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Whither China? Doubts about Constitutionalism in Late Qing Fiction

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Abstract

Constitutionalism, with its promise of a democratic, strong China, caught the attention of many late Qing writers who yearned to see China strengthen itself through reforms. As an important political movement at the time, it became one of the central topics in political fiction, a new literary genre promoted and practiced by reform-minded writers. It was also featured prominently in forward-looking utopian visions in late Qing fiction. However, keenly aware of the fundamental unpredictability of history, the existence of other historical possibilities for the future and, more importantly, the deep-rooted flaws in the national character of the Chinese, including the moral degeneracy and inertia of both the masses and the officialdom, these writers became haunted by doubts about the feasibility and limitations of constitutionalism in China as they tried to offer their utopian visions with caution and an awareness of their illusory nature. Unable to shake off their doubts and questions through different projections of the routes to the future, these utopian visionaries ended up failing to imagine a meaningful future or to build a bridge between the troubled present and a utopian future.

Keywords: late Qing fiction, constitutionalism, revolution, utopian visions, national character, moral education, exposé fiction, political fiction

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It is common knowledge that in traditional China utopian visions had invariably been premised on an idealized antiquity. One of the earliest examples of such visions, a vision attributed to Confucius, can be found in *Book of Rites* (Li ji):

> When the Grand Course was pursued, a public spirit ruled the whole world; people chose men of virtue and ability; they cultivated sincerity and harmony. Thus people did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. Provision was secured for the aged till their deaths, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up for the young. They supported widows, orphans, childless men, the disabled and the sick. Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. Though disliking that articles (of value) should be thrown away upon the ground, they did not wish to hoard them for their own gratification. Though disliking that strength should not be exerted, they did not exert it (only) for themselves. In this way (selfish) schemes did not rise and robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves. Hence the outer doors remained open, and were not shut. This was (the period of) what we call the Grand Union.[1]

In addition to its historical remoteness, what is noteworthy in this utopian vision is its irretrievability. The same passage goes on to describe how, after the Grand Course had disappeared, sages such as Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, the King of Cheng and the Duke of Zhou managed to achieve the Small Tranquility (Xiaokang) by paying special attention to the rules of propriety, rules that, as a whole, served only as a poor substitute for the public spirit that had permeated the world in the time of the Grand Union. Even if people tried to follow the rules of propriety, as *Book of Rites* urges them to do so vehemently, the best outcome would be the Small Tranquility, not the Grand Union. As can be seen here, the projections of utopian visions into a permanently lost past was accompanied by a fear of history as an inimical process that had already alienated humankind from its right course. Due to this suspicion against history, traditional Chinese utopian visionaries in general lacked the confidence to envision a future that would be drastically better than their cherished past, let alone to call for action to realize such a future. As Maurice Meisner has pointed out, the absences of both historical optimism and political activism characterized utopian strains in the Chinese tradition.[2]

This situation began to change in the late nineteenth century, as the urgent need for reform felt by Chinese reformers in the wake of China's numerous military and diplomatic defeats induced them to imagine, on the one hand, the miserable fate China would face if it continued on its set path and, on the other hand, the benefits reform would bring in the future. As Wang Xiaoming has noted, the honor of presenting the first reformist visions for the future in early

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[1] See the chapter "Li yun" (Phases of Rites) in *Li ji* (Book of Rites).

[2] Maurice Meisner, "Marxism and Utopianism," *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism: Eight Essays*, 5.

modern China should go to Western missionaries such as Timothy Richard (1845-1919), who projected optimistic visions for China through books published by the Tongwen Book Club in Shanghai.[3] In 1894 Timothy Richard further helped Chinese reformers re-conceptualize the future when he published an abridged translation of Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, a work that would inspire Chinese reformers such as Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei to offer their blueprints for the future. Aside from its utopian vision, Richard's translation of *Looking Backward* was also significant in that it introduced a new genre into Chinese literature, a genre that Liang Qichao would come to call "political fiction" (zhengzhi xiaoshuo) in 1898. Specifically, as scholars have noted, Richard's translation directly inspired Liang Qichao, who had worked for Richard as a secretary in 1895-1896, to write his own political fiction *The Future of New China* (Xin Zhongguo weilai ji) in 1902. However, as I will show in the following discussions of Liang's novel and works by other late Qing utopian visionaries, the influence of works such as *Looking Backward* was mediated and colored by the authors' own concerns and beliefs that in the end these authors often diverged quite significantly from their models in their conceptions of the future and the journey to the future.

Some scholars have argued that late Qing utopian writers, swayed by the powerful constitutionalist movement of the time, had consistently pinned the hopes of China's eventual salvation on constitutional reform. However, a careful reading of the late Qing fiction dealing with the issue of constitutionalism reveals a different picture. To begin with, we should realize that Liang Qichao's *The Future of New China*, the first example of late Qing political fiction, is quite uncertain about the prospects of constitutionalism. Three months before he published *The Future of New China* in the inaugural issue of his journal *New Fiction* (Xin xiaoshuo), Liang offered a synopsis of his forthcoming novel in an advertisement carried in New *Citizen Journal* (Xinmin congbao). The synopsis begins with the establishment of a democratic government in a southern province that eventually inspires other provinces and grows into a republic in China. With the hard work of the whole nation, China emerges as a leading world power and, incensed by racial discrimination in Europe and America, it leads an alliance with Japan and the Philippines to prepare for a race war after winning a victory over Russia for the control of Mongolia and Tibet. Finally, a peace is brokered by Hungary and, with the prime minister of China presiding over a global peace

[3] Wang Xiaoming, "From Petition to Fiction: Visions of the Future Propagated in Early Modern China," in *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840-1918*, 44.

conference held in the capital of China, a treaty is signed that guarantees equal rights for both the yellow and white races. Notwithstanding this outline, Liang became haunted by skepticism once he started writing his novel, as the following remarks in his preface to *The Future of New China* demonstrate:

> This work that I have written is solely intended to express my political views so that I can receive corrections from patriotic, knowledgeable men of virtue. Unwilling to write carelessly, I have thought long and hard about the stories in this work. However, this work consists of nothing more than my personal, occasional thoughts and private musings and I do not necessarily believe in their inevitability. Governments and nations are all organic entities that change daily. Even [sages like] Guan Zhong and Zhuge Liang cannot make any prediction about next year by what has happened this year. How can any prediction be made about what is going to happen decades from now? How can people like me, with so little learning, make such a prediction?[4]

Far from being just a conventional expression of modesty, Liang's statement should be regarded as a confession by a reluctant Darwinian prophet who knew only too well that to impose an ultimate vision on a world in constant flux would amount to building a castle in the air. As a result of his skepticism and reluctance, he could only manage to encapsulate his utopian vision in one paragraph at the beginning of his novel.

A political novel written explicitly to express the author's reformist views, *The Future of New China* is marked, first and foremost, by Liang's advocacy of constitutionalism and his hope for the eventual triumph of constitutionalism in China. However, in Chapter 2 of the novel, in a series of lectures on modern Chinese history delivered in the future (in 1962), the historian Kong Hongdao, a descendant of Confucius and an ardent supporter of constitutionalism, fails to describe how the Constitutional Party has achieved its victory in unifying and strengthening China. The implicit doubt about the practicability of constitutionalism only grows in Chapter 3 when Kong refrains from tipping the discursive balance in favor of Huang Keqiang, the gradualist founder of the Constitutional Party, in his recounting of a lengthy exchange of political views between Huang and Li Qubing, a radical revolutionary. Once more the inconclusive debate should be seen as a reflection of the conflicts in Liang's mind, this time over the strategies that should be used to reform China. After he fled to Japan in the wake of the failed reform in 1898, Liang for a while befriended revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen and became rather sympathetic to their radical views. In the summer and autumn of 1899 he often met Sun Yat-sen two or three times a week for heated yet friendly discussions, just as Huang Keqiang and Li Qubing do in his novel.

[4] Liang Qichao, "Xuyan," *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji*, in *Xin Xiaoshuo*, vol. 1, 51.

Despite the constant pressure from his mentor Kang Youwei, he continued to argue for the necessity of revolution in China in his writings in 1902. So it is little wonder that he made Li's argument for revolution sound as powerful as Huang's advocacy of constitutionalism.

As he remained torn between constitutionalism and revolution, Liang Qichao also faced a philosophical dilemma. A devoted reformer passionately engaged in contemporary political activities, Liang was also a thinker deeply influenced by Buddhism, a belief system that emphasizes, among other things, the transience of the human world, the world of the Red Dust. The influence of Buddhism is borne out in "The End of the World" (Shijie mori ji), a story Liang translated and published in the first issue of *New Fiction* as a "philosophical story" (zheli xiaoshuo). A dystopian nightmare, "The End of the World" foresees a world increasingly covered by ice and snow as the sun cools down and the temperature in the world drops. With major cities such as Rome, Paris, London, Vienna and New York already submerged under water for hundreds of thousands of years, a tropical city in Africa becomes the last center of human civilization in the year 2,200,000 A.D., where the overstimulated inhabitants, keenly aware of the fast approaching end of the world, pursue a hedonistic lifestyle and die at twenty-five on average. To locate a warmer place for his people to live and to find women willing to bear children, a citizen named Omega leads a group of young men on an expedition in a flying boat. Having learned from an old man in the Amazon valley that there is no woman in either the Americas or Africa and that Europe has long been covered by ice and snow, Omega and his men finally discover in Ceylon the last five women in the world. However, by the time they bring the women home their own city already lies in ruins. Finally, after their companions die off one after another, Omega and his lover Aiba are slowly frozen to death in a pyramid. In his note to the story Liang tries to justify the publication of such a depressing story in the inaugural issue of his journal by arguing that his translation is not intended for ignorant vulgar men or small-minded voice-hearers (shengwen, a Buddhist term referring to those who could only manage to save themselves through their personal enlightenment) but for Bodhisattvas (those who postpone Nirvana to help others to attain enlightenment). In view of this argument, one cannot help but wonder if Liang saw himself as a Bodhisattva who tried to free others from their delusions about the human world, including their utopian dreams. With its eschatological message about the impermanence of human existence, "The End of the World" in effect implicitly nullifies Liang's utopian vision and his utopian blueprint offered in the same issue of *New Fiction*.

Aside from the influence of Buddhism, the perilous international situation China faced at the turn of the century also gave Liang little ground for optimism

about the future. Worried about the current dangers posed to China by aggressive imperialist countries, Liang spends much of the space in Chapter 4 of his novel describing the suffering of the Chinese witnessed by Huang Keqiang and Li Qubing on a tour to Lushun (Port Arthur), a strategically important area in Manchuria taken over by the Russians and turned into a naval base. To create an impression of reality for his account Liang inserts numerous up-to-date statistics and news dispatches, either verbatim or in paraphrase, and repeatedly claims that he has not tampered with these source materials in the least. He might hope to galvanize his readers to action with these realistic elements in his account, but the pressing threat of colonialism he so emphasizes only makes his utopian dream even more tenuous. As he turns toward realism in the last two chapters of his unfinished novel, Liang increasingly demonstrates an inability to make the crisis-ridden present conducive to a better future. Perhaps this inability played a significant role in the final abortion of his utopian dream.

Liang's worry about the external imperialist threat to China was compounded by his concern about the moral deficiencies of his compatriots. In the eyes of late Qing reformers like Liang, the choice between constitutionalism and revolution was crucially linked to the state of the citizenry in China and on this issue they shared with the revolutionaries a rare consensus that the Chinese were by and large unenlightened. To stress the widespread moral flaws among the Chinese Liang portrays, in Chapter 5 of his novel, a group of revolutionaries as pompous, sloganeering poseurs who participate in a political rally just as enthusiastically as they attend a beauty contest for prostitutes. Modeled on exposé fiction, this unflattering group portrait shows Liang's serious reservations about not only the revolutionaries but also all his fellow countrymen. It is widely known that Liang changed his mind about revolution on August 19, 1903, when he claimed he would never advocate revolution again after learning about Wu Zhihui's alleged betrayal of Wu's fellow revolutionary Zhang Binglin to the Qing government in Shanghai.[5] His interest in the moral deficiencies of the Chinese, however, dated back at least to 1900, when he talked about the Chinese nation's servility, ignorance, selfishness, insincerity, cowardliness and passivity in an article titled "The Sources of China's Accumulated Weakness" (Zhongguo jiruo suyuan lun). Especially pertinent to our discussion is his description of those "virtuous" scholars who constantly mouth their concern for the country in public while privately indulging in wine and women.[6] As successors to the "virtuous" scholars,

[5] See the letter Liang Qichao wrote to Jiang Guanyun dated August 19, 1903 in *Liang Qichao nianpu changbian* (ed. Ding Wenjiang), 327-28.

[6] Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo jiruo suyuan lun," *Liang Qichao quanji*, vol. 1, 418.

the revolutionaries in Liang's novel simply perpetuate a pernicious tradition in a changed environment. Plagued by the habit of duplicity, insincerity and other spiritual diseases as they are portrayed in Liang's novel, these revolutionaries and their fellow countrymen would certainly not be able to reach utopia, an ideal world premised, after all, on the goodness of its inhabitants.

The Future of New China was significant in its time not only because it broadened late Qing writers' imaginative horizon and inspired them to envision the future but also because it raised important questions about the future: What political course should China follow to make itself strong and prosperous, constitutionalism or revolution? Given the precarious contemporary international situation, what kind of fate lay in store for China? Spiritually, could the Chinese correct the flaws in their national character and embark on a journey to a better future? As the above discussions show, Liang's own answers to these questions were full of contradictions and uncertainties, if not downright negative. For other late Qing writers who followed his lead in imagining the future these questions proved to be equally difficult. As we shall see in the rest of the present essay, whereas some late Qing writers tried to evade these questions by resorting to dreams and fantasies, others would look to China's moral tradition, especially Confucianism, for solutions. However, whether they resorted to dreams or to traditional moral values, these writers remained hardly able to reconcile the harsh reality of the flawed present with their utopian ideals for the future.

For some late Qing writers fantasy was a mechanism with which they tried to circumvent China's daunting internal and external problems. In *A Fool's Dream Talk* (Chiren shuomeng ji), a novel serialized in the fiction magazine *Illustrated Fiction* (Xiuxiang xiaoshuo) from February 1904 to July 1905, for example, the author Lüsheng conjures up a band of reformers who, in the manner of the heroes in *A Sequel to The Water Margin*, colonize, industrialize and democratize an island called Immortal Island as their final haven from the troubles in China. For all his veiled criticism of the political approaches and tactics adopted by some of his characters, who loosely stand for real historical figures such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen, Lüsheng's final solution of building a utopia far away from China proves to be utterly impracticable. At the end of the novel an émigré to Immortal Island dreams a dream in which he goes on a trip to a modernized and democratized China, but he is promptly woken up just as another character is from his dream about Immortal Island to face the reality of Stupor Village at the beginning of the novel. The final awakening, a common closure to utopian visions in late Qing fiction, makes it clear that Lüsheng and his like-minded visionaries were only too aware of the unreality and fragility of their fantasies.

A different kind of dream/vision can be found in *Yellow Embroiderer of the Globe* (Huang Xiuqiu), a novel serialized in *New Fiction* from April 1905 to January 1906. As indicated by the penname Yisuo, the author might be directly inspired by Aesop's fables to write his allegorical novel. In 1903 a collection of two hundred and ninety-eight of Aesop's fables was published by the Commercial Press in Chinese under the title *Aesop's Fables* (Yisuo yuyan), translated by Lin Shu in collaboration with Yan Peinan, Yan Fu's nephew, and Yan Ju, Yan Fu's son. Thanks to Lin Shu's fame and, among other things, the beautiful illustrations in the book, the collection became an instant bestseller. Writing in the wake of Lin Shu's popular translation and using his characters, with telling names such as Yellow Embroiderer of the Globe (Huang Xiuqiu), Yellow Knower of Principles (Huang Tongli) and Yellow Peril (Huang Huo), as vehicles for his political messages, Yisuo tried to outline a gradualist route to reform in the form of an allegory of ideas.

As an allegory of ideas with concrete recommendations for the reform of China such as unbinding women's bound feet, eradicating superstitious beliefs and establishing schools for women, *Yellow Embroiderer of the Globe* can be seen as an attempt to fill the gaps left by Liang Qichao's failure to find specific measures for his reformist agenda. As such it is praised by A Ying as the best late Qing novel dealing with issues related to women, including Chinese women's struggle for equality and the conflict between the old and the new.[7] However, unlike the vast majority of allegories, which tend to be literal, one-dimensional and rigid in interpreting their messages, *Yellow Embroiderer of the Globe* is characterized by complexities and ambiguities that eventually cast doubt upon its recommended course of action. First of all, in order to eradicate deep-rooted cultural practices in Freedom Village, the eponymous character often resorts to dubious schemes that end up compromising, rather than strengthening, her moral character. For example, when she lies in the name of Guanyin the Goddess of Mercy to frighten an old nun and her young apprentice into returning to secular life she is made out to be a Machiavellian for whom the virtue of honesty means very little. Moreover, even with her dubious schemes and convenient alliances with questionable characters, the course of reform in Freedom Village still remains subject to setbacks and reversals, as can be seen in the damage it suffers when the money-grubbing Manchu official nicknamed Pig's Large Intestine (Zhu Dachang) takes charge. The pivotal role the author assigns to government officials in determining the success or failure of reform indicates that,

[7] A Ying, *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi*, 105.

in spite of the emphasis on enlightening the ordinary people in China, not much faith or confidence is placed in the project. Although at the end of the novel regional autonomy is offered as an abstract solution to the problems of feudal dictatorship and venal government officials, no concrete course is specified and, as a result, the future of Freedom Village still remains an open question.

In virtually all late Qing fiction about the future the importance of moral enlightenment is stressed. Keenly aware of the weaknesses in the national character of the Chinese, late Qing reformers regarded moral enlightenment as a project that included not just the popularization of education or the introduction and practice of political concepts such as democracy and autonomy. A crucial part of the project was to foster the Chinese people's private morality. For example, from 1903 on Liang Qichao increasingly emphasized the value of private morality and tried hard to promote traditional moral self-cultivation in his discussions of the new citizen. In a way he already called attention to the urgent need for moral cultivation with his portrayal of the profligate revolutionaries in *The Future of New China*. In Chun Fan's *A Future World* (Weilai shijie), a novel first serialized in the magazine *Fiction Monthly* (Yueyue xiaoshuo) from November 1907 to January 1909, the issue of private morality is pushed to the center stage. In Chun Fan's opinion, constitutionalism is a moral issue rather than a political one, as he makes clear in the following remarks at the beginning of his novel:

> It is known at home and abroad that reforms are now implemented in all areas, old customs are being eliminated and constitutionalism has been proclaimed. Hearing this news, the idealists in China excitedly talk to each other and aver that China will certainly strive to strengthen itself after the implementation of constitutionalism. Little do they know that the issue of constitutionalism cannot be willfully resolved by just a few big shots in the central government or in the provinces. Constitutionalism and self-strengthening can only be achieved when, having realized that the issue of constitutionalism concerns him personally and that he is obliged to support constitutionalism, every one of the four hundred million people in the twenty-two provinces in China has become a full-fledged citizen under constitutionalism.[8]

Having thus perceived constitutionalism as first and foremost a task of cultivating civic virtues, Chun Fan proceeds to narrate the difficulties his reformer characters encounter in areas including family relationships, gender relationship, and popular education. Though purported to be a novel about life after the establishment of constitutionalism in China, much of the novel is written as exposé fiction, with its narrative focus falling in turn on the rogueries in Qiantang County, a murder, a love triangle and the solving of the murder case.

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[8] Chun Fan, *Weilai shijie*, 4-5.

Looking at the future through the lens of exposé fiction, the author betrays a pessimistic outlook that pushes him to say, at one point, that the only way to deal with the utterly benighted people in China is to blow them up with poisonous cannon balls.[9] For him the only hope lies with two enlightened characters—a school principal and a government official—who solve some of the thorny problems in the novel while the rest of the characters remain bogged down in selfishness and ignorance. In the last few chapters of his novel Chun Fan indeed offers some concrete suggestions for the implementation of constitutionalism, such as simplifying the Chinese language for educational purposes and establishing schools for women. However, like other late Qing utopian visionaries, he still has difficulty detailing a better future for China even with these suggestions. When he finally makes a brief mention of China becoming the most powerful country in the world two or three years after the education commissioner in Jiangsu Province forces everyone to receive a six-month training in constitutionalism, his hasty projection, overshadowed by his consistently pessimistic outlook on the Chinese, only appears to be unconvincing and totally out of place.

As we have seen so far, late Qing writers, fully aware of the inertia of the masses and the resistance from Chinese officials intent on keeping their powers and privileges, harbored serious doubts about the future of constitutionalism in China even as they expressed their support for constitutionalism. Among them the famous exposé fiction writer Wu Jianren held perhaps the most cynical attitude. Wu, to be sure, was by no means a die-hard conservative. In 1897 and 1898, at the height of the reform movement initiated by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, he wrote a series of sixty essays in which he offered his advice on a wide variety of reforms ranging from governmental, legal, educational, economic to military reconstructions. Collected under the title *An Unofficial Edition of Jianren's Ramblings* (Jianyi waibian) in 1902, these essays demonstrated his interest in contemporary politics, his knowledge of important social issues and his enthusiasm for reform. In his attempts to help his country achieve power and prosperity, Wu, however, refused to jettison the moral tradition of China. Instead, he held traditional Chinese moral values to be the key to a prosperous future. In an essay titled "A Discussion of Policies" (Shuo fa), Wu argues that "if our people are all made to know filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty and honesty, our country will definitely be put in order and it will not be difficult to reach the prosperity of the three ancient dynasties [Xia, Shang and Zhou]."[10] In the same essay he goes on to make the following statement:

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[9] Chun Fan, *Weilai shijie*, 32.

[10] Wu Jianren, "Shuo fa," *Jianyi waibian, Wu Jianren quanji*, vol. 8, 13.

> In the West education begins with language and mathematics and goes on to include astronomy, geography, physics, chemistry, investigation of natural phenomena and handicrafts. Nothing is not taught. As means of livelihood, these subjects are techniques and not the Way, but they result in the decrease of idle people. If our education today can take filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty and honesty as its warp, language and mathematics as its woof and Western subjects as the shuttle, people will daily rectify their hearts and increase their wisdom. And the result of controlling techniques with the Way and of supplementing the Way with techniques can be achieved right away.[11]

Reminiscent of the influential view that regarded Chinese tradition as the essence and Western techniques as vehicles, Wu's statement attaches paramount importance to moral education as the premise for the successful utilization of Western scientific knowledge. On the other hand, lack of moral character among his countrymen disenchanted Wu of any unrealistic hopes for easy solutions to China's problems, including the solution of constitutionalism. Two months after the Qing court issued a decree calling on the nation to prepare for constitutionalism on September 1, 1906, Wu published a short story "Celebrating Constitutionalism" (Qingzhu lixian) to mock the enthusiasm for the decree shown in the celebratory rallies held in major cities such as Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. In the story a rude fellow rushes onto the stage in the middle of a rally to call constitutionalism a dream before he declares that, to prepare for constitutionalism, Chinese people and Chinese officials should have their entrails washed in the Pacific Ocean to get rid of the former's selfishness, conservatism and hesitation and the latter's despotic habit. A month later Wu tried to further drive home his pessimistic view on the prospects of constitutionalism in China with the publication of another story "Preparing for Constitutionalism" (Yubei lixian). Told by an opium addict who racks his brains for months to find a way to prepare himself for constitutionalism, the story finally zeroes in on another addict's preparation: trying to get rich through winning a lottery so that, after gaining the rights to vote and to stand for election with his lottery winnings, he can further enrich and empower himself. Taking the opium addict as a representative of a segment of the Chinese nation and acknowledging the existence of countless people in China who are even more ignorant than the addict with regard to constitutionalism, Wu can only lament over the disheartening situation in an author's note to the story.

In Wu's view, as in the views of many other late Qing writers, the officialdom's inertia conspired with the ignorance and turpitude of the ordinary Chinese to

[11] Wu Jianren, ibid.

turn constitutionalism into nothing but a farce. To poke fun at such a farce resulted from the officialdom's resistance against change in the political realm, Wu published a story "Long Live Constitutionalism" (Lixian wansui) in *Fiction Monthly* on February 27, 1907. Set in heaven, the story narrates a fruitless tour, made by a group of miscellaneous gods at the order of the Jade Emperor to study constitutionalism in the human world, and their underlings' sabotage of the tour before it concludes with a decree from the heavenly court that reappoints some gods and keeps the rest of the gods in their positions. With everyone's vested interest thus remaining unharmed, even the saboteurs end up shouting "long live constitutionalism!" Though categorized as a "comic story," the story in fact reflected some important contemporary events in constitutional reform, including an attempted assassination of the envoys sent by the Qing government in 1905 to study constitutionalism in Japan and in the West and the superficial changes the Qing court made to its political structure in 1906 and 1907. Disillusioned with both the ordinary people and the officialdom in China, Wu could only imagine a drastic disruption of the world as the cause of a better future, as he did in the story "The Ten Thousandth Year of the Reign of Guangxu" (Guangxu wannian), a story published in *Fiction Monthly* on February 8, 1908 in which, after ten thousand years marked by the oppression by the powerful and the servility of the powerless in spite of the establishment of constitutionalism, China is suddenly turned into a utopia when a comet scrapes the earth and flips China from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere. The unlikelihood of such world-changing good fortune only accentuates Wu's pessimism about the future of China.

Wu's pessimism, we should note, stemmed not from a lack of utopian imagination on his part but from his failure to come up with any solution for his countrymen's deep-rooted moral problems. As his statement from "A Discussion of Policies" shows, he believed a miraculous future could be created through the successful integration of moral education and scientific knowledge. An imaginative picture of such a future is offered in his novel *A New Story of the Stone* (Xin shitou ji), a novel first partially serialized in a newspaper *Southern Daily* (Nanfang bao) from September 1905 to January 1906 before it was published in its entirety in November 1908. As we read the novel, the first thing we notice is a change in its narrative focus. Indeed the first thirteen chapters of the novel were presented as a "social novel" (shehui xiaoshuo) when they were first serialized, but when the novel was published as a whole it was relabeled an "idealist novel" (lixiang xiaoshuo). As a result of these different narrative orientations, the novel is neatly separated into two parts. Whereas the first twenty-one chapters narrate Jia Baoyu's exposure to a variety of modern gadgets and customs in Shanghai,

his eyewitness account of the farce staged by the Boxers in Beijing and his imprisonment in Wuhan for unknowingly offending the local superintendent of education in a casual conversation with a student, the last nineteen chapters are all focused on the technological wonders Jia Baoyu sees in a scientific utopia called the Civilized Realm. While highlighting a series of sharp contrasts between ignorance and knowledge, vice and virtue and, most importantly, reality and fantasy, the juxtaposition of the Barbaric Realm and the Civilized Realm also shows an unbridgeable chasm between the two worlds, making it impossible for the barbarians to get to the scientific utopia.

The first glimpse of the utter incompatibility between the two realms is offered in an X-ray test Jia Baoyu is secretly subjected to before he is allowed to enter the Civilized Realm. As his guide Old Youth (the penname Wu Jianren used when he first serialized *A New Story of the Stone*) tells him, he is allowed in because of his exceedingly rare purity detected in the X-ray test, whereas other visitors from the Barbaric Realm, unable to pass the test because of their impurity, would simply be rejected. While obviously a revelation of Wu's despair over the insuperable difficulty in reforming the residents of the Barbaric Realm, the separation of the pure from the impure also demonstrates his moral certitude. For all his fecund imagination of scientific wonders, Wu does not concern himself that much with discussions of moral issues, since these issues have already been resolved to his satisfaction. We learn that the official religion in the Civilized Realm is Confucianism and education there starts with self-cultivation and culminates in every citizen's thorough absorption of Confucian virtues. Significantly, Confucian moral education is used as a replacement for constitutionalism, a legacy from a founding father that has resulted in the disappearance of both criminals and law enforcement agencies from the Civilized Realm. Moreover, having heard about the upheavals caused by the socialists in reaction to the political dominance of the rich in constitutional countries, people in the Civilized Realm have decided to restore a dictatorship governed by the principle of "supporting what the people like and rejecting what the people loathe," a principle taken out of the Confucian classic *The Great Learning*. At the end of the novel Wu's endorsement of Confucianism as the key to national power and scientific advancement is reinforced by yet another significant revelation: Dongfang Qiang (Eastern Strength), the architect of the Civilized Realm, turns out to be Zhen Baoyu, a conformist to Confucian ideology and Jia Baoyu's foil in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Instead of being ridiculed by Jia Baoyu as a "career worm" interested only in study and service, as he is in the classic novel, Zhen Baoyu/Dongfang Qiang in *A New Story of the Stone* is held up as a hero who has realized Jia Baoyu's dream of mending the heaven and, in so doing, rendered

the latter superfluous in the construction of the scientific utopia. In making Zhen Baoyu/Dongfang Qiang the real hero and Jia Baoyu a mere observer and admirer in his work, Wu leaves no doubt about his own support for the Confucian ideal Zhen Baoyu/Dongfang Qiang embodies. Finally, his advocacy of Confucian moral education is also displayed in the way he fashions his work on the model of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. As a contemporary annotator pointed out, Wu's work was inspired by Bellamny's novel.[12] However, unlike *Looking Backward*, the second part of *A New Story of the Stone* is focused not on the social arrangements in a utopia that lead to equity and harmony. Rather, it is focused on the scientific wonders that have resulted from the integration of Confucianism and modern Western technology.

With his unequivocal preference of civilized dictatorship over constitutionalism, Wu Jianren might not have a great deal of company among reform-minded late Qing writers. But he was certainly not alone in realizing the imperfections and potential pitfalls of constitutionalism. In this regard even some supporters of constitutionalism knowingly or unknowingly agreed with him, as can be seen in the case of Biheguan zhuren, the author of *New Era* (Xin jiyuan). First published in Shanghai in March 1908, *New Era* purports to be a panegyric of China as a constitutional monarchy. Indeed we are told that in 1999 China has become the leader of the yellow race in the world. Central and local parliaments discuss important issues and wield real power, foreign concessions have all been returned to China and, what is more, a military six million strong has been built and one-third of the country's annual revenue of more than two trillion dollars is spent on military expenses, striking fear in Western countries. When a decision is made by the central parliament in China that all countries of the yellow race should adopt the Chinese calendar, a race war is triggered in which the Chinese military, with its fantastic weapons including marine sensors, torpedo detectors, underwater electric net and a liquid that turns water into ignitable oxygen, wins the final victory and forces the Western powers to sign a treaty strikingly similar to the unequal treaties imposed on China in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, granted that China's constitutional monarchy accounts for its military strength, revanchism eventually only brings more conflict, not everlasting peace, to China, since at the end of *New Era* it is mentioned that England and Russia refuse to sign the humiliating treaty and, instigated by newspapers, people all over Europe and America also rise to oppose the treaty, thus signaling more strife to come. More disturbingly, if China is imagined

[12] See Wang Junnian's "Wu Jianren nianpu" in *Wu Jianren quanji*, vol. 10, 37.

to behave like a European power in annexing its neighbors and forcing unequal treaties on its defeated enemies and, as a result, what arises is not so much a new era but an uncanny historical déjà vu, as David Wang argues,[13] the future will remain as flawed as the past or the present. With its endless inventory of outlandish gadgets and weapons, *New Era* might be a science/military fantasy imaginatively correcting historical wrongs by paying Western powers back in their own coin, but its Darwinian endorsement of constitutionalism certainly prevents it from projecting a utopian future. In ending his novel with an anticipation of future conflicts, Biheguan zhuren clearly acknowledges the limitations of his cherished political system. Meanwhile, Dongfang Qiang's promotion of international peace and racial equality at a global peace conference, described in a utopian dream about China Jia Baoyu has at the end of *A New Story of the Stone*, can be seen as a corrective to Darwinian competition Wu Jianren offers with the Confucian virtue of benevolence in mind. However, with the Chinese nation ignorantly wallowing in the Barbaric Realm, as Wu readily admits, the journey to utopia still remains impossible.

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[13] David Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*, 311.

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中國往何處去？
晚清小說對立憲主義的疑問

摘　要

立憲主義在晚清時代憧憬了中國民主強盛的未來，並因此吸引了許多傾向改革的小說家的注意。結果這一晚清時代的重要政治運動不僅在當時新興的政治小說中成爲一個重要論題，而且在晚清烏托邦想象中也佔據了突出的地位。然而，晚清烏托邦小說家同時也意識到其他的歷史可能性的存在，未來的不可預測性，以及對未來形成危害的中華民族的種種根深蒂固的缺陷，如道德水準的低下、以及普遍的惰性等等。因此，這些作家在對未來作出謹愼而缺乏信心的憧憬的同時，也表現了他們對立憲主義可行性的懷疑，和對立憲主義侷限性的清醒認識。由於他們在設想未來時無法擺脱這些懷疑，這些晚清烏托邦作家終於無法想像一個有實際意義的未來，也無法想像充滿缺陷的現在如何能夠過渡到一個美好的將來。

關鍵詞：晚清小說，立憲主義，革命，烏托邦想像，民族性格，道德教育，譴責小說，政治小說