

Ezra Pound's "Seven Lakes" Canto:
Poetry and Painting, From East to West

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The American modernist poet Ezra Pound was a leading figure of the avant-garde due to both his technical experimentation and his receptiveness to a wide variety of cultural traditions. His poetry draws on the classical and medieval traditions of Europe, weaving together a complex response to the visual arts, sculpture, music, theology, and poetry from a wide range of linguistic sources. Pound was alert to important intellectual and artistic currents in history, and developed affinities with those he saw to be unfairly marginalised despite their intensity and vigour. This intellectual and aesthetic ambition drew Pound to another set of traditions: the art and literature of Japan and China. The cultural heritage of East Asia had achieved a respectable level of popular currency in the West during the nineteenth century, particularly in France and the United States, but only began to receive comprehensive scholarly attention in the early years of the twentieth century. Pound's crucial role in establishing a deeper understanding of East Asian art and literature in the West, especially in his translations of Chinese poetry, has long been recognized. T. S. Eliot wrote as early as 1928 that Pound was "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (Eliot 14). In more recent decades, sinologists and literary scholars have been careful to qualify this youthful orientalism. They right-

ly show caution regarding Pound's more strident claims for and uses of Chinese materials, particularly as those materials were often mediated by other languages and scholarly traditions, such as French and Japanese.

Pound's initial enthusiasm for Chinese writing, especially its ideographic roots, bore a distinctly visual emphasis. As his understanding of sinolinguistics deepened over his lifetime, Pound came to understand the distinctive relation between word and image in Chinese and Japanese cultures as symbolic of an ideal Neo-confucian harmony – this functioned at each of individual, filial, social, political, and metaphysical orders, and bound them together in a unified cosmos. Pound explores this order at strategic points in his epic poem, *The Cantos*. One such example is the so-called “Seven Lakes” canto, which momentarily suspends an exposition of eighteenth-century European cultural and economic harmony in favour of an exotic aesthetic meditation. This poem is a collection of poetic translations from an album of painting and calligraphy (*tekagami*) given to Pound by his parents. The tone, timing and content of these creative translations in his epic poem provide insight into Pound's idealised view of East Asia as a model of order worth emulating in the immediate context of 1930s Europe, and as an integral part of his lifelong “paideuma” or poetic worldview. The complex ways in which Pound mediates word and image, between Chinese and Japanese sources and into an English-language poetic text, demonstrates that there is much more than aesthetic association at stake. Specifically, Pound marshals this material to support an increasingly fraught worldview, which seeks to combine Italian Fascist ideology with the civic vision of the American Founding Fathers, especially John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. More generally, he deploys East Asian aesthetics, and his views on the singular nature of the ideogram, as an aesthetic trope for the unity of ideas beneath the variegated tumult of history.

POUND AND CHINA

Pound's lifelong fascination with Chinese history, language and culture took hold after the death of Ernest Fenollosa, a Bostonian and scholar of Japanese art and literature. Fenollosa initially came to Japan as a professor of economics at Tokyo Imperial University. He helped found the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and the

Tokyo Imperial Museum, and later returned to the United States to become the inaugural Curator of Oriental Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts between 1890 and 1896 (Fenollosa xix-xxviii). Following his death in 1913, Fenollosa's widow Mary met Pound in the British Museum and gave him notebooks containing a large number of Chinese poems in translation, extensive notes on the Noh theatre, and other matters of Chinese and Japanese arts, languages and cultures. Pound used these notebooks as the basis for his 1915 volume of "translated" Chinese poems, *Cathay*, fusing his early impressions of Chinese aesthetics with the French Symboliste transformation of sense impressions into inner subjective states. He also adapted Fenollosa's notes into the 1919 essay, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," which outlined a so-called "ideogrammic" theory of the poetic image, where distinct concrete poetic elements would combine in a resonant discursive field by a process of local accretion ("ply over ply") or by resonating across larger sections of the poem. Pound had already developed a concept of the poetic image in 1912, which became a fundamental tenet of the Imagiste School of poetry in London – "an 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound, "A Few Don'ts" 200). This focus on precision, economy and direct treatment of objects in poetry became a hallmark of avant-garde English modernist verse. Pound's ideogrammic theory combined his rather imperfect understanding of the Chinese system of writing with his own visual habits, resulting in an image concept that allows seemingly heterogeneous elements to combine and establish a new ground for poetic insight: one such example is the account for the concept "red," an amalgam of "the abbreviated pictures of ROSE CHERRY IRON RUST FLAMINGO" (Pound, *ABC of Reading* 22). Pound drew an analogy with the pictographic and ideographic characters in Chinese writing, viewing them as the basic essence of written language as a means of direct representation, even though these characters have only ever comprised around five percent of characters in circulation at any point in the history of Chinese writing.

Pound did not know any Chinese at this time: he was drawing on Fenollosa's notes and paraphrases in English, which were themselves the result of Fenollosa's work with two Japanese professors, Mori and Ariga.¹ Pound's Chinese poems were thus mediated through Japanese scholarship from the beginning. Yet he set

himself the task of assembling English texts of the Four Books of Confucianism: *The Great Learning (Ta Hio)*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* (or, as Pound called it, *The Unwobbling Pivot*), the *Analects* and the *Book of Mencius*. Pound made progress on these texts during the 1920s and 1930s, publishing *The Great Learning* in 1928 and the *Analects* in 1937; the *Unwobbling Pivot* eventually appeared in 1951. During the same period Pound had settled into a rhythm of publishing instalments of his epic poem, the *Cantos*, in decads, or groups of roughly ten cantos. In the flurry of his prodigious writing and translating activity in the 1930s (including an intensive turn to economics, geopolitics and the history of civilisations), the scene was set for him to introduce Chinese materials into his epic poem.

CHINA IN POUND'S *CANTOS*

Pound described his *Cantos* as, like all epic, a “poem including history” (*ABC* 46). It aspired to be a modern epic, drawing deeply upon traditions of literature and myth initially from the West, but radiating outward to include greater spheres of culture and tradition as it progressed. The shape of the poem is multiform, but it bears strong and clear relations to Homer’s *Odyssey* and Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. It traverses what Pound considered to be the best art, literature, and thought in history, and presents various models of ideal government and economy in its bid to present a *paradiso terrestre*, a paradise on earth in which all functioned harmoniously under benevolent rule. Three significant locales for this *paradiso* can be found in the middle sections of his epic. The *Fifth Decad of Cantos* (Cantos XLII-LI, published in 1937) concerns the reign of Leopold, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and Duke of Tuscany in the later eighteenth century. Pound figures this time and place as one of harmony between the spheres of government, taxation, agriculture and artistic production, but in so doing, Pound also produces his most famous tirades against usury (Cantos XLV and LI), manifestly bearing the stain of his anti-Semitism. Pound refers to the Italian Fascist calendar in this section of his poem, and his admiration for Mussolini is evident. The following decad of cantos (LII-LXI, composed in 1938 and published in 1940) articulates the dynastic history of China as a struggle between the harmony inherent in Imperial rule modeled on Confucian principles, and the forces of corruption embodied in threats both from

outside (Mongols, Tartars) and from within the Middle Kingdom (Buddhists, Taoists, court eunuchs, and weak or corrupt rulers). These cantos are almost entirely comprised of Pound's translations from Joseph de Mailla's thirteen-volume *Histoire Générale de la Chine*. Mailla was a French Jesuit residing in the eighteenth-century Chinese court, and his history reflects a decidedly Confucian Imperial view of Chinese history. The next sequence of cantos, the Adams Cantos (LXII-LXXI, also published in 1940), presents the founding of the United States as a moment containing a potential *paradiso*: government based on ideals of freedom and democracy, enshrined in the documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and economy measured on principles of trade without tariff or undue taxation.

The China Cantos embody Pound's attempt to absorb Chinese history into his epic, but this is not the first time Chinese materials appear in the poem. Already as early as Canto XIII (1925) Pound has Confucius discuss the merits of good character with his students, as well as the radiating effects of order within the self upon the family, the state, and the natural world. The first Chinese ideograms are introduced at the end of Canto LI, immediately before the China Cantos begin. Yet the most extensive and intensive negotiation with Chinese literary, artistic and linguistic material prior to the China Cantos appears in Canto XLIX, the "Seven Lakes" canto, squarely situated within the Fifth Decad or Leopoldine Cantos sequence. This canto describes a series of images that appear to be drawn directly from Chinese painting and poetry, and seems anomalous amidst the dense political and economic history of Siena comprising the rest of the decad. Whilst its more natural place would appear to be within the China Cantos that immediately follow, the intensive negotiations between word and image and between Asian and Western traditions in this canto provide a perspective not only on the surrounding poetic material (eighteenth-century Siena and, by extension, modern Europe), but also help to bring the very concept of the *paradiso terrestre* into sharp focus.

A CHINESE AESTHETIC IN THE "SEVEN LAKES" CANTO

In keeping with the eclectic nature of the *Cantos* as a whole, this short lyric piece comprises a sequence of translations of Chinese poems framed by several

lines of Pound's original composition (Pound, *Cantos* 244-245).² The dramatic change in tone and subject matter from the surrounding material gives this canto an aura of quotation, a physical and textual partition from its immediate context. In compiling and composing this canto, Pound draws on his experience in earlier poetic "translations" or adaptations from Chinese, particularly his early volume *Cathay*. He also installs a strong bucolic sensibility in the canto that reaches across into other important sections of the *Cantos*. The effect of this aesthetic choice is to bridge the "Eastern" sensibility of this canto with the American pastoral tradition in evidence at specific points in his epic, not least in the *Pisan Cantos* largely composed whilst Pound was in the custody of the US Army several years later.³ An initial close reading of the text of the "Seven Lakes" canto will demonstrate how these effects of orientalism and American pastoralism converge in a suspended moment of contemplation, upon which the vigilant reader is then able to discern the significance of the source materials looming beneath this serene surface.

Pound begins Canto XLIX with a grammatically ambiguous rhetorical statement in the voice of *ego scriptor*, the narrating persona of the *Cantos*: "For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses:" (XLIX / 244). The first word "for" might indicate at least two different things: an embedded dedication indicating that the verses are "for" (in homage to) the seven lakes; or else the word might suggest that the following verses are produced by "no man" as a means of illustrating, "thus," or "in order to show" the seven lakes in poetry (the genre of *ekphrasis*). The grammatical ambiguity allows for both readings together, and the final colon in the first line has its function deictically, a gesture of pointing to and ushering in the verses to follow, like a raised curtain upon a stage. This is literally and figuratively a scene-setting which prepares the reader for the suspension of narrative and historical time at this point in the epic poem, and sets a tone for the ephemeral transience of the impressions in the "verses" to follow. These impressions – scenes from nature intermingled with human activity – fuse visual perception with melancholic contemplation.

The canto does not provide a series of clear internal indications where each of the "verses" begins and ends, or even what the plural of "verse" might mean here, aside from the visual cue provided by divisions into verse paragraphs. The attentive reader will detect a change in tone two-thirds of the way through the canto, dif-

ferentiating the “Chinese” sections from Pound’s own additions and other Chinese materials towards its conclusion. The following analysis will read the “verses” initially on their own terms and without significant reference to the genre from which they derive. The first stanza or verse paragraph sets the tone and atmosphere of the “verses” to follow:

Rain; empty river; a voyage,
 Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight
 Under the cabin roof was one lantern.
 The reeds are heavy; bent;
 and the bamboos speak as if weeping. (XLIX / 244)

Pound draws on several poetic and linguistic conventions in order to establish an orientalist mood: the brief lines rely on alliteration and assonance rather than rhyme, and the descriptive mode makes reticent any affective tonality in favour of controlled observation until the final word, “weeping.” Further, the preponderance of nouns and adjectives, and the paucity of verbs and prepositions have the effect of slowing time and concentrating attention on the physical detail described in the bucolic scene. The forlorn emptiness of the river scene has water dominate the elements: it blunts the “fire” and “twilight,” fills the air by way of rain, and physically reshapes the flora (bending reeds, “weeping” bamboo). These five lines alternate between the four elements with a disarming dexterity: fire alone indicates the functions of lightning, twilight, and the cabin lantern, bringing together the human world with the natural in a sympathetic gesture of the pathetic fallacy.

The next scene in the canto is separated by a line break and is thus physically distinct from the opening “verse.” This section continues the aesthetic and linguistic strategies of the first, providing a catalogue of reticent observations of the natural world dominated by nouns but introducing a number of verbs to indicate slow action:

Autumn moon; hills rise above lakes
 against sunset
 Evening is like a curtain of cloud,

a blur above ripples; and through it
 sharp long spikes of the cinnamon,
 a cold tune amid reeds.

Again the verse begins with single phrases and sentence fragments, working up to more complex observations in grammatically complete (or near-complete) sentences. Stock images of sunset, moonrise, cloud, water, reeds identify the scene as Chinese, but these images might also have the reader recall the English poetry of the 1890s or the early poetry of W. B. Yeats (such as his volume *The Wind Among the Reeds*, published in 1899). This mood of aestheticism is compounded by reference to music – the “tune amid reeds” – and there is even a suggestion of the paraphernalia of Chinese painting, where the cinnamon spikes and the reeds stand in for the brush. Whilst there is no line break at this point in the verse paragraph, the scene shifts to that of a brief image which combines space and time in the sound of the bell: “Behind hill the monk’s bell / borne on the wind.” The dense alliteration again confirms the orientalist aesthetic the poem strives to attain, and whilst there is no end-rhyme here, internal half-rhymes (hill / bell) retains the compact structure of these lines. The scene shifts again, abruptly, as though a new image is flashed before the viewer, or a new painting is approached in the poem’s gallery:

Sail passed here in April; may return in October
 Boat fades in silver; slowly;
 Sun blaze alone on the river.

Pound uses poetic space and punctuation to create a semantic tension: the use of semicolons slow the tempo of reading, and this is reflected semantically in the two semicolons bookending the word “slowly,” ostensibly referring to the movement of boats on the river. Yet the break between the first two lines is not punctuated, despite the transition to a new phrase or sentence. Instead the poetic space in the line-break accomplishes this task of signifying a new phrase. This use of the page space and poetic line is perfectly conventional on its own terms, but stands in contrast to the density of punctuation in these lines. This tension implies hesitancy, confirmed in the ambiguities of space described in the poem (“may return,” “Boat

fades in silver"). The final image is one of solitariness: the speaker observes the sun blazing alone through the haze and mists on the river.

The canto shifts into a brief two-line verse paragraph, a stand-alone image both in its spatial separation from the surrounding lines and in the sudden change of scene: "Where wine flag catches the sunset / Sparse chimneys smoke in the cross light." The familiar trope of sunset as a time of pensive solitary thought is reflected in the human world, in the image of the wine flag. The flickering effect ("catches the sunlight") works in contrast to the softening ambiguities of chimney smoke that dulls the "cross light." This image also recalls a specifically Romantic sensibility, perhaps best captured in William Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey," in which the poetic persona sees the "wreathes of smoke" lift among the trees, from "some hermit's cave, where by his fire / The hermit sits alone" (Wordsworth 132, ll. 18, 22-23). The scene opens out to speculative thought, where the human agent is not seen directly and only implied in the scene by virtue of the "artifacts" of flag and smoke. This ambiguity is confirmed grammatically, where the otherwise self-contained verse misses its final full-stop, and instead drifts out into the white space of the page.

The fourth verse paragraph contains three separate scenes: the first describes the "snow scur on the river," where the water appears as jade and "boat floats like a lantern." The water, near freezing point, exists precariously between solid and liquid states, and a third state, snow, settles upon the scene. Rather than inspiring a mood of pensive isolation, the first human inhabitants appear, "a people of leisure" as one might expect to find in a winter scene by Peter Brueghel. The second scene begins a new line and sentence, introducing fauna into these "verses": "Wild geese swoop to the sand-bar." A catalogue of conventional imagery follows – clouds, autumn, water – and the scene concludes with the symbolic convergence of human and avian domains: "Rooks clatter over the fishermen's lanterns." The repetition of the archaic "lanthorns" again resonates with a Romantic poetic sensibility (the word was a popular variation of "lantern" at the time), overlaid upon Pound's consistent emulation of a Chinese aesthetic. This bucolic scene blends into the third, in which "A light moves on the north sky line" and then on the "south sky line," suggesting a totality to this world, a sense of geographical and celestial closure in that north and south horizons both display the same phenom-

anon. Between these lines (the lines of the poem but also the two lines of the horizon) occurs the dominant image: “young boys prod stones for shrimp” (XLIX / 245). This is the first direct glimpse of human activity. Fittingly for “a people of leisure” this is a youthful ludic activity, although there is a subtle implication that the scene represents the honing and rehearsing of one’s fishing skills to ensure the survival of the community.

Another line lurks between the two horizons, in which the first individualised subject, “Tsing” comes into view: this figure is meant to portray T’ang Hsi,⁴ the second Emperor of the Ching Dynasty, who is said to have visited the region depicted in the poems in 1699 (Kodama 131-138). The effect of this interpolated is to break the historical continuity and bucolic sensibility of the sequence by introducing the proper name of an Emperor and the appurtenances of the Imperial Court. This telescoping of history confirms the iconic status of the “Eight Views” throughout history, even drawing an Emperor to see them in person, as well as drawing a link of association with the “Clod Beating Song” to follow. This context, compressed into that one word “Tsing,” prepares the ground for Pound’s four-line verse paragraph immediately before Pound’s adaptation of two famous Chinese poems:

State by creating riches shd. thereby get into debt?
 This is infamy; this is Geryon.
 This canal still goes to TenShi
 though the old king built it for pleasure (XLIX / 245)

These lines develop precisely the themes of the *Sacred Edicts*, but by way of negative example: where the twin evils of Usury (interest on unproductive debt) and Geryon (fraud) preside over social decay. Pound provides a stark counterpoint here to the idyllic *paradiso* in the preceding Eight Views (a *paradiso* heavily inflected by Buddhist and Daoist aesthetics). An Emperor who abuses his power unbalances the empire, the course of nature, and the livelihood of all people. His responsibility is to maintain harmony in himself and the empire by acting in accord with Confucian principles.

The governing effect of the canto to this point is that of ekphrasis, as though

these poems describe visual representations of scenic subject matter or of visual artworks. Another kind of relation between word and image is reinforced immediately following these bucolic scenes in the poem. The visually striking matrix formation of letters produces an effect where alphabet and ideogram, or even word and image converge:

KE I MEN RAN KE I
 KIU MAN MAN KE I
 JITSU GETSU K O KWA
 TAN FUKU TAN KAI (245)

These letters possess little meaning for the average Anglophone reader, beyond signifying a vague gesture towards the visual dimension of non-alphabetic scripts. These “words” or “alphabetic ideograms” in fact constitute a (faulty) romanisation of a Japanese transcription of a Chinese poem. The visual effect is intentional: the editor and printers of the first American edition of the poem complained about the author’s strict requirement for uniform spatial presentation of each set of letters.⁵ The clear message broadcast in these sixteen “words” – that the spatial dimension of linguistic material is the site of specific hermeneutic intensity, especially in non-alphabetic scripts presented to Western readers of avant-garde poetry – indicates that the ekphrastic burden of the poem as a whole functions as a special kind of translation between artistic and poetic traditions. It as though by estranging the Roman alphabet sufficiently it might be possible to capture a certain orientalist poetic sensibility. The sixteen “words” constitute a Chinese poem known as “Auspicious Clouds,” transcribed by Ernest Fenollosa in his notebooks with the aid of Professor Mori. The script in Pound’s poem is meant to represent the Japanese pronunciation of characters, but is to be read left to right. There are numerous errors, perhaps the most obvious of which is the “KAI” word-ideogram at bottom right, which is supposed to be a repetition of “KEI” above. James Legge’s verse translation reads:

Splendid are the clouds and bright,
 All aglow with various light!

Grand the sun and moon move on;
Daily dawn succeeds to dawn. (qtd in Fang 231-232)

Achilles Fang notes, incidentally, that the poem also served as the anthem of the First post-Dynastic Chinese Republic in 1911 (Fang 232). The poem shifts the tone of the canto from the earlier pensive melancholia to an outright celebration of light, and progress (the daily succession of dawn), telegraphing clear implications for robust physical activity, and social and political advancement.

The second additional poem follows immediately, and grounds the sensibility of “Auspicious Clouds” in peasant labour. This is the so-called “Clod-Beating Song,” a traditional verse adapted by Pound into an Imagist poem:

Sun up; work
sundown; to rest
dig well and drink of the water
dig field field; eat of the grain
Imperial power is? and to us what is it? (XLIX / 245)

He transforms the lyric into a sharp, crystalline form with a terse, direct tone by freeing syntax and grammar. Although the poem might be taken to voice a fatigued resignation to habitual labour, other translations of the same poem by James Legge and Herbert Giles present the poem as a cheerful song celebrating the contentment of peasant life. Human activity is the pivot upon which the poem turns, in direct contrast to the earlier poems: the synchrony of cause and effect in the natural and human worlds serves to reinforce the sense of harmonious dwelling in the world, to the extent that Imperial power, the mechanism driving thousands of years of history, is of no significant consequence to the peasants. A spirit of harmony has reached down from the Emperor to the most humble farmer, leaving everything in its rightful place and in accord with the empire and the cosmos. In fact cause and effect crosses from nature to the human and back again: “Sun up (natural element); work (human activity),” “dig well (human activity) and drink of the water (natural element).” This chiasmic movement, back and forth between the human and the natural, sharpens the reader’s attention to matters of produc-

tive human labour, a principal focus of the entire Leopoldine Cantos sequence in which Canto XLIX appears.

Even the meditative pastoral verses comprising the greater part of the canto connect to more significant political and cultural discourses than might at first appear. The complex provenance of this material includes the Japanese album of painting and calligraphy that forms a bridge between its subject matter of Chinese traditions of painting and poetry, and underwrites the poetic experimentations Pound was to perform with Chinese materials in Canto XLIX and later in the *Cantos*. Close consideration of the relationship between the album and Pound's poem helps to identify why he would choose this series of images at this point in his epic, immediately before his concentrated attention to Chinese Dynastic history in the China Cantos to follow.

THE SHŌ-SHŌ HAKKEI TEKAGAMI

The typical, even stereotypical scenes described in Canto XLIX might be seen to fit a Chinese aesthetic, as though the poems simulate a visit to the East Asian Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts⁶ – the speaker turning from one screen painting to the next, transforming each one into an approximately “Eastern” lyric. The actual pictorial origin for these verbal scenes is the seventeenth century album owned by Ezra Pound's parents, given to him in 1928 when he was living in Rapallo, Italy. This album has come to be known as the *Shō-Shō hakkei tekagami*: it is an album comprising eight painted scenes of the Xiao and Xiang rivers in Hunan Province (tributaries of the Yangtze converging near modern-day Changsha) each accompanied in triptych by a Chinese poem on the left and a transliteration into Japanese on the right. Such an album draws on the well-established artistic and poetic traditions of the “Eight Views” (*hakkei*) of the Xiao and Xiang rivers (*Shō-Shō*), and functions as a primer in various modes of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy. This genre comprises a conventional iconographic range to which Canto XLIX closely conforms, and which might be described as follows: “Night Rain,” “Autumn Moon,” “Evening Misty Temple,” “Sailboats Returning,” “Mist over Mountain Town,” “Snowfall over River,” “Wild Geese Returning,” and “Sunset over Fishing Village.” The album (*tekagami*) is thus made up of twenty-four panels in

which each painting is framed by two poetic texts in different scripts. The physical layout of the album in a concertina format invites most Western readers to adapt customary reading patterns, reading from “front” to “back,” two panels at a time (as in the image below), when instead it is correct to view the album as a series of triptychs, starting from the “back” and working to the “front,” turning the album over and working back to the point of commencement.⁷



Plate 1: (left) Autumn Moon, unidentified Japanese artist, (right) Chinese poem in hand of Genryu, *Shō-Shō Hakkei* tekagami, date unknown (Courtesy Mary de Rachewiltz, Brunnenburg, Italy)

The album in Pound’s possession was produced in the late seventeenth century by a calligrapher of the Edo period (d.1722) by the name of Genryu, whose name appears on the last painting, “Sunset Over Fishing Village,” and whose hand produces the Japanese calligraphy (although it is not known if he also produced the paintings). Wai-Lim Yip claims that the painter was inspired by painters of the Muromachi period (1336/38-1573), themselves following Chinese models laid down by Chan Buddhist painters of the Song and Yuan Dynastic periods (Yip 132). Several Chinese and Japanese literary scholars (among them Achilles Fang and Sanehide Kodama) assert that Pound’s translations comprising the larger part of

Canto XLIX are of high quality and capture the spirit of the original poems as recorded in the *tekagami*. Pound had the benefit of informed Chinese guidance, when the scholar Pao-sun Tseng read and transliterated the Chinese poems for him when visiting Rapallo in 1928 (Taylor 338). Pound also drew upon his own intensive study and translation of Chinese texts during this time. Kodama observes that “it is extremely difficult to decipher [the accompanying Japanese poems] without some historical knowledge of Japanese penmanship,” and attributes them to three Edo period courtiers: Asukai Masatoyo (1644-1712), Sono Motokatsu (1663-1713?), and Takakura Eifuku (1657-1725) (Kodama 131, 133-34). Pound makes no mention of the Japanese poetic material, nor of its complex and varied calligraphic presentation.



Plate 2: (centre) *Sunset Over Fishing Village*, unidentified Japanese artist, (left) Japanese calligraphy and (right) Chinese poem in hand of Genryu, *Shō-Shō Hakkei* tekagami, date unknown (Courtesy Mary de Rachewiltz, Brunnenburg, Italy)

A long and complex history looms behind this aesthetically refined object that came into Pound's zone of consciousness: a history of which it appears he was largely unaware. The *Shō-Shō hakkei*, the Eight Famous Scenes along the Xiao and Xiang rivers in Hunan Province, comprises a coherent genre in Chinese poetry and painting that took hold during the Northern Song Dynasty in the eleventh century and was transmitted to Japan in the later Muromachi period – although the genre has poetic precedent in the later poems of the Tang poet Du Fu, and perhaps even in the earliest expressions of the archaic poetic topoi of exile and

mourning.⁸ The scenes are taken from points ranging from the confluence of the two rivers near Changsha, north to Lake Dongting and then to the point at which they feed into the Yangtze further north. The region is noted for its fogs, mists and rains, where mountainous scenery, forests and rivers seem to merge together in an indistinct scene. This haunting topography has inspired mournful, even melancholic poetry and painting, and has often been associated with states of actual or metaphorical exile. Song Di (c.1015-c.1080) executed the first known series of paintings of the Eight Views following his dismissal from office and subsequent exile, and Shen Gua (1031-1095) composed the first known accompanying poetic sequence, drawing heavily upon the repertoire of Du Fu (Baker 10). Wang Hong (fl. 1131-1161) painted the oldest known surviving sequence of paintings, now held in the Princeton University Art Museum.



Plate 3: Wang Hong, *Sailboats Returning*, *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (*Xiao-Xiang ba jing*), ca. 1150, handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 23.4 x 90.7 cm, China, Southern Song, Edward L. Elliott Family Collection, Princeton University Art Gallery

Despite the fact that these paintings have faded over the intervening nine hundred years, they still display the genre's evanescent imagery, where earth and sky blend in mist and fog. Associations of melancholy, and the sense of loss in exile, are easily imagined here. The genre came to Japan in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods when numerous Chan (Zen) Buddhist masters (such as Kenchoji) visited or settled and became abbots of important temples. Many Japanese monks also travelled to famous Buddhist centres in southern China at this time and absorbed the poetic and artistic genres of the region (Yip 200).

Nowhere does Pound indicate any knowledge of the generic features and august provenance of the "Eight Views," but his sense of the melancholic potential

of Chinese poetry is evident as early as *Cathay* (1915), in poetic translations such as “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter,” or “The Jewel-Stair’s Grievance.” Pound had the technical and perceptive range to produce the kind of atmospheric poetry demanded of the genre, even if he was entirely unaware of its strong and long-standing links with the poetics of exile.⁹ The cursory account of Pound’s adaptations in Canto XLIX above makes note of the pronounced stock of familiar Chinese imagery at play in the text. His poetic adaptation displays an intuitive sense of the linguistic forms of *wenyan* or classical literary Chinese: a dexterity and suggestiveness prompted by the omission of verbs, conjunctions and prepositions, providing a sense of atmosphere by nuance and polysemy (Yip 127-128). Pound had internalised this feature of Chinese poetry early in his career, famously fusing it with an identifiably Japanese poetic genre in the haiku-like “In a Station of the Metro”:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.¹⁰

This poem makes full use of the potentialities of a Chinese poetic, by working with concrete images (station, faces, petals, bough) set in a kind of montage that registers subjective effects in the reader. The suggestive images in the poem are presented without any verbs, and with minimal articles and prepositions. On the poem’s first publication within a group of poems, in *Poetry* magazine in 1913 (the same publication in the same year as his essay “A Few Don’ts”), words were gathered together in clusters, as though to mimic the faces and petals that formed the poem’s subject matter:

In a Station of the Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

This intensified relation of word and image might be related to Pound’s early preoccupations with the ideogram (approximating the visual distribution of Chinese script), but it also points ahead to his ability to move between paintings, and Chinese poems paraphrased into English, to produce an evocative sequence of trans-

lations in the larger part of Canto XLIX.

Even the attentive reader of the *Cantos* is not necessarily aware that an actual album of artworks and poems (and calligraphy) stands behind the text – indeed an entire tradition stretching back a thousand years or more, spanning Chinese and Japanese painting and poetry as well as Buddhist and Daoist quietistic traditions. In addition, the average Western reader may not realise that the album itself demands to be read differently to Western concertina texts: that is, from right to left and in triptych rather than diptych. Yet there is more to the word-image relation, mediated between Eastern and Western sensibilities, in Canto XLIX than the “Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang”: there are matters of tone and register that alert us to the fact that this canto is a compound text. Following the “Eight Views” the canto contains two further poetic adaptations and eight lines of Pound’s own composition. These additional elements of the poem help clarify Pound’s motivations in producing this poetic adaptation and its complex word-image interplay.

Conclusion

Canto XLIX functions effectively as an expression of Pound’s endorsement of the Confucian worldview in the immediate historical context of 1930s politics. Balance within the self, on one hand, and balance with the family, social relations, and the entire political and metaphysical order up to the Emperor and the cosmos, on the other, comprise twinned virtues just as usury and Geryon are twinned vices. The poem also accords with other cantos in the Leopoldine sequence, extolling centralised political and economic structures in eighteenth-century Tuscany (and, *inter alia*, clearly reflecting Pound’s profound deference to Mussolini’s political persona and policy action). But why would the poet present his case by way of a Japanese album of painting on Chinese themes and Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, the existence of which is mentioned nowhere in the canto, as well as a picture poem indecipherable to most of his readers? The answer resides in the final two lines of the poem: “The fourth; the dimension of stillness. / And the power over wild beasts.” The fourth dimension, of stillness, is also the dimension of time. This paradox, of time caught still, answers the rhetorical question of Imperial power: it is eternal, memorialised, captured in a visual image (much like Keats’s Grecian

Urn captures the event of animal sacrifice to the Olympian gods), and affords a rare power over nature and its resources, “the power over wild beasts.”

But the poet is engaging in a cunning sleight of hand at the conclusion of the poem: the power over wild beasts also belongs to the poet-musician Orpheus, and to Apollo. This double vision, of Chinese Imperial order and classical Greek myth, is simply a return to the first line and to the establishing voice of the entire poem. “For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses” – everything that follows is anonymous, by no man. In Homer’s epic Odysseus tells the Cyclops Polyphemus that his name is οὐ τις, “no man.” Pound authors his text by a devious play at anonymity, simultaneously asserting the classical authority of both the poet-musician Orpheus and the epic wanderer Odysseus. The poem and its speaker thus absorb and assert the cultural authority of the poems and paintings caught in this fourth dimension, this stillness where word and image transmit across time and cultures, from classical Greek, eleventh-century China, and seventeenth-century Japan, to the present tense of composition in the 1930s and to the immediate present of the moment of reading. Pound puts on the mask of Odysseus, who is himself masked by anonymity; he reminds the reader in the first and last lines of the poem that the intervening scenes, whilst a picture of a paradise on earth, is only a temporary stillness in his own epic. On turning the page, the reader is returned to the world of corruption, usury, fraud, and the threats to political, imperial, natural and divine orders. Canto XLIX operates as a quiet exile from the fray, ironically drawing on the same Buddhist and Daoist aesthetic practices that Pound will consider threatening to Imperial power in the China Cantos to follow.

Notes:

- ¹ Pound also worked with W. B. Yeats on the Noh materials in Fenollosa’s notebooks during the winters of 1913-16 at Stone Cottage in Sussex, resulting in Pound’s *Noh or Accomplishment* and bearing a profound influence on Yeats’s later poetry and drama, especially such plays as *At the Hawk’s Well* (which echoes the techniques and mood of the Noh play *Hagoromo*) and *Deirdre*.
- ² Subsequent references are from the thirteenth printing of the 1970 New Directions edition, published in 1996 and now the standard edition. References

will be provided in the conventional canto / page format where necessary, e.g. XLIX / 244-245.

- ³ Sunsets and clouds predominate in the *Pisan Cantos*: in Canto LXXVI clouds appear “in colour rose-blue before sunset / and carmine and amber” (459); in a later canto they are explicitly linked to an American pastoral sensibility when the poetic persona exclaims that “The Pisan clouds are undoubtedly various / and splendid as any I have seen since / at Scudder’s Falls on the Schuylkill” (LXXVII/466).
- ⁴ The benevolent rule of T’ang Hsi, second emperor of the Qing Dynasty, is the subject of two of Pound’s subsequent China cantos, and his *Sacred Edicts* also provide the subject matter for two later cantos (XCVIII and XCIX) on matters of personal conduct, filial piety, and harmonious social relations (Terrell 191).
- ⁵ Richard de la Mare of Faber and Faber wrote to John Easton of Robert Maclehose & Co. (the printers of *The Fifth Decad of Cantos*) on 9 April 1939 complaining of Pound’s punctilious demands. The unpublished letter is housed in the Faber and Faber Archive in London (Taylor 351).
- ⁶ Ernest Fenollosa’s large private collection of Japanese paintings formed the basis for the formidable East Asian Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Fenollosa xxiii-xxv).
- ⁷ A facsimile of the *tekagami* comprises part of a box set edition with accompanying monograph (see De Luca).
- ⁸ Qian recounts the myth of the daughters of the legendary Emperor Yao, who died on the banks of the Xiang in mourning for their husband Shun. Qian associates this myth with the sound of rustling bamboo in Canto XLIX, which transforms the speaker into “a Westerner seeking a way out of political chaos” (*Modernist Response* 136-137).
- ⁹ Pound was to make use of this tradition of exile in the *Pisan Cantos*: not only in his recapitulation of imagery associated with the “Eight Views” (clouds, sky, smoke, birds, etc.), but more completely in binding the pastoral genre with the political discourse of *rustication*, whereupon a court official retreats to the country and a life of fishing, to await invitation to return to the court. The Chinese traditions of painting and poetry are replete with famous examples of political rustication (Du Fu preeminent among them), reflecting its prevalence

through history.

- ¹⁰ Pound first published the poem in his collection of short contributions titled "Contemporanea" in *Poetry* (Pound "Contemporanea" 12) and republished it in *Lustra* in 1916.

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