

【연구논문】

## The East Asian Influence in Ezra Pound's Pre-*Cathay* Poetry

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Modern American poetry exhibits an East Asian orientalism<sup>1)</sup> as one of its essential elements. From the early twentieth century, American poets, such as Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and John Gould Fletcher, have tried to adopt the themes, perspectives, and forms of East Asian poetry in order to innovate English poetry. The phenomenon is due to what should be called ‘American voracity’ in literature and culture. In the nineteenth century Walt Whitman tried to entitle people of heterogeneous backgrounds including Native Americans and African Americans to American citizenship in his

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1) Here I do not use the word ‘orientalism’ in the sense of Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism. That is, I do not refer with the word to the “corporate institution” or a consistent “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” which Said focuses on in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 3. I use it simply to refer to interest or taste in oriental things, as well as styles developed from that interest or taste. For this reason, I do not capitalize the word. To deal with the orientalism in modern American poetry in the context of Sad’s critique of Orientalism is a task beyond this essay’s subject matter.

poetry. In the twentieth century, as if the new Americans baptized by Whitman were now pronouncing their citizenship themselves, people from diverse origins try to express their own experiences in poetry, contributing to a new, heterogeneous American poetry. Ezra Pound who referred to Walt Whitman as his “pig-headed father”<sup>2)</sup> inherited this Whitmanian ‘voracity.’ He turns to such diverse sources as Ancient Greek, Classical Roman, Renaissance Italian, and Renaissance Provençal, and East Asian traditions for influence. Although he was not always infallible, through his experimentation Ezra Pound absorbed these traditions as part of the foundation of new American poetry. This essay focuses on the East Asian elements in Ezra Pound’s earliest poetry and traces how they influenced both his latter poetry and American poetry in general.

*Cathay* was not the first adventure into East Asian traditions that Ezra Pound made. Pound had affairs with Japanese and Chinese poetry even before he acquired the Ernest Fenollosa notebooks in 1913—notebooks that would become the crib for *Cathay* (1914) and *‘Noh’ or Accomplishment* (1916). Stimulated and informed by such intellectuals as T. E. Hulme, F.S. Flint, Lawrence Binyon, and Allen Upward in London, Pound learned about Japanese and Chinese poetry, read some of the work in English translation, and made attempts to incorporate their forms, motifs, and the perspectives in his own poetry. His several years of study yielded a technique called “the form of super-position” and a not insubstantial body of poetic work composed under Japanese and Chinese influence. Given this

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2) Ezra Pound, “A Pact,” in *Ezra Pound: Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: The Library of America, 2002), 269.

fact, one must look into these early encounters with East Asian poetry and relate them with his subsequent achievement in translations of Chinese poetry and in *The Cantos*.

In "Vorticism" (1914) Ezra Pound quotes two Japanese *haiku* and remembers how the poetry, specially its "form of super-position," was "useful" when he condensed the Metro emotion he got "[t]hree years ago in Paris"<sup>3)</sup> into a poem:

The Japanese have had the sense of exploration. They had understood the beauty of this sort of knowing. A Chinaman said long ago that if a man can't say what he has to say in twelve lines he had better keep quiet. The Japanese have evolved the still shorter form of the *hokku*.

"The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:  
A butterfly."

That is the substance of a very well-know *hokku*. Victor Plarr tells me that once, when he was walking over snow with a Japanese naval officer, they came to a place where a cat had crossed the path, and the officer said, "Stop, I am making a poem." Which poem was, roughly, as follows: —

"The footsteps of the cat upon the snow:  
(are like) plum-blossom."

The words "are like" would not occur in the original, but I add them for clarity.

The "one image poem" is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had then left by my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work "of second intensity." Six months later I made half that length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence: —

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3) Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," in *Gaudie-Brzeska: a Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 86.

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd:  
Petals on a wet, black bough.”

I dare say it is meaningless unless one has drifted into a certain vein of thought. In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.<sup>4)</sup>

“Three years ago” from 1914 is 1911, which allows us to date Pound’s work on the Metro poem to between 1911 and 1912.<sup>5)</sup> Reputed as the “the first published hokku in English,”<sup>6)</sup> the finalized version of “In a Station of the Metro” bears a close resemblance both in form and spirit to the Japanese *haiku*. *Haiku* is a Japanese lyric genre with seventeen syllables arranged in three units in a 5-7-5 pattern;<sup>7)</sup> it must also include a *kigo* (季語), a word or phrase that indicates one of the “five seasons” (four natural seasons and the New Year’s Month). In many cases it also has a *kireji* (切れ字), a “cutting

4) Ibid., 88-89.

5) More evidence: Pound first sent “In a Station of Metro” with other poems (“Contemporanea” group) to Harriet Monroe in October and December, 1912, and asked her “don’t use them until you’ve used ‘H.D.’ and Aldington” (Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. Paige [New York: New Directions, 1971], 11, 13). Therefore, “In a Station of Metro” was certainly completed by the fall of 1912. Complying with Pound’s request, Monroe published the H. D. and Richard Aldington pieces in the first issue of *Poetry* in October 1912 and Pound’s pieces in the second issue of April 1913.

6) Higginson, William H, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985), 51.

7) In English culture, the *haiku* has been formerly said of three “lines,” but “units” seems a more fitting word to describe the form because they are not usually written in three lines but straightly in one (traditionally vertical) line by the Japanese people. See Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 115 and Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook*, 128.

word” that indicates a caesura. Although “In a Station of the Metro” does not strictly follow the 5-7-5 syllable scheme, it certainly recreates the minimalist brevity (the poem is of 17-19 syllables according to how one counts) and the ‘super-pository’ structure, so that it reproduces the effect of simultaneous precision and suggestiveness found in the Japanese genre.<sup>8)</sup> Moreover, the poem captures a moment when the subjective becomes the universal, a “precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective” in Pound’s words, and does so by presenting ‘things’ rather than the ‘thoughts,’ just as many Japanese *haiku* do. Finally, it delivers a *sense* of life as eternal evanescence akin to the Zen spirit of *haiku* genre.

“In a Station of the Metro” is the most cited of all Imagist poetry and indeed the paradigmatic poem of the movement. The fact that Pound has reproduced it in the “Vorticism” article attests to its paradigmatic status. It closely follows the three Imagist “principles” that Pound had reported by F. S. Flint in “Imagisme”:

1. Direct treatment of the ‘thing’, whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.<sup>9)</sup>

In “In a Station of the Metro” there is no circumvention but only

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8) Concerning the caesura, Earl Miner emphasizes that Pound was the first person who ever “perceived, or at least ... discussed in print” the structural division in *haiku* “in English” (Miner, *The Japanese Tradition*, 115).

9) Qtd. in Ezra Pound, “A Retrospect,” in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 3.

“direct treatment of the ‘thing’” itself, the livelihood of human faces contrasted with the dead darkness and machinery of an underground metro station. And the ‘thing’ is delivered in an extreme economy of language that cuts out any unnecessary details. The rhythm does not follow “the sequence of the metronome” but the sequence of the presentation.<sup>10)</sup>

What counts for this essay’s argument is that the Imagist innovation in “In a Station of Metro,” i.e. the “direct treatment of the ‘thing,’” the economy of language, and the rhythm according to “sequence of the musical phrase,” is achieved via the application of the Japanese *haiku* “form of super-position.” The brevity and precision together with the trans-human attitude intrinsic in the genre proscribes any play of verbosity, emotional superfluity, or musical redundancy.

Besides, Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” intensifies and universalizes itself through the “form of super-position” just as a *haiku* does. In *haiku*, the meaning of the poem is not stated but rather *experienced* by the reader in the space structured between the two superposed ideas. In *One Hundred Famous Haiku*, Daniel C. Buchanan describes how a *haiku* invites readers’ participation:

Many haiku are beautiful word pictures, but not elaborate description. There

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10) The sequence of presentation was emphasized in the original typography of the poem in the April 1913 issue of *Poetry*.

The apparition        of these faces        in the crowd :  
Petals        on a wet, black        bow .

Six phases of apprehension, as units of the meaning, are arranged in threes in two lines, highlighted by the use of space. The spacing has been destroyed in following publications (qtd. in Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook*, 135).

is much understatement and omission, the reader being left to fill in the idea and make his own interpretation.<sup>11)</sup>

This is not so much because the *haiku* is demanding but as much because it is reader-friendly. In *The Haiku Handbook* William J. Higginson says *haiku* poets believe that “words that are too concerned with how *I* respond prevent *you* from responding freely to the object or event that caused my response.”<sup>12)</sup> Therefore, the best way to deliver the emotion is not to say it but instead to let the reader experience it. Just as in *haiku*, between the two superposed ideas in “In a Station of the Metro” is structured a space, a space “from which, through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing,” as Pound writes about ‘vortex.’<sup>13)</sup> And in this space the active engagement of readers’ imagination is elicited. Just as the reader of a *haiku* is “left to fill in the idea and make his own interpretation,” the reader of “In a Station of the Metro” is left to fill in the gap and make connections between the two superposed ideas (“The apparition of these faces in the crowd” and “Petals on a wet, black bow”).

The impact of the Japanese *haiku* on Pound’s work with the “form of super-position” was not limited to the composition of one poem. In the years 1912-1914 Ezra Pound found the “form” supple and versatile enough to apply in many poems on various themes and so produced a group of poems, which included “A Song of the Degrees,”

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11) Daniel C. Buchanan, *One Hundred Famous Haiku* (Tokyo: Japan Publications, 1973), 7.

12) Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook*, 22.

13) Pound, “Vorticism,” 88.

“Coitus,” “The Encounter,” “Shop Girl,” “Fish and Shadow,” and “Cantus Planus,” to name but a few. Notably, in this group are included two Chinese adaptations and one imitation which will be discussed below. In later years, the “form of super-position” expands and develops into that of multiple superpositions, juxtaposition of more than two ideas, which Pound names “ideogrammic method” after Ernest Fenollosa in the essay “Chinese Written Characters as a Medium for Poetry.”

Ezra Pound was attracted by Chinese poetry even in his early poetry, however, for in 1913 he produced a considerable number of poems with Chinese influence. Pound did not know any Chinese at this time,<sup>14)</sup> so his main source of influence in this period was Herbert Allen Giles’s *A History of Chinese Literature*, which Pound read in the fall of 1913, along with a few more English resources (currently unidentified) on the same subject. “Epitaphs” deals with the drunken death of two Chinese poets introduced in Giles’s *History*: Fu I and Li Po. “Ancient Wisdom, Rather Cosmic” versifies the famous “butterfly dream” (胡蝶夢) of Zhuangzi (莊子), also recorded in Giles’s *History*, but the transliteration of the name as “Sho Shu” in Japanese rather than as “Chuang Tzū” in Wade-Giles suggests a Japanese source. More importantly, Pound makes three little adaptations and one imitation of Chinese poetry: “After Ch’u Yuan,” “Liu Ch’e,” “Fan Piece for Her Imperial Lord,” and “Ts’ai Chi’h.” The first three are adaptations of Chinese poems translated by

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14) Ezra Pound begins to study Chinese characters sometime in the late 1910’s, according to Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 250.



Herbert A. Giles in his *History*, and the last one is, as far as is known today, a Chinese imitation.<sup>15)</sup> The importing of the four Chinese adaptations and imitations for Pound in his Imagist period is apparently of the highest importance, for he arranges to have all four poems included in his pages in *Des Imagistes*, the first Imagist anthology of 1914 he edits, with only two other poems (“*Δώρα*” and “The Return”). Consequently, the Chinese adaptations and imitations together with Allen Upward’s “Scented Leaves from a Chinese Jar” printed in the same anthology add a distinctively East Asian hue not only to Pound’s own Imagist poetry but also to the whole movement.

Interestingly, as mentioned above, Ezra Pound imposes the “form of super-position” in three of the four Chinese adaptations and imitations as if he felt obliged to apply the East Asian inspired form in his East Asian materials. As a result, the subtlety of presentation

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15) Achilles Fang affirms that the poem has no definite identity (Achilles Fang, “Fenollosa and Pound,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20 [1957], 236). Recent scholarship attempts to restore the Chinese background in the poem. Zhaoming Qian, for example, suggests several Chinese peach blossom poems by Tao Qian (陶潛, Tao Ch’ien in Giles’s *History*), Tu Fu (杜甫), and Wang Wei (王維) as possible influences, but not much is proven in his discussion. See Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 46-47. Personally I do not think “Ts’ai Chi’h” reads as Chinese as “Liu Ch’e” or “Fan-Piece.” They may look alike at first sight, but the image in “Ts’ai Chi’h” is not as concrete as those in the other two. It does not have any specific reference, either to the season or to the place or to the occasion, which is rarely the case in Chinese poetry. Compare the following piece (Ezra Pound, “Ts’ai Chi’h,” in *Ezra Pound: Poems and Translation*, ed. Richard Sieburth [New York: The Library of America, 2002], 286) with the other two which will be included later in the body of the essay:

The petals fall in the fountain,  
                   the orange-colored rose-leaves,  
 Their ochre clings to the stone.

in “Liu Ch’e,” “Fan Piece for Her Imperial Lord,” and “Ts’ai Chi’h” is intensified through the “form of super-position.” Compare Pound’s “Liu Ch’e” with Giles’s untitled translation and the Chinese original “Fallen Leaves and Plaintive Cicada”<sup>16</sup> (落叶哀蝉曲) by Liu Ch’e (劉徹), the Emperor Wu of Han (漢武帝):

*Liu Ch’e*

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,  
Dust drifts over the courtyard,  
There is no sound of footfall, and the leaves  
Scurry into heaps and lie still,  
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.<sup>17</sup>)

The sound of rustling silk is stilled  
With dust the marble courtyard filled;  
No footfalls echo on the floor,  
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door ...  
For she, my pride, my lovely one is lost  
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.<sup>18</sup>)

落叶哀蝉曲 罗袂兮无声 玉墀兮生	(낙엽애선곡) 낙엽은 매미 울음 소리에 슬퍼하네 (라메혜무성) 비단옷소매는 아~ 소리가 없고, (옥지혜진생) 옥섬돌에는 아~ 먼지가 생기네.
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16) The English title follows Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough’s later translation in *Fir-Flower Tablets: Poems* published in 1921 (139).

17) Ezra Pound, “Liu Ch’e,” *Ezra Pound: Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: The Library of America, 2002), 286.

18) H. A. Giles, *A Short History of Chinese Literature* (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1973), 100.

虛房冷而寂寞	(허방냉이적막) 텅 빈 방은 춥고 적막하고,
落叶依於重扇	(낙엽의어중경) 낙엽은 굳은 빗장을 의지하네.
望彼美之女安得	(망피미지여안득) 아름다운 그녀를 어떻게 얻을
	수 있겠는가?
感余心之未 <sup>19)</sup>	(감여심지미녕) 마음이 남아 안녕하지 못하네. <sup>20)</sup>

What distinguishes Ezra Pound's "Liu Ch'e" most from Giles's translation is the closing vision superposed on top of the scene: "A wet leaf that clings to the threshold." The vision is an invention by Pound's, for neither Giles's translation nor the Emperor Wu's original has a 'clinging leaf.' The superpository structure in the poem is also Pound's sheer invention. Both Giles's translation and the Chinese original heap scenes over scenes but do not "super-pose" ideas. They pile up details to build the master idea in the last line: sadness at the loss of love and longing for the deceased. In contrast, Pound has the vision of "clinging leaf" "set on top of"<sup>21)</sup> the original court scenes in Giles's version to give his piece a "form of super-position."

Pound imposes the "form of super-position" on another untitled translation in Giles's *History* and produces "Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord." In this piece he makes a more radical revision. Compare Ezra Pound's "Fan-Piece" with Giles's translation and the Chinese original, the "Song of Complaint" (怨歌行) by Ban Jieyu (班婕妤):

19) Liu Ch'e (劉徹), "Fallen Leaves and Plaintive Cicada" (落叶哀蟬曲), *Gu Wen Yuan* (古文苑); qtd. in "Exemplary Translations: Pound (2)" (翻译名家译作举例 - Pound [2]), *Wenku.baidu.com*, Baidu Wenku (百度文库), n. d. Retrieved on February 25, 2011. <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/088b8ef3f90f76c661371a5b.html>

20) The Korean translation is by Eunsung Kim. Korean translation of the poem is not available in print.

21) Pound, "Vorticism," 89.

*Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord*

A fan of white silk,  
clear as frost on the grass-blade,  
You also are laid aside.<sup>22)</sup>

O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver's loom,  
Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow-  
See! friendship fashions out of thee a fan,  
Round as the round moon shines in heaven above,  
At home, abroad, a close companion thou,  
Stirring at every move the grateful gale.  
And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn chills,  
Cooling the dying summer's torrid rage,  
Will see thee laid neglected on the shelf,  
All thought of bygone days, like them bygone.<sup>23)</sup>

新製齊紈素	(신열제환소) 제의 명물 흰 비단을 새로 자르니,
皎潔如霜雪	(교결여상설) 희고 맑기가 마치 서리나 눈과 같네.
裁爲合歡扇	(재위합환선) 이를 마름질하여 합환선을 만드니,
團圓似明月	(단원사명월) 둥글기가 흡사 밝은 보름달이라네.
出入君懷袖	(출입군회수) 그대의 가슴 속을 들랑날랑하면서,
動搖微風發	(동요미풍발) 가볍게 흔들리며 산들바람 일으켰네.
常恐秋節至	(상공추절지) 가을날 이르기를 언제나 걱정했네,
涼颺奪炎熱	(량표탈염열) 서늘한 바람 일어 더운 열기 몰아낼까.
棄捐篋笥中	(기연협순중) 상자 속에 급기야 내던져 졌으니,
恩情中道絕 <sup>24)</sup>	(은정중도절) 따뜻한 사랑이 중간에서 끊어졌네. <sup>25)</sup>

22) Ezra Pound, "Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord," in *Ezra Pound: Poetry and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: The Library of America, 2002), 280.

23) Giles, *Short History*, 101.

24) Ban Jieyu (班婕妤), "Song of Complaint" (怨歌行), *Wen Xuan* (文選); qtd. in 황견편, 이장우·우재호·장세후역, 『고문진보전집』(서울: 을유문화사, 2005), 108-9.

25) *Ibid.*

What strikes the eye first is the minimalist brevity and reticence in Ezra Pound's "Fan-Piece." Pound has cut out most of the details in Giles's translation, and left the least dispensable ones: "fan of white silk," therefore a lady of nobility; "frost on the grass-blade," therefore autumn; "You also are laid aside," therefore, by inference, something other than "you" has already been "laid aside." Indeed, as Earl Miner and others observe, "Fan-Piece" is an almost impeccable *haiku* in English.<sup>26)</sup> It is of three lines in 5-7-6 syllables,<sup>27)</sup> slightly violating the 5-7-5 syllable scheme in the Japanese, and with a seasonal reference ("frost," and the "fan" "laid aside," therefore the autumn) and a caesura (at the end of the second line). Although, as Miner points out, the subject matter *love* is not traditional in *haiku*, the way it is treated nevertheless makes the poem read as *haiku*-superposition of a master picture with a master reflection capturing the essential evanescence of life in the Zen Buddhist spirit. All in all, Pound has "fashioned out" an English *haiku* of a Chinese translation.

In comparison with Giles's version, what Pound's changes consist of is first of all the break of the iambic tetra- or pentameter ("To break the pentameter, that was the first heave," Pound would sing in Canto LXXXI), and for the second the improved objectivity and impersonality in the mode of presentation and increased emotional distance from the poetic persona to the scene. Herbert A. Giles, the chair of Chinese at Cambridge and former British consul in China, produced a body of translation that is sinologically accurate and

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26) Miner, *Japanese Tradition*, 118-19.

27) *Ibid.*, 119.

publicly appealing at the same time, but as Robert Kern points out in *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem*, he had the “willingness to comply with Victorian expectations regarding diction, rhythm, and a sort of Tennysonian atmosphere” so that his product should read perfectly natural in English to his Victorian readers.<sup>28)</sup> In other words, by imposing English rhymes and rhythms, Giles ‘Anglicized’ Chinese poetry, although he did not so much ‘domesticate’ Chinese subjects as his predecessors in the nineteenth century used to do.<sup>29)</sup> Apparently, part of the intention in Pound’s revision is to remove the conventional language of Giles’s translation. Pound drops all rhyming, breaks the iambic rhythm, and defamiliarizes the Victorian dictions in Giles’s translation. In other words, he fashions out an Imagist free verse from Giles’s regular verse.

As for the mode of presentation, Pound’s “Liu Ch’e” and “Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord” are more objective and impersonal than Giles’s pieces. They ‘show’ rather than ‘tell’ how

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28) Robert Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 172.

29) English translators in the eighteenth and early in the nineteenth century took up much liberty in translating Chinese materials. They rarely allowed the Chinese pieces to read as foreign or exotic. For example, Sir William Jones (1746-1974) translated a Chinese poem as follows (qtd. in *Ibid.*, 179-80):

Gay Child of Spring, the garden’s queen.  
Yon peach-tree charms the roving sight  
Its fragrant leaves how richly green!  
Its blossoms how divinely bright!

The translation was made from the two following lines of one of the Confucian odes (“Peach Tree” [桃夭], I. 6, “Kuo Feng,” *Shi Jing*) (하정옥. 『시경』 [서울: 평범사, 1976], 37):

桃之夭夭	(도지요요) 복숭아 나무 어린 가지에
灼灼其華	(작작기화) 복사꽃이 활짝 피었다.

the poetic personas feel. The personas thus restrain from freely pouring out their hearts, each instead presenting a neat metaphor for the personal emotions. The bereaved king in "Liu Ch'e," himself a poet, does not directly disclose his sadness but presents a metaphor for his emotion: the memory of the deceased love "clings" like "a wet leaf ... to the threshold." By doing so, he keeps emotional distance from the scene and stays aloof, maintaining integrity even in the middle of grief. Should this poem be read as a dramatic monologue, it is a poet dubbing a poet. Likewise, the lady in "Fan-Piece" does not directly begrudge or complain, or say "My life is dreary, / He cometh not" as Tennyson's Mariana does ("Mariana"). She does not even mention "love" or "lord" at all. Instead she picks up and presents an object, "a fan of white silk," delicate and beautiful but at the same time completely subject to the whim of its owner, who in this case is forgetful of his previous favor at season's change. The "fan of white silk" here becomes a perfect metaphor, an emotional equivalence, or an "objective correlative" in T. S. Eliot's words<sup>30</sup>) for the lady's fate and emotion. In this sense, like the bereaved king in "Liu Ch'e," the forsaken lady in the "Fan-Piece" is essentially a poet.

Indeed, Ezra Pound, perhaps obliviously, recaptures what has been lost in Giles's translation. Giles's version keeps intact most of the details of the Chinese original, but the mode of presentation is rather subjective compared with the Chinese originals. In the Chinese "Fallen Leaves and Plaintive Cicada," there is no first person singular

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30) T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," *Selected Essays* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1951), 145.

‘I,’ except the ambiguous “余” (*yü*) in the last line,<sup>31</sup>) but Giles has his speaker appear in bitter mood in the last two lines of his translation. Similarly, in “Song of Complaint” he has his lady implore “I fear, ah me!” whereas in the Chinese original the lady says “(one) always fears the coming of the fall” (常恐秋節至) rather than “I fear.” There is no first person singular in the Chinese original of the “Song” either.

Remarkably, Ezra Pound eliminates the first person singulars in his adaptations. In “Liu Ch’e,” Giles’s bereaved king is replaced in the last line by a metaphorical snapshot of a ‘clinging leaf.’ Even the “my pride, my lovely one” in Giles’s penultimate line is in Pound’s version depersonalized as “the rejoice of the heart.” As a result, “the speaker is presented ... as a virtually anonymous onlooker, almost a stand-in for the reader, to whom the scene finally yields its meaning in terms that make it more publicly available” as Robert Kern observes in *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem*.<sup>32</sup>) In “Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord” Pound again refrains from using the first person singular ‘I.’ As the poem assumes the “fan” as the imaginary listener, the mode of presentation in “Fan-Piece” may not be as ‘impersonal’ as that of “Liu Ch’e,” but it is still by far more objective than in Giles’s translation.

In fact, the repression of the first person singular—to be more truthful, all personal pronouns—is a tradition in Classical Chinese

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31) “余” (*yü*) can be either the first person singular ‘I’ or the simplified form of a homonym, “餘,” ‘to remain.’ The sight abides by the first, whereas the syntax does the second (as in English, in Chinese the subject is followed by the verb). The Korean translation above supports the second.

32) Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism*, 188.



poetry. In "On English Translation of Classical Chinese Poetry," Fu Hao remarks:

In classical Chinese poetry, the personal pronoun "I" is seldom used. Aesthetically, the poets prefer to construct a distanced situation or scene for their projected feelings without the presentation of ego so that every reader can step in with a similar state of mind evoked by the "objective correlative." The poet often retreats out of the scene as implied speaker or ... plays a third-person role in it.<sup>33)</sup>

The effect is objectivity and impersonality in the mode of presentation delivering the oriental sense of timelessness and universality. James J. Y. Liu observes in *The Art of Chinese Poetry*:

The sense of timelessness and universality is ... enhanced by the frequent omission of the subject of a verb in Chinese poetry ... Such omission of the subject allows the poet not to intrude his own personality upon the scene, for the missing subject can be readily identified with anyone whether the reader or some imaginary person. Consequently Chinese poetry often has an impersonal and universal quality, compared with which much Western poetry appears egocentric and earth-bound.<sup>34)</sup>

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33) Fu Hao, "On English Translation of Classical Chinese Poetry," Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, May 27, 2003, [http://bic.cass.cn/english/infoShow/Arcitle\\_Show\\_Forum2\\_Show.asp?ID=324&Title=The%20Humanities%20Study&strNavigation=Home-%3EForum&BigClassID=4&SmallClassID=8](http://bic.cass.cn/english/infoShow/Arcitle_Show_Forum2_Show.asp?ID=324&Title=The%20Humanities%20Study&strNavigation=Home-%3EForum&BigClassID=4&SmallClassID=8).

34) James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 40-41. The chapter where the quoted passage appears is titled as "Some Grammatical Aspects of the Language of the Poetry," and it illustrates how not just the omission of personal pronouns but also other characteristics of the Chinese language, such as the absence of the case, gender, mood, or tense, help create the sense of timelessness and universality in poetry (*Ibid.*, 39-47).

In 1913 Ezra Pound didn't have many ways to be acquainted with this particular aspect in Classical Chinese poetry. He did not know the Chinese language, nor did he have access to the originals because Giles's *History* did not reproduce them. Nevertheless, Ezra Pound had certainly noticed that East Asian poetry presents scenes rather than assertions, or to use Wallace Stevens's phrase decades later, "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself." In the years 1913-1914 Pound was labeling Liu Che and Qu Yuan (屈原, the "Ch'u Yuan" in "After Ch'u Yuan") "Imagists."<sup>35</sup> In the "Vorticism" passage quoted earlier, he observes that haiku "record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective." Moreover, Ezra Pound was not unaware of the "impersonal and universal quality," which is found not just in Chinese poetry but in oriental poetry more generally. In a short essay on "Tagore's Poems" written 1912, he wrote: "The Bengali brings to us the pledge of a calm which we need overmuch in an age of steel and mechanics. It brings a quiet proclamation of the fellowship between man and the gods; between man and nature."<sup>36</sup> We cannot decide exactly how much those East Asian or oriental poetic qualities contributed to the buildings of Ezra Pound's own penchant towards objectivity and impersonality professed, for example, in the three Imagist principles and others in "A Few Don'ts," but certainly they reinforced each other.

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35) Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters 1909-14*, eds. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions), 267; Pound, "Vorticism," 83.

36) Qtd. in Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 158.

Later, Ezra Pound would more and more consciously try to imitate and absorb East Asian poetics of objectivity and impersonality in English. The presentation of things in the “form of super-position” and the objective and impersonal mood established in the pre-*Cathay* period ultimately develops into the collage style in *The Cantos*<sup>37</sup>. “Ideogrammic method,” the “heaping together [of] the necessary components of thoughts”<sup>38</sup>) and “examination and juxtaposition of particular specimen”<sup>39</sup>) is indeed an advanced version of the “form of super-position.” Pound piles up in *The Cantos* not just two but multitudinous “slides”<sup>40</sup>) of history so that the readers should examine and find the leitmotif of history. He does not forget to include East Asian details among the “slides” of history. In this way, Ezra Pound paves the way on the one hand for Objectivist poets and on the other hand for poets like Gary Snyder to avail themselves of East Asian traditions.

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37) Although it is hard to call the voices in *The Cantos* “impersonal,” that they intend to reach the state of impersonal utterance is true. Notably, Ezra Pound rarely sings in the first person singular in *The Cantos*. The many “I”s in the long poems are in most cases in quotations or in dramatic speeches.

38) Ezra Pound, *ABC of Economics* (London: Faber, 1933), 37.

39) Ezra Pound, “The Teacher’s Mission,” in *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 61.

40) Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 22.

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**Abstract**

**The East Asian Influence in Ezra Pound's  
Pre-*Cathay* Poetry**

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Since early in the twentieth century American poetry has exhibited an East Asian orientalism as an essential part of its makeup. This essay traces the East Asian influence on Ezra Pound's poetry before the publication of *Cathay* in 1914. Ezra Pound began learning about Japanese and Chinese poetry even before his acquisition of the Ernest Fenollosa notebooks in 1913 and made attempts to incorporate their themes, forms, and perspectives into his own poetry. As early as 1912, Ezra Pound discerned a "form of super-position" in Japanese *haiku* and tried to adopt this form in his own English-language poetry. He also picked up Chinese themes from pre-existing translations of Chinese literature, such as those done by Herbert Allen Giles, and tried to incorporate them into his poetry. He even attempted to apply the Japanese-inspired form to Chinese-inspired subject matter in three out of the four Chinese adaptations and imitations he wrote in this period ("After Ch'u Yuan," "Liu Ch'e," "Fan Piece for Her Imperial Lord," and "Ts'ai Chi'h"). These efforts contributed to an enhancement of the intensity, precision, and suggestiveness of his poetry and an improvement in the objectivity and impersonality of its mode of presentation. In this way Ezra Pound's pre-*Cathay* poetry paved a way for American poets afterwards to naturalize themes, subject matters, techniques, and perspectives of East Asian origin into their poetry.

**Key Words**

East Asian Orientalism in Modern American Poetry, Japanese *Haiku*, Classical

Chinese Poetry, "Form of Super-Position," Intensity, Precision, Suggestiveness,  
Objectivity, Impersonality