

# Global Utopias of H. G. Wells and Kang Youwei: Comparative Confrontation

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## Abstract

The existing studies conducted in the field of social ideals are characterised by the Eurocentric approach. The aim of the given paper is to analyse two varieties of social ideal created in China and Great Britain at the beginning of the XXth century, which share a number of common peculiarities. The first one was offered by a British socialist, a member of the Fabian society – Herbert George Wells (1866 – 1946), the second was created by a famous Chinese thinker, a reformer and a representative of modern Neo-Confucianism – Kang Youwei (1858 – 1927). The research is based on the comparative method with the application of the functional analysis. It allowed us to compare the social ideals created within two genetically non-related cultures. The article shows that both Wells and Kang Youwei were concerned with global world reorganization, however they come to different results. Wells offered the model of an elite and authoritative Utopia, whose citizens are exposed to selection and segregation according to the strict moral code based on Confucianism. Regulations and standards are carried out by a special organization, the Samurai Order, which is very similar to the “guards” of the Plato Republic or phylarches in Thomas More’s Utopia. Kang Youwei offered the model of absolute freedom and open society free from any social, intellectual, ethnic and gender barriers. Moreover, he considered hedonism as the key feature of the human nature. The article submissions may be useful for researchers dealing with social utopias, comparative philosophy and history of social thought of the XXth century.

**Keywords:** Great Unity (*Datong*), globalism, Utopia, Confucianism

## 1. Introduction

The most important feature of utopian societies, described in numerous works beginning with Thomas More’s “Utopia”, was the image of an enclosed community detached from the world and having the lifestyle which seemed perfect to its author. Extreme authoritarianism and the regulation of the mode of life, asceticism and the artificial restriction of requirements were characteristic of utopian societies. In More’s “Utopia” freemen wear rough clothes made of undyed wool, and their slaves wear bright multicolored attire and gold shackles which appear to be their fee after they finish their service. In fact, afterwards it is forbidden for them to stay in Utopia. Similar motives can be found in Chinese works which are also ranked by modern researchers as utopias (Fokkema, 2011).

Utopia genre experienced essential evolution in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The novelties are clearly visible on the model of the society described by E. Bellamy in the novel “Looking Backward” (1888). The major novelties are the expansion of borders of Utopia (in case of Bellamy it covers USA) and freedom from asceticism in favour of consumption, which becomes the main entertainment of citizens. In fact, the conflict between the two “poles”, starting with freedom from requirements ending with extreme expansion, became the key content almost of all utopian projects offered after Bellamy. In this connection, the major problem for the researcher is to study and analyse text materials and social models offered by the thinkers who developed in various genetically non-related cultures with various perceptions of reality. We think that this problem can be tackled based on the projects of H.G. Wells and Kang Youwei, which were created practically at the same time.

Almost every author who wrote about “A Modern Utopia” by H.G. Wells emphasized the importance of this work for all intellectual history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but assessments sometimes were diametrically opposed. Thus, Kang Youwei pointed out that Wells “created Utopia satisfying the very last demands” (Clarke, 1979). Below he wrote, “Wells’ Utopia is the most important for 20<sup>th</sup> century, since it conveys extreme case of faith in progress.

However the irony is that now it presents the model of totalitarian society..." (Ibidem). From L. Mumford's point of view, "A Modern Utopia" is "distillation of Utopia" (Mumford, 1924). Mumford in the context of his classification placed "A Modern Utopia" among "Utopia of reconstruction" and emphatically claimed "Wells faced Utopia literature to reality". At last, George Orwell wrote: "The most part of what Wells dreamt about was realized in Nazi Germany" (Orwell, 1970). Currently, at the times when erosion of the traditional values became evident, as well as notions of desirable way of life began to shift, it is strongly necessary to do comparative research of Utopia systems, offered at the epoch of the first modernization in Europe and China. In particular, the period of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is of interest because the process of reciprocal acquaintance and diffusion of values of Western and Chinese civilizations just began, and the models of global future suggested by Wells and Kang Youwei are more or less indigenous.

## 2. Methodology and Research Strategy

Many researchers of Utopia genre mostly consider it as the genre of literature, for which the term *die Staatroman* was accepted by researchers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Batalov, 1989; Ricoeur, 1986). However, genre peculiarities put this genre beyond the research problems of specialists in study of literature. Substantial aspect of utopia is the narration about the perfect structure of human society with compulsory statement of principles of its organization that overcome antagonisms that are peculiar to the real, contemporary to the author of Utopia society. The result of that creative directive is descriptiveness and omnitude ("totality") of Utopia. Utopist views the perfect society from the outside that means closeness of literary "state novel" and socialism treatise. Utopist is a sociologist that discloses the basic tendencies and characters of the perfect for him social and state structure. Even from the point of view of a specialist in study of literature, "state novel" would not possess the most important feature of the novel as work of literature: Utopia interprets universality that is a sign of scientific work, not literature (Chernyshyova, 1975).

However it is considered that Utopia is tend to distance from reality in space as well as in time, but the resources of creating imaginary world are limited, not only by an individual author's fantasy. All the characteristics of creative imagination are based only on the information about the real world, available to the author. Any literary text is characterized by narrative time as it is the main scene and it has complete structure and is marked with historical epoch of narration (Bakhtin, 1986). Human imagination is limited by the personal experience in which the wisdom of the ages in the form of experience of the identity that a given person belongs to is disclosed (Volkovskaya, 1988). Thus, Utopia has marking signs of real history in aspect of the author's perception that is aspire to actualize imaginary reality in order to influence in fact lives of individuals and the whole communities of different dimension.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1 *Global World by H.G. Wells*

H.G. Wells published treatise-novel "A Modern Utopia" in 1905 under the impression of his own trip to Switzerland. Imagery of mountain country repeatedly appears in the text that represents something between the set of Utopia lectures and lengthy essay-monologue. The text differs from the classical Utopia by the absence of Vergil-guide to the world of Utopia that geographically is similar to the Earth. The subject of narration is continually changing and "spread" in the text that does not make it tedious - that is typical for many Utopists – Wells' contemporaries.

In the world of a Modern Utopia, there is a united civilization with no borders, and the most distant countries are connected by dense net of monorails and post offices, therefore the system in England and Switzerland is similar to the way of life in Asia and Africa. Catching the eyes of the newcomers, Wells' contemporaries, the civilization is well equipped therefore the absence of lower orders, engaged with the hard labor. All the peoples speak one language and belong to the unified culture (Wells, 2010). Land ownership and natural resources belong to local communities, regional government body takes charge of it. The most important infrastructural objects, in particular communications, are in the possession of planetary department, but it does not imply the socialism since the State represents the common reason of all humanity. Stimulus to work is the necessity to support oneself in old age by earning pension and giving back to the State expending on their citizens, the rest of the time Utopia citizen can do nothing. At the same time the citizen can inherit living wage from his/her parents, in this case, he/she has the right not to work at all and devote himself/herself to contemplation and reflection that are considered to the public utility (Wells, 2010).

Wells' Utopian society is not open. As a result of political upheavals political power passed to the Intellectual Order, who accepted the name of "Samurai" – rational people who placed individual desires under the command of public benefit. They take up all administrative posts and are the only citizens of Utopia who have the right to

vote and they form the so-called government (Wells, 2010). Inhabitants of Utopia are classified according to their mental abilities on four groups (they are called “classes”). L. Mumford pointed out that society of Wells is the reminiscent of “Utopia” by Thomas More, Laws of Manu and “Bhagavad Gita” at the same time (Mumford, 1924). The presence in Utopia of Samurai Order signifies Wells’ interest in social group that would maintain high level of development achieved by society, discipline, education and economics, and it is obvious for him that politicians and entrepreneurs would not manage to do that (Chertanov, 2010). One should admit with L. Mumford that ascetic bureaucracy is essential for Modern Utopia in the same extent as scientific-research laboratories are necessary for large industrial concern (Mumford, 1924).

H.G. Wells tried to avoid moot points of economics and associated economical prosperity in Utopia not with theory works of capital, but with sociology. In particular, according to his point of view the right social theory would have point the constructive energy of humanity to gratification of basic needs and solution of the problems of humanity. Therefore K. Kumar points out that Samurai were the result of influence the ideas of Th. Huxley on Wells (Kumar, 1987). Order defeated the human nature, at the same time it is not a caste or State in their ordinary meaning (Chertanov, 2010).

Utopia by Wells differs significantly from the texts of his contemporaries (Th. Hertzka, E. Bellamy, W. Morris) in one more aspect – in “A Modern Utopia” dynamic society is situated all over the surface of the Earth. All the previous Utopias – from the very first ones – occupied the extremely limited space (according to Th. Hertzka – jungles of Central Africa, E. Bellamy – USA). W. Morris, predecessor and Wells opponent avoided this issue.

### 3.2 *The Great Unity of Kang Youwei*

Kang Youwei's eclectic ideas were expressed in the treatise “The Book of Great Unity” (*Datong shu* 大同書). The two first chapters were published in 1913, but the whole book in 10 chapters did not come out until 1935, seven years after Kang Youwei's death (Martynov, 2012). L. Thompson (Ta T’ung-shu, 1958) did the only complete translation of the treatise into English. According to his values and worldview orientations Kang Youwei belonged to the “transitive” era in Chinese history of social thought (Chang Hao, 1987).

The shortest formula of society by Kang Youwei sounds like “The Great Unity [which as well is] The Great Peace” (*Datong taiping* 大同太平). This is the planet-size state, global society with no kinship concept and no racial, physiological and social differentiation characterized by the economics of communism and highest level of technological development. In other words, in The Great Unity world the utmost happiness can be reached by the unity and equality of all the people. Approaching the paradise on Earth (described by Kang Youwei in a very direct way) implicated four kinds of changes: political, social, economical and racial. Liquidation of the existing political system is some kind of a “hallmark” of Kang Youwei's system. Kang Youwei's ideas were based on the simple axiom that the frontiers provoke territory conflicts, thus only their liquidation would allow the humanity to get rid of the conflicts while if the states are sovereign it is absolutely impossible; so the states should be eliminated (Kang Youwei, 2005). One more tendency emphasized by Kang Youwei was the gradual replacement of autocracy with democracy. After the unification of the world in one state all its residents will be the world citizens with the rights to express their opinions in the institutions of local governing and elect representatives for the planet two-chamber parliament. It is significant that there will be no executive officials in the world of *Datong* and the simple majority of votes will make all the decisions.

The territorial division in The Great Unity world is very specific. Kang Youwei suggested to divide the world into 10 000 territories according to the network of coordinates in geographic map (so his system is not sexagesimal but decimal) and 10 macro-regions. The government in each area will be organized as global one but the communications and transport will be under global regulation only, while the local administration will not have any authority in those sectors. In description of the united humankind’s lifestyle Kang Youwei comes the closest to the proper utopia novel (Hsiao, 1975). People use only common accommodation, no private houses existing as well as countryside population living in small-scattered villages.

Basic social unit is “working area”, the big industrial or agricultural enterprise included in the system of self-government on the territorial and functional basis. Head of the farm or enterprise is also the head of local government committee, and all his workers can participate in the decision-making while the “area” is the cluster for educational and social institutions of 12 kinds, from maternity hospitals to retirement homes, sanatoriums, etc. Public works bureau and economics department are also included here (Kang Youwei, 2005). People can freely move to any country depending on the availability of work and their own wishes. Kang Youwei also emphasized the importance of traveling for the person's mental and social development, which should also have practical benefits (Fokkema, 2011).

### 3.3 *The Confucian Nature of the Great Unity*

Kang Youwei alongside with his inner circle not once declared the absolute uniqueness and independence of his project from the western utopias. In *Datong shu* there is a mention of C. Fourier (called an Englishman) but his phalansteries are compared to the “well-field” system described by the Chinese philosopher Mencius (372 – 289 BC). There has even been a debate between the Russian and US Kang Youwei's work researchers S. Tikhvinsky and Kung-Chuan Hsiao about the Chinese utopist's knowledge of the utopian socialism theories. Tikhvinsky fairly pointed that Kang Youwei did not have an opportunity to be acquainted with Fourier's works until his immigration in 1898 (Tikhvinsky, 2006). But it appears that the US socialist E. Bellamy's novel “Looking Backward” was already translated into Chinese in 1890s (Pusey, 1983), however the information on the exact year differs in different sources (Bernal, 1976).

Kang Youwei's idea of Western society repeatedly demonstrated in the text of *Datong shu* was very fragmentary and vague. However, a comparison of Kang Youwei's ideal to the Bellamy's novel (or rather its Chinese periphrasis made from interpretation of the missionary T. Richard) shows that in most general terms there are many similarities. In Bellamy's utopian America of 2000 the entire population under 21 years of age was obliged to get an education at public expense and then up to 55 years to serve in “industrial army” giving everything spent on them back to the state. Work assignment depends on the abilities of each person, while there is no gender discrimination, all get equal pay - or rather, equal access to public credit. Although the families are still based on couples, now a woman is independent from a man and its most striking example is the lack of kitchens in private houses as the entire population eats in the dining rooms and restaurants adjoining to their houses and places of work (Beaumont, 2004). All these aspects (Chinese specifics-adjusted) we can see in the *Datong shu*. By the way, it is significant that in the translation into Chinese Bellamy's society (in original referred to as the “nationalistic” not to be associated with socialism) is described through the concept of The Great Unity *Datong*

Despite all the similarities, the uniqueness of Kang Youwei's ideal cannot be denied. In most of his statements, he is much more radical than both Bellamy and Wells while his utopian ideal is based on a completely different socio-cultural reality. It becomes evident, for example, in the question of a common language. According to Kang Youwei, the society of The Great Unity will speak a common language created conventionally by the selection of the most frequently used concepts from all the world's languages. But just after this it appears that the Chinese writing system will remain hieroglyphic but phonetics will be based on the Roman languages (especially French and Italian), which “are so euphonious that can in this regard be compared well to the Beijing dialect” (Kang Youwei, 2005).

In this connection, it is necessary to remember that the ideal of Great Unity described in the ancient canon is extremely simple and unsophisticated: this is a typical patriarchal utopia. Many researchers of the ancient Chinese conceptions questioned the Confucian nature of this ideal (Fung, 1948). E. Bellamy's utopia, quite limited and certainly influenced by the ideas of ethnocentrism, brought an innovation that was very important for Kang Youwei: it demonstrated a highly developed technological world with a sophisticated system of consumption. This model of utopia let Kang Youwei picture the world of victorious hedonism and abandon material primitiveness of the classical ideal. In chapter 8, part 7 of *Datong shu* there is a sentence: “If in the primeval age the savages preferred the simplicity (尚 质), in the age of Great Unity it is the culture what is valued (尚 文)” (Kang Youwei, 2005).

### 3.4 *Similarities and Differences between the Ideals of Wells and Kang Youwei*

It is necessary to raise the question of propriety and possibility of direct comparison between functional parts of Wells and Kang Youwei's utopian societies. The problem is that in Modern Utopia Wells presents the result of a long process. Wells radically simplifies his task in the following respect: history of the “parallel World” where the Modern Utopia appeared is different from the one we know. The Roman Empire in the Wells' world didn't fall apart but, on the contrary, united all the peoples of the Earth; moreover, Christianity and Islam considering the nature of a man as the bearer of original sin, didn't appear at all, although religion of samurais recognizes one God and preaches asceticism. As a Confucian Kang Youwei considered human nature as absolutely good, and asceticism as evil. However, he did not write a novel-treatise describing the optimal way of social organization but the instructions for building a perfect society in a distant future. He distinguished three evolutionary eras in the history of humankind (Chaos, Rising Balance and Great Unity) each of which were characterized by a set of specific values, social institutions, etc. In this respect, it is more convenient to compare the Wells' ideal to Great Unity itself. According to Kang Youwei the reality of early twentieth century should be referred to the era of chaos, although some countries (USA, UK, Switzerland) with the federal and parliamentary constitutional systems came close to the boundary of the Rising Balance.

In thread Paris 2 and 3 of *Datong shu* there are the extensive tables on the features of all three eras on which we based the following comparative table.

Table 1. “H. Wells’ ideals vs Kang Youwei’s ideals”

<b>Object</b>	<b>“A Modern Utopia”</b>	<b>“The Book of Great Unity”</b>
State	Universal state – the federation of self-governing communities	Universal state with strict centralized structure
Government	Represent the interests of community and, at the same time, provides functioning of global infrastructure	The centralized structure, the members of which represent territorial unities. Governmental establishments of centre and the federal subjects are identical
Parliament	The object is not considered	Universal two-chamber parliament. The upper chamber deputies represent territorial entities and are an appointee of the local government, the lower chamber deputies are elected by direct vote of community with set population. However, some remarkable citizens are able to attend the session having right for advisory vote
Citizenship	Common citizenship. However, when changing his/her residence one should have the registration and send the biometric data (for providing hot water, etc.)	Common citizenship. No way succession rights can be limited
Federal subjects	Internal self-administration in charge of Order of Samurais	The head of territorial entity is an appointee of central government
Suffrages	Only the members of Order of Samurais have	All the adult capable citizens have. Any global issue is submitted to a national referendum and just then is considered by the government. Although, all the responsibility for results lies with the government
Opposition	There is no opposition, as all the members of Order of Samurais support discipline and are remarkable for high pitch of cohesion	“People going into opposition to the government, conceiving rebel and territories capturing, wishing to proclaim themselves as emperors and surround themselves with high officials, take honorable titles and reinstate hereditary ranks – all of them must be considered as mutineers and the worst of offenders” (Kang Youwei, 2005)
Infrastructure	Transport and informational infrastructure is public and controlled by central government	Communication facilities (telegraph, telephone) belong to government and are supported by it
Monetary circulation	Is regulated by common government. Currency is based on golden standard	Paper money and metallic currency are issued by central government depending on the economy requirements

Taxation	Is regulated by requirements of territories' economies	Is established by local government. The deduction in favor of universal government comes to 1%. There is no sales tax and export-import duty
Armaments	No armed forces – only police structures	There are police structures. Heavy armament is destroyed and no longer produced
Justice and punishment	In case of significant crime or asocial behavior individuals who are defective according to public morals are deported to far islands free to create the society whichever they liked	Confucius principle is accomplished: “punishment is out of necessity and no longer used”. As all the citizens get many blessings, rights and liberties from birth, there are crime that is no more deliberate. In case of undeliberate crime the most appropriate punishment is dishonor
Private property	Is allowed, including home unit and means of transportation – for example car. Legacy transfer is permitted. In this case, the heir can even stop working.	No private property. The punishment for sponging is minimal support after disability status
Individual rights	The most of population owns all the individual rights, which can be limited only by the other individuals' rights. Samurais Order members deny themselves the most part of them and conform to strict regime. Instead they get all the political freedom in its entirety	Population has absolute freedom and all possible rights, including retiring to a cloister, etc.
Marriage and family	Monogamous family. Marriage is regulated by biological needs (physically disabled and a-socially behaving people are not allowed to marry). Premarital sex is neither regulated nor condemned, unless they are connected with childbearing	No marriage or family. Partners can make renewable 1-year treaty. Absolute freedom of sexual behavior (including nudism and homosexuality). The only ban is connected with abortion and birth control. Mothers are not obliged to bring up their children – that's the state's business
Gender equality	Women's rights are limited by their physical peculiarities – this does not let them do some kinds of work. During her menstruation, the woman should stay at home as being seriously ill. The female main social function is maternity.	“Citizens are not differentiated according to sex and body shapes” (Kang Youwei, 2005)
Religion and Ideology	Samurai Order members adhere to strict monotheistic religion, which, however, does not demand special ceremonies and has no difficult theology. Personal views are not limited unless they lead to breach of public order	“All around the world ancient sages' teachings and nowadays justice principles are equally esteemed. People do not adhere to one religion, but combine [the best] their doctrines”

Social barriers	Open society. The citizens are divided into four classes according to individual peculiarities and inclination to asocial behavior. Only representatives from two leading classes possess the right of Samurais Order membership	Completely open society
Vegetarianism	Spread almost everywhere, firstly because of lack of meat for all the humankind. Is not regulated by law	Not only people, but also all the living creatures are equal, so meat eating is prohibited. For the animal-products-lovers artificial meat products, indistinguishable from the natural ones, are produced
Language	The one universal language (no more details)	Universal artificial language was introduced forcibly during the era of Rising Balance. The languages of the past are studied by few specialists
Education	Is mixed, practical. Geography is studied vividly, while travelling, botany – in forests, mineralogy – in mountains, etc. Advanced study takes place in older years, as a profession. Humanities and ancient languages are studied by few scientists	Practical education, mostly in the future workplace. Ancient languages and humanities are studied by few scientists in higher education establishments
Life pattern	Most of inhabitants of A Modern Utopia are “new nomads”, who frequently and readily change their place of living	Most of population settles in the most favorable places of Earth with wonderful landscapes. They easily get to work due to well-developed transport system

The table shows all nodal points of convergence and divergence of social and political models offered by Wells and Kang Youwei. One of the most important similarities is the idea of open society (Wells called inhabitants of Utopia a “new nomads”). The possibility to change the workplace and the residence is closely connected with the practical nature of education where technical and business skills are key priorities. Such kind of society needs a universal language as well, but Wells didn't take this topic into consideration at all. On the contrary, Kang Youwei devoted a chapter of *Datong shu* to the process of developing an artificial language, which represents the quintessence of the richest languages of the past. Both authors equally rejected the existence of army, leaving only police structures to the global community. The major difference is connected with public morals and, consequently, gender equality. Kang Youwei believed that in a hedonistic society Abrahamic religions, based on the principles of asceticism and self-restriction, would soon die off, while Taoism and Buddhism would longer exist. Wells thought that future world religion would be based on the principles of strict monotheism; moreover, Samurai Order members led the life close to monkhood. While Kang Youwei considered family as an unnecessary relic of the community with general wealth as well as he didn't support constant relations of partners (he also didn't condemn homosexuality), Wells insisted on the importance of monogamy with criminal prosecution for marital infidelity. It should be noted that Wells and Kang Youwei supported the idea of motherhood as the social and biological mission of a woman. However, Kang Youwei assumed that a child's birth in the hedonistic society would be the biggest suffering for a woman, and stood for the ban of contraception and abortions, whereas Wells believed that a woman was not able to support herself and the child. Both authors had more or less similar ideas about economy and social infrastructure.

#### 4. Conclusion

Every writer of utopias is forced to solve the same problems, which logically come from the common problems

of life society and its changes. In this regard, the comparison between *Datong shu* and Wells' *A Modern Utopia* is the most interesting because although in both of them the lifestyle of global technogenic societies seems similar Kang Youwei and Wells "disagree" in almost every detail. Even if we who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century consider Samurai's morality as puritanical then what would Kang Youwei say about it? By the way, the liquidation of the institute of marriage alongside with the practice of eugenic were suggested by Western utopians since T. Campanella, not to mention Charles Fourier (although his treatise on love appeared in print only in 1967), but there was no one who had shown the level of freedom as high as Kang Youwei (Crossley, 2011).

It was atypical for Kang Youwei to choose democratic system, which is not usually the characteristic of Western utopians. Many Western utopians either, starting from T. More, could not cope without a special class of "custodians" providing the order in society. In fact, a self-governing democratic community appears only in E. Cabet, but it exists on a hard-to-reach island. Wells' "A Modern Utopia" with its globalist fervor more closely resembles the task of Kang Youwei as the organization of all countries of the world and the unity of humankind are to be achieved through the total education, common language and interracial marriages. View on the practical nature of upbringing and education and the importance of traveling for the formation of personality bring them together again. However, the hedonistic principle is uncharacteristic for Western utopias, and only appears in 1932 in the O. Huxley's "Brave New World", and even there for the opposite reasons. In this regard, it is necessary to do a wide comparative research focused on the functional role of particular historical time markers used by the authors of utopian texts.

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