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Disturbing Reality and Narratives of Hope: Youth in Early Modern China's Utopian Dreams

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Abstract
This paper explores late Qing and early Republican Chinese intellectuals' construction of youth in utopian literature and thought. Utopianism, as a literary genre, was introduced to China at the end of the nineteenth century and spread among revolutionary elites as a way to reflect on an undesirable present, while projecting hope for an imaginary optimistic future. The younger generation, burdened with cultural symbolism as a possibility of progress in narratives of hope, became crucial in the utopian envisioning of a perfect China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the perspective of cultural history, this paper looks at turn-of-the-twentieth-century utopian novels and writings to argue early modern China's utopian dreams as transforming a nation's youth from protected children amidst traditional crisis heterotopias into hopeful agents in the wishful project of reshaping China into perfection. Chinese intellectuals associated youth with utopian power in saving the nation, seeing cultural reconstruction of youth as a reordering of China; by cultivating new citizens, regaining the nation's historical fame. Traditional Chinese descriptions of youth utopia from the Confucian worldview were recast with modernized meanings, though gendered connotations of Confucianist youth in social relationships still existed in early modern Chinese intellectuals' design of a perfect world. Western influences also shaped the Chinese utopian dream of overseas students and youthful females with sci-tech improvements and ideological enlightenment, bringing a transcultural perspective to textual analysis of early modern Chinese youth in utopias.

Key Words: *utopianism, youth, intellectual trends, literary history, early modern China*

Introduction

In late Qing and early Republican China, the frustrating sociopolitical reality contributed to waves of literary reform that demonstrated Chinese elites were making efforts to seek national salvation. Utopian literature emerged in this specific period as a way for the intellectuals to express their discontent towards society and desire for a better world. Utopian novels, wishful poetic imageries, as well as an author's call for revolutionary national campaigns, all provided abundant texts for analysis, as China's early modern envisioning of itself as a perfected nation did so under difficult conditions of a challenging and disturbing reality. "The youth," however, is a symbol and metaphor often utilized in Chinese utopian imagination, albeit rarely mentioned in research on pre-May Fourth utopian discourse and

cultural reconstruction. Existing discussions on the portrayal of the nation's youth in dreaming of a better future concentrate on May Fourth and New Culture Movements (Lee 31), as well as nation-building after the 1920s and 1930s (Graziani 117; Moore, "Kunming Dreaming" 52). Extant scholarship falls short of explaining an intertwined relationship between youth and utopia in late Qing and early Republican literary and intellectual trends.

This paper attempts to fill the current research gap by investigating a central research question—what is the role of the youth as envisioned by late Qing and early Republican intellectuals? As they built China's utopic future, how did the youth, as a socio-cultural category, embody national narratives of hope in turbulent years from 1890s to 1910s? This text first examines how youth were represented in intellectual utopian literature, thought, and cultural practice. With these findings, this paper parses early modern utopian ideals in China, focusing on how these ideals intersect with Confucian worldviews. This paper then concludes with an analysis of transcultural perspectives in portraying youth in China's ultimate modernization as a national utopian dream. Reforming the youth en route to a Chinese utopianism expressed a global wish for one perfectly ordered world.

This analysis relies on primary literary sources, looked at from cultural and historical perspectives. It argues early modern Chinese utopianism as transformative for the role of the nation's youth in society. The transformation turned young protected people in a "crisis heterotopia" into potential agents wishful rebuilding a perfect China. Yet the vision of youth's energy, power, and strength betrayed an elite group's patriarchal control over a younger generation, subterfuging their confidence in facing risks of modernization. Early modern Chinese utopianism reshaped pre-modern China's attitude towards the youth, praising youth for its beauty, for its longing for a place of harmony under a newly modernized Confucianism. Youth were culturally reconstructed in national rejuvenation schemes, including launching a new utopian social order, cultivating new citizens, and returning the nation to its youthful and glorified past. Western influences also shaped the Chinese utopian dream of overseas students and youthful females with sci-tech improvements and ideological enlightenment, bringing a transcultural perspective to textual analysis of early modern Chinese youth in utopias.

Foucault defines utopias as "sites with no real place" that "present society itself in a perfected form" (24). They are imaginary, unreal, and "placeless"

spaces that generate and manifest fantasized longings (Foucault 24). Utopianism conveys the desire for a better life and describes the hopeful process of seeking a perfect place—utopia. Utopia was introduced to China as a late nineteenth-century Western influence, intertwining a nation's "grim political reality" with its "revolutionary utopian desire" (Chan 1). This paper follows Foucault's definition of utopias, exploring early modern Chinese intellectuals' construction of the youth in their utopian imagination in response to disturbing reality. Youths are endowed with utopian power in narratives of hope for China's perfection, also faced with heterotopian restrictions deeply rooted in a traditional socio-cultural imaginary.

> Recent academic discussions on utopianism consider utopia "a method" by which to address "historically new forms of space," reorganizing of modern life into structural systems (Jameson, "Utopia as Method" 21). David Der-wei Wang (*Why Fiction Matters* 8) agrees that utopia and history can be "exchangeable notions," echoing Jameson's (*Archaeologies* 345) idea that utopian imagination represents "historical past and…historical futures." Wang has pioneered the analysis of China's utopian literature within historical contexts of a nation's transforming eras and socialist initiatives (*Why Fiction Matters* 3-5). Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinese youth strove to contribute to an alternative China. This establishes youth's significance in early modern China's utopian aspirations (Wang, "Return to Go" 257-258).

Existing literature on the portrayal of youth in twentieth-century China has connected the youth to textual spaces wherein interactions between elites and a younger generation occurred in the contexts of political movements and modern nation-building. Fabio Lanza argues that the youth in the May Fourth imagination can be considered a "political category" based on Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀, 1879-1942) and Li Dazhao's (李大釗, 1889-1927) poems (40). He points out two major metaphors depicting early modern Chinese youth. These are "springtime" (Lanza 36) and "morning suns" (41), with both representing utopian imageries. Lanza merely interprets the cultural meaning of Chinese youth's "purity, openness, and possibility" (37) as surreal and impractical "political resonance" (31). This paper adopts a different viewpoint, suggesting that instead of defining the youth's symbolic significance as unrealistic and over-politicized imagination utilized in mass mobilization, one can trace the roots late Qing and early Republican fantasies about the youth to utopian ideals. This provides more comprehensive explanations for the role of utopian ideals in intellectual and literary trends. Song Mingwei elaborates

on a similar classification of youth under politics as "yearning for enlightenment, cultural reformation, political revolution, national renaissance, and modernization" (2). His idea supports this paper's analytical perspective of drawing an idealized construction of youth in literature out of simplified political ends, relating early modern China's youth to wishful projects of national renewal. Song focuses on the close reading of the Chinese *Bildungsroman* genre from 1900 to 1958. This paper investigates a similar narrative mechanism in the cultural history of shaping the nation's youth, differing from Song's materials by exploring youths' being bound to a bright national future in the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries utopian-genre novels and writings.

Lee Ou-fan places youth as a kind of cultural capital, or resource, modeling a modernized consciousness in early modern China's incomplete modernization project as inspired by Western and Japanese Enlightenment (33). Douwe Fokkema adopts a related approach in comparing fictional youth ideals in May Fourth journals with those in European novels (281). These two scholars' works recognize a transcultural perspective in early modern China's construction of youth, supporting this paper's exploration of young people in China's utopian imagination of modernity, giving space to explore Western influence of technological advancement and liberal ideas. In contrast, Aaron Moore's examination of youths' interior selves in personal documents such as diaries and letters denies political movements and cultural trends' impacts on youth representation. Moore believes that texts created by Shanghai youths from 1927 to 1949 "show little evidence that May Fourth had a significant impact on Chinese youth culture, and the Northern Expedition seemed unable to make the party's revolutionary line truly universal among the young" ("Growing Up" 82). His argument contradicts the findings of Peter Zarrow, who believed political movements help spread the call for democracy among youth, representing "the abolition of boundaries—a key trope of Chinese utopianism" (39). This paper challenges Moore's conclusions by highlighting how his bottom-up approach overlooks broader societal and intellectual context in shaping youth representation. Investigations conducted in this paper consider evidence of integration between youth's image and the cultural and political yearnings of intellectuals, questioning Moore's assertions, presenting youth in a literary wave of utopianism.

Though youth as a symbol of alternate future possibilities has been widely discussed, scholars seem to prefer other analytical approaches to theories of

utopianism. Similarly, youths are also marginalized in literary analysis of utopian genres and writings. This paper is set to explore what has been previously neglected in early modern Chinese youth literature and history by analyzing the image of youth in utopian novels and thought from the 1890s to the 1910s. It seeks to contribute to current utopian studies with a detailed textual analysis of youth-related utopian works written by early modern Chinese intellectuals under a distressing socio-cultural context.

Youth in Heterotopias and Utopias

In imperial China, the concept of the youth was constructed within heterotopias as an age-based category under the protection and supervision of an older generation. The youth were meant to be guided and regulated throughout a process of growing up. This conceptualization of youth as weak and to-be-protected in traditional Chinese society matches Foucault's model of "crisis heterotopias," separating people in a state of crisis from the risks of the outside world (24). In China's case, the youth are sheltered by clan and family, educated through private schools (*sishu* 私塾), as the Confucian value system prepares them for life challenges.

As early modern China's semi-colonized context brought about urgent social problems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, utopian literature and thought emerged from intellectual cultural practices reacting to a disturbing reality. Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927) was among the first Chinese elites to advocate reforms in developing a utopian work in 1901, *On Great Harmony* (*Datong shu* 大同書). In this book, Kang describes a harmonious world where all national boundaries and hierarchies are eliminated. There is equality and equity in a universal moral community (105-107). Though his design of Chinese society's perfected form exhibits classical utopianism and combines Confucian, Christian, Buddhist, and Socialist visions of an imagined place of tranquility, Kang's expectations for the youth still fall into conventional heterotopias where every step of the youth's life is arranged in a fixed order.

According to Kang, in a utopia of great harmony, where no rigid form of family exists, the "crisis heterotopia" is prepared for the youth since conception (229). Pregnant women enter the house of humanism (*renben yuan* 人本院). It is a house of antenatal training, where newborns enter the public nursery, and children as well

as youth from three to twenty years old go sequentially through a school system before being assigned to various industries by a central government (Kang 229-230). Also noteworthy is that in Kang's design of the house of middle school (*zhongxue yuan* 中學院), he argues that children in middle schools are young, vigorous, and unsettled, for which reason they can be easily polluted (256). Therefore, schools should not be located near theaters, cemeteries, markets, and factories, in order to isolate youth from temptation, maintaining their pureness (Kang 256-257). Kang also regulates other minutiae of the youth's ideal environment:

- The nursery must be close to lakes and gardens where plenty of flowers and trees grow and many fishes and birds inhabit (249).
- Hospitals for children must be managed by professionals to build the youth's bodies, entertain their souls, and enlighten them with knowledge (250).
- The playground at the house of grade school (*xiaoxue yuan* 小學院) should be broad and equipped with swings, wooden facilities, and beams and poles for children's physical needs (254).
- Adolescents in living and dining halls should be ordered by class with uniforms and timetables (257).

Through such arrangements, Kang creates a space in heterotopia for for the education and control of young people. He believes that the peace his utopian world promises can be delivered to the younger generation in such a way that they will follow a proper and ideal coming of age. Kang displays patriarchal authority in monitoring the young, objectifying youth without providing alternative options in his wishful project of a Chinese utopia.

Such representations of youth as weak, in danger, and in crisis have long existed in the Chinese socio-cultural imaginary. In Chinese, youth is called *qingnian* (青年), which is a term closely related to age hierarchy. The word *nian* (年) means year and also refers to a person's age (*nianling* 年齡 or *nianji* 年紀). The word *qing* (青) refers to an immature plant's stage of growth, contrasting with the word *cheng* (mature 成) used to describe adulthood (*chengnian* 成年). Thus, in the Chinese context, the word *qingnian* represents a group of people who are in their "green" age, considered unready for tough situations. As Song concludes, the conventional image of youth in Chinese culture is a "a poetic indicator of the immature, innocent, yet-to-be-disciplined stage of the individual life" (1).

Social problems arose from foreign invasion as well as domestic chaos. These problems challenged the youth, a socio-cultural category previously characterized by immaturity and naivety, to become decisive in building China's future utopia. Following Kang's envisioning of a utopian Chinese society, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929), Jin Zuoli (金作礪, 18??-19??), Chen Tianhua (陳天華, 1875-1905), and other intellectuals in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries all made attempts at utopian writings highlighting youth's strength in realizing a new and perfectly ordered China.

Unlike Kang's depiction of youth living in a utopian world's protective harbors, Liang's youth stepped out of heterotopias, casting off constraints imposed on them by previous systems. Liang set the background of his uncompleted utopian work *The Future of New China* (*Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記) (serialized in 1902) in 2062, sixty years after this novel's fictional publication in 2002 (87). In Liang's imagination, a reformed and renewed China will be established by 2062 and become equal to the West in power ("Xin Zhongguo" 90-91). Nanjing will host the global peace conference while Shanghai is about to hold the World Expo, welcoming royal members and leaders from England, Russia, Japan, Hungary, and the Philippines to visit a prosperous and powerful China (Liang, "Xin Zhongguo" 87). What makes Liang's vision of utopian China stand out is that in his design, this strong nation-state with no violence or misery will be realized through youth's efforts. The two protagonists in *The Future of New China*, Huang Keqiang (黃克强), aged twenty-two, and Li Qubing (李去病), aged twenty-one, are described by Liang as crucial contributors to China's bright future in the 2060s (101-102, 104). Unlike traditional Chinese youth, Huang and Li were not restricted to staying in China. They studied overseas in Britain, returning home with ambitions to save an old and decaying nation with advanced knowledge (Liang, "Xin Zhongguo" 104-105). These two young men united patriots of different ideals, founding China's "Constitutionalist Party" (*xianzheng dang*憲政黨). This party laid a foundation for China's peaceful, democratic, and flourishing society in 2062 (Liang, "Xin Zhongguo" 92). Although *The Future of New China* was aborted after the fifth chapter, Liang's opinion of progressive youth as a solution to China's problems was openly stated, characterizing younger people as true and necessary builders of a Chinese utopia.

Liang's discourse of youth as a national and cultural symbol of hope was also

exhibited in his famous prose poem, *Ode to Young China* (*Shaonian Zhongguo shuo* 少年中國說), in 1900. His well-known sentence in this discursive work, "only when its youth thrive will the nation prosper," was widely spread and continued to be quoted in May Fourth and contemporary China's youth-targeted political propaganda (Liang, "Shaonian" 94). In *Ode to Young China*, Liang named the late Qing China the "Old China" (*laoda Zhongguo* 老大中國) while calling the wishful future progressive China led by the youthful generation a "Young China" (*shaonian Zhongguo* 少年中國) ("Shaonian" 88). By directly equivocating the nation's status with representations of its youth, Liang burdened the younger generation with the responsibility to modernize China. Young people in Liang's Chinese utopia are no longer protected in crisis heterotopias, but are mobilized for national salvation under the nation's pressing social problems and colonial context. Liang also expressed that if China wanted to be a "nation of the future," its youth must be active and progressive. If the Chinese youth lost their vitality, like the fixed and listless older generation, China would decay further and become a "nation of the past" ("Shaonian" 94). Thus, in Liang's "Young China" imagination, youths are linked directly to the running and development of a nation's future, playing an essential role in realizing national revitalization and completing expected utopian projects.

Similar expressions and narratives of "Old China" and "Youthful China" can also be found in other intellectuals' utopian literature. In Jin Zuoli's *New Century* (*Xin jiyuan* 新紀元) (published in 1908), the author portrays an imagined new world in 1999 when China would have already become an assertive constitutional country, reclaiming all concessions and lands occupied by Western powers (5). Jin describes this technologically-advanced, united, and thriving nation-state as "Young China," announcing that "the former old empire is not comparable to this young new China" (6). Again, metaphors of youth and age are utilized to label the perfected form of Chinese society. The author's ideal image of China is a nation whose aging process has been reversed, regaining its vitality through modernization. In Chen Tianhua's *The Lion's Roar* (*Shizi hou* 獅子吼) (serialized in 1905), the protagonist has a daydream where "the youth of new China" (*xin Zhongguo zhi shaonian* 新中國之少年) appear on stage to perform scenes of China's future independence and liberation (94). In Chen's utopian dream, youth becomes the medium by which to achieve and display the nation's exhilarating future success. The author also envisions the youth sacrificing themselves by devoting their "bodies and blood," enduring "a decade

of suffering" in order to reach the new nation (*xinbang* 新邦) of Young China (Chen 94). Moreover, the notion of "youth to find China's utopia" was most vividly expressed in Lüsheng's (旅生, penname) *A Fool's Fantasy* (*Chiren shuomeng ji* 癡人說夢記) (serialized in 1904). The young protagonist's father, Jia Shouzhuo (賈守拙), representing the old youth, fails to find fairy islands where immortals live (Lüsheng, vol. 19 1). His failure forces him place expectations on his son, Jia Xixian (賈希仙), who finds, together with his young classmates at Hubei missionary school, the fairy place, deciding to reorder Chinese society through developing a utopian island (Lüsheng, vol. 51 3). The failure of the father, whose name means "remaining clumsy," alludes to a predicament faced by the late-Qing empire when older generations spiralled into unspeakable predicaments. In comparison, the success of the youth reveals the author's faith that the Chinese nation will be discovered by the younger generation of an undefined and indeterminate future.

In the fiction of Liang, Jin, Chen, and Lüsheng, the new youth becomes a leading force in building China's utopia, with a power and strength considered superior to older generations. For these intellectuals, the nation's disturbing reality disappoints them and makes them feel they were only powerless "old youth" whose energy has faded with age. Political aspiration and desire for a better world fell now to a younger generation symbolizing hope, possibility, openness, and infinite progress. In the utopian dreams of these intellectuals, utopia would be built by the youth who conquered challenges by innovating.

Late-Qing and early-Republican intellectuals acknowledged the younger generation's power and agency. They did so, however, by shaping youth's image in narrative sensibilities of traditional Chinese patriarchy. Social ethics based on Confucianism require sons to obey their fathers (*sangang*, *The Three Cardinal Guides*三綱), whose authority in regulating the younger generation is recognized in the family and in public. This obeisance of the youth to their elders featured in Kang's *On Great Harmony*, where youth in heterotopia are raised in a system. Such obedience and submission to their elite elders are also embedded in other intellectuals' utopian writings, such as Liang's *The Future of New China*, where the utopian society is constructed on the basis of Confucian morals (*kongjiao changming* 孔教昌明) and the young heroes' stories are narrated by a descendant of Confucius ("Xin Zhongguo" 87-88). In early modern Chinese utopian imagination, youths were encouraged to shape a new world using thoughts and methods introduced by

intellectual-class authors. The youth lacked critically-thinking independent minds, seeming to serve as avatars and spokespeople for the elite. Lüsheng's *A Fool's Fantasy* is classical in making the son accomplish the father's unfinished dream, shifting responsibility for nation-building from fathers to sons. Thus, in these intellectuals' utopian dreaming, the youth serve as mouthpieces for ideas held by the older generation of writers, who superimpose their aspirations onto the nation's younger generation. The young people in utopias, although endowed with supposed ability to revive the country, were actually expected to fulfill a long-cherished wish belonging to the status quo. As a result, the youth who seemed to be released from conventional heterotopias in fictional utopian literature gained only limited autonomy from the authors' patriarchal control.

Cultural Reconstruction of Youth and China's Perfect Society

Chinese utopianism in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries shaped the image of youth in a dilemma between utopia's power and the heterotopia's restriction. This cast the youth as a cultural product whose relationship with Chinese society is redefined. In pre-modern China, society's recognition of youth was heavily influenced by Confucianism, consistently imposing binary gender roles. According to *The Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), boys are considered adults when they reach twenty. This is the year of *ruoguan* (弱冠), when they get the "crown ceremony" (*jiaguan* 加冠 or *guanli* 冠禮) to show they are ready for a career as grown-ups (Zheng 73). Girls normally enter adulthood at the age of fifteen – the year of *jiji* (及笄) – when the hair is long enough to wear a hairpin, indicating the girl is ready for marriage. Such gendered metonymies in Confucian descriptions of youth also existed in early modern Chinese intellectuals' envisioning of youth utopias, even under the shock of Western liberal ideas. This paper will elaborate on these gendered connotations later on in the text.

Like early modern Chinese elites' utopian expectations for a vital younger generation, traditional Chinese society's praise for the beauty of youth exaggerated positive features of young people, over-valuing early-life accomplishments. Pleasant imageries and symbols were adopted to describe youth through a Confucian perspective. Female youths pass throug their years of "the gold hairpin" (*jinchai* 金

釵, girls aged twelve), "the budding cardamom" (*doukou* 豆蔻, girls aged thirteen to fourteen), "peaches and plums" (*taoli* 桃李, women aged twenty), and "blooming flowers" (*huaxin* 花信, women aged twenty-four) (Zheng 70). In comparison, young men move through ages of "out for school" (*waifu* 外傅, boys aged ten), "devotion to learning" (*zhixue* 志學, boys aged fifteen), "studying music and dance" (*wushao* 舞勺, thirteen- to fifteen-year-old boys), and "mastering archery and horse riding" (*wuxiang* 舞象, fifteen- to twenty-year-old boys) (Zheng 72, 74). Metaphors such as "gorgeous years" (*huanian* 華年) and "the elegant wind and spark of talent" (*fenghua* 風華) were also used in pre-modern China to admire the energy and grace of youth.

However, the Confucian praise for youth in traditional Chinese socio-cultural imaginary was also mixed with doubt and denial of agency for the youth. By characterizing days of youth with symbols of a progressive coming-of-age journey by using natural metaphors and ritual practices, the Confucian worldview depicted ideal youth as "green" in age, further legitimizing patriarchal control. Youngsters, also called *housheng* (後生) in Chinese, are beautiful but vulnerable budding or blooming flowers, still learning essential skills represented by "eight cardinal virtues" (*bade* 八德) and "six classical arts" (*liuyi* 六藝) (Shek et al. 336). They are in need of adult protection and thus marginalized in pre-modern China. Early modern Chinese intellectuals frustrated by an undesirable present culturally reconstructing the youth utopia as presented in Confucianism, seeking to re-establish images of youth in a utopian world. In those writers' utopian works, young people of the new age began to handle responsibilities previously assigned to adults, acting as a new force in building a modern Chinese utopia. Such historical and cultural reconstruction of the youth and their relationship with China's utopian society can be mainly reflected in three aspects: knowledge production of a new social order to be launched by the youth, body politics of creating "new citizens," and nostalgic utopianism worshiping past glory.

1. Knowledge Production of a New Social Order

New understandings of reordering Chinese society with the power of youth emerged from utopian dreams. Late-Qing and early-Republican Chinese intellectual utopian vision put forward future-oriented plans critically reflecting on heterotopia-form resistance in a troublesome world. This critical reflection provided space within which to dissolve previously taken-for-granted knowledge, developing new

cognitive rules for different ground (Foucault 24). As a result, new knowledge, power, and order populated fictional utopian worlds (Mannheim 170-171). In facing China's hardships, Chinese elites came up with new ways of knowing, responding to disturbing realities with utopian narratives of hope. Chinese youth sought to fulfill three utopian principles and wishes: changes in regime to let professionals govern the country, the establishment of Oriental civilization centered in China, and domestic harmonizing and stability.

Wu Jianren's (吳趼人, 1866-1910) *New Story of the Stone* (*Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記) (serialized in 1908) discusses three utopian wishes through dialogues between "the old youth" (*lao shaonian* 老少年) and Jia Baoyu (賈寶玉) in the civilization realm (*wenming jingjie* 文明境界) (118). This utopian fiction is a rewriting of Cao Xueqin's (曹雪芹, 1715-1763) *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), which reinvented Cao's young protagonist Jia Baoyu from a literary heterotopia of late Qing society, "a barbarous and dark world" (*yeman zhiguo* 野蠻之國; *hei'an shijie* 黑暗世界), into a fictional utopia called the civilization realm (Wu 109). After experiencing darkness, despair, and injustice in the barbarous world of late Qing, Wu's Baoyu enters "the civilization realm" via "Confucius' Road" (*kong dao* 孔道), where he meets a bearded old man introducing himself as "the old youth" (118). There old youth and Jia Baoyu, a revitalized youth, discuss what kind of society can realize utopian peace and fairness—and then discuss how to build it. The old youth voices the author's views, summarizing that civilization is built on "civilized tyranny" (*wenming zhuanzhi* 文明專制), featuring Confucian discipline written about in the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學). There, professional members of parliament equipped with specialized knowledge governed each thread of the ruling power with their emperor (Wu 144). Such a design of the regime echoes Liang Qichao (*Xin Zhongguo* 96) and Chen Tianhua's (117-119) utopian desire for a new China governed by experts of an enlightened centralized power system educated in Confucian morés. Conflicted still between republican, constitutional, and autocratic governments, intellecturals were united in recognizing that a new social order will change the regime, leading to a well-run country which harmoniously rules its people.

Wu's "old youth" mentions the founder of the civilization realm is named "Dongfang Qiang (東方強)," meaning "strong Orient" (125). The founder has four children, representing Oriental wisdom, morality, law, and beauty (Wu 125). The

youngest daughter marries a scientist called "Hua Zili (華自立)," whose name means independent Chinese nation, constructing a whole family representing the author's wish for a perfectly ordered world centered in the Orient, or more specifically, China (Wu 125). The old youth passes this message of reformist reordering in Chinese society to Baoyu, the new youth. Thus, Wu declares his yearning for a revived government, a revitalized younger generation, and a renewed nation-state. Youths become hopeful agents of such utopian power and order in the journey of rebuilding a solid country. Their active role in China's perfect society is prescribed in newly emerged knowledge about national salvation, with the natural characteristic of being young also being culturally reconstructed.

2. Body Politics of Creating "New Citizens"

Youthful bodies and minds embed as an essential bio-political element in early modern Chinese utopianism, cultivating "new citizens" as a key theme in national salvation. For late-Qing and early-Republican Chinese intellectuals like Sun Yat-sen (孫中山, 1866-1925) (3), Liang Qichao (*Zhi "xinxin qingnian"* 81), and Zhang Taiyan (章太炎, 1869-1936), who all cultivated new citizens (*xin guomin* 新國民) embued with enlightened minds; ideal civic morality, political conscience, and advanced knowledge of science and technology are all crucial to establishing a new and modernized Chinese nation. In these vision of model citizens, the body is viewed as a "cultural product." Youth and youthfulness serve as perfect biological symbols (Guan 8). As a result, youths' bodies and minds are appropriated by revolutionary elitist utopian projects, where the body's performativity faces cultural reconstruction as foundation for creating qualified modern citizens.

In 1905, Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881-1936) published a translated work *The Art of Creating Humanity* (*Zaoren shu* 造人術) in the Chinese journal *Women's World* (*Nüzi shijie* 女子世界), depicting an American chemistry professor's experiment of "creating a sprout of humanity" (Rojas 73). This work was translated from Louise Strong's original and was followed by two commentaries written by Zhou Zuoren (周作人,1885-1967), Lu Xun's brother, and Ding Zuyin (丁祖蔭, 1871-1930), an editor of the journal (Lu X. 6). Lu Xun's introduction of this art of creating human newborns expresses his utopian desire to reconstruct and improve national civility starting from the inception of life. This is confirmed in his brother's commentary (6). The other reviewer, Ding, also comments he feels joyful for this art of "[forging] new national citizenry" (Rojas 75). However, he has to admit that this is just a

utopian fantasy as new citizens can be only created by "a nation's mothers…and educational texts" (Rojas 75). Another Chinese intellectual, Bao Tianxiao (包天笑，1876-1973), translates the same literary work, more openly discovering the notion of creating China's new citizens in his interpretation of early science fiction. Bao expresses that a human body is a machine that can be (re)produced, we we must create with care, ensuring quality human beings able to run the world (10).

Such interpretation and cultural reconstruction of a body's social meaning erodes boundaries between life, natural power, and a nation's developing process. There is an intellectual will to work upon the human individual from birth, bringing the young in to replace a tired citizenry. Scholars have long viewed the body as framed between utopias and heterotopias. The body is mired in corporeal existence (physical), embodying socio-cultural norms and values (non-physical) (Loos et al. 23). In early modern Chinese utopianism, the youth's body acts as a site for transforming social values and power, gaining its meaning by surrendering individuals to the collective. The Chinese youth lend their strength and agency to the nationalist and political ambition for "new individuals," engaging in communal resistance to disturbing realities. Young bodies are capable of reproducing the nation's energy, burdened with new historical and cultural significance in the wishful project of reshaping a perfect China.

3. Nostalgic Utopianism

Nostalgia for China's glorious past makes up a crucial part of early modern Chinese utopianism, linking the national goal of revitalization to the notion of regaining one's youth. Echoing the utopian wish for a civilized world centered in the Orient and China, late-Qing and early-Republican nostalgic utopian ideals express intense worship and praise for the pre-Qin era (*xian qin* 先秦), as well as Han and Tang dynasties, recognized as prosperous periods in Chinese history. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century calamities fostered a nostalgia for socio-cultural dynamics and superior positioning over neighboring countries during the pre-Qin, Han, and Tang times. The glorious past strongly contrasted late-Qing and early-Republican experience. Thus a national nostalgia integrated new conceptions of what it was like to be young into ideal national revitalization plans. Recollections of the past fed future potentials.

Early modern China compared China's historical progress to an individ-

ual's aging process, defining past prosperity in China as indicative of youthfulness, while present troubles and stiffness characterize today's China as old. Wu Jianren's utopian world of "civilized tyranny" with an entrance called "the Confucius' Road" embraces traditional Chinese moral salvationism based on "the rule of virtue" (*de zhi* 德治) (144). The author, through instructions given by the "old youth," educated Baoyu to become the "new youth" responsible for rejuvenating an elderly China. Baoyu learns about following traditional morés of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness (Wu 123). Similarly, Liang Qichao's *The Future of New China* keeps reminding new citizens in his imagined utopian society that the Chinese are offspring of Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang (*yanhuang zisun* 炎黃子孫), emphasizing continuity in Chinese civilization. This encourages a revival of China's previous glory ("Xin Zhongguo" 88). His *Ode to Young China* also praised the Chinese nation's previous triumphs under the rule of a list of emperors, including the three legendary kings (Yao 堯, Shun 舜, and Yu 禹), Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇), Emperor Wu of Han (漢武帝), and even the two Qing emperors Kangxi (康熙) and Qianlong (乾隆) (Liang, "Shaonian" 89-90). Wu and Liang hold utopian ideals based on China's unilinear historical progress, spanning pre-Qin, Han, and Tang periods, entering recently into old age. In their opinion, to reach the nation's perfect form in the utopian future, China must regain its youth and revisit its powerful and wealthy past. This is a mission to be completed by the youthful generation of new citizens (Wu 220-222; Liang, "Xin Zhongguo" 100-101).

Moreover, in Lu Shi'e's (陸士諤, 1878-1944) *New China* (*Xin Zhongguo* 新中國) (published in 1910), the author begins his utopian dream by reading *The Basic Annals of Xiang Yu* (*Xiangyu benji* 項羽本紀) in *Shi Ji* (史記), when he gets excited about Xiang Yu's victory in the Battle of Julu (*Julu zhizhan* 巨鹿之戰) (4). Lu Shi'e describes Xiang, a famous young war hero in Chinese history, as robust with a devoted army that no other feudal lord could beat (4). Xiang's ability and vigor are idealized to soothe the author's sadness about late Qing China's weakness and dilapidation, reigniting the author's hope for China's success in the current war against foreign invasion (Lu S. 3-5). Also, in this utopian dream, the author visits a "college for higher learning" (*gaodeng xuetang* 高等學堂), which, in another narrator's description, becomes famous, attracting scholars from all over the world. Much of this fame owes to the fame of a medical graduate Su Hanmin (蘇漢民) (Lu S. 28). In Lu Shi'e's depiction, Su invented a heart-curing medicine (*yixin yao* 醫心藥) as well as the the art of awakening (*cuixing shu* 催醒術). These tinctures were able to cure the sick body of Chinese citizenry, returning China to past harmony and

prosperity (30). Lu Shi'e presents a future and utopian China's strength by stating that Europe, America, and Japan all send students to the young medic Su Hanmin's school for knowledge. This statement is the opposite of current political realities (30). Utopian China becomes "the one for teaching (*shouxue* 授學)" instead of "the one for learning (*shouxue* 受學)." This inside/outside hierarchy alludes to a previous tributary system wherein China centered its dissemination of knowledge, such as in the Tang, when Japan sent students to China (Lu S. 31). Foreign powers at that time represented advanced technology and superior modern knowledge. Yet here they are depicted as seeking civilization and progress by looking to Lu Shi'e's utopian China. The author's wish-fulfillment of an imagined future was based on China's past glory.

Chinese intellectuals were taken with a nostalgic utopianism. They reconciled history with utopian narratives by linking memories of the past to present utopian desire. Chinese intellectuals wished of their nation to "regain its youthfulness in historical periods" (Liang, "Shaonian" 91). The intellectuals' longing for a glorified past in their utopian reconstruction of China's future was an attempt to reverse the nation's aging process. Their idea of returning to a satisfying youthful past conveyed a utopian wish. Youths become the perfect instrument in making China once again equal or superior to Western powers.

Youth, Modernization, and Transcultural Utopian Imagination

Utopianism, a literary genre originating in the West, was introduced to China in the late nineteenth century, invoking the transcultural imaginary of "a good place" for early modern China's envisioning of perfect nation (Vieira 5). According to David Der-wei Wang, "utopia was introduced as a neologism…by Yan Fu in his translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, *Tianyan lun* 天演論" ("The Panglossian Dream" 55). Yan Fu's (嚴復, 1854-1921) translated work inspired China's domestic discussions about possible Chinese utopias and the Western model of modernization based on sci-tech improvements and liberation of thought (41). Early modern Chinese utopianism context seeks ideal modernization for the nation. Transcultural conceptions of modernity inspired early modern Chinese intellectuals.

Overseas students always appear in the utopian imagination of China's future modernization because of their ability to travel between overseas and domestic

spaces. Overseas youths' possible transnational social experience makes them perfect protagonists in early modern China's utopian writings that emphasize learning from the West to achieve prosperity of the Chinese nation. In Liang's *The Future of New China*, two overseas students, Huang and Li, are important contributors to China's modernity in the 2060s. They studied and brought back modern weaponry, natural science, politics and law, as well as philosophy (105). Through Huang and Li's debates on their way from Russia back to China, Liang argues that Western powers' modern superiority is not only based on progressive revolutions and political reforms but mainly derives its power from scientific achievements and technology-aided weapons ("Xin Zhongguo" 112-113, 128). This emphasis on sci-tech improvements is considered "technological optimism" and a "brand of modern utopianism" by Adrian Thieret, where "the idea that technology will eventually solve all problems" appears in both Western utopian imagination and Liang's ideal modernization of China (33).

Moreover, Qiyouzi's (杞憂子, penname) novel *A Student of Misery* (*Ku xuesheng* 苦學生) (serialized in 1905) features a young student named Huang Sun (黃孫), who finds a utopian town with Chinese style in the United States while studying overseas (175). Notably, the overseas space surrounding Huang is initially a heterotopia reflecting discrimination, prejudice, and inequality faced by a Chinese diaspora in the US under the Chinese Exclusive Act (1894-the 1910s) (Qiyouzi 167). Huang and most Chinese passengers are banned from landing when they arrive at the US dock. "All the Westerners, most people from the East, and several Koreans are allowed to leave freely," while Huang is accused of "being sick" and kept under detention until a Japanese consul comes to negotiate on behalf of Huang's graduate school in Japan (Qiyouzi 155). During his study, Huang is also bullied, forced to resign from his part-time job, and finally gets expelled before he meets an elderly Chinese immigrant called Hua Sheng (華盛) in a peaceful utopian village (Qiyouzi 176). Hua Sheng built this utopia thirty years ago to shelter the overseas Chinese excluded and victimized by US society and named it after himself with the meaning of China's prosperity (Qiyouzi 176). Huang ends up finishing his study with the mental and financial support provided by the old immigrant, who entrusts this young overseas student to start a school back in China with modernized knowledge to enlighten minds (Qiyouzi 184). In Qiyouzi's imagination, the overseas student Huang crosses the boundary of heterotopia to come to the Chinese utopia constructed

in a foreign environment. He suffers from injustice as an individual from a country of backwardness but also witnesses hope for his nation's utopian future. With his identity shaped by an ability to bridge China with the West, Huang becomes an ideal and definitive guide for China's modernization, following older generations' expectations represented by village-builder Hua Sheng.

Another youth group shaped with similar transcultural utopian imaginations of modernity is that of the female youth. According to Joan Judge, Chinese women used to be constrained to the "inner space" (*nei* 內) of domestic environments (122). Girls in pre-modern Chinese society mark the beginning of their adulthood with the hairpin ceremony (*jiji li* 及笄禮) , indicating they are old enough to marry. By contrast, boys' entering adulthood are celebrated with the crown ceremony (*jiaguan* or *guanli*) , representing a young man full of learned Confucian virtues and arts. This new type of young adult is able to start a career, preferably as a civil servant. Such gendered connotations in Confucian expectations for the young define female youths as belonging to the "inner space," creating their value with their marriage and labor in the family. The male counterpart is placed in the "outer space" of society, expected to lead a promising career. Traditional Chinese society's praise for youth in the Confucian worldview gendered languages when complimenting the utopian features of male and female youths. Male youngsters' energy and learning are emphasized, as boys from ten to twenty are sequentially called "out for school" (*waifu*), to "devotion to learning" (*zhixue*), "studying music and dance" (*wushao*), and "mastering archery and horse riding" (*wuxiang*). In comparison, young girls' beauty and the socio-cultural imaginary of their idealized role in future marriage are expressed by symbols of hair accessories (*jinchai* and *jiji*) and budding or blooming flowers (*doukou* and *huaxin*). Such gendered hierarchy in pre-modern China's Confucian youth utopia elevated the male youth to powerful positions in an adult-dominated patriarchal society. Female youths were allocated to domestic environments, where their future life was defined by feminized objects, and not by knowledge.

However, early modern China's call for "ethos of the new citizen" provided possibilities for women to shift from "inner space" to "outer space" (*wai* 外) in society or even overseas (Judge 121). In early modern China's utopian writings, female youths are characterized as critically reframing thoughts on Western enlightenment, emancipating women from male and patriarchal control. This reframing served

as a milestone of modernity against ignorant and outdated traditional values. The female youth are situated in the transformation of customs related to new marriage, romance, gender relations, and family issues. Some of them are also portrayed in overseas travel or learning experiences, where they update their previous thinking. Young women enjoyed status as overseas youth in early modern China's transcultural envisioning of utopian modernization.

Chun Fan's (春颿, penname) *The Future World* (*Weilai shijie* 未來世界) (serialized in 1907) depicts two female protagonists showing the author's hesitation and ambiguity between following Western ideological enlightenment for national modernization and keeping conventional social ethics for loyalty to Confucianism. Chun Fan's utopian writing still conveys traditional Confucian gender roles. The author uses *jiji* and *doukou* to indicate the age of female youths, characterizing them in marriage and gender relations. His work explores possibilities of enlightening and modernizing the nation under influence of Western liberal ideas. In Chun Fan's "constitutional novel" (*lixian xiaoshuo* 立憲小說), a young female student Zhao Suhua (趙素華) meets her future husband Huang Lusheng (黃陸生) at the Industry School (*shiye xuetang* 實業學堂) (no. 3 18). Zhao has traveled and studied abroad for many years, getting a certificate from a US university, allowing Zhao follow a free, open, and unfettered Western lifestyle (Chun Fan, no. 3 17-18). Zhao believes in Western enlightenment values about freedom, equality, and human rights, strongly contrasting her cowardly and uneducated husband. This female youth ends up asking for a divorce from her husband, seeking romance in theaters and socialite parties (Chun Fan, no. 4 109-110). The author praises Zhao's courage to be independent of family as a "liberated modern citizen" (Chun Fan, no. 5 58). Still, he worries that Zhao's liberation of mind is so extreme that society may choose a "silent and simple daughter" rather than a "flamboyant woman" (Chun Fan, no. 1 61). There, the "silent and simple daughter" refers to the other young female protagonist, Fu Bifu (符碧芙). Fu's love for her cousin is interrupted by an arranged marriage settled by her mother with an overseas student returning to China from the United States (Chun Fan, no. 7 84-85). Fu has been suppressed by her family her whole life and ultimately dies of depression (Chun Fan, no. 7 93). The author considers Fu a victim of feudal ethics, too submissive to accept new cultural customs introduced by an advanced and modernized West. Fu's tragic story contrasts with Zhao's resistance, presenting two different choices faced by female youths seeing tension between

traditional Chinese values and modern Western pursuits of liberty.

In this "constitutional novel," the author creates male protagonists who devote themselves to political reform, building China's utopian constitutional government. Female protagonists are trapped by their failed marriages, facing tough family issues. The author distinguishes roles for young women in China's modernization. Women are burdened with a gendered hierarchy deeply rooted in Confucian tradition, and yet they are responsible for transforming China's old society with newly introduced rituals and thought. Through two young female protagonists, Zhao Suhua and Fu Bifu, the author expresses his support for ideological enlightenment in modernizing China. He also reveals fear that Western liberal ideas may shock or even disintegrate the conventional values on which Chinese society is built. For Chun Fan, Fu is "too obedient" while Zhao is "too revolutionary" (no. 7 95). His future China is constructed in this dilemma between modernization and excessive Western ideological enlightenment; and between a lifeless but fundamental body of traditional normative ethics. Young women and overseas Chinese students are expected to handle the wishful project of China's modernization by following a Western ideological and technological model. Female youths' mission to liberate themselves with progressive thinking and overseas Chinese youngsters' ability to cross the transnational boundaries enable each group to realize early modern Chinese intellectuals' dream for a modernity based on transcultural utopian imagination.

Conclusion

This paper draws on Chinese utopian literature, thought, and cultural practice from the 1890s to the 1910s, fulfilling its aim to explore historical and cultural constructions of youth in early modern Chinese intellectuals' utopianism. Based on detailed analysis of primary textual sources, this paper argues that Chinese utopianism in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries transformed the nation's younger generation from a vulnerable and protected group protected into hopeful agents capable of facing national crisis, while realizing Chinese society's perfected form.

From the perspective of literary history, this paper discusses idealized representations of youth in late-Qing and early-Republican utopian writings by Liang Qichao, Jin Zuoli, and Chen Tianhua. For those intellectuals, China's future

prosperity had to be accomplished through the efforts of the younger generation. Young people are meant to handle responsibilities in nation-building, representing possibility and openness, while "old youth" are unable to proceed with necessary changes needed in building the nation's utopian future. The act of shifting an older generation's duty of national salvation to a younger generation is apparent. It is shown in cultural reconstruction of youth in China's imaginary of a perfect society tasked with launching a utopian social order, creating new citizens, and resuming China's superior position in history. Wu Jianren's civilization realm, Lu Xun's art of creating humanity, and other intellectuals' utopian literature worship the nation's glorious and youthful past. Western influences on transcultural utopian imaginaries of modernity impact portrayals of overseas Chinese youngsters and female youths in utopian discourses of national modernizing projects. Liang and Qiyouzi's overseas students are expected to introduce advanced technology and enlightened thinking back to China. They are able to navigate heterotopian overseas spaces and utopian futures for China. At the same time, Chun Fan's young female protagonists show the author's praise of but hesitance to follow Western ideological enlightenment. There, female youth embody Confucian gendered roles in their youth-society relationship within an idealized social order. These girls are perfect representatives of learning from transcultural experience whilst modernizing the nation. Young women do this through the liberation of their thought.

This paper's historical and cultural approach, along with its textual analysis of youth in early modern China's utopian writings, sheds light on future research in the fields of modern Chinese utopian studies and cultural histories of youth. This paper explores the intertwining of youth and utopianism in the late-Qing and early-Republican intellectual history and literature. This text also explores elitist and intellectual expectations of younger generations in utopian projects of national rejuvenation, hoping to inspire discussion on twentieth-century China's youth rebellion as well as contemporary China's political mobilization in younger generations reflecting in the utopian discourse of the China Dream. This paper also lays out an outline for further investigations into the model youth image shaped by early modern China's longing for perfection and peace during the war years. It opens a new horizon for understandings concerning the youth utopias created as resistance in looking for solutions to national risks and generational challenges.

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