The Late Qing’s Other Utopias:
China’s Science-Fictional Imagination, 1900-1910

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Abstract
This research paper examines the genesis and mechanism of China’s imagination of the future at the turn of the 20th century, a time when the country’s current socio-political reality was seen as being in many ways abominable, while the future was seen as a utopian dreamland of possibility and hope. An analysis of Wu Jianren’s the late Qing fiction The New Story of the Stone (1905), especially its second half which depicts the future China as a “Civilized Realm” (文明境界), shows the influence on the young Chinese writers of contemporary Western science fiction and (especially) utopian fiction. It also shows that these late Qing writers wanted to portray their imagined China of the future as being “better” than the contemporary West (and also future West of Western utopian narratives) inasmuch as it will be using (originally Western) technology in a manner which is fundamentally moral and spiritual, as befits China’s traditional culture. Here the key contrast is between, on the one hand, ancient (Confucian, Daoist) Chinese civilization, moral idealism and spirituality, and on the other hand (contemporary and future) Western barbarism, empiricism, materialism, pragmatism, a “non-humanism” which seems to ignore moral and spiritual life. The author points out that Wu Jianren (吳趼人)’s future Chinese Civilized Realm has turned Western technology (the X-ray machine) into a “spiritual technology” (the Moral Nature Inspection Lens) which justifies China’s own cultural and philosophical past while simultaneously placing this past in a distant future which seems to go even “beyond” the one imagined by Western writers. That is, finally China will be technologically superior to the West on account of its age-old moral and spiritual superiority.

Keywords
Late Qing China, science/utopian fiction, Wu Jianren, New Story of the Stone,
Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy, Nature Inspection Lens, Civilized Realm,
Confucianism, Moral Superiority
The past is what man should not have seen; the present is what man ought not to be; the future is what artists are.
—Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” 155

As Northrop Frye suggested, we do not know what the future will be like except by drawing an analogy with “what has come to us through tradition” (Frye 15). Following this line of thinking, all visions of a social future are “rooted in the past, socially conditioned and historically placed” (15). Thus conceived, Chinese literary tradition, nurtured by the powerful imaginations of China’s past, might be thought to have a structure basic to any Chinese narrative about future development. Since nobody has seen the future with his or her own eyes, the future is always “as if” it were something that one has already seen. In this sense, the discursive space of a future China is the relocation and retrofitting of China’s past.

The late Qing period was a time when China advanced glamorous futures which were represented, vivified in a variety of late Qing fictional artifacts. In the eyes of later generations, most of these artistic imaginings of a future society turned out to be invalid social alternatives. However, this kind of artistic imagination is not a matter of social engineering but rather of making analogical “as-ifs” that transfer our past experiences into anticipations of the future. The late Qing provides us an angle from which to look at the early modern Chinese imagination in terms other than those of social statistics and historiography.

In brief, this paper will examine the genesis and mechanisms of the late Qing imagination. From where did these “as-ifs” come from?—what were they?—how were they assembled? Through an analysis of a late Qing novel, The New Story of the Stone—especially its utopian second half—and of the short story “Travels in

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1 Written by Wu Jianren (吳趼人; 1866-1910). Wu became a journalist in Shanghai in the 1880’s and started publishing his novels in 1903. His other famous works include Jiuming qiyuan (九命奇冤 A Strange Case of Nine Murders), Tong shi (痛史 Annals of Sorrow), and Ershinian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang (二十年目睹之怪現狀 Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades), the latter was recognized as one of the greatest novels of late Qing China. The New Story of the Stone was serialized in the newspaper Nanfang Bao (南方報) in 1905 (8.21-11.29) as a “social fiction” (社會小說 Shehui xiaoshuo) under the penname “Old Youth” (老少年). In 1908 “Shanghai Reform Fiction Press” (上海改良小說社 Shanghai gailiang xiaoshuoshe) published this work in book form under Wu Jianren’s other penname, “Wo Fo Shan Ren” (我佛山人). This publication was illustrated, and entitled Illustrated The New Story of the Stone. It was labeled as a “fiction of ideals” (理想小說 Lixiang xiaoshuo). The citations of the work in this paper are based on the edition published: Zhongzhou Guji Chubanshe (中州古籍出版社) in 1986. In The New
Utopia,” I will explore the influence of Western utopian narrative and modern science fiction on Chinese imaginations, styles, and mythological frameworks. The revival of both utopian narrative and science fiction in the late-19th-century West gave China a way to embody in fictional narrative its own social issues. Dramatized in late Qing China, such Chinese texts inherited from the modern West the internal tensions between the industrial and the social, but not without Chinese discursive renovations.

Thus, for instance, in the imagined utopia of The New Story of the Stone, Chinese scientific and technological superiority is especially linked to China’s moral superiority. The narrative seems to suggest that morality and civilized standards come with scientific development. The truly civilized society, after all, should be both technologically and ethically advanced. This morally loaded scientific discourse—where the moral weight (as opposed e.g. to scientific or metaphysical weight) seems typically Chinese (or East Asian) from a Western point of view—is then established through a fantastic plot that retroactively gives Chinese morality a scientific signification. Here I will especially emphasize the novel’s “Human Nature Inspection Lens” (性質測驗鏡), a scientific tool for measuring morality. For in a way, late Qing science fiction as a genre is also a discursive “lens” with a unique capacity for “seeing” history and ideology.

The importance of representing the future in late Qing Chinese fiction can be explored in many ways. David Derwei Wang analyzes this construction of the future in the late Qing period through what he calls “the future perfect mode.” In this mode of late Qing writing—started by Liang Qichao (梁啓超)—a “leap of time” allows the author to deal not with what may happen in the years to come but with what will have happened (Wang 282, 310).² Wang—using a progressive analytical dynamic of “releasing” the “repressed modernities”—cogently points out how the late Qing representational reforms allowed a “migration” of narrative modes, generic traits, and emotive registers. Especially, he shows how “the future perfect” mode betrayed the Chinese sense of belatedly entering the modern world. Such a narrative arrangement predetermined China’s imaginary future as a replica of Western nations’ present.

Story of the Stone (新石頭記), the young hero Baoyu (寶玉 precious jade)—the incarnation of a lofty pre-historic rock—is resurrected from Cao Xueqin’s (曹雪芹) classic novel Dream of the Red Chamber (紅樓夢 Honglou Meng) (a.k.a. Shitou Ji; 石頭記 The Story of the Stone).

² See Wang’s article “Translating Modernity”. See also Chapter 5, “Confused Horizons: Science Fantasy” in David Wang’s Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911. Of course, Western utopian novelists like Bellamy have also used this future-perfect mode.
Although the Chinese thereby inadvertently sentenced themselves to being forever latecomers, my perspective here is retrospective rather than progressive or developmental. The patina of the past, to be sure, lies thick on the Chinese imagination of the future. I chose *The New Story of the Stone* as an exemplary text not in order to expand upon David Wang’s analysis but to “discover” in the late Qing imagination the latent patrimony of the past. Instead of discussing how Chinese modernities were “repressed” after the time of these modern fictional works, I try to show how fully these narratives were immersed in traditional imaginations which will continue to be at work in any conception of a Chinese future.

*The New Story of the Stone*, as a work of science fiction and a utopian narrative, requires this fictionality in order to vivify or bring to life a “future science.” Yet its fictionality is tempered by a grounding in current social concerns, and is structured in traditional imaginative patterns which assimilate but do not surrender to Western generic conventions. In the West, science fiction as a genre emerged at the end of the industrial revolution in the late 19th century. Germinating in already-advanced industrial nations such as Britain, France, and the United States, Western science fiction employed a wide range of literary expressive forms, images and themes, from imaginary machines to the dimming of liberal horizons and the catastrophe of mass-culture technological regimes.

More broadly, the history of this genre incorporated evolving social attitudes toward the role of science and technology, attitudes not limited to the West. However, since the birth of science fiction in the late Qing preceded the actual advent of science in China, the late Qing utopian imagination echoed traditional mythology rather than primarily expressing the anxiety of advanced technological societies in post-World-War-II Western Europe and America. Keeping this observation in mind—for the purpose of engaging in a productive textual analysis—I will actually be closer to the sort of traditional myth criticism used by Northrop Frye than to e.g. Fredric Jameson’s oft-discussed utopian theoretical discourse. Jameson’s cognitive mapping of the postindustrial utopia is, after all, very different from that of the turn-of-the-century Chinese authors.

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3. This is further elaborated in his book, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911*.

4. Jameson’s major works on this theme include *Seeds of Time* and *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, to name just two.
In *The New Story of the Stone*, the young hero Baoyu (precious jade)—the incarnation of a lofty pre-historic rock—is resurrected from Cao Xueqin’s classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (a.k.a. *The Story of the Stone*). In the last chapter of *The Story of the Stone*, after bidding farewell to his father, Baoyu disappears into a mythical land. But this mysterious ending does not decisively end the stone-cum-hero Baoyu’s life, even in the original 18th-century novel. In *The New Story of the Stone*, which was written in 1905, Baoyu’s peaceful meditation is disturbed when he suddenly remembers his failed mission, his failed attempt to fix the fractured Tian-sky or Tian-heaven. As a result, he cannot stay in the stagnant mythical realm any longer, and he embarks on a journey which leads him to Shanghai, a semi-colonial metropolis in pre-industrial China. The journey symbolizes an ambivalent search for “modern” China.

The first half of *The New Story of the Stone* relates the resurrected Baoyu’s disappointing, dystopian adventures in the late Qing society. He encounters a race of humans that is degenerating along with their society. The novel’s second part transports him into an imaginary utopian future called the “Civilized Realm” (文明境界). Appropriately, the portal to this utopia is located somewhere close to Confucius’ hometown in Shandong province. The new, utopian adventure starts from Chapter 21. Baoyu—having narrowly escaped a political murder—is taking an excursion to Northern China. Ironically, at Qufu, (曲阜) Confucius’ hometown, he is robbed twice during the night. Being helpless and lost, Baoyu roams the main road from dark until daybreak. At the precise point where the sun rises Baoyu sees a high memorial arch with the inscription “Civilized Realm.” A gentleman with the name “Old Youth” greets him. After Baoyu passes the inspection of his “nature” at a border office, Old Youth becomes his companion on a tour of the territory.

Baoyu now finds this Civilized Realm to be in every respect superior to both a decaying China and an aggressive West, which the citizens of this utopia call the “Barbarian Realm” (野蠻境界) and the “Falsely Civilized States” (假文明國), respectively. The Civilized Realm imaginatively fulfills the late Qing dream of not only equaling but surpassing Western technology. For instance, at a hospital Baoyu

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5 The last chapter of the 120-chapter edition, with the last 40 chapters written by Gao E (高鶚; ?1738-?1815).
sees a complete set of medical lenses whose powers go well beyond those of Western photography and X-rays combined, because the lenses not only can visualize the patient’s bones, but can also visualize his or her marrow, blood, sinews, and internal organs. Moreover, the Navy operates an impressive submarine fleet that can fire a “silent electric cannon” (無聲電炮) and maintain underwater communication via wireless telephone. Under the ground there is an extensive network of subway trains.

On top of this amazing technology we also have a traditionally Confucian moral order, the true governing power. Its “civilized authoritarianism” (文明專制) is thought to be the most advanced political system in the world, far superior to Western “falsely civilized” values. Just as the name “Old Youth” is an oxymoron, the grafting of the latest technology onto an ancient Confucian morality is not without its tensions. This represents the grafting of two genres—science fiction and utopian narrative—in order to satisfy late-Qing Chinese social desires. To more precisely specify this “state,” and perhaps also this genre, we might say it is the fictive mapping onto a perfect social system of a facilitating technological prosthesis.

Science fiction, after all, is not only theoretical, not only the presentation of (real and imagined, present and future) scientific research; it is also practical, is itself a scientific practice. Both theory and practice are projects of discursive sense-making that are historically necessitated. To be sure, science fiction must be imaginative or fictional in order to bring to life a “future science,” but it is still grounded in, and necessitated by, contemporary social concerns. The preeminent science fiction writer of the turn of the 20th century in the West, Jules Verne, not only created this genre’s classic form but also charted the thematic capacities of scientific discourse.

The standard works of Western science fiction began to be translated into Chinese in substantial numbers from the mid-1800s. Towards the end of the century the gap between first publication and translation was in some cases only two or three years. Even so, Western science fiction’s range of social anxieties and technological conceptualizations needed to be placed by the Chinese in a different discursive space. The Chinese formulation of scientific discourse expressed severe doubts about the beneficent effects of science and technology, in line with European skepticism about progress but also in a typically Chinese way: the “bad” aspects of science and technology were believed to come from the untrustworthy West, while the “good” aspects were thought to be rooted in China’s long moral and humanistic tradition, its ancient “civilization.”
The arrival of Western science fiction also made it easier for the Chinese to be stimulated by their own traditional Chinese mythology. For instance, at one point in *The New Story of the Stone*, Baoyu—accompanied by Old Youth—undertakes a voyage of scientific exploration in a submarine equipped with a “driving engine,” “lighting engine,” “oxygen engine,” and “carbon dioxide recycling engine.” This vessel, clearly based on Captain Nemo’s *Nautilus* in Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, actually allows Baoyu and Old Youth to navigate traditional Chinese allusions, myths, and legends of the sea. While providing a colorful inventory of modern scientific neologisms, this submarine expedition is really a journey of return to China’s literary past, a means of discovering, capturing, and verifying each mythological specimen according to the records in ancient Chinese texts. The ultimate authority, therefore, is not Western knowledge but old Chinese sense-making discourses, preserved in such works as *The Classic of Waters* (**水經** Shui Jing) and *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (**山海經** Shanhai Jing). This episode then becomes a discursive practice of validating traditional Chinese epistemology, an imaginative Chinese displacement of the narrative motif of Western maritime exploration.

In fact, the key term “science” or *kexue* (科學) in late Qing science fiction texts is in itself a neologism; it replaces the earlier synonym *gezhi* (格致), which etymologically meant the neo-Confucian moralistic approach to investigating nature. The late Qing imaginative narrative about science also acquired a special classification—*kexue xiaoshuo* (科學小說)—a word-for-word translation of the Western phrase “science fiction.” At about the same time the term *wu tuo bang* (烏托邦), a transliteration of “Utopia,” had also become fashionable. Like the Westerners, the late Qing Chinese were fascinated with the concept of “utopias” no less than with science fiction. For clearly there is a natural connection, a generic affinity between science fiction and utopian (or dystopian) fiction. In Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, the *Nautilus* gives Nemo and his crew a peaceful exile from civilization, a kind of utopian environment where there is only

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6 This is the first book about Chinese water courses; in fact, there were two books by this name, one written in the Qin dynasty and the other in the late Han dynasty. Li Daoyuan’s commentary (**酈道元**; 6 AD) on the latter was more influential than the original book.

7 This is a largely fabulous, geographical and cultural account of the pre-Qin world as well as a collection of myths. The exact author of the book and the time it was written at is still undetermined. The consensus among modern Chinese scholars is that this book was not written at a single time by a single author, but rather by numerous people from the period of the Warring States to the beginning of the Han Dynasty. Therefore, this text is speculated as at least 2000 years old.
the pure quest for knowledge. Edward Bellamy’s socialist utopian novel *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888) also exemplifies the need for scientific and technological elements in utopian writing. In his utopia of the year 2000 Bellamy envisions the use of credit cards, the centralized distribution of goods, and “cable telephone” that brings classical music to people’s homes. Jameson claims that science and technology do not merely function as props in modern utopian texts: they are also intrinsic to this genre, because a utopian design is not far from being “a mechanism or even a kind of machine” (Jameson 56).

A suitable Chinese case in point is the Civilized Realm in *The New Story of the Stone*. This social utopia is made possible by its technologically advanced state. “Science fiction” and “utopia” are not the only late-Qing neologisms; the whole literary field of this period was in effect an experimental field of neologisms. Particularly in fiction and journalism, neologisms were experimented with and then popularized; this was a matching of modern experience with a new representational style. A “utopia” appeared in Yan Fu’s (嚴復) 1897 work *On the Evolution of Nature* (*天演論* Tianyan lun), the classic translation-adaptation of T.H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* into elegant literary Chinese. A full section of Yan Fu’s work is subtitled “wu tuo bang” (utopia), which does not correspond to Huxley’s original. Although the excitement about turn-of-the-century neologisms has long since been forgotten, traces of verbal experiments can still be retrieved from a multitude of texts published at this time.

Indeed the term “Utopia” (*wu tuo bang*) was used conspicuously in a late Qing fiction called “Travels in Utopia” (*烏托邦游記*), whose title suggests the mixture of travel writing—a classical Chinese literary genre—and Western-influenced utopian narrative. This unfinished serialization is narrated in the first person by a veteran world traveler and veteran reader of all the world’s travel novels. One day after reading *Utopia*, a novel written by the 16th-century British writer Thomas More (*佗麻斯摩爾*), the narrator comes to believe that this “Utopia” is a real place, and he is determined to tour it himself. His fascination is also a result of reading Huxley’s “On the Evolution of Nature”—apparently in Yan Fu’s Chinese rendition—with its “utopian” theme.

Having read such books, the narrator of “Travels in Utopia” thinks this real utopia must be the one last place on earth worth visiting. Then in a dream he arrives

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8 In fact, in this section Yan Fu talks about the colonization of a remote island, and the forming of an ideal society there.
9 This unfinished work was serialized in *The All-Story Monthly* (*月月小說*) 1.1 and 1.2 (1906), under the authorial name “Xiaoran Yusheng” (蕭然籲生).
at a remote island, literally a “Place of Nowhere” (何有鄉) in the middle of the ocean. He climbs up to the top of the highest mountain on this island and finds the inscription “Incredible Crags of the Great Fable Mountains” (大荒山無稽崖)—this is the name of the spot where the narrative of *The Story of the Stone* begins—and a temple, the “Temple of Emptiness” (皆空寺). An old monk in the temple blames the narrator for not serving his motherland but instead wandering in foreign places. The narrator (“I”) excuses himself by saying that in his motherland, China, his compatriots are content to be either “slaves” or “slave’s slaves,” and that he had left that disappointing country to travel to foreign lands. Upon hearing this, the old monk says that he is also a disillusioned Chinese. Filled with sympathy, he gives the narrator three volumes of a manuscript he has written, asking him to take it to the editors of the Shanghai monthly magazine known as “The All-Story Monthly,” which in fact has published this serialized fiction entitled “Travels in Utopia.”

The manuscript, which has the same title as the work it appears in, is a first-person account of three travels to “utopia” by a person with the name Mr. “No-One,” the old monk’s former name. Very interestingly, not only does time travel here come into play but the narrative order of the three journeys through time reverses the actual temporal order. The first volume recounts the monk’s most recent journey to the era of “reform,” the second recounts his earlier journey to the era of “transition,” and the last recounts his earliest journey, which was to the era of “corruption.” Now the narrator opens volume one, the account of Mr. No-One’s most recent trip. The vehicle used for the monk’s time-travel is an aero-vessel (飛空艇) that looks very much like an early-20th-century ocean liner with five floors. The aero-vessel also contains a large theater called “Mini World” (小世界), an auditorium for speeches, a workshop for artifacts, and a library of novels collected from all over the world.

In fact, this collection of novels updates its global database automatically via electronic transmission whenever a new novel is published anywhere in the world. In the library all novels are ranked according to their quality: the higher its quality, the higher a novel is put on the shelves. Here the satire continues, for the worst novels turn out to be traditional Chinese fiction. They are so debased that they are not even displayed on shelves, but must be piled on the ground. “Mini World” is presenting a series of plays about the situation in a most despicable despotistic state (專制國), one which has lasted for four thousand years. On the stage the clown—acting as the monarch—is costumed in a dragon robe and leans on a crutch. In front of his feet, his officials are kowtowing like beasts (畜生). One play presents the hope that there are secret societies plotting to overturn this regime; however, we
won’t know if they will be successful until the next day’s performance. This series of dramas, embedded within the novel, clearly satirizes the emperor and alludes to the ongoing political struggle in late Qing China.

The aero-vessel has in fact departed from the early 20th century—the present—and arrived in a utopian future, and present-day social and political events in China are presented and ridiculed on stage in the “Mini World” theater, in a soap-opera serial style where the plot at the end of each episode is suspended until the beginning of the following one. Fiction was a genre emphasized by late Qing intellectuals due to its capacity for social realism and its efficacy as a political weapon, and on the stage of Mini-World the serialized dramatic narrative serves as an index to China’s developmental stages “in the past.” Furthermore, the dramas draw a connection between late Qing China’s deplorable political backwardness and its attachment to the supposed negative elements in traditional fiction.

Unfortunately, the serialized narrative embedded in “Travels in Utopia” abruptly stops at this point. It seems to the reader that the aero-vessel passage to the utopian future has been permanently detained in mid-air: the flight—both as time-travel and as narrative—is incomplete. Thus, Mr. No-One will forever wait for the next show to begin in Mini-World. As for the narrator-protagonist of “Travels in Utopia,” he will go on sitting on the “Incredible Crags of the Great Fable Mountains” on the island called “Place of Nowhere,” reading the manuscript. The name “Incredible Crags of the Great Fable Mountains” also has a textual link, as mentioned above, back to the grounding myth of The Story of the Stone and its sequels. It is precisely at these Crags that, in the original story, a redundant mythological rock begins its anthropomorphosis. The late Qing fictive imagination is here attaching the “fables” of Western utopian narrative to the discursive locus of China’s own “incredible crags.”

The late Qing desire for a utopian future was not entirely a new phenomenon. After all, traditional Chinese literary narratives were not lacking in archetypical utopian or dystopian visions. Perhaps the best-known example is the 4th century “Account of Peach Blossom Spring” (桃花源記),10 which describes an Edenic village that is permanently separated from the outside world and its social and political corruption. The classic presentations of such a utopian vision were rich and varied, ranging from medieval anecdotes of the supernatural and classical tales to

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10 This was written by Tao Qian (陶潛; 372-427 AD). In this text, a fisherman from Wuling accidentally discovers the Peach Blossom Spring, by following which he comes across a utopian community totally separated from the outside world. This story became a perennial inspiration to generations of Chinese poets and playwrights.
late imperial novels such as *Flowers in the Mirror* (*鏡花緣*)\(^{11}\) and the short tales in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (*聊齋志異*).\(^{12}\) However, these are more classical in style and form, as compared to the late Qing narratives with their modern social and political concerns, now expressed in the form of utopian visions. Some classical narratives and essays—both in China and the West—describe impossible, unreachable spaces, and may also have a fantastic or supernatural sense of time-space: for instance, one day in the utopian land might equal one year in ordinary time. Yet while classical utopias represent escape from a current polity, they do not invent futuristic social models. The latter strategy, often used, as we have seen, in late Qing utopian fiction, was inspired by the modern development of Western utopian narrative under the influence of authors like Thomas More, Charles Fourier, Edward Bellamy, and William Morris.

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In the late-19\(^{th}\)-century Western utopian narrative there was a spatio-temporal shift: rather than on remote islands, utopias now began to be set in the future, as typified by Bellamy’s *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888) and William Morris’s response in *News from Nowhere* (1890). Bellamy’s portrait of Boston society in 2000 was a tiny sampling of the whole world rather than an isolated community. While More and Bacon imagined their utopian societies to have been created by God or some benevolent legislator, later authors imagined that they were created by more or less ordinary people who joined together. The vision of the future guiding the creation of the utopia was a practical solution to historical errors. Great attention was now paid to the texture and feel of utopian life—the way people bring up their children and socialize, and their philosophy of life. Modern utopias made historical claims. “It is well worth sleeping a hundred years to learn what the right answer

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\(^{11}\) This was written by Li Ruzhen (李汝珍; 1763-1830). *Flowers in the Mirror* is a very complex novel combining an historical backdrop with a utopian imagination. It takes place during the Tang-Dynasty. Frustrated by the cruel reign of Empress Wu, who had usurped the throne in 684 AD, the novel’s protagonist Tang Ao (唐敖) decides to leave China and embarks on a voyage with his brother-in-law Lin Zhiyang (林之洋), a merchant, and an old sailor named Tuojokong (多九公). They visit several strange lands.

\(^{12}\) This is a collection of nearly five hundred tales written by Pu Songling (蒲松齡; 1640-1715) in Classical Chinese during the early Qing Dynasty. Most of the tales are narratives of the supernatural and the fantastic. Some of them contain elements of utopian/dystopian imagination, for example “The City of Ogres and The City under the Ocean” (*羅剎海市*), which presents two mirror images of the Chinese society: one is a dystopian City of Ogres in the satirical mode, the other is an ideal City under the Ocean.
was, if, indeed, you have found it yet” (Bellamy 61): this is the message Edward Bellamy wished to impart with his *Looking Backward*. He wanted the reader to “look forward” to the kind of socialism he had described, rather than just think that it was a good idea in theory.

Bellamy targeted 19th-century capitalism as the “antithesis” to his envisioned 21st century. His protagonist—the upper-middle-class Bostonian Mr. Julian West—fell into a coma in 1887 and then woke up in 2000 as if he had merely been sleeping “overnight.” The coma marks a temporal rupture and a break with the possibilities of normal physical reality; Bellamy’s contemporary reader thus loses his “bearings” and becomes cognitively susceptible to the author’s alternative social vision. In other words, the reader relies on the narrator, who condemns capitalist society and embraces Bellamy’s utopia. Moreover, this implied late-19th-century reader will easily become a part of the supposed future community because it has already followed the right historical path. Bellamy did not make his protagonist a detached, scholarly observer of the society in 2000; rather, he made him an ordinary, open-minded recipient of the socialist-utopian doctrine common in that year and place. The narrator-protagonist finds his host family, the Leete’s, and his new environment most trustworthy.

Darko Suvin remarks that “Bellamy had hit exactly the right note at a time of widespread search for alternatives to ruthless plutocracy” (Suvin 178). The popularization of utopian tales between 1888 and the First World War was a direct result of Bellamy’s influence (Suvin 178). In America alone there were over one hundred publications of this kind. If we read Bellamy in the context of late Qing Chinese literature, his narrative strategy—the protagonist’s jump into a not-too-remote future and the explication of social engineering through ample dialogues—may remind us of Wu Jianren’s *The New Story of the Stone*, although there is of course some difference between the plots.

To be sure, Bellamy’s bestseller came out at exactly the right time in China. The novel was translated into more than twenty languages; only three years after its original publication in 1888 there was a Chinese translation by the British missionary Timothy Richard. Entitled “A Brief Account of Looking Backward” (回頭看紀略), this was published in the Shanghai *Chinese Globe Magazine* (萬國公報) between December 1891 and April 1892, from issues 35-39. In 1894, Richard rearranged the text into a monologue entitled “Slumber over One Hundred Years” (百年一覺), and this version had a huge impact on the late Qing social
This was not only because Richard’s Chinese intellectual friends—Kang Youwei (康有為) and Liang Qichao—were preeminent cultural figures, but also because the new novelists were first reading foreign fiction in translation before they began to try to write in a similar fashion. A glimpse back at Wu Jianren’s *The New Story of the Stone* will illustrate the degree to which that novel drew directly from Bellamy’s work.

Thematically, Bellamy’s Boston in the year 2000 and Wu’s Civilized Realm are both embodiments of social perfection, yet their depictions are not the same. The marvels of the future Boston are primarily institutional achievements that are more easily to be explicated than visualized, whereas the submarines and flying machines of the Civilized Realm are amazing to the eye. Bellamy made his first-person narrator West a sympathetic listener, while Wu Jianren’s third-person hero Baoyu functions more as an eyewitness. Thus while Julian West exhibits to the reader his full interiority, Baoyu is a man of action, an explorer who responds directly to what he sees in each scene of the novel. But it is mainly the two novels generic differences that make a systematic comparison difficult. After all, the second half of *The New Story of the Stone* is science fiction which sometimes tries to validate Chinese moral superiority via classical Confucian tenets, while *Looking Backward* is essentially a socialist variation on the Christian gospels. In terms of cultural encoding, *The New Story of the Stone* belongs to a quite different category, one which invites interpretations of its figurative language and allegorical plot, its social and cultural values and assumptions.

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When the novel becomes the dominant genre, epistemology becomes the dominant discipline.

—Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 15

Despite the assorted technological marvels it predicts, the utopian vision in *The New Story of the Stone* culminates in Baoyu’s eventual homage to the Civilized Realm’s benevolent monarch, Dongfang Qiang (東方強), literally “Strength of the East.” This monarch divides the Realm into districts that are named after Chinese virtues such as Mercy (慈), Filiality (孝), Loyalty (忠), Benevolence (仁), and

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13 For further information, see Chen Ch‘i-yun 62-125. This has also been pointed out by recent scholars such as Theodore Huters in his book *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* and Xiong Yuezhi (熊月之) in *The Westernization and the Late Qing Society* (西學東漸與晚淸社會).
Trustworthiness (信). He also makes his three sons and a daughter—Dongfang Ying (東方英; literally “Hero of the East” or “England of the East”), Dongfang De (東方德; “Virtue of the East” or “Germany of the East”), Dongfang Fa (東方法; “Law of the East” or “France of the East”) and Dongfang Mei (東方美; “Beauty of the East” or “America of the East”)—the administrators of state affairs. Seeing that the society has become perfect, the monarch retires to live in the District of “Benevolence.” As the appropriation of country names and moral labels suggests, the civilization of this Realm has a moral superiority which makes it in effect a world power. Even the Realm’s chemical weapon—which can anaesthetize the masses—is called a “benevolent special art” (仁術). While Western countries have forbidden the use of a chlorine gas cannon—as a military officer of the Civilized Realm explains—they use it anyway with hypocritical excuses. In contrast, the Chinese “benevolent special art” only renders the enemy inactive for a limited period of time.

In the Chinese novel, virtually every time a certain technological wonder is expounded, the West’s lack of this invention and thus its relative backwardness is ridiculed. This is of course the reverse of the actual situation in late Qing China, which did not yet have such new and amazing Western inventions as the airplane, submarine, and subway train. However, in the Civilized Realm people seize every opportunity to discourse on Western barbarity, which to them means the lack of moral cultivation. While one might be tempted to explain this mainly as China’s attempt to deal with its own inferiority complex vis-à-vis the West when it came to science and technology, we must bear in mind the fact that Wu Jianren is here giving his futuristic “technology” an allegorical meaning, a moral and spiritual quality, as if to say that this (rather than Western, purely “material” technology) is what the world really needs.

Thus we have the “Human Nature Inspection Lens” as an example of the Civilized Realm’s “more advanced science.” This lens can detect a person’s “nature”—it can see whether he is “civilized” or “barbaric” by looking inside his body. Of course, the real scientific basis for this fantasy was Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen’s discovery and application of the X-ray in medical science in 1895, but in Wu Jianren’s narrative the “lens” is a Chinese invention. The episode of the lens begins when Baoyu first enters the border area, where a “Human Nature Inspection Room”—annexed to the border hostel—is used by a doctor to “inspect” the visitor’s “nature.” While Baoyu and Old Youth are chatting in the hostel, the doctor finishes

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14 In 1896, only one year after Röntgen’s discovery, Liang Qichao had introduced the X-ray to the Chinese. In the same year Tan Sitong (譚嗣同) also described X-ray photos in his writing.
and reports that this new guest’s nature is “clear and bright” (晶瑩), which suggests that Baoyu is civilized enough to be admitted into the Civilized Realm.15

Baoyu then says, “I used to think that ‘human nature’ is an incorporeal thing. If you want to inspect ‘nature,’ it should be investigated through daily reflection. How can it be inspected by using a lens?” (Wu 168) Old Youth replies in a long scientific passage:

After the inception of science, what thing can not be subject to experimental verification? Take air for example. If you inspect it carefully, you can find myriads of things contained in it. The half-barbaric and half-enlightened people usually call all these things by the appellation ‘air.’ How can this mindset be sufficient? If air is shapeless and cannot be experimentally verified, how come the European and American acousticians can identify sound waves? However, although the acousticians can detect sound waves, the sound wave diagrams they make are only illustrations. The science doctors in our land will let you see the things with your own eyes every time they inspect something. Take the inspection of human nature for instance. This is achieved through a lens which was made by a prestigious medical doctor. The chemically-made glass is processed through several treatments by special liquid compounds. When one inspects the human body through it, his vision will bypass the blood, the muscle, the bones, and the sinews. The inspector can only see the inspectee’s nature. If the inspectee’s nature is civilized, it looks clear and bright like ice and snow. If his nature is barbaric, it is as turbid as smoke. You can evaluate the degree of barbarity by examining the density of the smoke. If it is as pitch-black as ink, it will be impossible to improve that person’s nature. (Wu 168)

15 Of course, one might see a danger in this sort of inner-self inspection by external “authorities,” a praxis which may seem an extension of the Foucauldian panopticon—and/or of the Althusserian “hailing” and “subjecting” ideological state apparatus—into the inner body or “inner subject.” Such a view would indeed reinforce a typically Western (to some degree distorted) perspective on Chinese society and culture. This view may be kept in mind throughout the following discussion, though the author’s point will be that a truly moral-spiritual view is also a true view on a level above that of merely scientific-material truth.

16 “科學發明以來, 何事何物不可測驗! 即如空氣之中, 精細測驗起來, 中藏萬有。野蠻半開通之流, 動輒以空氣二字, 一總包括在內, 如何使得? 哲學家, 不能測驗, 何以勸美哲學家, 尚能測出聲浪來? 不過哲學雖然測出聲浪, 但所論聲浪圖, 都是寫意為之。”
This seemingly empirical, analytic science derives from the practice, in traditional Chinese fiction, of telling good persons from bad persons. Old Youth continues:

Most of the ancient novels are loaded with demons and spirits. When those books talk about good and evil, they say that there is a red aura several feet high on top of a good man’s head, and there is dark air surrounding a bad man’s head. It is also said that people have either an air of vigor or an air of decay, and these airs cannot be seen by ordinary eyes but only through supernatural means. But those authors of novels in the old days couldn’t become demons and spirits themselves, so how could they know? It was just their belief. But since there is a belief, it’s possible that it will be proven. As a result, that medical doctor in our country used all of his ability to invent this lens. (Wu 169)

Old Youth’s reference to the apparently supernatural phenomena presented in traditional fiction in fact points to the ancient Confucian belief that people have a moral nature or quality that is spiritual, that is, beyond the reach of sense perception, and furthermore that this moral nature can somehow be seen or known by non-physical means. Therefore Confucius exclaimed: “Look to how it is. Observe from what it comes. Examine where it is that he feels at ease. How can he remain hidden? How can he remain hidden?” (論語 Analects 2:10). This nature-inspection lens is an extension of the Confucian moral eye. The scientific discourse about its optical “mechanism” validates rather than dismisses “observation” of moral qualities that can be visualized as bright or turbid gases. The lens thus serves as the trope of a scientific investigation that transforms intuition into rational verification.
This “fathoming” power of this lens also has a variety of medical applications in the Civilized Realm’s hospitals, which themselves have many lens-equipped devices that look like cameras with tripods. The late Qing Chinese were familiar with photography in their cities, especially in the treaty port of Shanghai. Western photography had become a symbol of Western science since the 1840s through the activities of entrepreneurs, diplomats, and missionaries. Following the lead of foreign photographic studios, Chinese photographic studios began to emerge.\(^{19}\) The Chinese public’s interest in this novel science as well as art was reflected in various publications, for example the Shanghai *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (點石齋畫報).\(^{20}\) Therefore, it was only natural that Wu Jianren would imagine the Civilized Realm’s Human Nature Inspection device as a kind of super-camera. It was for him also an imaginative extension of the newly-invented X-ray machine, which was after all an enhancement of the camera which let it see beneath the body’s surface and into the inner body. Of course, the actual (Western) X-ray could only see the *physical* (not the moral or spiritual) inner body, whereas Wu’s X-ray-like lens could see the inner essence. Indeed Wu’s Human Nature Inspection Lens was accompanied by a “Bone Inspection Lens” through which Baoyu could see the human body become a “snow-white skeleton,” and a “Marrow Inspection Lens” which could see through the bones themselves to the marrow inside, which is after all (figuratively or allegorically speaking) our true inner essence. Other lenses in the doctor’s Human Nature Inspection Room could detect blood circulation, tendons, and internal organs.

In his reading of Thomas Mann’s 1920’s novel *Magic Mountain*, Peter Brooks notes that “moment of great significance” (Brooks 263) when Hans Castorp visits the X-ray room for the first time. Castorp views Joachim’s body through a “lighted window” that displays the “empty skeleton,” and is amazed to see that Joachim’s “honor-loving heart” looks something like a “swimming jelly-fish.” Here Brooks wonders “if this is the first moment in literature that the heart is viewed in an X-ray” (Brooks 263). He aptly points out that at this point, Mann “uses the relatively new technology to rewrite an age-old trope of the heart as the seat of emotions and character” (Brooks 264). As the juxtaposition of “swimming jelly-fish” and “honor-loving” makes plain, this human heart is being viewed simultaneously as “a piece of anatomy” and “a moral concept.” Like Mann, Wu Jianren combines “physiology and poetry” to illuminate the unseen by analogically projecting from a pattern of

\(^{19}\) See Hu and Ma.

\(^{20}\) The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* depicted a scene of photo-taking in one of its pages in 1884. See Chen, *The Pictorial Late Qing* (圖像晚清).*
symbols on the level of the visible (Brooks, 264). In both cases the optics is also a poetics, one which is instrumental in allowing a particular culture to see what it intends to see.

In fact, optical objects have long been employed metaphorically in traditional Chinese fiction, and not only in the context of Confucianism. The most important figure is no doubt the mirror, which was associated with that self-reflective quality by which one might see the unseen truth, the truth that evades the naked eye. In the evolution of Neo-Confucianism, proper observation of one’s own moral nature as with a self-inspecting lens was fused with the Buddhist image of the ideal empty (void) mind that reflects the whole world like an empty mirror. In the *Dream of the Red Chamber*—the original *Story of the Stone*—there is a mysterious “Mirror for the Romantic” (風月寶鑒 Fengyue Baojian) with two sides in “the Hall of Emptiness in the Land of Illusion” (太虛幻境 Taixu Huanjing). Its front side or face makes clearly visible one’s erotic desires, while its back side or face presents a skull to serve (as in European Renaissance painting) as moral admonition.

In Chinese, the character “jing” (鏡) stands for both the mirror, an optical surface that reflects images into the human eye, and the lens, a transparent optical surface that mediates between the human eye and the object focused on by refracting the light reflected from the surface of the object. Since both things have the same name in Chinese, the more modern connotations of the lens—that scientific instrument and optical novelty newly-imported from the West—are still congruent with the classical symbolism of the mirror. Thus the conflated jing-trope unites these two senses of ancient Chinese mirror and modern Western lens; jing integrates China’s traditional past and (at the turn of the 20th century starting-to-be-predicted) scientific future into a unified optical epistemology, applied by Old Youth to justify the traditional discourse, in Chinese fiction, of the “red aura” (紅光) or “dark air” (黑氣) on top of a good or bad man’s head. That is, Old Youth’s pre-scientific (“supernatural”) imagining of the red aura and dark air which express a moral meaning can in a sense be validated by a creative scientific discourse; or, to take it the other way, the modern scientific discourse helps to validate a moral discourse that might otherwise seem purely metaphysical, supernatural or even magical. The utopian-philosophical, utopian-scientific and utopian-fantastic narrative gives a validity to the imaginative space of the ancient Chinese world, for it sees this world as being indispensable in and to the new (Western) scientific discourse. Conversely, the scientific discourse is assimilated as an organic component of the ancient ethical-metaphysical discourse about morality and human nature. In the 18th-century novel *Dream of the Red*
Chamber (the original Story of the Stone), Baoyu as the incarnation of a piece of supernatural jade is praised as having a very pure nature. This pure nature, in its moral sense, is echoed in the scientific sense of “purity” that comes into play, in Wu Jianren’s sequel, in the context of the Human Nature Inspection Lens. The pristine purity of the surface of the stone, which like a crystal can reflect light, is of course also associated with jing as both (ancient) mirror and (modern, turn-of-the-20th-century) lens.

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Western “backwardness” or “barbarity” are fairly often mentioned in this as well as other fictional narratives of the period, where it is always defined in terms of a lack of concern for moral cultivation and a civilized way of life. Before the late Qing period, Chinese intellectuals would most likely have thought that the relatively underdeveloped or uncivilized state of Western morality, of human and social relations, of spirituality is a direct result of the West’s over-emphasis on science and technology. Thus in the late Qing, toward the end of the 19th century, when Chinese novelists themselves started to employ scientific themes and even science-based plots in their work, they were in effect using the Westerners’ own science against them—by showing that there was another, more moral and spiritual way of looking at science and technology, that science and technology had a more moral and spiritual meaning than the West had thought possible.

In other words, China thought the West saw science as a purely “material” art or practice, a way of dealing solely with the physical, material world, which seemed to imply the view that there was after all only an essentially non-human, non-living material world. But this meant, from the Chinese perspective, that Western science was itself underdeveloped, uncivilized, and barbaric because it was limited to this world-view, failing to imagine that science was ultimately a spiritual practice or art which dealt with a world that was fundamentally moral and spiritual. As the use of the Human Nature Inspecting Lens in Wu Jianren’s Civilized Realm of the future makes clear, the narrative discourse of physiology and medical science in traditional China—that is, up to at least the end of the 19th century—had indeed been structured very differently from its Western counterpart. Even in the early 21st century it is generally believed that traditional Chinese medicine takes a more holistic approach to the living body—which is animated by the life-force known as chi, “air,”—and uses natural, organic medicines (e.g. herbs), whereas Western medicine takes an analytic, localized, atomistic (i.e. “non-living”) approach and
attacks the offending micro-organisms or toxins at a particular microscopic point with chemicals that are artificially produced in laboratories for just this purpose.

Hence in the following passage, Wu Jianren’s “doctor” mocks Western medical doctors and anatomists because they see the human body itself as a purely physical object, that is, as something non-human or minimally human, something already “dead”:

It is ridiculous that short-sighted people regard Western medicine as amazing, and want to follow it. They aren’t aware that Western medicine is stupid, far worse than ancient Chinese medicine. What’s more, the Westerners have never dreamed of these new inventions of ours. Although the Chinese had never practiced anatomy before, they at least know clearly the twelve channels of the body. The Westerners say that they need to dissect the body first, as only then can they claim to be objective. They don’t know that after a person’s death, his blood is congealed and his breath is gone. Even though you can dissect the body to examine the inside, you can get no more than the physical arrangement of the organs. You cannot see life itself in a corpse, even its color has changed. What after all can you get from an autopsy? It is pointless to perform an autopsy on a corpse. Even if you catch a living person and butcher him for examination, you still must know that while he is losing his breath, all his body functions stop; how then can you learn about his pathology now that he is dead? (Wu 185-86)²¹

Today few educated people in any country would deny the efficacy of autopsies, even if the one performing them is inevitably dealing only with “dead things” (dead tissues, organs, chemicals). Yet there is still something to be said for the Civilized Realm doctor’s point here. For one thing, non-Western, holistic, life-forced-based medical practices are (within limits) popular in the West, as are meditative and physical-exercise practices (yoga, tai chi 太極, etc.) which may well assume the presence of a life-energy or life-force like chi. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that our

²¹ “可笑世人鼠目寸光，見了西醫便稱奇道怪，又復見異思遷，不知西醫的呆笨，還不及中國古醫。西人解剖之術，中國古未有，而十二經脈各有明示；西人解剖過，便自以為實事求是。不知一般人死以後，血也凝了，氣也絕了，從使剖開了驗視，不過得了他的部位罷了。莫說不能見他的運動，就連他的顏色也變了，如何考驗得出來？況是剖死人，就捉一個活人來殺了去驗，也須知他一面斷氣，一面機關都停了，又從哪裏去考驗呢？”
rapidly-globalizing, specialized-science-based, ICT-driven world has, at the opening of the 21st century, many real and potential shortcomings, problems, confusions and outright dangers, most of them caused in one way or another by our own technology.

Still, the view that Westerners are purely materialistic with no morality or spirituality is obviously an exaggeration, as is the view that they are wild barbarians. Such views are also an expression of the strong anti-Western sentiment in late Qing China, that sentiment which is so clear in several of the narratives discussed above, including The New Story of the Stone, a sentiment which to some degree may have been justified. After all, earlier in the 19th century several Western powers had been occupying parts of China, and England had been selling opium to its people, profiting from their addiction. To some extent the anti-Western sentiment may also have been based on ignorance and/or a kind of inferiority complex, and to this degree it is of course a prejudice.

The common Chinese prejudice that Westerners are uncivilized barbarians is clearly expressed by the inhabitants of Wu’s Civilized Realm. In one passage of The New Story of the Stone we have the opinion that Westerners are basically low-class drunks who become wild when intoxicated and commit violent and immoral acts. Here Baoyu and his friends are savoring their (properly utopian and civilized) “no-drunk nectar” in the Naval Academy when the Admiral begins his talk:

The ancient people used wine to test people’s moral state. It is inevitable that after being drunk, people will disclose their true nature. . . . I have seen this verified with the people of barbarian countries. They pretend to be decent all the time, claiming that they are “civilized.” However, after they are drunk, they make trouble shamelessly, without any restraint. In such a state, they either refuse to pay the fare for their rickshaw or break into other people’s houses, even going so far as to steal things along the street. After all this craziness, they fall down on the street to sleep. Do not these behaviors reveal their barbaric nature? (Wu 254)22

22 “古人酒以觀德，凡人醉後，必露出本性……我曾經看見那野蠻國的人，平時傲然岸然，以文明自命；及至吃醉了酒，便顯出惡風邪的胡亂肇事，不是坐了車不給車費；便是胡亂闖入人家；甚至沿路搶東西；鬧到後來，便隨意在街上睡倒。這不是露盡了野蠻的本相麼?”

"The ancient people used wine to test people’s moral state. It is inevitable that after being drunk, people will disclose their true nature. . . . I have seen this verified with the people of barbarian countries. They pretend to be decent all the time, claiming that they are “civilized.” However, after they are drunk, they make trouble shamelessly, without any restraint. In such a state, they either refuse to pay the fare for their rickshaw or break into other people’s houses, even going so far as to steal things along the street. After all this craziness, they fall down on the street to sleep. Do not these behaviors reveal their barbaric nature? (Wu 254)"
And Baoyu agrees, recalling his experiences in the treaty port of Shanghai:

This is true. I had been living in Shanghai for a while, and had seen the criminal cases reported on newspapers. There is not a single account of the trouble made by a Chinese drunkard. In contrast, the concession police log shows that they oftentimes come across troublesome drunkards, who are all citizens from the “first class civilized countries.” Isn’t this weird? (254)²³

In another passage Old Youth expresses a view of Westerners which, in giving them a different rate of “evolution,” almost seems to make of them a different species:

China had been culturally cultivated from a very early time. In the prehistoric times of the three legendary kings and the five emperors, people were already cultivated. In the time of Emperor Wen and Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty, ceremonial observances and ritual music had been perfected. The only pity of China is its holding of the old ways and not changing. That is the reason why the evolution of the Chinese race has been retarded. The recently self-proclaimed “civilized countries,” on the other hand, were cultivated very late in history but evolved very fast. Since China was cultivated so early, the Chinese people have the built-in psyche of knowing customs and proprieties even before they are born. Although the evolution of the Chinese race is impeded, its inborn good nature will not lose. This explains the reason that Chinese people will not create trouble after they are drunk, . . . The less cultivated people, however, are full of the barbaric nature in their bodies. Although they evolve faster, they are barely disciplined by “morals.” Their reluctant obedience to the moral constraint has made them very uncomfortable. Once they get drunk, how can they not expose their true nature? Therefore, they are the type of ‘one person is drunk, one person will be in disorder; one hundred people are drunk, one hundred people will be in disorder.’

²³“正是。我在上海住了幾時，看見那報紙上載的公堂案，中國人酒醉鬧事的案子，是絕無僅有的。倒是捕房案，多有酒醉鬧事的，並且是第一等文明國人。這才奇怪呢。”
Someday, suppose a whole country is drunk, the whole country will surely be in disorder. (254-55)\(^{24}\)

The notion that Westerners might “evolve faster” is quite interesting, but not because it could really be true in Darwinian evolutionary (i.e. biological) terms. Rather, the most economically developed Western countries did, in recent centuries, in technological terms evolve earlier than did Japan (starting from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and again with World War II) or China (starting after World War II). But Old Youth’s point is that real “human development” is not technological—machines being something essentially barbarian in their non-human, non-living materiality—but rather ethical and spiritual. One could agree that there is some merit to his point, given the fact that we are very possibly destroying our planet through our technology, and that what we really need for world peace is universal morality, a pure human nature. But of course one could also argue that Old Youth’s “argument” is just a rationalization, a justification for China’s slower rate (at the time of the late Qing) of economic, technological and arguably also political “evolution.”

The late Qing Chinese idea that Westerners like to get drunk is also interesting if we think about another drug, opium. Perhaps (unconsciously at least) one reason late Qing Chinese thought wild, barbarian Westerners like to get drunk on alcohol is that it was British merchants who imported opium into China and managed to get many Chinese addicted to it, thus prospering all the more in their (drug-dealing) business. In the first half of *The New Story of the Stone*, the ne’er-do-well and gullible Xue Pan (薛蟠) is infatuated with the Boxers’ anti-foreign stand. One day, Xue Pan follows a local thug to pay a visit to a Boxer Master. The thug asks Xue Pan to wait for a while, because it is the time for the Master to enjoy his “Happiness and Longevity Paste” (福壽膏). Xue Pan inquires as to what the Paste is. The man replies that it is “like opium—but opium is imported from the foreigners—it is no

\(^{24}\) “……中國開化早，從三皇五帝時，已經開了文化；到了文武時，禮樂已經大備。獨可惜他守成不化，所以進化極遲；近今自稱文明國的，卻是開化的極遲，而又進化的機快。中國開化早，所以中國人從未出胎的先天時，先就有了知規矩，守禮法的神經。進化雖遲，他本來有的性質，是不消滅的。所以醉後不亂。……那進化遲的人，他滿身的性質，還是野蠻底子。雖然進化的快，不過是硬把‘道德’兩個字範圍著他，他勉強服從了這個範圍已是通身不得舒服。一旦吃醉了，焉有不露出來本性質之理呢？所以他們是一人醉，一人亂，百人醉，百人亂，有一天他們全國都醉了，還要全國亂呢。”
good to eat. The Happiness and Longevity Paste is made by our Chinese, and can increase your happiness and longevity. Therefore, it is thus named” (100).25

The contrast of this Happiness and Longevity Paste with opium, which is “imported from the foreigners” and therefore “no good to eat,” is striking. For one thing, opium was a (purely material) commodity dumped onto the Chinese by Westerners solely for the (very materialistic) purpose of making a profit for its sellers, and not at all for giving its Chinese users happiness or “enlightenment.” Of course, we will probably interpret the Boxers’ Paste as being basically the same substance as the foreigners’ “opium” but now given a different meaning (as well as name). Yet we also might say the Chinese Boxers have “appropriated” the foreigners’ opium here for their own (to a certain degree self-aggrandizing or myth-making) purposes, just as he Civilized Realm has appropriated Western science and technology and transformed them by giving them a powerful moral force, making them Chinese. And just as late Qing China appropriated from Western science-and-utopian fiction the perspective of the future, combining with its temporal mode of the “future perfect” or already-completed future—a future in which present-day dreams might be fulfilled—a mode of the present perfect, of those ancient traditions which still remain in place.

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25 “就同鴉片煙一般，不過鴉片煙是毛子帶來的，吃不得。福壽膏是咱們自己做的，吃了可以添福添壽，所以得了這個名兒。”


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[Received 13 March 2008; accepted 22 Aug. 2008; revised 4 Sept. 2008]