

Pound's Reference to Classical Chinese Culture——Taking "The Pisan Cantos" as an Example

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Abstract: Ezra Pound is obsessed with Chinese classical culture, and his poems are also deeply influenced by Chinese classical culture. His poetry creation draws on the Chinese classical poetry to create artistic conception and embody feelings in the scene, and the content also reflects the praise of Chinese Confucian ideas everywhere. Taking *The Pisan Cantos* as the research object, this paper discusses the process of Pound and Chinese classical culture and the methods of Chinese classical poetry creation and Confucianism of *The Pisan Cantos* reflected in the perspective of comparative poetics, and finally makes a brief evaluation of Pound.

Keywords: Pound "*The Pisan Cantos*", Chinese culture, Classical culture

Ezra Pound was the leader of the British and American new poetry movement in the 20th century. His imagery poetry swept away the cumbersome and obscure Victorian style of the poetry circle at that time, brought fresh air to the poetry circle, promoted the vigorous development of the new poetry movement, and played an important role in the formation of British and American modernist literature. It is worth mentioning that he is particularly obsessed with Chinese classical culture, and has a very deep understanding of it, and is widely used in his creation, which is rare in the world[1-3].

1. Pound and the Chinese classical culture

Pound's understanding of Chinese classical poetry benefited from the orientalist and poet Ernest Fenollosa. Fenollosa translated a large number of Japanese and Chinese poems into English, but died before they could be published. When Pound got the manuscript of Fenollosa, he was surprised by the great initiative of the Chinese people and declared that he had discovered "new Greece" in Chinese literature, thus launching a new "Renaissance".²

Pound has a deep study of classical Chinese culture. He created the western imagery poetry through the translation and interpretation of traditional poetry; translated the Four Books and the Book of Songs through the disassembly of Chinese characters; he also explained the theory of Confucius in the long poem "Poems", making a great contribution to promoting the cultural exchange between China and the West.

Specifically, his relationship with China can be roughly divided into three stages: Before 1920, he translated 28 poems by Chinese poets such as Qu Yuan, Tao Yuanming, Li Bai and Bai Juyi, which were collected in *Huaxia* and other poetry collections. From 1920 to 1945, he became interested in the "ideographic method" of Chinese hieroglyphics, and attempted to practice and promote it in his poems. From 1945 to 1972, he translated a number of Chinese classical documents, including the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Book of Songs*, and the *Book of Rites*, in an attempt to absorb the nourishment of Oriental wisdom.³

Pound has many identities in the study of Chinese classical poetry and Confucian culture. He is not only the recipient of deep influence by Chinese classical culture, reading and learning a large number of ancient classics, but also a disseminator of translating and publishing Chinese poetry, and even contains a large number of Chinese elements and thoughts in his own works. The "vortex" effect of the fresh and natural images of ancient Chinese poetry shows the possibility of the innovation of modern British and American poetry and provides him with inspiration; the beauty of harmony and order in Confucianism and the Confucian ideas are deeply rooted in his heart, providing the continuous power for his creation and ideal. His poetry is connected with the traditional beauty of the East, which gives a new life to western poetry, and the landmark modern poetry masterpiece "Poetry Chapter" is its

product.

"Poetry zhang" is a "landmark" modern poetry, which integrates individual, society, history, culture, with strange structure and rich and complex contents. The chapter consists of 117 chapters, plus several additional chapters compiled after Pound's death in 1972. The chapter is divided into early and late stages, written in 1945 from chapter 72. In the early chapter of Poetry, Chinese themes are very important, but not throughout, while in the later chapter of Poetry, Chinese themes are everywhere, and Confucianism became one of the pillars of all the chapters. "⁴

The creation of the poem lasted for more than half a century, and from its publication in batches from 1917 to 1969, Pound spent almost all his life. Many parts of Pound's chapter have their Chinese names: chapter 13 is called "chapter of Confucius"; chapter 49 is called "chapter of the Seven Lakes". In 1944, Pound said: " For forty years, I have been trying to write an epic, which began in the 'dark forest', passed through the 'purgatory' of human mistakes, and finally consolidated under the 'sunshine'.⁵ At this time, Pound was nearly 60 years old. After leading the imagism and the whirlpool movement, he devoted himself to the creation of Poetry for more than 30 years. In Pisa prison, Pound completed chapters 74 to 84, known as the The Pisan Cantos. At the time when he was likely to be executed for treason, the 11 chapter was written as a last word. The book is scattered: the career of life, friends and beliefs about the Confucian view of prosperity are all gathered in the poem. Among them, prison life, the prophecy of death, compared with the eternity of the surrounding mountains, make The Pisan Cantos the Pound's most poetic tension[4-9].

2. The artistic conception of Chinese poetry in the The Pisan Cantos

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, sentimental poetry prevailed in the West. The British and American imagery led by Pound aimed to "get rid of the sentimental sentiment and moan of romanticism, and strive to make poetry artistically concise and objective".⁶

Pound was first influenced by the condensed expression of Chinese poetry. He believed that in order to break the cliches, procrastination and decadent style left from the Victorian era, it is necessary to advocate a new style and creative technique with concise, distinct images and substantial content. Influenced by the short and concise style of Chinese classical poetry, Pound insists that "never use any words that do not help to express themselves" and draws lessons from the highly concise expression mode of Chinese classical poetry. His poems omit many articles, prepositions, line verbs and other words that have no ideographic function, even if they destroy the grammatical structure of the sentence, they insist to achieve the maximum simplicity. For example, Pang De translated Li Bai's poem "Send Friends" into "mind like a floating wide cloud, sunset like the parting gold acquaintance", and omitted the partial verb. This structure of juxtaposition and province reduction has achieved special artistic effect.⁷

In addition, in order to pursue the neat confrontation of classical Chinese poetry, there are many Chinese parallel structures appearing in Pound's poems. Pound, contrary to the western free and unrestrained expression style, has refined neat poems to express delicate emotions. For example, chapter 80:

"Because of the quiet
Under the Abergil Bridge
Everything flows
Because the trees are quiet
He wandered around in the Urite
Or under its trees
Or is under its railing?"⁸

This segment not only describes the environment and the brush strokes are quiet and fresh, but also describes the scenery with quite interesting interest, which has the charm of ancient Chinese poetry. It also often uses neat sentence patterns, which makes the rhythm of poetry more harmonious and enhances the emotional expression.

Finally, Pound also learned the characteristics of ancient Chinese poetry. In Chinese poetry, the images uses rich associations to link two or two images together. Therefore, the poem has no

connecword in the group structure, and there is no subjective comment from the poet in the sense. The whole poem is composed of several nouns or phrases, and multiple different images overlap in the same space and questions. Without connecwords between different images, the images are combined and jumped, which generates the aesthetic effect of imagery.⁹

Influenced by the application of images in ancient Chinese poetry, Pound also used images to express emotions in his works. He often juxtapose images, lyric scenes, blending scenes, and attract readers with the exotic colors of the picture.

For example, Chapter 76 of *The The Pisan Cantos*:

"And the sun hung high on the horizon, hidden behind the clouds

Set the clouds' edge into orange

The place where the memory is immortal

From the Sancha crossing to the castle

Layers of gray olive branches support the courtyard wall

Leaves flip in the southeast wind"¹⁰

Through the application of images and the construction of artistic conception, the beauty of the East and the creative inspiration of the poets have produced a strong artistic charm, which makes the readers not only face the enjoyment of beauty, emotional resonance, but also arouse the thinking of life. The image characteristics of Chinese classical poetry are very obvious[10-16]. The poets, such as Wang Wei and Li Bai, who are very good at presenting the images directly and letting the scenery express emotion, rarely preaching and commenting, which is exactly consistent with Pound's poetics theory. Therefore, he advocated imagism, supported his poetics theory by using Chinese classical poetry, initiated the poetry movement of imagism, and created western modernist poetry. Pound believes that " 'image' is the instantaneous complex of reason and emotion."¹¹

3. The Chinese characters in the Poetry Chapter of Pisa

In addition to expressing the emotions of ancient Chinese poetry, Pound was also obsessed with Chinese characters. By reading American scholars fee Rosa on the study of Chinese characters manuscripts and notes, pound realized that a meaning Chinese characters often consists of several expressive parts, and these parts itself is a good poetry symbol, the poetry symbol with his image theory, so he thinks that Chinese characters itself is a special image. Thus it can be seen that Pound not only understood the mystery of Chinese characters, but also excitedly found that Chinese characters have the characteristics of the image he was looking for: concise, vivid and profound meaning. Therefore, he used Chinese characters as a concise and vivid image into his poems.¹²

Poetry zhang is a complex epic work. From ancient times to modern times, from Europe to America and Asia, poets cite both classics and recall the past. There are 18 kinds of foreign characters alone, including Chinese, which appears more times. In the Chapter of Pisa alone, Pound quoted the University twice, the Doctrine of the Mean four times, the Analects of Confucius 21 times and Mencius nine times.¹³ In his opinion, Chinese characters— hieroglyphics — makes the perfect combination of images and concepts in concrete forms. Chinese characters are expressive and vivid, vivid and picturesque; in essence, Chinese poetry belongs to the imagery poetry. In addition, the Chinese language is concise, clear and concise. All of these had an important influence on Pound's writing, especially the creation of imagist poetry. In his life, he talked about how Chinese characters were "identical", "Japanese", "east", "wood", "male", "Japanese", "sun" is the image of the sun; "wood" is the image of a tree; two "wood" together is "forest"; the sun hanging in the tree is "east"; power plus the field is "male".¹⁴

For example, Chapter 77 of *The The Pisan Cantos*:

"The north wind comes with its unicorn

The corporal was heartbroken

On the hut

Shining dawn

On the hut"

Between the "shining dawn" and "on the hut", Pound inserts a character "Dan" to show the image of the dawn, using the Chinese characters as images into poetry.

In the *The Pisan Cantos*, there are many such examples: such as "mouth" is "like the sun — the mouth of god", "zhi" is "ambition, if the heart of the man" and so on.

In fact, according to statistics, this kind of hieroglyphics only occupies a part of Chinese, while most Chinese characters do not reach the state of "same heart and thing" as Pound imagined. In other words, Pound really hopes that Chinese characters would be hieroglyphs, no matter how many real hieroglyphs actually are. This is due to the need of his own poetics, and the "imagery" poetry he advocated seems to be confirmed in Chinese poetry. Concavity, imagery, clarity, unembellishment and commentary, all seem to be realized in Chinese poetry[17-21].

4. Confucianism in the *The Pisan Cantos*

In April 1945, Pound was arrested in La Baro, Italy. When he realized he was going to be taken somewhere, he grabbed a copy of the Four Books and a Chinese dictionary and put it into his trouser pocket. In Pisa Prison, he relied on the Chinese dictionary in the six feet square cell, stubbornly reading the Four Books and translated, which he thought was the greatest contribution to world literature. "The University" and "The Doctrine of the Mean" became the pillars of his faith, and Confucius became the spiritual mentor for his self-dialogue in his cage.

The *The Pisan Cantos* is an important work of Pound's life. It was originally published in the form of a monologue, mostly in Pound's words in prison. What followed was Pound's patchwork of memories, such as London, Paris, Italian and Venetian restaurants, bistros, cafes, or impressive literary gatherings, and conversations in these places, all related to literature.¹⁵

He wrote in Chapter 74:

"Under the gray cliff on the landscape
The sun dragged her stars down the sun
under the sun,
The wind came in the footsteps of the tree
Lonely man
Never alone"¹⁶

It shows that Pound tirelessly spread the flame of Confucianism to the West, mainly because his political ideals coincided with Confucianism. If it was only a poetic interest, then Pound could never write his epic in a desperate situation.

After studying many Confucian classics, Pound mentioned various Confucian ideas many times in Poetry, such as Confucius' thought of "the way is dao in the world". For example, chapter 74 of Poetry:

"The love of filial piety is
The foundation of human nature
The root of the way
It's not even true."¹⁷

In the political pursuit of the ideal country, Confucius hoped to establish a great society for the good of the world. Only by people with the heart of filial piety can they be benevolent and implemented in the society. He attributed the ruling order and social norms to this. Through the self-moral cultivation of "propriety, righteousness and letter", and using the political strategy of "governing the country by virtue", he finally achieved the goal of "loyalty to the king" and "patriotism". In terms of the attitude towards law and punishment, Confucius believed that the governance of the country only by the law should not make the mistakes feel ashamed, but also rely on moral education. Only when the people accept his "benevolence" thought, can they consciously self-denial and consciously go from good to the right way. In terms of his attitude towards ghosts and gods, Confucius believed that the most important thing was to pay attention to the real world, and to stay away from the "strange forces and disorderly

gods". Therefore, despite many myths and legends in ancient China, ghosts and gods superstition and theology, the religious atmosphere in China is still not as strong as the West, and it is mostly influenced by Confucius thought. Throughout the poem, Pound hardly involves the story of the devil in traditional Chinese culture, and has great respect for the attitude of the gods, such as the benevolence and the Virgin Mother image repeatedly mentioned in the poem.¹⁸ The Confucian concepts of morality and statecraft repeatedly appear in Pisa Poems, reflecting Pound's praise for Confucianism.

In chapter 76, Pound describes the ideal government that he had always wanted to see:

"We doubt

The government will not trust this' middle one

The word 'honesty' has been made

be the pink of perfection

No more gift to the country is Confucius's understanding

The man named Zhongni

Description rather than written as classics"¹⁹

These lines of poetry more directly express Pound's strong admiration for the Confucian concepts of "the mean" and "honesty", as well as his ideal of "rebuilding Europe with Confucianism".

After the First World War, the West became the "wasteland" of thought, abstract rationality lost its persuasion in the face of the powerful war machine, the stale poetry art of the 19th century could not resonate with people who had faced death, and Christian theology lost many believers. The war devastated the western culture overnight, and the faith that supported the faith collapsed. At this time of pound with "meaning" Chinese poetry emotion and ideal, in his view, Chinese expression of poetry and Confucianism can "cure" the shortcomings of their civilization and poetry, is the medicine to save the western civilization, in the poems related with Chinese traditional culture, Christianity in the identity of the recipient, in pound heart, not want to use Confucianism to replace Christian beliefs, but to use the Confucian long to fill the short of the west. For example, in chapter 74 of Poetry, Pound wrote:

"And the exact definition of Confucius " honesty'

Pass to Sigermundo,

And on to Ducho, Zuan Belin,

Or passed to the Bridal Church in the Outer Tiber district of Rome,

The Church of Christ Bride with parquet,

Direct transmission to our time / deified emperors"²⁰

As written in the poem, Pound hopes that the ethical ideas of Confucius represented by "honesty" can be passed on to a group of Italian artists, such as Sigscarmondo, sculptor Du Qiao and painter Zu An Belin, to the Church of the Christian Bride in Rome, to break the ignorance of the people and finally to the deified emperors and influence the whole country. The whole "poem" works, pound is also holding Confucianism to word of mouth, eventually make the Christian take its essence to the benefit of the western world, pound with his open, inclusive spirit of internationalism to Confucianism with a certain height, to western Confucianism, hope more and more scholars, scholars, economists, political scientists can focus on the east, looking for salvation.

However, the reality is certainly less idealized than in Pound's vision. First of all, there are differences between China and the West in various aspects, but in Pound's works, the background of these differences in basic conditions is not noticed. In his works, this unattainable "encounter" seems to have been realized, and the bridging gap seems to have been closed. Secondly, Pound has an idealistic tendency in his understanding of Chinese Confucianism. The "China" that Pound knows and expresses is more like a "mysterious, distant and romantic country". Pound's China, which changes the ignorant and backward Oriental image, interweaving the central culture with a positive and beautiful attitude, where the imaginary and idealized components may be greater than the actual description. And this is exactly what Pound needed in his historical conditions and in his personal creative practice. Pound's view of China still belongs to an Oriental concept, and what he projects on the concept of "China" is an ideal picture. The East from all directions absorbed and created the concept of "China". The idealism of Chinese language helped him find the poetic basis for creating the imagist poetry and became the

creator of Chinese poetry; the idealization of Confucius and Confucianism made him find the strength to fight against Christian civilization, especially the human paradise he dreamed of, and became the western Confucian who spread Confucianism to the West and creatively introduced Confucius.²¹

5. Conclusion

In short, the imagism movement initiated by Pound flourished after absorbing the rich nourishment of Chinese classical poetry. The poetry revolutionary movement broke the American poetry language rigidity, the lack of emotion, pound not only with the creation of ancient Chinese poetry method, brought the American poetry continuously the breeze, accelerate the pace of American poetry towards popularization, nationalization, also introduces the idea of Confucianism into the world vision, made a great contribution to the spread of the Chinese.

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