

Critical Dreams: Orientalism, Modernism, and the Meaning of Pound's China

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No figure of twentieth-century literature has had a more overt relation to China than Ezra Pound. From the early moments of his career in London to his final days in Italy, Pound made China part of his general project to rethink the nature of the West, to discover in poetry the best that humans had ever said or thought, painted or sung, and renew it. As a young man, he translated Chinese poetry into English, and through that poetry developed an aesthetic theory rooted in an ontology of Chinese writing. Later on, he intertwined Chinese characters and philosophy with his cantos, published translations of Confucian texts, and partially explained his interest by insisting that the texts belonged as much to him as to the Chinese. Such ideas stayed with him till the end of his life: a video segment made in the 1960s (*Ezra Pound*) shows him carefully explaining to the camera the pictorial relation between the Chinese characters for sun, tree, and east, a relation that he first brought to notice in a short book he edited and published in 1918, more than 40 years earlier (Fenollosa).

日	木	東
sun	tree	east

Cataloging Pound's relation to China has been the work of literary critics, who over the years have produced a vast discourse on the subject of Pound and China. Following Pound's literary canonization in the 1950s, scrupulous attention has been paid to his readings of Chinese history, to the sources of his Confucianism, and especially to his translations of Chi-

nese poetry. These have been subjects of innumerable chapters and critical essays, dissertations, and books. They range from meticulously researched discussions of Pound's original source material—John Nolde's *Blossoms of the East*, for instance, compares every single line of Pound's 1940 Chinese history cantos with Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla's 13-volume *Histoire générale de la Chine*—to more contemporary work on the role of the East in the construction of Western modernism. Between the practical and the theoretical we find a number of takes on Pound's techniques of translation, ranging from the critical (Dembo) to the comparatively neutral (Yip), all struggling to decide how far Pound saw into China or, in some cases, how far it saw into him.

The critical discourse on Pound and China thus has a life and history of its own, one symbiotic with but ultimately separate from the person Ezra Pound and his interest in China. It begins in reactions to Pound's earliest translations of Chinese poetry and extends well past Pound's death and into recent literary and cultural criticism. It includes the major texts of Pound criticism when they discuss China, the many essays and books that focus exclusively on Pound's Chinese material, and texts that situate the subject of Pound and China within larger frameworks of literary theory.

As "Pound and China" grows and changes, modifies its premises and reorganizes its conclusions, it reshapes the commonly understood relation between Ezra Pound and China. The latticework that has been built around the original relation between Pound and China can be read not only as a history of that particular relation but also as a history of a particular Western literary understanding of China and the Chinese language. And as a side effect—or perhaps its most important symptom—"Pound and China" also produces various understandings of the West's relation to China in general, understandings influenced by judgments both literary and moral. I am interested, therefore, not only in the ways in which Pound speaks to us about China today but also in the way Pound's perceptions have been either repeated or refused by critics working with a substantially different apprehension of the West's relation to China, their critical visions often dreaming through Pound's literary ones.

FRAME: ORIENTALISM AND MODERNISM

In 1995 Zhaoming Qian published *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams*, a book in which he claims that China's substantial influence on both the principles and the principals of Anglo-American modernism has been sorely overlooked. A year later, Robert Kern published *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem*, a book that attempts

to discover why China worked as an important catalyst for some American poets—among them Pound.

The linking of orientalism and modernism in both titles signals the (be-lated) arrival in "Pound and China" of the vital gesture toward Edward Said's landmark 1979 book *Orientalism*. *Orientalism* is a damning critique of the West's literary and political production of the Orient, which Said says helped justify and extend the West's colonization of the East. It is also one of the major attacks on Western literature's claim to autonomy from politics. Said insists that the literary academy's separation of politics from literature has concealed its cultural and political contribution to imperialism and goes on to suggest that the West cannot seriously study its own literature unless it considers that literature's relation to its political and social context.

Such claims, which offer a powerful explanatory narrative of the history of Western literature, have been less often applied to twentieth-century literature (and to modernism) than they have to the writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Orientalism's appearance in the titles of two books about Pound and China may not point to a general trend in scholarship, but it offers the opportunity to consider the value of the paired terms *modernism* and *orientalism* as a frame for thinking about Pound and China, the modernist and the Oriental.

Inconveniently, Pound, who said much about genre and style, said very little about his relation to China, and therefore makes a poor theoretical foil for Said (even though he makes a good subject of investigation). Both Kern and Qian therefore choose another figure as the avatar of a modernist conception of literature's relation to the Orient: T. S. Eliot. This choice depends largely on one sentence, which appears in Eliot's 1928 introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems*: "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time." This entrancing declaration has exerted such an influence on Pound scholarship that it is nearly impossible to find work in the field that does not cite it. And yet, as Kern points out, Eliot's remark, "often quoted as unqualified praise, . . . actually seems intended to indicate the limits of what Pound had accomplished" (3). Eliot had written:

As for *Cathay*, it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time. I suspect that every age has had, and will have, the same illusion concerning translations, an illusion which is not altogether an illusion either. When a foreign poet is successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time, we believe that he has been "translated"; we believe that through this translation we really at last get the original. . . . His [Pound's] translations seem to be—and that is the test of excellence—translucencies: we *think* we are closer to the Chinese than

when we read, for instance, Legge. I doubt this: I predict that in three hundred years Pound's *Cathay* will be a "Windsor Translation" as Chapman and North are now "Tudor Translations": it will be called (and justly) a "magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry" rather than a "translation." Each generation must translate for itself.

This is as much as to say that Chinese poetry, as we know it today, is something invented by Ezra Pound. It is not to say that there is a Chinese-poetry-in-itself, waiting for some ideal translator who shall be only translator. (14-15)

Eliot says at both the beginning and end of this quotation that Pound effectively "invented" Chinese poetry for his readers. In writing that the poems seem like "translucencies" and imagining *Cathay* a "magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry," Eliot makes clear the degree to which the sheer force of Pound's language makes its China believable. Eliot is thus in the difficult position of making two points at once: first, that *Cathay* is not Chinese poetry, and second, that it is great poetry. The effect of the second of these points is to make the first difficult to hear.

In claiming that Pound has invented Chinese poetry, Eliot carefully lays out the difference between what Pound has written and actual Chinese poetry. He emphasizes that Pound's representation of China will seem translucent for only a few hundred years and insists that "each generation must translate for itself." The illusion of Chinese reality will fade with time. He also insists, however, that no one will ever perfectly translate Chinese poetry: he does not want the reader to imagine he is criticizing Pound for not achieving perfection where someone else might do so. Accordingly, in the last sentence quoted above he insists that there is not a "Chinese-poetry-in-itself" waiting for a better translator. Perhaps because he is uninterested in China, Eliot never says whether actual Chinese poetry qualifies as Chinese-poetry-in-itself, or whether a Westerner might ever read that. He remains fully focused on what the West knows, and how it comes to know it.

Eliot's reaction to *Cathay* finally eludes the knotty problem of actual China with the following:

It is probable that the Chinese, as well as the Provençals and the Italians and the Saxons, influenced Pound . . . on the other hand, it is certain that Pound has influenced the Chinese and the Provençals and the Italians and the Saxons—not the matter *an sich*, which is unknowable, but the matter as we know it. (17)

By "matter *an sich*," Eliot means the actual Chinese or Provençals; he is saying that Pound does not literally influence those people but instead influ-

ences the English idea of who those people are. By differentiating between the matter as such and the known, Eliot can acknowledge both the impossibility of a literary production of "real" China *and* the powerful creative effect of Pound's version of it (emphasized by Eliot's surprising use of "Chinese" and "Provençals"—as if Pound had actually influenced the people rather than the poetry).

A half-century after Eliot called Pound "the inventor of Chinese poetry," Edward Said declared on the first page of *Orientalism* that "The Orient was almost a European invention." Like Eliot, Said is discussing the powerful reality effect of Western representations of the East. In some way, Said names the process Eliot had identified in 1928: the tendency for the West to believe that its literature and art accurately represented the Orient *an sich*. Unlike Eliot, however, Said sees this process as moral and historical, declaring that orientalism allowed the West to justify its imperialist exploitation of a good chunk of the world from the Enlightenment through the Second World War. For Said, orientalism means "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively" (3).

Unlike Eliot, for whom the reality effect of Pound's translations worked primarily as a thought-problem or an exercise in ontology, Said's concern with the West's Orient ultimately returns to the real Orient. The West's Orient develops its "reality and presence" (5) by virtue of the changes it effects on the minds of Westerners who then behave a certain way in the real Orient, dealing its effects on the people and governments that live there. The myth of orientalism thus returns to its source and becomes real, in the form of some extravagant self-fulfilling prophecy.

Said's interest and belief in the real Orient thus requires him to differentiate between the Western idea of the Orient—which only becomes real when it returns East in the form of Western imperialism—and the actual people and countries in the East, who have a reality whether the West thinks about them or not. He writes:

it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was *essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality. . . . There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West. . . .

(5)

In declaring the "brute reality" of Eastern nations and cultures "obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West," Said reveals his sense of the limitations of any fair or reasonable Western representation of the East, which must always come up short of the Orient's "brute reality" (or as Eliot would put it, the Orient-in-itself). His topic in *Orientalism* is the persistence of the Western belief that its knowledge of the Orient corresponded perfectly to the Orient's brute reality.

Making Eliot's declaration on Pound the representative statement of modernism turns the pairing orientalism/modernism into less of a binary opposition and more of a vaguely disturbing equivalence. At the very least, it suggests that the most obvious critical methodology suggested by such a pairing—using Said as the key to unlock Pound—cannot proceed in any simple or uncomplicated way. This theoretical assumption is borne out in the practice of Zhaoming Qian and Robert Kern, each of whom offers a certain resistance to a direct application of orientalism to modernism.

It is Kern who most explicitly puts Said and Eliot together. I have already noted Kern's sense that Eliot's "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" is often taken out of the context of its paragraph and quoted solely as praise. As Kern goes on to show, Eliot's influence on subsequent "Pound and China" criticism might thus be measured by the degree to which readers have ignored the context for the seductiveness of his declaration. By understanding Eliot's position as similar to Said's rather than opposed to it, Kern is able to incorporate elements of both critiques into his own take on Pound. He writes: "What Pound provides in *Cathay*, as Eliot suggested long before Edward Said formulated his conception of 'orientalism,' is not Chinese poetry itself but 'the matter as we know it'" (156). Following Eliot, Kern acknowledges that "Pound's *Cathay* is . . . largely an event within Anglo-American literature" (4). Later, in a nod to Said, Kern also acknowledges "Pound's subcareer as an orientalist" (155) and the degree to which he participated in a very traditional Western understanding of the East.¹

Eliot's concern with truth rather than fairness or justice does not preclude a complicated understanding of the burden of representation. While he appears to favor a sharp distinction between matters *an sich* and matters as they're known, Eliot hedges his bets when he describes the effect of translations as "an illusion which is not altogether an illusion." Unlike a complete illusion, and unlike a thing that is not at all an illusion, an "illusion which is not altogether an illusion" lives and breathes somewhere between the matter as we know it and the matter as such, real and unreal at the same time, like a dream. The only way Eliot can really describe what happens in *Cathay* is to combine the categories that he uses to differentiate between

things. This ontological complication suggests at least one way out of the apparent bind of orientalism, a way to acknowledge that a representation can be a truth and a lie at the same time.

This would seem to suggest that Eliot's understanding of cross-cultural influence is more complicated than Said's. But Said's complication is not in the same place as Eliot's. Said never demands that the West *stop* representing the East. When he declares that the "brute reality [of Eastern nations and cultures] is obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West," Said puts the West in a difficult position, one it cannot escape simply by shedding the burden of representation. Even when the representation seems substantially accurate, it still must confront the strictures of orientalism. For instance, if I reproduce (as Pound did) Chinese poetry's tendency to make each line a complete sentence in my English verse, I am taking something from genuine Chinese poetry, and yet I am still (if I announce to the world that my methodology is Chinese) participating in a Western invention of China—I am helping the West create a China as it knows it. While any single Western perception of China may be accurate and true to the real China, it is also necessarily inflected to some degree by Western ethnocentrism, in its reception as well as its production. (The reverse of this is also the case: just because something is orientalist doesn't mean it's not true.)

In both cases, the basic problem revolves around the possibility or impossibility of truth in representation, more specifically the capacity of representations to seem real while being unreal. What is for Eliot, however, an ontological and aesthetic problem becomes for Said a political and historical one. This difference depends as much on the difference between Eliot's and Said's historical periods and interests as on anything else. Ultimately, the demand or need for representation outweighs the fear that it will fail to adequately represent its object; both Eliot and Said are well aware of the repercussions of that demand.

There is a persistent tendency in Pound criticism to oppose orientalism to modernism, and especially to defend modernism against orientalism. Against this tendency I have been trying to find in both Eliot and Said a common attempt to solve the problem of representation. When it comes to Pound, such an approach is interesting because it offers a way to think about the persistent need to define Chineseness (or its absence) in Pound's work, a need shared by both Pound and his critics. Its persistence also offers an opportunity to consider the terms of critical takes on East/West influence as they are articulated and understood through Pound's work. The primary articulation of those understandings has come through reaction to Pound's translations, especially *Cathay*, to which I now turn.

CATHAY AND THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Cathay was 14 translations of Chinese poems gathered together in a flimsy volume the color of a brown paper bag. It was also, in 1915, a radical example of the new English poetry, a substantial break from traditional Anglo-American poetics and previous translations of Chinese. Its most remarkable aspect today is its endurance. Pound may have been the inventor of Chinese poetry for Eliot's time; he remains in many ways its inventor for our time as well. There are no substantial corrections or revisions to the theory of Chinese translation that he introduced and developed in *Cathay*.

Pound, who did not begin studying Chinese until 1936, translated *Cathay* on the basis of notes taken by the American scholar Ernest Fenollosa, who, while living and working in Japan, had transcribed a number of Chinese poems with the help of a Professor Mori and a Mr. Ariga. Often following, sometimes deviating, from Fenollosa's notes, Pound worked the word-for-word translations into English poetry. Sometimes he guessed at meanings, sometimes he misread Fenollosa's writing, sometimes Fenollosa got things wrong. That Pound's translations are successful has been taken by any number of critics as a literary miracle, by others as a literary fraud.

Such debates revolve around Pound's disruption of then-conventional codes of translation, a disruption through which he granted himself the right to substantially modify any literal or philologically correct reading in order to follow something he might have called the poem "itself." For instance, in *Cathay*'s second poem, "The Beautiful Toilet," Pound simply removed the original's fifth line, making it into the poem's title. "The Beautiful Toilet" is a translation of a poem attributed to Mei Sheng and written around 140 BC. The first four lines of the original are shown on the next page.

We know that Pound had seen Herbert Giles's version of the poem before he translated it. Giles, who served at one point as a British administrator in China, was with James Legge a major influence in turn-of-the-century English sinology. He translated Mei Sheng's opening as:

Green grows the grass upon the bank,
The willow-shoots are long and lank;
A lady in a glistening gown
Opens the casement and looks down, (qtd. in Kenner, *Era* 194).

These lines reveal the well-nigh inevitable Anglicization that Chinese undergoes when translated. Metrically, the switch from iambs in the second and third lines to trochees in the fourth doesn't stem from any Chinese

青

blue
[green]

青

blue
[green]

河

river

畔

bank
side

草

grass

鬱

luxuriantly
spread the
willow
[dense]

鬱

luxuriantly
spread the
willow
[dense]

園

garden

中

in
[middle]

柳

willow

盈

fill
full
[in first bloom of youth]

盈

fill
full

樓

storied
house

上

on

女

girl

皎

white
brilliant
luminous

皎

white
brilliant
luminous

當

just face
[at]

窗

window

牖

door
[window]

The first character, *qing*, can mean both blue and green in different contexts. The notes are by Fenollosa and the words in brackets are Yip's corrections. (Yip 131)

pattern or, it would seem, from the content of the English poem. Grammatically, Giles cannot retain the ambiguity of the Chinese. Even the use of "upon" forces a prepositional assumption where the original has none. And syntactically, Giles's removal of the double words that begin each line accedes to the habits of English readers who would find such repetition odd and disruptive.

It is worth remembering that Pound had seen Giles's version and therefore that "The Beautiful Toilet" might have been quite different had he not had something to react against. Here are Pound's first four lines (the fifth has become the poem's title):

The Beautiful Toilet

Blue, blue is the grass about the river
 And the willows have overfilled the close garden.
 And within, the mistress, in the midmost of her youth,
 White, white of face, hesitates, passing the door. (*Cathay*, n. pag.)

Pound plays faster and looser than Giles with the poem's content, which seems to contradict, for instance, the idea that the mistress is "in the midmost of her youth." But Pound, unlike Giles, manages to retain the double characters that begin each line. In the second line, for instance, Pound's visual repetition of double *l* and aural repetition of short *i* sounds in "willows" and "overfilled" substitute for the double words, and in the third, "within" and "midmost" repeat not only the short *i* but also something like a meaning.² At the same time, Pound makes the poem sound strange in ways Giles does not: the repetition of "and" in lines 2 and 3, combined with a meter that shifts with the poem's tone, offered the English reader in 1915 a poetic experience that registered as different and unusual.

Since *Cathay*'s frontispiece announced its contents as "Translations by Ezra Pound for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku," Pound's poetic innovations naturally appeared to stem from his Chinese sources. The *Times Literary Supplement*'s review of *Cathay*, highly aware of the estranging effect of Pound's meter and syntax, asked: "But is the Chinese language, we wonder, as unusual as Mr. Pound's? If not, he does misrepresent the effect upon a Chinese reader, though he may deliberately do that so as to enable us to understand the Chinese method" ("Poems from *Cathay*").

Pound's critics are not immune to the influence of his "unusual" "Chinese" style. His contemporary Arthur Waley, the sinologist and poet, once insisted that Pound did not translate but only "brilliantly paraphrased" the Chinese originals (*Poetry* 12). Waley wrote his version of Mei Sheng's poem three years after *Cathay*; Hugh Kenner suggests it was published in "implied rebuke" (*Era* 195). Waley translates the poem's first four lines this way:

Green, green,
 The grass by the river bank,
 Thick, thick,
 The willow trees in the garden.
 Sad, sad,
 The lady in the tower. (*Translations* 38)

With small exceptions, Waley uses almost all of Fenollosa's key words. His first two lines, "Green, green, / The grass by the river bank," use two articles and a preposition to place the grass in context for the English reader. That preposition marks the first substantial difference among the versions

of the poem: Giles uses "upon," Pound "about." The Chinese does not necessarily suggest any of these, and this first interpolation marks the difficulty of retaining the sparseness of the Chinese original. Waley's use of "Sad, sad" in the fifth line marks an important departure from the poem's other versions, since it bluntly foregrounds the emotional state of the woman in the tower. Pound had left the tower (the "storied house" of Fenollosa's notes) out of things entirely: "And within, the mistress, in the midmost of her youth." Pound's "within" suggests an interior space, but refers most immediately to the garden in the second line. His translation forgoes the specific interiority of the tower in favor of a generalized "within," a space complicated by Pound's choice of "midmost" to place the mistress's youth; she is "within" her youth in the same way that she is "within" the garden. Pound's version metaphorizes as interior the woman's place in both space and time.

It is difficult to know how to take Waley's translation, since it allegedly corrects Pound's. Like the differences between Pound's version and Giles's, the differences between Pound and Waley may depend as much on Waley's felt obligation to criticize his predecessor as an obligation to accurately translate Mei Sheng. But one way to understand the differences between Pound and Waley would simply consider Waley's version a more literal translation. Waley's poem actually repeats "thick," a closer match to the Chinese than Pound's repetition of /sounds, and through the rest of the poem, his translation quite resembles Fenollosa's (with exceptions where Fenollosa's translations are slightly off). In another book of translations, Waley said he

tried to produce regular rhythmic effects similar to those of the original. Each character in the Chinese is represented by a stress in the English; but between the stresses unstressed syllables are of course interposed. (*A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* 19)

Pound never articulated any method. He simply went further and changed more than Waley.⁵

Accordingly, it may be only in the light of Pound's translation that a reader would find Giles's verse simplistic and dated, or in the light of Waley's that some might conclude that Pound's free-verse translation offered only a limited accounting of the original. And yet Pound's influence on what we today consider to be good translations of Chinese poetry is vastly greater than either Waley's or Giles's. His work appears to have modified the technologies of reading and writing such that Waley's reply seems lamentable to Kenner (*Era* 195) and "insipid" to Yip (134). Kenner comments: "This is a resourceless man's verse; the resourceless man wrote but did not transmute; it is hard to wring song from philology" (*Era* 195).

By the time of Pound's literary canonization in the mid to late 1950s,

scholars wanting to discuss Pound's relation to China were able to see Giles, Waley, and Eliot as their forerunners, in no small part because all three men had credentials not only as poets but as scholars. Often disagreeing with Giles and Waley in favor of Eliot, these later critics, working on Pound as a canonical author and major figure of twentieth-century literature, were able to focus a scholarly attention on the difference between the Chinese poems, Fenollosa's notes, and Pound's final versions.

CATHAY: CHINESE OR ENGLISH PRODUCT?

The question of what made a translated poem "Chinese," and whether Pound's poems were of that type, has remained the major problem for critics of *Cathay*. As authors—some of whom knew Chinese, some of whom did not—worried over Pound's translations, they felt compelled to assess their effectiveness as either English poems or Chinese ones, and wondered at Pound's ability to write such Chinese-seeming poems. George Steiner, writing in 1975, attributed Pound's ability to call forth the Chinese original for his Western readers without breaks for explanation to "a general phenomenon of hermeneutic trust" (359). By this he meant that Pound's adoption of certain conventional associations (bowmen, blue grass, mountains, and so on) effectively reproduces an absence of knowledge that he and the reader share: "Pound can imitate and persuade with utmost economy not because he or his reader knows so much but because both concur in knowing so little" (359). In other words, Pound translated via a kind of cultural shorthand, in which elements easily recognizable as "Chinese"—willows, courtesans, peach blossoms—established the authenticity of the Eastern setting.

Steiner's general sense that Pound's ability to make things seem Chinese had more to do with his English audience than with anything in China concurred with the then-definitive position on *Cathay*, which Hugh Kenner had laid out in 1950: "*Cathay* is notable, considered as an English rather than a Chinese product" (*Poetry* 154). With this claim, Kenner attempted to exorcise the critiques of those who, like Waley, had read *Cathay* primarily as a failure of translation or who, like Achilles Fang, noted Pound's errors without comment. Such a position produced for Kenner an entire reading of *Cathay* as an English product, which appears in his masterful book *The Pound Era* (1971). In a chapter called "The Invention of China," Kenner writes that *Cathay*

inaugurated the long tradition of Pound the inspired but unreliable translator. In the subsequent half-century's sniffing and squab-

bling [over the correctness of translations] its real achievement went virtually unnoticed. (199)

That achievement, Kenner says, lies in *Cathay's* "effort to rethink the nature of an English poem" (199).⁴

The difference between Kenner and Eliot comes out in the contrast between his chapter title "The Invention of China" and Eliot's "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time." The change from Eliot's version to Kenner's not only grants Pound's work a larger breadth of influence (not just poetry but the whole country, and not just "for our time") but also reflects a different critical moment in Pound scholarship. Eliot's more modest claim for Pound's abilities indicates a different sense not only of Pound as a person but also of Pound's place in the history of Western literature. It would probably have been as difficult for Eliot to imagine that Pound invented China wholesale as it was for Kenner to imagine that he hadn't.

Kenner's defense of *Cathay* in *The Pound Era* insists that it is good (poetry) rather than bad (translation). He does so by noting the impossibility of ever translating to perfection, and declares that Pound has done the best he could with often-difficult source material: "from 'Yellow dog useless lament,' which is all [Fenollosa's] text provides, nothing intelligible can be done for an occidental. . . . every detail [in Pound's version] feels intelligible without notes" (206). At the same time, Kenner throws down the gauntlet to other translators who might criticize Pound, including ones who would translate Pound into Chinese. He quotes, for instance, several lines from Pound's 80th Canto, chock-full of references to European artists and poets, and asks: "What might some translator in China do with that?" (207). Against those who might see Pound as a hapless or ignorant translator, Kenner describes a poet who brilliantly develops a theory that allows him to translate the essentials of Chinese poetry without notes or detailed explanations, doing the best possible job with the material he had.

While Kenner, not an expert in Chinese, did not go so far as to say outright that Pound's translations were, despite their mistakes, accurate and intuitively correct representations of their originals, several Chinese scholars working in the United States have been willing to do so. Foremost among these is Wai-Lim Yip, who published *Ezra Pound's Cathay* in 1969, two years before Kenner's *The Pound Era* (though Yip thanks Kenner for being allowed to read an early draft of "The Invention of China"). Following his meticulous comparison of Pound's poems, Fenollosa's notes (when available), and the Chinese originals, Yip concludes:

Considered as a translation, *Cathay* ought to be viewed as a kind of re-creation. In these pieces, we cannot expect to find reproduc-

tion of all the details. . . . Instead, we find the "essential poems" preserved in luminous details. As such, they are bound to differ from the originals in the sense that certain literal details are either eliminated or violated; local taste is modified or even altered to suit the English audience and certain allusions are suppressed in order to relieve the readers from the burden of footnotes. And yet, in the examples we have examined, the "cuts and turns" of the mind in the originals are largely preserved, although Pound's ignorance of the Chinese language and Fenollosa's crippled texts occasionally led him into blind alleys. (164)

In this paragraph, Yip contrasts two types of information that come across in translation, a difference perhaps clearest between the second and third sentences, which differentiate "all the details" from "luminous details." Yip says that while Pound could not get "all the details," he reproduced the ones that were "luminous," that is to say, the ones that illuminate the "essential poems." Yip puts "essential poems" in scare quotes, as if to warn the reader against taking that idea too seriously. But "essential" seems to be exactly what Yip means when he says that Pound preserves the "'cuts and turns' of the mind in the originals." He is claiming that Pound, while not following the exact letter (all the details) of the Chinese poems, has nonetheless seen enough to illuminate their spirit. Both "essence" and "cuts and turns" suggest that Pound in fact reaches the heart of the Chinese originals *as such* and not simply as he knew them, that he manages to retain the crux of the original even though he misses out on some of the details. Like Tiresias, whose blindness produces a heightened ability to "see" into the unknown and there discern the truth of things, Pound as translator appears to know China with an understanding epistemologically beyond book learning, beyond his own ignorance or Fenollosa's mistakes.

The strictures of Kenner's simple division, English product/Chinese product, have been passed by. And while it may make some sort of binary sense to think about *Cathay* as either English or Chinese, the most interesting scholars of Pound seem to wind up somewhere in a complicated and confusing middle ground. For instance, Guyng-Ryul Jang makes Yip's point more boldly: "we can tentatively, but safely, conclude that Pound could invent *Cathay*—not in spite of his ignorance of the Chinese language, but because of his ignorance of the Chinese language" (353). In this world of learning turned upside down, ignorance allows Pound to avoid being trapped by a desire for a literal or accurate translation. Freed from the shackles of knowledge, Pound can discern the spirit of the original Chinese, leading Jang to conclude that "Pound is truly 'an inventor of Chinese poetry,' even

though he may be a 'devious' translator, as far as *Cathay* is concerned" (362).⁵

Jang's acknowledgment that Pound may be a "devious" translator would appear to grant that the carrying over of the Chinese originals to Europe does not happen without distortion. Following Pound's own sense of what could come through translation, Jang declares that Pound might have adequately translated the visual quality and logic of the Chinese originals, but that reproducing their rhythm or their music would be nearly impossible. And yet Jang's Pound displays an uncanny ability to reproduce the music of Chinese poetry. While translations by Waley, William Acker, and James Hightower do not sound "natural" to the "mind's ears" of the English reader (352), Pound's modifications of the Chinese original give the reader some impression of its musicality.

Jang quotes a section of Pound's "Separation on the River Kiang" to explain:

Ko-jin goes west from Ko-kaku-ro,
The smoke-flowers are blurred over the river.
His lone sail blots the far sky.
And now I see only the river,
The long Kiang, reaching heaven.

Jang comments: "The above translation, in spite of its naturalness of rhythm and language and its precision in producing original mood and images, contains some errors. Errors? Yes, if this poem be a translation at all" (357).⁶ Pound "must have known," Jang writes, that "Ko-jin" was not a person's proper name, and "Ko-kaku-ro would be far more desirable than any naive word-to-word translations" of "Yellow Crane Tower" (358). Pound's errors become sound poetic choices, and Jang notes that the first line of the poem—the source of all three errors—allows the reader to "sense waves of pleasant 'recurring sounds'" (358).

Pound's fortuitous errors lead therefore to a "better" translation, if only in the context of an English "mind's ear" as Jang imagines it. For Jang, Pound's unconscious brilliance at the musical level leads him to make "errors" that improve rather than detract from his translation and are therefore not "wrong" in the poetic sense. This focus on Pound's errors-that-are-not-errors leads to the conclusion that Pound, while translating with Europe in mind, has actually done a better job of translating China than others who may speak or read Chinese. Pound's lack of knowledge about China as such thus allows him to present it better, *as such*, to his European readers, via a translation that "deviously" takes a circuitous route to the truth.

Jang's position on Pound raises interesting questions about *Cathay's* role

as a Chinese or English product. While Kenner and other Pound scholars who were not experts in Chinese⁷ had been content to accept Eliot's judgment that *Cathay's* China revolved largely if not entirely around the needs of twentieth-century English poetry, Jang insists instead on *Cathay's* Chineseness. Such a position stems, as I suggested above, from a well-worked notion of Pound's genius. But its major effect is to reposition China at the center of *Cathay*, and therefore to reveal China's effect on Pound (rather than Pound's effect on China "as we know it").

Jang's position prefigures the much clearer recentering of China that takes place in Zhaoming Qian's *Orientalism and Modernism*. Qian's major premise is that the East can genuinely influence the West. This position leads him to claim that Pound did very little "inventing" when translating Fenollosa's notes:

Ever since T. S. Eliot made the influential remark that "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time," . . . Pound criticism has shown a tendency to praise his *Cathay* as an invention rather than a translation. Most critics, it seems, agree that *Cathay* has a freshness, elegance, and simplicity that are rarely seen in English and American poetry. Yet, surprisingly, few will acknowledge that *Cathay* is first and foremost a beautiful translation of excellent Chinese poems that exhibit freshness, elegance, and simplicity. (65)

With "acknowledge," Qian implies that the people who see *Cathay* as an English product do so out of a certain stubbornness, a refusal to admit something they don't *want* to admit. In declaring that the book is "first and foremost" a translation of *Chinese* poems, Qian criticizes those who would see *Cathay* as purely—or even primarily—Pound's. Instead, he is concerned to restore China to its proper place as a major influence on modernism. A sentence by Zhang Longxi on the back cover of the book states that mission concisely: "*Orientalism and Modernism* clearly sets the record straight by addressing the issue of how Chinese poetry and culture helped to precipitate the transition of Pound and Williams toward high Modernism."

Qian's claim that "*Cathay* is first and foremost a beautiful translation of excellent Chinese poems" reflects his reading of *Cathay* as Chinese, a reading that depends on seeing China as actively influencing the West rather than as the passive object of its fixations. Accordingly, in his specific readings of Pound's *Cathay* poems, Qian goes much further than Jang in emphasizing that Pound's "errors" actually improve his translations by bringing them closer to the Chinese originals. On several occasions, for instance, Qian notes that Pound's "errors" suggest interpretations supported by current Chinese scholarship. He writes: "Ironically, Pound's merging of images

from Chinese and Greek myths in 'After Ch'u Yuan,' which is generally seen as a disruptive endeavor, will find support in current Qu Yuan criticism" (34). In another case involving disagreement over whether Pound's "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," an antiwar poem in its English version, mistranslates the stirring call to arms of the Chinese original, Qian reveals that Pound's translation brilliantly anticipates later scholarship on the poem: "It is amazing that Pound, who knew nothing about the debate, should form an opinion so close to twentieth-century *Shi jing* scholarship" (75).

At another point in "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," Pound had rewritten Fenollosa's "Those four horses are *tied*" as "Horses, his horses even, are *tired*" (my emphasis). Kenner says of this change that "it is hard to know whether his [Pound's] eye failed or his dramatic sense prompted an improvement; presumably the latter" (*Era* 219), while Yip sees it as evidence of Pound's attempt to exaggerate the sorrow of the poem. Qian, on the other hand, suggests that Pound's change brings the light of day to the Chinese original as it existed *before* it was modified to suit the ancient emperor for whom it was written down: "It is probable that by making these ingenious changes, Pound has cut the decoration and restored the consistent tone of the ancient Chinese folk song" (76).

Pound's most remarkable ability, however, involves his seeing beyond Fenollosa's notes to the intention of the original Chinese. Writing, for instance, of a case where the "artistic emphasis" of the original has been lost in Fenollosa's notes, Qian says: "Pound, with his keen sensibility . . . must have perceived from the context the intensification of the poet's sense of loss in the concluding line" (71). Sometimes Pound learns not merely from the context but from the original poet's consciousness: "Pound is able to catch Liu Che's vivid imagery precisely because he and the Chinese emperor-poet see things from the same point of view" (41). And on the subject of Ronald Bush's praise for Pound's "inventions," Qian writes: "Amusingly, to my mind what Bush calls fine 'inventions' represent some of Pound's most admirable practices, in which he pierces beneath Fenollosa's crippled notes to Li Bo's original consciousness" (84). While Kenner's justification of Pound's "errors" works on the strength of the poetry's value in Europe, Qian's explaining them instead as instances of Pound's genius for China requires a belief in the accessibility of a truth that offers itself only to those gifted with a kind of second sight.

That Qian understands Pound's deviations as ultimately leading back to their original source, thus producing a China in Europe rather than a Europeanized China, makes it clear why he must disagree with Edward Said. In a book that seeks to redress the failure to acknowledge China's influence on Europe, Qian cannot see Pound's use of China as negative, distorting,

or as a justification of European imperialism. If Pound admired something under the name of "China," then Qian's project might be understood as linking that "China" to the real China and insisting that what Pound admired, what influenced him, and what he translated were all really Chinese, thus restoring China's influence on modernism to its proper place.⁸

Qian opens *Orientalism and Modernism* by sharply differentiating his use of *orientalism* from Said's:

For Said the Orient is specifically the Muslim Orient. For me it is the Far East, particularly China. . . . For Said "Orientalism is a cultural and a political fact. . . ." . . . For me the concept is primarily a literary one. (1)

Qian's literary, Chinese orientalism, as it plays out in his analysis of Pound's and Williams's use of Chinese poetry, refers to the positive influences of China and Japan on Euro-American modernism. Qian explains that Said's model has its shortcomings when applied to Williams and Pound:

First, Pound and Williams did not seem to believe in Western cultural superiority. Second, what attracted the two poets toward the Orient was really the affinities (the Self in the Other) rather than the differences (the Otherness in the Other). (2)

Qian's differentiation establishes a frame in which he can emphasize the importance of China to poetic modernism without needing to follow through on expected criticisms.

Qian goes on to suggest that it is the Far East, rather than the Middle East, that most influenced the twentieth-century West. Accordingly, he believes that "a study of the Far East's impact on Modernism indisputably has greater significance" than a study of Middle Eastern influence (1), and says that "it would be a gross insensibility not to perceive the Oriental contribution to [modernism's] growth" (5). While Said's Orient is weak and debased, Qian's Orient exerts a powerful, almost magical influence on Western authors: "Little wonder that the early Imagists . . . soon fell under the spell of the Orient" (3). Qian goes on to identify Chinese as a sort of ur-model for all world poetry:

In the Chinese models provided by Giles . . . Pound found an art more objective than the Greek, more suggestive than the Provençal, more precise than the modern French, and more brilliant and resourceful than the medieval Japanese. (51-52)

Qian's critique of Said and his critique of canonical *Cathay* criticism both stem from the same ground, namely that neither one acknowledges the importance of China to Western modernism. In the case of Said, Qian

criticizes what he sees as an inadequate and unfair stereotype of the Orient as the weak and passive subject of the West's literary musings. For *Cathay*, Qian seems to suggest that a certain Eurocentric bias has led to a general acceptance, following some version of Eliot, of the idea that China had little to do with *Cathay*. Qian upends the Eliot-Said assumption that any Western take on the East was mostly "invented," insisting instead that Pound's poetry translates (rather than paraphrases or invents) Chinese poetry. In other words, Qian believes in the possibility of knowing the matter as such across the East/West cultural divide, a feeling he makes clearest in his epilogue: "Things non-Western can, therefore, be converted into part of a Western literary heritage" (167). It is a sentence that Fenollosa would not have disagreed with, and yet it represents for Qian a strongly pro-China stance that was simply not possible for Fenollosa (or Pound).⁹

SOME CONCLUSIONS

What is in the air with this new, antiorientalism orientalism is, I think, both a general discomfort with the Saidian critique and a resistance to what Eliot saw back in 1928. If between them, Said and Eliot constitute the necessary frame of discussions of Pound and China today, then the history of "Pound and China" might be understood as an ongoing refusal of that legacy. The defense of Pound by both American and Chinese scholars against criticisms of his translations or of his cultural imperialism—whether justified or not—often takes place in a manner that remains deaf to the generally self-interested Eurocentrism behind the critique of Said's *Orientalism*. Such a defense, practically speaking, produces a misreading of both Eliot and Said.

I have already addressed—as has Robert Kern—the way in which Eliot's phrase "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" shifts meaning as authors try to articulate their sense of Pound's accomplishment. In each case, the disappearance of the context of Eliot's phrase authorizes an expanded sense of what Pound did and justifies by its faith in genius a refusal of the genuinely difficult ideological questions. Likewise, the misreading of Said proceeds by minimizing or ignoring what Rey Chow calls "Orientalism's general and continuing ideological role" (7).¹⁰ Zhaoming Qian and Xiaomei Chen in particular stress the inapplicability of orientalism to China because China was never geographically colonized by the West, which simply ignores Said's major concern in *Orientalism*: the West's production of knowledge about the East, which occurs regardless of the "brute reality" of colonization.¹¹

In a culture where representations of China are multiplying at a rate

related to China's economic and political presence in global affairs, surely it would be useful to establish a history of the West's cultural and literary representations of China that was not squeamish about orientalism and the privileged relationship to textuality. Such a history would at its best deal with the problem of (mis)representation neither by solving it nor by ignoring it, living instead in the more complicated space that combines uncertainty and discomfort with an attempt to write something that's true.

NOTES

¹ Xiaomei Chen is another scholar who resists the pressure of the Saidian trend. Her essay "Rediscovering Ezra Pound" offers a harsh critique of Saidian orientalism. After first suggesting that an essay on Ezra Pound may, in a "post-colonial era," be "politically incorrect" (81), Chen goes on to note that

"Misunderstanding" of the Other in a historical past—although subject to attack in a later age when a new language of theory needs proof for its own "political correctness"—may nevertheless be considered as exceedingly fruitful and constructive within its own cultural dynamics. (82)

Chen's suggests that Saidian orientalism fails to take Pound up in his own cultural context, where his various errors of translation or understanding allowed him to produce interesting knowledge. This leads to her larger claim that "misunderstanding" or "misreading" (81) is the natural form of all cross-cultural encounters: "Misunderstanding" (in quotation marks) means a view of a text or a cultural event by a 'receiver' community which differs in important ways from the view of the same text or event in the community of its 'origin'" (83).

In this, Chen takes up the essential point made by Eliot and Said while refusing the moral judgment usually connected with orientalism. Since "misunderstanding" always occurs across cultural boundaries, she suggests, there is no point in lamenting it; rather we should try and understand how it occurs and what its consequences are. Accordingly, she announces that she will perform a willful "misreading" of Pound, in which she insists, contra Pound, that much of what he thinks of as Confucian philosophy in his cantos is in fact Taoist. Chen concludes her essay by emphasizing again the necessarily hybrid nature of encounters between cultures:

because the desire for the exotic necessarily takes its point of departure from conditions within the "home" culture, the discovery of the culturally alien is not based on the nature and function of those elements in their own, indigenous environment. (103)

² For more on Pound's repetitions, see Kenner, *Era* 193–94.

³ Still, Waley would later tell John Gould Fletcher that his own translations owed a debt to Pound's *Cathay* (Yip 163–64). Yip also says that Waley in many cases "took over Pound's diction and sentence structure" (164).

⁴ Kenner's position on *Cathay's* style agrees with his reading of its meaning: its primary function, he declares, was as an anti-World War I volume, rather than as any representation of Chinese poetry or as an exemplification of imagism.

⁵ Jang does not give Eliot's full sentence: "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time." "For our time" is a crucial part of Eliot's emphasis on the culturally constructed value of *Cathay's* "illusion." Eliot never claims that Pound has actually invented Chinese poetry. Jang here participates in the larger trend of quoting Eliot as though he were only praising Pound.

⁶ The words "west leave" in the original mean to leave the west, not to go west. "Ko-kaku-ro" is in fact the Japanese sounds for Chinese characters referring not to a specific place but to a particular type of building. "Ko-jin" is not a person's name but instead means "old friend." (See Jang 358 and Kenner, *Era* 204).

⁷ Kenner's position was common for Pound critics who had little Chinese in the 1960s and 1970s. For a treatment of *Cathay* largely in its relation to Europe and English poetry, see Davie.

⁸ Even though he is explicitly disagreeing with Kenner, Qian is not immune to Kenner's influence. At one point Qian writes that "after two and a half years of sniffing and squabbling, [Pound] managed to have Fenollosa's essay on 'The Chinese Written Character' published" (64), a sentence that picks up Kenner's "half-century's sniffing and squabbling" in *The Pound Era*.

⁹ Another stance is taken by Xiaomei Chen in her 1995 book *Occidentalism*. In the book's third chapter, Chen traces the history of a movement in recent Chinese poetry that claimed to be influenced by Pound. She thus subjects "Pound and China" to an interesting reversal, in which Pound's "misunderstood" poetries return to the site of their origins only to be in turn "misunderstood"; her subject is not so much "Pound and China" as "China and Pound." And the Chinese "misunderstanding" of Pound, Chen writes, "is as profound as its better-known Western Orientalist counterpart" (69). Chen goes on to explain that the Chinese "misunderstanding" of Pound appeared relative to an official "understanding" of his work as decadent and capitalist; she consequently views the "misunderstanding" as a rebellion against an official totalitarian discourse.

In reversing the polarity of cross-cultural influence, Chen unmasks the particular ethnocentrism of Pound and China criticism, which invariably treats the East as the object of the West's intellect, failing always to consider that the reverse might also be true. This tendency is as present in Pound as it is in the majority of the criticism about him, for which the question is always: What did Pound learn from the Chinese? Kern, for instance, quite explicitly makes this point, writing that

my concern in this book, however, is less with Chinese language and literature per se than with their construction and representation in the West, mostly in the work of Anglophone writers whose own knowledge of Chinese is often quite limited. (xi)

¹⁰ Chow goes on to write:

Critics of Said in the East Asian field sometimes justify their criticism by saying that Said's theory does not apply to East Asia because many East Asian countries were not, territorially, colonial positions. This kind of positivistic thinking . . . is not only an instance of the ongoing anthropological tendency to deemphasize the "colonial situation" as I mention

above; it also leaves intact the most important aspect of Orientalism—its legacy as everyday culture and value. (7)

¹¹ Such a denial constitutes an interesting reaction to the politics of subalterity that dominated cultural and literary studies in the early 1990s. While identification as "subaltern" conferred a certain moral and even literary superiority on its recipient, it also reduced the recipient in some way to a second-class (or Third-World) citizen, one who might have to be saved by his or her benefactors in American universities. This situation, though often produced by extremely well-meaning people, is no less intolerable than its reverse, ethnocentrism.

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