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Naikan Tao

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## Pound's Conception of Comparison and His Comparative Poetics

Macquarie University    Tao Naikan

The first step of a renaissance, or awakening, is the importance of models for painting, sculpture or writing. We have had many "movements", movements stimulated by "comparison".

—Ezra Pound

"Comparative literature" sometimes figures in university curricula, but very few people know what they mean by the term, or approach it with a considered conscious method.

—Ezra Pound

The term comparison is manifoldly significant to readers of Ezra Pound. His view of "comparison" as a stimulus to invention underlies his cosmopolitan stance and his endeavour to encompass world literature as a whole in an attempt to establish universal poetic criteria. While the use of comparison as tropes in his Imagist and Vorticist poems has been circulated among Poundian studies, Pound's view of "comparison" as an epistemological norm and its relationship to his ideogrammic method has not been sufficiently investigated. An understanding of this aspect of Pound's conception of comparison is necessary for one's reading of his poems, particularly *The Cantos*,

whose fragmentary structure requires comparison of their different layers of fragments to one another and a discernment of the affinities between them in one's making sense of the cantos. In this paper I will focus upon Pound's theories regarding comparison in order to examine how "comparison" is formed as an epistemological norm and how it functions both as a pivotal conception and as a pragmatic means in the formulation of his poetics.

Pound's notion of comparison was derived from his interest in comparative literature. This interest of his has attracted considerable academic attention (see Alexander 45, 132-34; Ruthven 6-8). But the relationship between his comparatism and the formulation of his poetics is so complicated as to invite more investigations of the issue. A brief review of his initial engagement in comparative literature helps to clarify certain aspects of Pound's pioneer comparatism on the one hand, and on the other to set primary grounds for discussing how his notion of comparison operates in the shaping of his ideogrammic poetic. Pound said, "I began an examination of comparative European literature in or about 1901; with the definite intention of finding out what had been written, and how" (LE 77). The remarks suggest two of his persistent motives: to clarify what has been written in order to invent something new, to discover better elements as a "cure" for the maladies he found in modern poetry. So his interest in comparative literature was but the corollary of his attempt to establish universal criteria.

It seems that this interest of his grew with the development of comparative literature in the twentieth century. Before he obtained Fenollosa's manuscripts, Pound, though inclined to world literature rather than national literature, was unable to look beyond Europe.

The region of his comparative studies was then confined to the European languages and within the range of "World Literature" or Western literary heritage. However, comparative literature was in a sense derived from World Literature, and the demarcation between the two fields was, and perhaps still remains, equivocal. For instance, with regard to Wellek's and Aldridge's views, Clements notes in his survey that "comparative literature operates in three recognizable dimensions so far—Western Heritage [...]; East-West; and World Literature", but he himself prefers "the definition of World Literature or *Weltliteratur* as the maximum geographical dimension of comparative literature" (14-5, 26-7).

To go further, I would like to take the definition Prawer made of "comparative literary study" as a theoretical premise for examining Pound's view of comparative literature. The definition reads as below:

An examination of literary texts (including works of literary theory and criticism) in more than one language, through an investigation of contrast, analogy, provenance or influence; or a study of literary relations and communications between two or more groups that speak different languages. (8)

In this light, comparative study emphasises the examination of correlations rather than of the texts themselves, and includes the devices of comparison, namely "analogy" and "contrast" (another form of comparison), on the basis of multilingual and intercultural investigations. And in so far as the preferences of such comparatists

as Earl Miner and James Liu are concerned, this discipline allows the alternation of focus among such aspects as provenance, influence, "affinity" and "difference" (see Miner, 3-11; Liu, 3). With this modified definition, I attempt to examine to what degree Pound's view of comparative study has affected the formulation of his theories and methods in order to assess an aspect of Pound which Alexander considers insufficiently recognised: "The curricular facts of these seven university years are known, but the nature of [Pound's] training in Comparative Literature may not be so readily appreciated" (45).

In his first critical book, *The Spirit of Romance* (published in 1910), Pound seems to have been aware of the tenets of comparative literature as discussed above. Although he modestly says that "only by courtesy can it be said to be a study in comparative literature", (SR 7) the texts shows that he studied medieval poets mostly in a comparative way or at least in a Goethean manner of world literature. There is a certain similarity between Pound and his forerunners. If previous comparatists aimed at "restoring a lost unity and universality when Latin lost its position as a 'universal' language" (Prawer 10-11), Pound, like Goethe, and as he suggested in the preface to the book, attempted to pursue universal poetic criteria for the modern era.

As mentioned earlier, Pound was studying medieval literature with the intention to discover perdurable qualities. In doing so, he also shaped his "transhistorical" view that emphasised the contemporary significance of history (see Longenbach 14-6, 31, 114; Kronick 7-8, 174-75). He therefore preferred synchronic comparison over the diachronic comparison that was the fashion of comparative

study at the time. In the book there are occasions when Pound traces the influence of forebears upon their offspring, but in most cases he compares medieval poets either among themselves or achronologically with various writers. In his review of the poets, Pound extols Arnaut Daniel and Villon, praises Chaucer and Shakespeare, and disparages Milton. A remarkable example is the comparison made with Dante, to whom Pound gives priority not merely because he admires Dante's work but because he considers Dante "more apt in 'comparison'". (Here by comparison Pound means analogy and metaphor, and considers it a laudably poetic expression. SR 158) He therefore sets Dante as the central foil against which he compares as many poets as he can throughout the book. For instance, he compares Milton with Dante to contrast the former's inadequacy (judged according to Pound's bias) to the latter's merit; Shakespeare with Dante to show the difference and the shades of similarity; Shelley with Dante to trace the latter's influence on the former. A typical example is the comparison between Dante, Villon and Whitman. These cases reveal that even in his early career, Pound used comparative methods to "distinguish the shades of degree of the ineffable", qualities he felt difficult to name, (SR 87) in order to discover powerful elements as correctives for the inadequacies he found in modern poetry.

Among his discoveries, the quality he termed "precision" became the most conspicuous through the incessant reiteration of the term and its alternatives. Its connotation included such terms as "exactness", "details", "particulars", the "true" and the "real." By "precision" Pound essentially meant the authentic and direct experience of individual realities, and "the exactness of poetic presentation." (SR 87) He again considered that Dante typified this

quality: "a sort of hyper-scientific precision [that] is the touchstone and assay of the artist's power, of his honor, his authenticity" (SR 87). To illustrate this notion, Pound repeatedly cited Dante's example: "say, not 'Where a river pools itself', but 'As at Arles, where the Rhone pools itself'." (SR 159) Tracing the quality of "precision" to a tradition that survived from the Provençal poets to Dante, Pound considered this quality representing a spirit of the medieval and a paramount criterion for modern poetry. All this addressed his desire to renovate modern poetry with the notion of "precision" serving as an alternative to symbolist obscurity or "atmospheric suggestion". (SR 159)

A similar significance Pound found in the troubadours was in "emotion", "love" and "truth". For the young Pound, sincerity and emotion, even erotic passion, contributed to the crystallisation of ecstasy and intensity in poetry. Like precision, these elements were also considered part of the spirit of the medieval period; the troubadours "lost the names of the gods and remembered the names of lovers". (SR 90) He traced the singing of erotic passion to Hellenic paganism, and to the mysteries of love as rhymed by Ovid and Virgil, both of whom influenced the Provençal poets. (SR 90) Pound thus considered emotion to be an enduring "cult" that was fading away in his own time, and so it was worth taking pains to invoke "the dead" and to remind his contemporaries of this tradition—"by naming over the most beautiful things we know we may draw back upon the mind some vestige of the heavenly splendor." (SR 96) He even went so far as to modernise the cult of sexual attraction when he wrote *Lustra*, of which some poems were deleted from the commercial version because the editor considered them as obscene to readers of the time.

It is noteworthy that when Pound advocated emotional energy, he offered it along with linguistic precision as an antiseptic against rationalism, abstraction, verbiage and pretentiousness—the conventions inherited from some of his immediate forebears. Due to his cosmopolitan predilection and the stance he had assumed of a reformer for modern literature, Pound committed himself to comparative literature in search of critical standards. *The Spirit of Romance* in general displays an endeavour to seek enduring values through examination of contexts in different languages and within Pound's literary tradition. Pound afterwards began to look beyond and towards the East.

This book demonstrates some of Pound's comparative methods and his attitude towards different literatures. As we know, texts of comparative literature were at the time restricted to the canon of world masterpieces, though there has since been a break with this convention, and comparatists have been advised to look beyond the classics or the best that has been written. In view of this point, Pound actually anticipated his era. Even in the 1910s Pound gave extraordinary attention to troubadour poets like Arnaut Daniel, who is not often found in the list of world masters, and believed that the troubadour poets had influenced Dante. While his depreciation of Milton might have suggested a rebellious attitude to "orthodox" poetry, his heartfelt exaltation of the "troubadours" indicated an open-minded attitude to less known literatures.

Furthermore, Pound also broke with the boundaries of comparative literary studies at the time, which were circumscribed by European literatures. Even before the advent of Fenollosa's papers to him in 1908, Pound already showed an eye, as Goethe did, towards



the East. And in 1914 he actually wrote some *chinoïis* poems (later collected in *Lustra*) on the basis of Giles' translations. The weight of oriental literatures, especially of Chinese literature, grew in his concern as displayed in his essays, translations and poems from 1914 onwards. He edited and translated *Cathay* and the Japanese *Noh*, and began to adopt Japanese and Chinese elements in his drafting of the "Ur Cantos" (1917). Later in his life Pound studied and translated some Confucian classics, and as a result his "Later Cantos" abound with Chinese elements. Pound was, and is still, among the few who have studied Eastern literature side by side with Western texts to a distinctive degree in the twentieth century.

To look further at Pound's notion of comparison needs a close look at the key word "comparative". What it means in comparative literature seems to be controversial. Here I will relate this issue to Pound's own perception of comparative literature. If we follow the suggestion that "Comparative Literature implies a study of literature which uses comparison as its main instrument" (Prawer 2), we will find it at odds with another comparatist. Earl Miner asserts that "actual comparison" is scarcely found "in the work of comparatists", and even affirms that "comparatists do not talk about comparison". (20) Although Miner's remarks tend to exclude comparison as the central ground from comparatists' work, he himself cannot avoid talking about comparison in his work.

With regard to Pound's practice, I may assume that the word "comparison" Pound used in the category of comparative literature does not refer to any sense of comparison that is used as a trope, but to an epistemological mode that allows one to compare texts (or examine contexts) of different cultures and languages—an implement

that is used in comparative linguistics, comparative history and comparative anatomy. The point is, what signifies ultimately to comparative studies is not comparison in itself but "comparability" among things to be compared or examined side by side. Here I would like to justify this point with Miner's own views.

Miner, however, observes that "The nub of this problem is what elements constitute, or what procedure guarantees, *sufficient comparability*". (21) He goes on to affirm:

We must establish a basis for comparison between things possessing elements in common to degrees of likeness higher than resemblance and analogy. Otherwise there can be no certainty that we have avoided category error. (21)

Two points are essential to the issue concerned: "a basis for comparison" and "degrees of likeness" in things to be compared. These two points are correlated, and crucial to the build of the conception of comparability. Yet as for what can form such a basis, and what can be a higher degree of likeness than that of mere analogy, Miner would seem rather to skirt these points by providing examples than address them straightforwardly.

What answers can we find in Pound? He himself was also concerned with the basis of comparability for his own studies when he commented on the Renaissance poets Dante and Shakespeare, and on some historic events that happened in modern times:

There is almost an exact three centuries between their dates of birth [Dante was born in 1265; Shakespeare in

1564 ]. America had been discovered, printing, the Reformation, the Renaissance were new forces at work. Much change had swept over the world, but art and humanity, remaining ever the same, gave us a basis for comparison. (SR 157)

For Pound, then, one of the bases for comparison lies in “art and humanity”, or in aesthetic value and human worth, which may remain unchanging when judged from his “transhistorical” point of view of history: “All ages are contemporaneous.” (SR 8) It was on his present interpretation of aesthetic and human values that Pound based his comparisons; for example, Dante’s definite beauty and Shakespeare’s suggestive beauty (SR 158), or, in another case, Dante’s visionary truth and Villon’s autobiographical truth (SR 178). In Pound’s view, such notions of beauty and truth, apart from their peculiar representation in individual writers, are essentially in common to a higher degree of likeness than resemblance, because they are able to withstand the change of times and bear affinities that go beyond temporal and spatial boundaries.

Therefore, underlying such a basis for comparison is Pound’s appreciation of the present significance of history, which is explained by Kronick as below:

History exists as a synchronic entry, not as a genetic sequence. The geographical juxtaposition of various epochs redefines history in terms of the present moment. (174)

Pound’s view of history reflects a synchronic conception that

stresses that different epochs may co-exist at the same time, and that real time consists in the cultural level or manifestation of peoples rather than in diachronic sequence. It is Pound's historicism that allows for the concurrence of patterns of different eras and regions, and for the belief in the perpetuity of cultural values—a conviction that “certain forces, elements or qualities, which were potent in the medieval literature of the Latin tongue [...] are [...] still potent in our own.” (SR 7) Like Renaissance pioneers, Pound took comparative literature as a means by which he was able to transcend the immediate history of his own times, and to go back to remote cultural histories in search of power for starting another Renaissance.

Pound's comparative study of the medieval poets, as seen in *The Spirit of Romance*, provided a foundation for the development of his poetics. Impressed by the singular qualities he had found in the poets, he came to theorise his own perception, for example, putting forth two principal concepts, *virtù* and the “luminous detail” in the series of his essays, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”. (SP 19-44) By *virtù* Pound means a certain vitality that dominates a writer as a personal quality and intense power in which is manifest his or her particular distinction in creation (“On Virtue”, SP, p. 28). However, the “luminous detail” was once proposed as an attempt to establish a new method as opposed to that of categorisation or generalisation—what he called the method of “sentiment and generalisation” and of “multitudinous detail”. (SP 21) This new method can serve as a kind of “self-explanation” by means of comparison, on the reader's part, of texts in the original or translation, selected by the author with the intention of inspiring the reader. Its “luminous” or “interpretive” function ultimately depends

on readers' comparing of the particulars in the process of their reception. Here, then, we see a comparative sense working at the core of Pound's poetics.

Pound's concerns with comparative study gave him not only a working instrument but also a generic norm for his formulation of critical methods. He was preoccupied with the desire to establish international criteria for poetry, and consciously used his own critical works to exemplify his new methods. This is true of his *ABC of Reading* (1934), *Make It New* (1934), and especially *Guide to Kulchur* (1938). In the essay "Date Line" (collected first in *Make It New*), for example, Pound discusses categories and functions of criticism, and advocates "comparison" as a critical method in terms of "Excernment", which means to him "the elimination of repetition" and can exercise:

The work analogous to that which a good hanging committee or curator would perform in a National Gallery or in a biological museum. (LE 75)

In reference to this function, Korn observes that methods in terms of excernment "are selective and comparative" (Korn 39). This critical method depends exactly on comparativeness, albeit in the interest of selecting the better. Before selecting things one has to compare contexts. This sounds simple, but Pound took it as one of the principles of his study and adaptation of other national literatures, and even as a significant strategy to balance categorisation and prescription—methods which he considered to reduce the process of reading to passive reception. The method of

"excernment" is in fact based on the notion of "luminous detail" that aims at evoking active thinking on the part of readers before they make their generalisation. For Pound, comparison is not only a technique to transmit emotions and thoughts as do such tropes as metaphor, symbol and simile, but also a synthetic means to ensure the presentation of original or authentic texts so that readers can directly approach knowledge and truth.

In the article "The Teacher's Mission" (1934), Pound persists in his view of comparison as an epistemological mode, and expounds its practical significance. He even advocated this method as a corrective to the defection in the American education of the time, while he considered that the main cause was the use of "general terms", and "abstraction" which had been passed down from the nineteenth century, and was harming as perniciously as "tuberculosis to the health of the national mind". (LE 59) He went on to affirm that "the same mental defection in literary criticism" lay in "writing which consists of 'general terms'", and that these terms were used "with a meaning so vague as to convey nothing", and "finally have NO meaning". (LE 60) Thus, he recommends an empirical method:

General education is in [a] position to profit by the parallels of biological study based on EXAMINATION and COMPARISON of particular specimens. (LE 60)

In relation to literature, he advises:

All teaching of literature should be performed by the presentation and juxtaposition of specimens of writings and

NOT by discussion of some other discussor's opinion about the general standing of a poet or author. (LE 60)

He then describes this method as:

Dispassionate examination of the ideogrammic method (the examination and juxtaposition of particular specimens—e. g. particular works, passages of literature) as an implement for acquisition and transmission of knowledge. (LE 61)

Here Pound talks about “the ideogrammic method” as a scholastic mode that will ensure one acquire, under any conditions, “a little accurate knowledge based on examination and comparison of PARTICULAR books”. (LE 63) It is clear that this method is constructed by juxtaposition of particulars for the purpose of inspiration or education, and essentially depends on functions of “comparison”.

Furthermore, it is here that we apprehend the essence of Pound's conception of comparison: the “acquisition” and transmission of knowledge. These two faculties are fundamental to Pound's theory. While the acquisition of knowledge concerns his study and adaptation of other national literatures, the transmission of knowledge involves the matter of presentation, and so relates directly to the formulation of his poetics. This can partly explain why comparison or comparativeness characterises his poetic methods. Pound's Imagism and Vorticism depend largely on visual perception and analogical device. In brief, with the “luminous detail”, Pound intends to expel

abstraction and to approach the essence of things without discursive intrusion but by means of implicit comparison of the details presented. Through the "Image", a means to rid poetry of verbiage and obscure suggestion, the way toward the essence of things is controlled by an analogical device that can harmonize subject and object in an inspiring moment. In a circle of the "Vortex", an effort to bring Cubist art and dynamics into poetry, the structural mechanism is shifted to an organic scheme of synthesis that governs the relations of the particulars presented, and simultaneously reflects the affinities between them, and will in the due course bring forth an intelligent and aesthetic power.

Pound's conception of comparison is definitely related to "structure in *The Cantos*." Among various interpretations of it, those made by critics such as Géfin and Korn are inclined to hold the "ideogrammic" method as the major form (see Géfin xii-xiii, 27 and Korn 92, 136). Yet form in the conventional sense may remain uncertain with regard to *The Cantos*, particularly if, as Korn affirms, Pound's "late rejection of Aristotelian logic was in effect a rejection of 'form'" (92). In a sense, the ideogrammic method could scarcely lay claim to being a form, except for the significance of the principle of juxtaposition of particulars in suggesting relations for perception. If a form at all, this must be an "asyntactical" form that works for a synthetic formation of correlations (see Korn 121). In this sense Pound may have gained an ultimate form only in Taoist terms: "ultimate form has no shape" ("Da xiang wu xing" *Laozi xin yi* 151). This perhaps sounds too absolute to be an adequate notion of form. The "ideogrammic" method must be founded on concepts, more substantial and deeper than the mere juxtaposition of particulars



in the surface structure.

Pound himself, however, did not directly discuss the "ideogrammic" as a poetic device, but as an inclusive and pragmatic method that concerns "acquisition and transmission of knowledge". To relate the "ideogrammic" to his poetry is largely a critical hypothesis. A further look at his own theories concerning comparison may lead to another assumption. Since Pound appreciated the "ideogrammic" notion and expounded it as a method time and again in the *ABC of Reading*, *Make It New* and *Guide to Kulchur*, this concept must have had an effect on his poetics. Of his interpretations, the best-known is the contrast which he made to display the difference in epistemological process between the European and the Chinese languages. The former inclines to draw conclusions by categorisation while the latter prefers to do so by inference from concrete objects. In the Chinese case, to employ Pound's illustration, to apprehend the concept of "red" is to place side by side and observe "rose, cherry, iron-rust and flamingo". As Pound intended to modernise this method, he called it "scientific" and likened it to the biologist's method on the grounds that both depend on

careful first-hand examination of the matter, and continual COMPARISON of one "slide" or specimen with another. (ABCR 17)

His explanation of the ideogrammic method emphasises, most of all, "COMPARISON", and reveals an astute insight into the interrelations between things. This view concurs with Fenollosa's

philosophy that "relations are more real and more important than the things" (Fenollosa 22). Because of correlation, a "rose" for the poet or a "slide" of a plant for the biologist functions equally as the material for first-hand observation and as the basis for proper generalisation to be drawn, so the "primitive" and intuitive perception agrees with the method of modern empirical science. Pound actually based this identification on the basis of his perception of comparability.

The ideogrammic conception must have resulted from the integration of Pound's notion of empirical method and Fenollosa's perception of the formation of Chinese written characters. In his introduction to *Make It New* Pound said that "the ideogrammic method [was] dealt with narratively" by Fenollosa, but it was not formulated, as Pound did later, "as a method *to be used*". (LE, 77) Where the "ideogrammic" is applied is a conceptual norm rather than a formal method. This norm, whether applied in *The Cantos* or in his prose, essentially depends on ulterior affinities that bound together apparently disparate particulars, and on a process of comparative perception on the reader's part.

If Pound wanted to establish his ideogrammic method as a reader-oriented mode, the conception of comparison functioning for acquisition of knowledge was especially important to its construction. Since Pound rejected the conventional mode of discursive communication (second-hand knowledge) as a defective channel for knowledge, and turned to immediate and personal experience (first-hand knowledge) for ensuring one's acquisition of knowledge, his stress fell more and more on observation of particulars as an adequate approach to knowledge and truth. As a result, "comparison became

one of the key critical terms in his theories". It is clear that the dual principle of acquisition and transmission of knowledge by means of comparative examination underpins the juxtaposition of particulars. Pound's conception of comparison actually provided a theoretical foundation for the shaping of his methods. The "luminous detail", the "Image", the "Vortex" and the "ideogrammic method" all aim at promoting a self-reliant way of thinking, exposing readers to details and obliging them to abstract their own perceptions

Furthermore, "comparison" also serves as a medium for Pound's communication between the past and the present, and between the foreign and the national. As mentioned earlier, after Pound obtained Fenollosa's papers, he enlarged the scale of his comparative studies to include Far Eastern literatures. His interest grew until Chinese literature became one of the resources for his knowledge and invention. In the collections of his essays and *The Cantos*, Pound frequently cited directly from Chinese texts or mingled his ideas with Chinese parallels, making his writing not only eclectic but sometimes esoteric. Such a case is seen in *Guide to Kulchur* where Pound comments on Confucius:

Kung fu Tseu was a vorticist. Happy is the man who  
can start where he is, and do something. (GK 266)

To informed readers, this analogy may sound at odds with the principle of comparability. "Kung fu Tseu" (Kong Fuzi or Confucius, 551-479 B.C.), the founder of Confucianism, which has been taken as the orthodox Chinese ideology, is generally regarded as a representative of conservatism, whereas Vorticists such as Gaudier-

Brzeska, Wyndham Lewis and Pound were radical modernists who worked enthusiastically for a "revolution" of the arts in 1914 in London. How could Pound liken such apparent opposites to each other? Are Kung and a vorticist comparable? Is there a basis for this comparison?

To answer, we need to determine their meanings first. In the article "Royalty and All That" concerned, Pound comments on attitudes toward tradition and reform in his elusive and metaphorical way. The meaning of "vortices" one can infer from the context draws on Gaudier's view of "vortex" as force, will and consciousness, a kind of energy presented in a certain artistic form. Pound combines Gaudier's idea with his own notion of *virtù* in his definition of the "Vortex" that "every concept, every emotion presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form". (GB 88) He also remarks that "when the vortices of power and the vortices of culture coincide, you have an era of brilliance". (GK 266) Here he promotes a combination of political and cultural forces in an artistically satisfactory unity, and assumes that a vorticist is one who is able to present these two forces in an artistic form, and that "Vorticism" has just such a "constructive" capacity. He thus laments that "[Vorticism] has passed as a small local movement" without being duly recognised. With a similar admiration for Dante and Shakespeare, Pound remarked that Confucius was a vorticist, too, but lived in due time and did due things.

What Pound hints at here is presumably the fact that Confucius advocated the reading of poetry or the *Book of Songs* (*Shi jing*, the earliest formal collection of Chinese poems, which is traditionally referred to as *shi* [poetry]), and is generally attributed to a

compilation by Confucius), and considered it the best medium for cultivating morality. Pound therefore assumes that Confucius, an advocate of merging teaching and pleasure into a cultural activity, succeeded in carrying out his cause in his day. Similarly, in his own career, Pound grew from a "lotus-eater" to a didactic poet, and his poetry moved from aesthetic delight to a socio-political weight. From this point of view, what he means by "vortices" and "vorticist" in this context is but the unification of morality and literature into an artistic form. This matches Confucius's view of literature as an ideally didactic means. The significance of Confucian preaching through literature allows Pound to liken Confucius to a modern vorticist.

As Pound continues in another article "Kung", the implications of this comparison become clearer. Here Pound remarks that "Kung is modern in his interest in folk-lore", in his concern with "the living" rather than with "the dead", and in his emphasis on direct knowledge and personal experience, which can be obtained through travelling around and approaching commoners, and used as a "good antidote for theories" or pedantry. All these aspects of Confucius appear to Pound "to be in conformity with the best modern views". (GK 272-4) When Pound contemplated Kung, it was by means of comparison that he grasped the parallels between ancient and modern, East and West. The history of Confucius bore so many affinities to what Pound wanted amidst his own realities that he regarded him as a modern reformer. Yet teaching through delight is not promulgated by Confucius alone. The Confucian affectivism may remind one of Horace's doctrine.

Here we can see clearly how Pound bridges the past and the

present by means of comparison. What works in the invocation of the ancient canons for contemporary readers is the suggestion of affinity, one of the functions of his comparative mode. Seeing this point is crucial to understanding of *The Cantos* because this is the principal implement Pound uses in the long poem. For instance, in a draft of the "Three Cantos" Pound paralleled Confucius with Dante to suggest two perfect models, not only because Pound regarded the former his moral master, and the latter his artistic master, but because he also believed that they both started their own careers from their own selves (See Froula, 74). Likewise, in the "Pisan Cantos", he juxtaposes the Western saints Linus, Clatus and Clement with the Chinese sages Yao, Shun and Yu (C 74, 428) in order to imply sources for moral strength. In another case a fragment regarding Lenin's New Economic Policy is superposed the lines that tell how Shun governs the country with a humane and tolerant policy (zhongyong or mean), "holding empire as if not in a mortar with it". (C 74, 441-42) Although the purpose is to contrast, the function of transmission of knowledge, as discussed of Pound's conception of comparison, remains the same. The point is, contrast or display of difference is but another primary effect of the ideogrammic method.

Additionally, Pound's conception of comparison also concerns one of his policies for invention: to make it new is to make it old. In his view, poetry should bear a classical sublimity, a durable value, a universal implication, and above all a blend of modern sentiment with an ancient breath. He thought anterior elements as possible classical values that made one's writing outlast one's times, and so as possible catalysts for modern creative writing. To achieve these, one must know what has been written in the past. Whether or not influenced

by Nietzsche's belief that "The knowledge of the past is desired only for the service of the future and the present, not to weaken the present or undermine a living future", (Nietzsche, 22), Pound's review of history always pointed toward the present and future, as he said:

Retrospect is inexcusable, especially in education, save when used distinctly AS a leverage toward the future. An education that is not focused on the life of to-day and to-morrow is treason to the pupil. (LE 62; 1934)

Twenty four years had passed, but time did not alter the dogmatic view of history established in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910). Pound adhered to his conception that stresses the presentness in the past; history signifies our present moments. Because of his historicistic disposition, he had been working between the past and the present. There was, however, a gap between what he probed and the time he served. He needed some means to bridge the gap, temporal and regional. One of his implements was syncretistic comparison. While presenting contemporary moments against the background of a world history, Pound selected examples, renovated their elements and combined them with his own to make something new.

If we follow Pound's belief that particulars lead to sound generalisations, the above analysis of the remarks that "Kung is a vorticist" can illustrate the way in which Pound deals with the past and the present. He often perceived things by relating the past to the contemporary, and/or the foreign to the national, but he wanted his

readers to know things without any conceptual interference, even by himself. Since Pound repudiated generalisation and "Aristotelian logic", which is supposed to give order to the mind, he also abandoned "the notion of art imposing order on life" (Kearns 68-9; similar views are held by Alexander, 126; and Korn, 92). He was inclined to go beyond discussers' interpretations and descend to "raw" materials to gain original knowledge. In presenting, he relied on particulars and the technique of juxtaposition. But at one level the juxtaposition must be based on the principle of *comparability* among things, otherwise what is juxtaposed or paralleled is mere heterogeneous stuff. At another level, the particulars juxtaposed cannot form themselves into concepts, and the reader must relate one layer of particulars with another in order to understand them. Thus, the "ideogrammic" poetic essentially founds on the properties of transmission and acquisition in Pound's conception of comparison. This should be the internal structure of the non-connected fragments, historical, mythical, anecdotal or otherwise, presented in *The Cantos*.

In the whole course of his career, Pound had been striving to achieve universal poetics through his exploration of world literature. He committed himself to comparative literature, approaching the discipline "with a considered conscious method". (LE 16) He was cognisant of both the principles and functions of comparative study. He advocated it as a necessary means for cultivating one's literary virtuosity and critical capacity, as suggested by the remarks that "you can't judge any chemical's action merely by putting it with more of itself". (ABCR 60) The same is true of his attitude towards invention. He insisted that before attempting anything new, one



should know what has been written not only in one's own literature but also in other nations' so that one "might acquire some balance in NOT mistaking recurrence for innovation". (GK 274) This cosmopolitan stance motivated him to undertake comparative studies, first of European literatures, then of Eastern with Western literatures. In the process Pound shaped his conception of comparison—a constant norm that operated for both his criticism and poetics. Pound thus obtained applicable methods for presentation of his global temperament and offered "comparison" as an alternative and preferred means for approaching knowledge and truth.

**Abbreviations (Pound's Works Cited in the Text)**

- ABCR *ABC of Reading*. 1934; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.  
C *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. London: Faber and Faber, 3d ed. 1975  
GK *Guide to Kulchur*. 1938; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970.  
LE *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. Ed. by T. S. Eliot. 1954; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1968.  
SP *Ezra Pound; Selected Prose: 1909-1961*. Ed. by William Cookson. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.  
SR *The Spirit of Romance*. 1910; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1953.

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#### About the Author:

Tao Naikan obtained a MA from Nanjing University and a Ph. D in Comparative Literature from The University of Sydney. He is at present teaching at Macquarie University in Sydney. His recently

published an article on contemporary Chinese poetry in *World Literature Today* in the USA, and had an essay "The 'Peach-Fountain' Poetic and Canto IV" accepted for publication in an anthology which is editing at The University of Warwick, UK.