Orient and Orientalisms in US-American Poetry and Poetics

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(eds.)

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Modernist Scandals:
Ezra Pound's Translations of 'the' Chinese Poem

> The mere identification of a translation scandal is an act of judgment:
> here it presupposes an ethics that recognizes and seeks to remedy
> the asymmetries in translating, a theory of good and bad methods for
> practicing and studying translation.
>
> Lawrence Venuti.

> And Kung said "…even I can remember
> A day when the historians left blanks in their writings,
> I mean for things they didn't know,
> But that time seems to be passing."
>
> Ezra Pound, *Canto XIII*

Introduction

It is somewhat ironic that Ezra Pound's fascination with translating Confucius in 1917 coincides almost precisely with the early Chinese Modernist desire to cast off the restrictive traditions of Confucian society.[1] In China, at least for the Chinese avant-garde, Confucianism was dying, if not already dead. But for Pound, the voice of the Old Master seemed fresh and alive. There were other transpacific resurrections too. Pound's "discovery" of Chinese poetry in 1913 was due largely to the work of Ernest Fenollosa, a Harvard-trained Orientalist who in 1877 became the first chair of philosophy at the recently established University of Tokyo.[2] An avid collector of Japanese and Chinese art, Fenollosa amassed an impressive collection of paintings, sculptures, and calligraphic scrolls, and became a diligent student of Chinese orthography. In 1908, while working in the British Museum, Fenollosa suffered a serious heart attack and died. With the understanding that Fenollosa would have preferred his papers to have been handled as 'literature' rather than 'philology,' his widow, Mary, sent a collection of some sixteen

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I would like to thank Eric Hayot, Erik Rangno, Brooke Williams, and my respondents at the WHA conference at UC Irvine for their suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

[1] For a discussion of the anti-Confucianism of the "May Fourth Era" (1917-1927) in China, see Lee 157.

[2] For information on Fenollosa, see studies by L.W. Chisolm, Van Wyck Brooks, and additional information in Stock 148-75 and Nolde 13-28.

notebooks containing notes on East Asian literature, and draft translations of some Chinese poetry to Ezra Pound in 1913. Pound could not have been happier. It was a "goldmine."[3] Fenollosa's notes on Li Bo became the raw materials for the fourteen poems published in 1915 as *Cathay*, Pound's first experiment in translating Chinese poetry.

But it was Fenollosa's essay on the ideographic nature of the Chinese written language that truly cemented Pound's theory of translation, and later became the catalyst for one of the most crucial texts in the development of Anglo-American Imagism. It is in this essay published in 1919 under the ambitious title *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* that Pound spells out his theory that the unique architecture of the ideograph, a symbol created through the juxtaposition of two (or sometimes three) distinct parts, without connecting links, and without reference to phonetic representation, should form the basis for the new American Poetry.[4] And it is also in this essay through the voice of the dead Fenollosa, that Pound introduces his most radical argument: that the West must turn, finally, to the East or else continue its decline into artistic oblivion. "It is unfortunate," he writes,

> that England and America have so long ignored […] Oriental culture. We have misconceived the Chinese for a materialistic people, for a debased and worn-out race […]. The duty that faces us is not to batter down their forts or exploit their markets, but to study and come to sympathize with their humanity and their generous aspirations […]. We need their best ideals to supplement our own ideals enshrined in their art, in their literature and in the tragedies of their lives.   (Fenollosa 4)[5]

These are noble goals, to be sure, and seem to contradict the traditional vision of the colonizing West as offering 'civilization' to the rest of the world. And so, when Pound

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[3] For a brief description of how Pound acquired Fenollosa's notes, see Nolde 15.

[4] The essay was first serialized in four installments in *The Little Review*, beginning with the September issue of 1919, and later published as a small book in 1936. For more on its publication history, see Huang 17.

[5] There is some question about the degree to which Fenollosa and Pound would have agreed on these multicultural sentiments. Yunte Huang has shown how Pound excised some of the more ethnocentric passages of Fenollosa's original manuscript in preparing it for publication. In one of these edited passages, Fenollosa reflects on the crucial role of the West in advancing human civilization: "Vistas of strange futures unfold for man […] of hitherto undreamed responsibilities for nations and races. […] Especially for Great Britain and for the United States, it sounds a note of hope, and, at the same time, a note of warning. They alone, of modern people, still bear aloft the torch of freedom, advance the banner of individual culture. They alone, perhaps, possess the tolerance and the sympathy required to understand the East, and to lift her into honorable sisterhood. […] Strange as it may seem, the future of Anglo Saxon supremacy in the world is probably bound up with the future of that East" (qtd in Huang 18-20). Huang suggests that perhaps part of the reason Pound decided to remove these sentiments was that he implicitly understood the ethnographic nature of his poetic project.

says in Canto XIII, speaking this time for Confucius, "The blossoms of the apricot blow from the east to the west, / And I have tried to keep them from falling," we want to believe him. It is an attractive image: a proto-multicultural Pound assiduously juggling blossoms, keeping them in the air as they blow from East to West. It makes us want to believe Zhaoming Qian's argument that Pound's good intentions place him beyond the pale of Western Imperialism; that what attracted Pound to the Orient, "was the affinities (the Self in the Other) rather than the differences (the Otherness in the Other)," and that Edward Said's trenchant critique of Western Orientalism and its controversial legacy should not be relevant in a discussion of Pound's Chinese poetry (Qian 2).

However, even Pound's most ardent supporters sometimes notice that there seems to be very little 'China' in Pound's Chinese translations. As some scholars have recently argued, while T. S. Eliot's 1928 introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems* identifies Pound as "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time," such a statement does not necessarily imply unqualified admiration. In fact, the remaining statements in Eliot's introduction seem to emphasize the limitations of Pound's accomplishment:

> As for *Cathay*, it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time. I suspect that every age has had, and will have, the same illusion concerning translations, an illusion which is not altogether an illusion either. When a foreign poet is successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time, we believe that he has been 'translated'; we believe that through this translation we really at last get the original. The Elizabethans must have thought that they *got* Homer through Chapman, Plutarch through North. Not being Elizabethans, we have not that illusion; we see that Chapman is more Chapman than Homer, and North more North than Plutarch, both localized three hundred years ago. [….] The same fate impends upon Pound. His translations seem to be – and that is the test of excellence – translucencies: we *think* we are closer to the Chinese than when we read, for instance, Legge. I doubt this: I predict that in three hundred years Pound's *Cathay* will be a 'Windsor Translation' as Chapman and North are now 'Tudor Translations:' it will be called (and justly) a 'magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry' rather than a 'translation.' Each generation must translate for itself.   (Eliot 14-15)[6]

Certainly Eliot appreciated Pound's poetic translations, but his subtle resistance in this passage to the objectivity of translation as such, and the implied ethereality of Pound's

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[6] Kern has argued specifically that Eliot's statement, "often quoted as unqualified praise, […] actually seems intended to indicate the limits of what Pound had accomplished" (3). Hayot similarly notes that Eliot "makes clear the degree to which the sheer force of Pound's language makes its China believable. Eliot is thus in the difficult position of making two points at once: first, that *Cathay* is not Chinese poetry, and second, that it is great poetry. The effect of the second of these points is to make the first difficult to hear" (4).

"invention" in this passage seems to foreshadow Edward Said's more polemic argument on Western discursive constructions of the East: "The Orient was almost a European *invention,* and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said 1, emphasis added).[7] As Robert Kern has argued, Eliot seems to be suggesting "successful translation, or what passes for it […] is always a matter of temporal and linguistic localization, a perception of the foreign limited by an inescapably provincial or ethnocentric perspective" (Kern 4).[8]

In this sense, Pound's legacy of speaking for the dead through translation remains somewhat problematic. Indeed, the critical discourse on Pound's appropriation of Chinese poetry is as varied as it is polemic, and Pound's theories of translation have been alternately condemned and celebrated in both the West and the East. The task, then, for both those suspicious of Pound's quasi-multiculturalism, as well as those inspired by it, is to re-examine those "blossoms" blowing from the East to the West, and, perhaps more importantly, to identify the implicit and blustery gale that carries these blossoms between cultures; that is, to understand, finally, the "scandals of translation" (to borrow a phrase from Lawrence Venuti) and culture as reflected in Pound's Orientalist project.

For Lawrence Venuti, the word "scandal" refers as much to the impossibility of translation as to the widespread refusal to admit this impossibility (*Scandals* 1-8; "Translation Studies" 1-10). Venuti is quick to point out that this impossibility is hardly the exclusive malaise of translation. His understanding of this impossibility and its implicit scandal relies heavily on the post-structuralist unraveling of language *as such*. Venuti thus sees language (and not merely translation) as "a collective force, an assemblage of forms that constitute a semiotic regime" (*Scandals* 9). All language, he continues, "is thus a site of power relationships because a language, at any historical moment, is a specific conjuncture of a major form holding sway over minor variables" (10). The terms "major" and "minor," used metaphorically in the musical (rather than qualitative) sense, reveal an obvious debt to Deleuze and Guatarri, who Venuti cites generously. The most important task of Venuti's translator is thus the deliberate "minoritization" of a major language, which he argues is done in two ways: 1) by selecting texts that will lend themselves well to the minoritization of the major language, and 2) by translating texts in such a way that an element of disconcerting "foreignness" is preserved, thus providing an occasional signal to the reader that the text's "origin" lies

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[7]. Of course, there are important differences between Said and Eliot on this point. As Hayot explains, "In some way, Said was naming the process Eliot had identified in 1928: the tendency for the West to believe that its literature and art accurately represented the Orient as such. Unlike Eliot, however, Said gives this process a moral and historical twist, declaring that orientalism allowed the West to justify its imperialist exploitation of a good chunk of the world from the Enlightenment through World War II" (6).

[8] For a discussion on how and why Kern invokes Said's *Orientalism*, see Hayot 8-9.

(perhaps always) elsewhere. Naturally, the opposite of "minoritization" is the "domestication" of a text, a process that allegedly erases the foreignness from the text, appropriating it in such a way that all of its cultural codes are comfortably transformed in the target language. Thus, despite its overwhelming popularity as a methodology for translation, the danger of domestication is something Venuti sees as especially disturbing.[9] Indeed, in our current setting, given the "economic and political ascendancy of the United States," domesticating translations threaten to reinforce the "global hegemony of English" (10). If one hopes to counteract this "regime" of English, Venuti argues, "an American literary translator must not be cooperative, but challenging, not simply communicative, but provocative as well" (23). The task of the translator, in other words, is to draw attention to the underlying contingency of language as such by instilling in readers a sense of the "foreignness" in their own language (11).

Certainly, Ezra Pound did not have in mind the "global hegemony" of the English language when he began translating from the Chinese and other languages. But there were aspects of a more local, literary "hegemony" in the Victorian sense of what constituted poetry and poetic practice, and Pound's "scandalous" methods seem to reflect an intrinsically "minoritizing" effort to reinvigorate his own language. My purpose in this paper, then, is to interrogate the scandals of Pound's "invention" of Chinese poetry. What cultural capital (or lack thereof) could we point to as the catalyst for Pound's literary innovations?[10] What did Pound's emphasis on *ancient* Chinese poetry make possible (or prevent) in his contemporary political project? In Pound's translations we begin to see the classic modernist/orientalist problem: the "minor" style produced through the literary displacement of a 'minor' culture.

Pound's Translations and the Scandal of the Ideograph

It is fairly common knowledge that Pound could not speak or read Chinese. When referring to his 'translations,' most sinologists place the word in scare quotes, and quite often precede it with adjectives like 'creative,' 'inventive,' or, more often, 'bad.' George Kennedy, for example, in an extremely careful and informed reading of the

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[9] It is worth noting that this use of the word "domestication" as essentially bad carries some cultural baggage as well. In an insightful essay on "The Translation of Deconstruction," Jane Gallop wonders about "the consistent privileging of the foreign and denigrating of the domestic," particularly in relation to gendered discourse in which the domestic is "in and of itself undesirable" (49-50). Gallop's objections are especially interesting given Venuti's whole-hearted celebration of "minoritization" since the same strategies have often been described as "abusive translation" (49).

[10] I am using the term "cultural capital" in Bourdieu's sense. For an excellent discussion of Bourdieu's sociological theory in relation to canon formation, see Guillory 3-84.

aforementioned Pound and Fenollosa essay, argues that their theory "represents a totally irresponsible attitude toward the Chinese language." It may be "fine poetry" he says, but "undoubtedly it is bad translation. Pound has the practice, but not the learning. He is to be saluted as a poet, but not as a translator" (Kennedy 462).[11] So what is it about Pound's translations that inspire accusations of irresponsibility? There are at least three main problems usually identified: 1) Pound's fixation with ideographs, 2) his penchant to select only those aspects of Chinese poetry that suited his needs, and 3) his occasional practice of momentarily leaving the original poem behind when feeling inspired to elaborate or explore further. All of these strategies involve a rather violent domestication of 'the' Chinese poem, even if Pound's local poetic project involved an intense minoritization of 'the' American poem.[12]

  In their attention to Chinese ideography, Pound and Fenollosa entirely misunderstood the nature of the Chinese writing system, fixating somewhat blindly on its more exotic secondary elements. Pound even thought that Chinese ideography was so pictographically transparent (as opposed to phonetic writing), that one could decipher the characters without even knowing Chinese. Near the end of the essay on the *Chinese Written Character*, Pound tries to underscore this transparency by inserting a footnote detailing Gaudier-Brzeska's ability to "read the Chinese radicals and many compound signs almost at pleasure" without ever learning Chinese (31). One of the great (if completely unnoticed) ironies of such an assertion was that in the original *Little Review* publication of Fenollosa/Pound's essay, the Chinese characters for "sun rise east" were mistakenly translated with the words "Farmer pounds rice," a mistake acknowledged lamely in the next issue as "Owing to the initiation of printers, proof-readers, etc."[13] But even if Pound

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[11] Kennedy's argument is also important because, in the end, there is not much theoretical difference between the sophisticated poetic lens applied to Chinese characters by Pound/Fenollosa and the sophomoric, Christianizing lens applied to Chinese characters by C. H. Kang and Ethel Nelson in *The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis Were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language*. Astonishing in its absurdity, Kang and Nelson's study is a fascinating case study in the hermeneutic backwash of religious zeal. But, again, I would argue that their book operates on many of the same assumptions about Chinese writing as does Pound and Fenollosa's. For an extended discussion of Pound's misreading of specific ideographs, see Lan, "Five Types of 'Misreading' in Pound's Confucian Translations" 14-44 (ch.1).

[12] Here I refer to Pound's identifying of 'the' Chinese poetry to refer to the over-generalization that Pound engages in by allowing certain examples (while ignoring others) to stand in for an entire system. It is in this sense that Michelle Yeh identifies a similar tendency in the translation of Chinese poetry in her article, "The Chinese Poem: The Visible and the Invisible in Chinese Poetry," and I am borrowing her language in referring to 'the' Chinese poem in this essay.

[13] See the subsequent articles in *The Little Review* (October 1919: 61; Nov 1919: 55). Even more astonishing, however, Lawrence S. Rainey's *Modernism: An Anthology* reprints Pound/Fenollosa's essay and reproduces this same mistake from *The Little Review,* apparently without irony. Incidentally, the phrase "Farmer pounds rice" (discussed elsewhere in *The Chinese Written*

had a few truly ideographic examples to point to, the fact is that even the most generous estimates indicate that only a handful of Chinese characters (approximately 3%) actually conform to the ideographic principles outlined in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, causing us to feel naturally suspicious of Pound's propensity to speak of "the" Chinese character. Some scholars like John DeFrancis go even further and argue that not only is the Chinese writing system not ideographic, but "[t]here never has been, and never can be, such a thing as an ideographic system of writing" (*The Chinese Language* 133). Today, a wide variety of scholars of Chinese literature (Rey Chow, Michelle Yeh, and Zhang Longxi, among others) accept the DeFrancis argument, more or less rejecting 'ideographic' as a classifying term for the Chinese writing system.[14]

Given the growing consensus against the categorization of Chinese writing as ideographic, attempts to preserve the term in contemporary discourse usually seem somewhat under-theorized or confusing. For example, in an article in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Ming Dong Gu argues for a "reconceptualization" of the "linguistic divide" between the two sides in the debate on Chinese ideography. Ming tries to settle the debate through what he characterizes as a sympathetic reading of both sides. According to Ming, the pro-ideography camp is merely emphasizing one part (the semantic part – called the "radical") of the Chinese character while the anti-ideography camp is emphasizing the other part (the phonetic part). Thus, Ming argues,

> I believe, we must get out of the beaten track and engage in a truly meaningful comparative study based on a scientific approach to language […]. Otherwise, we will forever be bogged down in long and protracted seesaw debates, of which I have only given a brief account, and unable to see the significant insight that may be brought forth by the debates, still less to exploit it for cross-cultural studies. (108)

There is a curious problem with Ming's argument, however. In the very next sentence, Ming writes, "[t]he most fundamental difference between Chinese writing and Western

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Character), used as an example of a transitive verb phrase, must have been a lot of fun for Pound, as it is very possible that Fenollosa's notes served as "Farmer *Pound's* rice" – the farmer Ezra's rice bowl, as it were.

[14] In assessing the implications of DeFrancis's arguments, Rey Chow argues, "[c]onsidering the centrality of the early work of a scholar such as Jacques Derrida for poststructuralist studies in general, and remembering how that work invokes Chinese 'ideographic' writing as *the* metaphor for difference from 'Western' phonocentrism – the heart of Derrida's critique – the implications of DeFrancis's assertion are staggering" (22); Zhang Longxi argues, "[c]ontrary to popular misconceptions, however, Chinese writing is not pictographic or ideographic, because the characters are linguistic signs of concepts and represent the sound and meaning of words rather than the pictographic representations of things themselves" (*Mighty Opposites* 44). Michelle Yeh notes, "Despite efforts by sinologists – for example, Peter Boodberg, Yuen Ren Chao, and John DeFrancis and others – to dispel the myth [of Chinese orthography as ideographic], it remains strong to this date" (139).

writing is that the former employs characters or *ideographs* as linguistic sign while the latter uses alphabets to form words as linguistic sign" (108, emphasis added). In other words, we should not be arguing about whether or not Chinese characters are ideographic, *because they are ideographic*. In the end, Ming's creative attempts to resolve the issue seem much less persuasive than DeFrancis's careful linguistic research, all of which only makes Pound's infatuation with the supposedly ideographic nature of Chinese orthography seem less admirable.

Yunte Huang has recently argued that, based on "several" entries in Fenollosa's papers, "it is certain that both Fenollosa and Pound were aware of the fact that Chinese characters were not completely 'pictorial' but at least partly phonetic. This interesting willful 'misreading' seems quite common among Western poets, scholars, and philosophers" (37). However, the only entry from Fenollosa's notes that Huang cites as evidence of this "willful misreading" makes no mention of the phonetic aspects of Chinese characters, and deals only with the Japanese theory that Chinese characters originated in the West: "Characters necessitated by having to combine chinese lang/ with 'advanced Western thought'" (qtd. in Huang 37). Huang does suggest (more persuasively I think) that Pound and Fenollosa's "overemphasis on the visuality of Chinese characters" may have been due to the mediating influence of "the Japanese method of reading Chinese texts, a method called *wakun*" (37). By inserting marks and particles in the margins of a Chinese text, the *wakun* method hypostatizes individual characters, such that the reading of the text has to be "undertaken visually, or at least with reference to visual signs."[15] According to Huang, Fenollosa's notes on Chinese characters demonstrate the influence of his *wakun*-trained Japanese tutors:

> Given that *wakun* is an imperfect form of reading Chinese and is always dependent on a visual text, it makes perfect sense, I suppose, that Fenollosa and Pound would go on to promulgate the visualness of Chinese characters at the expense of the phonetic. It then becomes clear that what has always seemed to be a misreading by Fenollosa and by Pound is actually attributable to a peculiar style of translingual interpretation practiced by Japanese scholars.   (75)

However, this mediating influence hardly implies that Pound and Fenollosa were necessarily aware that Chinese characters were essentially phonetic. On the contrary, the Japanese filtering of Fenollosa's access to Chinese characters may have only further entrenched his and Pound's belief that the inherently ideographic nature of Chinese orthography made it especially suited to a reinvigoration of the American poem.[16]

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[15] For more on the *wakun* method, see Sakai 225.

[16] Michael Ingham has argued that critics should not overemphasize the visual in Pound's poetry. All of Pound's poems, Ingham argues (and particularly the Chinese names in Pound's Cantos "ring as gongs or tink as tuned stone slabs"), are composed "to a singer's imperative" (236).

In an effort to put Pound's emphasis on ideography into perspective, Huang has also argued that the practice might be compared to a situation in which one were attempting to teach a group of Chinese students "about the intimate relationship between the English language and American individualistic culture." In such a situation, Huang argues, one might choose to emphasize that "the English word *IndIvIdualIsm* contains four I's (first person singular pronoun)" (42). Huang wonders whether he would be "accused of misrepresentation since the capitalization of every *i* in *individualism* occurs only rarely in English," or if he might be acquitted of blame because his "need to illuminate cultural interpretations should justify [his] sleight of hand, especially since, after all, *individualism* can be so written" (42). One crucial difference that Huang fails to point out, however, is that none of the Chinese students in this hypothetical situation would be taught to conclude necessarily that English orthography *as such* reflects this Western (Cartesian/Freudian) interiority.[17] If, on the other hand, one presented the example of *IndIvIdualIsm* along with a host of other instances in which English orthography seems to reflect Western ideologies of the "self" or sexualized "ego" – pointing out, for instance, that the word "bed" *looks like a bed*, and that, as Melanie Klein has argued in "The Role of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child," the letters 'i' and 'e' as they appear in English writing "love one another […] the 'i' has a little stroke and the 'e' has a little hole […]. They represent the penis, and their path coitus" (qtd. in Derrida 333)[18] – if this notion of English orthography as directly reflecting Western 'inwardness' were to become the generally accepted way that people characterized English-language writing, then Huang's comparison might be more appropriately entertained. But the truth is that these types of psychoanalytic speculations and creative word games with the English alphabet are rare and esoteric. Their impact is extremely slight and hardly resembles the mainstream status of the myth of Chinese writing as ideographic.

One is equally justified in questioning Pound's decision to select only those aspects of the Chinese poem that suited his needs. As Tony Barnstone has argued, Classical Chinese poetry – much like the structured Victorian forms Pound wanted to abandon – was composed according to very strict inherited patterns. With fixed and complex tonal positionings, rhyme schemes, and metered verse, one could argue that Classical Chinese poetry, at least structurally, has little in common with Pound's translations.[19] Many of the

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[17] Here I am thinking of the Western discourse of the "self" as outlined by Charles Taylor in "Inwardness and the Culture of Modernity" 88-110.

[18] It is also interesting to note here that Derrida turns to both Klein's psychoanalytic interpretation of the English alphabet and Pound/Fenollosa's use of ideography as a means of deconstructing Western phonocentrism.

[19] According to Barnstone, "In the first decades of this century, Chinese poetry was a powerful weapon in the battle against Victorian form, and thus it was brought over into English in forms resembling free verse that it helped to invent. Rhyme and accentual meter were quietly dropped

Chinese poems Pound uses in *Cathay*, for example, were originally written in Chinese as five-character, eight-line, regulated poems. Pound, however, translated them in free verse without any specific rhyme scheme, and without any reference to the poem's original structure. One could argue, however, that these structural elements are more or less untranslatable, and that one cannot blame Pound for silently dropping them from the equation. But it is Pound's occasional practice of actually leaving the poem behind and elaborating on it (often without signaling to his readers that he has done so) that most calls into question the 'responsibility' of the translator.[20] For example, it is while translating a passage from the *Analects* of Confucius that Pound includes his beautiful image of the blossoms of the apricots, blowing from East to West. And yet, nowhere in the *Analects* can one find its equivalent. It is a striking image, to be sure, but it is not Confucian (Cayley 331).[21] In fact, the more one reads Pound's Chinese poetry, the more one begins to feel a little uneasy that the adjective 'Chinese' is applied with such confidence. Where, exactly, is the 'Chineseness' in Pound's translations? Or, and this is perhaps the most interesting question, does it even matter?

Pound's China and China's Pound

Some argue that Pound approximates the original Chinese poem in a way that transcends the more technical responsibilities of the translator, in short, that he got it right anyway. Zhaoming Qian, in *Orientalism and Modernism*, goes even further and argues that Pound, perhaps through some mysterious aesthetic intuition, was able to see through Fenollosa's

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from the equation because – unlike Chinese use of parallelism, caesura, minimalism, implication, and clarity of image – they weren't useful in the battle for new poetic form" ("The Poem Behind" 74).

[20] Pound also famously made the mistake of conflating two poems into one while translating/composing "The River Song." Traditional Sinologists like Arthur Waley and Achilles Fang derided the error as "a gross mistake," while Kenner and Qian defend the poetic quality of Pound's "incidental errors" (Huang 78-79; Kenner 204-205).

[21] Carroll F. Terrel's attempt to locate the line somewhere in Pound's sources seems hardly successful, and is extremely difficult to follow: "'Blossoms of the apricot': Chapter 31 of the Chuang Tzu starts: 'Confucius, after strolling through the Black Curtain Forest, sat down to rest on the Apricot Altar.' [Watson, p. 345. A footnote explains: 'the word altar here refers to a mesa or flat-topped hill rising out of the lowland.'] The apricot orchard, believed to be a place where Kung learned, is now 'marked by a pavilion enclosing a stone slab with the seal characters of *Hsing T'an* ("Apricot Temple") […] in front of the Confucian Temple in present day Ch'iu-fu of Shantung, Confucius home town.' Apricot blossoms 'symbolize at once cultural florescence and Confucian teachings' [Palandri, *Pai,* 3-3, 301]. These concluding lines suggest Pound's efforts to keep Confucian thought alive and flowing from the Orient to the Occident" (64, brackets in the original).

notes to the original Chinese poem. Referring to a poem by Li Bo in *The Book of Songs,* Qian writes, "Pound, with his keen sensibility […] must have perceived from the context the intensification of the speaker's sense of loss in the concluding line, and, therefore, he has managed to reproduce the effect in his own way"(71).[22] In Qian's view, Pound's methodology matters much less than his ability to see the original 'matter' of the Chinese poem: "Pound is able to catch Liu Che's vivid imagery precisely because he and the Chinese emperor-poet see things from the same point of view" (41). And, when Ronald Bush identifies one of Pound's translations as a "fine invention," Qian responds: "Amusingly, to my mind what Bush calls fine 'inventions' represent some of Pound's most admirable practices, in which he pierces beneath Fenollosa's crippled notes to Li Bo's original consciousness" (84). These are certainly broad, probably unfalsifiable claims, and it is worth noting Qian's motivation for seeing Pound as a Western prophet of Chinese poetry. Eric Hayot, in a brilliant review of Qian's book, identifies Qian's underlying purpose with the following:

> Qian implies that the people who see *Cathay* as an English product do so out of a certain stubbornness, a refusal to admit something they don't *want* to admit. In declaring that the book [*Cathay*] is 'first and foremost" a translation of *Chinese* poems, Qian criticizes those who would see *Cathay* as purely – or even primarily – Pound's. Instead he is concerned to restore China to its proper place as a major influence on modernism.   (37-38)

Thus, Hayot continues, "Qian's claim that '*Cathay* is first and foremost a beautiful translation of excellent Chinese poems' reflects his reading of *Cathay* as Chinese, a reading that depends on seeing China as actively influencing the West rather than as the passive object of its fixations" (38). Pound would almost certainly have agreed with Qian, who joins him in his efforts to keep the blossoms of the apricots from falling as they blow from the East to the West. The 'Chineseness' in Pound's translations is secured through his intuitive, almost spiritual, sense of Chinese aesthetics, all of this without actually speaking Chinese. For Qian, the real 'scandal' lies not in Pound's translations, but in the discourse on Pound, which has ignored the crucial role of China in the development of Anglo-American modernism.

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[22] In a similar vein, Songping Jin identifies the Pound/Fenollosa essay as "genealogically part of the *etymorhetorical* tradition" (42). Locating this etymorhetorical tradition (which he defines as "etymology employed largely to decorate speech for a rhetorical purpose") allows us to see how "interpretations of ideograms in Chinese literature cannot be understood in a purely linguistic context" (24). Thus, Pound and Fenollosa were essentially correct in identifying the distinctly "visual" aspects of the Chinese writing system. Chang Yao-hsin has also argued that Pound's Canto XIII "manages to keep the quintessence of Confucianism intact" (91).

In a similarly apologetic tone, Xiaomei Chen has argued that since all cultural understanding is necessarily "misunderstanding," Pound's "misreading" of Chinese writing is actually quite remarkable, even fortunate. It was, according to Chen, a "legitimate" misreading. It was "exceedingly fruitful and constructive within its own cultural dynamics" ("Rediscovering" 82). Chen also quotes Michael Alexander, who views Pound's "mistake" as "remarkably stimulating and fecund" (84). Laszlo Gevin, she points out, argues that Pound's act of translation "is a clear misunderstanding, but perhaps the most fruitful misunderstanding in English literature" (84). But Chen's view of "misreading" implies more than mere misinformation. "'Misreading' (in quotation marks) means a view of a text or a cultural event by a 'receiver' community which differs in important ways from the view of the same text or event in the community of its 'origin'" (82-83). In other words, *any* act of cultural translation, by definition, is necessarily a mistranslation. In fact, "misreading" she argues, can actually "become another legitimate or 'proper' reading, or a creative re-reading of the 'original text'" (87). Here Chen closely follows Harold Bloom's definition of "misreading" in *Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*, in which he argues that all poets feel a certain ambivalence or Oedipal "anxiety" toward the work of their literary predecessors. Thus, says Bloom, "to live, the poet must misinterpret the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the rewriting of the father" (*Map* 19). Viewed in this light, Pound's "creative misunderstanding" demonstrates the strength of his literary genius.

Interestingly, if Zhaoming Qian and Xiaomei Chen are right, and if Pound has actually kept apricot blossoms from falling as they travel from East to West, it is worth noting that these same blossoms have since made the journey back to the East. Consider, for example, the post-Cultural Revolution Chinese poets who turned to Pound as a radical model for their creation of a new transnational literary tradition. Following the strict censorship of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and prior to the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, Chinese poets in Beijing were quite excited at the apparent relaxing of academic inflexibility. For the first time in several years, Chinese poets were allowed to express themselves in ways that did not adhere to party lines. In 1984 Tony Barnstone and his father, Willis, were teaching at Beijing University, and were surprised at the level of intellectual freedom available to students. In an essay in 1992, the younger Barnstone remembers that their "rooms were crowded with young, passionate, bombastic poets and editors declaring the end of Social Realism, alternately praising and dismissing their contemporaries, telling horror stories of the Cultural Revolution, and excitedly combing through [his] rock & roll tapes" ("Introduction" 10).

Excited at the prospect of developing a new literary movement in China, these ambitious new poets, known as the Misty Poets, began sketching out a quasi-modernist

poetic theory for post-Cultural Revolution Chinese poetry.[23] One of these Misty Poets, under the pseudonym Hong Huang, published a "manifesto" wherein he turns, interestingly enough, to Ezra Pound's vision of the Chinese written character as a model for the new *Chinese* poetry. With some admiration, Huang writes of the "American imagist poet Ezra Pound," who provides a model for "reviving the rich visual-imagist tradition of Chinese poetry" (qtd. in Barnstone, "Introduction" 12). After referring directly to Pound, Huang claims:

> We live in an era of world cultural infusion. The magnificent heritage of Eastern classical painting, drama and poetry has influenced the modern Western arts. Similarly, in drawing on the modern arts of the Western world, we can come to understand more deeply the true value of our own artistic tradition. (Qtd. in Barnstone, "Introduction" 15)

There are no accusations here that Pound's translations have "domesticated" or orientalized Chinese poetry. On the contrary, Pound seems to have provided a vehicle for a radical, even revolutionary moment of political progress.[24]

Xiaomei Chen has identified the Misty Poet's appropriation of Pound's imagism as an example of "Occidentalism," a discursive practice that, "by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others" (*Occidentalism* 5). What Pound made possible for the Misty Poets, in other words, was a minoritization of the rigid Marxist poetry they had inherited in the post-Mao era. As Chen explains, "just as Pound's 'importation' of what was 'Chinese' into Western culture had profound ramifications for Western literature, so the importation of Western modernist poetics into post-Mao China dramatically transformed Chinese literary practice" (70). Thus, at a time when literary modernism had become largely passé in the West, it resurrected its 'scandals' in the East, and again invigorated the poetics of imagistic expression.

In pointing to the minoritizing juxtaposition of two cultures in these examples, apologists for Pound's Chinese poetry seem to be enchanted by a structural logic quite similar to that of the ideograph: two sides, coming together without connecting links, creating something new and interesting. In this sense, what unites Pound's Orientalism

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[23] The Chinese name for the Misty Poets is 朦朧 (*menglong*), which could also be translated as "dim," "hazy," or "obscure."

[24] It is also important to historicize this reception. Edward Said's aggressive critique of Orientalism in 1978 met with little enthusiasm in China. In fact, as Zhang Longxi points out in *Mighty Opposites,* when Said's *Orientalism* first appeared in 1978 harshly criticizing the West as a hegemonic colonizing force, most Chinese scholars found such rhetoric eerily familiar to the ultra-nationalistic discourse of the recent Cultural Revolution in China (188). Consequently, *Orientalism* had little impact in China during the late 1970s and 1980s.

and the Misty Poets' Occidentalism is not really some consistent literary essence, but the transpacific production of a 'third' power, something stimulating, fresh, and minoritizing (something inherently 'scandalous'). The point here is not that Pound was right or wrong about Chinese poetry, but that through the juxtaposition of different artistic sensibilities, a new, third possibility has emerged; an image is born.[25]

The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for American Orientalism

In contrast to the logic of Pound's ideography, however, one could point to the rather unequal distribution of voice in the matter of Pound's Chinese poetry. When Qian or the Misty Poets argue that Pound got it right, they imply more than just 'correct' translation. Inasmuch as translation is always already preceded by interpretation, Qian and the Misty Poets imply that Pound's modernist theories allowed him, more than anyone prior to him – even the Chinese – to correctly interpret Chinese poetry. In other words, the imagist notion of ideographic juxtaposition becomes not only a tool for translating Chinese poetry into English, and not only a pattern for the new imagist poetry, but also *the* method for interpreting Chinese poetry, something that apparently not even the Chinese understood prior to Pound. In short, what is really happening in Pound's appropriation of Chinese poetry is not properly 'ideographic.' There are not two sides equally contributing to the balance of meaning, but rather a silent category marker (the East) placed next to the more powerful phonetic voice (the West). Pound's practice of speaking for the dead secures him this position.

To make a more appropriate analogy, it is perhaps useful here to clarify something about the Chinese writing system. As I noted above, many scholars have argued that Chinese writing is not ideographic. John DeFrancis argues further that it is not pictographic, logographic, morphographic, morphemic, monosyllabic, or anything else one usually hears at cocktail parties. According to DeFrancis, Chinese characters, at least the vast majority of them (approximately 97%), are *morphosyllabic* – a heavy (if rather

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[25] In a review of *The Cantos,* the *Times Literary Supplement* made a similar argument: "The appeal of the Cantos is partly based on a system of echoes. Each line counterpoints another, building up a passage into a larger ideogram: but each passage, each Canto, and each group of Cantos are themselves juxtapositions which make better and better sense in the light of each other as ideas are repeated in different contexts. The whole of *The Cantos* is a giant ideogram whose subject is, ultimately, the human intelligence trying to make meaning out of flux, the artist statesman whose very material is transient because it is composed of actions" (qtd. in flyleaf of *The Cantos*). For an interesting discussion on how Pound's Confucian Cantos reflected his growing infatuation (and later disenchantment) with Italian Fascism, see Cheadle, "The Vision." Cheadle also addresses the issue of Pound's Chinese translations as "re-creation" in "Defining Ode 65."

clunky and esoteric) term intended to convey the dual semantic-phonetic nature of the majority of the Chinese characters. The character 媽 (pronounced "mā"), for instance, is composed of the silent, non-phonetic radical 女 (pronounced "nü"), meaning "woman," and the phonetic component 馬 (pronounced "ma"), which, although by itself would mean "horse," here serves as the key to the character's pronunciation. Thus, 媽 means not "horse woman," but the sound "mā," (in English, "mother"). It is a syllable, and it contains both a silent category marker, and the more important phonetic signal, but as DeFrancis argues, the two portions of the character are not created equal.[26] In most cases, one could quite easily drop the radical from a character and still represent speech, still convey a spoken "meaning." The irony here is that the cultural work performed by Chinese orthography (in both the West and the East) often ignores this rather weighty element of "sound." And yet Chinese writing, as it is discussed in artistic, calligraphic, and poetic discourses, is often held up as *the* liberating exception to Western phonocentrism (Derrida 74-94).[27] I emphasize this difference here, in part, to draw attention to the limitations of arguments like those of Hwa Yol Jung who argues – several years earlier than does Ming Dong Gu – that the attempts to emphasize ideography in the work of Fenollosa, Pound, and Derrida "are not so much wrong as one-sided" (223). That is, there is the "semantic" side and there is the "phonetic" side, but that the two halves simply work together "ideographically" to create meaning. My point here in referring to DeFrancis is to simply point out that these two "sides" of the Chinese character are not, in fact, equal halves.

Thus, in the fashion of Edward Said, we could view the architectural pieces of Chinese writing as mirroring the Orientalist relationship that is established between two cultural bodies in the structure of Pound's Chinese poetry – the one, a strong and eloquent voice, the other, a silent, dispensable marker.[28] In this sense, although Pound has been

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[26] Nor were they created at the same time. DeFrancis argues persuasively that in most cases the semantic "radical" was added to the character to clarify, for example, *which* "ma" sound was indicated (*Visible Speech* 105).

[27] See Chow (22). Of course, as difficult as it is to learn to read Chinese (a process that involves memorizing, at the very least, around 3,000 - 4,000 characters), one wonders whether what DeFrancis is arguing really matters anyway. When Derrida describes Chinese as "largely non-phonetic" he may be *technically* wrong, but for the average learner of Chinese, the phonetic elements are so erratic and difficult to pinpoint, that at a practical and cultural level, it might as well be "largely non-phonetic." Jerry Norman estimates that to learn "passable" Chinese, one needs to commit to around 7-8 years of study, with at least one of those years spent in China (142-151). Interestingly enough, I once asked Derrida about his fascination with Chinese in *Of Grammatology*, to which he replied that he had at one time tried to learn Chinese, but found it "too difficult."

[28] Speakers of Chinese will sometimes argue that the language has too many homonyms to be represented by anything other than Chinese characters. This myth has been so thoroughly debunked by DeFrancis and others that it is hardly worth debating, but it is worth pointing out that were the homonym myth correct, one could not expect spoken Chinese to make any sense at all.

appreciated primarily as a great innovator of English literature, we are forced to acknowledge the troubling violence that his domestications have done to our collective vision of 'the' Chinese poem. According to this formulation, Pound's 'scandalous' domestications of Chinese poetry not only prevent us from seeing the heterogeneity of Chinese cultural production, but also further entrench inherited notions of 'Chineseness.'

On the other hand, it is true that Pound's scandalous translations were also important in deconstructing our inherited notions of 'Americanness.' As Steven Yao has argued, "Ezra Pound's *Cathay* fundamentally altered the dimensions of several fields of literary culture within English," helping to "underwrite a change in the course of poetry in English" (25-26). But as I have tried to demonstrate here, not all scandals are created equal, and not all scandals maintain their scandalous power. The modernist project of minoritizing the rigidities of Victorian literary and ideological forms involved a turn to a 'minor' culture in a way that necessarily silenced that other culture, and did so at a time when literally thousands of people from that culture were attempting – unsuccessfully – to enter the West despite harsh and racist immigration legislation.

Conclusion: Historicizing Pound's Modernist Scandals

The type of reading practices that I am suggesting here with Pound's translations involve a more historically informed examination of the 'scandalous' in Pound's modernism. We must read Pound's translations, in other words, in the way that Lawrence Venuti suggests we do translation: "A translation can [and, Venuti implies, *should*] deviate from domestic norms to signal the foreignness of the foreign text and create a readership that is more open to linguistic and cultural differences" (87). Pound's translations may have accomplished a degree of "openness" for his Anglo-American audience in the 1920s, but, I would argue, in continuing to view Pound's translations as a framework for understanding 'the' Chinese poem today creates a scandal on two fronts: First, such a view closes our eyes to the simple fact that Chinese poetry is much more than the imagistic expressionism that Pound attributed to it; and second, it glosses over the contemporary realities that Pound ignored by continually turning to the proverbially ancient and the aesthetically ideographic.

Michelle Yeh, for example, has argued persuasively that "the modernist paradigm of the Chinese poem as a minimalist gem of imagery – nature imagery at that – tends to favor certain works of a poet over other works or to favor certain writers over others" (143). What does not get translated, in other words, is as interesting as what does get translated. As Yeh argues, "[h]owever creative and powerful it may be, 'the Chinese poem' in much contemporary English translation is a select representative of an essentialized view of Chinese language and culture" (143). Continuing to view 'the'

Chinese poem as not only quintessentially imagistic, but as necessarily compatible with Anglo-American modernism only perpetuates the circular inclination to see ancient Chinese poetry as somehow infinitely superior to Chinese modern poetry, an argument, as Yeh illustrates, that "is often supported by evidence that the former has exerted a significant influence on modern American poetry" (143).

This same tendency to privilege the ancient over the modern has interesting implications for Pound's supposedly multicultural politics. Consider, in conclusion, a brief example of how a more historically and politically informed reading of the scandals in Pound's poetry allow us to expand our understanding of the American 'modern.' Pound's translation, the "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," is the very first poem included in *Cathay* in 1915. At the moment Pound was translating this ancient poem, the location of actual, material contact between the cultures of the East and the West was undoubtedly Angel Island, off the coast of San Francisco. In what sense does our understanding of Pound's poem change when we consider how its narrative voice may have reflected the feelings of the living Chinese poets incarcerated on Angel Island between 1910 and 1940? The first half of the poem seems to speak directly to their despair:

> Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots
> And saying: When shall we get back to our country?
> Here we are because we have the Ken-nin for our foemen,
> We have no comfort because of these Mongols.
> We grub the fern-shoots,
> When anyone says 'Return', the others are full of sorrow.
> Sorrowful minds, sorrow is strong, we are hungry and thirsty.
> Our defense is not yet made sure, no one can let his friend return.
> We grub the old fern-stalks.
> We say: Will we be let to go back in October?
> There is no ease in royal affairs, we have no comfort.
> Our sorrow is bitter, but we would not return to our country.   (*Translations* 189)

Imprisoned on Angel Island as a result of the Chinese Exclusion act of 1882, thousands of Chinese citizens wrote poetry on the walls of the immigration station as they awaited interrogations, or possibly deportation from the 'barbarian' Americans.[29] Although the original Chinese poem refers to the constant battle against the Mongols, would it make sense to speak of Pound's translation as evoking the feelings of the Angel Island detainees as well? Pound, who was obviously not aware of Angel Island, had intended the poem to reflect the despair and disenchantment brought on by the First World War (the second half

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[29] The Angel Island poems are collected in Lai. For a more in-depth reflection on relative visions of modernity as translated in both the Angel Island Poems and Ezra Pound's Chinese poetry, see Williams.

of the poem, dealing with "soldiers" and "generals," clearly invokes these images). As Noel Stock explains, Pound sent a typescript copy of this and some other of the *Cathay* poems in December 1914 to Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, a young French sculptor who at the time was fighting in the trenches. On December 18, Gaudier-Brzeska wrote to Pound thanking him for the translations, saying "The poems depict our situation in a wonderful way" (qtd. in Stock 171-72). But how does our vision of Pound's modernist project change when we consider how his efforts to "minoritize" his own culture not only included a turn to another "minor" culture, but also involved a necessarily *ancient* form of that culture, far removed from the material realities that were going on around him?

This is not to say that Pound should have been much more of an activist for Chinese immigration (although I do not think it would be wrong to say so), but more simply to point out that Pound's ideographic emphasis on the ancient, 'minor' culture meant that the images he conveyed were continually couched in terms that allowed him to speak, and forced the 'other' to remain blank and silent. As Ezra Pound's Confucius will later lament in Canto XIII: "And even I can remember / A day when the historians left blanks in their writings, / I mean for things they didn't know, / But that time seems to be passing." Pound may have pushed the "blossoms of the apricot" from the East to the West, creating, in Yunte Huang's words, a "modern ethnography of the Far East" (92), but in so doing he created a scandalous image of 'the' Chinese poetry that relied on a series of "blanks," such that Pound's voice could be amplified, made loud, and strong, while the Chinese culture he described remained quiet, absent, and, in the case of Angel Island detainees, incarcerated indefinitely.

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