

Asia Orientale 古今東亞

18

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Asia Orientale 古今東亞

La collana Asia Orientale 古今東亞 propone testi di elevato livello didattico, scientifico, divulgativo nel campo delle varie discipline relative alla storia e alla cultura dell'Asia Orientale. L'interesse per l'area è certamente cresciuto in seguito all'importanza economica e strategica assunta negli ultimi decenni, come dimostra il fiorire di varie recenti iniziative editoriali in Italia presso piccoli e grandi editori. È ovvio che la prevalenza globale di quest'area ha portato un cambiamento negli orientamenti degli studi di settore, decretando il superamento sia dell'orientalismo 'vecchia maniera' che di quello 'impegnato' a carattere terzomondista. Con il declino dei vari 'orientalismi' è sempre più necessaria una conoscenza che corrisponda alle esigenze presenti, e che non può prescindere tuttavia da una specializzazione che tenga conto delle differenze culturali persistenti, e dal confronto fra civiltà diverse.

La presente collana intende concentrarsi sulla realtà di quest'area, offrendo e sollecitando contributi che coprano non solo la realtà immediata di cui dobbiamo tenere conto, ma vari aspetti delle antiche civiltà che ne costituiscono la base culturale. Perciò la collana intende promuovere varie discipline, oltre ai settori storici, filosofici e letterari, come quello linguistico e politico-economico. La collana si propone, inoltre, di incoraggiare la pubblicazione di monografie etnografiche sulle culture e società dell'Asia Orientale, con particolare riguardo all'antropologia della Cina.

La collana adotta un sistema di valutazione dei testi basato sulla revisione paritaria e anonima (peer review). I criteri di valutazione riguarderanno la qualità scientifica e didattica e la significatività dei temi proposti. Per ogni proposta editoriale, tali requisiti saranno accertati dal comitato scientifico, che si avvarrà di almeno un revisore esperto.

La possibilità di avere edizioni online oltre che a stampa permette l'utilizzo di sistemi multimediali e di comunicazione di particolare interesse per la distribuzione, la didattica e la fruizione su vari supporti.

Il direttore della collana, Paolo Santangelo (paolo.santangelo@uniroma1.it), è coadiuvato da un comitato scientifico composto dal Prof. Guido Samarani (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), dalla Prof. Stefania Stafutti (Università di Torino) e dal Prof. Alessandro Dell'Orto (Pontificia Università Urbaniana).

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STUDIES 2015

edited by
Paolo Santangelo



Ming Qing Studies 2015

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In memory of Prof. Lionello Lanciotti

On the 30th of June, 2015, Emeritus Prof. Lionello Lanciotti passed away. We have lost a great master and friend, expert of Chinese literature and ancient Classics, witness of decades of history of the cultural relations between Italy and China. Doyen of Italian sinology, member of prestigious national and international academies and associations, he has given his active contribution as a member of the Boards of *Ming Qing Studies*, and formerly, *Ming Qing Yanjiu*, with his articles and experience. We are grateful for his multifarious activities. This volume of *Ming Qing Studies 2015* is dedicated to his memory.

In memory of Bill

Bill has been an active and diligent peer reviewer of *Ming Qing Yanjiu* and then of *Ming Qing Studies*. He has been member of the Board of *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 2006 and 2007, and then of *Ming Qing Studies* from 2010 to the last issue of 2014.

Bill, name Arthur William (Bill) Edward Dolby was born on the 23rd March 1936 in Aldershot, England and passed away on the 7th February 2015. In 1955 to 1957 he studied for the Joint Service Language award at the SOAS London University and obtained a First Class with Distinction Award in written Chinese and additionally a first class distinction course as a flying Officer in the RAFVR (national conscription). In 1960 he obtained a University of Cambridge First Class honours degree in Modern and Classical Chinese and awarded a BA, MA. In 1964 to 1966 he was a lecturer in Chinese at the Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. In 1967 he obtained his PHD in Chinese. In 1968 he was appointed Lecturer Professor in Chinese at the University of Edinburgh until he retired in 1999. He has translated numerous works, those that were published by mainstream publishing houses included:

1. *History of Chinese Drama*, by William Dolby, published in 1976 by Elek Books Limited with ISBN 0 236 30903 X
2. *The Perfect Lady by Mistake and other Stories*, by Feng Menglong, translated by William Dolby, published by Paul Elek in 1976 with ISBN 0 236 40002 9
3. *Eight Chinese Plays thirteenth century to present*, translated by William Dolby, published in 1978 by Paul Elek with ISBN 0 236 40116 5
4. *Lao She, Mr Ma and Son*, translated by William Dolby, published by Penguin Australia in 2013 with ISBN: 9780143208112

Even after retirement Bill continued actively with his work and became world renowned in his field through his involvement in all aspects of the Chinese language. He maintained and continued dialogue with the University of Edinburgh. He actively coached and mentored numerous students through their studies and directed and assisted with their thesis presentations for PHD until his death. His knowledge and insight into China and the language was often described as deeper than many Chinese such was his enthusiasm for his work and his involvement in the subject is well known by the many experts that he advised and liaised with from Italy to Brazil, America to China. His enthusiasm and dedication will be sorely missed. He leaves behind four sons and one daughter who will sadly miss his jocular outlook on life. All, the Board, the editor, assistant editors and Editing Staff of *Ming Qing Studies* regret for the loss of a reliable advisor and competent collaborator and kind friend.

PREFACE

Most of the articles in *Ming Qing Studies 2015* are based on the interdisciplinary research done by colleagues and young researchers and deal with the interaction between Western and Chinese culture.

Two of these articles deal with Liang Qichao's literary works, while one exposes Kang Youwei's diary of his visit to Italy. **Lorenzo Andolfatto's** "Making sense of incompleteness: approximations of utopia in Liang Qichao's *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* and Chen Tianhua's *Shizi Hou*" deals with the short but fruitful production of utopian novels, one by Liang Qichao and one by Chen Tianhua, and seeks to uncover the causes of their not having been completed in the contradiction between the non-utopian present and the utopian future. Lorenzo Andolfatto is a PhD candidate at the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

Another article on Liang Qichao is by **Yunwen Gao**, from the Department East Asian Languages and Culture at the University of Southern California. "Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Colonial Modernity in Liang Qichao's '*Ban Dingyuan Conquering the Western Region*' 班定遠平西域" analyses the linguistic hybridisation of Cantonese *bakwa*, Classical Chinese, English, and Japanese in the play, and Liang Qichao's ideas of nationalism, ethnicity, and colonial modernity addressed to different strata of Chinese.

Martina Turriziani, in her article "A historical comparison between Italy and China emerging from Kang Youwei's *Yidali Youji* 意大利游记", recounts the Chinese scholar's visit to Italy in 1904: in his notes he expresses his comments on his experiences in Italy as well as his comparison between Italy and China. Martina Turriziani is a PhD Candidate, at the Department of Oriental Studies at Sapienza University of Rome.

Giorgio Casacchia's "Travelling in a Thronged Desert" presents Xu Xiake's long travelogue, which scans forty years of his wanderings throughout the Ming Empire, where natural landscape predominates, while the human presence is limited to specific circumstances. Recently this travelogue has been translated into Italian. Giorgio Casacchia is Professor of Chinese language and literature the University of Naples "L'Orientale".

Xie Xin-zhe's "Forensics and Politics in Qing China – Some Case Studies", on the other hand, is an enquiry of the causes of penal procedure reform of 1786, shedding light also on the social and political life of the period, the fractional conflicts, favouritisms, political careers and interests in the capital, and their influence on the forensic investigations. Xie Xin-zhe is currently a PhD candidate at the EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) in Paris under the supervision of Prof. Pierre-Étienne Will.

Two articles, by Giulia Falato and Xie Mingguang respectively, concern two interesting aspects on Christian missionary work. **Giulia Falato**, in

“Alfonso Vagnone SJ’s “*Tongyou Jiaoyu* (Child Education)” and its Contribution to the Introduction of Western Learning into Late Ming China” examines some contributions on pedagogic and philosophical concepts from Renaissance tradition by Alfonso Vagnone, and compares the chapter on “Western Learning” with the analogous essay by Giulio Aleni. Giulia Falato is PhD candidate at the Institute of Oriental Studies of Sapienza University of Rome.

Xie Mingguang’s “*Translation, or Transliteration? The Question of Chinese within the Catholic Liturgy in the Xiru Ermu Zi* (1626)” is a careful enquiry on Nicolas Trigault’s thought concerning the use of the Chinese language in Catholic liturgy in China, and on the question of choosing *transliteration or translation* for the Latinised Chinese words. Xie Mingguang has received his PhD at the Higher Normal School of Pisa.

Diego Cucinelli, “Windows onto the supernatural in the second half of the Edo period: from the *Gazu hyakki yagyō* (1776) by Toriyama Sekien to the *E-hon hyaku monogatari* (1841) by Takehara Shunsen” discusses on some Japanese supernatural stories.

Four articles by Chen Yushu, Donatella Failla, Marco Meccarelli, and Barbara Witt respectively, deal with the connection between fine arts and intercultural relations. **Chen Yushu** in “The Tension between the Realistic and Imaginary Elements in Alexander’s Illustration” deals with the works of William Alexander, the draughtsman of the Macartney Embassy to China, as well as the European interpretation of China, between fidelity and distortion, intuition and misunderstanding. Chen Yushu is a PhD Candidate at the Fine Arts Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Donatella Failla, in her “A Virtual Escape from the ‘Closed Country’ through Painting and Humorous Verses: Shiba Kōkan’s Seiyō Mitate Mimeguri Fūkei Zu 西洋見立三囲風景図” presents some Japanese landscapes by Shiba Kōkan, and discusses on the possible sources from which they were inspired. Donatella Failla is Director of the Museo d’Arte Orientale ‘Edoardo Chiossone’, Genoa, and Professor of History of Art of Eastern Asia, at the University of Genoa, Italy.

Marco Meccarelli, in “Chinese Painters in Nagasaki: Style and Artistic *Contaminatio* during the Tokugawa Period (1603-1868)”, presents the *Nagasakiha* ‘melting-pot’, with the confluence of the Chinese pictorial tradition (especially from Fujian and Zhejiang) and artistic trends coming from the Netherlands (Rangaku), which gave life to a series of new eclectic solutions. Marco Meccarelli, Oriental Art historian, who received his PhD in History and Civilisation of East Asia from Sapienza University of Rome, teaches at Catania University.

Barbara Witt’s “Child Imagery and the Representation of Li Nezha in *Fengshen Yanyi*” does not only deal with iconographic characters (the genre of children pictures), but enters deeply into the literary (the *Fengshen Yanyi*), religious (the legend of Nezha, the lotus flower), and anthropological aspects

(the child's imagery). It offers also a contribution on the popular imagery of children and infants. Barbara Witt is Research Fellow at Würzburg University.

Finally, two reviews conclude the volume; the first by Dr. **Mark Gamsa** (Anna Di Toro, *La percezione della Russia in Cina tra XVII e XVIII sec.* Rome: La Sapienza Orientale, 2012) and the second by Dr. **Hang Lin** (Jodi L. Weinstein, *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion.* Studies on Ethnic Groups in China Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).

I am grateful to Dr. Maria Paola Culeddu and Dr. Tommaso Previato for their generous commitment and precious contribution in the editorial work. I also wish to express my gratitude to Carmen F. Casadio, who checked the English.

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This issue has been dedicated to Prof. Lionello Lanciotti (1925-2015) who passed away last June, and who has greatly contributed to the development of Chinese studies in Italy through his scientific works, his organisational activities, and his editing management. My colleagues of the Editorial Staff and I also wish to commemorate William Dolby, who has cooperated with us until his last days and has been a very diligent peer reader of many contributions on Chinese literature.

We finally express our gratitude to Prof. Tan Tian Yuan 陳韞沅 for accepting to join the Board of *Ming Qing Studies*. Tian Yuan Tan is Reader in Chinese Studies at SOAS, University of London. His main areas of research include Chinese literary history and historiography, theatre and performance, and cross-cultural interactions between China and other countries. He is the author of *Songs of Contentment and Transgression: Discharged Officials and Literati Communities in Sixteenth-Century North China* (Harvard, 2010), *A Critical Edition of the Sanqu Songs by Kang Hai (1475-1541) with Notes and Two Essays* (Zhejiang Guji, 2011), co-author of *Passion, Romance, and Qing: The World of Emotions and States of Mind in Peony Pavilion* (Brill, 2014), and the co-editor of *Text, Performance, and Gender in Chinese Literature and Music: Essays in Honor of Wilt Idema* (Brill, 2009) and *An Anthology of Critical Studies on Tang Xianzu in Western Scholarship* (Zhejiang Guji, 2013).

Paolo Santangelo

**MAKING SENSE OF INCOMPLETENESS:
APPROXIMATIONS OF UTOPIA IN
LIANG QICHAO'S *XIN ZHONGGUO WEILAI JI*
AND CHEN TIANHUA'S *SHIZI HOU***

LORENZO ANDOLFATTO
(Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia)

In the fourth chapter of Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 novel *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* 新中國未來記 (The Future of New China), Liang's concise prose opens up unexpectedly to an English interpolation:

Such is the aspect of this shore –
' This, but living Greece no more!
...
Clime of the unforgotten brave!
Whose land, from plain to mountain-cave
Was Freedom's home, or Glory's grave —
Shrine of the mighty! Can it be
That this is all remains of thee?

These are lines from the *The Giaour*, a long poem written by Lord Byron in 1813, the first of his four popular Turkish tales. The interpolation is unexpected, alienating: whereas in the architecture of the novel it serves the purpose of characterizing the protagonists as romantic Byronian heroes devoted to the cause of Chinese nationalism, the English poem – although paraphrased in the Chinese text – was unlikely to be understood by the majority of Liang's readers, and likely to get lost as well the refined parallelism between Lord Byron's idealized Greece and Liang Qichao's idealized China. Lord Byron's tetrameters unfold like a foreign island of text among Liang's long-winded ruminations: within the ocean of Chinese text, they are glances of an elsewhere. Confronted by Lord Byron's 'finest Orientalism' and 'Western sentimentalism',¹ the ideal reader of Liang Qichao's novel is lead to think that utopia lies where the different strands of human imagination converge. Lord Byron's Greece, less a geography than an invention, becomes the embodiment of the late Qing reformer's struggle, and his aesthetic goal as a novelist. This is the measure of Liang Qichao's opera and of his literary persona, the romantic idealism of a cast-away reformer who wrote of the future of new China from the shores of Japan as Lord Byron sung of ancient

¹ These were the terms used Lord Byron himself in his poem 'Beppo' from 1818 to account for the success of his Turkish tales. See Byron and Bulwer 1841, p. 311.

Greece from those of England.

Liang Qichao put literature at the service of his country, asking his fellow reader, “Brother, can you still consider today’s China as a country that belongs to the Chinese?” (哥哥，你看現在中國還算得個中國人的中國嗎?)² In doing so, he mobilised the writers of his generation to the cause of the nation, he urged a ‘lion’s roar’ from those intellectuals who invoked reform against the fragmentation of the *Zeitgeist*. It is Huang Yibo 黃毅伯 (Liang’s fictional alter-ego) the first one to answer this question: “I dream’d that Greece might still be free / For standing on the Persians’ grave, / I could not deem myself a slave.” Such was the grandeur of Liang’s literary project, the Byronian afflatus of his attempt at the reinvention of the nation via the reinvention of the novel. In the end, this was the spirit – chimeric, romantic, unrealizable – that animated the Chinese imagination of utopia at the end of the Manchu Empire.

If we are to adhere to Darko Suvin’s definition of utopia as

the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis,³

and if we derive our definition of utopian novel accordingly, then it would be quite a rhetorical stretch to consider Liang Qichao’s *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* and Chen Tianhua’s 陳天華 *Shizi Hou* 獅子吼 as utopian. Because these works were left unfinished by their authors, they remain as incomplete sketches, forgotten blueprints, literary remainders of a misplaced modernity. On the other hand, if *significant* utopias are “thematically open” and they “reflect back upon the reader’s ‘topia’” in order to engage the reader, if they provide “a *method* rather than a *state*”, if indeed “utopia operates by example, demonstration, deictically, [...] by gestures of pointing”, and they provide a “wide-eyes glance from here to there, a ‘travelling shot’ moving from the author’s everyday lookout to the wondrous panorama of a far off-land”, then these two novels are quintessentially utopian.⁴

From this point of view, their condition of incompleteness (which is historical, contingent) can be disregarded as a flaw and welcomed as a defining trait: as utopias are not meant to be reached, so utopian novels are not meant to be completed. This is the perspective here adopted in our attempt of analysis of these two novels: to consider utopian not only what is presented as such in a cornucopia of details, but also what is left to loom in the distance as a silent referent to the imperfection of the present.

In the prologue of his *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji*, Liang Qichao expounds

² *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji*, p. 19.

³ Suvin 1979, p. 49.

⁴ Suvin 1979, pp. 37, 51-52.

the setting of his novel: it is the year 2513 after the birth of Confucius, and China is hosting the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the realisation of the reforms that transformed the sick man of Asia into a modern nation. We are therefore in the year 1962 of the Gregorian calendar, and ambassadors from all over the world have gathered in Shanghai to pay homage to the heir of the Yellow Emperor, bowing in respectful deference to the harbinger of *Datong* 大同. It is in this context that the reader is also introduced to the character of Kong Juemin 孔覺民, who is described as a present-day Sima Qian 司馬遷 and a national hero who held a crucial role in the process of modernization of the country. Almost seventy years old, Kong Juemin is a revered professor of history who is asked to give a lecture on the recent history of the Chinese nation in the occasion of its celebration. This is the narrative stratagem deployed by Liang Qichao to unfold his history of the future of new China, and it is a subtle stratagem indeed, as it contains in embryo the sought-after ‘worldliness’ and the ‘enmeshment’ of Liang’s aesthetic approach to the form of the novel. By means of textual recursion, Liang anchors his novel to the ‘worldliness of the text’, that ‘circumstantial reality’ that in Liang’s view forms the ground for a meaningful interpretation of the literary text oriented toward the utopia of a modern China.⁵

By introducing the character of Kong Juemin as an embedded narrator in his narration of reform, Liang Qichao manages to instil an interesting metafictional bend into his incomplete novel. We are referring here not only to the evident extradiegetical parallels that can be drawn between Kong the hero and Liang the author, but also to what we may term as the condition of textual hybridity that the apparently unassuming and certainly ironic metafictional allusion of Kong Juemin’s opening remarks entails.⁶

“The chief editor of *Xin Xiaoshuo* in Yokohama wants to publish my account in his magazine, and he keeps suggesting me to make it into a novel. If I were to write it in the manner of Sima Qian’s *Records* or Sima Guang’s *Mirror to Aid in Government*, how could I expect today’s readers, who are accustomed to novels and magazines, to read it without falling asleep halfway through it?” A roar of laughter burst from the audience.

因橫濱新小說報社主人要將我這講義充他的篇幅，再三諄囑演成小說體裁，我若將這書做成龍門《史記》涑水《通鑑》一般，豈不令看小說報的人懶懶欲睡，不能終卷嗎？滿堂聽眾拍掌大笑。⁷

This passage is noteworthy, not only because it marks a shift in the narrative

⁵ See Said 1975.

⁶ We know that Liang Qichao was writing these lines from Yokohama, where had fled in 1898 in order to avoid arrest after his reformist zeal, and in the novel’s prologue we learn that Kong Juemin 孔覺民 “always provided for himself and his traveling expenses; he studied abroad in Japan, America, England, Germany and France; he joined the reformists and got arrested twice” (*Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji*, p. 2).

⁷ *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji*, p. 6.

mode from the zero focalization of Liang's omniscient narrator to the metadiegetic level of Kong Juemin pseudo-historical account, but also because with this shift Liang bypasses the hierarchy of focal embedding by gesturing towards the world behind the text. Whereas it is true that the fourth wall of the traditional *xiaoshuo* 小說 form has always been frail, as if perpetually on the point of being demolished by the mannerist, vestigial mimics of the oral storytelling tradition, in Liang Qichao's work this trait acquires quite another value. Because Liang Qichao's attitude towards the literary text has always been one of continuous and seamless engagement with reality, these incursions of the real in the text and these "obsessive references to actuality" are never meaningless, as they are constitutive element of the utopian text, "interiorized in the text's very fabric in order to provide the stuff and raw material on which the textual operation must work."⁸

The chief editor who is mentioned by the character Kong Juemin in the passage above is of course Liang Qichao himself, who in the year 1902 was stationed in Yokohama, where he had escaped in 1898 after the *débâcle* of the Hundred Days' Reform, and from where in 1902 he started to publish his magazine *Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說. This metafictional gimmick is a clever move on the part of Liang, as it manages both to locate the novel within the historical subtext of *fin-de-siècle* China and the (projected) history of the future presented in the novel, and to locate Liang Qichao's position within these histories. As we will see, by gesturing from the world to the text as a theorist, and from the text to the world as a narrator, Liang manages to reassert those features of "enmeshment" and engagement that characterise the dialectic upon which the author builds his novel in the first place. Liang's efforts at the redefinition of the form of the novel both as a theorist and as a novelist are to be considered within the same artistic and conceptual continuum. By introducing his *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* as a fictional historical account of "the history of China in the last 60 years, starting from the *renyin* year of the Guangxu reign [1902] to the next [1962]" 我們所最喜歡聽的，叫做“中國近六十年史”。就從光緒二十八年壬寅講起，講到今年壬寅，⁹ and by looking backward from the novel at his own authorial praxis as a literary theorist and as a novelist, Liang validates the historical value of his efforts in the process of *rectification* of the country, of the Chinese nation.

As the idea of the nation became the "silent space of reference" upon which to build new China's modern socio-institutional imaginary,¹⁰ the form of the modern *xiaoshuo* emerged as a space of reference for the imagination, experimentation and representation of this ideal. As the whole institutional and conceptual infrastructure of the country was being questioned and redefined, the resulting social unrest was reflected in the form of the novel. During the late

⁸ Jameson 1977, p. 7.

⁹ *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Duara 1995, p. 28.

Qing period the *xiaoshuo* form developed in a multitude of sub-genres and narrative categories, as if in the attempt to cover all the new and different faces of the peculiar chimera that was the Chinese colonial modernity, that is to say an imagined modernity whose social grammar was coming into existence in the exact moment its existence was questioned.¹¹ In this context the utopian novel, with the wide narrative breadth it allowed and the sheer imaginative potential it entailed, became a space of representation both of the utopian aspirations of a colonised empire, as well as of the cultural debate that led to the need for utopia in itself.

But Liang Qichao's *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* 政治小說 and the narrative trend towards utopia that it fostered were not only the by-products of a broader debate on the question of the Chinese colonial modernity, they functioned also as one of its constitutive parts. Masked and encoded more or less blatantly behind the allegories of fiction were the volleys of an ongoing debate over the fate of modern China played upon essentialist dichotomies, tendencies of self-essentialisation and occidentalism along the lines of Zhang Zhidong's 張之洞 famous motto '*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*' 中學為體西學為用, and his modernist interpretation of the *ti-yong* 體用 dichotomy. Schizophrenic, these texts looked backward while moving forward, or longed forward while retreating backward; in offering tentative attempts at new, utilitarian literary aesthetics, they were torn apart between their artistic aspirations (the novel as a work of art) and their political function (the novel as instrument of social change). These texts were in the end heterogeneous, eclectic, at times overgrown and at other incomplete, open-ended, as if they were struggling to keep up with the ever-changing intellectual debate they initially stemmed from, and the ebullient historical background they belonged to.

Liang Qichao's vision of the future of new China is incomplete, as his political novel *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* of 1902, the author's only attempt at the form of the modern *xiaoshuo*, amounts only to a handful of chapters introduced by a magniloquent prologue about the author's position in regard to the role of literature in society (a prologue that we may ideally extend to Liang's opening essay – "Lun Xiaoshuo yu Qunzhi zhi Guanxi" 論小說與群治之關係 – on the

¹¹ "Within the broad formal category of *xiaoshuo*, a number of generic designations emerged during the late Qing, all of them bearing clear allegiance to the cause of popular education and national renewal. In an article published in *New Citizen* (新民叢報) Liang Qichao listed the following ten generic categories of novel: "historical" (歷史小說); "governmental" (政治小說); "philosophic-scientific" (哲理科學小說); "military" (軍事小說); "adventure" (冒險小說); "mystery" (探偵小說); "romance" (寫情小說); "stories of the strange" (語怪小說); "diaries" (札記體小說); and "tales of the marvelous" (傳奇體小說) [...] In the world of actual publication, other generic categories attached to titles in the contents of serial fiction like the *All Story Monthly* included "nihilist" (虛無黨小說); "utopian" (理想小說); "philosophical" (哲理小說); "social" (社會小說); "national" (國民小說); "comical" (滑稽小說); and "short stories" (短篇小說)." (Isaacson 2011, p. 31).

first number of the magazine *Xin Xiaoshuo*). In this respect, Liang's *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* is similar to Chen Tianhua's *Shizi Hou* (The Lion's Roar). The latter was serialized during the year 1905 in the pages of the newspaper *Minbao* 民報 (The People's Daily). *Shizi Hou* is a virulent *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* whose plot develops around the vicissitudes of a brigade of anti-Manchu revolutionaries and their efforts to reform the country through the overthrow of the Manchu rule. These were at least the intentions of its author, whose sudden departure – death by water as an act of protest against the mistreatment of the Chinese community by the Japanese – left us with what can be considered an extended prologue of eight chapters.

Many are the traits that are shared by these two novels: they are both experiments of political activism, in the sense that they were written not by novelists¹² but rather by intellectuals who found in the form of the novel a vehicle for the propagation of their own ideas; both the two novels are integrated – and should ideally be read – within the continuum of the intellectual agenda of their authors (in fact the two *xiaoshuo* were serialized through two periodicals in which the two writers worked as editors); furthermore, even though Chen Tianhua's political stance was much more radical than Liang's (who was not a revolutionary but rather a reformer in the manner of his teacher Kang Youwei 康有為), their opening chapters unfold in a conspicuously similar way, that is to say as articulated disquisitions over the destiny of the Chinese nation, the golden era of the pre-colonial past, and the necessity to restore it by picking up the arms (in a variable degree of figurativity); ultimately, these novels are both unfinished, and although the reasons behind this “condition of incompleteness” are incidental, this peculiar feature opens up to a useful reflection on the nature of the modern utopian endeavour, the possibility and the paradox of the variety of modernity it entails, the expectations projected by the Chinese intellectuals on literature and the novel, and the ambiguous position of the late Qing novel within the Chinese literary canon.¹³

Although incompleteness appears to be a recurrent feature in the eccentric landscape of the late Qing novel, in the case of the late Qing utopian novel, the imagination of utopia is often left to the reader, as the utopian locus is always approached but never reached. Again, our interpretation gives way to a practical allegory: these novels *happen* to be incomplete due to a series of incidental circumstances, there was no authorial intention behind this basic fact. Yet this recurrence, or rather this coincidence, may result meaningful in order to understand what were the circumstances that fostered this peculiar kind of

¹² As, for instance, Bihe Guan Zhuren 碧荷馆主人, Xiaoran Yusheng 萧然郁生, Lu Shi'e 陆士谔 and Wu Jianren 吴趼人 were.

¹³ On the vicissitudes of Liang Qichao, see in particular Levenson 1959; on the trajectory of Liang Qichao's “historical” thinking, on the “geography” of the discourse in which it is inscribed, and on the critical movement between reform and revolution of late-imperial China's most important philosopher, see Tang Xiaobing 1996.