Chinese Form of Utopia and Its Aesthetic Expression*

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In 2015, a new film *Mr. Six*, shot by the famous Chinese film director Feng Xiaogang, was widely discussed in the Chinese academia. Some scholars link this movie to Utopia that it reflects utopian imagination in contemporary Chinese society. Does “Juyi hall”¹ stand as the Utopian image in contemporary Chinese society? If for a period in the history of the outlaw Lin Chong “to join rebels” and go to “Juyi hall” was a Utopian image, so is it still the case today? In my point of view, to consider the process of modernization of Chinese society, to consider contemporary Chinese society, the Chinese form of Utopia is a significant theoretical issue.

In 1516, the British humanist Thomas Moore wrote and published his important book *Utopia*, with the full title “*A Truly Golden Little Book, No Less Beneficial Than Entertaining, of a Republic’s Best State and of the New Island Utopia*”. Combined the ancient Greek οὐ (no) plus τόπος (place) with the suffix ια, Moore creates the term Utopia refers to “nowhere”; a place does not exist in the real world, but might be an ideal and perfect place. Based on the nature of Utopia, Moore criticized the social system and political condition in the primitive accumulation capitalist period of Britain, and concluded a description from the relation of property, mode of production, urban-rural relationship, social welfare, academic-physical labor relations to a number of modern social systems to fit human nature. Since then, Utopia has become an important concept about the future social system, the rational existence of human beings, and the spiritual home of modern society. In the early stage of capitalism development in Western Europe, Utopia becomes synonymous with “Utopian socialism”. These thoughts, however, since the book published, became an important ideological source of Marxism. In 1880, in order to response theoretical confusion in reality, Friedrich Engels published his book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, to analyze and explain the difference and relationship between scientific socialism, which based on Marxism, and utopian socialism. Engels pointed out that the discovery and creation of historical materialism and residual/salvage value theory make utopian ideal into a realistic movement, which is the modern socialist movement. In 1917, leaded by Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders, October revolution in Russia achieved victory and built Soviet Union, the first socialist country in the history of mankind. After World War II, with the development of cold war, a series of anti-utopia (dystopia) works were published to make Utopia be a negative term, relating to the childish “left” disease and unrealistic fantasy.

In 1989, the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, the Berlin wall was torn down; global socialist movement and Marxism were stuck amid the gloom. Socialism and communism seem to be existed as ghosts

* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is supported by the major project of China National Social Sciences Funds of China “Research on the Essential Issues and the Patterns of Criticism of Contemporary Aesthetics” (15ZDB023).

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¹ The term is from a classic novel *All Men Are Brothers* or *Water Margin*, about a group of 108 outlaws gathered at Mount Liang to rebel the empire.

again, and the concept of Utopia has been repeatedly discussed in humanities research. Ernst Bloch discussed the “philosophy of hope”, to call socialist movement as concrete Utopia; American scholar Fredric Jameson in recent years has also focused on Utopia and demonstrated the importance of “the future” concept in philosophy, to treat the Utopia as the nature of things, and deep possibility and potentiality². The discussion of Utopian issues has been discussed and used in the sense of philosophical anthropology.

In his book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels wrote:

With the seizing of the means of production by society, production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by systematic, definite organization. The struggle for individual existence disappears. Then, for the first time, man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. ... Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history — only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.³

From our understanding of the capitalist system and human nature, this social ascent will not solve all problems coincidentally or smoothly with the collectivization of the means of production. It has proved that the transformation from the kingdom of necessity to the realm of freedom or the ascent is a very long historical process. Even this historical fact evidenced, it is an urgent and important theoretical question whether the pursuit of Utopia still exists. In contemporary society, what kind of forms does Utopia exist? Does Utopia still have values and meanings? Does the constant change in Utopia itself indicate the nature of Utopia is ideological concept rather than a realistic social movement? This paper will analyze the contemporary significance of Utopia and its aesthetic representation in Utopia existence forms and importance of China's modern history.

Utopian Impulse and Modernity in China

In 1894, during the First Sino-Japanese War, the Imperial Japanese Navy fought Beiyang Fleet in the Yellow Sea of China but the Beiyang Fleet was defeated. Therefore, China was forced to sign Treaty of Shimonoseki. Next year, the Qing empire founded the Imperial Tientsin University/ Peiyang University (now Tianjin University) and 1896, Nanyang College (now Shanghai Jiao Tong University). In 1897, Qiushi Academy (now Zhejiang University) was founded in Hangzhou. Almost at the same time, with the development of higher education in China, the modernization of Chinese society also processed. This year is the 120 anniversary of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. I pointed out a phenomenon in another paper: At the beginning of SJTU, aim from the cultivation of administrators and linguistic talents turned to the domination of engineering science. I think this history can be seen as microcosm of social modernization in China that the scientism (“sciences save the country”) is the most important basis of modernization. This reality is worthy of deep reflection of Chinese Humanities scholars.⁴

Twenty years after the first Sino-Japanese War failed, the journal *La Jeunesse* was founded in Beijing in 1915, the new cultural movement has become social enlightenment and the strong promoter of social transformation in modern China. Through the introduction of *La Jeunesse*, as the important foundation of

² 弗雷德里克·詹姆逊：《乌托邦作为方法或未来的用途》，王逢振译，《马克思主义与现实》2007 第 5 期。

³ Engels F., Historical Materialism. From *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch03.htm>.

⁴ 王杰：《美学的跨学科研究》在上海交大“科学与人文的冲突与对话国际学术研讨会”上的发言及会议论文 2016 年 5 月。

scientific socialism, Marxism began to enter China and the concept of Utopia began to enter Chinese culture. In modern China, Utopia is closely related to the idea of socialism. With the development of the vernacular movement and the new cultural movement, Chinese literature has changed greatly, and has formed its own new tradition in the change. As the core of culture, as well as the carrier of the social ideal, literature and art play a crucial role in the process of modernization of China. About the function of literature and art in China's modernization, understanding and research is still not enough and need to consider historical and social context to do interdisciplinary research. In my view, for the modern Chinese literary tradition, Utopia is a core concept, which may be different from Western tradition. In the twentieth century, on the rise and development of modernization, Western modern literature engaged some basic and core concepts, defamiliarization, abstraction, the concept of the future society from Utopia to the dystopia, the critics from the unreasonable social reality to science-oriented, and critics a possible social form of combination of science and modern despotism. In China, along with the development of the new cultural movement, the new vernacular literature based emerged rapidly, and formed their own traditions, which is the core concept of different forms of Utopia. From an aesthetic point of view, typical realistic performance approach and "lingering charm"⁵ lyricism become the most important aesthetic expression mechanism. Influenced by European literary tradition and aesthetic thoughts, also by Soviet aesthetics and literary theory, we have been called the two kinds of expression mechanism and performance as realism and romanticism in a long period of time; for scientific socialism as the basic concept of the literary tradition, we call it the revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. Since the beginning of reform and opening policy in 1980s, this kind of aesthetics and literary theory has been challenged and abandoned, instead of various modern and formalism aesthetics and literary theories. In this theoretical tendency and theoretical thoughts, utopian impulse was described as a kind of destructive power and cultural impulse, for example, the theoretical explanation of the avant-garde movement in Chinese literature and art in 1980s. Some scholars criticize and question the unreasonable phenomenon in the development of the socialist movement as the utopian impulse and the socialist movement itself. In my opinion, it is misunderstanding of Chinese avant-garde movement.

This paper argues that, with the process of the new culture movement in China, one of the most core issues is the literary expression of modernity and the reflection of the dilemma of modernity. Particularly, due to the great aftermath of Sino-Japanese war failure, Chinese intellectuals had almost completely embraced evolution theory, including the understanding of Utopia and its effects for Marxism in the early modern China. During that time, the utopian impulse had released tremendous influence and cultural power. Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, Cao Yu, Shen Congwen, Lao She, Nie Er, Xian Xinghai, Xu Beihong, Zhang Daqian, Qi Baishi and a large number of literary artists were famous, starry, and majestic. A Utopia impulse for a new and better world vision is the cultural factor of this art peak phenomenon. When the great power of new cultural movement encountered the strong desire of the vast majority become their own masters, a new support and strengthen mechanism were developed to inspire the great power of China society. The victory of the Anti-Japanese War, the establishment of new China, the victory of the Korean War, and later the "great leap forward" and Cultural Revolution are all expression of that great social power. If think about this phenomenon from the logic of Utopia impulse, we should see the internal logic in the cultural and social phenomenon, which is humanities scholars should face and reflection today.

⁵ “余韵”是我提出的美学概念，可参见拙作《审美幻象研究--现代美学导论》北京大学出版社 2012 年。

My personal view is, due to the huge shadow of Sino-Japanese war, the acceptance of Utopia in China society entered a narrow channel of instrumental rationality; the balance mechanism in culture system was broken, which leads to the variation of Utopian ideology, also led to the serious setbacks of the China socialism suffered during the Cultural Revolution. About the relationship between Utopian impulse and Chinese modernity, there are two basic propositions in this paper.

First of all, as Mao Zedong pointed out, after the first Sino-Japanese War, the fact is “only socialism can save China”. The reality of semi-feudal and semi-colonial situation needed socialism, and it is only half a century since Marxism was introduced into China to People’s Republic of China. The combination of social organization mode in Chinese agricultural society and socialist concepts creates a kind of socialism with Chinese characteristics, but Utopia impulse is the core concept.

Secondly, the failure of Cultural Revolution in 1960s and the beginning of economic reform and opening up in 1980s prove that only good wishes and great efforts of subjective initiative could not easily help China leap over the capitalist “Kafdin Valley”; the primary the stage of socialism—market economy as the main lever—will be a painful and long period. Therefore, the utopian impulse is characterized by another form of literature and art, which is another aspect of Chinese characteristic aesthetic modernity. I think it might be a more vital feature.⁶

These two basic propositions are the premise to discuss Chinese aesthetic modernity. The first theory follows that aesthetic modernity in China is a full of tragic theoretical concept, or that Chinese modern tragedy concept is a theoretical question of aesthetics China which must be answered. In theory, the “modern tragedy concept” is the aesthetic form of Utopia, which described by Engels as a tragic conflict “between historical necessity and the temporarily impossible”, also be summed up by western scholars as “historical tragedy”.⁷

“Modern tragedy” concept is first proposed in April 19th 1859, by Marx written in the letter to Lasalle. In this concept, Utopia is no longer a utopian ideal, but the realistic basis of social movements, a kind of aesthetic phenomenon of historical development. Marx wrote:

Secondly, the implicit conflict is not just tragic; it is the tragic conflict upon which the revolutionary party of 1848-49 justly foundered. Hence making it the fulcrum of a modern tragedy can only meet with my wholehearted approval. ...Unless, therefore, you wished to reduce the conflict to no more than what is portrayed in Götz von Berlichingen—and such was not your plan—Sickingen and Hutten were bound to go under because they imagined themselves to be revolutionaries (which cannot be said of Götz) and, just like the cultivated Polish aristocracy of 1830, turned themselves on the one hand into the organs of modern ideas while on the other actually representing a reactionary class interest. The aristocratic representatives of revolution—behind whose catch-words of unity and liberty there still lingers the dream of the imperial past and of club-law—ought not in that case to monopolise the interest as you make them do; rather the representatives of the peasants (of these in particular) and of the revolutionary elements in the towns should provide an altogether significant and dynamic background. This would have enabled you to give expression in far greater measure precisely to the most modern ideas in their most unsophisticated form; whereas, in fact now, the dominant idea, apart from religious freedom, is civic unity. Then you would automatically have had to “Shakespeareise” more, whereas your principal failing is, to my mind, “Schillering”, i.e. using individuals as mere mouthpieces for the spirit of the times.⁸

Marx’s ideas here were systematically explained later by Raymond Williams in his book *Modern Tragedy* in 1966, and also explained the aesthetic and social significance of European modernist literary.

⁶ 柏拉威尔：《马克思与世界文学》三联出版社。

⁷ 柏拉威尔：《马克思与世界文学》三联出版社。

⁸ MECW Volume 40, p. 418, retrieved from http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1859/letters/59_04_19.htm.

In China, “modern tragedy” exists in a more complicated form. If the modern tragedy for Marx and Williams is to represent the huge contradiction between the aim of socialism and the inevitable requirement of history with the proper art forms, so in China, connotations and forms of Utopia have more complex and Chinese characteristics. On the connotation, Chinese socialism requires the utopian impulse must leap over very backward mode of production, as a great historical challenge. On the other hand, Chinese form is a contemporary aesthetic theory. From the history process of Chinese modern aesthetics, we can see that a Chinese characteristic “expression form”, or the expression form of national style has always been the essence and key of many aesthetic debates. What kind of cultural form to express the Chinese connotation of “modern tragedy” is the key to promote creative development of Chinese culture.

Overlapping “Nostalgia”: Split Utopia

In Chinese culture, a very important proposition and idea called “body within soil” refer to the compatible state of human existence to others, living environment and culture. In this state, human beings can reach the happiness and reasonable nature. The root of such idea is the agricultural culture, which has a very important position on Chinese medical science, literature, philosophy and other cultural forms. With the development of Chinese social modernization, population mobility, a full introduction of Western culture, including architecture, medicine, clothing, diet and literary expression, all these make profound crisis for Chinese people and its culture. This anxiety and crises are projected to the Utopia ideas and the corresponding literature idols; it seems to me that this is the “nostalgia” concept and literary expression in native literature tradition since Chinese new literary movement.

From the perspective of “body within soil” concept, the critical realism from Russian literature tradition is also a powerful force in New Culture Movement of China and plays a powerful role in the process of China’s social modernization. But from the China form of Utopia or China expression, “typical” aesthetics and its tradition still have some distance from the deeper level of China’s experience. The “typical” aesthetics and understanding process of modernization by material and technology is the theoretical basis of “three prominent” aesthetics and “red aesthetics” during the Cultural Revolution. The validity and historical defects should be in-depth studied, but not within the analysis of this paper.⁹

Since Thomas Moore, literature is the most important means to express the idea of Utopia. In this sense, Marx and Engels pay high attention to Lassalle’s *Franz von Sickingen*, and also the essential reason for Mao Zedong host the Yan’an forum on literature and art in 1942, and Xi Jinping host a forum on literature and art in 2014. Utopia provides goals and future for a society, a nation, and even the world; in philosophy and aesthetics, it also provides the meaning of contemporary life and living.

On the “body within soil” and nostalgic feelings, a Chinese modern artist and art educator Li Shutong works as an example. Graduated from the Nanyang College, Li Shutong was the pioneer to engage in art education, the practice of “aesthetic education of religion” concept, and also the earliest promoters of Chinese stageplay. His song *Farewell* has a lasting influence in the process of Chinese modernization. In my opinion, the song *Farewell* aesthetically expresses the nostalgia of modernization in China.

⁹ 关于中国现当代文学表达机制问题，我在《中国马克思主义美学的问题与理论》一文中有过涉及。《文艺研究》2008年第一期。

In 1931, shortly after the outbreak of Anti-Japanese War, Li Shutong abandoned his early history of study in Japan, abandoned his Japanese wife, converted in a temple of Hangzhou, so his Buddhist name was Hong Yi. If there is a “structure of feeling” in his song, the core of this structure is the “nostalgic feeling”. In the early stage of Chinese social modernization, aestheticians had debates on “nostalgia” literature. Li Shutong, Shen Congwen, and Zhu Guangqian, similar as the lake poets in England, had been fiercely criticized by the “left” aestheticians and literary critics, which aftermath still exists. To consider Utopia in Chinese new culture, “nostalgia” is a concept should be seriously rethought.

M. H. Abrams’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms* and Toni Bennett’s *New Keywords* did not include “nostalgia”. In Chinese culture, “nostalgia” is a special structure of feeling, referring to memories and yearning for the past and the lost beautiful idyllic. “Nostalgia” relates to “rhyme” or “charm” in Chinese classical aesthetics but also be different. “Nostalgia” is a recent cultural and aesthetic phenomenon, since the emergence of Chinese modernization society, modern city, modern industry and indifferent and even contradictory relation of interpersonal relationship. Different from simply “dreaming the past” and “longing hometown”, “Nostalgia” includes a strong emotional color of utopization of the past. Perhaps because of this beautiful idyllic prettification from painful reality to the beautiful past, “nostalgia” becomes a tragic but aesthetic expression of the Utopian impulse in Chinese modernization.

In the history of Chinese literature, Lu Xun had described “nostalgia” in his *My Old Home*, as the earlier description. In *My Old Home*, Lu Xun wrote:

Another expression of “nostalgia” was written by the famous writer Shen Congwen. Wrote in his novel *Border Town*, Shen Congwen wrote:

Since 1980s, with the root searching literature, new native literature and avant-garde literature, the concept “nostalgia” has been further enriched and developed, and become the cultural relaying or utopia of contemporary Chinese society against the pain and the huge pressure of modernization.

Today, therefore, when we rethink and study the relationship of Utopia and Chinese social modernization, we must also consider these questions: in the process of globalization, for different ethnic groups and different types of civilization, whether expression form of Utopia will be different? For Chinese literature and art, what is the aesthetic expression of Utopian impulse? What is its aesthetic and cultural mechanism?

According to Marx’s letter to Lasalle in 1859, Marx pointed out that the modern tragedy concept embodied in literary and artistic works cannot stay in Goethe’s structure of feeling in his *Götz von Berlichingen*, but should express the future structure of socialist revolution feeling through literature figures. Therefore, in Marx’s aesthetics of tragedy, the possibility of future society should be concretely expressed in Shakespeare form of art, or using the terminology of contemporary aesthetics, to express the better social utopia by a fullness structure of feeling. Obviously, this is a very high and hard aesthetic standard. Back Marx’s theory to historical context of Chinese modernization to study, we will find that, it is not enough if only to fit in Marx’s aesthetics, also it may still fall into the Schillerian mode of expression. Only combining the theory of modern tragedy with Chinese cultural context, it is possible to express the future structure of feeling in Chinese social relations through the aesthetic mechanism of Chinese culture.

In the study of the relationship between Chinese literature and Utopia, we will find an interesting phenomenon that it lacks literary description of the “future”. Since the new cultural movement in early twentieth Century, China almost did not have similar works as Moore’s *Utopia*, Tommaso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*, William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, nor Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, George

Orwell's 1984. Chinese works, moreover, in the development of modern and contemporary literature in China, science fiction is a tiny and undeveloped literary genre. Does China lack of social Utopian impulse since the twentieth century? The answer is obviously negative. We can strongly feel the powerful force of Utopian impulse in Chinese modern political and literature works. Perhaps the answer may be that the utopian impulse in Chinese literature and art has alternative to achieve their own expression. I think, "nostalgia" is such literature and aesthetic form.

Different from the basic logic of Western utopian literature which refers to the "future", Chinese traditional native literature and critical realism in the literary tradition of "nostalgia" refer to the "past". It might relate to the ancestor worship in Chinese culture and philosophy. In Chinese culture, including Chinese philosophy and Chinese literature, "perfect" world, perfect social existence exist only in the distant past. With the falling of ritual era, Utopia in Chinese heart can connect with the presence of the past. So we see, after the failure of the Sino-Japanese war, the new culture movement, on the one hand, criticized the doctrine of Confucius and Mencius; on the other hand, for the study of Chinese myth, new generation focused on China traditional and popular songs. Lu Xun, Wen Yiduo, Zhou Zuoren, Li Shutong and other writers were the earliest Chinese mythology research scholars. In Yan'an during 1930s to 1940s, Mao Zedong, and other cultural elites promote the national form of literature and art to a very high status. "Potato school" of local literature, folk song, and folk dance become an important form of feeling for the literary representation of "future" structure. At Yan'an period with "the past" to represent the "future", prominent examples of literary works should be Mao Zedong's poem *Snow* and lyricist Guang Weiran and composer Xian Xinghai's song *The Yellow River Cantata*. In another paper, I have analyzed the strong utopian impulse in the poem *Snow*. In *The Yellow River Cantata*, all images are from the agricultural civilization, from the material foundation of Chinese civilization, without any relations of industrialization and market economy.

Mao Zedong's poem *Snow* expresses his emotional moment after the long march of the red army arrived in Northern Shaanxi, at the most difficulties and hardships but the dawn of China revolution. The structure of feeling expressed in *Snow* became a new establishment and development of China. Meanwhile, Guang Weiran and Xian Xinghai's song *the Yellow River Cantata* reflects the most difficult period for Anti-Japanese War. The structure of feeling expressed in *Snow*, on the other hand, has become the common emotion of many Chinese revolutionaries, or the common aspiration of the utopian impulse to challenge strong difficulties and hardships, and become the powerful weapon to "unite and mobilize people to fight the enemy". If *Snow* and *The Yellow River Cantata* contribute to face difficulties and hardships and look into the distance, the utopian impulse has become a powerful force in it, then, Li Shutong's *Farewell* expresses the "nostalgia sorrow", which expression of sadness and nostalgia type of the beautiful Utopia are more close to the structure of feeling in daily life of ordinary people, so it is more widely circulated, sung more lasting. *Farewell* written in Japan 1905, ten years after the first Sino-Japanese War, and ten years ahead of the journal *La Jeunesse* found. At the historical period between the Sino-Japanese War and the new culture movement, based on the sentimental tradition of Chinese poetry, and the concept of Utopian imagination of Chinese literary nostalgia, this song is an excellent literary text worthy of careful analysis.

Farewell/ Song Bie Ge

lyric by Li Shutong

composed by John P. Ordway

Outside the long pavilion, along the ancient route,
 fragrant grass green joins the sky,
 The evening wind caressing willow trees, the sound of the flute piercing the heart,
 sunset over mountains beyond mountains.
 At the brink of the sky, at the corners of the earth,
 my familiar friends wander in loneliness and far from home,
 One more ladle of wine
 to conclude the little happiness that remains; don't have any sad dreams tonight.
 Outside the long pavilion, along the ancient route, fragrant grass green joins the sky,
 I ask of you, as you go this time, when are you to return?
 When it's time to come please don't hesitate.
 At the brink of the sky, at the corners of the earth,
 familiar friends wander in loneliness and far from home,
 In life it is happy reunions that are rare; most often we bid farewell.¹⁰

Li Shutong's song *Farewell* did not attract more attention in the history of literature, because it originated from a British author, and the lyric was finished by Li Shutong. However, more than 100 years later, this song is still sung in ordinary people, still echoing structure of feeling in the process of modernization, so still need to analyze.

A large number of Chinese classical poetry language and imagery used in *Farewell*, tell the sorrow of parting among friends, to create a sense of classical aesthetics. The lyric "At the brink of the sky, at the corners of the earth, my familiar friends wander in loneliness and far from home" expresses a strong but modern style, peculiar the atmosphere of solitude and industrialization in cities. Because of this, the various intentions of classical friendship are close to perfect, and become the utopia for citizens abroad. Of course, it is just emotional utopia. In China, for the lonely individual in modern society, the Sino-Japanese War is not only the failure of a country, also means that the pattern of China-social structure, values and belief system was fundamentally impacted by the modernization process worldwide. The whole social system including material and culture, enough to live and work in peace was totally in a deep crisis. Looking outward, trying to "take off Asia into Europe," our neighbor Japan is the enemy of China, so it is impossible to become the "future of Chinese nation". In such desperate situation, mountainous hometowns, willows, sun, grass, old roads and others can comfort the soul and being emotion backing. Perhaps because of this mentality, Li Shutong wrote the song *Farewell*, to reflect structure of feeling after the China society was forced into the modernization process. We note that, various songs with the similar appear later in social modernization of China, prove the structure of feeling Li Shutong grasped.

This paper argues that the theme and images in Li Shutong's *Farewell* nostalgic utopia always exist in contemporary Chinese literature and art, from Lu Xun's *My Old Home* and *Weeds*, Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, Wang Zengqi's *Ordained*, Chen Zhongshi's *White Deer Plain*, Jia Pingwa's *Deserted City*, to the contemporary film, Zhou Xiaowen's *Lost*, Wei Desheng's *Cape No. Seven*, Hsiao-Hsien Hou's *Assassin Nie Concealed Woman*, and Bi Gan's *Kali Blues* represent good imagination of the "past" to reflect the structure of

¹⁰ Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_Bie_Ge.

feeling that creates brilliant from sufferings. However, the core of this structure is no longer the “heaven” or the ancestor worship of traditional Chinese society, but a socialist concept of utopia. As Marx analyzed the possibilities of Oriental Societies leap over the capitalist production “Kaftin valley”, based on kinship, commune organization and culture of Oriental societies could combine with modern technology and management of capitalist production, so as to achieve reasonable and equal justice, and help each other in the new historical level.¹¹

Chinese Form of Utopia and Aesthetic Anthropology as a Research Approach

The core of utopia is socialism. It is 500 years anniversary since *Utopia* published. Various forms of Utopia represent in literature and art, also practice in various social organizations. Theoretically, Utopia is a representation of human nature and desire, so it relates to social material and production means. On the other hand, it connects the inner drive, or existence of human nature. Therefore, the analysis of utopia is not only about the relationship between society and the “future”, but also for the inner world and existence of mankind. This paper argues that, because of the particularity of Chinese social modernization, because of the material and social conditions stipulated in Chinese modernization process, utopia expression is inevitable tragic, that is to say, as Marx and Engels pointed out, the inevitable requirement of the history cannot be achieved and then, tragic conflict happens. In China, utopian impulse is a strong desire that, after the failure of Sino-Japanese War, “only socialism can save China”. This desire is caused by reality and social conditions, at the same time, we should also see the fact that it is hard to achieve the socialist demands in such backward productivity of semi-feudal and semi-colonial society, inevitably accompanied by many great sacrifices and failure. This tragedy with utopian power or the utopian impulse in tragic artistic expression is the basic theme of Chinese literature and aesthetics since the Sino-Japanese War.

In contrast, the Chinese aesthetics history from Wang Guowei, we should see that Western aesthetic theories are difficult to fully explain the tragic questions in Chinese literature and art, even Raymond Williams’s *Modern Tragedy* and Terry Eagleton’s *Sweet Violence* cannot completely solve the expression problem of tragic or the existing way of utopia in Chinese literature and aesthetics. This paper tries to promote a theoretical explanation of Chinese modern tragedy based on the particularity of Chinese culture. We know that the whole Western tragic mode based on ancient Greece, laid the core that tragedy conflict cannot compromise, sacrifice in the conflict (scapegoat demigod) achieves purification of emotion, so citizens can get the cultural and psychological identity. So, contrary to “conflict visual display” as the key mechanism for cultural expression in ancient Greek tragedy and Western tragedy, perhaps the “conflict of beautiful and music show” is the expression mechanism of tragedy in Chinese modern literature and art. Indeed, music has a sacred and significant social role in Chinese culture. The first Chinese aesthetic book *Music Theory* discusses the relationship between hierarchy and ceremonies, and the difference between sacred and secular music. The repetition of the cyclotron and constant ensures the central of ceremony and unconditional acceptance. In Chinese ancient culture, the deity is obtained through the “original” and “pure”. As a culture of ancestor worship, Chinese philosophy regards “one” and “Tai Chi” as the supreme deity. Therefore, the “return” is the most basic mechanism for the expression of Chinese culture. In this sense, we can understand and explain why “nostalgia” become a basic theme and has the meaning of utopia in China’s social modernization. We see, in

¹¹ 参阅凯文·安德森：《马克思在边缘》。

contemporary Chinese literature and aesthetics, aesthetic expression of utopia has become a very complex and full of confusion domain, so aesthetics need to make explanation and evaluation of aesthetic and social significance embodied in the historical context. Two songs from Guan Hu's film *Mr. Six* and Bi Gan's *Kali Blues* are the same theme "nostalgia" to illustrate this point.

Guan Hu's film *Mr. Six* is considered to express the utopian impulse in contemporary Chinese society. The film describes the nickname of Mr. Six middle-aged man look for his gulfed son, many difficulties, problems, and finally, desperate die. When the hero saw his lover, the film visual image and the radio song *Flower Room Girl* form a kind of audio-visual montage, fix the icon of Mr. Six as an ideal tragic image to pursuit personal dreams, even though abandon love for the sake of utopia. *Flower Room Girl* was wrote and sung by a rock singer Cui Jian, as a representation of China's social utopia since the reform and opening up policy:

Flower Room Girl

by Cui Jian

I walk past your flower room every day. I see you, but I say nothing.

I'm so afraid to look at your ... face.

You ask me where I'm going. I point to the ocean.

Your surprise is my pride. oh...

You take me into your house. I cannot escape the fragrance of the flowers.

I forgot the direction.

You say I'm the strongest. I say you're the kindest.

You knew it was with the flowers, oh...

You want me to stay, you want me to be the same as them,

I look at you and say, oh..., no

I want to go back to my way, I want to go on.

I know I can't do without you, oh girl!

I'm going back to my way, I'm going to go on.

I know I can't do without you, oh girl!

Chinese language has multiple meanings. Therefore, like the young man in Lu Xun's *Passing Travellers*, the young boy always dreams the ocean and the other side of world. Full of utopia in his heart may be on the other side of the Pacific, the United States of America, or a "bright future", or "my beautiful hometown" etc. Everyone will get his/her own meanings from this song.

In the movie *Mr. Six*, Mr. Six used to a Beijing bully and a prisoner because of street fights; his "nostalgia" is "chivalry" of gangsters. The movie claims the chivalry of feudal culture as a utopia of justice for the utopia of contemporary society. In my opinion, it is confusion and error. In this sense, as what Marx criticized to LaSalle, the film *Mr. Six* did not represent contemporary society, social relations, social trend and so on. The film was highly valued at the box office and many scholars, and it can only be explained that the contemporary aesthetic meaning is not presented to us in a way of self-evident.¹²

Let's see the film *Kali Blues*. This is also a movie about "looking for". In a rural town, a doctor is also an amateur poet. He has done prison. After released, he became a doctor at a mountainous county of Guizhou. When his brother sent his son away, he began his own searching, including his nephew, his young lovers, and a woman look like his wife. In the film, with poems in his head, this man is just wandering, wandering in

¹² 王杰等:《电影<老炮儿>中的情感正义》上海艺术评论。2016年第3期。

contemporary rural areas and towns, seems to have purpose, but also seems to have unclear purpose. He faces a world he could not fully understand, a world totally without any feelings to him, but he insists to look for, without any hope and is patient and attach to everyone he meets. In this type of roaming, he meets a young woman like his wife, and then, he stops and sings a Taiwan campus song *Little Jasmine*.

Little Jasmine

Early morning, rain poured down - soaking the little jasmine
 The petals so white and pure they take your breath away
 The evening wind caresses the grass of the meadow
 The little jasmine is coloured red by the evening sun
 Smiling silently -unable to penetrate your secret

 Calm moonlight, mist surrounds the little jasmine
 Looking out to see you I hate having to depart from you
 Calm moonlight, mist surrounds the little jasmine
 Waiting for you to enter my dreams
 Little jasmine Will you forget me or not?
 Little jasmine Please remember that I'm still here
 Little jasmine Up in the branches it's naturally beautiful
 Little jasmine Please remember me- Don't forget me¹³

Little Jasmine is a pure serene song, but in this movie, the different way of singing and the cold, strange montage express the warm and beautiful side show of humanity. Even though it is fleeting, the movie *Kali Blues* represents hope and warmth through a heavy silence. Although weak, the sun will rise, I still accompany you.

Long shots in the movie *Kali Blues*, with the inner monologues lines, constitute a very innovative video montage, of the multi levels and context of social life in contemporary Chinese society. In this overlapping context, *Little Jasmine* singing by a poor, bad voice of a middle-aged man struggling to sing, the tenacity of life and the ordinary's sincere kindness impressed viewers. For utopia, it is undoubtedly important and necessary to discuss and debate from the perspective of social institutions, but the movie *Kali Blues* represents that: simple and pure life or pure and simple way of perceiving reality is still beautiful and full of hope, even in the science and technology era, the luxury and fashion era, and media-directed era.

Conclusion

Through all analysis and discussion, my conclusions as below:

First of all, due to the specific historical reasons, China's modernization has its special context, which we should recognize and pay attention to this particularity, and make theoretical explanations. One expression of this particularity is "nostalgia" and its rotary regression mechanism. This aesthetic expression mechanism embodied in a complex reality of multiple contexts, so aesthetic and social significance flow, and need to be recognized in context.

Secondly, literature, images and themes have been highly symbolic in contemporary society, as the basic concept in Chinese art, "nostalgia" expression mechanism has a huge uncertainty, and need to be taken back in to the historical materialism and political economy critique of contemporary society, and to the latest modern

¹³ Translated by Heng Xing, retrieved from http://www.jpopasia.com/lyrics/23624/rainie_yang/xiao-mo-li/.

science and technology. This requires the aesthetics and contemporary art criticism break through the limitations of disciplines, to carry out interdisciplinary research and interpretation.

Thirdly, the expression of utopia in Chinese literature and art is a very complicated social and cultural phenomenon, so we should not concluded based on one aspect or one phenomenon. If from the perspective of aesthetics, there are misunderstandings of nostalgia in literature and art as the basic content of aesthetic significance and social value, it is necessary to review and evaluation. The expression of utopia is closely related to the aesthetic expression mechanism of Chinese culture. Further research will help to understand the aesthetic modernity of China.

Fourthly, in theory, I personally advocate use “lingering charm”¹⁴ to summarize and describe this kind of utopian expression mechanism in China. This mechanism is formed by Chinese culture itself to achieve recreation, looking for its own new way in the process of modernization. This research approach requires interdisciplinary researches, sociology, anthropology and psychology, in order to accurately capture and describe this continuous sliding artistic phenomenon in the overlapping contexts, so to explain the meaning of our contemporary life. From my own research, aesthetic anthropology is valuable and significant to explain this phenomenon and expression mechanism.

¹⁴ 王杰, 《审美幻象研究---现代美学导论》北京大学出版社, 2012 年出版。