Several Faces of Ezra Pound: A Study Focused on the Translation and Introduction of the Six Principles of Imagism into China in the Early Twentieth Century*

庞德的几副面孔
——以“意象派六原则”在20世纪早期中国的译介为线索

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Abstract: Chinese Researchers have paid great attention to the relationship between Ezra Pound and China, especially the relationship between his contribution and the origin and development of Chinese new poetry and Chinese modern literature. Some researchers even regard him as the Godfather of the Literary Revolution in 1917. Doubtlessly, Pound was introduced to China as a member of the Imagist poets at the very beginning, with a label of the revolutionist, which clearly revealed the left-wing position of Liu Yanling 刘延陵 (1894–1988) at that time. However, Liu and Xu Chi 徐迟 (1914–1996) overlooked the complicated development of Pound’s own theory, ignored the divergence of opinion between Pound and Amy Lowell on Imagist theory, and neglected the variation of the so-called Six Principles of Imagism as well. All these problems are still waiting to be fully reviewed today, or else it would bring about simplification and confusion in our understanding of Pound’s true meaning. Based on reviewing old newspapers and comparing foreign original texts with Chinese translated versions, it is not difficult for us to find out that there exists a lot of misreading, perhaps more appropriately, some inventions in the process of translation and introduction of Pound’s theory and the Six Principles of Imagism into China during the early 20s. For example, Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962) took the principle of freedom as the core of imagist theory, made the definition of freedom equal with the free verse, and even identified the liberty within literary domain with the capitalized Liberty referring more to political issues. We can also see the disappearing of the label “the revolutionist” from Liu’s text to Xu’s, and even tiny changes of words, worthy of tracing, in Xu’s variant versions in different historical contexts. Thus, I would like to clarify different interpretations of Pound and Lowell, and outline a clue to rethink new poetry and even new literature in China: from revolutionary discourses of the left-wing to the Third Men’s deviation from revolution; from political movements to commercial activities; from the combination of enlightenment and salvation to the dispute of cosmopolitanism and nationalism; from Russia to the US, etc.

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Ezra Pound’s connection with China has always been reckoned with by researchers. Foreign researchers may focus on the pre-modern modernity found by Pound in classical Chinese literature, just as T. S. Eliot once judged, “Chinese poetry, as we know it today, is something invented by Ezra Pound,” \(^{1}\) while Chinese researchers seem to deem Pound even more important both in a negative way by criticizing the discourse on Orientalism based on Pound’s misreading of classical Chinese poetry, and in a positive way by showing their confidence in making Chinese literature known to the world through comparative studies on Chinese and Western literature as well as their literary theories based on Pound’s translations and inventions of China. These two seemingly opposite stances reveal an anxiety of comparison and influence into which Chinese researches on Pound have fallen. However, there is still a lack of a detailed, deep-going identification of the first translations of Pound, especially the “Six Principles of Imagism” in China in the early 20th century, which might be a potential cue for researchers to go back in retrospect through the history of construction of new poetry and new literature of China.

Out of question, it is as an Imagist that Pound was introduced to China at the very beginning. Such sources, as “Meiguo de xinshi yundong” (《美国的新诗运动》) (The Movement of New Poetry in America) by Liu Yanling published in Shi (《诗》) (Poetry) in February 1922, “Yixiangpai de qige shiren” (《意象派的七个诗人》) (Seven Poets of Imagism) and “Aicila · Bangde ji qi tongren” (《哀慈拉· 邦德及其同人》) (Ezra Pound and His Contemporaries) by Xu Chi published in Xiandai (《现代》) (Contemporary) in April 1934, and “Xiandai Meiguo shitan gaiguan” (《现代美国诗坛概观》) (Overview of American Modern Poetry) by Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906–1968) published in Contemporary in October 1934, all located Pound in the list of Imagists, though at that time, there were variant transliterations of the terms “Imagism” and “Ezra Pound.” Considered to be just subtly different in wording, those transliterations were afterwards confirmed to be consistent and identical. However, overlooking the subtle differences might otherwise lead to losing sight of various “inventions” of Pound, including those intentionally misread ones of course, by Chinese poets at that time. In fact, from Des Imagistes edited by Pound in 1914 to Some Imagist Poets in the charge of Amy Lowell in 1915, or from Imagisme to Imagism, Imagism or Imagist Movement has undergone significant changes in not only leadership but also guiding theory, world view and even essence. However, the subtle differences in wording, which indicate those significant changes were not given enough attention by neither the then researchers like Liu and Xu, or current ones. Therefore, it is necessary to question that identity, then further explore what kinds of Imagism we understood in the construction of new poetry is like.

I

The publication that contained Pound’s name for the first time was “The Movement of New Poetry in America” by Liu, which marked Pound as a “revolutionist” who made great contributions to the new wave of American poetry and first got those revolutionists together: “This

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article can hardly spare space to other poets of new poetry except of the Imagist poets who made
great contributions to the new wave of American poetry, worthy of a few words. It is Erza Pound\textsuperscript{2} who first got these revolutionists together.”\textsuperscript{1} Precisely because of his revolutionary character, Pound could have been mentioned within the limited capacity of the text. That might not only echo cries and passion for political and military revolution in China of that period, despite the disappearance of the label “revolutionist” in articles written by Xu and Shao in the 1930s, but also appeals for some sorts of new literature, such as the proposal “Literary Revolution” advocated by Hu Shi in 1917–1918, claiming to construct a “literature of national language” and “national language of literature,” which was specifically manifested in the “Six Principles of Imagism”:

1. To use words in common speech, not to use dead, obscure, and archaic words.
2. To create new rhythms to express new emotions, not to hang on the regulated ones.
3. To have the absolute freedom in choosing subjects.
4. To create an image, not an abstract sentence. (See details in Hu Shi’s “On New Poetry”)
5. To write a direct and definite poem, not to write an ambiguous one.
6. Believing meanings of poetry should be concentrated, which differs from the loose arrangement in prose.\textsuperscript{4}

Unfortunately, Liu neither provided his source of the six rules nor attached the original English text, but in the fourth rule he enclosed a special note, which reads “[s]ee details in Hu Shi’s ‘On New Poetry,’” abbreviation for “Tan xinshi—banian lai yijian dashi”《谈新诗——八年来一件大事》(On New Poetry: A Big Event in Eight Years) published in 1919, and gave a bibliography at the end of his article, of which Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Lowell published in 1917 was registered as the last one.

In “On New Poetry,” Hu did not mention Pound nor directly talk about Imagism. He simply noted in general terms that,

The replacement of Latin literature with vernacular literature in various European countries three centuries ago was a great liberation of language. The literature reform advocated by French Hugo and British Wordsworth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a great liberation of poetic language. The revolution in Western poetry circles in recent decades is a great liberation of language and literary form.\textsuperscript{5}

In the summary of methods of writing new poetry at the end of this article Hu pointed out that “[p]oems should be concrete instead of abstract. A good poem is concrete. The more concrete a poem is, the more poetic it will be. A good poem can bring a kind or kinds of obviously vivid images

\textsuperscript{2} Erza is the misspelling of Ezra, but it was the original text.
\textsuperscript{3} All Chinese texts quoted no matter directly or from a secondary source in this article are translated by the author himself. 刘延陵:《美国的新诗运动》,《诗》1922年第1卷2期,第31页。[LIU Yanling, “Meiguo de xinshi yundong” (The Movement of New Poetry in America), Shi (Poetry) 1, no. 2 (1922): 31.]
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{5} 胡适:《谈新诗——八年来一件大事》,《星期评论》1919纪念号第5卷,第1页。[HU Shi, “Tan xinshi——banian lai yijian dashi” (On New Poetry: A Big Event in Eight Years), Xingqi pinglun 1919 jinian hao (Weekly Review) 5 (memorial issue 1919): 1.]
to our mind. That is the concreteness of poetry.” Undoubtedly, such key words as “images” and “concreteness” suggest what Liu tried to echo. It can be seen that the revolution in Western poetry circles in recent decades must contain the Imagism Movement, meanwhile, Hu’s attitude was clear: Revolution and liberation of both language and literary style were a megatrend and could be taken as evidence of new poetry and the Revolution of the New Vernacular Literature in China. That was exactly what was pointed out by Liu at the beginning of “The Movement of American New Poetry”: “The New Poetry movement is worldwide instead of peculiar to China. The poetic revolution in China is just part of the worldwide megatrend. Now in China there are still dissidents from the megatrend. I guess I may awaken average dissidents to some extent if I tell them the source and status as well as meaning of the megatrend.” On the one hand, it sounds like a demonstration of enlightenment and a kind of cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, there seems to be a historical evolutionist voice right beneath to which Liu was at pains to respond, perhaps Amy Lowell’s:

To a certain extent, the change which marks American poetry has been going on in the literature of other countries also. But not quite in the same way. Each country approaches an evolutionary step from its own racial angle, and they move alternately, first one leads and then another, but all together, if we look back a century or so, move the world forward into a new path.

It is not hard to trace their shared inner logic and outer expression. Thus, it can be believed the source from which Liu translated the six principles is Lowell-led Imagism, or Amygism, in a stance of enlightenment, claiming writing poems freely in terms of language, subject and rhythm, with the purpose of endorsing vernacular new poetry advocated by Hu. As for Pound, to speak of him perhaps is no more than a byproduct, if necessary, in the retrospection of the revolution. However, it reveals a big problem in the translation of Imagism in China in the early 20th century: It is Pound’s break with Lowell as well as the impossible identification between Pound-led Imagism and Lowell-led Imagism or Amygism that were ignored.

Obviously, Hu was familiar with Lowell-led Imagism theories. In 1926 Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋 (1903–1987) identified “Eight Don’ts” by Hu with the six principles of Lowell-led Imagism in “Xiandai Zhongguo wenxue zhi langman de qushi”《现代中国文学之浪漫的趋势》(The Romantic Tendency of Chinese Modern Literature) for the first time:

For example, the Imagists, united by some poets in America, including Lowell and Fletcher, of which the unique feature is not to use stale words, or express stale emotions. Our overseas students in America, I think, were inevitably affected when Imagism was in its heyday 10 years ago in America. Almost all of the six principles listed in their manifesto, such as not to use literary allusions and not to use stale words, are consistent with the propositions of vernacular literature in China.

Another piece of evidence is an entry in Hu’s overseas diaries written at the end of December

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6 Ibid., 4.  
7 刘延陵:《美国的新诗运动》，第23页。[ LIU Yanling, “Meiguo de xinshi yundong” (The Movement of New Poetry in America), 23. ]  
9 梁实秋:《现代中国文学之浪漫的趋势》，《晨报副刊》1926年3月25日，第58页。[ LIANG Shiqiu, “Xiandai Zhongguo wenxue zhi langman de qushi” (The Romantic Tendency of Chinese Modern Literature), Chenbao fukan (Morning Post Supplement) 25 (March 1926): 58. ]
1916, in which he extracted the transcribed six principles of Imagism from “The New Poetry” published in *New York Times* on December 26, 1916, with a special note: “Their propositions are very similar to ours.” The entire text, worthy of being fully quoted, if not a bit too long, follows:

On the whole, one cannot help admiring the spirit that animates the “new poets” in spite of some of their ludicrous failures to reach a new and higher poetry in their verse. They at least aim for the real, the natural; their work is a protest against the artificial in life as well as poetry. It is curious to note, moreover, that the principles upon which they found their art are simply, as Miss Lowell, quoted by Professor Erskine, tells us: “The essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature.” These six principles of Imagism are from the preface to “Some Imagist Poets”:

1. *To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact nor the merely decorative word.*

2. *To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon “free verse” as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry a cadence means a new idea.*

3. *To allow absolute freedom in the choice of the subject.*

4. *To present an image, (hence the name “Imagist.”) We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.*

5. *To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.*

6. *Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.*

From the N.Y. Times Book Shechor

If too much emphasis is laid on the final note, there would be less light left to cast on the italics in the excerpt. In fact, all these italics should also be taken as notes, even more important ones, since there would be no italics either in his immediate source or in Amy Lowell’s original version, of which only one italic word stands out, namely “exact” in the first principle. Thus, they are more likely traces left by Hu himself who deliberately tried to underscore some details or to grasp key points in this way, rather than mistakes by typesetters. In other words, these italics should be regarded as elaborations of the abstract note in the end, which more specifically present Hu’s “invention” of Lowell.

Among all these italics, the interpretative one in the second principle draws much more attention. Obviously, Hu attempted to construct and emphasize the relationship between free verse and liberty: fighting for free verse as for a principle of liberty and objecting against free verse as against liberty or enlightenment. Thus, in principle, Hu set the seal on the irrefutable legitimacy of free verse as a possible form of new poetry. What is more, in the choice of subject, Hu emphasized absolute freedom. On the surface, his claim was freedom of poetry, and further evolved into a

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10 胡适:《胡适留学日记》, 上海: 上海书店, 1948年, 第1073页。[HU Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji* (Hu Shi’s Overseas Journals), Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1948, 1073.]

11 同上,第1071—1072页。[Ibid., 1071-72.]
particularly clear appeal — “a great liberation of language and literary form” in 1919. In essence, however, his true claim was political: freedom or even absolute freedom of man himself. In this sense, the lowercase “liberty” (within literary domain) is intertwined with the capitalized “Liberty” (universalized discourse), as if they were two sides of the same coin. Undoubtedly, Hu stood and viewed the world as a historical evolutionist, and embraced the trends of enlightenment. For him, such literary freedom was achieved with concrete images as well as common speech or living language, which helped construct a binary opposition between “the living” and “the dead,” to be continued in Liu’s version. This is Hu’s definition of the new poetry: New poems should flow out of man’s mouth naturally, an art of speaking, rather than be artificially or deliberately made by hands.

Inspired by Hu, there came a lot of positive reactions, such as Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) calling for “absolute freedom and absolute autonomy” 12 in 1920. Later, in 1930s, Fei Ming (Feng Wenbing) 废名/冯文炳 (1901–1967) insisted that “[t]he new poetry should be free verse.” 13 This sequence of reactions seems to form a tradition of free verse. However, some contemporary scholars do not believe the free verse, which was seen as a sort of bridge in Hu’s thoughts to freedom and liberation, could bear such burden, since the poetry practiced by Hu and his followers, lack of relatively constant forms, is quite another thing, whenever compared with Pound’s poetry or Lowell’s free verse. As a result, it should be appropriately renamed “liberalized poems” and so on. 14

Although these italics above were somewhat radical, it is the six rules of Imagism translated by Xu in “Seven Poets of Imagism” in 1934 that enabled a big step forward in free verse in a truly unequivocal way.

Six Principles of Imagism:
1. To use the language of common speech, to employ always the exact word, not the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods. We do insist upon free verse as the only method of writing poetry [...] but we believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject.
4. To present an image (hence the name: “Imagist”). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, we all believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry. 15

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12 郭沫若: 《郭沫若致宗白华》(1920年2月16日), 见《郭沫若全集》(文学编)第15卷, 北京: 人民文学出版社, 1990年, 第49页。
13 废名: 《谈新诗》, 北京: 人民文学出版社, 1984年, 第24页。
14 See 王珂: 《英语意象派运动的文体革命特点及与汉语新诗革命的差异》, 《社会科学研究》2007年第2期, 171—176页。
15 徐迟: 《意象派的七个诗人》, 《现代》1934年第4卷第6期, 第1013—1014页。
It is particularly noteworthy that the second rule here omits the sentence “[w]e fight for it as for a principle of liberty,” which was italic in the excerpt by Hu. Although Xu did not provide his source either, the one by Lowell can be virtually taken as the original. At first glance, Xu’s translation of the sentence “[w]e do not insist upon free verse as the only method of writing poetry” is wrong, since the sentence is negative in the original text but positive in his version. If compared with Shao’s translation, we can see that Shao has maintained the negative sentence pattern. The question is whose translation is more accurate, or how the translation by Xu should be understood.

In the original text, method and principle are obviously not laid at the same level; the latter is more important. Thus, Lowell’s negation of method is not a negation of free verse but only a kind of phraseology for balance or avoidance of extremes. In Xu’s version, the problem seems to focus on how to understand the phrase “the only method.” Did it touch on the method level or the principle level? Actually, the phrase is vague as it implies a process of depreciating from the Buddhist term “ultimate truth” to the secular term “method” or “approach.” Did Xu’s translation attribute to the principle level but Shao’s to the method level? If yes, why did Xu intentionally omit the more straightforward sentence “[w]e fight for it as for a principle of liberty”? Most likely, Xu did that in order to bypass the controversy between “method” and “principle,” to reject the rhetoric balance, and to identify free verse as the only legitimate form of new poetry summarily. As a result, new metrical poetry proposed by Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) is naturally excluded. In this sense, it strengthens Hu’s free verse and makes a further step forward in what was advocated by Lowell.

What is even more interesting is that there are many changes in “Seven Poets of Imagism” in Xu Chi wenji 《徐迟文集》 (Anthology of Xu Chi) published in 2014, when compared to its earliest version in Xiandai 《现代》 (Contemporary) published in 1934. For example, the transliteration of the term “Imagism” is determined based on the different versions, and some words and phrases including the second principle are modified for better accuracy:

2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods. But they do insist upon free verse as the only method of writing poetry [...] but they believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms.

Xu did not correct his “wrong” translation but retained it instead. However, he changed the subject in the second principle from former “we” to current “they,” or in other words, from a fellow traveler to a bystander. He added the word “but” for no reason, but did not change the subjects in the other rules. And he did not give up the claim in the third principle — “absolute freedom in the choice of subject.” How should that be understood? A bold speculation comes up that his “wrong” translation was not unintentional but intentional, and later he implicitly laid the blame for the absolutization or vulgarization of free verse on Lowell after he realized the adverse effects. In a sense, this was not a thorough self-reflection. Although it is always hard to tell the truth about history, these changes more or less reflect problems in Amygism: Free verse was absolutized and became a kind of “polyphonic prose,” and the dividing line between poetry and prose was blurred.

16 See 邵洵美: 《现代美国诗坛概观》,《现代》1934年第5卷第6期,第883页。[ SHAO Xunmei, “Xiandai Meiguo shitan gaiguan” (Overview of American Modern Poetry), Xiandai (Contemporary) 5, no. 6 (1934): 883. ]

However, such criticism could not be accepted by Lowell.

Xu identified the “conventional forms” in Lowell’s version specifically as the typical examples of classical Chinese poetry, which, as it were, further identified the opponents of vernacular free verse. Despite such words as “liberation” and so forth, the “revolutionist” in the 1920s really degenerated into a “player” in the 1930s. Perhaps, it implies that the duet of enlightenment and national salvation, which had been unified, evolved into two separate tones. Ever since, there exists a long-run dispute: whether enlightenment overwhelms national salvation or vice versa. As for Xu, he insisted more upon the Enlightenment rhetoric while keeping away from the left-wing revolutionary discourse.

Unexpectedly, this ambivalent and ambiguous article was thought highly of by many researchers and even regarded as “a mark of new era in domestic research of Imagism and Ezra Pound” and “the first time to put Pound in the first place, sweeping away previous arrangements focused on Lowell as the center by Wen Yiduo, Liu Yanling, and Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896–1945).”\(^{18}\) However, that was not the case, as can be seen at present. Actually, Xu did not negate the focus on Lowell or realize the essential difference between Pound and Lowell in world outlook and methodology. On the contrary, he demonstrated a lack of a good understanding of Pound at least in two aspects. On the one hand, he neglected Pound’s contribution to Imagist theories made in 1913, as he defined Imagism as a movement beginning in 1914 and ending in 1919, ignoring the fact that Pound went in for Vorticism and participated in the editing of _Blast_ in April 1914 shortly after the publication of _Des Imagistes_ in London instead of at the end of 1915. On the other hand, his cartoon-style portrait of Pound as “eccentric” and “it is said that Pound is a clever man of a cat’s head, with blue eyes and an Egyptian cat’s face”\(^{19}\) indicates that Xu’s accounts are tainted with some poetic imagination.

Thus, some useful critiques could be found from the overwhelming objections to revolution or to enlightenment through the review of _xueheng pai’s_ 学衡派 (the Xueheng School) fierce criticism of vernacular free verse such as Hu’s _Changshì ji_ 《尝试集》 (Collection of Attempts) in the 1920s. For example, Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (1890–1945) said in “Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe”《评提倡新文化者》(Criticizing Advocators of New Culture) in 1922 that “[a] dvocators of the so-called vernacular poetry, who simply imitate what are two degenerated schools in America, Vers Libre and the recent Imagism, forget their own origins, as if they could create but actually deceive the whole country.”\(^{20}\) Moreover, he pointed out Lowell’s degeneration by saying that “[t]he distinguished female poet Amy Lowell of _Verse Libre_ of the time, deriving from France, is one of the decadents. Although her poems are often seen and praised by common and superficial newspapers and magazines, her poems in essence are not poetry at all.”\(^{21}\) Such phrases as “not poetry at all” and “decadents” are just criticism of the problem of dividing line between poetry and prose caused by the extremes of free verse. So, it can be seen that both Mei’s criticism and Liang’s assertion, from the pro and con aspects, identify the ideological

\(^{18}\) 蔡洪新, 郑燕虹: 《庞德与中国的情缘以及华人学者的庞德研究——庞德学术史研究》，《东吴学术》2011年第3期，第124页。（JIANG Hongxin and ZHENG Yanhong, “Pangde yu Zhongguo de qingyuan yiji huaren xuezhe de Pangde”（《庞德与中国的情缘以及华人学者的庞德研究——庞德学术史研究》），《东吴学术》2011年第3期，第124页。）

\(^{19}\) 徐迟: 《哀慈拉·邦德及其同人》，《现代》1934年第5卷第6期，第983页。（XU Chi, “Aicila · Bangde ji qi tongren”（《哀慈拉·邦德及其同人》，《现代》1934年第5卷第6期，第983页。）

\(^{20}\) 梅光迪: 《评提倡新文化者》，《学衡》1922年第1期，第3页。（MEI Guangdi, “Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe”（《评提倡新文化者》，《学衡》1922年第1期，第3页。）

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
source of Hu’s literary revolution. Mei’s criticism reminds us to refocus debates over new poetry on the nature and boundary of poetry, which is necessary at least for academic research.

In addition to the Xuheng School in China in the 1920s, there were many critics of Lowell among American poetry circles at the time. For example, in 1916 John Livingston Lowes questioned: “Free verse may be written as very beautiful prose; prose may be written as very beautiful free verse. Which is which?”22 Pound also expressed his regret in 1916: “It is a pity for not declaring the end of the Imagism.”23 In response to such criticisms, Lowell and her peers defended themselves as well as free verse in the preface to Some Imagist Poets, 1916: “The fact is, that there is no hard and fast dividing line between prose and poetry. As a French poet of distinction, Paul Fort, has said: ‘Prose and poetry are but one instrument, graduated.’ It is not a question of typography; it is not even a question of rules and forms. Poetry is the vision in a man’s soul which he translates as best he can with the means at his disposal.”24 As they saw it, boundary in literary form does not matter; what matters is the freedom of soul and a self-given new judgment standard.

II

To sort out the differences between Lowell and Pound in Imagist theory, there needs the identification of their source translated by Hu and other Chinese scholars first, that is, the preface to Some Imagist Poets (1915) known as the manifesto or creed of Lowell. Most Chinese researchers believe that the copyright of the preface is owned by Lowell. But that is not entirely true. Actually, the preface was anonymous once it was published. However, Glenn Hughes said in Imagism and the Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry that “[t]his preface was written by Mr. Aldington, and was slightly revised by Miss Lowell.”25 The original text is provided here as how it once appeared in publication:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word.

2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon “free-verse” as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.

3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

4. To present an image (hence the name: “Imagist”). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who

22 Qt. in Peter Jones, Imagist Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 34.
seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.\[26\]

It is not hard to find out that some illustrative sentences are omitted in the third and fourth principles in Hu’s entry. These omissions were not intentionally made by Hu as they should be attributed to the incompletely transcribed version in the *New York Times* where Hu got his source. Such omissions are also seen in Liu’s and Xu’s version to varying degrees. The earliest complete version was contributed by Shao in his “Overview of American Modern Poetry” published in October 1934. It can also be found that there is also an italic mark “exact” in the preface, but that is totally different from the italics in Hu’s version. Thus, the difference of what the two versions want to emphasize can be seen. Obviously, Lowell paid more attention to the accuracy of words, refusing approximation or decoration, which is the concrete requirement of common speech, while Hu prioritized vernacularity over accuracy in vernacular poetry.

The third principle either in Hu’s version or Xu’s translation omits these sentences: “It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.” Although there seems to be of less significance, these explanations, instead of confining the subject of new poetry to the new world or new life, still maintain a consistent balance or ambiguity between affirmation and negation. It is understandable, even inevitable for the appearance of these sentences in *Contemporary*, since “modernist” poets who actively translated and imitated Imagist theories and poems thought much of experience in modern life, especially modern urban life, which perhaps was related to the so-called “new sensation,” thus turning to a new way to accept Imagism.

The way to compile that anthology (1915) mentioned in the preface is a perspective of understanding of “absolute freedom in the choice of subject” emphasized in the third rule. “Instead of an arbitrary selection by an editor, each poet has been permitted to represent himself by the work he considers his best, the only stipulation being that it should not yet have appeared in book form.”\[27\] “A sort of informal committee—consisting of more than half the authors here represented—have arranged the book and decided what should be printed and what omitted, but, as a general rule, the poets have been allowed absolute freedom in this direction, limitations of space only being imposed upon them.”\[28\] There is no doubt that what the new way of compilation goes against is Pound’s 1914 compilation. Decentralizing the power to choose poems and arranging poets in an alphabetical order, the new way of compilation could be said to have done well enough in freedom and equality. Is it a sort of democratic spirit demonstrated in the literary domain? In a sense, the new way successfully helps conceal or avoid displaying the pervasive power relationship. However, in another sense, it seems to be an excuse for criticism of Lowell’s “cutting corners” and suggests that the organization of Imagism was slack even though it looked presentable at that time. Thus, we may have a chance to better understand that “concentration” in the sixth rule, which implies an echo to democracy and concentration of the organization, while at

\[27\] Ibid., v.
\[28\] Ibid.
the same time a lack of potential regulation in artistic quality.

The question can be asked of why they could continuously publish poems till 1917. Had they really fulfilled their mission? If yes, what was their mission? Was the mission the liberation of poetry in content as Xu said? According to Hughes, Lowell “set herself the task of ‘selling’ new poetry to the whole world, at least to the American world,”^[29] when she visited London once again in 1914. She gathered the so-called “dinner of Imagists” at Dieu Donnes, of which the menu was given out, on July 17, 1914, and made other attempts to buy off a school consisting of six members including Richard Aldington, H. D., John Gould Fletcher, F. S. Flint, D. H. Lawrence and herself. Of course, in her attempts, the commercial one was the most important, and proved to be very effective. She signed a contract with Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin and Company for continuous publications of an anthology by Imagists per year from 1915 to 1917. In this sense, Lowell was found to be a business agent who was successful. Thus, the spread or transfer of Imagism from England to America was in fact a gradual process of its collusion with commercial capital. It is said that Eliot once denounced Lowell as “the demon saleswoman of poetry,”^[30] while Lowell retorted in a self-mocking manner, “God made me a businesswoman and I made myself a poet.”^[31]

Although the case of Lowell was not clearly grasped by Chinese researchers in the 1930s, tight connections between literature and business were the tendency, a case at least in America at the time. For example, Shao said in “Overview of American Modern Poetry” that “[...] in America with developed industry and commerce, there appear lots of overnight millionaires, who have to take possession of all kinds of knowledge in order to prompt their status in the ranking of an intellectual society [...] It is a kind of noble decorations of modern Americans,” and “I hold the view that the success of art works doesn’t necessarily come from the commercialization, but an economic stimulus is necessarily needed.”^[32] Beyond doubt those make sense. But at the end of his article, Shao expressed his dissatisfaction with the then poetic circles in China and envy of those in America “[b]ecause American modern poetry already has its own sponsors and poets expressing their own tastes and personalities, the glory now belongs to the western world.”^[33] However, as part of haipai 海派 (the Shanghai School), the magazine Contemporary did not give up on its own pursuit of commercial profit. In fact, this is one of the reasons why the image of “revolutionist” was hardly identified in the 1930s. On the one hand, it was a must for the magazine to survive the war. On the other hand, it was a necessary compromise on the collusion with commerce.

That said, Lowell succeeded in promoting free verse as a technical innovation in the American market, and bringing about a new situation, in which, Lowell’s great anxiety, to get rid of English poetry and literature, and establish the localized or Americanized ones, in a sense, got released. Yet the Imagist poets who did not live well in London could hardly keep a profile as “revolutionists” when they were faced with economic temptations. Actually, it is through negating “revolution” that Pound settled himself.

_Poetry: A Magazine of Verse_ edited by Harriet Monroe in March 1913 contained “Imagisme” over the signature of F. S. Flint and “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” over the signature of Pound, two important articles regarded as manifestoes of Pound on Imagism. What should be clarified is that Pound should be the holder of the copyright of “Imagisme” which contained several—


^[31] Ibid.


^[33] Ibid.
generally considered to be three—rules on Imagism which are well known by Chinese researchers, as Hughes said, “These were printed over the signature of F. S. Flint in what purported to be interview with an Imagist but which as a matter of fact was merely a statement by Pound.” 34 In fact, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” could be regarded as a further interpretation of these rules.

In “Imagisme,” Pound defined Imagism in the third person:

They have not published a manifesto. They were not a revolutionary school; their only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition, as they found it in the best writers of all time,—in Sappho, Catullus, Villon. They seemed to be absolutely intolerant of all poetry that was not written in such endeavor, ignorance of the best tradition forming no excuse.35

Needless to say, Pound who did not directly emphasize revolution or enlightenment was opposite to his image in China in the 1920s and 1930s. His emphasis on and pursuit of the best tradition, which went beyond his nationality and era and demonstrated the universality of human experience in writing poetry, was more about British humanist than American humanist, calling for researches similar to The Great Tradition by F. R. Leavis in 1948. A glimpse of aristocratic elites’ political and cultural tendencies could be caught in Pound.

The three principles—more accurately, four principles, the last of which was not listed—should be taken as an indispensable supplement or footnote:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regards rhythm, to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

By these standards they judged all poetry, and found most of it wanting. They held also a certain ‘Doctrine of the Image,’ which they had not committed to writing; they said that it did not concern the public, and would provoke useless discussion.36

No word, directly indicating enlightenment, revolution, or even free verse, is seen here. On the surface, Pound’s requirements for directness, exact words and new rhythm were inherited and developed by Lowell in the 1915 preface. In essence, however, there was a non-negligible break, which can be seen from Pound’s statement that suggests his break with Lowell: “Imagism was a point on the curve of my development. Some people remained at that point. I moved on.”37 However, the fact was that Lowell and her peers did not stay on the point either; they went on some paths of freedom and extreme a bit further.

III

Firstly, the most important aspect of Pound’s break with Lowell was of course in world outlook and stance, which was embodied in not only attitude towards the universal enlightenment

34 Glenn Hughes, Imagism & the Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry, 26.
36 Ibid., 201–2.
37 Qtd. in Glenn Hughes, Imagism & the Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry, 38.
discourse of liberty, democracy and equality—on the one hand in debates over free verse, and on the other hand in the way of anthology’s compilation or poets’ organization—but also the contradiction between cosmopolitanism and nationalism or localism.

There is no sufficient evidence that helps Pound identify Imagist poetry as free verse at either the method level or the principle level. In contrast, Lowell made this “invention.” In fact, Pound’s pursuit of ideal language and concern about the order of energy transfer in motion indicated that his Imagist poetry focuses on the specificity and strength or something like the “hardness.” It is this hard kernel that was easily lost after free verse went to the extreme. “The tendency was away from hardness and towards vers libre which was a form they had accepted from the beginning but in which it was all too easy to be ‘splayfooted.’” 38 In addition, the absolute free verse does not really exist, or only lie in an impractical imagination of an absolutely free subject, just as Eliot said, “[n]o verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job […] For those whose ears are not sensitive, any poetry can be free verse.” 39 Pound suggested in an interview, probably in 1962, that “[he thought] the best free verse [came] from an attempt to get back to quantitative meter.” 40 Perhaps, in a sense, the way back to quantitative meter, reminds us of the similar claims made by Wen and other poets from xinyue pai 新月派 (the New Moon School). Pound expressed that idea more clearly in “A Retrospect” in 1918: “I think one should write vers libre only when one ‘must,’ that is to say, only when the ‘thing’ builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the ‘thing,’ more germane, intimate, interpretative than the measure of regular accentual verse; a rhythm which discontents one with set iambic or set anapaestic.” 41

Obviously, Pound posed strict requirements on free verse. For example, he emphasized the musicality and stuck to the dividing line between poetry and prose. Thus, it is said that “he reformed free verse, gave it a musical structure, and to that extent we may say paradoxically that it was no longer free.” 42

As to the anthology’s compilation mentioned above, Lowell “now was intent on substituting ‘pure democracy’ among the Imagists for Pound’s ‘despotism.’” 43 Although there might be some problems in Pound’s interpersonal relationship, the wording “substituting ‘democracy’ for ‘despotism’” exaggerates the controversy to an ideological level.

As to the latter, Pound did not hold the view that iambic pentameter represents Britishness or free verse exclusively belongs to America, nor did he think of building a kind of national literature. Yet at the beginning of Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, Lowell indicated her national pride full of anxieties: “We are no more colonies of this or that other land, but ourselves, different from all other peoples whatsoever.” 44

In “Overview of American Modern Poetry,” Shao talked about Pound’s cosmopolitan dimension though he focused more on The Waste Land by Eliot: “All history makes up their
experiences, all cosmos is converged in their eyes: the emotions they reveal are not representatives, but emotions as such, which may be seen from unconscious expressions in ancient works, but they can fully apply them with consciousness. “

If such emphasis on common human emotions and respect for infinite cosmos is not properly handled, it would easily tend to be superficial like the critique at the end of the fourth rule in the 1915 preface by Lowell: “It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.”

Shao translated the term “cosmic” into “infinite,” on the one hand making some sense and on the other hand overlooking the root shared by “cosmic” and “cosmopolitanism,” which was just an embodiment of the tension between Pound and Lowell.

Secondly, another aspect of Pound’s break with Lowell was located in an understanding of the level where Imagism as an experimental movement was addressed. Pound tended to lay more emphasis on the metaphysical level of language, that is, the philosophical and ethical dimension, while Lowell focused more on the physical level of language, that is, skills, devices, and technical innovations. In a sense, the construction of new poetry in China fared in a way similar to Lowell’s, since how Hu and other followers attempted to transform language at large is limited to the instrumental level.

On the surface, Pound’s three rules talk about words and rhythm at the level of skills and devices. In essence, however, only the “order,” from “things” to “words,” is the key clue, which was further explained in Fenollosa’s The Chinese Written Characters as a Medium for Poetry edited and published by Pound in 1918.

It should be noted that Pound did not accept Fenollosa’s posthumous manuscripts or set eyes on the Orient until the three rules of Imagisme were proposed. So, Chinese characters are more supportive evidence—in which Pound discovered the natural order between “things” and “words,” as the essence of poetry, that is, the transitivity, not merely the pictorial representation of characters—than inspiration for Pound’s theory. The transitivity does not mean in a narrow sense that a verb can be followed by an object without a preposition but means that “things” are connected with each other in motion. Pound believed that “[a] true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature... Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature.”

The position of human beings in the cosmos can be understood as long as the mutual connection between things in motion is grasped, which is just the true meaning of Pound’s directness and concreteness.

The transitivity is not a modernist invention but a primitive preserve and an embodiment of the natural order, or the order of energy transfer. Then, it was quite “natural” for Pound to shift from the natural order to the social ethical order in the Confucian ideological system. Thus, it can be seen that Pound’s view on language was very similar to the one that language is degenerate instead of evolutionary. What Pound tried to find or rebuild through Chinese characters is an ideal and poetic language, or the language of Adam before his degeneration, and what Pound struggled to oppose are the logics and concepts since the medieval era. Those decorative words and grammatical particles were naturally regarded as obstacles to energy transfer, which were artificial instead of natural and thus rejected by him.

Thirdly, the definition of “image” is also an important aspect of Pound’s break with Lowell.

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45 邵洵美: 《现代美国诗坛概观》, 第886页。[SHAO Xunmei, “Xiandai Meiguo shitan gaiguan” (Overview of American Modern Poetry), 886.]
Liu, Xu, and Shao were all engaged in translations of Imagism and the six rules of Imagism, but most of their works are on their own interpretation of the definition of “image” and few on Pound’s view. However, at the beginning of “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” Pound proposed his celebrated definition of “image”: “An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” It is this kind of “image” that brings about a sense of “liberty,” Pound elaborated this idea explicitly, “It is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.” Obviously, “image” should not be simply identified with “painting” or “picture.” Pound himself realized the need to distinguish between “image” and “painting” or “picture” and listed that as one of the several don’ts:

Don’t be “viewy”—leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays. Don’t be descriptive; remember that the painter can describe a landscape much better than you can, and that he has to know a deal more about it.

Thus, Pound not only distinguished between “image” and “picture” or “landscape” but also told Imagist poets and painters apart. That is to say, Pound’s opposition to writing poems with the method of painting and objection to the superficial descriptiveness and pictorial representation of poetry is consistent with his rejection of Futurism and Impressionism. As it were, the following sentence in the 1915 preface by Lowell is particularly meaningful: “We are not a school of painters...”

That seems to be a clear-cut inheritance of Pound’s 1913 theory, but it may not be the case. A review of the 1915 volume by Conrad Aiken in the New Republic showed some complaints: “The poems lacked ‘emotional force,’ presented only ‘frail pictures,’ and offered nothing new or significant.” Similar criticisms became increasingly sharp. For example, in 1918 Alice Corbin Henderson criticized Some Imagist Poets in Poetry: A Magazine of Verse (1918) that “[u]nfortunately, imagism has now come to mean almost any kind of poetry written in unrhymed irregular verse, and ‘the image’—referred solely to the visual sense—is taken to mean some sort of pictorial impression!” Such expressions as “frail pictures” and “pictorial impression” indicate that Lowell did not inherit Pound’s theory that “image” should have hard emotions and a sensible kernel, but went in another way or even in the opposite direction. Thus, the sentence quoted above can be interpreted in the opposite way: It is a defense against Pound. Following this defense, there came a second one. A claim in the preface to Some Imagist Poets (1916) argued that “[i]n the first place ‘Imagism’ does not mean merely the presentation of pictures. ‘Imagism’ refers to the manner of presentation, not to the subject.” Compared to the judgment sentence in 1915, this claim here is a negative statement which is not out-and-out but reserved. Meanwhile, it shifts the bone of contention from object to method.

The distinction between “image” and “painting” or “picture” was communicated by such

49 Ibid., 200–201.
52 Qtd. in Neil Roberts, A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry, 135.
researchers as Xu in the 1930s but not given enough attention. Actually, the title of the entry registered by Hu which extracts the transcribed six rules of Imagism imperceptibly confuses “image” with “impression”, and theories on new metrical poetry advocated by Wen, such as well-known three beauties of painting, architecture and music, were more inspired by Lowell, at least at a first glance. Besides, Wen indeed had contact with Lowell and other Imagists during his overseas study in America. 

Pound also emphasized musicality—or did he? The answer is certainly positive, just as the case in saving free verse from danger through a way back to quantitative meter mentioned before. However, for Pound, what truly matters is the natural fluidity, by which poetry can be possibly promoted to one of the arts of time. As to musicality, Pound believed that “[i]t is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert.”

IV

The deeper we dig into translated versions with comparison, the more we feel awestruck as we fall under an immense shadow cast by the anxiety of influence, which Harold Bloom once insightfully illuminated as a true love of literature with some defense mechanisms. At the turning point of history, both western poets, such as Pound and Lowell, and Chinese intellectuals, such as Hu Shi and Xu Chi, are confronted with the same challenge, namely how to demonstrate their own imagination as poets or writers, and how to establish their own new forms of literature. With the anxiety of influence, it is very easy to see an interesting route of international cultural interactions, that is, “export/import-transformed abroad-import/export.” For example, Chinese characters is a case, while the Six Principles of Imagism is another. During this progress, there inevitably brings forth lots of misunderstandings, from which arises something new, for the meaning of acceptance and transformation is “concentrated” around our own primary task. However, as times goes by, historical goals fading into the background, it is time for us to have a close-reading of what was simply seen as the so-called “means” to think outside of frame “ends-means,” and to clarify the traces of the anxiety of influence.

It is not difficult to find from the variant versions of the six rules of Imagism in the historical context that the “image” of Pound translated into China in the early twentieth century was different from the one inscribed in the Western literary trend. For Pound, the “image” contains a sense of liberation inclined to emotions and inner experience, while in China of the time, Hu and his followers were motivated to fight for Liberty in the sense of enlightenment. Pound’s image—first set up as a “revolutionist,” then degenerated into a “player”—was too influenced by that of his “rival” Lowell and even confused with the latter, which should be distinguished. The apparent influence of Lowell is obvious and definite on vernacular free verse, new metric verse and modernist poetry among the Shanghai School, who have taken what they need from Lowell-led Imagism and made “innovations” based on that. However, as far as the intrinsic part is concerned, Hu, Xu, Wen and other advocates of new literature would all potentially share the same spirit of “making it new,” which Pound draws from Confucian thought. Therefore, as some scholars indicate, Lowell is indeed the “godmother” of new poetry and even new literature of China, while Pound could be regarded as the “godfather” to some extent, though further academic findings are still needed to portray a richer and more vivid image of him. Obviously, the retrospection in the

55 Ezra Pound, ”A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” 203.
historical sequence is not “natural” but “invented” intentionally.

However, even the experience of Pound who was imagined in multiple images in the “invented” retrospection vaguely clued researchers to the history of construction of new poetry and even new literature of China from the 1920s to the 1930s: From the left-wing “revolutionary” discourse to the “third group’s” alienation to and reflection on “revolution,” from “political movement” to “commerce,” from the combination of “enlightenment” and “salvation” to the dispute about “cosmopolitanism” and “nationalism,” and from the Soviet Union to the United States. There may be new interpretations of relevant disputes when Pound is involved. In this process, the city of Shanghai and its magazines, especially Poetry and Contemporary, which are calling for further research, have played a special role of media. In general, however, there is still no complete translation of Pound’s epic works The Cantos, not to mention research on it. So it is safe to say that a project of Pound’s true portrait with full details is still underway.

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摘要：埃兹拉·庞德（Ezra Pound）与中国的关系历来为研究者所重视，尤其是他与中国新诗或现代文学的兴起、发展关系密切，甚至被一些学者认为是1917年文学革命的教父。可以肯定的是，庞德最初是以意象派诗人的群像之一出现于当时的国人视野，其“革命家”的定性也充分显示了刘延陵等人当时的左翼政治立场。然而，问题在于刘延陵、徐迟等人不仅对庞德自身理论发展的复杂有所忽视，也没有充分在意象派内部的分裂与路线斗争，即庞德与艾米·洛威尔的分歧，以及所谓“意象派六原则”其实存在一个前后发展、变化的过程。这就造成了对庞德理解的简单化，甚至对庞德本身的面目有所模糊。而这一问题在今天的学界也没有得到充分的重新检视。通过检阅旧报刊和中外材料的比对，我们不难发现20世纪早期庞德及“意象派六原则”在中国的译介存在着不少误读，或者别有用意的“发明”，如胡适将自由原则作为意象派理论的核心，将自由与自由诗做同一性处理，甚至将文学领域内小写的自由与更多指向政治问题的大写自由相等；又如从刘延陵到徐迟，对庞德是否是“革命者”存在定论的转移，甚至徐迟前后译文中小有细微变化。由此，本文试图澄清庞德与洛威尔的不同面貌，以及洛克菲勒中国新诗至新文学建构史的线索；从左翼“革命”话语到“第三种”人对“革命”的疏离与反思；从“运动”到“商业”；从“启蒙”与“救亡”的合流到“世界主义”与“民族主义”的分裂；从苏联到美利坚。

关键词：埃兹拉·庞德；艾米·洛威尔；意象派六原则；意象主义；新诗；中国

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