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Xu Yuanchong as a Touchstone for Ezra Pound's Translation of Tang Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to compare and contrast Pound's Chinese-English translation with the translation rendered by Xu Yuanchong (1921-), winner of the "Aurora Borealis" Outstanding Literary Translation Award. This study endeavors not just to cast light on the dialectic nature of poetry translation, but it seeks to reveal what has been lost and what has been gained in the Poundian rendition. The new contribution of the current study lies, therefore, in its novel undertaking that employs Xu Yuanchong as a touchstone to examine the loss and gain in Pound's literary translation, and Pound as another to sieve whatever sievable inasmuch as the esthetic essence of Tang poetry is concerned. It strives to unveil the cross-cultural esthetic transmigration of Tang poets in lending their lifetime character alchemy, a Chinese alchemy in which image rhymes with music, to the forging of the new in American Imagism during the era of Ezra Pound.

摘要

本研究试图比较庞德的汉英翻译与许渊冲 (1921-) 的翻译, 后者是"北极光"杰出文学翻译奖的获奖者。本研究不仅试图揭示诗歌翻译的辩证性, 而且还试图揭示庞德诗歌翻译中所丧失与获得的華夏美學要素。因此, 本研究的新贡献在于, 其以许渊冲为试金石, 考察庞德文学翻译的得與失, 并以唐诗美学本质为切入点, 以筛选出任何可筛选的得與失。本文力图揭示唐代诗人的跨文化审美轮回, 探索一种以意象与音乐押韵的中国炼金术, 如何滋涵龐德創造新時代的美學, 賦予美國意象主義嶄新的境界。

1. Introduction: Chinese vs. Western poetics of translation

This study attempts to investigate Ezra Pound's Chinese-English translation in his *Cathay* (1915). The collection of Pound's bilingual rendition of classical Chinese poetry serves to be compared and contrasted with the translation of identical Tang poems rendered by Xu Yuanchong (1921-). Xu has published more than 100 translated works in Chinese, English, and French, wherein he boasts as the only scholar-translator that has translated classical Chinese poetry into well-rhymed English and French. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in The Literature in 1999 and obtained the Lifetime Achievement Award for Chinese Translation Culture in 2010. In 2014, he was honored with the "Aurora Borealis" Outstanding Literary Translation Award, the highest honor in

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the international circles of translation. It is the first time for the award to be conferred onto an Asian translator. Previous academic investigations explore how Ezra Pound appropriates either Chinese characters or Chinese poetry as the *point de repère*, as T. S. Eliot champions in his eponymous lecture, in the formation of his new Imagist esthetics. Some scholars tend to consider his translation not a far cry from being "derivative, fake, potentially a false copy" (Venuti 7). In a similar vein, Ming Xie claims in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* that the "appeal of *Cathay* is largely its exoticism, evoking a poeticized imaginary realm with nineteenth-century Tennysonian associations" (211). Others, however, opt to value Pound's creative rendition in spite of absolute fidelity to the original texts in bilingual translation: "To do justice to Pound, then, one should initially disregard the annotations and read the poems on their own" (Grønlie 138). In point of fact, Timothy Billings' *Ezra Pound, Cathay: A Critical Edition* (2019) has probed deeper into the complex process of cultural transmission from Fenollosa to Pound. Because of this new book, we perhaps need to reconsider how to approach the poems in *Cathay*, which should not be viewed purely as simple "translations," but also a connection in a series of glosses, revisions, and rewrites.

Although the seminal connection between Pound and Chinese culture has been a household notion in related academia across the globe, few scholars have actually delved into the dialogic and dialectic nature of poetry translation that plays a critical role in the inception of Pound's peculiar poetics known as Imagism. The current research, drawing on Pound's translation, particularly on that of Tang poetry, attempts not just to cast light on the dialectic nature of poetry translation that inspires Poundian esthetics, but it seeks to reveal what has been lost and what has been gained in the Poundian rendition. The new contribution of the current study lies, therefore, in its novel undertaking that employs Xu Yuanchong as a touchstone to examine the loss and gain in Pound's literary translation, and Pound as another to sieve whatever sievable inasmuch as the esthetic quintessence of Tang poetry is concerned. It strives to unveil the cross-cultural esthetic transmigration of Tang poets in lending their lifetime character alchemy, a Chinese alchemy in which image tends to rhyme with music, to the exigent forging of the new in American Imagism during the era of Ezra Pound.

Altogether, this essay explores translation theories proposed by Robert Frost (1874–1963), Dai Wang-shu (1905–1950), Yu Kwang-chung (1928–2017), Xu Yuanchong (1921-), and Ezra Pound (1885–1972). Frost is well known to wittily contend that "Poetry is that which gets lost in translation," which implies that the comprehensive virtues of true poetry cannot be thoroughly rendered in the target language, for something essentially poetic is doomed to be lost in translation. Dai, the French-Chinese translator, asserts nonetheless that "True poetry must be translatable, for translation serves rightly as the magic sieve of true poetry" (Dai 390). That is to say, genuine poetry usually boasts a good number of virtues and a certain portion of them must be able to be imparted to its translation across both lingual and literary frontiers; in stark contrast, if nothing essentially poetic of an original poem can be eventually extracted into the target text, to a certain extent it rebuts the contention that the original poem is itself a true piece of poetic work. As a renowned Taiwanese poet-translator across the Taiwan Strait, Yu Kwang-chung has devoted his life to translation for more than half a century. In his English article, titled "Digesting Nectar to Produce Honey: Analytical Comments on English Translations of Chinese Poetry," he aptly asserts that translation operates just like

politics and marriage, which applies particularly to literary translation, for it is by nature an alternative knack of compromise and concession (Yu Web). Likewise, in "Translation Knows No Perfection: Some Obstacles on the Road of Literary Translation," Yu defines translation as an art of approximating, for it is an art that knows no perfection; a translator along with his/her translated text is always in the process of approximating perfect equivalence (1996: 6). On the other hand, as a lifetime *travailleur* of literary translation shuttling amongst Chinese, English, and French languages and literatures, Xu particularly foregrounds the importance of representing the three original beauties – musical, formal, and semantic – in the target language when it comes to poetry translation (1998: 88).

As a matter of fact, Xu's academic trajectory and Pound's poetic pilgrimage seems to incidentally converge in the magic City of Light. As an English major, Xu graduated from National Southwest Associated University in China, studied abroad in France to further his Western languages proficiency and broaden his horizon of literatures at the University of Paris from 1948 to 1951. He came back to his native land with admirable learning, became a national academic rarity conversant with Chinese, English as well as French languages and literatures. What's more, he serves not only as a good will ambassador of Chinese culture in the global village but also as a most devoted literary translator who ferries with pride and pleasure Chinese literature across the boundless expanse of estranging oceans between the East and the West.

In the case of Ezra Pound, though definitely not an assiduous student devoted to the pursuit of scores or degrees, he is a genuine precocious *flâneur* in the poetic cityscapes of Goethean *Weltliteratur*. Admitted to the University of Pennsylvania's College of Liberal Arts at the age of 15 in 1901, Pound transferred in 1903 to Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, where he studied Latin, Provençal dialect, Old English, and Dante. He graduated at the end of June, 1905, with a Bachelor degree of Philosophy (Moody 19). In the fall, "he returned to Pennsylvania to do the Masters course in Romance Languages" (Moody 27), where he studied "Old Provençal, Old French, Early Italian Poets, Dante, Old Spanish, and Spanish Drama" (Moody 29). Evidently, his thorough study of the classics, Italian, and French literatures, as well as Provençal poetry, all contributes to paving the broad way of Pound's future esthetic explorations. Although Pound relocated to London from 1908 to 1920 to seek poetic reputation in the literary circles of London high society, Pound was unhappy with the literary *milieu* he lived in (Ruthven 52). As a better enemy or frenemy creator than a diplomatic friend maker, Pound knew no hesitation to claim: good writers in London, were scarce in number, and all the best literatures had been written in Paris. He called the established critics in London *amateurs*, stating that the editors of the literary magazines in London did not even know "good work from bad, nor cared for poetry as a living and changing art" (Moody 212).

In his essay, "How I Began," published in *T. P.'s Weekly* in June, 1913, Pound candidly wrote of his precocious poetic ambition: "I knew at fifteen pretty much what I wanted to do. I believed that the 'impulse' is with the gods; that technique is a man's own responsibility. I resolved that at thirty that [sic] I would know more about poetry than any man living" (1913: 707). It is such a firmly resolved poetic ambition and his excruciating disappointment with London that brought him to settle down in Paris from 1921 to 1924, where and when he timely became an influential literary figure for the fledgling expatriate Modernist writers who were so eager to dine at the Parisian table

for "A Movable Feast" of the lost generation. Geographical vagrancy notwithstanding, Pound's esthetic as well as poetic philosophy remains largely constant throughout his life: "Make it New." In his essay published in 1934 in London under that eponymous title, Pound summarized his whole theory in one sentence in the French language: "*Quand la forme n'est pas nouvelle, le fond ne l'est non plus*" (Pound 1934: 325), which signifies: "When the form is not new, the content is not new, either." Curiously enough, Pound's esthetic principles are sometimes pounded up by a nuanced discrepancy of which he seems to be unaware. Such an adamant Poundian belief in the indispensability of poetic form as quoted above is critically contradicted in the *ABC of Reading*, wherein formal rigors are unduly or inconsistently negated: "A classic is classic not because it conforms to certain structural rules or fits certain definitions (of which its author had quite probably never heard). It is a classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness" (Pound 1960: 13).

Both Ezra Pound and Xu Yuanchong regard Paris as the Mecca of Western literatures. Both are experts of English and French languages and literatures. It seems that the only difference between the two translators resides in Pound's outright deficiency in Chinese language ability: "He could not read the Chinese characters – he could not even sound them out" (Moody 272); Pound was "absolutely dependent on Fenollosa's simple crib with its halting one-English-word-for-one-Chinese-character, followed by a paraphrase of the line" (Moody 272). Nevertheless, in addition to their divergence in Chinese language capability, an even more fundamental theoretical as well as practical disparity lies between the two translators in regard to the way they render the poetic charms of the Tang dynasty: Xu insists on the necessity of rhyming patterns in translating Tang poetry so as to make intelligible its "musical, semantic, and formal beauties," whereas Pound, purely innocent of the complicated rhyme schemes and poetic meters of the original Tang poetry, buries himself in transplanting the Tang poems in blank verse style, with an attempt to render the ancient Chinese imagery as well as poetic freshness into the English language. Thus, reexamining Pound's Chinese-English translation of Tang poetry, the study seeks to demonstrate a critical condition of poetry translation, that is, the image beauty and semantic beauty tend to be regained in the target language, as Dai Wang-shu argues in his essay on poetic translatability and untranslatability, whereas the musical beauty and poetic numbers tend to be lost in translation, as Robert Frost so proverbially concludes. As such, the aforementioned seemingly contradictory translational theories or perspectives are yoked together with a metaphysical principle of dialectic translatability in literary translation. Making good use of Ezra Pound as a touchstone of Tang poetry, this research sets out not so much to criticize Pound's unfaithfulness of literary translation by pointing out his arguably erroneous takes in such a multilingual undertaking across Chinese, Japanese, and English as to lay bare what quintessential esthetic elements have been bravely sieved into the target language in the Poundian *enterprise* across lingual, cultural as well as literary borders between the West and the far East. Furthermore, the study will draw on Pound's own Imagist esthetics and poetic productions to reveal how Poundian translation of the Chinese Tang poetry most timely inspires, if not cross-pollinates, his newfound poetic sphere known as American Imagism.

2. Poundian poetics of translation in theory and practice

As a specialist of Romance languages, Pound studied, amongst other subjects, English, Latin, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Provençal, Anglo-Saxon, and Greek from 1901 to 1907 at the University of Pennsylvania. His grasp of other languages was considerably weaker. Later in his life, he took effort to learn a few more languages, notably Chinese, which, however, "remained rudimentary" (Xie 204–25). "Pound's early training in Romance philology and academic scholarship, coupled with his adventurous autodidacticism and his passionate desire to make past and foreign literature accessible and vital again, accounted in large part for his 'creative translations'" (Xie 205). Although Achilles Fang in his critical essay titled "Fenollosa and Pound" catalogs numerous linguistic errors in Pound's Chinese-English translation via Fenollosa's cribs without further commentary (Fang 221), which substantiates "the impression that *Cathay* can in no way stand up as translations" (Yip 5), one cannot deny the fact that Pound has "stunned the world of poetry and translation" (Ieong 112) with the publication of *Cathay* in 1915, a collection consisting of 18 English poems rendered from a small corpus of 19 classical Chinese poems discriminatingly culled from some of the best ancient Chinese poets. A century later, the poetic afterlife known as the Poundian phenomenon continues to fascinate poetry translators, and "Poundians, Poundites, Pounders or Poundists" (Ieong 112) still find *Cathay*'s overnight success and everlasting influence particularly intriguing.

As a lifetime practitioner of poetry writing and poetry translating, Pound raised three esthetic notions in his discourse regarding poetry translation across the border of languages: *melopoeia* deals with "the musical property" of a poem; *phanopoeia* refers to "the visual imagination" involved in a poem; and *logopoeia* signifies "the dance of the intellect among words" in a poem. Amongst the three poetic dimensions, Pound argues that only *phanopoeia* can be "translated almost, or wholly, intact," namely, almost entirely without loss or distortion in the target text (Pound 1960: 25). According to Pound, the three poetic dimensions are not equally translatable or untranslatable. " [C]ertain things are translatable from one language to another, a tale or an image will "translate," music will practically never, translate; and if a work be taken abroad in the original tongue, certain properties seem to become less apparent or less important. Fancy styles, questions of local "taste," lose importance of technique, technicalities in a foreign tongue cannot have for me the importance they have to a man writing in that tongue; almost the only technique perceptible to a foreigner is the presentation of content as free as possible from the clutteration of dead technicalities … " (Pound 1918: 59–60). In a similar vein, "*Logopoeia* does not translate; though the attitude of mind it expresses may pass through a paraphrase. Or one may say, you can*not* translate it 'locally,' but having determined the original author's state of mind, you may or may not be able to find a derivative or an equivalent" (Pound 1991: 114).

Therefore, in Pound's opinion, a poetry translator should strive to render and represent the original visual images, namely *phanopoeia*, in the target language, for that part of poetry is "indestructible" and thus could "*not be lost* by translation" (Pound 1913: 707); in contrast, both *melopoeia* and *logopoeia* tend to be "obtainable in *one* language only and were utterly incapable of being translated" (Pound 1913: 707). Apart from the theoretical contemplation over the poetics of literary rendition, Pound is particularly charmed by the implicit suggestiveness as well as symbolic pregnancy

embodied in ancient Chinese poetry: "It is because Chinese poetry has certain qualities of vivid presentation; and because certain Chinese poets have been content to set forth their matter without moralizing and without comment that one labors to make a translation" (Pound 1918: 54). In other words, Pound's attraction to ancient Chinese poetry accords with his earlier adamant esthetic principle: "The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment" (1911: 130). When the Poundian esthetic pursuit for consummate "vivid presentation" in art (Yip 35) meets the serendipity favored with Fenollosa's notebook that contains inviting and enlightening oriental poetics, the resultative harvest is Pound's *Cathay*: Chinese poetics transplanted "as freely as possible" on the Western soil, in spite of the "clutteration of dead technicalities" that may be of capital import in the original language (Pound 1918: 59–60). As thus, Pound in his imagist manifesto sanguinely extoled "direct treatment of 'the thing' whether subjective or objective" (Pound 1960: 25).

Interestingly, Pound's theory of poetry rendition is similar to yet different from that proposed by Xu Yuanchong, arguably his oriental counterpart on the Chinese mainland. While Poundian esthetic reflections divide the cosmos of poetics into three domains: *melopoeia, phanopoeia* and *logopoeia*, Xu by the same token considers a representative classic Chinese poem to be composed of tripartite beauties, namely that of sound (musical beauty), that of image (image beauty), and that of sense (semantic beauty). Notably, Xu's notion of musical beauty corresponds to Pound's *melopoeia*, his concept of image beauty resembles Pound's *phanopoeia*, and his perception of semantic beauty largely agrees with Pound's *logopoeia*. Similar overall divisions of poetic composition notwithstanding, a fundamental theoretical disparity lies between the two translators in regard to the way they render the poetic charms of the Tang dynasty: the former, unconversant with the rhyming pattern of the original classic Chinese poetry, chooses to transplant Tang poetry as freely as possible in blank verse and/or free verse styles, whereas the latter insists on the indispensability of rhyming effect in translating Tang poetry so as to make intelligible its "musical, semantic, and imagistic beauties" in the target text across the borders of language, literature and culture. It is therefore of great interest to compare and contrast Pound's and Xu's Chinese-English translations of identical Tang poems to see if the poetic elements considered to be "utterly incapable of being translated" by Pound (1913: 707) remain as untranslatable for Xu. Thus, I take Xu's translations to serve as a touchstone for Pound's translations. Through such contrastive translational analyses, one can easily see who has rendered more esthetic dimensions in his poetry rendition of Tang poetry. If one of them has rendered merely a particular poetic dimension of classic Chinese poetry, and his rendition is deemed to be great pieces of poetic art by the critics of the target language, we may further consider his translation to be an esthetic touchstone for the original excellence of Tang poetry. In other words, only when the Chinese poems do shine with their overall brilliance in the original text can one single aspect of successful representation of their poetic essences allow the translator to achieve esthetic accomplishment in the target language. To lay bare the panoramic wonders of classic Chinese poetry, the following section presents two representative classic Chinese poems, followed, respectively, by Pound's and Xu's English translations, which entail further critical analyses and academic discourse.

3. Translations as a dialectic touchstone for detecting formal fidelity to the original Tang poems

Example 1

送友人 李白
Syllables Rhyme
青山橫北郭, □ 5 a
白水遶東城。□ 5 b
此地一為別, □ 5 c
孤蓬萬里征。□ 5 b
浮雲遊子意, □ 5 d
落日故人情。□ 5 b
揮手自茲去, □ 5 e
蕭蕭班馬鳴。□ 5 b
 □
(Li 260)
Taking Leave of a Friend Rihaku
Syllables Rhyme
Blue mountains to the north of the walls, 9 a
White river winding about them; 8 b
Here we must make separation 8 c
And go out through a thousand miles of dead grass. 11 d
Mind like a floating wide cloud. 7 e
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances 12 f
Who bow over their clasped hands at a distance. 11 f
Our horses neigh to each other 8 g
as we are departing. 6 h
(Pound 1915, 28-29)
Farewell to a Friend Li Bai
Syllables Rhyme
Green mountains bar the northern sky; 8 a
White water girds the eastern town. 8 b
Here is the place to say goodbye, 8 a
You'll drift out, lonely thistledown. 8 b
Like floating cloud you'll float away; 8 c
With parting day I'll part from you. 8 d
We wave and you start on your way, 8 c
Your horse still neighs: "Adieu! adieu!" 8 d
(Xu 2000, 126)

Evidently, Li Bai's original Tang poem titled "*Song Yuren*" ("Seeing a Friend off") belongs to the particular poetic subgenre termed *wuyan lushi* (regular verse of five characters in each line) – an "exquisite" ancient classical Chinese poetic form (Han 594), wherein not only the ending syllables of the even lines should rhyme with a single sound throughout the entire poem, with the ending syllable of the very first line being optional, but the couplet of the third and fourth lines and that of the fifth and sixth lines should contain perfect antithetical parallelism, not to mention the strict and complicated requirements governing the even and oblique tones of every Chinese character in every line. Largely abiding by the traditional poetic rules, except that the first antithetical parallelism appears in the first couplet rather than in the second one, Li Bai's poem features optimal formal unity and regularity, as traditionally required of a *lushi* (regular verse), in whose "requisite formality" the Tang poet "expresses his strong feeling of

mourning" (Han 601). Such essential formal unity and regularity is utterly lost in Pound's translation, in which a restrictive total of "8" poetic lines – a critical "even" number as required by such a strict subgenre for the esthetic purpose of seamless structural symmetry as well as impeccable antithetical parallelism – is either "creatively" or "innocently" turned into a poem of "9" lines – an "odd" number that oddifies the celebrated Chinese *lushi*, a poetic genre of strict formal rigors. It goes without saying that the traditional *lushi* of the Tang dynasty remains a perfect stranger to such an oddity for more than 10 centuries.

Furthermore, every poetic line in Pound's English translation, as if it was pounded up by Pound's pounding pen, is composed of a different syllabic number, which risks turning the original lingering poetic ambience into a sheer prosaic reading. Last but not least, the essential rhyme scheme that functions as a magic musical crescendo to wrap up the entire poem with the climactic echoing of the very last character – the petit grand finale, so to speak – within the esthetic experience of "a single sitting" (Poe 140) vanishes all of a sudden in Pound's rhyme-less rendering. Xu, in stark contrast, strives to render and represent the original formal unity and musical beauty of Li Bai's Tang poem in his English translation. As required of a traditional *wuyan lushi* (regular verse of five characters in each line), Xu's English rendition is divided into eight corresponding lines and there are strictly eight syllables in each line across the whole poem. As far as musical beauty is concerned, the original rhyming pattern, which goes *abcbdbeb* with one single rhyme sound running across the entire poem, is strategically domesticated into *ababcdcd*, a rhyming pattern prevalent in English literature and the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition.

As a matter of fact, under the title "I gather the Limbs of Osiris," Ezra Pound the young poet published a first series of essays on music and rhythm in twelve installments in *The New Age* from November 1911 through February 1912. In these early publications, Pound explained his thoughts on traditional quantitative verse and conventional verse based on the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, especially with relation to poetic musicality and lyrical rhythm. In one of these essays he stated to "let the poet who has been not too long ago born make very sure of this, that no one cares to hear, in strained iambics" (January 251, 912). Years later, he expressed the despicable attitude he embraced toward traditional poetic formal rules with Poundian grit and glamor in *The New Age*: "One discards rhyme, not because one is incapable of rhyming neat, fleet, sweet, meet, treat, eat, feet, but because there are certain emotions or energies which are not to be represented by the over-familiar devices or patterns; just as there are certain 'arrangements of form' that cannot be worked into dados" (January 281, 915). That being said, if Pound had undertaken in his translation to represent the formal features of the original Tang poem, he would not have actually bothered himself to introduce "over-familiar devices or patterns" to his native English audiences; rather, he might have largely benefited his Western readership with a revitalizing poetic formal novelty that he would have transplanted from the deep structure of Chinese literature.

Despite the fact that Pound deviates from the fidelity to formal aspects of ancient Chinese versification in rendering Li Bai's "Taking Leave of a Friend," he does succeed in representing the original unique images in the English language. To some critics, "Taking Leave of a Friend" stands, in one way or another, for the best "translation" in *Cathay*, for it demonstrates Pound's esthetic claim that *phanopoeia* does come across the boundary of

languages. In spite of minor changes, Pound's highly literal version not only presents itself as an English "poem" in its own right, but it also brings across what was "literally" existent in Li Bai's original Tang poem: "Both in the simple images – mountains, walls, river, cloud, sunset, horses, etc. – and in the general arrangement into couplets which juxtaposes the objective and the subjective – the imagistic and the propositional, parallelism and non-parallelism, each line and couplet working as contained units interacting with the whole in a dynamic network . . . " (Claro 151). To put it another way, in "Pound's creative partnership with the dead" (Davis 18), the reader witnesses a partnership that cross-pollinates an Eliotian collaboration between Chinese literary tradition and Poundian individual talent. As such, "Pound imparts an awareness of a source text's foreignness precisely by means of his translations' avant-garde challenge to the norms of the target culture" (Davis 22).

Example 2
長干行 李白
Syllables Rhyme
妾發初覆額, □ 5 a
折花門前劇。□ 5 a
郎騎竹馬來, □ 5 b
繞床弄青梅。□ 5 b
同居長干里, □ 5 c
兩小無嫌猜。□ 5 b
…..…..…..…..…..…..
(Li 76-78)
The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter Rihaku
Syllables Rhyme
While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead, 12 a
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers. 11 b
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse, 10 c
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums. 11 d
And we went on living in the village of Chokan: 13 e
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion. 12 f
…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..….
(Pound 1915, 11)
Ballad of a Merchant's Wife Li Bai
Syllables Rhyme
My forehead covered by my hair cut straight, 10 a
I played with flowers pluck'd before the gate. 10 a
On a hobby-horse you came on the scene, 10 b
Around the well we played with mumes still green. 10 b
We lived, close neighbors on Riverside lane. 10 c
Carefree and innocent, we children twain. 10 c
…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..…..….
(Xu 2000, 96)

As the most frequently anthologized poem "by" Ezra Pound, "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" is another household translation in *Cathay*. The above stanza is excerpted from the beginning of a long folk song entitled "長干行" ("Song of Chang-gan"). The folk ballad was known to be composed by Li Bai. Amazed by Li's unchained and unrestrained poetic style of nonpareil grandeur, his contemporary prime minister He Zhizhang (賀知章) lauded him as the "Celestial Banished Immortal" (天上謫仙人) on earth. As a most

celebrated poet of the Tang dynasty, critics tend to consider Li Bai "the greatest of Chinese lyric poets" (Martin 22). Although the ballad style features a highly free and flexible rhyming pattern, the entire ballad actually rhymes from beginning to end with four different sounds (Qiu 77). Such a formal aspect governing the musical harmony with a rhyme scheme of *aabbeb* of the above initial stanza is totally lost in Pound's renowned translation that is devoid of any rhyming pattern (*abcdef*) at all but regained in Xu's *aabbcc* rhyme scheme in the English rendition. Besides, the original ballad lines are each composed of a particular syllabic unity of five characters, namely five syllables, a formal aspect neglected in Pound's rendition but respected in Xu's poetic lines, respectively, made up of 10 syllables. What's more, although the Chinese character "青" signifies a potential color that "covers the spectrum from green, blue, to dark blue" (Yip 137), the pragmatical collocation of the Chinese color term in actual usage is governed by both literary convention and linguistic idiomaticality, rather than by individual chameleonic free will. As such, Pound's "blue plums" does not appear to be as "normal" as Xu's "mumes still green" in the eyes of a Chinese reader as far as the original true color of the fruit is concerned, although the latter cannot help but resort to the Japanese loanword "mume" to achieve syllabic unity. Last but not least, Li Bai's ballad poem depicts a young wife's interior monolog interwoven of sentiments that feature youthful sparks and bashful moods to be rued over: reminiscences, yearning, helplessness, expectation, and so forth, but Pound takes liberty to flesh out her metaphysical solitary "thoughts" into a tangible, corporeal written "letter" to be delivered.

As an arguably Romantic poet of the Tang dynasty in the 8th century, Li Bai boasts Keatsian negative capability, wild imagination, as well as a simple and grand style. Little wonder that he was chosen to be Pound's favorite ancient Chinese poet. Out of the 19 poems in *Cathay*, Li Bai accounts for 12 poems in totality. Not only does Li Bai's legendary life of wanderlust mirrors Pound's diasporic expatriation across and around the globe (Wang 210), but Li Bai's negative capability in identifying himself with female visceral sufferance expressed in vivid poetic images is timely invoked to move the American imagist to render the subjective sensibility with Eliotian poetic objective correlatives. As a result, "*Cathay* is far more than translation as training and instruction, and demands an esthetic approach which surrenders itself to the voice of the poems, to that force which, meaningless in itself, is the medium whereby meaning becomes a poetic experience" (Claro 153). Nicknamed "The Modern Troubadour" and "a living archaism" (Rainey 199), Pound ventured out in Western and Eastern worlds to make a sort of chemical spectrum of the poetic arts of both Occidental and Oriental spheres. It is little wonder that: "Given its legendary status in literary studies, and its bewildering scope and depth, the spectre of Pound's archive looms large in any critical survey of new directions in the field" (Byron 4).

Admittedly, Ezra Pound has buried himself in a lifetime of poetic pursuit and translational practice, as if he were a devoted miner, aiming to "dig up the jewels and present them without the bulk of mud they were found in, the distractions of allusions that require footnotes, or the kind of verbose precision that bedims their luminosity" (Billings 76). Therefore, "[i]n an era when scholarly work is so often subject to measurement and quantification, the qualities of curiosity, inquiry, and critique deserve not merely protection, but also the space and time to unfold and extend the range of understanding of this complex poet" (Byron 4). Yet, in spite of Pound's peculiar

contribution to the Goethean sacred and broadminded ideal of *Weltliteratur*, a truly luminous scholarship of Tang poetry should not remain perfectly ignorant of its luminous details. In point of fact, the original luminous details of Li Bai's above Tang poem reveal to its posterity that a time-sieved and time-treasured *wuyen yuefu* (folk ballad composed of even lines of five characters in each line) is a poem composed of nothing but 150 characters, namely of 150 syllables in light of poetic length. As far as the aforecited stanza of "Song of Chang-gan" is concerned, there are no more than 30 characters, namely 30 syllables. How much "bulk of mud" can it actually contain in such a tiniest universe of poesy? If it be "verbose," as Timothy Billings is so anxiously concerned about, how can it be passed down from generation to generation after a thousand years of time? The candid truth resides perhaps in the fact that a celebrated Tang poem is itself made of nothing but "characters-jewels," that is, without any slightest muddy element at all: mostly 20, 28, 40, or 56 characters, depending on the exact subgenre of the poem itself, that are sieved and screened by the musing poet together with his Sinophone Muse so as to forge a "verbal string of pearls" – pearls that are silvery in both image and sound – which altogether strikes a perfect poetic presentation to be timely favored by the fairest grace of immortality.

4. Tang poetry in the Goethean *Weltliteratur* via translation

By applying Xu Yuanchong's translations as a touchstone to examine Pound's translations, I have pointed out Pound's striking formal infidelity to the original Tang poems, not least his infidelity to both original rhyme scheme and stylistic formal rigors. The touchstone theory can be applied to poetry evaluation, as elucidated by Matthew Arnold (1822–88):

> Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. (Arnold 168)

In a similar timbre, the touchstone theory can also be applied to evaluate poetry via the act of translating, as argued by Dai Wang-shu (1905–1950), a prominent Modernist Chinese poet-critic: translation serves as the touchstone of true poetry. It functions as a "bamboo sieve basket" to sieve the truly poetic elements contained in the original poems (Dai 389). Dai contends that if an original poem is good enough, something truly valuable must be sieved into the target language through the sifting act of translating; on the contrary, if an original poem is valueless in all aspects in itself, then, nothing truly valuable can be sieved into the target language after the bilingual metamorphic process of translating (Dai 388–90).

Based on Arnold's and Dai's touchstone theories, it is no Herculean task for us to infer the true value of Tang poetry from its translation in *Cathay*. T. S. Eliot's criticism on Pound's translation unveils to us how much treasure has been sieved into the English language through the Poundian "bamboo sieve basket," for which Eliot "issued to Ezra Pound a patent" (Qian 416): "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (Eliot Xvii). In truth, Eliot's literary criticism resonates with deep contemplations over the delicate function of rendition:

> Translation is valuable by a double power of fertilizing a literature: by importing new elements which may be assimilated, and by restoring the essentials which have been forgotten in traditional literary method. There occurs, in the process, a happy fusion between the spirit of the original and the mind of the translator; the result is not exoticism but rejuvenation. (Eliot 1917, 102)

If Pound's translation has imported so much valuable poetic elements into English literature, it is admittedly because the original Tang poems are so abundant in them that even unfaithful Poundian translations eventually amount to a happy Poundian serendipitous output:

> In other words, Pound was able to shape a voice never before heard in English because the freshness, simplicity and directness of the poems in *Cathay*, imagist preparation and creative translation perspective aside, result above all from his having rendered Chinese poems which are themselves fresh, simple and direct ... (Claro 153)

In fact, such laudatory adjectives as "fresh, simple and direct" alone do not suffice to characterize the essential features of Tang poetry. As Brad Bucknell contends in his monograph, *Literary Modernism and Musical Esthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein*: what is even more significant, however, is that to attain good poetry there has to be a "union of words, rhythm and music" (Bucknell 57). Tang poetry, as a most prominent and representative poetic genre in the meandering history of Chinese literature, chances to feature such a perfect alchemical union of characters, rhythm, image, tone, and rhyme – in short, a magic union coined of characters-pearls, pearls that have been largely lost between the lines in translation. Judging from "the central role that China came to play in Pound's work" (Twitchell-Waas 157), one cannot help but be astounded by his incognizance of the formal aspects of the Tang poems that the daring *Imagiste* ventured to render. Candid incognizance notwithstanding, Pound's daring spirit, if not brave heart, has constructed a conspicuous cultural bridge between Chinese literature and World literature. Albeit a foreign apprentice of Tang poetry unacquainted with the foundation of its architechtonics, the American Imagist's dauntless venture in cross-cultural and cross-literary translation has successfully introduced Tang poetry to a brand new universe known as World literature.

5. Conclusion

It is the application of the dialectic touchstone, a dialogic touchstone that converges the twain – Arnold's and Dai's theories of the touchstone, that contributes to unveiling to the reader the original "true elephant" in its panorama twice-removed from the original poetic truth in the venturous translation attempted by Ezra Pound: the Tang poems chosen by Pound to translate in *Cathay* are poems that shine in all aspects: namely *melopoeia, phanopoeia*, and *logopoeia*, considered in the light or darkness of Poundian poetics. The foregoing discussions have employed Xu Yuanchong's corresponding translations to serve as an opportune touchstone in investigating the American Imagist's renditions. The research reveals that Pound defaults on delivering the strict formal and musical elements required of the specific Chinese poetic genre of the Tang dynasty, his artistic success in rendering the original images – Chinese objective correlatives, intensive genuine poetic feeling and implicit suggestive pregnancy in the English target language

suffices to make *Cathay* stand out, so to speak, as a collection of poetic novelty as well as esthetic props. It is a pity that Pound's prismatic lens of translation renders just some beams of the poetic gems of the Tang dynasty, for the well-chosen Tang poems are themselves the gem of gems in World literature. Indeed, as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) so wittily puts it: "Few men will drink from the cup when they may drink from the fountain." The truth of *Cathay* is that most Western readers remain strangers to the genuine taste of the natural fountain of Tang poetry, albeit they tend to feel satisfied with a sip or two of Pound's translational cup. In the final analysis, it is with Xu Yuanchong as a touchstone that the study examines what is lost in Pound's translation of Tang poetry. By the same token, it is with Ezra Pound as a touchstone that the research investigates what is gained in his target language. While so much has been lost in translation to the seeing eyes, so much has been gained in translation to the appreciative connoisseurs. Little wonder that Poundian translation shines in those borrowed oriental poetic beams with a brilliancy of his own, an oriental esthetics that boasts poetic imagistic potential, objective-subjective correlatives, as well as superb lingual economy, which Ezra Pound timely draws on to cross-pollinate his contemporary Western poetics of Imagism in "making it new," if not in making it a new era of Pound.

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