The Translation and Collage of Ezra Pound

Xuan Tong*

Kunsan National University, Kunsan, Korea.

* Corresponding Author

Abstract

This essay delves into the poetic translation and stylistic innovations of Ezra Pound, exploring his extensive incorporation of Eastern elements, particularly Chinese characters and Confucian philosophy. Throughout Pound's poetic career, his translation and creation stimulated each other, mutually enriching imagism and Confucianism. Through the defamiliarization of Chinese characters and the innovation of collage art, Pound demonstrated his excellent talent in the realms of literature. In a unique manner, he harmoniously merged Eastern and Western cultures, crafting captivating masterpiece that laid the foundation for the development of modern English and American poetry.

Keywords

Ezra Pound, The Cantos, Translation Poetics, Collage Art, Defamiliarization, Chinese Characters, Confucianism.

1. Introduction

Ezra Pound (1885-1972) was one of the most influential poets and critics of the 20th century in America, and a significant figure in the modernist literary movement. For a century, there is presumably no other writer who has aroused such enduring and intense interest in both Western and Eastern academic circles as Pound. His works exerted influence on the development of English and American modernist poetry, while his distinctive approach to translation ignited reflections within the literary translation field, subverting conventional notions of poetry translation in a Poundian manner. Throughout Pound's literary career, his creative translations facilitated his unique stylistic innovations. The translation anthology Cathay "encouraged subsequent translations of Chinese to abandon rhyme and fixed stress counts" (Kenner 198), facilitated a distinct form of poetry that emphasis on imagery over prosody. This initiated "a whole new era of Anglo-American regard for Chinese poetry, along with a new era of translation"(Kern 169).

According to Yao, "the age of Modernism was, quite literally, an age of translations" (Yao 5). And as a leading figure of this era, Pound's translations and creations have become "models for modernist poetry ingeneral, both in his own work and in that of other poets as well" (Kern 155). In Kenner's exposition in The Pound Era, Pound's works served as "the major stimulus to the whole enterprise of translating Chinese poetry" (Kenner 218), and we are fortunate to witness "a man who was inventing a new kind of English poem" (Kenner 218).

Pound's translations and creations mutually influenced each other, becoming two experimental fields within Pound's poetic exploration that spanned his entire literary career. Consequently, to study Pound's poetry, it is essential to delve deep into these two realms, which has become a consensus in Pound scholarship. This essay endeavors to examine the interrelationship between Pound's translation and creation from two perspectives: the translation of Chinese classics and stylistic innovations. It seeks to provide a better understanding of how Pound

"enriches his tongue by allowing the source language to penetrate and modify it"(Steiner 67), as well as how "his genius runs to various schools and styles" (Sandburg 251).

2. Defamiliarization of Chinese Characters

"Defamiliarization" is a trem frequently used by Russian formalists and Prague linguistic scholars in their critical analysis of literature, especially poetics. In poetry, various techniques such as metaphors, unusual sentence structures, or repetition are often employed to draw attention to the medium of language itself. The purpose of linguistic defamiliarization is not only to highlight the text itself, but also to estrange it, forcing the reader to perceive familiar things in a fresh perspective. "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Shklovsky 12) . While Shklovsky favored the terms "defamiliarization" and "automatization" as contradictory concepts, Mukarovsky preferred to use "foregrounding" and "automatization" to denote the difference between poetic language and everyday language. Mukarovsky developed the concept of "defamiliarization" into a more systematic notion of "foregrounding," which involves purposeful distortion of the language components of a work for aesthetic purposes. He believed that "the function of poetic language consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance. Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme" (Mukarovsky 19). Through these arguments, it can be seen that the two concepts are essentially the same. The term "foregrounding" is more commonly used in the field of linguistics, while "defamiliarization" is favored in literary criticism.

Due to his discontent with the sentimentalism in Victorian and the conservatism of literary, Pound devoted himself to poetic innovation with a deep sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility drove his exploration across the East and the West ,as well as the historical and the contemporary. In his early stages, Pound's engagement with Eastern poetics primarily focused on Japanese Noh drama and haiku, which enriched the expressive power of the Imagism movement. However, after reorganizing and meticulously studying the notes of Ernest Fenollosa, Chinese elements became a lifelong source of inspiration for Pound's translation, poetics, and philosophy. Drawing inspiration from Chinese culture, Pound delved into the aesthetics of Chinese characters and classical literature, applying them to his own creations. These Chinese elements provided Pound with an alternative aesthetic perspective and creative approach distinct from Western poetic traditions, establishing him one of the most significant pioneer of the modernist movement.

After his death in London in 1908, Fenollosa's widow entrusted his unpublished notes on Chinese poetry and Japanese Noh drama to Pound. Together with William Butler Yeats, Pound used the notes to stimulate the growing interest in Far Eastern literature among modernist writers. The notes contained Fenollosa's translations, annotations, and comments on Chinese poetry, which played a crucial role in shaping Pound's later pursuit of poetic innovation and served as a significant source of inspiration. Influenced by Fenollosa, Pound viewed Chinese characters as highly symbolic pictographic images, akin to vivid paintings or sculptures that emanated poetry and visual allure. Pound described Chinese character as "ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things" (Pound 21). Pound focused particularly on the Chinese characters that frequently employed in Confucian classics, believing that these special characters encapsulated the essence of Confucian philosophy, and analyzing these specific characters would enable him to gain a deeper understanding of the core value of Confucianism. Throughout The Cantos, Pound ingeniously captured the essence of Confucian philosophy through two principles. On one hand, Pound

employed the ideographic character analyzing method, combining his comprehension of Confucian culture to interpret the profound Confucian thoughts contained in these characters. Secondly, Pound meticulously selected Chinese characters with Confucian thoughts and seamlessly integrated them into appropriate positions within the English text, thereby enhancing the visual effect and artistic impact.

Ideographic character analyzing method is an essential component of Pound's poetic system. Chinese characters are fundamentally ideographic symbols, with some originating from the era of oracle bone script. These particular characters were initially crafted to represent specific visuals or actions and are now known as radicals, which are the smallest indivisible units comprising Chinese characters. When compared to modern Chinese characters, these radicals possess a more pronounced ideographic nature and even afford readers the ability to directly grasp their meanings in certain contexts. In his creative process, Pound adopted the method of ideographic character analysis commonly employed in the study of ancient Chinese characters to extract meaning from individual characters. Specifically, Pound frequently put aside the semantic interpretation of a character and instead broke it down into its constituent parts or radicals. By consulting a Chinese-English dictionary and understanding the meanings of these individual components, Pound would then combine them again to derive the overall meaning of the character. This approach was commonly effective, because it mirrored the methodology of the originators who initially developed these Chinese characters. The application of ideographic character analyzing method is particularly evident in Pound's The Cantos and Confucius. Regarding the pervasive Chinese character "德" in The Cantos, which is explained as "virtue" in A Dictionary of Chinese Characters (Paton 26), Pound interprets it as "the action resultant from this straight gaze into the heart" (Pound 21). This interpretation evidently embodies Pound's utilization for ideographic character analyzing method and his identification of Fenollosa's view that Chinese characters are metaphorical symbols. According to Fenollosa, Chinese character "is metaphor; the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations" (Fenollosa 54). Therefore, by utilizing ideographic character analyzing method, Pound breaks the character "德" down into radicals "目" (eye) and "心" (heart), foregrounding their connection, naturally treating it as a metaphorical process that generates poetic visual imagery.

Considering the reference to "德" above, we shall examine its paired character "明", as they often emerge together in phrases in Pound's works. The Chinese character "明" is interpreted as "bright" in A Dictionary of Chinese Characters (Paton 85). Similarly, Pound breaks it down into "日" (sun) and "月" (moon), both representing luminous celestial bodies (although the moon's light is a reflection of the sunlight). Juts as Pound elucidates in Confucius, "the sun and moon, the total light process, the radiation, reception and reflection of light; hence, the intelligence. Bright, brightness, shinning" (Pound 20). Through the elaborate interpretation of "明" and "德", Pound deduced the significance of "明明德", as he elucidated in his Confucius: "The intelligence increases through the process of looking straight into one's own heart and acting on the results" (Pound 27). Whether it is individual Chinese characters or phrases, such cases are abundant. Supported by this array of artistic effects, Pound ultimately crafted a unique and unparalleled style of defamiliarization. In his commentary, Girolamo Mancuso observes that the characters employed by Pound act as "visual pivot points, and around which words dispose themselves like the rose in the steel dust around a magnet" (Mancuso 73). These characters, typical representatives of Confucian culture in the Chinese language, carry profound cultural implications. Jacques Derrida, the master of deconstruction, displayed great interest in Pound's intricate use of Chinese characters. In his deconstruction of logocentrism, Derrida acknowledged Chinese characters as a "civilization developing outside of all logocentrism" (Derrida 90), and he coined the term "irreducibly graphic poetics" (Derrida 92) to describe Pound's utilization of Chinese characters. By skillfully employing the visual structure and

semantic function of Chinese characters, Pound creates a multi-layered poetic expression that merges language, aesthetics, and cultural significance. In the introduction to Ezra Pound Selected Poems, T. S. Eliot praises Pound as the "inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (Eliot 13), commending his pioneering approach and groundbreaking contributions to the genre and generation.

明明德(Pound 27)

Another approach of stylistic defamiliarization is the extensive use of various foreign languages in The Cantos. Regarding the disparity among this multilingual text, "the only way to bridge these gaps was to create a kind of overlaying lingua franca by juxtaposing these various idioms and making them interact" (Xie 217). Through this approach, The Cantos showcases a stylistic foregrounding and evokes an aesthetic defamiliarization. Among these exotic languages, Chinese characters appear far more frequently than others in a striking manner. Throughout The Cantos, the majority of Chinese characters are deliberately bolded and enlarged, "耀" at the opening of The China Cantos even occupying half of the page (Pound 254), creating a modern visual artistic effect distinct from traditional poetic forms. As Nadel remarks, "Different fonts and sizes establish different codes or strategies for reading" (Nadel 18). Moreover, Pound's placement strategy of Chinese characters in the text exhibits diversity of visual art, they appear in various arrangements, including horizontal, vertical, left-side, and right-side. Some pages contain only a few Chinese characters, while some other pages are nearly filled with them, as seen in The China Cantos.

The Chinese Cantos covers a historical span ranging from the establishment of the Xia Dynasty to the era of Confucius. It mentions the virtues of several emperors admired by Confucius and specifically references the motto of Emperor Tang of the Shang Dynasty: "日日新" (day by day make it new), which originates from the Chinese Confucian classic The Great Learning: "汤之盘铭曰: "苟日新, 日日新, 又日新"". This sentence tells the story of Emperor Tang had this motto carved on his bath tub, symbolizing the aspiration to cleanse oneself morally, just as one cleanses oneself physically through bathing, striving for daily self-renewal (Wang 9). This motto is seen as a baptism of spirit and a cultivation of personality, inspiring people to abandon the old and embrace the new, reminiscent of the concept of daily repentance in Christianity. Pound also considered this motto as his guiding principle and used it as the title of his book Make It New in 1934 (Pound 1). In section LIIIX of The China Cantos (Pound 265), Pound employs the technique of juxtaposition, vertically placing the enlarged bold Chinese characters "新日日新" on the right side, with the English translation on the left side, creating a strong visual contrast. This presentation foregrounds the Chinese characters upon the English text, implying that the solution to poetic innovation may lie in the wisdom from the East.

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                wrote MAKE IT NEW
on his bath tub
            Day by day make it new
cut underbrush,
pile the logs
keep it growing
Died Tching aged years an hundred,
in the 13th of his reign
                ' We are up, Hia is down '
Immoderate love of women
Immoderate love of riches,
Cared for parades and huntin'
                Chang Ti above alone rules
Tang not stinting of praise
                Consider their sweats, the people's
If you wd/ sit calm on throne
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(Pound 265)

Due to the utilization of ideographic character analyzing method and Pound's own creative interpretation, the meanings of these Chinese characters and phrases in Pound's works are both related and different from their original connotations in native context. Apart from Chinese characters, all these foreign scripts, each with its own distinct style of defamiliarization, present to readers the allure and power of poetry that transcends linguistic boundaries.

3. Innovation of Collage Art

Throughout Pound's career as a translator and writer, the intertwining of translation and creation can be observed, whether it be in his early work Cathay or later works such as Confucius and The Cantos. This is especially evident in his bold and innovative collage art, which has become a unique literary form applied extensively in his translations and writings. However, it is puzzling why Pound chose to juxtapose the English translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer," written a thousand years ago with Rihaku's poem "Exile's Letter" (also known as "Reminiscing about old travels and sending Yuan to join the army in Qiaojun"). In my view, Pound employed the collage technique in his creative process. The "outcast" figure of the seafarer and Rihaku's portrayal of the "exile" both represent wandering souls in foreign lands, embodying a sense of rootlessness and homelessness, which resonates with Pound's identification with the characters in poetry. In 1915, Pound renamed Rihaku's poem as "Exile's Letter" and published his translation version in Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, accompanied by an preface: "From the Chinese of Rihaku (Li Po), usually considered the greatest poet of China: written by him while in exile about760 A. D., to the Hereditary War-Councillor of Sho, recollecting former companionship" (Pound 258). Pound discovered a deep emotional and identity connection with Rihaku. Therefore, the themes of "outcast" or "exile" became prominent in Pound's imagery, aligning with "The Seafarer" as well as "exile's letter" and leading to the placement of these two poems in adjacent sections of Cathay, creating a remarkable collage spectacle. Pound later regarded these two translated poems as his "Major Persona" in Umbra of Ezra Pound (Pound 128), in order to show that there is "certain implicit relation between the thematic formula of the book and the emotional register of Europe at the beginning of the First World War" (Xie 266). According to the description of Xie, Pound considered both The Seafarer and several poems from Cathay contain "themes of war and exile, separation and heroism" (Xie 266). The personal struggles of the characters in the works and their resistance against constraints have also sparked Pound's recognition and reflection on his own position and history, creating a resonance of personal identity. In other words, the seafarer and exile, transcending Eastern and Western cultures, find a profound alignment with Pound's inner self-exile at linguistic, cultural, and psychological levels. As an interpreter, Pound is also interpreted by others, bridging the gap between the interpreter and the translator, as well as

between Eastern and Western cultures. This excellent artistic effect arises from Pound's most prominent collage technique in translation and creation, creating one of the most classic collage examples in literary history.

Xie pointed out that "it is in The Cantos that we see Pound's engagement with translation at its most complex" (Xie 217), and this most complex form is essentially a collage. If Pound's "The Seafarer" is the largest collage text in his translation work Cathay, then The Cantos is the work where Pound's collage technique is employed most extensively. The Cantos contain numerous translations, from Homer's Odyssey, The Sacred Edict and other Chinese texts (mostly from previous European translations) to Richard of St. Victor, Ovid, Propertius and Frobenius. Interwoven with these are many of the images and motifs from Pound's previous translations: the troubadours, Cavalcanti, Old English "Seafarer," Noh plays, Cathay poems, Confucian texts. As Xie states, "The Cantos as a whole is indeed an epic of translation, with its multilingual, intertextual web of cultures and epochs, existing simultaneously in various modes of translation (as well as allusion, imitation, adaptation, quotation, and even parody)" (Xie 217).

In the first section of The Cantos, Pound breaks through the traditional English poetry style and frequently employs the two-part line structure of The Seafarer, as he later proclaimed, "to break the pentameter, that was the first heave" (Pound 518). From this, it is evident that the collage technique is already being presented as early as the opening of The Cantos. Additionally, the juxtaposition of the Chinese characters "日日新" and the English text in section LIIIX of The China Cantos, as explicated previously, can be interpreted both as a defamiliarization of ideographic character and a creation of collage.

Another distinctive collage in The Cantos can be found in the latter half of section XLIX (Pound 245), which is often referred to as the "Seven Lakes Canto" due to its focus on the theme of the "Eight Views of the XiaoXiang Rivers." Kodama identifies "the source of the poems as eight famous paintings of scenes along a river in China which pours into Lake Dotei. Ezra Pound's parents owned an old Japanese manuscript book which contained the eight Chinese and eight Japanese poems illustrated by the paintings" (Terrell 192).

KEI MEN RAN KEI
KIU MAN MAN KEI
JITSU GETSU KO KWA
TAN FUKU TAN KAI

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

The former stanza, through the meticulous research and analysis conducted by Asian-American scholar Achilles Fang, is known as Ching-yun ko (卿云歌 in Chinese) and is recorded in Shang-shu ta-chuan (尚书大传 in Chinese), where it is attributed to the legendary emperor Shun. Fang provided the original text and translation of the poem as follows (Fang 232):

卿云烂兮，
糺缦缦兮。
日月光华，
旦复旦兮。

> Splendid are the clouds and bright,
> All aglow with various light!
> Grand the sun and moon move on;
> Daily dawn succeeds to dawn. (Fang 232)

As for Ching-yun ko, Pound retained only the form of Chinese poetry as well as the sound and rhythm of Japanese pronunciation, without preserving the original meaning of the poem. Pound deliberately used Latin letters to annotate the pronunciation of Japanese which in Fenollosa's notes. Furthermore, in order to simulate the square feature of Chinese characters, Pound also made sure that the area of each Japanese annotation remained consistent. To achieve this, he widened some letters to align them vertically. The first, second, and fourth lines of this poem rhyme, and with the recurring head and internal rhymes, the entire poem has a clear rhythmic structure. Pound's initial intention in creating this poem was to maintain rhythm and rhyme, without concern for whether the reader understood its content. In response to reader complaints, Pound once wrote in a letter to a Sarah Perkins Copes: "Skip anything you don't understand and go on till you pick it up again. All tosh about foreign languages making it difficult. The quotes are all either explained at once by repeat or they are definitely of the things indicated. If reader don't know what an elefant IS, then the word is obscure. I can't conceal the fact that the Greek language existed." (Pound 335). Pound's implicit meaning is that the author will not refrain from using foreign languages just because the readers do not understand them. In Pound's view, it is not the author's responsibility if readers do not possess the same level of knowledge as the author. Regarding Pound's postmodern collage technique, the relationship between language and its referents is not fixed but fragmented and reassembled. The combination of language holds infinite possibilities, as each word in the text can evoke numerous other texts. The meaning of the text can expand and give rise to interconnected meanings, thus conveying a significance beyond the original intent.

The latter stanza, according to Fang, is supposedly a ballad sung by contented peasantry of the time of another legendary emperor, and is recorded in Ti-wang shih-chi (帝王世纪 in Chinese). Correspondingly, Fang provided the original text and translation of the poem as follows (Fang 232):

日出而作。
日入而息。
凿井而饮。
耕田而食。
帝力于我何有哉。
We get up at sunrise.
We go to bed at sunset.
We work hard. We plough the field to grow food.
We dig the well to get drink.
There is nothing for the King to do. (Fang 232)

For these self-sufficient peasants, their lives are not influenced by the "imperial power." They fully affirm themselves, boldly disdain the authority of emperors, and demonstrate the courageous attitude of proletariats. They confront life with independence and self-reliance, adhering to their values and beliefs, this attitude reflects their resistance to authority and their pursuit of freedom. Pound's translation maintains a high degree of fidelity, following the natural

word order of the original text and adhering to the common feature of Chinese classical poetry of lacking subjects. He does not hesitate to break the basic grammatical rule of subject plus predicate in English. Pound's approach aligns with Fenollosa's view: in the English language, "the subject is that about which I am going to talk; the predicate is that which I am going to say about it. The sentence according to this definition is not an attribute of nature but an accident of man as a conversational animal" (Fenollosa 47). On the other hand, Chinese language "has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built with it a second world of metaphor, but has, through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue" (Fenollosa 55). Pound's employment of subject-less sentence structures is the most convincing demonstration to his unwavering commitment to preserving the essence of the original.

In the Seven Lakes Canto, Pound employs the technique of collage to blend together art, painting, and music, while also incorporating English, Chinese, and Japanese languages. The collages present in the aforementioned two stanzas seamlessly integrate with the opening static descriptions of the seven lakes, creating a harmonious interplay of movement and stillness. Aside from the Seven Lakes Canto, the entirety of The Cantos is imbued with meticulously chosen collage elements. Pound draws inspiration from a wide range of philosophical, cultural, political, economic, historical, literary, and artistic sources, intertwining different texts and images to enrich the language and form of poetry, thereby creating a vibrant and intricate world of poetic imagination. This technique of collage expands the meaning of the poems, endowing them with possibility that surpasses singular interpretations. It ignites readers' imagination and cognition, offering multiple perspectives for reading and vast spaces for contemplation.

4. Conclusion

The birth of new literary genres and movements is inevitably accompanied by the renewal of linguistics and stylistic forms, the same holds true for the Imagist poetry movement, wherein the renewal of linguistics and stylistic forms remains a significant aspect. As the initiator of the Imagism movement, Pound spares no effort in his pursuit and tirelessly transcends the boundaries of traditional poetry, promoting the development through the application of exotic elements and collage techniques. Through these efforts, Pound's translations and creations achieved a distinctive translational style, blurring the boundaries between translation and creation, forcing us to reflect on the essence of translation and creation. According to the viewpoint of translation master Benjamin, the intention of translation is not merely reproduction but also creation because "a real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully" (Benjamin 260). To a certain extent, Pound's poetics is "essentially a poetics of translation and he has largely redefined the nature and ideal of poetic translation for the twentieth century" (Xie 204). Whether it involves the defamiliarization of Eastern elements or the intricate artistry of collage, these techniques merely serve as a fraction of Pound's multifaceted innovative genius. All of this vastness is condensed within Pound's motto "make it new," which has exerted a profound influence on subsequent generations of poets, leaving behind a precious legacy that transcends the boundaries of the "Pound era."

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