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ZHAOMING QIAN

TRANSLATION OR INVENTION: THREE CATHAY POEMS RECONSIDERED*

Ever since T. S. Eliot made the influential remark that "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (xvi), Pound criticism has shown a tendency to praise his *Cathay* as an invention rather than a translation.¹ Most critics, it seems, agree that *Cathay* has a freshness, elegance, and simplicity that are rarely seen in English poetry.² Yet, surprisingly, few will acknowledge that *Cathay* is first and foremost a beautiful translation of excellent Chinese poems that exhibit freshness, elegance, and simplicity.

Indeed, to what extent can *Cathay* be read as a translation? How much of its charm is transformed from the original and how much of it is actually invented by Pound? To seek an answer to these questions, one has to compare carefully Pound's *Cathay* poems with the corresponding Chinese texts and Fenollosa's notes which served as intermediary when Pound did the rendering. Twenty years ago, Wai-lim Yip made a pioneering effort at examining the "triple relation," to whose brilliant full-length study *Ezra Pound's Cathay* the present author owes a heavy debt. We may as well start our investigation with "Taking Leave of a Friend," which Yip has used as an example in his study. Whereas Yip's focus is on the syntactic aspect of the poetry, I will direct more of my attention to the aesthetic and thematic concerns in our comparison.

Let us first quote Pound's version of the poem.

Blue mountains to the north of the walls,
White river winding about them;

*I wish to thank Professor Barry Ahearn for taking the time to read and comment on the earlier versions of this paper. I should also like to thank John Blair for reading the first draft.

1. Kenner 154 states that "*Cathay* is notable, considered as an English rather than a Chinese product . . ." Bush 44, in discussing "Exile's Letter," argues that Pound gives the poem "some of his finest inventions." Jang 351 maintains that "*Cathay* can be read as an 'invention' or recreation rather than a translation."

2. See Hueffer (i.e. Ford) 108: "The poems in *Cathay* are things of a supreme beauty." Kodama 207: "it is not hard to imagine the impact the freshness, simplicity, and beauty of these poems had on the audience at the time of the book's first appearance in London."

Here we must make separation
And go out through a thousand miles of dead grass.

Mind like a floating wide cloud,
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances
Who bow over their clasped hands at a distance.
Our horses neigh to each other
as we are departing. (137)³

The original poem was composed by Li Po or Li Pai⁴ (701-762 A.D.), one of China's greatest poets. Here it runs with Yip's word-for-word translation following under each line⁵:

青	山	橫	北	郭
green	mountain(s)	lie-across	north	outer-wall-of-city
白	水	繞	東	城
white	water	wind-around	east	city
此	地	一	為	別
this	place	once	make	separation
孤	蓬	萬	里	征
lone	tumbleweed	ten-thousand	miles	travel
浮	雲	游	子	意
floating	cloud(s)	wanderer		thought (mood)
落	日	故	人	情
setting	sun	old	friend	feeling
揮	手	自	茲	去
wave	hand(s)	from	here	go
蕭	蕭	班	馬	鳴
hsiao	hsiao ⁶	parting	horse(s)	neigh
[xiao	xiao]			

If we compare the two, we'll immediately note that they share a distinct terseness and formal beauty. Pound's short lines, simple words, and parallelism as seen in lines 1 and 2 and lines 5 and 6 are all imitations of Li Po. More importantly, the pictorial quality that we perceive in "Taking Leave of a Friend" is unmistakably from the Chinese original: notice that in both versions each line represents a separate scene, and joined

3. All quotations of *Cathay* are taken from *Personae: The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1971). Further page references appear in the text.

4. *Li Pai* is the current standard Romanized spelling of the poet's name in China. But since *Li Po* has been more widely accepted among English readers, I shall adopt the latter form to refer to him in this study. It may as well be noted here that there are two systems employed for the transcription of Chinese characters: the Pinyin system and the Wade system. While I follow the Pinyin system in this paper, older scholars like Yip use the Wade system. *Li Po*, however, is neither the Pinyin nor the Wade spelling.

5. See Yip, p. 13.

6. Fenollosa is correct in noting that "hsiao hsiao" is "onomatopoeia for a solitary horse neighing." See Appendix 1.

together, they form a unified whole. The images: *mountains, walls, river, cloud, sunset, hands, horses*, etc. are all literal translations. The *dead grass*, however, is a simplification of the original “*孤蓬 gu peng*” (*lone tumbleweed*). Since both images suggest desolation and aimless drift, Pound’s version can hardly be called an invention.⁷

These images, by themselves, are familiar rather than foreign to the English reader. Indeed, most of them are seen more often in Western poetry than in Chinese poetry.⁸ Nevertheless, the way they are combined or juxtaposed is exotic. “Blue mountains” and “White river,” for example, are perhaps collocations that never occur in English poetry. In fact, the color word “*青 qing*” in classical Chinese can mean “blue,” “green,” “grey,” or “black” according to the context. Yip is certainly not mistaken to gloss the word as “green.” However, as readers of classical Chinese poetry, we must be aware of the fact that classical Chinese poetry is to a certain extent like classical Chinese painting and that in classical Chinese painting mountains in the far distance are depicted blue rather than green to show a “linear perspective.” This is so because, as one Chinese art critic explains, “the air is not entirely transparent. Therefore the densely-wooded mountains in the near distance are deep green while those in the far distance look pale blue or violet; further away still they are even paler until they become void of colour and their outlines obscure” (Jin 169). Thus, in Li Po’s contemporary Wang Wei’s lines

渭 城 朝 雨 邑 輕 塵
(In) Weicheng (a) morning shower (has) settled (the) light dust;
客 舍 青 青 柳 色 新
(The) inn-yard (looks) green (with) green willows fresh.
(Emphasis mine)

the character “*青 qing*” would signify to a Chinese reader the color of light green rather than those of blue or grey. Pound is quite accurate in rendering the second line as

The willows of the inn-yard
Will be going greener and greener, (137)

for after the morning shower, the willows right before one’s eyes naturally look very green. By contrast, in Li Po’s

7. In fact, “dead grass” is contributed by Fenollosa. See Appendix I.

8. According to Zhu 200, “There are two modes of beauty in nature: ‘energizing’ and ‘melting.’ ‘Energizing’ beauty refers to such things as mountains, seas, storms, still nights[,] and boundless deserts; ‘melting’ beauty refers to breezes, the moon, fragrance, shadows, hills[,] and lakes.” He believes that “Western poetry is primarily ‘energizing’ whereas Chinese poetry is primarily ‘melting.’”

三 山 半 落 青 天 外

(The) Three Mountains half visible beyond (the) pale sky,

“青天 qing tian” should mean “pale sky” or “dim sky.” More precisely, the phrase refers to the distant grey mist that obscures a full view of the Three Mountains outside the city of Jinling. So, in “The City of Chōan,” Pound is not at all wrong to omit the word “blue” that occurs in Fenollosa’s paraphrase:

The triangle mt. is half disappearing beyond the blue sky,
and put in the word “far” in his

The Three Mountains fall through the far heaven. (138)

As for “White river” in “Taking Leave of a Friend,” if one knows Wang Wei’s famous line “At sunset rivers and lakes gleam white” (qtd. in Jin 165), one will have no difficulty understanding that the whiteness of the water specifies the time of the parting scene in the poem. So, the color words here as well as in other classical Chinese poems really have the power of suggesting distance, time, and atmosphere. Whether Pound had through his English friend Laurence Binyon acquired an understanding of the aesthetic value and significance of Chinese paintings,⁹ and so was conscious of the visual suggestiveness of these images, we cannot know. But one thing is reasonably certain: these unexpected collocations, initially kept in Fenollosa’s notes (see Appendix I), must have appealed to Pound’s poetic sensibility, and therefore he deliberately translated them literally to preserve the exotic flavor.

With the same sensibility and deliberation, Pound also manages to imitate Li Po’s efficient style; notice the sharp transition from objective to subjective in the third line:

Here we must make separation.

Fenollosa renders this line as:

At this place we have for once to separate.

And Shigeyoshi Obata, whose translation of Li Po has won many admirers, has this to offer us:

Here we part, friend, once forever. (94)

Both Fenollosa and Obata have translated the formal meaning but missed the style and the tone. Pound alone, by using the English modal verb “must,” has brought out the sharpness, and

9. Holaday 27-36 offers a detailed discussion of Binyon’s effort to introduce Chinese aesthetics to the West and his influence on Pound.

in addition, conveyed the implication in the original; the poet and his friend have walked for a long while hating to part with each other.

When we come to the next couplet, however, we find inconspicuous differences within overall resemblance. Read Pound's

Mind like a floating wide cloud,
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances

side by side with Li Po's

浮雲游子意
Floating clouds, a wanderer's mood
落日故人情
Setting sun, an old friend's feeling.

One is struck by the affinity in imagery and sentence structure between the two. But a closer scrutiny reveals that Pound has ingeniously reversed Li Po's order of the images in the first juxtaposition. Moreover, he has added the connective word "like" in both lines perhaps in order to achieve clarity and a poetic flow. But in effect, the intended ambiguity and simultaneity in Li Po's lines are thus destroyed:¹⁰ a thing Pound would never do again in his later career when he learned more about Chinese poetry.

In line 7, nevertheless, we notice a more conspicuous discrepancy: "揮手 hui shou" ("wave hands") in the original is changed to "bow over their clasped hands." Examination of Fenollosa's notes indicates that this is not totally Pound's creation: Indeed, for "揮手 hui shou" ("wave hands"), Fenollosa provides three possible glosses: "(s)haking hands," "brandishing (hands)," and "(w)ringing hands" (see Appendix I), of which the first and the third are apparently erroneous. The second gloss "brandishing (hands)," though awkward in English, does point to the correct meaning of "waving hands." But Pound might have rejected it because it appeared more like a Western farewell gesture. Thus, misled by Fenollosa's glosses, he further labors to highlight the scene by presenting what he thinks must be a typical Chinese formality of courtesy at parting. This is of course a forced dramatization. Luckily, it is not so drastically devious as to destroy the original notion; namely, men are unable to voice their inner feelings, hence the silent communion. In Pound's translation, we can still sense the electricity of emo-

10. For a fuller discussion of these qualities in the Chinese syntax, see Yip, pp. 21-23.

tions: the two friends are at a loss what to say when the time has come for them to separate.¹¹

Then the awareness is articulated by the neighing of the parting horses. This unconventional treatment that we find in Li Po's concluding line is parroted in Pound's rendering. Notice that the communion between men is followed by the communion between men and nature.¹² Indeed, the same sort of poetic situation is found in other translations of Li Po by Pound. In "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," for example, we find the lonely court lady

... let down the crystal curtain
And watch the moon through the clear autumn. (132)

Meanwhile, the solitary moon is also watching the court lady with compassion. In "Exile's Letter," we read lines such as:

And the water, a hundred feet deep, reflecting green eyebrows
--Eyebrows painted green are a fine sight in young moonlight, (136)

and experience a moment in which "the human world and the world of the landscape reflect each other, and the equilibrium suggests the permanent ministry of poetry" (Bush 44-45). Bush, in discussing this section of the poem, comments that here Pound has given the poetry "some of his finest inventions" (44). But he is hardly aware that the harmony between man and nature which he admires is there in the Chinese original and that Pound's presentation is but a beautiful imitation of Li Po.¹³

In "Taking Leave of a Friend," it should also be pointed out that for the Chinese reader the fascination of Li Po's closing line lies not only in its philosophical idea, but in its rhetorical effect as well. The five Chinese characters "萧萧班马鸣" *xiao xiao ban ma ming* ("xiao / xiao / (the) parting / horse(s) / neigh") echo a classical line from *The Book of Songs* (《诗经》 *Shi Jing*): "萧萧马鸣" *xiao xiao ma ming* ("xiao / xiao / (the) horse(s) / neigh").¹⁴ Li Po here has just added one character "班" *ban* ("parting"), but by adding that character, he has given the classical line a new life. As the Chinese character "班" *ban* can mean "stray," "lost," "wandering,"

11. Cf. "What is the use of talking, and there is no end of talking. / There is no end of things in the heart" in "Exile's Letter" (Pound 136).

12. I tend to think that there is a Buddhist atmosphere here. As Zhu 207 points out, "The appreciation of nature through meditation is the greatest strength that Chinese poets gained from Buddhism."

13. One of the "inventions" Bush admires is Pound's subtraction of "agents and agency from Fenollosa's line, 'we floated a boat and played with the water.'" In fact, by cutting the agents and agency, Pound has restored the original presentation because the corresponding line in the Chinese text doesn't have agents or agency.

14. The one is from "车攻" *Chē Gōng* ("Our Chariots Are Strong"). For the Chinese text and English translation, see Legge, p. 290.

"separating," or "separated," the implication and stress are obvious. Thus, almost effortlessly, Li Po has brought the theme into prominence. This artistic emphasis is lost in Fenollosa's notes. Pound with his keen sensibility, however, must have perceived from the context the intensification of the poet's sense of loss in the concluding line, and therefore managed to reproduce the effect in his own way. Specifically, he resorts to the typographical device of breaking the line into two:

Our horses neigh to each other
as we are departing.

giving a little pause in between. The technique is entirely English or Poundian,¹⁵ but the effect is fully in accord with the Chinese original.

The saddening atmosphere in the final couplet is in fact a key to the motif of the entire poem. From it we see that the verse conveys the poet's feeling of sadness, loss, and anxiety at the fixed moment of his friend's departure. Unlike most English poems, however, this idea is not stated by words, but rather suggested by visible objects or images. The objects in the poem, we note, are all imbued with the poet's tranquil emotions: "drifting grass" (4), "wandering mind," "floating cloud" (5), "the setting sun" (6), etc. In them one perceives a strong sense of loss and apprehension. In fact, even the "misted mountains" and "the winding river" in the opening scene are not void of this spirit. They are suggestive of unforeseeable dangers and countless twists and turns in a wanderer's course of life.¹⁶

Thus, in "Taking Leave of a Friend," there is a silent communion between scene and sentiment, objective and subjective, nature and man. The images blended with feelings are able to incite the reader to build up in his imagination the undepicted details in the landscape and reconstruct what remains unsaid by the poet. If these images capable of silent communion are the charm that has appealed to Pound's readers, then they are all there in Li Po's original poem. But Pound as the translator deserves to be given credit for his success in bringing it across.

It is true that not everything in Li Po's original is kept intact in Pound's translation. Li Po's metrical arrangement, for example, which would be familiar to the Chinese reader, is changed to an English rhythmic pattern that sounds natural to

15. Cf. the closing lines of "Exile's Letter" (Pound 136).

16. Fletcher 173 states: "In Chinese thought, from antiquity down to the present day, there has been no separation made between human nature and external nature; and it is for this reason that the Chinese poets have so easily been able to shift their attention from one to the other." This observation may help us understand the poetic situation here.

Pound's audience. Li Po's cultural references are likewise lost in the rendering. But as is generally agreed, no translation translates everything. This is especially true when one copes with a language and culture so drastically different from English.¹⁷ The translator in such a case has to decide what to preserve and what to sacrifice. For Pound, what matters most in translating Chinese poetry are the fresh images and the sophisticated presentation, and what is less important and so can be sacrificed are the "music," the "(f)ancy styles," and things of "local taste."¹⁸ In his own words, Pound makes it clear to us that he translates Chinese poems precisely

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 . . . (qtd. in Yip 34)

As Yip points out, "(t)hese characteristics, namely 'vivid presentation' and 'without moralizing and without comment,' echo . . . the imagist credo: 'Direct treatment of the thing' (Summer 1912 *LE* 3), 'Don't be viewy' (1913 *LE* 6), and many related points" (34). So, it is Pound's own poetic sensibility that has inspired him to make a great effort to mimic Li Po's philosophical way of presenting poetic ideas. And it is also Pound's own poetic sensibility that has ensured his triumph in bringing out the Chinese poet's quintessence.

If Pound is essentially imitative in "Taking Leave of a Friend," and the beauty of the poem should first be ascribed to Li Po, he is more inventive in the "Song of the Bowmen of Shu." It is accordingly more difficult for us to determine how much of the charm is from the Chinese text and how much is Pound's creation.

The opening of Pound's "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" is worth quoting:

Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots
And saying: When shall we get back to our country?
Here we are because we have the Ken-in for our foemen,
We have no comfort because of these Mongols. (127)

The original Chinese text of this poem is from *The Book of Songs* (《詩經》 *Shi Jing*). Entitled "采薇 *Cai Wei*" or "Pick Ferns," the poem has six stanzas, each consisting of eight four character or syllable lines (indeed, most of the songs in *The*

17. Fletcher 165 observes: "... in the case of a language basically so different in its construction from English as classical Chinese, it is easy to see that any translation must, of necessity, be inexact as regards its ability to transmit all the shades and overtones of the original meaning."

18. These are Pound's own phrases, quoted in Yip, pp. 70-71.

Book of Songs were written in four character lines). Here is the first stanza of the poem which corresponds to Pound's first four lines of the "Song of the Bowmen of Shu." The literal translation given below is again Yip's.¹⁹

采	蕨	采	微
pick	fern	pick	fern
微	亦	作	止
fern	(expletive)	sprout	(expletive)
曰	歸	曰	歸
(expletive)	return	(expletive)	return
歲	亦	莫	止
year	(expletive)	dusk (v.)	(expletive)
靡	室	靡	家
no	house	no	home
玆	玆	之	故
Hsien	yun	's	cause (Because of Hsien-yun)
[Xian	yun]		[Xianyun]
不	遑	啓	居
no	time	kneel	sit (i.e. rest)
玆	玆	之	故
Hsien	yun	's	cause
[Xian	yun]		

The discrepancies between the two versions are apparent. For one thing, Pound has combined every two lines in the original into one, thus forming longer lines with more complicated sentence structures.²⁰ For another, he replaces the internal repetitions that occur in lines 1 ("Pick ferns, pick ferns"), 3 ("Return, return"), and 5 ("No house, no home") with a more varied repetition that disperses through the lines ("Here we are . . . / . . . / Here we are because . . . / . . . because . . ."), thus eliminating the choppy rhythm of the original, which would sound much too light for the sad tone of the poem if rendered into English.²¹ In other words, Pound's approach here is to

19. See Yip, p. 104.

20. Cf. "Midnight, and a letter comes to me from our mistress: / Telling me to come to Tibur: / At once!!" in "Homage to Sextus Propertius" (Pound 212).

21. Cf. Pound's retranslation of the poem, entitled "Ode 167" in *The Classic Anthology, Defined by Confucius*:

Pick a fern, pick a fern,
ferns are high,
"Home," I'll say: home,
the year's gone by,
no house, no roof.
these huns on the hoof.
Work, work, work, that's how it runs,
We are here because of these huns.

assimilate the meaning of the original and then reproduce it as a whole in his own poetic manner. Thus, in the "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," we read the complaint of an ancient Chinese frontier guard in the form of a natural modern English verse. There are local images reminding us that it is a Chinese poem. But, unlike "Taking Leave of a Friend," the charm of the "Song" doesn't lie in the literal translations of the images. Rather, it exists in the English rhythmic flow and the saddening atmosphere gradually imbued in it. This is particularly true when the "Song" comes to its end with a rhetorical question:

When we set out, the willows were drooping with spring,
We come back in the snow,
We go slowly, we are hungry and thirsty,
Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our grief?

As Bruce Fogelman notes, the "anguish" of the soldier is drastically intensified here by "the dense and varied repetition of *o* sounds . . ." (50). In fact, one might also note the effect of the equally dense and varied repetition of *w* sounds.

All this is evidently Pound's creation. Now the question is whether Pound's meddling in formal matters as well as certain details in content has changed the theme and mood of the original poem. For Sanekide Kodama, the answer is yes. In "*Cathay* and Fenollosa's Notebooks," he states that "the original Chinese poem 'Saibi' ['Cai Wei'] is not a discouraging poem. It is supposedly an 'inspiring' poem. It was written, reputedly by Bunno [King Wen of Zhou], to encourage rather than discourage his soldiers" (208). But "[b]y emphasizing the sorrow, uncertainty, and anxiety of the soldiers, Pound is building an anti-war poem out of the Chinese war poem" (213). Here we have to clarify a few points. First, the assumption that "Cai Wei" was written by King Wen of Zhou has long been rejected. According to findings in China, the expeditions to resist the northern tribe of Xianyun referred to in the poem were made in the time of King Xuan of Zhou (827-781 B.C.).²² From this we can infer that "Cai Wei" was composed between the late 9th and early 8th centuries B.C. King Wen of Zhou (Bunno) who lived about two centuries before (in the 11th century B.C.) certainly couldn't have been the author. Second, as is admitted by Kodama, there are several interpretations of the Chinese poem. Basically, how-

22. Gao 227, e.g., notes: "The poem was written in the time of King Xuan of West Zhou. During King Xuan's reign, the northern tribe Xianyun invaded the State of Zhou. King Xuan sent expeditions to drive out the Xianyun. The frontier guards then sang this song." (Translation mine) See also Mi

Wenkai & Pei Puxian: 《詩經今注》(A Study of the Book of Songs), Taipei, 1964, p. 341.

ever, there are but two: one, from the ruler's point of view, emphasizes the "national spirit" and a soldier's "duty to the king" while the other, from the people's point of view, stresses the "hardship" of a frontier guard and the "cruelty of war." Contemporary Chinese scholarship tends to favor the latter reading. Several annotated editions of *The Book of Songs* published in mainland China and Taiwan, for example, regard the poem as a song of complaint.²³ Pound, who knows nothing about the dispute, happens to follow the more up-to-date interpretation in his treatment of the "Song." But with a more radical attitude, he has, to a considerable degree, intensified the sorrow of the original, and moreover, altered certain details that appear contradictory to the anti-war mood. A typical example cited by Kodama and others is his changing Fenollosa's correct reading of "horses are tied" (see Appendix II) to "Horses . . . are tired."

Indeed, the depiction of the general's chariot and horses in stanzas 4 and 5 of "Cai Wei" are not quite in harmony with the overall atmosphere of the song. According to Yip, this section of the poem actually functions to turn "the mounting sorrow subterranean until it comes out piercingly again in the atmosphere of a most miserable moment" (119). His explanation sounds plausible. But I suspect that there is a possibility that these lines were added rather than created by the original anonymous author. As is commonly known, more than half of the songs in *The Book of Songs* were originally composed by ordinary people. I tend to believe that "Cai Wei" belongs to that group. It is said that before these folk songs were finally presented to the king, they were first examined by the royal recorders of songs and poems, and then polished and refined by the Grand Master, the king's tutor.²⁴ My guess is that these colorful phrases with a different mood from the general atmosphere of the poem were probably added by those royal refiners to improve the musical effect as well as to abate the complaining tone. Evidence supporting this assumption can be found in the

23. e.g. Gao: 《詩經今注》 (*The Book of Songs: A New Annotated Edition*), Shanghai, 1980;

Yuan Mei: 《詩經譯注》 (*The Book of Songs with a modernized text and annotations*), Jinan,

1981, and Wag Jing-zhi: 《詩經通譯》 (*The Book of Songs: A Modernized Version*),

Taipei, 1968. Also, in 《中國古代文學名篇選讀》 (*An Anthology of Chinese Classical Masterpieces*), eds. Xia et al.), the poem is treated as one of complaint.

24. Lu 41-42: "It was the custom of those days for the king in the first month of the year to send messengers to the districts where a wooden bell was rung, announcing that the royal recorders of songs and poems had arrived. Returning from those excursions, they presented what they had transcribed to the Grand Master, the king's tutor. The latter re-examined the rhythm and the music and transmitted the collection to the king himself so that he could learn from it how the people were reacting to the affairs of the state."

text of *The Book of Songs*. Lines such as “ 四馬同槽 ” (“The four horses are tied”) and “ 四馬同力 ” (“The four steeds are strong”), like refrains or ornaments, occur not only in “Cai Wei,” but in several other songs, for example, “ 四馬 Si Mu ” (“The Four Steeds”), “ 車攻 Che Gong ” (“Our Chariots are Strong”), and “ 鄧南山 Jie Nan Shan ” (“The Lofty Southern Hill”).²⁵ If this hypothesis can be accepted, then Pound’s meddling with the depiction of the general’s horses in the original poem will have to be considered in a new light. 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.

When we come to Pound’s “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter,” however, we are overwhelmed by a loveliness and simplicity that outshine “Taking Leave of a Friend,” and the “Song of the Bowmen of Shu.” The special appeal of this poem resides in the charming image of the speaker, a lonely teen-age wife. In Ford Madox Ford’s opinion, the image of this young woman is able to “stir your emotions; so you are made a better man; you are softened, rendered more supple of mind, more open to the vicissitudes and necessities of your fellow men” (qtd. in Kodama 219). His comment explains why “The River-Merchant’s Wife” ranks among the most anthologized of Pound’s poetic works.

The poem is a dramatic monologue--a form in which Pound finds himself most at home--by the Chinese teen-age wife--a kind of personality he is quite unfamiliar with. Nevertheless, he manages to produce the youthful Chinese woman’s own voice--simple, naive, and straightforward:

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chōkan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion. (130)

Notice the choice of images: “hair,” “forehead,” “pulling flowers,” “playing horse,” “playing with blue plums,” and “Two small people, without dislike or suspicion”--all connoting loveliness and innocence.

Nevertheless, the speaker’s tone of voice is constantly changing, signifying a curve in the heroine’s mental development over the years. For a time it is modest and shy:

25. For the Chinese text and English translation, see Legge, p. 249, p. 289, and p. 313.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back. (130)

For another, it is full of love and affection:

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever and forever.
Why should I climb the look out? (130)

But before the poem comes to its end, it becomes anxious, sorrowful, and finally almost despairing:

And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead. (130)

.....

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Chō-fū-Sa. (131)

So this is the image of the River-Merchant's Wife that Pound presents in his version which has the power of touching the reader's heart. The question that concerns us is whether we shall find the same charming image in the Chinese text. One has only to quote the corresponding lines for a comparison. The original poem by Li Po is indeed a song of love, separation, and mourning written in the form of a dramatic monologue. It opens in the same direct, sincere, artless voice of the sixteen-year-old River Merchant's Wife:

髮 初 覆 額
My hair barely covered my forehead.

折 花 門 前 戲
I played in front of the gate, plucking flowers,

郎 騎 竹 馬 來
You came riding on a bamboo-horse

繞 牀 弄 青 梅
And around the bed we played with green plums.

同居長干望

We were then living in Ch'ang-kan [Chang Gan].

兩小無嫌猜

Two small people, no hate nor suspicion.²⁶

All the lovely images are there, blended with the speaker's nostalgic feelings. Pound's "Two small people, without dislike or suspicion" in particular is a superb rendering of Li Po's "兩小無嫌猜."

Then there is a shift of tone to tenderness and timidity:

十四為君婦

At fourteen, I became your wife.

羞顏未嘗開

I seldom laughed, being bashful.

低頭向暗壁

I lowered my head toward the dark wall.

千喚不一回

Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

followed by an outburst of love:

願同塵與灰

We wish to stay together like dust and ash.

常存抱柱信

If you have the faith of Wei-sheng.

豈上望夫台

Why do I have to climb up the waiting tower?

Notice that the image of "dust" is there. Indeed, Pound's rendering of the line is closer to the original than Yip's literal translation, for Pound's choice of the word "mingled" brings out the implication of "becoming one body and soul" in the original whereas Yip's "stay together" doesn't. Also note the difference in the following lines; here Li Po's River Merchant's Wife becomes allusive, referring to a legendary personality and place where Pound's Wife sounds Shakespearean.²⁷ Yet, aside from this, we perceive in both voices the same sincere, fervent love.

In the latter half of the poem, however, the dominant tone changes to one of worry, longing, sorrow, and slight resentment:

26. The translation is from Yip, pp. 192-94.

27. Ruthven 205 notes that Pound's rendering is "modeled on Shakespeare's line, 'To-morrow and to-morrow, and to-morrow' " (*Macbeth*, V, v, 19).

五 月 不 可 蜀
 The unpassable rapids in the fifth month
 猿 聲 天 上 哀
 When monkeys cried against the sky.

.....

八 月 蛺 蝶 黃
 In the eighth month, butterflies come
 雙 飛 西 園 草
 In pairs over the grass in the West Garden.

感 此 傷 華 心
 These smite my heart.
 坐 愁 紅 顏 老
 I sit down worrying and youth passes away.

早 晚 下 三 巴²⁸
 When eventually you would come down from the Three Gorges.

預 將 書 報 家
 Please let me know ahead of time.

相 迎 不 道 遠
 I will meet you, no matter how far,

直 至 長 風 沙
 Even all the way to Long Wind Sand.

Again, the same images and the same moods. Pound's version is not without misrepresentation (for example, he misreads "the fifth month" as "five months") and deliberate intensification of the complaint element in the original.²⁹ However, one has to admit that the whole image he presents in "The River-Merchant's Wife" is that of Li Po's creation. Its charm, simplicity, and power of stirring emotions all exist in the original.

How about the style of language then? How much affinity and how much difference is there between the two versions? Sanekide Kodama in his comparison argues that Li Po, by using an elevated diction, makes the "speaker appear to be a prudent woman," whereas Pound in his translation presents "the image of a young wife, full of love but naive and simple . . ." (220). One of the examples he cites in support of his argument is

28. "三巴" San Ba" actually refers to Bajun, Badong, and Baxi, the three large counties in east Sichuan Province.

29. Bush 40-42 offers a perceptive analysis of Pound's intensification of the complaint theme, though I tend to disagree with his conclusion that "Pound, maintaining the beautiful indirection of the poem, transformed its subject."

Li Po's choice of the character “妾 qie” for the speaker to denote herself (“the first person singular pronoun ‘I’”) and the character “郎 lang” to indicate the person addressed (“the second person singular”). He explains that “郎 lang” was used here “to denote the husband with a tone of reverence,” and “妾 qie” “was used to show [the] humility of the wife toward her husband” (220). Apparently, Kodama has got the surface meaning right but misread the overtone in the context. As a matter of fact, in the Tang Period (618-907 A.D.) and later, “妾 qie” and “郎 lang” were used not only by married women to refer to themselves and their husbands, but also by unmarried women to indicate themselves and their lovers. In colloquial usage, moreover, the two characters or words³⁰ carry different tones in different contexts. In Li Po's “妾薄命” (“Wretched Me, Flimsy Fate”),³¹ a monologue by an imperial concubine that has fallen out of favor,³² for example, the speaker calls herself “妾 qie” with a miserable tone (hence “wretched me” rather than simply “me” in the rendering). In Li Po's “楊叛兒” (“Rebellious Yang”), a song of love between two unmarried people, we hear the speaker say:

You (my lord) sang “Rebellious Yang”
And I (your dear) poured the Xinfeng wine.

.....

Lord you drunk, stayed overnight in *my* home.³³ (Italics mine)

The young woman calls her lover “郎 jun” and herself “妾 qie” apparently with much tenderness and affection.

In “陌上贈美人” (“On the Street, to a Beautiful Woman”), still another poem by Li Po, the poet met a beautiful girl in the street, who

... smiling, drew aside a pearl-strung curtain.

Pointing to a red house beyond, “There's *my* home.”³⁴ (Italics mine)

Sure enough, the flirt in the street denotes herself with the word “妾 qie” in a frivolous tone. Similarly, the character or word “郎 lang” also has different overtones in different situations.

With this understanding, we realize that in “The River-Merchant's Wife,” Li Po chooses these words precisely because he wants to let the teen-age wife speak in an intimate and loving tone. Pound gets this right from the context where

30. I prefer to call them words because they were originally colloquialisms.

31. The translation is mine. For the Chinese text, see Xiao 242.

32. The speaker was indeed made empress when in favor.

33. The translation is mine. For the Chinese text, see Xiao 238.

34. The translation is from Lu 112. The poem is also translated by Obata 66.

Fenollosa and others fail to do so because they depend on a literal reading.

Another problem Kodama finds in Li Po's language is allusiveness. He argues that by putting allusions into the young wife's mouth, Li Po has made her sound like "an educated woman who is well versed in classical Chinese literature" (220). This is again an anachronical reading. In fact, the allusions which Kodama calls literary were commonly known to the Chinese, especially those of Li Po's time. By saying "have faith of Wei-sheng,"³⁵ the River-Merchant's Wife simply means "have an eternal faith," or in Pound's words, "Forever and forever and forever." She doesn't necessarily know the detail of the legendary story about Wei-sheng.³⁶ Similarly, when she says "climb up the waiting tower," she actually means "look out for my husband to return with no real hope." This is just like an English lady with little education referring to Greek myths or parables from the Bible. If Chaucer's Wife of Bath's copious biblical allusions do not sound particularly cultivated to the English audience, neither does Li Po's River-Merchant's Wife with her legendary references appear so well versed in classical literature to the Chinese reader.

Kodama, however, also finds Li Po's geographical references unfitting for the speaker. He wonders why the teenage wife "has strangely full knowledge about 'Kuto' ['Qutang Gorge'] and 'Enyotai' ['Yanyu Reef']" up the Yangtze River (223). The reason is in Chinese reality. During the Tang Dynasty, Nanjing on the lower Yangtze River (or Jinling as it was then called) was already a flourishing city, and about two miles south of it was a district called Chang Gan or Ch'ang-ken where a high percentage of the population made their living by sailing or doing business along the mighty river. The teenage wife, who grew up in this district, must have from early girlhood heard a hundred times from adults about how "[t]he monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead" when they travel through the narrows, and how boats are smashed against the Yanyu Reef and swallowed up in the torrent. Indeed, until the ominous rock at the entrance of Qutang Gorge was blasted away in 1958, Yanyu Reef remained a synonym of peril to the people living along the river for centuries. Therefore, it was only natural for the River-Merchant's Wife to think of these perilous spots and moreover refer to them with fear and horror when her own hus-

35. In the Chinese original, actually the name, Wei-sheng is not mentioned. A more literal rendering of the line would be: "Always have the faith of clinging to the pillar."

36. For a full account of the legendary story, see Xu, p. 588, note 2.

band had gone there on business. In Pound's rendering: "You went into far Ku-tō-yen, by the river of swirling eddies," we find the two place names ("Ku-to" and "Yenyotai" in Fenollosa's notes), are combined into one, while words like "far" and "the river of swirling eddies" are added to indicate the distance and danger of the place. Kodama believes that Pound's coinage of the new place name has an effect of "molding her character as an innocent, modest, helpless, and lonely woman" (223). But the fact of the matter is that even if Pound has such an intention, his audience will not be able to sense it as Kodama has, for whether the place name is coined or real it sounds all the same to them. On the other hand, the words added will surely convey a message, which is indeed the association that the Chinese reader will get from the place names.

Having reexamined the above three *Cathay* poems, we can probably draw some tentative conclusions. One observation that can be made is this: *Cathay* is a beautiful translation of classical Chinese poetry. It is considered as such because it has translated the charm and simplicity of the classical Chinese poems. To this one may add that it takes a great poet plus a great critic to translate great poetry.³⁷ Though Pound is handicapped by his own ignorance of the Chinese language and Fenollosa's numerous misrepresentations, with his poetic sensibility and critical experience he is able to penetrate the shell and catch the quintessence. It is true that there are many deviations in his translation. But compared with what he has preserved, the presentation, the mood, and the whole image, his flaws are negligible and his triumph is great. Critics who like to quote T. S. Eliot's praise of Pound as "the inventor of Chinese poetry" often ignore what is said by him next:

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. (xvi)

Indeed, it is through Pound that the English readers first get the original of such great Chinese poets as Li Po. But Pound himself has also benefited from translating Chinese classical poetry. He is exposed to new sensibilities and new techniques, which in turn exert an important impact on him in his literary career, and

37. I am heavily indebted here and elsewhere to Professor Wang Zuoliang's studies of verse translation. In "The Poet as Translator," a study of Dai Wangshu, a modern Chinese poet-translator, Professor Wang concludes after examining Dai's translations of Baudelaire, Yesenin, and Lorca that "it takes a poet to translate poetry" (Wang 127).

through him also exert an important impact on modern English poetry.

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APPENDIX I

A transcript of Fenollosa's Notes for "Taking Leave of a Friend." Courtesy, Professor Hugh Kenner.

Blue mountain lie horizontally north side of a walled city

Where blue mountain peaks are visible toward the northern suburb

White water encircle east castled town

And white water flows encircling the East of the city

This place once make separation
 ground

At this place we have for once to separate

Solitary rootless plant 10,000 miles go away
 dead grass [sic]

Like solitary dead grass (blown by northern wind) the departing one goes through 1,000 miles

Floating cloud -----wander-----mind

His (or your) mind may be that of a floating cloudlike wanderer

Falling sun old acquaintance emotion
 setting

(As for me) the sorrow of parting with an old acquaintance is comparable to the setting of the sun.

Shaking hands from this place away
 brandishing

Wringing hands in despairing resolution from this place it is away!
 (We have decided to separate)

Sho sho separating horse neigh
 onomatopoeia for a solitary
 horse neighing

(We men have so decided) and yet our very horses, separating, neigh *sho*, *sho*.

APPENDIX II

A Transcript of Fenollosa's Notes for "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," from Sanehide Kodama.

采 薇 采 薇 薇 亦 作 止。
sai, bi, sai, bi, bi, eki, saku, shi,*
pick off, a kind of edible fern, also to grow

We pick off the "Warabi" which first grow from the earth.

*The letter 止 is [sic] no meaning, no use, but each phrase being composed of 4 letters, this is put at the last of the phrase.

日 莫 暮
sun bo not

日 歸 日 歸 歲 亦 莫 止。
etsu, ki, etsu, ki, sai, eki, baku, shi
to say, to return, year, also, come to last.

We say to each other "when will we return to our country?"—It will be the last of the year.

The rhyme [sic] is 作 saku and 莫 baku.

靡 室 靡 家 玁狁 之 故
bi shitsu bi ka ken in shi ko
without room house of because

Here we are far from our home because we have the "ken-in" as our enemy.

室, 家 have figurative sense. I.e. 室 means *wife* for the part of husband, 家 means *husband* for the part of wife. "Ken-in" was a Turkish tribe who lived in the Mongolian desert. "Ken-iku," "Ken-in," "Kyo-do" are the same tribes, many European scholars approved that "Kyoto" is quite same to "Hun"; but it is very difficult question, some professors are quite opposite.

不 遑 啓 居 玁狁 之 故
fu, ko, kei, kyo, ken in shi ko
not to have, leisure, to sit down, to stay.

We have no leisure to sit down comfortably, (as we did at home) because we have ken-in as our enemy.

N.B.—The gardians [sic] go to the boundary of the empire in the last of spring when the "Warabi" grow from the earth. They return to the coun-

try in the winter of the next year. It is very disagreeable to be so far from their home during almost two years, but they shall not be angry against the emperor, because the army of "ken-in" is very formidable and to protect the country against the enemy is their duty.

采 薇 采 薇 薇 亦 柔 止
sai bi sai bi bi eki ju shi
soft

We pick off the "Warabi" which are soft.

日 歸 日 歸 心 亦 憂 止
etsu ki etsu ki shin eki yu shi

When we say the *returning* our mind is full of sorrow.

憂 心 烈 烈 載 飢 載 渴
yu, shin, retsu, retsu, sai, ki sai katsu
Sorrowful, mind, strong, then to be hungry thirsty

We are very sorrowful, we are hungry and thirsty.

我 戍 未 定 靡 使 歸 聘
ga ju mi tei bi shi ki hei
our, defense, not yet, finish, not, let, return, to ask

But our defence is not yet settled, so we cannot let our friends return to our country and ask how our family lives.

采 薇 采 薇 薇 亦 剛 止
sai, bi, sai, bi, bi, eki, go, shi
rough

We pick off the Warabi which have become already rough.

日 歸 日 歸 歲 亦 陽 止
etsu ki etsu ki sai eki yo* shi
October

We say to each other "when will we return to our Country?"--It will be October.

*In "Eki" the Symbol of October is i.e. all lines are "In."

There is not "yo" at all, but "yo" comes under the earth, therefore October is called contrarily "the month of Yo."

王 事 靡 盬 不 遑 啟 處
 wo ji bi ko fu ko kei sho
 royal, affair, not, easy, not, to have leisure, sit down, stay

We must be prudent for our affair (which is the order of our emperor);
 we have no leisure to sit down comfortably.

憂 心 孔 疚 我 行 不 來
 liu
 yu shin ko kiu ga ko fu lai
 sorrowful, mind, very, sick, we, go, not, return

The rhyme of this piece is 疚 and 來. The scholars who prefer the new commentary by Shushi (朱子) read 疚-*kyoku* and 來-*lyoku* to accord rhyme; but I think it forced the sound of words. In my own view, it is much better to read 疚-*ki* and 來-*li*; because *lai* contract [sic] to *li*, and *kiu* contract to *ki*; but I don't know what is the opinion of Prof. Mori.

Our sorrow is very bitter, but we would not return to the country.

彼 爾 維 何 維 常 之 華
 hi dei wi* ka wi jo shi ka
 that, blooming, what this, a kind of cherry, of, flower

What is that blooming flower?--That is "Niwazakura."

* 維 is used for emphasizing the meaning of phrase.

彼 路 斯 何 君 子 之 車
 hi lo shi ka kun-shi shi sha
 that, chariot, is, what, prince, of, carriage

Whose is that chariot?--That is our general's.

horse stout

戎 車 既 駕 四 牡 業 之
 ju sha ki ga shi bo gyo gyo
 chariot, already, to tie the horse, four

The horses are tied already to the chariot. They seem to be vigorous.

豈敢定居。一月三捷

gai kan tei kyo ichi getsu san sho
how dare repose one month three victory

Why shall we repose? We must conquer the enemy even three times in a month.

駕彼四牡。四牡騤騤。
ga hi shi bo shi bo ki-ki
to tie horse, that, four, horse, four, horse, strong

That [sic] four horses are tied; they are very strong.

君子所依。小人所腓。

kun shi sho i sho-nin sho hi
prince, that which, ride, subject, depend.

The *generals* are on their back, and the soldiers are by their side.

四牡翼翼。象弭服。
shi bo yoku-yoku, sho ji quiver
four horse skillful ivory, edge of arrow, fish fuku

The four horses are well educated; the generals have the ivory arrows and the quivers that are ornamented with the skin of fish.

豈可日戒。嚴狃孔棘。

ga fu jitsu kai ken-in ko kyoku
how, not, daily, make attention, very quick

We must be careful every day, because the enemy is very quick.

昔我往矣，楊柳依依。

Seki ga wo i* yo-liu i-i
other time, went willow drooping

Other time [sic] when we started the willows are [sic] drooping by spring wind.

* 矣 is no meaning, occupy the place only.

今 我 來 思 雨 雪 非 多

kon ga lai shi wu setsu hi hi
now, we, come,— it snows, much.

But now we come back when it snows.

行 道 遲 々 載 渴 載 飢

ko do chi-chi sai katsu sai ki
go road slowly then to be thirsty hungry

We go very slowly and we are thirsty and hungry.

我 心 傷 悲 莫 知 我 哀

ga shin sho--hi baku chi ga ai*
our, mind, to be sorrowful, not, know, our, grief

Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know our grief?

* 哀 contract to single "i"