

# Victorian Urban Governance and Modern Cosmopolitan Imaginary: H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*

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## Abstract

This paper explains how H. G. Wells's modern cosmopolitan imaginary, as evidenced in *A Modern Utopia*, translates Victorian politics of demos and urbanization discourse onto the global space at the turn of the twentieth century to bring into being a mutual reinforcement of urban governance and imagined globalism. I first briefly cover the historical contexts of Victorian urbanization to situate the making of H. G. Wells's utopia of a world state in the history at the turn of the century and then analyze the plot structure in terms of Friedrich Schiller's aesthetic theory. The creative attempts of H. G. Wells's utopian writing, linking two major historical contexts of his day, liberal governance and global trading, give expression to a cosmopolitan imaginary of classical globalization. London as an imagined city in the Wellsian utopia substantiates what the Great Exhibition of 1851 stands for, the vision of light that takes imperialism for granted and celebrates in the urban locale concentration of commodities brought forth by global trading. The significance of this historical situating of cosmopolitan imaginary is then to think of the city as a persistently dominant form of contemporary global visions.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitan imaginary, H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, classical globalization, urban governance, Friedrich Schiller

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We build now not citadels, but ships of state.

— H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*

Concomitant with the ascendance of neoliberal globalization at the turn of the twenty-first century is a surge of cosmopolitanism as a point of exigent attention. While cosmopolitanism is often taken up as an ideal rather than an artificial product of long social changes, in this article I would like to sketch a historical manifestation of what I venture to call a “cosmopolitan imaginary” at the turn of the twentieth century in England. I adopt this term to trace a realm not completely covered either by the history of intellectual ideas or by the history of literature to emphasize, on the one hand, a common vision of seeing the world in the city can be manifest in different forms of cultural expressions<sup>1</sup> and, on the other hand, cosmopolitan yearning sits between accepted traditions of genres and historical tendencies.<sup>2</sup>

The very beginning of the twentieth century is a key historical site where we could examine the making of early varieties of liberal cosmopolitan imaginary. Historically, it is a period of globalization too. Jeffrey A. Frieden in his history of global capitalism surveys how between 1896 and 1914 an “integrated international economy” at its core came close to the classical ideal of global free trade (6). The steamships and railroads gradually incorporated the geographical earth into transportation grids and world trade accelerated accordingly, from “under \$8 billion in 1898 to over \$18 billion in 1913” (19). What anchored the acceleration of international trading was the gold standard, inaugurated in 1844 by Bank of England and gradually receiving an almost world-wide acceptance, with the exception of only China and Persia in 1908 (17). Open trade was considered the norm of the day by such major industrial countries as Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States. In this newly formed world order Great Britain was central, investing half of her capital abroad and accounting for “about one-third of all international trade” (47).

The dominance of Great Britain’s capital incites a corresponding imaginary of expanding Victorian success to a global scale. To highlight the significance of this inquiry, I commence with H. Rider Haggard’s observation of adventure romance, a form that often orientalizes the globe for the metropolitan gaze. In

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Geddes expressed cosmopolitan imaginary in his exhibition plans, among which the Outlook Tower museum is the most studied by contemporary scholars. Please see Helen Elizabeth Meller’s *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner*.

<sup>2</sup> Here I follow largely the definition of social imaginary provided by Charles Taylor. Please see his *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

1894, he wondered, where “will the romance writers of future generations find a safe and secret place, unknown to the pestilent accuracy of the geographer, in which to lay their plots?” (qtd. in McClure 11) This archetypal adventure writer of England lamented the disappearing conditions that make possible adventure romance because cartographers on the ride of imperial expansion had practically mapped the surface of the globe toward the end of the Victorian era. Parallel to the decline of adventure fantasy, however, this study pinpoints around the turn of the twentieth century the rise of another kind of dreaming of the world, not necessarily revealed merely in form of popular literature but cutting across different forms of representation, which in effect opens up the city and converts the urban space into a site of endless reshaping and one of human future. This kind of cosmopolitan imaginary translates Victorian politics of demos and urbanization discourse onto the global space at the turn of the twentieth century to bring into being a mutual reinforcement of urban governance and imagined globalism. I will employ H. G. Wells as an exemplary to explain how the novelist articulates cosmopolitan imaginary of his day in his *A Modern Utopia* to “map” vital connections of modern urban globalism and the city-making of the nineteenth century. At the end I will float the suggestion that the cosmopolitan imaginary unearthed therewith would be of great relevance to understanding contemporary globalism today.

### Urban Prosperity in the Late Victorian England

To situate H. G. Wells’s utopia of a world state in the Victorian history of urbanization, rather than read it as *sui generis*, I will first briefly cover some historical contexts of Victorian urbanization. One underlying cause of Victorian urban prosperity, in addition to such well documented factors as the changed means of production, colonial expansion, globalized exchanges of commerce, is a rapid improvement of urban management of the lived environment and population. While Victorian urbanization indeed is a complex issue, a Foucauldian reading in particular provides a great vista into this problematic. Several Foucauldian scholars launched a revision of Victorian historical studies in the 1990s. Dean Mitchell first employs the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to interpret the social effects of the New Poor Law administration and thus underscores both the technical and the social dimensions in techniques of government. Mary Poovey codifies what Mitchell singles out in the term of the social body, an imaginary object of government which proposals and implementation of apparatuses delimit and work on. Nikolas Rose and Thomas Osborne identify the city as

the privileged space for the ongoing governmentality highlighted by Mitchell and Poovey. The major practices found in the history of Victorian urban development are, in Patrick Joyce's words, "the conditions of possibility of liberalism, or in a stronger sense, as themselves liberal infrastructure, with nineteenth-century infrastructure being in this sense political infrastructure" (70). Assumed in this historical narrative are two key concepts, the concept of technology and the making of subjects in the conditions of governing technologies.<sup>3</sup> As a result, these Foucauldian scholars render visible the building of the Victorian city as on-going attempts at administration/material "infrastructures," such as workhouses and sewages, to allow for self-discipline of urbanites. Freedom, in this sense, is not a willed act of doing as one likes, but a practice socially sanctioned by and prospering in a design of a municipal city.

Here I give a brief account of a prominent case for illustration,<sup>4</sup> the enforcement of the New Poor Law.<sup>5</sup> By 1830 the money paid for poor relief assumed one-fifth of the national expenditure in Britain (Englander 3). Thomas Malthus's theory of reproductive competition allowed one to draw a miserable conclusion that Britain was at the risk of being consumed away by an increasing burden of a population who were idle. Reformers concentrated on the question of how to keep the able-bodied from wasting funds of poverty relief. Edwin Chadwick and others promoted the practice of workhouses to deter those who sought aids. Once admitted into the workhouse, the person would subject him/herself to a rigid regimen of labor in an extremely harsh living condition and the sexes were separated inside. The moral legitimacy of this establishment was to prevent the able-bodied from degenerating into socially dependent paupers. Yet an obvious economic reason was to reduce the increasing relief rate collected from urban well-to-dos. The implementation of the New Poor Law<sup>6</sup> managed to keep some urban problems under a bearable check but still one sees in this case much is at stake. First of all, the urban authorities refrained themselves from intervening

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Patrick Joyce on statistics (20-61) and Pamela Gilbert's *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* on mapping.

<sup>4</sup> This is an often rehearsed portion of Victorian history. For an account of it, please read David Englander's *Poverty and Poor Law Reform* and Lynn Hollen Lees's *The Solidarities of Strangers*.

<sup>5</sup> One should be reminded that this is just one among many others to come, including the Sanitary Movement, the making of public libraries, the elimination of slaughtering the live stock, and the much discussed establishment of lighted streets. Christopher Hamlin offers a comprehensive account of the emergence of public health in the Sanitary Movement. Chris Otter discusses how light in the city shaped urban subjects. Patrick Joyce also discusses the removal of slaughter houses and cattle markets from the city and the designing of local libraries for public access.

<sup>6</sup> One must not think the historical project of liberal governance was complete. Mary Poovey rightly cautions the reader that it was in "the process of forming," and "never fully formed" (1).

in the labor market by artificially posing a standard of living, and returned the able-bodied back to the labor market for low wages. Second, in its practice one finds the triumph of free market in the sense that social relief was kept to a minimum to allow the manufacturers to collectively minimize labor wages without being responsible for social consequences of appalling working conditions, overcrowded living space and deteriorating health of workers. Thus, it forged a format of governmentality in which the rulers were made into resources managers and the ruled self-governing “liberal subjects.”

The theoretical concept of technologies of governance allows one to explain how the Victorian city weaved different kinds of social relationships in one ensemble of governing systems, machineries, organizations and so on and additionally opens up inquiries not yet well explored, and among which the human resources that make possible the operation of governing apparatuses have direct bearing on the making of modern cosmopolitan imaginary.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the intervention by urban management created a paradox: social reality is at once determined by place and amenable to social programs. Such a paradox then forms a condition that enlarged the role of intellectuals in this circuit of urban changes for they were in the position of designing and executing the social programs of urban governance. The creative potentials of human resources can always make technologies all the more elastic so as to be adaptable to contrived objectives. If we consider how Victorian urban governance in due course encouraged social planning by intellectuals, it is not hard to understand the social trend in which intellectuals tried to take the place of owners of property to be managers or trustees of social development. Foucauldian inquiries, focusing on how subjects are structured, are disposed to suspend this question of agency. Here it is instructive to go to the social history of British modernity narrativized by Harold Perkin to realize that the dominant success of technologies exclusively for the sake of free market is temporary at best. Professionals who lent a hand to the construction of social reforms were largely indiscernible in the midst of the triumph of the social projects at first (*Origins of Modern English Society* 252-270), but they returned with a vengeance between 1880 and 1914 (*The Rise of Professional Society* 116-170). Perkin observes in this period intellectuals of different

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<sup>7</sup> Another one, not directly relevant to the argument here, is that material resources are unavoidably required to keep technologies operative even if the technologies involved are not directly constructed on materials such as in the instance of the New Poor Law. Chris Otter makes a great case on the necessity of materials and maintenance that make lighting of the city streets “durable.” His investigation points to the fact that behind the booming of urban governing technologies lies an often ignored factor of wealth in the Victorian city. Any progress the Victorian city made assumes incredible material wealth but such a presupposition is not directly transparent.

backgrounds were mindful of their active engagement in the management of the society in general. In this sense, to explain such mounting awareness of agency among intellectuals, one cannot limit himself to the Foucauldian paradigm and bypass another inquiry on Victorian liberalism which lays emphasis on cultivation of an individual as an agent of social action.<sup>8</sup>

### **Articulating Classical Globalization beyond Realism: H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia***

After two sociological works on the global future, *Anticipations* (1902) and *Mankind in the Making* (1903), Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia* (1905), which Lewis Mumford famously regards as “the quintessential utopia” (184). Reading against the grain, assuming *A Modern Utopia* not just as an idealized future but also a manifestation of the present in a fundamental sense, I follow mainly Fredric Jameson and Walter Benjamin in understanding utopia as constitutive of modernity, a fantasy coexisting with the urban concentration of commodities,<sup>9</sup> and argue that Wells takes advantage of the utopian writing to form an imaginary of a globalized society at the beginning of the twentieth century. In examining how the imaginative or the literary dimension of *A Modern Utopia* vocalizes a version of modern globalism, we will see how he solidifies a global imaginary of abstract expansion that paradoxically sits with the urban reality of jam-packed materials and commodities.

Upon writing *A Modern Utopia*, H. G. Wells set out to accommodate contesting perspectives of what the world should be, and resolved on a form apparently novelistic, plotting an unexpected journey of the Owner of the Voice and the Botanist, two characters of distinctly different minds. This book unfolds as a stage exhibition, monitored by a chairperson. A presenter, vigorously denied to be the author, said to be the Owner of the Voice, reads from a manuscript. Along with the major presenter is another character “the Botanist,” who tags alone

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<sup>8</sup> Amada Anderson expounds how Victorians including Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, George Eliot and Oscar Wilde seek to cultivate the ideal of detachment. David Wayne Thomas argues that “the aspiration to many-sidedness,” or a valued practice to reach an autonomous decision in response to multiple restraints of a given situation, is the ideal of cultivation for Victorians (26).

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin’s theory of urban phantasmogoria is well known. Here is the complex way Jameson constructs utopia, which is “neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future (although its various forms use such representations): it can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective” (Jameson 284).

in the journey to an advanced world in spite of his own preoccupation with an unrequited love affair. In the background the utopia is projected in “the image of a cinematograph entertainment” (3). Glitches of the projection may cut in and the presentation alternates between blurred images and focused pictures. When the story begins, the two characters are “transported” into a world identical in its geographical and urban layouts with the Earth: “And behold! In the twinkling of an eye we are in that other world!” (14).

When it was published in 1905, literary luminaries such as Henry James and Joseph Conrad were effusive with their praise for the immense capacity of the Wellsian imagination (Hillegas viii). Bound up with Wells’s later propagandization of the world government, however, this book soon fell out of favor in the aftermath of the WWII. A typical voice against this work, represented by George Orwell, was a deep suspicion that it might proselytize a centralized world state with severely limited freedom in store for individuals. Continued interests in this book were sporadic and first and foremost derived from an appreciation of Wells’s place in the modern intellectual history. The major one is, in the midst of nationalist fervor, Warren Wager’s defense of Wells’s cosmopolitanism. Recently, we see a minor rise of attention to Wells’s book, especially in its “hybrid” form of presentation. *A Modern Utopia* is indeed unconventional in its form of presentation, which, Wells states, is a product of “trial and deliberation” (xxxii). Its form poses a challenge to literary criticism, not only because it mixes fictional writing and argumentation, but because within the fictional story one finds points of incoherence. June Deery explores the multiple meanings of the word “progress” to call attention to the fact that this work deals more than social progress: it is a work that reveals itself “in the process of being written” (217). Some others see this hybrid form a sign of Wells’s creativity. Patrick Parrinder echoes the earliest critical response and maintains that “it is for its textual and imaginative qualities, rather than for its ideas, that the book repays rereading” (116).<sup>10</sup> Harvey N. Quamen observes literary critics are hampered by a crude classification system borrowed from biology and evolution of the late Victorian era and fail to appreciate Wells’s experiment on literary genres but he values Wells’s experimentation for its potential contribution to the study of literary history in the way of how one should stress elastic boundaries of a genre.

This brief overview of critical responses allows us to find the reading of *A Modern Utopia* divided between the disciplines of intellectual history

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Parrinder, “Utopia and Meta-Utopia in H. G. Wells,” *Science-Fiction Studies* 12 (1985): 115-28.

and literary studies. I would instead explain it is necessary to place Wells's ideas and his form of writing side by side in our reading and how the form of the work itself is connected to the construction of a Wellsian utopia. To convince the audience that social reality is indeed fluid, subject to change, and may reach its optimal condition if the humankind all work toward this direction, one needs not just a global history, but a new form of persuasion. Lauren Goodlad is right to observe a close affinity between Wells and aestheticism of the late Victorian era and considers him a "quasi-Idealist" (219). I would like to extend Goodlad's insight by placing *A Modern Utopia* in the historical context of its urban governance to examine how Wells deals with crisis of representation in its narrow sense or how to articulate globalism without adequate forms of writing available.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, to write about large-scale changes of the social milieu for a writer at the end of the Victorian age is to face squarely the question of how not to write in the manner of realism, a form that vehemently presupposes an unchanged milieu. To make my point, I revisit first the finale of *A Modern Utopia*, where the Owner of the Voice is unexpectedly wrenched awake from his utopian dream, and acutely overwhelmed by sullied streets, bums and a prostitute: "the dirt-littered basin of the fountain," "tramps," and "a draggled prostitute" (360; 362). While the details of urban reality are unbearably clear and real in a sense, he regretfully bellows at the ongoing of crowds and city traffic: "I wish . . . I could *smash* the world of everyday" (emphasis original 363). And he yells again: "This is a dream too—this world" (363). In fact, we may privilege this scene as symbolic of the conception moment of Wells's utopian project although this howl for change is located at the end of the plot. The reversal of reality into dream and vice versa is here presented as the urgent task, to which the whole book is indeed constructed so as to respond in the form of "an illumination that passes as it comes" (373). Wells recognizes the obstacle to a perception of social evolution is the seemingly fixed context of urban life, beyond which the reader must be led to proceed. Significantly, to write a picture of social change at the turn of the twentieth century is also, to write against realism, a form that legitimizes urban reality by its relentless presentation of unchanged "thingness" in the environment.<sup>12</sup> What is noteworthy then is how Wells would break open the confinement of realism to render the city open for reshaping and transforming

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<sup>11</sup> Please read Chapter 16 of *The Condition of Postmodernity* by David Harvey for a close analysis of crisis of representation in the nineteenth century literature.

<sup>12</sup> In this case, we may go to Peter Brooks for his pithy acumen regarding the sociological significance of realism: "Realism is nothing if not urban: it is most characteristically about the city in some important way, as the new total context of modern life" (131).

into the very site of articulation of fantasy. Wittingly or not, he seeks a form that defies realism, more on the change of the milieu than on that of an individual.<sup>13</sup> In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells envisions a world state sharply distinguished from past utopias by its characteristic of being “kinetic”: “But the Modern Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages” (5). Critics have paid attention to the keyword “kinetic.” For example, Parrington glosses this word by identifying it as an instance of ethical evolution in the sense as Thomas Huxley sees it (98). However, to my knowledge, its meanings, of great consequence to understanding both the form and the content of this work, have not been thoroughly traced. Importantly, being kinetic has both temporal and spatial connotations. First of all, its temporal association is derived from positivism. Auguste Comte counter-distinguishes “social statics,” a stable moral order, from “social dynamics” to underscore “the uneven forces and disparate events that characterized human progress” (Cowen and Shenton 29). Typifying this new world as “kinetic,” Wells simply reaffirms Comte’s emphasis on “change and development” (*A Modern Utopia* 5). Second, being kinetic suggests the spatial meaning of a world of global flows of people and things. Interestingly, the two meanings of being kinetic, conceived together, are very close to “time-space compression,” a dominant meaning of globalization nowadays.<sup>14</sup> Such a characteristic presents a challenge to Wells in terms of the form of his writing. The author’s vision begs the question of what it takes to write a “kinetic” utopia. How could one explain the complex process of Wells’s settling down to the final form after giving up several other possibilities, and what does this struggle for articulation mean beyond his personal career of writing and politics, given the height of classical globalization at the early twentieth century?

The following discussion falls into two parts: one on how Wells creates a form and the other on what content is supported by the given form.

### *Aesthetic Imagination and the Formation of Wellsian Cosmopolitan Imaginary*

Wells constructs cosmopolitan imaginary by appealing to aestheticism. By and large, he privileges aesthetic imagination in his social planning. In a lecture

<sup>13</sup> Even though Quamen defends him for doing an experiment, I would say that Wells does not completely understand that his major target would be realism since he still tries his hands on realist novels after this book, including *Tono-Bungay*.

<sup>14</sup> David Harvey defines time-space compression: “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves” (240).

six years after the publication of *A Modern Utopia*, he valorizes literary education in the training of future officials.

We must have not only the fullest treatment of the temptations, vanities, abuses, and absurdities of office, but all its dreams, its sense of constructive order, its consolations, its sense of service, and its nobler satisfactions . . . the complicated social organization today cannot get along without the amount of mutual understanding and mutual explanation such a range of characterization in our novels implies. (151)<sup>15</sup>

One might perceive that the emphasis on novel is not for its verisimilitude but for its faculty to inspire ethical understanding with imaginative stories. A similar constellation of concerns of novel, politics and imagination dominates the making of *A Modern Utopia*. Like many Victorian predecessors, including the eminent social sage Matthew Arnold, Wells is driven by aestheticization of Friedrich Schiller in the way of conceiving of social evolution. Here I only briefly summarize some aspects of Schiller's theory that have direct relevance to our understanding of the form of *A Modern Utopia*.

Partly as a response to the terror of social fragmentation and the violence of regicide, Friedrich Schiller wrote *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* to dispel the fear of the demos.<sup>16</sup> It begins with the problematic of conflict between the needs of an individual and those of a society in general. Any individual seems at first to be governed by the conflict between what he calls "sensuous drive," including sensory experiences, basic needs of survival and emotional impulses, and "formal drive," the process of experiences into rational standards. Schiller thinks it is only seemingly so and these two can be synthesized into a "play drive," a disinterested activity for its own sake. Schiller provides a psychology of aesthetic elevation. This activity possesses both content of life, as from sense-drive, and form, as from form-drive, and constitutes a living form. This aesthetic activity is then full of social significance to Schiller, and means detachment from the immediate reality but toward the mutually beneficial relationship between an individual and the collective. In this way, the play-drive becomes "aesthetic semblance," or crudely put, detached aesthetic imagination that hovers a bit away from the immediate reality but "imitate" in imagination of beauty an ideal social relationship between an individual and the political authorities. By extension, an ideal political state would emerge if every individual is fully engaged in aesthetic semblance. The strength of this work lies in the visioning capacity Schiller allows aesthetic detach-

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<sup>15</sup> H. G. Wells, "The Contemporary Novel," *Henry James and H. G. Wells*, ed. Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray (London: Hart-Davis, 1958) 131-55.

<sup>16</sup> In the eighth chapter, he comments on the approaching chaos in the hands of the revolutionary crowd in France.

ment to develop. We are deeply restricted in our immediate experience, composed of sensory correspondences of external objects, but from which one can be detached once fully engaged in aesthetic imagination, and reach social harmony ultimately even when the sense experiences foretell the impossibility of it.

We are now in a better position to understand the form of *A Modern Utopia*: the fiction derives largely from allegorizing the mind drama, as Schiller delineates, between attachment to and detachment from the immediate experience by narrating a conflict of the two characters, the Owner of the Voice and the Botanist, since the latter allegorizes, especially in his nostalgic disposition toward his unrequited love, the pull toward immediate sense experiences and base desire. The Botanist represents a type of science-informed experts, whom the Owner of the Voice bluntly ridicules for their inflexibility in thinking and lack of imagination: “You scientific people, with your fancy of a terrible exactitude in language, of indestructible foundations built, as that Wordsworthian doggerel on the title page of *Nature* says, ‘for aye,’ are marvelously without imagination” (21). Supposedly because the Botanist is tied to the sense experiences and sets his eyes merely on the appearance of objects instead of social relationships, he has almost insurmountable difficulty perceiving differences between the Earth and its utopian double: “a terrestrial botanist might find his every species there, even to the meanest pondweed or the remotest Alpine blossom” (13).

The erection of a new world does not merely depend on what could be called “infrastructures.” Even if the world is already there physically, the question of how to get ready for it staunchly remains. By this plot design Wells has also the advantage of bringing into focus the question of cultivation of aesthetic detachment (or “disinterestedness” in Matthew Arnold’s word) in the interaction between the two characters. Most of the time the Botanist seems to act as the opposite to the Owner of the Voice in his preoccupation: the former on his past love, and the latter on the new world. Yet, the Owner of the Voice would envy the Botanist for his ability of “blending in,” to share his nostalgia with a passer-by in small talks. Moreover, the Owner of the Voice would occasionally sympathize with the Botanist’s plight and become cognizant of the difficulty of elevating oneself in a lofty imagination. Right before the climax of the novel, the meeting with the Samurai double, the Owner of the Voice, seeing the despondent Botanist, comes to understand how it is to be gnawed at by unrequited love. The Owner of the Voice laments, “We agreed to purge this State and all the people in it of traditions, associations, bias, laws, and artificial entanglements, and begin anew; but we have no power to liberate ourselves. Our past, even its accidents, its accidents above all, and ourselves, are one” (257). Thus, a tension between this world and the new world reaches a new height. In the story between the Owner

of the Voice and the Botanist, Wells foregrounds the slow coming to terms with a new reality and the necessity of cultivation against a “realistic” perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Although occasionally tugged back to a factual Victorian reality, the momentum of the plot picks up when the Owner of the Voice senses the piquancy of wanting to see his double, the same but a higher self: “I doubt if we shall meet our doubles, or if it would be pleasant for us to do so” (25). The climax is reached and so is his aesthetic assemblance at the moment when he meets his utopian double and finds out how the class of Samurai rules the world. The Samurai double is the one who develops the faculty of imagination. Central to this utopian state are those “possessing imagination that range beyond the known and accepted, and that involve the desire to bring the discoveries made in such excursions, into knowledge and recognition” (266). The utopia recognizes “the ultimate significance in life in individuality, novelty and the undefined, would not only regard the poietic element as the most important element in human society, but would perceive quite clearly the impossibility of its organization” (274).

A Schillerian aesthetic imagination is necessarily subject to a frail balance between detachment and attachment. This utopian planet of Wells is by no means a locale completely detached, independent of the Earth, but remains one similar to the latter with major threats: “a world of uncertain seasons, sudden catastrophes, antagonistic diseases, and inimical beasts and vermin, out of men and women with like passions, like uncertainties of mood and desire to our own” (7-8). It is important to note that one cannot stray too far away from the immediate factual life of changes and dangers. In a typical Schillerian view, any aesthetic activity, if deeply ungrounded, runs the risk of becoming delusory (“not logical semblance” in Schiller’s words). This is what after all happens to the Owner of the Voice, who “forget[s] that a Utopia is a thing of the imagination that becomes more fragile with every added circumstance, that, like a soap-bubble, it is most brilliantly and variously coloured at the very instant of its dissolution” (352). In addition, the reality check sets in too. After a long journey in this utopian world state, the Botanist still remains fixated on his perspective on the identical appearance. At the remark of the Botanist’s deep disbelief in the utopian world, these two are instantaneously shifted back, unwittingly, to Edwardian London: “There is no jerk, no sound, no hint of material shock. We are in London and clothed in the fashion of the town. The sullen roar of London fills our ears . . .” (omission mark original, 358). The imagination of a world state collapses

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<sup>17</sup> This resurges at the last discussion on the utopia when the Owner of the Voice cautions the reader to be on guard against racial prejudice. “We may watch against it and prevent it doing any great injustices, or leading us into follies, but to eradicate it is an altogether different matter” (325).

because the Owner of the Voice and the Botanist destroy the delicate tension by pulling each other far into an opposite direction, one soaring to imagination and the other staying on the empirical observations of the surface details of senses.

One could consider *A Modern Utopia* a sustained work of Schillerian “aesthetic semblance.” This doubling of the Earth, a typical instance of aesthetic semblance, detaches the reader from the immediate everyday life of the Earth and invites him to imagine a better one. As the Owner of the Voice constantly reminds the reader, the utopian reality is authored and thus authorized by no other but himself: “Thank Heaven this is my book, and that the ultimate decision rests with me” (67). The narrator is never shy about revealing “artistic limitations” of this creation (9). That is, the Owner of the Voice begins to, in Deery’s word, “hypothesize” a utopian world, rendering outputs of his imagination into concrete shapes. Notwithstanding, I would agree with Deery only up to a point. He considers this work subjective, so much so that Wells allows the story to take control, and implies a loss of rational authorial craftsmanship in some confusing parts (221). This judgment in effect misses the mark, circumnavigating Wells’s major premise that individual subjectivism is the starting point of the journey toward a better world. The legitimacy of this individual’s creative imagination is underwritten by a free play of individual consciousness in the Schillerian sense. And it follows aesthetic semblance is an activity full of tensions and sustained efforts. In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells shares with Schiller two imperatives: first, the unyielding optimism to strike a balance between the supposedly contradictory demands of an individual and the society in general; second, the feasibility of such harmony starts with aesthetic cultivation within an individual.

### *The Globe as the Victorian City Enlarged*

With an imagined better double of the Earth, Wells capitalizes on Schillerian aestheticism to concretize a modern urge of welcoming social changes of large scales. Wells’s globalism has often been characterized as a technological utopia but one should not be misled into believing that Wells is so immersed in some science fiction fantasy as to lose a grip of history. Wells partook profoundly in controversies of his own time as the profusion of topical references in this hybrid novel can prove. Most of all, he puts to use a range of then newly developed techniques of population controls, or what Patrick Joyce properly calls “technologies of governance,” and broadens the applied province of them into a globalized setting to explore their social consequences. I will enumerate instances of them below, including public transportation, the management of poverty relief, regime of public health, and trusteeship to demonstrate how the Owner of the Voice

radiates an unflagging optimism in “modernity at large,” to borrow Arjun Appadurai’s appellation of globalization: “a general consolidation of a great number of common public services over areas of considerable size is not only practicable, but very desirable” (*A Modern Utopia* 76).<sup>18</sup>

First of all, the Wellsian utopia glamorizes public transportation technologies for the benefits they might bring to the freedom of movement globally. If the first electric tramway in London opened on 15 May 1903, and many other technological innovations of transportation, such as trains, steel ships, steel bridges, horse-drawn tramways and undergrounds, were in place for some time, Wells carries to a logical conclusion to imagine that the entire planet would be permeated with traffic routes for the public. The varieties of this technological development are wide, including “interurban communications” (42), “webs of inconspicuous special routs” over the world (45), “great tramways” (46) and the high speed train that runs two hundred miles per hour (240). Even more importantly, what enthrall Wells are not merely innovative wonders in these diverse machines, but their rich socio-political consequences of enabling freedom of movement. World-wide transportation makes possible the basic condition of this utopia as a social body completely fluid in itself, “beyond any earthly precedent, not simply a travelling population, but migratory” (47). In turn, the unremitting flows of people warrant even more salient results. Above all, “[i]n the Modern Utopia travel must be in the common texture of life,” declares the Owner of the Voice (43). Freedom of finding jobs wherever they are available, unthinkable in the Victorian restrictions of settlement, is now given automatically to any citizen: “[a] free change of locality once or twice a year from a region of restricted employment to a region of labor shortage will be among the general privileges of the Utopian citizen” (150). In contrast, the severest punishment for criminals in this liquid world then is to deprive them of physical freedom by confining them in insular territories.

At this point it is appropriate to explicate the second important meaning of being kinetic: flows of people on a planetary scale. It also has a derivative meaning: in this condition each locale is a reflection point of the world of flows, in sharp contrast with the idea of it as a fixed center: “indeed all local establishments, all definitions of place, are even now melting under our eyes” (162). This meaning can be seen as a positive anticipation of what Anthony Giddens calls “disem-

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<sup>18</sup> Here I want to stress the formation factor of Wells’s liberalism comes much from his realization of social implications of Victorian urban technologies of governance. Steven McLean reminds us of Wells’s connection with Victorian liberalism. McLean might be right about an influence of Mill’s thought of liberalism over Wells, but it does not necessarily follow that Mill is the only source.

beddedness” or what Roland Robertson christens “relativization”<sup>19</sup> of globalization around the turn of the twenty-first century. Less frequently observed but vitally important is the point Wells utters almost in one breath freedom of movement and freedom in general as if the latter is not a right in itself but a condition guaranteed by technologies of movement.

Second, Wells’s conception of a proto world welfare state transposes Victorian practices of local poverty reliefs onto a global space. Contextually, one controversy in particular that dates Wells’s proposal of global welfare was the social inquiries separately conducted by two groups, respectively led by members of Charity Organization and socialist Fabians. Rising dissatisfaction with the New Poor Law was followed by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress in 1905. The concern of striking a delicate balance between how to prevent a depletion of local resources in social aids and how to maintain social security in areas of migratory populations continued to haunt reform-minded intellectuals in the very early twentieth century. In the novel, however, the Owner of the Voice alludes to the Victorian practices of the workhouse, again, a vital measure predominantly foregrounded in the New Poor Law, to remind the reader that Wells’s pseudo-welfare policies seek to address what the project of the Victorian social reforms failed to do. Extremely discontented with Fabians’ attempt of keeping their deliberations within the limit of an urban locale, in response Wells pitches in a new direction, pushing the old practices onto a global scale. Seen in the light of global migration, priorities would change completely and the legitimization of social aids cannot be derived locally and limited by local resources. When atomized in a world of migration, each individual is given a minimum protection everywhere he or she goes: “It will insist upon every citizen being properly housed, well nourished, and in good health, reasonably clean and clothed healthily, and upon that insistence its labour laws will be founded” (138). Thus, Wells practically makes social aids “portable,” so to speak, to an individual, who is always free to roam the earth. The right to social reliefs is similar to that to property: “he would receive as a shareholder in the common enterprise and not with any insult of charity” (141).

The significance of Wells’s reengineering of Victorian social aids is hardly exhausted by readers of *A Modern Utopia* to the best of my knowledge. One might suppose that Wells shows a strong collectivist outlook in the proposal of the world state welfare, but it could be argued otherwise. Insisting on providing

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<sup>19</sup> Robertson defines “relativization as the consequence of radical changed perspectives in which “globalization proceeds, challenges are “increasingly presented to the stability of particular perspectives on, and collective and individual participation in, the overall globalization process” (29).

anyone anywhere some basic cares, Wells comes very close to a discourse of human rights, an individual's inalienable claims to the humanity at large. And in this sense one can contend that Wells's social cares work for the cause of individualism instead and later in his life Wells became one of the first initiators of the human rights discourse during the twentieth century, and his proposal merged into the version eventually endorsed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations in 1948.<sup>20,21</sup>

Third, Wells's discussions on public health, including the environmental hygiene and mild population control, are variations of the Victorian models of the said measures. To begin with, the improvement of Victorian public hygiene is represented mostly via the Samurai double's reflection on social changes and his own social role. In the dialogue with the Owner of the Voice, the better double jubilantly declares, "Our hygiene and regimen are rapidly pushing back old age and death, and keeping men hale and hearty to eighty and more" (285). In fact, the doppelganger of the protagonist simply reiterates both the history and the prospect of hygiene reforms in the nineteenth century. For instance, when the utopian self explains utopians are vegetarians because they want to do away with hygienic problems associated with "slaughter-houses" (286), he effectively alludes to the history of moving cattle markets and slaughter-houses from the center of the city in the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> As if very much content with the progress of public hygiene improvement, the Samurai double turns away from public hygiene issues and takes on instead the task of devising a better scheme of imprisonment to address current complaints against the measure of extreme insulation (278).

Compared with the matter of public hygiene, Wells spends much more space on pseudo-eugenic policies. As a work that emerged at the turn of the century, proposals regarding population control were inevitably entwined with the contemporary discourse of eugenics. Although overlapping with some eugenic claims of birth control, Wells's preventionism is in essence different from the kind of eugenics Francis Galton advertised around the turn of the century (211). The idea of burden invites Wells to evoke key concerns that launched Victorian social reforms chiefly led by Chadwick. Wells seeks control of birth

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<sup>20</sup> Wells used all of his personal influences, gave lectures and wrote editorials to promote a draft of human rights declaration. In early 1940 he published the draft in a book entitled *The Rights of Man or What Are We Fighting For?*

<sup>21</sup> Wells's change of Victorian practices is of significance as an antecedent that corresponds to a sharp turn of attention to human rights issues in the early twenty-first century when migration moves unprecedented amount of people out of their habitats in which they grow up.

<sup>22</sup> Please read Patrick Joyce's discussion "The Blood of the City" (76-93).

for fear that children might claim social aids. That is, Wells considers it appropriate to conduct birth control to alleviate burdens of the society in general. Wells in this instance seeks to steer a middle path between individual freedom and interventionism. The utopians entertain substantial hope for self-motivated improvement: “people will exercise foresight and self-restraint to escape even the possibilities of hardship and discomfort” (185). However, forceful measures are proposed to prevent reproductive burdens. For instance, couples of ill health or inadequate wages are not qualified for marriage. One should add that Wells’s judgment of the women question is deeply entangled in or even subsidiary to his deliberation of “reproductive competition” (135). A case in point is that childbearing and rearing are regarded as “a service done” “to the whole community” (190).<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Wells’s forging of a Samurai class is, in spite of its foreign branding, no more than a continued thought on a British question of social trusteeship, starting from social reforms of Chadwick and further theorized by Stuart Mill,<sup>24</sup> in which “the intention to develop has been framed by trusteeship” (Cowen and Shenton 57). Wells persists in dwelling on cultivation and qualifications of trustees of the society. Among all of his utopian proposals, the formation of a global elite force for ruling over others is the most misunderstood, perhaps because of the militant overtone of the allusion to Japanese swordsmen and the historical associations of such an order with fascist regimes in the history of WWII.<sup>25</sup> However, the chapter on the class of “voluntary nobility” discusses much less the institutional roles over others than the cultivation of youths to be trustees of the global society. Wells places great weight on values of inventiveness and exercises of detachment. The Samurai recruits affiliates mainly from the top category of the four classes of the society, the poetic, the kinetic, the Dull and the Base (which we could roughly translate into the creative, the executive, and the common). The class divisions are flexible since it is said that such a perceived social order is merely a classification to an end (270). As with Stuart Mill, Wells values individuality and creativity but more than Mill Wells would advance what the cliché of today would dub as “institutional incentives of creativity”: “a great variety of devices by which poetic men and women

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<sup>23</sup> Again, Wells may sound very much like a socialist, valuing the community over an individual. In fact, I would say he is much more a biologist than a socialist in this instance.

<sup>24</sup> Wells’s concern of education and global progress is long standing as one of his final works *The Open Conspiracy* shows.

<sup>25</sup> For a historical account of Wells’s reputation of his being “the authoritarian and racist” in the early 1930s, please read Philip Coupland’s “H. G. Wells’s ‘Liberal Fascism.’”

were given honour and enlarged freedoms” (275). In addition, the world state stipulates a routine practice of a solitary journey in the wild to promote a ruling member’s detachment from the immediate everyday life. The utopian double of the protagonist describes how in one star-gazing moment in the desert he was transported into an elevated conception of his self: “[o]ne becomes an ambassador of mankind to the outer world” (308).

We might recall here my early point on the social agency of intellectuals in urban governance. Sociologically speaking, Wells participated in the shared critique of capital by the class of professionals around the turn of the century, as described by Harold Perkin (*The Rise of the Professional Society* 159). Wells removes wealth from being an indispensable qualification of the voluntary nobility and regards social classifications based upon land or capital as “accidental categories” (265). Furthermore, an individual is required to take “a vow of moderate poverty” upon entering the order of Samurai and denies this membership to be a channel of reaping profit (288). In these ways, Wells virtually takes over the governorship of the society from the wealthy to be given to the educated as trustees. One might speculate, nevertheless, that Wells dodges an ensuing problem of whether to pronounce the professional class to be the only qualified. It is said that utopians do not enforce an original rule that a member should be one with the training of “a Technique” (282). Professional training becomes an undecided quality presumably because it might imply a denial of membership to manual workers. Wells chooses to anchor the appeal of the Samurai class on the Victorian value of character building; a guardian of the society is one who possesses “a certain steadiness of purpose, a certain self-control and submission” (281). In this case, one can trace an emerging struggle by the professionals to grasp the legitimacy of being trustees of the society in general.

In *A Modern Utopia* Wells rescales the Victorian urban governance to be applied to the entirety of the globe. He believes the cosmopolis could naturally stem from globalized technologies of liberal governance. The Owner of the Voice once challenges the audience with a rhetorical question: “Utopia has sound sanitary laws, sound social laws, sound economic laws; what harm are these people [of different racial or ethnic backgrounds] going to do?” (339). I would like to bring to the fore the central double in the novel. Critics observe the doubling of individual identities in this work, but I contend this doubling of the major character is just a secondary feature, merely a derivative effect of the major kind of doubling, that of the social environments: the dominating double of this utopia writing is the globe as the city and the geographical city mirroring the globe in its flows of people.

### ***An Imaginary of Classical Globalization: London as a Wellsian Cosmopolis***

The creative attempts of H. G. Wells's utopian writing express a cosmopolitan imaginary of classical globalization. In what follows I bring up two major kinds of social relationship privileged in *A Modern Utopia*, a conception of global exchange, and a forging of the city as the networking center of global people flows, to portray this social imaginary.

First of all, the Wellsian utopia is intrinsically in sync with the ideal of classical globalization controlled by the gold standard. At first sight, Wells seems to propose to eradicate the gold standard, the underpinning of classical globalization. The idea of flows is so strong that even trading itself is considered a sign of barriers. Wells would like to remove gold from the circuit of global exchanges because he considers a representation of flows cannot be rendered onto a material, believing that globalization should be subject to the material fluctuations as one finds in gold (75). In fact, except the speculations resulted from trading, he completely accepts what the gold standard embodies: "it [gold] is the water of the body social, it distributes and receives, and renders growth and assimilation and movement and recovery possible" (73). Therefore, the Owner of the Voice proposes an alternative: this world is to be regulated by a standard measured by units of energy, supposedly better than the gold standard for its immaterial and readily transferrable quality.

In this utopia of global flows emerges a mega-city-centered geography. The binary opposition between the city and nature has been buttressed by the preferred Schillerian prioritization of art over nature. On the one hand, nature means raw materials and object of sensory experiences, from which one should cultivate some distance in activities of aesthetic imagination. It is no wonder that in the chapter on the nature of the utopia the Owner of the Voice does not want to listen to a defense of undeveloped nature by a utopian character he comes across. The apology of nature is taken to be "overbearing" to the point of being idiosyncratic. Unlike the Owner of the Voice, the Botanist, again, the allegorized image of a "naturalist," can engage in a conversation with the garrulous utopian, and their talk quickly turns to the Botanist's favorite subject, his lost love. The Owner of the Voice cannot hold his contempt of the pettiness of this topic in comparison with imagination and declares, "I can't attempt to explain these vivid spots and blind spots in the imaginations of sane men; there they are!" (124).

While the nature is associated with an undesirable lingering in the raw state, the city epitomizes the accomplishments of inventive utopians. The new world

is dominated by cities, which reflect in urban networking capacity the flows of the people. In fact, an important device of the setting in *A Modern Utopia* is the working of Paris in the background. Paris is said to house an index center that archives identity information of every individual of the globe. The processing of identity information in Paris allows the Owner of the Voice to locate his double so he can be transported to be with him and discuss the Samurai class. Beyond Paris, in the second half of the journey world city London is the topographical focus. We read a rewriting of London, reversed from a location of seamy corners to a place full of light, where flows of people daily visit and the institutes within have been busily gathering knowledge. Utopian London “designed by the artist-engineer[s],” sits at the apex of creative efforts of the humankind (Hillegas, *A Modern Utopia* xxii). The Owner of the Voice amazes at the wonders of buildings, which “will have flung great arches and domes of glass above the wider spaces of the town, the slender beauty of the perfect metal-work far overhead will be softened to a fair-like unsubstantiality by the mild London air” (emphasis mine 244). This new metropolis exults in the Victorian vogue enabled by the massive use of steel and glass. Moreover, the utopian buildings resemble the style of the glass dome of the Great Exhibition (1851), in which the frames of brick and mortar almost disappeared to allow sunlight to beam on the objects gathered from all over the world.

London also serves as a functional center of “social and intellectual exchange” (243). One obvious trait of the urban landscape is the plethora of hotels: “the cliffs of crowded hotels, the hotels that are still glowing with internal lights” (244). Another is the proliferation of such institutional centers as universities, libraries, and museums. These all are sites for the encyclopedic knowledge of the world (163). This belief in encyclopedic knowledge is derived from the Enlightenment hope that extensive cataloguing of objects can harness the global knowledge into one physical locale. At an early point of the book, the Owner of the Voice already proclaims with confidence, “Bacon’s visionary House of Salomon will be a thing realized, and it will be humming with this business” (60). In short, London remains a world city of the future because it is reshaped to mirror the globe in key aspect of its functions: the magnificence of the city then comes from its capacity of extensive reach to every corner of the globe as a center of travel and knowledge.

## Conclusion

My reading of *A Modern Utopia* would provoke, I hope, the important

question of how historically we have been conceiving of a world tightly connected, in which people flows are the major concern. H. G. Wells experimented to give an expression of what he considered the trends of the future. In the creative visions discussed in this paper, the expanding city of the late-nineteenth-century England was one of the ruling contexts. This artistic shaping of cosmopolitan imaginary points to the future as an urbanized one, so much so that any fantasy adventure of the world starts right where the urbanites stand. London as an imagined city in the Wellsian utopia substantiates what the Great Exhibition of 1851 stands for, the vision of light that takes imperialism for granted and celebrates in the urban locale concentration of commodities brought forth by global trading. Then, I would say to insist on this historical situating of cosmopolitan imaginary is to think of the city as a persistently dominant form of contemporary global visions.

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## 維多利亞的都市治理與現代世界主義 想像：論威爾斯的《現代烏托邦》

### 摘要

本文以威爾斯的作品《現代烏托邦》為例，思考英國二十世紀之交現代世界主義想像型塑的歷史。分析書中的未來想像曲折呈現了作者寫作的現代性條件，探討小說如何轉換維多利亞都市治理眾民的政治技巧為全球規模的未來世界，進而闡述現代世界主義在都市治理的成功經驗與全球化想像兩者互相反饋、彼此加強的過程中奠基成型。

本文首先說明當時西歐古典經濟全球化與英國自由主義式的都市治理的歷史促成威爾斯寫作的情境。接著分析《現代烏托邦》以席勒式的美學觀建構情節，表達前述兩項歷史情境產生的共振共鳴，藉此具體為現代世界主義想像發聲。尤其值得注意的是，在威爾斯的未來世界中，歷史上的西歐大都會如巴黎與倫敦仍扮演核心角色，後者更是作品後半部著墨的重心。就某種程度而言，威爾斯的烏托邦再現了1851年倫敦博覽會的象徵意義，對大英帝國的權力施展存而不論，並推崇全球貿易帶來商品集中都市的榮景。最後，透過詮釋威爾斯的烏托邦書寫，本文試圖提出批判性的發問，城市的歷史究竟如何左右當代全球化的想像？

**關鍵字：**現代世界主義想像，威爾斯 (H. G. Wells)，《現代烏托邦》，古典經濟全球化，自由主義式的都市治理，席勒 (Friedrich Schiller)