

In a Station of the *Cantos*: Ezra Pound's 'Seven Lakes' Canto and the *Shō-Shō* *Hakkei* Tekagami

Mark Byron

The literary reputation of the modernist American poet Ezra Pound is founded upon his technical innovation and experimentation, as well as his receptiveness to a wide variety of cultural traditions. His poetry draws on the classical and medieval traditions of Europe, weaving together a complex response to the visual arts, sculpture, music, theology, and poetry from a wide range of linguistic sources. Pound was alert to important intellectual and artistic currents in history, especially those that he saw as unfairly marginalised despite their conceptual intensity – such as the Neoplatonic theology of the ninth-century Irish scholar Johannes Scottus Eriugena, or the poetry of the Troubadours in twelfth-century Provence. This intellectual and aesthetic ambition drew Pound to another set of traditions – the art and literature of Japan and China. The cultural heritage of East Asia had achieved a level of popular currency in the West in the nineteenth century, particularly in France and the United States, but only began to receive comprehensive scholarly attention in the early years of the twentieth century. Pound's crucial role in establishing a deeper understanding of East Asian art and literature in the West, especially in his translations of Chinese poetry, has long been recognised – T. S. Eliot wrote as early as 1928 that Pound was “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.”¹ More recently, scholars have been careful to qualify Pound's youthful orientalism, and rightly show caution regarding his more strident claims for and uses of Chinese materials, particularly as Pound's materials were often mediated by such other languages and scholarly traditions as French and Japanese.

Pound's initial enthusiasm for Chinese writing, especially its ideographic roots, bore a distinctly visual emphasis. As his understanding of sinolinguistics deepened over his lifetime, Pound came to understand the distinctive relation between word and image in Chinese and Japanese cultures as symbolic of an ideal Neoconfucian harmony – functioning at each of individual, filial, social, political, and metaphysical orders, and binding them

Mark Byron is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Sydney.

¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction,' in Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), p. 14.

together. One such exploration of this order occurs in his epic poem, *The Cantos*, where an extended exposition of eighteenth-century European cultural and economic harmony is suspended, momentarily, in an aesthetic meditation of the so-called ‘Seven Lakes’ canto. This poem is a collection of poetic translations from an album of painting and calligraphy (*tekagami*) given to Pound by his parents. The tone, timing and content of these creative translations in his epic poem provide insight into Pound’s idealised view of East Asia as a model of order worth emulating in the immediate context of 1930s Europe, and as an integral part of his lifelong ‘paideuma’ or system of governing ideas in his writing. The complex ways in which Pound mediates word and image, between Chinese and Japanese sources and into an English-language poetic text, demonstrates that there is much more than aesthetics association as stake in this poetic manoeuvre. Specifically, Pound marshals this material to support an increasingly fraught worldview, which seeks to combine Italian Fascist ideology with the civic vision of the American Founding Fathers, especially John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. More generally, he deploys East Asian aesthetics, and his views on the singular nature of the ideogram, as an aesthetic trope for the unity of ideas beneath the variegated tumults of history.

Pound and China

Pound’s lifelong fascination with Chinese history, language and culture took hold after the death of Ernest Fenollosa, the scholar of Japanese art and literature. Fenollosa initially came from Boston to Japan as a professor of economics at Tokyo Imperial University. He helped found the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and the Tokyo Imperial Museum, and later returned to the United States to become the inaugural Curator of Oriental Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1890-1896).² Following his death in 1913, his widow Mary met Pound in the British Museum and gave him Fenollosa’s notebooks, which contained a large number of Chinese poems in translation, extensive notes on the Noh theatre and other matters of Chinese and Japanese arts, languages and cultures. Pound used these notebooks as the basis for his 1915 volume of ‘translated’ Chinese poems, *Cathay*, fusing his early impressions of Chinese aesthetics with the French Symbolist transformation of sense impressions into inner subjective states. He also adapted Fenollosa’s notes into the 1919 essay, ‘The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,’ which outlined a theory of the poetic image along so-called ‘ideogrammic’ lines, where distinct

² See Mary Fenollosa, ‘Preface,’ in Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 2007 [1912]), pp. xix-xxviii.

concrete poetic elements would combine in a resonant discursive field, by a process of local accretion ('ply over ply') or else by resonating across larger sections of the poem. Pound had already developed a concept of the poetic image in 1912, which became a fundamental tenet of the Imagiste School of poetry in London – "an 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and motional complex in an instant of time."³ This focus on precision, economy and direct treatment of objects in poetry became a hallmark of avant-garde English modernist verse. Pound's ideogrammic theory combined his rather imperfect understanding of the Chinese system of writing with his own visual habits, resulting in an image concept that allows seemingly heterogeneous elements to combine and establish a new ground for poetic insight: one such example is the account for the concept 'red,' an amalgam of "the abbreviated pictures of ROSE CHERRY IRON RUST FLAMINGO."⁴ Pound drew an analogy with the pictographic and ideographic characters in Chinese writing, viewing them as the basic essence of written language as a means of direct representation, even though these characters only ever made up around five percent of characters in circulation at any point in the history of Chinese writing.

Pound did not know any Chinese at this time: he was drawing on Fenollosa's notes and paraphrases in English, which were themselves the result of Fenollosa's work with two Japanese professors, Mori and Ariga.⁵ Pound's Chinese poems were thus mediated through Japanese scholarship from the beginning. Yet he set himself the task of assembling English texts of the Four Books of Confucianism – *The Great Learning (Ta Hio)*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* (or, as Pound called it, *The Unwobbling Pivot*), the *Analects* and the *Book of Mencius*. Pound made progress on these texts during the 1920s and 1930s, publishing *The Great Learning* in 1928 and the *Analects* in 1937; the *Unwobbling Pivot* eventually appeared in 1951.⁶ During the same period Pound had settled into a rhythm of publishing installments of his epic poem, the *Cantos*, in decads, or groups of roughly ten cantos. In the flurry of his prodigious writing and translating activity in the 1930s (including an intensive

³ Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste,' *Poetry*, vol. 1, no. 6 (March 1913), p. 200.

⁴ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 22.

⁵ Pound also worked with W. B. Yeats on the Noh materials in Fenollosa's notebooks during the winters of 1913-1916 at Stone Cottage in Sussex, resulting in Pound's *Noh or Accomplishment: A Study of the Classical Theatre of Japan* (New York: Knopf, 1917) and bearing a profound influence on Yeats's poetry and drama, especially *At the Hawk's Well* (first performed in 1916), which echoes the techniques and mood of the Noh play *Hagoromo*.

⁶ Ezra Pound, *The Great Learning* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1928); *Analects* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1937); *The Unwobbling Pivot* (New York: New Directions, 1951).

turn to economics, geopolitics and the history of civilisations), the scene was set for him to introduce Chinese materials into his epic poem.

China in Pound's *Cantos*

Pound described his *Cantos* as, like all epic, a “poem including history.”⁷ It aspired to be a modern epic, drawing deeply upon traditions of literature and myth initially from the West, but radiating outward to include greater spheres of culture and tradition as it progressed. The shape of the poem is multiform, but it bears strong and clear relations to Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divina Commedia*. It traverses what Pound considered to be the best art, literature, and thought in history, and presents various models of ideal government and economy in its bid to present a *paradiso terrestre*, a paradise on earth in which all functioned harmoniously under benevolent rule. Three significant locales for this *paradiso* can be found in the middle sections of his epic. The *Fifth Decad of Cantos* (Cantos XLII-LI, published in 1937) concerns the reign of Leopold, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and Duke of Tuscany in the later eighteenth century. Pound figures this time and place as one of harmony between the spheres of government, taxation, agriculture and artistic production, but in so doing, Pound also produces his most famous tirades against usury, manifestly bearing the stain of his anti-Semitism. He uses dates from the Italian Fascist calendar in this section of his poem, and his admiration for Mussolini is evident. The following decad of cantos (LII-LXI, composed in 1938 and published in 1940) articulates the dynastic history of China as a struggle between the harmony inherent in Imperial rule modeled on Confucian principles, and the forces of corruption embodied in threats both from outside (Mongols, Tartars) and from within the Middle Kingdom (Buddhists, Taoists, court eunuchs, and weak or corrupt rulers). These cantos are almost entirely comprised of Pound's translations from Joseph de Mailla's thirteen-volume *Histoire Générale de la Chine*. De Maille was a French Jesuit residing in the Chinese court, and his history reflects a decidedly Confucian Imperial view of Chinese history.⁸ The next sequence of cantos, the Adams Cantos (LXII-LXXI, also published in 1940), presents the founding of the United States as a moment containing a potential *paradiso*: government based on ideals of freedom and democracy, enshrined in the documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and economy measured on principles of trade without tariff or undue taxation.

The China Cantos signify Pound's attempt to absorb Chinese history

⁷ Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 46.

⁸ Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla, *Histoire Générale de la Chine*, 13 vols (Paris, 1777-1785).

into his epic, but this is not the first time Chinese materials appear in the poem. Already as early as Canto XIII (1925) Pound has Confucius discuss with his students the merits of good character and the radiating effects of order within the self upon the family, the state, and the natural world. The first Chinese ideograms are introduced at the end of Canto LI, immediately before the China Cantos begin. Yet the most extensive and intensive negotiation with Chinese literary, artistic and linguistic material prior to the China Cantos themselves appears in Canto XLIX, the so-called ‘Seven Lakes’ canto, squarely situated within the Fifth Decad or Leopoldine Cantos sequence. This canto describes a series of images that appear to be drawn directly from Chinese painting and poetry, and seems anomalous amidst the dense political and economic history of Siena. Whilst its more natural place would appear to be within the China Cantos that immediately follow, the intensive negotiations between word and image and between Asian and Western traditions in this canto provide a perspective not only on the surrounding poetic material (eighteenth-century Siena and, by extension, modern Europe), but also bring the very concept of the *paradiso terrestre* into sharp focus.

Canto XLIX: the ‘Seven Lakes’ Canto

In keeping with the eclectic nature of the *Cantos* as a whole, this short lyric piece⁹ comprises a sequence of translations of Chinese poems and a few lines of Pound’s original composition. The series of poems in which scenes from nature are intermingled with human activity are themselves framed by an acute sensibility of visual perception and melancholic contemplation. The first poem functions as an emblem of the entire sequence:

Rain; empty river; a voyage,
Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight
Under the cabin roof was one lantern.
The reeds are heavy; bent;
and the bamboos speak as if weeping.¹⁰

Movement and activity is the domain of the natural world throughout the poetic sequence: the “bamboos speak,” the bell is “borne on the wind,” “[w]ild geese swoop” and “rooks clatter.” The human dimension is markedly passive and is signified indirectly by reference to tools and objects – the monk’s bell, chimney smoke, the fishermen’s lanterns – until we reach the fifth stanza, where “young boys prod stones for shrimp.” In this stanza the first individualised subject, “Tsing,” comes into view: this figure is meant to portray

⁹ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996), pp. 244-245. Subsequent references are from this edition.

¹⁰ Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 244.

T'ang Hsi, the second Emperor of the Ching Dynasty, who is said to have visited the region depicted in the poems in 1699.¹¹ To this point, the governing effect is that of ekphrasis, as though these poems describe visual representations of the scenic subject matter. This sense of the imbrications of word and image is reinforced later in the poem. A visually striking matrix formation of letters produces an effect where alphabet and ideogram, or even word and image converge:

K E I M E N R A N K E I
 K I U M A N M A N K E I
 J I T S U G E T S U K O K W A
 T A N F U K U T A N K A I¹²

These letters have little meaning for the average Anglophone reader, beyond a vague gesture towards the visual dimension of non-alphabetic scripts. These 'words' or 'alphabetic ideograms' in fact constitute a faulty romanisation of a Japanese transcription of a Chinese poem. The visual effect is intentional: the editor and printers of the first American edition of the poem complained about the author's strict requirement for uniform spatial presentation of each set of letters.¹³ The clear message broadcast in these sixteen 'words' – that the spatial dimension of linguistic material is the site of specific hermeneutic intensity, especially in non-alphabetic scripts presented to Western readers of avant-garde poetry – indicates that the ekphrastic burden of the poem as a whole functions as a special kind of translation between artistic and poetic traditions. Indeed the canto and its constituent poetic material has a complex provenance: a Japanese album of painting and calligraphy forming a bridge between its subject matter of Chinese traditions of painting and poetry, on one hand, and, on the other, the poetic experimentations Pound was to perform with Chinese materials in Canto XLIX and later in the *Cantos*. Close consideration of the relationship between the album and Pound's poem helps to identify why he would choose this series of images at this point in his epic, immediately before his concentrated attention to Chinese Dynastic history in the China Cantos to follow.

¹¹ Sanehide Kodama, 'The Eight Scenes of Sho-Sho', *Paideuma*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1977), pp. 131-138.

¹² Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 245.

¹³ Richard de la Mare of Faber and Faber wrote to John Easton of Robert Maclehose & Co. (the printers of *The Fifth Decad of Cantos*) on 9 April 1939 complaining of Pound's punctilious demands. The unpublished letter is housed in the Faber and Faber Archive in London, and is quoted by Richard Taylor in 'Canto XLIX, Futurism, and the Fourth Dimension,' *Neohelicon*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1993), p. 351.

The Shō-Shō Hakkei Tekagami

The typical, even stereotypical scenes described in Canto XLIX might be seen to fit a Chinese aesthetic, as though the poems simulate a visit to the East Asian Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,¹⁴ where the speaker turns from one screen painting to the next, transforming each one into an approximately ‘Eastern’ lyric. The actual pictorial origin for these verbal scenes is the seventeenth century album owned by Ezra Pound’s parents, given to him in 1928 when he was living in Rapallo, Italy. This album has come to be known as the *Shō-Shō hakkei tekagami*: it is an album comprising eight painted scenes of the Xiao and Xiang rivers in Hunan Province (tributaries of the Yangtze converging near modern-day Changsha) each accompanied in triptych by a Chinese poem and a transliteration into Japanese. Such an album draws on the well-established artistic and poetic traditions of the ‘Eight Views’ (*hakkei*) of the Xiao and Xiang rivers (*Shō-Shō*), and functions as a primer in various modes of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy. The album (*tekagami*) is thus made up of twenty-four panels in which each painting is framed by two poetic texts in different scripts. The physical layout of the album in a concertina format invites most Western readers to adapt customary reading patterns, reading from ‘front’ to ‘back,’ two panels at a time (as in the image below), when instead it is correct to view the album as a series of triptychs, starting from the ‘back’ and working to the ‘front,’ turning the album over and working back to the point of commencement.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ernest Fenollosa’s large private collection of Japanese paintings formed the basis for the formidable East Asian Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Fenollosa became curator of the Department of Oriental Art for several years (1890-1896). See Mary Fenollosa, ‘Preface,’ in Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, pp. xxiii-xxv.

¹⁵ A facsimile of the *tekagami* is included in a box set edition with accompanying monograph: Maria Costanza Ferrero De Luca, ed., *Ezra Pound e il Canto dei Sette Laghi* (Diabasis: Reggio Emilia, 2004).



Figure 1: (left) Autumn Moon, unidentified Japanese artist, (right) Chinese poem in hand of Genryu, *Shō-Shō Hakkei tekagami*, date unknown (Courtesy Mary de Rachewiltz, Brunnenburg, Italy).

The album in Pound's possession was produced in the late seventeenth century by a calligrapher of the Edo period (d.1722) by the name of Genryu, whose name appears on the last painting, 'Sunset Over Fishing Village,' and whose hand produces the Japanese calligraphy (although it is not known if he is also produced the paintings). Wai-Lim Yip claims that the painter was inspired by painters of the Muromachi period (1336/1338-1573), themselves following Chinese models laid down by Chan Buddhist painters of the Song and Yuan Dynastic periods.¹⁶ Several Chinese and Japanese literary scholars (among them Achilles Fang and Sanehide Kodama) assert that the translations that comprise the larger part of Canto XLIX are of high quality, capturing the spirit of the original poems as recorded in the *tekagami*. Pound had the benefit of informed Chinese guidance, when the scholar Pao-sun Tseng read and transliterated the Chinese poems for him when visiting Rapallo in 1928.¹⁷ Pound also drew upon his own intensive study and translation of Chinese texts during this time. Kodama notes, "it is extremely difficult to decipher [the accompanying Japanese poems] without some historical knowledge of Japanese penmanship," and attributes them to three Edo period courtiers: Asukai Masatoyo (1644-1712), Sono Motokatsu (1663-1713?), and Takakura

¹⁶ Wai-Lim Yip, *Pound and the Eight Views of Xiao Xiang* (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2008), p. 132.

¹⁷ Taylor, 'Canto XLIX,' p. 338.

Eifuku (1657-1725).¹⁸ Pound makes no mention of the Japanese poetic material, nor of its complex and varied calligraphic presentation.



Figure 2: (centre) *Sunset Over Fishing Village*, unidentified Japanese artist, (left) Japanese calligraphy and (right) Chinese poem in hand of Genryu, *Shō-Shō Hakkei tekagami*, date unknown (Courtesy Mary de Rachewiltz, Brunnenburg, Italy).

A long and complex history looms behind this aesthetically refined object that came into Pound's zone of consciousness: a history of which it appears he was largely unaware. The *Shō-Shō hakkei*, the Eight Famous Scenes along the Xiao and Xiang rivers in Hunan Province, comprises a coherent genre in Chinese poetry and painting that took hold during the Northern Song Dynasty in the eleventh century and was transmitted to Japan in the later Muromachi period (although the genre has poetic precedent in the later poems of the Tang poet Du Fu, and perhaps even in the earliest expressions of the archaic poetic topoi of exile and mourning¹⁹). The scenes are taken from points ranging from the confluence of the two rivers near Changsha, north to Lake Dongting and then to the point at which they feed into the Yangtze further north. The topicality of place is noted for its fogs, mists and rains, where mountainous scenery, forests and rivers seem to merge together in an indistinct scene. This haunting topography has inspired mournful, even melancholic poetry and painting, and has often been associated with states of actual or metaphorical exile. Song Di (c.1015-c.1080) executed the first known series of

¹⁸ Kodama, 'Eight Scenes,' pp. 131, 133-134.

¹⁹ Qian recounts the myth of the daughters of the legendary Emperor Yao, who died on the banks of the Xiang in mourning for their husband Shun. Qian associates this myth with the sound of rustling bamboo in Canto XLIX, which transforms the speaker into "a Westerner seeking a way out of political chaos." Zhaoming Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), pp. 136-137.

paintings of the Eight Views following his dismissal from office and subsequent exile, and Shen Gua (1031-1095) composed the first known accompanying poetic sequence, drawing heavily upon the repertoire of Du Fu.²⁰ Wang Hong (fl.1131-1161) painted the oldest known surviving sequence of paintings, now held in the Princeton University Art Museum.



Figure 3: Wang Hong, *Sailboats Returning, Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (*Xiao-Xiang ba jing*), c. 1150, handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 23.4 x 90.7 cm, China, Southern Song, Edward L. Elliott Family Collection, Princeton University Art Gallery.

Despite the fact that these paintings have faded over the intervening nine hundred years, they still display the genre's evanescent imagery, where earth and sky blend in mist and fog. Associations of melancholy, and the sense of loss in exile, are easily imagined here. The genre came to Japan in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods when numerous Chan (Zen) Buddhist masters (such as Kenchoji) visited or settled and became abbots of important temples. Many Japanese monks also travelled to famous Buddhist centres in southern China at this time and absorbed the poetic and artistic genres of the region.²¹

Nowhere does Pound indicate any knowledge of the generic features and august provenance of the 'Eight Views,' but his sense of the melancholic potential of Chinese poetry is evident as early as in *Cathay* (1915), in poetic translations such as 'The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter,' or 'The Jewel-Stair's Grievance.' Pound had the technical and perceptive range to produce the kind of atmospheric poetry demanded of the genre, even if he was entirely unaware of its strong links with the poetics of exile. The cursory account of Pound's adaptations in Canto XLIX above makes note of the pronounced stock of familiar Chinese imagery at play in the text. His poetic adaptation displays

²⁰ Jennifer Baker, 'The *Eight Views*: From its Origin in the Xiao and Xiang Rivers to Hiroshige' (MA Thesis, College of Arts at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 2010), p. 10.

²¹ Yip, *Pound and the Eight Views*, p. 200.

an intuitive sense of the linguistic forms of *wenyan* or classical literary Chinese: a dexterity and suggestiveness prompted by the omission of verbs, conjunctions and prepositions, providing a sense of atmosphere by nuance and polysemy.²² Pound had internalised this feature of Chinese poetry early in his career, famously fusing it with an identifiably Japanese poetic genre in the haiku-like ‘In a Station of the Metro’:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.²³

This poem makes full use of the potentialities of a Chinese poetic, by working with concrete images (station, faces, petals, bough) set in a kind of montage that registers subjective effects in the reader. The suggestive images in the poem are presented without any verbs, and with minimal articles and prepositions. On the poem’s first publication within a group of poems, in *Poetry* magazine in 1913 (the same publication in the same year as his essay ‘A Few Don’ts’), words were gathered together in clusters, as though to mimic the faces and petals that formed the poem’s subject matter:

In a Station of the Metro

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

This intensified relation of word and image might be related to Pound’s early preoccupations with the ideogram (approximating the visual distribution of Chinese script), but it also points ahead to his ability to move between paintings, and Chinese poems paraphrased into English, to produce an evocative sequence of translations in the larger part of Canto XLIX.

Even the attentive reader of the *Cantos* is not necessarily aware that an actual album of artworks and poems (and calligraphy) stands behind the text – indeed an entire tradition stretching back a thousand years or more, spanning Chinese and Japanese painting and poetry as well as Buddhist and Daoist quietistic traditions. In addition, the average Western reader may not realise that the album itself demands to be read differently to Western concertina texts: that is, from right to left and in triptych rather than diptych. Yet there is more to the word-image relation, mediated between Eastern and Western sensibilities, in Canto XLIX than the ‘Eight Scenes of the Xiao and Xiang’: there are matters of tone and register that alert us to the fact that this canto is a compound text. Following the ‘Eight Views’ the canto contains two further poetic adaptations and eight lines of Pound’s own composition. These

²² Yip, *Pound and the Eight Views*, p. 127-128.

²³ Ezra Pound, ‘Contemporania,’ *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, vol. 2. no. 1 (April 1913), p. 6; republished in *Lustra* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916).

additional elements of the poem help clarify Pound's motivations in producing this poetic adaptation and its complex word-image interplay.

Further Poetic Apparatus in Canto XLIX

The first of the two additional poetic adaptations is that represented (very imperfectly) in the matrix visualising sixteen ideograms in alphabetic form, as though by estranging the Roman alphabet sufficiently it might be possible to capture a certain orientalist poetic sensibility. The sixteen 'words' constitute a Chinese poem known as 'Auspicious Clouds,' transcribed by Ernest Fenollosa in his notebooks with the aid of the Japanese scholar, Professor Mori. The script in Pound's poem is meant to represent the Japanese pronunciation of characters, but is to be read left to right. There are numerous errors, perhaps the most obvious of which is the "KAI" at bottom right, which is supposed to be a repetition of "KEI" above. James Legge's verse translation reads:

Splendid are the clouds and bright,
All aglow with various light!
Grand the sun and moon move on;
Daily dawn succeeds to dawn.²⁴

Achilles Fang notes, incidentally, that the poem also served as the anthem of the First post-Dynastic Chinese Republic in 1911.²⁵ The poem shifts the tone from the earlier pensive melancholia to an outright celebration of light, and progress (the daily succession of dawn), telegraphing clear implications for robust physical activity, and social and political advancement.

The second additional poem follows immediately, and grounds the sensibility of the 'Auspicious Clouds' poem in peasant labour: this is the so-called 'Clod-Beating Song,' a traditional verse adapted by Pound into an Imagist poem:

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?²⁶

He transforms the lyric into a sharp, crystalline form with a terse, direct tone by freeing syntax and grammar. Although the poem might be taken to voice a fatigued resignation to habitual labour, other translations of the same poem by James Legge and Herbert Giles present the poem as a cheerful song celebrating the felicities of peasant life. Human activity is the pivot upon which the poem

²⁴ Quoted in Achilles Fang, 'Fenollosa and Pound,' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1-2 (1957), pp. 231-232.

²⁵ Fang, 'Fenollosa and Pound,' p. 232.

²⁶ Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 245.

turns, in direct contrast to the earlier poems: the synchrony of cause and effect in the natural and human worlds serves to reinforce the sense of harmonious dwelling in the world, to the extent that Imperial power, the mechanism driving thousands of years of history, is of no significant consequence to the peasants. A spirit of harmony has reached down from the Emperor to the most humble farmer, leaving everything in its rightful place and in accord with the empire and the cosmos. In fact cause and effect crosses from nature to the human and back again: “Sun up (natural element); work (human activity),” “dig well (human activity) and drink of the water (natural element).” This chiasmic movement, back and forth between the human and the natural, sharpens the reader’s attention to matters of productive human labour, a principal focus of the entire Leopoldine Cantos sequence in which Canto XLIX appears.

What remains are Pound’s unmediated lines. He interpolates one line in ‘Sunset over Fishing Village,’ the final *tekagami* poem: “In seventeen hundred came Tsing to these hill lakes.” This line breaks the historical continuity of the sequence, which stems from the eleventh century. Instead, a named subject enters into the frame, and brings with him the appurtenances of the Imperial Court. This telescoping of history confirms the iconic status of the ‘Eight Views’ throughout history, even drawing an Emperor to see them in person. This figure, T’ang Hsi, was the second emperor of the Qing Dynasty, whose benevolent rule is the subject of two of Pound’s China cantos, and whose *Sacred Edicts* provide the subject matter for two much later cantos on matters of personal conduct, filial piety, and harmonious social relations.²⁷ This context, compressed into that one word “Tsing,” offers a clear relation to Pound’s four-line verse paragraph that follows, immediately before the ‘Auspicious Clouds’ word-object-matrix-poem.

State by creating riches shd. thereby get into debt?

This is infamy; this is Geryon.

This canal still goes to TenShi

though the old king built it for pleasure²⁸

These lines develop precisely the themes of the *Sacred Edicts*, but by way of negative example: where the twin evils of Usury (interest on unproductive debt) and Geryon (fraud) preside over social decay. Pound provides a stark counterpoint here to the idyllic *paradiso* in the preceding Eight Views (a *paradiso* heavily inflected by Buddhist and Daoist aesthetics). An Emperor who abuses his power unbalances the empire, the course of nature, and the

²⁷ Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 191.

²⁸ Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 245.

livelihood of all people. His responsibility is to maintain harmony in himself and the empire by acting in accordance with Confucian principles.

Conclusion

Canto XLIX as a whole functions effectively as an expression of Pound's endorsements of the Confucian worldview: of balance within the self, the family, social relations, and the entire political and metaphysical order up to the Emperor and the cosmos: these are twinned virtues just as usury and Geryon are twinned vices. The poem also accords with other cantos in the Leopoldine sequence, extolling centralised political and economic structures in eighteenth-century Tuscany (and, *inter alia*, clearly reflecting Pound's dazzlement with Mussolini in the 1930s). But why would the poet present his case by way of a Japanese album of painting on Chinese themes and Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, the existence of which is mentioned nowhere in the canto, as well as a picture poem indecipherable to most of his readers? The answer may reside in the three remaining lines of the poem: the opening line – "For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses" – and the final two lines: "The fourth; the dimension of stillness. / And the power over wild beasts." The fourth dimension, of stillness, is also the dimension of time. This paradox, of time caught still, answers the previous rhetorical question of Imperial power: it is eternal, memorialised, captured in a visual image (much like Keats's Grecian Urn captures the event of animal sacrifice to the Olympian gods), and affords a rare power over nature and its resources, "the power over wild beasts."

But the poet is engaging in a cunning sleight of hand at this point in the poem: the power over wild beasts also belongs to the poet-musician Orpheus, and to Apollo. This double vision, of Chinese Imperial order and classical Greek myth, is simply a return to the first line and to the establishing voice of the entire poem. "For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses" – everything that follows is anonymous, by no man. In Homer's epic Odysseus tells the Cyclops Polyphemus that his name is οὐ τις, "no man." Pound authors his text by a devious play at anonymity, simultaneously asserts the classical authority of both the poet-musician Orpheus and the epic wanderer Odysseus. The poem and its speaker thus absorb and assert the cultural authority of the poems and paintings caught in this fourth dimension, this stillness where word and image transmit across time and cultures, from classical Greek, eleventh-century China, and seventeenth-century Japan, to the present tense of composition in the 1930s and to the immediate present of the moment of reading. Pound puts on the mask of Odysseus, who is himself masked by anonymity; he reminds the reader in the first and last lines of the poem that the intervening scenes, whilst a picture of a paradise on earth, is only a temporary

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stillness in his own epic. On turning the page, the reader is returned to the world of corruption, usury, fraud, and the threats to political, imperial, natural and divine orders. Canto XLIX operates as a quiet exile from the fray, ironically drawing on the same Buddhist and Daoist aesthetic practices that Pound will consider threatening to Imperial power in the China Cantos to follow.