.5.

stringed instrument to his left, and a two-edged sword to his right. Towards the rear of the boat sit two old men, one holding the helm and the other cooking tea: both are celestial beings. A picture hangs in the cabin, with “a gift for Mr. Dun Xuan” written on the top and “drawn by Zhu Da (八大山人)” on the bottom. This scene is totally static, symbolizing the traditional utopia with its emphasis on reclusion, frugality and inactivity:

Here, you do not have to worry. Read books if you have free time, which will broaden your horizons and naturally open your mind. When you are hungry, pick the fruit from the trees; drink the running water from the Plum Stream (梅花灣) when you are thirsty. My cave is very quiet and safe, except for me and these two old men, no one from the outside world comes here. Here there is never any need for weapons or wars, unlike in China. Since the Yellow Emperor (軒轅黃帝) invented the tools for killing people, the world has been terribly disturbed. The last four or five thousand years have witnessed dozens of dynasties rise and fall, and tens of millions of people have been killed. In comparison, here it is a totally different world.²¹

Thus in the hermitage of the old man there are no earthly troubles: one lives a very simple life, reading in one’s free time, eating fruit when hungry and drinking spring water when thirsty. This pacific and reclusive life is a stark contrast to the turbulence of China, but with Madame Feng’s arrival the earthly reality intrudes into the ideal world. When she shares her story from the outside world with the old man in his peaceful realm. Only then does he realize how rapidly time has been passing. He recalls escaping abroad from chaos, and finding himself at this cliff. Somehow he is still alive, though he has been only vaguely aware of the passage of time. Navigating between the known and the unknown, between utopia and the mortal realm, between the eternal and the temporal, Dun Xuan contemplates his current situation and reminisces about the past.

This kind of withdrawal from the world was not, however, a value system revered by the writers of the late Qing dynasty. Long Menghua eventually arrives at Fengfei Cliff to be reunited with his wife Madame Feng, but the author does not allow the couple to settle there; instead, they take off in a balloon bound for the Moon, a symbolic new utopia. In

²¹ Huangjiang (1905), p.1.

comparison with the reclusive world of Dun Xuan, the Moon signifies the desire for prosperity and technology which the writers of the late Qing dynasty were pursuing. In *Tales of the Moon Colony*, “the walls [of space] are made of gold and the steps are made of white jade, splendid and magnificent.” Also, the balloons of the Moon reflect the advanced development its inhabitants: “whether it be the exquisite brilliance or the brightness, each of them is ten times better than ours. It seems that each of us resembles the Moon while each of them looks like the Sun.”²² Indeed, the level of illumination inside the balloon is much brighter than the incandescent bulbs of the late Qing dynasty. So in *Tales of the Moon Colony* the traditional fairyland is abandoned in favor of the Moon, just as in *Idiotic Nonsense* Jia Xi’xian founds Zhenxian Town as a total contrast with his father’s fairy island. Both novels are instrumental in establishing the utopian vision of the late Qing dynasty, reflecting their authors’ selection from and reconstruction of the prevailing value system.

Some traditional notions of fairyland recognize two poles: the eastern Fairyland has the immortals, the alchemists, Penglai (a fairy mountain beyond the sea) and Guixu (歸墟, Returning Mountain); and the western fairyland consists of the divine, with witches, Kunlun Mountain (the earthly capital of the heavenly emperor) and the source of the Yellow River.²³ Both the eastern and western fairylands were subjected to reinterpretation, distortion and recreation by late Qing writers. Thus, the plots of *Heroes in Utopia* and *Idiotic Nonsense* were mostly set against the background of a fairy mountain beyond the sea. Other works chose Kunlun as the background, for example *Electric World* (電世界) by Xu Zhiyan (writing under the pen name of 高陽氏不才子, literally: A Failure Surnamed Gaoyang) published in *Fiction Times* (小說時報) in 1909. Despite the reference to different types of traditional fairyland, these writers all shared the same motive, namely, to replace a self-sufficient and closed system by constructing a space of civilization-only-more-so. In Xu Zhiyan’s *Electric World*, a master of electrical knowledge emerges and turns Kunlun into “a large electrical empire,” in which modern electrical technology is used in the service of social welfare, education, politics and transportation. In the seventh chapter, schools use electric voice players and vivid pictures from electro-holography to develop knowledge and

22 *Ibid.*

23 For more details about the categorization into eastern and western fairyland in ancient Chinese literature, refer to Wang Xiaolian (1982), pp. 49-67.

ethical education; in the ninth chapter, electricity replaces the light of the sun to allow the tropical fruit Paramita to be grown in Swiss greenhouses, and even the Arctic is thus made suitable for farming; in the tenth chapter, crops are harvested by electrical machines, then immediately dried with silver light, and electrically heated water is used to turn fallen leaves into fertilizer; and in the eleventh chapter, hygienic electrical tools and microscopes are used to control mold growth and cure diseases.²⁴

To summarize: when the writers of the late Qing dynasty referenced the foreign concept of utopia, they simultaneously employed the preexisting literary codes and symbols of fairyland. Although this demonstrates how the prevailing literary traditions of Chinese culture constrained their expression, in the process of constructing their own novel literary traditions, these writers appropriated new content to contextualize, for the late Qing dynasty, the ancient concepts of fairyland, Penglai, Kunlun and alchemists. As a result, the connotations of these concepts were transformed, thereby reconstructing an ideal realm which was very different from the traditional fairyland. This new ideal realm emphasized hard work, exploration and science: the self-sufficient and closed realm of fantasy was transformed into a dynamic space driven by outward expansion.

“Translating and Editing”: Creating a New Future for China

Traditional Chinese culture, even more than other traditional cultures, tends to promote respect for ancient practices and beliefs, encouraging learning from the ancient past and complying with ancient conventions of etiquette and customs. For example, in *Tai Bo*, the *Analects of Confucius* (論語·泰伯), Confucius extols the abilities of the Duke of Zhou (周公). And in *Teng Wen Gong*, the *Works of Mencius* (孟子·滕文公), one reads that “the nature of man is good, and Yao and Shun (堯舜) are especially kind.” The ancient Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties (三代) are always taken as an example for how the country should be ruled. Thus, Wang Fan-Sen points out that:

²⁴ Xu (1909), pp.1-58.

Whenever they reach a dead end, traditionalists always proposed returning to the ancient Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties. This is because there were few other convincing alternative intellectual resources available. However, with the influx of intellectual and cultural trends during the late Qing dynasty, new kinds of intellectual resources and conceptual tools emerged, leading to great changes, with a radically new rationale for interpreting the past, designing the present and imagining the future.²⁵

Western intellectual trends which used the theme of evolution to write about the future were especially influential upon the writers of the late Qing dynasty, substantially altering their understanding and interpretation of time. Their respect for the past was replaced by worship for the future, and the notion of a Golden Age, which had always been located in the ancient past, was now envisaged as being in the future. From the perspective of the history of literature, futuristic novels were a significant development. The prevailing attitude of respecting and preferring the ancient, as evidenced by Liang Qichao's remark that "Chinese people always say that ancient China was prosperous while modern China is declining and deteriorating," was replaced by a longing for the future presaged by the evolutionary theories of Western philosophers.²⁶ Several questions arise in this context: When did late Qing writers accept the futuristic writings from foreign countries? Given the constraints of their own position, which elements did they choose to amplify or suppress? What shifts did the theme of future undergo in the process of being translated and edited?

The first futurist novel to influence the late Qing culture was *Looking Backward* published in *The Global Magazine* (萬國公報). The source text for this novel was the best-seller *Looking Backward: 2000-1987*, written by the American writer Edward Bellamy, first published in 1888: "it has sold over one million copies in Britain and United States, and has been translated into many different languages including German, French, Russian, Italian, Arabic and Bulgaria."²⁷ The novel tells the story of an American named West, who suffers from chronic insomnia and is put into sleep by hypnosis in the 1887 at the age of thirty, waking after 113 years in 2000. This narrative device allows the contrasting social conditions of the different

²⁵ Wang (2003), p.182.

²⁶ Liang (1999b), p.683.

²⁷ See Guo (1997), I.

centuries to be compared: in the year 2000 West sees numerous factories, advanced transportation, an equal society, an equal distribution of wealth, and a highly moral population; in 1887, he sees only hunger, death, inequality, chaos, and a decadent morality.

This optimistic message of evolutionary advance fitted the historical context of the late Qing dynasty. Introduced by missionaries, *Looking Backward: 2000-1987* was translated and serialized in 28 parts in *The Global Magazine* during 1891-1892. No translator's name is mentioned, though a note says it was "contributed by Xijin (析津)." According to Liu Shusen, "Xinjin" was actually the missionary Timothy Richard, the newly-appointed Director General of the Christian Literature Society for China (廣學會). Certainly, Richard's religious book *Salvation and the Benefits of Being Enlightened* (救世教益) was also serialized in *The Global Magazine*, and it may be that he preferred not to be credited directly for translating *Looking Backward*.²⁸ I have also found another piece of evidence to support this attribution: when Qiu Wei'e decided to retranslate Richard's version into vernacular Chinese in 1898, he commented that "the original name of this book was *Looking Backwards*, and it was written by an American called Bellamy. Later on, a British man named Timothy Richard did the translation."²⁹ In fact, the novel was published several times during the late Qing dynasty, under various titles. In 1894, Timothy Richard argued that "*Looking Backward*" failed to capture the plot of the story, changing it into "*A Sleep of One Hundred Years*," under which title the novel was published by the Christian Literature Society for China in the form of offprints. A total of two thousand were printed, many of which were presented to government officials, members of the Hanlin Academy (翰林) and other prominent intellectuals. Facilitated by the new communication strategies, the novel spread rapidly and widely. In 1898, Qiu Wei'e (裘維鐸) published his version of Timothy's translation in *Chinese Mandarin Vernacular Newspaper* (中國官音白話報); this aimed to promote the use of vernacular Chinese, but was discontinued after its first issue. In 1904, another vernacular version titled *Looking Backwards* (回頭看) was published in *Tapestry Portrait Novel* from Issues 25 to 36. This only credits "an American" as the translator, and its 14 parts are considered to comprise the

²⁸ Liu (1999), p.128.

²⁹ Qiu (1898), p.1.

most complete and detailed version. The involvement of various well-known journals and publishing houses confirms the attention the novel received around this time.

It was no accident that Timothy Richard choose *Looking Backward*, from among so many Western novels, to translate and publish in *The Global Magazine*. Originally called *Church News* (教會新報), it was founded by the American missionary Young John Allen to spread the Christian gospel and liaise between believers. Only a small amount of scientific knowledge and news was included in *Church News*, but after changing its name to *The Global Magazine* in 1874, there were substantial changes in editorial policy and content. No longer confined to promoting religion, it was turned into a comprehensive publication dealing with contemporary politics and society, introducing a considerable amount of information from Western countries. It discussed the administration and performance of officials, the circumstances of the people, folk customs, culture, education, science, industry, transportation, telecommunications, and China's relations with other countries. *The Global Magazine*, had previously hardly published any novels, so clearly *Looking Backward* was not chosen for its literary significance but for the Western methods it advocated. In his translation, Timothy Richard laid special emphasis on *Yangmin Xinfa* (養民新法, New Methods of Nourishing the People). For example, in the preface:

A book titled *Looking Backward* has emerged from the United States. Written by Bellamy, this novel discusses the social development of the country and various other changes after a period of a hundred years. As Western countries all like reading books on new methods of nourishing people, *Looking Backward* has been very popular. Tens of thousands of copies of the book have been printed and distributed throughout the world.³⁰

When Qiu Wei'e later retranslated the novel, based on Richard's version, using the title *Bainian Yijiao* (A Sleep of One Hundred Years), he further consolidated the motif of "new methods of nourishing the people." He argued that "At a first reading, the novel seems absurd. However, upon close examination, it proves to be sensible, as the author has fresh and reasonable

³⁰ Richard (1891), p.15.

views on the issue of how to nourish people.”³¹ In this, Qiu was accepting and complementing the personal views of Timothy Richard. In *Salvation and the Benefits of Being Enlightened*, published in January 1892, Richard had listed 21 new methods of nourishing the people adopted by Western countries, including opening to trade, mining, railway construction, manufacturing machines, and establishing post offices and newspapers.³² Also, his “New Policies” (新政策) had proposed four essential ways of saving China from its crisis, namely, Jiaomin (教民, enlightening the people), Yangmin (養民, nourishing the people), Anmin (安民, stabilizing people’s lives) and Xinmin (新民, invigorating the people).³³

Thus, the translators were primarily concerned with their social and political agenda, and this determined how the novel was translated and published. They neglected its literary content in order to emphasize the new methods of nourishing the people. In the abridged translation, much of the main character’s inner dialogue, and his emotional twists and turns, as well as the background descriptions, were simply omitted. Bellamy’s original novel was written in the first person, which directly conveyed West’s self-doubt, speculation, frustration, guilt and other emotions on awakening. However, the translated version simplified the character’s inner dialogue by employing a third-person narrative, whereas the parts describing new methods of nourishing the people were elaborated upon, with thorough explanations of the new social developments. Thus, chapter five presents a detailed account of the fact that the gap between rich and poor has been eliminated, so that all residents of the country are equal; in chapter twelve, it is again emphasized that there is no difference between people’s salaries, they retire at 45, and all the aged and sick are taken care of by the national welfare system; chapters ten and eleven are devoted to a discussion of how to enhance people’s quality of life, with shopping delivered directly to the customers’ homes through underground tunnels, music played at the touch of a button, and specialized machines for doing cooking and laundry. The translation clearly emphasizes the improvements made in social welfare, the efficiency of the government, and advanced machines, and is obviously intended to advocate Timothy Richard’s view that the new methods of nourishing the people already adopted in Western

31 Qiu (1898), p.1.

32 Richard (1892), pp.7-10.

33 Richard (1896), pp.1-6.

countries could provide a means for transforming China.

The missionary identity of Timothy Richard inevitably caused his misreading of *Looking Backward*, with him attributing the progress of “new social scenes” to religion. Although by 1881 *The Global Magazine* was already a comprehensive publication, it still retained its role of promoting religion. Richard argued that Buddhism focused on “cultivating peace and quiet in one’s own mind, without providing any way to empower the country and make its people prosperous” (清淨寂滅，不究富國強民之策)，³⁴ while Taoism, which was “perplexingly complicated and became even more complex after incorporating ideas from Shijiao, and Buddhist teachings such as salvation and reincarnation” (眩惑人心，並雜以釋教規則，如超度輪迴等事)。³⁵ Only Christianity was “comprehensive enough, and there is no better alternative to convey the teaching of God than Christianity” (可謂完全之道，而上帝訓人之妙法捨此更無他也)。³⁶ Indeed, in the preface to the translation he explicitly discusses his conception of an intrinsic class equality in the context of religion: “God intended to make people equal with each other and therefore artisans and wealthy people are still brothers. However, currently, due to the disparity in their wealth, the poor are deemed inferior, and treated as slaves, which inevitably results in conflict.”³⁷ Also, at the end of the translated version, when West realizes that “some of the troubles of the past are over now” and “all the poor people have become rich now,” he “knelt to show thanks to God,” whereas in the original English novel, the protagonist in fact kneels to his girlfriend, to show his humility as someone belonging to an unworthy past era who feels he does not deserve to breathe the air of today’s golden world. The translation completely omits West’s inner turmoil: his fear and alienation as a man of the past having to survive in a society of the future, his remorse and shame for having been a willing accomplice in maintaining the privileges of the upper classes. The translated character of West is rescued through prayer, and finally “promised to the God that he would change his mind and was willing to help others” receiving a response that “God is ever Merciful. Since you have repented of your error, your former sins will ultimately be forgiven.”³⁸

³⁴ Richard (1881), p.26.

³⁵ Richard (1874), p.98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.541.

³⁷ Xi (1891 and 1892), p.15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17.

Thus the translator starts and ends the book by making reference to God, and the religious color which has been added into the original text clearly derives from the Christian mission of Timothy Richard and *The Global Magazine*.

When this translation of *Looking Backward* is compared with another published in 1904 in *Xiuxiang Xiaoshuo* [Tapestry Portrait Novel], a literary periodical, the more literary character of the later translation is immediately obvious in its use of the original's first-person perspective: "My surname is West (威士), I am from Boston in the United States. I was born in the year of 1857." Also, the translator subsequently adopts a narrative tone which uses "I remember" to describe the differences between West's past and present, which is better able to reflect his inner thoughts. In this version, West is still enthusiastic about the social reforms, but he feels lonely and remorseful at having to live in this century when he should have stayed in the last. Thus, he falls into deep sorrow when he sees from his surroundings that everything has changed: "After a close observation, unbelievably, I could not recognize my hometown. Fretting about this, I nearly fainted. Worse still, the loneliness engendered fear. Thinking of this made me burst into tears."³⁹ Whereas the translation published in *The Global Magazine* uses religion to solve the problems of the novel's protagonist, the translation published in *Tapestry Portrait Novel* uses love to alleviate the isolation resulting from his temporal dislocation. When West's real identity is discovered, he is surprised to find that the girl with whom he is now in love, Miss Li, is the great-granddaughter of his fiancée (Ai Jie) from one hundred years before. This coincidence helps West to bridge the gap between the centuries, easing his pain: "When I looked at Miss Li, I felt the same as when I had looked at Ai Jie, a century earlier. So as I hugged Miss Li, my mind kept switching between her and Ai Jie."⁴⁰ Since *Tapestry Portrait Novel* did not bear the Christian mission of *The Global Magazine*, its translation ends with the protagonist kneeling to his girlfriend, rather than to God, which is more faithful to the original.

Thus the specific social, political and religious context of the late Qing dynasty translators markedly affected their treatment of foreign novels such as *Looking Backward*: in this instance, they gave most prominence to

³⁹ West (1904), p.17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.70.

“new methods of nourishing the people” while deemphasizing the literary and emotional aspects of the novel. In fact, this approach to accepting the newly reimagined concept of “the future” is even more obvious in a number of other works of futuristic fiction which *Looking Backward* inspired, including *The Future of New China* by Liang Qichao, *New China* by Lu Shi'e, and *Electric World* by Xu Zhiyan. These authors rejected the backward-looking emphasis of traditional Chinese literary intellectuals obsessed with the ancient past, instead writing characters who reach out toward a better future. They invariably adopted a hopeful and positive tone, and their narratives featured scenes where people live contented lives in a prosperous country. Any anxiety, hesitancy or uncertainty about the future is eliminated, and a tone of absolute optimism prevails. Any psychological difficulties in bridging the gap between past and future is ignored. A glorious future is portrayed as an inevitable consequence of the benefits of social, political and technological evolution, thus providing a blueprint for the real-world task of empowering China and enriching its people.

This new conceptual temporal framework of “the future” enabled the writers of the late Qing dynasty to construct a breathtaking vision of a “New China.” In 1902, Liang Qichao’s *The Future of New China* was published in *Xin Xiaoshuo* [New Fiction], China’s first magazine to use the word “fiction” in its title. As one of the earliest works to engage with a utopian perspective, this book was of great significance in the history of literature. It imagines a “golden moment” placed sixty years into the future, in 1962, “when Chinese people all over the country are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Wuxu Reforms (維新).” At this celebration, a 76-year-old man called Mr. Kong gives a speech about the historical development of China. His given name is Hongdao (弘道), and his courtesy name (字, zi) is Jueming (覺民); he comes from Qufu, Shangdong Province, and is a descendant of Confucius; he has a PhD in literature and is serving as president of the Chinese National Education Association (全國教育會). Superficially then, Liang seems to be supporting Confucianism, but in fact he uses Kong’s speech to show a descendant of Confucius utterly rejecting the Confucian approach of absolute veneration for the ancient world. The speech describes several different periods: “preparation (預備時代), separation (分治時代), unification (統一時代), large-scale production (置產時代), competition with foreign countries (外競時代) and mightiness (雄飛時代)” spanning sixty years of Chinese history, and the novel thus charts a course for China to become powerful and prosperous by retaining its

sovereignty and unifying the whole nation.

The Future of New China stimulated other writers to create their own visions of the future. For instance, Donghai Juewo (東海覺我, the pen name of Xu Nianci) projected an image of a new China in 1964, in his novel *A Debt from Passionate Days* (情天債) published in 1904. And in *New China*, written in 1910, Lu Shi'e envisioned the fortieth anniversary of the 1911 Revolution. These novels were based in China's contemporary reality, and tried to find a way out of China's ongoing national crisis: they were striving to define a new era and a new order, but they neglected the psychological difficulties of bridging the past with the future. In *New China*, the main character awakens to a brand-new world in which all the British shops have been replaced by bustling Chinese ones lit as brightly as daylight; foreigners are now more courteous and abide by Chinese laws and regulations; new and improved electric vehicles are easily controlled and energy-saving; there are no longer any pawn shops, and there are fewer poor people, so no one needs to pawn anything; an underground tram system is being constructed in a blaze of light, and the trams travel so rapidly. These kinds of expectations epitomized a widespread public desire during the late Qing dynasty, for sovereignty, science and political change; as the novel says: "We possess such a wonderful civilization that of course our nation can be the leader of the world!"⁴¹

Besides these writers who translated and edited novels about the future, there were others who, instead of expressing their utopian views in definite narrative form, chose to write discursive essays extolling the bright future. For example, *New Era* (新紀元), written in 1908 by Biheguan Zhuren, harshly criticized the cultural inertia of Chinese traditional writers:

The second half of the nineteenth century will be a world of steam engines, and the first half of the twentieth century will be a world of electricity, while its second half will be one of optical science Instead of focusing on the past or the present, the intention of fictional creations is to emphasize the world of the future, thereby writing utopian novels. Since science will be absolutely essential to the full development of our future, I choose to write this novel on the topic of science.⁴²

41 Lu Shi'e (1988), p.474.

42 Biheguan (1998), p.457.

To summarize: the influence of Western literature dealing with an imagined future caused a fundamental shift of perspective in late Qing fiction. Instead of looking backward to a Golden Age, writers now began to envisage a glorious future, marking a significant development in the history of Chinese literature. Chinese writers closely modeled their work upon the evolutionary progress toward the future depicted in futuristic Western novels: they emphasized methods of enlightening, nourishing, stabilizing and invigorating the people, and talked extravagantly about China's civilization and sovereignty, conjuring up a grand and wonderful society. In contrast, they were far less interested in describing their characters' emotional lives, and consequently paid little or no attention to the identity split experienced in moving from the past into the future. The imaginative works of fiction created during the late Qing dynasty, with their exploration of a new conceptual framework for the future, played a role in defining a blueprint for use in constructing a New China, based on democracy, science and civilization.

Transforming and Editing the Notion of “Great Unity”: Imagining a World Community

In constructing a new utopian space, late Qing fiction absorbed many concepts from the prevailing intellectual-cultural milieu. These included “nation,” “socialism,” “natural rights” and “theory of evolution,” but among the most important was the classical Confucian notion of “Great Unity.” This section will explore how intellectuals of the late Qing dynasty misread the concept of Great Unity and how it was appropriated, transplanted and transformed in their literary imagination, becoming ultimately a narrative style as much as a concept as such.

The notion of Great Unity derives from *The Conveyance of Rites* (禮運) in *The Book of Rites* (禮記), which concerns ethical treatment, social welfare, and political and economic systems, reflecting the conceptualization of the ideal society in ancient times:

When the Great Principle (of the Great Unity) prevails, the whole society is ruled by the public, where men of talents, virtue and ability are chosen; people's words are sincere, cultivating harmony. People do not only love their own parents, nor treat nicely only their own children. The provision of care to

the elderly is secured until their death; the middle-aged are guaranteed employment so that they can make a contribution to the society; the young can be helped to grow up. The widowed, orphaned, childless, handicapped and diseased are all taken care of. Each man has his responsibilities and each woman has her home. People dislike that resources are dumped on the ground, but not wishing to keep them for their own use. They dislike idleness and labour but not to their own advantage. In this way, any of the selfish thoughts are dismissed. Thieves, robbers and rebellious traitors do not exist and therefore, each household can keep their outside door open.⁴³

Thus, the concept of Great Unity embodies the ancient vision of an ideal society, with every member of society properly placed and all vulnerable persons appropriately taken care of. The political system is meritocratic, and the economic arrangements preclude any crime or chaos. This concept was used to define an ideal order in contrast to the society existing in prehistoric times when there were no written records, but by the time the Great Principle (of the Great Unity) was actually codified, Chinese society had become more oriented toward private values and prosperity. This demonstrates that Chinese traditions can be traced back to very ancient times.

The intellectual-cultural trends of the late Qing dynasty impacted the idea of Great Unity, causing some significant changes. In the 1850s, Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全) led a peasant uprising known as the Taiping rebellion (太平天國運動). Making use of some rudiments of Christian doctrine, Hong advocated that “every place should have equal shares, and everyone should be clothed and fed.” His vision was also based on *The Conveyance of Rites*:

In the remote ancient times of Tang Yao and Yu Shun during the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, people helped each other. Households did not lock their doors, and things picked up on the road were not kept for one’s private use. The differences between men and women were acknowledged, and those with abilities and virtues were chosen for office. Even for Tang Yao and Yu Shun, it was not easy to constantly maintain their charitable works and provide relief for everyone who required it, so why bother to distinguish “my land” from “your land”; Yu [the founder of the Xia dynasty] and Hou Ji [the founding ancestor of the Ji clan that ruled during the Zhou dynasty] were

43 Zheng (1999), pp.658-9.

both concerned with the suffering of the people, so why do we need to distinguish “my people” from “your people”?; Tang (the first ruler of the Shang dynasty) banished Jie (the last ruler of the Xia dynasty) and King Wu (one of the founders of the Zhou dynasty) assaulted Zhou (the last ruler of the Shang dynasty), and there seems no need to distinguish “my country” from “your country”; Both Confucius and Mencius travelled throughout different states, so why bother to distinguish “my state” from “your state”?⁴⁴

Although Hong obtained his inspiration from antiquity, he also made changes to the notion of the Great Unity to accommodate his Christianity. Thus he rejects the distinction between “my” and “your” for land, people, country and state, and places this within the framework of the “Heavenly Kingdom of Equality” which he was trying to establish in China: “the whole world belongs to Emperor God, where no one keeps things for their own use but instead offers them to Emperor God. Emperor God makes sure that every place has equal shares and everyone is kept clothed and warm.”⁴⁵ For Hong, the issues of ethical responsibility, social welfare, political systems, and economic systems, as mentioned in *the Conveyance of Rites* now become subject to the authority of “Heavenly Father and Emperor God” (天父上主皇上帝一家).

Another reinterpretation of the Great Unity came from Kang Youwei, who integrated the original notion with that of a “well-off society” (小康論) from *the Conveyance of Rites*, and the “Three Generations Theory” which was originally from Gongyang Chunqiu, all within the context of the political trends of the late Qing dynasty. In 1891, Shanghai Datong Translation Bureau published Kang Youwei’s *Mr. Dong Zhongshu’s Study of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋董氏學), from which we can see how Kang understood Great Unity:

The theory of “Three Generations” was originated by Confucius, and expounded in his *Spring and Autumn Annals*. This theory proposed that human societies had to undergo three stages in succession: *Suo Chuan Wen Shi* or *Ju Luan Shi* (Chaos), *Suo Wen Shi* or *Sheng Ping Shi* (Peace) and *Suo Jian Shi* or *Tai Ping Shi* (Paradise). In the period of Chaos, culture and education are absent; during the Peace period, culture and education start to emerge and

⁴⁴ Jian (1985), p.157.

⁴⁵ Hong (2000), p.91; p.322.

people are able to live a moderately prosperous life; and on entering the period of Paradise, the society is a commonwealth where all people have equal status, and culture and education flourish.⁴⁶

Thus, by starting from Confucius's idea, Kang elaborated on his own political views, arguing that China had been in the period of Chaos for two thousand years, and that only through reforms could it evolve into Peace and Paradise.

With the influence of the West and the new world order, Kang Youwei abandoned the attempt to maintain the traditionally closed and self-sufficient utopian vision, instead proposing a new concept of Great Unity, through which late Qing China could assert itself in the world again. He advocated radical changes to remove social stratification, private property, sexism, marriage and family, racism, xenophobia, and the territorial state system: "nine types of barriers can be eliminated by putting up one barrier" (入一界去九界總其綱). Kang's ultimate goal was to create a democratic greater world community without any monarchs or military power:

National boundaries will be eliminated and the world will consist of different self-governing administrative districts, loyal to the central government, which is similar to the system practiced by the United States or Switzerland Hence, there will be no nations or emperors, and people will love each other. In the world of great unity, everyone will be equal and things will belong to everyone.⁴⁷

By selecting and absorbing ideas from Chinese and Western thought, both ancient and modern, Kang Youwei constructed a blueprint of Great Unity which was quite different from that envisioned in *The Conveyance of Rites*, comprising a complex conceptual framework interconnecting the whole world with the knowledge of science and philosophy now available in the Late Qing dynasty:

The idea of Great Unity incorporates ideas from *Jingzi Shiji* in *Imperial Collection of Four* (四庫全書) and the core philosophies of Buddhism and

⁴⁶ Kang (1976a), p.61.

⁴⁷ Kang (2002), p.95.

Confucianism, as well as learning from the intellectual-cultural trends which have newly emerged in China and Western countries; the notion of Great Unity encompasses the mysterious changes of the infinite world and many different complementary schools of thought. Developing this concept entailed an in-depth exploration of everything in the world, its ancient past and future development, including the original humans, the vast universe, diverse trivia, and natural laws. Based on this, one can settle down, thoroughly understand the reason behind things, and live a comfortable life.⁴⁸

Thus, prior to the twentieth century, Hong Xiuquan and Kang Youwei had already augmented and reinterpreted the traditional concept of Great Unity with many layers of entangled Chinese and Western thought. The way in which the late Qing writers of fiction transformed and edited the concept of Great Unity involved a fundamental change of categories, with Great Unity being discussed as a type of narrative style instead of as a concept, and this led to further new connotations. Various writers integrated new world-views, political expectations, and concerns about social and international issues, so that the concept of Great Unity was envisioned within a very broad perspective. Although Hong had proposed that “every place should have equal shares, and everyone should be clothed and fed” and Kang had suggested that “people will love each other ... and everyone will be equal and things will belong to everyone,” the subsequent discussions of these issues by late Qing fiction writers concealed the view that China should be the master of the world, even while they paid lip service to egalitarianism. In *The Future of New China*, Liang Qichao depicts the 50th anniversary of Wuxu Reform, in 1962, in truly magnificent terms, greatly inflating China’s power and influence:

On the occasion of the celebration held throughout the country, all allied nations have dispatched warships to convey their greetings and best wishes. Participants in the celebration include the king and queen of the United Kingdom, the emperor and empress of Japan, the tsar and tsarina of Russia (zhuyi, 注意, attention), the Supreme Commander of the Philippines (attention), and the emperor and empress of Austria-Hungary (attention). All of the other foreign powers have sent their envoys to gather in Nanjing, presenting a busy and bustling scene. Agreement has been reached to hold the

48 Kang (1976c), p.15.

Great Exposition in Shanghai, which will be unusual in not being limited to commercial themes, but will also encompass a joint assembly for different schools of thought and religions. This is what is meant by the Great Unity.⁴⁹

So this grand gathering is Liang's vision of Great Unity: effectively a new world order with China at its center, very far from the egalitarian world advocated by Hong and Kang. Notice that in several places Liang deliberately interjected the Chinese word "zhuyi" (attention) in a smaller font, resulting in a pause and transition in rhythm, thus obliging his readers to pay attention to the fact that so many world leaders of different countries are visiting China, emphasizing their acknowledgement of China's (future) resurgence.

Thus, Kang Youwei's concept of the Great Unity, with which he hoped to go beyond the interests of individual families, nations and ethnic groups, actually turned into a new world with China occupying the central position, and there are similar storylines in other late Qing novels. Many of these sought to move towards constructing some kind of world of great unity by discussing international treaties with an important role for China; these involved organizing armistice negotiations (弭兵會會所), the suspension of wars, the abolition of the military, and the establishment of an international court of justice (萬國裁判衙門). Admittedly, these themes reflected the social reality of China in the late Qing dynasty, which was being invaded and divided up between foreign powers, so the novels represent a kind of wish-fulfillment fantasy intended to allay Chinese anxieties that the situation could deteriorate further by presenting a vision of a glorious future with China's power and pride restored. The vision of Great Unity presented in late Qing fiction, at a time when China had been geopolitically marginalized to easy to understand. When commenting on the real-life situation of China, Liang Qichao lamented that

Our greatest shame is that our country has no name. When we call ourselves the people of Xia, Han and Tang, these are all in fact the names of dynasties ("諸夏," "漢人," "唐人" 乃是以朝廷命名). And names like Zhendan (震旦) or Zhi'na (支那) are actually what foreign people call us. China is thus characterized as having no country name (無國名) or as lacking a country name

49 Yin (1902), p.4.

(失國名), and therefore has no history (無史).⁵⁰

The idea of an international court of justice is central to Lu Shi'e's 1909 novel, *New China*. The Chinese emperor sends a proposal to abolish all military forces to many different countries, and organizes a meeting in Tianjin to be attended by the leaders of each country. An international court of justice is established as the final arbiter for solving problems, and its president is to be the Chinese emperor, with the judges elected by the public of various countries. The novel's intention is clearly to mend the shattered China, at least in the imagination, with the Qing Empire as the focus of world attention:

Our Qing Empire was the first country to propose this initiative ... twenty-two countries including England, Russia, Germany, the United States, France, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Turkey, Mexico, Peru, Austria, Chile, the Netherlands, Spain, Thailand, Japan, Persia, and Venezuela, have all agreed on the initiative.⁵¹

While most late Qing writers of fiction were trying to reconstruct a world of great unity in which China was leading the world, their passionate optimism was not universal: a few others expressed dissent with such a vision, and sought to look beyond the framework of nationalism. Li Boyuan's *Icebergs and a Sea of Snow*, published in 1906, harshly criticized the tone of imperialism (帝國主義) implied in the concept of Great Unity:

It is the most evil thing for the concept of "great unity" to pretend to be civilization when it is actually a brutal imperialism. It presents a seemingly ethical argument to gather together a bunch of people from the whole world. However, in essence, it simply put the rights and assets which should have belonged to everyone into the exclusive hands of one person.⁵²

After reading some translated Japanese fiction,⁵³ Li Boyuan took a very

⁵⁰ Liang (1999a), p.449.

⁵¹ Lu Shi'e (1988), pp.533-4.

⁵² Li (1906), p.32.

⁵³ According to Wei Shaochang, although Li Boyuan's name appeared on the copyright page of *Icebergs and a Sea of Snow*, the novel is actually a translation. For more details, refer to

firm line on this issue. He was resolutely against the concept of a world of great unity with any specific country as an implicit power center, and inclined toward socialism as an alternative approach. *Icebergs and a Sea of Snow* features characters of different races being oppressed throughout the world, such as Jews severely abused in America and miserable black people in Africa. After having experienced various kinds of suffering, these people gather at an island called “Datong Society” [society of great unity] and live a life as follows:

In this society, no one is superior or inferior to anyone else, no person is richer or poorer than any others. Without social classes, there is no inequality. As to the matter of which human race is better or worse, such discussions are particularly unwelcome here.⁵⁴

In Li’s Datong Society, both naturally produced and manufactured items are distributed equally between people, and nothing is privately owned. People of different races coming from around all the world live in public housing and eat together publicly, regardless of merit and regardless of the order of their arrival. No one is particularly noble and rich or humble and poor; all the people, men and women, young and old, were equal.

The novel ends with a magnificent ceremony celebrating the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Datong Society, when the president and delegates from different countries make speeches. Although such scenes of rituals and celebrations are common in late Qing fiction, Li conveys a very different message from those of Liang Qichao and Lu Shi’e:

My society is named Datong because it is free of racial boundaries, religious differences, gaps between rich and poor, and political barriers. We are guided by humanity and natural law. Education is open to all, and all our assets belong to the public, as well as all our land. Since the establishment of the society, all cloth and grain produced has been stored for public use and cannot be privately owned. This constitutes a golden world and a land of ultimate happiness.⁵⁵

Wei (1979), pp.1-4.

⁵⁴ Li (1906), p.62.

⁵⁵ Li (1906), p.122; p.124.

Li's embrace of socialism in constructing his Datong Society, is deliberately intended to disrupt the framework favored by his peers in which a putative "world of great unity" is in practice led by China. This further changed the connotations of the traditional idea of Great Unity, as well as breaking down various kinds of barriers on the issues of race, country, religion and politics. By placing the Datong Society in the context of socialism, Li was responding to the arguments of Ma Junwu in his 1903 article "The View on Avatamsaka of the First Utopian Socialist, Thomas More" (社會主義之鼻祖德麻司摩兒之華嚴界觀) published in *Translated Books and Collections* (譯書匯編): "there is equality between the rich and the poor and no gap exists. People cooperate with each other and rely on each other for a living. People are living in harmony and no one is selfish."⁵⁶ Because of his personal beliefs, Ma Junwu deliberately incorporated Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, (who also coined the term), within the framework of socialism. The same applies to *Icebergs and a Sea of Snow*, which purposely misread the idea of Great Unity so as to construe it in socialist terms, and thereby further shifted the meanings of this concept.

Conclusion

The fiction writers of the late Qing dynasty vigorously condemned the desperate national situation, but they also created a much more positive narrative, imaginatively constructing a reformed and innovative future for "New China." The convergence of Chinese and Western intellectual-cultural trends was fundamental to their approach: on the one hand, late Qing fiction engaged with traditional words and concepts such as "peach colony," "fairylnd" and "Great Unity," which undoubtedly sustained the preexisting Chinese literary framework; on the other hand, they envisioned ideal realms such as "New China," "Zhenxian Town," a "truly civilized world," "utopia" and a "New Era," thus reflecting the growing demand for liberty, democracy, global awareness, civilization, science, etc. It can therefore be argued that the utopian space articulated by late Qing fiction absorbed a miscellany of elements derived from both Chinese and Western intellectual-cultural resources. China's traditional notions of

⁵⁶ Ma (1903), pp.109-10.

“fairyland,” “future” and “Great Unity,” amongst others, were integrated with foreign values, and after a process of evolution, development and transformation, a utopian vision involving these concepts, and specific to the late Qing dynasty, was ultimately constructed.

This process of maintaining and reorienting Chinese and Western intellectual-cultural trends, both new and old, was not simply a matter of direct linear influence, but instead entailed a generational struggle by younger writers competing with and trying to improve upon the works of their elders. This paper has examined the phenomena of “new edition,” “translating and editing” and “transforming and editing” to analyze how the process of editorial translation was used by various late Qing writers to establish their own utopian visions. Creating new editions of existing works was a way for them to reinvigorate Chinese traditional myths and legends of fairyland by interpolating new elements, thereby significantly changing the value connotations of these symbols. Since the writers of the late Qing dynasty were no longer embedded within a traditional agricultural society with its ancient fears of witchcraft, they were not confined to the vision of a closed and self-sufficient fairyland. Instead, they emphasized material advancement and prosperity, opening up new territories, and accumulating more knowledge through science and technology. Ideas such as hard work, exploration, development and reconstruction resulted in a dynamic expansion of the traditional fairyland.

Translating and editing describes a process whereby late Qing writers interjected their own ideas and beliefs to recreate foreign futuristic fiction, producing Chinese utopian novels which fitted into the context of the late Qing dynasty. This paradigm shift in Chinese fiction is especially evident in the treatment of *Looking Backward* by late Qing intellectuals, through translating and editing the original text to emphasize a vision of the future instead of respect for the past. This “future” was addressed in a very specific fashion by late Qing writers, who devoted a substantial part of their narratives to discussing how China could become truly civilized, and how the country could regain its sovereignty, while largely neglecting the inner feelings of their protagonists. This was understood as a process of enlightening, nourishing, stabilizing and invigorating the people, for which purpose late Qing writers of fiction approached the future with an overtly optimistic tone, eliminating any considerations of uncertainty or ambiguity.

Transforming and editing entailed category shifts, transitioning from one category to another. Prior to the twentieth century, Hong Xiuquan and

Kang Youwei had deliberately misread the notion of “Great Unity.” The former interpreted the idea in the context of Christianity and the needs of subsistence farmers, whilst the latter infused the notion with ancient and modern Chinese and Western thought, to imagine a “world community” free of national boundaries. However, when the late Qing writers transformed and edited the idea of Great Unity, the palpable contrast between the real and their imagined worlds resulted in further change to its connotations. For example, Liang Qichao depicted a future in which all the major foreign powers acknowledge China as the world leader. This theme of China’s power and pride restored was taken up by other authors, but there were a few dissenters, including some who presented Great Unity within the context of socialism by emphasizing egalitarianism and public ownership.

Thus, the writers of fiction during the late Qing dynasty used several types of editorial translation to manipulate both a traditional body of Chinese thought and an influx of Western cultural ideas. Rather than producing straightforward and accurate translations of source texts originating in the West, they strove to integrate these stimulating new ideas within the preexisting framework of Chinese fantastical worlds, blending and expanding codes and symbols as required to provide entirely novel imaginative frameworks. In the resulting narratives, the writers of late Qing fiction, presented a utopian vision which was very different from the traditional one. Different writers made different choices in the way that they actively selected and engaged with Chinese and Western literary traditions and intellectual-cultural trends, but they were all responding to the contemporary situation of China in crisis, and through their novels they sought to construct an ideal realm capable of serving as a vision to encourage and inspire social and political reform.

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