

Outline of Utopian Literature

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As a unique literary pattern or genre^① in the literary history in the West, utopian literature^② hasn't received enough attention from the academic circle in China until today. Serving as a modest spur to induce more people to come forward with their valuable contributions, this paper attempts to make an exploration into issues such as the origin and development of this kind of genre, its basic connotations and characteristics, and the possible significances of studying this literary genre, etc., so as to obtain suggestions from experts with the same interest.

I. Utopia: A Large Woven Basket

As is known to all, "Utopia" is a terminology created by Thomas More, a famous English humanist, in the early 16th century. This word originates from two Greek words: *Eutopia*, referring to "a good place" and *Outopia*, standing for "a place that doesn't exist". Combining these two Greek words together, it means "a state which doesn't exist"^③. In this way, this terminology "Utopia" has possessed a dual meaning since More created it. Though many scholars have repeatedly pointed out it ^④, more people would rather intercept the meaning conducive to their arguments according to their personal understanding, and stuff their own thoughts into it during this process. As a result, "Utopia" has become a terminology featured by divergent public opinions, broad connotations and even inclusive of all things. In the opinion of many people, Utopia seems to be "a large woven basket" where everything can be put in.

As pointed out by Levitas, the current definition of Utopia^⑤ can be inspected from three aspects, namely, content, form and function. Lewis Mumford believes that in terms of general use, the word Utopia can refer to stupid ideas of human beings or extremes of human expectations, an unfruitful dream for perfection, looking forward to recreating the human environment and system and even the essence of shortcomings of human existence in a country or rational efforts which will never be in existence, so as to enrich the possibilities of daily life^⑥. As pointed out by Mary L. Boreanaz in *A Journey to Transcend Utopia*, though totalitarian Utopia should take the main responsibility for the dystopian attitude in intellectuals in the modern time, Utopia doesn't always describe an organized society, a centralized country and a state of mechanized people. *Tahiti* by Diderot or *News from Nowhere* by Morris has provided us with a kind of Utopia where people are free from physical and moral oppression; they didn't work due to necessity or a kind of responsibility, but they find work is a pleasurable activity. There, love makes people ignorant of law, and everyone is an artist. George Kateb believes that we should imagine Utopia as a world where individuals and groups enjoy the freedom, will, energy and gift to create and recreate their

lives which won't be subject to the cumbrance of deficiency and horror for sudden death^⑦. However, as pointed out by Oscar Wilde, a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of utopias. Anatole France also holds that without Utopia about another time, human beings will still be living in caves, miserably and nakedly. It is exactly Utopians who have depicted the contour of the first city...having formed the beneficial reality from extremely colorful dreams. Utopia is the principle for all kinds of progress, and the attempt to enter a more beautiful future.

However, most intellectuals in China deem that the so-called "Utopia" is equal to "fantasy" and "day-dream". As time goes by, the tendency of the generalization of Utopia will be more obvious. Since the translation of and introduction to dystopian fictions such as *1984* and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, etc. in the 1980s, people began to name socialist practices in the time of Mao as Utopian movements, and link them with labels such as "totalitarianism" or "totalism". For example, as believed by some scholars, "All kinds of imagination carry a Utopian characteristic more or less"^⑧, but people will coincidentally think of "Utopia" when giving a definition to certain "ideal", "planning" or "blueprint" pointing at the future.

Utopia has become an ambiguous word, having almost become a synonym to "beautiful society" or "wonderful era". People use it to refer to dreams and prospects of all nations and all times: Looking back upon the myths in the golden time to future prospects in the splendid society of prosperity at a time of national peace and order, from *Paradise Lost* to *Paradise Regained*. No matter it is at home or abroad, differences on the understanding of Utopia are mainly demonstrated in the dichotomy of "Utopia with substance" and "Utopia with value". Prejudice on either of the two will probably give rise to misunderstandings of Utopia. As believed by the author of this paper, "Utopia is the psychokinesis existing internally in the living structure of human beings to seek for ideals, perfectness and freedom, and this kind of psychokinesis is exactly an important dimension for people's existence. In short, Utopia is a research and revelation of existence"^⑨. This kind of research and revelation are first manifested in a kind of imaginary text called "Utopia". In the history of Western civilization, Utopia has formed a more special tradition of exploring social and political thoughts, with its theme being peculiar themes of thoughts in the Western society, namely, power, inequality, democracy and science. However, as an imaginary form, its disposal to these themes is unique and fascinating. Utopia is far more than a product of imagination or satisfaction of wishes, but also is a critical rehearsal of modern social predicaments, as well as an indicative description of the best way to solve these predicaments.

II. Utopian Literature, Dystopian Literature and New Utopian Literature

From the whole view of the cultural history in the West, the appearance of utopian thoughts in the literary field can be said to have a long history. According to the general opinion, utopian literature first appearing in *Timaeus* by Plato was elaborated in detail in *The Republic*. The

idealized description of Sparta in *Bibliography of Lycurgus* by Plutarch also belongs to this kind of utopian works. Legends about “Atlantis” have inspired many utopian myths. Similar ideas can be seen in many legends in Norway, Celt and Arab in the Middle Ages. Retrospection and description of the “golden time” in *Theogony, Works and Days* by Hesiod is one of the early images of utopian literature.

However, generally speaking, most part of the utopian literature in the early times was scattered with limited scale and incomplete parts of ancient scripts. Besides, achievements on essence, aesthetic feature, creative skills and means of expression of utopian literature, etc., were not either colorful or ordered at this stage. Therefore, they are far from being said to be self-knowledge of utopian literature. It was not until More that utopian literature was used as a narrative genre creatively. With the writing practices of a statesman, More makes his *Utopia* become the genre-setting novel of a unique literary genre, i.e. utopian fictions, in the history of Western literature. This has paved the way for the patterns of modern utopian fictions, and is of extremely important significance to the developmental history of utopian literature in the West.

In human practices of art, every creation in art is not only the birth of a piece of work, but also the birth of an artistic concept. When More created the unprecedented work *Utopia*, people would not only read this piece of work, but also would have such association that if he called this kind of writing as a piece of literary work, then his ideas on art had been obviously different from the traditional ones. At this time, people were making a comparison between traditional concept of art and that represented in modern artworks. This situation clearly and unmistakably tells us that the appearance of utopian literature is definitely not a dispensable thing. Maybe More himself never anticipated that his causal title and his model creations would exert any impact on the cultural history of human beings, especially the political history, literary history and ideological history. Putting aside the significance of the political history and ideological history, we might as well take a look at its influence on the literary history first.

In the second volume of *Utopia*, More depicts a pagan communist state where all systems and policies are totally subject to the dominance of rationality, i.e. an idealized state without deprivation or oppression. As is generally believed, the purpose for More to depict the system and dignity of such a state is to satirize current politics by making a striking contrast between it and the irrational political system in the Christianity-dominant Europe, hence evoking the courage and determination of the ruling party to reform the maladministration, and attempting to provide a reasonable plan for this kind of anticipated reform, i.e. ideals about a fair society, so as to take the role of “legislator” of this country. Though this ideal of More hasn’t been realized completely, it still “has influenced policies of the Tudor dynasty in certain aspects”^⑩, and received extensive response from statesman and humanists in major countries in Europe at that time^⑪.

Though More was sent to the guillotine by Henry VIII, his spirit of sacrificing himself for ideals has illuminated people of later generations. His establishment of the genre of sub-fictions, i.e. utopian fictions, has not only been inherited loyally by later generations, but also developed

remarkably. From the 17th century to the 19th century, in major countries in Europe such as Britain, and France, it had been the favorite way for people to criticize the current system by way of utopian works. At that time, hundreds of works of this kind were published. In addition, many literary Utopias featured by both religion and secularity appeared in Protestantism. The 19th century was “a time when fantasy was prevalent”, “The 19th century was filled with all kinds of utopian books and assumptions. In the last 12 years of that century, about 100 utopian fictions appeared”^⑫. Many utopian fictions are more of satirizing or mocking nature in current conditions than of providing feasible solutions to or methods for them. In the days afterwards, even today when people have entered into the information age, utopian fictions, as a genre of sub-fictions, have formed a tradition almost without interruption. In the 20th century, when the possibility of a planned society was approaching, many ardent dystopian and non-Utopian fictions appeared, with *Animal Farm* and *1984* by Orwell as the representatives. These dystopian fictions have expressed negation of and mistrust in Utopia in the form of art. *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *We* by Zamyatin are reputed as the three great dystopian fictions. With the historical changes of utopian literature in the West, the so-called New Utopian Literature has made its appearance in the present day, which mainly refers to the spring-up of the genre of sub-Utopian fictions such as feminist utopian fictions, and ecological utopian fictions, cyber utopian fictions, etc.

III. Outline of Characteristics of Utopian Literature

When investigating into the English utopian fictions since the 16th century, especially from the 16th century to the end of the 19th century, the author has found out that this kind of unique genre shows a striking feature during the long progress of development, i.e. a rare stability and obvious tendency of stylization in form:

1. The plot is relatively easy;
2. Usually, the clue of the story runs through the text by way of an overseas expedition or sailing (often with accidents such as shipwrecks or loss of orientation);
3. The whole or partial of the text adopts the dialogical narrative method, and the plot is usually developed in the form of reminiscence, sometimes in the alternative form of narration or flashback, with the author usually taking the role of the narrator;
4. One of the greatest events in the story is usually the discovery of an unknown mysterious land (be it an island, a country with unspecified geographic position, or certain outer space) ^⑬;
5. The discovery of this mysterious land is usually the discovery of the customs and habits, local manners and feelings, which is especially linked to the detailed description of its “perfect and idealized” political system and social orders;
6. To truly find out those contents mentioned in Item Five, especially to describe and even explore the political system and social order of the place to be found, it is necessary to learn the language of this place. This is the content that Utopian fictions are going to describe very probably;
7. Human characters are not the focus of this kind of fictions;
8. The purpose of the description and pursuit for Utopia is mainly to make a contrast between it and the countries from which explorers and navigators came, thus giving people hopeful guidance or reasons for criticism.

The author believes that, these incomplete summaries above are generally suitable for

utopian literature outside Britain. Based on this kind of understanding, the author attempts to make an elaboration on the features of utopian literature from the aspects of time, space, constructive imagination, and uncompromising spirit of criticism, etc.

First of all, in terms of the dimension of time, Utopian literature is usually directed at the future⁽¹⁴⁾, because the main content of utopian literature is the description of a perfect society which actually doesn't exist in the secular world. This society exists in the remote future. In such a kind of society without oppression or deprivation, the essence of people is completely objectified, and the potential of people is fully realized. Be it utopian island nations described by More, or "the city of sun" attentively depicted by Campanella, they both show a perfect and even magnificent "nation of tomorrow". But since the appearance of dystopian literature, its dimension of time has changed: Though the picture depicted by this type of fictions is also directed at the future, such a kind of distance between future and reality is transient. For example, *1984*, published by George Orwell in 1949, clearly marked the predicative year of "1984", giving people an "imminent" sense of urgency and reality.

Secondly, in terms of the concept of space, stories depicted in utopian fictions are set in unknown mysterious land which is shut off from the society or remote from the secular world. No matter it is the utopian island nation described by More, or the Herland depicted by Gilman, they are both "Paradise" or "Pure Land" which are remote from the secular world and free of the pollution from the so-called "civilization". Even utopian resorts with strong legendary colors depicted by utopian literature in the time when utopian literature is originated from such as "Utopia", "the golden age", "Garden of Eden" and "Atlantis" are mostly unreachable and indefinite places. In a word, space in utopian fictions attempts to leave people an impression featured by inaccessibility and inapproachability, letting people feel they are "celestial mountains beyond the sea" or "Pure Land" in Chinese legends, rather than easily accessible circumstances. In other words, space in utopian fictions always wants to let readers understand that this Utopia is different from reality and the secular world. In utopian fictions, the difference between "this" and "that" is clear at a glance. Even though readers have delusions during the process of reading (on account of being attracted), taking the utopian society in fictions as the real existence, when they get away from the reading process, they will generally clearly realize that is a remote idealized existence after all.

With the change of utopian literature towards dystopian literature, the concept of space in it has also changed remarkably. This is mainly shown in the angusty between the society depicted in utopian fictions and reality and the secular world, which is almost synchronic with the author's time, the social and historical conditions when the fictions were published, or only several steps away. The society depicted in dystopian literature often gives readers a sense featured by reality and fantasy, as well as falsehood and actuality, encouraging the reflection and anxiety of readers on their own living circumstances and the prospects of the social development, thus keeping due alertness to blindfold optimism and absolute social evolutionism.

This has actually involved the third important feature of utopian fictions, i.e. the uncompromising spirit of criticism which it has expressed. That is to say, utopian fictions are not games for amusement, but works with holy spiritual appeal. No matter it is traditional utopian or dystopian fictions, or the upcoming New Utopian fictions, and no matter the thing depicted in it is a perfect society or a horrible, depraved and evil society, its essence aims at criticizing, questioning and negating the current reality, with utopian fictions of different sub-genres only showing certain differences in specific division of work. If utopian fictions express questioning and criticism to the current system and society by depicting a free, perfect, affluent society, free of the contamination from modern civilization, then dystopian fictions achieve their goal of satire and criticism by amplifying, exaggerating and transforming the malady of systems and civilization in the modern society. Utopian fictions exist as an absolute “other” of the current system and fixed orders, and the relationship between the utopian society in these fictions and the current system is like that between water and fire, being opposed to each other, showing “complete negation” in form. However, dystopian fictions go between reality and fiction, revealing most profoundly the civilization of science and technology, civilization of machines, and especially political horrors, thus achieving the goal of warning the world and criticism. Though totalitarian political horror exposed and criticized in the classical “Anti-Utopian Trilogy” in the 20th century, and the ravage of humanity, reversal and destruction of ethics, throttlehold of freedom, and suppression of ideals don’t represent the real living conditions of all people. On account of the outrageous consequences of Auschwitz Concentration Camp brought to the whole world, people cannot face the future easily and willingly at all, but rather, hold cheap optimistic imagination towards it. This kind of almost indifferent excoriation and dry criticism originated from the profound discernment of reality undoubtedly causes people to understand truly and profoundly the society and its prospects where they live in.

Though all forms of literary art are the product of imagination, this doesn’t mean that the dependence of all disciplines of literary art on imagination is equally important. In all disciplines of art, utopian and dystopian fictions borrow imagination remarkably, with constructive imagination as their fourth important feature. They do not take describing “typical characters in typical circumstances” like realistic fictions, depict scenes of social life by way of staying from the aspect of photographic restoration like naturalistic fictions, or even take creating “Gothic atmosphere” as the stunt like Gothic fictions. Fundamentally speaking, the borrowing of imagination by utopian and dystopian fictions is decided by the origin of these two genres of sub-fictions and their missions. Since Utopian and dystopian fictions are destined to depict a society deviating from and opposing the current society and systems, reveal people’s dissatisfaction with the secular world, its use of imagination is exclusively associated with these two extremes: One is to spare no effort in constructing (by “imagination”) a future society far more perfect, peaceful, affluent, happier and freer than the reality, which is named by Westerners as an idealized “Utopian” society. This kind of use is normal. The other is to do its utmost to

amplify (by “imagination”) the malady, darkness, incompleteness, oppression and deficiency of the real secular world, which is the “negative Utopia” called by Westerners. This kind of use is abnormal. However, no matter from which extreme the society has originated, it has an obvious distance from and contrast with the current society, serving the criticism of the reality and secular world, hence inspiring people’s determination to devote themselves to practices and build a beautiful future, or warn the world to be alert to the defects and maladies of the reality and secular world, so as to take feasible measures to contain the imminence of “evil Utopia” as early as possible. Even in terms of the significance above, the use of imagination in utopian and dystopian fictions has obviously played a positively constructive role, well demonstrating the utilitarian color of literary art. Undoubtedly, the use of imagination by utopian and dystopian fictions is different in emphasis from that of other disciplines of fictions: The reason why fictions such as those of romanticism and fantasy use imagination is that they take the artistic and aesthetic purpose as the top priority, while what utopian and dystopian fictions pay more attention to is that whether the imagination can take the effect of “deeming pens as flags” for the social progress and the development of human civilization.

English writer Aldous Huxley described the revolution in five aspects^⑮ carried out by the new world “in human beings spiritually and physically” in his *Brave New World*^⑭, thus making us see a so-called “New World” featured by confounding the right and wrong, indiscernibility between black and white, malposition of ethics, abnormalcy of morality:

Standardized production of artificial insemination has become the normal way of human proliferation in the New World by supplanting viviparity. From the very beginning of insemination, people there had been arranged with five major “castes”, namely, α , β , γ , δ , and ϵ , each major caste is divided into two sub-types by adding or subtracting, thus dividing the whole society into 10 castes in all. Status, rank, level of intelligence, social responsibility and fate, etc. of different castes are all set appropriately according to specific biological and chemical methods, “Alpha and Beta are of higher caste, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon are of lower caste. People with higher caste do managerial and technological work, while people with lower caste do simple work. People of the former group are clever, beautiful, orgulous and hard-hearted; while people of the latter group can only execute relatively simple task, living an ignorant and muddleheaded life. They multiply in large numbers, with one germ cell breeding dozens of children who are totally identical with features of their caste.” Even the colors of newspapers, houses and costumes differ according to different castes.

The New World advocates that “Rationality cannot be applied to any kind of moral education.” Therefore, proceeding from the education of sleep and the motivation of conditioned reflex at the stage of the kindergarten, making people in the New World comfortable with the set position since childhood, and even their emotional reaction including love and hate become a psychological set through repeated motivation. In the New World, all material desires of human beings can be satisfied. Watching sensuous movies, listening to the saxophone, traveling and immoderate sexual life become the basic ethics and laws of things.

According to the aspect of reference, *Brave New World* seems to have depicted an

imminent future society in the industrial civilization characterized by “happiness”, “stability” and “freedom”, showing success and invincibility in everything it does of the scientific and technological progress. The time of this mechanized future society is not far from 1932 when the fiction was published, which is 2058, over 100 years later. If seen from the author’s time, this means that this society is in a place within arm’s reach. According to the president’s ambitious declaration, this is “a kind of existence which even philosophers haven’t dreamt about”, and this is an unmatched “Pure Land”. However, by reading this book in detail, and understanding the fiction from the aspect of referent of the text, it is not hard to find that optimism from the aspect of reference actually doesn’t exist, as an illusory and gorgeous dream at most. Young Huxley wasn’t issuing a scientific prediction, but rather warning us to be alert to the scientific utopianism, revealing the bourgeois’ deep anxiety about the control and deprivation of human beings by capitalism, thus satirizing the hegemony-like slogan of “Community, Identity, Stability” of the New World. From the text of the fiction, it can be clearly seen that no matter what kind of caste the so-called “people of the New World” are, they are all slaves of the totalitarianism in the New World in essence except for some external differences in division of work and status, etc. They cannot love, marry or give birth, but all of them should be loyal to the country. In the New World, community, identity, and stability have occupied and expunged everything of human beings. Though such a kind of New World is probably not coming soon, and though it won’t come at last, just an assumption of this kind of life is sufficiently shocking and worrisome, and will make every reading think about an acute question together with the author, i.e. whether people can be happy when all of their material desires have been satisfied? The direction at which young Huxley was guiding is the ideal of a “clear-minded society” and “advanced utilitarianism”. Of course, we are unable to find out whether such a kind of society and such a kind of ideal can come true at last, however, the expectation of the spiritual life expressed by young Huxley in his assumption is worthy of attention: After all, people are a kind of animals with rationality, emotion and thoughts. Apart from material desires, they cannot lose the pursuit for spiritual life. If spiritual life has been ignored or rejected, then there is no true happiness. In some sense, this kind of concern and thought about human existence from the aspect of spirit has really exceeded the consideration from the aspect of materials. As a model fiction, *Brave New World* obviously well demonstrates the features of utopian fictions mentioned above.

Taking a further study of utopian and dystopian fictions, we may find their features are more than the four aspects mentioned above. Besides, exploration into their features focusing on the aspect of aesthetics, including “the tension structure of stylization and formularization”, “rich narrative reference” as well as “profound spiritual sight glass”, etc. of utopian and dystopian fictions can also be carried out.

IV. Why do People Study Utopian Literature?

Obviously, for Utopian literature, a literary genre of long historical origin, a distinct characteristic system, as well as multifold aesthetic and non-aesthetic influences, deep and careful

study is of self-evident significance. Specifically speaking, I believe the significance of the study of utopian literature (fictions) can be mastered in the following aspects.

Firstly, studying utopian literature can help us better put literary heritage at home and abroad in order. Previous orthodox literary study did not pay due attention to Utopia as a kind of unique literary form. This situation is especially true in China. This has not only obscured us from understanding and appreciating the history of Western literature from an entire view, but also hindered the possibility for us to obtain valuable resources of literary thoughts.

Clues of the development of utopian literature in the West are of course important literary resources. But previous research circle of foreign literature seemed not to have expressed sufficient attention, with only a few research findings existing mainly in the form of monographs. In addition, limitations of repeated selections of topic and unitary angle of view exist in these not too many research findings. Many people made parallel contrast between two pieces of work from different cultural systems. Of course, there were some articles with broad views and original understanding. However, generally speaking, our attention to and study of Utopian literature as one important component of the history of Western literature are still at the transitional stage from self-control to self-consciousness, lacking the self-consciousness of comprehensively and deeply studying Utopian literature from such angles as narratology, fictional stylistics and genology. This will naturally influence our carding and recognition of utopian literary resources in the West, and exert an impact on our assertion and carding of utopian literature in our own literary traditions^{①6}.

Secondly, studying Utopian literature can help us make a review of the existing views of fictions, and even the whole history of foreign literature and literary theories. The classification of the literary heritage at home and abroad of course cannot do without certain guidance of literary views. We can neither bring all written works in the world into the category of literature without principle, nor sweep many works originally with life and value out of the door of literature on account of extremely narrow literary views. However, by investigating into the realities of literary studies at home and abroad, we can find the situation that the question of “what is literary” hasn’t been solved properly at any time. This is especially obvious in the research circle of foreign literature in China. I don’t plan to make a judgment on the value of the two systems of literary views in China and the West here, or list their differences and similarities one by one. Instead, I only want to point out a basic reality, i.e. what we deem as literature today may not be considered as literature in the past at all. Conversely, putting what were deemed as literature in the past in today’s pure literary views, many things will naturally be swept out of the palace of literature as well. It is exactly in this kind of two-way malposition of past and present that we have lost many valuable things, while those things remaining are not necessarily the quintessence.

This kind of investigation is also generally applicable to the field of both Chinese and foreign fictions. Among the three elements of character, plot and environment, scholars both in China and the West all unanimously consider the character as the “most important element” of the art of fictions. Seeing from the classical times of fictional views in China and the West, summaries of

features of fictions and identical recognition of the central role of character in the art of fictions by scholars at home and abroad are undoubtedly identical with views of fictions at home and abroad, as well as the practices of development of the art of fictions. From modern times till the contemporary era, fictions at home and abroad seem to be more and more inclined to explore the art of fictions from the angle of psychology, i.e. “existence of characters in deeper sense--- the inner world”. However, in the face of actual, rich and specific practices of the art of fiction, pale and wizened summaries of fictional theories seem unable to do as much as they would like to. Though we loyally take summaries of the features of fictions above as the criterion for judging whether a text is a fiction, we will embarrassedly find that these summaries are still insufficient to include all fictional texts. What’s more, since the connotation of fictions is never to solidify, “‘Fictions’ are now used to refer to various kinds of works, with the sole common feature being that they are all extended imaginary stories written in prose”⁽¹⁷⁾. Therefore, we obviously cannot use a solidified view of fictions to replace the recognition of all fictional texts, at least cannot include the utopian fictional texts referred to by the author of this paper.

According to summaries of features of utopian fictions above, the author tries to give a descriptive definition to utopian fictions, i.e. utopian fictions (including dystopian ones) is a kind of narrative literary pattern, which develops narration by way of a strikingly high degree of imagination. It takes the description of an idealized society or its opposite side by using a unique fictional technique of writing, profoundly reflecting people’s expectation of a beautiful future or rejection to the nightmarish future through the description of relevant story plots such as traveling or sailing, etc., and studying the existence of human beings by means of art.

In this descriptive definition, what is in accordance with the conventional view of fiction on earth? And what cannot be framed and standardized by the conventional view of fictions? From the general view of utopian literature in the West, utopian fictions have formed relatively fixed formulas and basic set patterns of their own as mentioned above. The author believes that, the descriptive definition and summaries of basic patterns of utopian fictions above can not only be applied to most utopian fictions, but also applicable to dystopian fictions to some extent. It can be said that these eight aspects of formulas and four points of features are the major criterion of judging whether a text is a utopian fiction or not. It is not difficult for us to find that utopian fictions differ remarkably from the three elements of “character, plot and environment” of fictions in general sense. To illustrate this kind of difference by a not too proper analogy, we might as well say that in fictions in general sense, the consistency of the three elements of “character, plot and environment” is very high, but extremely low in Utopian fictions (in some utopian fictions, it is so dangerously low that people are not aware of this, making people unwilling to admit this kind of texts as fictions). This kind of discrepancy between the view of fictions and the practice of fictions warns us that we must expand our view of concept, or it will be an empty talk if we use theories to guide or summarize practices of the art of fictions.

As pointed out by Krishan Kumar⁽¹⁸⁾, according to the definition, all Utopias are fictions;

Differing from historical works, what the former solves is a possible world rather than an actual one. In this sense, they are similar to all forms of imaginary literature. Nevertheless, by research-like reading of utopian fictional texts, it is not difficult for us to see that compared with traditional fictions, utopian fictions go further in some aspects. This mainly shows that the latter pays more attention to problems outside individuals, while taking strong interest and definite thinking orientation in prospects of the country, future of the nation, progress of human beings, evolution of Nature, fairness of the society, happiness of all people and interpersonal relationships, etc. In other words, what utopian fictions pay attention to is “the greater self” rather than “the small self”. With further study of utopian literature, we may return to the starting point of literature in proper, rather than being confined to the narrow aesthetic space like now.

In the current context featured by “the magic power has been broken for the sake of the world”, it is more necessary for us to return to the primitive state of literature. Literature should not confine itself to the scope demarcated by all kinds of literary theories, but definitely can unlimitedly expand its own discourse circle, because it itself has rights to talk about many things.

Thirdly, studying utopian literature can inject certain spiritual vigor and necessary ideal dimension into Chinese contemporary literature characterized by malaise, indulgence in sensuous organs, carnal desire, materialism, hedonism and consumerism.

Since the beginning of the reform and opening-up, we have made painstaking efforts to bring in numerous works of world literature, especially those of modern and contemporary Western literature. This has undoubtedly played an active role in enriching our spiritual life, expanding our horizon, increasing our knowledge and updating our views. But what is equally undeniable, since we have different kinds of limitations in literary views, there are some deviations appearing in the process of bringing world literature, i.e. the interest in bringing in works containing harmful elements such as pornography, violence, and weirdness, etc. far exceeds that in bringing works with a unique aesthetic style, novel means of artistic expression and rich imagination; and the interest in bringing in salable, fast food-styled, sensational as well as flashy but not substantial works far exceeds that in introducing artistically fruitful and thoughtful works which pay attention not only to human existence, but also to the livelihood and sufferings of the people. In a word, enthusiasm in the pursuit of eccentric habits is much higher than intimacy to works featured by a lofty style and uncommon state. The existence of such a kind of deviation directly gives rise to the deficiency of those works which can “inspire our spirit and improve our state”.

Reasons for the appearance of maladies and turbidity currents such as malaise, indulgence in sensuous organs, carnal desire, materialism, hedonism and consumerism in social lives including literary creation include the impact from the market economy and commodity tide, as well as the author’s initiative abdication of basic values of human beings such as ideals, spirit, responsibilities, progress and happiness, which has given rise to the embattled situation of the literature today. To reverse this kind of situation, remould the image of literature in proper, restore and even improve the status of literature in the spiritual world of human beings, it cannot do without the new

exploration from the angles of spirit and ideals. Apart from seeking for possible spiritual resources from our own cultural traditions, especially literary traditions, we should also attempt to derive possible spiritual resources from foreign cultural traditions, especially foreign literary traditions. In my opinion, utopian fictions are a relatively feasible literary pattern to inject certain kind of spiritual vigor and dimension of ideals into the flagging Chinese contemporary literature: utopian fictions always pay attention to the existence of human beings in this life, studying existence by an unique means of artistic expression, being able to provide people in adversity or people with defects in this life with ideals and hope, making people feel confident with their prospects and future, and offering the solidest guarantee to people from the aspect of spirit. This kind of artistic ideal and value demand of utopian fictions is directed not only at individuals in real life, but also at the entire human society where individuals live. In a more exact sense, we can even say that attention of utopian fictions paid to the whole nation, country, and all human beings (“the greater self”) is more than that paid to individuals (“the small self”) in real life.

Fourthly, studying utopian literature can reveal the relationship between utopian fictions and the society and culture whose appearance and development are dependent on utopian fictions, thus discovering new resources for the literary and cultural researches.

As a kind of relatively marginalized literary pattern, utopian fictions can exactly become one of the important fields to which literary researches pay attention. Utopian issues and utopian fictions are both closely related to the society and culture in which they appear. Utopian literature is the artistic expression and specific design of the expectation of people in adversity and turbulent times of a social life featured by peace, tranquil, happiness, beauty and affluence. Generally speaking, this kind of expression and design are more of conciliation of the anguish, confusing, somber and horrible minds than of clarion of the social reforms. However, the significance and function of utopian fictions actually cannot be contained in the word of “conciliation”, mainly because utopian fictions are importantly related to the existence and survival of human beings. As a kind of spiritual urge existing internally in the spiritual structure of human beings, Utopia has been imbedded in the spiritual life of human beings, expressing this in all aspects of the social life. utopian literature transcends the current experience with a constant posture of an “Other”, measuring the current life and systems of human beings with unusual looks, and pressing people to probe into the significance of life and the value of existence.

In a place without hope, in position with unconstrained pain, at the moment of crisis when material desire proliferates, under the dangerous circumstances where morality decays and humanity disassimilates, Utopia intends to provide human beings with a spiritual oasis, an ideological homestead where people can stay freely. In the seemingly indifferent, flat and dry description, in the almost rigid and monotonic process of successive investigations and records, Utopia has completed the severe judgment of the current society, declaring mercilessly: This is not a beautiful society or a society where people should live in. A more beautiful future hasn't come yet!

This kind of severe investigation and judgment of the current situation is not the utmost purpose of the Utopian literature. In other words, Utopian literature is an “Other” whose “subject consciousness” is quite obvious. It is a born enemy and rival to “reality”, “this life”, “current situation”, and “been-ness”. This kind of definite setting and conscious undertaking of its own mission undoubtedly puts utopian literature in great danger and a situation of tough challenges. Combining the study of utopian fictions and the study of culture will probably become a “mutually beneficial” wonderful thing: the former can elevate its level and state on account of its introduction of the latter, while the latter can not only bring new spiritual resources for itself, but also open up a new battlefield due to its initiative approach to the former.

Notes:

① Though Utopia exists in different civilizations in one form or another, in terms of the author’s limited investigations, compared with Utopias in other systems of civilization, Utopian thoughts in Western civilization are not only of a long history, but also can be rated as model representatives worldwide due to its systemization and diversified forms.

② Generally speaking, utopian literature mainly refers to utopian fictions, including short ones, full-length ones and medium-length ones. Though utopian elements also exist in other literary genres such as the poem, prose and opera, according to the actuality of researches on utopian literature at home and abroad, existing research fruits are mainly concentrated on the field of utopian and dystopian fictions. For the convenience of discussion, utopian fictions in the following text, if not specifically stated, are generally equal to discussions of all utopian literary patterns including utopian fictions. In addition, dystopian fictions are a new literary genre of sub-fictions after the appearance of utopian fictions, which is logically related to the existence of utopian fictions in terms of doctrine. Therefore, in the following discussion, the author will also use the concept of utopian fictions to simultaneously refer to utopian and dystopian fictions. Those clearly differentiated are excluded.

③ Another saying is that Utopia is composed of two Greek words, i.e. “*ou*” and “*topos*”, referring to “a state which doesn’t exist” or “a place that doesn’t exist”. For the connotation of Utopia, views of scholars at home and abroad are quite different from each other.

④ See Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922.

⑤ Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*. New York, London, Toronto, Tokyo, Singapore: Philio Allan, 1990, P. 4.

⑥ Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*. New York: Viking Press, 1922.

⑦ George Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies*. New York: Schoeken Books, 1972.

⑧ Zhao Yiheng, “Hong Ying, a Unique Person and Her God” [J]. Chinese Books Business Book Review, 2001.

- ⑨ Yao Jianbin, "Utopian Fictions: As an Art of Studying Existence" [J]. *Journal of Beijing Normal University*, 2003(2).
- ⑩ ⑪ Osnovsky, *Bibliography of Thomas More*. Trans. Yang Jiarong, Yang Xinghan. The Commercial Press, 1984, pp. 91, 101, 102.
- ⑫ Russell Jacoby, "Looking Forward to Utopia". Ed. & Trans. Wang Yanling. *Tianya*, 2001(2), P. 40.
- ⑬ Amy Boesky straightforwardly defines Utopian fictions as "founding fictions", believing "discovery" is the essence of Utopia. See Amy Boesky *Founding Fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England*. Athens & London: Press of the University of Georgia, 1996, P. 2.
- ⑭ Some utopian literature goes backwards in the concept of time, its content of description is the reminiscence of wonderful scenes in the past. The most obvious case in point is the description of the "golden age" by Hesiod, as well as the Garden of Eden on the tip of the pen or in the memory of many Westerners. As for the kind of utopian fictions such as *Looking Backward* by Bellamy, its dimension of time is directed at the future in essence.
- ⑮ See Sun Fali. "Preface of the Translation", *Brave New World* (translated version in Chinese). Yilin Press, 2002: 3-12.
- ⑯ For discussions and assertions of the existence of utopian literature in Chinese literature, see Aldridge, A. L. "Utopianism in World Literature". *Tamkang Review*, Autumn 1983-Summer 1984(1-4); Hsiao-ting Yang. "Utopian Tradition in Chinese Literature: A Sampling Study." Diss. National Taiwan University, 1980, pp.67-87, 85-106; Chang Hui-chuan. "Literary Utopia & Chinese Utopian Literature: A Generic Appraisal (Phd Dissertation)." University of Massachusetts, 1986; Ma Qian. "Ideality and Reality: Feminist Utopias and the Patriarchal World in Chinese and English fictions in eighteenth-century Chinese and English fiction." Emory University (Phd Dissertation), 1997.
- ⑰ M. H. Abrams, *Glossary of European and American Literature*. Trans. Zhu Jinpeng, Zhu Li. Press of Peking University, 1990, P. 214.
- ⑱ Krishan Kumar. *Utopianism*, Milton Keynes. Open University Press, 1991, P. 25.