

Ezra Pound and Classical Chinese Poetry

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Abstract. Ezra Pound’s engagement with classical Chinese poetry represents a pivotal moment in the development of modern poetry. This study explores how Pound’s use of Chinese ideograms and Confucian philosophy in *The Cathay* and *The China Cantos* revolutionized Western poetic forms, creating a bridge between Eastern and Western literary traditions. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis, historical contextualization, and cultural interpretation, this study sheds light on Pound’s enduring legacy as a modernist innovator. By examining Pound’s imagist and vorticist principles, as well as his adaptations of Chinese poetry, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intercultural dialogue that shaped modernism. The findings highlight Pound’s ability to transcend temporal and geographical boundaries, offering new insights into the interplay between Eastern and Western aesthetics in modern poetry.

Keywords: Imagism, Vorticism, “The Cathay”, “The China Cantos”, ideograms

Наташа Габерова. ЕЗРА ПАУНД И КЛАСИЧЕСКАТА КИТАЙСКА ПОЕЗИЯ

Резюме. Заниманията на Езра Паунд с класическата китайска поезия представляват повратен момент в развитието на модерната поезия. Това изследване разглежда как използването на китайски идеограми и конфуцианска философия в *Катай* и *Китайските кантоси* революционизира западните поетични форми, създавайки мост между източните и западните литературни традиции. Чрез интердисциплинарен подход, който съчетава литературен анализ, исторически контекст и културна интерпретация, настоящото изследване хвърля светлина върху трайното наследство на Паунд като новатор в модернизма. Чрез изследване на неговите имажистки и вортицистки принципи, както и на адаптациите му на китайска поезия, това изследване допринася за по-дълбоко разбиране на межкултурния диалог, който формира модернизма.

Резултатите подчертават способността на Паунд да надхвърля времевите и географските граници, предлагайки нови прозрения за взаимодействието между източната и западната естетика в модерната поезия.

Ключови думи: имажизъм, вортицизъм, „Катай“, „Китайските кантоси“, идеограми

Research/Научно изследване

1. Introduction

Ezra Pound, an American poet and literary critic, represents an important figure in the history of modern poetry. His poetic vision is marked by numerous experiments with style, form, and themes, as well as his interest in Chinese culture and Confucianism. In this paper, I will focus on two key aspects of Pound's poetry: Imagism and Vorticism, as well as his interest in Chinese themes through works such as *Cathay* and *The Cantos – Chinese Poems (LII–LXI)*, including *Canto XIII*, which is crucial for understanding *The China Cantos*. These works exemplify his deep interest in Eastern culture and his ambition to present it to a Western audience through his poetry. Through these themes, Ezra Pound's poetry offers insights into the richness and diversity of the modern poetic tradition, as well as his persistent pursuit of new modes of expression and knowledge. In the following sections, I will examine specific works and verses that illustrate these aspects of Pound's poetry and their role in the development of modern literature.

The research question guiding this study is: How did Ezra Pound's incorporation of Chinese cultural and linguistic elements contribute to the development of modern poetry in the West.

The hypothesis is that Pound's adaptation of Chinese poetic techniques, such as the use of ideograms and the juxtaposition of images, enabled him to develop a unique poetic language that bridged Eastern and Western literary traditions. This hypothesis is supported by the following propositions:

1. Pound's use of Chinese ideograms in *Cathay* and *The China Cantos* reflects a deliberate effort to infuse Western poetry with the moral and philosophical depth of Chinese tradition.

2. The principles of Imagism and Vorticism, as articulated by Pound, were significantly influenced by his engagement with Chinese poetry.

3. Pound's cross-cultural synthesis represents a transformative moment in modern poetry, offering a model for future literary innovation.

This paper contributes to the field by providing a comprehensive analysis of Pound's cross-cultural synthesis, highlighting its significance for contemporary poetic practices and the broader dialogue between Eastern and Western literary traditions.

This study employs a multi-faceted methodological approach to analyze Ezra Pound's engagement with classical Chinese poetry. The analytical method is used to dissect Pound's poetic techniques, particularly his use of ideograms and Imagist principles, in works such as *Cathay* and *The China Cantos*. The critical method allows for an evaluation of Pound's adaptations of Chinese themes and their impact on modern poetry. The historical method contextualizes Pound's work within the broader framework of early 20th-century modernism and his fascination with Eastern cultures. Finally, the comparative method is used to juxtapose Pound's adaptations with their Chinese sources, highlighting the ways in which he transformed traditional Chinese poetry into a new Western aesthetic. By combining these methods, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Pound's creative process and the significance of his cross-cultural synthesis. The analysis draws on primary sources, including Pound's poetry and essays, as well as secondary sources such as critical studies and historical accounts of his work.

Ezra Pound's engagement with Chinese poetry and culture has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, with numerous studies exploring the ways in which his work reflects a profound cross-cultural synthesis. Hugh Kenner's seminal work, *The Pound Era* (1971), situates Pound at the center of modernist innovation, emphasizing his role in reshaping Western literary traditions through his engagement with non-Western texts. Kenner's analysis highlights Pound's use of Chinese ideograms as a key element in his poetic technique, arguing that Pound's encounter with Chinese writing fundamentally altered his approach to language and form. This perspective has been foundational for subsequent studies, which have further explored the philosophical, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions of Pound's work. Feng Lan's *Ezra Pound and Confucianism: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity* (2005) delves into the philosophical underpinnings of Pound's engagement with Chinese thought. Lan argues that Pound's appropriation of Confucian ideals was not merely an aesthetic choice but a deliberate effort to address the moral and cultural crises of modernity. By integrating Confucian concepts into his poetry, Pound sought to create a new humanism that could counter the fragmentation and alienation of the modern world. Lan's work is particularly significant for its exploration of how Pound's cross-cultural synthesis extends beyond aesthetics to encompass ethical and philosophical concerns. Steven Yao's *Toward a Prehistory of Asian American Verse* (2007) shifts the focus to the broader implications of Pound's engagement with Chinese culture, particularly through his translations in *Cathay*. Yao argues that *Cathay* represents a pivotal moment in the history of Asian American literature, as it marks the beginning of a sustained dialogue between Western and Eastern poetic traditions. By examining Pound's orientalism and its influence on later writers, Yao highlights the transformative potential of cross-cultural exchange, while also critiquing the limitations and appropriative tendencies inherent in Pound's approach. Other scholars have explored specific aspects of

Pound's engagement with Chinese culture. Ernest Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (1936), edited by Pound, has been a critical text for understanding Pound's fascination with Chinese ideograms. Fenollosa's essay, which argues that Chinese characters embody a dynamic, poetic logic, profoundly influenced Pound's conception of language and imagery. This influence is evident in Pound's *Cantos*, where the use of ideograms serves as a visual and conceptual anchor, bridging disparate cultural and historical contexts. Ming Xie's *Elegy and Personae in Ezra Pound's Cathay* (1993) offers a nuanced analysis of Pound's translations, emphasizing their elegiac tone and the ways in which they reflect Pound's own preoccupations with loss and memory. Xie's work underscores the complexity of Pound's engagement with Chinese poetry, suggesting that his translations are not merely imitations but creative reinterpretations that resonate with his modernist aesthetic. Qian Li's *Pound's Poetic Mirror and the China Cantos: The Healing of the West* (2008) examines the *China Cantos* as a reflection of Pound's vision of cultural renewal. Li argues that Pound's portrayal of Chinese history and philosophy serves as a mirror through which he critiques Western modernity and imagines an alternative path forward. This perspective aligns with Lan's emphasis on the ethical dimensions of Pound's work, while also highlighting the historical and political implications of his cross-cultural synthesis. John J. Nolde's *Blossoms from the East: The China Cantos of Ezra Pound* (1983) provides a detailed analysis of the *China Cantos*, situating them within the broader context of Pound's oeuvre. Nolde's work is particularly valuable for its exploration of Pound's sources and the ways in which he adapted Chinese historical and literary materials to his own poetic purposes. By tracing Pound's engagement with Chinese texts, Nolde sheds light on the intricate interplay between translation, adaptation, and innovation in Pound's work.

In addition to these studies, recent scholarship has continued to explore the implications of Pound's cross-cultural synthesis for contemporary literature and theory. Zoran Skrobanović's *Experiences of Chinese Writing in European Modernism* (2011) examines the broader influence of Chinese writing on modernist aesthetics, situating Pound's work within a larger network of cross-cultural exchanges. Similarly, W.P.C. Holaday's *From Ezra Pound to Maxine Hong Kingston: Expressions of Chinese Thought in American Literature* (1978) traces the legacy of Pound's engagement with Chinese culture in later American literature, highlighting its enduring impact on writers who seek to bridge Eastern and Western traditions. Finally, the critical reception of Pound's work, as documented in Betsy Erkkilä's *Ezra Pound – The Contemporary Reviews* (2011), provides valuable insights into how Pound's engagement with Chinese poetry was perceived by his contemporaries. These reviews reveal the extent to which Pound's cross-cultural synthesis challenged and transformed the literary landscape of his time, paving the way for future explorations of global modernist aesthetics.

Building on these foundations, this study offers a detailed analysis of Pound's use of Chinese ideograms and their impact on his poetic techniques. By examining specific examples from *Cathay* and *The Cantos*, it seeks to illuminate the ways in which Pound's engagement with Chinese writing shaped his approach to imagery, rhythm, and structure. Furthermore, this study explores the broader implications of Pound's work for the development of modern poetry, arguing that his cross-cultural synthesis represents a transformative moment in the history of literary modernism. Through this analysis, it aims to contribute new insights into the potential of cross-cultural exchange to enrich and redefine poetic practice.

Pound's influence on the development of poetry is undeniable not only in the United States but also worldwide. Critics of that era speak about Pound's influence. Hugh Kenner's book on modernism, titled *The Pound Era*, with its opening sentence, *Let's start with Pound*, best attests to the poet's influence in the early years of the twentieth century (Kenner 1917: 2). Placing Pound's figure at the beginning of this book suggests his place in the history of modern poetry. It is also worth remembering that the final text of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* gained its brilliance and full form after Pound masterfully perfected the manuscript. Vesna Elez, in her scholarly criticism *One Hundred Years of Eliot's The Waste Land*, mentions how Leon Cohen recalls the circumstances surrounding the creation of the work itself, in the hands of two authors, Eliot's and Ezra Pound's, where Pound, as is known, shortened Eliot's original manuscript and thus earned dedication and the epithet *il miglior fabbro* in later editions. Pound's creative contribution is undeniable; he made the verses simultaneously more universal and more enigmatic, employing poetic image montage in *The Cantos* (Elez 2022: 410). Eliot, a later Nobel laureate, accepted all of Pound's suggestions and altered the original text according to his instructions (Ibid.).

In Italy he thought that the Fascist movement was the model of society to be followed and in the fascist leader Mussolini he saw the contemporary Peisistratus, who, according to tradition, is credited with recording Homer's poems¹. During World War II he read anti-American speeches on Radio Rome. In 1942, he was not allowed to join the Americans who evacuated from Italy and in 1943, he was charged in the United States with treason.

In the United States, he was declared mentally incapable of trial and was imprisoned at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, where he will spend 12 years. Ezra Pound received recognition for his poetic contribution to modern poetry during his time in a mental hospital. This fact alone speaks volumes about his influence in literary circles of that era. Ezra Pound received the Bollingen Prize for his *The Pisan Cantos* from the Yale Foundation, under the auspices of the Library of Congress,

¹ Peisistratus (born 6th century–died 527 bce) was a tyrant of ancient Athens whose unification of Attica and consolidation and rapid improvement of Athens's prosperity helped to make possible the city's later preeminence in Greece.

then the most prestigious award in America. This prestigious award was given for excellence in creativity in the arts, and in Pound's case, for his contribution to modern poetry.²

2. Imagism and Vorticism

Born in America but spending his life in Europe, London, Paris, and Italy, Ezra Pound drew ideas from the core of European culture. However, we will see that his writing was greatly influenced by Japanese and Chinese cultural traditions as well.

In 1914, Pound published the first anthology of Imagist poetry, which included six of Pound's poems, three of which were influenced by classical Chinese poetry. From Imagism, through Vorticism to ideograms, Pound developed his poetic language techniques.³ In the manifesto of Imagism titled *A Few Don'ts* (1913), Pound wrote about what should not be done in poetry, emphasizing the importance of precise poetic imagery without unnecessary adjectives and abstractions.⁴ A year later, in another article titled *Vortex* (1914), Pound explained the ideas of Vorticism in painting and sculpture, associating Imagism more closely with poetry. Here, Pound emphasizes that the poetic image is not a decoration but should speak for itself; it is the word behind the embodied poetic language. Through his works, especially through his poetry, Ezra Pound promoted Vorticism as an artistic movement. His poetic experiments, such as *The Cantos* and other works, were inspired by Vorticist principles. Pound used rapid rhythm changes, language fragmentation, and strong imagery to create a poetic expression that reflects the dynamism and chaos of modern life. The page of paper becomes a generative element of meaning, as with the Futurists, Cubists, and Dadaists. This means that writing paper is a visual field that serves the writer to draw the reader's attention by the appearance of the text itself. The writer uses various visual elements, as the font, Letter size and word layout and thus visual aspects contribute to a better interpretation of content and thus paper becomes a visual and spatial entity.

² The Yale Foundation, established in 1948, was founded with the aim of promoting and supporting artistic creativity and cultural creation. The Bollingen Prize was primarily established to support creative artists in the fields of literature, poetry, music, art, and related areas. It is particularly significant because the recipient of the award had the opportunity to focus on their creative work and continue with their creative endeavors without financial worries.

³ Vorticism was a movement in modern art that emerged in England at the beginning of the 20th century as a reaction to Post-Impressionism and Futurism. The name *Vorticism* comes from the term *vortex*, which means whirlwind or swirl in English. The movement was most significant in painting and literature, and besides its founder Wyndham Lewis, one of the most famous representatives of Vorticism is certainly Ezra Pound. Lewis utilized typographical innovations from Russian and Italian Futurism in the magazine *Blast*.

⁴ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/58900/a-few->

Vorticism was recognizable for its abstract and geometric aesthetics, emphasizing dynamism and energy. Instead of depicting static scenes, Vorticists aimed to capture speed and movement in their works, often using sharp angles, elongated lines, and contrasting colors. This stylistic characteristic reflected the speeds and changes that characterized urban life in the modern world. Although Vorticism was a relatively short-lived movement that did not have a lasting impact like some other modernist movements, such as Futurism or Cubism, its aesthetics and ideas left a significant mark on the art world. Vorticism was an important step towards experimentation and innovation in arts of the English-speaking world.

In the book *The Pound Era*, Kenner says that *the image became a vortex* (Kenner 1971:161). Art is a constant force that attracts, rotates and directs attention by changing the way people view themselves and the world around them. Pound explains vortex and says that each concept, every emotion exists in some of its primary form. Color is the primary pigment for the painter, and for the poet – a poetic picture (Pound 1916: 101–102). Ezra Pound explained how the famous version of the poem *In a Station of the Metro* was created (*The apparition of these faces in the crowd / Petals on a wet, black bough*)⁵. He turned to haiku techniques and Japanese Noh drama to best express an image that is not an ornament but serves itself (Ibid.). This means that all superfluous adjectives should be rejected and that everything that the human eye can see and what it really sees should be pointed out with clarity.

Magarasevic emphasizes that this is Pound's first poem to indicate the importance of his and T.S. Eliot's theory of juxtaposition of different—often mutually contradictory—poetic images and scenes (Magarašević 2019: 562). This poem is the best example of the Imagist ideals listed in the essay *A Few Don'ts* because it excludes every unnecessary word. Haiku poetry is considered the shortest form of poetry in the world. It took him six months to shorten the original poem and a year to get the current version. The Japanese poet uses a minimal number of words, arranged in the simplest possible short poem in which everyone recognizes themselves and can find a reflection of their life. *In a Station of the Metro*, that's exactly what it shows, an image without abstraction, and in Pound's version, the collision of man and civilization.

Pound's poetic evolution from Imagism to Vorticism reflects his commitment to precision, dynamism, and cultural synthesis. Imagism, as articulated in *A Few Don'ts* (1913), emphasized the use of precise imagery and the elimination of superfluous language. This approach was further refined in Vorticism, which sought to capture the energy and movement of modern life through abstract and geometric aesthetics. Pound's engagement with Chinese poetry, particularly through the ideogrammic method, allowed him to transcend traditional Western poetic forms and create a new visual and linguistic aesthetic. For example, Pound's poem *In a Station of the Metro* exemplifies the principles of Imagism and Vorticism. By jux-

⁵ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/12675/in-a-station-of-the-metro>

taping the image of faces in a crowd with petals on a wet branch, Pound creates a vivid and dynamic poetic image that reflects the influence of Japanese haiku and Chinese poetic techniques.

3. Ezra Pound and classical Chinese poetry

3.1. Chinese Influence

Feng Lan divides Pound's Confucian creation into three phases: imitative, creative, and comprehensive. The first phase, according to Lan, covers the period when Pound was interested in translating the works of Confucius at the beginning of the 20th century, resulting in his poetic work the *Cathay* (1915). The second creative phase lasts from the 1930s to the end of World War II, during which Confucian ideas gained momentum in the epic *Cantos* (*The Chinese Cantos LII–LXI*). Pound also wrote essays, discussions, and delivered radio speeches during this period, based on translations of English and Italian books on Confucian wisdom, which became problematic due to their political background. And the third, post-war phase, during which Pound published translations of four, according to Lan, most important books of Confucius: *The Great Learning* (*Da xue*, 1947), *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong*, 1947), *The Analects* (*Lun yu*, 1951), and *The Works of Mencius* (*Mengzi*, 1947), where he translated four chapters (Lan 2005: 2).

In the first phase of his creative work, Pound showed interest in Confucian philosophy through the translation of Confucius' books, culminating in his poetry the *Cathay*. This phase was of exceptional importance for shaping Pound's critical and aesthetic position, providing him with insight into one of the most important aspects of Chinese culture and thought. Through translation, Pound not only became acquainted with Confucian themes and ideas but also explored ways in which they could be conveyed in poetry and art. This first phase served as a transition for Pound into the world of Chinese culture and as a foundation for the development of his later interests and creative endeavors.

The second phase, which covers the period from the 1930s to the end of World War II, represents the most creative and intensive period in Pound's relationship with Confucian ideas. During this period, Pound was fully engaged in applying Confucian principles to his poetry and creativity. In addition to written works and discussions, during this period, Pound created the epic work *Cantos*, which represents the culmination of his interest in Chinese culture and tradition. Pound not only translated Confucian texts but also applied their concepts and principles in his poetry, creating new forms and expressions inspired by Chinese wisdom. Pound's Confucian creation not only represents a significant contribution to his personal artistic development but also a significant influence on modern poetry and cultural dialogue between East and West. His ability to integrate Confucian ideas into his creativity demonstrates his breadth and depth as an artist, as well as the power of

cultural diversity and dialogue in poetry. This refers to the creation of a new text from a translation.

In the third phase of Pound's creative work, which takes place after World War II, special emphasis was placed on translating and interpreting classical Confucian texts. This phase represents a continuation and further development of his interests in Chinese culture and wisdom. His translations and interpretations of classical texts allowed him to delve deeper into concepts such as morality, justice, governance, education, and human relationships, and to understand their significance for contemporary life.

I will focus on the first two phases of Pound's poetic creation, specifically the second phase of *The China Cantos*.

3.2. *The Cathay*

Cathay represents a pivotal moment in Pound's engagement with Chinese poetry. Through his translations and adaptations, Pound introduced Western readers to the emotional and aesthetic richness of Chinese literature. Poems such as *The River Song* and *Lament of the Frontier Guard* exemplify Pound's ability to merge Eastern and Western poetic traditions, creating works that are both elegiac and innovative.

In Ernest Fenollosa's essay *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Fenollosa explains the language of poetry written in English and Chinese. Here, he gives preference to Chinese characters over the English alphabet because in a good verse, more than the accumulation of adjectives and nouns, the verb achieves better function (Fenollosa 1936: 12). Also, the gap between the visible and invisible can be bridged by metaphor or the use of material images suggesting immaterial relationships (Ibid.). In the Imagist manifesto and the essay *Vorticism*, Pound will explain Ernest Fenollosa's understandings and create poetry in line with these principles, such as rejecting shorter forms of the verb *to be* and using transitive verbs. Inspired by the descriptions of Chinese characters and explanations by Professors Ariga and Mori, Pound creates the collection *Cathay* without knowing Chinese or Japanese. Pound's use of Chinese characters as the basis for creating poetry clearly illustrates the importance of intercultural dialogue and the exchange of artistic ideas between different cultures and languages.

His poetry intertwines with the style of Chinese poets, elegantly transferring the elegance and mysticism of Chinese poetry into the framework of modern Western expression. Pound does not merely translate Chinese poets but creates new poems inspired by their work. For example, when he creates his own version of the famous Li Po, merging two poems into one – *The River Song*⁶. The individualized perspective in *Cathay* is mostly retrospective and almost always tinged with elegiac tones (Ming 1993: 278). This poem demonstrates the beauty of the Far East interspersed with elegiac tones that describe a dialogue with nature: *And I have moped in the*

⁶ <https://genius.com/Ezra-pound-the-river-song-annotated>

*Emperor's garden, awaiting / an order-to-write.. and heard the five-score nightingales aimlessly singing. The wind bundles itself into a bluish cloud and wanders off..The Emperor in his jeweled car goes out to inspect his flowers.. to listen to hear the new nightingales.*⁷ And Poems in the collection *Cathay* gain a new perspective because Pound creates something new from the old, sometimes combining multiple poems into one, and the poetic images of the Far East come to life again in his interpretation. Here, Eliot will say that Pound is *more himself than anyone else* when standing behind the masks of well-known poets like Li Po (Erkkila 2011: 105). Back in *The Lustra* (1916), Pound explored the concept of masking and hiding the identities that people adopt in society. The poetic process of depersonalization of the lyrical self, according to Pound, began in the book *Personae* when he introduces the masks of himself through poems and when through translations he presents a complex treatment of masks (Pound 1916: 98). This Anglo-modernist principle, which was developed in many of Ezra Pound's short poems, created at the beginning of his writing (1909–1917), develops into the polyphony of many mythological and historical figures in the *Cantos* (created in the period from 1915 to 1962).

Lament of the Frontier Guard, Separation on the River Kiang, Taking Leave of a Friend exude sadness, nostalgia, and a melancholic mood. In these poems, Pound explores themes of nostalgia for the past, as well as awareness of the transience of time and life. The dramatic nature of the poem *Lament of the Frontier Guard* where spring is transformed into a bloodthirsty autumn, is intensified by verses speaking of how in ancient China, border guards ended their lives in the jaws of tigers:

“Sorrow to go, and sorrow, sorrow returning,
Desolate, desolate fields,
And no children of warfare upon them,
No longer the men for offence and defence.
Ah, how shall you know the dreary sorrow at the North Gate,
With Rihoku's name forgotten,
And we guardsmen fed to the tigers”⁸

An example of clear poetic imagery in the poem *Taking Leave of a Friend* points to the characteristics of Imagism, and the line where horses neigh as they part (*Our horses neigh to each other as we are departing*)⁹ merges visual and auditory imagery. “Phanopoeia signifies shaping images through visual imagination, while logopoeia or the dance of the intellect among words suggests that this poetry takes special care of usage habits, the context in which we expect a word, its usual accompanying circumstances, its valid meanings, its playful meanings” (Đurić 2009: 142). Pound would later, in *ABC of Reading* (1934), say that phanopoeia, the projection of images into visual imagination, is primarily associated with the Chinese language because

⁷ <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/50155/pg50155-images.html>

⁸ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50155/50155-h/50155-h.htm>

⁹ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50155/50155-h/50155-h.htm>

of its very nature (Pound 1934: 42). Here, we'll also add melopoeia, where words are filled "over and beyond their ordinary meaning, with some musical property that directs the orientation or direction of that meaning" (Grčić 2006: 88). In this way, Ezra Pound recommended a threefold division of poetry to new poets.

The Epitaph: Light rain is on the light dust / The willows of the inn-yard / Will be going greener and greener / But you, Sir, had better take wine ere your departure / For you will have no friends about you / When you come to the gates of Go serves as an introduction to *Four parting poems from Rihaku*¹⁰. Besides the two previously mentioned (*Separation on the River Kiang and Taking Leave of a Friend*), there are also *Leave-taking near Shoku* and *The City of Choan*. The parting poems in Pound's poetry represent profound expressions about the transience of time, loss, and change: *Men's fates are already set / There is no need of asking diviners – Leave-taking near Shoku* or mentioning the scattered palaces of the Chou dynasty and sorrow: *Now the high clouds cover the sun / And I can not see Choan afar / And I am sad – The City of Choan*¹¹.

If we look at the adaptation of the elegy by the ancient Chinese poet Mei Sheng, *The Beautiful Toilet*, we observe strong poetic images because from the beauty, in the bloom of youth, we unexpectedly learn that her beauty is not innocent, as she was a courtesan and is now married to a drunkard. The same emotion, loneliness, and disappointment, this time of a man, a government official, we read in the poem *The Exile's Letter*, which, investigating corruption and bribery, becomes his victim and is sent into exile, and thus everything disappears, both *the cup of red jade* and *the dishes set on a table of blue jewels* and the pleasures *among the courtesans, who changed as they pleased*¹². An example of the adaptation of Mei Sheng's poem in Pound's poetry provides insight into the emotional world of women in Chinese society. The courtesan described in the poem carries with her complex layers of beauty, loneliness, and disappointment. This work presents a nuanced picture of the female experience in Chinese society. Similarly, in the poem *The Exile's Letter*, Pound conveys the drama and loneliness of a man who has become a victim of corruption and exile. This adaptation provides insight into various aspects of political and social life in Chinese society.

The Cathay represents a transitional period in Pound's orientalism, which takes as its starting point the methodology and style of earlier imagism but also serves as an aesthetic form for the later successful form of *individual* modernity in *The Cantos* through the presentation of Chinese history and language (Yao 2007: 145). As Yao says, *The Cathay*, as a collection representing a transitional period in Pound's orientalism, marks a significant step in the development of his poetics. This collection combines the style and methodology of earlier imagism with new elements,

¹⁰ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50155/50155-h/50155-h.htm>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

namely Chinese culture and history. Through *The Cathay*, Pound explores the ideas and techniques of Chinese literature and language, which influence the development of his stylistic and aesthetic expression. Pound not only translated Chinese texts into English but also explored various aspects of Chinese culture and history. This synthesis reflects respect for Chinese culture and people, but also serves as an example of transcending national and cultural boundaries in artistic expression. *Cathay* represents a significant contribution to enriching Western literature, emphasizing the importance of intercultural dialogue and synthesis in Art.

3.3. *The Cantos*

In *The China Cantos*, Pound integrates Confucian principles and Chinese history into his epic work, using ideograms to create a visual and linguistic bridge between cultures. The ideogrammic method, which involves the juxtaposition of disparate elements without conventional rhetorical connections, is a key feature of *The Cantos*. This section argues that Pound's use of Chinese ideograms and themes reflects his commitment to creating a universal poetic language that transcends cultural boundaries.

Pound began the first draft of *The Cantos* as early as 1904, working on it until his death in 1972. One of the most striking elements of the *Cantos* is Pound's writing style, characterized by complex syntax, free meter, and the use of various linguistic techniques. Pound combined elements from various literary traditions, including Chinese poetry, Italian Renaissance poetry, and ancient Greek poetry, to create a unique and innovative poetic form. This style was revolutionary in its time and had a profound impact on the development of modern poetry. Pound's ideographic method is an approach that involves moving from one element to another without establishing conventional rhetorical connections. In this way, a visual field is created from disparate discursive elements –quotes from Middle English, phrases in Greek, quotes related to Egyptian mythology, resulting in a cultural hieroglyph. Through his poetic landscapes, Pound explores questions of ideology, history, culture, and the individual, providing us with insight into deep reflections on the world and human existence. Additionally, *The Cantos* deal with various themes and motifs, including historical events, mythology, politics, economics, philosophy, and art. Pound used *The Cantos* as a means of expressing his ideas about society and culture, as well as for exploring human nature and universal themes. Through this collection, he raised important questions about the nature of power, identity, art, and morality, making *The Cantos* not only a poetic work but also a philosophical treatise. Pound's use of different linguistic techniques and references often makes *The Cantos* challenging to read and interpret. The poet used archaic expressions, foreign languages, quotes, allusions, and symbols to create a layered and multi-significant textual structure. This complexity requires the reader to carefully consider and analyze the text to fully understand its meaning and messages.

3.4. Chinese Poems – *The China Cantos (LII-LXI) and Canto XIII*

The procedure prescribed by Pound as a representative of Imagism, and then Vorticism, is one where the Chinese script served as a significant segment and stimulus. “Pound experienced the nature of Chinese writing and the principles of constructing Chinese characters as a series of evocative, emotional sets that represent an effective expressive means” (Skrobanović 2011: 762). Pound’s insight into the nature of Chinese writing and his ability to transform those elements into poetic images were crucial for the formation of *The China Cantos*. Through his exploration of Chinese culture and language, Pound discovered a richness and depth that served as a source of continuous inspiration. The process of translating Chinese poetry and adapting its stylistic elements into a Western context became a pivotal moment in Pound’s artistic development. This understanding and artistic use of Chinese poetry allowed Pound to expand the boundaries of poetic expression and to transform his vision into unique and innovative poetic works.

Here I will include Pound’s *Canto XIII*, although it belongs to a group of sixteen Cantos written in 1925 when *The China Cantos* had not yet received their final form (they were published in 1940), because it is important for understanding the *Chinese Poems*. *Canto XIII* begins like this: *Kung walked /by the dynastic temple / and into the cedar grove / and then out by the lower river.* (Pound 1970: 58). Kung is Confucius and we see him in a harmonious environment, beside the temple, in the woods, next to the river, which is in contrast to the disharmonious world in which Pound lived, the era before the Second World War. If there is disharmony in the West, Pound will turn to the East: *If a man have no order within him / He cannot spread order about him / And if a man have no order within him / His family will not act with due order.* *And Kung gave the words order and brotherly deference* (Ibid., 59). The meaning of order in the messages given by Confucius is faith in a better future for humanity, which needs to be conveyed from Eastern philosophy to the West: *The blossoms of the apricot / blow from the east to the west/ And I have tried to keep them from falling* (Ibid., 60). These are the last verses of *Canto XIII* where Pound takes on the task of preventing the apricot flowers from falling and being forgotten. “It is believed that Kung (Confucius) gathered and taught his disciples in a grove of apricot trees; that presumed place is now marked by a pavilion where the ideogram Hsing Tian (Apricot Temple) is carved; apricots in bloom symbolize the flourishing of culture and Confucian teachings” (Magarašević 2019: 676). Pound keeps his promise and fifteen years later publishes *The China Cantos, capturing the teachings of Confucius as apricot flowers flutter in the wind and shaping poetry that serves as a mirror of history* (Li 2008: 46). Holaday also believes that the West must turn to Confucian ethics and Chinese history, which value order and responsibility, and this is the main message of *The China Cantos* published in 1940 (Holaday 1978: 17). However, nothing new will be achieved without *naming things by their proper names*, as shown by

the ideogram (ching ming) that stands as a warning at the end of *Canto LI*, serving as a sort of introduction to the *Chinese Poems*.

Canto LIII continues and deepens the thoughts and ideas of Chinese philosophy initiated in *Canto XIII*. Cheng Tang, the founder of the Shang dynasty (1766–1122), ordered to be inscribed on the edge of his bath, *MAKE IT NEW: Tching prayed on the mountain / and wrote MAKE IT NEW / on his bath tub/ Day by day make it new / cut underbrush/ pile the logs/ keep it growing* (Pound 1970: 265). The Chinese characters 新日日新 (xīn rì rì xīn) mean *create a new day by day*. The ideograms for *new* and *Sun* suggest the birth of a new day where every individual, ruler, and statesman should reflect on the past and find a way to follow Confucius' principle of renewal and creation. To prevent everything from being *lost in the night clubs*, one must preserve peace: *Keep the peace, care for the people* (Ibid., 266). This quote comes from the ancient Chinese text *The Great Learning* (大學, Dà Xué), which is one of the classical Confucian writings. In the tradition of Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, this principle is considered the foundation of personal ethics and social responsibility. It means that a person should not remain in a state of stagnation, but should strive for progress every day – whether in knowledge, behavior, or creativity.

The ideograms 堯 (yáo – venerable, renowned), 舜 (shùn – wise), 禹 (yǔ – diligent, disciplined) represent the names of three emperors, according to Confucius – models for morality and considered ideal rulers of China. Pound also wrote about these emperors in *Canto LVI*. Good rulers build bridges, do not impose high taxes, and teach the people harmony. A good ruler in *Canto LV* also is one who gives to the people and respect them.

The ideogram is read from top to bottom rén zhě, yǐ cái fā shēn, bù rén zhě, yǐ shēn fā cái). The ideogram 仁 (rén) is a combination of the ideograms 人 (person) and the number 二 (two) and signifies humanity and harmony in Confucius's heart because 人 according to Confucius, *kind-hearted and courteous* are

the main qualities that every person should have (Li 2008: 50). A person who lives by heavenly laws on earth is a perfect person, which is the primary virtue of Confucianism, according to Magarasevic's explanation (Magarašević 2019: 777). Also, one should respect Confucius' moral principles and not rely on religion. Pound rejects reliance on Taoism and Buddhism. The ideogram 變 (biàn), which means *change*, is the one that warns of destruction. Rulers who turn to religion often forget real human needs. This kind of change leads to the downfall in *Canto LVII*. The ruler of the Song dynasty (Hui-tsung – Sung) almost lost his dynasty because he stubbornly clung to Taoism, and the sad end associated with the Tang dynasty ruler (Hsien-tsung – Tang) is the *elixir* he took in order to become immortal (Nolde 1983: 315). In conclusion to his *China Cantos*, *Canto LXI*, Ezra Pound speaks

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about the Qing dynasty emperor (Yongzheng) where the ideogram for happiness fú (福) is highlighted: Personal happiness depends on oneself, not on the emperor or outside influence. Pound emphasizes that the emperor died in the year when John Adams, the second President of the United States, was born (Ibid., 423).

The Orient in the text includes two forms of perception, one is visual, and the other rhetorical. All typographic layouts, combinations of text and sound, phoenopoeia, as Pound indicates, define the page of text as a visual field (Nadel 2003: 19). These visual fields are clearly visible on the pages of *The Cantos*, specifically *The China Cantos* where the ideographic method of representing text is used. Pound believed that the way we see the text is related to how we understand the text (Ibid., 19). Through the use of ideograms and visual organization of the text, Pound provides us with new ways of understanding and experiencing poetry, allowing readers to delve deeper into his verses and messages.

In *The China Cantos*, Pound not only explores Chinese culture and its influence on the world but also conveys the significance of self-awareness, individuality, and the constant pursuit of happiness. Through examples from Chinese history and Confucianism, Pound brings us stories that reflect our contemporary society and existence. As Pound emphasized, the way we see the text is in line with how we understand it, which is crucial in grasping poetry. This visual dimension of the text, clearly reflected in *The Cantos*, represents an important aspect of his creativity and contributes to our understanding and interpretation of poetic texts. Pound thus leaves a lasting impact on world literature and continuously inspires new generations of creative minds to explore the boundaries of expression in poetry.

4. Conclusion

Ezra Pound remains an undisputed figure in the history of poetry, whose work and influence span a wide range of cultural and ethnic contexts. Through his research and creative expression, Pound sought to establish order in the discord of the contemporary world and find patterns of harmony that would restore meaning and purpose to human existence. In his work on the collection of poems *The Cathay* and *The China Cantos*, Pound applied the concepts of imagism and vorticism, using linguistic and stylistic techniques he transferred from various cultural contexts. For example, Chinese writing and culture served as inspiration for shaping his poetic expression, while the concept of vorticism allowed for explicit poetic freedom and creativity. As an artist who explored different aspects of culture and cultural heritage, Pound was at the forefront of every new creative endeavor. Through his work, particularly in poems related to Chinese culture and tradition, we see how he reexamined Confucius' moral principles and attempted to apply them in the context of modern poetry. Although his life was marked by challenges, controversies, and periods of tragic self-isolation, Pound's legacy remains alive and inspiring for fu-

ture generations of artists and poets. His constant pursuit of harmony and guidance through artistic expression provides valuable insights into the nature of humanity and culture, and his work on poetry such as *Cathay* and *The Chinese Cantos* represents a significant contribution to this quest.

*The artist is always beginning. Any work of art which is not a beginning, an invention, a discovery is of little worth.*¹³ As Pound pointed out, the artist is always at the beginning, and any work of art that does not signify a new discovery has little value. It is precisely in this light that we should consider his legacy and contribution to poetry, as a source of inspiration and challenge for future generations of artists to continue exploring, trying new stylistic and thematic approaches, and seeking harmony and meaning in a world that is constantly changing and evolving.

Ezra Pound's engagement with Chinese poetry and culture represents a significant contribution to modern literature. Through his use of Imagism, Vorticism, and the ideogrammic method, Pound created a new aesthetic that bridged Eastern and Western literary traditions. This paper has demonstrated how Pound's adaptations of Chinese themes and techniques in *Cathay* and *The China Cantos* not only enriched his own work but also reshaped the landscape of modern poetry. The findings highlight the importance of cross-cultural dialogue in artistic innovation and suggest that Pound's legacy continues to inspire new generations of poets. By exploring the interplay between Eastern and Western traditions, Pound's work offers valuable insights into the potential for cultural synthesis in literature.

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¹³ <https://thequotesearch.com/quote/ezra-pound-the-artist-is-always-beginning-any-work/>

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