

**Transcending Boundaries:
Sinitic Aesthetics in the Imagism Poetics of Laurence Binyon,
Ernest Fenollosa, and Ezra Pound,
1908-1936**

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Table of Contents

Introduction: An Intellectual, Emotional, and Historical Complex.....	5
Chapter I. The Beginnings of Pound: Gathering the Imagistes at the British Museum.....	11
Chapter II. The Petal and the Rain: Sinitic Motifs in Early Imagism Poetry.....	23
Chapter III. A Legacy from Overseas: Fenollosa's Preservation of Japanese Art.....	34
Chapter IV. Translingual Aesthetics: From Ideogram to Imagism.....	42
Epilogue: Redefining Culture.....	56
Bibliography.....	59

Introduction

An Intellectual, Emotional, and Historical Complex

This thesis intends to explore the network of artistic and scholarly influences, focusing on those of Sinitic cultural origin, that gave rise to Ezra Pound's Imagism poetry published between 1912 and 1915. It studies both the socio-political and intellectual/aesthetic implications of the transcultural circulation of verbal and pictorial symbols. Two pioneering scholars of East Asian aesthetics in the pre-World War I period, Ernest Fenollosa and Laurence Binyon, laid the groundwork for Pound's mediation of the East-West intellectual traditions as a way to renovate the modern English verse. Using poetry, art criticisms, and paintings as its primary source, the thesis intersects with the disciplines of comparative literature and art history and argues for a new scheme of culture in which culturally-specific symbols merge, intertwine, and generate new meanings when they are re-contextualized into the modern era.

The notion of "Sinitic" is borrowed from Shu-mei Shih's definition of the Sinophone sphere. Rather than using the politically-contentious categories of "Chinese" and "Japanese," Sinophone highlights the interchange within the broader Sinitic language and community outside the geopolitical realm of China proper. The prefix Sino is a derivative of the Late Latin *Sīnae*, which comes from Greek *Sīnai*.¹ The term is probably from the Middle Chinese *tshin*, *Qin*, referring to the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE).² The Sinophone, like the Francophone or Anglophone, recounts the colonial and imperial history when Sinitic languages were either

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=sino>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

² Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, "Qin dynasty, 221–206 BCE," <https://asia.si.edu/learn/for-educators/teaching-china-with-the-smithsonian/explore-by-dynasty/qin-dynasty/#:~:text=At%20the%20end%20of%20the,in%20the%20north%20and%20south>, accessed February 26th, 2023.

forcefully imposed or willingly adopted, serving as the written lingua franca of the East Asian world, and continuing their presence in localized forms.³ This notion is particularly useful for this research project which emphasizes the fluidity of intellectual exchange and hybridity in cultural genesis.

Imagism is the literary movement that emerged in early-twentieth century London. As Ezra Pound defined in 1912, “an ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”⁴ The first historian of the Imagism movement, F. S. Flint, recorded that Pound first invented the term ‘Imagisme’ to designate the aesthetic of “Les Imagistes,” the group of poets including H. D., Amy Lowell, Richard Aldington, T. E. Hulme, among many others. By using French spellings, Pound, despite his disclaimer, wanted Imagism to echo Symbolism, the first modernism movement led by Charles Baudelaire in 1857.⁵ The influence of Symbolism on Imagism has been thoroughly studied by scholars such as René Taupin and William Pratt.⁶ Yet Imagism, just like many literary and artistic movements, incorporated a variety of sources for inspiration. The ones that have been recognized include Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chinese, and Japanese influences.⁷ In some ways, it is those influences that spurred Imagism’s departure from Symbolism and ultimately its goal to revolutionize modern literature.

³ Shu-mei Shih, “Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production,” *Global Chinese Literature*, edited by Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang (Leiden, The Netherlands, 2010), 36.

⁴ Ezra Pound, “Ripostes,” included in “A Retrospect,” *Poetry*, 1918.

⁵ F. S. Flint, “The History of Imagism,” *Egoist Magazine*, 1915; republished in *This Fortnightly Review*, 2017.

⁶ René Taupin, *The Influence of French Symbolism on Modern American Poetry* (AMS Press, 1986); William Pratt, “The Permanence of Imagism” in *Homage to Imagism* (AMS Press, 1992).

⁷ Glenn Hughes, *Imagism & The Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry* (The Humanities Press, 1960), 3.

In 1915, Ezra Pound published the collection *Cathay* which included 14 poems that are his rewriting of Classical Chinese poetry. Without knowledge of the language, Pound based his rewriting on the notes of Ernest Fenollosa, who studied Kanshi — the art of writing poetry in the Sinitic script — while in Japan. The British Museum was the place where Pound examined Fenollosa's study notes and befriended the Keeper of Oriental Prints and Drawings, Laurence Binyon, from whom Pound attained a comprehensive understanding of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. *Cathay* is also a development from many of Pound's earlier publications that were inspired by Sinitic models, such as "Ts'ai Chi'h" and "Liu Ch'e," both published in 1914.

In tracing Sinitic aesthetics tradition into Pound's poetics, most scholars, including Achilles Fang, Ming Xie, Robert Kern, and Twichell-Waas, have deemed his work to be appropriative and Orientalist. His poems are "not a translation or even a loose adaptation...but quote literarily an invention of Chinese poetry for his time." Via rewriting the classics, it was as if Pound tried to create some poetic *chinoiserie* of his own.⁸ Recent scholarships, however, have been trying to re-understand *Cathay* under the context of interconnecting world history, and reframing the analysis using new theories of cultural hybridity and translingual poetics. Zhaoming Qian, Rupert Arrowsmith, and Haun Saussy have initiated this new stage of *Cathay* scholarship, and this thesis attempts to be in conversation with them and further the discussion. Focusing on modern intellectual history, the thesis treats literature and art as the primary record of human consciousness and are emblematic of their historical conditions. To develop from Ezra Pound's poetic philosophy, they are the intellectual, emotional, and historical complex.

⁸ Pound, Ezra. "Ts'ai Chi'h" In *Cathay: A Critical Edition* edited by Timothy Billings (Fordham University Press, 2018), 304.

This thesis closely studies how culturally-specific symbols — words, images, and art objects — encounter, intermingle, generate new meanings, and contribute to the aesthetic characteristics of the period known as modernity. Rewriting the archaic is not a rare method for artistic innovations. Indeed, interstitial relationships — that is, cross-cultural lending and borrowings, between people, ideas, and works of art — are the most accurate descriptions of our circumstances, both historical and contemporary.⁹ This is why this research is careful in choosing the word “inspiration” instead of “influence,” for in the history of culture and ideas there is no unidirectional impact: everything is associative and intertwined.

The need to emphasize the fact that aesthetic concepts flowed at least as vigorously from East to West as vice versa in the modern period is largely a result of scholars’ frustration with the construct of cultural, national, and ethnic boundaries.¹⁰ These divisions have been the primary organizing unit in writing any type of history. Further, cultural hybridity itself often grows out of the (violent) encounter between the dominant and submissive powers. “To highlight these transnational and cross-ethnic ironies is, ultimately, to reassert the very national and ethnic categories of identity that a cross-cultural poetics is meant to outstrip” cautions Jahan Ramazani in *Transnational Poetics*.¹¹ Is there a way to exit the circular logic when it comes to deconstructing cultural categories?

⁹ Jahan Ramazani, “Transnational Portics,” in *A Transnational Poetics* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, “The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System” in *Modernism / Modernity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 40.

¹¹ Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 47.

Early critics of Pound's translingual practice tended to point out numerous "mistakes" in *Cathay* when comparing it to the classical "originals." But word-for-word translation always posits, like Lydia H. Liu said, hypothesized equivalence between two terms whose emergence was a part of the discourse formation that is intertwined with power.¹² What *Cathay* reveals is never an issue of translation. What it reveals is the unequal confrontations of power that gave rise to its shape and form. How can we elucidate the interplay between violent encounters, cross-cultural interchange, and aesthetic innovations? This thesis is motivated by the desire to revisit — if not entirely resolve — these conundrums.

Following a chronological structure, Chapter 1 starts with Ezra Pound's arrival in London in 1908 and recounts the history of Imagism's formation till 1913. It contextualizes Pound and Binyon's accessibility to Sinitic works of art at the British Museum with the Museum's acquisition history, and channels that were opened up via the 1860 and 1900 looting in Beijing. Chapter 2 closely examines Pound's early Imagism poetry by comparing and contrasting them with Laurence Binyon's criticism of Sinitic aesthetics, *The Flight of the Dragon*, published in 1911. It summarizes two recurring motifs, the petal and the rain, and analyzes their respective connotations under Taoist cosmology and ukiyo-e aesthetics. Chapter 3 introduces Pound's meeting with Mary Fenollosa, the widow of Ernest Fenollosa in London in 1913. It then recounts the history of Ernest Fenollosa's study of Classical Chinese poetry in Tokyo from 1887 to 1908 and contextualizes Fenollosa's ability to access Sinitic aesthetics under the history of the Meiji restoration, which is a reaction against the U.S. imperial expansion in 1853. Chapter 4 closely studies Ezra Pound's 1915 poetry collection *Cathay* which is based on Ernest Fenollosa's

¹² Lydia H. Liu, "Introduction," *Translingual Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1995).

Classical Chinese study notes. By reviewing Fenollosa's manuscripts and *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, the chapter argues to conceptualize the Classical Chinese script as aesthetic symbols and further inquires into the relationship between words and images.

Chapter I
The Beginnings of Pound:
Gathering the Imagistes at the British Museum

And also near the Museum they served it mit Schlag
in those days (pre 1914)
the loss of that cafe
meant the end of a B. M. Era
(British Museum era)

.....
So it is to Mr Binyon that I owe, initially,
Mr Lewis, Mr P. Wyndham Lewis. His bull-dog, me,
as it were against old Sturge M's bull-dog.
Ezra Pound, *Cantos* 89/506-7.

On August 14, 1908, a young American sailed to London from Venice after earning a Master's Degree in Romance Philology from the University of Pennsylvania. Carrying 3 pounds in total with barely any local contacts, Ezra, like many beginner poets, had to find his original voice by first imitating the works of preceding masters.¹³ "I have written bushels of verse that could offend no one except a person as well-read as I am who knows that it has all been said just as prettily before." In 1908, Ezra wrote to his friend from the University of Pennsylvania, Williams Carlos Williams, "Why write what I can translate out of Renaissance Latin or crib from the sainted dead?" In response to Williams' feedback on his poem drafts in 1908, Ezra admitted that, to the "ultimate attainments of poesy," he was "only at the first quarter-post in a marathon."¹⁴ Upon leaving Pennsylvania Ezra took some time off to teach French and Spanish at Wabash College in Indiana.¹⁵ But what really drove his moving overseas was a combination of private incidences and the desperation of facing an early career failure. Pound's biographer

¹³ Carpenter Humphrey, *A Serious Character* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 97.

¹⁴ Ezra Pound, "Letter to Williams, 1908," *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (New York : New Directions, 1971).

¹⁵ Pratt, 7.

Humphrey Carpenter wrote that, in the early 1900s, the more Pound considered it, “the less seemed to hold him to America... no job, and a bad time of year for finding one in the academic field; a broken ‘engagement,’ for what it had been worth; no publisher interested in his poetry.” Years later Pound would recall these first five years of his trying to become a poet: “I had exactly one brief poem accepted by one American magazine.”¹⁶

But the year 1908 was the year to prepare Ezra to grow from a nobody to Pound. Since his arrival in London in August, Pound occupied himself with making connections within the small and close-knit literary circle and broadened the scope of his literary studies as he met and learned from artists and scholars in various institutions. To him, London was “the centre of at least Anglo-Saxon letters, and presumably of intellectual action,” even though there was actually little going on in the literary circle of London in 1908.¹⁷ Having self-published his first poetry collection *A Lume Spento* in Venice early that year, he sought to market his book by persuading the bookseller, Elkin Matthews, who had published Pound’s idol W. B. Yeats’ book in 1899, to distribute *A Lume Spento* in his shop. Matthews introduced Pound to a group of artists and scholars from various institutions.¹⁸ Among those was Laurence Binyon, who later invited Pound to his lecture at Kennington in March 1909 titled “Art and Thought in East & West: Parallels and Contrasts.”¹⁹ This lecture series contained four parts, and each of them was distributed in the

¹⁶ Humphrey, 82.

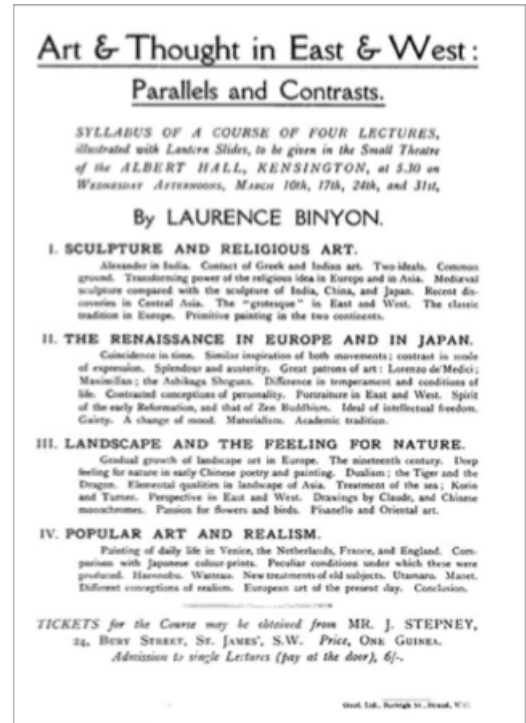
¹⁷ Humphrey, 97.

¹⁸ J. J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris* (Penn State Press, 1990), 5.

¹⁹ Handbill advertising Laurence Binyon’s 1909 Albert Hall lectures. Houghton Library, Harvard (bMS Eng 1148 [126]).

small theatre of the Royal Albert Hall every Wednesday afternoon from March 10th to March 31st.²⁰

“Art and Thought in East & West” was Pound’s first introduction to Sinitic aesthetics. He owed his education to Binyon, the Englishman whom he described as “A modern Wordsworth or Matthew Arnold.”²¹ Graduating from Trinity College, Oxford with a degree in Classics in 1892, Robert Laurence Binyon was the winner of the Newdigate poetry prize (which Oscar Wilde had won in 1878) with his poem *Persephone*. “[T]o me nature is a word more sacred than God,” Binyon wrote in 1888 to Manmohan Ghose, his teenage friend from St. Paul’s High School, “we and all the forms of life we see are but passing phases of God, the fluctuations of this eternal life... God is in Nature and Nature in God.”²² Such insights attained at a young age might not only explain why he chose to be called by his middle name, Laurence, instead of Robert, his christened name, but also the driving force that directed his lifelong search for beauty in its purest form. After his graduation in June 1892, Binyon decided to apply for a vacancy in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. His



Handbill advertising Laurence Binyon’s 1909 Albert Hall lectures. Houghton Library, Harvard (bMS Eng 1148 [126]).

²⁰ London *Times*. Quoted in Rupert Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 115.

²¹ Wilhelm, 7.

²² John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon: Poet, Scholar of East and West* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), 22.

references, R. W. Raper of Trinity College, called him “a born poet & artist,” and Robert Bridges, who would later become the Poet Laureate, emphasized Binyon’s “real enthusiasm and natural turn for art.”²³ The challenge, however, was to master the German language in order to work with the Museum’s important collection of German woodcuts. While Binyon was piped into second place during the language examination by another Oxford graduate, Campell Dodgson, he found himself nominated for a post in the Department of Printed Books in September 1893.²⁴

Since the start of Binyon’s career as the Second Class Assistant, the British Museum’s Oriental art collection was comprehensively transformed. As Binyon wrote in *Chinese Paintings in English Collections*, it was not “till about the last quarter of the nineteenth century that any pictures by artists whom the Chinese would recognize as Masters arrived in England.”²⁵ The period for the first group of Chinese master paintings’ arrival in England corresponded with the two Sino-British wars, ranging from 1839 to 1860. Many art objects acquired by the British Museum during this time have their provenance traced back to the Summer Palace in Beijing, and the channel of their transmission was opened up through the large-scale treasure looting led by Lord Elgin.²⁶ Another major source for the British Museum’s collection and display of the

²³ Testimonial, 8 Oct. 1892, Binyon Application Papers, Central Archives, British Museum. Quoted in Hatcher, 37.

²⁴ Hatcher, 38.

²⁵ Laurence Binyon, *Chinese Paintings in British Collections* (Paris and Brussels, G. Vanoest Publisher, 1927), 10.

²⁶ Young-tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 140.

For a list of objects from the Beijing Summer Palace and in preservation at the British Museum, see: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=Summer%20Palace%20%28Beijing%29>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

empire's "war trophies" is the 1900 Beijing looting.²⁷ The most notable object acquired by the Museum after 1900 is the Admonitions Scroll, which was first presented to Binyon by Captain C. Johnson, leader of the army unit that the British had sent from India to China, in 1902.²⁸ Claimed to be by the master Ku K'ai-Chih, the Admonitions Scroll was at that time the earliest Chinese painting known to exist.²⁹ Binyon undertook a close analysis of the painting's brushwork and composition after its acquisition in 1904. Publishing his study and re-assessment of the growing museum collection of Oriental art in the 1908 catalog *Paintings in the Far East*, Binyon prefaced the book with the collection's difficult history. "For Chinese paintings," he wrote, "so vast an amount has been destroyed by time, fire, wars, rebellions, and the armed ravages of Western civilizations, that very few specimens of its finest periods exist."³⁰

This collection of Chinese paintings, which used to be looted treasures during imperial expansions, became the basis for Pound's access and understanding of the Sinitic tradition. It is reasonable to infer that Binyon's 1909 lecture at the Royal Albert Hall, which Pound attended, derived primarily from the 1908 publication *Paintings of the Far East*. Drawing from the Museum's growing collection of East and South Asian artworks, Binyon presented the first comprehensive study of Far Eastern paintings written in the English language, four years before

²⁷ James Hevia, "'Looting Beijing: 1860, 1900,'" *Tokens of Exchange : the problem of translation in global circulations*, edited by Lydia H. Liu (Duke University Press, 1999), 199.

²⁸ Shane McCausland, *First masterpiece of Chinese painting : the Admonitions scroll* (New York : G. Braziller, 2003), 118.

²⁹ Binyon, *Asiatic art in the British Museum (sculpture and painting)* (Paris ; Brussels : G. van Oest, 1925), 19.

³⁰ Binyon, "Preface," *Painting in the Far East: an introduction to the history of pictorial art in Asia, especially China and Japan* (London : E. Arnold, 1908), viii.

the posthumous publication of Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*.³¹

Additionally, the British Museum's visitors' book recorded Pound's entry into the Prints and Drawings Students' Room (known as the Print Room) on 9 February 1909, and later in 1912 and 1913, examining Chinese and Japanese art along with his wife Dorothy Shakespear. His first entry into the Students' Room on February 9th, 1909 happened only a few days after the initial meeting with Binyon via Elkin Matthews's introduction at the Vienna café, and this visit was followed by four subsequent entries during the following spring and summer.³²

It was at the British Museum, with the guidance of Laurence Binyon, that Pound nurtured his grasp of Sinitic aesthetics which later on inspired Imagism. Located in what is now the Late-Medieval Room (Room 42), the Print Room between 1884 and 1914 served both as the office of the Department of Prints and Drawings and as its reference area.³³ Noted, the Print Room is different from the public-facing Prints and Drawings Gallery; it is an exclusive area of the British Museum that normally requires membership for admittance.³⁴ Since gaining admission tickets to the museum before the First World War consisted of a complicated, partially intractable process, Pound would likely have been admitted with the curator Laurence Binyon's companionship. In the summer of 1909, Pound was endorsed with the card that enabled him to use the British Museum Library with the help of the patron Mrs. Ann Withey.³⁵ There he was provided the

³¹ Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and modernism : the legacy of China in Pound and Williams, 1913-1923* (Duke University Press, 1995), 13.

³² Rupert Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum: Asian, African, and Pacific art and the London avant-garde* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 108.

³³ Zhaoming Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art* (University of Virginia Press, 2003), 34.

³⁴ Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum*, 106.

³⁵ Wilhelm, 3.

additional opportunity to closely read Binyon's publications as well as scholars of Binyon's influence: Ernest Fenollosa, Okakura Kakuzo, Herbert Allen Giles, to name a few. His friendship with Binyon developed throughout the years, and "Bin-Bin" was the nickname Pound used to designate his friend in many of his letters to Dorothy Shakespear.³⁶ As the British Museum gradually became the center for intellectual and artistic exchange at the turn of the century with visits from W. B. Yeats, Odilon Redon, Esther Pissaro, Robert Bridges, among many others, the most persistent literary visitor throughout the first fifteen years of the 20th century was Ezra Pound himself.³⁷

Most scholarships on Pound and the British Museum, however, have either dismissed the context behind Binyon and Pound's ability to access Chinese paintings, or have not comprehensively articulated the Museum's multifaceted functioning as an institution to construct national history and the birthplace for the avant-gardes. It is via the Museum's ability to collect an eclectic variety of objects from across the world that different artistic traditions interact, collide, and hybridize into new art forms that best represent the essence of the global — and colonial — modern world. In Rupert Arrowsmith's *Modernism and the Museum*, he briefly noted that political instability in China during this period allowed for a certain amount of "opportunism" in the Museum's acquisition planning.³⁸ Other scholarships, such as Louise Tythacott's *Collecting and Displaying China's "Summer Palace" in the West* and James Hevia's "Looting Beijing: 1860, 1900," have failed to relate the interlocking symbolic meanings of these

³⁶ Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, their letters, 1910-1914*, edited by Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (New York : New Directions, 1984), 34.

³⁷ Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum*, 108.

³⁸ Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum*, 109.

looted treasures, both as evidence of the British Empire's military prowess and as ambassadors of aesthetic and intellectual traditions from a distant land.³⁹ Ever since the two Sino-British wars, the British Museum boasted its greatest abundance of Chinese and Japanese artworks in Europe in 1910, making this institution one of the best places to study East Asian aesthetics in the whole world.⁴⁰ Yet without violent intrusion, the crime of theft violence, and countless sacrifices, many of the Chinese paintings that Binyon and Pound studied would not have arrived in London.

It has been estimated that about 1.5 million objects were either looted or destroyed by British and French troops in October 1860. In addition to the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the South Kensington Museum — both frequented by Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear in the early twentieth century — housed a large portion of its Chinese treasures from channels that were opened up through the looting.⁴¹ While these objects provided scholars such as Laurence Binyon and H. A. Giles invaluable first-hand resources to understand the East Asian civilization, resulting in the advancement of research whose depth far exceeded the early stage of simply spectating “curiosities” or ethnographic record of the exotic, the irony within cross-cultural interchange as we contextualize the whole process of the artworks' circulation could leave us unsettling. Art objects, as reasoned by Lydia H. Liu, are tokens of exchange whose symbolic value — whether economic, political, or aesthetic — is constantly undergoing reevaluations.⁴² The works of art that inspired Pound's literary practice, and the

³⁹ Louise Tythacott, “The Yuanmingyuan and its Objects,” *Collecting and Displaying China's “Summer Palace” in the West* (Taylor & Francis, 2018), 11.

⁴⁰ Sidney Colvin, “Preface,” *Guide to an exhibition of Chinese and Japanese paintings (fourth to nineteenth century, A.D.) in the print and drawing gallery* (The Trustees of the British Museum, 1910).

⁴¹ Pound, *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear; their letters, 1910-1914*, 35.

⁴² Liu, “Introduction,” *Tokens of Exchange* (Duke University Press, 1999).

poetry that he would go on to produce should be viewed with the consciousness that their complicated history was a part of their meaning and aesthetics. Modernism, therefore, is a literary and artistic movement in which aesthetic innovations are multifaceted distillations of not only the artist but also the socio-political conditions that gave rise to the artwork's irreplaceable shape and form which are unique to its history.

Another source of inspiration for Pound's early writing was the Poet's Club, a community that dined and read poetry regularly at Soho, London, every Wednesday since 1908.⁴³ T. E. Hulme, a dropout from the University of Cambridge who was intensively self-studying philosophy in London, was the founder.⁴⁴ On April 22nd, 1909, six days after publishing his second poetry collection *Personae* with Elkin Matthews, Pound was introduced into the Poet's Club via the introduction of F. S. Flint's friend T. D. FitzGerald.⁴⁵ F. S. Flint, the first historian of Imagism movement, recalled that Pound "added nothing to their meetings — absolutely nothing," and was someone ignorant of the French Symbolists.⁴⁶ Years later Pound recalled that his poetic career in 1910 as "I hadn't in 1910 made a language, I don't mean a language to use, but even a language to think in."⁴⁷ His turn towards East Asian aesthetics, partially also under the impact of Flint, was to break away from his artistic barrenness and renovate his work.

⁴³ F. S. Flint, "The History of Imagism," *Egoist Magazine*, 1915.

⁴⁴ Glenn Hughes, *Imagism & The Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry* (The Humanities Press, 1960), 9.

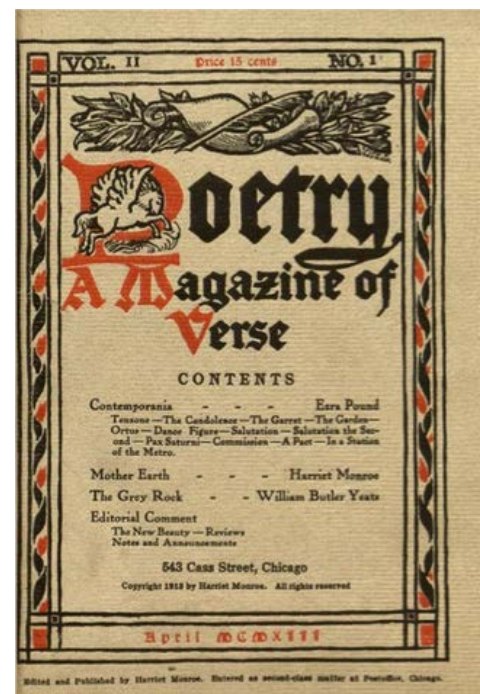
⁴⁵ Flint, "The History of Imagism."

⁴⁶ Jacob Isaacs, "The Coming of the Image," *The background of modern poetry* (New York : Dutton, 1952), 36.

⁴⁷ Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), 399.

In 1912, an aspiring publisher named Harriet Monroe reached out to Pound, inquiring whether him being an American poet overseas would be interested in contributing poems from other sources than America to a magazine that she envisioned dedicated solely to poetry. “Are you for American poetry or for poetry?” Pound asked, “the latter is more important, but it is important that America should boost the former, provided it don’t mean a blindness to the art. The glory of any nation is to produce art that can be exported without disgrace to its origin.”⁴⁸ After spending great effort in securing sponsorship from business leaders in Chicago, Monroe published the first issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in October 1912 with Pound’s two contributing poems. In October 1912, the 3rd issue of *Poetry* contained Pound’s commentary on the poems he solicited from Rabindranath Tagore. In 1913, Monroe published Pound’s earliest Imagist sequel, “Contemporania,” followed by the article illustrating his poetic principle “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste.”⁴⁹

The first use of the word “Imagiste” is found in Pound’s collection *Ripostes* published in the autumn of 1912. In his forward to the *Completed Works* of T. E. Hulme, Pound commented that Hulme’s “Autumn” and “A City Sunset,” previously published in Poet’s Club’s



Poetry, April 1913.
Poetry Foundation Digital Archive.

⁴⁸ Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, 9-10.

⁴⁹ *Poetry Magazine Archive*, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/issue/70324/april-1913>, accessed October 16, 2022.

1909 anthology, were the first Imagist poems.⁵⁰ The French influence, signified by the spelling of the word Imagisme, is especially emphasized as Pound draws a comparison between Symbolism, Impressionism, and Post-Impressionism, claiming that the School of Imagism, a descendent of the Poet's Club, is the soundest of them all.⁵¹ By 1912, Pound, along with H.D., Richard Aldington, and F.S. Flint, had founded the Imagist group. Their principles are outlined at the beginning of "A Retrospect," a 1918 collection of Pound's essays on poetry:

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 the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.⁵²

Richard Aldington, one of the earliest members of the Poet's Club, has further explained this principle: Imagism is not the representation of images but the clear and unburied statement of the image with the chosen "exact word": "the exact word does not mean the word which exactly describes the object in itself, it means the exact word which brings the effect of that object before the reader as it presented itself to the poet's mind at the time of writing the poem."⁵³ This idea echoed T. E. Hulme's insistence on absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage in poetry.⁵⁴ In "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," a practical guide written for fellow poets, published in *Poetry* in March 1913, Pound defines the "image" as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an

⁵⁰ Pound, "A Retrospect," *Classic Writings on Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), edited by Harmon William, 509, ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed March 20, 2023.

⁵¹ Jacob Isaacs, "The Coming of the Image," *The background of modern poetry*, 38.

⁵² Pound, "A Retrospect and a Few Don'ts," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69409/a-retrospect-and-a-few-donts>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

⁵³ Isaacs, 54.

⁵⁴ Flint, "The History of Imagism."

instant of time.”⁵⁵ The notion “complex” was evoked from the British psychologist Bernard Hart, demonstrating the influence in psychological theories on Pound’s conception of the role of poetry.⁵⁶ He elaborates on the “rules” of imagism, advising precision, and proclaiming, among other things, to “use either no ornament or good ornament” and “go in fear of abstraction.”⁵⁷ Many of the ideas will be revisited in a closer look at Pound’s early poetry in relation to Binyon’s criticisms.

⁵⁵ Pound, “A Retrospect and a Few Don’ts.”

⁵⁶ J. Rhett Forman, “A Vague, Invarious Delight”: Ezra Pound’s ‘Middle-Aging Care’ and Bernard Hart’s Psychology of the Complex,” <https://doi.org/10.22455/2541-7894-2019-7-394-413>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

⁵⁷ Pound, “A Retrospect and a Few Don’ts.”

Chapter II
The Petal and the Rain:
Sinitic Motifs in Early Imagism Poetry

Art is not an adjunct to existence, a reduplication of the actual; it is a hint and a promise of that perfect rhythm, of that ideal life. Whatever rhythm is, it is something intimately connected with life, perhaps the secret of life and its most perfect expression.

Laurence Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 15-16.

Laurence Binyon's *The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan Based on Original Sources*, published in 1911, crystallizes his contemplation of Chinese and Japanese paintings based on collections at the British Museum. Resorting to a comparative method and closely engaging with Chinese and Japanese art while illuminating the theoretical foundations that gave rise to artistic traditions, Binyon articulated his admiration and deep understanding of Sinitic aesthetics via his lucid, poetic, and elegant prose style. In 1915, Pound published his review of *The Flight of the Dragon* under the title "Laurence Binyon" in the second issue of the periodical *The Blast*, edited by the writer and critic Wyndham Lewis.⁵⁸

Without direct access to the conversation between Binyon and Pound in the British Museum Print Room, *The Flight of the Dragon* could give us a glimpse into their major intellectual concerns between 1911 to 1915. As pointed out by the art historian David Peters Corbett, Laurence Binyon's contribution to the modernism movement as a critic and theorist of East Asian art — compared to the American scholar Ernest Fenollosa — is relatively understudied.⁵⁹

By tracing the correspondence with Binyon's ideas on the use of pictorial motifs in Pound's early

⁵⁸ Pound, "Chronicles," *The Blast*, edited by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, 1915), The Modernist Journals Project (searchable database), Brown and Tulsa Universities, ongoing, www.modjourn.org.

⁵⁹ David Peters Corbett, "Laurence Binyon and the Aesthetic of Modern Art," *Visual Culture in Britain* v. 6, n. 1 (01 June Summer 2005), 101.

work, this chapter intends to highlight Binyon's influence on the development of Imagism, and, by doing so, examine the circulation of Sinitic aesthetic motifs in early Imagist poetry.

In the first Imagism masterpiece by Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," published in Harriet Monroe's magazine *Poetry* in April 1913, we are presented with such an image and metaphor:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough .⁶⁰

Hokku-like with imagery of the cherry blossom, this poem has been analyzed by Rupert Arrowsmith as to be indebted to Hokusai's *Poem by Ono no Komachi*, a painting that was



Qiu Ying, *A Lady Meditating by a Lake*.
Image © The Trustees of the British
Museum.

acquired by Binyon just before Pound's first visit to the Print Room.⁶¹ Zhaoming Qian, on the other hand, has noticed the possible influence of Qiu Ying's *A Lady Meditating by a Lake*.⁶² This painting by the Ming dynasty master was acquired by the British Museum in 1902 and examined in Binyon's 1927 catalog *Chinese Paintings in British Collections*.⁶³

Few scholars, however, have noticed the genealogy of flower petal motif across the history of Sinitic

⁶⁰ *Poetry*, April 1913, Poetry Foundation archive, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=12675>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

⁶¹ Arrowsmith, "The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System", 40.

⁶² Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, 13.

⁶³ Binyon, "Lady in a pavilion by a lake," *Chinese Paintings in British Collections* (Paris and Brussels, G. Vanoest Publisher, 1927), Plate XLIII; The British Museum collection, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1902-0606-0-53, accessed February 1st, 2023.

aesthetics. “Painters and poets,” Binyon observed in *Flight of the Dragon*, “preferred to tell of their emotions and experiences, not directly but allusively, under the guise of flower or bird.”⁶⁴ Describing a moment in the underground metro station, Pound thought that the faces of the individuals in the metro were best put into a poem not with a description but with an “equation”: there is no verb that connects the two lines, yet the reader confronts a juxtaposition which suggests a parallelism between the “apparition” and the “petals.”⁶⁵ Indeed, flower petal is the motif that Binyon focuses his analysis on; it is the natural symbol which, to those imbued with Taoist conceptions, to partake of an ideal existence.⁶⁶

Let us see another example. In 1914, Ezra Pound edited and published the first anthology of the Imagism movement, titled “Des Imagistes: An Anthology.” The anthology included exemplary works by various authors who were a part of the movement, such as H.D., James Joyce, F. S. Flint, and Allen Upward. Pound's poem “Ts'ai Chi'h” was also featured in the anthology:



Pheasants and flowering trees above a stream. Examined by Laurence Binyon in *Chinese Paintings in British Collections*, Plate XL.
Image © The Trustees of the British Museum.

⁶⁴ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan Based on Original Sources* (London: Murray, 1911), 25.

⁶⁵ J.T. Barbarese, “Ezra Pound's Imagist Aesthetics: Lustra to Mauberley,” *The Columbia history of American poetry* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 307-308.

⁶⁶ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 25.

The petals fall in the fountain
 the orange coloured rose-leaves,
 Their ochre clings to the stone.⁶⁷

The scholar Achilles Fang has analyzed this poem to be a possible rewriting of a poem by Cao Zhi 曹植 translated by the Cambridge scholar H. A. Giles, who had previously collaborated with



Watanabe Gentai,
*Blossoming plum-tree
 against the full moon.*
 Acquired by the British
 Museum in 1881.
 Image © The Trustees
 of the British Museum.

Binyon as a fellow academic.⁶⁸ A poem with multiple sources of inspiration, “Ts’ai Chi’h” is not solely stimulated by Binyon’s ideas, yet its central motif continues to fit within the Sinitic aesthetic tradition centering the flower petal imagery. A poet, telling their sorrow through flower petals, expresses “a common aspiration to be a real part of the whole world of nature: to be flexible and gracious as the willow, bold and tenacious as the bamboo shooting up through the hard ground of water.” In this process of reconciling between humanity and its habitat, “there was no fixed and frigid symbolism, but rather a fine network of subtle associations, linking the human heart to the life of the earth, the waters, and the air.”⁶⁹ In 1912, Pound wrote in “A Few Don’ts” that the proper, perfect, and adequate symbol is the natural object.⁷⁰

In the Sinitic tradition, depictions of natural objects, or landscape paintings, is the predominant genre whose history spanned longer

⁶⁷ Ezra Pound, ed., *Des Imagistes: An Anthology* (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1914), 46.

⁶⁸ Ezra Pound, “Ts’ai Chi’h,” *Cathay: A Critical Edition* edited by Timothy Billings (Fordham University Press, 2018), 304.

⁶⁹ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 23

⁷⁰ Pound, “A Retrospect and a Few Don’ts.”

compared to landscape paintings in Europe.⁷¹ The philosophy of nature reflected by this art form also emerged rather late in the West.⁷² Yet Pound's innovation of the English verse, based on both Eastern and Western intellectual traditions, signified his attempt to recreate literature via cultural hybridity. In depicting nature the artist is not portraying something external to himself, rather,

the winds of the air has become his desires, and the clouds his wandering thoughts, the mountain peaks are his lonely aspirations, and the torrents his liberated energies. Flowers, opening their secret hearts to the light and trembling to the breeze's touch, seem to be unfolding the mystery of his own human heart, the mystery of those intuitions and emotions which are too deep or too shy for speech...the universe, in its wholeness and its freedom, has become his spiritual home."⁷³

The human and the non-human are one under the Taoist cosmology. This sentiment directed the the principle of art creation, which is in opposition to Plato's mimesis, the paradigm that has shaped Western aesthetics from early on. Lacking if not belittling the idea of art being the imitation of nature, the sole purpose of art was to dissolve and recreate the artist's mind by reusing natural forms and to access another spiritual order of reality. A "norm in the great school of Chinese and Japanese art," the realization of this purpose existed rather sporadically in Europe.⁷⁴ The case that most intimately reflects the Taoist affinity between man and nature is the treatment of flower petals in Chinese and Japanese art.⁷⁵ "Their sensitiveness and vigour alike,

⁷¹ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 19.

⁷² Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 67.

⁷³ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 19 - 20.

⁷⁴ David Peters Corbett, 187. "Make it New: Laurence Binyon, Pound and Vorticism," *Paideuma* 26, no. 2/3 (1997): 187.

⁷⁵ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 24.

the singleness of purpose in their expansion to the light, their bountiful exhalation of their sweetness, their sacrifice, their beauty,” writes Binyon, "all made a particular appeal.”⁷⁶

The rich collection of Chinese and Japanese paintings, including paintings of wildlife from the Sung, landscape studies from the Ming, and the Edo period’s ukiyo-e prints, have made the recurrent symbol that interlocks the human and the natural — petals on a bough — a part of Pound’s visual lexicon. Passing through a crowded underground metro, the poet’s mind harked back to drawings from an earlier age, relating the scene from an urban setting with medieval and early modern depictions of nature. “In a Station of the Metro,” in a way, problematizes the environment where humanity resides — whether the city has become the new landscape. The crowd, like Baudelaire theorizes, is the new site for spectacles, contemplations, and artistic portrayal.

The Imagist aesthetic principle was influenced by Binyon's critiques of Chinese and Japanese paintings, which Pound expressed through a style characterized by "reticent, allusive brevity.”⁷⁷ A poem of fourteen words, “In a Station of the Metro” is derived from Pound’s first draft consisting of over thirty lines. “To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.”⁷⁸ This rule of Imagism presented by Flint in 1913 is evaluated by Pound in "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" to be the result of long contemplation.⁷⁹ Imagism aesthetics incorporated the Sinitic art principle of evocation and suggestion. “In Chinese art and poetry,”

⁷⁶ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 25.

⁷⁷ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 25.

⁷⁸ Flint, “Imagisme,” *Poetry* March 1913, p.199, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=1&issue=6&page=27>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

⁷⁹ Pound, “A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste,” *Poetry* March 1913, p.201, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=1&issue=6&page=29>, accessed February 1st, 2023.

writes Binyon, “we find an instinctive avoidance of display, a reliance on suggestion, a pregnant hint.”⁸⁰ This idea reoccurs in Pound’s article published in *The Blast* in 1914, in which he says that the Vortex capture of the world should be “CONCEIVING instead of merely observing and reflecting.”⁸¹ Emphasizing dynamism and intense movement, Vorticism distinguishes itself from Imagism yet incorporates Pound’s earlier aesthetic principles that were influenced by Binyon’s study of Chinese and Japanese paintings.⁸² The goal of creating evocative and succinct literary art was embedded in Pound’s early poetic career.

Scholars have suggested that the spacing between words in Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" reflects the poem's musical tempo. However, the void created by the spacing also visually expands the realm of imagination within the poem. Pound's painterly approach to poetry echoes the Taoist idea of empty space, as seen in Sinitic landscape paintings. As Binyon notes, such paintings are not filled but are “waiting for our imagination to enter into it, to feel the air coming out of the great heights of the sky over the bare hillside, to hear the swaying of the branches of the giant pine, to listen to the words, to watch the faces and the gestures of the disciple and his master.”⁸³ In Taoist thought, incompleteness is a central aspect of design, and in poetry, this void is filled with words whose sound is mute.

Employing the principle of suggestion and the economy of language, “In a Station of the Metro” forces the reader to read in-between lines and to treat each word as a fundamental

⁸⁰ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 23.

⁸¹ Pound, “Vortex,” *The Blast*, Number 1, edited by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, 1914), The Modernist Journals Project (searchable database), Brown and Tulsa Universities, ongoing, www.modjourn.org.

⁸² Matthew Hofer, “From Imagism to Vorticism,” *English Language and Literature* Vol. 64 No. 2 (2018), 178.

⁸³ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 58.

contributor to the imagery. Another notable element is Pound's description of the black bough with petal as "wet," suggesting that it has been touched by water or rain. For artists in nineteenth-century Japan, mist and rain is of particular fondness. While the rain is tiresome and uncomfortable to the Europeans, to Hiroshige, as Binyon notes, it is a theme of endless beauty.⁸⁴ "Water," said Lao-tzu, "is the weakest and strongest of things, yet overcomes the strongest and hardest." Its fluid ontology allows it to penetrate everything effortlessly and retains its permanent form via formlessness. Water therefore becomes a symbol of the spirit. For the ukiyo-e printmaker, water symbolizes "the impermanence of things, the transitoriness of life, which in Buddhism was allied to human sorrow," but is converted into "a positive and glowing inspiration."⁸⁵ The rain distills the paradoxical desire to capture the eternal in a fleeting moment of time, and Pound's recreation of the flower petal motif therefore combines its Taoist cosmological root with the worldview embedded into the ukiyo-e. An intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time, "In the Station of a Metro" is Pound's flashback towards and intermingling of the variety of Sinitic visual artworks he viewed at the British Museum.



Utagawa Hiroshige, *View of Higashibashi below Kinryuzan in Asakusa in the Rain*. Examined in Binyon, *A Catalogue of Japanese & Chinese Woodcuts Preserved in the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 1916. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum.

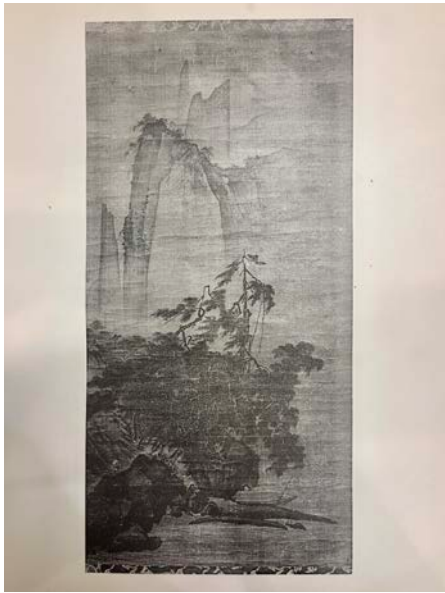
⁸⁴ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 28.

⁸⁵ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 27.

Let us examine a longer example. “Doria” was first published in Pound’s 1912 collection *Ripostes*. Realizing what this piece has accomplished, Pound included it in the anthology *Des Imagistes*:

Be in me as the eternal moods
 of the bleak wind, and not
 As transient things are —
 gaiety of flowers.
 Have me in the strong loneliness
 of sunless cliffs
 And of grey waters.
 Let the gods speak softly of us
 In days hereafter,
 The shadowy flowers of Orcus
 Remember Thee.⁸⁶

The distinct musicality in “Doria” is explicated by the Pound scholar Charles Altieri, who



Pines and Rocky Peaks by Ma Yuan
 Examined by Binyon in *Painting in
 the Far East*, 130-131.

recognizes its cadence created by the change from the sound “e” at the beginning to the emphasis on “a” and “o” in the middle and its closing up with the “e” sound at the end.⁸⁷ Moreover, the visual motifs in the poem can be reevaluated through the lens of Sinitic aesthetics. Here, flowers symbolize fleeting things, which contrasts with the eternal. As a succinct and impressionistic depiction of a moment in time, the poem suggests the desire to preserve memory out of the fleeting moment using tropes of natural imagery. In addition to its

⁸⁶ Pound, *Des Imagistes: An Anthology*, 41.

⁸⁷ Charles Altieri, “Why Pound’s Imagist Poems Still Matter,” *Ezra Pound in the Present: Essays on Pound’s Contemporaneity* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

engagement with Taoist cosmology, the poet's sentiment also resembles the aesthetics of ukiyo-e, or 浮世絵, which literally means "pictures of the floating world." Like Hiroshige's prints, Doria attempts to create a lasting record of experiences that would otherwise quickly disappear.

Pound's innovation of the English verse is again based on a hybrid association of historical and philosophical implications. "The strong loneliness/of sunless cliffs" attaches the mental state of loneliness with the image of a cliff in shadow, and recalls the imagery in the Sung landscape painting, *Pines and Rocky Peaks* by Ma Yuan, illustrated in Binyon's 1908 book *Painting in the Far East*.⁸⁸ The ambiance of the poem digs into the internal spiritual state of a favorite subject matter for Sung dynasty painters, that of a sage who retired from the world to contemplate the lotus, as in Sheng Mou's *The Sage in the Forest*.⁸⁹ When contemplating nature, "the wild and waste places and the mountain altitudes hold no horror, and in whose work the human spirit appears so unhampered and serene."⁹⁰ In

a smiler fashion as how the ukiyo-e inspired the worldview behind Impressionistic paintings, medieval Sinitic paintings renovated the use of imagery and motifs in English poetry, "merges the local with the cosmic, and mirrors 'a state of the soul.'⁹¹



The Sage in the Forest, examined by Binyon in *Painting in the Far East*, 3rd edition, plate XXII. Quoted in *Asiatic Art of the British Museum*, 45.

⁸⁸ Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, Plate IX.

⁸⁹ Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, Plate XXII.

⁹⁰ Binyon, *Chinese Paintings in British Collections*, 22.

⁹¹ Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon*, 33.

The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to trace the inspiration from Laurence Binyon's criticisms in Pound's early Imagism poetry. However, it by no means argue that Pound was the literary executor of Binyon's ideas. An art critic, Binyon was recognized to be a member of the Late-Romanticisms, as reflected in his recollection of the Taoist philosophy of nature.⁹² In other words, Binyon expressed influences more so than creating something original. In the 1915 review of *The Flight of the Dragon*, Pound criticizes Binyon be someone "not rebellious enough."

We find him in a disgusting attitude of respect toward predecessors whose intellect is vastly inferior to his own...Mr. Binyon has thought; he has plunged into the knowledge of the East and extended the borders of occidental knowledge, and yet his mind constantly harks back to some folly of nineteenth century Europe. We can see him as it were constantly restraining his inventiveness.⁹³

What Pound is trying to express in *Pavannes and Divagations* is not a denunciation of Binyon's talent; rather, he is trying to suppress, within these words, a sense of pity for Binyon not manifesting his talent in full, the pity for Binyon's conformism to the orthodoxy. Clearly, Pound did not want to be an interpreter of the arts — that which is the task for Binyon, our art critic — he wanted to be the creator of a new form of art.

⁹² Corbett, "'Make it New': Laurence Binyon, Pound, and Vorticism" (*Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, 1997), 184.

⁹³ Pound, "Laurence Binyon" in *Pavannes and Divagations* (New York: New Directions, 1958), 149.

Chapter III
A Legacy from Overseas:
Ernest Fenollosa's Preservation of Japanese Art

Startling the cool gray depths of morning air
 She throws aside her counterpane of clouds,
 And stands half folded in her silken shrouds
 With calm white breast and snowy shoulder bare.
 High o'er her head a flush all pink and rare
 Thrills her with foregleam of an unknown bliss,
 A virgin pure who waits the bridal kiss,
 Faint with expectant joy she fears to share.
 Ernest Fenollosa, "Sonnet: Fuji at Sunrise," 1893

In 1913, Mary Fenollosa met with Ezra Pound in a literary salon in London.⁹⁴ As the widow of Ernest Fenollosa, the scholar who Laurence Binyon deemed as the one "to whom more than anyone else we owe the first clear recognition of the greatness of the ancient art of the Far East,"⁹⁵ Mary Fenollosa was purposefully seeking a literary executor of her husband's unpublished manuscripts on Classical Chinese poetry and Nōh drama. Little has been written on the exact circumstances of the two's encounter; yet records have indicated that Pound's "Cotemporania" sequence, including "In a Station of the Metro," was "read in delight" by Mary Fenollosa after its publication earlier that year.⁹⁶ In addition to Pound's developing poetic mastery, his demonstrated interest in Sinitic aesthetics, resulting out of his appreciation of Japanese and Chinese paintings held at the British Museum, was another reason why Mary Fenollosa considered Pound to be a suitable candidate to take on her husband's legacy.

In 1876, Ernest Fenollosa withdrew from philosophical studies at Harvard's Unitarian Divinity School, and devoted himself to the arts and had been taking painting and drawing

⁹⁴ *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, edited by Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams (Greenwood Press, 2005), 154.

⁹⁵ Binyon, *Asiatic art in the British Museum*, 11.

⁹⁶ Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism*, 14.

courses at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.⁹⁷ After a year, in 1877, the former zoology lecturer at Harvard University, Edward Sylvester Morse, sought to recommend Fenollosa to the newly-established Tokyo Imperial University to fill the position of a political philosophy professor.⁹⁸ Having few acquaintances among philosophers, Morse recognized the brilliant record in philosophy Fenollosa had previously made, and wrote Fenollosa a strong recommendation letter, which gave the 23-year-old young man the extraordinary opportunity to lecture on Hegel and Spencer on generous salary offered by the Japanese government.

The 1877 establishment of Tokyo Imperial University, however, was a reaction against the Imperialistic expansion led by the United States. Anchoring the black ship on the coast of Uruga in 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry was among the many foreign militaries and merchants seeking to build trade and diplomatic relations with Japan, after centuries of the shogun government's restrictions on foreign trade access. When the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed in 1854, political opposition rallied against the shogun government, leading to the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867.⁹⁹ The newly restored Meiji government committed to modernization and industrialization following European and American models and employed foreign professionals to instruct the Japanese in natural and social sciences. In 1877, Tokyo Imperial University was established with the hope to educate the nation's future leaders, and

⁹⁷ Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: the Far East and American culture* (Yale University Press, 1963), 31.

⁹⁸ Chisolm, 29.

⁹⁹ Felice Fischer, "Meiji Painting from the Fenollosa Collection" in *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1992), 2.

Morse was among the first five hundred foreign professionals employed by the government. In 1878, Fenollosa started lecturing on Hegel and Spencer in Tokyo.

Outside of his formal responsibilities, Fenollosa began collecting Japanese art and studying Japanese aesthetics. With his student Okakura Kakuzo, Fenollosa was among the small group of Meiji restoration era artists and scholars who hoped to reverse the intellectual flow so that Asian concepts could influence European and American ideologies. In 1882, Fenollosa addressed the speech “Truth of Fine Arts” to an influential group of politicians:

“Japanese art is really far superior to modern cheap Western art that describes any object at hand mechanically...Despite such superiority the Japanese despise their classical paintings, and, with a deep adoration for the Western civilization, admire its modern paintings which are artistically worthless and imitate them for nothing. What a sad phenomenon it is! The Japanese should return to their nature and its old racial traditions, and then take, if there are any, the good points of Western paintings.”¹⁰⁰

Following his argument about the significance of Japanese traditional art, Fenollosa proposed practical solutions to resolve issues of contemporary Japanese art, including the establishment of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts.¹⁰¹ In 1886, Fenollosa was decorated by Emperor Meiji for his discovery of ancient Chinese scrolls and the preservation of many Buddhist artifacts during the Haibutsu Kishaku movement.¹⁰² Called by Yone Noguchi the “discoverer” of Japanese art for

¹⁰⁰ Ernest Fenollosa, “Truth of Fine Arts,” address delivered to the Ryuchi-kai, Tokyo, 14 May 1882, translated into Japanese by Omori Tadanaka as “Bijutsu Shinsetsu” in *Meiji Bunka Zenshū* [Collection of Works on Meiji Culture] ed. Yoshino Sakuzo, 12 vols. Tokyo, Nihon Kyoronsha, 1928-1930, Vol. 12, pp. 168-170, English quotation as retranslated by Kotakane Taro in “Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, His Activities and Influence on Modern Japanese Art”, *Bulletin of Eastern Art*, No. 16, April 1941, p. 22, quoted in Kevin Nute, “Ernest Fenollosa and the Universal Implication of Japanese Art” in *Japan Forum* (Spring 1995), 25, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/scholarly-journals/ernest-fenollosa-universal-implications-japanese/docview/1311430006/se-2>.

¹⁰¹ J. Thomas Rimer, “Hegel in Tokyo: Ernest Fenollosa and His 1882 Lecture on the Truth of Art,” *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 101.

¹⁰² Nute, 26.

Philosophy, and Science.¹⁰³ Regularly he met with Professor Kainen Mori, whom he deemed as “the greatest living authority on Chinese poetry,” and Nagao Ariga, one of Fenollosa’s former pupils and a close friend, to study the art of Kanshi, that is, writing poems in Classical Chinese.¹⁰⁴ They worked laboriously through “Rihaku” (the Japanese name of Li Po 李白) to produce two large volumes of notes including “cribs, glosses, comments, scholarly apparatus for 64 poems.”¹⁰⁵ The total 8 notebooks contained 150 poems, ranging from *Shijing* 詩經, or *The Book of Songs*, written in the 11 to 7 BC, to Tang poetry 唐詩 from the 8th to 10th centuries CE. Pencil scribbles of Fenollosa recorded his 4 step process of first learning the Classical Chinese written characters, followed by their contemporary Japanese pronunciations, then each character’s corresponding meaning in English, and finally a rewriting of the entire line of the poem.¹⁰⁶ Known as the Fenollosa manuscripts, its author could not have foreseen the impact of these 8 notebooks on modern poetry at large.

In 1908, the same year when Pound have just arrived in London, Fenollosa died suddenly in London on the way home from a study trip with his students.¹⁰⁷ Between 1908 to 1912, Mary Fenollosa toiled through “the most complicated and difficult manuscript” for the last three years,

¹⁰³ Chisolm, 121-135.

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Fenollosa, “The Chinese Written Language as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica,” in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, edited by Haun Saussy et al. (Fordham University Press, 2008), 43.

¹⁰⁵ Zhaoming Qian. *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 57.

¹⁰⁶ Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. The exact interpretation process varies with respect to different poems and in different notebooks.

¹⁰⁷ Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle* (E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc, New York, 1962), 66.

resulting in the publication of *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* in 1912.¹⁰⁸ More research needs to be done in order to know why, in 1913, Mary Fenollosa specifically thought Pound to be the perfect candidate to continue her husband's work.¹⁰⁹ It remains a question as to who else has been considered, and further, whether she was purposefully seeking to expand her husband's influence in the Anglo-American circle, belittling if not entirely neglecting the talent and potential of her husband's Japanese students such as Okakura Kakuzo. "I am giving to you the novels, envelopes, pamphlets, or whatever for they go in," wrote Mary Fenollosa to Pound in November 1913, "you merely let me know that No.1, has safely arrived, - then No.2 -, and so on. It will be enough to giving me 'an shin'; which is to say 'peace of the spirit.'" ¹¹⁰

Between 1913 to 1915, Pound continued working on Fenollosa's notes at the British Museum's Reading Room. "I think you are now on li po — version 1 just above all of E.F.F.'s Nōh material" wrote Mary Fenollosa to Pound, "but if there is hope — in the future, of future volumes — I have still, stored away at Kobinata, a priceless treasury of M.S.S. — Chinese poetry — translations of it giving each ideograph embedded in various nuances of meaning — E.F.F.'s essays and studies of Chinese poetry — also of philosophy, civilization, etc etc — I cannot believe that any coming student of these things is to have E.F.F.'s peculiar advantages — and China is the coming nation!" ¹¹¹ What Mary Fenollosa implied was that the discovery of Sinitic literary heritage could be a source for modern literature's renovation. Perceiving China as

¹⁰⁸ Mary Fenollosa, "Preface" in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art : An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (Stone Bridge Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Brooks, 65.

¹¹⁰ Mary Fenollosa, "Fenollosa, Mary McNeil" (YCAL MSS 43, Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

¹¹¹ Mary Fenollosa, "Fenollosa, Mary McNeil" (YCAL MSS 43, Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

“a new Greece,” Pound looked to its ancient civilization — named “Cathay” — for a Renaissance.¹¹²

The Fenollosa notes are the eight notebooks compiled of his studies with Professor Mori Kainan, whom he deemed as the greatest living authority on Chinese poetry, with the help of Ariga Nagao as his interpreter.¹¹³ Their subject of study was the art of writing Kanshi, that is, writing poems in Classical Chinese. They worked laboriously through “Rihaku” to produce two large volumes of notes including “cribs, glosses, comments, scholarly apparatus for 64 poems.”¹¹⁴ The notes are said to have contained 150 poems in total, showing the process from first learning Chinese characters, to the Japanese pronunciations, and finally to each character’s meaning in English.¹¹⁵ Up to the expectation of Mary Fenollosa, in April 1915, Pound presented his grasp and his innovation of Chinese poetry in the collection *Cathay*. The book contained 15 poems, 10 of which are his rewriting of Li Po’s work.

The second half of the year 1915 and 1916 were for Pound a moment to harvest the fruit he produced through years of writing and studying. “Ezra's new book 'Cathay' is full of the most beautiful things” wrote Amy Lowell, fellow Imagism poet based in New England, in a personal letter to Harriet Monroe, “I have seldom read anything finer.”¹¹⁶ In addition to the published appraisal in *Outlook*, written by the English novelist Ford Hueffer (whose work had been

¹¹² Pound, “The Renaissance,” *Poetry*, 1914. Quoted in Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism*, 18.

¹¹³ Fang, Achilles, 222.

¹¹⁴ Qian, 57.

¹¹⁵ Ezra Pound Papers. Collection at Beinecke Library.

¹¹⁶ Amy Lowell, “Letter from Amy Lowell to Harriet Monroe, June 11, 1915,” in *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle with Extracts from Her Correspondence*, edited by Samuel Foster Damon (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1935), 107.

reviewed highly by Pound before), *Cathay* was deemed by the forceful critic A. R. Orage as “the best and only good work Mr. Pound has yet done.”¹¹⁷ Compared to the harsh criticism he received in 1913 from Chicago-based literary editor Wallace Rice, who described his lines as “derivations, experiments in the manner of a novice, searching after individual expression without attainment,” Pound seemed to have now slowly come into the center of attention.¹¹⁸ *Cathay* was his first major contribution to twentieth-century world literature, as well as a work of art justifying his poetic philosophy.

¹¹⁷ A. R. Orage, “A.R. Orage on the thought and form of *Cathay*, 1915” in *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Eric Homberger (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

¹¹⁸ Rice Wallace, “From China to Peru” in *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Eric Homberger.

Chapter IV
Translingual Aesthetics:
From Ideogram to Imagism

I hope in some day to see a bilingual text, each ideogram with full explanation so that the American reader may have ... one full meaning hold in such restraint that a hierarchy of imperatives be not lost.

Ezra Pound, *Immediate need of Confucius*

In 1936, Pound edited and published Fenollosa's *ars poetica* written in 1906, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry*.¹¹⁹ Early criticisms about Fenollosa's ideogrammatic thinking have pointed out that not *all* Chinese characters are pictographs or ideograms, and traditional Chinese etymology postulates six principles known as the Liu Shu.¹²⁰ Justifiable as this criticism is, Fenollosa's notes taken while studying Classical Chinese in 1901 have included these notions: 象形, 指示, 會意, 形聲, 轉注, 假借 (mirroring the form, embodying the thing, suggesting the meaning, harmonizing the form and the sound, mutually defining, borrowing).¹²¹ Another major criticism is that Fenollosa mistakenly identified the Chinese written character or the writing *script* as the Chinese *language* itself and misunderstood the language to be lacking in its sound, while the sound is a fundamental structuring tool for the Classical Chinese poetic syntax.¹²² Yet in his notes, Fenollosa has demonstrated his study of 律, 和, 聲, or measure, harmony, and voice, indicating that his knowledge about Classical Chinese

¹¹⁹ Ernest Fenollosa, "The Chinese Written Language as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica," in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, edited by Haun Saussy et al (Fordham University Press, 2008), 75.

¹²⁰ James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 4.

¹²¹ Ernest Fenollosa, "Chinese Poetry: Prof. Mori's Lectures, Vol. 1," (YCAL MSS 43, Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

¹²² Ming Xie, *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry* (Garland Publishing, 1999), 41.

was beyond the scope of what *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* has explicated.¹²³

“It is easy to demolish the ideogrammatic method philologically,” writes Achilles Fang, “by no means so when it comes write on its operation on poetic levels where it looks like a fugue.”¹²⁴ In 2003 the scholar Zhaoming Qian asked how to bring the discussion on Fenollosa’s ideogrammatic method beyond philology.¹²⁵ Attempting to respond to this intellectual inquiry, this section of my essay examines the genesis of Fenollosa’s thinking by comparing and contrasting his notes with the Classical Chinese originals and Ezra Pound’s *Cathay*. Aiming to elucidate the relationship between ideogrammatic thinking and Imagism, I read *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* as an investigation of poetry, not language — or to be more precise, the universal elements of aesthetic form.

Below is Fenollosa’s interpretation of two lines from Li Po under the guidance of Mori and Ariga:

I	kio	rian	to	itsu	gu	kun
I	bridge	south	head	once	meet	you
(on my returning to Tojan), I passed over the the I bridge (again)						
And at the Southern end I once again meet you						
San	tai	shi	hoku	yu	ri	fun
San	palace	s	north	again	separate	crowd
					from	

¹²³ Ernest Fenollosa, “Chinese Poetry: Prof. Mori’s Lectures, Vol. 1” (YCAL MSS 43, Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

¹²⁴ Achilles Fang to Noel Stock, 20 July 1955, in University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Pound Collection. Quoted in Zhaoming Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, 144.

¹²⁵ Qian, 144.

but this meeting is not of long duration)
 Because you are to go to the north of the San terrace,
 So that (we) the growth must separate

These two lines come from Li Po's 忆旧游寄譙郡元参军, written between 744-753 CE.¹²⁶

渭桥南头一遇君
 鄴台之北又离群

After experiencing disappointment in his political career, Li Po visited his friend Yuan Yan 元演, who was serving as the governor of the Qiao 譙 country and had the title 元参军, or senator Yuan. The poem was written when Po was thinking about Yan after returning home in Donglu 東魯 following the two's fourth departure from each other. For the two places mentioned, Wei 渭 refers to Wei river 渭水, running from Chang'an 长安 in the midwest to the southeast, passing through Qiao 譙, and subsuming into Huai river 淮河. 鄴台 was a part of the Qiao county during

Tang. It has been inferred that Li Po came from the south, went through Qiao, and met Yuan Yan at the Wei river bridge 渭水桥.¹²⁷

After a brief meeting, Yuan Yan accompanied Po for more than 20 miles to Zanxian, and the two

departed from each other in the

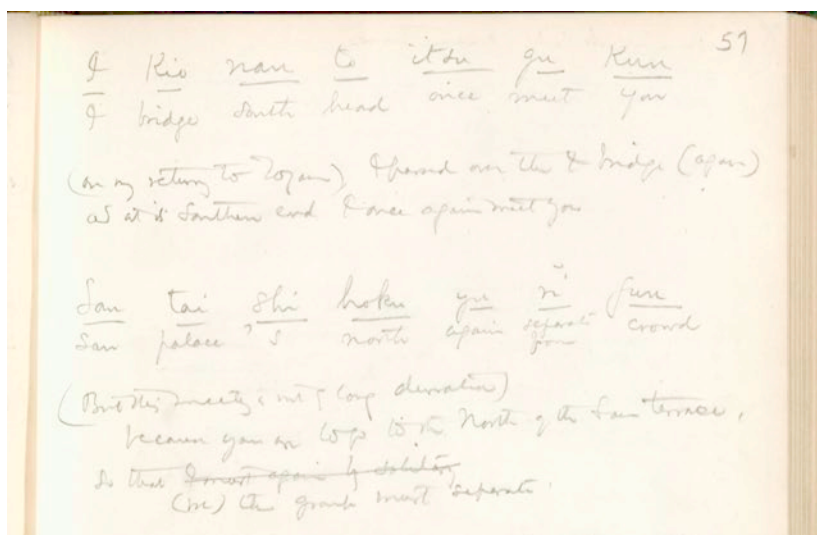


Figure 1 “Chinese Poetry: Mori & Ariga, Vol. 2,” (YCAL MSS 43), 57.

¹²⁶ 薛天纬, 李白诗解 [Tianwei Xue, *Interpretation of Li Bai's Poems*] (China Social Sciences Press, 2016), 158.

¹²⁷ Xue, 160.

north. In Fenollosa's interpretation, Wei 渭 is represented by the sign "I." In Pound, the poem is entitled "Exile's Letter," and the line becomes

And once again, later, we met at the South bridgehead.
And then the crowd broke up, you went north to San palace¹²⁸

While 鄜台 becomes "San palace," the name Wei 渭 is missing. To pair with the phrase "north to San place," Pound capitalizes "South," making it both a name and a direction. In Li Po, however, the two phrases 渭桥南头 and 鄜台之北 are juxtaposed side by side, imbuing the lines with movement and imagery. One reads the poem recalling the geographical expanse of this visit between the two. In 忆旧游寄谯郡元参军, Po reminisces upon the four visits to Yuan Yan in different stages of his life, contrasting their pleasure shared together with the loss and despair he experienced in his career as well as in the socio-political realities.¹²⁹ Narrating his life trajectory around the four meetings with Yuan Yan, Po used the two lines above to describe the fourth and last time the two had together, which is both short and long: short in the time they have spent, long in the distance they have traveled. It therefore reflects both the deep friendship that Yuan and Po developed over the years and the reality of having to depart from each other, enhancing Po's loss after returning home. This poem is the channel to communicate Po's missing his friend without directly saying so, and a part of this message is conveyed by relying on knowledge about the local geography. Pound's replacement of the place names with south and north universalizes the experience of an exile while leaving out the culturally and historically contingent contexts

¹²⁸ Ezra Pound, *Cathay* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915), 22.

¹²⁹ 周啸天, 唐诗鉴赏辞典, [*Xiaotian Zhou, Dictionary of Tang Poetry Appreciation*] edited by Ruchang Zhou et al. (Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2004), 294.

that generate meaning for Li Po's specific audience, thus reconfiguring the reader of this poem into a new one.

Let us look at another line from the same poem: 君亦归家渡渭桥. This line describes the third visit between Li Po and Yuan Yan. In Fenollosa's notes, it becomes:

Kun	yeki	ki	ka	do	Ti(?)	kio
lord	also	return	home	pass over	name	bridge
you					of	
					river	

And you, going home, would have passed over the T(?) bridge

Here, Wei 渭 is interpreted as an unspecified notion "name of river."

In Pound, the line simply becomes

"You back to your river-

bridge."¹³⁰ Taking away the

location that Po was referring

to as where Yan went after

them bidding goodbye, the line becomes in a way timeless — one can take this line to apply to

the general circumstance of friends' departing from each other, and certainly, I deduce, to

Pound's experience. The mistake of the missing word 渭 Wei is consistent in *Cathay*. As seen in

"Four Poems of Departure," where Pound writes:

Light rain is on light dust
The willows of the inn-yard
Will be going greener and greener.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Pound, *Cathay*, 20.

¹³¹ Pound, *Cathay*, 28.

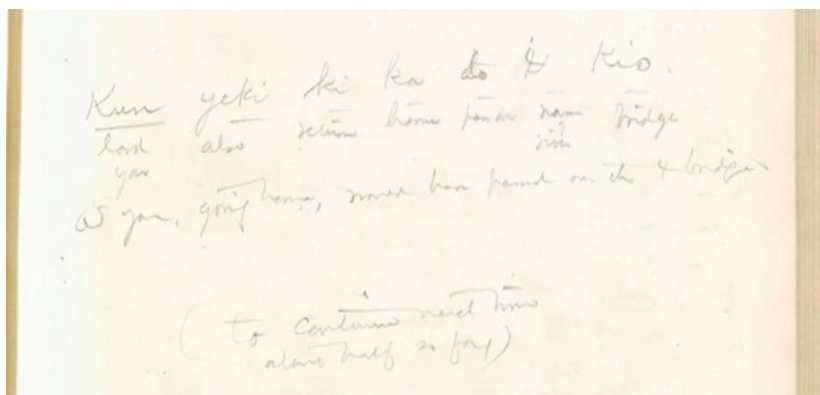


Figure 2 "Chinese Poetry: Mori & Ariga, Vol. 2," (YCAL MSS 43), 50.

This line is an interpretation of 王维 Wang Wei's 送元二使安西, written before 750 BC:

渭城朝雨浥轻尘
客舍青青柳色新

The other title of this poem is 渭城曲 or Song of the Wei City.¹³² From 安西 An'xi (in Chang'an) to 渭城 (Wei city), Wang Wei sent off his friend 元二 by taking the long journey, showing his care for his friend to bid farewell. The depth of this emotional connection reflected by the journey's distance is not equally communicated in Pound's rewriting, where he omits both Wei city and An'xi. In *Cathay*, these four lines from Wang Wei are positioned as an italicized introductory stanza for the sequence "Four Poems of Departure" attributed to Li Po.¹³³ The incorrect attribution of this poem can be explained by Pound's confusion about some poets' identities, evidenced by the notes he took when studying Fenollosa's work. In de-historicizing the poem from its context, not only does the poem become timeless, the Chinese character attains the goal of mediating what is believed to be the purist poetry. The character 渭, since Fenollosa's

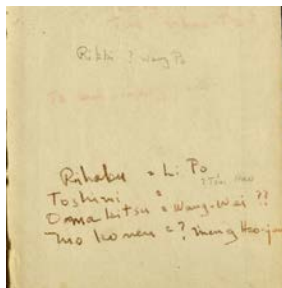


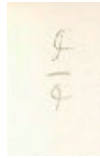
Figure 3
Rikki ? Wang Po
Rihaku = Li Po
Toshini = ? T'sui Hao
Omakitsu = Wang - Wei ??
Mokonen = ? Wang Hao-jan

Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹³² 李映葵, “社会符号学翻译法视角下《送元二使安西》两个英译本的对比分析” [Yingqin Li, “A comparative analysis of two English translations of 送元二使安西 from the perspective of social semiotic translation method”] in *Data of Culture and Education* (Nanjing Normal University Press, 2021), 63.

¹³³ Pound, *Cathay*, 28.

interpretation, become indecipherable signs, for this word represents the history that is untranslatable.¹³⁴



From Figure 1



From Figure 2

Let us look at another line from Li Po's 忆旧游寄谯郡元参军:

问余别恨今多少
落花春暮争纷纷

This line, following the narrative of Li Po's fourth and last visit to Yuan Yan, describes Li Po's feeling at the moment of the poem's composition. Fenollosa interpreted it as [sic]

Mon	yō	letsu	kon	chi	ta	sho
ask	me	separation	sadden	knew	much	few
(if you) ask me now much I regret that parting (much or little)						
Raku	kura	shun	lō	so	lit=tangle	fun
falling	flower	spring	end	so	fun	pun
				compete	in	(same)
				with	turmoil	in confusion

I would avow that my sorrow is as much as
much as the falling flower at the end of spring
struggling with one another in a tangle

In Pound's "Exiles's Letter," the line becomes:

And if you ask how I regret that parting:
It is like the flowers falling at Spring's end
Confused, whirled in a tangle.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ In Ronald Bush's "Pound and Li Po: What Becomes a Man" in *Ezra Pound Among the Poets* (The University of Chicago Press, 1985), this character has been mistakenly transcribed as "4," which does not fit into its context.

¹³⁵ Pound, *Cathay*, 22.

Pound replaces “as much as” with “It is like” for clarity. It is the same technique he uses when rewriting the Hokku “The footsteps of the cat upon the snow: (are like) plum blossoms.”¹³⁶ In both cases, Pound emphasizes the line that

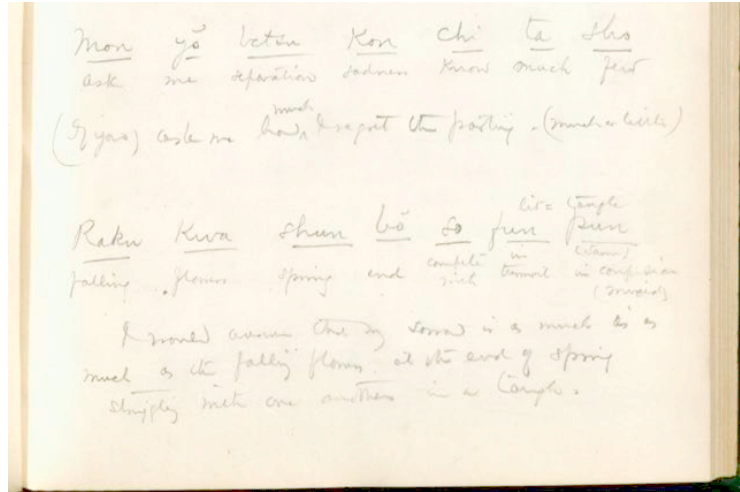


Figure 5 “Chinese Poetry: Mori & Ariga, Vol. 2,” (YCAL MSS 43), 57.

metamorphoses the poet’s inner

mental state into a picture by breaking it with indentation. When Li Po was reminiscing the time he spent with Yuan Yan after their separation, what he felt when composing the poem was not distinctively “sadness”— he could not have been aware of being sad himself for he was absorbed in that feeling — all he directly felt was this image of petals dispersing, a metaphor of his emotion which he did not consciously make. By mediating the reader to envision such an image through language, Li Po made Pound see the same flower across thousands of years. This image is something 言亦不可及，情亦不可及， or something that is of no use to be talked about and something that has no end in the heart.¹³⁷

Loss, departure, and isolation are *Cathay*’s themes. This thematic focus, along with its status as a work of transliteration, explores Pound’s interest in the alienation between the language we speak and our inner lives. In “The Beautiful Toilet,” for example, a silent woman is reduced to the synecdoche of extending a slender hand at a door she does not open; and in

¹³⁶ Ezra Pound, “Vorticism” in *Fortnightly Review* 96 [n.s.], 1 September 1914, 461–471.

¹³⁷ Pound, *Cathay*, 22.

“Taking Leave of a Friend,” two men are shown to be standing silent as a river road winds toward a looming mountain.¹³⁸ Pound is attentive to the narrator’s emotional curves, spirit, and consciousness more than the culturally specific languages employed. What a phrase means and what the whole poem embodies, in terms of the poet’s inner emotional state, are independent of each other, and these two are, respectively, one that is not translatable and one that is. The reason why *Cathay* preserves the ancient Chinese poets’ emotional curves albeit its misunderstanding of the poems’ historical contexts is that the poets’ inner lives are conveyed not through language but through images. Poetry is image, not language, although it has to be navigated through the channel of language. The image, pointing towards the innermost feelings, is universal for it encompasses all human consciousness.

The Pound scholar, Richard Sieburth, has observed that *Cathay* contains allusions to the military attire worn during World War I.¹³⁹ Similarly, Hugh Kenner has analyzed *Cathay* as paraphrases of elegiac war poetry.¹⁴⁰ In 1915, when Pound's friend, the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, received Pound's draft while fighting on the French front, he found that "The Song of Bowen of Shu," originally from the 11th century BCE collection Song of Songs, wonderfully depicted his situation. "We do not yet eat the young nor old fern roots, but we cannot be over paralleled in where we stand...I was spying on a German through a shooting cranny and leading my rifle when the order came to pack up and get ready to start a one-night march. We do not know the destination..."¹⁴¹ This sentiment is echoed in the central question repeated in "The Song

¹³⁸ Ronald Bush, 39.

¹³⁹ Richard Sieburth, ed., *New Selected Poems and Translations* (New Directions, 2010), 4.

¹⁴⁰ Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1971), 34.

¹⁴¹ Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska, a memoir* (New Directions, 1960), 61.

of Bowen of Shu," the first poem in *Cathay*: "When shall we go back to our country?"¹⁴²

Whether through an imaginative antique land called "Cathay" or through a re-contextualization of war poetry from the past, Pound's collection showcases the timeless and transcultural language of poetry that speaks to the human experience.

Let us examine another example. In 黄鹤楼送孟浩然之广陵, Li Po wrote

孤帆远影碧空尽
惟见长江天际流

In Fenollosa's notes, it is interpreted as

Ko	han	En	yei	hoki	ku	jin
solitary	sail	far	shadow	blue	sky	terminate
(? at the lord) the distant shadow						
of the solitary sail is leaving at the very eternity of the blue sky						
T	kew	Cho	Ko	tew	sai	riu
only	see	long	Kiang	heaven	limit	flow
(and the moment after)						
I only see the long River Kiang inside the Huanghe						
huanghe mean ? to Koris						

In *Cathay*, under the title "Separation on the River Kiang," it becomes

His lone sail blots the far sky
And now I see only the river
The long Kiang, reaching heaven.¹⁴³

The lines seem to be about a scene of the river Kiang but are in fact about the poet's inner mental picture. In 735 CE, Li Po sent off his friend Meng Haoran near Wuhan. What he saw in nature after climbing up the Yellow Crane Tower was a reflection of what he felt from the inside, for the way nature manifests itself is by responding to the viewer's perspective of looking at it. This

¹⁴² Pound, *Cathay*, 5.

¹⁴³ Pound, *Cathay*, 28.

view of a lone sail vanishing
 midway between river and sky
 is less about describing Meng's
 traveling but more about how
 Li Po felt when seeing his
 friend's leaving: a picture of
 boundless emptiness loomed
 large in his mind, and the

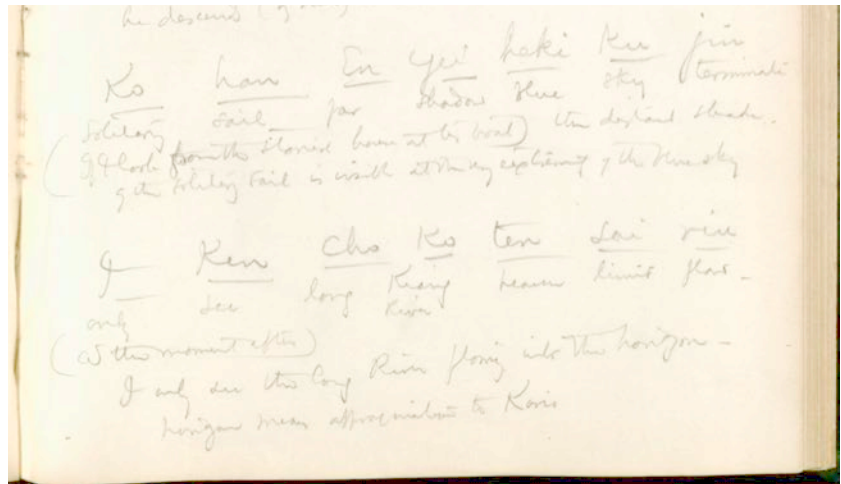


Figure 6 “Chinese Poetry: Mori & Ariga, Vol. 2,” (YCAL MSS 43), 87.

reader is presented with the same view via language’s mediation. While the English letters could not distill pictures in words, Pound makes the poetic form pictorial with the line break to highlight the movement within and allows the reader to pause before entering the poet’s inner mental sphere with the space created through indentation.

As the editor of Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry*, Pound cut off parts of the essay which presented a version of William James’ radical empiricism that is subject to the test of East Asian philosophical critique.¹⁴⁴ The philosophical root of ideogrammatic thinking that has impacted modern English literature is more Poundian than Fenollosian, although Pound and Fenollosa had their aesthetic theories correspond with those of one another. As early as 1914, Pound was intuiting a part of Fenollosa's aesthetics whose goal was to transform the experience of reading poetry into seeing.¹⁴⁵ *The Chinese Written Character* essay spelled out what he had been developing in his mind. This process is just like when Henry

¹⁴⁴ Haun Saussy, “Fenollosa Compounded,” in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Pound, “Vorticism.”

James read William James' *Pragmatism* in 1907, he realized that throughout his life he has been unconsciously pragmatizing without naming the act "Pragmatism."¹⁴⁶ The insight that Fenollosa attained individually back in 1906 partially incorporates Imagism, which asks for poets not to treat images as ornaments, tools, or representations of something else — an image should be the speech itself, the word beyond formulated language, the poem's very expression.

Understanding the Chinese character each as vivid shorthand pictures of nature that creates concepts by metamorphosing immaterial concepts into material relationships between tangible things, Fenollosa proposes a linguistic possibility that is less about the Chinese language, or an imagined alternative to the abstract, hierarchical form of speech in the Latin alphabet. It is more about an aesthetic form that can permeate the boundary between the channel of expression and that which is expressed. Similarly, Imagism intends to distill intense movements within the fewest number of words, to capture how feelings and ideas intersect as a reality of our consciousness, and not to categorize our perceptions into divisible units such as lines, words, and sentences. The fabric of the Chinese language, its flexible syntax and etymology, is a partial prototype for such ideogrammatic thinking that seeks to capture the interconnected workings of both nature and the human mind.

One difference between ideogrammatic thinking and Imagism, as testified by their application in *Cathay*, is the different understandings of "nature" that underlie Fenollosa and Pound's thinking. Robert Kern argues that Fenollosa's view was influenced by Emerson's transcendentalism in the way he idealizes the Chinese characters to be the closest representation

¹⁴⁶ Henry James, *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 3, William and Henry* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 347.

of nature as it is.¹⁴⁷ Further, Haun Saussy explores Fenollosa's earlier drafts, and complicates this notion into a "limitless network of causal connections, none of them self-supporting or self-elucidating."¹⁴⁸ But neither of these views corresponds with what Pound has expressed in "Vorticism," or at least the way he carries out Imagism (the precursor for the Vorticism movement in poetry) in *Cathay*. Both Pound and Li Po have explored the equivalence between the natural world and the human psyche: the image that the poet perceives is not a metaphor for the internal feeling, although this literary technique has to be applied due to the limitation of language. Imagism prioritizes the "feeling of inner need" to the outer world, which is different from Fenollosa's intention for poetry to be the closest representation of nature and can epistemically assist our access to the environment we live in. The first principle might be broadly conceived as Idealistic while the other is empiricist. Further, as a literary execution of both eastern and western intellectual traditions, *Cathay* conveys images that are the mutual reflection and response between the perceiver and that which is perceived, and this interdependency between the natural and the artificial points toward deeper issues about the conceptual flows between eastern and western intellectual traditions, including Taoist cosmology, which have been partially extrapolated in Chapter II. It seems that the works of mankind, including speech and works of art, are not to organize or describe nature, as according to Fenollosa's essay, but that these works are a part of nature's manifestation to which mankind belongs. This inquiry points toward deeper philosophical themes that exceed the scope of this research.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 127.

¹⁴⁸ Saussy, "Fenollosa Compounded," 39.

The Vortex that Pound constructed to defend Imagism seeks to concentrate the rapid movement of ideas within human consciousness within works of art. Language, as indicated by the title “The Chinese Written Character as a *Medium* for Poetry” is one of the *media* for such expression of internal emotional curves. Certain emotions might find their most appropriate expression in some one particular art, and this reveals the common bond or the “inter-recognition” between all arts.¹⁴⁹ Poetry’s expressive content can be transformed into inter-culturally communicable images. In these linguistic traces of the human psyche, some part about an individual remains, which depth is beyond the institutional forces that shaped the way these emotions were manifested. “The [poetic] sign has to first conduct itself within its aesthetic-cultural context,” wrote Singh in *Transcultural Poetics*, yet “the unmimetic crossing becomes a concrete possibility only through cultural passage.¹⁵⁰” What he means is that while poetry has to be first conducted within the medium of a specific language, and denote its meaning within the web of references dependent upon a metaphysics that is relative to its socio-political context (which is the mechanism of mimesis), poetry’s unmimeticness, that is, poetry can point inward to the human mind and emotion, can only be revealed when it is conducted cross-culturally.

¹⁴⁹ Pound, “Vorticism.”

¹⁵⁰ Gurbhagat Singh, “Chapter 1,” *Transcultural Poetics: comparative studies of Ezra Pound's Cantos and Guru Gobind Singh's Bachitra nātak* (Ajanta Books International, 1988).

Epilogue **Redefining Culture**

The early 1900s was a time of great change and upheaval, marked by significant historical events such as the 1911 revolution in China that brought an end to the Qing dynasty, the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and the 1917 exhibition of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* at the Society of Independent Artists. Amidst this backdrop of global transformation, literary modernism was fueled by new networks of transcultural exchange, with artists and writers drawing inspiration from each other's works. Modernism, like every other movement in human history, was an international and multicultural movement that transcended national and linguistic boundaries.

Examining the origins of Imagism poetry, a prominent literary movement of the early 1900s, this thesis aims to reflect on the broader intellectual and historical conundrum via close analyses of several cultural artifacts. It was motivated by an attempt to disrupt the cultural categories that we have adopted from history within our usual discourse. Transnational history has recently been proposed, such as with Arrowsmith's argument that transcultural interactions were "the root of modernism" and modernism is "a product of the complex cultural interplay between the metropolitan centers across the globe, with aesthetic and technical concepts flowing at least as vigorously from East to West as vice versa."¹⁵¹ But to particularize the temporal dimension of transnational history to be exclusive of modernity risks being Eurocentric itself. To what extent is there a similitude between modernization and westernization, between modernism, cosmopolitanism, and imperialism? While a work of art might serve to construct certain ethnic or

¹⁵¹ Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, "The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System" in *Modernism / Modernity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 40.

cultural categories via the forces of museums or research institutions, the creativity of humanity constantly resists any attempt to define or add meanings that are external to the work itself. We have to first acknowledge the power dynamics that condition the production of a painting, a poem, or a piece of music in order to view the work as the expression of an individual, independent of their time, geographical location, or ethnic and cultural identities. It is through deconstruction that we may discover something universal across all humanity, and rethink our conceptualization of the terms such as East versus West, Oriental versus Occidental. It is no surprise that at the merge of the East-West intellectual traditions we land at the central concern of nature: the view about mankind's relationship to its environment is everywhere present within literary and visual artworks.

In January 2023, the British Museum's official website introduces its exhibition of the Admonitions Scroll, acquired by Laurence Binyon in 1903 and known as one of the earliest masterpieces of Chinese art, by acknowledging the difficult history of the Museum's collections: "[S]ome collections have been acquired such as through military action and its consequences. In other instances, collections may be acquired during a period of conflict but the exact circumstances of how they were acquired are not known."¹⁵² In the same month, Greece rejected the British Museum's proposal to lend the Parthenon marbles as a "long-term loan," dismissing the U.K. institution's legitimate ownership of the artwork and describing the sculptures as the "product of theft."¹⁵³ Our present world lives within the legacy of transcultural interactions in the

¹⁵² <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/collecting-histories>, accessed January 7th, 2023. The exact passage which acknowledges the Admonition Scroll's acquisition history is no longer on this site as of May 2nd, 2023.

¹⁵³ Jo Lawson-Tancred, "Dispelling Rumors, Greece Has Rejected the British Museum's Offer to Return the Parthenon Marbles as a Long-Term Loan," <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/greece-rejects-british-museum-loan-deal-parthenon-marbles-2241261>, accessed March 1st, 2023.

last two centuries, and the irony that aesthetic innovation is often enabled by cross-cultural interaction, which is at the same time conditioned by unequal power dynamics, still begs further reflections. The close analysis of words and images continues to inspire the unpacking of hermeneutics during the exchange of ideas and the channels of meaning communicated through the interrelated web of cultural significance.

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